

**Spencer Whistle Stop Outfitter and Guide Opportunities
Final Environmental Assessment
August 2015**



Lead Agency

**United States Forest Service
Glacier Ranger District**

Responsible Official

**Tim Charnon
Glacier District Ranger
Glacier Ranger District
PO Box 129
Girdwood, Alaska 99587**

For Further Information, Contact:

**Teresa Paquet
Glacier Ranger District
PO Box 129
Girdwood, Alaska 99587**

Summary Table

What action is proposed?	The type and amount of commercial recreation, related services and infrastructure to be provided under Special Use Permits at the Spencer Whistle Stop and surrounding area during the snow free season.
Why?	Recently completed infrastructure at Spencer Whistle Stop was designed to provide opportunities and support multiple commercial services for the public. The purpose of this action is to provide outfitter and guide recreation opportunities at the Spencer Glacier Whistle Stop and surrounding area, through the issuance of special use permits through a prospectus.
What other action would meet the same need?	There is no other action that would meet the same need.
What would it mean to not meet the need?	Commercially guided opportunities would no longer be available to the public. This would not meet the purpose of the Whistle Stop Project.
What factors will be used when making the decision between alternatives?	The No Action alternative (Alt. 1) is the current condition, which does not allow for expanding or increasing recreation opportunities. The Modified Proposed Action (Alt. 2) is the preferred action as it meets management direction to improve recreation opportunities while minimizing natural resource and heritage disturbance.
Are there any ways to mitigate adverse effects?	Yes, see Design Features, pg. 9 of this document.
What monitoring is required?	This project will include additional sites that will be incorporated into monitoring already identified in the 2006 Whistle Stop Project Record of Decision (pgs. 16-19) and are being implemented in the vicinity of the Spencer Glacier Whistle Stop.

Introduction

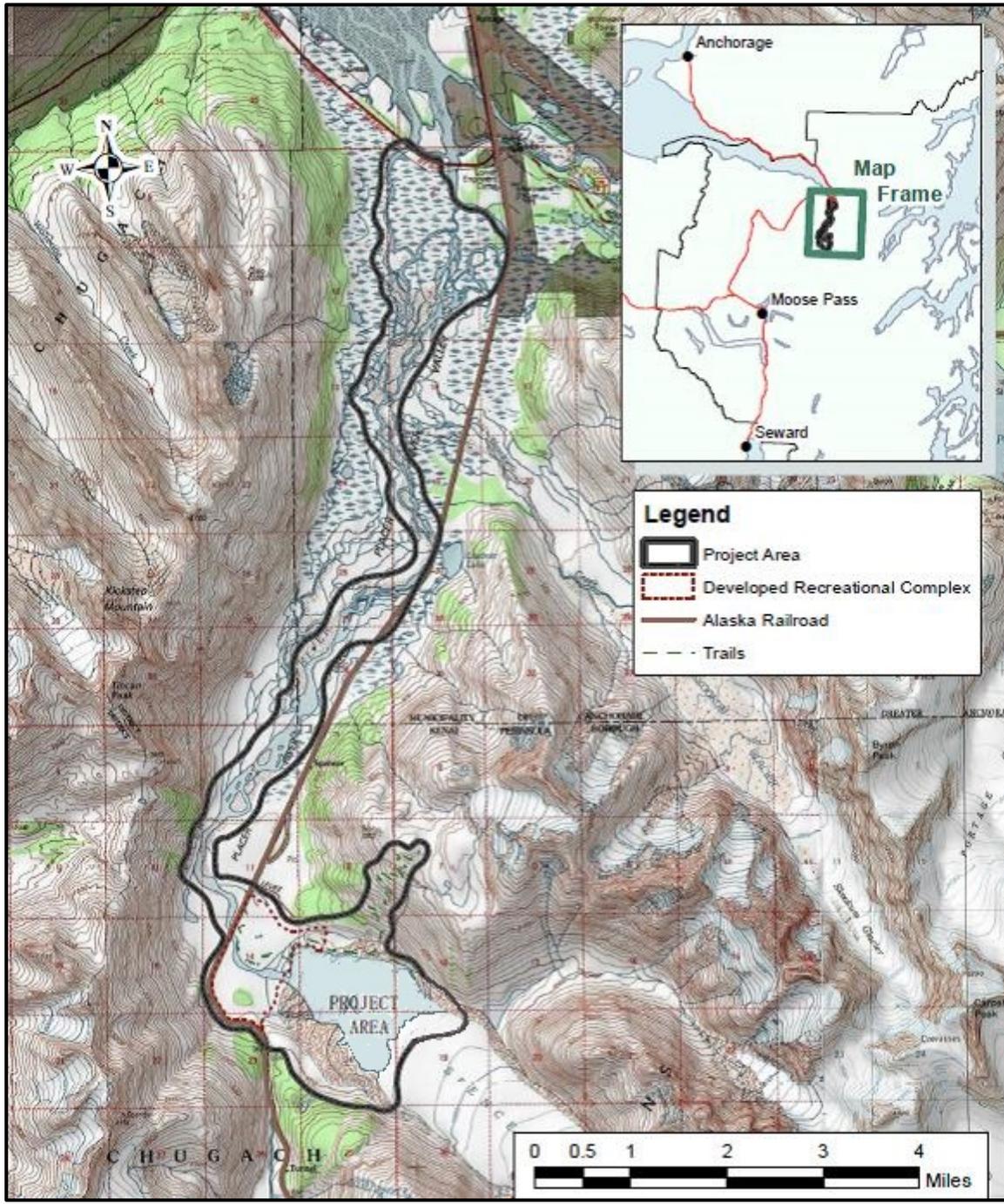
We are proposing to determine the type and amount of commercial recreation and related services to be provided under special use permits at the Spencer Whistle Stop and surrounding area during the snow free season. These actions are proposed to be implemented on the Glacier Ranger District of the Chugach National Forest, in the Kenai Borough, State of Alaska.

This environmental assessment (EA) is being prepared to determine whether implementation of the proposed action may significantly affect the quality of the human environment and thereby require the preparation of an environmental impact statement (EIS). By preparing this EA, we are fulfilling agency policy and direction to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). This project implements the 2002 Chugach National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan and is subject to 36 CFR 218, Subparts A and B. Specifically, this project also implements the desired future condition outlined in the Whistle Stop EIS and Record of Decision (2006).

Location and Background

The project area is the Spencer Whistle Stop and surrounding area, 6,270 acres in the Chugach Mountain Range southeast of Anchorage, Alaska. The Spencer Whistle Stop is adjacent to the Alaska Railroad at railroad mile 54.6, approximately 10 miles south of the Portage Train Depot as shown on figure 1, project area map.

Figure 1- Project Area Map



**Figure 2 –Spencer Whistle Stop
(Existing Condition)**

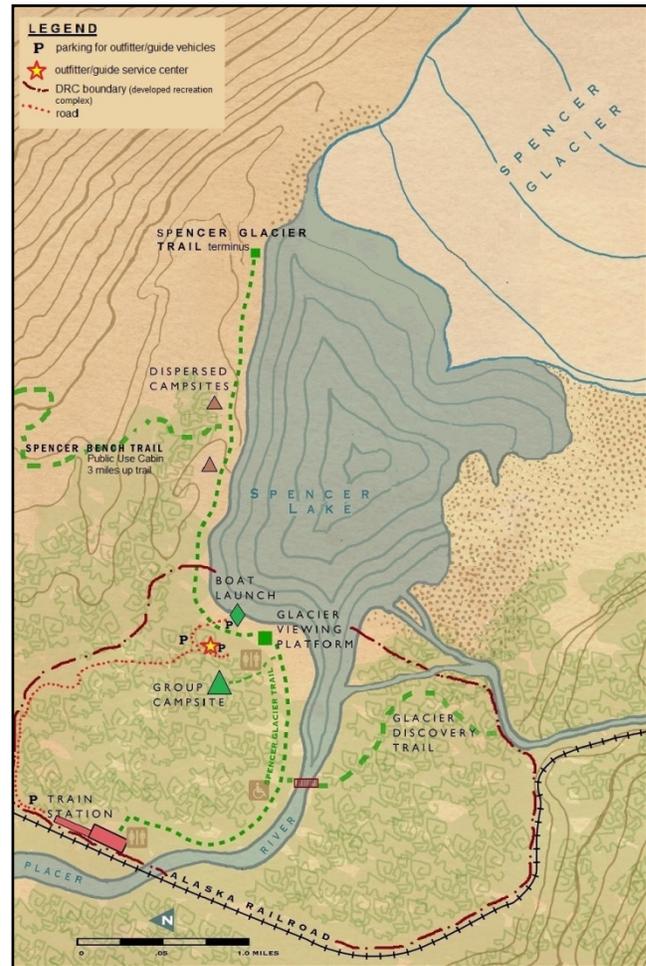
The Whistle Stop Project is a partnership between the Chugach National Forest and the Alaska Railroad Corporation (ARRC) to provide new recreation opportunities in the backcountry with access via the Alaska Railroad passenger service. Up to five whistle stops, associated facilities, and a system of trails will be constructed as part of the project. The most developed site is at the Spencer Glacier Whistle Stop, which has been open to the public during the passenger season (May – September) since 2007.

The Developed Recreation Complex (DRC) is shown conceptually in Figure 2 and contains all the developed facilities in the Spencer Whistle Stop except for portions of some trails. Some physical features form the boundaries of the DRC such as the railroad on the west, the lake shore and boat launch on the east, the lake’s outlet stream (Placer River) on the south, and the quarry roads on the north.

The Forest Service has completed most infrastructure development at Spencer Whistle Stop, including construction of a footbridge over Placer River, pavilions at the railroad site, a group campsite, toilets, backcountry camping areas, approximately eight miles of hiking trail, a viewing platform, a rustic boat launch, and the recently completed Spencer Bench Cabin. Along with providing a range of new recreation opportunities, the Whistle Stop Project also aims to provide:

- Opportunities for visitor information and education,
- A unique transportation and recreation experience found nowhere else in the United States, while encouraging alternative transportation and public safety, and
- Sustainable economic business opportunities

The environmental analysis for the Whistle Stop Project focused on the development of the infrastructure for the project; it did not define the type or amount of recreation commercial services that would be provided. The Whistle Stop EIS states that “a separate NEPA analysis will be conducted for special use proposals in the project area”; and the Record of Decision, pg. 6, states that “facilities that are affiliated with current or future outfitting and guiding operations may be approved through a Special Use Permit and are not part of this decision.”



During the initial development of the Whistle Stop Project, ongoing commercial recreation activities within the Spencer Whistle Stop that were under one-year permits have been allowed to continue on a year-to-year basis; however, new special uses and new permits have not been authorized. In 2009 the Forest Service solicited companies to determine if there was interest in providing recreational services in the area. Several companies expressed an interest in providing compatible services including raft, kayak and paddle board outings, hiking, glacier hiking/climbing, overnight trips, and transportation services for their clients or the general public. Forest Service policy directs that if there is competitive interest in offering commercial services, a prospectus must be issued. Based on this solicitation, the Forest Service has determined there is competitive interest in providing certain types of recreation services.

Based on the 2002 Chugach National Forest Revised Forest Plan (Forest Plan) direction and Whistle Stop Project goals, the Glacier Ranger District prepared a capacity study to define the amount of guided use that could be authorized in the project area.

Need for the Proposal

The purpose of this action is to provide outfitted and guided recreation opportunities at the Spencer Glacier Whistle Stop through the issuance of special use permits through a prospectus. Forest Service policy discourages the continued use of one-year temporary permits, and provides direction to issue outfitter and guide permits with a term of up to ten years to provide businesses with more stability and to make permit administration more efficient. When there is competitive interest, the process requires issuance of a prospectus. To meet Forest Plan and Whistle Stop Project goals, there is a need to continue to provide outfitted and guided services at the Spencer Glacier Whistle Stop. Interested companies have also indicated a need for base camps to stage equipment on site and provide transportation for their clients.

The Forest Plan has several forest-wide goals that this project will support, including:

- Maintain quality settings for non-motorized recreation opportunities (Forest Plan pg. 3-8)
- Provide recreation opportunities for interpretation and education as related to all Forest resources (Forest Plan pg. 3-8)

Public Involvement

On October 14, 2009 a solicitation of interest letter was sent to potential vendors asking for identification of summer recreational opportunities for commercial services. Further opportunities to comment were made available by holding a public meeting in Girdwood on December 2, 2009. Approximately five vendors expressed interest in offering several activities including; non-motor and motorized boat trips, boat/bike rentals, gold panning and overnight accommodations. On June 26, 2013, 106 letters were requesting input to help guide the development of the prospectus. And on December 17, 2013 a letter requesting input on the proposed action was sent to a list of 132 interested parties including, commercial guides, individuals, and Native Tribes and Corporations. Several comments were received.

The issues shown below were identified in public comments received during the scoping period. These issues have been factored into the proposed action (Alternative 2), as described below.

Issues

- 1) *Proposed capacity maximums. The proposed numbers of parties for some activities and the maximum group sizes for all activities would have negative impacts on the recreation experience.*

This issue is addressed in modifications to the proposed action. Specifically, the modified proposed action reduces the maximum group sizes that would be permitted for non-motorized boating on Placer Lake, rafting on Placer River and overnight camping.

- 2) *Boat launch. There is not enough room at the boat launch for multiple guides all launching at the same time and for storage of equipment.*

This issue has also been addressed in the modified proposed action. A second boat launch is proposed to be constructed to allow more than one guide to store and prepare equipment at the lake shore.

- 3) *Parking at Whistle Stop. Current parking location at the train station limits the number of vehicles that can park therefore would not be able to handle an increase in use.*

This issue will be addressed in the modified proposed action. Parking at the train station for guides and Forest Service will be designated near the existing whistle stop to accommodate additional vehicles. The location will be selected so that it does not impact the scenic view of people disembarking from the train.

- 4) *Motorized use on Spencer Lake has a negative impact on non-motorized user's experience.*

This issue is outside the scope of this analysis. The proposed action does not allow motorized guided activities on Spencer Lake or Placer River. These uses are not compatible with recreational opportunities at the Spencer Whistle Stop.

Public motorized use of Placer River would likely continue; however, Forest Service discretion over this activity is limited and beyond the scope of this analysis.

- 5) *Boat take-out at Luebner Lake (Alaska Railroad property) is eroding and cannot handle any more boats than what the current operator has used. As a result of current conditions, the ARRC established a capacity limit of 50 people at the Luebner take-out.*

A portion of this issue can be addressed through modifications to the proposed action. The location of the take-out site is on Alaska Railroad lands, not National Forest System lands.

Therefore improvements would be the responsibility of the Alaska Railroad. What can be addressed is the number of outfitters and group size permitted to use the Luebner site.

Modifications to the proposed action identify only one large group to be authorized for float trips that require this take out. Other groups would be less than 30 people at one time or would utilize the take out at the Seward Highway.

Alternatives

Alternatives Considered But Not in Detail

Alternative A – No outfitter and guide permits would be issued

The alternative would not issue additional special use permits to outfitter and guides. Current guided activities would likely expire, as long-term permits could not be awarded without a competitive process.

This alternative was not considered in detail because it does not meet a purpose of the Whistle Stop project which is to provide for sustainable economic business opportunities.

Alternative B – Original Proposed Action

The alternative would authorize a maximum of 3 parties per day for rafting Placer River with a group size of 100 people per party, 3 parties for non-motorized boating with a group size of 100, and 3 overnight campsites with a group size of 30. Concerns were expressed that this level of capacity would lead to feelings of being crowded, especially on Spencer Lake. Although the capacity study identifies that these levels of use are consistent with the Forest Plan, a more conservative approach to increasing recreation use levels would help the Forest Service monitor the impacts of recreation use to insure that backcountry objective were being met, before additional use was proposed. The overall intent of the project is to provide forest visitors with a high quality, backcountry experience (Whistlestop DEIS and ROD 2006).

This EA discusses the environmental impacts of two alternatives, one action alternative and a no action alternative. The following section describes these alternatives in detail:

Alternatives Considered

Alternative 1 – No Action

This alternative is the same as the existing condition, as guided activities are currently occurring at the Spencer Whistle Stop area. Two outfitter and guide companies have one year permits. Allocation and use is shown on Table 1.

Table 1. Alternative 1 – Existing Activities, Allocation and Actual Use

NAME & USE	LOCATION	MAXIMUM PERMITTED PARTIES/DAY	MAXIMUM PERMITTED PARTY SIZE	ALLOCATED SERVICE DAYS	ACTUAL USE 4-YR AVG 2011 - 2014
<u>Company A</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lake rafting & canoeing Base camp near boat launch (20 picnic tables, 30' x 30' canopy & weather port) Storage of boats and gear at boat launch 44-passenger bus, truck, 15-passenger van, bike, trailer 	Spencer Lake	No limit <u>Avg. use</u> 2 parties/day w/4 boats/day	No limit	3,000	2,041
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> River rafting 	Placer River (main take out at Luebner Lake and option to take out at Seward Hwy – used rarely)	No limit <u>Avg. use</u> 1 party w/ 4 rafts /day	No limit		
<u>Company B</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spencer Glacier hiking & climbing, Access to glacier by kayak Base camp at Service Center Storage of kayaks at boat launch 	Spencer Glacier Trail within Spencer Whistle Stop Developed Recreation Complex (DRC)	3 *	24	300 2012-2014	303 2012-2014 3-YR AVG
	Basecamp (O/G Service Center within DRC)	No limit	No limit		
	Spencer Glacier Trail & Spencer Glacier (outside of DRC)	6 *	10		

* each party must be a minimum of one minute a part.

Forest Service policy does not allow for indefinite extension of temporary permits, which are short-term and non-renewable. The current permits for companies A and B are transitional priority use permits, which allow for issuance in one-year increments until a prospectus or other necessary studies are completed by the Forest Service. In this alternative, the recommended capacity levels would not be approved and a prospectus would not be issued. Consequently, permitted outfitter guide permits would eventually expire.

Alternative 2 – Modified Proposed Action

The modified proposed action would approve the types and capacity of recreation use and approve issuance of special use permits. The types and capacity of recreation use are shown on Table 2. The table shows the maximum capacity that would be allowed. In some cases these capacity levels are less than those prescribed by the Forest Plan and the Spencer Whistle Stop capacity study.

Table 2. Activities proposed and maximum number of people

ACTIVITY	MAXIMUM PERMITTED PARTIES/DAY	MAXIMUM PERMITTED PARTY SIZE	ADDITIONAL NOTES
Non-motorized boating on Placer Lake	1 2	100 30	Motorized boats and boats with sails would not be permitted due to noise and visual impacts. * Appropriate water craft would include rafts, kayaks, packrafts, canoes, and other self-powered water craft. Boats traveling together are considered one group. The number of groups permitted to have a group size of 100 has been reduced from recommended levels in the capacity study to one in order to limit the overall number of boats on Spencer Lake.
Rafting Placer River	1 2	100 30	The number of groups permitted to have a group size of 100 has been reduced from recommended levels in the capacity study to one in order to limit the overall number of boats on Placer River and addresses the limited capacity at the Luebner Lake take-out
Glacier climbing & hiking	3	30	At this time, there is limited safe access to the glacier. Only the Spencer Lake route is currently viable. Therefore only 3 parties would be approved. It is possible with greater access to the glacier, such as the re-establishment of a trail route, additional use could be prescribed. However, no more than 3 parties per day that utilize helicopters to provide guided access to the glacier would be approved.
Overnight camping	3	10	Guided overnight camping would be allowed on south side of Spencer Lake at designated locations. Group size has been reduced to 10 per party in order to minimize the encounters with people recreating on Spencer Lake.
Guided hiking	7	30	Guided hiking may occur on any of the designated trails in the Spencer area. There is no capacity limit for guided hikes within the DRC. For trails located outside the DRC a maximum of 7 groups would be authorized with a maximum group size of 30.

* For emergency purposes only, an inflatable boat with motor will be authorized for each guide company.

Connected Actions

There are several connected actions to approval of the activities and use levels identified in Table 2. These activities include storage, identification of three additional group campsites, development of a second boat launch site, and development of additional parking areas.

Storage facilities. Permits issued for boating, rafting and glacier climbing would also authorize season long storage at a base camp facility located within the developed recreation site. Non-permanent base camp facilities would be consistent with the Whistle Stop design theme. Commercial overnight use at the base camps would not be authorized. Boat storage will be in or near the lake adjacent to launch sites.

Boat launch. A second smaller launch site would be established in a small cove approximately one quarter of a mile east of the existing launch site. See Figure 3. This site would be accessible via a spur trail from the Spencer Glacier Trail.

Campsites. Three campsites would be located on the SW side of the lake to divide guided camping from dispersed camping by the general public on the north side of the lake.

Transportation. Permitted activities would include shuttle service to the lake. Additional shuttle service could be offered to the general public for access to the lake and group campground.

Parking. New parking areas would be developed at the whistle stop and boat launch areas. Locations will be chosen to reduce visual impacts.

Design Features for Alternative 2

Recreation

- 1) Base camps and overnight camp areas will be located to minimize effects to non-guided public recreation use of the Whistle Stop, while providing desirable features for outfitter and guide operators.
- 2) A second smaller launch site will alleviate overcrowding during peak use of the existing boat launch.

Visual and Aesthetic Resources

- 1) Temporary structures, storage structures, and other structures at base and overnight camps will use materials, shapes and styles that are consistent with the Whistle Stop Design Theme and approved by the Authorized Officer.
- 2) Camps will be carefully located so they are not visible or audible to people using trails, people in boats on the lake, or people on the glacier.
- 3) The second launch site will have less ancillary facilities (no covered picnic site) resulting in a site less dominated by outfitter guide's equipment.
- 4) Encourage quiet forms of energy for transportation services.
- 5) Create vehicle storage and pick-up areas near train station (Whistle Stop) that do not detract from the train station as a point of entry by using vegetative screening (alders).

**Figure 3 - Alternative 2 Map
(Modified Proposed Action)**

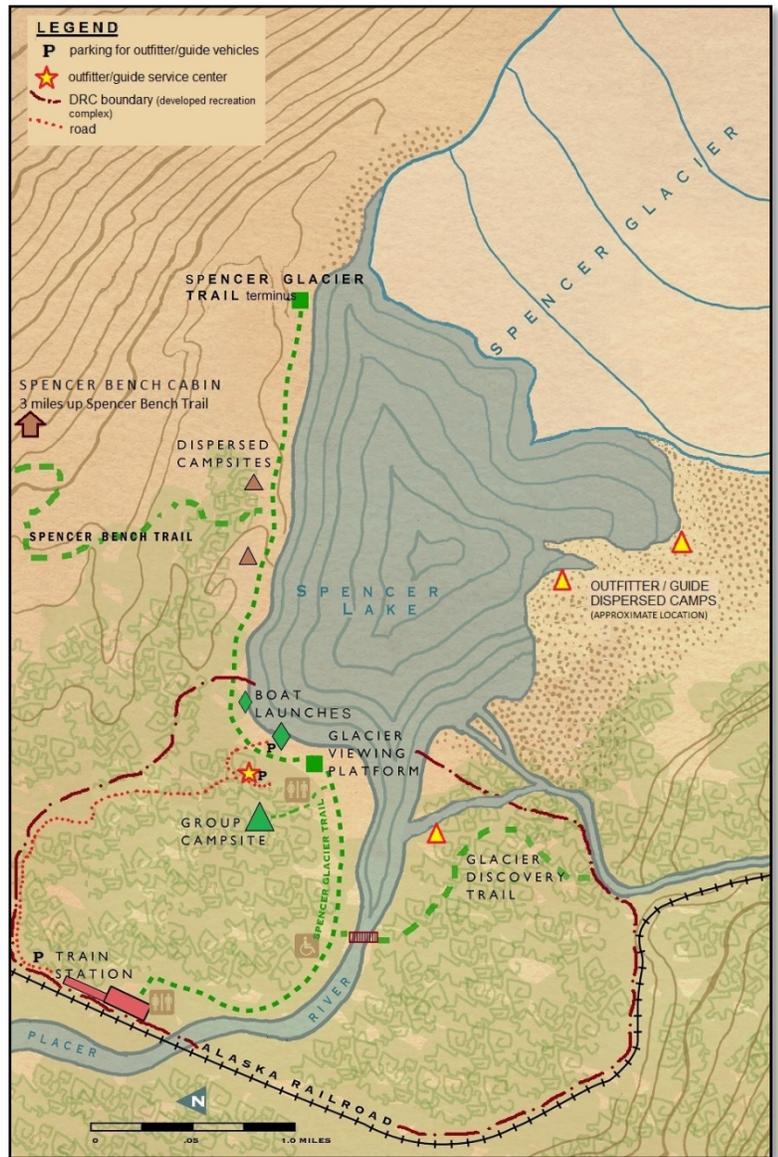
Wildlife

- 1) Human and pet food, garbage, and odorous attractants should be attended by humans or stored in a bear resistant manner (bear cans or lockers, or inside of vehicles). Garbage should be removed frequently (at least weekly).
- 2) To reduce the risk of negative human-bear encounters, it is recommended that outfitter and guides instruct clients on proper behavior to avoid surprising bears.
- 3) Incidents where bears have obtained human food or waste or pet food, property was damaged, or a bear deterrent was used will be reported to the wildlife biologist.
- 4) Avoid project activities in mountain goat lambing/kidding habitat from mid-May through mid-June when choosing paths to Spencer Glacier.
- 5) Report wildlife sightings for the following species: brown bear, moose, Canada lynx, gray wolf, Kenai wolverine, and mountain goat.

Sensitive Plants

Design features for non-native plants have been adapted from the Chugach Invasive Plant Plan (2005). These recommended design features may help reduce potential impacts to sensitive plants.

- 1) Prior to entry onto National Forest, the permit holders will ensure all equipment and supplies are free of visible dirt, plants, and plant parts.
- 2) Do not revegetate or seed the site without consulting with the District or Forest Ecologist/Botanist.
- 3) If possible, avoid travel through patches of common dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*) and invasive plants identified in the booklet “Selected Invasive Plants of Alaska,” particularly when they have gone to seed to prevent their spread into new areas. If travel through such populations is unavoidable, ensure equipment has been cleaned before bringing to a new site.
- 4) If any previously undiscovered sensitive plants are encountered at any time by the District or Forest Botanist/Ecologist prior to or during implementation of this project, the population would be protected. In addition, ground disturbing activities in the area containing the population would stop until the District or Forest Ecologist/Botanist evaluate the population and recommend



avoidance or mitigation measures. The following sensitive species have the potential to occur in the project area:

- a. *Aphragmus eschscholtzianus*
- b. *Cypridium guttatum*
- c. *Ligusticum caldera*
- d. *Papaver alboroseum*
- e. *Romanzoffia unalaschcensis*

Heritage

- 1) Any future structures, including any temporary camps, at the Spencer site should be consistent with the Whistle Stop Design Narrative and meet the guidelines identified in the Whistle Stop Programmatic Agreement for the Management of Historic Properties (2006).
- 2) Leave No Trace principles for Heritage sites is encouraged and enforced. Collecting of artifacts is not allowed.
- 3) Artifacts and railroad camp remains should not be re-used in the O/G camps. Regardless of origin of artifact, on private land or federal.

Hydrology

- 1) Spencer Lake boat launch and Luebner Lake take-out on Placer River (AKRR property). The unconsolidated alluvial banks along the Spencer Lake and the Placer River are susceptible to erosion. There is potential for increased erosion due to increased number of users and human trampling, especially where riparian vegetation is absent or damaged. Erosion from increased boat launches may occur. Monitoring and adaptive management may be necessary at these locations. If bank degradation becomes a problem, site mitigations such as hardened access or stairs or vegetative recovery may be necessary.
- 2) Discourage user created trails to nearby wetlands and riparian areas.
- 3) Do not store solid wastes, petroleum products or other hazardous substances within 100 feet of Spencer Lake, Placer River or within floodplains, wetlands or riparian areas.
- 4) Overnight camping locations must be located outside of floodplains, wetlands, and riparian areas and adhere to Forest Plan Riparian Management area buffers (the greater distance of the active alluvial fan or 130 feet from the current channels). It is requested that outfitter/guides utilize a portable toilet and use “leave no trace/ pack it in- pack it out” standards.
- 5) All tours, including the glacial tours, will pack out human waste and utilize a portable toilet or “wag bags” if necessary and employ “leave no trace/pack it in- pack it out” standards. This will minimize the potential for water quality degradation.

Environmental Impacts of the Proposed Action and Alternative

Biological evaluations and other specialist reports were written in response to the proposed action and alternative. The following section summarizes these reports. Complete reports are located in the project record.

Recreation

Alternative 1 – No Action

Recreation opportunities for the public would not significantly increase; therefore overall recreation use would remain at existing levels or increase modestly. For example, some increase in use could be expected from completion of the Spencer Bench cabin. Otherwise, the amount of guided and independent use would most likely remain at current levels. The outfitter's camp near the boat launch would remain in its current location and would continue to dominate the site. No additional boat launch would be created and the need for guides to coordinate use of the boat launch site would continue.

Alternative 2 – Modified Proposed Action

By implementing the modified proposed action, the number of permitted outfitters, the types of recreation use, and the overall levels of recreation use are all expected to increase. Table 2. describes the type and amount of use projected. Existing uses that would likely be expanded include rafting tours down Placer River and boat tours on Spencer Lake and guided hiking. New uses would include overnight camping.

The proposed action includes moving a base camp away from the boat launch area to the O/G service center. This will improve the boat launch's image as a public-use facility rather than an exclusive use area for a commercial rafting operation. Boat moorage near the launch site will continue to be allowed.

An additional boat launch will also be created, allowing more people to get onto the water more quickly. The short duration for a day-trip activity (determined by the train schedule) creates a high-demand for quick launches onto the lake. The need to coordinate use of the boat launches between permittees and the general public may continue, but the additional launch site will alleviate much of the issues currently faced by boating permittees. If the proposed action and prospectus result in boat rentals and transportation services, many additional people will be using the boat launch sites.

The proposed action also includes overnight camps for permittees to use for multi-day trips to Spencer Glacier Whistle Stop. This has the potential to greatly increase the amount of people staying overnight from current levels. Currently, when the Glacier Discovery train is heading back to Portage, almost all recreation users have left, and the few people camping at the designated group campsite or the dispersed campsites long Spencer Glacier Trail have the entire area to themselves. Locating the additional guided camping use areas on the south side of Spencer Lake will minimize this change for current users.

Visual and Aesthetic Resource

Alternative 1 – No Action

There would be no change to the existing situation. The vehicles parked by the train would continue to be a visual distraction for people arriving on the train, and one outfitter's camp would remain adjacent to the boat launch, detracting from the visual resource as seen from the trail and lake.

Alternative 2 – Modified Proposed Action

The proposed action would allow additional development to occur within the DRC, adding to the developed character of the Spencer Glacier Whistle Stop. Establishing base camps and overnight camp area(s) will add daily operations noise, from transportation services, gear shuffling, safety talks, and other trip preparation activities. The structures associated with camps could detract from the natural undeveloped landscape. Use of dark colors, rustic design-theme elements and ensuring maximum heights are less than surrounding vegetation's height will minimize effects to the visual resource.

The boat launch areas will be recognized as a public use area. The commercial operator's boats will be allowed to be stored at the launches, but other base camp gear and storage facilities will be located in areas that provide separation and minimize visual impacts from the boat launch sites.

Another effect to the aesthetic resources from implementing the proposed action is the likelihood of increasing the number of vehicles readily available for transportation at the train station area. These vehicles could detract from the Whistle Stop entry area, especially as viewed by people remaining on the train or on other trains that pass the Whistle Stop, and by people not using these services. Design features for this alternative include ensuring adequate vegetative screening for vehicles parked near train station area.

Wildlife

Alternative 1 - No Action

The continuation of current ongoing special uses will perpetuate ongoing wildlife disturbance and displacement, affecting primarily brown bears and moose at low impact levels. Currently special uses occur on 147 acres, or 5% of summer range, of moose habitat, resulting in decreased access to this habitat. No brown bear denning habitat is affected in current conditions by special uses.

Alternative 2 – Modified Proposed Action

The increase spatially and frequency of human use and disturbance with a substantial increase in human use of the area, will result in low level impacts to mountain goats and moose, and moderate level impacts to brown bears.

Of all the wildlife impacted, brown bears are likely to be the most impacted with an estimated 15% of denning/spring habitat affected by a high level of human use that will displace brown bears from using this suitable habitat from May-September. The proposed action will increase the spatial extent of special uses in moose habitat from the current 147 acres to 300 acres, or 9%. Because availability of habitat is considered one of the population limiting factors for moose in the Placer River area, but not a limiting factor across Alaska Department of Fish and Game Management Unit 7, reduced access to foraging habitat due to more disturbance both spatially and frequency, Alternative 2 contributes more than Alternative 1 to the currently decreasing moose population trend.

The spatial and frequency increase in human use of the area will increase the risk of negative human-bear and human-moose encounters, which therefore increases the risk of brown bear and moose mortality from defense of life and property kills (DLPs).

Sensitive and Non-native Plants

Alternative 1 – No Action

Under Alternative 1, existing activities would continue to occur. Existing commercial activities include hiking, climbing, rafting, canoeing, kayaking, base camp, boat and gear storage, and minimal bus use on existing roads. Impacts of these existing activities have already been analyzed and past sensitive plant surveys for those projects resulted in no sensitive plants found within the project area. As a result, there would be no effects to sensitive plants under Alternative 1.

Alternative 2 – Modified Proposed Action

Numerous field surveys have been conducted in the project area for various projects including the Whistle Stop project, Spencer Invasive Plant project, and the Spencer Mineral Material project. During the survey for the Whistle Stop project, a population of *Carex lenticularis* var. *dolia* was found. However, that species has been removed from the Region 10 Sensitive Plant list and is no longer considered for this action. No other sensitive plants were found during surveys. Since a thorough survey was conducted by qualified botanists at the proper time of year and no sensitive plants were found, a risk assessment is not warranted (FSM 2672.43). The project, as described, is expected to have no impact on sensitive plants. However, there are potential threats to natural habitats through the introduction of non-native, invasive plants. Implementation of the design features should minimize effects resulting from introduction of non-native species.

Hydrology, Floodplains, and Wetlands

Alternative 1 – No Action

Existing activities would continue to occur. Existing commercial activities include hiking, climbing, rafting, canoeing, a base camp, a boat launch, gear storage and minimal bus use on existing roads. Erosion and loss of riparian vegetation from the Spencer Lake boat launch, the Placer River takeout, trail surfaces, roads, riparian trampling and stream bank degradation from user-created trails in areas of concentrated use would remain at current levels. Water quality degradation from human waste and petroleum products would also remain at current levels. Overall, Alternative 1 would have no additional effects on water resources above those resulting from the current use of the area.

Alternative 2 – Modified Proposed Action

The modified proposed action would allow increased use and development beyond the existing levels and activities. This increased use and development would include increasing the number of visitors to the area, the construction of an additional boat launch, the construction and use of overnight camps and the movement of the current base camp to a new and larger location to accommodate additional Outfitter Guides.

Floodplains, wetlands and riparian areas around Spencer Lake, the Placer River and the project area may be impacted by Alternative 2. Potential impacts include increased levels of soil compaction, stream bank degradation, and losses of wetlands and riparian vegetation. The increased number of visitors may result in increased levels of wetland, riparian and stream bank trampling from user created trails. There will be a loss of riparian vegetation and wetlands from the construction of an additional boat ramp, overnight camping facilities and a new base camp. These impacts have the potential to lead to channel widening, sedimentation, decreased water quality and degraded fish habitat. These impacts should not

be significant and should be minimized by following Best Management Practices (BMP's). Monitoring is recommended.

Water quality in Spencer Lake, the Placer River and the project area may also be impacted by Alternative 2. Construction of the new boat launch, the overnight campsites and new base camp may result in temporary increases in erosion and turbidity/sediment loads. Additionally, the increased general visitor use will lead to an increased number of boat launches, use on trails and travel on roads. All of these have the potential to cause slight increases in turbidity/sediment loads when compared to Alternative 1. However, these increases would not be significant, and almost negligible, especially in many of the glacial streams where sediment loads are naturally high. These minimal impacts should be minimized by following Best Management Practices (BMP's). Monitoring is recommended.

Water quality may also be decreased in Alternative 2 by solid waste management from increased visitor use and overnight camping. Best management Practices and proper waste treatment and disposal sites should minimize effects to soil and water quality from bacteria, nutrients, and other pollutants. Increased vehicle traffic and use of camps may also increase the potential for water quality degradation from soaps, petroleum products and other miscellaneous chemicals. Best Management Practices and proper hazardous waste and chemical storage should minimize the potential for contamination and degradation of water resources in the project area.

Overall, the cumulative effects of this project with other past, present, and future projects and activities in the Placer River watershed should not have a significant effect on the hydrology or water resources within the Placer River watershed.

Heritage

Alternative 1 – No Action

Heritage resources within the Spencer viewing area are currently being avoided and adequately protected. Continue with monitoring plan for historic properties to identify any damage from looting or vandalism.

Alternative 2 – Modified Proposed Action

The area in and around Spencer Glacier has been surveyed and inventoried for cultural resources by Forest Service Archaeologists and by private contractors in support of the Whistle Stop Recreation area, the mining plan of operation and the Alaska Railroad (ARR) cleanup activities at the Spencer siding area. These reports are on file in the Heritage Program files on the Chugach National Forest and are also on file with the Alaska State Historic Preservation Office (AK SHPO).

Previous field surveys, literature reviews and project related reviews have identified numerous cultural resources within the Spencer Glacier area. Many of these cultural resources that exist are eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. Once a cultural resource has been determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, it is then identified as a historic property. There are also cultural resources that have not yet been evaluated for the National Register within, and also outside of, the area of potential effect.

Potential impacts to the heritage resources on the south side of Spencer Lake and along the Placer River are likely if the modified proposed action is implemented. Looting of artifacts and damage to the historic properties is at a greater potential due to increased use by overnight camping and hiking within the historic property boundaries. Adverse effects to the known historic properties will likely occur if the agreed upon mitigation measures outlined in the Whistle Stop Programmatic Agreement are not implemented.

Monitoring

This project will include additional sites that will be incorporated into monitoring already identified in the 2006 Whistle Stop project Record of Decision (pgs. 16-19) and being implemented in the vicinity of the Spencer Glacier Whistle Stop.

Agencies and Persons Consulted

The Forest Service consulted the following individuals, Federal, State, and Tribal agencies during the development of this EA:

- Local Outfitter and Guide companies
- Alaska Railroad Corporation
- 29 Native Tribes, Corporations and Villages
- Alaska Department of Natural Resources