

**Environmental Assessment on the
Alaska Power and Telephone
Extension of Service to Dyea**

**Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park
Skagway, Alaska
July 2002**

PURPOSE AND NEED

The National Park Service (NPS) is considering issuing a permit to the Alaska Power and Telephone Company (AP&T) to install, operate, and perform continued routine maintenance on a 7.2 kilovolt single phase underground power line and a 50-pair telecommunications cable in the Chilkoot Trail Unit of Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park (the park) in Skagway, Alaska. The right-of-way permit for a 10 foot right-of-way would be granted along existing gravel and paved roads that cross National Park Service (NPS) lands and provide access to private land within and adjacent to the park.

The APT project has been permitted by the State Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (Permit Number 3-299520-02-13, dated April 8, 2002) for portions of the project that would occur within the State road right-of-way. The lines would cross properties of various ownership, including the State, the City of Skagway, the NPS, and private entities (see project area map below).

The purpose of the proposed project is to provide reliable electrical power and telecommunications service to property owners in the Dyea area, some of whom are within Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park boundaries, and all of whom reside within the Chilkoot Trail and Dyea National Historic Landmark. Property owners in Dyea (including the NPS) currently rely on diesel generators for their electrical needs and unreliable radio phones for communication. Diesel generators produce noise and exhaust emissions including nitrous oxides, carbon monoxide, and hydrocarbons. The proposed AP&T power line extension would not only provide reliable telecommunication and electrical services to the residents of Dyea, it would also result in the reduction of noise and exhaust emissions associated with diesel generator use.

This environmental assessment (EA) evaluates the potential impacts to natural and cultural resources resulting from the no action and proposed action alternatives. Although the power line would cross both NPS and private property, this EA analyzes only the potential impacts of actions occurring on NPS lands. The EA has been prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 and regulations of the Council on Environmental Quality (40 CFR 1508.9).

BACKGROUND

The NPS Organic Act of 1916 states that the purpose of the national parks is to "conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wildlife therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations." (16 U.S.C. 1). The NPS Organic Act and the General Authorities Act prohibit impairment of park resources and values. The NPS Management Policies and Director's Order #55 use the terms "resources and values" to mean the full spectrum and intangible attributes for which the park is established and are managed, including the Organic Act's fundamental purpose and any additional purposes as stated in the park's establishing legislation. The impairment of park resources and values may not be allowed unless directly and specifically provided by statute. The primary

responsibility of the National Park Service is to ensure that park resources and values will continue to exist in a condition that will allow the American people to have present and future opportunities for enjoyment of them.

Enabling legislation passed on June 30, 1976 created the Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park..."in order to preserve in public ownership for the benefit and inspiration of the people of the United States, historic structures and trails associated with the Klondike Gold Rush of 1898, the Secretary of the Interior is authorized to establish the Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park, consisting of a Seattle unit, a Chilkoot Trail unit, and a White Pass Trail unit." Additionally, the town of Dyea and the Chilkoot Trail were designated a National Historical Landmark on June 16, 1978. National Historic Landmarks are nationally significant historic places designated by the Secretary of the Interior because they possess exceptional value or quality in illustrating or interpreting the heritage of the United States.

Dyea and Chilkoot Trail National Historical Landmark is located about eight road miles west of Skagway. Access to the site is along a narrow, windy, and mostly gravel road from Skagway. The Dyea and Chilkoot Trail National Historic Landmark includes all of the historic Chilkoot trail and the townsite of Dyea. Extending from the Taiya River Inlet north, it encompasses the Taiya River valley to the Canadian border and the summit of Chilkoot Pass. Dyea developed on the mouth of the Taiya River plain at the head of Lynn Canal. Adjoining the Dyea area and partially outside the park boundary on state land near the Dyea road are portions of a Park Service campground, a ranger station, and seasonal employee residences.

The 1996 General Management Plan for Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park (GMP) called for the expansion of park management, resource protection, and maintenance needs to meet most of the expected visitor-use increases in the park, while protecting park resources from degradation. The GMP further stated that park facilities would be upgraded with improvements to the visitor and administrative facilities in Skagway and the development of new facilities in Dyea. The 1996 GMP also encouraged the NPS to continue to work with the state of Alaska to provide better access to the Dyea and Chilkoot Trail areas.

ISSUES

To focus the environmental assessment, the NPS selected specific issues for further analysis and eliminated others from evaluation. Subsequent environmental consequences related to each alternative focus on these issues. A brief rationale for the selection of each topic is given below

Issues Selected for Analysis

Natural Soundscape: The natural soundscape of the area could be affected by noise generated by heavy equipment used to excavate the trenches. However, the natural soundscape would improve as the reliance on diesel powered generators is replaced with hydro-electric power provided by the servicing company as a result of this project.

Vegetation: Mostly non-native grasses and forbs could be affected by excavation associated with the installation of an underground power line by AP&T inside the park boundary.

Soils: The proposed excavation and trenching could affect soils in the project area.

Wildlife: The operation of heavy equipment could temporarily displace wildlife from the project area.

Recreation/Visitor Use: Construction could temporarily affect park visitors traveling or recreating in the project area.

Park Operations and Management: NPS operations and management in the Dyea area could benefit from improved telecommunication and electrical services.

Visual Quality: The visual quality of the project area could be affected by the above-ground placement of pedestals and distribution closures.

Air Quality: Local air quality could be affected by the limited use of motorized tools and heavy equipment to excavate the trench. Air quality could also be affected if Dyea residents change from diesel to electric generators.

National Historic Landmark: The resources and values of the Dyea and Chilkoot Trail National Historic Landmark could be affected by the proposed actions.

Issues Eliminated from Further Consideration

Cultural Resources: Cultural resources within the road right-of-way would not be affected by excavation associated with the installation of an underground power line and telecommunications cable by AP&T inside the park boundary. Because the project area has been surveyed in the past and no cultural resources were identified, much of it is outside of the historic Dyea townsite boundary, and the area has been previously disturbed by road development and maintenance, cultural resources are not expected to be affected by the proposed actions.

Floodplains: Although the project area is within the Taiya River and West Creek floodplain, the alternatives would not impact the floodplain. The installation of underground lines adjacent to the Dyea Road does not fit into one of the three classes of actions requiring a Floodplain Statement of Findings (NPS DO-77 Floodplain Management). The Taiya River is a fairly dynamic fluvial system with frequent lateral channel migrations. The current river alignment in the project area is a single stable channel (documented in its current location for at least 54 years). Several abandoned side channels (now densely revegetated) can be viewed in the project area. Whether these old channels were abandoned naturally (due to glacial rebound or lateral migration) or as a result of human actions is uncertain. The proposed action would not occur in the most active area of the floodplain but future flooding of the site is possible given the dynamic nature of the fluvial system. Placement of the underground lines on the west side of the road through most of the project area would protect them somewhat from scour and damage if flooding of the project area were to occur. The underground lines that would be used are a filled-cable with water blocking to prevent damage if lines become submerged during flooding. Therefore, impacts on the underground lines from flooding are not expected.

Wetlands: There are no wetlands on the site of the proposed project, thus no impact to wetlands would occur.

Threatened and Endangered Species: There are no known federal or state listed threatened or endangered species, federal candidate species, or state-listed species of special concern within the project area (USFWS 2002).

Wilderness: There is no Congressionally designated wilderness within the park. A wilderness suitability analysis for the Chilkoot Trail and White Pass Units of Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park was completed in 1988 and reviewed in the park's GMP (1996). No block of land was found suitable due to the lack of minimal acreage. Consequently, no effects on wilderness would occur.

Subsistence: Subsistence activities in or adjacent to the project area would not be affected by the alternatives (see Appendix A for the ANILCA Section 810 subsistence evaluation).

Executive Order 12898, Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low Income Populations: This order requires all federal agencies to identify and address disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of their programs and policies on minorities and low-income populations and communities. This project would not result in any changes in the socioeconomic environment of the project area, and, therefore, would not be expected to have any direct or indirect impacts to minority or low-income populations or communities.

Fisheries and Water Resources: Although the project area is adjacent to the Taiya River and West Creek, proposed activities would have no effect on water resources. Silt fencing would be installed near the Taiya River and West Creek to ensure that soil excavation in these areas would not result in sedimentation or other impacts to water resources.

PERMITS AND APPROVALS NECESSARY TO IMPLEMENT THE PROJECT

Table 1 outlines the permits and approvals needed to issue the Right-of-Way permit, including the assessment of subsurface characteristics.

Table 1: Environmental Permits and Approvals for Project Completion

| Required Permit/Approval | Regulatory Agency | Authority | Description |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Project possibly affecting historical or archeological sites (Cultural Resource Concurrence) | State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) | National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 | For any federal project the SHPO must concur that cultural resources would not be adversely affected. The SHPO concurred that cultural resources would not be adversely affected. |
| Projects that would possibly have an effect on coastal resources (Alaska Coastal Management Program) | State of Alaska Division of Governmental Coordination | Alaska Coastal Management Act of 1977 | The ACMP requires that projects in Alaska's coastal zone be reviewed and found consistent with statewide standards of the ACMP. |

ALTERNATIVES INCLUDING THE PROPOSED ACTION

NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE

Under the No Action Alternative, the NPS would not issue the right-of-way permit.

PROPOSED ACTION ALTERNATIVE

Under the Proposed Action Alternative, the NPS would issue a right-of-way permit to the Alaska Power and Telephone Company (AP&T) to install, operate, and perform continued routine maintenance on a 7.2 kilovolt single phase underground power line and a 50-pair telecommunications cable with a 10 foot-wide right-of-way in the Chilkoot Trail Unit of Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park (the park) in Skagway, Alaska. The 10 foot-wide right-of-way would encompass about 5 feet of land either side of the center of the power and telecommunications lines. The right-of-way permit would be granted along existing gravel and paved roads that cross National Park Service (NPS) lands and provide access to private land within and adjacent to the park. The project area within federally owned lands is located in Township 27S and Range 59E, Sections 15 and 22, CRM beginning north of the Taiya River bridge on the State Route 299520.

The section of the underground power line and telecommunications cable to be permitted by the NPS would run from the north side of the Taiya River Steel Bridge and terminate at the south end of the West Creek Bridge (approximately one mile in length). From this main line, underground lines would also be run to several parcels of private property. These sections of the utility easement occur on lands managed by the NPS. The work would consist of excavation of a trench parallel to and immediately adjacent to the existing roadways using a small track hoe or a Case 580 backhoe and a small Cat for cleanup. Trenching would occur generally within 40 feet of the centerline of the roads. The trenches would be approximately 1-2 feet wide, and 3-4 feet deep. The underground lines would be installed on the west side of Dyea Road for the southern 9/10 of the project area and on the east side of the road for the northern portion.

Cable junction pedestals that are 36 inches by 36 inches by 36 inches and are painted munsel green (dark green) per National Electrical Manufacturers Association (NEMA) standards would be installed at approximately 8 locations in the road corridor. The project proposal indicates that no base units/transformers would be installed on federally owned lands. Installation of the power line would occur in the fall of 2002 and require 4-5 weeks for completion. The underground lines that would be used are a filled-cable with water blocking to prevent damage if lines become submerged during flooding. The expected lifespan of such lines is 25 years. Routine maintenance would involve only the pedestals and would not require excavation or work on the buried lines. The potential for damage to underground lines would be highly unlikely from natural events but possible from human error (i.e., excavation with heavy equipment for unrelated projects).

Mitigation Measures:

- Silt fences would be required for excavation (during initial construction and subsequent maintenance activities) immediately adjacent to the Taiya River and West Creek to control erosion/sedimentation and protect water resources.
- An NPS cultural resource specialist would be present throughout the installation of the power line to ensure that important cultural resources are not impacted. Should unknown resources be uncovered during the implementation of ground disturbing activities within the project areas, work would be stopped in the discovery area, and the NPS would consult according to 36 CFR 800.11 and, as appropriate, provisions of the Native American Graves Protection and

Repatriation Act of 1992. Any artifacts recovered from park property would be accessioned, cataloged, preserved, and stored in compliance with NPS-28.

ENVIRONMENTALLY PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

In accordance with Director's Order-12, *Conservation Planning, Environmental Impact Analysis, and Decision-making*, the NPS is required to identify the "environmentally preferred alternative" in all environmental documents, including EAs. The environmentally preferred alternative is determined by applying the criteria suggested in the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, which is guided by the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ).

Generally, these criteria mean the environmentally preferable alternative is the alternative that causes the least damage to the biological and physical environment and that best protects, preserves, and enhances historic, cultural, and natural resources (Federal Register, 1981).

The "No Action Alternative" is the environmentally preferred alternative, because no excavation or vegetation clearing would occur under this alternative. However, the "No Action Alternative" is environmentally preferred over the "Proposed Action Alternative" by only the smallest of margins. The fact that the proposed actions would occur within a previously disturbed road corridor minimizes the resulting environmental impacts. On the other hand, continuing with diesel-based energy sources under the No Action Alternative would result in impacts such as fuel spills and noise.

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

Natural Soundscape: The project area is used primarily for summer recreation and supports very few year-round residents. Although it is a predominantly natural area, the natural soundscape is intermittently impacted during the summer season by noise associated with automobiles, recreationists, and the use of diesel-powered generators.

Vegetation: Mostly non-native grasses and forbs grow within the project area (40 feet either side of the road centerline). Native species present in the project area include fireweed, goatsbeard, wild rose, and horsetail. Recreational uses and road maintenance activities have already affected vegetation in the project area. Off-road vehicle use is common on unofficial trails that parallel the Dyea Road. Vegetation is maintained in an early successional stage due to regular mowing.

Soils: Soils in the area are characterized as alluvial and marine deposits overlying compact glacial deposits. Detailed information on soils is limited. Local bedrock formations consist of igneous and metamorphic rock.

Wildlife: Wildlife occurring in the area include river otter, red squirrel, black bear, grizzly bear, bald eagle, varied thrush, common raven, chestnut-backed chickadee, northern goshawk, weasel, sapsucker, and small rodents. Disturbance and displacement of wildlife currently occurs in the project area due to the noise associated with automobiles and recreationists; therefore, the road corridor is unlikely to be important wildlife habitat. Noise from the operation of diesel generators may disturb wildlife and cause them temporary displacement and/or permanent avoidance of adjacent habitats.

Recreation/Visitor Use: The park's management objectives for the Chilkoot Trail/Dyea area are described in the GMP (1996): "The Chilkoot Trail/Dyea Unit is intended to offer an intermediate look into the past. Some development and visitor services will be provided to assist the visitor in

understanding the events that took place in the valley and the changes that have occurred since the gold rush, yet provide protection to remnant townsites. Access to Dyea Flats area will be provided along with small picnic and primitive camping areas.” Visitation and recreation in the project area is highest in summer when people come to view wildlife, hike the Chilkoot Trail, explore the intertidal areas, camp, and view the area’s rich cultural resources. The actual number of visitors to the area is unknown. Some visitors may be adversely affected by the noise of local diesel generators.

Park Operations and Management: The park service operates a ranger station and employee housing facilities in the Dyea area. Currently the park relies on propane and diesel generators for lighting, heat, refrigeration, and electricity. An unreliable radio phone is available for communications with park headquarters and police dispatch in the town of Skagway.

Visual Quality: The visual quality of the project area includes the Dyea Road corridor. The portion of the Dyea Road that traverses the park is a raised, 2 lane, chip-sealed surfaced road without shoulders. Vegetation is mowed from 20 to 40 feet on both sides of the road. Off-road vehicle trails parallel the road in several places. No utility lines or poles are present. Physical and biological components of the corridor are described above.

Air Quality: Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park is currently classified as a Class II airshed under the provisions of the Clean Air Act amendments (42 USC 7401 et. seq.). The park is managed to attain the highest air quality levels and visibility standards consistent with the Clean Air Act designation and mandates specified by enabling legislation. Significant generators of airborne pollutants in the vicinity of the park include exhaust emissions from cruise ships, homes, businesses, and motor vehicles. A pilot air quality study was conducted in the park from 1998-1999. The concentrations of chemical elements in lichen tissues from the Klondike Park - city of Skagway area were used to assess local air quality (Furbish et al. 2000). The Klondike-Skagway area exceeded air pollution indication thresholds for the USDA-Forest Service Pacific Northwest and Alaska Regions for heavy metals, sulfur and other elements. Direct measurements of ambient air quality are needed to determine whether the high levels of heavy metals seen in this study are the result of past exposures or current sources.

National Historic Landmark: The town of Dyea and the Chilkoot Trail were designated a National Historic Landmark on June 16, 1978. National Historic Landmarks are nationally significant historic places designated by the Secretary of the Interior because they possess exceptional value or quality in illustrating or interpreting the heritage of the United States. The NPS’ primary management goal for the Dyea and Chilkoot Trail National Historic Landmark is to encourage the preservation, protection, and public appreciation of the cultural values and resources present within (NPS 1996).

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE

Natural Soundscape:

General Analysis. The natural soundscape in the park would not be impacted in the short-term by noise associated with installation of power and telecommunications lines. Noise from automobiles, recreationists, and the use of diesel generators would continue to impact the natural soundscape over the long-term. However, the adverse effect of this noise on the natural soundscape would be minor, because the noise is intermittent, localized, and occurs mainly during summer months.

Conclusions. There would be minor adverse long-term impacts on the natural soundscape. Because impacts would be minor, there would be no impairment of park resources and values associated with this topic.

Vegetation:

General Analysis. Since the NPS would not issue the Right-of-Way permit for the installation of an underground power line to AP&T under this alternative, vegetation present in the utility corridor would not be impacted.

Conclusions. There would be no impacts on vegetation; therefore, there would be no impairment of park resources and values associated with this topic.

Soils:

General Analysis. No impact to soils would occur under this alternative as no ground disturbance is proposed.

Conclusions. There would be no impacts on soils; therefore, there would be no impairment of park resources and values associated with this topic.

Wildlife:

General Analysis. Wildlife occurring in the area such as river otter, red squirrel, black bear, grizzly bear, bald eagle, varied thrush, common raven, chestnut-backed chickadee, northern goshawk, weasel, sapsucker, and rodents would not be disturbed by the use of heavy equipment to install the power line under this alternative because no construction would take place. As described under the “Affected Environment”, disturbance and displacement of wildlife currently occurs in the projects area due to the noise associated with automobiles and recreationists; therefore, the road corridor is unlikely to be important wildlife habitat. Existing noise from diesel generators would continue to have the potential to displace wildlife from adjacent habitats. This adverse effect would be of negligible to minor intensity, however, because the noise potentially causing displacement would continue to occur on an intermittent basis mainly during the summer and would affect wildlife within relatively small areas close to the generators.

Conclusions. Negligible adverse long-term impacts on wildlife would continue as a result of noise from diesel generators. There would be no new impacts on wildlife. Because continuing impacts would be negligible; there would be no impairment of park resources and values associated with this topic.

Recreation/Visitor Use:

General Analysis. Visitors to the park would not be impacted by noise and inconvenience associated with installation of the power and telecommunications lines; however, they would continue to hear the sound of diesel generators in the park and be unable to . Noise from the use of existing diesel generators may continue to adversely affect some visitors. However, the long-term adverse effects on recreation/visitor use would be minor because the generator noise would continue to be intermittent, localized, and occur mainly during the summer months. Lack of public telephones would also continue to adversely impact recreation/visitor use in the long-term.

Conclusions. Minor adverse long-term impacts on visitors would continue as a result of noise from diesel generators and lack of public telephones. There would be no additional impacts on recreation/visitor use. Because impacts would be negligible, there would be no impairment of park resources and values associated with this topic.

Park Operations and Management:

General Analysis. Park operations and management would continue at the current level and conditions under this alternative. Park operations and management in the Dyea area would continue to

be affected by the lack of reliable power and communications. This existing impact is of minor intensity, negative, long-term, and site-specific, because the lack of reliable communications would continue to affect the ability of the NPS to respond to emergency situations in the Dyea area especially in summer.

Conclusions. There would be no additional impacts on park operations/management. Existing adverse impacts would continue to be minor over the long term. Because the impacts would be minor; there would be no impairment of park resources and values associated with this topic.

Visual Quality:

General Analysis. The visual quality of the project area would be unchanged under this alternative as the above-ground placement of pedestals and distribution closures would not occur.

Conclusions. There would be no impacts on visual quality; therefore, there would be no impairment of park resources and values associated with this topic.

Air Quality:

General Analysis. Local air quality would be unaffected under this alternative, since existing conditions would continue. Currently, the use of diesel-powered generators produces exhaust emissions including nitrous oxides, carbon monoxide, and hydrocarbons which adversely affect local air quality. Because there are relatively few diesel-generators currently in use in Dyea, existing impacts would be minor.

Conclusions. Existing adverse impacts would continue over the long-term; however, there would be no impairment of park resources and values associated with this topic.

National Historic Landmark:

General Analysis. The Dyea and Chilkoot Trail National Historic Landmark would be unchanged under this alternative as the installation of the underground lines and above-ground pedestals and distribution closures would not occur.

Conclusions. There would be no impacts on the National Historic Landmark; therefore, there would be no impairment of park resources and values.

Cumulative Impacts Analysis: Cumulative impacts are defined as the *incremental impacts* on the environment resulting from adding the proposed action to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions (also referred to as regional actions), including those taken by both federal and nonfederal agencies, as well as actions undertaken by individuals. Cumulative impacts may result from singularly minor but collectively significant actions taking place over a period of time (CEQ Sec 1508.7).

Past, present, and reasonable foreseeable future actions impacting the issues addressed above within the Dyea area, include the following:

- Once a thriving town of approximately 8,000 inhabitants during the height of the 1898 gold rush, Dyea was essentially abandoned by 1903. Currently, less than 50 people claim residency there. With the creation of the park in 1976, infrastructure improvements, including road upgrades, have gradually occurred. It is expected that private and city property will eventually be developed as primary residences. Most of these parcels occur on lands not occupied by the historic Dyea townsite; therefore, cultural resources are not expected in these areas.
- Long-term cultural resource management programs identified in the 1996 GMP include the following: 1) the cultural landscape at Dyea would be restored (i.e., selected townsite streets

and ruins, now overgrown with vegetation, would be cleared); the tidal flats would be managed to protect the remaining historic Dyea wharf features; and the Taiya River erosion would be evaluated and a plan to prevent additional loss of cultural resources would be developed.

- The effect of erosion in the Taiya River floodplain on the historic townsite has been significant. Likewise, glacial rebound continues to shape the landscape. A rising land mass and reclamation of the open tide zone by invading trees and shrubs are altering the visual setting of the area. Large Sitka spruce, cottonwoods, and alders cover the site, and a thick layer of duff (decaying vegetation) covers much of the historic town. Encroaching vegetation and contemporary uses of the area have resulted in a spider web of roads and trails that mask the original grid and layout of the historic townsite of Dyea.
- Off-road vehicle use is common on unofficial trails that parallel the Dyea road. Recreational uses and road maintenance activities have already affected natural and cultural resources in the project area.
- Alaska Department of Transportation has completed bank stabilization projects along the Dyea Road near the Taiya River inlet.

Although human influence has been extensive in the Dyea area beginning in the gold rush era, the area is still relatively undeveloped. Services and recreational opportunities for visitors and residents are fairly primitive although motorized recreational activities are increasing in popularity. Existing impacts to natural and cultural resources in the area include loss of upland forest and estuarine meadow habitats to development; altered floodplain processes due to facilities and infrastructure within the 100 year floodplain; disturbance to wildlife from traffic and people; noise and light disturbance from facilities; introduction of non-native, invasive plant species; and destruction/theft of cultural resources. Regardless of the above past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions, there would be no cumulative (incremental) impacts on the issues described above, under this alternative, as no new actions would be taken.

Conclusions. There would be no incremental (cumulative) impacts associated with the No Action Alternative to the issue topics identified. All impacts would be associated with past, present, and future actions.

PROPOSED ACTION ALTERNATIVE

Natural Soundscape:

General Analysis. Although the natural soundscape in the park would be impacted to a minor degree in the short-term (up to 5 weeks) by noise associated with installation and construction of the lines, existing long-term impacts from diesel generators would probably diminish. Instead of relying on noisy diesel generators, Dyea residents would likely switch to quieter hydro-electric services, thus improving the area's natural soundscape. Because the existing noise from the generators is intermittent, occurs mainly during the summer, and affects a relatively small area close to the generators, the virtual elimination of this noise would be considered a minor long-term benefit on the natural soundscape.

Conclusions. Overall, the proposed action would result in minor, short-term adverse impacts, but beneficial, localized, long-term impacts to the natural soundscape. The nature of these impacts would not result in the impairment of park resources and values associated with this topic.

Vegetation:

General Analysis. This alternative requires the disturbance of primarily exotic and highly disturbed vegetation (grasses and forbs); within approximately one linear mile not to exceed 40 feet in width either side of the center line, paralleling the Dyea Road. Ground disturbance associated with the power line installation could increase the potential for weed spread and establishment within the project area. However, given the previously disturbed nature of the site, it is unlikely that the proposed action would alter the structure or composition of the vegetative community present. Additionally, the park periodically monitors developed areas for exotic and invasive plants and implements control actions if necessary. Future maintenance of the lines could also result in negligible impacts to roadside vegetation if vegetation is cleared to access the pedestals. Altogether, because the affected area is small and already greatly disturbed, and because thousands of acres of high quality, native vegetation would remain intact, adverse impacts on vegetation would be negligible both in the short-term and long-term.

Conclusions. Overall, the proposed action would result in negligible, adverse, site-specific, short-term and long-term impacts to vegetation. The nature of these impacts would not result in the impairment of park resources and values associated with this topic.

Soils:

General Analysis. Although ground disturbance would occur under this alternative (approximately one linear mile not to exceed 40 feet in width, paralleling the Dyea Road), adverse impacts to soils in the project area would be negligible over both the short-term and long-term for several reasons. Significant erosion is unlikely given the relatively flat topography and lack of steep slopes on this river terrace site. Off-road vehicle use is common on unofficial trails that parallel the Dyea road. This recreational off-road vehicle use, as well as on-going road maintenance activities have already greatly compacted and otherwise disturbed soils in the project area.

Conclusions. Overall, both the short-term and long-term impacts to soils from this alternative would be negligible, adverse, and site-specific given existing conditions in the project area. The nature of these impacts would not result in the impairment of park resources and values associated with this topic.

Wildlife:

General Analysis. Wildlife occurring in the area such as river otter, red squirrel, black bear, grizzly bear, bald eagle, varied thrush, common raven, chestnut-backed chickadee, northern goshawk, weasel, sapsucker, and rodents would be disturbed by the use of heavy equipment to install the power line under this alternative. Wildlife could be temporarily displaced from the project area while construction is occurring (up to 5 weeks). Normal habitat use and movement patterns would likely continue at times of day when construction activities are not occurring (evenings, night, early morning). Work is not scheduled to occur during the sensitive breeding season. Wildlife use of the project area has already been affected by existing human disturbance in the area. However, existing disturbance from diesel generators would likely diminish once AP&T supplied electricity is available and residents switch to this power source (see “No Action Alternative”). As described under the “Affected Environment” an unknown amount of disturbance and displacement of wildlife currently occurs in the project area due to the noise associated with automobiles and recreationists; therefore, the road corridor is unlikely to be important wildlife habitat. For all of these reasons, adverse impacts on wildlife from the proposed actions would be negligible and short-term.

Conclusions. The temporary nature of the potential impacts to wildlife would result in negligible, adverse, localized impacts to wildlife. The nature of these impacts would not result in the impairment of park resources and values associated with this topic.

Recreation/Visitor Use:

General Analysis. Visitors to the park would be impacted by noise and inconvenience associated with installation of the power line; however, these effects would be negligible and short-term (the 5 weeks of construction) as work would be scheduled in the fall when visitation is low. Work within the park would not result in traffic delays, but noise and the visual perturbation associated with excavation could detract from the visitor's experience of the park briefly as they travel the Dyea road.

Construction would occur after the peak summer visitation season, so fewer numbers of visitors would be affected. Long-term minor benefits to recreation/visitor use would result from the diminished use of diesel generators in the park as residents switched to cleaner, quieter, hydro-electric power.

Conclusions. In the short-term, impacts would be adverse but negligible. Over the long-term, the proposed action would result in minor, beneficial, localized, long-term impacts to recreation/visitor use. The nature of these impacts would not result in the impairment of park resources and values associated with this topic.

Park Operations and Management:

General Analysis. Park operations and management would benefit from the extension of power and telephone to Dyea. This new power source would be much more reliable, clean, quiet, and easy to use than current diesel generators and propane powered appliances. Likewise, the potential for diesel fuel spills would be diminished. Similarly, park communications would be greatly improved with the availability of improved telecommunications services (telephones and computers). With the improvement of communications in Dyea, the NPS could ensure greater safety and service to park visitors. Reliable power and phone would also improve the efficiency of NPS staff in maintaining NPS facilities.

Conclusions. Overall, the proposed action would result in minor, beneficial, localized, long-term impacts to the park operations and management. The nature of these impacts would not result in the impairment of park resources and values.

Visual Quality:

General Analysis. The visual quality of the project area would be affected by the above-ground placement of pedestals and distribution closures. Short-term effects to the visual quality of the project area would occur during placement of the underground power line. On-going maintenance of the power line would likewise affect the visual quality of the project area. The long-term impact (i.e., the visual impact of the above-ground pedestals and distribution closures) would be minimized by the relatively small size of these features (making them easily concealed by vegetation) and the green color (providing camouflage). Because the lines would be placed underground in a previously disturbed area adjacent to the existing road, impacts to the visual quality of the project area would be negligible.

Conclusions. Given the size and nature of the infrastructure to be installed, impacts to the visual quality of the project area would be negligible, negative, long-term and localized. The nature of these impacts would not result in the impairment of park resources and values.

Air Quality:

General Analysis. Local air quality would be affected by the limited use of motorized tools and heavy equipment to excavate the trench; however, these negative impacts would be negligible because they would occur only for short periods of time during the 4 to 5 week construction period. Local air quality could potentially be improved if Dyea residents change from diesel to electric generators because airborne pollutants would be reduced.

Conclusions. In the short-term, impacts would be adverse but negligible. Over the long-term this alternative would have negligible to minor, positive, localized impacts to air quality in Dyea. The

nature of these impacts would not result in the impairment of park resources and values associated with this topic.

National Historic Landmark:

General Analysis. The Dyea and Chilkoot Trail National Historic Landmark would be affected by the above-ground placement of pedestals and distribution closures. Short-term effects would occur during installation of the underground lines. On-going maintenance of the power line would likewise affect the National Historic Landmark. The long-term impact (i.e., the visual impact of the above-ground pedestals and distribution closures) would be minimized by the relatively small size of these features (making them easily concealed by vegetation) and the green color (providing camouflage). Because the lines would be placed underground in a previously disturbed area adjacent to the existing road, impacts to the Dyea and Chilkoot Trail National Historic Landmark would be negligible.

Conclusions. Given the small size and nature of the infrastructure to be installed, impact to the Dyea and Chilkoot Trail National Historic Landmark would be negligible, negative, short and long-term, localized impacts to the The nature of these impacts would not result in the impairment of park resources and values associated with this topic.

Cumulative Impacts Analysis:

General Analysis. As noted in the "No Action Alternative," past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions have impacted the above mentioned issues, in many ways. These actions and related impacts would not differ under this "Proposed Action Alternative." Additional impacts resulting from implementing the "Proposed Action Alternative" would be negligible to minor for all impact topics (see above analysis). Therefore, the cumulative impacts of implementing the "Proposed Action Alternative" in addition to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions would be minor at most for all impact topics

Conclusions. The cumulative (incremental) impacts of implementing the "Proposed Action Alternative" in addition to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions would be minor at most for all impact topics.

CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

The following agencies, organizations, and individuals were consulted in the preparation of this document.

Federal Agencies/Individuals Consulted

National Park Service, Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park

Bruce Noble, Superintendent
Theresa Thibault, Chief of Resources
Karl Gurcke, Cultural Resource Program Manager
Debbie Sanders, Museum Curator
Reed McCluskey, Chief Ranger
David Eslinger, Chief of Interpretation
Meg Hahr, Natural Resource Program Manager

National Park Service, Alaska Support Office

Joan Darnell, Team Manager, Environmental Resources
Heather Rice, Environmental Protection Specialist
Tim Hudson, Environmental Planning, Design, and Maintenance
Chuck Gilbert, Lands Specialist
Bruce Greenwood, Subsistence Specialist

National Park Service, Geologic Resources Division

Hal Pranger, Geomorphologist, Denver, CO

National Park Service, Water Resources Division

Gary Smillie, Hydrologist, Fort Collins, CO

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APPENDIX A

ANILCA SECTION 810 (a) SUMMARY EVALUATION AND FINDINGS

I. INTRODUCTION

This section was prepared to comply with Title VIII, Section 810 of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA). It summarizes the evaluations of potential restrictions to subsistence activities, which could result from the proposal to issue a permit to the Alaska Power and Telephone Company (AP&T) to install, operate, and perform continued routine maintenance on a 7.2 kilovolt single phase underground power line and a 50-pair telecommunications cable in the Chilkoot Trail Unit of Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park (the park) in Skagway, Alaska.

II. THE EVALUATION PROCESS

Section 810(a) of ANILCA states:

“In determining whether to withdraw, reserve, lease, or otherwise permit the use, occupancy, or disposition of public lands ... the head of the federal agency ... over such lands ... shall evaluate the effect of such use, occupancy, or disposition on subsistence uses and needs, the availability of other lands for the purposes sought to be achieved, or disposition of public lands needed for subsistence purposes. No such withdrawal, reservation, lease, permit, or other use, occupancy or disposition of such lands which would significantly restrict subsistence uses shall be effected until the head of such Federal agency -

- (1) gives notice to the appropriate State agency and the appropriate local committees and regional councils established pursuant to Section 805;
- (2) gives notice of, and holds, a hearing in the vicinity of the area involved;
- (3) determines that (A) such a significant restriction of subsistence uses is necessary, consistent with sound management principles for the utilization of the public lands, (B) the proposed activity will involve the minimal amount of public lands necessary to accomplish the purposes of such use, occupancy, or other disposition, and (C) reasonable steps will be taken to minimize adverse impacts upon subsistence uses and resources resulting from such actions.”

ANILCA created new conservation system units and additions to existing units of the national park system in Alaska. Section 816 of ANILCA prohibits the taking of wildlife in national parks and monuments except as specifically authorized. Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park was established in 1976 before the passage of ANILCA. ANILCA and NPS regulations do not authorize subsistence use on federal lands within Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park.

The potential for significant restriction must be evaluated for the proposed action’s effect upon “... subsistence uses and needs, the availability of other lands for the purposes sought to be achieved and other alternatives which would reduce or eliminate the use.”

III. PROPOSED ACTION ON FEDERAL LANDS

The National Park Service (NPS) is considering issuing a Right-of-Way permit to the Alaska Power and Telephone Company (AP&T) to install, operate, and perform continued routine maintenance on a 7.2 Kv single phase underground power line along a 10 foot utility easement in the Chilkoot Trail Unit

of Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park (the park) in Skagway, Alaska. The utility easement would be granted along existing gravel and paved roads that cross National Park Service (NPS) lands and provide access to private land within and adjacent to the park.

The APT project has been permitted by the State Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (Permit Number 3-299520-02-13, dated April 8, 2002). The power line extension would cross properties of various ownership, including the State, the City of Skagway, the NPS, and private entities (see project area map below).

The purpose of the proposed project is to provide reliable electrical power and telecommunications service to property owners in the Dyea area, some of whom are within Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park boundaries, and all of whom reside within the Chilkoot Trail and Dyea National Historic Landmark. Property owners in Dyea (including the NPS) currently rely on diesel generators for their electrical needs and unreliable radio phones for communication. Diesel generators produce noise and exhaust emissions including nitrous oxides, carbon monoxide, and hydrocarbons. The proposed AP&T power line extension would not only provide reliable telecommunication and electrical services to the residents of Dyea, it would also result in the reduction of noise and exhaust emissions associated with diesel generator use; thus benefiting local air quality and the natural soundscape.

This analysis addresses two alternatives: the “No Action” alternative and the “Proposed Action” alternative. A full discussion of the alternatives and anticipated effects can be found in the Environmental Assessment (EA) for this project.

IV. AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

A summary of the affected environment pertinent to subsistence is presented here. For a comprehensive description, see the “Affected Environment” and “Environmental Consequences” sections of the EA. The Resource Management Plan (RMP) contains additional descriptions of the environment of Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park (NPS 2000).

Federal Lands within Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park are closed to subsistence uses. Other federal lands adjoining the park in the Tongass National Forest are open for subsistence uses. Regional subsistence activities that take place include hunting, fishing, trapping, berry picking, and plant gathering. Black bear, moose, fish, furbearers, small mammals, waterfowl, berries, other edible plants, and wood constitute the major subsistence resources used by local residents in Unit 1D.

V. SUBSISTENCE USES AND NEEDS EVALUATION

To determine the potential impact on existing subsistence activities, three evaluation criteria were analyzed relative to existing subsistence resources that could be impacted.

- the potential to reduce important subsistence fish and wildlife populations by (a) reductions in numbers; (b) redistribution of subsistence resources; or (c) habitat losses;
- what effect the action might have on subsistence fisherman or hunter access;
- the potential for the action to increase fisherman or hunter competition for subsistence resources.

- 1) The potential to reduce populations:

The “No Action” alternative is the status quo. It does not involve issuance of the permit by the National Park Service, and consequently has no potential to reduce populations of subsistence resources through the actual reduction of numbers, the redistribution of resources, or habitat loss beyond the existing level resulting from the existing level of development of the project area.

The “Proposed Action” alternative involves issuance of a permit by the National Park Service to AP&T for the extension of power and phone service to the Dyea area. Installation of the underground lines and routine maintenance will affect only previously disturbed areas along established roads. No subsistence is known to occur in these areas. The extension of power and phone service to the area is not expected to reduce or redistribute subsistence resources. Wildlife and habitats would be subjected to minimal temporary impacts and disturbances caused by these improvements. The potential impacts would be temporary and would not reduce wildlife populations or their habitat.

2) Restriction of Access:

The “No Action” alternative is the status quo. It does not involve the issuance of the permit by the National Park Service to AP&T. Consequently, it will not lead to an increase in restrictions to access.

The “Proposed Action” alternative involves the issuance of a permit by the National Park Service to AP&T for the extension of power and phone service to the Dyea area. The rights of access for subsistence harvest on NPS lands are granted by section 811 of ANILCA. The park is managed according to legislative mandates, NPS management policies, and the Code of Federal Regulations. This alternative would not in any way affect the access to resources by local subsistence users. Consequently, no restrictions on access to resources by subsistence users are proposed.

3) Increase in Competition:

The “No Action” alternative is the status quo. It does not involve the issuance of the permit by the National Park Service to AP&T. Consequently, it will not lead to an increase in competition.

The “Proposed Action” alternative involves the issuance of a permit by the National Park Service to AP&T for the extension of power and phone service to the Dyea area. This alternative would not produce any increases in competition for subsistence resources. The continued implementation of provisions of ANILCA Title VIII should ensure a subsistence priority on federal lands within the region.

VI. AVAILABILITY OF OTHER LANDS

The availability of other lands outside and within the park have been considered in the proposed actions. Limiting the installation of the underground power line to the existing road corridor would minimize the potential impacts to cultural and natural resources in the project area. The proposed actions are consistent with NPS mandates. Because the proposed actions occur on federal lands that are not available for subsistence use, the proposed actions do not affect the availability of federal lands for subsistence use.

VII. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

No alternatives other than the “No Action” and “Proposed Action” alternatives were considered.

VIII. FINDINGS

This analysis concludes that the “Proposed Action” alternative will not result in a significant restriction of subsistence uses. The “No Action” alternative will also not result in a significant restriction of subsistence uses.

REFERENCES:

- NPS. 1996. General Management Plan/Development Concept Plan and Environmental Impact Statement, Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park, Skagway, Alaska.
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