Executive Summary

A. Introduction

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has prepared this Proposed Resource Management Plan (RMP) and Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to provide direction for managing public lands within the Bay planning area boundaries and to analyze the environmental effects that would result from implementing the Alternatives presented in the Draft RMP/EIS.

The Bay planning area encompasses lands within the Bristol Bay and Goodnews Bay areas of southwest Alaska. Of the approximately 23,048,653 acres within the planning area, decisions in the RMP/EIS will apply to 1,923,261acres. After conveyances are complete in 2010, it is expected that approximately 1,163,604 acres, or approximately 5% of the total acreage in the Bay planning area, will remain under BLM management.

The Proposed RMP/Final EIS was prepared using BLM's planning regulations and guidance issued under the authority of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA), and under requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), the Council on Environmental Quality regulations for implementing NEPA (40 CFR 1500-1508), BLM's NEPA Handbook 1790-1, and BLM's Land Use Planning Handbook 1601-1 (March 2005).

B. Purpose and Need

The RMP will provide the BLM Alaska's Anchorage Field Office with a comprehensive framework for managing lands within the planning area under the jurisdiction of BLM. The purpose of an RMP is to provide a public document that specifies overarching management policies and actions for BLM-managed lands. Implementation-level planning and site or project-specific projects are then completed in conformance with the broad provisions of the RMP. The RMP is needed to update the Southwest Management Framework Plan (MFP) approved in 1981, and to provide a land use plan consistent with evolving law, regulation, and policy. This RMP meets the requirements of FLPMA, which states, "The Secretary shall, with public involvement . . . develop, maintain, and, when appropriate, revise land use plans which provide by tracts or areas for the use of the public lands" (43 U.S.C. 1712).

C. Decisions to be Made

Land use plan decisions are made on a broad scale and guide subsequent site-specific implementation decisions. The RMP will make the following types of decisions to establish direction in the planning area:

- Establish resource goals, objectives, and desired future conditions.
- Describe actions to achieve goals, objectives, and desired future conditions.
- Make land use allocations and designations.
- Make land use adjustments.

Management under any of the alternatives would comply with State and Federal regulations, laws, standards, and policies. Each alternative considered in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS allows for some level of support of all resources present in the planning area. The alternatives are designed to provide general management guidance in most cases. Specific projects for any given area or resource would be

detailed in future implementation plans or site-specific proposals, and additional NEPA analysis and documentation would be conducted as needed in accordance with BLM's National Environmental Policy Act Handbook (H-1790-1).

After the comments on the Draft RMP/EIS were reviewed and analyzed, the responsible officials have decided that Alternative D will be BLM's Proposed RMP.

Following the 30-day protest period, and the resolution of any protests, a Record of Decision will be signed and an approved RMP will be released.

D. Issues

A planning issue is an area of controversy or concern regarding management of resources or uses on the BLM-managed lands within the planning area. Issues for the Bay RMP were identified through scoping, interactions with public land users, and resource management concerns of BLM, the State, and other Federal agencies. These issues drive the formulation of the plan alternatives, and addressing them has resulted in the range of management options across the proposed RMP alternatives. Additional discussion on each issue can be found in the Scoping and Issues section in Chapter I. Issues of primary concern in the development of this proposed RMP/EIS include:

- Determine which lands should be made available for oil and gas and hardrock mineral development, and how these lands will be managed to sustain natural resources and subsistence use.
- Explore land tenure adjustments that would allow BLM to consolidate discontiguous blocks of land to benefit land management.
- Determine how access will be provided to BLM-managed lands for various purposes including recreation, subsistence activities, and general enjoyment of public lands, while protecting natural and cultural resources.
- Determine whether any Special Management Areas will be identified.
- Determine whether eligible rivers should be recommended for inclusion in the National Wild Rivers System.

E. Alternatives

The basic goal in developing alternatives was to prepare different combinations of management actions to address issues and resolve conflicts among uses. Alternatives must meet the purpose and need; must be reasonable; must provide a mix of resource protection, use, and development; must be responsive to the issues; and must meet the established planning criteria. Each alternative constitutes a complete RMP that provides a framework for multiple use management of the full spectrum of resources, resource uses, and programs present in the planning area. Under all alternatives BLM would manage their lands in accordance with all applicable laws, regulations, and BLM policies and guidance.

Four alternatives were developed and carried forward for detailed analysis in the Draft RMP/EIS. Alternative A (the No Action Alternative) represents the continuation of current management practices. Alternatives B, C, and D describe proposed changes to current management, as well as what aspects of current management would be carried forward. These three alternatives were developed with input from the public, collected during scoping, from the BLM Planning Team, and through collaborative efforts conducted with the State of Alaska and the BLM-Alaska Resource Advisory Council (RAC). The alternatives provide a range of choices for meeting BLM planning and program management requirements, and resolving the planning issues identified through scoping. Alternative D, with modifications outlined in this document, represents BLM's Proposed RMP.

1. Alternative A

Alternative A represents the continuation of current management practices, also called the No Action Alternative. This alternative would include continued management under guidance of the existing Southwest Management Framework Plan (1981) for the Goodnews planning block only, and other management decision documents affecting all BLM-managed lands in the entire planning area. Direction contained in existing laws, regulations and policy would also continue to be implemented, sometimes overriding provisions in the Southwest MFP. The current levels, methods and mix of multiple use management of BLM land in the planning area would continue, and resource values would receive attention at present levels. No lands would be open to oil and gas leasing, including leasing for coalbed natural gas (CBNG), and large tracts would remain closed to locatable minerals activities due to retention of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) 17(d)(1) withdrawals. No special management areas, such as Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs), Special Recreation Management Areas (SRMAs), or Wild and Scenic Rivers (WSRs), would be designated or recommended in this RMP for BLM-managed lands within the planning area, and lands would remain unclassified for off-highway vehicles (OHVs) and visual resources. In general, most activities would be analyzed on a case-by-case basis and few uses would be limited or excluded as long as their actions were consistent with State and Federal laws. Oil, gas, locatable mineral activities, and other permitted activities would be guided by requirements in specific Plans of Operations on a project-specific basis. The BLM publication, *Placer Mining in Alaska – A Guide to Mitigation and Reclamation (BLM 1989),* is incorporated by reference for Required Operating Procedures for Locatable Minerals.

2. Alternative B

Alternative B highlights actions and management that would facilitate resource development. All unencumbered BLM lands would be open to leasable and locatable mineral exploration and development unless they were withdrawn under some authority other than ANCSA 17(d)(1) (e.g. Military withdrawal, FERC withdrawal). The latter comprise withdrawals of approximately 3,968 acres. Selected lands whose selection is relinquished or rejected would also be open to mineral exploration and development. All ANCSA 17(d)(1) withdrawals would be revoked, allowing increased potential for mineral exploration and development. The BLM-managed lands within the planning area would be designated as “open” to OHV use. No SRMAs would be identified. In all areas, the focus would be on management of permits. As with Alternative A, no Special Management Areas (SMAs) would be designated and visual resources would be managed as Visual Resource Management (VRM) Class IV. Leasable and locatable mineral activities and other permitted activities would be guided by requirements in specific Plans of Operations on a project-specific basis.

3. Alternative C

Alternative C emphasizes actions and management that protect and enhance renewable resources, archaeological, and paleontological values. Leasable and locatable mineral activities would be more constrained than in Alternatives B or D, and where Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) are proposed, salable mineral activities would be excluded to protect important resources. Two ACECs, the Bristol Bay ACEC and the Carter Spit ACEC, would be established and specific measures adopted to protect or enhance values within these areas. ANCSA 17(d)(1) withdrawals would be maintained within the Carter Spit ACEC, closing this area to mineral activities. All BLM-managed lands within the planning area would have a “limited” OHV designation, allowing for limitations on OHV activities to protect water quality, habitat, soil and vegetation, cultural resources, and recreation experiences. No SRMAs would be identified. In all areas, the focus would be on management of permits. ANCSA 17(d)(1) withdrawals would be maintained as an interim measure at locations where proposed Wild and Scenic river segments are located until Congress has had an opportunity to act on the proposals, in order to protect or maintain

resource values. Three river segments, a portion of the Alagnak River, and portions of the Goodnews River mainstem and Goodnews River Middle Fork would be recommended for WSR designation. Portions of these rivers recommended for a Wild River designation would be managed for VRM Class III, the proposed ACECs would be managed as VRM Class III, and most of the remainder of the BLM-managed lands within the planning area would be managed as VRM Class IV. Resources would be protected through Stipulations, Required Operating Procedures, and project-specific requirements.

4. Alternative D

Alternative D provides a balance of protection, use, and enhancement of resources. ANCSA 17(d)(1) withdrawals would be revoked, and the majority of unencumbered lands and any selected lands whose selection is relinquished or rejected would be open to leasable and locatable mineral activities subject to seasonal or other constraints. Approximately 3,968 acres would continue to be withdrawn under Agency withdrawals other than ANCSA 17(d)(1). ANCSA 17(d)(1) withdrawals would be revoked from the one proposed ACEC, the Carter Spit ACEC. Stipulations, Required Operating Procedures, and project-specific requirements would protect values within these areas. The ACEC would be closed to salable mineral entry. No WSRs would be recommended. Specified lands in the Goodnews Bay and Bristol Bay areas would be managed up to one-half mile from established winter trail or road systems at VRM Class III (Table 2.4). BLM lands in the full visible foreground up to one mile from the boundaries of Conservation System Units (CSU) would be managed at VRM Level III. The proposed ACEC would be managed at VRM Class III, and all other BLM lands would be managed at VRM Class IV. All BLM-managed lands within the planning area would have a “limited” OHV designation, allowing for limitations to be placed on OHV use to protect water quality, habitat, soil and vegetation resources, and/or recreation experiences. As with Alternative C, resources would be protected through Stipulations, Required Operating Procedures, and project-specific requirements.

5. BLM Preferred Alternative

Alternative D was selected as the Preferred Alternative based on examination of the following factors:

- Balance of use and protection of resources.
- Extent of the environmental impacts.

This alternative was chosen because it best resolves the major issues while providing for common ground among conflicting opinions. It also provides for multiple use of BLM-managed lands in a sustainable fashion. Alternative D provides the best balance of resource protection and use within legal constraints.

F. Environmental Consequences

Selection of Alternative A, the No Action Alternative, would maintain the current rate of progress in protecting resource values and in resource development. It would allow for use levels to mostly continue at current levels in the same places in the planning area, with adjustments required in order to mitigate resource concerns in compliance with existing laws and regulations. ANCSA 17(d)(1) withdrawals would be retained, precluding all leasable mineral activities and most locatable mineral activities, and the effects of those activities. With no Off-highway vehicle designations or weight limits, OHV activity could be the source of some impacts to vegetation, soil, and water resources.

Alternative B would allow for maximum resource development with the fewest constraints. This Alternative would result in greater impacts on the physical and biological environment than would implementation of Alternative C or D. Effects of leasable mineral activities would be the greatest under

this Alternative, but according to the Reasonable Foreseeable Development Scenario, would be limited to the Koggiling Creek planning block of BLM-administered land. Effects of locatable mineral activities would most likely occur in the Goodnews planning block due to renewal of pre-ANSCA placer mining and exploration for lode mining; however, the Klutuk Creek planning block could also be affected by placer or lode mining exploration. Cumulative effects from mining and infrastructure developments in the planning area but outside of BLM-administered lands could occur during the life of this plan. Impacts to vegetation, soil, and water resources could occur from an "Open" OHV designation.

Alternative C would have the least potential to impact physical and biological resources from BLM actions. Uses would be the most restrictive. ANCSA 17(d)(1) withdrawals would be revoked from all unencumbered BLM lands except the three Wild and Scenic River designations and one of the two proposed ACECs (Carter Spit). A "Limited" OHV designation would restrict OHVs to designated trails, avoiding impacts to vegetation, soils, and water resources.

Alternative D would allow for increased levels of resource development while providing for site-specific protection of resources through designation of one Area of Critical Environmental Concern and through Required Operating Procedures, Stipulations, and project-specific requirements. This Alternative would provide as much opportunity for mineral development as Alternative B. Closures to mineral entry and location would be limited to small, site-specific areas or to specific seasons of the year. This alternative could result in economic benefits to local economies from resource extraction. All unencumbered BLM lands in the planning area would be designated as "limited" to OHVs with a maximum gross vehicle weight rating of 2,000 pounds. On State-and Native-selected lands, OHVs would be managed consistent with the State's Generally Allowable Uses, resulting in less resource degradation than under Alternatives A or B. Alternative D provides a balance of protection and use of resources.

G. Public Involvement

Public involvement has been an integral part of BLM's planning effort. During scoping, nine public meetings were held from January 2005 until the end of March 2005. Public scoping meetings were held in Anchorage, Kenai, Homer, Dillingham, Iliamna, New Stuyahok, Aleknagik, King Salmon, and Naknek. Newsletters have been mailed to update interested parties on the progress of the Planning Team and stages of the planning process. In addition, numerous briefings were held with various groups and organizations during the preparation of the Draft RMP/EIS. BLM also invited all Native villages in the area for government-to-government consultation during the course of the process. Public involvement is described in more detail in Chapter V.

The comment period on the Bay Draft RMP/EIS extended for 90 days following publication of the Environmental Protection Agency's Notice of Availability in the Federal Register. After 90 days, comments were evaluated. Substantive comments were taken into consideration, and this proposed RMP and Final EIS was then completed. If protests are received on the Proposed RMP/Final EIS, they will be reviewed and addressed by the Director of the BLM before a Record of Decision and Approved Plan are released.

Six public meetings and subsistence hearings were held throughout the planning area. One additional public meeting was held in Anchorage and comments were taken via conference call from residents of Quinhagak. Comments received or postmarked by February 5, 2007 were reviewed and analyzed by the BLM Planning Team. Appendix I: Response to Comments outlines all substantive comments received on the Draft RMP/EIS and BLM's responses to those comments.

Changes made between the Draft and the Final EIS resulted from public and internal review of the Draft RMP/EIS. A summary of the changes can be found on pages ix–xi, and are highlighted in grey throughout the Proposed RMP/Final EIS.

A 30-day protest period will begin with publication of the Notice of Availability of the Proposed RMP/Final EIS in the Federal Register by the Environmental Protection Agency. All protests received will be reviewed and addressed by the Director of the BLM before a Record of Decision and Approved Plan are released.