

EXCITED ABOUT LAND USE PLANNING? **You betcha!**

“I love it when a plan comes together!” Jolie Pollett, BLM-Alaska’s Planning and Environmental Coordinator exclaims, borrowing a quote from the “A-Team” television classic. A self-professed “planning nerd,” Jolie admits she likes having a hand in the BLM’s land use planning process and feels it helps the public to build trust in the BLM and its land management practices. The plans guide land managers on how to make tough decisions about the land’s resources.

An ecologist by training, Jolie says ecology is a holistic discipline, like planning. As an ecologist, she participated in preparing land use plans and found she was good at it. She also discovered many people do not have the desire to plod along developing plans that take years to compile and contain different types of decisions.

Jolie enjoys synthesizing volumes of information (see photo) about all of the different resources and uses the BLM manages on public lands. Planners pull the information together, apply the many different aspects of public land management, look ahead to the future to identify and solve problems, and work to present the best ways to manage the lands for the next 10 to 20 years. She equates the process to those used by municipalities in “city planning.”

“[Your] input helps us make better decisions that will affect the American people for many years to come.”

Jolie explains that it is always a challenge to present so many different types of information in a way that is clear and easy to follow. The plan becomes the “user’s guide” for managers and the public regarding effective use of resources and protection of values on public lands. These plans identify what uses and activities are appropriate on the lands. The decisions made in the plans work toward sustainability. Land use plans can affect where different types of recreational use can occur, identify routes of travel across public lands by various modes of transportation, establish areas where miners may stake claims and areas where companies can explore for natural gas, identify methods of protecting endangered species, and identify unique ecosystems and how best to protect their features.

Jolie’s role is to coordinate the land use plans and amendments that BLM-Alaska develops. She works to ensure consistency in planning decisions across Alaska. She helps keep the plans on-track and within budget. She also checks to make sure the plans make all of the decisions that BLM is required to make (fulfilling policy requirements). It takes a long time to compile all the



Pam Eldridge

A tower of work — Jolie Pollett, Planning and Environmental Coordinator in the BLM-Alaska state office, stands next to a stack of BLM’s current land use plans, many have three or more volumes for one plan. 2008 was a busy year for the planning staff.

background and supporting information needed to make decisions and land use allocations, and many of BLM-Alaska’s plans fill more than one volume.

Because the BLM manages such large areas, especially in Alaska, Jolie knows it is critical that the agency hear from the public and stakeholders about the best ways to manage for multiple-use and sustained yield. She says, “The public helps us identify areas that would benefit from special protection, or areas that are most valuable for development (such as oil/gas leasing, geothermal energy exploration, or mining). We need people to tell us how and where they like to recreate – this helps us define recreation zones. Alaska Natives share

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valuable information about their traditional practices and advise us on how BLM-Alaska can best preserve those practices on public lands. These are just some of the ways others make positive contributions to public land management. This input helps us make better decisions that will affect the American people for many years to come.”

The documents are lengthy because they require analysis of various ways of managing lands. This analysis tells the land manager which decisions to finalize in the land use plan and ensures the BLM is managing lands for the best use. Obviously, not everyone can agree

on the best use of public lands, but the land manager must sift through the data to make the best-informed decisions, which are rarely easy decisions.

When the signing of the Record of Decision signals the completion of the planning process, Jolie smiles as she admits it’s a reason to celebrate. These plans can take three or four years to complete, but they will guide managers for many years to come. “It’s not easy to put an expiration date on a land use plan, but typically we work under a land use plan for 15 or 20 years or more unless conditions change.”

It’s clear that for Jolie Pollet, land use planning is more than a job, it’s a passion.

Four Alaska Land Use Plans Approved in 2008

Considering the lengthy process to complete land use plans, 2008 was a notable year for BLM-Alaska land use planning. The agency released four Records of Decision (RODs)/Approved Plans in 2008 covering over 20 million acres of BLM-managed lands. Most recently approved is the Bay Plan, covering approximately 1.9 million acres within the Bristol Bay and Goodnews Bay areas of southwest Alaska.

The Bay Plan

The BLM released the Bay ROD and Approved Resource Management Plan on Nov. 14, 2008. Decisions include goals and objectives, land use allocations, and management actions for the public lands in the Bay Planning Area managed by the BLM’s Anchorage Field Office. Most objectives are long-range and will take from 10 to 50 years to achieve. Some of the major decisions in the Bay Plan include:

- ▶ Recommend revocation of all ANCSA section 17(d)(1) withdrawals, which would open 1.1 million acres to mineral leasing or mineral entry.
- ▶ Subject 1,834 acres of sensitive aquatic habitat to No Surface Occupancy and 300-foot setbacks.
- ▶ Designate the 36,220-acre Carter Spit as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern to protect Steller eider (a threatened species) habitat.
- ▶ Manage lands in the planning area as a Semi-Primitive Motorized recreation area and as an Extensive Recreation management area.
- ▶ Limit off-highway vehicle (OHV) use to existing trails (except for subsistence use of OHVs). Allow snowmachines to open, cross-country travel when there is adequate snow cover.

In the final Bay Plan, the BLM addresses comments from citizens concerned that the proposed Pebble Mine project poses risks to the environment, especially salmon habitat. Southwest Alaska is home to the most productive fisheries in the world. Salmon is the single most important subsistence food in the planning area and an extremely valuable commercial export.



Pam Eldridge

Planning Writer-Editor Caron Gibson holds the Approved Bay Resource Management Plan and Record of Decision.

The site of the Pebble project, a proposed open-pit copper and gold mine under exploration by Northern Dynasty Mines, Inc., is on State land 30 miles northeast of the nearest BLM-managed land. The BLM has no jurisdiction on State land. Although the Pebble project is only a proposal at this time, the BLM analyzed potential impacts to BLM-managed public lands from the Pebble

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project and other potential development on adjacent lands. This analysis of potential cumulative effects was included in the Bay Plan. Should any lands under BLM jurisdiction be disturbed due to mining operations, the BLM would require Plans of Operation that would include restoring soils and vegetation to their pre-mining condition.

Bay Plan—What Happens Next?

Now that the plan is approved, the BLM will begin its implementation. Actions will include an inventory and assessment of resources such as soils, Steller eider habitat, and cultural and paleontological resources. The BLM will prepare detailed land and legal records to support the ROD's recommendation to revoke ANCSA section 17(d)(1) withdrawals.

Should the level of exploration and development significantly exceed what is in the current Reasonably Foreseeable Development scenarios in the Bay plan, the BLM would amend the plan and include public participation as part of that process. Any plan

amendment would comply with the requirements in the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

Getting Involved

This spring, the BLM will open a Dillingham field station to maintain a presence in the Bay planning area. (See "Dugan Nielsen: BLM's Bristol Bay Connection," *Frontiers*, Fall 2008.)

Throughout the Bay Plan's implementation, the BLM will continue to actively involve the public, using news releases and mass mailings to ask for participation and provide information about new and ongoing implementation planning, site-specific or project planning and opportunities and timeframes to comment. The BLM will also continue to coordinate with the numerous state, federal, tribal, and local agencies and officials interested and involved in the management of BLM public lands in the Bay Planning Area.

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Other BLM Plans Completed and Approved Within the Last Year

Ring of Fire

(ROD signed in March 2008)

The Ring of Fire Resource Management Plan covers 1.3 million acres of BLM-managed public lands in Southeast and Southcentral Alaska and the Aleutian Islands. The Ring of Fire Plan designates two Special Recreation Management Areas (SRMA) for the Knik River and the Haines Block. It also designates the Neacola Mountains as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC). The BLM will re-evaluate the ACEC designation for the Haines Block. The BLM will defer the determination of suitability for 14 eligible Wild and Scenic River segments until land ownership in the planning area is better defined. As with the Bay Plan, the BLM recommends revocation of the existing ANCSA Section 17(d)(1) withdrawals within the Ring of Fire planning area.

Northeast National Petroleum Reserve—Alaska (NPR-A)

(ROD signed in July 2008)

In July 2008 the BLM released the Record of Decision (ROD) for the Northeast National Petroleum Reserve—Alaska (NPR-A) Supplemental Integrated Activity Plan (IAP)/ Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The ROD for the Northeast NPR-A Supplemental IAP/EIS designated approximately 4 million acres

immediately available for oil and gas leasing. It defers leasing on 430,000 acres north and east of Teshekpuk Lake for 10 years, and makes 219,000 acres of Teshekpuk Lake and its islands unavailable for oil and gas leasing. The Supplemental IAP/EIS addresses the cumulative effects of leasing in response to concerns of the District Court. Those concerns arose after release of an amendment to the NPR-A Plan in 2005. The Supplemental IAP/EIS also establishes performance-based stipulations and required operating procedures. It requires studies and monitoring. The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service told the BLM that proposed activities in the planning area would not jeopardize listed and proposed species under the Endangered Species Act, including the polar bear, listed as "threatened" in May 2008.



Polar Bear.

Karen Laubenstein

Kobuk-Seward Peninsula

(ROD signed in September 2008)

The approved Kobuk-Seward Peninsula Resource Management Plan recommends revocation of all ANCSA Section 17(d)(1) withdrawals, and will make up to 11.9 million acres of BLM-managed public lands and mineral estate available to mineral leasing and locatable mineral entry. The Approved Plan also designates six Areas of Critical Environmental Concern: Nulato Hills ACEC (1,080,000 acres); Shaktoolik River ACEC (234,000 acres); Ungalik River ACEC (264,000 acres); Inglutalik ACEC (466,000 acres); Western Arctic Caribou Insect Relief ACEC (1,529,000 acres); and Mount Osborn ACEC (82,000 acres). The Approved Plan identifies two Special Recreation Management Areas — the Squirrel River SRMA and the Salmon Lake-Kigluaik Mountains SRMA. The BLM designated the Squirrel River SRMA in response to current user conflict in the area and will develop a SRM Plan for the area within three years. Meanwhile, the BLM is implementing interim management until the conflicts can be resolved.



Journey into Alaska's Past

with *BLM-Alaska Archaeologist Robert King*

LBJ's Role in Alaska's History



Arnold Newman

President Lyndon B. Johnson.

In an earlier issue of *BLM Alaska Frontiers*, I told the little-known story of President Andrew Johnson's important role in supporting the purchase of Alaska in 1867. It coincided with the 200th anniversary of his birth in 2008. Now, with 2008 coincidentally marking the centennial of the birth of our other President Johnson, Lyndon Baines Johnson (1908-1973), known to many Americans as 'LBJ,' it is fitting to tell LBJ's equally little-known importance in Alaska's history, both leading up to Statehood in 1959 and afterward.

As a supporter of President Franklin Roosevelt's "New Deal," Democrat Lyndon Johnson was first elected to the U.S. House of Representatives from Texas in 1937 and then to the U.S. Senate in 1948. Thereafter, he served as a Texas Senator from 1949 until becoming Vice President of the United States with the inauguration of John F. Kennedy as President in January 1961.

During his years in the Senate, LBJ's genius for political strategy and tactics earned him the coveted post of Minority Leader in 1953 (the

youngest to hold that post in Senate history) and then Majority Leader in 1955 when the Democrats gained a majority in the Senate. That meant that by the early to mid-1950s, when the final struggle for Alaska statehood was underway, Johnson was one of the most powerful figures in Washington, D.C. Without his support, the Alaska Statehood Act would not have passed the Senate in 1958 and been signed by President Eisenhower on July 7, 1958.

One of the reasons statehood for Alaska had been blocked in the past was the fear by some in Congress that Alaska would immediately elect Democrats to both new Senate seats and to the one seat in the House of Representatives (which did happen). Republicans didn't like this prospect, so it took a compromise to un-jam the stalled road to Alaska statehood. The solution was to link the admission of the other territory wanting statehood, Hawaii, to Alaska statehood. Some thought that Hawaii would elect all Republicans to Congress (the opposite of Alaska) and consequently the balance of power in Congress would not shift if Hawaii became a state at virtually the same time. (Hawaii achieved statehood on Aug. 21, 1959.)

Bob Bartlett, the non-voting Alaska Delegate who had tirelessly lobbied Congressmen and everyone else in power to favor Alaska statehood, found LBJ supportive. Indeed, Johnson made a very important commitment to Bartlett that to the best of Johnson's ability, the Alaska Statehood bill would not be filibustered by certain senators, including recalcitrant southern Democrats, who had sometimes dubious and self-serving reasons to oppose Alaska's statehood. These reasons varied from fear by Washington's senator that his state's fishing fleets would lose control of some Alaska fisheries, to others that important Cold War Era military defense

facilities couldn't be managed as effectively by the military, or those who thought statehood would be "too expensive."

Yet, steady talking by Bartlett and others, plus steady prodding in the Senate by Johnson, plus growing support in the House of Representatives ultimately won the day, and the Alaska Statehood Act passed!

Critically important, too, by January 1958 President Eisenhower reversed his position on Alaska's status. He fully endorsed Alaska statehood for the first time. Thus, in 1958, all of the "ingredients" finally came together: Congress passed and President Eisenhower signed the Alaska Statehood Act in July, and on Jan. 3, 1959, President Eisenhower signed the official declaration that made Alaska the 49th state.

But Lyndon Johnson's support for Alaska didn't end there.

In May 1966, as President of the United States, LBJ wrote to Alaska's first governor, William Egan (1914-1984). LBJ informed Egan that, under his administration, a last major step in the transition to Alaska's statehood had taken place. It was the signing of deeds conveying the airports at Nome, Northway, Umiat, Summit, Gulkana, Cold Bay, Bettles and Cordova to the State of Alaska. That action completed the transfer to Alaskan ownership of twenty-one small airports previously owned by the United States and operated by the Federal Aviation Agency. With that action and support by President Johnson, Alaska achieved a major milestone in gaining control over its own infrastructure and becoming the state it is today.

On Nov. 1 and 2, 1966, President and Lady Bird Johnson visited Alaska briefly on their way back from a 17-day tour of the Pacific and Asia. Their trip had included the battle zone of Vietnam, a war that was increasingly eroding his Presidency.

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