

Categorical Exclusion

DOI-BLM-LLAKF010-2013-43-CX

A. Background

BLM Office: Arctic Field Office LLAKF010

Lease/Serial/Case File No.: FF090576

Proposed Action Title/Type: PLO Withdrawal Extension (2311.70)

Dates of Proposed Activity: 20 Year Renewal (2014 - 2034)

General Location of Proposed Action: Mesa Site

Description of Proposed Action:

The applicant, the Arctic Field Office of the Bureau of Land Management, has requested a withdrawal extension of lands known as the Mesa Site. The original withdrawal was approved March 10, 1994 for a period of twenty years with Public Land Order 7032 and consisted of 2,560 acres. The requested extension is also for a period of twenty years from 2014 to 2034.

Background: In 1978, during routine field compliance survey, an archeological site was discovered within the southeastern portion of the National Petroleum Reserve of Alaska (NPR-A). Test excavations were conducted at the site in 1979. Charcoal recovered from the remains of ancient campfires was submitted for radiocarbon dating and yielded radiocarbon dates ranging from 12,000 to 13,700 calendar years before present. The age of the site and the style of artifacts recovered there indicated that its inhabitants were people known as Paleoindians.

Paleoindians are the oldest scientifically documented human inhabitants of the New World. Although humans entered the Western Hemisphere via the Bering Land Bridge, no Paleoindian site had previously been found in the Alaskan or Canadian Arctic. This is extraordinary since Paleoindians would have to have been in the Arctic prior to their occupation of the High Plains and Southwest, where all previous finds have been located. The Mesa Site is the first well-documented Paleoindian site to be found in the North American Arctic.

The oldest date from the Mesa Site (13,700 years BP) is older than any dates for the Clovis people, the oldest known occupants of North America. Information recovered from the Mesa has caused scientists to rethink and restructure theories concerning the migration of people across the western hemisphere.

In 1986, the Division of Cadastral Survey redefined the location of the Peak 4640 which is referenced in Executive Order 3797-A, of February 27, 1923 (this order described the boundaries of the NPR-A). Peak 4640 is utilized to define the southeast corner of the Reserve. This adjustment by Cadastral Survey moved the southeast boundary approximately six (6) miles to the west. With this boundary shift, the Mesa Site was no longer within the boundaries of the NPR-A.

The Record of Decision for the Utility Corridor Resource Management Plan (RMP) (approved January 11, 1991) designated the Nigu-Iteriak Rivers Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC). The Mesa Site lies within the boundaries of the Iteriak portion of the ACEC. The importance of the area as an ACEC includes the cultural, geological, and scenic resources.

Given the discovery of and the national importance of the Mesa Site, as well as subsequent discoveries of other Paleoindian sites within the NPR-A, the Bureau of Land Management is provided an opportunity to demonstrate its ability to commit to the protection and management of our nation's cultural resources.

Extension of the PLO: Public Land Order No. 7032 which was signed February 28, 1994 with an effective date of March 10, 1994 withdrew the Mesa Site from settlement, sale, location, or entry under the general land laws, and from location and entry under the United States mining laws, but not from mineral leasing for a period of 20 years for the Bureau of Land Management to protect the archaeological, historical, and cultural resource integrity of the Paleoindian site.

The Mesa Site is potentially eligible as a National Register Site and will strengthen support of the Bureau's Initiatives such as **Cultural 2000, Adventures in the Past, Heritage Education, and Volunteers and Partnerships**. The purpose of the withdrawal extension is to protect the archaeological, historical, and cultural resource integrity of the Paleoindian archaeological site known as the Mesa Site. Licenses, permits, cooperative agreements, or other discretionary land use authorizations of a temporary nature would be allowed but only with the approval of an Authorized Officer of the Bureau of Land Management.



Figure 1: Photo of Mesa Site



Figure 2: Photo of Mesa Site

Legal Description: Section 11-14, Township 12 South, Range 17 West, Umiat Meridian

B. Land Use Plan Conformance

The proposed action is in conformance with Cultural Resources Proposed Action 51: Cultural resources would continue to be inventoried and evaluated as part of project or activity planning. Such evaluation would consider the significance of the proposed project and the sensitivity of cultural resources in the affected area - Utility Corridor Resource Management Plan (RMP) (approved January 11, 1991) and Record of Decision for the Utility Corridor Resource Management Plan (RMP).

C. Compliance with NEPA

This action is covered by one of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) categorical exclusions developed pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act. The BLM has screened the proposed action against the Department of the Interior exceptions to the use of categorical exclusions and determined that none of the exceptions apply. Therefore, neither an environmental impact statement nor an environmental assessment is necessary.

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.

“Withdrawal extensions or modifications, which only establish a new time period and entail no changes in segregative effect or use”.

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.

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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).		X
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.

Authorized Officer, Arctic Field Office

Contact Person

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