DRAFT COMPATIBILITY DETERMINATION
Selawik National Wildlife Refuge
Semi-Permanent Structure

Use: Construct and Manage a Semi-Permanent Bridge on the Singauruk River, Alaska

Refuge Name: Selawik National Wildlife Refuge

Establishing and Acquisition Authority(ies):

In 1980, the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) (section 302) established the Selawik National Wildlife Refuge.

Refuge Purpose(s):

ANILCA identifies the purposes for which each refuge in Alaska was established. The purposes of the Selawik National Wildlife Refuge are described in Section 302(7)(B). These purposes include the following:

> (i) To conserve the fish and wildlife populations and habitat in their natural diversity including, but not limited to, the Western Arctic Caribou Herd (including participation in coordinated ecological studies and management of these caribou), waterfowl, shorebirds and other migratory birds, and salmon and sheefish
>
> (ii) To fulfill the international treaty obligations of the United States with respect to fish and wildlife and their habitats
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> (iii) to provide, in a manner consistent with the purposes set forth in subparagraphs (i) and (ii), the opportunity for continued subsistence uses by local residents
>
> (iv) to ensure, to the maximum extent practicable and in a manner consistent with the purposes set forth in paragraph (i), water quality and necessary water quantity within the refuge.
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> (94 Stat. 2387, dated Dec. 2, 1980, Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act)

National Wildlife Refuge System Mission
The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System is "to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and, where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans." (National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act, as amended)

Description of Use
The Northwest Arctic Borough (NWAB) and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (Service), Selawik National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge), as partners, propose to construct and manage a semi-permanent bridge across the Singauruk River (known locally as the Singiagruk River), Alaska. The purpose of this project is to replace a temporary seasonal bridge used by refuge staff and the public for winter trail crossings of the Singauruk River. The

temporary bridge was constructed by search and rescue volunteers with materials purchased by the Refuge. The bridge is currently, and would continue to be, restricted to snowmobile traffic only. The bridge would be located between the villages of Noorvik and Selawik, Alaska, on a trail within the refuge boundaries.

The Noorvik-Selawik trail was established and used before the refuge was established. The trail crosses lands within the refuge boundary that have been conveyed to Native corporations. On these conveyed lands, easements have been retained by the federal government under Section 17(b) of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA). The State of Alaska has not claimed this section of the trail as a right-of-way under RS 2477. (See Appendix K of the Selawik National Wildlife Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan, Environmental Impact Statement, Wilderness Review and Wild River Plan, adopted in 1987.). There is a public emergency-shelter cabin along the trail a few hundred yards east of this river crossing.

The exact site would be located at 66.7 degrees North, 160.5 degrees West, within sections 11 and 12, Township 15 North, Range 9 West, Kateel River Meridian. The proposed structure location has been cleared via a Refuge-sponsored archaeological assessment and would use one of the historical crossing locations. This reach of the river, where the trail crosses, is frequently open water in the winter because of thermal effects, overflow, or both. Travelers must ford the shallow open water, even at 30 degrees below zero, or use a series of temporary log or wooden structures to cross. The temporary bridge has provided safe crossing but must be removed prior to the end of the season, often when it is needed most. The proposed bridge would have the smallest footprint and construction impact of all structures considered that still alleviate the existing safety concern for staff and many residents of northwest Alaska.

The refuge would like to enter into a partnership with the NWAB to construct the replacement bridge and to issue the project (NWAB) a five-year permit for this joint structure. After that time, the impacts and adequacy of the structure would be evaluated and establishment of a long term protocol for management would be determined. The roles and responsibilities would be outlined in a cost-share agreement. The conveyance of right-of-way permit would be-reconsidered if lands had not yet been conveyed.

A free-standing wooden beam and truss bridge, anchored by one-inch Rebar stakes would be constructed. This structure would rely on its structural weight as the primary means of stability.

This compatibility determination (CD) addresses the construction and placement in the identified area as well as the impacts of the use of this structure, as identified in the draft environmental assessment for this project.

Availability of Resources

A significant amount of administrative staff time and a modest budget would be needed to proceed with the proposed project. Administrative staff time would primarily involve in-person discussion, written correspondence, environmental-compliance documentation, overview of proposed construction activities, interaction with project participants, and

final administration (management and maintenance) of the structure. A minimal amount of archaeological field work (one to two days) and construction (four days) effort would be required. An additional effort would be required to monitor the construction phase of this project. A modest effort would be involved in the management and maintenance of the structure.

Anticipated Impacts of the Use

The actual construction of a structure would be short term (three to four days). The bridge would not be projected to increase the level of use, but rather facilitate that use which already exists and provide a safe crossing for the public. To minimize or alleviate any adverse effects to the associated vegetation, transportation of construction materials and equipment to the site would be done when adequate snow cover exists.

Impacts associated with the proposed construction activities would be anticipated to be minimal. Construction and transport activities could potentially render some short-term minor disturbance to wildlife resources and/or local subsistence users, if any are present in the immediate vicinity. In light of the short period of proposed use for construction purposes, the Refuge does not expect subsistence users or any significant numbers or concentrations of wildlife to be present in the immediate vicinity of the use area. The construction site visit would not result in any significant disturbance or damage to fish and wildlife and would result in minimal disturbance to habitats. Minimal amounts of brushing might be required to route the existing trail to the crossing location. All brushing activities would be done with hand tools or small power tools. The Refuge considered conducting all construction during the winter months to minimize any soil disturbance. It was determined to be not feasible because drifting snow would make site access difficult, crews would have to work in overflow, and low temperatures would make operation of small power hand tools difficult. The Refuge believes site impacts during the summer or fall would be minimal because transport to the site will be by helicopter, and there is an existing cabin at the site for shelter.

The Refuge anticipates that there would be no change in level of use of the trail system once the new structure were in place. A safe and reliable crossing structure would encourage and focus stream crossings in the area of the preferred bridge site. This would reduce use and associated impacts from travelers seeking alternate crossing as happens when the temporary bridge is not in place or has washed out.

The lands where this activity would occur are federal lands within the boundary of the Selawik National Wildlife Refuge; these lands have been selected by Kikiktagruk Inupiat Corporation (KIC) and/or Northwest Alaska Native Association regional corporation for conveyance under provisions of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act. KIC and NANA are familiar with this project and do not object to this activity. No Native allotments are located in the immediate vicinity of the proposed construction area.

Public Review and Comment

A notice will be posted at the Selawik Refuge headquarters, Building 160, 2nd Avenue, Kotzebue, Alaska. In addition, this draft compatibility determination and the supporting draft environmental assessment is available for review on the U.S. Fish & Wildlife

Service regional compatibility webpage at

http://alaska.fws.gov/nwr/planning/compdeter.htm

The public will have 14 calendar days from June 1st, 2004 in which to provide comments to the refuge manager.

Determination (check one below)

_____Use is Not Compatible

__X__Use is Compatible with Following Stipulations:

Stipulations Necessary to Ensure Compatibility

1. Transportation of materials and equipment would only be conducted during the winter months when adequate snow cover exists in order to minimize any adverse impact to habitats.

2. All construction would occur using only hand tools or handheld power tools. No heavy machinery or tracked vehicle would be allowed (snowmobiles excluded).

3. No permanent dikes, concrete approach ramps or support pads, or pilings would be constructed.

4. Structural integrity, relative to spring floods, would rely on structural weight and approach ends of structure to be placed above the mean high water

5. Permanent placement of the structure would not be determined until an archaeological reconnaissance of the site had been conducted.

6. Use of any bridge constructed at this location would be for winter snowmachine traffic only, and the bridge would be open and closed on a seasonal basis as determined by the refuge manager. This determination would be made relative to the snow conditions that exist leading to and from the bridge location.

7. The use of off-road vehicles (except snowmachines) would be prohibited.

8. Fuel caches would be prohibited.

9. The use of heavy equipment would not be permitted for the construction of any structure.

Justification:
The proposed activity supports a use of refuge lands authorized by ANILCA 1110(a). Based on the draft environmental assessment, the refuge manager believes construction of this bridge and the use that the public would make of this structure would not have a significant effect on the accomplishment of the refuge's mission. It would also minimize the impact of snowmachines at this stream crossing, eliminate other crossings in the area, and improve public safety. Similar structures currently used along this river provide a proven history of minimal impact. For this reason, the proposed construction and use, following the stipulations established in this determination, are considered to be compatible with refuge purposes.

Mandatory Re-Evaluation Date (provide month and year):

_____ Mandatory 15 year Re-Evaluation Date (for priority public uses)

_____ Mandatory 10 year Re-Evaluation Date (for all uses other than priority public uses)

NEPA Compliance for Refuge Use Decision (check one below)

____ Categorical Exclusion without Environmental Action Statement

____ Categorical Exclusion and Environmental Action Statement

__X__ Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact

____ Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision

Signature:
Refuge Manager: _____ 7-23-04
(Signature and Date)

Concurrence:
Acting **Regional Chief:** _____ 8/5/4
(Signature and Date)