

Central Yukon Resource Management Plan Public Scoping Summary Meeting Notes Koyukuk * December 10, 2013



Planning Team

Jeanie Cole, BLM Planning & Environmental Coordinator
Tim Hammond, BLM Supervisory Physical Scientist

Tara Bellion, URS

Questions and Comments during the Presentation:

Government-to-Government Consultation

Was that a yes or a no have you heard back from Koyukuk yet? [Regarding a letter that BLM sent requesting Government-to-Government consultation with the Tribe]. *BLM: BLM sent the letter Government-to-Government consultation was in May and faxed one last week, but has not yet heard back from the tribe. Speaker requested that BLM resend it via email to Koyukuk.*

Land Ownership and Land Use

If and when you guys start negotiating the transfers, can we comment then? *BLM: Do you mean the transfers to the corporations? Yeah. BLM: That is a separate process, the corporations select the land which I am sure you are familiar with and then our office in Anchorage processes the paperwork to convey those lands and that all happens in accordance with the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA). This land use plan can't change*

that and can't alter those selections so the conveyance process is outside this land use planning process. I don't know that they don't go visit other villages and talk about issues when they are getting ready to convey lands. Like if they were getting ready to convey lands on the North Slope – like to the Arctic Slope Regional Corporation they wouldn't come down here and ask for your opinion on that – I think that the expectation is that would happen through the corporations talking to the BLM Anchorage office.

The old village road project there [referring to the Doyon Road to Stevens Village] it would be nice to know if it has been selected. *BLM: Doyon has submitted an application for a winter road but they changed their mind about the route and don't have an authorization yet. As far as I know they intend to go forward with it.*

Are you going to be taking comments on that proposed Ambler Road? *BLM: We will. The state had not yet submitted an application to usso at this point it is just them talking about a project. Once they actually submit a right-of-way application, BLMs process for processing their application would include getting input from the public on what are your concerns with the road. But that is still just a project they are talking about.*

And why are they proposing that road to Ambler? *BLM: It is part of the road to resources proposal – there are significant copper and deposits near Ambler. The idea is that it would make it feasible to develop those deposits north of Ambler.*

At the Western Arctic Caribou herd meeting in Anchorage – 2018 was the date [they said the road would be constructed]...*BLM explained the State still need to go through the permitting process of BLM, the US Army Corps of Engineers, and National Park Service and what that entails.*

We are using BLM lands for hunting, fishing, and getting wood. And then we are going to be building a biomass facility here this summer. Right now we are going to be getting the driftwood off of the river and we have some Gana-A-Yoo lands we need to harvest some of the wood. *BLM: That would be really helpful to know where that is that is because if there is BLM nearby we want to make sure that it is also available for timber if needed. If you are able to show us on the maps and then send BLM comments later about where the timber cutting area is that would be helpful.* And we can also describe the areas we use for berry patches – the general areas.

Historic place the animals they migrated with us. They might see something awkward and for a long time go this way. Homes in this area, Koyukuk, Athabaskan, the birds and animals speak our language. Animals, like the brown bear meet up and talk in their Athabaskan language and they understand. All different birds speak in our language mocking birds, chickadees, camp robbers, owl – the birds speak our language. This generation can't understand that. *BLM – It is important to know in this plans that if there are areas that are culturally significant, special places to the Athabaskan those are places we can recognize in our plan and to avoid impacts to those as well.*

The blackfish choose to come up the Koyukuk River.

Minerals Management

Question regarding the duration of the gold and copper in the Ambler area. *BLM: There was exploration done out there in the early 1970 and they decided if they had overland access it would be economic to develop. Nova*

Gold did exploration three or four years ago to expand on that. I think they are done on the exploration and might have an economic deposit if they can get overland access.

When they get the copper [Nova Gold] how are they going to process it? *BLM: That is one of the big questions that need to be answered. Presumably they would truck ore across this Ambler road and down to Fairbanks and smelt it or put it on a train and haul it somewhere else to smelt it. There are questions about whether they would want to build a smelter in Ambler and no one had answered them and transportation could happen in Fairbanks, but there are no answers at this point.*

What are the resources in the Ray Mountains – is it gold? *BLM: In the Ray Mountains there are rare earth minerals that they are interested in accessing. These are obscure metals that are used in electronics for computers and cell phones. That is what the interest is in getting to the Ray Mountains for mining. Is there a gold mining operation there now? BLM: There are mining claims staked out there now, but there is no development.*

How is that one [mine] being managed up by the Hog River? *BLM: The Taiga mine? Where they have the road that comes down by the Hog River? Is it Hog River? BLM: By Hog Landing? Yeah I think, I think it is Hog River or what is that mine up by Huslia? BLM explained the location of the Taiga Mine on the Hog River and how it sits on different land ownership and under various regulatory regimes.*

Who manages at Illinois Creek? I know that one is closed and then there are some storage areas there that they used to clean mineral with. *BLM: Illinois Creek is State of Alaska managed mine. I have never seen it and BLM has never dealt with that mine. I know they were shut down for contamination issues and heap leaching. I have not heard that it has caused any problems recently, but it is on state lands and is not something we deal with. Is that on any corporation land like Doyon? BLM: I don't know for sure, it probably is Doyon, but there could be a village corporation that has land out there. I don't know.*

I worked in Hog Village there for 70 years (sic) so I am pretty familiar with that area - right now they mine over there at the Clear Creek area and they haul material over to that mine at Hog River to process the gold and Clear Creek is a spawning ground for salmon when they go up the Koyukuk. *BLM: BLM fish biologists go out there about 3 to 4 times a year and look at water quality and talk with the mine about what they can do to improve fish habitat. We work quite a bit with them to help to avoid impact to fisheries out there.*

I built that road on the ... back in the 1950s. One margin of land across the across Hog Rover side across the flats there is a mountain. I was having lunch and picking rocks and a lot of fossils, fish fossils in that area, at the base of that mountain where the road come across and turns. There were a lot of fossils - every rock I picked up had a fossil.

Invasive Species

We have a big concern about invasive species. Is that being taken into consideration on the Dalton Highway? *BLM: that is a big concern for us on the Dalton Highway right now. It is also a concern for invasive species moving up and down river. We know they showed up in Galena – we can speculate how they got there but no*

one is sure and we want to manage it in a way that we don't contribute to invasive species coming further down river. Chum salmon and invasive species moving up and down the river are a concern.

Yes, invasive plant species are a particular concern. High river waters come and spread them including those tall white flowers. I think some planning for invasive species should be done to try to get rid of them.

The river's high waters sometimes spread invasive species. Does anyone ever go out to those areas and see what is spreading them? *BLM: at the Kanuti River where it crosses the Dalton Highway– we pull weeds right at the highway there every year. We also work with the Kanuti Refuge to look and see if there are any weeds floating down and getting established. At the South Fork of the Koyukuk crossing we check down there going down several miles to see if we find any weeds coming in and the Bettles Road we check to so we are keeping an eye out, but if you have areas you think they are getting in let us know so we can take a look.*

Special Areas

What are they doing at that site [Toolik Lake]? *BLM explained is a research facility looking how Arctic ecosystems will respond to climate change...how plants and animal to climate change.*

Utility Corridor

What is your feeling on the State selected lands near Wiseman that the state wants? *BLM: If it is state land they can say we are building a state road without having to deal with the federal permitting process, so their process would be less expensive and shorter and more efficient, but I don't think having a BLM management would prevent them from pursuing the development activities they want to.*

In that area [utility corridor], what are the wildlife resources? Caribou? *BLM discussed low moose populations and the concern that habitat impacts would impact local villages.*

Wildlife and Wildlife Habitat

In 1974 I worked for the State and we flew over that area quite a bit behind Land Clark and Grand Mountain (?) and in summertime there was a caribou herd...and about 50 years ago used to come down this canyon down by Rampart north and south. *BLM: We do work with the State of Alaska and we have radio collars on the Ray Mountains and the Tozitna herds to monitor those herds and so we'll know if they start to decline or not.*

Fish and Fish Habitat

It is real important to protect our spawning areas for salmon. There are some really sensitive places for spawning in the Koyukuk River and the Yukon; there are populations, with the Chinook being so low I think it is really important to the spawning grounds.

BLM and Fish and Wildlife studies in spawning areas have determined that due to climate change in the last 10 years, our salmon went outside and have not returned. For some reason, returns are declining and we don't know what this is about- maybe the vegetation. The last five years the salmon are coming back smaller. Three year olds are staying in the Bering Sea and I don't think they are going out to the Pacific. I haven't seen a six and seven year old for the last five years. Last summer I caught one. So due to the climate change in the Pacific – I

don't know if you ever studied this water temperature out there in the center of the Pacific whether it is changing a few degrees or what. One or two degrees would make a lot of difference and that is why we may be having this – this temperature change out in the Pacific. Don't know how water is in the central Pacific and there are a lot different temperatures in the Pacific. *BLM: One thing we are working on for this whole area is going watershed by watershed and figuring out which of those are the highest value for salmon production and other fisheries resources and that is one tool we'll use to make decisions on how to prioritize areas. Managing for the protection of fish that are subsistence - many areas for fish that are important to subsistence is definitely a high priority for us. Salmon is the big one for us but sheefish as well and whitefish, so if you know the areas that they spawn or it is really efficient for you to catch and stuff you'd like to see us protect tell us where those areas are as it is really helpful. And we are also going through the whole planning area systematically to see the areas where fishery resources are.*

This last summer we did not have many insects. We had no gnats at all this year.

Cultural Resources

We had a meeting in Ruby and up in the Takotna area they discovered human remains – one adult and maybe two kids and they are trying to trace it back and they also found stone tools about 10,000 years old and that stone came from the Hughes area. Out of Hughes, my wife knows more about it, but the stone came from Hughes area. They tried to do a study with the people in Hughes to see if the remains are related to the people in that area or not. A lot of peoples migrated from around Shungnak area and migrated through Whaley Pass, there are some Athabascan, Iliamna and Anchorage areas. All those people came from this area. They migrated through ...the Kobuk River – down to Ambler that used to be Athabascan land and a couple there from Chandluk? ...and later Athabascan names and I asked this couple the Athabascan names and they said the Athabascan lands in about 1750 due to starvation they moved out...the Athabascan moved to the Upper Koyukuk River about 1751 the Eskimos moved in the summertime and then lived off the fish. In the winter they live on ... [indiscernible]...caribou lichens have no nutritional value and this couple what vegetation did they use the lichens. And I asked the scientists...and they travel to Siberia because of the caribou.

Fire Management

About land management and fire protection, will the [Resource Management] Plan call-out thick timber where to make fire breaks? *BLM: Alaska Fire Service can assist the villages with fire breaks. Generally the BLM lands are so far from the villages that it is not the best place to put fire breaks. If there are areas out here that need protection that is an option – if an area would benefit the protection of a village – down by Tetlin several years ago we did some fire breaks. The ecosystem is fire dependent and you have to have some fire for the ecosystem to work – one thing we are looking at in the Nulato Hills is how we need to manage fire to make sure that the winter caribou habitat stays intact – but for the most part we don't do proactive fire protection of habitat like that. It's just too expensive – we couldn't go cut 100,000 acres of trees.*

In the McGrath area several years ago you guys did that controlled burn. *BLM: I'm not really familiar with that area – I have been told it helped a lot.*