

Toolik Field Station R&PP Renewal

Introduction

The University of Alaska, Fairbanks (UAF) Institute of Arctic Biology (IAB) Toolik Field Station (TFS) is a world renowned Arctic research station in the northern foothills of the Brooks Range in Alaska. The location allows scientists access to three major physiographic provinces of Alaska—the Brooks Range, the Arctic foothills, and the Arctic coastal plain. TFS has been a major location for scientific research in the Arctic since 1975.

Summary

The University of Alaska proposes to renew their recreation and public purposes lease for another 25 years to support researchers from all over the world to conduct scientific Arctic research around the Toolik area. Support includes but is not limited to providing housing, meals, transportation, and laboratories for use by the researchers.

Decision

I have decided to authorize a lease on public lands to the University of Alaska for 25 years; for the purpose of continued support of Arctic scientific research at the Toolik Field Station located at mile post 285 off the Dalton Highway, more specifically described as Secs. 29 and 32, T. 9 S., R. 11 E., Umiat Meridian, containing approximately 33.87 acres. Stipulations are attached to the lease.

Management Considerations

The Determination of NEPA Adequacy and supporting documentation have been prepared consistent with the requirements of various applicable 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)

One BLM land use plan applies to the overall project area, the Utility Corridor Resource Management Plan.

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 September 14, 2015. No comments have been received as of October 15, 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 Central Yukon Field Office, 1150 University Avenue, Fairbanks, Alaska 99709 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.

Approval from Authorized Official:

Field Office 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 approved plan in conformance with the Utility Corridor Resource Management Plan.

/s/ Timothy J. La Marr

Signature

Timothy J. La Marr

Field Manager

Central Yukon Field Office

January 28, 2016

Date

— Appendix A — Essential Fish Habitat

NEPA Document No.: DOI-BLM-AK-F030-2015-0034-DNA

Prepared by: David G. Parker

Date: 10/15/15

The proposed action lies within the general range of Dolly Varden (*Salvelinus malma*); arctic char (*S. alpinus*); Lake Trout (*Salvelinus namaycush*); burbot (*Lota lota*); and whitefish (Coregonid spp.). Arctic grayling (*Thymallus arcticus*) and slimey sculpin (*Cottus cognatus*) are ubiquitous throughout the region (ADF&G 1978). Northern pike (*Esox lucius*), Alaska blackfish (*Dallia pectoralis*), longnose sucker (*Catostomus catostomus*) and ninespine stickleback (*Pungitius pungitius*) are also found in select streams and lakes in the area (BLM 2010 and Mecklenberg et al. 2002). The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) recognizes fresh waters cataloged (ADF&G 2014) as being used by salmon under AS 41.14.870 (*Catalog of Waters Important for the Spawning, Rearing or Migration of Anadromous Fishes*) as essential fish habitat (EFH).

The proposed action described in this Determination of NEPA Adequacy (DNA) is a renewal of a Recreation and Public Purpose Lease for 25 years. There are no anticipated effects on fish habitat.

Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) Finding: *No adverse effect.* EFH consultation with NMFS is not required.

References:

Bureau of Land Management, 2010. Fish Streams Along the Trans-Alaska Pipeline System, A Compilation of Selected References with Current TAPS Stationing. BLM Open File Report 105. 43 p.

Mecklenburg, Catherine W., T. Anthony Mecklenberg, and Lyman K. Thorsteinson, 2002. Fishes of Alaska. American Fisheries Society. Bethesda, Maryland. 1037 p.

State of Alaska, Alaska Department of Fish and Game. 1978. Alaska's Fisheries Atlas. Volume 2. Edited by R. McLean and K. Delaney. Alaska Department of Fish and Game.

State of Alaska, Alaska Department of Fish and Game. 2014. An Atlas to the Catalog of Waters Important for Spawning, Rearing, or Migration of Anadromous Fishes, Resource Management Region V. Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Habitat and Restoration Division.

<http://extra.sf.adfg.state.ak.us/FishResourceMonitor/?mode=awc>

— Appendix B — Wilderness Characteristics Assessment

NEPA Document No.: DOI-BLM-AK-F030–2015–0034–DNA

Serial No.: F-91037

Applicant: University of Fairbanks

Location: Mile post 285 off the Dalton Highway, more particularly described as within Secs. 29 and 32, T. 9 S., R. 11 E., Umiat Meridian

Prepared by: Robin Walthour

Date: September 14, 2015

Proposed Action

The University of Alaska proposes to renew their recreation and public purposes lease for the Toolik Field Station (TFS) for another 25 years located at mile post 285 off the Dalton Highway and increase the size from 26.84 acres to 33.87 acres. This would include extend the current boundary to the edge of Toolik Lake. This field station is the base for scientific research of the Arctic for researchers from all over the world. Additionally their long range plan for the next 25 years consists of relocating certain existing facilities, demolishing inefficient or outdated facilities, replacing inefficient temporary structures, constructing new facilities, and upgrading some utility services at TFS. Implementation of the TFS Long-Range Facilities Plan would result in the following five distinct areas within TFS: Community Zone, Industrial Zone, Laboratory Zone, Residential Zone and Swing Space.

The Residential Zone was established in the portion of TFS that is farthest from the primary sources of noise. The electrical power generators, machine shops, and truck delivery areas in the Industrial and Laboratory Zones are separated from the Residential Zone to provide better conditions for resting and sleeping. Administrative facilities would be spread through Community Support, Laboratory, and Residential Zones. Implementation of the TFS Long-Range Facilities Plan would consolidate like facilities and activities into specified areas, which would enhance operations and increase efficiency. Swing Space would be located at the intersection of the four zoning districts, which would allow flexibility in development by allowing existing structures to be temporarily relocated within the footprint of the pad to accommodate planned development. The Long-Range Facilities Plan would be implemented in a series of phases and not all work would be performed during a single year. Phasing the implementation of activities is required due to limited construction lay down space on the pad and the short weather dependent construction periods within a year. A conceptual sequencing has been developed to integrate the process of new construction, relocation, and demolition to minimize the potential for disruption of TFS operations to coincide with available funding, and to ensure that services are available throughout the process. The timing of construction demolition for specific structures or utilities during the process of implementing the Long-Range Facilities Plan would be determined by funding and the weather during the typical construction periods. All proposed activities would be on the existing TFS site on the south shore of Toolik Lake.

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). The action being considered is located within the Sagavanirktok Segment of the Nonwilderness Assessment, which covered approximately 512,000 acres total in 1980. Portions of this segment meet the 5,000 acre minimum size. However it was determined that the Sagavanirktok Segment did not meet the standards for naturalness due to roads, camps, airfields, pipelines, material sites and associated facilities. These disturbances bisect the entire length of the segment.

FINDING

The proposed action will not occur on lands identified as having wilderness characteristics and therefore will not affect wilderness characteristics

Type of Assessment/Sources

- U.S. Department of Interior, BLM, 1980. Nonwilderness Assessment: The Alaska Natural Gas Transportation System, Final Decision. Anchorage, Alaska
- U.S.G.S. topographic map Philip Smith Mountains; GIS data; Google Earth images
- Aerial surveys in 2013 and personal knowledge of the area.

— Appendix C — Section 810 Assessment

NEPA Document No.: DOI-BLM-AK-F030–2015–0034–DNA

Applicant: University of Alaska

Serial No.: F-91037

Proposed Action: The University of Alaska proposes to renew their recreation and public purposes lease for the Toolik Field Station (TFS) for another 25 years located at mile post 285 off the Dalton Highway and increase the size from 26.84 acres to 33.87 acres. This would include extend the current boundary to the edge of Toolik Lake. This field station is the base for scientific research of the Arctic for researchers from all over the world. Additionally their long range plan for the next 25 years consists of relocating certain existing facilities, demolishing inefficient or outdated facilities, replacing inefficient temporary structures, constructing new facilities, and upgrading some utility services at TFS. Implementation of the TFS Long-Range Facilities Plan would result in the following five distinct areas within TFS: Community Zone, Industrial Zone, Laboratory Zone, Residential Zone and Swing Space.

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Location: Mile post 285 off the Dalton Highway

Township/Range: Secs. 29 and 32, T. 9 S., R. 11 E., Umiat Meridian, Alaska

Evaluation by: Erin Julianus and Dave Parker

Date: 10/3/2015 and 10/15/2015

Type of Assessment/Sources:

Effect of the proposal on subsistence uses and needs

Fisheries:

The proposed action would not alter the distribution, migration, or location of harvestable fisheries resources. Approved mitigation measures would prevent degradation of adjacent water sources and fisheries habitat. The proposed action will not create any legal or physical barriers that would limit access by subsistence users of the fisheries resources.

Wildlife:

The proposed action is located in Game Management Unit (GMU) 26B. Species of wildlife that are used for subsistence harvest in the area include moose, sheep, bears, furbearers, and small game. These species may temporarily avoid the area when activities and personnel associated with the permitted action are present. Although subsistence activities occur throughout the area, the proposed action will not significantly affect subsistence uses and needs.

Other resources:

The proposed activity will not significantly impact other resources such as wood, water, or berries. Subsistence activities that target these resources occur in a much broader area than where the proposed action is to take place. Therefore, the proposed action will not significantly restrict subsistence uses and needs.

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

None

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

None

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

None

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

None

Finding:

The proposed action will not significantly restrict subsistence uses. Access to subsistence resources will not be hampered by the proposed activity. There is no reasonably foreseeable significant decrease in the abundance of harvestable resources and in the distribution of harvestable resources due to the proposed action.

References: