

Chapter 4.0 Consultation and Coordination

Alaska Fire Service solicited issues to address during the development of alternatives from the BLM-Alaska State Office and Field Office staffs, the public, and other federal and State agencies.

The present situation (Sections 2.3 Management in Common and 2.4 No Action Alternative), BLM resource objectives identification (Section 2.5.1), and procedures, restrictions and constraints (Sections 2.3.3 and 2.5.5) were the focus of meetings held at each Field Office. BLM State Office staff critiqued the document and initiated the reviews required by law by other federal and State agencies.

A Notice of Intent was published in the Federal Register on Oct. 15, 2003 which opened the 60-day period for public comments. A news release inviting public participation and announcing the public meetings was distributed to the media and mailed to more than 600 people on the AFS newsletter list. A public meeting was held Dec. 2, 2003 in Anchorage and another was held Dec. 4, 2003 in Fairbanks. Both meetings were also advertised in local newspapers and through Public Service Announcements. In an effort to reach citizens in western Alaska, a presentation was made at the December 10, 2003 meeting of the Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group whose members include subsistence and sport hunters, conservationists, commercial hunting guides, federal and state agencies, reindeer herders and representatives from western Alaska communities.

Three people attended each of public meetings. The news media from Anchorage TV Channel 13 also attend the Anchorage meeting. That evening their statewide evening news broadcast described the BLM's effort to integrate fire-related resource objectives into its land use plans and requested comments be sent to Alaska Fire Service. Comments in Anchorage focused on use of biomass for cogeneration of electricity and techniques for rehabilitation and erosion control. The Fairbanks meeting was attended by a person from the University of Alaska doing a post-doctoral study on human influences in the fire regime. A comment was also received to review management options after large wildfires near

villages.

One written public comment was received.

Next, planning criteria were itemized and alternatives developed. An initial version of the EA was submitted to the State Office, the three Field Offices, and an Alaska BLM Resource Advisory Council member in December with a request for comments. Comments received have been assimilated into the final version.

4.1 BLM Internal Issue Development

Alaska Fire Service staff held the following major meetings in which the internal issues were discussed and developed. In addition to these, there were numerous informal meetings and phone conversations with the Planning staff at the Alaska State Office and Field Office staff members.

- January 22-31, 2003 BLM National Office of Fire and Aviation conducted a review of the BLM Alaska Fire Management Program.
- March 24, 2003 Formal review findings were received by the Alaska-BLM State Director. One finding noted Alaska land use plans contained inadequate direction for wildland fire and fuels management.
- July 21, 2003 Meeting with Field Office Managers and Associate State Director.
- August 11, 2003 Briefing paper and Notice of Intent submitted for publication in the Federal Register was sent to BLM national office.
- September 4, 2003 Meeting with new Deputy State Director for Resources.
- October 13-14, 2003 Meeting with Alaska State Office Branch of Resources and Planning.
- October 15, 2003 Notice of Intent published.
- October 27 and October 30, 2003 Northern Field Office.
- October 28, 2003 Anchorage Field Office.
- November 4, 2003 Glennallen Field Office.
- December 12, 2003 Initial Amendment criteria sent to State Office and Field Offices for review and comment.

4.2 Outreach Efforts

- May 8, 2003 Alaska Interagency Wildland Fire Coordinating Group briefed.
- September 17, 2003 Meeting with Alaska Department of Fish and Game.
- October 15, 2003 Notice of Intent published.
- October 24, 2003 Initial consultation with Fish and Wildlife Service.
- October 31, 2003 600 Notices mailed to interested parties.
- October 31, 2003 News release issued.
- November 13, 2003 BLM Resource Advisory Council briefed.
- December 2, 2003 Public Meeting, Anchorage
- December 4, 2003 Public Meeting, Fairbanks
- December 10, 2003 Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group briefed.

4.3 Public Comments and Responses

4.3.1 Written Comment

One written comment was received. Three issues were raised. The response follows each issue.

1. The designation of four appropriate management responses (critical, full, modified and limited) have been essentially developed on the basis of human population densities with limited being in the most unpopulated areas and critical being near villages, towns, etc. In the designation of these options little attention has been given to past fire history in terms of temporal or spatial distribution of these disturbances across the landscape. The Environmental Assessment should address impacts to the human environment by initiating these management options. This has not been done in the past. Tanana Chiefs Conference (TCC) provides services to 43 villages that cover a wide range of natural fire disturbance regimes. Although much of the village corporation lands are within the full protection management option, several of these villages have seen negative impacts to land, water and cultural resources by fires allowed to burn on adjacent federal lands. Areas where very large fires have burned in recent history may particularly be affected

by additional large fire events. Village concerns have been brought up about burning trees falling into spawning salmon streams, burned up traplines and cemetery sites, and the burning of lichen areas, which may take up to 60 years to grow with the subsequent displacement of caribou.

Response:

- Chapter 3 of this document contains the environmental analysis. It addresses the direct and indirect effects of wildland fire and ties the cumulative effects to management option designations.
 - An Environmental Assessment was also prepared during the development of the original interagency fire management plans. Doyon Corporation and TCC were two of the signatory parties.
 - Management option changes were beyond the scope of the Amendment.
 - If the villages or Tanana Chiefs wish to recommend management option changes, it is appropriate for them to work with the suppression Fire Management Officer responsible for their lands and follow the AWFCG procedures (Appendix C) to effect those changes.
 - Site-specific management option designations (Section 2.3.3e) are available for cultural and paleontological sites, high value resources, etc. Corporations or villages are encouraged to work with suppression agencies to identify sites on the map atlas.
 - The inclusion of villages in the management option review process and monitoring for BLM-managed lands is noted in Sections 2.5.3 and 2.5.6.
 - Each year the Alaska Wildland Fire Coordinating Group hosts a Fall Fire Review to discuss issues that have arisen in that fire season; the review is open to all.
2. On the other hand there are villages within the TCC region that contain lands that have not had wildfires in the recent past. Village corporation lands, which are under BLM fire protection services, can also be eligible for dollars related to fuel management projects. These villages have seen negative impacts to wildlife resources from habitat that has aged

and may have a preponderance of black spruce and/or decadent willow. In many cases village corporation lands may have inholdings of Native allotments. In the past the BLM has not been very receptive to conducting landscape level prescribed burns for the main benefit of wildlife habitat enhancement. These projects, however, have the added benefit of fire-proofing adjacent villages, and with available Bureau of Indian Affairs Hazard Fuel Reduction funds, can also help reduce fire risk on Native allotments.

Response:

- The role of BLM, Alaska Fire Service is outside the scope of this amendment. This amendment is applicable only to BLM-managed lands.
 - In the past BLM has cooperated with Alaska Department of Fish and Game, State of Alaska, Department of Natural Resources and TCC implementing prescribed fires for habitat improvement. For example: Mosquito Flats Burn in 1999.
 - Under this Amendment, projects for habitat improvement are authorized. However, authorization does not insure funding. Project proposals for burns that include BLM-managed lands should be submitted to the appropriate Field Office Fire Management Officer.
 - Written proposals for BLM, Alaska Fire Service assistance for project development or implementation should be submitted in to the Manager, Alaska Fire Service.
 - The inclusion of villages in the management option review process and monitoring is noted in Sections 2.5.3 and 2.5.6.
 - The Bureau of Indian Affairs is the agency responsible for all issues related to Native allotments.
3. The Environmental Assessment should also address rural economic issues as they relate to the human environment. By including villages and fire crews in fire projects

relating to hazard fuel reduction and prescribed burning activities, a more positive working relationship can be achieved between the fire agencies and the constituents they serve. This will result in true fire management as opposed to fire suppression or non-suppression activities.

Response:

- Past BLM Field Office fuels projects have been implemented by BLM, Alaska Fire Service personnel. The necessity and authorization for hiring village fire crews is included with individual project plans.
- Past national office policy did not allow for hiring EFF crews for project work; current policy allows crew hires under specific conditions and defines length of time.
- The role of BLM, AFS is not within the scope of this Amendment. AFS is the manager of the EFF crew program. For reference, the history of fire suppression organizations and economic impacts of AFS are in Appendix P.

4.3.2 Verbal Comments

A verbal comment at the Public Meeting in Anchorage regarded methods of disposal of debris resulting from projects.

Response:

- Biomass utilization has been included as an option to explore under all management option classifications and fuel management projects. (See Table 2-2 Summary of Preferred Alternative).

Research on the human element of wildland fire was the main topic raised at the Fairbanks meeting.

Response:

- University of Alaska has received a grant to study this topic. Participation by BLM and AFS staff is voluntary.

4.4 List of Preparers

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The comments and edits that were submitted by BLM Field Office and State Office staff on the initial document were merged with sections composed by the listed contributors and are essential components of the document. Editors included:

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