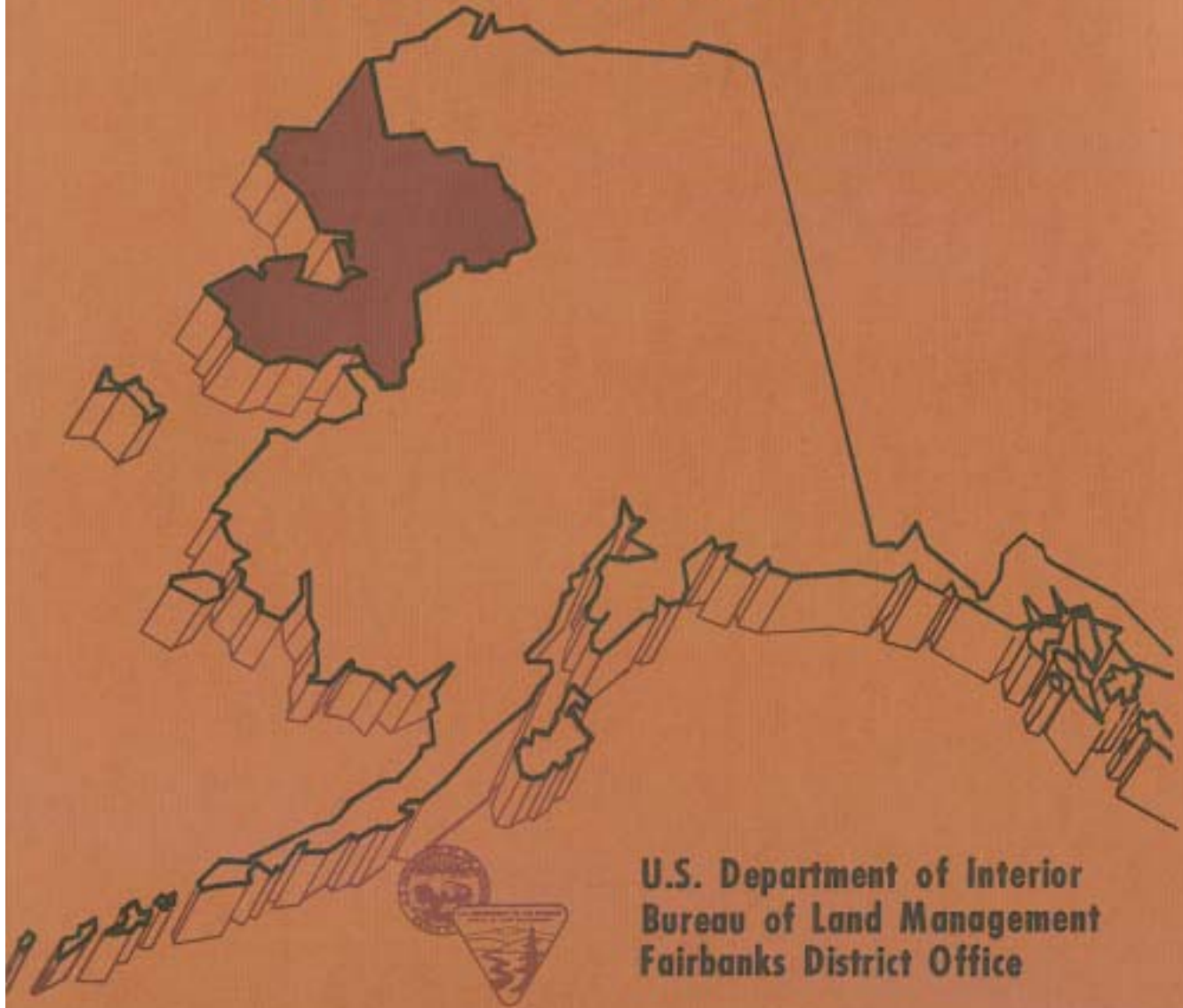


BLM Land Use Plan for Northwest Planning Area

A SUMMARY



**U.S. Department of Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Fairbanks District Office**

July 1983

To the Reader:

This booklet summarizes the land use plan completed for lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management in Northwest Alaska. The plan (called the Management Framework Plan, Northwest Planning Area) is a body of decisions BLM uses to guide its management program for the area. It is based on the management philosophy of multiple-use.

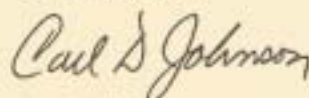
When we began work on the plan in January 1981, the first task was to identify the most important land use issues and to learn of the concerns of the people interested in Northwest Alaska. To get this information a wide range of people, were contacted including groups and individuals with special interests in the area, Native organizations, all levels of government, and residents of the area. The issues and concerns that were identified, combined with an analysis of the resources and present land uses of the area, were used to design a proposed plan.

The proposed plan was submitted for public review in February 1982, asking for comments and suggestions. The review process consisted of circulating the proposed plan to the public; holding public meetings in Nome, Kotzebue, Anchorage, and Buckland; and meeting with Native groups, state, federal, and local government agencies. After this review, the proposed plan was revised to address important suggestions made by the public.

The Bureau of Land Management is grateful to all those people who provided information and suggestions toward development of the plan. Their help provided the critical link between the planning concept and the real world situation in which we all work.

A management framework plan is dynamic, and may be changed as national or local conditions require. Your comments and suggestions are welcome at any time.

Sincerely yours,



Carl D. Johnson
District Manager



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Northwest Planning Area General Description



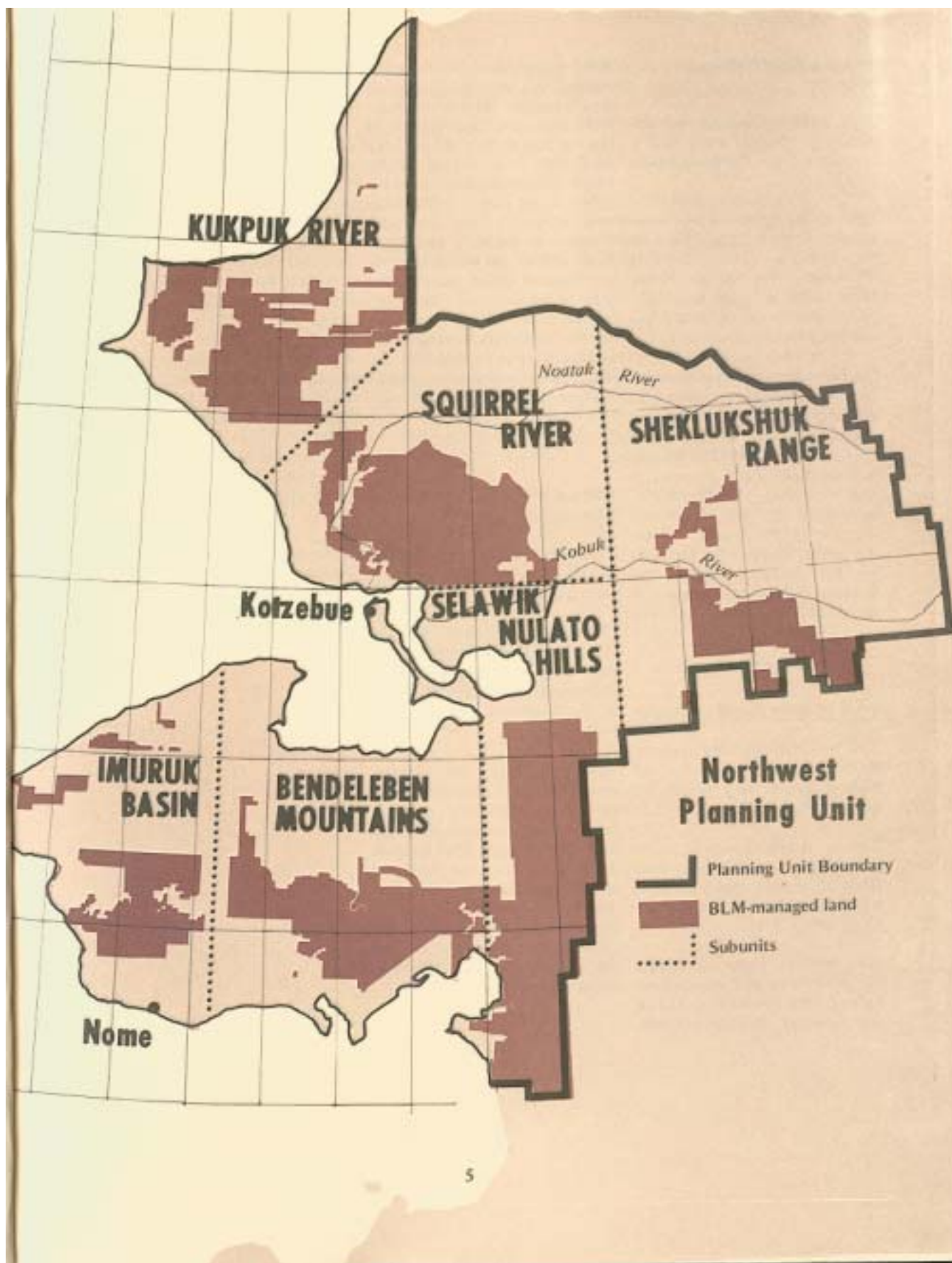
The Northwest Planning Area includes all of northwest Alaska, excluding National Petroleum Reserve - Alaska. This is an immense area of varied land forms and ecosystems. Ownership and management patterns of this planning area are rapidly changing; however, enough is known about ownership patterns that planning is possible. When land owner-

ship is settled, the Bureau of Land Management expects to manage approximately 6 million acres in this planning area.

Residents of Northwest Alaska have a rich cultural heritage and continuation of this heritage is important. Although resource development means jobs and may help the area economical-

ly, it also brings social change. The planning process provides the framework for orderly development and addresses environmental issues to minimize impacts.

The Northwest Planning Area was divided into six subunits for planning purposes.



Kukpuk River Planning Subunit

This subunit contains approximately 6,100,000 acres, and is located on the Lisburne Peninsula.

The topography varies from coastal flats to steep areas in the Lisburne Hills, DeLong Mountains, and the Amatusuk Hills. The climate is greatly influenced by the Chukchi Sea and the Arctic Ocean.

Major mineral development may occur in the southeastern portion of the subunit and access and major support facilities will be required. This area is potentially high in archaeological values. Recreational activities are low, but may increase in the future. There are major anadromous fish runs on the Kukpuk, Wulik, and Kivalina Rivers. Caribou are an important subsistence resource.

Squirrel River Planning Subunit

This Subunit contains approximately 1,003,900 acres of BLM-managed land within the Squirrel River basin.

The topography varies from the meandering Squirrel River lowlands at 50 feet above sea level to 4,000 foot peaks in the Baird Mountains.

The Squirrel River is suitable for float trips and recreational fishing, and has been identified for potential Wild and Scenic

River designation. If this designation is approved, tourism may increase. Mineral development may be a major activity in the northeast part of the area on Kler Creek. Currently, the entire subunit is withdrawn by Public Land Order 5179 from new mineral claim location. Timber is located on Omar River and on the North Fork of the Squirrel River, but there is little or no demand. Archaeological values are present. The Squirrel River basin is used for wintering and migration by portions of the Western Arctic Caribou Herd.

Sheklukshuk Range Planning Subunit

This Subunit contains approximately 604,700 acres of BLM-managed land.

The topography varies from the lakes, ponds, and bogs of the Pah River Flats (400 foot elevation) to Angutikada Peak in the Lockwood Hills (4,000 foot elevation).

This subunit has shrubs, trees, and an Interior climate. Many areas have abundant big game and furbearers. Subsistence use is heavy in the Sheklukshuk Range and Lockwood Hills, and commercial trapping is done in the Pah River Flats. There is concern about impacts on caribou migration routes and the Rabbit Creek caribou wintering area.

Imuruk Basin Planning Subunit

The Imuruk Basin Planning Subunit contains approximately 585,900 acres of BLM land on the western half of the Seward Peninsula.

The topography varies from the Imuruk Basin, Nuluk River and Kuzitrin River lowlands near sea level to the 4,700 foot Mt. Osborn in the Kigluaik Mountains.

The vegetation is mostly tundra with some willows and shrubs along creeks. BLM lands in the southwest portion of the Kigluaik Mountains are accessible from the Nome-Teller Road. Subsistence uses of these public lands are the most important uses. The remainder of lands along the road systems are on either State or Native selected lands. Reindeer grazing and some mining will continue to be demands on the resources.

Bendeleben Mountains Planning Subunit

This Subunit contains approximately 1,523,000 acres of BLM-managed land within the Fish, Kuzitrin, Tubutulik, and Koyuk River basins.

The topography varies from the 100 foot elevation Kuzitrin River lowlands to 3,700 foot Mt. Bendeleben.

There are Native allotments within the Fish River drainage, and the Bering Straits Regional Corporation has selected lands in this subunit. Mining is a major use which is expected to increase the need for access.

A number of major archaeological sites are known. Reindeer grazing will continue to be an important use. Habitat for waterfowl and moose is important in the Kuzitrin Valley, and McCarthys Marsh areas, which are also primary subsistence areas. The Bendeleben Mountains Subunit contains the Koyuk River, which was designated for study as a potential Wild & Scenic River.

Selawik/Nulato Hills Planning Subunit

This Subunit contains approximately 2,930,500 acres of BLM-managed land.

The topography varies from the Shaktoolik River lowlands near sea level to 3,300 foot peaks in the Selawik Hills.

Access to public lands is difficult in this subunit. The Shaktoolik, Ingloolik, Ungalik, and Buckland Rivers have major anadromous fish runs. The Buckland Basin is an important wintering area for the Western Arctic Caribou Herd. Reindeer grazing is a limited use.

Bering Straits Regional Corporation has selected lands in the subunit and there are archaeological sites in the northwest portion.

The area contains important big game habitat and there is some timber in the Nulato Hills, but lack of access restricts most uses.

Major Issues and Concerns

The first important step in the planning process was to determine issues and concerns on which decisions are needed,

Early in the process, comments and suggestions on issues and concerns were solicited through a mailing to several hundred individuals and groups. Based on responses received, an issue summary was published in January 1981.

BLM specialists then gathered social, economic, and resource information, and conducted an analysis to identify opportunities for responding to the issues and concerns. These opportunities were developed into specific recommendations which were published for comment in February 1982. A series of meetings with groups and the general public was held at this time and all comments, both written and oral, were considered in the development of the final decisions presented in this summary.

Throughout the planning, issues were reviewed and tempered by public comments concerning projected resource uses. Planning issues and concerns can be categorized as follows:

1. land use authorizations and disposal
2. opening land to mineral location and leasing
3. reindeer grazing

4. use/disposal impacts on subsistence resources

Land Use Authorization and Disposal

At the start of the planning process, it was BLM's perception that the Alaska public wanted land to be made available for homesites, homesteads, headquarters sites, and trade and manufacturing sites. The land settlement laws for Alaska are effective until 1986, and the present policy is to make land available for such uses if the planning process shows this to be in the national interest. The Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) contains provisions for the disposal and lease of the public lands under conditions contained in the act, which include determining the proper land use through the planning process. Most of the land in this planning area is not available for disposal or leases because of State and Native selections, designation as parks and refuges under the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA), and withdrawals dating back to the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA). The issue is: can the State public's needs and desires to occupy and use public land be met without displacing other resource uses of greater interest to local and national publics?

Opening Land to Mineral Location and Leasing

Several Public Land Orders withdrew lands for Native selection and possible inclusion into parks, refuges, forests, and Wild and Scenic Rivers, and closed lands to mineral entry and leasing. Some of the lands were not selected by the Natives, nor included in the conservation units. The Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA), Title X, requires the Secretary of the Interior to establish an oil and gas leasing program and to assess the oil, gas, and other mineral potential on all public lands. The issue is: to determine which lands to study and/or lease for the exploration and development of leasable minerals, and which lands to open for mineral location,

Reindeer Grazing

There has been a historic overlapping of the reindeer grazing and caribou winter range in the Buckland River drainage. Reindeer have wandered off with migrating caribou. There is concern about transmission of disease to and from the Western Arctic Caribou Herd, a primary subsistence resource in Northwest Alaska. Since caribou and reindeer can interbreed, there is concern about changing the genetic



A portion of the western arctic caribou herd

base of the caribou. There is concern that grazing reindeer on the winter range of the caribou could result in overgrazing and deterioration of the range to the detriment of both reindeer and caribou herds. The issue is: how to provide grazing for both caribou and reindeer with as few undesirable impacts as possible.

Use/Disposal Impacts on the Subsistence Resources

Land disposal, with resulting permanent occupancy, would impact subsistence resources more than intermittent casual use, because of the introduction of constant human activity in areas not now occupied. Leases of public lands for intermittent casual use can be managed so that impacts to subsistence resources can be avoided or mitigated. Leases can be reviewed before granting and be monitored during the term of the lease to assess the impacts to subsistence resources.

Reindeer grazing could reduce the caribou population, an important subsistence resource, by using the available forage and causing changes in the normal caribou migratory patterns.

The issue is: how can subsistence resources be protected?

Resources and Significant Decisions

Lands

The lands resource is those surface and subsurface public lands managed by the BLM. The lands activities revolve around the authorization of uses through permits and leases, or disposal through sales, exchanges, or transfer under settlement, mining, and State and Native selection laws.

The acreage managed by BLM is uncertain, because selections by the State and Natives are not complete. We estimate the final acreage will be 4 to 7 million acres in this planning unit.

Decisions

1. No settlement will be allowed under the settlement laws, but leases and sales for cabin sites or for other commercial uses under the Federal Land Policy Management Act (FLPMA) will be considered.

Much opposition was expressed to opening lands under the settlement laws, usually because of anticipated impacts on subsistence needs and uses. Four persons expressed approval of opening lands. FLPMA leases and/or sales will make land available for commercial sites, while allowing BLM

to safeguard subsistence resources by considering environmental impacts.

2. Public leases will be allowed on areas containing hot springs.

Most hot springs in the planning unit are on land not managed by BLM. Our regulations allow leases for development of facilities that are open to the public. Environmental impacts will be carefully assessed prior to granting any leases, and each hot springs application will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

3. Uses on high mountain peaks will be regulated to avoid conflicts with potential use for communication sites.

Any application for use of high peaks will be evaluated for its impact on the value of the peak as a future communication site. Generally, the first priority value of high peaks is for use as a communication site.

4. Review the use of lands withdrawn for special purposes and determine if the withdrawals should be continued, modified, or revoked.

There are a series of withdrawals for various size tracts for special purposes. Some examples are: a powersite

reserve, and several communication sites along the coast. These will be reviewed and, if the need no longer exists for the withdrawal, the withdrawal will be modified or revoked, and the lands restored to multiple use or State or Native selection.

5. A program to inform the public about the location and permitted uses will be developed for easements to public lands established under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act.

This program will identify easements for public uses and any special stipulations applicable to the use, and should help to reduce trespass on private lands.

6. Protect potential transportation corridors by not allowing conflicting land uses.

Several transportation corridors in the planning area have been identified. Two were identified in the Alaska National Interest Land Acts - the Deering to Taylor winter trail, and an access road from the Ambler Mining District east to the Alaska Pipeline Haul Road. A haul road from the mineral claims in the Wulik River area to the seacoast is proposed, and the State of Alaska has proposed a railroad from Nome to the DeLong Mining District.



7. Develop a program as needed, to acquire easements across private property for access to BLM-administered public lands.

There are discontinuous stretches of trails not included in easements reserved under provisions of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANSCA), and easements may be needed to ensure access to public lands.

8. Land exchanges will be considered if there is a public benefit.

Minerals

The minerals resource of the planning area includes locatable minerals, such as gold; leasable minerals, such as oil, gas, and coal; and saleable minerals, such as sand and gravel. The minerals activities center on having lands open for entry, location, and development of locatable minerals, and for exploration, leasing, or sale of leasable and saleable minerals.

Decisions

1. Review those withdrawal orders which have closed lands to mineral entry and modify, amend, or revoke those withdrawals not serving the original purpose of the withdrawal.

Much public land was closed to mineral entry during D-2 procedures for establishment of parks, forests, refuges, and Wild and Scenic Rivers, and to permit State and Native selections. Some of the withdrawn lands were not included in parks, forests, refuges, or Wild and Scenic Rivers, or selected by the State or Natives. Opening these lands to mineral entry will be considered.

2. Open all areas to oil and gas leasing governed by the following conditions:

- A. An environmental assessment of the impacts of allowing oil and gas leasing will be done under the Sec. 1008 (ANILCA) study now underway.

- B. Caribou wintering areas in the Selawik/Nulato Hills subunit and the Squirrel River subunit will be subject to seasonal closure and/or restriction. Delay opening date of Selawik/Nulato Hills subunit to coincide with opening date of remainder of Nulato Hills outside this planning unit.

- C. Defer opening the Kukpuk River subunit until the State of Alaska selections are finished in this area. The area north of the 68th latitude has been designated as a competitive sale area.

3. Permit the exploration and leasing of coal, oil shale,

geothermal, and other leaseable minerals.

These permits are issued only after the environmental impacts are assessed and protective stipulations are developed and included in the permits.

4. Permit the sale of minerals such as sand, gravel, and building stone.

The applications for sale are examined individually for impacts to the environmental and subsistence resources and may be rejected, modified, or issued as requested, with stipulations depending on the conditions at each site.

Forest Products

Forest resources consist mostly of noncommercial woodland. Local cutting for house logs and firewood is the major expected use.

Decisions

1. Issue permits to authorize harvesting of forest products.

Most of the woodlands under BLM management are not close to villages; consequently, there is little demand for forest products from BLM-managed lands.



Bunchberry

Range

The range resource is presently used for reindeer and wildlife grazing. Management of the resource will be important, as the reindeer industry maximizes opportunities to increase herds.

Decisions

1. Adjust reindeer allotment boundaries and/or designate nonuse areas to avoid conflict with consistently-used caribou winter ranges as follows:

A. Reindeer grazing may be permitted, on BLM-administered lands east of the West Fork and Main Fork of the Buckland River within the confines of the Hadley Allotment, after five consecutive years of nonuse by caribou. Upon receiving a request for winter use of this range, BLM will determine the suitability of that use based on availability, condition, and trend of the forage; ADF&G population and distribution goals for the Western Arctic Caribou Herd; and the objectives and needs of the reindeer operation. An allotment management plan would be prepared and approved prior to permitting.

- B. Reindeer grazing by the NANA herd will be permitted on BLM-adminis-

tered lands along the bottomlands of the West Fork and Main Fork of the Buckland River (T. 3, 4, and 5; R. 9 W., KRM) during late summer or early fall as herds move to the Koyuk River drainage. This use will be permitted under a grazing plan (BLM, SCS, or privately prepared) approved by BLM.

This decision will allow for protection of important caribou winter range in the Buckland Valley, while allowing for the present management needs of the NANA reindeer operation.

2. Develop Allotment Management Plans which comply with the following objectives:

Maintain and improve the quality of existing range resources by:

- a. Rotation grazing systems
- b. Management of fire through prescriptions
- c. Adjustment of seasonal use
- d. Control of grazing intensity within forage capability

managed to provide quality and quantity of water needed, to reduce flood and sediment damage, and protect vegetation resources.

Decisions

1. Require a permit for all vehicles weighing over 2,000 pounds used off existing trails.

Indiscriminate use of off-road vehicles on snowless terrain can cause erosion. Uses will be permitted primarily during winter months, when adequate snow cover exists to protect surface vegetation.

2. File for water rights under State law to secure water needed for BLM uses.

Dahl Creek airstrip and Granite Mountain will be first priorities. Applications for water rights in other locations should be filed when the need is identified.

Watershed

The watershed program is

Wildlife

The wildlife program is concerned with protecting and maintaining or enhancing wildlife habitat.

Decisions

1. Reject reindeer grazing applications in areas where significant conflicts with wildlife are likely to occur.

Conflicts with wildlife will be considered in the environmental assessment prepared for each new reindeer grazing permit application. Consultation with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game will be part of this environmental assessment process.

2. Protect areas of crucial wildlife habitat. In other areas, competing uses should be mitigated so as not to significantly alter the population of the species.

Habitat management plans for important wildlife species will be prepared, where crucial habitat has been identified, to provide management with additional guidance for management purposes.

3. Allow fire under prescribed conditions.

Wildlife habitat management plans will identify areas where wildlife habitat would be improved by allowing fire

to burn under specified conditions. (Fire management plans will consider the positive and negative effects of allowing fire to burn and these plans will provide the overall guidance for fire management on planning unit lands.)

2. Trail maintenance and markers are recommended along the Iditarod Trail. Cooperative agreements with Native Corporations should recognize the historic route.

The Iditarod Trail is part of the National Historic Trail System; that part between Ungalik and Baldhead (via Koyuk) crosses land managed by BLM.

Cultural Resource Management

The management of the cultural resources includes the inventory, protection, and management of historical, archaeological, and cultural sites.

Decisions

1. Inventory archaeological and historical sites as time and funding permit. BLM encourages university and private inventories of sites under permit to meet BLM management needs.

Applicants for surface-disturbing uses may be required to furnish the needed inventories. Inventories in three areas should be conducted because of the high potential of important sites and the likelihood of development activities which could damage sites. The three areas by priority are the DeLong Mountains, Squirrel River basin, and the Western Seward Peninsula.



Old Buckland townsite, West Fork Buckland River

Recreation Management

This program plans, develops, and manages the recreation resources and facilities.

Decisions

1. Monitor recreation activities on a casual basis to detect any change in the intensity of recreation use.

Access to public land is limited, and recreational use is light. Therefore, construction of new recreation facilities will not be considered in the foreseeable future.

2. Public use trail shelters may be constructed.

The need for public use trail shelters was identified during public meetings. BLM can allow this by sale, lease, or permits for these sites.

3. Retain the option to place additional restrictions on off-road vehicle use should it become necessary, within constraints of Sec. 811 of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act. (See Watershed section.)

Cumulative Environmental Overview

Lands

The land use decisions to allow leases and sales of cabin sites will have social and economic benefits to the users and the community. Adverse impacts to other resources will be mitigated through the environmental assessment process with associated stipulations as required. Other land program decisions were made to benefit the public socially or economically with any potential adverse effects to be mitigated before approval of the actions.

Minerals

The potential for adverse effects on the wildlife and the environment is present in opening lands to mineral location and mineral leasing. An environmental assessment of the potential for adverse impacts and possibility of mitigation will be done before any order opening the land will be issued.

The potential for jobs and other socioeconomic benefits is always present in any mineral development.

Forestry

Allow residents to harvest forest products. No adverse impacts are anticipated.

Range

The range decision adjusting the reindeer grazing boundary in the Buckland River drainage will have positive benefits to range permittees and wildlife. The decision-setting objectives of an Allotment Management Plan will have positive benefits to range.

Watershed

The decision to require permits for vehicles weighing over 2,000 pounds, when used off existing trails, will lessen soil erosion, vegetation damage, and water pollution.

Wildlife

The decisions to maintain or enhance wildlife habitat will provide positive social and economic benefits by increasing opportunities to meet sport, nonconsumptive, and subsistence needs.

Recreation, Visual, and Cultural

Decisions in these activities protect these resources under existing laws and regulations.

Any proposed action will consider adverse impacts.

Subsistence

Subsistence is interwoven throughout the above resources and programs. Before BLM approves any action, the effect of such use, occupancy, or disposition on subsistence uses and needs will be evaluated, and Sec. 810 of the Alaska National Interest Lands Act will be followed.

Interrelationship With Other Plans

This plan was developed in coordination with the State of Alaska and the Bering Straits and NANA Regional Corporations. Exchange of information was effected by public meetings in Nome and Kotzebue, many meetings with State and local government units and interest groups, and by mailings.



Kotzebue waterfront

Actions After the Management Framework Plan

The decisions in this plan will be carried out by on-the-ground actions directed by further, more detailed, planning and/or environmental analysis. For example, the decision to open areas to oil and gas leasing is currently being implemented through an environmental assessment. All actions are dependent upon time, money, and available staff, and subject to provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act, FLPMA and many other laws. If an environmental assessment of a proposed action indicates that unacceptable impacts are inevitable, the action will either be modified or rejected.

This plan will be updated, amended, or revised when new information becomes known, new technology is developed, or public needs change. Any major change will be subject to public review. This plan will be used in developing BLM's Annual Work Plan, budget requests, and in making day-to-day land use decisions.



Mountainous terrain in the planning unit

Glossary

As in most systems, BLM's Planning System has its own "language." This glossary is included to help you understand some of the terms used in this brochure.

Activity Plan: Detailed action plans for specific programs.

Management Framework Plan (MFP): A land use decision document which establishes, for a given planning area, projected land uses, and management objectives to meet identified public needs. It is the Bureau's Land Use Plan. It is prepared in three steps: 1) Resource recommendations. 2) Impact analysis and multiple use recommendation development. 3) Decision.

Multiple Use: Management of land and resources so that land use is in the best combination to meet the present and future needs of the American people.

Planning Area: One or more planning units for which an MFP is to be prepared. In this land use plan, the terms "planning unit" and "planning area" refer to the same tract of public land.

Planning Area Analysis: A document that analyzes present and future needs and demands of the public for land, and for renewable and nonrenewable resources. It shows the significance of BLM land within a planning area to users, operators, the community, and region. It is based on data in the URA and other regional information.

Planning Unit: A portion of a BLM District used for assembling resource inventory data. For each planning unit the District Manager prepares a Unit Resource Analysis.

Unit Resource Analysis (URA): A basic source of information on the land and its resources, consisting of: a base map showing roads, rivers, villages, and prominent landmarks; a physical, biological, and man-made environment; an analysis of present uses, problems, resources, conditions, and capability; and an identification of specific opportunities which are possible for resolving problems, enhancing resources, and for filling the public's need for land, minerals, recreation, wildlife, watershed, forest products, and grazing.

Use Authorization: A document showing permission to use land or its resources.