

DRAFT COMPATIBILITY DETERMINATION

Use: Non-motorized transportation

The following refuge types of non-motorized transportation are considered in this compatibility determination:

- Boating (human, wind, or water-current powered) – travel by canoe, kayak, raft, rowboat, or similar boat propelled through the water by oars, paddles, poles, or other human, wind, or water-current powered devices
- Cross-country skiing – the use of cross-country skis to aid on or off-trail snow travel
- Dog sledding and ski jouring – the use of dogs to pull sleds or people
- Hiking and backpacking – the use of trails or backcountry areas by hikers and backpackers
- Snowshoeing – the use of snowshoes for on or off-trail snow travel
- Horseback riding – the non-commercial use of horses on or off designated trails; and
- Pack animals – the non-commercial use of horses, mules, llamas, dogs, or other animals to carry people or gear.

Supporting Uses: The following activities are often done in support of or in conjunction with non-motorized transportation: audio recording; boating – human-powered and wind-driven; cabins; camping; concession use; cross-country skiing; dog sledding & ski jouring; electronics use; environmental education and interpretation; fishing; hiking and backpacking; hunting; photography and videography; scientific capture/release or collection – plants, fish, birds, mammals, insects, rocks, etc.; snowshoeing; subsistence; surveys – scientific inventory and monitoring; swimming and beach use; trapping; tree harvest – firewood; 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 primary purposes for each refuge in Alaska. The purposes of the Yukon Flats NWR are described in Section 302(9) (B), and are as follows:

- 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
- 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 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 USC 668dd-668ee]).

Description of Use

Non-motorized transportation is a method of transportation derived from any source of motive power like muscle, wind or water current. This type of access has been and would continue to be a common activity. These activities would occur at all times of the year, but mostly in the spring, summer and fall. This use is frequently done by small groups of 1 - 3 people on foot, in canoes, rafts, and dogsleds on or near areas of convenient access such as rivers and lakes. These activities typically involve subsistence and/or wildlife-dependent recreation and the supporting uses listed above. We do not have a good estimate on the number of refuge visitors, but virtually all refuge uses are facilitated by non-motorized transportation.

Boating

Non-motorized boating is a popular recreational activity. The most common type is the use of canoes or rafts on major waterways like Beaver Creek, Sheenjek and Yukon rivers during the months of June through September. This use is currently allowed without a special use permit. For the purposes of this compatibility determination, the use of non-motorized watercraft for legal, public uses is under consideration.

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Cross-country skiing

Cross-country skiing is not a popular recreational activity on the refuge. The use may occur occasionally in conjunction with winter camping or trapping. The location of this use is likely to be on rivers or traplines during the months of October through May. This use is currently allowed without a special use permit. For the purposes of this compatibility determination, the use of cross-country skis for legal, public uses is under consideration.

Dog sledding or ski jouring

The use of dogs to pull sleds or people on the refuge is an activity that appears to be declining in popularity. Dog sledding is more common than ski jouring and would likely occur on major waterways and traplines between the months of October and May. This use is currently allowed without a special use permit. For the purposes of this compatibility determination, the use of dogs to access areas of the refuge for legal, public uses is under consideration.

Hiking and backpacking

This activity is a common use on the refuge. When it occurs it is normally in conjunction with other public use activities and in the same areas that recreational activities take place on the refuge. This use occurs between the months of June and September. This use is currently allowed without a special use permit. For the purposes of this compatibility determination, hiking and backpacking for legal, public uses is under consideration.

Snowshoeing

Snowshoeing is not a common activity on the refuge. Like hiking and backpacking, snowshoeing is likely an activity that occurs to facilitate other compatible uses. This use occurs between the months of October and May. This use is currently allowed without a special use permit. For the purposes of this compatibility determination, snowshoeing for legal, public uses is under consideration.

Horseback riding and pack animals

Horseback riding and/or the use of pack animals are not common activities on the refuge. Like hiking and backpacking, these activities would facilitate other compatible uses. These uses might occur throughout the refuge at any time of the year. These uses are currently allowed without a special use permit. For the purposes of this compatibility determination, non-commercial horseback riding and the use of pack animals for legal, public uses are under consideration.

Non-motorized transportation that substantially differs in scope and purpose from the activities covered by this compatibility determination will require a separate determination for compatibility. Non-motorized transportation that is part of a

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collaborative effort or part of a 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 non-motorized transportation activities at current and projected levels. Staff time (not more than five staff days) primarily involves monitoring use for impacts to refuge resources.

Anticipated Impacts of the Use(s)

Non-motorized transportation at current levels, in accordance with established Federal regulations, does not appear to be resulting in significant adverse long-term adverse impacts to natural resources. Frequency of this activity may rise in the next ten years as visitation of the refuge increases and the number of local residents rises. This could lead to more concentrated activity and result in damage to tundra from hiking trails or user conflicts on rivers or in trapping areas. However, this is very speculative. If information indicates impacts are increasing, this use may be reevaluated for compatibility. 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.

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

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.

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(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 non-commercial, non-motorized transportation activities on refuge lands. Refuge staff will monitor non-motorized transportation activities, and findings from these monitoring efforts will be used to determine what additional management actions, if any, are needed to ensure these activities remain compatible with refuge purposes and in compliance with federal regulations.

Justification

This compatibility determination is a reevaluation of an existing use (non-motorized transportation) that facilitates virtually all other refuge uses. ANILCA section 1110(a) provides that the Secretary shall permit, subject to reasonable regulations to protect the natural and other values of the conservation system units, “. . . non-motorized surface transportation methods for traditional activities (where such activities are permitted by this Act or other law). . . .”

After fully considering the impacts of this activity, as described in the anticipated impacts section of this compatibility determination, it is my judgment that non-motorized transportation, as defined above, does not materially interfere with or detract from the purposes for which the refuge was established or the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Non-motorized transportation is not recognized as a priority public use of the Refuge System, and after an opportunity for public comment, must be reevaluated if conditions under which the use occurs change significantly or if there is significant new information regarding the effects of the use, but not less frequently than every ten years.

Mandatory 10-Year Reevaluation Date: May 15, 2017

NEPA Compliance for Refuge Use Decision

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

Supporting Documents

- Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act of 1980 (as amended)
- Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971 (as amended)
- Archaeological Resources Protection Act of 1979 (as amended)
- Compatibility Determination, Uses (includes non-motorized transportation by foot, dogsled, kayaks, rafts, etc.) allowed by the 1987 Yukon Flats NWR Comprehensive Conservation Plan, 19 July 1994
- Comprehensive Conservation Plan, Environmental Impact Statement and Wilderness Review, Yukon Flats NWR, 29 December 1987
- Environmental Assessment for the Policy on Commercial Big-Game Guide-Outfitters and Transporters on National Wildlife Refuges in Alaska, 22 May 1992
- Finding of No Significant Impact, Environmental Assessment for the Policy on Commercial Big Game Guide-Outfitters and Transporters on National Wildlife Refuges in Alaska, 9 June 1992
- National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966 (as amended)
- Refuge Manual, US Fish and Wildlife Service, 12 March 1982
- River Management Plan – Beaver Creek Wild River, December 1983
- Subsistence Management for Federal Public Lands in Alaska, Final Environmental Impact Statement, Record of Decision signed 2 April 1992

Refuge Determination

Refuge Manager /
Project Leader Approval: _____
(Signature) (Date)

Regional Chief
National Wildlife
Refuge System: _____
(Signature) (Date)