

Alaska Lands Update

monthly updates on Federal management actions for the people of Alaska

Citizens' Advisory Commission on Federal Areas, Department of Natural Resources, State of Alaska
3700 Airport Way Fairbanks, AK 99709

BLM Releases First Rapid Ecoregional Assessment

On June 18, 2014, the BLM issued its first Rapid Ecoregional Assessment, or REA, in Alaska, summarizing the conditions of the Seward Peninsula ecoregions.

REAs gather and synthesize existing data for all the lands in an ecoregion and identify important habitats for fish, wildlife, and species of concern. REAs also help identify areas that are not ecologically intact or readily restorable; and where development activities, such as transmission lines, may be directed to minimize potential impacts. REAs then gauge the potential of these habitats to be affected by four overarching environmental change agents: climate change, wildfires, invasive species, and development.

State Director Bud Cribley said, "Alaska is unique in that we have not experienced the large scale land development that causes threats to terrestrial and aquatic habitat on the scale that the other western states have. REAs will assist us in identifying overlapping areas of concern that we can address during our planning processes so that we wisely manage the public lands to sustain their health, diversity and productivity."

The study area boundaries encompass approximately 60,000 square miles and include lands managed by the State of Alaska, Alaska Native regional and village corporations, Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, and Fish and Wildlife Service as well as other local and private entities. All REAs are

prepared in cooperation with other Federal and state land management agencies, including the U.S. Geological Survey, the Department of the Interior's lead science agency.

The Seward Peninsula REA report and data are now available on the internet at http://www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/prog/more/Landscape_Approach/reas/seward.html. Additional Alaska REAs have been initiated in the Yukon Kuskokwim ecoregions, North Slope ecoregions, and Central Yukon ecoregions. ♦

Alaska Park Science

Alaska Park Science Journal is an award-winning periodical publishing semi-annually on topics pertinent to Alaska's National Parks. The current issue "*Alaska Park Science: Wilderness in Alaska*". Is available at: http://www.nps.gov/akso/nature/science/ak_park_science/volume_13_issue_1.cfm.

Alaska Park Science is a "paperless" publication, every individual article and every complete issue is available online as easily-printed PDF files. If you want your own copy of an issue that you missed, printed copies of most of the back issues are also available from the Alaska Geographic bookstore:

<http://www.alaskageographic.org/>

General information can be requested at: akr_info@nps.gov. ♦

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BLM Requests Nominations and Comments for NPR-A Oil & Gas Lease Sales, November 2014 -

CACFA will be holding its next meeting on Friday, August 8 and Saturday, August 9, 2014, at the Anchorage Legislative Office. While the original location of the LIO office in Anchorage is under construction, the meeting will take place at the interim location across the street.

More information, agenda items and public comment sessions, please access that information on our website as the meeting date approaches.

That web address is:

<http://dnr.alaska.gov/commis/cacfa/>.

Comment Deadline Reminders

- **Use By Over-Snow Vehicles, USFS proposes revision to a portion of the Travel Management Rule.** Comments must be submitted by August 4, 2014. For more information contact Joseph Adamson, (202) 205-0931, Recreation, Heritage, and Volunteer Resources Staff; or go online at: <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2014-06-18/pdf/2014-14273.pdf>;
- The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is calling for **Nominations and Comments on available tracts to be considered for its scheduled November 2014 oil and gas lease sale in the National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska (NPR-A).** Nominations and Comments must be received by July 18, 2014. For more information and a map of the NPR-A showing available areas is online at <http://www.blm.gov/ak>.
- FWS and NOAA have extended the comment period until October 9, 2014 for: Proposed Rule for Interagency Cooperation under Section 7 of the Environmental Protection Act and Proposed Rule for Listing Endangered and Threatened Species and Designating Critical Habitat and the Draft Policy on Implementation of Section 4(b)(2) of the ESA. See the article on page 4 of this newsletter for more information;
- BLM has released and posted online the **Scoping Summary Report for Bering Sea-Western Interior RMP and the Community Scoping Meeting Summaries for the Central Yukon RMP.** The Report can be found online at: <http://www.blm.gov/ak/st/en/prog/planning.html>; select the project title, then Documents and Reports.
- The next step is to seek **Nomination's for Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC)** as part of its **Bering Sea-Western Interior (RMP) and the Central Yukon RMP**, which are now under development. The BLM will accept ACEC nominations until August 29, 2014. To learn more about the planning process, please review the various scoping materials available at: <http://www.blm.gov/ak/st/en/prog/planning.html> on the Documents and Reports page as well as the maps available on the Maps page;
- **Citizens' Advisory Commission on Federal Areas** will have it's next meeting at the interim offices of the **Anchorage Legislative Office on Friday, August 8 and Sunday, August 9.** Meeting times, agenda items and public comment sessions will be posted on our website as the meeting approaches. The web address is: <http://dnr.alaska.gov/commis/cacfa/>.

Diverse Team Convened to Develop United States' Plan for Polar Bear Conservation

A plan to conserve the polar bear in the United States over the next century is being crafted by a diverse group of stakeholders, led by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The required plan, when finalized, will guide activities for polar bear conservation in response to the 2008 determination that the polar bear is a threatened species due to the ongoing loss of sea ice habitat from global climate change.

"We are working with our partners here in Alaska, throughout the U.S., and internationally to address all threats to polar bears," said U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Regional Director Geoffrey Haskett. "The team we have convened to develop the United States' conservation management plan includes a diverse array of perspectives about polar bears, but the one thing everyone can agree on is that polar bears should be conserved, the question is 'how?'"

The plan will meet legal obligations under the Endangered Species and Marine Mammal Protection acts, and will contribute to a global plan being drafted by the parties to the 1973 Agreement on the Conservation of Polar Bear -- United States, Canada, Russia, Norway, and Greenland/Denmark—the five polar bear "Range States."

The Polar Bear Recovery Team—as the group is known—includes 35 representatives from Federal Agencies, the State of Alaska, the North Slope Borough, Alaska Native organizations, industry, non-profit organizations, and the Canadian Wildlife Service, with expertise in polar bear biology, climate science, policy, communications, and traditional and contemporary indigenous ecological knowledge. The team's goal is to have the draft plan available for a 60-day public comment period in late fall 2014 and a final plan for presentation to the international partners at their 2015 meeting.

"The Service received over 700 thousand public comments during the listing process, so we know the public has a great interest in the fate of polar bears," Haskett said. "The public will have a similar opportunity to weigh in on how we continue to conserve and manage polar bears into the future as outlined in the plan."

A public announcement will be issued when the comment period opens on the draft polar bear conservation management plan. Learn more about the Polar Bear Recovery Team and progress on the draft plan at www.fws.gov/alaska/pbrt and follow the team's progress on Facebook. ♦

Agency Websites:

National Park Service

<http://www.nps.gov/state/ak/index.htm>

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

<http://alaska.fws.gov/>

U.S. Forest Service - Region 10, AK

<http://www.fs.usda.gov/r10/>

Bureau of Land Management

<http://www.blm.gov/ak/st/en.html>

Department of the Interior

<http://www.doi.gov/>

National Marine Fisheries Service

<http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/>

Kenai Peninsula-Anchorage Borough Resource Advisory Committee

The Kenai Peninsula- Anchorage Borough Resource Advisory Committee, or RAC, will meet in Portage, Alaska. The committee is authorized under the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act (the Act) and operates in compliance with the Federal Advisory Committee Act. The purpose of the committee is to improve collaborative relationships and to provide advice and recommendations to the Forest Service concerning projects and funding consistent with Title II of the Act. The meetings are open to the public. The purpose of the meetings is to monitor current projects and the review and recommendation of new projects.

DATES: The meetings will be held at 10:00 a.m. on the following dates: Saturday, June 12; Saturday, July 19 and Saturday, July 26.

The meetings will be held at Begich Boggs Visitor Center, 800 Portage Lake Loop, Portage, Alaska. If you are not able to meet in person, you can still participate via teleconference, by contacting the person listed. Written comments may be submitted as described below. Meeting are subject to cancellation, please confirm with staff

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

April Dent, RAC Coordinator, by phone at 907-754-2313, or via email at: aprildent@fs.fed.us. ♦



Commission Members

Representative Wes Keller, Wasilla
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Senator John Coghill, Fairbanks (G)

Susan Smith, Chokosna (G)

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(S) SENATE APPOINTMENT

(H) HOUSE APPOINTMENT

(G) GOVERNOR'S APPOINTMENT

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For more information, visit our website:

www.dnr.alaska.gov/commis/cacfa

AS 41.37.160 The Citizens' Advisory Commission on Federal Management Areas in Alaska is established in the department [Natural Resources]. In the exercise of its responsibilities, the commission shall consider the views of citizens of the state and officials of the state.

Unmanned Aircraft to be Prohibited in America's National Parks

National Park Service Director Jonathan B. Jarvis signed a policy memorandum on June 20, 2014, that directs superintendents nationwide to prohibit launching, landing, or operating unmanned aircraft on lands and waters administered by the National Park Service. "We embrace many activities in national parks because they enhance visitor experiences with the iconic natural, historic and cultural landscapes in our care," Jarvis said. "However, we have serious concerns about the negative impact that flying unmanned aircraft is having in parks, so we are prohibiting their use until we can determine the most appropriate policy that will protect park resources and provide all visitors with a rich experience."

Unmanned aircraft have already been prohibited at several national parks. These parks initiated bans after noise and nuisance complaints from park visitors, an incident in which park wildlife were harassed, and park visitor safety concerns. Last September, an unmanned aircraft flew above evening visitors seated in the Mount Rushmore National Memorial Amphitheater. Park rangers concerned for visitors' safety confiscated the unmanned aircraft. In April, visitors at Grand Canyon National Park gathered for a quiet sunset, which was interrupted by a loud unmanned aircraft flying back and forth and eventually crashing in the canyon. Later in the month, volunteers at Zion National Park witnessed an unmanned aircraft disturb a herd of bighorn sheep, reportedly separating adults from young animals.

The policy memorandum directs park superintendents to take a number of steps to exclude unmanned aircraft from

national parks. The steps include drafting a written justification for the action, ensuring compliance with applicable laws, and providing public notice of the action. The memorandum does not affect the primary jurisdiction of the Federal Aviation Administration over the National Airspace System.

The policy memorandum is a temporary measure. Jarvis said the next step will be to propose a Service wide regulation regarding unmanned aircraft. That process can take considerable time, depending on the complexity of the rule, and includes public notice of the proposed regulation and opportunity for public comment.

The policy memo directs superintendents to use their existing authority within the Code of Federal Regulations to prohibit the use of unmanned aircraft, and to include that prohibition in the park's compendium, a set of park-specific regulations.

More information can be found at the following links: <http://www.nps.gov/gaar/parknews/prohibition-of-unmanned-aircraft-in-national-parks.htm> and <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/government-moves-to-ban-drones-in-400-national-parks/>. ♦



Use by Over-Snow Vehicles - US Forest Service Proposed Revisions to a portion of the Travel Management Rule

Consistent with a court order on March 29, 2013, the U.S. Forest Service is proposing to amend the agency's travel management rule (TMR) to require designation of National Forest System (NFS) roads, NFS trails, and areas on NFS lands where over-snow vehicle (OSV) use is allowed, restricted, or prohibited. Under the amended subpart C, the responsible official could establish a system of routes and areas where OSV use is prohibited except where allowed or a system of routes and areas where OSV use is allowed unless prohibited. The proposed rule would continue to exempt OSV use from subpart B of the TMR, which provides for des-

ignation of a system of routes and areas where motor vehicle use is allowed and prohibits motor vehicle use off the designated system.

Comments must be received in writing by August 4, 2014 and can be submitted electronically by following the instructions at the Federal eRulemaking portal at <http://www.regulations.gov>. For more information contact Joseph Adamson, (202) 205-0931, Recreation, Heritage, and Volunteer Resources Staff; or go online at: <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2014-06-18/pdf/2014-14273.pdf>. ♦

USFWS & NOAA Endangered Species Act Proposed Regulations and Draft Policy

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration have extended the public comment period on a draft policy and proposed revisions to regulations on designation, destruction or adverse modification of critical habitat under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The draft policy and proposed regulation revisions were released in the *Federal Register* on May 12, 2014 and can be found at the following links: [Proposed Rule for Interagency Cooperation under Section 7 of the ESA](#) and [Proposed Rule for Listing Endangered and Threatened Species and Designating Critical Habitat](#) and the [Draft Policy on Implementation of Section 4\(b\)\(2\) of the ESA](#). The public comment period on these proposals was extended until October 9, 2014. The extension notices are found here: [Proposed Rules](#) and [Draft Policy](#).

Submit comments electronically at the *Federal eRulemaking Portal*: <http://www.regulations.gov/#!home>. In the Search box, enter the appropriate docket number; for the proposed revised definition of destruction or adverse modification of critical habitat, use FWS-R9-ES-2011-0072; for the proposed rule to amend the regulations for designating critical habitat, use FWS-HQ-ES-2012-0096; and for the draft policy, use FWS-R9-ES-2011-0104. ♦

BLM Requests Nominations and Comments for NPR-A Oil & Gas Lease Sale Scheduled for November 2014

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is calling for nominations and comments on available tracts to be considered for its scheduled November 2014 oil and gas lease sale in the National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska (NPR-A). This will be the fourth sale since the President directed the Department of the Interior to conduct annual oil and gas lease sales in the NPR-A.

There are 873 tracts on about 9.8 million acres that will be available for nomination and comment under this lease sale, which is consistent with the [Record of Decision for the NPR-A wide Integrated Activity Plan](#) signed in February



EPA & COE – Definition of “Waters of the United States” Under the Clean Water Act – Proposed Rule

In April, 2014 the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers released a proposed rule defining the scope of waters protected under the Clean Water Act (CWA). According to the Congressional Research Service, the proposed rule would revise the existing regulatory definition of “waters of the United States” consistent with legal rulings – especially Supreme Court rulings in 2001 and 2006 - that interpreted the regulatory scope of the CWA more narrowly than previously, but created uncertainty about the precise effect of the Court’s decision. The proposed rules can be found at: <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2014-04-21/pdf/2014-07142.pdf>. In response to requests by the public, the agencies recently announced an [Extension of the Comment Period](#). Comments must be received on or before October 20, 2014 and can be submit comments at the *Federal eRulemaking Portal*: <http://www.regulations.gov/#!home>. In the Search box enter docket number EPA-HQ-OW-2011-8880. ♦

BLM ANNOUNCES NEW MINING FEES FOR THE 2015 ASSESSMENT YEAR

The new fees became effective on June 30, 2014, when the *Federal Register* published the new fees. (See *Federal Register Volume 79, No. 125*). The new fees are:

1. Mining claim maintenance fees increased to \$155.00 (from \$140).
2. Association placer claim fees are \$155.00 for every 20 acres or portion thereof.
3. New Mining claims (as of September 1, 2014) increased to \$37 (from \$34).

Anyone who already paid \$140.00 for the 2015 assessment year will need to pay an additional \$15.00. Failure to pay this increase will result in forfeiture of your claims.

You may send the payment to either BLM Anchorage or Fairbanks Offices, depending on where your claims are located. ♦

2013. Currently, there are 207 authorized oil and gas leases encompassing 1,755,863 acres in the NPR-A.

For more information and a map of the NPR-A showing available areas is online at <http://www.blm.gov/ak>.

The Call for Nominations and Comments was published in the *Federal Register* which announced the start of a 45-day period. BLM-Alaska must receive all nominations and comments on these tracts for consideration on or before July 18, 2014.

