Toolik Lake Access Road

Introduction

The Toolik Lake Research Station was established in 1975 with the purpose of providing specialized logistical support to the academic institutions conducting scientific research in the Arctic. The Research Station supports over 5,000 research users primarily May through September during field season. Historically, the Rsearch Station has operated under a FLPMA lease issued by the Central Yukon Field Office. To access the Research Station, the University of Alaska filed for a right-of-way from the Dalton Highway to the Research Station in 1994, which expired June 2014.

Summary

The University of Alaska — Fairbanks proposes to renew their existing right-of-way to access the Toolik Lake Research Station and auxiliary roads from the Dalton Highway, mile post 285.

Alternatives Considered

The No Alternative Option is the only alternative considered and was not selected as it would not allow the users of the Toolik Lake Research Station to access the site.

Decision

I have decided to authorize a right-of-way grant on public lands for the purpose of renewing an existing gravel road for access to the Toolik Lake Research Station, the former airstrip, the current airstrip and construction camp gravel pad from the Dalton Highway, mile post 285 for twenty (20) years. This road measures 100 feet wide by 14,168 feet long for a total of approximately 32.50 acres.

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

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 June 30, 2014. No comments have been received as of July 14, 2014.

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 in conformance with the Utility Corridor Resource Management Plan.

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

July 15, 2014
Date

Essential Fish Habitat

NEPA Document No.: DOI-BLM-AK-F030–2014–0044–CX

Prepared by: Bob Karlen

Date: 7/11/2014

Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) Finding: There are no salmon species catalogued by the State of Alaska present in the area to be used or impacted by this action. Based on this finding, it is anticipated that the proposed action will not have an adverse effect on EFH for salmon. Therefore, the proposed action is assigned the EFH determination: *No affect*. EFH consultation with NMFS is not required.

References: Alaska Department of Fish and Game. 2014. Fish distribution database. Internet website at: http//www.sf.adfg.state.ak.us.

Wilderness Characteristics Assessment

NEPA Document No.: DOI-BLM-AK-F030–2014–0044–CX

Serial No.: F-91038

Applicant: University of Alaska — Fairbanks

Location: Mile post 285 off the Dalton Highway to the Toolik Lake Research Station more particularly described as Secs. 20, 21, 28, 29 and 33, T. 9 S., R. 11 E., Umiat Meridian, Alaska, containing approximately 32.50 acres

Prepared by: Karen Deatherage

Date: July 1, 2014

Proposed Action

The University of Alaska proposes to renew their existing right-of-way grant for an access road from the Dalton Highway to the Toolik Lake Research Station, the former airstrip, the existing airstrip and the former Toolik Lake Construction Camp Gravel Pad. The road was constructed by Alyeska during the construction of the pipeline. The access and auxiliary roads consist of dirt and gravel and measure 100 feet wide by 14,168 long for approximately 32.50 acres. Primary use of the road occurs between April and September with intermittent use the remainder of the year. Use would consist of users and visitors to the Research Station, usually in passenger cars or pickup trucks. Larger commercial trucks, providing fuel and supplies to the Research Station would use the road once or twice a week during the primary field season. Last year Department of Transportation and Public Facility subcontractors using heavy commercial trucks accessed the road to Toolik Lake to extract water for maintenance of the Dalton Highway. Any and all damage to the road was repaired by the subcontractor and if they continue to use the road, they would continue to repair any damage they cause. Toolik Lake Research Station would continue to perform annual grading and maintenance, lift road in areas that develop snow accumulation and crown road to ensure proper drainage.

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).

Effects on wilderness characteristics on BLM lands within the Utility Corridor are evaluated according to the Nonwilderness Assessment, a special project approved by the BLM Director and conducted by the BLM along portions of the Trans-Alaska Pipeline System (TAPS) corridor in 1980. This assessment identified lands under BLM administration that were considered lacking in the wilderness characteristics as defined by the Wilderness Act of 1964. The assessment was conducted in a manner that met the requirements of Section 603 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA).

The action being considered is located primarily within the Sagavanirktok Segment of the Nonwilderness Assessment, which covered approximately 512,000 acres total in 1980. Portions of this segment meet the 5,000 acre minimum size. However it was determined that the Sagavanirktok Segment did not meet the standards for naturalness due to roads, camps, airfields, pipelines, material sites and associated facilities. These disturbances bisect the entire length of the segment.

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
- U.S.G.S. topographic map Philip Smith Mountains; GIS data; Google Earth images
- Aerial surveys in 2013 and personal knowledge of the area.

Section 810 Assessment

NEPA Document No.: DOI-BLM-AK-F030–2014–0044–CX

Applicant: University of Alaska — Fairbanks

Serial No.: F-91038

Proposed Action: The University of Alaska proposes to renew their existing right-of-way grant for an access road from the Dalton Highway to the Toolik Lake Research Station, the former airstrip, the existing airstrip and the former Toolik Lake Construction Camp Gravel Pad. The road was constructed by Alyeska during the construction of the pipeline. The access and auxiliary roads consist of dirt and gravel and measure 100 feet wide by 14,168 long for approximately 32.50 acres. Primary use of the road occurs between April and September with intermittent use the remainder of the year. Use would consist of users and visitors to the Research Station, usually in passenger cars or pickup trucks. Larger commercial trucks, providing fuel and supplies to the Research Station would use the road once or twice a week during the primary field season. Last year Department of Transportation and Public Facility subcontractors using heavy commercial trucks accessed the road to Toolik Lake to extract water for maintenance of the Dalton Highway. Any and all damage to the road was repaired by the subcontractor and if they continue to use the road, they would continue to repair any damage they cause. Toolik Lake Research Station would continue to perform annual grading and maintenance, lift road in areas that develop snow accumulation and crown road to ensure proper drainage.

Location: Mile post 285 off the Dalton Highway to the Toolik Lake Research Station

Township/Range: Secs. 20, 21, 28, 29 and 33, T. 9 S., R. 11 E., Umiat Meridian, Alaska, containing approximately 32.50 acres.

Evaluation by: Erin Julianus and Bob Karlen

Date: 7/7/2014 and 7/11/14

Type of Assessment/Sources:

Fisheries: Though there are fish present in the surrounding drainages, no subsistence use of fish is documented for residents of Alaska within the permitted area (USDI BLM 1989). Even if there was fish movement and subsequent subsistence use of fish upstream or downstream from the study sites, the proposed action would not significantly reduce harvestable fisheries resources that are available for subsistence use since this activity will not affect fish or their habitat. The proposed action will 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) 26B. 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 and personnel associated with the permitted action are present. Traffic on the road has the potential to impact subsistence wildlife populations through roadkill incidents. However, traffic will generally be light and slow

moving, which should mitigate impacts. Although subsistence activities occur 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 wood, water, or berries. 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 will not significantly alter the distribution, migration or location of harvestable wildlife resources, nor would it create any legal or physical barriers that would limit subsistence harvest and access.

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:

Other public lands are available for the purposes to be achieved. However, the proposed action is a permitted activity for an existing road on BLM lands in an area that is designated for research activities. This action will support research activities. There is no compelling reason to change the site of operation outside of BLM lands.

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 that conflict with subsistence uses. 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

USDI Bureau of Land Management. 1989. Utility Corridor Proposed Resource Management Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement. USDI/Northern Field Office. Fairbanks, Alaska.