

A. Background

BLM Office: Arctic Field Office LLAKE01000

Lease/Serial/Case File No. FF097018

Applicant: Arctic Slope Regional Corporation
Energy Services Alaska, Inc.
3900 C Street, Suite 700
Anchorage, Alaska 99503

Proposed Action Title/Type: Summer Studies (FLPMA Permit)

Date of Proposed Action: August 3-10, 2015 (approximate dates, dependent on weather)

General Location of Proposed Action: Barrow to Atkasuk

Description of Proposed Action: The applicant, Arctic Slope Regional Corporation (ASRC) Energy Services Alaska, Inc. (AES) has requested authorization to conduct summer studies on lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) within the National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska (NPR-A). AES received a similar permit in 2014 from BLM. AES's client, the North Slope Borough (NSB), seeks to improve the broadband network in North Slope communities through the Arctic National Broadband Network (ANBN).

The proposed activity would take place approximately August 3 through the 10th. There would be no camping on BLM lands. Crews would overnight either at Barrow or Atkasuk and fly out to the project area each day. AES estimates 40 helicopter landings for the project. Fuel would be obtained from either Barrow or Atkasuk.

In 2015, AES would focus on a project corridor from Barrow to Atkasuk. This corridor was selected as the preferred corridor for the Barrow to Atkasuk Transmission Line, another NSB project, during consultation between the NSB and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Because the ANBN may have similar environmental concerns as the Transmission Line, the ANBN is also considering this route.

The 2015 fieldwork purpose is to identify potential permitting and constructability issues with the various broadband technological options and to provide information for refining the preliminary ANBN route within the Barrow to Atkasuk segment. The field team would identify cultural, fish, and wetlands concerns along this route, and add to the baseline information within the route corridor. Additional field surveys may be required by various regulatory agencies prior to applying for permits for project construction. These more detailed subsistence, cultural, environmental, and wetlands studies would be conducted, as appropriate, once project parameters are more defined.

The 2015 field team would survey a two-mile (3.2-km) wide, approximately 70-mile (112-km) long corridor from Barrow to Atqasuk (Figure 1 and Table 1). This corridor is based on a proposed power transmission line between the two communities, and is the preferred of two routes considered by the team working on the transmission line project. The ANBN survey corridor can be refined to accommodate the regulatory constraints, engineering constraints, and the various technology options under consideration.

The summer 2015 fieldwork scope consists of a helicopter overflights and aerial reconnaissance with discretionary on-the-ground site surveys and inspections. The team would land the helicopter for closer inspection and documentation at stream crossings, areas with high cultural resource probabilities, potential upland areas, and other points of environmental interest. AES targeted locations to visit this field season through a desktop study (Figure 1). The field team may identify additional target locations while conducting the survey and would make additional on-the-ground visits, as warranted.

AES' proposed 2015 field survey would evaluate potential route alternatives to identify:

- Important subsistence use areas and resources
- Engineering constraints
- Important or sensitive fish and fish habitat resources
- Uplands and wetlands for seasonal construction considerations
- Cultural resource sites and areas having high potential for cultural resources
- Relative availability of lakes and water resources for seasonal construction considerations

The multi-disciplinary effort would aid in determining what additional information may be required by various regulatory agencies prior to applying for permits for project construction. The field crew would consist of two archaeologists/cultural resource specialists, a fishery biologist, a subsistence advisor, and a wetlands scientist.

AES would use a combination of aerial reconnaissance and on-the-ground observations to identify and document environmental and cultural features. The crew would use an A-Star or similar helicopter to fly the route and obtain an overview of the route and corridor. In the road-accessible northern portion of the project area, the crew would conduct survey work using a crew cab pickup truck. This portion of the project area begins in Barrow and follows approximately an 8-mi (13-km) road leading out of Barrow to the southeast.

On-the-ground visits beyond the road accessible portion of the corridor would be supported by helicopter in areas not reachable by road. All landings would be on State lands or BLM administered lands. No landings on private lands or native allotments would be conducted.

AES archaeologists may conduct shovel test pit excavations in areas having high potential for cultural resource sites. Testing would be conducted to establish cultural resource presence/absence and preliminary site boundaries. This level of testing may not be enough to determine whether or not sites are eligible to the National Register of Historic Places.

Archaeological testing would be conducted under an Archaeological Resource Protection Act (ARPA) permit from the BLM (AA093883). AES would obtain a curatorial agreement with the Museum of the North prior to collecting any artifact samples.

The AES wetlands scientist would conduct wetland field surveys in areas determined to be candidate locations for wetland/upland boundaries delineations. The survey corridor consists primarily of wetlands habitats ubiquitous to the North Slope coastal plain. The field crew would visit sites to delineate wetlands and potential upland locations within the survey corridor. The location of the ordinary high water marks of waters of the United States would also be identified at stream crossings. Wetlands delineations would use hand tools (shovel or soil probe) for soil testing purposes. All wetlands delineations would be conducted in accordance with the 1987 US Army Corps of Engineers Wetlands Delineation Manual and the 2007 Alaska Regional Supplement to the US Army Corps of Engineers Wetlands Delineation Manual.

The AES fish biologist would conduct cursory fish sampling at stream crossing sites appearing to have potential to support fish. Potential stream sampling sites are identified in Figure 1; however, the AES fish biologist would determine fish sampling sites while in the field. AES would use standard fish sampling gear, such as minnow traps and beach seines, and would use standard protocol for determining fish presence in North Slope streams and rivers. AES would perform all fish sampling activities in accordance to the terms and conditions of the Fish Resource Permit (typically referred to as the Fish Collection Permit) required by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) for fish sampling. All fish captured would be positively identified, measured and immediately released, unharmed, at the point of capture.

AES practices “Leave No Trace” fieldwork. AES crew members would dilute urine with water from a water bottle. Crew members would avoid lakes, ponds, or streams when urinating. Solid wastes – human, toilet paper, etc. – would be packed out and properly disposed of at approved facilities. AES crews have completed first aid and bear awareness training and are required by AES to wear/use personal protective equipment.

Table 1 Legal Description: All in Umiat Meridian

Township	Range	BLM Managed Sections	Non BLM managed sections
23 North	18 West	None	27-29, 32-34
22 North	18 West	6 - partial	2-6 partial, 10-15, 22-26, 35-36
22 North	17 West	None	7, 18, 19, 30, 31
21 North	18 West	None	1, 12-14, 23-25, 34-36
21 North	17 West	None	6-8, 17-20, 30-31
20 North	18 West	None	3-5, 8-11, 14-16, 21-23, 25-28, 34-36
19 North	18 West	None	1-4, 9-11, 14-22, 25-28, 31-35

18 North	19 West	1, 12-14, 22-29, 31-35	--
18 North	18 West	5-8, 17-20, 30 (Excluding Private Land)	Private Land within Sections 19,20
17 North	19 West	3-8, 18	--
17 North	20 West	1, 10-16, 20-23, 26-33	(N/A within ½ mile Section 33)
17 North	21 West	35-36	--
16 North	21 West	2-4, 9-11, 14-17, 20-22, 27-29, 32-34	--
15 North	21 West	3-5, 8-10, 15-17, 20-22, 27-29, 31-33 (Excluding N/A)	(N/A within Sections 16, 21, 29)
14 North	21 West	4-9, 16-21	28-33
13 North	21 West	None	4-8, 17-20, 29-30
13 North	22 West	None	1, 12-13, 24

Land Use Plan Conformance

The proposed action is in conformance with the following planning document: National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska Integrated Activity Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (IAP/EIS) dated November 2012 and associated Record of Decision dated February 2013.

The proposed action is in conformance with the Naval Petroleum Reserves Production Act which allows for the authorization of uses consistent with the purposes of the Act.

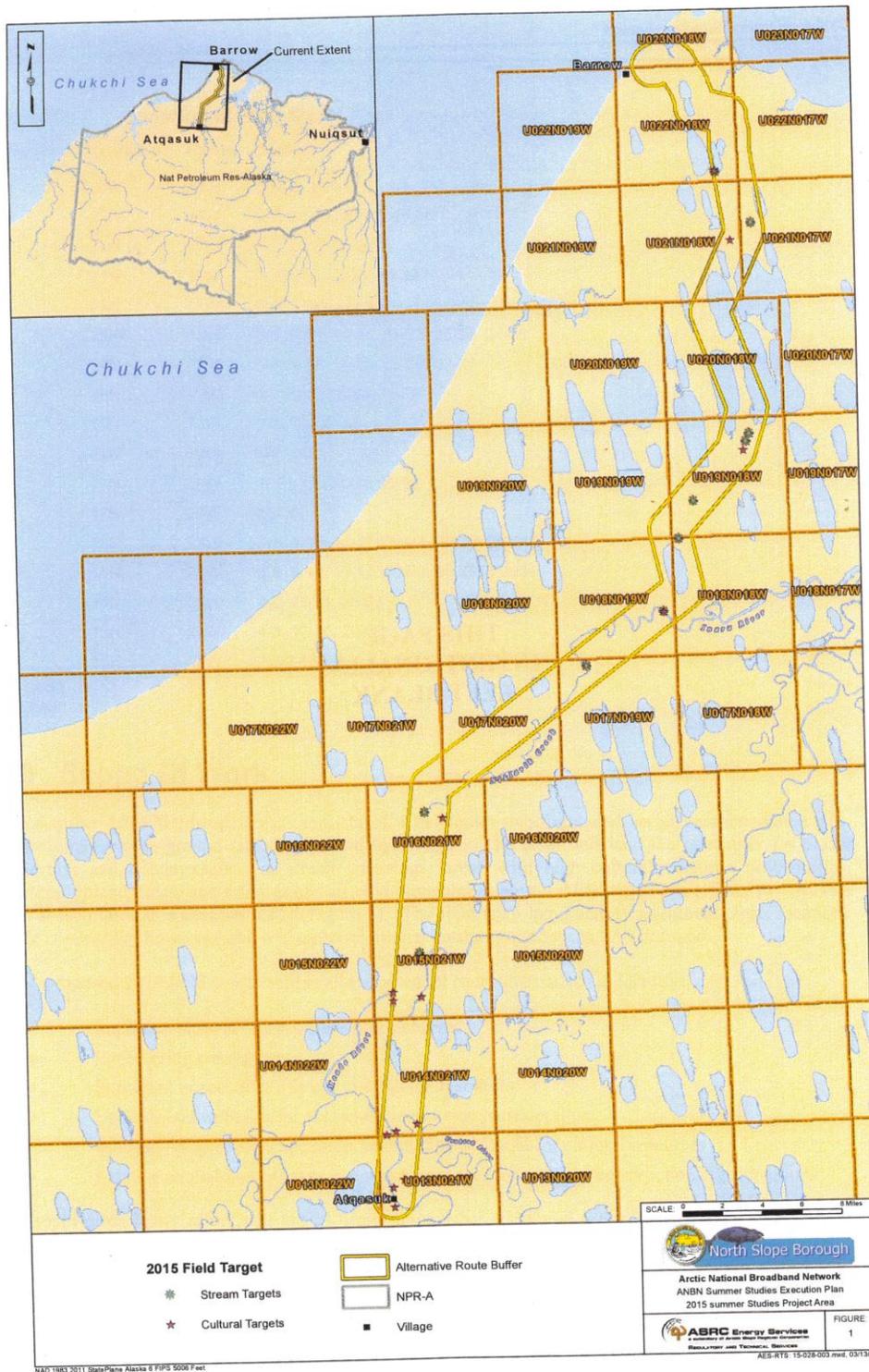


Figure 1. Applicant Submitted map

B. Compliance with NEPA:

The IAP/EIS Record of Decision for the NPR-A developed stipulations and best management practices applicable to all activities in NPR-A. The stipulations and best management practices applicable to the proposed action will be provided, along with project-specific mitigation, to the applicant and are entitled: “FF097018 ASRC AES Summer 2015 Permit Stipulations.”

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. Specifically the proposed action meets the criteria for a categorical exclusion under 516 DM 11.9, BLM H-1790-1 National Environmental Policy Act Handbook Appendix 4 (F-10) BLM Categorical Exclusions.

“Nondestructive data collection, inventory (including field, aerial, and satellite surveying and mapping), study, research, and monitoring activities.”

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.

Extraordinary Circumstances	Yes	No
2.1 Have significant impacts on public health or safety.		X
2.2 Have significant impacts on such natural resources and unique geographic characteristics as historic or cultural resources; park, recreation or refuge lands; wilderness areas; wild or scenic rivers; national natural landmarks; sole or principal drinking water aquifers; prime farmlands; wetlands (Executive Order 11990); floodplains (Executive Order 11988); national monuments; migratory birds; and other ecologically significant or critical areas.		X
2.3 Have highly controversial environmental effects or involve unresolved conflicts concerning alternative uses of available resources [NEPA Section 102(2) (E)].		X
2.4 Have highly uncertain and potentially significant environmental effects or involve unique or unknown environmental risks.		X
2.5 Establish a precedent for future action or represent a decision in principle about future actions with potentially significant environmental effects.		X
2.6 Have a direct relationship to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant environmental effects.		X
2.7 Have significant impacts on properties listed, or eligible for listing, on the National Register of Historic Places as determined by either the bureau or office.		X
2.8 Have significant impacts on species listed, or proposed to be listed, on the List of Endangered or Threatened Species, or have significant impacts on designated Critical Habitat for these species.		X

