

Center for State of the Parks



LAKE CLARK NATIONAL PARK AND PRESERVE

Lake Clark National Park and Preserve lies in the pristine headwaters of southwest Alaska's Bristol Bay, home to the world's largest remaining runs of wild sockeye salmon, indigenous cultures, and renewable resource-based economies dependent upon clean waters. While this virtually roadless region has seen limited human-induced impacts, an industrial mining district being explored and designed just a few miles outside Lake Clark could put at risk lifestyles that have evolved over thousands of years, intact and naturally functioning ecosystems, and much more.

The National Parks Conservation Association's Center for State of the Parks recently assessed the condition of natural and cultural resources at Lake Clark National Park and Preserve, awarding some of the highest scores of any park assessed to date. Natural resources are in "excellent" condition (score of 91 out of 100), and the park's cultural resources program is outstanding, receiving **the highest cultural resources score of any of the more than 60 parks** assessed to date (score of 84 out of 100). The key now is ensuring that Lake Clark's special resources remain properly managed and protected from adjacent land developments, such as the proposed Pebble Mine. Highlights and chal-



Paddlers enjoy the splendor of Kontrashibuna Lake, nestled in the rugged Chigmit Mountains within Lake Clark National Park and Preserve.

lenges identified in the assessment report are included here.

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Salmon anchor the economy, traditional lifeways, and ecosystem.** A source of renewable economic and subsistence values to the people of Alaska, wild salmon are also the cornerstone of the Bristol Bay ecosystem. Salmon spawning in freshwaters, such as Lake Clark, and then dying in vast numbers, transport millions of tons of nutrients from the rich marine environment to Alaska's freshwater systems and adjacent uplands.

- **Dynamic ecosystem processes showcased.** Active glaciers, volcanoes, tectonic plates, wild rivers, and extreme weather have shaped the region's landscape and its people. Lake Clark National Park and Preserve includes one of the largest designated wilderness areas in the United States and is a naturally functioning ecosystem.
- **Dedicated staff provide depth of knowledge and expertise.** Many staff have been at the park for decades, providing a continuity of institutional knowledge and commitment to both the natural landscape and the local community. Even so, the park would benefit from operational budget increases to support additional staff to study, manage, protect, and interpret natural and cultural resources, and address adjacent land development issues.
- **Publications and outreach programs outstanding.** Park staff are innovative and proactive in documenting the rich historic, cultural, and natural resources at Lake Clark and educating the public through publications, partnerships, websites, and community outreach.
- **Private parcels conserved.** The Park Service has acquired nearly two dozen inholdings (more than 10,000 acres) and is open to acquiring additional private parcels from willing sellers. Through these acquisitions the park has extended protection of critical sockeye spawning habitat,



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delicate riparian areas, historic sites, and Cook Inlet coastline.

- **Traditional knowledge valued.** Lake Clark respects and values the traditional ecological and cultural knowledge of the region's indigenous peoples and rural residents, often incorporating their insights into management practices. Local residents have shared observations of wildlife and climate trends, recollections passed down from previous generations, and priceless historic photographs. The park also has a very successful ethnography program that scored the highest of any park the Center for State of the Parks has assessed to date.

CHALLENGES

- **Advanced industrial mining explorations in progress on adjacent lands.** The pursuit of extensive, untapped (but low-grade and highly reactive) deposits of gold and copper on State of Alaska mining claims, staked only miles from Lake Clark park's southwestern boundary, dwarfs other immediate challenges facing the Bristol Bay region and park resource managers. If built, the proposed Pebble Mine could become the largest mining project in Alaska, the largest open-pit mine in North America, and a catalyst of industrialization in the headwaters of one of the last remaining wild sockeye salmon fisheries on Earth. Since 2003, approximately 1,000 square miles of mining claims have been staked around the Pebble deposit. And in December 2008, the Bureau of Land Management finalized a plan to open more than 1 million acres of federal public lands in the Bristol

Bay watershed to mining, a move that could multiply the prospects and compound the impacts of a future mining district on lands near Lake Clark and Katmai National Parks. Predicted mining impacts at Lake Clark park include degraded air and water quality (with associated impacts on fisheries), habitat disturbance and displacement of wildlife and birds, increased competition for subsistence and/or sport resources from new residents and mine workers, and diminishment of the visitor experience (due to a loss of wilderness character).

- **Game management strategies are complex and require cooperation.** Lake Clark National Preserve covers 1.4 million acres and contains rich wildlife habitat. The Park Service and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game's wildlife management strategies can conflict when the State's permitted hunting methods and means (including season length and bag limits) do not align with federal mandates to preserve healthy wildlife populations. This is especially true regarding management of populations of predators such as wolves and brown bears.
- **Extensive historic and archaeological sites.** The park and preserve contains highly significant and unique known archaeological resources chronicling more than 10,000 years of habitation by indigenous peoples. Approximately 40,000 acres have been surveyed; yet, this represents less than 1 percent of the park. A recently funded archaeological overview and assessment will serve as a vital tool for identifying, prioritizing, and planning archaeological work in the park.

ABOUT NPCA AND THE CENTER FOR STATE OF THE PARKS

Since 1919, the National Parks Conservation Association has been the leading voice of the American people in protecting and enhancing our National Park System. NPCA, its members, and partners work together to protect the park system and preserve our nation's natural, historical, and cultural heritage for generations to come.

NPCA initiated the State of the Parks program in 2000 to assess the condition of natural and cultural resources in the parks. The goal is to provide information that will help policy-makers, the public, and the National Park Service improve resource conditions in national parks, celebrate successes as models for other parks, and ensure a lasting legacy for future generations.

CONTACT US

For a copy of NPCA's full report on Lake Clark National Park and Preserve, to get copies of reports on other parks, or for more information about the Center for State of the Parks, visit www.npca.org/stateoftheparks or contact Dr. James Nations, vice president for the Center for State of the Parks, at jnations@npca.org.

For more information about NPCA's work in Lake Clark National Park and Preserve, contact NPCA's Alaska Regional Office at 907.277.6722 or akro@npca.org. Visit the park online at www.npca.org/alaska and www.nps.gov/lacl. For media inquiries, contact NPCA's media relations manager Lindsay Bartsh at 415.989.9921 or lbartsh@npca.org. To learn more about how to help improve the health of our national parks, visit www.npca.org/take_action.