

John Boyle
Commissioner

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Department of
Natural Resources

Anchorage, Alaska

STATE OF ALASKA

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release: September 4, 2025

Neil Johannsen Presents the First 25 Years of Alaska State Parks

(Anchorage, AK) – Alaska State Parks will host Neil Johannsen in Anchorage on Sept. 10, 2025 to share stories about his tenure at Parks. Neil stands as Parks longest acting Director—12 years and seven months— and worked for Parks from the 1971 through 1995.

Alaskans are invited to Johannsen's presentation at the Atwood Building in the William Egan Room (106) from 1:00 p.m. to 2:30 p.m. on Sept. 10, 2025. The event will also be streamed on Microsoft Teams for those who cannot attend in person. This reflection launches the *America250-Alaska Celebration Series* from DNR's Division of Parks & Outdoor Recreation to reflect on and celebrate 250 years of America's inception.

"The System of Dreams" is a term Johannsen coined in reference to the State of Alaska agency that started out simply—the result of the dreams of a few hardy individuals—and now oversees more than 157 park units from Alaska's far north to the tips of Southeast. Alaska's park system encompasses some three-million acres of land and water; by far the most acreage of any state park system in the country.

Chugach State Park was established in 1970, and Johannsen became the first Superintendent of the Park, now encompassing 500,000 acres in the Anchorage area. In 1976, he became the Chief of Planning and later resigned when appointed Deputy Director of California State Parks. On January 1, 1983, he returned to Alaska as Director of Alaska State Parks and for the next twelve years and seven months, he worked with five Governors and 11 DNR Commissioners.

During his tenure with Parks, 46 Park units were established, including Point Barrow State Park, Chilkat Islands State Park, Shoup Bay State Marine Park and the Kenai River Special Management Area. During his tenure, Kachemak Bay State Parks expanded by 50,000 acres, and Ernest Gruening State Historic Park was established.

Johannsen recently donated 10 boxes of personal records from his 25-year tenure to the University of Alaska Anchorage Archives.

"I kept every scrap of paper on how it all came together. Every letter, every note, every piece of history regarding legislation that passed, Park plans, even every hand-scribbled note to Parks staff for the many years I was a grunt – and the director," said Johannsen.

In this presentation, Johannsen will recall Parks history from 1971 to 1995, including early staffing and management of parks, the creation of Wood-Tikchick State Park, Independence Mine State Historic Park, 33 state marine parks, the Kenai River Special Management Area,

Public Use Cabins, Shuyak State Park, impact of the Exxon Valdez wreck on state parks, Park User Fees, volunteerism, more.

Join us for this historic presentation and a walk down memory lane on the precipice of America's 250 birthday, at the Atwood Building or via Teams streaming. For a virtual invite, please email wendy.sailors@alaska.gov

About [America250-Alaska](#): *America250 is a nonpartisan initiative working to engage every American in commemorating and celebrating the 250th anniversary of the United States in 2026. The guiding principle for Alaska's participation is "History for Tomorrow" highlighting the importance of the next generation to Alaska's future. The theme was inspired by the Alaska Constitutional Convention members who bequeathed the state constitution they had just forged to Alaska's youth in 1956. "You are our future," according to the resolution. "We ask you to take tomorrow and dream."*

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