

United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
Arctic Field Office
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In reply refer to:
FF095714
2984.01 (AK012)

PLAN CONFORMANCE / NEPA COMPLIANCE RECORD

DOI-BLM-LLAKF012-2010-0040-CX

Arctic Field Office, Bureau of Land Management

Applicant: Kristen Simac
Research Wildlife Biologist
USGS Alaska Science Center
4210 University Drive
Anchorage, Alaska 99508

Proposed Action: Polar Bear Research in the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska (NPR-A) (2984.01).

Description of Proposed Action: The applicant Kristen Simac, with the USGS Alaska Science Center has requested authorization for field activity access and landing by a helicopter, on lands within the National Petroleum Reserve Alaska (NPR-A) in support of polar bear research.

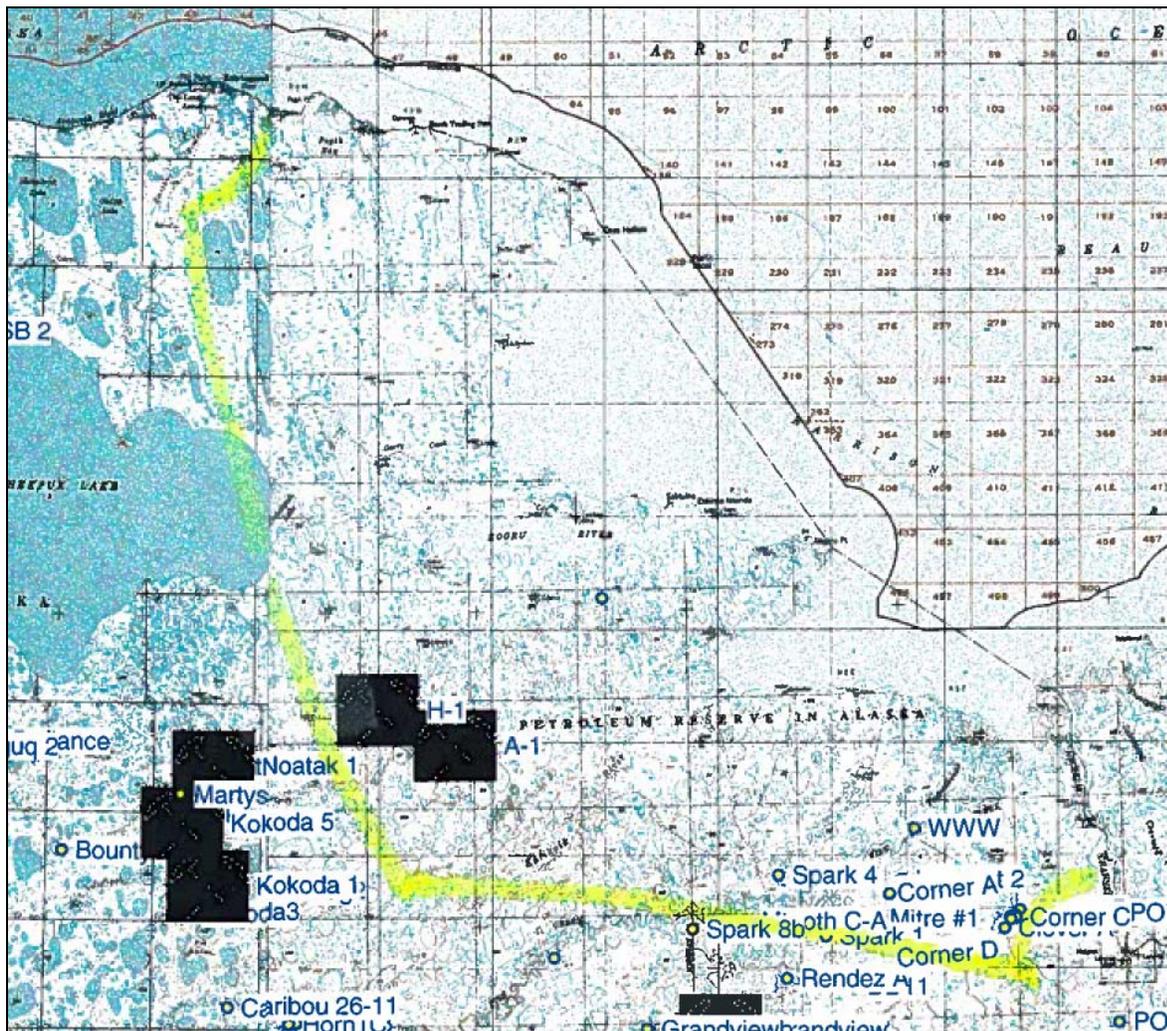
The proposed action would authorize two studies of polar bears. The first project involves ground-truthing the current digital polar bear denning habitat map by using a helicopter to fly transects across the NPR-A and stopping to measure the elevation of various ground features along the transect. Bluffs, hills and banks that are greater than 1.3 meters in elevation have been deemed to catch enough snow to qualify as polar bear denning habitat. To verify the accuracy of the digital map, the helicopter will land at areas identified as at least 1.3 meters in elevation in order to obtain the actual measurement of the topographic feature. This project is scheduled from September 10 to September 24, 2010. The project will be staffed by one helicopter pilot and two research biologists. There will be no field camps. A total of 1700 kms of transects will be flown, with an estimated 510 landings to evaluate the ground features. The first set of transects will originate from Barrow. The second set of transects will originate from Nuiqsut (see general locational maps, below).

The second project is to document terrestrial habitat used by polar bears. The work will consist of two types of aerial surveys. Coastal surveys will be flown parallel to the coast, and inland surveys will be flown a short distance inland perpendicular to the coast. The project centers around visually identifying polar bears from the air, so few landings are needed. During the inland surveys, fat biopsies will be collected from the polar bears by shooting them with a hollow-tipped dart that will fall naturally off the bear and be retrieved from the helicopter using a pole with a magnetized end.

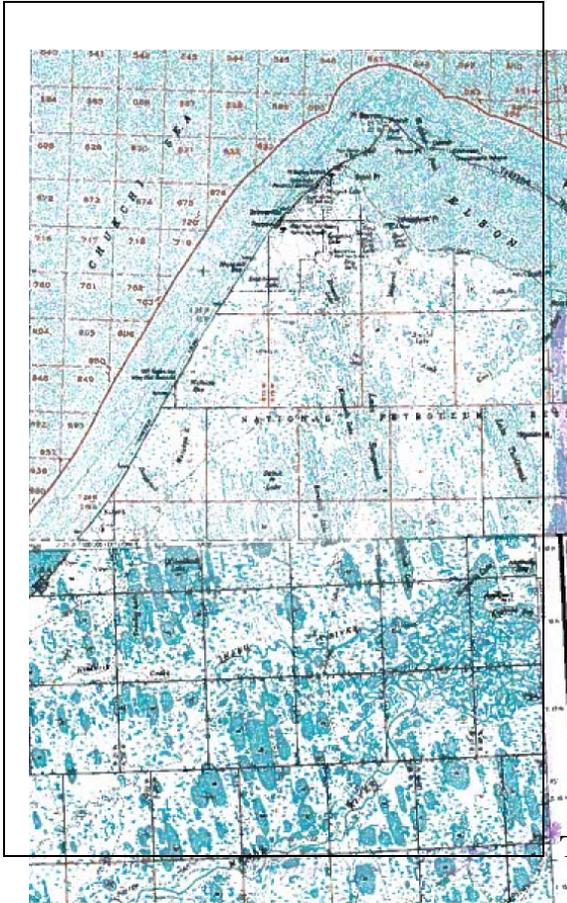
Approximately 10 landings for 10 darted bears are estimated to account for the need to land to retrieve the darts should it be necessary. The survey will occur from Peard Bay to the Canadian Border, and will encompass the entirety of the coastal area of the NPR-A (see general location for second project, below). The survey will occur from August 19 through October 23, 2010. The project will be staffed by one helicopter pilot and two research biologists for the coastal survey, and one pilot and three biologists for the inland surveys. There will be no field camps.

For both projects, the applicant has requested to store 12 barrels of aviation fuel at the Point Lonely DEW Line Site in the NPR-A.

General Location of Transects for First Project

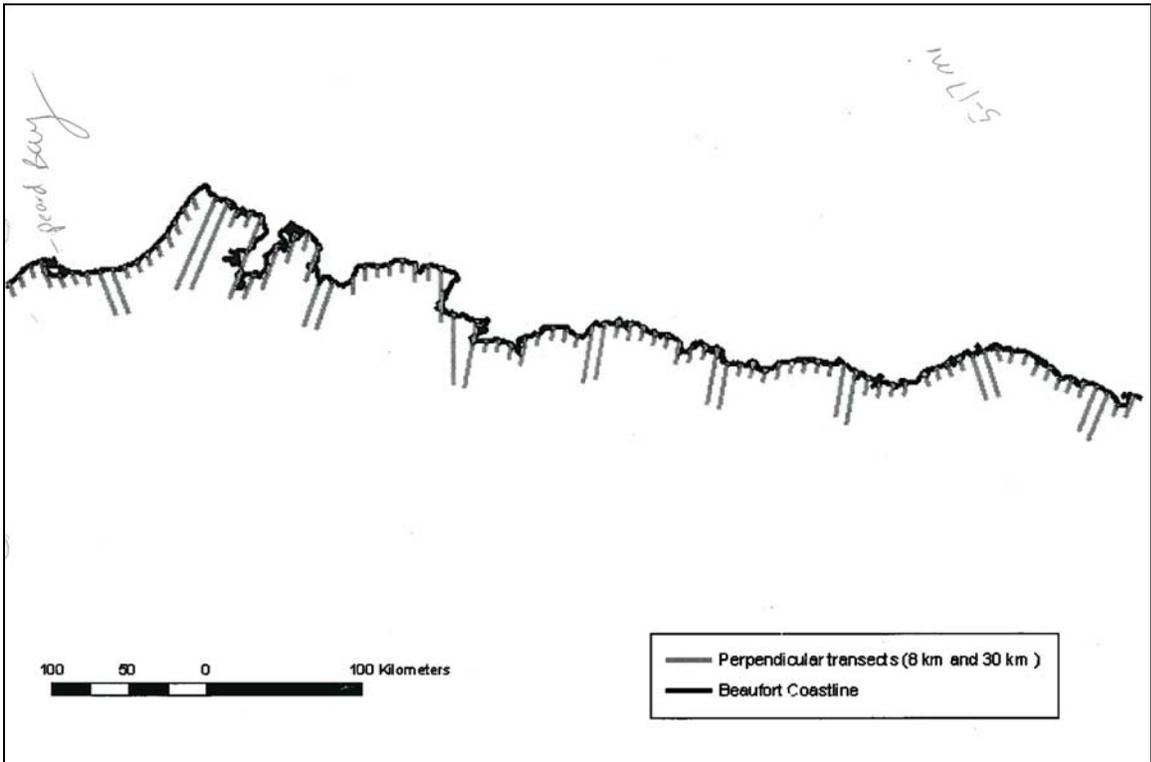


Transects originating from Nuiqsut.



Transects originating from Barrow

General Location of Transects for Second Project



Part I: Plan Conformance Review

The proposed action is subject to the following planning document: Northeast National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska Supplemental Integrated Activity Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (IAP/EIS) dated July 2008, and Northwest National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska IAP/EIS dated 1/22/2004. The proposed action is not inconsistent with the purposes of the Naval Petroleum Reserves Production Act of 1976. The applicant will be provided with stipulations entitled "FF095714 USGS Simac Summer 2010 Stipulations."

Date August 4, 2010

//Donna L. Wixon
Natural Resource Specialist, Arctic Field Office

Part II: NEPA Review and Decision

Categorical Exclusion Review

This proposed action meets the criteria for a Categorical Exclusion in accordance with 516 DM 11.9, D.10,

This proposed action qualifies as a Categorical Exclusion 1.6 under 43 CFR 46.210 and 46.215

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

The proposed action has been reviewed to determine if any of the exceptions described in 43 CFR 46.210 and 46.215, apply.

The proposed action will not meet any of the extraordinary circumstances listed below.

Extraordinary Circumstances	Yes	No
2.1 Have significant impacts on public health or safety.		X
2.2 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
2.3 Have highly controversial environmental effects or involve unresolved conflicts concerning alternative uses of available resources [NEPA Section 102(2)(E)].		X
2.4 Have highly uncertain and potentially significant environmental effects or involve unique or unknown environmental risks.		X

2.5 Establish a precedent for future action or represent a decision in principle about future actions with potentially significant environmental effects.		X
2.6 Have a direct relationship to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant environmental effects.		X
2.7 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
2.8 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
2.9 Violate a Federal law, or a State, local, or tribal law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment.		X
2.10 Have a disproportionately high and adverse effect on low income or minority populations (Executive Order 12898).		X
2.11 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
2.12 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

Date August 4, 2010

/s/Donna L. Wixon
Natural Resource Specialist, Arctic Field Office