

## **2004 WORK PROGRAM**

### **ALASKA BLM RESOURCE ADVISORY COUNCIL**



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# **RAC 2004 Work Program**

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## **SCOPE OF THE COUNCIL**

The Alaska BLM Resource Advisory Council (“RAC” or “Council”) is a chartered 15-member citizen body appointed by the Secretary of the Interior. Council members represent a wide spectrum of public interests across Alaska, including energy/minerals/commercial recreation, conservation/dispersed recreation/historic interests, elected officials, Alaska Natives and the public-at-large.

The Council provides representative citizen counsel and advice to the Secretary concerning the planning and management of public land and resources in Alaska. The Alaska RAC advises the Secretary through the BLM Alaska State Director. Members of the Council serve at the pleasure of the Secretary for staggered terms that may be renewed (after an initial transition period, all terms will be three years).

The Council is responsible for developing recommendations for the BLM regarding the preparation, amendment, and implementation of land use plans for the public lands and resources in Alaska. The Alaska RAC provides the BLM with a representative citizen forum with which to receive public input and to analyze various proposals affecting public land and resources. All Alaska RAC meetings are open to the general public and any person or organization may file a statement or appear before the RAC regarding topics on its meeting agenda. The Council meets quarterly, with a field trip generally scheduled during the summer.

The Alaska RAC operates in accord with an Annual Work Program developed by its membership in coordination with the BLM Alaska State Office. The Annual Work Program is reviewed and approved by the Alaska RAC at the beginning of each calendar year. RAC members, the BLM Alaska State Director or the public, propose the individual items included in the Annual Work Program.

## **2004 WORK PROGRAM**

The BLM Alaska RAC will address the following issues during 2004. However, unanticipated circumstances may occur to cause the RAC to add or subtract issues and/or otherwise influence the priority and attention the RAC may devote to any issues. The issues are listed below as either action items, or ongoing informational items.

Action items contemplate the RAC taking some sort of proactive action during the year (most likely through the passage of a resolution), while informational items are generally ongoing issues where the BLM will keep the RAC informed and seek input as needed. However, the Council may amend the work program at any time if it is determined that informational items should become action items (or vice-versa), or new developments require immediate action.

### **I. ACTION ITEMS**

#### **A. Outdated Federal Land Segregations**

In many areas, the map of Alaska is covered with federal land withdrawals, many of which were originally reserved for purposes of Native land selections or for possible creation of new federal conservation system units. However, as events unfolded, many of these land segregations were never removed or revoked, even though they no longer serve their intended purpose. As a result, the affected land remains segregated and therefore unavailable for activities such as mining, settlement, forestry, etc.

The RAC initiated this work item during 2003 and it has been progressed by the BLM working in conjunction with a RAC Working Group. A portion of the Bristol Bay Region was identified through this process for more detailed analysis and subsequent action by the BLM. During 2004, this Work Group and the BLM will complete their analysis of these outdated segregations in the Bristol Bay area and take the steps necessary to revoke and/or modify the withdrawals that no longer serve their intended purpose. In addition, they will also

identify and prioritize other areas in Alaska where similar efforts would be productive.

***Action: Continue the Outdated Segregations Work Group and identify and prioritize existing federal land withdrawals in Alaska that should be revoked and/or amended by the BLM because they no longer serve their intended purpose (by 3Q 04).***

***Work Group: Tom Crafford (Chair), Susan Olsen, Randall Frank, Paul Roehl***

## **B. OHV Usage Policy**

Unregulated Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) usage has become a significant issue affecting land and resource health in Alaska. OHV activity in Alaska has expanded exponentially over the past two decades. The advent of advanced OHV technology has enabled public users to access areas heretofore considered inaccessible.

By the late 1970's, the all-terrain vehicle (ATV) had become a significant mode of overland travel in Alaska. The advent of the 4-wheel drive in 1981 further revolutionized ATV travel. If current trends continue, OHVs may eventually outnumber snowmachines in Alaska.

OHV trails are becoming increasingly ubiquitous throughout most of Alaska. OHV trails now commonly radiate out from most rural communities and from roadside trailheads, landing strips and other points of access. The impacts of OHV usage to fragile vegetation and sensitive wildlife areas have become pronounced in many areas of the state.

This issue has become one of the most significant land and resource management concerns in Alaska. As such, the RAC is interested in working with the BLM to educate the public concerning the impacts of such usage and to evaluate options to better manage and reduce adverse impacts.

During 2003 the RAC created a Work Group to address this issue. Due to a late start, the Work Group never got off the ground and this task was not addressed during 2003.

***Action: The RAC OHV Work Group will meet with the BLM and evaluate options to help address this problem. These options may include the adoption of new management regulations, enhanced public education, and the closure of some public lands to OHV usage (by 3Q 04).***

***Work Group: Susan Olsen (Chair), Larry Taylor, Philip Driver, Keith Tryck, Suzanne McCarthy***

### **C. Expansion of the Public Recreation Use Cabin System**

The BLM already manages a system of public recreational use cabins in the Steese Conservation Area and the White Mountain National Recreation Area. With Alaska's resident and visitor population increasing, public interest has been expressed in expanding this system, including consideration of public use cabins in new areas where none now exist.

Additional areas to be considered for public recreation cabin consideration might include the NPR-A, the Squirrel River, Denali Highway and Dalton Highway corridor. It is recognized that this consideration is best undertaken in the context of the BLM's Resource Management Planning process.

It is also recognized that the creation of additional public use cabins will require capital construction funds and an ongoing revenue stream adequate to cover management costs. In addition, depending upon location, the development of additional public use cabins may require an expansion of the existing trail system to ensure proper access. This would present opportunities for the integration/coordination of trail and public use cabin systems between one or more public land management agencies.

The RAC has created a Work Group to study this issue and work with the BLM to identify areas appropriate for expansion of the public cabin system.

***Action: The RAC Work Group will work with the BLM to determine if and where additional areas on BLM land in Alaska might be appropriate for the establishment of public recreational use cabins (by 1Q 04).***

***Work Group: Gary Gustafson (Chair), Sandra Key, Teresa Imm, Evie Witten, Randall Frank***

#### **D. RAC Representation in Resource Management Planning (RMP)**

The BLM has begun nationally an effort to update existing RMPs or to prepare new RMPs for areas not already covered. In Alaska, this effort has focused upon several areas where no plans currently exist or where existing plans are outdated. According to the BLM national planning schedule the following plans are scheduled for activity during 2004 (either already underway or scheduled to begin).

Furthermore, the RAC has designated the following liaisons to work with the BLM on all aspects of the planning process:

1. **East Alaska RMP** - Susan Olsen, Suzanne McCarthy, Sandra Key
2. **Ring of Fire RMP** - Jim Posey, Sandra Key, Paul Roehl
3. **Northeast NPR-A IAP/EIS Update** - Teresa Imm, Charlie Boddy
4. **South NPR-A IAP/EIS** - Teresa Imm, David van den Berg, Phil Driver
5. **Kobuk/Seward Peninsula RMP** - Phil Driver, Tom Crafford, Teresa Imm
6. **Statewide Fire Plan Amendment** - Keith Tryck, Larry Taylor

The BLM Alaska RAC Charter specifically provides that the RAC shall develop recommendations for the BLM regarding the preparation, amendment and implementation of land use plans for the public lands and resources within the jurisdiction of the Council (Alaska). This includes the allocation and expenditure of federal funds related to such long-term planning.

Although the RAC has been briefed upon the status of several proposed and ongoing planning efforts in Alaska (above), the RAC has not yet fulfilled its duties as provided under the Charter. Therefore, the RAC should immediately address this issue and develop recommendations for the BLM Alaska concerning its long-term planning efforts.

In order to fulfill its Charter function and best assist the BLM during plan development, the RAC will appoint a liaison(s) from within its membership to each BLM RMP. The liaison(s) will work closely with the BLM during all aspects of the planning process (including pre-planning), with particular focus upon public interface. It is expected that the liaison(s) will attend key agency meetings on the plan and will also personally attend all public meetings as the plan progresses from scoping to final adoption. The liaison will regularly brief the RAC on the progress of the plan and notify the RAC if additional resources are needed.

In addition, the BLM State Director will annually review the planning priorities of BLM Alaska with the RAC.

***Action: The RAC has assigned a liaison or liaisons from within its membership for each plan already underway or scheduled to begin during 2004. The BLM will annually review its planning priorities with the RAC (1Q 04).***

**E. Establishment of an Interim NPR-A Research and Monitoring Subcommittee**

During 2001 BLM formed a NPR-A Research and Monitoring Team (RMT) in order to implement a provision of the Northeast NPR-A IAP/EIS that called for the secretary of the Interior to assess NPR-A research and monitoring needs, develop and recommend research priorities, and apply information gained to improve technical and operating practices. However, the RMT was determined to be limited in its scope because it was focused upon the NE NPR-A, rather than the entire North Slope. As a result, the BLM did not recharter the RMT.

Meantime, efforts to replace the RMT with a comprehensive, region-wide North Slope Science Initiative (NSSI) are not expected to be completed for at least one year. As a result, the BLM has asked the RAC to create an Interim NPR-A Research and Monitoring Subcommittee to carry on the work of the RMT until the NSSI can be fully implemented.

***Action: The RAC will create an Interim NPR-A Research and Monitoring Subcommittee to serve under the authority of the RAC Charter. The Subcommittee will consist of Gary Gustafson, Jim Posey, Teresa Imm and Sandra Key and will provide advice to the full RAC and the BLM State Director until such time as the NSSI is implemented (4Q 04).***

## **II. INFORMATION ITEMS**

### **A. ANCSA 17(b) Easement Identification and Management**

Section 17(b) of ANCSA provided a mechanism for the BLM to consult with the state and reserve public use and access easements across land conveyed to Native corporations. As a result, many easements (either 60 ft. or 25 ft. wide) were reserved in many areas of Alaska. However, most of these easements have never been marked and their location is poorly understood.

Several years ago the RAC passed a resolution asking the BLM to develop a strategy for the long-term management of easements across Native lands. In response the BLM formed an interdisciplinary team that has been working to inventory, mark and manage these easements. The RAC will continue to follow the progress of this effort and will assist the BLM as requested, particularly to help educate users from within the RAC's respective interest groups.

***Status:*** Stay informed about the progress of the BLM 17(b) easement identification and management program and assist where requested (Ongoing).

### **B. Land Conveyance Process**

BLM Alaska is well along in the process of conveying land to the state pursuant to the Alaska Statehood Act and to Alaska Natives pursuant to ANCSA. However, as these entitlements near closure the process becomes increasingly more difficult. The state and Alaska Natives understandably desire to receive only the highest quality remaining lands to fulfill their entitlements. As a result, they often prefer to wait until more is learned about the resource capabilities of the land.

In some areas, state and Native land selections overlap, thereby creating confusion over the identity of the eventual landowners. In addition, the state and ANCSA corporations are allowed to overselect their land entitlement, meaning that they have generally chosen more land than they are actually entitled to receive. This situation usually creates uncertainty over future land ownership and sometimes complicates BLM's ability to manage areas of land.

The BLM has announced plans to complete the land conveyance process in Alaska by 2009 and legislation has been introduced to help facilitate this goal.

The RAC is interested in following the progress of land conveyances to the state and Native corporations and assisting where needed with efforts to resolve conflicts.

***Status:*** Continue to monitor the state and Native land conveyance process and assist the BLM where requested to help solidify future land ownership patterns (Ongoing).

### **C. Prescribed Burns**

There are multiple opportunities for prescribed burns to occur on BLM lands throughout Alaska. Handled safely, these prescribed burns enhance watershed health and restore vegetative diversity, reduce the danger of wildfire and provide valuable contributions to wildlife habitat.

It is important, however, that prescribed burns on federal land be conducted in the context of an adopted policy that incorporates public input. This policy should also be consistent with efforts underway

nationally to reduce fire hazards and manage the impact of wildfires on communities and the environment.

***Status:*** The RAC will assist the BLM Alaska State Office as requested with efforts to develop and implement a prescribed burn policy (Ongoing).

#### **D. Trans-Alaska Pipeline System (TAPS) Oversight**

The RAC also maintains great interest in the BLM's management and oversight of the Trans-Alaska Pipeline System (TAPS). This includes the current efforts related to the ROW lease renewal as well as ongoing maintenance and safety considerations.

***Status:*** The RAC will be kept closely informed of all BLM activities related to the TAPS (Ongoing).

#### **E. Fee Schedule Review**

Given the costs associated with land management and stewardship in Alaska, the RAC is interested in whether the existing BLM fee schedule for recreation and other activities is appropriate. The RAC requests a review and briefing from the BLM concerning this issue, including any suggestions as to how the RAC might assist to assess the issue and make recommendations for future action.

#### **F. NPR-A Activities**

A significant portion of BLM's resources are devoted to planning and management for the NPR-A. There are three significant BLM IAP's and EIS's either underway already, or soon scheduled to begin. In addition, the relationship of oil and gas exploration and development, fish and wildlife habitat and resources, cultural values and subsistence uses, transportation corridors and other activities simply mandate that considerable research and monitoring activities must be completed in order to assess impacts and ensure proper safeguards are in place.

***Status:*** The BLM will regularly brief the RAC on all NPR-A activities and ask the RAC for advice and assistance where appropriate (Ongoing).

### III. 2004 RAC Meeting Schedule – Proposed Agenda Items

<u>Meeting Date</u>	<u>Tentative Agenda Items</u>
February 5-6* (Anchorage)	Outdated Land Segregations Status Report Public Recreation Use Cabins NPR-A Status Report Land Conveyance Status Report BLM Alaska Fee Schedule Overview Election of Officers
April 29-30* (Fairbanks)	Outdated Land Segregations – cont. Public Recreation Use Cabins – cont. Land Conveyance Process Update OHV Usage Policy Resource Management Planning Status 2004 Prescribed Burn Proposals
July 29-31 Field Trip*	Unalakleet Area (details TBD) NPR-A Update
October 14-15* (Anchorage)	Outdated Land Segregations – cont. OHV Usage Policy – cont. 17(b) Easement Status Report TAPS Update NPR-A Issues

\* Includes public comment opportunity