

# **State of Alaska Fish Sonar Research**

## **Introduction**

The State of Alaska, Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) has filed an application proposing to conduct fish sonar research on lands that have been conveyed to BLM from the State of Alaska for the purpose of conveying to a Native applicant. In the interim the lands would be in federal jurisdiction and would require a permit. ADF&G has been occupying the site since June 2013 and would continue until October 2015.

## **Summary**

The proposal would include a camp with improvement onsite including of a sonar, cook, gear and sleep tents, water/shower shed, and two (2) outhouses. Additionally, storage of approximately 237 gallons of gasoline would be stored in three (3) 55 gallon drums and 12 6 gallon boat and generator cans. Approximately 150 gallons of diesel fuel would be stored in ten (10) 15 gallon containers and are used for the heating stoves. Additional equipment consists of three outboard skiffs, satellite antenna, an ATV, small gasoline generators, cable with transducers and rotators.

## **Alternatives Considered**

The No Alternative Option is the only alternative considered and was not selected as ADF&G already is currently occupying the site.

## **Decision**

I have decided to authorize a permit for the purpose of a fish sonar research camp from March 18, 2014 through October 31, 2015 to the State of Alaska, Department of Fish and Game.

## **Management Considerations**

The Categorical Exclusion and supporting documentation have been prepared consistent with the requirements of various statutes and regulations, including but not limited to:

- Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act of 1980 (ANILCA)
- Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA)
- National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA)
- National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (NHPA)

One BLM land use plan applies to the overall project area, the Central Yukon Resource Management Plan, Kuskokwim SubUnit.

## **Public Involvement**

It was determined that due to the remoteness of the action, there would be no impact to the general public. Additionally, this document was published to the electronic Central Yukon Field Office NEPA Register on Marc 6, 2014. No comments have been received.

## **Appeal or Protest Opportunities:**

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 Central Yukon Field Office, 1150 University Avenue, Fairbanks, Alaska 99709 within 30 days from receipt of this decision. If you decide to file an appeal, you must carefully follow the procedure described on the enclosed form 1842-1. If you don't file your appeal at the locations specified on the form within 30 days, the Board may dismiss your appeal as untimely without considering its merits. Be sure to send a copy of your notice of appeal to each party named in this decision and to all of the addresses on the enclosed form 1842-1. You may also ask the Board to stay or suspend the effect of this decision while your appeal is pending. If you desire a stay, you must enclose your request for a stay with your notice of appeal. You have the burden of showing a stay is justified. The Board will grant a stay only if you provide sufficient justification based on the following standards:

1. The relative harm to the parties if the Board grants or denies the stay,
2. The likelihood of the success of your appeal on its merits,
3. The likelihood of immediate and irreparable harm if the Board does not grant the stay, and;
4. Whether the public interest favors granting a stay.

**Approval from Authorized Official:**

**Field Office Manager Recommendation**

Having considered a full range of alternatives, associated impacts, and public and agency input, I recommend the adoption and implementation of the attached Approved Plan in conformance with the Central Yukon Resource Management Plan.

David Parker  
Signature  
for Nichelle W. Jacobson  
Field Office Manager  
Central Yukon Field Office

March 11, 2014  
Date

## — Essential Fish Habitat Assessment

NEPA Document No.: DOI-BLM-AK-F030-2014-0012-CX

Prepared by: Dave Parker

Date: 03/7/14

The proposed action lies within the general range of Dolly Varden (*Salvelinus malma*); arctic char (*S. alpinus*); Lake Trout (*Salvelinus namaycush*); burbot (*Lota lota*); and whitefish (Coregonid spp.). Arctic grayling (*Thymallus arcticus*) and slimy sculpin (*Cottus cognatus*) are ubiquitous throughout the region (ADF&G 1978). The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) recognizes fresh waters cataloged (ADF&G 2012) as being used by salmon under AS 41.14.870 (*Catalog of Waters Important for the Spawning, Rearing or Migration of Anadromous Fishes*) as essential fish habitat (EFH).

The Tanana River at the site of the proposed action is listed in the anadromous catalog as stream #334-40-11000-2490-3290 and contains habitat important for Chinook (*Oncorynchus tshawytscha*), coho (*O. kisutch*), and chum (*O. keta*) salmon. The permit requires adherence to the 'Leave No Trace' camping techniques, and safe fuel handling and storage methods detailed in the stipulations, and therefore there should be no deleterious effect on EFH.

### Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) Finding:

No adverse effect. EFH consultation with NMFS is not required.

### References:

State of Alaska, Alaska Department of Fish and Game. 1978. Alaska's Fisheries Atlas. Volume 2. Edited by R. McLean and K. Delaney. Alaska Department of Fish and Game.

State of Alaska, Alaska Department of Fish and Game. 2012. An Atlas to the Catalog of Waters Important for Spawning, Rearing, or Migration of Anadromous Fishes, Resource Management Region V. Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Habitat and Restoration Division.

<http://extra.sf.adfg.state.ak.us/FishResourceMonitor/?mode=awc>

## — Wilderness Characteristics Assessment

**NEPA Document No.:** DOI-BLM-AK-F030-2014-0012-CX

**Case File No.:** F-96765

**Applicant:** State of Alaska, Department of Fish and Game

**Location:** Lot 2, U.S. Survey No. 10012, within Secs. 28 and 29, T. 2 N., R. 16 W., Fairbanks Meridian, Alaska containing 159.94 acres

**Prepared by:** Lisa Shon Jodwalis

**Date:** 10 March 2014

### **Proposed Action**

The State of Alaska, Department of Fish and Game has already established a fisheries research sonar station on a piece of property that is currently owned by the State of Alaska but will be conveyed and title accepted on March 18, 2014. This proposal will cover the time that title is accepted by the Bureau of Land Management until the time that BLM conveys it to the heirs of the Native applicant. The purpose of the sonar project is to estimate the daily passage of Chinook, chum and coho salmon migrating up the Tanana River. Data from this project will be used to manage the Yukon River commercial and subsistence salmon fisheries. They propose to use this site for three (3) years beginning every year June through October, the first year was June 2013. Current improvement onsite consists of a sonar tent, cook tent, gear tent, six (6) sleep tents, water/shower shed, and two (2) outhouses. The structures are not permanent and the wall tents are on plywood platforms. Additionally, storage of approximately 237 gallons of gasoline would be stored in three (3) 55 gallon drums and 12 6 gallon boat and generator cans. Approximately 150 gallons of diesel fuel would be stored in ten (10) 15 gallon containers and are used for the heating stoves. All fuel would be placed in secondary containment. Additional equipment onsite three (3) outboard skiffs, satellite antenna mounted on a tree behind the sonar tent, an ATV for moving fuel, water and equipment, small gasoline generators, cable to connect transducers and rotators to equipment in sonar tent, a fish lead approximately 40 feet long, constructed of galvanized metal pipe tripods and aluminum pickets and a sonar transducer mounted on an aluminum pod 4 feet tall and 4 feet wide, placed in the water approximately 3 feet deep and 30 feet from the left bank shore.

### **Evaluation**

The basis for this evaluation is BLM Manual 6310-Conducting Wilderness Characteristics Inventory on BLM Lands, and BLM Manual 6320 - Considering Lands with Wilderness Characteristics in the BLM Land Use Planning Process, which direct offices to conduct and maintain inventories regarding the presence or absence of wilderness characteristics, and to consider identified Lands with Wilderness Characteristics (LWC) in land use plans and when analyzing projects under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The BLM has further determined that, if a project or activity does not negatively affect wilderness characteristics, the permitting process may proceed as usual, regardless of whether an inventory of wilderness characteristics has been completed.

The land in question is less than 5,000 acres so does not meet the criteria for lands with wilderness characteristics.

## **FINDING**

The land in question is less than 5,000 acres so does not meet the criteria for lands with wilderness characteristics.

### **Type of Assessment/Sources**

USGS topographic maps, GIS data, Google Earth images

## — Section 810 Analysis

**NEPA Document No.:** DOI-BLM-AK-F030-2014-0012-CX

**Applican):** State of Alaska, Department of Fish and Game

**Case File No.:** F-96765

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**Location:** On an island in the Tanana River west of Manley

**Township/Range:** Lot 2, U.S. Survey No. 10012, within Secs. 28 and 29, T. 2 N., R. 16 W., Fairbanks Meridian, Alaska containing 159.94 acres

**Evaluation by:** Erin Julianus and Dave Parker

**Date:** 3/6/2014 and 3/7/2014

**Type of Assessment/Sources:**

### **Effect of the proposal on subsistence uses and needs**

#### Fisheries:

The proposed action is a renewal of a lease for the continued use of 159.94 acres adjacent to the Tanana River near Manley, Alaska, to conduct a fish counting sonar operation with associated camp. Approved 'Leave No Trace' and safe fuel handling and storage stipulations and mitigation measures listed in the CX would prevent degradation of fisheries habitat. The proposed action will not create any legal or physical barriers that would limit access by or use of fisheries resources by subsistence users.

#### Wildlife:

The proposed action is located in Game Management Unit (GMU) 20. Although subsistence activity occurs throughout the area, the proposed action will not significantly affect subsistence uses and needs.

Other resources:

The proposed activity will not significantly impact other resources such as berries, willows, and spruce roots. Subsistence activities that target these resources occur in a much broader area than where the proposed action is to take place. Therefore, the proposed action will not significantly restrict subsistence uses and needs.

**Expected reduction, if any, in the availability of resources due to alteration in resource distribution, migration, or location:**

The proposed action would not alter the distribution, migration, or location of subsistence resources.

**Expected limitation, if any, in the access of subsistence users resulting from the proposal:**

None. Access to resources by subsistence users will not be limited by the proposed action.

**Availability of other lands, if any, for the purpose sought to be achieved:**

No other public lands are available for the purposes to be achieved. The applicant will use existing, temporary structures to support their fish survey work. Therefore, no alternative public lands were proposed.

**Other alternatives, if any, which would reduce or eliminate the use, occupancy, or disposition of public lands needed for subsistence purposes:**

The only alternative that would reduce or eliminate the use, occupancy, or disposition of public lands needed for subsistence purposes is to not allow or permit any activities on public lands. However, such an alternative is not viable because the BLM manages public lands for multiple uses.

**Findings:**

The proposed action will not significantly restrict subsistence uses. Access to subsistence resources will not be hampered by the proposed activity. There is no reasonably foreseeable significant decrease in the abundance of harvestable resources and in the distribution of harvestable resources due to the proposed action.

**References**