

Park Service mulls wilderness

by **A.J. McClanahan**

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The National Park Service is reviewing 17.9 million acres of the 54.9-million-acre National Park Service system in Alaska to decide how much more land should be designated as wilderness.

Boyd Evison, regional director of the service in Alaska, said he does not expect the wilderness designation to be controversial.

"What it boils down to is that this would at least inhibit additional development for general public use,"

he said.

Evison said such restrictions on development could help protect subsistence, especially since a wilderness designation would prevent construction of roads and overnight lodging facilities.

Of the Park Service's current system of 54.9 million acres, 33.7 million acres already have been tagged as wilderness.

The designation prevents certain types of development, but it would be less restrictive in Alaska than in the

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national parks

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Lower 48.

For example, activities that would still be allowed include access for aircraft and use of snow machines and motor boats.

Evison said a majority of land in many of the major parks in the Lower 48 already is designated as wilderness or under consideration for it.

Park Service officials said they plan a major public participation effort this fall to find out how people throughout Alaska feel about wilderness designations.

Service spokeswoman Nancy Stromsem said meetings will be held throughout the state in September and October. She said they will be held in a number of villages near parks as well as Anchorage, Fairbanks and Juneau.

Evison admitted that a package of nine park plans developed recently by the Park Service became controversial and that the plans were not approved by the Alaska Land Use Council.

The two Native representatives on the council split on the issue with Alaska Federation of Natives President Janie Leask voting in favor of the plans and Don Nielson of the Bristol Bay Native Corp. voting against them.

But Evison pointed out that the nine plans include a total management program for most of Alaska park areas and said proposals for wilderness areas were a problem generally because some people thought the 17.9 million acres would be automatically included in the wilderness designation.

The acreage is under consideration, he said, and only some of it may be finally approved as wilderness. For example, he noted that ownership for 1.5 million acres of the 17.9 million is currently undetermined, and how much of it is available for wilderness will depend on such factors Native land selections.

The nine park plans were criticized by some for being too restrictive or not having enough information.