

DRAFT COMPATIBILITY DETERMINATION

Use: Natural Resource Collection (personal use)

The following refuge uses are considered in this compatibility determination:

- Plant gathering – the collection of berries, mushrooms, firewood, or other plant parts for non-subsistence and non-research purposes.
- Rock collecting – collecting of rocks or minerals by hand for non-research purposes. The collection of silver, platinum, gemstones and fossils is prohibited on National Wildlife Refuges in Alaska [50 CFR 36.31(b)] and is not covered by this compatibility determination.
- Antler collecting – the collection of naturally-shed antlers by hand for non-research and non-commercial purposes.

Supporting Uses: The following activities are often done in support of or in conjunction with natural resource collection: boating – human-powered, motorized, and wind-driven; cabins; camping; cross-country skiing; dog sledding & ski touring; environmental education and interpretation; fixed-wing aircraft use; fishing; hiking and backpacking; hunting; photography and videography; electronics use; scientific capture/release or collection – plants, fish, birds, mammals, insects, rocks, etc.; snowmobile use; snowshoeing; surveys – scientific inventory and monitoring; swimming and beach use; trapping; and wildlife observation.

Refuge Name: Yukon Flats National Wildlife Refuge, Fairbanks, Alaska

Establishing and Acquisition Authority

In 1978, President Jimmy Carter established the 10.6 million-acre Yukon Flats National Wildlife Monument with Presidential Proclamation 4627. The monument was established from lands in the public domain. In 1980, the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) (Section 302) adjusted the boundary to 8.6 million acres, and established the Yukon Flats National Wildlife Refuge (Yukon Flats NWR) as part of the National Wildlife Refuge System (Refuge System).

Refuge Purposes

ANILCA sets out the purposes for each refuge in Alaska. The purposes of the Yukon Flats NWR as described in Section 302(9)(B), include:

- to conserve fish and wildlife populations and habitats in their natural diversity including, but not limited to, canvasbacks and other migratory birds, Dall sheep, bears, moose, wolves, wolverines and other furbearers, caribou (including participation in coordinated ecological studies and management of the Porcupine and Fortymile caribou herds) and salmon
- to fulfill the international treaty obligations of the United States with respect to fish and wildlife and their habitats

Compatibility Determination for Natural Resource Collection – Yukon Flats NWR

- to provide, in a manner consistent with the purposes set forth above, the opportunity for continued subsistence uses by local residents
- to ensure, to the maximum extent practicable and in a manner consistent with the purposes set forth above, water quality and necessary water quantity within the refuge.

National Wildlife Refuge System Mission

The mission of the 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 USC 668dd-668ee]).

Description of Use

Natural resource collection activities are the non-commercial, non-subsistence uses of plant materials, and the surface collection, by hand (including handheld gold pans), of certain rocks or minerals in accordance with 50 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) § 36.31. Legal natural resource collection has been, and would continue to be a common activity. The specific use, frequency, dates, and locations are not available. Separate compatibility determinations for activities that may be associated with natural resource collection have been done for cabin use, motorized transportation, non-motorized transportation, scientific research, State of Alaska management activities, subsistence, and trapping. Access for these activities is usually by airplanes and a variety of watercraft including motorboats and rafts to access the refuge. Activities such as camping, backpacking, hiking, and other incidental uses, such as those listed above, are associated with natural resource collection.

Plant Materials

There is infrequent plant collection by non-subsistence users. The most commonly used plant materials are probably dead plant material for firewood, berries, and mushrooms. The non-commercial collection of these items is currently allowed without a special use permit. For the purposes of this compatibility determination, the gathering of natural plant materials for personal use is under consideration.

Rocks and Minerals

Refuge visitors rarely express interest in the hand collection of rocks and minerals – to our knowledge gold is the only mineral that visitors are interested in collecting. 50 CFR § 36.31(b), authorizes the surface collection (including handheld gold pans) of rocks and minerals. However, the collection of silver, platinum, gemstones and fossils is prohibited. Furthermore, collection methods that may result in disturbance of the ground surface are prohibited. For the purposes of this compatibility determination, the legal gathering of rocks and minerals for personal use under refuge regulations is under consideration.

Antler

Visitors to the refuge may infrequently collect shed moose or caribou antler(s). The non-commercial collection of these items is currently allowed without a special use permit. For the purposes of this compatibility determination, the gathering of natural-cast animal antler for personal use is under consideration.

This compatibility determination addresses the predominant natural resources collection taking place. Natural resource collection that substantially differs in scope and purpose from the activities covered by this compatibility determination will require a separate determination for compatibility. The scope of this determination includes natural resource collection conducted by all agencies or entities other than the Service. Natural resource collection that is part of a collaborative or cooperative effort with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is not subject to a formal compatibility determination.¹

Availability of Resources

Adequate refuge personnel and base operational funds are available to manage this activity at existing and projected levels. Staff time (not more than five staff days) primarily involves phone conversations, written correspondence, and field work associated with investigating potential impacts to refuge resources. No permits are required for this use.

Anticipated Impacts of the Use

Non-commercial natural resource collection at current levels—in accordance with established Federal regulations—is not having significant long-term adverse impacts to natural resources. Frequency of this activity may rise in the next ten years as visitation of the refuge increases. This could lead to more localized standing tree harvest. This use could be re-evaluated if monitoring and/or incidental observations warrant the need. In our opinion, impacts to natural resources from this activity at present levels are minimal.

Public Review and Comment

Public involvement for this document includes: a public notice in the *Fairbanks Daily News Miner*; posting the draft on the Service's Alaska Region compatibility determination Web site, <http://alaska.fws.gov/nwr/planning/index.htm>; posting a notice of availability at the Refuge headquarters in Fairbanks; and a 30-day public comment period.

¹ Any action taken by the Service or Service-authorized agents including contractors, cooperating agencies, cooperating associations, refuge support groups, and volunteers is a refuge management activity, and thus is exempt from the compatibility determination process. 50 CFR 25.12 defines refuge management activities as any activity conducted by the Service or a Service-authorized agent to fulfill one or more purposes of the national wildlife refuge, or the National Wildlife Refuge System Mission.

Compatibility Determination for Natural Resource Collection – Yukon Flats NWR

Copies will be mailed or e-mailed upon request. Comments must be received by the refuge headquarters within the 30-day comment period to receive timely consideration. The period of public review and comment will commence on 16 April 2007, and end 16 May 2007.

Please send comments to:

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Yukon Flats National Wildlife Refuge
Attn: Compatibility Determination Comments
101 12th Avenue, Room 264, Box 14
Fairbanks, Alaska 99701
(907)456-0440
(907)456-0447 (fax)
yukonflats@fws.gov

If you e-mail comments, please place the words, “Compatibility Comments,” in the subject line and your comments in the body of the text. Please do not include attachments because they will not be opened due to the potential of computer viruses.

Determination

Use is Not Compatible

Use is Compatible

Stipulations Necessary to Ensure Compatibility

A special use permit (with stipulations) is not required for natural resource collection (personal use) activities on refuge lands. Refuge staff will monitor natural resource collection activities, and findings from these monitoring efforts will be used to determine what additional management actions, if any, are needed to ensure natural resource collection activities remain compatible with refuge purposes and in compliance with federal regulations

Justification

This compatibility determination is a reevaluation of an existing use: natural resource collection. Natural resource collection as defined above is often associated with and can enhance wildlife-dependent recreation. This activity can also contribute to the public’s understanding of and appreciation for nature. Past experience on this refuge has not shown that this activity has a significant adverse impact on refuge resources. After considering the impacts of this activity, as described previously in the anticipated impacts section, it is my judgment that

