



United States Department of the Interior



BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
Eastern Interior Field Office
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Fairbanks, Alaska 99709-3844
<http://www.blm.gov/ak>

In Reply Refer To:
FF-093728

CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION /PLAN CONFORMANCE DOCUMENTATION AND DECISION

DOI-BLM-AK-F020-2012-0012-CX

Proposed Action: Issue a five year renewal Special Recreation Permit for an organized group.

Date of Proposed Action: January 1, 2012 through December 31, 2016.

Location: The White Mountains National Recreation Area, Dalton Highway, Steese National Conservation Area, and Fortymile Wild and Scenic River.

Applicant: UAF Outdoor Center

Serial Number: FF093728

Description of Proposed Action:

The proposed action is to provide for recreation activities on BLM-managed lands through a renewal to an existing Special Recreation Permit (SRP). The permittee, the University of Alaska – Fairbanks Outdoor Center, organizes and coordinates trip opportunities for students. These trips may include some or all of the following:

1. Up to three annual trips up the Dalton Highway around the Atigun Pass area for sightseeing and hiking/backpacking within the corridor. Specific trip areas include: Chandalar Shelf, Continental Divide, and James Dalton Mountain between Dalton Highway Mileposts 137-150. Each trip will be 3-7 days in length.
2. Up to four annual hiking/skiing/camping trips to the White Mountains National Recreation Area (WMNRA) in the vicinity of Wickersham Dome and the Mount Prindle area. Each trip will be 2-3 days in length.
3. Up to two annual hiking/backpacking trips on the Pinnell Mountain Trail (PMT). Each trip will be 3-4 days in length.
4. Up to one annual float trip on the Fortymile Wild and Scenic River (WSR). This trip will be 4-5 days in length.

All trips are non-motorized and basic/primitive camping style techniques are employed. All guides are trained in both First Aid/CPR and “Leave No Trace” principals. Most hiking/backpacking trips will include up to 10 persons in size and the Fortymile river trip will host up to 16 persons.

Land Use Plan Conformance

Land Use Plans Name:

The proposed action is in conformance with the applicable Land Use Plans (LUP) because it specifically provided for the following in the LUP decision:

Utility Corridor Resource Management Plan

Date Approved: January 11, 1991

Chapter 2 of the Utility Corridor Resource Management Plan (pages 2-26 and 2-27) Proposed Action # 28 Recreation Management Areas and Recreation Program Objective 2 found in Appendix N (page N-19). Additional guidance is provided in the Recreation Area Management Plan Dalton Highway.

These actions along the Dalton Highway have also been reviewed under the following past NEPA actions: CX-AK-029-02-063 and EA-AK-025-04-063.

River Management Plan (RMP) for the Fortymile River

Date Approved: October 11, 1983

Item 6 – Visitor Management; Action 6.3: Permits are required for all commercial guides or outfitters operating within the river corridor pursuant to 43 CFR 8372, now 43 CFR 2390.

Fortymile Management Framework Plan

Date Approved: September 1980

Summary of Land Use Decisions and Management Direction – this plan has been written with the goal of providing the most appropriate management for each area and situation, in accordance with the principals of multiple use”. Issuance of special recreation permits is clearly consistent with the principals of multiple use.

This action on the Fortymile WSR has also been reviewed under past NEPA action: EA-AK-024-08-006

Steese National Conservation Area Resource Management Plan/Record of Decision

Date Approved: February 6, 1986

Goal-3: Manage lands consistent with multiple use principles and maintain the environmental quality. Management Direction: Special Recreation Use Permits are required for commercial uses such as commercial outfitting and guiding and guiding for commercial river trips, etc.

This action in the Steese National Conservation Area has also been reviewed under past NEPA actions: EA-AK-028-02-088 and CX-AK-024-08-009

White Mountains Resource Management Plan/Record of Decision

Date Approved: February 2, 1986

Goal 1: Provide for a variety of public outdoor recreational opportunities which emphasize the existing natural primitive and semi-primitive values appropriate to the WMNRA designation. Objective 6: Provide for semi-primitive motorized recreation on lands along the southern and western boundaries of the WMNRA. Management Direction: Special Recreation Use Permits would be required for commercial use, competitive events, and special uses involving over 50 participants.

Compliance with NEPA:

The Proposed Action is categorically excluded from further documentation under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) in accordance with 516 DM 11.9 E (9) (DOI 2004), which states,

“Renewals and assignments of leases, permits or rights-of-way where no additional rights are conveyed beyond those granted by the original authorization.”

The proposed action must be screened against the extraordinary circumstances found in 43 CFR 46.215 and listed below. Any “yes” finding requires that an Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement be prepared for the Proposed Action.

EXTRAORDINARY CIRCUMSTANCES	YES/NO
1) May have significant impacts on public health or safety.	No
2) May have significant impacts on such natural resources and unique geographic characteristics as historic or cultural resources; park, recreation or refuge lands; wilderness areas; wild or scenic rivers; national natural landmarks; sole or principal drinking water aquifers; prime farmlands; wetlands (Executive Order 11990); floodplains (Executive Order 11988); national monuments; migratory birds; and other ecologically significant or critical areas.	No
3) May have highly controversial environmental effects or involve unresolved conflicts concerning alternative uses of available resources.	No
4) May have highly uncertain and potentially significant environmental effects or involve unique or unknown environmental risks.	No
5) Might establish a precedent for future action or represent a decision in principle about future actions with potentially significant environmental effects.	No
6) May have a direct relationship to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant environmental effects.	No
7) May have significant impacts on properties listed, or eligible for listing, on the National Register of Historic Places as determined by either the bureau or office.	No
8) May have significant impacts on species listed, or proposed to be listed, on the List of Endangered or Threatened Species, or have significant impacts on designated Critical Habitat for these species.	No
9) Might violate a Federal law, or a State, local, or tribal law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment.	No
10) May have a disproportionately high and adverse effect on low income or minority populations (Executive Order 12898).	No
11) Might limit access to and ceremonial use of Indian sacred sites on Federal lands by Indian religious practitioners or significantly adversely affect the physical integrity of such sacred sites (Executive Order 13007).	No
12) Could contribute to the introduction, continued existence, or spread of noxious weeds or non-native invasive species known to occur in the area or actions that may promote the introduction, growth, or expansion of the range of such species (Federal Noxious Weed Control Act and Executive Order 13112).	No

Recommendation

I have found that the Proposed Action is compatible with the Utility Corridor, Steese NCA, and White Mountains NRA Resource Management Plans, the Fortymile River Management Plan, the Fortymile Management Framework Plan and is an action that can be categorically excluded. The Proposed Action does not trigger any of the Extraordinary Circumstances found in 516 DM Chapter 2, Appendix 2. I recommend that the Proposed Action be allowed and that an Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement is not needed.

/s/ Collin Cogley

7/26/2012

Collin Cogley, Outdoor Recreation Planner
Eastern Interior Field Office

Date

Concurrence

I concur that the above action is in conformance with the applicable land use plans, does not meet any of the extraordinary circumstances, and qualifies as a Categorical Exclusion.

/s/ Michael Gibson for

7/26/2012

Lenore Heppler
Field Manager
Eastern Interior Field Office

Date

/s/ Shelly Jacobson

7/31/2012

Shelly Jacobson
Field Manager
Central Yukon Field Office

Date

Contact Person

For additional information concerning this CX review, contact Collin Cogley, Outdoor Recreation Planner, Eastern Interior Field Office, at 907-474-2382.

**Decision for Categorical Exclusion
DOI-BLM-AK-F020-2012-0012-CX
University of Alaska-Fairbanks Outdoor Center, Organized Group Permit**

Decision

It is my decision to approve the renewal of the University of Alaska-Fairbanks Outdoor Center for the multiple trips listed in the proposed action of Categorical Exclusion DOI-BLM-AK-F020-2012-0012-CX. The following Standard Operating Procedures developed in prior NEPA documents will be carried forward as part of this decision.

Standard Operating Procedures for SRPs on BLM-managed lands

- All trip participants should stay on developed trails where they exist and use dispersed traveling techniques as described in “Leave No Trace” guidance in undeveloped areas.
- All equipment, including boot soles, rafts, and tents should be cleaned to assure that they are free of non-native seeds and plant parts before beginning the trips.
- All trash and human waste should be retrieved or dealt with accordingly using established facilities or by “Leave No Trace” guidance. A portable toilet system should be utilized when reasonable i.e., Fortymile float trip.
- Campsites with human or naturally hardened sites should be utilized. Camp areas will be located at least 25 feet from the nearest trail. Camp areas will be cleaned of all litter before departure.
- Respect wildlife. Do not feed animals and avoid disturbing them from natural activities.
- Firewood collection will be limited to dead and down wood. Gas stoves or U.S. Forest Service approved fire pans should be used for cooking meals and any fires. All dead and out ashes and cinders will be scattered to the wind, preferably on the gravel bars or rocky areas. All left over wood will likewise be scattered around the area.
- No commercial use of the Pinnell Mountain National Recreation Trail shall occur during the weekend before or weekend after the Summer Solstice or over July 4 holiday weekend.
- Avoid camping in areas that result in disturbance of birds of prey (raptors) such as peregrine falcons, bald eagle and redtail (Harlans) hawk. Nesting raptors will typically indicate disturbance by vocalizing loudly and often circle above people.

Rationale:

1. The University of Alaska-Fairbanks Outdoor Center has been permitted for these activities for the past ten years and received “good” to “superior” ratings on their annual end-of-year evaluations. No violations of stipulations or negative observations have been documented.
2. BLM lands are managed for multiple use recreational activities. All actions proposed, such as camping, hiking, backpacking, and floating, are considered standard and common practices during these times of year.
3. This authorization is for five years. Annual post use reports will be reviewed and stipulations added if necessary to protect health, safety, and critical resource values.
4. The proposed action is consistent with the approved White Mountains NRA, Steese NCA, and Utility Corridor Resource Management Plans, and the Fortymile River Management Plan.
5. There are no expected effects on Essential Fish Habitat (EFH). See attachment **
6. There are no anticipated impacts to cultural resources. See attachment **
7. The Proposed Action will not significantly restrict subsistence uses. See attachment **

Appeal Procedures

This decision may be appealed to the Interior Board of Land Appeals, Office of Hearings and Appeals, in accordance with 43 CFR Part 4 and DOI Form 1842-1. The notice of appeal must be filed in the Bureau of Land Management Eastern Interior Field Office (at the above address) within 30 days from receipt of this decision. Appeals from administrative decisions issued by BLM-Alaska must be filed in writing in the office of the deciding official, either by mail or hand delivery. Notices of appeal transmitted by electronic means, such as facsimile or e-mail will not be accepted as timely filed.

/s/ Michael Gibson for

7/26/2012

Lenore Heppler, Manager
Eastern Interior Field Office

Date

/s/ Shelly Jacobson

7/31/2012

Shelly Jacobson
Field Manager
Central Yukon Field Office

Date

Contact Person

For additional information concerning this CX review and decision, contact Collin Cogley, Outdoor Recreation Planner, Eastern Interior Field Office, at 907-474-2382.