

Compatibility Determination

Use: Trapping

Supporting and Incidental Uses: Fixed-wing aircraft landings, snowmobiling, boating (motorized and non-motorized), fishing, hunting, natural resource gathering, camping, cross-country skiing, dog sledding and skijoring, hiking and backpacking, wildlife photography and videography, snowshoeing, swimming, wildlife observation, pets, and firewood cutting.

Refuge Name: Selawik National Wildlife Refuge

Establishment and Acquisition Authority: The Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) established the 2.5-million-acre Selawik National Wildlife Refuge (Selawik refuge, refuge) as part of the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service National Wildlife Refuge System (Department of the Interior) on December 2, 1980.

Selawik Refuge Purposes: As stated in ANILCA Section 302 (7) (B), the purposes for which the Selawik Refuge was established and shall be managed include:

- (i) to conserve fish and wildlife populations and habitats in their natural diversity including, but not limited to, the Western Arctic caribou herd (including participation in coordinated ecological studies and management of these caribou), waterfowl, shorebirds and other migratory birds, and salmon and sheefish;
- (ii) to fulfill 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 subparagraph (i), water quality and necessary water quantity within the refuge.

The purpose of the congressionally designated Selawik Wilderness Area is to secure an enduring resource of wilderness, protect and preserve the wilderness character of the area as part of the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS), and administer the area for the use and enjoyment of the American people in a way that will leave it unimpaired for future use and enjoyment as designated wilderness.

National Wildlife Refuge System Mission

The mission of the National Wildlife 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]).

Description of Uses

Trapping on the refuge has occurred prior to and since refuge establishment in 1980 and was found to be a compatible use in 1994. This activity is a consumptive use involving the taking of

furbearers within seasons established in the Federal subsistence harvest regulations and Alaska trapping regulations and requires an Alaska trapping license. Trapping primarily involves the use of various types of leg hold traps or snares to catch furbearers, with some provisions to allow licensed trappers to take furbearers with firearms. In the open, treeless terrain in northwest Alaska, firearms are commonly used to harvest furbearers. Firearms are also sometimes used to dispatch animals caught in traps. Furbearers such as wolf, fox, beaver, mink, lynx, wolverine, ermine, muskrat, and river otter are occasionally trapped on Selawik refuge. Small game, such as snowshoe hares and squirrels, are also occasionally taken with traps or snares. Trapping predominantly occurs from late fall through mid-winter with the exception of muskrats and beaver, which are frequently taken with a firearm in the spring before and after ice break-up.

Low fur prices in recent decades have led to a decrease in trapping on the refuge since the late 1970s. The highest recorded harvest occurred in 1978 when 5,320 muskrat hides from the Selawik drainage and 5,849 from the Kobuk drainage were sold to fur buyers (Dau 1987). Today, trapping is not a major commercial venture as it once was. Most trapping activities can be characterized as an extension of subsistence activities (Georgette 2000), with much of the fur harvest used locally for clothing such as hats, parka ruffs, and gloves. Lynx and red fox are the primary species trapped for export. Some species, such as muskrat, are both sold and used locally. Other furbearers such as arctic fox, wolverine, and wolf are highly prized by residents in the region for their value as trim on winter clothing.

Snowmobiles and airplanes are the most common modes of access to and on refuge lands for trapping. Motorboats or non-motorized watercraft may occasionally be used for muskrat and beaver hunting in the spring after ice break-up. Cross-country skiing and snowshoeing occur infrequently and mostly in close proximity to villages. A number of local residents own sled dogs for competitive racing, but dog sled use as a means of access for trapping activities within the refuge is not common.

The annual number of trapping-related visits and the number of furbearers harvested on the refuge are unknown. The Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) management goal for furbearers in Game Management Unit 23, which includes the refuge, is to maintain populations capable of sustaining 1986–1997 harvest levels, recognizing that populations fluctuate in response to environmental factors (Dau 2007).

Availability of Resources

Adequate refuge personnel and base operational funds are available to manage trapping on Selawik refuge. The ADF&G administers most management activities associated with trapping. The refuge staff devotes only a minor amount of time to management of trapping activities. Field work associated with managing this use primarily involves surveys to monitor some furbearer populations such as beaver, whose increasing numbers have generated local concerns, and cooperative research projects on other species with the ADF&G, National Park Service, and Bureau of Land Management. A minor amount of staff time is spent answering questions, providing information to the public, and reviewing and commenting on proposed changes to State and Federal trapping regulations.

Anticipated Impacts of Uses

At current and expected levels of use, the anticipated impacts of trapping on refuge wildlife resources and other users are minor. State and Federal trapping regulations are established to maintain harvest levels at sustainable levels, and the number of trappers using the refuge is low. Incidental take of non-target wildlife inevitably occurs but not at substantial levels. Most

trapping occurs during the winter, when snow cover and frozen conditions protect ground surface and vegetation and when other uses on the refuge are limited. There is minor localized destruction of vegetation associated with clearing trap line trails and collecting firewood and logs for temporary trapping shelters.

Public Review and Comment

Public comments were solicited concurrently with the revision of the Selawik National Wildlife Refuge's Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Assessment (USFWS 2010). Public comments on compatibility determinations were accepted during the public review period for the draft plan and announced in the Federal Register. The public comment period was October 21, 2010 to March 15, 2011, which provided 145 days for public review. We mailed the full draft plan and a summary to the individuals and organizations on our mailing list. We invited public comments through an advertisement in a local newspaper and attended city council meetings in Selawik and Noorvik to receive comments on the draft plan. Planning team members met with the Citizen's Advisory Commission on Federal Areas to discuss the issues at Selawik refuge and alternatives that were proposed in the draft plan. The draft compatibility determinations were posted on the Service's Region 7 Web page.

We received no comments on the draft of this compatibility determination; however, several individuals expressed opposition in general to trapping in the refuge.

Refuge Determination (check one below)

Use is not compatible

Use is compatible

Stipulations Necessary to Ensure Compatibility

Visitors will be required to comply with any regulations in place such as seasonal closures for resource protection.

Justification

Trapping has a long history on the refuge and played a vital role in the region's economic and social history. The majority of trapping effort on the refuge today may be characterized as a secondary activity occurring in conjunction with winter travel or other subsistence activities. The State of Alaska manages harvest of furbearers to ensure their long-term sustainability. Trapping can contribute to furbearer studies when biologists conduct trapper interviews and obtain carcasses from trappers that aid in determining population parameters such as productivity and reproductive history. Most trapping occurs at the time of year when there are few visitors on the refuge and migratory species such as waterfowl and caribou are absent. The current level of trapping, or even a moderate increase in trapping, would most likely have a negligible effect on refuge resources. After fully considering the impacts of this activity, as described previously in the "Anticipated Impacts" section of this document, it is my determination that trapping activities within the refuge do not materially interfere with or detract from the purposes of the refuge or mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Supporting Documents

Dau, J. D. 1987. Unit 23 furbearer survey-inventory progress report. Pages 64-70 in B. Townsend, editor. Annual report of survey-inventory activities Part XIV. furbearers 1 July 1983 – 30 June 1984. Alaska Department of Fish and Game. Project W-22-3, Job 7.0. Juneau, Alaska.

Dau, J. D. 2007. Unit 23 furbearer survey-inventory progress report. Pages 291-300 in P. Harper, editor. Furbearer management report of survey and inventory activities 1 July 2003 – 30 June 2006. Alaska Department of Fish and Game. Project 7.0. Juneau, Alaska.

Georgette, S. 2000. Subsistence harvest in Northwest Alaska: Caribou, moose, bear, wolf and wolverine 1999-2000. Division of Subsistence, Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Juneau, Alaska. 22 pp.

U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 1987. Selawik National Wildlife Refuge Final Comprehensive Conservation Plan, Wilderness Review and Environmental Impact Statement. U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Anchorage, Alaska. 378 pp.

U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 1987. Record of Decision: Selawik National Wildlife Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan, Environmental Impact Statement, Wilderness Review, and Wild River Plan. U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Anchorage, Alaska. 15 pp.

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).

U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2011. Final Revised Comprehensive Conservation Plan. Selawik National Wildlife Refuge. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Anchorage, AK.

Refuge Determination

Refuge Manager/
Project Leader Approval:



Lee Anne Ayres

14 July 2011
Date

Concurrence

Regional Chief
National Wildlife
Refuge System:



Mitch Ellis

7-20-2011
Date

Mandatory 10-Year Re-evaluation Date: 2021

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