



RING OF FIRE

Proposed Resource Management Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement
Bureau of Land Management
Anchorage Field Office

August 2006



The Ring of Fire Proposed Resource Management Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement is scheduled to be released in August 2006!

In August 2006, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) will release the Ring of Fire Proposed Resource Management Plan/Final EIS (PRMP/FEIS) to the public. This document outlines BLM's management intentions for the approximately 1.3 million acres of BLM-managed lands within the Ring of Fire planning area. This planning area includes all of the public land and federal mineral estate managed by the Anchorage Field Office (AFO) from below the Dixon Entrance in Southeast Alaska to Attu Island at the western end of the Aleutian Islands, a linear distance of approximately 2,500 miles. The boundaries are generally described to include lands starting at

the Canadian border on the Southeast portion of the planning area; the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, Municipality of Anchorage, and Kenai Peninsula Borough in Southcentral Alaska; Kodiak Island; portions of the Alaska Peninsula; and the Aleutian Islands in the western part of the planning area.

The PRMP/FEIS contains all substantive comments received on the Draft RMP/EIS, and the BLM's responses to these comments. A summary of the major changes that resulted from public involvement are outlined later in this newsletter.

BLM

Anchorage Field Office



The timeline for completing this planning process includes a 30-day protest period that begins with the publishing of the Notice of Availability in the Federal Register in August. Once any protests that may have been submitted are resolved, the BLM State Director will sign the Record of Decision, which is the document that finalizes this RMP. The entire process should be completed by October 2006. All implementation-level plans proposed in the document will be consistent with and tier off of this RMP.

Public Comments on the Draft RMP/EIS

The public comment period on the Draft RMP/EIS officially ended on January 30, 2006. Seven public meetings were held in communities across the Ring of Fire planning area including Juneau, Haines, Skagway, Palmer, Kodiak, Anchorage, and Kenai. Comments were accepted at any point during the 120-day period and were submitted via email, United States (U.S.) mail, in person, fax, or through oral testimony at the public hearings. All comments received or post-marked by January 30, 2006 were analyzed.



Sitka Block House. Sitka, Alaska.

The public process resulted in 783 submissions received on the Draft RMP/EIS. These 783 submissions were received in the following formats: 732 emails, of which 679 were electronically-generated form letters; 30 letters; 16 from public hearing testimony; and five from the comment form.

The three cities that produced the greatest number of submissions were the Alaskan cities of Haines, Anchorage, and Palmer with 22, 15, and 12, respectively. However, the state that produced the greatest number of submissions was California with 108. Upon analysis, these 783 submissions produced 922 unique comments.

Changes in the PRMP/FEIS

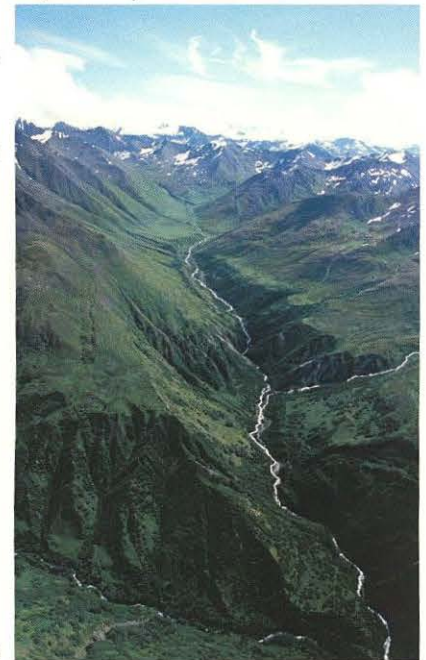


Neacola Glacier in the proposed Neacola Mountains ACEC.

The BLM has made several changes to the PRMP/FEIS after the analysis and consideration of public comments. A few of these changes are described

below. Minor changes regarding text, content, and analysis can be reviewed fully in the PRMP/FEIS (Chapter 6).

- The 14 Wild and Scenic Rivers (WSRs) that were determined to be eligible in the Draft RMP/EIS were taken through the suitability process and none were determined as suitable in the PRMP/FEIS. An updated discussion of the eligibility and suitability process, and the inclusion of further information on the Outstandingly Remarkable Values for each eligible river segment are included in the PRMP/FEIS.
- Many different nominations for special management areas (SMAs) were received throughout the planning process. These included nominations for WSRs, proposals for different SMA designations for the three proposed SMAs, and nominations for new areas. Expanded discussions on these nominations and why they were or were not carried forward were added to Section 2.2 of the PRMP/FEIS.



Knik River SRMA.

Future Step-Down Planning Efforts



Marbled Godwits.

Three SMAs were identified and carried forward in the Ring of Fire PRMP/FEIS: the Neacola Mountains Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC), the

Knik River Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA), and the Haines Block SRMA. Each of these areas will require future implementation-level planning efforts. BLM will work with all interested stakeholders, including surrounding land managers, the communities, and user and conservation groups, and would consider the various resource uses and values during the development of these plans. This subsequent planning process will also include additional opportunities for the public to participate and comment. Per BLM policy, this work normally should be completed within five years of the signing of the Record of Decision for the PRMP/FEIS. SMAs will not encumber either State or Native selected lands, and further planning processes are unlikely to take place until selections are adjudicated.

Neacola Mountains ACEC

Located 120 miles southwest of Anchorage, the Neacola Mountains (229,000 acres) rise to 7,900 feet in elevation. None of the lands within the proposed

Neacola Mountains ACEC are selected by the State or Native corporations; these lands will remain in long-term BLM ownership. The southern block is extremely

scenic, with changes in elevation from 1,000 feet to nearly 8,000 feet. Rugged mountains, hanging valleys, and ice and snow fields dominate



Mount Neacola in the proposed Neacola Mountains ACEC.

the landscape, interspersed with razor sharp ridgelines. At the core of the proposed ACEC are Blockade Glacier and Lake. This area contains unrivaled scenic and geologic features associated with the natural landscape of mountain peaks, glaciers and spires. It is these scenic qualities that support the ACEC designation.

Knik River SRMA

The area of the proposed Knik River SRMA consists of 80,000 acres of State and Native

selected lands approximately 30 miles north of Anchorage. Because of its proximity to Anchorage and the nature of the Knik River flats, it is a popular off-highway vehicle (OHV) recreation

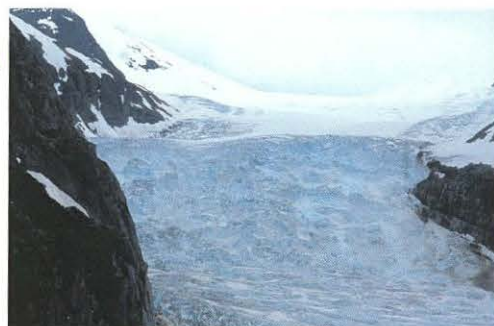


Recreationists on the Knik River flats. Palmer, Alaska.

destination. The Knik River flows through these lands and is used by recreational and commercial boaters. Various drainages flowing into the Knik River support anadromous fisheries. Dall sheep are found in the upper reaches, and bear and moose are common in the valley. Dispersed recreation, including hunting, fishing, hiking, and horseback riding is common in the area. Small aircraft pilots practicing take-offs and landings routinely use portions of the valley floor. Because of the ease of access, these lands are subject to the dumping of stolen vehicles, and are at times used as an unregulated shooting range. These conditions have created a risk to public health and safety, the potential for habitat damage, and challenges for management of both public and private property. Any SMA designation would not carry forward if lands in this area were transferred out of BLM ownership.

Haines Block SRMA

The Haines Block SRMA comprises 273,000 acres of mountainous snow and ice fields. The entire area is



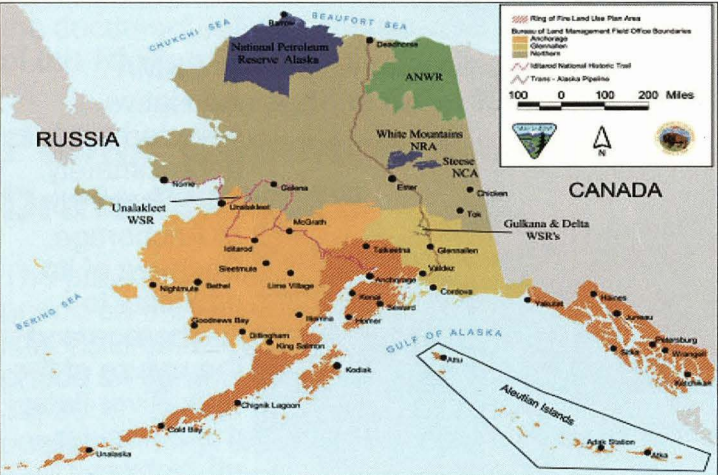
Glacier in proposed Haines Block SRMA.

selected by the State of Alaska, but has not been assigned a selection priority. Several rivers within the Haines Block were evaluated as potential WSRs. The area also includes the Ferebee, Nourse, Chilkoot, and Chilkat Glaciers. The Haines Block provides habitat for a variety of wildlife species, including mountain goats, brown bear, and wolverine. The area has become increasingly

popular for helicopter-supported commercial recreation operations for activities such as hiking, backcountry skiing, and filming. BLM has an ongoing Special Recreation Permit (SRP) program that reviews and authorizes these activities. BLM recognizes the potential for impacts on the community as well as the wildlife populations from proposed and permitted activities. Any SMA designation would not carry forward if lands in this area were transferred out of BLM ownership.

Stay Updated on BLM Ring of Fire Planning Efforts!

If you would like to be kept up to date on future planning efforts in the Ring of Fire planning area, please send an email to akrofrmp@blm.gov. Be sure to specify which of the three implementation-level plans you are most interested in (Neacola Mountains ACEC, Knik River SRMA, or the Haines Block SRMA).



Ring of Fire Project Area Map.

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