

# Childs Glacier Recreation Area Facilities Expansion



## Environmental Assessment



CORDOVA RANGER DISTRICT  
Chugach National Forest  
September 2002

# DRAFT

## I. PROPOSED ACTION

The Cordova Ranger District of the Chugach National Forest is proposing to expand and upgrade facilities at the Childs Glacier Recreation Area (USS 8366 Lot 2). The proposed action will meet the current and projected demand for day-use and overnight activities and improve health and safety issues between people and vehicles. The proposed action will relocate the interior access road, relocate and enlarge the parking area to more safely accommodate car, bus, and RV parking, add overnight camping facilities for RVs, add a new group use area, add covered picnic shelters, add a potable water source, add a drive-up glacier viewing area, and add additional footpaths, toilet facilities, and bear-proof garbage and food storage containers. See Chapter II, Alternative 3 for a more detailed description of the proposed action.

## II. PURPOSE OF AND NEED FOR ACTION

### INTRODUCTION & HISTORY

Childs Glacier is an active calving glacier with spectacular scenery and geological uniqueness. The area had been an important transportation link to the interior of Alaska during the past mineral exploration era, with remnants of the nearby Million Dollar Bridge to attest to its history. The demise of mineral production and the 1964 earthquake affected access into the area. Today, the only access is by the 48-mile Copper River Highway, from Cordova to the Million Dollar Bridge, and the Copper River. The 700,000 acre Copper River Delta is one of the world's most productive bird habitats (part of the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network). The Delta provides some of Alaska's most important habitat for shorebirds, waterfowl, big game, and anadromous fish.

The project area is located at milepost 48 of the Copper River Highway and consists of two 40-acre parcels of National Forest System land (collectively US Survey 8366) surrounded by private land. They are located approximately 1000 feet apart (see Map #1). A Forest Service road across private land connects the two parcels. The legal description of the site is US Survey 8366, Alaska; Lots 1 and 2 (Township 14 South, Range 4 East, Sections 7 and 18). These parcels were withheld from conveyance to Chugach Alaska Corporation (CAC), the surrounding land owner, to help meet the need for public recreation near Childs Glacier while providing a transportation corridor across the Copper River should the Copper River Highway be completed. Trail and road easements connect the two parcels through Chugach Alaska Corporation property. The withholding of the two 40-acre parcels was a special stipulation of the Chugach Native Inc. Settlement Agreement of 1982. The trail easements are regulated by the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, Section 17b. The actions will occur only on USS 8366 Lot 2. The access road across private land would not change.

In the early 1980s, the Childs Glacier Recreation Area was accessed by a low standard, automobile road through CAC lands. There were no recreation improvements. Site capacity was estimated at 25 PAOT (people at one time) with 3,000 RVDs (recreation visitor days) of use annually. In 1986, an analysis was completed and a decision was made to develop recreational facilities to accommodate projected visitor use for the next decade. These facilities included an access road designed for a 40-passenger bus, one vault toilet, parking areas to accommodate 10-15 cars, covered pavilions and picnic tables near the viewing area, and interpretive and warning signs (USDA, Forest Service, 1986). Five primitive tent camping sites were approved in 1998.

Outside of the five tent camping sites at Childs Glacier, there are no other designated camping sites on National

Forest System lands on the Copper River Delta. The District has three developed day-use recreation facilities located at mile 18 and mile 22 on the Copper River Highway and at the end of Alaganik Road. There are several other areas (mile 16 pond, Sheridan River, mile 28 sand pit & mile 29 swimming pond) that attract users at various times of the year. They are not developed recreation sites nor are they maintained by anyone other than the users, although the Forest Service patrols the areas frequently.

In the 1970s the Forest Service maintained a small campground near Cabin Lake. When the Eyak Native Corporation made their land selections, the campground and the surrounding lands became private property. Camping opportunities are now permitted at this site. The only other camping facilities that serve the local community are operated by the City of Cordova and are within the city proper.

## PURPOSE AND NEED



Today, improvements at the Childs Glacier Recreation Area include roads, parking areas, a viewing platform overlooking the glacier, covered picnic tables, five overnight tent camping sites, and one vault toilet (see Map #2). Site capacity is 120 PAOT. Volunteer Forest Service hosts monitor the site from early June through August. Development of the site and increasing levels of tourism over the past years has brought an increasing number of people into the area to view the calving glacier. Current use is 7,000 to 9,000 people annually. The current level of use exceeds the capacity of the facilities and is not consistent with the activities people want to engage in. It is not uncommon to find vehicles (passenger cars, tour busses, motor homes, trailers and truck campers) lining the entire loop road and extending up both sides of the entrance road. Not only does this create dangerous driving and walking conditions but taxes available picnicking, sanitation and toilet facilities. Sites are being overused, rogue sites are being created and existing bear-proof garbage facilities have to be emptied more often, which causes reduced coverage on other areas of the Delta.

The loss of Cabin Lake Campground through native selections in the late 1970s eliminated the only camping facility on public lands on the entire Delta. Over the past ten years, Childs Glacier has become one of, if not the major destination point on the Delta. When you consider the 96 mile round trip from Cordova to the closest camping facilities (of which 70 miles are over a gravel road) it is not surprising that the public has requested camping facilities. With no camping facilities available, RV's are camping on both public and private roads causing congestion, unsafe conditions and trespass problems.

Over the past six years cruiseship dockings have ranged from 16 to 44 per summer, raft and jet boat visitation has grown from 4 to 41 and RV's visiting Cordova has increased approximately 33% in the past three years. Some tourist businesses are offering packages that include a flight to Cordova with a bus ride to Childs Glacier. Others transport clients around the state in their vans with Childs Glacier listed as one of their many

destinations. Combined, these various suppliers of visitors have contributed to the increased demand on the facilities and resources at the site.

## FOREST PLAN MANAGEMENT DIRECTION

The Revised Chugach National Forest Land and Resource Management plan Record of Decision was signed May 31, 2002. This document provides the overall long term management direction for the Forest. It is similar to a zoning document. It is the decision document for the integrated, long-term resource planning on the Forest. It establishes goals, management direction, and standards and guidelines to follow in implementing the goals.

The Chugach National Forest is further divided into Management Area Prescriptions. These management area prescriptions include specific direction on how to manage different land areas. The descriptions of each management area prescription include the following:

Theme: A short description of a management scenario or philosophy.

Management Intent: A summary of the desired future conditions for social and ecological systems.

Activities Tables: A tabular display of typical activities that may or may not be allowed in a given prescription:

Standards and Guidelines: Specific Management direction for a conditionally allowed management activity.

Prescription Categories - The management area prescriptions are grouped into five categories to represent similar ecological processes, levels of development, or human influence. They range from little human influence (Category 1) to long term human influence (Category 5).

The Childs Glacier Recreation area is located within a 501(b)-3 Management Area Prescription, with a prescription category 3. Most of the Copper River Delta is located within a 501(b)-2 or 501(b)-1 management area. The only places on the Copper River Delta with a 501(b)-3 category are along road corridors to allow and manage for a higher level of human influence and recreational use. A 501(b)-3 Management Area Prescription has the following characteristics:

Theme: 501(b)-3 Management Areas emphasize the conservation of fish and wildlife and their habitats while providing for a variety of multiple use activities.

Management Intent:

Ecological Systems desired condition: Ecological processes, relatively undisturbed by human activity, dominate 501(b)-3 Management Areas. A mix of unmanaged and managed vegetation to meet the needs of fish and wildlife characterizes these areas. Evidence of resource management may be present.

Social Systems desired condition: 501(b)-3 Management Areas will provide opportunities for solitude, isolation, and quiet when traveling cross-country. The Recreation Opportunity Spectrum will range from Primitive to Roaded Natural. Scenery will be relatively unmodified in appearance. There will be evidence of human use such as trails, hardened campsites, historic structures, and resource developments. Developments should be localized in recreation concentration areas, minimizing effects

on the overall management area.

Activities Table: The following is a summary of activities allowed, conditionally allowed, or not allowed in a 501(b)-3 Management Area:

Biological Elements:

Vegetation Management....Y  
Wildlife Habitat Projects....Y  
Fish Habitat Projects.....Y

Recreation/Tourism Activities:

Recreation Gold Panning...C  
Maximum ROS Class...RN  
Day-Use Facilities....Y  
Campgrounds...Y  
Hardened Dispersed Camping Sites...Y  
Viewing Sites...Y

Transportation/Access:

Boat Docks and Ramps...Y  
New FS Built Roads...Y  
New Roads Build by Others...Y  
New Trails...Y

Y – Means activity is permitted consistent with the management intent.

C – Means the activity is allowed consistent with management intent, standard, guidelines.

N – Means the activity is not permitted in the management area.

Standards And Guidelines:

Vegetation: Standards: Use the full range of biologically appropriate silvicultural practices to create or maintain a mosaic of vegetative cover types.

Recreation: Guidelines: Recreational activities may be seasonally restricted to meet wildlife habitat objectives or to reduce wildlife human interactions.

Access and Transportation: Guidelines: Motorized access may be restricted to protect fish and wildlife habitat.

Consistency with Forest Plan Direction:

The Childs Glacier Recreation expansion project as proposed in this Environmental Assessment is consistent with the 501(b)-3 Management Area Prescription for this area as described in the Chugach National Forest Land and Resources Management Plan. The proposal is consistent with the theme, management intent, and standards and guidelines for the area. All activities proposed in the Childs Glacier Environmental Assessment, Alternatives A, B, and C are activities that are allowed within the 501(b)-3 management prescription activities table.

\*\*For additional information on the 501(b)-3 management prescription, see section 3-76 of the Chugach National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan.

### Endangered Species Act of 1993

The proposed recreation facility expansion would have no effect upon any Federally listed endangered, threatened, or sensitive species of plants or animals (Reference Biological Evaluation, Appendix A and Wildlife Report, Appendix G in project file).

### National Historic Preservation Act of 1966

Items of historic, prehistoric, or paleontological value are protected under various Federal laws, including the Antiquities Act of 1906 (16 USC 433) and the Archeological Resource Protection Act of 1979 (16 USC 470ee) and Federal regulations. Forest Service programs for compliance with these acts and regulations includes locating, inventorying, and nominating all cultural sites that may be affected directly or indirectly by the proposed action. A cultural site survey was conducted and the findings sent to the State Historic Preservation Officer. No sites were identified within the project area. No cultural resource sites will be affected by the proposed recreation facility expansion (Reference Appendix B in project file).

### ANILCA Section 810, Subsistence Evaluation and Finding

The effects of this project have been evaluated to determine potential effects on subsistence opportunities and resources. Moose, furbearers, edible berries and salmon are subsistence resources commonly found throughout the Copper River Delta. Fishing for subsistence purposes is also allowed further upstream near Chitina and Glennallen. There is no documented or reported subsistence use that would be restricted as a result of this decision (Reference Appendix C in project file).

### Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972, as amended

The Coastal Zone Management Act requires the Forest Service, when conducting or authorizing activities or undertaking development directly affecting the coastal zone, to ensure that the activities or development to be consistent with the approved Alaska Management Program to the maximum extent possible. Forest Service has found that this project will not have any significant impact on the environment, and therefore no significant impact on coastal resources or uses. Increasing the capacity of the campground may slightly increase the recreational use of coastal resources, however, so minor effects on the coastal zone could result. Accordingly, we have reviewed the applicable standards of the Alaska Coastal Management Plan (ACMP) found in 6 AAC 80, and have determined that the project is consistent, to the maximum extent practicable, with these enforceable policies of the ACMP. Because the project is well outside the boundary of the nearest coastal district--Cordova--and will not affect it, no coastal district plan applies to this project.

### Flood Plain Management (E.O. 11988) and Protection of Wetlands (E.O. 11990)

The proposed action is not located within flood plain as defined by Executive Order 11988 and is not located within wetlands as defined by Executive Order 11990 (Reference Appendix D, Watershed Report in project file).

### PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Scoping for the Childs Glacier Recreation Area Expansion Project began on January 20, 1994. A scoping letter was sent to all interested parties. On June 13, 1994, further analysis on the project was delayed to allow Chugach Alaska Corporation sufficient time to prepare an overall recreation development strategy for the area surrounding Childs Glacier (See letter from Cordova Ranger District dated June 13, 1994). Scoping was reinstated on December 13, 1999. Between 1994 and 1999 there was continued public input and interest in providing additional public facilities at Childs Glacier. A scoping letter was again sent to interested parties describing the proposed action, and proposed plans were discussed at several public meetings in Cordova. Most parties supported the expansion of facilities. However, there were some different opinions of what facilities should be constructed at this time (Reference Appendix E, Summary of Scoping Comments in project file).

In 1999 and 2000 a conceptual recreation site master plan for the Childs Glacier site was developed based on past and present public input, and included public meetings held at that time. On October 16, 2001 a final scoping letter was sent to all interested publics who had expressed an interest or provided comments or input previously. As a part of the most recent public scoping, a meeting was held in Cordova on November 7, 2001 which was advertised on the scanner, local radio, and in the newspaper. Individual scoping meetings were also held with adjacent landowners, the Eyak Corporation, November 21, 2001 at the Eyak Corporation Office, and November 6, 2001 at the Chugach Alaska Corporation Office in Anchorage. The purpose of those meetings was to share information concerning the proposal, gather input, and provide adjacent landowners an opportunity to comment on the proposal (reference summary of scoping meeting notes sent to CAC February 6, 2002 and Eyak February 20, 2002 in project file). Scoping and informational letters were sent on January 20, 1994 (CAC & Eyak), December 13, 1999 (CAC & Eyak), March 21, 2000 (CAC & Eyak), January 24, 2001(CAC), March 16, 2001(Eyak), October 16, 2001(CAC & Eyak), February 6, 2002 (CAC) and February 20, 2002 (Eyak) to review and discuss the proposed plans for the Childs Glacier Recreation Area. Both Eyak and CAC were also given an opportunity to comment on the pre-draft Environmental Assessment (reference July 12, 2002 letter from CAC and July 12, 2002 letter from Eyak in project file).

#### Summary of Issues Generated from the Scoping Process

The following issues are addressed in this environmental analysis:

1. What level (types, kind and numbers) of recreational improvement is appropriate for the Childs Glacier Recreation Area to meet the increasing public use of the area?
2. What safety standards and requirements will be needed to protect people and bears?
3. What, if any, effects will improving and expanding recreation opportunities at Childs Glacier have on potential activities on adjacent private lands?

#### Decision to be Made

The decision to be made is whether or not to construct additional camping facilities, additional day use facilities, and additional parking on National Forest System lands located near Childs Glacier, and if so, to what level (kind, type, and amount). The decision will also include the standards and mitigation measures necessary to mitigate any adverse affects of the new development.

The Forest Supervisor is the Deciding Official for this project.

### III. ALTERNATIVES

## ALTERNATIVE FORMULATION

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires that a reasonable range of alternatives be developed that address the environmental issues (40 CFR 1502.14). Alternative 1 is the no action alternative as required by NEPA. Alternative 2 proposes to expand day-use recreation facilities at the Childs Glacier Recreation Area to meet current and future demand. Alternative 3 proposes to expand day-use recreation facilities and provide overnight (camping) facilities to meet current and future demand. Alternative #3 is the Forest Service proposed action.

## ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED BUT ELIMINATED FROM FURTHER ANALYSIS

Additional facilities such as a boat ramp, recreation cabin(s), and alternate locations for camping facilities were considered in this EA, but not in detail. Construction of new Public Recreation Cabins generally occurs farther from the road system. A boat ramp is not suitable for the Childs Glacier Site because it is too close to the glacier and ADF&G Sonar Counting Station, creating safety concerns and causing interference with the accuracy of the fish counts. Both opportunities could be developed on adjacent private lands should they desire to do so. Suitable locations for camping facilities on public lands closer to Cordova are limited for three reasons. Most areas would require filling of wetlands, it is very expensive, and numerous permits would be required. Areas that are not wetlands generally have limited access and/or amenities without building additional road to them.

The Childs Glacier area was selected because it is a natural destination for visitors, it would not compete with existing private camping facilities (Cabin Lake ) and the fact that the two 40 acre parcels at Child's Glacier/ Million Dollar Bridge were specifically withheld from conveyance to Chugach Alaska Corporation to help fulfill the need for public recreation and transportation facilities in the area. Also, by locating the facility on the "edge" of the delta, and along the road corridor within an existing "enclave" it minimizes effects to the fish and wildlife resources as required under the ANILCA 501(b) mandate.

## ALTERNATIVES STUDIED IN DETAIL

The following alternatives were developed to fulfill the purpose and need, address all issues, and provide a contrast of opinions and environmental effects. Table 1, at the end of this chapter, shows how each alternative address the issues.

Alternative 1 - No Action - Do not expand the recreation facilities near Childs Glacier.

Under Alternative 1- No Action, no additional recreation facilities at the Childs Glacier Recreation Area would be constructed. The Forest Service would continue to maintain the existing improvements including the roads, parking area, viewing platform overlooking the glacier, covered picnic sites, five overnight tent camping sites, and vault toilets (see Map #2). Site capacity would continue at 120 PAOT. Bear proof garbage containers and food storage containers would continue to be provided.

Alternative 2 - Expand the day use recreation and parking facilities near Childs Glacier.

Alternative 2 (see map #3) proposes expanding and relocating the parking area, and realigning the road so it

parallels the southern and eastern boundary lines and ties into the existing entry road near the Northeast corner of USS 8366 Lot 2 (approximately 2100 feet). The purpose of the road realignment is to improve pedestrian safety, so that pedestrians using the recreation facilities do not have to cross the main access road. A short spur from this road (approximately 50') would also provide access to CAC land should they in the future decide to use it to access their land. The day use area would have a new 40 PAOT group use pavilion located at the down-river end of the existing day use area and potentially two to four additional covered pavilions (same size as existing covered picnic sites) on the up-river end. Signing (directional, warning, and property boundary) will be designed into any new development as appropriate and needed. Supplementary interpretive signing will also be developed and incorporated into the new facilities, focusing on existing natural features, recent historical, and pre-railroad native, aboriginal history of the Copper River Delta, Prince William Sound and Chugach Region. Additional pathways would be constructed to connect new facilities with existing. A road-accessible glacier viewing area would be constructed in the northwest corner of the lot, but would likely be included in a later phase of expansion. Parking spaces for cars would be increased from 17 to 50 and busses /RVs from 2 to 8. Additional toilet facilities and potable water sources will be installed. Site capacity would be 530 PAOT. Bear-proof garbage containers and food storage containers, identical to those already on site, will be installed in all newly developed areas. The existing access road and parking area would be rehabilitated and converted to a trail to access the five existing primitive tent sites. Recreation facilities within alternatives #2 and #3 are designed to occur in phases. If funding becomes available, more than one phase may occur at one time.

Alternative 3 - Proposed Action - Expand the day use recreation and parking facilities near Childs Glacier and construct campground facilities.

Alternative 3 (see map #4) proposes the same recreation facilities and parking area design as Alternative #2. In addition, this alternative proposes to construct campground facilities in the southeast corner of the parcel. The campground would consist of two loops with eight to ten spurs each. A fee would be charged for overnight use of the campground. The second loop would be constructed if and when demand warranted. Additional toilet facilities and potable water sources will be installed. Site capacity would be 610 PAOT. Bear-proof garbage containers and food storage containers, identical to those already on site, will be installed in all newly developed areas.

## COMPARISON OF ALTERNATIVES

Table 1.

	Alternative #1	Alternative #2	Alternative #3
Tent camping	yes	yes	yes
Potable water	yes	yes	yes
Additional picnic facilities	no	yes	yes
Expanded parking	no	yes	yes
Group use pavilion	no	yes	yes
Additional trails	no	yes	yes
Additional toilets	no	yes	yes
New access road	no	yes	yes
Identified CAC access Rd	no	yes	yes
Drive-up glacier viewing	no	yes	yes
Campground (overnight) facilities	no	no	yes

## IV. AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

### Land Status

The project area is located at milepost 48 of the Copper River Highway and consists of one 40 acre parcel on the east shore of the Copper River directly opposite Childs Glacier. The legal description of the areas is US Survey 8366 Lot 1 & 2 (T. 14 S., R. 4 E. Section 18). This parcel was withheld from conveyance from Chugach Alaska Corporation, the surrounding land owner, to help fulfill the need for public recreation near Childs Glacier. The withholding of both 40 acre parcels was a stipulation of the Chugach Natives Settlement (CNI) Agreement of 1982.

Recreation and Social Environment More than 40 miles of National Forest System trails lead to glaciers, lakes, mountain valleys, and wetlands of the Copper River Delta area from the Copper River Road corridor. Recreation opportunities available from the road corridor include picnicking, sightseeing, wildlife viewing, fishing, camping, hiking, hunting, boating, and many other opportunities. The ability to experience the uninhabited landscape left primarily in its natural state has been identified as important to the traveler in pursuit of recreational experiences. Inappropriate placement and design of facilities will lead to over development and a loss of valuable fish and wildlife habitat.

Forest Service recreation sites on the Copper River Delta are limited to three day-use picnic sites, six toilet facilities, four public recreation cabins, and two boat ramps. The Childs Glacier Recreation Area (USS 8366 Lot 2) includes an access road designed for a 40-passenger bus, one vault toilet, parking areas to accommodate 10-15 cars, covered picnic sites near the viewing area, interpretive and warning signs, five primitive tent sites and one RV style parking spur with a holding tank for the Volunteer Hosts. These facilities were constructed in 1989/1990 to meet the expected demands for the next 10 years. The site is used mostly by locals but a growing tourism industry is adding to the 7,000 to 9,000 annual visitors.

The Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) designation for this area is Roded-Natural. A Roded-Natural ROS classification includes the following characteristics:

- Visual Quality: Alterations are subordinate to landscape
- Access: All methods of access and travel may occur
- Remoteness: Remoteness is of moderate importance
- Social Encounters: Moderate concentrations of users on roads
- Visitor Impacts: Use is noticeable
- On Site Development: Facilities are rustic

### Biological Resources

The 40 acre project site is located within a uniform cottonwood/alder overstory and salmonberry/devil's club understory. It is characteristic to the vegetation which covers several thousand acres adjacent to the upper Copper River.

Wildlife use includes brown and black bears, moose, and songbirds. The Copper River provides a migration corridor for salmon spawning enroute to the clear water tributaries upstream. No spawning is known to occur in the main glacial river channel. There are no threatened or endangered species which use or occupy the area (Reference Appendix A, Biological Evaluation and Appendix G, Wildlife Report in project file).

### Cultural Resources

The general area around the Million Dollar Bridge is known for its historical importance by the connection with Copper River Northwest Railroad. No native or prehistoric resources are known to exist in the immediate

vicinity of the Childs Glacier Recreation Area. Several cultural sites are known to exist on the Copper River Delta; however, none of these sites will be affected by the proposed expansion of recreation facilities on the Childs Glacier Recreation Site (Reference Appendix B, Cultural Resources Survey in project file).

### Subsistence Resources

Moose and furbearers, edible berries, and salmon are subsistence resources commonly found throughout the Copper River Delta, including the Childs Glacier area. Personal use and subsistence fishing occur up-river and on the flats but do not occur near the project area (Reference Appendix C, ANILCA section 810 Determination in project file).

### Relationship To Adjacent Private Landowners

#### History

The Eyak Natives were the first people to settle in the Copper River Delta area and served as traders or middlemen between two different Native groups, the Chugach Aleut and Ahtna. Native populations were undisturbed until the mid 1700's when European exploration of Alaska began. By the early 1900's the natural resources of the area had brought many people into the Copper River area. Construction of the railroad began in 1905, was completed in 1911 and brought copper ore from the Kennecott Copper Mine to the docks of Orca Inlet in Cordova. By 1938, the cost of recovery for copper ore closed the mine and the railroad was abandoned. During the 1950's the railroad was converted into a road and in the 1964 earthquake one span of the Million Dollar Bridge collapsed.

For many years, viewing Childs Glacier was accomplished by traveling a low standard automobile road which spurred off of the Copper River Highway near the Million Dollar Bridge and provided access along the river to Childs Glacier. The route went through what is now known as USS 8366 Lot 1 and CAC lands (see Childs Glacier Recreation Site Map #1). In 1990, the access road was relocated and designed to access USS 8366 Lot 1 and Lot 2 and accommodate vehicles as large as a 40-passenger bus. Recreation facilities were constructed on Lot 1 (Million Dollar Bridge) and Lot 2 (Childs Glacier). Facilities included a vault toilet, parking area, interpretive signs, and covered viewing pavilion in both Lots, and picnic tables, fire grates, and two covered picnic sites in Lot 2 (Childs Glacier).

As a result of public and community requests for a campground facility on the Copper River Delta, on January 20, 1994 the Forest Service began public scoping regarding the Childs Glacier and Million Dollar Bridge area. Scoping centered around whether or not to build a campground, its size, location, and how to access the campground if it were constructed. Scoping also requested comments about the location and size of any potential drive up glacier viewing, and identification of issues or opportunities associated with the project.

Princess Tours/CAC Proposal: On June 13, 1994, further analysis on the project was delayed to allow Chugach Alaska Corporation (CAC) sufficient time to prepare an overall recreation development strategy for the area surrounding Childs Glacier. Other factors also played into the Forest Service decision to delay any further analysis. An announcement had been made by Princess Tours and Chugach Alaska Corporation of their plans to develop a lodge in the vicinity of Childs Glacier. Following the announcement, there was subsequent interest by CAC and Eyak Corporation to pursue additional developments in the same area. (See letter from Cordova Ranger District dated June 13, 1994, in project file).

On July 31, 1996, an article in the Anchorage Daily News was released which announced the decision by Chugach Alaska Corporation and Princess Tours to shelve the plans for a hotel (reference Anchorage Daily News article 7/31/96 in project file). Following that decision, the Forest Service reopened discussions regarding expansion of the Childs Glacier Recreation Area to meet increasing public needs.

In 1998, in order to address a safety issue associated with the camping that was occurring along the river bank across from the Childs Glacier, five primitive tent sites were added near the parking lot, outside of the wave zone in USS 8366 Lot 2 (Childs Glacier).

Public Scoping Reinitiated: Scoping was reinitiated on December 13, 1999. Between 1994 and 1999 there was continued public input and interest in providing additional public facilities at Childs Glacier. A scoping letter was again sent to interested parties describing the proposed action and discussed at several public meetings in Cordova. Most parties supported the expansion of facilities. However, there were some different opinions about what facilities should be constructed at this time (Reference Appendix E, Summary of Scoping Comments in project file). In 1999 and 2000 a conceptual recreation site master plan for the Childs Glacier site was developed based on past public input, and included public meetings held at that time. On October 16, 2001 a final scoping letter was sent to all interested publics who had expressed an interest or provided comments or input previously.

As a part of the most recent public scoping a meeting was held in Cordova on November 7, 2001 which was advertised on the scanner, local radio, and in the newspaper. Individual scoping meetings were also held with adjacent landowners the Eyak Corporation, November 21, 2001 at the Eyak Corporation Office, and November 6, 2001 at the Chugach Alaska Corporation Office in Anchorage, to share information concerning the proposal, gather input, and provide adjacent landowners an opportunity to comment on the proposal (see summary of scoping meeting notes sent to CAC February 6, 2002 and Eyak February 20, 2002, available in project file). Among the points made at these meetings were that the site receives approximately 7,000 to 9,000 visitors per year and costs the Forest Service money to operate. Also discussed was the idea that the type of user the Forest Service is targeting at the Childs Glacier Recreation Area is generally different than the recreational user being targeted by CAC or Eyak. The Forest Service was targeting backpackers, bikers, tenters, possible RV users, and people wanting to go camping and cook hotdogs over a fire. In contrast, the Native Corporations would generally be targeting people willing to spend money on services. In other words, the Native Corporations would be providing more highly developed settings and recreational experiences that would produce revenue for their shareholders.

Present Condition - In the 1988 Copper River Delta Recreation Plan, the “enclave” concept was conceived. “Enclave” is a word used to describe the grouping of developed recreation facilities into areas whose natural character is to be changed by the works of man. This leaves more areas free of development and reduces the potential impacts to fish and wildlife habitat. The Childs Glacier Recreation Area is one of several of these “enclaves” situated along the 49-mile Copper River Highway which links Cordova with the Million Dollar Bridge. The highway is built primarily on the old railroad grade. The majority of recreational use is focused along this road corridor due to ease of access, and focusing use in the enclaves leaves the large majority of the road system free of developments. Outside of the Copper River Highway road corridor, and several short spur roads that lead to it, the terrain on National Forest System lands remains undeveloped in natural settings providing outstanding dispersed recreation opportunities.

This project confines its scope to the existing enclave (USS 8366 Lot 2) at Childs Glacier Recreation Area. Today, improvements at the Childs Glacier Recreation Area include a primary access road, parking area, a viewing platform overlooking the glacier, covered picnic sites, five overnight tent camping sites, and one vault toilet.

## V. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

## INTRODUCTION

This section describes the direct, indirect, and cumulative effects of implementing the proposed action and the alternatives. The environmental consequences are described referencing the issues that are listed in Chapter II.

No endangered, threatened, or sensitive plant or animal species or their habitat would be affected by this project (Reference Appendix A, Biological Evaluation, and Appendix G, Wildlife Report). No historic or cultural resources would be affected (Reference Appendix B Forest Archeologist Report). This project would have no effect on subsistence resources (Reference Appendix C, ANILCA 810 Determination). The proposed recreation facility expansion would not affect any Coastal Zone Management. The proposed action would not affect any flood plain or wetland (Reference Appendix D, Watershed Report). All Appendices can be found in the project file.

## ISSUES

Issue #1 - What level (types, kind and numbers) of recreational improvement is appropriate for the Childs Glacier Recreation Area to meet the increasing public use of the area?

The Childs Glacier Recreation Area is located near the end of the 50-mile Copper River Highway. Sightseers, anglers, hunters, and wildlife watchers visit the Copper River Delta throughout the spring-summer-fall seasons. In the spring, the shorebird migration attracts hundreds of birders each year. Vehicle travel beyond the Million Dollar Bridge is not possible. Nearby trails provide access into parts of the Delta.

Improvement at the Childs Glacier Recreation Area include roads, parking areas, a viewing platform overlooking the glacier, covered picnic sites, five overnight tent camping sites, interpretive, directional, and warning signing, and one vault toilet. Site capacity is 120 PAOT. Past development of the site has brought an increasing number of people into the area not only to view the glacier, but also to picnic, hold gatherings, and camp overnight.

Since the advent of cruiseships docking at Cordova (44 in 1998), the proposed State trail paralleling the the Copper River from Chitna to the Allen River (10 miles north of the Childs Glacier), an increase of boat transported visitors from (four in 1996 to 41 in 2001) and RVs visiting Cordova via the State Marine Highway (27 in 1999, 40 in 2000 and 39 in 2001) the area is commonly subjected to overcrowded facilities or visitors requiring facilities that are nonexistent on the entire Delta (RV camping). Although the Cordova City Campground offers RV camping facilities, they have been unavailable to normal vacationing RV'ers for the past four years and it appears 2002 as well. These sites are reserved, sometimes a year in advance, by fisherman and construction workers' families for the entire summer.

Most people visiting the area come to view the calving glacier. Most of the use is day use and includes private vehicles, commercial vans, and buses, especially when cruise ships are in Cordova (2-4 times/week). Some people use the Childs Glacier Recreation Area as a destination campsite. Most of these people use their motorized vehicles (motor homes, campers, trucks, cars, and vans) for camping. There is no designed space for this type of use, so most people park along the main access road. A few people camp in the 5-unit tent camping area. A \$5/night fee is charged for tent camping; no fee is charged for day use.

The current facilities do not meet the demand nor the needs of the public using the area. Based on a 90 day season, the Childs Glacier Recreation Area is being used at about 80 percent of the PAOT capacity. Site use of 60 percent is considered optimum use; 80 percent is overuse. At the 80 percent level, the facilities are exceeding their capacity on most weekend days, holidays, and on many heavily used days throughout the season of operation. The tent campsites are not being used to the optimum level (15 percent). Adequate facilities for

camping or parking recreational vehicles, such as campers, trailers, and motor homes are not available. Many of these vehicles camp along the access road, causing congestion and unsafe parking and walking conditions.

The direct effect of Alternative 1 is that no new facilities would be constructed, nor would any improvements be made. The indirect effect of this is that the current overuse and inappropriate use would continue. Congestion and unsafe conditions would remain unaddressed and would probably increase through time.

The direct effect of Alternative 2 is that the day use facilities and parking areas would be expanded and the capacity of the Childs Glacier Recreation Area would increase to about 530 PAOT. Signing (interpretive, directional, warning) would be designed into the new facilities, and additional property boundary signing posted to reduce trespass onto private land. Parking congestion would be lessened and the unsafe parking and walking conditions would be improved. Inappropriate use of the existing facilities is expected to decrease with the addition of new day use facilities.

Under Alternative 3 (the preferred alternative), the direct and indirect effects would be similar to Alternative 2, but with the added effects associated with the addition of overnight camping facilities. The capacity would expand to 610 PAOT. An additional indirect effect of this Alternative is that the need for overnight camping on public lands on the Copper River Delta would be addressed and improved. Based on the average increase, it is projected that this level of development would meet the demand for the next 10 to 15 years at the 60 percent use level.

Issue #2 - What safety standards and requirements will be needed to protect people and bears?

Bear/human encounters at the Childs Glacier Recreation Area have been few. Since the bear-proof trash containers were installed in 1993, camping by the beach prohibited, and bear-proof food storage containers were installed in 1998, bear/human encounters have been non-existent. The ADF&G fish monitoring station, near the Million Dollar Bridge, had a problem bear in 1997 or 1998 but was trapped and moved before becoming a problem at the Childs Glacier site. In 1992, prior to developing the Childs Glacier Bear Plan, a young brown bear frequented the Childs Glacier/Million Dollar Bridge area for several weeks before being trapped and moved to Montague Island. Other sightings have occurred but the bears have not remained in the area or they have avoided contact with humans.

Bears are wild animals that can be both dangerous and deadly. For many people, seeing a bear in the wild is an experience of a lifetime. Alaska is noted for its outstanding bear viewing areas, such as McNeil River, Katmai National Park, Kodiak Island, Admiralty Island, Fish Creek, and the Brooks River. Each year thousands of travelers, campers, and other recreationists invade bear country. The fact that there are relatively few human/bear encounters attest to the bears' acceptance of humans. Most of the time, bears avoid humans. The vast majority of encounters between brown bears and humans result in virtually no interaction. Bears are most dangerous when they are surprised, protecting their young, or defending a food source. However, there are some cases of bear attacks for no apparent reason (Bauer, 1997). While bears may appear to be very docile, they can become violent in a moment. When one looks at a entire bear population, you will find a gradient of behavior from one extreme (shyness) to another (very aggressive), (Cheek, 1997).

Prevention of dangerous human-bear interactions through information, education, and understanding is the key to safety in bear country. Bears are aggressive animals who tend to view the territory surrounding them as they move as their own. Each bear has its own personal safety zone in which it feels secure. The size of these zones is impossible to predict. Dr. Charles Jonkel of the Border Grizzly Bear Project in Montana believes we should "... teach people-bear behavior and people-bear etiquette." For example, insist that people view bears from a viewing platform. This platform becomes the human's 'fishing spot' as far as the bears are concerned.

The bears have their fishing spot and the people have theirs. They all respect each other's space (Cheek, 1997). Bears should never be approached. Telephoto lenses should be used when photographing bears. Most importantly, every effort should be made to keep bears away from human food (Patent, 1987). Bears that become conditioned to human food may become dangerous; many times they have to be destroyed.

To help mitigate possible conflicts between humans and bears, a Bear Management Plan has been prepared for the Childs Glacier Recreation Area. Prevention measures include posting bear warning signs, providing pamphlets on bear safety, training campground hosts and the Forest Service "Delta Crew" in bear safety, and notifying the public if any on-site restrictions are imposed. Bear-proof garbage containers have been installed at both sites. Garbage is collected in a timely manner from the containers and picked up throughout the sites. People camping or picnicking at the site are required to store food in a vehicle or in bear proof containers which are provided at the site. The Bear Management Plan also outlines actions if a bear encounter occurs.

While there is always some inherent risk in bear country, bears can be viewed in relative safety at Childs Glacier because: 1) they are accustomed to being watched, 2) they have not learned to associate humans with food, and 3) bears are attracted to the area because they have learned that food (washed up salmon) can be found on the beach. Although there has never been an person injured by a bear at Childs Glacier, this does not mean that a bear/human incident could not occur.

The direct effect of Alternative 1 is that no new facilities would be constructed, nor would any improvements be made. The indirect effect of this is that whatever unsafe conditions currently exist as a result of people and bears mixing at this site, or from other unsafe conditions such as calving glacier ice, would continue, and may worsen if the expected increase of visitation occurs.

The direct effect of Alternative 2 is that the day use facilities and parking areas would be upgraded and expanded. An indirect effect of these changes is that they would encourage more people to use the site. Although additional infrastructure will increase the level of use, the major portion will merely accommodate the existing overflow. The enlarged and additional facilities will direct activities to specific areas and increase accessibility and safety for the visitors. Bear-proof garbage and food containers will be located through out the site. The Bear Management Plan (Reference Appendix F in project file) will be adhered to by Forest Service employees for their use in educating visitors and managing the site, and the likelihood of human/bear encounters should decrease.

Under Alternative 3 (the preferred alternative), the direct and indirect effects would be similar to Alternative 2, but with the added effects associated with the addition of overnight camping facilities. Bear-proof garbage and food containers will also be located through out the camping loops to lessen the likelihood of human/bear encounters.

If mitigation measures outlined in the Bear Management Plan are followed, all alternatives for the Childs Glacier Recreation Area Facilities Expansion project would have a low effect on bears.

Issue #3 - How will the new recreation improvements affect adjacent private lands?

Surrounding the two National Forest parcels are 512 acres of private land owned by Chugach Alaska Corporation (CAC) in full fee. To the north, across the bridge, and to the south of the CAC full fee property are split estate lands owned by the Eyak Village Corporation (surface estates) and CAC (subsurface estates) see Map 5.

The Revised Forest Plan states, "encourage the development of accommodations and commercial services,

including outfitter and guide services, on private land to meet the demand. If private land is not available, or the private sector is not interested, and existing facilities on non-National Forest lands are not adequate, then consider increases of capacity for some existing National Forest overnight facilities.”

CAC plans to develop their 512 acre parcel surrounding the National Forest System lands at some point in the future when economic conditions and visitation levels warrant development. Projects being considered include a range of facilities, from campgrounds to resorts, but generally tend to be facilities that would produce revenue for shareholders and tend to be more highly developed than Forest Service facilities. They believe development has not occurred because there has been too little commercial activity and visitation to justify development. They also believe that improvements to the Childs Glacier site should be minimized in deference to development of their lands (see July 31, 1996 Anchorage Daily News Article, letters from CAC, January 14 and April 20, 2000, available in the Project File).

The Eyak Village Corporation also has plans to develop a range of small recreation facilities adjacent to the Forest Service site, which include: campgrounds, glacier viewing areas, bus, RV, and vehicle parking areas, lodges, and hotels. The Eyak Corporation believes that the proposed expansion and promotion of any commercial use facilities at this site will continue to be direct competition with private interests (letter from Eyak Corporation April 10, 2000, available in the project file).

As a result of increased visitation to National Forest System lands, private land owners are concerned about trespass on their land, whether or not recreation facilities would be improved.

The direct effect of Alternative 1 is that no new facilities would be constructed, nor would any improvements be made. The indirect effect of this is that with the expected increase in visitation may come more inadvertent trespass onto private lands because visitors would not find the facilities they are looking for on the Forest Service site. Because no change to the current facilities would occur, there would also be no change in the current status of any perceived competition with private landowners.

The direct effect of Alternative 2 is that new day-use facilities would be constructed, parking would be increased and traffic flow patterns changed to better facilitate the use of the site. A spur road leading from the Childs Glacier Recreation Area entrance road to the adjoining CAC lands would be approved under this Alternative. In most instances, visitors are attracted to a site because of its comfortable, safe and clean facilities. The proposed additional facilities could have positive ramifications for neighboring land owners. It is quite likely that by increasing recreation opportunities on public lands, an indirect effect would be that trespass on private lands may decrease. The Forest Service will continue to work with the adjacent land owners and the public to prevent trespass and littering. The Forest Service will post all common boundaries at the Childs Glacier Site in order to reduce inadvertent trespass.

In addition, the new road location would provide easy access to CAC lands to the south of USS 8366 Lot 2. None of the proposed additions will affect the opportunities of adjacent land owners to develop their properties. We encourage additional public services in the area in order to expand the recreation opportunities in the Childs Glacier area and better serve the needs of local and out-of-town users. Activities such as food vendors, restaurants, lodges, boat launches, and cabins which are not compatible with Forest Service management direction have been directed to private land owners (reference summary of scoping meeting notes sent to CAC February 6, 2002 and Eyak February 20, 2002, in project file). The Forest Service will work with adjacent land owners to maximize any mutual benefits.

Under Alternative 3 (the preferred alternative), the direct and indirect effects would be similar to Alternative 2, but with the added effects associated with the addition of overnight camping facilities. The addition of overnight camping facilities should help decrease the likelihood of inadvertent trespass onto adjacent private

lands by visitors looking for a place to sleep in the area. Because the facilities would be aimed at use by car and tent campers and RVs, there should not be any increased competition for the segment of the public who are looking for overnight facilities such as lodges, restaurants and cabins which have been proposed by the adjacent landowners.

## VI. Cumulative Effects

The Copper River Delta is mandated under ANILCA section 501(b) to be managed primarily for the conservation of fish and wildlife and their habitat. Because Forest Service proposals involving the Copper River Delta have been sensitive to the ANILCA mandate, over time few management activities have affected the rich wildlife and fish resources and habitat of the Copper River Delta.

This cumulative effects section will discuss existing actions, proposed actions, and foreseeable future actions with regard to the area being analyzed, and includes a summary section.

### History and Past Actions:

The history of the Childs Glacier area, Princess Tours/CAC proposal, Public Scoping, and Present Condition, were detailed in section IV - Affected Environment - Relationship To Adjacent Private Landowners discussed earlier in this document. The remaining sections will focus on existing actions, proposed actions, and future management actions and project proposals that potentially could affect the Childs Glacier Recreation Expansion Alternatives discussed in this environmental assessment.

### Existing Actions

#### Existing Federal and Non-Federal Actions Affecting the Childs Glacier Proposal:

1. Heli-Skiing: A heli-ski permit encompassing approximately 241,000 National Forest acres in the northern portion of the Cordova Ranger District north of Allen Glacier, west of the Copper River, including National Forest Lands within the Cleave and Tasnuna River Drainages, has been issued to Valdez Heli-Ski Guides for the 2002 heli-ski season (see Map # 6). A recreational carrying capacity analysis for the area was completed to determine the level of use appropriate for the area based on the critical goat habitat issue, safety, and a primitive Recreational Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) classification. Valdez Heli-Ski Guides is based out of Valdez with flights accessing the heli-ski area through Marshall Pass. Although a large number of National Forest acres are included within the permit area, the number of people using the area at any one time will be relatively low, to stay within established primitive ROS standards. Because the main heli-ski season occurs during the months of March, April, and portions of May, before the Childs Glacier site is open to the public, and because helicopters flight paths will not cross the Childs Glacier area, the heli-skiing permit would have no effect on the Childs Glacier Recreation Area.
2. River Rafting: It is estimated that use of the Copper River by private and commercial rafters has doubled in the past five years (Campbell, 2002). Raft trips generally begin in McCarthy or Chitina, traveling approximately 50 miles downriver, are generally 3-7 days in length, and end at the Million Dollar Bridge (mile 48), 37 mile, or 27 mile bridges on the Copper River. Rafters travel down the Copper through a variety of land ownerships including Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, Forest Service, and Native Corporation

(Chugach Alaska, Tatitlek, Ahtna, and Eyak) lands. Requests by commercial rafting companies for Special Use Permits to use National Forest System lands has increased. River rafters commonly pull out of the Copper River at the Million Dollar Bridge and utilize the Childs Glacier Recreation Area for camping, picnicking, or as a pickup point to travel back to Cordova. As use of the river increases, use of the Childs Glacier Recreation Area will also increase, thereby adding to the pressure on already inadequate facilities. It is anticipated that rafting use will continue to increase in the years ahead.

3. Roadless Areas: The Copper River Highway and the Childs Glacier Recreation Area are located between two large inventoried roadless areas, the Sheridan Glacier Roadless Area (see Map # 7) and the Bering Lake Roadless Area (see Map # 8). The Sheridan Glacier Roadless Area lies west of the Childs Glacier enclave and Copper River Highway and includes approximately 231,810 National Forest System acres. The Bering Lake Roadless Area lies east of the Childs Glacier enclave and Copper River Highway and includes approximately 966,240 National Forest System acres (CLMP FEIS 5/2002). Total acreage of these two roadless areas combined is approximately 1,198,050 acres. The Childs Glacier enclave includes a total of approximately 40 acres surrounded by private land, and is not in a roadless area (see Childs Glacier Recreation Area Map, Map # 9). Comparing the nearby roadless area acreages (1,198,050) to the Childs Glacier Recreation Area located outside of the roadless area (40 acres) represents approximately .003% of this total. Approximately 10 acres have currently been developed. Alternative 2 - Expand Day Use would develop an additional 8 acres, creating an 18 acre footprint, and Alternative 3 - Expand Day Use and Provide Overnight Camping would develop an additional approximately 5 acres, creating a 23 acre footprint.

Within the roadless areas described above (outside of the Copper River Highway road corridor, the spur roads, and “enclaves” associated with it and on adjacent private lands) the focus will be to maintain the natural integrity of these areas to reflect the roadless character, “primitive” ROS classification, and ANILCA 501(b) management direction which mandates that the Copper River Delta be managed for the primary purpose of the conservation of fish and wildlife and their habitat. The recreation focus within these roadless areas will be to provide dispersed recreation opportunities such as hunting, fishing, and hiking, which reflect the “primitive” ROS classification and roadless character of the landscape. New “developed” recreation facilities such as “enclaves” within a roadless area with a primitive ROS classification and ANILCA 501(b) management direction is highly unlikely.

In consideration of the management direction and size of the two inventoried roadless areas which includes 1,198,050 acres, as compared to the Childs Glacier Recreation Area located along the road system outside of the roadless area (40 acres) representing approximately .003% of this total, a very small percentage of the total area is dedicated to developed recreation facilities. The proposed expansion of public facilities within USS 8366 Lot 2 at the Childs Glacier Recreation Area will have no effect on the adjacent roadless area character.

### Proposed Actions:

#### Federal and Non-Federal Actions Potentially Affecting the Childs Glacier Recreation Proposal:

1. Proposed Carbon Mountain Road: As guaranteed by ANILCA, an easement for a 34 mile

road across National Forest System lands from the Copper River Highway (milepost 42) to the Carbon Mountain area has been granted to Chugach Alaska Corporation (CAC). Construction of this road would affect the wildlife and fisheries resources of the Delta by replacing some habitat with a road, and bisecting other wildlife habitat (reference the summary of effects writeup from the Carbon Mountain Road analysis (1999) in project file). If constructed, this road would be open to the public and provide roaded access into the East Copper River Delta from the Copper River Highway (milepost 42), up the Martin River drainage. Currently, the East Copper River Delta is used primarily by hunters, fishermen, snowmobilers, subsistence users and others who fly, boat, canoe, snowshoe or snowmobile into this remote backcountry area for dispersed recreation and subsistence uses. The proposed road would bisect the East Copper River Delta and cross the Bering Lake inventoried roadless area which includes approximately 1,032,730 total acres and approximately 966,240 acres of National Forest System lands (See Bering Lake Roadless Area Map # 8 in Appendix). Additional roaded access into the East Copper River Delta would likely result in a slight increase in overall public use of the Copper River Delta due to increased use by tourists, sightseers, RV and other people using the road system. Because the Copper River Highway is not connected via road system to the rest of Alaska, it is not expected this increase would be substantial. It would be expected that as use of the road system increases, a corresponding increase in the use of the Childs Glacier Recreation Area would also occur.

2. Million Dollar Bridge Renovation Project: The Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (ADOT/PF) has proposed a project which would rehabilitate and restore the Million Dollar Bridge (reference copy of the Copper River Highway Million Dollar Bridge Environmental Assessment in project file). The current plan is to rehabilitate the bridge to its pre-earthquake functional condition, lifting Span #4, and seismically retrofitting the bridge to better withstand future earthquakes. If ADOT/PF plans go according to schedule, the estimated 11 million dollar contract would be advertised the summer/fall of 2002 with rehabilitation and restoration to occur beginning in 2003.

According to the Environmental Assessment (EA), most work will occur during times of extreme low water or on the ice to minimize sediment into the river. To minimize impacts to anadromous fish resources ADOT/PF plans to time main in-stream work to occur before and after salmon migrate past the ADF&G sonar counters (early spring, late fall, or during winter). Because the bridge is located 48 miles from town, the contractor will be required to provide a construction camp facility for workers. According to the EA the construction camp would be a "full service" semi-permanent facility typically consisting of access roads, food preparation on site, electrical power, water well, dump station and sewage disposal, trash disposal, shower, laundry and lavatory. The camp will be located within a "reasonable" distance either north or south of the bridge. Also, according to the EA, traffic volumes are not expected to increase substantially, because Cordova cannot be accessed from the rest of Alaska via highway system.

---

This proposed renovation project would probably have the largest effect on the Childs Glacier Recreation Area during the time the project was underway, due to the increase in industrial noise, construction equipment traffic, and construction workers using the Childs Glacier Recreation Area. This effect would be temporary in nature and last as long as the renovation project lasted. As suggested in the EA, after the bridge is renovated, traffic volumes are not expected to increase substantially as a result of this project. With any increases in traffic on the Copper River Highway, a corresponding increase in use of the

Childs Glacier Recreation Area is likely to occur. Because this project would not increase projected traffic volumes substantially, the effects to the current Childs Glacier Recreation Area and to the proposed Childs Glacier Alternatives 2 and 3 being analyzed in this environmental assessment, are expected to be minimal.

3. Private Lodge: A lodge approximately 1/4 mile east of Childs Glacier and lying adjacent to the Copper River has been proposed for construction in the summer of 2002, through a private land-lease on Eyak Corporation lands (see Map # 6 for lodge location). Access to the proposed lodge would be from the Copper River Highway, exiting approximately 1/4 mile north of the Million Dollar Bridge. The lodge would be a combination of overnight and restaurant/bar facilities. According to the developer of the lodge, part of the proposed access road would follow the Forest Service 17(b) trail easement that also runs adjacent to the river in that area. This easement has been the focus of a two year capital investment project, to develop and improve the approximately two mile trail into a class III (Developed/ Improved) trail which provides public access to public lands. As with all 17(b) easements, public access would need to be maintained before, during, and after proposed road construction, should the construction occur.

Current plans for the summer of 2002 are for construction of a restaurant and bar, with future plans to provide overnight facilities. In anticipation of the Million Dollar Bridge renovation project, the developer intends to provide housing for construction workers in lieu of them building a construction camp in the vicinity of the bridge. Rental of kayaks, canoes, and boat trips on the Copper River would also be probable services that would eventually be provided. The Forest Service has been approached by the developer to obtain a special use permit for commercial use of the Childs Glacier and Million Dollar Bridge Recreation Sites.

It is anticipated that the Childs Glacier Trail easement, which the proposed access road would cross, could be an asset to the proposed operation, as it would provide opportunities to hike a developed trail that provides public access to National Forest System lands. The proposed Childs Glacier Recreation Area expansion of public facilities would also be an asset, because those facilities would provide additional recreational opportunities for visitors using the lodge if a lodge were constructed. A certain percentage of people coming to visit the Forest Service public facilities (approximately 7,000 to 9,000 visitors/year) would likely utilize the lodge facility as well if it were available.

It is not anticipated that the Forest Service proposal will conflict with the proposed lodge because two different types of recreational users are being targeted. The type of user the Forest Service is targeting at the Childs Glacier site is generally different than the recreational user being targeted by CAC or Eyak Corporation. The Forest Service is generally targeting backpackers, bikers, tenters, possible RV users, and people wanting to go camping and cook hotdogs over a fire. The Native Corporation would generally be targeting people looking for a more developed setting.

4. Copper River Trail: In 1996, Alaska State Parks, at the request of Governor Tony Knowles, began examining the feasibility of constructing a trail along the Copper River following the abandoned Copper River and Northwestern Railway route. In February 1998, a Draft Copper River Trail Plan was written. This plan recommended 1) the trail be constructed in phases; 2) user fee to pay for operation and maintenance; 3) a cooperative agreement to operate facilities be initiated with Native land owners; 4) State Parks oversee Operations and Maintenance; 5) major portions of trail be designed for non-motorized uses; and 6)

snowmobiles be allowed to continue using the trail in winter. The total length of all 10 proposed segments is approximately 184 miles and the total estimated cost was \$27,032,250. In the plan, the Copper River Trail would connect the communities of Chitina and Cordova (approximately 130 miles). Since 1998, variations of this proposal have been discussed, but due to the variety and number of adjacent landowners and their individual interests and objectives, the proposal has not progressed any further.

The State of Alaska Department of Natural Resources' current position is that the original project has been shortened to include the section from Chitina to Cleave Creek with a Richardson Highway connector along the Tiekle River. The lower trail project has been shelved but could be revisited under a separate public process if enough interest is there to resolve the issues.

If a non-motorized bike path were actually constructed connecting Chitina with the Million Dollar Bridge, use of the Childs Glacier Recreation Area would increase. The Childs Glacier Recreation Area is a natural destination site. The existing Child's Glacier site and any future public facilities would receive additional use if the bike path were constructed.

5. Copper River Highway Maintenance: On August 14-16, 2002 the Chugach National Forest was involved in a Chugach National Forest roads review. Participants included representatives from the Chugach National Forest, Alaska Regional Office, Washington Office, and representatives from the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (ADOTPF) Central and Northern Regions.

At that meeting, the ADOTPF indicated the intent to continue moving ahead with several projects associated with the Copper River Highway between mileposts 37 and 49. These projects included; renovation of the Million Dollar Bridge scheduled for contract release in the fall of 2002 (estimated 11 million dollar project), resurfacing (including possible paving) of the road between mile 37 and 49, and continued road maintenance of this and other sections of the Copper River Highway up to the Million Dollar Bridge. It was also discussed how the current river shift to alongside the road between mileposts 39 to 42 mile would need to continue to be addressed (including possible bridge placement or other solutions) before additional road improvement work in this area could be accomplished. Based on these discussions there is no intent by the ADOTPF to abandon this section of road due to the current flooding problems between 39 and 42 mile which would isolate the Childs Glacier and Million Dollar Bridge area.

## Potential Future Actions:

As more and more people discover the Copper River Delta area, tourism will increase. It is projected for Alaska that there will be an 8 to 12 percent yearly increase in tourism. Because of its remoteness, this rate will most likely be less for the Copper River Delta area, however, as use increases there will be more demand for recreational facilities. If visitation increases to a point where the limited Forest Service facilities cannot meet the demand, private landowners would be encouraged to meet the public's needs. In many cases private landowners have much more flexibility with the types of services that can be provided. Concessionaire requests that have been denied on National Forest System lands, because they conflict with management direction could potentially operate on private lands.

## Federal and Non-Federal Actions Potentially Affecting the Childs Glacier Recreation Proposal:

1. Bear Viewing: A future project that may occur approximately 5 miles from the Childs Glacier Recreation Area is bear-viewing along the Abercrombie Rapids adjacent the Copper River, north of Miles Lake on private lands. Concentrations of brown bears are commonly seen in this area during the peak salmon spawning season. If in the future this concept is further developed, it is unlikely to significantly affect the Childs Glacier Recreation Area.

Future expansion of recreation facilities on National Forest System lands or private lands in the Childs Glacier area would modify some wildlife habitat and would bring more people into the area. The magnitude of disturbance would largely be a function of the number of people visiting the area.

## Consistency with CFR 241.22 and ANILCA 501(b) Primary Purpose Direction:

The Copper River Delta is mandated under ANILCA section 501(b) to be managed primarily for the conservation of fish and wildlife and their habitat. Because Forest Service proposals involving the Copper River Delta have been sensitive to the ANILCA mandate, over time few management activities have affected the rich wildlife and fish resources and habitat of the Copper River Delta.

CFR 241.22 states that a multiple-use activity may be permitted or authorized within the areas of the Chugach National Forest (ANILCA 501(b)) only after a determination by the responsible Forest Officer that such activity is consistent with the conservation of fish, wildlife, and their habitat. A use or activity may be determined to be consistent if it will not materially interfere with or detract from the conservation of fish, wildlife and their habitat.

The Childs Glacier Recreation Area Facilities Expansion Project as described in this Environmental Assessment is consistent with the ANILCA primary purpose direction. There are several reasons why this proposal meets this primary purpose direction which are outlined below:

1. All proposals and Management area prescriptions in the Chugach National Forest Land and Resources Management Plan within the ANILCA 501(b) management area were analyzed and developed to reflect this mandate.
2. The proposal will use Forest Service BMP's (Best Management Practices) during layout, construction, and maintenance of all facilities.
3. Recreational facilities along the Copper River Highway are grouped into "enclaves" to leave the majority of the landscape undeveloped. An enclave is the word used to describe the grouping of developed recreation facilities into selected areas whose natural character is to be changed by the works of man. This leaves more areas free of development and reduces the impacts to wildlife and helps to maintain the natural "delta character" and "delta experience".
4. The Sheridan Glacier Roadless Area lies west of the Childs Glacier enclave and Copper River Highway and includes approximately 231,810 National Forest acres. The Bering Lake Roadless Area lies east of the Childs Glacier enclave and Copper River Highway and includes approximately 966,240 National Forest acres. Total acreage of the two roadless areas is approximately 1,198,050 acres.

If all developed areas within the four enclaves within the road corridor along the 48 mile Copper River Highway were combined, (Childs Glacier/Million Dollar Bridge (15 Acres) , Alaganik (7 Acres), Mile 22 (5 Acres), Delta Entrance (3 Acres), the total acreage of land with developed recreation facilities would total approximately 30 acres (.0025% of the total roadless acres).

The Childs Glacier enclave is located within the road corridor between two roadless areas but is not in a roadless area. It includes a total area of approximately 40 acres or approximately .003% of the total 1,198,050 of inventoried roadless area (see Map # 5). Not all of these 40 acres would be developed with this proposal. All 1,198,050 acres described above also lie within the area designated by Congress to be managed under ANILCA 501(b) direction.

The recreation focus within the Bering Lake and Sheridan Glacier roadless areas will be on providing dispersed recreation opportunities such as hunting, fishing, and hiking, which reflect the primitive ROS classification and roadless character of the landscape. New developed recreation facilities within a roadless area with a primitive ROS classification and ANILCA 501(b) management direction is highly unlikely.

In consideration of the management direction and size of the two inventoried roadless areas which includes 1,198,050 acres as compared to the Childs Glacier Recreation Area located along the road system outside of the roadless area (40 acres) representing approximately .003% of this total, a very small percentage of the total area is dedicated to developed recreation facilities. The proposed expansion of public facilities within USS 8366 Lot 2 at the Childs Glacier Recreation Area will have no effect on the adjacent roadless area character.

In consideration of the factors listed above and other factors discussed in this Environmental Assessment, the proposed expansion of the Childs Glacier Recreation Area is consistent with **CFR 241.22 and** the ANILCA 501(b) mandate for the Copper River Delta.

**Summary:** In summary, the proposed expansion of facilities at the Childs Glacier Recreation Area would have little effect on potential future development of adjacent landowners. It is not considered to be in competition with development options in the area, should adjacent landowners decide at some point in the future to develop their lands. The facilities being proposed for construction are generally not the same type that would be proposed on Native Corporation lands.

This proposal is consistent with The Revised Chugach National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan. The proposal is also consistent with ANILCA 501(b) primary purpose direction for the Copper River Delta, which states that the area be managed primarily for the conservation of fish and wildlife and their habitat, and is consistent with CFR 241.22 which identifies that the project will not materially interfere with or detract from the conservation of fish, wildlife and their habitat.

## V. AGENCIES AND PERSONS CONSULTED

Chugach Alaska Corporation  
Eyak Corporation

Dave Crowley, ADF&G  
Cevin Gilleland, ADF&G Habitat  
Dean Davidson  
Dave Blanchet  
Linda Yarborough & Myra Gilliam  
Dan Logan, Steve Babler & Milo Burcham  
Steve Hening & Alison Rein Anne Dohmann  
Chuck Frey  
Ken Hodges  
Dick Smith  
Bob Behrends, Chris Dunlap, Dixon Sherman

#### LITERATURE CITED

Bauer, Erwin A., Big Game of North America, Voyager Press, Stillwater MN, 1997, pages 133 and 135.

Cheek, Roland, Learning to Talk Bear, Northwinds Publishing and Printing, Great Falls, MT, pages 12 and 284.

Patent, Dorothy Hinshaw, Bears of the World, Holiday House. New York, NY, 1980, page 53.

Patent, Dorothy Hinshaw, The Way of the Grizzly, Clarion Books, New York, NY, 1987, pages 58, 59, and 61.

CNI Agreement  
Chugach National Forest Revised Land and Resource Management Plan  
Wildlife Specialist Report  
Biological Evaluation  
Cultural Resources Evaluation - Forest Archeologist Report  
ANILCA 810 Determination  
Copper River Highway Million Dollar Bridge Environmental Assessment  
Draft Copper River Trail Plan