



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and
Preserve
Alaska



Finding of No Significant Impact

Horsfeld Camp Move

April 2010

Recommended: Margaret G. Jensen April 25, 2010
Superintendent, Wrangell-Saint Elias National Park and Preserve Date

Approved: Victor King 4/28/10
Acting Regional Director, Alaska Date

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Horsfeld Camp Move

Wrangell-Saint Elias National Park and Preserve, Alaska
April 2010

The National Park Service (NPS) has prepared an environmental assessment (EA) to evaluate a proposal to relocate and rebuild nine structures at a facility near Horsfeld, Alaska, within Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve (WRST).

Horsfeld Creek is aggrading just above its confluence with Beaver Creek, forcing its main channel to move to the east. Associated flooding has damaged many structures, some of which may soon be destroyed. This flooding adversely affects visitor experiences. The park reviewed a request from the applicant to relocate and rebuild the affected structures on a terrace immediately to the east and partially overlapping the current camp, and worked with him to revise the proposal.

The NPS has selected Alternative B, the NPS and Environmentally Preferred Alternative, to issue the applicant a special-use permit to move and replace structures associated with providing commercial visitor services out of the active Horsfeld and Beaver Creek floodplains.

One written comment on the proposed action was submitted by the National Parks and Conservation Association (NPCA). No other written comments were received. The NPCA comment supported the proposed action as described and did not change the conclusions in the EA regarding its environmental effects.

ALTERNATIVES

The EA evaluated two alternatives as described below:

Alternative A – No-Action Alternative:

This alternative represents a continuation of the existing use of the Horsfeld facility and provides a baseline for evaluating the changes and impacts of the proposed action alternative.

Under the No-Action Alternative, the applicant would not relocate the Horsfeld facility, flooding would continue, and several key buildings would eventually be swept down Horsfeld Creek into Beaver Creek. The applicant would continue to access his facility by the existing ORV trail, which connects it to the Horsfeld Airstrip located about ½ mile to the northwest across Horsfeld Creek, as authorized in writing by the Superintendent in recognition of the special circumstances as provided in his existing concession contract.

Alternative B – Action Alternative (*NPS and Environmentally Preferred*):

Under the Action Alternative, the applicant would remove nine structures from the active Horsfeld and Beaver Creek floodplains, relocating and rebuilding five of them on higher ground situated just east of the current facility and one—the washroom—on a safer site just north of Beaver Creek. The total number of buildings would be reduced by three, and the footprint of the headquarters facility would be reduced by 143 square feet.

Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Further Consideration

WRST considered and rejected an alternative which would have permitted the applicant to move part or all of his structures associated with providing commercial visitor services to a new location west of Horsfeld Creek and north of the ORV trail. NPS personnel determined that that location could substantially increase foot traffic on and around the area’s most significant cultural sites, potentially affecting them adversely.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The EA was available for public review and comment for thirty days between February 23 and March 23, 2010. WRST placed Notices of Availability and links to the document on the Wrangell-Saint Elias National Park website at www.nps.gov/wrst and on the NPS Planning, Environment and Public Comment website at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov>, and also mailed Notices to approximately thirty stakeholders. The NPS only received one comment during the public review period; from the NPCA in support of Alternative B. No changes were made to the EA.

DECISION

The NPS decision is to select the Proposed Action Alternative (*NPS and Environmentally Preferred*): to issue the applicant a special-use permit to relocate and rebuild nine structures near Horsfeld, Alaska.

Rationale for the Decision

Alternative B (the *NPS and Environmentally Preferred Alternative*) would cause the least possible impact to park resources and values while still satisfying the action’s purpose and need. Although it would result in minor negative effects to upland vegetation by generating about four acres of new disturbance, that is outweighed by negligible beneficial effects to aquatic resources by reducing the potential for horse waste contamination; negligible beneficial effects to floodplains by restoring natural function; minor beneficial effects to wetlands by enhancing opportunities for natural recovery; and minor beneficial effects to visitor use and recreational opportunities by improving the condition of visitor facilities. No significant adverse impacts would occur.

Significance Criteria

Implementation of the preferred 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.

(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. This EA evaluated the effects of the preferred alternative on visitor use, cultural resources, aquatic resources and floodplains, vegetation, and wetlands. Implementing the preferred alternative would have minor beneficial effects on visitor use, minor negative effects on cultural resources, negligible beneficial effects on aquatic resources and floodplains, minor negative effects on vegetation, and minor beneficial effects on wetlands. No significant adverse impacts would occur and there would be no significant restriction of subsistence use or uses.

(2) The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety. Implementation of the selected alternative would not affect public safety to any known or appreciable degree either adversely or beneficially.

(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 permitted subsistence house log harvest is the lower Beaver Creek valley within Wrangell-St. Elias National Preserve. While the area does contain some cultural resources and wetlands, the implementation of this action's selected alternative will not result in any significant new impacts.

(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 content nor the number of comments received during the 30-day public comment period indicates 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. No impacts associated with this action are highly uncertain or 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. This action only addresses specific conditions at the Horsfeld facility. 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. This action only addresses specific conditions at the Horsfeld facility. It is not related to other actions 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. Because the special-use permit will contain specific protection measures to address unique resources, the likelihood 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. Implementing the selected alternative will not adversely affect any known 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. No federal, state, or local laws or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment will be violated by implementing this alternative.

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 The proposed action complies with the Endangered Species Act, The National Historic Preservation Act, and Executive Orders 11988 (Floodplain Management) and 11990 (Protection of Wetlands). 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.

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.