

ALASKA WILDERNESS PROPOSALS
ISSUE PAPER

I. A. KENAI NATIONAL MOOSE RANGE

Issue: To enlarge the present wilderness proposal pending before the Congress.

Background: Kenai NMR is located in the third judicial district on the Kenai Peninsula in southcentral Alaska, approximately 20 air miles south of Anchorage. The Kenai NMR was established in 1941 by Executive Order 8979 to protect the natural habitat and feeding ranges of the giant Kenai moose and other native wildlife species. The boundary was revised in 1964 by Public Land Order 3400.

Once entirely wilderness, the Range is now bisected by the Sterling Highway and other transportation and utility routes which provide access to recreational facilities and commercial developments. Much of the Range, however, remains pristine wilderness.

The Kenai NMR is slightly over 90 miles long and varies from 20 to 50 miles wide. It contains approximately 1,730,000 acres of which about 1,204,000 acres are considered suitable for inclusion into the National Wilderness Preservation System.

The Range is divided into two generalized physiographic types, a mountainous region and a forested lowland. The lowland is covered by a spruce-birch-aspen forest. The Kenai Mountains in the southeastern portion of the Range rise to 6,600 feet and are treeless above the 2,000 feet elevation. Behind the mountains lies the Harding Ice Field, with numerous glacial fingers projecting from between the mountains. The glaciers, mountains, lakes, alpine meadows and receding foothills are very scenic.

The Climate is subarctic with a normal annual precipitation of 19 inches. Temperatures rarely rise above 80 degrees or fall below -30 degrees Fahrenheit in winter.

A variety of wildlife abounds in the Range. As many as 9,000 moose roam the lower elevations. Major calving and winter feeding grounds are in the lowlands, and the foothills provide important habitat during summer and fall. About 1,000 Dall Sheep and 200 mountain goats occupy mountainous slopes, while marmot colonies are numerous in alpine areas. Black bear are common and a few brown bear, wolves, wolverine, coyotes and a growing caribou herd, are also present. Furbearers include beaver, muskrat, fox, land otter, mink, lynx and weasel.

The Range supports more than 146 species of birds, including numerous shorebirds and waterfowl in the lake habitat of the lowlands. The more obvious species are grebes, loons, gulls, terns and the trumpeter swan. Thousands of waterfowl, primarily pintails, mallards, teal, widgeon, lesser Canada and snow geese, use the tidal waters of Chickaloon Flats and some lakes during migration periods. A substantial number also nest on the Kenai.

This region supports a valuable sport fishery resource. Rainbow, Dolly Varden, lake trout and five species of salmon spawn in Moose Range waters. Salmon produced on the Range support a significant proportion of the multimillion dollar Cook Inlet salmon fishery.

Most of the northern part of the Range is open to oil and gas exploration. The Swanson River oil field contains over 40 wells producing approximately 18,000 barrels of oil per day. Several minor gas fields have also been discovered in this general region. The developing Beaver Creek oil field produces less than 1,000 barrels of crude oil a day but contains several gas wells.

The Moose Range with its diversity of scenery, wildlife, fishery and water resources offers unusual opportunities for high-quality recreation. Because of its nearness to more than 1/2 the State's population it is one of the most important outdoor recreational areas in Alaska - accommodating about 200,000 visitors annually. Recreational activities include fishing, hunting, camping, scenic driving, wildlife observation, photography, berry picking, hiking, canoeing, boating, cross-country skiing and snowmobiling on a limited scale.

A study conducted by Colorado State University in 1968 and 1969 revealed that one third of the out-of-state tourists and one-fourth of the Alaskans who visited the Range did so because of its wilderness characteristics, scenery and wildlife.

A variety of resources and demands for maintaining quality moose habitat through mechanical manipulation, commercial and recreational uses creates a complex management unit that requires detailed zoning. Primary uses of the Range include wildlife, recreation, oil and gas recovery and land management activities, such as logging, prescribed burning and habitat disturbance using three 40-ton LeTourneau tree crushers. Plans are to manipulate 3,000 to 5,000 acres annually on a 20-25 year rotational schedule. Petroleum exploration and extraction will continue on those areas considered to be unsuitable for wilderness designation. Habitat manipulation in the lowland forests by logging, fire and/or mechanical means will be necessary to maintain moose populations.

Sizeable land areas are necessary to provide space of campgrounds and other recreational uses. Hikers, cross-country skiers, canoeists and nature observers need undisturbed space and more solitude than those recreationists using a form of mechanical equipment. Likewise, some wildlife species such as Dall sheep, brown bears, wolves, wolverine and mountain goats require a wilderness type habitat for survival, while others do not.

Thus, wilderness classification will effectively zone the Moose Range into various commercial, recreational and wildlife uses.

A wilderness study was completed in April, 1971, and public hearings were held on June 13, 23 and 25, 1971. Six wilderness units were proposed as follows:

1. Andy Simons Unit	840,000	acres
2. Swan Lake Canoe Units	40,040	acres
3. Swanson River Canoe Unit	72,000	acres
4. Mystery Creek Basin Unit	45,000	acres
5. Caribou Hills Unit	36,400	acres
6. Elephant Lake Unit	<u>10,460</u>	acres
Proposed Total	1,043,000	ACRES

Following the public hearings, the proposals were adjusted and only an 829,000 acre Andy Simons unit was recommended. The remaining 901,000 acres were excluded from the proposal because (1) certain portions of the Range constituted important outdoor recreational areas requiring a variety of facilities; (2) certain areas must be intensively managed to provide continuing forage for moose; (3) oil and gas leases dominated preservation; and (4) native selections were pending.

Conclusion: A reevaluation of the entire wilderness study area has been completed in light of the President's Environmental Message. Many oil and gas leases have expired. The proposed highway by the State between the Caribou Hills Unit and the Andy Simons Unit is no longer being considered. Habitat management and research objectives have been refined. Tustumena Lake, which is owned by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, will be surrounded by wilderness except for the extreme northwest end. Finally, the native selections were made with pending wilderness establishment in mind.

With these facts, an estimated additional 375,000 acres could be considered for possible expansion of the existing proposal of 829,000 acres. This would create a wilderness area, comprised of 3 units, of approximately 1,204,000 acres on the existing Range lands. In addition to this, under ANSCA proposals, approximately 123,000 acres would be added to the Range and change the name to the Kenai National Moose Refuge. This addition is proposed as instant wilderness and would bring the total wilderness proposal to approximately 1,327,000 acres.

Special provisions were made in Section 4(d)(1), of the Wilderness Act that: "the use of aircraft or motorboats, where these uses have already become established, may be permitted to continue subject to such restrictions as the Secretary deems desirable..." Due to the vastness of the area, prior use of aircraft for recreation, research, management and enforcement, continued use of aircraft as authorized by the Refuge Manager for these purposes is essential for the proper operation of all phases of the Moose Range including wilderness management.

Four Lakes within the Canoe Lake Unit, have traditionally been used by local air taxi operators as fly-in fishing camp sites. Three air taxi operators presently have authorization, under Special Use Permits, to operate nine camp sites on these four lakes. A semi-permanent structure consisting of a wooden platform with half walls, covered with canvas is located at each site. Operators fly campers into the area for fishing, leaving them there. Permits are issued annually with renewal subject to compliance with special regulations as set by the Refuge Manager. Because of the long history of this type use, the wilderness recreational opportunities and the safety of sometimes inexperienced people left in a wilderness setting, it is suggested that this use be continued.

Air taxi operators do not have exclusive use of the Lakes for landings as they are open to the general public on the canoe system.

Seven private tracts containing 128 acres and six 40 acre mining claims containing 240 acres within the Andy Simons Unit will be acquired. Surface exploration for minerals within proposed wilderness units will not be permitted.

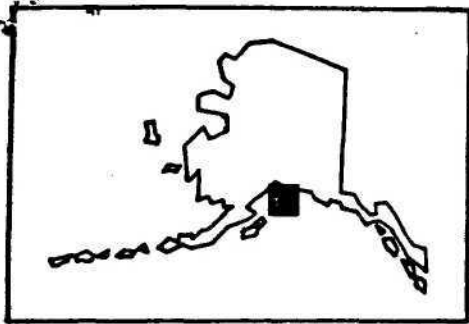
The Elephant Lake Unit will be dropped due to native claims, outstanding oil leases and commercial activity.

The Swan Lake Canoe Unit and the Swanson River Canoe Unit are combined and enlarged to form the Canoe Lakes Unit.

The Caribou Hills Unit is combined, along with Lake Tustumena, with the Andy Simmons Unit.

Recommendation: It is recommended that the above proposal be adopted and that the Kenai National Moose Refuge Wilderness area be established.


Date September 7, 1977 Prepared by B. Neely Telephone X-4047



KENAI NATIONAL MOOSE REFUGE

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

KENAI WILDERNESS PROPOSAL

 Wilderness Proposal



SEWARD MERIDIAN

Scale 0 5 10 15 20 25 MILES

