

BLM Central Yukon Field Office (CYFO)
Report to the Western Interior Regional Advisory Council
Teleconference
February 16-17, 2022

PLANNING

Contact: Chel Ethun 474-2253

- The Central Yukon Draft Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (RMP/EIS) public comment period ended on June 9, 2021. The BLM is reviewing public comments and waiting for Headquarters-level guidance prior to moving forward with work on the Final EIS.
- The Central Yukon Draft RMP/EIS is available for download and review on the project website: <https://eplanning.blm.gov/eplanning-ui/project/35315/510>.

RECREATION

Contact: Steve Taylor 474-2242

- Steve Taylor was hired as an Outdoor Recreation Planner in November. Prior to joining the BLM, Steve was the Superintendent of Parks for the Fairbanks North Star Borough. He brings a great deal of experience to the CYFO team. CYFO is already seeing and appreciating strong contributions from Mr. Taylor.
- The CYFO currently authorizes 32 Special Recreation Permits (SRPs) operating in the Western Interior region:
 - 10 commercial hunting guides (5 operating in or around the Dalton Highway Corridor)
 - 22 tour companies (including 3 dog mushing tour guides operating out of Galbraith Lake and Chandalar Shelf).

Permittees submit their annual post use reports in December and January. Post use report data will be summarized by this spring.

REALTY

Contact: Sheri Wilson 474-2246

- The CYFO realty program is processing or administering the following authorizations:
 - The BLM granted a right-of-way to the Alaska Industrial Development and Export Authority (AIDEA) for the construction of the Ambler Road on January 5, 2021. AIDEA is in the pre-construction phase of the project, and will continue to conduct archaeological surveys along the proposed route during summer, 2022.
 - The CYFO is leading the National Historic Preservation Act Section 106 process for the Ambler Road Project (<https://www.blm.gov/AmblerRoadEIS>) and developed a Programmatic Agreement that outlines how inventory, evaluation, and resolution of adverse effects to historic properties

will be completed during the life of the project. Consultation is ongoing, and the BLM continues to engage and seek input for the Section 106 process.

- The Bettles Winter Trail right-of-way is under current authorization until 2029.
- BLM authorized a 5-year right-of-way to the North Slope Borough for a staging area at the material pit near Galbraith Lake and to construct, operate and maintain a winter trail to access the village of Anaktuvuk Pass by borough organized convoy. The route is only open when the State of Alaska, BLM, and the North Slope Borough Municipal Code standards are met. Applications for other uses of this route, such as commercial hauling, are reviewed and processed as necessary.
- BLM gave emergency permission to the North Slope Borough to haul fuel by Rolligon to Anaktuvuk Pass along the winter trail prior to route construction was authorized on 1/6/2021. Deep snow drifts approximately January 11 around MP 12 of the route made the route impassable and the vehicles had to turn back before reaching the village. The emergency need was created by fuel shortages in the village such that villagers are rationing the heating oil they currently have. This situation is pending as of this writing (January 12, 2022).
- The fiber optic lines installed by BorTek and Quintillion are authorized until 2035. The BLM continues to monitor the routes as the land stabilizes and revegetates.
- A research authorization is in place studying frozen debris lobes along the Dalton Highway which expires in 2036.

PLACER MINING

Contacts: John Barefoot 474-2250; Tara Hutchison 474-2241

- There were eight active federal placer gold mining operations in the CYFO in 2021.
- One placer mining operation is undergoing modifications to their mine plan for the 2022 mining season.
- Three new plans of operations are being processed for operations along the South Fork Koyukuk River, Clara Creek, and Nolan Creek.

SAND AND GRAVEL

Contacts: John Barefoot 474-2250; Rob Sherwood 474-2383

- There were 7 active federal mineral material sites in CYFO in 2021. There were 3 new mineral material sales out of 3 mineral material sites.
- Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (ADOT&PF) continued to resurface the Dalton Highway during the summer of 2021. DOT&PF mined and crushed material at mineral material sites at mileposts 125, MP 154 and MP 253.

WILDLIFE

Contact: Erin Julianus 474-2358; Jennifer McMillan 251-8128

- The CYFO continues to contribute to interagency efforts to track Dall's sheep abundance and population composition in the Central Brooks Range. In 2021, the BLM entered a partnership with the NPS Arctic Network to conduct surveys which included all BLM managed lands in the vicinity of the Dalton Highway. Surveys were conducted using the established distance estimation transect surveys which provide a modelled estimate of population size. See the attached sheep survey summary for results of the 2021 survey.
- The CYFO is continuing a study locating and characterizing naturally occurring mineral sources which are important habitat for Dall's sheep. Field work related to this project was conducted in 2021. Data processing is currently underway.
- An aerial raptor survey was conducted by BLM contractors in summer, 2021. Focal species were bald and golden eagles, but other cliff nesting birds were also documented. The survey area extended 2 km to the east and west of the Dalton Highway between the Yukon River Bridge and Galbraith Lake as well as some areas outside of this where ground disturbing activities are most likely to occur. The report from this data is in preparation.
- USGS resumed their annual Breeding Bird Surveys (BBS) nationwide in 2021. Surveys were conducted by BLM staff and volunteers along the Dalton and Elliott Highways.

ECOLOGY

Contact: Jennifer McMillan 251-8128

- 2022 is planned as the seventh year of herbicide treatment at a closed mineral material site and the fourth year of treatment at six additional mineral material sites and the Bettles Road staging area. Treatment has been largely successful and will continue with the goals of creating weed-free material sites and removing invasive plants from heavily trafficked areas. Results from this work have been compiled in a report which will be made available upon request in spring of 2022.
- Formal monitoring and inventory of various infestations of invasive plants in the Dalton Highway vicinity, including the roadside white sweetclover north of Wiseman, was conducted in 2021. A hand-crew contracted by CYFO commenced manual and mechanical treatment of invasive plants in June and July of 2021. Treatment sites included high priority sites not feasibly treatable via herbicide; including but not limited to the roadside infestation of white sweetclover north of Wiseman and infested areas adjacent to waterways. Results from this work have been compiled in a report which will be made available upon request in spring of 2022.
- The CYFO will begin the first year of Terrestrial Assessment, Inventory, and Monitoring (AIM) work in the Ray Mountains Ecoregion in summer, 2022. This work is part of a national effort to inventory soil, vegetation, and habitat resources on BLM lands, and will complement the Aquatic AIM data that has been collected in the CYFO since 2018.

FISHERIES AND HYDROLOGY

Contact: David Esse 474-2365; Matthew Whitman 474-2249

- CYFO's Aquatic AIM program conducted stream surveys this past summer in the Brooks Range along the Dalton Highway Corridor and in the region around Galena. Data will inform baseline conditions in aquatic habitats based on watershed size and stream channel characteristics such that the same data collected in the future or in other locations where land management activities are occurring can be compared to baseline conditions to inform potential management decisions.
- BLM is engaged in a partnership being led by the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation to address turbidity issues in Gold Creek, approximately MP 197 of Dalton Highway. The current focus of the effort is the initiation and development of a watershed plan. For summer 2022, the BLM is planning to conduct a sediment source inventory (via contract) to identify key sources of turbidity in the watershed and inform the watershed plan.
- Multiple sites along Gold Creek were monitored for turbidity during the summer of 2021 utilizing water quality meters that logged several measurements per day. This data will contribute to an ongoing evaluation of sedimentation issues within that drainage.
- Technical assistance was provided by the BLM for a post-mining stream reclamation effort on Davis Creek, a tributary to the South Fork Koyukuk River. Approximately two-thirds of the project was successfully completed in 2021. Additional work in 2022 is planned to complete the project.
- In 2021, the CYFO completed the third year of its aquatic invasive species inventory and monitoring project along the Dalton Highway. Chapman Lake, near Coldfoot, was inventoried for the invasive aquatic plant elodea. No elodea was detected during the survey.
- The CYFO continues to conduct long-term NRCS snow surveys every month at established sites along the Dalton Highway.

ARCHAEOLOGY

Contact: Crystal Glassburn 474-2240

- The CYFO cultural resource staff spent six days floating approximately 45 miles of the Dulbi River in July to inventory for archaeological sites. Six prehistoric sites were identified that aid in understanding prehistoric land use and resource procurement along that stretch of the river. More work is planned for future years.
- CYFO cultural resource staff also completed proactive monitoring of historic cabins and mining sites near Coldfoot and Wiseman in August. The work focused on updating site locations, recording site boundaries with GPS, taking photos, and evaluating the condition of the historic sites.

LAW ENFORCEMENT

Contact: Steve Mazur 474-2366

- Since his hunting season patrols reported on last Fall, Law Enforcement Ranger/Pilot Steve Mazur has continued on with ground-based patrols in the Dalton Highway corridor this winter. While his efforts have continued to demonstrate a visible BLM Law enforcement presence and provide public assistance to those in need, Steve has not encountered any substantial subsistence-focused violations this winter. Steve continues to coordinate with other law enforcement entities with his patrols, and with the days gradually getting longer, before too long we will be leaning back into having Steve conduct aerial patrols in concert with his ground-based efforts.

