

Environmental Assessment  
Case File No. AA-82857  
AK-040-02-EA-034

Applicant: USDA, U.S. Forest Service, Chugach National Forest, Seward Ranger District

Type of Action: Russian River Corridor Withdrawal

Location: Seward Meridian, Alaska

Township 4 North, Range 4 West

Sec. 9, SE $\frac{1}{4}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$ , E $\frac{1}{2}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$ ;

Sec. 10, SW $\frac{1}{4}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$ , W $\frac{1}{2}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$ ;

Sec. 16, E $\frac{1}{2}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$ , SE $\frac{1}{4}$ ;

Sec. 21, W $\frac{1}{2}$ E $\frac{1}{2}$ , fractional parts of S $\frac{1}{2}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$  lying east of the Forest boundary, SW $\frac{1}{4}$  lying east of forest boundary;

Sec. 28, W $\frac{1}{2}$ E $\frac{1}{2}$ , fractional parts of W $\frac{1}{2}$  lying east of the Forest boundary;

Sec. 29, fractional part of E $\frac{1}{2}$  lying east of the Forest boundary;

Sec. 32, fractional part of NE $\frac{1}{4}$  lying east of the Forest boundary;

Sec. 33, W $\frac{1}{2}$  E $\frac{1}{2}$ , fractional parts of W  $\frac{1}{2}$  lying east of the Forest boundary.

Township 3 North, Range 4 West

Sec. 4, fractional parts of N $\frac{1}{2}$  lying east of the Forest boundary, SE $\frac{1}{4}$  lying east of the Forest boundary;

Sec. 9, fractional part of NE $\frac{1}{4}$  lying east of the Forest boundary;

Sec. 10, fractional part of N $\frac{1}{2}$  lying north of the Forest boundary;

Sec. 11, fractional part lying north of the Forest boundary, excluding the N $\frac{1}{2}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$ ;

Sec. 12, fractional part of the S $\frac{1}{2}$  lying northeast of the Forest boundary;

Sec. 13, fractional part of N $\frac{1}{2}$  lying north of the ordinary high water mark along the northeast shore of Upper Russian Lake.

Approximately 2,998 Acres

Prepared By: Donna Petersen, Minerals Specialist, FS  
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Case File No. AA-82857 (2321)  
EA No.: AK-040-02-EA-034

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Chugach National Forest  
Seward Ranger District  
P.O. Box 390  
Seward, Alaska 99664

Date: October 31, 2002

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Forest Service (FS) has submitted an application to the Secretary of the Interior through the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to withdraw approximately 2,998 acres of National Forest system land in the Chugach National Forest, Kenai Peninsula Borough, from mineral entry under the public land and general mining laws. The withdrawal would be in effect for 20 years, at which time the need for continuing it would be reassessed.

Under the withdrawal, the described lands would be withheld from settlement, sale, location or entry under some or all of the general land laws, including the mining laws. The purpose of the withdrawal would be to limit activities under those laws in order to maintain other public values in the area or reserve the area for a particular public purpose or program. The withdrawal would assist in the maintenance of the Russian River Valley's scenic quality, primitive recreational values and natural ecosystem.

No new mining claims could be located in the withdrawn area. Only valid claims located within the withdrawn area would be recognized. Withdrawn areas not claimed, and those not validly claimed, would be closed to mineral entry. Prospecting and working these areas for the purpose of making a mineral discovery would be prohibited.

The proposed withdrawal area extends the current withdrawal (PLO 6884) approximately five miles south along the east side of the Russian River and three miles east along the north side of the Russian River. It extends along the Russian River from Lower Russian Lake to Upper Russian Lake. The land on the west and south side of the proposed Russian River Corridor Withdrawal is designated as wilderness within the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge.

### **A. Purpose and Need**

The purpose of the Proposed Action would be to preserve and protect exceptional resources related to fisheries, brown bears, recreation, scenic, archaeological and cultural values. The aggregated total withdrawn area (proposed withdrawal of 2,998 acres and current withdrawal comprised of 1,855 acres) would be 4,853 acres.

### **B. Conformance with Land Use Plans**

This environmental analysis is tiered to the revised Chugach National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) and Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), May 2002. The Forest Plan provides guidance and direction for resource management activities on the Chugach National Forest. Although the subject of a land withdrawal for the Russian River Corridor area is not specifically addressed in the Forest Plan, the Proposed Action is consistent and in conformance with the goals and objectives of the Forest Plan.

The proposed project, the Russian River Corridor Withdrawal, falls within the Brown Bear Core Management area in the Forest Plan. The theme for this area is “to manage selected landscapes and their associated habitats to meet population objectives for brown bears and to reduce dangerous encounters between humans and brown bears.”

If a mining operation were to occur on a valid existing claim(s), the Forest Plan guideline would require inclusion of “terms and conditions controlling operating methods and times to prevent and control adverse impacts on brown bear habitat and prevent negative bear-human interactions.” Such guidelines would be implemented in accordance with the Forest Plan.

The Forest Plan and Environmental Impact Statement are available for review at the Office of the Forest Supervisor in Anchorage, Alaska and the Seward Ranger District Office in Seward, Alaska.

**C. Relationship to Statutes, Regulations, Policies, Plans or Other Environmental Analyses**

The following elements are considered in this environmental analysis:

Compliance with Executive Order 11593 of May 13, 1971, which orders Federal agencies to “...provide leadership in preserving, restoring, and maintaining the historic and cultural environment of the Nation...” (FS Manual 2300-90-4).

Surface Resource Regulations, Title 36 Code of Federal Regulations, Section 228 Minerals, provide for a limited measure of protection to minimize surface resource disturbance, avoid unnecessary or undue degradation, and provide for reclamation. Under these existing regulations, disturbance could be minimized, but not eliminated.

General Procedure for Withdrawals, Title 43 of the Code of Federal Regulations, Section 2310.3-2 requires that certain issues be addressed in the environmental analysis. These regulations and the Chugach Land Management Plan provided the source for identifying the significant issues used to formulate the alternatives and analyze environmental effects.

Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972, as amended: The State of Alaska, Division of Governmental Coordination (DGC) and the FS recognize that certain activities have “de minimus” effects and normally do not affect the coastal zone (FS Agreement #00MOU-111001-26 signed February 2000). Since the proposed activity is an administrative action involving a land withdrawal, there are no

impacts to the coastal zone. A project description was sent to DGC in February of 2002 describing the withdrawal.

The withdrawal would be made under the authority of Section 204 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) of 1976.

## II. PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVE

### A. Proposed Action

The Proposed Action is to withdraw approximately 2,998 acres of National Forest system land in the Russian River drainage from location and entry under the United States General Mining law of 1872 as amended, subject to valid existing rights. See attached map. The withdrawal would be in effect for a period of 20 years, and would be re-evaluated for continuation at the end of the twenty-year period.

The legal land description of the withdrawal proposal, including submerged lands to the middle of the Russian River is:

Seward Meridian, Alaska

#### Township 4 North, Range 4 West

Sec. 9, SE $\frac{1}{4}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$ , E $\frac{1}{2}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$ ;

Sec. 10, SW $\frac{1}{4}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$ , W $\frac{1}{2}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$ ;

Sec. 16, E $\frac{1}{2}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$ , SE $\frac{1}{4}$ ;

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Sec. 12, fractional part of the S $\frac{1}{2}$  lying northeast of forest boundary;

Sec. 13, fractional part of N $\frac{1}{2}$  lying north of the ordinary high water mark along the northeast shore of Upper Russian Lake.

Approximately 2,998 Acres

**B. No Action Alternative**

Under the No Action Alternative, the lands would not be withdrawn and would remain open to settlement, sale and/or location and entry.

**III. AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT**

This section briefly describes the environmental components of the area. Additional information concerning the resource values can be found in the Chugach National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan and EIS.

**A. Critical Elements**

It has been determined that the following Critical Elements of the human environment are either not present or would not be affected by the Proposed Action or the No Action Alternative.

- Air Quality
- Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs)
- Environmental Justice
- Farm Lands (prime or unique)
- Invasive, non-native species
- Native American Religious Concerns
- Wastes (Hazardous/Solid)

**Critical Elements Present That May Be Affected**

Cultural Resources

A portion of the Sqilantau Archaeological District occurs within the proposed project area. This Archaeological District was determined eligible for the National Register in 1981. The Russian River Valley floor is considered high in potential for cultural resources and numerous sites are surmised to exist in the area. The area has been heavily utilized for the exploitation of seasonal runs of anadromous fish since prehistoric times. During early historic times, Russian occupation of the area occurred with the construction and use of a trading post.

Known prehistoric and historic cultural resources within, and in the immediate vicinity of the proposed withdrawal include two recorded sites along the Russian River between Upper and Lower Russian Lakes, and two recorded sites on the northern portion of the Upper Russian Lake.

Wild and Scenic Rivers

The Russian River is recommended for inclusion as a wild and scenic river for its “outstandingly remarkable value” for fisheries and prehistoric values. The portion of the Russian River within the proposed withdrawal is eligible under the Wild classification. It is recommended for classification in the revised (May 2002) Land and Resource Management Plan for the Chugach National Forest.

### Subsistence

The Russian River Corridor is Federal Land as defined in the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA), Section 102 and falls under the authority of the Federal Subsistence Board and the Subsistence Regulations for the Harvest of Fish and Wildlife on Federal Public Lands in Alaska. From prehistoric times to the present, people have utilized the anadromous fish runs, and the availability of bird, terrestrial mammal, and botanical resources in the area. The dependence on these resources is not well documented.

The Russian River Corridor is outside the non-rural area identified by the Federal Subsistence Regulations. This makes all residents within Cooper Landing eligible for customary and traditional use. However there is no traditional use determined at this time for fish resources like salmon, char, trout, grayling, burbot or Dolly Varden. The Federal Subsistence Board intends to begin a study to make this determination in the near future, but at this time, there is no subsistence use allowed for these species in the Russian River drainage. The extent to which furbearers, birds, and other small game species is harvested for subsistence purposes has never been documented. Moose is probably taken as a subsistence resource during the general hunting season.

Local residents probably collect subsistence in the form of berries, mushrooms and birch bark gathering. The trail system is the main area of use for this activity.

### Threatened and Endangered Species

The Federally listed and FS sensitive species known or expected to be within the Russian River corridor, or that the project potentially affects, were identified and evaluated. No Federally listed species are within the proposed withdrawal area. There is one small population of sensitive plant species, *Thlapsi arcticum*, located on the western shore of Upper Russian Lake.

### Water Quality (Surface/Ground)

The Russian River forms a 63.5 square mile tributary to the Kenai River. Lower Russian Lake (210 acres) and Upper Russian Lake (1150 acres) are both located on the main stem of the Russian River. From Upper Russian Lake down to its mouth on the Kenai River, the Russian River forms the east boundary of the Chugach National Forest. Average annual precipitation is approximately 25 inches, with average maximum snow pack at approximately 35-40 inches. The heaviest rainfall events generally occur in September and October. No use of water would be required to fulfill the purposes of the proposed withdrawal.

Water quality in the Russian River is very pure. Water samples collected on the Russian River by a variety of organizations since the 1950's have not indicated elevated levels of sediment and/or fecal coliform for the Russian River.

#### Wetlands/Riparian Zones/Floodplains

Floodplains along the Russian River and its tributaries are small but important to the long-term maintenance and health of fish habitat. Floodplains also provide off-channel rearing habitat for fish, and riparian cover for the stream channel.

#### Wilderness/Roadless Area

The proposed land withdrawal area is located within Inventoried Roadless Area #4 as described in the revised 2002 Chugach National Forest Land Management Plan (Forest Plan). The area has a very high degree of natural integrity. Most long-term ecological processes are intact and operating. Some evidence of human activity exists (e.g. cabins, trails, mining operations), but these activities have little or no effect on the natural integrity of the area. During the analysis process for the revised Forest Plan the area was considered for Wilderness status but not designated.

### **B. Other Resources**

#### Land Status

The lands proposed for withdrawal became part of the Chugach National Forest by Presidential Proclamation of February 23, 1909. The Presidential Proclamation of August 2, 1915 reduced the size of the Chugach National Forest and established the thread (middle) of the Russian River as the western boundary of the Forest. The proposed withdrawal area has been managed as National Forest system lands subject to all pertinent public land laws since it was added to the Chugach National Forest in 1909.

In the 2002 revised Chugach National Forest Management Plan, facilities such as roads and utility systems may be approved in the "Brown Bear Core Area" prescription. New FS proposed roads are prohibited, but new roads built by others may be conditionally approved. Existing roads may be used during the winter for resource management activities, with road management emphasizing monitoring and restricting human access to important fish and wildlife habitats, such as salmon spawning and brown bear habitats.

#### Soils and Topography

The Russian River drainage is a moderately wide valley shaped by glacial activity approximately 10,000 – 15,000 years ago. The Russian River and its tributaries have deeply incised channels. Steep sided mountains exhibiting large areas of barren rocky ground characterize the area. Soils found on the steep side-slopes

consist mainly of sand and gravel derived from glacial till and eroded material. Soil depth averages from two to five feet deep and may be overlaid with avalanche debris in many locations. Some low-lying areas have one to two feet of muskeg type organic cover over mineral soil.

#### Timber/Vegetation

The primary vegetation type within the project area is a mix of white and Lutz spruce and Kenai paper birch dominating the overstory, with an understory of quaking aspen and mountain hemlock. The riparian areas typically support willow and alder species. The landscape has a relatively natural appearance although spruce bark beetles have heavily impacted some of the spruce stands in the area. In 1991, an 8,300-acre human-caused fire escaped from the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge side of the Russian River Valley and burned 300 acres on the FS side of the valley.

#### Geology and Mineral Resources

Bedrock within the drainage consists mostly of slate and greywacke belonging to the Late Cretaceous Valdez Group. The Valdez group is dominated by interbedded greywacke, siltstone, and mudstone with rare pebble conglomerate. Four small travertine (a form of limestone) deposits of postglacial age and possible hot springs origin are known to exist along the eastern edge of the Russian River drainage. The occurrence of scattered travertine boulders (outside of known deposits) suggest that other travertine deposits may exist, but are covered by talus and avalanche debris.

Mineral resource values within the proposed Russian River corridor land withdrawal, and the entire Russian River valley are low to non-existent. There are no known metallic (i.e. gold) mineral occurrences except in trace amounts, no known occurrences of oil and gas deposits, and no economically valuable common variety mineral deposits. Except for a 50 ton bulk sample of travertine taken from one of the deposits (RS & S #2) in the lower valley during the fall/winter of 1984, and an additional 6 tons removed in December 1985, there is no other recorded production of mineral resources from the Russian River drainage.

Based on BLM mining claim records maintained in Anchorage, Alaska, there are two mining claims filed within the proposed withdrawal area. They are both placer claims located for travertine and are called the RS & S #2 (AA #082741) and the C.R.A.P. #1 (AA #082836). They are located in T. 4 N., R. 4 W., Section 9, and T. 4 N., R. 4 W., Section 28, Seward Meridian. It appears the current BLM mining claim recording requirements were not filed by the September 3, 2002 deadline for the 2003 assessment year. Since the owner of the

mining claims neglected to keep the claims in current legal status any valid existing rights that the claimant may have been able to retain have been extinguished. A decision will be rendered on the status of the claims in the near future.

### Fisheries

The largest recreational fishery for sockeye salmon in the world occurs in the Russian River. The Russian River Sockeye salmon sport fishery targets two runs. The first run normally arrives by mid-June. The second run arrives in late July. The Russian River contains habitat for both resident and anadromous fish species including sockeye, coho and king salmon, rainbow trout, and Dolly Varden. The river contributes significant numbers of fish to both sport and commercial fisheries and is one of the most intensively managed in the State. The Russian River accounts for an average of 25 percent of late run sockeye escapement up the Kenai River. However, the Russian River makes up only three percent of the drainage area of the Kenai. This means that the Russian River is some eight and a half times more productive for late-run sockeyes than the rest of the Kenai River System (which is very productive in and of itself).

### Wildlife

The area contains habitat for such big game species as moose, Dall sheep, mountain goat, wolf, brown bear and black bear. Dall sheep and mountain goat are restricted to the alpine habitat of the drainage while brown bear and black bear are distributed over the entire drainage. Furbearers include wolf (a pack is centered around the Upper Russian Lake), pine martin, beaver, wolverine, weasel, coyote, lynx, fox, land otters, and mink. Upland game birds such as ruffed grouse, ptarmigan and spruce grouse are distributed over the entire drainage.

Brown bear on the Kenai Peninsula has been identified by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) as a “species of special concern.” The Department took this action because the population is vulnerable to a significant decline due to low numbers, restricted distribution, and dependence on limited habitat, resources, or sensitivity to environmental disturbance.

### Recreation

The Russian River Valley has high recreational resource values. Natural and cultural features of the proposed withdrawal area provide outstanding primitive and recreational opportunities for day-hiking, backpacking, camping, photography, sightseeing, nature studies, cross-country skiing, recreational cabin rental, wildlife and fish viewing, hunting and sport fishing. The Russian Lakes Trail is located in the proposed withdrawal area and it is one of the more popular trails on the Kenai Peninsula. A visitor register kept at the trailhead for Russian

Lakes Trail indicates that people from around the world visit the Russian River Valley each year.

Visual Resources

The outstanding visual quality of the Russian River Valley is a result of the variety in landscape features including water features, landforms, and vegetation patterns. The clear water stream of the Russian River, with its major run of sockeye salmon is a major component of this variety. This highly scenic area is visited by thousands of people every year. The limited access and lack of developed facilities in the upper part of the drainage accents the wildland character of the landscape. The landscape management objective for the Russian Lakes area requires that ground-disturbing activities should not be visually evident to the average Forest visitor.

**IV. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES**

The following statement is true for all elements. To the extent of valid existing rights, impacts under the Proposed Action would be similar to the No Action Alternative. However, impacts would be limited to those valid existing rights that are ultimately acted upon, i.e. actual mining operations.

**A. Critical Elements**

Cultural Resources

*No Action:* Land uses, such as development or resource (commodity) extraction is an intrusive and destructive activity, and therefore constitutes an 'adverse' effect on an eligible property, even when occurring outside of (but adjacent to) the historic property. Advisory Council of Historic Preservation (ACHP) regulations (36 CFR 800.9(b)(3) define adverse effects as the "introduction of visual, audible, or atmospheric elements that are out of character with the property or alter its setting". The establishment of work crews, landscape alterations, heavy equipment, and/or mine processing facilities would have effects on the visual, audible and atmospheric elements in the Russian River area.

Surface disturbing activities typically associated with mining may compromise the integrity of the Sqiilantau Archaeological District and sites relative to Dena'ina cultural values and heritage. The status and integrity of the National Register Eligible property and formal nomination to the National Register may be compromised.

*Proposed Action:* The management of cultural resources in the Russian River area would remain the same as currently exists. All Federal laws pertaining to cultural resources would be in effect, subject to valid existing rights. Withdrawal would maximize protection of the Sqiilantau Archaeological District relative to

Dena'ina cultural values and heritage. The proposed land withdrawal would have a positive effect in preserving those sites that remain or those cultural resources that are yet to be discovered subject to valid existing rights.

#### Wild and Scenic Rivers

*No Action:* Mining activity could result in an eligible river becoming ineligible, or result in its being eligible in only the Recreational classification. Some types of mineral exploration may not affect the classification of a river as Scenic or Recreational, as long as the outstandingly remarkable values and classification objectives are maintained.

*Proposed Action:* The proposed withdrawal would help preserve the character of the area and minimize or prevent activities that may render the Russian River ineligible for listing in the Wild category. Wild rivers are withdrawn from mineral entry.

#### Subsistence

*No Action:* The No Action Alternative may have an effect by altering the distribution and abundance of plant and animal subsistence resources depending on the extent of habitat conversion during mining activities (i.e. road building and use, ground disturbance).

*Proposed Action:* The Proposed Action would not measurably restrict subsistence uses, decrease the abundance of subsistence resources, alter the distribution of subsistence resources, or limit subsistence user access from currently existing conditions. There have been no identified conflicts with current use, and if the withdrawal were implemented, it would give another level of protection to the area.

#### Threatened and Endangered Species

*No Action:* The No Action Alternative may have a negative effect on plant species populations and vegetation ecology by allowing disturbance of vegetated areas for mining and mineral exploration, and possibly introducing fast colonizing non-native or noxious weed species.

*Proposed Action:* The Proposed Action would have positive effects and benefits on the ecology of the project areas by maintaining the current vegetative cover and by allowing areas previously disturbed to recover.

#### Water Quality (Surface/Ground)—Wetlands & Floodplains

*No Action:* Mining operations have the potential to adversely impact water quality, floodplains, and wetlands. Issues that can be associated with mining

operations include development of access to the mining site, water use for the mining operation, ground disturbance associated with the mining, storage of fuel and increased levels of toxic material running off from the mining operation and associated camp facilities. Potential impacts to water quality could originate from fuel spills, sediment from road and mining ground disturbance and fecal contamination. In order to minimize adverse impacts to water quality, if an active mining operation were to occur, implementation of FS Best Management Practices and the 36 CFR 228 Regulations would minimize the potential effects from a mining operation.

*Proposed Action:* Withdrawal of the area from the mining laws would prevent further claims from being filed. The risk of impacts to water-based resources (wetlands, floodplains and water quality) would be greatly minimized.

#### Wilderness/Roadless Area

*No Action:* Mining operations have the potential to change the character and use of the area. This may decrease enjoyment by recreation users and impact the quality of the recreational experience. Users that desire a more remote type setting could be displaced due to the noise, road construction and the general lack of solitude and remoteness. The existing landscape character and the scenic attractiveness of the Russian River Valley may be altered because of the introduction of mining.

*Proposed Action:* The proposed segregation of the 2,998 acre withdrawal from settlement, sale, location, and entry under the general laws, including the mining laws, would protect the unique resources as well as the area's natural ecosystem. The outstanding solitude and primitive recreational values of the area would be available for future generations.

## **B. Impacts to Other Resources**

### Mineral Resources

*No Action:* The only known mineral resource in the area, travertine, is considered a common variety mineral material. Analysis undertaken in a FS validity examination determined that the travertine that occurs in the Russian River Valley is not a valuable, locatable, mineral deposit. A market analysis indicated that the travertine could not be extracted at a profit, and no viable market exists for the end product (agricultural lime used to amend the soil). Environmental impacts that could result if the area would remain open to mineral location and entry could place the area's valuable resources in jeopardy as a result of surface disturbing activity.

*Proposed Action:* This withdrawal would not affect mineral development on the Chugach National Forest. The disposal of mineral materials (travertine) is a discretionary function under FS Regulations at 36 CFR 228 Subpart C. There are no mineral leases or lease applications on or adjacent to the project area. The proposed withdrawal area is not "prospectively valuable" for any energy or non-energy leasable mineral commodities.

The removal of locatable minerals would not be affected since no precious metal claims exist in the area. The geology and mining history indicate that the subject lands have a low probability for the development of a valuable mineral deposit of gold or other base metals.

#### Fisheries

*No Action:* Potential effects of mineral development may include sedimentation into adjacent streams and the lakes, channel disturbances and altered riparian vegetation. Sediment can fill spaces between spawning-sized gravel and suffocate eggs and pre-emergent fry. Fine sedimentation can irritate the gills of juvenile and adult salmon. Taking no action leaves open the possibility of mineral development within the drainage and possible unacceptable impacts to the fishery resource.

*Proposed Action:* The long and short term effects of a withdrawal to the Russian River are all favorable to the fisheries resource in the drainage. The watershed would remain in its present natural state and the existing high value habitat and fisheries resource values would be maintained.

#### Wildlife

*No Action:* Mineral activities would likely necessitate improved access into the area. This in turn would decrease habitat effectiveness for brown bears. Alteration of current vegetative patterns by a mining operation would locally disturb wildlife habitat. Some species would be impacted more than others. Moose, as well as non-game species favoring shrubs, young trees and grasses, could all benefit from this new habitat. If mining operations were too disturbing and noisy, many species would avoid the mining area. A brown bear cumulative effects model has shown that habitat effectiveness is reduced when noise and human visitation are introduced into an area. Taking no action leaves open the possibility of mineral development within the drainage and the impacts that mining brings to wildlife species and their habitats

*Proposed Action:* The Proposed Action would reduce the possibility of further access and disturbance on wildlife.

Recreation and Visual Resources

*No Action:* Mining would likely change the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum Class primarily because of motorized access development. Management of the area would likely change from Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized (summer) Class to a Semi-Primitive Motorized or Roaded Natural Class. Hiking trail impacts may occur if motorized use was authorized for mine access. The visual quality objective of Retention would likely change to Partial Retention or Modification.

*Proposed Action:* The Recreation Opportunity Spectrum Class would remain as Semi-Primitive Non Motorized (summer) Class and the Russian River Valley would remain much as it exists today. Only Non-Motorized access would be allowed during a snow-free season. A perception of remoteness would be retained and the cultural, recreation, scenic and wilderness values would be enhanced by the proposed withdrawal. The existing rustic recreational facilities would be retained and maintained to standard. The Visual Quality Objective of Retention would be maintained.

**C. Cumulative Impacts**

*No Action:* On those portions that have already been disturbed by mining, no new cumulative impacts are anticipated. Any future development to gain access to the mining areas would reduce the acreage of restored mined land, and undeveloped areas, and cause a shift and increase in use to other locations. There would be a loss of natural vegetation and subsequent loss of wildlife habitat.

*Proposed Action:* The area would remain “as is” with no new cumulative impacts associated with the proposed land withdrawal. However, in the future, if any development associated with valid existing rights or if development takes place in support of specific objectives in recreation-based activity, it may add to the incremental losses that are already occurring in the Russian River Valley. An increase in noise and human interaction would result if new and existing facilities (i.e. trails, cabins etc.) are developed and maintained.

**D. Mitigation Measures**

No mitigation measures are required for either the Proposed Action or the No Action Alternative for this proposed withdrawal project. If mining or other FS based recreation development were to take place, project specific mitigation would be developed in accordance with management direction and objectives outlined in the Chugach National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan.

**V. CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION**

Consultation and coordination with individuals, State, local and tribal governments, other Federal Agencies, and non-governmental groups took place. In addition, notices were

placed in the *Federal Register* on Wednesday, February 28, 2001 (Volume 66, Number 40) and entitled “Notice of Proposed (temporary) Withdrawal and Opportunity for Public Meeting” and the *Federal Register* on Tuesday, January 29, 2002 (Volume 67, Number 19), “Notice of Public Open House for the Russian River Withdrawal.”

Scoping for public comments and to assist in determining the issues and alternative development included these actions: On February 4, 2002, a letter announcing the public meetings, and a request for comments was mailed to approximately five hundred interested parties. A “public notice” was placed in the legal section of three local newspapers; the *Seward Phoenix Log* on February 21, 2002, the *Peninsula Clarion*, on February 15, 2002, and the *Anchorage Daily News* on February 18, 2002. The project was listed in the *Chugach National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions* in the April and July 2002 issues. There were also three “opinion-type” articles published in Alaska newspapers that addressed the proposed withdrawal; in the *Anchorage Daily News* on February 26, 2002, the *Peninsula Clarion* on February 24, 2002, and the *Ketchikan Daily News* on February 26, 2002.

In addition, two public “open house” information meetings were held in Soldotna and Anchorage on February 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup>, 2002. At least ten people attended the Anchorage meeting and eight people attended the Soldotna meeting. These numbers are based on the sign-in sheets, there appeared to be several more people in attendance at both meetings. Fourteen letters were received in support of the withdrawal and five in support of maintaining the area open to mineral entry. No significant issues or concerns were identified as a result of the scoping effort. Persons and agencies contacted and comments received are noted below.

**A. Persons and Agencies Consulted**

These are some of the key agencies that were sent a letter requesting comments. A complete list of all 500 of the parties contacted is listed in the appendix.

State of Alaska, Division of Forestry  
State of Alaska, Division of Governmental Coordination  
State of Alaska, Division of Parks and Recreation  
State of Alaska, DOT and PF  
State of Alaska, Department of Fish and Game  
State of Alaska, Division of Lands  
Alaska Board of Fish and Game  
State of Alaska, Department of Park and Recreation  
Kenai National Wildlife Refuge  
National Marine Fisheries  
National Marine Fisheries  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

U.S. EPA Region 10  
Kenai Peninsula Planning Department  
Kenai Peninsula Borough Assembly  
Bureau of Land Management\*

\*In accordance with 40 CFR §1501.6, the BLM, having jurisdiction over withdrawals, is a cooperating agency.

Alaska Native groups:  
Alaska Native groups, both local and out of the area, were sent a scoping letter announcing the project and requesting input:

Kenaitze Indian Tribe, IRA (local-Kenai)  
Qutekeak Native Tribe (local-Seward)  
Cook Inlet Region Incorporated (Anchorage)  
Chugach Alaska Corporation (Anchorage)  
Doyon, Inc  
Ahtna, Inc  
Aleut Corporation  
Arctic Slope Regional Corporation  
Bering Straits Native Corporation  
Bristol Bay Native Corporation  
Calista Corporation  
Koniag Inc.  
Nana Native Corporation  
SeaAlaska Corporation

Individuals and organizations that provided written comments:

Ellen Simpson – Alaska Dept. Fish & Game  
Bob Churchill – Alaska Fly Fishers  
Jack Willis – Trout Unlimited  
Jan Konigsberg – AK Salmonid Biodiversity Program  
John Schoen – Audubon Alaska  
Dale McGahan  
Stacy Corbin  
Ed Oberts  
Sherman Smith  
Clarence Petty  
George & Trina Smallwood  
Clifford Bove  
John Dodge  
Joseph Cook

Florence Collins  
Jo Clark  
Robert Baldwin  
Bill Stockwell  
David Rhode

**B. List of Preparers**

FS Resource Specialists that contributed analysis reports and their area of expertise:

Dean Davidson	Soil Scientist
Linda Yarborough	Forest Archaeologist
Elizabeth Bella	Vegetation
Dean Davidson	Soil Scientist
Bill Shuster	Wildlife Biologist and Subsistence Coordinator
Donna Peterson	Minerals Specialist and EA Author
Carol Huber	Forest Geologist
Norm Day	Former Chugach NF Geologist
Leo Keeler	Lands Staff Officer
Eric Johansen	Fishery Biologist
Rob DeVelice	Ecologist
Patrick O'Leary	Recreation

**C. Attachments**

Russian River Corridor Land Withdrawal Vicinity and Location Map  
Minerals and Geology Report  
Mineral Potential-Classification Report for Aglime Travertine  
Water Resource Report  
Soils Report  
Heritage Report  
Wildlife Report  
Ecology Report  
Biological Evaluation  
Fishery Report  
Lands Report  
Recreation Report  
Economic Impact Analysis Report  
Water Use Statement  
Floodplain/Wetland Statement  
Consultation Statement  
Public Participation Statement

**D. Appendix**

February 4, 2002, public scoping letter with mailing list.  
Copies of letters received during public comment period.