

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT BRIEFING PAPER

DATE: March 18, 2016
FROM: Bud C. Cribley, State Director, BLM Alaska
SUBJECT: Alaska State Senate Resources Committee Requested Presentation

REQUEST

The Alaska State Senate Resources Committee extended an invitation to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to present on the Resource Management Plans (RMPs) recently presented to groups such as the Alaska Professional Hunters Association. Specifically, the Senator and her committee members expressed interest in:

- How the proposed plans will impact the following stakeholders:
 - local residents in proximity to Bureau land;
 - users of Bureau land (hunters, fishermen, hikers, mushers, cyclists, developers; etc.).
- The role public comments and stakeholder input have played in the development of the plans, and what further steps remain in the process to give stakeholders an opportunity to offer their insights.

BACKGROUND

State of Alaska Operations

Commercial Hunting Guides and Guide Use Areas (State of AK info)

- Non-residents who hunt Brown Bear, Dall Sheep, or Mountain Goat must be accompanied in the field by licensed Alaska Big Game Registered Guide-Outfitter or be accompanied in the field by an Alaska resident 19 years or older who is within the second degree of kindred
- Nonresident aliens (non-U.S. citizens) hunting any big game must be accompanied in the field by an Alaska Big Game Registered Guide-Outfitter
- 1300+ guides currently permitted by state
- The State of Alaska is divided into 26 Game Management Units (GMU). The Big Game Commercial Services Board has divided each GMU into Guide Use Areas (GUAs). Some GMUs have only one GUA while others have multiples GUAs
- GUAs have a mix of landownership patterns (State, BLM-managed, Native Corp, etc.)
- A Master/Registered Guide-Outfitter must register with the DNR the GUA which they will be providing big game services in annually, at least 30 days prior to providing big game services

Guide “Concession” versus BLM Permit “Allocation”

The term “concessions” is how the State described their 2013 proposed process to determine selection and distribution of commercial hunting guides on state-managed lands in GUAs. The BLM worked with the State and had an MOU to apply the same “allocation process” on BLM-managed lands if the process was accepted. The BLM uses the term “allocation” (not concession).

Under the FWS and NPS competitive guide concession programs, exclusive use areas are awarded to guides after an extensive application and ranking process. The guide retains

exclusive operating use of an area for 5 years. Often this period is extended another 5 years if the guide complies with the terms of the awarded concession.

The Western Interior RAC feels that adopting a competitive concession (allocation) program on BLM land will reduce competition and pressure on the resource because the guide(s) holding the concession will have a vested interest in maintaining the resource over time and act as an incentive to improve stewardship of resources in the area.

BLM Special Recreation Permits

The BLM has discretion to choose whether or not to authorize new Special Recreation Permits (SRP) or renew existing SRPs. All SRPs have terms and conditions that must be followed to maintain good standing with BLM or, risk loss of the permit. BLM uses SRPs to authorize and manage activities of state-approved commercial hunting guide operators on BLM lands. All hunting guides and some transporters who operate on BLM-managed public land do so with BLM-authorized SRPs. Commercial Hunting SRPs authorize how commercial guides may access and use BLM-managed lands, they DO NOT authorize or manage any aspect of state-approved hunting regulations. Simply put, SRPs authorize where a hunting guide can "access" and "camp" on BLM-managed land. Some guides access and camp on BLM land, then hunt on state land.

BLM-Alaska (similar to the State) has no set maximum number of SRPs on BLM-managed lands within each Guide Use Area (GUA). Therefore, SRPs are currently issued on a first-come-first-served basis after NEPA analysis is completed.

When BLM receives a new SRP application, the BLM assesses effects of the proposed action on subsistence resources through ANILCA Section 810 Analyses. The BLM also assesses the effects of the proposed action on: 1) resource availability; 2) access to the resource, and; 3) abundance of the resource. BLM holds 810 hearings if there is a "positive" finding in the 810 Analysis or if no impacts are found in a "high interest" area.

Commercial uses of BLM-managed lands may be limited based on decisions made in RMPs or other specific NEPA documents. For example, SRPs may be approved until an affected area's "desired use level" is reached. A desired use level is determined in resource management plans, recreation area management plans or, in their absence, through analysis of resources and visitor use for each area utilizing the areas recreation setting character, limits of acceptable change, or other methods. When a desired use level is reached in an area, no additional permits are issued and new permits may be made available only when certain conditions are met. Example conditions may include: management objectives to increase the number of allowable users within a use season or by lengthening the use season or a new areas for use become available.

SRP denials are rare however, the BLM may deny an SRP application or renewal based on various factors, including: state licensing requirements; the results of an environmental analysis; the applicant's past performance, including previous convictions for violating federal or state laws or regulations; and the inability of the managing office to issue, manage and monitor the proposed use; among others.

Some recent BLM proposals related to current RMPs include commercial big game hunting SRP allocation limits (total number of SRPs per GUA) and zoning of permitted operations to minimize conflicts among different user groups operating in the same area at the same time (Attachment 1).

CONTACT INFORMATION

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ATTACHMENTS

Statewide Planning Area Map
ADD RMP-specific attachment

ATTACHMENT 1

BLM CURRENT SITUATION / BLM-AK LAND USE PLANNING

Bering Sea-Western Interior RMP (BLM Anchorage Field Office)

- 2013 – 13 hunting guide SRPs issued
- 120 “recreation visits” for guided hunters
- RMP status – “Preliminary Alternative Concepts” – preliminary concepts outreach in 2015 to gather public input on
 - Maximum of 30 - 40 hunting guide SRP holders within planning area (allocated by GUA), based upon a 10-year average use per GUA
 - Length of SRP – 1 to 10 years
 - Extent of SRP – 2 to 3 GUAs
 - distance between commercial hunting guide camps
 - Community buffers
 - 0 - 25 mile buffer around villages where NO commercial hunting guide SRPs activities would be authorized
 - some communities could be buffered while others may not be
 - No proposed process to select guides
 - whether or how to address “outfitters” and “transporters” (in addition to “guides”)
- Currently, the BLM AFO requires transporters to have a SRP when gear, equipment, and/or guide services are provided to their passengers on BLM lands

Squirrel River Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA) (BLM Anchorage FO)

- Kobuk Seward Peninsula RMP (2006) – Step down EA for Squirrel River SRMA being developed (draft due in few weeks)
- 10 guides and 8 transporters currently operating in GMU 23-06
- Social conflicts from recreation/guide use in high demand hunting area due to concentrations of caribou
- EA will only cover access and camping
- The BLM lands in this area have been designated as a Special Recreation Management Area to better address social issues (e.g., conflicts between different user groups) and to enhance management of the area
- The number of BLM authorizations for camping and access activities, in conjunction with state-approved commercial hunting activities in 2015 is 6 guide/outfitters and 5 transporters
- BLM is attempting to find a balance between commercial recreation operations and resource protection in this area
- Potential solutions and opportunities currently being analyzed or considered include:
 - Allocate 1-3 guide-outfitters and 1-3 transporters within GUA 23-06
 - Develop a fair and reasonable rating system for selection of commercial recreation providers
 - Establish an agreement with the State with any allocations on all lands within GUA 23-06 (not just BLM lands)

- Produce a transportation management plan to address off-highway vehicle use by commercial recreation providers
- Recommend “above ground level” flight elevation by transporters over noise-sensitive areas and other activities in the area (e.g. 2,000 ft.)
- Increased adaptive management efforts, to include how and where permit monitoring shall occur

Dalton Corridor Programmatic EA (BLM Central Yukon Field Office)

- Programmatic EA – “Issuance of Special Recreation Permit in the Dalton Highway Corridor Management Area Dall Sheep Hunting in GUA 24-03”
- 2016 – 5 big game hunting guide SRPs (Dall sheep and brown bear focus)
- Applications for guides are due 6 months prior to guide operations
 - Annual review with 810 and categorical exclusion
 - early deadline established to allow BLM to evaluate cumulative impacts of all guide SRPs in the Central Brooks Range
- No guides have been denied
- Guides are assigned specific geographic areas
- Under the programmatic EA, up to 12 clients are permitted to hunt sheep on BLM lands in GUA 24-03. In reality, take of sheep under BLM SRPs is much less (1-2 per year)
- Conflicts with local subsistence users remain

Central Yukon RMP (BLM Central Yukon Field Office)

- Status – developing preliminary alternatives
- 2016 – Nine big game hunting guide/outfitter SRPs
- The CYFO requires the SRP holders to submit annual post use reports to document harvest, number of clients, and user days
- Guide-related issues that may be addressed in CY RMP:
 - Competition for resources or space
 - Guide limits and selection process
 - Exclusion areas
 - Dall sheep and impacts of guided hunting

Eastern Interior RMP (BLM Eastern Interior Field Office)

- Status – preparing Final EIS
- No guide allocation determinations were made in the EI RMP
- The Field Office will embark on a NEPA analysis to determine the capacity for guides and review possible allocations in 2016



Planning Area

- Bay
- Bering Sea-Western Interior
- Central Yukon
- East Alaska
- Eastern Interior
- Kobuk - Seward Peninsula
- National Petroleum Reserve - Alaska
- Ring of Fire
- Area does not contain BLM lands

R U S S I A

C A N A D A

