

# Central Yukon Resource Management Plan Public Scoping Summary Meeting Notes Allakaket \* January 6, 2014

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## Planning Team

Shelly Jacobson, BLM Central Yukon Field Manager  
Jeanie Cole, BLM Planning and Environmental  
Coordinator

Angel Rabon, URS

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## Questions and Comments during the Presentation:

### NEPA/EIS Process

Is this [Plan] coming out of Natural Resources? *[BLM explained the three main federal land management agencies in the Department of Interior and the lands they management adjacent to Allakaket and how they work together.]*

There is one thing that I wanted to mention and that's House Bill 77. From what little I know about it is that the Governor proposed this to the legislature to pass and it says something about if the State is planning to build roads or anything that they are not going to have public comment or opposition to it to any of the roads or development in Alaska. What about House Bill 77? Does this [Resource Management Plan] have anything to do with that? Are you familiar with it (House Bill 77)? *BLM: BLM and all of the federal agencies have a piece of federal legislation we call NEPA- the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and that is an Act that gives us our direction for doing these plans but it also gives us a process that we have to use every time we issue a permit where we have to provide the public the opportunity to comment on it and participate. All of the federal agencies must do this but the State does not have to follow NEPA. The State does have a process they use, but it is not the same as the federal agencies and I think they are trying to explain to the public what process they want to use which sounds like it might not have much public involvement.*

What I understand is if somebody is going out to their camp or trapping area or something one day and then a couple of days later they'll go the same area and find a mining operation and then they don't have any say over what's going to happen. They can't tell the State that they don't want mining in that area. *BLM: With BLM lands, you should not be surprised by it, you might not be happy about it but you should not be surprised by it because before the mine would show up, there would be notice to the public about it and opportunities to comment. It would be on our website. The Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement would be on the web so people could comment on it. So, it's not that it always goes the way of everybody [wants] but at least they're not surprised and have a chance to comment.*

### **Land Ownership and Land Use**

So, grandfather rights would fall under "recognized and protected valid existing rights"? *BLM: Right. Some of those we know like, traditional uses of trails but there's probably a lot that we don't so we could use help all along the way to identify valid existing areas.*

We would like to keep the Kanuti National Wildlife Refuge part of the Middle Yukon River subunit and not have it merged with the Dalton Highway Corridor unit so we as a community can have more of a say. We would be totally out-numbered if we are combined with the Dalton Highway Corridor subunit.

I oppose that proposal [from Doyon to do a winter road in the vicinity of Stevens Village for oil and gas exploration and also interest from some of the private property owners in the Ray River/Big Salt River/Ray Mountain areas] because it goes right into the Kanuti Flats, Big Ray and Big Salt Rivers.

One of the things that we'd like to see in order to protect our way of life is we'd like to put everything on hold for the next 30 years. So we can figure out which way our people can live. *BLM explained that the RMP has a 20-year planning period. Every 20 years there is another opportunity to revisit the plan. BLM recommended looking at maps because most of the land is open to mining so you might not necessarily want the current situation to continue.* That's why I would like to see everything on hold for the next 30 years because our way of life is being affected. There is no way for us to get beef or whatever from around here since it cost so much to buy and most all of us do not have the money so we live off the country. We'd all end up on welfare or whatever and nobody wants to do that.

We'd like to avoid new mines in the future by limiting access roads for mining.

That proposed road to Ambler is 60 miles upriver from where the whitefish (sheefish) spawning area. That is of great concern for us since we rely on the whitefish because the salmon travel so far, they are not edible by the time they reach us.

### **Minerals Management**

One of the things we locally [Allakaket] have to watch for is the opening of mining, temporarily. They're all temporary because they last maybe four or five years and there is no more after that and then we have an impact of people coming in. We live off the country subsistence and we don't just go a little ways in just certain areas, as subsistence users, we have to all over and follow the animals. *[BLM explained the importance of knowing about mining activities, even if they're far away from Allakaket. BLM explained the difference between "Mom & Pop" operations that are family-run and larger placer mines like the Hogatza.] There are really important fisheries resource in the Hogatza River in terms of salmon so it's really important*

*that they and others do a really good job if they are to continue mining in the area that the waters stay clean and that the fish keep coming back, which seems to be the case for that mine.*

Is there a lot of mining permit requests up in our area or in the entire Central Yukon area? *BLM: Not around Allakaket. The Dalton Highway is our biggest area of mining right now of active mining. We have about 40 active placer mines that are going on in the Dalton, and that's just the federal ones. There are probably another 20 or more that are going on state lands nearby. The Dalton is a very active mining area, that's the Koyukuk Mining District. Then further out within the rest of the area really not so much- like that Ruby/Poorman area used to have a lot more mining. But now, other than the Hogatza, that Tiaga Mine which is huge, it's the only mine out there.*

### **Special Areas**

What would you do if a river was "Wild and Scenic"? What would happen? *[BLM explained it is a conservation status that would make land off-limits to mining and requires an act of Congress.]*

Is the Alatna River designated as a Wild and Scenic River? *BLM: Not by BLM.*

Do water rights for a village have a say in Wild and Scenic Rivers once they are designated as "Wild and Scenic"? *BLM: I think once it gets designated, then you can't have any major withdrawals or impoundments put in. So if in the future you wanted to have a reservoir or something for power or a community water supply you would probably be prevented from it.*

If the Alatna River was a Wild and Scenic River, would the residents from around here and Alatna be able to still hunt there? *BLM: Yes, they are still open for non-destructive uses like that. Usually what they are off-limits are road rights of-way unless they already exist like the Fortymile Area already had roads when it was designated. If there are already mining claims in there, they become valid existing rights and get to continue to operate.*

So if the Alatna River were to be designated as Wild and Scenic, then the road to Ambler would not be able to cross it? *BLM: Not necessarily. It just makes it harder to approve and there is a special process that you have to use. If it's not already designated and I'm not sure if it is on Fish and Wildlife Service or National Park Service lands, the proposal for the road would likely come in before the designation happens.*

What have they found at the Toolik Research Station? *BLM: They have found all kinds of things. They have a website that talks about all of the studies they've got and links to the research papers. There is some interesting information on the hibernation of ground squirrels, the way water mixes in the lakes, nutrient cycling, they studied that big fire near Anaktuvuk Pass and how though the tundra normally does not burn that much up there it burned more than normal during that fire.*

### **Fire Management**

That Gray Mountain to the south is a big winter habitat for caribou and should be a concern especially if there are large fires.

### **Fish and Fish Habitat**

There is a salmon spawn area in South Fork on the south fork of the Koyukuk River.

I would be opposed to mining near (Koyukuk River and South Fork Koyukuk) because I set net in summer time and around here on the beach it really hurts us if up north the mining muds contaminate the river. We had all those dead fish last summer on the beach so I would be opposed to mining up there.

That one year, the water was really brown and people down here did not know why it was like that. But I guess there is that mine up there. *BLM suggested reporting the dirty water or dead fish. BLM explained a scenario when thawed permafrost slumped into the Selawik River, causing excessive silt. Global warming, mining, or fire could cause events that result in dirty water or dead fish.*

### **Climate Change**

Does BLM conduct studies on global warming? *BLM: No we do not conduct our own studies, but we partner with other agencies and the University of Alaska.*