



BLM - ALASKA FRONTIERS

Issue 68 July/August 1998

BLM agreement preserves Sitka cemetery and Russian blockhouse

In July, the Bureau of Land Management entered into an agreement with four partners to preserve and protect an historic Russian cemetery and blockhouse in Sitka, Alaska. When the National Park Service relinquished its management of the site back to the BLM, local interest in preserving the site was overwhelming.

The site has a long history, beginning in the early 1800s when the Russians constructed a stockade and three blockhouses to establish themselves in the homeland of the Tlingits. Through the years, the structures have gone through stages of disrepair, demolition, and rebuilding.

The BLM's primary role is to provide interpretation of the site with four way-side exhibits that describe the cemetery and the blockhouse, and explain Russian influence and history, and the Native Holy Trinity Church. BLM interpretive specialists Nancy Stimson and Gene Ervine will work this fall with partners to develop an interpretive plan. The panels will be scripted, designed and installed by next summer.



Nancy Stimson

BLM signed a memorandum of understanding with four Sitka organizations to preserve and maintain the site of a Russian blockhouse and cemetery. Bob Rinehart, BLM realty specialist, and interpretive specialists Nancy Stimson and Gene Ervine stand in front of the historic blockhouse in Sitka.

Joint efforts reveal Sitka's past



Bob Rinehart

The blockhouse stands as a reminder of the Russian colonial influence in the Tlingit homeland in Southeast Alaska. A pavilion shades the grave of Saint Yakov', the first Aleut Priest, who helped translate the gospel from Russian to Fox Aleut dialect. A stone monument marks the location of the Holy Trinity Church.

On July 9, 1998, representatives of the Bureau of Land Management, Sitka Tribes of Alaska, St. Michael's Orthodox Church, Sitka Historical Society, and the Mayor of the City and Borough of Sitka signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to protect and preserve the historic Russian cemetery and blockhouse in Sitka. Under the terms of the MOU, the BLM will install interpretive panels explaining the site's historical significance, and the MOU partners will manage and maintain the site.

"It's critical that we preserve this site and many diverse groups have agreed to help. We don't have many opportunities to please everyone, but I think we did this time," says BLM realty specialist Bob Rinehart who, along with interpretive specialist Nancy Stimson, represented BLM at the MOU signing in Sitka.

Dr. Orienne First Denslow, administrator for the Sitka Historical Society, says, "This is an exciting opportunity for a cooperative partnership between five agencies to participate in the management and maintenance of the historic blockhouse."

Rinehart and Stimson began exploring the possibility of alternative management when the National Park Service (NPS) decided to relinquish the site to the BLM. "The blockhouse and cemetery no longer met the mission of the National Park Service," says Stimson. After some inquiring, they found such local interest in the site they were convinced that they could find partners to share in its management and preservation.

Besides the blockhouse, other aspects of the site have garnered interest. "We are more interested in sprucing up the grave sites in the cemetery," says Bob Polasky, general manager for the Sitka Tribe. He says putting a pathway to the cemetery will make it more accessible and show more respect for the dead buried there. Sitka Tribes plans to do a walking tour of the cemetery next summer as part of their tourism program.

Since the signing, Stimson has begun researching the history of the site so she can de



Nancy Stimson

An historic cemetery containing more than 1,600 graves tells the dramatic story of Sitka's past. Some of the headstones originally served as ballasts on ships that sailed from Russia.

velop an interpretive plan. She discovered that the blockhouse, which is set on a small grass knoll overlooking downtown Sitka, is a replica of the 18th century Russian blockhouse that served as a stockade separating the Russian compound from the Tlingit village. The Russians constructed a stockade and eventually built three blockhouses to protect their settlement following the battles of Sitka in 1802 and 1804. The Tlingits abandoned the site after the battles and did not return until the mid 1820s.

Although relations between the Russians and the Tlingits were strained, with both Russian soldiers and Tlingits dying in a battle in 1855, the Russians depended on them for fresh food and meat. Trading took place in special areas.

After the transfer of land to the United States, the U.S. Army obtained control of the area and maintained peace until their withdrawal in 1877. Within a week, the Tlingits tore down a portion of the stockade which was never rebuilt.

In 1890, President Harrison set aside Blockhouses C and D for public purposes, and other land which eventually became the Sitka National Monument. In 1897, Blockhouse C collapsed; 24 years later, Blockhouse D was demolished after the U.S. Observatory in Sitka claimed the metal in the blockhouse affected their instruments.

In 1926, the secretary of the Sitka Commercial Club, with support from the Alaska Historical Association, the Territorial Museum, James Steese and Territorial Governor George Parks proposed to donate a Russian blockhouse to the park. In April, 1926, the U.S. Park Service approved the proposal. Later that year, a replica of Blockhouse D was built using hardware from the original structure.

During World War II, Sitka served as a naval air station and coastal defense strong point and the blockhouse remained. Over the years, it fell into a state of disrepair and by early 1950, requests for funds to repair or rehabilitate the blockhouse were denied. On July 21, 1959, with a bulldozer already working in the area, the park superintendent decided to bulldoze the structure. The people in Sitka were "outraged" — no one in the town had been notified, including the current Mayor of Sitka, who had participated in rebuilding the previous structure. After receiving numerous letters from the people of Sitka, the Under Secretary of Interior agreed to rebuilding of the blockhouse. The NPS agreed to build the blockhouse, not within the monument, but on the original site where it stands today.

—Jeff Krauss/Danielle Allen

Interior officials review Alaska programs

Anne Shields, Chief of Staff to Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt, and David Hayes, Counselor to the Secretary, visited Alaska in June to review programs of the different agencies in the DOI. Shields and Hayes toured the Campbell Creek Science Center with BLM-Alaska State Director Tom Allen and Anchorage Field Manager Nick Douglas to learn about the center's partnership with the Anchorage School District.



Teresa McPherson

The group watches bright red spawning salmon navigate their way upstream at Campbell Creek from a new multipurpose bridge installed in the fall of 1997. The Anchorage Field Office is the only BLM administrative site which boasts a salmon spawning stream within the largest city in the state. The stream serves as an outdoor classroom for students attending programs at the nearby Campbell Creek Science Center to learn about fish habitat and stream studies. L-R: Tom Allen, Anne Shields, David Hayes and Anchorage Field Office Associate Manager Clinton Hanson.

No invitation, but they moved in anyway

Imagine reaching for a topographic map and finding a sleeping bat. Or being surprised by a bat in the bottom of your wastepaper basket! Until recently, regular visits by little brown bats to the Bureau of Land Management's Glennallen Field Office (GFO) had made the place a real bat house.

Bats were coming into the office through holes the diameter of a pencil, but the real draw was the roof of the building. Years of bat habitation had left the roofing insulation in a terrible state, saturated with bat guano. "The smell was horrible," says Kurt Sorenson, GFO maintenance worker. The guano also presented a health risk since it commonly contains pathogenic bacteria and fungi.

The bat problem became critical last year. A routine inspection of GFO by the Office of Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) left the staff with a citation and a curious safety dilemma: What were they going to do with the bats?

Throughout the years, the GFO staff have built bat houses and used electronic devices that emit sounds to drive the bats away, but nothing worked. Sorenson says, "If you were a bat, would you prefer a nice, warm office or a cold, damp bat house?"

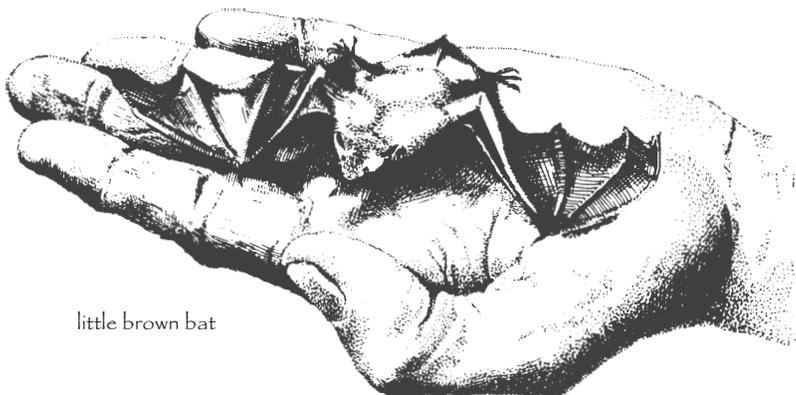


Weighing only a quarter of an ounce and with a wingspan from six to eleven inches, the little brown bat is the only bat found in Alaska. It's the world's longest-lived mammal for its size, with a life-span that can last more than 30 years.

Under the guidance of the Bat Conservation Society, the eaves where the bats entered the office were rebuilt, making access more difficult.

"Bats have been an ongoing problem for many years, and removing the roof is our most recent attempt at getting rid of them," says Sorenson, who was assisted by masked firefighters. "When we took off the roof, about 10 bats flew away," but Sorenson doesn't think this is the end of their bat problems. "There's a good chance they'll join their buddies and find another home in one of our other (nine) buildings."

Before the roof was repaired in July, GFO outdoor recreation planner KJ Mushovic sought advice from fellow BLM employee, bat lover and Bat Conservation Society (BCS) member Carol Belenski. According to Belenski, "bats are found throughout the world and Alaska is no exception." Belenski, the "batwoman" at BLM-Alaska's State Office, occasionally makes bat presentations at local elementary schools.



little brown bat

BLM unveils proposed NPR-A management plan

After an 18-month planning process and extensive public input, the Bureau of Land Management released its proposal for managing 4.6 million acres in the northeast corner of the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska. Under the plan, approximately 87 percent of the 4.6-million-acre study area would be made available for oil and gas leasing.

BLM also proposes to close nearly all the goose molting area east of Teshekpuk Lake to oil and gas leasing, and prohibit oil development in the entire molting habitat — a vital area for many geese, including the Black brant geese. It also includes important calving and insect relief areas for caribou. In addition, the plan would:

- △ prohibit permanent oil and gas surface occupancy on Teshekpuk Lake and other locations important for fish and subsistence use, and around specific rivers and streams important for subsistence or raptors (with exceptions for essential pipelines and road crossings).
- △ establish procedures so the people of the North Slope would be consulted before activities that may affect them could be conducted; establish a subsistence advisory panel, and an interagency research and monitoring team made up of federal agencies, the State of Alaska, the North Slope Borough and others to coordinate research and monitor the effectiveness of stipulations on surface resources.
- △ limit road construction to drilling areas and establish one-mile facility setbacks (other than pipelines and roads) around cabins and campsites.

BLM will accept comments through September 8, 1998. Following the comment period, the plan will become effective with the signing of a Record of Decision. Address comments to:

NPR-A Planning Team
BLM-Alaska State Office (930)
 222 West 7th Avenue, #13
 Anchorage, Alaska 99513
 or e-mail to: jducker@ak.blm.gov
 or visit the NPR-A website at:
<http://aurora.ak.blm.gov/npra/>

Copies of the plan are available at libraries throughout Alaska, and can be obtained from BLM offices in Alaska and Washington D.C. An eight-page summary is available from BLM offices in Washington, D.C., or call BLM-Alaska at (907) 271-5960.

“Bats are misunderstood,” says Belenski. Contrary to popular misconception, bats are not blind and seldom transmit disease to other animals or humans. These nocturnal creatures are beneficial, especially in the woods of Glennallen where one little brown bat can catch 600 mosquitoes in just one hour.

Sorenson can only anticipate when and where the bats will show up next. A recent follow-up safety inspection conducted by BLM staff revealed no bats, so last year’s bat citation by the OSHA is a thing of the past ... for now!

—Danielle Allen/Jeff Krauss

BLM has an active partnership with the Bat Conservation International. For more information on conservation efforts contact the Bat Conservation International, P.O. Box 162603, Austin, TX 787165, or on the Internet at: www.batcon.org.



Campgrounds rise up from mountains of mining tailings

An old mining area in the Nome Creek Valley, once home to gold dredging miners, now features Alaska's newest road, and the Bureau of Land Management's two newest campgrounds which serve as access into the White Mountains National Recreation Area.

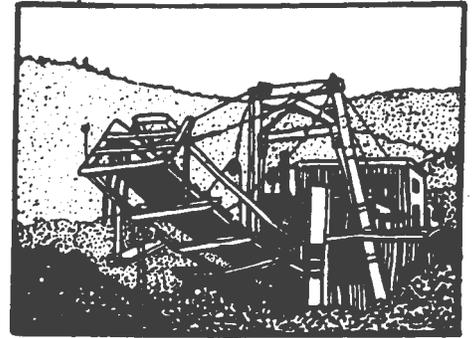
In mid-July 1910, a small stampede took place after the discovery of a large amount of gold in Ophir Creek, a tributary of Nome Creek. By the end of summer, all of the ground in the Nome Creek and Trail Creek drainage basins was staked, occupied by the camps of fortune-seeking miners. Over the next 30 years, considerable amounts of placer gold were recovered in Nome Creek by companies using hydraulic, open-cut, drift and dredge mining. Although some mining continues on the creek today, years of mining helped reshape Nome Creek and left the valley with thousands of tons of tailings, some piled 15 feet high.

In 1987, a BLM cadastral survey party finished the centerline survey for the now completed Nome Creek road. The 16-mile gravel road, which runs near the southern border of the one-million acre White Mountains National Recreation Area, is the first road to be built in Alaska



Jeff Krauss

The Bureau of Land Management built two new campgrounds and a road in an old mining area in the Nome Creek Valley. The campgrounds provide access into the White Mountains National Recreation Area.



since the Dalton Highway. Constructed from 400,000 tons of mine tailings, the road is wide enough for recreational vehicles and has numerous parking turnouts for fishing, hiking and gold panning. Although the new road will not be plowed in the winter, access for snowmachines and dog teams is improved, enabling visitors to travel to BLM's 10 public recreation cabins throughout the area.

The new Nome Creek valley campgrounds are recreation-fee sites with well water, trash cans, and wheelchair accessible outhouse-style toilets. Each campground has pull-through and back-in campsites with picnic tables and fire rings.

At the upper end of Nome Creek is the Mt. Prindle Campground. With 13 campsites, the campground is close to Mount Prindle, alpine tundra meadows and the only developed trail — the Quartz Creek Trail. The 16-mile trail, open to both hikers and off-road vehicles that weigh less than 1,500 pounds, crosses alpine tundra and cold mountain streams. Wildlife, such as moose, grizzly bear, caribou, owls, eagles and ptarmigan is abundant.

The larger campground, Ophir Creek, is located downstream at the confluence of Nome and Ophir creeks. This campground has 19 campsites and is surrounded by tall white spruce trees. Nearby is a staging area to Beaver Creek National Wild River, a two-mile float downstream that leads to deep pools where Arctic grayling are easily caught on lures and flies. (In the Nome Creek valley, fishing for grayling is on a catch-and-release basis only.)

Between these two campgrounds, the BLM has set up a recreational gold panning area. Although gold panning is limited to hand tools and light equipment such as gold pans, rocker boxes, sluice boxes, and picks and shovels, there is plenty of opportunity to search through gravel missed by dredges in earlier years.

—Jeff Krauss

Early days — golden times

Excerpts from a historical greeting card, written by Sam Godfrey, published in the Alaska Miner, September/October 1985.

In the early 1900s Sam Godfrey left his home in a small prairie town in central Kansas to join his brother in the stampede for gold to the Klondike. Hoping freight cars and waiting tables on a freighter, Sam found his way north and settled in Dawson. After gambling his money away, and with no way to get to his brother at Fortymile, he took a job as a dishwasher until he saved up enough to buy a grocery house in Dawson.

Godfrey's plans changed in 1904 when Dawson City burned to the ground. The next day, he and a friend purchased a boat and traveled 1,500 miles down the Yukon River to the Tanana River, then 400 miles upstream to Fairbanks. Sam "grubstaked" a partner, financing him while he looked for new fields and splitting half of whatever he found.

In 1915 Sam met his partner on Livengood Creek, where they had a big find. Over the next 10 years, the creek produced some six million dollars in gold. In 1925 Livengood Creek had been nearly mined out by pick and shovel; Sam decided it was time to get into dredge mining. That year, Sam and five friends leased lands on Nome Creek, and in 1926 they built a six-foot bucket dredge costing \$300,000. According to U.S. Geological Survey field notes, the Nome Creek Dredging Company produced a large share of placer gold in the Fairbanks district.

In the spring of 1932, Godfrey experienced a reversal of fortune when a fire destroyed the dredge. Refusing to be discouraged, Sam moved to western Alaska and took leases out on the Kougarok River, 100 miles northwest of Nome, where he had some success. When Sam wrote this greeting card, there were only two dozen mining operations left along the 50-mile Kougarok River; Sam's dredge was one of them.



Set the table —
it's dinner time!

An increase in the size of the subsistence management area the Glennallen Field Office (GFO) manages means 1,000 more hunting permits will be issued this year than last. Eight years ago, five federal government agencies assumed management of subsistence hunting and fishing on unencumbered federal public lands throughout Alaska. Since 1990, the GFO has been processing hunting permits for Alaska's rural residents through the Federal Subsistence Management Program.

A board has been established to oversee the program, with a representative of the Secretary of the Interior serving as chair and directors of multiple federal agencies serving as members. The board also receives input from regional advisory councils and state representatives.

Brenda Becker, longtime resident and BLM realty assistant with the GFO, says the permit application process, which takes 20 minutes to complete, "gives me the opportunity to talk with a lot of people I get to see only a few times a year. All of the people who come here for their permits use the meat obtained from the caribou and moose to get through the winter."

Although the open season varies at each management unit, a qualifying resident can harvest two caribou while one member of a family can harvest a moose. In 1997-98, the GFO issued 446 moose and 1,512 caribou permits. To qualify, Alaska rural residents must possess a current Alaska hunting license, a valid drivers license or Alaska state ID card, and proof of their physical address, such as a voter registration card.

Although many rural Alaskans coming to the GFO differ on the amount of government involvement needed in the Federal Subsistence Program, all agree the program is essential to their survival. Ben Neeley, who has spent his whole life in the Glennallen area, was one of the first people to obtain a 1998-99 permit. "I shot my first caribou when I was 12, more than 70 years ago. Hunting is a way of life — my life."

—Jeff Krauss

Traveling around the Bering Glacier region? Worried about the weather? Fear no more. Let the Bureau of Land Management help you plan for a safe trip.

BLM installed a weather station east of Vitus Lake at the foot of the Bering Glacier. Termed RAWS (Remote Access Weather Station), the station collects data on air temperature, wind speed and direction, and other useful information, and sends it to a satellite every three hours. Folks in Boise, Idaho download the data and put it on the Internet. You can have accurate weather data whenever you need it!

BLM's Alaska Fire Service has links to all 73 RAWS stations in Alaska. The AFS website is: <http://fire.ak.blm.gov>. Just pick weather from the home page and follow the prompts through the Bering Glacier. You can get current weather information or query all the data collected within the past year; it's that easy. For more information contact Jacqui Frair at 907-271-3539.

BLM-Alaska just published a new, updated version of one of its most popular publications, *Public Land Laws of Alaska*. The new edition has been revised and expanded, and now includes all major land laws and amendments passed between 1906 and 1997.

Copies can be obtained for \$10 each from BLM Public Information Centers in Fairbanks and Anchorage.



Staff from BLM's Juneau Mineral Information Center participated in Juneau's annual Gold Rush Days celebration, June 27-28. More than 350 people visited the BLM booth where BLM geologists gave away rock samples and posters to local children, identified rock specimens, and helped residents learn more about local geology and services available at the center. You can get more information by calling 907-271-5960 or 907-474-2251.

A new homepage design for the National Interagency Fire Center Internet site now includes reports of national interest as well as daily updated national and international wildland fire news. The NIFC homepage, at www.nifc.gov, has situation reports; there is also a detailed Fire News site with accurate statistics and information about wildland fire in the U.S., Canada, Mexico and Central America. Information is also available on the BLM's Alaska Fire Service homepage at <http://fire.ak.blm.gov>.



The BLM, in cooperation with the State of Alaska and Ahtna, Inc., is undertaking a limits of acceptable change (LAC) planning process for the Gulkana River system. The planning process, to be completed in 24 months, will be the basis for updating the Gulkana National Wild River Management Plan and developing a Lower Gulkana River Management Plan.

Editor: Janet S. Malone

Text and photos from *BLM — Alaska Frontiers* may be reproduced in whole or in part. Black and white photos may be available on request for republication. Please credit BLM — Alaska. *BLM — Alaska Frontiers* is located on the internet at: http://www.ak.blm.gov/blm_frontier/frontindex.html

Return if not delivered in 10 days

OFFICIAL BUSINESS/PENALTY FOR PRIVATE USE \$300

Printed on recycled paper.

BLM-AK-GI-94-005-1120-912

BLM EXTERNAL AFFAIRS OFFICE ▼ 222 W. 7TH AVENUE #13 ▼ ANCHORAGE, ALASKA 99513