

Eastern Interior RMP News

Eastern Interior Field Office, Bureau of Land Management

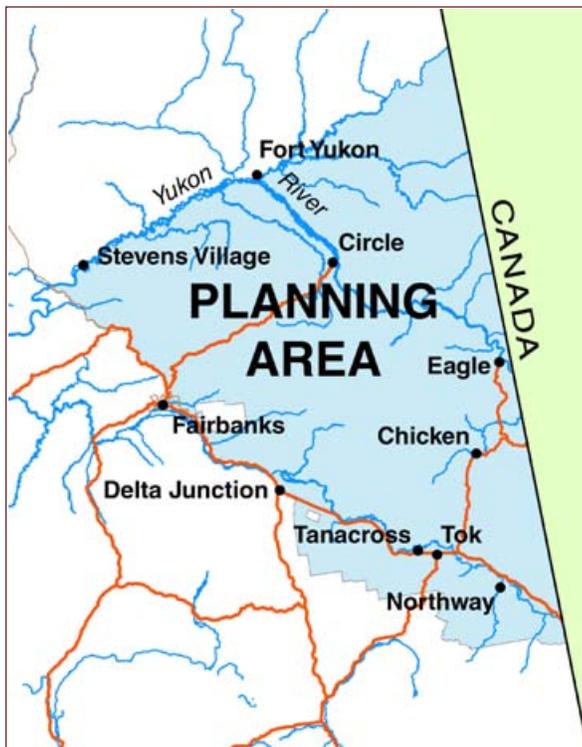
February 2012

On February 24 the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) announced the release of its Draft Eastern Interior Resource Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement. The plan, known as the Eastern Interior RMP, is available for a 150-day public comment period that ends on July 23. As part of this public comment period, the BLM will be holding public meetings and hearings. We will soon announce the dates and locations of these meetings. In the meantime, you may submit written comments by mail or on our website (see back page for details).

When completed and approved, the Eastern Interior RMP will guide the next 15 to 20 years of BLM management for 6.7 million acres of public land. This land lies within a 30-million-acre planning area that includes the White Mountains National Recreation Area, the Steese National Conservation Area, and the Fortymile area. BLM-managed public lands in the upper Black River and scattered parcels along the highway system will be covered by a BLM land use plan for the first time.

Resource management plans provide the BLM with comprehensive, long-term direction concerning the use and management of resources on BLM-managed public lands. As you read through the Draft Eastern Interior RMP, you will find it establishes goals and objectives for managing resources, and it outlines the measures needed to achieve those goals and objectives. It also identifies lands available for certain uses, along with any restrictions on those uses, and identifies lands closed to certain uses.

I strongly believe that the success of the plan depends on public involvement. This newsletter answers common questions about what's in the Draft Eastern Interior RMP, and it explains how you can obtain a copy of the draft plan, provide comments, participate in public meetings, and *be involved*. If you have additional questions, do not hesitate to contact us. Thanks again for your participation in the planning process.



Lenore Heppler
Field Manager



Questions & Answers

Which Planning Issues Does the Draft RMP/EIS Address?

During the scoping process, public input helped the BLM identify the following issues, which have been addressed in the Draft RMP/EIS:

- Climate change
- Fisheries
- Minerals
- Recreation and Visitor Services
- Rights-of-way
- Subsistence
- Travel Management
- Water Quality
- Wilderness Characteristics
- Wildlife

Why Was the Planning Area Split into Subunits?

Subunits allow a more focused look at issues that may not affect the entire planning area. The Eastern Interior

Planning Area is divided into four subunits, which are described below. The planning process will ultimately result in four Records of Decision, one for each subunit.

Which Alternatives Does the Draft RMP/EIS Present?

The Draft RMP/EIS presents four alternatives:

Alternative A, the No Action Alternative, continues present management practices and present levels of resource use.

Alternative B emphasizes protection of resource values. Production of minerals and services would be more constrained than in Alternatives C or D. Uses would be excluded in many areas to protect sensitive resources. Four new Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs)

would be designated, and five eligible but currently undesignated river segments would be recommended suitable for designation under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. Off-highway vehicle (OHV) travel in some areas would be subject to seasonal closures and/or limited to existing or designated trails.

Alternative C, the BLM's preferred alternative, proposes a balanced level of protection, use, and enhancement of resources and services. It represents the mix and variety of actions that the BLM believes best resolves the issues and management concerns, in consideration of all resource values and programs. Production of minerals and services would be less constrained than in Alternative B but more constrained than in Alternative D. Three ACECs would be designated, and no additional river segments would be recommended suitable

Subunits of the Eastern Interior Planning Area

(BLM-Managed Acreage in Parentheses)

Steese Subunit (1.3 million acres) BLM-managed lands include the Steese National Conservation Area, Birch Creek Wild and Scenic River, federal mining claims along the Steese Highway, and scattered townships around the village of Circle.

White Mountains Subunit (1 million acres) consists of the BLM-managed White Mountains National Recreation Area, Beaver Creek Wild and Scenic River, and mining claims around Livengood.



Upper Black River Subunit (2.4 million acres) includes a large, mostly contiguous block of BLM-managed land bordered by Yukon Flats National Wildlife Refuge, Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve, and state and Native corporation lands.

Fortymile Subunit (2.1 million acres) extends from the Canadian border east to the Alaska and Elliott highways and from the Upper Black River Subunit south to the Alaska Range and Tetlin National Wildlife Refuge. Most of this subunit consists of state land. BLM-managed lands include the Fortymile Wild and Scenic River, relatively large blocks of land within the Fortymile watershed, and scattered parcels along the Alaska Highway.



The Fortymile Caribou Herd makes extensive use of the Steese National Conservation Area and other parts of the Steese and Fortymile subunits.

for designation under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. Less of the planning area would fall under restrictive OHV designations than in Alternative B, but OHV travel in those areas would still be subject to seasonal closures and/or limited to existing or designated trails.

Alternative D emphasizes management to facilitate resource development. Constraints to protect resources would be implemented, but would be less restrictive than under Alternative C. Three ACECs would be designated, but they would be smaller and subject to fewer restrictions than in other alternatives. No additional river segments would be recommended suitable for designation under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. Travel and trail restrictions would be less restrictive than in Alternatives B and C.

How Would the Alternatives Affect Subsistence?

Section 810 of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) requires the BLM to

evaluate the effects of proposed actions in the Draft RMP/EIS on subsistence activities in the planning area, and to hold public hearings if it finds that subsistence use may be significantly restricted. The BLM's evaluation of the Draft RMP/EIS found that Alternative D, in combination with cumulative impacts, may significantly restrict subsistence use in the Fortymile and Steese subunits.

In a cumulative impacts analysis, the BLM looks at all past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future activities on all lands in or near the planning area. The cumulative impact analysis for the Draft Eastern Interior RMP/EIS determined that activities in parts of the planning area may negatively affect the Fortymile Caribou Herd, a primary subsistence resource for many communities in Interior Alaska. Because of this finding, the BLM will hold Section 810 hearings as part of its public meetings in several communities in the planning area. Further details will be made available when the meeting schedule is released.

Planning Timeline

This timeline shows the entire planning process. The shaded boxes indicate steps that have already been completed.



Contact Us

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What's Next?

The next major step in the planning processing is collecting public comments on the Draft RMP/EIS during the 150-day public comment period. Then, BLM staff will review and respond to the comments and revise the RMP/EIS where necessary. The responses to comments will be included in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS when it is published.

How Can I Get a Copy of the Draft RMP/EIS?

The easiest way to access the document is on the website listed at the bottom of this page. You can download a copy of the plan or review an interactive version. We are minimiz-

ing the use of paper and CD copies to reduce reproduction and mailing costs, but if you request the document in one of these formats, we will do our best to accommodate your needs. Paper or CD copies may be requested by email (EasternInterior@blm.gov); by phone at 907-474-2340 or 1-800-437-7021 (within Alaska); or in person from the Fairbanks District Office at the above address or from the Alaska State Office, Public Information Center, Bureau of Land Management, 222 West 7th Avenue, Anchorage, Alaska 99513.

How Can I Provide Comments on the Draft RMP/EIS?

You may submit written comments using any of the following three methods:

In person at one of the public meetings to be held during the public comment period in communities within the planning area. We will announce the meeting dates, times, and specific locations through news releases and on the Eastern Interior RMP website, available from the web address listed below.

By mail to the BLM Eastern Interior Field Office, Attention – Eastern Interior Draft RMP/EIS, Bureau of Land Management, 1150 University Avenue, Fairbanks, Alaska 99709.

Online by accessing the BLM's ePlanning system. Visit the web address listed below to access an interactive version of the document. The website includes detailed instructions on how to submit comments.

Comments must be received by July 23, 2012 to be considered.