

# KEEPING IN TOUCH

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



## NOTES FROM THE TEAM!!

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~Wishing you well from afar ~

Although our research will be continuing remotely due to COVID-19, we are following news from Alaska with anticipation and hope you are staying healthy and in good spirits!

We are delighted to share the third issue of the “Keeping in Touch” newsletter as part of our research about building scenarios and reflecting the future visions 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 enhancing processes for inclusive conservation across all communities in the Denali region. Each of our

newsletters aims to share different parts of our project and keep you posted on our plans for opening up a dialogue and building strategies that respond to community needs and conservation objectives.

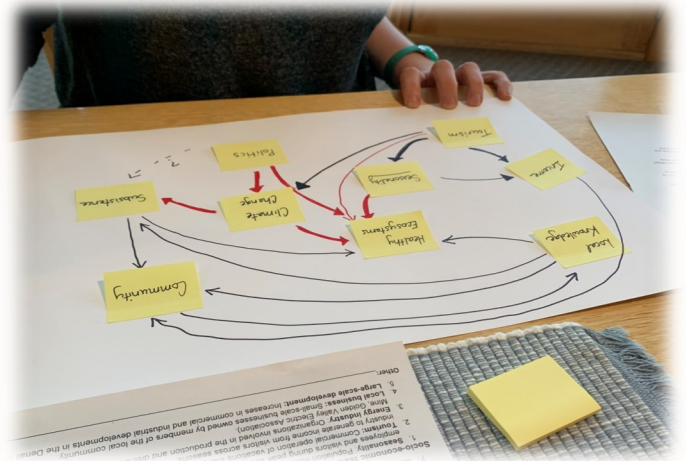
We are grateful for your interest in and support of our ongoing research with communities in the region. We hope you enjoy Keeping in Touch as we strive to enhance the impact of our research and make sure you benefit from this study.

## CHARACTERIZING THE DENALI REGION

During our last visit in January, we learned a lot about people's connections to places in the region, their histories, knowledge, relevant resource management challenges, and concerns about the future. We spoke with residents of Talkeetna, the Stampede, and McKinley Village, and prioritized meeting people who could share perspectives on local business operations. Through conversations and individual mapping exercises, we collected data on the challenges that many business owners are facing and their views of the future. **A rapidly changing social-ecological landscape has created uncertainty around the future of tourism and recreation** - facets of the Denali region that many local businesses depend on. Understanding how to best prepare for this change is a top priority for Denali business owners.

We appreciated the chance to learn about people's perspectives and reflect on findings from the interviews we have conducted over the past two years. Key lessons from conversations with residents across the Denali region have helped us better understand the importance of the area and the unique challenges faced by people living there. Some of these lessons include:

- Tensions exist between environmental sustainability and growth of tourism in the Denali region. The tensions at play in Denali differ from the traditional tradeoffs associated with national parks related to use versus preservation.
- Subsistence use is a complex and sensitive issue in Alaska. Several residents are concerned by the policies and approach to subsistence use eligibility of Denali National Park and Preserve, and the federal government more broadly.
- Residents' attitudes toward the decision-makers overseeing public lands in Alaska range from an uneasy alliance with the federal government to a sense of betrayal and deceit. The extent of each of these feelings is an open question.
- There is an expressed lack of representation of residents' voices in federal policies related to protected area management.



**Thanks to all of the people we met with this past winter and who shared such interesting perspectives during our mapping exercises shown here!**

In addition to interviews, findings from the individual mapping exercises we've conducted have helped us see how residents characterize the Denali region and identify potential "drivers of change" that are playing the biggest role in shaping the landscape. These data have shed light on the features that should be most carefully considered by decision-makers. Here are some highlights from our ongoing analysis:

- The shared importance of wildlife, sense of community, subsistence, and healthy ecosystems were most valued across all communities within the scope of our research.
- Tourism has been described as one of the most central features characterizing Cantwell, McKinley Village, the Stampede, and Talkeetna, but not Healy or Anderson.
- Main drivers of change include federal legislation, public land management agencies, industrial tourism, and natural resource extraction.
- Features that were identified as most vulnerable to change include the economy, sense of community, and local customs
- Features that were considered less vulnerable to change include wilderness and public land

## ENGAGING OUR LOCAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

**O**ur local Executive Committee came together for a discussion about our project the last time we were in town. This committee consists of ten key leaders in the region representing sectors such as education, local government, subsistence use, local business, public land management (at the state and federal level), and industrial tourism. This was a tremendous opportunity to receive feedback on our research direction and identify ways that our findings could be used by residents. During this exchange, we were particularly grateful for the input offered on our upcoming survey process, future directions of our research and our approach to partnerships. Our team looks forward to engaging members of the local Executive Committee during our next site visit!



**We very much appreciated the discussion with our Executive Committee at the Murie Science and Learning Center. This group of experts is providing continued input and guidance on our project!**

## TOURING CLEAR AIR FORCE STATION



**A special thank you to Major Erik Haugen for the fantastic tour of CLEAR!**

events) that have been hosted by the Air Force station. We're grateful to have had the chance to learn more about CLEAR and its significance to residents of the Denali region.

**A** highlight of our trip was touring CLEAR Air Force Station, and learning about the station's main duty of detecting incoming intercontinental and submarine-launched ballistic missiles. It was fascinating to tour the facilities, gain a sense of the Air Force station's operations, and hear about upcoming advancements. We also learned about the importance of CLEAR's contribution to the local economy, and were struck by the year-round employment opportunities available to many residents in the surrounding communities. Beyond surveillance, we learned that CLEAR is an integrated part of the communities in the Denali region. We heard from several employees about CLEAR's provision of emergency services (e.g., fire suppression) to residents throughout the Interior region and several community events (e.g., high school social



## SHARING FINDINGS IN OUR PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITY

The University of Illinois hosted the 2020 Academy of Leisure Sciences' Conference on Research and Teaching, and our team was eager to make our presence felt! **Evan Salcido presented research examining the relationship between values assigned to features of the park landscape**, and the behavioral activities of park visitors. Drawing from a 2016 on-site survey, this research indicated that park visitors most heavily value the park as a pristine wilderness area with high ecological integrity, and left Denali intending to act more pro-environmentally than they reportedly had prior to their visit. Understanding how values relate to behavior before and after visiting the park is key to understanding pro-environmental behavior in protected areas, and to sustaining outdoor recreation opportunities and landscape integrity.



**Ben Leitschuh sharing his Alaska Native and non-native subsistence use research**

Meanwhile, **Ben Leitschuh presented research focused on understanding subsistence use in both Alaska Native and non-native communities**, and exploring policy strategies to enhance representation of native voices. Preliminary findings showed complex subsistence use patterns in and around Denali, with differing motives among Alaska Natives and non-native residents. Many non-native users linked subsistence to views of the land as a harsh place that requires self-reliance, but also allows for personal freedoms not available in urban areas. Alaska Native users often tied subsistence use – or “customary and traditional use” – to practicing sovereignty and maintaining their connection to a land imbued with the memories, spirits, and stories of their ancestors. Undergraduate student **David Nguyen also presented results from an analysis of interviews that commented on off-road vehicle policy implementation** in the region. These findings suggest a need for the federal and state government to re-visit current structures of subsistence regulations and adaptive management. Let us know if you'd like to learn more about any of these results!

## LIFE DURING COVID-19

Our lives have changed so much during the COVID-19 global pandemic. We understand that the people and businesses in the Denali region have been deeply affected, and we are keeping you all in our thoughts. Team member Ruth Colianni has been keeping us posted about local happenings and the **efforts of the Denali Recovery Alliance, Chamber of Commerce, and Denali Borough** to consider the effects of the pandemic on local communities. We have also appreciated updates from our partners the Talkeetna Community Council and National Park Service. Our team recognizes the strong and nimble leadership of the Denali area, and are impressed with the proactive position being taken to engage current events.


In Illinois, starting in March, our campus shifted to remote teaching and learning, and we transitioned to working from home and in physical isolation. We've become conscious of social distancing and doing what we can to follow good practices. It feels overwhelming at times, but we're coming together and looking forward to being on the other side of this virus. While we've **postponed our plans to spend time in Denali this summer and fall**, we continue to keep in touch through friends and associates living and working there. We are all in this together!

## LOOK OUT FOR AN UPCOMING HOUSEHOLD SURVEY!

We are excited to announce that we will be launching a regional household survey as part of the next phase of our ‘Inclusive Conservation’ research project with communities in the Denali region. Building on two years of in-depth discussions with residents, our survey aims to evaluate Denali region residents’ connections to places, pro-environmental behavior, visions for the future, values, and more!




Our survey will be sent to 3,000 residents living between Fairbanks and Talkeetna in communities along the Parks Highway and residents of Minchumina (including you!). We will be launching our survey in June and copies will be sent via mail to P.O. boxes and residential addresses. There will be an option to mail back a completed hard copy using a postage paid envelope, or to fill in your responses online. Keep an eye out for the survey in your mailbox during the month of June! Your responses are tremendously important to us, and we hope that you take this opportunity to express your opinion 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>

## INTRODUCING NEW TEAM MEMBER

Riley Andrade has joined our team as a Postdoctoral Research Associate! Riley is a Landscape Ecologist and Geographer from Arizona State University. Her research is focused on human-environment interactions, including attitudinal factors, landscape management, and biodiversity. Outside of her research, Riley enjoys outdoor activities such as hiking and rock climbing, as well as a good craft beer! She is excited to join the team to work on inclusive conservation topics in the Denali region.

Riley will be responsible for leading a social learning forum, where the team hopes to engage with residents of the Denali region to deliberate on issues surrounding environmental change and management. Look for the invitation to participate in the upcoming regional household survey!

**We are very fortunate to have Riley join our University of Illinois team!**



**Meet Riley!**



**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/>



**Other Key Members of our Team**

Rose Keller  
Amy Craver  
Erik Johnson  
Christopher Raymond

Riley Andrade  
Evan Salcido  
Dana Johnson  
Ruth Colianni

Gillian Rowe  
Ben Leitschuh  
Haley Ware  
Yen-Hsuan Chang

David Nguyen  
Cynthia Segura  
Gina Fumagalli



**THANK YOU FOR CONTINUING TO SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCES & THOUGHTS WITH US!**