

Categorical Exclusion

Project Title: Port Alsworth Woodlot Trail Improvements
Park Unit: Lake Clark National Preserve (LACL)
PEPC Project Number: #51464
PMIS Number: (None.)

Proposed Action

The National Park Service (NPS) proposes to improve an existing off-road vehicle (ORV) trail to the woodlots near Port Alsworth in Lake Clark National Preserve (Figure 1).

The Port Alsworth area is remote and accessible primarily by aircraft. Wood cutting has occurred in the area since the first prospectors arrived to camp near the mouth of the Tanalian River in the early 1900s. Today, ORVs are used to access firewood resources near the community of Port Alsworth, especially when Lake Clark does not freeze and/or there is not adequate snow cover to use snow machines to access more distant timber resources.

This specific trail segment was designated for ORV use in the 2008 FONSI for the "Management of ORVs near Port Alsworth...EA." (Prior to 2008, the woodlot was accessed exclusively by an existing trail that traversed land now owned by the Tanalian Native Corporation.) The trail exists on the ground, but in an unsustainable and often impassable condition. Current terrain conditions on the access trail are rough and uneven, creating a trail that is unusable by ORVs in the winter months and subjecting the trail to considerable degradation during thaw periods. Trail surface improvements would create a sustainable trail, minimize resource damage, and allow access for subsistence firewood cutting.

This trail improvement project would include stabilization of a 1,700-foot long by 6-foot wide section of the existing woodlot route that is currently severely rutted and undermined. The stabilization of the route would require park staff to fill and compact the ruts and potholes with topsoil. When filling and compaction are complete, a geotextile woven fabric (such as geotech) would be laid down. The geotech would be pinned to the tundra mat with landscaping pins and covered with 4 to 6 inches of 1.5-inch minus gravel in a 50/50 mix with black soil. The gravel would mix be leveled, compacted and smoothed and would ultimately serve as the trail surface. The project would require approximately 250 cubic yards of locally-sourced gravel and approximately 100 cubic yards of top soil that was previously removed during an airport hangar project in Port Alsworth.¹

Trail improvement activities would take approximately two weeks to complete using a three-person NPS maintenance crew. The work is proposed for completion in summer 2015. The crew would use motorized equipment to complete the hauling, leveling, and compacting aspects of the project; for example, the crew may use a small truck, backhoe, or dumptruck on site.

¹ A vacant NPS-owned parcel adjacent to the NPS airplane hangar will be used as the gravel source. This vacant parcel is approximately 50 feet wide by 150 feet long and is covered with a mix of small paper birch (*Betula neoalaskana*), thinleaf alder (*Alnus tenuifolia*), and Sitka alder (*Alnus viridis* ssp. *sinuata*). Disturbance to this vacant parcel occurred during construction of the adjacent runway when overburden was cleared for the runway and placed on the parcel location.

This project would not require excavation or vegetation removal as the access route has been previously cleared. Roots and stumps in the trail bed would not be removed. The trail corridor is clear of vegetation; however, some limbing or brushing may be necessary over time to maintain a clear corridor.

Ultimately, the trail would be improved to accommodate year-round ORV use. The trail will not be wide enough to accommodate passenger vehicles.

The trail would receive basic annual maintenance, as needed.

Describe the category used to exclude action from further NEPA analysis and indicate the number of the category. Include an explanation as to why this category is applicable, as appropriate.

The NPS has categorically excluded various actions (18) related to development from further NEPA analysis provided that no exceptional circumstances apply. CE C.11, minor trail relocation or development of compatible trail networks on logging roads or other established routes, is applicable to the proposed woodlot trail improvements.² The 1,700-foot segment proposed for improvement is an established (existing), designated ORV route. The level of improvement proposed is consistent with "minor trail development" as identified in the CE. The proposed improvement activities would not modify the footprint of the existing trail and would not require ground disturbance (sub-surface work).

The eighteen CE exceptions (extraordinary circumstances) were reviewed for applicability to this action and/or its potential effects; none of the exceptions apply.

Mitigation(s)

If cultural resources are discovered during trail improvement efforts, work will be halted at the discovery site, the discovery will be protected and the Lake Clark Superintendent or Chief of Cultural Resources will be notified. The site will be evaluated for eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places. Appropriate action will be taken to avoid adverse effects to any eligible cultural properties.

Describe compliance for other required laws, if applicable (e.g., NHPA Section 106, ESA Section 7, etc.).

Subsistence use is permitted in the park and preserve in accordance with the provisions of ANILCA Title VIII. ANILCA Section 810 [16 USC §3120] states that the NPS shall evaluate the effect of certain federal actions on subsistence uses and needs. The ANILCA 810 Evaluation for this project is on file at LACL. ANILCA Section 811 [16 USC § 3121(b)] provides for continued access to public lands for subsistence use. Specifically, it states that "... rural residents engaged in subsistence uses shall have reasonable access to subsistence resources on public lands" and "Notwithstanding any other provision of this Act or other law, the Secretary [of Interior] shall permit on the public lands appropriate use for subsistence purposes of snow machines, motorboats and other means of surface transportation traditionally employed for such purposes by local residents, subject to reasonable regulations."

Subsistence firewood gathering is allowed and firewood cutting is permitted under NPS regulations (36 CFR 13.485).

² Depending on the DO-12 version, this CE is sometimes listed as C.12.

The area was examined by regional archeologists in 2014 and no cultural resources were identified at that time. The current project design does not require any ground disturbance and so is unlikely to result in the discovery or destruction of buried cultural resources. As stated in the mitigation section, if any resources are identified all work will stop and the resources will be evaluated.

No federally designated threatened or endangered species are known to occur within the project area; Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act would not be triggered by this action.

On the basis of the environmental impact information in the decision file, with which I am familiar, I am categorically excluding the described project from further NEPA analysis. No extraordinary circumstances apply, and the action is consistent with Chapter 3 of the DO-12 Handbook as identified above.

Superintendent: *M. J. Horn* Date: *7/20/15*

References

NPS-12. Director's Order (DO) #12, Handbook for Environmental Impact Analysis.

NPS 2008. Management of Off-Road Vehicles near Port Alsworth in Lake Clark National Preserve, Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI). July 7, 2008.

NPS 1984. Lake Clark National Park and Preserve, General Management Plan and Environmental Assessment.