

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Klondike Gold Rush National
Historical Park
Alaska



Finding of No Significant Impact

Sheep Camp Campground Relocation

March 2006

Recommended: _____

3/09/2006

Superintendent, Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park Date

Approved: _____

3/10/06

Regional Director, Alaska

Date

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Sheep Camp Campground Relocation

Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park, Alaska March 2006

The National Park Service (NPS) prepared an environmental assessment (EA) to relocate the recreational Sheep Camp Campground and a portion of the Chilkoot Trail from their current flood-prone locations to nearby sites with reduced flood and erosion potential. Sheep Camp Campground is a primitive backcountry facility with twenty campsites (serving up to fifty campers per night during the peak season) located twelve miles up the rugged Chilkoot Trail in Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park. The campground lies immediately adjacent to the Taiya River, a dynamic glacial river prone to spontaneous channel migrations and shallow flooding. Since its construction in 1993, the campground has experienced frequent inundation from flood waters. It is located within the one to two year floodplain and is subject to periodic flooding during the summer visitor use season. A flood in 2002 created particularly unsafe conditions for Chilkoot Trail hikers and caused extensive damage to Sheep Camp facilities. Emergency flood remediation measures were taken in the spring of 2003 which involved replacement of the flood-damaged campsites, repair of a footbridge, rerouting of the Chilkoot Trail, and relocation of several pit toilets.

The purpose of the proposed project is to improve the safety of visitors hiking the Chilkoot Trail, alleviate sanitation concerns, eliminate further degradation of floodplain values, and enhance backcountry operations. Frequent flooding in the existing campground has impacted visitor safety and access in this popular backcountry area of the park. Relocation of the campground from the flood zone is necessary to provide the type and level of visitor services described in the park's General Management Plan for the Chilkoot Trail Unit.

Six parties provided comments during the EA public review period. Four parties provided substantive comments, and the NPS response to these comments is provided in the attachment to this Finding of No Significant Impact. No changes were made to the EA.

ALTERNATIVES

The EA evaluated two alternatives, the No Action Alternative and the Proposed Action Alternative.

No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative, no action would take place at the Sheep Camp Campground. Sheep Camp Campground would remain in its current location and the segment of the Chilkoot Trail south of the campground would not be relocated to a site outside of the active floodplain. Zig Zag Bridge would not be relocated to a more stable location.

Proposed Action Alternative

Under the Proposed Action Alternative, the NPS would relocate Sheep Camp campground and a portion of the Chilkoot Trail from the active floodplain. A footbridge known as “Zig Zag Bridge” that spans a newly occupied channel of the Taiya River would also be relocated to a more stable site approximately 1,230 feet upstream of its current location crossing a tributary to the Taiya River, Waterfall Creek.

Under the Proposed Action Alternative, Sheep Camp Campground would be relocated to a new site, approximately one mile north, adjacent to the Sheep Camp State Cabin which was constructed as a hiker shelter in 1963. The existing campground would be permanently closed, all structures would be disassembled and transported to the new site if feasible or removed via helicopter, pit toilets would be filled in, and trails would be disguised with dead and down limbs and trees. Given the frequency of natural disturbance (i.e., flooding) and the likely occurrence of scattered archeological sites, active rehabilitation of the site is not proposed. Once human activity is eliminated from the area, natural revegetation is expected to occur relatively quickly given the disturbance-adapted vegetative community present.

The existing campground is primitive in nature and contains twenty campsites (many containing wooden tent platforms), two warming shelters, two pit toilets, two composting toilets (i.e., “moldering privies”), a small ranger storage shed, a food-hanging pole, bear-proof food storage, signs and picnic tables in designated food preparation areas adjacent to each warming shelter. The new campground would contain approximately the same number and types of campsites and facilities as the existing campground. Total overnight occupancy would also remain the same.

The total area occupied by the existing Sheep Camp Campground is approximately 2.7 acres while the new campground would be approximately two acres in size, about 25% smaller than the existing campground. Of the total acreage, about one acre would be disturbed by crews using hand tools for the construction of facilities, campsites (including wooden tent platforms) and associated trails. The vegetation would be cleared with minimal disturbance to mineral soil except in the immediate location of tent platforms and outhouses. Each campsite would consist of a fifteen feet by fifteen feet area cleared of vegetation and a ten feet by ten feet elevated lumber tent platform. Facilities would be sited in natural openings whenever possible; however, it is anticipated that between ten and twenty trees would be removed during construction of the trails and other facilities. Large live trees would be preserved and only small trees (less than ten inches dbh) would be removed. Standing dead trees would be retained for wildlife unless they pose a safety hazard.

In addition, two moldering privy composting toilets would be constructed in the new campground. The park would relocate the two moldering privies at Sheep Camp to the new site. The existing composting waste at Sheep Camp would continue to be monitored until 2008 or 2009, at which time the final composted material would be flown out of the park for incineration in Skagway. The NPS would continue to consult with the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (ADEC) in regards to installation and maintenance of the moldering privies. Any new facilities would be located in accordance with ADEC regulations (at least 100 feet from any surface water; and at least 200 feet from a drinking water source).

The existing State Cabin (rough hewn log structure built in 1963) would be minimally repaired so that it could once again serve as a warming shelter for hikers, its original purpose. Repair would require replacement of the floor, decking and wood stove.

The proposed reroute of the Chilkoot Trail at Zig Zag Bridge would entail the construction of approximately 1,500 linear feet of new trail south of the existing campground. The trail would be rerouted onto a bench paralleling the existing trail but above the Taiya River floodplain to ensure that flooding and erosion would no longer be concerns along this length of trail.

Approximately 546 feet of existing trails in the vicinity of the State Cabin would be utilized in the design of the new campground. In order to provide easy access to the Chilkoot Trail from the new campsites, approximately 235 feet of new trail would be constructed to form a loop with the existing trail system. Shorter trails would also be constructed to link individual campsites to the main trails. Trails would be routed around larger trees as needed, but small saplings up to three inches in diameter and dead timber would be removed. The NPS Trail Crew would remove vegetation along the trail corridor to a width of approximately eight feet. The trail tread would be approximately 36 inches in width and brushed back an additional two to three feet on each side.

In addition to the trail relocation, Zig Zag Bridge, a footbridge located at the south end of the campground, would be replaced in-kind and relocated to a more stable site along the proposed trail reroute approximately 1,230 feet upstream of its present location. In its current location, Zig Zag Bridge spans a very dynamic channel of the Taiya River and has suffered frequent damage from flooding and scouring. The new bridge would instead span a clearwater tributary of the Taiya River (i.e., Waterfall Creek). The discharge from this much smaller creek does not fluctuate substantially nor does the creek bed appear unstable as is the case with the Taiya River. Construction of a new bridge would require in-stream work and the placement of bridge abutments below the mean high water line necessitating a permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Bridge design would resemble that of the existing Zig Zag Bridge and would reflect historic character and known precedents. Two support cribs would be constructed on either side of the creek using six to eight inch diameter logs five foot long obtained from blow down and trail construction. The cribs would be twenty feet apart on either side of the creek, but would likely be on the edge of the high water level. The south side crib would be cut into the creek bank about two feet. The cribs would be five feet by five foot wide and five foot high with between six and twelve inches below grade. All material removed during excavation would be separated with the river rock used to fill the center of the cribs and the silt spread on the trail surface away from the creek. The stringers would be constructed in three twenty foot spans using six inch by twelve inch by twenty foot long treated lumber. The center section would run from crib to crib and the end sections would run from the cribs to six inch x eight inch sills anchored to the ground using twenty four inch spikes. The decking would be three inch by twelve inch boards three foot wide nailed to the stringers. Once the new trail section and bridge are complete, the old bridge would be dismantled and the parts stacked in an open area near Sheep Camp Campground for removal at a later date.

The construction of the trail and campsites should be completed by NPS personnel during the summer of 2006 but may continue into the summer of 2007 if work cannot be completed in one

season. Construction supplies and materials would be sling-loaded to the site by helicopter. This would require one to three days of flights. These flights would occur in May prior to the start of the project. Crews are expected to start work on the new campground and trail relocation in May and continue working into September. The crew would travel to the site by foot and stay in temporary facilities in the vicinity of the Sheep Camp Ranger Station during construction. Approximately four to ten maintenance workers would be involved in this project. The exact location of individual campsites would be determined on the ground by the park's trail crew working in conjunction with NPS natural and cultural resource specialists. Sensitive areas identified by these specialists would be avoided. Only structures consistent with the primitive character of the area would be used. These structures would also reflect the cultural and historical character of architecture for the period of significance. The Proposed Action Alternative is the environmentally preferred alternative.

The following permits and approvals have been obtained for this project:

- A U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Clean Water Act Section 404 permit, Nationwide Permit (NWP) No. 18
- A State Historic Preservation Office cultural resource concurrence of "no adverse effect."

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The EA had a 30-day public review and comment period from January 13, 2006 through February 15, 2006. The park mailed the EA to approximately 60 agencies, organizations, and individuals, and provided the EA through the NPS PEPC public website, at park headquarters, and by telephone request. The park issued a press release announcing the availability of the EA and the public comment period on January 13, 2006. The news release was sent to newspapers and radio stations in Haines, Skagway and Juneau, Alaska, and Whitehorse, Canada, during the public comment period. The park posted the press release on bulletin boards at the Skagway City hall, public library, and post office, and placed a public notice in the local newspaper (*The Skagway News*) announcing the comment period and document availability.

Comments were received from the State of Alaska, ANILCA Implementation Program (State); National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA); U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; State of Alaska Department of Natural Resources Office of Habitat Management and Permitting (DNR); the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; and one local resident. The comments received were either of a clarifying nature, supported the proposed action, or expressed no objections to the proposed action given compliance with the specific mitigation measures. The public comments did not change the conclusions in the EA concerning the environmental effects of the proposed action. NPS responses to the substantive comments are provided in Attachment A.

DECISION

The NPS decision is to select the Proposed Action Alternative along with the mitigating measures. No modifications this alternative were made during or after the public comment period.

Mitigating Measures

The relocation of Sheep Camp Campground would be subject to standard permit procedures and conditions, and other stipulations deemed necessary to protect the resources of the park, including:

Soils

Construction impacts such as soil loss and erosion would be minimized by salvaging and reusing the native soils. Removal of vegetation would be minimized when possible. Trail and campground construction would be planned and designed to minimize erosion and sedimentation. Alignment of trails would avoid disturbing fragile wetland soils or intercepting and diverting seeps and stream channels. These areas would be accessed and traversed by boardwalks or bridges to prevent compaction, churning, or rilling of soils. Trails would be constructed in a manner to avoid or minimize steep treadways, reducing the potential for soil erosion due to formation of water rills, gullies, and outboard trail tread failure. Hiking trails would also be designed to prevent development of social trails or other off trail uses.

Vegetation

Work on trails and the campground would be planned so as to reduce impacts on vegetation. Trails would be designed and maintained to discourage social trail development. Efforts would be utilized to control exotic species. A dedicated program of invasive species control would be implemented to insure minimal negative impacts to native vegetation. The main components of the program would be to prevent spread of known exotic species populations and survey to detect new infestations, increase public awareness, manage existing exotic plant populations (e.g., techniques could include hand pulling plants), and monitor to determine population levels and effectiveness of control treatments.

Wildlife

To the extent possible, trail construction activities would be timed to avoid sensitive periods, such as nesting season. The new campground and trail would be sited to avoid the following sensitive wildlife habitats:

- Wildlife travel corridors
- Foraging areas
- Denning sites
- Nesting or brood-rearing areas

Measures would be taken to reduce the potential for wildlife to get food from humans. Bear-proof food storage containers would be required in the campground. Visitors and park staff would be required to secure all food and garbage in bear-proof containers. Visitors would continue to be educated about the need to refrain from feeding wildlife through the use of signs attached to picnic tables and posted on kiosks in the campground. Park staff would be instructed in the use of pepper spray and encouraged to carry it at all times while on duty.

Safety

Overall safety in the Sheep Camp area may be improved for all alternatives via education, including brochures, interpretive talks and displays. In addition to the bear safety brochures currently available, “safe backcountry travel” brochures stressing preparedness would be distributed.

Cultural Resources

An archeologist would monitor all construction activities. If unknown or concealed archeological or historical resources are encountered during any activity listed above, all necessary steps would be taken to protect the resources discovered and to immediately notify the Chief of Resources, Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park, at the park headquarters in Skagway, Alaska. Further work on the project would be suspended until the nature and extent of the resources can be determined. If artifacts are recovered, those artifacts and any other written or photographic documentation associated with this project would be curated at the Park according to standard NPS practices.

Rationale for the Decision

The Proposed Action Alternative with mitigating measures will satisfy the purpose and need of the project better than the No Action Alternative. The Proposed Action Alternative would improve the safety of visitors hiking the Chilkoot Trail, alleviate sanitation concerns, eliminate further degradation of floodplain values, and enhance backcountry operations. Frequent flooding in the existing campground has impacted visitor safety and access in this popular backcountry area of the park. Relocation of the campground from the flood zone is necessary to provide the type and level of visitor services described in the park’s General Management Plan for the Chilkoot Trail Unit.

The Proposed Action Alternative is the environmentally preferred alternative, because human health and safety, water quality, and floodplain values are enhanced under this alternative. Relocation of Sheep Camp Campground includes only the replacement of existing facilities. The overall size of the campground (i.e., the environmental footprint) would be reduced by 25% and the maximum number of visitors the site could hold would be the same at the new site.

Significance Criteria

The Proposed Action Alternative will not have a significant effect on the human environment. This conclusion is based on the following examination of the significance criteria defined in 40 CFR Section 1508.27. Therefore, the Proposed Action Alternative will not have a significant effect on the human environment.

(1) Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse. A significant effect may exist even if the Federal agency believes that on balance the effect will be beneficial. The EA evaluated the effects of the Proposed Action Alternative on natural soundscape, vegetation, soils, wildlife,

recreation/visitor use, park operations and management, National Historic Landmark, cultural resources, water resources, safety, and floodplains. There will be minor effects on natural soundscape, minor effects on vegetation, minor effects on soils, minor effects on wildlife, major effects on recreation/visitor use, major effects on park operations and management, negligible effects on National Historic Landmark, minor effects on cultural resources, minor effects on water resources, no effect on safety, and minor effects on floodplains.

(2) *The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.* The proposed action will not adversely affect public health or safety.

(3) *Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.* The geographic area of the proposed action is the Sheep Camp area of Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park. There are no prime farmlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas in the project area. Although there are wetlands in the vicinity, the specific sites chosen for campground and trail relocation do not contain wetlands. The vegetation and soils within the project area indicate these sites would not likely be classified as wetlands. Generally, soils within the Upper Taiya valley bottom are very deep and well-drained. The current location of Sheep Camp Campground is within the 100-year floodplain. The proposed relocation of Sheep Camp Campground would remove overnight accommodations and associated development from the floodplain, and relocate these visitor facilities to a location outside of the flood hazard zone. Relocation of the campground could have beneficial impacts on floodplain values. Historic Sheep Camp was one of several established campgrounds along the Chilkoot Trail. During the gold rush it contained several log cabins and frame tents that housed hotels, restaurants, and other businesses. The proposed relocation is in the vicinity of historic Sheep Camp. Archeological investigations identified areas of concern which were subsequently avoided in locating the new campground.

(4) *The degree to which effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.* The effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial. Neither the number of comments received on the EA during the 30-day public comment period, nor their content, indicate that a high level of controversy exists regarding the proposed action.

(5) *The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.* The degree or possibility that the effects on the human environment will be highly uncertain or will involve unique or unknown risks is remote.

(6) *The degree to which the action may establish a precedent of future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.* The degree or possibility that the action may establish a precedent of future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about future considerations is remote.

(7) *Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts. Significance exists if it is reasonable to anticipate a cumulatively significant impact on the environment. Significance cannot be avoided by terming an action temporary or*

by breaking it down into small component parts. The proposed action would relocate Sheep Camp Campground and a portion of the Chilkoot Trail from their current flood-prone locations to sites with reduced flood potential. The action is not related to other actions of individual insignificance that will amount to cumulatively significant impacts on the environment.

(8) Degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources. The geographic area of the proposed action is the Sheep Camp area of the park. The project area also lies within the Dyea and Chilkoot Trail National Historic Landmark. NPS archeologists have intensively surveyed the sites proposed for relocation of the bridge, campground and trail, and determined that these areas are clear of archeological features or other gold rush era remains. While the proposed area is adjacent to an area where subsurface archeological deposits were located, these deposits were considered to be deep enough that indirect impacts to them would be negligible. The site proposed for relocation of the campground is not pristine. It is an existing developed area containing limited visitor facilities. These existing facilities would be incorporated into the new campground and well concealed within the forest thus reducing the visual impact and amount of new construction overall. The facilities to be constructed would be compatible with the historic period for which the National Historic Landmark was established. With the specific mitigation measures for cultural resources protection, the degree or possibility that the action may cause loss or destruction of known scientific, cultural, or historic resources is remote.

(9) The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973. There are no threatened or endangered species or critical habitat in the project area.

(10) Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment. The action will not cause a violation of any Federal, State, or local law or requirements for environmental protection.

FINDINGS

The levels of adverse impacts to park resources anticipated from the selected alternative 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.

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

The NPS has determined that the selected 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 is not needed and will not be prepared for this project.

ATTACHMENT A

NPS Responses to Public Comments for the Sheep Camp Campground Relocation Environmental Assessment

This attachment amends the subject environmental assessment (EA) and provides NPS responses to public comments.

NPS RESPONSE TO PUBLIC COMMENTS

The EA had a 30-day public review and comment period from January 13, 2006 through February 15, 2006. Comments were received from the State of Alaska, ANILCA Implementation Program (State); National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA); U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; State of Alaska Department of Natural Resources Office of Habitat Management and Permitting (DNR); the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; and one local resident. The paraphrased comments and the NPS responses follow.

Substantive comments are those that modify the existing alternatives, propose new alternatives not previously considered, supplement, improve, or modify the impact analysis, or make factual corrections. These comments did not change the EA conclusions about the effects of the proposed action or other alternatives.

Comment No. 1: We recommend that the new bridge not be constructed of any wood treated with a preservative containing creosote or pentachlorophenol to protect water quality.

Response: *Wood treated with preservatives containing creosote and pentachlorophenol would not be used in this project.*

Comment No. 2: Has the NPS inspected Sheep Camp since the heavy rains we had in November 2005? Has this event required any changes to your relocation plans?

Response: *Due to the remote nature of this backcountry site, the NPS has not visited Sheep Camp since the heavy rains of November 2005. The USGS operates an automated streamflow gage on the Taiya River at Dyea, Alaska, (approximately 12 miles downstream of Sheep Camp). The stream gage provides continuous, real-time streamflow data for the river system. Although the river did reach a peak discharge of 7,880 cfs on November 23, 2005, this is an average peak flow and would not be expected to dramatically alter the stream channel and adjacent floodplain. The existing campground, bridge and trail may have been impacted by the heavy rains; but it is unlikely that the more geomorphically stable sites chosen for relocation were measurably affected.*

Comment No. 3: Portions of the proposed project are affected by the nearly complete Falls Creek land exchange between the State and the Service. Please clarify these effects and relationships in your final decision document.

Response: *The existing campground, trail and bridge as well as the sites proposed for relocating these facilities are on lands owned by the State of Alaska and managed by the NPS through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). Both sites are within units proposed for exchange under the Falls Creek land exchange between the State and the NPS. Under conditions of the proposed land exchange, title of these lands would transfer from the State to the NPS. Both alternatives considered in this EA would have no effect on the proposed Falls Creek land exchange. Nor would the transfer of title from the State to the NPS substantively affect land use as these lands are already under limited NPS management.*

Comment No. 4: The EA did not include a socio-economic review and value estimates for the alternatives and reiterate the importance of including this information in all EAs. It is essential that the public understand the fiscal consequences of each alternative to ensure informed consideration. Please refer to the June 18, 2004 memorandum from the Service's Regional Director for Alaska entitled "*NEPA Document Improvements: Presenting facility cost figures, conducting socioeconomic analyses, and considering ANILCA Section 1306.*"

Response: *The same memo referred to above also contains the following clarification: "Detailed cost breakdowns are usually not applicable to routine projects such as in-kind replacement or rehabilitation." In this case, the campground relocation may be classified as "replacement or rehabilitation" and therefore not subject to a detailed cost breakdown. A socioeconomic review is unnecessary as the action is inside the park, will be maintained with park resources and funds, and does not require concessionaire or contracted maintenance.*