

Draft Compatibility Determination

Title

Draft Compatibility Determination for Cabin Use (modern public use cabins, historic or existing cabins designated as public use cabins, and historic or existing cabins designated as administrative cabins), Kenai National Wildlife Refuge.

Refuge Use Category

Other

Refuge Use Type(s)

Cabins

Refuge

Kenai National Wildlife Refuge

Refuge Purposes and Establishing and Acquisition Authorities

Franklin D. Roosevelt established the Kenai National Moose Range (Moose Range) on December 16, 1941, for the purpose of “. . . protecting the natural breeding and feeding range of the giant Kenai moose on the Kenai Peninsula, Alaska, which in this area presents a unique wildlife feature and an unusual opportunity for the study, in its natural environment, of the practical management of a big-game species that has considerable local economic value...” (Executive Order 8979).

The Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) substantially affected the Moose Range by modifying its boundaries and broadening its purposes to include conservation of a broad array of fish, wildlife, and habitats in their natural diversity, meeting international treaty obligations, protection of water quality and quantity, and providing opportunities for scientific research, land management training, and educational and recreational activities. ANILCA also redesignated the Moose Range as the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge), added nearly a quarter of a million acres of land, and established the 1.32-million acre (534,349 hectare) Kenai Wilderness.

ANILCA sets out purposes for each refuge in Alaska. The ANILCA purposes of the Refuge are described in Section 303(4)(B) of the Act. The purposes identify some of the reasons why Congress established the Refuge and set the management priorities for it.

ANILCA purposes for the Refuge are as follows:

- (i) to conserve fish and wildlife populations and habitats in their natural diversity, including but not limited to moose, bears, mountain goats, Dall sheep, wolves and other furbearers, salmonoids and other fish, waterfowl and other migratory and nonmigratory birds;
- (ii) to fulfill the international treaty obligations of the United States with respect to fish and wildlife and their habitats;
- (iii) to ensure, to the maximum extent practicable and in a manner consistent with the purposes set forth in paragraph (i), water quality and necessary water quantity within the Refuge;
- (iv) to provide, in a manner consistent with subparagraphs (i) and (ii), opportunities for scientific research, interpretation, environmental education, and land management training; and
- (v) to provide, in a manner compatible with these purposes, opportunities for fish and wildlife-oriented recreation.

Policy (FWS 603 2.8) directs that pre-ANILCA purposes remain in force and effect, except to the extent that they may be inconsistent with ANILCA or the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, and that such purposes only apply to those areas of the Refuge in existence prior to ANILCA. The Executive Order purpose to protect Kenai moose, however, is treated as complementary to the broader ANILCA purpose of conserving fish and wildlife populations; therefore, no special attention is given the Executive Order purpose in this compatibility review process.

The Wilderness Act of 1964 (Public Law 88-577) created additional purposes for the Refuge. Section 4.(3)(b) of the Wilderness Act provides, “Except as otherwise provided in this chapter, each agency administering any area designated as wilderness shall be responsible for preserving the wilderness character of the area and shall so administer such area for such other purposes for which it may have been established as also to preserve its wilderness character. Except as otherwise noted in this Act, wilderness areas shall be devoted to the public purposes of recreational, scenic, scientific, educational, conservation, and historical use.”

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 (Pub. L. 105-57, 111 Stat. 1252).

Description of Use

Is this an existing use?

Yes

This compatibility determination reviews and supersedes the 2004 compatibility determination for the public use of cabins. The use of cabins on the Refuge by the public has occurred since refuge establishment in 1941. In 2004, the Refuge developed a Cabin Management Plan, associated Environmental Assessment (EA) and Finding of No Significant Impact (USFWS 2004). This Plan called for an enhanced cabin management program on the Refuge. It allowed for new public use cabins to be constructed in non-Wilderness areas, increased opportunity for overnight stay and enjoyment of several historic cabins, established a reservation and permit system for some cabins, increased levels of maintenance and patrols associated with cabins, and enhanced historical interpretation of cabins and cabin sites. Overnight stay limits are controlled by Refuge-specific regulations (50 CFR 36.39). This use is consistent with this Plan and these Refuge-specific regulations.

What is the use?

We propose allowing the use of certain Refuge-maintained cabins by the public consistent with the Refuge 2004 Cabin Management Plan and Refuge-specific regulations. The use of cabins also requires other uses such as canoeing/kayaking, hiking/snowshoeing, horseback riding, use of motorboats, use of airplanes, and/or use of snowmachines for transportation to and from. These incidental uses are not evaluated in this compatibility determination, but are evaluated in their respective compatibility determinations.

Is the use a priority public use?

No

Where would the use be conducted?

Sixteen cabins are currently available for overnight use by the public (Table 1 & Figures 1 & 2). Seven of these cabins are of modern construction while the remaining 9 cabins are historic cabins. Of these 9 historic cabins, 6 are located within the Kenai Wilderness (Caribou Island, Pipe Creek, Doroshin Bay, Vogel Lake, Big Bay and Emma Lake cabins). There are no cabins of modern construction located within designated Wilderness.

Fourteen of the 16 cabins are located adjacent to a lake while the remaining 2

cabins (Big Indian Creek and Pincher Creek) are in close proximity to a water source. Three cabins are road-accessible by vehicle with only a short hike along an established trail required to reach them (Upper Ohmer Lake, Engineer Lake and Kelly Lake cabins). Another high visitation cabin, Dolly Varden Lake cabin, is accessible after a short paddle from the nearest launch point. The remaining cabins require either a longer paddle, a motorboat, or an airplane to access during the summer months or a snowmachine to access during the winter months when the refuge is open to snowmachining.

The Refuge lies on the western Kenai Peninsula (Peninsula). This 10,039-square-mile (26,000-square-kilometer) Peninsula is connected to mainland Alaska by a 10-mile (16-kilometer) wide isthmus and is flanked by Prince William Sound to the east, Cook Inlet to the north and west, and the Gulf of Alaska to the south.

Flora and fauna on the Refuge are unusually diverse for this latitude because of the juxtaposition of two biomes on the Peninsula: the northern fringe of the Sitka spruce-dominated coastal rainforest on the eastern side of the Kenai Mountains and the westernmost reach of boreal forest in North America on the western side of the Kenai Mountains. The forests on the Refuge are dominated by white and black spruce with an admixture of aspen and birch. Extensive peatlands are interspersed among spruce in the Kenai Lowlands on the northern part of the Refuge. Lichen-dominated tundra replaces hemlock and subalpine shrub above tree line in the Kenai Mountains and Caribou Hills.

The eastern one-third of the Refuge lies within the Kenai Mountains, which range in elevation from 3,000–6,600 feet (900–1,800 meters). The mountains are heavily glaciated, and many of the high valleys are buried beneath the vast Harding Icefield, which covers approximately 720 square miles (1,865 square kilometers) at elevations of 4,000–5,300 feet (1,200–1,600 meters). The remaining two-thirds of the Refuge lie in the Kenai Lowlands, which is part of the Cook Inlet–Susitna Lowlands. These lowlands consist of ground moraine and stagnant ice terrain with low ridges, hills, and muskeg.

The Kenai River flows through the Refuge and drains much of it. Other primary watersheds include those of the Swanson River, Chickaloon River, and Kasilof River. There are thousands of lakes on the Kenai Peninsula—nearly all of them are on the Refuge. The largest are two glacial lakes, Tustumena Lake (73,000 acres or 29,500 hectares) and Skilak Lake (25,000 acres or 10,110 hectares). More than 4,600 smaller lakes dot the Refuge, mostly in the Moose, Swanson, and Chickaloon river drainages.

The Refuge has documented 1,086 species of flora and fauna: 151 birds, 20 fish, 30 mammals, 164 arthropods, 484 vascular plants, 97 fungi, 35 lichens, 14 liverworts, 90 mosses, and 1,139 other terrestrial and aquatic invertebrates. Eighteen formations have been classified on the Refuge under the National Vegetation Classification

System.

The Refuge now hosts more than 1 million annual visitor use days, and an estimated 300,000 visitors spend extended periods of time on the Refuge enjoying a variety of outdoor activities, including fishing, camping, hunting, hiking, wildlife viewing and photography, canoeing and river floating. Refuge environmental education and interpretive programs provide education and outreach to over 12,000 students and/or visitors annually.

A more detailed description of the Refuge environment is found in the 2010 Revised Comprehensive Conservation Plan (USFWS 2010).

When would the use be conducted?

Year-round. Each cabin is normally closed approximately 33 days per year for maintenance activities but is otherwise available for reservations/use outside of maintenance days. Occasionally, cabins may have a longer closure in order to address larger maintenance issues or facilitate administrative use.

Table 1. Kenai National Wildlife Refuge Cabins

Modern Cabins (Reservations Required)	Historic Cabins (Reservations Required)	Historic Cabins (1 st Come, 1 st Served)
Upper Ohmer Lake	Caribou Island	Emma Lake
Engineer Lake	Nurses	Trapper Joe Lake
Dolly Varden	Pipe Creek	
Snag Lake	Doroshin Bay	
McLain Lake	Vogel Lake	
Pincher Creek	Big Bay	
Kelly Lake	Big Indian Creek	

How would the use be conducted?

Fourteen cabins are available for reservations through the Recreation.gov website with a fee. Two cabins (Trapper Joe Lake and Emma Lake) are available on a first-come first-served basis with no accompanying fee. The use of cabins is subject to occupancy and length of stay limitations. Refuge-specific regulations (50 CFR 36.39) limit the use of a cabin to a maximum of 7 consecutive days. Each cabin has its own occupancy limit that is outlined in the recreation.gov website. Use fees are

evaluated periodically by the Refuge to ensure that they are comparable for fees of similar structures on adjacent federal properties.

The level of use of cabins varies according to their accessibility. Upper Ohmer Lake cabin is our highest use cabin (277 nights of occupancy during an average year) and is one of the most easily accessible with only a short hike from the parking area. Other cabins accessible with a short hike from a road, such as Engineer Lake Cabin or Kelly Lake Cabin, average around 240 nights of occupancy per year. Snag Lake cabin is only accessible by float plane during ice-free months or snowmachine with adequate snow cover during winter months and has the lowest reported average use at 9 nights per year.

Why is this use being proposed or reevaluated?

The use of cabins by the public is an existing use that is being reevaluated subject to 603 FW 2.11 (H). Public use cabins facilitate a variety of public uses on the Refuge including hunting, fishing, boating, wildlife viewing, photography, camping, trapping, snowmobiling, skiing, hiking, snowshoeing, and other related outdoor recreational experiences. Cabins also help facilitate gathering and harvest of wild foods for subsistence purposes. These activities would take place in the absence of cabins, but use levels, locations of use, safety, harvest success and the enjoyment of the experience may all be positively impacted by the presence of cabins. Cabins also can serve as a focus of historic education and interpretation and can be the sole reason for some visits to the cabin sites.

Availability of Resources

Management of reservations for the 14 public use cabins requiring a reservation is done through the www.recreation.gov website. Funds generated through reservations assist the Refuge in the annual maintenance of these structures (Table 2). These reservation fees do not provide sufficient funds to fully cover the salary of the one full-time staff member and the seasonal crewmember who conduct monitoring and maintenance activities nor for the supplies and equipment utilized. Operational and maintenance funds are used to supplement the use fees in order to maintain these structures. The 9 historic cabins listed in Table 1, as well as other historic structures that are used for administrative purposes, require staff and maintenance costs regardless of their use by the public to maintain. The Refuge has not attempted to differentiate the costs of annual and recurring maintenance for cabins utilized for public use from similar cabins and other structures utilized for administrative purposes or for interpretation. To-date, through a combination of fees generated from reservations and appropriated operational and maintenance funding, funds have been sufficient to conduct routine and recurrent administrative activities and maintenance.

Additional administrative costs associated with cabins are incurred for providing information on Refuge cabins to the public, routine law enforcement patrols, and for monitoring and, if necessary, control of invasive plant species at cabin sites conducted by Refuge biological staff. Considering how popular the road-accessible cabins (Upper Ohmer, Engineer, Kelly, and Dolly Varden cabins) are throughout the year, the Refuge may incur future one-time costs associated with construction and planning for additions to the cabin program.

One-time costs

One-time expenses would be incurred should the decision be made to add an additional cabin to the cabin use program. Any additional cabin would be evaluated for NEPA compliance and an amendment may be needed to the existing Cabin Management Plan Environmental Assessment. It is estimated that any new cabin would require a one-time investment of \$150,000 for the structure, \$5,000 for needed environmental review and up to \$1,000 for interpretive signage and brochure updates.

Annual/recurring expenses

Labor associated with the maintenance and monitoring of cabins is the greatest expense associated with the cabin program. Labor costs for a full-time cabin manager, seasonal cabin maintenance helper, law enforcement, fire and biological staff is estimated to total \$140,000 annually. An additional \$20,000 is needed for annual maintenance supplies. Monitoring expenses total approximately \$10,000 which is primarily aviation travel to remote cabins and fuel for travel by truck/boat to more accessible cabins. Monitoring is needed to ensure safety of visitors, structural needs of the cabin and monitoring for invasive species and other habitat impacts. Also included is the cost for removal of fuels for fire protection and the removal of beetle-killed spruce trees that may pose a danger to the cabin or visitors. A minor amount of funds (less than \$250) is estimated for updating signage and brochures annually.

Off-setting Revenue

From November 2020 to November 2021, fees of \$64,950 were generated to support this use from cabin use reservation fees.

Table 2. Costs to Administer and Manage Cabin Use

Category and Itemization	One-time Cost	Recurring Annual Expenses
Develop Plan/NEPA	\$5,000	--

Category and Itemization	One-time Cost	Recurring Annual Expenses
document/opening package		
Construct facilities	\$150,000/cabin	--
Develop signage and brochures	\$1,000	\$250
Staff time (LE, administration and management)	--	\$140,000
Maintenance	--	\$20,000
Monitoring	--	\$10,000
Total one-time expenses	\$156,000	--
Total recurring annual expenses	--	\$170,250
Offsetting revenues	--	-\$65,000
Total expenses	\$156,000	\$105,250

Anticipated Impacts of the Use

The effects and impacts of the proposed use to refuge resources, whether adverse or beneficial, are those that are reasonably foreseeable and have a reasonably close causal relationship to the proposed use. The environmental impacts of cabin use by the public has been more thoroughly detailed in the Cabin Management Plan Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact (USFWS 2004). This compatibility determination includes a brief synopsis of the anticipated impacts and a more in-depth written analyses of the environmental consequences on a resource only when the impacts on that resource differs in some way from the Cabin Management Plan Environmental Assessment. Generally, we will not consider resources that would not be affected or only negligibly affected by the proposed action. Those resources that are not likely to be affected or negligibly affected include; threatened and endangered species, geology and soils, air quality, floodplains, refuge management and operations and socioeconomics.

Wildlife and Aquatic Species, Habitat and Vegetation

For cabin use associated with an otherwise permitted activity (such as fishing or hunting) and where the number of participants is not increased due to the availability of a cabin, we do not anticipate impacts beyond short-term and localized disturbance which would not result in any measurable changes to fish, wildlife or plant populations or habitats within the Refuge. Cabin use by the public where an increase to group size or length of stay due to the cabin accommodations or in instances where visitation would not occur except for the presence of a cabin, we would expect impacts from disturbance to fish and wildlife or potential for habitat impacts would increase. It is believed that disturbance above that created from an otherwise permitted activity will occur at the 4 cabins that are relatively easily accessible and have high visitation and thus concentrated public use (Upper Ohmer Lake, Engineer Lake, Kelly Lake and Dolly Varden Lake cabins). Impacts to wildlife may result in avoidance of the immediate vicinity of these cabins. Impacts to vegetation would be greater than would occur without the presence of a cabin.

Certain wildlife species can become habituated to human presence at cabins and may become food conditioned through intentional or inadvertent feeding. Food conditioning increases potential for human-bear conflicts, affecting public safety and often resulting in negative consequences for bears. To reduce potential for human-bear conflicts and other human-wildlife interactions, we require visitors to follow stewardship practices that reduce opportunities for bears and other wildlife to receive an anthropogenic food reward. Therefore, food, including pet food, must be stored in cabins, bear-resistant coolers, or bear-resistant panniers. Garbage must also be stored in cabins and packed out at the end of the trip. We also recommend burning off any food on grills for ten minutes after use. For safety, we strongly recommend carrying bear spray and that people hike in groups of three or more and make noise while hiking to reduce a surprise encounter with a bear.

Visitors can unintentionally bring terrestrial and aquatic invasive species to cabins as well as the areas people use to access cabins. Some soil disturbance from foot traffic occurs, particularly at the high visitation cabins, which can increase the potential for invasive species establishment. Vectors include float planes, vehicle tires, horses, clothes, and shoes. The refuge routinely surveys for early detection, and treats areas, as necessary, around cabins, campgrounds, trails, lakes, streams, rivers, parking lots, and roadsides as part of recurrent efforts to prevent larger scale infestations and prevent encroachment of terrestrial and aquatic invasive species into remote areas currently free of them.

Water quality

Leave-no-trace practices are promoted by the Refuge. Improper management of human waste and littering with toilet paper are recurrent impacts associated with

backcountry use of the Refuge regardless of the activity. Deposition of solid human waste within 100 feet of the annual mean high water level of any wetland, lake, pond, spring, river or stream and within 100 feet of a campsite or trail, while prohibited by regulation, is observed in many areas. The presence of an outhouse at each cabin reduces this impact.

Wilderness

While there are no modern cabins within designated Wilderness, 6 of the historic cabins (Caribou Island, Pipe Creek, Doroshin Bay, Vogel Lake, Big Bay and Emma Lake cabins) are located in the Kenai Wilderness. Backcountry cabins support opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation in the Kenai Wilderness. Structures within Wilderness impact the undeveloped quality of wilderness character. Administrative regulations related to cabin use impact opportunities for unconfined recreation, and presence of visitors at a cabin may impact opportunities for other users in the area to experience solitude.

Visitor Use and experience

Cabin use is often associated with an individual participating in another permitted activity (e.g. hunting, fishing, hiking, etc.). To the extent that the cabin assists the user in safely conducting those associated activities, the presence of a cabin positively impacts visitor use and experience.

The presence of a cabin can impact other users recreating in the area. By regulation, tent camping is prohibited within 600 feet of a cabin if not a member of the party that is renting the cabin for the night. This may require a user to camp at a less desirable site.

To enhance public safety, the discharge of firearms is prohibited within ¼ mile of any public use cabin, which in effect restricts hunting near cabins. This impacts hunting opportunity on approximately 2,000 acres (i.e. 16 cabins x 126 acres per cabin) of this nearly 2 million acre Refuge.

Cultural Resources

Nine cabins used for public use are historic cabins. Prior to allowing public use at historic cabins and prior to maintenance being conducted on historic cabins, review per Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act was completed. This helps ensure that impacts to cultural or historic resources are avoided or minimized.

In 2019, 5 of these historic cabins were surveyed and recommendations provided for preservation (USFWS 2020). Vandalism was noted to have occurred at 2 public use cabins. Vandalism was also noted in the same report at an historic

administrative cabin that is not open for public use. Vandalism documented included initials carved into the wood of the cabin, ammunition cartridges driven into log butts and bullet holes in cabin logs.

Subsistence

Opportunities for subsistence users to utilize Refuge cabins help facilitate gathering and harvest of wild foods for subsistence purposes.

Potential impacts of a proposed use on the refuge's purposes and the Refuge System mission

Cabins of varying sizes, uses, and locations have long been associated with the Refuge. Most historic cabins were used as shelters by early trappers, hunters and hunting guides, or gold miners. Some cabins were built to serve as short-term overnight shelter for occasional use while others served as long-term accommodations.

Sixteen cabins are now designated for public use and 14 of these are available by reservation while 2 are on a first-come first-served basis. Refuge public use cabins help facilitate a variety of other compatible public uses including several priority Refuge System uses, specifically hunting, fishing, wildlife viewing and photography. The presence of cabins also enhances safety of refuge visitors, particularly in backcountry settings.

Short-term impacts

Wildlife – Disturbance impacts to wildlife at many public use cabins (up to 12 of the 16 cabins) would be considered minor and short-term given the limited number of days of use by the public per year (less than 150 days/year).

Long-term impacts

Wildlife and plants – Long-term disturbance impacts to wildlife may occur at the 4 public use cabins that have high visitation (Upper Ohmer Lake, Engineer Lake, Kelly Lake and Dolly Varden Lake cabins). Some species of wildlife may avoid areas around these 4 cabins due to past and recurrent disturbance from visitors.

Human-bear conflicts arising from food conditioning of bears that obtain human or pet foods, which increase risk to public safety and sometimes result in bear mortality through defense of life or property takings or lethal management action by agencies, are an ongoing and recurrent issue. Regulations regarding food storage are in place to reduce the potential for food-conditioning of bears and other wildlife. Ongoing public education and enforcement efforts by the Refuge and partner agencies are necessary and further mitigate this impact.

Potential for introduction of invasive species by the public when accessing cabin sites is a long-term impact which must be monitored. The Refuge mitigates this impact by employing early detection and rapid response as part of an overall integrated pest management strategy. Focus is on control and prevention of large scale infestations in high use areas where risk is greatest and preventing establishment in remote areas. Accessible cabins are monitored annually while remote cabins are intermittently surveyed. Invasive species found are treated as necessary. Public education is focused on reducing potential for introductions of injurious invasive species such as *Elodea*, an aquatic invasive with high potential to negatively impact freshwater ecosystems.

Water quality - Each public use cabin has an outhouse. The presence of a properly located outhouse away from waterways and waterbodies helps protect water quality over the long-term.

Wilderness - Cabins support opportunities for visitors to enjoy primitive recreation and experience solitude in the Kenai Wilderness. For some visitors, cabins make a remote backcountry experience in a wilderness setting possible.

Maintaining the 6 public use cabins located within designated Wilderness represents a long-term negative impact to the undeveloped quality of the Kenai Wilderness. These cabins are historic structures and as heritage resources their presence and maintenance concurrently supports the recreational and historic use public purposes of Wilderness.

Administrative regulations related to cabin use, the reservation system and fee requirement negatively impact opportunities for unconfined recreation, and the recurrent presence of visitors at a cabin is a potential long-term negative impact on opportunities for other users in the vicinity to experience solitude.

Visitor use and experience - Positive long-term impacts of administering the Refuge's public use cabin program through a reservation system and under specific regulations include an enhanced experience for cabin users, reduced potential for wildlife conflicts and conflicts between users, and enhanced public safety.

Restrictions on camping within 600 feet of a public use cabin and restrictions on discharge of a firearm within $\frac{1}{4}$ mile of a public use cabin could be considered a long-term negative impact to visitors who have not reserved a cabin and/or are prohibited from participating in an otherwise permitted activity in the areas adjacent to cabins. However, these regulations affect public uses in a very small area (approximately 2000 acres) of this nearly 2 million-acre Refuge.

Cultural resources - Both positive and negative long-term impacts may occur to cultural resources. The nine historic cabins that are part of the public use program are only a fraction of the over 100 historic cabins and cabin ruins and remnants that are found on the Refuge. These nine cabins, through restoration and ongoing

maintenance, are positively impacted and serve as representation of the many other cabins that have been lost over the history of modern human occupation on the Kenai Peninsula. The use of these cabins by the public may result in long-term negative impacts if vandalism, arson or accidental damage occurs.

Public Review and Comment

Legal notice of the draft renewal compatibility determination is planned to be published in the Anchorage Daily News and the Kenai Peninsula Clarion which will initiate a 30-day public comment period. A notice is also planned for the Refuge's website <<https://www.fws.gov/refuge/kenai>> and on the refuge Facebook page. A press release will be prepared and sent to our standard mailing list during the same time period. Concerns expressed during the public comment period will be addressed in the final Compatibility Determination.

Proposed Determination

Use is Compatible with the Following Stipulations.

Stipulations Necessary to Ensure Compatibility

The following stipulations governing administration of the Refuge cabin management program are in place to ensure compatibility with Refuge purposes and the Refuge System mission. Stipulations 1-7 are derived from the Cabin Management Plan (USFWS 2004). Stipulations 3, 5, 6 and 8 are also refuge-specific regulations (50 CFR 36.39) or a general Refuge System regulation (50 CFR 27.52) in place to protect resources, enhance public safety and/or enhance visitor experience by reducing conflicts between users. Stipulation 9 is necessary to ensure compliance under Section 810 of ANILCA.

- 1) The use of cabins by the public will only be maintained and sustained if adequate resources are available to ensure adequate administration of the program, including maintenance to uphold public safety standards, monitoring for wildlife concerns and to prevent or reduce impacts from invasive species, actions to ensure Wilderness stewardship, historic preservation legal compliance, public education and outreach, and enforcement of applicable regulations to protect resources and public safety.
- 2) Periodic assessment of cabin use reservation rates will occur to ensure rates are comparable to similar cabin use rates on adjacent federal or state properties.
- 3) Cabin reservations do not grant the exclusive use of any area of the refuge, outside of the cabin itself, by the user although camping within 600 feet of any public use cabin and the discharge of firearms within ¼ mile of any

public use cabin is prohibited.

- 4) Seasonal or other restrictions on cabin use (or their ultimate removal or relocation) will be imposed to reduce or eliminate documented problems with wildlife.
- 5) A seven day maximum length of stay by any group at one site will be imposed.
- 6) All food, beverages, personal hygiene items, odiferous refuse, or any other item that may attract bears or other wildlife, and all equipment used to transport, store, or cook these items must be locked in the cabin or in a commercially produced and certified bear-resistant container or immediately accessible to at least one person who is outside and attending to the items.
- 7) No new cabin construction will occur in designated Wilderness areas.
- 8) It is illegal to introduce invasive species onto a National Wildlife Refuge (50 CFR 27.52) and Alaska (5 AAC 92.141). Best management practices shall be taken so that no invasive plants, insects, other invertebrates, or animals are introduced to refuge habitats. All hay and feed used on the refuge for domestic stock and sled dogs must be certified under the State of Alaska's Weed Free Forage certification.
- 9) Cabin users will take no action that interferes with subsistence activities of Federally qualified 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, and damage to cabins, trails, traditional campsites or caches used by subsistence users.

Justification

Staying in a Refuge public use cabin has become integral to the use and enjoyment of the Refuge for many visitors, and a use through which the public can develop and foster knowledge and appreciation for the Refuge, its resources and history.

Based on available information and best professional judgement, the Service has determined that cabin use by the public at Kenai National Wildlife Refuge, in accordance with the stipulations provided above, would not materially interfere with or detract from the fulfillment of Refuge purposes and the National Wildlife Refuge System mission. Availability of public use cabins facilitates a variety of other compatible recreational uses on the Refuge including Refuge System priority uses of hunting, fishing, and wildlife viewing and photography, and other recreational activities including hiking, canoeing and kayaking, snowmachining, trapping, skiing and snowshoeing. Cabins help facilitate subsistence uses and enhance safety for Refuge users, particularly in backcountry settings.

Cabin use, as outlined in this compatibility determination and with continued oversight and management by the Refuge to mitigate for potential and realized impacts to biological resources and water quality, would not conflict with requirements of the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act, as amended, to maintain the biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of the refuge.

Signature of Determination

Refuge Manager Signature and Date

Signature of Concurrence

Assistant Regional Director Signature and Date

Mandatory Reevaluation Date

March 2032

Literature Cited/References

Executive Order 8979. 1941. 6 Federal Register 6471. Enacted Alaska (Kenai National Moose Range)

USFWS. 2004. Kenai National Wildlife Refuge Cabin Management Plan and Final Environmental Assessment. Soldotna, Alaska: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 60 pp.

USFWS. 2010. Revised Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Impact Statement (2 volumes): Kenai National Wildlife Refuge. USFWS, Region 7, Division of Conservation Planning & Policy, Anchorage, AK.

USFWS. 2020. A Historic Structure Survey Report and Preservation

Recommendations for Six Public Use Cabins on the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge, Kenai Peninsula, Alaska. Soldotna, Alaska: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 250 pp.

Figures

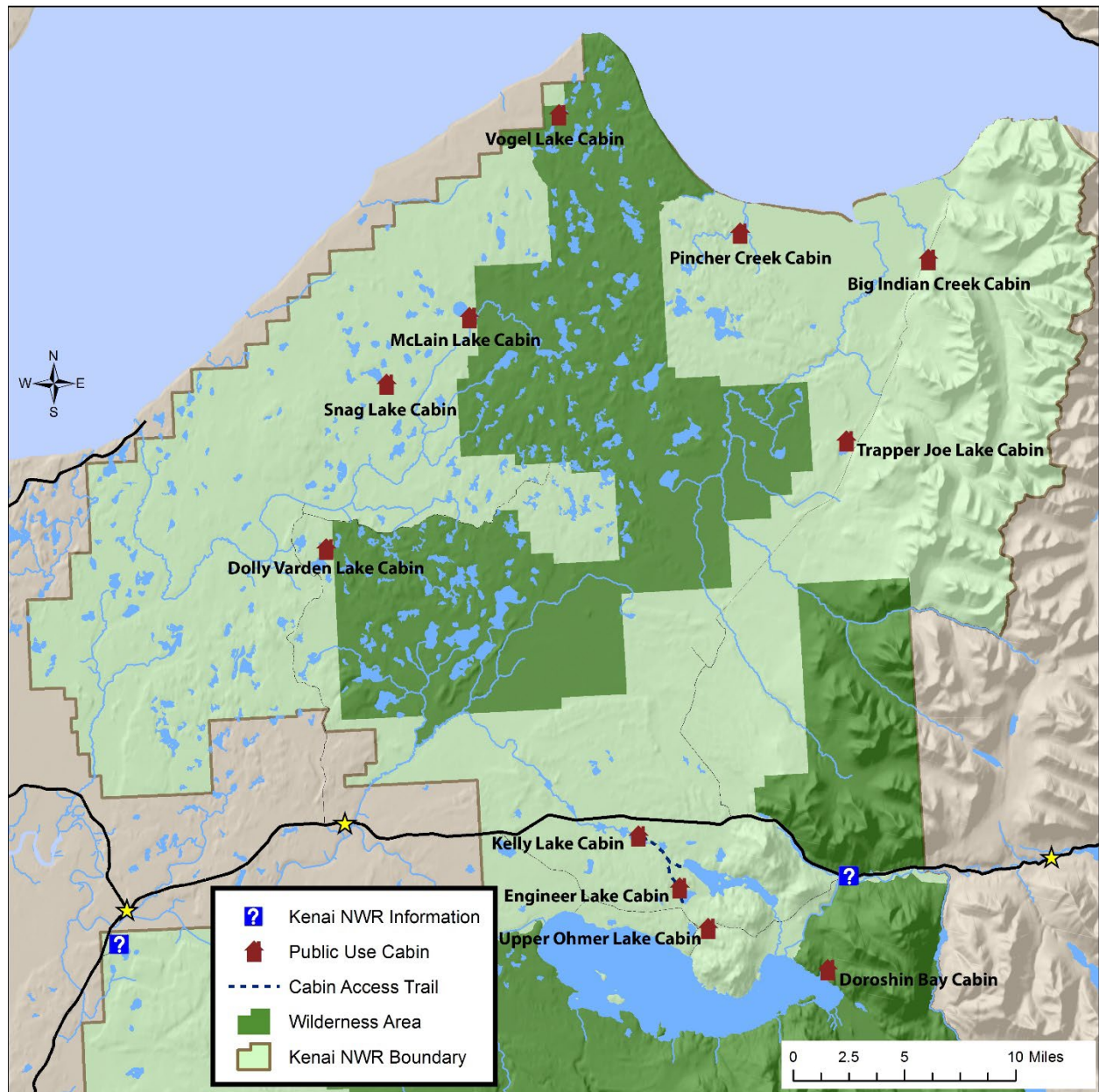


Figure 1 Public Use Cabins Available North of Skilak Lake

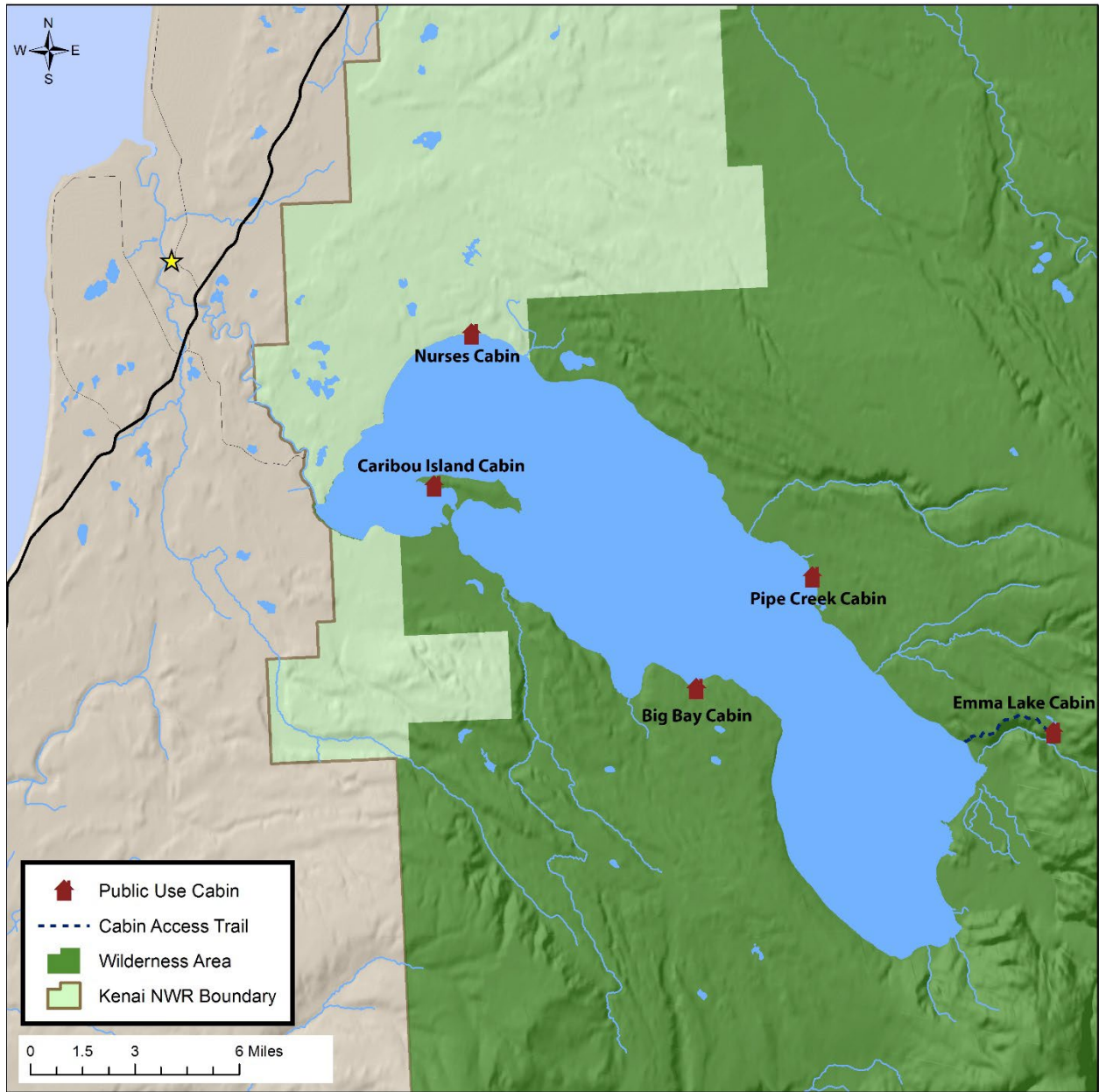


Figure 2 Public Use Cabins Available Near Tustumena Lake