

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

A PROPOSED PUBLIC USE CABIN

AIALIK BAY, KENAI FJORDS NATIONAL PARK

ALASKA

PREPARED BY
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
ALASKA REGIONAL OFFICE

MAY 1992

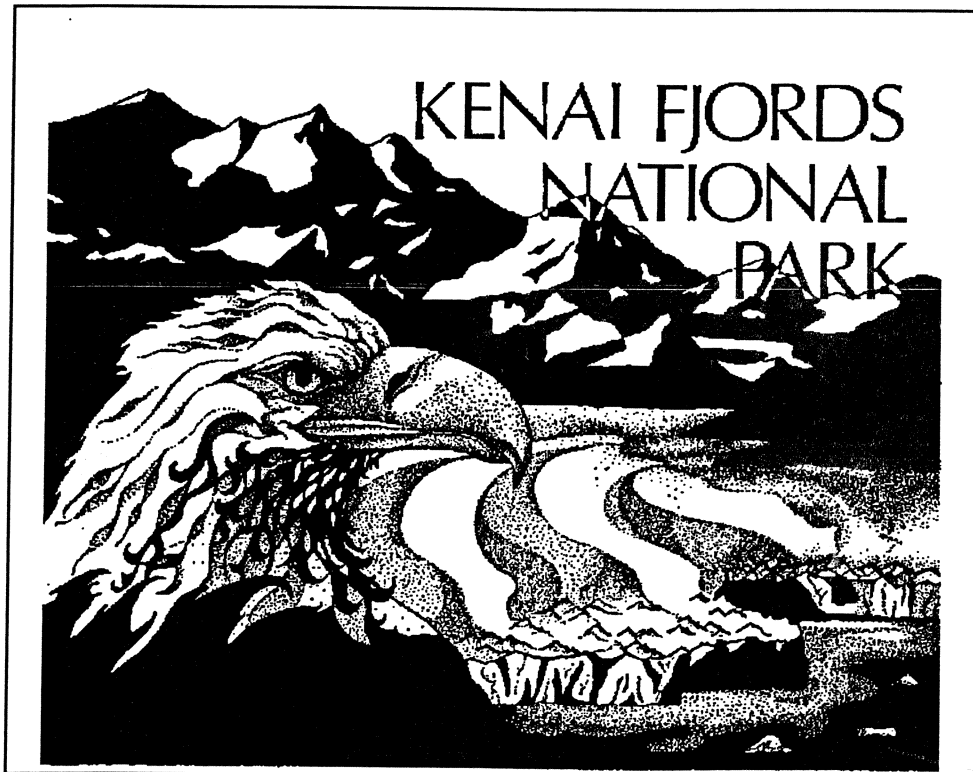


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I. PURPOSE AND NEED

The National Park Service (NPS) is considering construction of a public use cabin in Aialik Bay, Kenai Fjords National Park. Funds are being made available from a special Congressional appropriation to the National Park Service in Alaska for the purpose of constructing public use cabins to facilitate public use and enjoyment of the parks. Managers at Kenai Fjords National Park have identified several sites where construction of public use cabins may be appropriate in the park. The proposed Aialik Bay public use cabin would be located in Quicksand Cove of Aialik Bay, about 45 miles by vessel or 25 miles by aircraft from Seward, Alaska (Figures 1 and 2). The analysis in this environmental assessment (EA) will form the basis for the NPS decision to approve or disapprove construction of a public use cabin at this site.

This Environmental Assessment (EA) has been prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 and regulations of the Council on Environmental Quality (40 CFR 1508.9).

A. BACKGROUND

Visitation to Kenai Fjords National Park has increased from about 5,600 people in 1981 to almost 108,000 people in 1991. About 45,000 additional visitors travel to Aialik Bay on tour boats in summer. Aialik Bay is the most popular destination along the coast of the park. A ranger station/residence was constructed in Aialik Bay about one mile south of Coleman Bay in 1985, and a public use cabin (PUC) was built about one mile north of Coleman Bay in 1986 (Figure 2). In recent years that PUC has been nearly completely reserved many weeks in advance of the summer season. Managers at Kenai Fjords National Park decided that another cabin should be built in the area and dedicated to public use.

B. LEGAL AUTHORIZATION

The area now known as Kenai Fjords National Park was first established as a national monument by Executive Order on December 1, 1978. The Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA), P.L. 96-487, Section 201 (5) redesignated the area as a national park on December 2, 1980. The construction and maintenance of cabins are discussed in ANILCA, TITLE XIII - Administrative Provisions, Sections 1303, 1306, and 1315. Section 1303 (a) "Improved Property On National Park System Lands" (3) states:

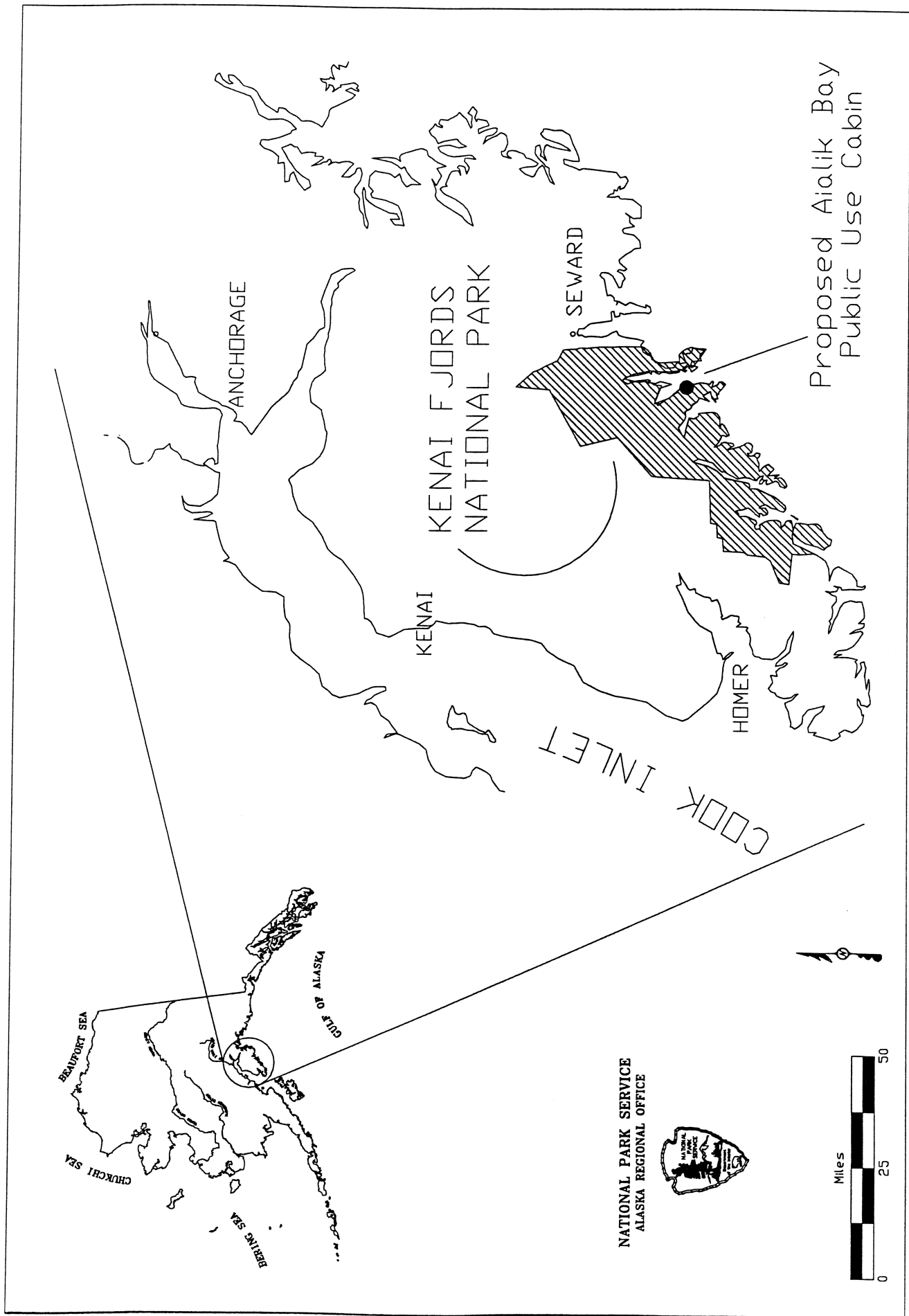
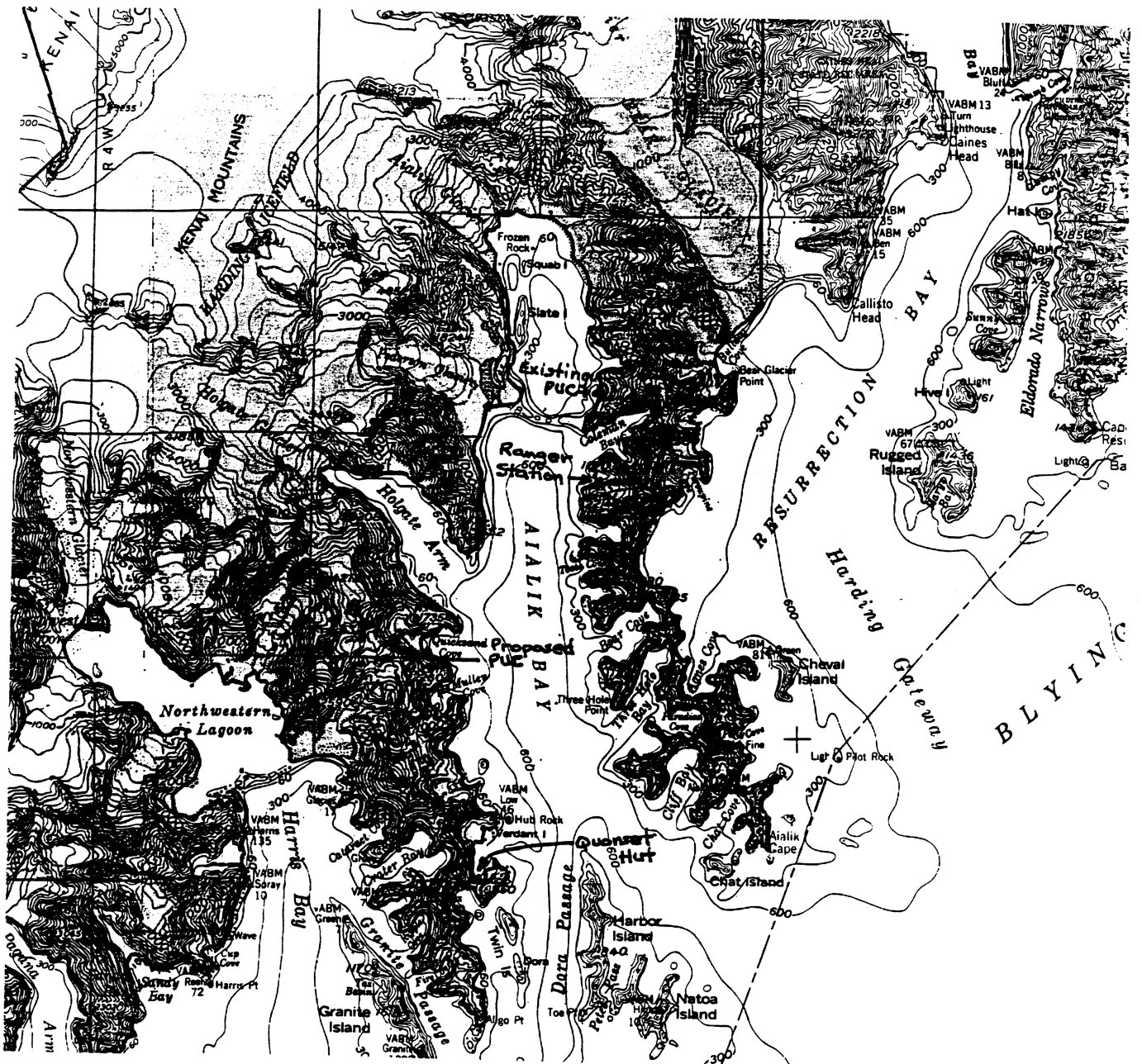
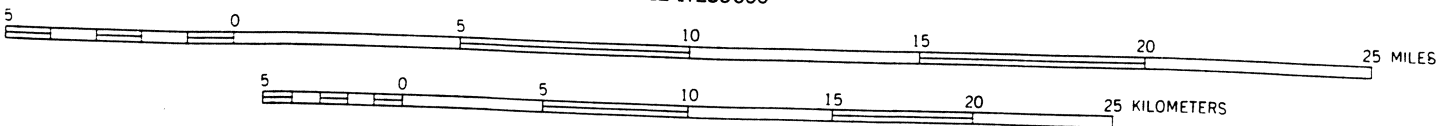


Figure 1. Location of Kenai Fjords National Park and Proposed Aialik Bay Public Use Cabin.

Figure 2. Location of Proposed Cabin and Existing Facilities



SCALE 1:250000



Cabins or other structures not under permit as specified herein shall be used only for official government business: Provided, however, That during emergencies involving the safety of human life or where designated for public use by the Secretary, these cabins may be used by the general public.

Section 1306 (a) "Establishment" states:

In conformity with the conservation and management plans prepared for each unit and the purposes of assuring the preservation, protection, and proper management of any conservation system unit, the Secretary may establish sites and visitor facilities --

(1) within the unit, if compatible with the purposes for which the unit is established, expanded, or designated by this Act, and the other provisions of this Act, or

(2) outside the boundaries of, and in the vicinity of, the unit. To the extent practicable and desirable, the Secretary shall attempt to locate such sites and facilities on Native lands in the vicinity of the unit.

Section 1315 (d) "New Cabins" under subtitle Wilderness Management states:

Within wilderness areas designated by this Act, the Secretary or the Secretary of Agriculture as appropriate, is authorized to construct and maintain a limited number of new public use cabins and shelters if such cabins and shelters are necessary for the protection of the public health and safety. All such cabins or shelters shall be constructed of materials which blend and are compatible with the immediate and surrounding wilderness landscape. The Secretary or the Secretary of Agriculture, as appropriate, shall notify the House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs and the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources of his intention to remove an existing or construct a new public use cabin or shelter.

ANILCA, TITLE XIII, Section 1301 authorized the Secretary to submit conservation and management plans for new NPS units in Alaska, commonly called general management plans. The General Management Plan (GMP) for Kenai Fjords National Park, Alaska (NPS 1984) addresses public use cabins in the fjords on pages 49 and 50 where it states in part:

Public use cabins will be constructed in the fjords portion of the park. Two public use cabins will be provided in Aialik Bay and two cabins may be provided in Nuka Bay when visitation increases. The generally wet conditions and rough terrain in the fjords make simple overnight facilities desirable. The cabins will provide safe, comfortable accom-

modations for overnight visitors. These cabins will be basic rustic structures, with bunks for up to six people. Wood burning stoves will not be provided in the cabins because gathering wood in the vicinity of the cabins would lead to unacceptable impacts. Cabins will be located and designed to blend in with the surrounding landscape to the maximum possible extent. Pit toilets or other feasible methods of disposal of human wastes will be provided near the cabins. A reservation and fee system will be instituted.

The National Park Service will seek to have these cabins located on private lands in the fjords, and to the extent practical and desirable, will locate public use cabins on native land. Specific provisions for construction, maintenance, and administration of cabins will have to be developed with private landowners. If it is not possible to build public use cabins on private lands, the cabins will be constructed by the NPS on federal lands in the park.

The Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) as revised July 1, 1991 address cabins and other structures in 36 CFR Part 13 - National Park System Units in Alaska, Subpart A - Public Use and Recreation, Section 13.17. This section states:

(a) Purpose and policy. The policy of the National Park Service is to manage the use, occupancy and disposition of cabins and other structures in park areas in accordance with the language and intent of ANILCA, the National Park Service Organic Act (16 U.S.C. 1 et. seq.) and other applicable law. Except as Congress has directly and specifically provided to the contrary, the use, occupancy and disposition of cabins and other structures in park areas shall be managed in a manner that is compatible with the values and purposes for which the National Park System and these park areas have been established. In accordance with this policy, this section governs the following authorized uses of cabins and other structures in park areas:

(b) Applicability. Unless otherwise specified, this section applies to all park areas in Alaska except Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park and Sitka National Historic Park.

(5) General public use cabins.

(i) The Superintendent may designate a cabin or other structure located outside of designated wilderness areas and not otherwise under permit under this section (or under permit for only a portion of the year) as a public use cabin. Such designated public use cabins are intended for short term recreational use and occupancy only.

- (8) New Cabins and Other Structures Otherwise Authorized by Law. The Superintendent may issue a permit for the construction, temporary use, occupancy, and maintenance of a cabin or other structure which is authorized by law but not governed by any other paragraph in this section.

II. AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

A. EXISTING CONDITIONS

Aialik Bay lies about 100 air miles south of Anchorage, Alaska's population and transportation hub (Figure 1). The area is accessible by boat or float plane from Seward which lies 125 miles SSE of Anchorage via the Seward Highway. Seward, the gateway community to the park, is also accessible in summer on a daily basis from Anchorage by passenger railroad, air service, and bus; and periodically from the coast by State ferry and cruise ships. Cruise ship dockings at Seward are expected to increase from about 30 per year to over 100 in 1993. In 1991 over 45,000 people visited the Aialik Bay area on tour boats, about 31,000 people passed by the fjords on cruise ships and associated helicopter trips, and 383 people flew over the park on flight-seeing excursions.

Three structures presently exist in Aialik Bay: an existing PUC, the ranger station/residence, and a quonset hut on a native allotment (Figure 2). The existing PUC comfortably accommodates six people, has an oil heater, has an outhouse, and will be retro-fitted for handicap access during summer 1992. Two seasonal park employees live in the Aialik Bay Ranger Station/residence which has a wood stove, propane stove/oven, and outhouse. The quonset hut on the Dodge Native allotment in Verdant Cove has not been occupied in recent years.

B. NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Spectacular Aialik Bay lies along the rugged southeast coast of the Kenai Peninsula, Alaska. Tectonic forces have pulled down the jagged ridges into the Gulf of Alaska as indicated by drowned glacial cirques near the distal ends of Aialik and Harris Peninsulas. The Great Alaska Earthquake of Good Friday 1964 submerged this entire coastal region of the park 3 to 8 feet (1.5-2.5 meters) (Pflaker and Miller 1967, Lemke 1967, and Pflaker 1969). Aialik Glacier and Holgate Glacier plunge from the mile-high Harding Ice Field to the sea in this fjord. Holgate Glacier lies at the head of Holgate Arm, and it serves as a focal point for tour boats visiting Aialik Bay in summer.

Though tidewater glaciers in Aialik Bay discharge great amounts of ice into the sea, their terminal positions have not changed drastically in the last century as tidewater glaciers have

elsewhere in Alaska (see Grant and Higgins 1913, Post 1980b, Hamilton and Rice 1989, and Wiles 1992).

Water resources and hydrologic hazards have not been thoroughly investigated in the area. The stream which drains the area is large enough to support salmon runs. Some minor risk from flooding exists from extreme precipitation events or tsunamis. Large snow avalanches are common on the glacially-steepened slopes, but hazardous zones are easily recognized and avoided.

The proposed construction site lies in a stand of mature Sitka spruce (Picea sitchensis) with various understory species. Several dead spruce stand along the sea side of the beach which were killed from salt water intrusion resulting from the 1964 earthquake. Behind the beach berm lies a wetland classified by Hall (1989) as a palustrine (swampy), emergent or scrub-shrub, hyper-haline (above salt zone), seasonally affected tidal area. Wetlands of differing classifications exist elsewhere in the Quicksand Cove area.

The climate of the area is considered to be subarctic maritime characterized by cool temperatures and heavy precipitation. A summer weather station is monitored at the Aialik Bay Ranger Station where maximum mean summer temperatures range from 40° to 60° F. Late spring and early summer are generally the driest part of the year, whereas fall and early winter are the wettest. Long term annual precipitation at Seward is about 64 inches, but Aialik Bay generally receives over twice as much precipitation. Rangers recorded over 100 inches of precipitation between mid-May and mid-September, 1989. Over 30 inches of rain a month has been recorded on more than one occasion. Deep snows often blanket the area in spring. Snow did not completely melt from the Aialik Bay Ranger Station area in 1991 until July 1.

Wildlife in the area include many species of marine mammals, terrestrial mammals, seabirds, and terrestrial birds. Marine mammals that visit near shore areas of Quicksand Cove may be humpback whale, minke whale, killer whale, harbor porpoise, sea otter, harbor seal, and Steller sea lion. Terrestrial mammals in the area are mountain goat, black bear, coyote, land otter, wolverine, mink, short-tailed weasel, porcupine, hoary marmot, red squirrel, and various mice and voles. Coastal birds documented in the vicinity include: American black oystercatcher, arctic loon, bald eagle, black-legged kittiwake, double-crested cormorant, glaucous-winged gull, harlequin duck, horned puffin, Kittlitz's murrelet, marbled murrelet, northwestern crow, pelagic cormorant, pigeon guillemot, red-faced cormorant, surf scoter, and white-winged scoter (Nishimoto and Rice 1987 and Bailey and Rice 1989). Two bald eagle nests have been observed in the Quicksand Cove area, but neither of them have been documented as active since observations were first recorded in 1986 (Tetreau 1991). A small number of various duck species may use the palu-

strine areas behind the beach berm during spring and fall migrations. Numerous species of passerine birds may use the area.

Anadromous fish using the nearby stream (ADF&G #232-40-10280) are pink salmon, dog salmon and dolly varden. Average run size for pink salmon, the dominant species, is 1000, but up to 3000 fish have been estimated in the drainage.

No known threatened or endangered species occur within the boundaries of the park (defined by mean high tide) except the Steller sea lion which hauls out parts of the coast (Garret, pers. comm. and 50 CFR 17.11 and 17.12). Several whales species are classified as endangered, but of those only the humpback whale is regularly observed in Aialik Bay. Gray whales migrate past the capes and islands in spring and fall, but they rarely, if ever, venture into the fjords. Only one species of plant in the area, the pale poppy (Papaver alboroseum) is listed as a candidate III species for threatened status (Murray and Lipkin 1987), but this plant is not known to occur in Aialik Bay.

C. CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT

Archeological reconnaissance work in Aialik Bay was conducted by the Bureau of Indian Affairs in 1986 and in response to the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill of 1989 (Mobley et al. 1990). Culturally modified trees exhibit evidence of former human habitation in Aialik Bay. Schaaf (1988) reported on an artifact collection discovered in Verdant Cove of Aialik Bay, about seven miles south of the proposed project site. That site was later documented by Exxon archeologists. Shoreline surveys were conducted near the proposed construction site during the response to EVOS which did not reveal cultural resources at the proposed site. An NPS archeologist would clear the site prior to construction for compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.

D. HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

The 1990 U.S. census for Seward revealed a population of 2,699, and outlying areas including Spring Creek Prison produced 1,238 residents for a grand total of 3,937 people (Skibeness pers comm.). The community seeks an expanded and enhanced economic base including industries such as tourism, sport and commercial fishing, timber harvest and lumber production, shipping, rail service, and education. The City of Seward welcomes and encourages attractions to the area such as improved access and visitor facilities along the coast.

Visitation to Aialik Bay has increased dramatically over the last decade. About 738 people visited the area in 1982 compared to 46,700 visitors in 1991 (including campers, PUC users and people on tour boats). A visitor use survey was conducted in summer

1990 (Littlejohn 1991) in which respondents were asked to list activities in which they participated. Fifty-five percent of all respondents took a boat tour to the coast, and 30 percent of all visitors stopping at Kenai Fjords NP in Seward visited Aialik Bay. Of 329 respondents who made additional comments at the end of the survey, five requested more cabins along the coast.

The Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for wilderness recommendations in Kenai Fjords National Park proposes that 88 percent of the park be protected (NPS 1988). The preferred alternative (Figure 3) includes all coastal areas as wilderness. The proposed public use cabin would be constructed on Native-selected land, as directed by ANILCA.

III. DESCRIPTION OF ALTERNATIVES

A. ALTERNATIVE 1 (PROPOSED CABIN CONSTRUCTION)

The proposed cabin would be constructed on the south side of Quicksand Cove of Aialik Bay, T4S, R3W, Sec 34, Seward Meridian (Figure 2). The structure would measure 20 feet by 24 feet with an eight-foot wide porch added to the long end. Roof pitch would be at least 10 feet rise over 12 foot reach to shed snow. This cabin could easily accommodate six adults. The draft floor plan calls for an open room cabin with space for cooking, eating, living and sleeping. A handicap access ramp would be placed to the entrance, but this would probably be buried under snow during winter and spring months.

Cabin amenities would include a counter, a space heater, insulated walls and ceiling, outhouse, smoke detectors, curtains, table and chairs, living furniture, and bunk beds. Space heat may be supplied by an oil stove or propane heater. Water would be available from the nearby stream or runoff from the mountain sides. Grey water from the facility would be filtered through a leach system and into the ground.

This cabin would be made available for public use primarily during summer only. The building would be boarded by park employees in fall to protect it against deep snows in winter.

B. ALTERNATIVE 2 (NO ACTION)

No new public use cabin would be built under this alternative. The NPS would continue to rent out the existing PUC in Aialik Bay.

C. ALTERNATIVES ELIMINATED FROM DETAILED STUDY

Several alternative sites in Aialik Bay were considered by park staff, but these sites were eliminated for various reasons. Verdant Cove was considered as a candidate site, but the area lacks a reliable source of fresh water, and it is complicated by a fairly significant cultural site and wetlands. A beach area in Bear Cove lacks a reliable source of fresh water, and it lies outside Native land selections and therefore inside prospective wilderness. Access to two beach areas along the southeast part of Holgate Arm is often blocked by rafts of ice drifting from Holgate Glacier and rocks exposed during low tide. Beaches along the north side of Holgate Arm are not under Native selection and are therefore slated to become wilderness.

IV. IMPACTS OF ALTERNATIVES

| <u>Impact Topics</u> | <u>Build Public Use Cabin</u> | <u>No Action</u> |
|-----------------------------------|--|--|
| Aesthetics | This proposal would add one cabin and one outhouse to Aialik Bay which has three existing cabin sites, adding to cumulative impacts to the natural setting. The structures would be placed in woods to minimize visual intrusion from sea. | No impact. |
| Coastal Zone | The project would be consistent with the Kenai Peninsula Coastal Zone Management Plan. | No impact. |
| Cultural Resources | No known impact. | No impact. |
| Floodplain Mgmt. | The structures would not be located in any known floodplain. | No impact. |
| Park Management | Existing cabins are insufficient for public use demands. The new cabin would provide a second public use cabin in Aialik Bay as recommended in the GMP. Park employees would have to maintain records and facilities at two sites in Aialik Bay. | The park would remain one cabin shy of the number recommended for Aialik Bay in the GMP. The existing PUC would continue to receive increased use. Cabin use would not be dispersed. |
| Socioeconomic Values | Recreational use of the Aialik Bay area and Seward would increase slightly from the new cabin attracting 6-18 people a week. The local area economy would benefit, particularly transportation services. | Recreational use of the area would not be enhanced. Local businesses would not benefit as much if no new cabin is built. |
| <u>Impact Topics</u> | <u>Build Public Use Cabin</u> | <u>No Action</u> |
| Subsistence | There would be no significant restriction of subsistence use. (See Appendix A). | No impact. |
| Threatened and Endangered Species | A slight increase in boat traffic would have negligible effect on use | No impact. |

of the area by humpback whales and Steller sea lions.

Vegetation

A few Sitka spruce trees from 50-150 feet tall, assorted shrubs and ground cover would be removed. The disturbed area would be limited to a 20' X 30' construction pad, outhouse and access trail from shore.

No impact.

Visitor Use

Visitor use and enjoyment of the area would be enhanced and dispersed. About 100 to 300 hundred additional people would visit the area overnight during the summer. Visitor health and safety would be improved. One camping area would be displaced.

Visitor use during summer would be stabilized at present patterns and levels. The existing PUC would be used heavily. Visitor health and safety would not be improved with a cabin along the southwest side of Aialik Bay.

Water Resources

There would be negligible affect on ground water from grey water discharge near the shore.

No impact.

Wetlands Protection

The project would avoid adjacent wetlands.

No impact.

Impact Topics

Build Public Use Cabin

No Action

Wilderness

The project would be built on Native-selected land to avoid adverse impacts to impending wilderness.

No impact.

Wildlife/Habitat

There would be minor impact to habitat for black bear and bald eagle.

No impact.

V. ANALYSIS OF IMPACTS

A. ALTERNATIVE 1 (PROPOSED CABIN CONSTRUCTION)

1. Aesthetics

This alternative would add one cabin and one outhouse to the area, thereby adding to the cumulative impacts to the natural setting in Aialik Bay of four cabin sites. The proposed structures would be placed in the woods to minimize visual intrusion from the sea. The cabin would be constructed of materials and painted to help it blend with the surrounding environment.

2. Coastal Zone Management

This project would occur within the Kenai Peninsula Coastal Management Zone. All areas below 1000 feet elevation are considered within this zone. This project does not occur in a wetland or identified floodplain, nor would it lead to adverse affects to an anadromous stream. The main source of flooding would be from tsunamis resulting from a major earthquake in the region. The project would be consistent with the Kenai Peninsula Coastal Management Plan (Pearsall pers. comm.).

3. Cultural Resources

There would be no known impact to cultural resources as a result of constructing this public use cabin. Before construction the site would be examined by archeologists to assure compliance with section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.

4. Floodplain Management

The NPS is required to follow Executive Order 11988 (Floodplain Management Guidelines). There are no large drainages in the vicinity of this project, and floodplain maps are not available for the coast of the park. This site does not occur on any area with seasonal, temporary or permanent flooding as shown on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service National Wetlands Map (Blying Sound D-8). The Corps of Engineers feels that the proposed site is probably prudent (LeGare pers. comm.). The proposed cabin construction is not likely to have a significant effect on natural floodplain values.

5. Park Management

The existing public use cabin is insufficient for public use demand in the Aialik Bay area. The new cabin would provide a second PUC in the Aialik Bay area as recommended in the GMP. Park employees would have to maintain registration records and the facilities at two sites in Aialik Bay. Minor field maintenance would be accomplished on a regular basis by seasonal

rangers stationed in Aialik Bay. Major maintenance functions such as periodical painting would be done by maintenance staff.

6. Socioeconomic Impacts

The new cabin would attract five to twenty additional people a week to Aialik Bay for overnight visits. The local area economy would benefit, particularly transportation services such as charter vessel operations and air taxi businesses. Support businesses in Seward such as restaurants, hotel/ motel, grocery and supply businesses would also benefit incrementally.

7. Subsistence

Subsistence uses are prohibited in Kenai Fjords National Park (36 CFR 13.67). There would be no significant restriction of subsistence use in the area.

8. Threatened and Endangered Species

There are no known endangered species occurring on land in the Aialik Bay area. A slight increase in vessel traffic may affect use of adjacent area waters by the endangered humpback whale and the threatened Steller sea lion. Impacts would be negligible considering the level of vessel traffic that already exists. Vessel operators would be required to avoid disturbing these marine mammals.

9. Vegetation

About ten Sitka spruce trees from 50-150 feet tall and assorted shrubs and ground cover would be removed. The disturbed area would be limited to the construction pad for the cabin measuring about 20 feet by 30 feet, a four foot by four foot outhouse, and a foot path from the shore to the cabin.

10. Visitor Use

Visitor use and enjoyment of the Aialik Bay area would be enhanced and dispersed with the addition of a new cabin. About 100 to 300 additional people would visit the area overnight during the summer. Visitor health and safety would be improved since the area may receive tremendous rainfall and violent storms during the visitor season. This cabin provides shelter along the west side of bay where most of the overnight visitors start and end their excursions. One area used occasionally for camping would be displaced.

11. Water Resources

There would be negligible affect on ground water from grey water discharged near shore. The facility would be located a couple

hundred yards from the nearest anadromous stream. Fresh water would be available from this stream or small rivulets that cascade down nearby steep slopes.

12. Wetlands Protection

The NPS must abide by Executive Order 11990 (National Wetlands Protection). The proposed cabin would not be built on a wetland as determined by consultation with the USFWS National Wetlands map for the U.S Geological Survey quadrangle Blying Sound D-8. The cabin would be located on the seaward side of a wetland. The project would have no adverse impact on wetlands.

13. Wilderness

The project would be located in proposed wilderness as shown in Figure 3 (NPS 1988), but the site occurs on Native-selected lands which would not become established wilderness if conveyed. This arrangement is consistent with ANILCA and the park's GMP.

14. Wildlife/Habitat

A small area of habitat used by black bear and bald eagles would be affected. A camping party shot and killed one black bear at this site in 1986. Proper food storage in a cabin may lessen the potential for adverse bear-human interaction. Neither of two eagle nests observed in the Quicksand Cove area have been active since 1986 (Tetreau 1991), however, eagles probably feed on salmon that spawn in the nearby stream. The cabin is located as far as practicable from the stream to minimize adverse impacts to eagles and bears.

B. ALTERNATIVE 2 (NO ACTION)

1. Aesthetics

There would be no impact to the natural setting from this alternative.

2. Coastal Zone Management

There would be no impact to the Kenai Peninsula Coastal Management Zone from this alternative.

3. Cultural Resources

There would be no impact to cultural resources from this alternative.

4. Floodplain Management

There would be no additional impact to floodplain values from this alternative.

5. Park Management

Only one PUC would continue to be available during summer in Aialik Bay. This would leave the park one cabin shy of the number recommended in the GMP. The existing cabin would receive increased use if possible. Cabin use would not be dispersed. Park employees would be spared records keeping and maintenance of an additional cabin.

6. Socioeconomic Values

Recreational use of Aialik Bay and the Seward area would not be enhanced. Local businesses would not benefit as much if no new cabin is built.

7. Subsistence

There would be no impact to subsistence from this alternative.

8. Threatened and Endangered Species

There would be no impact to threatened or endangered species from this alternative.

9. Vegetation

There would be no new impact to vegetation from this alternative. Backcountry campers have produced minor impacts to ground vegetation in the area.

10. Visitor Use

Visitor use patterns during summer would be stabilized at present levels. The existing PUC would receive heavy use. Visitor health and safety would not be improved with an additional cabin along the southwest side of Aialik Bay.

11. Water Resources

This alternative would have no impact to water resources.

12. Wetlands Protection

Wetlands would not be affected by this alternative.

13. Wilderness

Wilderness values would not be affected by this alternative.

14. Wildlife/Habitat

Wildlife and habitat would not be affected by this alternative.

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IX. APPENDICES

A. ANILCA SECTION 810, SUBSISTENCE EVALUATION

1. INTRODUCTION

This section addresses Title VIII, Section 810 of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA), 16 USC Section 3120. It summarizes the evaluations of potential restrictions to subsistence activities which could result from construction of a public use cabin in Aialik Bay in Kenai Fjords National Park, near Seward, Alaska.

II. EVALUATION PROCESS

Section 810 (a) of ANILCA states:

"in determining whether to withdraw, reserve, lease, or otherwise permit the use, occupancy, or disposition of public lands...the head of the federal agency...over such lands...shall evaluate the effect of such use, occupancy, or disposition on subsistence uses and needs, the availability of other lands for the purposes sought to be achieved, and the other alternatives which would reduce or eliminate the use, occupancy, or disposition of public lands needed for subsistence purposes. No such withdrawal, reservation, lease permit, or other use, occupancy or disposition of such lands which would significantly restrict subsistence uses shall be effected until the head of such Federal agency -

(1) gives notice to the appropriate State agency and the appropriate local communities and regional councils established pursuant to section 805;

(2) gives notice of, and hold, a hearing in the vicinity of the area involved; and

(3) determines that (a) such a significant restriction of subsistence uses is necessary and consistent with sound management principles for the utilization of the public lands, (b) the proposed activity will involve the minimal amount of public lands necessary to accomplish the purposes of use, occupancy or other disposition, and (c) reasonable steps will be taken to minimize adverse impacts upon subsistence uses and resources resulting from such actions."

ANILCA created new units and additions to existing units of the National Park Service system in Alaska. Kenai Fjords National Park was created by ANILCA for the following purposes, among others:

"To maintain unimpaired the scenic and environmental integrity of the Harding Ice Field, its outflowing glaciers and

coastal fjords and islands in their natural state; and to protect seals, sea lions, other marine mammals, and marine and other birds and to maintain their hauling and breeding areas in their natural state, free of human activity which is disruptive to their natural processes. In a manner consistent with the foregoing, the Secretary is authorized to develop access to the Harding Ice Field and to allow use of mechanized equipment on the ice field for recreation."

The potential for significant restriction must be evaluated for the proposed action's effect upon "...subsistence uses and needs, the availability of other lands for the purposes sought to be achieved and other alternatives which would reduce or eliminate the use."

III. PROPOSED ACTION ON FEDERAL LANDS

The proposed action calls for the construction and occupation of a cabin in Aialik Bay of Kenai Fjords National Park near Seward, Alaska (T4S, R3W, Sec 33 & 34, Seward Meridian). Appropriations for up to \$500,000 have been approved for construction of public use cabins in National Parks in Alaska. The cabin would be insulated and include heating installations for winter use. The facility is needed to provide overnight shelter for visitors to the Aialik Bay area in summer. The proposed action will have virtually no impact on wildlife. No subsistence activity is known to occur on land near Seward.

IV. AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

The mountain goat is presently the only customary and traditional subsistence resource recognized by the State of Alaska in Game Management Unit 7 (which includes Kenai Fjords National Park). Subsistence users of this resource are the residents of English Bay and Port Graham. The subsistence hunting area, located between Rocky Bay and Tutka Bay on the southwest part of the Kenai Peninsula, is not near the affected environment.

V. SUBSISTENCE USES AND NEEDS EVALUATION

The Potential to Reduce Populations

The proposed action and/or alternatives considered will not significantly reduce resource populations. Impacts on habitat will be minimal and increased competition from non-subsistence harvest will not occur.

Restriction of Access

No restrictions or interference with access for subsistence hunter/gatherers will result from this action since no subsistence use is known to occur in the affected environment.

Increase in Competition

Subsistence hunting does not occur in the vicinity of Seward that is road accessible, so the proposed action would cause no increase or effect on competition for subsistence hunting.

VI. AVAILABILITY OF OTHER LANDS

No other lands have been considered for the proposed action.

VII. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

Other alternatives considered included the no action alternative and other sites in Aialik Bay. None of the alternatives considered would have any effect on subsistence uses in the area.

VIII. FINDINGS

This analysis concludes that the proposed action and/or stated alternatives will not result in any significant restriction of subsistence uses.