

A. Background

BLM Office: Arctic Field Office LLAKF010

Lease/Serial/Case File No.: FF097023

Applicant: Bradley W. Barr, PhD. –Chief Scientist and Co-Principal Investigator
NOAA Maritime Heritage Program
1305 East West Highway, 11th Floor
Silver Spring, Maryland, 20910

Proposed Action Title/Type: Mapping nearshore waters / NPR-A Permit (298401)

Dates of Proposed Activity: August 10 – 26, 2015

General Location of Proposed Action: Chukchi Sea within the NPR-A

Description of Proposed Action: The applicant, Bradley W. Barr of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Maritime Heritage Program, has requested authorization for field activity and access to conduct mapping in the nearshore waters of the Chukchi Sea, within the NPR-A. The mapping would take place between Wainwright Inlet and the Seahorse Islands (Figures 1 and 2). The purpose of the mapping is to search for shipwrecks of the approximately 50 whaling ships lost in the area in the 1860's until the 1890's.

NOAA plans to use a seabed mapping system, a towed gradiometer, which utilizes two magnetometers to identify iron and steel (and other metals with magnetic properties) lying on or in the surficial sediments of the seabed. The magnetometry NOAA plans to utilize to collect the data needs to be quite sensitive because they are searching for whaling shipwrecks from the 19th Century, which were primarily made of wood, but with some smaller metal components (e.g. chainplates, anchors and anchor chains, try pots).

To improve the sensitivity of the mapping system to identify the smaller metal components, NOAA would be utilizing a Geometrics Base Station. This instrument collects data on background changes in the Earth's magnetic field in the area where they would be mapping in order to correct the mapping data for these changes, and allow them to identify magnetic targets of a relatively small size.

The base station is a small pole on a tripod base (link to Geometrics web page for picture and background information: (<http://www.geometrics.com/geometrics-products/geometrics-magnetometers/g-862-caesium-base-station/>)) (figure 4) that would be temporarily placed on the beach for the duration of the mission. The tripod is about 3 feet tall and would be installed on the sand anchored with short stakes or some other minimally invasive installation to keep it vertical. The site would be restored to original conditions when the instrument is recovered. The tripod would be placed at a location described as Lump 1947 (Figure 1 and 2). The location was chosen as NOAA presumed this to represent the higher elevation on the beach, to help insure that the instrument is located so that it is not subject to immersion. Once the base station has been placed on the beach, it would be left in that location for the entire mission, and would require

maintenance (i.e. changing the batteries) 2-3 times during the time it is on the beach. NOAA anticipates placing the instrument on the beach on or about the 11th of August and retrieving it on or about the 25th.

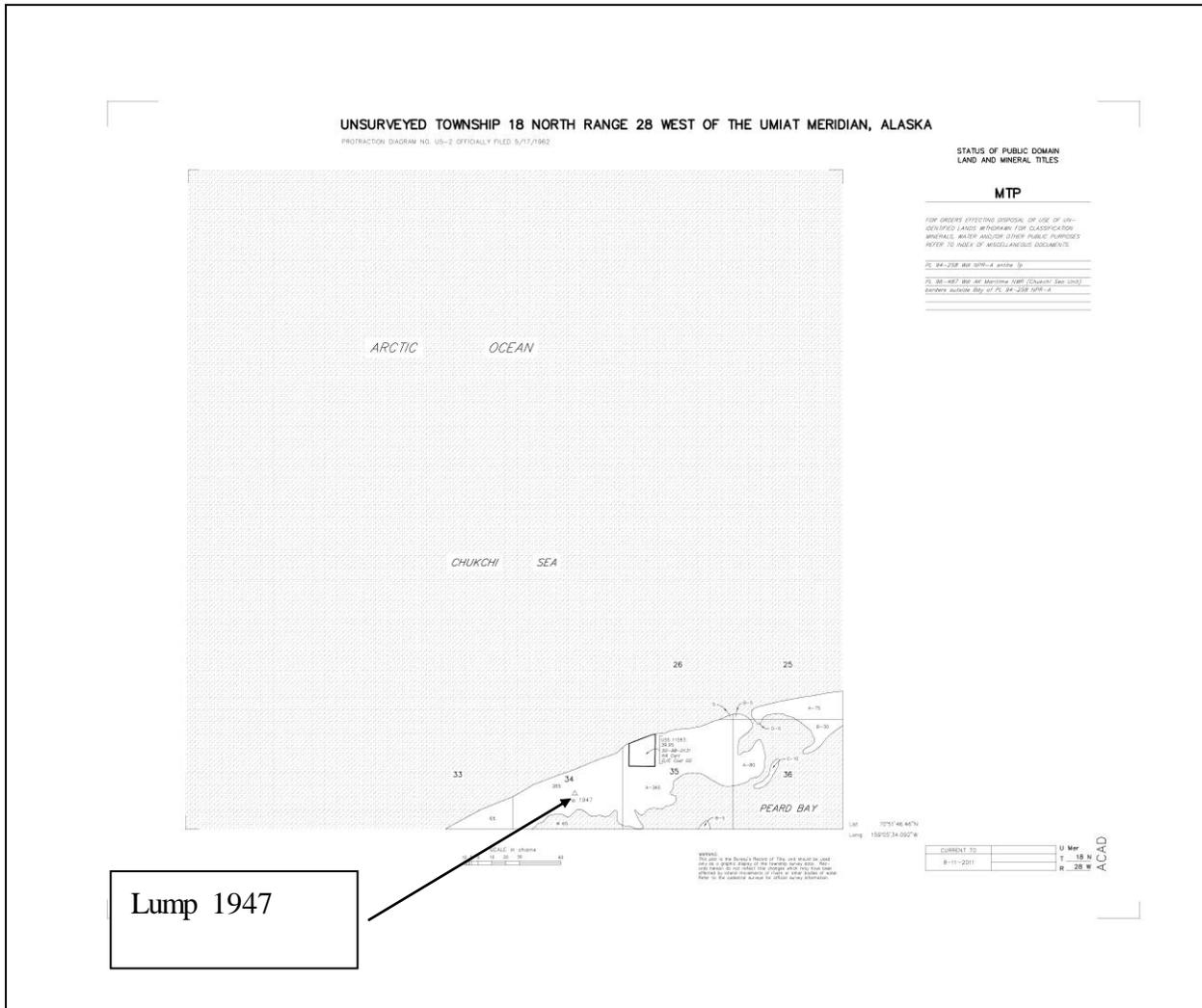


Figure 1: BLM MTP – section 34 Lump 1947 tripod base location

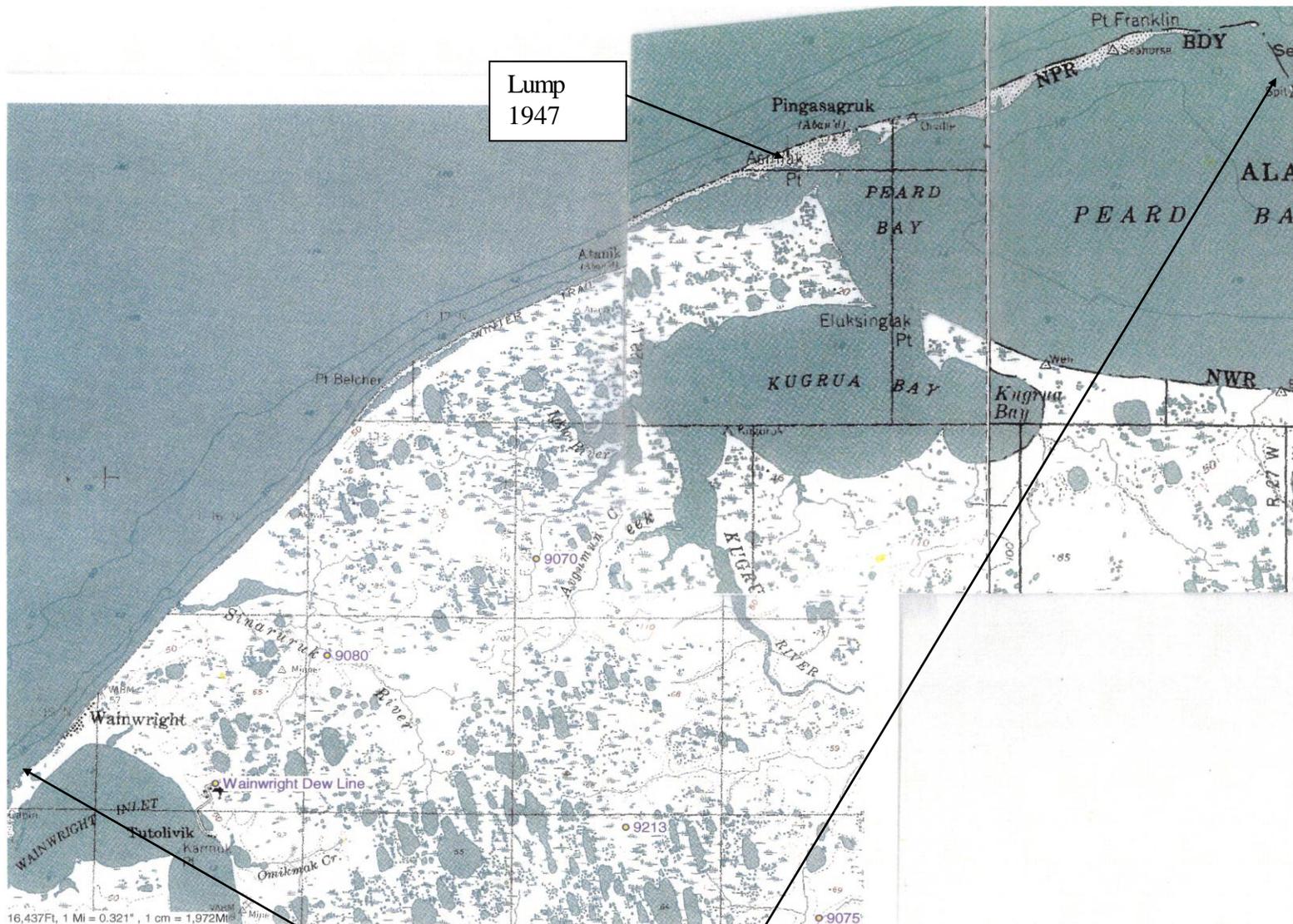


Figure 2: Map Wainwright Inlet to Lump 1947 to Seahorse Islands

The beach location would be accessed from the mapping vessel, the R/V UKPIK (figure 3), landing and returning in an Avon inflatable tender (raft). The placement and recovery of the instrument and required periodic maintenance would be accomplished by two mission personnel landing on the beach. The placement of the instrument would take approximately 1 hour, and the maintenance visits and recovery at the end of the mission is estimated at approximately ½ hour each. The crew would stay (sleep) on the R/V UKPIK, offshore. All human waste would be disposed in the holding tanks onboard the research vessel.

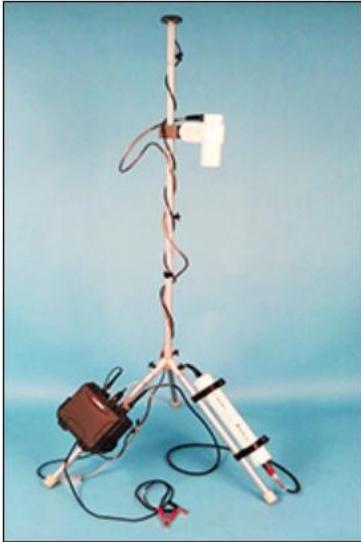
The proposed survey would extend offshore about 2 kilometers or about 1 ¼ miles. They plan to travel with the R/V UKPIK and make long, regular along shore transects, but may have to make shorter partial transects if they need to relocate to avoid either marine mammals or subsistence hunters. NOAA does not intend to disturb or recover any archaeological resource during the mission, and are operating under an archaeological research permit from the State of Alaska Office of History and Archaeology and the North Slope Borough (NSB) permit, which both incorporate this provision.

NOAA's emergency plan includes beach area observation to insure that no bears are nearby during the installation, servicing, or recovery of the instrument, and observers would be posted on the deck of the research vessel during the time the mission personnel are on the beach, and would be alerted, by radio if any wildlife approaches while personnel are on land. If the sea state presents an unsafe environment for landing, it would be postponed until such time as a safe landing can be made.

NOAA has received a permit from the NSB for the mapping mission, and held community meetings in Wainwright and Barrow at the end of June. No objections to the project were raised. As a part of the operational protocols for the mapping mission, NOAA would be engaging in ongoing radio communication with representatives of Wainwright to avoid any disturbance with cultural subsistence activities. They would also be initiate radio contact with any passing vessel to exchange information during the mission as an element of their protocols.



Figure 3: R/V Ukpik photo from: <http://www.rvukpik.com>



The G-862RBS Cesium Base Station

Figure 4: Tripod example

Legal Description (Umiat Meridian):

Section 34, Township 18 North, Range 28 West, Umiat Meridian

B. 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.

C. 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: “FF097023 Bradley Barr NOAA 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
2.9 Violate a Federal law, or a State, local, or tribal law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment.		X
2.10 Have a disproportionately high and adverse effect on low income or minority populations (Executive Order 12898).		X
2.11 Limit access to and ceremonial use of Indian sacred sites on Federal lands by Indian religious practitioners or significantly adversely affect the physical integrity of such sacred sites (Executive Order 13007).		X
2.12 Contribute to the introduction, continued existence, or spread of noxious weeds or non-native invasive species known to occur in the area or actions that may promote the introduction, growth, or expansion of the range of such species (Federal Noxious Weed Control Act and Executive Order 13112).		X

D. Approval and Contact Information

I considered the proposed action and have determined that there is no potential for significant impacts.

/s/
Stacie McIntosh
Authorized Officer, Arctic Field Office

7/27/2015
Date

Contact Person:

For additional information concerning this CX review, contact:

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