



What are we doing?

Selawik Refuge is revising its Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP). Since the first CCP for the refuge was completed in 1987, laws and policies have changed, new information has become available, and different issues exist in the region. This revised plan addresses these changes and will provide direction for managing the Selawik Refuge for 15 years after the plan becomes final.

Summary of the Draft Revised Comprehensive Conservation Plan

Selawik National Wildlife Refuge



Dried whitefish and pike are a specialty in Selawik, which has no local salmon run.

The Process

This plan follows a process guided by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service policies, and other laws. This process includes:

1. Ask public for their ideas. Identify planning issues.



2. Develop goals, objectives, and alternatives to address the issues.



3. Analyze impacts of and compare alternatives.



- 4. Publish draft plan. Ask the public to review and comment.***



5. Publish final plan. (We expect to publish a final plan in spring 2011.)

*** We are now at step four.**

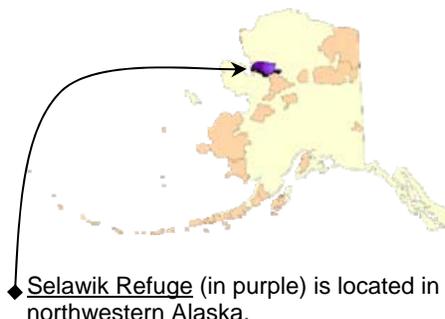
What will you find in this summary?

- Goals of Selawik Refuge
- Key planning issues
- Management alternatives developed by the planning team

What is a Comprehensive Conservation Plan?

A CCP guides overall refuge management. It ensures that management actions comply with the purposes for which the refuge was established and with other laws.

It serves as a “road map” for refuge staff and allows for more consistent management. It also provides an opportunity for public involvement and participation.



Selawik Refuge (in purple) is located in northwestern Alaska.

Selawik Refuge

Selawik Refuge straddles the Arctic Circle east of Kotzebue Sound in northwestern Alaska. On December 2, 1980, President Jimmy Carter signed the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act, or ANILCA. The Selawik Refuge was established as part of the National Wildlife Refuge System by this law.

The lands within the Selawik Refuge have been the hunting and fishing grounds of the Iñupiaq people for thousands of years. Because of its remoteness, the refuge is primarily used for subsistence by people living in the region. The villages of Selawik and Noorvik are within the refuge's boundary. The larger city of Kotzebue (population approximately 3,500) and the villages of Ambler, Buckland, Shungnak, Kiana, and Kobuk are within 30 miles of the refuge. Most residents of these communities are of Iñupiaq descent.

Extensive tundra wetlands dominate the refuge landscape, while boreal spruce forests, alder, and willow thickets trace stream and river drainages. Selawik Refuge is home to an array of mammals, birds, and fish. The Western Arctic Caribou Herd (WACH) migrates through the refuge on its way between calving and wintering grounds. Multitudes of migratory waterfowl and shorebirds breed and stage on the thousands of lakes and ponds in the refuge. Fisheries are diverse due to the presence of rivers, lakes, sloughs, and adjacent wetlands. The Selawik and Kobuk river systems support large populations of resident and migratory fish.

Access to the refuge is possible only by boat, float- or ski-equipped airplane, snowmachine, or dog sled team. Snowmachine trails provide vital links among the local communities in winter and are usually passable to travelers through the end of April.



Trees and shrubs line the streams and rivers, while tundra dominates the remainder of the landscape in the middle Selawik valley.

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. Selawik Refuge is a part of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Why was the refuge established?

Refuges exist to protect wildlife, fish, habitats, and to provide for public enjoyment of these lands and resources, such as hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, and education. Selawik Refuge was established to

- conserve fish and wildlife populations and habitats in their natural diversity including, but not limited to, the Western Arctic caribou herd, waterfowl, shorebirds, other migratory birds, and salmon and sheefish;
- fulfill international treaty obligations for fish and wildlife;
- provide the opportunity for continued subsistence use by local residents; and
- ensure water quality and quantity.

Refuge Goals

The goals for Selawik Refuge are based on the refuge's vision statement and describe how the purposes of the refuge will be fulfilled.

Goal 1: Fish, Wildlife, and Habitat

Conserve the diversity of fish and wildlife and their habitats on refuge lands, while allowing natural ecological processes to shape the environment.

Goal 2: Water Quality and Quantity

Maintain the integrity and promote the environmental health of waters and aquatic habitats within the refuge.

Goal 3: Subsistence

Provide and promote opportunities for rural residents to engage in subsistence activities on the refuge.

Goal 4: Visitor Experience

Provide quality visitor experiences and enjoyment of refuge resources through compatible recreation activities, including hunting, fishing, wildlife viewing, and photography, in ways that minimize conflicts among visitor groups and residents.

Goal 5: Outreach and Education

Provide outreach and education to foster a sense of stewardship and respect for fish, wildlife, cultural values, and the environment.

Goal 6: Cultural Resources

Preserve and protect the cultural, historical, and archeological resources of the refuge.

Goal 7: Partnerships

Develop and maintain credibility and open communication with partners in resource management and conservation, including Federal and State agencies, local communities, Native corporations, tribal governments, neighboring landowners, and businesses and organizations.

Goal 8: Climate Change

Develop a leadership role in addressing climate change in northwest Alaska.

Note: The full text of the refuge vision statement and the objectives for each goal can be found in the draft plan.

Who is on the Planning Team?

The Selawik CCP team includes people from:

- Northwest Arctic Borough
- NANA Regional Corporation
- Alaska Department of Natural Resources
- Alaska Department of Fish and Game
- The refuge staff and the regional office of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service



Along the Arctic Circle, the season of snow and ice lasts far longer than the open water season. Long shadows and pastel colors bathe the land on this mid-January afternoon in the village of Selawik.

Key Planning Issues

We have worked to gather input from all interested groups. The comments and concerns raised were summarized into eight key issues, described below. The Selawik CCP addresses the issues identified by the public, the planning team, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Ways of dealing with all the issues were explored by the planning group. Issues 1-5 could be addressed in more than one way, so the group came up with a range of alternatives (see page 6). We are now seeking feedback from you about the alternatives.

The remaining issues (6-8) are addressed through the refuge's goals (see previous page).

Issue 1: How will the refuge maintain hunting opportunities within the refuge boundary?

There is a history of conflict between non-local and subsistence hunters in the northwest Arctic region. The conflict tends to be less intense on Selawik Refuge lands than in other parts of the region. Many people expressed concern about the numbers of non-local hunters, lack of limits on commercial guides and transporters, and impacts of commercial operations on subsistence hunters.

Issue 2: How will the refuge enhance its relationship with communities, provide more outreach, and better communicate with the public?

Comments reflected the broad topics of education, outreach, and the refuge's relationship with local communities. Issues included location of office facilities, search and rescue, traditional knowledge, elder involvement, youth programs, environmental education, communicating research, local hires, and clarification of regulations and policies.

Issue 3: How will the refuge address transportation and access needs?

None of the communities in the Northwest Arctic Borough are linked by road, and no roads connect this region to the rest of Alaska. Public discussion of road development in the region has resurfaced recently. Opinions on roads are divided. The use of ATVs for transportation is limited to within the villages by the natural terrain.

Issue 4: How will the refuge address local public use needs on the refuge?

Several established winter trails link communities and provide access for subsistence. The trail markers and shelter cabins must be maintained each year. There is public concern about the usefulness of the Sinjaġruk Bridge. The Hot Springs is an important use area for local residents where limited facilities need to be improved.

Issue 5: How will the refuge protect fish, wildlife, habitat, subsistence, and the wild character of the refuge while addressing community needs?

Considerable public interest exists to maintain the refuge in its current state, which includes unspoiled habitats, opportunities for subsistence activities, and experiences of solitude. Many people did not favor increased visitation to the refuge but did support continuation of existing snow mobile and dogsled racing. Others noted a need for local community and economic development.



Ice fishing is a common winter activity in communities near Selawik Refuge. A variety of fish are caught at different times and places.

Issue 6: How will the refuge maintain fish and wildlife populations?

Considerable support for maintaining fish, wildlife, and their habitats was expressed. Several people mentioned wildlife as what they valued most about the refuge, while others listed wildlife management as an important future issue facing the refuge. Expanding beaver numbers and their impacts on fish habitat and water quality were frequently mentioned.

Issue 7: How will the refuge monitor and address the effects of climate change?

Climate change was frequently mentioned as one of the most important issues facing the refuge in the future. Both the local and national publics seem to be well aware of the change occurring in the Arctic and the implications for humans and wildlife. Comments were a mix of personal observations of environmental change, requests for continued monitoring, and interest in receiving more information and outreach.

Issue 8: How will the refuge address water quality and quantity issues?

Public comments indicated a concern about contamination of water and subsistence resources from specific sites off the refuge, including aging village garbage dumps, sewage facilities, and an abandoned submerged airplane in the Selawik River.



This thaw slump, or mudslide, on the upper Selawik River is one example of the type of events that may be brought on by climate change.



Students at Selawik Science Culture Camp participating in a caribou hunt with a camp leader.

What are alternatives?

Alternatives represent different options for future actions. They are different ways to respond to issues, concerns, and management opportunities.

Developing alternatives

We are required to develop a range of reasonable alternatives to address the planning issues. We considered three alternatives, all of which continue to protect resources on refuge lands. Traditional subsistence activities, wildlife-dependent recreational activities, and current methods of public access would continue to be allowed.



The common redpoll is one of over 180 different types of birds that can be found on Selawik Refuge.

Alternative A: This is the “No Action” alternative, as required by NEPA. It describes what would happen if current management continues as outlined in the 1987 CCP, as amended by the Inventory and Monitoring Plan, Fire Management Plan, Cultural Resources Guide, and Fishery Management Plan for Selawik Refuge.

Alternative B: This alternative is preferred by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Most general management direction would continue as under Alternative A.

Additional actions proposed in Alternative B:

- Limiting access to some public lands for commercial guides and transporters whose clients are big game hunting (see page 10).
- Creating a formal partnership between local entities and the refuge to manage a shared office facility.
- Conducting a study of traditional access methods of subsistence users.
- Creating several formal partnerships with local groups to deal with local public use and access needs.

Alternative C: This alternative is intended to offer another way to deal with some of the issues raised. Differences in Alternative C are outlined below:

- Sets up a system of numbered parcels of public land which would be open to use by guides and transporters unless specifically closed by actions of the refuge manager (see page 11).
- Selawik Refuge would independently maintain office facilities in a community within the refuge.
- Slightly different means to address a number of public use and access needs.

Note: These alternatives are described in more detail in the table on pages seven through nine.



Shelter cabins, such as this one at Paniqsiqvik, are located along winter trails and are addressed in the refuge’s plan.

Comparison of the Alternatives

Issue	Alternative A (Current Management)	Alternative B (Preferred Alternative)	Alternative C
<p>Issue 1: Maintain hunting opportunities</p> <p>Commercial guides and transporters for big game hunting</p>	<p>Commercial guides and transporters whose clients are big game hunting are authorized by special use permit. There is one big game Guide Use Area for Selawik Refuge; commercial use of private lands is not allowed; The refuge closely communicates with all commercial operators to help minimize conflicts.</p>	<p>Same as Alternative A, plus refuge lands in close proximity to or intermingled with private lands in the northwest portion of the refuge would be closed to these commercial uses by permit stipulation (see Map 1 on page 10).</p>	<p>Same as Alternative A, except a system would be set up where sections of refuge lands, numbered 1 to 5, would each be open to these commercial uses unless specifically closed at the discretion of the refuge manager (see Map 2 on page 11).</p>
<p>Issue 2: Enhance relationships and communication</p> <p>Shared Service/community building(s)</p>	<p>Currently, the refuge leases a small private office space in the village of Selawik with inadequate storage, meeting, and sleeping space.</p>	<p>A formal partnership is created between the refuge, NWAB, NANA, Maniilaq, tribal council, and city council (or some combination of these groups) to jointly maintain a shared facility of one or more buildings with capacity for office, meeting, storage, bunkhouse space, and joint community center in the community of Selawik and/or Noorvik.</p>	<p>Selawik Refuge independently maintains a building with adequate capacity for office, storage, and bunkhouse space in the community of Selawik and/or Noorvik.</p>
<p>Issue 3: Transportation needs</p> <p>All-terrain vehicles (see 50 CFR 36.2 for definition)</p>	<p>No ATV routes or areas are currently designated. There is no known established use or pattern of use for subsistence purposes on Selawik Refuge. Routes may be authorized by special use permit in the future.</p>	<p>Same as Alternative A, plus conduct a traditional access study of use for subsistence purposes in cooperation with the State of Alaska, Alaska Native elders, and local communities.</p>	<p>Same as Alternative B</p>



Blueberries, abundant on the refuge in most years, are one of the many resources harvested for subsistence by local residents.

Comparison of the Alternatives, continued

Issue	Alternative A (Current Management)	Alternative B (Preferred Alternative)	Alternative C
<p>Issue 4: Local public use needs</p> <p>Winter trail marking</p>	<p>Selawik Refuge maintains informal partnership with local communities and search and rescue (SAR) to assist them with winter trail marking.</p>	<p>A formal partnership is created between the refuge, NANA, NWAB, and Alaska DOT to formalize roles and responsibilities to perform regular marking of winter trails in support of local efforts and to address the need for more leadership and oversight of the winter trails network in and adjacent to the refuge.</p>	<p>Same as Alternative B, plus this partnership plans and implements an expansion of the marked winter trails on refuge lands.</p>
<p>Shelter cabins</p>	<p>Two cabins by special use permit to NWAB/SAR. There is no regular maintenance or enforcement to address vandalism or wear and aging.</p>	<p>A formal partnership is created between the refuge, NWAB, and local search and rescue organizations to formalize roles and responsibilities to perform regular maintenance and/or replacement of shelter cabins.</p>	<p>Same as Alternative B, plus this partnership reviews the need for additional shelter cabins and appropriate location(s) with the option of joint construction or relocation of a maximum of two additional shelter cabins on the refuge.</p>
<p>Singauruk (<i>Sinjiagruk</i>) Bridge</p>	<p>Bridge was built by the Northwest Arctic Borough (NWAB). The refuge has ownership and partnered in construction. There is no formal agreement to provide maintenance.</p>	<p>A formal partnership is created between Selawik Refuge and NWAB to formalize roles and responsibilities for jointly re-evaluating the bridge for rebuilding or repairs to address issues of slope, approach, width, and location. Regular management and maintenance of the bridge is responsibility of this partnership.</p>	<p>The refuge removes the existing bridge and constructs a seasonal, temporary bridge with assistance from the communities of Selawik and Noorvik. Regular management and maintenance of the seasonal bridge is responsibility of these communities.</p>
<p>Hot Springs</p>	<p>Winter access only to two cabins and two outhouses by special use permit to the elders of Shungnak and Huslia. The hot springs is shared and all facilities are maintained by the permit holders.</p>	<p>A formal partnership is created between the refuge, the Shungnak and Huslia elders, and other appropriate partners to formalize roles and responsibilities to perform joint facility maintenance at the Hot Springs. The partners develop and maintain a trash disposal system, identify and conduct major repairs needed on structures, and perform regular cabin maintenance.</p>	<p>Same as Alternative B</p>

Comparison of the Alternatives, continued

Issue	Alternative A (Current Management)	Alternative B (Preferred Alternative)	Alternative C
<p>Issue 5: Protect character of refuge while addressing community needs</p> <p>Dog sled racing</p>	<p>The annual Kobuk 440 and the occasional Kobuk 220 races are authorized by special use permit on winter trail areas on refuge lands. These races are locally important. The refuge evaluates requests for other races case-by-case with any new racing activities subject to appropriate use and compatibility policies.</p>	<p>Same as Alternative A</p>	<p>Same as Alternative A</p>
<p>Snowmachine racing</p>	<p>The annual Willie Goodwin/Archie Ferguson historic snowmachine race authorized by special use permit on winter trail areas on refuge lands. This race predates establishment of the refuge and is locally important; a six-mile segment of the over 200-mile race course is on refuge lands.</p>	<p>Same as Alternative A, plus the refuge evaluates requests for other races on a case-by-case basis with any new racing activities subject to appropriate use and compatibility policies.</p>	<p>Same as Alternative A, plus the refuge prohibits all other snowmachine races.</p>



Mushers and bystanders get ready for the start of the Kobuk 440 dog sled race on the ice in front of Kotzebue. Photo by Tina Moran.

Options for Reducing Conflicts

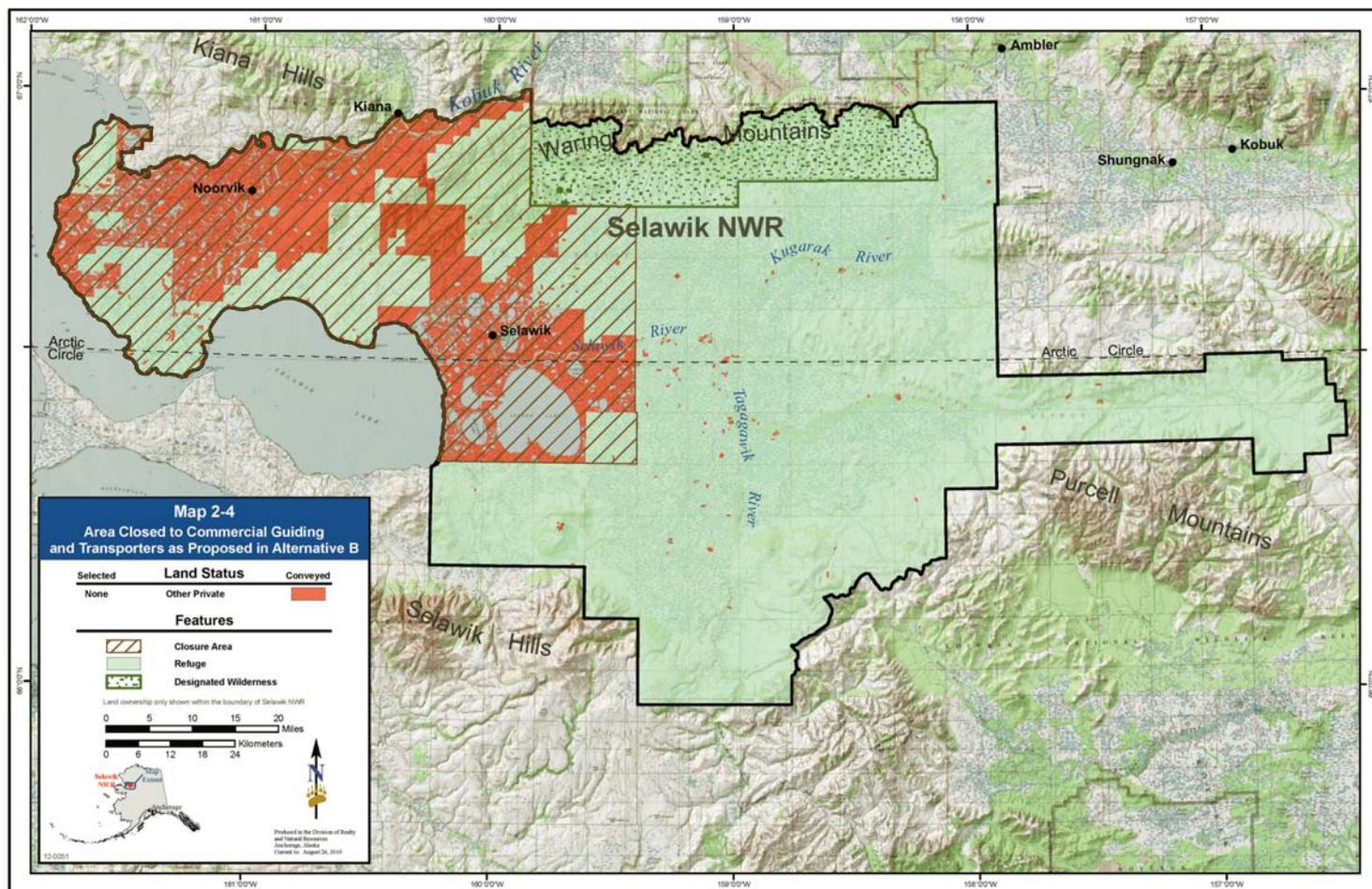
The region has a history of conflicts during fall hunting between non-local hunters, who use commercial services, and subsistence hunters living in the region. The options to address this issue were developed by the Selawik planning team and are summarized in the preceding table and depicted in the following two maps.

Under Alternative B, the area with diagonal lines on the map below would be closed for commercial hunting guides and transporters whose clients are big game hunting. These lands would still be open to the general public.



Animals in the Western Arctic Caribou Herd cross numerous rivers in the region during their annual migrations. Photo by Chris Zimmerman.

Map 1. Preferred Option for Reducing Conflicts—Alternative B



Options for Reducing Conflicts, continued

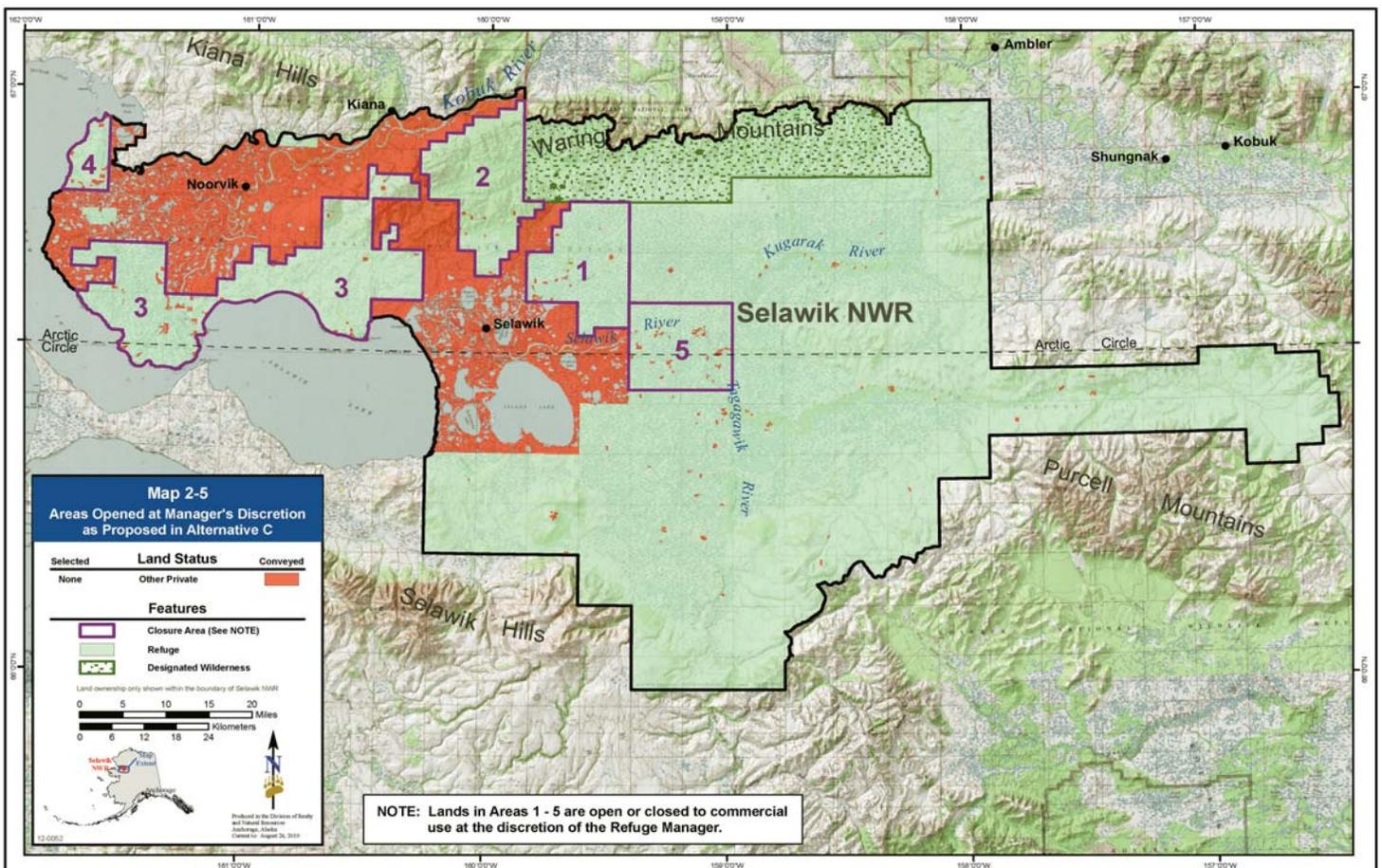
Under Alternative C, the refuge could open or close areas 1-5 on Map 2. The objective would be to allow commercial operations at times and in places that minimize disturbance to federally qualified subsistence hunters. The lands in areas 1-5 would generally be open for commercial use unless specific action is taken to close them. The areas would be treated individually, so some could be open when others are closed. The refuge manager would have the authority to close areas, based on the criteria below.

Factors the refuge manager would evaluate when deciding which areas to open or close:

- (a) density of private lands and allotments at access points
- (b) the number of commercial operators and their estimated number of clients
- (c) where commercial providers propose to operate
- (d) the timing and routes of the caribou migration

We have not yet determined how these criteria would be weighted, or the specifics of the process. The refuge will closely cooperate with the State of Alaska, communities in the region, and other partners to develop these specifics if this Alternative is selected.

Map 2. Option for Reducing Conflicts—Alternative C





The Singauruk (*Sinjaġruk*) Bridge along the Selawik-Noorvik winter trail spans a major stream that often has overflow or open water.

We need to hear your comments!

Public input submitted in writing or by email is welcomed!

Please complete the enclosed worksheet and send it back to us before January 15, 2011.

The full plan provides additional details about permitted uses and activities which have changed in some small ways since the 1987 plan. We would like to hear your comments about the new management guidelines.

The full-length Selawik Draft CCP is available online at <http://alaska.fws.gov/nwr/planning/selpol.htm>. Please contact us if you would prefer a paper copy or a compact disk of the document. We will be hosting public meetings and visiting communities in the region (times and places will be announced).

For more information about the refuge, you may view <http://selawik.fws.gov/>.

Comments and requests for compact disks, paper copies, or further information should be directed to:

Jeffrey Brooks, Planning Team Leader
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Requests for further information about Selawik Refuge should be directed to:

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Please remember, the comment period closes on January 15, 2011.