

## COMPATIBILITY DETERMINATION

**Use:** Wildlife Viewing, Photography, Environmental Education, and Environmental Interpretation (wildlife-dependent recreation)

**Refuge Name:** Alaska Peninsula and Becharof National Wildlife Refuges, King Salmon, Alaska

### **Establishing and Acquisition Authority(ies)**

In 1978, President Jimmy Carter established the 1,157,000-acre Becharof National Wildlife Monument with Presidential Proclamation 4613. The monument was established from lands in the public domain to protect the area, notably the unique brown bear denning islands in the Island Arm area of Becharof Lake.

In 1980, the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) (§302) established the Alaska Peninsula National Wildlife Refuge and changed the Becharof National Wildlife Monument into a national wildlife refuge as part of the National Wildlife Refuge System. ANILCA (§303[1]) created the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge by redesignating 11 pre-existing refuges as units of the new refuge and by adding other public lands on islands, islets, rocks, reefs, spires, and designated capes and headlands in the coastal areas and adjacent seas of Alaska.

In 1983, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) decided to manage the Ugashik and Chignik units of Alaska Peninsula Refuge, the 9,900-acre Seal Cape area of Alaska Maritime Refuge, and Becharof Refuge as a “complex” because they share resources and resource issues. Management of the Pavlof and North Creek units of the Alaska Peninsula Refuge was shifted to the Izembek Refuge because distance and weather create barriers accessing them from King Salmon.

The Becharof Wilderness Area of the Becharof Refuge was designated in 1980 by ANILCA (§702 [4]).

### **Refuge Purpose(s)**

ANILCA sets out the purposes for each refuge in Alaska. The purposes of the Alaska Peninsula and Becharof National Wildlife Refuges are described in Section 302(1)(B) and Section 302(2)(B). Purposes for the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge are described in Section 303(1)(B). These purposes identify the reasons why Congress established the Refuges and establish management priorities.

The purposes of the Alaska Peninsula and Becharof Refuges are follows (unless otherwise noted, the purposes apply to all units of the Refuges):

- to conserve fish and wildlife populations and habitats in their natural diversity including, but not limited to . . .  
[Becharof] . . . brown bears, salmon, migratory birds, the Alaska Peninsula Caribou herd, and marine birds and mammals  
[Alaska Peninsula] . . . brown bears, the Alaska Peninsula caribou herd, moose, sea otters and other marine mammals, shorebirds and other migratory birds, raptors, including bald eagles and peregrine falcons, and salmonids and other fish

[Alaska Maritime] . . . marine mammals, marine birds and other migratory birds, the marine resources upon which they rely, bears, caribou and other mammals

- to fulfill the international treaty obligations of the United States with respect to fish and wildlife and their habitats
- to provide, in a manner consistent with the purposes set forth above, the opportunity for continued subsistence uses by local residents
- [Alaska Maritime] to provide, in a manner consistent with the purposes set forth above, a program of national and international scientific research on marine resources
- to ensure, to the maximum extent practicable and in a manner consistent with the purposes set forth above, water quality and necessary water quantity within the refuge

[Supplemental Purposes of the Becharof Wilderness Area] The Wilderness Act of 1964 (16 U.S.C. 1131-1136 § 2a) defines supplemental purposes of all designated wilderness areas. These apply to the Becharof Wilderness Area and are as follows:

- to administer the wilderness for the use and enjoyment of the American people in such a manner as will leave it unimpaired for future use and enjoyment as wilderness; to provide for the protection of the area, for the preservation of its wilderness character, and for gathering and dissemination of information regarding its use and enjoyment as 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, as amended [16 U.S.C. 668dd-668ee]).

### **Description of Use(s)**

The Refuges provide excellent opportunities for “Big Six” wildlife-dependent, priority public uses, which are hunting, fishing, wildlife viewing, wildlife photography, and environmental education and interpretation. These activities predate refuge establishment in 1980. They occur throughout the Refuges and throughout the year. Hunting and fishing are discussed in other, separate compatibility determinations.

Associated activities such as camping, backpacking, hiking, and other incidental uses are considered part of these wildlife-dependent activities.

Recreational settings on the Refuges are remote and not accessible by road. Traditional forms of access for all areas on the Refuges include fixed-wing aircraft, motorboat, snowmachine, off-road vehicle (on designated trails in the Yantarni Moderate Management Area), nonpowered boats, dogsled, foot, snowshoes, cross-country skis, and other nonmotorized means. However, the vast majority of the visitors participating in these activities access the Refuges by commercial air taxi. The most common means of access by the relatively few recreational users not using commercial transporters (air

taxis) are private aircraft and boats. Use of helicopters, jet-powered watercraft, and airboats is specifically excluded from this evaluation.

Wildlife viewing and photography primarily occur incidentally to hunting and fishing activities. Increased use of the Refuges for ecotourism activities (which would include wildlife viewing) projected by the previous Public Use Management Plan have not occurred. Camping usually occurs for periods of several days. Camps range from small, backpack-type tent camps to larger, multiperson, fully equipped wall tents.

Because of the lack of developed visitor facilities on the Refuges, interpretive and education efforts occur primarily off-refuge in King Salmon or in surrounding villages. The Refuges' public-use staff manages and operates the King Salmon Interagency Visitor Center in cooperation with the National Park Service, Bristol Bay Borough, and Lake and Peninsula Borough. The center is located in a leased building at the airport in King Salmon. During 2000, more than 13,000 people visited the center. Visitors from 43 states and 21 countries signed the guest register, reflecting the national and international appeal of the area's attractions and opportunities.

The visitor center contains a number of interpretive displays and exhibits, a theater, an interactive computer, and a bookstore sponsored by the Alaska Natural History Association. Exhibit topics include common fish of the Alaska Peninsula used for recreational purposes, birds, wildlife, Native peoples, and local history of the Alaska Peninsula. The center also contains a resource-lending library, which makes available books, videotapes, and audiovisual materials on natural and cultural resources.

The Refuges have an active education and outreach program. Environmental education programs focus on the National Wildlife Refuge System, the purposes for which the Refuges were established, and significant resource-management issues. The Refuges also promote conservation of geese and waterfowl through the Western Alaska Goose Calendar Contest and the Alaska Junior Federal Duck Stamp Contest. Other topics have included predator-prey relationships and the conservation of bears, birds, caribou, moose, and marine mammals. Refuge public-use staff typically give 65-100 educational programs annually in 12 villages, working with more than 600 students. The Refuges conduct additional programs and activities for special events and occasions such as National Wildlife Refuge Week, National Wildlife Week, International Migratory Bird Day, and National Fishing Week.

In cooperation with numerous other entities, the Refuges conduct a week-long residential camp—"Spirit of Becharof Lake" Ecosystem Science Camp—for area high school students. Facilities are located within the Becharof Wilderness Area on the Becharof National Wildlife Refuge. Sessions integrate western science methodology with traditional local knowledge .

### **Availability of Resources**

Adequate refuge personnel and base operational funds are available to manage on-refuge wildlife-dependent recreational activities at existing and projected levels. Administrative staff time primarily involves phone conversations, written correspondence, and interaction with visitors at the visitor center. There is additional work entering activity data into a database. Field work (as many as 5 staff days) associated with administering the program related to wildlife viewing and photography primarily involves monitoring

recreational users' compliance with state and federal regulations. The only environmental education and interpretation occurring on the Refuges and under the scope of this compatibility determination are in conjunction with the annually conducted five-day long "Spirit of Becharof" science camp. The refuge contributes \$17,000 to fund this camp in cooperation with the local school districts and several of contributing partners.

### **Anticipated Impacts of the Use(s)**

Regulations, combined with law-enforcement efforts of state and refuge personnel, minimize impacts of wildlife-dependent uses on fish and wildlife, other refuge resources, other refuge users, and wilderness values.

As stated previously, the vast majority of the recreational users access the Refuges using commercial air taxis, which predominantly land on lakes and rivers using float-equipped aircraft. Impacts associated with transporter access are discussed in a separate compatibility determination specific to that use. Although users who access the Refuges by personal transport also use float planes, use of boats and wheeled planes is more common. Because of river access by boats, types of landing areas used by aircraft, and the relatively low overall levels of use and access, impacts to refuge habitats are minimized. A potential impact or threat associated with floatplane access is the introduction of invasive species carried on the aircraft floats, although this has not been known to have happened on the Alaska Peninsula to date. Wheeled planes land on existing, un-maintained landing strips, gravel bars, and un-vegetated sand or cinder blows. Occasionally, landings are made on vegetated lowland tundra, usually with Piper Super Cubs or other light aircraft equipped with tundra tires. Disturbance to vegetation is minimal and short-term unless repeated landings are made in exactly the same location (this practice has not been observed to date). Temporary displacement and/or disturbance of wildlife can occur during take-offs and landings. There is no known long-term impact to refuge wildlife populations from this disturbance.

The use of off-road vehicles (for other than subsistence purposes) by subject users is prohibited on the Refuges except on three designated trails in the Yantarni Moderate Management Area. Regulations promulgated in 1995 allow three- or four-wheeled vehicles having a gross weight of 650 pounds or less for general public use on these designated trails. The trails are on an existing gravel airstrip and roads that were constructed for oil exploration prior to the Refuges' establishment. The use of off-road vehicles on these trails by nonlocal or unguided recreationists is not known to have occurred. Very little future use is anticipated because of the expense of transporting off-road vehicles to this very remote location. Even if future use were to occur at moderate levels, there is little potential for soil and other resource damage because the trails are located on existing gravel roads and the airstrip (with the exception of a short stretch where the airstrip has been naturally eroded away by a change in course of a nearby stream).

Observation of and conversations with recreational visitors in the field takes place as part of routine patrols and during site-specific public-use studies, such as the public-use and creel surveys conducted in recent years at Ugashik Narrows, Becharof Outlet, and Island Arm.

All recreational uses occur to some degree within the designated Becharof Wilderness Area, located in the southeastern portion of the Becharof Refuge. Very few trips solely for wildlife viewing and photography are made to the area. Nearly all environmental education and interpretation activities take place off the Refuges, creating no adverse impacts. The “Spirit of Becharof” science camp is the only organized environmental education event being conducted within the Wilderness Area. The current low and projected numbers of wildlife-dependent recreational visitors and activities to the Becharof Wilderness Area for environmental education and interpretation purposes should not significantly affect solitude and other wilderness values.

In summary, the magnitude of use related to wildlife viewing and photography, environmental education and interpretation is not likely to change in the near future, and there will continue to be negligible direct or indirect effects on the refuge.

### **Public Review and Comment**

The public was invited to comment on this compatibility determination and a number of other determinations during the public review period established for the draft revised Comprehensive Conservation Plan. Public notice of the availability of the draft conservation plan and draft determinations was published in the Federal Register. The draft determinations were also posted on the Region 7 Refuge Conservation Planning and Policy Web pages. No substantive public comments pertaining to this determination were received. Where appropriate, comments addressing elements of the draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan revision that pertained to the specific uses evaluated in this determination were considered in preparing the final compatibility determination.

### **Determination**

Use is Not Compatible

Use is Compatible

### **Stipulations Necessary to Ensure Compatibility**

Management direction provided in the revised Comprehensive Conservation Plan for the Refuges will be implemented. This includes provisions for adequate monitoring of the wildlife-dependent recreational activities. Findings from these monitoring efforts will be used to determine what additional management actions, if any, are needed to ensure all wildlife-dependant recreational activities remain compatible with refuge purposes.

The following stipulations apply to special-use permits issued for wildlife-dependent recreation (wildlife viewing, photography, environmental education, and interpretation). To minimize impacts on refuge lands and resources, law-enforcement patrols will routinely be conducted in an effort to maximize compliance with policies, rules, and regulations.

- All activities will be monitored by the refuge manager to ensure that wildlife-dependent recreation and its impacts remain compatible with refuge purposes.
- Participants will be monitored to ensure that permitted activities are conducted in compliance with refuge regulations.

## Appendix H: Compatibility Determinations: Wildlife Viewing, Photography, Environmental Education and Interpretation

- The construction or clearing of landing strips or pads is prohibited. Incidental hand removal of rocks and other minor obstructions may be permitted.
- The operation of aircraft at altitudes and in flight paths resulting in the herding, harassment, hazing, or driving of wildlife is prohibited. It is recommended that all aircraft, except for take-off and landing, maintain a minimum altitude of 2,000 feet above ground level.
- Any problem with wildlife and/or animals taken in defense of life or property must be reported immediately to the refuge manager and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game; animals taken in defense of life or property must be salvaged in accordance with state regulations.
- In accordance with the Archaeological Resources Protection Act (16 USC 470aa), the excavation, disturbance, collection, or purchase of historical, recent, ethnological, or archaeological specimens or artifacts is prohibited.
- Construction of cabins or other permanent structures is prohibited.
- The use of helicopters is prohibited unless specifically authorized in writing in the permit.

### Justification

All refuge lands in the Alaska Peninsula and Becharof Refuges are open to general public access unless specifically closed. The National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1997, as amended, (§5) identifies wildlife-dependent recreation as priority public uses of the System. These are defined as uses of a refuge involving hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation. These uses are generally encouraged and are to receive emphasis in management of public uses of the Refuges.

Over the past 24 years, means of access—including aircraft, motorboats, and snowmachines for traditional activities as provided by ANILCA and as currently regulated by the Service—have not materially interfered with or detracted from refuge purposes. Should the amount of motorized transportation grow to levels such that it interferes with refuge purposes, steps would be taken to bring the use under control.

To protect and manage land and wildlife resources for the benefit of the American people is part of the Refuge System's mission. It is important to provide the opportunity, when possible, for the public to visit the Refuges, allowing them to observe wildlife and its habitats in the simplest and most basic form. The Refuges provide an incredible opportunity to function as an outdoor classroom, promoting an awareness of ecological functions and the interrelationship between human activities and the natural system, and to educate and motivate future generations of people so that they effectively support wildlife conservation. For many, the only opportunity to gain that experience will be on a national wildlife refuge. The current and projected levels of wildlife-dependent recreational activities (wildlife observation, wildlife photography, environmental education, and interpretation) occurring on the Refuges are very low. After fully considering the impacts of this activity, as described previously in the "Anticipated Impacts" section of this compatibility determination, it is my determination that wildlife viewing and photography, environmental education, and environmental interpretation

**Appendix H: Compatibility Determinations: Wildlife Viewing, Photography,  
Environmental Education and Interpretation**

**Mandatory 10-Year Re-Evaluation Date** (provide month and year for allowed uses only): NA

**Mandatory 15-Year Re-Evaluation Date** (for priority public uses): January 2020

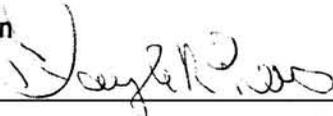
**NEPA Compliance for Refuge Use Decision**

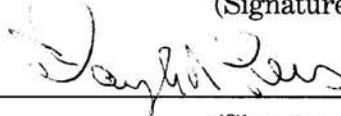
- Categorical Exclusion without Environmental Action Memorandum
- Categorical Exclusions and Environmental Action Memorandum
- Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact
- Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision

**Supporting Documents**

- USFWS. 1994. Final Alaska Peninsula/Becharof National Wildlife Refuge Complex Public Use Management Plan, March 1, 1994. Anchorage, Alaska: U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.
- USFWS. 1994. Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact, Alaska Peninsula/Becharof National Wildlife Refuge Complex Public Use Management Plan, May 12, 1994. Anchorage, Alaska: U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.
- USFWS. 1994. Compatibility Determination, Final Public Use Management Plan, Alaska Peninsula/Becharof National Wildlife Refuge Complex, May 16, 1994. Anchorage, Alaska: U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.
- USFWS. 2004. Draft Revised Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Impact Statement: Alaska Peninsula and Becharof National Wildlife Refuges. Anchorage, Alaska: U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Region 7, Division of Refuge Planning and Policy.
- Hood, R.E. 1995. "Option for resolution of user conflicts in the Island Arm area of Becharof Lake." Briefing Statement, U.S.F.W.S., Alaska Peninsula/Becharof National Wildlife Refuge Complex, King Salmon, Alaska: U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.

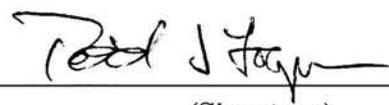
**Refuge Determination**

Prepared by:  1-31-05  
(Signature) (Date)

Refuge Manager /  
Project Leader Approval:  1-31-05  
(Signature) (Date)

**Concurrence**

Refuge Supervisor:  3/26/05  
(Signature) (Date)

Regional Chief,  
National Wildlife  
Refuge System:  4/18/05  
(Signature) (Date)