



FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

The U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI), Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is proposing to provide Wildlife Restoration (Pittman Robertson) Act grant funding to the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G), Division of Wildlife Conservation to upgrade and expand the public Upper Stiles Creek Shooting Range. The project is located in the Chena River State Recreation Area (CRSRA) within the Fairbanks North Star Borough (FNSB), Alaska. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) served as a cooperating agency and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, and the Alaska Department of Natural Resources, Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation (ADNR DPOR) served as participating agencies.

The Service and a State of Alaska Contractor prepared the Upper Stiles Creek Shooting Range Improvement Project, Chena River State Recreation Area, Alaska, incorporated herein by reference, pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA; 42 U.S.C. 4321 *et seq.*) the DOI NEPA regulations (43 CFR 46), and the DOI Departmental Manual part 516 chapters 1-4 and 8.

Executive Order 14154, Unleashing American Energy (Jan. 20, 2025), and a Presidential Memorandum, Ending Illegal Discrimination and Restoring Merit-Based Opportunity (Jan. 21, 2025), require the Department to strictly adhere to the NEPA. Further, such Order and Memorandum repeal Executive Orders 12898 (Feb. 11, 1994) and 14096 (Apr. 21, 2023). Because Executive Orders 12898 and 14096 have been repealed, complying with such Orders is a legal impossibility. The Service verifies that it has complied with the requirements of NEPA, including the Department's regulations and procedures implementing NEPA at 43 CFR Part 46 and Part 516 of the Departmental Manual, consistent with the President's January 2025 Order and Memorandum. The Service has also voluntarily considered the Council on Environmental Quality's rescinded regulations implementing NEPA, previously found at 40 CFR Parts 1500–1508, as guidance to the extent appropriate and consistent with the requirements of NEPA and Executive Order 14154.

Background

The existing rudimentary Stiles Creek Shooting Range Facility has been owned and managed by the ADNR DPOR since the late 1960s. Prior to ADNR DPOR ownership, the gravel pit was owned by the Alaska Department of Transportation and used as a materials site for the construction and maintenance of Chena Hot Springs Road. Once ADOT no longer had a need and the site was abandoned, the gravel pit was used by locals for recreational shooting. ADNR

DPOR has turned a portion of the gravel pit into a rudimentary but serviceable public shooting range. Over time, a few improvements at the range were performed by volunteer groups but fell short of meeting any type of standards. The most recent improvement work was in 2006 when minimal upgrades occurred to the range in response to increased use, however, the range still does not meet any established outdoor range guidelines. Other concerns include lack of drainage, limited parking, lack of Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) access, a narrow and exposed firing line, the presence of the winter trail near the firing line, the presence of litter, and wildfire ignition hazard. As a result, there is a lack of accessibility, an increased concern for safety, continued site degradation, and dissatisfaction from the public.

This site is one of two public outdoor shooting ranges that serve the 7,444 square mile FNSB and surrounding area. Given the interest in hunting and target shooting, safe, public gun ranges are too few to support the demand. Shooting ranges that are constructed for safety and public accessibility play a key role in recruiting new hunting and target shooting enthusiasts, and in improving their skill and proficiency.

Purpose and Need for Action

The purpose of the proposed action is to improve an existing, rudimentary, public outdoor shooting range to expand capacity and promote safe, responsible, and knowledgeable firearm use. The need for the proposed action is to provide an upgraded, expanded, and more environmentally friendly public shooting range in a region severely lacking a sufficient number of shooting range facilities.

The proposed action is intended to upgrade and expand the range to conform to the current National Rifle Association (NRA) range guidance as described in the *NRA Range Source Book* (2012). In addition to increasing safety, the project will provide an expanded, confined, and cleaner environment for recreational shooting activities. Proposed range improvements would include expansion and access upgrades including berms to increase safety and help prevent lead shot from entering adjacent waters, walkways, a covered firing line, additional benches (including an ADA-compliant bench, additional parking (including ADA compliant parking), and access road improvements to meet visitor needs and to improve hydrological connections.

Agency, Public and Tribal Coordination and Consultation

The proposed project is not controversial and visitors of the CRSRA, area shooting enthusiasts, and members of the public have all expressed support for the upgraded shooting range as greatly needed. In October 2023, a 30-day public review of the proposed project was published

electronically through the ADNRP DPOR Stiles Creek Improvements webpage, online public notice, as well as the ADF&G social media page.

To fulfill the requirements of Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, the Service offered Government to Government Consultation to seven Federally Recognized Tribes and offered to consult with seven Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANSCA) Village corporations and one ANSCA Regional Corporation located within a 100-mile radius of the proposed project site. No offers of consultation were accepted. The Service also consulted with the Alaska State Historic Preservation Office on the proposed project.

Required Permits and Authorizations

The proposed project site may contain wetlands under USACE regulatory jurisdiction, therefore, a USACE wetland fill permit may be required under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act. An application has been submitted and is under review by the USACE.

The Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (ADEC), Alaska Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (APDES) Program, would require the submittal of a Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP) and a Notice of Intent (NOI) in accordance with the Alaska Construction General Permit (ACGP) AKR100000 prior to the initiation of construction activities. The ACGP would be required to comply with the provisions of the Clean Water Act (CWA), 33 U.S.C. §1251 et. seq., as amended by the Water Quality Act of 1987, P.L. 100-4, and the permit is issued under provisions of Alaska Statutes 46.03. The ACGP allows construction sites to discharge stormwater if they implement specific measures to minimize pollution in that runoff. These measures include the submittal of the SWPPP seven days prior to initiating site work and utilizing best management practices (BMP's) to control sediment and other pollutants from entering waters, thereby protecting water quality.

The proposed project site is located within the FNSB and would be subject to its permitting requirements, which include obtaining Floodplain Development and Building Permits. Applications to be submitted prior to commencing construction.

The proposed project site is not within the range of any species listed, proposed to be listed, or considered a candidate for listing under the ESA. Nor is there any federally designated critical habitat for any ESA-listed species at the proposed project site.

The Service conducted a National Historic Preservation Act Section 106 Review and recommended a finding of no historic properties affected per 36 CFR 800.4 (d)(1). On

November 29, 2024, the State of Alaska, State Historical Preservation Officer concurred with the Service's finding

No Action Alternative, Proposed Action, and Reasonable Range of Alternatives

This section provides a summary and comparison of the reasonable range of alternatives as described in more detail in the Environmental Assessment. The terminology “reasonable range of alternatives” refers to a range of alternatives that are technically and economically feasible and meet the purpose and need for action. This section provides a comparative overview of the baseline No Action Alternative and the reasonable range of alternatives including the proposed action.

Alternative A is the Preferred Action Alternative because of the many desired amenities supportive of the 2006 CRSRA Management Plan and ADF&G's priorities for providing public shoot ranges as well as the environmental improvements beyond baseline conditions that will be implemented.

Alternative A – Stiles Creek Shooting Range Upgrade and Expansion

Alternative A would include widening the existing footprint of the range from approximately 80' to approximately 180' which would allow for the installation of an approximately 85-foot-long by 15-foot-wide concrete slab-covered shooting pavilion that would provide for a minimum of seven additional benches to supplement the three current benches, including an ADA-compliant bench. Side or backstop berms do not currently exist and would be designed and constructed for increased safety of range and winter trail users, as well as reducing wildfire risk and minimizing the amount of lead that might migrate off the range.

To accommodate the shooting range improvements, this project would include a parking lot expansion and paving to include ADA-compliant parking and improvements to the access road. The access road would be culverted, graded, scarified, and paved. The culverts which would be appropriately sized to restore proper hydrologic connectivity between the wetlands.

Alternative A would minimize environmental impacts related to range operations and improve current environmental conditions by following the pertinent and feasible U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (USEPA) *Best Management Practices for Lead at Outdoor Shooting Ranges* (2005) and conform to current NRA range guidance as described in the *NRA Range Source Book* (2012). Alternative A would implement stormwater controls, and drainage structures in accordance with the ADEC APDES, General Permit for Discharges from Large and Small Construction Activities, AKR100000.

ADNR DPOR has consulted, and is working closely, with agencies such as USACE, ADF&G, and the Service to address regulatory compliance for the proposed project. Final shooting range designs may be altered to adjust to all federal, state, and local permitting as required.

The expansion and associated improvements under Alternative A would increase capacity of the range drawing additional users to the facility as intended in Pub. L. 116-17 Target Practice and Marksmanship Training Support Act of 2019 (Tar-Mark) which amended the Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act to facilitate the construction and expansion of public target ranges in the United States.

Alternative B – Stiles Creek Shooting Range Upgrade Without Expansion

Alternative B would not expand the footprint of the existing range therefore improvements would be greatly reduced compared to Alternative A. Alternative B would provide for a covered firing line but would keep the range at the current size of approximately 80 feet wide by 400 feet long which would result in far fewer firing lanes (shooting benches) than Alternative A due to the need to construct side berms within the existing footprint. Alternative B would provide a reduced amount of additional parking commensurate with fewer shooting benches, the down range area would be elevated and resurfaced, and the access road would be minimally upgraded instead of resurfaced, paved, and culverted as under Alternative A. Alternative B would minimally improve the existing Stiles Creek Shooting Range, which could draw some additional users to the facility but would not expand capacity to the desired extent as in Alternative A.

Alternative C – No-Action Alternative

A No-Action Alternative is included reflecting baseline conditions that would continue to exist if neither Alternative A or B is implemented. With the No-Action Alternative, the proposed project site would continue to be used, in its current condition, as an active shooting range with none of the improvements called for in the CRSRA Management Plan. The range would not conform to safety standards outlined in NRA Range Source Book, nor implement the USEPA Best Management Practices for Lead at Outdoor Shooting Ranges document.

Implementation of Alternative C would result in continued potential impacts to adjacent wetland and waterways from sedimentation runoff and the potential release of lead into the environment from accumulated spent lead. The facility would continue to perpetuate existing safety issues, especially for nearby trail users and other outdoor recreationalists, and perpetuating existing access issues, especially for disabled users as the range is not currently ADA-compliant.

Alternative C would fail to expand capacity of the range as intended in grant authorizing legislation Pub. L. 116-17 Tar-Mark.

Summary of Reasonably Foreseeable Effects to the Human Environment

This section provides a summary and comparison of the reasonably foreseeable effects of the No Action Alternative as compared to the reasonable range of alternatives including the proposed action as described in the Environmental Assessment (EA). The terminology “reasonably foreseeable effects” refers to effects that are sufficiently likely to occur and that encompass both the direct and indirect effects of the action as well as effects of the action in addition to other potential past, present, and future effects.

The proposed project is not expected to conflict with any local, state, Tribal or Federal plans for the area. All the adjacent land is under the ownership and managed by ADNR DPOR for recreational purposes, no additional development or further expansion of the range is planned, once the proposed project is completed. No reasonably foreseeable future activities or development are anticipated at this time in the CRSRA due to funding limitations and the priority to maintain existing sites. Therefore, any reasonably foreseeable future effects would solely result from the proposed action, are anticipated to be minor or insignificant, and are anticipated to range from short-term, negative effects to long-term, beneficial effects as described in the EA analysis. None of the alternatives considered are anticipated to result in significant impacts to the quality of any aspect of the human environment.

Both alternative A (Preferred Action Alternative) and alternative B are expected to provide long term recreational, economic, environmental, and safety benefits for the public and local community, while minimizing any adverse impacts to an insignificant level through the use of mitigation measures and best management practices as outlined in the EA. The current range lacks safety features and engineered controls to reduce lead migration of site. Implementation of side and end berms and ground contouring will provide the long-term benefit of permanently increasing public safety and improving baseline environmental conditions by containing spent lead on site and reducing leachate and its potential negative effects on wildlife and surrounding habitats. Minor short term negative impacts include effects of construction noise on wildlife, and increased emissions and dust from construction activities. Minor long term negative impacts include loss of an insignificant amount of natural habitat, increased vehicle emissions from additional range users, and increased runoff from the addition of impervious surfaces. The main difference in environmental effects between alternatives A and B is that the Preferred Action

Alternative will result in the loss of approximately 0.1769 acres of wetland due to the footprint expansion necessary to meet desired range capacity.

Construction of the Preferred Action Alternative will achieve the desired level of increased range capacity, improve baseline environmental conditions at the proposed project site, benefit water quality and offset wetland loss (without need for compensatory mitigation) by creating uplift in the wetland function or service categories (primarily sediment and toxicant retention) lost through footprint expansion. This will be accomplished through sound project design, appropriate mitigation measures, reestablishing wetland connectivity, and adherence to the best management practices as described in the EA.

Alternative C (No Action Alternative) will not result in any new environmental impacts, nor will it provide any benefits (social or environmental) through site upgrades. Any current impacts to surface and groundwater quality will remain unchanged with the continued possibility of existing sediments and lead migration from the poorly graded and unimproved site.

Finding of No Significant Impact Determination

Based on review and evaluation of the EA, I have determined that the proposed action, that consists of providing Wildlife Restoration Act grant funding to ADF&G for expansion and upgrades to the ADNR DPOR owned/operated Upper Stiles Creek (public) Shooting Range is not a major Federal action that would significantly affect the quality of the human environment pursuant to section 102(2) of the NEPA. Accordingly, preparation of an environmental impact statement on the proposed action is not required.

Office of Conservation Investment

Regional Manager