

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Dry Bay Facility Improvements Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve, Alaska June 2004

The National Park Service (NPS) prepared an environmental assessment (EA) evaluating improvements to its visitor and administrative support facilities in the Dry Bay area of Glacier Bay National Preserve (GLBA). Dry Bay is located near the mouth of the Alsek River as it meets the Gulf of Alaska on the northwestern corner of GLBA. Dry Bay has a ranger station and is the NPS point of contact for river float trips and commercial fishing activities. The project will be to demolish, reconstruct, construct or improve several facilities.

The purpose of the project is to address NPS facility deficiencies in the Dry Bay area, specifically:

- improve resource protection and visitor service functions through renovation and expansion of administrative support facilities,
- improve health and safety concerns associated with human waste disposal systems,
- reduce conflicts between river rafters, commercial fishing operations and airplane traffic at the Alsek River takeout site, and
- improve visitor enjoyment of the area.

These improvements are needed to provide for efficient and effective service to park visitors and protection of park resources, specifically:

- bring the sewage dump station up to State of Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) standards,
- bring the ranger station septic system up to DEC standards,
- improve deteriorating NPS buildings, and
- reduce the safety and use conflicts between the raft camp area and the commercial fish operations.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The EA was issued for public review and comment from April 21, 2004 to May 23, 2004. Full paper copies of the EA were mailed to 28 addressees. Notices of the EA were sent by mail to 56 addressees and by email to 36 addressees. The EA was posted on the park's webpage and the park issued a press release about the availability of the EA and open comment period. Four written comments were received.

The Friends of Glacier Bay group and one individual expressed support for Alternative C (see the Alternative descriptions below). Another individual expressed support for Alternative B. The State of Alaska supported the project and suggested additional signage for visitors.

The attached errata sheet includes NPS responses to the comments. The public comments received did not change the conclusions about the environmental effects of the proposed action.

The NPS submitted a *Negative Determination* for the project regarding the Alaska Coastal Management Program (ACMP) for coastal zone consistency and included it as an appendix in the EA. The NPS received a letter of concurrence from the ACMP dated June 1, 2004. The NPS also received three *Approval to Construct* certificates from DEC for the wastewater systems proposed in the project – the raft sewage dump station, the ranger station septic system and the public use cabin outhouse.

ALTERNATIVES

Three alternatives were evaluated in the EA. Alternative B is selected for implementation but is modified as described in later sections of this Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI).

Alternative A, No-Action

No new construction or facility reconstruction would take place. The area would be managed using the existing facilities.

Alternative B, the Proposed Action (NPS Preferred Alternative)

Visitor Facilities.

- relocate the raft takeout point to a site 600 feet downstream
- relocate the rafter camp area to a site 600 feet downstream
- clear a new airplane taxiway to the new camp area
- reconstruct the sewage dump station (with an outhouse) in its present location
- demolish and fill the existing pit toilet

Public Use Cabin.

- reconstruct the pit toilet

Ranger Station.

- reconstruct a storage shed and add a workshop
- reconstruct the shower room, add a toilet and remove the workshop
- construct an open three-sided storage shed
- reconstruct the volunteer cabin
- reconstruct the bunkhouse cabin
- construct a fuel storage structure
- construct a wastewater system

Alternative C, Move the River Takeout, Camp Area and Dump Station to West of Airstrip

The planned actions in Alternative B would occur except for the first four points under *Visitor Facilities* above. The raft takeout point and rafter camp area would be relocated about 1,200 feet west of the existing site, the sewage dump station with an outhouse would be reconstructed near the new camp area, and a new airplane taxiway would be constructed from the west end of the airstrip about 200 feet towards the new camp area.

DECISION

The NPS decision is to select a modified Alternative B along with the mitigation measures. The attached errata sheet has corrections to the EA, clarifications and a description of the modifications to the proposed action.

The modifications to the original Alternative B are: 1) retain the existing raft takeout point, 2) retain the existing rafter camp area, 3) do not clear a new airplane taxiway, and 4) retain the existing bunkhouse cabin.

The existing raft takeout point, camp area and taxiway will be left as they are. A safety separation between the camp area and the airplane taxiway will be maintained. A new airplane taxiway will not be required from the runway to the camp area, so no new taxiway will be cleared or constructed. A new sewage dump station with a new leach field will be constructed next to the existing dump station. The new dump station will also be tied into the old leach field; consequently the old leach field will not be removed or abandoned. The old dump station will be removed. A new ADA accessible outhouse will be constructed on top of the new dump station's septic tank. The existing pit toilet near the camp area will be demolished and the pit will be filled and graded flush with the surrounding ground. The site of the existing pit toilet will be abandoned and allowed to overgrow back to a natural condition.

At the East Alsek River public use cabin, a new ADA accessible toilet will be constructed over a new pit. The existing pit toilet will be demolished and the old pit will be filled, graded flush with the surrounding ground and marked.

At the ranger station: the storage shed will be removed and reconstructed with a workshop added; the workshop on the back of the ranger cabin will be removed; the shower room on the back of the ranger cabin will be reconstructed and a toilet will be added; an open three-sided storage shed will be constructed; the volunteer cabin will be demolished and reconstructed; the existing bunkhouse cabin will be converted to a storage building; a new bunkhouse cabin will be constructed; a fuel storage structure will be constructed; a new wastewater system will be constructed; and the existing ranger cabin and pit toilet will be left as they are.

MITIGATING MEASURES

The following mitigation measures apply to the selected alternative (a modified Alternative B). These mitigation measures are incorporated into the proposal. They will be effective in reducing the level of environmental impact.

1. Vegetation will be allowed to grow in naturally, adjacent to the sewage dump station, in order to hide the station.
2. All new and reconstructed public facilities will be ADA accessible.
3. If any cultural resources are discovered during construction activities, the site will be protected and the activities will stop until the park archeologist can be notified and has the opportunity to evaluate the site.
4. The park will provide a wheeled equipment carrier, similar to a game carrier or large garden cart. This will allow the river rafters to more easily haul their portable river toilets to the sewage dump station and haul their rafts and equipment to the airplane pickup point.
5. Demolition of structures and facilities will make use of “deconstruction” principles as much as possible to salvage usable materials.
6. Flood mitigation plans are in place; see the statement of findings (SOF) for floodplains in Appendix 5 of the EA. Mitigation measures taken in this project provide the same level of protection as have been present in the Dry Bay developed area in the past. Additional flood mitigation measures may be utilized in the future as knowledge of flood hazard conditions improve.

ENVIRONMENTALLY PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

The selected alternative, a modified Alternative B, is the *environmentally preferred* alternative because it will eliminate the health and safety issues of the existing sewage dump station, ranger station wastewater system, ranger station fuel storage hazard and public use cabin outhouse toilet, and will keep the new facilities primarily in previously disturbed areas.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES OF THE SELECTED ACTIONS

As documented in the EA and in this FONSI, the NPS has determined that a modified Alternative B can be implemented with no significant adverse effect to water quality, vegetation and soils, wildlife, visitor experience, health and safety, and park management. The environmental effects of a modified Alternative B are summarized below.

Water Quality

Water quality would benefit because the new sewage dump station and ranger station septic system would be rebuilt to comply with DEC standards. The sludge dumping activity in the meadow would no longer take place. The proper containment of the fuels stored at the ranger station would protect local groundwater quality.

Vegetation and Soils

New structures would not significantly change the development footprint of the area; about one acre of additional land would be disturbed. Some alders and spruce up to 30 years old would be removed. No further excavation would occur in the meadow where the sludge has been buried in the past. Existing development for an airstrip, ATV trails and structures for a variety of seasonal uses covers about 20 acres of land.

Wildlife

Bears would no longer be attracted to the sludge burial site in the nearby meadow. Migratory and breeding birds would be disturbed from short-term construction activities. Birds and other wildlife would be displaced over the long-term from wooded habitat due to clearing about one acre of land.

Visitor Experience

The river raft takeout site would remain accessible to river trips during high flows. The camp area would remain located next to the takeout point. The new sewage dump station and outhouse toilet would improve sanitation and address issues concerned with visitor health. Rafting parties would be required to transport portable river toilets about 150 feet to the new sewage dump station. The hydrology of the Alsek River may result in the river takeout location becoming inaccessible in the long-term. If that occurs, a new takeout point would have to be established.

Health and Safety

The new dump station design and operation would eliminate the need to bury sewage sludge in a nearby meadow and reduce exposure of the park ranger to possible contamination from septic sludge. Fuel would be stored safely. The new pit toilet would improve visitor health at the public use cabin by replacing the old pit toilet that is now full.

Park Management

Administrative facilities would improve because deteriorating structures would be rebuilt; additional housing would be available; fuel barrels, tools and ATVs would be adequately stored; and maintenance and health issues associated with maintaining an unsafe sewage dumping station would be resolved.

RATIONALE FOR THE DECISION

The selected actions will satisfy the purpose and need of the project and will result in less impact on park resources than other alternatives. Health and safety concerns will be addressed. Needed DEC permits will be obtained. Conflicts between user groups (raft parties and commercial fish-buying operations) will be reduced. Deteriorating facilities will be rebuilt and upgraded.

The current rafter takeout point is in a natural gully that provides a gradual grade from the riverbank to the upland camp area. It can be easily maintained without additional excavation or stabilization by regular minimal vegetation trimming. During periods of low river flow, when the takeout point cannot be reached by river, visitors will continue to haul their rafts and equipment to the camp area or airplane pickup point as they do presently, but in context of their whole ten-day river trip, this is not a significant inconvenience. The benefits of keeping the takeout point and the camp area in their present locations outweigh the impact to rafters who arrive at times of low water when the takeout point cannot be reached by raft.

The new sewage dump station will improve health and safety conditions for visitors because it will be redesigned to improve sanitation and sewage handling operations. It will address health issues, improve sanitation and be rebuilt to comply with DEC health regulations. By leaving the takeout point, camp area and dump station in their current locations, river rafters will transport the portable river toilets to the new dump station without passing near the fish-buying operation. This will maintain a safe separation. The impact on vegetation and soil from the excavation for the new dump station, especially the clearing and trenching necessary for the new septic leach field, will be minor. The loss of trees in this small clearing will be a minor impact to wildlife. A benefit to wildlife will result from not burying sewage sludge on an annual basis in a nearby meadow, a practice that has attracted bears in the past. The new outhouse will be closer and more convenient to the camp area than the existing pit toilet and closer than facilities in other alternatives. The new outhouse, built in conjunction with the new wastewater system, will be more sanitary than the existing pit toilet and will be ADA accessible.

The new pit toilet at the East Alsek River will improve health conditions because it will replace the existing pit toilet that has reached capacity. It will also be ADA accessible and comply with DEC regulations.

The project will benefit local groundwater quality by the removal of two pit toilets (one near the public use cabin and the other near the rafter dump station) and construction of two new wastewater systems (one at the rafter dump station and the other at the ranger station).

NPS operations will improve because the newer facilities will improve sanitation, comply with the DEC health regulations, require less maintenance and provide better working and living conditions for rangers and volunteers. By converting the old bunkhouse cabin to dry storage, the ranger station will operate more efficiently because supplies and equipment will be safely stored out of the elements. Fuels and hazardous materials at the ranger station will be contained in order to protect local groundwater. These improvements represent positive long-term impacts to park management.

Alternative A (No-Action) was not selected because it would fail to satisfy the purpose or need for the project. Deteriorating structures and facilities would not be repaired or improved. Sanitation deficiencies would not be addressed.

Alternative B (the Proposed Action), without modification, was not selected because it would have resulted in additional impact to park resources. Specifically, vegetation disturbance associated with the clearing of a new taxiway to a new camp area. Due to the steepness of the Alsek River bank in this area, the establishment of a new river takeout point about 600 feet downriver (as in the original Alternative B) would have required additional soil excavation, vegetation clearing and grubbing, bank stabilization and additional permitting before it would be usable by rafting parties, and it would ultimately result in additional resource impact. The new camp area would have been located a greater distance (about 650 feet) from the new outhouse, resulting in potential sewage problems in the woods near the camp area. Under the original Alternative B, the locations of the river takeout and the sewage dump station would have required the transport of raw sewage within ten feet of an active fish-buying operation. The original Alternative B, that included demolition of the old bunkhouse cabin, did not provide enough storage for supplies and equipment to address the administrative needs at the ranger station.

Alternative C (Move the River Takeout, Camp Area and Dump Station to West of Airstrip) was not selected because it would involve additional vegetation clearing in previously undisturbed areas for a new camp area and for airplane taxiway between the camp area and the airstrip. The new taxiway and the west end of the airstrip would need to be hardened with a soil cement or similar treatment because of the soft soils. The camp area would be located in a more flood-prone lowland site, west of the eight-foot elevation drop. The camp area, river takeout and airplane pickup points would be about 1,200 feet farther from the assistance of the ranger station than the selected alternative. Alternative C would have no increase in environmental protection over Alternative B and would have reduced visitor service.

The levels of adverse impacts to park resources anticipated from the selected alternative will not result in an *impairment* of park resources or values.

The selected alternative will not affect endangered or threatened species or their habitat. There will not be significant negative impact on cultural resources under the National Historic Preservation Act. There will not be significant impact on floodplains managed under Executive Order 11988 (see the project Statement of Findings in the EA appendix) or on wetlands protected under EO 11990. There will not be significant negative effect on public health and safety. There will not be significant restriction of subsistence activities (see the ANILCA Section 810(a) Subsistence Evaluation in the EA appendix). There will not be significant impacts to unique characteristics of the area. The project is not in or adjacent to a wilderness area. The impacts are not highly controversial or unknown. The actions will not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects. There will not be a significant impact from *cumulative impacts* of other related actions. There will not be violation of any federal, State or local law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment.

FINDINGS

I find that the selected alternative, a modified Alternative B, does not constitute a major federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment. Therefore, in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 and regulations of the Council on Environmental Quality (40 CFR 1508.9), an environmental impact statement is not required and will not be prepared for the project.

Recommended: *Lorie Patrick Lee* *6/9/2004*
Superintendent, Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve Date

Approved: *Marcia Blasquez* *6/9/04*
Regional Director, Alaska Date

MITIGATION MATRIX

MITIGATION MEASURE	CRITICAL MILESTONE	RESPONSIBLE PARTY
Vegetation screening	After completion of new sewage dump station	Project manager
Design and construct ADA accessible visitor facilities	Prior to final approval of building designs	Project manager or building designer
Protection of cultural resources	If cultural resources are discovered during construction	Project manager or COR
Provide a wheeled equipment carrier	Prior to approval of the first river runners	Area ranger
Deconstruct buildings and salvage materials	At the beginning of each building's demolition	Project manager or COR
Add standard-operating-procedure flood safety elements	As knowledge of flood hazard conditions improve	Park Safety Officer

ERRATA SHEET

Environmental Assessment
Dry Bay Facility Improvements
Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve
June 2004

This errata sheet amends the subject environmental assessment (EA).

1. **Alternative B is modified as follows:**

- The river raft takeout point and the camp area will not be relocated.
- A new airplane taxiway will not be constructed to a new camp area.
- The old bunkhouse cabin at the ranger station will not be demolished but will be adaptively used for unheated storage.

2. **Comment:** The State of Alaska encouraged NPS to provide project costs and socioeconomic impacts.

Response:

- The approximate cost of the project will be \$150,000. This could vary if unfavorable conditions occur.
- NPS will use two employees hired locally and possibly will hire two more positions to construct the project.
- Many of the supplies and materials will be procured locally in Gustavus, Juneau or Yakutat.

3. **Comment:** The State of Alaska encouraged NPS to provide signs for visitors.

Response: NPS orientation signs will direct visitors to the river raft take-out location, the sewage dump station, the outhouse and the ranger station.

4. **Comment:** An individual mentioned NPS digging a well as part of the project.

Response: To clarify, the NPS has no plans to install a well. The rafter camp area is a “dry camp” with any needed water coming from the river. The water for the ranger station comes from roof-collected rainfall.

5. **Comment:** The Friends of Glacier Bay and an individual encouraged NPS to use the abandoned Foley building for volunteer housing or storage.

Response: The building was demolished in May 2004. It was not in usable condition and it was located far from the other ranger station buildings so it was inadequate for storage or staff housing.

6. **Comment:** The Friends of Glacier Bay and an individual encouraged NPS to select Alternative C because
- a) it separates the sewage dump station from the commercial fish activity thereby reducing risk of contamination;
 - b) it is more accessible during low water periods;
 - c) it has less vegetation so it is more open, has better views, less clearing would be needed and less wildlife habitat would be disturbed; and
 - d) it is farther away from fishing activity and its associated airplane traffic so visitor experience and opportunities for solitude would increase.

Response: The NPS selected Alternative B, as modified, over Alternative C because

- a) the contamination risk to commercial fishing activity is minimized because 1) the route from the raft takeout to the sewage dump station now does not pass by the fish-buying station, and 2) the new sewage dump station will be redesigned and rebuilt to comply with DEC health regulations; and the camp area under Alternative C would have been in a more flood-prone location west of the eight-foot elevation drop;
 - b) the 1,200-foot difference in the two sites would not make a significant difference for river access during low flow events;
 - c) while the existing vegetation at the lower site is thin, it would still need some clearing, whereas the selected site needs no vegetation clearing because it is already clear;
 - d) while the lower site would be more isolated from the main fishing activity by about 1,200 feet, selection of the lower site would have caused more resource damage from new ground disturbance and vegetation removal (a new taxiway would have to be constructed, a new camp area cleared, and a new wastewater system installed), and the camp area would be in a more flood-prone location.
7. **Comment:** The Friends of Glacier Bay and an individual encouraged NPS to relocate the ranger station to the Foley building area because
- a) it would consolidate the NPS administrative and visitor use areas;
 - b) it would reduce the need for clearing additional land; and
 - c) it would give campers easier access to NPS personnel in the event of an emergency or if seeking information.

Response: The NPS did not consider moving the ranger station because (as described in the EA on page 22 in Alternatives chapter in the section on Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Further Consideration, number 6) moving the ranger station to a location near the camp area could significantly decrease the

quality of NPS and volunteer staff living conditions in this isolated area due to the frequent after-hours disturbances by campers.

8. The following figure replaces **Figure 11** in the EA and correctly describes the project design decisions.

