Draft Compatibility Determination

Title

Draft Compatibility Determination for the Iron Dog Snowmachine Race across Selawik National Wildlife Refuge.

Refuge Use Category

Other Uses

Refuge Use Type(s)

Snowmobiles (snowmachines) - The use of snowmobiles over snow-covered terrain.

Competitive Sporting Event.

Refuge

Selawik National Wildlife Refuge

Refuge Purpose(s) and Establishing and Acquisition Authority(ies)

As stated in the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) (Public Law 96-487) Section 302 (7) (B), the purposes for which Selawik National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge) was established and shall be managed include:

> (i) to conserve fish and wildlife populations and habitats in their natural diversity including, but not limited to, the Western Arctic caribou herd (including participation in coordinated ecological studies and management of these caribou), waterfowl, shorebirds and other migratory birds, and salmon and Sheefish;
>
> (ii) to fulfill international treaty obligations of the United States with respect to fish and wildlife and their habitats;
>
> (iii) to provide, in a manner consistent with the purposes set forth in subparagraphs (i) and (ii), the opportunity for continued subsistence uses by local residents; and
>
> (iv) to ensure, to the maximum extent practicable and in a manner consistent with the purposes set forth in subparagraph (i), water quality and necessary water quantity within the refuge.

ANILCA Section 702(12) designated approximately 240,000 acres as the Selawik Wilderness. Section 102(13) of the act clarifies the term "wilderness" has "the same meaning as when used in the Wilderness Act." The purposes of the Wilderness Act are additional purposes of the designated Wilderness portion of the Refuge.

ANILCA Sections 602(41) and 605(a) designated that portion of the Selawik River from

a fork of the headwaters in township 12 north, range 10 east, Kateel River meridian to confluence of Kugrarak River; within the boundaries of the Selawik Refuge as a wild river pursuant to the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (WSRA), as amended by ANILCA Section 606. The purposes of the WSRA are to ensure: "certain selected rivers of the Nation which, with their immediate environments, possess outstandingly remarkable scenic, recreational, geologic, fish and wildlife, historic, cultural or other similar values, shall be preserved in free-flowing condition, and that they and their immediate environments shall be protected for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations."

National Wildlife Refuge System Mission

The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS) 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 (Pub. L. 105-57; 111 Stat. 1252).

Description of Use

Is this an existing use?

No

What is the use?

An organized snowmachine race involving multiple classes of racers using a existing designated winter trail.

The proposed use is the annual Iron Dog snowmachine race, a long distance winter activity recognized for its extreme endurance requirements and its status as the longest and one of the most technically challenging snowmachine races in the world. The event draws participants from across Alaska and beyond and includes several distinct classes of travel.

Prerace activities include participant route-familiarization rides and racecourse condition assessments conducted by race officials. Participant prerace travel is intended to familiarize riders with the route and observe general snow and trail conditions. Race officials separately inspect and mark select portions of the course, which may include installing trail markers, reflectors, and other navigational indicators; verifying safe travel conditions across ice and overland segments; identifying hazards; and coordinating with local communities, volunteers, and land managers.

The Pro Class is the competitive portion of the event, in which two person teams operating individual snowmachines and traveling in tandem are timed across a route that stretches over 2,500 miles across Alaska. Teams compete for cash prizes, with the total purse commonly exceeding $250,000. During the highspeed (100mph+) race, participants may experience mechanical breakdowns, weather related delays, or accidents. These situations can require coordinated response actions, including search and rescue operations, recovery of disabled machines, temporary route closures or adjustments conducted by race officials, search and rescue personnel, and/or volunteers. Participants race at any time during a 24-hour period (morning, afternoon, and/or night).

The Expedition Class follows much of the same general route but travels at a slower pace, emphasizing group travel, backcountry experience, and non-competitive participation. The Ambassador Class typically completes a shorter route and focuses on community engagement, outreach events, and public visibility for the race and its partners.

Postrace activities consist of cleanup operations carried out by volunteers and/or land managers using snowmachines to collect and remove all race related trail markers, trash, and debris.

In total, approximately 90–100 people and snowmachines are expected to participate in the race and a small number are anticipated to participate in pre-race and post-race activities.

Is the use a priority public use?

No

Wildlife-dependent recreational uses, including hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation are the priority public uses identified in the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 (Pub. L. 105-57; 111 Stat. 1252; 16 U.S.C. §§ 664, 668dd, and 668ee).

Where would the use be conducted?

In northwest Alaska within and around Selawik Refuge, the proposed route would primarily utilize the network of existing winter trails connecting communities. The Refuge cooperates with regional partners to mark and maintain the winter trail network to provide safer travel for subsistence and other activities.

The proposed racecourse would include approximately 132 miles within Selawik refuge's borders (Figure 1). Approximately 34 miles would occur on Refuge lands. In the eastern portion of the Refuge, the route would traverse approximately 19 miles of Refuge lands near the Selawik Hot Springs. The marked winter trail along this section intersects with Selawik Hot Springs. Pro-class racers would be expected to bypass Selawik Hot Springs and establish an approximately 2-mile long section of trail to the

east. Expedition-class and Ambassador-class racers may bypass Selawik Hot Springs or use the existing trail system, intersecting the hot springs site.

In the western portion of the refuge, the race route would cross refuge lands, the Kobuk River, NANA Regional Corporation Inc. owned lands, and private lands. The racecourse would include approximately 13 miles of Refuge lands on the trail between Selawik and Noorvik. Race participants would cross the Singaurak River bridge or, if available, a snowbridge over the river. Racers would continue on to Kotzebue via the Kobuk River and up-to 3 miles of Refuge-owned lands along the *Snyder cut-off* trail.

Race spectators, officials, and participants may stop at Selawik Hot Springs during the proposed use period. The number of people at the hot springs at any one time as a result of the use would be less than 50. Gear, equipment, fuel, food, and other items will be stored at the site while in use.

The racecourse would cross numerous streams, rivers, lakes, and wetlands and would traverse important habitat for species and species groups named in refuge purposes and/or identified as priority resources of concern, including caribou, scoters, Canada and Cackling geese, other waterfowl, shorebirds, migratory birds, salmon, sheefish, whitefish, and northern pike.

Additionally, the route would cross approximately 79 miles of Koyukuk National Wildlife Refuge lands, other lands/waters administered by the Bureau of Land Management and State of Alaska, and privately owned lands. This Compatibility Determination evaluates only those portions of the proposed route that occur on Refuge owned lands within the Selawik Refuge boundary. Although the racecourse passes through additional lands located within the mapped Refuge boundary, those areas are not under U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service jurisdiction and are not subject to this Compatibility Determination. Use of lands administered by the State of Alaska, the BLM, Native Village Corporations, Regional Corporations, or private Native allotment owners is outside the scope of this analysis and requires authorization from the respective landowners or managing agencies.

How would the use be conducted?

Race participation typically averages approximately thirty Pro Class teams (2 person teams) and thirty or more Expedition Class riders (2 to 4 person teams), resulting in a total of 90–100 participants traveling the route each year. In the weeks prior to the race, participants may access the racecourse to assess conditions; however, use associated with pre-race assessments is anticipated to be minimal. Only a small number of Pro Class racers, if any, are expected to conduct such assessments. Most pre-race activity would consist of trail marking conducted by race officials and volunteers, who place temporary wooden stakes or reflectors along select portions of the course, primarily near communities. These activities may occur up to one month prior to the start of the race.

During the event, the Pro Class would be expected to travel through refuge lands at

high speeds, potentially reaching up to 100mph+, and would typically pass through the refuge within one to two days. Pro Class racers are not expected to stop on refuge lands except in the event of mechanical failure or for quick personal-need breaks. The Expedition and Ambassador Class would travel at lower speeds and over a longer duration, generally several days. These racers may stop intermittently along the route for personal-need breaks or to view natural features or landscapes within the refuge. Racers may choose to stop at the Selawik hot springs site and use existing facilities. All classes of racers would refuel only in designated communities serving as official race checkpoints. All checkpoints and designated rest stops will be located off refuge-owned lands.

Mechanical breakdowns are an expected component of the Iron Dog race. Teams are required to perform all repairs themselves while on the trail, and outside assistance is prohibited except in life threatening emergencies. Racers carry tools and spare parts on their sleds for this purpose. If a snowmachine cannot be repaired in place, the operable machine may tow the disabled machine to the next checkpoint or community. Emergency situations, such as extreme cold, injury, or severe weather, are treated differently. In such cases, teams may request assistance, and race officials or local search and rescue personnel may respond.

When would the use be conducted?

The proposed use would occur during late winter—mid to late February—consistent with the reoccurring annual timing of the Iron Dog race. Prerace activities, including route-familiarization rides by race participants and trail marking by race officials and volunteers are anticipated to take one week during the month preceding the event. These pre-race activities are expected to be minimal in scope, with only a small number of racers conducting condition assessments and the majority of activity associated with placement of temporary trail markers occurring near communities.

Race operations on Selawik National Wildlife Refuge would occur over a short duration. Pro Class racers would be expected to travel through refuge lands over the course of one to two days, typically moving at high speeds and making few, if any, stops except in the event of mechanical failure. Expedition and Ambassador Class participants would travel through the refuge at lower speeds and over a longer period, generally several days, with occasional brief stops for personal-need breaks.

Emergency responses, if required due to mechanical failure, injury, severe weather, or other safety concerns, could occur at any time during the race window. All race-related activities on refuge lands would conclude once post-race activities, such as cleanup and trail marker removal have been completed.

Why is this use being proposed or reevaluated?

Since 2014 the Iron Dog racecourse has included a loop through northwest Alaska. Prior to the addition of that race loop, Selawik Refuge worked with race organizers to

identify a route that would avoid refuge lands and meet race objectives. Currently sections of the race occur within Selawik Refuge borders on private lands and frozen channels of the Kobuk River.

In 2025, Iron Dog Race, Inc. applied for a Special Use Permit to authorize use of refuge owned lands for portions of the racecourse, prompting the need for this evaluation. Upon receiving the application, refuge staff worked with race organizers to explore alternate routes that would avoid refuge owned lands while still meeting race objectives (expanding the number of communities along the race route and minimizing repeated use of individual trail sections).

In addition to local communities along the existing racecourse (Buckland, Selawik, Kiana, Noorvik, and Kotzebue), the proposed route would pass through 3 additional communities (Huslia, Shungnak, and Ambler) near to Selawik Refuge. Under the current race configuration, several trail segments near Nulato, Kaltag, Unalakleet, Shaktoolik, and Buckland are used twice during the event. The proposed route would reduce this repeated use by creating a more continuous loop. Alternatives for accessing Huslia, Shungnak, and Ambler without crossing refuge lands would require repeated use of existing trail segments and/or the creation of new trails on other federal or state lands.

The proposed use was found to be appropriate because it may contribute to fulfilling goals and objectives of the 2011 Selawik National Wildlife Refuge Revised Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP), including goals related to subsistence, public use, outreach, and partnerships. Race organizers would conduct outreach events in local communities to promote snowmachine use and safety for youth, and, if requested, work with local communities on efforts to improve trail conditions.

Locally organized snowmachine races have occurred on and around Selawik Refuge since before establishment of the refuge. The CCP recognizes the community and historic importance of specific local races and allows for the Willie Goodwin/Archie Ferguson Memorial Snowmachine Race to occur on refuge lands in the western portion of the refuge annually. The CCP also acknowledges the importance of winter trails and snowmachine use for other purposes, including travel between villages, accessing subsistence resources, and participating in hunting, fishing, and other wildlife dependent recreational activities.

Availability of Resources

Resources would be required for yearly administration of a Special Use Permit, trail marking, monitoring for compliance with permit conditions, ensuring public safety during the race, monitoring for impacts to refuge resources, and outreach.

Table 1. Costs to Administer and Manage Iron Dog Snowmachine Race on Selawik National Wildlife Refuge

Category and Itemization	One-time Cost	Recurring Annual Expenses
Permitting and compliance (Staff time for NEPA, NHPA, ESA, ANILCA Sec. 810, SUP, etc. document prep, Consultation, correspondence, travel)	**$30,000**	**$2,000**
Supplies and equipment (2 snowmachines and winter camping equipment)	**$50,000**	**$4,000**
Participation in trail staking (2 people for 3 days, fuel, & travel expenses)	**--**	**$3,400**
Compliance monitoring and public safety patrols (2 trips, 2 people for 8 days total, fuel, & travel expenses)		**$10,400**
Resource monitoring (baseline data collection near hotsprings, follow up after first use and every 5 years following)	**$11,500**	**$3,833**
Outreach (staff time, materials)		**$700**
Total expenses	**$91,500**	**$24,833**

Anticipated Impacts of the Use

Potential impacts of a proposed use on the refuge's purpose(s) and the Refuge System mission

Conservation of fish and wildlife populations and their habitats

The Refuge is important wintering and migratory habitat for the Western Arctic Caribou Herd (WACH). The WACH population has been declining since the early 2000's, with most recent population estimate of approximately 121,000, down from a high of 498,000; a population decrease of approximately 76%. The race would occur within the wintering range of the WACH, and caribou could be encountered in the refuge anywhere along the route. The proportion of the WACH located near to the route in any given year is variable but is generally very low. Caribou along the route would likely react to presence of snowmachines and expend energy while leaving the area. Although repeated disturbance can impact caribou body condition, impacts of disturbance from race activities on caribou survival are likely to be negligible due to the limited spatial and temporal nature of the use. Temporary displacement of other wildlife, including moose, wolves, other furbearers, and ptarmigan would also occur along the route.

Minor changes to habitat from repeated use of a currently un-established trail segment that bypasses Selawik Hot Springs are likely to occur. The area where racers would establish a trail is dominated by high tussocks and prone to wind scour. Repeated use of the approximately 2-mile section of the route would lead to development of a visible trail, where tussock tops are flattened, linear gaps between tussocks become pronounced, and ground surface is depressed. These impacts are visible in adjacent, existing trail segments. The amount of habitat affected by this type of trailing would be negligible in relation to available habitat and would not significantly affect the overall population or distribution of caribou, other land mammals, birds, or fish.

Subsistence opportunity

Subsistence uses occur throughout the year on the refuge. During February, subsistence users primarily seek caribou, wolves, other furbearers, ptarmigan, fish, and firewood. Local residents rely on the winter trail network for accessing subsistence areas by snowmachine. Although the winter trail system would remain open for use by subsistence users during the race, some subsistence users would perceive travel on the trails to be unsafe and avoid certain areas and/or not attempt to look for subsistence resources during the race. Some subsistence users would still use the trails during the race possibly creating user conflicts. Increased trail use prior to the race by racers assessing course conditions and presence of snowmachines and racers during the race would displace caribou and other game species (when present) from near to the trail, making it more difficult to locate and harvest subsistence resources.

The winter trail between Huslia and Shungnak is not frequently used in mid-winter and temporary trail stakes are not typically installed. Use of the route by racers would result in a packed snow trail, potentially making travel along that stretch easier for subsistence users. Effects on trail conditions in other areas would vary depending

on weather and pre-race and race-day snow conditions and could include changes such as a smoother or more compacted trail surface, a rougher trail, or reduced snow cover.

Water quality and quantity

The event takes place during mid-winter— primarily over frozen wetlands, streams, rivers, and lakes within the refuge boundary. Potential impacts to water quality could occur if fuel, oil, or other hazardous materials were accidentally released during the event. However, quantities of fuel and other hazardous materials transported across refuge lands would be limited to what is carried by individual snowmachines. Cold temperatures and frozen surfaces would further limit the likelihood of contaminants reaching waterways.

Water quality at Selawik Hot Springs could be impacted by introduction of human waste, garbage, or other contaminants to the site associated with additional use by race participants, personnel, spectators, or other people drawn to the area by establishment of the race route. A bathhouse and two cabins are located at the hot springs, which is along the Selawik River near the headwaters. There has not been an evaluation of visitor capacity at the hot springs.

There is a low probability that a snowmachine could break through the ice during the event. Race organizers typically select routes with known, reliable ice conditions, and racers are experienced in identifying and avoiding hazardous ice. In the unlikely event that a snowmachine does go through the ice, any associated release of fuel or oil would be localized and limited to the small volumes carried by the machine. Given the frozen conditions, the potential for contaminants to enter flowing water is low.

Overall, the risk of measurable impacts to water quality or quantity is expected to be low, provided racers comply with permit stipulations and standard spill prevention practices.

Selawik Wild and Scenic River and Selawik Wilderness

The upper stretch of the Selawik River is designated as a wild river for its outstandingly remarkable scenic, geologic, wildlife, fishery, cultural, and recreational values and for its water quality. The proposed use would occur within the Selawik Wild and Scenic River corridor for approximately 1 mile. A few perennial trail markers currently exist within the corridor; additional trail markers may be installed to facilitate the race and would be visible on the landscape. Winter travel within the corridor is not expected to affect the outstandingly remarkable values or water quality of the river.

The proposed route would occur a minimum of 3 miles from the border of Selawik Wilderness; no impacts to Wilderness are anticipated.

Mission of the NWRS

Wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities including hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, environmental education, and interpretation are priority uses of National Wildlife Refuges. Use of refuge lands for priority uses (excluding subsistence hunting/fishing) is generally low in February, when the race would occur. Some individuals participating in wildlife-dependent recreation and accessing the refuge via snowmachine, dog-team, or skis may avoid the race route, or may experience temporary disruption due to increased activity associated with the event. However, interest in the race would result in more people, including Expedition and Ambassador class racers, visiting the refuge and participating in wildlife-dependent recreation.

Allocation of resources for administering uses that are not directly tied to the mission of the NWRS would result in a decrease in resources available for other activities directly associated with conservation, management, and restoration of fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats.

Public Review and Comment

The draft compatibility determination will be available for public review and comment from May 13 to May 28, 2026. The public will be made aware of this comment opportunity through emails and/or letters to local Tribes, municipal governments, and the State of Alaska; public notices on local radio stations and in local newspapers; and via Selawik Refuge's social media accounts. A hard copy of this document will be posted at the Selawik Refuge Headquarters in Kotzebue and electronically at https://www.fws.gov/project/irondog-cd. Concerns expressed during the public comment period will be addressed in the final Compatibility Determination.

Determination

Is the use compatible?

Yes

Stipulations Necessary to Ensure Compatibility

The following stipulations are required to ensure the use meets the minimum threshold for not materially interfering with or detracting from the fulfillment of Refuge purposes and the NWRS mission. Stipulations may be revised or updated to

adaptively meet the intent of ensuring Compatibility with Refuge purposes and the mission of the NWRS. Additional terms, conditions, and stipulations will be required to ensure compliance with all applicable laws, regulations, and agency policies.

1. Authorization granted under this Special Use Permit applies only to portions of the route located on Refuge-owned lands within the Selawik Refuge boundary. Although the racecourse passes through other lands within the refuge boundary, those areas are not under U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) jurisdiction and are not covered by this authorization. Use of lands outside Service jurisdiction requires authorization from the respective landowners or managing agencies. Upon request, the permittee shall provide the Service with written proof of authorization to access lands owned or managed by other parties within or adjacent to Refuge-owned lands that are intersected by the race route.
2. The permittee shall conduct all activities in accordance with the permittee's Special Use Permit Application, as amended and accepted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. All deviations from the Special Use Permit Application must receive prior written approval by the Refuge Manager or their designee.
3. The permittee is responsible for ensuring that all employees, personnel, volunteers, race officials, race participants, and any other persons working for the permittee and/or conducting activities allowed by this permit are familiar with and adhere to all permit stipulations.
4. If the permittee becomes aware of any deviations from the Special Use Permit application or violations of permit conditions by employees, personnel, volunteers, race officials, race participants, and any other persons working for the permittee or conducting activities allowed by this permit, the permittee shall notify the Refuge Manager as soon as practicable.
5. Permit may be cancelled or revised at any time by the Refuge Manager in case of emergency or to ensure protection of refuge resources (e.g. if snow conditions are not adequate for protection of vegetation and soils, open water areas are present along the route, extreme weather presents unmitigable safety risks, etc.).
6. Snowmachine use on refuge lands is authorized only during time periods and locations with adequate snow cover to protect vegetation and soils (i.e., no contact with surface vegetation or soils). Snowmachines are self-propelled vehicles intended for off-road travel primarily on snow having a curb weight of not more than 1,000 pounds (450 kg), driven by track or tracks in contact with the snow and steered by a ski or skis in contact with the snow.
7. Placement of trail markers and trail grooming to facilitate race activities on refuge lands shall be coordinated with the Refuge Manager. Type of trail

markers to be used on refuge lands shall be approved prior to placement. Trail markers shall be removed following race activities unless written approval from the Refuge Manager is obtained for permanent/semi-permanent placement of markers.

8. The permittee shall provide an Emergency Response Plan to the Refuge Manager at least 30 days prior to the schedule start of the race.
9. The permittee shall give public notice to all communities along the route of travel in northwest Alaska at least 2 weeks prior to the start of the race. At a minimum, notice must be given to Tribes, city and borough governments, and other user groups. The date, time, start and finish locations, and route of travel, and recommended safety precautions must be included in notices. Notices shall be made using relevant media outlets (e.g. local radio and social media platforms).
10. Prior to permitted activities occurring on refuge lands, the permittee shall provide to the Refuge Manager, in writing, the names of all persons conducting activities on refuge lands, and names/contact information for race officials.
11. Prior to moving equipment and gear from point of origin across or onto refuge managed lands, the permittee shall ensure that all equipment, vehicles, and gear is free of visible soil, seeds, and vegetative parts.
12. Race participants shall remain on the designated route while travelling across refuge lands and waters. Race-related access to the Selawik Wilderness is prohibited.
13. Fuel, oil, hazardous substances, gear, or equipment shall not be stored on refuge lands.
14. Spill reporting and cleanup will be conducted in accordance with Service policies. Absorbent material in sufficient quantity to handle spills must be on hand at all times for use in the event of an oil or fuel spill. All hazardous wastes (as defined by the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act of 1976, as amended) will be stored, transported, and disposed in accordance with regulation requirements.
15. The operation of aircraft at altitudes and in flight paths resulting in disturbance to subsistence hunters and other users of the refuge is prohibited. It is recommended that all aircraft maintain a minimum altitude of 2,000 feet above ground level (AGL).
16. 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 maintain a minimum altitude of 2,000 feet above ground level (AGL).
17. The use of helicopters on refuge lands is not authorized under this permit.

18. The use of unmanned aircraft systems (ie drones) on refuge lands is not authorized under this permit.
19. Race participants and other personnel conducting permitted activities shall take no action that interferes with subsistence and recreational activities of rural users or restricts the reasonable access of subsistence users to refuge lands. This may include, but is not limited to disturbance of wildlife and their movements near subsistence hunters.
20. Race participants and other personnel conducting permitted activities shall yield the right-of-way to all other trail users, including sled dog teams, skiers, and other snowmachine users.
21. Race participants and other personnel accessing refuge lands shall abide by rules and established protocols for use of Selawik Hot Springs site, cabins, and bathhouse, as well as shelter cabins.
22. Race participants and other personnel accessing refuge lands must be equipped with adequate safety and survival equipment and be advised by event officials of any natural or man-made hazards along the event route. Racers must be equipped with sufficient reflective materials or other apparatus to be effectively visible in the dark. Additionally, permittees must provide information regarding trail etiquette to racers prior to the event.
23. The permittee shall ensure that race participants and other personnel conducting permitted activities on refuge lands have adequate knowledge, skills, and experience for arctic backcountry survival.
24. The permittee must initiate appropriate search and rescue procedures by contacting the Alaska State Troopers in the event of any lost or injured event participants.
25. As soon as practicable the permittee shall notify the refuge manager of any accidents or other safety related incidents associated with permitted activities on the refuge. Reportable incidents include those that result in a death or physical injury requiring immediate medical attention beyond basic first aid, involve significant property damage or loss, or require search and rescue efforts.
26. Any problems 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, and animals taken must be salvaged in accordance with State regulations.
27. All property must be removed upon completion of permitted activities. Permittee is responsible for ensuring no equipment, personal property, garbage, or other items are left on refuge lands by race participants or persons providing support to the race.

28. Within 14 days of completion of activities, permittee will notify Refuge Manager, in writing, of completion and provide a report of any incidents or resource issues occurring on refuge lands.

Justification

Fish and wildlife species and habitats would not be substantially impacted by use of refuge lands for the Iron Dog Snowmachine race. Stipulations would require that the race only occurs on refuge lands during periods of adequate snow cover to prevent damage to vegetation and soils. Minor trailing would be expected to occur over time along the 2-mile bypass trail near the Selawik Hot Springs, however the area of impacted habitat would be negligible in comparison to available habitat.

Minor, negative impacts to subsistence opportunity would occur from displacement of wildlife and avoidance of race activities. However, trail use by racers may improve conditions of trails in some places and allow for easier access to the Selawik Hot Springs area for subsistence users and for people continuing use of the site for cultural, medicinal, and recreational purposes.

Likelihood of mishaps resulting in discharge of fuel, oil, or other hazardous materials that would impact water quality on the refuge is low, and the amount of fuel and other hazardous materials that would be transported across refuge lands would be relatively low. Race organizers would be responsible for ensuring spill containment and clean-up materials are available for spill response.

The outstandingly remarkable values of Selawik Wild River would not be adversely effected by the race. Snowmachine use for subsistence access, travel between communities, and other traditional activities is currently allowed within the Selawik Wild River corridor during periods of adequate snow cover, and additional snowmachine use would have negligible impacts to resources.

The race would draw attention to refuge resources and result in an increased number of visitors participating in wildlife-dependent recreational activities, including Expedition Class and Ambassador Class participants who would stop along the route. Although some local residents oppose use of local trails for snowmachine racing, races are generally supported by local communities. Authorizing the proposed race route would provide opportunity for communities of Huslia, Shungnak and Ambler to participate in race events. Outreach activities and youth programming provided by race organizers would support local community goals. The Iron Dog Snowmachine Race has achieved national recognition and is supported by leaders in the state of Alaska. Opening access to public lands in Alaska has been identified as a priority.

Safety concerns for trail users, including racers, other snowmachine users, and dog

mushers, would be mitigated by 1.) requiring that race participants are skilled and knowledgeable in arctic backcountry travel and have adequate gear and equipment for arctic winter survival; 2.) notifying the public of race activities and safety precautions; and 3.) ensuring that an emergency response plan is in place.

Although the race may contribute to fulfillment of some refuge goals, the resources and staff time (capacity) required for administering the use would diminish the capacity for working on tasks directly related to fulfillment of refuge purposes and the mission of the NWRS. Increasing demand for additional uses of the Refuge could interfere with and detract from Refuge purposes and the NWRS mission in the future.

After fully considering the effects of the Iron Dog Snowmachine Race, as described above, it is my determination that the use of the refuge lands would not immediately and materially interfere with or detract from the purposes of Selawik National Wildlife Refuge or the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System, provided that stipulations are adhered to and adequate capacity for monitoring and adaptively managing the use remain available.

Signature of Determination

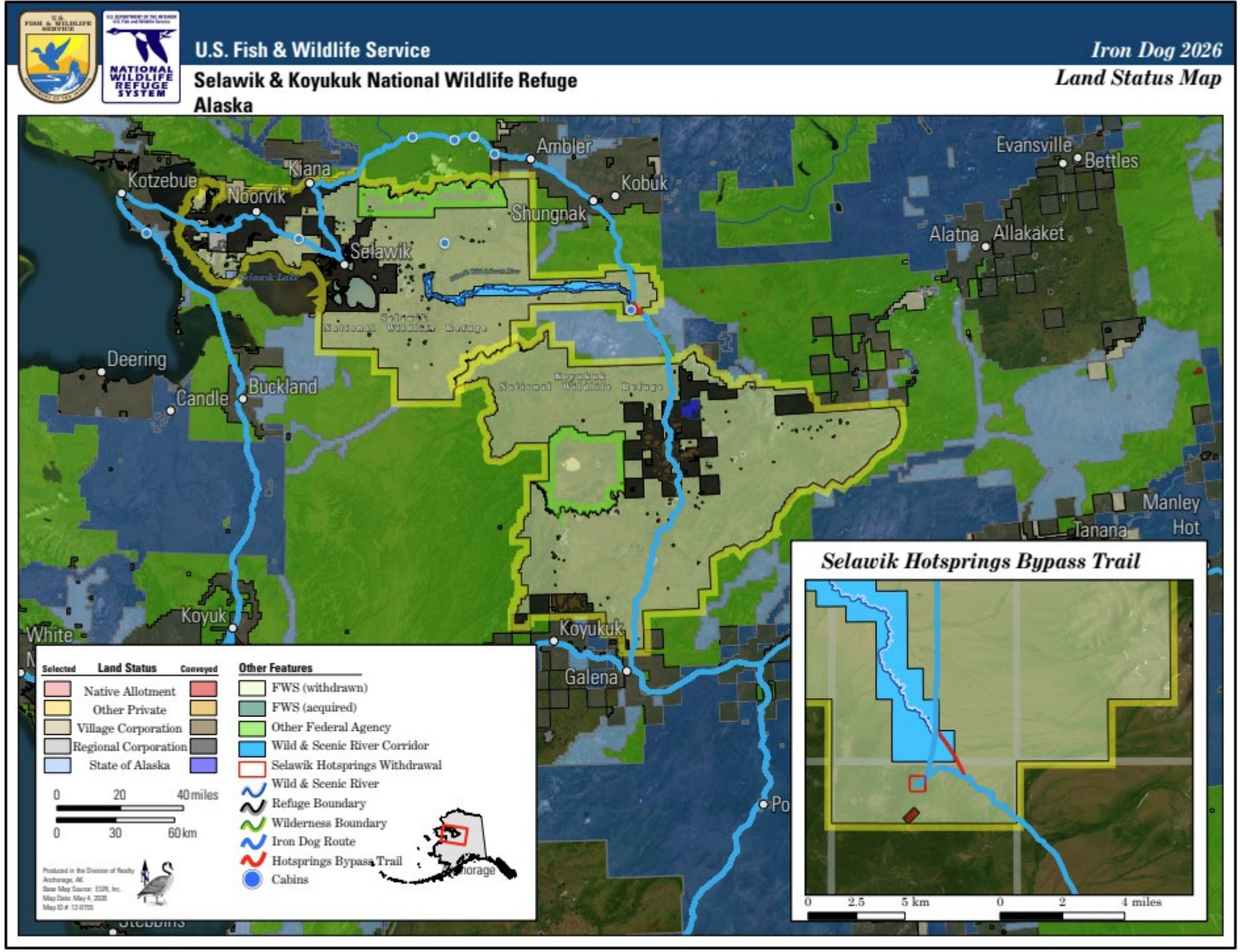
Refuge Manager Signature and Date

Signature of Concurrence

Assistant Regional Director Signature and Date

Mandatory Reevaluation Date

Figure 1. Map of proposed Iron Dog Snowmachine race route.


U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Selawik & Koyukuk National Wildlife Refuge
Alaska
Iron Dog 2026
Land Status Map
Kotzebue
Noorvik
Kiana
Ambler
Kobuk
Shungnak
Selawik
Deering
Buckland
Candle
Koyuk
White
Koyukuk
Galena
Evansville
Bettles
Alatna
Allakaket
Manley
Hot
Tanana
Selawik Hotsprings Bypass Trail
Land Status
Selected
Conveyed
Native Allotment
Other Private
Village Corporation
Regional Corporation
State of Alaska
Other Features
FWS (withdrawn)
FWS (acquired)
Other Federal Agency
Wild & Scenic River Corridor
Selawik Hotsprings Withdrawal
Wild & Scenic River
Refuge Boundary
Wilderness Boundary
Iron Dog Route
Hotsprings Bypass Trail
Cabins
0 20 40 miles
0 30 60 km
0 2.5 5 km
0 2 4 miles