



*Your Land.
Your Voice.*



Sue Steinacher

Forging a Healthy Future for Alaska's Federal Public Lands

A guide to the Bureau of Land Management lands in Alaska

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Alaska’s public BLM lands are a national treasure. Often undervalued for their significance, they form a vital link within the patchwork of Alaska’s federal public lands. These lands contain incredibly diverse and critical wildlife habitat that directly supports the economic needs of Alaska’s communities and maintains the long-standing traditional cultures of Alaska Natives in all regions of the state. BLM lands are high quality, multiple-use lands that serve as habitat migration corridors for wildlife, prime hunting and fishing areas, and support vast recreation opportunities for the American public.

Generic and short-sighted planning has left our public lands in Alaska vulnerable to a wide array of development scenarios. Due to faulty Bush era decisions, nearly 100 percent of Alaska’s BLM lands have been handed over to private industry, despite the multitude of other values they possess. The Alaska Wilderness League is working hard to change the fate of these lands and reverse these harmful decisions by ending the era of the “all-access pass” for industry. It is our hope that as the public and decision makers continue to learn about the significance of these lands, we can restore sound management principles and achieve a reasonable balance between protection and development. This shift is greatly needed to preserve the unique natural heritage of Alaska’s BLM lands for future generations.

Cindy Shogan
Executive Director
Alaska Wilderness League



BLM



Sue Steinacher

INTRODUCTION

Between the years of 2003 and 2008, under the Bush administration, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) created and finalized four Resource Management Plans (RMPs) that developed management prescriptions for more than 21 million acres of land in Alaska. These RMPs recommended opening nearly 100 percent of these public lands to mineral and oil and gas development.

The majority of these lands fall under withdrawals established in the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) § 17(d) (1). These lands were set aside under the ANCSA with a two-fold mandate. The first: to preserve the lands in their current state until portions could be conveyed to the State of Alaska, Native Corporations, and individuals for Native Allotments. Second, the BLM is obligated to inventory and assess the values on public lands to determine if it is necessary to maintain withdrawals or reclassify lands 'to ensure that the public interest in these lands is properly protected.' 43 U.S.C. § 1616(d)(1). The intent of these reviews is to coordinate the orderly

development and management of BLM lands in Alaska for present and future public needs, without initiating "a 'land rush' and massive filings" for development. Such a rush is viewed as potentially degrading pristine and undeveloped lands that are relatively unknown culturally, biologically, and economically.

"We are fortunate to be in a position where we can prevent impacts to critical renewable resources, rather than trying to restore what has been damaged."

-Nushagak River Watershed
Traditional Use Conservation Plan

The BLM utilized the Resource Management Planning (RMP) process to conduct reviews of these withdrawals and make recommendations for their revocation and maintenance. The RMPs are intended to prescribe long-term management and determine which lands are compatible with development and which lands required continued

withdrawal or classification. Unfortunately, this multi-year public process has resulted in unbalanced management plans that increase competition for natural resources and decrease opportunities for the dominant uses of these lands - hunting, fishing, and recreation.

COMMON CONCERNS

- Millions of acres of protective withdrawals removed without site-specific reviews and despite clear public desire for sustainable, long-term management.
- Development scenarios underestimate and disregard impacts to the region from mineral development on and adjacent to BLM lands.
- Even areas that have been identified for biological and cultural significance have been made available to mineral interests.
- The strongest protections offered by the BLM just the worst impacts of development activities, while still allowing significant surface disturbing impacts and environmental contamination.
- No rivers, statewide, managed by the BLM have been recognized for their outstanding fisheries, recreation, or scenic qualities.
- There is a lack of serious commitment to manage public lands in a changing climate.
- Essential subsistence hunting, fishing, and gathering grounds may be significantly impaired by increased development activities permitted under the RMPs.



Wayne Todd



Katherina Merchant

SALMON CENT

Millions of salmon return to Bristol Bay each year to push up river to spawn - 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); the area accounts for more than 55 percent of wild sockeye salmon production in the world.

The Bay Resource Management Plan (RMP), the last of the Bush era plans, covers 1.2 million acres. Despite public support for the outstanding renewable and sustainable fishery found within the planning area, the BLM did not recommend any protections for Bristol Bay lands and instead made 99 percent of the lands available to private industry. The area is facing tremendous possible changes from major development scenarios on and off shore, including drilling in the outer continental shelf and the enormous proposed Pebble Mine. The cumulative impacts to the area over time could devastate the fishery - a global treasure.

PROBLEMS WITH THE PLAN

No special protections were established for the BLM lands in the Bristol Bay watershed.

The BLM did not include the high economic value of the commercial fishery when reviewing the anadromous watersheds of Bristol Bay for protective designations. No rivers managed by the BLM were found suitable for recommendation as a Wild and Scenic River. Of the more than 4,306 miles of streams that the BLM manages in Bristol Bay - the majority of which supply spawning habitat for anadromous fish - none were deemed significant or outstanding in their contribution to the world class fishery.

"The harvest and processing of Bristol Bay fish generates nearly \$320 million a year and provides jobs for some 12,500 people."

-Duffield et al, 2006

The BLM removed provisions for public oversight that would have ensured high standards for development proposals on public lands and waters.

Local planning efforts to conserve and manage traditional resources were not reviewed or incorporated into

the RMP - omitting a wealth of traditional knowledge and critical habitat information that the Nushagak River Watershed Traditional Use Conservation Plan provides.

Decisions have been made to allow mineral development in one of the last great wild salmon fisheries on the planet without a basic understanding of the regional waterways, water quality and quantity requirements for a healthy fishery.



WH Bill Fletcher
AK Div of Tourism



BLM

RAL: BAY RMP

SOLUTIONS

No action should be taken to implement the plan or remove protective withdrawals until a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) is created with better science, site specific analysis, and a common sense approach to sustainable management that incorporates local concerns and protection strategies for Bristol Bay lands.

New reviews should be conducted for streams, taking a watershed level approach and placing a higher value on stream contributions to the sustainability of the commercial, sport and subsistence fisheries of the region.

Bristol Bay lands deserve management that is locally and publicly supported. A plan that will ensure Bristol Bay fish are protected for future generations.

Healthy lands and waters that contribute to Bristol Bay's world class fishery will be made available to development interests with no protections. This action is inappropriate for:

Kvichak Tributaries

world's largest sockeye run

- Kaskanak Creek
- Ben Courtney Creek
- Yellow Creek
- Ole Creek
- Bear Creek
- Coffee Creek
- Alagnak River & tributaries

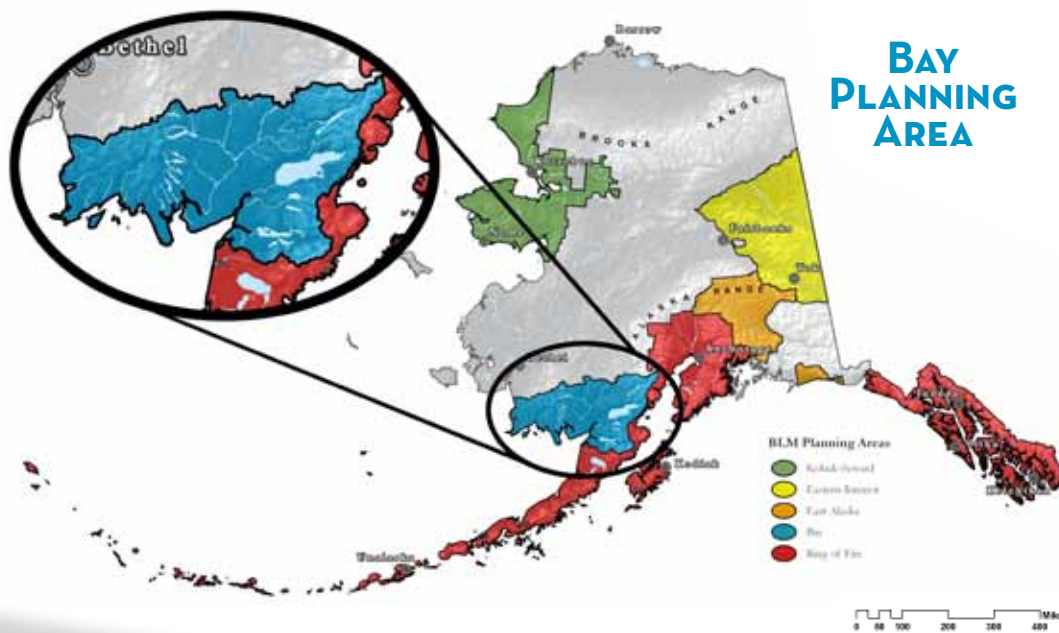
Nushagak Tributaries

world's largest king run

- Koggling Creek
- Klutuk Creek
- Lower Klutuk Creek
- Turnavik Creek

Iliamna

- Upper Talarik Creek
- Iliamna River



LONGEST, HIGHEST, AND LA

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 area's fisheries and estuarine environment; it contributes to the wetlands that host migratory and resident bird populations, including sensitive species such as the trumpeter swan.

The East Alaska region also offers the most recreational opportunities on BLM lands in Alaska - each year, an average of more than 15,000 local and national visitors come to the Delta and Gulkana National Wild and Scenic River areas. The BLM has designated a majority of these lands (546,000 acres) for special recreation management but the BLM still allows oil and gas and mineral development in the majority of these places.

PROBLEMS WITH THE PLAN

The BLM did not provide adequate protections for the Bering Glacier Research Natural Area (RNA).

The impacts from potential development threaten to negatively impact the integrity of the pristine glacial system - including the wetlands, lakes, and estuaries that contribute to globally significant climate change studies and education, the local subsistence fishery, and staging areas for migratory birds.

The BLM has recommended the eastern one-third of the Bering Glacier RNA open for mineral development despite federal, local, and public support for protections.

Despite strong public support, the BLM failed to create proposed areas of critical environmental concern (ACECs) for essential wildlife and fisheries habitats.

The East Alaska planning region contains spectacular recreation and tourism opportunities that are sustainable and have higher economic value than short term mineral development.



Gregory Gusse



BLM

RGEST: EAST ALASKA RMP

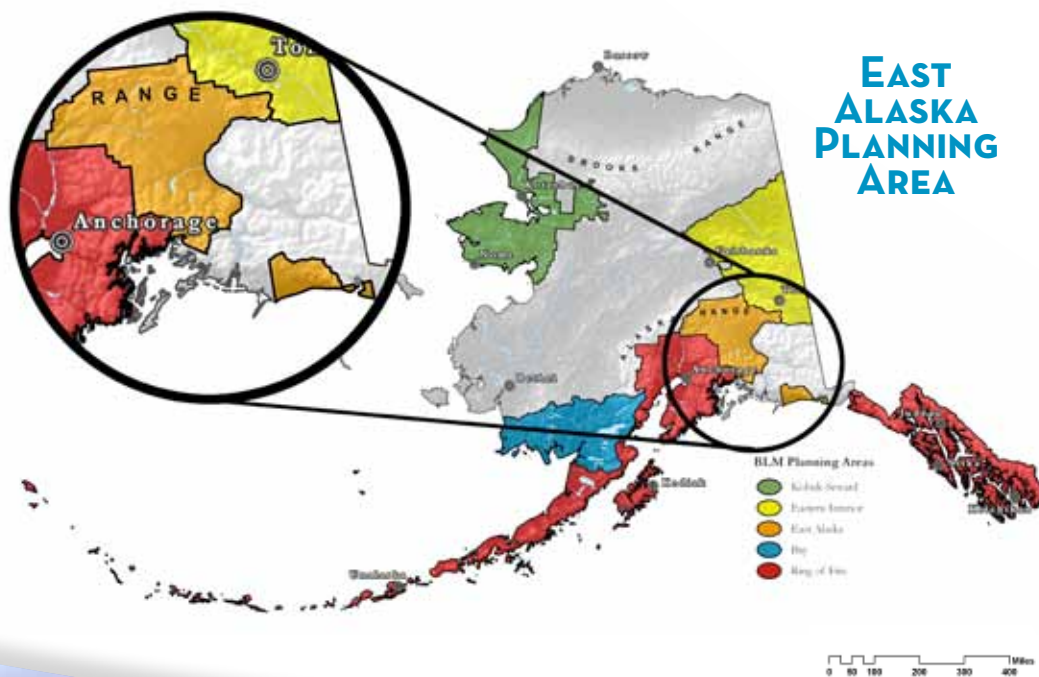
SOLUTIONS

The BLM should adopt management that will offer a balance between development, recreation, and protections for public lands. Alternative C in the Proposed RMP will properly address public comments and support for site-specific protections. This middle ground alternative will reduce the impacts to public lands as mineral, oil and gas, and community development increase on BLM and adjacent state lands. Further, it will promote appropriate designations

such as wild and scenic rivers and managing for wildlife and a wide array of recreation experiences. Otherwise, the landscape may greatly change for East Alaska, resulting in permanent habitat fragmentation or destruction, displacement of wildlife, decreases in water quality and wetland habitats, and overall disturbance to the natural environment.

Far too many lands that are high value recreation and critical wildlife habitat have been recommended as 'open for business' by the plan. This action is inappropriate for:

- Bering Glacier
- Gulkana National Wild and Scenic River
- Nelchina Caribou Herb Calving Area
- Viewsheds of the Glenn, Richardson and Dalton Highways



Doug Whittaker



OUR PUBLIC LAND

6

"For many of us Alaskans the Bristol Bay headwaters and the fisheries supported by this exceptionally rich and healthy ecosystem sustain a livelihood and way of life that we wouldn't trade for anything and if lost could never be replaced. I have been lucky enough to grow up fishing in the Bay and am now running my own fishing business there. In my opinion Bristol Bay's pristine salmon habitat is so crucial for sustaining the world's largest and most valuable salmon fishery as well as the cultural integrity of Alaska Natives who have lived off this land for thousands of years that all lands in the Bristol Bay watershed should be afforded the highest possible protections. Protections must include federal public lands managed by the BLM as well as those managed by the state so that we can pass on to our children, the next generation of Alaskans, a fishing way of life that is rich with tradition and deeply connected to the land and sea, a lifestyle that defines for me what it is to be Alaskan."

**- Commercial Fish Captain and Business Owner,
Lindsey Bloom**



Corey Arnold



David Thorne



Sue Steinacher

DS AT A GLANCE



"The 'Kigs' are a small but spectacular range which provide the scenic backdrop for two of Nome's three highways, and offer unique road-accessible but remote wilderness recreation opportunity in all seasons. These rugged mountains, so far undisturbed by the intrusion of resource development, serve as a critical refuge for the most robust breeding stock of moose, grizzlies and other important wildlife in the Nome region. The opportunity to enjoy these magnificent mountains, and the refuge they provide to the wildlife we value, are what sustains most of us who tough it out year after year in this distant NW corner of Alaska. BLM's responsibility should be to hold these smaller but highly valuable tracts of land in trust for the public's enduring enjoyment and not allow them to be exploited for short term economic gain by relatively few individuals. "

- Sue Steinacher of Nome Alaska



Katherina Merchant



Sue Steinacher

COMPLEX PROBLEMS

No action should be taken to remove protective withdrawals: Reviews need to be conducted and high value areas afforded the strongest possible protections, no ANCSA 17(d)(1) withdrawals should be revoked.

Enact Strong Conservation Policies: Little is known about many of Alaska's BLM lands, thanks to a decision to prohibit wilderness inventories and reviews statewide handed down by Secretary of Interior Gale Norton in 2003. This restrictive directive is not a citizen-based policy and should be eliminated to allow inventory work on high value public lands such as those in Bristol Bay and the Bering Glacier.

Fix the Plans: All of the Alaska Resource Management Plans have strongly favored resource development interests by recommending nearly 100 percent of public lands be opened for development. Some of these plans considered, but rejected, alternatives that would have protected important resources and habitat. The BLM should revisit the RMPs and issue new Records of Decision that suitably balance the protection of resources with development.



Melanie Smith, Audubon AK



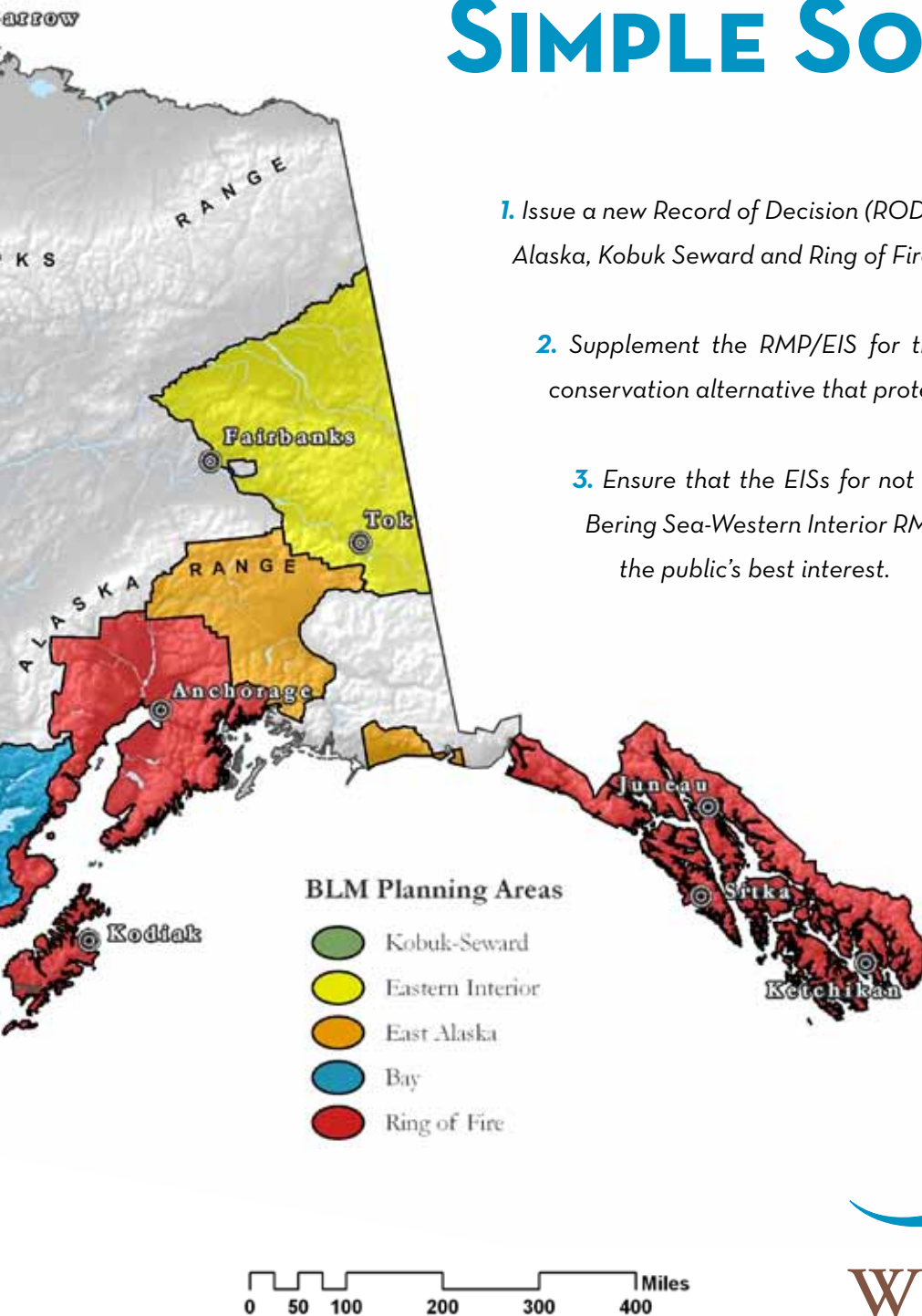
Sue Steinacher



Gregory Gusse

SIMPLE SOLUTIONS

1. Issue a new Record of Decision (ROD) selecting Alternative C in the East Alaska, Kobuk Seward and Ring of Fire RMPs.
2. Supplement the RMP/EIS for the Bristol Bay RMP to evaluate a conservation alternative that protects Bristol Bay.
3. Ensure that the EISs for not yet completed Eastern Interior and Bering Sea-Western Interior RMPs provide balanced alternatives in the public's best interest.



Kevin Lauscher

OUR PUBLIC LAND

“BLM lands surrounding Haines provide a spectacular, mountainous backdrop. Located in a transition zone between the coastal temperate rain forest and the Canadian interior, these lands support diverse and unique varieties of plants and wildlife. Of particular importance are mountain goats, as BLM Haines area lands provide habitat for the overwhelming majority of naturally occurring mountain goat populations on BLM lands nationwide. Local residents and tourists enjoy mountain climbing, skiing, hiking, and hunting opportunities on these lands.”

- Nancy Berland, of Lynn Canal Conservation in Southeast Alaska



S AT A GLANCE *continued*



"The Copper Basin and nearby lands are still largely undisturbed, and the area's healthy fish and game populations are important subsistence resources for local residents. A plan for this region should balance protection of these resources with an appropriate, relatively minimal level of sensitive development. That didn't happen under the previous administration, which heavily emphasized development. Hopefully the new administration will make necessary changes and provide long-term protection for important fish and game populations and habitats."

**- Ruth McHenry and Cliff Eames,
Copper Country Alliance**



Kevin Lauscher

MIGHTY YUKON RIVER:

The Yukon River is Alaska's longest river and it is home to the longest salmon migration in the world. The river spans more than 2,000 miles and supplies an international fishery shared by the U.S. and Canada. The region's chinook and chum salmon are cherished for their size and high oil content. The BLM manages lands and waters of some of the Yukon's major tributaries including the Beaver and Birch Creeks, the Black River and the Fortymile River.

The Eastern Interior RMP is in the very beginning stages of planning but the guidelines established for planning were outlined under the Bush administration which could lead to a continued legacy of improperly balanced management for public BLM lands in Alaska. The plan consists of four areas: the White Mountains National Recreation Area (NRA) and Beaver National Wild and Scenic River (WSR); the Steese National Conservation Area (NCA) and Birch WSR; the Black River area; and the Fortymile (WSR).

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE PLAN

Continue prohibitions on mineral activities in congressionally-designated conservation and recreation areas. Maintain withdrawals in the Steese NCA, White Mountains NRA, and WSRs to protect natural and recreational values as designated by Congress.

The BLM must allow ample time for review and comment on four distinct areas and complex planning documents.

Potential impacts and environmental shifts from climate change must be explicitly addressed.

"The lives of the people of Chalkyitsik are inextricably connected to these rivers, the surrounding lands and their resources. Their association with these lands goes way back into a distant past, and the rivers and lands are more than just a source of subsistence resources."

- Joe Matesi

Meaningful government-to-government interactions with Tribal governments needed. All of BLM's tribal consultation meetings, subsistence hearings, and public meetings are typically combined into one open public meeting, rarely resulting in meaningful two way dialogue and information sharing.

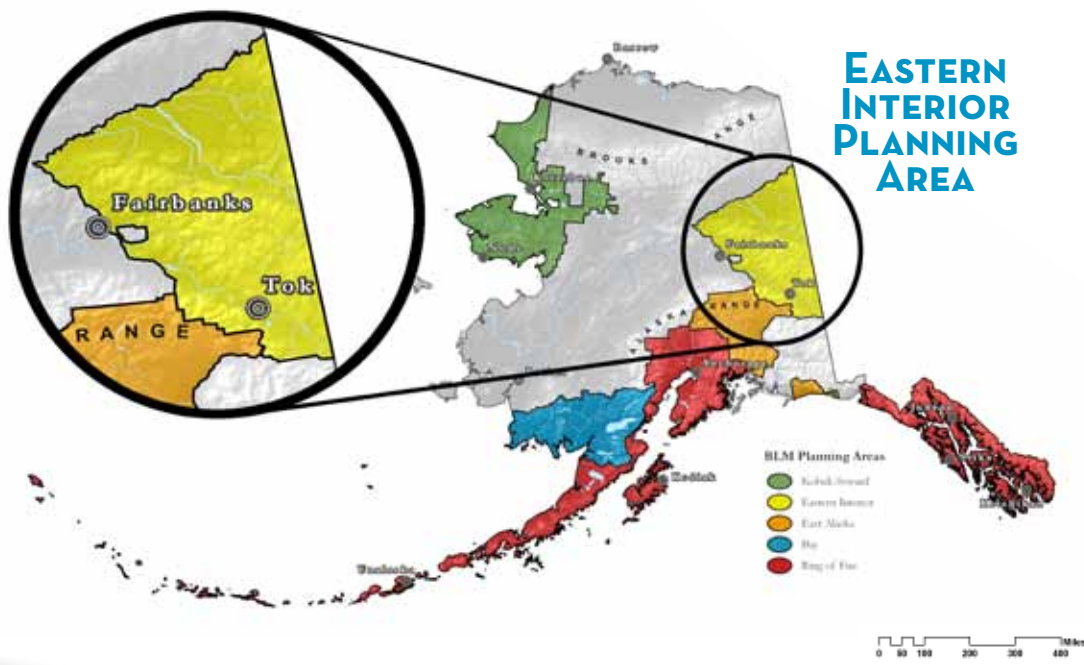
EASTERN INTERIOR RMP

The Upper Black River, traditionally known as the Dranhjik T'ee Terra'a'in, is of great local social, cultural, and traditional importance. There is strong local and public support to protect the wilderness qualities, traditional uses and cultural ties to the Black River area with closures to mineral development

Local planning efforts to document, conserve, and manage traditional resources, such as the traditional land use plan of the Council of Athabascan Tribal Governments, should be reviewed and incorporated into the plan.

Recreation management in the White Mountains NRA and Steese NCA is well balanced between primitive and motorized opportunities; current designations should be maintained.

Road proposals through White Mountains to potential oil and gas development in the Yukon Flats National Wildlife Refuge are not consistent with the protective designations for the Beaver Creek, the White Mountains NRA or the Yukon Flats Refuge.



Steven Craig



ALASKA'S LARGEST CARIBOU

The Western Arctic Caribou Herd is our nation's largest. The herd winters, migrates through, and seeks critical relief from summer insects throughout this 11.9 million acre expanse in northwest Alaska. Forty two Native Alaskan communities live within the range of the herd and depend on the caribou for both cultural and nutritional sustenance.

Under BLM management, the public lands that the Western Arctic Caribou Herd (WACH) depends on are being opened to oil and gas and mineral development, even within designated critical habitat areas. This dramatic shift in policy comes at a time when the herd's stability is in question, and the Arctic is undergoing dramatic climate change with unknowable consequences for the herd and other Arctic wildlife. The need to balance development with protections to ensure the sustainability of the herd has never been greater.

PROBLEMS WITH THE PLAN

Increased caution and adaptive management is needed to properly management the Western Arctic Caribou Herd especially in light of recent declines herd of more than 100,000 animals.

No protections for the critical habitats of the Western Arctic Caribou Herd, despite public support.

The BLM removed the protective Research Natural Area designation for Mount Osborn replacing it with required operating procedures (ROPs) and stipulations that only mitigate the worst of the impacts.

Climate change was not adequately analyzed within the RMP with no monitoring or mitigation in the ever changing Arctic.

The BLM lacks basic and necessary science for long-term decisions in the changing Arctic

and caribou habitat -including: vegetation, and habitat requirements for the Western Arctic Caribou Herd.

"Because of its tremendous size, the ecological importance of the Western Arctic Herd to Northwest Alaska is incalculable. Although they are important prey for wolves and bears, these caribou directly and indirectly impact the entire food web through nutrient cycling - affecting organisms from bacteria to moose."

- Riley Woodford & Jim Dau,
Alaska Department of Fish and Game



Sue Steinacher



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HERD: KOBUK-SEWARD RMP

SOLUTIONS

Caribou habitat should be the management priority for BLM lands. By adopting Alternative C in the Kobuk-Seward RMP, the BLM will be able to offer a balance of protections for caribou habitat and development on appropriate lands. The 'conservation alternative' offers strong protective management for 5.9 million acres of the

11.9 million acre planning area, recognizes amazing public rivers for protections under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, and recommends revocation of d-1 withdrawals to be replaced with new withdrawals to protect and maintain resources. This would reduce long and short term impacts, habitat fragmentation, and address the concerns of the public and local residents.

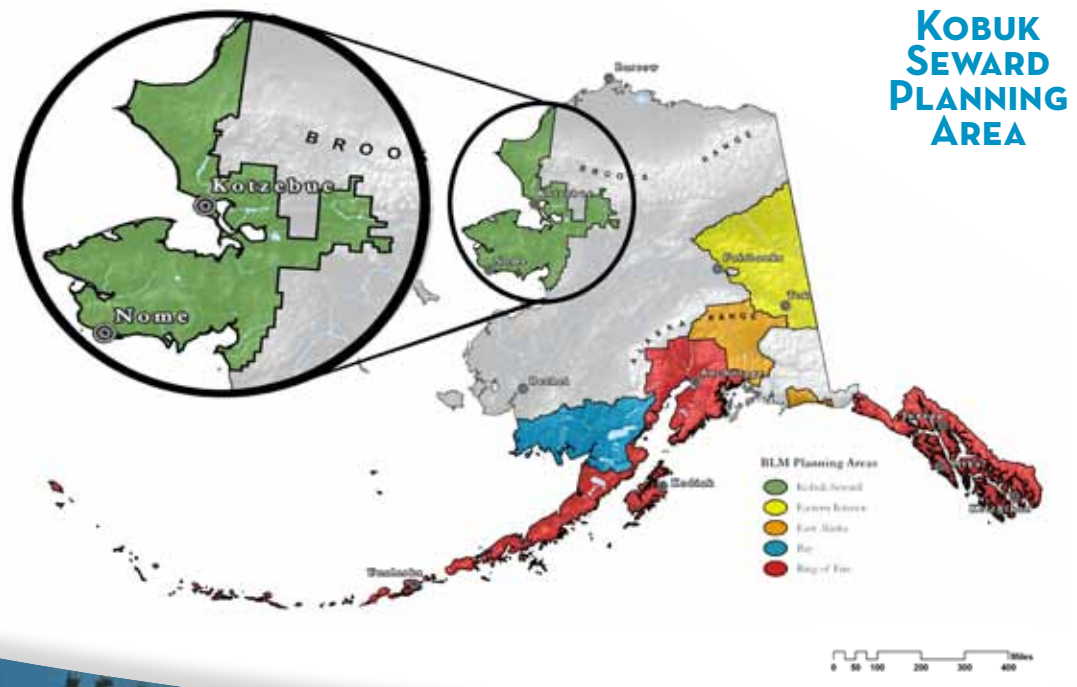
High value recreation and critical wildlife habitat has been recommended available for mineral development under the plan. This action is inappropriate for:

Western Arctic Caribou Herd

core habitat

- Nulato Hills
- Shaktoolik River
- Ungalik River
- Inglutalik River
- Insect Relief and Calving Areas

- Squirrel River
- McCarthy's Marsh
- Upper Kuzitrin River
- Kigluaik Mountains



**KOBUK
SEWARD
PLANNING
AREA**



USFWS



Sue Steinacher

40 MILLION BIRDS:

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 southcentral Alaska, and include Kodiak Island and the Aleutian Islands.

The BLM's Ring of Fire lands are home to the highest densities of brown bear, moose and coastal wildlife. The majority of these lands are located in the southcentral and southeast areas of Alaska, near the largest population centers in the state. These lands are frequented for their beauty, recreation, and subsistence and sport hunting and fishing opportunities.

MANAGEMENT CONCERNS

The plan prioritizes mineral development - all of these public lands have been made available to private industry.

Special management provisions are needed for the Haines area mountain goat habitat that will prioritize wildlife habitat and health.

Nearly all naturally occurring mountain goat populations have been lost on BLM lands, making the Haines area population one of the largest and last nationwide under BLM management.

The BLM is lacking strong interim management for rivers suitable for protections under the National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.

The Chilligan River was not offered strong protections despite overwhelming and unanimous public support;

Chilligan River should be included in the Neacola Mountains area of critical environmental concern.



USFWS



David Thorne

RING OF FIRE RMP

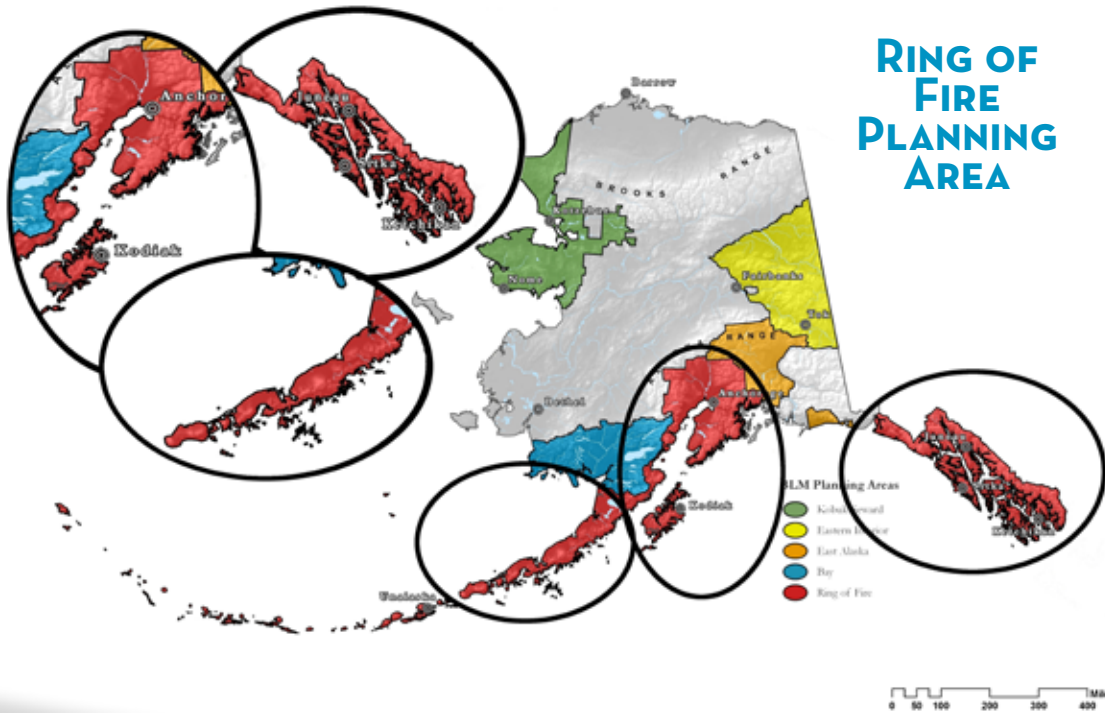
SOLUTIONS

To ensure proper management of public lands, the BLM should adopt Alternative C in the Ring of Fire RMP. It will designate the same special recreation management areas and areas of critical environmental concern as the current plan but will reserve judgment on retaining,

replacing, or revoking protective withdrawals until there is site specific planning that will allow more informed decisions for public lands.

High value habitat and designated areas deserve strong management. Removing protective withdrawals is inappropriate for:

**Haines Mountain Goat Habitat
Neacola Mountains Area of Critical Concern
Chilligan River**



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