



Dear neighbors of McCarthy/Kennecott,

June 2020

I hope this note finds you and yours well. Like many of you, the park continues to adapt to Covid-19. The last of our seasonal staff will join our workforce in time for July 1st when we begin providing visitor services at numerous locations throughout the park. This summer season has shaped up to look different than prior seasons; however, you'll see below that there are still quite a few updates to share and activities going on in the McCarthy and Kennecott communities.

Of note, I want to share two items with you all. First, you'll see below an update regarding environmental investigations we are pursuing in Kennecott. These investigations are assisting us in determining if additional safety measures should be taken to protect employees and the public from mining and milling-related contamination. We are establishing an information repository near the site to house the Administrative Record and prepare a Community Involvement Plan (CIP) and Community Fact Sheets to inform the public about the investigation process. We will begin forming this repository this year and in time for completion in Spring 2021.

Additionally, recent events have drawn attention to the complicated nature of the Kennecott subdivision, its platted easements and rights-of-ways. To bring clarity and transparency to this topic the NPS will be pursuing an updated survey for parcels held in public trust. We expect the survey work to begin in 2021 and the park will make available the latest information to the public at key junctures of the survey process.

For many of us, this year has brought many changes to our daily routine and it has affected our ability to meet, to socialize and to convene in public the way we have felt comfortable to do in the past. As we adapt to this new norm for the months ahead, I want you to know that our relationships with community members matter to me and to the park staff, very much. I ask for your patience as we find new ways to convene, new ways to convey information, and ways to improve our communications. The foundation of trust built these last years is being tested by the distance created under current events; but the intent to work together has not changed. It will just look different and perhaps unfold more slowly until we more fully adapt to the challenges we face.

In the interim, if you have any concerns or questions, please reach out to me or any of the staff listed below. Stephens Harper remains my key local liaison and I encourage you to touch bases with him this summer as needed.

Warm regards,

Ben

### **Facilities Management Updates**

#### **Staffing, Priority Maintenance and Stabilization Projects.**

The Kennecott maintenance crew is smaller this year than normal and started later, due to Covid-19 related delays. A significant focus of Facilities Maintenance this summer is custodial work. Regular cleaning of facilities especially of the vault toilets between Chitina and the Root Glacier Trail is a high priority. Other work scheduled for completion this summer includes: Completing the reconstruction of the West Bunkhouse entry deck and utilidor. Painting of the Kennecott Dairy Barn, Recreation Hall and New School. Brushing (Fire-wising) Silk Stocking Row housing to maintain adequate defensible space. Brushing the Kennecott waterlines along National Creek. Repairs and annual maintenance on NPS housing and operations support facilities. Addressing a moisture Infiltration problem with the historic General Managers Office. Reconstruction of a deck on Northside of the Kennecott Machine Shop.

#### **Kennecott Mill Building Stabilization (Phase III).**

On February 18, 2020 the National Park Service (NPS) awarded a construction contract to complete the Phase III of the Upper Mill Building Structural Repairs. The successful contractor is Alaska Aggregate Products LLC. (AAP) of Palmer, Alaska. Numerous rehabilitation campaigns have occurred at the mill building over the years. This project is Phase III of the recent rehabilitation efforts. This project will stabilize the upper levels of the mill building. The work includes selective replacement of deteriorated heavy timber wood columns, beams, floor and roof structures, the leveling of remnant ore in historic ore bin to install structural scaffold, installation of horizontal siding, and the partial demolition and reconstruction of the high-grade ore chute.

The NPS anticipates the project being accomplished over two construction seasons, June through October 2020 and May through September 2021. This project is scheduled to be completed in October 2021.

AAP begin site work on June 16, 2020. For the 2020 construction season AAP plans to work 7 days a week. The crew size will consist of approximately 12 individuals. The construction crew will be housed in a private construction camp near McCarthy, Alaska. AAP has established pandemic safety protocols to be followed while on site. The protocol specifics are included in AAP's Health and Safety Plan which is available from the Park upon request. For the 2020 construction season AAP plans to work through mid-October, weather permitting.

#### **Trails, Cabins and Airstrip Maintenance.**

The WRST Backcountry Maintenance Crew will be completing several projects this season. Collection of GIS and trail condition assessment data is a priority and data will be collected from a wide variety of trails across the park this season, including the Jumbo Mine Trail. Above Kennecott, Jumbo Tram Tower #18 will receive some stabilization work and the area around the tower will be cleared of vegetation. There will be a

clean-up effort at the Mudhole Smith Cabin on the Old McCarthy Airstrip which will focus on the removal of non-historic trash and debris as outlined in the Historic Structures Report for that cabin. We are pursuing a possibility to install a dehydrating vault toilet in 2021 near the Crystalline Hills Trailhead at Mile 34.8. This toilet would provide sanitary facilities for day-use visitors as well as serve as a pilot test for this technology, which may be utilized in other areas of the park, including as a possible future replacement for the Jumbo Creek pit toilet along the Erie Mine Trail. For more information, contact: Chief of Facility Management, Chris Wilcox, 822-7246, [christopher\\_wilcox@nps.gov](mailto:christopher_wilcox@nps.gov)

### **Interpretation and Education Updates**

**Visitor Services.** At this time, visitor services in Kennecott are limited. Other park locations are also providing limited visitor services, with the Main Visitor Center in Copper Center, Slana Ranger Station, and Chitina Ranger Station currently closed. By July 1st, the park will be offering more visitor services; watch for a news release or check the park website for details. Due to low staffing and Covid-19 concerns, the Kennecott Visitor Center will be closed this season. Visitors can Dial-A-Ranger at (907) 205-7106 from 9-5 daily starting July 1 for park information. This season, bear-resistant food containers will not be available to be checked out by visitors. The NPS buildings at Kennecott Mines NHL will be closed for the summer, and only accessible through our concessionaire, St. Elias Alpine Guides. This will allow for safe cleaning protocols and smaller groups, while still providing access to these buildings.

Interpretive Rangers will be out on foot, providing information and assistance to visitors. South District Interpreter, Jamie Hart, is working to communicate news and information on the summer's protocols via signage, on social media, and in-person throughout the valley. There are information signs posted at the Footbridge and the Airport that community businesses use regarding any COVID updates for their summer's operation. Please feel free to post so visitors know what to expect as they visit our valley. Our Lead Interpreter, Katie Moser, and Interpreter Dianne Milliard have been hired to assist with visitor services.

We will be working with Kennecott Glacier Lodge to provide outdoor evening interpretive programs two days a week starting July 3rd.. The Interpretation staff is working with Mike Loso, our park's Physical Scientist, to develop products that will interpret the changes to the Kennecott Glacier, so stay tuned for those!

For more information, contact: Acting Chief of Interpretation & Education, Carrie Wittmer, 907-822- 7255, [carrie\\_wittmer@nps.gov](mailto:carrie_wittmer@nps.gov)

### **Resource Stewardship and Science Updates**

#### **Kennecott Environmental Investigations.**

In 2019, NPS performed air monitoring and limited sampling in the area of the Kennecott Mill to determine whether additional safety measures should be taken to protect employees and the public from mining and milling-related contamination. The Air Monitoring Report did not find Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) exceedances given the protective measures already in place (e.g., public hand washing stations, warning signs, employee training and use of protective equipment during certain work activities). The report did recommend additional dust suppression on the road and increased cleaning inside buildings, as well as additional signage to restrict access to areas of known physical hazards or elevated contaminant concentrations. These measures will be implemented this season. The results of air monitoring and sampling also will help identify data needs for the upcoming Remedial Investigation (RI), which NPS will conduct pursuant to its authority under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability

Act (CERCLA, commonly known as the Superfund Law). The RI will be planned this year and culminate in a Sampling and Analysis Plan (SAP) to collect environmental data needed for site characterization, human health risk assessment, ecological risk assessment, regulatory requirements, and alternatives analysis. It is hoped that RI sampling will begin in 2021 and be phased over several periods to understand how contaminants behave seasonally and in different media. To manage this work, NPS has activated a Contaminated Site Team (CST) to work closely with the park and the community in undertaking the investigation. This year and in time for spring 2021, we will establish an information repository near the site to house the Administrative Record and prepare a Community Involvement Plan (CIP) and Community Fact Sheets to inform the public about the investigation process. These Fact Sheets will be available in the Visitor Center, the information repository, and other frequented public locations.

### **Subsistence Fishing and Hunting Permits.**

The park is committed to issuing federal subsistence fishing and hunting permits to federally qualified subsistence users for the 2020 season, although the permit issuance processes have been adapted to ensure the safety of permit applicants and park staff. The point of contact for permits in the Kennecott/McCarthy area is Elizabeth Schafer, who can be reached at 205-7631. In some cases, staff at park headquarters may be reaching out to subsistence users with information about how to obtain a permit.

### **Glacier Monitoring.**

This summer will begin the fifth year of including Kennicott Glacier in the NPS Inventory and Monitoring Program's long-term glacier monitoring study. As part of this effort, we hope to be maintaining and re-measuring stakes (short pieces of metal conduit) at five locations on the Kennicott Glacier and Gates Glacier tributary to measure snow accumulation and snow/ice melt. Collaborators from University of Alaska Fairbanks have planned additional complementary work on and around Kennicott Glacier as well. Timing of these activities, including the question of whether they will happen at all, of course depend on progress of the pandemic and related safety concerns.

### **Kennicott River Gaging.**

Collaborators from the U.S. Geological Survey will again be making periodic direct measurements of river discharge from the footbridge and (during high discharge events like the Hidden Creek Lake flood) from the freight bridge. We will aim to notify the community in advance about use of the freight bridge for river monitoring efforts in order to minimize disruptions. Boaters and flood watchers- -please remember that real-time stage and discharge readings from the Kennicott River are available online: [http://waterdata.usgs.gov/ak/nwis/uv/?site\\_no=15209700](http://waterdata.usgs.gov/ak/nwis/uv/?site_no=15209700). Finally, for those that are interested, we know peak river discharges during the Hidden Creek Lake jokulhlaup over the last four years: On July 26, 2016, river flow peaked at 24,300 cubic feet per second (cfs). 2017 and 2018 were both smaller (13,600 cfs on July 17, 2017 and again on July 18, 2018), and last year's flood was a doozy: 25,800 cfs on July 8. This year USGS added some new sensors to the gage on the West Kennicott River footbridge. In early May they installed a stilling well on the bridge that allows direct hourly measurements of river turbidity and conductivity, and NPS staff will occasionally be collecting water samples from the footbridge to directly measure suspended sediment concentrations. These measurements will help us to distinguish jokulhlaups from "regular" high water events.

## **Mitigating and Interpreting Consequences of Kennicott Glacier Retreat.**

This year we will conclude our 3-year effort to better map, understand, and interpret the consequences of changes at the terminus of the Kennicott Glacier. Over the last two years NPS successfully acquired a bunch of new data: a complete map of the bathymetry (water depths) of proglacial Lake Kennicott (it's over 72 meters, or 235 feet, deep!), new aerial photographs and elevation models of the terminus region, and a lidar-based map of the bare ground topography under the vegetation around town. Some of these data have already proven useful for community members interested in the flooding issues around McCarthy, and we'll be using them this summer to work on three products: 1) a report on hazards posed to infrastructure by changes in the glacier and related hydrology, 2) interpretive exhibits that help explain these changes to the public, and 3) a scientific article describing the changes in detail. This project will again fund the hiring of a Guest Scientist through the Geoscientists-in-the-Parks program. Because of concerns about bringing covid-19 into the community, the guest scientist (Tristan Amaral, who worked in Denali last year) and our physical scientist, Michael Loso, will work primarily out of the NPS Regional Office in Anchorage this summer.

## **NPS Fire Management Program.**

At this time, there are no formalized plans to conduct any fuel-reduction work this season around the McCarthy/ Kennecott area (except as noted above, Kennecott staff will be brushing (Fire-wising) Silk Stocking Row housing to maintain adequate defensible space). NPS fire staff will continue to support our partners, State of Alaska - Division of Forestry, in wildland fire response throughout the park. To increase our situational awareness and collaborative planning efforts, NPS fire staff may also be continuing efforts to conduct wildland fire risk assessments of NPS structures throughout the park. More information, contact: Mark Miller, Team Lead for Resource Stewardship and Science, 907-822-7212 (desk), 907-302-1373 (mobile), or [memiller@nps.gov](mailto:memiller@nps.gov)

## **Lands and Planning Updates**

### **Public review/revision- Kennecott Operations Plan (2013), Kennecott Support Facilities Plan (2007):**

The Kennecott Operations Plan is our primary planning document for management of the Kennecott Mines NHL. The plan directs us, once every five years, to initiate a review and seek full community input in advance of adopting any revisions. Changes have occurred and management issues have arisen that should be included and addressed. Our strategy going forward is to combine the two plans to create one comprehensive guidance document for park managers to utilize as the primary site management tool, and to further clarify the management goals and actions for the next phase of Kennecott management. This process will be guided with extensive public involvement. We began the public engagement process in 2018 and are going to continue throughout 2020. Previous to COVID-19 we scheduled two, in-person, meetings for this year, one in Kennecott and one in McCarthy. These in-person meetings have now been canceled and we are currently evaluating alternative meeting formats. Topics for consideration and discussion include the following: The Architectural Control Committee and Kennecott Covenants, the proposed foot trail on the East side of the Kennicott River from McCarthy to Kennecott, the community involvement plan as a part of the CERCLA process, Kennicott Glacier interpretive plan, and all of the topics identified in the Kennecott Operations Plan that have not been completed but the NPS is currently working on. For more information: Outdoor Recreation Planner, Morgan Gantz, 822-7213, [morgan\\_gantz@nps.gov](mailto:morgan_gantz@nps.gov)

## **Closure of Bonanza Ventilation Adit:**

During the summer of 2019, WRST was getting reports of an open tunnel in the Bonanza mine area of the Kennecott Mines National Historic Landmark. This information was later confirmed by NPS staff; A small team went to do a safety assessment during August of 2019. An inspection of the breakthrough area of the 1503 Ventilation Adit revealed unstable material that was susceptible to slide. Due to the danger of the underground workings and the danger of the breakthrough portal, the NPS is planning to close the ventilation adit. Due to the change in park operations during the summer of 2020 from the COVID19 pandemic, the NPS is proposing the closure of the 1503 Bonanza Ventilation Adit to occur in phases over the next couple of years. Phase 1 would be implemented in summer 2020 with a temporary closure method that would consist of bolting a wire cable netting across the adit opening. The plan would be to have this net in place for 2-3 years until we can formally close the opening using explosives. This opening possesses hazards including risk of death due to falls into shafts if one were to enter the tunnel; potentially low oxygen levels underground; and rock-fall hazards underground. Mines, unlike caves, tend to be inherently unstable. The objective of this project is to initiate an explosion which would result in the permanent closure of the 1503 Bonanza Ventilation Tunnel opening, eliminating the public health and safety risks related to the abandoned mining features, as required by a 2008 Director's Memorandum. For more information: Chief of Lands and Planning, Joshua Scott, 907-822-7243, [Joshua\\_scott@nps.gov](mailto:Joshua_scott@nps.gov)

## **Visitor and Resource Protection Updates**

**Staffing.** The South District protection ranger staff includes all familiar faces and returning rangers: Kirin Riddell, Elizabeth Schafer, Jon Cooperman, Sharon Tingue and Stephens Harper. The only difference from this summer compared to last is that Sharon is in the Kennicott District Ranger position, the one formerly held by Stephens. Protection rangers provide emergency medical, search and rescue, public use management and law enforcement services. Rangers place an emphasis on education of best practices and enforcement of regulations that protect visitor safety and public resources.

The WRST Search and Rescue Team is operational. We appreciate the dedicated local residents who volunteer their time to be on this important team. To report an emergency or violation on NPS managed land call 907-683-2276. This number reaches our 24/7 NPS dispatch. Please only call them to report an emergency or violation. NPS rangers often respond to emergencies outside of NPS areas but do so at the request of other agencies. To report a medical emergency on private land call MXY EMS dispatch, 554-1240. For law enforcement issues on private land call 911, or fire on private land call 554-2102. For more information: South District Ranger, Acting Kennecott Unit Manager, Stephens Harper, 707-9739, [stephens\\_harper@nps.gov](mailto:stephens_harper@nps.gov)

Sincerely,



Ben Bobowski, Superintendent  
Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve  
PO Box 439 Copper Center, AK 99573  
(907) 822-5234  
<https://www.nps.gov/wrst>

