

Compatibility Determination

Use: Subsistence Activities

Primary Uses: Fishing, natural resource gathering, hunting, trapping, and other subsistence.

Supporting and Incidental Uses: Boating (motorized and non-motorized), snowmobiling, snowshoeing, trapping, firewood cutting, natural resource gathering, camping, cross-country skiing, dog sledding, hiking and backpacking, picnicking, wildlife observation, fixed-wing aircraft landings, swimming, and beach use.

Refuge Name: Selawik National Wildlife Refuge

Establishment and Acquisition Authority: The Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) established the 2.5-million-acre Selawik National Wildlife Refuge (Selawik refuge, refuge) as part of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Wildlife Refuge System (Department of the Interior) on December 2, 1980.

Selawik Refuge Purposes: As stated in ANILCA Section 302 (7) (B), the purposes for which the Selawik refuge was established and shall be managed include:

- (i) to conserve fish and wildlife populations and habitats in their natural diversity including, but not limited to, the Western Arctic caribou herd (including participation in coordinated ecological studies and management of these caribou), waterfowl, shorebirds and other migratory birds, and salmon and sheefish;
- (ii) to fulfill international treaty obligations of the United States with respect to fish and wildlife and their habitats;
- (iii) to provide, in a manner consistent with the purposes set forth in subparagraphs (i) and (ii), the opportunity for continued subsistence uses by local residents; and
- (iv) to ensure, to the maximum extent practicable and in a manner consistent with the purposes set forth in subparagraph (i), water quality and necessary water quantity within the refuge.

The purpose of the congressionally designated Selawik Wilderness Area is to secure an enduring resource of wilderness, protect and preserve the wilderness character of the area as part of the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS), and administer the area for the use and enjoyment of the American people in a way that will leave it unimpaired for future use and enjoyment as designated wilderness.

National Wildlife Refuge System Mission

The mission of the National wildlife Refuge System is to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans (National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966, as amended [16 U.S.C. 668dd-668ee]).

Description of Uses

This is a re-evaluation of the compatibility of subsistence uses of Federal lands within Selawik refuge. Subsistence was found to be compatible, subject to reasonable regulation, in 1994. Subsistence activities in this determination include fishing, hunting, trapping, firewood gathering, berry picking, and gathering of other plant materials. Snowmobiles and motorboats are the primary means of surface transportation traditionally employed for such purposes, as allowed under ANILCA Section 811. Subsistence has also been historically supported by the occasional use of airplanes for access to remote locations surrounding some communities.

Residents of villages located in and near the Selawik refuge have ways of life and economies that depend on subsistence resources. Selawik and Noorvik are located within the refuge boundary. Ambler, Buckland, Shungnak, Kiana, Kobuk, and Kotzebue are less than 30 miles away from the refuge boundary—a short distances in this vast open region. Residents of the Athabaskan village of Huslia also use the refuge. Subsistence use by local residents accounts for the majority of public use on the refuge. On a per pound basis, caribou and fish (primarily salmon, sheefish, whitefish, and northern pike) are the most widely harvested subsistence foods in the nearby villages. Moose, bear, marine mammals, small game, and waterfowl are also taken. Salmonberries, blueberries, cranberries, sourdock, and many other plants are also gathered for food. Spruce and alder are cut for firewood, and birch bark is collected for basket making. Subsistence activities are not just a way of obtaining food but are an important mechanism for maintaining cultural values such as kinship, community, respect for elders, hospitality, sharing, and the passing of values to younger generations. In addition, many residents in the area prefer the taste of traditional wild foods to those commercially prepared.

Local trappers operate within the refuge harvesting wolves, lynx, marten, fox, river otter, beaver, and other small furbearers. The sale of these furs provides supplemental income to residents who depend on a subsistence way of life. Trapping is considered a subsistence activity for federally qualified subsistence users. The compatibility of trapping as a refuge use is considered in a separate determination.

Availability of Resources

Adequate refuge personnel and base operational funds are available to manage subsistence activities at existing and projected levels. Management primarily includes the inventory and monitoring of fish and wildlife subsistence species; environmental education, such as steel shot clinics, culture camps, or other efforts aimed at improving public understanding of major conservation issues; and law enforcement patrols. During such patrols, refuge staff members opportunistically conduct outreach to increase subsistence user awareness of the status of local fish and wildlife populations, the relationship of regulations to sustainable yield, and the importance of knowing land ownership and regulatory boundaries. Refuge staff members spend considerable time participating in and supporting the regulatory development process with the Federal Subsistence Board, Alaska Migratory Bird Co-management Council, Regional Advisory Council, and the Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group to ensure harvest levels are sustainable.

Anticipated Impacts of Uses

Fish and wildlife harvested by subsistence users at current and projected levels (and in accordance with established State and Federal regulations pertaining to seasons, bag limits, and methods of harvest) are not expected to have long-term impacts on the overall populations of fish and wildlife resources within the refuge. State and Federal biologists monitor fish and game populations, and State and Federal regulatory bodies continually respond to management needs by adopting

regulations to ensure the continued health of fish and wildlife populations. The combination of Alaska State hunting regulations (SAAC) and the Federal Subsistence regulations (50 CFR Part 100) are intended to provide a sustainable harvest over the long term. It is possible that localized or short-term population reductions may occur due to unanticipated changes in physical condition and distribution of animals, environmental conditions, predation, and harvest pressure.

Refuge habitats will remain largely unaffected by continuation of subsistence uses as outlined in the Revised Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Assessment for the Selawik refuge. Anticipated and unanticipated impacts to resident fish and wildlife populations and subsistence opportunities can be mitigated through further restrictions on methods, means, seasons of harvest, and bag limits by the Alaska Boards of Fisheries and Game and the Federal Subsistence Board, or through subsequent revisions of the Comprehensive Conservation Plan. Likewise, impacts related to availability of anadromous fish, particularly sheefish, and migratory birds can be mitigated through the Alaska Boards of Fisheries and Game and/or the Federal Subsistence Board allocation process and through Federal regulations. In summary, subsistence uses will not materially interfere with or detract from the purposes for which the Selawik refuge was established.

Public Review and Comment

Public comments were solicited concurrently with the revision of the Selawik National Wildlife Refuge's Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Assessment (USFWS 2010). Public comments on compatibility determinations were accepted during the public review period for the draft plan and announced in the Federal Register. The public comment period was October 21, 2010 to March 15, 2011, which provided 145 days for public review. We mailed the full draft plan and a summary to the individuals and organizations on our mailing list. We invited public comments through an advertisement in a local newspaper and attended city council meetings in Selawik and Noorvik to receive comments on the draft plan. Planning team members met with the Citizen's Advisory Commission on Federal Areas to discuss the issues at Selawik refuge and alternatives that were proposed in the draft plan. The draft compatibility determinations were posted on the Service's Region 7 Web page.

We received no comments on this draft compatibility determination; however, the Northwest Arctic Borough emphasized the importance of the refuge being managed in accordance with ANILCA's subsistence priority.

Refuge Determination (check one below)

Use is not compatible

Use is compatible

Stipulations Necessary to Ensure Compatibility

Subsistence users will be required to comply with any regulations in place, such as seasonal closures for resource protection.

Management direction is provided in the Revised Comprehensive Conservation Plan. This direction includes implementation of applicable sections of the refuge's wildlife inventory plan and adequate monitoring of public use activities. The Service will use the findings from wildlife, public use, and habitat monitoring efforts to determine what additional management actions, if any, are needed to ensure that subsistence activities remain compatible with refuge purposes.

Justification

Ensuring the continuation of the subsistence uses listed previously was clearly the intent of Congress, providing that such uses are compatible, and is reflected in the enacting legislation. ANILCA established a preference for subsistence users, stating that the taking of fish and wildlife on public lands for non-wasteful subsistence use is given priority over other consumptive uses. Title 1 of ANILCA, Section 101(b), states in part: "It is the intent of congress in this Act to ... preserve wilderness resource values and related recreational opportunities including but not limited to hiking, canoeing, fishing, and sport hunting ..." Title 3 of ANILCA, Section 302 (7) (B) (iii), states in part: "The purposes for which the Selawik National Wildlife Refuge is established and shall be managed include ... the opportunity for continued subsistence uses by local residents; ..." Title 8 of ANILCA, Section 801 states in part: "The Congress finds and declares that ... (1) the continuation of the opportunity for subsistence uses by rural residents of Alaska, including both subsistence uses by rural residents of Alaska, including both Natives and non-Natives, on the public lands and by Alaska Natives on Native lands is essential to Native physical, economic, traditional, and cultural existence and to non-Native physical, economic, traditional, and social existence." Section 811 of ANILCA ensures that subsistence users can access public lands by snowmobile, motorboat, and other traditionally used means of surface transportation, subject to reasonable regulation. After fully considering the impacts of this activity, as described in the "Anticipated Impacts of the Uses" section of this determination, it is my determination that subsistence activities within the refuge do not materially interfere with or detract from the purposes of the refuge or mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System, and that current management of fish, wildlife, and habitat is adequate to ensure that subsistence remains compatible.

Supporting Documents

Subsistence Management for Federal Public Lands in Alaska, Final Environmental Impact Statement, and Record of Decision signed April 2, 1992.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 1987. Final Comprehensive Conservation Plan, Environmental Impact Statement, Wilderness Review, and Wild River Plan Final for the Selawik National Wildlife Refuge. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Anchorage, Alaska. 378 pp.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 1987. Record of Decision: Selawik National Wildlife Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan, Environmental Impact Statement, Wilderness Review, and Wild River Plan. U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Anchorage, Alaska. 15 pp.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2010. Draft Revised Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Assessment. Selawik National Wildlife Refuge. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Anchorage, AK. 285 pp (plus ten appendices).

U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2011. Final Revised Comprehensive Conservation Plan. Selawik National Wildlife Refuge. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Anchorage, AK.

Refuge Determination

Refuge Manager/
Project Leader Approval



Lee Anne Ayres

14 July 2011
Date

Concurrence

Regional Chief
National Wildlife
Refuge System



Mitch Ellis

7-20-2011
Date

Mandatory 10-year Re-evaluation Date: 2021

NEPA Compliance for Refuge Use Decision

- Categorical Exclusion without Environmental Action Memorandum
- Categorical Exclusion and Environmental Action Memorandum
- Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact
- Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision

