

THE
FUTURE
OF
AMERICA'S
NATIONAL
PARKS

First Annual
Centennial Strategy for

Kenai Fjords National Park

August 2007

CENTENNIAL INITIATIVE



Site: KEFJ

Year: 2007

Vision Statement

Established just 27 years ago, Kenai Fjords National Park continues to mature as one of Alaska's high use road accessible destinations. With visitation that has increased 150% in the last 15 years, the park struggles with staffing, planning, program, and infrastructure needs to accomplish the park's mission. While visitation increases, global climate change and the rapidly evolving marine ecosystem in the Gulf of Alaska have had profound impacts on park resources with declines upwards of 80% in at least two species of marine mammals and one seabird species that we know of.

As many new parks have, KEFJ identified the need for a visitor center and administrative facilities. In the last ten years, KEFJ in collaboration with the City of Seward and the USFS have been working on the Mary Lowell Center and have completed land acquisition and schematic design. Completion of this project remains the highest priority for improving park operations and for providing basic visitor needs. KEFJ will continue to improve its operational sustainability (increased efficiency and alternative fuels/technology) and continue to be climate neutral (carbon offsets and alternative fuels) for 100% of its park operations.

Working with local tourboat companies, KEFJ provides interpretive services to approximately 140K visitors annually. The park will build upon this highly successful partnership by assisting the tour companies to improve the quality of their interpretive programs. KEFJ would like to implement a statewide Interpretation and Education Renaissance with special emphasis on: encouraging and adopting innovation in appropriate technologies and employing established interpretive standards as assessment measurements for program evaluation. Seward's success as the "Gateway to Kenai Fjords National Park" translates into a seasonal housing market that doesn't meet the need of park staff. Either building new park housing or funding for leasing long-term seasonal housing will facilitate the park being able accommodate additional volunteers and seasonal employees.

As the home of the Ocean Alaska Science and Learning Center the park will lead the region on the implementation of the NPS Ocean Stewardship Action Plan. The park will work cooperatively with partners to improve its monitoring of the physical and biological changes associated with climate change. KEFJ will continue its Gateway Community planning efforts with the City of Seward and other surrounding communities to ensure that growth and diversification remain compatible to recreational and resource preservation needs. KEFJ would like to develop appropriate winter recreation and education opportunities at the Exit Glacier including the development of a year round alternative transportation route to the Exit Glacier.

Newer, faster boats have made more remote areas of the Kenai Fjords accessible for day-use, the park will restore its coastal management capacity in terms of vessels, facilities, and staff presence. In response to a new lodge development on one of many private landholdings along the coast, the park will seek cooperative solutions to minimize the impact to critical habitats.

Park/ Superintendent/ Program Manager

Jeff Mow

Site: KEFJ

STEWARDSHIP

Provide inspiring, safe, and accessible places for people to enjoy - the standard to which all other park systems aspire.

Other Park/ Program performance goal(s)

There are three signature visitor experiences at KEFJ: a boat tour into the Kenai Fjords, an up close and personal experience with the Exit Glacier, and the rewarding views of the Harding Icefield from the Harding Icefield trail. Due to the rapid retreat of the Exit Glacier terminus, providing that glacier terminus experience has been the most difficult one to provide. The park is currently making some trail reroutes and additions to maintain the experience, but we anticipate that we will continue to be challenged over the next several years as existing opportunities diminish and new ones become available. The park will continue to work with the 4 mile trail network at the terminus of the Exit glacier in order to provide all visitors with the best opportunity to experience the Exit Glacier. To that end the park has developed a lighter more flexible standard for trail and wayside development. We know that flexibility and "light-handed construction" will be necessary in an era of climate change.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Site: KEFJ

STEWARDSHIP

Improve the condition of park resources and assets.

Restore native habitats by controlling invasive species and reintroducing key plant and animal species.

KEFJ has an active program to document and control invasive plants. Efforts to this time have primarily focused on the Exit Glacier Area; the program is expanding to provide better protection and restoration of coastal areas as well.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Improve high-priority assets to acceptable condition, as measured by the Facility Condition Index.

The completion of the Mary Lowell Center Line Item Construction Project will be the primary way to ensure the park's highest priority asset has an acceptable FCI measure. A model of federal, state, and local partnership, the facility will be owned by the NPS, but the design, construction, and operation will be shared jointly by the NPS, City of Seward, and USFS. Secondary partners include Alaska State Parks, the National Marine Fisheries Service, and the Alaska Natural Association. The visitor center will serve as the one-stop for state and federal public lands located in the area. The law enforcement portion of the building is designed to be shared by LE staff from four agencies. The USFS and the NPS will have administrative offices that share common areas. Portions of the visitor center will be available to the community for local events and small conferences during off-hours and off-season periods.

The NPS will vacate the present Information Center at the Boat Harbor and the Ray building in downtown Seward.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Improve the natural resources in parks, as measured by the vital signs developed under the Natural Resource Challenge.

As part of the SWAN I&M network vital signs monitoring is being implemented within KEFJ. Park management will track monitoring results in order to identify appropriate management actions to protect or improve natural resources within the park.

In addition, monitoring and research on non-I&M vital signs will continue or increase. This includes black and brown bear populations, mountain goats, Kittlitz's murrelets, and the Exit Glacier.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Site: KEFJ

STEWARDSHIP

Improve the condition of park resources and assets.

Complete all cultural resource inventories for designated priority resources.

Complete assessment of all park cultural resources for appropriate designations, such as inclusion on the list of classified structures and the Alaska Heritage Resources Survey.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Other Park/ Program performance goal(s)

Improve protection and restoration of coastal resources through park-based and partnership strategies, including the Ocean Park Strategy, acquisition of coastal inholdings, development of conservation easements and a Marine Protected Area, and active partnerships with local native corporations for cooperative management. Restore and increase the park's presence by augmenting vessel capabilities, establishing facilities, and increasing coastal staffing.

Restore cultural and natural resources in the Nuka Bay Historic District by removing non-historic structures and hazardous waste associated with the Kinney and Glass Heifner Mines. Appropriately close high priority adits and shafts. Develop and implement plan for appropriate action to remove or mitigate mercury pollution at the Sonny Fox/Kinney Mine.

Accomplish the Exit Glacier Area Plan and GMP amendment by developing and implementing indicators and standards with monitoring protocols for the summer management zones and pursuing additional data needed to make decisions for winter management. Pursue planning process for completion of Wilderness designation for KEFJ initiated in 1989.

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Site: KEFJ

STEWARDSHIP

Assure that no compelling chapter in the American heritage experience remains untold and that strategically important landscapes are acquired, as authorized by Congress.

Other Park/ Program performance goal(s)

The park will continue to work with partners to seek funding for conservation easements on private lands located along the Kenai Fjords coast.

KEFJ will conduct research, including ethnographic, archeological and social science disciplines, to document traditional uses of the park and immediately surrounding area.

KEFJ will continue to develop staff, facility and planning capabilities for cultural resource management, including stewardship of museum collections, to ensure that all chapters of the area's historic and prehistoric heritage are preserved.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Site: KEFJ

STEWARDSHIP

Serve as the Preeminent resource laboratory by applying excellence in science and scholarship to understand and respond to environmental changes.

Other Park/ Program performance goal(s)

KEFJ will continue to participate in research and monitoring initiatives involving critical species, vegetation, habitats, and glacial dynamics associated with the Harding Icefield and the rapidly changing marine ecosystem of the Gulf of Alaska. While there are many monitoring systems that came to the park in the wake of the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill, there will be many more initiatives coming forward as a result of climate change and the potential impacts to the Harding Icefield.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Site: KEFJ

STEWARDSHIP

Encourage children to be future conservationists.

Other Park/ Program performance goal(s)

KEFJ will expand the use of SCA, YCC, and Public Land Corps students. These programs have been very successful for the park and as funding increases for these programs grow, the park will increase the use of them. These programs have been integral to our trail maintenance and construction program, exotic plant management, visitor information desks, and our interpretive programs. We routinely have more applicants than positions for the local YCC positions.

The park has been very successful with the Junior Ranger Program and as the venues where we can offer the program have grown, so have the number of students completing the program. The park offers the Junior Ranger program at seven venues around the park and on some days as many as 50 children will have completed the program. Through its education programs, a uniformed ranger park will contact every school age child in Seward each year. Through the Ocean Alaska Science and Learning Center, the park will support the statewide qualifier competition for the National Ocean Science Bowl held in Seward each year.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Site: KEFJ

ENVIRONMENT

Reduce environmental impacts of park operations.

Reduce the environmental impacts of park operations on air and water quality.

KEFJ will continue to be climate neutral for 100% of its park operations. The park is currently climate neutral for 100% of its vehicle use, marine vessel use, electricity use, heating fuel use, and air travel associated with TDY. The park will continue to explore ways to reduce, reuse, recycle in its daily operation as well as utilize carbon offsets for those activities where GHG emissions are unavoidable. the park will become a climate friendly park. The park will expand its pilot program to provide a carbon offset program to park visitors.

As a leader in demonstrating hydrogen fuel cell technology at a remote off the grid location, the park is committed to supporting the hydrogen fuel cell currently in use at the Exit Glacier. We will continue the partnership between the University of Alaska, the Denali foundation, and others as they explore this technologies application to other rural areas of the state.

The park will continue to purchase hybrid or electric vehicles as the fleet is replaced over time..

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Other Park/ Program performance goal(s)

KEFJ will continue to take a leadership role in the state in the management of backcountry human waste. The park will build upon it's success in working with commercial guides to haul out human waste by implementing alternative technologies at the public use cabin sites.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Site: KEFJ

ENVIRONMENT

Inspire an environmental conscience in Americans.

Establish programs to showcase exemplary environmental practices and increase visitor awareness of how the practices apply to their daily lives, as measured by surveys.

KEFJ will continue to provide interpretive programs that speak directly to the impacts on park resources from climate change. Current programs highlight the park's activities and uses of carbon offsets. As the park finds new way to reduce it own GHG emission we will share those as well. The park will continue to interpret the hydrogen fuel cell at Exit Glacier and interpret the benefits and downsides with the public. The park will continue to find new ways to interpret changes due to climate change using technology and other interpretive media.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Demonstrate environmental excellence through increased use of alternative energy and fuels at every park.

As a leader in demonstrating hydrogen fuel cell technology at a remote off the grid location, the park is committed to supporting the hydrogen fuel cell currently in use at the Exit Glacier. We will continue the partnership between the University of Alaska, the Denali foundation, and others as they explore this technology's application to other rural areas of the state.

In addition the park will consider other locally available alternative fuels such as wood or fish oil for the new Mary Lowell Center which is currently under design.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Site: KEFJ

ENVIRONMENT

Engage partners, communities, and visitors in shared environmental stewardship.

Other Park/ Program performance goal(s)

The Mary Lowell Center which is currently under design at the park is a partnership project between the USFS, NPS, and the City of Seward. As a public facility in downtown Seward, it is anticipated that there will be numerous public meeting to discuss its design. Current schematic design calls for LEED Silver certification and public meetings give us the opportunity to explain LEED design principles. The facility is being designed for maximum sustainability utilizing as many of the positive aspects of the local setting (no need for air conditioning). The project is also considering several alternative fuels including beetle-kill wood waste and fish oil from local fish processing facilities.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Site: KEFJ

RECREATION

Encourage collaboration among and assist park and recreation systems at every level—federal, regional, state, local—to help build an outdoor recreation network accessible to all Americans.

Rehabilitate over 2,000 miles of trails within or connected to national parks, including trails accessible to those with disabilities.

KEFJ will rehabilitate the 4.5 mile long Harding Icefield Trail to a standard appropriate to its level of use and previously identified desired future condition. Originally designed as a climber's access trail to the Harding Icefield, recent estimates are that upwards of 20,000 visitors a- year hike this trail to gain views of the park's primary resource. Many sections of the existing trail involve scrambling over short cliff sections.

Also in the area, the park will continue to rehabilitate the 4 mile trail network at the terminus of the Exit glacier in order to provide all visitors with the best opportunity to experience the Exit Glacier. The glacier's rapid retreat has diminished the experience at some vista locations. New vistas have been established and been made accessible, however trail management will likely need to "chase" the glacier to provide opportunities for visitor experience as the ice continues to recede.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Other Park/ Program performance goal(s)

KEFJ will work with local, state, and federal partners to provide a 9-mile long alternative access route to the Exit Glacier. Designed as a bike trail in the summer and a ski trail in the winter, this project will cross private, state, USFS, and NPS lands in linking to the existing bike trails along the Seward highway. This trail will parallel the existing Exit Glacier road, provide a seamless network of trails, and reduce user conflicts that occur on the existing road throughout the year.

The completion of the Mary Lowell Center will be a model of federal, state, and local partnership with a goal towards outdoor recreation. The facility will be owned by the NPS, but the design, construction, and operation will be shared jointly by the NPS, City of Seward, and USFS. Secondary partners include Alaska State Parks, the National Marine Fisheries Service, and the Alaska Natural Association. The visitor center will serve as the one-stop for state and federal public lands located around Resurrection bay and the eastern Kenai Peninsula.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Site: KEFJ

RECREATION

- Establish "volun-tourism" excursions to national parks for volunteers to help achieve natural and cultural resource protection goals.
- Increase annual volunteer hours by 100 percent, from 5.2 million hours to 10.4 million hours.

KEFJ will increase volunteer hours 100% over the next several years. This will be achieved by developing more capacity for volunteers such as housing and RV sites for volunteers. The park will also develop a site for a campground host position at the Exit Glacier campground. KEFj will expand its partnerships with civic groups and local businesses for volunteer work.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Site: KEFJ

RECREATION

- Expand partnerships with schools and boys and girls associations to show how national park experiences can improve children's lives.
- Other Park/ Program performance goal(s)

KEFJ is committed to working with partners such as the Alaska Natural History Association to develop more programs that can accommodate family and youth groups. Infrastructure is lacking within the park, but opportunities to partner abound in the community and in the surrounding National Forest. Development of the Jessie Lee Home Leadership School is a statewide effort to bring native and rural youth to a residential education program. KEFJ as one of many participating agencies that will use this venue to communicate national park values to youth.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Site: KEFJ

RECREATION

Focus national, regional, and local tourism efforts to reach diverse audiences and young people and to attract visitors to lesser-known parks.

Increase visitation by 25 percent at lesser-known parks through a national tourism effort aimed at helping people to discover the breadth of parks and experiences.

KEFJ is part of a statewide marketing plan to increase visitation to the road accessible parks, primarily KEFJ and WRST. The park is on track in 2007 to see an increase in visitation of 9-10%. KEFJ will continue to lead this statewide effort in that local infrastructure (hotels, restaurants, tour operators, etc) to sustain a 25%+ increase in visitation is in place. KEFJ will pursue OFS increases for staffing to accommodate such levels of increased visitation. Completion of the Mary Lowell Center as the park's first visitor center facility will be a major component of achieving this goal.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Increase the number of visitors that attend ranger-facilitated programs such as campfire talks, hikes, and school programs.

Increasing visitors to programs will require expanded program offerings and increasing staff. KEFJ will pursue a housing initiative that will enable the park to meet the demand for park interpretive services. While funding for additional seasonal staff may be available over the course of the Centennial Initiative, the ability to acquire seasonal housing in the local community has diminished. While the park has made good use of its local hire authority, those registers frequently lack applicants. Constructing seasonal housing or entering into leases that stimulate the private sector to construct seasonal housing will be crucial.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Site: KEFJ

EDUCATION

Cooperate with educators to provide curriculum materials, high-quality programs, and park-based and online learning.

Other Park/ Program performance goal(s)

KEFJ will work with partners such as the Alaska Natural History Association, the Alaska Sea Life Center and the USFS to offer an accredited summer seminar series designed for teachers. These seminars will take advantage of what each partner has to offer and will assist teachers in their ability to teach such topics as ocean conservation, climate change, glaciers, and forest health. The park would also like to implement the teacher-ranger-teacher program which draws educators from communities adjacent to parks as well as teachers from underserved urban areas. Participating teachers would be required to contribute to the Alaska learning exchange, perhaps through curricula development or hosting a blog, etc.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Site: KEFJ

EDUCATION

Introduce young people and their families to national parks by using exciting media and technology.

Increase the number of web hits through the introduction of advanced, interactive features that attract young people to national parks.

Launch, by September 2008, an overhauled web portal to Alaska's National Parks, connected to the nps.gov "Exploring the Real Thing" - or hosted by an educational partner - that replaces outdated "ParkWise" website with park curricula, inventory and reservations system for traveling trunks, teacher training materials, and a place for educators to communicate with park educators and with each other about curricula, share lesson plans, etc. Introduce new content such as e-lessons, electronic field trips, podcasts, and webcams, etc. Create platform for students to post their own images, blogs, and home movies (via NPS screening process) about their national park experiences to encourage peer-to-peer social marketing . Offering one-stop shopping for curricula on Alaska's national parks would allow educators to find what they want and to see what else might be available, ideally encouraging repeat visits to the site to see what is new. A consistent curriculum presentation would allow teachers to become familiar with our "style" and reinforce the idea that when you go to our website you will get X, Y, and Z.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Other Park/ Program performance goal(s)

Extend the Alaska Region's videoconferencing system with necessary equipment upgrades and connectivity protocol to facilitate ranger-facilitated distance learning programs. Broadcast from the backcountry into the classroom to connect students throughout the state and nation to their collective heritage. Completion of the Mary Lowell Center will provide for distance education opportunities.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Site: KEFJ

EDUCATION

Promote life-long learning to connect generations through park experiences.

Enroll an additional two million children in the Junior Ranger program.

The park has been very successful with the Junior Ranger Program and as the venues where we can offer the program have grown, so have the number of students completing the program. The park offers the Junior Ranger programs at seven venues around the park on some days issuing over 50 Junior Ranger Badges in a day. The park will develop an online program that will employ webcams and other technology in the park to illustrate the rapid changes due to climate change.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Site: KEFJ

EDUCATION

Impart to every American a sense of their citizen ownership of their national parks.

Increase visitors' satisfaction, understanding, and appreciation of the parks they visit.

For the last two year, KEFJ has reported a 99% visitor satisfaction rate with 100% rating on satisfaction with visitor services. The park will be working very hard to sustain these very high marks. Implementation of the Education renaissance strategy and the evaluation components will increase the effectiveness of interpretive programs and media. Completion of the Mary Lowell Center, completion of exhibits at the Exit Glacier Nature Center, and the installation of waysides on the Exit Glacier trail system will facilitate an increase in the rate of visitor understanding and appreciation.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Other Park/ Program performance goal(s)

The park will continue to develop ways for visitors participate in climate change mitigation during their visit to the park. The development of a carbon offset for park visitors has spawned several additional ideas for meaningful ways that visitors can reduce their GHG emissions during their visit. Feedback on the current carbon offset has been very positive and undoubtedly has meaningful impact.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Site: KEFJ

PROFESSIONALISM

Be one of the top 10 places to work in America.

Meet 100 percent of diversity recruitment goals by employing people who reflect the face of America.

KEFJ has had a long history of recruiting seasonal employees from the partnership universities in the southwest . We have found that the small town road accessible nature of the local community provides students from more urban settings enough amenities for them to be comfortable. Many of these students have gone on to careers with natural resource agencies. KEFJ will continue to recruit for seasonal positions from the partnership universities and will tap into other recruitment resources by advertising in diverse publications (Diversity Inc.), or local/community newspapers and we will utilize available technology by recruiting on U-Tube & MySpace. Additionally, KEFJ will develop a relationship with Alaska Native Consortiums to partner with for the purpose of recruitment.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Attain the highest employee satisfaction rate of all federal agencies, as measured by Office of Personnel Management surveys.

The cooperative development of a statewide workforce planning strategy for all the NPS units in Alaska will be the first step towards identifying how recruitment and retention needs can be met. Training and professional development of the NPS workforce in Alaska is not well-coordinated and there fore limited training funds are not spent as efficiently and effectively as they could be. If all NPS units in the state can undertake sustainable budget planning which includes developing a target organization, then adequate levels of funding for training and professional development should follow. Development of a holistic strategy for the NPS workforce in Alaska will have the benefit of improving every employees opportunities for training and advancement.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Site: KEFJ

PROFESSIONALISM

Promote a safety and health culture for all employees and visitors.

Reduce the number of employee lost-time incidents and serious visitor injuries by 20 percent.

KEFJ will implement the regional NPSafe plan and develop a park specific plan. Improvements to the existing parkwide safety program will include an expansion of the tailgate safety program and use of other media to communicate a safety culture. The park will fund a reimbursable fitness program and a monthly employee fitness/wellness program.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Other Park/ Program performance goal(s)

KEFJ will join with other NPS units across the state to implement a statewide dispatch program which will promote employee safety across a huge breadth of activities and locations. Many of the methods used to check in or report filed status rely on antiquated or unreliable technologies. A joint dispatch center will improve safety in the parks for both employees and the public.

A fit staff is a productive staff. The Alaskan climate, especially in dark winter months, can make it difficult for even the most dedicated employee to commit to a personal fitness program. Therefore, KEFJ will continue to develop an employee wellness program to encourage personal fitness, particularly during the winter, through flexible work schedules, group gym memberships, reimbursement of some fitness costs, provision of limited fitness equipment, and monthly wellness activities.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Site: KEFJ

PROFESSIONALISM

Model what it means to work in partnership.

Other Park/ Program performance goal(s)

The completion of the Mary Lowell Center will be a model of federal, state, and local partnership. The facility will be owned by the NPS, but the design, construction, and operation will be shared jointly by the NPS, City of Seward, and USFS. Secondary partners include Alaska State Parks, the National Marine Fisheries Service, and the Alaska Natural Association. The visitor center will serve as the one-stop for state and federal public lands located in the area. The law enforcement portion of the building is designed to be shared by LE staff from four agencies. The USFS and the NPS will have administrative offices that share common areas. Portions of the visitor center will be available to the community for local events and small conferences during off-hours and off-season periods.

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Site: KEFJ

PROFESSIONALISM

Make national parks the first choice in philanthropic giving among those concerned about environmental, cultural, and recreational values.

Other Park/ Program performance goal(s)

KEFJ will develop a Centennial project for the Exit Glacier area which will exemplify the spirit of philanthropy for one of the park's primary venues. The project will include significant needs such as exhibits, remodel work, and a new gathering pavilion for group use, it will also demonstrate the strong connection that many local businesses have to the park. The Alaska Natural History Association will take the lead to raise funding for this Centennial Project.

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