

How to Locate a Parcel of Surveyed State Land

If you are interested in applying for a parcel of state land, you are strongly encouraged to first review all the information and then personally inspect the land before filing an application. The land chosen by an applicant is taken “as is” with no guarantees, expressed or implied, as to its suitability for any intended use.

The State of Alaska offers land for sale at fair market value and includes parcels of land that have all been previously surveyed. To accurately determine the location of the parcel on the ground, you will have to locate one or more of the survey monuments for the parcel. Survey monuments look like this:



The survey monuments define the corners of each surveyed lot (often, a lot corner may have only a piece of rebar with an aluminum cap instead of a monument -- the survey plat should tell you this). The monuments are usually very close to the ground, and in many instances are overgrown and obscured. Some monuments may actually be out of the ground due to frost heaving and the playful pulling of bears.

A really good way to get oriented is by using a USGS map for your area of interest (at a scale of 1:63,360). These maps contain physical features such as hills, lakes, and rivers that may help you find your way around. USGS maps are available from the Earth Science Information Center on the Alaska Pacific University campus at 4320 University Drive, Room 101, Anchorage, Alaska, 99508-4664 (phone: (907) 786-7011). Some private businesses may also carry USGS maps in your area.

To find the correct reference for the USGS map(s) of your area, look under the vicinity map on the upper right corner of the state survey plat, or you may use the “USGS Map Reference” on the N 133 screen for the Department’s Land Administration System (LAS) computers. Before you start, you will need to know the Meridian, Township, Range and Section(s), which are listed in the parcel table under “MTRS”. These computers are located at DNR information offices.

The easiest way to find a monument is to find a bearing tree. Get a copy of the survey plat for the parcel or subdivision (available from DNR Information Offices for \$2.00 per sheet). The survey number is listed in the parcel table. The survey plat will show locations and types of monuments at each lot corner, distances along lot lines, and the general configuration of the subdivision. The survey plat will also show if there is a bearing tree for the monument. Bearing trees usually have a 4.5"x6" yellow bearing tree tag that lists the bearing and distance to the monument. The bearing tree tag will look something like this:



Note: Don’t forget to account for magnetic declination when getting your bearings! Review all the available information on the parcel. The appraisal report (available from DNR Information Offices) will be especially helpful, as it may have pictures of the parcel and surrounding area. Try to pick out some distinctive features in the pictures that could help you locate the lot on the ground (a uniquely shaped tree, for example).

Get a copy of the land status plat that shows the parcel. The status plat (available from DNR Information Offices for \$2.00 per sheet) will show which lots in the subdivision or area have been disposed of previously, and may help you figure out which lots in the area have people living on them. You may try asking people living in the area what their lot and block numbers are—this will help orient you.

Take a compass and measuring tape to help orient yourself and measure distances along lot lines. Look for brushed and cleared lines—these may be the lot lines for the parcel you are looking for. Also look for the surveyors tape and wooden stakes -- sometimes these were used to mark the locations of the monuments. Also, a metal detector is a very useful tool in locating monuments.

If you use a Positioning System (GPS) device, you may find the “Land File Reference” on our LAS System (available for use at DNR Information Offices) useful for information on the latitude and longitude of the section corner closest to the parcel. This information is accessed through the N133 screen, using Meridian, Township, Range and Section. Please be aware that the GPS collects datum in NAD 83, while the maps use NAD 27 information. Make sure the GPS datum is set for NAD 27, or a conversion must be done. In addition, the GPS is only accurate to within 100 meters (roughly the length of a football field), unless the GPS is differentially corrected.

Once you find a monument, compare the markings on the top of the cap with the survey plat. This will let you know which corner you are at. Compare the survey “ASLS” number with the status plat to determine which survey that you are at. If you are unable to tell what corner the monument is supposed to be for, write down the exact markings from the cap and talk with a surveyor.

If you still cannot locate the monuments, please let us know. Contact one of the DNR Public Information Centers listed on page 2.