

Kanuti National Wildlife Refuge — Wood Cutting

A. Background

BLM Office:LLAKF03000

Lease/Serial/Case File No.: FF096944

Proposed Action Title/Type: Kanuti National Wildlife Refuge — 5510 Wood Cutting Permit

Location of Proposed Action: Township/Range: T. 23 N. R 15 W., Kateel Meridian, Sections 21, 22, 26, 28, 29, 30 and T. 23 N. R 16 W., Kateel Meridian, Sections 8, 9, 15, 16, 22, 25, 28

Description of Proposed Action: A 5510 Free Use Application and Permit, Vegetative and Mineral Material, has been received from Mike Spindler of the Kanuti National Wildlife Refuge. The Refuge proposes to cut up to five (5) cords of fuel wood for use at the US Fish and Wildlife Services' Bettles Administrative Site and Visitors Center. Wood cutting would be of dead down and standing dead trees. Stipulations and permit Special Conditions outline cutting methods, and conservation practices. Duration of the permit is for five years.

B. Land Use Plan Conformance

Land Use Plan Name: Utility Corridor Management Plan

Date Approved/Amended: January 11, 1991

Compliance

The proposed action is in conformance with a management framework plan or a resource management plan, 43 CFR § 1610.8(a)(3). The Department of the Interior has determined and found that the proposed action is within a category of actions that do not individually or cumulatively have a significant effect on the human environment and that neither an environmental assessment nor an environmental impact statement is required, 40 CFR §1508.4. It is my decision to allow for the cutting of down dead and standing dead trees along the Bettles Winter Road for up to five (5) cords of fuel wood for use at the FWS' Bettles Administrative Site and Visitors Center.

The action, as proposed, is consistent with objectives outlined in these Central Yukon Field Office (CYFO) documents and not in conflict with other resources in the area. The proposed use is in conformance with current policy of the Fairbanks District Office, BLM. The Proposed Action conforms and is tiered to the existing land use plans (LUPs) and environmental documentation below.

Selected Action

A 5510 Free Use Application and Permit, Vegetative and Mineral Material, has been received from Mike Spindler of the Kanuti National Wildlife Refuge. The Refuge proposes to cut up to five (5) cords of fuel wood for use at the US Fish and Wildlife Services' Bettles Administrative Site and Visitors Center. Wood cutting would be of dead down and standing dead trees. Stipulations and permit Special Conditions outline cutting methods, conservation practices, and duration of permit.

Compliance with NEPA:

Summary

The Proposed Action is categorically excluded from further documentation under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) in accordance with 516 DM 2, Appendix 1, or 516 DM 11.9.

The proposed action is categorically excluded from further documentation under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) in accordance with United States Department of the Interior 43 CFR §46.210 or United States Department of Interior Manual, Part 516, Chapter 11 which provides:

11.5 C. Forestry.

1. Sale and removal of individual trees or small groups or trees which are dead, diseased, injured, or which constitute a safety hazard, and where access for the removal requires no more than maintenance to existing roads.

This categorical exclusion is appropriate in this situation because there are no extraordinary circumstances potentially having effects that may significantly affect the environment. The proposed action has been reviewed, and none of the extraordinary circumstances described in 516 DM 2 apply.

Alternatives Considered

Due to winter road access on the Bettles road, and the lack of other roads in the region to wood cutting areas, no Alternatives were considered.

Public Involvement:

No public comment has been received on this proposed action

Rationale:

This categorical exclusion is appropriate in this situation because there are no extraordinary circumstances potentially having effects that may significantly affect the environment. The proposed action has been reviewed, and none of the extraordinary circumstances described in 516 DM 2 apply.

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 (at the above address) 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.

Authorizing Official:

Having considered a full range of alternatives, associated impacts, and public and agency input, I recommend the adoption and implementation of the attached Approved Plan as the Utility Corridor Management Plan allows.

Nichelle W. Jacobson
Manager, Central Yukon Field Office

Date

Contact Person

For additional information concerning this Finding, contact.

Kelly Egger, Outdoor Recreation Planner
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1150 University Ave.
Fairbanks, AK 99709
907/474-2242 or kegger@blm.gov

Appendix A — Essential Fish Habitat Assessment

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Evaluation by:

Date:

Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) Finding: Chum and Chinook salmon are present in the project area (ADF&G 2014). However, due to the location and stipulations attached to the proposed action it is not anticipated that the proposed action will have an adverse effect on EFH. Therefore, the proposed action is assigned the EFH determination: *No effect*. 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>.

Appendix B — Compliance with ANILCA Section 810

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Evaluation by:

Date:

Evaluation

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

FINDING

Effect of the proposal on subsistence uses and needs

Fisheries: The Jim River, which includes Prospect Creek as a tributary, is closed to all subsistence fishing. The proposed action would not significantly reduce harvestable fisheries resources downstream of the Jim River given adequate protections are stipulated to minimize impacts to water, fish habitat and ultimately fish species. The proposed action will not alter the distribution, migration or location of harvestable fisheries resources downstream of the Jim River. 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 will occur in Game Management Units (GMUs) 24A and 24B. The proposed action may cause localized disturbance to big game and other wildlife when human activity is present. However, big game will likely avoid the area just when human activity is present. Moose population size in GMU 24A and 24B is estimated to be 1,929±550 moose; density is estimated at 0.32 moose/sq. mi. (Stout 2010). However, moose are broadly distributed throughout the Unit. There is a winter subsistence moose hunt (Dec. 15-April 15) in GMU 24B, and caribou are occasionally harvested in the Unit during the winter months. The applicant should avoid the area in the event that subsistence hunting activities are observed to be taking place during

activities associated with the proposed action. The proposed action will not have a significant effect on subsistence uses and needs.

Other resources:

The proposed activity will not significantly impact other resources such as berries and water. The proposed activity will reduce the amount of firewood available as a subsistence resource for residents of Bettles and Evansville, but will not do so to the extent that it will appreciably reduce the amount of firewood available and impact with subsistence use. Subsistence activities such as collecting firewood occur in a much broader area than where the proposed action is to take place, which further moderates the effect of the activity.

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

None. Temporary avoidance may be observed when the applicants are on the project area. However, there is no expected reduction in the availability of resources due to alteration in resource distribution, migration, or location.

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

None. Access to subsistence resources will not be hampered by the proposed action.

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

The location of the proposed activity was selected based on its proximity to the applicant's facilities. Other lands were available for the proposed activity, but were not considered for this reason.

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

There is no substantial evidence that would indicate a significant impact on subsistence will result from the proposed action. No other alternatives were evaluated.

Type of Assessment/Sources

Findings:

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

References:

Stout, G.W. 2010. Unit 24 moose. Pages 572-610 in P. Harper, editor. Moose management report of survey and inventory activities 1 July 2007-30 June 2009. Alaska Department of Fish and Game. Project 1.0. Juneau, Alaska.

Appendix C — Wilderness Characteristics Assessment

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Evaluation by: Kelly Egger

Date: 02/09/2015

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 in land use plans and when analyzing projects under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

The BLM has further determined that, if a project or activity does not negatively affect wilderness characteristics, the permitting process may proceed as usual, regardless of whether an inventory of wilderness characteristics has been completed (Barns, 2012).

The area proposed for wood cutting was burned in a wildfire in June and July of 2013 and the proposed activity would take place adjacent to a road determined to be a Wilderness Inventory Road. Due to the limited quantity of wood requested, the dispersal of harvest over a large area, and the stipulations that it be dead and/or downed trees only, the harvest is unlikely to affect naturalness in the area.

Findings:

The proposed activities in this area do not significantly impair the size or naturalness of this area, or the opportunities for solitude and recreation of a primitive and unconfined nature. The proposed action will not affect existing wilderness characteristics.

References

1. Chris Barns, BLM Representative, Arthur Carhart National Wilderness Training Center, 9 September 2012. "Wilderness Characteristics Guidance for the BLM. Training Module IIID – LWCs and Proposed Projects." Online at Wilderness.net: <http://www.wilderness.net/index.cfm?fuse=NWPS&sec=manageBLM>
2. USGS topographic maps, GIS data, Google Earth imagery
3. Personal knowledge and aerial survey of the area, 2013