

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Yukon-Charley Rivers
National Preserve
Alaska



Finding of No Significant Impact

Eagle Housing Construction

June 2008

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Recommended: GREG DUNDLEON 6/19/08
Superintendent, Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve Date

Approved: *[Signature]* 6/20/08
Regional Director, Alaska Date

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Eagle Housing Construction Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve June 2008

The National Park Service (NPS) prepared an environmental assessment (EA) to evaluate a proposal to purchase a 4-acre parcel and construct a residence for staff of Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve near Eagle, Alaska.

The NPS has selected Alternative B, *Acquire Property, Construct Housing, and Provide for Future Construction of NPS Facilities* (NPS Preferred Alternative) which would proceed with the acquisition of the 4-acre parcel and begin construction of a residence near Eagle, Alaska. The Alternative was not modified by public comment.

ALTERNATIVES

Two alternatives were evaluated in the EA.

Alternative A, No Action

Under the no action alternative, there would be no property acquisition and no residential construction. The NPS would continue to use the tent frames near the Eagle airport for summer and transient housing. No NPS housing for year-round occupancy would be available, and employees would seek rental housing in the City of Eagle.

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.

The 4-acre parcel includes raw land and a large shop building. 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. 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.

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.

Depending on NPS needs, future site development (including vegetation clearing and soil disturbance) may include construction totaling up to 80 percent build-out, leaving at least a 10-foot wide vegetation screen perimeter, for a potential future disturbance of about 3.6 acres. Facilities may include 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.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The EA was issued for public review and comment from April 24, 2008 to May 27, 2008. The EA was sent by mail or email to over 50 government agencies, tribal entities, interest groups and individuals. The EA was posted on the NPS Planning, Environment, and Public Comment website <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/> and the park's webpage. The park issued a press release about the availability of the EA and the open comment period on April 24, 2008. One written comment was received.

The public comment did not change the conclusions in the EA about the environmental effects of the action. The NPS responses to substantive public comments are found in the attached *NPS Responses to Public Comments*.

DECISION

The NPS decision is to select Alternative B, *Acquire Property, Construct Housing, and Provide for Future Construction of NPS Facilities*.

Mitigating Measures

Mitigating measures were integrated into the proposed action and were not developed separately.

Rationale for the Decision

Alternative B (NPS Preferred Alternative) was selected. This alternative will satisfy the purpose and need of the project because it will provide housing for NPS staff. The purchase of the 4-acre lot with a garage, and the construction of a house will provide improved NPS staff housing.

The existing tent frames are near the Eagle airstrip where daily commuter planes and helicopter operations can be noisy during routine fire operations. This area can be especially loud when multiple-agency helicopters are using the airstrip as an airbase. Multiple helicopter operations can sometimes fly anytime between 7am and 10pm during high fire years in the Upper Yukon River. Thus, removal of the tent frames and subsequent replacement with housing located away from the airstrip will allow the NPS to provide better staff housing.

The new two-bedroom house will provide year round housing options. During the coldest parts of the year tent frame housing is not adequate.

The new housing will reduce the strain for showers and laundry facilities at the Eagle office.

Significance Criteria

The preferred alternative (Alternative B) will not have a significant effect on the human environment. This conclusion is based on the following examination the significance criteria defined in 40 CFR Section 1508.27.

(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.

As documented in the EA, Alternative B 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.

(2) The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.

The proposed action would not negatively affect public health or safety.

(3) Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetland, wild and scenic rives, or ecologically critical areas.

The 4-acre parcel location is within the Eagle Historic District National Historic Landmark, but there are no known historic structures or features and the lot does not contain any unique characteristics.

(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 would not be controversial.

(5) The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

The effects of the selected alternative do not involve unique or unknown risks.

(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 purchase of the lot, construction of a housing unit, and future construction of additional buildings would not set a precedent for future actions.

(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 EA considered future and existing facilities in the area in its cumulative impact analysis. 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 analysis concluded that the impacts of all existing facilities including the proposed building construction and future construction projects will be minor.

(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 selected alternative will not adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

(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.

The selected alternative will not adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat.

(10) Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

The selected alternative (Alternative B) will not violate any Federal, State, or local law.

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. 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 National Park Service 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
Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve EA for
Eagle Housing Construction

PUBLIC COMMENTS

In response to the environmental assessment, the NPS received one comment letter from a private individual (PI). Described below are the substantive comments and the NPS responses.

Comment 1, PI: First, contrary to the EA's claim, replacing two of the existing tent frames with a two-bedroom house will do nothing to alleviate the NPS Eagle housing shortage. In fact, in some ways it will only worsen the problem, since the new housing is designed for occupancy by year-round employees and therefore would in all probability be unavailable to the volunteer and transient employees who now occupy the tent frames. If the tent frames are torn down, where will we house these non-permanent employees?

Response 1, NPS: This Eagle housing project is being conducted to improve staff housing. The new two-bedroom house can serve seasonal staff in the summer and transient staff in the off season. Transient employees can travel through Eagle any time of the year. Some of this travel can occur anytime between November and February during the coldest parts of the year when tent frame housing would not be adequate.

Removal of the seasonal tent frames and subsequent replacement with improved housing located away from the airstrip will provide the NPS with more seasonal and winter housing options. The tent frames are near the airstrip where daily commuter planes and helicopter operations can be noisy during routine fire operations. This area can be especially loud when multiple-agency helicopters are using the Eagle Airstrip as an airbase. Multiple helicopter operations can sometimes fly anytime between 7am and 10pm during high fire years in the Upper Yukon River.

Comment 2, PI: The second problem with the proposed alternative concerns the type of housing the NPS intends to construct. It seems to me that a fancy two-bedroom home with flush toilets is not the most appropriate type of NPS housing for Eagle or Bush Alaska. Trucking in large quantities of water for a full bathroom and kitchen to be used for showers and flushing toilets will put a strain on the city's well (which is clearly marked for drinking water only), and is not sensitive to the resources or nature of the community.

Response 2 NPS: The purchase of this 4-acre lot with a garage and constructing the house will provide improved NPS staff housing. It can be used as both summer seasonal and winter transient housing, and will reduce the strain for showers and laundry facilities at the Eagle office. Water for the new facilities will be provided by the BLM well at the NPS office, so (unless the BLM well fails) there will be no impact on the community drinking water in downtown Eagle.

Comment 3, PI: Far more appropriate and more cost effective would be to construct a number of simple, dry, winterized cabins. Individual cabins would provide more privacy, could be constructed at a fraction of the cost, and would be much more in keeping with the general character and way of life of the town of Eagle.

Response 3 NPS: As indicated in the EA, there could be future housing construction projects at the site which could include dry cabins or additional modern housing. The types and number of buildings has not been determined yet.

Comment 4, PI: In conclusion, the proposed alternative appears to me to be poorly conceived and hardly a solution to the problem. I recommend that it be reconsidered, with more thought given to maintaining the existing transient housing (which would cost almost nothing) and building new permanent housing that is simpler, less expensive, and more in keeping with the character of the rural Alaskan way of life.

Response 4 NPS: Dry cabins would be more cost effective to maintain, but this construction project is part of the process for the NPS to provide adequate housing for field staff. This long term initial investment in improved housing may seem like a high price to pay, but it is one of necessity as we need to provide a range of housing alternatives for future housing needs for the NPS staff.