

Decision Record Memorandum

Introduction

Programmatic Fuel Reduction for Fairbanks District Office

DOI-BLM-AK-F000-2014-0001-EA

Summary

Small, low complexity pile burns not to exceed 40 acres of vegetation per year in the Central Yukon and Eastern Interior Field Offices.

Alternatives Considered

The No Alternative Option is the only alternative considered and was not selected as it would not allow piles to be burned, and other methods of disposal are less than desirable.

Decision

I have decided to implement the Proposed Action (including mitigation as described in the Environmental Assessment) and authorize a permit on public lands for the purpose of burning piles to dispose of small acreages of vegetation.

Management Considerations

The Environmental Assessment 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)

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 July 10, 2014. No comments have been received as of March 27, 2015.

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 Fairbanks District Office, 1150 University Avenue, Fairbanks, Alaska 99709 within 30 days from the date of this decision. If you decide to file an appeal, you must carefully follow the procedure described on 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. 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:

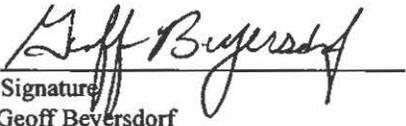
1. The relative harm to the parties if the Board grants or denies the stay,
2. The likelihood of the success of your appeal on its merits,
3. The likelihood of immediate and irreparable harm if the Board does not grant the stay, and;
4. Whether the public interest favors granting a stay.

Approval from Authorized Official:

District 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 Proposed Action in conformance with the following planning documents:

1. Alaska Interagency Wildland Fire Management Plan (2010)
2. Bureau of Land Management-Alaska Wildland Fire Management Plan (2005)
3. Bureau of Land Management-Land Use Plan Amendment for Wildland Fire and Fuels Management for Alaska Environmental Assessment (2005)
4. Fortymile Management Plan Framework (1980)
5. Record of Decision, Resource Management Plan, Steese National Conservation Area (1986)
6. Resource Management Plan and Record of Decision for the Central Yukon Planning Area(1986)
7. Southwest Management Framework Plan Record of Decision (1981)
8. Utility Corridor Resource Management Plan/ Environmental Impact Statement (1991)
9. White Mountains National Recreation Area Resource Management Plan and Record of Decision (1986)


Signature
Geoff Beyersdorf
District Manager
Fairbanks District Office

7/27/2015
Date

Essential Fish Habitat

NEPA Document No.: DOI-BLM-AK-F000-2014-001-EA

Prepared by: David Esse

Date: 12/17/2014

Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) Finding: Anadromous fish species are present in some of the streams within the proposed action's project area (ADF&G 2014). However, due to the conditions for burning and mitigation measures associated with the proposed action the effects of the action on EFH are expected to be insignificant in the area encompassed by this permit. It is also unlikely the impacts downstream of the project area will be significant. Based on these assumptions, the proposed action is assigned the EFH determination: *No effect*. No further EFH consultation is 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-F000-2014-001-EA

Applicant(s): Bureau of Land Management; Fairbanks District Office

Proposed Action: Disposal of woody debris pile from activities such as small-scale thinning, brushing or clearing projects of less than 40 acres annually utilizing prescribed burns. Access and removal methods are not considered.

Location: Eastern Interior and Central Yukon Field Offices

Township/Range: inclusive of all lands within these Field Offices

Map: refer to map in the NEPA file

Evaluation by: Holli McClain, Outdoor Recreation Planner

Assessment of Wilderness Characteristics:

Type of Assessment/Sources:

An inventory for wilderness characteristics was completed for the Eastern Interior Resource Management Plan. Wilderness Characteristics Inventory: Eastern Interior Resource Management Plan, BLM, EIFO, March 2011. An inventory for wilderness characteristics was initiated for the Central Yukon Resource Management Plan in 2014, with completion in early 2015. This is a programmatic action covering over 6 million acres in the Eastern Interior Field Office and around 11 million acres in the Central Yukon Field Office. The actual location and size of the burns will vary by year.

Does the area of project authorization possess wilderness characteristics?

A review of the wilderness characteristics inventories shows that for the Eastern Interior Planning Area 99 percent contains wilderness characteristics and for the Central Yukon Planning Area over 90 percent contains wilderness characteristics as of January 2015. These areas are generally natural in appearance, having been primarily affected by the forces of nature and contain generally minimal evidence of people's work. The areas contain outstanding opportunities for solitude or outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation. Many areas also contain supplemental ecological, geological and scenic values.

How will the proposed action affect wilderness characteristics?

If the actual location of debris piles are located on lands that contain wilderness characteristics, burning of a pile up to 40 acres would not reduce the minimum size of 5,000 acres (40 acres is less than 1 percent of the minimum size). Fire is a natural part of the ecosystem and the area burned will regenerate within one or two growing seasons resulting in a generally natural appearing landscape, having been primarily affected by the forces of nature. Burning of debris piles would not generally result in substantially noticeable evidence of people's work. The area would still contain outstanding opportunities for solitude or outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation after the prescribed burn was completed. If the area contains supplemental

ecological, geological and scenic values only ecological (vegetation) may be impacted by a prescribed fire.

Findings:

In accordance with WO IM 2011-154, BLM has evaluated the effect of the proposed action on wilderness characteristics and has determined proposed action covers lands with wilderness characteristics but would have no or minimal effect and requires no further analysis.

Section 810 Assessment

NEPA Document No.: DOI-BLM-AK-F000-2014-001-EA

Applicant: BLM — FDO

Proposed Action: The proposed action is to conduct prescribed burns to dispose of debris piles comprised of woody vegetation from up to 40-acres of forest annually.

Location: Eastern Interior and Central Yukon Field Offices

Evaluation by: Erin Julianus and Dave Esse

Date: 12/09/2014

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 following fish species inhabit waterbodies in the area of the proposed action and are valued as subsistence resources: Chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*), chum salmon (*O. keta*), sockeye salmon (*O. nerka*), pink salmon (*O. gorbuscha*), coho salmon (*O. kisutch*), Arctic lamprey (*Lamptera camtschatica*), Arctic grayling (*Thymallus arcticus*), Arctic char (*Salvelinus alpinus*), lake trout (*S. namaycush*), burbot (*Lota lota*), broad whitefish (*Coregonus nasus*), humpback whitefish (*C. clupeiformis*), least cisco (*C. sardinella*), bering cisco (*C. laurettae*), inconnu (*Stenodus leucichthys*), Dolly Varden (*Salvelinus malma*), northern pike (*Esox Lucius*), and longnose sucker (*Catostomus catostomus*). There are 22 rural communities in the proposed action's project area whose residents' subsistence activity may be affected by the proposed action.

The no action alternative would have no impact on subsistence species, habitat, or activities. Under the Proposed Action, prescribed burns to dispose of debris piles comprised of woody vegetation on less than 40-acres of forest annually. Also under the proposed action, all burning activities will be conducted at least 50' from any waterbody and burning of piles is only allowed when snow covered ground, saturated ground, or mineral soil underneath the piles and surrounding the piles by at least 10 feet. It is anticipated that with these mitigation measures the proposed action will not significantly reduce harvestable fisheries resources that are available for subsistence use or would negatively affect fisheries habitat. The proposed action should not alter the distribution, migration, or location of harvestable fisheries resources. The proposed action would not create any legal or physical barriers that would limit access by subsistence users to the fisheries resource.

Wildlife:

The following terrestrial wildlife species inhabit BLM-managed lands within the Central Yukon (CYFO) and Eastern Interior Field Office (EIFO) boundaries, and are valued as subsistence resources: moose (*Alces alces*), caribou (*Rangifer tarandus*), Dall's sheep (*Ovis dalli*), black and brown bears (*Ursus americanus* and *U. arctos*), small game such as upland game birds and snowshoe hare (*Lepus americanus*), and furbearers. There are 16 rural communities in the CYFO

and 6 communities in the EIFO that will potentially be in the vicinity of projects implemented on BLM-managed lands through the proposed action.

No more than 40 acres of wildlife habitat will be disturbed under the proposed action (Alternative 1). Subsistence species may temporarily avoid the area when activities and personnel associated with the proposed action are present. However, the distribution of subsistence species will not be permanently altered as a result of the proposed action. Fire is a natural disturbance common to interior Alaska, and post-burn vegetative succession is beneficial to species such as moose, which take advantage of mid-successional stands of deciduous trees and shrubs (MacCracken and Viereck 1990, Maier et al. 2005). Increases in wildlife habitat would be negligible at the field office level due to the small scope of the project.

The proposed action is not expected to alter the distribution, migration, or location of harvestable wildlife resources, nor would it limit access to harvestable resources by subsistence users.

Other resources:

The proposed action may alter the availability of wood or vegetation resources in areas selected for woody debris reduction or removal. However, the scale at which this would occur would not appreciably impact the availability of these resources on the landscape. Other harvestable resources such as water or berries would not be impacted by the proposed action.

1. Evaluation and Finding for Alternative 1: The Proposed Action

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

Localized, small scale reduction of wood and vegetation resources may occur as a result of the proposed action. However, these resources are common at the landscape level and their use occurs in a much broader area than would be impacted by the proposed action. There would not be a significant reduction in the availability of these resources for subsistence use.

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

None; the proposed action would not create any legal or physical barriers that would limit subsistence harvest and access.

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

The proposed action would occur as needed at specific sites on BLM-managed lands in the Fairbanks District. Therefore, no other lands were considered.

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

The only other alternative considered was the No Action Alternative, which would not reduce or eliminate the availability of or access to subsistence resources in the vicinity of the proposed action. There is no substantial evidence that would indicate a significant impact will result from the proposed action. No other alternatives were evaluated.

Findings:

The proposed action would not significantly restrict subsistence uses. No reasonably foreseeable and significant decrease in the abundance or distribution of harvestable resources, and no reasonably foreseeable limitations on harvester access have been forecasted to emerge as a function of the proposed action analyzed in this document.

2. Evaluation and Finding for Alternative 2: No Action Alternative

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

Under the No Action Alternative, prescribed burns for small-scale disposal of woody debris piles would not be implemented. Under this Alternative, the availability of subsistence resources would remain unchanged and the distribution, migration, and location of these resources would not be impacted.

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

Under the No Action Alternative, access to subsistence resources would remain unchanged.

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

Under the No Action Alternative, availability of other lands for the purpose sought to be achieved does not apply.

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

The proposed action was the only other alternative considered.

Findings:

The No Action Alternative would not significantly restrict subsistence resources, uses, or needs.

References

Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G). 2014. Fish distribution database. Internet website at: <http://www.sf.adfg.state.ak.us>.

MacCracken, J.G., Viereck, L.A. 1990. Browse regrowth and use by moose after fire in Interior Alaska. *Northwest Science*, 64:1. 11-18.

Maier, J.A.K, VerHoef, J.M., McGuire, A.D., Bowyer, R.T., Saperstein, L., Maier, H.A. 2005. Distribution and density of moose in relation to landscape characteristics: effects of scale. *Canadian Journal of Forest Research*, 35: 2233-2243.

Fairbanks District Office, Bureau of Land Management

ASSESSMENT OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORIC RESOURCES

Serial Number	n/a
NEPA Number	DOI-BLM-AK-F000-2014-0001-EA
Applicant	BLM-FDO
Quadrangle	Multiple – FDO wide
Date	10-14-14

Location:

This action applies to lands managed by the Central Yukon and Eastern Interior Field Offices, of the BLM Fairbanks District Office. Figure 1.

Description of Proposed Action:

The BLM Central Yukon and Eastern Interior Field Offices will conduct prescribed burns to dispose of woody debris piles from less than 40-acres of forest or brush annually. The woody debris piles will consist of forest vegetation from various small-scale thinning, brushing, or clearing projects on lands managed by the Field Offices. The actual location and size of the burns will vary by year; however the total area burned or area cleared and burned is not to exceed 40 acres of vegetation per year. If additional acreage needs to be burned further NEPA analysis will be conducted.

This action does not include the cutting of the vegetation; it will only provide a mechanism for disposing of the vegetation from clearing or thinning projects. Separate NEPA analysis will need to be done for the clearing of vegetation, per project. This action will not cover broadcast burning, burning of debris piles composed of vegetation cut from more than 40 acres, burning of debris piles during times of high fire danger, burning debris piles with a large complex organization, burning of garbage, or the burning of buildings. This action also will not cover burns for a military purpose on withdrawn lands; those are covered under a Department of Defense NEPA process.

OFFICE REVIEW

Existing data review and Description of past inventory work in the area

The Alaska Heritage Resources Survey database, maintained by the Alaska State Historic Preservation Office, indicates 1000s of known cultural sites in the lands managed by the BLM in the FDO.

Anticipated impacts to cultural resources / Effects on Cultural Resources

There are no anticipated impacts to cultural resources by the Proposed Action. Burning of wood already piled up will not affect cultural resources. Separate NEPA will be reviewed per project for the actual cutting and stacking of the wood piles.

Recommendation and/or Mitigative Actions Required

I do not recommend additional inventory or other mitigative actions prior to approval of the Proposed Action.

FIELD EXAMINATION

Description of the area surveyed

N/A

Survey methodology

N/A

Results of survey

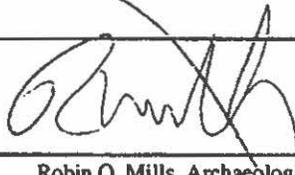
N/A

SUMMARY: CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

There are no anticipated impacts to cultural resources by the Proposed Action. Burning of wood already piled up will not affect cultural resources. Separate NEPA will be reviewed per project for the actual cutting and stacking of the wood piles.

The following paragraph, outlining basic laws pertaining to cultural resources, needs to be attached to the completed package associated with DOI-BLM-AK-F000-2014-0001-EA:

All operations shall be conducted in such a manner as not to cause damage or disturbance to any historical or archaeological sites and artifacts. The Antiquities Act (1906), Archaeological Resources Protection Act (1979), Federal Land Policy and Management Act (1976), and general United State property laws and regulations, all prohibit the appropriation, excavation, injury, or destruction of any historic or prehistoric ruin or monument, or any other object of antiquity situated on lands owned or controlled by the United States (16 U.S.C. 470; 16 U.S.C. 432; 43 U.S. 1733(a); 18 U.S.C. 1361; 18 U.S.C. 641; 43 CFR 8365.1). Such items include both prehistoric stone tools and sites, as well as historic log cabins, remnants of such structures, refuse dumps, and other such features. Should any such site be discovered during the course of field operations, the permittee should avoid impacting such materials, and will immediately notify the Authorized Officer, who will contact a qualified cultural resource specialist to evaluate the discovery, take action to protect or remove the resource, and allow operations to proceed.



Robin O. Mills, Archaeologist
BLM-FDO EIFO

References Cited

none

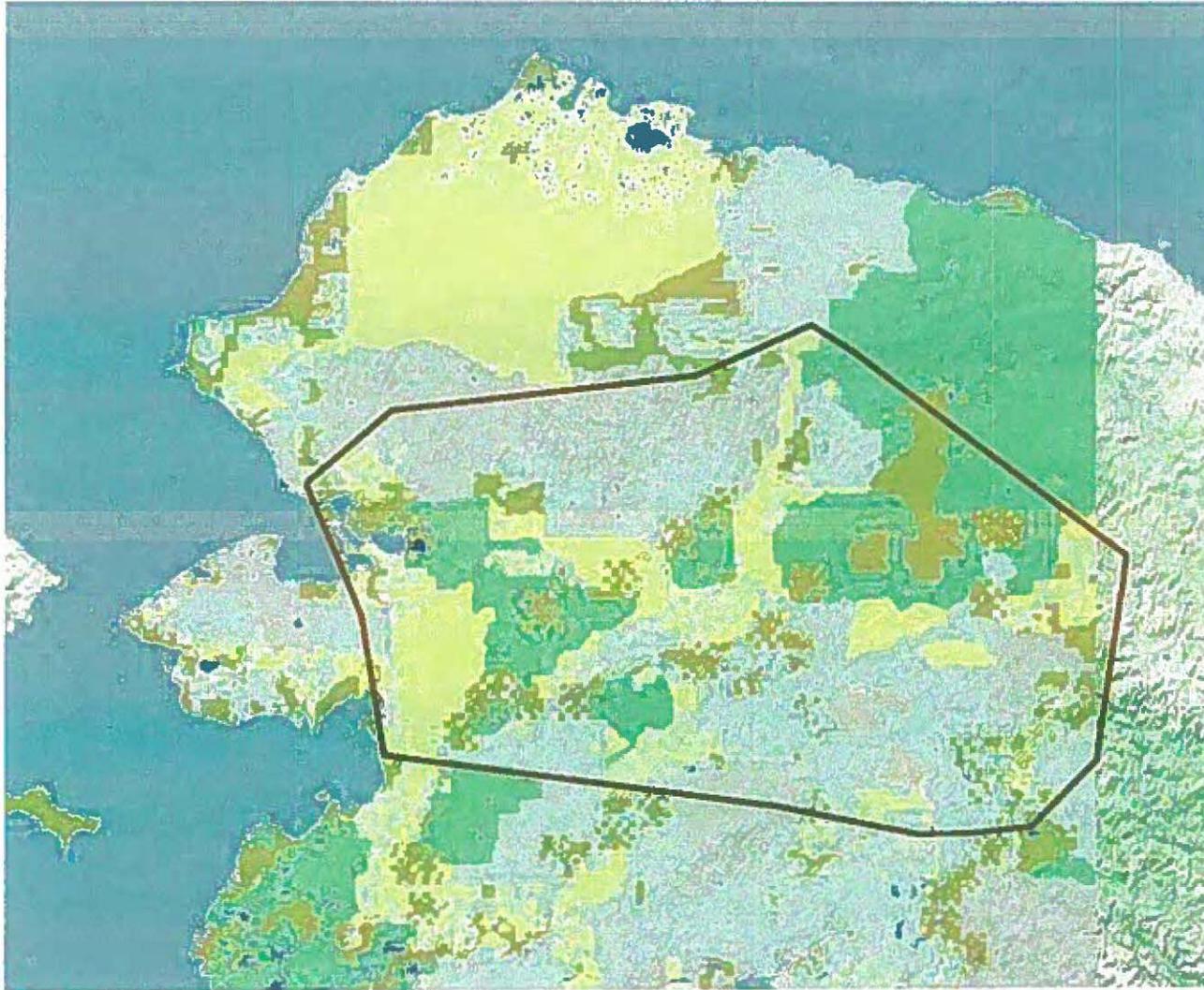


Figure 1. Central Yukon and Eastern Interior Field Offices in northern Alaska (yellow and yellow-hatched areas encircled by red polygon – approximate).