

## Unit B – Lakes and Wetlands

### Unit Description

This unit encompasses both state and private lands located primarily south and east of Maud Road extension (ADL# 206989) and the Rippy Trail. The northern boundary runs east and west along the 1000 foot elevation line at the base of the Chugach Mountains, while the southern boundary runs east and west along north side of the Knik Glacier Trail (RST-17). The dominant features of this unit consist of the extensive system of lakes, creeks, and wetlands including Mud, Jim, Gull, Leaf, and Swan lakes; and McRoberts and Jim creeks. See Map 3-1, *Knik River Management Plan Units* pp 3 - 3.

### **Land Ownership**

There are approximately 7,725 acres of state land and 400 acres of private land in this unit. See Map 1-2 on pp. 1 - 5 for generalized land status of the planning area and surrounding lands.

### **Access**

Two major routes provide overland access from adjacent borough, private, federal and state land. The Maud Road extension (a 66-foot-wide easement, ADL 206989) and the Rippy Trail provide access in the northern portion. Access into the southern portion is provided by the Knik Glacier Trail. Jim Creek provides water access from the south.

### **Recreational use**

This unit receives moderate levels of recreational use, although use levels vary. Use levels increase on weekends and during the fall fishing and hunting seasons. In these instances a high level of use is characteristic and it is likely that use levels will increase in the future. In winter, use increases when snow and ice conditions allow greater access. Because of the varied terrain, opportunities to view wildlife, and exceptional viewshed opportunities; Rippy Trail is a popular destination for both motorized and non-motorized users.

Non-motorized use occurs primarily along the Maud Road Extension, Rippy Trail and other user-created trails. Non-motorized users access the area for a wide variety of recreational opportunities including, hiking, biking, canoeing, wildlife viewing, horseback riding, hunting, and fishing. When ice and snow conditions permit, the numerous waterbodies and wetland areas receive a variety of uses including snowshoeing, biking, skating, and skiing. Non-motorized boating occurs on the expansive network of lakes and creeks. Jim and Mud lakes and Jim and McRoberts creeks are primary destinations for many of these users. Non-motorized watercraft include canoes, kayaks and rafts.

1 Motorized uses occur throughout this unit primarily to access the area for hunting and  
2 fishing as well as other forms of recreation. Uses include OHV operation and boating.  
3 OHV use occurs primarily on the Maud Road Extension and the Rippy Trail. Some OHV  
4 use also occurs in wetland areas adjacent to the Rippy Trail near Jim Lake; on wetlands  
5 on the south side of Swan Lake; and, on wetlands in the eastern portion of the unit near  
6 Friday Creek. During winter months frozen ground conditions allow for increased  
7 motorized recreational opportunities and access.  
8

9 Motorized boating occurs on many of the waterbodies. Motorized use from the primitive  
10 launches at Jim and Mud lakes is typically by small watercraft with low horsepower.  
11 During the fall hunting and fishing seasons, larger watercraft are used on the lakes and  
12 streams, and wetlands. The launches at Jim and Mud lakes provide access to other  
13 waterbodies within the KRPUA. Motorized boating use increases during fishing and  
14 hunting seasons.  
15

#### 16 **Fisheries habitat**

17 Primary waterbodies in this unit include Jim, Mud, Gull, Swan and Leaf lakes; and Jim  
18 and McRoberts creeks. Waterbodies provide habitat for resident and anadromous fish  
19 species. Because of the diverse waterbodies and extensive wetlands this area is very  
20 productive fish spawning and rearing habitat. Coho salmon are present and/or spawning  
21 in all of the waterbodies in this unit. Sockeye salmon are present in Jim and McRoberts  
22 creeks and Jim Lake. See Appendix B, Map B-1 for a depiction of those streams and  
23 waterbodies included in ADFG's catalogue of waters important for the spawning, rearing,  
24 or migration of anadromous fish.  
25

#### 26 **Wildlife habitat**

27 Habitat consists of expansive areas of lakes, wetlands and streams and forested uplands.  
28 The north edge of the unit is delineated by an abrupt transition zone between boreal forest  
29 and sub-alpine environments. The extensive wetland areas are interspersed with forested  
30 uplands. These uplands are remnant dunes formed after the Knik Glacier retreated.  
31 Because of the diversity of vegetation types and extensive wetlands, this unit is very  
32 productive wildlife habitat.  
33

34 Waterfowl utilize the expansive lakes, creeks, and wetlands for resting and staging during  
35 their spring and fall migrations. Trumpeter swans frequent the open waters of Mud and  
36 Jim lakes in early spring prior to migrating to nesting areas elsewhere in Alaska. In the  
37 fall, large numbers of trumpeter swans return to the lakes and wetlands to rest prior to  
38 migrating to over-wintering habitat in Canada and the western United States. Many  
39 species of waterfowl utilize the habitat for nesting and brooding during spring and  
40 summer including many varieties of puddle ducks such as mallards, widgeons, and green-  
41 wing teals; diving ducks such as goldeneye, scaup and grebes. Trumpeter swans and  
42 loons are known to return annually to nest. See Appendix B, Map B-2 for waterfowl  
43 habitat.  
44

1 Moose habitat ranges from the valley floor to the vegetated sub-alpine areas. Calving  
2 and rutting generally occurs in the sub-alpine and on the valley floor. A moose calving  
3 concentration area has been identified by ADFG within this unit. Moose commonly  
4 over-winter in this area because of ample forage and minimal snow cover. See moose  
5 habitat Appendix B, Map B-3.

6  
7 Dall sheep are generally found in the higher elevations but are consistently found at lower  
8 elevations at a few locations including by the outlet of Jim Creek Canyon. This area is  
9 known locally for its high densities of lambs and ewes, and is often characterized as a  
10 “lambing area.” See Appendix B, Map B-4 for sheep habitat.

11  
12 Bears and wolves are occasionally seen and sometimes harvested in this unit. Small  
13 game species such as rabbit and spruce grouse can be found in the vegetated areas.

### 14 15 **Commercial Use**

16 This unit receives low to moderate amounts of commercial use from ATV and airboat  
17 tours. Currently, no land use authorizations for temporary or permanent commercial  
18 facilities have been issued by DNR in this unit. Hunting and fishing guides may operate  
19 in this unit.

### 20 21 **Facilities**

22 Primitive recreational facilities include the parking and boat launch areas at Jim Lake.

### 23 24 **Trails and Easements**

25 The Maud Road extension is located on an easement (ADL 206989) reserved to DNR. In  
26 addition to facilities developed on easements, a number of trails have been created by  
27 users of the area; most notably, the Rippy Trail which connects the Jim Lake parking area  
28 to the upper Jim Creek. Other user-created trails in this unit access areas adjacent to this  
29 unit within the Public Use Area.

### 30 31 **Cultural and Historical**

32 Resources related to Native cultures and early non-native settlement may be located in  
33 this unit. Early accounts of Native cultures using the area describe a village site and a  
34 cabin site in this unit. The village site is located on a 160-acre Native allotment on the  
35 eastern shore of Swan Lake. The cabin site was used by a local native Alaskan while  
36 hunting and fishing in the Knik Valley. Remains of another structure and associated  
37 artifacts related to early non-native settlement exists in this unit as well.

### 38 39 **Issues**

40 Issues that affect management in this unit include use of OHV's and airboats in  
41 waterbodies, wetlands and adjacent areas and several trespass structures. Many  
42 individuals expressed concern that airboat and OHV use was negatively impacting habitat  
43 for waterfowl, wildlife and spawning salmon. Many other individuals were interested in  
44 maintaining their opportunities to use airboats and OHV's for recreation and as a means  
45 to access fish and game resources. Some individuals indicated that some forms of

1 motorized recreation were negatively impacting their own recreational uses. Trespass  
2 structures in this unit are primarily “duck shacks” used by waterfowl hunters. These  
3 structures, once abandoned, become rundown and eventually end up as litter. They may  
4 also have the effect of displacing some recreational users from utilizing the area around  
5 them.

6  
7 One of the primary access points occurs on an existing easement (Maude Road extension)  
8 on Eklutna Inc. uplands at Mud Lake. Currently the site has a primitive road and boat  
9 launch. It is unclear how much of the current developments are within the existing  
10 easement. The use of the easement increases during the hunting and fishing season, but  
11 is popular with other users throughout the summer and winter season. The area  
12 surrounding the easement on private land is heavily impacted related to use of the  
13 easement and adjacent state waterbody. A management agreement between Eklutna Inc.  
14 and DNR is necessary before DNR can address the impacts occurring on and adjacent to  
15 the easement. If an agreement can be made between the parties, DNR could develop  
16 management and facilities recommendations to address impacts associated with use of  
17 the easement and adjacent state waterbodies.

18  
19 There are other issues concerning this unit that apply to the entire public use area. These  
20 arewide issues are summarized in Chapter 2 rather than in every unit. Many arewide  
21 issues are addressed by draft regulations recently released for public review and comment  
22 and now are in the process of being finalized.

### 23 24 **Management Intent**

25 The management intent for the Lakes and Wetlands Unit is to manage for high levels of  
26 public use at proposed parking and camping areas and at public use sites, and at other  
27 popular use areas associated with boat launches, shooting areas, and use of the Rippy Trail.  
28 The remainder of the unit will be managed for moderate levels of use. Recreational  
29 opportunities will be enhanced by applying management guidelines directed specifically to  
30 this unit and those that apply to the entire public use area. It will be managed to provide the  
31 full spectrum of public uses and increased use in the future, while minimizing impacts of use  
32 on fish and wildlife habitat and protecting public safety. Facilities are proposed to be  
33 constructed at key locations that will enhance the public’s enjoyment of the area, protect  
34 public safety and minimize impacts on fish and wildlife habitat. DNR will also address trail  
35 use impacts to identified sensitive fish and wildlife habitats through the TMP as described in  
36 Appendix D.

37  
38 It is intended that DNR will work with ADFG to monitor the swan population within this  
39 unit. If ADFG concludes that the population of swans within the PUA is declining, DNR  
40 will work with ADFG to identify potential causes and will develop appropriate strategies to  
41 address the decline.

42  
43 DNR has developed a recommendation involving the creation of a non-motorized area along  
44 Rippy Trail. This is the only area recommended to be designated for non-motorized use in  
45 the PUA, and it involves the conversion of this trail to non-motorized use. This

1 recommendation is in response to public comments received during the review of  
2 management alternatives in early 2007 and derives from these comments and the subsequent  
3 analysis of potential non-motorized areas within the PUA by DNR. DNR staff concluded  
4 that this approach provides the most practicable approach to the provision of a non-motorized  
5 area within the PUA, and is consistent with legislative direction calling for management of a  
6 “full-spectrum of recreational uses” ... “including motorized and non-motorized.” Following  
7 review and consideration of public comments, the commissioner may decide to modify the  
8 preferred action or propose an entirely different action. An alternative to the preferred action  
9 is discussed below.

### 10 **Management Guidelines**

- 12 • DNR will work with ADFG to monitor trumpeter swan populations within the PUA.  
13 Reviews should be conducted annually and should begin within 5 years from the  
14 adoption of this plan. Based on the results of this review, further management  
15 strategies may be developed.
- 16 • Areas for recreational shooting may be developed on the north side of the Maud Road  
17 extension, east of Mud Lake or in the forested areas east of the Pavilion Parking area.  
18 The area proposed for designation east of Mud Lake is currently used as a shooting  
19 area by the public. The proposed shooting areas are depicted on Map 2-1, pp. 2 - 17.  
20 Time of use or other restrictions will be determined by DNR.
- 21 • Maude Road extension should be upgraded.
- 22 • Recreational discharge of firearms will be prohibited consistent with regulations at  
23 11 AAC 96.015. Legal hunting is not affected by this regulation.
- 24 • A 5 MPH speed limit will be created from the portage at Jim Lake/McRoberts Creek  
25 to the confluence of McRoberts Creek and Jim Creek. This action is proposed to  
26 address the safety issue of watercraft operations on a narrow stream channel with  
27 limited sight distances where both motorized and non-motorized boating occurs.
- 28 • Motorized access on Jim Lake and associated wetlands and waterbodies will be  
29 restricted to not more than 5 horsepower watercraft. This restriction only applies  
30 during the ice-free periods of the lake. This action will protect current use patterns,  
31 while protecting identified sensitive waterfowl nesting in and around Jim Lake and  
32 the associated wetlands and waterbodies. The area affected by this horse power  
33 restriction for watercraft is indicated in Map 3-2, pp. 3 - 11.
- 34 • Rippy Trail Development:
  - 35 ○ **Preferred Action:** The area of approximately 836 acres around the existing  
36 Rippy Trail, including all trails originating at and extending easterly from the  
37 Jim Lake parking area, will be managed for the enhancement of non-  
38 motorized recreational opportunities. This area is depicted on Map 3-3, pp.  
39 3 - 19. All existing trails in this area will be developed to sustainable trail  
40 standards. Because of limited DNR funding to develop trails, it is envisioned  
41 that this will be accomplished through partnering with local stakeholder  
42 groups and individuals. The Rippy Trail and associated trails will be reserved

1 by a public access easement for non-motorized forms of transportation only.<sup>1</sup>  
2 This action will restrict some current uses of the Rippy Trail but will enhance  
3 non-motorized recreation opportunities. Non-motorized recreation  
4 opportunities are currently limited within the public use area.

5 The primary effects of this action would be a reduction in motorized  
6 recreational and commercial opportunities and a reduction in the area  
7 accessible for hunting via motorized means in a portion of the PUA. A de  
8 facto seasonal closure to OHV use on the wetlands connected to Jim Lake and  
9 the forested land and wetlands east of upper Jim Creek are another effect of  
10 this action. Combined with the potential closure of the wetlands west of  
11 Friday Creek, which may result from the conveyance of federal land to  
12 Eklutna Inc., a significant area within the Lakes and Wetlands Unit may be  
13 restricted from motorized use.

- 14 ○ **Alternate Action:** Following review of public comments, the Commissioner  
15 may modify or reject the current “Preferred Action,” propose an entirely new  
16 action, or propose to maintain status quo uses on the Rippy Trail and adjacent  
17 area. Examples of modifications could include spatial and/or temporal  
18 restrictions on uses thus allowing some uses to continue at specific times in  
19 specific areas, modification of the boundary of the non-motorized area, and/or  
20 locate a non-motorized area in another portion of the PUA.

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<sup>1</sup> The prohibition on motorized use in the Rippy Non-motorized Area may be reconsidered if access to the eastern portions of the public use area is blocked due to erosion of RST 17 by the Knik River or loss of legal access along RST 17 due to a change in land ownership.

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**Map 3-3: Rippy Non-motorized Area**

**Management Recommendations**

- DNR should work with OHMP and ADFG in the identification of anadromous stream crossings, the catalog process, and the general permits for stream crossings.
- DNR should work with interested parties to achieve the development and maintenance of recommended facilities within the management unit.
- DNR should consider the feasibility of road and trail improvements to enhance public use of the area, to consolidate general access impacts to the extent possible, and to provide for more efficient law enforcement efforts.
- DNR will order the removal of unauthorized structures.
- DNR may identify a possible area for concession operator for camping area.

**Facilities Recommendations**

- Jim Lake<sup>2</sup>
  - The Jim Lake shoreline should be designed to maximize day use for multiple groups and users.
  - The primitive parking lot at Jim Lake may be upgraded to accommodate and facilitate parking for both the current and anticipated future levels of use. The parking facility should be designed to accommodate a wide variety of vehicles including vehicles with trailers. The parking facility should be located away from Jim Lake at or near its current location.
  - A camping area may be developed near the current primitive parking lot. Whether or not this camping area includes drive-in campsites or just walk-in sites will be determined at the design phase. The camping area should be located away from Jim Lake.
  - Sanitation facilities may be constructed in the area of the parking and camping area. These facilities should consist of vaulted toilets (or similar facilities), picnic tables, fire grates, and bear-resistant trash receptacles.
  - The access trail and launch at Jim Lake should be developed to accommodate typical highway vehicles and facilitate the launching of small watercraft at Jim Lake. The access should be sited to minimize impacts to habitat and wetlands. A primitive, hand-carried boat launch/dock may be developed to facilitate access to Jim Lake.

**Public Use Sites**

Public Use Sites are designated for the Jim Lake and the confluence of Jim and McRoberts creeks as depicted on Map 2-2, pp 2 - 29. These sites receive high levels of seasonal use. See Chapter 2 for management guidelines for Public Use Sites.

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<sup>2</sup> A more detailed site analysis will precede the development of proposed facilities at Jim Lake.

1 **Land Use Designation**

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

4

5 **Allowed/Prohibited Uses**

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

9