



**UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
REGION 10**

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OFFICE OF
ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW
AND ASSESSMENT

August 11, 2016

Jeanie Cole, Planning and Environmental Coordinator
BLM Fairbanks District Office
Attn: Eastern Interior Draft RMP/EIS
1150 University Avenue
Fairbanks, Alaska 99709

Dear Ms. Cole:

Thank you for the opportunity to review the Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Eastern Interior Proposed Resource Management Plan, Alaska (EPA Project #08-013-BLM). As we stated in our comments on the Supplemental Draft EIS, we appreciate the effort of the Bureau of Land Management to include potential mining activities which were overlooked in the original plan. We also note that the Final EIS evaluates potential impacts from activities associated with fluid leasable materials.

The BLM did not identify a preferred alternative in the Draft Supplemental EIS. We stated that although Alternative B appeared to be the environmentally preferable alternative, Alternative C struck a balance between multiple uses and user interests, and provided reasonable protections for exceptional resources in the planning area.

Overall, we are pleased that the Final EIS and Proposed Resource Management Plan has identified Alternative E as its preferred alternative (the "proposed RMP"). Our understanding is Alternative E is largely based on Alternatives B and C from the Draft EIS and was developed primarily in response to the extensive public and stakeholder input provided through this NEPA process. We believe Alternative E will generally minimize impacts to water quality, fish and other aquatic resources in comparison to other alternatives, in part through the designation of 73 Riparian Conservation Areas and seven watershed restoration priority areas.

We do note that Alternative E permits the same or greater personal and commercial timber harvest, as well as forest product use, as Alternatives B and C. Also, areas formerly closed or withdrawn for mineral leasing would now be open, with restrictions, under Alternative E. We previously recommended that mining be limited to areas that have higher potential mineral value but lower sensitivity, or that the BLM consider size restrictions for certain types of operations. We believe Alternative E is responsive in part to this recommendation. We also recognize that monitoring will be implemented with any leasing, and we encourage the implementation of responsive adaptive management protocols in cases where effects of activities are outside of the anticipated results.

Again, we appreciate the opportunity to comments on the Final EIS. Please contact Jennifer Curtis of my staff in Anchorage at (907) 271-6324 or curtis.jennifer@epa.gov with any questions you have regarding our comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Christine B. Littleton". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent "C" at the beginning.

Christine B. Littleton, Manager
Office of Environmental Review and Assessment