Endorsed by President Obama, Secretary Jewell Changes Name of Mount McKinley to Denali

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ANCHORAGE, AK – In recognition of the long history of strong support from Alaska state, tribal and congressional leaders, and in resolution of an official request for a name change pending for 40 years, U.S. Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell today announced that the highest mountain in the United States and North America, formerly known as Mount McKinley, will be officially given the traditional Koyukon Athabascan name of Denali.

President Obama endorsed Jewell's decision to issue a Secretarial Order that officially changes the name. Jewell is granted the authority to make such changes in certain cases per the 1947 federal law that provides for the standardization of geographic names through the U.S. Board on Geographic Names. The name change will be reflected in all federal usage.

"This name change recognizes the sacred status of Denali to many Alaska Natives," Secretary Jewell said. "The name Denali has been official for use by the State of Alaska since 1975, but even more importantly, the mountain has been known as Denali for generations. With our own sense of reverence for this place, we are officially renaming the mountain Denali in recognition of the traditions of Alaska Natives and the strong support of the people of Alaska."

Since 1987 and until today, the official name of the mountain in federal publications has been Mount McKinley. The mountain retained the federally authorized name Mount McKinley, even as the name of the national park was changed in 1980 from Mount McKinley National Park into the new (and larger) area named Denali National Park and Preserve under the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act. "Recognizing the long history and discussion about the name of this iconic American mountain, the time has come to restore the traditional Alaska Native title Denali for this landmark, which holds great significance to the people of Alaska," said National Park Service Director Jonathan B. Jarvis.

In 1896, a prospector emerged from exploring the mountains of central Alaska and received news that William McKinley had been nominated as a candidate for President of the United States. In a show of support, the prospector declared the tallest peak of the Alaska Range as Mount McKinley – and the name stuck.

For centuries, the mountain that rises more than 20,000 feet above sea level, the tallest on the North American continent, had been known by another name – Denali. McKinley, our 25th President, was tragically assassinated just six months into his second term, but he never set foot in Alaska.

On March 11, 1975, Governor Jay S. Hammond of Alaska requested that the Secretary of the Interior direct the U.S. Board on Geographic Names to officially designate Mount McKinley in Alaska as Denali.

This proposal, never withdrawn, is based on a resolution that was passed by the Alaska State Legislature.

Since 1977, the Board, in deference to potential congressional action, had not resolved the proposal for changing the federally recognized geographic name from Mount McKinley to Denali. Secretary Jewell's action today finally resolves the March 1975 petition by former Governor Hammond.

Denali National Park & Preserve, where the mountain is located, was established in 1917 and annually sees more than 500,000 visitors to the 6 million acres that now make up the park and preserve. About 1,200 mountaineers attempt to summit the mountain each year; typically about half are successful.
