

November 23, 1982

Re: 2420-14
(8351.1)

· Rhon River Roadhouse Site/Iditarod National Historic Trail

Louis Waller
McGrath Area Manager
Bureau of Land Management
4700 E. 72nd Avenue
Anchorage, Alaska 99507

Dear Mr. Waller:

This letter is in response to your request for a recommendation for the size of withdrawal needed for historic trail management purposes at the site commonly known as the Rhon River Roadhouse Site.

The Rhon River Roadhouse site currently falls within an Air Navigational Site Withdrawal. I recommend retaining a minimum of 335 acres in public ownership in order to preserve the historic, scenic and outdoor recreation values of the site. The recommendations are based on the following references:

Iditarod National Historic Trail
Volume One
Comprehensive Management Plan

Iditarod National Historic Trail
Volume Two
Resources Inventories

Public Law 90-543 (as amended by P.L. 95-625) directed the Department of Interior to prepare a management plan for the newly established Iditarod National Historic Trail. The Secretary of the Interior delegated this responsibility to the Bureau of Land Management which then formed the Iditarod National Historic Trail Project Team. By law, the comprehensive plan was to include the identification of the historic trail system. In addition, the plan was to identify all significant natural, historic and cultural resources to be preserved and identify areas having a high potential for outdoor recreation. Based on the evaluation, the project team was to make site and segment recommendations including recommended rights-of-way and identification of access needs.

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Based on the evaluations made by the interagency-interdisciplinary Iditarod Project Team (historians, historic architects, outdoor recreation planners, and landscape architect), the site at Rhon River Roadhouse was identified as one of the most significant sites on the entire 2300 mile Iditarod National Historic Trail System.

Historic Significance

The Rhon River Roadhouse was first established in 1910 after the Alaska Road Commission first surveyed the Seward to Nome Route. The exact location of the Seward to Nome route was identified by the Project Team by the discovery of 1:25,000 scale survey maps prepared by the Alaska Engineering Commission in 1914. The Roadhouse lies at the junction of two trails which traverse the Alaska Range: Rainy Pass and Ptarmigan Pass routes. The site served as a primary roadhouse site from 1910 until the early 1920's. The site maintained historical importance as a navigational and communication site when air travel replaced dog sled travel across the Alaska Range. Today four cabins remain at the historic site. The four cabins, the oldest of which is over 70 years old, vary from "ruins" to "excellent" condition.

Natural (Scenic) Significance

The Project Team rated the portion of the historic trail at Rhon River as being a Class A Scenic Quality area (BLM-Visual Resource Management Rating System). The rating team, made up of BLM and USDA Forest Service resource specialists, gave the segment the highest rating - "outstanding scenic quality."

Outdoor Recreation

The trail segment was rated as having a "high potential" for outdoor recreation opportunities. This evaluation was based on suitability for summer and winter use, the accessibility (airstrip), and the presence of the structures at the historic site.

The site is also used as a key checkpoint in the annual Iditarod Sled Dog Race. Probably as many as 20 drivers and 300 dogs have "camped" at Rhon River at one time, in addition to the race support crews.

Specific Recommendations

Based on the evaluations performed by the Project Team, the historic site and intersecting trail segment were recommended for "Active Management."

Specific recommendations made included:

1. Nominate Historic Site and Trail Segment to the National Register of Historic Places.

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2. Establish a 1000 foot right-of-way on trail segment.
3. Perform historic and archaeological research at site to include testing, mapping, photo documentation, and historic archival research as a prerequisite for site work.
4. Prepare a site management plan.
5. Reconstruct two cabins and the log cache at the historic site.
6. Maintain Tatina airstrip for public access.
7. Initiate a trail/site caretaker program using site as a caretaker quarters and a visitor facility.
8. Maintain site and segment in public ownership.

Attached is a sketch map indicating areas needed to carry out the recommendations in the management plan. The areas I am recommending for retention:

- Area 1: Trail corridor including roadhouse site (National Register Nomination). (Approximately 150 acres.)
- Area 2: CCC Cabin Site (National Register Nomination). (Approximately five acres).
- Area 3: Area retained for recreation/administrative purposes (approximately 165 acres) including airstrip, sites suitable for caretaker cabins and wood lot.
- Area 4: Buffer between trail corridor and Tatina River (approximately 15 acres).

Final acreage determination should be made only after specific recommendations No. 3 and No. 4 (found on the preceding page of this letter) are carried out.

Sincerely,

Judith E. Marquez
Director

By: Terry O'Sullivan
Iditarod Trail Coordinator
Joint State/Federal Iditarod Trail Office

cc: Wayne Boden
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