

State tells Alaska Land Use Council nine park plans not ready yet

ANCHORAGE — The state of Alaska has informed the Alaska Land Use Council that plans for nine federal parks in Alaska are not ready to be adopted. Commissioner of Natural Resources Esther Wunnicke noted that although "the National Park Service has made a good faith effort to respond to public concerns, it didn't go far enough. The plans still do not provide policy guidance to park superintendents on a wide range of important issues."

Wunnicke told the Alaska Land Use Council that those issues include policy guidance on cabin use, subsistence use of aircraft, and commercial concession operations. "The public needs to know in advance what uses will be permitted and under what conditions, without giving too much discretion to park superintendents," she said.

Commissioner of Environmental Conservation Bill Ross commented that "the park plans do not adequately protect traditional existing uses as intended by Congress." In some cases, Ross said, "it also appears that the National Park Service may be shortcutting the federal regulatory process which must precede the restriction of traditional uses."

Deputy Commissioner of Fish and Game Dennis Kelso noted that the plans do not adequately recognize the state's authorities and responsibilities, including the roles of the Alaska Boards of Fisheries and Game. "The park plans also need additional work to resolve a variety of state concerns about the management of fish and wildlife," he said.

Speaking for the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, Mark Hickey, Special Assistant to Commissioner Richard Knapp, reported that "several of the plans inappropriately state or imply that the development of roads under Title XI of ANILCA would be incompatible with the protection of park resources. This appears to prejudge transportation questions prior to pursuing the Title XI application process," he said.

As examples, Hickey pointed to the Park Service's negative determination regarding the development of a northern access route in Denali, and premature statements in the Gates of the Arctic General Management Plan that indicate that the future development of roads and airstrips would be

incompatible with the park.

ALUC State Cochairman Designee Robert Grogan complimented the National Park Service for revisions to the original plans which made them more consistent, better organized, and clarified the federal regulatory process. He also called attention to the Park Service's increased awareness of and sensitivity to Alaska conditions and lifestyles.

"These nine plans have been considerably improved over the draft plans reviewed by the state in February," Grogan said. "However, we just don't believe we can responsibly endorse their adoption until our remaining concerns are satisfied."

"We understand that the Park Service is facing time constraints imposed by Congress and the Interior Department, as well as budget and staff limitations," he continued. "We believe the state has a good working relationship with the Park Service, and with some more time and additional effort, we can ensure that congressional intent and the legitimate concerns of Alaskans are met."