

## Unit C – Upper Knik Flats

### Unit Description

This unit encompasses state and private lands from the terminus of the Knik Glacier downstream to Unit A. It includes all state shorelands in Township 16N, R4 & E, Seward Meridian as well as a small area of upland adjacent to the Knik River in T16N, R5E as depicted on Map 3-1, *Knik River Management Plan Units* pp 3 - 3. The dominant features of this unit are the expansive areas of exposed shorelands referred to as the “flats” and the Knik River.

#### **Land ownership**

There are approximately 17,094 acres of state land within the Upper Knik Flats Unit. See Map 1-2 on pp. 1 - 5 for generalized land status of the planning area and surrounding lands.

#### **Access**

Access is provided by the Knik Glacier Trail (RST 17), Knik River Road, Federal lands managed consistent with PLO 3324, and the Knik River itself. A few individuals utilize aircraft for access via a few un-maintained gravel airstrips. Portions of this unit are accessed by motorized and non-motorized users from the Knik Glacier Trail (RST 17) on adjacent federal land. The Knik Glacier is a primary destination for many of users.

#### **Recreational use**

This unit receives low to moderate use levels depending on season. Use levels are moderate during summer and fall and low to moderate during winter and spring. The Knik Glacier is the destination for many users of the Public Use Area.

Non-motorized use occurs at low levels throughout the year. Non-motorized users access the area for a wide variety of recreational opportunities including, hiking, boating, wildlife viewing, horseback riding, and hunting. When ice and snow conditions permit, the Knik River and Flats areas receive a variety of uses including snowshoeing, biking, and skiing. Non-motorized boating occurs during the ice-free periods on the Knik River. Non-motorized watercraft include canoes, kayaks, and rafts.

Motorized uses occur throughout this unit at low to moderate levels. Motorized users access this area for hunting and fishing as well as other forms of recreation. Uses include OHV operation and boating. OHV use occurs primarily on the Flats. During winter months frozen ground conditions allow for increased motorized recreational opportunities and access. Motorized boating occurs on the Knik River. Motorized boating use generally increases during the fishing and hunting seasons. Pilots often use the unvegetated gravel bars for practice landings and takeoffs.

**Fisheries habitat**

The Knik River is the primary waterbody in this unit. The Knik River provides habitat for resident and anadromous fish species. Coho, sockeye and chum salmon are present and spawn in some portions of the river. See Appendix B, Map B-1 for a depiction of those streams included in ADFG's catalogue of waters important for the spawning, rearing, or migration of anadromous fish.

**Wildlife habitat**

Wildlife habitat in the Upper Flats Unit includes both vegetated and unvegetated areas of state shorelands adjacent to the numerous braids, sloughs and abandoned channels of the Knik River. This unit also includes a small area of vegetated wetlands and uplands at the base of the mountains north and west of the glacier. This habitat is used for forage and cover for many wildlife species.

Migratory waterfowl utilize the water of the Knik River as a stopover during their spring and fall migrations. Habitat for nesting and brooding is limited on the Knik River. Many types of game and non-game species of waterfowl use available habitat during the ice-free periods. See Map B-2 for waterfowl habitat.

Large and small wildlife species utilize available habitat found in this unit. Moose utilize habitat primarily for over-wintering, however, use outside of winter also occurs. A moose calving concentration area has been identified near the terminus of the glacier. Bear habitat encompasses the entire unit. Small game species such as rabbit and spruce grouse can be found in the vegetated areas. See wildlife habitat maps in Appendix B.

**Commercial Use**

This unit receives low to moderate levels of commercial use. Upland adjacent to the Knik Glacier is the destination for many of the tours offered. Currently, two land use authorization for a tour operator has been issued by DNR in this unit. Commercial uses include OHV, jet-boat, flightseeing, and air-boat tours. Hunting and fishing guides may operate in this unit.

**Facilities**

Other than un-maintained airstrips and commercial operator facilities authorized by DNR, developed facilities do not exist in this unit.

**Trails and Easements**

The Knik Glacier Trail (RST 17) crosses through a portion of this unit west of Metal Creek. Numerous user created trails exist in the vegetated wetlands and uplands and on the flats.

**Cultural and Historical**

No cultural or historical artifacts or sites have been reported to date.

**Issues**

The primary issue affecting management is the concentration of commercial and non-commercial use in a relatively small area in front of the Knik Glacier. Because the moraine in front of the glacier is a destination for many commercial and non-commercial users, there is a need to provide specific management of this area that is more restrictive than that allowed under the state's generally allowed uses. The use of firearms at this area of concentrated use has been identified by a number of individuals as a concern. Some users suggested the state should ensure safe use of the area by the public and commercial operators.

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

**Management Intent**

The management intent for the Lower Knik Flats Unit is to manage for high levels of public use at the proposed public use site and other popular recreation areas that may develop over time and the remainder of the unit will be managed for moderate to high levels of use. Recreational opportunities will be enhanced by applying management guidelines directed specifically to this unit and those that apply to the entire public use area. It will be managed to provide the full spectrum of public uses and increased use in the future, while minimizing impacts of use on fish and wildlife habitat and protecting public safety. DNR will address trail use impacts to identified sensitive fish and wildlife habitats through the TMP described in Appendix D.

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

**Management Guidelines**

- Recreational discharge of firearms will be prohibited per 11 AAC 96.015. Legal hunting is not affected by this regulation.

**Management Recommendations**

- (None)

1 **Facilities Recommendations**

- 2 • (None)
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4 **Public Use Sites**

5 A Public Use Site is established for the face of the glacier near Metal Creek as depicted on  
6 Map 2-2, pp. 2 - 29. This site has a moderate occurrence of public use throughout the year as  
7 a destination for recreational users and for commercial operators. See Public Use Sites in  
8 Chapter 2 for management guidelines.

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10 **Land Use Designation**

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

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14 **Allowed/Prohibited Uses**

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

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