



**Alaska District
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers**

Engineering Division

Public Notice

Date 16 April 2012 Identification No. ER 12-06
Please refer to the identification number when replying

**Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact
for
Removal Action
Petroleum-Contaminated Soil
Ocean Cape Radio Relay Station
Yakutat, Alaska**

Defense Environmental Restoration Program
Native American Lands Environmental Mitigation Program

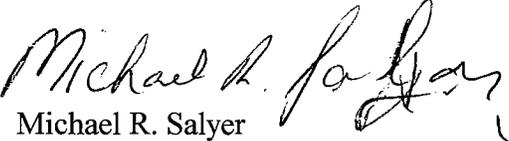
The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) prepared this environmental assessment (EA) to address the excavation of petroleum-contaminated soils and other environmental restoration work to be performed at the former military facilities at Ocean Cape near Yakutat, Alaska. The Yakutat Tlingit Tribe (YTT) would perform the work as part of the Native American Lands Environmental Mitigation Program (NALEMP), in partnership with the Corps. The proposed project is a continuation of recent activities by YTT to remediate the former Ocean Cape Radio Relay Station. Currently planned activities include the removal and off-site treatment of about 500 cubic yards of contaminated soil, demolition of concrete footings, and further environmental sampling.

Comments and questions regarding the proposed action should be submitted to the address below no later than 30 days from the date of this public notice. Written comments received on or before this date will become part of the official record and will be considered in the determination of whether to prepare an environmental impact statement. No public meeting is scheduled.

If you believe a public meeting is needed, send a written request to the address below during the 30-day review period explaining why a meeting is necessary.

U.S. Army Engineer District, Alaska
ATTN: CEPOA-EN-CW-ER (FLOYD)
P.O. Box 6898
Elmendorf AFB, Alaska 99506-0898

Please contact Mr. Chris Floyd of the Corps' Environmental Resources Section at (907) 753-2700 or write to the above address if you would like more information about the proposed work. Comments, requests for public meetings, and requests for additional information may also be submitted electronically to the following e-mail address:
Christopher.B.Floyd@usace.army.mil.


Michael R. Salyer
Chief, Environmental Resources

Enclosure



**US Army Corps
of Engineers**

Alaska District

Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact

Removal Action
Petroleum-Contaminated Soil

Ocean Cape Radio Relay Station Yakutat, Alaska

Native American Lands Environmental Mitigation Program



April 2012

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:

**Removal Action
Petroleum-Contaminated Soil
Ocean Cape Radio Relay Station
Yakutat, 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 Ocean Cape.

Reinhard W. Koenig
Colonel, Corps of Engineers
District Commander

Date

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) to address under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) the excavation of petroleum-contaminated soils and other ground-disturbing activities to be performed at the former military facilities at Ocean Cape near Yakutat, Alaska. The Yakutat Tlingit Tribe (YTT), in partnership with the Corps, would perform the work as part of the Native American Lands Environmental Mitigation Program (NALEMP). The Corps has prepared several EAs in the past for environmental cleanup projects in the Yakutat area, but none of those EAs addressed large-scale excavation and removal of soil. Previous YTT cleanup activities at Ocean Cape have consisted primarily of environmental sampling, structure demolition, and debris removal. Those activities were determined to fall under categorical exclusions to the NEPA process established by the U.S. Army, so no EA was prepared for those efforts.

1.2 Site Description

The Ocean Cape site is located on the Gulf of Alaska, approximately 370 miles southeast of Anchorage and 5 miles west of Yakutat (figure 1). Ocean Cape can be accessed by road from Yakutat.

The U.S. Air Force acquired the Ocean Cape site in 1960 to construct a radio relay station between Hoonah and Cape Yakataga. The facility was part of the White Alice Communication System (WACS) and Ballistic Missile Early Warning System. Four 60-foot tropospheric antennas were constructed, as well as support buildings, water and fuel tanks, utility lines and utilidors, an access road, and a bridge. The U.S. Air Force released the Ocean Cape property in 1977, and ultimately conveyed it to the YTT in 1983. The property is owned by the village corporation Yak-Tat Kwann, Inc. (Ridolfi 2012).

Under the NALEMP program, the YTT conducted site investigations and cleanup work at the Ocean Cape site each year from 2008 through 2011. YTT activities have included sampling and analysis of soil, water, and waste materials; demolition of buildings and removal of debris; and dismantling and removal of water and fuel tanks. Several concrete foundations and a drum dump remain at the site. Sampling results show that soil contamination with petroleum hydrocarbons and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) still exists in some areas of the site (Ridolfi 2012).

1.3 Need for Action

The YTT wishes to expedite the removal of contaminated soil and building remnants at the former Ocean Cape site, as it is within a popular subsistence and recreation area. A youth culture camp is operated nearby, where local elders teach traditional subsistence practices.

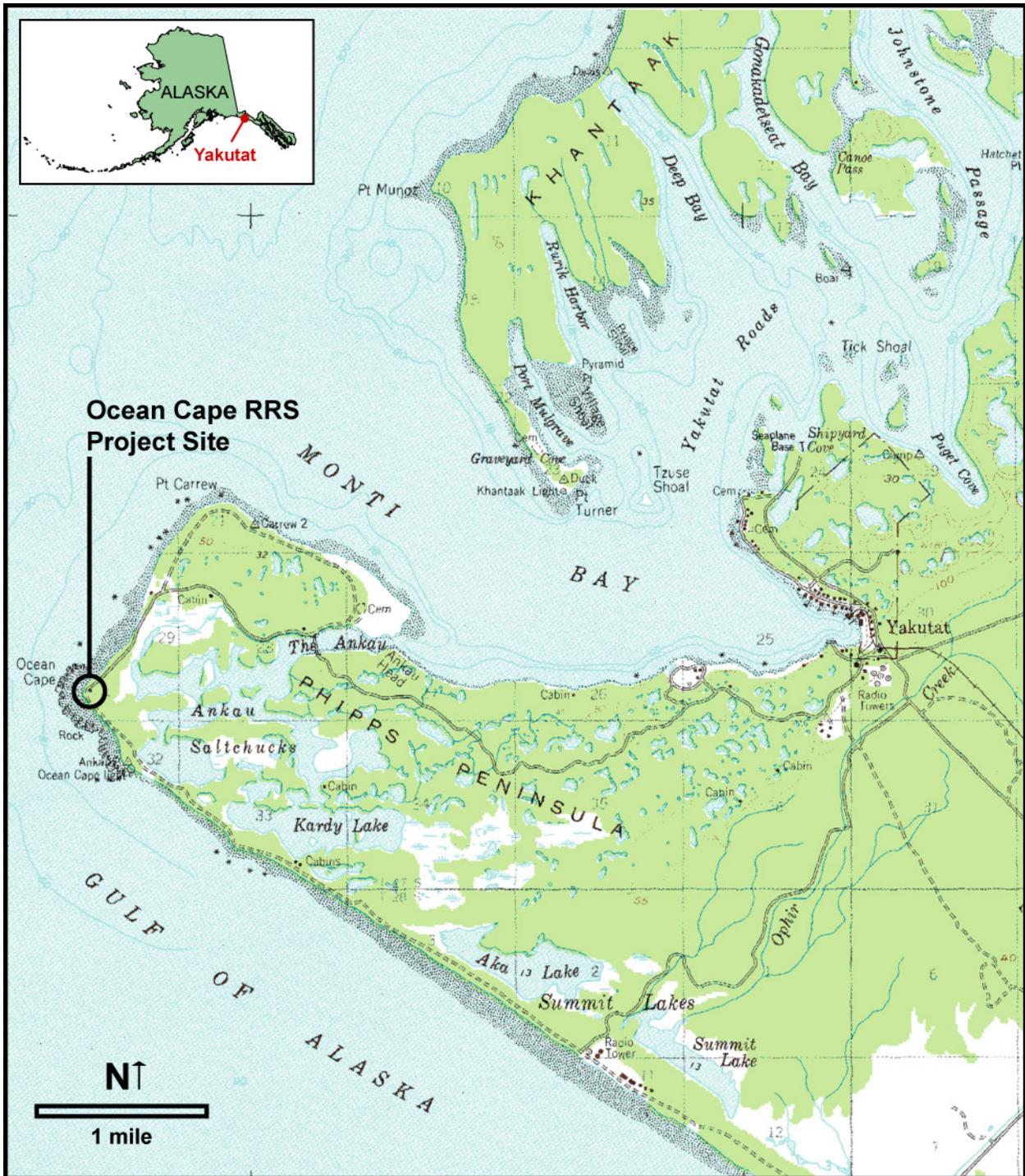


Figure 1. Location of Ocean Cape Radio Relay Station site.

2.0 ALTERNATIVES

2.1 No-Action Alternative

Under the no-action alternative, the contaminated soil, concrete foundations, and debris would remain in place. This would limit the use of the area by the community, and potentially allow the migration of chemical contaminants to nearby wetlands and subsistence areas. The no-action alternative would avoid the short-term disruptions to the local environment that would be caused by the operation of heavy equipment and excavation of soil and concrete.

2.2 Removal Action Alternative

The preferred alternative is to continue with the removal of contaminated soil and building remnants, and investigations of potentially contaminated areas.

In 2012, YTT plans to:

- Excavate and remove up to 500 cubic yards of petroleum-contaminated soil at the former diesel aboveground tank (AST) and fuel pump house area, and remove and dispose of concrete footings and associated piping from the AST area (figures 2 and 3).
- Excavate 5 cubic yards of petroleum-contaminated soil at the former gasoline storage tank.
- Remove the water tower footing and associated piping.
- Conduct sampling of the concrete slab in garage building for PCBs.
- Conduct a site investigation at the north drum dump (figure 2).

The proposed activities are detailed in YTT's project work plan (Ridolfi 2012). Contaminated soil would be excavated and loaded into 1-cubic-yard sacks. The sacks of contaminated soil would be transported to Yakutat, loaded into a shipping container, and ultimately shipped to an appropriate remediation facility. The excavations would be backfilled with clean soil from the remaining earthen berm at the AST location. Concrete footings would be broken up with jackhammers, and the debris disposed of at the Yakutat landfill.

The project site would be accessed by existing roads. Some brush removal with hand tools and chainsaws would be necessary to approach some features with heavy equipment; trees with a diameter of 12 inches or greater would not be felled unless absolutely necessary. Cut brush may be used alongside silt as an erosion control measure (Ridolfi 2012).

Future restoration activities planned by YTT at Ocean Cape include:

- Removing concrete foundations.
- Removing or closing concrete vaults and manholes.
- Remediating PCB contamination.

- Remediating the north drum dump.
- Conducting confirmation sampling.

3.0 AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

3.1 Community

The Ocean Cape site is near the city of Yakutat, a community of about 700 at the mouth of Yakutat Bay on the Gulf of Alaska. Yakutat is accessible only by air or sea. Yakutat's economy depends on fishing and fish processing; in 2010, 153 residents held commercial fishing licenses. Recreational fishing in the area, both saltwater and freshwater, is considered to be world class. Most residents depend on subsistence hunting and fishing, harvesting salmon, trout, shellfish, deer, moose, bear, and mountain goat. The area maintains a traditional Tlingit culture with influences from Eyak Athabascans, as well as Russian, English, and American traders and miners (ADCRA 2012).

3.2 Current Land Use

The Phipps Peninsula and Ankau Saltchucks area has been relied upon heavily for subsistence foods, including berries, clams, cockles, ducks, salmon, and seaweed. Yak-Tat Kwan operates the Yakutat Culture Camp, a youth camp where local tribal elders teach traditional subsistence practices near the site of the former Ocean Cape WACS (CCTH 2004).

3.3 Climate

Yakutat is in a maritime climate zone, characterized by heavy precipitation, cool summers, and mild winters. July is the warmest month with an average temperature of 53.6 degrees Fahrenheit. January is the coldest month with an average temperature of 25 degrees Fahrenheit. Average annual precipitation for the area is 151 inches, while the average annual snowfall accumulation is 202 inches. June is usually the driest month, with an average monthly precipitation of 7.3 inches. The greatest amount of rainfall is in October, with an average monthly precipitation of 23 inches. Prevailing winds blow from the east to southeast at an average velocity of 6 to 8 miles per hour (USACE 1999).

3.4 Topography, Soils, and Hydrology

The Ocean Cape site is on the low-lying Phipps Peninsula between the Gulf of Alaska and Monti Bay (figure 1). The soils in the area are likely a complex of glacial outwash, alluvial, and lacustrine sediments, overlain with an organic layer deposited by the well-established conifer forest that occupies much of the area. The highest ground on the peninsula appears to be a low ridge running along the western shore, while the interior of the peninsula contains an extensive network of tidal lagoons (also known as saltchucks), ponds, and bogs. Groundwater is thought to be about 10 feet below ground surface at the project site (ENSR 2000).

3.5 Biological Resources

The main terrestrial vegetative community in the Yakutat area is coastal western hemlock-Sitka spruce forest. The coastal forest consists of three plant communities: true forest, grass-sedge meadows, and muskeg. The dominant tree species in the true forest are western hemlock, Sitka spruce, Alaska cedar, and western red cedar. Understory vegetation is represented by alder shrubs and moss. Wetland habitats and ponds along glacial moraines are dominated by sedges, mosses, and low shrubs. Wetlands along streams are dominated by tall willows, alder, sedges, mosses, and low shrubs. Low lying muskegs are dominated by thick mats of sphagnum moss, sedges, herbs, and low shrubs (USACE 1999).

Black bear and brown bear are common in the Yakutat region, along with deer, moose, mountain goat, wolf, and wolverine. Other mammals known to inhabit the area include marten, land otter, fox, ermine, lynx, coyote, and weasel. Marine mammals expected to frequent the area include harbor seals, sea lions, fur seals, and sea otters. Several species of whales, most notably humpback, gray, killer, fin, right, sperm, and blue also have been seen in the area. The Yakutat area is on a major flyway for waterfowl and shorebirds, and is important for nesting bald eagles and swans (USACE 1999). The USFWS eagle nest database has no records of eagle nests within 1 mile of the project site (Lewis 2012), but the presence of an undocumented nest is a possibility.

Area streams support all five species of Alaska salmon (red, chum, pink, king and coho), along with steelhead trout, cutthroat trout, Dolly Varden, northern pike, and rainbow trout. Salmon are known to spawn in drainage ditches and other water bodies adjacent to the airport runway. Many of the lakes, especially the larger lakes such as Malaspina, Harlequin Mountain, and Italo provide important fish habitat. Saltwater habitats support important species including herring, halibut, flounder, cod, rockfish, crab, clams and cockles. A significant portion of Yakutat's economy is tied to the use of marine fishery resources. Sport fishing for salmon and steelhead trout plays a vital role in the area's economy (USACE 1999).

3.5 Wetlands

The Phipps Peninsula contains extensive lagoons, marshes, ponds, and bogs. However, the Ocean Cape facility appears to have been built on higher ground and perhaps areas of fill along the western shore. The immediate project work areas where buildings and other structures were constructed were presumably filled and modified at the time of construction.

3.6 Threatened and Endangered Species

The project area is within the historic range of seven species of whales (blue, fin, sperm, humpback, right, bowhead, and sei). All seven species of whale are federally listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) as endangered. Whales are infrequent visitors to near-shore waters. Most are found in deeper waters off the Gulf of Alaska, North Pacific, and Bering Sea (USACE 1999).

The Steller sea lion population west of 144° west longitude (a line near Cape Suckling, Alaska, or roughly 150 miles west of Yakutat) was listed as “endangered” under the ESA in April 1997 due to recent declines in populations in the western Gulf of Alaska. The Steller sea lion population east of this line is listed as “threatened.” It is unclear how extensively Steller sea

lions use the Yakutat area; the closest NMFS-designated sea lion critical habitat area to Ocean Cape is a haulout at Cape Fairweather, about 80 miles to the southeast (NMFS 2012a).

Kittlitz's murrelet was designated a candidate species in 2004 for listing under the ESA. In Southeast and Southcentral Alaska, this seabird selects a nest site on the ground, on barren, steep-sided mountains or ledges of steep, rocky cliffs adjacent to the coastal waters where it feeds (USFWS 2011).

3.7 Essential Fish Habitat and Anadromous Streams

The near-shore marine waters adjacent to Ocean Cape are designated by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) as essential fish habitat (EFH) for Chinook, chum, coho, pink, and sockeye salmon, as well as flathead sole and skate. No NMFS-designated Habitats of Particular Concern (HAPC) or other fishery protection areas are nearby. The "Gulf of Alaska Slope Habitat Conservation Area – Yakutat" is on the continental shelf roughly 50 miles south of Ocean Cape (NMFS 2012).

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADFG) lists several nearby waterbodies on the Phipps Peninsula in the Anadromous Waters Catalog (AWC). The Ankau Saltchucks (AWC #183-50-10100) and Kardy Lake (AWC #183-50-10100-0010) are cataloged as having coho and sockeye salmon, as well as steelhead, Dolly Varden, and cutthroat trout "present." An unnamed stream (AWC #183-50-10100-200) discharging into the west end of the Ankau Saltchucks near the project site is listed as a spawning stream for coho salmon. Several other salmon spawning streams discharge along the coast within a few miles southeast of Ocean Cape, such as Ophir Creek, Tawah Creek, Lost River, and Situk River (ADFG 2012).

3.8 Cultural and Historical Resources

The primary historical properties within the project's area of potential effect (APE) are the Ocean Cape White Alice site itself (cataloged in the Alaska Historical Resource Survey as YAK-00047), Ocean Cape Road (YAK-00121), Pt. Carew Road (YAK-00129), Artillery Road (YAK-00119), and the Ankau Slough Bridge (YAK-00153). All WACS properties in Alaska were listed on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) in 1988. Since their listing, many WACS properties, including Ocean Cape, have undergone demolition and removal. The distinguishing features of the Ocean Cape site, namely its tropospheric antennae and the radio station building, were removed in 1984 (USACE 2008).

The roads listed above would be used to access the site. These roads have undergone minor repairs and brush-clearing during earlier phases of the Ocean Cape cleanup. The bridge over Ankau Slough is a treated-timber stringer bridge built in 1961 as an access route to the Ocean Cape lighthouse (USACE 2008).

Eight other known sites are listed on the AHRS in the vicinity of Ocean Cape, which is within the boundaries of the Yakutat Landing Field (YAK-072), a National Register eligible World War II facility; however, Ocean Cape is not a contributing property to the landing field. The Ocean Cape Loran A station (YAK-089) is roughly 1 mile southeast of the WACS facility. Another 2 miles southeast along the coast is New Russia (YAK-029). This was the site of a major Russian colony that was established in 1796 and completely destroyed by the Yakutat Tlingit in 1805. Some archaeological traces of the colony have been reported. The Ocean Cape cleanup will avoid

the Loran station and New Russia, and thus, there will be no effect on these properties (USACE 2008).

3.9 Air Quality

No information on local air quality is available. The low density of emission sources in the Ocean Cape area suggests generally good air quality

3.10 Noise

The noise levels at the site are generally low and considered comparable to similar rural areas. The major source of noise would presumably be from motor vehicles such as watercraft, aircraft, and all-terrain vehicles.

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 operation of heavy equipment and excavation of soil and concrete. However, the contaminated soil, concrete foundations, and debris would remain in place, which would limit the use of the area by the community and potentially allow the migration of chemical contaminants to nearby wetlands and subsistence areas.

4.2 Preferred Alternative

Under the preferred alternative, contaminated soils would be removed from the site to the extent practical, and the removal of building remnants such as concrete foundations would be completed. The potential environmental consequences are described below.

4.2.1 Current Land Use

The planned environmental cleanup activities at Ocean Cape may cause some brief restrictions on public access to portions of the general area. Active work sites may need to be closed off for public safety, and heavier-than-usual vehicle traffic on the local roads may discourage some residents from accessing the area.

4.2.2 Topography, Soils, and Hydrology

The small areas of excavation would not significantly alter the topography or patterns of overland water flow in the area.

4.2.3 Biological Resources

The planned activities would be highly localized in their impacts and affect an area already altered by the former military facility and past cleanup efforts. A small amount of brush may need to be cleared to access specific features. The activities would have little effect on local wildlife and no long-term negative impact on their habitat. The project site is surrounded by large

areas of similar, higher-quality habitat, and any wildlife displaced from the project area by noise and activity should be able to quickly resume their natural behavior.

Nesting birds are likely to be the most vulnerable animal species at the site. The destruction of active nests, eggs, or nestlings is a violation of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA). The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service advises that the period 15 April through 15 July should be considered the nesting window for forest- or shrub-nesting birds in Southeast Alaska (USFWS 2007). The project activities may overlap this nesting window. One means of avoiding a “taking” of nesting birds under the MBTA would be to perform the necessary brush and tree removal before the start of the nesting window.

The Corps determines that the planned activities would have no adverse effect on any species listed under the Endangered Species Act or their critical habitat. The project would not enter the marine environment or require crossing or altering any anadromous streams, and so would not have any effect on essential fish habitat.

The currently planned activities do not involve the discharge of material into wetlands and should have no adverse effects on any wetlands or water bodies.

4.2.4 Cultural Resources

In a letter dated 16 May 2008, the State Historic Preservation Officer concurred with the Corps’ determination (USACE 2008) that removing the Ocean Cape Radio Relay structures will have no adverse effect on historic properties. The Corps will seek concurrence from the SHPO with a determination that excavation of contaminated soil from areas at the site will likewise have no effect on historic properties.

4.2.5 Air Quality

Air quality may be affected during the project period from the use of heavy equipment, vehicles, and generators. The Corps believes any poor air quality conditions caused by the project would be transient and highly localized and would dissipate entirely at the end of the project.

4.2.6 Noise

The planned activities at the site and the movement of trucks and equipment into and out of the project along local roads would increase the levels of noise in the local area during several weeks of the working season. The remedial activities would be timed to minimize the level of interference with the lives of the local residents.

4.2.7 Coastal Zone Management

Alaska’s Coastal Zone Management Program expired on 31 July 2011. Project proponents are no longer required to evaluate projects for consistency with enforceable standards of coastal management plans. The annual activities of the Ocean Cape environmental restoration project were offered for review to the former Alaska Coastal Management Program in 2008, 2009, 2010, and 2011, and the Corps received concurrences that the project would have no impact on the coastal zone. The Corps believes that the proposed continuation of the Ocean Cape project would likewise have no adverse impact on coastal resources.

4.2.8 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 express purpose of the proposed project is to reduce risks to human health and welfare in the region by removing contaminants from the environment. The Corps does not anticipate adverse impacts from this project to the local human population.

4.2.9 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 would have the ultimate net effect of removing a large mass of chemical contamination from the environment. The immediate incremental impacts of air pollutants and noise from construction machinery would be of short duration and would not contribute to long-term cumulative effects. The project may indirectly contribute to long-term changes in land use and environmental quality by encouraging use of the restored land.

4.2.10 Mitigation

The YTT work plan (Ridolfi 2012) describes the measures site workers would take to minimize negative environmental impacts to the area as a result of the project. Erosion control best management practices would include covering exposed soil with brush, netting, erosion blankets, or mulches (e.g., chipped brush). Silt fences would be used to control sediment runoff from the project site perimeter and to protect any nearby creeks or drainage channels. Exposed soil at the surface of the backfilled excavations would be covered with a layer of mulch that would be left in place at the end of the project.

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 will include sorbent mats, socks, and pads for absorbing fuels and fluids used on site.

Site workers would avoid destroying active bird nests, as described in Section 4.2.3. No active eagle nests have been documented by the USFWS within a mile of the project site, but if new eagle nests are discovered, the site workers should consult USFWS guidance on avoiding disturbances to nesting eagles at http://alaska.fws.gov//eaglepermit/guidelines/baea_nhstry_snstvy.htm.

5.0 PERMITS AND AUTHORIZATIONS

This continuing project would require few resource permits or authorizations. The Corps will seek concurrence from the State Historical Preservation Officer that the soil excavation work would not cause adverse effects to historical properties. The Corps does not expect the project to require discharge of materials into wetlands. If an excavation did extend into a wetland area, the backfilling of that excavation would be authorized by Nationwide Permit No. 38, "Cleanup of Hazardous and Toxic Waste".

6.0 CONCLUSION

The continued environmental cleanup efforts at Ocean Cape, as discussed in this document, would have some minor, largely controllable short-term impacts, but in the long term would 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.

7.0 PREPARERS OF THIS DOCUMENT

This Environmental Assessment was prepared by Chris Floyd and Diane Walters of the Environmental Resources Section, Alaska District Corps of Engineers. The Corps of Engineers Project Manager is Carey Cossaboom.

8.0 REFERENCES

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<http://alaska.fws.gov/fisheries/endangered/consultation.htm>

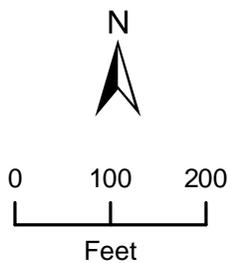
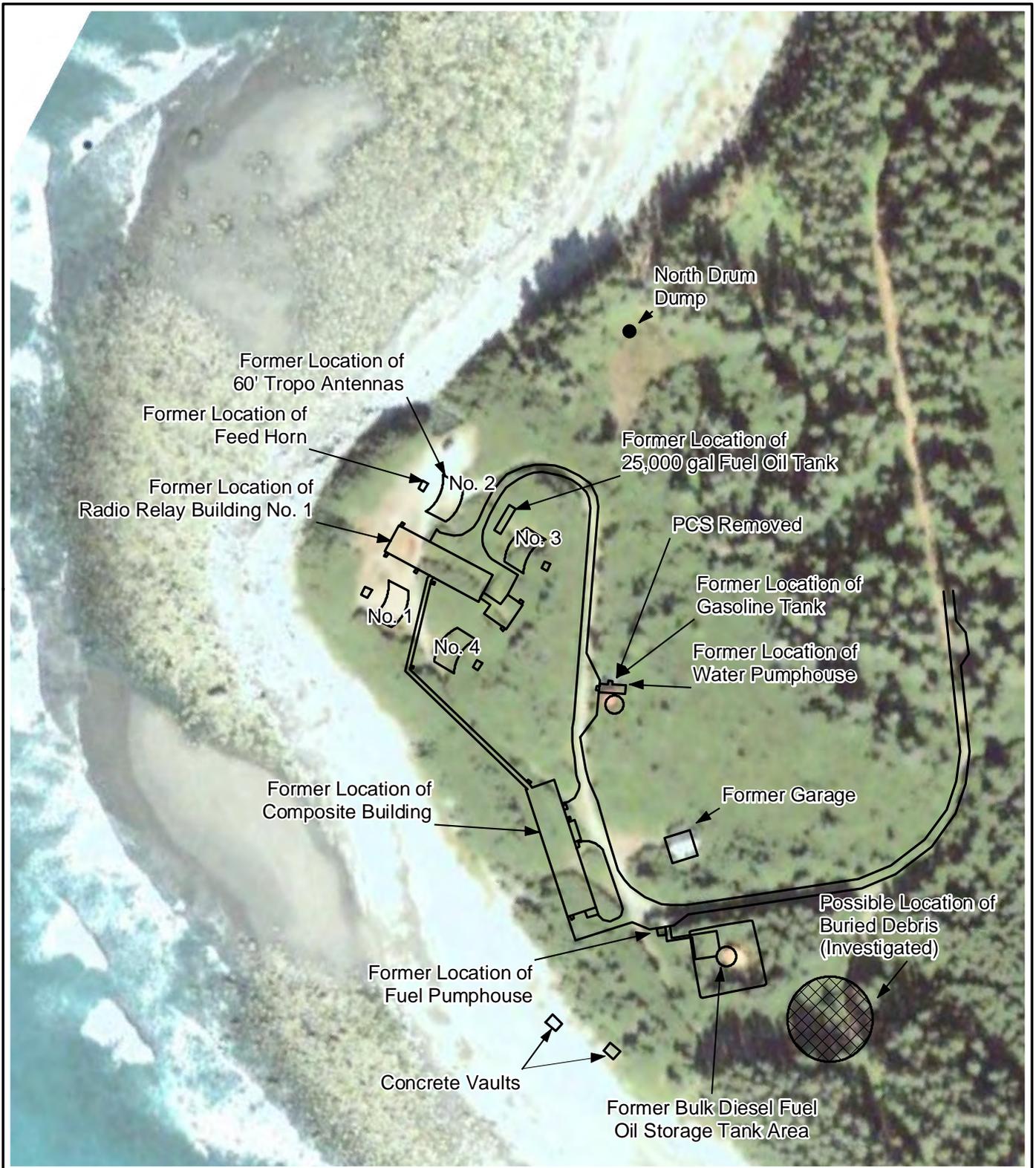
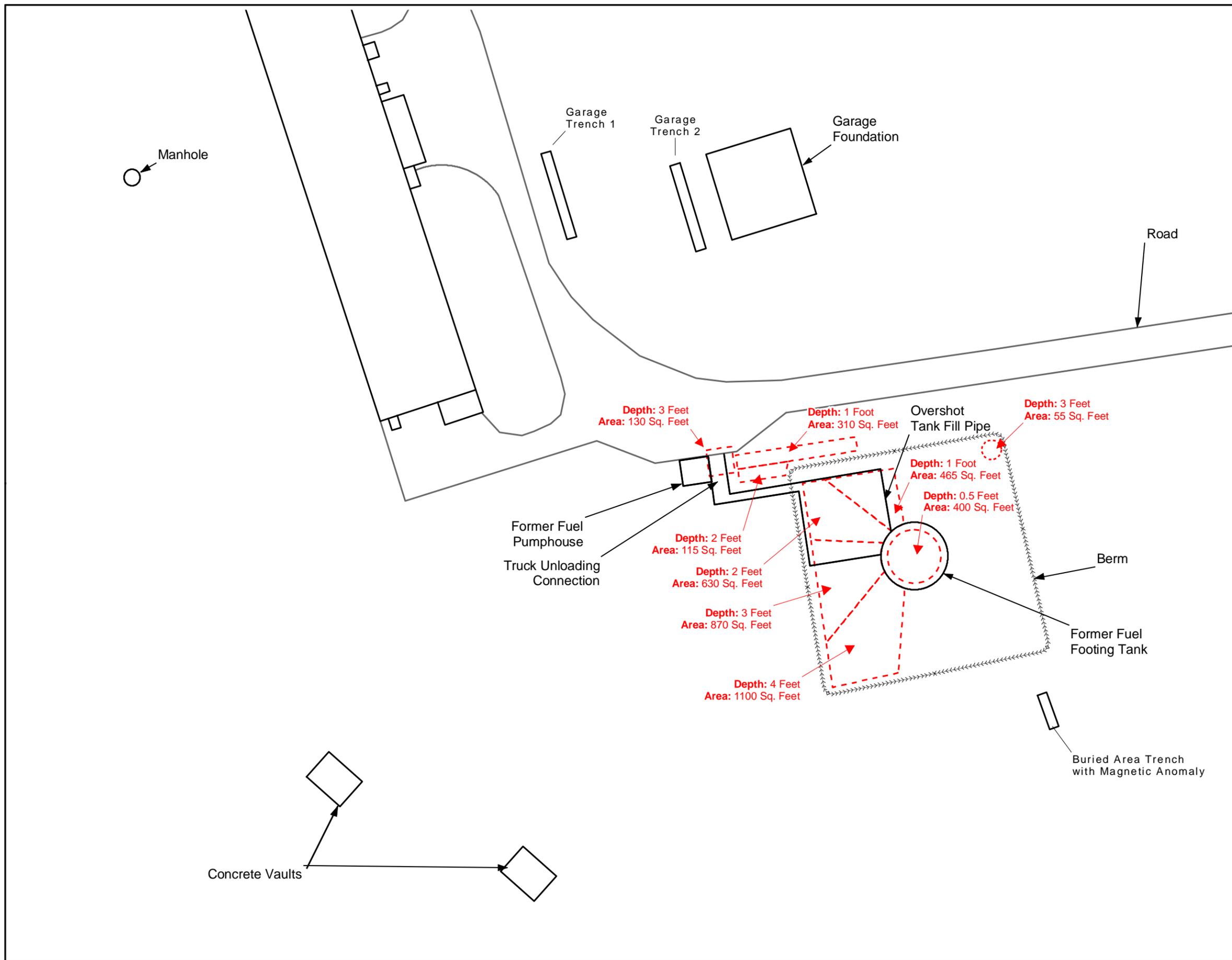


Figure 2
OCRRS Site Features

Ocean Cape Radio Relay Station
Removal Action / Site Investigation
Work Plan

February 2012





Legend

- Extent of Petroleum Contaminated Soil With Depth and Area

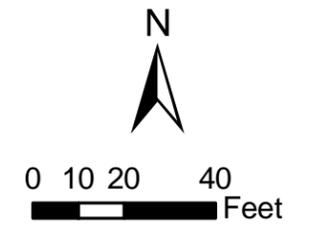


Figure 3
Removal Areas
Ocean Cape Radio Relay Station
Removal Action and
Site Investigation Work Plan

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