

## Chapter One: Purpose and Need

### Overview

This *South Denali Implementation Plan and Environmental Impact Statement* (EIS) provides specific direction for expanded visitor facilities and recreational opportunities in the South Denali region until 2021. Proposed actions are guided by established laws and policies that affect the National Park Service, State of Alaska, and Matanuska-Susitna Borough. The plan also responds to public concerns identified during project scoping, comments made by the public during the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) review process, and the social and environmental impacts identified as part of the NEPA review.

### INTRODUCTION

This implementation plan represents a cooperative effort between the State of Alaska, the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, and the National Park Service. The visitor center proposed in this plan would be cooperatively managed by the State of the Alaska and the National Park Service.

This implementation plan is based on existing federal, state, and borough plans including the 1986 *Denali National Park and Preserve General Management Plan*, 1997 *National Park Service South Side Denali Development Concept Plan*, 1989 *Denali State Park Master Plan*, 1998 *Matanuska-Susitna Borough Petersville Road Corridor Management Plan*, and consideration of the Governor-chartered *South Denali Citizens Consultation Committee Report* (1999). These plans and reports recognize the need for expanded facilities to serve a growing population of visitors to the South Denali region.

The 1986 *Denali National Park and Preserve General Management Plan* calls for development of visitor services and access to the South Denali region to take advantage of the area's dramatically sculptured landscapes and mountain-oriented recreational opportunities. This plan recommends the project be planned and developed cooperatively with the state of Alaska and with involvement from the private sector.

The 1997 *South Side Denali Development Concept Plan* is a regional cooperative plan formulated by a team representing the National Park Service, State of Alaska, Matanuska-Susitna Borough, Denali Borough, Ahtna, Inc., and Cook Inlet Region, Inc. In the Record of Decision (ROD) the NPS and State of Alaska decided to construct visitor facilities in the Tokositna area at the western edge of Denali State Park near the end of an upgraded and extended Petersville Road. Developments would include a visitor center, parking, up to 50 campsites, a picnic area, hiking trails, information and safety signage, and associated facilities. The NPS and State of Alaska also decided to construct new visitor facilities along the George Parks Highway within Denali State Park. Additionally, the ROD called for facility development at Chelatna Lake and in the

Dunkle Hills. This current implementation plan further develops some of the concepts presented in the 1997 plan. Other concepts presented in the 1997 plan could be implemented through the planning and environmental compliance processes outlined in that document.

The 1999 *South Denali Citizens Consultation Committee Final Report* recommended modifying the development concepts in the 1997 *South Side Denali Development Concept Plan* while remaining consistent with its goals and objectives: to provide resident and visitor facilities throughout the south side of the Alaska Range to meet a wide range of needs and interests of the region's diverse user groups. The committee recommended that a visitor center be constructed along the Parks Highway and a nature center be constructed within the Denali State Park boundary in the Peters Hills to avoid an extensive upgrade of the Petersville Road through the canyon, thereby minimizing impacts to mining and backcountry uses. This current implementation plan further develops the concepts presented in the 1999 report.

The 1989 *Denali State Park Master Plan* recommends facility construction in the South Denali region: "Tremendous views of the Mt. McKinley massif and the diversity of surrounding areas make the park an appropriate location for a 'South Denali Visitor Complex'. The visitor complex will provide a focal point and staging area for the Denali State Park interpretive program." This current implementation plan is compatible with the vision for development in the state park. Specific language in the master plan has been amended through a concurrent process so that the specifics of development are in concurrence.

One of the objectives of the 1998 *Matanuska-Susitna Borough Petersville Road Corridor Management Plan* is to enhance the visitor experience of Petersville Road in conjunction with facility development in the South Denali region. Recommendations include interpretive panels, informational kiosks, vegetative buffers, and retention of scenic qualities along the road corridor. The planning team for this current implementation plan considered the recommendations in the Petersville Road plan.

For this planning effort, South Denali is defined to include the local communities, the Petersville Road corridor, the western section of Denali State Park, the northern part of the Peters Hills, lands east of the Peters Hills to the eastern boundary of Denali State Park, and the Parks Highway corridor from Rabideux Creek north through the state park. All proposed developments would occur on state or borough lands. Figure 2-1 (located in the map section at the end of Chapter Two) provides an overview of the planning area.

This plan provides direction for developments to the South Denali region until 2021. The cooperating agencies have prepared this environmental impact statement to evaluate the potential environmental impacts of actions proposed in the *South Denali Implementation Plan*. The draft environmental impact statement findings and public comment formed the basis for the decision by the South Denali Steering Committee on the *Final South Denali Implementation Plan*. Implementing the plan may require promulgation of special regulations and public advisories in consultation with other federal and state agencies and

the public. This environmental impact statement has been prepared according to the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 and regulations of the Council of Environmental Quality (40 CFR Part 1500).

## **PURPOSE OF THE PLAN**

The purpose of the plan is to enhance recreation and access throughout the South Denali region. Actions described by this plan

- Provide a quality visitor experience while protecting resource values in Denali State Park;
- Enhance recreational and access opportunities throughout the South Denali region for the benefit of a wide variety of visitors including Alaskans, independent travelers, and package tour travelers;
- Preserve the quality of life for residents in nearby communities.

## **NEED FOR THE PLAN**

A South Denali Implementation Plan is needed because visitation in the South Denali region continues to increase, requiring additional visitor opportunities and new methods of management to protect natural and cultural resources and quality of life values in local communities.

The resident population of Alaska has grown more than 50 percent since 1980, and the resident population of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough increased 50 percent from 1990-2000. Increasing population in the South Denali region has created an increasing year-round demand for recreational opportunities on public lands in the South Denali region.

In the last twenty years general growth in the tourism industry statewide has brought more pressure for access to Alaska's wild lands. Twenty years ago the relatively few recreational users of the public lands were sparsely spread over a vast area, but today – particularly in areas that are accessible from the state road system – the use is much denser. Traffic on Petersville Road is increasing and use of the Petersville Road for recreation has increased. New hotels near Talkeetna and along the Parks Highway near the Chulitna River have developed. Since it opened in 1997, the McKinley Princess lodge has doubled the number of rooms from 162 to 326, and its third expansion is adding another 126 rooms. The latest expansion will make the hotel second in size only to the company's flagship operation near Denali National Park.

Local residents report unacceptable impacts to their lifestyle from vandalism, trespass, litter, damage to natural resources, and public safety issues that they attribute to increased use of the area. Land management agencies are responsible for managing recreational and other uses to protect resources and prevent conflicts among users.

## PLANNING HISTORY

In general, there has been a shared vision among public land managers in the South Denali region that the south side of Denali should provide opportunities for greater visitor use. However, the issues related to development to support increased visitor use have historically generated extensive public controversy.

### 1960s and 1970s: Parks Highway Proposals

In **1968** the U.S. and Alaska Departments of Commerce proposed a facility at Chulitna Pass. That was followed by a **1969** proposal by the National Park Service and the Alaska Division of Tourism for a facility on South Curry Ridge (NPS 1969). The location at Chulitna, which is only 70 miles from the main entrance of Denali National Park, and lack of existing infrastructure at both sites made these projects unappealing to many people. Neither proposal materialized, though the designation of Denali State Park in 1970 was intended to provide the land base and protections needed for a major public tourism facility (Cresap, McCormick, and Paget 1968).

In **1974** Alaska State Parks proposed a lodge, visitor center, park headquarters, and a downhill ski area at Byers Lake (ADNR 1974 and 1975). This project was let out for competitive proposals and a contract was awarded; however, the successful bidder never seriously pursued the project.

### 1970s: Peters Hills Proposals

The concept of locating recreation facilities in the Peters Hills emerged from a study undertaken by the state in **1970** to explore ways to increase the role of tourism in the Alaskan economy. One of the study recommendations was the construction of a hotel in the South Denali area. Bradford Washburn, the director of the Boston Museum of Science and world renowned Mount McKinley cartographer, photographer, and mountaineer recommended that visitor facilities be constructed at a site south of the Tokositna River (ADNR 1980).

In **1972**, U.S. Senator Mike Gravel urged the state and the federal government to jointly study the feasibility of locating visitor facilities in the South Denali area. In **1973**, the *Mount McKinley National Park Master Plan* recommended an expansion of the park boundary to the south and a shift of visitor attention and facilities to the south side. The **1975** *Denali State Park Master Plan* recommended the addition of the Tokositna study area to the state park for the development of visitor and recreation

facilities. In **1976**, the state legislature added to the state park the land that comprised the study area (ADNR 1980).

Following these two events, State Senator Patrick Rodey and Representative Clark Gruening, with the strong support of Senator Gravel, sponsored the passage of two appropriation bills in the **1978** legislature. One bill appropriated \$310,000 to the Alaska Department of Natural Resources to investigate the feasibility of constructing a lodge and visitor center complex at Tokositna, and the second bill appropriated \$85,000 to the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities to study access to the area. These developments led to a memorandum of understanding, signed in October **1978** by the secretary of the U.S. Department of Interior, the governor of Alaska, and the mayor of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, to jointly plan visitor facilities and programs in Denali State Park (ADNR 1980).

In May **1979**, the state legislature set up the Tokositna Special Committee, with Senator Gravel, State Senator Rodey, and Commissioner of Natural Resources Robert LeResche as members. The purpose of this committee was to provide direction for the Tokositna project. The vision for this project was a major, year-round tourism and recreation destination that included commercial lodging and a variety of other facilities and services; various outdoor recreation activities including alpine skiing; campgrounds; trailheads; an airstrip; and a Teflon dome enclosure to house many of these facilities. Four reports were produced that deal with the feasibility of developing major recreation facilities at Tokositna: 1) Environmental Investigation and Site Analysis; 2) Market Analysis and Economic Study; 3) Downhill/cross-country Ski and Outdoor Recreation Study; and 4) Transportation Study.

The *Environmental Investigation and Site Analysis (1980)* analyzed key environmental information about the physical aspects of the Tokositna area. The *Market Analysis/ Economic Feasibility Study (1979)* analyzed the potential in-state and out-of-state visitor use demand. The *Skiing Feasibility Analysis (1979)* passed a positive judgement on the feasibility of skiing in the South Denali area: “Based upon the scope and quality of terrain the tentatively selected site compares favorably with other successful ski resorts in the U.S., Canada and Europe” (Sno Engineering 1979). Disadvantages included high development and operating costs, sensitive environmental and wilderness values, conflicts with existing mining claims, and untested technologies with regard to the Teflon dome enclosure.

## **1980s: Site Proposals**

These studies were followed by a series of site proposals. In **1980** the Alaska Division of Parks and the NPS proposed facilities at the Tokositna site. In **1986** the *Denali National Park and Preserve General Management Plan* proposed cooperative state, federal, and private development of a visitor center/hotel complex on South Curry Ridge (ADNR and NPS 1986). The plan calls for the development of visitor services and access to the South Denali region to take advantage of the area’s dramatically sculptured landscapes and mountain-oriented recreational opportunities, and

recommends the project be planned and developed cooperatively with the state of Alaska and with involvement from the private sector.

Three years later the **1989** *Denali State Park Master Plan* proposed a facility for High Lake in the north end of Denali State Park (ADNR 1989; ADNR 1990). The Master Plan recommends facility construction in the South Denali region because, “Tremendous views of the Mt. McKinley massif and the diversity of surrounding areas make the park an appropriate location for a ‘South Denali Visitor Complex’. The visitor complex will provide a focal point and staging area for the Denali State Park interpretive program.”

The **1986** *South Denali Concept Proposal for Developing a Major Visitor Destination in Denali State Park on the South Side of the Alaska Range* was a product of the Alaska Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation and the National Park Service. The concept proposed was a major, year-round, destination on South Curry Ridge at the south end of Denali State Park. Facilities included a visitor center, private lodging, restaurants, and other public/private tourist facilities and services.

In **1985** the Alaska Department of Natural Resources (ADNR), in cooperation with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADFG) and the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, completed the *Susitna Area Plan* for general state lands and borough lands within the borough boundaries (15.8 million acres). The plan presents goals, management guidelines, land allocations, and implementation procedures that affect major resources and types of land use.

## 1990s

Most south side visitor development proposals in the 1990s were rejected because they weren’t accessible by road and railroad. Only two points on the main highway system in the south side area offer both railroad access and a good view of Mount McKinley – High Lake and Talkeetna. High Lake was rejected after considerable public opposition and after it was determined to be only marginally feasible for hotel development. In **1990** CIRI proposed a facility about a mile south of the Talkeetna townsite.

In October **1990** the Senate Appropriations Committee directed the National Park Service to address visitor facility development in Talkeetna, Denali State Park, and on the south side of Denali National Park. The **1991** report in response to the directive from the Senate Committee on Appropriations concluded that the CIRI site for a Talkeetna Visitor Center was desirable but there wasn’t enough information at the time to evaluate whether it was “practicable” (DOI 1991).

In **1993**, the National Park Service published a *Draft Development Concept Plan/Environmental Impact Statement*. In this draft document, several south side developments were proposed, including an orientation center in the state park along the George Parks Highway, scenic and interpretive waysides along the highway, and

public use cabins and backcountry trails. A visitor center/hotel complex in Talkeetna also was evaluated as required by a 1990 Senate Appropriations Committee Directive. This document was withdrawn and no final document was published.

In **1994** at the request of Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt, a Denali Task Force was established to make recommendations on, among other matters, the cooperative management and recreation development of Denali's south side. The task force submitted its final report to the National Park System Advisory Board in December 1994, and the report's recommendations for the south side were adopted by the advisory board without modification (Denali Task Force 1994).

In **1995** the Alaska Visitors Association (AVA) proposed a tram to Alder Point to access South Denali. The AVA recommended further study of a 2-stage aerial tramway at Alder Point extending from the south end of Denali State Park several miles toward, and into, Denali National Park.

In May **1995**, south side planning was reinitiated cooperatively by an intergovernmental planning team. Governor Tony Knowles directed the state to take a lead role in this cooperative effort to increase recreation and tourism opportunities on the south side of Denali. The cooperative planning team was comprised of representatives from the National Park Service, State of Alaska, Denali Borough, Matanuska-Susitna Borough, and two Native regional corporations (Ahtna, Inc., and Cook Inlet Region, Inc.). One component of this cooperative endeavor was the preparation of a **1997** *South Side Development Concept Plan/Environmental Impact Statement* (DCP/EIS).

The *Revised Draft DCP/EIS* was filed with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in March **1996** and the final plan was filed with the EPA in January **1997**. The selected alternative in the final DCP/EIS provides for enhanced access and recreational opportunities throughout the South Denali region for a variety of visitors, including Alaskans, independent travelers, and package tour travelers, while at the same time protecting the important resource and community values in the area, including the rural lifestyle of local residents. The DCP/EIS plans visitor facilities for the Tokositna area at the western edge of Denali State Park near the end of an upgraded and extended Petersville Road; in the central development zone of Denali State Park along the George Parks Highway; at Chelatna Lake; and in the Dunkle Hills.

The **1997** Record of Decision for the DCP/EIS commits the NPS to take all practicable measures to avoid or minimize adverse environmental effects that could result from implementation of the selected action. These measures include conducting cooperative research on the natural and cultural resources and human uses on the south side; protecting sensitive wildlife habitat and activities; protecting, to the extent practicable, wetlands and vegetation; implementing best management practices to protect water quality and surface water resources; implementing measures to reduce soil loss; implementing measures to reduce the potential for human/wildlife conflicts;

protecting archeological and historic resources, as necessary; and incorporating sustainable design principles and aesthetics into facility design and siting.

At the same time, the Matanuska-Susitna Borough finalized the **1998** *Matanuska-Susitna Borough Petersville Road Corridor Management Plan*. One of the objectives of this plan is to enhance the visitor experience of Petersville Road in conjunction with facility development in the South Denali region. Recommendations include interpretive panels, informational kiosks, vegetative buffers, and retention of scenic qualities along the road corridor.

These planning processes relied heavily on public input; however, portions of the 1997 plan remained controversial even after substantial modifications were made to address public concerns. To address implementation of the south side plan, in **1997** the Governor of Alaska chartered the South Denali Citizens Consultation Committee, which included representatives from south side communities and interested user groups.

The **1999** *South Denali Citizens Consultation Committee Final Report* recommended modifying the development concepts in the 1997 *South Side Denali Development Concept Plan* while remaining consistent with its goals and objectives: to provide resident and visitor facilities throughout the south side of the Alaska Range to meet a wide range of needs and interests of the region's diverse user groups. The committee recommended that a visitor center be constructed along the Park Highway and a nature center be constructed within the Denali State Park boundary in the Peters Hills to avoid an extensive upgrade of the Petersville Road through the canyon, thereby minimizing impacts to mining and backcountry uses.

## **2000 and beyond**

The **2000-2001** *Denali National Park Business Plan* offers South Denali development as the long-term solution for an alternative tourist destination to Denali National Park and Preserve: "The area offers beautiful views of Mount McKinley and the Alaska Range, glaciers, streams, and much of the impressive array of wildlife for which the Denali Park Road is famous. This alternative visitor destination would be created through partnerships with the state, local communities, and native corporations."

In **2000**, the National Park Service received a Congressional appropriation of \$162,000 for community planning to mitigate impacts caused by Denali National Park related tourism. The money was used between **2000-2003** for community planning in Talkeetna, Trapper Creek, and the Y area.

In fiscal year **2004**, Denali National Park and Preserve received \$741,000 to begin the *South Denali Implementation Plan*. A cooperative agreement was finalized between the State of Alaska, Matanuska-Susitna Borough, and the National Park Service to cooperatively plan for development at specific locations to provide new access and increased recreational opportunities in the South Denali region.

## **DENALI STATE PARK PURPOSES**

The park's enabling legislation does not include a formal statement of purpose for Denali State Park. The Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation, as part of the planning process and in conjunction with the Susitna Valley State Park Citizen's Advisory Board, developed the following Mission Statement:

Denali State Park shall be managed and developed in a manner compatible with the following goals:

1. Protect the natural and cultural resources of the park and ensure that the park's resources are maintained to allow for the public's experience and understanding of the unique natural features that are found in this part of Alaska.
2. In a manner consistent with Goal I, provide for a variety of opportunities for visitors to the park to experience and understand the park's natural and cultural resources, including viewing Mount McKinley. Park facilities shall be designed and developed to support the public use and understanding of the park and its resources and not serve as attractions in and of themselves.
3. In a manner that is compatible with Goals I and II, recognize and accommodate, in so far as reasonable, the diverse needs of different types of visitors to the park. Avoid conflicts between different groups of visitors, and between visitors and park resources.

## **SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SOUTH DENALI REGION**

### **Wildlife and Habitat**

Visitors to the South Denali region often observe caribou, wolf, grizzly bear, moose, and fox. The region has thousands of lakes and diverse avian habitat that attract birds from all over the world. Rich and varied vegetation includes alpine tundra, shrub-scrub tundra, mixed spruce-birch woodlands, taiga, wetlands, and extensive riparian areas. The subarctic plant communities have adapted to long, bitterly cold winters. Even with these extreme conditions, a diversity of flowering plants inhabit the slopes and valleys of the region.

### **Mountains and Glaciers**

The region contains a major portion of the Alaska Range, one of the great mountain uplifts in North America. The Alaska Range is dominated by North America's highest peak, Mount McKinley, with its summit at 20,320 feet above sea level. A number of large glaciers originate in the high mountains, including some of the largest in North America, up to 45 miles long and 4 miles wide.

### **Large Protected Area**

Denali National Park and Preserve encompasses a vast area of over six million acres. Most of the two million acres of the original park has been in protected status since 1917. Adjacent to the national park, Denali State Park encompasses 324,240 acres. This large protected area enables a spectacular array of flora and fauna to live together in a healthy natural ecosystem and provides excellent opportunities to study large subarctic ecosystems in settings primarily undisturbed by humans. Because of these values, the United Nations Man and the Biosphere Program designated the national park and preserve an International Biosphere Reserve.

### **Scenic Resources and Air Quality**

Outstanding views of natural features, including mountains, glaciers, faults, and rivers dominate the landscape. On a clear day, Mount McKinley can be seen from Anchorage, more than 130 air miles to the south. The exceptional air quality in Alaska and the lack of city lights near the parks provide the conditions for outstanding daytime views and excellent night sky visibility in fall, winter, and spring.

### **Cultural Resources**

Known resources in the South Denali region include archeological and historic sites associated with Athabascan Indian groups, early explorers, and mining history.

### **Recreation**

The South Denali region offers superlative opportunities for snowmachining, snowshoeing, dog mushing, skiing, hiking, backcountry camping, boating, biking, ORV use, hunting, and fishing.

## **APPLICABLE LAWS, REGULATIONS, AND PLANS**

Management of the South Denali region must be consistent with the laws, regulations, policies, and plans of the federal, state, and local governments. The legal and policy framework that governs management of the area is extensive; the following information summarizes the most important directives.

### **Federal**

#### National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA)

NEPA mandates that any federal project or any project that requires federal involvement be scrutinized for its impact on the natural and human environment, and that reasonable alternatives for accomplishing the project purpose be considered. The purpose of NEPA

is to help public officials make decisions that are based on an objective understanding of environmental consequences and to take actions that protect, restore, or enhance the environment. To ensure compliance with NEPA, a specified process for proposed projects must be followed. The steps in this process are:

1. Scoping
2. Draft Environmental Impact Statement
3. Public Review of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement
4. Final Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision

#### Endangered Species Act

This act requires federal agencies to ensure that any action they authorize, fund, or carry out does not jeopardize the continued existence of any endangered or threatened species or result in the destruction or adverse modifications of critical habitat.

#### National Historic Preservation Act, Section 106

Any federal project or federally assisted project must consider the effect of the project on any district, site, building, structure, or object that is included in or eligible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places. This provision includes construction of trails or other visitor facilities.

#### Executive Order 11990 Protection of Wetlands

This executive order requires the NPS to evaluate project impacts to wetlands. Objectives of the order are to avoid, to the extent possible, the short- and long-term adverse impacts associated with occupancy, modification or destruction of wetlands, to preserve and enhance the natural and beneficial values of wetlands, and to avoid indirect support of development and new construction in such areas wherever there is a practicable alternative.

#### Executive Order 12898 Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low Income Populations

Executive Order 12898 requires federal agencies to incorporate environmental justice into their missions by identifying and addressing disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of their programs and policies on minorities and low-income populations and communities.

### **State**

#### Denali State Park Legislation

Denali State Park was created by the Alaska Legislature in 1970 and enlarged in 1976. The park is managed by the Alaska Department of Natural Resources Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation. The current *Denali State Park Master Plan* was adopted in 1989.

#### Land Management Statutes and Plans

The Alaska Department of Natural Resources (ADNR) manages state-owned lands and resources under Titles 38 and 41 of the Alaska Statutes. Alaska Statute 38.04.058 addresses restrictions on easement or right-of-way use. ADNR, in cooperation with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADFG) and the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, completed *the Susitna Area Plan* in 1985. The *Susitna Area Plan* provides management guidelines for state-owned public domain lands adjacent to Denali State Park and the south side of Denali National Park. In 1991, ADNR, with the assistance of ADFG, cooperation of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, and assistance from the National Park Service, adopted the *Susitna Basin Recreation Rivers Management Plan* to guide management of six legislatively designated recreation rivers and adjacent river corridors, including the Deshka (Kroto Creek/ Moose Creek) and Lake Creek.

#### Fish and Wildlife Management Statutes and Responsibilities

Under Title 16 of the Alaska Statutes, the ADFG is responsible for the management, protection, and maintenance of fish and wildlife resources. Also under Title 16, the Alaska Board of Fisheries and the Alaska Board of Game develop the regulation governing fishing, hunting, and trapping.

#### Highway Management Statutes and Responsibilities

Under Title 19 of the Alaska Statutes, the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities is responsible for the planning, construction, maintenance, protection, and control of state-owned roads and associated rights-of-way, including the George Parks Highway and the Petersville Road.

### **Local**

#### MSB 1.10.115 Planning and Zoning, MSB 15, MSB 16, and MSB 17

MSB 1.10 sets out the responsibility of the borough for planning, platting, and zoning on an area wide basis. MSB 15 Planning, MSB 16 Platting, and MSB 17 Zoning, provide detailed standards and procedures for implementing those powers.

#### Comprehensive Land Use Planning

Comprehensive land use planning is conducted by a public process. Final decisions are made by the borough assembly. The comprehensive plan is composed of a variety of component plans including but not limited to transportation, recreation, schools, public facilities, coastal management, and land use. The land use plan is composed of an older (1970) comprehensive plan, which is being updated on a community by community basis. The land use plan also incorporates some state plans such as the *Susitna Area Plan* and *Willow Sub Basic Plan* for state-owned land in the borough. Planning goals and objectives are pursued through capital projects, operational funding and regulations. Land use regulations are a primary tool to implement the requirements of approved plans. Borough Land Use Regulations must be consistent with the stated goals and objectives of an adopted Land Use Plan.

### Corridor Management Planning

Corridor Management Plans allow affected communities to consider the various ways of using and benefiting from the scenic highway corridor while developing management guidelines to maintain the integrity and values of the highway. Corridor management plans are developed by a process similar to the manner used by the borough in updating its comprehensive plan. Management guidelines may include a variety of measures including vegetative buffers, road design criteria, pullout identification, zoning, and conveyance language. The planning effort includes public participation in the form of public meetings where the plan is discussed and comments received and through formal public hearing by both the Borough Planning Commission and Assembly. Both the plan and the methods in which it is implemented must be adopted by ordinance.

### MSB 17.17 Denali Special Land Use District

The area of the Denali State Park including privately owned inholdings are subject to the Land Use Standards of MSB 17.17 Denali Special Land Use District. This district is designed to encourage land use that will be compatible with the character of the Denali State Park and to provide for appropriate economic development.

For more information, see Appendix A: Summary of Actions and Plans that Apply to Lands along Petersville Road.

## **ISSUES AND IMPACT TOPICS**

Scoping is designed to be an early, open public process to determine the scope and significance of issues to be addressed in an environmental document for a proposed action. The scoping process for this *South Denali Implementation Plan* was initiated on February 13<sup>th</sup>, 2004, with the publication of the Notice of Intent to prepare an environmental impact statement in the *Federal Register*. In February, 2004, a scoping newsletter was distributed to introduce the goals of the project and solicit input on the development of alternatives. During February 2004, public meetings were held in Anchorage, Wasilla, Susitna Valley, McKinley Village, and Fairbanks.

The issues and impact topics identified during the scoping process, together with federal, state, and local legal requirements, formed the basis for the environmental analysis in this document. A brief rationale is presented for each issue and topic. Issues and topics considered but not addressed in this document are also identified and discussed.

### **Impact Topics Considered in this Document**

#### Potential Effects on Soils

New developments, especially parking areas, visitor centers, and trails, could impact soils in the planning area. An increase in recreational use that is spurred by these new developments could also impact soils.

#### Potential Effects on Aquatic Resources

Construction runoff, stormwater runoff and sanitary wastes could impact water quality in the planning area. Construction runoff could introduce high sediment loads and pollutants such as fuel and lubricants from construction equipment. Stormwater runoff could introduce vehicle-related pollutants into the streams and lakes from the use of the roads and parking lots. Recreational activities utilizing powered equipment such as boats, ORVs, and snowmachines could introduce pollutants similar to those anticipated for passenger vehicles. Concerns were also raised about impacts to aquatic ecosystems including macroinvertebrate and fish communities. New development and increases in use could reduce fish habitat.

#### Potential Effects on Wetlands

New construction could affect wetlands by degrading the quality of the wetlands or by reducing the amount of wetlands in the region. Increases in use (particularly ORV use) could damage wetland communities.

#### Potential Effects on Vegetation

New construction could affect fragile tundra ecosystems. Increases in use (particularly ORV use and snowmachine use) could damage sensitive plants and increase the spread of invasive plant species.

#### Potential Effects on Wildlife

New development and increases in use could reduce wildlife habitat and displace wildlife from areas it currently uses. Increases in use could also lead to more incidences of poaching, increased human-bear interactions, and more incidences of bears obtaining human food.

#### Potential Effects on Cultural Resources

Physical developments and increased backcountry use could disturb archeological and/or historic resources.

#### Potential Effects on Socioeconomics

New development could create local employment opportunities and affect regional and local economies of Southcentral and Interior Alaska, particularly the recreational and tourism sectors. It could also lead to a need for more emergency and routine medical services and more public safety officers.

Increased use could lead to crowding, congestion, traffic problems, litter, and vandalism. It could change the character of local communities to one that resembles a large town with lots of development, tourists, and amenities. Creating a new tourist destination could lead to strip development along the Parks Highway. New buildings and roads could affect the appearance of natural landscapes.

#### Potential Effects on Visitor Opportunity

Plan components could affect visitor numbers, how visitors access public lands, what kind of activities visitors participate in, the type of experience available, and visitor health and safety.

### **Issues and Impact Topics Considered but not Addressed**

The following planning issues and impact topics are not addressed in this document. An explanation is provided for each issue or topic.

#### Effects on Air Quality

Exhaust emissions from internal combustion engines associated with automobiles, motorboats, snowmachines, and airplanes could have adverse impacts on air quality. Denali National Park and Preserve is designated a Class I airshed under the Clean Air Act amendments and has exceptionally clean air. Resource experts believe that actions proposed in this plan would create negligible impacts to air quality in the South Denali region.

#### Effects on Subsistence

An ANILCA section 810 statement has been prepared in conjunction with this environmental impact statement and is included as Appendix B. Subsistence was dismissed as an impact topic because no federal subsistence use is known to occur on Denali National Park lands within the planning area since the planning area is not within Denali National Park and Preserve. Very low levels of subsistence use are believed to occur within the planning area. The south side planning area lies within Alaska Game Management Units 13E and 16A. Unit 16A is part of the Anchorage/Matanuska-Susitna/Kenai nonsubsistence area, which means that dependence on subsistence is not a principal part of the economy, culture, and way of life of the area. Consequently, State subsistence priority does not apply to unit 16A (see Title 5, Alaska Administrative Code 99.016).

#### Effects on Threatened and Endangered Species

No federally listed threatened and endangered species are known to occur within the planning area.

#### Effects on Minority and Low-Income Populations

Executive Order 12898 requires federal agencies to incorporate environmental justice into their missions by identifying and addressing high and adverse human health or environmental effects of their programs and policies on minorities and low-income populations and communities. The proposed actions would not result in disproportionately high direct or indirect adverse effects on any minority or low-income population or community.

## **PERMITS AND APPROVALS NECESSARY TO IMPLEMENT THE PLAN**

A Corps of Engineers Clean Water Act Section 404 Permit is needed for any part of the project that traverses the waters of the United States, including wetlands. A National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permit is required for construction projects that disturb more than one acre. The Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) would need to issue a Certificate of Reasonable Assurance pursuant to the Clean Water Act Section 401. Where development would impact anadromous streams, the Division of Natural Resources Office of Habitat, Management, and Permitting (OHMP) requires a Fish Habitat Permit. The State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) must approve any construction of access that could adversely affect historic or archeological resources. Any developments proposed within the Scenic Buffer along Petersville Road and the Parks Highway will require evaluation by the State of Alaska Department of Natural Resources Southcentral Regional Office. Constructing and providing nonmotorized boat access downstream of the mouth of Troublesome Creek may require a coastal zone determination. The Matanuska-Susitna Borough's Planning Department's Development Checklist will also need to be completed and submitted. A detailed Implementation Plan is outlined in Appendix C.