

Eastern Interior RMP News

Eastern Interior Field Office, Bureau of Land Management

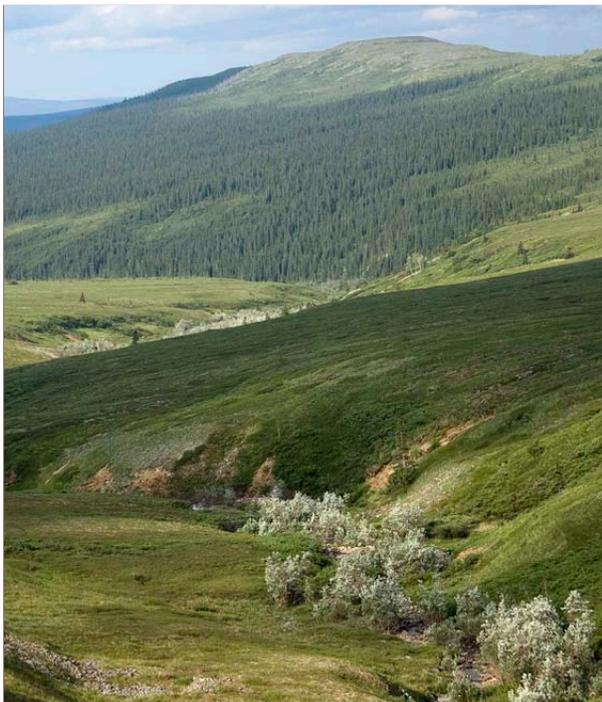
January 2013

BLM

Since we released the Draft Eastern Interior Resource Management Plan/ Environmental Impact Statement (RMP/EIS) in March, we've received your public comments at meetings in 12 communities and heard from many of you via email or the RMP/EIS website. You've given us lots of useful information and raised important questions for the BLM to consider.

In fact a comment received on the Draft RMP/EIS triggered our decision, announced in the *Federal Register* on January 11, 2013, to issue a Supplement to the Draft RMP/EIS to address the issue of leasing of hardrock minerals in the White Mountains National Recreation Area.

Issuing the Supplement months after releasing the Draft RMP/EIS certainly poses some challenges for keeping the RMP on track. However, we have concluded that addressing the hardrock mineral leasing now is better than risking even longer delays later in the planning process. To ensure that the public has sufficient time to comment on the information presented in the Supplement, we have extended the



The Little Champion Creek drainage lies within one of the areas considered for hardrock mineral leasing in the White Mountains National Recreation Area.

public comment period for the Draft RMP/EIS and are scheduling additional public meetings. More information on the timing of and need for the Supplement, as well as what leasing of hardrock minerals could entail, may be found on page 2 and 3 of this newsletter.

We appreciate the input received to date and hope to receive more comments on both the Draft RMP/EIS and the Supplement. Your input is important.

Lenore Heppler
Field Manager

Alaska



Questions & Answers

How does the Supplement change the Draft RMP/EIS?

The Supplement to the Draft Resource Management Plan /Environmental Impact Statement (RMP/EIS) amends Alternative D to recommend opening 160,000 acres (16 percent) of the lands in the White Mountains National Recreation Area (WMNRA) to possible exploration and leasing of hardrock minerals, including placer gold and rare earth

elements. The potential leasing areas are shown on the map below.

Why is the BLM issuing this supplement now?

The Draft RMP/EIS addressed hardrock mineral leasing in the WMNRA as an alternative considered but not analyzed in detail. According to the BLM's initial interpretation of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) and

leasing regulations, only holders of valid mining claims could qualify for a lease—and no more such claims are located in the WMNRA. However, comments we received in response to the Draft RMP/EIS raised issues that led the BLM to do further legal research on the issue. The BLM eventually concluded that our initial interpretation was incorrect. Additionally, the BLM decided that the Supplement was needed to analyze a full range of alternatives and to obtain

public comment on hardrock mineral leasing in the WMNRA.

What is the BLM's position on leasing?

Alternative D in the Draft RMP/EIS, which the Supplement amends to include hardrock mineral leasing in the WMNRA, is not the agency preferred alternative (Alternative C). The BLM will review and consider public comments before deciding whether or not to include hardrock leasing in the agency preferred alternative for the Proposed RMP/ Final EIS.

How could leasing occur?

ANILCA withdraws the WMNRA from the mining laws, but allows for the Secretary to



Under Alternative D, these areas on the southern edge of the White Mountains National Recreation Area would be opened to hardrock mineral leasing.

BLM Concludes First Round of Public Meetings on the Draft RMP/EIS

The BLM held public meetings in 12 communities between April 9 and June 1, 2012, to present the Draft RMP/EIS to the public and obtain public comments. Some meetings also included Section 810 subsistence hearings. We received comments regarding possible restrictions to subsistence uses, impacts to fish, wildlife, and water quality, restrictions on access by off-road vehicle, special designations such as Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, and areas that should be open or closed to mining.



issue leases for hardrock minerals if he or she finds that leasing would not have significant adverse effects on the administration of the recreation area. Section 1312 of ANILCA allows for leasing of hardrock minerals in the WMNRA under the regulations found in 43 CFR parts 3500 and 3580. If BLM included a decision allowing hardrock mineral leasing in the WMNRA in the Approved RMP and Record of Decision, the agency could issue exploration licenses and leases.

How will the Supplement affect subsistence?

The BLM completed a Section 810 Analysis on the Supplement which is included as an appendix to the Supplement. Through this analysis the BLM found that Alternative D, with the addition of hardrock mineral leasing, may significantly restrict subsistence use of the Fortymile caribou herd by communities in or near the planning area. Additionally, when considered with the cumulative case, Alternative D may result in signifi-

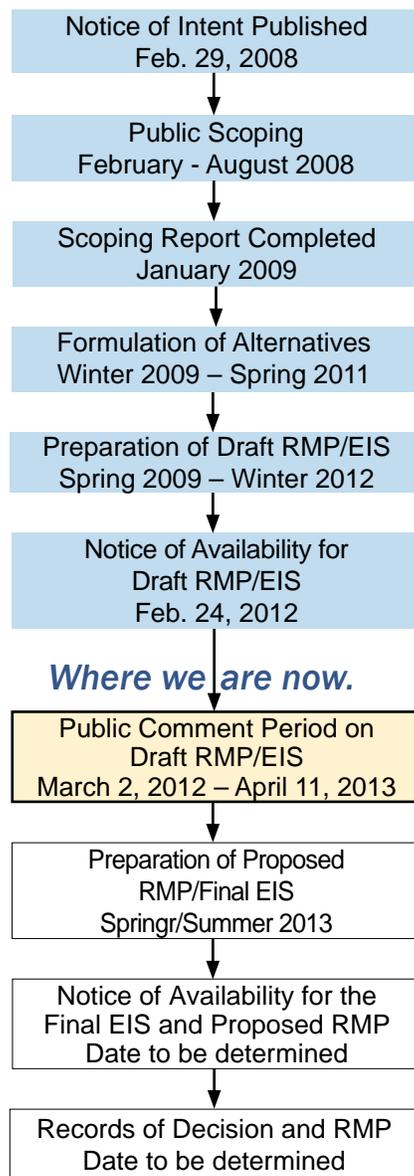
cant restrictions on subsistence use of Chinook salmon and Fortymile caribou in, adjacent to, and downstream from the planning area. The BLM will hold Section 810 hearings in the region in conjunction with the public meetings for the Supplement.

How will the BLM ensure that the public has a chance to comment on the Supplement?

The BLM is taking several steps to ensure that the public has an adequate opportunity to provide public comments on the Supplement. First, the public comment period has been extended to April 11, 2013. Second, the BLM will hold additional public meetings and Section 810 hearings. We will announce the schedule for these meetings and hearings soon. As before, we are accepting public comments on the Supplement, or any other part of the Draft RMP/EIS, through public meetings, by email or regular mail, and through the RMP/EIS website. Details are listed on the back page.

Planning Timeline

This timeline shows the entire planning process. Blue boxes indicate already completed steps.



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What's Next?

The BLM will continue to collect public comments on the Draft RMP/EIS and Supplement during the remainder of the 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 and Supplement?

The easiest way to view the document is on the BLM's website: www.blm.gov/ak. You can download a copy of the plan or review an interactive version. We are minimizing 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 Ave., Anchorage, Alaska 99513.

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

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

- 1** 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 at www.blm.gov/ak.
- 2** By mail to the BLM Eastern Interior Field Office, Attention: Eastern Interior Draft RMP/EIS, Bureau of Land Management, 1150 University Ave., Fairbanks, Alaska 99709.
- 3** Online by accessing the interactive document on BLM's Eastern Interior RMP website at www.blm.gov/ak. The website includes detailed instructions on how to submit comments.

Comments must be received by April 11, 2013 to be considered.