

Fortymile News

Eastern Interior Field Office, Bureau of Land Management

June 2009

BLM



Field Manager Lenore Heppler

Dear Reader,

It has been two years since we last sent out this newsletter. A project we started back then, the Eastern Interior Resource Management Plan, is ramping up this summer as we put the finishing touches on a draft plan that will be released for public comment next winter. Another 2007 project, the Jack Wade Dredge, also takes a major step forward in coming months as we work with local partners to complete an interpretive exhibit displaying pieces of the dredge. These projects progress as the BLM continues to convey land to the State and Doyon Ltd., shifting land ownership patterns in parts of the Fortymile. You'll find information about these topics and more in this newsletter. Please feel free to send any questions or concerns my way.

Lenore Heppler

Changing Land Status in the Fortymile Region

What It Might Mean for You

Where will you hunt this fall? Land ownership in the Fortymile/Eagle area is changing. In some cases, lands where you have hunted for years may be switching from public to private ownership. The BLM is in the process of conveying more than 1 million acres of land in the Fortymile/Eagle area to Doyon Ltd. under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA). When that occurs, the lands will convert to private property. Using these lands—including wood-cutting, hunting, fishing, or trapping on them—will then require permission from Doyon Ltd.

If conveyance of these lands will block the public's access to adjacent State or federal public lands, the BLM will reserve a transportation easement across the private land. Such easements, called "17(b) easements" after the section of ANCSA that describes them, are travel corridors the public can use to reach public lands without asking permission from Doyon Ltd. The BLM may also reserve 1-acre site easements for parking, temporary camping, and several other uses. Last summer the BLM held public meetings in Eagle, Chicken and Tok to obtain information on regional access needs.

The BLM conveys acreage to Doyon Ltd. and identifies ease-



ments as it processes each parcel of land. In some areas, the conveyance process has been slowed because of appeals to the BLM's easement decisions. Some appeals oppose specific easements reserved by the BLM, while other appeals assert that the BLM has not reserved enough easements. Until the appeals are resolved, the affected lands cannot be conveyed and the BLM continues to manage them.

At the same time as the BLM is conveying land to Doyon Ltd., the State of Alaska has also asked for priority conveyances in the Fortymile/Eagle area. Some of the State-selected land has also been selected by Doyon Ltd. Native corporation selections have priority over State selections, so the BLM cannot convey these lands to the State until Doyon Ltd.

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Alaska



BLM is working with restoration experts and volunteers to stabilize historic buildings on the Fortymile River

Embracing History at Steele Creek



The sturdy wooden braces tell the story. Without them the Steele Creek Roadhouse, one of only two two-story log roadhouses left in the state, would by now have collapsed into a jumble of logs. The roadhouse once anchored a bustling community where Steele Creek enters the main stem of the Fortymile National Wild, Scenic and Recreational River, about 6.5 river miles below the Taylor Highway bridge. The site, which dates to the late 1890s, served as a vital river and overland transporta-

tion link in the Fortymile River drainage for half a century until the construction of the Taylor Highway in the early 1950s.

Since that time, the site's buildings have fallen into disrepair. In 2002, with the roadhouse's decrepit condition ever more apparent, the BLM conducted a special study to assess the entire site and determine how its structures could be preserved. Experts in stabilizing historic structures looked at all four remaining buildings at the site: the Steele Creek

roadhouse, which is on the National Register of Historic Places, and three smaller, single-room log cabins.

The following year work crews began to implement a host of stabilization measures outlined in the condition assessment report. They removed trees and other vegetation next to all of the buildings, waterproofed the tin roofs, and,

most importantly, erected a series of internal and external braces to prevent the collapse of the two-story roadhouse. In 2006 and 2007 crews replaced the rotten lower logs in two of the single-room cabins and installed a new floor in one cabin. Workers also contoured the ground around one of the cabins to direct melt water away from it during spring breakups.

This summer the BLM has contracted with the U.S. Forest Service to replace rotten basal sill and wall logs of the roadhouse itself. The primary labor force for this summer's work will be volunteers with the Teacher Restoration Corps, a non-profit organization that specializes in reconstructing and rehabilitating historic structures. Last year a group of its volunteers, mostly teachers, helped stabilize a bunkhouse at the historic Jumbo Mine near Kennicott.

LAND STATUS

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relinquishes its selections or the Doyon Ltd. selections are rejected.

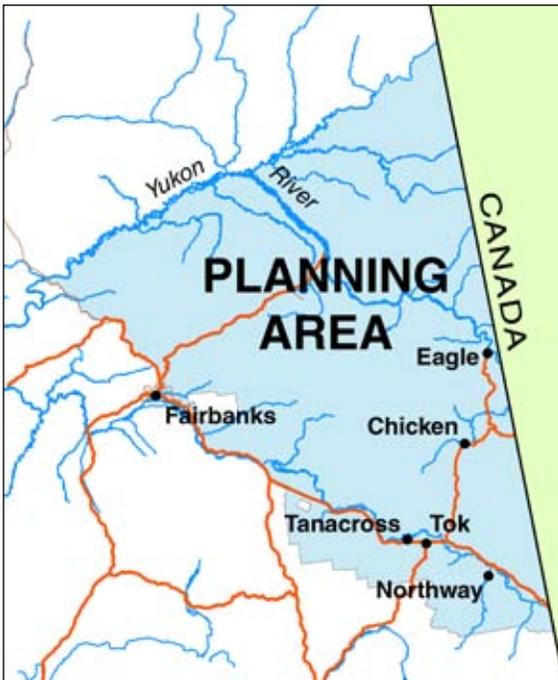
All this contributes to a rapidly changing pattern of land ownership. Some lands have been conveyed (and are now private property), some lands are being processed (and in some cases, appealed), and some lands have not yet been processed. The specific lands in each category change on a weekly basis. Because of this, any land status map produced by the BLM quickly becomes obsolete.

We understand that the public wants accurate and up-to-date information about the changing land status, especially with hunting season approaching. In August and September, the BLM will be visiting communities in the region to provide our most current information. At these meetings we'll not only present updates on the status of land conveyance to Doyon Ltd. and the State, but we'll explain where 17(b) easements are located and what types of use are allowed on these easements.

For meeting locations, watch for fliers in local post offices or check our Web site at www.blm.gov/ak.



Members of the North Star fire crew prepare to lower a new sill log under one of the Steele Creek cabins in 2007.



The Eastern Interior Planning Area includes 8 million acres of BLM-managed public lands in east-central Alaska.

Update on the Eastern Interior Resource Management Plan

The Eastern Interior Draft Resource Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement (RMP/EIS) is scheduled to be released for a 90-day public comment in January 2010. The plan will guide the BLM's management of public lands in the Eastern Interior planning area, which includes the Fortymile region.

The BLM is currently developing a range of alternatives to be analyzed in the Draft RMP/EIS. We expect that the Draft RMP/EIS will have four alternatives: the No Action Alternative and three action alternatives. The No

Action Alternative is the current management with no changes. The action alternatives will include a range of management strategies, the impacts of which will be analyzed in the EIS.

In the alternatives, the Draft RMP/EIS will discuss possible changes to how the BLM manages public lands, including:

- seasonal limitations on the use of off-highway vehicles in some areas
- disposal (sale or exchange) of isolated parcels of public land
- opening additional areas to mineral development

During the public comment period, the BLM will hold a series of public meetings, most of them at communities

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Parts Not Just Parts in Chicken

Jack Wade Dredge Exhibit Nears Completion

The BLM, the Fortymile Mining Association and the State Historic Preservation Office have been hard at work developing an exhibit of equipment salvaged from the Jack Wade gold dredge, dismantled in 2007 due to public safety concerns.

This summer, six pieces of the dredge (trommel, boiler, gears, draw works, gear reduction box, and levers) will be installed on exhibit bases next to the Fortymile Mining Association community building in Chicken. Nine exhibit panels, now undergoing final review, will use illustrations and historic photos to describe how the dredge worked and explain what each of the salvaged pieces did. The panels will also describe the history of mining in the Fortymile, including daily life in the dredge camps.

Freighted up the Fortymile River from Dawson during the winter of 1906-07, the Jack Wade Dredge was

one of the first bucket-line dredges in the Fortymile. It first operated on the Walker and South forks before the North American Mining Company bought it in 1935 and moved it to Wade Creek on sleds and gas-driven tractors.

The dredge was shut down in 1941, shortly after its steam engines were replaced by diesel engines. During the years that followed, the dredge's condition deteriorated until BLM engineers in 2000 concluded that it posed a threat to public safety.

The BLM originally intended to display the dredge pieces at the Walker Fork Campground, but the Fortymile Mining Association requested that



Pieces of the Jack Wade Dredge await construction of the interpretive exhibit in Chicken.

the exhibit be moved to Chicken to increase public visitation.

The BLM acknowledges the contributions of Dick Hammond, Mike Busby, and Sheldon and Janne Maier of the Fortymile Mining Association in making this important part of Fortymile history available to the public.

BLM Campground Hosts Return for Another Year

Each summer volunteer campground hosts help the BLM take care of its three campgrounds along the Taylor Highway. The hosts greet visitors, provide information to campers and travelers, and perform minor maintenance at the campgrounds. Returning

to the West Fork Campground this year is Dennis White of Grand Rapids, Michigan. After a one-year break, Bill Baker and Ann McCain will return as hosts of the Walker Fork Campground. The campground in Eagle operates without volunteer hosts.



Walker Fork hosts Bill Baker and Ann McCain.



West Fork host Dennis White.

EASTERN INTERIOR RMP

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within the planning area. One meeting will likely be held in Anchorage. If you have suggestions on meeting locations, please let us know. Additionally, the Draft RMP/EIS will be available for commenting on the BLM's Web site.

The public comment period for the Draft RMP/EIS will occur during the winter, when most seasonal residents of the Fortymile are absent from the region. Consequently, if you would like to be notified when the Draft is released, it is important to provide the BLM with a mailing address for your winter residence.

To add your name to the mailing list, contact the BLM at 1150 University Avenue, Fairbanks, AK 99709, by phone at 1-800-437-7021, or by e-mail at eirmp_comments@blm.gov.



New Faces and Familiar Faces at the BLM

Jason Post recently took over fisheries biologist duties for the Eastern Interior Field Office. Post previously ran the BLM's salmon-counting weir on the Tozitna River.

Tyler Cole, most recently of the U.S. Geological Survey in Fairbanks, will assume mining compliance duties in the Fortymile this summer.



Tyler Cole

Cory Roegner, who joined the Eastern Interior recreation staff last year after



Cory Roegner

working for the BLM in Glennallen, will also devote much of his time to the Fortymile. Kent Davis and Colter Franz will both be back at the Chicken Field Station this summer.

Tell Us on Tuesdays in Chicken

Lenore Heppler, BLM Field Manager for the Eastern Interior Field Office, will be in Chicken three Tuesdays this summer to meet with residents and visitors in the Fortymile area. Stop by to voice a concern, ask a question, or learn about how the BLM manages your public lands.

When: June 16, July 14, and Aug. 11

Where: BLM Chicken Field Station, one-half mile east of Chicken

Time: 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Or contact Lenore by phone or e-mail:
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www.blm.gov/ak

