

BERING GLACIER Proposed Research Natural Area

Importance: The entire Bering Glacier icefield and the surrounding glacially-influenced environment is unique to BLM-managed lands across the nation for its dynamic landscape, pristine environment, and outstanding biodiversity. Its harsh conditions, physical isolation, and frequently dynamic landscape are thought to have encouraged the evolution of unique plants and animals. The Bering Glacier is the largest (5200 sq km) and longest (190km) glacier in North America. It is bounded to the north by the St. Elias Mountain range and to the south by the Gulf of Alaska. In various places, this tidewater glacier has a thickness of over 800 meters. The extent of the combined Bagley Ice Field and Bering Glacier, including all tributaries, encompasses a multitude of variant natural communities including marine, post-glacial freshwater ponds and lakes, coastal lowlands, non-vegetated terminal moraines, mountainous highlands, nunataks, and the glacier itself.

The Bering Glacier area is a seasonal home or migratory staging area for numerous species of birds, and a yearlong home to various species of mammals and fish. Among these are mountain goats, harbor seals, waterfowl (including trumpeter swans, dusky Canada geese, Tule white-fronted geese, Vancouver Canada geese, red-throated loon, etc.), moose, wolves, coyotes, fox, beavers, coastal brown bears, and black bears. Vitus Lake (in the foreground of Bering Glacier) and adjacent lowlands/riparian areas provide important parturient habitat for harbor seals, trumpeter swans, dusky Canada geese, and other species of waterfowl, shorebirds, and songbirds considered Sensitive Status Species by BLM-Alaska. Its floristic elements include those from Beringia, the Aleutian/Asian connection, southeast coastal ranges and the Cordilleran range of the interior.

Description of Area: Proposed area under Alternative D covers 818,614 acres, all of which is unencumbered BLM.

General Stipulations in the Bering RNA:

Seasonal Limitations

- To protect raptor nests, activities or surface use exceeding fourteen days would not be allowed within ¼ mile of historically active nests from 4/1 to 8/31.
- To protect trumpeter swans and other waterfowl, activities or surface use exceeding fourteen days would not be permitted in designated priority waterfowl areas from 4/1 to 9/15.
- To protect critical moose winter range, no designated trails or new public use cabins or surface disturbing activities from 10/15 – 3/31.
- No surface disturbing activity would be permitted within 200 feet of all anadromous streams and lakes during open water.
- No surface disturbing activities or designated trails on nunataks.

ALTERNATIVES – Bering Glacier RNA

DIFFERENCES IN MANAGEMENT GUIDANCE BY ALTERNATIVE				
Management Actions	Alternative A: Current management	Alternative B: Development end of spectrum	Alternative C: Conserve/maintain end of spectrum	Alternative D
Decision	No RNA designation	Same as A.	Include State and Native selected lands in RNA designation. Total designated area would be 1,000,316 acres.	Designate RNA as indicated above. Interim management of State and Native selected lands within the area would follow guidelines and measures identified below. Selected lands retained in federal ownership would be included in RNA.
Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) Use	No current restrictions on BLM-managed lands.	Same as A.	Trails designated year-long. Designate nunataks non-motorized, at least seasonally.	OHVs limited to designated trails 5/1 to 8/31. Goals of designation: 1) prevent un-managed proliferation of trails; 2) avoid waterfowl staging and nesting areas; and 3) protect nunataks.
Construction of new airstrips	Construction of new airstrips authorized by permit.	Same as A.	No new construction.	Avoid new construction of airstrips.
New road construction	Construction of roads and trails would be allowed, considered on case-by-case basis.	Same as A.	No new construction.	Construction of roads and trails would be authorized by ROW only, consistent with protection of values identified.
Minerals: Locatable minerals	Bering sub-region currently closed to locatable entry under PLO 5179.	Open for locatable minerals.	Maintain withdrawal.	Maintain withdrawal identified in Alternative A. If State and Native selected lands in area are retained in federal ownership, withdraw from mineral entry.

ALTERNATIVES – Bering Glacier RNA

Management Actions	Alternative A: Current management	Alternative B: Development end of spectrum	Alternative C: Conserve/maintain end of spectrum	Alternative D
Minerals: Leasable minerals (Oil & Gas)	Bering sub-region currently closed to leasable entry under PLO 5179.	Open for leasable minerals, subject to seasonal stipulations to protect values identified.	Maintain withdrawal.	Maintain withdrawal. If State and Native selected lands in the area are retained in federal ownership, they would be closed to mineral leasing.
Minerals: Leasable minerals (Coal)	Bering sub-region currently closed to mineral leasing under PLO 5179.	Open for coal leasing, using only certain stipulated mining methods and under seasonal constraints to protect identified values.	Maintain withdrawal.	Same as Leasable minerals (Oil and Gas).
Minerals: Mineral Materials	Location and operation of mineral material extraction would be according to an approved plan.	Same as A.	No new mineral material sites permitted.	Same as C.
Public use cabins	No current guidance. State currently has two public use cabins in the area.	Allow.	No.	Public use cabins may be considered, consistent with general guidelines listed above and with carrying capacity developed for SRPs. None in moose winter range and none on nunataks.

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Management Actions	Alternative A: Current management	Alternative B: Development end of spectrum	Alternative C: Conserve/maintain end of spectrum	Alternative D
Special Recreation Permits (SRP)	No limits currently identified for number of SRP permits. Current SRPs for the area contain stipps for mitigation of impacts.	Same as A.	Same as D.	Carrying capacity will be developed for the area for SRPs, consistent with managing for a primitive recreation experience. No heli-skiing or helicopter-supported heli-tours.
Recreation facilities	No facilities exist.		No new facilities.	No new campgrounds. Other recreation facilities will adhere to general guidelines listed above
Lands and Realty: Emphasis area for acquisition?	No.	No.	Yes.	Nonfederal and private lands within the ACEC would be identified for possible future acquisition.
Lands and Realty: FLPMA and R&PP leases	Yes, considered case-by-case.	Yes.	No, only when associated with research activities.	R&PP and FLPMA leases considered on a case-by-case basis. Approval contingent on proposal being consistent with protection of values identified.

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Lands and Realty: FLPMA 302 permits	32	Yes.	No, only when associated with research activities.	Occupancy type permits, such as commercial use cabins, would be authorized under the following conditions: 1) no new structures within RNA; 2) Existing structures would be authorized only if they can clearly be tied to a commercial enterprise, such as guiding or trapping. Other occupancy permits (non-cabin) considered case-by-case, if consistent with protection of values identified.
Lands and Realty: Rights of Way (ROW)	Evaluate case-by-case.	Same as A.	No, only if associated with research activities.	ROW avoidance area. If allowed, mitigate to protect identified values.
Military permits, activities	Evaluate case-by-case.	Same as A.	Do not permit.	Same as C.
Forestry	No current activities.		No commercial timber or firewood sales permitted.	Forestry practices allowed if primary objective is enhancement of identified values (such as moose winter range). Contingent on utilizing existing or temporary roads.