
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve
Alaska



Eagle Housing Construction Environmental Assessment April 2008



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Note to Reviewers

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ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT FOR EAGLE HOUSING CONSTRUCTION

1. PURPOSE AND NEED

The National Park Service (NPS) is considering acquisition of a 4-acre parcel near the City of Eagle, Alaska and construction of a residence for staff of Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve. The property is located approximately 1 mile southwest of Eagle, along the Taylor Highway.

The Preserve operates a year round field office in Eagle, Alaska. Eagle is located at the end of the Taylor Highway, a two lane road (cover photo) that is unpaved for approximately 65 miles south of the City of Eagle. The highway is closed for the winter due to snowfall. The only NPS-owned staff residences in Eagle are 3 un-insulated tent frame housing units near the airport which do not have running water or sewer service. These units are substandard and obsolete. The NPS rents a house in Eagle for permanent staff, but the availability of additional rentals in Eagle is limited.

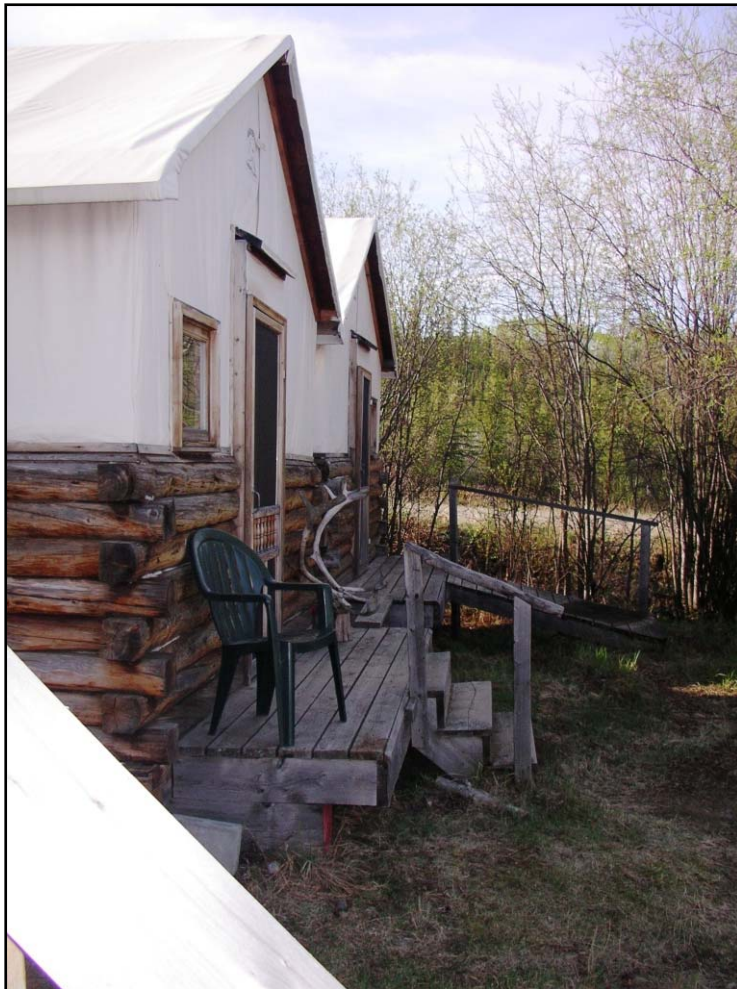


Figure 1 – Tent frame employee housing

This project would replace two existing tent frame units (Figure 1) with the construction of a single family house for year round occupancy on the newly acquired property. This would address a mission critical lack of housing for the Preserve.

This environmental assessment (EA) analyzes the potential environmental impacts which could result from the alternatives considered, including the No Action alternative. This EA has been prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, regulations of the Council of Environmental Quality (CEQ) (40 Code of Federal Regulations 1508.9), and the NPS NEPA compliance guidance handbook (Director's Order (DO)-12, *Conservation Planning, Environmental Impact Analysis, and Decision Making*) (NPS, 2001a).

2. DESCRIPTION OF ALTERNATIVES

2.1 Alternative A – NO ACTION

Under the No Action alternative, use of the three tent frames would continue for housing Preserve staff. The 4-acre parcel would not be acquired by the NPS, and the new house would not be built. Seasonal, permanent, and transient staff would continue to stay in the three tent frames, or rent in the limited Eagle housing market.

2.2 Alternative B – ACQUIRE PROPERTY, CONSTRUCT HOUSING, AND PROVIDE FOR FUTURE CONSTRUCTION OF NPS FACILITIES (NPS Preferred Alternative)

Under this proposed action, the NPS would purchase property near the City of Eagle, outside of the Preserve, and would build a house on the site. Future NPS facilities on the 4-acre property have not been determined.

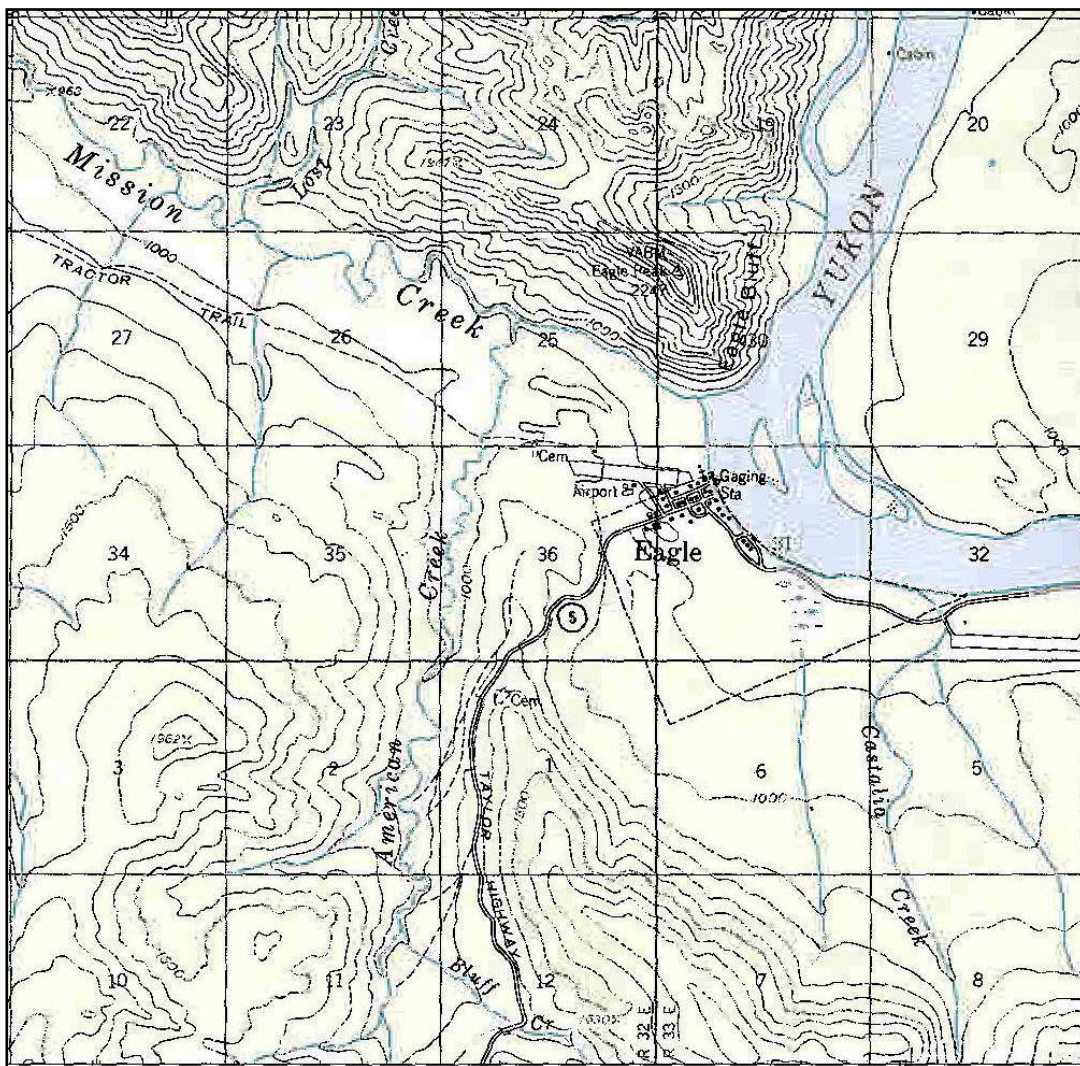


Figure 2 – Eagle area map

2.2.1 Property Acquisition

The NPS would acquire a 4-acre parcel near the City of Eagle. The site is about 1 mile southwest of the center of Eagle, along the east side of the Taylor Highway (Highway 5). The parcel is not within the boundaries of the Preserve. It includes raw land and a large shop building (Figure 3). It is described as Lot #1 in the Biederman Subdivision, Plat 90-66 (Figure 4). It is within the Eagle Historic District. It is about elevation 1,075 feet above sea level and about 225 feet above the level of the nearby Yukon River. It is about 1 mile south of the Yukon River, and about 8 miles west of the Canadian border.

2.2.2 House Construction

The NPS would construct a 2-bedroom, 1-bathroom, single-family house for year round occupancy on the newly acquired parcel. The house would have approximately 1,200 to 1,500 square feet of interior space. No garage would be built as part of the house, because the existing nearby shop/garage building would serve this purpose for the occupants. The new house would be built in the wooded area southwest of the existing shop/garage building (Figure 5).

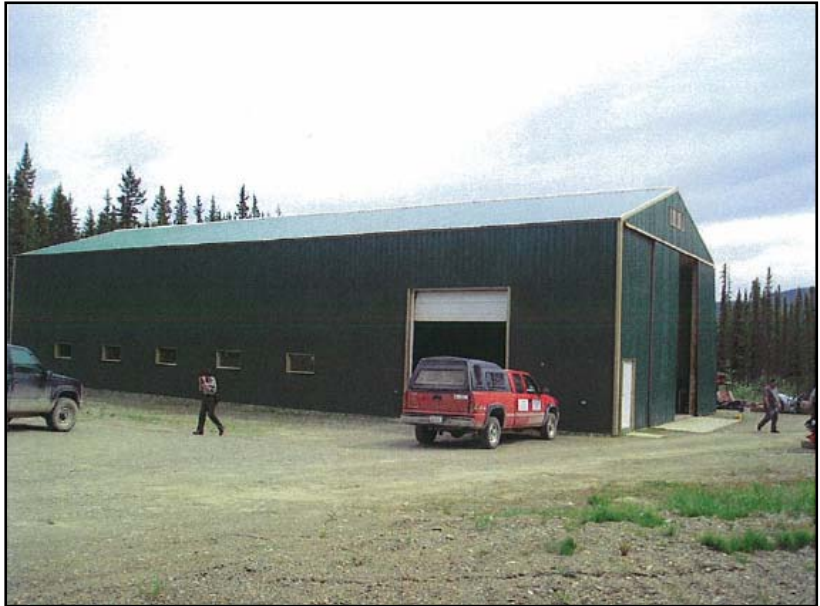


Figure 3 – Existing building on the site

A septic system would be constructed consisting of a 1,000 gallon septic tank and a leach field. There is no drinking water well on site, and no water well would be drilled as part of this initial house construction. The house would be built over 2 - 500 gallon water tanks in the basement crawl space, and water would be trucked in from existing wells in town, as is common practice in Eagle.

There is existing overhead electrical power to the site, so an electrical generator would not be necessary.

The proposed project would involve ground disturbing activities needed to construct a house, septic system, circulation around the site, and fire safety clearing. The area proposed for vegetation clearing would be about 200 by 400 feet for the house area, plus about 150 by 15 feet for an access driveway. In order to protect nesting birds, vegetation will not be cleared between May 1 and July 15.

Since the project could affect cultural resources, it would proceed in compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended (NHPA). As lead federal agency, the NPS has initiated the Section 106 consultation process with the Alaska State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO). In accordance with 36 CFR 800, the NPS, in consultation with the

SHPO, would identify historic properties within the Area of Potential Effect and make an assessment of adverse effect on any identified properties.

Once the house is completed, the NPS would remove 2 of the 3 tent frames at the NPS maintenance site at the end of the Eagle airport.

2.2.2.1 Costs: One-time house construction costs would be about \$260,000 to \$320,000. Annual operating cost (heating, electrical, and maintenance) would be about \$5,500 to \$6,500.

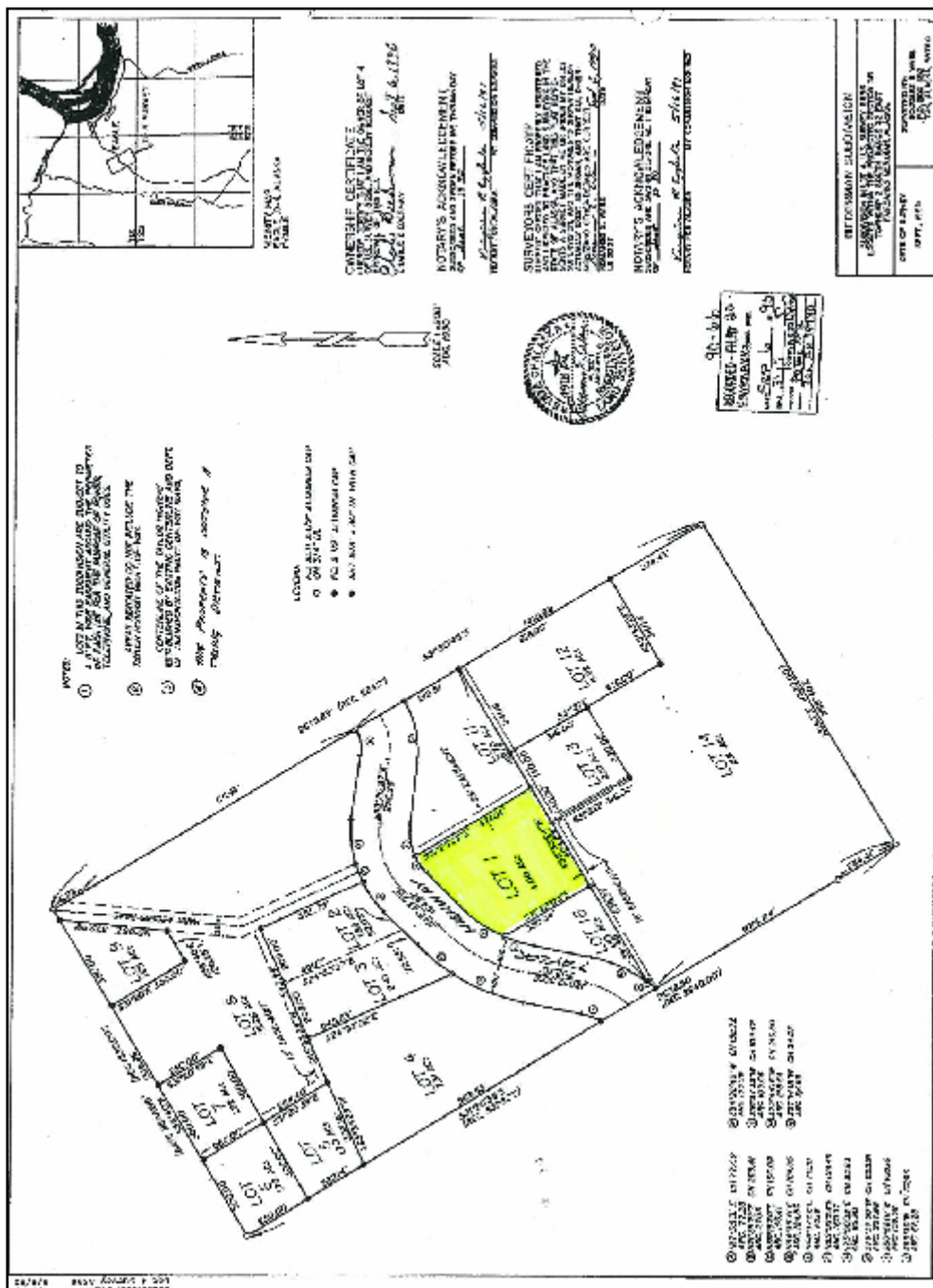


Figure 4 – Plat map showing the project site as Lot 1

2.2.3 Future Construction of NPS Facilities

Future NPS facilities on the 4-acre property have not been determined. Depending on NPS needs, future construction (including vegetation clearing and soil disturbance) under this EA may include up to 80 percent build-out, leaving at least a 10 foot vegetation perimeter, for additional staff housing for permanent employees of similar scale as the above proposed house, single-occupancy cabins or duplexes for seasonal or transient employees, vehicle parking space, construction of a well, heated and unheated storage, shop facilities, outbuildings, office space, and increased capacity septic system and leach field to support increased use.



Figure 5 – Aerial photo of project site

3. AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

The Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve and the City of Eagle lie within a greater ecological zone known as the Taiga, or northern boreal forest, an area extending from the Alaskan interior east into Canada and dominated by spruce and several species of deciduous hardwoods. In the Preserve, as elsewhere in the Taiga, lowlands and drainages are often heavily forested.

The 4-acre project site is gently sloped toward the east. It is about 225 feet above the level of the Yukon River which is about 1 mile northeast. Soils are well drained, gravelly, and probably glacial and alluvial deposits. Permafrost occurs throughout the area, and ice lenses in the soil are common. No ponds or seasonal wetlands occur on the property.



Figure 6 – Vegetation on the project site

The vegetation on the property is predominately mature white spruce, but thinning and transitioning to lower black spruce towards the south. The understory consists of low shrubs, primarily willow (*Salix* spp.), alder (*Alnus* spp.), wild roses (*Rosa* spp.), Labrador tea (*Ledum* spp.), and various species of non-vascular plants (mosses). (Figure 6).

The area likely supports red squirrels, wolverine, voles, lemmings, jays, ravens, chickadees, foxes, moose, black bear, and caribou.

For potential cultural resources at the 4-acre lot, NPS staff performed a database (Alaska Historic Resources Survey or AHRS) and literature search for historic and archaeological resources in the area surrounding the property. The project site is within

A:	07	487280mE	7186600mN
B:	07	492500mE	7186550mN
C:	07	487255mE	7182125mN
D:	07	492475mE	7182140mN

The verbal boundary description of the NHL is: “From the west boundary of Fort Egbert as surveyed in 1906, east to a line drawn perpendicular with the easternmost point of Eagle Township as surveyed in 1909, including Belle Isle.”

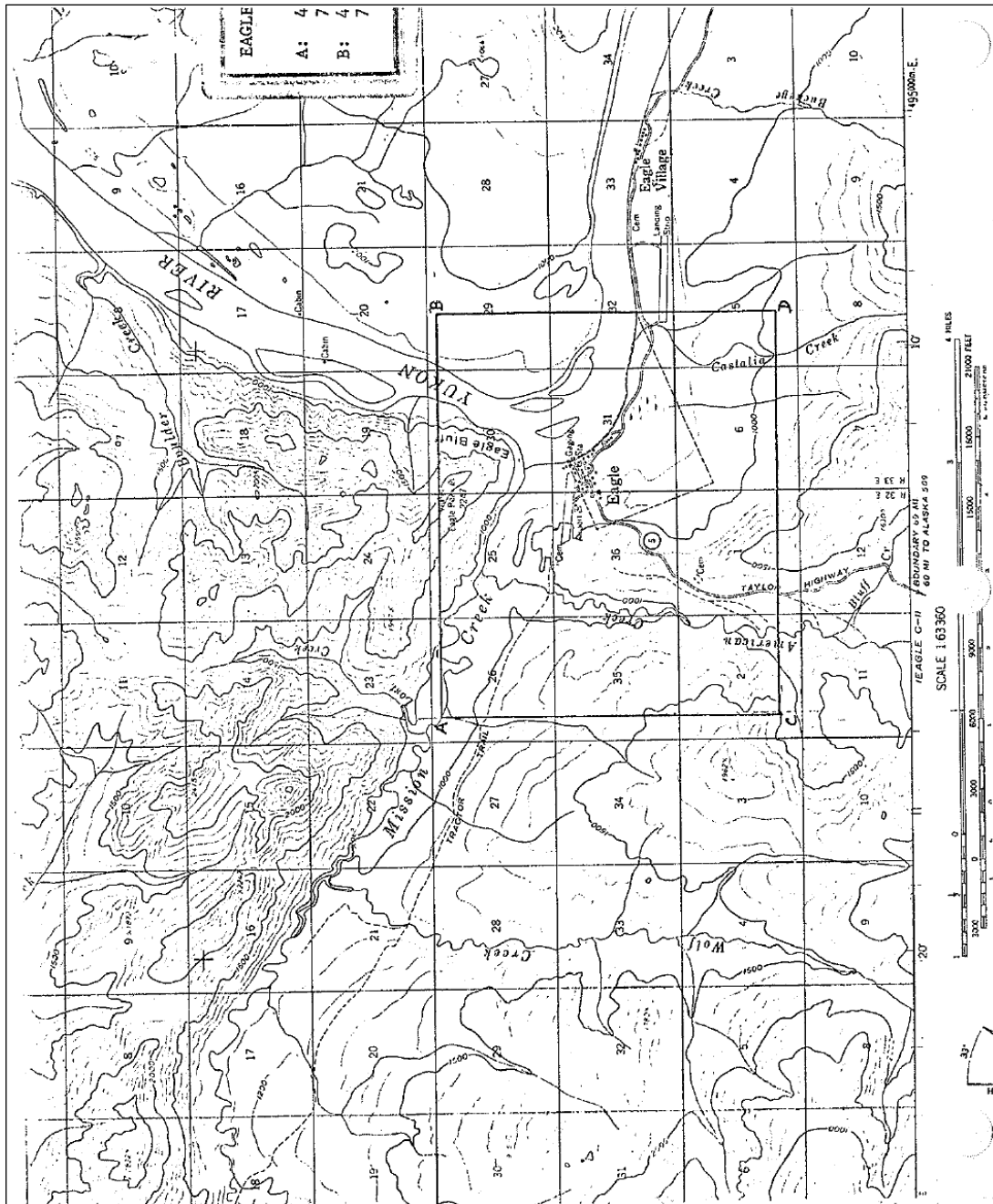


Figure 7 – Official 1978 Nomination Map of the Eagle Historic District NHL

Cultural resource concerns include ground disturbing activities that have potential to disturb archaeological (and paleontological) deposits. Small, buried prehistoric lithic scatters and historic refuse dumps are known in the area. Survey investigation of historic properties located within the 4-acre lot along the Taylor Highway would be completed prior to any construction activities. Any subterranean remains encountered would be assessed for their historical and archeological significance. The geological context of the project site suggests that it has low potential to contain deep, stratified, significant archaeological deposits. Archaeological materials are likely to be in shallower contexts, so excavations (if required for mitigation) would be simpler and less costly. The project site is approximately 1 mile west from the core historic Fort Egbert and townsite of Eagle.

Although the project site is within the boundaries of the Eagle Historic District National Historic Landmark, there are no historic buildings or structures in this area, but new construction (within the past 20 years) is nearby. The proposed new housing would not need to incorporate any historic design elements (per 3/13/08 meeting with SHPO and NPS staff).

In the process of site development, should it be determined that archeological or historic resources are present, the NPS in consultation with the SHPO would make an Assessment of Adverse Effect. If the SHPO and NPS found that significant historic properties would be affected adversely, consultation would result in a Memorandum of Agreement that would outline agreed upon measures to resolve the adverse effect. See Cultural Compliance Schedule, Appendix B.

If historic properties were discovered, or unanticipated effects on historic properties found after the completion of the Section 106 process without an agreement document, the NPS would apply the requirement of 36 CFR 800.13(b), Discoveries Without Prior Planning. If the Section 106 process resulted in a Memorandum of Agreement, that agreement would define a process to resolve the discovery of historic properties or the unanticipated effect.

4. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

4.1 Alternative A – No Action

No impacts would occur to the natural resources of the property under the No Action Alternative. NPS would not acquire the 4-acre property and would not construct a house on the site. The NPS would not cut white spruce for construction. Site activities would continue to be conducted by the private owner on the property. There would be no short-term noise from NPS construction activities.

The 3 tent frame cabins would remain near the Eagle airport, and would continue to be used for summer seasonal and transient NPS housing. No NPS housing for year-round occupancy would be available, and employees would seek rental housing in the City of Eagle.

4.2 Alternative B – Acquire Property, Construct Housing, and Provide for Future Construction of NPS Facilities (NPS Preferred Alternative)

4.2.1 Vegetation. The area proposed for vegetation immediate clearing would be about 200 by 400 feet for the house area, plus about 150 by 15 feet for an access driveway. The proposed disturbance area is mostly composed of white spruce, black spruce, with willow shrub understory.

A similar or larger size clearing of vegetation could occur with future construction of additional employee housing or other NPS facilities. These effects would be localized, long-term, and minor.

4.2.2 Wildlife. There would be temporary displacement of wildlife due to noise and human activities during the site clearance and house construction. In order to protect nesting birds, vegetation will not be cleared between May 1 and July 15. When the house construction project is finished, human activity would be returned to normal levels and wildlife would resume their normal patterns. The long-term loss of wildlife habitat from vegetation clearing would be minor. The short-term, direct disturbance of wildlife would be localized and minor.

4.2.3 Soils. Soil disturbance would be limited to the footprint of the cleared area. Soil compaction would occur a few feet beyond the cleared zone as is common to construction activities. These effects would be localized, long-term, and minor.

4.2.4 Soundscape. There would be minor, short-term, localized noise from construction crews. The noise would continue at varying levels for a maximum of 10 weeks. Long-term noise impacts from operations and housing occupation would be localized, and negligible to minor.

4.2.5 Air Quality. There would be short-term, local, negligible to minor impacts to air quality from heavy construction equipment causing fugitive dust.



Figure 8 – Project Site near the City of Eagle and Yukon River

4.2.6 Night Sky. Outdoor utility and security lighting at the 4-acre lot would be minimized and shielded in order to protect dark skies in the local area. Impacts to night sky resources would be localized, long-term, and negligible beyond the property boundary.

4.2.7 Cultural Resources. Cultural resources could be affected by the purchase and development of the 4-acre site. Cultural resource impacts could include ground disturbing activities that have potential to disturb archaeological (and paleontological) deposits. If cultural resources were found, local ground disturbing activities would stop until cultural evaluations were completed. Impacts, if any, would be fully mitigated through a Memorandum of Agreement with the SHPO and subsequent actions. Impacts to cultural resources would be long-term and negligible to moderate.

If historic properties are discovered or unanticipated effects on historic properties found after the completion of the Section 106 process without an agreement document, the NPS will apply the requirement of 36 CFR 800.13(b), Discoveries Without Prior Planning. If the Section 106 process results in a Memorandum of Agreement, that agreement will define a process to resolve the discovery of historic properties or the unanticipated effect.

Survey investigation of cultural resources located within the 4-acre property along the Taylor Highway is scheduled for May/June 2008.

CUMULATIVE EFFECTS: Cumulative impacts from past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions near the project site have occurred since before the Klondike Gold Rush. They include construction and maintenance of the Taylor Highway (partially paved and closed in winter), construction and occupation of the towns of Eagle (population 168) and Eagle Village (population 35). Continuous human occupation of the region along the Yukon River (about 1 mile from the project site) has been documented from archeological sites at over 13,000 years. Human change to the landscape has been minor. The mature trees on the project site might be second growth, because heavy tree harvest occurred along the Yukon River corridor around the turn of the 20th Century.

Impacts from Alternative B (the proposed action) would be minor in the regional context of Eagle. The added site development from the project, especially along the Taylor Highway corridor near the City of Eagle, would add to the cumulative modern footprint of development in the area. Two of the 3 tent frame cabins near the airport would be removed, thus reducing the development footprint in that area slightly. The clearing of a portion of the newly acquired property would include removal of several dozen mature white spruce trees. Some fragmentation of the surrounding boreal forest would occur. No wetlands or surface water would be affected by the proposed project.

CONCLUSION: Alternative B (the proposed action) would have a no effect on the resources of the nearby Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve, and would have a minor effect on the natural and cultural resources in the vicinity of Eagle. The level of impact to natural resources from Alternative B would not result in impairment of NPS or Preserve resources that fulfill specific purposes identified in the enabling legislations or that are essential to the natural and cultural integrity of the Preserve.

5. LIST OF PREPARERS

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- Mary Miner, Civil Engineer, U.S. Public Health Service, NPS Alaska Regional Office
- Richard L. Anderson, Environmental Protection Specialist, NPS Alaska Regional Office
- Lisa Fox, Environmental Protection Specialist, NPS Alaska Regional Office
- Janet Clemens, Historian, NPS Alaska Regional Office
- Jeff Rasic, Archeologist, Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve

6. REFERENCES

NPS, 1976. Eagle Historic District National Historic Landmark (1976 NHL nomination) with BLM and Alaska State Historic Preservation Officer.

NPS, 1985. Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve, General Management Plan.

NPS, 1994. Eagle Development Concept Plan and Environmental Assessment, Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve, Alaska, June 1994; and Finding of No Significant Impact, approved August 26, 1994.

NPS, 1995. Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve, Resource Management Plan.

NPS, 2001a. Director's Order #12 and Handbook, *Conservation Planning, Environmental Impact Analysis, and Decision Making*.

NPS, 2004. Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve, Fire Management Plan.

NPS, 2006. National Park Service Management Policies 2006.

NPS, 2008. Preliminary Cultural Resource Compliance Assessment for NPS Housing in Eagle, prepared by Jeff Rasic, Archaeologist, Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve, February 25, 2008.

APPENDIX A

ANILCA SECTION 810(a) SUMMARY EVALUATION AND FINDINGS SUBSISTENCE ANALYSIS

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 Title VIII, subsistence activities which could result from the National Park Service (NPS) acquisition and development of a 4-acre lot near the City of Eagle, Alaska. The site is located outside of Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve. This analysis does not evaluate State authorized subsistence use and activities on adjacent private, city, or State lands.

II. EVALUATION PROCESS

Section 810(a) ANILCA states:

“In determining whether to withdraw, reserve, lease, or otherwise permit the use, occupancy, or disposition of public lands under any provision of law authorizing such actions, 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, and other alternatives which would reduce or eliminate the use, occupancy 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, and holds, a hearing in the vicinity of the area involved; and

(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 units and additions to existing units of the national park system in Alaska. Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve was established by ANILCA section 201(10) for the purposes, among others:

“To maintain the environmental integrity of the entire Charley River Basin, including streams, lakes and other natural features, in its undeveloped natural condition for public

benefit and scientific study; to protect habitat for, and populations of, fish and wildlife, including but not limited to the peregrine falcons and other raptorial birds, caribou, moose, Dall sheep, grizzly bears, and wolves; and in a manner consistent with the foregoing, to protect and interpret historical sites and events associated with the gold rush on the Yukon River and the geological and paleontological history and cultural prehistory of the area.”

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 that would reduce or eliminate the use.”

III. PROPOSED ACTION ON FEDERAL LANDS

Alternative A: No Action

Under the No Action alternative, use of the three NPS tent frames near the airport would continue for housing Preserve staff. The 4-acre parcel would not be acquired by the NPS, and a new house would not be built. Seasonal, permanent, and transient staff would continue to stay in the three tent frames, or rent in the limited Eagle housing market.

Alternative B: (Proposed Action / NPS Preferred Alternative)

Under the proposed action, the NPS would purchase a 4-acre lot near the City of Eagle, outside the Preserve, and would build a house on the site. Additional NPS facilities would be built on the site in future years.

IV. AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

The Yukon-Charley region, and the City of Eagle, lies within a greater ecological zone known as the Taiga, or northern boreal forest, an area extending from the Alaskan interior east into Canada and dominated by spruce and several species of deciduous hardwoods. In the Preserve, as elsewhere in the Taiga, lowlands and drainages are often heavily forested.

The project site is outside of the boundaries of Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve and would not become part of the Preserve. The lot is currently private property and not federal public land, so it is not subject to federal subsistence under ANILCA Title VIII.

Subsistence harvest of fish and wildlife is allowed in the nearby Preserve, by qualified subsistence users subject to federal subsistence management regulations and NPS regulations. ANICLA provides that subsistence uses by local rural residents are a priority consumptive use over other non-subsistence consumptive uses. The area of concentrated subsistence use within the Preserve extends along the Yukon River as well as lower stretches of the Charley, Kandik, and Nation Rivers. Along the Yukon, residents of Central (population 52), Circle City (population 73), Eagle (population 168) and Eagle Village (population 35) engage in subsistence activities.

The 4-acre project site is gently sloped toward to east and is 225 feet above level of the Yukon River which is about 1 mile northeast. Soils are well drained, gravely, and probably glacial and alluvial deposits. Permafrost occurs throughout the area, and ice lenses in the soil are common. No ponds or seasonal wetlands occur on the property. The vegetation on the site is predominately

mature white spruce, but thinning and transitioning to lower black spruce towards the south. The understory consists of low shrubs, primarily willow (*Salix* spp.), alder (*Alnus* spp.), wild roses (*Rosa* spp.), Labrador tea (*Ledum* spp.), and various species of non-vascular plants (mosses).

The area likely supports red squirrels, voles, lemmings, jays, ravens, chickadees, ptarmigan, lynx, wolverine, wolves, martens, foxes, black bear, moose, and caribou.

Caribou, moose, salmon, black bear, marten, and lynx are the most important species for subsistence users in and around the Preserve. These species are supplemented by waterfowl, snowshoe hares, grouse, ptarmigan, wolves, beaver, and various species of resident fish. In addition to fish and game species, bark, firewood, berries and other plant materials are harvested. Subsistence hunting activities are concentrated in the spring and fall months, fishing and plant gathering in summer and fall, and trapping in mid-winter. Subsistence harvests vary considerably each year because of weather, migration patterns, and population cycles. Subsistence hunting and gathering occurs opportunistically whenever people leave the town. Many local rural residents depend upon traditional areas and a wide array of resources in the Preserve and around Eagle to sustain a subsistence way of life.

For a comprehensive description of NPS policies, see the NPS Management Policies (NPS 2006), and the Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve General Management Plan (NPS 1985).

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 evaluation criteria are:

- 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 hunter access;
- the potential for the action to increase fisherman or hunter competition for subsistence resources.

The Potential to Reduce Populations:

Adoption of the proposed action would have a negligible effect on populations of important subsistence resources. The 4-acre parcel may provide a travel corridor for some large mammals, and also likely provides suitable habitat for small mammals, small furbearers, and birds.

The loss of this land to development would constitute a minor loss of wildlife habitat. For the house construction, there would be a loss of about 200 by 400 feet, plus about 150 by 15 feet for an access driveway. The vegetation community and wildlife habitat lost is well represented both locally and regionally.

Project actions would be aimed at providing cost-effective employee housing and other future NPS facilities. The localized displacement of plants and animals from the project site by

construction and operations activities would occur. The proposed actions would not have significant effect on subsistence species populations or habitats.

Restriction of Access:

The proposed actions would not significantly change regional subsistence use patterns. Access for subsistence uses on federal public lands is granted by Section 811 of ANILCA. NPS lands, including the 4-acre parcel near the City of Eagle, are managed according to legislative direction, NPS management policies, and the approved General Management Plan. The proposed action would not limit or restrict the access of subsistence users to natural resources within the Preserve.

Increase in Competition:

The proposed action would not increase fisherman or hunter competition for subsistence resources. NPS regulations and provisions of ANILCA direct that, if and when it is necessary to restrict taking of fish or wildlife, subsistence users are given a priority over other user groups.

VI. AVAILABILITY OF OTHER LANDS

Subsistence users make use of other federal public lands within the region, including Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve. The proposed action would not affect the availability of federal public lands for subsistence uses. The proposed actions are consistent with NPS policies and the Preserve's General Management Plan.

VII. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

The EA and this evaluation have described and analyzed the proposed action and the No Action alternative. The proposed actions are consistent with NPS mandates and the General Management Plan.

VIII. FINDINGS

This analysis concludes that the proposed action would not result in a significant restriction of subsistence uses.

APPENDIX B

Cultural Resources Compliance Draft Schedule

If historic properties are discovered or unanticipated effects on historic properties found after the completion of the Section 106 process without an agreement document, the NPS will apply the requirement of 36 CFR 800.13(b), Discoveries Without Prior Planning. If the Section 106 process results in a Memorandum of Agreement, that agreement will define a process to resolve the discovery of historic properties or the unanticipated effect.

January 2008	Initiate Section 106 process (done)
March 2008	Preliminary identification of historic properties through consultation with NPS staff and SHPO. (done)
May/June 2008	Site investigation of historic properties
June 2008	Assessment of survey results of historic and archaeological resources. NPS determination of “No historic properties affected” or “Historic properties are affected.”
June/July/August	Depending on survey results and the determination of NPS 2008 of potential adverse effects, the Section 106 process may continue in consultation with SHPO, so that adverse effects can be resolved. If not, the process will continue with a resulting Memorandum of Agreement.