

# **Alaska – Bureau of Land Management (BLM) National Landscape Conservation System (NLCS) Strategy FY2013-2015**

## **Alaska’s BLM National Landscape Conservation System Units**

- Central Arctic Management Area Wilderness Study Area (WSA)
- Beaver Creek National Wild and scenic River (WRS)
- Birch Creek National Wild and Scenic River (WSR)
- Delta National Wild and Scenic River (WSR)
- Forty Mile National Wild and Scenic River (WSR)
- Gulkana National Wild and Scenic River (WSR)
- Unalakleet National Wild and Scenic River (WSR)
- Iditarod National Historic Trail (NHT)
- Steese National Conservation Area (NCA)

## **SUMMARY**

This document identifies strategic priorities for the Alaska NLCS Units to implement the Themes and Goals of the BLM 15 Year NLCS Strategy. The Alaska Strategy was crafted from its 30 year history of ANILCA designations (Iditarod designated in 1978), management planning and long-term monitoring of conservation values. These many years of experience conserving special values has molded a program at first heavily challenged by its new legislative charge overcoming a political environment of development into a solid program of protection. Some challenges remain in terms of; proposed developments including pipelines, transportation corridors and transmission to cross NLCS Units; new Off-Highway Vehicle cross-country technology; and impacts to conservation values caused by grandfathered uses. To advance the conservation agenda and continue to improve upon protected area designation, the following priorities are presented to guide the BLM Alaska NLCS program into the future.

## **Alaska Strategic Priorities**

**Overarching Priority** - Advance a regional landscape-ecosystems approach to management of conservation values in NLCS Units that include: a coupled ecological-human systems framework; enhanced science-based assessment and monitoring; and multi-scale local-to-international public-private collaborative management and targeted partnerships. Further expand conservation efforts beyond enabling legislative values to ecosystem service values in order to fully embrace the protected area status and benefits to global natural and human systems significance.

**#1 FY2013 - Integrate Internal Agency Processes and Programs**

**#2 FY2014 - External Statewide and Unit Communication Plans**

**#3 FY2015 - NLCS Showcases**

## **NLCS National 15-Year Theme and Goal Summary**

### **Theme 1: Ensuring the Conservation, Protection & Restoration of NLCS**

#### **Values**

- Goal 1A:** Clearly communicate that the conservation, protection, and restoration of NLCS values is the highest priority in NLCS planning and management, consistent with the designating legislation or proclamation.
- Goal 1B:** Expand understanding of the NLCS values through inventory and monitoring.
- Goal 1C:** Provide a scientific foundation for decision-making and resource protection.
- Goal 1D:** Use the NLCS as an outdoor laboratory and demonstration center for new and innovative management and business processes that aid in the conservation, protection and restoration of NLCS areas.
- Goal 1E:** Limit discretionary uses to those compatible with the conservation, protection and restoration of the values for which NLCS lands were designated.

### **Theme 2: Collaboratively Manage the NLCS as Part of the Larger Landscape**

- Goal 2A:** Emphasize an ecosystem-based approach to manage the NLCS in the context of the surrounding landscape.
- Goal 2B:** Adopt a cross-jurisdictional, community-based approach to landscape-level conservation planning and management.
- Goal 2C:** Work with tribes, state agencies, and local communities to identify and protect lands that are critical to the long-term ecological sustainability of the landscape.
- Goal 2D:** Adopt a community-based approach to recreation and visitor services delivery, consistent with conservation of NLCS & the socio-economic goals of the community.

### **Theme 3: Raising Awareness of the Value and Benefits of NLCS**

- Goal 3A:** Launch a long-term public awareness initiative about BLM (state name)'s NLCS units, including statewide and local outreach, communications and media plans.
- Goal 3B:** Advance and strengthen partnerships to facilitate shared stewardship and to advance the relevance of the NLCS to communities of interest and place.
- Goal 3C:** Expand use of volunteers within the NLCS.
- Goal 3D:** Engage the public in stewardship through education and interpretation.
- Goal 3E:** Recruit and retain well-trained youth from diverse backgrounds for entry-level careers, and engage youth in recreation, education, and stewardship.

### **Theme 4: Building on BLM's Commitment to Conservation**

- Goal 4A:** Improve internal communication and understanding of the NLCS and its potential to enhance the BLM as a whole.
- Goal 4B:** Cultivate shared responsibility for the NLCS conservation mandate as an integral part of BLM's multiple-use, sustained-yield mission.
- Goal 4C:** Clearly define, understand, and justify staffing needs, and administratively organize the NLCS areas to operate as a cross-cutting program within the BLM.
- Goal 4D:** Ensure the NLCS budget is coordinated with the other BLM programs. Set clear expectations and procedures for interdisciplinary budget development, priority setting, and reporting of accomplishments.

## **Overarching Priority - Advance a regional landscape-ecosystems approach to management of conservation values in NLCS Units**

**FY2013-15 and beyond** - Include a coupled ecological-human systems framework; enhanced science-based assessment and monitoring; and multi-scale local-to-international public-private collaborative management and targeted partnerships. Further expand conservation efforts beyond enabling legislative values to ecosystem service values in order to fully embrace the protected area status and benefits to global natural and human systems significance.

Implements NLCS 15 Year Strategy Themes and Goals: 1A, 1C, 1E, 2A, 2B, 2C, 2D,

### **Alaska Strategic Priority #1: Integrate Internal Agency Processes and Programs**

Consolidate a team approach to the NLCS Program by enhancing internal coordination from Field Offices to Headquarters and across programs at each organizational level as an initial step to strategic implementation as well as identify FY14 and FY15 actions to achieve priorities.

FY2013 – Conduct an all-hands internal Alaska workshop with all programs and support centers at the State Office, District Office and Field Office levels to include Headquarters participation for enhancing strategic direction, policy, budget, and programmatic teamwork, management/monitoring/marketing and administrative workplans. The expected result of the internal workshop is to enhance an agency culture of NLCS priority and conservation as part of our multiple use mission. The expected outcome of the workshop is a NLCS Report specifying Unit-by-Unit actions to implement the Goals of the 15 Year National Strategy and the 3 Year Alaska Strategy and a comprehensive overview of accomplishments program-by-program.

Implements NLCS 15 Year Strategy Themes and Goals: 1A, 1B, 1C, 1E, 2C, 4A, 4B, 4C, 4D

### **Alaska Strategic Priority #2: External Statewide and Unit Communication Plans**

Raise awareness and understanding of NLCS and ecosystem service values, cultivate and strengthen relationships, and promote individual and community stewardship through effective communications and outreach.

FY2014 – Develop Statewide and Unit communication plans involving: print and social media; website enhancements; wired and wireless infrastructure; employment, youth and volunteer opportunities; interpretive and education strategies, relationships to Public Land Information Centers and web-based services; partnership development; targeted messages to media outlets, schools and universities, industry, and private sector; and collaboration with federal, state, tribal, Borough, and community agencies.

Implements NLCS 15 Year Strategy Themes and Goals: 3A, 3B, 3C, 3D, 3E

## **Alaska Strategic Priority #3: NLCS Showcases**

Demonstrate the commitment to conserving, protecting and restoring NLCS and ecosystem service values by showcasing NLCS units in a public forum or document that highlight values, science initiatives, partnership efforts, and accomplishments to establish a comprehensive conservation agenda.

FY2015 – Implement a public showcase for each Alaska NLCS Unit through customized events and/or documents befitting each unit’s history and personality. The showcase effort may involve one or more of the following: highlighting partnerships; sharing case studies; compilation of accomplishments; policy review; science forum; community involvement; baseline inventory identification; monitoring of trend and condition reports; art, music, or photography inspired by the Unit; educational field excursions; professional development and volunteer opportunities; and recognition of employees and partners. Examples of showcases are Unit Conferences or symposium and documents similar to the Steese National Conservation Annual Report.

Implements NLCS 15 Year Strategy Themes and Goals: 1A, 1D, 2A, 2B, 2C, 3A, 3B, 3D, 3E, 4A, 4B

### **The BLM National Landscape Conservation System in Alaska**

In Alaska, BLM manages over two million acres in the following NLCS units:

The **Steese National Conservation Area**, located 60 miles northeast of Fairbanks, is divided into northern and southern units by the Steese Highway. This 1.2 million-acre area is home to caribou, Dall sheep, bears, wolves, wolverine, other furbearers, and raptors. The 27-mile Pinnell Mountain National Recreation Trail provides excellent vistas of the alpine tundra and ridge-tops. In summer, the Birch Creek National Wild River is a primary recreational attraction winding through the vast expanse of the Yukon Flats in Central Alaska.

The **Iditarod National Historic Trail** is a network of more than 2,300 miles of trails used by generations of Alaskans for transportation. The trail’s heyday was during the gold rush in the early 20th century. Later a sled dog relay using a portion of the trail brought lifesaving serum during a diphtheria epidemic in Nome. Today, the spirit of the Iditarod lives on when racers put their minds, muscles, machines or animals to work in epic long-distance winter racing linking Alaska communities large and small, including the world-renown 1,000-mile Iditarod Sled Dog Race from Anchorage to Nome. More than 1,500 miles of the historic winter trails are open for public use across federal and state lands. BLM manages about 150 miles of trail and 4 public shelter cabins.

The **Central Arctic Management Area Wilderness Study Area** contains approximately 800,000 acres of public land, in various-size parcels, on the North Slope of Alaska. Characterized by foothills and uplands of the northern fringe of the Brooks Range, CAMA also includes a portion of arctic coastal plain that provides year-long range for both caribou and moose. River drainages provide important habitat for grizzly bears. Dall sheep inhabit the most rugged mountainous areas. Opportunities for primitive recreation exist for big game hunting, fishing, sightseeing, hiking, and photography, boating and limited horseback riding.

The 62 mile **Delta Wild and Scenic River** is 175 miles south of Fairbanks and 22 miles west of Paxson on the Denali Highway, where it flows through the Alaska Range. Year-round recreational opportunities abound throughout the river’s watershed – over 150,000 acres, 160 miles of streams, and 21 lakes. The

Tangle River connects several of the Tangle lakes, drains into the Delta River, joins the Tanana River, and then flows into the mighty Yukon River. You can boat, camp, hike, hunt, trap, pick berries, snowmachine, and view wildlife along with excellent grayling fishing. Stay at the popular Tangle Lakes campground and put-in at the Delta Wild and Scenic River wayside (mile 21.5) on the Denali Highway. The gently meandering Gulkana National Wild River system of 181 miles offers three-day to two-week trips through rolling uplands and flat, marshy lowlands dotted with interconnected lakes. The Gulkana offers excellent opportunities to see moose, waterfowl, bald eagles, and bears. Salmon runs peak mid-June to late July. Among the most popular sportfishing rivers in Alaska, the Gulkana has easy road access at put-in and take-out points and the popular BLM Sourdough Campground. The Gulkana falls 1,250 feet in the 81 river miles between Paxson Lake and its confluence with the Copper River. The most popular float trips take place in the river's main stem, with nearly 50 river miles ranging from Class I to roiling Class III white water.

The 105-mile **Unalakleet Wild and Scenic River** (80-miles are designated as wild and scenic) originates in the Nulato Hills and flows into Norton Sound near the village of Unalakleet, 400 miles air miles from Anchorage and accessible only by plane. This slow-moving, clear river starts fast and then slows to offer world-class fishing for Chinook, coho, chum, pink salmon, arctic grayling, and Dolly Varden. Experience a Unalakleet adventure through a wilderness paralleling part of the historic Iditarod Trail.

From its headwaters just north of the Steese National Conservation Area, the **Birch Creek National Wild River** flows swiftly through upland plateaus, forested valleys, and marshy lowlands on its 344-mile journey to the Yukon River. Of the 126 miles designated as wild and scenic, popular float trips range from a 16 day or a 110-mile trip depending on put-in and take-out points. River travelers often see moose, caribou, and a variety of birds, with arctic grayling the clear tributaries. Floaters can access both ends of the Wild and Scenic River segment from BLM recreation sites along the Steese Highway. Water is mostly Class I, but there are some Class II and III rapids. In the winter months, you can dog mush, snow machine, cross-country ski, or trap on the frozen river. Each February the Yukon Quest International Sled Dog Race between Fairbanks and Whitehorse, Canada, makes portions of the river busy with dog teams and mushers.

The **Fortymile Wild and Scenic River** drainage is an extensive network of creeks and rivers in east-central Alaska and 392 miles are classified as wild, scenic or recreational. Gold prospectors gave the Fortymile River its name because it joins the Yukon River about 40 miles below Fort Reliance, an old Canadian trading post. Today, the BLM manages the historic Fortymile River corridor and its two campgrounds. Here, you can find relaxation, adventure or a touch of the past in the area that provided Interior Alaska's first gold rush in 1886. Discover scenic beauty, solitude, and glimpses of gold-mining dredges, turn-of-the-century trapper cabins and abandoned town sites. For an Alaska river, the Fortymile has an unusual number of access points and choices for recreational trips through deep, winding canyons filled with forest of birch, spruce and aspen.

The **Beaver Creek Wild and Scenic River** is a moderately swift, clear, shallow stream that passes from its headwaters in the rolling hills and jagged limestone peaks of the White Mountains, approximately 50 miles north of Fairbanks, through the marshy lowlands of the Yukon Flats on its 303-mile journey north to the Yukon River. The 127-mile wild and scenic river portion provides exciting fishing for arctic grayling, northern pike, burbot and whitefish. Long a popular river adventure, floating Beaver Creek's clear Class I waters can take from seven days to three weeks to complete. For shorter trips, you can arrange for pick-up from a gravel bar near Victoria Creek by local air service. The 360-mile trip has been called the longest road-to-road float in North America. You can reserve BLM's Borealis-LeFevre cabin at river mile 32 or four other hike-to cabins. The Ophir Creek campground is right next to the Nome Creek put-in for float trips.