

GLBA BACKCOUNTRY COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

Approved: _____

Susan L. Boudreau
Superintendent, Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve

Effective date: 4/15/2014

This plan is in effect immediately and will remain in effect until superseded or cancelled.

Contents

1. Applicability
2. Definition of Backcountry Operations
3. Required Communication Devices
4. Dispatch Centers
5. Three Step Communications Process
6. Loss of Communication
7. Tracking and Response
8. Exceptions
9. Figures
10. Appendices

1 Applicability

This plan applies to all Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve (GLBA) employees, volunteers, visiting National Park Service (NPS) employees, and nonemployees (such as some contractors) whose daily work is supervised by an NPS employee. In this plan, all of these user groups combined are referred to as “employees.”

2 Definition of Backcountry Operations

For the purpose of this plan, backcountry operations include any on-duty operation meeting any of the following criteria:

Aviation

- All “special use” flights (as outlined in the Park Aviation Plan) including any flight to or from Dry Bay.

Motor Vehicle Use

- Any form of motorized transport in the preserve that is outside of the Dry Bay Camp Area (Figure 1)

Boating

- All motorboat operations *except* by cruise ship, tour boat, or by charter or collaborator vessel under a boater permit
- All nonmotorized boat operations

Hiking

- All hikes in the park that are outside of the Bartlett Cove Developed Area (Figure 2)
- All hikes, including any form of non-motorized transport, in the preserve that are outside of the Dry Bay Camp Area

Camping

- All overnight camping in the park outside of the Bartlett Cove developed area
- All overnight camping in the preserve outside of the Dry Bay camp area

3. Required Communication Devices

An effective means of communication is necessary whenever working in or traveling into the backcountry. At the minimum, each group of two or more employees is required to carry at least two portable park radios or have available a satellite phone or stationary radio. Employees working or traveling solo are required to carry one park radio or satellite phone. All other means of communication (SPOT devices, SpyderTrack devices, etc.) are considered to be in addition to but not a replacement for a park radio or satellite phone.

4. Dispatch Centers

Communication with a dispatch center is a key element of all safe backcountry operations. GLBA backcountry communications are routed through the Bartlett Cove Visitor Information Station (VIS) or the NPS Alaska Region Communications Center (ARCC), depending on time of year and time of day.

VIS:

Radio: “KWM20 Bartlett Cove” (the VIS monitors VHF channels 12 and 16)

Phone: (907) 697-2627

Alternate (ranger on duty): (907) 697-2632

Email: glba_visitor_contact_station@nps.gov

In person: head of Bartlett Cove public use dock

The VIS is responsible for dispatch at the following times:

May 1–May 31 8 am to 5 pm

June 1–Aug. 30 7 am to 7 pm

Sept. 1–Sept. 30 8 am to 5 pm

For all other dates and times, dispatch is routed through the ARCC.

ARCC:

Radio: “700” (the ARCC monitors Bartlett Cove VHF ParkNet channel 2 “BearTrack” and Yakutat VHF ParkNet channel 2 “Deception Hills”)

Phone: (907) 683-9555

Alternate (cellphone): (907) 378-5751

Satellite phone: 8816-3145-8390

Email: dena_commcenter@nps.gov

5. Three-step Communications Process

The approved process for employee backcountry communications includes three steps: (1) filing a written backcountry travel plan, (2) checking in and out of service, and (3) making predetermined status checks.

Backcountry Travel Plan

Prior to traveling into the backcountry, each employee or group of employees traveling together is required to file a written Backcountry Travel Plan with the dispatch center that is in service at the time the trip is to begin.

There are three standard Backcountry Travel Plans in use at GLBA:

- **Backcountry Itinerary** (Appendix A) required for all qualifying hikes, camping, and travel by motorized vehicle such as ATV or UTV.
- **Float Plan** (Appendix B) required for all qualifying boating operations
- **Flight Plan** (Appendix C) required for all qualifying flights

Current Backcountry Travel Plan forms can be found at <https://sites.google.com/a/nps.gov/arcc-region/home/documents>

If traveling or working in a group of two or more, only one plan is required for the group. If persons within the group split up, a deviation to the Plan must be reported to the dispatch center.

On any single trip that includes more than one means of transportation, multiple plans may be necessary.

Upon completion of a backcountry trip, it is essential that employees close out their Backcountry Travel Plan with the dispatch center as soon as possible. If you fail to do so, a time-intensive and costly search may ensue, perhaps placing other employees at risk.

Reporting In and Out of Service

All employees shall notify the dispatch center when entering or leaving the backcountry. This is called reporting in and reporting out, respectively. For employees overnighing in the backcountry, a call to dispatch is required each morning before 10 am to report into service. Employees overnighing in the backcountry must prearrange a daily reporting out time with dispatch.

Use of a radio or satellite phone is the preferable method for reporting in and out of service. In some cases, automatic SPOT updates will suffice for status checks, and manual notification by SPOT will fulfill daily in and out of service check-ins. This is allowed only when specifically requested in a Backcountry Travel Plan.

Status Checks

In addition to reporting in and out of service, employees working or traveling in the backcountry are required to check-in with the dispatch center at time intervals determined by the method of travel (Table 1). More frequent status checks are left to the discretion of the employee and/or their supervisor. It is the employee's responsibility to initiate their own status checks.

Status checks are usually accomplished by calling in to a dispatch center via radio or satellite phone. In some cases, the use of an automatically updating SPOT device will relieve this requirement. In other cases, the use of both a radio or satellite phone and a SPOT device are required (Table 1).

Deviations from Route or Schedule

All deviations to travel plans must be reported to the park communications center prior to the deviation or immediately upon discovering the deviation.

Table 1. Frequency of Required Status Checks

Travel Method	Qualifying Backcountry Operation	Status Check Frequency (<i>minimum, in addition to daily reports in and out of service calls</i>)
Air	All “special use” flights (as outlined in the Park Aviation Plan), including any flight to or from Dry Bay.	Every 30 minutes by radio or satellite phone and every 15 minutes automatically by Spydertrack
Motor Vehicle	Any form of motorized transport in the Preserve but outside of the Dry Bay Camp Area	Every four hours by radio or satellite phone or every 30 minutes automatically by SPOT device
Motorboat	All motorboat operations except by cruise ship, tour boat, or by charter or collaborator vessel under a boater permit.	Every four hours by radio or satellite phone or every 30 minutes automatically by SPOT device or Automatic Identification System (AIS)
Nonmotorized boat	All nonmotorized boat operations (see “Exception to check-ins” below).	Every four hours by radio or satellite phone or every 30 minutes automatically by SPOT device
Hike off trail system*	All hikes beyond the Bartlett Cove developed area or Dry Bay camp area, including transport by any nonmotorized means or overnight camping	Every four hours by radio or satellite phone or every 30 minutes automatically by SPOT device
Hike on trail system	All hikes on a developed trail outside of the Bartlett Cove developed area or the Dry Bay camp area	Report in and out of service only
Hazardous operations	All hazardous activities outside of the Bartlett Cove developed area or the Dry Bay camp area (see “Hazardous operations” below).	Additional check-ins to be determined by a risk assessment

Exception to check-ins through a dispatch center for hikes or travel by nonmotorized boats when based out of a “mother ship”

Employees hiking or using nonmotorized boats may report in and out of service and accomplish status checks by reporting directly to a manned mother ship (motorboat or float house) that has its own active float plan and check-ins arranged with a dispatch center. This exception is only valid for instances when the manned mother ship remains within radio range of the employees for the entirety of their hike or nonmotorized boat trip. The frequency of check-ins will be the same as those accomplished through a dispatch center. The mother ship must be able to relay messages to and from a dispatch center, as needed, through the use of a radio or satellite phone. As far as the dispatch center is concerned, these employees are part of the mother ship’s float plan.

Hazardous Operations

Each employee or group of employees involved in a high-risk operation shall base their check in frequency on a risk assessment of their task. High-risk activities include swift-water crossing, hazard tree removal, and emergency response operations. It is recommended that each group of employees engaged in a high risk activity assign one employee to monitor a radio at all times if safe to do so.

Off-Duty Services (nonmandatory)

Tracking services are available through a dispatch center for use by employees who are located in the backcountry for work even when that employee is off-duty. These services may be used, at the employee's option, when an employee has completed his or her workday and decides to hike for recreation.

6. Loss of Communication

Radio Coverage Dead Zones

Operations conducted in areas of suspected spotty radio coverage or radio-dead zones (Figure 3) require special precautions. To facilitate better operational control, personnel entering radio dead zones should contact dispatch prior to entering these areas and again upon exiting. Dispatch should be advised of the time of day that employees expect to enter radio dead zones and when they are expected to exit the dead zone. Use of alternative communication equipment, such as satellite phones, is encouraged to minimize or eliminate the amount of time employees are without radio contact capability.

Communication Equipment Failure

In the event of known communication equipment failure while in the backcountry, the employee has the responsibility to recognize that search efforts may follow and should attempt to intervene by exiting the backcountry, if safe to do so, along predictable routes as soon as possible or by locating another unit with good communication equipment (trail crew, etc.). Exiting the backcountry is preferred unless the exact location of the other unit is known and it can be reached in a timely manner.

7. Tracking and Response

Dispatch Tracking Procedure

Unless specifically requested, the dispatch center will not initiate status checks. The responsibility of the dispatch center is to track employee status checks and calls in and out of service and notify rangers if these calls have been missed. In cases where a backcountry traveler is still in the field when one dispatch center hands service over to the other, it is the responsibility of the first dispatch center to also transfer all relevant information on the traveler (such as hike plans, check-in times, etc.).

Initiation of a Response

If an employee fails to answer or initiate a status check, or fails to call out of service, the dispatch center will make three more attempts at five-minute intervals to make contact. If no contact is made, a dispatcher will notify the ranger on duty, district ranger, or chief ranger and the superintendent, in that order. Ranger staff will be responsible for initiating appropriate action that is intended to locate and ensure the safety of any employee who is unaccounted for. The ranger staff will gather all available information regarding the employee and their described route, plan, weather conditions, area hazards, and other information that will assist in determining an appropriate reaction or response (i.e., search urgency). Efforts to contact the employee will continue. Keep in mind that *the inability to contact an employee does not necessarily prompt an immediate or even delayed response*. This procedure shifts such decisions from a dispatcher to a supervisory park ranger and is consistent with the manner in which all backcountry overdue persons or parties are addressed in the park.

The employee's supervisor will be notified by ranger staff each time efforts are initiated to follow up on employees who fail to respond to status checks or fail to check out of service. In such events, the supervisor is required to notify his or her division chief.

8. Exceptions

Alternative communication procedures are permitted for law enforcement missions only as approved by the district ranger or chief ranger. These alternative procedures should still include reports into and out of service and regular status checks but may be accomplished by means other than through the dispatch center.

Any other exception from this policy must be preapproved by the superintendent in writing. Prior to the commencement of travel, the written superintendent-approved exception from policy must be submitted to the dispatch center along with the associated Backcountry Travel Plan.

9. Figures

1. Dry Bay Camp area map
2. Bartlett Cove developed area map
3. Radio coverage map (Glacier Bay proper)

10. Appendices

1. Backcountry Itinerary
2. Float Plan
3. Flight Plan

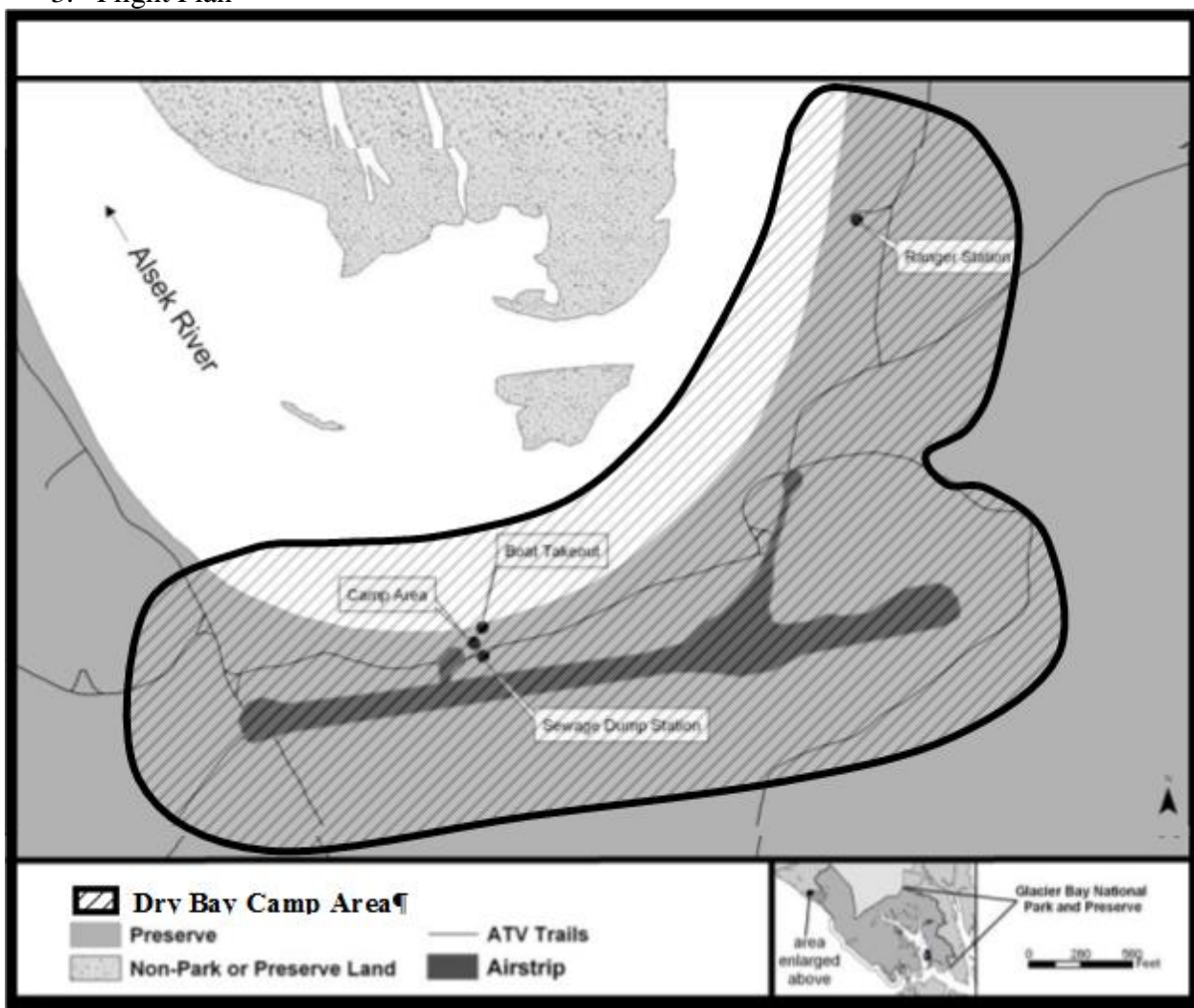
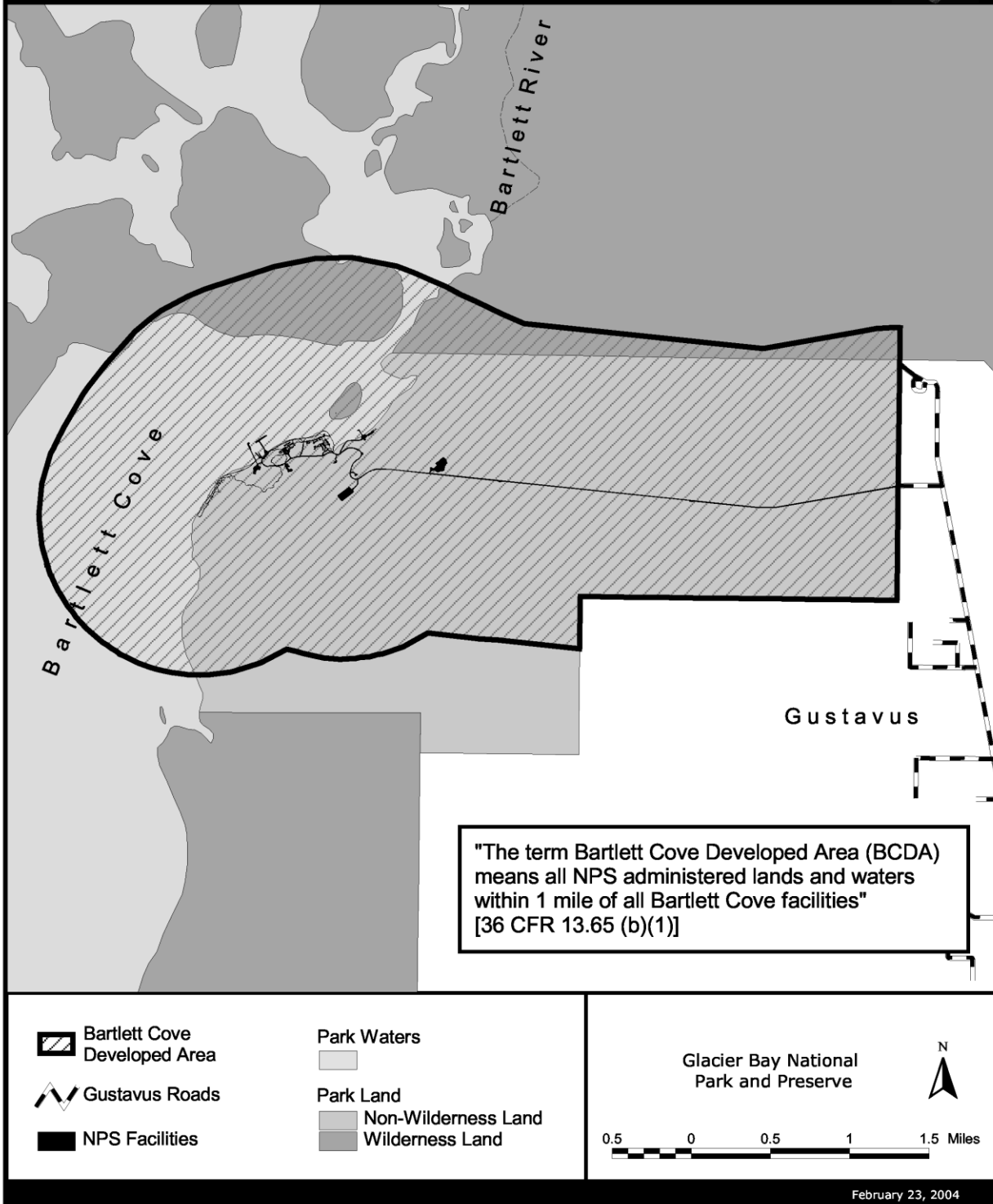


Figure 1. Dry Bay Camp area map.

Dry Bay Camp Area: For the purposes of this plan, the term Dry Bay camp area means all lands and waters within 500 feet of the Dry Bay Ranger Station complex, campground, boat takeout, airstrip, and the portion of ATV trails that connect these features.

Bartlett Cove Developed Area

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



c:_work\bcda_base2.apr

February 23, 2004

Figure 2. Bartlett Cove Developed Area Map.

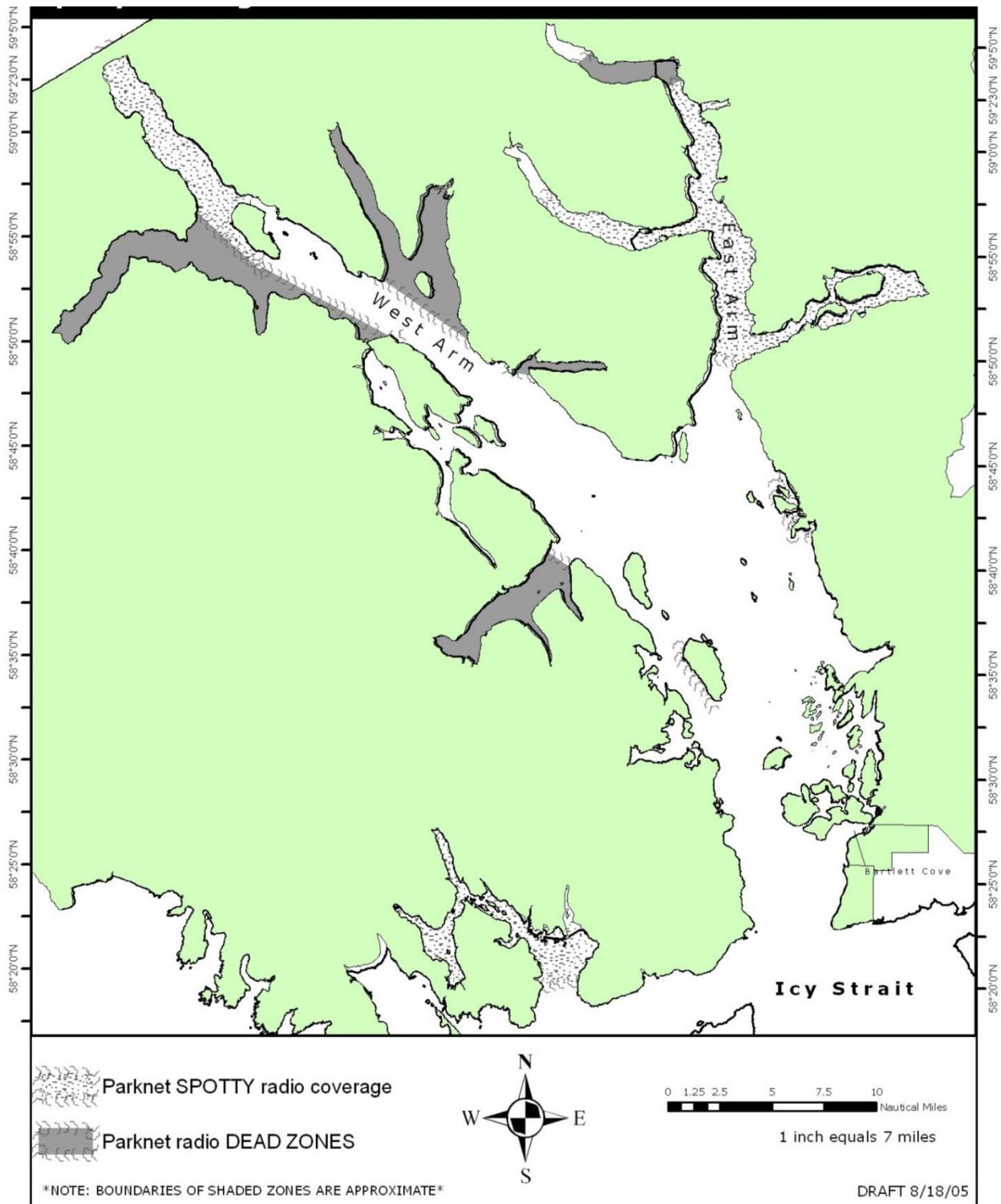


Figure 3. Radio coverage map (Glacier Bay proper).

Appendices

Appendices in their current versions can be found at:

<https://sites.google.com/a/nps.gov/arcc-region/home/documents>

Appendix A. Backcountry Itinerary: see “ARCC Backcountry Itinerary”

Appendix B. Float Plan: see “ARCC Float Plan”

Appendix C. Flight Plan: see “ARCC Flight Plan”