



United States Department of the Interior



BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
Eastern Interior Field Office
1150 University Avenue
Fairbanks, Alaska 99709-3844
<http://www.blm.gov/ak>

PLAN CONFORMANCE / NEPA COMPLIANCE RECORD
FF095828
DOI-BLM-AK-02000-2011-0009-CX

A. Background

Title: Soil surveys and data collection by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Location: Within the following townships located within the White Mountains National Recreation Area (WMNRA): T.5N., R.4E., FM; T.6N., R.4E., FM; T.6N., R.5E., FM; T.7N., R.5E., FM; T.6N., R.6E., FM; T.7N., R.6E., FM. and within the following townships within the Steese National Conservation Area (SNCA): T.5N. R.10E., FM; T5N., R.11E., FM; T.5N., R.12E., FM; T.5N., R.13E., FM; T.5N., R.14E., FM; T.5N., R.15E., FM; T.5N., R.16E., FM; T.5N., R.17E., FM; T.6N., R.10E., FM; T.6N., R.11E., FM; T.6N., R.12E., FM; T.6N., R.13E., FM; T.6N., R.14E., FM; T.6N., R.15E., FM; T.6N., R.16E., FM; T.6N., R.17E., FM; T.7N., R.10E., FM; T.7N., R.11E., FM; T.7N., R.12E., FM; T.7N., R.13E., FM; T.7N., R.14E., FM; T.7N., R.15E., FM; T.7N., R.16E., FM and T.7N., R.17E., FM.

Description of Proposed Action:

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) entered into an Interagency Agreement on 09/20/2010 which calls for the NRCS to conduct soil surveys and collect other data on BLM managed lands over a five (5) year period. The Bureau of Land Management proposes to approve and allow the soil survey and data collecting activities in accordance with the terms of that Agreement. The planned activities for the summer of 2011 will occur in the Nome Creek drainage of the WMNRA and the Birch Creek drainage of the SNCA (south unit). Similar work in future years will occur in the Beaver Creek, Fortymile River and Black River Areas of the Eastern Interior Field Office if funding is available.

Work on BLM managed lands (during the 2011 field season) will take approximately 30 days with one “study site” being completed each day. A “study site” consists of one transect of 4 to 8 “plots” over a distance of three-quarters to one mile. Each “plot” is approximately 20 inches wide, 20 inches long and 20 inches deep. The vegetative mat will be removed and set aside to be placed back on top when the plot is completed. Soils that are removed from the site will be placed on a tarp to retain them for back-filling the hole. From the bottom of the initial opening a 2 inch hand auger will be used to sample soils down to 60 inches or to the depth of “auger refusal”. All materials that are removed will be placed back into the hole and the vegetative mat will be placed back on top of the site at the conclusion of each plot. This disturbance does not produce any bare ground or sediment that can leave the sampling site, interrupt hydraulic flow or alter permafrost conditions. Sites in Alaska normally recover fully within 1 to 5 years to the point where they cannot be located or differentiated from the surrounding landscape.

Access to each transect will be by helicopter or by existing road. No four-wheelers are anticipated to be used for access to the study sites in 2011. Crews will walk to each sampling location along the transect to collect soils and ecological data for the BLM. This will include measuring and aging trees as well as identifying the vegetative communities that are present.

Each team will have a person trained to recognize archaeological sites. All plots will be located to avoid any potential archaeological sites. If any archaeological sites are found along a transect, they will be mapped and that information will be turned over to the appropriate agency personnel. NRCS has an MOU in place with the State of Alaska SHPO office on the conduct of business and what each agency expects of the other. Mark Clark, the state soils scientist, has the details on that MOU.

B. Land Use Plan Conformance

The proposed action is located within areas that are covered by the White Mountains National Recreation Area Resource Management Plan or the Steese National Conservation Area Resource Management Plan. The proposed action is consistent with the stated purpose of both plans. It is also consistent with Goal # 1 of the White Mountains National Recreation Area Plan and Goal # 2 of the Steese National Conservation Area Plan. The purpose of the White Mountains National Recreation Area Land Use Plan is to “provide the Bureau of Land Management and the public with guidelines for protecting the quality and managing the use of the White Mountains.” Goal # 1 of that Plan is to “provide for a variety of public outdoor recreational opportunities which emphasize the existing natural primitive and semi-primitive values appropriate to the WMNRA designation.” The purpose of the Steese National Conservation Area Land Use Plan is to “provide the Bureau of Land Management and the public with guidelines for protecting the quality and managing the use of the conservation area.” Goal # 2 of that plan is to “manage present and historical caribou habitat as a primary land use.”

C. NEPA Review

This proposed action fits the description of Departmental Categorical Exclusion 1.6 found in 516 DM 2, Appendix 1; and is therefore excluded from further documentation under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The wording of that exclusion is as follows:

1.6 “Nondestructive data collection, inventory (including field, aerial, and satellite surveying and mapping), study, research, and monitoring activities.”

The proposed action must be screened against the extraordinary circumstances found in 43 CFR 46.215 and listed below. Any “yes” finding requires that an Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement be prepared for the proposed action.

EXTRAORDINARY CIRCUMSTANCES

	YES	NO
1) May have significant impacts on public health or safety.		X
2) May have significant impacts on such natural resources and unique geographic characteristics as historic or cultural resources; park, recreation or refuge lands; wilderness areas; wild or scenic rivers; national natural landmarks; sole or principal drinking water aquifers; prime farmlands; wetlands (Executive Order 11990); floodplains (Executive Order 11988); national monuments; migratory birds; and other ecologically significant or critical areas.		X
3) May have highly controversial environmental effects or involve unresolved conflicts concerning alternative uses of available resources.		X
4) May have highly uncertain and potentially significant environmental effects or involve unique or unknown environmental risks.		X
5) Might establish a precedent for future action or represent a decision in principle about future actions with potentially significant environmental effects.		X
6) May have a direct relationship to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant environmental effects.		X
7) May have significant impacts on properties listed, or eligible for listing, on the National Register of Historic Places as determined by either the bureau or office.		X
8) May have significant impacts on species listed, or proposed to be listed, on the List of Endangered or Threatened Species, or have significant impacts on designated Critical Habitat for these species.		X
9) Might violate a Federal law, or a State, local, or tribal law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment.		X
10) May have a disproportionately high and adverse effect on low income or minority populations (Executive Order 12898).		X
11) Might limit access to and ceremonial use of Indian sacred sites on Federal lands by Indian religious practitioners or significantly adversely affect the physical integrity of such sacred sites (Executive Order 13007).		X

12) Could contribute to the introduction, continued existence, or spread of noxious weeds or non-native invasive species known to occur in the area or actions that may promote the introduction, growth, or expansion of the range of such species (Federal Noxious Weed Control Act and Executive Order 13112).		X
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D. Signature

Authorizing Official:  Date 5-6-11
(Signature)

Lenore Heppler
Manager, Eastern Interior Field Office

Contact Person

For additional information concerning this CX review, contact Vic Wallace, Realty Specialist, Eastern Interior Field Office, 1150 University Ave., Fairbanks, AK 99709. Phone: 907-474-2363.

Decision for Categorical Exclusion DOI-BLM-AK-02000-2011-0009-CX
to
Approve and allow soil survey and data collection activities to occur on BLM managed lands.

Decision

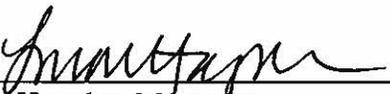
It is my decision to issue a Letter of Approval to NRCS which will allow them to proceed with their proposed soil survey and data collection activities on BLM managed lands in accordance with Interagency Agreement between these two agencies. (All applicable State and Federal laws shall be followed to protect cultural resources and to minimize potential contamination from petroleum, oil and lubricants.)

Rationale

1. This action is consistent with the White Mountains National Recreation Area Resource Management Plan and the Steese National Conservation Area Resource Management Plan.
2. There are no anticipated impacts to cultural resources. See attachment #1.
5. The Proposed Action will not significantly restrict subsistence uses. See attachment #2.

Appeal Procedures

This decision may be appealed to the Interior Board of Land Appeals, Office of Hearings and Appeals, in accordance with 43 CFR Part 4 and DOI Form 1842-1. The notice of appeal must be filed in the Bureau of Land Management Eastern Interior Field Office (at the above address) within 30 days from receipt of this decision. Appeals from administrative decisions issued by BLM-Alaska must be filed in writing in the office of the deciding official, either by mail or hand delivery. Notices of appeal transmitted by electronic means, such as facsimile or e-mail, will **not** be accepted as timely filed.



Lenore Heppler, Manager
Eastern Interior Field Office

5/6/11
Date

Contact Person

For additional information concerning this CX review and decision, contact Vic Wallace, Realty Specialist, Eastern Interior Field Office, at 907-474-2363.