

White Mountains National Recreation Area

Public Scoping Project: Spring 2016

Do you recreate in the White Mountains National Recreation Area? Do you rent cabins or stay in the campgrounds? If so, the BLM needs your input.

BACKGROUND

Visitor use has increased and evolved in the White Mountains National Recreation Area since the BLM last addressed camping and cabin stays. In recent years the recreation area's user base has expanded beyond Interior Alaska residents to include recreationalists from outside Alaska. Visitors now explore the area in winter by bike, ski, snowmobile, and dogsled, and in summer by ATV, boat, and foot. The high-use periods, including holidays, spring break, and hunting season, now see the facilities at full capacity.

With greater use has come more competition for the public use cabins and other recreational facilities. Due in part to this increased competition, users have expressed a desire to revisit the cabin reservation system to better accommodate trip planning. In addition, BLM's customer surveys indicate that the supplemental rules regarding stay limits and reservations – some of which date back to 1987 – have not kept pace with the changes in visitation and are in need of revision.



Resolving some of these issues can be handled relatively quickly through administrative processes. Other would involve environmental analysis, *Federal Register* notification, additional supplemental rules, or other more time-consuming steps. For a few issues, the BLM may first need to complete the ongoing Eastern Interior Resource Management Plan (RMP) and/or associated step-down plans.

HOW TO OFFER YOUR INPUT

BLM is hosting a series of Open Space Forums in the month of April. (An explanation of the Open Space Forum process is included in the FAQs below.) These informal conversations will center around a set of eight open-ended questions that will help BLM determine what the agency needs to consider in tailoring our rules and policies to better accommodate current and expected visitor use in the White Mountains.

The Open Space Forums are scheduled for **Wednesday, April 13 from 4 to 8 p.m. and Saturday, April 16 from 2 to 6 p.m.** Both open houses will be held at the BLM Fairbanks District Office, 222 University Avenue, in Fairbanks.

Those who are unable to attend one of the open houses will be able to provide input by using online commenting tools on BLM's ePlanning website (<http://1.usa.gov/1SGi2lr>), contacting BLM at 907-474-2223, emailing your thoughts to methun@blm.gov, or **visiting BLM's booth at the Fairbanks Outdoor Show, April 22–24** at the Carlson Center in Fairbanks.

FAQ'S

- **Why are we only addressing camping and cabin stays?** The public may be concerned about additional recreation-related issues, but BLM's most pressing need is addressing how long users can stay and how a user can make reservations or conduct effective trip planning. During periods of high use, conflicts between users have occurred in the recreation area as well as in the BLM office. These issues cannot wait until the ongoing Eastern Interior Resource Management Plan is finalized and a step-down plan is put into place (possibly an additional three years). Addressing these issues now will alleviate a majority of the conflicts that are occurring.
- **Will BLM make all of the changes suggested?** BLM is asking the public to provide input on what BLM should consider when making new rules and/or policies. Not all suggestions will be acted upon. Some considerations will inform administrative processes that can be enacted quickly, while others will inform decisions that require environmental analysis under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The public will have additional opportunities to review decisions as they are made and to view the comments and suggestions provided.
- **Is BLM asking for responses to alternatives?** No, BLM does not have a formal environmental action to consider at this time. The public is being asked to provide input into what considerations BLM should have when addressing future changes. Those changes that will have a NEPA component will have a range of alternatives, and the public will have an additional opportunity to comment on those when presented.
- **How does this affect the Eastern Interior RMP?** Resource Management Plans (RMPs) and other land use plans make broad decisions on management priorities and goals for public

land. In the Eastern Interior RMP, we make decisions about identifying areas that will be managed as Special Recreation Management Areas (locations where BLM determines the resources require special management). However, land use plans do not decide site-specific rules such as camping fees. Rather, such decisions are made in ‘step-down plans’ that can be reviewed and changed more easily — as long as they remain in accordance with the RMP. Some of the input gained from this scoping will inform the sideboards for developing a step-down plan, in this case a Recreational Area Management Plans (RAMP), which the BLM will develop for the White Mountains after signing the record of decision for the RMP. Step-down plans such as the White Mountain RAMP go through an additional public input process and environmental review.

- **What if I can’t attend a workshop?** Interested parties can either attend one of the workshops or submit their thoughts via email or phone. In addition, a web page on BLM’s ePlanning website will provide updates and a portal to accept public comments.
- **What is an Open Space Forum?** Open space is a tool that enables groups of any size to address complex, important issues and achieve meaningful results quickly. It functions best where more traditional formats fail: in situations involving conflict, complexity, diversity of thought or people, and short decision times.
 - In Open Space meetings and events, participants create and manage their own agenda of parallel working sessions around a central theme of strategic importance. A moderator starts the session by reading the big question/task at hand. The moderator explains that sub questions are located on white boards throughout the room and explains that participants add their thoughts, additional questions or ideas to each board or may create their own. Participants annotate their thoughts and move about the room.
 - This method tends to work better for idea generation than the standard public meeting because it prevents grandstanding and really gives people a chance to build on ideas.
- **How quickly could BLM implement changes to the current rules and policies?** Business decisions (how reservations are made, new signage, new methods of providing information) can be made quickly, i.e., in less than three months. Other decisions that require NEPA analysis, such as those involving Special Recreation Permits, or impacts to the land, will be scheduled in the workflow for the office and may take as long as six months and require additional public involvement. Decisions that affect current Supplemental Rules would need to go through the Supplemental Rule process and would require NEPA analysis, a minimum of 60 days public notice, and posting in the *Federal Register*. This process can take more than a year depending on the complexity of the issues at hand.

Questionnaire: How can the BLM best address use and stay limits in the White Mountains National Recreation Area?

Cabins

1. How can the BLM best provide equitable access to rent cabins for all including Interior residents and potential users outside of Alaska?

2. The current rule states that cabins must be reserved no more than 30 days in advance. What should the BLM consider for the appropriate amount of time to plan a trip and reserve a cabin that is equitable to all users?

3. How should the BLM consider accommodating rentals of the cabins during high use periods such as spring break, hunting or holiday times?

4. There currently is a three day consecutive stay limit in any cabin. What are the things that BLM needs to consider when reviewing this rule for future planning?

Camping

5. The current stay limitation in the White Mountain campgrounds is 10 consecutive days. What are the things that BLM needs to consider when reviewing this rule for future planning?

6. The current stay limits for camping in dispersed areas of the White Mountains (not in a cabin or in the campground) is 10 days. What are the things that BLM needs to consider when reviewing this rule for future planning?

7. Fall is a busy time in the Nome Creek Valley. What should the BLM consider to accommodate the multiple users (berry picking, hiking, hunting) during this time? How can the BLM address camping for these varied users?

Visitor Experience

8. What impacts to a recreational experience should the BLM consider in the next recreation management plan?

a. for winter

b. for fall

c. for summer

We need your input!

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Email your thoughts

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Contact our office

907-474-2200

Visit the project website: <http://1.usa.gov/1SGi2lr>