

## **Summary of Changes between the Draft and Final Environmental Impact Statement**

The agencies received 72 comments on the *Draft South Denali Implementation Plan and EIS*. Chapter 6 contains a characterization of comments received and the agency responses to those comments. This Final plan and EIS was revised from the Draft plan and EIS based on response to public comments and on internal discussions within the interagency planning team. Per the National Environmental Policy Act section 1503.4, regarding responses to comments, agencies preparing final EISs can respond to comments in a number of ways. These ways are listed below along with some of the major areas where comments resulted in changes to the Final EIS.

### **Modify alternatives including the preferred alternative**

In response to public comment, the preferred alternative (Alternative C, Parks Highway) was modified to include additional land use controls along the Parks Highway and Petersville Road corridors, mitigation measures for alleviating conflicts between motorized and non-motorized use, and the addition of wildlife monitoring in Denali State Park. To reduce potential human-bear conflicts, the proposed trail near Hill 1007 was removed from the alternative and the proposed new access to the Chulitna River was moved downstream from the mouth of Troublesome Creek.

### **Supplement, improve, or modify EIS analyses**

Each impact topic was reviewed and revised as necessary to ensure that each action being considered was evaluated adequately. Many sections were edited to improve clarity. The impacts analysis for soils, water quality, aquatic resources and fish, wetlands, vegetation, wildlife, socioeconomics, and visitor opportunity were revised to improve logic and clarity. Analyses were edited to better reflect impacts from cross-country ORV use, cumulative impacts from the Boy Scout camp south of Denali State Park, and indirect impacts from increasing the size or constructing new parking lots along the Parks Highway and Petersville Road.

### **Make factual corrections**

Some public comments noted factual errors in the Draft plan and EIS. These were evaluated and, where necessary, the text was revised for accuracy.

### **Other changes between Draft and Final**

Chapter Five: Consultation and Coordination was updated to include descriptions of the public meetings that occurred after the Draft plan was published and to include additional descriptions of the consultation process.

Chapter Six was added. It contains a record of public comment with accompanying agency response to substantive comments.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### PURPOSE AND NEED

#### **Why are the National Park Service, State of Alaska, and Matanuska-Susitna Borough developing this plan?**

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

- Provide a quality visitor experience while protecting resource values in the South Denali region.
- 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.

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 in local communities.

### ALTERNATIVES

#### **What Does This Plan Do?**

The Draft plan and EIS includes a no-action alternative and two action alternatives. Under Alternative A, no new actions would be implemented to support the 1997 Record of Decision for the *South Side Denali Development Concept Plan* except for those projects already approved and initiated. This alternative represents no change from current management direction and therefore represents the existing condition in the South Denali region. However, it does not ensure a similar future condition which could be affected by factors unrelated to this planning effort.

Under Alternative B (Peters Hills Alternative) a new nature center would be constructed on approximately 2.5 acres in the Peters Hills inside the southern boundary of Denali State Park. The total building requirement would be approximately 7,500 square feet. A paved parking area would be constructed near the junction of Petersville Road and the proposed access road (MP 28 of Petersville Road) to accommodate private vehicles. An access road approximately 7 miles in length would be constructed from MP 28 of Petersville Road to the nature center. Upgrading and widening Petersville Road between MP 9.3 and 28 is a connected action that would be necessary to implement this

alternative. Approximately 31 miles of trails would be constructed in the vicinity of the new nature center.

Under Alternative C (Parks Highway, Preferred Alternative) a new visitor complex would be constructed on approximately 4.1 acres near Curry Ridge in Denali State Park. The total building requirement would be approximately 16,000 square feet. A paved parking area would be constructed on the natural bench across from the Denali View South Wayside near Parks Highway MP 134.6. An access road approximately 3.5 miles in length would be constructed from the parking area to the visitor center. Approximately 13 miles of trails would be constructed in the vicinity of the new visitor center.

## ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

### **What are the consequences of each alternative to the resources in the South Denali region?**

#### *Alternative A (No Action)*

This alternative would generally not affect resources in the planning area.

#### *Alternative B (Peters Hills)*

This alternative would have minor adverse impacts on water quality, aquatic resources, fish, and wildlife; and moderate adverse impacts on soils and cultural resources. This alternative would result in the clearing of 14 acres of wetlands and 117 acres of terrestrial vegetation.

Construction effects would be considered a major beneficial impact on industry, employment, and income. The construction impacts on planning area population and demographics would be minor. Housing impacts would likely be minor if on-site housing were provided. If on-site housing were limited, the impacts would be moderate to major. The operations impacts on housing and real estate would be minor. The construction impacts on borough and municipal revenues and expenditures would be minor because the construction would be of a short duration and largely untaxed. Alternative B would have a major impact on the planning area's quality of life indicators, particularly in the Petersville area. A majority of the quality of life indicators could be affected by developments proposed in Alternative B; in fact, all indicators except self-sufficient lifestyle could be affected. Impacts on land ownership and use would be moderate because the land uses would shift, but the proposed changes would be consistent with existing plans or controlled by land use restrictions.

The actions proposed in this alternative would have a major positive impact on visitor opportunities for individuals who require assistance with access, facilities, and services, especially in the Peters Hills, along Petersville Road, and on the Chulitna River by increasing access, interpretation, visitor services, and trails. Actions in this alternative would improve access for some recreational activities, would enhance the experience for snowmachine users, and would retain current opportunities for primitive recreation near Curry Ridge. It would simultaneously create a major negative impact by degrading the

quality of the experience for non-motorized winter recreation throughout the planning area and introducing adverse impacts to primitive, self-reliant recreational opportunities in the Peters Hills, along Petersville Road, and on the Chulitna River by providing opportunities for increases in types and levels of use which could create user conflicts. Visitor safety would be improved by education associated with interpretive panels, information kiosks, and agency staffing. Visitor safety would be adversely affected by conflicts between motorized and non-motorized users.

*Alternative C (Parks Highway, Preferred Alternative)*

This alternative would have minor adverse impacts on water quality, aquatic resources, fish, and wildlife; and moderate adverse impacts on soils and cultural resources. This alternative would result in the clearing of 6 acres of wetlands and 143 acres of terrestrial vegetation.

Construction effects would be considered a major beneficial impact on industry, employment, and income. The construction impacts on planning area population and demographics would be minor. Housing impacts would likely be minor to moderate if on-site housing were provided. If on-site housing were limited, the impacts would be moderate to major. The operations impacts on housing and real estate would be minor. The construction impacts on borough and municipal revenues and expenditures would be minor because the construction would be of a short duration and largely untaxed. Alternative C would have major impacts on the planning area's quality of life indicators. Five quality of life indicators could be affected by developments proposed in Alternative C, including rural character, community cohesiveness, economic characteristics, government interaction, and recreation opportunities. Impacts on land ownership and use would be moderate because the land uses would shift, but the proposed changes would be consistent with existing plans or controlled by land use restrictions.

The actions proposed in this alternative would have a major positive impact on visitor opportunities for individuals who require assistance with access, facilities, and services throughout the South Denali region and especially at Curry Ridge, along Petersville Road, and on the Chulitna River by increasing access, interpretation, visitor services, and trails. Actions in this alternative would improve access for some recreational activities, would enhance the experience for snowmachine users, and would retain current opportunities for primitive recreation in the Peters Hills. It would simultaneously create a major negative impact by degrading the quality of the experience for non-motorized winter recreation throughout the planning area and introducing adverse impacts to primitive, self-reliant recreational opportunities on Curry Ridge and on the Chulitna River by providing opportunities for increases in types and levels of use which could create user conflicts. Visitor safety would be improved by education associated with interpretive panels, information kiosks, and agency staffing. Visitor safety would be adversely affected by conflicts between motorized and non-motorized users.

