

Memorandum (3-13-78)

To: Rep. Paul Tsongas, Rich Ahrenberg
From: Jack Hession, Ben Shaine, Alaska Coalition
Re: Addition to Wrangell-St. Elias Wilderness
Possible amendment to counter deleting amendment by Don Young

Don Young will probably offer an amendment to decrease wilderness in the Wrangells. The amendment will probably remove wilderness from the National Preserve and parts of the Park as well. Because the Subcommittee and the Committee have substantially reduced the size of the Park already, these deletions will remove protection from large and important areas.

Defense of the existing Committee Print wilderness boundary against the deletions is appended in the attached briefing papers.

A counter amendment is to add the uplands around Chisana (pronounced Shu-Sha-Na) to the wilderness. These lands, part of the Preserve, include some of the very best hiking, camping, and horse-packing country in Alaska. Because so much of the Wrangells is covered by rock and ice, these lands are especially important for recreation. Wilderness designation would protect the experience now enjoyed by the many hunters that use the area and would continue to use it under this Act. The area is hunted extensively using horses, so access is even less of a problem than in areas hunted predominantly by airplane. Existing use patterns, such as airstrips, continue of course in all wilderness in H.R. 39.

Parts of the proposed wilderness are within mineralized belts. But the boundaries are drawn to exclude the areas of major interest. The Orange Hill-Bond Creek area is excluded, along with both alternative routes to possible mines there, from Nabesna and up the Nabesna River. Another exclusion is made around the old settlement of Chisana, so that the mineral process can apply to that area. Nothing of significance has been located around Chisana in many decades. Although the area is surrounded by the wilderness, access could be provided via the transportation process of the bill, should discoveries be made in the future.

The total acreage added to the Wrangell-St. Elias wilderness is about 920,000.