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# BLM seeks input on draft Public Land Order environmental impact statement

## Analysis considers impacts of revoking protections on 28 million acres

### Organization

Bureau of Land Management

### BLM Office:

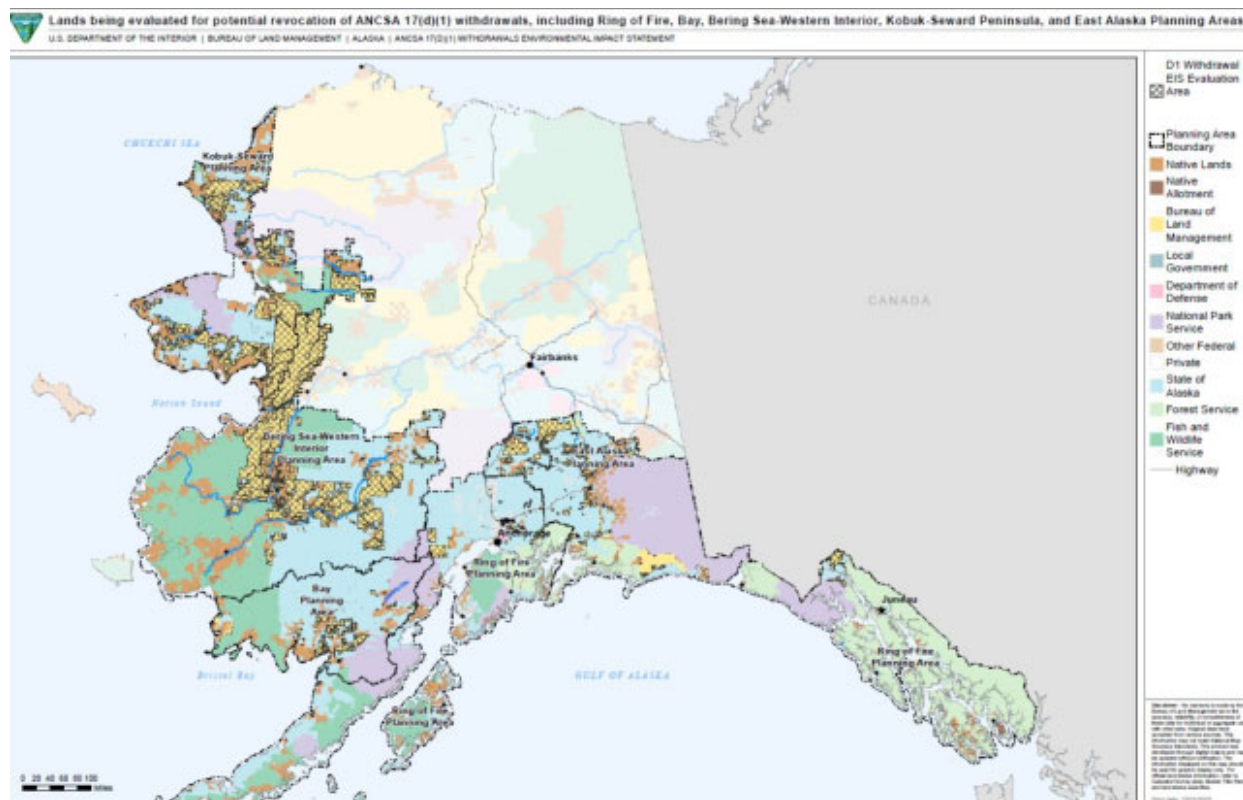
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Relevant areas within Alaska as outlined in this EIS.

**ANCHORAGE, Alaska**— The Bureau of Land Management is seeking public comment on a [draft environment impact statement](#) analyzing proposals developed by the previous administration to revoke long-standing protections on 28 million acres of public lands in Alaska. When finalized, this analysis will inform a decision by the Secretary of the Interior regarding whether to continue, alter, or end the protections.

The lands are often referred to as 17(d)1 lands, referencing [a section of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act \(ANCSA\)](#), and they are protected from mining claims and oil and gas development through a mineral withdrawal. The draft analysis considers whether opening the lands to development remains consistent with some of the purposes of ANCSA, which requires that “the public interest in these lands is properly protected,” including factors such as subsistence hunting and fishing, habitat connectivity, protection of cultural resources, and protection of threatened and endangered species.

The lands under consideration stretch across the State, spanning the Bay, Bering Sea-Western Interior, East Alaska, Kobuk-Seward Peninsula, and Ring of Fire [BLM planning areas](#). The draft analysis considers the impacts that may result from removing those protections, including changes to land use that could affect residents, wildlife, vegetation, and cultural, air, and water resources, and subsistence use.

“The draft analysis takes another look at impacts of revoking or maintaining withdrawals across a vast area of BLM-managed lands in Alaska” said **BLM Alaska State Director Steve Cohn**. “We are grateful for the work of many—BLM staff, Alaska Native Tribes and Corporations, and others—who got us to this point. We look forward to engaging with the public over the coming months to ensure we provide a comprehensive analysis to the Secretary to inform her decision on these withdrawals.”

Specifically, the 2021 Action under review is revocation of the ANCSA 17(d)(1) withdrawals as described in Public Land Orders 7899, 7900, 7901, 7902, and 7903. This analysis evaluates the resource conditions on these lands and incorporates and describes additional coordination with other Federal agencies, State and local governments, federally recognized Tribes, Alaska Native Corporations and other stakeholders to ensure that the environmental analysis previously conducted will be updated and expanded upon as appropriate. This additional analysis is necessary to ensure disclosure of the impacts of revocation of the ANCSA 17(d)(1) withdrawals; to correct errors in the previous decision-making process regarding these withdrawals; and to ensure that opening these lands is consistent with the purposes of ANCSA 17(d)(1),

In 2022, Secretary of Interior Deb Haaland partially revoked the withdrawals on these lands to allow for land selection by [Alaska Native Vietnam-era Veterans](#). That decision made an additional 27 million acres available to the approximately 1,900 Veterans eligible to select their 160-acre land entitlement under the Dingell Act.

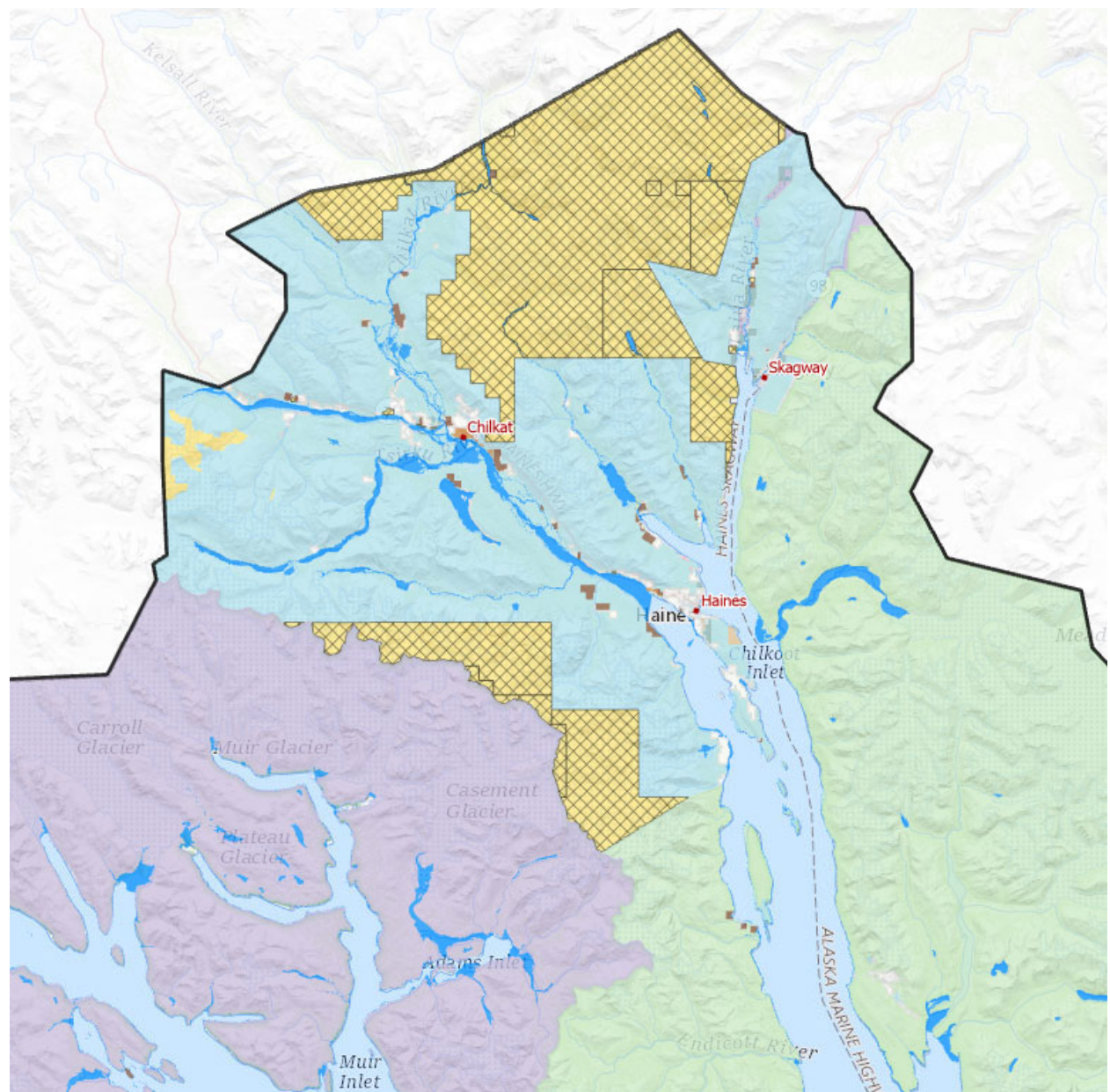
The Bureau is initiating a 60-day public comment period that closes February 14, 2024. Please submit comments online through the Participate Now link at the [BLM National NEPA Register](#) (preferred) or deliver to “Attn: ANCSA 17(d)(1) Withdrawals EIS, Anchorage District Office, 4700 BLM Road, Anchorage, AK 99507.” The [project webpage](#) includes maps, planning documents, and other information about the project and will house information about future public meetings, subsistence hearings and other engagement opportunities as they are scheduled.

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*The BLM manages more than 245 million acres of public land located primarily in 12 western states, including Alaska, on behalf of the American people. The BLM also administers 700 million acres of sub-surface mineral estate throughout the nation. Our mission is to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of America’s public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations.*





- **Alternative A:** Retain the withdrawals on all lands.
- **Alternative B:** Revoke in part withdrawals in a manner that would allow only State top filed Priority 1 and 2 lands to convert to effective selections where conflicts with natural, cultural, subsistence, recreational resources, or proposed or existing areas of critical environmental concern (ACECs) would be minimized.
- **Alternative C:** Revoke in full those portions of the 17(d)(1) withdrawals that have high mineral potential, including State top filed Priority 1 and 2 lands. Revoke in part any remaining Priority 1 and 2 top filings outside of the high mineral potential areas for the limited purpose of opening those lands to selection under the Alaska Statehood Act selection.
- **Alternative D:** Revoke in full the withdrawals on all lands.

Alternative	Total Acres where 17(d)(1) Withdrawals Retained	Total Acres where 17(d)(1) Withdrawals Fully Revoked	Total Acres where 17(d)(1) Withdrawals Partially Revoked*
Alternative A	27,735,000	0	0
Alternative B	27,301,000	0	433,000
Alternative C	19,673,000	7,702,000	361,000
Alternative D	0	27,735,000	0

# New Biden administration report considers opening 28 million acres of Alaska lands to development

By Alex DeMarban

Anchorage Daily News

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The Biden administration has moved a step closer to determining whether 28 million acres of federal land in Alaska should remain protected or be opened to potential oil and gas development and mining claims.

On Thursday, the Bureau of Land Management issued a draft report analyzing the environmental impacts of unlocking the lands, which are scattered across broad swaths of the state. The lands were protected from such development in the 1971 Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act.

The Trump administration had taken steps to remove the protections, an effort supported by Republican Gov. Mike Dunleavy and U.S. Sens. Lisa Murkowski and Dan Sullivan. Doyon, an Alaska Native corporation and the state's largest landowner, also wants the land opened so the half-century-old process of conveying federal land to the corporation can be completed.

But the Biden administration said it found legal flaws in the previous administration's effort, leading to the new environmental review to determine the best use of the lands.

Conservation groups and dozens of Alaska tribes say the land should not be opened, with climate change raising new questions about the health of caribou and salmon that support traditional diets. One of their concerns is that unlocking the lands would allow an expansion of mining opportunities around the Donlin Gold mine prospect near the middle Kuskokwim River.

Calista Corp. has also expressed concerns about opening the lands unless certain criteria are met, including the conveyance of land promised to Calista and Alaska Native village corporations under the 1971 act. Calista says it's entitled to 330 square miles of land, much of which it hasn't selected, according to a letter the corporation sent last year to the BLM.

The lands that could be opened to future development are located in Western Alaska, such as the Western Interior, Seward Peninsula and Bristol Bay regions. They're also found in Southcentral Alaska and in eastern Alaska.

In addition to opening the door to mineral leasing, removing the protections could lead "to the conveyance of land out of federal ownership," which would remove the federal subsistence

priority from the lands, said Racheal Jones, a planning and environmental coordinator with the Bureau of Land Management, in an email.

The federal subsistence priority gives rural residents precedence for fish and wildlife.

The federal government could open some or all of the lands, or keep the protections in place, according to the 392-page draft report.

Last year, Interior Secretary Deb Haaland partially revoked the withdrawals on the lands to allow about 2,000 Alaska Native Vietnam-era veterans or their heirs to select 160-acre tracts under the Dingell Act, the agency said in a statement Thursday.

The Bureau of Land Management said the draft analysis considers whether opening the lands to development is consistent with some purposes of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, which requires that “the public interest in these lands is properly protected.” That includes factors such as subsistence hunting and fishing, habitat connectivity, protection of cultural resources, and protection of threatened and endangered species, the agency said in a statement.

The agency has planned 18 meetings around the state on the topic in January and February, including four virtual meetings, plus in-person stops in Anchorage, Fairbanks and many rural communities.

A public comment period also opened this week, running through Feb. 14. Information on how to weigh in can be found at the agency’s project website.

A final report leading to a decision on how the lands should be used is expected this summer, according to the draft report.