

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Case File No.: AA-8448-EE

AK-040-02-EA-027

Applicant: Kodiak Soil and Water Conservation District

Type of
Action: 17(b) Easement Trail Improvement Project

Location: Sections 15, 16, 21, and 22, in T. 30 S., R. 20 W., Seward Meridian, Alaska.

Prepared By: Kathy A. Stubbs, Realty Specialist

Preparing
Office: Bureau of Land Management
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Date: August 9, 2002

I. INTRODUCTION

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the Kodiak Soil and Water Conservation District (KSWCD) entered into a Memorandum of Understanding on June 27, 2002 to provide procedures for maintenance and improvement of public access trail easements reserved by the United States pursuant to section 17(b) of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, (ANCSA) 43 U.S.C. 1616(b).

A. Purpose and Need for the Proposed Action:

KSWCD has submitted a plan of development to remediate rutting, extensive damage to the vegetation, surface erosion and stream bank erosion caused by extensive all-terrain vehicle (ATV) activity on a portion of a 17(b) easement trail.

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 proposal (43 CFR 1610.8(b)(1)).

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

The applicant has received a letter of Non-objection from Leisnoi, Inc. Leisnoi owns underlying land along the 17(b) easement and representatives have endorsed the plan of improvement as evidenced by the letter dated March 5, 2002.

Permits have been obtained from the State of Alaska Department of Fish and Game and the Corps of Engineers.

II. PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

A. Proposed Action:

The Proposed Action is to improve about 700' by 6.5' wide of an existing 25' trail located on a 17(b) easement extending from Kalsin Bay to Summit Lake. The 17(b) easement is located within Sections 15, 16, 21, and 22, in T. 30 S., R. 20 W., Seward Meridian, Alaska. The easement is also known as the Summit Lake Trail. The surface area was patented to Leisnoi Inc. (50-86-0067) and the subsurface was patented to Koniag Regional Corporation (50-86-0068). EIN 29a D 9 L (AA-008448EE) is a 17(b) easement twenty-five (25) feet in width for an existing access trail from the Kodiak Island Highway in Section 10, T. 30 S., R. 20 W., Seward Meridian to public lands.

Uses allowed on a 25-foot wide trail easement are travel by foot, dogsled, animals, snowmobiles, two and three-wheeled vehicles and small all-terrain vehicles less than 3,000 lbs. Gross Vehicle Weight.

KSWCD has proposed placing Geoblock Porous Pavement System on the surface of the existing ground. Geoblock is an industrial porous pavement system marketed as a soil reinforcement product for pathways, parking areas, driveways and fire lanes. Geoblock has been field tested by the National Park Service (NPS) in small-scale applications in Wrangell-St. Elias National Park. Presently, Geoblock is marketed as a 40" x 20" panel, 2" in thickness with a 3-inch square grid pattern and has demonstrated significant potential for stabilizing trail degradation from off-highway vehicle (OHV) use on sensitive soils. Geoblock has characteristics making it particularly suitable for supporting traffic over wet and boggy terrain as interlocking tabs between panels helps transfer loads over a large surface area. The open grid of the product allows for natural water movement, which restores wetland function. Vegetation growth through the open grid helps anchor the treatment and restore lost habitat.

On the selected trail segment, Geoblock will be installed to provide a stable trail surface. The Geoblock would define a single trail route thereby limiting braided trail development. Adjacent impacted areas would then be allowed to naturally stabilize and re-vegetate.

Work is scheduled to begin August 18, 2002 and spring of 2003. The reason for this schedule is because the use of the trail in late summer is minimal. The focus of use of the trail is the fishing at Summit Lake that is the most popular in the spring. It is projected that within the 10 days of construction the traffic use across the trail would not consist of more than ten ATV users. It is anticipated ATV traffic will avoid any area of construction and there is no intention of blocking access to the public during the construction. KSWCD staff will manage trail construction and volunteers will assist in placement of trail features. All volunteer efforts will be supervised by KSWCD or other qualified personnel.

No excavation is proposed and existing vegetation will grow up through the openings in the mat. The improved surface will be about 6.5' wide extending to naturally occurring hard points at the beginning and end of the improvement. Two small drainage ways will require the construction of bridges. The bridges are of local design using all weather wood and generally consist of three stringers (4" x 12"), simple abutment timbers (4" x 8"), decking (2" x 6"), and railings (4" x 4").

A summary of work along the centerline stationing of the 17(b) easement follows:

From	To	Length (Feet)	Note
0	68	68	Hard point east end to easement sign-no work req'd
68	74	6	Trail hardening
74	82	8	Bridge installation necessary
82	445	363	Trail hardening to 100 degree turn to left
445	471	26	Trail hardening
471	507	36	Trail on existing gravel surface
507	558	51	Un-improved ford
558	676	118	Trail hardening
676	688	12	Bridge installation necessary
688	726	38	Trail hardening
726	763	37	Hard point south to easement sign-no work req'd

Upon completion, the improvements will be inspected annually. KSWCD will make repairs on an as needed basis.

- B. No Action Alternative:
Under the No Action Alternative, the BLM would not issue a Notice to Proceed and the remediation work would not occur.

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
Environmental Justice
Farmlands (Prime or Unique)
Floodplains

Native American Religious Concerns
Wastes, Hazardous or Solid
Wild and Scenic Rivers
Wilderness

1. Cultural Resources:
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.
2. T&E Species:
The Proposed Action and Alternative were evaluated in accordance with the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended. The Proposed Action has been analyzed and was determined to have no effect on any threatened and endangered species or their habitat. No consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USF&WS) is necessary pursuant to Section 7 of the Act.
3. 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.
4. Invasive, Non-native Species:
There are no known invasive, non-native species plants within the boundaries of the Proposed Action. The trail has been disturbed by ATV users and this disturbance may perpetuate an environment for introduction of these species.
5. Water Quality (Surface/Ground):
Surface and ground water at the site are not used for drinking water purposes.
6. Wetlands/Riparian Zones:
Wetlands vegetation consists of sedges, grasses and mosses.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Alaska District, reviewed the proposed action September 14, 2001 under the Rivers and Harbors Act of 1899 and Section 404 of the Clean Water Act. They determined that the Proposed Action contains wetlands under the Corps' regulatory

jurisdiction. However, since KSWCD will not be doing any ground preparation, they did not consider the Geoblock system alone as fill, and no permit was required.

B. Land Status:

The surface area was patented to Leisnoi Inc. (50-86-0067) and the subsurface was patented to Koniag Native Regional Corporation (50-86-0068). EIN 29a D 9 L (AA-008448-EE) is a 17(b) Easement twenty- five (25) feet in width for an existing access trail from the Kodiak Island Highway in Section 10, T. 30 S., R. 20 W., Seward Meridian to public lands.

C. Recreation:

Recreation activities are not permitted on Summit Lake Trail or adjacent privately owned lands. The easement trail provides access to recreation opportunities on State patented public lands near Summit Lake.

D. Vegetation:

Kodiak Island is within the Alaska Peninsula and Southwestern Islands major land resource area. The project area occurs in the Olds River Valley at the mouth of Kalsin Bay. The maritime climate results in lush vegetation that is dominated by dense grasses, alder, low shrubs, and associated forbs, with the wetlands vegetation consisting of sedges, grasses and mosses.

E. Visual Resources:

Scenic quality is best described as the overall impression retained after traveling through or being within an area of land. Visual resources of the Summit Lake Trail consist of features that are fairly common to the physiographic region, Class C.

Trail degradation, widening and braiding has developed as a result of OHV use, altering the appearance of the Summit Lake Trail. Visual Resource Management (VRM) Class 5 is assigned to the project area. This classification is applied to areas where the natural character of the landscape has been disturbed to a point where rehabilitation is necessary to increase the area's visual quality

F. Wildlife:

The site of the Proposed Action and surrounding area supports a variety of animal species. Resident populations include black tail deer, brown bear, microtine rodents and at least 50 species of resident and migrant birds. Many migrant birds pass through the area during spring and fall migration, including many raptor neo-tropical land bird species. Shrubs and mixed spruce forest habitats provide

nesting habitat for land birds and raptors, particularly Bald Eagles. Several species of amphibians occur in the area.

IV. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

A. Impacts of the Proposed Action:

1. Critical Elements:

a. Invasive, Non-Native Species:

Due to encroaching subdivision developments surrounding the area, weedy invasive plant species are expected to increase in the more disturbed areas. Disturbed areas could recolonize the first few years in weeds. Much of the adjacent areas are at different successional stages due to human influences. Each area would progress to a climax community in due time, if no other impacts would occur. The overall impacts on the integrity of the vegetation within the project area are expected to be minimal and if the mats work correctly, will have a beneficial impact due to the decrease of trampling and rutting, and decreased disruption of the water regime.

b. Water Quality, Surface/Ground:

The installation of the Geoblock material will stabilize and improve the trail, reduce the track width, reduce rutting and erosion. Water quality would generally be improved as a result of less erosion from trail braiding.

c. Wetlands/Riparian Zones:

The wetlands have been altered by ATV use that has caused trail braiding and rutting in the area. The installation of the Geoblock material will stabilize and improve the trail, reduce the track width, reduce rutting and erosion. Wetlands/Riparian Zones would generally be improved as a result of less erosion from trail braiding.

2. Recreation:

During the construction period, trail use will be limited and may impact access to recreation opportunities on public lands. Alternative trails or routes may receive additional pressure as use shifts to other areas. Trail users will experience an increase in noise and safety hazards associated with construction activities.

The new bridges and reinforced, well-defined trail will ultimately improve access to recreation opportunities on public lands.

3. Vegetation:

Under the Proposed Action, there would be minor impacts to the vegetation in the project area. Most of the impacts would be the smothering of vegetation directly underneath the impermeable areas of the mats and the bridge. However, the impacts are expected to be beneficial overall, as the traffic would be confined to a more stable surface in a single track and the previously disturbed vegetation in adjacent ruts can regrow, as well as that within the matted areas.

Disturbed areas could recolonize the first few years in weeds. Much of the adjacent areas are at different successional stages due to human influences. Each area would progress to a climax community in due time, if no other impacts would occur. The overall impacts on the integrity of the vegetation within the project area are expected to be minimal and if the mats work correctly, will have a beneficial impact due to the decrease of trampling and rutting, and decreased disruption of the water regime.

4. Visual Resources:

Visual resource quality will be temporarily compromised throughout the duration of the Proposed Action. The construction of bridges across two drainage ways will permanently alter their natural appearance. However, man-made features (i.e., bridges) that compliment the natural landscape may enhance the scenic value.

The visual quality of the trail will increase as a result of rehabilitating rutting caused by OHVs, confining the trail to a single, stable surface, and re-vegetating areas where native vegetation is damaged.

5. Wildlife:

Currently the segment of the trail within the Proposed Action is being degraded by ATV use. The installation of the Geoblock material will stabilize and improve the trail, reduce the track width, reduce rutting and damage to wildlife habitat. Improved conditions on the trail may lead to increased use and access to Summit Lake, thereby increasing the potential for conflicts with brown bears and the taking of bears in the defense of life and property.

B. Impacts of the No Action Alternative:

1. Critical Elements:

a. Invasive, Non-native Species:

Weedy invasive plant species are expected to increase as the area becomes more disturbed.

- b. Water Quality, Surface/Ground:
Surface or ground water quality may continue to degrade under the No Action Alternative as erosion and source migration continues. The water leaving the site is not used as a drinking water source.
 - c. Wetlands/Riparian Zones:
Further degradation to the riparian zone may occur. Erosion will continue to be a factor as well as additional trail braids will be created.
- 1. Recreation:
Access to recreation opportunities on public lands will diminish with further trail deterioration. Without trail improvement it is more likely that users will get off the easement and trespass on Lesnoi land.
 - 2. Vegetation:
Vegetation would continue to be destroyed as OHVs create additional rutting, soil erosion and stream bank erosion.
 - 3. Visual Resources:
Visual resource quality will continue to decline with additional trail degradation, braiding and damage to vegetation.
 - 4. Wildlife:
There would be a minimum loss of wildlife habitat from damaged vegetation and soil erosion.
- C. Cumulative Impacts:
- 1. Critical Elements:
 - a. Water Quality, Surface/Ground:
The installation of the Geoblock Porous Pavement System will harden the trail and will provide the public with a hard surface trail to follow. There won't be a need for the public to deviate from the trail causing further disturbance to surface and ground water quality.
 - b. Wetlands/Riparian Zones:
The installation of the Geoblock Porous Pavement System will harden the trail and will provide the public with a hard surface trail to follow. There won't be a need for the public to deviate from the trail causing further disturbance and erosion in the wetland/riparian zone.

2. Recreation:

Trail improvements may result in additional, more intensive trail use as recreation opportunities on public lands become more easily accessible. Increased visitation may expand the diversity of users and potentially create user conflicts.

D. Mitigation Measures:

Educational signage along the trail could help inform users about the importance of staying on designated routes to promote long-term trail maintenance.

The area should be monitored for invasive, non-native species and they should be removed if they occur.

V. CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

A. Persons and Agencies Consulted:

Sam Christensen, KSWCD

B. List of Preparers:

Melissa Blair, Recreation Specialist

Debbie Blank, Botanist

Dean Brinkman, Engineer

Jeff Denton, Wildlife Biologist

David Kelley, Surface Protection Specialist

Donna Redding, Archaeologist

Mike Scott, Fisheries Biologist

Bruce Seppi, Wildlife Biologist

Kathy Stubbs, Realty Specialist

Mike Zaidlicz, Forester/Iditarod Trails Coordinator