



Bureau of Land Management

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Environmental Assessment

Ground's Keeping Material Storage Yard Berm
And
Campbell Creek Science Center Activity Field
AK-040-06EA-039

Location:

Sec. 3, Township 12 North, Range 3 West, Seward Meridian
Campbell Tract Facility

Prepared By:

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I. INTRODUCTION

This environmental document will assess the environmental consequences of two proposed actions to be undertaken by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) on its administrative site in the Anchorage Bowl, commonly referred to as the Campbell Tract. The BLM proposes to construct a gated, vegetated *berm* around a current ½-acre grounds keeping material site located on the Campbell Tract. The BLM also proposes to construct and vegetate approximately a ½-acre site on Campbell Tract Facility with native grasses for use as an *activity field* for school children while at the Campbell Creek Science Center, located on the grounds of the Campbell Tract.

A. Purpose and Need for the Proposed Actions

Berm

In order to manage and maintain the roads, trails, airstrip and other infrastructure located on the Campbell Tract, the BLM stores gravel, topsoil, logs, and other materials in a storage yard on the tract. The storage yard is located adjacent to the entrance road leading to the Campbell Creek Science Center. The storage yard is visually and aesthetically offensive. Theft of materials from the site has taken place. Currently, some materials stored at the site have been configured as a berm to reduce these problems. The proposed action would screen the yard, enhance its visual characteristics and discourage unauthorized removal of stored materials. At some point in the future the BLM may no longer need the use of the storage yard. If and when it is determined that the storage yard is no longer needed it can be reclaimed and revegetated.

Activity Field

The Campbell Creek Science Center provides educational opportunities to school aged children and the public in the environmental sciences. Many of these educational activities are conducted in outdoor classrooms. On occasion, the Campbell Creek Science Center is unable to meet the demand for outdoor classrooms. The proposed activity field, part of the original design for the Science Center, will provide more versatility for conducting outdoor educational programs at the Campbell Creek Science Center.

B. Conformance With Land Use Plan

The lands effected by the Berm and Activity Field are within lands included in the Management Plan for Public Use and Resource Management on the Bureau of Land Management Campbell Tract Facility, signed June, 1988. Development of the Berm and the Activity Field are in conformance with the Management Plan for Public Use and Resource Management on the Bureau of Land Management Campbell Tract Facility. Both are also in compliance with the Southcentral Management Framework Plan (MFP), March 1980.

C. Relationship to Statutes, Regulations, Policies, Plans or Other Environmental Analyses

Public Land Order 7471 renewed the withdrawal of the Campbell Tract as an administrative site for the BLM under Public Land Order 6127 and extended the withdrawal until 2022.

Development of the Activity Field was addressed in the Campbell Creek Environmental Education Center Development Plan and Environmental Assessment, dated February, 1993.

II. PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

A. Proposed Action

Berm

To meet its maintenance responsibilities on Campbell Tract, the BLM stores grounds keeping materials, i.e. gravel, top soil, boulders, etc., on a former World War II aircraft-parking apron located on the Tract. The site is approximately ½ acre in size (150 feet square). The site is located between the Campbell Creek Science Center access Road and Moose Track Trail. The site has become unsightly over time. As the site is close to the public's access to the Tract and the Campbell Creek Science Center, the site has been subjected to the unauthorized removal of materials from time to time. The BLM proposes to develop a berm on the road and trail sides of the site to enhance its visual characteristics and deter the unauthorized removal material. (The remaining sides of the storage yard are either not visible or inaccessible to the public due to forestation.) The berm on the access road side would be five feet in height, 12-15 feet across at the base, and approximately 100 feet in length. It would be located eight feet off the road. A locked steel gate eight feet across would be located at the north end of the berm. A second intersecting berm similar in height and width would be constructed from the gate in a westerly direction for approximately 50 feet. A third berm of smaller size

would be located across back of the storage yard to screen the yard from users of the Moose Track Trail. A second locked gate would be placed at the northern end of this berm to allow BLM access to and from Moose Track Trail. Currently, material stored at the site has been configured in the general shape and location of the berm.

Vegetation native to Southcentral Alaska would be placed on the berm to provide additional screening, make the berm more visually attractive and to help prevent erosion. This will include the use of alder live cuttings and other native vegetation. Alder will be the primary vegetation used to revegetate the berms. Native trees and shrubs may also be planted on the berm. White spruce, paper birch, quaking aspen, black cottonwood, balsam poplar, felt leaf willow, pacific willow, American green alder, swamp gooseberry, northern black currant, American red currant, devils club, and high-bush cranberry may be used. All transplants will be at least 12 inches tall and will be introduced as they become commercially available or are donated.

Activity Field

The second proposed action is to convert a second partially re-vegetated WWII parking apron located approximately 500 feet northeast of the Campbell Creek Science Center to a semi circular activity field. The completed activity field will be approximately ½ acre in size. Existing vegetation will be removed. A 20 to 25 foot wide screen of current tree stand will be maintained between the field and the existing dogsled trail that runs across the north side. Approximately 6 inches of donated topsoil would be dumped, then leveled out and compacted. The entire area would then be hydro seeded with a commonly used local seed mixture of grasses.

Vegetation Rehabilitation

The activity area would be revegetated with a commonly used local seed mixture of mostly native grasses by hydro seeding. The proposed seed mix is for 30% Nugget Bluegrass, 40% Arcta-Red Fescue, and 30% Bering Hairgrass

B. Storage Yard Revegetation Alternative

Alternative B would be to construct the activity field as proposed. But instead of berming the storage yard and continuing to use it to store materials, the BLM would no longer use the yard for storage and allow it to revegetate naturally.

C. No Action Alternative

Under this alternative the Bureau would not construct the activity field or construct a berm around the storage yard. The existing use of the storage

yard would continue.

III. AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

A. Critical Elements

There would be no impacts to the following critical elements; ACECs, environmental justice, farmlands, floodplains, riparian zones, Native American religious concerns, T & E species, air quality, water quality, wild & scenic rivers, subsistence, or wilderness.

1. Cultural

The Campbell Garrison (AHRS # ANC-01384) is situated within the Campbell Tract. The garrison and airstrip were authorized in 1942 as one of four 5000 foot long satellite airfields associated with Fort Richardson. In 2004 the Campbell Garrison was determined eligible to the National Register of Historic Places.

The first soldiers to arrive at Campbell Garrison found that a scarcity of Quonset huts forced them to live initially in 5 man pyramantle tents. The soldiers soon built more permanent huts of sod in an area off the northeast end of the gravel airstrip. Today there are few visible signs of this camp. The area identified as its location shows some slight depressions that may be the remains of these sod huts. The area's surface has been disturbed by the building of the air strip and taxiways. Some foxholes have been dug into the disturbed areas and a short ditch occurs in the general area but does not appear to lead to any structural remains.

Sometime after December 1942, a more permanent and comfortable Quonset hut camp was constructed along Campbell Creek. The Corps of Engineers as-built map (1944) of the garrison show Quonset huts used as barracks, an officers' quarters, a recreation hall, a mess, an aid station and several storage huts. The latrine and the power and pump house were the only structures that were not Quonset huts. At the close of the war the Army removed all the Quonset huts at Campbell Garrison. The concrete foundations of the latrine and the power and pump house are the only observable remains of that camp today.

The airstrip and taxiways are essentially the same as when they were constructed in 1942 despite over 60 years of use by the military, fire support, and more recently by BLM to support field operations for the Cadastral survey, the Anchorage Field Office, and the CCSC. The airstrip has received regular maintenance to keep it operable for aircraft over the years. The proposed activity field would be located on top of an aircraft apron that has not been

used or maintained by the BLM.

2. Invasive, Non-native Species

There are 38 species of non-native plants known to exist in Anchorage that are listed in the Alaska Exotic Plants Information Clearing House list. Several of these species are likely to occur on the CT relocation areas. These include Buckhorn Plantain *Plantago sp.*, Yellow Toadflax *Linaria vulgaris*, Blue Burr Stickweed *Lappula echinata*, Annual Bluegrass *Poa annua*, Leafy Spurge *Euphorbia esula*, Tufted Vetch *Vicia cracca* and possibly other species. These species are generally found in disturbed areas and often colonize areas around roads and trails.

The Amber-marked Birch Leaf Miner *Profenusa thomsoni*, a small insect introduced from Europe, in the Anchorage area since the mid 1990's, has infected many of the birch trees in the entire Anchorage Bowl, including the CT. It causes defoliation of some trees and can kill trees that are weak or otherwise stressed.

3. Waste, Hazardous and Solid

There are no known hazardous or solid wastes at the sites.

B. Land Status

The proposed project sites are located near or adjacent to Campbell Creek Science Center; on the 730 acre BLM administered Campbell Tract Facility, within the Sec. 3, T.12 N., R.3 W., Seward Meridian. Located in east Anchorage, the general site area has road access via Abbott Loop Road. The Campbell Tract is bordered by residential neighborhoods to the west and partially to the south, and Municipality of Anchorage managed Bicentennial Park to the east and north.

C. Vegetation

The vegetation in the area is typical of the coastal forest in south-central Alaska.

The existing storage yard is mostly barren of vegetation, except for a few clumps of alder. There is no topsoil present to support vegetation and the gravel substrate is compacted preventing the successful natural revegetation from taking place.

The proposed activity area was once an aircraft apron back during World War II. While large patches of cleared gravel remain, the area is partly vegetated with small spruce trees, alder, and brush composed of willow, aspen and cottonwood. Small patches of moss, lichen and grasses are growing on the gravel as well.

D. Wildlife

Most of the species of wildlife that occur in south-central Alaska can be found on the Campbell Tract. These include large mammals like moose, brown bears, black bears, coyotes, wolf and lynx. The most common furbearers are mink and ermine, and beavers occur upstream and downstream of the sites. There are many small mammals such as snowshoe hare, red squirrel, redback voles, other rodents, and shrews within the general project area.

The common birds are slate-colored junco, golden-crowned sparrows, Myrtle warbler, orange crowned warbler, Swainson's thrush, varied thrush, ruby-crowned kinglet, and robin. Resident song birds include boreal and blackcapped chickadees, brown creepers, red-breasted nuthatches, common raven, black-billed magpie, American dipper, and redpolls. The most common raptors are great horned owls, boreal owls, and goshawks.

E. Recreation

The Campbell Tract is designated for non-motorized recreational use. Recreation management for the Campbell Tract is directed by the June 1988 "A Management Plan for Public Use and Resource Management on the Bureau of Land Management Campbell Tract Facility. There are approximately 11 miles of developed recreation trails. Some of these trails link to an area wide trail system on adjoining municipal lands. The proximity of Campbell Tract to urban Anchorage places high demands on the site from a variety of users. Most recreation occurs on trails that were developed on old tank roads and airplane taxiways.

Access for recreation use on Campbell Tract is gained from two formal on-site trailheads and four trails entering from surrounding parks. Established trailheads with parking include the Smoke Jumper Trailhead located at the main Anchorage Field Office complex entrance and the Campbell Airstrip Trailhead located at mile 1.1 on Campbell Airstrip Road. Trail maintenance, signing, and event permitting is a cooperative effort between the BLM, MOA Parks and Recreation Division, and various volunteers and user groups.

Recreation users are primarily residents of Anchorage and surrounding communities. Estimated 2004 visitation was 69,000 user days. Users are typically found walking, running, biking, skiing, snowshoeing, dog-mushing and horseback riding. Many users live close to the Campbell Tract and use the area regularly for exercise, often with their family dogs. Regular competitive events, often starting on adjacent non-BLM lands traverse the Campbell Tract including the Nordic Ski Club's Tour of Anchorage, the start of the Iditarod Sled Dog Race and the World Sled

Dog Championship Races.

A dog mushing trail is located along the north side of the proposed activity field. The heavily used Moose Track Trail is located along the west side of the storage yard.

F. Soils

The soils in the area are generally shallow, well-drained, slightly acid, silty sands over very gravelly glacial till. There is no permafrost. These soils are suitable for construction, forestry, and wildlife habitat. There is currently no soil present on either site, as the soils were stripped and removed many years ago. Both sites consist of compacted gravel.

G. Visual Resources

The area of the project is surrounded by a closed canopy forest, so there are few scenic vistas. The Chugach Mountains can be viewed through the trees in places. The general area is visually appealing to most people who come to the Campbell Tract for its visual beauty. The existing storage yard detracts from that experience

IV. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

A. Impacts of the Proposed Action

1. Cultural Resources

The WWII footprint of airstrip, taxiways and parking aprons on Campbell Tract has been determined to be eligible to the National Register of Historic Places. Constructing berms around a parking apron is an adverse impact to the historic WWII footprint on the Campbell Tract. The open and slowly revegetating parking aprons and revetments are visual reminders of the original WWII use. However, the construction of berms around the parking apron can be reversed.

An adverse impact to the parking apron by the proposed playing field would include ground disturbance from the removal of existing vegetation. The addition of topsoil to the cleared parking apron as well as revegetation with native grasses could be seen as a mitigating effect since the parking apron would be maintained as an open area with the same footprint as the original. Re-use of this open space as a playing field would also help retain the openness of the original.

2. Vegetation

There is little to no existing vegetation that would be impacted by the proposed storage yard. The storage yard berm would be revegetated primarily using live cutting of alder. Additional revegetation using spruce and other native species might occur as vegetative material becomes available. It is expected that rapid growth of especially the alder cuttings will help screen the contents of the storage yard from the public.

There are 20-30 small spruce and numerous clumps of alder, willow, and other brush that would be removed to create the proposed activity field. The proposed activity field would be revegetated by hydro seeding with a commonly used local grass mix.

3. Wildlife

The proposed actions will have an effect on wildlife, although neither areas currently provide much habitat value due to the lack of soil cover. The proposed activity field does provide some moose browse, but the area is poorly vegetated. The local moose would lose the minimal willow/aspen browse currently present, but would gain in grasses available for early spring grazing. The storage yard currently provides very poor habitat, but formalizing its use as a permanent storage yard prevents the opportunity to revegetate and create higher value habitat. However, if at some point in the future the storage yard is no longer needed, the site could be reclaimed and revegetated.

Both brown and black bears are found to regularly pass through the sites of the proposed actions. Recently, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) presented data showing that three radio-collared brown bears are regular residents along the South Fork of Campbell Creek which runs through Campbell Tract. The biologists knew the bears were using the area, especially during salmon runs, but the data show the degree of residency is higher than was previously understood.

Guided school groups will be utilizing the proposed activity field, but the proposed field is at least 100 yards from the creek, where known bear activity is concentrated. The activity field is well within the existing footprint of the CCSC. The proposed storage yard is approximately 50 yards from the creek, at the edge of the creek riparian area. The only use of the storage yard would be by BLM employees on an infrequent basis. The proposed action would have no effect on that use, it would only screen that use from the public.

The noise and activity associated with the construction of the proposed actions will tend to cause some wildlife species to temporarily avoid the sites and relocate to other areas. The construction of a materials storage area and activity area will prevent the opportunity of creating approximately one acre of wildlife habitat on the Campbell Tract.

4. Invasive, Non-Native Species:

Invasive, non-native plant species are known to occur near the project site and throughout the Anchorage Bowl. As topsoil added and revegetation occurs there is potential to introduce invasive plant species. The organic rich soil identified to carry out the proposed actions is being excavated from deep under marshy areas of the Bragaw extension road project, and does not include and seeds or other vegetative material. There is little potential to introduce invasive plants located within this particular topsoil.

However, new construction always offers an opportunity to introduce invasive plants as there are other transmission sources of invasive plants present, including wind and existing vehicle use. As a result invasive plants are starting to show up on the Campbell Tract, particularly along existing roads. Invasive species would be more likely to colonize areas along disturbed ground following construction activity. Equipment brought on site would have a potential to bring in seeds from invasive or undesirable plant species.

To mitigate the potential introduction of invasive plants the proposed action sites will be monitored for invasive plants for the next two years. Any invasive plants found will promptly be removed by hand methods.

5. Wastes, Hazardous and Solid:

Some heavy equipment use will be necessary to construct the berm, and strip and place topsoil on the proposed activity field. The used of heavy equipment presents potential for fuel and oil/hydraulic fluid spills during fueling and from break-down/leaks during operation.

6. Subsistence

No change in Federal Subsistence Management Program authority or implementation would occur from the proposed action. The proposed action will not significantly restrict subsistence uses, decrease the abundance of subsistence resources, alter the distribution of resources, or limit subsistence user access from currently existing conditions.

7. Recreation

There should be no significant impacts to public recreation from the proposed projects project. A few recreational users to the area will be very temporarily exposed to noise and dust during the construction. The normally quiet project areas would be noisier than usual due to equipment use during construction and material handling operations; however, this will generally occur on weekdays during the day when use levels are traditionally at their lowest.

Primary use of the activity field would be in the spring/summer/fall when the dog mushing trail is not in use. Recreational users of the Moose Track Trail and the CCSC should have their experience visually enhanced by screening the storage yard from the trail and the CCSC access road.

8. Visual Resources

As an administrative site, Campbell Tract visual resources have not been inventoried and VRM management classes have not been assigned. Visual resources are managed at the equivalent of a VRM Class IV objective which allows actions that significantly modify the character of the existing landscape. However, in all cases, the visual impacts of projects are modified and mitigated to reduce long-term impacts to the visual landscape.

Impacts of the proposed actions will result in short-term negative impacts and long-term positive impacts to CT visual resources. Short-term impacts will result from the construction of berms on the gravel pad and the laying of topsoil on the activity field. Casual observers will notice the exposed soil and recently planted trees and grass seed in both areas. Berms around the storage pad will stand out to the casual observer for the first few seasons as artificial while vegetation is getting established, but will eventually blend in with the existing road and trail-side vegetation. This will result in a positive impact for travelers on both routes as the area of the storage yard will not be readily visible to most observers.

The activity field will result in a permanent change to the existing landscape as the site changes from a hardened revetment pad with sparse pioneer vegetation to a grass-covered activity field. This change will be mostly noted by CCSC users who expect this type of environment adjacent to the science center. Most recreational users on CT do not routinely pass the location of the proposed activity field. Winter sled dog users will not be drawn to the activity field view due to the decreased winter use and speeds at which they move through CT.

B. Impacts of the Storage Yard Revegetation Alternative

Alternative B would be to construct the activity field as proposed. But instead of berming the storage yard and continuing to use it to store materials, the BLM would allow natural revegetation of the yard and no longer use it for storage.

The principle impact would be that BLM would lose the current capability to store materials used on the Campbell Tract for road and trail improvements and other uses. The BLM would need to find another alternative site to store these materials. A new area might need to be cleared.

Impacts to visual resources for the activity field would be the same as described above. Visual impacts resulting from total re-vegetation of the entire storage pad site would be the same as described above, however the berms supporting screening vegetation could be built approximately two feet lower as their main function would revert to excluding vehicles from the re-vegetation site. Impacts to recreation would not change.

C. Impacts of the No Action Alternative

The principal impact of not authorizing the proposed action is there would be no new activity field for the CCSC to use for their educational activities. The storage yard use would continue but would not be secured and screened from the public. The view shed for travelers on the science center access road and Moose Track Trail will continue to be impacted by unrestricted views of the storage yard.

D. Cumulative Impacts

There would be some minimal negative cumulative impacts of the proposed actions to local resources. While one form of moose browse would be taken away by the activity field by stripping the existing vegetation, a new browse source would be introduced by hydro seeding the field with a common locally used grass seeds. An opportunity to reclaim and revegetate the storage yard would be lost. There would be some positive cumulative impacts to the visual impacts to the public by screening the storage yard, and to the CCSC ability to conduct educational programs by adding the activity field.

E. Mitigation Measures

BLM will use native species to revegetate the storage yard berm and reseed the new activity field. Fueling of vehicles needs to be restricted to a designated location where containment of spills is practical. Construction crew should be required to have adequate spill response materials on-hand to cleanup any/all releases of oil/hydraulic fluid that occur during the project.

V. CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

List of Preparers

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