

Office of the Secretary

For Immediate Release: June 17, 1998

Contact: Mike Gauldin 202-208-6416

Alaska's Historic Kennecott Mill Protected

Eleven Year Effort Secures Picturesque Buildings and 2,825 Acres of Land

On June 16, 1998, one of the most photographed places in Alaska, the ghost town of Kennecott, became the newest addition to America's National Park system, Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt announced today.

"Kennecott, already a National Historic Landmark, is now owned by the public and will be preserved by the National Park Service for all visitors to share its rich history in the heart of our nation's largest national park" said Babbitt.

The acquisition climaxes an 11-year effort to purchase the former copper mine, 14-story mill, historic buildings and surrounding 2,825-acre property as additions to Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve, the nation's largest. Kennecott is in south-central Alaska about 200 miles east of Anchorage.

"This acquisition could not have taken place without the commitment and assistance of the Conservation Fund, the State of Alaska, the local communities, the landowners, Kennecott Minerals Company and Senator Ted Stevens (R-AK)", stated NPS Regional Director Robert Barbee.

In this transaction:

the owners of the surface estate, Great Kennicott Land Company and Consolidated Wrangell Mining Company, donated four major historic buildings, including the 14-story Mill Building, the central focus of the Kennecott complex;

the surface owners received approximately \$3 million for 2,825 acres of land and other buildings;

the Kennecott Minerals Company of Salt Lake City, Utah donated 3,097 acres of subsurface mineral rights to the property, as well as the Kennecott cemetery.

Bill Orchow, president and CEO of Kennecott Minerals Company said, "The Kennecott Mine in Alaska represents a defining period in mining history. We are pleased to see the legacy of Kennecott secured within the national park system." The Kennecott Minerals Company, which got its start at the namesake mine in Alaska, voluntarily completed a \$3 million environmental cleanup of the Kennecott site in 1993 and 1994.

"The Kennecott project is an exceptional example of what can be accomplished for the public benefit through partnerships between the private sector, Congress, non-profit organizations, and government agencies" said John Turner, President of The Conservation Fund. "We owe the success of the Kennecott project to our many partners in this effort, especially the Alaska congressional delegation, the National Park Service, and the Kennecott Corporation."

Congress appropriated funding for the acquisition in 1998 through the Land and Water Conservation Fund with the leadership of U.S. Senator Ted Stevens (R-AK). The Kennecott property will be owned by The National Park Service and managed in partnership with one or more local non-profit organization such as the Friends of Kennicott.

"Ownership of Kennecott puts the National Park Service in the position of working directly with the community so that the Kennecott visitor experience is maintained at a very high quality for generations to come," according to Jon Jarvis, superintendent for Wrangell-St. Elias National Park.

- DOI -

KENNECOTT AND WRANGELL-ST. ELIAS NATIONAL PARK AND PRESERVE FACT SHEET

6/5/98

The Copper Story:

Kennecott is the site of the world's richest copper discovery, with the raw ore consisting of up to 79% copper. Mines currently in production range from 0.3% to 3% copper.

The Kennecott mines produced \$300 million worth of copper between 1911 and 1938. In present value, the copper from Kennecott would be worth over \$1 billion.

Total production from the Kennecott mines was over 590,000 tons of copper and 9 million ounces of silver.

Chief Nikolai, an Ahtna Athabascan Native, directed early prospectors into the area near the turn of the century. Prospectors staked the first claims at Kennecott in 1900 after initially mistaking the green copper ore for verdant pastures. Development of the Kennecott ore required the construction of the 196-mile Copper River and Northwestern Railway through the Alaskan wilderness. All the wood and construction materials were shipped from Oregon and Washington as a city of 1,000 residents grew around the Kennecott mine.

Kennecott was a company town that included homes, a school, hospital, gymnasium with a silent movie theater, and even a wood-surfaced tennis court. For diversion, workers traveled a few miles down the road to the nearby town of McCarthy where they found saloons and other frontier entertainment.

The development of Kennecott took place in an era dominated by a few influential industrialists. Major financial backers of the project included the Guggenheim family and J. P. Morgan.

"Kennecott can be seen as the model for resource development in Alaska", said Judy Bittner, Alaska State Historic Preservation Officer. "Kennecott was a self-contained company town deep in the wilderness, accessible only by a railroad engineering marvel." The Copper River and Northwestern Railway spanned 200 miles from tidewater in Cordova to the mountainsides of Kennecott. Trestles, tunnels and bridges were built to bypass glaciers, mountains and rivers. Tramways ran up the hillsides to the Bonanza, Jumbo, and Mother Lode mines, connecting to over 70 miles of underground tunnels. During its heyday Kennecott was the largest industrial site in Alaska, at a time when the entire state population was less than 60,000 residents.

In the face of low copper prices and declining reserves, the Kennecott mines closed in 1938. Expecting to return, the Kennecott Copper Corporation simply locked the doors and walked away. The buildings remained fully stocked, with sheets on the beds, dishes in the cupboards, and medicine on the hospital shelves. But the mine never became active again, and Kennecott remained a ghost town for several decades, with only a very few individuals living in the area.

The Kennecott surface property and buildings were sold to an individual in 1957 and later to Consolidated Wrangell Mining Company in 1964. The surrounding land was designated a national park in 1980, and the Kennecott mine complex was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1986. In 1990, Kennecott was listed by the National Trust for Historic Preservation as one the "ten most endangered sites" in the country.

Kennecott Today: The Kennecott complex sits in a spectacular setting at the center of Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve. The Kennicott Glacier ⁽¹⁾ **edges the historic buildings, with 16,390 foot Mt. Blackburn to the northwest and a ring of towering peaks surrounding the mine.**

Kennecott provides important wildlife habitat for Dall sheep, grizzly bears and black bears, bison, wolves, golden eagles, lynx, wolverine, moose, and mountain goats, and caribou. A network of historic trails provides excellent hiking and mountain climbing opportunities.

Kennecott's adjacent town of McCarthy, which was the support community during the mining era, is home to approximately 20-30 year round residents. A variety of guiding services, restaurants, and guest lodges are available in the Kennecott-McCarthy area.

Many of the picturesque Kennecott buildings are well-preserved, due in large part to the cold and dry climate. Nonetheless, a number of the wooden buildings are in need of repair. From 1992-94 the Friends of Kennicott group was responsible for securing state and federal funds and completing emergency work to stabilize some of the historic buildings. While the Park Service and the Friends of Kennicott expect to continue the work to stabilize some of the major structures, complete restoration is not considered an option

Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve Facts

- Superintendent: Jonathan B. Jarvis
- The park and preserve encompass about 13.2 million acres, the largest national park in the system. It is also the largest wilderness park in the system, with 9.7 million acres.
- FY1998 budget is \$1.9 million.
- The unit was established on Dec. 2, 1980 as part of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act.
- The park has 22 permanent and 22 other employees.
- Visitation averages 45,000 recreational visits per year.
- The 13.2 million-acre Wrangell-St. Elias park is six times the size of Yellowstone National Park. Wrangell-St. Elias, adjacent Glacier Bay National Park and Canada's nearby Alsek-Tatshinshini Parks, and Kluane National Park together comprise the largest internationally protected park area in the world.
- Wrangell-St. Elias National Park is one of the few national parks in Alaska which is accessible by road. Park officials expect the park to provide a popular alternative travel destination to Denali National Park.
- The park and preserve contain the continent's largest assemblage of glaciers and greatest collection of peaks over 16,000 feet. One glacier, the Malaspina, is the size of Rhode Island. This giant and more than a hundred others are fed with powerful winter storms that drop as much as 50 feet of snow in the upper reaches of the Bagley Icefield. These in turn spawn the river systems and riparian lowlands of the park.

The park/preserve contains one of the largest concentrations of Dall sheep in North America -- some 15,000 sheep in more than 3 million acres of excellent habitat.

###

ADDITIONAL CONTACTS:

Brad Meiklejohn, Alaska Representative, The Conservation Fund, (907) 694-9060

Judith Bittner, Alaska State Historic Preservation Officer, (907) 269-8715

Connie Godwin, Press Secretary, Office of Senator Ted Stevens, (202) 224-3004

Jim Harrower, Great Kennicott Land Compan & Consolidated Wrangell Mining Company, (907) 345-2891

Jon Jarvis, Superintendent, Wrangell-St. Elias National Park, (907) 822-5234

David Litvin, Director of Public and Government Affairs, Kennecott Minerals Company, (801) 238-2493