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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

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# 1 CHAPTER 1

## 2 INTRODUCTION

### 3 Introduction and Background

4

#### 5 Summary of Purpose of the Plan

6

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

11

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

14

15

#### 16 Description of the Planning Area

17

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

22

23

Area	Acres
State-owned uplands	211,381
State-selected uplands	411
State-owned tidelands	42,489
Total Acreage	254,281

24

25

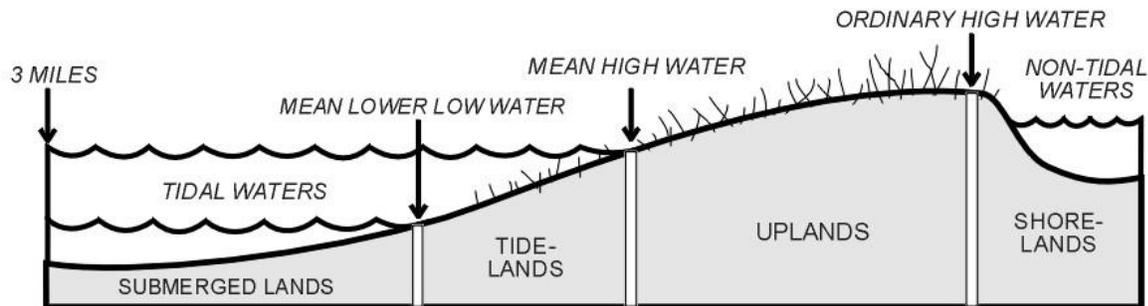
26 **NOTE:** There are six Legislatively Designated Areas (LDA) within the planning area and they  
27 encompass approximately 386,000 acres. The SSAP establishes land use designations for these  
28 areas, but management intent is found in the statutes, regulations and management plans  
29 applicable to each LDA. Refer to the LDA region description at the end of this chapter for  
30 more details.

31

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

2  
3 Tidelands span the area from mean high water to mean lower low water; submerged lands  
4 reach from mean lower low water to a line three miles seaward from mean lower low water.  
5 Shorelands include the lands below ordinary high water in non-tidal areas.

6  
7 **Figure 1-1: Submerged lands, tidelands, uplands, and shorelands as described in this plan**  
8



## 9 10 11 Update of the Original Willow Sub-Basin Area Plan

12  
13 The original Willow Sub-Basin Area Plan was prepared in the late 1970s and was adopted in  
14 1982. The entire area of the original Willow Sub-Basin Area Plan is within the planning  
15 boundary of the Southeast Susitna Area Plan (SSAP). The original Susitna Area Plan was  
16 adopted in 1985 and a portion of its South Parks Highway Subregion is within the planning  
17 boundary for the SSAP. Since their original adoption, much has changed in the Susitna Valley,  
18 with much of the area along the Parks Highway being developed. A variety of economic and  
19 demographic trends have accelerated growth, and probably will continue to accelerate growth,  
20 in this area. Another major change has been the marked decline in the inventory of state land.  
21 In the early 1980s the state was the principal land owner in the Valley but since that time its  
22 importance has decreased with much of its holdings being conveyed to the Matanuska-Susitna  
23 Borough, Cook Inlet Regional Corporation, the Mental Health Trust, and the University of  
24 Alaska. This has resulted in a decreased and dispersed state land base, although significant  
25 holdings still remain in the far easterly and westerly parts of the planning area. For these and  
26 other reasons, revision of the 1982 plan was appropriate and was undertaken beginning in 2007.  
27 Area plans are intended to be updated on a 15 to 20 year schedule.

28  
29 This revision supersedes and replaces the entire 1982 Willow Sub-Basin Plan and the affected  
30 portion of the Susitna Area Plan. The Land Classification Order that accompanies this revision  
31 revises and supersedes all previous land classifications. Current mineral orders and leasehold  
32 location orders however remain in effect and are not modified by this revision.

## 1 **Planning Area**

2  
3 The planning boundary of the Southeast Susitna Area Plan includes all state owned and state  
4 selected uplands, and all tidelands, submerged lands and shorelands within the area depicted on  
5 Figure 3-1 at the beginning of Chapter 3. This area includes the cities of Houston, Wasilla, and  
6 Palmer and occupies portions of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough. The planning area extends  
7 from the intersection of the Talkeetna Spur Road and the Parks Highway in the north, to the  
8 Knik Arm of Cook Inlet in the south, and is bounded by the Susitna River in the west, the  
9 Matanuska River in the east, and the Hatcher Pass Management Plan in the northeast. Within  
10 this planning area are a number of large Legislatively Designated Areas (LDAs) which total  
11 386,000 acres and include: the Willow and Nancy Lake State Recreation Areas, the Palmer  
12 Hay Flat, Goose Bay, and Susitna Flats State Game Refuges, and the Little Susitna State  
13 Recreation River. The recommendations of this plan pertain primarily to the state-owned and  
14 state-selected land not within the LDAs, a total of 254,281 acres.  
15

## 16 17 **How the Plan is Organized**

18  
19 The plan has four chapters:  
20

21 **Chapter 1** includes a summary of the purpose of the plan, description of the planning area,  
22 how and why the plan was developed, what the plan does and does not cover, and a summary  
23 of plan actions.  
24

25 **Chapter 2** includes goals of the plan and guidelines that apply throughout the planning area.  
26 Guidelines are listed in 11 resource and land-use categories. Guidelines are specific directives  
27 that will be applied to land and water management decisions as resource use and development  
28 occurs.  
29

30 **Chapter 3** includes an explanation of plan designations, general management intent for state  
31 land, descriptions of the eight planning regions, and a detailed listing of management units. It  
32 also provides a summary of management constraints and considerations based on existing  
33 plans, legislative designations and other management constraints that significantly affect  
34 resource management, and a description of navigability as it relates to state waters within the  
35 planning region.  
36

37 The bulk of this Chapter, however, consists of the Resource Allocation Tables. State land in  
38 the planning area is divided into spatial units called 'units'. These may either be tidelands or  
39 uplands and may consist both of small areas of state land, like a lot or tract within a state  
40 subdivision, as well as very large areas that have common locational, access, use, or resource  
41 characteristics. There are 151 upland units and 2 tideland units. This table, for each unit,  
42 identifies the recommended land use designation, background and resource information, and  
43 management intent. These parcels correspond to the management units identified on the plan  
44 maps.

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

5  
6 **Appendices** include a glossary and a land classification order.  
7  
8

### 9 **Why This Plan Was Developed**

10  
11 The planning area is rich in natural resources, contains a mix of developed and undeveloped  
12 land, and there are competing demands for the use of state land. There are many different ideas  
13 about how these resources should be used or protected. Although some proposed uses might be  
14 in conflict with each other, many different uses can occur throughout the planning area while  
15 protecting vital resources, providing the uses are properly managed.  
16

17 This plan establishes the land use designation for state land and describes their intended uses.  
18 The plan directs which state lands will be retained by the state and which should be sold to  
19 private citizens, used for public recreation, or used for other purposes. It also identifies general  
20 management guidelines for major resources and land uses within the planning area as well as  
21 guidelines for the development and use of resources for specific parcels.  
22

23 With an area plan, state permits and permit review processes become more efficient for the  
24 government and the public. The area plan guides DNR decisions for leases, sales, and permits  
25 that authorize use of state lands. Preparation of land use plans for state lands (except for State  
26 Park System lands) is required under Title 38 of Alaska Statutes. DNR's actions will be based  
27 on the area plan.  
28  
29

### 30 **The Mandate**

31  
32 The state is responsible for the management of those lands it owns and the Department of  
33 Natural Resources is that agency specifically responsible for this management. There are over  
34 1,000,000 acres of uplands within the planning boundary and over 40,000 acres of tidelands  
35 and submerged lands. Of the uplands, most state land is associated with Legislatively  
36 Designated Areas (386,000 acres) and only 212,000 acres is associated with general state land.  
37 This plan focuses on the management of the general state land, although plan designations are  
38 identified for the LDAs.  
39

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

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

### 10 **What the Plan Will Do**

12 The plan will help ensure that state resource management takes into account the sustained yield  
13 of renewable resources, that development is balanced with environmental concerns, and that  
14 public access to state land is provided. The plan encourages cooperation with other landowners  
15 to better address conflicts caused by checkerboard land ownership patterns. Finally, the plan  
16 documents the state's intent for land management so that both public and private interests know  
17 how the state plans to manage lands over the long term.

### 20 **How This Plan is Used**

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

### 30 **Public Participation in Planning Process**

32 The Southeast Susitna Area Plan is the product of over a year-long planning process conducted  
33 by the Division Mining, Land, and Water (DMLW) of the Department of Natural Resources;  
34 other divisions within DNR; state and federal agencies (primarily ADFG); local government  
35 (primarily the City of Houston and the Matanuska-Susitna Borough); interest groups, and the  
36 public. Public meetings were held in the planning area from August through November of  
37 2007. These meetings dealt with an explanation of the state planning process and the  
38 identification of local issues, which included both land use and resource management issues.  
39 The results of these discussions and meetings were incorporated into the Public Review Draft.  
40 A second round of meetings will focus on the review of the Public Review Draft.

## 1 **Process of Plan Preparation**

2  
3 The following process was used to develop this area plan:

- 4 • identify issues in the planning area;
- 5 • map and analyze resources and uses;
- 6 • conduct public meetings to identify land use issues;
- 7 • prepare the Public Review Draft (PRD) based in part on comments previously received
- 8 from the public and from agencies;
- 9 • public reviews the PRD<sup>1</sup>;
- 10 • prepare an Issue/Response summary of all public comments on the PRD;
- 11 • based on the results of the Issue/Response Summary, prepare an Intent to Adopt (ITA)
- 12 draft of the plan and circulate for public review;
- 13 • prepare the final plan incorporating comments on the ITA; and
- 14 • the Commissioner signs the plan and adopts it as DNR's management intent for state
- 15 lands in the planning area.
- 16
- 17
- 18

## 19 **Who Developed the Plan?**

20  
21 The DNR planning staff directs the planning process, including data collection, drafting the  
22 plan, response to public and agency comments, and final plan preparation. A number of local,  
23 state, and federal agencies review the preliminary draft of the PRD and provide land use and  
24 resource recommendations that are valuable in refining initial plan recommendations. The  
25 Commissioner of the Department of Natural Resources formally adopts the Southeast Susitna  
26 Area Plan, which is scheduled to occur following the review of public and agency comments on  
27 the PRD.  
28  
29

## 30 **Uses and Resources Within the Planning Area**

31  
32 **Uses of State Land.** The plan outlines management objectives for state land. This includes  
33 describing what resources and valid existing uses should be protected, and what uses are most  
34 suitable for development or protection on state land during the planning horizon.  
35

36 **State-selected Land and Land Susceptible to Navigation.** Some lands have been selected  
37 but not yet been conveyed to the state. Other lands are under waterbodies that, if determined  
38 navigable, are state-owned. In both cases, the plan determines how to manage these lands if  
39 they are state-owned.  
40

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<sup>1</sup> This is the current phase of plan preparation.

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

4  
5 **Land Conveyance.** The Matanuska-Susitna Borough has completed its land selections under  
6 the Municipal Entitlement Act. Accordingly, this plan does not provide additional guidance to  
7 the municipal entitlement process as it applies to this Borough.

8  
9 **Roads, Trails, and Access.** The plan considers access across state lands, including existing  
10 and proposed roads, trails, easements, and rights-of-way.

11  
12 **Mining.** The plan reviews the mineral potential within the planning area and describes the  
13 statutory authorities that affect mining use. Because of the general lack of mineral potential  
14 within the planning area, the plan does not recommend the use of Mineral Closing Orders or  
15 Leasehold Location Orders. All state owned lands are open to mineral entry, except for those  
16 areas that have been previously closed to mineral entry.

17  
18 **Recreation.** Recreation is a popular use of state land. The plan proposes designations to  
19 manage lands for recreation in several locations where winter recreation is extensive. Many  
20 areas that are designated either Habitat or Water Resources are also widely used for winter  
21 recreation and this use is recognized in the management intent of a number of parcels.

22  
23 **Fish and Wildlife Habitat and Harvest.** The plan documents fish and wildlife habitat and  
24 harvest areas and provides management intent and guidelines for these resources and uses.

25  
26 **Water Resources.** DNR, through the DMLW, is responsible for allocating water resources on  
27 all lands within the state of Alaska. The plan designates areas to be managed for their water  
28 resource values and describes management guidelines for instream flow reservations. Areas  
29 with water resource values are primarily associated with the maintenance of wetlands, which  
30 are extensively distributed throughout the planning area.

### 31 32 33 **What the Plan Won't Do**

34  
35 The Southeast Susitna Area Plan is not the only way in which land management goals are  
36 implemented. The area plan is coordinated with a variety of other programs and projects  
37 implemented by the Department of Natural Resources and other state agencies. There are some  
38 important issues that are not addressed in this plan:

39  
40 **Non-DNR Lands.** This plan does not apply to federal, municipal, private, University of  
41 Alaska, Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, or Mental Health Trust  
42 lands.

43

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

3  
4 **Generally Allowed Uses (GAU).** The area plan does not regulate activities that do not require  
5 a written authorization on state land, such as hiking, camping, boating, hunting, and fishing.  
6 Generally allowed uses are identified in 11 AAC 09.030 and 11 AAC 96; these sections also  
7 indicate the requirements, if any, affecting such uses.

8  
9 **Legislatively Designated Areas.** The plan does not apply to state refuges and recreation areas  
10 that are legislatively designated.

11  
12 **Decisions on Specific Applications.** While this plan provides general management intent for  
13 state lands, the plan does not make decisions about specific land-use authorizations. These  
14 decisions are made through the application review process. Land-use authorizations must,  
15 however, be consistent with the plan, and existing laws and regulations.

16  
17 **Actions by agencies other than DNR.** The plan does not provide management intent for  
18 prescribing actions and policies for agencies and governments other than DNR.

## 19 20 21 **Planning Period**

22  
23 This plan reflects land management decisions and allocations based on the best available  
24 information on the demand for use of state land and resources projected over the next 20 years.

25 It is also based on a specific set of social, environmental, economic, and technological  
26 assumptions. The plan guides state land use and resource decisions for the next 20 years or  
27 until the plan is revised.

## 28 29 30 **Summary of Plan Actions**

### 31 32 **Management Intent**

33  
34 The planning area consists of six regions that primarily contain uplands, one region consisting  
35 of tideland areas within Knik Arm, and a single region that encompasses six LDAs. The  
36 regions are composed of state-owned and state-selected lands that are contiguous to each other,  
37 have similar characteristics, and are thought of as distinct parts of the local community. The  
38 plan presents management intent that explains the department's overall resource management  
39 objectives for each region and unit, and provides resource and use information for land  
40 managers. This information is presented in Chapter 3.

1 **Land Use Designations**

2

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

7

8

9 **Management Guidelines**

10

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

16

17

18 **Classifications**

19

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

26

27

28 **Summary of Plan Implementation and Modification**

29

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

34

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

39

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