

# State of Alaska Department of Natural Resources



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## Public land access in Knik River watershed protected in settlement agreement

(Anchorage, AK) – Vital public recreational access in the Knik River Public Use Area has been preserved in a recent settlement between the Alaska Department of Natural Resources, the U.S. Bureau of Land Management, and Eklutna, Inc.

The settlement was necessary to maintain public access to state lands adjoining the 31,000 acres of land that BLM plans to convey to Eklutna Inc. under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA). Eklutna and BLM have been working since the passage of ANCSA to have aboriginal lands returned.

“We greatly appreciated this opportunity to work with Eklutna to fulfill its land entitlement while preserving public access to state lands. This is a very workable agreement that we hope will be an example for the future. DNR looks forward to future collaboration with Eklutna and recreational user groups to provide good stewardship of our adjoining lands,” said Natural Resources Commissioner Andy Mack.

Over the past year, DNR, BLM and Eklutna have been negotiating in good faith over 17(b) access easements, which are required under ANCSA to assure perpetual public access to adjoining public lands. DNR appealed BLM’s conveyances to Eklutna in the Friday Creek area because BLM did not reserve the 17(b) easements necessary to allow travel between state recreational lands within the Knik River Public Use Area – in particular, a popular public access route between Jim Creek and the Knik Glacier.

The 17(b) easements contained in this settlement agreement preserve public access on the existing trails on lands that will be conveyed to Eklutna. Also, the settlement excludes some submerged lands in the Knik River originally included in BLM’s conveyance. DNR and BLM remain in disagreement over whether this portion of the river is navigable, and thus whether these submerged lands already belong to the State of Alaska. Today, the State filed a quiet title action asserting state ownership of these submerged lands.

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