



Denali Citizens Council

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Dear Brooke,

I hope your summer is going well, and that you are getting some time to enjoy the park and the house.

We were very happy to have Cody at our annual meeting. The meeting was generally very successful – we heard a lot of great stories from people who have worked along the park road for decades that were illuminating if perhaps not surprising. People with long experience on the road value it for much the same reasons we always tell visitors – the incredible landscapes, the unforgettable wildlife stops, the magical lighting on the land at certain times of the day or year. Refreshing was the lack of cynicism – while panelists and audience members voiced concern for the climate-change disruption and the decline of parts of the road experience (for example, the disappearance of some frequently-seen bird species), there was a shared feeling that the goals of maintaining a rustic road in a wilderness landscape with once-in-a-lifetime wildlife viewing experiences are still very valuable, whether from the perspective of someone taking their first trip or someone taking their 1,000th.

With that inspiration, we discussed the Pretty Rocks project at our board meeting on July 3. As the project has gotten under way we have received little bits of information that cause concern. We have a few questions we hope you can answer.

- In the Section 106 consultation letter we received it was indicated that the contractor is wishing to use a particularly historic section of the park road – what Tom Walker calls the “Pioneer Curve” (mile 45.6) – for staging materials and equipment. We thought this staging was going to take place at Polychrome Overlook. Can you clarify why the contractor needs to move to a more sensitive site?
- Now that the contractor is on site, has a determination been made about how to get equipment to the west side of the slump? We have asked about this before, and there has never been a firm plan. The same Section 106 consultation letter indicates that the contractor intended to access the west side through an area “so steep that a pedestrian survey is not possible.” That seems like it would be an extremely hazardous way to access the west side of the site. The consultation letter also indicates that 3 acres of “non-vegetated wilderness” would be added to the project area. Is that a full 3 acres of Congressionally-designated wilderness? If a portion of the Denali Wilderness is included, could we see the Minimum Requirement Determination for the change?



- Also, given the extended timeline and the significant increase in dirt work for the project, is the cost also going to go up? And if so, how will NPS/FHWA pay for it? What is the maximum that NPS is willing to invest in this project before it just looks too absurd?
- We have heard that you have the final bridge design now. Can you share that?
- With the final design and contractor input, what deviations are there from the project as described in the EA?
- Are NPS and FHWA still confident that this project will have a lifespan of 50 years? The news about climate change is increasingly dire, and we wonder if the thermo-siphons on a south-facing slope will really be able to keep the permafrost frozen over the next several decades.
- Through our members, we hear that there is going to be further geologic research conducted at the Bear Cave site. Are there any new concerns there? What are present thoughts about the timeline for the Bear Cave project given the extended schedule for Pretty Rocks?
- Without the excitement of walking up to the slide this year, are visitors still happy with the shortened road experience? Is NPS getting much positive or negative feedback from visitors traveling the park road?
- Finally, what now is the timeline for the Ghiglione Bridge replacement?

If it easier to answer these questions verbally rather than in writing, we would be happy to set up a call.

We hear deep skepticism about the bridge project within the community, with many people voicing concerns about either the feasibility or the desirability of the project as it has evolved. In the past you have had to defer a lot of questions because the iterative nature of the contracting process meant that NPS did not yet have the answers. Now that you have a final design and the contractor on site, we feel this would be an opportune time to have a public meeting or town hall where you, FHWA, and the contractor could respond to some of the doubts and questions, and quell (or affirm!) some of the rumors. We would strongly support such a meeting, and hope that NPS could hold one in the near future. A Zoom option for participating in public meetings is always appreciated.

Thanks for keeping us in the loop Brooke. We look forward to your responses.

Charlie Loeb
President, Denali Citizens Council