



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Kenai National Wildlife Refuge

Planning Update

Winter-Spring 2005

This is the third in a series of updates about the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge and the revision of its comprehensive conservation plan. The Revised Comprehensive Conservation Plan will provide management guidance and direction for the refuge for the next 15 years.

The purpose of this Planning Update is to give you the opportunity to review and comment on the preliminary management alternatives the planning team developed to address significant issues. To electronically provide comments, click on the following link:

<<http://alaska.fws.gov/nwr/planning/KenaiPMA.cfm>>.

This update will also introduce you to the next phase of the planning process.

Progress Report

The Kenai National Wildlife Refuge is pleased to report significant progress being made on development of its *Revised Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Impact Statement*. The refuge's interdisciplinary planning team has met eight

times to work on the revision since publication of last summer's Planning Update. Here are a few highlights of the team's accomplishments:

- Revised goal statements based on public comment and developed more than 100 wildlife and public use-related objectives.
- Completed drafts of Chapter 1 (Introduction) and Chapter 3 (Affected Environment).
- Identified how we intend on addressing more than 50 issues raised during the scoping period.
- Identified how we intend on managing 100 different activities on the Refuge.



Crowding along the Kenai River was a common issue identified during scoping.

Refuge Purposes

The purposes for which Kenai Refuge was established, as identified in Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act, are as follows (unless otherwise noted):

- (i) to conserve fish and wildlife populations and habitats in their natural diversity, including, but not limited to, moose, bears, mountain goats, Dall sheep, wolves and other furbearers, salmonoids and other fish, waterfowl and other migratory and nonmigratory birds;
- (ii) to fulfill the international treaty obligations of the United States with respect to fish and wildlife and their habitats;
- (iii) 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;
- (iv) to provide in a manner consistent with subparagraphs (i) and (ii), opportunities for scientific research, interpretation, environmental education, and land management training;
- (v) to provide, in a manner compatible with these purposes, opportunities for fish and wildlife-oriented recreation; and
- (vi) [Supplemental Purpose—The Wilderness Act of 1964—Public Law 88-577] to secure an enduring resource of wilderness, to protect and preserve the wilderness character of areas within the National Wilderness Preservation System, and to administer [the areas] for the use and enjoyment of the American people in a way that will leave them unimpaired for future use and enjoyment as wilderness.

Our Vision of Kenai National Wildlife Refuge

The Kenai National Wildlife Refuge will enhance the quality of life on the Kenai Peninsula by sustaining the ecological integrity of the Cook Inlet Basin during threatening global climate change, increasing development, and competing demands for refuge resources. It will be the anchor for biodiversity on the peninsula and will be a haven for all wildlife and habitats native to this phenomenal land we call “The Kenai.”

Refuge staff and partners will work together to employ the best of what science, technology, and human sweat and determination have to offer to ensure that management activities promote biological health and minimize negative human impacts. Together we will achieve excellence in land stewardship, and the refuge and the communities it serves will be recognized throughout the world as leaders in wildlife and wilderness conservation.

We will ensure an enduring legacy of plant and wildlife populations for people to enjoy today and in the future. By means of a wide spectrum of wildlife-dependent recreation opportunities, facilities, and interpretive and educational programs that encourage informed and ethical use of the refuge’s natural resources, visitors will feel welcomed and safe and will experience, appreciate, and enjoy the attributes that define Alaska—an abundance of wildlife in a natural setting, breathtaking scenery, and opportunities to experience the Last Frontier.

Goals

The following goals have been revised, based on input from the public, since their publication in the *Summer Planning Update*. The *Revised Comprehensive Conservation Plan* adopted as a result of this planning effort will direct Refuge staff to work toward these goals.

Goal 1: Research

Increase our knowledge of fish, wildlife, and plant populations; ecosystems; and dynamic processes on refuge lands and waters.

Goal 2: Conservation and Management

Ensure natural diversity and viability of refuge species, habitats, and ecosystems.

Goal 3: Resource Assessment

Ensure that the integrity of ecological systems is protected and unimpaired for future generations.

Goal 4: Water Resources

Ensure natural function and condition of water resources necessary to conserve fish and wildlife populations and habitats in their natural diversity.

Goal 5: Training and Education

Natural resource professionals, students, and the visiting public value opportunities to increase their knowledge of refuge ecosystems and management practices.

Subgoal 5.1: Land Management Training

Land managers, scientists, and other partners learn practices and techniques to study, manage, and monitor the boreal forest biome.

Subgoal 5.2: Interpretation and Environmental Education

Diverse audiences understand and appreciate all management programs and support the refuge’s efforts to maintain and enhance wildlife populations and habitats.

Goal 6: Cultural Resources

Alaskans and other Refuge visitors appreciate conservation of cultural and archaeological resources.

Goal 7: Wildlife-Oriented Recreation

Visitors of all skills and abilities enjoy wildlife-related recreation opportunities in safe and secure settings.

Goal 8: Facilities

Visitors and refuge personnel value and enjoy safe, well-maintained facilities and quality programs.

Goal 9: Wilderness Stewardship

Preserve and, where necessary, restore the character and integrity of Wilderness for present and future generations.

Summary of Scoping: Identification of Significant Issues

In an effort to recruit public involvement in the planning process, we distributed 3,100 Issue Workbooks to individuals on our mailing list, established an e-mail address for the public to use in contacting us, and hosted five open-house meetings in local communities on the Kenai Peninsula and in the City of Anchorage.

At least 100 people attended public open-house meetings, and more than half of the 314 responses received during scoping were generated during those meetings. Public comments covered a broad spectrum of concerns. The planning team reviewed them, identified 13 significant planning issues, and categorized them under five broad issue questions.

Presentation of Preliminary Management Alternatives

The planning team developed three preliminary management alternatives, in addition to Alternative A: Current Management. These alternatives, which

represent different management approaches to address issues identified during scoping, were developed within the framework of legal mandates, refuge purposes, and refuge goals.

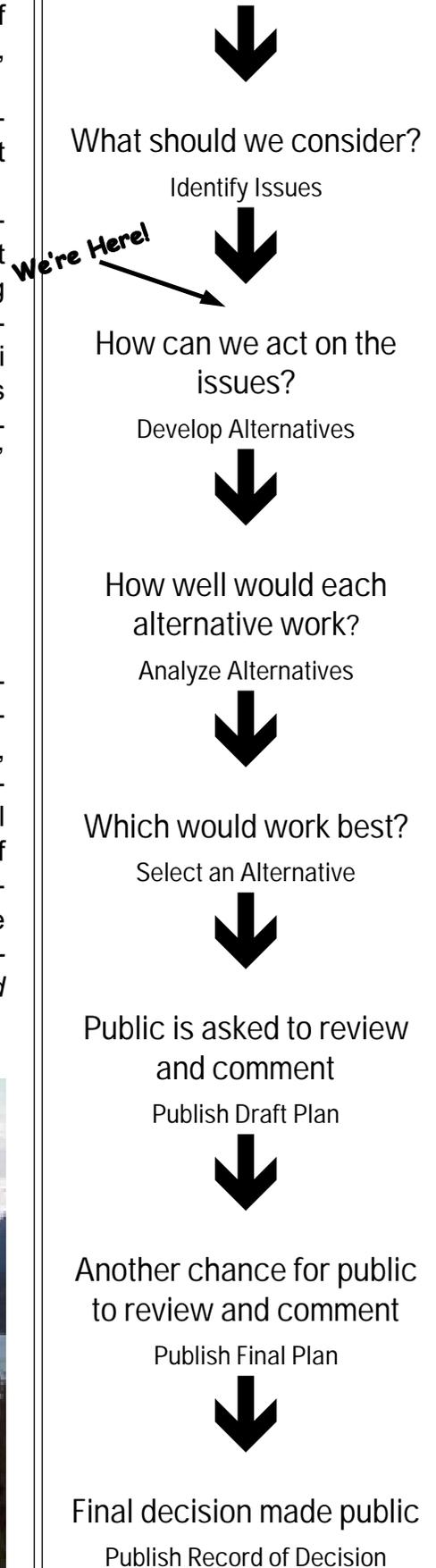
A comparison table summarizing the preliminary management alternatives is on the following pages. We invite you to provide input on these management alternatives, including indicating those you believe most appropriate for the future of the Kenai Refuge. At this time, no decisions have been made concerning selection of a "preferred alternative."

Next Steps— Environmental Impact Analysis and Selection of Proposed Action

Once the planning team receives your comments on the preliminary management alternatives, we will develop a final range of alternatives, assess the beneficial and detrimental effects of each of them, and select a Proposed Action, which will be presented in the *Refuge's Draft Revised Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Impact Statement*.



Steps of the Planning Process



Preliminary Management Alternatives

The following table contains abbreviated descriptions of the preliminary management alternatives developed to address significant planning issues that were identified during scoping. The full description of the alternatives will be provided in the *DRAFT Revised Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Impact Statement*. Once you have finished reviewing the alternatives, click on the following link <<http://alaska.fws.gov/nwr/planning/KenaiPMA.cfm>> to provide comments electronically.

	Alternative A: Current Management	Alternative B	Alternative C	Alternative D
Issue 1. How will the Refuge address large-scale habitat changes and the use of fire?				
Fire Management (Prescribed Fire and Wildland Fire)	Prescribed fire allowed in Intensive and Moderate land management categories (LMCs); use of wildland fire allowed in all LMCs except Intensive	Prescribed fire allowed in Minimal LMCs not adjoining designated Wilderness; use of wildland fire allowed in all LMCs except in Intensive and Moderate	Prescribed fire allowed in all LMCs except Wilderness; use of wildland fire allowed in all LMCs; use emphasized in Minimal LMC and is default action in Wilderness	Prescribed fire allowed in all LMCs; use of wildland fire will be allowed and is default management action in all LMCs except Intensive
Land Management Categories	Five LMCs: Intensive, Moderate, Traditional, Minimal, and Wilderness	Convert Traditional lands to Moderate and Minimal LMCs	Convert Traditional lands to the Minimal LMC	Convert Traditional and Moderate lands to the Minimal LMC
Issue 2. How will the Refuge manage facilities for public use while ensuring natural resources protection?				
Beaver Creek Oil and Gas Unit	All roads, pipelines and facilities removed and sites restored except some roads retained for possible public and administrative uses; bicycles not allowed; camping facilities not provided	All roads, pipelines and facilities removed and sites restored; bicycles not allowed; camping facilities not provided	Most existing roads converted to trails for pedestrian and horse use; all pipelines and facilities removed and sites restored; bicycles not allowed; as many as two primitive camping areas constructed	Most existing roads would be maintained for public and administrative uses; most pipelines and facilities removed and sites restored except some facilities retained for administrative uses; bicycles allowed; as many as one developed campground constructed
Swanson River Oil and Gas Unit	All roads, pipelines and facilities removed and sites restored except some roads retained for possible public and administrative uses; bicycles not allowed; camping facilities not provided	All roads, pipelines and facilities removed and sites restored; bicycles not allowed; camping facilities not provided	Most existing roads would be converted to trails for pedestrian and horse use; all pipelines and facilities removed and sites restored; bicycles not allowed; as many as five primitive camping areas constructed	Most existing roads would be maintained for public and administrative uses; most pipelines and facilities removed and sites restored except some facilities retained for administrative uses; bicycles allowed; as many as two developed campgrounds constructed

	Alternative A: Current Management	Alternative B	Alternative C	Alternative D
Mystery Creek Road and Pipeline Corridor	Unimproved road to Alaska Pipeline corridor maintained by ENSTAR; vehicular use allowed from August 9 until snow cover; pedestrian, horse, and snowmachine access allowed; bicycles allowed generally from August 9 until snow cover; road and pipeline corridor restored after life of project	Same as Alternative A, except industrial vehicular use allowed, public vehicular and bicycle use not allowed	Unimproved road to Alaska Pipeline corridor maintained by ENSTAR; vehicular and bicycle use allowed from August 9 to November 30 for life of the project; pedestrian, horse, and snowmachine access allowed; road and pipeline corridor improvements limited; primitive experience ensured; re-evaluate public use and restoration efforts after life of project	Unimproved road to Alaska Pipeline corridor maintained by ENSTAR; increased maintenance to provide for additional vehicular use; vehicular use allowed from July 1 to November 30; pedestrian, horse, and snowmachine use allowed; bicycles allowed from May 1 to November 30; road and pipeline improvements conducted to enhance public access during and after life of project
Ski Hill Road Maintenance and Access	Irregular state maintenance of gravel road; routine Refuge plowing and grading; northern and southern entrances open to pedestrian, bicycle, and vehicular use	Regular Refuge maintenance of gravel road; northern and southern entrances open to pedestrian, bicycle, and vehicular use	Year-round Refuge maintenance; improve southern entrance and hard-surface road; northern entrance to remain gravel and open to pedestrian, bicycle, and emergency vehicles only	Same as Alternative C plus construct a pedestrian and bicycle trail along side of the southern entrance route
Skilak Loop Road Maintenance	Limited state maintenance of gravel road	Regular Refuge maintenance of gravel road	Year-round Refuge maintenance; widen hazardous sections and harden surface (e.g., chip seal)	Year-round Refuge maintenance; widen entire route and asphalt.
Sterling Highway Pullout	Pullout serves as a defacto rest stop without facilities or maintenance	Eliminate and rehabilitate site	Develop site as a formal rest area	Eliminate and rehabilitate site; evaluate appropriate location for formal rest area
Trail Maintenance and Planning	Maintenance decisions driven by availability of funding	Develop and implement annual trail maintenance plans	Same as Alternative B plus develop trail standards	Same as Alternative C plus conduct a needs assessment and develop new trails as recommended
Issue 3. How will the Refuge enhance wildlife-oriented recreation opportunities?				
Personal Collection of Natural Resources	Generally prohibited	Allow collection of edible plants; one skull with or without horns or antlers and one detached horn or antler per person per year	Allow collection of edible plants; one skull with or without horns or antlers and three detached horns or antlers per person per year	Allow collection of edible plants; two skulls with or without horns or antlers and eight detached horns or antlers per person per year

	Alternative A: Current Management	Alternative B	Alternative C	Alternative D
Wildlife Viewing Opportunities	Opportunities and facilities limited; habitat projects with associated facilities not provided	Improve existing facilities (e.g., pullouts, waysides) only	Improve existing facilities and develop new facilities (e.g., overlooks, towers, blinds, boardwalks)	Improve existing facilities and develop new habitat projects with associated facilities
Issue 4. How will the Refuge manage increasing public use to ensure resource and visitor experience protection?				
Swan Lake and Swanson River Canoe System Crowding	Party size limited to 15 individuals without special use permit; self-registration is required; dispersed camping allowed	Same as Alternative A plus increase enforcement of registration requirement; conduct a Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC) planning process to establish indicators, standards, and management actions.	Same as Alternative A plus campsites monitored for impacts and managed as needed; human waste regulations will be imposed	Party size limited to 15; camping allowed in designated sites only; reservations required; outhouses may be provided at designated campsites
Kenai River Crowding: Upper River (Russian River to Skilak Lake)				
General Public Use (Boating and Fishing)	Allowed without restriction on number of users	Initiate a cooperative effort to reevaluate indicators, standards, and management actions identified in 1997 Upper River Interagency Cooperative Plan; modify and implement as needed	Implement management actions identified in 1997 Upper River Interagency Cooperative Plan regardless of other agencies participation	Implement a limited permit program for all floating and fishing trips between Sportsman s and Jim s landings; program specifics will be determined by a public rulemaking process
Sport Fishing Guides	Special use permits required; limited to 20 permits issued; each permit allows 10 starts per week with no more than 4 starts per day	Special use permits required; limited to 20 permits issued; further manage timing of current level of boats and starts	Same as Alternative A but special use permits limited through attrition to 18 permits	Same as Alternative A but special use permits limited through attrition to 15 permits
Sport Fishing Guides (Incidental Use Permits)	State-licensed guides not having Refuge permits may be issued incidental permits for as many as three trips per year (subject to quotas and blackout dates)	Same as Alternative A except limit permits to 1 trip per year	Same as Alternative A except restrict number of permits issued by establishing additional blackout dates and quotas	Eliminate the incidental permit program entirely
Scenic Float-Trip Guides	Special use permits limited to 17; no limit imposed on number of trip starts or clients	Same as Alternative A except limit permittees to their highest annual client days reported during the last 5 years, plus 10% increase (or minimum allocation of 100 client days)	Same as Alternative A except limit permittees to their highest annual client days reported during the last 3 years	Same as Alternative A, except 1 special use permits limited to 15 permits

	Alternative A: Current Management	Alternative B	Alternative C	Alternative D
Dispersed Camping	Allowed for as many as 14 days, except closed within one-quarter mile of Sterling Highway	Same as Alternative A, except camping within 100 yards of river limited to 24 hours within any 14 day period	Not allowed within 100 yards of the river	Same as Alternative B plus camping within 1 mile of the inlet or outlet of river and Skilak Lake not to exceed 48 hours within any 14-day period
<u>Kenai River Crowding: Middle Kenai River (Skilak Lake to Refuge Boundary)</u>				
General Public Use (Boating and Fishing)	Allowed without restriction on number of users	Same as Alternative A	Same as Alternative A, plus conduct LAC process to identify indicators, standards, and management actions	Implement a limited permit program; program specifics would be determined by a public rulemaking process
Sportfishing Guides	Permits issued without limit; no limits on number of starts	Upon conclusion of the Kenai River—wide guide-limitation process, evaluate need for implementing a permitting process similar to upper river	Limit number of permits to current number of permittees; grandfather existing permittees	Limit number of permits to 20 by competitive process; also, manage timing of current level of boats and starts
Issue 5. How will the Refuge balance motorized and nonmotorized use with resource and visitor experience protection?				
Aircraft Access to Lakes in Designated Wilderness	Access allowed on 48 lakes (some with seasonal restrictions)	Close access to 1 additional lake, plus conduct an environmental assessment of aircraft use and impacts to wildlife	Open access to 4 additional lakes	Open access to 17 additional lakes, plus allow earlier access (September 10 rather than September 30) to 4 lakes
Aircraft Access to Chickaloon Flats	Limited to 3 upland landing zones, 1 landing strip, and designated beach and floatplane landing areas	Same as Alternative A plus allow wheeled aircraft to land on unvegetated portions of Chickaloon Bay tide line	Same as Alternative B plus conduct regular maintenance on Big Indian airstrip	Same as Alternative C, plus allow access September 1—December 15 on approximately 20 square miles of the flats
Snowmachine Access	Authorized in designated areas December 1—April 30 when snow cover permits	Same as Alternative A, plus evaluate the effects of snowmachines on wildlife and habitats; monitor levels and patterns of use	Same as Alternative B plus allow different zones to be opened December 1—April 30 at various times when snow cover permits	Same as Alternative C, except eliminate the December 1—April 30 dates; allow use in various zones when snow cover permits
Game Cart Use	Not allowed	Allowed to retrieve harvested game on designated industrial roads	Allowed to retrieve harvested game on all designated Refuge roads	Same as Alternative C, plus allowed on designated non-Wilderness trails
Canoe Carrier Use	Not allowed	Same as Alternative A	Allowed on designated non-Wilderness trails originating from Swanson River Road	Allowed on designated non-Wilderness trails Refuge-wide

Now that you have completed your review of the alternatives, click on the following link <<http://alaska.fws.gov/nwr/planning/KenaiPMA.cfm>> to provide your comments electronically.

How to Contact Us

You are always welcome to write, fax or e-mail your comments or questions to

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The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service:

Part of the U.S. Department of Interior, the Fish & Wildlife Service is the principal federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting, and enhancing the nation's fish and wildlife populations and their habitats for the benefit of all people. It has responsibility for migratory birds and fish, endangered species, and certain marine mammals. The Fish & Wildlife Service also manages the National Wildlife Refuge System, the world's largest collection of lands set aside specially for protection of fish and wildlife populations and habitats. Today there are more than 500 refuges spread from Alaska to Puerto Rico, from Maine to Hawaii. Varying in size from one-half acre to thousands of square miles, they include more than 90 million acres of the nation's best wildlife habitat. The vast majority of these lands are in Alaska.

The National Wildlife Refuge System Mission

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 of the United States of the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.