



United States Department of the Interior



BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT  
Glennallen Field Office  
P.O. Box 147  
Glennallen, Alaska 99588  
<http://www.blm.gov/ak>

**MMG Exploratory Drilling**  
Environmental Assessment, DOI-BLM-AK-A020-2014-0013-EA

Case File: AA093554  
Applicant: MMG Exploration LLC

**DECISION RECORD**

**Background**

In March 2013, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) received an application from MMG, USA Exploration, LLC, to conduct mineral exploration (drilling) on lands that are managed by the BLM. Exploration would occur from June 2013 until completed or September 30, 2015 whichever comes first. This consists of up to 6 drill holes at different locations, with 1 hole approximately 3.8 inches in diameter and approximately 1000 feet deep being drilled at each site. Each site will only be used for approximately 7 days. Each site will have a drill pad that is normally 16ft X 16 ft and will be constructed using timbers to minimize the amount of earthmoving and reclamation. All sites will be reclaimed when the drilling is complete. Reclamation will include plugging each hole with bentonite slurry or equivalent for a minimum of 10 feet within the top 20 feet of the hole, the remainder of the hole to the surface will be backfilled with drill cuttings. The drill will be working 24 hours per day with 2 crews working. All access will be done by helicopter.

**Decision**

I have decided to select Alternative 2, Proposed Action Alternative. This decision is based on specific analysis found within the *MMG Exploratory Drilling Environmental Assessment* (DOI-BLM-AK-A020-2014-0013-EA). This decision is further supported by management decisions contained in the Record of Decision for the East Alaska Resource Management Plan (RMP/ROD; BLM 2007).

Specifically, it is my decision to authorize:

- Exploratory drilling and associated activities as outlined in the EA.

To mitigate impacts further, it is my decision to implement the following mitigation measures or Required Operating Procedures (ROPs):

- Helicopter avoidance of caribou aggregations by maintaining a 0.5 mile horizontal buffer.
- Helicopter avoidance of recreational users by maintaining a 0.5 mile horizontal buffer.
- Within defined caribou calving areas, no activities will be permitted from May 1 to June

15.

- Projects will be designed to protect water quality and comply with State and Federal water quality standards.
- In open, exposed landscapes, development will be located in the opposite direction from the primary scenic views, if feasible.

The Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) indicates that the selected alternative has been analyzed in an Environmental Assessment (EA) and has been found to have no significant environmental effects. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement is not required and will not be prepared.

### **Rationale for the Decision**

The No Action Alternative was not selected because it would not meet the purpose and need for the applicant nor BLM. The need for the action is established by BLM's responsibility under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) to respond to requests for the commercial use of public lands. Consistent with 43 CFR § 2920 and section 302 of FLPMA it is the BLM's objective or purpose in considering this action, to provide for the orderly and timely processing of proposals for commercial use of the public lands.

The Proposed Action Alternative was selected because it meets the BLM's purpose and need. Additionally the seasonal date restrictions contained within this alternative would eliminate possible conflicts with the Nelchina Caribou calving grounds. Therefore, the selected alternative supports the RMP/ROD decision to, "issue land use authorizations for various authorizations and agreements to use BLM lands such as right-of-way grants, road, and temporary use permits under several different authorities including leases, permits, and easements under section 302 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA)."

### **Laws, Authorities, and Land Use Plan Conformance**

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

- National Historic Preservation Act as Amended 1992
- North America Wetlands Conservation Act of 1989 (as amended 1990 and 1994)
- Executive Order 11987 of May 1977 (Exotic Organisms)
- Executive Order 11990 of May 1977 (Protection of Wetlands)
- Executive Order 11644 of February 1972
- Executive Order 11989 of May 1977
- Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 (as amended 1936, 1960, 1969, 1974, 1978, 1986, and 1989)

The East Alaska Resource Management Plan and Record of Decision (RMP/ROD) provides the overall long-term management direction for lands encompassed by the proposed project (BLM 2007). The Proposed Action and alternatives are consistent with the RMP/ROD.

### **Public Involvement, Consultation, and Coordination**

Moderate controversy concerning the effects of this action on the quality of the human environment can be expected. However these effects are primarily perception based. A summary of the proposed project was posted to the BLM's national NEPA register website, ePlanning on April 21, 2014. A scoping notice was placed in the Copper River Record the week of April 25, 2014. Notice of the Proposed Action and solicitation of comments were published on the What's Up Alaska list server, and mailed to Ahtna, Incorporated, and commercial guides that work in the area during the week of April 25, 2014.

Comment deadline was Thursday May 15, 2014. Eight comments were received during the comment period, and two comments were received after the comment period closed. One new issue was raised that was not identified by the interdisciplinary review team. This issue consisted of the impacts of noise on the affected environment including the Nelchina Caribou calving grounds. All other comments were generally opposed to the project and concern was expressed over the project taking place in and around the Nelchina Caribou calving grounds.

### **Appeal Opportunities**

This decision may be appealed to the Interior Board of Land Appeals, Office of the Secretary, in accordance with the regulations contained in 43 CFR § 4. To appeal you must file a notice of appeal at the BLM Glennallen Field Office, P.O. Box 147, Glennallen, Alaska 99588, within 30 days from receipt of this decision. The appeal must be in writing and delivered in person, via the United States Postal Service mail system, or other common carrier, to the Glennallen Field Office at Mile 186.5 Glenn Highway, Glennallen, Alaska or as noted above. *The BLM does not accept appeals by facsimile, email, or other electronic means.* The appellant has the burden of showing that the decision appealed from is in error.

If you wish to file a petition pursuant to regulation 43 CFR § 4.21 (58 FR 4939, January 19, 1993) for a stay of the effectiveness of this decision during the time that your appeal is being reviewed by the Board, the petition for a stay must accompany your notice of appeal. Except as otherwise provided by law or other pertinent regulation, a petition for a stay of decision pending appeal shall show sufficient justification based on the following standards: (a) The relative harm to the parties if the stay is granted or denied, (b) The likelihood of the appellant's success on the merits, (c) The likelihood of immediate and irreparable harm if the stay is not granted, and (d) Whether the public interest favors granting the stay.

Copies of the notice of appeal and petition for a stay must also be submitted to each party named in this decision and to the Interior Board of Land Appeals and to the Office of the Solicitor (see 43 CFR § 4.413); Office of the Regional Solicitor, Alaska Region, U.S. Department of the Interior, 4230 University Drive, Suite 300, Anchorage, Alaska 99508; at the same time the original documents are filed with this office. If you request a stay, you have the burden of proof to demonstrate that a stay should be granted.

*/s/ Dennis C. Teitzel*

*June 30, 2014*

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Dennis C. Teitzel  
Glennallen Field Manager

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Date

### **References**

BLM. 2007. East Alaska Resource Management Plan and Record of Decision. September, 2007.

**Attachments**

*Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)* for DOI-BLM-AK-A020-2014-0013-EA

*MMG Exploratory Drilling* Environmental Assessment, DOI-BLM-AK-A020-2014-0013-EA