



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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Anchorage, Alaska 99503-6199

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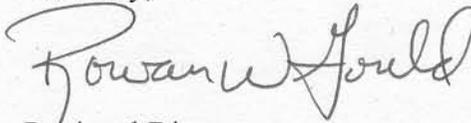
Dear Reader:

Enclosed for your information is the Record of Decision for the *Revised Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Alaska Peninsula and Becharof National Wildlife Refuges*. I have selected Alternative 3a – Preferred Alternative as described in this Record of Decision.

To view the entire revised CCP and EIS go to <http://alaska.fws.gov/nwr/planning/akpenpol.htm>. A stand alone copy of the plan, without the alternatives or environmental analysis, will be available soon and posted on the web. A compact disc version will be available upon request.

To request a copy of the *Revised CCP and EIS for the Alaska Peninsula and Becharof National Wildlife Refuges* or the stand alone CCP once it is published, contact Peter Wikoff, of my staff, at the above address or by phone at, (907) 786-3837.

Sincerely,



Regional Director

Enclosure

Record of Decision
for
Revised Comprehensive Conservation Plan
and
Environmental Impact Statement
Alaska Peninsula and Becharof National Wildlife Refuges

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service – Region 7

February 2006



I. Introduction and Background

This record of decision (ROD) documents my decision for approving the Revised Comprehensive Conservation Plan for the Alaska Peninsula and Becharof National Wildlife Refuges (Revised Conservation Plan) and the rationale for making that decision. The Revised Conservation Plan is based on the Preferred Alternative in the *Revised Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Impact Statement Alaska Peninsula and Becharof National Wildlife Refuges*, released via *Federal Register* notice on October 13, 2005. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) notice of availability was published in the *Federal Register* October 28, 2005.

The Revised Conservation Plan is part of the planning requirements for National Wildlife Refuges in Alaska set forth in the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) of 1980. The ANILCA requires that the Secretary of the Interior prepare and, from time to time, revise a comprehensive conservation plan. Service planning policy requires that conservation plans be revised every 15 years or sooner if necessary. The Revised Conservation Plan was developed under direction of ANILCA Section 304(g) and the planning requirement in the Service Manual 602 FW 1-3. The Revised Conservation Plan and this ROD will guide the management of the Alaska Peninsula and Becharof National Wildlife Refuges for the next 15 years or until it is revised.

Refuge Setting

The area affected by this Revised Conservation Plan includes the Becharof National Wildlife Refuge, the Ugashik and Chignik units of the Alaska Peninsula National Wildlife Refuge, and the Seal Cape portion of the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge, hereafter collectively referred to as the Refuges. The Pavlov and North Creek Units of the Alaska Peninsula Refuge are administered as part of the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge and are not covered by this decision. The planning area covers 4,932,600 acres of federal land, of which 502,900 acres are designated Wilderness.

The northern boundary of the Refuges lies approximately 10 miles south of King Salmon and extends roughly 250 miles along the peninsula. The Ugashik and Chignik units are separated by the Aniakchak National Monument and Preserve.

Original Conservation Plans

The original conservation plans for the Refuges were completed between 1985 and 1988. While the management direction in those plans was fairly similar, there were some differences. Activities addressed in one plan were sometimes missing from another, and there was sometimes different direction for the same activity. For example, while surface geophysical studies are allowed throughout the Refuges, seismic surveying techniques are allowed throughout the Alaska Peninsula Refuge but not allowed on the Becharof Refuge. The 1985 Becharof Refuge and 1987 Alaska Peninsula Refuge plans included 880,200 acres recommended for Wilderness designation. The 9,900-acre Seal Cape Unit of the Alaska Maritime Refuge was also recommended for Wilderness designation in its 1988 plan. As I will explain later, the Wilderness recommendations were not revisited during revision.

II. Decision and Rationale

It is my decision to select the Preferred Alternative, as described in the *Revised Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Impact Statement Alaska Peninsula and Becharof National Wildlife Refuges*, published in October 2005. This decision and adoption of the Preferred Alternative supersedes and replaces the 1985 and 1988 Comprehensive Conservation Plans and ROD for the areas covered by this plan. It also updates and replaces the 1994 Public Use Management Plan.

The management direction in the Preferred Alternative reflects my intent to manage the refuges in Alaska to meet the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System (System) while also meeting the refuge purposes set forth in ANILCA. The Revised Conservation Plan facilitates public use, subsistence, and recreation opportunities in settings that emphasize natural and unaltered appearing landscapes.

We received overwhelming support from local users and interested publics to continue managing the Refuges much as they have been managed since they were created. I fully intend to honor that request by ensuring that the Refuges will be managed consistent with the ANILCA purposes for which they were designated. My vision for the Refuges is that *the Alaska Peninsula and Becharof Refuges will remain as they are today with healthy, natural populations of fish and wildlife living in primarily unaltered habitats. The Refuges will continue to provide local residents opportunities for subsistence use of resources. The Refuges will be open to all people to engage in a variety of wildlife-dependent activities and to enjoy the spectacular setting and resources.*

We heard from the State of Alaska that we should maintain flexibility in evaluating and approving new uses. I believe that I have accomplished that by adopting the direction provided in the Preferred Alternative. The vision statement, goals, and objectives in the Revised Conservation Plan provide the basis for managing the Refuges to meet current and future fish and wildlife habitat needs and visitor wildlife-dependent activities. It is not possible or necessary to anticipate every conceivable activity or use that may arise in the future. As technology, scientific knowledge, and public uses evolve, management direction will also need to evolve.

ANILCA Conservation Plan Requirements

The ANILCA requires that each plan designate areas within the Refuges according to their resources and values; set forth the programs for conserving fish and wildlife and the programs for maintaining the values of the Refuges; specify the uses that may be compatible with the major purposes of the Refuges; and set forth the opportunities for fish and wildlife-oriented recreation, ecological research, environmental education, and interpretation of the Refuges' resources and values.

Designate Areas According to Their Resources and Values

The Preferred Alternative divides the Refuges into three management categories that reflect my management intent and the resources and values inherent in those areas. The Congressionally designated Becharof Wilderness is in the Wilderness Management category. This area will be

managed to maintain its wilderness character as well as to meet the other purposes of the Refuges. The Yantarni Bay area is placed in a Moderate Management category. This reflects my intent to continue to provide for off-road vehicle (ORV) use on designated trails within this area. The rest of the lands within the Refuges are placed in the Minimal Management category. This management category focuses on providing fish and wildlife habitat and recreational opportunities in a natural environment with very little evidence of human-caused change.

Programs for Conserving Fish and Wildlife and Maintaining the Refuges Values

The goals and objectives in the Preferred Alternative provide the framework for addressing current and future challenges to managing the fish and wildlife and their habitats within the Refuges. It is my intent to implement the objectives in the Revised Conservation Plan within budgetary constraints and to provide fish and wildlife programs and public use opportunities that complement my vision for the Refuges. As the Refuges implement the objective to gather information on pre-ANILCA traditional subsistence access it should collect all useful information on pre-ANILCA uses and activities, not just those related to subsistence.

The Preferred Alternative provides management direction for a large variety of activities and uses that are or could be conducted on the Refuges. By managing those uses within the direction provided, all refuge values will be adequately protected.

I do not anticipate all the activities discussed in the management direction will be conducted on the Refuges. Some of them may never be proposed and some are not allowed within the management categories selected for implementation unless the plan is amended. I do think it is important that this range of activities and actions is displayed so that future refuge managers, and the public, can understand the basis for decisions made on requests or applications for activities not currently authorized on the Refuges.

Uses Compatible With the Refuges

The management direction in the Preferred Alternative provides direction for managing the uses of the Refuges. Some uses may be conducted with no further authorization. Some uses require a special-use permit or other authorization before they may be conducted, and some uses may not be conducted under this Revised Conservation Plan. Appendix H of the Revised Conservation Plan contains compatibility determinations for the current uses of the Refuges. They include recreational fishing; recreational hunting; wildlife viewing, photography, environmental education, and environmental interpretation; commercially guided recreational fishing services; commercially guided big-game hunting services; commercial transporter services; subsistence activities; reburial of archaeological human remains; scientific research; and State of Alaska management activities. Associated activities such as methods of access by motorboat, airplane, snowmachine, all-terrain vehicle (ATV), and nonmotorized access; use of camps and field equipment are also covered in the compatibility determinations.

Should the uses covered by these compatibility determinations change significantly, new compatibility determinations will need to be prepared. Activities and uses not covered by these compatibility determinations will need a site-specific analysis and separate compatibility determination before the use is authorized.

Opportunities for Fish and Wildlife Oriented Recreation

Opportunities for fish and wildlife oriented recreation are abundant throughout the Refuges. All areas within the Refuges are open to hunting and fishing, consistent with State of Alaska hunting and fishing regulations and federal subsistence regulations.

Goal 8 is “to conduct interpretive and environmental education programs that increase understanding and support for the System; development of a sense of stewardship for wildlife, cultural resources, and the environment; and enhanced visitor experiences.” The objectives associated with this goal build on the work in environmental education and interpretation currently being carried out by the Refuges staff.

Opportunities for Ecological Research, Environmental Education, and Interpretation

The goals and objectives adopted by this Plan provide direction for conducting ecological research, environmental education, and interpretation. Goal 2 is “to improve knowledge of fish and wildlife population and their habitats in order to conserve species in their natural diversity, especially those that are identified in the refuge purposes, that have restricted populations, or that have been identified as species or populations of ecological interest.” The objectives associated with this goal will further our knowledge of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources of the Refuges and help us understand the changes to the environment associated with global warming.

Issues and Alternatives Considered

The Preferred Alternative in the Revised Conservation Plan differs from the one identified in the Draft Plan (published in February 2004) in two areas. First, the management direction in Sections 2.4 through 2.24 has been rewritten to remove extraneous material. Second, I further modified the Preferred Alternative to allow for evaluation of future applications for helicopter permits to transport recreation users onto the Refuges. While most public comments on this subject favored not allowing permits for helicopter use, the State of Alaska requested we continue to keep the option open to allow evaluation of future proposals. I respect the public comments but am persuaded by the State’s argument that precluding any consideration of future proposals for helicopter-based recreational access is not necessary at this time.

Public Involvement

A notice of intent to revise the Alaska Peninsula and Becharof Comprehensive Conservation Plans was published in the *Federal Register* on February 26, 1998, beginning the formal public comment and involvement period. We followed up with two planning updates discussing the opportunity for public involvement and the results of the comments we received. We held 10 public meetings in the communities within or adjacent to the Refuges. Comments received at this stage were used to identify the issues that needed to be addressed in the environmental impact statement (EIS) and the alternative approaches to respond to the issues.

After developing the preliminary alternatives, we again went out to the public with a planning update asking for comments on the preliminary alternatives. We also created a planning web site and posted the alternatives there.

The *Draft Revised Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Impact Statement Alaska Peninsula and Becharof National Wildlife Refuges* (Draft Revised Conservation Plan) was released for public review in February 2004. The public comment period ran through May 31, 2004. We published a notice of availability in the *Federal Register* and provided a summary of the alternatives in a planning update. Copies of the Draft Revised Conservation Plan were mailed to interested individuals, organizations, and government agencies. We held public meetings in eight communities to receive comments on the Draft Revised Conservation Plan.

We received almost 11,600 comments on the Draft Revised Conservation Plan. I have reviewed the public comments on the DEIS and responses to those comments presented in Appendix I of the final EIS. Based on the comments received, especially the compelling argument made by the State of Alaska, I directed the planning team to develop a revised preferred alternative.

Development of Alternatives

The planning team—consisting of the refuge manager, refuge and regional office staff, and state representatives from the Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G) and Alaska Department of Natural Resources (ADNR)—analyzed the public comments collected during scoping and identified the major issues to be addressed in the Revised Conservation Plan. Different ways to respond to the two major issues were then developed.

The public raised several issues that were determined to be outside the scope of the Revised Conservation Plan and were not included in alternatives. For example, several comments suggested the Refuges should be closed to recreational hunting. The National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act, as amended, identifies hunting as one of six priority public uses of the Refuge System. Providing opportunities for compatible wildlife-dependent recreation such as hunting is also specifically addressed in ANILCA. Hunting and fishing have occurred on the Refuges since they were created. As long as this activity is conducted consistent with State hunting regulations and Federal subsistence regulations, there is no need at this time to develop alternatives that would close all or parts of the Refuges to hunting.

The Service received several comments during scoping that recommended conducting a wilderness review and making recommendations for additional Wilderness area designations part of the Revised Conservation Plan. We conducted a thorough analysis of ANILCA and Service planning policy requirements for planning and wilderness reviews. This included a legal review. Based on that analysis the Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), in a February 18, 2004, memorandum instructed that when preparing and revising comprehensive conservation plans for refuges in Alaska to ensure the region meet the planning requirements in Section 304(g) of ANILCA, but to not apply the wilderness review section of the Service Planning Policy 602 FW 3.4 C.(1)(c). The 1988 Wilderness recommendations developed during the first round of planning still stand.

All alternatives are constrained by the purposes for which the Refuges were created. Alternatives that would deviate from meeting the purposes spelled out in ANILCA were not developed.

The planning team developed the alternatives by first developing a vision statement and goals and objectives for the Refuges. I articulated that vision for the Refuges earlier in this ROD. The management direction provided in the original Conservation Plans was reviewed and updated. The management direction in this Revised Conservation Plan was developed to be consistent to the maximum extent practicable with other conservation plans for national wildlife refuges in Alaska. I am confident that the direction is appropriate for these Refuges.

The team then addressed the two issues identified during scoping. The first issue—how should we address recreation access to remote and sensitive areas?— primarily deals with helicopter access for recreation activities. The team developed three approaches for dealing with this issue.

The second issue—how can conflicts between refuge user groups be minimized?— is dealt with by developing objectives and a monitoring plan for addressing public use. These objectives and monitoring plan are applicable to all the action alternatives. Chapter 6 sets out a monitoring plan to track the progress of plan implementation. I am committed to implementing the monitoring set out in that section, within the constraints of budgets and available workforce.

Description of Alternatives Considered in Detail

Alternative 1

This is the No-Action Alternative and represents current management. It is the 1985, 1987, and 1988 Final Comprehensive Conservation Plans for the respective units of these Refuges. It includes the changes made to the final Alaska Peninsula Conservation Plan in the ROD and the management direction from the 1994 Public Use Management Plan. These plans provide opportunities for wildlife-dependent recreation and subsistence uses and allow traditional forms of access for traditional activities. The original plans identify five management categories: Intensive, Moderate, Minimal, Wild and Scenic Rivers, Wilderness, and Cooperative. None of the lands were placed in the Intensive Management or Wild and Scenic River categories. The Refuges contain 502,900 acres of Congressionally designated Wilderness and are managed accordingly. The plans specify the activities and actions that could be undertaken in each category, but the management direction varies among the different units. The original plans do not contain vision statements, goals and objectives, or a monitoring plan but do contain Wilderness recommendations. Requests for permits to allow helicopter access for recreation activities is evaluated on a case-by-case basis. There is no management direction to proactively manage user conflicts. Additional information on the No-Action Alternative and the other alternatives is found in Section 2 of the final EIS.

Alternative 2

This alternative contains a vision statement, goals and objectives, and a monitoring program to identify potential conflicts between user groups at an early stage. It uses three management categories from the original Conservation Plans: 9,100 acres are placed in Moderate Management, 3,728,300 acres are placed in Minimal Management, and 502,900 acres are placed in Wilderness Management. Direction for managing these categories has been strengthened and clarified to make it consistent among the different units of the Refuges. Requests for permits to allow helicopter access for recreation activities in non-wilderness areas would be evaluated after development of a separate plan to identify sensitive areas where helicopters would not be allowed.

Alternative 3

This alternative contains the same vision statement, goals and objectives, and monitoring program as does Alternative 2. The size of the Moderate Management category is reduced from 9,100 acres to 4,000 acres without affecting current uses of this area. The lands removed from Moderate Management are placed in the Minimal Management category. Requests for permits to allow helicopter access for recreation activities would not be allowed. This is the only difference between this alternative and Alternative 3a. The vision statement, goals and objectives, updated Public Use Management Plan, and management direction from Chapter 2 of the Final Plan would guide the day-to-day management of the Refuges. Additional step-down plans would be developed with opportunities for public input.

Alternative 3a

This is the Service's Preferred Alternative. This alternative contains the same management direction as Alternative 3, except that requests for permits to allow helicopter access for recreation activities will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. This alternative emphasizes natural processes across the Refuges. Large-scale changes to the landscape are not anticipated. All requests for activities and uses not specifically addressed in the compatibility determinations in Appendix H will undergo separate compatibility determinations.

Four thousand acres in Yantarni Bay are designated Moderate Management to allow use of off-road vehicles on designated trails. All other lands not within the 502,900-acre Congressionally designated Becharof Wilderness are placed in the Minimal Management category.

The Preferred Alternative strengthens the biological program of the Refuges by focusing scientific studies and management on understanding the natural and anthropogenic processes affecting resources important to the people using the Refuges. The wildlife and habitat inventory plans identified in the objectives under Goal 2 will refine the biological program and provide additional guidance on where and how the Refuges should focus its emphasis on inventory, survey, and monitoring work.

Management of public use will continue very much as it has been in the past. Increased effort will be made to identify user conflicts and work toward resolution; law enforcement efforts will be improved. Access and uses that have been occurring since the Refuges were established will continue. If monitoring shows changes in conditions or use patterns that would be detrimental to the natural or other values of the Refuges, steps will be taken to protect those resources that are at risk. Increased education will be the first step; should those efforts not provide the needed results, however, other steps, including restrictions on human activities, will be considered.

The Environmentally Preferable Alternative

The Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations for implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) require that the ROD specify "the alternative or alternatives which were considered to be environmentally preferable" [40 CFR 1505.2(b)]. This is generally considered to be the alternative that causes the least potential damage to the biological and physical environment; it also means the alternative that best protects, preserves, and enhances historical, cultural, and natural resources (CEQ "Forty Most-Asked Questions," 46 FR 18026,

March 23, 1981). While the differences in environmental effects among the four alternatives are very small, Alternative 3 is the environmentally preferable alternative because it has the least potential for adverse effects to the biological and physical environments.

III. Findings Required by Other Laws and Authorities

This Revised Conservation Plan was developed in conformance with many federal laws. In this section, I consider each of the major laws involved in this decision.

National Environmental Policy Act

The NEPA requires federal agencies to prepare detailed statements on proposed actions that significantly affect the quality of the human environment. The Service has completed a draft and final environmental impact statement that addresses the proposed action and major issues identified during scoping. I find that the environmental analysis and public involvement process complies with all of the major elements of the requirements set forth by CEQ for implementing NEPA (40 CFR 1500-1508).

The final EIS considers a reasonable range of alternatives. The four alternatives considered in detail in the final EIS respond to the major issues raised during scoping. Substantive comments made on the DEIS are responded to in Appendix I of the final EIS. The comments, especially those from the State of Alaska, resulted in numerous changes and corrections to the alternatives and analysis and the creation of a new preferred alternative (Alternative 3a).

The final EIS discloses cumulative effects of the alternatives by evaluating past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future action in the planning area. Potential actions or uses of the Refuges are discussed, and the ramifications of those actions are discussed to the degree appropriate for a programmatic NEPA document.

ANILCA Pre-Planning Requirements

The ANILCA requires the Service to identify, before developing the conservation plan, the resources, values, potential administrative sites and visitor facilities, access, and significant problems that may adversely affect the fish and wildlife populations and habitats. In this section, I discuss the information used to develop the Revised Conservation Plan.

Populations and Habitats of Fish and Wildlife Resources of the Refuges

The final EIS discusses the populations and habitats of the major fish and wildlife species that occur within the Refuges. Fish, especially salmon, are ecologically and economically significant resources. The refuge contains more than 1,000 salmon-producing streams, and annual production exceeds 30 million fish. Sockeye, Chinook, pink, coho, and chum salmon; rainbow, steelhead, and lake trout; Dolly Varden; Arctic char; Arctic grayling; whitefish; northern pike; and burbot inhabit the aquatic ecosystem. The commercial and ecological importance of sockeye salmon make it the most important fish species on the Refuges.

More than 200 species of birds have been observed on or near the Refuges, of which 15 to 20 species are year-round residents. The cliffs, bays, and lowlands of the Refuges provide abundant habitat for millions of birds, particularly pelagic birds, waterfowl, and shorebirds that use the

Refuges primarily as a staging area during migration to and from nesting grounds in the Arctic. Pelagic birds use the Refuges for breeding. Numerous ponds, lakes, streams, and wetlands provide ample breeding habitat for a number of waterbirds. During summer, migratory songbirds and raptors make use of the abundant meadow and terrestrial environments on the Refuges.

No formal surveys have been conducted for small mammals such as masked shrews, dusky shrews, meadow jumping mice, tundra voles, northern red-backed voles, brown lemmings, Arctic shrews, meadow voles, northern bog lemmings, and little brown bats. Porcupines, Arctic ground squirrels, and snowshoe and tundra hares are common throughout the Refuges. Hoary marmots are present in the mountains and muskrats are infrequently observed in the wetland areas of the Refuges.

The Refuges provide habitat for gray wolves, coyotes, red fox, wolverines, river otters, mink, short-tailed weasels, least weasels, and beaver. Beaver dams and lodges are commonly observed. Coyotes have been observed more frequently over the past 15 years. Traditional methods of monitoring these animals (i.e., track counts) are difficult because of unreliable snow cover.

The Alaska Peninsula supports some of the highest brown bear densities in the world. The ADF&G estimates for Game Management Unit (GMU) 9E, which contains most of the Refuges, is roughly 3,200 bears. Important bear habitat includes the east side of Becharof Lake, the east side of Ugashik Lakes, and the area around Black Lake.

The Northern Alaska Peninsula caribou herd ranges from Port Moller to north of the Naknek River. The majority of the caribou use the coastal plain outside the Refuges for calving. Since 1994, 10 percent to 30 percent of the annual post-calving count has been found in the Aleutian Range, which includes most Refuges lands. Historically, the population has ranged from a high of 20,000 caribou to a low of 2,000, where the population stands today.

Moose have been on the Alaska Peninsula since the early 1900s, but did not become abundant until the 1950s. In 1983, the population in GMU 9E was estimated at 2,500 moose. More recent trend surveys indicate the population remains stable; calf recruitment, however, continues to be low, and the number of moose the habitat can support is unknown. Winter moose concentration areas on the Refuges include the Kejulik River, Ugashik Lakes, the Dog Salmon River, Mother Goose Lake, the upper Meshik River valley, and Black Lake as well as on the Pacific coast drainages of Yantarni, Mitrofanina, and Stepovak bays.

Harbor seals, Steller (northern) sea lions, and sea otters often use the Pacific coastline of the Refuges. Harbor seals and sea lions migrate up and down the coast, frequently hauling out on the Refuge land and intertidal areas. Sea otters are common in coastal areas of the Alaska Peninsula, and the population is estimated at approximately 6,500. Gray, killer, humpback, and minke whales and an occasional fin whale inhabit the nearshore waters along the Pacific coast of the Refuges.

Special Values of the Refuges

Public comments indicated that people valued the naturalness of the Refuges, their wildness and wilderness qualities, wildlife in its natural diversity, the naturally functioning ecosystems, and the associated wildlife-related recreation opportunities.

Section 1.6 of the final EIS identifies areas containing special values and discusses the values within these areas. The areas include:

- *Becharof Wilderness Area*
- *Becharof Ecosystem—Becharof Lake*
- *Island Arm and Ruth Lake*
- *Becharof and Katmai Uplands*
- *Mt. Peulik and Gas Rocks Area*
- *King Salmon River Drainage (Egegik)*
- *Big Creek Drainage*
- *Kanatak Village*
- *Seabird Colonies*
Pacific Coast
- *Ugashik Lake*
- *Dog Salmon River, Mother Goose Lake, and King Salmon River (Ugashik)—*
- *Black Lake—Chignik Lake Area*
- *Castle Cape*
- *Mount Veniaminof*
- *Seal Cape*

Areas That Are Suitable for Administrative Sites or Visitor Facilities

The Refuges headquarters is located in King Salmon. It will continue there and will be upgraded as funds become available. The visitor center is located at the King Salmon airport and is run cooperatively with the National Park Service, Bristol Bay Borough, and Lake and Peninsula Borough. This outreach program, located in a leased building, will be expanded to provide outreach environmental education programs at off-refuge locations.

The refuge manager has also identified the need for a subheadquarters for the Chignik Unit, but no suitable location for that facility has been evaluated. A needs assessment and evaluation of suitable sites will be completed within the next 15 years.

Present and Potential Requirements for Access as Provided for in Title XI

The State of Alaska has identified four potential rights-of-way across the Refuges. Two of the corridors were identified in the draft 1984 Bristol Bay Cooperative Management Plan and subsequent comprehensive conservation plans for the Alaska Peninsula and Becharof Refuges. One corridor connects Port Heiden with Kajulik Bay, the other one connects Pilot Point with Wide Bay. These corridors were originally identified as necessary to support oil and gas development off the Refuges.

The State of Alaska “Southwest Alaska Area Transportation Plan: Alaska Peninsula Corridor” identifies two transportation corridors within the Refuges. One corridor connects Port Heiden with Chignik, and the second route links the Chignik villages with Perryville and Ivanof Bay. Appendix G in the final EIS discusses the four corridors and shows their general location.

All four of these corridors fall within the Minimal Management category on the Refuges. Should an application for one of these transportation and utility corridors be filed, a separate NEPA compliance document and compatibility determination would have to be conducted. The Revised Conservation Plan would also have to be amended to remove the land from Minimal Management before any right-of-way permit could be issued.

Significant Problems That May Adversely Affect the Populations and Habitats of Fish and Wildlife

I am concerned that the Northern Alaska Peninsula Caribou Herd is below ADF&G population targets of 12,000 to 15,000 animals. The current low numbers appear to be within the range of natural variability but are below those needed to meet subsistence and recreation demand. The Refuges will continue coordinating with ADF&G on monitoring the caribou herd and habitat.

No where in the world is the evidence of global climate change more evident than in the high latitudes. The effect increased temperatures is having on growing seasons, lake levels, precipitation, native plant and animal distributions, and introduction of nonnative species is not clear, but the long-term effects could be substantial. At the national and regional levels, the Service is coordinating efforts with the U.S. Geological Survey and others to look at strategies to understand and manage for the changes taking place.

I am committed that the Refuges will cooperate with any larger efforts conducted to understand the ramifications of climate change. The management strategies outlined by this Revised Conservation Plan should put the Refuges in a good position to understand and react to changes that affect the fish, wildlife, and habitats of the Refuges.

Invasive species is another threat to native species and habitats that has worldwide implications. On the Alaska Peninsula, the potential for invasive species is much less than in more temperate and disturbed environments. However, invasive species are already on the peninsula, and the spread of established or new invasive species onto the Refuges is highly possible. In implementing this Plan, it is my intent that the Refuges staff will take aggressive action to prevent or remove invasive species from the Refuges.

ANILCA Section 810 Subsistence Uses

A subsistence use evaluation and determination is found in Section 4.9 of the final EIS. None of the alternatives contain actions that would reduce subsistence uses or change the availability of resources by altering their distribution, migration, or location; or place any limitations on access to harvestable resources.

Endangered Species Act (ESA)

The ESA Section 7 consultation requirements were completed with the Ecological Services Division of the Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service. Both agencies concluded that the Revised Conservation Plan is fully consistent with Section 7 of the ESA, and critical habitat for any endangered or threatened species would not likely be adversely affected by management under the Plan.

Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA)

The Revised Conservation Plan is fully consistent with the requirements of Section 307(c) of the Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972 and the State of Alaska Coastal Management Program state standards. It is also consistent with the enforceable policies of the Lake and Peninsula Borough Coastal Management Plan, the Aleutians East Borough Coastal Management Program, and the Kodiak Island Coastal Management Program.

Clean Air Act and Clean Water Act

The types and level of activities covered by this plan are not anticipated to have any detrimental effect on state water-quality requirements or on state air-quality plans. Any actions that fall within this Revised Plan will be further analyzed at the project specific level to minimize or eliminate any potential water-quality or air-quality issues. Indeed, providing water quality and necessary water quantity is one of the purposes of the Refuges.

Environmental Justice (Executive Order 12898)

Federal agencies are required to make achieving environmental justice part of their mission by identifying and addressing disproportionately high and adverse human health and environmental effects of their programs, policies, and activities on minority populations and low-income populations. The communities associated with the Refuges are rural, contain many low-income households, and rely on subsistence use of the natural resources. Chapter 4 in the final EIS contains a discussion of effects the Revised Conservation Plan could have on the local communities. It is my conclusion that the risk of disproportionate effects on minority or low-income populations from implementing the Revised Conservation Plan is very low.

Flood Plains and Wetlands (Executive Orders 11988 and 11990)

These executive orders require federal agencies to avoid, to the extent possible, short-term and long-term effects resulting from the occupancy and modification of flood plains and the modification or destruction of wetlands. The management direction provided in this Plan does not envision any occupancy, modification, or destruction of wetlands by any of the actions undertaken to implement the Revised Conservation Plan. The Revised Conservation Plan's intent is to fully protect these resources.

Tribal Government Consultation

The ANILCA planning requirements and Executive Order 13084 require adequate consultation with Native corporations and tribal representatives. The refuge manager met with tribal representatives from all villages that use the Refuges during scoping. He also met with interested representatives at the draft stage and ensured their comments were adequately addressed in the final Revised Conservation Plan.

Consistency with State of Alaska Fish and Wildlife Plans

The ANILCA requires consultation with state agencies during development of comprehensive conservation plans within Alaska. While not directly applicable to Alaska Refuges, the Refuge Administration Act planning requirements require that comprehensive conservation plans coordinate to the maximum extent practicable with state conservation plans for fish and wildlife and their habitats.

Working through the State ANILCA coordinator, representatives from the ADF&G and other state agencies as appropriate have been involved since the early stages in the development of this Revised Conservation Plan. The ADF&G species management plans were reviewed prior to developing this Plan. I am convinced that this Plan is consistent with all ADF&G published plans for managing fish and wildlife.

IV Implementation

The waiting period for implementing this Plan ended 30 days after the EPA publication in the *Federal Register* of the Notice of Availability. Therefore, this Revised Comprehensive Conservation Plan is effective immediately.


Regional Director

2/22/2006
Date