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of **ALASKA**
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Greg Dudgeon, Superintendent
Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve
National Park Service
4175 Geist Road
Fairbanks, AK 99709

Dear Mr. Dudgeon:

The State of Alaska reviewed the General Management Plan Amendment/Wilderness Stewardship Plan (GMP Amendment or plan) Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve (GAAR). The following comments represent the consolidated views of state agencies.

As directed in the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA), the National Park Service (NPS or Service) provided the State with opportunities to review and comment on the draft plan at various stages during its development. While the scope and content of the plan was modified during that timeframe, the State consistently expressed its concerns regarding the Service's intent to implement national wilderness policies, without regard for the exceptions and limitations in ANILCA, which apply to park units in Alaska. In addition, now that the legal and policy framework (i.e. management guidelines) has for the most part been removed from the plan, it is especially important to clarify in the final plan that the GMP Amendment/Wilderness Stewardship Plan supplements but does not replace 1986 GMP.

We supported the Service's decision in 2013 to terminate the wilderness study and associated environmental impact statement, especially considering the recent proposal by the Alaska Industrial Development and Export Authority (AIDEA) to develop a transportation corridor across the southwestern preserve to serve the Ambler Mining District. We appreciate the consistent recognition in the plan that ANILCA Section 201(4) provides explicit direction to the Service to authorize access across the preserve; however, we reiterate our objection to the stated intent in the plan to conduct a wilderness study in the future and to manage all non-designated lands to protect wilderness character indefinitely, without explicit authorization from Congress.

As explained in more detail below, the limited authority in ANILCA to conduct a one-time follow-up wilderness review has long expired. Managing non-designated lands as if they were designated Wilderness not only violates both ANILCA and the Wilderness Act, it will also inappropriately influence discretionary plan implementation decisions. In addition, as the plan expresses unrealistic concerns regarding distant projects or unrelated activities that have little or no effect on park resources (e.g. oil and gas development in the NPR-A, increased use of the Dalton Highway, impacts from Red Dog Mine), we anticipate impacts to wilderness character (the sole criteria in the plan for guiding management of the park and preserve into the future) will be the basis for requesting increased mitigation and other requirements associated with

projects within or adjacent to the park and preserve, such as the Ambler Mining District access road or the AK LNG gasline project, regardless of whether or not the lands are designated Wilderness.

Further, we note the primary difference between Alternatives B and C is that Alternative C acknowledges that the Service has the discretionary authority to provide different experiences and address resource impacts by means other than limiting visitor use, which is the only means left if actions such as hardening trails and campsites, establishing trailheads, etc. are taken completely off the table. Yet Alternative C does nothing more than allow consideration of management actions. Nothing is actually proposed to provide for a range of experiences or to encourage increased visitation. With few very limited exceptions, the actual on-the-ground effect of all three alternatives is to simply maintain the status quo and manage the entire park unit as Wilderness.

While we acknowledge it is appropriate to manage *designated* Wilderness for a primitive wilderness experience, it is entirely inappropriate to also manage non-designated Wilderness in exactly the same manner. In addition, managing the entire park, over seven million acres of public land, for one extreme wilderness experience ignores explicit provisions in ANILCA, which accommodate the unique Alaska context by allowing facilities, such as cabins and shelters for public health and safety and temporary structures on all public lands where the taking of fish and wildlife is allowed.

This approach also unnecessarily limits one of the Park's primary purposes "*...to provide continued opportunities, including reasonable access, for mountain climbing, mountaineering, and other wilderness recreational activities*" to just one type of visitor experience, and by extension, the number and type of visitors who are willing and able to explore the park unaided under the extreme conditions that exist in northern Alaska. With only 579 documented visitors actually entering the park in 2010 (page 178) and no actions proposed in the plan to encourage additional use, we seriously question whether this plan facilitates the fundamental purpose of parks in the NPS Organic Act, which "*includes providing for the enjoyment of park resources and values by the people of the United States*" (2006 NPS Management Policies, Section 1.4.3).

To rectify many of these issues, the final plan and decision document must provide clear and distinct standards and indicators for managing designated Wilderness within the park differently from non-designated preserves. In addition, the plan recognizes a high percentage of use is concentrated in a small acreage of the Park (page 160); therefore, the final plan needs to provide for a range of visitor experiences, including within designated Wilderness, and appropriate facilities and infrastructure to encourage visitation at dispersed locations within the Park and Preserve and to address resource damage resulting from concentrated use at popular locations.

These and other issues are addressed in more detail in the following comments.

Wilderness Protection of "Eligible" Non-designated Lands Violates ANILCA and the Wilderness Act

As noted, the plan makes no management distinction between congressionally designated Wilderness¹ and non-designated lands administratively determined to be "eligible" for further

¹ ANILCA Section 701 designated approximately two million seven hundred and seventy thousand acres within Gates of the Arctic National Park as Wilderness.

study and recommendation as designated Wilderness.² The plan also fails to disclose relevant direction in ANILCA and historical information that, if appropriately considered, would affect management direction for non-designated lands within the preserve units.

The plan indicates that direction to manage “eligible” lands to protect wilderness character stems from direction in the NPS 2006 Management Policies and Director’s Order #41: Wilderness Stewardship, dated May 13, 2013, to ensure that the lands are protected “*until Congress takes action on whether to designate the areas as wilderness*” (Page 20, first column, last paragraph).

While these national policies do in fact provide such general direction, the policies are also very clear that protecting “eligible” lands is intended as a short-term measure in the wilderness study process. It is not intended as a stop-gap measure to protect “eligible” lands indefinitely; thereby circumventing Congress’ authority to designate Wilderness,³ and, as is the case in Alaska, to make an end-run around the limited authority granted in ANILCA to conduct wilderness studies.

Director’s Order 41 includes an important caveat:

It is important to note that these policies may in some instances be superseded by statutory provisions that apply to individual wilderness areas, by rights reserved by former landowners and, in Alaska, by applicable provisions of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA). [emphasis added]

ANILCA Section 1317 provided limited authority for the Service to study all lands within the unit boundaries not already designated by the Act, as to their “*suitability or nonsuitability for preservation as wilderness*” and report findings to the President within 5 years of the enactment of the Act; wilderness recommendations were to be forwarded by the President to Congress within 7 years. In contrast, ANILCA Section 1320 granted the Bureau of Land Management continuing authority to conduct wilderness studies and make recommendations “*from time to time.*” ANILCA Section 1326(b) prohibits further studies for the single purpose of establishing new conservation system units (CSUs) (wilderness and wild and scenic rivers are defined by ANILCA as CSUs) *unless directed by ANILCA or a further Act of Congress.*

The NPS completed the studies mandated in Section 1317 and the signed 1988 Record of Decision for the Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve recommended Congress designate an additional 330, 846 acres in the northeast preserve. However, the recommendations for all park units were never forwarded by the Secretary of Interior to the President or Congress for consideration. The plan indicates the process is incomplete (page 31); however, the plan fails to mention that the timeframe for conducting these studies has long expired. Further, Congress has provided no additional authority to conduct new studies in Alaska. Since the Service no longer has the authority from either Congress or ANILCA to conduct wilderness studies in Alaska, implementing policy and planning direction to protect “eligible” lands – lands which have neither been recommended to Congress nor designated by Congress as Wilderness - is in direct violation of the Wilderness Act and ANILCA. We request the GMP Amendment be corrected accordingly.

² The term “eligible” means lands are at least 5,000 acres and possesses wilderness characteristics as defined by the Wilderness Act. The term applies to the first preliminary phase of a wilderness study and is synonymous with the term “suitable” as used in ANILCA Section 1317.

³ The Wilderness Act states “...designation as “wilderness” shall become effective only if so provided by an Act of Congress.”

Fish and Wildlife Management

The GMP Amendment does not adequately recognize the role and responsibilities of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) for the management of fish and wildlife. The limited references in the GMP Amendment to ADF&G (many of which indicate the Service will “consult” with the State on fish and wildlife management issues) coupled with the current proposed Wildlife Regulations,⁴ implies all responsibility for management of fish and wildlife in GAAR has been relegated to the Service, placing ADF&G in an advisory capacity.

The original 1986 GMP clarifies the related responsibilities for both the Service and ADF&G in regards to fish and wildlife management and we request the GMP Amendment clarify that this limited amendment has not replaced or revised the 1986 GMP. In addition, since the GMP Amendment will likely be viewed separately from the original 1986 GMP, we also request the GMP Amendment reference the following specific information.

- ANILCA, with specific reference to Titles VIII, XI, and XIII for fish and wildlife management. These sections provide direction related to access (public and administrative), management authorities and subsistence use.
- 43 CFR Part 24 State-Federal Relations, which reaffirms the basic responsibility and authority of the states to manage fish and resident wildlife on federal lands.
- 2006 NPS Management Policies, including 8.2.2.6 Hunting and Trapping, 4.4.2 Management of Native Plants and Animals, and 4.1.4 Partnerships.
- Master Memorandum of Understanding between ADF&G and the Service, 1982 (MMOU). This document outlines the basic relationship expected to occur between ADF&G and the Service.

Each of these documents, (ANILCA, 43 CFR Part 24, 2006 NPS Management Policies, MMOU) and the GMP Amendment, include frequent references to “consultation” with the State; however, no detail is provided as to how it will occur. In addition, the context of “consult” in the GMP Amendment appears to minimize the importance of the requirement. We are concerned that absent a description of consultation, its application will remain at the discretion of individual Park Superintendents, with varying levels of implementation. We request that the Service commit to work with the State to develop a mutual understanding of the essential elements of consultation.

Given the lack of acknowledgement in the GMP Amendment of state fish and wildlife management responsibilities, we are particularly concerned that state management activities will be unnecessarily limited. Unlike the Lake Clark GMP Amendment, which emphasized collaboration between the Service and ADF&G, the GAAR GMP Amendment states “*Outside research requests (i.e. research not directed by the National Park Service) would be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. This includes not only the compliance review noted previously, but an assessment of whether the research fits and compliments the mission, purposes, and policies of the National Park Service at Gates of the Arctic, including wilderness character of the park and preserve*” (page 82). This statement limits the types of research allowed in the park and preserve to only those research activities deemed acceptable by the Service, a situation that could

⁴ Federal Register/Vol. 79, No. 171/Thursday September 4, 2014/Proposed Rules

negatively affect the ability of the State to fulfill its fish and wildlife management responsibilities. The plan also includes statements that do not seem to adequately recognize the access provisions of ANILCA. For example, in the Management Zoning narratives for Alternatives B and C, where 95% and 76% of NPS lands in the park, respectively, are included in Management Zone 3, the description for Administrative Infrastructure, Facilities, and Transportation/Access allows “*Very limited use of snowmachines and motorboats, and limited use of aircraft for administrative access*” (Table 2, p. 41).

The GMP Amendment also seems to imply that cooperative research with the State is a last resort rather than a desirable opportunity, “*If NPS staff or their partners (e.g. contractors) cannot conduct the research, the park staff would seek agreements with or assistance from other federal agencies, state agencies, universities, and other organizations (e.g., CESUs, research study units) to conduct or cooperatively supplement research efforts*” (page 81). However, the 2006 NPS Management Policies’ discuss the benefits of cooperation between agencies. For example:

- Section 2.1.3 “*The Service will actively seek out and consult with...government agencies. The Service will work cooperatively with others...*”;
- Subsection 2.3.1.3 “*Interdisciplinary teams...will prepare general management plans. Planning teams will work with ...other agencies with jurisdiction by virtue of law or expertise...*”;
- Section 4.1.4 “*The Service will pursue opportunities to improve natural resource management within parks...by pursuing cooperative conservation with public agencies...in accordance with Executive Order 13352...*” (Executive Order 13352 states: “*The purpose of this order is to ensure that the Departments of the Interior...implement laws relating to the environment and natural resources in a manner that promotes cooperative conservation, with an emphasis on appropriate inclusion of local participation in Federal decisionmaking...*”);
- Section 4.1.4 “*Such cooperation may include...the management of species harvested in parks...integrating management practices to reduce conflicts, coordinating research, sharing data and expertise, exchanging native biological resources for species management*”;

We request the plan or final decision clearly acknowledge that collaborative research efforts, including those conducted in collaboration with ADF&G, are desired, and recognize and support the 2006 Management Policies regarding other agency research in 4.2.2 and 5.2.2.

As noted in previous comments on the proposed Wildlife Regulations, we have significant concerns regarding the Service’s recent efforts to supersede existing public processes and state authorities related to the management and allocation of fish and wildlife. The GMP Amendment illustrates these concerns in the discussion of adaptive management standards for species that are not consistent with state management objectives (particularly Dall sheep). The plan also includes intent to subsequently implement changes to bag limits, seasons, permits, methods and means and closures in the Superintendents Compendium (p.52, Table 3, first row, last column), implying that existing public processes through the Alaska Boards of Game and Fisheries (reference to which is notably absent from the management strategies) and the Federal Subsistence Board will be bypassed.

These combined actions have the potential to significantly and negatively affect the State's ability to fulfill its constitutional mandates regarding fish and wildlife conservation and management. We therefore request the plan fully recognize the State's management authorities, including the agreement in the MMOU between the Service and ADF&G, to use the Alaska Boards of Game and Fisheries, as well as the Federal Subsistence Board, where appropriate.

Visitor Impacts and Facilities

We support the direction in Alternative C, which would allow future consideration for hardening of trails and campsites for resource protection if warranted, and support efforts to educate the public regarding impacts of off trail use and improper use of campsites and request the final plan recognize this discretionary authority regardless of the alternative selected. Not including the option for adaptive management by hardening primitive user-created trails and campsites will only result in unnecessary closures to public use. Similarly, the plan cannot turn a blind eye to allowances provided for conservation system units in Alaska through ANILCA, such as public use cabins, which are allowed for public health and safety, including in designated Wilderness.

There are numerous inconsistencies between the management descriptions under the action alternatives and the descriptions for the management zones (Table 2, pages 39-41), which need to be reconciled and clarified in the final plan. In addition, the description for Zone 3 incorrectly omits the allowance (i.e. "shall permit") in ANILCA Section 1316 for temporary structures on all public lands where the taking of fish and wildlife is allowed (see page 39). The allowance in Zones 1 and 2 for designated trails and campsites also conflicts with direction in Alternative B, which does not provide for current or future consideration of hardened trails or sites (see page 40). Designating trails or campsites without an option to harden them is inconsistent with standard recreation management practices.

Page-specific Comments

Page ix, first paragraph: ANILCA Section 1301 provides specific direction on preparing management plans for Alaska park units. The 2006 Management Policies also reference this direction, which is specific to Alaska. The introductory section needs to clarify how the plan meets the requirements in ANILCA Section 1301, not just the national planning standards as currently indicated.

Page 3, Introduction, first column: This would be an appropriate place to clarify that the GMP Amendment is a Wilderness Stewardship Plan that supplements but does not replace the 1986 GMP. "Updates" could be interpreted to mean the full content of the original GMP has been revised or replaced.

Page 4, Brief History and Description of the Park, third paragraph, fourth sentence: We request that the GMP Amendment recognize that while there are no designated or maintained trails, signs or permanent visitor facilities, well established social trails do exist within the Park, such as the trail to Arrigetch Peaks. Such trails are well known and used by the public to transit within the area.

Page 9, Purpose and Need for the GMP Amendment: We question some of the examples provided as potential "threats" to park resources and values. For example, we assume the "*large-scale oil and gas development and road construction near its northern boundary*" refers to development in the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska (NPR-A). In the last planning effort for the NPR-A, BLM prohibited oil and gas development in the entire southwestern unit (7.3

million acres), which is the unit located nearest to the park's northern boundary. Further, the Greater Mooses Tooth Project, currently the only permitted oil and gas development project within the NPR-A, is located approximately 200 miles from the northern boundary of the park. The plan needs to be more specific and realistic about potential threats to the park.

Page 9, Purpose and Need for the GMP Amendment, first column: We understand the plan should incorporate new planning guidance regarding management of congressionally designated Wilderness but we believe the plan inappropriately applies guidance intended for designated Wilderness to non-designated wilderness. See above general comment.

Page 9, Relationship of the GMP Amendment and The Wilderness Stewardship Plan: ANILCA Section 1301 provides specific direction on preparing management plans for Alaska park units. The 2006 Management Policies also reference this direction, which is specific to Alaska. This section needs to clarify how the plan meets the requirements in ANILCA Section 1301, not just the national planning standards as currently indicated. We also request this section clarify that the GMP Amendment, which is primarily a Wilderness Stewardship Plan, supplements but does not replace the 1986 GMP.

Page 9-10, Key Laws, Regulations, and Policies: Beyond recognizing ANILCA as the establishing legislation and that it provides for surface transportation access across the Kobuk River Preserve, the GMP Amendment does not adequately recognize the unique, non-traditional park management provisions in ANILCA that affect access, hunting and subsistence, wilderness, habitat, and cultural protection. The 1986 GMP outlines specific provisions in both the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act and ANILCA that apply to park management. Merely stating that “*some previously approved park guidance from that plan are carried forward and referenced*” implies the GMP Amendment supersedes currently relevant information in the original 1986 GMP. We request the amendment reference the 1986 Plan and propose the following language.

ANILCA is the establishing legislation for Gates of the Arctic NPP. The additional legislative and subsequent regulatory requirements of ANILCA must be considered in the interpretation and application of Service-wide mandates and policies to determine whether the explicit Alaska-specific direction in ANILCA would prevail. Please refer to the 1986 General Management Plan, Land Protection Plan, and Wilderness Suitability Review for more comprehensive information about how ANCSA and ANILCA affect management of park units in Alaska.

Page 10, Key Laws, Regulations, and Policies, first column, first paragraph: In Alaska, designated Wilderness is managed in accordance with the Wilderness Act, as amended by ANILCA. We request the reference to the Wilderness Act in this section include this important ANILCA caveat, and that it applies to the GMP Amendment.

Page 11, NPS Guidelines on Impairment of National Park Resources, 2nd paragraph: We request the following sentence be inserted after the second sentence: “*In Alaska, NPS managers have the added congressionally-directed challenge of allowing hunting and trapping in areas designated as national preserves, maintaining opportunities for scientific research, providing for rural residents to continue their subsistence way-of-life, and managing wilderness areas in accordance with the exceptions established in ANILCA.*” We also request the third sentence which begins “*However the laws do give*” be revised as: “*Laws, such as ANILCA, do give...*”.

Page 12, first column, third paragraph: This section indicates the purpose of GAAR is to “*preserve the vast, wild, undeveloped character and environmental integrity of Alaska's central*

Brooks Range and to provide opportunities for wilderness recreation and traditional subsistence uses,” which is derived from the park’s Foundation statement, and is not a congressionally identified purpose in ANILCA. We request the plan limit the GAAR purposes to only those identified in ANILCA Section 201(4)(a).

Page 13, first bullet: We question the source and use of the subjective statement that GAAR is the “*premier*” Wilderness Park in Alaska. For example, Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve is larger overall, has more designated wilderness, and is part of a much larger World Heritage area. The claim would be more defensible by adding “arctic” in the description.

Page 13, fourth bullet: Since the referenced mountain ecosystem expands beyond the boundaries of GAAR, this statement would be more accurate if “in its entirety” were deleted.

Page 13, Fundamental resources and values, 2nd column, first paragraph: Since “visitor experiences” are a fundamental resource, we request “local resident experiences” should also be listed as a fundamental resource. Local residents rely on park resources to support their subsistence lifestyle and are not “visitors” in the same sense as others who travel from outside the state to vacation in the park and preserve.

Page 13, last paragraph: This paragraph states that the GAAR Foundation Statement is dated NPS 2009. We note that the State provided comments on a draft Foundation Statement in February 2010. We recommend citing the date of the final document.

Page 14, Anaktuvuk Pass Land Exchange: Considering that the migration routes for caribou and other game change over time, we are concerned that while current access to subsistence resources may be satisfactorily addressed, the GMP Amendment, as written, does not have the flexibility to enable people to change their access patterns. We request the plan recognize that the land exchange did not negate the allowance for ATV access (i.e. . . .other means of surface transportation traditionally employed) pursuant to ANILCA Section 811(b). Clearly, the purpose behind the land exchange is evidence enough that ATVs were being used by local rural residents in GAAR when ANILCA passed in 1980.

Page 16, Visitor Use and Experience: This section identifies planning issues and concerns, and references potential increase in use of the Dalton Highway and the possibility of a transportation corridor through the Kobuk Preserve to the Ambler Mining District. This should be an “or” statement, not an “and” statement as increased traffic on the Dalton can occur without an Ambler Mining District Access Road. This section should also clarify that “highway” is a misnomer in this context as it is a gravel road hundreds of miles long with limited services, is one of the most isolated roads in the United States, and historical use has been as a haul road to support the Trans-Alaska Pipeline and oil production at Prudhoe Bay. In these years of declining oil production, it is not reasonably foreseeable that Dalton Highway traffic would significantly increase. There are also motorized use restrictions that apply on lands within the road corridor, which inhibit access to GAAR by the general public. Therefore, any increase in haul road traffic to Prudhoe Bay does not necessarily increase visitors to the park. Should traffic on the Dalton Highway increase, there should be a defined causal effect between the increased traffic and the park in order to properly manage and mitigate such effects.

In reference to the congressionally-mandated surface transportation corridor across the Kobuk Preserve to the Ambler Mining District, this road is currently proposed as a limited use, non-public road. The State of Alaska and the project proponent, AIDEA, have advanced no plans for a public road and the Draft Environmental Impact Statement is specific to only a limited use,

non-public, access-controlled industrial road. It is therefore inappropriate and out of context to make reference to increased visitation to GAAR as a result of the proposed road. We request the plan base projections of future visitor demand on scientific principles, data, national census, or mathematical algorithms to gain integrity and repeatability in projections of the future.

Page 16, Human Impacts on Natural and Cultural Resources: first column: This section states "...[human] *impacts on pristine ecosystems...include oil and mineral exploration...*" Human impacts in the context of this paragraph all refer to impacts within the park. Including only one theoretical activity outside the park, particularly of limited extent and duration, undermines the credibility of this document. The reference to oil and gas exploration should be removed or equal weight should be given to the sundry of human activities outside the park, such as climate change, forest fires, etc. This section should address practical, non-theoretical impacts of those human activities within the park that are allowed and managed by the Service.

In response to concerns regarding the looting of cultural artifacts, we recommend the visitor orientation include information about the significance and value of cultural resources to ensure these important resources are protected.

Page 17, Research Activities and Data Collection: Congress clearly indicated in Section 101(b) of ANILCA that opportunities for scientific research needed to be maintained, and in Section 101(c), that fish and wildlife management needed to occur in accordance with recognized scientific principles. It is also important to recognize that concerns exist amongst state staff and the public about potential limits that might be invoked on the level and types of research activities that will be allowed in GAAR designated Wilderness.

Considering the data gaps that the Service recognizes on natural and cultural resources, as well as visitor use, it seems premature to place direction in a GMP Amendment that could preclude scientific research activities needed to fill the "many data gaps the Service faces" understanding park and visitor use data.

Page 17, Research Activities and Data Collection, second paragraph, second sentence: While information can always be improved, we question the accuracy of the statement that there is little information available on the moose population and trends in the park (e.g., the joint radio collar study for moose movement and survival in the Upper Koyukuk Region). We request the Service clarify what specific information is lacking in regards to species of fish and wildlife within the park unit. Understanding what specific data gaps exist, and what is needed for management purposes, can direct interest and resources towards cooperative research projects, or identify information that may be available elsewhere.

Page 17, Wilderness Management: Additional details on the types of changing visitor-use patterns and levels would be useful. While Service statistics show that visitor use has increased by almost 10 fold since 1986, the numbers are hard to quantify. For example, 2014 data indicates that there were a total of 6,166 Backcountry campers for the year. Yet these campers had a total of 6,166 total overnight stays. It seems unlikely that the solo campers were going to the GAAR and camping for a single night. The plan also acknowledges that most travelers visit the various visitor centers located outside the park unit and do not actually camp within the park boundaries (page 178 of the plan indicates 579 visitors entered the park in 2010). If visitor use is a concern, an update to the access and circulation plan required under ANILCA Section 1301(b)(4) may be more appropriate.

Page 18, Western Unit (Kobuk River Preserve) Transportation Right-of-Way: This section indicates the plan addresses desired conditions for resources and visitor use and experience on lands adjacent to the potential transportation corridor. This is precisely why we are concerned about the Service managing non-designated lands as if they were designated Wilderness. The plan must clearly distinguish between management of designated Wilderness and the non-designated preserves.

Page 19-20, Proposing New Wilderness: As noted above, this discussion needs to recognize that ANILCA Section 1317 included time constraints for recommending new wilderness in Alaska park units.

The last paragraph indicates “eligible” lands are being managed to protect wilderness character “...until Congress takes action on whether to designate the areas as wilderness.” The plan needs to disclose that the Service did not forward the Section 1317 recommendations to Congress within the mandated timeframes and new studies are not authorized under ANILCA. It is important to recognize that indefinitely managing these lands as if they are designated Wilderness is contrary to ANILCA and the Wilderness Act, as Congressional action is required to authorize new studies in Alaska, as well as designate Wilderness.

Page 20, External Pressures, Boundary Issues: Identifying the growth of Anaktuvuk Pass as a threat to park water quality due to concerns about possible future dumping of trash in the river is a disservice to the public and the community of Anaktuvuk Pass. It would be more appropriate for the Service to use this management plan to propose water quality monitoring along sensitive river corridors to establish a scientific baseline to determine if and when water quality may be affected, and by what mechanism it would be affected. The Service could then work with the appropriate regulatory agencies to ensure appropriate measures are taken to preclude or reverse reductions in water quality.

In addition, as noted previously, in the last planning effort for the NPR-A the entire southwestern unit has been placed off limits to oil and gas development. The first and only oil and gas development project is located approximately 200 miles from the northern boundary of GAAR. The likelihood of visitor use significantly increasing as a result of increased traffic along the Dalton highway is also addressed above. Therefore, the inclusion of all of these alleged “threats” is both unnecessary and misleading.

Page 23, Impact topics retained and dismissed for Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve, Table 1: We request that 43 CFR Part 24, ANILCA, and the MMOU between ADF&G and the Service be listed in the “relevant law, regulation, or policy” column for natural resources, wilderness character, visitor use and experience. Additionally, we request that ANILCA be listed in the “relevant law, regulation, or policy” column for socioeconomics, park operations, and scenic resources.

We also recommend retaining and evaluating Environmental Justice and Conflicts with Land Use Plans, Policies or Controls. Since no proposals are being included in this GMP Amendment to facilitate future needs by Anaktuvuk Pass residents to hunt in other areas, this plan could have adverse effects on the community.

Page 23, Table 1, Wilderness Character: ANILCA does not identify GAAR as the premier wilderness park; therefore, we request the plan either provide a citation or remove this qualifier. Further, one of the ANILCA park purposes is “to provide continued opportunities including reasonable access, for mountain climbing, mountaineering, and other wilderness recreational

activities.” We request the plan refer to specific purposes instead of vague or incomplete summaries, such as *“opportunities for solitude and challenging wilderness adventures.”*

Page 29, Portfolio of Management Plans for Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve, 2nd column: It appears many of the documents listed have either not been finalized or posted on the website. In addition, other documents are missing, such as the final GAAR 1994 Resource Management Plan (RMP), which is not listed on the website or in the GMP Amendment. To our knowledge, the 1994 RMP has not been updated although the RMP states that it would be revisited annually. The purpose of the RMP as listed on page 7 is to *“...guide land managers in inventorying, monitoring, researching, and protecting the natural, cultural, and subsistence resources of Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve.”* Further, the RMP describes how the National Park Service will implement the resource management directives in the GMP. We would assume that information from the RMP would have been used to inform the GMP Amendment.

Page 30, National Park Service Plans, first column: Contrary to the statement in this section, the 1986 GMP/Land Protection Plan/Wilderness Suitability Review found that *“Approximately 1,009,638 acres of nonwilderness lands within the park and preserve met the criteria as established by the Wilderness Act.”* In other words, the 1986 GMP found that approximately 1,009,638 acres of land had wilderness characteristics. The 1986 GMP also correctly identified the need for the preparation of a “wilderness report and environmental analysis” prior to any formal recommendation. The final wilderness recommendation/EIS and Record of Decision for Gates of the Arctic only recommended 330,856 acres in the northeast preserve unit. That recommendation was never forwarded by the Secretary of Interior to the President or Congress for action. We request this section be revised to reflect this factual information.

Pg. 31, Land Protection Plan, first column: To our knowledge, the GAAR Land Protection Plan has not been finalized; therefore, the basis for the following statement is unclear *“All of the actions in the 2013 GMP Amendment are consistent with the park land protection plan.”* It also would be prudent to provide a location where the public may locate the referenced plan.

This section makes general statements about the GMP Amendment as being consistent with other local and state plans in the area. The GMP should also provide supporting statements on how the GMP is consistent with the plans listed. For example, the Dalton Hwy Scenic Corridor Partnership Plan called for increased coordination between landowners and managers along the Dalton highway corridor. A summary of how the Service is participating in coordination with other landowners and managers would be appropriate.

Page 31, Final EIS/Wilderness Recommendation: As noted, this section needs to be corrected to reflect that the ANILCA Section 1317 mandated review process was not fully completed and the timeframe for forwarding recommendations to the President and Congress has expired. Similarly noted previously, ANILCA Section 1326(b) does not allow for new studies unless authorized by Congress.

Page 40, Table 2, Recreational Improvements: Please clarify that ANILCA 1315(d) allows for new public use cabins and shelters when necessary for public health and safety purposes and that 1316(a) allows for the continuance of existing uses, and future construction and use of temporary campsites, tent platforms, shelters and other temporary facilities and equipment directly and necessary for the taking of fish and wildlife. Please note that the 1316 allowance is for all public lands where the taking of fish and wildlife is permitted. When listing the ANILCA sections,

please also identify what use is allowed. We further suggest for zone 3, instead of stating no recreational improvements are “allowed,” indicate they are not “proposed” in this plan.

Page 42, Introduction, third paragraph, last sentence: We suspect the following is a typo and the intended phrase is “wilderness values” not “wild and scenic river values”: *“These measures will help park staff protect and enhance wilderness ~~wild and scenic river~~ values over time.”*

Page 46, Natural Quality: We disagree with using the Service’s interpretation of sheep population structure as a measure of wilderness character, and that a decline in the number of full-curl rams would be considered an adverse trend for implementing changes in management, including adjustments to the season or bag limits for sport hunting. See the Fish and Wildlife Management general comment.

Page 48, Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation Quality, second paragraph: Before going to a permit system to redistribute use if contact rates are exceeded, we request Service consider collecting information (e.g. visitor survey) regarding visitors’ perceptions of crowding and preferences for management action.

We also request that additional information be provided regarding management of airspace over Park Units. The GMP Amendment should clarify that by itself, the Service does not have the authority to regulate airspace (a responsibility of the Federal Aviation Administration), but that cooperative efforts have been implemented between user groups, commercial interests and state and federal managers to understand and develop strategies to manage airspace, such as through the Denali Aircraft Overflights Council. We also recommend providing the public with information about where overflights tend to be more concentrated in order to facilitate backcountry trip planning for those that may want to time their use to periods when aircraft may not be encountered on a frequent basis, or select their route based on the likelihood of encountering and avoiding aircraft noise.

Page 49, Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation Quality, third paragraph: If additional visitor created campsites and trails are documented over time, we request the Service consider providing information to visitors regarding existing trails or campsites in order to prevent proliferation before implementing any user restrictions, including commercial use authorization (CUA) restrictions on where aircraft may land. Many visitors may prefer to use an established trail or existing campsite in keeping with Leave No Trace, but may be limited in their ability to do so by lack of generally available information.

Page 52, Table 3 Measures, Standards, and Potential Management Strategies: Specific to where the table discusses using the Compendium as a vehicle for fish and wildlife management actions, such as changes to bag limits, seasons, permits, and closures, we request that the strategy be limited to following the State Board of Game and the Federal Subsistence Board, as appropriate, and as committed to in the MMOU between the Service and ADF&G. See above general comment.

Page 55, Table 3, Use of aircraft, motorboats, snowmachines, and motorized equipment: It is unclear why snowmachines are singled out as the “unauthorized” use that will be evaluated. Snowmachine use (as well as aircraft and motorboats) is allowed pursuant to ANILCA Sections 811 and 1110 and ANILCA implementing regulations at 36 CFR 13.460 and 43 CFR 36.11(c), respectively. While the 1986 GMP includes statements that imply the park unit would be closed to recreational snowmachine use, closures have never been implemented by regulation, as required by 43 CFR 36.11(h). There is no need to *“craft a regulation to enforce recreational use*

of snowmachines” when under ANILCA, the use is allowed (without a permit) until closed or restricted by regulation. We request the measure and strategies for this indicator be corrected, as noted.

Page 59, Actions Common to all Alternatives, Commercial Services: We request this section be revised to clarify which visitors require guided hunting services:

(36 CFR section 13.40[d]), e.g., a nonresident who hunts brown bear, Dall sheep, or mountain goats must be accompanied by an Alaska-licensed guide or an Alaska resident 19 years of age or older who is within the “second degree of kindred.

Pages 59-60, Commercial Services: The requirements for commercial service providers appear to apply to the entire park unit, without any distinction between activities occurring in designated Wilderness and non-designated areas. Commercial service providers should not be required to meet wilderness-mandated standards in non-designated Wilderness. We request this section be modified to provide different standards and requirements for commercial activities that are conducted in non-designated areas. See above general comments.

Page 63, Commercial Services, second paragraph: This section states that “*Fixed facilities in support of [commercial service] operations is not consistent with the purpose of maintaining the wild and undeveloped character of the area, and thus would not continue to be permitted.*” As noted elsewhere in the plan, ANILCA amends the Wilderness Act in Alaska and allows for public use cabins and shelters in designated Wilderness for public health and safety (Section 1315(c) and (d)) as well as existing and new temporary facilities on all public lands where the taking of fish and wildlife are allowed, including designated Wilderness (Section 1316). If permanent structures are allowed under ANILCA, they may be used by both the public and commercial operators. Please remove this statement.

Page 65 and 90: Access Points into the park along the right-of-way for the Ambler Mining District limited use, controlled access industrial road is not proposed by the state or the project proponent. Any access points along the controlled access road would need to be requested by the Service and appropriately managed.

Page 65, Visitor Facilities, Overview: Please clarify that ANILCA Section 1306 allows for visitor facilities to be developed both within and outside the park and preserve.

Page 67, Visitor Facilities, Temporary Facilities: The prohibition of new temporary facilities in the park conflicts with the allowance provided in ANILCA Section 1316(a). While no sport hunting is allowed in the park, sport fishing and subsistence activities are allowed, and facilities may be necessary to support them. Please revise this section to clarify what is allowed under ANILCA.

Page 67, Administrative Access and Facilities, Overview, 2nd paragraph: Please clarify that the minimum requirements analysis is only required for uses prohibited under Section 4(c) of the Wilderness Act. It also does not apply to administrative activities conducted outside of designated Wilderness.

Page 67, Transportation and Access, 2nd paragraph: Please clarify that snowmachines are allowed under ANILCA Section 811 for subsistence use and under ANILCA Section 1110 for traditional activities and for travel to and from villages and homesites.

Page 69, Scientific Activities and Resource Management, Research and Resource Management, third paragraph: The GMP Amendment states that outside research requests would be assessed for whether the research fits and compliments the mission, purposes, and Service policies at Gates of the Arctic. We request the plan clarify that this would not hinder the State's ability to conduct surveys and research in the park and preserve.

Page 70, Research and Resource Management: This section gives the incorrect impression that the Service is the sole manager of fish and wildlife within the park. See general comment on State management of fish and wildlife.

Page 70 Alternative A, page 82 Alternative B, and page 95 Alternative C: *“Although the National Park Service would consult with the State of Alaska on the management of hunting, fishing, and trapping in the park and preserve, the goal would continue to be the support of natural ecosystem functions, not the improvement or enhancement of resources for ongoing consumptive uses.”* See above general comment on State Fish and Wildlife Management. Per existing statute, regulation and policy, we request “consult” be changed to “coordinate.” This also applies to Table 5, page 127.

Page 74, Concept Description: As noted above, we disagree with the management strategies that have a single purpose of protecting wilderness character in the preserve. The preserve areas are not designated wilderness, and current management can and should provide for non-wilderness uses.

Page 76, Visitor Permits/Registration: The permit requirement for pack animals constitutes an ANILCA Section 1110(a) access closure and if carried forward would need to be implemented by regulation pursuant to 43 CFR 36.11(h) and 36 CFR 13.460, as appropriate. This discussion could also be read as limiting the number of sled dogs to three per individual or group, which would make travel by dog team infeasible. We request clarification in the GMP Amendment that this limit does not apply to sled dogs.

Page 76, Visitor Permits/Registration: Because most visitors arrive via air taxi or as part of a commercially guided group, we recommend orientation requirements be listed in this section in addition to the section on Commercial Services.

Page 77, Commercial Services: We request the following edit to accurately convey the requirements to provide orientation to guided visitors while only encouraging orientation for visitors arriving by air taxi: *“These management directions include the requirement to bring commercially guided visitors to ranger stations.”*

Page 77, Commercial Services: See page 63 comment regarding the “ban” on fixed facilities.

Page 77, Other Miscellaneous Services and Uses: We recommend including a citation as to where the reader can find the regional policies referenced in this section.

Page 77, Visitor Facilities, Overview: As previously noted, ANILCA Section 1306 also allows for visitor service facilities *within* park units.

Page 78, Campsites: For clarity, we recommend describing and providing a map of the area “around Arrigetch Peaks.”

Page 78, Cabins: Because this is the section the public and Service staff will reference when looking for guidance regarding cabins, we request a reference to the ANILCA Section 1315(d) cabin allowance as described on page 77: *“However, the National Park Service may provide public-use cabins in wilderness for the safety, well-being, and health of visitors, per section 1315(d) of ANILCA.”*

Also, the plan indicates a cabin management plan is currently being developed for cabins that remain standing. We support completion of this plan. If delayed further, fewer existing cabins will remain standing due to lack of maintenance. Until then, we recommend providing the public with the location of existing emergency cabin locations so they can be utilized for public health and safety. When conducted, the cabin management plan should evaluate reconstruction of fallen cabins that are considered cultural cabins and not just maintaining standing cabins, even if the fallen cabins have not yet been determined historic property.

Page 79, Temporary Facilities: We request this section include a specific allowance for subsistence use of temporary facilities for the harvest of fish and wildlife in both the park and preserve pursuant ANILCA Section 1316. In addition, the NPS 2013 document referenced is not listed in the References section of the plan.

Page 79, Administrative Access and Facilities, Overview: It is unclear what activities are meant by *“NPS staff would continue to access the park for all activities identified in ANILCA.”* ANILCA did not specify for which activities the Service could or could not access the park and preserve. Please clarify.

Page 79, Administrative Access and Facilities, Overview: We request this section clarify that the minimum requirements analysis is only required in designated Wilderness; as written, there is no differentiation between operations in Wilderness versus non-wilderness.

Page 80, Transportation and Access: Please clarify that the access goals for walking, snowshoeing, skiing, floating, and boating would only apply to Service staff, not state administrative activities.

Further, it is unnecessary to do a minimum requirements analysis for activities not prohibited by the Sec. 4c of the Wilderness Act or those methods of access allowed by ANILCA. We request the following edit:

NPS staff would strive to walk, snowshoe, ski, float, or boat within the park and preserve, but all modes of access and transportation within the park would be determined through an interdisciplinary review and the results of a wilderness minimum requirements analysis, unless the mode of transportation is an ANILCA allowance.

When determined to be the minimum tools for accessing and getting around the park other methods allowed by ANILCA could include the use of dog teams, snowmachines, fixed-wing aircraft (generally used to place NPS staff in the field to conduct research and law enforcement, and flown on routes and altitudes that minimize disruption to visitors and wildlife). ~~Lower level flights and h~~Helicopter landings would only be made in emergencies (including active law enforcement needs) or when they are determined the minimum tool necessary to accomplish management activities.

Page 81, Alternative B, Research and Resource Management. ANILCA Section 1314 provides that, *“Nothing in this Act is intended to enlarge or diminish the responsibility and authority of*

the State of Alaska for management of fish and wildlife on the public lands except as may be provided in title VIII of this Act, or to amend the Alaska constitution.” Both the Service and the State have differing mandates for our management responsibilities; however, the proposed strategy referenced here is too broad as it attempts to supersede the State’s management authority. This strategy also appears contrary to title VIII of ANILCA. We request the following edits:

National Park Service would also continue to consult with appropriate state and federal agencies on research that is conducted. Outside research requests (i.e., research not directed by the National Park Service) would be evaluated on a case-by case basis. This includes not only the compliance review noted previously, but an assessment of whether the research fits and complements the mission, purposes, and policies of the National Park Service at Gates of the Arctic, including wilderness character of the park and preserve. Research at the park would feed adaptive resource management programs that respond to changes in resource conditions and recreational use. The National Park Service would strive to the natural abundance, behavior, diversity, and ecological integrity of native species as part of their ecosystems. Management would focus on human uses and activities that affect populations and their habitats rather than direct management of resources. The only direct management of resources would be to restore natural conditions maintain to damaged areas in response to issues that arise on a case-by-case basis (e.g., cleanup activities, removal of invasive plants). The park staff would continue to respond aggressively using the minimum tools necessary to restore, rehabilitate, and mitigate impacts. Although the National Park Service would consult with the State of Alaska on the management of subsistence hunting, fishing and trapping in the park and preserve, the goal would continue to be the support of natural ecosystem functions., ~~not the improvement or enhancement of resources for ongoing consumptive uses.~~

Page 83, Resource and Visitor Protection, Resource Protection: We request this section provide additional information on how “*ranger activities would protect the subsistence priority at the park.*”

Page 85, Other Management Activities, Dalton Highway Corridor and Partnerships: We request the Service clarify that tour providers and transporters on the Dalton Highway are excluded as stakeholders, as referenced in the Partnerships section.

Page 102, Mitigation Procedures Common to All Action Alternatives: A minimum requirements analysis is not required for activities that are not prohibited under 4(c) of the Wilderness Act or for methods of access allowed under ANILCA. To assist in determining how ANILCA affects management of designated Wilderness in Alaska, we request this section reference “The Alaska Supplement to the Minimum Requirements Decision Guide.”

Page 103, Mitigating Procedures Common to All Action Alternatives: The GMP Amendment states, “*An emphasis would be placed on improving relations with the State of Alaska and Alaska Native tribal offices, local community groups and community development efforts.*” However, the example items listed include all of the above with the exception of the State of Alaska. We recommend including at least one item regarding the State of Alaska.

Page 104, Future Studies and Implementation Plans: We note that there is no mention of Species Conservation Plans, yet a GAAR Dall’s Sheep Species Conservation Plan has been drafted by GAAR staff, and we have been informed that these plans are required for all species in the park.

We request the Service provide additional information regarding the Species Conservation Plans, including where they will be done, what species they will include and a timeline for implementation, as well as how the State's management authority will be addressed.

Page 105, Future Studies and Implementation Plans, Wilderness: Please see above general comment on conducting additional wilderness studies.

Page 107, Identification of the Preferred Alternative: We question the value of assigning points to the alternatives, considering the one criterion determined to be most important, the "*protection of wilderness character and opportunities for the wildest experience*" overrides the point system. Costs are associated with additional education efforts, yet a major benefit of Alternative B, the future ability to adaptively manage user-created trails and campsites, has no present cost and most likely no future cost if the projected flat visitation rates are correct. In addition, since Alternative C only allows consideration of additional management actions, it is difficult to see how this translates into calculable costs.

Page 110, Wilderness Study: see previous comments on the deferment of a wilderness study.

Page 113, Table 5 Alternatives Summary: The columns for Alternative B and C are blank for "Visitor Permits/Registration."

Page 114, Table 5, Alternatives Summary, Visitor Permits/Registration: The language in Alternative C states that all visitors, guided and unguided, would have to stop at a visitor center, which is incorrect for visitors who arrive with a CUA holder who is part of the Guardian of the Gates Program. We suggest the following revision: "*In addition, to help foster visitor appreciation of park resources and values, this alternative would require that all visitors not part of the Guardian of the Gates Program—guided or unguided—stop at a ranger station or other information facility for an orientation ...*".

Pages 116-117, Table 5 Alternatives Summary, Alternative C column, Indicators and Standards/ User Capacity: For consistency and clarity, recommend replacing Alternative C text for the "Indicators and Standards/ User Capacity" rows with "Same as alternative B" because the text is identical.

Page 118, Table 5 Alternatives Summary, Alternative B column: For consistency and clarity, recommend replacing Alternative B paragraph under "Access Points" with "Same as alternative A" because the text is identical.

Page 119, Table 5 Alternatives Summary: The ANILCA Section 1315 cabin allowance should be included for every alternative, as described on p. 77: "*However, the National Park Service may provide public-use cabins in wilderness for the safety, well-being, and health of visitors, per section 1315(d) of ANILCA.*"

Page 121, Table 5 Alternatives Summary, Overview (first row): See comment for page 79, Administrative Access and Facilities, Overview, regarding activities identified in ANILCA.

Pg. 139-140, Vegetation and Airborne Pollutants: The GMP Amendment calls out regional industrial and mining activities and the Red Dog Mine as depositing airborne contamination within the park. The management plan does not support this statement by fact or scientific findings. It strains the credibility of this document to state that the Red Dog Mine, nearly 200

miles away, is depositing industrial pollution in the park. Please either provide supporting information for this statement or if none is available, delete it.

Page 146, Wild and Scenic Rivers, ninth paragraph, last sentence: We note that “NPS 2014b” is not available on the park’s website (<http://www.nps.gov/gaar/parkmgmt/planning-portfolio.htm>) as indicated in the References section on page 307.

Page 165, Current Subsistence Use, third paragraph, last sentence: This statement is misleading. ANILCA Section 811(b) allows for “*other means of surface transportation traditionally employed*” by rural residents for subsistence use. The overarching purpose of the Anaktuvuk Pass Land Exchange makes it clear that rural residents used ATVs for subsistence when ANILCA passed in 1980, therefore, they can still be allowed pursuant to 36 CFR 13.460.

Page 166, Subsistence and Climate Change: “*Water quality and flow changes linked to climate impacts have already affected the range and quality of some fisheries important to Alaskan subsistence users such as salmon and sheefish.*” We are unaware of any scientific information to support this statement. Please either substantiate or delete the statement.

Page 189, General Assumptions, fifth bullet: Is this assumption accurate? On page 58 under actions common to all alternatives, the GMP Amendment states, “*The Isiak Cabin complex would be removed and the site rehabilitated.*”

Page 189, General Assumptions, sixth bullet: It appears that this bullet is left over from a previous draft and should be deleted. The wilderness study was terminated.

~~*The wilderness proposals in the alternatives would be designated by Congress as wilderness. Eligible areas not included in the proposals would be released from further wilderness consideration.*~~

Page 203, Alternative B (NPS Preferred Alternative), Analysis, fourth paragraph: The wilderness study was terminated; therefore, this section needs to be deleted.

~~*Under alternative B, the designation of about 914,000 acres in the preserve as wilderness would provide permanent legal protection to the four qualities of wilderness character in these areas, and prevent potential actions or developments that would be inconsistent with wilderness—the undeveloped, natural, untrammeled, and outstanding opportunities for solitude and primitive unconfined recreation in the national preserve would be protected in perpetuity. This would maintain wilderness character in these areas.*~~

Page 205, Alternative C (NPS Preferred Alternative), Analysis, fourth paragraph: The wilderness study was terminated; therefore, this section needs to be deleted.

~~*Under alternative C, designation of about 459,690 acres in parts of the Eastern and Western units as wilderness would provide permanent legal protection to the four qualities of wilderness in these areas and prevent potential actions or developments that would be inconsistent with wilderness—the undeveloped, natural, untrammeled, and outstanding opportunities for solitude and primitive unconfined recreation in parts of the Eastern and Western units would be protected in perpetuity. This would maintain wilderness character in these areas.*~~

Pg.234, Right-of-Way Consultation: Consultation with the Alaska Department of Transportation (ADOT) is an out of date reference. The Governor of Alaska transferred the Ambler Mining District Road Access Project from ADOT to the AIDEA specifically to enable the road to become a non-public use road in accordance with the stated interests of the surrounding subsistence communities to not have the road open to the public. Please replace with: *The Service and Park Staff, and the National Transportation Agency have been in consultation with the State of Alaska, the Alaska Industrial Development and Export Authority, and the Alaska Department of Natural Resources on the proposed Ambler Mining District Industrial Access Road.*

Page 249, Appendix B: Minimum Requirements Decision Guide. We request the “Alaska Supplement to the Minimum Requirements Decision Guide” be included here to provide important Alaska-specific context in regards to the relationship between ANILCA and the Wilderness Act.

Page 257, Desired Conditions, Wilderness: *“Research related to the wilderness ecosystem, key natural resources, and visitor experience will be encouraged when consistent with NPS responsibilities to preserve and manage wilderness.”* We request the GMP include a statement that ADF&G management and research activities are consistent with Service desired conditions for wilderness.

Page 258, Desired Conditions, Wilderness Experience/Visitor Use and Experience, Strategies: This section references length of stay requirements, which we did not see discussed elsewhere in the document. If public use is intended to have duration limits those limits need to be disclosed and evaluated through a public process.

Page 259, Fundamental Resources & Values, Populations of Fish and Wildlife: We request clarification that the Kobuk River is primarily within the preserve, and that ANILCA directs that healthy populations of wildlife be maintained on preserves rather than ”natural” as referenced here.

Page 273, Administrative Goals: Subsistence Use, Description, second paragraph: The Federal Subsistence Management Program manages allocation of harvest and harvest limits to provide a priority opportunity for subsistence, but does not manage wildlife resources in the general sense of a full wildlife management program which involves surveys, research, and biological interpretation. We request the following revision:

On July 1990, the Federal Subsistence Management Program began managing allocation of wildlife resources on federal public lands and waters following a court decision that found the State of Alaska out of compliance with ANILCA, Title VIII subsistence provisions.

Page 273, Administrative Goals: Subsistence Use, Desired Condition/Goals: We request the first sentence be deleted as natural balance is undefined and likely will lead to difficulties of interpretation. *“Continued consumptive uses of fish and wildlife populations, and the collection of plant materials and berries within the park do not disrupt the natural balance. Natural resources used for subsistence are maintained at healthy population levels in the preserve and natural and healthy population levels in the park.”*

Page 273, Administrative Goals, Subsistence Use, Desired Condition/Goals: This statement seems incomplete. What restrictions are being referred to in this statement?

Nonwasteful subsistence uses of fish and wildlife and other renewable resources continue to be the priority on public lands over the taking of fish and wildlife for other purposes. These restrictions would occur when necessary to ensure the continued viability of fish and wildlife populations.

Page 274, Administrative Goals: Subsistence Use, Resident Zone Communities: We request the following edit for consistency with Title VIII of ANILCA: “*NPS staff will work to have a clear understanding of the commission’s needs, such as annual subsistence harvest needs, and will have clearly established rules to ensure take of fish and wildlife for subsistence purposes has priority over the take of fish and wildlife for other purposes ~~sport or recreational uses.~~*”

Page 276, Administrative Goals, Sport Hunting, Fishing, and Trapping, Description: This sentence appears contradictory, and we request the following revision: “*Sport hunting, fishing and trapping are all activities allowed in Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve; ~~however, hunting and trapping are allowed in the national preserve under nonconflicting federal and state regulations.~~ (See also the desired conditions for commercial services.)*”

Page 276, Administrative Goals, Sport Hunting, Fishing, and Trapping, Desired Conditions/goals: Coordination with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game and proper permits would be necessary for the third bullet under strategies.

Artificial stocking of fish in park and preserve waters will be considered only if necessary to reestablish species extirpated by human activities.

Page 276, Administrative Goals, Sport Hunting, Fishing, and Trapping, Strategies: The fourth bullet restates the first.

Page 280, Administrative Goals, Ambler Mining District Access Corridor, fourth bullet: This section includes the following desired condition/goal “*To the extent possible, the corridor is compatible with the management directions in the GMP Amendment.*” We object to this goal as long as the plan continues to provide direction to manage the Western Preserve Unit in the same manner as designated Wilderness in the hard park.

Page 281, Administrative Goals, Utilities and Communication Facilities: We note that ANILCA is listed as one of the laws addressing utilities and communication facilities; however, the strategies and desired condition sections need to specifically reference and accurately reflect ANILCA Section 1310 and the Title XI process, which also *requires consideration* of proposed projects within designated Wilderness. We request the following edits:

Desired Condition/Goals

- *Park resources for public enjoyment are not denigrated by nonconforming uses. No NPS telecommunication facilities or utilities are built in the park, and towers built to facilitate NPS or other agency communication are the bare minimum, unobtrusive, and limited to developed areas of the park such as Anaktuvuk Pass. If they are determined to be necessary, utility lines will be placed with minimum impact to park resources.*
- *No new nonconforming use or rights-of-way are permitted through the park without specific statutory authority and approval by the director of the National Park Service or his/her representative. The ANILCA title XI process will be followed, as required, for proposed transportation and utility projects. ~~,and uses are permitted only if there is no practicable alternative to such use of NPS lands.~~*

- *Park operations will employ the best available technology for communications while ~~not~~ ~~allowing~~ minimizing permanent facilities or resource degradation. Considerations should be made in the event of incidents and emergencies for temporary communication systems—for example: temporary repeaters for major incidents such as search and rescue and fire, or in support of remote, temporary research and management facilities.*

Strategies

- *~~If necessary, and there are no other options,~~ Applications for new utilities and communications infrastructure will follow the ANILCA Title XI process for transportation and utility systems ~~be placed outside the wilderness area, along other established corridors.~~ NPS staff will work with service companies, local communities, and the public to locate new telecommunication structures and utility lines ~~outside the wilderness area so there is a minimal effect on park resources in nonwilderness areas.~~ For extension into undisturbed areas in nonwilderness areas, routes will be selected that minimize impacts on the park's natural, cultural, and visual resources.*

Page 289-300, Appendix E, Legislation: We support including relevant sections of ANILCA as an appendix in the GMP; however, it is not always clear in the document, where they apply. In addition, several sections had been truncated in a way that could lead to misunderstandings, and other relevant sections which are absent. We request relevant sections in ANILCA be included in their entirety.

Page 313, Index: The Index appears incomplete and should be revised to include the following additional references: cultural resources, Fairbanks, guide management, access points, State of Alaska, Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve General Management Plan, Noatak National Preserve General Management Plan, Dalton Highway Master Plan, population, North Slope Borough, Kobuk, Shungnack, Northwest Arctic Borough, Yukon-Koyukuk Borough, Fairbanks North Star Borough, Alaska Department of Natural Resources, Alaska Department of Transportation, US Fish & Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management, Nongovernment Organizations and should list all the laws and regulations referenced in the amendment.

Conclusion

As initially noted, while we were afforded an opportunity to provide input on various drafts of the proposed GMP Amendment/Wilderness Stewardship Plan, the public review draft plan is significantly different from the last version we reviewed in 2012, which included wilderness recommendations but also appropriately, the management guidelines section, which provided ANILCA context.

It is especially troubling to discover that while the wilderness study was terminated to (according to the plan) allow for processing the the Ambler Mining District proposed access road application as mandated in Section 201(4)(b), the plan establishes standards for managing the entire park unit, including preserve lands surrounding the proposed road corridor, *as if they were already designated Wilderness*. The complete disregard for both ANILCA, which places limitations on further wilderness studies in Alaska, and the Wilderness Act, which mandates that only Congress can designate Wilderness, is unprecedented in the Alaska Region. We are greatly concerned about the precedent being set in the GMP Amendment, as we believe it threatens to disrupt the balance Congress achieved for Alaska through ANILCA.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. We are available to meet at your convenience to discuss the issues raised in these comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "S. Magee". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "S" and a long, sweeping tail.

Susan Magee
ANILCA Program Coordinator

cc: The Honorable Lisa Murkowski, United States Senate
The Honorable Dan Sullivan, United States Senate
The Honorable Don Young, United States House of Representatives
Bert Frost, Alaska Regional Director, National Park Service
Kip Knudson, Director of State/Federal Relations, Office of the Governor