

# **Decision Record - Memorandum**

**Prepared by**  
**U.S. Department of the Interior**  
**Bureau of Land Management**

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# **Chapter 1. Alaska Gas Pipeline Geotechnical Sampling Program**

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DOI-BLM-AK-F030-2015-0003-EA

## 1.1. Compliance

This proposed action is within the Utility Corridor Resource Management Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement approved January 11, 1991. The proposed action is in conformance with plan because it is specifically provided for in the following planning decision (objectives, terms, and conditions):

Appendix N Lands Program Objectives (pages N 7-9)

7. Process applications for land use authorizations from the general public, federal and state agencies, and research organizations on a case-by-case basis. Section 28 of the Mineral Leasing Act of 1920 provides for authorizations for pipeline purposes

## 1.2. Selected Action

It is my decision to authorize a right-of-way grant and permit to the Alaska Gasline Development Corporation for the purpose of exploring soil characteristics by geotechnical borehole drilling, approximately 1,500 sites, along the proposed Alaska Stand Alone Pipeline (ASAP) alignment (from Prudhoe Bay to Cook Inlet, Alaska) and at proposed exploration areas as potential gravel sources. Proposed activities include access on existing trails and roads, and clearing on non-existent trails or roads, installing thermistors, piezometers and data loggers, drilling and collection of geotechnical and geophysical data on public land. Access on trails and roads would only be allowed by foot, snow machine in winter with adequate freeze/snow depth and helicopter. All mitigations have been incorporated into the stipulations which are attached to the permit.

## 1.3. Compliance with NEPA:

All concerns have been appropriately addressed in the environmental assessment DOI-BLM-AKF030-2015-0003. This includes cultural resources, essential fish habitat, wilderness characteristics and subsistence concerns (see attached EFH, Wilderness Characteristics Assessment, Section 106 and 810 findings). All mitigations measures are being carried forward in stipulations attached to the permit.

## 1.4. Public Involvement:

The Bureau of Land Management published the environmental assessment on the Central Yukon Field Office website on November 15, 2014 and letters were mailed to interested third parties on February 9, 2015. Comments received as of March 10, 2015 are in favor of the proposal.

## 1.5. Rationale:

1. The proposed action is consistent with the use of public lands under the authority of Sec. 28 of the Mineral Leasing Act and the regulations found in 43 CFR 2881.
2. All concerns are appropriately addressed in the EA DOI-BLM-AK-03000-2015-0003. This includes cultural resources and subsistence concerns (see attached NHPA Section 106, ANILCA

810 findings, boundary risk and wilderness characteristic assessments and essential fish habitat. The project has been considered in the context of public health and safety and consistency with regards to Federal, State, and local laws. It is my decision to authorize a right-of-way grant and permit, case file number F-95641-A to explore soil characteristics by geotechnical borehole drilling, approximately 1,500 sites, along the proposed Alaska Stand Alone Pipeline (ASAP) alignment (from Prudhoe Bay to Cook Inlet, Alaska) and at proposed exploration areas as potential gravel sources. Proposed activities include access on existing trails and roads, and clearing on non-existent trails or roads, installing thermistors, piezometers and data loggers, drilling and collection of geotechnical and geophysical data on public land. All mitigations have been incorporated into the stipulations which are attached to the permit and right-of-way grant.

The No Action Alternative was not chosen as it would not allow AGDC to conduct exploratory borehole drilling in support of building a gas pipeline.

## **1.6. 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 and 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.

## **1.7. Authorizing Official:**

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/s/ Nichelle W. Jacobson  
Field Manager, Central Yukon Field Office

March 12, 2015

## **1.8. Contact Person**

For additional information concerning this Finding, contact.

Robin Walthour, Realty Specialist  
Central Yukon Field Office

*Chapter 1 Alaska Gas Pipeline Geotechnical  
Sampling Program  
Appeal or Protest Opportunities:*

1150 University Avenue  
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# Appendix A. - Essential Fish Habitat Assessment

**NEPA Document No.:** DOI-BLM-AK-F-030-2015-0003-EA

**Prepared by:** Bob Karlen

**Date:** 3/11/15

**Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) Finding:** There are salmon species catalogued as present by the State of Alaska in the area to be used or impacted by this action. However, the proposed action is not anticipated to have an adverse effect on EFH for salmon contingent on no winter drilling in flowing water. Given that premise, the proposed action is assigned the EFH determination: *No affect*. EFH consultation with NMFS is not required.

## References:

Alaska Department of Fish and Game. 2011a. Fish Distribution Database. Internet website at: <http://www.sf.adfg.state.ak.us>

Alaska Department of Fish and Game. 2011b. Alaska Freshwater Fish Inventory. Internet website at: <http://www.adfg.alaska.gov>

Arctic Long Term Ecological Research. 2011. Toolik field station research web site. <http://ecosystems.mbl.edu/arc/default.html>.

BLM, Final Environmental Impact Statement for Renewal of the Federal Grant for the Trans-Alaska Pipeline System Right-of-Way, BLM/AK/PT-02/026+2880+990, U.S. Department of the Interior, Anchorage, Alaska, November 2002.

Brown, J., et al., 1997, .Circum-Arctic Map of Permafrost and Ground-Ice Conditions. U.S. Geological Survey Map CP-45.

Hamilton, T.D., 1986, .Late Cenozoic Glaciation of the Central Brooks Range,. pp. 950 in Glaciation in Alaska - The Geologic Record, T.D. Hamilton et al. (editors), Alaska Geological Society.

Kreig, R.A., and R.D. Reger, 1982, Air-Photo Analysis and Summary of Landform Soil Properties along the Route of the Trans-Alaska Pipeline System, Geologic Report 66, Alaska Department of Natural Resources, Division of Geological and Geophysical Surveys, Juneau, Alaska.

TAPS Owners (Trans Alaska Pipeline System Owners), 2001a, Environmental Report for Trans Alaska Pipeline System Right-of-Way Renewal, Anchorage, Alaska.

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

USDI, 2010. Fish Streams along the Trans-Alaska Pipeline System. BLM Open File Report 105, U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, Anchorage, Alaska.

Wahrhaftig, C., 1965, Physiographic Divisions of Alaska, U.S. Geological Survey Professional Paper 482, Washington, D.C.

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# Appendix B. — Wilderness Characteristics Assessment

**NEPA Document No.:** DOI-BLM-AK-F030-2015-0003-EA

**Applicant:** Alaska Gasline Development Corporation (AGDC)

**Serial No.:** F-95641-A

**Location:** Prudhoe Bay to Cook Inlet, Alaska

**Township/Range:** Multiple sections, townships ranges and meridians

**Evaluation by:** Karen Deatherage

**Date:** 11/24/14

**Proposed Action:** The Alaska Gasline Development Corporation (AGDC) proposes to explore soil characteristics by geotechnical borehole drilling, approximately 1,500 sites, along the proposed Alaska Stand Alone Pipeline (ASAP) alignment (from Prudhoe Bay to Cook Inlet, Alaska) and at proposed exploration areas as potential gravel sources. Proposed activities include access, installing thermistors, piezometers and data loggers, drilling and collection of geotechnical and geophysical data on public land. Information obtain would be used to support engineering design activities along the proposed gas pipeline corridor.

**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).

**Type of Assessment/Sources:**

U.S. Department of Interior, BLM, 1980. Nonwilderness Assessment: The Alaska Natural Gas Transportation System, Final Decision. Anchorage, Alaska

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# Appendix C. - Compliance with ANILCA 810

**NEPA Document No.:** DOI-BLM-AK-F030-2015-0003-EA

**Applicant:** Alaska Gasline Development Corporation (AGDC)

**Serial No.:** F-95641-A

**Proposed Action:** The Alaska Gasline Development Corporation (AGDC) proposes to explore soil characteristics by geotechnical borehole drilling, approximately 1,500 sites, along the proposed Alaska Stand Alone Pipeline (ASAP) alignment (from Prudhoe Bay to Cook Inlet, Alaska) and at proposed exploration areas as potential gravel sources. Proposed activities include access, installing thermistors, piezometers and data loggers, drilling and collection of geotechnical and geophysical data on public land. Information obtain would be used to support engineering design activities along the proposed gas pipeline corridor.

**Location:** Prudhoe Bay to Cook Inlet, Alaska

**Township/Range:** Multiple sections, townships, ranges and meridians.

**Evaluation by:** Erin Julianus and Bob Karlen

**Date:** 3/7/2015 and 3/11/2015

**Type of Assessment/Sources:**

## Effect of the proposal on subsistence uses and needs

Fisheries: Small quantities of fish are taken by subsistence users living in Wiseman, Nolan and the surrounding area. Species harvested include Arctic grayling, lake trout, northern pike, whitefish species and Arctic char (Scott 1993). Given the proposed plan of operation and attached mitigation, fish habitat quantity and quality are not expected to diminish in an important way. As a result, the proposed action is not expected to significantly reduce harvestable fisheries resources. Similarly, the proposed action should not alter the distribution, migration or location of harvestable fisheries resources in any of the drainages where borehole drilling occurs. The proposed action will not create any legal or physical barriers that would limit access by subsistence users of the fisheries resource.

### Wildlife:

Important wildlife species used for subsistence include Dall's sheep (*Ovis dalli*), moose (*Alces alces*), caribou (*Rangifer tarandus*), black bears (*Ursus americanus*), furbearers, waterfowl, and small game. These animals are present in the area impacted by the proposed action either seasonally or year round. Drilling at proposed sites will occur during specific, limited time periods. These species will likely avoid areas when human activity and disturbance is taking place. Disturbance to subsistence game animals is expected to be temporary. Relatively little wildlife habitat will be disturbed or destroyed at the landscape level, and is not anticipated to negatively impact subsistence wildlife populations.

Residents of two rural communities, Coldfoot and Wiseman, are qualified subsistence users residing in the vicinity of the proposed action. The primary subsistence use area for Wiseman residents extends from Dalton Highway MP 160 – 240, but subsistence activities occur beyond this core area, extending from interior Alaska, through the Central Brooks Range, and onto the Arctic coastal plain as well (Scott 1993).

Subsistence hunting of moose and Dall's sheep occurs primarily in this area during the months of August, September, and October. Caribou are hunted opportunistically through fall migration and while the migratory Central Arctic Herd (CAH) are on their winter range. Local residents trap furbearers throughout the winter, and many subsistence activities, such as firewood gathering and small game hunting, occur year round.

Borehole test sites are proposed within 26 potential material pit sites and along the proposed pipeline route within the primary subsistence use area for the community of Wiseman. Drilling and human activity may impact wildlife movements and associated subsistence hunting activities during the months of August – October.

Other resources:

Local residents also use non-game subsistence resources such as wood, berries, and edible vegetation for food, fuel, and construction materials. The proposed action would not appreciably change or impact any other harvestable resources such as wood, water, berries, or vegetation.

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

Although subsistence game animals may avoid the area while personnel are present and the proposed activity is taking place, the proposed action will not permanently alter the distribution, migration, or location of subsistence game.

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

Access to subsistence resources is not expected to be impacted by the proposed action. Potential impacts to subsistence activities during this time may be mitigated by avoiding drilling at test sites within the utility corridor from Dalton Highway MP 160 – 240, and by avoiding an area if subsistence activities are encountered or observed.

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

The pipeline route and material pit locations for the proposed Alaska Stand Alone Gas Pipeline have been analyzed in an SEIS and subject to public scoping. The locations of these test sites are based on that approved route. As such, other lands are not available for the purpose sought to be achieved.

**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. 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. The proposed action will not create any legal or physical barriers that would limit subsistence harvest and access.

### **References**

Scott, C. P. 1993. Continuity and change in the Wiseman area of Alaska. MS Thesis. University of Alaska, Fairbanks. Fairbanks, Alaska. 268pp.