

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**  
**Property Acquisition in Kotzebue, Alaska**  
**Western Arctic Parklands**

The National Park Service (NPS) has prepared an environmental assessment (EA) on the purchase of 1.0 acres of land, and associated existing structures, in Kotzebue, Alaska. The property is located on the west end of Third Avenue (specifically, Lots 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9, Block 11, US Survey 2863A), and will be purchased from the NANA Regional Corporation and private individuals. NPS purchase of Lot #9 from the NANA Regional Corporation assumes the Corporation will have already completed a land exchange with the Alaska Department of Transportation (AKDOT), transferring Lot #9 from AKDOT, its current owner, to the NANA Regional Corporation.

The purchase will include the following existing structures:

- the 19,035 square-foot NANA Museum building,
- an 1,800-2,000 square foot mobile home, and
- a 2000-gallon above-ground fuel storage tank.

The City of Kotzebue currently owns the alley that runs through the above property. The City was approached about the possible abandonment of a segment of the alley for incorporation into a re-platted parcel upon which a Heritage and Cultural Center would be constructed. The City indicated that it was likely that such an application would be approved assuming all necessary utility requirements for easements could be met. The alley is 20 feet wide and intersects with Second Avenue at an acute angle so the portion that would be dedicated would vary in length from 139 to 224 feet (0.08 ac). Utility easements for water and overhead electrical are included within the alley and in all likelihood will be relocated so that any improvements are not restricted. The alley contains flat, grassy terrain and is completely free of any buildings.

In order to determine development constraints for future design and construction on the site, the NPS will assess subsurface characteristics such as soils and archeological resources. In late summer 2002, the NPS will excavate sections of the property to identify soil types, as well as the extent of any archeological artifacts, features, and/or human remains. At this time, the exact location and methods for these excavations is not known, so for the purpose of this analysis, it's assumed that these tests will be conducted over the entire property.

### **Public Involvement**

The EA had a 30-day public comment period beginning June 21, 2002 and ending July 20, 2002. 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 11 agencies, organizations, and individuals. No comments were received from the public.

## **Alternatives**

The EA evaluated the following two alternatives: (1) a "No Action" alternative under which the NPS would not purchase the property; and (2) a "Proposed Action" alternative under which the NPS would purchase the property as described above.

## **Mitigating Measures**

Mitigation to be taken in conjunction with implementing the "Proposed Action" alternative includes:

- Any hazardous materials identified on the properties would be removed prior to property acquisition by the NPS.

## **Environmentally Preferred Alternatives**

The "No Action Alternative" is the environmentally preferred alternative, because no excavation or vegetation clearing would occur under this alternative for subsurface site assessments. However, the "No Action Alternative" is environmentally preferred over the "Proposed Action Alternative" by only the smallest of margins. The fact that the property is already developed minimizes the environmental impacts of further disturbance resulting from proposed acquisition and subsurface site assessments and allows for the assumption that impacts under the "Proposed Action Alternative" and the "No Action Alternative" are not very different.

## **Environmental Consequences of the "Proposed Action" Alternative**

As documented in the EA, the NPS has determined that the "Proposed Action" alternative can be implemented with no significant adverse effect to natural or cultural resources. The only resource impacted by the proposed actions would be vegetation, including wetland vegetation. These impacts are described below.

### **Impacts to Vegetation, Including Wetlands**

Vegetation would not be impacted directly by the proposed land acquisition. However, for the purpose of the environmental analysis, it was assumed the entire parcel would be cleared to conduct subsurface resource assessments needed for future design and construction on the site. As a result of this land clearing, 0.23 acres of non-jurisdictional palustrine unconsolidated bottom, cobble/gravel, seasonally flooded wetland beneath the NANA Museum building would be lost. However, this wetland has already been severely compromised and provides minimal wetland functions. Because of its current condition, draining or filling this wetland as part of an assessment of subsurface characteristics would, for all purposes, have no additional wetland impacts.

The only wetland impacts resulting from this proposal would be the loss of the 0.02 acres of jurisdictional palustrine emergent persistent saturated wetland on the extreme southern end of the property. Given the disturbed nature of this wetland and limited value in terms of functions served (see *Wetland Statement of Findings*), the permanent loss of this amount is considered a negligible adverse impact on wetland vegetation. Further support for this conclusion lies in the fact that the city of Kotzebue is surrounded by thousands of acres of intact, high quality, moist tundra vegetation, which is classified as wetland in Alaska (NPS 1994). To meet the requirements of Section 404 of the Federal Water Pollution Control Act of 1972, as amended in 1977 (Clean Water Act), a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Nationwide #6 Permit (Survey Activities) has been obtained for the assessment of subsurface characteristics (soils and archeological resources).

Less than half an acre of non-wetland vegetation would be lost as a result of the proposed actions; however, this loss would have no impacts on overall plant populations, due to the abundance of these types of opportunistic plant species throughout the Kotzebue area.

## **Decision**

The National Park Service has decided to select the "Proposed Action" alternative, which will involve the purchase of 1.0 acres of land and associated existing structures in Kotzebue, Alaska.

## **Rationale for the Decision**

Purchase of the 1.0 acres of land and associated structures will allow the NPS to increase its land holdings in Kotzebue to provide a site for a cultural and heritage center and, possibly, NPS and NANA administrative offices. (Actual construction of these facilities would require additional environmental documentation and public review.)

The 1986 General Management Plan for Cape Krusenstern National Monument (GMP) called for the construction of several new NPS facilities in Kotzebue, including a visitor contact facility, a museum, administrative offices, and equipment storage. A more recent Programmatic Needs Assessment completed in 2002 listed several other structures, including an improved maintenance building, warehouse storage, curatorial storage, and an employee bunkhouse (NPS 2002).

When considering new development, the 1986 GMP encouraged the NPS to comply with section 1306 of the 1980 Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA). Section 1306 authorizes the Secretary of Interior and Federal agencies to attempt to locate sites and facilities on Native lands in the vicinity of the park unit to the extent practicable and desirable. Toward this end, ANILCA authorizes the Secretary and other Federal agencies to "lease or acquire by purchase, donation, exchange, or any other method (except condemnation) real property (other than Federal land), office space, housing, and other necessary facilities." Acquisition of the NANA property specifically would fulfill this directive. More specifically, the GMP identified NANA as one of several possible cooperators in funding the construction and operating a museum in Kotzebue.

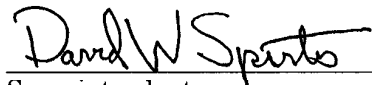
As indicated, the adverse impacts of the property acquisition will be negligible and will not result in an impairment of park resources that fulfill specific purposes identified in the establishing legislation or that are key to the natural or cultural integrity of the park.

Though it is the environmentally preferred alternative, the "No Action" alternative was not selected for implementation, because it would not meet the purpose of the project as described above.

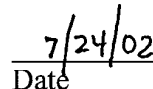
The "Proposed Action" alternative complies with the Endangered Species Act, the National Historic Preservation Act, and Executive Orders 11988 and 11990. There will be no significant restriction of subsistence activities as documented by the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act, Title VIII, Section 810 (a) Summary Evaluation and Findings.

I find that the environmentally preferred alternative 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), an environmental impact statement will not be prepared for the project.

Recommended:

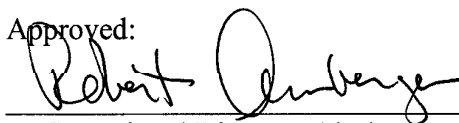


Superintendent,  
Western Arctic Parklands

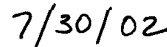


Date

Approved:



NPS, Regional Director, Alaska



Date