Environmental Resources Section

Public Notice

Alaska District
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

Date: JUL 31 2015 Identification No. ER-15-14
Please refer to the identification number when replying.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) has prepared an environmental assessment (EA) and draft Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for the following project:

Remedial Action
Underground Storage Tanks
Former Rocky Point Garrison
Caines Head-Fort McGilvray
Near Seward Alaska

The Corps' proposed actions are authorized under the Department of Defense (DOD) Environmental Restoration Program – Formerly Used Defense Sites (DERP-FUDS), which provides the means to clean up waste materials, contaminated soil, and unsafe structures and debris from areas formerly used by the DOD.

The proposed project and potential environmental impacts are described in the enclosed EA and draft FONSI, which is available for public review and comment for 30 days from the date of this notice. It may also be viewed on the Alaska District's website at: www.poa.usace.army.mil. Click on the Reports and Studies button, look under Documents Available for Public Review, and then click on the Environmental Cleanup link.

To obtain a printed copy, please send a request via email to: Christopher.B.Floyd@usace.army.mil or send a request to the address below. The FONSI will be signed upon review of comments received and resolution of significant concerns. Please submit comments regarding the proposed action to the above email or to the following address:

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Alaska District
ATTN: CEPOA-PM-C-ER
P.O. Box 6898
Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska 99506-0898

For information on the proposed project, please contact Chris Floyd of the Environmental Resources Section at the above email or Corps postal address.

Michael D. Noah
Chief, Environmental Resources Section

US Army Corps of Engineers
Alaska District

Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact

Remedial Action
Underground Storage Tanks

Former Rocky Point Garrison
Caines Head – Fort McGilvray

Near Seward, Alaska
F10AK0039

Formerly Used Defense Sites Program

July 2015

DRAFT FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Alaska District (Corps) has assessed the environmental effects of the following action:

Remedial Action
Underground Storage Tanks
Former Rocky Point Garrison
Caines Head – Fort McGilvray
Near Seward, Alaska

This action has been evaluated for its effects on several significant resources, including fish and wildlife, wetlands, threatened or endangered species, marine resources, and cultural resources. No significant short-term or long-term adverse effects were identified.

This Corps action complies with the National Historic Preservation Act, the Endangered Species Act, the Clean Water Act, the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, and the National Environmental Policy Act. The completed environmental assessment supports the conclusion that the action does not constitute a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human and natural environment. An environmental impact statement is therefore not necessary for the removal action at the former military site at Rocky Point.

_____ _____

Michael S. Brooks Date
Colonel, Corps of Engineers
District Commander

Environmental Assessment

1.0 PURPOSE AND NEED OF REMEDIAL ACTION

1.1 Introduction

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) prepared this environmental assessment (EA) under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to address the environmental impacts of closing three underground storage tanks (USTs) at a formerly used defense site at Rocky Point Garrison, Caines Head–Fort McGilvray, Alaska. The Corps' proposed actions are authorized under the Department of Defense (DOD) Environmental Restoration Program – Formerly Used Defense Sites (DERP-FUDS), which provides the means to clean up waste materials, contaminated soil, and unsafe structures and debris from areas formerly used by the DOD. Most FUDS projects follow Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA) processes, which would not include preparation of an EA under NEPA. However, the proposed project includes the stabilization and closure of USTs, which falls outside the purview of CERCLA.

1.2 Site Description and History

The Rocky Point site is a small promontory on the west side of Resurrection Bay, approximately 9 miles south of Seward, Alaska, and approximately 1 mile south of Caines Head (figure 1). Former military facilities at Rocky Point and Caines Head (also known as Fort McGilvray and Battery 293) were part of the Seward Harbor Defense Network constructed to defend Resurrection Bay and the strategic ice-free port of Seward from potential Japanese attack during World War II. The Caines Head facilities included two 6-inch coastal defense gun emplacements and a concrete underground magazine. A wooden pier and dump site were at North Beach, while a troop garrison was located at South Beach. The structures at Rocky Point appear to have been additional garrison facilities supporting a battery of four 155-mm howitzers. The Fort McGilvray Military Reservation was established in July 1941, then ordered abandoned in April 1944. The property was transferred to the Bureau of Land Management in 1945, then to the State of Alaska in 1962, and placed under management of the State of Alaska Department of Natural Resources, Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation in 1971 (USACE 2015, Bristol 2012).

The greater Caines Head area has been the subject of several environmental investigations by the Corps. In 1995, the director of Alaska State Parks formally requested that the Corps conduct building demolition and debris removal at Caines Head to mitigate potential safety hazards to park users. The Corps responded with a 1996 report recommending investigations and removal actions at storage tank and dump sites, but that work was not completed. Subsequent investigations and record searches identified thirteen suspected petroleum tank sites across the grounds of the former military installation (USACE 2015, Bristol 2012).

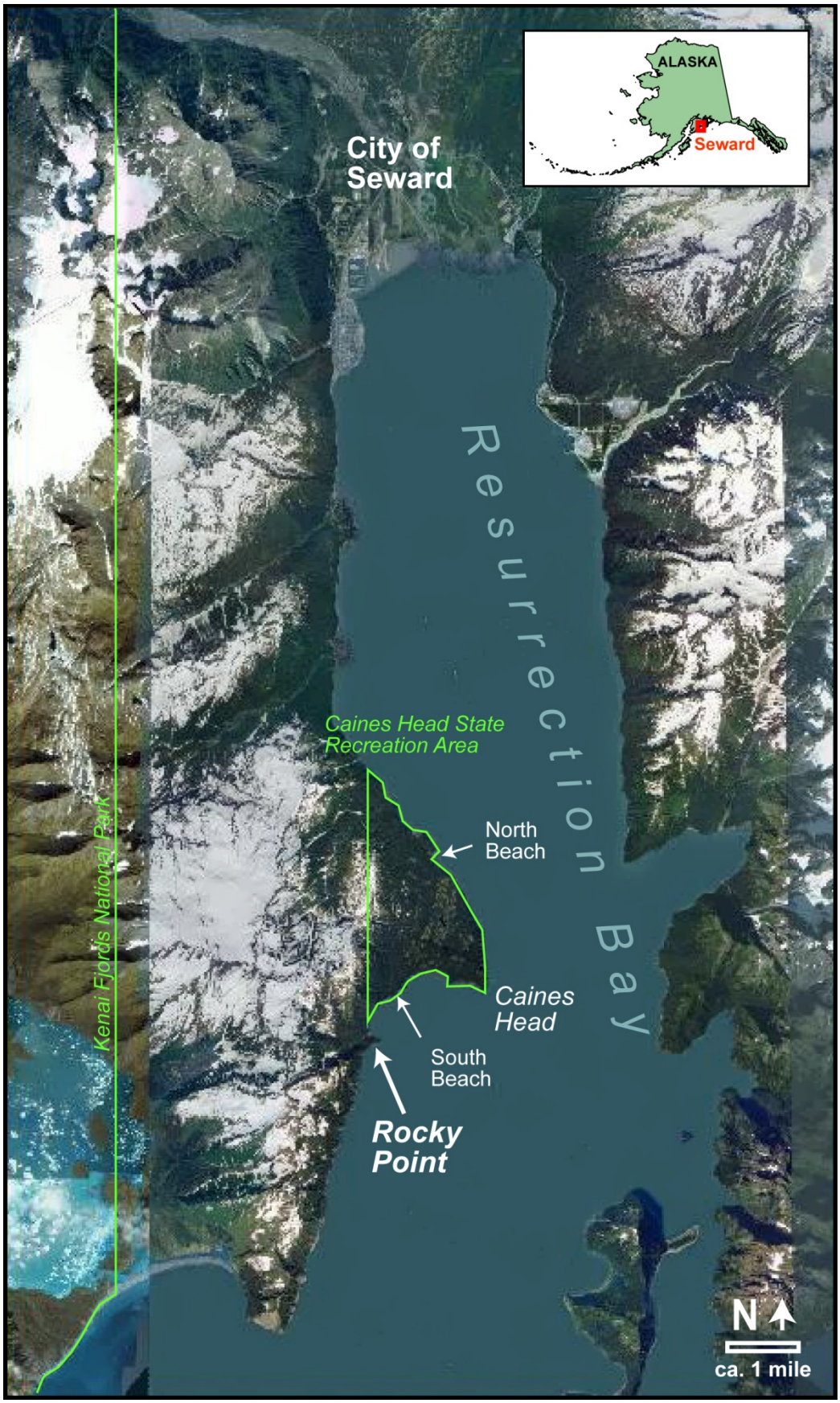

Figure 1. Location and vicinity of the Rocky Point project site.

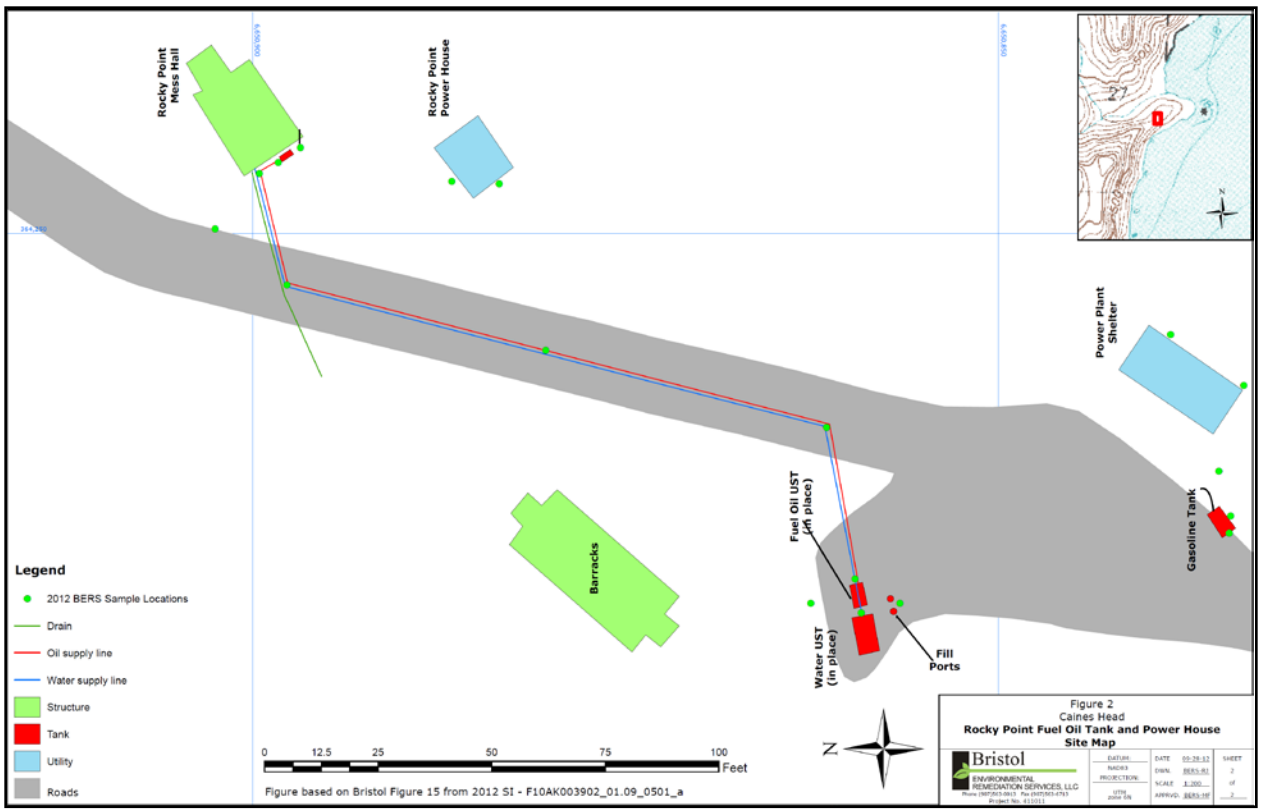

Figure 2. Locations of Rocky Point USTs relative to other structures (adapted from Bristol 2012).

In April 2015 the Corps visited the Rocky Point area to locate several previously identified USTs and confirm their contents. One 300-gallon fuel oil UST and one 300-gallon gasoline UST were found; a third tank, a 960-gallon water UST, was found adjacent to the fuel oil UST. The USTs were partially excavated to confirm their size, access the interior of the tanks, and to collect soil samples from below the bottoms of the fuel USTs. Each UST contained approximately 1 inch of water, but no signs of remaining fuel. The soil samples collected from beneath the fuel tanks found no contaminants above State of Alaska cleanup levels (USACE 2015).

1.3 Need for Action

While no signs of significant chemical contamination were found at the Rocky Point USTs, the tanks themselves present a physical hazard for people and wildlife using the area. As they deteriorate further, the buried steel tanks have the potential to collapse under the weight of unwary visitors, or collapse spontaneously and create entrapment hazards for wildlife.

2.0 ALTERNATIVES

2.1 No-Action Alternative

The no-action alternative would leave the empty USTs in place, but not complete the process of closing them. The USTs would deteriorate and pose a hazard of collapse and entrapment for

people or wildlife using the area. The no-action alternative would avoid the environmental impacts described below.

2.2 Remedial Action Alternatives

The preferred alternative is the closure-in-place of the three USTs in accordance with State of Alaska UST regulations (18 AAC 78.085c). The contractor will remove any sharp metal protrusions of the UST that are above ground. The existing openings in the tops of the USTs will be enlarged to facilitate closure. Existing water inside of the USTs will be extracted and run through granulated activated carbon treatment equipment before water is disposed of onsite; the treated water will be disposed of in a manner that does not cause erosion. The emptied USTs will then be backfilled with certified clean fill material, and their locations and dimensions documented (USACE 2015).

Another alternative under consideration when this EA was initiated was the excavation and removal of the USTs and any fuel-contaminated soil around or underneath the USTs. The removal alternative would have had significantly greater impacts to the biological and historic environment at the site, and required the transportation of heavier equipment to the site and the clearing of more vegetation. This alternative was discarded when the results of soil sampling under the USTs showed no significant chemical contamination, allowing the tanks to be closed in place with no excavation.

2.3 General Work Practices and Environmental Protection

The Corps' Scope of Work (USACE 2015) for the project leaves many details to be developed by the contractor in its work plan and Environmental Protection Plan. Given the extreme terrain and site access challenges, the Corps expects that the contractor will use watercraft to land personnel and light equipment (e.g., hand tools) at the beach adjacent to Rocky Point, but use a helicopter to sling-load to the site heavier items (e.g., a portable generator) and the inert fill material (most likely sand or fine gravel) needed to fill the empty tanks. Safely sling-loading items to the work site would require clearing an area near the work site of dense vegetation. The Corps would encourage the contractor to remove brush from a previously-cleared area, and minimize the cutting of trees.

All fuels and fluids used in machinery and excavation equipment would be stored at least 50 feet from creeks and beaches. Equipment and trucks containing fuel would park at least 50 feet from creeks and beaches when not in use. Emergency spill response procedures and materials would be provided on all equipment; materials would include sorbent mats, socks, and pads for absorbing fuels and fluids used on site.

3.0 AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

3.1 Community

The project site is uninhabited and is accessible only by boat or hiking trails. The nearest community is the City of Seward, roughly 6.5 miles to the north.

3.2 Current Land Use

The Rocky Point project site is on State of Alaska land just south of Caines Head State Recreation Area, a popular hiking destination. It is also about 3.5 miles east of the boundary of Kenai Fjords National Park (figure 1). The general area is undeveloped other than the World War II-era structures and modern trail improvements. The primary human use of the area is recreational hiking and picnicking, along with berry and mushroom gathering at appropriate seasons. The small beach on the north side of Rocky point offers a relatively sheltered landing for skiffs and sea kayaks.

3.3 Climate

The Gulf of Alaska coast of the Kenai Peninsula has relatively mild winters and cool summers; mean winter lows range from 0 to 20°F, while mean highs in the summer are below 60°F. The mean annual rainfall in the Seward area is about 63 inches. Snowfall is common at sea level from November through April. Severe storms can generate waves up to 30 feet in height at the mouth of Resurrection Bay; such storms are most common in the winter (NPS 1984).

3.4 Topography, Soils, and Hydrology

A geological history of repeated glaciations and tectonic movements has created the rugged landscape of fjords, sheer rock faces, and steep mountain slopes seen along this coast. Soils tend to be shallow except in valleys or other lowland areas. Within forested areas, mosses and plant-derived debris create a thin organic mat overlaying bedrock or boulder fields. Persistent groundwater tends to be limited to alluvial fans. Freshwater storage is generally in the form of ice and snow accumulated on mountain peaks, and short melt-water streams are common in the area.

3.5 Air Quality and Noise

The project site presumably enjoys excellent air quality because of the near-absence of pollutant emission sources and persistent winds from the adjacent ocean. Cruise ships, boats, and small aircraft passing up and down Resurrection Bay would be the only vehicular emission sources approaching the project site. Pollutants generated in Seward by power plants, vehicles, and wood stoves would generally be kept away from Caines Head by the prevailing winds. Particulates from forest fires in the Kenai Peninsula interior, or from volcanoes on the Alaska Peninsula, might occasionally affect air quality in Resurrection Bay. There is no established ambient air quality monitoring program at Caines Head or at Seward, however, and little existing data to compare with the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) established under the Clean Air Act (CAA). These air quality standards include concentration limits on the “criteria pollutants” carbon monoxide, ozone, sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxides, lead, and particulate matter. The community is

not in a CAA “non-attainment” area, and the “conformity determination” requirements of the CAA would not apply to the proposed project at this time.

No specific noise data exist for Caines, but man-made background noise would consist solely of that generated by ship, boat, and aircraft traffic.

3.6 Biological Resources

Rocky Point is within a narrow belt of dense forest between the ocean and alpine habitat. Coastal forest habitat in the Resurrection Bay and Kenai Fjords National Park area is at the northern extremity of the Pacific temperate rainforest ecosystem and is dominated by Sitka spruce and western hemlock (figure 3). Understory vegetation includes shrubs such as alder, willow, blueberry, and salmonberry, and abundant ferns and mosses (figure 4). Terrestrial mammals of this habitat include black and brown bears, wolves, wolverines, martens, red squirrels, and porcupines. Bald eagles, sharp-shinned hawks, ravens, and Steller jays are year-round residents of the coastal forest, while migratory songbirds such as warblers and kinglets are abundant in the summer. All five species of Pacific salmon (king, silver, red, chum, and pink) are present in coastal streams, although the extreme topography tends to limit the extent of spawning habitat available (NPS 1984).

Figure 3. View of the dense alder and conifer forest at Rocky Point (April 2015).

Figure 4. View of dense red alder growth in the vicinity of one of the USTs (April 2015).

3.7 Wetlands

The project area has not been delineated for jurisdictional wetlands. However, its location on a rocky outcropping suggests that wetlands are unlikely to be present within the project sites.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (USFWS) National Wetlands Mapper website indicates no wetlands at Rocky Point other than small pockets of marine wetlands along the shore. This is in contrast to the small ponds and areas of forested wetlands scattered through the saddle inland of Caines Head to the north (USFWS 2015a).

3.8 Protected Species

Endangered Species Act. Species listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) that may be found in or near Resurrection Bay include (NMFS 2015a; USFWS 2015b):

- Steller sea lion, Western Distinct Population Segment (endangered)
- Humpback whale (endangered)
- North Pacific right whale (endangered)
- Sperm whale (endangered)
- Short-tailed albatross (endangered)

The only species listed above with critical habitat in Alaska is the Steller sea lion. The nearest designated critical habitat for Steller sea lions is a haulout site in the Chiswell Islands (roughly 59.60°N, 149.59°W), outside Resurrection Bay and about 25 miles south-southwest of the Rocky Point project site (NMFS 2015b).

Figure 5. Annotated screen-shot from the National Wetlands Inventory mapper website (USFWS 2015a)

Marine Mammal Protection Act. Marine mammals not listed under the ESA but protected under the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) include harbor seal, northern fur seal, Dall's porpoise, harbor porpoise, Pacific white sided dolphin, gray whale, killer whale, minke whale, and northern sea otter (NMFS 2015b).

Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act. The bald eagles commonly seen along Resurrection Bay are protected under the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act, as well as the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (see below). In addition to prohibiting direct takes such as killing eagles or destroying nests, this act also regulates human activity or construction that may interfere with eagle's normal breeding, feeding, or sheltering habits. The nesting and rearing period for bald eagles in Alaska generally begins with courtship and nest-building in February, and ends when the young fledge by late August or early September; September through January is considered the non-nesting period (USFWS 2011).

Migratory Bird Treaty Act. With the exception of State-managed ptarmigan and grouse species, all native birds in Alaska (including active nests, eggs, and nestlings) are protected under the federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA). The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service advises that the period 1 May through 15 July should be considered the nesting window for forest- or shrub-nesting birds in Southcentral Alaska, 15 April through 7 September for seabird colonies, and 10 April through 10 August for cliff-nesting raptors and ravens (USFWS 2009).

3.9 Essential Fish Habitat and Anadromous Streams

A small stream in the draw immediately north of Rocky Point (figure 6) is cataloged as an anadromous stream in the Alaska Department of Fish & Game's Anadromous Waters Catalog (AWC; ADFG 2015). The AWC assigns the otherwise-unnamed stream the code number 231-20-13525, and states that the stream is spawning habitat for pink salmon. The grade of the stream course becomes very steep within a quarter-mile of the ocean, so the amount of salmon spawning habitat within the stream is historically limited.

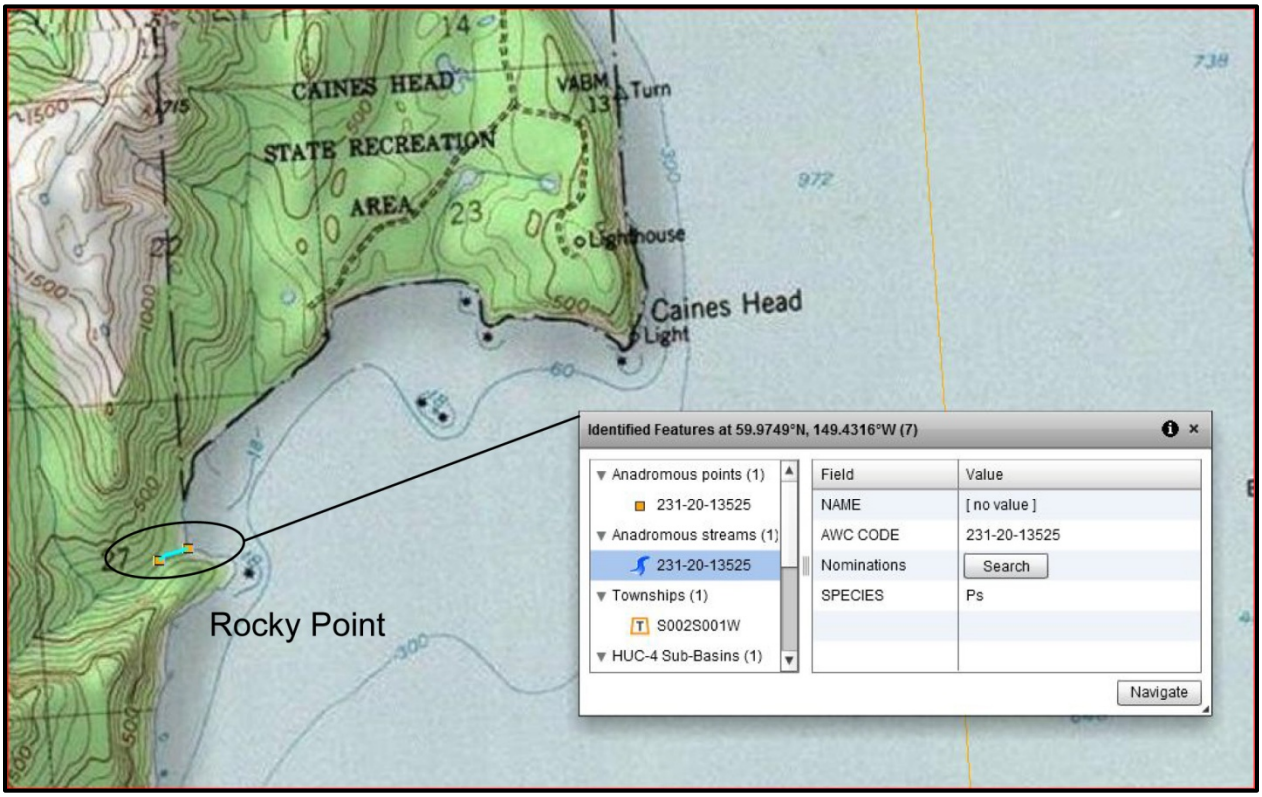

Figure 6. Annotated screen-shot from the ADFG anadromous waters mapper website (ADFG 2015), showing the location of the cataloged anadromous stream just north of Rocky Point.

A site visit in April 2015 found this stream channel to be choked with gravel and rocky debris (figure 7), presumably from a recent flash flood. It is unlikely to be usable salmon habitat until additional high-flow events re-establish the stream channel.

Marine waters offshore of Rocky Point include essential fish habitat (EFH) designated by the NMFS for all five Pacific salmon species, walleye pollack, skate, Pacific cod, flathead sole, rex sole, rougheye rockfish, arrowtooth flounder, and squid (NMFS 2015c).

Figure 7. View of the streambed north of Rocky Point (April 2015).

3.10 Cultural and Historic Resources

Examination of the Alaska Historic Resources Survey (AHRS) by the Corps' District Archaeologist shows one cataloged historic property within the project area of potential effect (APE): the Rocky Point Garrison itself (designated as XBS-039 in the AHRS). No determination of eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) has been completed for the Rocky Point Garrison historic property. The next closest historic property is Fort McGilvray Battery #293 at Caines Head 1 mile to the north, designated as XBS-013. No known prehistoric sites are reported within or immediately adjacent to the APE (Pierce 2015).

The AHRS description of the Rocky Point Garrison historic property states that it includes four concrete "Panama" mounts on which the howitzers were once staged, several partially-collapsed barracks buildings, two generator buildings, and a mess hall.

4.0 ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES OF ALTERNATIVES

4.1 No-Action Alternative

The no-action alternative would avoid the short-term disruptions to the local environment that would be caused by the tank closure activities, but would leave the potential physical hazard of the deteriorating underground tanks. Failure to close the tanks in accordance with State of Alaska standards may lead to regulatory action by the State of Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation.

4.2 Preferred Alternative

The preferred alternative involves mobilizing to the Rocky Point site to close the three USTs by filling them with inert material; the environmental effects of this action are described below.

4.2.1 Effects on Community and Land Use

The project site is believed to be seldom visited, and the need to restrict access to the immediate project area during the brief project time period is unlikely to cause inconvenience to State land users. The project may temporarily improve public access to the project site due to the clearing of brush.

4.2.2 Effects on Air Quality and Noise

The project will cause a temporary intermittent increase in noise at the project site and along the route from the project site and Seward due to boat and helicopter traffic and the use of powered tools at the project site. The increased noise level will return to background levels immediately upon the completion of the project. The Corps believes that impacts to air quality from vehicles or equipment used during the project will be negligible.

4.2.3 Effects on Topography, Soils, and Hydrology

The proposed activity would not alter the topography or patterns of overland water flow in the area.

4.2.4 Effects on Biological Resources

The planned activities would be highly localized in their impacts and affect areas already altered by the former military facilities. A limited area of alder brush will need to be cleared to receive loads of fill material carried in by helicopter; removal of large trees will be avoided and should not be necessary. Natural vegetation succession will quickly replace the removed brush. The activities will have little short-term effect on area wildlife and no long-term negative impact on their habitat. The project site is surrounded by large areas of similar, high-quality habitat, and any wildlife displaced from the project area by noise and activity should be able to quickly resume their natural behavior.

4.2.5 Effects on Wetlands

No jurisdictional wetlands appear to be present at the project site, and the filling of the empty tanks would not constitute a discharge under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act.

4.2.6 Effects on Protected Species

The Corps determines that this project will have no effect on endangered or threatened species. The ESA-listed and MMPA-protected species identified in Section 3.8 are all marine species that would only be found off-shore of the project site and not directly affected by the on-site activities. Resurrection Bay is heavily used by recreational and commercial vessels, and by flight-seeing aircraft. The use of motor vessels and helicopters to carry personnel and materials to the project site will not cause a significant increase in the overall disturbance within Resurrection Bay.

The Corps expects the work to take place during the last half of September into October. Birds protected by the MBTA and the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act will have completed nesting and rearing their young by then, and many migratory birds will have left the area. Bald eagles remain in Resurrection year round. Consistent with USFWS guidance on avoiding disturbance of non-nesting eagles (USFWS 2006), the contractor will be instructed to operate the helicopter at least 1,000 feet from the shoreline while in transit, except where flight safety demands a closer approach.

4.2.7 Effects on Essential Fish Habitat and Anadromous Streams

The project will not require entry into or alteration of water bodies, including anadromous streams. No significant excavation is anticipated as part of project activities, so the risk of sediment runoff will be minimal. The anadromous stream identified in Section 3.9 has been at least temporarily filled in with rocky debris from natural processes and does not appear to currently provide anadromous fish spawning or rearing habitat. The project will not alter the marine environment or effect Essential Fish Habitat.

4.2.8 Effects on Cultural Resources

No determination of eligibility has been completed at the Rocky Point garrison site. However, the scope of the proposed action is extremely limited and unlikely to disturb any remaining historic or prehistoric features at the project site. No prehistoric sites are reported within the project vicinity, and no excavation is planned beyond soils already disturbed. The USTs will be modified, but not removed or destroyed, and will remain as identifiable features of XBS-039. The Corps determines that the UST closure activities described will have no adverse effect on historic properties, and has sought concurrence from the Alaska State Historic Preservation Officer (Pierce 2015).

4.2.9 Effects on Coastal Zone Management

Alaska's Coastal Zone Management Program expired on July 31, 2011. Project proponents are no longer required to evaluate projects for consistency with enforceable standards of coastal management plans.

4.2.10 Effects on Environmental Justice

Executive Order 12898, "Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations," requires Federal agencies to identify and address any disproportionately high and adverse human health effects of its programs and activities on minority and low-income populations.

The purpose of the proposed project is to reduce future risks to people and wildlife using the area by removing physical hazards from the environment. The Corps does not anticipate adverse impacts from this project to the human population.

4.2.11 Cumulative Effects

Federal law (40 CFR 651.16) requires that NEPA documents assess cumulative effects, which are the impact on the environment resulting from the incremental impact of the action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions.

The proposed project will not alter use of the project area, and no other activities are known to be planned for the site.

5.0 PERMITS AND AUTHORIZATIONS

This project will require no resource permits or authorizations. The Corps has sought concurrence from the State Historical Preservation Officer that the soil excavation work will not cause adverse effects to historical properties or cultural resources.

6.0 CONCLUSION

The continued environmental cleanup efforts at the former Rocky Point Garrison, Caines Head-Fort McGilvray, as discussed in this document, will have some minor, largely controllable short-term impacts, but in the long term will help improve the overall quality of the human environment. This assessment supports the conclusion that the proposed project does not constitute a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment; therefore, a finding of no significant impact will be prepared and signed.

7.0 PREPARERS OF THIS DOCUMENT

This Environmental Assessment was prepared by Chris Floyd and Diane Walters of the Environmental Resources Section, Alaska District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The Corps of Engineers Project Manager is Christy Baez.

8.0 REFERENCES

Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADFG). 2015. Anadromous Fish Distribution Database: http://www.sf.adfg.state.ak.us/SARR/AWC/index.cfm/FA/maps.interactive.

Alaska Office of History and Archaeology (AOHA). 2013. Department of Natural Resources, Alaska Heritage Resource Survey online database (restricted access).

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