

Central Yukon Resource Management Plan Public Scoping Meeting Notes Lake Minchumina * November 18, 2013



Planning Team

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Questions and Comments during the Presentation

Fire Management

BLM: How close did the fire come? It came within about a mile of Carol's place on the other side of the lake. There had a fire line, between North Bay and Muddy River. You can't really tell now where the fires were, due to the snow cover. It's been closer in other years. There's a map (on the wall) of the fire lines.

BLM: Some of you have been out here long enough to have seen if there has been habitat improvement after the fire, or has it stayed sterile for a while or improved. The habitat definitely changes, but it depends on how hot and how fast the fire moved. It depends if it destroys the soil, the organic material.

BLM: You have lichen caribou habitat and willows and trees that have burned? It's mostly spruce. It often doesn't come back as spruce, but as deciduous trees. The burns are a source of firewood. From a 1991 fire, we are still getting firewood from small standing black spruce for a cook stove.

Land Ownership and Land Use

BLM: BLM is trying to get a better idea of which trails are being used, and is interested in any other input on the trails. In Glennallen, there is a trail that is eroding and people are upset about that. Sometimes the map says there is a trail, but there is no actual trail or it's in a different location than shown on the map. That trail that goes north, I'm not sure that it's there. Are they old mail trails? Some maybe haven't been used for

100 years. I think it's nice not being connected to a trail system. We are connected to a cat trail from Nenana in 1989. It's called the Bryce Cat Trail. No one maintains it. Some snowmachiners tried to follow it once and it took them five days to get here and they ran out of gas. We like that kind of reputation that it's hard to get here and there are no facilities to gas up and go back by snowmachine.

If you wanted to put on snowshoes and go with the dogs in some direction, does it matter whose property we are on? Someday are we going to have a NO TRESSPASSING sign and a barbed wire fence saying we can't go this way? Are we really going to be changing so much now that we will have to know exactly where everyone's boundaries are? I can't conceive that we could know where everyone's boundaries are. *BLM explained the differences between casual and commercial use on BLM lands.*

It's different on Native Corporation land. It is private land and they vary on access regulations. Around Cantwell you have to get a berry picking permit.

It's good that BLM got an application for commercial berry picking but denied it because there were no road accessible places that BLM was willing to identify for commercial use.

If the State decides to build a road across BLM land, how does the BLM decide whether or not to allow it? *BLM: We partner with the other agencies that could be affected by the road. Even though the state doesn't have the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process, the state has its own process. But if there is a federal agency involved, as a land manager or such as the Corp of Engineers for the wetlands permit, then the whole project gets exposed to the NEPA process, which usually involves an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The Corps is frequently the lead agency, as they are responsible for selecting the Least Environmentally Damaging Practicable Alternative. Other agencies consider not just the environmental question, but also other aspects things such as economics that might factor into it. All of the other agencies might be in agreement what the best route might be, but if the Corps is not in agreement, they cannot issue permit for it. It's usually best to let them be the lead, and try to coordinate between the agencies. Each agency has to issue the right-of-way for the part that crosses their lands.*

It's mostly Mental Health Trust Land in this area. We don't know what it's going to end up being. The only reason they [the State] have it is to make money off of it...to sell it down the road. *BLM: One of the things that could happen in the future is land exchanges. They can exchange land in and out of conservation system units, but there are not a lot of new lands being added to conservation system units.*

We have about 680 acres in this area [near Lake Minchumina] that was BLM land, and then under FAA control, and then had to go through a process to go back to BLM. Outside of that, we are surrounded by state land selections to Mental Health Trust. For the future interest of the development of this community, what you see is a small example of this: this building is an example of federal land conveyed to the community (2/3 acre). As a community we would like to have a say in identifying local wood lot areas, berry picking areas, traditional things that have always been. Are there opportunities for conveyance from BLM directly to a community? *BLM: Around a community, the goal of a land use plan is frequently to convey those lands to the state, so they can be transferred to the borough and used for house lots and such. There is no homesteading. The land cannot go to a person, but to a borough or a community.*

If it goes to the State, it would immediately go under the control of the Mental Health Trust, which can be cumbersome to deal with.

What is the research UAF conducts and who owns the land?

Recreation Management

BLM: Tourists comes to Lake Minchumina to do what? Get away. There is rock skipping contest. There used to be an old Alaska Fire Service compound out here. There are some trails for the hardy, for people that do their own trail breaking and GPS points. Ray Jr. knows how to get out here, but not too many people do. It's not easy. We ran a lodge, but it's kind of not doing anything right now. There is some fly-in tourism.

If BLM gave permits for temporary camps (to assist with trap lines) how easy would it be to get railroaded by mining companies and transportation/roads?

Would [public comments about mining or roads that conflict with trapping interests] do any good?

Can you have more than one [trapping license]? *BLM: Yes. This is a new thing then? BLM: Yes. When I looked into it a few years ago, it was very difficult to get a permit, and it required an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). BLM: It still requires an Environmental Assessment, not an EIS. It is possible to get a permit. Trappers and hunting guides get permits for base camps.*

There are no hot springs in this area that would be suitable for commercial leases (special use lease).

Planning Areas and Planning Processes

You're currently initiating the Central Yukon Resource Management Plan. Is that area, maybe the south central, also in the process of initiating a plan? *BLM: Yes, the Bering Sea Western Interior Plan.*

Is the plan that you are working on now, do you have a feel that it will be more conservation oriented or more development oriented than the prior plan? Or is there no feel for it yet? *BLM: That's a good question. I think a lot of it in the next 20 years may just stay the same, in terms of what actually happens on the ground. The plan can say a lot of things, but if there are no proposals for development, the land will likely be managed in a manner similar to how it has been. But there have been several roads to resources applications. There will be a lot of interest from the state and different industries to make sure areas will stay open for future possibilities. I don't know how the BLM state director will handle those, but I would imagine that there would be large portions in some kind of conservation status because it is so remote. The Dalton Highway is a big question. You don't have to get far from the road before it feels like wilderness, but the purpose is for oil and gas development. The state is very interested in that. That area could be very different; the state manages differently than BLM in terms of allowable uses.*

When do you need the first round of comments? *BLM: Between now and January 17, 2014 for comments to part of the Scoping Report. You can comment any time, and we will try to use them. There are better times to comment- between now and January is the best to make sure we have all of the issues on the table.*

You said there is an [environmental] impact statement on this being done? *BLM: We'll be developing that after we get the range of alternatives.*

So that [EIS writing] hasn't even started? And that would take, what, a year or two? *BLM: Several years. Right now we are doing an analysis of the management situation and we are reviewing the existing plans. Is it working, in their opinion? Are there comments that are making them think that the situation and the plans need to change?*

Who's doing that [EIS writing]? *BLM: It's an interdisciplinary team of about 20 people that are consulting with peers at other agencies and academia: hydrologists, wildlife biologists, and others that are writing from their specialty perspective.*

Minerals Management

On your map you showed an area north and west of the lake that was closed to mining. Can we anticipate that it would be the same in the new plan? *BLM: We could likely anticipate that there will be at least one alternative that would consider leaving it like it is. But the state will be pressuring the BLM to open these areas. If the public would like these areas to remain closed, for whatever reasons, we need to hear that. As of now, you have no way to predict if it would be open or closed? BLM: No.*

Are you familiar with anyone pressuring to open the area [north and west of Lake Minchumina] to mining? *BLM: No, not in this area.*

BLM: Has there ever been historic mining in this area [Lake Minchumina]? We have heard of one Native Corporation exploring, but don't know what they found.

And there are some areas that are not open to mineral leasing? *BLM: Yes, and that is different, the Mineral Leasing Act refers to oil, gas, and coal. Some lands could be open to leasable minerals and closed to locatable minerals, or vice versa. The last category that many people don't care about, unless you're on the Dalton highway, is salable. That is sand and gravel. It's a little bit of a scarce resource to get gravel out of the ground that doesn't cost a lot to process.*

Special Areas

Is there a category that an area can ask for? Like say, a wilderness research area? People always seem to come to Lake Minchumina to do water resource research, air quality research, methane research. Maybe it would be nice to have a research area and stay that way. To keep it in a category as is. We are at Denali. Could we continue to be a research area? But if it was a research area, you may not be able to hunt and fish and trap. *BLM: In Toolik Research Natural Area hunting is allowed, but researchers are a little frightened of the hunters, it seems at times.*

There has always been allowed subsistence in the arctic refuges. *BLM: Yes, but you should make it clear what you are asking for. Sometimes they do restrict uses, such as recreational uses near Toolik Research Natural Area.*

Do we take an offensive stand, or when we find out in 20 years that they have changed everything, and then we have to be defensive? Is there a way to be offensive, and avoid having to be defensive later? *BLM: If there is university-type research going on, they may submit comments separately from the state.*