5. Evaluation of the Alternatives

5.1 Evaluation Criteria

The alternatives were evaluated against six criteria based on existing policy and law. These criteria were selected as being the most important factors to be used in selecting the preferred alternative. Following are these criteria, in order of importance:

1. How well does the alternative satisfy the purposes of the Togiak Refuge and Alaska Maritime Refuge and other provisions of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA)?
2. How well does the alternative satisfy the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System?
3. How well does the Alternative contribute to meeting the goals of the Refuge?
4. How does the alternative address the issues identified during scoping?
5. How well does the alternative maintain biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health at the Refuges- and ecosystem-scale and contribute to managing the Refuges as part of an ecosystem?

The differences among the alternatives are relatively small. Each action alternative varies slightly from the current management direction; therefore, differences in meeting the evaluation criteria are slight. Alternatives that would clearly not meet the purposes of the Refuges or System mission were not developed.

The most important criterion used in evaluating the alternatives is the degree to which the alternatives achieve the purposes of the Refuges as mandated by ANILCA. Chapter 4 of the Public Use Management Plan (PUMP) describes the physical, biological, and socioeconomic impacts of each of the alternatives and provides a summary of the projected changes.

5.2 Response to Refuge Purposes

While some plan alternatives will be more effective than others, all alternatives will:

i) conserve fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats in their natural diversity

ii) fulfill the international treaty obligations of the United States with respect to fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats

iii) provide, in a manner consistent with (i) and (ii), the opportunity for continued subsistence uses by local residents

iv) provide, in a manner consistent with (i) and (ii), a program of national and international scientific research on marine resources of the Hagemeister Island portion of Alaska Maritime Refuge

v) ensure, to the maximum extent practicable and in a manner consistent with (i), water quality and necessary water quantity with the Refuges

[Togiak Wilderness Area] secure an enduring resource of wilderness, to protect and preserve the wilderness character of the area and to administer this wilderness for the use and enjoyment of the American people in a way that will leave it unimpaired for future use and enjoyment as wilderness

Alternative E provides the highest level of protection for Refuge resources. The apparent naturalness of the Togiak Wilderness Area would be improved with the removal of existing permanent structures located within the Wilderness Area. Reduced recreational use under Alternative E would provide the greatest amount of wilderness solitude.

Alternative B would provide slightly less protection than Alternative E, followed by Alternatives C (the preferred alternative), A (no action), and Alternative D (which, when compared with the other four alternatives, responds least to Togiak Refuge purposes).

Alternatives A (no action) and D provide the least amount of protection of Wilderness values through increased visitation in the Togiak Wilderness. Alternatives B and C (the preferred alternative) will allow some additional competition from recreational users; therefore, subsistence opportunities under these alternatives will fall between Alternative E, and Alternatives A (no action) or D.

5.3 Response to National Wildlife Refuge System Mission

All alternatives were developed with the Refuge System Mission in mind, and all contribute to fulfilling that mission. The Refuges play a part in supporting migratory birds, salmon, waterfowl, shorebirds, and marine mammals that migrate far from the Refuges and even from the state. Many other species (e.g., brown bears, caribou, and moose) use the Refuges for part of the year and migrate to other areas seasonally.

5.4 Response to Refuge Goals

All alternatives support the Refuge goals proposed in the Comprehensive Conservation Plan presented earlier in this document.

5.5 Response to Issues

5.5.1 Public Use at Cape Peirce Wildlife Viewing Area and Public Facilities at Sangor Lake

All alternatives will maintain a low-disturbance environment to protect sensitive wildlife species. Alternatives C (the preferred alternative), D, and E will provide increased wildlife-viewing opportunities. Alternatives A (no action) and B will maintain existing wildlife-viewing opportunities. Alternatives A (no action), B, and E and will provide the greatest amount of visitor safety and comfort through facilities development. Alternatives A (no action) and D will not provide an equitable allocation between air-taxi operators and wildlife-viewing guides for future visitation to the area as access continues on a first-come, first-served basis.

5.5.2 Unguided Recreational Opportunities in the Kanektok and Goodnews River Watersheds

Alternative E provides the most opportunities for wilderness solitude but will also provide the fewest number of recreational opportunities. Alternative A (no action) and D both provide for several additional recreational opportunities but will provide the fewest opportunities for outstanding wilderness solitude through increased visitation and commercial motorized use within the Togiak Wilderness Area. Alternatives B and C (the preferred alternative) will maintain current wilderness conditions and opportunities for wilderness solitude but will slightly reduce the potential for added recreational opportunities in the future. Current recreational opportunities would be maintained as part of Alternatives B and C (the preferred alternative).

5.5.3 Waste Management

Alternative E will immediately reduce, through direct management actions, impacts related to improper disposal of human waste and will best address this issue over the short and long term. Alternative C (the preferred alternative) will work toward a voluntary pack-out program which may avoid additional regulations and improve conditions within the Togiak Refuge in the long-term. Alternatives B and D will also address the issue over the long term through increased monitoring and established standards but will only implement increased visitor

education and outreach in the short term. Alternative A (no action) is least effective in responding to this issue through increased visitor education and outreach.

5.5.4 Commercial Sport Fishing in the Goodnews, Togiak, Osviak, and Matogak River Watersheds

Alternative D provides the greatest number of commercially guided sport fishing opportunities through additional special use permits for the Goodnews, Togiak, Osviak, and Matogak river watersheds. Alternatives A (no action) and E provide no additional opportunities. Alternative B provides only a few more opportunities than does Alternative A (no action). Alternative C (the preferred alternative) provides a moderate number of additional commercial sport fishing opportunities, with the amount falling between Alternatives B and D.

5.6 Biological Integrity and Ecosystem Management

The Service policy on maintaining the biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of the National Wildlife Refuge System ecosystem provides refuge managers with direction to follow while achieving refuge purposes. The policy also provides an evaluation process to analyze refuges and, through the planning and compatibility processes, to set appropriate management direction to maintain and, where appropriate, restore biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health. Ecosystem management is more a way of thinking than an end product. It embodies the concepts of a constantly changing landscape where humans play a part, influence the ecosystem, and have a role in decisions affecting the land. To understand the effects of an action, the manager must look at it from scales both larger and smaller than the refuge. Ecosystem management requires the manager to look at the long-term effects of actions and to think in terms of years and decades.

Each of the alternatives provides management direction that maintains the biotic and abiotic conditions on the Refuges within historic ranges. All alternatives maintain the biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of the Refuges and integrate scientific knowledge into the management of the Refuge. Natural processes are the dominant force at work within the Refuges.

Human activities are predominantly related to hunting and fishing and are managed by state regulations and Federal Subsistence regulations.

Ecosystem goals for the ecoregions encompassing the Refuges have not been developed. When they are developed, it will be possible to display the role the Refuges play in contributing to meeting those ecosystems goals.