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## **Chapter 8**

# **FACILITY RECOMMENDATIONS**

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## Chapter 8

# FACILITY RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter presents recommendations for recreational and interpretive facilities. The proposals are designed to rectify management problems, correct for deficiencies in the present number and type of facilities, and to provide opportunities for a variety of park users and visitors, including Alaskans and non-residents. Figure 12 shows many of the facility recommendations.

Most of the recommendations in this chapter call for traditional recreational facilities, such as campgrounds, trails, backcountry campsites, and river access points. Others, particularly the South Denali Visitor Complex, are oriented toward natural history interpretation. Recommendations are consistent with the mission statement and other goals and objectives for the park.

### **South Denali Visitor Complex**

Denali State Park provides excellent opportunities for interpretation of the region's natural history. Tremendous views of the Denali massif and the diversity of surrounding areas make the park an appropriate location for a “South Denali Visitor Complex.” The visitor complex will provide a focal point and staging area for the Denali State Park interpretive program.

The National Park Service, through an interagency planning effort with the State of Alaska and the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, developed a Final South Denali Implementation Plan and Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS). That document along with a Denali State Park Management plan Amendment explored possibilities for development of the south Denali region. Through a public process, a development alternative for facilities along the Parks Highway at Curry Ridge was chosen for implementation. Those facility recommendations are described below.

#### General Concept

This destination facility will serve, Alaskan and out-of-state travelers, local school groups and package tours. The vision is for a high quality facility that offers a range of opportunities for learning and recreating. It will provide visitors of various abilities a chance to experience alpine and subarctic tundra environments and opportunities to view Denali and the Alaska Range.

The visitor center and trail system could engage visitors for an hour, half-day or all day. Diverse opportunities (such as interpretation of natural and cultural resources, viewing Denali, short walks, long hikes, educational programs, hands-on exhibits and viewing films) and information about regional recreational opportunities, safety, and emergency assistance will be provided to accommodate diverse visitor interests and backgrounds. Opportunities for winter activities will be provided, though not at the same level of service as in summer.

Visitor Center

A new visitor complex will be constructed on approximately 4 acres at the Parks Highway site in Denali State Park. The road junction to the facility will be located at approximately mile 134.6. The total building requirement would be approximately 16,000 square feet. A facility this size could accommodate up to 300-400 people at a time. See Figure 2-11, Parks Highway Visitor Center, in FEIS for a conceptual diagram of this facility.

The visitor center will be designed to facilitate park visitors' connection with and understanding of the landscape and natural resources. To the extent practicable, development will be hidden and blended into the landscape. Portions of the visitor center may remain open during the winter. Agencies will limit development to facilities that will be necessary to provide a quality setting for visitors.

Service functions such as housing, maintenance, and storage will be located at the parking area (see description below). A well will be drilled and a wastewater system installed at the site. Generators and maintenance buildings will be located at the parking area. Alternative energy sources (solar, wind) will be used to the extent feasible.

Traffic patterns at the visitor center will allow buses to unload, load, and depart from the site. Parking spaces will be provided for ranger vehicles or to accommodate private vehicles in the off-season or at times of low visitation.

Parking Area

A paved parking area will be constructed on the natural bench across from the Denali View South Wayside near Parks Highway mile 134.6. Lot size will not exceed the space necessary to accommodate 300 automobiles and 150 buses or RVs. A water well will be drilled and a wastewater system will be installed. See Figure 2-12, Parks Highway Parking Area and Campground, in FEIS for a conceptual diagram of this facility.

The office, located in the parking area, will serve as a contact station and will have static displays and information that visitors can read while waiting for the buses. Information will be provided on natural resources, trails and other recreational opportunities in the south Denali region, safety, and "Leave No Trace" principles. During the busiest part of the season, a park volunteer could assist visitors with questions. The contact station will serve as a shuttle transfer site in summer and will accommodate winter visitation. Staffing will depend upon visitation levels.

Potential will exist to include other shuttle bus stop locations in the state park in order to better serve visitors and to reduce the size of the parking lot. The shuttle buses could pick up passengers from nearby sites including Byers Lake campground, Veterans Memorial, Denali View South wayside, Mary's McKinley View Lodge and the Mt. McKinley Princess.

### Access Road

An access road approximately 3.5 miles long will be constructed from the parking area to the visitor center. During busy times of the day, private vehicles will park in the parking area and passengers will take a shuttle bus up to the visitor center. The access road will be designed for low volume, low speed traffic (20-25mph), with narrow lanes and tight corners as required to fit the mountainous terrain with minimal cut and fill. Wide spots could be provided for viewing stops. The road will be paved but low profile, with gravel shoulders.

### Campground

A campground will be constructed adjacent to the proposed parking lot at mile 134.6 of the Parks Highway. The campground will include restrooms, a camp host site, up to 50 tent sites and 50 RV sites, for a total site requirement of 19 acres. The campground could be built in phases depending on availability of funds and demand. If unacceptable resource damage or conflicts occur as a direct result of this campground, the campground will not be expanded until resource damage or conflicts are mitigated. See Figure 2-12, Parks Highway Parking Area and Campground, in FEIS for a conceptual diagram of this facility. The campground could be privately operated.

### Trail Systems

The “hub-and-spoke” trail concept provides the general vision for trail systems in the South Denali region: the main parking area at the highway site at mile 134.6 will serve as the transportation and information hub, with access to trails and rivers occurring at strategic locations. All trails are conceptual and will require additional site investigations to determine exact locations. Estimated tread widths, brushing distances, and trail lengths are listed below. Actual widths and lengths will depend on vegetation, topography, projected volume of use, and purpose. Tread widths will likely be wider closer to facilities and narrower further from the visitor center. Tread widths will likely be less than those listed below, except for the trail listed as ADA accessible.

Approximately 13 miles of trails will be constructed in the vicinity of the new visitor center. Trails will be unpaved.

- A 4-mile interpretive hiking trail will be constructed from the parking area at mile 134.6 of the Parks Highway to the visitor center. This trail will be separated from the visitor complex access road. There will be 2-3 pullouts/bus stops/trailheads along the access road, and loop trails will be constructed from one pullout and return to a second one. See “Trail A” on Figure 2-10 in FEIS that shows a conceptual location for this trail.
- A half-mile developed (ADA accessible) interpretive trail loop will be constructed from the visitor center to the alpine area. This trail will provide a relatively short interpretive trail for visitors. See “Trail B” on Figure 2-10 in FEIS that shows a conceptual location for this trail.
- A 3-mile hiking trail will connect the visitor center with the Curry Ridge Trail. See “Trail C” on Figure 2-10 in FEIS that shows a conceptual location for this trail.

- A 5-mile easy interpretive loop trail will be constructed from the visitor center to Lake 1787 and around the lake. This trail will also connect to the access road. See “Trail D” on Figure 2-10 in FEIS that shows a conceptual location for this trail.
- A trail from the visitor center to private lands located along the southern boundary of the park could be constructed to protect natural resources and enhance recreational opportunities on Curry Ridge.
- The summer hiking trails near the visitor center could be maintained in winter for Nordic skiing.
- Winter trails will be developed and select trails will be improved for winter use. Winter uses of the park in some areas may be separated or restricted to minimize conflicts between user groups and protect park resources.

### Regional Visitor Information Stops

A large number of visitors pass through the Denali region, unaware of the recreational opportunities available to them. Small log cabins or covered kiosk stops should be developed to display detailed regional maps, brochures and graphics which clearly depict the region's features and attractions.

Since there is a substantial amount of vehicle traffic north and south through this region, there should be information stops at the north and south ends of the Denali region. Healy, Cantwell, Trapper Creek and Talkeetna junctions appear to be the most appropriate locations.

<b>Proposal</b>	<b>Management Objectives</b>	<b>Facilities</b>	<b>Justification</b>
Visitor information stops at north and south ends of Denali recreation region: Healy, Cantwell, Trapper Creek and Talkeetna junctions.	Inform visitors of variety of opportunities within region.	Small unstaffed structures or kiosks with parking. Areas for maps, brochures, and other information.	Visitors are often unaware of the variety of opportunities within the Denali region. Information centers would promote the regional recreation network.

## Interpretive Facilities

A primary management goal for Denali State Park is to interpret the natural systems and forces that function in this region. The Denali Region owes much of its form and ultimate environs to the work of glaciers that emanate from its peaks.

In addition to the South Denali visitor complex, there are a variety of opportunities to interpret the natural systems of the park and region. This plan makes specific recommendations for the development of smaller facilities designed to form an interpretive network. Proposed facilities include several outlooks along the Parks Highway, a wildlife habitat and a scenic viewing route.

Wildlife Viewing Facilities. Wildlife and habitat viewing are important elements of the overall Denali State Park interpretive program. It is essential, however, that the interpretive facilities not encroach on the habitat to the point of disturbing and displacing wildlife. There are opportunities in the park for viewing wildlife in their natural habitat without disturbing the subject or endangering the viewer. For example, proposed viewing stations are situated on heavily vegetated bluffs that have a substantial vertical separation between subject and viewer. Some of these bluffs overlook clearwater sloughs that flow into the Chulitna River. Salmon congregate in these clearwater sloughs as they return to spawn, and bears gather to feed on the salmon.

Final design of viewing platforms should be developed with guidance from biologists of the Department of Fish and Game and other knowledgeable sources. The facilities should include small parking areas, foot trails, controlled (fenced or railed) overlooks with observation blinds, and possibly, mounted spotting telescopes. These overlooks are directly accessible from the Parks Highway. They should be designated as wildlife viewing areas by the Board of Game to maximize viewing opportunities. Limitations and/or partial closures to hunting may be necessary.

Proposal	Management Objectives	Facilities	Justification
Wildlife and scenic viewing overlooks along Parks Hwy.	Provide wildlife habitat viewing opportunities.	Viewing platforms would include small parking areas, foot trails, controlled overlooks with observation blinds and perhaps spotting telescopes. Final design will be developed with guidance from ADF&G biologists.	These facilities would be designed to generally enable wildlife viewing without habitat disruption or wildlife/human confrontation.

Figure 12  
**PROPOSED FACILITIES**

### **Park Headquarters, Storage Yard, Housing, Patrol Cabin**

If the South Denali Visitor Complex is built along the Parks Highway, then park offices and storage will be accommodated on that site. However, if the South Denali Visitor Complex is not constructed, then park headquarters and storage yard improvements would continue to be needed at the existing Byers Creek facility along the Parks Highway that supports Denali State Park operations.

Some ranger, shop and storage yard facilities are located at the Byers Creek site rather than the Byers Lake campground area in order to reduce noise and visual impacts on visitors. Facilities currently at the site include a rustic headquarters cabin, outdoor storage area, and a shop building with a dry storage area for year-round maintenance, water well, communication facility and generator. These facilities are minimal and improvements are recommended. New facilities should be designed to be in character with the other structures in the headquarters complex. Improvements recommended include:

- Fenced security yard for short- and long-term storage of vehicles, equipment and materials including an area for ADOT/PF equipment and materials.
- Improved outdoor covered storage.
- Improved communications capabilities.
- Individual cabins for full-time rangers.
- A multi-unit dorm-style housing structure for volunteer, seasonal and research personnel.
- Restroom and shower facilities for park personnel.
- Designated helicopter landing zone for emergency, research and park management use.

Should the South Denali Visitor Complex proposals be implemented, then the majority of facilities would be located at the Parks Highway Visitor Complex and the purpose of the Byers Creek facilities will be converted from the park's primary maintenance yard to a facility providing housing for seasonal, volunteer, and research personnel with a limited maintenance area for ADOT/PF equipment and materials storage.

A remote patrol cabin is located on Canyon Creek (a tributary of Long Creek) north of the Peters Hills. This cabin shall continue to be managed and maintained for administrative purposes.

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<b>Proposal</b>	<b>Management Objectives</b>	<b>Facilities</b>	<b>Justification</b>
Continue to operate the Byers Creek headquarters /maintenance/storage yard/hosing complex. If the South Denali Visitor Complex is built, shift some of the functions to that facility.	Provide necessary facilities to support State Park operations.	Fenced security yard, individual cabins, multi-unit dorm-style housing, restroom & shower facilities, helicopter landing zone, improved outdoor storage and communication capabilities.	Existing facility does not meet needs. Storage is not protected or centrally located, and encroaches on Byers Creek. There is presently no appropriate housing for volunteer or seasonal help. No well or electrical generation.
Canyon Creek remote patrol cabin.	Provides administrative site to provide shelter and store gear in remote portion of the park.	Continue to manage and maintain small cabin for administrative purposes.	Patrol cabin provides shelter and storage site for patrol, research and other park staff in this remote part of the park.
Create storage area for ADOT/PF equipment and materials.	Provide centrally located facilities to support ADOT/PF maintenance activities.	Secured equipment storage and area for materials such as sand.	The Byers Creek facility is centrally located for ADOT/PF purposes. Storage space there would create efficiencies for local road maintenance of the Parks Highway, existing State Park facilities, and the new visitor facility.

## Camping Facilities

Campgrounds in this region are utilized by in-state and out-of-state visitors, with the heaviest use from residents of the railbelt region. In recent years the existing Byers Lake facilities have been used at or above design capacity. Trailheads, waysides, gravel pits and picnic areas have served as spillover campgrounds.

Three major factors have led to the recommendations for camping facilities: demand for campsites continues to grow, exceeding the available supply; existing facilities do not provide the diversity of campsite types desired by park users; and existing facilities are in severe need of rehabilitation.

The following campground improvements and new camping facilities are recommended:

- Rehabilitate Byers Lake drive-in campground.
- Rehabilitate Byers Lake walk-in campsites on east side of lake by providing new picnic tables, developing a covered group cooking facility, and moving food lockers by cooking facility. Campers would be required to cook, store and eat food by the cooking facility to reduce bear problems.
- Develop group campground near Byers Lake with 10-15 tent pads that could be reserved in advance.
- Develop a campground adjacent to the proposed parking lot at mile 134.6 of the Parks Highway associated with the South Denali Visitor Complex. The campground would include restrooms, a camp host site, ten tent sites and 25 RV sites, covering approximately 19 acres total.
- Develop remote campsites at designated locations on the Curry-Kesugi Ridge trail system and at Blair Lake for resource protection and user safety.
- Develop campsites accessible by railroad, riverboat or raft along the Susitna River.
- Develop campground loop road at Denali View North Scenic Overlook with individual sites just north of and connecting to the existing parking area.

Proposal	Management Objectives	Facilities	Justification
Rehabilitate existing Byers Lake campground.	Improve existing facilities.	Campsites need new picnic tables, benches, barriers, parking signs, fire pits and tent pads. Access road needs improvement.	Maintenance of existing facilities has been deferred due to funding shortfalls. Tent areas need leveling and enlargement.

<b>Proposal</b>	<b>Management Objectives</b>	<b>Facilities</b>	<b>Justification</b>
Group campground near Byers Lake.	Provide camping facilities designed for organized groups on a reservation basis. Group campsite would eliminate displacement of other users from single campsites by large groups and reduce noise in the campground.	Integrated campground with multiple tent pads (10-15), central fire pit and grill. Small covered shelter.	There are no existing group campsites in the park. Groups either don't visit the park or use individual sites, which displaces individual users. Proximity to Byers Lake would provide opportunities for water-related activities, such as canoe training. Group campground should not be located on the point.
Byers Lake walk-in/canoe-in campground on east side of lake.	Provide an alternate camping opportunity adjacent to Byers Lake.	Rehabilitate campsites by providing new picnic tables, developing a covered group cooking facility, and moving food lockers by cooking facility. Campers would be required to cook, store and eat food by the cooking facility to reduce bear problems.	Rehabilitate the existing campground and reduce bear problems.
Develop campsites at Denali View North Scenic Outlook.	Develop additional overnight facilities for car and RV camping along the Parks Highway.	Develop a campground loop road with individual sites just north of and connecting with the existing parking area.	Currently RVs and cars park overnight at this overlook in the large parking area. The current design does not provide for individual campsites in a rustic setting.
Susitna river remote campsites.		See the section <i>Developments along the Alaska Railroad</i> later in this chapter.	
Remote campsites on the ridge trail system between the north end of Kesugi Ridge and Blair Lake.	Minimize impact of backcountry camping within the sensitive alpine environment. Control waste disposal. Reduce encroachment into important habitat areas. Improve bear/human safety.	Up to 10 remote campsites, each with 3-4 sites, pit or vault toilets, hardened tent sites or platforms, and anchored metal bear caches.	Alpine areas are very sensitive. Improved or designated remote campsites at appropriate locations along the trail system will minimize environmental damage from random camping. Campsites will have pit toilets (or vault toilets where waste is carried out) intended to reduce signs of human waste and water quality problems along the trail. Where feasible these campsites should be sited so as not to degrade the viewshed.

<b>Proposal</b>	<b>Management Objectives</b>	<b>Facilities</b>	<b>Justification</b>
Campground adjacent to the proposed parking lot at mile 134.6 of the Parks Highway associated with the South Denali Visitor Complex.	To provide increased camping opportunities associated with the South Denali Visitor Complex.	Develop a 10 tent/25 RV site campground with restrooms and a camp host site.	This campground would add to the current inventory of sites in the park and enhances the South Denali Visitor Complex.

**Public Use Cabins and Shelters<sup>29</sup>**

Public use cabins and shelters have been well received in other units of the State Park System by providing a style and quality of overnight accommodations between campgrounds and commercial hotel/motel lodging. They are especially popular in the winter and spring for cross-country ski touring, snowmachining and snowshoeing.

Siting must be done carefully so they are not prominently visible and to avoid detracting from the wilderness experience of other park users. Public use cabins should not be located in alpine areas.

Locations in the table below are preliminary, and subject to further study and review.

<b>Proposal</b>	<b>Management Objectives</b>	<b>Facilities</b>	<b>Justification</b>
Public use cabins and shelters. Public use cabins should not be located in alpine areas.	Provide variety of overnight accommodations. Provide year-round shelters for emergency purposes, research bases, hiking loop trips, winter and spring cross-country ski, snowmachine and snowshoe touring.	Public use cabins and shelters in various locations along trails each with pit toilet, fire pit, and possibly bear-proof cache. May also be located in conjunction with raft put-in/pullout points and train stop shelters. General locations: - along Susitna River, some associated with the ARR - along Chulitna River - along the Tokositna River including Home Lake - on bench behind Byers Lake - Lucy and Spink lakes - along Kesugi and Curry ridges, located on spur trails so as to minimize impact to users of the main trail - additional cabins around Byers Lake - along the bluff just north of the Denali View North proposed campground loop.	By providing public use cabins and shelters, the park is more accessible to a wider range of users. They also provide additional opportunities for overnight stays in the park in remote locations in the winter. A cabin/shelter network would expand cross-country ski touring, snowmachining, and snowshoeing in the park. Cabins also support park maintenance, research, and management activities. Public use cabins would be available through a reservation system. Shelters may be on a first-come, first-served basis.

<sup>29</sup> Also see the next section, *Developments along the Alaska Railroad*.

## Developments along the Alaska Railroad

The Alaska Railroad (ARR) skirts the eastern boundary of Denali State Park and provides excellent access for hiking, camping, sightseeing, fishing and floating the Susitna River. At whistle stops along the railroad, including at Curry, Gold Creek, Indian River Canyon, and the Parks Highway, facilities are proposed that would enhance visitors’ experiences of both the railroad and the park.<sup>30</sup> Train stop shelters, boat landings, campsite facilities and trails that are fairly minimal in scale, would facilitate the intermodal exchange of passengers between trains, boats and hiking. Because visitors would be spending time in this location waiting for transport, often in inclement weather, shelters are proposed. Public use cabins might also be built at or adjacent to whistle stops along the railroad. Nature trails and interpretive signs could be developed at these locations. Some of these facilities would be constructed on State Park land located along the Susitna and Indian rivers and some would be within or adjacent to the Alaska Railroad right-of-way. Facilities on ARR land could be designed, built, and operated by State Parks through a cooperative agreement.

<b>Proposal</b>	<b>Management Objectives</b>	<b>Facilities</b>	<b>Justification</b>
<u>Train stop shelters.</u>	Provide small covered facilities to be used as drop-off/pick-up points along rail corridor. Provide staging areas for river and hiking trips. Serve as emergency shelters.	Shelters or small cabins with associated pit toilets. Preliminary locations would be at the four whistle stops mentioned above.	Train shelters can serve a variety of functions year-round, including trip staging, research base, and emergency shelter. Possibly associated with and in proximity to public use cabins.
<u>Nature trails and interpretive facilities.</u>	Develop additional opportunities for short walks and natural/cultural history interpretation adjacent to the ARR.	Develop nature trail and interpretive signs/kiosks at the four whistle stops.	Provide enhanced visitor experience along the railroad.
<u>Public use cabins.</u>	Provide enhanced visitor experience along the railroad.	Public use cabins and associated fire rings and pit toilets at the four whistle stops or other locations along the railroad.	Provide for additional opportunities for overnight stays in and adjacent to the park, both in summer and winter.
<u>Boat landings.</u> Develop a boat landing on east side of the Susitna River at Curry and at Gold Creek.	To provide a safer and more easily accessible facility for visitors to transition between the railroad and boats on the Susitna River.	Develop boat landing and trails by Curry and Gold creeks. Improvements would also facilitate launching of boats carried on the train.	The current lack of good footing along the bank and a level trail between the railroad and the river presents safety concerns that a developed boat landing would alleviate.

<sup>30</sup> Locations listed are subject to further study and review.

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<b>Proposal</b>	<b>Management Objectives</b>	<b>Facilities</b>	<b>Justification</b>
<u>Susitna River remote campsites.</u>	Provide campsites accessible by rail/ boat/raft along the Susitna River. Provide trailheads for spur trails to connect with ridge trail system.	Develop designated campsites along Susitna River at whistle stops and possibly other locations, each with 6-12 tent sites, pit toilet, fire pit, and bear cache. Located to avoid conflict with local residents and wildlife.	The Susitna River is heavily traveled by riverboats, rafts, and canoes. Campsites will offer new camping opportunities while controlling litter, waste, and conflicts with wildlife.
<u>Footbridge or handtram crossing the Susitna River.</u>	To provide additional hiking opportunities on the east side of Curry Ridge.	Develop a pedestrian connection between the railroad stop at Curry and the proposed trail on the west side of the river connecting to the Curry Ridge trail system.	To provide the opportunity to hike from the historic Curry train stop to the Curry Lookout, South Denali Visitor Center and the Curry Ridge trail system.
<u>Trails and trailheads.</u>		See the <i>Trails and Trailhead</i> section later in this chapter for facilities of this type proposed along the ARR.	

**River Access**

Rivers are among the most dominant natural features in Denali State Park. The Susitna, Chulitna and Tokositna rivers are major elements of the park’s landscape and provide a number of recreational and interpretive opportunities.

The Susitna is a large, swift river with good rafting and excellent jet boat opportunities. To realize the river's recreational potential, it may be necessary to develop modest pick-up and drop-off boat landings at the Gold Creek Bridge and at Curry. These would improve river access and provide river recreation opportunities to less mobile or older individuals. Raft take-out/put-ins are also recommended along the Susitna River adjacent to the Alaska Railroad. In particular, combining an improved Lower Troublesome Creek Trail project with a raft takeout would provide the opportunity for floaters to take out earlier than points along the river further south.

The Chulitna River flows the length of the park in a southerly direction, generally parallel to the Parks Highway. It offers excellent river rafting, scenic and wildlife viewing. The Chulitna is presently rafted by some guided tours and individuals, but access to put-ins and take-outs is difficult. For this reason, the number and diversity of users are limited. To expand opportunities for half-day, full-day and overnight raft trips and to protect public safety, raft put-ins and take-outs are recommended at four locations on the Chulitna River.

There is currently an undeveloped river take-out/put-in below the Chulitna River Bridge at mile 132. Unfortunately, the only public land to access this site is on a steep trail within the ADOT/PF right-of-way that requires crossing the guardrail and the Parks Highway to access the parking area on the opposite site of the highway. If the Troublesome Creek river take-out/put-in is developed, no additional improvements to the mile 132 site are recommended. Specific locations for the put-in and take-out points should be selected in coordination with local landowners, river users and guides. River safety and condition information should be made available at major access points.

<b>Proposal</b>	<b>Management Objectives</b>	<b>Facilities</b>	<b>Justification</b>
Susitna River access points at Gold Creek Bridge and Curry.	Provide safe raft pick-up/drop-off and boat docking areas for rafters and riverboat travelers and residents. Enhances multi-modal transportation.	Boat docking facility and river put in/take outs for rafts, with protected eddy and ramp. Utilize train stop structure for staging area.	Would permit safe on- and off-loading, broadening the river recreation opportunities available to park visitors. Encourage use of different transportation modes. Confer with local residents to mitigate impacts.

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<b>Proposal</b>	<b>Management Objectives</b>	<b>Facilities</b>	<b>Justification</b>
Raft put-in/take-out points on Chulitna River.	Provide safe access to the Chulitna River, located to enhance river safety and allow partial day or full-day float trip experiences. Increase user group access to the river.	Small parking areas, with hardened trails leading to river. Possibly roofed shelters and/or public use cabins. Four sites along Chulitna: 1 west of Byers Lake campground; 1 near mile 132; 1 at mouth of Troublesome Creek; 1 at Honolulu Creek (north of the park).	Access to Chulitna River for rafting is very difficult at this time, inhibiting wider use and enjoyment of river. Developed access facilities increase safety for river users and create multi-seasonal use of other recreational facilities.

## Trails and Trailheads

Denali State Park’s limited trail system offers some of the best highway-accessible hiking, camping, scenic and wildlife viewing opportunities in Alaska. The ridge system trail, which follows much of the Curry-Kesugi ridge, is truly a wilderness experience. This plan reviews existing trails and trail facilities, recommends necessary changes, and identifies new opportunities for trail-based recreation.

The following modifications and new trail segments are intended to protect areas of significant wildlife habitat and provide a wider variety of opportunities for park users to experience Denali State Park. It is important that a range of day, overnight and longer trail trips are available.

### Proposed Trails and Trailheads

Several new trails and trailheads are proposed for the park beginning along the Parks Highway and along the Alaska Railroad. Those associated with the South Denali Visitor Complex along Curry Ridge are described earlier in this chapter.

A trail and trailhead are proposed that would provide access to the Eldridge Glacier. The trailhead would be located north of the Pass Creek Trailhead. A suspension bridge or hand-tram over Coal Creek will be necessary. This proposal is considered a relatively low priority for development at this time. The proposal is subject to further review and study.

A winter trail and trailhead are proposed just inside the southern park boundary that would provide access to the Tokositna area for winter recreation activities. The parking lot would be along the highway and designed to be cleared in the winter.

The next trail would be a relocation of the existing Lower Troublesome Creek Trail that is heavily used for fishing. Because the existing trail is located in the Chulitna River floodplain, it has maintenance problems. The new trail would be relocated, if feasible without causing serious habitat encroachment and disturbance, to an area out of the floodplain and would facilitate launching of hand-carried boats on the river and better access to fishing.

The next new trail would be a replacement of the existing Upper Troublesome Creek Trail. In analyzing wildlife habitats and the history of incidents, it is clear that the Troublesome Creek trail (from the trailhead to the waterfall) transects one of the highest bear concentration areas in the park. Troublesome Creek is an anadromous fish stream that supports several salmon runs. The stream itself is an attractive boulder-strewn waterway. Bears, both grizzly and black, congregate or travel along the creek as they feed on salmon. Noise created by the stream, combined with thick vegetation, make it difficult for both bears and humans to recognize the others’ presence. In addition, the trail is difficult to maintain because of thick alders and does not present the shortest route to scenic alpine areas. A new trailhead and ridge connector trail should be developed in the area of the “RCA Tower Hill” just north of the existing trail. This new route directs hikers away from the Troublesome Creek drainage while still enabling

opportunities for two- or three-day loop trip. Utilizing the existing road access to the tower facility reduces the number of driveways onto the Parks Highway and avoids new disturbance to natural areas. If this new trailhead and trail is developed, the Troublesome Creek Trail should be abandoned.

Smaller proposed trailheads along the Parks Highway (see Figure 12) include one that provides access west of Veterans Memorial to a proposed raft put-in/take-out on the Chulitna River and one for the proposed Pass Creek Falls Trail that would originate at a wayside on the west side of the Parks Highway. The Pass Creek trailhead is intended to serve a one-mile trail that would provide viewing of the waterfall on Pass Creek. An overlook should be developed over the creek to permit viewing of the falls.

Three new trailheads and associated trails are proposed along the Alaska Railroad at Curry, Gold Creek and Indian River Canyon that would offer additional trail loop alternatives, as well as provide access to the Curry and Kesugi ridge trail system from the Alaska Railroad. The trailheads at Curry and Gold Creek could also be accessed by boat. The trail originating from the west side of the Susitna River at Curry could also be accessed from a pedestrian bridge or hand-tram across the river. Finally, two loop trails off the northern end of the Kesugi Ridge Trail are proposed that provide access to High Lake and other alpine areas.

Proposed Improvements and Modifications to Trails and Trailheads

Many of the existing trails and trailheads are in need of maintenance and improvements to better serve the growing recreational needs of visitors to the area and to protect the habitat. Improved signage at trailheads and along trails would provide environmental education opportunities and allow users to better follow trails especially in adverse conditions. A map describing allowable activities and depicting recreational opportunities and land ownership in the Peters Hills area would promote park resources while protecting park and private property and help prevent user conflicts.

The Byers Lake and Veterans Memorial area facilities receive heavy use and may need to be expanded in the future. Trailheads at Byers Lake, Coal Creek and north of Ermine Lake will need to be evaluated periodically to insure that they can accommodate growing visitation with adequate vehicle parking and sanitary facilities. Continued upgrades and maintenance for the Byers Lake Trail will be necessary to provide for safety and easy walking. The Byers Lake suspension and outlet bridges receive heavy winter snowloads that cause damage and require repair and necessitate design modifications.

<b>Proposal</b>	<b>Management Objectives</b>	<b>Facilities</b>	<b>Justification</b>
<p><u>Existing Trailheads.</u> Located at Byers Lake, north of Ermine Lake and Coal Creek.</p>	<p>Continue to maintain, and expand as need arises, these three existing trailheads that provide access to trails connecting with the Curry-Kesugi Ridge trail system.</p>	<p>Adequate parking, vault toilets and information kiosks.</p>	<p>Provide parking, kiosks and sanitary facilities for trail users. Facilities also used by Parks Highway travelers as waysides. In the future, they may also serve as stops for a park shuttle associated with the South Denali Visitor Complex.</p>

<b>Proposal</b>	<b>Management Objectives</b>	<b>Facilities</b>	<b>Justification</b>
<u>Upper Troublesome Creek Trail and Trailhead.</u> Consider abandoning existing Troublesome Creek Trail between Parks Highway and Ultima Pool waterfall, and relocating it to avoid bear concentrations. Develop new trail and trailhead up RCA Tower Hill.	Reduce human/bear confrontations and improve visitor safety. The relocated trail will also provide more direct access to scenic alpine areas.	Existing trailhead has 12 parking spots, vault toilet and kiosk. New trail up RCA Tower Hill: trailhead parking and vault toilet, locked gate, possible revegetation in future. Existing trail: close trailhead, let trail revert to game trail.	The Troublesome Creek Trail travels through bear concentration areas and there have been several human/bear encounters, some resulting in human injuries.
<u>Veterans Memorial Trail and Trailhead.</u> Trailhead west of Veterans Memorial with trail that provides access to Chulitna River.	Provide safe access to a proposed raft put-in/take-out on the Chulitna River.	Small trailhead with parking area and hardened trail to the river.	This would provide additional recreational opportunities in the Byers Lake area and access to the river for rafting that is currently difficult to achieve.
<u>ARR Connecting Trails.</u> New Indian River Canyon, Gold Creek and Curry rail-accessed trailheads, with new trails connecting to Curry and Kesugi ridge trail system.	New trails would offer additional trail loop alternatives, as well as provide access to the ridge trail from the east via the railroad.	Trails from Indian River and west side of Susitna River across from Curry. Covered shelters at trailheads with backcountry campsites and pit toilets.	Will permit additional ridge trail access, and new options for loop trips. Will enable train passengers to travel the park’s trail system.
<u>Byers Lake Trail.</u> Continue to make minor upgrades to the loop trail around Byers Lake.	Trail provided easy and pleasant walking experience around Byers Lake by campground and day users.	Make minor upgrades to the loop trail where the trail is rough, steep, wet or is becoming overgrown.	Provides easy trail around lake, more points for bank fishing.
<u>Byers Lake Suspension Bridge and Byers Lake Outlet Bridge.</u>	Continued upkeep of two bridges, perform major repairs, reduce winter snow damage.	Suspension bridge: significant repairs needed from winter snowloads. Replace decking with new design so snow-loads don’t accumulate (or remove decking in winter). Byers Lake Outlet Bridge: minor repairs and maintenance as needed.	Bridges allow for complete loop trail around lake. Both are destinations and scenic viewpoints.
<u>Pass Creek Falls Trail and Trailhead.</u> Trail to Pass Creek Falls and overlook.	Provide short, scenic walking/ hiking opportunity.	Extend existing parking area and develop new medium-standard trail, approximately one-mile long. Develop an overlook over the creek that provides viewing of the falls.	Provides a new opportunity for walking, hiking, and landscape viewing that is accessible to users of all abilities.

Chapter 8 – Facility Recommendations

<b>Proposal</b>	<b>Management Objectives</b>	<b>Facilities</b>	<b>Justification</b>
<u>Lower Troublesome Ck. Trail relocation.</u>	Provide access to Chulitna River that is out of floodplain and a location to launch hand-carried boats.	Relocate the existing trail if feasible without significant habitat encroachment and disturbance. Develop to a standard that allows transporting hand-carried boats for launching.	Existing one-mile trail is heavily used for fishing, but has maintenance problems due to its location in the Chulitna River floodplain.
<u>Winter Trailhead.</u> Winter trailhead and route west of Chulitna River. Winter parking and pullout along Parks Highway.	Facility supporting cross-country ski touring, snowmachining and snowshoeing in the Tokositna area.	Parking lot and trailhead facility, with 10 parking spaces, designed to be cleared in winter.	Promotes winter recreation activities in this area. Provides good access and views of the mountain. The need for this trailhead may be precluded if a winter trailhead is developed south of the park at Mile 121 or 131.
<u>Improved Signage.</u> Increase signing of trail system.	Provide education and route guidance for trail users.	Signs at trailheads and at intervals that allow users to follow trail in adverse weather conditions.	Well marked trails provide increased safety to users.
<u>High Lake Trail System.</u> High Lakes area, new trail loops and remote campsites.	Provide additional hiking and camping opportunities on Kesugi Ridge.	New trail loops and remote campsites. Accessed by the Little Coal Creek Trail and Kesugi Ridge Trail system.	The north end of Kesugi Ridge provides views of Denali, the braided Chulitna River, Broad Pass, Eldridge Glacier, and the alpine areas of Kesugi Ridge.
Create a map showing existing recreational opportunities in the Peters Hills area including a map of private property and mining claims.	Educate the public on park resources, prevent conflict among users, and avoid trespass.	A map showing land ownership, recreation opportunities, and a description of allowable activities.	Protects resources in and adjacent to the park by concentrating use onto hardened surfaces. Promotes use of the park while protecting private property and mitigating conflicts in the area.
Trails and trailheads associated with proposed Visitor Facility Complex.		See <i>South Denali Visitor Complex</i> section for more information.	
Eldridge Glacier trail and trailhead.	Provide access to the Eldridge Glacier.	Trail, trailhead, suspension bridge or hand-tram.	The Eldridge Glacier provides a unique interpretive opportunity to have an up close experience with a glacier.

## Highway Pullouts

A significant amount of the use of Denali State Park will continue to occur at pullouts along the Parks Highway, as travelers enjoy mountain views and take short breaks for rests, picnics and walks. Some of these allow overnight camping, others serve as trailheads, and some include kiosks and nature trails. Since the Management plan was adopted in 1989, additional waysides have been constructed along the highway. Veterans Memorial<sup>31</sup> facilities have also been greatly expanded during this time. Additional improvements to these waysides and outlooks are proposed in the following table. Some of these proposed improvements would provide for additional overnight parking while others involve minor upgrades. A few new waysides/trailheads are proposed. DPOR will continue to work with ADOT/PF to insure that waysides and pull-outs are located and designed to accepted safety and design standards. Sight distances on the roadway adjacent to pullouts will continue to be maintained through brushing.

Proposal	Management Objectives	Facilities	Justification
Denali View South.	Provides a high-volume facility for mountain viewing and camping.	This facility replaced the Ruth Glacier Overlook which was located on a dangerous turn with limited sight distances. New facility includes parking spaces for 30 vehicles including pull-throughs for buses and RVs, 9 campsites, 2 vault toilets, ¼ mile nature trail to a panoramic viewpoint of the Alaska Range, Tokositna Mountains and Chulitna River, interpretive signs/kiosk and campground host site.	This is currently the most heavily visited scenic outlook in the park. The facility is used for both day and overnight use. Because of the large area needed to accommodate parking, the site has little additional flat terrain to build more campsites. No major improvements are proposed at this time.
Denali View North.	Provides a high-volume facility for mountain viewing.	Facility includes parking spaces for 35 vehicles including pull-throughs for buses and RVs, 10 vehicle campsites, 4 tent sites, 2 vault toilets, short nature trail, panoramic viewpoint of the Alaska Range, Tokosha Mountains and Chulitna River, interpretive signs/kiosk and campground host site. Additional campground loop and public use cabins proposed.	Existing facilities are very popular for both day and overnight use. Provide for additional campsites and possibly public use cabins on bluff to north of proposed campground loop.

<sup>31</sup> Improvements to the Veterans memorial are included in the next section.

<b>Proposal</b>	<b>Management Objectives</b>	<b>Facilities</b>	<b>Justification</b>
Troublesome Creek Picnic Area.	Provide for a number of day-use activities.	Continue to maintain this popular wayside with large parking area, picnic tables and vault toilets. Serves as a trailhead to the Lower Troublesome Creek Trail. Continue to maintain wayside, install “No-overnight camping” signs.	This is a popular rest stop used for parking, picnicking and access for fishing and launching rafts at the mouth of Troublesome Creek. See Trails section for proposed Lower Troublesome Creek Trail relocation project. Discourage overnight camping because of high bear concentrations during the salmon run.
Horseshoe Creek Scenic Overlook.	Provides scenic view and fish and wildlife viewing opportunities.	This is small site was an old gravel pit with a short connecting road. It’s located on the east side of the road and overlooks Horseshoe Creek. Provides bear and salmon viewing opportunities.	This site needs minimal improvements except for brushing.
Plowing of Waysides.	Improve highway safety, facilitate winter use of the park.	Continue to work with ADOT/PF to insure that waysides that receive winter use, particularly the Veterans Memorial, be plowed to provide adequate parking to keep parked vehicles off the highway.	Each winter, the park experiences increased winter visitation, particularly in the Byers Lake / Veterans Memorial areas. Snow accumulations along this section of the Parks Highway can be extreme. Without plowed parking, use of the park and waysides in winter would be significantly reduced.
Brushing of Overlooks and along the Highway.	Maintain vistas along the Parks Highway in the park.	Continue to brush overlooks and along the highway to maintain views of the Denali, the Alaska Range and the Chulitna River.	Enhance viewshed along the highway and outlooks.
Trailheads.		For pull-offs that primarily serve as trailheads, see the <i>Trails and Trailheads</i> section earlier in this chapter.	

**Other Recreational Facilities, Improvements in the Byers Lake and Other Areas**

There are several facility proposals that would substantially improve recreational access and enjoyment at relatively small cost. Most of these are described in other sections of this chapter. This section recommends improvements in the Byers Lake area that are not addressed under other sections in this chapter.

The Veterans Memorial originated as a wayside adjacent to the Byers Lake Campground and has expanded over the years to include a seasonally staffed visitor center, covered kiosk area, interpretive signs, overlook deck, large parking area, walkways, vault toilets, Byers Lake connecting trail and caretaker facilities. Visitor center staff answer questions, hand out brochures and sell books relating to the area. The facility also has radio communications to facilitate emergency response. The visitor center is run by Friends of State Parks – Mat-Su under a cooperative agreement. The National Park Service funds a portion of the operation.

The Byers Lake beach area below the existing overnight camping area should be rehabilitated with gravel and sand to create a more appealing beach activity area. The boat launch at Byers Lake also should be evaluated to insure that it provides adequate opportunity to launch small boats.

Historic structures in the park should receive regular maintenance. The Curry Lookout is of particular concern, especially if it receives increased visitation if the South Denali Visitor Complex is implemented.

<b>Proposal</b>	<b>Management Objectives</b>	<b>Facilities</b>	<b>Justification</b>
<u>Veterans Memorial.</u>	Meet the demands of increased visitation to the wayside and public inquiries about opportunities along the Parks Highway.	Expand and improve visitor center to meet increasing visitation. Improve traffic flow and parking as needed.	Increase the capacity of this popular wayside and visitor center.
<u>Byers Lake Beach.</u> Rehabilitate Byers Lake beach.	Provide an attractive beach area for lakeside recreation.	New, clean gravel and sand for existing cleared beach area.	After intensive use over a several years, the Byers Lake beach needs rehabilitation. This proposal will improve the beach area and make it more attractive and useable.

Chapter 8 – Facility Recommendations

<b>Proposal</b>	<b>Management Objectives</b>	<b>Facilities</b>	<b>Justification</b>
<u>Protect Curry Lookout and other historic structures.</u>	Protect historic structures while providing opportunities for education and interpretation.	Receive regular maintenance to preserve the historic integrity of these structures. Education/interpretation efforts should focus on the structures' preservation and significance. If a new visitor center is built nearby, agencies would restore the Curry Lookout and stabilize the foundation.	Protect historic structures while providing opportunities for education and interpretation.
<u>Byers Lake boat launch/parking.</u>	Provide opportunities to launch small boats.	Evaluate the need to improve the existing boat launch at Byers Lake.	Some visitors find it difficult to carry boats the 50 yards from the parking area to the water.