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State seeks comment on proposed Bristol Bay Area Plan amendment

(Anchorage, AK) – The Alaska Department of Natural Resources is proposing a determination of reclassification and amendment to the Bristol Bay Area Plan that would substantially increase the amount of lands classified for wildlife habitat and make several other changes.

The department is proposing these changes in response to litigation filed in 2009 by several entities regarding the 2005 revision of the plan, which covers 12.6 million acres of state uplands and 6 million acres of submerged lands and tidelands. The plan was revised in 2005 to update the original 1984 plan, issued before the conveyance of many state lands and the formation of boroughs.

The department reached an agreement this year with the plaintiffs who were challenging the plan in state Superior Court to treat their legal case as a petition to reclassify land. A petition to reclassify land is an administrative process that can be used by the public to seek changes to an area plan. This is the first time a petition to reclassify land has been filed regarding the Bristol Bay plan.

The department agreed to address some errors it found in the plan and to consider other issues raised by the plaintiffs, and to produce a public review draft of the amended plan no later than Jan. 30, 2013. As a result of this agreement, the court case was dismissed.

Several proposed changes to the plan are technical in nature – for example, ensuring that the plan's description of land uses matches regulatory definitions and clarifying that certain types of habitat – moose wintering and calving areas, for example – are protected. The plan's management guidelines already provide broad protection for moose wintering and calving habitat, but these habitat types were inadvertently omitted from a list in one chapter of the plan.

The department also proposes to increase the amount of lands classified and/or managed for wildlife habitat and public recreation. The proposed reclassification would 1.) increase the lands classified for wildlife habitat and public recreation by 723,811 acres and, 2.) revise the management intent for an additional 1.3 million

acres classified for “resource management” to include the management of wildlife habitat and sensitive fisheries. The affected state lands are distributed throughout the planning area but are largely located in the Mulchatna-Nushagak river drainages and in drainages emptying into Lake Iliamna ([see attached map](#)).

The types of land affected by the reclassification include major stream and river corridors – such as the Upper Mulchatna River – as well as important moose and caribou calving and wintering areas. These proposed changes are based on moose and caribou calving and wintering habitat data from the Alaska Department of Fish and Game that were unavailable during the prior planning efforts.

The cumulative impact of these proposed changes is that more lands in the Bristol Bay region would be managed for wildlife habitat and public recreation than under either the 1984 or 2005 area plans. These lands are to be managed for multiple use.

The department denied the petitioners’ request to reclassify nearly all of the Bristol Bay planning area for wildlife habitat and reclassify much of the planning area to public recreation. As a broad principle, area plans are designed to offer opportunities for multiple use of state land, not just one or two uses.

The state will hold a 90-day public comment period on the draft plan amendment. Comments will be accepted in writing on or before **April 4, 2013**. Please send comments to Ray Burger at dnr.bbapamend@alaska.gov, by fax to 907-269-8914, or by mail to Ray Burger, Resource Assessment and Development Section, Alaska Department of Natural Resources, 550 West 7th Ave., Suite 1050, Anchorage, Alaska 99501-3579. To review the public review draft, including maps, go to <http://dnr.alaska.gov/mlw/planning/areaplans/bristol/amend>. Comments can also be submitted online via this website.

Once the Natural Resources Commissioner signs the final plan amendment, it will be subject to a 20-day reconsideration period.

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