

Central Yukon Resource Management Plan Public Scoping Summary Meeting Notes Fairbanks* December 9, 2014

Planning Team

Shelly Jacobson, BLM Central Yukon Field Manager
Jeanie Cole, BLM Planning and Environmental Coordinator
Tim Hammond, Supervisory Physical Scientist

Questions and Comments during the Presentation:

NEPA/EIS Process

On managing the lands and when you showed the maps and the earlier discussion. Is the overlap of state and private lands, how do you manage over someone else's property? When there are rules of and regulations for hunting or access how do you manage how they already manage their lands. *BLM: We try partner with them and through that we try to find out what their management plans say. But there are a lot of selected lands that in the next five years may or may not stay with BLM. They may be going to the state or Native Corporation and so at the end of the day the plan only applies to our own land. We try to be as compatible as possible but we don't have the same mission as our neighbors. So it's probably not going to be entirely possible. But we never know until we find out what the other goals are. For example right about at Atigun Gorge we have two conservation system units that come really close to the utility corridor that gates the arctic park and arctic refuge. They are really concerned about trails that a lot of people like to access those off the Dalton and walk in there. It doesn't look to bad to us from a BLM point of view. But the park services and fish and wildlife service are concerned that over time those trails may start to detract from their wilderness goals for their areas. So they want us to be cognizant for those goals and not funnel people and concentrate the use if we can avoid it.*

These are foot trails you are talking about? I mean walking trails? *BLM: Yes, I think they consider that a front country...and people that are sensitive to that notice the foot track trails.*

Special Designations

I have a map here that shows the proposed additional ACEC it's called Snowden Mountain and I would point out that in the lower right hand corner of that there is a little notch and that happens to be our headquarters site which is a hunting camp. And the extension of the ACEC to Matthews River would prohibit our use of a small ATV that has been in use for 47 years. For that reason I would oppose that extension of that ACEC.

As far as the justification for the ACEC [Snowden Mountain] for minerals to keep it open for minerals because that areas has been pretty well explored. Bear Creek was explored for copper several years ago and the state has to since then. Apparently there is nothing of too much interest there. Bear Creek found a lot of interest on the lower...big spruce which is the next creek to the east of Matthews and they drilled two holes their and quiet excited about them but nothing has been done about that since.

Good opportunity for river management and we are just beginning to look at those prospects and we will probably has to wait until the draft to have that information that you have going. You might consider if you are not able to people out into the field on all those rivers is there something you can partner with the public? For people to report to you very specifically on that kind of question [river inventory].

Wildlife and Wildlife Habitat

The BLM has published the results of the sheep studies along the corridor and that has resulted in a big increase of hunting pressure there, And also of abuse of the game laws. For instance within a mile of our hunting camp two years ago, two illegal sheep were taken. And fortunately Scott Crisp from the protection division was able to (with some direction) get into the basin and pick up the results. It ended up being two fellows from Anchorage and I don't know how or if they were processed or not. But the fact is that the hunting pressure has increased a lot there so it's something that you might want to pay attention to

Another thing and I suppose it's outside of your prerogative, but we have had extremely low sheep production at least the last three years. This last summer is the only time in 46 years that I haven't been there on the ground. But my friend next door to me here has been their last two years and he can vouch for that. In fact the lamb production is almost zero in that area last year. So if you want to do some good you can do a little predator control.

Salmon is important, the caribou wintering habitat we heard last week for western caribou herd and other caribou herds it's really important to take a hard look at. So the caribou wintering habitat is greatly affected by the Fire Management Plan. This can be an important step in identifying which lands are crucial to trying to protect the lichens from fire.

Planning Area and Planning Process

When can we expect the analysis of the management situation to come out? *BLM: Our staff is currently working on that. They are going back and looking at the existing decisions and trying to make some determinations of what's working and what's not working. And that does result in a product that be available online sometime this summer.*

One of the things we [Alaska Wilderness League] have been talking about with the communities I work with and within my own organization is developing our own alternative and submitting it to BLM to be evaluated with the range you also develop for yourself. Thinking that the Analysis of the

Management Situation about would really be helpful for us in order to really be able to dig in and make sure we are evaluating the situation appropriately before we develop our own alternative. And would you guys accept that at that later date? *BLM: We are receptive to that. We will build alternatives ourselves based on the issues we find but if the public is able to analyze the issues and come up with some solutions we will be willing to consider those.*

In this region are there a lot of active mines and it would be helpful to have ahead of time how much monitoring BLM has done, compliance record, how much man power it has taken for that effort, and if we are going to add to the workload [through the new plan] in this time of declining budgets. *BLM: We have a really active mining program in the Central Yukon Field Office; I think we have the largest placer mine in the state, on the Hogatza River. In the Dalton highway area we have 40 active placer mines on the BLM lands. We have a staff of three geologist and mining engineers that do the compliance and our whole office works on the permitting for those. But we definitely have our hands full with current staffing. They renew at different rates and right now we are able to keep up with the renewals and do a good job on the compliance, we work with other permitting agencies for things like water quality and other things in their jurisdiction so between all of us I think we do a good job monitoring the active mines, but you never know with the price of metal or fuel, it could increase throughout the life of the plan. If we keep at our current staffing levels we will continue to do a good job it will just take longer to do it.*

The inclusion of the conservation system units [Fish and Wildlife Refuges] within the external boundary of your plan it's my understanding that's just that you're looking at adjacent land owners. Is there any activity with respect to the subsurface where you would be affecting what might happen on those CSU's with this plan? They have their own planning process. *BLM: Not with this plan, we do manage the sub surfaces estate, refuges if they were to develop or wanted to develop their oil and gas resources, but that is not being proposed by this plan so it won't be analyzed or covered by our plan.*

In the Eastern Interior plan it was presumed there would be millions of acres of lands open for mining, but within the life of the plan that only one or two mines would be developed. And so therefore the analysis of impact an environmental impact showed relatively low impact. And that seemed liked a flawed way of looking at it. If the mining withdrawals are lifted they are lifted forever. And if it's zoned for mining it could occur and if it's open for claims it could be a zillion claims or might be one. So how are you thinking of addressing that? *BLM: I would suppose that if areas are open for mining now or eventually in our final plan we will think of all the acres that could possibly be mined, but as far as the development scenarios we will come up reasonable development scenarios based on known mineral potential in that area and access and the likelihood that people would actually go out there and stake mine claims. Similar to the way it was done in the Eastern Interior Plan. I don't know if you have seen the Placer Mine EIS that BLM did in the late 1980s for a lot of the mining districts. They talk about that so they imagine that over the life of those plans that 40 or 50 mines and then analyze the impact based on that... it would probably be similar.*

Considering how much land would be open you don't know what really will happen, but looking at your capabilities to manage impacts and taking a cumulative impact look at how the stresses from mining added to stresses on the ecosystem from climate change to other factors to the Yukon River, fisheries and other things. There might be things with phasing of timing if you're considering of opening more lands for mining that are opened today. I don't know how many lands are opened today I'm presuming that's from withdrawal not from your allocations from the last mine. *BLM: That's Right.*

I would like to encourage BLM to have a map meeting before the draft environmental impact statement public hearing and in that process unveil a lot of maps. That is the most meaningful part of the process for people to look at in the villages and here in town. And do that before you have gone all the way in deciding what your alternatives are. This is a huge area with complicated issues.

It would be meaningful to send a newsletter to every box holder in the affected areas so they know what you're talking about when they come to the meetings, at the very least to send that out with your request for government consultations with notices to city governments and so on. With maps even just a couple maps, those are really key.

It is important to have plan summaries and if you can do it by the different units. A map atlas makes it easier for the public to review.

This is a really important process. More than a third, almost half of BLM lands are being managed under land use planning efforts. The entire Yukon watershed, almost the entire river watershed is part of this planning effort. One of the important values is the intact Arctic ecosystem and looking at that in terms of climate change issues and out in the future how the aspects of that.. ecosystem is a whole change. And clearly the BLM only has pieces but those are pieces that you have land management responsibility for. So the BLM can really be a leader in some places where it is farther from conservation units. We are to seriously look at the conservations units and how you may have an important role that could either negatively influence the conservation system units or be a positive step in the kinds of activities that can be allowed on your lands that may not be appropriate within the conservation system unit.

Utility Corridor

The Dalton Highway, utility corridor is being managed pretty well right now. We would like to see it being maintained within the BLM's management.

We urge you to retain the public land order 5150. The public lands, having BLM as a manager in the utility corridor, provides a check and balance between the state and federal management of that area that we feel is warranted in light of its national energy significance as well as the track record has been improved by having both managers involved. We may have lots more natural gas pipelines. It is not appropriate to take lands out and convey them to state until all that activity is done.

Along the Haul Road our organization will not support further development. We are very concerned about the roads to Ambler and Umiat and some of the other development roads off the haul road.

Land Ownership and Land Use

One thing I would like to comment on is existing rights; I don't have a dog in the fight up here. But I have had problems in other areas where we have had something that we were able to do and then it was taken away. I really feel that if somebody has something and they made an investment, been there for a long time, then it's obviously not extremely detrimental to the environment then you should at least to give that person the opportunity to continue what they are doing where it's mining, access or whatever. You might discuss with them what they can do to make less impact. I just don't think its right to take an existing right away from someone and I see that you are trying to respect that. That is appreciated and it should continue.

I am really perplexed about the department of defense leased lands from BLM and they have had a massive training program EIS about I believe their lands and air space activities. If that is still BLM land, will there be anything where you are looking at its functions and its detrimental things may have happened or are we assuming that's already in the military's EIS? BLM: *We are usually asked to partner with the military on their in-ramps, their natural resource management plans that the military does for those lands. But because they are bombing ranges that's their primary use and there is not a lot of compatible other uses. Although for some of those lands BLM does manage the third party uses, but that is always subject to the military's non-objection which there is again a lot of incompatible uses. We will continue to partner with the military on their land use plans.*

Sometimes it's kind of a mystery what goes on, on the other side of the river from our community in Tanana flats. There may be an educational component that may be helpful for BLM to do that is an interface of what is happening on the lands and what the military is doing. And until this third meeting it didn't really occur to me to think about that aspect of just our local community. These are some of the closest lands that people do use.

Another question is have you come across a compilation of formerly used defense sites within your BLM lands in this region or abandoned mines and map those? BLM: *We did have a project a couple of years ago that we are just finishing up. We don't have all the results yet. A contractor reviewed different mining districts for abandoned mine hazards and it didn't come up with a lot of stuff which is good, but there were some findings of sites that need to be remediated. Formerly used defense sites, there are some in the area. Every once in a while we get contacted by the military regarding the cleanup of those lands. Some of those lands are owned by the military they will never come back to the BLM. Some of them if they get cleaned enough then it may be the goal of the military to return them to public lands, but that is negotiated through the cleanup process.*

Recreation

The wild lands recreation: our organization has been concerned about the wilderness values and characteristics surrounding the Trans- Alaska pipeline corridor. The emphasis on wild lands

recreation BLM has done a good job with it in the corridor. Things for the tourist, going up and having that as a pretty wild land area still is of value to tourism to the Fairbanks economy. And really taking a hard look before any of that is changed to allot a lot more use would be something we recommend. It's a tremendous resource for recreation but it part of what is now recreation out of Fairbanks. We need to recognize that.

Subsistence

For subsistence I think it's important to have a standard. How can subsistence management be improved? I don't think that has come up much. And in terms of standard there may be competing values but I think taking a hard look is there something more that could bed done so we can avoid problems or just to make that management smoother.