

KEEPING IN TOUCH

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



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~We send our regards from IL to AK~

While COVID-19 has kept us away, we have been closely following news from the region, particularly around the Clear Fire and Pretty Rocks Landslide. We hope you've stayed healthy and in good spirits during the past tourism season!

NOTES FROM THE TEAM!

We are thrilled to finally share a fourth issue of the "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 reconnect with members of the local community like you and keep you up to speed on our project happenings.

In the pages of this newsletter, you'll see that we highlight how we're sharing what we've learned about community perspectives on future growth, and explain how we are working toward

our goal of enhancing processes for inclusive conservation across all communities in the Denali region. Each of our newsletters aims to keep you updated on different parts of our project and informed about 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 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.

PUBLISHING FINDINGS FROM DENALI

Our team at the University of Illinois has been hard at work consolidating data we've collected from residents of the great state of Alaska over the years, and preparing to report out on findings through multiple information outlets.

We have been preparing a **technical report of our team's findings from the Denali region**. This report is being prepared for and will be published through the National Park Service. The Interior report summarizes our team's research process for identifying and supporting a process for inclusive conservation in the Denali region, and is structured around the three objectives that guided our work with Denali residents. Those objectives were characterizing the meanings of places and how they are changing in the region; understanding the experiences, perspectives, and preferences of residents; and evaluating social learning about inclusive conservation through deliberation.

The team has also prepared a statewide technical report for publication through the Zenodo open-access repository. This report focuses on **protected area management perspectives** that our team collected **from residents across the entire state of Alaska**, and is structured around four distinct topical areas that will help researchers, decision-makers, and/or other stakeholders better understand and more effectively engage with residents of Alaska around protected area management. These topical areas encompass basic descriptive information about Alaska's residents; current views of public land management in Alaska; beliefs held and behaviors practiced by Alaskan residents; and long-term drivers of change among Alaskan residents.

Finally, a **research article**, "Perceived inclusivity and trust in protected area management decisions among stakeholders in Alaska", **has been published in the open-access journal *People and Nature***. Spearheaded by Devin Goodson, this study examines the relationship between trust and



Congratulations to team member Devin Goodson for his first published paper related to this project!

stakeholder perceptions of inclusivity in public land management decisions. Devin and his co-authors found that, on average, Alaskan residents were not disposed to trust others; tended to not trust the federal government; did not believe federal land management agencies shared their values; and did not believe these agencies adhered to a moral code of conduct. Beliefs about decision-making based on a moral code of conduct were most important in explaining what opportunities to contribute to public land management were perceived. Information sources about protected areas were also critical in explaining perceived levels of inclusion in how resource management decisions were reported. Goodson et al. (2022) offers a roadmap for agencies to improve public relations and work towards a model of inclusive conservation around protected areas. The full article can be read here: <https://besjournals-onlinelibrary-wiley-com.proxy2.library.illinois.edu/doi/full/10.1002/>

IMPLICATIONS OF OUR WORK

Those we've heard from and spoken with throughout our time in the Denali region have repeatedly emphasized the need for transparency and opportunities to engage natural resource management; greater access to decision-making processes; and more information on plans for public input. The results and recommendations emerging from our work are meant to inform both resource managers and residents; facilitate a more productive exchange between agencies and stakeholders of opinions and visions for the future; and support new platforms for deliberating and voicing opinions about the future of the Denali region and the park. The perception of inclusivity in natural resources decision-making is crucial, yet often overlooked. With our work, we seek to provide the Denali region with the tools this collaborative, inclusive conservation process needs.



Knowing & understanding what matters to our neighbors leads to greater inclusivity in conservation efforts around protected areas!

HOUSEHOLD SURVEY

The University of Illinois team carried out a regional household survey as part of Phase 2 of our 'Inclusive Conservation' research project with communities in the Denali region. Building off of two years of in-depth discussions with residents, this survey was meant to evaluate Denali region residents' connections to places, pro-environmental behavior, visions for the future, values, and more!

Our household survey was mailed in three waves to 3,000 residents living between Fairbanks and Talkeetna in communities along the Parks Highway, as well as residents of Minchumina. After accounting for removals due to vacancies, non-deliverables, etc., we received completed surveys from 332 Interior Alaska residents, for a response rate of 12.3%.

Thank you to everyone who took this opportunity to express your opinions and help us better represent and understand issues related to public land management!

A Survey of Residents in Alaska:

Understanding your experiences and preferences for public land management



Alaska is a great place to live, yet there are many changes influencing the landscape. To understand how residents like you are responding to these changes, the University of Illinois is partnering with local organizations to learn more about your opinions and experience. You are one of a small number of people chosen for this study, because you live in the region. Your response is important to us. Results from this research will be made publicly available and shared with community leaders and decision-makers. All personal information will be kept confidential and your participation is voluntary.

Please answer each question carefully and save any additional comments for the final page. This questionnaire will take about 20 minutes to complete.



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

DENALI DISCUSSION FORUM

Although we were unable to visit Alaska due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we wanted to continue learning about why the Denali region is special to all of you. So for three weeks from January-February 2021, we held an online dialogue called the Denali Discussion Forum. The goal of opening this forum was to encourage residents from the Denali region to discuss important topics, provide a space for them to learn from each other, and then share the important take-aways from these conversations with decision-makers. Throughout the Denali Discussion Forum, 39 residents exchanged 400+ comments about a wide array of topics such as the benefits of living in the region, threats to the region, management practices, and their values.

Residents identified 15 benefits of living in the Denali Region. The most frequently discussed benefits included wildness and natural beauty, a strong sense of community, and an Alaskan way of life (i.e., independence, “living with less”). Alternatively, eight major threats to the region were acknowledged. Most discussions about threats centered around climate variability, development, and tourism.

Residents exchanged ideas for management practices that reflected the benefits and threats previously discussed. Many suggestions embraced improved management of ecosystems, landscapes, and trails. Residents also frequently discussed the importance of public engagement in decision-making. Smaller conversations broke out where residents identified issues with enforcement of pre-existing laws and how to handle new development tied to tourism.

Residents discussed what guiding principles informed their decisions about management. These varied by individual but people frequently mentioned



Common words participants used to discuss the outcomes of the Denali Discussion Forum

a commitment to the land and sustainability, pursuit of a full life, and compassion. Residents also reflected on their respective communities with many agreeing that community members often shared similar values. There were also important conversations around how land managers should center community values at the heart of future decisions.

What we've described here is just a snapshot of the discussion forum aspect of our project, but if you want to learn more you can read an in-depth summary from each week of discussion here: <https://denalidiscussion.org/weekly-discussion-summary/>. Additionally, we've been reporting out on these findings to the NPS and community over the last year, so be on the lookout for presentations on this topic!

MEETING WITH OUR EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

We convened our local Executive Committee for a remote meeting in February 2021. This committee consists of ten key leaders in the Denali region representing sectors such as education, local government, subsistence use, local business, public land management (at the state and federal level), and industrial tourism.

During this exchange, we learned about the implications of the global pandemic on local organizations, businesses, and the community, as well as receiving valuable feedback on our project findings and how they can be used by residents. We concluded this meeting by discussing strategies for circulating these findings with residents and strategies. We look forward to putting these plans into action during our upcoming site visit! Our team is tremendously grateful for the Executive Committee's insights and commitment to the Denali community.



RETURNING TO THE DENALI REGION

The University of Illinois team is **planning our next in-person trip to the Denali region in 2023!** It has been quite some time since we've been able to go to Alaska in-person, due to the global COVID-19 pandemic. But as the formal research phases of our study draw to a close, we are committed to making at least one more in-person trip to Alaska. Our goals for this visit will be to **discuss findings, implications, and publications that have emerged from our work in the region**, and of course to say **thank you to all those who've supported us over the years!** Both our Interior and Statewide technical reports are expected to be published by the time of our visit, and we hope these will make for good discussion pieces while we're in the neighborhood. Currently, we are aiming to go back to the Denali region in **April or May 2023**. We are very eager to see you all again soon!



All of us look forward to re-connecting with all of you during our next in-person visit to the Denali region!

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

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Check out our project website:

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

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WE LOOK FORWARD TO SEEING YOU NEXT SPRING!