



Decision Record

for the

Land Use Plan Amendment
for
Wildland Fire and Fuels Management
for Alaska
Environmental Assessment

AK-313-04-EA-001

Prepared by
Bureau of Land Management
Alaska Fire Service
Fairbanks AK

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Henri R. Bisson". The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a horizontal line.

Henri Bisson, State Director, Alaska

7/20/05
Date

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The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is amending all the existing Resource Management Plans, Management Framework Plans, and National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska Integrated Activity Plans for BLM-managed lands within Alaska to update direction for wildland fire and fuels management. Amending these plans will bring them into compliance with the National Fire Plan and the 2001 Review and Update of the 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy. This Land Use Plan Amendment for Wildland Fire and Fuels Management for Alaska (Fire Amendment) and its associated planning analysis also apply to all BLM-managed lands not covered under an existing plan, thereby applying to all BLM-managed lands in the state of Alaska. The Fire Amendment identifies land use and resource goals and objectives in conjunction with the wildland fire suppression options and fuels (vegetation) management activities that achieve those objectives. The appendices and maps in the Environmental Assessment (EA) contain statistical data, reference material, and historical information on fire occurrence, suppression, and planning. The Fire Amendment reinforces the BLM's commitment to support the Alaska interagency fire program, consider the latest available technology and methods, and encourage scientific research to study fire effects and improve business practices. The EA and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) are available on the Alaska Fire Service's website at <http://fire.ak.blm.gov>. Hard copies are available from the Alaska Fire Service, the BLM-Alaska State Office, and BLM Field Offices in Anchorage, Fairbanks, and Glennallen.

Decision

Due to the record-breaking 2004 fire season in Alaska, I delayed signing this Decision Record to allow the BLM to evaluate whether BLM policies and procedures adequately addressed both the issues and concerns identified in agency and interagency fire season critiques and the issues and concerns identified by the public at the community meetings held in the fall of 2004. At this time, I have determined that BLM policies and procedures are appropriate for fire management on BLM lands and that the Preferred Alternative provides the necessary flexibility for the BLM to adapt to future program management needs. I hereby approve and implement the Preferred Alternative, as defined in the EA, as the Land Use Plan Amendment for Wildland Fire and Fuels Management for Alaska. As a member of the Alaska Wildland Fire Coordinating Group, the BLM will continue to cooperate and collaborate with other federal, State, and Native land managers and with other suppression organizations to address issues and concerns related to wildland fire management in Alaska and to implement operational resolutions.

My decision includes adoption of the BLM Policy for Structure Protection (Appendix L of the EA) as statewide policy to be implemented by all Field Offices. In addition to the BLM's standard environmental analysis requirements, all Field Offices will also follow the direction in the Alaska Wildland Fire Coordinating Group's Management Option Change Procedures (Appendix F of the EA).

I confirm that the FONSI for the EA signed on July 6, 2004, is valid and that preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement is not necessary; therefore, this Decision Record concludes this phase of the planning process. During future planning efforts to update or complete new Resource Management Plans, the decisions made in this Fire Amendment will be reviewed. If the decisions are still valid, they will be incorporated; if they are no longer valid, they will be revised to apply to that specific planning area. Public and firefighter safety is, and will continue to be, the number one priority in all fire management activities.

Alternatives: Two alternatives for wildland fire and fuels management are analyzed in the EA. The No Action Alternative (EA, Section 2.4) describes the existing wildland fire management direction contained in the BLM's land use plans. Table 2-2 in the EA summarizes the existing fire management direction, while Appendix I of the EA contains a more detailed summary of that direction in each of the existing land use plans. Under the No Action Alternative, suppression criteria and operational direction would continue as defined in the Alaska Interagency Wildland Fire Management Plan. Fuels projects would continue to be addressed on a case-by-case basis with appropriate analyses.

The Preferred Alternative (EA, Section 2.5) identifies land use and resource goals and objectives, wildland fire suppression options and priorities, and fuels (vegetation) management activities for BLM-managed lands statewide. This alternative provides consistent statewide wildland fire and fuels management guidance and direction for the BLM in order to both meet the objectives and supplement the direction in the existing land use plans. Fire management options emphasize the protection of human life and site-specific values while recognizing fire as an essential ecological process and natural agent of change in Alaskan ecosystems. Table 2-3 in the EA summarizes the criteria for determining when an amendment to the plan is necessary. The tables in Appendix K of the EA contain detailed descriptions of each management option. Fuels project types are prioritized (EA, Section 2.5.7a), and appropriate treatment methods for Alaska are listed (EA, Section 2.5.7b) and described (EA, Appendix H). Projects to support scientific research may be developed and implemented independently or in cooperation and coordination with BLM partners and cooperators. Individual projects were not analyzed as part of this alternative; they will be considered, analyzed, approved, and funded on a case-by-case basis. The preferred alternative acknowledges wildland fire use for resource benefit as a viable management tool.

In addition to these two alternatives, the EA identifies management common to both alternatives in Section 2.3. Existing Alaska-specific interagency fire management direction is cited in this section as well. This section is referenced in the Preferred Alternative and is adopted as part of that alternative.

Mitigation: The Fire Amendment includes standard operating procedures and mitigation measures (EA, Sections 2.3.3d and 2.5.5a) to reduce the effects of management efforts and to ensure that best management practices are followed.

Monitoring: Vegetative communities will be monitored for the cumulative effects of wildland fire, suppression actions, and the effects of excluding fire from the landscape (as funding permits), to evaluate best management practices. Criteria for determining which communities will be monitored are listed in Section 2.5.6 of the EA.

Public Participation: On October 15, 2003, a Notice of Intent to amend the land use plans in Alaska was published in the Federal Register. The Alaska Fire Service invited public participation through publication of a news release announcing the project and advertisement of public meetings in Fairbanks and Anchorage. The news release was distributed to the media and to more than 600 interested and affected individuals and organizations. Public meetings were held in December 2003. The Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group, the BLM Resource Advisory Council, and the Alaska Wildland Fire Coordinating Group were also briefed. In July 2004 the EA was completed and the FONSI was signed; both of these documents are available on the Alaska Fire Service's website. Members of the public who attended the public meetings or submitted written comments were notified of the availability of the documents and protest procedures. The protest period closed on August 20, 2004. No protests were received. Concurrent with the protest period, the Governor's Office provided formal review of the EA and FONSI for consistency with State plans and policies. The Governor's Office affirmed that the proposed Fire Amendment was consistent.

Management Considerations: Federal fire policy states that land use plans will define and identify overall wildland fire and fuels management direction to meet land use and resource management objectives. I have decided to adopt this Fire Amendment because it satisfies federal fire policy requirements; it ensures that human life, designated private property, and identified resources receive an appropriate level of protection with available firefighting resources; it optimizes the ability to achieve land use and resource management objectives; and it reinforces the premise that the cost of suppression efforts be commensurate with the values identified for protection.

I have determined that the level of detail in the Fire Amendment is appropriate and fulfills the Purpose and Need described in Chapter 1 of the EA; that the EA complies with the planning constraints and processes imposed by laws, policies, and legal and regulatory agreements; that during the planning process, the planning criteria that were established were followed (EA, Section 1.5); and that the Fire Amendment is consistent with current Alaska interagency fire policies. The Fire Amendment was prepared in compliance with the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 and the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969.

Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA), Section 810 Determination: ANILCA Section 810 requires that an evaluation be completed that includes findings on three specific issues: the effect of such use, occupancy, or disposition on subsistence uses and needs; the availability of other lands for the purpose sought to be achieved; and other alternatives that would reduce or eliminate the use, occupancy, or disposition of public lands needed for

subsistence purposes. The ANILCA evaluation, located in Appendix M of the EA, concluded that no significant effect on subsistence will result from the activities planned under the Fire Amendment.

Implementation: Based on the information detailed above, I have concluded that adopting the Fire Amendment will meet national requirements and provide appropriate guidance and direction for the BLM's fire management program in Alaska. The Land Use Plan Amendment for Wildland Fire and Fuels Management for Alaska, as identified as the Preferred Alternative in the EA, is effective upon my signature. This amendment amends all existing BLM land use plans and serves as interim guidance for all BLM-managed lands where land use plans have yet to be completed.