

1488
~~14887~~ 113298

BY THE U.S. GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE
**Report To The Secretaries Of Defense,
The Interior, And Transportation**

Protection And Prompt Disposal Can Prevent Destruction Of Excess Facilities In Alaska

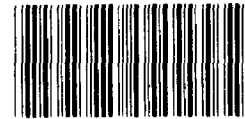
Federal agencies may withdraw land from the public domain and use it for their program requirements. When an agency no longer needs the property, it notifies the Department of the Interior, which determines whether the land is suitable for return to the public domain or for disposal.

GAO found that excess facilities on land withdrawn from the public domain in Alaska are not being protected and maintained and are subject to extensive deterioration and vandalism while awaiting disposal. Long delays in the disposal process and a lack of protection allow excess property to sit idle and become essentially worthless. Untimely actions by the Department of the Interior and holding agencies have created this situation.

GAO makes several recommendations aimed at speeding up the disposal process and protecting property awaiting disposal.



9/20/29



113298

LCD-80-96
SEPTEMBER 12, 1980

For sale by:

**Superintendent of Documents
U.S. Government Printing Office
Washington, D.C. 20402**

Telephone (202) 783-3238

**Members of Congress; heads of Federal, State,
and local government agencies; members of the press;
and libraries can obtain GAO documents from:**

**U.S. General Accounting Office
Document Handling and Information
Services Facility
P.O. Box 6015
Gaithersburg, Md. 20760**

Telephone (202) 275-6241

B-196565

The Honorable Harold Brown
The Secretary of Defense

The Honorable Neil E. Goldschmidt
The Secretary of Transportation

The Honorable Cecil D. Andrus
The Secretary of the Interior

This report discusses the results of our review of agencies' policies, procedures, and practices for protecting and disposing of excess property previously withdrawn from the public domain in Alaska. The report contains suggestions to prevent destruction of excess facilities through better protection and timely disposal action by agencies.

We discussed this report with agency officials and their comments were incorporated where appropriate.

This report also contains recommendations to you on pages 13 and 21. As you know, section 236 of the Legislative Reorganization Act of 1970 requires the head of a Federal agency to submit a written statement on actions taken on our recommendations to the House Committee on Government Operations and the Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs not later than 60 days after the date of the report and to the House and Senate Committees on Appropriations with the agency's first request for appropriations made more than 60 days after the date of the report.

We are sending copies of this report to the Chairmen, House and Senate Committees on Appropriations, House Committee on Government Operations, and Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs; and to the Director, Office of Management and Budget; the Secretaries of the Army and Air Force; the Director, Bureau of Land Management; the Administrator, Federal Aviation Administration; the Commandant of the Coast Guard; the Administrator of General Services; and other interested parties.



for Donald J. Horan
R. W. Gutmann
Director



D I G E S T

Federal agencies have not protected and maintained facilities they have built on lands withdrawn from the public domain in Alaska which they no longer need. Long delays in the disposal process and the lack of protection have allowed property improvements to suffer extensive deterioration and vandalism.

When land which was originally withdrawn from the public domain by a Federal agency for its program requirements becomes excess to the agency's needs, the agency notifies the Department of the Interior's Bureau of Land Management. The Bureau determines if the land is suitable for return to the public domain. If it has been changed substantially by improvements, the land is not returned to the public domain. Instead, the Bureau requests the General Services Administration to dispose of the property. (See p. 1.)

As of September 30, 1979, the Bureau in Alaska had 123 open case files on property excess to the needs of Federal agencies. Of these, 31 had major improvements with an acquisition cost of about \$111 million. Agencies reporting these properties as excess included the Air Force, the Army, the Coast Guard, and the Federal Aviation Administration. GAO reviewed 5 of the 31 cases with improvements costing over \$23 million. (See pp. 4 and 6.)

Long delays in the disposal process and a lack of protection have allowed properties to sit idle and become essentially worthless. Some deteriorated facilities have become safety and health hazards and continually project an image of Government waste. (See pp. 5 to 12.)

LCD-80-96

Holding agencies are required to protect and maintain excess property until disposal, but they have not done so. For example, the Army closed a missile site south of Fairbanks, Alaska, in June 1970 and reported it as excess to the Bureau in August 1971. According to the Army, the property was in good condition when it was abandoned in 1970; but since the Army left the site, it has not protected or maintained the facilities which originally cost \$5 million.

GAO visited the site in November 1979 and found that the facilities had been extensively damaged by vandals and the elements. Windows and electrical fixtures were broken or removed; doors were missing. Property left at the site--poles, transformers, floodlights, chain link fencing, and gates--had been stolen. (See pp. 7 to 9.)

In late 1977 the Coast Guard closed a navigation site located south of Kodiak, Alaska. One of the buildings at this site is being lived in by a foreman of a cattle ranch and his family. When the Coast Guard left the site, the sewage treatment plant was turned off. Since the sewage system is being used by the building occupants and the treatment plant is not in operation, 1 inch of raw sewage had backed up in a 20X40 foot section of one building, creating a health hazard. (See p. 7.)

Untimely actions by the holding agencies and the Bureau delay the disposal of excess properties. Some agencies have abandoned properties before reporting them excess, and others have taken years to decide whether properties not in use should be declared excess. (See p. 14.) For example, the Coast Guard took 12 months to determine if any of its activities needed an excess site at Sitkinak Island. The Army took 14 months to see if either the Air Force or the Coast Guard needed one of its excess Nike sites. (See p. 15.)

The Bureau has not actively pursued the processing of property disposals. Bureau personnel said their resources are allocated to the problems of conveying lands to the Natives and to the State of Alaska, and therefore, disposals suffer. (See p. 14.)

GAO believes that a major factor contributing to delays in the disposal process is a lack of incentives to ensure timely action. Bureau regulations do not require that disposals be completed within a specified time, and the Bureau is not responsible for protecting and maintaining property when delays occur.

When long delays occur, the cost of protecting excess properties may be prohibitive, unnecessary, and a burden on the holding agency. Protecting excess properties is not cost effective when the protection and maintenance costs exceed the value of improvements. In such cases, the property should be destroyed according to Federal Property Management Regulations. (See pp. 3 and 20.)

RECOMMENDATIONS

GAO recommends that the Secretaries of Defense and Transportation require their agencies in Alaska to determine the condition of current and future excess properties under their jurisdiction and comply with the Federal Property Management Regulations by:

- Protecting and maintaining properties pending transfer to another agency or disposal.
- Destroying (1) properties having no commercial value and (2) properties where the estimated cost of continued protection and maintenance will exceed the estimated proceeds from their sale.
- Not abandoning the properties. (See p. 13.)

Also, GAO recommends that the Secretaries of Defense and Transportation promptly notify the Bureau when property is going to be excess. (See p. 22.)

To reduce delays in processing excess improved property previously withdrawn from the public domain, GAO recommends that the Secretaries of Defense and Transportation promptly notify the Bureau of Land Management when they will excess the property.

To expedite the disposal process, GAO recommends that the Secretary of the Interior require the Bureau of Land Management to establish and follow a specified time schedule for determining whether excess property should be returned to the public domain or transferred to the General Services Administration for disposal.

AGENCY COMMENTS

GAO submitted draft copies of this report to the agencies involved and later obtained oral comments from agency officials. These officials agreed with the facts presented in the report.

C o n t e n t s

	<u>Page</u>	
DIGEST	i	
CHAPTER		
1	INTRODUCTION	1
	Process for disposing of excess property	1
	Protection and maintenance of excess real property	2
	Objectives, scope, and methodology	4
2	PROPERTY COSTING MILLIONS IS ALLOWED TO SIT IDLE AND BECOME ESSENTIALLY WORTHLESS	6
	Examples of deteriorated property	6
	Excess sites are health and safety hazards	12
	Conclusions	13
	Recommendations	13
	Agency comments	13
3	WHY EXCESS FEDERAL PROPERTIES IN ALASKA BECOME WORTHLESS	14
	Reasons for the long delays in disposing of excess improved land in Alaska	14
	Agencies do not protect and maintain excess properties	16
	Conclusions	21
	Recommendations	21

ABBREVIATIONS

BLM	Bureau of Land Management
GAO	General Accounting Office
GSA	General Services Administration
FAA	Federal Aviation Administration



CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Certain lands in the United States are considered to be public domain lands because they have never left Federal ownership. In Alaska, as of March 31, 1980, over 171 million acres belonged to the public domain.

These lands are administered by the Department of the Interior's Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and may be made available to other Federal agencies if needed for a Federal program. In these instances, the land is referred to as having been withdrawn from the public domain. When the agency no longer needs the land, BLM must determine if it is suitable for return to the public domain. Lands which have been substantially changed in character by improvements are not suitable as public lands and are to be disposed of by the General Services Administration (GSA).

PROCESS FOR DISPOSING OF EXCESS PROPERTY

Federal Property Management Regulations provide that agencies holding lands withdrawn from the public domain notify BLM of their intention to relinquish such lands when they no longer need the lands. On the basis of a field examination and a land report, BLM determines if the property should be disposed of or returned to the public domain. If the property is not suitable to be returned to the public domain, BLM promptly reports it to GSA as excess. GSA then screens other Federal agencies to see if they need it. If not, GSA may offer the property to State and local governments and to nonprofit organizations. If the property is not selected by these agencies and organizations, GSA offers it for sale to the general public.

Additional disposal steps in Alaska

Disposition of property in Alaska, however, requires an additional step. Prior to making property available to State and local governments, BLM must consider whether disposal should be accomplished under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971.

The Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971, as amended, settled Alaskan Native use and occupancy rights as recognized by the Congress in 1884. The act established

native village and regional corporations and granted the corporations about 44 million acres. Native village and regional corporations had to select land by December 18, 1975, from certain excess Federal land, except land formerly withdrawn for national defense purposes. As of March 31, 1980, about 14.6 million acres had been conveyed.

One of the regional corporations--Cook Inlet Region, Incorporated--is located in the most highly developed area of Alaska, and little public domain land was available for selection within its region. The Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act was amended in January 1976 to permit that regional corporation to select lands outside of its region. The amendment also permitted the corporation to select lands excessed after December 18, 1975, and to select property which had originally been withdrawn for national defense purposes. The State of Alaska must approve each excess property as being available for selection by Cook Inlet Region, Incorporated. If the State does not agree that the property should be made available for selection, it is turned over to GSA for disposal.

PROTECTION AND MAINTENANCE OF EXCESS REAL PROPERTY

The Federal agency holding excess real property is responsible for protecting and maintaining the property until it is conveyed, or responsibility for it is assumed by GSA. Concerning agency responsibility, the Federal Property Management Regulations provide that:

"The holding agency shall retain custody and accountability for excess and surplus real property including related personal property and shall perform the physical care, handling, protection, maintenance, and repairs of such property pending its transfer to another agency or its disposal."

The regulations further provide that:

"The holding agency shall be responsible for the expense of physical care, handling, protection, maintenance, and repair of such property pending transfer or disposal for not more than 12 months, plus the period to the first day of the succeeding quarter of

the fiscal year after the date 1/ that the property is available for immediate disposition. * * *

"In the event the property is not transferred to a Federal agency or disposed of during the period mentioned [above]* * *, the expense of physical care, handling, protection, maintenance, and repairs of such property from and after the expiration date of said period shall be reimbursed to the holding agency by the disposal agency."

Thus, under normal disposal procedures, holding agencies are responsible for the expense of protecting and maintaining the property for a specified period of time. After that period, the disposal agency--usually GSA--is responsible for such expense.

Disposal of property previously withdrawn from the public domain, however, is not so straightforward. The property management regulations provide that agencies holding such property do not report it to GSA as excess until after BLM determines it is not suitable for return to the public domain. Thus, according to the requirements of the Federal Property Management Regulations, the amount of time an agency is required to maintain property the agency no longer needs depends on how fast BLM does its job. Regarding abandonment and destruction of the property the regulations provide that:

"No property shall be abandoned, destroyed or donated by a Federal agency--unless a duly authorized official of that agency finds in writing, either that (1) such property has no commercial value, or (2) the estimated cost of its continued care and handling would exceed the estimated proceeds from its sale. * * *

* * * any Federal agency having control of real property which has no commercial value or of which the estimated cost of continued care and handling would exceed the estimated proceeds from its sale, is authorized: * * * To destroy Government-owned improvements and related personal property located on Government owned land. Abandonment of such property is not authorized."

1/Another section of the regulation notes that normally this will be the date that GSA receives an acceptable report of excess.

As of September 30, 1979, BLM in Alaska had 123 open case files on land which Federal agencies had reported as no longer being needed. Of these, 31 had major improvements costing about \$111 million, as shown in the following table.

<u>Agency</u>	<u>Number of cases</u>	<u>Cost of improvements</u>
U.S. Army	5	\$ 55,897,825
U.S. Air Force	9	28,538,976
U.S. Coast Guard	4	12,226,570
U.S. Navy	3	10,757,000
Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)	7	2,109,040
U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration	2	1,740,950
Alaska Power Administration	<u>1</u>	<u>30,000</u>
Total	<u>31</u>	<u>\$111,300,361</u>

Most of the open cases in Alaska have been in the disposal process for years. We reviewed the disposal process in Alaska to determine why it takes so long and to identify ways to improve it.

OBJECTIVES, SCOPE, AND METHODOLOGY

The subject of our review was agency relinquishments of withdrawn public domain lands which had significant improvements. We reviewed excess Federal land case files at BLM's offices in Anchorage and Fairbanks, Alaska.

Our review was made during the winter months. In order to visit the sites and observe the conditions of the improvements, we selected five cases south of Fairbanks for detailed review. Cases reviewed were not selected statistically, therefore, we cannot state that the conditions found are representative of all open cases.

Cases selected for review had total improvements costing about \$23.2 million. Agencies reporting these properties

included the Air Force, the Army, the Coast Guard, and FAA. The dates of relinquishment ranged from 1968 to 1979. We visited each site except the FAA site at Shuyak. Bad weather precluded our visiting that site.

We interviewed officials at each holding agency and reviewed files and other information relating to the agency relinquishments. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers files and personnel also provided information for the military relinquishments.

Information regarding the disposal process and actions was obtained both at BLM and GSA. Since BLM is the primary agency for relinquishments, we interviewed its personnel and reviewed its files regarding delays.

We also visited two vacated U.S. Army Nike sites which are being protected and discussed with Army personnel the problems and costs involved in protecting these sites.

CHAPTER 2

PROPERTY COSTING MILLIONS IS ALLOWED TO SIT IDLE AND BECOME ESSENTIALLY WORTHLESS

In Alaska, improvements to Federal lands costing millions of dollars are being wasted because of ineffective management by Federal agencies. Federal agencies allow property improvements on excess land to sit idle for years and thus become essentially worthless due to vandalism, theft, and deterioration. Also, some of the properties have become safety and health hazards and continually project an image of Government waste.

The extent to which excess properties have deteriorated is illustrated by the following discussion of the properties we reviewed. For comparative purposes, we also visited two excess Nike sites that the Army has protected and maintained. These comparisons are also shown below. Agencies' actions or inactions permitting the waste are discussed in detail in chapter 3.

EXAMPLES OF DETERIORATED PROPERTY

We reviewed the following five cases in detail:

<u>Holding agency</u>	<u>Location in Alaska</u>	<u>Cost of improvements</u>	<u>Years in disposal process</u>	<u>Current condition</u>
U.S. Coast Guard	Sitkinak Island	\$12,084,570	1	Fair
U.S. Army	Near Fairbanks (Nike Site Jig)	5,070,265	8-1/2	Very poor
U.S. Army	Near Fairbanks (Nike Site Love)	5,439,600	8	Very poor
U.S. Air Force	Near King Salmon	444,000	8-1/2	Very poor
FAA	Shuyak Island (near Kodiak)	<u>118,955</u>	11-1/2	Very poor
Total		<u>\$23,157,390</u>		

Coast Guard, Sitkinak Island Station

Sitkinak Island is located about 150 air miles south of Kodiak, Alaska. The Coast Guard withdrew the land in January 1963 for use as a long-range aid to a navigation site. The Coast Guard closed the site in late 1977 as being excess to its needs, but did not notify BLM until January 1979. Buildings and other improvements on the land cost about \$12 million. Personal property costing about \$221,000 was left at the site because the Coast Guard concluded its removal was not cost effective.

The Coast Guard reported that the property was in good condition when it abandoned the site in 1977. Since leaving the site, the Coast Guard has not protected or maintained the facilities. We visited the site in November 1979 and found that personal property, such as a tractor and its replacement parts and beds, had been stolen. Also, the buildings were beginning to deteriorate. For example, the roof in the living quarters is failing, and the roof has failed completely in a section of the engineering building. Vandalism has not been a problem at this site because it is remote. One of the buildings is being lived in by the foreman of a cattle ranch and his family. When the Coast Guard left the site, the sewage treatment plant was turned off. However, the foreman's family is using the sewer system, resulting in raw sewage backing up through a toilet in the engineering building, covering a 20x40 foot section of the building with 1 inch of raw sewage.

Army, Nike Site Jig

Nike Site Jig is located about 34 miles south of Fairbanks, Alaska. The Army withdrew the land in 1956 through 1958 for the Nike missile site. Buildings and other improvements cost about \$5 million. The Army closed the site as being excess to its needs on June 30, 1970, and reported the land and improvements to BLM on August 19, 1971.

The Army reported that the property was in good condition when it abandoned the site in 1970. Since leaving the site, the Army has not protected or maintained the facilities. We visited the site in November 1979 and found that it had been almost totally destroyed by vandals and the elements. As illustrated by the following photographs, all windows were broken or removed, and most of the roof was gone. Most of the doors were missing, and all electrical fixtures were removed or broken. Nothing in the building was salvageable.



**SECTION OF BATTERY CONTROL AND ENLISTED MEN'S BARRACKS,
25,497 SQUARE FEET, ORIGINAL COST - \$1,944,500.**



**CONTROL BUILDING AT NIKE SITE JIG, 2,038 SQUARE FEET,
ORIGINAL COST - \$141,000.**

Barracks and dining facilities had been completely tripped, as illustrated by the following photograph.



MESS HALL, ENLISTED MEN'S BARRACKS.

Other property left at the site has been stolen, including telephone poles, transformers, and floodlights. In addition, most of the 7,785 lineal feet of chain link fencing and both 16-foot gates have been stolen.

Army, Nike Site Love

Nike Site Love is located about 11 miles northwest of Fairbanks, Alaska. The site's 1,060 acres were withdrawn from the public domain in May 1958. Buildings and other improvements cost about \$5.4 million. The Army reported the site was in good condition when it closed the site and reported the land and improvements to BLM as excess in 1971. Since leaving the site, the Army have not protected or maintained it.

We visited the site in October 1979 and found the site in a similar condition as Nike Site Jig. Improvements had been totally destroyed by vandals and the elements.

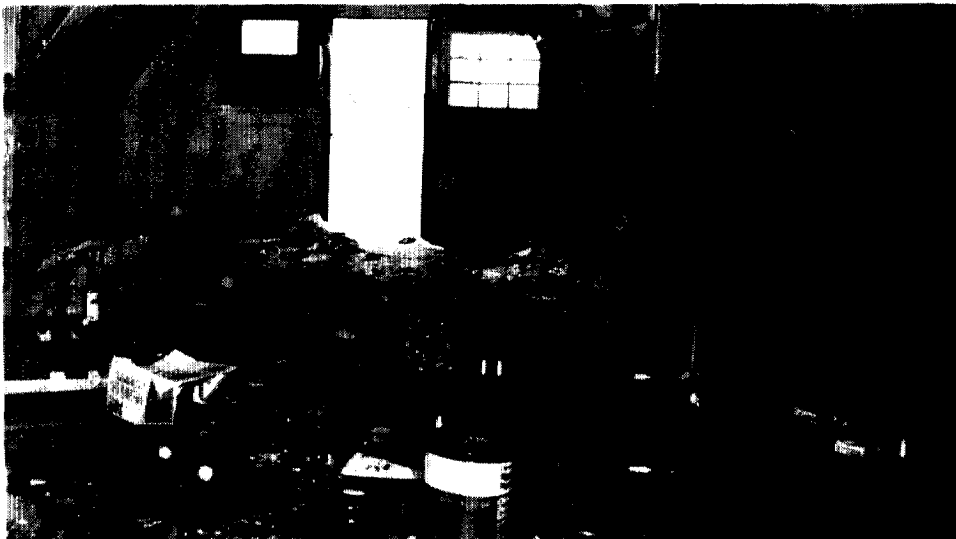
Air Force, King Salmon
Recreation Camps

King Salmon is located about 300 miles southwest of Anchorage, Alaska. The Air Force has two recreation areas-- Lake Camp and Rapids Camp--about 15 miles from King Salmon. Land for the sites was withdrawn from the public domain in June 1965. Improvements at the Lake Camp cost about \$186,000, and the improvements at the Rapids Camp cost about \$258,000. The Air Force closed the sites in July 1976 and notified BLM on June 20, 1977, that they were excess to Air Force needs.

The Air Force has not protected or maintained the improvements at either site. Nevertheless, as recent as October 1978, BLM reported that the camps' improvements were substandard, but in usable condition.

We visited both camps in November 1979 and found the Lake Camp was almost nonexistent. Buildings having 7,790 square feet were destroyed in December 1978 by fire set by vandals. Vandalism, lack of maintenance, and exposure to weather have essentially rendered the remaining structures worthless.

Buildings were still standing at the Rapids Camp but had been vandalized, as illustrated by the following photograph. Doors and windows were broken or removed, light fixtures were removed, and the sewage treatment plant, which was inoperative when the Air Force closed the site, was rendered useless by vandalism.



**INTERIOR SHOWING DEGREE OF TRESPASS AND VANDALISM
AT RAPIDS CAMP.**

FAA, Shuyak Island Station

Shuyak Island is located about 60 miles north of Kodiak, Alaska. FAA withdrew the 266-acre site in October 1947 for an air navigation site. Site improvements cost about \$107,000. FAA closed the site in late 1967 and reported it to BLM as excess property on July 30, 1968. Personal property costing about \$12,000 was left at the site.

Since leaving the site, FAA has not protected or maintained the facilities. We did not visit this site; but a BLM 1977 photograph, shown below, illustrates the degree of destruction to a house which cost \$30,000 in 1947. Half of the roof was missing, and the dwelling was generally in shambles.



QUARTERS AND EQUIPMENT BUILDING, 1,605 SQUARE FEET, ORIGINAL 1947 COST - \$30,000.

(BLM 1977 photograph)

An FAA trip report dated May 13, 1970, shows:

"The quarters were a mess. There are empty cans, books, glass, and furniture dumped all over the floor. The other, a 2-bedroom house, had partitions ripped down and lumber all over the floor. Fixtures were ripped out of the kitchen while the washer and dryer were tipped over in the furnace room."

EXCESS SITES ARE HEALTH
AND SAFETY HAZARDS

The poor condition of the properties and lack of protection result in the sites being safety and health hazards. For example, an accident at Nike Site Love resulted in serious injury to one young man. The site was not protected, and the young man had climbed to the top of an electrical tower. He was severely shocked when he twice contacted a 20,000 volt power transmission line. Although he survived the shocks, he was in intensive care and in critical condition for some time.

During our visit to a missile storage bunker at Nike Site Love, an auditor almost fell through a floor opening about 8 feet deep. The cover for a 4x7 foot access hole was removed. The bunker was dark, and the opening was not marked. Pipes and a motor were at the bottom. Also, the discharge of raw sewage from the backed up sewer at Sitkinak is a health hazard.

These properties not only become safety and health hazards, but they project a continuing image of Government waste. For example, in commenting on the FAA site discussed above, an FAA letter dated July 15, 1970, noted that:

"Each succeeding day allows more people to observe the deplorable condition of the personal property in the vacant houses at Shuyak. This condition does not help the public image of the FAA."

- - - - -

At each of the sites visited, except Sitkinak where only personal property had been removed, almost everything of value had either been removed or been destroyed.

Everything from lumber to security fencing has been stolen. At one of the Nike sites, an Alaskan State Trooper arrested an individual who was found with trunks, equipment, and a working crew removing the security fencing. At the sites we visited, there was unauthorized removal of two 150-kilowatt power generators, automatic fire detection systems, lumber, telephone poles, transformers, doors, and electrical fixtures. During our visit to a Nike site, a person on the property said that he was trying to locate insulating material for his home.

CONCLUSIONS

Federal agencies have permitted excess improved land to sit idle and the improvements to become essentially worthless due to vandalism and deterioration. In some cases, the improvements have deteriorated to a point where they (1) have become safety and health hazards and (2) are an eyesore and present a continuing image of Government waste. Holding agencies--the Departments of Defense and Transportation--should clean up such property. Cleanup at some sites may require destruction or removal of remaining improvements.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For current excess facilities on land withdrawn from public domain, we recommend that the Secretaries of Defense and Transportation require their agencies in Alaska to determine the condition of excess properties under their jurisdiction and to comply with the Federal Properties Management Regulations by:

- Protecting and maintaining properties pending transfer to another agency or disposal.
- Destroying (1) properties having no commercial value and (2) properties where the estimated cost of continued care and handling will exceed the estimated proceeds from their sale.
- Not abandoning the properties.

AGENCY COMMENTS

We submitted draft copies of this report to the agencies involved and subsequently obtained oral comments from agency officials. The officials essentially agreed with the facts presented in this report, and we made minor changes based on their comments.

CHAPTER 3

WHY EXCESS FEDERAL PROPERTIES

IN ALASKA BECOME WORTHLESS

Improvements to excess Federal lands in Alaska are allowed to become essentially worthless because of long delays in disposing of the lands and because the agencies holding the excess lands are not protecting and maintaining the improvements.

REASONS FOR THE LONG DELAYS IN DISPOSING OF EXCESS IMPROVED LAND IN ALASKA

Excess improved land in Alaska, not suitable for return to the public domain, often takes years for disposal. The long delays result primarily from inaction on the part of BLM in processing the properties. Delays are also caused by the Federal holding agencies not reporting the properties promptly to BLM and by requirements imposed by the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act.

Disposal delays caused by BLM

Federal Management Circular 73-5 dated December 17, 1973, provides that property not suitable for return to the public domain be promptly reported to GSA as excess. However, BLM regulations do not specify a time limit for action during each step of the disposal process. In view of this, and since BLM is not responsible for protecting and maintaining the properties, BLM personnel place a low priority on disposing of the properties.

At three of the sites we reviewed, long delays resulted because BLM personnel did not actively pursue the cases. For example, the Army reported Nike Site Jig to BLM as excess in August 1971. BLM did not make a land report because it did not make a field examination to determine whether the property was suitable for return to the public domain until February 1979, or 7-1/2 years later.

At Nike Site Love, BLM made the field report determining the property should not be returned to the public domain less than 1 year after it was declared excess by the Army. However, BLM did not request GSA's concurrence until 3 years later.

FAA reported the Shuyak Island Station as excess to BLM on July 30, 1968. The case was not actively processed until March 18, 1970, when an oil spill was reported at the station. FAA disposed of the oil stored at the station during May 1970 but did not notify BLM until June 21, 1971. Nine months after being informed, BLM confirmed that the Environmental Protection Agency was satisfied with FAA's action. No further substantive action was taken by BLM until July 1975 when a survey was completed. One of the villages filed a village selection application for the station on December 16, 1975. About 3 years later, BLM notified the Native corporation that the land was not available for its selection, and even if the land had been, the application was almost 1 year past the filing deadline.

BLM personnel stated that they allocated their resources to work on the many problems involved in conveying lands to the Natives and to the State of Alaska. As a result, disposals have suffered. For example, between 1976 and 1979 only 49 cases were closed, compared to 140 cases for the same period a decade earlier. The number of open cases at the end of the fiscal year increased from 43 in 1967 to 123 in 1979.

Disposal delays caused by the excessing agency

In two of the cases we reviewed, additional delays were caused by the Federal agencies which held and reported the properties as excess. For example, delays occurred in excessing the Sitkinak Island site because it took 12 months for Coast Guard headquarters to screen the property for other Coast Guard operational requirements and to prepare legal and engineering documents required for disposal actions. The Coast Guard reported the property to BLM as excess on January 16, 1979.

The Army delayed reporting Nike Site Jig as excess to BLM so that the Coast Guard and Air Force could determine if they had a need for the property. This resulted in a 14-month delay. Department of Defense policy provides that written holds beyond 60 days should not be honored without the assumption of financial responsibility.

Disposal delays caused by the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act

For a variety of reasons, the Department of the Interior has not been able to rapidly convey land title to Alaskan Native corporations. These reasons were discussed in our

report "Land Title Should be Conveyed to Alaska Natives Faster" June 21, 1978, CED-78-130. That report included recommendations to help prevent these delays. However, as of March 31, 1980, only about 14.6 million of the 44 million acres had been conveyed to the Natives. According to a BLM official, it will be well into the mid-1980s before a major portion of the land is conveyed. Thus, the excess improved lands that have been selected by the Natives may sit idle for years.

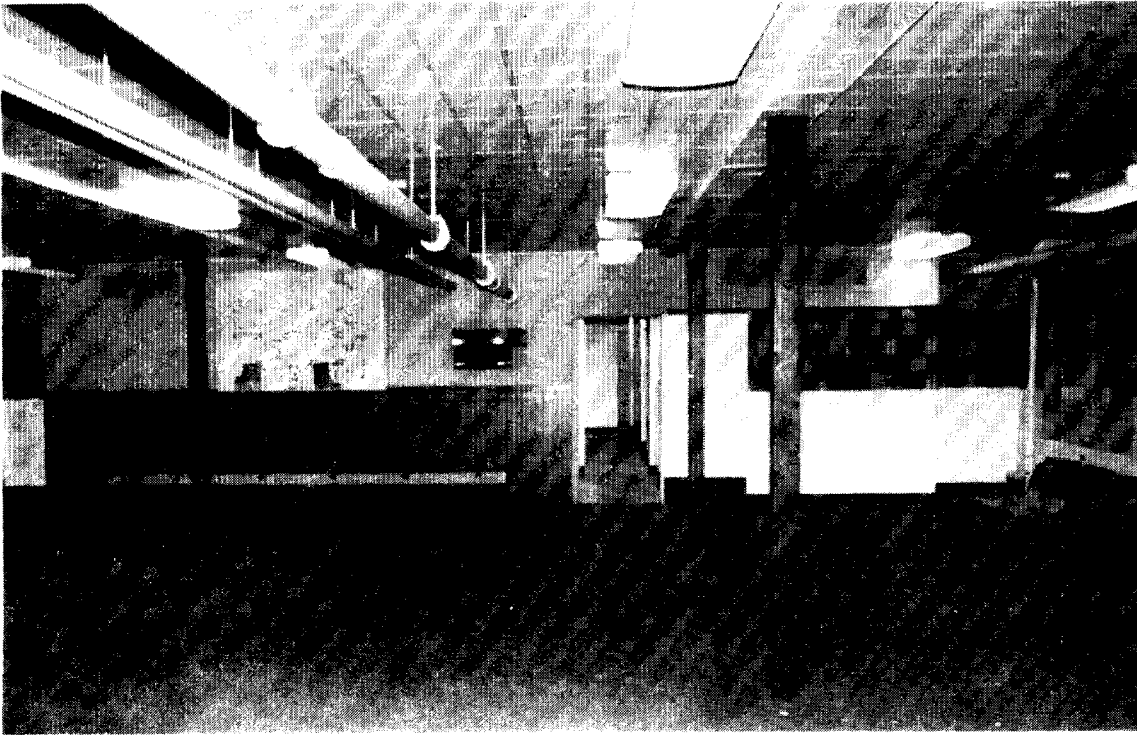
If the excess properties are not protected and maintained during these delays, they will be subject to vandalism and deterioration, such as that described in chapter 2.

AGENCIES DO NOT PROTECT AND MAINTAIN EXCESS PROPERTIES

Federal agencies excessing improved lands in Alaska are not protecting and maintaining the properties as required by the Federal Property Management Regulations. According to representatives of FAA, the Coast Guard, the Army, and the Air Force, they do not protect and maintain the properties because of the high cost. However, the Army has protected three Nike Sites--Summit, Bay, and Point--since they were vacated.

The protected Nike Sites were constructed similar to Nike Sites Jig and Love, previously discussed. To compare the conditions at protected and unprotected property, we also visited two of the protected sites--Bay and Point. Structures at the protected sites were usable, while ones at the unprotected sites were not. For example, the mess halls at the protected sites were in excellent condition, but the ones at unprotected sites were beyond repair. The differences between the two are illustrated by the photographs on the following page.

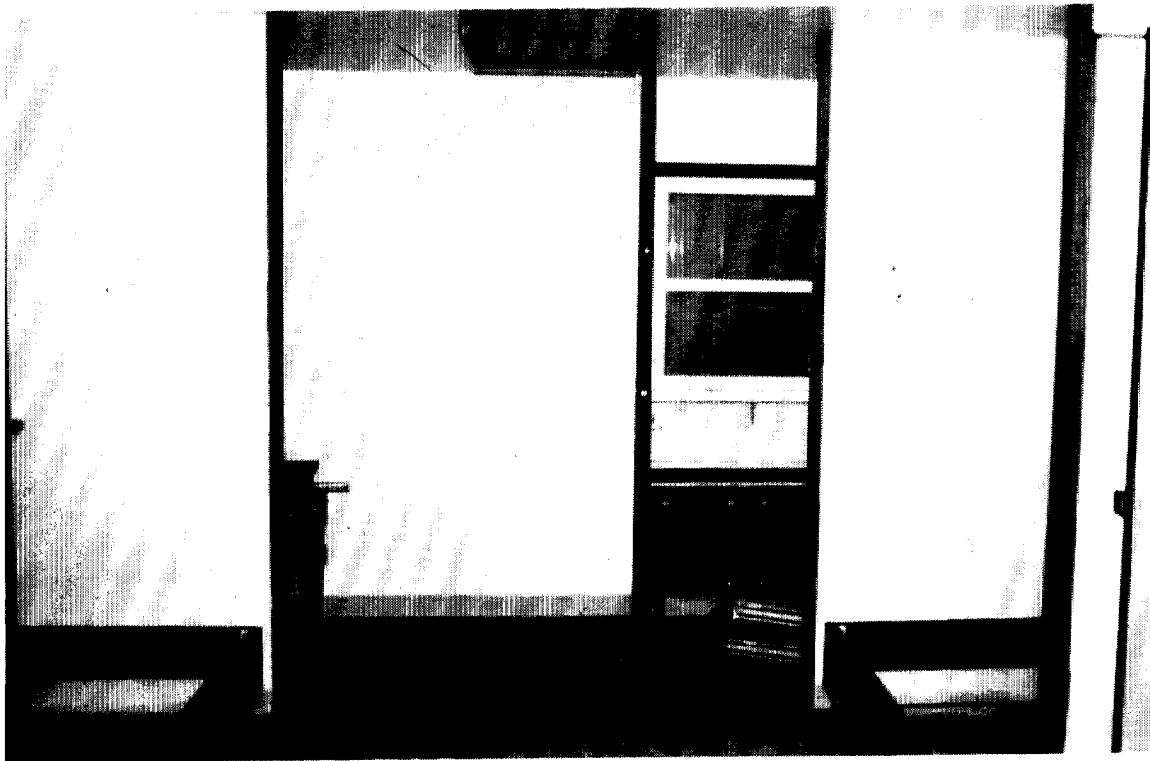
The bedrooms in the enlisted men's barracks at the unprotected sites were uninhabitable, whereas the bedrooms at the protected sites were in excellent condition. Also, the protected sites were not vandalized, as illustrated by the conditions of the restrooms at protected and unprotected sites. The contrasting conditions of these facilities are illustrated by the photographs on pages 18 and 19.



MESS HALL AT PROTECTED NIKE SITE POINT.



MESS HALL AT UNPROTECTED NIKE SITE LOVE.



BEDROOM AT PROTECTED NIKE SITE POINT.



BEDROOM AT UNPROTECTED NITE SITE JIG.



RESTROOM AT PROTECTED NIKE SITE BAY.



RESTROOM AT UNPROTECTED NIKE SITE JIG.

In a letter dated September 24, 1979, the Commanding General for the 172d Infantry Brigade (Alaska), summed up the reasons for protecting Nike Sites Bay and Point.

"Absence of physical security at remote sites could focus current anti-Federal Government attitude among the population of the State against the Army. Vandalized Government facilities will be viewed by the public as a further example of Government waste and ineptitude. Destruction of Government property at these remote locations is inevitable unless secured. Already, civilians have inquired as to when the Army plans to vacate the sites so electrical wiring and plumbing can be removed. Furthermore, the Army is leaving itself liable to suits from persons injured while trespassing. As long as the Army is responsible, physical security must be provided until a new owner assumes responsibility."

The Army uses troops from the 172d Infantry Brigade to guard the sites. In the 4-month period ended November 30, 1979, the Army spent about \$139,000 to protect the two sites. As an alternative, the Army has contracted for guard services at the two sites. Contracted protection cost for 1 year at both sites is \$212,509.

The Air Force does not provide full-time protection for its excess property, but does provide surveillance. Surveillance consists of site inspection every week or two. An Air Force representative told us that surveillance serves only to identify and report, rather than prevent damage.

The cost of protecting excess sites is a burden to the agencies because funding for site protection and maintenance comes from operation and maintenance funds, which are limited and needed for current operations.

If delays in disposing of the properties continue, protection costs could become prohibitive. For example, properties selected by the Natives under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act may not be conveyed until the mid-1980s. Federal agencies will bear the burden of protecting and maintaining the unneeded properties for years or suffer the consequences of theft, vandalism, and safety and health hazard problems.

CONCLUSIONS

To prevent the destruction of valuable excess Federal property and to reduce the costs of protecting and maintaining excess properties, delays in the disposal process must be eliminated. Long delays occur because of BLM's inaction in processing cases. BLM has been able to defer action on these cases because it does not face time limits and is not responsible for the cost of protecting and maintaining properties.

A less serious delay, but unnecessary, is agencies not timely reporting excess property to BLM. Agency delays are caused by long screening times for other interests within the excessing agency. In addition, some Department of Defense agencies hold up excessing the property while other agencies determine if they want it. This should not, but does, occur for excess military property. Department of Defense policy provides a 30-day limit for screening, and written holds beyond 60 days should not be honored without the assumption of financial responsibility.

On the basis of our review, we found that Federal agencies in Alaska were not protecting their excess properties as required by Federal Property Management Regulations. Some agencies use spot checks, but these serve only to identify the deterioration and destruction that has occurred.

Federal agencies need to protect their excess properties, thus lessening the chance for theft, vandalism, and safety and health hazards. The perception of Government waste would also be lessened if the properties were protected.

However, the high cost of protecting excess properties becomes prohibitive when long delays occur in disposing of the properties. Protecting property during these delays is an unnecessary expenditure of funds and an unnecessary burden on the agency. It is not cost effective to protect property for any length of time when protection and maintenance costs exceed the value of improvements and their removal costs. In addition, action must be taken to preclude unnecessary expenditure of Federal funds for protecting unused facilities for those cases awaiting possible conveyance of land set aside for Alaskan Natives.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To reduce theft, vandalism, and safety and health hazards at excess Federal property sites in Alaska, we recommend that

the Secretaries of Defense and Transportation require that their agencies excessing improved land comply with the Federal Property Management Regulations, specifically those relating to protecting and maintaining the properties during the disposal process, disposing of properties with no commercial value, and not abandoning excess properties.

To reduce delays in processing excess improved property previously withdrawn from the public domain, we recommend that the Secretaries of Defense and Transportation promptly notify BLM when they will excess the property.

To expedite the disposal process, we recommend that the Secretary of the Interior require BLM to establish and follow a specified time schedule for determining whether excess property should be returned to the public domain or transferred to GSA for disposal.

(945375)



AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER

UNITED STATES
GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

OFFICIAL BUSINESS
PENALTY FOR PRIVATE USE, \$300

POSTAGE AND FEES PAID
U. S. GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE



THIRD CLASS