



July 13, 2022

The Honorable Deb Haaland  
Secretary of Interior  
Department of the Interior  
1849 C St, N.W.  
Washington DC 20240

Dear Madam Secretary,

We, the undersigned stakeholders in the Denali National Park (DNP) area and Alaska tourism supporters from across the state, wish to convey our strong support for the expeditious completion of the Pretty Rocks construction project for safe and sustainable access into one of Alaska's and America's National Park treasured destinations.

**Specifically, we are asking you to:**

- **Continue to prioritize the Pretty Rocks slide area construction project** so it may be finished in as timely a manner as possible to mitigate further economic impact to tourism and outdoor recreation businesses;
- **Invest an additional contingency budget of 20% above anticipated costs**, a general norm within construction projects, particularly in Alaska; and
- **Allocate funding, staff, and equipment towards maintenance of the west end of the road**, including critical infrastructure like Eielson Visitor's Center throughout the construction project.

Denali National Park is a key component of Alaska's federal land inventory, one which provides amazing traveler experiences, wildlife viewing and educational opportunities to visit a sub-arctic ecosystem. The visitor industry supplies jobs, direct revenue to businesses, and indirect revenue to local boroughs and municipalities to fund important infrastructure and public services. Its significance is underscored by the statistic that 1 in 5 visitors to Alaska have DNP in their travel plans. Additionally, ongoing scientific research makes DNP a living laboratory for the study of a variety of fields, including ornithology, biology, geology, and climate change providing educational value to many.

We are primarily concerned for the timeframe of the proposed Pretty Rocks construction project, now expected to extend into and possibly through 2024. The urgency in completing this project cannot be overstated, as the impact of the road closure at MP 43 will be felt economically across the region. Challenges to tour operators, as well as to research teams, resident recreationists, and conservation groups, among others, will grow with each month of uncertainty around schedules, limited capacity, complicated logistics, and contingency planning.

Please consider allocating an additional budget to cover any overruns encountered during the project timeline. Delays in securing added funding will mean an exponential impact to businesses and individuals who are counting on the road being repaired and re-opened as quickly as possible.

A contingency of 20 percent beyond the identified budget is not unrealistic when planning for Alaska construction, seasonality, and weather, especially in the Denali landscape.

While the road closure at mile 43 remains in place for at least two years, we fear the west end of the road beyond the Pretty Rocks slide area will fall into disrepair without a maintenance presence. The road has required ongoing maintenance in previous years to provide safe access to such facilities as the Eielson Visitors Center, Wonder Lake Campground, and the Kantishna area, with multiple privately-owned inholdings. Without on-going maintenance, the road is at risk for degradation between miles 45 and 92, while the multimillion-dollar Eielson Visitor Center, a LEED Platinum-awarded facility, is left to the elements during the Pretty Rocks construction timeline. The Kantishna Airstrip will lack ongoing grading and brush-cutting which threatens access to private landowners assured through the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act of 1980.

Recognizing the high cost of transporting equipment and personnel to the west side of Pretty Rocks, we are advocating for added funding for DNP to be able to cover this increased expense.

Please see the list of signatories representing Alaska's tourism industry, outdoor recreation community, conservation groups and business partners supporting the completion of the road construction process into Denali National Park.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Sarah Leonard  
Alaska Travel Industry Association

Aaron Schutt  
Doyon, Limited

Joe Bovee  
Ahtna, Incorporated

Kati Capozzi  
Alaska Chamber

Leila Kimbrell  
Resource Development Council

Scott McCrea  
Explore Fairbanks

Vanessa Juszczak  
Denali Chamber of Commerce

Jim Adams  
National Parks Conservation Assn

Lee Hart  
Alaska Outdoor Alliance

Greg LaHaie  
Skyline Lodge/ Kantishna Air Taxi

Josh Howes  
Premier Alaska Tours

Jodi Rodwell  
Denali Education Center

Emily Edenshaw  
Alaska Native Heritage Center

Bonnie Quill  
Mat-Su Convention & Visitors Bureau

Jenna & Simon Hamm  
Camp Denali

Kirk Hoessle  
Alaska Wildland Adventures

Steve Cleary  
Alaska Trails