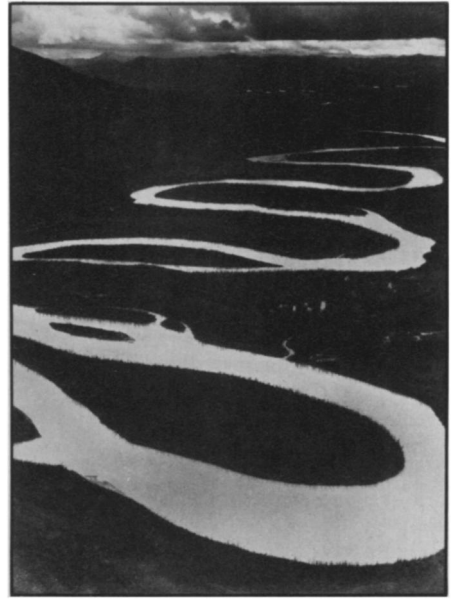
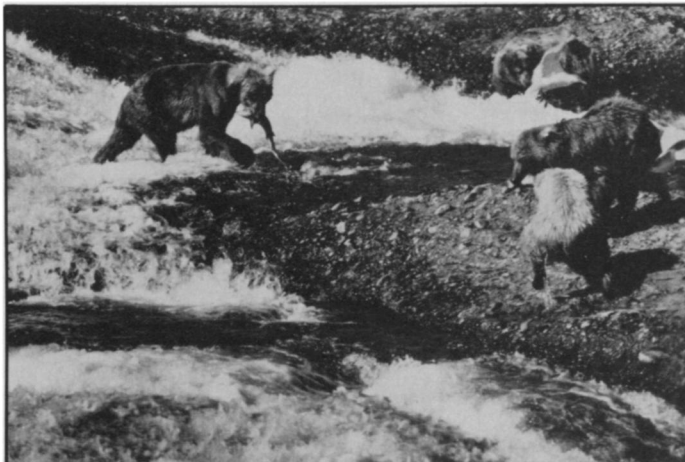


# Preserving the Alaska Frontier

Nine areas of the Alaskan frontier would be added to the National Park System and two existing parks expanded



Mt. Drum in the proposed Wrangell-St. Elias park lies a day's drive from Anchorage. A river winds through Gates of the Arctic.



Photos: National Park Service

Proposed Katmai Park would increase protection of grizzly bears (left). Mt. McKinley National Park would be expanded (right).

Almost unnoticed amidst the controversy over the Alaska pipeline, efforts to save vast Alaska wild areas by adding them to the National Park System are slowly working their way through Congress. The Secretary of the Interior proposed the addition of nine areas and the expansion of two others in 1973, but so far only a few hearings on the matter have been held. Some opposition has developed from those who want disposal of the areas left to Alaskans.

The areas span a wide variety of terrain and accessibility, from glaciers and peaks of the proposed Wrangell-St. Elias National Park, only a day's drive east of Anchorage, to the virtually unexplored Gates of the Arctic National Park, far to the north. An hour's plane ride west of Anchorage takes visitors to the proposed

Lake Clark National Park, with its two active volcanoes. And at the state's eastern border with Canada lies Yukon-Charley National Rivers area—which inspired the lines, "This is the Law of the Yukon, that only the strong shall thrive."

The new parks would bring the second highest mountain in the United States, Mount St. Elias, into the National Park System. Many animal species would be given a better chance for survival since the preserved areas would be large enough to represent complete ecological systems for several species, including the brown bear. Other animals whose habitats fall within the boundaries of the proposed parks include the bald eagle, the rare "glacier bear," animals long hunted for their pelts—such as mink and seal, vast

herds of moose and caribou, and an abundant diversity of sea birds. Four threatened whale species frequent the adjacent protected bay waters.

In all, the proposed parks contain 32 million acres of land unmatched for rugged beauty anywhere in the world. Their inclusion into the National Park System would nearly double its domain—to 2.7 percent of the country's land. Considering that these areas cost the United States only two cents an acre originally, the proposals would normally be viewed as an unprecedented bargain. But competition for land and its minerals is growing, even at the rim of America's last frontier, so the issue now before Congress eventually will come down to this: "What price beauty?"

—John H. Douglas