

A. Background

BLM Office: Arctic Field Office LLAKF010

Lease/Serial/Case File No.: FF096459

Applicant: Eric V. Regehr, Ph.D.
Marine Mammals Management, Polar Bears
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
1011 E. Tudor Rd., MS341
Anchorage, AK 99503

Proposed Action Title/Type: Fuel Storage/NPR-A Permit at Point Lonely (298401)

Dates of Proposed Activity: August 22- November 15, 2013

General Location of Proposed Action: Pt. Lonely, Alaska

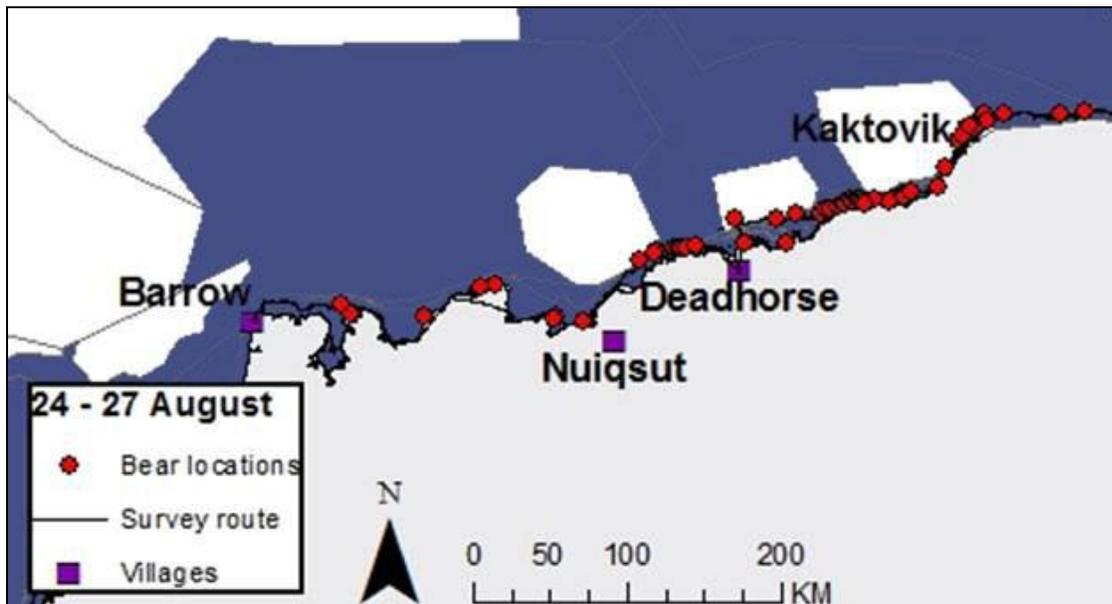
Description of Proposed Action: The applicant, Eric V. Regehr, with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) has requested authorization for access and landing by a helicopter on lands within the National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska (NPR-A) in support of a Polar Bear Study. The USFWS is conducting a study of the demography and behavior of polar bears summering on shore in Alaska. The project would occur along the coastline and barrier islands of the southern Beaufort Sea, between Barrow and the U.S. - Canada border, during the ice-retreat season. All survey activity would occur in an aircraft at approximately 300 ft. The locations, sex and age class, and body condition of observed polar bears would be recorded as they are flown over. Short durations of flight may occur below 300 ft, if necessary to visualize bears. The project is a continuation of long-term monitoring by the USFWS that provides information related to polar bear ecology and management, including understanding patterns of habitat use and potential for human-polar bear conflicts. The information is important to polar bear conservation.

The USFWS propose to fly two surveys with an R44 helicopter. The surveys would start on 23 August and 9 October and each would take two to three flight days to complete. The logistical base is Prudhoe Bay, with flights occurring daily to the west and east of this location, until the entire coastline has been flown. No field camps would be utilized. The number of people participating in each survey is three (pilot & two biologists). Surveys are coordinated to not overlap with USGS research conducted by Kristin Simac. The only take off and landings on BLM managed land would be to deliver the fuel by fixed-wing aircraft and to refuel the helicopter at Pt. Lonely. Mr. Regehr anticipates one fixed-wing take-off and landing for the delivery of the fuel and four take offs and landings for each of the two trips for a total of eight take offs and landings by the helicopter.

The USFWS is requesting to store four 55 gallon drums of Avgas at Pt. Lonely. They would use standard containment with capacity to exceed 1.5 times the volume of fuel, and with an on-site spill response it. The fuel and containment would be delivered prior to the August survey and removed following the October survey.

This project is coordinated with other agencies and activities on the North Slope of Alaska. Each year, a letter of notification is sent and telephone contact is maintained with the North Slope Borough Department of Wildlife Management (NSB) and village governments in the survey area (primarily Barrow, Nuiqsut, and Kaktovik). Flyers describing fieldwork are distributed by email, physical mail, and posted in communities; other presentations and outreach is performed on an opportunistic basis.

Survey flights are coordinated with subsistence activities that may occur at this time of year. When flights occur in or near whaling season, daily contact is maintained with whaling communication centers for Barrow, Nuiqsut, and Kaktovik; and verbal approval is obtained from whaling captains prior to approaching active areas by air. Also, potential interaction with caribou hunters in the western part of the study area is coordinated with the NSB, although this is unlikely to be an issue in 2013 because they are flying only on the coast, and most caribou hunts occur inland. In 2011, survey routes were modified to avoid areas around Admiralty Bay where caribou hunting was occurring in August. In recent years, similar surveys using a fixed-wing aircraft or helicopter have been successfully coordinated to avoid disturbance or the perception of disturbance of local activities. Letters of notification and verbal contact is also maintained with security captains in the Prudhoe Bay region and with other research activities (e.g., COMIDA flights), as necessary depending on survey timing.



Example of Global Positioning System track logs (black lines) for USFWS monitoring of polar bears on the North Slope of Alaska. Polar bear locations (red dots) are from a survey conducted in August 2012. Survey flights in 2013 are expected to follow a similar route.

Figure 1 Applicant Submitted Map

Legal Description

Section 17, Township 18 North, Range 5 West, Umiat Meridian

B. Land Use Plan Conformance

The proposed action is in conformance with the following planning document: National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska Integrated Activity Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (IAP/EIS) dated November 2012 and associated Record of Decision dated February 2013.

The proposed action is in conformance with the Naval Petroleum Reserves Production Act, which allows for the authorization of uses consistent with the purposes of the Act.

C. Compliance with NEPA

The IAP/EIS Record of Decision for the NPR-A developed stipulations and best management practices applicable to all activities in NPR-A. The stipulations and best management practices applicable to the proposed action will be provided, along with project-specific mitigation, to the applicant and are entitled: “FF096459 USFWS Regehr Summer Stipulations 2013”.

The Proposed Action is categorically excluded from further documentation under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) in accordance with 516 DM 2, Appendix 1, or 516 DM 11.9. Specifically the proposed action meets the criteria for a categorical exclusion under 516 DM 11.9, BLM H-1790-1 National Environmental Policy Act Handbook Appendix 4(F-10) BLM Categorical Exclusions.

“Nondestructive data collection, inventory (including field, aerial, and satellite surveying and mapping), study, research, and monitoring activities.”

This categorical exclusion is appropriate in this situation because there are no extraordinary circumstances potentially having effects that may significantly affect the environment. The proposed action has been reviewed, and none of the extraordinary circumstances described in 516 DM 2 apply.

Extraordinary Circumstances	Yes	No
2.1 Have significant impacts on public health or safety.		X
2.2 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.		X
2.3 Have highly controversial environmental effects or involve unresolved conflicts concerning alternative uses of available resources [NEPA Section 102(2) (E)].		X
2.4 Have highly uncertain and potentially significant environmental effects or involve unique or unknown environmental risks.		X
2.5 Establish a precedent for future action or represent a decision in principle about future actions with potentially significant environmental effects.		X
2.6 Have a direct relationship to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant environmental effects.		X
2.7 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.		X

2.8 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.		X
2.9 Violate a Federal law, or a State, local, or tribal law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment.		X
2.10 Have a disproportionately high and adverse effect on low income or minority populations (Executive Order 12898).		
2.11 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).		X
2.12 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).		X

D. Approval and Contact Information

I considered the proposed action and have determined that there is no potential for significant impacts.

 Lon Kelly
 Authorized Officer, Arctic Field Office

 Date

Contact Person:

For additional information concerning this CX review, contact:

Donna Wixon
 Natural Resource Specialist
 Bureau of Land Management
 Arctic Field Office
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 Fairbanks, Alaska 99709

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