

## Unit A – Lower Knik Flats

### Unit Description

This unit encompasses both state and private lands in the vicinity of the Old Glenn Highway Bridge. It extends from approximately two miles west of the Old Glenn Bridge to the eastern boundary of Township 16N, R3E. It is bounded by the Ordinary High Water Mark of the Knik River on the south, and the north side of the Knik Glacier Trail (RST 17) is the northern boundary. The dominant feature of this unit is the extensive “flats” that are composed of the exposed bed of the Knik River. The confluence of Jim Creek and the Knik River is within this unit. See Map 3-1, *Knik River Management Plan Units* pp 3 - 3.

### **Land Ownership**

There are approximately 7,686 acres of state land and 5 acres of private land within this unit. See Map 1-2 on pp. 1 - 5 for generalized land status of the planning area and surrounding lands.

### **Access**

The Sexton and Envy trails and the Knik Glacier Trail (RST 17) provide the primary access from adjacent MSB, private, federal and state land. Many users access the PUA from the north end of the Old Glenn Bridge. Access on the south side of the Knik River is provided by state shoreland, federal land within PLO 3324 and one 17(b) easement. There are numerous other user-created trails that provide access into and through this unit. The Knik River provides boat access to this and other units. Airplanes may access this on the unvegetated gravel bars of the river.

### **Recreational Use**

This unit receives the highest levels of use in the planning area. Moderate to high levels of use occurs in this unit year-round, but primarily on weekends. Both non-motorized and motorized use occurs in this unit; however, the majority of recreational use is motorized.

Non-motorized uses in the unit include hiking, fishing, boating, camping, wildlife viewing, horseback riding, biking, swimming and hunting. This unit is the gateway for many users to access units to the east. When ice and snow conditions permit, the area receives a variety of uses including snowshoeing, winter biking, and skiing. Non-motorized boating occurs during the ice-free periods on the Knik River and Jim Creek. Floating the Knik River from the glacier is uncommon because of the difficult access to the headwaters. Canoes and rafts routinely put in at access points along the Knik River Road and float down to takeouts at the New and Old Glenn bridges. Non-motorized watercraft includes canoes, kayaks and rafts.

1 Motorized uses include highway and OHV operation as a means of access for fishing,  
2 hunting and for recreation. Motorized boat use is common on the Knik River. OHV use  
3 occurs primarily on the numerous trails near the Pavilion Parking, the unvegetated gravel  
4 bars of the Knik River, and the Knik Glacier Trail (RST 17). During winter months  
5 frozen ground conditions allow for increased motorized recreational opportunities and  
6 access. Motorized boating primarily occurs on the Knik River and Jim Creek during ice-  
7 free periods. Typical vessels include motorboats, jetboats and airboats. Limited airboat  
8 use occurs throughout the year. Motorized boating use increases during the fishing and  
9 hunting seasons.

### 10 11 **Fisheries Habitat**

12 The Knik River is the primary waterbody in this unit; however, Jim Creek is important as  
13 the gateway into the Lakes and Wetlands Unit and is a popular fishing destination. The  
14 Knik River provides habitat for resident fish species and is catalogued by ADFG as an  
15 anadromous stream. Coho, sockeye and chum salmon are present and coho salmon  
16 spawn in portions of the Knik River. See Appendix B, Map B-1, *Anadromous Streams*  
17 *and Waterbodies* for a depiction of those streams included in ADFG's catalogue of  
18 waters important for the spawning, rearing, or migration of anadromous fish.

### 19 20 **Wildlife Habitat**

21 Habitat consists of forested areas of uplands, dunes, and forested wetlands in the northern  
22 portion of the unit adjacent to the flats. Habitat in the flats includes both vegetated and  
23 unvegetated areas of state shorelands adjacent to the numerous braids, sloughs and  
24 abandoned channels of the Knik River. Habitat in the unit is used for cover and forage  
25 for many wildlife species.

26  
27 Migratory waterfowl utilize the water of the Knik River and adjacent shorelands as a  
28 stopover during their spring and fall migrations. Habitat for nesting and brooding is  
29 limited. Many types of both game and non-game species of waterfowl can be found. See  
30 Appendix B, Map B-2 for waterfowl habitat and nesting habitat.

31  
32 Large and small game species utilize available habitat. Moose utilize habitat primarily  
33 for over-wintering, however, use outside of winter also occurs. Bear habitat encompasses  
34 the entire unit. Small game species such as rabbit and spruce grouse can be found in the  
35 vegetated areas. See Appendix B, Map B-3, Moose Habitat.

### 36 37 **Commercial Use**

38 This unit receives moderate amounts of commercial use, primarily as access to other units  
39 in the Public Use Area. Currently, no land use authorizations for temporary or permanent  
40 commercial facilities have been issued by DNR in this unit. Commercial uses include  
41 OHV, jet-boat, flightseeing, and air-boat tours. Hunting and fishing guides may operate  
42 in this unit.

**Facilities**

The only developed facility is the Old Glenn Highway Bridge.

**Trails and Easements**

Numerous trails exist in the Lower Knik Flats Unit. The primary trails in this unit are the Knik Glacier Trail (ADL# 223176) and the Sexton and Envy trails. The Knik Glacier Trail is a state recognized RS 2477 and is identified as RST 17. This trail provides access through and within the northern portion of the unit. The portion of the Knik Glacier Trail that crosses Eklutna Inc. lands has a 17(b) easement (EIN no. 45) to provide for public access. The Sexton and Envy trails provide access from the Pavilion Parking area on Sullivan Road to the Knik River. A large number of user-created trails exist within this unit.

**Cultural and Historical**

Resources related to Native cultures and early non-native settlement may be present. Early accounts of Native cultures have indicated that a village site was located in the western portion of the unit. This site was abandoned after glacial outburst flooding from the Knik Glacier. Remains of another structure related to early non-native settlement exists just outside of the eastern boundary. Artifacts related to occupancy and use of the structure may be located in the area.

**Issues**

The primary issues are the unlawful activities, high levels of use, and trespass on private land that is occurring.

This unit receives a high level of use that is unlawful or that constitutes a threat to public safety. This type of use is facilitated by the relative ease of access to this unit from the Old Glenn Highway Bridge and the Sexton and Envy trails. Current staffing shortages in Department of Public Safety and difficulty in accessing the PUA by two wheel drive patrol cars has hampered efforts to increase law enforcement patrols. Dangerous and/or reckless discharge of firearms, destruction of private and public property, and the wrecking and burning of automobiles are a few of the major problems identified by the public. Many users have indicated that they do not feel safe recreating while individuals are shooting in the area of trails. Several individuals indicated they had people unknowingly shooting at them while they were recreating. Several others indicated that they have had bullets fired into residences or private property adjacent to the PUA. Many members of the public cited a lack of law enforcement in the area as a major issue.

The second issue affecting management in this unit is the high levels of use, primarily west of Jim Creek. Because of the ease of access to this unit and its close proximity to the major population centers of Alaska and the community of Butte; this unit receives the highest levels of use. The majority of users access this unit by means of motorized highway and off-highway vehicles. Many users of this area recreate with OHV's on the numerous user-created trails developed in forest and dune areas as well as on the shorelands of the Knik River. Land in this unit is highly valued by motorized users for

1 recreation and access to adjacent units for hunting and fishing. The high level of use is  
2 causing impacts to the existing trails in addition to displacing some users from those  
3 same trails. Some users suggested they are displaced from the area because of conflict  
4 with other user groups on trails. Others suggested that trail rutting and debris on the trails  
5 made them unusable for some methods of non-motorized travel.  
6

7 There are other issues concerning this unit that apply to the entire public use area. These  
8 arewide issues are summarized in Chapter 2 rather than in every unit. Many arewide  
9 issues are addressed by draft regulations recently released for public review and comment  
10 and now are in the process of being finalized.  
11

### 12 **Management Intent**

13 The management intent for the Lower Knik Flats Unit is to manage for high levels of public  
14 use, particularly at proposed parking and camping areas and at the public use site.  
15 Recreational opportunities will be enhanced by applying management guidelines directed  
16 specifically to this unit and to the entire public use area. The unit will be managed to provide  
17 the full spectrum of public uses and increased use in the future, while minimizing impacts of  
18 use on fish and wildlife habitat and protecting public safety. Facilities are proposed to be  
19 constructed at key locations that will enhance the public's enjoyment of the area, protect  
20 public safety and minimize impacts on fish and wildlife habitat. DNR will address trail use  
21 impacts to identified sensitive fish and wildlife habitats through the TMP described in  
22 Appendix D.  
23

24 It is intended that OHV and highway vehicle uses continue on the forested uplands adjacent  
25 to the Pavilion Parking area and on the unvegetated shorelands of the Knik River. See Map  
26 2-3, pp. 2 – 35 for a depiction of this area. Increasing levels of such use are also considered  
27 appropriate. DNR has concluded that the continuation of these uses is appropriate in these  
28 areas and that rutting and ground disturbing impact from these uses have minimal and an  
29 acceptable level of impact on the identified area. The TMP will address potential impacts  
30 associated with use of trails in all other areas of the unit. Except for impacts related to  
31 rutting and ground disturbance, uses in the area described above remain subject to all local,  
32 state, and federal authorities for other impacts associated with their use.  
33

34 DNR is committed to improve access from Sullivan Avenue to the lower flats. DNR will  
35 improve access into the PUA from Sullivan Ave. through road/trail upgrades, and/or new  
36 road construction. These access improvements will be a top priority of DNR because they  
37 will aid our enforcement strategy. These improvements will be reserved through easements,  
38 and they will provide needed access to law enforcement personnel and DNR staff.  
39

### 40 **Management Guidelines**

- 41 • Recreational discharge of firearms will be prohibited per 11 AAC 96.015. Legal  
42 hunting is not affected by this regulation.
- 43 • The portions of the Sexton (ADL# 230254) and Envy (ADL# 230256) trails on state  
44 land will be surveyed and reserved as a public easement to DNR as multiple use  
45 trails.

- 1 • Motorized use on the waters of Manmade Lake will be prohibited during ice-free  
2 periods. Additionally, motorized use of the land within 100 feet of the shoreline of  
3 Manmade Lake will be seasonally restricted to no more than 10 miles per hour. See  
4 Proposed Waterbody Restrictions, Map 3-2, pp. 3 - 11.
- 5 • Develop a non-motorized trail from the area of the Pavilion Parking lot to the Knik  
6 River flats. DNR will explore available funding sources and will, in cooperation with  
7 local groups, work to secure this funding to identify a route and build this new trail  
8 for non-motorized users. The new trail will be reserved as a non-motorized easement  
9 to DNR.

### 10 **Management Recommendations**<sup>1</sup>

- 12 • The portion of the Knik Glacier Trail (RST 17) between the Pavilion Parking area and  
13 the Mouth of Jim Creek may be developed as a maintained road. If this occurs the  
14 upgraded portion of the road will be reserved as a public road easement. In addition,  
15 a parking area and sanitary facilities may be developed in the area of the mouth of  
16 Jim Creek.
- 17 • A maintained road may be developed from adjacent state land near the Pavilion  
18 Parking Area to the Knik River flats. The purpose of this road would be to provide  
19 access for public safety, enforcement and maintenance. This new road would not be  
20 open to the public for use.
- 21 • DNR should work with the Office of Habitat Management and Permitting and ADFG  
22 to identify stream crossing locations that will minimize impacts to resources  
23 including fish and wildlife and to the recreating public.

### 24 **Facilities Recommendations**<sup>2</sup>

- 26 • A camping facility may be developed near the proposed Jim Creek parking facility.  
27 This camping area would provide primitive camping sites, and should be located  
28 away from the confluence of Jim Creek and the Knik River.
- 29 • Sanitation facilities may be constructed in the area of the parking and/or camping  
30 facilities at Jim Creek. These facilities should consist of toilets, picnic tables, fire  
31 grates, and bear-resistant trash receptacle(s).
- 32 • Sanitation facilities should be constructed at Manmade Lake. Development of these  
33 facilities is dependant upon adequate staffing and funding for site planning and  
34 development.
- 35 • Time and use restrictions for facilities will be developed at the time they are  
36 constructed.

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<sup>1</sup> In the Recommendations that follow, the words “may,” “will,” and “should” are used. “Will” requires a management action by DNR; “should” indicates the intent to pursue a specific course of action given the availability of funds and the resolution of permitting issues. “May” means the same as “should.” See *Glossary* in Appendix A for a definition of terms.

<sup>2</sup> “Should” indicates the intent to pursue development of a facility subject to availability of funds and the resolution of permitting agencies.

- A boat launch facility should be developed at either the Old Glenn Highway Bridge or in the location of Manmade Lake. Development of this facility is dependant upon adequate staffing and funding for site planning and development.

**Public Use Sites**

A public use sites is designated for the western portion of the flats, and is depicted on Map 2-2 pp. 2 - 27. Several areas near the Old Glenn Bridge and mouth of Jim Creek are heavily used for camping and fishing, particularly during the fall. Another area near Manmade Lake is a popular swimming location for families and receives high use levels during the summer season. The remainder of this area receives increased use related to recreation and fishing throughout the summer and fall. See Public Use Sites in Chapter 2 for management guidelines.

**Land Use Designation**

All state land is co-designated Public Recreation and Wildlife Habitat. All state land will be retained in public ownership.

**Allowed/Prohibited Uses**

All land uses (including commercial recreation) may be authorized except for uses/activities that are designated as “prohibited” in Chapter 4, pp 4 - 4. Uses may be allowed if they are consistent with the legislation, pertinent state laws, regulations, and management guidelines.

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**Map 3-2: Proposed Waterbody Restrictions**