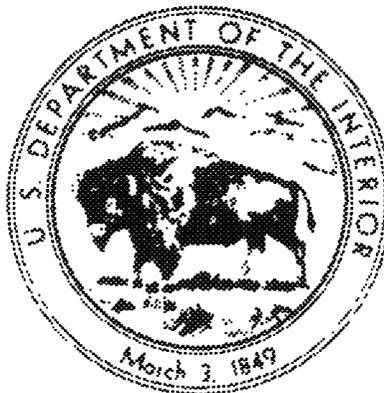


UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

ARCTIC NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE, ALASKA,
COASTAL PLAIN RESOURCE ASSESSMENT

REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION TO THE CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES
AND FINAL LEGISLATIVE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT



APRIL 1987

In accordance with Section 1002 of the
Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act,
and the National Environmental Policy Act

Prepared by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
in cooperation with U.S. Geological Survey
and the Bureau of Land Management

Archeological sites are also likely along rivers and streams that cross the 1002 area from the Philip Smith Mountains. These rivers could have provided fishing and would have been natural travel routes between the coast and the foothills. Sites known from the river courses are chiefly tent rings, although two interior sites have sod houses. Points of particular possibility are high, well-drained banks, especially near stream confluences.

Undiscovered sites may also be on high points of land that provide overlooks above the surrounding moist tundra; such spots are known to contain archeological sites throughout most of northern Alaska and Canada. There are relatively few such locations on the 1002 area, and sites that have been identified in such locations are uniformly small scatters of lithic material.

Archeological sites are even less likely on the relatively stable sandy areas in river deltas. As with the overlook sites, material from blowouts in deltas is currently limited to lithic remains.

The remainder of the 1002 area consists largely of flat to gently rolling tundra, now very wet. Such areas are least likely to contain sites, or to contain sites that are susceptible to discovery.

Recreation

Recreational use of the Arctic Refuge is varied and is related to wildlife or wilderness values. Types and amount of recreation are limited by the refuge's remoteness, harsh climate, and poor access. Fewer than 3,000 visits occur annually. Wet and moist ground conditions in the short summer season make surface travel difficult, and extended periods of cold and darkness during the winter reduce recreational uses at that time. Access is almost exclusively by aircraft and is costly. Nonetheless, recreational use of the 1002 area is slowly increasing as it becomes better known and as scheduled airline services to Barter Island improve.

The most common forms of recreation area are hunting, backpacking, and float trips on the larger rivers such as the Canning, Hulahula, and Aichilik. Other recreational pursuits are wildlife observation, photography, sightseeing, cross-country skiing, fishing, and nature study. Most recreationists pursue several of these activities. Kaktovik residents also engage in snowmobiling.

~ In 1986, 14 hunting guides operated on the refuge, though none guided on the 1002 area. Another 9 recreational guides conducted group float or backpack trips on the refuge. One or two guides operated recreational trips, at least in part, on the 1002 area during the past 5 years. Float-trip groups average 6-12 people. Figures on nonguided recreationists are unavailable, but probably fewer than 100 unguided visits occur annually on the ground in the 1002 area. Several hundred visitors fly over the 1002 area annually to sightsee or en route to other parts of the Arctic Refuge. ~

Wilderness and Esthetics

The Arctic Refuge is the only conservation system unit that protects, in an undisturbed condition, a complete spectrum of the arctic ecosystems in North America. Approximately 8 million acres of the refuge is designated as wilderness by ANILCA section 702(3), and adjoins the 1002 area on the south and east, including the coastal plain from the eastern 1002 area boundary to the Canadian border.

Wilderness is described by the Wilderness Act of 1964 (Public Law 88-557) as " * * * an area of undeveloped Federal lands retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions and which (1) generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable; (2) has outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation; (3) has at least five thousand acres of land of sufficient size as to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition; and (4) may also contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value." With the exception of the two abandoned DEW Line sites on the coast, the entire 1002 area meets these criteria (Gamer and Reynolds, 1986). The coastal plain in its present state has outstanding wilderness qualities: scenic vistas, varied wildlife, excellent opportunities for solitude, recreational challenges, and scientific and historic values.

~ The 1002 area is the most biologically productive part of the Arctic Refuge for wildlife and is the center of wildlife activity. It serves as an important calving ground for the Porcupine caribou herd; it contains a high percentage of the refuge's observed muskoxen range; it is an important fall staging area for lesser snow geese; it provides nesting habitat for waterfowl and shorebirds; and it is frequently used by denning polar bears from the Beaufort Sea population. Migrating caribou and the postcalving caribou aggregation offer an extraordinary spectacle. The area presents many opportunities for scientific study of a relatively undisturbed ecosystem. ~

Visual resources of the 1002 area encompass diverse ecotypes and landforms. The irregular coastline of the Beaufort Sea--characterized by its barrier islands, lagoons, beaches, submerged bars, spits, and river deltas--gives way to the south to the gently rising coastal plain. The backdrop of the steeply rising Brooks Range, with its deep river valleys and glacier-clad peaks, accents the abruptness and rugged beauty of the area.

~ Although the esthetic value of the 1002 area had been temporarily reduced as a result of seismic exploration, the area remains noteworthy and its wilderness values have not been diminished. Recent botanical studies show that recovery on the 1002 area is starting, with seismic trails less visible in the second year after disturbance (Felix and others, 1987). ~