Chapter I: Introduction

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

This chapter contains background information on the Bureau of Land Management's Resource Management Plan planning process and sets the stage for the information presented in the rest of this document.

The identification of issues in the *Scoping and Issues* section on page 9 is especially critical to the entire planning process as these major issues are the main drivers in the formulation of alternative management scenarios presented for consideration.

A. Background

On March 18, 2003, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) issued a Notice of Intent in the Federal Register to prepare a Resource Management Plan (RMP) and associated Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for public lands administered by the Glennallen Field Office. As defined by the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) of 1976, as amended, public lands are those federally-owned lands and interests in lands (e.g., federally-owned mineral estate) that are administered by the Secretary of the Interior, specifically through the BLM. In this case, public lands also include lands selected, but not yet conveyed, to the State of Alaska and Native Corporations and villages.

The approved RMP will meet the BLM statutory requirement for a master land use plan as mandated by section 202 of FLPMA, which specifies the need for a comprehensive land use plan consistent with multiple use and sustained yield objectives. The RMP/EIS also fulfills the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as amended, to disclose and address environmental impacts of proposed major Federal actions through a process that includes public participation and cooperation with other agencies.

The BLM is the lead agency in preparing this RMP/EIS. The BLM is coordinating closely with the State of Alaska and with Ahtna and Chugach Native Corporations, as well as with all village councils located within or affected by actions occurring within the planning area. In addition, the BLM has coordinated with Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve, Chugach National Forest, Copper Valley Economic Development Council (there is no local government in the Copper Valley), and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in preparation of this document.

B. Purpose and Need for the Plan

Through completion of the RMP/EIS, the BLM proposes to provide a single, comprehensive land use plan that will guide management of the public lands and interests administered by the Glennallen Field Office. Site specific decisions and management actions, such as designation of specific trails, will occur through subsequent implementation-level plans.

Current management of these lands is guided by the Southcentral Management Framework Plan (MFP), completed in 1980 and amended in 1985 and 1998 (BLM 1980a). In the 25 years since this document's approval, many additional laws, regulations, and policies have created additional considerations that affect the management of public lands. As a result, some of the decisions in the MFP are no longer valid or have been superseded by requirements that did not exist when the MFP was prepared. Coupled with new issues and concerns and increasing demands on certain resources in the planning area, these changes in management policy drive the need for an inclusive, comprehensive plan that provides clear direction for both the BLM and the public.

C. Planning Area

1. Land Ownership and Administration in the Planning Area

Maps 1 and 2, located at the end of this chapter, show the location of the planning area within the State of Alaska and depict the varying ownership and conveyance status within the planning area. Of the approximately 30,908,000 acres within the planning area, decisions in the RMP/EIS will apply to 7,056,000 acres, classified as follows:

- BLM: These are lands that will most likely be retained in long-term Federal ownership. They are not selected by the State or by Native corporations or villages. These lands constitute approximately 5 percent of the planning area.
- State-selected: These are formerly unappropriate and unreserved public lands that were selected by the State of Alaska as part of the Alaska Statehood Act of 1958 and Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) of 1980. Until conveyance, State-selected lands not falling within the Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve or Chugach National Forest will continue to be managed by the Glennallen Field Office. ANILCA, which amended the Statehood Act, allowed for overselection by the State by as much as 25 percent of the entitlement (sec. 906 (f)). Therefore, some State-selected lands will eventually be retained in long-term Federal ownership. State-selected lands constitute approximately 10 percent of the planning area.

- Native-selected: The Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) of 1971 gave Alaska Natives an entitlement of 44,000,000 acres to be selected from a pool of public lands specifically defined and withdrawn by the Act for that purpose. As ANILCA provided for overselection by the State, ANCSA provided for the Natives to overselect lands (sec. 12); some of these lands will therefore be retained in long-term Federal ownership. Native-selected lands constitute approximately 1 percent of the planning area.
- Dual-selected: These are lands that have been selected by both the State and Natives. Again, because of overselection, some of these lands could be retained in long-term Federal ownership. Dual-selected lands constitute approximately 7 percent of the planning area.
- Mineral estate: All subsurface mineral estate lying beneath BLM lands is BLM administered. In addition, BLM administers 12,874 acres of subsurface mineral estate beneath private surface within the planning area. No mineral development occurs on State or Native-selected lands until conveyance occurs. After conveyance, mineral estate goes to the State or the Native corporation.

Lands within the planning area that will not be covered by the RMP/EIS:

- State lands: These are lands that have already been conveyed to the State of Alaska. These lands constitute approximately 24 percent of the planning area.
- Native lands: These are lands already conveyed to Native allotees or village and regional corporations and are now private lands. These lands constitute approximately 4 percent of the planning area.
- National Park Service lands. These are lands within Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve and Denali National Park and Preserve. These lands constitute approximately 40 percent of the planning area.
- USDA Forest Service: These are lands managed by the Chugach National Forest. These lands constitute approximately 7 percent of the planning area.
- Private lands: These lands are privately owned, aside from Native corporations or villages. Most are located along the highway corridors. These lands constitute approximately 2 percent of the planning area.

Table 1. Land Status within the East Alaska Planning Area

Land Category	Acres
BLM-administered lands	
BLM public lands	1,572,000
State-selected	3,397,000
Native-selected	44,000
Dual-selected	2,100,000
Military	3,000
Total	7,116,000
National Park Service-administered lands	
National Park Service lands	11,630,000
State-selected	6,000
Native-selected	800,000
Total	12,436,000
State of Alaska lands	
State lands	7,022,000
Total	7,022,000
Forest Service-administered lands	
Forest Service lands	1,891,000
Native-selected	342,000
Total	2,234,000
Native-owned	**2,036,000**
Private	**64,000**
Total lands within planning area	**30,908,000**

2. Geographic and Social Setting

The planning area extends from the southern slopes of the Alaska Range to the Chugach Mountains, from the Talkeetna Mountains to the Wrangell Mountains, and includes an extensive area of coastline in Prince William Sound. The area is bisected by the Glenn, Richardson and Denali Highways, and is accessible by Alaska standards. The area is also bisected by the Trans-Alaska Pipeline, which runs north to south and roughly parallels the Richardson Highway.

Located at the core of the planning area, the Copper River Basin is very rural in nature, with small communities and villages scattered throughout the area. The 2000 Census reported a population of 3,120 in the Copper River Basin. The larger communities of Cordova and Valdez are within the planning area on Prince William Sound. Cordova is located near the mouth of the Copper River. Residents of the cities of Anchorage, Palmer, Wasilla, and Fairbanks utilize the area heavily for recreation as well as for sport and subsistence hunting and fishing.

The area experiences a climate of cold, relatively dry winters and warm summers. The Copper River Basin is quite dry as it is surrounded by four major mountain ranges. These ranges essentially block most storm systems that would affect the basin. Mean annual precipitation is only 9-10 inches in the Copper River Basin. Precipitation

amounts increase in all directions as the valley floor gradually increases in elevation toward the mountain ranges. Sixty percent of the annual precipitation occurs from June through September. The remaining precipitation falls mainly from October through December. The driest period of the year is January through May.

D. Scoping and Issues

1. The Scoping Process

Early in the planning process, the public was invited to help the BLM identify planning issues and concerns relating to the management of BLM-administered lands and resources in the planning area. The formal scoping period began with publication of the Notice of Intent (NOI) in the Federal Register in March 2003 (Federal Register 2003). The scoping process included 30 public meetings, most of which were held in small communities and villages within the Copper River Basin, though meetings were also held in Fairbanks, Anchorage, Valdez, and Cordova. Cumulatively, over 300 people attended these meetings. Concurrent with the meetings, an East Alaska Resource Management Plan website was developed (http://www.ak.blm.gov/gdo/landplan/index.html). The website contained a public meeting schedule and a detailed explanation of the RMP process. At the end of the scoping period, a scoping report was posted on the website and sent out via newsletter to all those who participated in the public meetings. News releases and radio announcements were also used to notify the public of the planning process and how to become involved.

Additional information on public involvement opportunities can be found in the *Collaboration* section on page 22 and in *Appendix F: Public Involvement Opportunities.*

2. Identification of Issues

Issue identification is the first step of the nine-step BLM planning process outlined in Table 2 on page 20. A planning issue is a major concern, controversy, or dispute regarding management of resources or uses on the public lands that could be addressed in a variety of ways. During scoping, the BLM asked the public to provide issues or concerns to be considered in development of the RMP. Analysis of the comments was completed and a Scoping Report was finalized in June 2003. After consideration of public responses, seven major issues were formulated. These issues drove the formulation of the plan alternatives. The issues are controversial and addressing them will result in a range of management options across the plan

alternatives. While other concerns will be addressed in the plan, management may or may not change in the alternative development. Issues are described below. The order of the issues does not reflect their level of importance. Subsistence is discussed last to consider potential impacts to subsistence that could result from proposed management actions or allowable uses described under the previous six issues.

3. Issues Addressed

a) Issue 1: Travel Management

Issue Statement: **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.**

(1) Access

The planning area is comprised of a checkerboard pattern of mixed land status. As lands are conveyed from public management to private ownership (in the case of Native selections), some access routes to public lands are in danger of being lost if easements are not reserved as part of the conveyance process. Section 17(b) of ANCSA provided for the reservation of easements across lands being conveyed to Native regional and village corporations primarily to provide access to isolated public lands. In some cases, easements were reserved as a result of a paperwork exercise using maps without being field-checked. Easements were also frequently reserved for proposed roads and trails. The locations of some easements were not field verified or marked for public use. As a result, easements are often unusable due to terrain or land ownership patterns. Additionally, many easement reservations were effectively nullified by later conveyance of Native allotments across the easement, thereby making them discontinuous. Some 17(b) easement trails are nearly impassible due to wet or unstable surface conditions, resulting in trespass on Native land when users travel off the trail (and off the easement) to avoid boggy or impassable trail segments. Some members of the public use 17(b) easements for uses that are not allowed as specified in the conveyance document or regulations. These uses may constitute a trespass to Native lands underlying the easement or restrict others' valid use of the easement.

(2) Off-highway Vehicle (OHV) Management and Trails

The use of motorized off-highway vehicles (OHVs) is increasing throughout the planning area and is a concern for managers, interest groups, and some members of the general public. OHVs including four-wheelers, Argos, and tracked vehicles, are used recreationally, but their predominant use in Alaska is to access hunting and fishing areas. A 1996 ADF&G Division of Wildlife Conservation Report to the Alaska Board of

Game (Off Road Vehicle and Snowmachine Use in Alaska—A Report to the Alaska Board of Game, 1996) summarizes the issue below:

> "Small, highly maneuverable, 4-wheel-drive ORVs [off-road vehicles] are a significant evolution in hunting methods and means during the snow-free season. The number of hunters using ORVs has increased in many areas; however, heaviest use extends from the road systems which connect urban areas in southcentral and interior Alaska. At low levels of use, ORVs may be advantageous to hunters and wildlife managers by enhancing ability to harvest and retrieve meat and trophies in remote areas and dispersing hunting pressure away from roads. However, several factors combine to concentrate ORV use. Terrain features tend to funnel ORV use, and hunters attempt to hunt in the most productive areas. At high use levels, this can adversely affect wildlife populations and the public's perception of ORVs. In states with many ORVs, their use has damaged soils and vegetation; stressed, displaced, and killed wildlife; and conflicted with other outdoor uses. Increasing public complaints and observations of resource managers indicate that Alaska is no exception" (ADF&G 1996).

(3) Roads

Portions of the Richardson, Glenn, Parks, and Denali Highways all occur within the planning area. These highways connect the urban centers of Fairbanks, Anchorage, and Valdez and provide access for hundreds of thousands of tourists and out-of-state visitors every year. In addition, the highways provide access to recreational opportunities, hunting, and fishing for rural and urban residents alike. There are very few secondary roads in the area; most that do exist are associated with service access to the Trans-Alaska Pipeline or access to private residences. The issue in regards to roads is related to the future potential for development of an area, the consideration of access for resource development, and resolution of any resource conflicts that might occur from road construction.

b) Issue 2: Recreation

Issue Statement: 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.

A variety of outdoor recreational opportunities are provided within the East Alaska planning area. The existing road network makes these resources relatively easy to access for residents of the planning area, those living in Anchorage, Fairbanks, and Valdez, and the hundreds of thousands of visitors to the State who pass through the area every year. State of Alaska Department of Transportation counts on the Denali

Highway indicate at least 27,000 visitors during the 2001 summer season. This represents a small subset of the non-resident tourists as well as Alaskan recreationists who use the areas adjacent to the Glenn, Richardson, Parks, and Denali Highways. Access is more difficult off these highways, and opportunities for primitive and semi-primitive experiences are still readily available.

Recreational uses, demands, and impacts in the planning area are increasing. Thousands of visitors travel the Richardson, Glenn, and Denali Highways every summer season and utilize BLM developed facilities. Winter use is also on the rise – the annual Arctic Man Ski and Sno-Go Classic event in the foothills of the Alaska Range draws 10,000-15,000 spectators alone, most of whom spend time in the area using snowmachines. Recreational use on the Delta and Gulkana Wild and Scenic Rivers has doubled in the last 30 years. Increasing OHV use is mostly unmanaged, resulting in unquantified resource impacts to vegetation, cultural resources, soil, water, and wildlife. The number of applications received for commercial recreational activities such as guided fishing and float trips, organized races and events, and heli-skiing are also increasing. Increasing recreational activities have impacted cultural resources in areas such as the Tangle Lakes Archaeological District. Concerns are being raised about the impacts, both individually and cumulatively, of these activities on natural resources, subsistence resources, and the quality of recreational experiences.

c) Issue 3: Natural and Cultural Resources

Issue Statement: 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.

The planning area is rich in natural resources. Off the highway system, resource conditions are still relatively pristine with few human impacts. The planning area provides habitat for approximately 35 percent of Alaska's trumpeter swan population and for the Nelchina caribou herd; the herd is a significant subsistence resource for rural residents on the Copper River Basin. BLM-managed lands include the headwaters of the Copper River, which provide a salmon run that is vitally important to the economic and subsistence needs of Copper River Basin and Cordova residents. The Bering Glacier complex is the largest glacier in continental North America; the glacier forelands provide valuable habitat for waterfowl and contain ecologically unique plant and animal communities.

As Alaska's and the nation's population increases, so do demands for natural resources. Sustainable resource development is vital to the Copper River Basin's economy. How do we balance sustainable resource development with protection of resource values?

d) Issue 4: Lands and Realty

Issue Statement: 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.

In 1983, Public Land Order (PLO) 6456 opened 10,250 acres of lands in the Slana area to settlement. As claims in the area were patented, a pattern of isolated and unmanageable tracts emerged, creating an opportunity for an ongoing sale program in an area that is already identified for disposal. This opportunity must be balanced with the potential social and environmental impacts associated with increased population and settlement in an area with very little infrastructure.

e) Issue 5: Vegetation Management

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

The planning area contains vast tracts of relatively undisturbed lands and vegetation. With the exception of the highway corridors, human-caused disturbance has been minimal and vegetation communities are able to progress naturally through their successional stages. Bark beetle kill in white spruce and fire have had the greatest effect so far on vegetation within the planning area. Wetlands are abundant within the Copper River Basin; consequently, there has not been an abundance of large stand-replacement fires. Some timber sales have occurred (mostly on Native Corporation lands), but they have been on a relatively small scale. With a lack of natural and human-caused disturbance, black and/or white spruce tend to dominate the potential natural communities. This has resulted in reduced amounts of shrub-dominated early seral vegetation types, important components of moose and other wildlife habitats.

There is local demand for personal and commercial harvest of firewood and house logs. Although approximately 65,000 acres of BLM-administered land within the planning area have commercial forest potential, most of these acres are inaccessible. Opportunities exist to utilize commercial and personal harvest to improve wildlife habitat, improve forest health, and reduce the potential for wildfire in the urban interface. There are also opportunities to utilize prescribed fire and wildland fire to improve wildlife habitat. These opportunities must be balanced with other resource values. Other activities such as mineral development and OHV use must be managed to minimize disturbance to vegetation, minimize the potential for introduction of noxious weeds, and reclaim damages to vegetation.

f) Issue 6: Leasable and Locatable Minerals

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

ANCSA opened Federal lands to selection by the State and Native Corporations; sec. 17(d)(1) withdrew most lands to mineral entry during the selection and conveyance process. These withdrawals are still in place. This planning process will assess the continued need for withdrawals, balancing the need for mineral development and production with protection of resource values.

There are no active Federal or State oil and gas leases in the planning area. The State of Alaska issued a 5-year oil and gas exploratory license in October 2000 for 398,000 acres in the Copper River Basin. The licensing program encourages exploration in areas of Alaska where there is higher investment risk and relatively low or unknown hydrocarbon potential. Under this program, the State will convert all or a portion of the license area to standard oil and gas leases if work commitments by the licensee have been met.

In addition, there are known mineral deposits throughout the planning area, particularly along the Denali Fault, which parallels the Alaska Range. If withdrawals are revoked, they will be replaced with site-specific measures for protection of resources.

g) Issue 7: Subsistence/Social and Economic Conditions

Issue Statement: 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.

Subsistence opportunities and resources are an important part of rural Alaskan lifestyles. ANILCA requires that rural residents have a priority over other users to take fish and wildlife for subsistence on Federal public lands where a recognized customary and traditional pattern of use exists. When it is necessary to restrict the taking of fish and wildlife on these lands, subsistence uses are given preference over other consumptive uses.

Resource development, increasing recreational activities, increased OHV use, and an increasing number of sport hunters and anglers all have the potential to affect subsistence resources and access to subsistence resources. ANILCA mandates that the BLM consider the effect of proposed management on subsistence resources.

The State of Alaska is seeking title to all lands in the planning area lying within the transportation and utility corridor created by PLO 5150. These lands are not currently allowed for conveyance, but were legally top-filed in accordance with ANILCA section 906(e) by the State. If the BLM's final planning decision recommends making these lands available for conveyance to the State of Alaska, the recommendation would be sent to the Secretary of Interior for approval. If the Secretary approves revocation of PLO 5150, conveyance of the land would end subsistence management by the Federal government in that area, and reduce the area subject to Federal subsistence regulation by 453,514 acres.

4. Issues Beyond the Scope of the Plan

Several concerns were raised during scoping that were either beyond the scope of this planning effort or represented questions about how the BLM would go about the planning process and RMP implementation. The planning process and RMP implementation are described in section *(I)(F) Planning Process* on page 19 of this document. The issues and concerns beyond the scope of the plan are summarized below and will not be analyzed further for the reasons stated.

a) Land Conveyance

Decisions made in the RMP will not speed up or affect the land conveyance process, nor will the RMP affect the legislation recently adopted to speed up the conveyance process. The RMP does not attempt to influence prioritization of selections by either the State or Native entities.

b) Federal Subsistence Program Management

Decisions made in the RMP will not change administration of the Federal Subsistence Program. The program will continue to be conducted through the Regional Advisory Councils and the Federal Subsistence Board, with input from the general public, Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G), and Federal staff. The RMP will, however, consider impacts and access to subsistence resources and subsistence opportunities from proposed actions associated with the alternatives considered in the EIS.

c) Fishing and Hunting Regulations

The BLM manages wildlife and fisheries habitat; ADF&G manages wildlife and fish populations and issues fishing and hunting regulations. Alaska Board of Game and Board of Fisheries create the regulations. Decisions made in the RMP will not affect fishing or hunting regulations. Any actions that might affect hunting and fishing will be coordinated with the ADF&G consistent with 43 CFR Part 24, the Secretary's Policy on relationship with State fish and wildlife management agencies, and the Master Memorandum of Understanding between the agencies.

d) Wilderness Inventory and Management

In 1964, Congress enacted the Wilderness Act "to assure that an increasing population . . . does not occupy and modify all areas within the United States . . . , leaving no lands designated for preservation and protection in their natural condition." The statutory criteria used to identify lands with wilderness character have been in effect since passage of the Wilderness Act nearly 40 years ago.

Alaska lands were exhaustively inventoried, reviewed and studied for their wilderness values under the Wilderness Act criteria, beginning in 1971, when Congress enacted the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA). For eight years thereafter, the Department evaluated National Parks, Forests, Wildlife Refuges, Wild and Scenic Rivers and other lands for potential designation as wilderness.

Subsequently, Congress passed the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act of 1980 (ANILCA). In ANILCA, Congress chose to preserve more than 150 million acres in specially protected conservation units. This acreage represents more than 40 percent of the land area of the State of Alaska, and about 60 percent of the Federal land in Alaska. Pursuant to ANILCA, more than one-third of the lands preserved in conservation units, or 57 million acres, were formally designated as wilderness. Alaska has a higher percentage of land in wilderness than any other state.

In recognition of the sensitive and protracted negotiations that resulted in the designation of large amounts of wilderness, and the limitations wilderness designations impose on the multiple use of those lands, Congress did not mandate further wilderness inventory, review or study of BLM lands in Alaska, with one exception. Section 1001 of ANILCA mandated a study of Federal lands north of 68 degrees latitude and east of the western boundary of the National Petroleum Reserve – Alaska. These lands do not occur within this planning area.

Rather than mandating further wilderness inventory, review or study, Congress granted the Secretary the discretion to undertake additional wilderness study of BLM lands but, per section 1326 (b) of ANILCA, precluded further study of any Department lands in the

State of Alaska ". . . for the single purpose of considering the establishment of a conservation system unit, national recreation areas, national conservation area, or for related or similar purposes" absent Congressional direction.

Shortly after the passage of ANILCA, the Secretary exercised this discretion to adopt a policy not to conduct further wilderness inventory, review or study (outside of ANILCA) as part of the BLM planning process in Alaska. This policy was in effect for approximately twenty years. On January 18, 2001, Secretary Babbitt adopted another approach that deviated from this long-term policy.

Clearly, Congress may direct BLM to undertake further wilderness study in Alaska in future legislation. However, in the absence of further legislation, Congress has granted the Secretary the discretion to determine whether further wilderness inventory, review and study of BLM lands in Alaska is warranted. The current Secretary has instructed BLM to "consider specific wilderness study proposals in Alaska, as part of any new or revised resource management planning effort, if the proposals have broad support among the State and Federal elected officials representing Alaska. Absent this broad support, wilderness should not be considered in these resource management plans."

The State of Alaska has asked BLM to adhere to this directive in its Resource Management Planning, stating "At this time it is clear that there is a lack of broad support for further wilderness proposals." (State of Alaska 2003). In consideration of all of the above, wilderness inventory was not conducted as part of this planning process and wilderness areas are not considered in any of the alternatives.

e) Lands with Wilderness Characteristics

There are no BLM-managed wilderness areas or wilderness study areas within the planning area. There are areas that possess opportunities for a primitive recreation experience, solitude, and naturalness. These will not be designated or managed as Wilderness areas. In many cases, they will be managed to maintain the current primitive recreation experience. A description of the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum inventory, including primitive opportunities, is discussed in Chapter III in the *Recreation* section. Management prescriptions for recreation are described in Chapter II, and impacts to primitive recreation experiences are described in Chapter IV.

E. Planning Criteria and Legislative Constraints

The Federal Land Policy Management Act (FLPMA) is the primary authority for the BLM's management of public lands. This law provides the overarching policy by which public lands will be managed and establishes provisions for land use planning, land acquisition and disposition, administration, range management, land use authorizations, designated management areas, and the repeal of certain laws and statutes. National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) provides the basic national charter for environmental responsibility and requires the consideration and public availability of information regarding the environmental impacts of major Federal actions significantly affecting the quality of the human environment. In Alaska, ANCSA and ANILCA add to the legal framework for lands and realty issues, as well as access and subsistence issues.

Planning criteria are the standards, rules, and guidelines that help to guide data collection, alternative formulation, and alternative selection in the RMP development process. In conjunction with the planning issues, planning criteria assure that the planning process is focused. The criteria also help guide selection of the final RMP and provide a basis for judging the responsiveness of the planning options.

The following planning criteria were developed by the BLM and reviewed by the public as part of the East Alaska RMP scoping process:

- The principles of multiple use and sustained yield as set forth in FLPMA will be applied in the RMP.
- Opportunities for public participation will be encouraged throughout the RMP process.
- The RMP will address all lands within the Glennallen Field Office boundary that are currently administered by the BLM, including State- and Native-selected lands. Management of these lands will be consistent with section 906(k) of ANILCA, and section 22 (i) of ANCSA.
- Management of State-selected lands will be consistent with Alaska Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Area Plans currently in place.
- Valid existing rights will be recognized and protected.
- Subsistence uses and needs will be considered and adverse impacts will be minimized whenever possible in accordance with section 810 of ANILCA.
- The Planning Team will work cooperatively with the State of Alaska, Native corporations, municipal governments, other Federal agencies, interested groups, and individuals.
- The RMP will recognize Federal land management agency obligations under applicable tribal treaties and laws and executive orders relating to Native American reserved rights, religious freedoms, and traditional use areas.
- Wildlife habitat management will be consistent with ADF&G objectives.
- The RMP will use existing data, information, plans, and land use analyses. Some additional fieldwork and assessment will be needed.

- The RMP will be compatible with the river management plans for the Delta and Gulkana rivers completed in 1983.
- The RMP will be consistent with the mandates of FLPMA, NEPA, the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ), the National Historic Preservation Act, the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968, and all other Federal laws, regulations, and policies as required. The planning process will include preparation of an EIS in compliance with NEPA guidelines.
- Off-highway vehicle designations for all public lands within the planning area will be completed in accordance with 43 CFR 8342.
- Areas proposed as Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs) will meet the criteria contained in 43 CFR 1610.7-2.
- Review of waterways as eligible for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic River System will follow the criteria contained in 43 CFR 8351.
- Actions and activities that are potentially adverse to the existing Trans-Alaska Pipeline energy right-of-way will be avoided.
- Management actions, Required Operating Procedures, or Oil and Gas Leasing Stipulations will be consistent with BLM's Alaska Statewide Land Health Standards (BLM 2004d).

F. Planning Process

An RMP is a master land use plan that guides the management of public lands in a particular area or administrative unit. RMPs are usually prepared to cover the lands administered by a certain field office, in this case the Glennallen Field Office. An approved RMP establishes the following items:

- Resource goals and objectives
- Allowable resource uses and related levels of production or use to be maintained
- Land areas to be managed for limited, restricted, or exclusive resource uses or for transfer from BLM administration
- Program constraints and general management practices and protocols
- General implementation schedule or sequences
- Intervals and standards for monitoring the plan

Preparation of an RMP involves nine interrelated steps as depicted in Table 2.

Table 2. Steps in the BLM Land Use Planning Process

Step	Description
1: Identification of issues	This step is designed to identify major problems, concerns, or opportunities associated with the management of public land in the planning area. Issues are identified by the public, the BLM, and other governmental entities. The planning process is then focused on resolving the planning issues.
2: Development of planning criteria	Planning criteria are identified to guide development of the RMP and prevent the collection of unnecessary information and data.
3: Collect and compile inventory data	This planning step involves the collation and collection of various kinds of environmental, social, economic, resource, and institutional data. In most cases, this process is limited to information needed to address the issues. The data required for land use planning decisions is usually at a broader scale than data required in implementation level planning and analysis.
4: Analysis of the management situation	This step calls for the deliberate assessment of the current situation. It identifies the way lands and activities are currently managed in the planning area, describes conditions and trends across the planning area, identifies problems and concerns resulting from the current management, and identifies opportunities to manage these lands differently.
5: Formulate alternatives	During this step, BLM formulates a reasonable range of alternatives for managing resources in the planning area. Alternatives include a combination of current management (no action) alternative and other alternatives that strive to resolve the major planning issues while emphasizing different management scenarios. Alternatives usually vary by the amounts of resource production or protection that would be allowed, or in the emphasis of one program area over another.
6: Estimation of effects	This step involves estimating the physical, biological, economic, and social effects of implementing each alternative in order to provide a comparative evaluation of impacts in compliance with CEQ regulations for implementing NEPA (40 CFR 1500).
7: Selection of preferred alternative	Based on the information resulting from the estimation of effects, the BLM identifies a Preferred Alternative. The Draft RMP/EIS is then prepared for printing and distributed for public review.
8: Selection of RMP	Following review and analysis of public comments on the Draft RMP/EIS, BLM makes adjustments as warranted and selects a proposed RMP. The Proposed RMP and a final EIS is then published. A final decision is made after a 60-day Governor's Consistency Review and a 30-day public protest period are completed. BLM then publishes the Record of Decision (ROD) and prepares the Approved Resource Management Plan.
9: Monitoring and evaluation	This step involves the collection and analysis of resource condition and trend data to determine the effectiveness of the plan in resolving the identified issues and achieving desired results. Implementation of decisions requiring subsequent action is also monitored. Monitoring continues from the time the RMP is adopted until changing conditions require revision of the whole plan or any portion of it.

1. Relationship Between the RMP and EIS

This document actually contains two documents: A Proposed RMP (Alternative D) and a Final EIS. As part of the EIS, the RMP is not a stand-alone document; rather, it consists of the text, data, and maps found in Chapter II. Chapter II describes four alternatives for the RMP and explains the differences between these alternatives as they relate to the seven issues. Each of the four alternatives represents a different RMP that would address the issues in different ways, though some decisions may be common to more than one alternative. Chapter II is also a required component of an EIS, written to compare and analyze the effects of implementation of each of the alternatives.

After public comments on the Draft EIS were analyzed, this Final EIS was prepared. The Final EIS is very similar in content to the Draft EIS but includes responses to all public comments. Any errors or corrections identified through the comment process or through internal review are addressed in the Final EIS through modifications to the proposed plan or alternatives, development and evaluation of alternatives not previously considered, corrections to the document, and/or improved, supplemented, or modified analyses.

No earlier than 30 days after the Proposed RMP/Final EIS document is issued, a Record of Decision (ROD)/Approved RMP will be approved and published in a single document. The approved RMP may be different from the proposed RMP identified in the Final EIS if the deciding official elects to combine elements of multiple alternatives into the final RMP. The RMP will describe the goals, objectives, and actions for fulfilling the direction and vision developed throughout the planning process. The ROD/Approved RMP will function as a stand-alone document to guide future land management decisions.

2. Implementation of the RMP

Resource Management Plans provide broad, general direction for management of BLM-managed lands. After an RMP is approved, many of the decisions made in the RMP become effective immediately. Other decisions will only be effective after additional action. For example, a decision to withdraw lands from mineral entry would not be effective until after formal action at the Secretarial level.

Before specific projects can be implemented on the ground, an implementation plan must be completed, and all implementation plans must tier to and be in compliance with the affected area's RMP. All implementation-level planning will be tiered to the management framework established in the RMP. For example, the RMP will describe

what areas will be available for land disposal. The implementation level plan would describe under what conditions the lands would be made available and other conditions necessary to facilitate land disposal (appraisal, fair market value determination, access, etc.).

3. Relationship of the RMP to BLM Policies, Plans, and Programs

A number of plans have been developed by the BLM that relate to or otherwise govern management in the planning area. These major plans and other major management guidance are listed below and provide a perspective of the many management considerations pertinent to the planning area.

- Southcentral Management Framework Plan, as amended (BLM 1980a).
- River Management Plan for the Delta National Wild and Scenic River (BLM 1983a).
- River Management Plan for the Gulkana National Wild River (BLM 1983b).
- BLM-Alaska Land Use Amendment for Wildland Fire and Fuels Management (BLM 2004c).
- Trans-Alaska Pipeline Right-of-Way Renewal EIS (BLM and JPO 2002).
- BLM's Alaska Statewide Land Health Standards (BLM 2004d).

4. Collaboration

Collaboration is often described as interaction with a wide range of external and internal working relationships. A variety of strategies have been implemented throughout the planning process to foster a collaborative approach, improve communication and develop understanding of the issues and the process in development of the RMP/EIS. Some of these strategies are widely accepted outreach tools; others have been implemented based on suggestions made by the public as to how they wanted to collaborate with BLM in development of the plan.

a) Public Participation

A Notice of Intent for the East Alaska RMP was published in the Federal Register on March 18, 2003. Public scoping began in mid-February, 2003 and extended to mid-June, 2003. A total of 30 public meetings were held, mostly within the Copper River Basin. The meetings were widespread and focused on scattered small communities and villages within the planning area. Meetings were also held at the larger towns/cities

of Fairbanks, Anchorage, Valdez, and Cordova. At communities within the Copper River Basin, two meetings were held, the first to identify issues and concerns and the second to discuss how (or if) those issues and concerns would be addressed within the RMP.

Concurrent with the meetings, an East Alaska RMP website was developed. The website contained a public meeting schedule and a detailed explanation of the RMP process. As the first round of meetings was completed, meeting notes and a summary of the issues/concerns/questions raised were listed on the website. The second meeting notes were also posted, as was the Scoping Report.

In addition to the initial round of public scoping, another series of public meetings was held to review draft alternatives. These were held in 17 different locations, and more than 500 draft alternative packets were distributed. No preferred alternative was identified. These draft alternatives were also posted on the website and comments taken electronically. The public was also able to review and comment on the Draft RMP/EIS.

The publishing of a Notice of Availability for the East Alaska Draft RMP/EIS by the Environmental Protection Agency on April 29, 2005 marked the beginning of a 90 day public comment period (Federal Register 2005.) During that 90 days, the BLM held 7 public meetings to answer questions, present the information within the Draft, and hear public testimony.

Alternative B of the Draft RMP/EIS proposed the revocation of Public Land Order 5150 which makes up the transportation and utility corridor that houses the Trans-Alaska Pipeline System. This action, as identified by the ANICLA section 810 Analysis, would significantly restrict subsistence uses and therefore required that subsistence hearings be held in the area affected by the proposed action. Seven subsistence hearings were held as well as a special session of the Southcentral Federal Regional Subsistence Advisory Council to allow the council to hear testimony on the revocation of PLO 5150 and submit a formal comment.

b) Cooperating Agencies/Invitees

Just after publication of the Notice of Intent, a cooperator's letter was sent out to agencies and Native Corporations within the area. The letter explained the RMP process, stressed the need for consultation and cooperation, and invited participation. Letters were sent out to the following agencies and Native Corporations:

- State of Alaska
- USDA Forest Service, Chugach National Forest
- USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service, Alaska State Office
- National Park Service, Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve and Denali National Park and Preserve

- Ahtna Native Corporation
- Chugach Alaska Corporation
- Copper Valley Economic Development Council

In addition, a letter was sent from the BLM State office in May of 2002, inviting the State of Alaska to participate in the process as a cooperator. A joint BLM-State position has been created, with that person acting as liaison between State of Alaska and BLM in this planning process. This has been effective in facilitating information exchange and review of draft materials by State personnel.

c) Collaboration with Native Corporations and Village Governments

In addition to the public meetings described above, scoping meetings were held with Ahtna Native Corporation, Chitina Native Corporation, and with each Village Council in the area. The purpose was to develop issues and concerns for management of BLM lands in the area. These meetings have resulted in the development of three different Memoranda of Understanding with different village governments: Cheesh-Na, Chitina, and Tazlina. These MOU will facilitate coordination with the villages throughout the planning process and open the door to increased coordination/consultation after the process is done. In addition, BLM has a contract with a cultural anthropologist to work the village councils and elders to identify cultural, traditional, and subsistence sites or areas important for maintenance or protection.

G. Related Plans

Plans formulated by Federal, State, local and tribal governments that relate to management of lands and resources are reviewed and considered as the RMP/EIS is developed. BLM planning regulations require that BLM plans be consistent with officially approved or adopted resource related plans of other Federal, State, local and tribal governments to the extent those plans are consistent with Federal laws and regulations applicable to public lands.

Management of Federal and State lands immediately adjacent to public land administered by the BLM will be considered to the extent possible in the formulation of alternative management scenarios and land use allocations. The main planning documents of other Federal, State, local, and tribal governments to be considered in development of the RMP are listed below:

- Chugach National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) (FS 2003)

- Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve General Management Plan (NPS 1986)
- Susitna Area Plan (ADNR and ADF&G 1985)
- Copper River Basin Area Plan (ADNR and ADF&G 1986)
- Prince William Sound Area Plan (ADNR and ADF&G 1988)
- Yakataga Area Plan (ADNR 1995)
- Denali to Wrangell St. Elias, Assessment and Management of Scenic Resources along the Highways between Denali and Wrangell-St. Elias National Parks (ADNR 1982)
- Copper Valley Regional Plan Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (Copper Valley Development Council 2003)

Map 1. EARMP Planning Area Land Managers

File size: 187 KB
File name: 01_mang.pdf
Map size: 11x17

Map 2. EARMP Planning Area General Land Status

File size: 189 KB
File name: 02_ls.pdf
Map size: 11x17