

Fairbanks District Office

Resource Advisory Council Briefing

April 2012

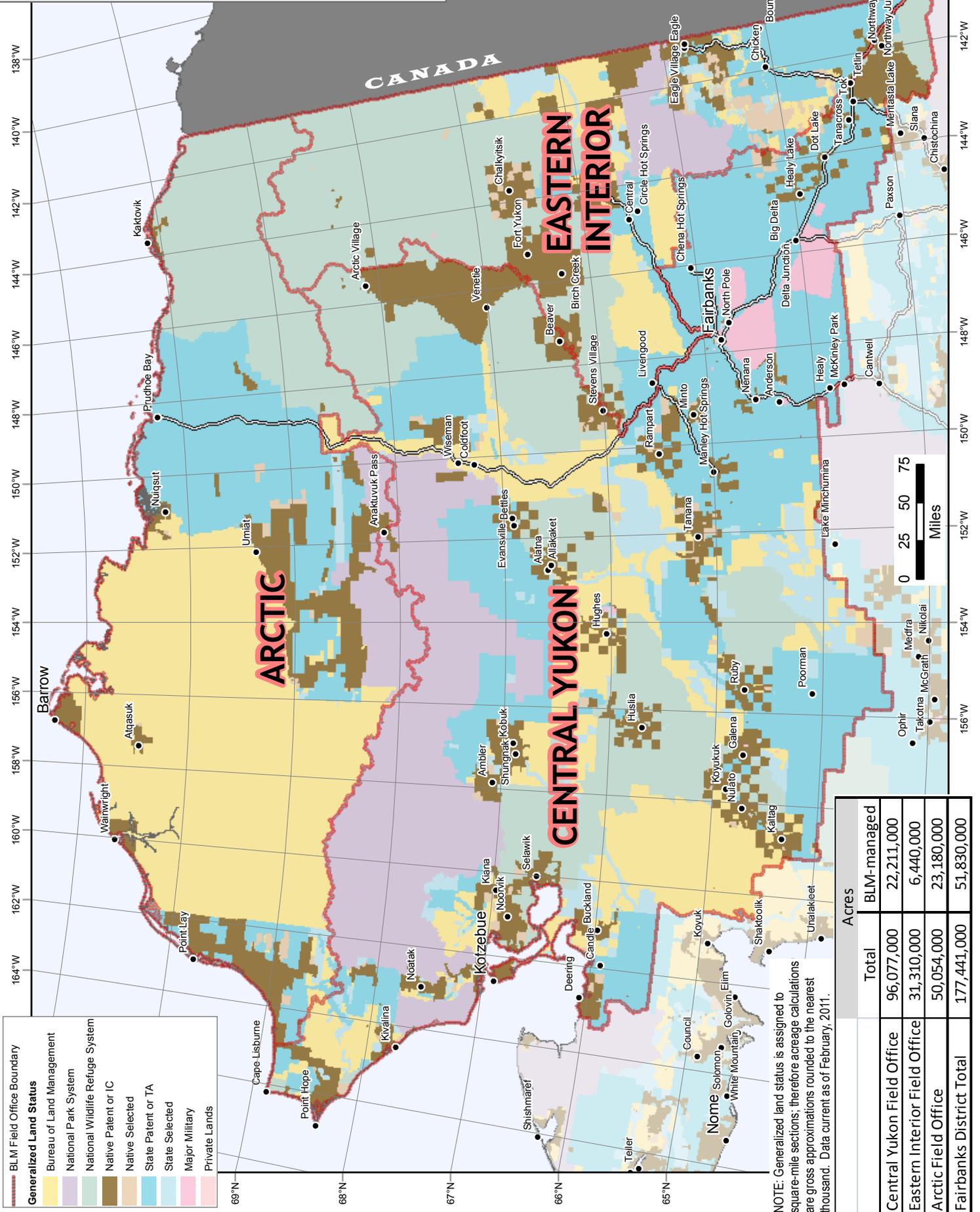
Alaska



Aurora over Sukakpak Mountain, Dalton Highway
March 2012. Photo by BLM volunteer Dave Bachrach.



General Land Status



Generalized Land Status

- BLM Field Office Boundary
- Bureau of Land Management
- National Park System
- National Wildlife Refuge System
- Native Patent or IC
- Native Selected
- State Patent or TA
- State Selected
- Major Military
- Private Lands

NOTE: Generalized land status is assigned to square-mile sections; therefore acreage calculations are gross approximations rounded to the nearest thousand. Data current as of February, 2011.

	Acres	
	Total	BLM-managed
Central Yukon Field Office	96,077,000	22,211,000
Eastern Interior Field Office	31,310,000	6,440,000
Arctic Field Office	50,054,000	23,180,000
Fairbanks District Total	177,441,000	51,830,000

Arctic Field Office

Meeting with North Slope Borough

In mid-February District Manager Steven Hartmann and Arctic Field Office Manager Lon Kelly met with North Slope Borough Mayor Charlotte Brower and oil and gas analyst Jason Bergerson to learn about their priorities and concerns regarding BLM-managed lands and issues. They discussed the protocol for interactions between the agency and the Borough. In addition, they discussed National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska (NPR-A) issues, including Legacy Wells, the draft NPR-A Integrated Activity Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (IAP/EIS), and subsistence cabins located on BLM-managed public lands. The Borough is a cooperating agency for the NPR-A IAP/EIS. The meeting was very positive and promoted a positive working relationship between the Borough and the BLM.

“Office hours” and community outreach in the NPR-A

Field Manager Lon Kelly and anthropologist Stacey Fritz visited the village of Atqasuk March 13–15 as part of a new, regular series of visits (“office hours”) in NPR-A communities. Kelly and Fritz were available to discuss residents’ questions or concerns about oil and gas development and other BLM-related issues. They also gave brief presentations on BLM activities, including an update on the Draft NPR-A IAP/EIS. Village office hours will continue in Nuiqsut and Barrow April 23–26, when Fritz and Kelly will visit the two villages to help with ANILCA subsistence hearings for the FAST pipeline project.

The BLM is currently recruiting a replacement for Ben Nageak, the field office’s long-time employee in Barrow. While we were sorry to see Ben leave the BLM last December, he remains a good friend and contact in his new position leading the Village Affairs Division in the North Slope Borough Mayor’s Office.

Draft NPR-A Integrated Activity Plan/Environmental Impact Statement

Through the winter the Arctic Field Office continued government-to-government consultation with the 43 federally-recognized tribes that may have an interest in the NPR-A IAP/EIS. The tribes that utilize the NPR-A were sent hard copies of the Draft NPR-A IAP/EIS upon its March 30 release and were invited to attend the public meetings and ANILCA Section 810 subsistence hearings. They were also encouraged to set up face-to-face meetings with Lon Kelly in conjunction with the meetings. The remaining 32 tribes were sent CD-ROM versions of the draft plan and were encouraged to contact us with any issues or questions they may have.

The field office will be working with the contractor (AECOM) to schedule and conduct the upcoming public meetings and ANILCA Section 810 subsistence hearings for the Draft NPR-A IAP/EIS. Lon Kelly, Stacey Fritz, and AKSO planners Bridget Psarianos and Serena Sweet plan on attending the meetings.

The tentative schedule is as follows:

- May 14 Point Lay, NPR-A IAP/EIS Draft Public Meeting and ANILCA 810 Hearing
- May 15 Wainwright, NPR-A IAP/EIS Draft Public Meeting and ANILCA 810 Hearing

- May 16 Nuiqsut, NPR-A IAP/EIS Draft Public Meeting and ANILCA 810 Hearing
- May 17 Atqasuk, NPR-A IAP/EIS Draft Public Meeting and ANILCA 810 Hearing
- May 21 Barrow, NPR-A IAP/EIS Draft Public Meeting and ANILCA 810 Hearing
- May 22 Anaktuvuk Pass, NPR-A IAP/EIS Draft Public Meeting and ANILCA 810 Hearing
- May 23 Fairbanks, NPR-A IAP/EIS Draft Public Meeting
- May 24 Anchorage, NPR-A IAP/EIS Draft Public Meeting

Central Yukon Field Office

Dalton Corridor gravel pits

Demand for gravel and mineral materials continues to increase in the Dalton. Central Yukon Field Office (CYFO) resource specialists are processing reauthorization requests for several pits, as well as a few proposals for new pits. We are currently considering a proposal for a pit at the site of old Dietrich Camp as an alternative to two controversial proposals for gravel extraction in the viewshed of Sukakpak Mountain, perhaps the Dalton Highway's most iconic landmark. We recently met with the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (ADOT&PF) to discuss improving the information obtained in gravel pit applications, as well as the need for a strategic long-term gravel plan in the Dalton. We also provided ADOT&PF with a proposal to close numerous pits that have not been used for many years.

Gas Pipeline

The CYFO recently reviewed the draft resource reports for the Alaska Pipeline Project. The final resource reports were scheduled to be submitted to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) in October, starting an 18-month EIS process. However, TransCanada/ExxonMobil last week announced that it has put the project on hold as it considers the option of building a pipeline and liquefaction plant for sending liquefied natural gas tankers to Asia. TransCanada/ExxonMobil has proposed amending its license with the State of Alaska to postpone its FERC application deadline for two years.

Red carpet film premiere in Coldfoot?

The CYFO and Post Modern Company (Paul Feldman, Director) are nearing completion of the film "*Arctic Visions & Voices*" for the Arctic Interagency Visitor Center in Coldfoot. This short interpretive film will play in the center's theater during the summer season. Designed to complement the exhibits, the film brings the four seasons alive—especially winter, which very few people experience. The film includes interviews with people who live, work, and travel through Arctic Alaska near the 414-mile Dalton Highway. The film, like the center itself, is an interagency effort between the BLM, the USFWS (Kanuti, Yukon Flats, and Arctic National Wildlife Refuges) and Gates of the Arctic National Park & Preserve. We have tentatively scheduled a premiere of the film for summer solstice, June 20, at the Arctic Interagency Visitor Center. The film provides the finishing touch on the center, which opened in 2004.

Foothills West

The CYFO has received a right-of-way application from the State of Alaska for the Foothills West Transportation Project, which proposes construction of a road from the Dalton Highway to Umiat, an exploration camp on the Colville River. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is the lead agency for the environmental review of the project, while the BLM is a cooperating agency. Scoping meetings have been conducted, and a final scoping report was completed in February 2012.

Several issues have been highlighted during the scoping process, but impacts to subsistence use have generated the most concern. Issues and route alternatives raised during scoping will be considered during the EIS process. The original route proposed by the State is nearly 100 miles long and would cross approximately 8 miles of BLM-administered land.

Gold mining history outreach

CYFO archaeologist Bill Hedman presented *“Mining the Upper Koyukuk: 1899-1940”* to approximately 40 miners at the Jan. 27 Alaska Miners Association breakfast in Fairbanks. Hedman’s presentation included historic photos and films showing the early 20th-century development of gold mining near Coldfoot and Wiseman.

In his presentation, Hedman also detailed the CYFO’s ongoing efforts to create an outdoor mining exhibit near the Arctic Interagency Visitor Center in Coldfoot. Last summer, we took a major step forward by building a replica miner’s log cabin at the exhibit site. This winter Hedman is working with a local machine shop to refurbish a historic churn drill that was donated by a Coldfoot miner for inclusion in the exhibit. Exhibit planners also hope to include other mining equipment and outbuildings that would typically have been found at an underground drift mine in the early 20th century.



The replica miner’s cabin built last summer.

Squirrel River plan amendment

During development of the Kobuk-Seward Peninsula Resource Management Plan several years ago, the CYFO committed to taking a closer look at ongoing conflicts between subsistence and recreational use in the Squirrel River area. We are now fulfilling that obligation by releasing a draft Squirrel River plan amendment, scheduled for release in May for a 30-day public review. Coordination with cooperating agencies and government-to-government consultations are ongoing.

Dalton Highway invasive plant management strategy

In April the CYFO plans to complete public review of the draft Environmental Assessment for a proposed invasive plant management strategy for the Dalton Highway and adjacent BLM-managed public lands. We hope to begin implementing the management strategy during the upcoming field season.

Last year the BLM led an interagency and volunteer effort to remove two invasive plant species, sweetclover and bird vetch, from river crossings between the Kanuti River and Coldfoot. In 2012 we anticipate conducting two volunteer projects at these crossings. Plans are underway to include Student Conservation Association volunteers from Anaktuvuk Pass during the June control efforts.

Abandoned mine lands inventory

The CYFO has an ARRA-funded agreement with Michigan Technological University to undertake a three-year Abandoned Mine Lands (AML) inventory throughout the Fairbanks District, including the upper Koyukuk River drainage. Field crews are inventorying and cataloging physical and environmental hazards, which are then prioritized for remediation. They also inventory any associated cultural resources. During the 2010 and 2011 field seasons, the Michigan Tech team inventoried nearly 2,000 acres of federal land near Fairbanks and documented several hundred AML sites. In 2012 we plan to conduct extensive helicopter-supported inventories along the Dalton Highway, particularly near Coldfoot and Wiseman.



AML survey near Fairbanks.

CYFO archaeologists featured in new videos

Archaeologist Bill Hedman and his research on the prehistory of northwestern Alaska are featured in several new videos on the Alaska science website *Frontier Scientists* (www.frontierscientists.com). For several years Hedman and University of Alaska Museum of the North archaeologist Jeff Rasic have led expeditions to the prehistoric Raven Bluff archaeological site, which Hedman discovered north of Kotzebue, Alaska. The videos detail Hedman and Rasic's research methods as well as their involvement

with the PolarTrec program, which sends K-12 teachers to research projects in the polar regions for two to six weeks each summer.

Eastern Interior Field Office

Draft Eastern Interior Resource Management Plan released

On February 24, BLM-Alaska released the Draft Eastern Interior Resource Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement (RMP/EIS) for public comment. This plan will provide future direction for 6.7 million acres of public land including the White Mountains National Recreation Area, the Steese National Conservation Area, and the Fortymile area. Based on comments received during the scoping period, the issues of most public interest are expected to be mining, access issues, land management in the upper Black River (which has never had a land use plan), and subsistence. The comment period extends through July 23, 2012.

EIFO resource specialists and planners developed the entire RMP/EIS using the BLM's ePlanning system. EPlanning offers an integrated software system for registering and tracking proposed actions, facilitating interdisciplinary review, building plan documents, and distributing interactive versions of documents for public review and comment via the Internet. The Draft Eastern Interior RMP/EIS represents BLM-Alaska's first use of ePlanning version 2.0 for a major land use planning project.

In addition to the interactive ePlanning document, the Draft RMP/EIS is available in print, on CD, and as a downloadable PDF document. Because the document is approximately 1,200 pages long, the field office also developed shorter summaries for each of the four subunits in the planning area. Comments may be submitted online, in writing, or orally at public meetings.

Currently scheduled public meetings include:

April 9	Fairbanks
April 11	Fort Yukon
April 16	Circle
April 23	Eagle
April 24	Eagle Village
May 7	Central
May 9	Anchorage
May 16	Tok
May 17	Delta Junction

Additional meetings are planned for Chicken and Chalkyitsik. Times and locations are posted on the Eastern Interior RMP website as they become available.

Human remains at prehistoric archaeological site trigger consultation

In December the Eastern Interior Field Office initiated consultation with several Interior Alaska tribal governments following the inadvertent discovery of human remains at an archaeological site on public land near the Steese Highway. University of Alaska Fairbanks and BLM archaeologists excavated a small portion of a prehistoric hunting and butchering site in early August 2011. No human remains were identified in the field. Following standard excavation procedures, the archaeologists sent samples to a laboratory to recover small and fragile animal and botanical remains. In early December this analysis identified human bone fragments and a tooth. The field office is now consulting with Alaska Native tribes likely to be affiliated with the site to determine final custody of the remains pursuant to the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act. No further excavation or other disturbance is planned at the site.

“Two-Step” Louie Schmidt’s grave marker returned to family

In February archaeologist Robin Mills coordinated the transference of a wooden grave marker and brass plaque to the descendants of “Two Step” Louie Schmidt, who mined on Nome Creek from 1911 to 1946. The badly deteriorated grave marker had been retrieved from Nome Creek during the 1990s and replaced with a replica. Last summer two of Schmidt’s nieces traveled to Alaska from Arizona and Florida, in part to learn more about their uncle’s life as a prospector. They visited the remains of his cabin in the White Mountains National Recreation Area and inquired about the original grave marker, which Mills located in BLM archives and sent to them. The nieces were thrilled.

White Mountains National Recreation Area joins Facebook

In early April BLM-Alaska launched a Facebook page for fans of the White Mountains. The page will be used to share natural history, recreational opportunities, and other information with users of the 1-million-acre White Mountains National Recreation Area. The page may be viewed at www.facebook.com/BLMWhiteMountains.



The new White Mountains Facebook page.