

Congress may be required to approve ATVs

by Steve Pilkington

for the *Tundra Times*

A draft agreement prepared in August by the Department of the Interior aimed at allowing Anaktuvuk Pass villagers to use all-terrain vehicles in wilderness areas of northern Alaska may require federal legislation.

Roger Siglin, superintendent of the Gates of the Arctic National Park, said congressional action may be needed to allow a land exchange between the Arctic Slope Regional Corp., Nunamiut Corp. of Anaktuvuk Pass and the National Park Service. The exchange is needed in order for the villagers to be able to use their ATVs.

Riley Morry, Anaktuvuk Pass mayor, said more work remains to be done on the agreement, but added he is optimistic about it.

The agreement may solve the problem of ATV use for subsistence hunting by villagers in Anaktuvuk Pass, a village surrounded by Gates of the Arctic National Park.

The ATVs are considered by the draft agreement as six- or eight-wheeled vehicles.

The Park Service currently does not allow village residents to use ATVs for hunting in the summer months because parts of the park are designated as wilderness.

In 1983, the Park Service first restricted Anaktuvuk Pass ATV use as a result of a land exchange in which

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the federal government gained land in the Chandler Lake area. Villagers contend that as a result of the restrictions they cannot get to the caribou they hunt and back to their village in a reasonable amount of time.

Siglin said Park Service officials are waiting for the response from ASRC and Nunamiut to the Interior's draft.

Last month, the Park Service and Native officials were hoping that Congress would not have to enact legislation in order to get the agreement, but Siglin does not think that is possible now.

"I think it has to be legislated," he said, because the exchange involves "substantial wilderness."

Siglin hopes disagreements about language in the draft can be resolved quickly. He said the Park Service proposes to seek passage of legislation this year.

The exchange under the current draft agreement would allow the National Park Service to gain a potential wilderness addition of 39,000 acres north and east of Anaktuvuk Pass, as well as 12,160 acres of potential wilderness near Itkillik Lake.

The Park Service would also gain conservation easements prohibiting development on an additional 53,800 acres of land.

ASRC and Nunamiut would be allowed ATV access on 59,520 acres of land which may result in those lands losing their wilderness status. ATV access would also be assured on 88,312 acres of old ASRC lands for subsistence use.

ASRC would take on some restrictions on the exploration of subsurface rights on 17,843 acres of land. The

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Park Service indicated that these restrictions are not required by law, but ASRC has accepted them in the agreement.

According to Morry, Anaktuvuk Pass residents currently own about 30 ATVs.

Siglin does not foresee any language problems in the agreement that can't be solved.

The current draft has a provision which would give the Park Service a lot inside Anaktuvuk Pass which Morry found objectionable, but Siglin said he met with the mayor and the problem has been resolved.

If the agreement is accepted and legislation passed, ASRC, the Park Service and Nunamiut will all become involved in monitoring the environmental effects that ATVs have on the wilderness lands.

"Certainly, ATVs used regularly on a piece of land destroy vegetation down to mineral soil," Siglin said. "But I don't know what the long-term effects would be."

If Congress does act on the issue this year, Siglin believes both sides will benefit.

No date has been set for when the Park Service will take the agreement before Congress.