

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
Case File No.: AA-82671
AK-040-EA01-002

Applicant: U. S. Army Corps of Engineers

Type of
Action: Right-of-Way (UXO Cleanup)

Location: Secs. 16, 17, 22, T. 28 S., R. 20 W., Seward Meridian

Prepared
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Preparing
Office: Bureau of Land Management
Anchorage Field Office
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Date: October 31, 2000

I. INTRODUCTION

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) filed an application for a right-of-way (R/W) to conduct geophysical investigation along the Burma Road in the vicinity of Kodiak, Alaska. The majority of the project area is within a 200 foot corridor along the Burma Road.

The R/W will be for a period of three years, with the rights to renew, according to Title V of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 and 43 CFR 2800.

A. Purpose and Need for the Proposed Action:

The Corps conducted a record research of past unexploded ordnance clearance projects conducted in the 70's and 80's in the Burma road area. They found that additional testing was necessary to determine if soil and groundwater contamination exist in the area.

B. Conformance With Land Use Plan:

No land use plan exists for this area. However, this environmental analysis assesses the impacts of the Proposed Action and provides a basis for a decision on the application (43 CFR 1610.8(b)(1)).

C. Relationship to Statutes, Regulations, Policies, Plans or Other Environmental Analyses:

The applicant has received a letter of Nonobjection from Leisnoi, Inc.

II. PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

A. Proposed Action:

The Corps contracted with Jacobs Engineering to perform a geophysical exploratory investigation along the Burma Road. The project is being funded under the Defense Environmental Restoration Program. The Corps' goal is to remediate contaminated soils associated with Unexploded Ordinance (UXO) in the Burma Road area. This investigation is necessary to protect human health and the environment in the local watershed. These lands are selected by Leisnoi Corporation and cleanup is necessary before the lands can be conveyed. The investigative work is scheduled to begin as soon as approvals are granted.

The primary areas of concern are Sites No. 3, 4, 5, 7 and blow hole Sites No. 19 and 20. Sites north of the washed out bridge (Sites No. 3, 4, 5, and 7) will have vehicular access. Sites south of the washed out bridge are too wet, allowing for foot traffic only.

Access to the investigation sites will be along the Burma Road and on previously disturbed two-track trails to those sites not adjacent to Burma Road. The road and the two-track trails will be cleared of brush by using an angled hydroax or chainsaw. Only brush overgrowing the roadbed and within three feet of the road will be cut. The maximum width of the clearing would allow access sufficient for a pickup truck, backhoe or small excavator. Investigation sites will be cleared by hydroaxing or by use of a chainsaw to the boundaries of the site. The total area to be cleared is approximately 2½ acres.

Additional brush clearing for geophysical investigation along the Burma Road may occur. Clearing will be limited to Sites No. 3, 4, 5, 7 and blow hole Sites No. 19 and 20 and 200 feet on each side of Burma Road for 2½ miles. Approximately 180 acres would be investigated.

A sampling grid will be established for Sites No. 3, 4, 5, and 7. Soil samples will be collected. Two feet deep test pits will be excavated and subsurface samples will be collected for analysis. If the results exceed cleanup criteria, further excavation will occur to locate groundwater. Based on surface ponding and depth to the bedrock, groundwater is expected to be encountered within five feet of the surface. The Corps plans to drill up to six wells located in the vicinity of Sites No. 3, 4, 5, and 7, but may drill more wells if additional contamination is found. Each well would be contingent on soil contamination and the presence of groundwater. The drill will be mounted on the bed of a pickup truck. The wells will be two inches outside diameter PVC casing with sand filter pack and a bentonite seal. The material from the shallow well would be sidecast and spread fanning out from the well opening. The bentonite seal will be hydrated at six inch intervals to produce an adequate seal against surface infiltration. The well will be completed with a flush mount steel monument.

B. No Action Alternative:

The No Action Alternative would be to not conduct any geophysical investigations at the site.

III. AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

A. Critical Elements:

The following critical elements of the human environment are either not present or would not be affected by the Proposed Action:

Air Quality

Areas of Critical Environmental Concern

Cultural/Paleontological Resources
Environmental Justice
Farmlands (Prime or Unique)
Floodplains
Invasive, Nonnative Species
Native American Religious Concerns
Subsistence
Threatened and Endangered (T&E) Species
Wastes, Hazardous or Solid
Water Quality (Surface/Ground)
Wetlands/Riparian Zones
Wild and Scenic Rivers
Wilderness

1. T & E Species Clearance:
The Proposed Action has been analyzed and was determined to have no effect on any threatened and endangered species or their habitat.
2. ANILCA Section 810 Clearance:
The Proposed Action will not alter the current status of lands regarding the Federal Subsistence authority and regulations. The lands are validly selected by Leisnoi, Inc. and are not public lands as defined under ANILCA. Therefore, the Proposed Action was determined to have no effect on subsistence uses and needs under Section 810 of the ANILCA.
3. Cultural Section 106 Clearance:
The Proposed Action has been analyzed under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and determined to be in compliance with pertinent historic preservation laws and regulations.

B. Land Status:
Lands affected by the Proposed Action have been selected by Leisnoi Inc. A letter of concurrence with the project was received on August 27, 2000.

C. Recreation:
The Burma Road/Devils Canyon area supports moderate public recreation by residents of the town of Kodiak. The lower reaches of Devils Creek supports a recreational fishery for anadromous species. The old road that parallels Devils Creek is largely overgrown, but does provide ATV and non-motorized use to the south end of the canyon. All access is from the north end of the Canyon. The road/trail terminates near a small lake and provides the only camping within the drainage. No social spur trails have been identified that lead up and out of Devils Canyon. Overland hiking (without a trail) is very difficult in this area.

D. Soils:

The project area is located in a valley along the mountainous foot slopes of Kodiak Island. Ashy, dark red to reddish brown to black soil dominate the area to depths reaching 30 inches. The soil is underlain by gravelly glacial till, weathered bedrock, cindery ash deposit or sandy or gravelly alluvium. Investigators at the site indicate bedrock is only 8 inches below the surface in some places. Soils are very strongly acid. Steep hillsides create severe limitations for most kinds of construction.

E. Vegetation:

The Kodiak archipelago can be divided into two major life zones, the Hudson Zone and the Arctic Zone. The proposed project would occur in the Hudson Zone, which is characterized by spruce forest. However, the area itself has been heavily disturbed with a two-track trail and military activity, so the vegetation currently consists of heavy patches of alder with a calamagrostis (bluejoint grass) understory. Open patches are characterized by meadow-like areas consisting of grasses, forbs and mosses.

There are no known rare or sensitive plant species in the area.

F. Visual Resources:

The area affected by the Proposed Action is managed under a Class III Visual Resource Objective. This objective is to partially retain the existing character of the landscape. The level of change to the characteristic landscape should remain moderate.

The visual resources in the area affected by the Proposed Action are naturally reclaimed disturbed areas. Vegetation has grown to the point in some areas of limiting the view of the surrounding highlands, particularly from the Burma Road. In some of these areas, distinct linear features such as Old Womens Mountain have been left in an otherwise undisturbed landscape. Viewer sensitivity in the area is very low.

The Visual Resource Scenic Quality Inventory has rated this area as a Type B. This is a mid-level rating recognizing the land form, water and scenic values of this area, but also identifies commonality of this to Kodiak Island proper.

- G. Wildlife:
The area supports a variety of animal species. Resident large mammals include coastal brown bear and Sitka black-tailed deer. Numerous species of resident and migrant neotropical birds nest in the alder shrub vegetation on the disturbed areas of the road along Devils Creek and on adjacent slopes.

IV. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

A. Impacts of the Proposed Action:

1. Critical Elements:

a. Cultural Resources:

No cultural resources are known in the proposed cleanup area. The Anchorage Field Office archaeologist visited the cleanup area on September 13, 2000. There is low potential for previously undiscovered surfaces or buried resources - most probably isolated flake scatters and/or small, temporary campsites.

2. Fisheries:

The proposed project will have minimal or no effect on fisheries.

3. Recreation:

Brush clearing along the Burma road may occur for geophysical investigations. Hydro-ax clearing would open up only the Northern portion of the road. This clearing would likely allow increased vehicular access to the washed out bridge. This would make access much easier for non-motorized users to the lake and camping area at the southern end of the road.

4. Soils:

Soil disturbance during initial sampling is expected to be minor and confined to very small localized test pits. Soil horizons will be altered when digging and/or refilling these pits. Drilling of test wells will result in soil being removed from the well base. Overall, no more than 1,500 square feet of disturbance is expected in this initial exploration phase.

5. Vegetation:

Approximately 2½ acres would be cleared of vegetation. Access trails to investigation sites (“areas of concern”), would be cleared to allow passage of vehicles. The areas of concern are approximately 10,000 square feet and fall within a 100' x 100' grid. Many of these areas have been heavily disturbed in the past and an estimated 25 surface samples (within the top 6" of soil) would be collected from each of these areas. If a vegetative mat is present, it will be removed so the underlying soil can be sampled. For subsurface sampling, tests pits will be dug two feet below ground surface (or to bedrock). The soil would be stockpiled adjacent to the pit, then scraped back into the pit after testing. Vegetation would be impacted by being removed from these sites.

Areas of Concern 19 and 20 consist of barren craters (a.k.a. “high energy craters”), so no vegetative impacts will occur from sampling.

Drilling cuttings from wells drilled could smother vegetation if not spread thinly on the surround area.

Due to the maritime climate and high rainfall of Kodiak, the shrubs would regrow in a short time, if the root system is not disturbed.

Kodiak Island is fairly free of invasive and/or noxious weed species, so no invasive or noxious weed infestations are likely provided equipment brought into the area is weed free.

6. Visual Resources:

The Proposed Action would have little effect upon the visual resources in the Burma Road/Devils Creek area. Clearing the road wide enough to allow vehicle access will have minor visual impact and will not affect the visual resource rating.

7. Wildlife:

As long as the applicant stays within the limits of the Proposed Action, the work will have minimal or no effect on wildlife.

B. Impacts of the No Action Alternative:

1. Critical Elements:

a. Water Quality, Surface and Ground Water:

The extent of possible contamination would not be determined and could result in contamination of ground water and possibly transfer into the environment.

2. Vegetation:

There would be no impacts to vegetation since no disturbance would occur.

3. Visual Resources:

Visual quality would remain unchanged with no intrusions.

4. Wildlife:

Wildlife would not be impacted and natural processes would continue to occur.

- C. Cumulative Impacts
No residual or cumulative impacts are expected to be incurred by implementing the Proposed Action.
- D. Residual Impacts:
Residual impacts would be the short term loss of vegetation and wildlife habitats.
- E. Mitigation Measures for the Proposed Action:
Vegetation impacts could be minimized if the soil is stockpiled in the more sparsely vegetated areas.

V. CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

- A. List of Preparers:
Donna Redding, Archaeologist
Bruce Seppi, Wildlife Biologist
Jeff Denton, Wildlife Biologist
Mike Scott, Fisheries Biologist
Debbie Blank, Botanist
Jake Schlapfer, Outdoor Recreation Planner
Kathy Stubbs, Realty Specialist
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