Pioneering Conservation in Alaska

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**Comparing to Katmai, a much more difficult and lengthy struggle preceded the final form of Glacier Bay National Monument.** Unlike Katmai, Glacier Bay had been seen by large numbers of people, sat closer to populated areas, and contained gold and other valuable minerals. Moreover, nearby Tlingits possessed credible claims to ownership or, at least, subsistence uses of the land. Glacier Bay’s preservation therefore required more public support and incurred greater resistance. Like Katmai, however, as in the case of nearly all national parks, Glacier Bay possessed far more scenic value than mineral or logging potential. And, like Katmai, Glacier Bay attracted university scientists and inspired one to lead an effort for its permanent protection.

**Visitors to Glacier Bay**

Glacier Bay, now more than 50 miles long, extends northwest of Chichagof Island into the center of the monument. Its best-known feature, Muir Glacier, crucially influenced the attainment of monument status. The glacier filled the
bay when the first westerners, a crew sent out by Captain George Vancouver of the HMS *Discovery*, visited it in 1794. The ice receded and U.S. Navy Lieutenant Charles Erskine Scott Wood, who reached it by canoe from Sitka in 1877, explored the bay in its modern form. Also by canoe came John Muir, S. Hall Young, and their Tlingit guides in 1879 and 1880.\(^1\)

Of all the grandeur he had surveyed, few places moved Muir as did Glacier Bay. There he spent many days climbing, hiking, and studying vegetation and glaciation processes. After witnessing the calving of Muir Glacier he wrote:

> When a large mass sinks from the upper fissured portion of the wall, there is a keen, piercing crash, then a deep deliberate, long-drawn-out, thundering roar, which slowly subsides into a comparatively low, far-reaching, muttering growl; then comes a crowd of grating, clashing sounds from the agitated bergs that dance in the waves about the newcomer as if in welcome; and these, again, are followed by the swash and roar of the berg-waves as they reach the shore and break among the boulders. . . . When the sunshine is pouring and sifting in iris colors through the midst of all this wilderness of angular crystal ice, and through the grand, flame-shaped jets and sheets of radiant spray ever rising from the blows of the falling bergs, the effect is indescribably glorious.\(^2\)

Muir thrilled his reading audience with his portrayal of a morning on the bay. As a spectacular sunrise faded,

> the green waters of the fiord were filled with sun-spangles; with the up-swinging breeze the fleet of icebergs set forth on their voyages; and on the innumerable mirrors and prisms of these bergs, and on those of the shattered crystal walls of the glaciers, common white light and rainbow light began to glow, while the mountains, changing to stone, put on their frosty jewelry, and loomed again in the thin azure in serene terrestrial majesty. We turned and sailed away, joining the outgoing bergs, while “Gloria in excelsis” still seemed to be sounding over all the white landscape, and our burning hearts were ready for any fate, feeling that whatever the future might have in store, the treasures we had gained would enrich our lives forever.\(^3\)

Muir had been drawn to Alaska not only by his love for Nature but also by a desire to learn more about glaciers and how they shaped the earth, a continuation of his investigations in the Sierras. His writings for the public highlighted the spectacles of Southeast Alaska, most prominently the glaciers. Thus the 300-foot-high and two- to three-mile-wide Muir Glacier, the largest and most accessible at tidewater, became a “frozen Niagara,” a source of pride for Americans who wished to believe they possessed grander treasures than could be found in Europe. The first tourists, eager to see what Muir had described, arrived in 1883 in the *Idaho* under the veteran coastal shipmaster James Carroll. Captain Carroll is said to have given Muir Inlet and Muir Glacier their names.
His sojourn in the Idaho heralded a steady stream of visitors in other vessels, including the Pacific Coast Steamship Company’s City of Topeka, George W. Elder, and Queen. The spreading fame generated by enthusiastic vacationers and by the 1899 Harriman Expedition moved Glacier Bay toward ultimate status as a park.

Lituya Bay on the Pacific coast enriched the history of Glacier Bay National Monument. For years it hosted the largest Tlingit settlement on the Fairweather coast. Tlingits also visited to take advantage of its abundant resources. But Nature made Lituya Bay a dangerous place. Two French vessels under Commander Jean Francois de Galaup de La Perouse, hoping to make territorial claims, paid the first European visit to the bay in June and July 1786. They passed through the narrow entrance at an unusual slack tide and nearly foundered. Once inside, they found their exit barred by rolling waves continuously sweeping the entrance from shore to shore. It turned out to be an agreeable place to be confined, endowed by plentiful fish, berries, herbs, wood, and freshwater. Many mammal species lived on the land and sea otters along the coast. Of the scenery La Perouse remarked, “I doubt whether the profound valleys of the Alps and Pyrenees exhibit a picture equally terrific.” He voiced less appreciation for the local Tlingit men, who stole at every opportunity, “always quarreling among
themselves, indifferent to their children, absolute tyrants to their women, who are incessantly condemned to the most laborious occupations.\textsuperscript{95}

While reconnoitering the exit, a boat commanded by an able officer was pulled into the waves by the powerful current. Attempting a rescue, a second boat followed. Both sank, drowning all 21 men. After more than three weeks’ delay the ships gained the ocean, only to be wrecked and ending the lives of the remainder of the 200-man expedition in the Solomon Islands.\textsuperscript{6} Evidence of the Alaska stay survived in dispatches La Perouse sent back to France by way of Kamchatka.\textsuperscript{7}

Hearing of the French landing and planning to extend their own territorial control down the Northwest coast, the Russians entered Lituya Bay in 1788 and buried a copper plate as a symbolic land claim. Nothing came of the French visit, and the Russians built forts at Yakutat and Sitka. Their hunting crews killed 1,800 sea otters in or near Lituya Bay in 1788 and quickly stripped the region of otters. In retribution the Tlingits attacked and destroyed the forts at Sitka in 1802 and Yakutat in 1805.

Tlingits also suffered from disasters at Lituya Bay. In 1788 a war party of ten canoes overturned in the breakers and 80 men drowned.\textsuperscript{8} Legend spoke of an entire village disappearing beneath an enormous wave. The legend came alive in July 1958. As three trolling vessels operated in the bay an earthquake struck, sending down 90 million tons of rock from a mountainside and 1,300 horizontal feet of ice from Lituya Glacier. A gigantic wave climbed the wall of Gilbert Inlet opposite the slide, scouring off vegetation to a height of 1,700 feet. At 100 miles an hour a surge of water raced down the bay toward the ocean, engulfing 2 vessels and claiming 2 lives. The \textit{Edrie} snapped her anchor chain and rode out the wave, passing over a forested spit 80 feet above the trees. When the water calmed, great rafts of logs spread for miles out to sea.\textsuperscript{9}

William H. Dall in 1874 conducted one of the first scientific observations of Lituya Bay.\textsuperscript{10} The bay attracted gold seekers as early as 1880, and prospectors found placer gold in the beach sands not far from the bay entrance in the late 1880s. Mining peaked in 1896 when upwards of 200 men worked the sands. Lituya Bay Placer Gold Mining Company manager Hans Nelson, his wife, Edith, and three other employees stayed through the winter of 1899–1900. In the fall of 1899 one of the men shot dead a fellow worker, wounded another, and aimed the gun at Edith. Hans knocked him down and subdued him. Unable to take the accused to court or effectively guard him, the miners held a trial and sentenced the man to death. Edith carried out the sentence by hanging him. The company left the area in 1900.\textsuperscript{11}

Ownership of the Glacier Bay region lay in dispute during most of the 19th Century. An 1825 Anglo-Russian treaty described the boundary in vague terms. In 1887 Canada advanced a claim interpreting the treaty in its favor, to include
the Glacier Bay area. The Gold Rush forced the issue, necessitating clear ownership of mines and ports. Negotiations completed in 1903 resolved the issue in favor of the United States and established Glacier Bay and its surroundings as U.S. territory.12

John Muir’s articles about Glacier Bay attracted the attention of academic scientists who studied glaciers to understand Ice Ages. Tour vessels enabled them to reach Alaska, and the first scientist, George Frederick Wright of Oberlin College representing the U.S. Geological Survey, arrived in 1886. A second team under Harry Fielding Reid of the Case School of Applied Sciences entered the inlet in 1890, finding John Muir on the site measuring glacial movement. Others continued the investigations in the 1890s, among them the scientists of the Harriman Expedition. Grove Karl Gilbert, a member of the Harriman party representing the U.S. Geological Survey, initiated a focus on plant succession in the wake of the retreating glacier. Then, weeks after the expedition departed, earthquakes apparently caused the face of Muir Glacier to collapse into the bay, leaving it full of ice. This ended visits by tourists for a decade. For many years, tour boat companies took their clients to Taku Glacier near Juneau.13

Lack of access to Glacier Bay also suspended glacial research for well over a decade. But the writings of John Muir and the glacial scientists sparked the curiosity of Detroit native William Skinner Cooper (1884–1978), a botany professor at the University of Minnesota. Fascinated by mountains after accompanying his father on outings, Cooper made numerous trips to the Colorado Rockies beginning at age eighteen. Earning a degree in botany and ecology from Alma College in 1906, he completed a PhD at the University of Chicago in 1911. He spent four years in California examining the redwoods, chaparral, other plant communities, and sand dune morphology. In 1914 he studied postglacial vegetation in British Columbia and took a side trip to Alaska looking for a site to assess plant growth in the wake of a rapidly receding glacier. A colleague later suggested Glacier Bay, and Cooper found what he sought when he returned to do research in 1916, 1921, 1929, and 1935.14

Cooper had been mentored by Harry Fielding Reid and had taken courses in plant succession from Henry Chandler Cowles, a prominent theorist in plant ecology. When he started work at Glacier Bay in 1916, Cooper and his colleague John V. Hubbard laid out quadrats to be examined in periodic surveys of plant species and growth rates in the soil where the glacier had receded. Rapid plant growth, and known locations of the glacier front at various points in time, made Glacier Bay an ideal site for measurement of successional processes. On nine quadrats, three each on land first exposed in 1879, 1892, and 1899, Cooper compared vegetation growth between 1916 and 1921. He found a high mortality rate in individual plants but a net gain in numbers and surface area
covered. One pioneer species in the evening primrose family declined while others increased:

The major part of the advance in the establishment of the vegetation cover was due to the activities of a few individuals which survived and persisted from the many that germinated. The most important of the persisting individuals were the *Dryas* [in the rose family] and the willows, all mat-formers and therefore extremely effective in covering the ground.

The gradual acceleration of the successional process, evident in general observation study, has already begun even at this early stage.

Cooper’s work culminated in the presentation of a paper in 1922 at the Ecological Society of America, and the ensuing discussion gave birth to the idea of preserving Glacier Bay. The society appointed Cooper chair of an exploratory committee.\(^\text{15}\)

**MONUMENT STATUS FOR GLACIER BAY**

Cooper’s committee launched a survey of the bay area and proposed boundaries to encompass all the desired ecological features. Robert F. Griggs sat on the
four-member committee. Reflecting on his Katmai experience and congressional responsiveness to extractive interests, Griggs suggested, “A national monument is created by presidential proclamation, whereas a national park is made by an act of Congress. In the first case it is necessary to convince only one man of the advisability of the action, whereas in the second, six hundred, more or less, must be converted to the idea.” This lesson had inspired the design of the Forest Reserves Act of 1891 and of the Antiquities Act of 1906, the legal basis for nearly all Alaskan preserves between 1892 and 1978.

Warren Harding, the first president to see Alaska, visited Glacier Bay in 1923 and expressed a desire to see it protected. More than 80 organizations endorsed the plan of the Ecological Society of America, including the National Research Council, American Geographical Society, National Parks Association, Explorers Club, Associated Mountaineering Clubs of North America, American Forestry Association, Botanical Society of America, and American Society of Geologists. Proponents cited five attractive features of the proposed monument: (1) numerous tidewater glaciers, not found in any other park or monument, (2) accessibility for tourists, (3) a pristine coastal forest, (4) opportunity for study of glaciation, and (5) historical associations from Vancouver to Muir.

In Juneau and Haines, the chambers of commerce registered their objections. Cooper's committee had emphasized the lack of economic potential at Glacier Bay but had thought it best to seek the advice of the U.S. Geological Survey's chief representative in Alaska, Alfred H. Brooks. Mining appeared at that time to be the main land-based means of developing the Alaskan economy. Based on a brief assessment reporting gold, silver, and molybdenum, the Geological Survey prepared to oppose monument status. But the influential Council on National Parks, Forests, and Wild Life endorsed the monument. Secretary of the Interior Hubert Work recommended a presidential executive order withdrawing land in the wide parameters recommended by Cooper's committee, pending a review by the Interior Department. President Calvin Coolidge's signature on the order on April 1, 1924, provoked a negative reaction from the Juneau Daily Alaska Empire and settlers in Southeast Alaska.

A Daily Alaska Empire editorial, citing concern for loss of mining and homesteading opportunities, ventured,

The suggestion that a reserve be established to protect a glacier that none could disturb if he wanted and none would disturb if he could or to permit the study of plant and insect life is the quintessence of silliness. And when it is proposed to put millions of acres, taking in established industries and agricultural lands and potential resources that are capable of supporting people and adding to the population of Alaska, it becomes a monstrous crime against development and advancement. It leads one to wonder if Washington has gone crazy through catering to conservation faddists.
Cooper replied in part that “the time is not too far distant when, due to destruction, and to proper use as well, our forests will have lost their primeval magnificence. We [wish] to reserve a few small areas so that our children may enjoy the bounties of nature untouched by man.” He added that Alaska could expect, as in the cases of Yellowstone and Yosemite parks, to reap economic benefits from tourism.21

Secretary Work sent General Land Office official and soon-to-be Alaska governor George A. Parks to do the economic assessment of Glacier Bay. Parks, an advocate of Alaskan development, listed in his report every such activity actually or potentially occurring in the proposed monument: fox farming, timbering, mining, homesteading, fish traps and canneries, Native allotments, and agriculture on the 90,000-acre Gustavus forelands. He recommended against monument status for more than a core segment of the withdrawn lands, if any at all. Cooper’s committee called forth another massive expression of demand for monument status from citizen groups. In negotiations toward a compromise, the Geological Survey insisted on access for mining, and the Forest and National Park services both sought control of the monument. Cooper fought for
inclusion of some forest perimeter. He achieved it in the boundaries eventually accepted, but, for the time being, the monument consisted mostly of a mountainous core. The Park Service won control over a monument closed to mining in the presidential proclamation of February 26, 1925. The edict cited—in addition to the traditional scenic values—scientific study of glaciology and ecology, protection of forests, and historic values based on famous visitors.22

MANAGEMENT PROBLEMS

A scattering of small-scale economic activities existed within the monument lands. Salmon salteries and canneries operated at Bartlett Cove from 1888 to 1890, Dundas Bay from 1900 to 1931, Dry Bay from 1910 to the mid-1940s, and Excursion Inlet from 1908 throughout the remainder of the century. A sawmill operated at Excursion Inlet from shortly after 1900 to the late 1930s. Fox farms occupied Lemesurier, Beardslee, Strawberry, and Willow islands between 1920 and the late 1930s when the value of fox fur went down. Nearly all the lands occupied by these ventures passed to monument status.23 During World War II the army constructed a storage base at Excursion Inlet, cutting down acres of surrounding forest. At Gustavus it built an air base to accommodate B-29s that might strike Japan from the Aleutians. Neither facility proved necessary for the war effort, and the lands reverted to National Park Service control.24

Mining in the Monument

Mining presented a problem for the monument. In 1936 a second move to permit mining in the monument brought Cooper back to chair a committee assembled to combat it. He had the sanction of 150 groups including Audubon, Isaac Walton League, National Parks and American Forests associations, American Nature Association, and the new Wilderness Society. Nevertheless, not all public sentiment in the States could be counted on. Popular Hearst writer Rex Beach, author of many Alaskan adventure stories and champion of the small man, envisioned a movement of prospectors exploiting Alaska’s mineral wealth as an antidote to the Great Depression. He took up the cause of miners working a claim prior to designation of the monument. Joe Ibach and his wife, Muz, prospected at Reid Inlet in 1924 and found gold in two locations, filing their claims in the late summer after Coolidge’s withdrawal. Six months later monument status specifically prohibited mining. Although the Ibachs probably had a legal right to proceed, officials advised them not to develop the claims. Their protests failed until Rex Beach visited in 1935. Beach had known Joe as a guide in 1915 and felt sympathy for him.25 Beach touted the mining bill and went
to see FDR. Roosevelt wanted to avoid alienating the Hearst papers, but he also wanted compromise among the federal agencies and environmental groups involved. In a week’s time and without notice to the conservationists, the mining bill rushed through congressional committees and passed both houses, and Roosevelt signed it.26

More than sympathy may have motivated Beach’s efforts. He returned to join Joe Ibach in prospecting, and in 1936 they staked a group of claims. The venture did not pan out. Never discouraged, the Ibachs engaged another partner, Captain Tom Smith. After two years of effort the three split their total profits of $26. Joe and Muz worked their original claims until 1956.27

Contrary to the hopes of economic boosters, prospectors discovered few promising mineral deposits in Glacier Bay National Monument. Miners dug in numerous locations, finding copper and nickel deposits, albeit none of outstanding commercial value. The U.S. Geological Survey, territorial and state politicians, and development interests backed mining in the monument but ultimately lost the contest. In 1976 the Mining in the Parks Act ended new claims and permitted buyouts of old claims.28

Boundary Changes

Although the 1936 mining law dismayed conservationists and National Park officials, another issue promised to change the picture. Since the mid-1920s, Forest Service and National Park Service planners had contemplated widening the monument’s boundaries to the west and south to encompass Lituya Bay and forest habitat suitable for a brown bear sanctuary. The Forest Service felt pressure from brown bear advocates to designate Admiralty and Chichagof islands as national parks. Large stands of commercially exploitable timber covered both islands; the Forest Service therefore preferred expansion of, and national park status for, Glacier Bay. National Park Service directors concurred, reasoning that Admiralty and Chichagof offered comparatively little except for brown bear populations. Bureau of Biological Survey chiefs, Alaska Game Commission officials, and Governor Parks favored the Glacier Bay National Park option. Interior Secretary Harold Ickes visited Glacier Bay in 1938 and indicated approval of eventual national park status.

After FDR opened Glacier Bay to mining in 1936, advocates of expansion had begun to consider retaining monument status. Some believed mining in a national park would set a bad precedent and that conservationists might oppose such a plan. FDR signed a proclamation in April 1939 adding 905,000 acres of national forest and other lands, including Lituya Bay, to Glacier Bay National Monument.29 The additions increased the size of the monument from 1,820 to 3,850 square miles.30
Soon after the 1939 boundary change, residents in the settlement of Gustavus on Strawberry Point at the edge of the monument complained that potentially valuable agricultural land had been closed to them. Some blamed the decline of cattle herds, down by half from a high of 278, and the decrease of settlers, from 35 to 10, on monument expansion. Alaska congressional delegate Bob Bartlett contacted park officials in the mid-1940s suggesting deletion of much of the lowland near Gustavus. National Park Service officials rated the land as submarginal for cattle or crops, noting that cattle herds had shrunk before the boundary change. They predicted that loss of the flatland, including a small airfield, would result in elimination of wolves and bears in the monument within reach of the private lands. Moreover, in the words of Chief Architect Thomas C. Vint, “Anyone taking up a homestead would certainly be doing so for the future, as a business property in connection with the airport and the National Monument, rather than for future farming.” He proposed that to avoid an array of administrative problems, the government should acquire all private plots in the Gustavus area.31

Part-time Gustavus resident Charles Parker organized a campaign to remove the disputed land from the monument. In a December 18, 1954, letter to the Juneau *Daily Alaska Empire* he termed it “disheartening to see this virgin 10,000 acres of agricultural and stock-raising land dormant and unused.” Pointing to the Cold War buildup he pronounced, “It is time every red-blooded Alaskan and American write his delegate and Congressman and insist that pressure be put on and the release of Gustavus Land from the Glacier Bay National Monument be secured at once. Then we can settle this section with veteran fighting men, and come what may, we will be able to produce thousands of tons of food for our people and military force.”32 The campaign triumphed in 1955 when President Dwight Eisenhower signed an order deleting about 18,000 acres for “an airfield for military purposes” and “limited type of agricultural use.”33

As in many other Alaskan disputes, national security claims provided more excuse than reason for the deletion. A *Daily Alaska Empire* editorial came closer to the truth: “Although the farming possibilities of the area have long been known, to many the new release order is more important in that a large area has been thrown open to duck hunters for the first time in 16 years. Geese and ducks by the thousands stop to rest on the Gustavus flats and in the many sloughs that criss-cross the grassy coastal plain, but when the 1939 order took in the area, hunting was forbidden.” No airfield materialized and, eighteen months after the opening of the “agricultural” area, only one party had filed for a homestead. Within three months they abandoned their farming project.34
Native Claims

Tlingit Indians possessed far broader and more long-standing claims to Glacier Bay than did either miners or settlers. At least since the most recent Ice Age glacial retreat, Tlingits had hunted seals and mountain goats, fished for salmon, gathered gull eggs, and picked berries on its lands and in its waters. Implicitly, and notwithstanding the designations of the Tongass National Forest and Glacier Bay National Monument, they could insist on ownership of at least part of the monument. But in the process of designating and adding to the monument in 1925 and 1939, neither conservationists nor the National Park Service paid attention to Tlingit concerns. They focused on a vision of parklands as “natural,” or unspoiled by human activity. They viewed mining as the foremost potential threat and also sought to eliminate fish traps, canneries, fox farming, trapping, logging, hunting, and other consumptive activities. Monument status precluded nearly all of these, mining being a glaring exception.35

After the 1925 proclamation, Tlingits in the 800-person village of Hoonah 25 miles south of the monument continued to visit it for hunting, fishing, and gathering. They may have been unaware of the new law, and, in any case, no Park Service personnel lived within many miles of the monument. Park Service planners avoided the questions involved in Native land claims, in part because they had no experience accommodating such claims in parks in the States. Also, Native Americans as well as whites commonly accepted the goal of assimilation in the 1920s and 1930s. Hoonah Tlingits had engaged in cannery labor and commercial fishing since well before the turn of the century and actively sought wage work during World War II. Park Service leaders interpreted this as evidence of progressive integration into the cash economy and corresponding abandonment of economic dependence on, and cultural ties to, subsistence use of natural resources. In this light, hunting and fishing in the monument appeared as poaching. If done for cash or commercial sales, the taking seemed unnecessary or even immoral.

Moreover, hunting in the park ran counter to tourists’ desire for close-up views of trusting animals. This applied particularly to harbor seals, the most numerous marine mammal species at Glacier Bay. Hoonahs traditionally hunted them for meat, seal oil, and skins for clothing. During the territorial period they killed seals in large part for a two- or three-dollar bounty and, later, for skins to be sold on the European market. Park rangers came upon the remains of 243 seals killed at Bartlett Cove in 1963. Nearly all the meat had been left. Another Tlingit hunter killed 300 seals at Glacier Bay in 1964. Such incidents fed a determination to end hunting in the monument, a goal the Park Service finally accomplished in 1974.36

For their part, the Hoonah Tlingits believed they possessed a legitimate right to enter the monument lands for subsistence to fulfill cultural traditions
and that the Park Service had unfairly restricted them. Research indicated that they retained a significant level of dependence on Glacier Bay resources, even during the high-wage years of World War II. They considered seal hunting for bounties and hides essentially the same as subsistence hunting.37

The 1968 resolution of *Tlingit and Haida Indians v. United States*, first brought in 1929, acknowledged Tlingit rights to land ownership in the Tongass National Forest and Glacier Bay National Monument. The court ordered compensatory payment of $7.5 million. Passage of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) in 1971 extinguished land claims in exchange for cash and
land selections, not to be made in national parks or monuments. While the Hoonah Natives could not own land in the monument, ANCSA and the 1980 Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act both supported subsistence use rights on most federal lands. The Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972 permitted Native Americans to hunt seals and other creatures for traditional purposes if not done in a wasteful manner.38

Unlike Katmai, Glacier Bay’s formation featured a cultural, philosophical, and political clash over Native rights. Preservation-oriented conservationists and Park Service officials thought their insistence on unspoiled Nature a just goal that outweighed Tlingit prerogatives. Hoonah Tlingits eventually received land claims compensation in the form of cash payments and land selection outside the monument, and the Park Service eventually ended hunting. The experience suggested, but did not illuminate or resolve, some basic questions about natural resource protection: Is it fair to exclude traditional users from a park for the presumed benefit of society? Could or should “nature preservation” include human consumptive activities? If so, where should the lines be drawn between “natural” and disruptive or destructive activities? What motives, needs, traditions, and technologies should determine the limits of use? Who should be eligible for consumptive use rights, and would the arrangement be politically viable and manageable? These questions plagued the Park Service into the 21st Century in the dispute over commercial and subsistence fishing in Glacier Bay.

Park Service officials had for years pointed to the apparently wasteful killing of seals and tried to exclude all subsistence hunting and fishing in the monument. But jurisdiction over the waters beyond low tide had not been legally determined. Exercising interim control, the State of Alaska permitted commercial and, in 1989, subsistence fishing in Glacier Bay. At the onset of the 21st Century, fishing vessels contested whale-watching and sightseeing tourist boats for space in Glacier Bay in the heart of the monument.39

Tourism picked up rapidly in the 1970s. Whereas small private boaters had done most of the visiting in the 1940s and Canadian cruise ships in the 1950s, American cruise vessels reappeared in 1969 and escalated their trips over the following decades.40 The mixture of fishing and tourism operations threatened to injure the park’s ecological integrity and degrade the value of visitation. Nevertheless, as tourism multiplied over the years, Glacier Bay rivaled Katmai as proof of the appeal of nonconsumptive use values.

National Park Status

Glacier Bay National Monument, like Katmai, survived for decades despite challenges to its integrity and a near-absence of supervision and funding.
Physical remoteness and relative lack of pressure from extractive commercial enterprises helped protect the units. Concerted action by astute Park Service leaders fended off challenges in Washington. Territorial officials, viewing the units as potential tourist attractions, began to call for their development rather than their abolition. Seasonal rangers appeared in both units in 1950, and year-round supervision began in the mid-1960s. Glacier Bay’s government-owned tourist lodge opened in 1966 and Park Service on-site headquarters in the early 1980s.41

At the 1966 dedication of the Park Service lodge at Bartlett Cove in the southeast corner of the monument, honored guest William S. Cooper predicted that “Glacier Bay National Monument will become Glacier Bay National Park.”42 Upon passage of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act two years after Cooper’s death, his prophecy came true. Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve soon proved a highly popular scenic and wildlife viewing attraction, one of the best-known parks in Alaska. More than 200 bird species can be seen on its 3.3 million acres (5,322 square miles), encompassing colonies of nesting sea birds. Despite its mountainous character it is home to brown bears, black bears (some in the blue or “glacier bear” phase), wolves, moose, mountain goats, coyotes, wolverines, and smaller land mammals. In its waters swim humpback, minke, and killer whales, harbor and Dall’s porpoises, sea lions, harbor seals, sea otters, and four species of salmon.43 Mt. Cooper, within its boundaries, honors its founder, the botany professor.44

First intended as a reserve for tourism and science, Glacier Bay evolved into an outstanding example of ecosystem preservation. Quite similarly to Katmai National Monument, it offered scientific curiosities in the form of glaciers. Publicity by John Muir and others, followed by thousands of sightseers including President Harding, generated stateside interest in its preservation. A dedicated advocate, Cooper effectively mobilized public support. Like Katmai, Glacier Bay held almost no appeal for mining or logging companies or agricultural interests. A thoroughly unscientific claim of agricultural potential cost the park an ecologically valuable waterfowl feeding site, but a political compromise added a brown bear sanctuary. Visitors cherished the birds and mammals, thereby confirming ecosystem preservation as a central purpose of the park. Designation in the 1990s as part of a 27-million-acre U.S.- and Canada-managed Glacier Bay–Kluane-Tatshenshini-Wrangell/St. Elias World Heritage Site broadened the park’s role to participation in a holistic plan for international cooperation in ecosystem maintenance.