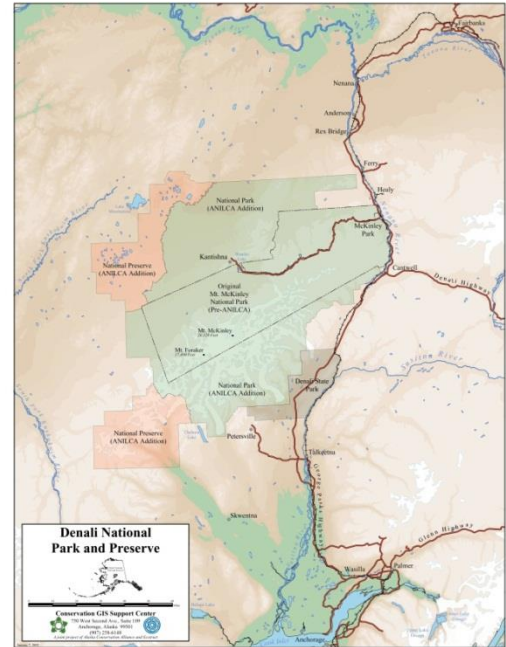




## Denali Wildlife and Wildlife Habitat

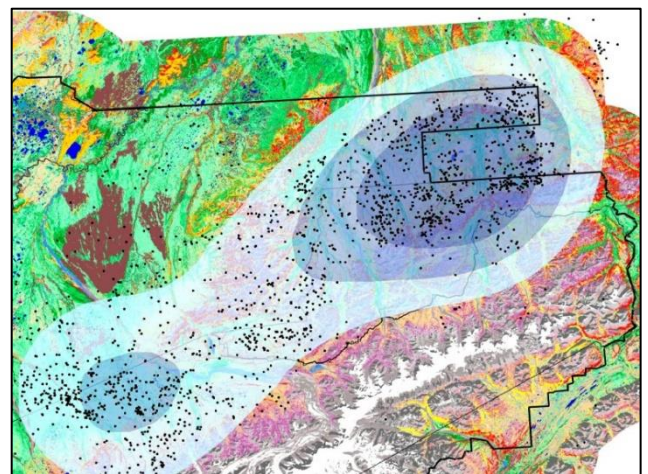
*"The prime resource for which the north addition is established is the critical range necessary to support populations of moose, wolf, and caribou as part of an integral ecosystem. Public enjoyment of these outstanding wildlife values would thus continue to be assured." **Senate Report on the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act***

In 1980, the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) added 4 million acres to then-Mt. McKinley National Park. The additions north of the Alaska Range were intended to accomplish a visionary goal: protect an intact naturally-functioning ecosystem including the wide range of the Denali caribou herd. Management directed at achieving natural conditions runs into problems at the park boundaries – where State of Alaska management regimes take over – and even within the boundaries where other park purposes create conflicts. For instance, approximately 1.3 million acres of the park additions were designated as National Preserves where hunting and trapping are allowed under state game management rules, as long as that management does not conflict with park purposes. Subsistence hunting and trapping by qualified subsistence users is allowed in certain areas of the park and preserve additions where that use has been deemed traditional. The use of off-road vehicles for subsistence activities was later authorized in a designated area near the village of Cantwell. This mixture of hunting and off-road vehicle use with more traditional national park purposes is unique to the large national parks of Alaska where residents depend on public lands for wild food and other renewable resources.



### Protect Ecosystem Integrity in the Stampede Townships

A key region for wildlife management controversy is the Stampede Townships, an area of state land in Denali's northeast corner enclosed on three sides by the national park. This area is critically important as winter range for Denali Park caribou (see map). Wolves from inside Denali Park follow the caribou. Grizzly bears that den in the park also venture onto these lands. Although the framers of ANILCA suggested a land trade for these townships, they have remained in State of Alaska ownership, something likely to continue into the future. DCC no longer works toward inclusion of the Stampede Townships in the park, but we support the underlying goal of the land trade – the protection of the natural integrity of the greater Denali ecosystem. We were encouraged when the State of Alaska, in the *Yukon Tanana Area Plan* revision, confirmed the primary importance of the Stampede Townships for wildlife habitat and dispersed recreation.



NPS Graphic, Winter Radio-Collared Caribou locations 1986-1998

## **Protect Denali Wolves at the Boundaries of the Park**

Beginning in the early 1990s and over the next 15 years, the Alaska Board of Game enacted a few small “buffer zones” where no hunting or trapping of wolves was allowed on state lands, thus partially protecting wolves that den inside Denali from harvest by humans just outside the park boundary. In 2010, the Alaska Board of Game allowed the existing buffer zone to expire and rejected proposals to expand it. The Board of Game has since rejected many successor buffer zone proposals. DCC believes it is in the interest of local citizens, park visitors and wildlife managers that a buffer zone be re-established in the Stampede townships. We are also concerned about grizzly bears that den in the park but venture onto state lands, particularly now that the Board of Game allows bear baiting.

## **Improve State Wildlife and ORV Management**

Although Denali National Park and Preserve is large, park animals venture outside the park onto state lands in the Stampede townships, the Yanert Valley and the Cantwell area. All of these areas have easy access from state highways and developed communities. Animals protected by park policies promoting natural diversity walk across an unseen line onto state lands managed for abundance of prey for human hunters. In addition, access to hunting by off-road vehicles is poorly regulated, a situation that has created irreparable damage to some areas in the Denali Borough. DCC advocates for state policies that may promote hunting but are not devoted to maximizing hunter access at the expense of healthy wildlife populations and habitats. DCC encourages enhanced trail management and off-road vehicle regulation by all state agencies to avoid irreparable habitat damage. We support continued designation of the Yanert and Wood River Valleys as non-motorized for hunting.

## **Override State Predator Management Policies in Denali National Preserve**

Hunting is allowed in the Denali Preserves, but since the creation of the preserves in 1980 NPS has usually deferred to the Alaska Board of Game’s hunting rules. However, in recent years the Board of Game has instituted season and bag limit regulations aimed at reducing predator populations, conflicting with NPS mandates to preserve natural wildlife populations in the Preserves. In response, NPS asserted its authority in 2014 by promulgating a regulation prohibiting the objectionable state practices, but a new federal administration is now seeking to roll back that rule. DCC supports the 2014 regulation and has partnered with Trustees for Alaska in preparation for a legal challenge to the roll-back.

## **Raise Awareness of the Importance of Climate Change to the Regional Ecosystem**

The consequences of climate change are being experienced disproportionately in the arctic and subarctic regions. Profound changes are being felt in and around Denali National Park, including the rapid melting of glaciers in the Alaska Range, the rapid thawing of permafrost, the advance of tree line, and more subtle changes within the food chain and vegetative mat. DCC feels that awareness of these affects is essential in the development of appropriate long-term habitat and wildlife management policies.

## **Large, Industrial-Scale Resource Development**

Large, industrial-scale resource developments (such as gas drilling networks and large pipelines) are inconsistent with the habitat and recreation values of park gateway lands. We have actively opposed such development and will continue to suggest less damaging alternatives as projects are suggested. The Usibelli Coal Mine has operated for decades on state leases east of the Nenana River. Mining coal, even if done to the highest standards, irreparably changes the landscape, creates hazards at the site of the mine and produces water and air quality damage not only at the mine site, but during transportation, storage and shipping. DCC believes that for whatever time coal is mined in the Denali Borough, the most stringent standards for environmental quality and health must be practiced, with an eye to the eventual transition to cleaner resources.