

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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INTERIOR DEPARTMENT AGENCIES ANNOUNCE PROPOSED INTERIM RULES
TO RELAX RESTRICTIONS ON ALASKAN NATIONAL PARKS AND MONUMENTS,
PRESERVES, AND WILDLIFE REFUGES

The Interior Department's National Park Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will issue proposed interim rules on January 19 which would relieve many current restrictions on public use, access, and recreation on 118 million acres of national parks, monuments, preserves, and wildlife refuges in Alaska.

The proposed rules would apply to national parks, monuments, and preserves covering 44 million acres administered by the National Park Service and national wildlife refuges encompassing 74 million acres administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, most of which were created or enlarged by the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act of 1980.

Certain general regulations of the two agencies have been deemed more restrictive than currently warranted for many of these lands. The new proposals include a relaxation of regulations on camping and picnicking, sport hunting and fishing, gathering of firewood and certain plants, transportation on public lands, and the carrying of firearms, among others.

In addition, various provisions of the recently enacted Alaska legislation require that the opportunity for subsistence uses of natural resources by Native and non-Native rural residents be continued. In park areas, this requirement has necessitated regulations that will distinguish subsistence users from other, "consumptive" recreational users of park system resources.

The proposed interim rules are intended to be responsive to local needs and to allow more management flexibility than current rules permit. The proposed rules were closely coordinated between the National Park Service and the Fish and Wildlife Service, but still reflect some differences between the management responsibilities of the two agencies.

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The regulations to be proposed would apply to the following units of the National Park System: Alagnak National Wild River, Aniakchak National Monument and Preserve, Bering Land Bridge National Preserve, Cape Krusenstern National Monument, Denali National Park and Preserve, Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve, Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve, Katmai National Park and Preserve, Kenai Fjords National Park, Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park, Kobuk Valley National Park, Lake Clark National Park and Preserve, Noatak National Preserve, Sitka National Historical Park, Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve, and Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve. Twelve additional National Wild Rivers are within the boundaries of other park units in Alaska.

They would also apply to the following National Wildlife Refuges: Alaska Maritime, Alaska Peninsula, Arctic, Becharof, Innoko, Izembek, Kanuti, Kenai, Kodiak, Koyukuk, Nowitna, Selawik, Tetlin, Togiak, Yukon Delta, and Yukon Flats. Six National Wild Rivers and four river study areas within these refuges are also covered by the proposed rules.

These proposed rules, to be published in the January 19, 1981, Federal Register, will be open for public comment until March 5, 1981. Comments on the National Park Service's portion of the regulations should be sent to the Alaska Regional Director, National Park Service, 540 Fifth Avenue, Anchorage, Alaska 99501. Comments on the Fish and Wildlife Service's portion of the regulations should be sent to the Alaska Regional Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 1011 East Tudor Road, Anchorage, Alaska 99507.

The interim regulations are intended to become effective this spring in time for peak public use of Alaska public lands. Final regulations will be adopted in the future after a full rulemaking process, including consultation and public comment.

In brief, highlights of the proposed regulations include:

Subsistence Activities:

- Use of snowmobiles, motorboats, and other means of surface transportation traditionally used by local rural residents for subsistence would generally be allowed;
- Noncommercial cutting of live-standing timber (pursuant to a permit in park areas) and noncommercial gathering of fruits, berries, mushrooms, and other plants by local rural residents would be allowed;
- Closure of parks and refuges to subsistence uses of fish, wildlife, and plants would be made only for reasons of public safety or administration, or to assure the continued viability of such populations. In addition, such closures would last only so long as reasonably necessary to achieve the purposes of the closure. The Park Service proposes a system of resident zones and, in special cases, subsistence permits, to identify subsistence users.

General Use of Motorized Vehicles/Access:

- Use of snowmobiles, motorboats, and aircraft would be permitted in Alaskan national parks, preserves, and refuges. In national parks and monuments, aircraft access for taking fish and wildlife for subsistence would be prohibited, with limited exceptions;
- In addition to use on established roads and parking areas, off-road vehicles would be allowed on routes and in areas designated by the park superintendent or refuge manager;
- Reasonable access across parks and refuges which is not otherwise available under the above access methods would be assured under a permit process for any person who has a valid property or occupancy interest in lands or buildings that are effectively surrounded by the Federally-owned lands of a park or refuge.

Other Uses:

- Public recreational activities including, but not limited to, sight-seeing, nature observation and photography, sport hunting and fishing, boating, camping, hiking, and picnicking, would be authorized as long as they are compatible with the purposes for which these parks and refuges were established;
- In preserves and refuges, sport hunting, trapping, and fishing would be allowed in accordance with the applicable State and Federal laws;
- Exercise of valid commercial fishing rights, including the use of campsites, cabins, and motorized vehicles directly related to such fishing operations at 1979 levels of use, would be authorized for refuges and specified parks;
- Cabins: Under certain limited conditions, new cabins would be allowed under permit in parks and refuges. Most existing cabins would be allowed to remain, also under permit;
- The possession, use, and transportation of firearms within refuges would be authorized for hunting and personal protection. The carrying of firearms would be allowed within park areas, except for Klondike Gold Rush and Sitka National Historical Parks. The carrying of traps and bows would also be allowed within national preserves, but only during those times when such taking of fish and wildlife is authorized. Subsistence users may carry traps for subsistence purposes.

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