



U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Region 7 - Alaska

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News

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**Service Seeks Public Comment on Future Management of
Arctic National Wildlife Refuge**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today opened public comment on a draft plan developed to ensure long-term conservation of fish, wildlife and plants, and to sustain outdoor recreational opportunities and environmental education and interpretation in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska.

The draft plan, called a Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Impact Statement, outlines a 15-year management plan for the refuge. Conservation plans are revised periodically for every refuge around the country, as a matter of course. The draft plan contains six alternatives for long-term management, ranging from the continuation of current practices to the designation of three geographic areas (including the Arctic Refuge coastal plain) for potential inclusion within the National Wilderness Preservation System, and the potential designation of four additional Wild and Scenic Rivers on the refuge.

The draft plan does not identify a preferred alternative among the six presented today; all of the options remain under active consideration and the Service is conducting a series of public meetings and reviewing public comments before finalizing the plan, which will ultimately identify a preferred alternative. Public comments will be accepted through November 15, 2011. None of the alternatives would change existing protocols for subsistence harvest.

In conducting a wilderness review for each geographic area under consideration, the Service evaluated whether a recommendation to designate wilderness would assist in achieving the purposes for which the refuge was established, and to determine the suitability for inclusion into the National Wilderness Preservation System. As part of the analysis, the Service assessed the areas' ecological, recreational, cultural, and symbolic values; their wildlife, water, vegetation, mineral, and soil resources; and their public uses and refuge management activities. The Service also addressed whether the refuge could effectively manage each area to preserve its wilderness character – meaning the benefits and impacts of managing each area as wilderness were compared to the benefits and impacts of managing the area under an alternate set of goals, objectives, and strategies not involving a wilderness designation.

In addition to the public comment period, the Service announced it will hold a series of public meetings in Alaska at the following locations (a full list of dates and meeting facilities is available at:

<http://arctic.fws.gov/ccp.htm>):

Fairbanks: Open House – August 24
 Public Hearing – October 19

Anchorage: Open House – September 20
 Public Hearing – September 21

Arctic Village: August 30

Fort Yukon: to be announced

Kaktovik: to be announced

Venetie: September 1

The involvement of the public is a critical part of the multi-year Comprehensive Conservation Plan development process, and we look forward to receiving substantive public input on the draft plan," said Sharon Seim, Natural Resource Planner in the Alaska Region Division of Conservation Planning and Policy, "We want to know what people like, what they don't like, and why. We want to know what we've missed and how we can make the plan better."

Comments on the draft must be submitted no later than November 15, 2011. A copy of the draft plan, and additional materials, is available on the Arctic Refuge website at <http://arctic.fws.gov/ccp.htm>. Public comments may be submitted by e-mail to: ArcticRefugeCCP@fws.gov or by postal service mail to: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Arctic NWR – Sharon Seim, 101 12th Ave, Rm 236, Fairbanks, AK 99701. Comments may also be faxed to: (907) 456-0428.

If the final plan recommends additional Wilderness and/or Wild and Scenic River designations, the recommendation (s) would require approval by the Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service, the Secretary of the Interior, and the President. The President would then submit the recommendation to Congress, which alone has the authority to make final decisions on any proposed Wilderness or Wild and Scenic River designations.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov.