



National Parks Conservation Association®
Protecting Our National Parks for Future Generations

FIELD REPORT

ALASKA REGION

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Serpentine Hot Springs © Gregory Gusse

Glacier Bay Resources Get a Positive Review

Glacier Bay's natural resources scored on high marks while cultural resources ranked only fair in NPCA's recently released Glacier Bay State of the Park report (SOTP). This is the second SOTP report done in Alaska (Denali was completed in 2003) and is part of a national effort to assess the condition of America's national parks so that

Glacier Bay © NPCA



policymakers will support adequate funding of basic park operations, which includes resource protection.

The Glacier Bay report gives high marks to the park's strong ethnography program and its solid relationship with the Huna Tlingit, including work with local schools to take Huna and Yakutat Tlingit schoolchildren on annual field trips into the park to participate in traditional song, dance, and storytelling with tribal elders. The report recommends that additional federal funding be allocated to enhance these educational outreach efforts by building a traditional Tlingit longhouse near park headquarters for cultural events and educational exhibits and to hire staff to record, transcribe, and translate Tlingit oral traditions, at risk of being lost as Tlingit elders pass away.

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The park's healthy natural resources were tempered a bit by the lack of data about fish caught (both commercially and recreationally) within the boundaries of the park. These permitted harvests could significantly affect the long-term population health of some marine species, particularly halibut. Additional studies are needed to determine if marine species are being seriously affected. For more information, the report and summary are available at www.npca.org/stateoftheparks/glacier_bay

We're Planning a Birthday Party!

With the Park Service's 100th birthday just seven years away, it's not too soon to begin party preparations, and work on gifts like a reduction in the deferred maintenance backlog in the Lower 48. Part of these preparations include looking to the second 100 years of America's national park system, and that's where the Second Century Commission comes

into play. Supported by NPCA, the Second Century Commission is a group of prominent Americans, including former senators Howard Baker and Bennett Johnston, former Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, and our very own former Governor Tony Knowles. In a recent press release announcing the formation of the Commission,

Commission Co-Chair Baker said "this Commission will examine the role of the national parks today and articulate a bold vision of a future where national parks continue to enrich and ennoble this nation and its citizens." The Commission's final report is due in September 2009. More information on the Commission can be found at www.VisionFortheParks.org



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Jim Stratton watching Kobuk. © NPCA

Our Parks Embody Alaska's Cultural History

Reflections by Regional Director

Jim Stratton

Ask anyone on the street to name a national park and you'll get Denali, Grand Canyon, Yellowstone, or Yosemite—big, iconic natural wonderlands full of wildlife and eye-popping geology. Although you may occasionally hear someone say "Gettysburg," you will seldom, if ever, hear of Charles Pinckney National Historic Site, Rosie The Riveter WW II Home Front National Historical Park, Casa Grande

Ruins National Monument, or even Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park in Skagway. Did you know Alaska's first national park was Sitka National Historical Park?

Of the 391 units of the National Park System, only 45 are national parks. The majority of the remainder are historic sites, battlefields, monuments, and military parks. More than preserving a vestige of wild America before it was colonized, the National Park System is the embodiment of America's cultural and history. It's where we can learn about ourselves by looking to the past.

Here in Alaska we have two historical parks – Klondike Gold Rush in Skagway, Sitka, and one affiliated historic area – Aleutian WWII in Unalaska. But that is far from the full extent of America's history and culture captured in Alaska's parks. Often forgotten in the rush to see Denali, watch whales in Glacier Bay, or photograph bears fishing at Brooks Falls is the fact that these other parks also preserve Alaska's cultural heritage.



© Dave Patton/NPCA

Lake Clark National Park & Preserve, like many of the ANILCA park units, was created, in part, to perpetuate the local subsistence culture. And at Lake Clark the Park Service is doing just that. In this field report, Alaska Field Representative Melissa Blair reflects on just how important that information is when large mining projects loom on the horizon.

Thanks to a grant from the Rasmuson Foundation, NPCA engaged Alaska Pacific University graduate student Cody Alf in developing a cultural resources map of Serpentine Hot Springs in Bering Land Bridge National Monument. As the Park Service begins planning for the Serpentine area, the information Cody has collected and writes about in this issue, will be invaluable in ensuring that the traditional healing values of Serpentine are protected.

And our recent State of the Park report on Glacier Bay details the very positive working relationship between the Park Service and the Huna Tlingit, while also suggesting that additional funding could make Glacier Bay's cultural program even better. More on Glacier Bay and several other important develops in our parks are in these four pages. Thanks for reading.



Lake Clark's Future Needs Its Past

By Melissa Blair

In Bristol Bay's headwaters, the boundary of Lake Clark National Park and Preserve draws invisible lines around nearly 10,000 years of overlapping historic themes: indigenous cultures, fishing, subsistence, mining, trapping, religion, adventure, transportation, recreation, and rugged, backcountry wilderness living that only the most determined survive in this remote region of southwest Alaska.

Oral histories have been recorded and volumes have been written, capturing the voices and lifestyles of disappearing generations throughout the Bristol Bay region. As the 21st century causes village life to evolve and new development threats loom on the horizon, we are fortunate that Lake Clark national park has an enviable cultural resources team, including historians, anthropologists and ethnographers, capturing these historic voices and working to preserve and protect the prehistoric, historic, and modern legacies of the park.

These very same park professionals

wisely recognize that Lake Clark is entwined with a vast, wild watershed that is much larger than its 4 million acres. Lands adjacent to the national park and preserve are targeted by ambitious developers pursuing one of the world's largest remaining copper and gold deposits—the proposed Pebble Mine. But in Bristol Bay not all that glitters is gold. Sometimes it's red, like millions of blazing sockeye salmon racing up sparkling rivers each summer to freshwater spawning grounds in Lake Clark and beyond.

As the future of Lake Clark, Bristol Bay and its salmon become the subject of heated discussions of whether a mine of Pebble's immensity should or should not be built in such sensitive salmon spawning habitat, NPCA will continue to promote enlightened management philosophies that integrate traditional ecological knowledge, respect for cultural diversity, and an intimate sense of past and present. We hope that these concepts will be an important part of the Pebble debate, shaping the decision-making and park planning process, because history looks forward as well as back.

NPCA's next report in our State of the Parks series will feature Lake Clark National Park and Preserve - look for it in 2009!



Wildlife Reports Support Additional Funding

People from all over the world visit Alaska's national parks to view wildlife. But unlike most parks in the Lower 48, Alaska's parks allow some sport hunting and subsistence hunting, so long as wildlife populations remain "natural and healthy." Sustaining natural and healthy populations, however, requires solid science. To address this concern, NPCA analyzed the lack of harvest data in its 2006 report, *Who's Counting?* and evaluated the status of baseline wildlife population science in its newest report, *Minding the Gap*. Both reports make the case for additional funding for science, a need also recognized by the Park Service in its 2008 strategic plan. Both reports are at www.npca.org/akro/wildlife

Changes Coming to Denali Bus System

By Joan Frankevich

On a brilliant August day with blue skies, new snow, and clear views of Mt. McKinley, I had an awesome day on a Denali shuttle bus viewing moose, bears, caribou, a fox, ptarmigan, and even a wolf. Since 1972, travel on the Denali park road has been limited to

mostly buses, a decision widely praised for preserving the kind of wildlife viewing experience I had this summer.

In the past 36 years, the park bus system has evolved to serve independent travelers, tour companies, campers and hikers. With traffic on the park road approaching the annual limit of 10,512 trips, NPS planners are re-evaluating this system. The new vehicle plan could modify such things as carrying capacity, bus schedule and spacing, size and type of buses, and tour services. The 10,512 limit might increase or

decrease or the Park Service might determine the road's carrying capacity with an entirely new method.

This significant plan will affect how you and others visit Denali for years to come. NPCA is involved and focused on providing park experiences for all types of visitors at affordable prices while protecting park resources. If you have ideas for managing vehicles on the park road and would like to get involved, visit the park website at www.nps.gov/denali/parkmgmt/roadvehmgteis.htm.



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Serpentine Hot Springs

By Cody Alf – Alaska Pacific University & NPCA Intern

The Bering Land Bridge National Preserve is a vast wilderness of rolling tundra, mountain ranges, and arctic beaches, and Serpentine Hot Springs is one of the hidden gems of the preserve, located in northwest Alaska. This little-known area is home to magnificent granite tors up to 80 feet tall and hot spring water up to 170°F.

Serpentine has been a culturally

important place to the Inupiaq Eskimos of the Seward Peninsula for thousands of years. My internship with NPCA gave me the chance to dig into the literature and find out every detail I can about this little-understood place in anticipation of the Park Service beginning to plan for Serpentine's future.

Recently I was able to travel to Serpentine as an NPS volunteer to get a better sense of place and map some points of interest on a global positioning satellite (GPS) map. While at Serpentine, it felt like I was in a different world among stone giants, each with its own personality.

On this trip I was also able to meet with the elders of Shishmaref to gain more traditional knowledge on how they and their elders experience Serpentine Hot Springs. The stories I heard about the traditional healing power of the hot springs are important not only to help NPS plan appropriately, but also to preserve Inupiaq culture.

Serpentine Hot Springs © Cody Alf



Discovery Series 2008. © Melissa Blair NPCA

NPCA's Alaska National Parks Discovery Series Returns

Look for the popular Discovery Series to return to the Widlberry Theater in February 2009. NPCA will once again spotlight Alaska's National Parks and those that venture into their beauty and vastness.

Go to <http://act.npca.org/npca/join.tcl> to sign-up for Parklines, our monthly e-newsletter, to receive updates of Discovery Series dates and presenters.

