

## COMPATIBILITY DETERMINATION

**Use:** Furbearer Trapping (Non-Subsistence)

**Refuge Name:** Arctic National Wildlife Refuge

**Establishment and Acquisition Authority:** The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge, Arctic Refuge) was established by the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) (Public Law 96-487 Stat. 2371) on December 2, 1980. The Refuge boundary encompassed 19.64 million acres of land, including the 8.83-million acre Arctic National Wildlife Range (Range), which was established on December 6, 1960, by Public Land Order 2214. ANILCA re-designated the Range as part of Arctic Refuge, designated 7.16 million acres of the Refuge as Wilderness, and designated three wild rivers. In 1988, Public Law 100-395 added 325,000 acres of lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to the Refuge. An additional 1.3 million acres of land, originally selected by the State of Alaska under the Alaska Statehood Act (Public Law 85-508) but later relinquished, was added to the Refuge in two actions occurring in 1983 and 1985. Both these additions were of lands already within the boundaries of the Refuge.

**Refuge Purposes:** ANILCA established four purposes for the Refuge (including lands and waters in the original Range):

- i. *to conserve fish and wildlife populations and habitats in their natural diversity including, but not limited to, the Porcupine caribou herd (including participation in coordinated ecological studies and management of this herd and the Western Arctic caribou herd), polar bears, grizzly bears, muskox, Dall's sheep, wolves, wolverines, snow geese, peregrine falcons and other migratory birds and Arctic char and grayling;*
- ii. *to fulfill the international treaty obligations of the United States with respect to fish and wildlife and their habitats;*
- iii. *to provide, in a manner consistent with the purposes set forth in subparagraphs (i) and (ii), the opportunity for continued subsistence uses by local residents; and*
- iv. *to ensure, to the maximum extent practicable and in a manner consistent with the purposes set forth in paragraph (i), water quality and necessary water quantity within the Refuge.*

Public Land Order 2214 established the original Arctic National Wildlife Range "for the purpose of preserving unique wildlife, wilderness and recreational values...." These pre-ANILCA purposes apply only to those lands and waters in the original Range, and they remain in force and effect only to the extent they are not inconsistent with ANILCA or the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANILCA Section 305; 603 FW 2.8).

The Wilderness Act of 1964 (Public Law 88-577) creates the following additional purposes for the designated Wilderness area in the Refuge's boundaries; these purposes are within and supplemental to the Refuge's ANILCA and Range purposes: secure an enduring resource of Wilderness; protect and preserve the Wilderness character of areas in the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS); administer the NWPS for the use and enjoyment of the American people in a way that will leave these areas unimpaired for future use and enjoyment as Wilderness; and gather and disseminate information regarding the use and enjoyment of Wilderness areas.

***National Wildlife Refuge System Mission:*** The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System (Refuge System) is to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans (National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966, as amended [16 U.S.C. 668dd-668ee]).

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***Description of Use(s):*** This determination re-evaluates the compatibility of furbearer trapping on the Refuge by trappers who are not qualified subsistence users because of residence in a non-rural area, such as Fairbanks. Trapping was found to be a compatible use in the Refuge's 1988 Comprehensive Conservation Plan, and then again in 1994. Wolves, fox, beaver, marten, lynx, snowshoe hares, wolverine, ermine, and river otters are regularly trapped on the Refuge. Trapping occurs during winter on the Refuge in accordance with State of Alaska trapping regulations and seasons (5 AAC). Trapping activity has generally been decreasing since the 1980s. Access to trapping areas is primarily by fixed-wing aircraft and snowmobile. Currently, only a small number of traplines are active. Trappers often use one or more permitted cabins to support the activity. Compatibility determinations for trapping cabins will not be completed in the Plan; they will be done for each cabin separately at the time of permit renewal.

***Availability of Resources:*** Adequate Refuge personnel and base operational funds are available to manage trapping on the Refuge. Refuge personnel spend less than five days per year managing this use .

***Anticipated Impacts of Uses:*** No long-term adverse impacts on wildlife populations or other Refuge resources are likely to occur due to continuation of trapping on the Refuge. State trapping regulations are established to ensure healthy, sustainable furbearer populations. Interviews with trappers and information from carcasses can be useful to biologists in

determining population parameters of furbearers such as productivity and reproductive history. This added information can positively impact furbearer population management. Intensity of harvest and density of traplines on the Refuge is very low, and overall trapping pressure has declined since the 1980s; , therefore, except for the occasional harvest of non-targeted animals, trapping has little impact on Refuge resources. Diminishing trapping activity seems to have been the result of low fur prices, high energy prices, and diminishing interest. Refuge staff will monitor harvest and attempt to determine trends through field observations and trapper interviews. If population concerns manifest, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) will become engaged in review of the appropriate State of Alaska trapping regulations. Refuge staff will also be engaged in field enforcement of trapping regulations.

***Public Review and Comment:*** Public comments on compatibility determinations were solicited concurrently with the draft of the Refuge's Revised Comprehensive Conservation Plan (Plan) and Environmental Impact Statement. Public comments on compatibility determinations were accepted during the public review period for the draft Plan, which was announced in the Federal Register, on local radio stations, and in local newspapers. The 90-day public comment period began on August 15, 2011, and ended on November 15, 2011. We mailed the full draft Plan, and a summary of the Plan, to the individuals and organizations on our mailing list and posted both on the Refuge's web site. Six public hearings were held in Anchorage, Arctic Village, Fairbanks, Fort Yukon, Kaktovik, and Venetie, during which the Service received comments on the draft Plan. We received one specific comment from an individual on this compatibility determination.

The individual suggested that we combine all consumptive recreation into a single compatibility determination called "Fish and Wildlife Harvest Programs" that would focus on the biological effects of wildlife management activities that are implemented through State regulations. The Service agrees that this is one way that compatibility determinations could be organized, and our policy allows for consideration of uses either independently or as a group of related issues. We feel that analyzing the commercial consumptive recreational uses individually and separate from the non-commercial consumptive uses serves us better for several reasons; the uses are not dependent upon one another, and we can better analyze the use, its potential to impact Refuge purposes, and propose stipulations that apply specifically to commercial users in the permit process when the use is considered individually.

The State of Alaska and several others commented that, when compatible, recreational trapping was an appropriate use of a national wildlife refuge in Alaska. Many general comments centered on the Service acquiring a better inventory of trapping cabins and were concerned about the limitation on new cabins. The Alaska Board of Game wanted to ensure that trapping was recognized as a traditional activity and be allowed to continue. One commenter felt that trapping in designated Wilderness was inconsistent with an area "untrammled by man." Most people did not have an issue with allowing recreational trapping as long as it did not interfere with Refuge purposes, but some felt that trapping should not be allowed. No changes were made to the compatibility determination as a result of public comments.

**Refuge Determination (check one below):**

Use is not compatible

Use is compatible

**Stipulations Necessary to Ensure Compatibility:** Special use permits are not required for furbearer trapping activities, so there are no associated stipulations. However, visitors will be required to comply with existing State and Federal regulations. The Refuge provides information on Leave No Trace principles, or other minimal impact techniques, and other means to minimize impacts to Refuge resources. Additionally, those trappers utilizing trapping cabins on the Refuge will need to abide by stipulations for trapping cabin permits.

**Justification:** Furbearer trapping is among the traditional uses of Arctic Refuge that ANILCA sought to preserve. The entire Refuge is open to this use, which is conducted under State trapping regulations. No special use permit is necessary for trapping, although a permit is necessary to use a cabin in association with trapping activity. After fully considering the impacts of these activities, as described previously in the "Anticipated Impacts" section of this document, it is my determination that non-subsistence furbearer trapping in the Refuge does not materially interfere with or detract from the purposes of the Refuge or the mission of the Refuge System.

**Supporting Documents:**

- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 1988a. Arctic National Wildlife Refuge Final Comprehensive Conservation Plan, Environmental Impact Statement, Wilderness Review, and Wild River Plans. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Anchorage, Alaska. 609 pp.
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 1988b. Record of Decision: Arctic National Wildlife Refuge Final Comprehensive Conservation Plan, Environmental Impact Statement, Wilderness Review, and Wild River Plans. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, November 10, 1988. Anchorage, Alaska, USA.
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2011. Arctic National Wildlife Refuge Draft Revised Comprehensive Conservation Plan, Draft Environmental Impact Statement, Wilderness Review, and Wild and Scenic River Review. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, June 2011. Anchorage, Alaska, USA.

**Refuge Determination:**

Refuge Manager/

Project Leader Approval

Richard J. Os

8-4-12

Date

**Concurrence:**

Regional Chief

National Wildlife

Refuge System

Mike Boylan (Acting)

8/15/12

Date

**Mandatory 10-year Re-Evaluation Date:** 2022

**Mandatory 15-year Re-Evaluation Date** (for priority public uses): 2027

**NEPA Compliance for Refuge Use Decision:**

Categorical Exclusion without Environmental Action Memorandum

Categorical Exclusion and Environmental Action Memorandum

Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact

Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision

