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TAKE PRIDE IN AMERICA

AA-085086 (1864)

JUN 17 2005

To: Chief, Branch of Lands and Realty (932)

From: Navigable Waters Specialist C. Michael Brown

Subject: Navigability of Tazlina River and Tazlina Lake in the Copper River Region

On July 18, 2003, the State filed an application for a recordable disclaimer of interest for the bed of the Tazlina River from its mouth at the Copper River to and including Tazlina Lake. In addition, the state applied for lands underlying "all named and unnamed interconnecting sloughs" of the Tazlina River between Tazlina Lake and Copper River. In support of its application, as amended by letter dated June 8, 2005, the State claims to own the lands underlying Tazlina Lake and Tazlina River from the lake to the Copper River. The State's claim is based upon the Equal Footing Doctrine, the Submerged Lands Act of 1953, the Alaska Statehood Act, the Submerged Lands Act of 1988, and "any other legally cognizable reason." As evidence of its claim, the State submitted five Bureau of Land Management (BLM) memoranda dated March 13, 1980, August 19, 1980, January 19, 1983, November 15, 1991, and May 17, 1993, all containing statements to the effect that Tazlina River or Tazlina Lake is navigable.[1] The BLM issued these memoranda in support of land conveyances to Native corporations and the State of Alaska under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) and the Alaska Statehood Act, respectively.

The purpose of this paper is to review the merits of the state's application. The paper considers: 1) whether any new information changes or modifies BLM's navigability findings; 2) whether any decision by the federal courts or Interior Board of Land Appeals changes or modifies BLM's navigability findings; and 3) whether the state's application for lands underlying the subject water bodies meets the regulatory requirements.

Land Status

Land status along Tazlina Lake is a mixture of federal and state lands with some private lands (several headquarters sites). In the uppermost eight and a half miles of the lake (T. 1 S., 7 W.,

[1] Tom Irwin to Henri Bisson, BLM, July 18, 2003, file AA-085086 (1864), Alaska State Office, BLM records, Anchorage. Robert M. Loeffler, Director, Division of Mining, Land & Water, signed the letter.

and T. 1 N., T. 7 W., Copper River Meridian [CRM]), lands abutting the lake are under federal management (BLM) and are selected by Ahtna, Inc., (AA-8104-3, AA-11126) and the state (AA-6799 and AA-6776). In addition, federal lands (BLM) are located in Sec. 12, T. 2 N., R. 7 W., and in Sec. 3, T. 2 N., R. 6 W., CRM. The former section is selected under AA-11126; the latter is selected by both Ahtna, Inc., under AA-11126 and the state under AA-21200. The remaining lands along the lake were patented to the state.

The Tazlina River, from Tazlina Lake to Copper River, lies in ten townships. Because the river's riparian lands have been conveyed out of federal ownership, the United States no longer has any right, title, or interest in the lands underlying the river in these townships.[2] From Tazlina Lake, the river flows through four townships (Tps. 3 N., Rs. 4, 5, and 6 W. and T. 4 N., R. 4 W., CRM) where the State of Alaska is the owner of the riparian lands. The riparian lands are either patented or tentatively approved. The river then flows through five townships (T. 3 N., Rs. 2 and 3 W., and T. 4 N., Rs. 1, 2, and 3 W., CRM) where Ahtna, Inc., is the riparian landowner. (It is not certain that the Tazlina River flows through T. 4 N., R. 1 W., CRM. The survey plat for T. 4 N., R. 1 W., CRM, dated February 28, 1914, and based upon an August 1911 field survey, shows the river in lots 5 and 6 of Section 31. It is not as clear that it does on modern USGS maps on the scale of 1"-1 mile. This report assumes that the river is located in the township.)

In T. 3 N., R. 1 W., CRM, where the Tazlina River empties into the Copper River, land status is more complex. A number of people settled where the Richardson Highway crosses the Tazlina River in this township. The BLM's master title plats show mostly patented state lands, Native corporate lands, and Native allotments along the river. The Native allotments, all of which have been issued certificates, abut the river in lot 7 in Sec. 8; lots 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11, and 12 in Sec. 9; and lot 10 in Sec. 15, T. 3 N., R. 1 W., CRM. Mineral rights were reserved in the Native allotment certificates. In addition, there is a patented mission site (Patent No. 1158433) on the left bank of the river in Section 15. Mineral rights were also reserved in this patent.

BLM Navigability Determinations

The BLM has consistently held that Tazlina Lake is navigable. These determinations were made during the early 1980's in the course of adjudicating State of Alaska land selections along the lake. In all cases, these determinations were incorporated into appealable decisions to convey riparian lands along the lake to the state. Lands underlying the lake were excluded from the conveyances.[3]

The BLM's position on the navigability of the Tazlina River, from Tazlina Lake to the Copper River, has changed over time. In the late 1970's, the agency adjudicated land selection applications filed by Tazlina, Inc., and Ahtna, Inc. (since merged) under the Alaska Native

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[2] Section 901(b)(1) of the Submerged Lands Act of August 16, 1988 (Public Law 100-395).

[3] See Mac Wheeler, "Navigability Report-Valdez Quadrangle-FY80-Report No. 3," March 13, 1980, and H.W. Gabriel to SD (910), n.d.; Robert E. Sorenson, Decision, September 29, 1980; and Elaine O. Wilde, Decision, August 30, 1982, file AA-021201 (T. 2 N., R. 7 W., CRM), state selection files, BLM records, Anchorage. The State Director concurred in the navigability finding on August 22, 1980. BLM's navigability finding for the Tazlina River was subsequently incorporated into decisions for tentative approval of state selection filings. See files AA-021200 (T. 2 N., R. 6 W., CRM); AA-004812 (T. 3 N., R. 6 W., CRM); and AA-006776 (T. 1 N., R. 7 W., CRM), state selection files, BLM records.

Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) and determined that the river was not navigable. Subsequently, the BLM adjudicated State of Alaska applications for land on the upper reach of the river and, after considering information that had not been available earlier, determined that the Tazlina River was navigable. In 1993, at the request of Ahtna, Inc., the agency formally determined that the Tazlina River was also navigable where it flowed through the corporation's lands.

Ahtna, Inc., a Native corporation, owns all of the Tazlina River's riparian lands in four townships and some riparian lands in one township. In 1979 the BLM issued an appealable decision to convey these lands to Tazlina, Inc., and Ahtna, Inc. The decision included a determination that the Tazlina River was not navigable.[4] Insofar as the navigability determination was concerned, the decision was not appealed. Subsequently, on October 11, 1979, the BLM conveyed unsurveyed lands to the Native corporations by Interim Conveyance (IC) Nos. 245 and 246. The bed of the Tazlina River in Tps. 3 and 4 N., Rs. 2 W., and Tps. 3 and 4 N., Rs. 3 W., CRM, was not excluded from the IC's. (Ahtna, Inc., has not yet received patent to these lands.) In 1980, the Native corporations received patent to riparian lands in Sections 9 and 36, T. 3 N., R. 1 W., CRM, and in Section 31, T. 4 N., R. 1 W., CRM, where the lands had already been surveyed.[5]

In justification of the finding of non-navigability, the BLM cited the absence of evidence showing use of the river as a highway of commerce. In fact, the only known use of the river consisted of recreational fishing, rafting, kayaking, and power boating. The Tazlina River was part of a "float trail" that included the Little Nelchina River, Nelchina River, and Tazlina Lake. From the Glenn Highway crossing, recreationists in inflatable rafts, canoes, and kayaks descended the Nelchina waterways, Tazlina Lake, and Tazlina River to the Richardson Highway. Snow machines were also used to ascend the frozen Tazlina River from the Richardson Highway. In the mid-1970s, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game characterized the level of use on the waterways as "light," but the state agency noted that rafting and kayaking on the Tazlina River had been increasing within the past five years, a trend that was expected to continue.[6]

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[4] The decision also applied to surveyed riparian lands in T. 3 N., R. 1 W., CRM, which the Native corporations had selected. See Clair M. Whitlock to Chief, Division of ANCSA Operations, June 21, 1979, and Carlene M. Welfelt, Decision, August 16, 1979, file AA-6704-EE, ANCSA files, BLM records. In the former memo which addressed the subjects of final easements and navigability, the BLM state director determined that the Tazlina River was not navigable.

[5] See Patent Nos. 50-80-0002 and 50-80-0003, BLM records. Prior to 1979 the BLM had not determined the navigability of Tazlina River. In 1909 a government surveyor meandered and segregated the riverbed from uplands in T. 3 N., R. 1 W., CRM. In 1909 Thomas A. Haigh, the surveyor, identified only the Copper River as navigable. "The Copper river is navigable for river boats, it averages about a fourth of a mile wide in flood season and is very rapid," he wrote. As was customary then (and still is to this day), the river was meandered because it was more than three chains (198 feet) in width. In subsequent years, as it disposed of surveyed lots abutting the river, the federal government (i.e., the General Land Office and the BLM) did not consider whether or not the river was navigable. Thomas A. Haigh, "Field Notes of the Resurvey of the East Boundary of Tp. (Copper River B.UM.) and the Survey of the Subdivision and Meander Lines of Township No. 3 North, Range No. 1 West, of the Copper River Base Meridian, Alaska," 1910, BLM records. See also survey plat for T. 3 N., R. 1 W., CRM, dated April 11, 1912, BLM records.

[6] Frank A. Stefanich to Curtis McVee, November 21, 1974; see also Justification Statement for Public Use Recommendations Forms for Tazlina River Boat Launch Site, Tazlina River Boat Access, Tazlina River Trail, and Tazlina River (shoreline easement), file AA-6704-EE, ANCSA files, BLM records.

The State of Alaska owns all lands abutting Tazlina River in four townships, all upstream of the reach conveyed to the Native corporations. Between 1980 and 1982, the BLM concluded that the Tazlina River, along with the lower reach of the Nelchina River and Tazlina Lake, were navigable. On September 11, 1981, the BLM state director concurred that the Tazlina River was navigable in three townships: Tps. 3 N., Rs. 4 and 5 W., and T. 4 N., R. 4 W., CRM. On August 16, 1982, the BLM determined that the river was also navigable in T. 3 N., R. 6 W., CRM. All these findings were incorporated into appealable decisions which ultimately resulted in the transfer of the riparian lands to the State of Alaska. None of the decisions were appealed for reasons relating to navigability.[7]

Two key BLM documents contain the majority of facts used to support the determination that Tazlina Lake and Tazlina River are navigable. In 1980 a BLM examiner reported:

> Tazlina Lake is obviously physically large and deep enough to accommodate traditional watercraft. As previously discussed, the fact that it is somewhat remote (about six miles from Glenn Highway at Tazlina Lodge) and has no road access, has not precluded use of that waterbody. Recreational and commercial-recreational craft (kayaks, canoes, rubber rafts) cross Tazlina Lake on their way from the put-in on Glenn Highway (Little Nelchina) and the take-out on Richardson Highway (Tazlina River). Recreational and commercial-recreational floatplanes use the lake for fishing and access to hunting areas. Probably some of these users leave boats on the lake to assist in their operation.
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> It seems reasonable to assume that sometime in the future, given the relatively short distance, a road will be built from Glenn Highway to Tazlina Lake. This would open up the area to recreational as well as commercial development. This development could be in the form of commercial tour boats to Tazlina Glacier (heaven forbid) as well as ferry and supply boats connecting various development centers around the lake with the road.
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> Part of the Nelchina River, as discussed earlier, is physically susceptible to certain types of traditional watercraft. It seems evident, based on Larry Kajdan's observation of two boats on the Nelchina River and his physical description of the river, that certain boats can traverse the Nelchina Delta and progress upstream on the Nelchina. The upstream limit of navigability for these boats, based on USGS mapping and interviews, is probably the point where the river braids out (glacial outwash plain). Recent mineral discoveries in the Nelchina Basin may encourage individuals to utilize the river in the transport of bulkier items up to the glacial outwash plain. Floatplanes (less expensive than helicopters) could bring these items to Tazlina Lake where they would be loaded off and taken to the upper limit of the Nelchina River by boat.[8]
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> Even though the historical record of use of the Nelchina River is silent, there was native development in the Tazlina Lake area as evidenced by cabins and cemeteries at Mendeltna Creek and the lake outlet. With the

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[7] Lawrence J. Kajdan (signed by Lance Lockard), "Navigability Report: Gulkana Quadrangle-FY81-Long Format," July 2, 1981; Donovan Yingst, Acting Chief, Division of Resources, to State Director, September 9, 1981; Willa May Shore, Decision, May 14, 1982, files AA-4810 and AA-4811, state selection files, BLM records. The decision of May 14, 1982 applied to lands in Tps. 3 N., Rs. 4 and 5 W., CRM. BLM's navigability finding was incorporated into subsequent decisions for tentative approval of state selection filings along other sections of the river. See decisions in files AA-4801 (T. 4 N., R. 4 W., CRM) and AA-4812 (T. 3 N., R. 6 W., CRM), state selection files, BLM records. Decisions of tentative approval were issued for AA-4801 and AA-4812 on June 29, 1982 and November 19, 1982.

[8] Mac Wheeler, Navigability Report-Valdez Quadrangle-FY80-Report #3 (Short Format), March 3, 1980, and Gerald W. Zamber to State Director (932), March 13, 1980, AA-6798, state selection files, BLM records.

> known lifestyle of the natives in other similar areas of the state, it seems reasonable that they may have boated the Nelchina River in traveling and trading to and from the Cook Inlet area.[9]

Reviewing this report, another BLM examiner noted that fur-bearing animals were present in the area; that an old trail followed Nelchina River, Tazlina Lake, and Tazlina River; and that "a prospector's trail" from Valdez Glacier to the Tazlina Lake Trail once existed. He pointed out that during the Valdez Gold Rush of 1898, stampeders had taken boats down the nearby Klutina Lake and Klutina River. Possibly, prospectors also descended the Tazlina River in boats. "I assume that if travel across the lake and down the river occurred in the summer it would have been in watercraft fashioned by the prospectors or brought with them," the examiner wrote.[10]

In 1981 the BLM prepared another report on the subject of the Tazlina River's navigability. The report writer summarized the evidence of use as follows:

> Use of the Tazlina River dates back to Russian occupation and was most likely used by natives for transporting trade goods prior to that time. Basil Austin, in his Diary of a Ninety-Eighter, describes use of this river by miners around 1900. One of the boats he mentions as being used by the miners is a dory, which is capable of carrying over 1,000 pounds. The river is currently used by commercial jet boat operator John Breivagle [sic] of Copper Center. He stated that his boat, capable of carrying over 2,000 pounds, can carry passengers, supplies and small vehicles up and down the Tazlina River. Karl Becker, doing business as Open Door, Alaska Water Adventures, floats this river in rafts capable of carrying over 2,000 pounds. I have floated this river with four other people in a raft equiped [sic] with an outboard motor, carrying about 2,000 pounds, and found no obstacles to navigation.

The report writer added, "It has been used by miners around 1900 and receives similar use today for access to mining claims along the Nelchina River. Finally, the writer noted that the U. S. Coast Guard, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the State of Alaska, and a research firm called Grumman Ecosystem Corporation had determined that the Tazlina River was navigable.[11]

In 1993, at the request of Ahtna, Inc., the BLM formally determined that the Tazlina River was also navigable where it flowed through the corporation's lands. Two years earlier, Ahtna, Inc., had requested this determination under the procedures set forth in 43 CFR Subpart 1865. Subsequently, the BLM concluded that the entire river, from Tazlina Lake to the Copper River, was navigable. The BLM's navigability determination was not incorporated into an appealable decision affecting the corporation's lands.[12]

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[9] Donovan Yingst to SD (932), c. August 18, 1980 ["Navigability Supplement to Report Number 3, Valdez Quadrangle, Dated March 13, 1980"], attached to memo, Richard W. Tindall to State Director (932), August 18, 1980, file AA-6798, state selection files, BLM records.

[10] Sherm Berg to Files—State Selections—Nelchina 'Gold Rush' Area, August 19, 1980; Chief, Division of Resources to State Director (910), August 19(?), 1980, file AA-6798, state selection files, BLM records. The State Director concurred on August 22, 1980.

[11] Lawrence J. Kajdan (signed by Lance Lockard), Navigability Report: Gulkana Quadrangle-FY81-Long Format, July 2, 1981; Donovan Yingst, Acting Chief, Division of Resources, to State Director, September 9, 1981, file AA-4811, state selection files, BLM records.

[12] See Lisa Burgess to Ahtna, Inc., June 13, 1991; John L. Devenport, Land and Resource Manager, Ahtna, Inc., to Lisa Burgess, August 21, 1991, file AA-6704-B, part 5 (2651); and Louis E. Doores, Acting Chief, Branch of Mapping Sciences, to Chief, Branch of Survey Preparation and Contracts, May 17, 1993, file AA-6704-EE, BLM records.

Other Federal Navigability Determinations

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has not determined the navigability of the Tazlina River and Tazlina Lake.[13] On its website and in a document dated January 1993, the Corps of Engineers does not list the Tazlina River as a navigable river. However, in a 1987 Corps of Engineers document entitled "Administrative Determinations on Navigability," the Tazlina River was identified as "navigable entire length (Grumman)." The document has the word "old" handwritten on it. In another document entitled "Navigable Waters of the United States, Alaska (Trans-Alaska Pipeline Crossings)," dated October 31, 1973, the Tazlina River was listed as navigable up to Tazlina Lake.[14]

The word "Grumman" in the Corps' 1987 document refers to the Grumman Ecosystems Corporation. Under contract to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Alaska District, in 1974 and 1975 the corporation investigated the navigability of rivers, streams, and creeks on the trans-Alaska oil pipeline route. The contractor reported that sportsmen and recreationists boated the Copper River and its major tributaries, namely the Chitina, Klutina, Gulkana, and Tazlina Rivers. There was evidence of commercial boat traffic on the Copper River, and possible evidence of such traffic on the Klutina River. Given the road network and reliance upon airplanes for travel, the contractor doubted that waterborne commerce, other than that associated with recreation, would develop in the area. As the contractor put it: "The only boating of commercial significance is for recreational purposes where guides either take sportsmen down a 'wild' river or on a fishing trip. This may constitute interstate commerce if the sportsmen are from outside the state. There is potential for waterborne commerce of this nature in the future, especially when pipeline construction commences and this area becomes even more accessible."[15]

The Grumman Ecosystems Corporation recommended that Tazlina River to and including Tazlina Lake be determined navigable. This recommendation clearly was based upon reports that inflatable rafts had been taken down the river from the lake to the Richardson Highway. The contractor reported "no known historic commercial river usage," "no historic native settlements located on river," and "no present development, including campsites and boat ramps, on river."[16] During a July 1974 helicopter trip over the length of the river, a corporation employee made a "subjective evaluation that the Tazlina River was boatable, however, with very light draft and extreme caution."[17] After landing the helicopter on the riverbank above the bridge, an employee recorded this observation: the river was "boatable going downstream."[18]

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[13] Unlike the BLM, the Army Corps of Engineers and the Coast Guard may rely solely upon evidence of contemporary commercial activities in making navigability determinations. The BLM's determinations are made as of the date of statehood (1959).

[14] U.S., Army Corps of Engineers, "Administrative Determinations on Navigability," n.d. (1987); U. S. Army Corps of Engineers, Alaska District, "Navigability Determinations," January 1993, in writer's files. See also Grumman Ecosystems Corporation, vol. 1, 3-88 and vol. 2, 4-168. The river does not appear on Corps' October 19, 1995 list of navigable waters in Alaska which is posted on its website (www.poa.usace.army.mil/reg).

[15] Grumman Ecosystems Corporation, vol. 1, 3-78 and 3-79.

[16] Grumman Ecosystems Corporation, vol. 2, 4-167.

[17] Grumman Ecosystems Corporation, vol. 2, 4-172.

[18] Grumman Ecosystems Corporation, vol. 2, following p. 4-180.

The U.S. Coast Guard also does not list the Tazlina River in its 1998 edition of "Navigable Waters of the U.S. Within the Seventeenth Coast Guard District (State of Alaska)." However, the Grumman Ecosystems Corporation reported in 1975 that the Coast Guard had determined the river to be navigable to the trans-Alaska pipeline crossing at mile 5.6, a short distance upstream of the Tazlina River bridge on the Richardson Highway. This determination appeared in a document entitled "Navigable Waters of the United States, Alaska (Alyeska Pipeline Service Company, Haulroad Stream Crossings)," dated October 16, 1970.[19]

Tazlina River and Tazlina Lake—Physical Characteristics

The Tazlina River is a major tributary of the Copper River, the largest river emptying into Prince William Sound. From Tazlina Glacier, the river flows a short distance to empty into Tazlina Lake, the second largest lake in Southcentral Alaska.[20] The lake (elevation 1,786 feet) is about twenty miles long and ranges in width from about four miles at its southern end to less than a mile on its northeast end. From the eastern end of the lake, the Tazlina River flows easterly forty miles to empty into the Copper River. The river drains an area of 2,590 square miles, the largest of any western tributary of the Copper River.

Known to nineteenth-century Russian and American fur traders as Lake Plaveznie, Tazlina Lake (57 square miles) is situated in a lake-studded area known as the Lake Louise Plateau. The lake is but thirty miles from the large Lake Louise, which flows into the Upper Susitna River, and the headwaters of the Matanuska River, which empties into Knik Arm of Cook Inlet. The lake is fed principally by runoff from Tazlina Glacier on its southern end and by Nelchina River, which empties into the lake from the northwest about thirteen miles from its head. Other important named tributaries of the lake include Mendeltna Creek and Kaina Creek. Steep mountain sides characterize much of the lakeshore, especially along the southeastern shoreline, but the western shoreline, where Native settlements and fish camps once existed, is less steep. The lake is obviously deep, but it is not known how deep.

From Tazlina Lake to the Copper River, the Tazlina River flows mostly in a canyon through a relatively high, flat, forested country. In its first twenty-five miles below the lake, especially between miles 20 and 30, the river is confined between bluffs 500 feet high. The lower fifteen miles of the river flow between relatively low (six to eight feet high) banks. Gravel shoals, rocks, and debris are more common on the lower reaches. For its entire length, the river averages about 300 feet in width. At its narrowest, the river exceeds 100 feet. Large boulders are scattered throughout in the river's course.[21]

Falling an average of seventeen (17.4) feet per mile, Tazlina River is a fast river.[22] In fact, the Indian word "Tazlina" means "swift water."[23] Detailed descriptions of the river are rare. In

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[19] U.S., Coast Guard, "Navigable Waters of the U.S. Within the Seventeenth Coast Guard District (State of Alaska), " revision date of August 13, 1998; Grumman Ecosystems Corporation, vol. 1, p. 3-88; vol. 2, p. 4-166. The writer did not obtain a copy of the 1970 document.
[20] Stan Carrick, 286.
[21] Grumman Ecosystems Corporation, vol. 1, 2-79.
[22] The fall between the lake and Durham Creek is about 20 feet per mile; between Nickel Creek and Durham Creek, 17 feet per mile; and below Nickel Creek, 15 feet per mile. See plate 9, Tazlina River, in Grumman Ecosystems Corporation, vol. 2, 6-12. See also Carrick, 178.

July 1974, after flying over the river in a helicopter, a government contractor wrote, "The river is characterized by swift flow, a steep gradient, many riffles, boulders in channel, entrenched meanders, a well-defined single channel, and a bluish-gray tint from glacial flour." The contractor measured the river's velocity at a point about a mile upstream of the Richardson Highway bridge crossing. A reading of six feet per second was obtained. At the time the river was "thought to be a moderate to high stage."[24]

Little is known about stream depths. In 1974 the Grumman Ecosystems Corporation did not take measurements, citing the river's current as too strong to risk wading into the channel. In 1981 a BLM outdoor recreation specialist who rafted down the river estimated depths of two to twelve feet and noted standing waves up to three feet high in some reaches.[25]

Having maintained a stream gauging station on the Tazlina River at the Richardson Highway bridge since 1952, the U.S. Geological Survey has accumulated considerable stream flow data. In a twenty-two-year period, the average discharge was 4,100 cubic feet per second (cfs). As the Grumman Ecosystems Corporation has pointed out, however, the flow is seldom "average." The base rate is generally ten percent of average annual. "Open flows reach a maximum in mid summer when heavy mountain precipitation coincides with maximum glacier melt. Summer flows range from average to five times average, while autumn flows are low, prior to freeze-up, and usually range down to one quarter the average flow."[26] The mean stream flows reach a maximum in July (11,630 cfs) and August (14,490 cfs). In comparison, the mean discharge in June is 6,353 cfs and in September, 7,396 cfs. The river is frozen five to six months of the year.

Unlike the case of the Klutina River, there are few reports of Tazlina River floods. In late January 1927 the *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner* carried a report that the river flooded, raising the water in the Copper River within three feet of the Richardson Highway at Copper Center. It was supposed that an ice jam at Tazlina Lake had broken. According to the report, "This is the first time in history that a flood of such magnitude has been recorded during winter in the interior."[27] In early August 1968, the local newspaper reported that the Tazlina Lake "broke loose an[d] roared down into the Tazlina River." No mention was made as to the possible cause of the flood.[28]

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[23] In 1921, a Copper River Native named Tazlina Pete provided this translation. See Shirley A. Baker, "Chronological Report Covering Investigations on the Copper River, Oct. 1 to Oct. 18, inc., 1921, Copper River," Reports of Bureau of Fisheries Agents, 1917-29, Records of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Record Group (RG) 22.

[24] Grumman Ecosystems Corporation, 4-170. The Grumman report includes a number of photographs of the Tazlina River. Subject matter includes high bluffs, large boulders, and standing waves. See vol. 2, pp. 4-173 to 4-180.

[25] Lawrence J. Kajdan (signed by Lance Lockard), Navigability Report: Gulkana Quadrangle-FY81-Long Format, July 2, 1981, file AA-004810, State selections, BLM records.

[26] Grumman Ecosystems Corporation, vol. 1, 2-182, and vol. 2, 4-165 and 4-166.

[27] *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner*, January 26, 1927, 1.

[28] *Alaskan Bush News*, August 8, 1968, 4.

History of Use

Copper River Indians

Archaeologists have found evidence of Indians inhabiting the Tazlina Lake area for more than 500 years. During the 1970s and 1980s federal and state cultural resource personnel investigated prehistoric and historic sites at Tazlina Lake. From interviews with local Natives in 1974 to 1976, Holly Reckord identified eight sites in the Tazlina River system, all of them along Tazlina Lake.[29] In 1982 and 1983 Doug Reger and R. Greg Dixon (Jim Stone accompanied them in 1983) inspected the Tazlina Lake shoreline and located numerous sites, some of which were tested for cultural material. Finally, in 1987 and 1988 anthropologists with the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) investigated several sites along the lake which were selected by the Native corporation under Section 14(h)(1) of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act.[30]

Three sites in particular appear to have been occupied for long periods of time. One is located on the north shore of the lake at its outlet; another at the mouth of Mendeltna Creek; and the final one at Kaina Creek, on the south side of the lake. All three locations are in well known salmon spawning areas.

On modern U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) maps, a cabin and a cemetery site is shown at the outlet of Tazlina Lake. Reckord's informants identified this site as "K'estsiik'e."[31] Perhaps more than 150 years old, the site was occupied until 1940. Reckord believed that this may be the location of the village that the Russian explorer Sereberenikov visited in 1848 and observed Indians killing caribou in the lake from a boat. Before the gold rush period, the Indians occupied the site for much of the year, hunting and fishing. Afterwards, they spent their summers at fish camps along the Copper River near Copper Center, returning to the lake in the fall to hunt. House pits, several graves, and a cabin mark the site. Both Reckord and Reger noted a cabin and other structures of more recent construction nearby. Reckord also mentioned the presence of a boat. Reger described the location of a small log cabin and cache as located "about 100 m[eters] north of the graves along a road cut through black spruce on the edge of a swampy meadow."[32]

Mendeltna Village, located along lower Mendeltna Creek, was certainly the largest settlement on the lake. Modern USGS maps show the location of several cemeteries, as well as one cabin, on the south side of the creek. In 1982 Reger counted 10 house pits and 35 cache pits here. John Alfonsi of Ahtna, Inc., counted 23 house pits, 223 cache pits, 5 graves, 1 cabin, and associated outbuildings. Federal archaeologists describe the Mendeltna Creek site (AA-58702-12) as consisting of "eleven activity areas divided into four discrete parcels of land (Parcels A, B, C and D)."[33]

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[29] Holly Reckord, *Where Raven Stood*, 154-158.

[30] U.S., Bureau of Indian Affairs, "Report of Investigation for Lake Sites in the Southwest Ahtna Region," file AA-011126, part 3, ANCSA files, BLM records.

[31] The word means "outlet." Other names include Bendilbene' ("flows-to-lake lake outlet") and Plavezhnoe Ozero. Holly Reckord, *Where Raven Stood*, 154.

[32] Holly Reckord, *Where Raven Stood*, 155; D. R. Reger, 20.

[33] D. R. Reger, 3; U.S., Bureau of Indian Affairs, "Report of Investigation for Lake Sites in the Southwest Ahtna Region," 45, 53. Reckord refers to two villages along Mendeltna Creek--"Bendilna'" (possibly "flows-to-lake creek") and Bendilden ("flows-to-lake place"). The precise location of these village is not certain. Reckord

Between twenty and thirty Indians lived at Mendeltna Village on a permanent basis. The village was not only important in the fur trade between Cook Inlet and the Copper River area; Indians from Tyone Lake, Old Man Lake, Lake Louise, and other nearby lakes gathered there to hold potlatches, fish for salmon in Mendeltna Creek, and to prepare for sheep and caribou hunting expeditions. On these occasions, the village's population swelled up to fifty people. Much of what we know about the history of the village comes from Morrie Secondchief, who was born in 1910 at Eklutna, a village on Knik Arm in Cook Inlet, and lived with her stepfather Tazlina Joe and her mother, Chief Tyone's only daughter, at Mendeltna Creek from 1913 to 1918. She described the place as Chief Tyone's winter village. Tazlina Joe's mother, sister, and uncle were buried there.

The Spanish flu epidemics of 1918 or 1919 may have decimated Mendeltna Village. Afterwards, the Indians dispersed to other sites in the Copper Valley. Some survivors moved to the mouth of Tazlina River, and some moved to other nearby lakes. The village site was not permanently abandoned, however. Former residents returned on a seasonal basis. Beginning in the mid 1920s, for example, Morrie and Joe Secondchief traveled from their home at Old Man Lake to Mendeltna Creek to hunt, fish, and trap. The family fished for salmon at Kaina Creek and hunted for moose at the "glacier end of Lake Tazlina." They used a boat on the lake to reach this hunting area. At least one trapper was located at the site in the 1940s or early 1950s because he moved Tazlina Joe's family cabin to another location along the creek during that time.[34]

Kaina Creek, which empties into Tazlina Lake nearly opposite of Mendeltna Creek, is a salmon spawning stream. A fishing camp called K'aay Cae'e ("ridge mouth") was located at the creek's mouth. According to Reckord, "The principal trail between Tazlina Lake and Klutina Lake starts at the site." The site is also associated with a battle between two clans and a tradition of intermarriages.[35] In 1983 state archaeologists found "a series of house pits, cache pits, a collapsed log cabin located just east of the Kaina Creek delta."[36] Morrie Secondchief described the site as being very old, used by the Indians long before her birth. Natives not only fished there for salmon, but also hunted along the creek for moose and trapped for fox and mink during the winter. She last visited the creek in 1927, but claimed that Native trappers continued to work in the area. Frank Carroll, a well known resident of Copper Center, also had a cabin at the site during the mid-1900s, but nothing is known about his activities there.[37]

Besides these three main sites along Tazlina Lake, anthropologists have reported other cultural sites along or near the lake. One site, known as "Tazlina Glacier Camp," is located on the southwest side of the lake. Reckord recorded the Native name of the site as Bendilluu'gha ("by flows-to-lake's glacier"). An Indian family maintained "a traditional sheep hunting camp" here.

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describes the village site as being located in T. 2 N., R. 7 W., "where the Glenn Highway crosses Mendeltna Creek." However, the highway does not cross the creek in this township. Holly Reckord, *Where Raven Stood*, 155-156.

[34] J. A. Bittner, 16, 18; U.S., Bureau of Indian Affairs, "Report of Investigation for Lake Sites in the Southwest Ahtna Region," 47, 48, 51. The survivors moved to the mouth of the Tazlina River, only returning to the Mendeltna Creek site on a seasonal basis to hunt and fish. "With their deaths, even seasonal use of the site ended," Reckord wrote. Reckord, 156.

[35] Holly Reckord, *Where Raven Stood*, 156-57.

[36] D. R. Reger, 22.

[37] U.S., Bureau of Indian Affairs, "Report of Investigation for Lake Sites in the Southwest Ahtna Region," 93.

From the hills above the camp, they could spot sheep on Tazlina Glacier.[38] Federal archaeologists found a cabin and a collapsed cache at the site, and referred to Morrie Secondchief's statement that this was a sheep-hunting camp. In the 1920s, the Joe brothers also used the cabin in their winter trapping circuit.[39]

State cultural resource specialists have also reported at least eight cultural sites along Tazlina Lake between the mouth of Mendeltna Creek and the lake's outlet. These consisted mainly of house pits, cache pits, and graves. The north beach of the lake is a known salmon-spawning area.[40]

Finally, anthropologists have reported several village sites along several lakes and creeks that drain into Tazlina Lake. Of interest here is a site at Old Man Lake and along the mid reaches of its outlet, Mendeltna Creek. The Old Man Lake site was called Bendaes Bene' ("shallows-lake lake"). Reckord suggests that this may have been the village that military explorers in 1898 called Matanuska Village. Here the explorers met Chief Andre, his wife, and six other people fishing for salmon and preparing for a caribou hunt. Several other Indian camps were also seen around the lake. According to local residents, the Indians at this place were decimated by an influenza epidemic. Survivors later returned and spent the winter there to engage in fur trapping.[41]

The Tazlina Lake population probably consisted of twenty to thirty Indians—about a tenth of the total Indian population in the Copper River drainage area. In 1898 Abercrombie reported 150 Indians at the lake and surrounding area, but this figure is almost certainly incorrect. In February 1910, while conducting a census of the Copper River Indians, William H. Whittlesey of the Bureau of Education visited many Indian villages along the Copper River. Interestingly enough, he did not report a settlement at the mouth of the Tazlina River, though Ewan's cabin was about a mile from the river's mouth. Ewan, who was absent at the time, was reported trapping at the Tazlina [Lake?]; he was "considered by many [to be] the best example of the natives of the Copper." (He also had another cabin at a village at Dry Creek, near George Rorer's roadhouse.) Whittlesey attempted to visit Tazlina Lake and other nearby lakes, but gave up the effort after "bucking the deep snow" for twenty-five miles on the trail. His guide, a Tazlina Lake Indian, assured Whittlesey that he had already met all the Tazlina Lake Indians on the trail, except for those who were at Knik on Cook Inlet. The guide informed him that thirty-two Indians lived at Tazlina Lake in three cabins and one tent. Twelve Indians also lived at two other villages beyond the lake. He identified one of these two villages as "Jokko."[42]

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[38] Holly Reckord, *Where Raven Stood*, 157.
[39] U.S., Bureau of Indian Affairs, "Report of Investigation for Lake Sites in the Southwest Ahtna Region,", 87, 88.
[40] D. R. Reger, 21 (see also figure 1 on page 2); J. A. Bittner, 14.
[41] Holly Reckord, *Where Raven Stood*, 158.
[42] Whittlesey took photographs of Tazlina River Natives who had visited Copper Center with furs for sale. William H. Whittlesey, "Report Concerning the Indians of the Copper River Valley, Alaska," March 11, 1910, Copper Center-6, 1910-11, General Correspondence, 1908-35, Alaska Division Files, Bureau of Education, Box 13, Entry 806, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, RG 75, NA. In 1909 Thomas A. Haigh, the surveyor, noted five settlers, including William Klitske, owner of the Tazlina roadhouse, and four or five Indian families at or near Tazlina. See Thomas A. Haigh, "Field Notes of the Resurvey of the East Boundary of Tp. (Copper River B.UM.) and the Survey of the Subdivision and Meander Lines of Township No. 3 North, Range No. 1 West, of the Copper River Base Meridian, Alaska," 1910, BLM records. See also survey plat for T. 3 N., R. 1 W., CRM, dated April 11, 1912, BLM records.

Perhaps up to thirty-two Indians lived at Tazlina Lake before the flu epidemic. Their numbers probably fluctuated, depending upon the season and the availability of work. Whittlesey enumerated 3 Indians at Tazlina , 32 at Tazlina Lake; and 12 at Jokko.[43] In 1915 E. M. Ball of the Bureau of Fisheries reported 12 Indians at Dry Creek and 15 at Tazlina Lake. None was reported at the mouth of Tazlina River or beyond Tazlina Lake.[44] In 1918 the *Valdez Miner* newspaper, which estimated the Copper River Indian population at 406, reported about twenty Natives living "on the headwaters of the Tazlina and Lake Plaveznie."[45]

How many Tazlina Lake Indians died during the Spanish flu epidemics of 1918-19 is unknown. The federal government sent a relief expedition consisting of a surgeon and four nurses to Copper Center. In February 1919 it was reported that ten Copper River Indians had died from the flu. At Copper Center, 43 Indians were sick; at Upper Tonsina, 30; and at Tazlina, 10.[46] Possibly an expedition was also sent to Tazlina Lake, but if so a record of it has not been found.

Tazlina Lake was at the center of numerous trails extending to the upper Susitna River, Knik Arm of Cook Inlet, Klutina Lake, and Copper River. During the gold rush period, all these trails would also be used by stampeders and military explorers. Probably the best known trail followed the north side of Tazlina River and Tazlina Lake from the Copper River to the mouth of Mendeltna Creek and thence westward to Cook Inlet. Morrie and Joe Secondchief, who used to reside at Old Man Lake, recalled using a trail that led from Tyone Village on Tyone Lake to the mouth of Mendeltna Creek and thence along Tazlina Lake to Kaina Creek. Jim McKinley identified a number of his former trapping trails, some of them used in the period 1910 to 1918. One trail linked Tazlina Lake and Klutina Lake via Kaina Creek, Kaina Lake, and Saint Anne Lake. From Klutina Lake an old trail followed Klutina River to the Copper River.[47]

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[43] *Ibid.*

[44] E. M. Ball, Assistant Agent, Seward, to Commissioner of Fisheries, October 21, 1915, Entry 91, Item 2, Reports and Related Records—Copper River District, 1916-17, Division of Alaska Fisheries, Bureau of Fisheries, Records of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, RG 22, NA.

[45] *Valdez Miner*, August 24, 1918, 7.

[46] *Valdez Miner*, January 18 (pp. 1, 2), February 1 (p.2), February 8 (p. 2), 1919.

[47] U.S., Bureau of Indian Affairs, "Report of Investigation for Lake Sites in the Southwest Ahtna Region," 42 and figure 3 ("Ahtna Trail Systems"), 43. Reckord's informants also recalled traveling over Tazlina Glacier. Reckord, *Where Raven Stood*, 52. The local newspaper also contained a report of men crossing Tazlina Glacier. In 1913, two prospectors named Fred Grenough and Max Lichtenberg rushed to the Tazlina Lake area from Prince William Sound, crossing Shoup, Columbia, and Tazlina glaciers. They established a camp "five miles south of the lake" and, later, another camp at Tazlina Lake, where they intended to catch salmon, whitefish, and grayling for use as dog food and then to trap and prospect. However, Greenough fell ill and died. Lichtenberg placed the body in a tepee on a bluff overlooking the lake and returned to Shoup Bay, arriving in a nearly starved and frozen condition after twenty-three days on the glacier trail. In the spring Lichtenberg and Charles McCallum returned to Tazlina Lake over the glacier trail to recover Grenough's body. Because of poor travel conditions on the glaciers, they decided against bringing the body back to Valdez. However, it was later reported that the two men planned to make another trip over the glacier route to retrieve the body. A petition was circulated among Valdez businessmen to secure funds for the expedition. It is not known whether they were successful. *Valdez Weekly Miner*, December 21, 1913, 4, May 7, 1914, 8, May 19, 1914, 5.

Russian and American Exploring Expeditions

During the Russian-American period, Tazlina Lake or Lake Pleveznie was a well known landmark on the Copper River-Cook Inlet trade route. The Russian traders knew of the inter-regional trail from Copper River Natives who arrived at trading posts in Cook Inlet and Prince William Sound to trade their furs. The Russians explored the Copper River region and even established a small post at Taral on the Copper River at the mouth of the Chitina River. Otherwise, they maintained a limited presence in the area. The reasons are not fully understood. The fact that several Russian exploring expeditions met a violent end in the Copper River region is usually given as the reason.

At least three Russian expeditions were sent to the upper Copper River and Tazlina Lake area. In 1796 Samoilov of the Lebedev-Lastochkin Company led a small party from Cook Inlet to Tazlina Lake via the Matanuska River route. All fourteen men were reportedly killed by Ahtna Indians.[48] Nearly fifty years passed before another exploring expedition was sent to the area. This time the Russians were successful. In 1843 Grigoriev traveled from Nuchek on Hinchinbrook Island in Prince William Sound to Tazlina Lake. According to anthropologist Holly Reckord, "Grigoriev's expedition was successful; for the first time, an exploring party had contacted the Ahtna deep in their homeland, surveyed the landscape briefly, judged the potential for trade, and returned safely to a Russian post."[49]

However, the last Russian expedition also met with disaster. In May 1848 Sereberenikov and his party of eleven men ascended Copper River to its headwaters, where they were massacred by the Indians. The Russian's journal was returned to Nuchek and subsequently published in a St. Petersburg journal the following year. In the journal, Sereberenikov described his journey to and exploration of Tazlina Lake. From the Copper River the Russians traveled overland, following Tazlina River to the lake. Sereberenikov described Tazlina River as "shallow, full of stones, and very rapid." Before reaching the lake, the Russians met two Indian families at a "small river" with whom they traded tobacco for moose meat. Upon reaching the lake outlet, they found another two Indian families. According to Sereberenikov, the Indians were "the same language, same destitution, and constant suffering as do those of Copper River." Considering the Indians' state of poverty, the Russian explorer was not optimistic about the area's prospect for a profitable fur trade. The Indians were subsisting on rabbits until the arrival of "red fish" (red salmon) in mid June, still several weeks away. Presumably it was with these Indians that the Russians traded beads for one of the four caribou that the Indians had killed swimming in the lake. For two days the Russians explored Tazlina Lake in a baidarra which they had built.[50] Sereberenikov observed "a chain of mountains capped with ice" on the southeastern end of the lake and noted the existence of "a portage to the Bay of Kenai" (Cook Inlet), a trip that required twelve days. After spending about a week in the Tazlina River country, the Russians left the lake, reaching the

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[48] U.S., Bureau of Indian Affairs, "Report of Investigation for Lake Sites in the Southwest Ahtna Region," 17.
[49] Reckord, *Where Raven Stood*, 17.
[50] In 1885 Lt. Allen described a bidarra or baidarra, which he used on the upper Copper River and several of its tributaries, as a moose-skin boat 27 feet long, 22 inches deep, with a 5-foot beam. Lieutenant Henry T. Allen, "Report of a Military Reconnaissance in Alaska, Made in 1885," in U.S., Senate, *Compilation of Narratives of Explorations in Alaska*, 432. See also *Valdez Miner*, October 19, 1918, 5, for Sereberenikov's account. The newspaper reported that a prospector or trapper had found "an antique Russian gun" leaning against a tree in a remote spot and suggested that the gun might have belonged to Serebrenikov's party.

Copper River in their baidarra on the following day. They then proceeded farther up the Copper River.[51]

Not long after the Purchase of Alaska, traders of the Alaska Commercial Company replaced the Russian fur traders at the various posts. Little is known about the activities of these traders, especially in remote areas of Alaska. In the case of the Copper River fur trade, there is evidence suggesting that the Indians continued to use the traditional routes to carry on trade with posts in Prince William Sound and Cook Inlet. Some anthropologists believe that by the 1880s Knik Station was the principal trading station for Indians in the Tazlina Lake and middle Copper River area.[52] Federal anthropologists wrote, "The journals kept by Ballou and Shell indicate that over half of the Alaska Commercial Company's Knik Station furs were bought from the Copper River Indians: 69 percent of the year's trade during the winter of 1886-1887; 67 percent during the winter of 1889-1890; and 59 percent during the winter of 1890-91. The percentage of sales of furs to the Nuchek Station by Copper River Natives during that time appears to be similar."[53]

In the period 1867 to 1898 several U. S. Army exploring expeditions were sent to the Copper River area. In 1884 Lieutenant W. R. Abercrombie explored the lower reaches of the Copper River as well as the Valdez Bay area. Lieutenant Henry T. Allen's expedition of 1885 was one of most successful in the history of Alaska. Allen succeeded in exploring many of the Alaska's major rivers, that is, the Copper, Tanana, Yukon, and Koyukuk Rivers. On his journey up the Copper River, Allen planned to ascend the Tazlina River, thinking that the trail would lead to the Tanana River, but upon reaching the mouth of the river, which he described as "only about 25 or 30 yards wide, besides being swift, with a bed filled with bowlders," he was convinced that the trail led instead to Cook Inlet. Although Allen did not follow the Tazlina River, he confirmed that it was part of a trade route to Cook Inlet. He met Copper River Indians with flour obtained from a trading post on Knik Arm, and obtained a Native's sketch map of the route to Knik Arm. Published in his account of the journey, the sketch map shows the Tazlina River heading in Tazlina Lake. The route appears to follow the Nelchina River to mountains and thence to a trading station called Tasnai, located on Knik Arm.[54]

In 1898 the U.S. Army sent another expedition to the Copper River region, then the scene of the Valdez Gold Rush involving several thousand men from the United States and other countries. Abercrombie, now a Captain, again led the expedition. This time, he and his men explored various sections of the Copper River valley, following the Native trails and gold rush trails. When in late September Abercrombie reached the Tazlina River, he found two settlements on the

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[51] Lieutenant Henry T. Allen, "Report of a Military Reconnaissance in Alaska in 1885,in U.S., Senate, *Compilation*, 413. Allen read a translation of Serebrenikov's journal, which was published by S. N. Buynitzi in the *Journal of the Russian Geographical Society*, St. Petersburg, 1849. U.S., Bureau of Indian Affairs, "Report of Investigation for Lake Sites in the Southwest Ahtna Region," 52.
See also Holly Reckord, *Where Raven Stood*, 17 and 18.
[52] U.S., Bureau of Indian Affairs, "Report of Investigation for Lake Sites in the Southwest Ahtna Region," 20, 21.
[53] *Ibid.*, 22.
[54] Lieutenant Henry T. Allen, "Report of a Military Reconnaissance in Alaska in 1885," in U.S., Senate, *Compilation*, 413. See also "Native Map of the Route to Cook Inlet Via the Suchitno River," following page 436. Allen did not visit Tazlina Lake, but learned from local Natives that twenty people lived at the headwaters of Tazlina River and "Lake Plavesnie" U.S., Bureau of Indian Affairs, "Report of Investigation for Lake Sites in the Southwest Ahtna Region," 53.

lower reaches of the river: one at its mouth and another a short distance upstream where the Valdez-Eagle trail crossed. Eight or ten cabins were located at its mouth. This probably was a Native village because Abercrombie immediately notes that some 150 natives lived at Tazlina Lake and "the neighborhood," which was known as "one of the choicest game ranges in the valley." "Their chief is known and respected from Mentasta Lake to Cooks Inlet," he wrote. Ten to twelve cabins were located at the trail crossing of the Tazlina River. He specifically identified these as built mostly by prospectors who had spent the summer at Tazlina Lake and in the headwaters of its tributaries. Abercrombie, who did not travel to the lake, described it as five to ten miles wide and about twenty-five miles long with numerous glacier streams emptying into it. While on the lower reaches of the river, he observed that the Tazlina River carried as much water as the Copper River at this point. He doubted that the river was susceptible to navigation: "The currents in the Tazlena preclude any sort of navigation. At points it is filled with bowlders; at all times it is a mad, dangerous stream, which can not be forded at any season of the year, but must be swum in certain places where there are short stretches of smooth water."[55]

Valdez Gold Rush of 1898

During the Valdez Gold Rush of 1897-98, thousands of people, mostly men, arrived on steamships at the head of Valdez Bay and founded the town of Valdez. They chose this place to start the overland journey to Interior Alaska and the Klondike. The most popular route was across Valdez Glacier to the head of Klutina Lake and thence down its outlet, Klutina River, to the Copper River, where another small community called Copper Center was founded. From this point prospectors could choose several different trails for the northward journey. Another overland route, used during the winter months, extended from Klutina Lake to Tazlina River via St. Anne Lake. According to one account, many stampeders followed this route, thinking that it led to a river called "Konsina," reportedly the first navigable tributary of the Copper River. Finding navigable waters was important to the stampeders because during the summer months it was virtually impossible, without horses or wagon roads, to transport heavy loads of supplies and other goods needed to survive in remote areas of Alaska. Otherwise, they had to wait for winter in order to move heavy loads by sled over the snow and ice.

During the gold rush, the Tazlina River was repeatedly tested as a route of boat travel. The results were mixed. In his reminiscences, Basil Austin took a dim view of the Tazlina River as navigable waterway. Austin was encamped on the Tazlina River some distance below Tazlina Lake from mid May 1898 to January 1899, when he and others decided to leave the Copper River Valley for the Fortymile River, a tributary of the Upper Yukon River. In this time, he made several overland trips to miners' camps along the Tazlina River, at Copper Center, and at Klutina Lake. In addition, he observed many attempts to boat the Tazlina River.

Like so many other stampeders in the winter of 1897-98, the Austin party followed the Valdez Glacier route from Valdez to Klutina Lake. While most parties followed the Klutina River to the Copper River or waited until summer to shoot the river in boats, Austin's decided to continue on to the "Konsina River," reportedly thirty-seven miles distant by trail, where, according to a man

[55] Captain W. R. Abercrombie, "A Military Reconnaissance of the Copper River Valley," in U.S., Senate, *Compilation*, 577, 579, 587-588.

hired by the stampeders to carry mail, there was a "big camp" of men building boats in anticipation of the opening of navigation.[56] Later, they would learn from Indians that the river was called the Tazlina. Transporting more than a ton of supplies and equipment in sleds over deep snow on the Klutina Lake-St. Anne Lake trail, the men arrived at the upper reaches of the Tazlina River in mid May. Standing on a bluff overlooking the river, Austin recorded his first impression of the Tazlina River:

> Down below—some five hundred feet—was the river bottom. The channel was wide with gravel bars and strewn with boulders, but the water was low, certainly not navigable as yet. From rim to rim the gorge was about a mile in width. At this point the river bed was at the far side, biting into a steep clay bluff, leaving on this south side a bar of perhaps a hundred acres covered with a good growth of gouging out of the wall of the gorge. As the snow was now practically gone, I was surprised to see the water so low. It was evident from the size of its bed that the majority of water must come from the mountains and glaciers that would thaw out later.[57]

The Austin party descended the steep bluff and entered a miners' camp along the river in a good stand of trees. Here miners, when not prospecting or fishing, were busily cutting down trees and building boats. Some had completed their boats a month ago and were now waiting for higher water. The boats came in all sizes and shapes. "Most of them were mediocre and some just too bad to be termed boats," wrote Austin. Some were well built, however. Austin noted one thirty-two-foot-long boat called the "Montana." Austin's party built two boats--a dory and a scow, both twenty feet long.[58]

In late May Austin recorded the beginning of a major exodus from the camp as the stampeders, their patience finally rewarded with higher water, attempted to shoot the river in boats. Austin described the scene as chaotic:

> The river had been slowly but constantly rising. The current was swift and as yet navigation seemed dangerous. A short distance below, at a bend, there were bad rapids with large boulders which deflected the current, leaving only narrow channels between. But those who had boats ready were anxious to be off. On Saturday, May 21st, the first two boats made a start. The 'Blakeley' with Copper River Bill as pilot struck a rock in the first rapids, turned sideways and capsized. One man was nearly drowned and only about half of their wet freight was recovered. The 'Montana' was next with Carl as captain. This went through the rapids grazing one boulder but was stuck not more than a mile below camp.
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> On June 1st the Benton party made a fine start with their thirty-two foot boat, but we heard the next day they were stuck three miles down and had unloaded. These repeated failures in navigation, with the fact that in this whole territory there was little hope of finding gold was discouraging, so a few were selling their supplies and returning to Valdez.[59]

Several of Austin's companions joined another party in attempting to descend the river in the twenty-foot-long dory in early or mid June. Whether they were successful is not known. Austin probably would have joined them if had not fallen sick and stayed behind.

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[56] Basil Austin, 44 and 45.
[57] *Ibid.*, 46.
[58] *Ibid.*, 47 and 48.
[59] *Ibid.*, 51 and 52.

In early summer, rumors of gold discoveries farther upriver spread through Austin's camp, causing some men to leave the camp for the source of the rumors. Four men returned a week later, all demoralized by the experience. "The traveling was bad, they had tried to raft the last part of the way down the river, had upset and were still in wet clothes," wrote Austin. Later, "Blain—with two dogs—left, towing his small boat up the Tazlina with the idea of packing over the divide and going down the Knik River to Cook Inlet. He returned in a few days, his face blood-stained from mosquitoes, all but out of his mind. His boat was swamped up-river so he hired 'Frenchy' to pack his goods back to camp. Then he sold out and left for Valdez."[60] Presumably he followed the Tazlina River downstream to the Copper River.

By mid June Austin was clearly disgusted by the numerous false rumors about gold discoveries in the region and frustrated over the difficulties encountered in navigating the Tazlina River. As Austin wrote, "by this time there were camps at intervals, all the way down the Tazlina, where boats had been wrecked, and at points on the Copper River too. And as there was more or less travel between these camps, news sifted through frequently. Checking on all news items, we came to the conclusion that there was little more gold in this part of Alaska than in Michigan."[61] The local Indians did not give him much hope. In late May he recorded the arrival in camp of two Indians "from upstream." Though they spoke little English, the Indians informed the white men something about their whereabouts relative to Valdez Bay and the Copper River, told them that the river's name was Tazlina, that the "Kosina" was "somewhere off to the southeast," and that "thirty sleeps" would pass before the Tazlina River "would rise to any extent." Much to Austin's disappointment, the Indians did not know anything about gold prospects. Nor did they contribute advice on navigating the Tazlina. According to Austin, "These Indians had no boats or canoes, which seemed to prove that the rivers in this part of the country were hardly safe to navigate. Perhaps boating downstream at high water was possible, but getting back might be impractical."[62] Rather than risk losing their possessions in a boating accident, Austin's party decided to wait for winter when they would be able to move their supplies and equipment over the snow and ice with sleds.

During the summer, Austin fished for salmon running up the Tazlina River and even made an overland trip to the Copper River. To catch salmon, he and friends built a trap across the river, using a boat in the project. "It was also quite a task to cross the river, for it took two strong oarsmen with the boat pointed almost upstream to make it." Later they placed a ferry boat on the river, using a long rope with pulleys. This required skill in operations because the swift water could swamp the boat or push it against rocks and boulders. Eventually, on July 21, as six visiting Indians predicted it would, the river crested from snowmelt and rainfall and swept away the fish trap.[63]

About a week after the fish trap went out, Austin and another man made a trip to the Copper River. Rather than descend the river in a boat, they followed along the river, climbing the bluffs many times to avoid the high water. When this became impossible, they followed an Indian trail along the north side of the river. This proved difficult, because "it was seldom used, and its only

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[60] *Ibid.*, 52 and 53.
[61] *Ibid.*, 57.
[62] *Ibid.*, 51-52.
[63] *Ibid.*, 57-60, 61.

marks were an old blaze on a tree once in fifty to one hundred yards. When trees were scarce we had to guess, but having a compass and knowing the direction, we did not get far astray."[64] Upon reaching Tazlina Camp at the mouth of the river, Austin and his companions "shot" the Copper River in a boat to Copper Center at the mouth of the Klutina River.

In returning to their campsite on the Tazlina River several weeks later, Austin's party followed an Indian trail from Tazlina Camp at the river's mouth. "The Indian trail was about two miles back from the river at Twelve Mile camp, and as we had mail to deliver there, we did not know just where to leave it and strike for the river," Austin wrote. Eventually, they left the trail and blazed a new one to the river, striking it about a quarter mile or so above the stampeders' camp (Twelve Mile).[65]

Austin and his friends remained at their nearby Tazlina River camp for the remainder of the year. They built a cabin for the winter, went hunting, and even walked to St. Anne Lake in the Klutina River drainage area to hunt for waterfowl. Several men went to Tazlina Lake to hunt for bear. In early October, less than two weeks before ice began forming in the river, three men left the camp in a boat, bound for Orca, the site of a salmon cannery near present-day Cordova. Austin was optimistic that they would succeed in getting down the Tazlina River "without too much trouble." The river was high, and they were traveling light. "Their boat turned completely around in the rapids below camp, but this was the worst piece of water they would most likely encounter." By October 22 ice began to form on the Tazlina River, and by the end of December the river was frozen.[66]

With winter, traveling became easier. Austin traveled to Valdez by way of St. Anne Lake and the Valdez Glacier, returning over the same route. He recorded several visits by Indians to the camp, some of them on their annual fur trade journey. An Indian named Nicholi, who earlier had visit the camp with another Indian named Stickwan, brought a chief from the Gulkana River with furs and moccasins to trade. After the river froze, a number of Indians came down the river. Austin described the procession as follows: "Indians came down on their way to some trading post down the Copper River. We understood they went there at this period of the year to trade their furs. The squaws drew the sleds while the men walked carrying only a gun or a few light things. They had a number of dogs which were small wolfish animals. Some carried packs, but none were harnessed to sleds."[67]

By January 1899, Austin and his companions were ready to leave their Tazlina River camp and begin the long journey to the Fortymile River in the Upper Yukon region. By this time, there was a general exodus from the Copper River Valley, many leaving in disgust and disappointment over the failure to find gold. Austin and his companions helped some to return to Valdez by way of the Klutina River-Valdez Glacier route. They then returned over the same trail, and in March,

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[64] *Ibid.*, 63.
[65] *Ibid.*, 68-69.
[66] *Ibid.*, 76, 78, and 87. Austin would later meet two men from this trip at Valdez. They had "a good trip down the Copper encountering no very bad rapids . . . ." Ibid., 93.
[67] *Ibid.*, 72, 79-81, 87-88.

with geographical information provided by the Indian named Nicholi, began the successful journey to the Fortymile River.[68]

Nelchina Gold Rush of 1913-14

By 1900 Valdez Glacier was no longer an important route to the Interior. Since the summer of 1898 Army personnel under the command of Captain W. R. Abercrombie had been at work locating and building a trail over a new route up the Lowe River valley. A year later, soldiers and civilians had extended a good trail to a point near Copper Center and had built shelter cabins and a telegraph line connecting them. Two years after the Valdez Gold Rush, the trail was extended to Tazlina River and a bridge was built over Klutina River.

The Valdez Trail became a key component in the federal government's trail and telegraph system in Alaska. In 1900 Congress provided funds for the construction of military roads, trails, and bridges in Alaska and a Washington-Alaska Military Cable and Telegraph System. After 1905 the Alaska Road Commission (ARC) in the War Department received annual appropriations for the construction and maintenance of roads and trails in Alaska. Under the direction of General Wilds P. Richardson, the ARC focused its efforts to improving the trail from Valdez to Fairbanks for wagons and subsequently for automobiles. In the meantime, the Morgan-Guggenheim Syndicate built the Copper River & Northwestern Railroad up the Copper River valley from Cordova to Chitina and McCarthy in order to tap world-class copper mines. From 1911 to 1938, when the railroad was abandoned, the Richardson Highway and the Copper River railroad were the principal routes from Prince William Sound to Interior Alaska. Afterwards, the highway's importance grew as the sole overland route from Prince William Sound to Interior Alaska.

The Valdez Trail crossed the Tazlina River near its mouth. For several years a ferry was operated on the river at this point. The river was too swift for people to wade across it. After trying for several days to force cattle across the swift river at this point, a man drove the cattle to a crossing near Tazlina Lake where the river was not as fast.[69] In 1906 the ARC constructed the first bridge over the river. It has undoubtedly been replaced many times over the years.

Before the First World War, the Valdez Trail was the jump-off point for several gold rushes to the upper reaches of the Nelchina River, a large glacial river emptying into Tazlina Lake. This area was accessible from both Cook Inlet and the Copper River. Albert Creek, where the discovery of gold in the early 1910's sparked a minor stampede, is located a short distance across a divide from the headwaters of the Matanuska River, which empties into Knik Arm of Cook Inlet. The creek is a tributary of Crook Creek, which in turns flows into the Little Nelchina River, a tributary of the Nelchina River. In the Cook Inlet district, stampeders followed a trail along the Matanuska River to the new diggings. In the Copper River region, they followed several different trails to the upper Nelchina River. Tazlina Lake was an important landmark on the trails. Once stampeders were in sight of the lake, they had little difficulty in locating the Nelchina River and the trail leading to the new diggings.

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[68] *Ibid.*, 90-91.
[69] *Alaska Prospector*, September 21, 1905, 2.

Between 1898 and 1905, prospectors working in the Upper Susitna River and Upper Nelchina River country probably relied upon the Valdez Glacier trail to access the country. In the spring of 1902, H. A. Monroe returned to Valdez after spending several months in the area of the upper Susitna River. He and his party had traveled to the Susitna River by way of Valdez Glacier, Klutina Lake, St. Anne Lake, and Tazlina Lake. At the lake they obtained an Indian guide. Monroe mentioned that others were on the trail to the Upper Susitna River.[70] In the fall of 1903 two men named William Bonney and John McLaren arrived in Valdez from the Susitna River country by way of Tazlina Lake.[71] According to Henry Ober, a well known pioneer of Valdez, Charles Sanberg and Hans Miller in 1898 traveled to the Upper Nelchina by way of Valdez Glacier, Klutina Lake, St. Anne Lake, and Tazlina Lake. The two men had recovered two ounces of gold from "Eureka Creek," which was identified as a tributary of Crooked Creek in the headwaters of the Tazlina River.[72] In 1902 a Valdez newspaper reported that four men (two named Mason and Oliver) had spent the season prospecting in the headwaters of the Tazlina River, which they had reached by way of St. Anne Lake and Tazlina Lake.[73]

By 1905, prospectors were reported traveling to the Tazlina River country from Copper Center and other points on the Valdez-Fairbanks trail. Three prospectors reported plans to prospect the Klutina and Tazlina Rivers during the summer of 1905. They intended to access the country from the Valdez Trail by way of the Tiekel River.[74] Later that summer, it was reported that T. D. Hogan had left Valdez about the middle of June to locate a silver ledge at Tazlina Lake. How he reached the lake was not mentioned, nor how he planned to return to Copper Center.[75]

In the summer of 1906, Copper Center was the definite jump-off point for a small and short-lived gold rush to the headwaters of Tazlina River. Arriving at Copper Center to obtain supplies in mid June, Jim Edwards announced that he and Hosfeld, Myers, Simpson, and Jack Carrol had struck gold in the upper Tazlina River country. They were already sluicing and determined that they had a good paystreak. The new diggings were five days' travel from Copper Center. Several weeks later, Carrol also appeared in Copper Center for supplies and confirmed news of the strike. The news sparked a small rush to the Upper Tazlina, most of the men coming from around Copper Center and the Upper Chistochina River. Upon returning to Copper Center from the scene of the strike, Charles Overheiser announced plans to start a winter freighting business from Copper Center to the Upper Tazlina. It is not known whether he act upon his plans. In any case, the newspaper did not describe the route to the new diggings, but it is probable that the stampeders followed the old Indian trail to Tazlina Lake.[76]

The Nelchina Gold Rush of 1913-14 was sparked by the discovery of gold on Alfred Creek, a tributary of Crooked Creek in the upper Nelchina River area. According to Theodore Chapin of the U.S. Geological Survey, placer gold was discovered on Alfred Creek in 1912. In the spring

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[70] *Alaska Prospector*, April 30, 1902, 1.
[71] Their route from the lake is unclear. The paper mentioned "the Quartz creek divide." There is a Quartz Creek that empties into the Tonsina River. *Alaska Prospector*, October 1, 1903, 1.
[72] *Valdez Weekly Miner*, March 8, 1914, 8.
[73] *Alaska Prospector*, April 24, 1902, 1.
[74] *Alaska Prospector*, May 25, 1905, 4.
[75] *Alaska Prospector*, August 3, 1905, 1.
[76] *Alaska Prospector*, June 21 (p. 3), July 5 (pp. 1, 2), July 12 (p. 2), August 24 (p. 2), 1906.

of 1913, Odin Olson, Fred Getchell, Joe Palmer, and Duncan McCormick staked ten claims. In that year, they recovered about 60 ounces of gold, and in 1914 about 150 ounces of gold.[77]

In September 1913, news of the gold strike reached Prince William Sound communities. Early that month, a government official reported in Cordova that Seward residents were excited over reports of a significant find on the headwaters of the Tazlina River. Miners from Knik reportedly had taken out fifteen ounces of gold after digging through several feet of muck. The news had already spurred Turnagain Arm miners to rush to the Matanuska River and thence to the new field.[78]

By the end of September, the Valdez, Cordova, and Chitina newspapers had acquired more definite information. On September 30, the *Chitina Leader*'s headlines announced "The New Nelchina Gold Diggings," which had the "earmarks of another great placer gold field." According to a story first published at Seward, miners Duncan McCormick, Odin Olson and Fred Getchell arrived at Knik from Albert Creek with $1,200 in gold dust after six weeks of mining.[79] J. L. Denny, who had spent the past five years prospecting in the Susitna River region, informed the Cordova newspaper that he had met Nelchina miners McCormick and Palmer at Knik and from them learned of the discovery:

> The first rich dirt was taken out by Duncan McCormack [McCormick], who went into that country last winter. Three years ago a small crowd from Valdez had run a cut on this same claim, but before reaching bed rock they struck frost and abandoned their work. This summer McCormack continued on the same cut and on reaching bed rock struck good pay.
>
> Joe Palmer, Ed. Miller, Oleson [Olson] and Getchell, and several others soon made good locations and took out good pay. A large number of others have since gone from the Knik country."[80]

Within days, men in the Copper River region were on the trail to the new diggings. Copper Center was the jump-off point for many. Reinhold Blix, the proprietor of the Copper Center roadhouse, reported "that a regular stampede has occurred" in his area. This may have been sparked when "a reliable Indian" arrived from the head of Tazlina River and reported that the camp of fourteen white men and one woman were "taking out gold by the handful."[81] Blix believed the Indian's story, recalling that a man named A. W. Hall had arrived at Knik two years ago with gold from the same area. He reported small parties had left Copper Center for the diggings over several different routes. One small party planned to leave the Richardson Road at Tiekel and follow the old trail to Quartz Creek, Klutina Lake, St. Anne Lake, and Tazlina Lake. Another party of more than fifteen men had already left Copper Center for the Nelchina, presumably by way of the Tazlina Lake trail.[82]

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[77] Theodore Chapin, 61.
[78] *Chitina Leader*, September 9, 1913, 3.
[79] *Chitina Leader*, September 30, 1913, 1. Initially, Albert Creek was confused with Alfred Creek, which is located in the Matanuska River drainage area.
[80] *Chitina Leader*, September 30, 1913, 1.
[81] The Indian's name may have been Nicholi. Joe Stanton, the mail carrier, later reported that he had talked to the Indian who brought the news of the strike to Copper Center. Nicholi informed him that two men work sluicing in the area and had taken out "two handfuls of gold." *Valdez Weekly Miner*, October 5, 1913, 1.
[82] *Chitina Leader*, September 30, 1913, 1.

By mid October 1913 many Nelchina stampeders had returned to Valdez. Traveling light to the district, they had spent only a few days there, enough to assess the situation and locate claims on promising creeks. They did not wish to be caught there far from the source of provisions by a heavy snowfall. After recording their claims, they intended to return and perform development work. Once snow arrived, they would be able to transport sufficient quantities of supplies to permit a thorough testing of the ground. According to the Valdez newspaper, "All agree that the task of getting supplies to the diggings will not be difficult when the snow will permit of sledding. Dog teams are being secured to transport supplies from the government road [Richardson Road] to the camp until the freezeup will permit of horse teams being used on the river. Indications point to a great activity in the district during the coming winter with a good prospect of a big camp being developed."[83] R. W. McCrary of Copper Center stated that "[t]he distance from Tazlina road house is not far and it is over a good trail. Many who went in have come out to make preparations to return with thawers and remain during the winter."[84] Richard Malik pointed out that the Tazlina River route was "practically water grade" with only low and rolling hills to cross while the Matanuska River route involved crossing high and very steep divides.[85]

During the winter of 1913-14, prospecting parties and freighters followed at least two routes from the Richardson Road: the frozen Tazlina River and the Tazlina Lake trail. Prospecting parties traveled by dog team and sometimes with horses; freighters used horse teams pulling double-enders. By early November the Tazlina River had frozen to such an extent that it was suitable for travel. The Valdez newspaper reported, "they say sledding on the river from its mouth to the lake is exceptionally good."[86] Many stampeders went over the "government road to Tazlina and up that river to the lake of the same name, near where the diggings are located."[87] Robert McIntosh, who operated the McIntosh Stage and Transportation Company on the Richardson Road, offered his services to the Nelchina miners and prospectors. From Valdez he transported up to twenty tons of freight to the camp by horse team.[88] McIntosh later stated that his company's teamsters made the first round trip from Valdez to the Nelchina in seventeen days. When the freighters arrived at the new camp, they estimated its population at about 200 people. In addition, they met about 150 prospectors on the trail en route to the camp.[89] Later, in the spring, McIntosh reportedly sent twenty-one teams to the Nelchina with supplies for the miners.[90]

Not all freight went over the Tazlina River ice. There is much evidence that travelers and freight also went over the Tazlina Lake trail. Charles S. Black, a prospector who went in over the Knik route and came out over the Tazlina route, described the trail from Tazlina as being located "along the river for nearly the entire distance of 80 miles, without any hills or summits to climb."[91] Harry Schultz, a miner on the Upper Chistochina River who later became the recorder

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[83] *Valdez Weekly Prospector*, October 19, 1913, 7.
[84] *Chitina Leader*, October 28, 1913, 3.
[85] *Valdez Weekly Prospector*, November 2, 1913, 8.
[86] *Valdez Weekly Miner*, November 9, 1913, 7.
[87] *Valdez Weekly Miner*, November 16, 1913, 1.
[88] *Valdez Weekly Miner*, November 16, 1913, 1.
[89] *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner*, February 11, 1914, 2.
[90] *Valdez Weekly Miner*, March 29 (p. 5), April 5, 1914 (p. 5).
[91] *Chitina Leader*, December 9, 1913, 3.

at the Nelchina diggings, mushed to the new camp on November 20. In a letter to a friend, he described the trail as follows:

> The Nelchina trail starts about three miles from Tazlina bridge and after crossing Moose creek (about four miles), heads about ten degrees south of west. The trail was well blazed and not bad to travel on with horses, but not so easy by the face. I figure that a good horse could haul 1,800 pounds with little difficulty. We struck the Nelchina river at nine a.m., November 30, about four miles below the Tanzy cabin, so we did not get down to Tazlina lake at all but stayed high up on the benches. I figure it about eighty miles to Tanzy's cabin and ten or twelve miles from there to No. 22.[92]

In a letter to the Valdez newspaper, another Nelchina prospector provided a similar description of the winter trail. He wrote: "Arriving at Copper Center over the established route, the trail leads up the Copper to the mouth of the Tazlina, thence up the Tazlina to Moose creek, thence up Moose creek for a distance of about four miles where the river is abandoned, the balance of the route leading across country in a westerly direction to the Nelchina.... From Moose creek there rises a series of plateaus, each approached by a gradual incline. The surface of each plateau is a lake which greatly helps in the winter travel." The prospector estimated the distance from Copper Center at seventy-five to ninety miles. In early February one man made the trip from Copper Center to Crooked Creek with a horse pulling 1,800 pounds of supplies in four and a half days. He made the return trip in two and a half days.[93]

At its height, the Nelchina camp probably had a population of 200 to 400 people. In January 1914, Angus McDougall, a well known miner from Valdez, reported 250 men and three women in the camp. In February, Robert McIntosh thought about 200 people were in the camp. In June, Reinhold Blix gave an estimate of 200 people. Theodore Chapin of the U.S. Geological Survey estimated 400 prospectors in the area.[94]

The recorder and U. S. Commissioner had their headquarters at "Callico Camp," located on the Nelchina River about two miles below the confluence of Crooked Creek. The camp earned its name from the fact that there were only four women residing in the camp. Harry Schultz was elected the recorder of the Nelchina Recording Precinct (created in December 1913). L. F. Shaw was appointed as the U.S. Commissioner.[95]

During the open season of 1914, there is little mention in the Valdez and Chitina newspapers of travel to the Nelchina country, a clear indication that the stampede was over. A report from Blix at Copper Center suggests that some men planned to follow the Tazlina River trail. Citing letters that he had just received from the camp, Blix reported in early June that the "Nelchina is a sure camp." Miners were optimistic that it would be a permanent camp. "Several outfits with pack horses will start packing supplies to the camp from Copper Center as soon as the trail begins to

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[92] *Valdez Weekly Miner*, December 28, 1913, 1, 8.
[93] *Valdez Weekly Miner*, March 15, 1914, 5.
[94] *Valdez Weekly Miner*, January 25, 1914, 2; *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner*, February 11, 1914, 2; *Chitina Leader*, June 2, 1914, 3; Theodore Chapin, 59.
[95] *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner*, March 13, 1914, 4. The boundaries are described in *Valdez Weekly Miner*, December 21, 1913, 4. Several Land Office officials visited the camp for several weeks in the spring of 1914, traveling over the Tazlina River route. Ralph Gilliland was a timber cruiser, and George Parks was a mineral surveyor. Parks was the territorial governor of Alaska in the 1920s. *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner*, March 6, 1914, 4.

dry," he reported.[96] Most freight for the camp was probably transported during the winter, however. L. F. Shaw, the U.S. Commissioner, reported that the owners of Discovery claim (Getchell, Olson, Kemp and Anderson) "will take in supplies this winter in preparation for next summer's operations."[97]

During the winter of 1914-15, the Nelchina camp virtually collapsed. According to Theodore Chapin of the U.S. Geological Survey, most people left the area after little gold was produced during the 1914. When in the spring of 1915 A. A. "Tony" Zimmerman, a well known and respected miner in the Fairbanks area, made a brief stop at the camp on his long overland journey from Knik to Fairbanks via Broad Pass, he counted only ten men in the district. It was, he claimed, "a graveyard for grubstakes. There is no pay in there except on discovery and 1 above."[98]

Mining in the Nelchina area continued on a small scale for decades. With the construction of the Alaska Railroad from Anchorage to the Matanuska Valley and up the Matanuska River to the Chickaloon coal field, access to the Nelchina camp became much easier. The Chickaloon-Nelchina trail became the customary route of travel to the Nelchina camp; it was the only trail to the Nelchina camp subsequently improved by the Alaska Road Commission. For many years, the Anchorage newspaper frequently carried reports about developments in the Nelchina camp. The Valdez and Chitina newspapers did not, suggesting that travelers bound for the Nelchina area seldom if ever used the Tazlina Lake trail.

U.S. Bureau of Fisheries' Expedition of 1919

In the years between the First and Second World Wars, the U.S. Bureau of Fisheries sent a number of expeditions to Alaska to identify salmon-spawning tributaries of the Copper River. This action was taken in response to complaints from missionaries, government officials, and Natives that commercial fishing operations on the lower Copper River were having a significant adverse impact on the salmon runs, upon which the Natives and whites depended for human and dog food. In 1916, for example, Tazlina Joe and Mantasta Pete, known as "representatives of the two most remote points on the Copper River," reported to Bureau officials that their people had to extend the hunting season because of the lack of salmon.[99] While several trips were made to the Klutina and Gulkana Rivers, among others, the first (an apparently the only) trip to Tazlina Lake was made in 1919.[100] Nearly all trips into these areas were made by horse or foot.

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[96] *Chitina Leader*, June 2, 1914, 3.
[97] *Chitina Leader*, October 13, 1914, 3.
[98] Theodore Chapin, 59; *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner*, April 15, 1915, 4. Chapin believed that more prospecting needed to be done.
[99] James H. Lyman to Commissioner of Fisheries, February 16, 1916, Reports and Related Records—Copper River District, 1916-17, Division of Alaska Fisheries, Bureau of Fisheries, Records of the Fish and Wildlife Service, RG 22, NA.
[100] A chronology of the Bureau of Fisheries' investigations in the Copper River region up to 1933 shows no further visits to the Tazlina Lake area. Evidently agents relied upon information provided by local residents. See "Copper River Original Copy," Manuscript Regarding Copper River and Its Tributaries, SSR49, Division of Alaska Fisheries, Bureau of Fisheries, Alaska Division, RG 22, NA, hereafter cited as "Copper River Original Copy," c. 1935.

The Bureau of Fisheries' expedition of 1919 consisted of Professors Henry B. Ward and W. A. Oldfather of the University of Illinois, Superintendent J. R. Russell of Birdsview, Washington, and guide Frank H. Carroll of Copper Center. Russell's and Ward's reports still survive. (Oldfather was part of the expedition, but it is not clear that he also accompanied the party to Klutina and Tazlina Lakes.)

In August 1919, the expedition traveled overland with horses from Copper Center to Klutina Lake, explored that lake, and then moved to Tazlina Lake by way of St. Anne Lake. The portage from Klutina Lake to Tazlina Lake took two or three days (August 21-23), depending upon whether one relies on Russell's (three days) or Ward's (two days) account. Russell described this part of the trip as "very difficult." "Since there was no trail, it was necessary to meander around marshes and swamps cutting much brush en route," he wrote. They reached the southeast shore of Tazlina Lake near the outlet on the evening of August 23.

The expedition spent a week exploring the entire perimeter of Tazlina Lake, sometimes making use of a canvas boat. According to Russell, this proved to be "almost impossible" because of "daily heavy winds blowing off Tazlina Glacier" and "rough water." Unlike Russell, Ward occasionally made note of the fact that whites and Natives had visited the lake to fish for red salmon. Carroll told him that "two Norwegians" had camped "near the angle of the lake some years ago" and "caught plenty of redfish in a net set in an eddy near their camp." Ward made no mention of human habitations at or near Mendeltna Creek.[101] However, he was told, presumably by Carroll, that red salmon ascended the creek to spawn in lakes twelve to fifteen miles distant. Ward wanted to visit the lakes but cited the lack of time and trails as obstacles. At the expedition's campsite near the outlet of Tazlina Lake, Ward wrote that this site had clearly been used to conduct "regular and successful fishing operations." The Indians had not occupied the site in 1919, however, for reasons connected with the death of Tazlina Johnny, whose cabin was located here. Ward noted that the Indian had died during the winter of 1918-19. "We set our net from stakes which had been located evidently for salmon fishing in a very small indentation of the shore near the cabin, and within a short time had secured a considerable number of fish," he wrote.

The expedition followed the Tazlina Lake trail to Copper Center, about fifty miles. Both Russell and Ward characterized the three-day journey as a difficult one. "The trail leads along the north side of the Tazlina River," wrote Russell. "This is a winter trail laid out in a winding course in order to afford an ice crossing of the several lakes and swamps. Traveling over some of these swamps was very difficult." Ward simply noted that "the trail" was "some distance from the

[101] J. R. Russell to Commissioner of Fisheries, November 26, 1919, Reports and Related Records—Copper River Investigations, Dr. Ward, 1919, Division of Alaska Fisheries, Bureau of Fisheries, RG 22, NA. Russell described Mendeltna Creek as follows: "It averages seventy-five feet in width and from six to eighteen inches in depth. The muddy color of the river seems to indicate that inland lakes drain into it. This stream appeared more adapted to salmon than any other in the Tazlina Lake region." Setting a gill net at "the northeast corner of the lake near the outlet, where the current toward the river was barely perceptible," they caught thirty salmon in less than twenty-four hours.

river." He added, "The country was too difficult and the time too short to justify any attempt to follow the stream or to work in it between the lake and its junction with the Copper."[102]

Hunting, Fishing and Trapping Activities, 1919-1958

Following World War I and the Spanish flu epidemic, hunters and fur trappers worked in the Tazlina Lake country, but very little is known about their activities. In the nearby Klutina River system, hunters and fur trappers usually reached Klutina Lake by trail or airplane. This was probably true in the case of Tazlina Lake, too. It is true, nevertheless, that the local newspapers shed little light on these activities. In January 1931 it was reported that two trappers named Carl Christensen and Lynn Phillips left Valdez over the Richardson Highway for the Tazlina country, where they intended to trap for beaver. They returned to Valdez a month later.[103] In January 1940 the local newspaper carried a story about the family of Charles Underwood, a trapper who lived at Tazlina Lake. One of his four sons had broken through the lake ice and drowned. Underwood went to Copper Center with pilot Jack Hewson to get help in recovering the body under the ice.[104]

During the 1940s the local newspapers reported two instances of men using boats on the Tazlina River system. In the summer of 1940 J. D. McCall and A. R. Brechtbill, both from Seattle, decided to take an "ideal vacation" in Alaska. By this they meant a hunting and prospecting trip to Tazlina Lake by boat. "Roughing it was their idea of adventure, so the trip up the Tazlina River was made in primitive fashion." Charles Swanson, a pioneer miner, accompanied them as cook and guide. Sometime in June they apparently lined a boat up the Tazlina River from the Richardson Highway. When McCall left the group to prospect on his own and failed to return, Brechtbill "poled the rapids of the Tazlina River, made the trip to Copper Center, and notified the authorities that his partner was missing." Jean Nicolie of Copper Center volunteered to search for the missing man. From Tazlina on the Richardson Highway, he followed "the Nelchina Trail" probably as far as Tazlina Lake. After two days and a night, he gave up the search. Almost a week later, McCall walked out of the wilderness and found himself somewhere near Tolsona Creek on the Glenn Highway. Fortunately, he had found Charles Underwood's cabin and cache at Tazlina Lake because he had exhausted his food supply after four days.[105]

With the construction of the Palmer-Richardson Highway branch (Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes approved the name "Glenn Highway" in March 1942) in 1941 and 1942, the Tazlina country was certainly more accessible. The road parallels much of the river as well as the Tazlina Lake trail on the north side, and crosses several rivers and creeks that drain into Tazlina Lake and Tazlina River. The highway was opened to the public in November 1942. Not long thereafter roadhouses and hunting lodges were constructed along the highway. The area was seen as choice hunting territory, especially for caribou and bear.

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[102] J. R. Russell to Commissioner of Fisheries, November 26, 1919; and Henry B. Ward, "Report of an Examination of the Copper River and Tributaries With Special Reference to the Run of Salmon," Reports and Related Records—Copper River Investigations, Dr. Ward, 1919, Division of Alaska Fisheries, Bureau of Fisheries, RG 22, NA.
[103] *Valdez Miner*, January 31 (p. 4); February 28 (p. 4); March 7, 1931, 4. Two of the articles mentioned the Tazlina country; one said Tasnuna. It is assumed that Tazlina was their destination.
[104] *Valdez Weekly Miner*, January 5, 1940, 4; *Alaska Miner*, January 16, 1940, 11.
[105] *Valdez Weekly Miner*, July 19, 1940, 1; *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner*, August 9, 1940, 2; *Alaska Miner*, August 20, 1940, II-1.

After the construction of the highway and continuing well into the 1960s, the Tazlina Lake country was seldom visited, if local newspaper reports are any indication, except by local hunters, fishermen, and trappers. Given the plentiful recreational alternatives in the new country opened up by the Glenn Highway and the difficulties in reaching the lake by traveling overland or by boat from the highway, it is probable that the lake did not receive much public use. Most hunters and fishermen probably relied upon planes to access the lake. However, there is one report of boat use on the Nelchina River that appeared in the Fairbanks newspaper in 1946. According to this report, Dick Tousley and Doc Rising started down a river for Tazlina Lake in a boat. The newspaper identified the river as "Mendeltna River," but it was more likely the Nelchina River. In any case, on July 26, Tousley, a longtime trapper in the Oshetna River country, died near his camp along the river. Rising returned to the Glenn Highway for help. L. L. Pennington, who had a small floatplane on Snow Shoe Lake along the Glenn Highway, volunteered to assist in the recovery of Tousley's body. After notifying the deputy marshal at Copper Center and picking up his partner, Clarence Tarbert at Tazlina Lake, Pennington flew over the area "to scout out the easiest way for getting the body to the highway." A seven-man party subsequently slashed a trail from the highway to the camp and brought out the body.[106]

Post-Statehood Period, 1959-Present

Since Alaska achieved statehood, at least three significant changes have occurred in the Tazlina River drainage area. First, several white hunters and trappers established permanent headquarters along Tazlina Lake. Hunters and trappers had been visiting the Tazlina Lake area in airplanes for decades, but this was the first time that they filed applications with the BLM for headquarters sites along the lake. Second, recreationists discovered the Nelchina River and Tazlina River system. From the Glenn Highway crossing they launched inflatable rafts and kayaks and descended the Nelchina River system to Tazlina Lake and, if they had not arranged for a pilot to meet them at the lake, continued down the Tazlina River to the Richardson Highway. Finally, beginning in the 1970s, recreationists and commercial operators used power jet boats on the entire length of the Tazlina River and for some distance up the Nelchina River. The boats were launched from the Richardson Highway.

Hunting, Fishing, and Trapping Activities

Most settlement claims are clustered along the Richardson Highway crossing of the Tazlina River. However, two claims are located on Tazlina Lake, and one on the bluff overlooking the mid reaches of Tazlina River. All were filed with the BLM in the late 1960's. The claimants ordinarily reached Tazlina Lake by airplane or snow machine. The Tazlina River claim is reached over trails from the Glenn Highway. There is no evidence in the case files that landowners travel to or from their land by boat. One landowner, however, transported a boat overland from the Glenn Highway to Tazlina Lake during the winter and advertised the boat for rent to recreationists.

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[106] *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner*, August 9, 1946, 3.

The earliest land claim, filed with the BLM in 1966, is located at the mouth of Mendeltna Creek, near the former site of Mendeltna Village. Byron A. Anderson of Palmer claimed the land, describing it as "remote," accessible by airplane and trail, and thus "ideal for people to get away from every day traffic." The lake offered good opportunities to catch ling cod and lake trout; Mendeltna Creek, for grayling and salmon. Anderson occupied the land in February 1966, staking the corners and selecting a cabin site for use in hunting and trapping. In 1971 he applied to purchase a five-acre headquarters site, claiming that he was conducting a year-round fishing business at Mendeltna Creek. At the site he had constructed a cabin, hauled in boats, and built an airplane landing strip on the beach.[107] He rented the cabin, boats, and an ice auger for income. He had planned to construct another two cabins in the summer of 1972 but decided to postpone his plans until the issue of Native land claims had been settled. (His claim was in conflict with a Native protest AA-545.) Anderson noted that cabin-building materials "must be hauled in by snow machine as this type of material is almost impossible to haul in by float plane." In the summer of 1973 a BLM employee traveled by helicopter to the site. At the site he found a frame building on the waterfront with a poster reading 'Tazlina Lake Rentals—Boat—Cabin—Motor" on the wall. A two-story log cabin was located behind this cabin. He also noted a corral and "a flimsy outhouse of poles and cardboard." Five years later, Anderson obtained a patent to the land.[108]

Another hunting and trapping headquarters site is located on the southwest shore of Tazlina Lake, near Tazlina Glacier in Section 21, T. 1 S., R. 7 W., CRM. Peter D. Robinson filed for this land in 1968, having occupied it in April for use in running winter traplines and in hunting. When in 1973 he applied to purchase a headquarters site, he claimed to use the land in connection with his guided hunting business and in his trapping activities (fox, beaver, mink, and ermine). Improvements on the land included a log cabin, lumber, furnishings, a bath house, and a bridge across a creek he called "Sauna Creek." In support of the application, Alfred M. Lee of Palmer wrote BLM that Robinson had worked for him as an assistant guide during the 1972 season and planned to do the same in 1973. They worked out of the Tazlina Lake cabin.[109] In addition, Robinson earned income selling articles to various magazines, such as the *Alaska Magazine* and *Fur-Fish-Game*, and later wildlife photographs. In 1974 he published an article in the *Alaska Magazine* describing the construction of a tipi in 1972 for the temporary use of his family until he built a new log cabin. Al Lee, whose home was at Mile 156½ on the Glenn Highway, made several trips in his floatplane transporting tipi materials as well as supplies to Robinson's cabin.[110] Visiting the site in July 1976, a BLM examiner found Robinson living in a

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[107] Don Deering, a longtime pilot in the Eureka area, reported that Anderson had two boats, twenty feet and thirty feet long, at his Tazlina Lake cabin. He transported the boat over a trail from Tazlina Lodge on the Glenn Highway to the cabin during the winter. Mac Wheeler, "Navigability Report: Valdez Quadrangle—FY 80 Report #3 (Short Format)," March 3, 1980 (p. 8), file AA-21201, state selection files, BLM records.

[108] Byron A. Anderson, "Notice of Location of Settlement or Occupancy Claim, September 14, 1966; Byron A. Anderson, "Application for Purchase Headquarters Site and Petition for Survey," August 17, 1971; Byron A. Anderson to Bureau of Land Management, November 10, 1971; John Tiffany, Land Report, December 14, 1973; Patent No. 50-79-0011, October 4, 1978, file AA-000268 (2563), Homesites and Headquarters files, BLM records.

[109] Peter D. Robinson, "Notice of Location of Settlement or Occupany Claim," July 9, 1968; Peter D. Robinson, "Application to Purchase Headquarters Site and Petition for Survey," June 28, 1973, Alfred M. Lee, "To whom it may concern, June 5, 1973, J.A. Hagans to Peter D. Robinson, September 20, 1973, file AA-3019, Homesites and Headquarters files, BLM records.

[110] Peter D. Robinson, "Tipi on the Tundra," *Alaska Magazine* (October 1974): 16-18, 56.

cabin. The examiner described the place as being "located in a remote and uninhabited area making it a suitable location for trapping business headquarters."[111] The BLM subsequently approved the application, surveyed five acres of land in 1979, and issued a patent in 1981.

The only land claim along the Tazlina River beyond the Richardson Highway bridge is located along the mid reaches of the river, approximately one mile south of Mile 180½ on the Glenn Highway. The claimed land does not abut the river, but appears to be on the bluffs overlooking the river. In 1965 Marshall R. Poe of Palmer filed an application with the BLM for a homesite north of Tazlina River in Section 26, T. 4 N., R. 3 W., CRM. Five years later, he applied to purchase a homesite. In 1965, he claimed that he had begun construction of a log cabin on a stone foundation and a frame outhouse, and had cleared a side yard. He resided in the cabin during the winter of 1965-1966. According to BLM's land examiner, who verified the existence of the improvements in March 1971, "the site is accessible from mile 180 of the Glenn Highway by turning south onto Lake Ewan Trail, proceeding one mile to an east-west footpath, then east on the footpath about ½ mile." The BLM subsequently approved the application for a five-acre parcel.[112]

Few other records exist of hunters and trappers visiting Tazlina Lake by airplane.[113] Only when someone was injured or killed were these visits reported in the local newspapers. For example, in September 1972 a guide-pilot named Raymond J. Caposella of Anchorage flew a New York hunter, Nelson J. Stimaker, to Tazlina Lake. They had sighted a brown bear and were stalking it, despite the fact that the bear hunting season had not yet opened. When the guide surprised the bear while it was feeding on a kill, the bear attacked and killed the guide.[114]

Recreational Floating and Boating

Beginning in the early 1970s, reports of recreational boating and floating on the Tazlina Lake and River were published. The BLM considered, for example, several proposed recreational easements along the Tazlina River where the local Native corporations had selected lands under ANCSA. One person nominated a boat access site easement on the lower reaches of the Tazlina River. As justification for the proposed easement, he claimed that "[r]afting and power boating of the Tazlina River is increasing. A large increase in boating and rafting are expected. Boating and rafting use is on the upswing and the Tazlina River offers a unique, beautiful and wild adventure for those who undertake to float it."[115] The Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) proposed easements along both banks of the river so as to allow the public access to

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[111] Suart Hirsh, Land Report, January 31, 1977, and Lori Fitzsimons to the casefile, July 28, 1978, file AA-3019, Homesites and Headquarters files, BLM records.

[112] Marshall R. Poe, "Notice of Location of Settlement or Occupancy Claim, October 27, 1965, and "Application to Purchase Homesite," November 30, 1970; John Tiffany, Land Report, March 15, 1971; U.S. Survey No. 5679 and Patent No. 50-76-0238, Homesites and Headquarters Site files, BLM Records.

[113] Fred Williams, an area manager with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game at Glennallen, stated that recreationists and guides land floatplanes on Tazlina Lake in order to fish and to gain access to hunting areas. Mac Wheeler, "Navigability Report: Valdez Quadrangle—FY 80 Report #3 (Short Format)," March 3, 1980 (p. 8), file AA-21201, state selection files, BLM records.

[114] *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner*, September 8, 1972, 1,3, and September 15, 1972, 1.

[115] "Justification Statement(s) for Public Use Recommendations" (form) for "Tazlina River Boat Access," n.d., file AA-6704-EE, Part 1, ANCSA files, BLM records.

the river for fishing, trapping, rafting, and canoeing. The State agency maintained that the level of public use of the river was "moderate," but it was "expected to increase especially for float trips starting at highway on the Nelchina River."[116] Another justification for the streamside easements included "access by snow machines to trapping areas in early winter when thin river ice is unsafe for such travel."[117] In yet another justification form for a fifty-foot easement along the north bank of the river from its mouth to Tazlina Lake, the nominator claimed that this route "has been used since historical times as river access from upstream sites. Increasing use in past 5 years for rafting and kayaking. North bank is needed as a public campsite as the trip requires several days to complete. Use of this river system by recreationists will greatly increase in the future."[118]

In July 1974 representatives of the Grumman Ecosystems Corporation, contracted by the Corps of Engineers to investigate the navigability of the Copper River and many of its tributaries along the trans-Alaska pipeline route, conducted a helicopter survey of many rivers. From the owner of the Tazlina Trading Post in Glennallen, they learned that "the Tazlina River was boated by rubber raft over its entire length, and that fishing was also exercised on the river." While boats were observed on several rivers, none was sighted on the Tazlina River. Nor were there improvements and developments along the river upstream of the Richardson Highway. They attributed this fact to the river's steep bluffs. The contractor noted that the river was accessible only at three points: from the Richardson Highway bridge at mile 1.8, at Moose Creek from Glennallen at mile 5.9, and at Tolsona Creek from a Glenn Highway campground at mile 28. They observed that the Tazlina Lake trail, located on the bluffs, did not provide access to the river.[119]

Expert kayakers and rafters have assigned a rating of WW2-3 and Class III to the Tazlina River. In one of the first books published about recreational floating streams in Alaska, Sepp Weber in 1976 described the river as "a fast white-water river for experienced paddlers. Water volume must be judged carefully before embarking. The river is generally last difficult before spring runoff, in May and June, late in a dry summer or after cold weather slows glacial runoff. It is a rewarding trip for connoisseurs." Canoe and rafting enthusiasts Jack Mosby and David Dapkus rated the river as easier to float than the Klutina River. Expert kayaker Andrew Embick considered the river suitable for "intermediate kayakers, rafters, and highly skilled open canoeists." According to Embick, the first run down the river in an open canoe may have occurred in 1966. John Tryon and Bill Cheney floated down the river from Tolsona Creek to the highway. "With only one boat, and no wet suits, this was a bold run," Embick wrote.[120]

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[116] Frank A. Stefanich to Curtis V. McVee, BLM, November 21, 1974, file AA-6704-EE, Part I, ANCSA files, BLM records

[117] Justification Statement for Public Use Recommendations (form) for "Tazlina River," n.d. file AA-6704-EE, Part I, ANCSA files, BLM records.

[118] Justification Statement for Public Use Recommendations (form) for Tazlina River, n.d, AA-6704-EE, Part I, ANCSA files, BLM records.

[119] Grumman Ecosystems Corporation, vol. 1, 3-58 and vol. 2, 4-170.

[120] Sepp Weber, 98; Jack Mosby and David Dapkus, 64; Andrew Embick, 254 and 255. Weber described a WW2 stream as consisting of "easy rapids of medium difficult, wide, clear passages, low benches." A WW3 stream was characterized by "numerous high irregular waves, rapids with narrow passages require expertise in maneuver, inspection need, splash cover mandatory." Sepp Weber, 58.

Embick considered the Tazlina River as not "really spectacular in any way, either in difficulty, remoteness, or setting." However, he noted one section of whitewater that expert kayakers and rafters might enjoy. This was the section called Oxbow Drop:

> Just before the take-out, about 5 minutes downstream from the Trans-Alaska Oil Pipeline crossing, the river (at the time of the 1981 flood) completed cutting through the narrow neck of an oxbow bend and bypassed 0.75 mile of a channel all at once. Later measurements revealed a drop of seventeen feet in a couple of hundred yards. Macho kayakers and bored rafters will find this short stretch the only really thrilling section of the river. However, since the Tazlina is not really a river for hotshot kayakers or rafters, but rather for beginning rafters and intermediate kayakers (and skilled whitewater canoeists), this cut Oxbow Drop will doubtless generate a lot of adrenaline. The old, now-dry channel can be seen leaving and then returning on the right, and immediately downstream, the river has almost turned another peninsula into an island.

Other than this section, which deserved a rating of Class III+, the river offered only moderate whitewater. From the lake, a kayaker could run the river in six to eight hours.[121]

Several BLM officials have also descended the Nelchina River system from the Glenn Highway to Tazlina Lake in inflatable rafts and left brief accounts of their experiences. In September 1974 Larry Kajdan of the BLM's Glennallen Resource Area and four other people floated down the Nelchina River and Tazlina River in a thirteen-foot Avon raft equipped with an outboard motor. Upon reaching the Nelchina River, which he described as about two hundred feet wide and six to eight feet deep, Kajdan observed two boats (16 to 18 feet long) going upstream. He believed that the boats had to have come upstream from Tazlina Lake because the Little Nelchina is not suitable for such boats and there was no other known access to the area. Kajdan also descended the Tazlina River, encountering "no serious obstacles to navigation."[122]

In 1980 "Mac" Wheeler of the Anchorage District Office also descended the rivers to Tazlina Lake in an Avon Adventurer raft. Like Kajdan, he also described the Nelchina River upstream of its delta as about 200 to 250 feet wide and over six feet deep. He described the river as "easily boatable." "The most difficult section of the Nelchina River to navigate was the delta area immediately before the river dumps into Tazlina Lake," he wrote. However, he believed that "someone experienced in picking the correct channel could ascend this reach in a riverboat 'capable of carrying in excess of 2,000 pounds.'" Wheeler must have ended the trip at Tazlina Lake because his account makes no reference to floating down the Tazlina River.[123]

Eventually, the Tazlina River would attract commercial recreation operators. It is a simple matter to fly clients in floatplanes to Tazlina Lake, the beginning point for float trips down the river to the Richardson Highway. Little is known about these commercial activities, however.

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[121] Andrew Embick, 254.

[122] Mac Wheeler, "Navigability Report: Valdez Quadrangle—FY 80 Report #3 (Short Format)," March 3, 1980, file AA-004818, and Lance Lockard for Lawrence J. Kajdan, "Navigability Report: Gulkana Quadrangle-FY81-Long Format," July 2, 1981, file AA-004811, state selection files, BLM records. However, Don Deering, a bush pilot who had lived in the Eureka area for over twenty years, informed Wheeler that he had never observed a boat on the Nelchina River, though he thought a jet boat probably could be taken up the river "to the edge of the braided area in the glacial outwash plain."

[123] Richard W. Tindall to State Director (932), August 18, 1980, file AA-4818, state selection files, BLM records. The Tindall memo is entitled, "Navigability Supplement to Report Number 3, Valdez Quadrangle, Dated March 13, 1980."

Operating under the name Open Door, Alaska Water Adventures in the early 1980s, Karl Becker may have been the first to offer rafting trips down the Tazlina River for a fee.[124]

Jon Brievogel may have been the first to offer commercial recreation jet boating trips on the Tazlina River. Operating a company called Rivers Unlimited from Copper Center, Brievogel introduced jet boats into the Copper River region about 1972. In 1977 he began using a powerful twenty-four-foot jet boat.[125] On at least one occasion he was hired to assist in search and rescue operations. One day in early June 1977 Pat Rease Roesch, an employee of the State department of highways, attempted to canoe down Mendeltna Creek from the Glenn Highway. When he didn't return to work, a search was made by airplane, resulting in the discovery of his overturned canoe. A ground search produced no body. The State troopers suspected that his body was lodged in a large log jam in the creek. According to the local newspaper, a trooper was to make an attempt to take apart the log jam. Whether he succeeded or not is not known. Years later, Brievogel recalled his participation in the search for the body. He stated that in June 1977 he took a State trooper up Mendeltna Creek about a half mile from Tazlina Lake in his twenty-four-foot jet boat.[126]

By the late 1970s some local residents in the Copper River region were concerned about the impact that powerful jet boats, some with 400-horsepower engines, were having on salmon spawning grounds. Ed Church, a longtime resident of the area, noted that the number of boats on certain Copper River tributaries had "greatly increased" and, as a result, were jeopardizing the salmon spawning grounds. These tributaries included the Klutina, Tonsina, and Slana Rivers, as well as Mendeltna Creek. He proposed that the use of these boats on spawning streams be prohibited in order to build up the fish populations.[127]

"Interconnecting Sloughs"

The State of Alaska applied for all "interconnecting sloughs" of the Tazlina River. These were not identified by name or by legal description. Nor did the state provide any information about the sloughs in general or in specific. Nevertheless, there is no need here to identify each slough and evaluate its use or potential use as a highway of commerce. If these "interconnecting sloughs" were an integral part of the Tazlina River at statehood, then they transferred to the State of Alaska as a part of the navigable river.

Conclusions

In assessing the merits of the State of Alaska's application for a recordable disclaimer of interest application, the BLM relies upon federal administrative and case law and the advice of the Interior Department's Solicitor's Office. The classic definition of navigable waters is found in *The Daniel*

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[124] Lance Lockard for Lawrence J. Kajdan, "Navigability Report No. 2: Gulkana Quadrangle-FY81-Long Format, July 2, 1981," file AA-04811, state selection files, BLM records.
[125] See Jon Breivogel's article "About Jet Boats," in *Copper Valley News*, March 11, 1981, 7. Breivogel wrote this article in part because of local residents' complaints that jet boating adversely impacts salmon-spawning streams.
[126] *Copper Valley News*, June 15, 1977, 1; and Mac Wheeler, "Navigability Report-Valdez Quadrangle-FY80-Report #3 (Short Format)," March 3, 1980, AA-006798, state selection files, BLM records. See also C. Michael Brown for Don Koenig to File AA-6704-EE, April 30, 1993, ANCSA files, BLM records.
[127] *Copper Valley Views*, December 31, 1979, 3.

Ball, 77 U.S. (10 Wall.) 557 (1870). Pertinent DOI Office of the Solicitor's opinions include Associate Solicitor Hugh Garner's memo of March 16, 1976 ("Title to submerged lands for purposes of administering ANCSA") and Regional Solicitor John Allen's memo of February 25, 1980 ("Kandik, Nation Decision on Navigability"). The agency is also guided by the Equal Footing Doctrine, the Submerged Lands Act of 1953, the Submerged Lands Act of 1988, and any other cognizable reason.

After reviewing the State's application, land status, the historic record pertaining to the Tazlina River system as set forth above, and the legal guidance on title navigability, we affirm that Tazlina Lake is navigable. In 1980, 1981, and 1982, the BLM determined that Tazlina Lake was navigable. The determinations were incorporated into BLM decisions to tentatively approve the conveyance of uplands to the State of Alaska. These decisions were not appealed. Since then, we have not discovered any information that would cause BLM to change its navigability determinations for Tazlina Lake. Indeed, archaeological and ethnohistorical information about Tazlina Lake that surfaced in 1983 and later reinforces the earlier determinations. For example, archaeologists have discovered much evidence that Indians have long occupied various sites around the lake. Oral tradition and the historical evidence support the conclusion that travel between these sites was by boat.

Except for certain riparian lands in T. 3 N., R. 1 W., CRM, where oil and gas or mineral rights were reserved, the United States no longer has any right, title, or interest in the lands underlying the Tazlina River.[128] The riparian lands have been conveyed to Ahtna, Inc., or the State of Alaska. The State of Alaska owns all riparian lands in four townships: Tps. 3 N., Rs. 4, 5, and 6 W. and T. 4 N., R. 4 W., CRM. Ahtna, Inc., owns all riparian lands in five townships: Tps. 3 N., Rs. 2 and 3 W., and Tps. 4 N., Rs. 1, 2, and 3 W., CRM. In all these townships, the BLM determined that the Tazlina River was navigable. In the early 1980's, the BLM issued a series of appealable decisions, which incorporated the navigability determination, to convey uplands (including riparian lands) to the State of Alaska. The decisions, insofar as navigability is concerned, were not appealed. In 1993, in accordance with the regulations set forth in 43 CFR Subpart 1864, the BLM also determined that the river was navigable through lands conveyed to Ahtna, Inc., by Interim Conveyance Nos. 245 and 246.

The United States no longer has any right, title, or interest in most lands underlying the Tazlina River in T. 3 N., R. 1 W., CRM.[129] In 1910 the government surveyed the exterior boundaries, section lines, and meanders in this township. In accordance with traditional survey practices, the river was meandered and the riverbed segregated from uplands because the Tazlina River was more than three chains (198 feet) in width. Subsequently, most riparian lands in this township were patented to the State of Alaska. The BLM patented lot 14 in Section 9 to the Native corporations. Other than in the decision to convey this lot, the BLM (or its predecessor) has not made a navigability determination for the Tazlina River in this township.

In several riparian land cases in T. 3 N., R. 1 W., CRM, the United States reserved oil and gas or mineral interests. The cases include five Native allotments (50-66-0514, 50-69-0003, 50-69-

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[128] See Sections 901(b)(1) and 901(c)(1) of the Alaska National Interests Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA), as amended by the Submerged Lands Act of 1998 (P.L. 100-395).
[129] Ibid.

0004, 50-74-0154, and 50-77-0193) and one mission site (patent 1158433). The Native allotments abut the Tazlina River near the Richardson Highway bridge, specifically, lot 7 in Sec. 8; lots 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11, and 12 in Sec. 9; and lot 10 in Sec. 15, T. 3 N., R. 1 W., CRM. The mission site is also located along this reach of the river. The issuance of a patent is the "final agency action" with respect to whether the river is navigable or not. If the river is non-navigable, the United States may have an interest in the Tazlina riverbed where it abuts these patented Native allotments and former mission site.[130]

The State of Alaska's application for lands underlying the "interconnecting sloughs" of the Tazlina River should not be approved. If the sloughs were an integral part of the river at statehood, they transferred with the river. We recommend that the disclaimer not specifically address "interconnecting sloughs."

[130] See Section 901(c)(1) of the Alaska National Interests Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA), as amended by the Submerged Lands Act of 1998 (P.L. 100-395).

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