

STATE OF ALASKA

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July 18, 2001

Jane Bacchieri
Alagnak Wild River Project Coordinator
Katmai National Park and Preserve
PO Box 7
King Salmon, AK 99613

Dear Ms. Bacchieri:

The State of Alaska offers these scoping comments in response to the April 20, 2001, National Park Service (NPS) Notice of Intent to prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) for the Alagnak Wild River Management Plan. State representatives attended the January 30 intergovernmental meeting in King Salmon, and open house sessions aimed at identifying significant issues for the plan and the EIS analysis. We appreciate this opportunity to outline the State's interests and concerns, and to acknowledge the continuing efforts of the Service to recognize State involvement in Alagnak river corridor planning. We also appreciate the recognition that the Alagnak River, Kukaklek Lake and the Nonvianuk system are indeed State-owned navigable waterbodies, and the willingness to explore coordinated interagency management strategies along the river corridor. The January 30 intergovernmental meeting in King Salmon provided a good opportunity to set the stage for this approach. Most issues that State agencies have raised in recent discussions are compiled here.

Intergovernmental meetings: In a hand-out listing the steps involved in developing the Alagnak Wild River Management Plan, an intergovernmental meeting is listed shortly after the public release of the Draft EIS. At the January meeting, a third intergovernmental meeting was added at the conclusion of the Phase II scoping of the alternatives. We also request a another meeting after the NPS has compiled the results of issues identification. The cooperative characterization of issues that will be addressed in the alternatives is essential for those land owners and managers who will be contributing solutions. In other words, to reach agreement on solutions, land managers must first agree on the problems.

Use trends and user data: A number of preliminary issues stem from the NPS data showing increasing use of the river over the past decade. As most Alagnak River users are there to go fishing, it is useful to refer to corresponding data from the Alaska Department of Fish and Game. The Division of Sport Fish statewide harvest/catch survey shows that angler use on the Alagnak

has leveled off and may actually have decreased. In addition, ADF&G license data shows a downward trend in statewide sport fish license sales over the same period. The plan should reflect current use data, citing all available source information, including the ADF&G sport fish data and hunter harvest statistics. Research funded by the Federal Subsistence Board for the current 2001 season may shed additional light on harvest and use trends. We request the planning team contact ADF&G to share and discuss these and other available data sources related to fish and wildlife uses occurring on the river, including data collected by river rangers and from commercial guide reports.

New research needs: The November 1999 NPS “Study Plan to Complete a Comprehensive River Corridor Management Plan for the Alagnak Wild River” identifies research projects and data gathering tasks in various stages of completion. While communication and coordination with ADF&G and other State agencies has been sporadic in the past, we appreciate recent improvements. Raised initially at the January meeting, the State requests a comprehensive list of NPS research projects related to the plan. We encourage the NPS to take advantage of expertise in other agencies when designing studies, to conduct peer review of preliminary findings, and to share final data in a timely manner. Research projects developed with consultation with other agencies are more likely to successfully influence NPS and non-NPS management decisions.

Backcountry Permits. To the extent that these are or become a management tool, we have an interest in how this program is administered and how it may affect public use along the Alagnak River. Since the permits are required for other areas besides the Alagnak River corridor, we will be working with the Superintendent on this process in a larger context.

Boat wake study: State representatives who reviewed the recent NPS boat wake study questioned the methodology and noted the results appear to be inconclusive. Based on our current understanding of this study, we do not believe it provides an adequate basis for making management decisions or asserting boat wake damage.

Management tools: Once appropriate planning issues have been outlined and applicable data have been gathered, the next step is identifying the best available tools for responding to the issues. The plan should look beyond the normal NPS tool kit and consider tools available under various State agencies, the Coast Guard, Lake and Peninsula Borough, and other local landowners and managers. On the Togiak Refuge, for example, planning for several rivers has led to implementation actions by the Alaska Departments of Natural Resources, Fish and Game, Environmental Conservation, and Public Safety, the Board of Fisheries, and the village of Quinhagak.

Funding support: As previously expressed in various meetings and conversations, State agencies unfortunately have limited resources to expend on externally driven federal plans that affect State land or management jurisdictions. The NPS may wish to follow the lead of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and consider some modest funding to support additional and nominal targeted State involvement. Ken Rice, Chief of Planning with the US Fish and Wildlife Service, can explain how a relatively small amount of funding has significantly streamlined the national wildlife refuge comprehensive conservation plan updating process and has facilitated much improved coordination with the State. He can be reached in Anchorage at 786-3502.

Land status maps: All maps of the Alagnak River corridor that depict land status should note that the State owns the beds of the navigable waterbodies.

Fish and wildlife harvest and allocation issues: During public involvement and in written materials about the plan, NPS should consistently clarify that the Alaska Boards of Fisheries and Game are responsible for regulating the take of fish and resident wildlife under State jurisdiction, including allocation among user groups. Such educational opportunities will insure public understanding that harvest and allocation regulations are thus not within the scope of the Alagnak River management plan revision process. On the other hand, *recommendations* to the Boards of Fisheries or Game are among the numerous planning tools available. We also appreciate that the NPS has chosen not to call this effort a "fishery management plan," which would have similarly led to public confusion.

Subsistence issues: To ensure that the Alagnak plan does not negatively affect subsistence uses, the EIS should demonstrate an understanding of seasonal subsistence and other harvest activities and should fully assess anticipated impacts.

Management zones: The notice of intent states that the preferred alternative will address issues through specific management zones to provide a range of user experiences and resource conditions. Regardless of the management zone selected, each must still adhere to the basic access provisions of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) and implementing regulations. Given the importance of access along navigable waterways, and for the utilization of State-managed fish and wildlife resources, we recommend working closely with State resource agencies when defining management zones.

Coordination with ADF&G: We recognize the value of good communication between local ADF&G biologists and Alagnak/Katmai staff. By the same token, local biologists cannot reasonably be expected to represent the Department or State as a whole. To insure appropriate lines of communication, we request that communications about initiating or coordinating local research activities include these three area biologists who are expected to be involved throughout development of the Alagnak plan:

Dan Dunaway, Division of Sport Fish, Dillingham
Slim Morstad, Division of Commercial Fisheries, King Salmon
Dick Sellers, Division of Wildlife Conservation, King Salmon

Any ADF&G coordination needs regarding subsistence should include:

Terry Haynes, Division of Subsistence, Fairbanks
Ted Krieg, Division of Subsistence, Dillingham

For all other general, planning related, or multi-purpose needs, you should contact:

Tina Cuning, ADF&G Commissioner's Office, Anchorage

As ADF&G's ANILCA coordinator, Tina can insure that the appropriate ADF&G staff in all divisions are informed and involved to the extent necessary. For general purpose State coordination, the Division of Governmental Coordination is usually the best contact point since we can network with all State agencies as appropriate.

Alaska Land Use Council Synopsis for Wild and Scenic Rivers: The plan should incorporate or reference the 1982 "Synopsis for Guiding Management of Wild, Scenic, and Recreational River Areas in Alaska," developed by the Alaska Land Use Council and adopted by the Department of Interior. This useful guide, which was acknowledged in the original 1983 Alagnak River Management Plan, outlines how the provisions of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act apply in Alaska in the context of ANILCA. A copy is attached to our hard copy mailing of this letter.

Regulatory authorities: As articulated in the January 26 letter to Superintendent Deb Liggett from Department of Natural Resources Commissioner Pat Pourchot, the State does not believe NPS regulations at 36 CFR 1.2(a)(3), adopted July 5, 1996, are legally defensible. We recognize this is a larger issue than the Alagnak plan, but we encourage the planning team to avoid relying on these regulations during plan development and implementation. As noted above, there are numerous other tools at the disposal of the NPS, the State, and other land and resource managers that can address a variety of public use. This approach will keep the discussion on the ground where the real issues are, instead of triggering legal disputes that will tend to stifle a more productive partnership approach.

Thanks for the opportunity to summarize these views. We look forward to continued dialogue regarding the scope of the Alagnak Wild River Plan. If you have any questions, please contact me at 907-269-7477.

Sincerely,

/ss/

Sally Gibert
State CSU Coordinator

cc: Deb Liggett, Superintendent, Katmai National Park and Preserve/Alagnak River
John Katz, Governor's Office, Washington, D.C.
Pat Galvin, Director, Division of Governmental Coordination
Pat Pourchot, Commissioner, Department of Natural Resources
Frank Rue, Commissioner, Department of Fish and Game
Michele Brown, Commissioner, Department of Environmental Conservation
Deborah Sedwick, Commissioner, Dept of Commerce and Economic Development