

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

Introduction and Background.....	1
Summary of Purpose of the Plan.....	1
Description of the Planning Area.....	1
Uplands and Shorelands as Described in This Plan.....	2
Figure 1-1: Submerged lands, tidelands, uplands, and shorelands as described in this plan.....	2
Update of the Original Susitna Area Plan.....	2
Planning Area.....	3
How the Plan is Organized .....	4
Figure 1-2: Planning Boundary and Regions .....	5
Why This Plan Was Developed .....	6
The Mandate .....	6
What the Plan Will Do.....	7
How This Plan is Used.....	7
Public Participation in Planning Process .....	7
Process of Plan Preparation .....	8
Who Developed the Plan?.....	8
Uses and Resources Within the Planning Area.....	8
What the Plan Won't Do .....	10
Planning Period.....	11
Summary of Plan Actions .....	11
Management Intent .....	11
Land Use Designations .....	11
Management Guidelines .....	11
Classifications .....	11
Summary of Plan Implementation and Modification.....	12

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

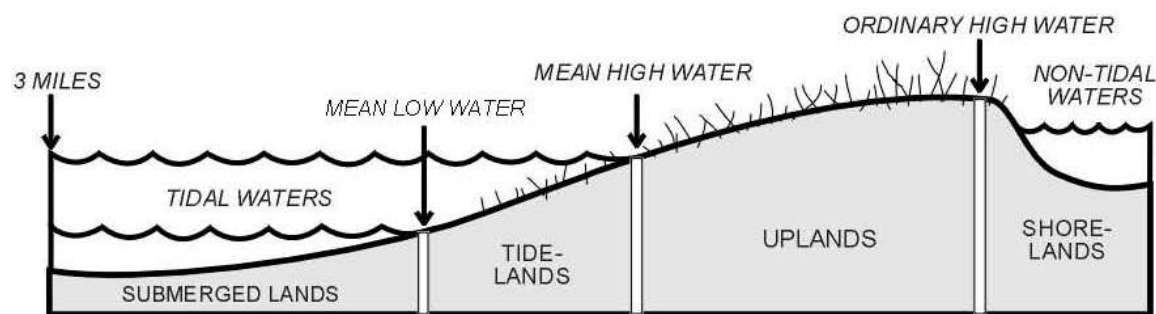
Area	Acres
State-owned uplands	8,462,045
State-owned shorelands	79,340
State-selected uplands	<u>71,976</u>
Total Acreage	8,613,361

**NOTE:** There are seven Legislatively Designated Areas (LDA) within the planning area which encompass approximately 3 of the 9 million acres. The SMAP establishes land use designations for all of these areas (except for 337,608 acres in state park units) but management intent is found in the statutes, regulations and management plans applicable to each LDA. Refer to the LDA region description at the end of Chapter 3, and definition in the Glossary, for more details.

## Uplands and Shorelands as Described in This Plan

Figure 1-1 depicts those areas typically owned by the state and affected by area plans. In the case of this area plan, because the planning area does not include tidelands or submerged lands, only that portion of the figure that depicts uplands and shorelands apply. Shorelands include the lands below ordinary high water in non-tidal areas. Uplands include all other land above ordinary high water in non-tidal areas. These definitions are also found in the Glossary.

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



## Update of the Original Susitna Area Plan

The original Susitna Area Plan was prepared in the early 1980s and was adopted in June, 1985. The original plan included a number of regions that are not part of this update.

This revision makes several changes in the planning boundary. The 2011 Susitna Matanuska Area Plan (SMAP) does not include the following regions: Beluga, the southern part of South Parks Highway, Lake Louise, and the northern portion of the Talkeetna Mountains region. The Beluga region has been dropped since it is covered by the Kenai Area Plan. As a matter of practice, DNR develops its area plans to coincide with borough boundaries. The southern portion of the South Parks Highway region has been incorporated into the Southeast Susitna Area Plan (2008), and both the northern part of the Talkeetna Mountains and Lake Louise region have been excluded from this revision and are to be covered in a new area plan for these two regions. Until the land use ownership patterns are established with some amount of finality in the Talkeetna Mountains unit, it did not appear prudent to update this portion of the area plan. Figure 1-2 depicts the plan boundary and the planning regions within this boundary for the 2011 SMAP.

Since the adoption of the Susitna Area Plan in 1985, much has changed in the Susitna and Matanuska Valleys, with much of the area along the Parks and Glenn Highways being developed. A variety of economic and demographic trends has accelerated growth and probably will continue to create growth in the areas most readily accessible from the developed roads or major regional trails. Another major change has been the marked decline in the inventory of state land, which has been particularly noticeable in the areas along and adjoining the Parks and Glenn Highways. In the early 1980s the state was the principal land owner in these areas. Since that time the amount of state land has steadily decreased with state land being conveyed to the Matanuska-Susitna Borough; Cook Inlet Region, Inc.; the Mental Health Trust; the University of Alaska; and to private parties through state land and agricultural land sales and settlements. This has resulted in a decreased and dispersed state land base in areas near the two highways, although extensive state holdings remain in the more remote and inaccessible parts of the planning area. Additionally, the 1985 area plan has been found difficult to use for decision making in DNR since its land ownership patterns and land classification designations do not reflect the current patterns of state ownership or land classification. For these and other reasons, revision of the 1985 plan was appropriate and was undertaken beginning in 2009. Area plans are intended to be updated on a 15 to 20 year schedule.

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 Susitna Matanuska Area Plan includes all state-owned and state-selected uplands and shore lands within the area depicted in Figure 1-2. This extensive area consists of vast areas of mountainous terrain associated with the Chugach Mountains in the east, the Talkeetna Mountains and Alaska Range in the north, and the Tordrillo Mountains in the west, which are also part of the Alaska Range. Interspersed between these areas is the expanse of the lowlands of the Susitna Valley and portions of the Matanuska Valley. This area coincides with the boundary of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough in the west and much of the north, but almost all of the planning area occurs within the corporate boundary of this borough. Significantly, the planning area does not include the more central and heavily used lowlands that are included as part of the Southeast Susitna Area Plan, the westward extension of the Knik Glacier, and the mountainous area associated with the Hatcher Pass management area. The area of the Knik Glacier and Knik River are managed under the Knik River Public Use Area Management Plan and the area of Hatcher Pass, by the Hatcher Pass Management Plan. Consult these three plans for management requirements on the state lands that they affect. Within this planning area are seven Legislatively Designated Areas (LDAs), which total 3,044,116 acres, and include: the Nelchina Public Use Area, Denali State Park, Matanuska Valley Moose Range, Caribou Creek Recreational Mining

Area, Petersville Recreational Mining Area, and portions of Susitna Basin Recreation Rivers and Chugach State Park. The recommendations of this plan pertain to the state-owned and state-selected land not within the LDAs, a total of about 6 million acres.

## **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.

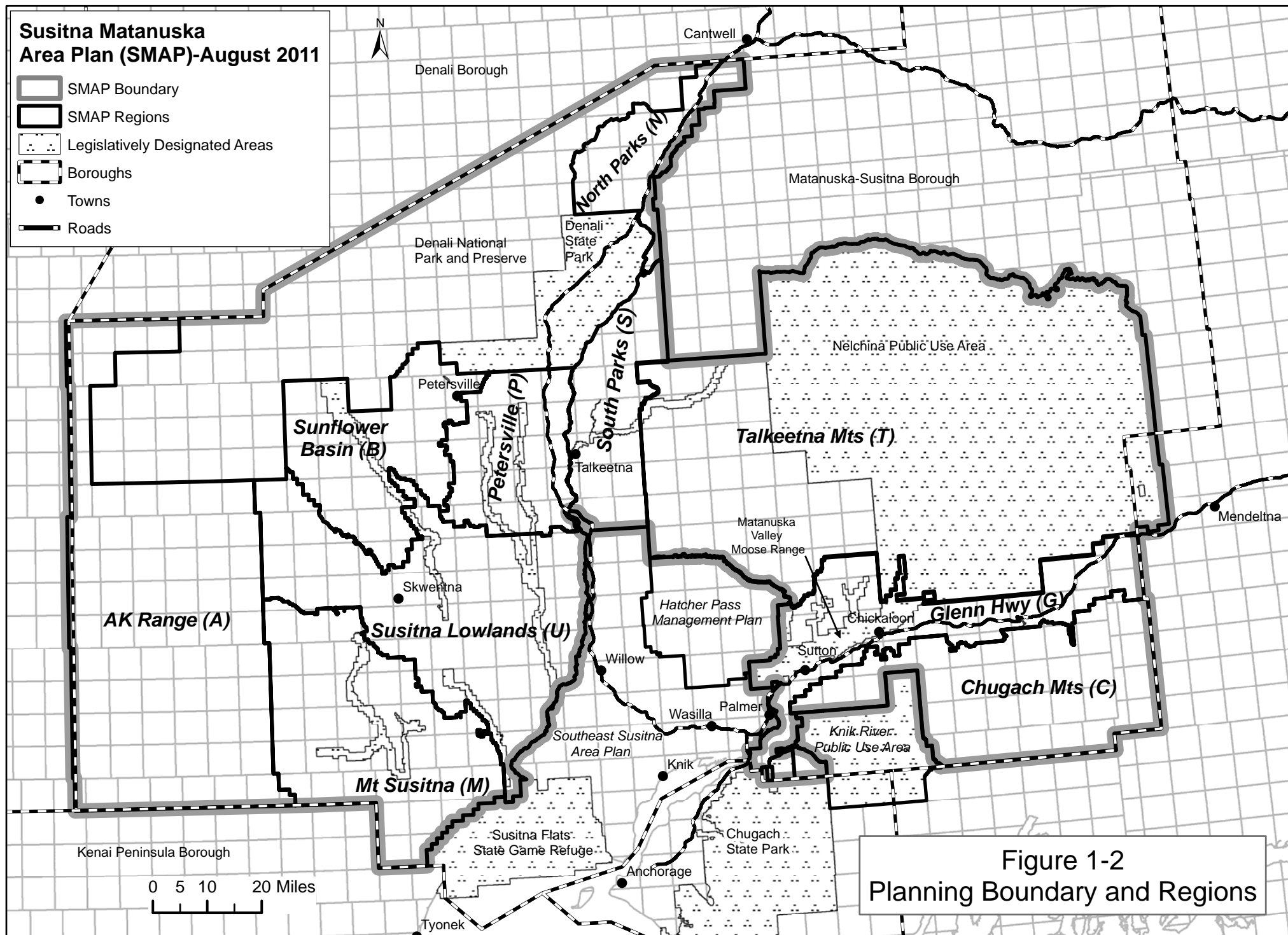
The bulk of this Chapter, however, consists of the Resource Allocation Tables. State land in the planning area is divided into spatial areas called ‘units’. These are either uplands or shorelands and may consist both of small areas of state land, like a lot or tract within a state subdivision, as well as very large areas that have common location, access, use, or resource characteristics. There are 166 upland units and four shoreland units along the Susitna, Matanuska and Chulitna Rivers. 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.

# Susitna Matanuska Area Plan (SMAP)-August 2011

-  SMAP Boundary
-  SMAP Regions
-  Legislatively Designated Areas
-  Boroughs
-  Towns
-  Roads



0 5 10 20 Miles

Figure 1-2  
Planning Boundary and Regions

## **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.

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 about 9 million acres of uplands within the planning boundary and approximately 79,000 acres of shorelands associated with the Susitna, Matanuska and Chulitna Rivers. Nearly 33% of all state land within the planning area is associated with Legislatively Designated Areas (LDAs); the remainder of state land (6 million acres) is associated with general domain land managed under AS 38.04 and 38.05. This plan focuses on the management of the general state land, although plan designations are identified for most of the LDAs in order to permit leases and other disposal of less than the fee estate to occur.

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, both uplands and shorelands 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 assured. 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 Susitna Matanuska Area Plan is the product of a two year planning process conducted by the Division Mining, Land, and Water (DMLW) of the Department of Natural Resources (DNR); other divisions within DNR; state and federal agencies (primarily ADF&G); local government (Matanuska-Susitna Borough); interest groups, and the public. A first round of public meetings focused on a description of the planning process and planning area and on issue identification and scoping. A second round of public meetings were held in the planning area in the spring of 2010. These meetings focused on the Public Review Draft with information provided on proposed plan designations and management intent (for specific management units) and on plan implementation. The results of these discussions and the subsequent review of public comments submitted on the Public Review Draft formed the basis for revisions to the draft plan.



## **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 reviewed the preliminary draft of the PRD and provided land use and resource recommendations that were valuable in refining initial plan recommendations. The Commissioner of the Department of Natural Resources formally adopted the Susitna Matanuska Area Plan, following the review of public and agency comments on the PRD.

## **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 or agricultural land disposal.

**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, Coal Leasing, and Oil and Gas Development.** The plan reviews the mineral, coal, and oil and gas potential within the planning area and describes the statutory authorities that affect mining, coal development, and oil and gas extraction. The 1985 area plan implemented a number of mineral closing orders and leasehold location orders; these primarily affected areas proposed for settlement and for designation as state recreation rivers. (The recommendations on recreation rivers were subsequently implemented through a Legislatively Designated Area designation.) This revision maintains all of the current closures but does not recommend any further closures to mineral entry and development. The more critical areas have been adequately covered by the 1985 mineral closures. Other than the 1985 closures, all state-owned lands are open to mineral entry. Coal and oil and gas development can occur throughout the planning area, although certain stipulations on these types of uses are prescribed in the Susitna Basin Recreation Rivers Management Plan.

**Forest Resources.** Extensive forest resources exist within the planning area. These are scattered throughout the eastern, central, and western portions of the planning area, and total approximately 683,000 acres. The plan identifies these areas and specifies the areas considered appropriate for inclusion in the sustained yield calculations that are made by the Division of Forestry. Those areas with forest resource potential that are designated Forestry in the area plan are considered appropriate for inclusion in a state forest, should the legislature consider the creation of a state forest within the planning area.

**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.** The plan documents important fish and wildlife habitat 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 Susitna Matanuska 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. The following 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 parks, refuges, public use areas, and recreation areas that are legislatively designated. It also does not apply to the Matanuska Valley Moose Range.

**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 ten regions that primarily contain uplands and a single region that encompasses seven 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 Chapter 3 along with Resource Allocation Tables that contains the designations specific to individual units.

### **Management Guidelines**

According to the Alaska Constitution, state lands are to be managed for multiple uses. 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. Table 4-2 in Chapter 4 shows how designations convert to classifications. 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 periodically 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.