FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
Apache Alaska Corporation 3-D Seismic Program
Kenai National Wildlife Refuge

BACKGROUND

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) has received an application from Apache Alaska Corporation (Apache) for a special use permit to conduct a three-dimensional (3-D) seismic survey. The 3-D seismic survey is being proposed in order to obtain high quality imagery of subsurface geological features which may contain recoverable oil and natural gas owned by Cook Inlet Region Incorporated (CIRI) within the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge). The Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) (Section 1110(b)) and Federal regulations (43 CFR 36.10) require that the Service provide for "adequate and feasible" access to these privately-owned mineral resources within the Refuge. Legal agreements between CIRI and the U.S. Department of the Interior also require the Service to allow for access for exploration and development of CIRI-owned coal, oil and gas resources and subsurface estate within the Refuge.

In addition, the Tyonek Native Corporation (TNC) proposed to allow use of their surface ownership (lands conveyed to TNC under Section 22(g) of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act) within the Refuge by Apache for conducting seismic survey activities associated with imaging off-Refuge subsurface resources. Consistent with federal regulations (50 CFR 25.21), the Service completed a Compatibility Determination for the proposed use of the TNC 22(g) lands in April 2013, and determined that the proposed use was compatible.

The Service is issuing a Special Use Permit to Apache for conducting seismic survey operations within the Refuge and must decide on permit stipulations governing Apache's operations which will best protect Refuge resources and minimize conflicts with public uses of the Refuge.

Apache's seismic survey within the Refuge will be conducted within an approximately 223-square mile area (142, 810 acres) overlying CIRI-owned subsurface resources. The project area lies in the northwestern and central portions of the Refuge. The project will involve land surveying to identify source hole and receiver placement locations, drilling, detonation of explosives to generate a sound source, and deployment of receivers to record the speed and intensity of the returning signal, and clean-up operations. Helicopters will be used to support all phases of the seismic survey; snowmachines will also be used (dependent upon adequate snow cover) for ground transport of crews and equipment. Drilling will utilize heliportable drilling units, and the survey will employ cable-free receivers. Source holes will be drilled to a depth of 35 feet and loaded with a 9.7 pound explosive charge. Shot holes which can only be drilled to depths of 16-25 feet will be loaded with a 4.85 pound charge. The 3-D seismic survey would be conducted from October through April over a three-year period from October 2013to April 2016.

Seismic operations to support imaging of off-Refuge subsurface resources to be conducted on TNC 22(g) lands within the Refuge will include land surveying to identify receiver placement locations, and deployment and retrieval of wireless receivers. These activities would be conducted between August 15 and December 15 in either 2013 or 2014.

FINDINGS

Based on a review and evaluation of the information contained in the Environmental Assessment (EA) referenced below, I have determined that the proposed action of issuing a Special Use Permit to Apache Alaska Corporation for conducting a 3-D seismic survey on selected lands within the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge, and for seismic survey operations on TNC 22(g) lands supporting imaging off-refuge subsurface estate, is not a major federal action which would significantly affect the quality of the human environment within the meaning of Section 102(2) of the National Environmental Policy Act. The environmental review conducted by the Service supports the conclusion that impacts of the project, as conducted under the stipulations of the Special Use Permit, do not exceed a threshold of significance. Accordingly, the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement on the proposed action is not required. A Special Use Permit will be issued by the Service for the project, containing stipulations deemed necessary to minimize environmental impacts, thereby protecting Refuge resources and minimizing conflicts with public uses of the Refuge to the maximum extent practicable. The Service will ensure compliance with permit stipulations through active monitoring of project activities.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

1. Environmental Assessment, Apache Alaska Corporation 3D Seismic Survey
2. ANILCA 810 Evaluation included in the Environmental Assessment
3. Compatibility Determination, Seismic exploration (3-D) activities on Tyonek Native Corporation 22(g) lands within Kenai National Wildlife Refuge

Mike Ellis, Acting

Regional Director

7/3/2013

Date