

VOLUNTEER AIRLIFT FOR WRANGELL CLAN

# Supporters fly in food and supplies for Pilgrims

*Pilots reach family locked in dispute with National Park Service*

By TOM KIZZIA  
Anchorage Daily News

Friends and political supporters are flying winter supplies this weekend to the remote Wrangell Mountain cabin of the Pilgrim family, who have been blocked by the National Park Service from hauling supplies over an old mining-era road that the family had reopened with a bulldozer.

Food and clothing for the 17-member family are at the top of the list for volunteer pilots flying to the high valley home, 14 overland miles from the settlement of McCarthy. The property lies in the heart of Wrangell-St. Elias National Park.

"The response has been overwhelming here in the valley," said Lee Adler of Glennallen, who flew the first two loads Wednesday, landing his two-seat Citabria on the family's prospecting-era gravel airstrip. "There's a lot of stuff waiting on both

sides of the river and even more in Glennallen."

Much of the materiel is donated. Pilots are also flying in supplies purchased by the Pilgrims and stockpiled in McCarthy.

The group helping organize the airlift, the American Land Rights Association, is calling the Park Service's road closure a "blockade" and likening the effort to the Berlin Airlift of 1948, when President Truman ordered planes to carry supplies after the German city was cut off by Soviet troops.

"If Alaskans — both rural and urban — don't rally now to stop this agency in McCarthy, large parts of our state will be next for the Green Iron Curtain of Exclusion," says the association's Internet alert.



MARC LESTER / Anchorage Daily News

Papa Pilgrim wants the National Park Service to allow him to use a mining-era road in the park.

“  
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”

— Papa Pilgrim, on people participating in the airlift of supplies

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MARC LESTER / Anchorage Daily News

The Pilgrim family's cabin is 14 miles up McCarthy Creek from the town of McCarthy.

## PILGRIMS: Volunteers airlift food, clothing to family

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The Park Service contends the Pilgrims' problems are the result of their long refusal to take park regulations seriously and their decision to clear overgrowth from the old road last year without permits.

Park officials say they have spent more than \$250,000 investigating damage and preparing a civil case against the Pilgrims. They have also cited several Pilgrims for misdemeanors involving park rules.

The family's 62-year-old patriarch, who goes by Papa Pilgrim but whose legal name is Bob Hale, finally applied for an emergency access permit last month. Park officials said it will take several months to prepare an environmental study before access might be granted over the road, which requires more than a dozen bulldozer crossings of a stream containing Dolly Varden char.

Critics say the Park Service is engaged in heartless bureaucratic stalling. Wrangell park superintendent Gary Candelaria says the arrival of winter in rural Alaska does not constitute an emergency.

The Pilgrims' plight is drawing

national attention and financial contributions, though these would barely be enough to cover costs of the airlift, said Rick Kenyon, a McCarthy pastor and newspaper publisher. "They're wonderful, loving people who I find to have a high degree of integrity," he said. "We're helping them because they're American citizens wronged by their government."

McCarthy-area residents have been divided over the Pilgrims and their needs since the family arrived two winters ago and bought an old mining property near the head of McCarthy Creek for \$450,000. They are making payments on the land to the previous owner.

The family has said they hoped to live a quiet life in the wilderness following their Christian beliefs. But they came to see they needed overland access because flying gear to their land was too expensive.

Their backers see the Pilgrims' road as a test case for access to in-holdings in Alaska parks, which were established under a special law in 1980 guaranteeing access subject to "reasonable" regulation.

They also argue that the route, a historic mining road, has been legally claimed by the state.

Park service officials say they have to take the Pilgrims' bulldozer journey seriously to prevent similar efforts by other inholders to open access routes in the park.

Park officials have recommended that the family wait until winter to attempt overland access, when environmental damage would be minimal, saying a permit would be easier to obtain then.

The family's supporters said supplies are needed right away. Some goods, such as animal feed and building materials to replace a cabin that burned down last winter, can't be hauled in by plane, they say.

"By no means is this an alternative to the access they need," said Ray Kreig, an Anchorage land-rights activist.

Some environmentalists who have been following the Pilgrims' high-profile case say it may be just that, noting that Alaskans fly in supplies all over the state.

"The rich irony here is that flying in supplies is exactly what many

of us have been saying to do since this most recent 'emergency' started," said Jim Stratton of the National Parks and Conservation Association.

Last week, the Park Service offered to sit down with a third-party facilitator to talk with Pilgrim and his attorney. The family has not yet responded to the offer, said the attorney, J.P. Tangen.

Pilgrim, in the phone interview Friday, declined to comment in detail on the airlift, expressing misgivings about how it might be portrayed in the newspaper.

"It's pretty rotten that we're having to go to this much trouble," he said. "People are risking their lives" because of the park's intransigence, he said.

He was more effusive speaking to an Associated Press reporter earlier in the week.

"It's just beautiful," he said of the relief effort. "I cannot tell you the unity. ... They just poured out their hearts."

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MORE INFORMATION:  
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