

KEEPING IN TOUCH

The latest and greatest from our team at the University of Illinois



NOTES FROM THE TEAM!!

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We've been struck by the distinctive self-reliance and deep-seated connections that people have with places in the Denali region!

We are delighted to share the first 'Keeping in Touch' newsletter as part of our research about building scenarios and visioning for the future of communities around Denali National Park and Preserve!! We are excited about this opportunity to keep members of the local community like you up to speed on our project happenings.

In the pages of this newsletter, you'll see that we share highlights from what we are learning about community perspectives on future growth, and explain how we are working toward our goal of establishing a process for inclusive conservation across all communities in the

Denali region. Each newsletter will share different parts of our project, and most importantly, keep you all posted on our plans for opening up a dialogue and building strategies that respond to community needs and conservation objectives.

We are grateful for your interest and support of our ongoing research with communities in the region. We hope you enjoy **Keeping in Touch** as we strive to enhance the impact of our research and make sure you benefit from this study.

SHARING STORIES OF LIFE AROUND DENALI

As part of our visits to the Denali area this past March and in October 2018, we met with many individuals to introduce ourselves and become familiar with their history in the region. As part of these discussions, we brought out the goals of the research project and identified our hope to understand the perspectives of various stakeholders. Our questions for people centered around their reasons for living in the Denali area, their 'sense of place' and values for the landscape, perceptions of landscape change, organizations that people belong to, and relationships to one another. We felt fortunate to learn about the many ways in which the region was appreciated, and learned about the distinctive self-reliance that people feel for living there. **With each person we engaged, we were inspired by the stories they shared about their lifestyle and deep connections to the Denali landscape.**

Questions that people had for our research team were often directed at clarifying our research objectives, understanding the timeline of our project, and wondering about the impact of our research. With the project being a five-year endeavor, we are currently in the initial phase in which we get to know the landscape, the people who care about it, and the various agencies and organizations who have influence on its future. Our research works towards engaging stakeholders not only with our research project, but engaging them with each other. We are hopeful that at least one impact will be to **leave stakeholders with a stronger awareness of each other, and an enhanced capacity to share information** and partner with each other on projects related to access and conservation.

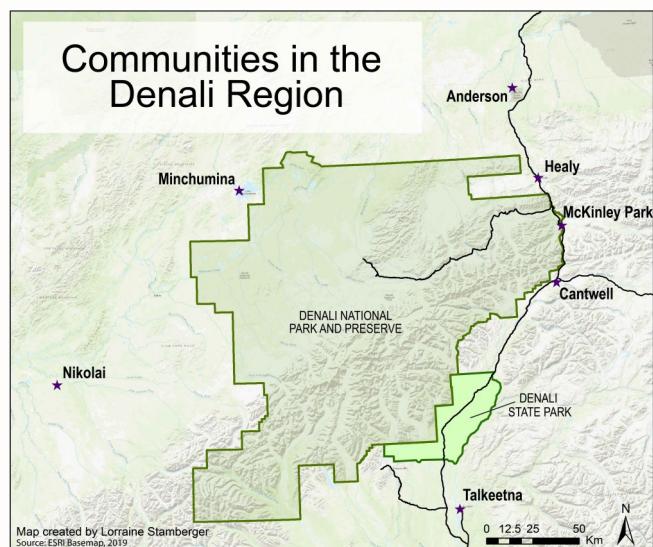
We didn't get the chance to meet with everyone we wanted to. Fortunately though, we'll talk with some people on the telephone, and also be back this summer to continue our face-to-face conversations. We are still building connections with people, and learning about others with whom we would like to meet. In fact, our interviews end with a question about anyone else we should meet. That is, in trying to engage an array of viewpoints from stake-



Team member Bill Stewart heard from Roger Robinson about expeditions out of Talkeetna

holders in the Denali region, we are purposely asking for you to suggest names of people who might hold different perspectives or disagree with you. We have been appreciative of the people who have shared their connections and relationships to others, and impressed by the high degree of interconnections in Denali – even in the face of disagreements!

We are working to understand the perspectives of eight different communities in the Denali region. To date, we've conducted 21 interviews and held four focus groups. Check out our study area map below!



CHARACTERIZING SOCIAL-ECOLOGICAL PLACES

During our visit in March 2019, we organized several group-based discussions about places and changes in the Denali region. We had four focus groups across Cantwell, McKinley Village, and Anderson to learn more about the ways that folks define the towns where they live. Each focus group included individual introductions and a broad overview of our project. In most contexts, we then transitioned into a discussion about significant features of the Denali landscape. Participants were asked to talk about what they saw as important in the region, and what is changing. We also completed individual mapping exercises with the purpose of coming to know how people characterize relationships between communities, organizations, and landscapes, which we refer to as ‘social-ecological places.’ **We really enjoyed seeing everyone’s creativity come to life in the development of these mental maps!!**

We have learned a lot about how people characterize the region and the different ‘drivers of change’ that are influencing places. Though differences emerged, we heard a lot of similarities across the focus groups and are coming to appreciate the importance of industrial tourism, climate variability, and large scale development as key factors that are influencing change. Along with group discussions, the individual maps that folks created are providing us with deeper insights on significant fea-

tures in the landscape like local business, wildlife, and sense of community, as well as the connections among these features. Since returning to Illinois, we have been busy analyzing these data to learn more about how people are thinking about pressures that lie on the horizon. We are also coming to appreciate the diversity of perspectives that have been expressed. We will be sharing results on our website and at the [International Symposium on Society and Resource Management](#), as well as a workshop at the University of Amsterdam in the Netherlands to gain insight from other researchers that study communities and conservation.



Our focus group in McKinley Village was a hit! Thanks to Rose Keller for spreading the word.

We will continue holding group discussions with local communities over the summer. During our next visit, we will plan on continuing data collection through these group discussions and individual mapping exercises to gain a more complete understanding of how the region is characterized. The information we gather from focus groups will guide development of a household survey focused on landscape change and preferences for growth, which will take place next year so stay tuned!!



Dana Johnson facilitated a discussion about our research. Thanks to Cantwell School for opening up their doors and welcoming us!!

WE ARE HIRING!

We are hiring a local community representative to work as a research intern over the summer to help us conduct interviews and improve our understanding of local communities and residents. Contact Ben Leitschuh (bleits2@illinois.edu) for more information!



We are forming an **Executive Committee of key representatives from the local community** to help guide our research. Thanks to the people who have agreed to share their knowledge and help us keep our research relevant and flowing back to members of the local communities around Denali!! We are looking to expand this group in the future to make sure all relevant interest groups are represented and our research reflects a variety of perspectives. Thus far, we have been fortunate to hear from people involved with the organizations listed below. We will be expanding this list in the future as our project grows.

- ⇒ **Denali Chamber of Commerce**
- ⇒ **Denali Borough**
- ⇒ **Camp Denali**
- ⇒ **Ahtna Inc.**
- ⇒ **Denali Fly Fishing Guides**
- ⇒ **Denali Borough School District**
- ⇒ **National Park Service**
- ⇒ **And more organizations to come!!**



We are learning about mushing as a way of life. Shout out to the Santos family @ The Wolf's Den Kennel for an incredible time with their dogs!

NEXT STEPS!

Summer 2019 is fast approaching, and we are excited to return to the area and learn more about how members of the local communities around Denali are visioning for change and characterizing their connections to social-ecological places. We have a few activities on the docket and hope you can participate in different ways.

- ⇒ One-week visit to Nikolai to learn more about this community. We would like to hold **participatory mapping exercises** that facilitate an exchange whereby elders in the community share their knowledge and provide an opportunity for others to learn more about this history and values of places.
- ⇒ We will continue our conversations with members of the local community during **formal and informal interviews**. We are looking forward to learning more about the landscape, the people who care about it, and the various agencies and organizations who will influence its future.
- ⇒ Focus groups shall return!! We are looking forward to more group-based conversations and will be holding focus groups in Healy, Talkeetna, and Anderson. Please help us raise awareness of these opportunities, and if you didn't get the chance to **share your opinions** during our March visit, please participate this summer and help shape the future of the Denali region.



Example of a participatory map completed during another project about the values and meanings of places in Illinois.

Please contact us if you have any questions or thoughts about this project!

Carena van Riper

Project Leader

Department of Natural Resources & Environmental Sciences

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Phone: 217-244-9317

Email: cvanripe@illinois.edu

Check out our new website :

<https://publish.illinois.edu/inclusive-conservation-in-denali/>



Bill Stewart

Project co-Leader

Department of Recreation Sport and Tourism

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Phone: 217-333-4410

Email: wstewart@illinois.edu

Other Members of our Team

Christopher Raymond, University of Helsinki

Ben Leitschuh, University of Illinois

Dana Johnson, University of Illinois

Julianna Rogowski, University of Illinois

David Nguyen, University of Illinois



WE LOOK FORWARD TO SEEING YOU THIS SUMMER!