

Draft Taylor Highway Recreation Fee Site Business Plan



United States Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Eastern Interior Field Office

2023



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Business Plan for BLM Eastern Interior Field Office Recreation Fee Sites

Executive Summary

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Eastern Interior Field Office (EIFO)/Taylor Highway service area prepared this recreation fee business plan pursuant to the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA) of December 2004 (P.L. 108-477, as amended) and BLM recreation permit and fee program policy. FLREA provides the BLM the authority to charge and collect recreation fees for benefits and services provided to visitors. FLREA also authorizes the BLM to retain collected fees locally, outlines how revenues may be used, and identifies specific limitations on recreation fees. Collected revenue may be expended for benefits and services such as facility repair, maintenance, enhancement, interpretation, visitor information and services, visitor needs assessments, signs, restoration, law enforcement related to public use and recreation, and operating or capital costs directly associated with the recreation fee program.

BLM Manual 2930 requires field offices to produce a business plan when establishing new fee areas and sites and developing or changing recreation fees. The business plan outlines the fee program for the identified location and thoroughly discusses and explains how fees are consistent with the criteria set forth in FLREA. Business plans assist offices in determining appropriate fee rates, outlining the costs of administering fee programs, and identifying priorities for future fee program expenditures. The plan also serves as the outreach document to provide the public with opportunities to participate in the development of or modification of recreation fees.

The EIFO manages campground use through issuance of Recreation Use Permits (RUP) for short-term recreation use of specialized sites, facilities, and/or services which meet the fee collection criteria established by FLREA. This business plan describes the recreation fee sites, proposed site fee changes, planned fee revenue expenditures, a financial analysis of fee charges for other similar recreation facilities, and impacts of proposed fee changes.

After careful consideration of the current fee program, the anticipated revenues and expenditures, and comparison with other regional recreation providers, the EIFO proposes the following fee modifications:

- Increase the individual campsite fee at Eagle Campground, Walker Fork Campground, and West Fork Campground from \$10 to \$12 per night.
- Add an expanded amenity fee for reservation services across the field office.

The proposed fee modifications are necessary to meet the growing expenses of the campground program, especially deferred maintenance costs stemming from the growing popularity of the EIFO campgrounds as travel destinations and the associated increase in public use and increasing age of the facilities. Developed fee campgrounds are management tools used to prevent further resource damage and to provide better visitor services.

1. Introduction

a. Background and Authorities

The authorities and regulations for this business plan are:

- **The Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA), as amended,** [Public Law 94-579] contains BLM’s general land use management authority over the public lands and establishes outdoor recreation as one principal use of those lands. Section 302 (b) of FLPMA directs the Secretary of the Interior to regulate through permits or other instruments the use of the public lands. The BLM originally began collecting recreational fees for the use of public lands under this authority. Section 303 of FLPMA contains the BLM’s authority to enforce the regulations and impose penalties.
- **The Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA) 2004** [Public Law 108-447] repealed applicable portions of the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act and replaced the BLM’s authority to collect recreational fees. The FLREA provides the BLM the authority to establish, modify, charge, and collect recreation fees at federal recreation lands and waters that meet certain requirements. The FLREA also allows the BLM to keep the fee revenues at the local offices where they are collected and directs how the BLM will manage and utilize these revenues, including for expenses such as facility repair, maintenance and enhancement, interpretation, visitor information, services and needs assessments, signage, law enforcement directly related to public use and recreation, and operating or capital costs associated with the Recreation and Visitor Services program. The FLREA also established the America the Beautiful–The National Parks and Federal Recreational Lands Pass program. The FLREA is codified in the U.S. Code in Title 16 (Conservation), Chapter 87 (Sections 6801-6814).
- **43 CFR 2930: Permits for Recreation on Public Land.** The Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) is an annual codification of the general and permanent rules published in the Federal Register by the executive departments and agencies of the federal government. Title 43 covers public lands administered by the Department of the Interior. Sections 1000 – 9999 cover the Bureau of Land Management.

This business plan has also been prepared pursuant to all applicable BLM recreation fee program policies and guidance, including:

- BLM Recreation Permits and Fees Manual 2930
- BLM Recreation Permits and Fees Administration Handbook (2930-1 Handbook)

b. Fees and Business Plan Requirement

The BLM strives to manage recreation and visitor services to serve diverse outdoor recreation demands while maintaining the sustainable resource conditions needed so recreation opportunities remain available. The BLM's goals for delivering recreation benefits from BLM-administered public lands and waters to the American public and their communities are:

- Improve access to appropriate recreation opportunities.
- Ensure a quality experience and enjoyment of natural and cultural resources.
- Provide for and receive fair value in recreation.

This business plan will assist the EIFO in meeting these recreation and visitor service goals.

According to BLM Handbook 2930-1, Recreation Permits and Fees (Rel. 2-300, dated November 17, 2014), each recreation fee program must have an approved business plan which comprehensively explains fees and illustrates how they are consistent with the FLREA fee criteria. Business plans assist management in the determination of the appropriateness and level of fees, the cost of administering a fee program per fiscal year (FY), the expected benefits provided for the public, and to produce a structured communication and marketing plan. This plan primarily serves as public notification of the objectives for the use of the recreation fee revenues and to offer the public an opportunity to comment on the proposed changes. Recreation permit revenues for the EIFO are deposited in the EIFO recreation fee accounts (WBS LVRDAK030000, LVRDAK040000, LVRDAK100000, and LVRDAK110000).

This business plan will encompass descriptions of the fee sites, proposed fee changes, associated operating costs, financial analysis, and the impacts of the fee changes. This report utilized data from internal BLM tracking and accounting mechanisms such as the Recreation Management Information System (RMIS), Collections and Billings Systems (CBS), Federal Business Management System (FBMS), and other locally generated recreation and visitor use tracking spreadsheets. Some data contained in these systems may be subject to the requirements of the Privacy Act of 1974.

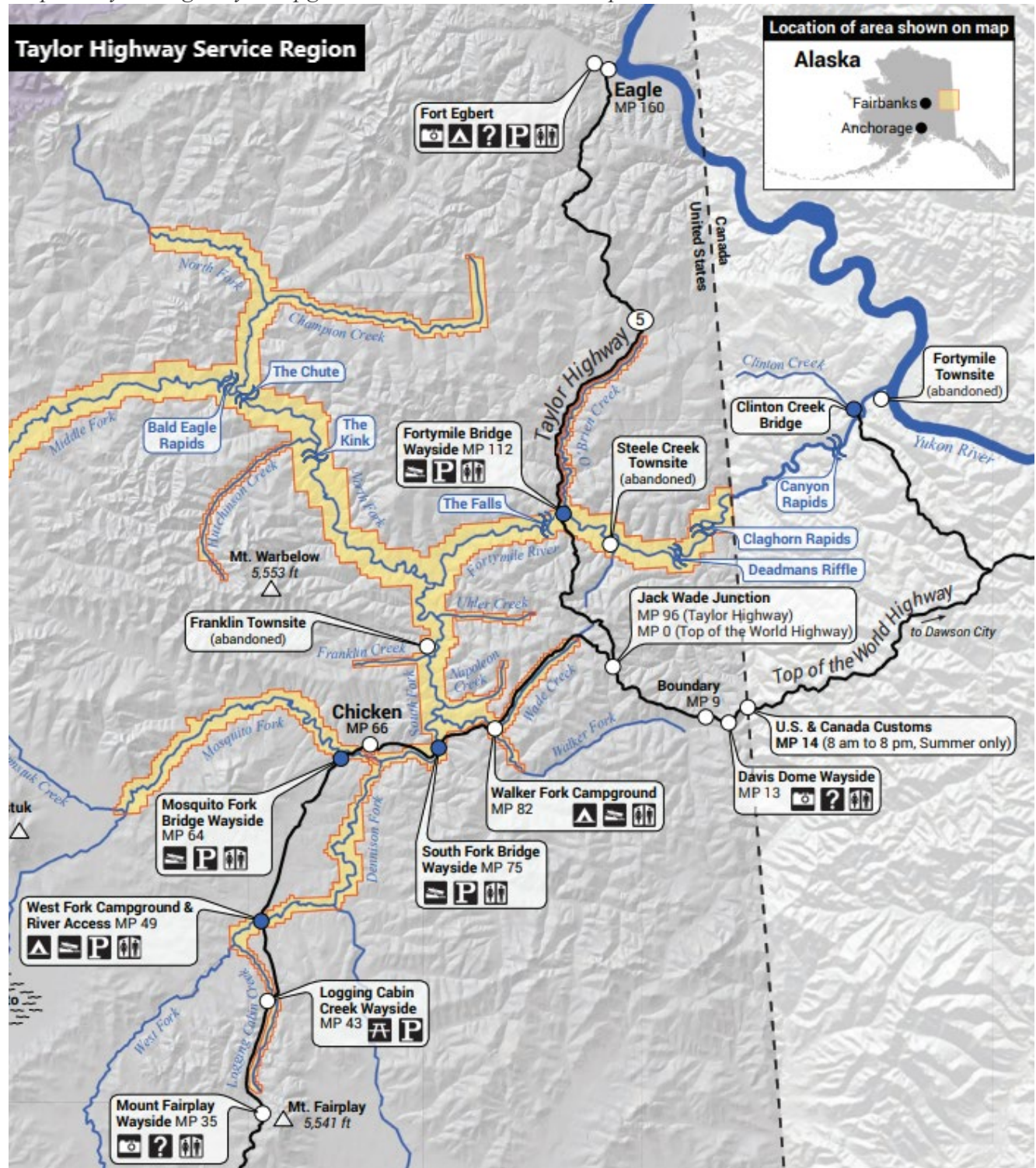
c. Environmental Justice

Consistent with Department of Interior and BLM priorities, the BLM EIFO seeks to achieve environmental justice, equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility and make a difference in Alaskan communities through expanding recreational access and opportunities and providing for natural resource interpretation. This includes to:

- encourage, facilitate, and improve partnership with and access for youth, tribes, and underserved communities to public lands through recreation partnerships and collaborations;
- improve public health and safety at developed recreation sites and areas by updating and modernizing infrastructure—including meeting accessibility standards for people with disabilities;
- invite education, interpretation, and recreational access for all Americans, especially for diverse populations and those near urban areas to encourage enjoyment of BLM-managed public lands and waters;
- collaborate with community members, government organizations, nonprofit organizations, academic institutions, and other stakeholders to address environmental and health-related challenges for recreation management;

- enhance understanding of environmental and health-related issues at the community level;
- improve methods for identifying, addressing, tracking, and measuring progress toward achieving environmental justice;
- and develop and support youth education and outreach programs.

Map 1. Taylor Highway campground and recreation site map



2. Background

a. Area Description

From its start near the Tanana River to its end at the Yukon River, the Taylor is a highway built around, next to, over, and because of rivers. It provides travelers with unparalleled access not only to the mighty Yukon but also the Fortymile Wild and Scenic River (WSR), a watercourse that has shaped this region in ways as deep as the valleys it has carved through the Yukon-Tanana Uplands. The Taylor Highway's twisty path passes through some of the state's most interesting history while providing gorgeous scenery along the way.

Image 1. Walker Fork of the Fortymile WSR



Gold Rush prospectors gave the Fortymile WSR its name because it joins the Yukon River about 40 miles below Fort Reliance, an old Canadian trading post. In 1980, 392 miles of the river in east-central Alaska were designated as a WSR by the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act. The BLM manages the WSR corridor as well as three campgrounds and Fort Egbert National Historic Site in the Eagle Historic District National Historic Landmark.

Today's visitors can find relaxation, adventure, or a touch of the past in the Fortymile region, which provided Interior Alaska's first gold rush in 1886. Float trips on the Fortymile WSR offer scenic beauty, solitude, and glimpses of gold-mining dredges, turn-of-the-century trapper cabins, and abandoned town sites. Threading through this rugged landscape, the twisty and picturesque Taylor Highway leads motorists into the heart of the Fortymile and over American Summit to the historic town of Eagle on the Yukon River. The Top of the World Highway forks off the Taylor Highway, allowing access to Dawson City in Canada's Yukon Territory.

b. Visitor Demographics

Most visitors to the Taylor Highway service area are residents from the Fairbanks North Star Borough and neighboring communities or travelers from Canada in the nearby Yukon Territory. Some visitors have come back to the area year after year for decades. There has been an increase in visitors from the contiguous United States as well as international visitors, although their specific demographics cannot be determined.

The following information was compiled from United States Census Bureau data, Statistics Canada – Census Profile, and State of Alaska Labor Department and Workforce Development – Research and Analysis data.

The nearest territory in Canada to the Taylor Highway is the Yukon, which has a population of 40,232. The closest town is Dawson City with a population of 1,577 and the closest city is Whitehorse with a population of 28,201, which is the largest and only census city in the Yukon. The median household income in the Yukon Territories in 2021 was Can\$54,800.

The state of Alaska has a population of 733,391 people with 291,247 living in the Municipality of Anchorage and 107,081 in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough. Anchorage is the most populous city in Alaska. Fairbanks North Star Borough has an estimated population of 95,655, the third highest in the state and the most populous near the Taylor Highway.

Alaska is the twelfth most diverse state in the United States. Anchorage has a diversity index of 66.7%, meaning it ranks in the top fifteenth percentile for diversity in the nation and has three of the most ethnically diverse neighborhoods in the country, according to 2013-2014 census data.

The median household income for the state of Alaska is \$77,790 (2016-2020) with 10.5% of the population living below the poverty level. The state's median age is thirty-four with 47.6% of the population being female. Alaska is racially composed of 64.5% Whites (non-Hispanic), 15.7% American Indians and Native Alaskans, 7.5% Hispanics or Latinos, 6.6% Asians, 3.6% Black or African Americans, 1.6% Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders, and 7.9% two or more races.

The median household income for Fairbanks North Star Borough is \$76,464 (2016-2020) with 7.2% of the population living below the poverty level. The median age is 31.5; 23.5% are persons under the age of eighteen and 45.9% of the population is female. Fairbanks is racially composed of 75.3% Whites (non-Hispanic), 3.4% Asians, 8.4% Hispanics or Latinos, 8.2% American Indians and Native Alaskans, 5.2% Black or African Americans, .6% Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander, and 7.2% two or more races.

c. Recreation Site Descriptions

i. Eagle Campground

Eagle, Alaska is located at the end of the Taylor Highway at milepost (MP) 160. The Eagle Campground has eighteen sites and several outhouses within walking distance of historic Fort Egbert and downtown Eagle. Current fees for the campground are \$10 per night.

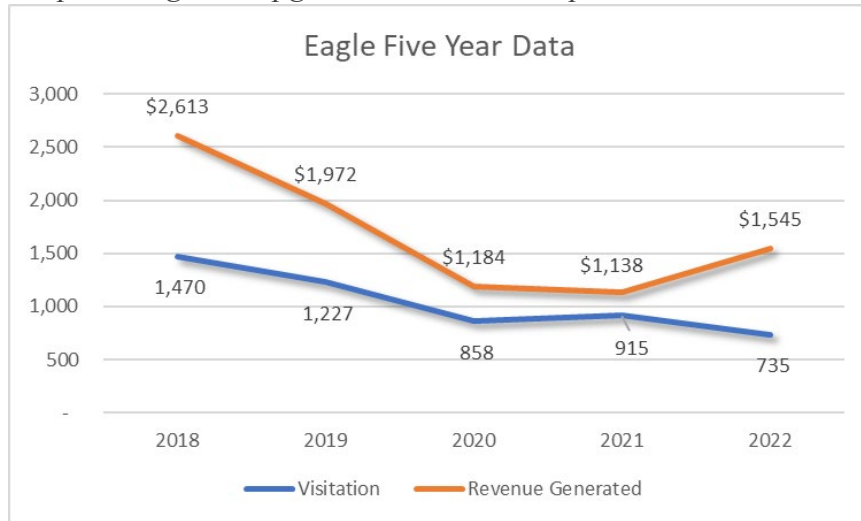
Image 2. Eagle Campground campsite



Table 1. Eagle Campground revenue

FY	Visits	Visitor Days	Revenue Generated
2018	1,470	1,250	\$2,613
2019	1,227	1,043	\$1,972
2020	858	729	\$1,184
2021	915	778	\$1,138
2022	735	625	\$1,545
Average	1,041	885	\$1,690

Graph 1. Eagle Campground visitation compared to revenue



ii. Walker Fork Campground

Walker Fork Campground is located at MP 82 of the Taylor Highway. This developed campground has eighteen campsites, outhouses, and a picnic area which occupies the site of what was once the Lassen airstrip in the 1930s and 1940s. Year-round air service to this site eventually replaced the sleds that delivered equipment and fuel to mining camps on nearby Jack Wade Creek during the winter. Current fees for the campground are \$10 per night.

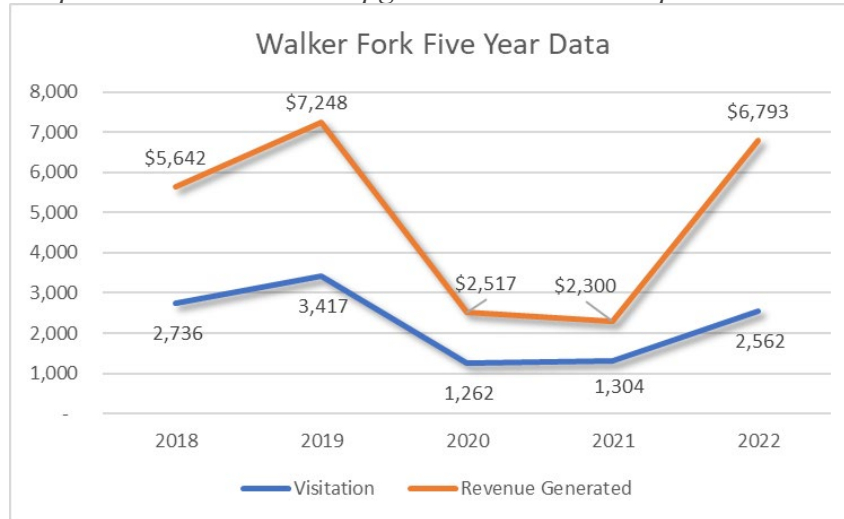
Image 3. Entrance to Walker Fork Campground



Table 2. Walker Fork Campground revenue

FY	Visits	Visitor Days	Revenue Generated
2018	2,736	2,332	\$5,642
2019	3,417	2,913	\$7,248
2020	1,262	1,076	\$2,517
2021	1,304	1,112	\$2,300
2022	2,562	2,184	\$6,793
Average	2,256	1,923	\$4,900

Graph 2. Walker Fork Campground visitation compared to revenue



iii. West Fork Campground

West Fork Campground is located at MP 49 of the Taylor Highway. This campground has seven pull-through spaces, eighteen back-in spaces, and outhouses. During the summer months, potable water is hauled to the site and is available at a centralized location for campers. A nearby small lake is often home to moose and trumpeter swans. One quarter mile north of the campground, there is parking and river access to the West Fork of the Dennison Fork of the Fortymile WSR. Boats must be carried about twenty yards to the water. Except during periods of high water, such as spring runoff, this section of river is typically too shallow for canoeing or rafting. Current fees for the campground are \$10 per night.

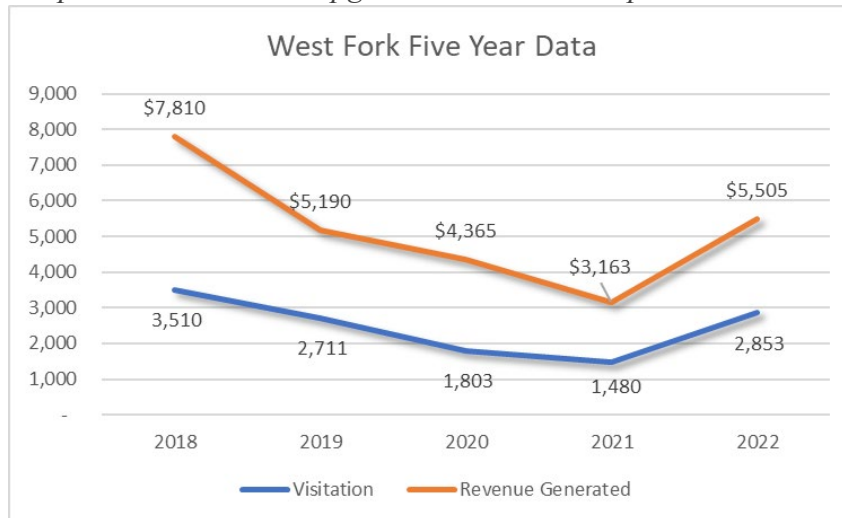
Image 4. West Fork Campground campsite



Table 3. West Fork Campground revenue

FY	Visits	Visitor Days	Revenue Generated
2018	3,510	2,984	\$7,810
2019	2,711	2,304	\$5,190
2020	1,803	1,533	\$4,365
2021	1,480	1,258	\$3,163
2022	2,853	2,425	\$5,505
Average	2,471	2,101	\$5,207

Graph 3. West Fork Campground visitation compared to revenue



d. Operating Costs

EIFO expends considerable resources in managing the remote areas along the Taylor Highway. The current system of trails and remote campgrounds requires substantial levels of trail maintenance, facility maintenance, staff and seasonal interns, and law enforcement staff to maintain a presentable and safe experience for visitors to BLM land managed by the EIFO.

Direct cost for recreation management of the EIFO area of responsibility includes BLM and intern labor, services such as restroom pumping, garbage collection, firewood, hazard tree mitigation, potable water testing, vehicles and vehicle maintenance, law enforcement, signage, maintenance materials and supplies, brochures, and other interpretive materials. The field office operates a small fleet of vehicles to include four passenger trucks, three OHV's, two UTVs, three snowmobiles, several trailers, and multiple watercrafts.

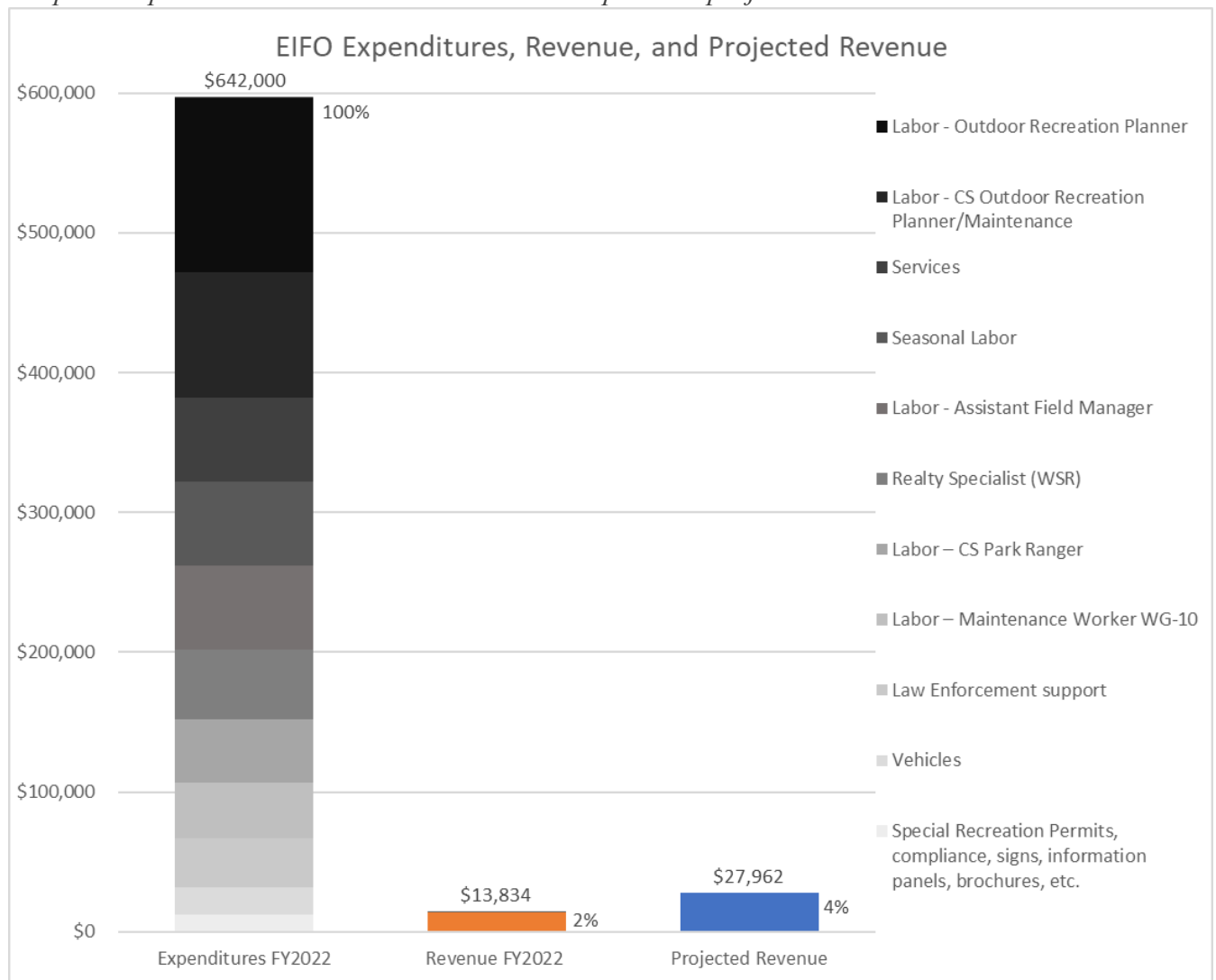
Table 4 below is a breakdown of all approximated costs associated with operating EIFO recreation fee sites in FY2022. These expenditures represent expenses of a typical year, although some years may be higher due to unforeseen circumstances.

Table 4. FY2022 recreation fee site expenditures

FY2022 Expenditures	Amount	*Amount of FY2022 Fees Spent Toward Expenditures
Labor - Assistant Field Manager (5 work months)	\$60,000	\$1,293
Labor - Outdoor Recreation Planner (10 work months)	\$125,000	\$2,694
Labor - CS Outdoor Recreation Planner/Maintenance (8 work months)	\$90,000	\$1,939
Labor – CS Park Ranger (8 work months)	\$45,000	\$970
Labor – Maintenance Worker WG-10 (4 work months)	\$40,000	\$862
Realty Specialist (WSR) (4 work months)	\$50,000	\$1,077
Law Enforcement support	\$35,000	\$754
Seasonal Labor	\$60,000	\$1,293
Services - Road, trails, cabin maintenance, garbage, restroom pumping, maintenance of equipment, winter and summer trails, waysides, etc.	\$60,000	\$1,293
Special Recreation Permits, compliance, signs, information panels, brochures, etc.	\$12,000	\$259
Vehicles	\$20,000	\$431
Total FY2022 Expenditures	\$642,000	

*Amount of revenue toward expenditures is estimated on the percentage of each category from total.

Graph 4. Expenditures and revenue in FY2022 compared to projected revenue



e. Recreation Use Fees and Revenues

The three campgrounds currently collect fees in a manner consistent with the criteria listed in section 803 (b) of FLREA. From 2018-2022, an estimated yearly average of 5,769 people visited Taylor Highway service area campgrounds and generated an average of \$10,789 in revenue annually (Table 5). Visitation from North America and international locations continues to increase significantly. Clients of several tour companies now complement the growing numbers of independent travelers. Visitation trends are highly variable and influenced by several factors, including the state of the economy, fuel prices, weather, and the overall condition of the Taylor Highway.

Several reasonable explanations could account for the variability in fee revenue versus visitation numbers. When the BLM collected similar fees irrespective of the visitation, there was a consistent campground host presence throughout the summer, leading to more thorough encouragement of payment. In some seasons, campground hosts have had intermittent presence due to unforeseen circumstances such as weather, vehicle problems, lack of recruitment, or medical issues.

Table 5. Taylor Highway 5-year visitation and revenue

FY	Visitation	Revenue
2018	7,716	\$16,065
2019	7,355	\$14,411
2020	3,923	\$8,066
2021	3,699	\$6,600
2022	6,150	\$13,843
5 Year Average	5,769	\$10,791

3. Fee Proposal

a. Summary of Fee Proposal

This fee proposal includes increasing camping fees at three campgrounds within the EIFO. Table 6 below shows the proposed changes to the fee structure.

Table 6. Existing and proposed fee structure

Recreation Site	Existing Fee	Proposed Fee	Percent Increase
Eagle Campground	\$10.00	\$12.00	20%
Walker Fork Campground	\$10.00	\$12.00	20%
West Fork Campground	\$10.00	\$12.00	20%

b. Expanded Amenity-Reservation Services

EIFO will use various e-commerce technologies, as directed in BLM Instruction Memorandum 2022-019, to provide recreation visitors opportunities to find, reserve, and pay for campsites and day use within the field office. Most of these options are provided through the interagency reservation service Recreation.gov.

If the EIFO decides to make reservation services or other types of e-commerce options available in the future, an expanded amenity fee for reservation services would be charged in addition to any other standard or expanded amenity fees in accordance with 16 U.S.C. 6802(g)(2)(G). Reservation services fees could range from \$0.50 to \$10.00 depending on the type of service provided. The reservation service fee is subject to contracting requirements and will be adjusted with contract changes or with future updates to the business plan. For visitors who wish not to pay the expanded amenity fee of reservation services, the traditional iron ranger with RUP envelopes will exist until the field office moves the fee area completely to e-commerce options and/or the RUP envelope is no longer available for payment.

c. Financial Analysis

In FY2022, EIFO collected \$13,843 from the three campgrounds. With the proposed increase, the BLM estimates that EIFO could collect an additional \$14,128¹, an increase of 102%. This number assumes all visitors to the first-come, first-served campgrounds pay the full or correct amount for every night of stay.

Table 7 below illustrates the projected revenue if the fee increases are implemented. Revenue projections are based on the implementation of the proposed fee increases and investigation of three factors 1) total number of RUPs, 2) average length of stay, and 3) percentage of discounted RUPs.

Table 7. Campground fee projected revenue

Recreation Fee Site	*RUPs Issued	*Site Occupancy (Nights)	*Length of Stay	Proposed Fee	Estimated Revenue from Proposed Fees	**Percent Increase in Revenue
Eagle	236	311	1.32	\$12.00	\$3,081	38%
Walker Fork	612	961	1.57	\$12.00	\$9,509	24%
West Fork	684	1553	2.27	\$12.00	\$15,371	30%
Total:					\$27,962	-
Average:					-	29%

*Figures based on a five-year average from RMIS (FY2018 – FY2022)

**Percent increase calculated from actual 5-year average adjusted for average length of stay

Figures for revenue are derived by multiplying the total number of RUPs by 65%, the estimated percentage of full-priced RUPs purchased. The remaining RUPs (35% of the total) involve Senior or Access passes that reduce fees by half. The EIFO multiplied the number of full-priced and discounted RUPs by the average length of stay, then by the appropriate proposed fees (full-priced or discounted) to determine projected revenue.

Using Eagle Campground as an example, 236 RUPs x .65 = 153.3 full-priced RUPs. 153.3 full-price RUPs x 1.32 days avg. stay/RUP = 202.3 days. 202.3 days x \$12/day = \$2,427.8. 236 RUPs – 153.3 full-price RUPs = 82.5 half-priced RUPs. 82.5 half-priced RUPs x 1.32 days avg. stay/RUP = 108.9 days. 108.9 days x \$6 per day = \$653.6. **\$2,427.8 + \$653.6 = \$3,081.4 projected revenue.** The projected revenue figures assume all visitors to the first-come, first-served campground pay the full or correct amount. Unfortunately, collections demonstrate that this is not always the case, so actual revenue will likely be lower than the estimates.

d. Fee Calculation

The EIFO determined the new expanded amenity fees for existing and proposed recreation fee sites by comparing its facilities to park facilities offering similar recreation activities, access, services, and amenities in Alaska. These include facilities managed by adjacent BLM field offices as well as those managed by the Alaska Department of Natural Resources (DNR), United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), United States Forest Service (USFS), and private facilities. The Taylor Highway is remote and there are few campgrounds nearby to compare fees with. The closest campgrounds comparable to the ones along the Taylor Highway are managed by the DNR in the Northern region and private entities which are included in the fee analysis.

¹ This estimate is likely to overpredict figures, especially at West Fork where the average length of stay is high (2.27 nights).

All developed campgrounds within the market comparison area charge an overnight fee. Fees at campgrounds range from \$6 per walk-in and \$10 per night at more rustic and remote BLM campgrounds to \$23 (individual) and \$33 (double occupancy) per night at highly developed, urban interfaced USFS campgrounds. The highest priced facilities are the private campgrounds at \$36 per night for basic sites and \$58 per night for full RV hookups.

The average price per night at the lowest developed campgrounds is \$14 per night, medium is \$15 per night, and highest is \$24 per night. West Fork is in the low developed category and Walker Fork and Eagle are in the medium category. The average price for all campgrounds in the market analysis was \$17 per night. Fees were calculated based on information provided on Recreation.gov for federal campgrounds, ReserveAmerica.com for some state campgrounds, and private websites for state and private campgrounds.

The EIFO determined the proposed fee increase directly from this analysis. The proposed fees lie within the range of other service providers' and are based on what these agencies currently charge for similar visitor facilities, access, and amenities. Although comparison to facilities with similar services and amenities was the main determining factor, the EIFO also took into consideration the length of time since the EIFO last raised fees, the length of time since other agencies last raised fees at their sites, the number of discounted RUPs sold, and the increased cost of maintaining and operating the recreation sites.

Appendix A on page 22 shows the Alaska campground amenity and fee list.

e. Use of Fees

The EIFO's primary goal for recreation fee sites is to provide high-quality recreation opportunities and experiences for all visitors. BLM labor will continue to be the highest operating cost, but currently minimal recreation site fee revenue is used for labor. However, this may change in the future. An update in fee structure is not meant to fully cover these costs. It is meant to help defray these costs, ensuring quality recreation sites for the future. It can also serve to augment appropriated funds for development and improvement. BLM staff, among many other things, provides visitor information, conducts field patrols, maintains facilities, collects and reconciles fees, and rehabilitates natural resource damage.

Recreation fee revenue will continue to heavily support operations of the sites. The following is an initial list of priority expenditures that recreation fee site revenue will continue to be used for:

- Service contracts for garbage collection, septic pumping, water testing, and hazard tree mitigation.
- Supplies including but not limited to cleaning supplies, toilet paper, hand soap, paper towels, hand sanitizer, fuel for motorized equipment, paint, lumber, etc.
- Maintain, improve, and replace recreation site infrastructure such as trails, campsites, signage, fire rings, picnic tables, restroom buildings, etc.
- Government vehicles and trailers.
- Maps, brochure reprints, and interpretive materials.
- Construction of recreational facilities.

Recreation.gov – Recreation.gov is a federal government service that serves as a one-stop visitor service resource for recreation facilities and activities offered by a multitude of federal agencies, including the BLM.

f. Impacts of Fee Changes

i. Effects of the Fees

EIFO has not changed or updated its campground fees along the Taylor Highway service region since 2008. Since 2008, the cost of goods, labor and services have steadily increased and the Consumer Price Index (CPI) has increased by 87 points, or 41% (US Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics). As the costs of goods, labor, and services increase, the purchasing power from recreation fees decreases proportionately. As an example, \$10.00 (the current fee at Taylor Highway campgrounds) in January of 2008 has the same purchasing power as \$14.12 in October of 2022.

If the proposed fee increases were adopted, current services would continue. Some of the revenue would be used to incrementally reduce the maintenance backlog.

New projects identified in the priorities for future expenditures section would be implemented. Site infrastructure, cleanliness, and visitor services and information would also benefit. All these combined would improve the overall visitor experience.

ii. Effects to the Environment

Increased fees also benefit the natural environment. By providing trailheads, waysides, campgrounds, and day-use areas for visitors, the field office can consolidate resource impacts to a much smaller area. Human waste and garbage can be dealt with in an appropriate manner in areas where sufficient infrastructure is provided. If these services were not available, illegal dumping could proliferate. If these services were not available, the impacts could be felt across a wide area

Increased fee revenue could allow more purchasing power to acquire items that help reduce resource damage. For example, new and updated signs and interpretive materials could be installed to educate visitors about responsible recreation.

A lack of fee revenue could eventually lead to a reduction in services. Negative resource impacts could also be realized as services decline. Human waste, garbage, and vandalism issues could be intensified. Reduced recreational staff presence and public contact could further negative behaviors and reduce public trust.

iii. Effects to Low-Income Populations and Environmental Justice Communities

A recent study² concluded that user fees did not play an important role in how low-income individuals chose outdoor recreation settings. However, low-income outdoor recreationists tended to visit non-fee settings when they were available and provided similar opportunities. The Taylor Highway service area provides a variety of overnight camping opportunities. Free dispersed camping is allowed on BLM lands. There are also developed recreation areas and trails offering free dispersed sites.

² Lamborn et al., "User Fees Displace Low-Income Outdoor Recreationists."

Another study³ compared acceptance of recreation fees of very low-income individuals (less than \$10,000 a year) to those of other individuals. Most people at every income level accepted fees, preferring them to reduced services or closed recreation areas.

The BLM typically does not have fees for use of dispersed recreation opportunities, which remain free to all users. Dispersed camping is free and permitted anywhere on BLM administered lands unless otherwise posted for up to 14 days in any 28-day period. Fees are only charged at sites where they are needed to help manage use, maintain visitor safety, and conserve the recreation setting.

iv. Effects to Recreational Users

Because of the remote nature of the Taylor Highway, high-quality campgrounds and lodging facilities are a limited resource. With increases in visitation and recreation demand, it is vitally important for the EIFO to continue providing and improving recreational offerings for the public.

It is worth noting that rises in fuel-prices and the remote nature of these fee sites means travel to those sites already represents significant cost, especially when many visitors are traveling from outside the local commuting area (and in some cases, from other states). A \$2 fee increase would not represent significant financial burden or change visitors' ability to patronize these fee sites.

Increased fee revenue would allow the EIFO to continue to provide safe, well-maintained, high-quality recreation experiences. Additional resources could also provide opportunities to expand recreational offerings and modernize current offerings. Some examples already being explored include non-cash payment options, additional campground hosts, new picnic tables and fire rings, improved information kiosks, and public firewood offerings, among other things.

The campground facilities represent a substantial public investment, and visitors could expect to see a loss of functionality and use of these facilities as maintenance efforts may be reduced. As costs continue to increase, maintenance may not happen as quickly or as often as needed, and some services may be reduced. Deferred maintenance costs would increase as facilities age, and some facilities may not be reopened due to a lack of funds. Maintenance that is deferred because of insufficient funding may result in increased safety hazards, reduced service to the public, higher costs in the future, and inefficient operations.

A worst-case scenario may be a reduction in recreation and maintenance staff as those positions may not be filled if vacated. Recreation demands will continue to increase as visitation increases. Already constrained resources will be allocated to simply keeping up with increased demand rather than improving recreation assets. The opportunities for future planned developments would be limited and likely set aside.

The EIFO may have challenges fulfilling the BLM's Recreation Strategy, instead focusing only on basic sanitation and health and safety needs.

³ Burns and Graefe, "Toward Understanding Recreation Fees: Impacts on People with Extremely Low-Income Levels."

v. Effects to the Local Economy

Benefits to the local economy could also be realized. Providing high-quality recreation sites helps ensure continued visitation. Recreation and tourism contribute significantly to the local economy. Visitors to the Taylor Highway spend locally on lodging, fuel, food, supplies, etc. Visitors coming from outside the local area typically stay longer and spend more.

An Outdoor Industry Association ⁴study found that in 2017, outdoor recreation generated \$887 billion in consumer spending in the United States and generated \$7.3 billion in Alaska alone. It also brought in \$337 million in Alaska state and local tax revenue. It is imperative to the local economy to keep recreation site infrastructure in good condition, clean, and serviced to high standards. Maintaining these high standards and creating new opportunities improve the overall recreational experience for current and future visitors alike.

vi. Negative Impacts of Not Adopting the Proposed Fees

New and existing facilities represent a substantial public investment. Without a fee increase, visitors could expect to see a loss of functionality and use of these facilities as maintenance capacity will be reduced due to insufficient funding or staffing.

As costs are anticipated to increase, maintenance may not happen as quickly or as often as needed, and some services might be reduced. Deferred maintenance costs would increase as facilities age, and some facilities might not be operated at full capacity. Maintenance that is deferred because of insufficient funding might result in increased safety hazards, reduced service to the public, higher costs in the future, and inefficient operations.

Recreation demands would continue to increase if visitation increased, thus the costs to operate the fee sites and those proposed in this analysis would become more dependent on fluctuating appropriated funding. The opportunities for future planned developments would be constrained and likely set aside. The field office might have challenges implementing the BLM's recreation strategy. As mentioned earlier, not raising or establishing these proposed sites could lead to the erosion of services such as cleaning and maintaining the sites. If sites are not appealing to visitors, they might stop recreating in this region, thereby affecting the local economy.

Negative impacts to the environment could also occur. Fewer trash pickups and pumping of toilets could occur, creating human waste and garbage impacts. These garbage impacts could also attract wildlife such as bears, leading to negative impacts on visitors and the environment. Less frequent patrols from recreation staff to maintain trails, signage, and education materials might allow some visitors to act inappropriately by creating new trails and vandalizing facilities. If visitors began to view these sites as non-maintained, it could lead to a belief that these sites are not frequented at all and could exacerbate problems with dumping and vandalism.

vii. Fee Discounts

Section 5 of FLREA provided for the establishment of a single interagency national pass known as the America the Beautiful Pass—the National Parks and Federal Recreational Lands Pass. This pass provides the bearer full coverage of standard amenity fees. No sites within the EIFO charge a standard amenity fee (these are typically day use fee areas, high visitation picnic areas, etc.); the one current fee charged is for an expanded amenity.

⁴ <https://outdoorindustry.org/state/alaska/>

Holders of the Interagency Senior and Access passes may receive half-off of expanded amenity fees at individual sites only. This includes overnight camping at EIFO campgrounds. No other fee discounts, passes, or waivers are allowed.

4. Outreach

a. Public and Stakeholder Participation

The BLM’s “Connecting with Communities” recreation strategy provides a vision to increase and improve collaboration with local community service providers to help communities produce greater well-being and socioeconomic health to deliver outstanding recreation experiences to visitors while sustaining the distinctive character of public land recreation settings. As part of this strategy, the EIFO seeks engagement and partnerships with local stakeholders to accomplish mutual public access and recreation objectives. The EIFO also seeks relationships with youth groups, like the Student Conservation Association and Fairbanks Folk School to help promote a positive experience for youth and to inspire them to take a greater interest in public land issues.

The BLM will continue building existing partnerships and pursuing new ones that complement the agency’s mission. In a fiscal environment that cannot sustain wasteful spending and program inefficiency, the agency continues to act on opportunities that will support a healthy, robust, relevant, and accountable recreation program for the public. Future priorities include increasing the number and scope of such partnerships and agreements associated with the EIFO recreation program.

Draft business plans must be made available for public review and comment for a minimum of 30 days. Prior to implementing new fees, the EIFO will conduct outreach efforts to notify the public of its opportunity to review and comment on the draft business plan.

The BLM will issue a press release and undertake other outreach efforts regarding the increased fees at EIFO campgrounds. This will include release to media outlets when the 30-day public comment period is announced.

b. Visitor Feedback Mechanisms

The BLM will provide a 30-day public review period during which the public will have the opportunity to learn about the proposal and to submit comments for consideration.

The public may submit comments on the proposed recreation use fee changes utilizing the following methods:

- Website: <https://www.blm.gov/office/eastern-interior-field-office>
- E-mail: blm_ak_fdo_eifo_generaldelivery@blm.gov
- Mail: BLM Eastern Interior Field Office, 222 University Ave, Fairbanks, AK 99709

5. Appendices

Appendix A – Alaska Campground Fee Comparison Table

Agency	*Use	Campgrounds	Sites	RV Pull-through	Host	Picnic Area	Boat Launch	Existing Fees	Other Fees	Proposed Fees
DNR	3	Big Delta	25	X	X	X		\$20		-
DNR	3	Birch Lake	25	X	X	X	X	\$20		-
DNR	3	Harding Lake	90	X		X	X	\$20		-
DNR	2	Red Squirrel	5			X	X	\$20		-
DNR	2	Rosehip	37	X	X	X	X	\$20		-
DNR	2	Granite Tors Trail	24		X	X	X	\$20		-
DNR	2	Salcha River	6		X	X	X	\$20		-
DNR	2	Upper Chatanika River	24			X	X	\$20		-
DNR	2	Whitefish	25	X		X	X	\$20		-
DNR	2	Olnes Pond	15			X	X	\$20		-
DNR	1	Lost Lake	12			X		\$15		-
DNR	1	Upper Chatanika River	24			X	X	\$20		-
DNR	1	Donnelly Creek	12					\$15		-
DNR	1	Clearwater	17	X		X	X	\$15		-
DNR	1	Eagle Trail	35			X		\$20		-
DNR	1	Moon Lake	15	X		X	X	\$20		-
DNR	1	Tok River	27	X		X	X	\$20		-
BLM	2	Marion Creek	27	X	X	X		\$10		-
BLM	2	Brushkana	21		X			\$15	\$6 walk-in	-
BLM	2	Tangle Lakes	45	X	X		X	\$15	\$6 walk-in	-
BLM	2	Paxson Lake	50	X	X	X	X	\$15	\$6 walk-in	-
BLM	2	Sourdough Creek	42	X		X	X	\$15	\$6 walk-in	-
BLM	2	Cripple Creek	18					\$6	\$3 walk-in	-
BLM	2	Mount Prindle	13			X		\$6		-
BLM	2	Ophir Creek	20				X	\$6		-
BLM	2	Eagle	18	X	X			\$10		\$12
BLM	2	Walker Fork	18	X	X			\$10		\$12
BLM	1	Galbraith	30			X		\$10		-
BLM	1	Arctic Circle	19			X		\$10		-
BLM	1	Five Mile	8		X	X		\$10		-
BLM	1	West Fork	25	X				\$10		\$12
Private	3	Nenana RV Park	45	X	X			\$20		-
Private	3	Tok Sourdough	75	X	X			\$29	\$58 RV hookup	-
Private	3	Chicken Gold Camp	71	X	X	X		\$36		-
USFS	3	Trail River	91	X	X	X		\$23	\$200 group	-
USFS	3	Williwaw	60	X	X	X		\$23	\$33 double	-
USFS	3	Russian River	83	X	X	X		\$23	\$33 double	-
USFS	2	Tenderfoot	35	X	X		X	\$23		-
USFS	2	Quartz Creek	45	X	X		X	\$23	\$33 double	-
USFWS	1	Upper Skilak Lake	25			X	X	\$10		-
USFWS	1	Hidden Lake	44	X		X	X	\$10		-

*Use: Rating based on a combination of popularity, amenities offered, number of sites, accessibility, proximity to urban areas, and general description. 3=high use, 2=medium use, 1=low use

All campgrounds excluding Galbraith and Arctic Circle offer drinking water. Only the private campgrounds offer shower facilities. All campgrounds offer toilet facilities.

Appendix F - Acronyms, Abbreviations, and Symbols

BLM – Bureau of Land Management

Can\$ - Canadian Dollar

CBS – Collection and Billing System

DNR – Alaska Department of Natural Resources

EIFO – Eastern Interior Field Office

FBMS – Federal Business Management System

FLREA – Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act

FY – Fiscal Year

MP – Milepost

NPS – National Park Service

OHV – Off-Highway Vehicle

RMIS – Recreation Management Information System

RUP – Recreation Use Pass

RV – Recreational Vehicle

SO – State Office

USFS – United States Forest Service

USFWS – United States Fish and Wildlife Service

WBS – Work Breakdown Structure

WSR – Wild and Scenic River