

3 Yukon—Charley National Rivers

Two rivers in the upland interior of Alaska would provide a new type of parkland. They are the entire eighty-eight-mile length of the Charley River, sparkling clear and ideal for float trips, and a portion of the historic Yukon, once the Mississippi of the north as paddle-wheelers carried the gold-rush traffic of the 1880's and 1890's.

The Yukon flows from icy peaks and carries a heavy load of glacial silt. The Charley empties crystal waters into the Yukon, its drainage too far inland to be blanketed by the heavy snows needed for glaciers. Cliffs and bluffs along both rivers provide sites where peregrine falcons and gyrfalcons nest, and, in the hinterlands beyond the riverbanks, grizzlies, Dall sheep, and moose follow their timeless cycles. Erosion along the rivers has exposed strata rich in fossils which record life from as long ago as Upper Cambrian time; 500 million years in the past.

The Charley merges with the Yukon between the early-day boom towns of Eagle and Circle. Strung along the Yukon's banks are the abandoned structures and equipment of a score of camps where men once mined, or cut wood, or fished. A few buildings remain; most sites have been reclaimed by nature. Their melting back into the riverbank is silent testimony to the force of change inherent within time's flow.



1 Gates of the Arctic National Park

Here is the ultimate wilderness park. Four times the size of Yellowstone, it lies in the Brooks Range midway between Fairbanks and the Arctic Ocean, a rugged region austere and beautiful. Great caribou herds, wolves, and grizzly bears roam this vast expanse. Dall sheep seek the sanctuary of the high country. Small mammals abound.

The sheer remoteness and scale of this land are among its major appeals—a system of canyons and slopes and of meandering rivers that fill broad valleys with music, their very names rhythmic: the Alatna, Noatak, Killik, Tinayguk, and the north fork of the Koyukuk. Spruce and birch forests cloak slopes on the south side of the range and reach up the valleys. To the north, treeless tundra stretches from the high drainages to the ocean, about 100 miles distant. The balances of life are fragile here, the veil of vegetation thin, the territories of wildlife immense by other standards. Seemingly limitless space captivates the human soul and stretches it.



4 Aniakchak Caldera National Monument

Mentally drain the water from Crater Lake, Oregon, and you have Aniakchak, the shell of a volcano that long ago collapsed inward. The caldera rims of each measure about six miles across; the walls tower nearly 2,000 feet.

But instead of Crater Lake's indigo water, Aniakchak's rocky floor lies exposed like a geology text opened to the chapter on volcanism. There are cinder cones, explosion pits, lava flows and plugs, hot springs, and small, green Surprise Lake. Its waters empty into a foaming river which rushes through a rift in the caldera wall, then meanders for twenty-seven miles across rolling tundra and shrubland to the Pacific.

The plan for the park area includes land from the volcanic summit to the island-dotted coast, with the wild Aniakchak River linking the two. Trout and sockeye salmon swim in its waters, preyed upon by bald eagles and brown bears. Seals, sea lions, sea otters, and sea birds frequent coastal islets, kelp beds, and cliffs. Moose wander the river banks to feed on alder, and caribou and fox venture within the caldera itself. Aniakchak is varied, significant, and spectacular.



2 Lake Clark National Park

The name specifies a lake, but that is the merest hint of the grandeur within this proposed park. There are scores of lakes: large lowland lakes ringed by spruce and jewel-like alpine lakes nestled on the flanks of high mountains. Where the 9,000-foot Alaska and Aleutian ranges collide, rocky peaks form a frenzy of spires and smoking volcanoes. Glaciers still actively sculpt cirques, and low passes and valleys once filled with ice now link high country with low, and provide a maze of natural hiking and flying routes.

Waterfalls and rivers splash everywhere; the greatest red salmon streams in the world have their headwaters here. Vegetation and wildlife are as diverse as the rugged coast-to-mountain topography. The variety is from coastal spruce to alpine tundra, and from beluga whales and nesting waterfowl to Dall sheep and caribou.



Hear the word "ALASKA," read it or say it, and what comes to mind? Glaciers? Forests? Rivers and lakes? Mountains? The tundra? Clusters of houses linked to the outside by bush plane? The neon of Anchorage and Fairbanks and Juneau? Oil?

What of the people? Russian accounts dating from 1741 make the first written mention of Alaskans, estimating a population of nearly 74,000 Natives and no non-Natives. Today non-Natives outnumber natives nearly five to one, although as recently as the time of World War II the proportions stood essentially equal. In just two centuries the change in human life patterns has been profound.

In the same time the land has changed little—until now. Harsh climate and inaccessibility have shielded it from wholesale impact by outsiders—until recently. Today, however, change sweeps inexorably across both land and life, and the need is to direct it wisely. The job is tough because the values in Alaska are many and divergent. But it's a job now completed into the advanced planning stage. As a human organizational undertaking it has been as gargantuan in its way as the engineering achievement of the more publicized oil pipeline. Each affects us all.

Two Acts of Congress set the stage for the present land proposals. One was the statehood bill of 1958 which came while most of Alaska's 375 million acres were still in federal ownership, as had been true since purchase from Russia in 1867. With that bill came the right to select 103 million acres of land for state ownership as an economic base, a greater proportion of total area than is held by any other state. These lands in aggregate are equivalent to the size of California, in a state more than twice the size of Texas. But state rights are not all.

The native Eskimos and Aleuts, the NaDéné Indian peoples including the Eyaks, Tlingits, Haidas, and interior Athapascans, and the Tsimshian Indians of Metlakatla also constitute entities with claims to the land. Their rights reach back for millennia with recognized boundaries that never before have been recorded but that clearly predate all others. The American public of all fifty states forms still another entity.

In 1971 Congress provided for the rights of the Native groups and the public as a whole by passing a bill called the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act. It officially recognizes more than two hundred Native villages and group corporations and thirteen regional corporations. It also provides a \$962.5-million Alaska Native Fund and authorizes the selection by Natives of forty million acres of federal land.

In addition to these provisions, the Settlement Act acknowledges the interest of all United States citizens by authorizing study of eighty million acres of land to be considered for addition to four federal systems: National Parks, Wildlife Refuges, Forests, and Wild and Scenic Rivers. These eighty million acres are Alaska's "national interest lands," or "d-2 lands," after the section of the law concerning them. Deciding how they should be managed has involved studies that now total scores of volumes. Factors inventoried range from the social, economic, and political effects of changes in land status to the natural processes that alter environment. The evidence left by earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, floods, and wildfires has been analyzed. So have the migration patterns of waterfowl and sea birds, and the interlocking destinies of caribou and wolves, salmon and brown bears.

The effort is audacious, the reports voluminous. What it adds up to is the last chance to plan the future of vast stretches of land within our Nation.

The Park Proposals in Alaska total thirty-two million acres, a doubling of the land now within the National Park System. Nine areas with unique values not presently represented are recommended, along with expansion of two existing park areas (Mount McKinley and Katmai). The proposed additions to the system vary from a glacier visible from the windshield of a car to remote mountain peaks beloved by climbers; from dunes of golden sand north of the Arctic Circle to a volcanic crater six miles across and to mist-shrouded beaches that face Siberia a scant 100 miles distant. There are foaming white-water rivers suited to experienced kayakers and canoeists, and rolling tundra a child can stroll; archaeological sites that tell of man's beginnings in the Americas and historic sites that date from Russian exploration of Alaska, the fur trade era, and the gold rush.

Boundaries have been drawn to avoid commercial timberlands and mineral-rich areas where mining someday may be desirable (and in one proposed park some mining will continue by permit). Alaska Natives will be allowed to continue their traditional subsistence hunting of wildlife and harvesting of plants (and backpackers may need to detour around a caribou hunt, or canoeists to portage rather than blunder into nets set for a salmon run). Carefully controlled sport hunting will be permitted in six parks where for generations it has been important in the life of the local area (and the Secretary of the Interior will require periodic reports regarding the well-being of the wildlife).

The Alaska national park proposals thus are tailored to Alaskan conditions. In combined size they amount to fifteen Yellowstones, necessary where climate spreads the membrane of life so thin that a single grizzly bear may need 100 square miles as territory, caribou herds must keep moving as they graze, and full grown trees stand mere inches high. In combined attributes the new parks assure all Americans, present and future, a sampling of this last wilderness of ours.

Proposed National Park Lands

ALASKA



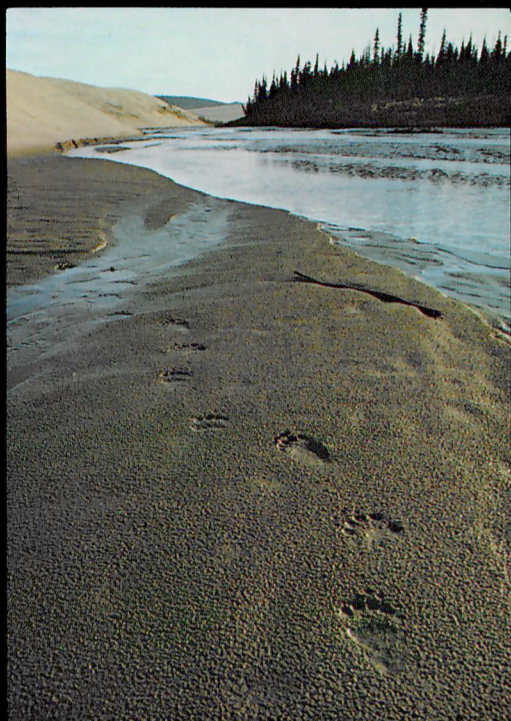
As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has responsibility for most of our nationally owned public lands and natural resources. This includes fostering the wisest use of our land and water resources, protecting our fish and wildlife, preserving the environmental and cultural values of our national parks and historical places, and providing for the enjoyment of life through outdoor recreation. The Department assesses our energy and mineral resources and works to assure that their development is in the best interests of all our people. The Department also has a major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in Island Territories under U.S. administration.

5 Kobuk Valley National Monument

Hike amid 100-foot sand dunes formed of glacial debris, canoe a meandering river, or climb ridges for a view across the boreal forest and tundra to the Brooks Range. All of this is the Kobuk, a collage of gentle landscapes together with evidence of geophysical action and of a cultural heritage dating back more than 8,500 years.

The renowned Onion Portage archaeological site straddles the eastern boundary of the proposed monument and descendants of the early-day Eskimos who hunted caribou at this important river crossing still rely on the hunt. In addition to the caribou, a host of other species are present in the forest and tundra of the Kobuk region, including moose, bear, beaver, and otter. Flocks of ptarmigan feed on river bars during part of the year. The water abounds in salmon, whitefish, and sheefish (a sea-run species related to whitefish, which has a limited distribution in the American and Siberian arctic and subarctic). Wildlife ranges are proposed adjoining the national monument to the north and south, and Eskimos will continue their traditional subsistence pursuits.

The Kobuk is a valley where land and river, wildlife and man, seem still comfortably linked, cradled by wilderness. The proposals seek to protect this quality.



7 Katmai National Park

Volcanic eruptions at Katmai in 1912 belched out so much ash that the skies darkened for 100 miles around and explosions were heard as far distant as Juneau, 750 miles away. The famous moonscape known as The Valley of Ten Thousand Smokes resulted from this devastation, a starkly scenic and geologically significant area that became the nucleus of what is a two million-acre national monument.

The valley gets acclaim—and warrants it—but Katmai is more than ash and still-smoking volcanoes. It also is taiga and tundra, large and small lakes, and a wild sea coast. Its rich chain of life includes a major sockeye salmon run and one of the world's greatest concentrations of brown bears. The lands proposed for addition to the area would change Katmai's designation from national monument to national park and nearly double the size. Vital salmon spawning streams would be protected through the inclusion of the headwaters of drainages within the park, and bears would be assured the huge domain they need for self-perpetuation. Brown bears are the world's largest land carnivore, a species once widely distributed in the north but with their survival now in jeopardy. Katmai would assure a sanctuary. Ecosystems would be available for man to visit but not to dominate.



9 Cape Krusenstern National Monument

Treeless and windswept, Cape Krusenstern stretches along the Chukchi Sea north of Kotzebue in great furrowed rows, a rich green in summer and white the rest of the year. Across its low parallel ridges lie the artifacts and middens that comprise an internationally important archaeological record of man in the Arctic.

The ridges extend between the surf line and the cape's inland bluffs, a distance of from a mile and a half to two miles. There are 114 ridges in all, each the beach line of a former day. Eskimos still pitch their spring sealing camps along the foremost ridge, the current shore. Inland its successive ridges previously hosted the shoreline camps of earlier Eskimo peoples who hunted seals and whales here. Walk over the entire series of the ancient beaches and you have stepped back progressively through 5,000 years to the time of the Denbigh Flint People, the first Eskimos. Climb along the palisades overlooking the cape and you will have peeled away at least another 1,000 years, for there archaeologists have found the smoky-gray obsidian projectile points of hunters who predate the Eskimos.

Few other sites in America or Eurasia match Krusenstern's continuing human record, with its clear chronology of arctic prehistory. And in addition to this the cape provides a valuable geological record of the effects of ocean currents, wind, and weather interacting through the millennia to build the gravel ridges.



10 Chukchi-Imuruk National Reserve

Land and sea and life, and the intertwining relations between them, are the focus of this proposal. During the last ice age, when glaciers lowered the world's oceans, by locking up a stupendous amount of water, a broad "bridge" of land stretched across what today is the Bering Strait and linked Asia to America. Across this connection between the continents, nearly 100 miles long by 1,000 miles wide, migrated plants and animals and man himself.

Today scientists find traces of those earlier circumstances in the ponds and eroding bluffs of the Chukchi-Imuruk area. Fossil pollen and well preserved bits of leaves, bark, and wood have been recovered, as have mammoth bones and the remnant stone houses and implements of ancient men. All American Indians, whether living in North America, Central America, or South America, trace their ancestry to bands of people who entered the New World through this gate. Stone cairns left by more recent Eskimo peoples still stand as lonely sentinels perhaps intended as route markers, perhaps as a means of directing the path of caribou herds. Cooperative studies by American and Soviet scientists are anticipated in this region, and eventually land on the Siberian coast opposite Chukchi may be set aside for special protection and study.

Eighty-seven species of migratory birds nest within the proposed Alaska reserve, hundreds of thousands of them flying between Old World and New: an "aerial bridge" that echoes the ancient Bering Land Bridge. Because of these high concentrations of birds the Chukchi-Imuruk Reserve is proposed for administration by the National Park Service in cooperation with the Fish and Wildlife Service.



Another hallmark of this area is volcanism. At Imuruk Lake flows of lava now covered with lichens and mosses reach like giant tongues into the lake. Explosion craters that once spewed forth ash cradle ponds, and hot springs well up in a gentle valley that is studded with massive rock pinnacles twenty to thirty feet high.

Landscape and life in all of Chukchi-Imuruk command attention, from the great sweep of the tundra to the flocks of birds and occasional instances of polar bears on the winter pack ice and herds of walrus swimming in open water between floes in spring. Even more, it is intangibles that engage the mind: the brooding immensity with its whispers of what it must have been like for those men who, unknowingly, first entered this gateway to the Americas.

11 Wrangell—St. Elias National Park

Here is a vast domain of rock and ice, peaks and valleys, meadows and rivers where time and space seem without end. The Wrangell—St. Elias high country holds North America's premiere assemblage of peaks over 14,500 feet. Some are visible from the Richardson Highway a half day's drive from Anchorage, others lie in the back-beyond accessible only by hiking, by small aircraft, or on a mountaineering expedition. On the east this park would abut Canada's Kluane National Park and Klutane Game Sanctuary, and to the north and southwest it would be bounded by the proposed Wrangell Mountains National Forest. Included on proposed Forest Service lands is the legendary Kennecott Copper Mine perched above Chitina Valley; begun in the 1880's and abruptly shut down in 1938, mine and community structures still stand.

The largest glacier system in the United States, the Malaspina, would be within this park along with the Bering and Nabesna glaciers, which are among the longest in the world. The high peaks of the area include 18,008-foot Mount St. Elias, 16,300-foot Mount Blackburn, and 16,237-foot Mount Sanford. There are deep glacier-carved valleys, rolling foothills carpeted with tundra and woodland, a small but select sample of wilderness coastal plain, and bays where glaciers break into the sea.

Caribou migrate through this wilderness; large Dall sheep forage the cliffs. Peregrine falcons, bald eagles, geese, and ducks nest within the proposed boundaries; trumpeter swans breed and raise their young on the nearby Copper River delta.

6 Harding Icefield—Kenai Fjords National Monument

Placid seascapes reflecting icebound landscapes and salt spray virtually merging with mountain mists, this is Harding Icefield—Kenai Fjords, a proposed park area situated within a three-hour drive of Anchorage. It is a land of change acted upon by the powerful forces of glaciers, earthquakes, violent storms, and open seas. Geologists believe that the Kenai Mountains are slipping into the sea, dragged under by the collision of two tectonic plates: specifically, the unit of the earth's crust that underlies the Pacific Ocean and the one bearing the North American continent. What were alpine valleys carved by glaciers now are coastal fjords, and former mountain peaks are today battered by ocean waves into sea stacks and island arches. The process of this submergence still goes on. The 1964 Alaska earthquake in one day dropped the mountains an additional eight feet.

Despite the lowering, however, a mile-high mountain platform still backdrops the coast. It is mantled by a 700-square-mile white wilderness known as the Harding Icefield one of the greatest unbroken icecaps in Alaska. Bulging lobes of this ice push to the coast and hundreds of cascades and waterfalls from its melt tumble into the sea. Harbor seals bask on icebergs calved from the glaciers; Steller sea lions haul out along rocky ledges. Sea otters, once nearly extirpated by fur hunters, again float in the kelp beds. Whales and porpoises spout close by. Thousands of sea birds fill the air with their cacophony and whitewash the cliffs (as many as 20,000 puffins on a single rock). Back from the water, black bears roam and den in the spruce-hemlock forest of the fjord shores and mountain goats browse the slopes above. Peregrine falcons and eagles also are present.

Harding Icefield—Kenai Fjords is a region accessible by land or sea, and wondrously varied in scenery and life forms.

8 Mount McKinley National Park

The highest peak on the continent, 20,320 feet above sea level, Mount McKinley and its surrounding scenery draw more visitors than any other attraction in Alaska. Yet nearly half of the mountain is outside the boundaries of the existing national park.

The proposal, doubling the size of the park, would extend the boundary to encompass all of the McKinley massif. Included would be soaring peaks, huge glaciers, and immense valleys such as the Great Gorge of the Ruth Glacier where sheer granite walls and monoliths are reminiscent of a much bigger Yosemite still locked in the last ice age. Also added to the park would be choice recreation areas on the south side of the Alaska Range and the unique Cathedral Spires, gigantic razor ridges and fingers of rock unsurpassed anywhere else in Alaska. To the north, habitat critical for moose, caribou, and wolves would be given much needed protection.



Besides the proposed park lands mentioned here, three other areas are being suggested for inclusion in the National Park System; the Noatak, additions to Glacier Bay National Monument; and Admiralty Island. Undoubtedly, other proposals will emerge during the decision-making process that was started by the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act.

For further information write:

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The film "The Age of Alaska" is available for showing to groups by contacting your nearest National Park Service area or office.