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 Glennallen Field Office boundaries and to analyze the environmental effects that would result from implementing the alternatives presented in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS.

The planning area includes approximately 7.1 million acres in east Alaska administered by the Glennallen Field Office, including approximately 5.5 million acres of lands that are selected by the State of Alaska or Alaska Natives. The BLM is responsible for management of selected lands until conveyance occurs or until the selections are relinquished back to the BLM because of overselection. The planning area also includes private land (including Native Corporation land), State land, and lands managed by other Federal agencies. Management measures outlined in the Proposed RMP apply only to BLM-managed land in the planning area; no measures have been developed for private, State, or other Federal agency lands.

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, 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), the BLM's NEPA Handbook 1790-1, and the BLM's Land Use Planning Handbook 1601-1 (March 2005).

B. Purpose and Need

The RMP will provide the Glennallen Field Office with a comprehensive framework for managing lands within the planning area under the jurisdiction of the 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-specific projects are then completed in conformance with the broad provisions of the RMP. The RMP is needed to update the Southcentral Management Framework Plan approved in 1980, 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. Vision

Comments received during scoping represented a broad range of desires from both individuals and organizations. These same desires were expressed by the planning team during discussion of management of public lands in the planning area. As a result, the following vision statement provide the underlying vision for management of BLM lands in the planning area:

Within the capability of the resources:

- Provide diverse recreational and educational opportunities;
- Support a sustainable flow of benefits in consideration of the social and economic systems of eastern Alaska;
- Sustain and, where necessary, restore the health and diversity of forest, aquatic, and riparian ecosystems; and
- Maintain subsistence opportunities and resources.

D. 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
- Identify land adjustment categories.

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.

After the comments on the Draft RMP/EIS were reviewed and analyzed, the responsible officials have decided that Alternative D, with some minor modifications, 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.

E. Issues

A planning issue is a major controversy or concern regarding management of resources or uses on the public lands that can be addressed in a variety of ways. During scoping, the BLM suggested several broad categories as major issues that would drive the development of the planning alternatives. The BLM asked the public to comment on these issues and to provide other issues or concerns to be considered in development of the RMP. As a result, the Draft RMP/EIS primarily focused on seven planning issues and the decisions needed to resolve them. The issues were identified through public scoping, concerns raised to BLM staff in interactions with public land users, and resource management concerns of the BLM and cooperating agencies. These issues drive the formulation of the plan alternatives, and addressing them has resulted in the range of management options across the RMP alternatives. Additional discussion on each issue can be found in *Chapter I: Introduction*. The following issue statements were developed to summarize the concerns surrounding each issue.

1. Issue 1: Travel Management

Manage access, roads, and use of OHVs for various purposes, including recreation, commercial uses, subsistence activities, and general enjoyment of public lands, while protecting natural and cultural resources.

2. Issue 2: Recreation

Manage recreation to provide a diversity of experiences on BLM-managed lands. Determine what measures are necessary to ensure that a diversity of recreational opportunities is maintained.

3. Issue 3: Natural and Cultural Resources

Manage to protect natural and cultural resources (including wildlife, fisheries, soil, water, air, and vegetation) identified by resource specialists and identified through the public scoping process.

4. Issue 4: Lands and Realty

Determine the appropriate mix of lands and realty actions needed to provide a balance between land use and resource protection. Establish conditions that would apply if the Slana settlement area is made available for disposal, considering the effects of disposal on the social and environmental conditions of the area.

5. Issue 5: Vegetation Management

Manage vegetation to provide for forest and riparian health, personal and commercial wood products, and fish and wildlife habitat. Determine what role fire will play in vegetation management.

6. Issue 6: Leasable and Locatable Minerals

Determine which areas should be made available for mineral exploration and development.

7. Issue 7: Subsistence/Social and Economic Conditions

Maintain and protect subsistence opportunities. Determine how the management actions, guidelines, and allowable uses prescribed in response to the other issues will affect both subsistence opportunities and resources and the social and economic environment.

F. 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 the BLM would manage the public 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 and Proposed RMP/Final EIS. Alternative A (the No Action Alternative) was developed using available inventory data, existing planning and management documents, policies and decisions, and established land use allocations. Alternatives B, C, and D were developed with input from the public collected during scoping, from the BLM interdisciplinary planning team, and with sub-group recommendations from the Alaska Resource Advisory Council (RAC). Alternative D, with modifications outlined in this document, represents the BLM's Proposed RMP. Other alternatives that were considered but not analyzed in detail are described in *Chapter II: Alternatives*.

1. Alternative A

Alternative A is the No Action Alternative. This alternative would continue present management practices based on the existing Southcentral Management Framework Plan and other management direction documents. Valid decisions contained in the Southcentral Management Framework Plan would be implemented if not already completed. Direction contained in existing laws, regulations, and policies would also continue to be implemented, sometimes superseding provisions in the Southcentral plan. The current levels, methods, and mix of multiple use management of public lands in the planning area would continue, and resource values would receive attention at present levels. In general, most activities would be analyzed on a case-by-case basis and few uses would be limited or excluded as long as they were consistent with State and Federal laws.

2. Alternative B

Alternative B lays the groundwork for active management to facilitate resource development. In this alternative, constraints to protect resource values or habitat would be implemented in very specific geographic areas rather than across the planning area or in special designations. Most stipulations and guidelines would be developed on a site-specific basis. With the exception of the Delta and Gulkana Wild and Scenic River corridors, all ANCSA d(1) withdrawals would be revoked on lands retained in long-term Federal ownership. Public Land Order 5150, which withdrew lands for the transportation and utility corridor, would be revoked to allow for conveyance of the corridor to the State of Alaska. These actions would allow increased potential for mineral exploration and development. This alternative includes the highest level of forest and woodland treatments. Travel and trail restrictions would be maintained at the current levels. Recreation management would focus on development of facilities to handle increasing uses. Management of Native- and State-selected lands would be mostly custodial.

3. Alternative C

Alternative C emphasizes active measures to protect and enhance resource values. Production of minerals and services would be more constrained than under Alternative B or D, and, in some cases and in some areas, uses would be excluded to protect sensitive resources. Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs), Special Recreation Management Areas (SRMAs), and a Research Natural Area (RNA) are identified, and specific measures are proposed to protect or enhance values within these areas. All areas would be designated as limited or closed to off-highway vehicles (OHVs) to protect habitat, soil and vegetation resources, and recreation experiences. Some ANCSA d(1) withdrawals would be revoked, but others would be maintained to protect or maintain resource values. This alternative treats lands selected by the State and by Native or Village Corporations as if they were to be retained in long-term Federal ownership.

4. Alternative D

Alternative D, emphasizes a moderate level of protection, use, and enhancement of resources and services. Constraints to protect resources would be implemented, but would be less restrictive than those implemented under Alternative C. This alternative would designate one RNA and four SRMAs, but measures to protect resource values would be applied to other geographical areas that are also identified under Alternative C. This alternative would revoke many ANCSA d(1) withdrawals but would retain some

withdrawals in areas where strong resource protection is needed. It would retain most of PLO 5150, maintaining a viable federal subsistence hunting unit. This alternative describes interim and long-term management strategies for lands selected by the State or Native or Village Corporations.

5. BLM Proposed RMP

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

- Balance of use and protection of resources,
- Extent of the environmental impacts, and
- Incorporation of recommendations from the Alaska RAC on OHV management.

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 public lands in a sustainable fashion. Alternative D provides the best balance of resource protection and use within legal constraints.

G. 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. OHV use would remain unrestricted in most areas, resulting in the continued proliferation of unmanaged trails.

Implementation of Alternative B would allow for maximum resource development with the fewest area-wide constraints. This alternative would result in greater impacts on the physical and biological environment than would implementation of Alternative C or D. Uses would generally be least encumbered by management under this alternative, though legal constraints and Required Operating Procedures would be applied. This alternative would offer the greatest potential economic benefits on a local scale from resource extraction. Opportunities for Federal subsistence hunting would be negatively impacted by conveyance of the transportation and utility corridor to the State of Alaska.

Alternative C would have the least potential to impact physical and biological resources from BLM actions, but it would wield the greatest potential for short-term impacts to local economies and businesses that depend on public land for resource extraction. Implementation of Alternative C could result in economic benefits from non-motorized

recreational activities and protection of fish and wildlife habitats. Less aggressive forest treatments under this alternative could result in increased fire risk and habitat degradation in certain locations. Subsistence resources would be maintained or enhanced, but some access could be restricted through strong OHV regulations.

Implementation of Alternative D would allow for increased levels of resource development while providing for site-specific and some area-wide protection of resources. This alternative could result in economic benefits to local economies from resource extraction and from enhanced recreational experiences. Subsistence opportunities and resources would be maintained.

H. Public Involvement

Public involvement has been an integral part of the BLM's East Alaska planning effort. In order to engage the public during the timeframes involved in development of an RMP, newsletters have been mailed throughout the process to update interested parties on the progress of the planning team and stages of the planning process. Thirty public meetings were held by the BLM during the initial scoping period, followed by 16 public meetings to review draft alternatives and distribute packets of information on the alternatives. In addition, numerous briefings were held with various groups and organizations during the preparation of the Draft RMP/EIS.

In addition to public involvement opportunities, one subgroup was convened by the Alaska RAC to engage in collaborative problem solving and consensus-based decision-making to assist the BLM with recommendations on the major issue of OHV management. The BLM also invited all Native villages and Corporations in the area for consultation during the course of the process. These invitations have resulted in numerous briefings and development of several Memorandums of Understanding to increase government-to-government communications.

The 90 day comment period on the Draft RMP/EIS began on April 29, 2005 with the Environmental Protection Agency's Notice of Availability in the Federal Register (Federal Register 2005). Seven public meetings and eight subsistence hearings were held throughout the planning area. Comments received before July 28, 2005 were reviewed and analyzed by the BLM planning team. *Appendix J: Responses to Comments* outlines all substantive comments received on the Draft RMP/EIS and BLM's responses to those comments.

The changes made between the Draft and the Final resulted from public and internal review of the Draft RMP/EIS. A summary of the changes can be found on pages xiii-xx and are highlighted in grey throughout the Proposed RMP/Final EIS.

A 30 day protest period will begin with the publishing 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 is released.