

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Document Structure

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Delta River Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA) Plan and associated East Alaska Resource Management Plan (EARMP) Amendment. The EA will propose alternative management strategies for the Delta River SRMA and discloses the potential environmental impacts that would result from the alternatives. The EA is intended to facilitate decision making based on an understanding of the environmental consequences of the alternatives, and is used to determine whether the preparation of an environmental impact statement is required. Decisions made in this planning process will be incorporated into a subsequent revision of the 1983 Delta Wild and Scenic River (DWSR) Management Plan. The EA contains the following sections:

- **Introduction:** Includes information on the history of the project proposal, the purpose and need for the project, issues identified from public and internal scoping, and decisions that will be made for achieving the purpose and need.
- **Proposed Action and Alternatives:** Provides a description of current management, the BLM's proposed action for future management, as well as alternative methods for achieving the stated purpose.
- **Affected Environment:** Describes the existing natural environment and provides information regarding recreational use trends and visitor use within the Delta River SRMA.
- **Environmental Impacts:** Describes the environmental effects of implementing the proposed action and other alternatives; organized by issues identified during public and internal scoping.
- **Consultation and Coordination:** Provides a list of preparers and agencies consulted during the development of the EA.
- **Bibliography:** Contains references to documents used in the preparation of the EA.
- **Appendices:** Provides more detailed information to support the analysis presented in the EA.

1.2 Background

The Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA, P.L. 96-487, Sec. 603(47) December 2, 1980) established the upper stretch of the Delta River and all of the Tangle Lakes and Tangle River as a component of the Wild and Scenic Rivers System, to be administered by the Secretary of the Interior through the BLM. Subject to valid existing rights, ANILCA classified and designated approximately 18 miles of the Delta River as a "recreational" river and approximately 20 miles as a "wild" river pursuant to the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (WSRA, P.L. 90-542). ANILCA also designated, but did not classify, 24 miles of the Tangle Lakes and Tangle River as a component of this system. The classification of these additional 24 miles as "scenic" was done in the original 1983 DWSR Management Plan.

By classifying various segments of the DWSR as either "wild", "scenic", or "recreational", Congress mandated that these segments be administered according to the following objectives in Section 2 (b) of the WSRA:

- Wild:** "Those rivers or sections of rivers that are free of impoundments and generally inaccessible except by trail, with watersheds or shorelines essentially primitive and waters unpolluted. These represent vestiges of primitive America."
- Scenic:** "Those rivers or sections of rivers that are free of impoundments, with shorelines or watersheds still largely primitive and shorelines largely undeveloped, but accessible in places by roads."
- Recreational:** "Those rivers or sections of rivers that are readily accessible by road or railroad, that may have some development along their shorelines, and that may have undergone some impoundment or diversion in the past."

ANILCA Sec. 605 (d) directed the Secretary of the Interior to establish detailed boundaries, prepare a management plan, and present this information to Congress by December 2, 1983. In response to these

directives, the BLM developed the 1983 DWSR Management Plan, which established detailed boundaries and developed general management policies for the DWSR corridor.

Since 1983, the BLM has managed the DWSR corridor consistent with the WSRA, ANILCA, and the 1983 DWSR Management Plan. Management efforts have focused on monitoring use levels and visitor impacts within the river corridor and developing strategies to mitigate visitor impacts. Registration boards at boat launches, random river user surveys and river corridor overflights have been used to document visitation levels and user trends. The BLM patrols the river at least three times per year, picking up litter, burying or disposing of human waste, inventorying and monitoring campsite impacts, and making public contacts to provide information regarding low impact camping, rules and regulations. A detailed inventory of river surveys, campsite monitoring documentation, overflight history, and public comments has allowed the BLM to track visitor use trends and to identify impact issues that have developed within the river corridor since the completion of the original 1983 DWSR Management Plan.

1.3 Planning Area

The DWSR is one of a few road-accessible rivers in the state of Alaska, and less than a 6 hour drive from Fairbanks (pop. 83,000) and Anchorage (pop. 260,000). The DWSR corridor shares the same boundary as the Delta River SRMA. Access to the Delta River is along the Denali Highway, approximately 21 miles west of Paxson and the Richardson Highway, or 114 miles east from Cantwell and the Parks Highway. Lands within the Delta River SRMA are primarily unencumbered BLM lands, except for a few private inholdings and a portion of the river corridor that has been determined to be a navigable waterway, managed by the State of Alaska.

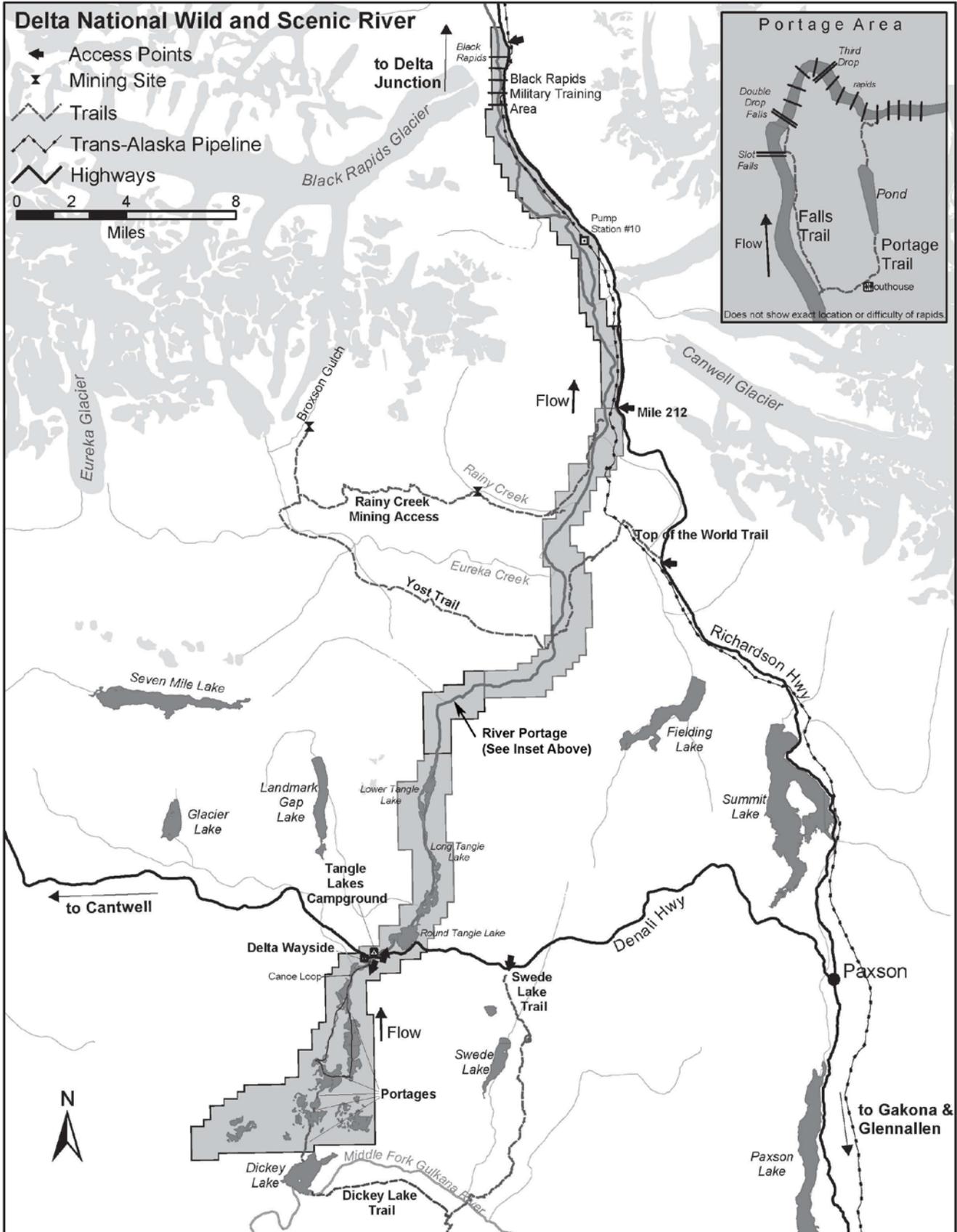
A navigability determination for the DWSR corridor was completed by the BLM in February 2010, and most of the DWSR corridor was determined to be nonnavigable, except for approximately 10 miles of the river located between the confluences of Garrett Creek and Phelan Creek. The lands underlying the navigable section within the river corridor fall under state jurisdiction, below the ordinary high water marks. The BLM acknowledges the State of Alaska's authority to manage between the ordinary high water marks within this section, which includes the water column and most unvegetated beaches and gravel bars. The BLM navigability determination is included in the administrative record located at the Glennallen Field Office.

Table 1: Acreage and Designated River Miles by WSR Classification

Acreage* and Designated River Miles	Acres	Designated River Miles
Total Acreage* and Total Designated River Miles	44617	62
Private Inholdings	30	N/A
Wild Classification	12352	20
Scenic Classification	23892	24
Recreational Classification	8343	18

* The State Of Alaska owns the submerged lands of the Delta River below the ordinary high water line where the river has been determined navigable.

Map 1: Delta Wild and Scenic River Vicinity Map



Great care has been taken to ensure that the information represented is as accurate and complete as possible at the time of compilation. However, the information displayed on this map is intended to be used for graphic representation only. Questions regarding information displayed should be directed to BLM GFO at (907) 822-3217.

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1.4 Purpose and Need for Action

On September 7, 2007, the Record of Decision was signed for the EARMP. The EARMP is a comprehensive land use plan that guides management activities on all BLM managed lands within the Glennallen Field Office boundaries. After the completion of the EARMP in 2007, the BLM determined that the 1983 DWSR Management Plan needed to be updated to reflect recent decisions that were made in the EARMP, and to address current and future issues in the river corridor that had developed since 1983.

The EARMP designated the DWSR corridor as a SRMA. This SRMA designation requires the completion of an implementation plan that describes specific recreation management actions within the planning area. Subsequent to the development of the EARMP, the BLM developed new recreation land use planning requirements (following the Benefits Based Management (BBM) process) that were not included in the EARMP. This new guidance requires specific recreation-related land use allocations and the development of recreation management zones (RMZ) for each SRMA. Although the EARMP did identify four RMZs within the Delta River SRMA, further review and study has shown that an additional RMZ and associated RMZ boundary changes may be necessary to reflect current recreational use patterns. Therefore, as part of developing the SRMA plan, the EARMP must be amended to make these decisions.

The original 1983 DWSR Management Plan developed management objectives for the river corridor and recognized that Sections 1(b) and 10(a) of the WSRM mandate that a wild and scenic river be administered to protect and enhance certain “outstandingly remarkable values” that were the basis for the original designation. However, the 1983 DWSR Management Plan did not clearly identify and define the outstandingly remarkable values (ORVs). As part of this planning process, ORVs will be clearly identified and a management strategy will be developed to enhance and protect the ORVs. This will help to ensure that current and future activities within the river corridor are compatible with, and do not negatively affect, the identified ORVs for the river corridor.

New decisions that will be made as part of the Delta River SRMA Plan and EARMP Amendment will be analyzed in this EA. These decisions will apply to recreation management and only for BLM managed lands within the DWSR corridor and Delta River SRMA. Recreational decisions made in this plan will be incorporated into a subsequent revision of the 1983 DWSR Management Plan. Decisions made in the EARMP for other resources within the planning area will not be changed and will also be incorporated into the revised DWSR Management Plan.

1.5 Decisions to be Made

The BLM will identify numerous decisions during the development of the Delta River SRMA Plan and EARMP Amendment in accordance with Land Use Planning (LUP) Guidance (BLM LUP H 1601-1, Appendix C), SRMA Planning Guidance (BLM LUP H 1601-1, Appendix C), and WSR Planning Guidance (BLM M-8351). Decisions to be made are described below:

For BLM lands within the Delta River SRMA, implementation decisions will:

- Develop management actions that will be the basis for the creation of Special Rules for the river corridor in accordance with 43 CFR 8351.2-1.
- Develop management decisions for off highway vehicle (OHV) use, including the closure of unauthorized OHV routes not designated in the EARMP, establish weight limitations for OHV use, and develop OHV trail management and maintenance prescriptions.
- Designate nonmotorized trails and establish associated management and maintenance prescriptions for nonmotorized trails.
- Develop management decisions for airplane landings and the potential for new airstrip construction.
- Develop management decisions for motorized boating use.
- Establish decisions to manage private and commercial use as directed in WSR planning guidance; including group size, length of stay, and user capacity.
- Establish limitations on chainsaw use, fireworks, caching of supplies and recreational shooting.
- Prescribe the level and scope of future facility developments, including potential property acquisition opportunities.

- Guide the development of interpretative and educational materials while focusing marketing efforts to specific recreational activities.
- Prescribe adaptive management actions to address issues associated with litter, human waste, fire rings, campsite impacts, and visitor use limitations.
- Prescribe monitoring actions to ensure that management objectives are being achieved.

For BLM lands within the Delta River SRMA, LUP Amendment decisions will:

- Apply recreation planning guidance as directed in the BLM LUP Handbook 1601-1, Appendix C.
- Identify RMZs and corresponding recreation niches within each RMZ.
- Develop recreation management objectives for the specific recreation opportunities to be produced and the outcomes to be attained (activities, experiences and benefits).
- Prescribe recreation setting character conditions required to produce recreation opportunities and facilitate the attainment of both recreation experiences and beneficial outcomes.
- Describe an activity planning framework that addresses recreation management, marketing, monitoring, and administrative support actions (e.g., visitor services, permits and fees, and appropriate use restrictions) necessary to achieve stated recreation management objectives and setting prescriptions.

In addition to these implementation and land use planning decisions, the BLM will identify Outstandingly Remarkable Values (ORV) and associated management objectives for the DWSR corridor. ORVs are not a land use allocation or an implementation decision, but rather a finding based on a study/inventory process to determine what values or characteristics make the river worthy of special designation and protection. Chapter 2.2.1 describes the identified ORVs and associated management objectives.

1.6 Scope of the Analysis and Planning Criteria

During the scoping process, the BLM identified the following planning criteria to guide the LUP Amendment:

1. The plan amendment will be consistent with the standards and guidance set forth in the Federal Land Policy and Management Act, the National Environmental Policy Act, the Council on Environmental Quality's implementing regulations, the National Historic Preservation Act, the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, ANILCA, and other Federal laws, regulations, and policies as required;
2. the plan amendment will comply with Section 810 of ANILCA, as well as other subsistence and land use decisions;
3. the plan amendment will recognize valid existing rights;
4. the plan amendment will only affect the public lands managed by the BLM in the Delta River SRMA (as defined in the EARMP);
5. the BLM will work cooperatively with the State of Alaska and other Federal agencies, Native corporations, Tribes, and Municipal governments. Collectively, these entities have additional jurisdiction by law or special expertise;
6. public participation by interested groups and individuals will be encouraged throughout the planning process;
7. wildlife habitat management will be consistent with Federal and Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) objectives and mandates;
8. any OHV trail designations within the planning area will be completed in accordance with ANILCA Sections 810, 811, and 1110, Department of Interior regulations at 43 CFR 36.11 and 43 CFR 8342, and applicable state law;
9. the BLM will make all possible attempts to ensure that its management prescriptions and planning actions complement other plans and planning efforts in the area;
10. the BLM will, to the extent possible, use current scientific information, research, new technologies and the results of resource assessments, monitoring and coordination to determine appropriate management strategies that will enhance resource values;
11. the plan amendment and associated implementation plans prepared by the BLM will conform to the Bureau of Land Management H-1601-1 Land Use Planning Handbook: "Appendix C, Program-Specific and Resource-Specific Decision Guidance and Supplemental Program Guidance Manual for Recreation and Visitor Services"; and

12. the plan amendment will only address recreation management and will supersede only those sections of the existing EARMP that relate to management of the Delta River SRMA. The plan will conform to all other decisions made in the EARMP.

1.7 Land Use Plan Conformance

The EARMP and the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA) provide the overall long-term management direction for the Glennallen Field Office. FLPMA is the primary authority for the BLM's management of public lands. It provides overarching policy by which BLM public lands will be managed and establishes provisions for land use planning, land acquisition and disposition, administration, land use authorizations, designated management areas, and the repeal of certain laws. In particular, Sec. 202 (a) requires the Secretary of the Interior, with public involvement; to develop, maintain, and when appropriate, revise land use plans. Management actions identified in this EA are consistent with the goals and decisions identified in the EARMP:

EARMP Recreation Goal M-1: Manage recreation to maintain a diversity of recreational opportunities. (Approved RMP, page 34)

EARMP Recreation Allocation M-2: Delta Wild and Scenic River Corridor Area: Objectives are to maintain existing recreation opportunities with an emphasis on managing for a primitive experience in the portion of the WSR Corridor classified as "wild;" managing to protect VRM Class 1 viewshed; OHVs would be restricted to the two designated trails (Top of the World, Rainy Creek) from May 15 to October 16 or when there is less than an average of 12 inches of snow or 6 inches frost; snowmachine use will not be limited; recommend limitations on motorized use on the Tangle Lakes; no public use cabins will be considered; general visitor use and commercial use limits will be established in implementation-level planning; the Tangle Lakes Campground will be renovated; the river take-out at mile 212 on the Richardson Highway would have increased signage; acquisition of one of the area lodges may be considered. (Approved RMP, page 35)

EARMP Implementation Planning M-4: Implementation plans will be done for each SRMA. These plans will describe specific objectives for each area, based on the objectives outlined above as well as benefits-based analysis conducted for each area. Implementation plans will include travel management and describe specific trail limitations and designations. Implementation plans will include facility maintenance and construction plans, based on guidance described above. Implementation plans, where necessary and as described above, will determine general visitor use or commercial limits. These will be based on achievement of SRMA objectives. If necessary, assessment of visitor recreation experiences, tolerance for impacts, and benefits will be conducted through user surveys or benefits-based analysis. (Approved RMP, page 39)

EARMP Monitoring M-5: Monitoring of recreation resources will continue to occur throughout the planning area with emphasis placed on developed recreation sites and SRMAs. Monitoring will include regular patrols to check on signing, visitor use, recreation use-related impacts, and user conflicts. Monitoring on the Delta Wild and Scenic River will be described in the revised river management plan for the river. Monitoring will include litter, human waste, fire rings, camp encounters, campsite condition and trend, water quality, visitor use and commercial permits. (Approved RMP, pages 39-40)

1.8 Relationship to Laws, Regulations, Statutes, and other Policies

In addition to the EARMP and FLPMA, the BLM must follow other laws, regulations, and statutes as appropriate:

1.8.1 National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA)

The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 requires that the BLM analyze the environmental effects of activities it authorizes on the public lands to determine whether they will have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment, 42 U.S.C. §4332. Management direction for BLM NEPA compliance is found in the BLM Land Use Planning Handbook H-1601-1 and the BLM NEPA Handbook H-1790-1.

1.8.2 Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968 (WSRA)

The management of the DWSR corridor must be consistent with the WSRA. The WSRA created the Wild and Scenic Rivers System (WSRS) and established a framework that provides federal protection for certain free-flowing rivers, with the intent of preserving these rivers as free-flowing and managing their immediate environments in such a manner as to protect and enhance the outstandingly remarkable values that were the basis for their inclusion in the WSRS. The WSRA provides guidance for developing and implementing any proposed management actions within the river corridor. Interpretation and management direction of the WSRA for the BLM is provided through the Wild and Scenic Rivers—Policy and Program Direction for Identification, Evaluation, and Management Manual (1993, BLM M-8351).

1.8.3 Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act of 1980 (ANILCA)

ANILCA established the Delta River as a Conservation System Unit (CSU) and as a component of the Wild and Scenic Rivers System. ANILCA provides specific guidance for management issues that are unique to Alaska, including subsistence and special access considerations. The BLM is required by ANILCA, Title VIII, Section 810 to consider any potential impacts to subsistence activities, resources, or subsistence access from the proposed action and alternatives. These impacts are discussed in an ANILCA Section 810 Evaluation Report (Appendix 8.2). In addition, Title XI of ANILCA outlines detailed procedural requirements to authorize new transportation and utility systems within CSUs, and provides special access considerations for traditional activities and access to inholdings.

Specific procedural requirements must be followed to close or restrict access to subsistence resources (ANILCA Section 816), or to restrict access for traditional activities within CSUs. Closure procedures for access provisions under Title XI have been codified in 43 CFR 36.11(h). These closure procedures allow the federal land manager to restrict access in a CSU if the agency determines that such uses would be detrimental to the resource values of the area.

1.9 Public Involvement

A Notice of Intent to initiate the planning process was published in the *Federal Register* on April 10, 2008. This marked the beginning of the scoping process for the planning effort. As part of scoping, the BLM identified preliminary issues and planning criteria that were published in the *Federal Register* Notice of Intent. A letter and scoping bulletin was sent to more than 1,300 parties on the Glennallen Field Office contact list, comprised of individuals, local and national organizations, Native tribes, villages, and corporations, and state and federal agencies who had expressed interest in the Delta River planning process or BLM Alaska planning efforts. The scoping bulletin was also posted on the BLM website and publicized through local venues including the Copper River Record, Delta Wind, and the statewide “What’s Up” list serve. Public service announcements aired over KCHU, KDHS and KCAM.

Scoping comments were accepted for 60 days, beginning July 15, 2008 and ending on September 15, 2008. A total of twenty comments were received during the public scoping comment period. After a detailed analysis of these comments, a scoping report and comments table were prepared and were made available on the Delta River planning website. These documents may be viewed on the internet at: http://www.blm.gov/pgdata/content/ak/en/prog/planning/east_alaska_plan/East_AK_Delta_River_EA_Amend.html

After analysis of the scoping comments, management alternatives were developed and effects were analyzed in a Draft EA. The Draft EA was then released for public comment from March 23-May 6, 2010. Letters detailing the availability of the Draft EA were sent to more than 1,300 parties on the Glennallen Field Office contact list, and were posted on the BLM website and publicized through local venues including the Copper River Record, Delta Wind, Anchorage Daily News, Fairbanks News Miner, and the statewide “What’s Up” list serve. Public service announcements aired over KCHU, KDHS and KCAM. A total of 68 comments were received on the Draft EA; these comments and associated BLM responses are included as Appendix 8.4 of the Final EA.

In addition to the scoping and public comment period associated with the Draft EA and NEPA requirements, the BLM also conducted focus group meetings and administered a recreational river survey that were used as preplanning tools during the preparation of the formal NEPA planning process.

1.9.1 Benefits Based Management (BBM) Planning

Traditional approaches to recreation planning have focused on developing and maintaining recreational opportunities and facilities by providing programs, services, and implementing use restrictions. Users gain certain benefits or outcomes from these experiences, but are disconnected from the planning process. BBM is a new approach that identifies the primary activities, experiences, and benefits through an interactive process with focus groups and stakeholders who have a vested interest in the area. After these values are identified, specific setting prescriptions and implementation actions are prescribed for Recreation Management Zones (RMZ) to enhance or maintain the identified outcomes (activities, experiences, and benefits). Additional information on the BBM process can be found in Appendix 8.1.

The Glennallen Field Office conducted a series of focus group meetings in February 2007 during the BBM planning process. Discussion at these meetings focused on how people used the area, their primary purpose for using the area, and their opinions on desired future conditions and management options for the area. Stakeholders included representatives from local subsistence user and hunting groups, motorized access groups, environmental and conservation groups, Native tribes and corporations, and other state and federal agencies. Seven meetings were held and a total of 78 people attended. Comments obtained from these meetings, including desired activities, experience, benefits, setting prescriptions, and implementation actions, are included in the administrative record located at the Glennallen Field Office.

1.9.2 Delta River Recreation User Survey

To prepare for the revision of the river management plan, a river recreation survey was developed and administered by Research Confluence and Consulting of Anchorage, Alaska in 2005 as a method of obtaining river users' opinions on a variety of issues, management actions, and preferences within the DWSR corridor. The overall study objectives were to describe the current users on the Delta River, examine the impacts they experience on their trips and their tolerances for those impacts, and to assess the public acceptability of management actions that might be used to address impacts or conflict problems. A summary of results from the 2005 Delta River Recreation Survey is included in the administrative record located at the Glennallen Field Office.

1.10 Resources and Issues for Analysis

Resources and issues for analysis have been identified that will help guide the formation of alternatives for the NEPA process. Resources and issues will be analyzed if they are potentially significant and if they lead to a basis for a reasoned choice among the alternatives. Resources and issues were identified based on an evaluation of the 1983 DWSR Management Plan, 2005 Delta River Recreation User Survey, BBM planning meetings conducted in February 2007, internal BLM concerns, and comments received during the scoping process.

As a result of internal and external scoping, the following resources and issues were identified as requiring further analysis: Climate Change, Cultural Resources, Fisheries, Lands and Realty, Natural Quiet and Natural Sounds, Recreation Resources, Scenic Resources, Soil Resources, Subsistence, Travel Management, Vegetation, Water Quality, Wilderness Characteristics, and Wildlife.

1.9.1 Climate Change

- Effects of recreation management decisions to contributing causes of climate change.

1.9.2 Cultural Resources

- Effects to cultural resources from recreational facility development and campsite management decisions.
- Effects to cultural resources from OHV management decisions.
- Effects to cultural resources from identifying ORVs.

1.9.3 Fisheries

- Effects to fisheries habitat from OHV trails and OHV river crossings.
- Effects to fisheries habitat from motorized boating decisions.
- Effects to fisheries resources from identifying ORVs.

1.9.4 Lands and Realty

- Effects of recreation decisions on access to State lands, private land parcels, and mining operations that are located adjacent to the DWSR corridor.
- Effects of potential property acquisition by BLM in the DWSR corridor.

1.9.5 Natural Quiet and Natural Sounds

- Effects of recreation decisions on natural quiet and natural sounds present within the DWSR corridor.

1.9.6 Recreation Resources: Facilities and Visitor Management

- Effects of proposed recreational facility developments on the natural and primitive character of the DWSR.
- Effects of the proposed user capacity management decisions on a user's ability to have positive recreational experiences within the DWSR corridor.
- Effects of proposed recreation management decisions regarding litter, human waste, fire rings, and educational/interpretational information on a user's ability to have positive recreational experiences within the DWSR corridor.
- Effects of proposed BBM decisions on preserving a diversity of recreational experiences within the DWSR corridor.
- Effects to recreation resources from identifying ORVs.

1.9.7 Scenic Resources

- Effects of proposed recreational facility developments on scenic resources.
- Effects of travel management decisions on scenic resources.
- Effects to scenic resources from identifying ORVs.

1.9.8 Soil Resources

- Effects of OHV management decisions on soil resources.
- Effects of campsite management decisions on soil resources.

1.9.9 Subsistence

- Effects of the proposed recreation management decisions to subsistence use of fish and wildlife in the DWSR corridor.

1.9.10 Travel Management

- Effects of travel management decisions on the natural and primitive character of the DWSR corridor and on preserving a diversity of recreational experiences.

1.9.11 Vegetation

- Effects of OHV management decisions on vegetative resources.
- Effects of campsite management decisions on vegetative resources.
- Effects of decisions regarding the use of firewood gathering on vegetative resources.

1.9.12 Water Quality

- Effects to water quality from potential contaminants as a result of motorized boating and human waste disposal decisions.
- Effects to water quality from potential sedimentation sources including designated campsites, OHV trails and OHV river crossings.

1.9.13 Wilderness Characteristics

- Effects of management actions on wilderness characteristics, including naturalness, solitude, and primitive and unconfined recreational opportunities that are found within the DWSR corridor.

1.9.14 Wildlife

- Effects of OHV travel management decisions to moose and caribou.
- Effects of motorized boating and airplane landing decisions to land birds and waterfowl.
- Effects of recreation decisions on human and bear interactions.
- Effects to wildlife resources from identifying ORVs.