

## APPENDIX A

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# Explanation of Resource Policies in the Plan

The Copper River Basin Area Plan makes decisions on how resource development on state land should be handled. Many factors were taken into consideration in the decision making process, including existing state policies and regulations, existing resource values, and comments from the public, interest groups, and other state agencies.

To show the range of choices for managing state land, three alternative plans were developed. Each alternative fulfilled statewide goals, but emphasized a different theme. The public reviewed and provided comments on these alternatives.

Based on public comments on the alternatives, a draft plan was developed. The public was given 45 days to review the draft plan. Over 1,000 copies of the draft plan summary were distributed. Fourteen public meetings were scheduled to solicit comments. The draft plan was revised based on comments at these meetings, in letters, and in calls to the department.

This appendix presents the reasons why the policies in the final plan were chosen. This will be helpful to the public and future decision makers in understanding the logic behind the final plan.

## Settlement

### Issue:

The state policy is to allow opportunities for settlement of state lands. The issue is what level of land offerings should be allowed in this region.

### Alternatives Considered:

Three levels of land offerings were considered, the highest being approximately two and 1/2 times the acreage of the lowest alternative. The lowest level included all the better quality state land that is relatively accessible or close to existing communities. The highest level included all of the former as well as several remote areas on lakes and in sensitive fish and wildlife habitats, and lands which are selected by the both the state and native corporations.

### Resolution of Issue in Final Plan:

A level of sale closest to alternative 1, the lowest alternative, was chosen. Generally, the best quality and the most accessible land was included. The total nonagricultural land offerings are 12,000 acres over 20 years. The old road to Mentasta area was dropped from the contingency list due to public opposition and possible impacts. A new land offering area was identified near the Gulkana Airport. The acreages at Paxson and Fireweed Mt. - McCarthy were dropped to 400 and 900 acres, respectively. A number of additional guidelines were added for specific land offerings in response to public comments.

**Explanation of Policy:**

The issue of settlement was one of the most difficult policies to resolve in this plan. Public comments, especially from within the basin, were primarily against land sales in remote areas. However, quality land offerings are desired by the public.

The planning team established several criteria for potential land offering sites. The most important criteria were quality of land and accessibility. Land offering sites that had poor soils, or were very inaccessible (such as land across a major river) were considered but eventually excluded from the plan. Comments generally supported the level of land sales in the draft plan.

The issues of land sales in the McCarthy and Paxson areas were difficult to resolve. The team felt obligated to recommend at least a minimal level of land sale in both areas because this is some of the more desirable land available in the basin. The land sale area chosen west of McCarthy would not have as much impact on the community as disposals east of the Kennicott River and would have less impact on the environment than many of the other potential disposal sites in the basin. The land sale area at Paxson includes a large gross area but a relatively small net acreage would be offered. This allows the disposal planning process to design a land offering which has a minimum impact on the people and resources of Paxson.

**Agriculture****Issue:**

Current state policy is to designate and dispose of land capable of supporting agriculture under agricultural programs. The best agricultural lands are also well suited for settlement. Some of the better quality agricultural land in the basin is inaccessible across the Copper River. What level of agriculture disposals would be appropriate for the basin, and should settlement be considered in lieu of agriculture in some areas?

**Alternatives Considered:**

Three levels of agricultural offerings were considered. The highest level was about 6 1/2 times the acreage of the lowest. However, the highest alternative did not necessarily encompass the best soils. The lowest alternative included more high quality agricultural soils than the other two alternatives. Some of the land with good soils, however, had poor access.

**Resolution of Issue in the Plan:**

The gross acreage of agricultural offerings is closest to the level suggested in the middle alternative. Accessible land capable of supporting agriculture received an agricultural designation. Areas with marginal soils were designated for both settlement and agriculture. That is, at the time of disposal, parcels found not suitable for agriculture could be offered for settlement. The most remote agriculture lands received a resource management designation, which means that the land is not committed to agriculture at the present time, but could be used for agriculture in the future.

The total agricultural offerings are 6,000 acres over 20 years. One more small area was added to the final plan as a possible agricultural offering near Kenny Lake.

**Explanation of Policy:**

There is very little accessible, state-owned land in the basin which is suitable for agriculture. The plan would make this land available for agricultural use.

## **Remote Cabins**

### **Issue:**

Issuing remote cabins permits is one way to allow for low density settlement in remote areas. However the result of a remote cabin permit can be the same as a remote homestead disposal. Although land covered by the permit is retained in state ownership, it is often perceived to be private land.

### **Alternatives Considered:**

Alternatives ranged from no remote cabins allowed under alternative 1, to allowing cabins in all feasible areas under alternative 2.

### **Resolution of Issue in the Final Plan:**

The plan limits remote cabins to a few specific areas within the basin. Remote cabins are allowed in a large part of the Gakona and Chistochina river drainages. Problems that occasionally arise from remote cabins such as blocking airstrips and trail access can be avoided through management guidelines. The number of cabins was reduced from 60 in the draft plan to 50 in the final plan, although the areas where cabins are allowed remains the same. Additional guidelines were added in response to public concerns, the most notable being a guideline which requires DNR to deal with existing unauthorized cabins before implementing the remote cabin program.

### **Explanation of Policy:**

The final plan allows for remote cabins in the areas with lowest conflicts with wildlife, recreation, and fire management. Conflicts will be minimized by guidelines dealing with cabin locations and unauthorized uses.

## **Forestry**

### **Issue:**

Forestry is an important issue primarily because of the local demand for personal use firewood. A very small level of commercial timber harvesting is occurring at the present time. Areas with good forestry potential are also prime wildlife habitat and are suitable for settlement. Which forestry areas would be the most important to retain in public ownership for sustained yield management?

### **Alternatives Considered:**

Alternative 3 emphasized the retention of state land for forestry and other uses. In alternative 1, fish and wildlife habitat took precedence in areas of potential conflict. In alternative 2, settlement generally took precedence over forestry where the two values were in conflict.

### **Resolution of Issue in the Final Plan:**

Most high and moderate value forest land along the road corridor was designated as forestry land. One potential conflict is where forest resources are found within trumpeter swan habitat. It was agreed that seasonal restrictions could be placed on harvest activities without detracting from the forest value. There was no significant change in forestry designations between the draft and final plans.

### **Explanation of Policy:**

There were not many areas of conflict between forestry and settlement or wildlife habitat. Forest management is generally compatible with multiple-use management. Public comments supported forestry, particularly for personal-use firewood.

## **Mining and Oil/Gas**

### **Issue:**

With the exception of the Slate Creek - Chisna River area, the highest known mining values are found on privately owned land or in the national park/preserve. Therefore, the planning team did not consider this to be a major issue on state lands.

Three reasons that might warrant closure to new mineral entry in the Copper River Basin are protection of trumpeter swan habitat, protection of important salmon streams, and protection of recreation resources.

### **Alternatives Considered:**

Under all 3 alternatives, the majority of state land remained open to mineral entry, ranging from 88% open under alternative 1 to 97% open under alternative 2. Alternative 1 had the lesser amount of land open because of its emphasis on wildlife habitats. Under all alternatives, existing access to mining claims were retained.

### **Resolution of Issue in the Final Plan:**

Approximately 97% of state lands are open to mineral entry and all state land is available to oil and gas leasing except under the Gulkana River. The Slate Creek - Chisna River area, where mining is a primary use, was expanded from the draft plan to encompass all areas intensively mixed.

### **Explanation of Policy:**

The planning team felt it was important to keep as much area open to surface and subsurface resource development as possible. The public strongly supported the concept of protecting swan habitats and important salmon streams and spawning sites.

Swan habitat areas will remain open to mineral entry and oil and gas leasing. Seasonal limitations, such as control of overland access during swan nesting periods, are sufficient to protect the habitat.

Only the most important spawning and rearing areas for anadromous fish in streams and lakes, the Kettlehole - Mendeltna Creek recreation area and archaeological sites on the north shore of Tazlina Lake, will be closed to new mineral entry. In Thompson Pass, only the road and pipeline corridor will be closed to new mineral entry. The potential for conflict between minerals and other resources is high in these areas. The relative values of fish habitat or recreation at these specific sites are higher than potential mineral values and therefore warrant a closure.

## **Fish and Wildlife Habitat**

### **Issue:**

The Copper River Basin supports some unique wildlife habitats, most notably trumpeter swan nesting areas. People emphasized that hunting and fishing are a very important part of their lifestyle and economy. What areas should be designated as habitat, and what areas can be managed for habitat concurrently with other resources?

### **Alternatives Considered:**

Alternative 1 emphasized protection of fish and wildlife habitat. It included recommendations for legislative designation of trumpeter swan habitat. In general, wherever habitat values conflicted with other resource values, habitat took precedence. This was not the case in the other two alternatives. Under all three alternatives, significant portions of state land had habitat designation co-primary with another designation.

**Resolution of Issue in the Final Plan:**

Most of the important habitat areas received a habitat designation. There is not an immediate need to recommend legislative designation of the swan nesting areas. The most important salmon spawning streams and lakes are closed to new mineral entry.

**Explanation of Policy:**

There was very strong support from the public for protecting swan habitats. However, existing uses and subsurface resource values are minimal in these areas; therefore, potential conflicts are low. Interagency coordination is sufficient to ensure that forestry resources in swan habitats will be available for harvest subject to seasonal restrictions. Other uses that could adversely affect swans are carefully managed through guidelines contained in Chapter 2 of the plan.

Swan habitats north of Ewan Lake, which are low in other resource values, are relinquished to BLM. BLM will manage these areas to protect swans.

Potential disposal lands suggested in remote areas were not included in the plan because of inaccessibility and to avoid habitat-settlement conflicts.

**Recreation****Issue:**

The basin has unique recreation potential but lacks developed facilities. The basin is road accessible and is on the tourist track. A sizeable proportion of land in the basin lies within the national park and preserve. How should recreation resources on state land be managed?

**Alternatives Considered:**

Under alternatives 1 and 3, most public land with recreation values were retained in public ownership. Under alternative 2, some of these lands were retained in public ownership, but many were proposed for eventual disposal. Alternatives 1 and 3 contained recommendations for legislative designations of three recreation areas as well as creating several new recreation sites. Alternative 2 did not include any. All three alternatives did designate public land with high recreation values as "recreation", usually along with a forestry or habitat designation.

**Resolution of Issue in the Final Plan:**

The plan species that most land with high recreation values be kept in public ownership. The state legislature should consider designating the Thompson Pass, Kettlehole Lakes - Mendeltna Creek, and Tazlina - Nelchina Rivers as state recreation areas. Other state lands with recreation values received a recreation designation - usually along with a forestry or habitat designation.

**Explanation of Policy:**

Recreation use of state land was supported by the public. The three areas recommended for legislative designation have very high recreation values and receive the most public use. Other prime recreation areas, such as Tazlina Lake and Summit Lake, can be adequately protected through retention in state ownership and management guidelines.

**Transportation****Issue:**

What new transportation facilities are needed to implement this plan and how should other new transportation facilities be accommodated in the plan?

**Resolution of Issue in the Final Plan:**

The plan does not identify the need for any major new transportation projects in order to implement the plan. The plan allows for new transportation where it crosses state land. The plan specifically allows for construction of the Copper River Highway if it crosses state land.

**Explanation of Policy:**

The plan leaves options open for future transportation facilities on and across state land.

**Trails****Issue:**

Due to land conveyances under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act and state land disposals, the primary trail issue is to retain and designate existing access to state land. Another issue is what level of trail management is needed in the planning area.

**Resolution of the Issue in the Final Plan:**

The plan identifies certain trails that need to be retained in state ownership. The plan identifies trail easements where signs should be posted at trailheads and trails which need to be marked where they cross private lands.

Use of most trails is not regulated by the plan, and no major trail maintenance activities are proposed for state land in the basin.

**Explanation of Policy:**

The plan maintains existing access to state land. In most areas, easements already reserved across private lands provide adequate access to state lands. Where additional access is needed, the plan specifies options to obtain more access.

**Selections and Relinquishments****Issue:**

The state can make additional selections from vacant and unappropriated federal land. The state can also relinquish selected land in the basin in favor of making more valuable selections within the region or elsewhere in the state.

**Alternatives Considered:**

The planning team considered additional selections in Thompson Pass for recreation; at Tonsina Plateau for settlement; and between Meier's Lake and Paxson for transportation, habitat and settlement. Relinquishments were suggested for land in the trumpeter swan areas which could be more efficiently managed by BLM and which had low resource values, for land along the Gulkana River for more efficient management by BLM, and for one tract of land within the national park.

**Resolution of Issue in the Final Plan:**

Selections in the final plan focus on acquiring land suitable for settlement, recreation and transportation. The team made an additional suggestion for a selection along the Little Tonsina and Tielke Rivers for settlement, transportation, forestry, and recreation. Additional selections in the final plan along the Denali Highway complement recent state selections in the Denali block.

None of the land suggested for relinquishments had high resource values of interest to the state economy or contain resources which are adequately managed under federal ownership.

Early in the alternatives process, the team considered a land exchange with the National Park Service involving the state's inholding along the McCarthy Road. However, it decided to designate that land as multiple use, due to settlement, recreation, forestry and habitat values.