

frontiers

*We've been
busy BLMers*



Lisa Cleason

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Thomas Hartmann

Welcome to *frontiers*!

We had more stories than we could fit in this issue, as so much work is ongoing in many areas at BLM Alaska. We are sharing stories from last summer, including Artists in Residence, Trail Interpretation, bird surveys, exploring the remote Utukok River, Coffee with a Scientist, and addressing migratory birds from Alaska to the Philippines. We are including a profile on a BLM planner that will leave you in awe. All of this and more! Thank you for sharing our Alaska frontier.

Karen J. Laubenstein
Editor

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@BLMAlaska

New Videos!

Our Glennallen Field Office was fortunate to have media intern Jeremy Gallman this summer. He created two stunning videos for BLM Alaska.



Project Healing Waters

For eight years and counting, BLM Alaska hosted an annual Project Healing Waters event at the Delta Wild and Scenic River and Tangle Lakes area. Project Healing Waters Fly Fishing is a nationwide nonprofit organization dedicated to the physical and emotional rehabilitation of disabled active military service personnel and veterans through fly fishing. The BLM partners with Project Healing Waters Alaska and provides boat transportation to participants and the Wrangell Institute of Science and Environment prepares meals for the volunteers.

Watch the video at: <https://youtu.be/G6O-TMksZnk>



Gulkana Wild and Scenic River Feature

It's your river. Make your splash! This year marked the the 50th Anniversary of the *Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968*, which guides the management of more than 200 rivers in 40 states and Puerto Rico. BLM Alaska cares for six of these rivers, including the Gulkana Wild and Scenic River, which was recognized for its primitive character, abundant fish and wildlife, and its geologic, cultural and recreational values.

Watch the video at: <https://youtu.be/fL9QgY251ys>

Cold Weather Stress Tips

Alaska's long winters can be tough on the body and mind, but luckily there are plenty of strategies to combat the stresses brought on by cold weather.

For your body

Regular exercise is the most common advice given by Alaska health care experts. Outdoor exercise is even better because you can take advantage of winter sunshine. Taking vitamin D and using light therapy to combat Seasonal Affective Disorder are also common in Alaska. Limit your consumption of alcohol and try to eat healthful foods.

Prevent hypothermia and frostbite

Hypothermia starts with symptoms like shivering and slurred speech, and it escalates to dazed consciousness, irrational behavior, decreased heart rate, dilated pupils, and uncontrollable shivering in waves. Ward off hypothermia by staying hydrated and dry and continuing to move your body. Wear layered clothing made of either wool or synthetic materials.

For your mind

Taking care of your body will promote positive mental health. Make plans with family and friends even if you feel like avoiding social engagements. Identify activities that elevate your mood, and make time for them. Find BLM events at www.blm.gov/alaska and on our [Facebook Page](#). We have public meetings, lectures and fun events in the evenings and on weekends throughout the winter months. Also remember to take time to rest and get cozy.



Boys building a snow shelter during Frozen Chosen Winter Camp near Paxson Lake. The camp teaches how to have fun while surviving the cold winters.

rules to play by

Tundra to the Tropics

Alaska's Migratory Birds Bring People Together



Casey (third from left) and New Zealand delegate (third from right) with local farmers, who now also operate as tour guides.

With the tropical sun beating down, I peer through my binoculars and scan a rice field where the seasonal monsoon flood is finally receding. Sweat beads up, making it difficult to focus through the lenses. There are so many birds here, including species that are completely new to me. The purple herons, whiskered terns, little and great egrets, greenshanks, and long-tailed shrikes are exciting to see, but they aren't the reason I'm here. Then I see it! A medium-sized shorebird, heavily streaked with a bright white belly. This is a pectoral sandpiper, a bird that may have nested on the arctic tundra, then traveled halfway around the world, and is now here, like me, in the Philippines.

Although not obvious at first, the connections between our very different countries became apparent to me during my week in the Philippines. We share a number of migratory birds, primarily shorebirds, and a few songbirds. Our countries provide different components, of what these migratory birds need to survive during their entire lifecycles. What is less obvious, and what I

was excited to learn, is how much we in Alaska have in common with the people managing the birds and their habitats in the Philippines and in many other countries throughout the East Asian-Australasian migratory bird flyway.

I was invited to the Philippines as a representative of the United States to participate in a Communication, Education, Participation and Awareness (CEPA) workshop hosted by the East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership. The partnership works to ensure migratory birds and their habitats are recognized and conserved for the benefit of people and biodiversity. This goal fits well with the management of wildlife and habitat in Alaska, where habitat and species are often managed with subsistence and other human uses in mind. In Alaska we cannot manage our birds alone. We need to work with managers throughout the flyway to ensure nesting, stopover, and wintering habitat is available.

After sharing CEPA activities from Alaska and hearing from the 10 other countries represented, we worked to identify coordinated outreach actions that can span



Casey presenting on the breeding birds and habitat of the Arctic tundra at the NatGeo Migratory Bird Youth Seminar.



Bird watching with a group of students at the NatGeo Migratory Bird Youth Seminar.

multiple countries. I was amazed to hear the similarities of bird and habitat management in very different countries, including Russia, China, and North Korea. These shared experiences build bridges between countries, cultures and languages. The CEPA group is a great example of a successful international partnership.

Following the CEPA workshop, I presented at a National Geographic-sponsored Migratory Bird Youth

Seminar to about 150 high school students from the metro Manila area. These kids were eager to learn, and have not had much exposure to natural habitats and migratory birds. During introductions, each school group shared an art project and a cheer for migratory birds. Following my presentation on the birds, the habitat, and various research and monitoring activities in the arctic tundra, the inquisitive kids asked many questions and wanted pictures with me and my counterparts. After

lunch, we took the kids to one of the only patches of natural habitat in the Manila area, where we observed kingfishers, herons, and a variety of songbirds in a mangrove and tidal flat habitat.

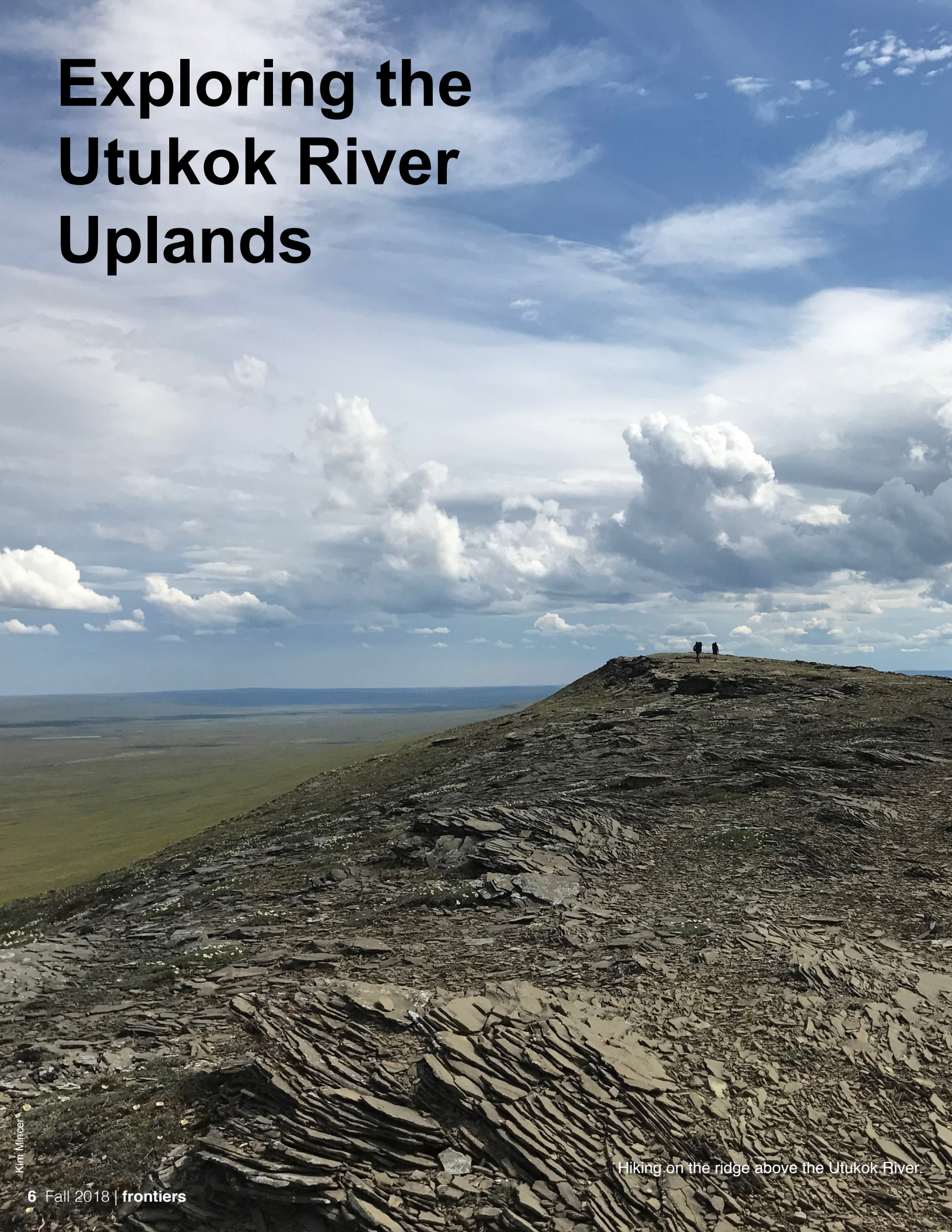
This brings us back to the Candaba rice field where this story began. Upon arriving in the adjacent small town, we were greeted by the local mayor and then led by two farmers on levees between the rice fields. Some farmers also grow tomatoes, and when we figured out that tomatoes cost 30 times more in Alaska than in the Philippines, they jokingly hatched a plan to load my bags with tomatoes to take home and sell so they could get rich. A local conservation group trains farmers to manage the cropland for birds and lead bird tours. The group recently started working with Manila tour companies to develop this trip for the public. Only an hour and a half north of Manila, this area has great potential to attract wildlife watchers while maintaining agricultural production. I was honored to be a “test tourist” and hope that providing a direct economic value to habitat management will help conserve this important habitat and manage it for multiple use.

As a sponsored invitee, I was fortunate to travel to the Philippines to share the Alaskan perspective. I made many contacts and connections that will be useful in managing birds and their habitats developing outreach activities. It is gratifying to see how our shared migratory birds will continue to bring people together in the future.

— Casey Burns
BLM Alaska Wildlife Program Lead
Alaska State Office

Editor’s Note: BLM Alaska is part of the [East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership](#).

Exploring the Utukok River Uplands



Kim Mincer

Hiking on the ridge above the Utukok River.

I first heard of the Utukok River a month before four friends and I planned our departure to spend two mid-summer weeks hiking, camping and packrafting the river. We had always ventured to the northeastern side of Alaska for our “arctic fix,” so I was curious and excited for what we’d find in northwestern Alaska.

Utukok (meaning “old” or “ancient” in Inupiaq) is a 225-mile river that rises in the De Long Mountains and flows north of the Brooks Range, northeast through the National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska, and then northwest into the Chuckchi Sea and Arctic Ocean. This river was once a historic travel corridor for Inupiat hunters. Today, more than 40 villages use the river and its surrounding lands as part of their traditional lifestyle. We planned our two-week travel through a short 85-mile stretch of the Utukok River Uplands. This would give us plenty of time to set up multi-day base camps along the river and explore the low ridges by foot.

We flew commercially from Anchorage to Kotzebue, where we met our bush pilot for a flight to a gravel bar put-in at the confluence of Driftwood Creek. We were greeted with silence and a vast arctic landscape where boundless skies met the expanse of tundra, and the horizon seemed to stretch to infinity. The low Uplands ridges offered easy walking, 360-degree vistas, and splendid wildlife viewing. We saw brown bears, caribou, muskox, and loads of migratory birds (Canada geese, rough-legged hawks, peregrine falcons, robins, gulls, brants, and semipalmated plovers, to name a few). The river is also home to pink and chum salmon.

Other delights of the Uplands were a splendid variety of alpine wildflowers, 24 hours of daylight, an ancient feel to the landscape (full of bones, cool rock features and cultural artifacts), the ease of backcountry travel across the tundra, and the simplicity of tent camping. Also, the Utukok is a Class I river, making the paddling relatively effortless – until the wind weighs in.

In the open Arctic, a traveler is exposed to the elements, and the Utukok River Uplands is no exception to bucking strong winds. Finding a reasonably protected place to pitch a tent was challenging in this land of low ridges but not impossible. Waiting for winds to calm down, however, was a necessity for packrafting.

When our Arctic journey came to an end, our bush pilot plucked us from the gravel bar at the confluence of Carbon Creek and took us to the skies. Every glimpse down onto that magnificent landscape fulfilled a much longed-for sense of wildness.

— Kim Mincer
Visual Information Specialist
Alaska State Office

Editor’s note: Much of the Utukok River flows through the BLM-managed National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska (NPR-A). The Utukok River Uplands is designated a Special Management Area within the NPR-A.



Wildflowers nestled in between the rocky ridges.

Kim Mincer



Making camp along the Utukok River.

Kim Mincer



Our group packrafting on the Utukok River.

Kim Mincer



Sandstone slabs covered in orange lichen on the Utukok River Uplands.

Kim Mincer

Art & Inspiration

BLM Campbell Creek Science Center

Picture yourself with a pencil and sketchbook in hand getting lost in the intricate patterns of a lichen patch, or imagine yourself on a warm summer evening painting watercolors with friends and exploring the complex colors of a wild geranium leaf. Visitors experienced all of this and more last summer with the Campbell Creek Science Center's *Inspired by Nature* evening art class series. The series included field sketching, watercolor painting and printmaking with natural objects. Participants learned different mediums and techniques, before practicing their new skills in the beautiful gardens and meadows surrounding the science center.

— Leila Pyle
Student Conservation Association Intern
BLM Campbell Creek Science Center



Leila Pyle



Leila Pyle



Leila Pyle



Leila Pyle

Inspired by Nature art class series: Printmaking (Top). Field sketching (Bottom Left and Top Right). Watercolor painting on the porch of the science center (Bottom Right).

Walking the Plank

Aspen Interpretive Trail



Mataya Clark

Hiking the Aspen trail.

On a sunny June day, BLM Glennallen Field Office Outdoor Youth Leadership Interns Amanda Friendshuh and Mataya Clark joined other staff to lead 10 youth on a hike along the Aspen Interpretive Trail. To get rural youth into the outdoors, the BLM partners every year with the Wrangell Institute for Science and Environment for weekly hikes and camping trips. New to the Aspen trail are interpretive signs created through a collaborative effort between many people in the Copper River Basin and local elementary and high school students.

The fun-filled hike had many obstacles and interpretive trail signs. At first observation, the Aspen Interpretive Trail doesn't look like much, but closer inspection shows many unique flora and fauna to make it worth the trek into the thick barrier of trees.

A little boardwalk was one of four water crossings along the trail, ending at a wide bridge overlaying a mini pond active with tadpoles and

other water life. That pond was quite popular with the kids.

Students also learned about wood frogs, which survive cold Alaskan winters by allowing their brains and hearts to freeze completely solid while using natural solutes to continue to breathe.

"I wish I could do that!" joked hike participant Shepherd Korth.

The group encountered a sign cautioning hikers that although this is a hiking trail, wildlife walk and live there. Claw marks on trees showed where black bears climbed. BLM Partnership and Outreach Coordinator Robben Taylor showed off her expert bear-like climbing skills, following the claw marks up the tree. The kids were fascinated that the claw marks wrapped around the tree and went upwards until they couldn't see the marks anymore. Black bears can climb really high!

One sign claims the most dangerous creature on earth is the little mosquito! These bugs may be small,

but don't be fooled; the little suckers (pun intended) pack a punch! While not the case in Alaska, they are huge carriers of many fatal or long-lasting diseases in some parts of the world. Their bites sure are irritating, though. Thankfully the group was equipped with lots of mosquito spray to keep the pests away!

After the hike, the group made paintings of aspen trees. Using a variety of techniques involving paper, tape, paint, toothbrushes, straws, and a dropper or Q-tip, the kids learned how to make their favorite color of aspen with a fun and creative spin. The kids freely used bright colors splattered on the paper to create their own interpretation of what they discovered about the aspen trees along the hike.

— Mataya Clark
Outdoor Youth Leadership Intern
Glennallen Field Office

BLM's First Joint Record of Decision

Last August, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the BLM signed a joint record of decision for the Donlin Gold mine project in Alaska. The decision document is the culmination of efforts by both agencies to fulfill the intent of Executive Order 13807 and is the first action of its kind for both agencies nationwide.

In 2012, Donlin Gold, LLC applied for permits to develop an open-pit hardrock gold mine near the Alaska community of Crooked Creek, about 280 miles west of Anchorage and 145 miles northeast of Bethel. Donlin has both subsurface (below the ground) and surface-use agreements with two Alaska Native Corporations: Calista Corporation and The Kuskokwim Corporation.

“This important project – which includes stipulations for Alaska Native hiring preference – will bring more than 3,000 construction jobs and 1,400 operations jobs to the Yukon-Kuskokwim region of Alaska,” said Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke. “It will create good-paying jobs in a region of Alaska with historically high unemployment. We look forward to realizing the many opportunities that the mine will bring to the state of Alaska and the American people.”

Gold mining is nothing new in the area where the Donlin mine will be built. Small-scale placer mining activity has been ongoing at the proposed Donlin Gold Project Area since the early 1900s. Miners first discovered placer gold at Snow Gulch, a tributary of Donlin Creek, in 1909. From 1910 to 1940, small-scale mining continued in the area. In 1975, the Calista Corporation identified gold potential in the region and undertook prospecting and limited exploration activities from 1984 to 1987. In 1988 and 1989, the first substantial hard rock gold exploration drilling program was initiated by WestGold. Placer Dome U.S. explored the vicinity from 1995 to 2000 and constructed a 75-person camp, 17 miles of roads, and a 5,000-foot-long airstrip to support advanced exploration and other programs.

Donlin estimates that construction for mining facilities – including the open-pit, natural gas-fired power plant, mill facility, and other facilities – plus a 30-mile road, a new 5,000-foot dedicated airstrip, and a 316-mile, 14-inch natural gas pipeline, will take three to four years. The company foresees the facilities lasting about 27 years and producing approximately 30 million ounces of gold, processing about 59,000 tons of ore per day! The



Lisa Gleason

Commander of the Corps' Alaska District Colonel Michael Brooks and Assistant Secretary for Land and Minerals Management Joseph Balash signed the Joint Record of Decision on August 13.

planned road and airstrip construction will bring access to the mine site.

While the proposed Donlin mine doesn't sit on BLM-managed public land, the pipeline will cross BLM Alaska's jurisdiction. This requires a right-of-way grant, or permission to build the pipeline across approximately 96.7 miles and 2,329 acres of BLM-managed public lands.

The Corps and the BLM worked hard to show the public that their federal government will make sound decisions on environmental reviews. These efforts will not only fulfill needs for Alaska's economy, but will also ensure that the state's majestic beauty remains intact for future generations to enjoy. The company still needs to complete permitting steps with the state of Alaska before construction can begin.

— Joe Edmonds
Planning and Environmental Coordinator
Alaska State Office

Editor's Note: Executive Order 13807, *Establishing Discipline and Accountability in the Environmental Review and Permitting Process for Infrastructure*, aims to increase infrastructure investment in order to strengthen the American economy by eliminating inefficiencies in project decisions including the management of environmental reviews, permit decisions or authorizations.

Stephanie Rice's road to the Red Card was paved in white ... snow that is!



Lisa Gleason

Stephanie finishes a weekend training hike up Mount Baldy in Eagle River, Alaska.



Lisa Gleason

When Stephanie Rice attended 'Pathways,' the BLM's new employee training program, she had no idea she'd be inspired to become a wildland firefighter. Her regular job is a planning and environmental coordinator for BLM Alaska. But during the training last April in Phoenix, she learned that fire suppression— especially during summers — is a substantial part of BLM's mission. With her supervisor's enthusiastic support, Stephanie decided to complete the application, schedule her medical health screening, and prepare for the training and rigorous tests to become qualified to provide fire support. Just a few months separated Stephanie's decision to apply and the June 2017 Incident Qualifications and Certification (Red Card) evaluation week.

Stephanie's first challenge was to prepare physically for the rigorous Red Card test. After initially just increasing her normal physical activities of CrossFit and commuting to work on foot, bike or skis, she decided to escalate her workouts, literally.

By taking to the mountain trails around Anchorage and incrementally adding weight to her pack, she developed the aerobic endurance and muscular strength necessary to pass the arduous work capacity test. Otherwise known as the "pack test," firefighting applicants must complete a three-mile trek with a 45-pound pack in less than 45 minutes. Often a training session included a 2,000-foot climb, with up to 30 extra pounds in her pack. And since most of her training was completed before the snow pack melted, Stephanie would need to add ice grippers over her boots to provide enough traction for the climbs.

"It's nice to have a goal to train for in the springtime to stay motivated. It can be hard at the end of the workday to get yourself out to do a hard training hike, so having an objective with a deadline helped," said Stephanie. "Although I didn't get to go on a fire assignment this year, I'm hopeful that I'll be able to go next year, and I intend to maintain this qualification."

Becoming a Red Card carrying member of the BLM team that supports firefighting is just one way Stephanie reaches out to help. She also volunteers for the Alaska Mountain Rescue Group, a nonprofit volunteer search and rescue organization based in Anchorage. Responding to calls for assistance keeps Stephanie on her toes.



(Above) Stephanie unpacks 25 pounds of water she carried up Mount Baldy in Eagle River, Alaska. (Right) Ridgeline hike at Mount Baldy. (Bottom Right) Stephanie finishes a weekend training hike up Mount Baldy.

From the moment a call comes in, volunteers determine their ability to respond and then dress and pack for missions that are likely to include locating and then assisting hypothermic individuals.

“Volunteering for an organization that trains regularly to assist people who are lost, injured or stranded in Alaska’s vast backcountry made me confident that Stephanie would be a good fit for the wildland firefighting team,” said her supervisor, Serena Sweet. “Her devotion to the agency’s needs as well as this remarkable volunteer mission speaks volumes about her character and willingness to serve others.”

“Do it!” is Stephanie’s advice to others considering applying. “I think some people can be intimidated by stories of Hotshot crews and assignments, but the firefighting program is more than that. There are opportunities for everyone wanting to contribute.”

As the summer season of work winds down in The Last Frontier, thoughts of winter are at the forefront of BLM staff in Alaska. Stephanie is proof that snow, cold, wind, and short days need not be barriers to achieving an objective. In fact, they may actually be the tools that help contribute to attaining a goal.

— Lisa Gleason
Public Affairs Specialist
Alaska State Office



Development begins on a new Integrated Activity Plan for NPR-A

Bob Wick

Fulfilling Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke's promise to jump-start development in the National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska (NPR-A), the BLM published a Notice of Intent on Nov 21 to begin the development of a new Integrated Activity Plan (IAP) and associated Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the area.

The purpose of the IAP and EIS is to develop a new management strategy for the NPR-A consistent with Secretarial Order 3352, that continues clean and safe development in the NPR-A while assessing regulatory aspects that may encumber energy production, constrain economic growth and prevent job creation. The order calls for the review and development of a revised IAP "that strikes an appropriate balance of promoting development while protecting surface resources."

The action comes after the State of Alaska and the North Slope Borough asked the Department of the Interior to make more investment in infrastructure and to help build capacity to support their aligned goals in light of recently increased activity on Alaska's North Slope. The state and the borough seek to balance economic growth, preservation of a healthy environment, and a vibrant traditional subsistence culture.

"Production from Federal leases is being realized 95 years after the Naval Petroleum Reserve was established," said Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Land and Minerals Management Joe Balash. "As development and production increases into the NPR-A and as advances in technologies are discovered for use on the North Slope of Alaska, the Department of the Interior determined it is appropriate to consider a different approach to management of the NPR-A."

The new IAP and EIS will include: a range of leasing alternatives that consider new areas to leasing; examination of current special area boundaries; and consideration of new or revised lease stipulations and best management practices. The new plan will incorporate the most current information and lay out management goals and objectives that are environmentally responsible, respect traditional uses of the land and maintain access to subsistence resources.

"The planning being initiated today calls for substantial public involvement to include consideration of the State of Alaska's regional planning efforts for the North Slope," said Ted A. Murphy, acting BLM Alaska State Director.

The 45-day public scoping period, which will include public scoping meetings in North Slope communities as well as Anchorage and Fairbanks, ends Jan 7, 2019.

Get Involved

Visit the new NPR-A IAP/EIS website:
<http://www.blm.gov/alaska/NPR-A-IAP-EIS>

Submit written comments via:

Online in ePlanning (Click on the Comment Button next to the Notice of Intent)

Fax: 907-271-5479

Mail: NPR-A IAP/EIS Scoping Comments
222 West 7th Avenue, #13 Anchorage, AK 99513-7504

In Person by attending a Public Meeting:

Wainwright: Wednesday, Dec 5,
7-10 pm at the community center

Point Lay: Thursday, Dec 6,
7-10 pm at the community center

Utqiagvik: Friday, Dec 7,
7-10 pm at the Inupiat Heritage Center

Nuiqsut: Saturday, Dec 8,
1-5 pm at the community center

Anchorage: Monday, Dec 10,
5:30-8:30 pm at the Campbell Creek Science Center

Atkasuk: Tuesday, Dec 11,
7-10 pm at the community center

Anaktuvuk Pass: Wednesday, Dec 12,
7-10 pm at the community center

Fairbanks: Thursday, Dec 13,
5:30-8:30 pm at the Morris Thompson Center

Scoping Public Comment Period ends Jan 7, 2019.

POSTPONED
due to
earthquake.
Will be
rescheduled.

COFFEE WITH A SCIENTIST

Joe Edmonds



Lisa Gleason

Summer in Alaska ushers in school breaks, long days, loads of tourists, and the Alaska National Park Service's (NPS) summer speaker series. Each week, the Alaska NPS hosts its "Coffee with a Scientist" program on various Alaskan science topics like glaciers, volcanology, biology, archaeology, geology, or careers in environmental studies.

In July, BLM Alaska planning and environmental coordinator Joe Edmonds shared his educational, volunteer, and work experiences with prospective environmental studies students. To prepare, Joe said he spent a great deal of time reflecting on his "Path to Planning." What a path it has been.

"Researching facts on the many places I lived during my professional career, seeing the pins on the map, and then realizing the miles I'd traveled made preparing for this speaking opportunity very enjoyable," Joe explained.

He grew up in Dayton, Ohio, a city with a population equivalent to the entire state of Alaska. Kicking off his journey in Kentucky at Berea College with a Bachelor's Degree in English, Joe credits many of his future achievements to a solid foundation in writing. Between undergraduate

and graduate degrees, Joe jumped on opportunities to participate in outdoor naturalist volunteer training. Eventually this led him to Ohio University for a Master's Degree in Environmental Studies.

His desire to explore more of the country led Joe west to Oregon to work for AmeriCorps in urban, regional and environmental planning. A University of Oregon AmeriCorps program brought Joe to the Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians in Southwest Oregon where he wrote his first resource management plan, as well as an environmental assessment on invasive weed treatment using herbicides. The work gave Joe valuable insights on another culture's perspectives, history, and language. He also developed a deep connection with a place he had never visited before. This intersection was where Joe first encountered the *National Environmental Policy Act* (NEPA), a key legislation that guides environmental planning. He completed his volunteer time in the Volunteer in Service to America (VISTA) program at BLM Oregon's Roseburg District Office.

Joe's journey then took to the air with a one-way ticket and a couple

suitcases to Sitka, Alaska. He started his federal career as a U.S. Forest Service planner for the Tongass National Forest. Living and working on an island in the Alaska Panhandle taught him many things, not the least of which was that he would soon want to get back on the road system. And he did.

Another one-way ticket dropped Joe in Anchorage, where he now is a planning and environmental coordinator for the BLM Alaska State Office.

His supervisor, Serena Sweet, said, "Having Joe in Anchorage benefits our BLM Alaska planning team immeasurably. His energy, excitement, and willingness to tackle any new challenge inspires all of us."

From his middle-America start, Joe covered almost 4,000 miles in his Path to Environmental Planning and he's not yet sure if the "Last Frontier" is his last stop.

"Maybe, maybe not. Life is certainly a journey, and I can't wait to see what destination it takes me to next!"

— Lisa Gleason
Public Affairs Specialist
Alaska State Office

Surviving the “State Bird” While Counting Birds

Alaska! One thinks of cool blue glaciers, whales leaping from the water, majestic bald eagles ...

Then there is the other Alaska, the one that doesn't make the glossy magazine covers. The Alaska that hums, that flies, that bites. I'm talking about the mosquito – the other “State Bird.” I'll come back to them in a moment.

Recently I, Rich Capitan, Science Instructor with the BLM's Campbell Creek Science Center, assisted Bruce Seppi, Subsistence Biologist with the Anchorage Field Office, on the Anvik River Breeding Bird Survey. The field office and the science center often work together to ensure the BLM mission thrives both in Anchorage and in rural Alaska.

“Breeding bird surveys have been done since the 1960s to estimate bird population trends in North America and Canada,” Seppi explained. “In the Lower 48 states, these surveys are done by cars on roads, but here in Alaska in roadless areas, surveys are done using boats on rivers.”

The survey route started 70 miles up the Anvik River after a 40-mile boat trip up the Yukon River from the village of Holy Cross. The Anvik River is a clear tributary of the Yukon River approximately 350 miles northwest of Anchorage. The route includes 50 survey points spaced one-half mile apart. Starting a half hour after sunrise (3:30 a.m. in June) we boated downriver, stopping every half mile to record all birds seen and heard for three minutes. The complete route takes about six to seven hours, barring any low water or submerged trees blocking our route.

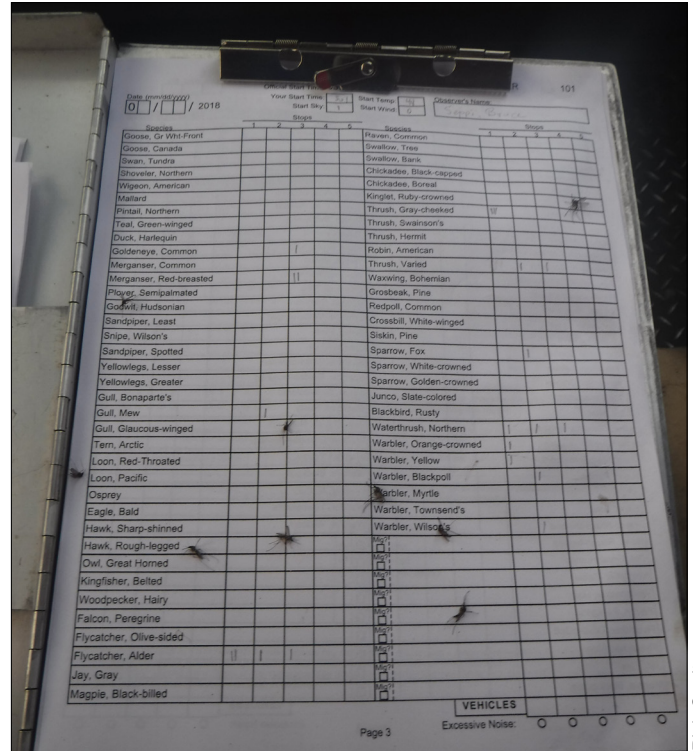
The riparian habitat is thick willow, alder and spruce forest with open grassy wetlands, which is perfect for the neotropical migrants that we were listening for: the northern water thrush, gray cheeked thrush and yellow Wilson's and blackpoll warblers. These birds spend their winters in Central and South America, including the tropical southern part of Mexico and the Caribbean, thus the term “neotropical.”

The Anvik River is great mosquito habitat – and they let you know it. The air literally hums with them. They seek anything breathing or giving off heat, making your tent the most wonderful place on the planet, where you can remove your bug jacket and simply exist. Of course, these insects are also why the birds are here, as that's a lot of available food.



Science Instructor and bird counter Rich Capitan.

Bruce Seppi



Just a sampling of downed mosquitoes on the breeding bird survey data sheet.

Rich Capitan

I found a new appreciation for the mammals that live in this environment, including wolves, moose, wood bison, and bears. They have no refuge from mosquitoes and must constantly deal with their maddening swarms.

When in camp, we were “spoken to” almost nightly by a neighborhood beaver with a heavy tail slap upon the water – “kersplash!” – letting us know it disapproved of us setting up camp in its neck of the woods. Since my return and reinsertion back into society I have found it difficult to turn off my “bird radar/listening” and I find myself still swatting imagined bugs.

— Rich Capitan
Science Instructor
BLM Campbell Creek Science Center

Paint, Pics, Pebbles, and more



BLM Artist in Residence Kelly Sheridan poses with one of her paintings in the Atigun River valley off of the Dalton Highway.

Artist in Residence Program Goes above the Arctic Circle

The Central Yukon Field Office's goal to establish an Artist in Residence (AiR) program for the Dalton Highway became a reality this year when Kelly Sheridan, an art teacher from Idaho Falls, Idaho, accepted an invitation to travel north.

Kelly arrived in Alaska July 18 for a nine-day visit. Picking her up at the Fairbanks Airport proved easier than anticipated. Although field office staff had not met her before, Kelly was readily identifiable from the artwork painted on her backpack, which resembled one of the sample works she had submitted with her application.

After a six-hour drive up the Dalton Highway to the Brooks Range community of Coldfoot, Kelly wasted no time in pulling out the paintbrushes. Over the next few days, she visited many places in the Coldfoot area.

The Arctic Interagency Visitor Center hosted "Art in the Arctic," on July 21, a program initiated by Student Conservation Association interns Sarah Gage (FWS) and Sarah Evans (BLM). The program gave locals and visitors a chance to make art, and as a bonus, get some pointers from Sheridan.

After the Art in the Arctic event, Kelly accompanied BLM's Marion Creek Campground Host Thomas Hartmann, an experienced photographer, into the heart of the Brooks Range. They traveled up and over 4,739-foot Atigun Pass, Alaska's highest pass with year-round road access, to Galbraith Lake.

Nestled in the northern foothills of the Brooks Range, Galbraith Lake is a gorgeous spot situated where the mountains give way to the vast Arctic tundra. Kelly and Hartmann enjoyed three days of hiking, photography and painting on BLM-managed public lands and also visited the Gates of the Arctic National Park & Preserve, the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, and the scientific research station at Toolik Lake.

Once back at Coldfoot, Kelly had a day to get everything in order before the long drive back to Fairbanks. The field office's first Dalton Highway residency finished as a great success for the artist, the public and the BLM.



Craig McCaa

Photographer Thomas Hartmann and Outdoor Recreation Planner Collin Cogley relax during a float trip.



The artists and their BLM guide float down Beaver Creek Wild and Scenic River past a ridge dusted with fresh June snow.



BLM Artist in Residence Margo Klass works with pebbles, twigs, and twine on a Beaver Creek gravel bar.



Artist in Residence Frank Soos took breaks from writing to harvest several Arctic grayling. Margo Klass then tanned the fish skins and included them with a variety of other “found objects” in her artwork.

“BLM-administered lands in the Dalton Highway Corridor inspire people in so many different ways,” said Central Yukon Field Manager Tim La Marr. “Kelly’s residency and her work beautifully tap into some of that inspiration and bring it to light for others to experience and appreciate.”

— John Rappahn

*Park Ranger, Arctic Interagency Visitor Center Manager
Central Yukon Field Office*

Collaborative Artistry on the River

Last summer, thanks to support from the BLM’s Artist in Residence (AiR) program, the BLM Alaska Eastern Interior Field Office hosted artists on each of three Wild and Scenic Rivers the field office manages to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the *Wild and Scenic Rivers Act*. These rivers were Beaver Creek, Birch Creek, and the Fortymile River.

The summer’s activities kicked off with the Beaver Creek Wild and Scenic River, which flows through the middle of the BLM-managed White Mountains National Recreation Area before entering Yukon Flats National Wildlife Refuge. The BLM selected a Fairbanks couple, Margo Klass and Frank Soos, as the Beaver Creek artists. The artist selection panel valued Klass’ use of fish skins in her art as representing one of the Outstanding and Remarkable Values for which Beaver Creek is designated. Soos is a former Alaska poet laureate with a convenient interest in obtaining fish skins for Klass — through fly-fishing!

A six-person crew of two artists and BLM and FWS staff, began the trip June 9. The following day, the group encountered rain, sleet, hail and snow. Three of the crew hiked 20 miles out from the float trip’s midway point to conduct trail monitoring along BLM’s Summit Trail with some parts buried under a foot of new snow. BLM staff and the two artists finished the float and were flown out by air taxi on the ninth day.

While on the river, BLM staff conducted Special Recreation Permit monitoring, river monitoring, and a post-cleanup inspection of a site where a small plane had crashed into the river the previous week.

July saw two more artists — Jessica Cherry and Jules Tileston — visit the Fortymile Wild and Scenic River for a week. Then in mid-August, the last artist, Becca Rora-baugh, floated Birch Creek Wild and Scenic River as migrating caribou criss-crossed the ridges of the surrounding Steese National Conservation Area. The field office plans on hosting public presentations by all of the artists in the coming year.

— Collin Cogley

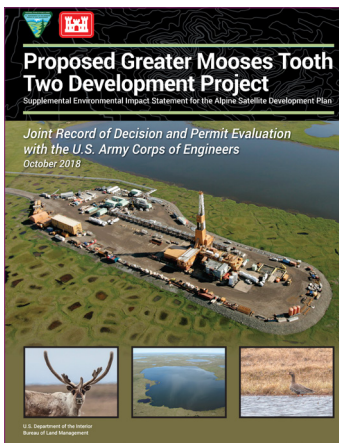
*Outdoor Recreation Planner
Fairbanks District Office*

frontiers *flashes*

Coastal Plain Oil and Gas Leasing Program

Title II of the *Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017* directed the Secretary of the Interior to establish a competitive oil and gas program for the leasing, development, production, and transportation of oil and gas in and from the Coastal Plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR), with a minimum of two lease sales required within seven years. A *Federal Register* Notice of Intent published April 19 to initiate scoping in preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the leasing program. The 60-day public scoping period closed June 19. During that period, the BLM heard many diverse views with an emphasis on subsistence uses and caribou migration and calving. BLM Alaska is currently developing the Leasing EIS to inform BLM's implementation of the *Tax Act* to hold multiple lease sales and to analyze the environmental impacts of issuing those oil and gas leases.

Find out more about the EIS at www.blm.gov/alaska/coastal-plain-eis.



Greater Mooses Tooth 2 (GMT2) Joint Record of Decision (ROD)

BLM Alaska issued a Joint ROD with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers on Oct. 15 for the GMT2 project in the 22.8-million-acre National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska (NPR-A). The August 2015 application from ConocoPhillips Alaska, Inc. is to permit a 14-acre pad and up to 48 wells, an 8.2-mile road, and an 8.6-mile pipeline connecting GMT2 with GMT1.

ConocoPhillips anticipates starting construction of GMT2 during the winter of 2018-2019, and expects the site to be in production for 30 years from 2020-2050. ConocoPhillips estimates approximately 40,000 barrels of oil to be produced per day, which will result in royalties amounting to roughly \$2.13 billion, with payments shared among the resource owners. The GMT2 project will provide substantial economic benefits to Alaska Native Corporations that own a significant portion of the subsurface mineral estate while also delivering an essential product to support America's future energy needs.

NPR-A Oil and Gas Lease Sale

BLM Alaska has held annual oil and gas lease sales in the NPR-A since 2011. Unlike lease sales in the Lower 48, NPR-A lease sales are conducted by sealed bids. BLM Alaska will hold an NPR-A oil and gas lease sale in December. All of the nominated tracts offered in the 2018 lease sale are available for leasing under the 2013 NPR-A Integrated Activity Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (IAP/EIS) Record of Decision. This will be the 14th lease sale since 1999. Total bids received from the 13 prior sales were \$282,097,563. Presently, there are 199 leases covering 1,384,352 acres in the NPR-A.

Ambler Road Project

The BLM is the lead federal agency for the Ambler Road project EIS and is currently developing the draft EIS. The proposed 211-mile all-season industrial road from the Dalton Highway to the Ambler Mineral District (characterized as one of the largest undeveloped copper-zinc mineral belts in the world) would cross 18 miles of BLM-managed lands along the Dalton Highway Utility Corridor, as well as state lands, Alaska Native Corporation lands, and National Park Service-managed lands. Cooperating agencies on the EIS include the U.S. Coast Guard, Army Corps of Engineers (Corps), State of Alaska, and Northwest Arctic Borough. Participating agencies are the Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The Alaska Industrial Development and Export Authority submitted a consolidated application in 2014 to the BLM, National Park Service, U.S. Coast Guard, and Corps for a proposed right-of-way grant to construct, operate, and maintain the access road. A *Federal Register* Notice of Intent published Feb. 28, 2017 to solicit public comments and identify issues. The BLM expects the Final EIS and Record of Decision to be issued in 2019.

Willow Development

A *Federal Register* Notice of Intent published in August seeking public comment for the proposed development of a Master Development Plan by ConocoPhillips Alaska, Inc. Willow prospect, and the comment period closed Sept. 6. Willow is within the Bear Tooth Unit of the NPR-A and may use GMT1 and GMT2 infrastructure. The proposed project includes the construction, operation, and maintenance of a central processing facility, infrastructure pad, up to five drill pads with up to fifty wells on each pad, access and infield roads, an airstrip, pipelines, and a gravel mine on BLM-managed lands. In addition, ConocoPhillips has proposed a temporary island to facilitate module delivery via sealift barges, which would occur within waters managed by the State of Alaska. BLM Alaska anticipates releasing a draft EIS in Feb. 2019.

Alaska Liquefied Natural Gas (AKLNG) Pipeline Project

In August, BLM Alaska sent a notice of complete application to the Alaska Gasline Development Corporation (AGDC) for the [AKLNG project](#). The AGDC submitted an application in 2014 for a pipeline right-of-way across BLM-managed lands pursuant to the *Mineral Leasing Act*. The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) is the lead agency for the EIS, and the BLM is a cooperating agency. The AGDC has project status under Title 41 of the *Fix America's Surface Transportation Act* (FAST-41), which provides coordination and oversight procedures for certain infrastructure projects. The FERC anticipated the EIS will be completed in November 2019, with all federal agency permit and authorization decisions issued by February 2020.

News from around the State

State Land Conveyances and Public Land Orders

In 2017, BLM Alaska initiated a Public Land Order (PLO) Working Group to enhance collaboration between BLM Alaska and the Alaska Department of Natural Resources regarding State land entitlement. The results of the working group include the recent lifting of five PLOs in the Goodnews Bay area and subsequent conveyance of land to the state. PLOs encumber certain lands from being selected by the State to fulfill the state's entitlement. Instead, the State has "top-filed" on lands in anticipation of PLOs being revoked. Currently, the state is overselected by 258 percent, or seven million acres. Per Sec. 906(f) of the *Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act*, land selections are limited to 125 percent over entitlement. This breaks down as follows:

- Approximately 5.3 million acres remaining in entitlement;
- 13.7 million acres of selections; and,
- 6.5 million acres top-filed, with approximately 2.5 million acres being Priority 1.

Although the working group no longer meets, the state helped BLM prioritize its top-filings so that the BLM can recommend revoking those areas from the respective PLOs. The working group resulted in:

- Revoking five PLOs on a total of 229,715 acres in the Goodnews Bay area;
- BLM Alaska has submitted a revocation package for seven more PLOs to the Secretary of the Interior for approximately 1.2 million acres in the Fortymile subunit of the Eastern Interior RMP (currently pending with the Secretary's office); and,
- The state is initiating a complete reprioritization effort of selections and top-filings for fine-tuning their priorities for remaining entitlement.

Revoking a withdrawal allows the top-filing to attach and become a valid selection by the state. The state selection will segregate the lands from mineral entry until the lands are conveyed, when they will become open to mineral entry under state law. The BLM and the state continue to work together to identify issues with state conveyance and for regular updates.



BLM Alaska Deputy State Director of Lands and Cadastral Survey Erika Reed signs patents for State of Alaska entitlements in the Goodnews Bay area, October 19.

Placer Mining Strategic Plan

All levels of mining management within BLM Alaska are working on a strategic plan to foster more collaboration among interdisciplinary teams and the mining communities they assist. A groundwork meeting in March helped form broad goals for the plan. Management teams and staff also participated in a contractor-led strategic plan development workshop to continue refining the plan's focal points and tactical problem-solving ideas. Ultimately, BLM Alaska is striving to balance agency compliance requirements with providing technical support and outreach to Alaska's mining community.



BLM Alaska Fisheries Biologist Matt Varner and placer miner Chris Race.

Resource Management Plans

Central Yukon

The Central Yukon Planning Area is approximately 56 million acres, with approximately 13.1 million acres of BLM-managed lands. Within the planning area are the Dalton Highway Utility Corridor, Central Arctic Management Area Wilderness Study Area, and a segment of the Iditarod National Historic Trail. The planning area boundary includes 24 remote villages (15 have tribal entities) and three ANCSA Regional Corporation boundaries (Doyon Limited, Arctic Slope Regional Corporation, and NANA, Inc.). Once completed and approved, the [Central Yukon RMP](#) will replace two existing BLM land use plans: the Utility Corridor RMP (1991) and the Central Yukon RMP (1986). It will also provide a RMP for a portion of the lands currently covered by the Southwest Management Framework Plan (1986) and unplanned lands near Fairbanks. The BLM is working to refine the range of alternatives based upon public input and to draft the RMP. BLM Alaska anticipates the draft EIS will be available in early 2019.

Bering Sea-Western Interior

The Anchorage Field Office is developing a new land use plan that encompasses approximately 62.3 million acres of land in Western Alaska, including 13.5 million acres of BLM-managed public lands (surface lands and federal minerals). The [Bering Sea-Western Interior RMP and associated EIS](#) will replace portions of the existing 1981 Southwest Management Framework Plan and 1986 Central Yukon RMP Record of Decision. The BLM anticipates the draft EIS will be available for public review and comment before the end of 2018.



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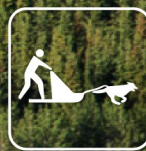
**127
MILES**

CLASS I-II

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moose, black & brown bears, wolf, caribou, Dall sheep, lynx, beaver, marten, wolverine, muskrat, fox, eagle, peregrine falcon, owl, and migratory waterfowl



POINT OF CONTACT
Eastern Interior Field Office
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Fairbanks, AK 99709
Phone: 907-474-2200



**Air Taxi
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Arctic grayling
burbot
northern pike
whitefish

