

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Case File No. AA-082810

AK-040-EA01-008

Applicant: Teton Gravity Research
James F. Conway
1579 East Sherleen Circle
Salt Lake City, Utah 84124

Type of
Action: Minimum Impact Filming Permit
43 CFR 2920

Location: Copper River Meridian, Alaska
T. 26 to 31 S., R. 54 E.;
T. 25, 26, 30 and 31 S., R. 55 E.;
T. 25 to 28, 30 and 31 S., R. 56 E.;
T. 24 to 27 and 29 to 32 S., R. 57 E.,
T. 24 to 27, 32, and 33 S., R. 58 E.,
T. 25 to 28, and 33 S., R. 59 E.,
T. 33 S., R. 60 E.

Prepared By: Martin Hansen, Realty Specialist
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Preparing
Office: Bureau of Land Management
Anchorage Field Office
6881 Abbott Loop Road
Anchorage, Alaska 99507

Date: March 19, 2001

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Purpose and Need for the Proposed Action

Teton Gravity Research (TGR), an extreme outdoor sports film company, has applied for a minimum impact permit. The purpose and need for the Proposed Action is to film skiers and snow boarders on Bureau of Land Management (BLM) administered public lands near Haines, Alaska.

B. Conformance With Land Use Plan

There is no land use plan for this area. This environmental analysis assesses the impacts of the Proposed Action and provides the basis for a decision (43 CFR 1610.8(b)(1)).

C. Relationship to Statutes, Regulations, or Other Plans

BLM issues filming permits under Public Law 106-206 of May 26, 2000, and Section 302(b) of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of October 21, 1976. Permitting regulations are in Title 43 Code of Federal Regulations Part 2920.

The State of Alaska has selected the public lands identified for this Proposed Action. Presently, this type of activity falls within the list of generally allowable uses that are permissible on state lands without a permit. Therefore, filming does not require the formal 906(k) concurrence.

II. PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

A. Proposed Action

TGR will film professional skiers and snow boarders on north facing slopes in the mountains above the Takhin and Tsirku Rivers. They will scout for future filming locations in the mountains above the Chilkat, Klehini, and Chilkoot Rivers. They have applied for a permit from March 21 to April 15, 2001. The filming and scouting locations are within thirty miles of Haines in the following townships:

Copper River Meridian, Alaska

T. 26 to 31 S., R. 53 E.,
T. 25, 26, 30 and 31 S., R. 55 E.,
T. 25 to 28, 30, and 31 S., R. 56 E.,
T. 24 to 27 and 29 to 32 S., R. 57 E.,
T. 24 to 27, 32, and 33 S., R. 58 E.,
T. 25 to 28 and 33 S., R. 59 E.,
T. 33 S., R. 60 E.
See attached map.

TGR has two film crews. Each crew has a guide, a cinematographer, a photographer, and two or three athletes. While one crew is filming, the other will be flying to the next location in an Aerospatial B-2 helicopter, from ERA Aviation. The helicopter will be staged and fueled at the Haines airport or on private land on the road system north of Haines. The crews will use commercial lodging in Haines.

The crews will be skiing and filming on steep north facing slopes above the glaciers. The athletes and cameraman will select a slope from the air, land, and assess the avalanche risks. If the risks are acceptable, they will ski and film. Occasionally they will film from the helicopter. Between flights, the helicopter will park in a safe location within radio contact.

TGR plans four or five full days of filming starting at 8:00 or 9:00 A.M. and ending an hour before sunset. They also plan five to ten days when they will fly for three to five hours. These days will be devoted to scouting and evaluating avalanche hazards. They applied for a 25-day permit to allow for time lost to bad weather and unsafe conditions.

TGR will avoid all wildlife and touring parties by moving away at least one drainage. They will never land or ski above a touring party. Guides will record all wildlife and touring party sightings in their field books. TGR will give copies to BLM. TGR will pack out everything they pack in, including human waste. They have offered to give BLM a location credit in their film. TGR will follow the skiing and scouting procedures in their Film Shoot Safety and Operations Plan. A copy is in the case file.

- B. No Action Alternative
Under the No Action Alternative, BLM would not issue a filming permit to TGR.

III. AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

- A. Critical Elements
The following critical elements of the human environment have been analyzed and either are not present or will not be affected by the Proposed Action or Alternative:

- Air Quality
- Areas of Critical Environmental Concern
- Cultural Resources
- Environmental Justice
- Farmlands (Prime or Unique)
- Flood plains
- Native American Religious Concerns

Threatened and Endangered Species
Invasive, Non-Native Species
Subsistence
Wastes (Hazardous/Solid)
Water Quality (Surface/Ground)
Wetlands/Riparian Zones
Wild and Scenic Rivers
Wilderness

1. ANILCA Section 810 Clearance
Because the lands are State selected, they are not subject to subsistence review under Section 810 of ANILCA. At this time, the Proposed Action will not significantly reduce subsistence uses, decrease the abundance of subsistence resources, alter the distribution of subsistence resources, or limit subsistence user access from currently existing conditions on Federal Public Lands in Alaska. No further analysis is necessary at this time.
2. Section 106 Cultural Clearance
Snow cover will protect historic structures or artifacts in the permit area.
3. Threatened and Endangered Species Clearance
Based on currently available information, the Proposed Action will not affect threatened or endangered plant and animal species or their habitats.

- B. Wildlife
Bald eagles winter in the river valleys feeding on salmon carcasses. They will be starting their courtship flights.

Mountain goats will be on their crucial winter ranges, generally south facing slopes and wind swept ridges. Late winter and early spring is the most nutritionally and physiologically stressful period of the annual cycle in undisturbed mountain goat populations. They are also most vulnerable to avalanches during this period. Pregnant females will be in their third trimester.

This is the control area for a BLM study to determine the effects of summer helicopter tourism on mountain goats in adjacent areas. The study period is May and June. It began in 1995. This will be the first BLM permit allowing helicopter landings in this area.

IV. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

A. Impacts of the Proposed Action

The sight and sound of the helicopter could disturb bald eagles in the river bottoms. The sight and sound of the helicopter could cause Mountain goats to abandon their winter ranges.

BLM's study of helicopter impacts on mountain goats could be compromised by exposing previously undisturbed goats to helicopters.

Cultural resources could be disturbed by the film crews when they are on the ground.

The film will expose the public to BLM and BLM resources.

Haines' economy will receive a boost during an economically slow period. Local businesses will be housing, feeding, and selling supplies to the film crews and helicopter pilot for twenty-five days.

BLM will have copies of the TGR guide's field book with recorded sightings of touring parties and wildlife on BLM administered public lands.

B. Impacts of the No Action Alternative

The loss of business would be a negative impact to Haines' economy.

BLM would not receive a copy of the guides' field books.

BLM would not get a location credit in TGR's film.

C. Residual or Cumulative Impacts

There will not be any cumulative or residual impacts from the Proposed Action.

D. Mitigation Measures for the Proposed Action

Impacts to wildlife and the BLM study can be mitigated by keeping the helicopter away from bald eagles in the river bottoms and mountain goat on their winter ranges.

V. CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

A. Persons and Agencies Consulted

Craig Bradley, State of Alaska, Department of Natural Resources

Teresa Paquet, U.S. Forest Service, Girdwood Ranger District

Neil Barten, State of Alaska, Department of Natural Resources, Biologist

B. List of Preparers

Martin Hansen, Realty Specialist

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Deborah Blank, BLM, Botanist

Jeff Denton, BLM, Subsistence Coordinator/Biologist