

# Chapter 1

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### Introduction and Background

#### Summary of Purpose of the Plan

The role of state land use plans was established by state statute (AS 38.04.005). It is the policy of the State of Alaska “...to establish a balanced combination of land available for both public and private purposes. The choice of land best suited for public and private use shall be determined through the inventory, planning, and classification processes...”

The plan determines management intent, land use designations, and management guidelines that apply to state lands in the planning area.

#### Description of the Planning Area

The Southeast Susitna Area Plan (SSAP) directs how the Alaska Department of Natural Resources (DNR) will manage general state uplands, shorelands, tidelands, and submerged lands within the planning boundary. The following is a summary of the acreage to which the plan will apply:

Area	Acres
State-owned uplands	212,785
State-selected uplands	411
State-owned tidelands	<u>42,545</u>
Total Acreage <sup>1</sup>	<u>255,741</u>

**NOTE:** There are six Legislatively Designated Areas (LDA) within the planning area and they encompass approximately 386,000 acres. The SSAP establishes land use designations for 343,000 acres in three state game refuges and 17,000 acres in one state recreation river,

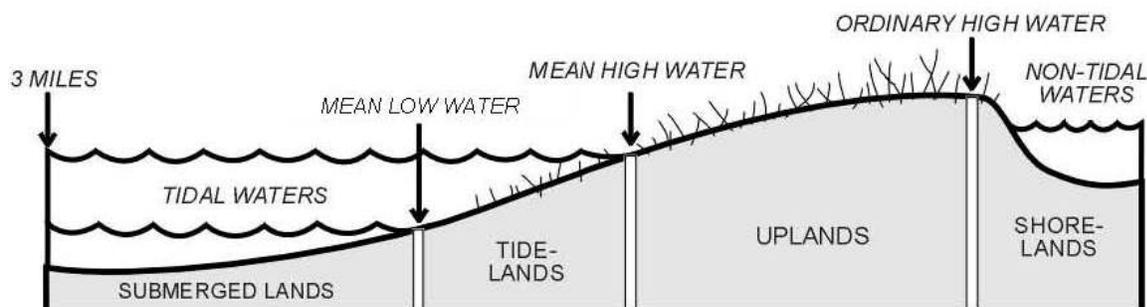
<sup>1</sup> Acreage related to legislatively Designated Areas not included.

but management intent is found in the statutes, regulations and management plans applicable to each LDA. The SSAP does not apply to the 26,000 acres in two state recreation areas. Refer to the LDA region description at the end of Chapter 3 for more details.

## Submerged Lands, Tidelands, Uplands and Shorelands as Described in This Plan

Tidelands span the area from mean high water to mean low water; submerged lands reach from mean low water to a line three miles seaward from mean low water. Shorelands include the lands below ordinary high water in non-tidal areas.

**Figure 1-1: Submerged lands, tidelands, uplands, and shorelands as described in this plan**



## Update of the Willow Sub-Basin Area Plan and a Portion of the Susitna Area Plan

The original Willow Sub-Basin Area Plan was prepared in the late 1970s and was adopted in 1982. The entire area of the original Willow Sub-Basin Area Plan<sup>2</sup> is within the planning boundary of the Southeast Susitna Area Plan (SSAP). The original Susitna Area Plan was adopted in 1985 and a portion of its South Parks Highway Subregion lies within the planning boundary for the SSAP. Since the original adoption of these two plans, much has changed in the Susitna Valley, with much of the area along the Parks Highway being extensively developed. A variety of economic and demographic trends has accelerated growth, and probably will continue to accelerate growth in this area. Another major change has been the marked decline in the inventory of state land. In the early 1980s the state was the principal land owner in the Valley but since that time its importance has decreased with much of its holdings being conveyed to the Matanuska-Susitna Borough; Cook Inlet Region, Inc.;

<sup>2</sup> Subsequent to the adoption of the Willow Sub-Basin Area Plan (WSAP), two management plans were prepared that superseded the WSAP in their areas of application. These were the Deception Creek Land Use Plan and the Kashwitna Management Plan.

Mental Health Trust; and University of Alaska. This has resulted in a decreased and dispersed state land base, although significant holdings still remain in the far easterly and westerly parts of the planning area. For these and other reasons, revision of the 1982 plan was appropriate and was undertaken beginning in 2007. Area plans are intended to be updated on a 15 to 20 year schedule.

This revision supersedes and replaces the entire 1982 Willow Sub-Basin Area Plan<sup>3</sup>, the two area management plans (Kashwitna and Deception Creek), and the affected portion of the Susitna Area Plan. The Land Classification Order that accompanies this revision revises and supersedes all previous land classifications. Current mineral orders and leasehold location orders however remain in effect and are not modified by this revision.

## **Planning Area**

The planning boundary of the Southeast Susitna Area Plan includes all state-owned and state-selected uplands, and all tidelands, submerged lands and shorelands within the area depicted on Figure 1-2 on Page 1 - 5. This area includes the cities of Houston, Wasilla, and Palmer and occupies portions of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough. The planning area extends from the intersection of the Talkeetna Spur Road and the Parks Highway in the north, to the Knik Arm of Cook Inlet in the south, and is bounded by the Susitna River in the west, the Matanuska River in the east, and the Hatcher Pass Management Plan in the northeast. Within this planning area are a number of large Legislatively Designated Areas (LDAs), which total 386,000 acres and include: the Willow Creek and Nancy Lake State Recreation Areas, the Palmer Hay Flats, Goose Bay, and Susitna Flats State Game Refuges, and the Little Susitna State Recreation River. The recommendations of this plan pertain primarily to the state-owned and state-selected land not within the LDAs, a total of 255,741 acres.

This area plan does not, however, apply to a specific area of state and borough land situated west of the Little Susitna River, east of the Susitna River, north of the Susitna Flats State Game Refuge, and south of the Nancy Lake State Recreation Area. This area is referred to as the Fish Creek management unit in the SSAP, and is to be managed under the DNR/Borough Fish Creek Management Plan (FCMP). Approximately 43,300 acres are encompassed by the FCMP, of which 14,859 acres are state-owned. Consult this management plan for plan designations, management intent, and management guidelines in the Fish Creek area.

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<sup>3</sup> Except for the Fish Creek and Moraine Ridge management units, which are managed under the Fish Creek Management Plan, adopted 2010

## How the Plan is Organized

The plan has four chapters:

**Chapter 1** includes a summary of the purpose of the plan, description of the planning area, how and why the plan was developed, what the plan does and does not cover, and a summary of plan actions.

**Chapter 2** includes goals of the plan and guidelines that apply throughout the planning area. Guidelines are listed in 11 resource and land use categories. Guidelines are specific directives that will be applied to land and water management decisions as resource use and development occurs.

**Chapter 3** includes an explanation of plan designations, general management intent for state land, descriptions of the eight planning regions, and a detailed listing of management units. It also provides a summary of management constraints and considerations based on existing plans, legislative designations and other management constraints that significantly affect resource management, and a description of navigability as it relates to state waters within the planning region.

The bulk of this Chapter, however, consists of the Resource Allocation Tables. State land in the planning area is divided into spatial units called ‘units’. These may either be tidelands or uplands and may consist both of small areas of state land, like a lot or tract within a state subdivision, as well as very large areas that have common location, access, use, or resource characteristics. There are 156 upland units and 3 tideland units. This table, for each unit, identifies the recommended land use designation, background and resource information, and management intent. These parcels correspond to the management units identified on the plan maps.

**Chapter 4** discusses specific actions necessary to implement the plan. These include a description of how land use designations convert into classifications, a description of survivor designations and classifications, and a land classification order. Procedures for changing the plan are also discussed.

**Appendices** include a glossary and a land classification order.

## Why This Plan Was Developed

The planning area is rich in natural resources, contains a mix of developed and undeveloped land, and there are competing demands for the use of state land. There are many different ideas about how these resources should be used or protected. Although some proposed uses might be in conflict with each other, many different uses can occur throughout the planning area while protecting vital resources, providing the uses are properly managed.

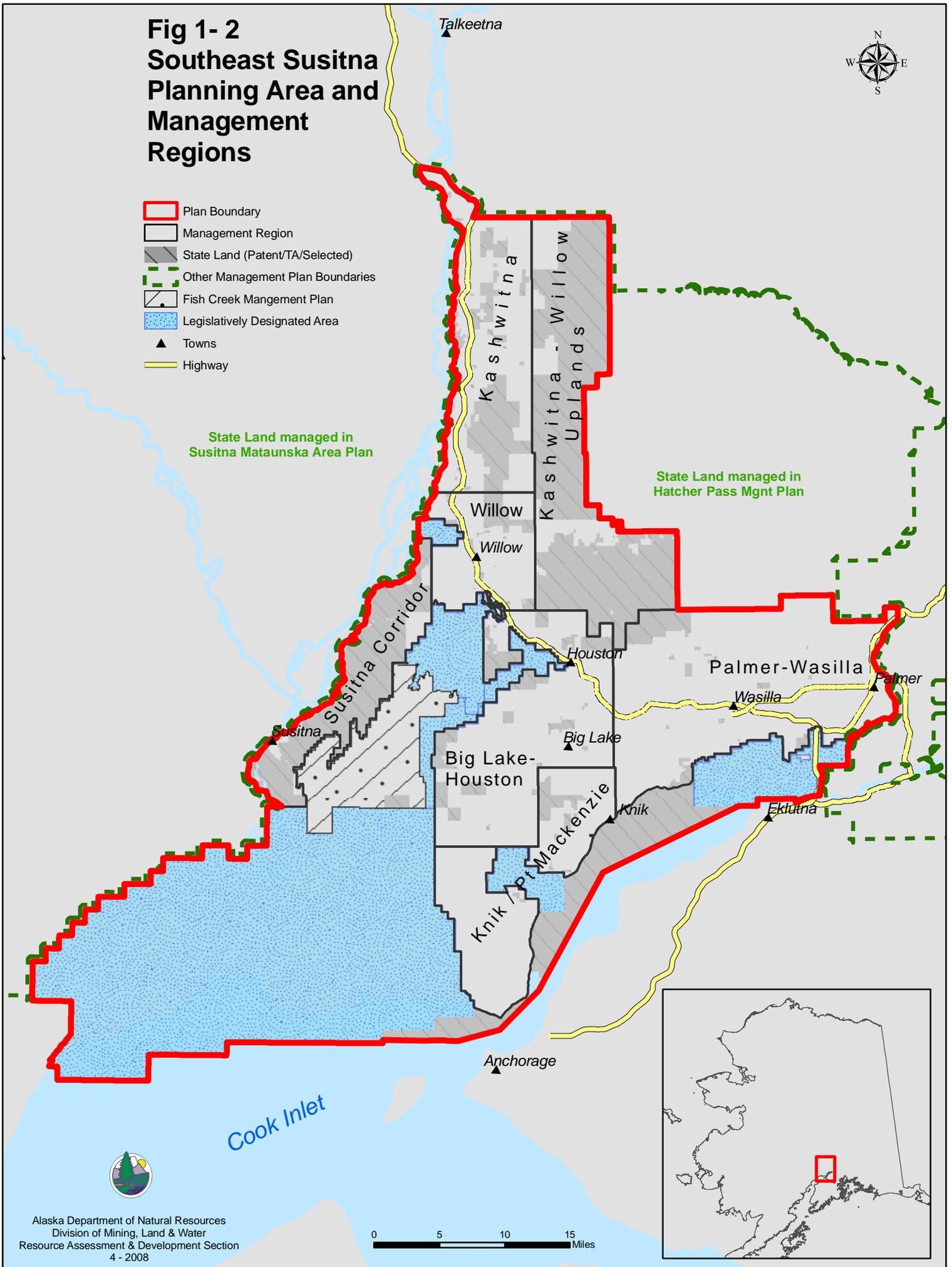
**Fig 1-2  
Southeast Susitna  
Planning Area and  
Management  
Regions**



- Plan Boundary
- Management Region
- State Land (Patent/TA/Selected)
- Other Management Plan Boundaries
- Fish Creek Mangement Plan
- Legislatively Designated Area
- Towns
- Highway

State Land managed in  
Susitna Matauska Area Plan

State Land managed in  
Hatcher Pass Mgmt Plan



This plan establishes the land use designation for state land and describes their intended uses. The plan directs which state lands will be retained by the state and which should be sold to private citizens, used for public recreation, or used for other purposes. It also identifies general management guidelines for major resources and land uses within the planning area as well as guidelines for the development and use of resources for specific parcels.

With an area plan, state permits and permit review processes become more efficient for the government and the public. The area plan guides DNR decisions for leases, sales, and permits that authorize use of state lands. Preparation of land use plans for state lands (except for State Park System lands) is required under Title 38 of Alaska Statutes. DNR's actions will be based on the area plan.

## **The Mandate**

The state is responsible for the management of those lands it owns and the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is that agency specifically responsible for this management. There are over 1,000,000 acres of uplands within the planning boundary and over 40,000 acres of tidelands and submerged lands. Of the uplands, most state land is associated with Legislatively Designated Areas (386,000 acres) and only 213,000 acres is associated with general state land. This plan focuses on the management of the general state land, although plan designations are identified for some of the LDAs.

Alaska Statute (AS 38.04.065) requires the Commissioner of DNR to “adopt, maintain, and when appropriate, revise regional land use plans that provide for the use and management of state-owned land.” To ensure that these lands are properly managed, DNR has developed this plan for all state lands – uplands, shorelands, tide and submerged lands – in the planning area.

The planning process provides a means of openly reviewing resource information and public concerns before making long-term decisions about public land management. The planning process resolves conflicting ideas on land use and informs the public about what choices were made and why. Decisions are made on a comprehensive basis, rather than case-by-case, providing consistency and consideration of the wide diversity of resources and uses within the planning area. This process provides for more efficient use and protection of the area's resources.

## **What the Plan Will Do**

The plan will help ensure that state resource management takes into account the sustained yield of renewable resources, that development is balanced with environmental concerns, and that public access to state land is provided. The plan encourages cooperation with other

landowners to better address conflicts caused by checkerboard land ownership patterns. Finally, the plan documents the state's intent for land management so that both public and private interests know how the state plans to manage lands over the long term.

## **How This Plan is Used**

This plan is intended to manage state lands and resources within the planning area, and is the expression of how DNR will pursue this management. Much of the use of this plan is by the DNR Division of Mining, Land and Water. Adjudicators use this plan when reviewing and making decisions on authorizations for use of state land, including permits, leases, sales, conveyances, and rights-of-way. The DNR Division of Forestry and Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation also use this plan in the administration of their programs and activities.

## **Public Participation in Planning Process**

The Southeast Susitna Area Plan is the product of over a year-long planning process conducted by the Division Mining, Land, and Water (DMLW) of the DNR; other divisions within DNR; state and federal agencies (primarily ADF&G); local government (primarily the City of Houston and the Matanuska-Susitna Borough); interest groups, and the public. Public meetings were held in the planning area from August through November of 2007. These meetings dealt with an explanation of the state planning process and the identification of local issues, which included both land use and resource management issues. The results of these discussions and meetings were incorporated into the Public Review Draft. A second round of meetings focused on the review of the Public Review Draft, which commenced in early 2008.

## **Process of Plan Preparation**

The following process was used to develop this area plan:

- identify issues in the planning area;
- map and analyze resources and uses;
- conduct public meetings to identify land use issues;
- prepare the Public Review Draft (PRD) based in part on comments previously received from the public and from agencies;
- public reviews the PRD;
- prepare an Issue/Response summary of all public comments on the PRD;

- based on the results of the Issue/Response Summary and additional agency review, prepare the final plan;
- DNR Commissioner adopts the area plan as DNR's management intent for state lands in the planning area.

## Who Developed the Plan?

The DNR planning staff directs the planning process, including data collection, drafting the plan, response to public and agency comments, and final plan preparation. A number of local, state, and federal agencies review the preliminary draft of the PRD and provide land use and resource recommendations that are valuable in refining initial plan recommendations. Following the review of public comments, DNR planning staff develops an issue response summary, which contains recommendations for specific revisions to the plan. The DNR Commissioner formally adopts the Southeast Susitna Area Plan following the review of public and agency comments on the PRD. The plan was adopted by the Commissioner on April 28, 2008.

## Uses and Resources Within the Planning Area

**Uses of State Land.** The plan outlines management objectives for state land. This includes describing what resources and valid existing uses should be protected, and what uses are most suitable for development or protection on state land during the planning horizon.

**State-selected Land and Land Susceptible to Navigation.** Some lands have been selected but not yet been conveyed to the state. Other lands are under waterbodies that, if determined navigable, are state-owned. In both cases, the plan determines how to manage these lands if they are state-owned.

**Land Sales.** The state has offered land for sale to Alaskan citizens. The planning process reviewed the state land holdings to determine which undeveloped lands are suitable for settlement uses in the future.

**Land Conveyance.** The Matanuska-Susitna Borough has completed its land selections under the Municipal Entitlement Act. Accordingly, this plan does not provide additional guidance to the municipal entitlement process as it applies to this Borough.

**Roads, Trails, and Access.** The plan considers access across state lands, including existing and proposed roads, trails, easements, and rights-of-way.

**Mining.** The plan reviews the mineral potential within the planning area and describes the statutory authorities that affect mining use. Because of the general lack of mineral potential within the planning area, the plan does not recommend the use of Mineral Closing Orders or Leasehold Location Orders. All state-owned lands are open to mineral entry, except for those areas that have been previously closed to mineral entry.

**Recreation.** Recreation is a popular use of state land. The plan proposes designations to manage lands for recreation in several locations where winter recreation is extensive. Many areas that are designated either Habitat or Water Resources are also widely used for winter recreation and this use is recognized in the management intent of a number of parcels.

**Fish and Wildlife Habitat and Harvest.** The plan documents fish and wildlife habitat and harvest areas and provides management intent and guidelines for these resources and uses.

**Water Resources.** DNR, through the DMLW, is responsible for allocating water resources on all lands within the state of Alaska. The plan designates areas to be managed for their water resource values and describes management guidelines for in-stream flow reservations. Areas with water resource values are primarily associated with the maintenance of wetlands, which are extensively distributed throughout the planning area.

## What the Plan Won't Do

The Southeast Susitna Area Plan is not the only way in which land management goals are implemented. The area plan is coordinated with a variety of other programs and projects implemented by the DNR and other state agencies. There are some important issues that are not addressed in this plan:

**Non-DNR Lands.** This plan does not apply to municipal, private, University of Alaska, Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, or Mental Health Trust lands. It only applies to those federal lands that have been selected for conveyance to the state.

**Fish and Wildlife.** Allocation of fish and game stocks and regulating methods and means of harvest are the responsibility of the state boards of Fisheries and Game.

**Generally Allowed Uses (GAU).** The area plan does not regulate activities that do not require a written authorization on state land, such as hiking, camping, boating, hunting, and fishing. Generally allowed uses are identified in 11 AAC 09.030 and 11 AAC 96; these sections also indicate the requirements, if any, affecting such uses.

**Legislatively Designated Areas.** The plan does not apply to state game refuges, recreation rivers, and recreation areas that are legislatively designated, although plan designations do apply to the game refuges and recreation river.

**Decisions on Specific Applications.** While this plan provides general management intent for state lands, the plan does not make decisions about specific land use authorizations. These decisions are made through the application review process. Land-use authorizations must, however, be consistent with the plan, and existing laws and regulations.

**Actions by agencies other than DNR.** The plan does not provide management intent for prescribing actions and policies for agencies and governments other than DNR.

## **Planning Period**

This plan reflects land management decisions and allocations based on the best available information on the demand for use of state land and resources projected over the next 20 years. It is also based on a specific set of social, environmental, economic, and technological assumptions. The plan guides state land use and resource decisions for the next 20 years or until the plan is revised.

## **Summary of Plan Actions**

### **Management Intent**

The planning area consists of six regions that primarily contain uplands, one region consisting of tideland areas within Knik Arm, and a region that encompasses six LDAs. The regions are composed of state-owned and state-selected lands that are contiguous to each other, have similar characteristics, and are thought of as distinct parts of the local community. The plan presents management intent that explains the department's overall resource management objectives for each region and unit, and provides resource and use information for land managers. This information is presented in Chapter 3.

### **Land Use Designations**

Each unit identifies one or more designations representing the uses and resources for which the area will be managed. Plan designations are identified and described in the first part of Chapter 3. The Resource Allocation Tables in the same Chapter contains the designations specific to individual units.

## **Management Guidelines**

According to the Alaska Constitution, state lands are to be managed for multiple use. When potentially conflicting uses are designated in a parcel, the plan provides guidelines to allow various uses to occur without unacceptable consequences. Management guidelines for specific management units are given in Chapter 3. Guidelines that apply to the entire planning area are identified in Chapter 2.

## **Classifications**

All state lands in the planning area will be classified consistent with the land use designations in this plan. Classifications made by the plan will be noted to the state's Land Status Plats. A table that shows how designations convert to classifications is located in Chapter 4. The Land Classification Order (LCO) that is to be adopted with this plan is included as Appendix B. The LCO actually enacts and imposes the classifications that are identified as designations in the area plan.

## **Summary of Plan Implementation and Modification**

The plan is implemented through administrative actions such as leases, permits, land conveyances, and classification orders. The plan serves as the final finding for land classifications. Chapter 4 presents the details of plan implementation recommendations and procedures.

Economic and social conditions in Alaska and the planning area are sure to change and the plan must be flexible enough to change with them. The plan will be reviewed regularly to monitor progress in implementing the plan and to identify problems that may require amendment or modification.

Specific modifications may be made whenever conditions warrant them, though a request for these changes must follow certain procedures. The plan may be amended after approval by the Commissioner of DNR following public review and consultation with the appropriate agencies. Special exceptions and minor changes must follow certain procedures. See Chapter 4 for a more detailed description of procedures for plan modifications, amendments, special exceptions, and minor changes.