

**U. S. Department of the Interior  
Fish and Wildlife Service  
Region 7**

**DECISION AND FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

Environmental Assessment:  
Revised Comprehensive Conservation Plan  
Selawik National Wildlife Refuge, Alaska

**Summary**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) has completed the Revised Comprehensive Conservation Plan (Plan) for the Selawik National Wildlife Refuge (Selawik refuge, refuge). The draft Plan and environmental assessment (EA) described three alternatives for managing the refuge and analyzed the potential effects of the alternatives on the physical, biological, and human environments of the refuge (USFWS 2010).

Minor changes were made in Alternative B (the preferred alternative) in response to public comments. Technical edits, corrections, and clarifications were also made in response to public comments. After these slight modifications, Alternative B was selected for implementation in the final Plan.

This Finding of No Significant Impact documents my decision that implementing the preferred alternative will not have any significant impacts on the quality of the human environment of the Selawik refuge.

**Purpose of and Need for the Project**

Section 304(g) of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act of 1980 (ANILCA), as amended, directs the Secretary of the Interior to prepare, and from time to time, revise a Plan for each refuge in Alaska. The Plan is based on guidance found in the ANILCA; the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966, as amended by the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997; the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), as amended; and other Federal laws.

The purpose of this planning process was to revise the refuge's original Plan adopted in 1987, which contained no goals or objectives and some outdated management direction. The final Plan was developed to provide broad policy guidance and establish management direction for Selawik refuge. It defines long-term goals and objectives to guide and direct management activities on refuge lands. It identifies which uses may be appropriate and compatible with the purposes of the refuge and mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System. Although the final Plan provides direction for management for the next 15 years, it is considered to be a dynamic, living document that requires monitoring and periodic reviews and updates.

This Plan was developed to address the current and primary needs of the Selawik refuge to:

- update management direction related to national and regional policies and guidelines that are used to implement the Federal laws that govern refuge management;
- incorporate new knowledge and scientific information into refuge management;
- evaluate current refuge management direction based on changing public demand for use of the refuge and its resources, including subsistence use, commercial use, public recreation, and general visitor management;
- develop an updated and comprehensive description of the refuge environment, including ecological and social aspects such as land ownership, physical and biological resources, cultural and historic features, communities in the refuge area, and human activities on refuge lands.

The draft Plan described the current management situation at the Selawik refuge (i.e., Alternative A) and two additional alternatives for managing the refuge in the future that differed from the current management situation. The alternatives were formulated and proposed by the planning team to provide managers and decision makers with a range of options for addressing and resolving specific issues raised by the public and the Service. The alternatives described management actions that could potentially affect the refuge environment. The Service simultaneously prepared an EA as part of the draft Plan as directed by NEPA. The EA analyzed and described potential effects or impacts to the refuge environment that could result from implementing each of the proposed alternatives.

### **Alternatives Considered**

The ANILCA requires the Service to designate areas according to their respective resources and values and to specify programs and uses. To meet this requirement, the Alaska Region of the Service established management categories for all refuges in Alaska, including Minimal, Moderate, Intensive, Wilderness, and Wild River Management. The draft Plan identified appropriate activities, public uses, commercial uses, and facilities for each management category. Only Minimal, Wilderness, and Wild River Management categories apply to the Selawik refuge. The draft Plan did not propose to change the amount of refuge lands currently designated in these categories.

Alternative A, the no-action alternative, proposed to continue the current management situation at Selawik refuge, largely based on the 1987 Plan.

Alternative B, the preferred alternative, proposed updated management direction that resulted from changes and adjustments to policies and guidelines since completion of the original Plan in 1987. Alternative B proposed a vision statement, goals, and objectives for managing the refuge. Alternative B proposed limiting access to some public lands, which are intermingled with private lands, for commercial guides and transporters whose clients are big game hunting. Alternative B proposed that a formal partnership be created between the refuge and local entities to jointly maintain a shared facility of one or more buildings with capacity for office, meeting, and storage space in a community within the refuge. Alternative B proposed a study of traditional access

methods for subsistence purposes. Alternative B proposed that local public use and access needs be addressed by creating formal partnerships between the refuge and local entities.

Alternative C also proposed to incorporate specific changes or updates in management direction as well as adopt the new vision, goals, and objectives for refuge management. Alternative C proposed that the refuge manager could open or close some public lands, which are intermingled with private lands, to use by commercial guides and transporters whose clients are big game hunting. Alternative C proposed that the refuge independently maintain a facility of one or more buildings with capacity for office, meeting, and storage space in a community within the refuge. Alternative C proposed the same study of traditional access methods for subsistence purposes as described in Alternative B. Alternative C proposed to address local public use and access needs by proposing to expand or improve some opportunities for public use and access on refuge lands.

### **Public Review**

Public comments on the draft Plan and EA were solicited from October 21, 2010 through March 15, 2011. Written comments were received from 30 individuals and organizations: 21 from Alaska, five from outside Alaska, and four unknown. Agencies and organizations commenting included the State of Alaska, the Citizens' Advisory Commission on Federal Areas, NANA Regional Corporation, Northwest Arctic Borough, Native Village of Kotzebue, Native Village of Selawik, Safari Club International, Alaska Professional Hunters Association, Science Now Project, and Friends of Alaska National Wildlife Refuges. Twenty individuals commented, including one registered guide and transporter and at least three residents of communities near the Selawik refuge. Refuge staff attended tribal or city council meetings in Selawik and Noorvik, where oral comments and questions were received from approximately 9 individuals. Refuge staff also held informal conversations with the public about the draft Plan and EA as opportunity allowed.

There were numerous positive comments. The State of Alaska made several helpful suggestions that clarified various parts of the Plan. The State of Alaska "appreciated the considerable efforts of both refuge and regional staff in developing a clear planning document that addresses a variety of management issues identified through the planning process." The Northwest Arctic Borough appreciated our "communication and willingness to work cooperatively with the borough and our residents on the CCP." NANA Regional Corporation stated, "Overall, we are very pleased with the level of local community and regional involvement that went into the creation of this management plan."

Several reviewers were complimentary about the vision and goals. The Northwest Arctic Borough called the goals "very good." The Native Village of Kotzebue said, "It appears from the proposed plan that the refuge understands the needs of the local communities ... The emphasis on communication and building relationships is a positive approach." One individual commented, "I welcome and support the refuge's vision statement. It is refreshing to see its integration of community well-being into the overall vision for this refuge ..."

Alternative B, the Service's preferred alternative, received the most support from reviewers, although many favored modifications to it or one of the other alternatives for certain issues. For

example, on the issue of shelter cabins, Alternative C received more support than Alternative B. The commercial use issue received the most attention and the greatest mix of substantive comments and opinions. Although Alternative B received the most support on this issue, a similar number of reviewers supported either Alternatives A or C for the issue of commercial use of refuge lands for big game hunting.

### **Revisions from Draft Plan**

A number of technical corrections were made in response to comments and many of the editorial suggestions provided by the State of Alaska and others were adopted in the final Plan.

The preferred alternative (Alternative B) was slightly modified as a result of public comments on the draft Plan. Use by commercial guides and transporters for big game hunting is not authorized by permit stipulation on refuge lands in close proximity to or intermingled with private lands in the northwest portion of the refuge where refuge lands are intermingled with private lands. The area affected by this decision is approximately 376,378 acres of refuge lands. This reflects a reduction in the number of acres proposed in Alternative B. In the draft Plan, Alternative B proposed that approximately 444,585 acres be included in the affected area. As the remaining selected land becomes conveyed and other changes occur, the refuge manager will update and revise the land status maps used to show the affected area and provide these maps to commercial operators as part of their permit packages. This language about revising and updating the map was not specified in Alternative B but is now required as part of management direction. In addition, language was added to state: on a case-by-case basis, the refuge manager may authorize commercial use by special use permit for a specific area or areas within this larger affected area. The refuge manager will use two criteria to evaluate requests for commercial operations in the affected area: a compatibility determination will be completed, and an 810 analysis will be conducted.

Another change is reflected in the new language describing the management of shelter cabins on refuge lands: a formal partnership and memorandum of understanding (or other voluntary agreement among partners) will be created between the Service, Selawik refuge, Northwest Arctic Borough, NANA regional corporation, and local search and rescue organizations to formalize the roles and responsibilities of each partner in performing regular maintenance and/or replacement of shelter cabins on refuge lands. Members of the formal partnership will review the need for additional shelter cabins and appropriate location(s) for them, with the option of joint construction of an additional 1-2 shelter cabins or relocation of an existing shelter cabin on refuge lands. Alternative B did not include the option for either construction of additional shelter cabin(s) or the relocation of an existing shelter cabin on refuge lands.

### **Decision and Rational**

Three alternatives were analyzed in the draft Plan and EA. Alternative B was selected because it best meets the purpose and need of the project with no significant impacts to the environment.

Alternative B best accomplishes refuge purposes, best helps achieve the missions of the National Wildlife Refuge System and the Service, and best meets the vision and goals identified in the

Plan. Alternative B provides the best balance between public and commercial uses of refuge lands. It provides a proactive, responsible, and transparent means for addressing long-term issues of conflict between commercial and public uses in the Selawik region. Alternative B responds to the concerns of members of the public who are intimately familiar with refuge lands and private lands and protects those visitors who are not. Alternative B strengthens the special use permitting process by making it public and proactive. Of the three alternatives, Alternative B best ensures high quality hunting experiences for both local residents and refuge visitors that use commercial services. Alternative C would have been substantially more difficult to implement, requiring resource and public use data not currently available. The revised management direction in the final Plan derived from the proposal in Alternative B best addresses the primary concerns that we heard from the local public representing commercial operators.

### **Finding of No Significant Impact**

The EA analyzed direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts on the physical, biological and socio-economic environment. It included an ANILCA Section 810 subsistence evaluation and found no restrictions of subsistence on refuge lands. The analysis contained in the EA indicates that there will not be a significant impact, individually or cumulatively, to the refuge environment as a result of the management actions proposed in the preferred alternative.

I have determined that approving the final Plan and implementing the preferred alternative is not a major Federal action that would significantly affect the quality of the human environment as defined in Section 102 (2) c of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended. Accordingly, the Service is not required to prepare an environmental impact statement. This determination is made after full consideration of the context and scope of the management direction in the Plan.

### **Supporting Document**

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).



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Date

