

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

AK-040-04-EA-030

Case File: AA-085582 (540001)

Applicant: Bureau of Land Management  
Anchorage Field Office

Type of Action: Aspen regeneration and hazard tree removal on the Campbell Tract, Alaska

Location: Seward Meridian, T. 12 N., R. 3 W.

Section 2  $W\frac{1}{2}W\frac{1}{2}E\frac{1}{2}NW\frac{1}{4}$ ,  $W\frac{1}{2}NW\frac{1}{4}$ ,  $W\frac{1}{2}E\frac{1}{2}W\frac{1}{2}SW\frac{1}{4}$ ,  $W\frac{1}{2}W\frac{1}{2}SW\frac{1}{4}$ ;  
Section 3 Lots 1 through 4, inclusive,  $S\frac{1}{2}N\frac{1}{2}NE\frac{1}{4}NE\frac{1}{4}$ ,  $S\frac{1}{2}NE\frac{1}{4}NE\frac{1}{4}$ ,  
 $S\frac{1}{2}SE\frac{1}{4}NW\frac{1}{4}NE\frac{1}{4}$ ,  $S\frac{1}{2}NE\frac{1}{4}$ ,  $S\frac{1}{2}NE\frac{1}{4}SE\frac{1}{4}NW\frac{1}{4}$ ,  $SE\frac{1}{4}SE\frac{1}{4}NW\frac{1}{4}$ ,  
 $S\frac{1}{2}SE\frac{1}{4}SW\frac{1}{4}NW\frac{1}{4}$ ,  $S\frac{1}{2}SW\frac{1}{4}SE\frac{1}{4}NW\frac{1}{4}$ ,  $SW\frac{1}{4}$ ,  $E\frac{1}{2}SE\frac{1}{4}$ ;  
Section 10  $NE\frac{1}{4}NE\frac{1}{4}$ ,  $E\frac{1}{2}NW\frac{1}{4}NE\frac{1}{4}$ ,  $NW\frac{1}{4}NW\frac{1}{4}NE\frac{1}{4}$ ,  $N\frac{1}{2}SW\frac{1}{4}NW\frac{1}{4}NE\frac{1}{4}$ ,  
 $N\frac{1}{2}N\frac{1}{2}N\frac{1}{2}NW\frac{1}{4}$ ;  
Section 11  $NW\frac{1}{4}NW\frac{1}{4}NW\frac{1}{4}$ ,  $W\frac{1}{2}SW\frac{1}{4}NW\frac{1}{4}NW\frac{1}{4}$

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Campbell Tract (CT) is a 730 acre Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Administrative Site of natural, mostly wooded, public land located within the city limits of the Municipality of Anchorage (MOA). The primary purpose of the CT is to support the administrative functions and offices for the Anchorage Field Office (AFO) of the BLM. The CT is centered on the Campbell Airstrip, a 5,000' gravel runway dating to 1942 that is actively used by the AFO and other agencies for government purposes.

The CT is also designated a Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA) and contains over 11 miles of multi-use, non-motorized trails that provide year-round recreational opportunities for approximately 40,000 area users. The CT is adjacent to, and managed in cooperation with, the 4,000-acre MOA Far North Bicentennial Park (FNBP), forming a contiguous piece of wilderness-like land linking the high mountains of Chugach State Park to the heart of Anchorage.

A. Purpose and Need for the Proposed Action:

Aspen stands on the CT have become overmature and are nearing the end of their normal lifespan. Naturally occurring, periodic fires have usually thinned aspen stands in the past to promote new growth and create a mosaic of size and age classes. However, fire has been excluded from the CT for the past 60 years and the aspen populations have reached the point where they are dying faster than they are being regenerated. Given the semi urban nature of the CT, it is unlikely that large scale fires will be allowed to burn and regenerate these senescent stands.

Since aspen bests regenerates through root suckering from an existing stand, the preferred method of regeneration is to thin existing stands and remove competition from other trees and shrubs. In this way, the large, existing root system will provide the necessary nutrients to the developing seedling and sapling stands. As the seedlings sprout, they will also require fencing to protect them from moose browsing for several years until they can adequately compete on their own.

Other areas near the CT airstrip are in need of re-vegetation. Old, unused aircraft taxiways and hardstands should be replanted to provide ground cover and provide a vegetative barrier to prevent casual users and wildlife from wandering on to the active runway. By replanting a variety of sizes and species of trees on these areas, it will be possible to influence use away from the active runway, while providing improved wildlife habitat away from high traffic areas.

The proposed action would also remove dead and down material along the Viewpoint Trail and Radio Communication Access Road which has the potential to fall across the trail and become a hazard to users.

The result of these projects will be the overall enhancement of forest health on the CT with the added benefits of an improvement of wildlife habitat through a diversification of species and size classes as well as the removal of dead and downed material which could potentially create hazards by falling across trails and result in a buildup of fire fuels.

B. Conformance with Land Use Plan:

This action is in conformance with the Southcentral Management Framework Plan (MFP), dated March 1980. The Management Plan for Public Use and Resource Management on the Bureau of Land Management Campbell Tract Facility (June 1988) identifies the project area as part of the Dispersed Recreation Zone. The management objective for the Dispersed Recreation Zone is to allow and enhance non-motorized, dispersed recreation uses where compatible with administrative use of the airstrip, the communication sites, access roads, and to allow new trail development as needed.

II. PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

A. Proposed Action:

The Proposed Action is for a contractor to harvest and remove approximately 50 cords of dead and downed white spruce from the vicinity of the Viewpoint Trail and the Communication Site Access Road. This operation will require the use of either a small tractor or skidder to remove the material to an access point. A truck will then remove the material from the site. It is estimated that the individual trees can be removed from the site by a small crew (3-4 individuals) in less than one week. Skid trails will be re contoured and any logging debris will be piled for future burning or lopped and scattered on the affected area before the contractor leaves the area.

The contractor will also thin approximately one acre and fence it and an additional two acres of treated area for a total of three acres. This thinning will treat over mature aspen and other species near the existing fire break on the southeast portion of the CT (see Exhibit A map). The aspen fencing will incorporate the material thinned from the site as “worm fences” as well as additional smooth wire fencing. Small ATVs to move fencing material and tools will be utilized to access the site. No tractors or heavy equipment will be used for this portion of the project.

Either a contractor or agency staff and volunteers will revegetate the major unused taxiways and hardstands accessing the center of the active Campbell airstrip with transplanted white spruce, aspen, and other hardwoods. As needed, a caterpillar tractor will rip the compacted surface of the taxiways and hardstands to loosen the soil and allow trees to be transplanted. Soil and other organic material (peat) will be hauled to the site by truck and mixed with the existing rocky soil to provide an adequate seed bed for the transplants. Aspen seedlings will be individually fenced to protect them from moose until they are large enough to survive on their own. A tree spade machine will be utilized to transplant larger spruce and hardwoods (6-8 feet tall) from areas near the revegetation area to areas adjacent to the runway to provide visual screening of the airstrip. Additional smaller seedlings will be hand planted away from the airstrip and access routes. The activity will begin during the fall of 2004 and will continue as funding becomes available in 2005.

Signs will be posted on View point and Moose Meadow Trails warning recreational users of the harvest and regeneration activities and the actual trails will be closed to traffic as needed to facilitate safe operations.

B. No Action Alternative:

The No Action Alternative is to not remove any of the dead or downed trees along the Viewpoint Trail and Communication Site Road. No attempt will be made to revegetate aspen or other species either along the existing fuel break, or on the abandoned taxiways and hardstands.

III. **AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT**

A. Critical Elements:

The following Critical Elements are either not present or would not be adversely affected by the Proposed Action or the No Action Alternative: Air Quality, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, Environmental Justice, Farmlands (prime or unique), Floodplains, Native American Religious Concerns, Water Quality (Surface and Ground), Wetlands/Riparian Zones, Wild and Scenic Rivers, and Wilderness.

1. Cultural Resources:

The CT contains scattered WWII remains dating from 1942 when a 5,000 foot military airstrip and support facilities were constructed to support nearby Ft. Richardson. War related improvements included an airstrip, taxiways, and revetments for aircraft use and various sod structures for housing and administrative functions including quarters, a kitchen and mess hall, latrines, and guard posts. These facilities were constructed from sod and locally available materials due to a shortage of building

supplies and now appear as shallow pits and earth mounds covered with vegetation, and overgrown concrete foundations with occasional scattered boards and nails. Most of these cultural sites and remains lie off the north end of the existing Campbell Airstrip.

2. Threatened and Endangered Species:

No threatened or endangered species are known to be found on the CT.

3. Invasive, Non-Native Species:

There are 38 species of non-native plant species known to exist in Anchorage that are listed in the Alaska Exotic Plants Information Clearing House list. Several of these species likely occur in the identified trail relocation areas. These include Buckhorn Plantain *Plantago sp.*, Yellow Toadflax *Linaria vulgaris*, Blue Burr Stickweed *Lappula echinatat*, Annual Bluegrass *Poa annua*, Leafy Spurge *Euphorbia esula*, Tufted Vetch *Vicia cracca* and possibly other species. These species are generally found in disturbed areas and often colonize areas around roads and trails.

The Amber-marked Birch Leaf Miner *Profenusa thomsoni*, a small insect introduced from Europe, in the Anchorage area since the mid 1990's, has infected many of the birch trees in the entire Anchorage Bowl, including the CT. It causes defoliation of some trees and can kill trees that are weak or otherwise stressed.

4. Subsistence:

The CT lands are Federal Public Land as defined in the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA), Section 810 and fall under the authority of the Federal Subsistence Board and the Subsistence Regulations for the Harvest of Fish and Wildlife on Federal Public Lands in Alaska. The CT lies within the Anchorage Management Unit of Game Management Unit 14C under which the current Subsistence Regulations noted above is closed to the taking of wildlife under both State (hunting and trapping) and Federal Subsistence Regulations. The taking of wildlife on the CT is further limited by Supplemental Rules issued on November 20, 1998 under 43 CFR 8365.1-6 that closed the CT to the use of firearms, archery equipment, traps, or snares. The CT has no documented consistent use by rural Alaskans of fish or game and no knowledge of such use has become available since the inception of the Federal Subsistence Program or the issuance of the noted Supplementary Rules.

5. Wastes, Hazardous and Solid:

There are no known hazardous or solid waste sites in the affected area.

B. Land Status:

CT is under the jurisdiction of the BLM by withdrawal for an administrative site directed by PLO 7471 which expires in 2022.

C. Recreation:

The CT is designated for non-motorized recreational use. Recreation management for the CT is directed by the June 1988 “A Management Plan for Public Use and Resource Management on the Bureau of Land Management Campbell Tract Facility”. There are approximately 11 miles of developed recreation trails on CT. Some of these trails link to a wider trail system on the adjoining MOA FNP. The proximity of CT to urban Anchorage places high demands on the site from a variety of users. Most recreation occurs on trails that were developed on old tank roads and airplane taxiways.

Access for recreation use on CT is gained from two formal on-site trailheads and four trails entering from FNP. Established trailheads with parking include the Smoke Jumper Trailhead located at the main CTF AFO complex entrance and the Campbell Airstrip Trailhead located at mile 1.1 on Campbell Airstrip Road. Trail maintenance, signing, and event permitting is a cooperative effort between the BLM, MOA Parks and Recreation Division, and various volunteers and user groups.

Recreation users are primarily residents of Anchorage and surrounding communities. Estimated 2003 visitation was 40,000 user days. Users are typically found walking, running, mountain biking, skiing, snowshoeing, dog mushing and horseback riding throughout the CT. Many users live close to CT and use the area regularly for exercise, often with their family dogs. Regular competitive events, often starting on FNP lands traverse CT including the Nordic Ski Club’s Tour of Anchorage and the World Sled Dog Championship Races.

D. Vegetation:

The CT contains a variety of habitats including spruce and birch forests, bogs, and riparian areas. Cottonwood, aspen and birch dating to the WWII era dominate the woodlands, interspersed with less mature white spruce, numbers of which have experienced high rates of recent beetle kill. The understory is comprised of shrubs, forbs, lichens and moss above a ground cover of heavy organic litter.

E. Wildlife:

The CT contains a rich diversity of resident and non-resident wildlife. Resident species include moose, porcupine, mink, weasel, red squirrel, muskrat, beaver, snowshoe hare, voles, and shrews and at least 50 species of resident and non-resident birds including horned owl, northern saw-whet owl, boreal owl, northern goshawk, and spruce grouse. Non-resident species moving seasonally through CT to and from the Chugach Mountains to the east include grizzly bear and black bear, red fox, lynx and wolf. The South Fork of Campbell Creek traverses the northeast corner of CT. This stream supports populations of king and silver salmon, as well as rainbow trout, Dolly Varden, and spiny sculpin.

IV. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

A. Impacts of the Proposed Action:

1. Critical Elements:

a. Cultural Resources:

The proposed activity will adversely affect WWII cultural resources at CT on the taxiway portion of the project. The abandoned taxiway will be re-vegetated with planted spruce, aspen, and cottonwood trees. Heavy equipment will loosen the compacted soil, creating a seedbed which will allow the new seedlings to become established. The AFO is in consultation with the Alaska SHPO concerning mitigation.

b. Invasive, Non-Native Species:

Invasive, non-native plant species are known to occur on the project site and throughout the Anchorage Bowl. As vegetation is removed to re-establish trail corridors, the potential for an increase in invasive species would be higher. Invasive species would likely colonize areas along newly established trails and re-vegetated social trails. Fill materials and related transport equipment brought on site would have a potential to bring in seeds from invasive or undesirable plant species.

c. Wastes, Hazardous & Solid:

Potential for harm to the environment is presented by risks associated with spills of fuel, oil and/or hazardous substances during operation of machinery in the construction area. Accidents and mechanical breakdown of machinery, or accidental spills while refueling chainsaws, heavy equipment, 4-wheeler ATV's, etc. are possible.

2. Recreation:

Users on CT are often seeking the solitude and quiet of the wooded CT to escape the noise and congestion of Anchorage. Increased levels of noise will be associated with brief intervals (5-10 days) of mechanized equipment use during the project. Portions of the Viewpoint and Moose Meadow Trails may also be closed during periods of mechanized equipment use when transporting material to and from the work site and during major volunteer trail work events including National Trails Day and National Public Lands Day. Temporary closure during construction should not inconvenience most CT users. Opportunities to view wildlife may be decreased during construction due to noise, machinery, and increased human presence.

3. Vegetation:

Approximately 50 cords of dead spruce will be removed from the vicinity of the Viewpoint Trail and the Communication Site Access Road. Trees and brush will be removed with mechanized equipment, and chainsaws, as needed, and skidded to the trails where they will be hauled offsite by truck. Ground vegetation along the corridor may be trampled by vegetation removal activities, but should return before the end of the next growing season and be well established along the trails by the next year.

Approximately one acre of over mature aspen will be thinned by removing one third of the existing aspen stems and the majority of other competing vegetation near the existing fuel break (see map Exhibit A). The thinned material will remain on site to provide material for a “worm fence” designed to protect the new aspen sprouts from damage by moose. An additional two acres of previously disturbed area within the fuel break will be fenced to protect naturally regenerating aspen seedlings from moose.

The abandoned taxiway near the center of the Campbell airstrip will be revegetated with transplanted spruce, aspen and cottonwood seedlings and sapling size material obtained from other areas of the CT as well as from nursery stock obtained off site.

4. Wildlife:

Construction events may have short-term impacts on CT wildlife in the immediate area of the project corridor, temporarily driving species away from areas of increased human activity. Minimal habitat will be deleteriously affected since the revegetation of aspen and other species will enhance moose and small game habitat. Moose and bear may be encountered during construction operations and are potentially dangerous.

The noise and activity associated with the project will probably prevent most inadvertent encounters with animals.

B. Impacts of the No Action Alternative:

The effects of current management practices and user patterns on CT will continue unchanged. Many users will continue to use the airstrip as a means of transiting the CT, and other users will continue to enter and exit the area by crossing the airstrip near the AFO. Since the abandoned taxiway will not be closed and revegetated, casual use will continue on or near the active airstrip.

Aspen stands will continue to deteriorate with little opportunity for regeneration leading to the eventual loss of most aspen vegetation. Dead spruce will not be removed from along the Viewpoint Trail which might fall onto the existing trails causing hazards for the CT user.

C. Cumulative Impacts:

CT as a wilderness-like recreation area is surrounded by development. Housing developments press against the western boundary of CT and closely follow the southern boundary of adjacent FNB. Numerous social trails can be followed onto CT from these neighborhoods. The population of Anchorage is growing exponentially and the MOA is establishing a new sports park consisting of ball fields and a 200 vehicle parking lot adjacent to the southeast corner of CT off Abbott Loop Road. A major established trailhead also departs from this new parking lot, leading onto CT from the south. Both a planned MOA roadway expansion of Abbott Loop Road and a proposed 48" diameter waterline installation project adjacent to the west boundary of CT are certain to increase awareness and visibility of CT. All of these influences will lead to increased use and recreation pressure on area park lands in general and CT in particular. Increased trail wear, forest impacts, and wildlife disturbance are obvious outcomes of this heavier use.

User experience and perception of solitude may also be modified by increases in user traffic and noise associated with vehicle traffic and ball field activities. To handle this increase in year-round user traffic and preserve the natural character of CT, it will be important to provide a healthy resilient forest ecosystem and a well managed, diverse mosaic of forest stands capable of meeting the needs of the CT's users.

Implementation of the Proposed Action will result in a positive effect on the cumulative impacts facing CT by providing a significantly larger area of re-vegetated land than will be removed from CT by the proposed activities. Approximately two acres of road bed and social trails will be re-vegetated. A

second positive effect of the Proposed Action will be the reduction of additional social trailing caused by users detouring around runway barriers to access the airstrip for unauthorized recreation purposes.

D. Mitigation Measures:

1. Cultural Resources:

In consultation with the Alaska SHPO an MOA mitigating the adverse effect upon the taxiways will be negotiated. Four interpretive panels addressing the role of the CT, Anchorage and Alaska in WWII will be placed on the CT. Information recording the affected taxiway will be sent to the SHPO (*and possibly HABS/HAER NPS*).

2. Invasive, Non-Native Species:

Clearing and soil disturbance should be minimized where practicable to limit opportunities for invasive, non-native species to become established. Topsoil or fill material brought on site should be free of invasive, non-native species. Re-vegetation should be performed using only native species. During and following construction, disturbed areas should be monitored for invasive, non-native species and eradicated by hand or mechanical means.

3. Waste, Hazardous and Solid:

To prevent spills, refueling should be performed only at designated locations where the project manager has established adequate spill containment and appropriate spill response materials. Spill kits should also be either carried by vehicles or positioned close to where they are being operated to facilitate rapid response to a release during operation.

Vehicles should be brought to the CTF fuel pad for refueling. Operators of machinery should be properly trained for spill response. Accidental releases outside of a containment area should be reported immediately to CTF Management. First Responders should perform initial emergency response actions, contractors will be called in by CTF management to perform detailed cleanup operations.

4. Recreation:

All efforts should be made to perform heavy equipment use on Monday through Friday between the hours of 8:00 A.M. and 4:00 P.M. to reduce impacts on users during the traditional heavy use periods of evenings and weekends. Signs will be posted at Viewpoint Trail, Moose Meadow Trail, the communication site access road, and abandoned taxiways warning users of potential dangers and the closure of the affected routes.

5. Vegetation:

Trees to be removed should be designated with boundary markings to prevent unnecessary destruction of trees outside the trail corridor. Re-vegetation will be performed with native species including, white spruce seedlings, white birch seedlings, and aspen with protective cages.

V. CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

A. List of Preparers:

Donna Redding - Cultural Resources

Jeff Denton - Wildlife Biologist

Rodney Huffman - Reality Specialist

Brian Sterbenz - Fire Management Specialist

Doug Ballou - Outdoor Recreation Planner