

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Establish the NANA Regional Boundary as the Resident Zone Boundary for Cape Krusenstern National Monument and Kobuk Valley National Park Western Arctic National Parklands

The National Park Service (NPS) has prepared an environmental assessment (EA) for designating all lands within the Northwest Alaska Native Association (NANA) region as the resident zone for subsistence uses of Cape Krusenstern National Monument (CAKR) and for Kobuk Valley National Park (KOVA). This would replace the three resident zone communities for CAKR and seven resident zone communities for KOVA with a single resident zone. Alternative B (Proposed Action) would be implemented through a regulatory change in the NPS regulations.

Alternative B responds to a Subsistence Resource Commission (SRC) recommendation submitted to the Secretary of Interior under provisions in Section 808 of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA). The SRC recommendation requests the establishment of a single resident zone for both CAKR and KOVA that coincides with the political boundaries of the NANA region. ANILCA established the SRCs to devise and recommend to the secretary of the interior and the governor a program for subsistence hunting in CAKR and KOVA. The secretary responded to the commission's recommendations, directing the NPS to complete an EA and a Section 810 subsistence evaluation before deciding whether to modify the resident zone boundaries through the regulatory process.

Public Involvement

The EA had a 30-day public comment period beginning February 21, 2003, and ending March 25, 2003. Public notice of the availability of the EA was published in the Arctic Sounder and posted on local bulletin boards. The EA was mailed to 85 agencies, organizations, and individuals. Two written comments were received supporting the proposed action. Two telephone calls were received at Western Arctic National Parklands (WEAR), requesting clarification of the action; and after discussions, the callers supported the proposed action.

Alternatives

The EA evaluated the following three alternatives:

Alternative A (Retain Existing Resident Zone Definitions)(No Action) would retain the existing resident zones for CAKR and KOVA. Residents in CAKR and the communities of Kivalina, Kotzebue, and Noatak would continue to qualify for subsistence use within CAKR. Residents in KOVA and the communities of Ambler, Kiana, Kobuk, Kotzebue, Noorvik, Selawik, and Shungnak would continue to qualify for subsistence uses in KOVA. Residents of the NANA region living outside the current resident zones for CAKR and/or KOVA (including Deering and Buckland) would establish eligibility for subsistence use of those units by applying for a 36 CFR 13.44 permit and demonstrating their individual eligibility according to the 36 CFR 13.44 criteria.

Alternative B (Establish Resident Zone with Boundaries Coinciding with NANA Regional Boundaries)(Proposed Action and NPS Preferred Alternative) would establish the area encompassed by the boundaries of the NANA region as a single resident zone for both CAKR and KOVA. The Kobuk Valley National Park Subsistence Resource Commission and the Cape Krusenstern National Monument Subsistence Resource Commission under the authority of Section 808(a) of ANILCA recommend this alternative. Under this alternative, all residents whose permanent residence is located in the NANA region (Figure 1) would be eligible to engage in subsistence activities within KOVA and CAKR without going through a 36 CFR 13.44 process demonstrating their eligibility. This alternative would replace the current resident zone described for KOVA in 36 CFR 13.69(a) and the resident zone described for CAKR in 36 CFR 13.62(a).

Alternative C (Evaluate All Individual Communities within the NANA Region as Resident Zone Communities) would designate the NANA Region communities not currently included within the resident zones for KOVA and CAKR as "Resident Zone Communities," pending each community's meeting the requirements as specified under 36 CFR 13.43. It is expected that all of the communities would qualify as resident zone communities for both CAKR and KOVA. Communities currently not in the CAKR resident zone are Ambler, Buckland, Deering, Kiana, Kobuk, Noorvik, Selawik, and Shungnak. Communities currently not included in the KOVA resident zone are Buckland, Deering, Kivalina, and Noatak.

Mitigating Measures

NPS and other federal regulations provide corrective mechanisms should the implementation of the proposed action result in resource levels that created potential conservation concerns.

Environmentally Preferred Alternatives

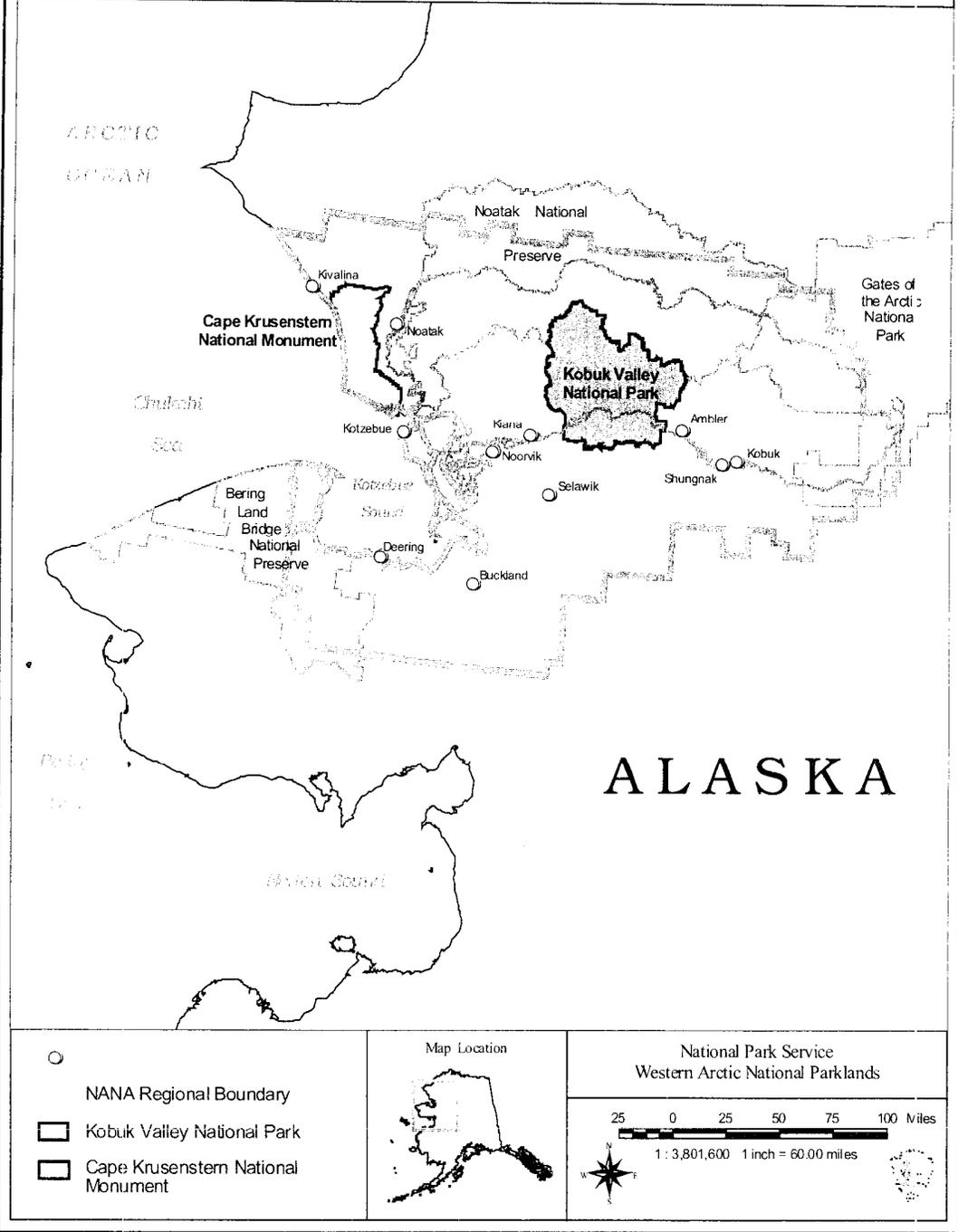
The NPS has identified Alternatives A, B, and C as environmentally preferred alternatives for this action. Each of the alternatives would have similar impacts on the resources of CAKR and KOVA with only minor effects anticipated.

Environmental Consequences of Alternative B (Proposed Action)

As documented in the EA, the NPS has determined that Alternative B (Proposed Action) can be implemented with no significant adverse effect to natural or cultural resources.

Fisheries: Fisheries management would remain a cooperative blend of state and federal regulation. Enlarging the resident zone to incorporate additional communities in the region would not be expected to significantly affect participation in the harvest of resident species. Migratory species such as chum salmon or sheefish have historically drawn regional residents to concentration points on a seasonal basis. Migratory species do transit the park units; but since

FIGURE 1
NANA Regional Boundary



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much heavier concentrations are available outside the park unit boundaries, the effect of broadening the residence zone would be similar to that of the resident fish.

Wildlife and Habitat: Harvest levels for some species might increase somewhat but would remain consistent with maintaining healthy populations. Overall, this alternative would have a negligible effect on wildlife populations and habitat. The increase in numbers of qualified subsistence users would be in areas farther from currently used resources, and a change in hunting patterns as a result of this alternative would not be expected.

Threatened and Endangered Species: Both threatened eider species, Steller's and spectacled, migrate past CAKR. Residents in the NANA region are known to hunt waterfowl during the spring and fall migrations. The proposed change in resident zone for CAKR could attract additional hunters to the coastal area, but eiders generally land at sea, not inland, so the proposed action should not have any appreciable effect on hunter access to eiders. The proposed action may lead to a negligible increase in incidental take of Steller's and spectacled eiders.

Recreation/Visitor Use: One of the primary attractions for visitors to the region is ecotourism and the experience of visiting an Eskimo culture that remains in its environment, maintaining cultural ties to the landscape through subsistence activities. Although the potential for interaction between subsistence users and recreational users is small, subsistence activities are not incompatible with recreational use and may enhance it.

Wilderness: This alternative would not affect designated wilderness in KOVA. An increase in subsistence use in the wilderness area would not be expected because village's that traditionally use the designated wilderness areas are currently in the established resident zone and would remain so under this alternative.

Subsistence: This alternative would provide a simplified system for subsistence use: eligibility by eliminating the need for 36 CFR §13.44 permits by residents within the region residing outside the existing resident zone. This alternative would be compatible with traditional social and cultural subsistence resource-use patterns of residents of the region. The overall impacts to subsistence uses and access would be beneficial, but the actual short- and long-term changes would be negligible. Appendix A of the EA contains the ANILCA Section 810 Subsistence Summary Evaluation and Findings.

Cultural Resources: Impacts to cultural resources would not be expected to change under this alternative visitation by subsistence users conducting harvest and related activities would be expected to remain at existing levels. Impacts to cultural resources would be minor.

Park Management: This alternative would have positive and beneficial impacts on park management. It would eliminate the need for administering a costly and complex permit system. Establishing a regulatory regime that reflects, and is compatible with, customary and traditional practices in the region would build relationships with local subsistence users, as well as be in compliance with ANILCA Sections 801 and 802.

Decision

The National Park Service has decided to select Alternative B (Proposed Action), which will designate all lands within the NANA region as the resident zone for CAKR and KOVA.

Rationale for the Decision

Alternative B (Proposed Action) is intended to enhance subsistence opportunities for residents in the region by extending eligibility to those residents who are potentially excluded or would be subjected to the unwarranted administrative requirements to demonstrate individual eligibility and obtain individual permits. This alternative provides the greatest flexibility to the residents of the region by allowing them to conveniently adapt their harvest patterns to meet changing conditions. Alternatives A and C pose potential by unnecessary administrative burdens to those subsistence users who are residents of the NANA region, but are not residents of a resident zone community for one or both NPS units.

As indicated in the EA, the adverse impacts of making the NANA region the resident zone for CAKR and KOVA will be negligible to minor and will not result in an impairment of park resources that fulfill specific purposes identified in the establishing legislation or that are key to the natural or cultural integrity of the parks.

Alternative B (Proposed Action) complies with the Endanger Species Act, the National Preservation Act, and Executive Orders 11988 and 11990. There will be no significant restriction of subsistence activities as documented by ANILCA, Title VIII, Section 810 (a) Summary Evaluation and Findings.

I find that Alternative B (Proposed Action) does not constitute a major federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment. Therefore, in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 and regulations of the Council on Environmental Quality (40 CFR 1508.9), the NPS will not prepare an environmental impact statement for the project.

Recommended:



for David W. Spirtes
Superintendent, Western Arctic National Parklands

4/16/03
Date

Approved:



for Robert L. Arnberger
Regional Director, Alaska

4/18/03
Date