

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

RECORD OF DECISION

South Side Denali Development Concept Plan

INTRODUCTION

The south side of Denali is defined to include the 1980 Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) addition on the south side of Denali National Park and Preserve; Denali State Park; lands extending south to include Chelatna Lake, the Petersville Road area, and Talkeetna; and the road/rail corridor as far north as Cantwell. A *Final South Side Denali Development Concept Plan/Environmental Impact Statement* (DCP/EIS) was prepared cooperatively by the National Park Service, State of Alaska, Denali Borough, and Matanuska-Susitna Borough. Ahtna, Inc. and Cook Inlet Region, Inc., two Native regional corporations with substantial land ownership within the planning area, participated as planning partners pursuant to the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, Public Law 92-203, Sec. 2(b), but were not official cooperating agencies on the DCP/EIS. The final DCP/EIS evaluates options to improve recreational opportunities and visitor facilities on the south side and is guided by the following vision:

- 👉 Provide opportunities for high quality, resource-based destination experiences and provide information, orientation, and recreation services and facilities convenient to park visitors.
- 👉 Develop facilities and access in a location and manner that minimizes impacts on resources, local lifestyles, and communities.
- 👉 Establish working partnerships for funding and phasing development.

This Record of Decision documents the decision of the Department of the Interior, National Park Service, regarding the South Side Denali plan. The State of Alaska has signed this Record of Decision in concurrence with its findings. This Record of Decision briefly discusses the background for the planning effort, states the decision and discusses the basis for it, describes other alternatives considered, specifies the environmentally preferable alternative, identifies measures adopted to minimize potential environmental harm, and summarizes the results of public involvement during the planning process.

BACKGROUND

While there has been a generally shared vision among public land managers in the region and others that the south side of Denali should receive greater use and development for visitors, the size and location of facilities have generated extensive public controversy for many years. In 1993, the National Park Service published a *Draft South Slope Denali Development Concept Plan/Environmental Impact Statement* that proposed several developments on the south side of Denali National Park and Preserve. Unfortunately, the 1993 draft plan did not resolve the controversy and, 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 (though an amendment was made regarding the task force's recommendations for the north side).

In May 1995, south side planning was reinitiated cooperatively by an intergovernmental planning team. Governor Tony Knowles directed that the state take a lead role in this cooperative effort to increase recreation and tourism opportunities on the south side of Denali. The cooperative planning team is 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 has been the preparation of a *South Side Development Concept Plan/Environmental Impact Statement* (DCP/EIS). In compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended, the National Park Service has been the lead federal agency responsible for the DCP/EIS; the state and the two boroughs have been cooperating agencies. The two Native corporations may not serve as cooperating agencies under the National Environmental Protection Act, but have been considered planning partners pursuant to ANCSA (P.L. 92-203, Sec. 2(b) and in accordance with National Park Service policy and the Federal Advisory Committee Act.

A revised draft and final DCP/EIS have been completed. The revised draft DCP/EIS was filed with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in March 1996 and the final was filed with the EPA in January 1997. Considerable consultation with the public occurred throughout the planning process.

The final DCP/EIS describes three action alternatives, including a proposed action, for improving visitor access, interpretation, and recreational opportunities on lands south of Mount McKinley and the Alaska Range and along the George Parks Highway. A no-action alternative also is described. In addition, the final DCP/EIS presents the major issues associated with each alternative, as identified through the public scoping process; examines the environmental consequences of each alternative; presents measures to avoid or minimize adverse environmental effects; and presents and responds to substantive comments made during public review of the revised draft DCP/EIS. Furthermore, the final DCP/EIS sets the stage for establishing working partnerships for more detailed decision-making, funding, and phasing of appropriate visitor facilities and services on the south side. Descriptions of facilities in the final DCP/EIS are conceptual. More detailed information on and analysis of the exact site location, design, capacity, and functions of facilities will be addressed in subsequent site-specific plans.

DECISION (selected alternative)

The National Park Service, in partnership with the State of Alaska and others necessary to the implementation of the plan, will implement the proposed action as described in the *Final South Side Denali Development Concept Plan/Environmental Impact Statement*. The South Side Denali plan, as determined by this decision, serves as an amendment to the 1986 *General Management Plan* for Denali National Park and Preserve.

Description of the Selected Alternative. The emphasis of the selected alternative is to enhance 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. Visitor facilities are planned 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. A phasing and funding schedule will be developed by a South Side Denali Plan Implementation Partnership to be established by the governor. Phasing construction of developments will allow orderly plan implementation over an established period of time that compliments funding availability and addresses visitor needs.

Developments in the Tokositna area include a visitor center (up to 5,000 square feet), parking, up to 50 primitive RV or tent campsites, a picnic area, up to four public use cabins, a system of short hiking/interpretive trails and viewing areas in the vicinity of the visitor center and longer trails leading through the brush to alpine terrain into Denali National Park and Preserve, information/safety signage at trailheads, and associated facilities to support staffing and operations. The alternative calls for the Petersville Road to be upgraded from the Forks Roadhouse at about mile 19 and extended to about mile 40 to access the new facilities. Appropriately-sited bicycle and pedestrian enhancements along the Petersville Road also are part of this alternative. These enhancements may be a part of or separate from the road.

Other areas of facility development include Chelatna Lake, the Dunkle Hills, and Denali State Park along the George Parks Highway. Facilities at Chelatna Lake include up to five primitive fly-in only campsites, up to two public use cabins, a hiking trail leading through the brush from the lake to alpine terrain in Denali National Park and Preserve, and trailhead information/safety signage. The Dunkle Hills road could provide new public access opportunities in the Dunkle Hills/Broad Pass area, including access into Denali National Park and Preserve via a trailhead, pending resolution of land status/access issues. In cooperation and where desirable, a partnership between the National Park Service, local communities, ANCSA Native corporations, and the state of Alaska will develop visitor facilities and services in the central development zone of Denali State Park, at Broad Pass, and in Talkeetna, when the need and opportunity to do so are established. Similarly, in cooperation and where desirable, partnerships for providing additional visitor services along the George Parks Highway may be pursued. Consultation and coordination with local communities to define need and determine appropriate courses of action will be essential. For the state park central development zone of Denali State Park, facilities include construction of a visitor center (up to 3,000 square feet), hiking trails near the visitor center, expansion of the Byers Lake campground by up to 25 sites or construction of a new campground of up to 50 sites elsewhere in the central development zone, and interpretive roadside exhibits. All of these facilities will be easily accessible via the George Parks Highway.

Development at Tokositna will provide access to the superb views in the area and provide opportunities for visitors to immerse themselves in the landscape and be surrounded by the Alaska Range. This component of the plan will provide the visitor with a sense of departing the main highway and its faster pace and arriving at a wilder, slower-paced locale. Facilities and road improvements will be designed with this in mind. Facilities at Tokositna will be designed to encourage visitors to leave their vehicles and experience the adjacent tundra/alpine landscape in both the state and national parks. Visitors will be able to obtain area-specific park orientation and interpretive information at a visitor center, explore the area and access Denali National Park and Preserve via hiking trails, or make use of a campsite or public use cabin on state park land. Tokositna will also serve as a jumping off point for longer hiking or backcountry trips in the surrounding wild lands.

Facilities along the George Parks Highway will provide convenient information and orientation for visitors to the area, access and recreational opportunities for those wishing to use that area of the state park and for those who do not have the time, interest, or resources for an off-the-main highway experience such as at Tokositna, Chelatna Lake, or the Dunkle Hills.

General Policies and Actions. Several general policies and actions will be implemented as part of this decision:

- 👉 Lodging, restaurants, and other primarily commercial facilities and services should not be developed on park lands. Small-scale ancillary food service and sale of educational and interpretive materials may be appropriate in some cases on park lands and in park facilities. Construction of full-service campgrounds (with hookups) on private lands is encouraged.
- 👉 Except in specific development areas highlighted in this plan, the wild character of Denali State Park and Denali National Park and Preserve will be protected.
- 👉 Additional or revised land management plans and land use controls will be in effect before major development occurs.
- 👉 The state will review and modify, as necessary, portions of the Susitna Area Plan and related policies to designate state lands in the immediate Petersville Road corridor for retention in public ownership to protect the scenic, wildlife, mineral, recreation, and other resource values. (The Susitna Area Plan already prohibits disposal of state land along the Petersville Road north of the Forks Roadhouse.)
- 👉 New facilities and uses will be designed and located to minimize impacts on existing uses (e.g., mining, subsistence, wildland recreation).
- 👉 Construction will be restricted to the minimum area required and work will be monitored to ensure that work methods minimize adverse impacts on lands near the construction site(s) and that mitigating measures identified in the contracts are followed.
- 👉 Pursuant to ANILCA, sections 1306 and 1307 and respective implementation policy and regulations, the National Park Service will continue its commitment to giving priority to the application of Title XIII with regard to federal expenditures for visitor centers, facilities, and services.
- 👉 Development will be phased in practical and achievable steps and projects will be accomplished in a cost-effective manner.
- 👉 Creative funding strategies will be pursued, including private sector options for construction and operation of facilities.
- 👉 Up to two additional roadside exhibits will be developed at existing pullouts along the George Parks Highway.

- 👉 Watchable Wildlife areas along the George Parks Highway and/or the Petersville Road will be identified and established based on existing and additional scientific information (e.g., wildlife, habitat).
- 👉 Self-guiding interpretive brochures will be developed for appropriate portions of the George Parks Highway and the Susitna River.
- 👉 The Matanuska-Susitna Borough's Special Land Use District currently in place in Denali State Park will be reviewed and revised, as appropriate, to improve implementation and enforcement.
- 👉 The state, the National Park Service, the boroughs, and other jurisdictions, as appropriate, will continue to coordinate on issues that affect multiple ownership. In addition, they will work together, as appropriate, to manage recreational activities and other uses of public lands in the area. These uses will continue but will be managed to protect the area and preserve a quality experience. Existing travel modes, both motorized and non-motorized (aircraft, snowmobiles, boats, ATVs, skis, dogsleds, etc.) will be examined to determine the need for, and appropriateness of new access points, parking, restrooms, trails, corridors, signing, mapping, and other special measures.
- 👉 The need for services (fire protection, emergency medical services, ambulance) resulting from plan implementation will be addressed through work with local residents, businesses, and applicable volunteer organizations.
- 👉 The Matanuska-Susitna Borough will complete separate corridor management plans for the Petersville Road and portions of the George Parks Highway to protect resource values associated with developments resulting from the South Side Denali plan, maintain and enhance the scenic driving experience, and develop community-based recommendations for managing continued growth in the region.
- 👉 The state will continue to manage state rights-of-way to maintain safety and protect scenic values. Management tools include vegetation management, driveway and pullout location and design, frontage roads, enforcement of sign laws, and addressing encroachments. Selective brushing and vista clearing will be conducted to improve views along the George Parks Highway.
- 👉 State land management plans and policies will support the maintenance of environmentally-sound mining activities. The state will work with the mining industry and individual claim holders to address mining issues in the project area, such as RS 2477 rights-of-way, recreational mining proposals, status and shared use of roads, and avoidance/mitigation of conflicts between mining and other land uses.
- 👉 State scenic byway designation for portions of the George Parks Highway, including the section in Denali State Park, will be considered following corridor management planning by local governments.

- 👉 Land exchanges will be considered between the state and the Matanuska-Susitna Borough along the Petersville Road to provide the borough with alternate lands elsewhere that are better suited to development.
- 👉 Studies on the natural and cultural resources and human uses of the planning area will be conducted in advance of south side development, as appropriate. The National Park Service, the state, and others will work cooperatively to secure funding and carry out these studies. Studies will have the objectives of providing broad spectrum resource data useful in environmental analyses and in addressing human use issues; providing site-specific resource information for facility design and siting; and filling voids in existing baseline information, particularly as it relates to sensitive species or ecosystem elements.
- 👉 Necessary staffing and operating funds will be made available to implement the plan.
- 👉 Additional planning and environmental impact assessment will be completed prior to construction of major facilities and access upgrades.
- 👉 Any significant amendments to the south side Denali plan will be coordinated among the planning/implementation partnership.
- 👉 A Denali South Side Plan Implementation Partnership will be formally established to continue the cooperative partnership approach in implementing the development concept plan. This partnership team will develop additional details on phasing, funding, and plan implementation. It will also serve as a monitoring group to evaluate the progress of implementation activities and associated mitigation actions and to keep these two items linked. Substantial community involvement will be a part of this plan implementation.
- 👉 Progress on plan implementation will be assessed by the Denali South Side Plan Implementation Partnership after three years in light of funding availability, results of wildlife research, and progress on identified mitigation strategies, and priorities or management emphasis will be adjusted as needed.

The concepts in the Denali State Park Master Plan are consistent with those in the final South Side Denali DCP/EIS. The objectives of the Tokositna component are more clearly defined in the final DCP/EIS than in the draft and the visitor facility at the Tokositna location is downsized considerably. Given these two changes between the draft and final DCP/EIS, a revision of the master plan may not be necessary. As facility siting details and designs are fleshed out, the need to revise the master plan will be evaluated by the state, in consultation with the implementation partnership and others.

BASIS FOR THE DECISION

The proposed action is selected because 1) it represents the best option to enhance visitor use and appreciation of the south side Denali area for the widest variety of visitors, 2) it represents the best option to address anticipated visitor growth on the south side, 3) it offers the best destination alternative on the south side to the existing entrance area in Denali National Park and Preserve, and 4) it offers the best

option on the south side for access into Denali National Park and Preserve. Overall, the proposed action best addresses the vision and goals as outlined in the final DCP/EIS. Furthermore, it is consistent with the legislative intent for the area and the Denali State Park Master Plan. Although the estimated cost of this alternative is higher than the other alternatives evaluated in the DCP/EIS, the benefits are, likewise, greater. Furthermore, while the planning partners believe this alternative is achievable, the partners are committed to reviewing progress on the plan within three years and, if needed in light of funding availability and other considerations, adjusting priorities or management emphasis.

Taken together, developments in the Tokositna area, along the George Park Highway, at Chelatna Lake, and in the Dunkle Hills area offer a wide variety of high-quality recreation opportunities for a variety of visitors. Visitors traveling in groups and those traveling independently can benefit from the options offered. Some, and perhaps all, of the facilities and opportunities should be attractive to Alaska residents who recreate on the south side. Visitor centers in the Tokositna area and along the George Parks Highway will provide information, orientation, and shelter to visitors in two very different settings. Public use cabins, hiking trails, and camping facilities will provide options for visitors to experience the landscape in remote as well as in easily accessible settings. Taken together, these developments should reasonably and well accommodate the visitor growth anticipated for the south side over the next 15 to 20 years.

The Tokositna/Petersville Road area, which has been the focus of most of the public opposition to the proposed action in the South Side Denali DCP/EIS, represents a high-quality, resource-based alternative destination to the existing entrance area on the north side of the Denali National Park and Preserve that cannot be provided as well or as feasibly elsewhere on the south side. Furthermore, it provides a new destination and additional visitor opportunities in Denali State Park. Even in poor weather, the area's scenic alpine setting is attractive for a range of outdoor activities. Characteristics that combine to make the Tokositna area a true alternative destination include the superb views of Mount McKinley and its surrounding landscape; scenic wild land views, even in poor weather; the alpine setting; the relative ease of access via an upgraded and extended road; and its location approximately 40 miles off the main highway in an area almost free of residential or business development. Virtually all land adjacent to the Petersville Road from the Forks Roadhouse at about mile 19 to the Tokositna area is undeveloped state land and will remain so, thus providing a largely undeveloped approach through mostly wild land to the Tokositna area for at least the last half of the drive from the George Parks Highway. Concepts in the plan for improvements to the Petersville Road, including bicycle and pedestrian enhancements, will guide future detailed road planning so that design, routing, and siting decisions are compatible with the objectives of the South Side Denali plan. In addition to being a true alternative destination, the Tokositna area offers opportunity to access the national park via hiking trails.

Facilities in Denali State Park along the George Parks Highway will offer easily accessible visitor opportunities along the state's main highway between Anchorage and Fairbanks for those who prefer to experience this part of the state park, who wish to stop en route to other destinations along the highway, or who do not have the time, inclination, or means for an off-the-highway experience at Tokositna, Chelatna Lake, or the Dunkle Hills. Views of Mount McKinley from Denali State Park along the George Parks Highway contribute to the Denali experience, and provide a preview for many travelers along the highway who intend to visit Denali National Park and Preserve. Access to the national park is not practical from facilities in Denali State Park along the George Parks Highway due to topography, vegetation, and the distance of the national park boundary from the highway.

Facilities at Chelatna Lake will offer remote, fly-in camping and hiking opportunities in a scenic mountain and lake setting. Public use cabins provide yet another option for visitor use in this area. Opportunity will be provided to access the national park via hiking trails. Likewise, a trailhead in the Dunkle Hills will provide access into the national park for hikers seeking a backcountry experience.

Economic and employment opportunities and potential benefits will be created for local residents and Native corporations, particularly through establishment of an alternative and new south side visitor destination at Tokositna and construction of visitor facilities along the George Parks Highway in Denali State Park. Residents of south central Alaska, in particular, will benefit from improved recreational access with this alternative.

The types of adverse effects anticipated with this alternative are similar to those of the other action alternatives. The magnitude and duration of effects, however, could be somewhat greater (e.g., wildlife habitat disruption, temporary air and water quality degradation, change in rural quality of life perceived as undesirable by some local residents). Quality of life changes will be positive for those interested in increased availability of jobs and earnings, improved access along the Petersville Road and in the Tokositna area of Denali State Park, and/or enhanced recreation opportunities in the Byers Lake area of Denali State Park. For those interested in maintaining a sense of remoteness and a quiet, rural atmosphere, the perception may be of a degraded quality of life.

Potentially adverse effects should be minimized or avoided through strict adherence to all pertinent laws and regulations, as well as the mitigation measures, policies, and actions outlined in the plan. This will ensure environmental protection, as well as protection of local community values and the rural lifestyle of local residents. Potentially negative effects will be minimized or avoided through cooperative wildlife research, careful facility design and siting, phasing construction of developments over time, involving the interested public as the plan is implemented, and taking reasonable measures to ensure compatible land uses along the Petersville Road corridor leading to the Tokositna area. Local planning decisions also can help ensure such compatibility.

Additional, more detailed and site-specific environmental assessment of visitor facilities will be conducted as details of siting and design are developed. Also, an EIS for the Petersville Road upgrade/extension will be prepared by the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities to address the details of this construction project.

The framework for plan implementation described in the final DCP/EIS is an effective start in ensuring a reasonably-paced, well-coordinated, and achievable plan that protects the environment as well as local community values. The South Side Denali Plan Implementation Partnership to be established by the Governor of Alaska will ensure that the cooperative approach taken in developing the plan will continue through plan implementation. This group will be comprised of those necessary to the implementation of the plan. Implementation will be closely coordinated to meet state, National Park Service, borough, Native corporation, and local needs. An important task for the partnership will be to flesh out the details of the implementation framework described in the final DCP/EIS. The partnership team will serve as a monitoring group, with substantial community involvement, to evaluate the progress of implementation activities and associated mitigation actions and to keep these functions linked. The partnership will be strongly committed to continued citizen/public meetings and other means of public involvement throughout plan implementation.

OTHER ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

Two other action alternatives and a no-action alternative were considered in the final DCP/EIS in addition to the proposed action (selected alternative); they are described below. Most of the general policies and actions described above for the selected alternative also apply to the two action alternatives (some are specific to the selected alternative). Some of the general policies and actions also apply to the no action alternative.

Alternative A (Large-Scale Visitor Facility along the George Parks Highway). All facilities would be located in Denali State Park along the George Parks Highway. No facilities would be constructed in the Tokositna area, in the Dunkle Hills, or near Chelatna Lake. The Petersville road would not be upgraded or extended beyond mile 19 under this alternative. One large visitor center (up to 13,000 square feet) would be built in either the northern, central, or southern development zone of Denali State Park along the George Parks Highway. The Byers Lake campground would be expanded by up to 25 sites or a new campground of up to 50 sites would be built elsewhere in the central development zone. Hiking/interpretive trails would be constructed in the vicinity of the visitor center. No public use cabins would be constructed.

Alternative B (Small-Scale Visitor Facility along the George Parks Highway). Under alternative B, all facilities would be located in Denali State Park along the George Parks Highway. No facilities would be constructed in the Tokositna area, in the Dunkle Hills, or near Chelatna Lake. The Petersville Road would not be upgraded or extended beyond mile 19 under this alternative. One small visitor center (up to 1,500 square feet) would be built in either the northern, central, or southern development zone of Denali State Park. A small campground (up to 25 sites) would be constructed in the central development zone along the George Parks Highway. Short hiking/interpretive trails would be developed near the visitor center.

Alternative C (No Action). Under alternative C, all facilities would be located in Denali State Park along the George Parks Highway. No facilities would be constructed in the Tokositna area, in the Dunkle Hills, or near Chelatna Lake. The Petersville Road would not be upgraded or extended beyond mile 19 under this alternative. A 320-square-foot visitor contact station was recently constructed by the state near the Alaska Veterans Memorial in the central development zone of Denali State Park. A short trail to the Chulitna River would be developed by the state in the southern development zone of the state park. The Matanuska-Susitna Borough would likely construct a snowmobile user parking area and associated sanitary facilities near the Forks Roadhouse along the Petersville Road. An existing privately built (trespass) cabin near Chelatna Lake would be converted to public use. In addition, four public use cabins may be developed by the state on the east side of the Chulitna River in Denali State Park. Development of campgrounds or other visitor facilities on the south side would not be anticipated by the state, the National Park Service, or the boroughs.

The no action alternative is intended to, among other things, provide a contrast to the action alternatives. The actions identified above are those visitor service related actions that would still be carried out by public land managers on the south side if an action alternative was not selected. This alternative does not

address the need for additional visitor facilities and opportunities to meet the expected growth in visitation to the region as well as the action alternatives.

ENVIRONMENTALLY PREFERABLE ALTERNATIVE

The environmentally preferable alternative is that which causes the least damage to the biological and physical environment, and best protects, preserves, and enhances historical, cultural, and natural resources. Alternative B may be considered the environmentally preferable alternative because, overall, it results in the fewest adverse effects on the resources of the south side. With the exception of the no action alternative, it entails the least amount of development, with facilities concentrated along the George Parks Highway. Unlike the no action alternative, alternative B provides a level of management attention and accommodation to visitor growth on the south side. With effective implementation of the proposed action (selected alternative), however, this alternative will provide protection and preservation of resources in the Tokositna/Petersville Road area that may not otherwise be afforded the same level of protection if one of the other alternatives were selected.

MEASURES TO MINIMIZE ENVIRONMENTAL HARM

All practicable measures will be taken 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.

Adverse environmental effects also will be minimized by implementing additional land use controls prior to major development and managing recreational and other activities to protect south side resources (see the list of general policies and actions to be taken under the selected alternative).

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Public comment has been sought both formally and informally throughout the South Side Denali planning process, and the plan has been modified as a result of public comments received.

A *Notice of Intent* to prepare an environmental impact statement, published in the *Federal Register* in April 1991 (56 FR 15931), formally initiated the National Park Service's planning and environmental impact statement effort for the south side. In July 1991, a letter was distributed to the public and affected agencies soliciting issues and concerns regarding the possibility of developing additional facilities on the south side. In February 1992 an *Alternatives Workbook* was published and public comment was again requested. After the *Draft South Slope Development Concept Plan/Environmental Impact Statement* was

released in June 1993, a series of public meetings to discuss the document was held in Anchorage, Talkeetna, Denali National Park and Preserve, Trapper Creek, and Cantwell.

As noted previously, the 1993 draft plan did not resolve the issue of development of the south side, and a final plan was not completed. Instead, in 1994, at the request of Secretary of the Interior Babbitt, a Denali Task Force was formed as a subcommittee of the National Park System Advisory Board to make recommendations on, among other matters, the cooperative management and recreation development of South Side Denali. This stakeholder group was comprised of Alaskans interested in Denali National Park and Preserve who represented a range of interests. Their recommendations for the south side, which were adopted by the National Park System Advisory Board, were used as a starting point in developing a *Revised Draft South Side Denali Development Concept Plan/Environmental Impact Statement*. In May 1995, the National Park Service convened a meeting with representatives of the other major land managers on the south side to collectively determine whether a reinitiated, cooperative planning effort for the south side was feasible.

Public input was solicited early on, through distribution of a newsletter, telephone communications, media announcements, and through a series of public open houses in Fairbanks, Cantwell, Healy/Denali Park, Anchorage, Talkeetna/Trapper Creek, and Wasilla/Palmer in August 1995. A new proposed action and two other development alternatives for the south side were presented to the public for comment and discussion, and modifications were made to the ideas presented based on comments received at these public sessions.

In October 1995, the National Park Service published a *Notice of Intent* to prepare a *Revised Draft South Side Denali Development Concept Plan/Environmental Impact Statement* in the *Federal Register*, (60 FR 54705) officially reinitiating the planning process for the south side, this time as a cooperative endeavor among the region's major land managers. The cooperative partnership was comprised of representatives of the National Park Service; State of Alaska; Denali Borough; Matanuska-Susitna Borough; Ahtna, Inc.; and Cook Inlet Region Inc. The cooperative planning partners met in Anchorage almost monthly from May through December 1995. These coordination meetings were open to and attended by the public. In addition to these meetings, the partners engaged in a number of informal meetings and frequently communicated by telephone and electronic mail to further exchange ideas and information about the south side.

In March 1996, the National Park Service published another notice in the *Federal Register* (61 FR 12095) announcing the availability of the revised draft DCP/EIS. About 1300 copies of this DCP/EIS were distributed.

Public hearings on the revised draft DCP/EIS were held in several Alaskan communities in April and May 1996. About 330 people attended hearings held in Fairbanks, Healy, Cantwell, Trapper Creek, Talkeetna, Anchorage, and Wasilla.

Written public comments were accepted for 75 days (the end date for public comments was extended in response to public requests). During the public review period, about 480 written comments (letters, postcards, and statements) were received from agencies, interest groups, businesses, and individuals. The final DCP/EIS was made available to the public in late January 1997. Approximately the same number of final documents was distributed to the public. All substantive comments on the revised draft

DCP/EIS were addressed in the final by either providing clarification of information, modifying the text, and/or by reproducing the comment in the final DCP/EIS and directly responding to it.

CONCLUSION

A *Federal Register* notice announcing the availability of the final DCP/EIS was published by the Environmental Protection Agency on January 24, 1997, commencing the required 30-day no action period (62 FR 3681).

The factors and considerations presented in this Record of Decision support selection of the proposed action alternative, as described in the *Final South Side Denali Development Concept Plan/Environmental Impact Statement*, and the final plan is hereby approved.

Approved: _____ **Effective Date:** _____
Alaska Regional Director, National Park Service

Concur: _____ **Effective Date:** _____
Legislative Director, State of Alaska