



100 YEARS

FIELDREPORT

Alaska Region | Summer 2019



Pebble Mine Threatens Brown Bears and the Bear-Viewing Economy

By Alex Johnson

A new study by University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF) researchers highlights the strong and growing economic value of bear viewing on the west side of Cook Inlet, including the spectacular coasts of Katmai and Lake Clark National Parks and Preserves. This region—the heart of the greatest brown bear concentration in the world—also happens to be where the Pebble Partnership wants to build an industrial transportation corridor to service its proposed gold and copper mine.

The UAF study, funded in part by NPCA, surveyed regional businesses and concluded that bear-viewing-related service providers (e.g., air and boat taxis, guides, and lodging facilities) generated \$34.5 million in sales in 2017. Spending by these providers and their households supported 490 sustainable jobs in the region, including 371 reported direct hires.

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Defending the Future of Arctic Caribou

By Alex Johnson

In the wide-open lands of northwest Alaska, wildlife moves freely across the landscape as it has for thousands of years. The Western Arctic Caribou Herd epitomizes this boundlessness. Each year, 250,000 caribou migrate across a 100-million-acre landscape, an area equal in size to the state of Montana.

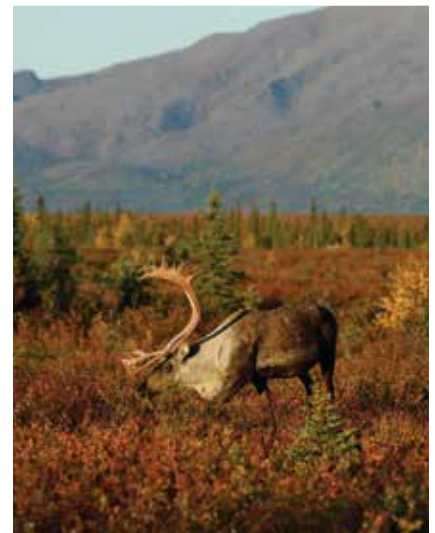
At 2,700 miles long, the migration of the Western Arctic Herd is one of the longest land migrations on Earth. Wandering from their calving grounds north of the Noatak National Preserve to their wintering grounds on the Bering Land Bridge and back again, their trek is the equivalent of a cross-country trip from New York to Seattle.

Unlike nearly every other Arctic caribou population in North America, the population of the herd is currently stable. Across the continent, herd populations have plummeted from 4.7 million to 2.1 million since the mid-1990s. Caribou depend upon large unbroken landscapes which the Western Arctic Caribou Herd is still fortunate enough to enjoy.

The National Park Service (NPS) manages over 20 million acres of the herd's range, including lands within Gates of the Arctic and Kobuk Valley National Parks, Bering Land Bridge, Gates of the Arctic and Noatak

National Preserves, and Cape Krusenstern National Monument. Most of these lands are managed in a contiguous, ecologically intact landscape that encompasses nearly all of the western Brooks Range. In a state whose immense scale is hard to comprehend, this core habitat could fit the top 10 largest

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Top: Brown bear along Chinitna Bay, Lake Clark National Park, Alaska ©Cathy Hart Photography
Above: A lone caribou from the Western Arctic Caribou Herd grazes in the foothills of the Brooks Range. ©Seth Kantner

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100 YEARS
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Alaska Corner by AK Regional Director Jim Adams

This May, NPCA celebrated 100 years of working to protect the resources and the meaning of America's national parks. Not only has our nation's growth since 1919 dramatically increased the pressures on our remaining natural areas, it has also greatly added to the stories of national identity in need of preserving. NPCA's mission to protect and enhance the air, water, wildlife and cultural resources of our national parks is as vital today as it's ever been, and the challenges to the integrity of the parks are as great as they've ever been.



brown bears in Alaska national preserves. The state of Alaska supports this rule in a short-sighted attempt to suppress predator populations in order to increase moose and caribou populations for sport hunters. Approving the state's effort to turn national preserves into game farms would reveal a fundamental misunder-

standing about the purpose of the National Park System, and NPCA stands ready to challenge a bad decision by the secretary or loudly applaud a good one.

In a nation that is divided on many fronts, our parks can serve as common ground, and protecting them together can unite us. National parks tell America's stories, connect visitors to the cultural and natural treasures of a diverse people, and reveal the evolving story of our quest to achieve a more perfect union.

As just one example of a threat to our Alaska national parks, Secretary of the Interior, David Bernhardt, is expected to soon permit the killing of hibernating and denning black bears and wolves and their young as well as the baiting and killing of



A Loss for National Park Rivers and Lakes

By Jim Adams

In April, the Supreme Court ruled that the National Park Service (NPS) does not have authority to limit hovercraft on navigable rivers and lakes in Alaska unless they cause demonstrable damage to shoreland owned by NPS. The decision was an unfortunate end to an eight-year legal battle over whether an Alaskan could use a hovercraft in the Yukon-Charley National Preserve despite a NPS regulation prohibiting their use nationwide.

The consequences of the ruling, beyond allowing the use of hovercraft on navigable rivers and lakes, are still murky and may

require further litigation. A broad reading of the decision by courts could ultimately lead to the loss of federal subsistence fishing rights for rural Alaskans or the mass killing of wolves that venture onto frozen lakes in the middle of national parks. A more appropriate, narrow reading would leave NPS with the authority to limit most damaging uses on navigable lakes and rivers in national parks.

NPCA will continue to follow this issue closely as we work to ensure that NPS can protect the rivers and lakes that are the lifeblood of Alaska national parklands.

Above: Sunset over the Yukon River, Alaska
©PMoarein19 | Dreamstime

According to a study by the University of Alaska Fairbanks, bear viewing on the western side of the Cook Inlet contributed

\$34.5M

in economic sales in 2017. The Pebble Mine development threatens this economic engine and could impact the bears of Katmai and Lake Clark National Parks and Preserves.

A playful brown bear enjoys its habitat in Lake Clark National Park & Preserve ©Cathy Hart Photography



ZERO-LANDFILL INITIATIVE: From 2016 to 2018, Denali National Park and Preserve reduced the total municipal solid waste bound for a landfill by

46%

NPCA participated in World Migratory Bird Day on May 19 to “Be the Solution to the Plastic Pollution.” This young participant signed a pledge to eliminate the use of single-use plastics and received a NPCA water bottle and centennial gear. Photo courtesy of Erica Carroll



AKRO BY THE NUMBERS

Alaska's

24

national park units encompass

54.7M

acres and accommodated

2.9M

visitors in 2018.



storytellers shared their stories of adventures in Alaska national parks, ranging from float trips down the Noatak National Wild and Scenic River to climbs of Denali, during Trail Tales on March 7. The centennial event was a collaboration between NPCA and AK Trails. Photo courtesy of Erica Carroll



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Alaskan delegates attended NPCA's annual April lobby day in Washington, D.C. and met with Senator Lisa Murkowski to speak about potential impacts of Pebble Mine and threats to the Denali Park Road.

Alaska contingent presented Senator Lisa Murkowski with the National Park Heritage Award. | Photo courtesy of Alex Johnson



250,000

caribou comprise the Western Arctic Caribou Herd which migrates across a 100-million-acre landscape every year. NPS manages over 20M acres of this range.

Swimming the Kobuk, Kobuk National Park ©NPS



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Defending the Future of Arctic Caribou

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national parks in the lower 48 (including such greats as Death Valley, Grand Canyon, Yellowstone and Yosemite)—plus the state of Connecticut.

Despite the Western Arctic Caribou Herd’s incredible story, the future of the herd is uncertain. The Alaska National Interest and Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) mandates that the National Park System permit a mining access road across Gates of the Arctic National Preserve lands. This “Ambler Access Road”—referred to as the “Road to Ruin” by local residents—would consist of a 210-mile route across the tundra of the southern Brooks Range, cutting directly through the eastern third of the caribou’s migration corridor. Recent studies indicate that roads impact caribou behavior, and there is serious concern that this road would shift the herd further west, away from the Alaska Native villages whose residents’ subsistence-based living depends on this animal’s meat.

NPCA will continue advocating against the construction of this road and its associated mining district. We encourage you to speak up during the public comment period later this summer in support of Arctic caribou and the people who depend upon them.

For more information, visit www.npca.org or call Alaska Program Manager, Alex Johnson, at 907.891.2272.



Pebble Mine Threatens Brown Bears and the Bear-Viewing Economy

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Visitation at Lake Clark National Park and Preserve, now at 17,000 visitors annually, has quadrupled in the past decade, in no small part thanks to increased bear viewing. In fact, the number of visitors arriving to view bears has surpassed those who come to sport fish. Similarly, 79% of Katmai National Park and Preserve’s 30,000 annual visitors come primarily to see the bears.

Developing a mine in this location would—among other things—displace denning habitat, change bear movements, and increase defense of life and property killings. We will continue to provide more opportunities for you to tell the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Senator Murkowski and other decisionmakers that this is the wrong mine in the wrong place.

Above: Tourists photograph a bear fishing for salmon in Lake Clark National Park’s Chinitna Bay. ©Cathy Hart Photography

SUPPORT NPCA! Support NPCA! As NPCA continues to celebrate its centennial year in 2019, please support our local and national park protection work with a donation at www.npca.org/give. Thank you!

