



ASSES EARS



NORTHWEST COAST OF PRESERVE



LOWER SERPENTINE RIVER

As the nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has basic responsibilities to protect and conserve our land and water, energy and minerals, fish and wildlife, parks and recreation areas, and to ensure the wise use of all these resources. The department also has major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in island territories under U.S. administration.

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INTRODUCTION

The wilderness suitability of lands within Bering Land Bridge National Preserve is to be reviewed pursuant to section 1317(a) of ANILCA. Section 1317(b) specifies that this review will be conducted by the secretary of the interior and that the president will advise the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives of the recommendations, in accordance with the provisions of sections 3(c) and (d) of the Wilderness Act.

The following suitability review meets the requirements of ANILCA. Actual recommendations on whether to designate suitable areas of the preserve as wilderness will be made following approval of a general management plan, at which time an environmental impact statement will be prepared.

WILDERNESS DEFINITION

The Wilderness Act of 1964 defines wilderness as follows:

A wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his own works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain. An area of wilderness is further defined to mean in this Act an area of undeveloped Federal land retaining its primeval character and influence, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions and which: (1) generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable; (2) has outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation; (3) has at least five thousand acres of land or is of sufficient size as to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition; and (4) may also contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value.

INTERIM MANAGEMENT OF SUITABLE LANDS

All lands determined suitable for wilderness designation will be managed under the terms of ANILCA to maintain the wilderness character and values of the lands until designation recommendations have been proposed and Congress has acted on these proposals (see "Appendix J: Wilderness Management").

WILDERNESS REVIEW CRITERIA

Wilderness suitability criteria have been developed that are based on the Wilderness Act's definition of wilderness and the specific provisions of ANILCA that relate to wilderness areas. These criteria are concerned primarily with the physical character of the land and current land status, and they were applied to all lands in the preserve to determine their suitability. Other factors such as appropriateness for management as wilderness, and state and local concerns with wilderness management, will be considered when the wilderness recommendation is formulated. ANCSA 17(b) easements are not discussed in the wilderness suitability criteria because these easements occur only on native corporation lands. The following criteria have been used in this evaluation of wilderness suitability.

<u>Description of Land or Activity</u>		<u>Suitable for Wilderness</u>	<u>Not Suit- able for Wilderness</u>	<u>Suit- ability Pending</u>
Land Status	Federal	X		
	Federal, under application or selection			X
	State or private land, patented or tentatively approved		X	
	Private ownership of subsurface estate		X	
Mining	Areas with minor ground disturbances from past mining activities	X		
	Areas with major ground disturbances from past mining activities		X	
	Areas with current mining activities and ground disturbances		X	
Roads and ORV Trails	Unimproved roads or ORV trails that are unused or little used by motor vehicles	X		
	Improved roads and ORV trails regularly used by motor vehicles		X	

<u>Description of Land or Activity</u>		<u>Suitable for Wilderness</u>	<u>Not Suit- able for Wilderness</u>	<u>Suit- ability Pending</u>
Airstrips	Unimproved or minimally improved and maintained	X		
	Improved and maintained		X	
Cabins	Uninhabited structures; hunter, hiker, and patrol cabins	X		
	Inhabited as a primary place of residence		X	
Size of Unit	Greater than 5,000 acres adjacent to existing wilderness, or of a manageable size	X		
	Less than 5,000 acres or of unmanageable size		X	

SUITABILITY ANALYSIS

This suitability analysis treats the preserve as a whole. In determining whether the minimum suitability criteria are met, it has not been necessary to divide the area into units, such as watersheds, for separate consideration. Such a division may be necessary in preparing future recommendations where the feasibility of actual management as wilderness must be considered.

LAND STATUS

There are 2,509,360 acres (90 percent of the preserve) that are federally owned and on which there are no pending applications or other claims (see Land Status map). However, 180,819 acres (6 percent) are subject to application by native village or regional corporations (including overlapping applications made by both) or for unresolved cemetery and historical site selections, native small tract applications, or unpatented mining claims. There is one small portion of conveyed village corporation land (1,280 acres) northeast of the Killeak Lakes, but there are no other private or patented lands. There are also 87,554 acres of state-owned tidelands and submerged lands. In addition, 41 native allotments (5,947 acres) have been approved.

MINING DEVELOPMENT

Unpatented mining claims are located on portions of seven sections of federal land in the immediate vicinity and to the east of Serpentine Hot Springs. The claims are clustered in two separately owned groups. Very little exploratory activity has taken place. The validity of the group of claims immediately south of Serpentine Hot Springs is being challenged by the National Park Service.

ROADS

There are no improved or unimproved roads in the preserve. ANILCA section 201(2) allows the continuation of customary patterns and modes of travel within a 100-foot-wide corridor along the existing route from Deering to the Taylor Highway during periods of adequate snow cover. Although not individually identified in ANILCA, several other routes have been used for winter travel between villages or to fishing camps and reindeer herding operations. In all cases the usual mode of travel has been by dogsled or snowmachine over adequate snow cover or on frozen rivers. Along some portions of the route from Deering to the Taylor Highway, along a route from Taylor to Serpentine Hot Springs, and in some other isolated areas there is evidence of tracked vehicles having been used without adequate snow cover or when the ground was not solidly frozen.

LANDING STRIPS

There are two unimproved landing strips within the preserve, one at Serpentine Hot Springs and the other near Ear Mountain.

CABINS

No permanently occupied cabins are within the preserve. Several seasonally occupied summer fish cabins and maintained winter shelter cabins lie along the Chukchi Sea coast; most of these are on native allotment applications or are associated with reindeer herding operations. Two structures at Serpentine Hot Springs are used occasionally by visitors to the hot springs and by subsistence users. Several historic cabins associated with former mining activities (e.g., along Fairhaven Ditch) are still standing but are in a state of disrepair.

NPS DEVELOPMENT

No NPS development has taken place within the preserve. The structures occasionally occupied at Serpentine Hot Springs are used as patrol cabins and are not considered seasonally occupied backcountry cabins.

SIZE OF THE UNIT

The total size of the preserve is 2,784,960 acres.

HISTORIC AND ARCHEOLOGICAL SITES

The status of a number of cemetery sites and historic places is yet to be determined. Areas that are conveyed will no longer be federal land and will, therefore, be unsuitable.

Serpentine Hot Springs is the only historic site that currently has visitor use and development. This site will remain in federal ownership because the application for the area by the Bering Straits Native Corporation under ANCSA has been denied. Currently, visitors arrive by either snowmachine or airplane for short visits for ritual healing or recreational hot springs bathing. Because both transportation modes would continue to be acceptable with or without wilderness designation (ANILCA 1110(a)), and structures may be allowed in wilderness (ANILCA 1315(c)), the Serpentine Hot Springs area is currently suitable for wilderness.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of the suitability criteria, the following three categories of land in Bering Land Bridge National Preserve have been identified with respect to wilderness suitability (see Wilderness Suitability map):

Federal lands on which there are no pending applications--All these lands (2,509,360 acres) are considered suitable for wilderness.

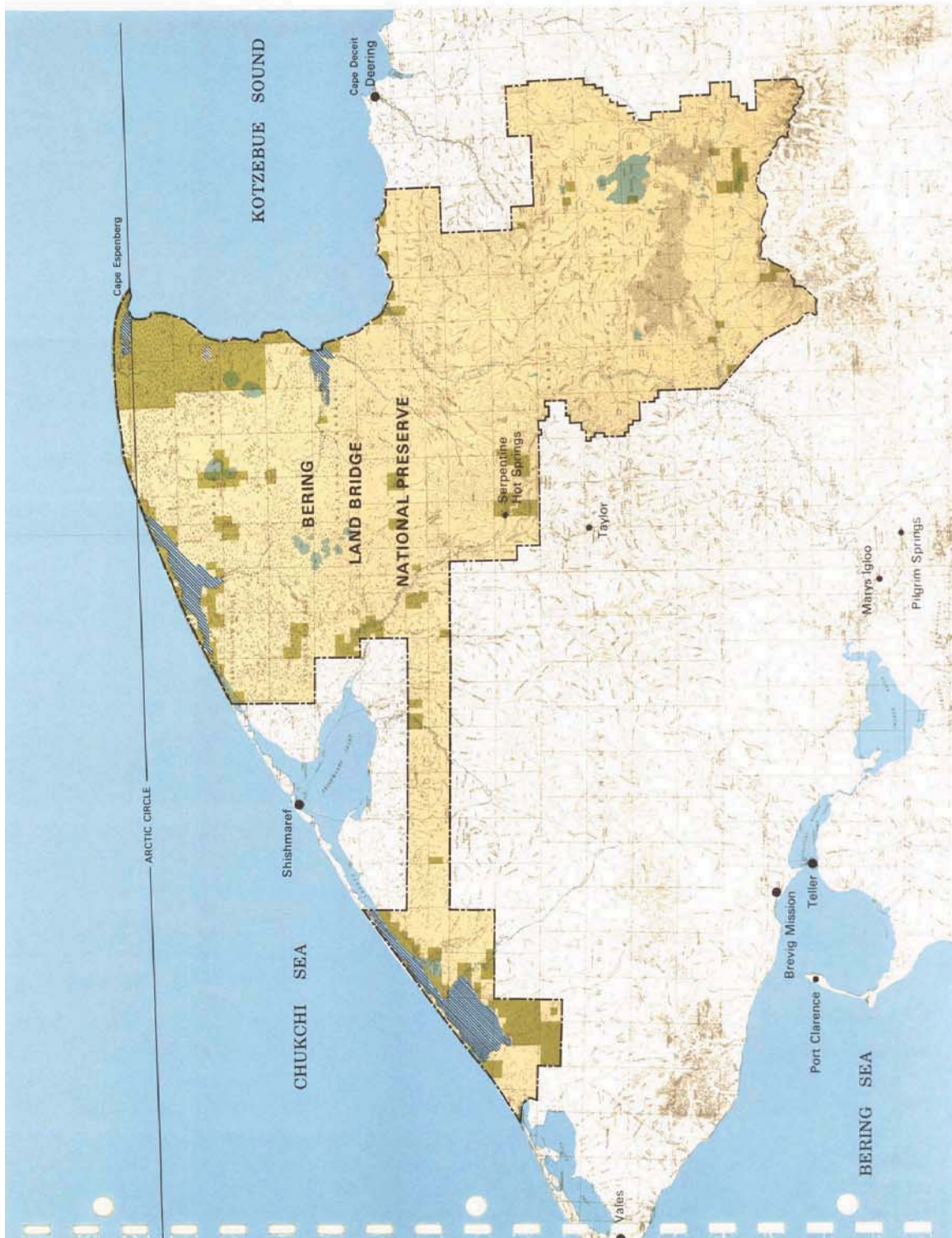
Federal lands on which applications are pending and which could as a result be conveyed out of federal ownership--All of these lands (180,819 acres) are considered as suitability pending for wilderness but will become unsuitable if conveyed to the applicant.

Nonfederal lands--The 1,280 acres of interimly conveyed land owned by Kikiktagruk Inupiat Corporation, state navigable waterways and submerged lands (87,554 acres), and 5,947 acres of approved allotments are not suitable for wilderness designation.

In summary, most of Bering Land Bridge National Preserve is considered suitable for wilderness. As various applications by native groups are resolved, however, and as some lands are conveyed out of federal ownership, those particular lands will no longer be suitable.

Changes in land status occurring or likely to occur between now and when the recommendations are made to the president and Congress will be reflected in the final recommendations. A determination of suitability does not affect any pending selections or other prior existing land disposal actions. All future wilderness recommendations will recognize valid existing rights, including rights-of-way under RS 2477.

Recommendations on whether to designate suitable areas as wilderness will be made following completion of the general management plan. An environmental impact statement will be prepared as part of the wilderness recommendation process. The public will have the opportunity to review and comment on these recommendations, and public hearings will be held. Upon completion of the environmental impact statement and secretarial review, the president will make his recommendations to Congress.



SUITABLE

UNSUITABLE

SUITABILITY PENDING

NOTE: LAND STATUS IS SUBJECT TO CHANGE AS VARIOUS CONDITIONS AFFECTING LAND STATUS ARE RESOLVED FOR EXAMPLES: NAVIGABILITY DETERMINATIONS, STATE AND NATIVE LAND CONVEYANCES, REJECTIONS OR RELINQUISHMENTS, RIGHT OF WAY, EASEMENT, AND SMALL TRACT ADJUDICATION, BEDS OF INLAND NAVIGABLE RIVERS AND LAKES, TIDELANDS, AND SUBMERGED LANDS BENEATH MARINE WATERS ARE STATE OWNED

BOUNDARY ADJUSTMENT AND POTENTIAL LAND EXCHANGE AREAS ARE SHOWN ON BOUNDARY ADJUSTMENTS AND LAND EXCHANGES MAP



WILDERNESS SUITABILITY

BERING LAND BRIDGE NATIONAL PRESERVE

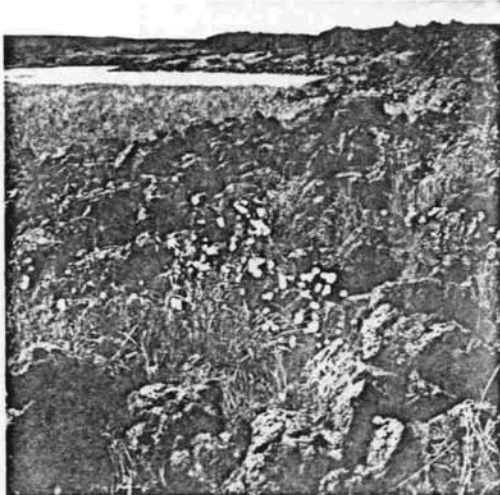
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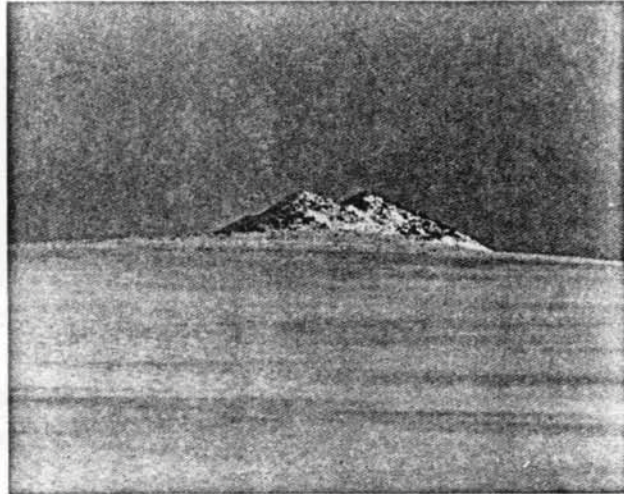
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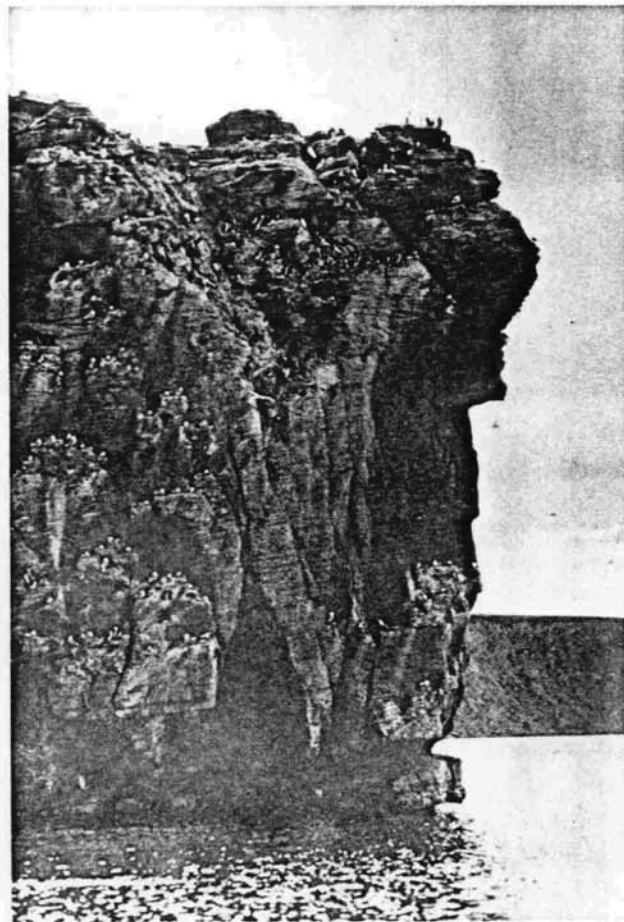
DWARF RHODODENDRON



VEGETATION EMERGING FROM LAVA



ASSES EARS



SULLIVAN BLUFFS SEABIRD COLONY

CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION
APPENDIXES
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY
PLANNING TEAM