



U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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News

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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Doyon, Ltd. Announce Availability of Draft Land Exchange Terms

The “Agreement in Principle” associated with the proposed land exchange within the Yukon Flats National Wildlife Refuge that was announced last month is now available on the Service’s website. The document and associated maps are posted at <http://alaska.fws.gov/media/doyon/index.htm>. As additional materials become available, they will also be posted on the site.

Doyon, Limited, an Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) Corporation, currently owns 1.25 million acres within the exterior boundary of Yukon Flats NWR. In October, negotiators for Doyon and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Alaska Region, “agreed in principle” to provide Doyon title to some refuge lands that may hold developable oil and gas resources. In exchange, the Service would receive habitat currently owned by Doyon within the refuge boundary. This would consist of wetlands previously identified by the Service as quality fish and wildlife habitat.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will hold public meetings in January and February 2005 to obtain feedback on the proposed land exchange. Meetings will be held in the cities of Fairbanks and Anchorage; as well as the Yukon Flats villages of Beaver, Birch Creek, Chalkytsik, Circle, Fort Yukon, and Stevens Village.

Prior to and during the public meetings, the public will have an opportunity to review the “Agreement in Principle” along with the results of an environmental evaluation currently being developed by the Service. The Service will consider public comments before finalizing a detailed agreement necessary to implement the exchange.

The key elements of this agreement are as follows:

- Phase 1 of this agreement will result in Doyon receiving lands with prospects for oil and gas, while the refuge will gain an estimated net increase of 98,000 acres of quality fish and wildlife habitat; acreage that will also be available for recreation and subsistence use. The estimated net increase of 98,000 acres is calculated as: the estimated 150,000 acres to be received by FWS in the exchange *minus* the 110,000 acres of surface/subsurface conveyed to Doyon in the exchange *plus* 58,000 acres of 12(b) entitlement that will not be taken within the refuge. Doyon’s 58,000 acres of ANCSA 12(b) entitlement represents entitlement to land that must be reallocated by Doyon to villages within the Doyon region. Most of Doyon’s remaining 12(b) selections are within the refuge. Doyon will also take title to approximately 96,000 acres of subsurface oil and gas interests in a “halo” of lands around the core lands and other Doyon holdings within the refuge. If marketable oil and gas resources are discovered, Doyon will be able to access their halo land interests only by directional drilling from their adjacent surface holdings. No surface occupancy or surface construction will be permitted on these 96,000 acres.

- If development goes forward and Phase 2 is implemented, Doyon will pay into an “Alaska NWR Land Acquisition and Facility Account” a production payment of 1.25% of resource value at the wellhead for all oil and gas extracted from lands and interests acquired through this agreement. The Service will be able to use these funds to purchase an additional 120,000 acres of quality fish and wildlife habitat within the borders of Yukon Flats NWR that will also be available for recreation and subsistence use. The Service could then continue to use such funds, as available, to purchase other private lands from willing sellers within other national wildlife refuges in Alaska and, as a second priority, construct needed facilities.

The parties to this agreement believe that implementing its provisions is in the public interest. As a result of the agreement, there would be less privately-held land within Yukon Flats NWR boundaries. The Service believes that, when all elements of the agreement are viewed in aggregate, the agreement will benefit the Yukon Flats National Wildlife Refuge, the refuge system and the Service’s trust responsibilities to fish and wildlife resources.

Benefits to Doyon shareholders are more speculative, but could be significant under the most positive scenarios, including job training and long term employment for residents of an economically disadvantaged part of rural Alaska.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 544 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resources offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign and Native American tribal governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

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