

**COMMUNITY PITS PROJECT
MINERAL MATERIAL DISPOSAL
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
USDA Forest Service
Seward Ranger District, Chugach National Forest
Kenai Peninsula Borough, Alaska
April 2003**

INTRODUCTION

For over 30 years, the District has approved the removal of common variety materials of sand, gravel, and stone from the Mile 2, Mile 38, Mile 33, and Mile 35 pits. These community sites have met a need for a local source of material for both commercial and personal use. In October of 1999, The District Ranger closed these pits pending an environmental review under the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act. Initially, this review focused on a short-term solution to allow the continued issuance of personal free-use permits. In May of 2000, the District Ranger signed a Decision Memo allowing for the removal of material from within the existing area of impact of these pits. This decision extended operations for a period of one year, allowing the issuance of personal free-use permits.

PURPOSE AND NEED

Forest Service policy is to make mineral materials on National Forest lands available to the public. The Mile 2, Mile 38, Mile 33, and Mile 35 community pits have been a local source of sand, gravel, and stone for the past 30 years, and the public continues to request the material from these sites. The District's objectives are to provide mineral material to meet public need at these community pits with minimal additional resource disturbance, and reclaim the sites upon cessation of operations.

These community pits have not been evaluated to determine the long-range impacts of operations, or considered the needs of the private versus commercial requests. Concerns about the amount of material available, public safety, conflicting demands for the material, and possible impacts to adjacent resources have been raised.

PROPOSED ACTION

The Seward Ranger District is proposing to issue permits that allows removal of common variety materials of sand, gravel, and stone from the Mile 2, Mile 38, Mile 33, and Mile 35 community pits. The priority would be given to supplying non-commercial permits to meet the need of local communities. These sites would be managed for a minimum of ten years unless there is no longer a demand, or the pit is exhausted. The present proposal is not to expand the pits, but to take from the existing area of impact.

Permits would be issued conditionally upon the acceptance by the permittee to certain management constraints and mitigation measures outlined in the Operating Plan (see attached Exhibit A). A pit plan would be developed for each site covering operations and reclamation, as per the requirements of Title

36 of the Code of Federal Regulations, Subpart C, Sec. 228.64. Disposal authorized under permit would not exceed the average annual levels established over the previous five years of operation at each site.

DECISION TO BE MADE

The decision to be made is whether to implement the proposed action as described above, or to take no action at this time and stop issuing permits.

The environmental assessment is tiered to the revised Chugach National Forest Land Management Plan (CNF-LMP) and Final Environmental Impact Statement (May 2002) as amended. The proposed action is consistent with the Plan and amendments. Thus, this decision will not require any amendment of the CNF-LMP.

LOCATION

The following outlines the site-specific description of the proposed action along with detailed information about each mineral material site on the following 12 pages.

Community Pits Project - Mineral Material Disposal

Mile 2 - Hope Road	T. 8N., R.1W., SE ¼, NW ¼, Sec 3
Mile 38 - Sterling Hwy	T.5N., R.2W., SE ¼ Sec 11
Mile 33 Sand Pit - Seward Hwy	T.5N., R.1W., SE ¼ Sec 21
Mile 35 Gravel Pit - Seward Hwy	T.5N., R.1E., SW ¼, SE ¼, Sec 17 and N. ½, NE ¼, Sec 20.

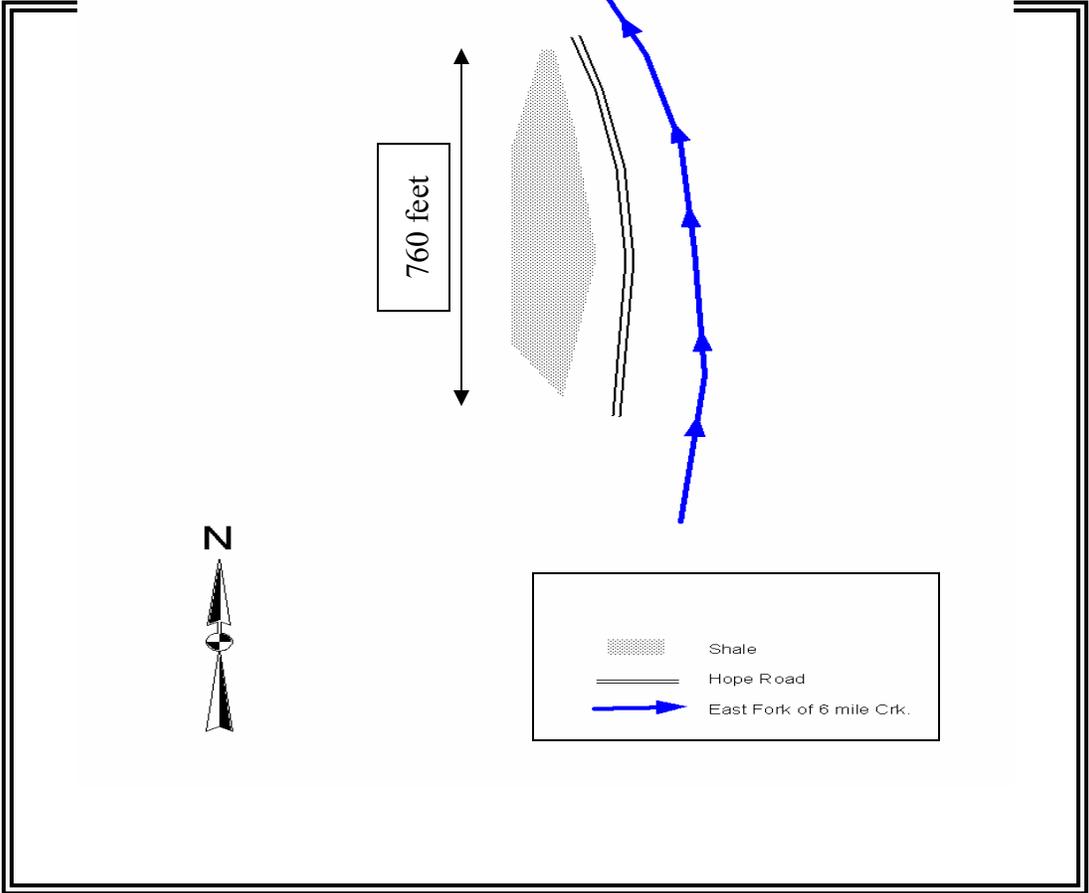
Mile 2 Hope Road, Decorative Stone

T. 8N., R.1W., SE ¼, NW ¼, Sec 3



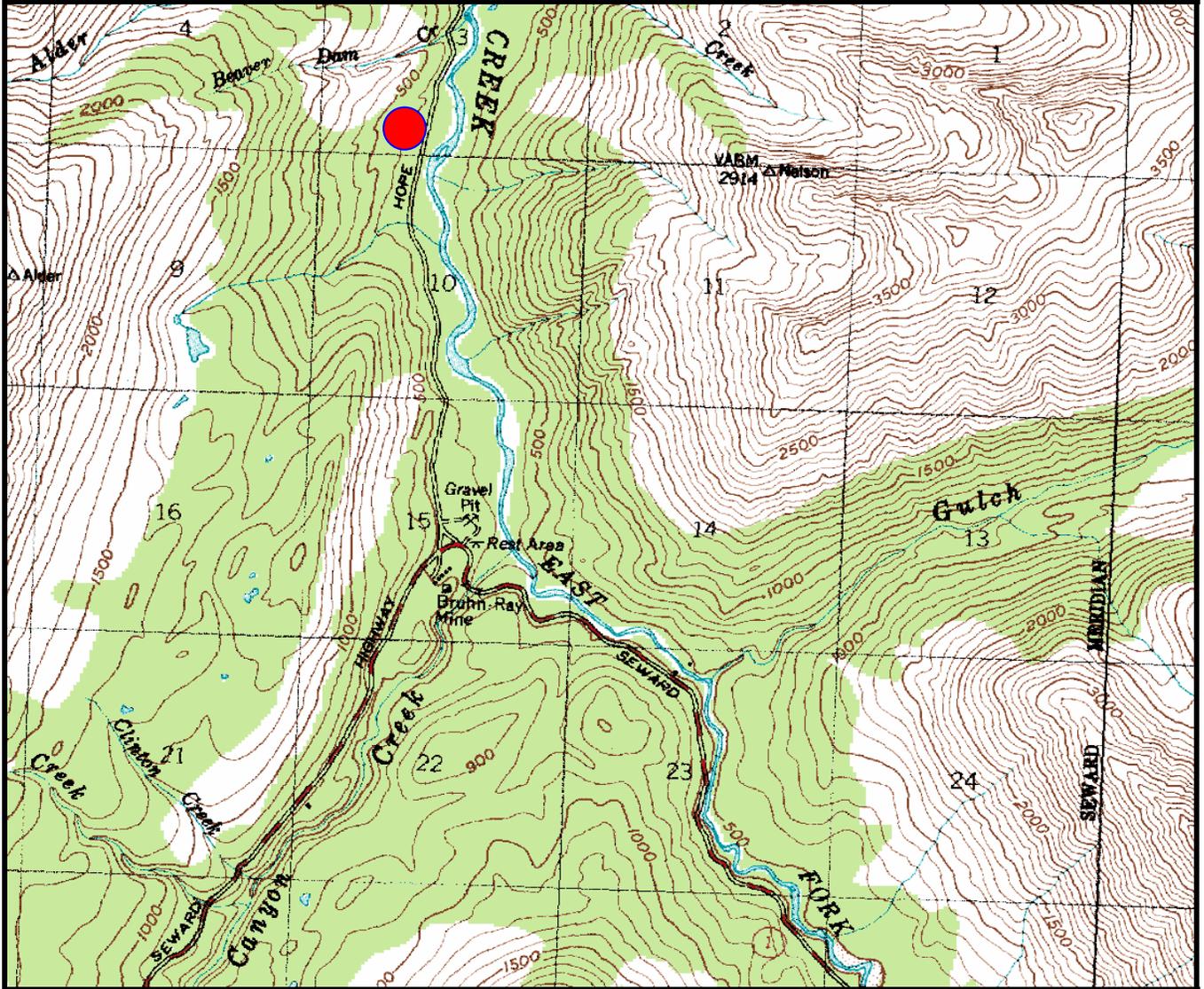
Historically, this site has been used as a source of naturally occurring decorative stone, and has not been developed into a community pit. Typically, material is removed from the face of the outcrop or selected from the material at the base of the vertical wall. The face of this outcrop is 760 feet long and between 35-40 feet high. The rate of use from 1995 through 2000 is estimated to be 20 cy/yr. Only decorative stone is being considered for disposal at this site.

The method of disposal would be limited to removing material that has been dislodged from the outcrop naturally, can be removed with hand tools, and loaded into a personal vehicles (pick-up or small trailer). Use of equipment at the Mile 2 rock source site would be restricted, unless specifically authorized.



Vicinity Map

Mile 2 Hope Road T. 8N., R.1W., SE ¼, NW ¼, Sec 3
Decorative Stone



**Mile 38 Sterling Hwy,
Tern Lake Quarry**

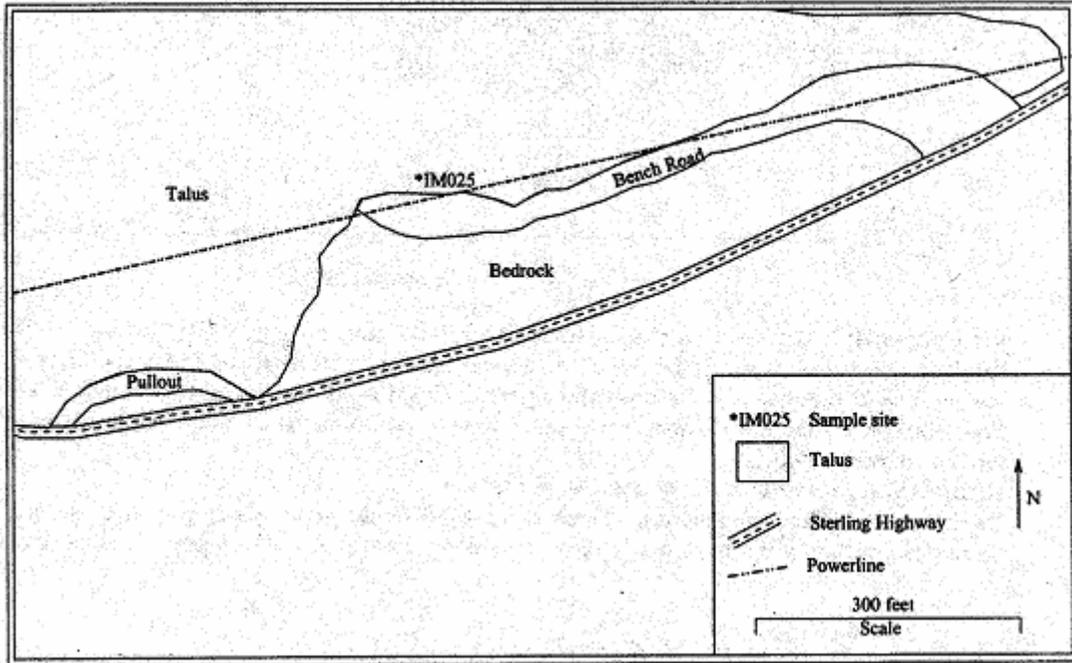
T.5N., R.2W., SE ¼ Sec 11



Historically, this site has been used as a source of decorative stone. This deposit is a naturally occurring talus slope of loose rock, not an established community pit. The estimate of material at this site is 217,391 cubic yards (250,000 short tons of loose rock). The rate of use from 1995 through 2000 is estimated to be 3760 cy/yr. Only decorative stone is being considered for disposal at this site, and therefore not all the available material will be disposed of.

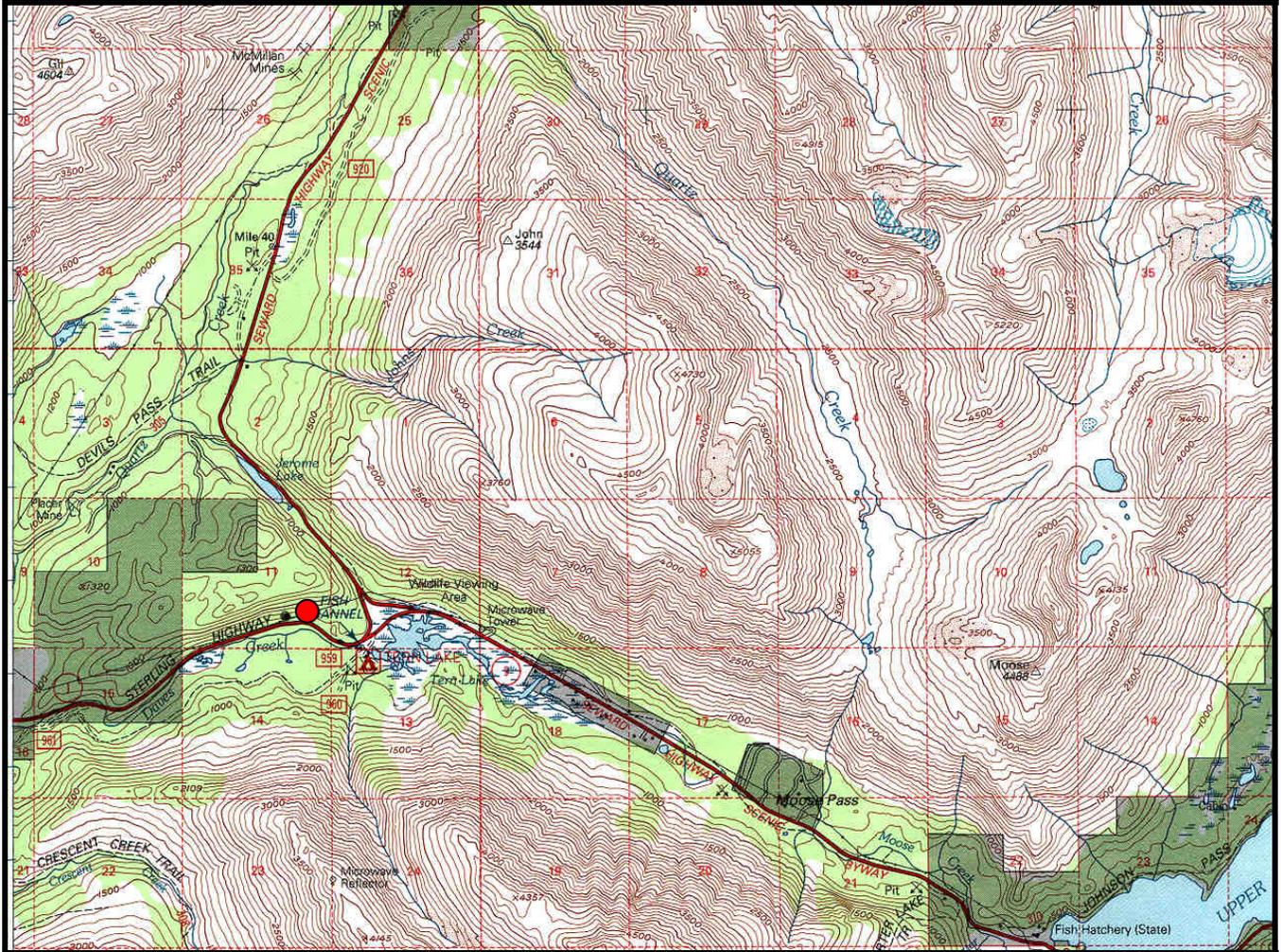
The method of disposal would involve that which can be removed with hand tools, and loaded into personal vehicles (pick-up or small trailer). Use of equipment at the Mile 38 pit would be restricted, unless specifically authorized.

Site Map Tern Lake Quarry



Vicinity Map Tern Lake Quarry

Mile 38 - Sterling Hwy T.5N., R.2W., SE ¼ Sec 11



Mile 33 Sand Pit T.5N., R.1W., SE ¼ Sec 21

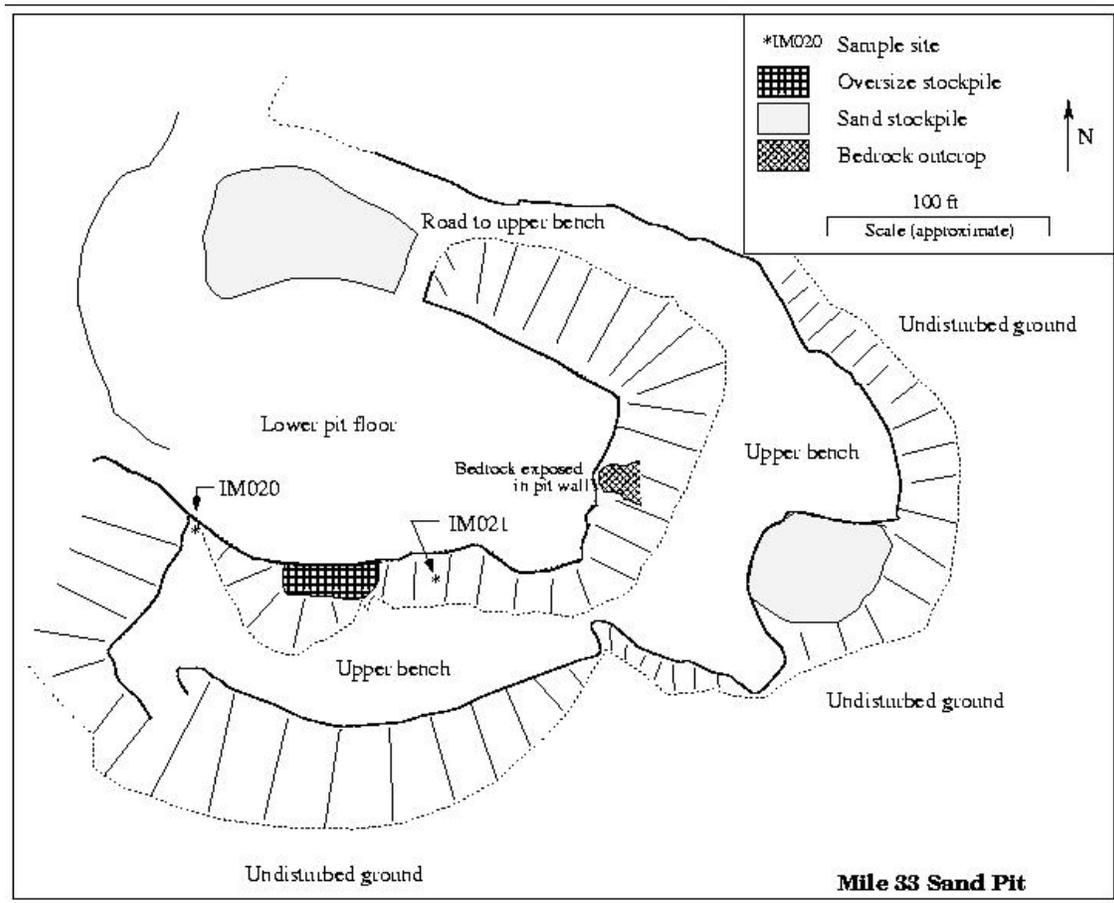


The site is approximately 3.7 acres. An estimated 12,200 cubic yards (18,178 tons) of sand is available based on excavating the existing pit floor down an additional 13 feet to bedrock. The rate of use from 1995 through 2000 is estimated to be 3760 cy/yr. 90% of the material was sold for commercial use. At current use rates, the supply of sand available at this site would satisfy the demand for approximately three to four years. The rate of disposal for non-commercial use of this material averages 339 cy/yr. Limiting the supply to primarily non-commercial permits would extend the reserves for an additional 30 years. Any commercial takings should be limited to 10-20 cubic yards.

Equipment would be either hand tools, loading into a personal vehicle (pick-up or small trailer), or a front-end loader and dump truck, depending on the amount of material authorized in the permit. Access and haul routes would be on existing roads.

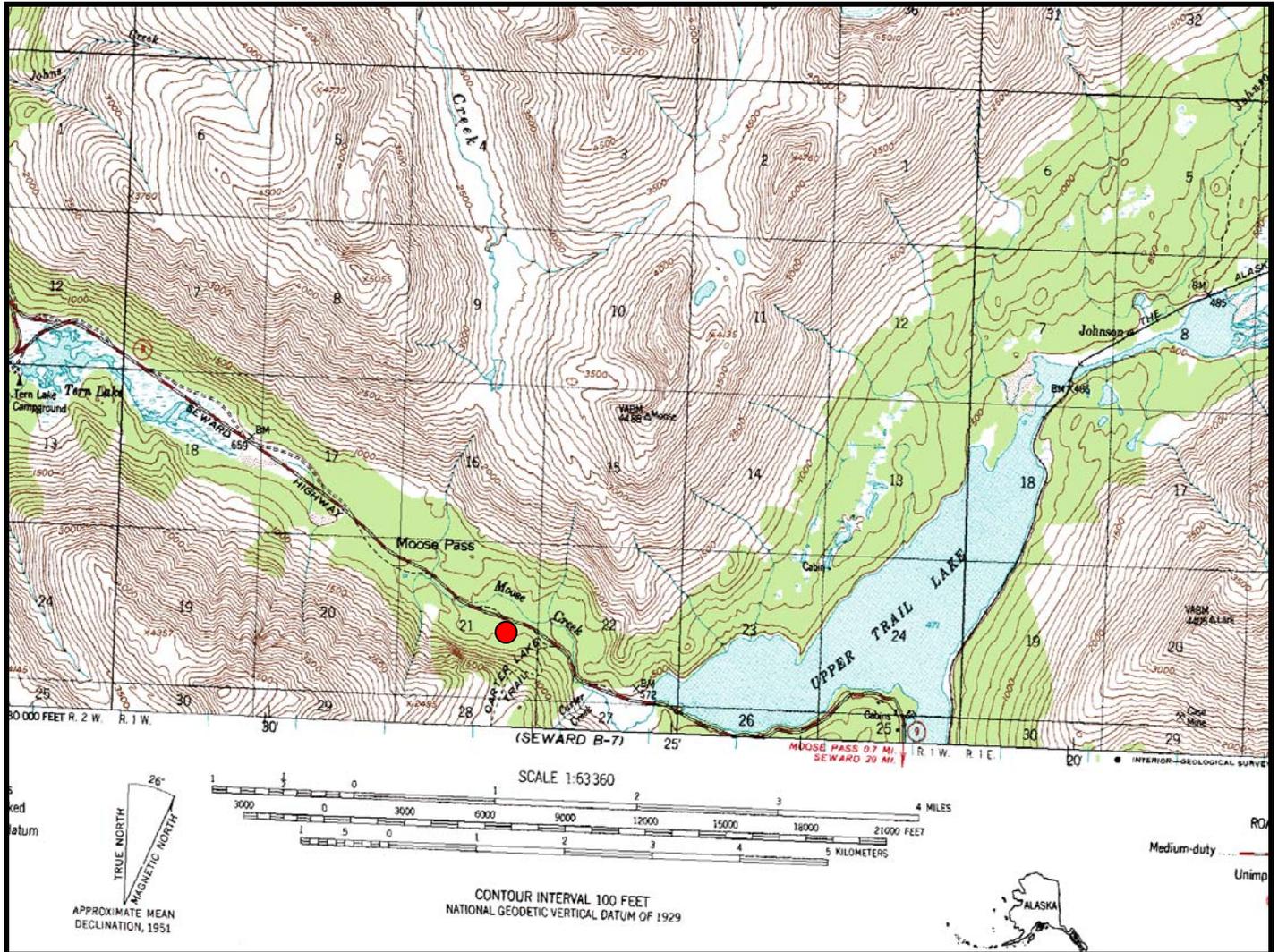
When the materials have been exhausted, reclamation would include exploring opportunities to convert the site into a wildlife viewing area. A separate analysis allowing additional public involvement will be conducted before a decision is reached.

Site Map, Mile 33 Sand Pit



Vicinity Map

Mile 33 Sand Pit, Seward Hwy T.5N., R.1W., SE ¼ Sec 21



**Mile 35 Gravel Pit T. 5N., R.1E., SW ¼, SE ¼, Sec 17 and N. ½, NE ¼,
Sec 20.**



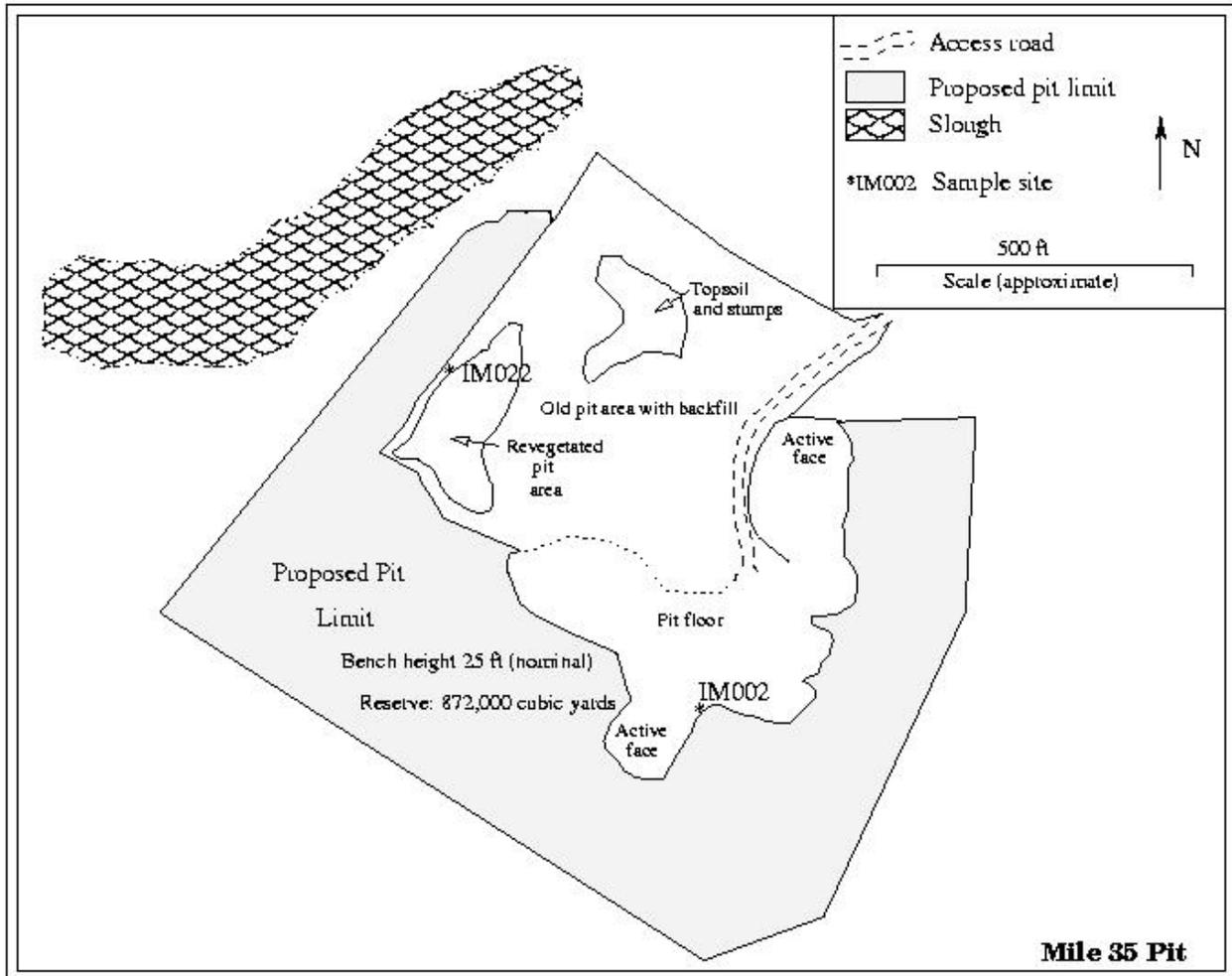
The quality of the material does not meet the current standards of base or pavement requirements for highway construction; however, this aggregate is a good source of borrow material for driveways, and building site fill.

The site is approximately 22 acres. An estimated 872,000 cubic yards (1,377,760 tons) of gravel is available. The rate of use from 1995 through 2000 is estimated to be 2900 cy/yr. The supply of gravel available at this site should satisfy the demand for at least the next 300 years at current use rates. Gravel would be removed and utilized as is, or screened and crushed on site.

Equipment would be either hand tools, loading into a personal vehicle (pick-up or small trailer), or a front-end loader and dump truck, depending on the amount of material authorized in the permit. Access and haul routes would be on existing roads.

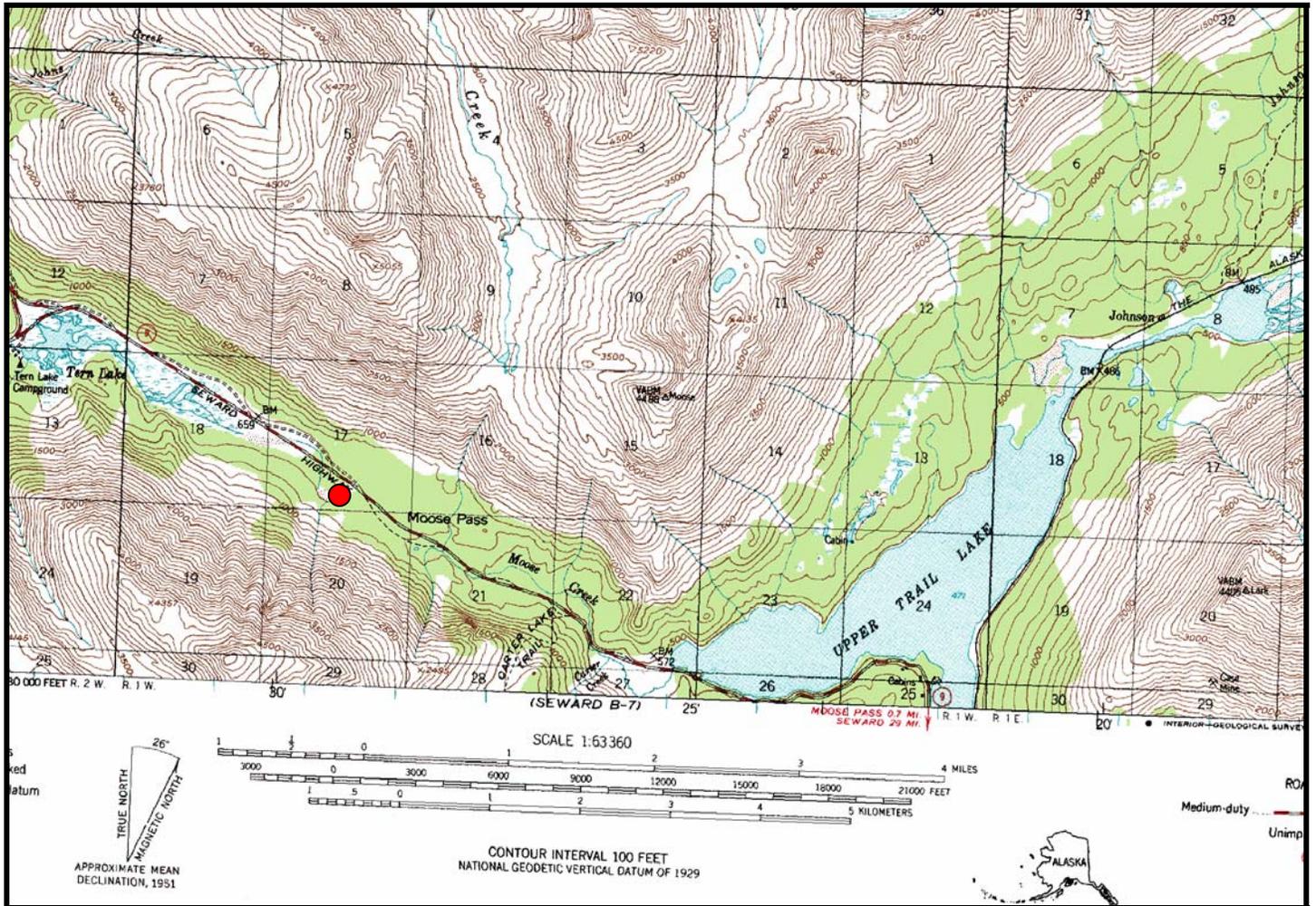
When the materials have been exhausted, reclamation would include exploring opportunities like converting the site into a campground. A separate analysis allowing additional public involvement will be conducted before a decision is reached.

Site Map Mile 35 Gravel Pit



Vicinity Map

Mile 35 Gravel Pit, Seward Hwy T.5N., R.1E., SW ¼, SE ¼, Sec 17 and N. ½, NE ¼, Sec 20.



MANAGEMENT DIRECTION

Forest Goals (CNF LMP Appendix H, pg H-3): The Fish, Wildlife and Recreation prescription falls within the mineral material source site areas. This prescription emphasizes active management in selected locations to accommodate the existing high human use for a variety of multiple use activities including mineral extraction. Mineral management guidance will provide for the orderly development of the minerals resources in the Chugach National Forest, in harmony with existing laws, regulations, and policies.

The following will be emphasized for mineral material sites:

- A. Design gravel extraction sites within foreground view areas to meet inventoried quality objectives. Rehabilitate sites by reshaping and planting. Leave access roads open where necessary to improve resource management. Selected sites will be designed to meet the objective of all resources.
- B. Rehabilitate existing gravel extraction sites to mitigate visual impacts and increase dispersed area camping.
- C. Removal of riverine gravel for a material source must comply with section 404 of the Clean Water Act, section 10 of the Rivers and Harbors Act, and Army Corps of Engineers requirements.
- D. Common variety mineral material permits will be assessed in light of all resources. Scope of this assessment will include but not be limited to: 1) Minimize impacts created by surface disturbance. 2) Potential utilization of existing developed sites. 3) Potential of closure and rehabilitation of existing developed sites. 4) Development of operating and reclamation schedules for each site.
- E. Consider opportunities for providing salmonid rearing ponds when locating extraction sites for common variety mineral materials.

The Mining and Minerals Policy Act of 1970 (P.L. 91-631, 84 Stat. 1876; 30 U.S.C 21a), states in part that “it is the continuing policy of the Federal Government in the national interest to foster and encourage (1) the development of economically sound and stable mining, minerals, metal and minerals reclamation industries, (2) the orderly and economic development of domestic mineral resources, reserves, and reclamation of metals and minerals to help assure satisfaction of industrial, security and environmental needs”.

The Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (P.L. 94-579, 90 Stat. 2743, as amended; 43 U.S.C.), Section 102 (12) states: “the public lands be managed in a manner which recognizes the Nation’s need for domestic sources of minerals, food, timber, and fiber from public lands including implementation of the Mining and Minerals Policy Act of 1970 (84 Stat. 1876; 30 U.S.C 21a) as it pertains to public lands;”.

US Code: Title 16, Section 477. Use of timber and stone by settlers - The Secretary of Agriculture may permit, under regulations to be prescribed by him, the use of timber and stone found on national forest, free of charge, by bona fide settlers, miners, residents, and prospectors for minerals, for firewood, fencing, buildings, mining, prospecting, and other domestic purposes, as may be needed by such persons for such purposes; such timber to be used within the State or Territory, respectively, where such national forest may be located.

Title 36 of the Code of Federal Regulations, Subpart C, Section 228.43 – Policy governing disposal: (a) General. Forest Service policy is to make mineral materials on National Forest lands available to the public and to local, state, and Federal government agencies where reasonable protection of, or mitigation of effects on, other resources is assured, and where removal is not prohibited.

Title 36 of the Code of Federal Regulations, Subpart C, Sec. 228.64 - Community sites and common-use areas.

- (a) Designation. Nonexclusive disposals may be made from the same deposit or areas designated by the authorized officer; the designation of such an area and any reclamation requirements must be based on an environmental analysis.
- (b) Pit plans. The Forest Service must prepare operating plans (Sec. 228.56) for the efficient removal of the material and for appropriate reclamation of community sites and common-use areas.
- (c) Reclamation. The Forest Service is responsible for reclamation of community sites and common-use areas.

ANLICA section 810, Subsistence Evaluation and Finding: The effects of this project have been evaluated to determine potential effects on subsistence opportunities and resources. There is no documented or reported subsistence use that would be restricted as a result of this decision.

Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972, as amended: The State of Alaska, Division of Governmental Coordination (DGC) and the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) recognize that certain activities have “de minimus” effects and normally do not affect the coastal zone. (FS Agreement No 00MOU-111001-026 signed February 2000). Since the mineral material source pits are located in an upland location, have been in use for the last 30 years without any detrimental effects to the coastal zone, and are not near any watercourses, the continued extraction of mineral material at the selected sites will not affect the coastal zone. A project description was sent to DGC in July of 2001 describing the project.

Forest Service Manual (FSM):

FSM 2850.3 - Policy

1. Dispose of mineral materials only when the authorized officer determines that the disposal is not detrimental to the public interest and that the benefits to be derived from a proposed disposal exceed the total cost and impacts of resource disturbance.
2. Maintain an inventory of mineral materials at all times.

3. Estimate demand for mineral materials annually for at least the next 10-year period. Do not allow disposals of mineral materials for external use if there are not enough probable reserves to meet estimated in-Service demand.
4. After March 1985, an approved development plan must cover mineral materials for in-Service use, except as noted in FSM 2853.21.
5. Use mineral materials from in-Service sites for Forest Service projects unless the authorized officer provides written justification to the effect that it is more economical to purchase commercial supplies.
6. Recover administrative costs associated with disposals of mineral materials

FSM 2852 - FREE USE.

(36 CFR 228.62). Do not give away without charge more than 5,000 cubic yards (or weight equivalent) to a nonprofit association, corporation, or individual in any 12 consecutive months 36 CFR 228.62(d)(2). Establish lower limits if necessary for effective resource management.

FSM 2850 R-10 Supplement No. 2800-2000-1

2850.43 3. District Rangers may authorize Forest Officers to conduct sales and issue free use permits for up to 1,000 tons of mineral material from community sites and common use areas

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The proposed action was listed in the Schedule of Proposed Actions from summer of 2001 to the spring of 2003.

On August 4, 2001, the Seward Ranger District sent a scoping letter to 94 individuals, community groups, Alaska Native groups, and government agencies inviting comments to the proposed action. A news release was sent to the Anchorage Daily News (published 8/21/2001), Seward Phoenix Log (published 8/30/2001), and the Peninsula Clarion Daily (published 8/23/2001). Six written comments were received.

A Decision Memo signed in May 2000, allowed removal activities to take place within the same pits and rock source sites identified in this proposed action. Public comments were invited during this initial environmental analysis and fifteen written comments were received. These comments, along with the six mentioned above, were considered as part of this analysis.

Significant Issues

Issues are points of debate or disagreement about the *effects* of the proposed action. Issues are determined to be significant because of extent of their geographic distribution, the duration of their effects, or the intensity of interest or resource conflict.

The Forest Service reviewed public comments received during the scoping in April of 2000, and the additional comments received in August 2001. No significant issues were identified.

Issues other than Significant Issues

All issues that were raised were determined to be non-significant for one or more of the following reasons:

- 1) The issue is outside the scope of the proposed action,
 - 2) The issue is already decided by law, regulation, Forest Plan, or other higher-level decision.
 - 3) The issue is irrelevant to the decision to be made,
 - 4) The issue is conjectural and not supported by scientific (or factual, site-specific) evidence.
- Several comments expressed concern for the economic effect to the local community and to small business if the mineral material from the Seward Highway Mile 33 and 35 pits was no longer available. This concern is in agreement with the proposed action that would allow continued use of these two pits. The priority will be given to supplying non-commercial permits.
 - One comment expressed concern about the availability of material from 33 and 35 pits for future highway maintenance and construction needs. This concern is in agreement with the proposed action that would allow continued use of these two pits. The priority will be given to supplying non-commercial permits.
 - One comment expressed concern about implementation of the multiple use mandates for National Forest System lands. The Forest Plan, and the Federal Land Policy and Management Act along with other laws and regulations direct the Forest Service to consider the multiple use concepts in all decisions. (non-significant, reason 2)
 - One comment expressed concern that changes should be made to the proposed LMP currently under review. The issue is outside the scope of the proposed action. (non-significant, reason 3)
 - One comment expressed concern about the impacts of commercial use vs. non-commercial uses. Volume of material and type of equipment used. This concern is in agreement with the proposed action that will give priority to supplying non-commercial permits.

- Several comments expressed support for continued operations at these community pits. This is in agreement with the proposed action that would allow continued use at these pits. The priority will be given to supplying non-commercial permits.

ALTERNATIVES

Alternatives Considered

The *No Action Alternative* is required by the National Environmental Policy Act and provides a baseline of comparison for the effects of the Proposed Action. Under the No Action Alternative, the pits would be closed to public use, and no permits would be issued. The No Action Alternative assumes that certain Forest Service administrative activities would continue, such as, routine maintenance of roads within the pits, use of the pits for burning debris and gravel extraction for Forest Service generated projects.

The *Action Alternative* would allow for the issuance of permits for removal of common variety materials of sand, gravel, and stone from the Mile 2, Mile 38, Mile 33 and Mile 35 Pits. Issuance of personal use permits would be the primary use at these mineral material source sites. Issuance of commercial permits may be considered from the Mile 33, Mile 2, and Mile 38, source sites for quantities of approximately 10-20 cubic yards. Use of equipment at the Mile 38 and Mile 2 rock source sites would be restricted, unless specifically authorized. Issuance of larger quantity (over 100 cubic yard) commercial permits would be considered from the Mile 35 Pit.

Comparison of Alternatives

Comparison of Alternatives

<u>Accomplishment of Purpose and Need</u>	<u>Alternative 1 No Action</u>	<u>Alternative 2 Proposed Action</u>
Provide mineral material to the public.	Would not meet the Purpose and Need	Would meet the Purpose and Need
Meet public need for the next 10 years.	Would not meet the Purpose and Need	Would meet the Purpose and Need
Allow operations with a minimum of resource disturbance.	Would not meet the Purpose and Need	Would meet the Purpose and Need
Restore and reclaim the sites.	Would not meet the Purpose and Need	Would meet the Purpose and Need

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

Effects relative to significant issues No significant issues were identified.

Effects relative to significant factors

(1) Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse. A significant effect may exist even if the Federal agency believes that on balance the effect will be beneficial.

Effects of the Proposed Action on Water Quality and Fisheries: (E. Johansen 8/03/01)

- There are no fisheries or water quality concerns with operation at these extraction sites. There are no streams located within or adjacent to these sites. By utilizing appropriate Forest Standards and Guidelines, the proposed action will have no impact. No adverse cumulative effects are expected.

Effects of the Proposed Action on Management Indicator Species: (M. Benoit 8/05/01)

- **Brown Bear:**

Direct Effects: Increases in human activity in an area can result in increased direct human-induced deaths of bears from increased legal hunting, illegal kills, wounding losses, and from the defense of life or property. Excavation permits will be issued at the same rate as in previous years, so increases in activity are not expected over current usage. There are no records of bear mortality related to use at these sites. Direct effects are expected to be minimal. Disturbance as a result of excavation is expected to be minimal, and is not expected to restrict access to salmon streams or inhibit movement through the watershed.

Indirect Effects: Habitat alteration will not occur at the Mile 33, 38, and Hope Highway sites. Habitat alteration at the Mile 35 Gravel Pit will affect minimal acres, will not impact prime foraging habitat or travel corridors, and should not have any indirect effects on bears resulting from reduction of habitat quality. Although excavation activities have the potential to disturb bears fishing or traveling through Moose Creek, Dave's Creek, or Six Mile Creek, there is currently enough existing cover between the sites and the creeks to sufficiently reduce disturbance, provide cover, and reduce potential human/bear conflicts. Bear hunters currently use the site for locating bears. This may indirectly affect individuals by increasing hunter success, but is unlikely to effect the population.

Cumulative Effects: Over time, continued developments within a watershed that restrict access to salmon streams or inhibit movement through the watershed, increase disturbance or potential human/bear conflicts, can substantially reduce habitat quality.

- **Moose:**

Direct Effects: Increases in human activity in an area can result in increased mortality due to moose-vehicle collisions. Permits will be issued at the same rate as in previous years, so increases in activity are not expected over current usage. There are no records

of moose mortality related to use at these sites. No significant direct effects are expected to occur.

Indirect Effects: Moose forage adjacent to all 4 sites in early successional stages. Some foraging habitat (< 5 acres) may be lost in birch and aspen during the expansion of the Mile 35 pit.

Cumulative Effects: After excavation of the side slopes, the sites should re-vegetate and provide future foraging habitat for moose after approximately 5 years.

- **Mountain Goat:**

Direct Effects: No significant direct effects are expected, lack of suitable habitat.

Indirect Effects: Goat habitat occurs primarily above the sites on south facing slopes, and will not be affected by excavation activities. Hunters currently use the site for locating goats. This may directly affect individuals by increasing hunter success, but is unlikely to effect the population.

Cumulative Effects: No significant cumulative effects are expected.

Effects of the Proposed Action on Sensitive Species: (M. Benoit 8/05/01)

- **Bald eagle:**

No *Direct, Indirect, or Cumulative Effect* is expected to occur. Eagles nests are known to occur 1 mile northwest of Mile 35 Pit. Suitable nesting trees do not occur adjacent to any of the excavation sites. Eagles may forage in adjacent habitats, but the project should have no impacts on foraging opportunities.

- **Northern Goshawk:**

No *Direct, Indirect or Cumulative Effect* is expected to occur. A goshawk nest is known to occur about 3.5 miles north of the Hope Highway Rock Source. Some old growth habitat occurs within 1 mile north of the Mile 38 rock site and within 1 mile south of the Mile 33 pit. Goshawks may nest in the area and forage near the pits. Suitable nesting habitat does not occur adjacent to the pits, nor will any old growth be affected. Habitat for prey species such as squirrels and birds may be lost on up to 10 acres at Mile 35 pit, but goshawks are not known to use the area for foraging.

- **Osprey:**

No *Direct, Indirect or Cumulative Effect* is expected to occur. No osprey nests are known to occur within 0.25 miles of any of the sites. The hemlock/spruce forest type, snags, and large green trees near water will not be affected by project activities.

- **Peale's Peregrine Falcon:**

No *Direct, Indirect* or *Cumulative Effect* is expected to occur. Suitable nesting habitat will not be affected by excavation, and does not occur within 0.25 miles of the gravel pits. The project will have minimal effects on peregrine prey species (birds).

Effects of the Proposed Action on Species of Special Interest: (M. Benoit 8/05/01)

- **Gray Wolf:**

No significant *Direct, Indirect, or Cumulative Effect* is expected to occur. Approximately 10 wolf packs occur on the Seward District. Wolves may hunt or travel through areas adjacent to the sites. Site excavation will not have significant impact on wolf habitat, prey species, increase roads, or substantially increase human activity beyond current levels.

- **Lynx:**

Direct Effects: No significant direct effects are expected. No new roads will be constructed. Human activity levels are not expected to increase.

Indirect Effects: No significant indirect effects are expected.

Cumulative Effects: Upon cessation of operations, and completion of reclamation, the re-vegetated site may provide habitat for snowshoe hare and foraging habitat for lynx.

- **River Otter:**

No significant *Direct, Indirect, or Cumulative Effect* is expected to occur. Habitat modification will not occur within 100-500 feet of aquatic habitats. Old growth will not be impacted.

- **Townsend's Warbler:**

Direct Effects: Some individuals nesting within 0.25 miles of the pits at Mile 33 and 35 may be disturbed by excavation activities.

Indirect Effects: Some potential nesting habitat (< 6 acres) may be lost during the expansion of the Mile 35 pit.

Cumulative Effects: No significant cumulative effects are expected

- **Wolverine:**

No significant *Direct, Indirect or Cumulative Effect* is expected to occur. Wolverine habitat most likely occurs above tree line, well above the gravel pits. Excavation activities should not affect large animal populations or availability of carrion.

Effects of the Proposed Action on Sensitive, Special Interest, and Management Indicator Species of plants: (R. DeVelice 11/05/01)

- No significant *Direct, Indirect, or Cumulative Effect* is expected to occur. No rare, endangered, or sensitive plants were located within areas likely to be affected by project activities.

Effects of the Proposed Action on Soil and Water: (D. Blanchet 08/01/01 – D. Davidson 08/01/01)

- *Direct Effects:* No significant direct effects are expected. None of the sites are within floodplain zones, and all sites are well drained.
Indirect Effects: No significant indirect effects are expected.
Cumulative Effect: Safety concerns with oversteepening relative to continued extraction by the public at the Mile 38 and Mile 2 sites.

Effects of the Proposed Action on economics:

- Based on the past 20 to 30 years of operation, continued access to the material offered at these sites should not interfere with private enterprise in the area. There have been no concerns raised by the public indicating a conflict with private businesses.
- Generally, no other source is available within close proximity to the communities currently utilizing this material. If these sources were no longer available (no action alternative) than the net result would have a negative economic effect on the surrounding communities. Longer haul distances would increase the cost to consumers.
- The proposed action leaves to the discretion of the Authorized Officer whether to issue free use permits or sell the material at fair market value. Either choice would not have a significant economic effect.

(2) The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.

The continued extraction of mineral materials from the community pits at Mile 33, and Mile 35 will be governed by operating requirements consistent with all Federal and State Health and Safety rules, regulations, and policies.

The Mile 38 site on Sterling Highway, and Mile 2 site on the Hope Road are both natural, undeveloped rock sources. The potential hazards identified for the Mile 2 and Mile 38 sites (tripping, falling, lifting, etc.), were reasonably incidental to the type of activities typical to an outdoor setting. The proposed action will not increase the degree that public health and safety is affected. At the Mile 2 site, the proposed action would allow the continued removal from this site with the stipulation that only naturally dislodged material would be available.

(3) Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.

There are no parklands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas within the project area. The Mile 33 sand pit, and the Mile 35 gravel pit are adjacent to the Seward National Scenic Byway.

Under Alternative 2, the Proposed Action, the Mile 33 sand pit and the Mile 35 gravel pit will retain the vegetation that is screening the view of these sites from the Seward Highway Scenic Byway.

(4) The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment is likely to be highly controversial.

The effects of this proposed action on the quality of the human environment is not likely to be highly controversial. These material sources have been utilized for many years without any indication of controversy. Public comments received in April 2000 and August 2001 did not identify any highly controversial issues.

(5) The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment is highly uncertain or involves unique or unknown risks.

The possible effects of the action alternative are neither highly uncertain nor would they present unique or unknown risks. The proposed action would implement basic management practices that have been in use for decades.

(6) The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.

The action alternative analyzed here would not set a precedent for future actions. Any future actions would be analyzed separately and site-specifically, on their merits, in compliance with the NEPA.

(7) Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts. Significance exists if it is reasonable to anticipate a cumulatively significant impact on the environment. Significance cannot be avoided by terming an action temporary or by breaking it down into small component parts.

The anticipated actions within the proximity of the community pits and rock sources will primarily be highway maintenance and reconstruction. Each site is located adjacent to either a road or highway. The mile 35 gravel pit is also located near private land where residential development can be anticipated. Highway reconstruction may affect the vegetation that provides visual screening at the Mile 33 sand pit and the Mile 35 gravel pit. However, the highway has been designated a National Scenic Byway which emphasizes visual qualities. The proposed action will not affect this screening and future actions will be required to protect visual qualities.

(8) The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.

No heritage resource sites have been listed or identified as eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, nor have determinations of significance been made for any cultural or historical resources within or in close proximity to the project areas. No significant cultural remains were discovered during the course of surveys completed in June of 2000 for the Mile 2 and Mile 38 decorative stone sites, and the Mile 33 and Mile 35 community pits. No adverse cumulative effects are expected.

(9) The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.

Wildlife:

No endangered or threatened species or its habitat will be adversely affected by this action. No Federally threatened, or endangered wildlife species are found in the project area. (M. Benoit 8/05/01).

10) Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

Seward Ranger District resource specialists have checked the proposed action and found it to be consistent with the rules, regulations, and policies listed above under Management Direction on page 15.

Agencies And Others Consulted

The scoping letter mailing list, detailing interested parties and other agencies contacted, is included in the appendix.