



November 9, 2023

Ben Bobowski  
Superintendent  
Wrangell-St Elias National Park and Preserve  
Mile 106.8 Richardson Hwy  
Copper Center, AK 99573

Submitted electronically on NPS Planning, Environment, and Public Comment Page (PEPC) and to [wrst\\_planning\\_kennecott@nps.gov](mailto:wrst_planning_kennecott@nps.gov)

Re: Kennecott Operations and Management Plan

Dear Mr. Bobowski,

The State of Alaska (State) reviewed the Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve (WRST) Revised Kennecott Operations and Management Plan, 2023. The Kennecott Operations Plan (KOP) states that it is a guiding document for National Park Service (NPS) management of park land in and around the Kennecott Mine's National Historic Landmark (NHL).

The State appreciates the NPS efforts to pursue the following in the 2023 KOMP: adaptive co-management; and delineation of legal authority regarding transportation activities, such as clarification regarding easements and right of ways. The public will benefit from clear delineation of legal authority on transportation corridors. We request the NPS include detailed maps in any future planning process clearly showing land ownership.

### **Commercial Use Authorizations**

In the 2023 Specific Action Item Review and Summary document, the NPS describes a 2022 request to establish Commercial Use Authorizations for shuttles wishing to turn around on NPS-owned lots (2023 Summary, page 4). The State agrees that shuttle services provide much needed transportation services to the Kennecott Mill Site, particularly for non-Alaskan visitors or local visitors without vehicle transportation east of the Kennecott River bridges. However, the State requests that NPS list their authority and jurisdiction to issue commercial use authorizations within transportation corridors. The road is identified in the 2013 Kennecott Operations Plan as the "Alaska State [Right of Way] ROW, McCarthy to Kennecott,<sup>1</sup>" and is a lawful public access owned and managed by the State of Alaska. We note that the NPS states the shuttle turnaround is on NPS land and we request the NPS produce a map or other verification that the turnaround is not within the transportation corridor ROW. If the process of turning around the shuttle bus does not require the use of park lands, no CUA would be needed for driving on or turning around a shuttle bus on the ROW.

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<sup>1</sup> NPS, 2013 Kennecott Operations Plan, p. 11

Additionally, the NPS should update the KOMP to carry forward the 2013 recognition of the State ownership of this ROW.

### **Local OHV Use**

The State supports providing safe access routes and parking areas for users visiting WRST and the Kennecott Mine area. While shuttle transportation is needed for many visitors, the focus on access by shuttle does not recognize the needs of Alaskans who may be accessing the Kennecott mill site and greater Wrangell-St. Elias Preserve using off-highway vehicles (OHVs) that may need parking at the mill site. OHV access can be authorized under 43 CFR 36.11(g), and only a limited number of visitors would utilize OHVs to access the mill site parking lot. The additional use by OHVs parking at the mill site should cause minimal additional impacts to the road and parking surface. If, for example, a McCarthy/Nizina area inholder or a hunter accessing the preserve decides to visit the mill site or Root Glacier, providing parking for OHVs is good for them and the NPS. Designated parking is better for the NPS, as the alternative is for visitors to leave their OHV on the Omnibus Road right of way, which presents potential safety issues. Alaskans visiting the area should be able to park their OHVs in the parking spots dedicated to motor vehicles as the user numbers are limited and the surface is durable. Future NPS transportation plans should incorporate this type of access in the area.

The local state roads are open to use by highway vehicles and OHVs by all Alaskans, including rural residents. The State requests that Preserve roads, currently only open to rural residents, also be used by other Alaskans operating highway vehicles and OHVs. The road surfaces of the Toe of Kennecott Glacier Road and the Wagon Road are durable and the increase in user numbers would likely be minimal. General OHV use, (i.e., by Alaskans) can be authorized on roads, parking areas, designated routes/areas, or under a general permit. The Preserve portions of WRST area roads should be open to OHV use by the limited number of general hunters and Alaskans on designated routes already open to rural residents.

### **Accessibility**

The new proposed handicap parking at the Dairy Barn is at a significantly lower elevation than the current handicap parking at the shuttle turn-around. We question the accessibility of the newly proposed handicap parking. Please explain how the new parking maintains the handicap accessibility of the prior spots adjacent to the shuttle turn-around or consider maintaining the current handicap parking location.

### **Department of Natural Resources Management Authority**

DNR has management authority for state lands (including the land, water, tidelands, and shorelands of navigable waters within the State). This authority includes management of navigable waters, tidelands, and shorelands within and adjacent to the boundaries of federal lands, including conservation system units created under ANILCA. The NPS should be aware that the State has an interest in the submerged lands adjacent to the Kennecott Operations area, including but not limited to East Fork Kennicott River.

Additionally, DNR manages RS 2477 rights-of-way across the state. The State requests that NPS acknowledge these existing, state managed, public transportation corridors within the Kennecott Operations area. The NPS should be aware of State interests in trails/easements including but not limited to the Wagon Road.

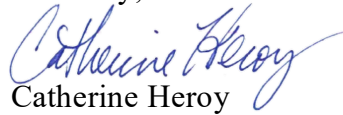
### **Trail improvements**

The KOMP and 2023 Specific Action Item Review and Summary document discuss several trail maintenance or project options. The State requests that any trail improvements on existing easements not impede the rights of individuals to use legally appropriate means of access.

### **Closing**

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. Please contact me at (907) 269-0880 or by email at [Catherine.heroy@alaska.gov](mailto:Catherine.heroy@alaska.gov) to coordinate any follow up discussions.

Sincerely,



Catherine Heroy

Acting State ANILCA Program Coordinator