

Bureau of Land Management Wildlands Program

Fact Sheet



Irresponsible Management Threatens Alaska's Greatest Treasures

Public lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) support Alaska Native cultures, wildlife and the sustainable economies of recreation, hunting and sport and commercial fishing. The BLM's most recent decisions have put vast acreages of public lands in private hands based on decisions that weight development considerations more than concerns over healthy wildlife and habitat or tourism and recreation. The BLM's portfolio of public lands contains some of the last truly wild places left in the United States; places that support vigorous populations of mammals, fish and birds threatened in other regions of the globe.

How These Decisions Are Being Made

BLM has been working on five land use plans, called Resource Management Plans or RMPs, for various regions of Alaska. The plans will establish a framework for managing public use of these lands for the next 20 years and impacts that could last generations.

Bay RMP — Many millions of salmon return each year to Bristol Bay to spawn in its tributaries – creating not only the world's largest wild salmon runs, but also the largest commercial sockeye salmon fishery on earth. Five species of Pacific salmon are found in the Bay Region: chinook, coho, sockeye, chum, and pink. And the area accounts for more than 55 percent of wild sockeye salmon production in the world.

The Bay RMP encompasses 1.2 million acres of BLM lands in Goodnews Bay and Bristol Bay. Bristol Bay lands, in particular, are under intense threat by development proposals for off shore drilling and the Pebble Mine Project on adjacent state lands; they are further threatened by BLMs management decisions to make nearly 100 percent of these lands available without providing any protections for the critical salmon spawning habitat on the one million acres of BLM managed lands in Bristol Bay.

East Alaska — The largest, longest glacier in North America is found in the East Alaska planning area. The Bering Glacier winds its way through the St. Elias Range, the highest coastal mountain range in the world, for 1,900 miles. The region is known as a globally-renowned glacial research area. The Bering Glacier plays a major role in the areas fisheries and coastal estuary environment.

The BLM made decisions in the East Alaska RMP that will affect over 7 million acres of public lands. 1.4 million acres of which are wetlands that host migratory and resident bird populations including sensitive species such as the trumpeter swan and tule white-fronted goose. The BLM proposed to make approximately 80 percent of the public lands available to mineral development – particularly oil and gas that could dramatically change the many public recreation areas and impact the currently high functioning and pristine wetland habitats.

Eastern Interior — The Yukon River is Alaska’s longest river and is home to the longest salmon migration in the world. The river spans more than 2,000 miles and hosts an international salmon fishery shared with Canada and directly supports the subsistence needs of over 45 rural communities, in Alaska. The Black River, a tributary to the Yukon, is culturally significant for the village of Chalkyitsik and is utilized by the village as a municipal clean water drinking source.

BLM manages approximately 10.5 million acres; many of these lands are within recreation units and along national wild and scenic rivers designated to protect the natural environment. Unlike the other RMPs, this area is still in the beginnings of planning but based on BLM’s track record we can reasonably presume that they will recommend close to the entire 10.5 million acres as open for development.

Kobuk-Seward — The Western Arctic Caribou herd, with nearly 500,000 animals, is the world’s largest. The herd requires a large portion of the 11.9 million-acre expanse for critical winter and summer habitat, in northwest Alaska, to maintain its health and numbers. Some 40 rural Alaskan communities, including many Alaska Natives, depend on these caribou for their subsistence lifestyle.

These public lands are being opened to oil and gas and mineral development even within designated critical habitat areas for the Western Arctic Herd. A balance of development and protections is needed to ensure the sustainability of the herd, prevent fragmenting vital habitat, and permanently altering or displacing migration routes. The arctic is the front lines for climate change and local residents have witnessed the effects – the decisions that BLM has made for these lands will likely increase the impacts on public lands.

Ring of Fire — The largest number of sea birds in North America—nearly 40 million birds of 30 species—come to the Ring of Fire region each year to nest and raise their young. Covering a total of 1.3 million acres, the Ring of Fire region is made up of widely fragmented pieces of land that run across southeast and south central Alaska, and include Kodiak Island and the Aleutian Islands. These lands also supply critical staging locations for migratory birds on their way to the arctic. This area contains over 500 miles of salmon streams, three caribou herds, over 10 million migratory birds, unparalleled moose and bear habitats as well as the most *productive commercial fisheries in the world – the Aleutian Islands are the gateway to Bristol Bay.*

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What Is The Solution?

Alaska Wilderness League and the public are calling on the BLM to undo these Bush era decisions by:

1. Adopting pro-conservation management in the Ring of Fire, Kobuk Seward, and East Alaska RMPs
2. Completing a new management plan for Bristol Bay that would incorporate sound science and the strongest possible protections for the sustainable and renewable resources.

*For more information contact Jeremiah Millen or Jennifer Hillman
Alaska Wilderness League, 907-222-4046
www.AlaskaWild.org*