

UAF Seismic Site Renewal at Coldfoot

Introduction

The University of Alaska at Fairbanks has filed an application proposing to renew their existing seismic station and upgrade data quality for another ten (10) years located on the rim/edge of a mineral material site at mile post 174 on the Dalton Highway.

Summary

The BLM would renew a grant to the University of Alaska at Fairbanks, Geophysical Institute for another ten (10) years for their existing seismic station and to allow additional improvements and equipment to upgrade their data quality.

Alternatives Considered

The No Alternative Option is the only alternative considered and was not selected as it would not allow renewal of the seismic station nor the upgrades for data quality which is essential for earthquake research purposes. All equipment would have to be removed.

Decision

I have decided to authorize a ten (10) year right-of-way for the renewal of the existing seismic station and to authorize additional improvements and equipment to provide for better data quality at mile post 174 on the Dalton Highway. This site is essential for earthquake research purposes.

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 Utility Corridor Resource Management Plan.

Public Involvement

Due to the remoteness of this area it was determined that the general public would not be impacted. Non-objection letters were obtained from the State of Alaska and Alyeska.

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 Decision

Having considered a full range of alternatives, associated impacts, and public and agency input, I have decided to adopt and implement the attached Approved Plan as the Utility Corridor Resource Management Plan.

/s/ Gary M. Foreman
Signature
Nichelle W. Jacobson
Field Manager
Central Yukon Field Office

April 18, 2014
Date

— Essential Fish Habitat

NEPA Document No.: DOI-BLM-AK-F030-2014-0016-CX

Prepared by: David Parker

Date: 3/25/14

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 slimey 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). Because the proposed action is a renewal of an existing lease, and the proposed equipment improvements will have no effect on fish habitat, EFH will not be affected.

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>

— B Wilderness Characteristics Assessment

NEPA Document No.: DOI-BLM-AK-F030–2014–0016–CX

Serial No.: F-93996

Applicant: University of Alaska at Fairbanks, Geophysical Institute

Location: Mile post 174 on the Dalton Highway more particularly described as the NE¼, Sec. 28, T. 28 N., R. 12 W., Fairbanks Meridian, containing approximately 0.10 acre

Prepared by: Lisa Shon Jodwalis

Date: 18 March, 2014

Proposed Action

The University of Alaska at Fairbanks proposes to renew their existing seismic station and upgrade their data quality near Coldfoot Alaska for ten (10) years. The site is southeast of an existing mineral material source commonly identified as OMS 98.0–2. The unit is powered by wind and solar charged batteries. The batteries are valve regulated, recombinant lead/acid non-spillable batteries that are exempt from the DOT requirements. A MSDS was submitted with the application and is on file. The wind/solar structure is a custom built 4 x 4 x 5 fiberglass hut with two seismometers in a vault made from a 95 gallon fiberglass drum buried and coupled to bedrock with concrete. To upgrade data quality they also propose to add a shallow borehole next to the existing seismic vault. The borehole would be 3m-5m deep and 20cm in diameter. It will be drilled using a small portable coring machine, and the hole will be cased with PVC pipe. The borehole will house their broadband seismometer while the existing vault will continue to house the datalogger and strong motion instrument. Additional improvements would be to install a small barometer/thermometer instrument, add one or two additional solar panels on a swingset-style mount near the existing hut. They would maintain the current foot trail to the station from the parking area. The entire footprint is approximately 130 square feet.

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). Wilderness characteristics are defined in Section 2(c) of the Wilderness Act of 1964 and include sufficient size, naturalness, and outstanding opportunities for either solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation and may also include supplemental values.

On BLM lands within the Utility Corridor, the effects of proposed projects on wilderness characteristics are evaluated in accordance with the Nonwilderness Assessment, a special project inventory approved by the BLM Director and conducted by the BLM along portions of the Trans-Alaska Pipeline System (TAPS) corridor in 1980. The assessment complied with the wilderness review requirement in Section 603 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA).

The action being considered is located along the Dalton Highway within the Prospect Segment of the Nonwilderness Assessment, which covered approximately 555,000 acres. It was determined that 302,000 acres of this segment, primarily in proximity to the North Slope Haul Road (Dalton Highway) and Trans-Alaska Pipeline, lacked naturalness and outstanding opportunities for solitude and primitive, unconfined types of recreation and thus did not meet the criteria contained in the Wilderness Act.

FINDING

The proposed action will occur on lands identified as lacking wilderness characteristics and therefore will not affect wilderness characteristics.

Type of Assessment/Sources

- U.S. Department of Interior, BLM, 1980. Nonwilderness Assessment: The Alaska Natural Gas Transportation System, Final Decision. Anchorage, Alaska
- USGS topographic maps, GIS data, Google Earth images
- personal familiarity with the site of the proposed action

— Section 810 Analysis

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Applicant: University of Alaska at Fairbanks, Geophysical Institute

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Proposed Action: The University of Alaska at Fairbanks proposes to renew their existing seismic station and upgrade their data quality near Coldfoot Alaska for ten (10) years. The site is southeast of an existing mineral material source commonly identified as OMS 98.0-2. The unit is powered by wind and solar charged batteries. The batteries are valve regulated, recombinant lead/acid non-spillable batteries that are exempt from the DOT requirements. A MSDS was submitted with the application and is on file. The wind/solar structure is a custom built 4 x 4 x 5 fiberglass hut with two seismometers in a vault made from a 95 gallon fiberglass drum buried and coupled to bedrock with concrete. To upgrade data quality they also propose to add a shallow borehole next to the existing seismic vault. The borehole would be 3m-5m deep and 20cm in diameter. It will be drilled using a small portable coring machine, and the hole will be cased with PVC pipe. The borehole will house their broadband seismometer while the existing vault will continue to house the datalogger and strong motion instrument. Additional improvements would be to install a small barometer/thermometer instrument, add one or two additional solar panels on a swingset-style mount near the existing hut. They would maintain the current foot trail to the station from the parking area. The entire footprint is approximately 130 square feet.

Location: Mile post 174 on the Dalton Highway.

Township/Range: NE¼, Sec. 28, T. 28 N., R. 12 W., Fairbanks Meridian, containing approximately 0.10 acre

Evaluation by: Erin Julianus (Wildlife) and David Parker (Fisheries)

Date: 03/25/2014

Type of Assessment/Sources: Review of application materials, subsistence database, local knowledge, interviews with staff knowledgeable about the area and the proposed action.

Effect of the proposal on subsistence uses and needs

Fisheries:

The proposed action is a renewal of an existing lease to continue to operate seismic equipment on a mountaintop, and involves removal and upgrade of existing equipment. Previously this action has not adversely affected fish resources, and in the proposed 10 year lease it is not expected to significantly reduce harvestable fisheries resources that are available for subsistence use. The proposed action would not alter the distribution, migration, or location of harvestable fisheries resources. The proposed action will not create any legal or physical barriers that would limit access by subsistence users of the fisheries resource.

Wildlife:

The proposed action is located in Game Management Unit (GMU) 24A. Species of wildlife that are used for subsistence harvest in the area include moose, sheep, bears, furbearers, and

small game. These species may temporarily avoid the area when activities associated with the permitted action are occurring, but the activity will not permanently impact their distribution in the area. 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:

The proposed action is to renew a permit for existing structures on public lands. Therefore, no alternative sites 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