

United States Department of the Interior
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Western Arctic National Parklands
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Park / Superintendent's Report

Welcome to new staff!

Emily Creek is onboard as the park anthropologist. Emily holds a Master's in Anthropology from the University of Denver. Her wide range of duties include supporting subsistence activities and meetings, community and tribal relations, and anthropology research projects.

Annie Carlson is onboard as the Resource Program Manager. Annie holds a Master's in Biology and previously worked in Yellowstone National Park. She will oversee several programs for Western Arctic National Parklands, including natural resources, wildlife, archeology, anthropology, and resource compliance.

Andrew Bell is onboard as the Facility Manager. Andrew comes to the NPS from the Alaska Technical Center in Kotzebue. Andrew is a long-time resident of the area, skilled in the construction trades and an experienced snowmachine mechanic.

Jon Nicholson is onboard as the Interpretation and Education Program Manager. Jon is an Army veteran who served in Afghanistan. Jon holds a Master's in Education. He has ten years of experience with the NPS and previously worked in Yellowstone National Park.

Western Arctic National Parklands announced the park pilot job opening in January 2023. Interviews are ongoing.

Western Arctic Caribou Herd

In January 2023, Western Arctic National Parklands invited federally recognized tribes in the Northwest Arctic Borough to consult on Western Arctic Caribou Herd population trends and possible management actions. Staff also attended the Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group meetings in Anchorage.

Western Arctic National Parklands evaluated commercial activity in Noatak National Preserve in connection with the hunting closure to non-federally qualified subsistence users, known as Wildlife Special Action 21-01A. District Ranger Joe Dallemolle will provide a detailed report during winter meetings.

Notably, there was a 90% decrease in commercial flights into Noatak National Preserve in 2022; see Figure 1 below. NPS and community members reported minimal sport hunting on the Noatak River. In season, August - September, there were low numbers of migrating caribou in the Preserve, which likely contributed to the large decrease in commercial activity. Wildlife Special Action 21-01A is a temporary closure for 2022 and 2023.

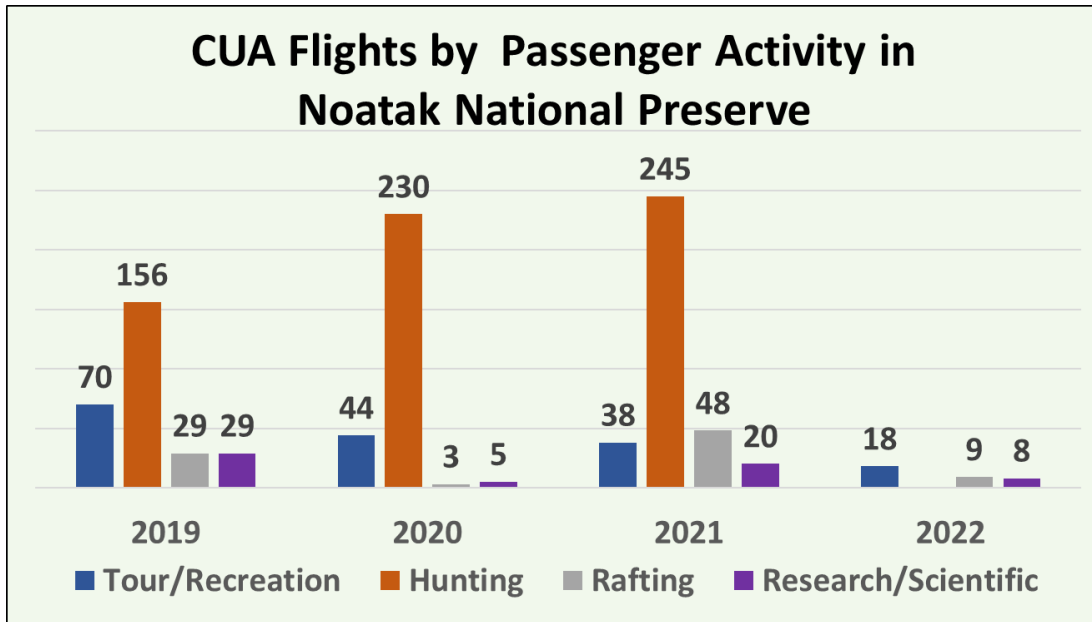


Figure 1

Rivers

The NPS is beginning a research project to study why some rivers are orange in the Western Arctic National Parklands and Brooks Range. The Salmon River in Kobuk Valley National Park will be studied. Jon O'Donnell, from the NPS Arctic Inventory and Monitoring Network, will cover this topic in depth during the winter meetings. We think the orange water is bad for fish. We are developing a related study to monitor impacts on fish for the next 5-10 years.

Noatak Airport Relocation

The National Park Service reviewed plans from the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to relocate and rebuild the Noatak airport. The FAA held a meeting in Noatak in January to gather community input. Construction would include a new, larger runway 4,000 feet long by 75 feet wide. The proposal includes an ice / snow road from the Red Dog Road to Noatak—this route is entirely outside of Cape Krusenstern National Monument; the route was evaluated in previous studies. The ice/snow road is needed to bring heavy equipment such as bulldozers to the village. The FAA will release an Environmental Assessment for the public in late winter / early spring 2023. Construction could begin in 2027.

Wildlife Rule

The National Park Service is proposing to change its regulations for sport hunting in NPS preserves in Alaska. We are revisiting this action at the request of the Secretary of the Interior. The regulations would not impact subsistence practices—they only apply to non-federally qualified subsistence users.

The practices that would no longer be allowed are:

- killing black bears (including cubs and sows with cubs) with artificial light at den sites,

- killing black and brown bears over bait,
- killing wolves and coyotes (including pups) during the denning season,
- shooting caribou while swimming.

We discussed this topic in the fall 2022 SRC and RAC meetings. The NPS recently completed a public comment period on the proposed rule and invited federally recognized tribes to consult. The NPS will review feedback from all parties before issuing a final rule. We'd like to hear your thoughts on this topic and can answer any questions you have.