

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Case File No. AA-086244

AK-040-06-EA-010

Applicant: Arctic Orienteering Club

Type of
Action: Special Recreation Permit Outdoor Environmental Education

Location: Campbell Tract Administrative Site
Portions of Secs. 2, 3, 10, and 11, T. 12 N., R. 3 W., Seward Meridian

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Preparing
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I. INTRODUCTION

The Campbell Tract (CT) is a 730 acre Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA) of natural, mostly wooded, public land located within the city limits of the Municipality of Anchorage (MOA). The primary purpose of the CT is to support the administrative functions and offices for the Anchorage Field Office (AFO) of the BLM. The CT is centered around the Campbell Airstrip, a 5,000' gravel runway dating to 1942, that is used by the BLM and other agencies for various government purposes. Miles of multi-use non-motorized trails on the CT provide year-round recreational opportunities for approximately 75,000 user days. The CT is adjacent to, and management is coordinated with, the 4,000-acre MOA Far North Bicentennial Park (FNBP), forming a contiguous piece of natural public and park land linking the high mountains of Chugach State Park to the heart of Anchorage.

A. Purpose and Need for the Proposed Action:

Orienteering is both a sport, and a valuable skill for individuals to possess when faced with a variety of outdoor situations. Orienteering can be very useful in survival situations and is an important outdoor education skill which helps people navigate through the wilderness. Orienteering is a hands-on activity that necessitates a natural, wilderness-like setting to practice field skills. Campbell Tract provides a venue in close proximity to Anchorage for the development of these skills. This EA is required to document the environmental impacts of the proposed activity.

B. Conformance With Land Use Plan:

This action is in conformance with the Southcentral Management Framework Plan (MFP), dated March 1980.

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

Permits for commercial recreation use are regulated by 43 CFR 2930. With this regulation an applicant may be authorized to conduct commercial recreation activities on BLM-administered land. The Authorized Officer may issue Special Recreation Permits for up to five years subject to annual re-authorization. The permittee must satisfactorily meet the requirements associated with the Special Recreation Permit as well as conform with applicable laws and regulations.

II. PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVE

A. Proposed Action:

The Proposed Action is to conduct events that educate the general public about the sport of orienteering and to hold recreational meets on CT. The Anchorage based Arctic Orienteering Club (AOC) holds three to five events on CT per year with between 50 to 250 participants at each event. At each event AOC offers

basic training to new participants, as well as more challenging courses for advanced participants. Club activities focus on introducing people to the sport by using a map and a compass to familiarize people with navigating themselves in a wilderness-like setting.

Meets are run between a series of checkpoints (controls), which are topographic or manmade features in the woods. Participants navigate with a map and a compass between checkpoints. There are five courses set at any given meet offering a variety of levels of difficulty. The majority of the participants are beginners and use courses that follow established trails, which minimize impact to CT, except for the area directly next to each checkpoint. Rarely do checkpoints get used two years in a row.

AOC generally holds 3-5 events on CT annually including National Orienteering Day, a greater Far North Bicentennial Park/Campbell Tract meet, and a fall public Halloween orienteering event. The National Orienteering Day event, with up to 150 participants, focuses on basic orienteering skills and a general introduction to the sport. Activities during this event are focused on trails and open areas to conform to beginners.

The Far North Bicentennial Park/Campbell Tract is a more advanced event that utilizes a small portion of CT for checkpoints and short routes.

The Halloween meet, which can serve up to 250 participants, mostly children, is held on a weekend night around October 31. Costumed club members staff elaborate checkpoints decorated with various Halloween props and costumed children and parents move between these checkpoints. Checkpoints and routes for this event stay on established trails near the Science Center, are monitored for impact post-event, and rotated annually.

This action is subject to standard stipulations for CT including adhering to Leave No Trace principles, prohibition of activity on the Campbell Airstrip and AFO core administrative area, and other safety and conservation stipulations related to this particular use.

B. No Action Alternative:

The No Action Alternative is to continue present management of the CT. Under this alternative, management practices and resource uses would remain the same.

III. AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

A. Critical Elements:

It has been determined that the following Critical Elements are either not present or would not be adversely affected by the Proposed Action or the No Action Alternative: Air Quality, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, Environmental Justice, Farmlands (prime or unique), Floodplains, Invasive, Non-native Species, Native American Religious Concerns, Wastes (Hazardous/Solid), Water Quality (Surface and Ground), Wetlands/Riparian Zones, Wild and Scenic Rivers, and Wilderness.

1. Cultural Resources:

The CT contains scattered World War II remains dating from 1942 when a 5,000 foot military airstrip and support facilities were constructed to support nearby Ft. Richardson. War related improvements included an airstrip, taxiways, and revetments for aircraft use and various sod structures for housing and administrative functions including quarters, a kitchen and mess hall, latrines, and guard posts. These facilities were constructed from sod and locally available materials due to a shortage of building supplies and now appear as shallow pits and earth mounds covered with vegetation and overgrown concrete foundations with occasional scattered boards and nails. Most of these cultural sites and remains lie off the north end of the existing Campbell Airstrip.

2. Threatened and Endangered Species:

No threatened or endangered species are known to be found on the CT.

3. Invasive, Non-Native Species:

There are 38 species of non-native plant species known to exist in Anchorage that are listed in the Alaska Exotic Plants Information Clearing House list. Several of these species likely occur in the identified trail relocation areas. These include Buckhorn Plantain *Plantago sp.*, Yellow Toadflax *Linaria vulgaris*, Blue Burr Stickweed *Lappula echinatat*, 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.

4. ANILCA Section 810 Compliance:

The CT lands are Federal Public Land as defined in the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA), Section 810 and fall under the authority of the Federal Subsistence Board and the Subsistence Regulations for the Harvest of Fish and Wildlife on Federal Public Lands in Alaska. The CT lies within the Anchorage Management Unit of Game Management Unit 14C under which the current Subsistence Regulations noted above is closed to the taking of wildlife under both State (hunting and trapping) and Federal Subsistence Regulations. The taking of wildlife on the CT is further limited by Supplemental Rules issued on November 20, 1998 under 43 CFR 8365.1-6 that closed the CT to the use of firearms, archery equipment, traps, or snares. The CT has no documented consistent use by rural Alaskans of fish or game and no knowledge of such use has become available since the inception of the Federal Subsistence Program or the issuance of the noted Supplementary Rules.

The Proposed Action will not significantly restrict subsistence uses, decrease the abundance of subsistence resources, alter the distribution of subsistence resources, or limit subsistence user access from currently existing conditions. No further compliance with additional provisions of Section 810 is necessary at this time.

5. Wastes, Hazardous and Solid:

There are no known hazardous or solid waste sites in the affected area.

B. Recreation:

The CT is designated for non-motorized recreational use. Recreation management for the CT 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 on CT. Some of these trails link to a wider trail system on the adjoining MOA FNBP. The proximity of the CT 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 CT is gained from three formal on-site trailheads and four trails entering from FNBP. Established trailheads with parking include the Smoke Jumper Trailhead located at the main Campbell Tract Facility AFO complex entrance, the Campbell Airstrip Trailhead located at mile 1.1 on Campbell Airstrip Road, and the Lore Road Trailhead located on Abbott Loop

Road, one half mile south of the main BLM entrance road. Trail maintenance, signing, and event permitting is a cooperative effort between the BLM, MOA Parks Department, and various volunteers and user groups.

Recreation users are primarily residents of Anchorage and surrounding communities. Estimated 2005 visitation was 75,000 user days. Users are typically found walking, running, mountain biking, skiing, snowshoeing, dog mushing and horseback riding throughout the CT. Many users live close to CT and use the area regularly for exercise, often with their family dogs. Regular competitive events, often starting on FBNP lands traverse CT including the Nordic Ski Club's Tour of Anchorage and the World Sled Dog Championship Races.

C. Vegetation:

The CT contains a variety of habitats including spruce and birch forests, bogs, and riparian areas. Cottonwood and birch dating to the WWII era dominate the woodlands, interspersed with less mature white spruce, numbers of which have experienced high rates of recent beetle kill. The understory is comprised of shrubs, forbs, lichens and moss above a ground cover of heavy organic litter.

D. Wildlife:

The CT contains a rich diversity of resident and non-resident wildlife. Resident species include moose, porcupine, mink, weasel, red squirrel, muskrat, beaver, snowshoe hare, voles, and shrews and at least 50 species of resident and non-resident birds including horned owl, northern saw-whet owl, boreal owl, northern goshawk, and spruce grouse. Non-resident species moving seasonally through CT to and from the Chugach Mountains to the east include grizzly bear and black bear, red fox, lynx and wolf. The South Fork of Campbell Creek traverses the northeast corner of CT. This stream supports populations of Chinook and coho salmon, rainbow trout, Dolly Varden, and slimy sculpin.

IV. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

A. Impacts of the Proposed Action:

Critical Elements:

1. Cultural Resources:

Existing cultural resources may be damaged from people walking over them, crumbling debris mounds and collapsing pit walls during the non-winter season. When the ground is frozen, people will have little impact on these surface resources. Surface artifacts are often exposed by natural soil processes and could be removed from the site by individuals attending outdoor education sessions.

2. Recreation:

Users on CT are often seeking the solitude and quiet of the wooded tract to escape the noise and congestion of Anchorage. While these events take place there will be a higher volume of activity from the participants. Recreationists would be aware of a short term increase of users as they use the trail system to navigate to various checkpoints located throughout CT.

3. Vegetation:

Most of the activity by participants will occur on established trails. Some activity will take place off of the established trail system, for more of the challenging courses, and some trampling of vegetation will occur. Most of the trampling of vegetation will occur in the direct area around the checkpoints. Checkpoints will seldom be used two years in a row.

4. Wildlife:

Outdoor training sessions may have local, short-term impacts on CT wildlife. In winter months, moose, snowshoe hare and other animals that browse and use forested habitats may be temporarily displaced by the participants as they travel through wildlife habitat.

Populations of birds and mammals may be impacted by training activities that occur in the animals feeding or reproductive habitat. Birds may not reproduce or leave the area for the season if disturbed during breeding season. Wildlife encounters may occur in all seasons. Moose and bear are potentially dangerous. Streamside activities could impact spawning salmon and increase siltation downstream.

B. Impacts of No Action Alternative:

The effects of current management practices and user traffic will continue to impact CT including 40,000 annual student visits utilizing the grounds adjacent to the CCSC and approximately 75,000 user days of recreational activities on CT. Wildlife, streamside sites, forest areas and recreational trails will experience continued heavy use and will receive periodic scheduled maintenance and monitoring.

C. Cumulative Impacts:

The population of the Anchorage Bowl continues to increase each year placing ever greater demands on public lands providing outdoor education and recreation opportunities. Impacts of ARCT use on CT will result in a greater human presence on the landscape and natural communities of CT for these three events. Increased trail, forest impacts and wildlife disturbance will result from increased

use. User experience and perception of solitude may also be modified by this temporary use. These cumulative impacts can be partially mitigated and are not likely to result in a material increase in the impacts on the human environment.

D. Mitigation Measures:

Critical Elements:

1. Cultural Resources:

Training sites will be located in areas where cultural resources are not present. Checkpoints and all activities will not be located near these cultural resources. Event coordinators will discuss with participants prohibitions on picking up, disturbing or destroying cultural resources prior to field activities.

2. Recreation:

Event coordinators will be coached to utilize checkpoint sites away from heavily used multi-use trails to reduce impact on other user's recreation experience and reduce the possibility of accidents and conflicts. Participants should also be made aware of recreation activity on CT and to be sensitive to those users and their needs. Winter activities should be prohibited within 50 feet of established dog sled trails for the safety of participants and to dog sled teams.

3. Vegetation:

Checkpoint sites and activities will be located away from sensitive habitat areas including stream banks and areas of unique vegetation. Activities off-trail should be limited. Since the majority of participants are beginners, they should be encouraged to use established trails whenever possible.

4. Wildlife:

Activities will be scheduled when wildlife will be least impacted. Event staff will take action to prevent participants from harassing or destroying wildlife and obvious habitat including salmon and stream beds, birds and nests, and other CT habitat and species.

Event staff will notify CCSC desk staff of bear and moose sightings and should follow the Wild Animal Response Policy for CT. Event staff should carry bear spray during spring, summer, and fall months, as well as communication devices and first aid kits while in the field.

To reduce the possibility of wildlife encounters, consumption or transportation of food and snacks should not be permitted in the field during these events.

V. CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

- A. List of Preparers:
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