

RECORD OF DECISION
YUKON FLATS NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE
Comprehensive Conservation Plan,
Environmental Impact Statement,
and Wilderness Review

This Record of Decision is based on the Final Comprehensive Conservation Plan, Environmental Impact Statement, and Wilderness Review (Plan) for the Yukon Flats National Wildlife Refuge dated October 1987. It also considers comments from the public received during the public review period for the draft Plan and comments received on the final Plan. The Plan describes five alternatives for managing Yukon Flats Refuge and the effects of implementing each of these alternatives. An alternative reflecting current management is included as one of the management strategies (Alternative A, the Current Situation). The other alternatives reflect a broad spectrum of management emphasis.

It is my decision to select Alternative D, the Preferred Alternative, as described in the final Yukon Flats Refuge Plan, for implementation. This alternative proposes 650,000 acres (8% of the refuge) in the White-Crazy Mountains for wilderness designation.

The determination of impacts on subsistence is found in the Environmental Consequences chapter of the plan, and is in accordance with Section 810 of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act. In order to implement some aspects of this Record of Decision, the Service may prepare regulations governing resource protection in Yukon Flats Refuge for public review. If this occurs, the regulations will be published in a proposed form and public hearings will be conducted in the vicinity of the refuge to solicit public comment prior to regulation finalization.

12/29/87

Date

Walter D. Stieglitz

Regional Director

Attachments

ATTACHMENT A
To the Record of Decision for the
Yukon Flats National Wildlife Refuge
Comprehensive Conservation Plan

To address concerns about the final Yukon Flats Refuge Plan raised by the State of Alaska, the following letter is hereby made a part of the Yukon Flats Record of Decision. The letter was the result of coordination efforts between the Alaska Department of Fish and Game and the Service regarding the process by which a final Plan could be revised.

Don W. Collinsworth, Commissioner
Alaska Department of Fish and Game
1255 West 8th Office
P.O. Box 3-2000
Juneau, Alaska 99811

Dear Commissioner Collinsworth:

At recent meetings with members of your staff to discuss various aspects of the comprehensive conservation plans, it was apparent that there is a misunderstanding about the process for modification of a completed plan. This was discussed in relation to mechanical manipulation under the minimal management category where it states, "May be considered subject to appropriate plan revision."

The Service position is that when there is an instance during the life of a plan where it is mutually agreed that mechanical manipulation or other large scale management action is necessary this process would be followed:

- o The action would require National Environmental Policy Act compliance (this means the Service would have to do, at a minimum, an environmental assessment).
- o If a full Environmental Impact Statement was necessary, we would do one.
- o Either way, public participation is necessary. If an Environmental Impact Statement was needed, the preferred alternative would assess the impact of the operation and redesignate the area to be impacted to a management category that would accommodate such activities.
- o If after public participation only an Environmental Impact Analysis was needed, the Service would advise the public that:
 - the area where the management activity was to occur was being changed to a management category that would permit it; and
 - the Service was proceeding with the management activity.
- o This action would be appended to the individual plan, and when a major revision of the plan was executed it would adequately incorporate the management activity.

This process is available to the Department of Fish and Game through our joint fish and wildlife management responsibilities as reflected in the Memorandum of Understanding and 43 Code of Federal Regulations 24.

Sincerely,

Original Signed By
Walter O. Stieglitz

Regional Director

ATTACHMENT B
To the Record of Decision for the
Yukon Flats National Wildlife Refuge
Comprehensive Conservation Plan

To address concerns about the final Yukon Flats Refuge Plan that were discussed at the November 24, 1987, Alaska Land Use Council Meeting, the following letter is hereby made a part of the Yukon Flats Record of Decision. The letter provides clarification of the Regional Director's rationale for signing this Record of Decision.

Mr. Vernon R. Wiggins
Federal Cochairman
Alaska Land Use Council
1689 C Street, Suite 100
Anchorage, AK 99501

Mr. Robert L. Grogan
State Cochairman Designee
Alaska Land Use Council
Office of Management and Budget
Division of Governmental
Coordination
P.O. Box AW
Juneau, AK 99811

Gentlemen:

At its November 24 meeting, the Alaska Land Use Council voted to endorse the preferred alternative of the Yukon Flats National Wildlife Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan/Environmental Impact Statement/Wilderness Review with a recommendation for inclusion in the Record of Decision.

That recommendation, made by the State, requested that the Fish and Wildlife Service withdraw the portions of the Yukon Flats wilderness recommendation which are adjacent to State land. The State wants assurance that adequate seismic studies to determine oil and gas potential in the area can be done. Because such studies would involve both State and refuge land, the State is concerned that wilderness designation of that portion of the refuge will prevent a comprehensive assessment of oil and gas potential.

While I appreciate the concern of the State and the Council members who supported the recommendation, I do not see this wilderness proposal as presenting a major problem. First of all, it is still a proposal. There would be no prohibition on seismic studies between now and the time Congress designates it as Wilderness if Congress chooses to do so. Second, as stated on pages 122 and 138 of the final plan, Section 1010 of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act allows seismic studies in designated wilderness areas when they are conducted by or for Department of Interior agencies. For these reasons, I agree with the preferred alternative, including the wilderness proposal, and will sign the Record of Decision which implements it.

I appreciated, and found helpful the debate related to the plans at the Council meeting. Thank you for your support.

Sincerely,

Original Signed By
Walter O. Stieglitz

Regional Director

cc: Council Members
Land Use Advisors Committee