

Forestry

The forest resources of the Susitna planning area are a mixture of white spruce and paper birch in the upland areas with cottonwood and balsam poplar in the lowland areas. Paper birch is the dominant species in this boreal forest type. White spruce has commercial value for sawlogs, biomass, fiber, and woodchips. The commercial value of the paper birch is for biomass, fiber, and wood chips with some sawlog value in birch which contains little or no defect. Most of the birch within the Southeast Susitna is over 70 years old and contains a high percentage of rot or defect. There are some specialty markets for the cottonwood and balsam poplar but for the most part these species have little commercial value at the present time in this area.

A unique aspect of forest management within the Susitna Valley is the application of specific standards that affect forest operations and management. Normally, areawide management guidelines are not provided at this level of specificity. Rather, the area plan provides forest management recommendations, but these are necessarily generalized and the specifics of forest stand management and harvest layout are deferred to the Forest Land Use Plan(ning) process conducted by the Division of Forestry (DOF) for specific tracts at the time of timber sale. Within the SMAP planning area, the document, 'Susitna Forestry Guidelines' provides the basis for the interim management of forest resources and timber layouts pending the preparation and adoption of the new forest resources management plan described below in Management Guideline J. The Guidelines control the method for calculating sustained yield and establish general and specific design and siting requirements that affect timber harvest layout and operation logging requirements within the Susitna Valley. They complement the requirements for forest management contained in this section. The relationship between the Guidelines and the area plan is described in more detail, following.

This plan also recommends that consideration be given to the creation of a state forest as a mechanism to manage the significant state forestry resources within the planning area. State Forests, besides providing a strong basis for forest stand management, provide areas for public recreation and are important for the protection of key wildlife and fisheries resources and their associated habitat. This recommendation affects those parcels that are designated or co-designated Forestry or General Use where the management intent statement indicates that the parcel is appropriate for timber harvest. See Management Guideline H for more detail. Also recommended is the preparation of a forest resources management plan within areas designated Forestry, to provide more detailed management guidance to the several resources and uses that occur within these areas. See Management Guideline J for more detail on this recommendation.

The recommendations that follow implement constitutional and statutory policies to develop the state's renewable resources, making them available for maximum use, consistent with the principle of sustained yield and with the overall public interest. The primary purpose of the timber management program is timber management that provides for the production,

utilization, and replenishment of timber resources while allowing other beneficial uses of public lands and resources. Forestry designated lands are to be managed by DNR as a 'working forest' consistent with the constitutional mandate to encourage the use and development of state's resources, including renewable resources. A 'working forest' refers to actively managed forest lands that provide wood for personal and commercial use, while protecting fish and wildlife habitat, providing the public with recreation and other multiple use of state land, and maintaining public benefits such as clean air, land, and water. Uses such as agriculture, grazing and settlement are not generally appropriate.

The Alaska Forest Resources and Practices Act (AS 41.17.060) sets standards for management of all state forest land for the management objectives of sustained yield and multiple use (AS 41.17.060(b) and (c)). AS 41.15.010-020 and .170(2) set standards for forest protection from fire and other destructive agents. These standards, including those for forest economics, reforestation, fish and wildlife habitat, scenic quality, and other use apply statewide. In addition, the following goals apply specifically to the SMAP area.

Goals

Personal Use Timber. Provide timber to meet the needs of Alaskans. Subject to limits of funding, staffing, and sustained yield, this program will be provided on a demand basis when the operational costs of administering this program are satisfactory.

Economic Opportunities. Provide for economic opportunities and stability in the forest products industry by allowing the use of state uplands in areas designated Forestry. Also, to benefit the state's and borough's economies by providing royalties to the state from stumpage receipts, and adding to the state's economy through wages, purchases, jobs, and business.

Support Timber Industry. Continue to perform reviews of private timber harvests for adherence to the Alaska Forest Resources and Practices Act and provide the timber industry with information, technical expertise, and management guidance for utilizing forest resources.

Wildland Fire Suppression. DOF shall continue to provide wildland fire suppression within the planning area consistent with the requirements of the Alaska Interagency Fire Management Plan and with statute, which requires the protection of natural resources and certain cultural features.

Forest Health. To improve forest health and vigor by harvesting and replacing mature birch stands with healthy new stands of regrowth, while protecting and maintaining other resource values.

Wildlife Habitat Management. DNR will seek to create, enhance and maintain wildlife habitat consistent with forest management by providing a mosaic of forest stand areas, including some early-successional stages, for the variety of wildlife species that live in the planning area.

Management Guidelines

A systematic program of scheduled timber harvests is appropriate within the planning area. Timber management activities are subject to the following management guidelines.

Another important component of the state forestry program within the planning area is fire management. A management guideline is included that describes the broad aspects of this program. The implementation of the state fire management program is identified and controlled in detail by the Alaska Interagency Fire Management Plan.

A. Timber Harvest Guidelines.

- 1) All timber harvest activities must be compatible with the general management guidelines of this section and with the management intent statements and land use designations identified in specific management units of this plan found in Chapter 3. Systematic timber harvest programs are to be conducted in areas designated Forestry⁶. Forest harvest operations conducted on a parcel of state land intended for subdivision development by DNR can precede actual construction. However, these operations must be consistent with the subdivision plan for the parcel; consultation with DMLW is required before commencing operations.
- 2) Timber harvest operations will be conducted in accordance with the stipulations in the Forest Land Use Plan, the Five Year Schedule of Timber Sales, the Alaska Forest Resources and Practices Act (AS 41.17 & 11 AAC 95), the Alaska Land Act (AS 38.05 & 11 AAC 71), Susitna Forest Guidelines⁷, and other pertinent state guidelines and laws. The Forest Practices Act provides statewide policy and regulatory authority for managing forestry related activities. The Susitna Forestry Guidelines provide specific management guidance for timber harvest layout in the Susitna Valley, which are in addition to the requirements of the Forest Resources and Practices Act. The specific layout and other site-specific requirements of a timber sale is addressed through a Forest Land Use Plan (FLUPs), which is prepared prior to any commercial timber harvest or sale (AS 38.05.112).

⁶ Harvest activities related to habitat manipulation or to the management of overall forest health are exempt from this requirement.

⁷ Or successor management plans. Note: This comment applies to all other references to Susitna Forest Guidelines made in this section.

FLUPs developed for timber sale or harvests in the planning area are to be consistent with the Forestry Management Guidelines of this Chapter and the Management Guidelines specified for particular parcels in Chapter 3. FLUPs shall consider, in their preparation, the sensitive resources and wildlife, or any other significant factors, identified in the Management Guidelines for a parcel.

- 3) This area plan establishes the geographic areas to which the Susitna Forest Guidelines apply. The Guidelines apply to those management units in this plan that are designated Forestry or co-designated Forestry in the SMAP. If there is inconsistency between the requirements of this plan and the specifics of timber harvest and harvest layouts, the Guidelines apply. The Susitna Matanuska Area Plan, however, shall be used as the basis for the determination of the areas appropriate for timber harvest within the planning area and for the calculation of sustained yield estimates within the Susitna Valley.

B. Timber Salvage From Rights-of-Way. Timber with commercial or personal use value should be salvaged from lands that are to be cleared for other uses such as roads, transmission lines, material sites, mining, and habitat enhancement projects (AS 41.17.083). The DMLW Regional Manager shall determine the amount and kind of material that is to be salvaged and shall coordinate with DOF on timber salvage operations having commercial value.

C. Personal Use Wood Harvest. When forested lands are available near communities and where personal use harvest is consistent with other purposes for which the land is being managed, DOF may provide wood products for personal use. This program will only be undertaken, however, if it can be effectively and efficiently administered by DOF. In areas designated for settlement, personal use forestry permits may be issued by Division of Forestry after consultation with DMLW's Land Sales Section to assure compatibility with future land sales.

D. Sustained Yield of Forest Resources. Forestland will be managed to guarantee perpetual supplies of renewable resources to serve the needs of all Alaskans for the many products, benefits, and services obtained from them. The annual allowable harvest will be calculated using a volume control method and will be based on the guidelines in Susitna Forestry Guidelines. Only areas designated or co-designated 'Forestry' are to be included in the sustained yield calculation for stands within the SMAP planning area.

E. Salvage of Damaged Trees. Trees damaged due to fire, wind throw, insects or disease, or other causes may be salvaged on all land use designations unless management intent statements for specific management units in Chapter 3 specifically prohibit salvage harvest. A Forest Land Use Plan, if required, will provide the rationale for conducting the salvage harvest and describe how the action will not conflict with the management intent for each management unit.

F. Fire Disturbance. The intent of fire management is to identify where wildland fire can be allowed or managed fires can be used to reduce costs of fire suppression, reduce the risk of damaging fires, and maintain the natural diversity and productivity of forest stands. Fire suppression will be a priority near residential areas or other forms of active land use, high value recreation use areas, and areas with infrastructure development. Consistent with AS 41.15.010 and AS 41.15.020, DOF will protect forest resources from destructive agents commensurate with the values needing protection. However, where feasible, wildland fires will be allowed to burn and suppression will be limited to decreasing the long-term risk of damaging fires and to maintaining the natural diversity of forest stands, stand ages, and habitat types. Where soil erosion is not a concern, habitat enhancement techniques may be appropriate. Ground scarification to ensure exposure of mineral soil, a substrate essential to the natural regeneration of early successional browse species, may be appropriate for use. Specific fire suppression levels are identified in the Alaska Interagency Fire Management Plan.

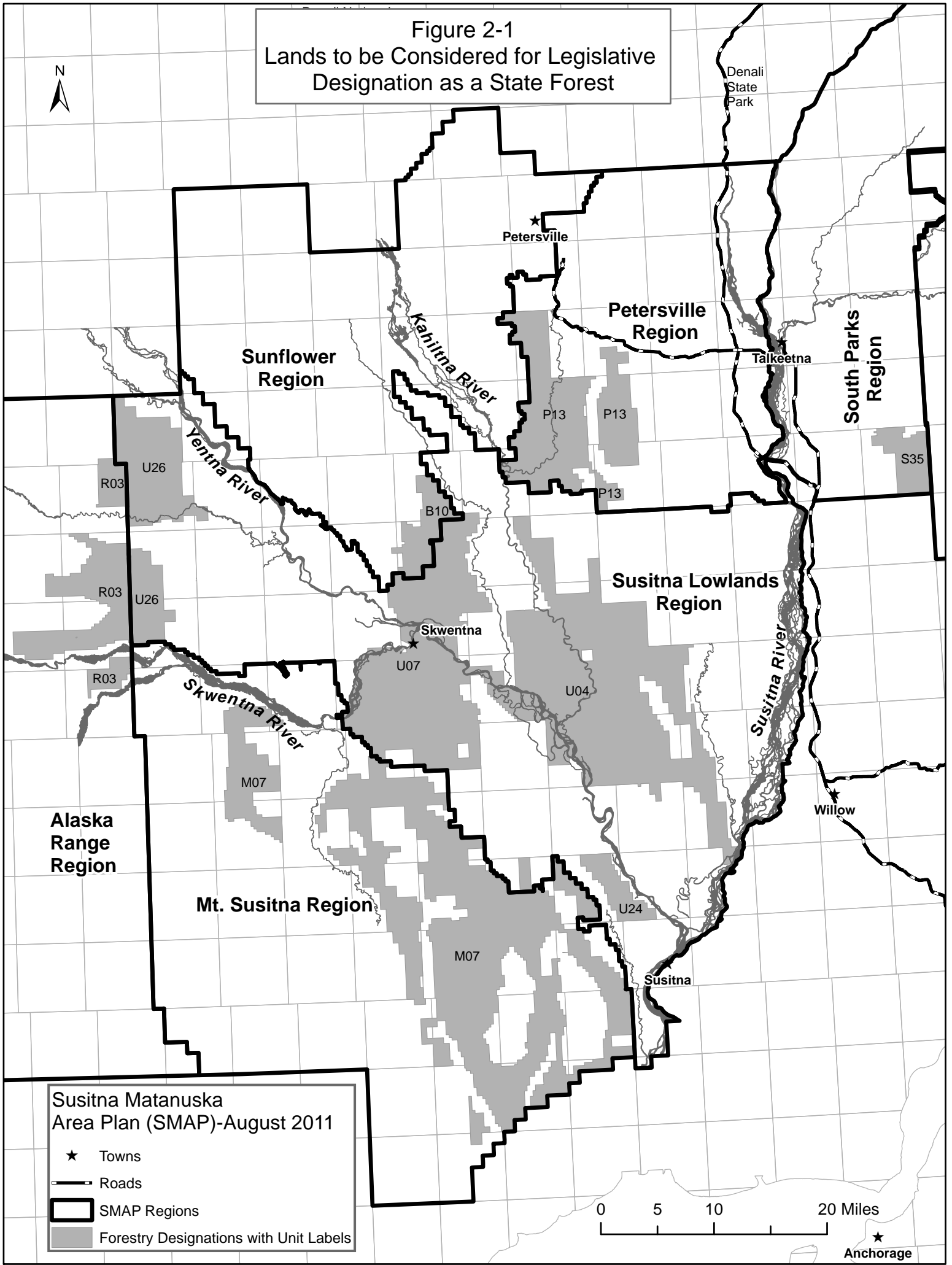
G. Wildlife Habitat. Forest management is an important tool for improving wildlife habitat. DOF will consult with ADF&G's local biologist during the planning stage of timber harvest layout and in the preparation of the Forest Land Use Plan in order to receive guidance on wildlife habitat enhancement opportunities. Trees and vegetation may be manipulated by cutting, crushing, harvesting, or burning to provide or improve wildlife habitat.

H. Creation of a State Forest. This plan recommends that consideration be given to the establishment of a state forest within the Susitna Valley as a Legislatively Designated Area. This recommendation encompasses the forest resources that are identified in this plan (see *Figure 2-1*) but also in the recently adopted Southeast Susitna Area Plan, where extensive forest resources also exist. State forests are multiple use in terms of overall management, providing for areas of public recreation and the protection of key habitat areas, while providing a more vigorous approach to the management of forest stand resources as 'working forests' within the Susitna Valley. This recommendation applies to those management units in both plans that are designated or co-designated Forestry and those units that are designated General Use in SSAP where the management intent for the unit identifies timber harvest as an appropriate use.

I. Maintenance of State Land Base. Land designated or co-designated Forestry is to be retained by the state and is not to be converted to another designation. If the latter is considered necessary, a public hearing is to accompany the plan amendment. It is the policy of this plan that such conversions not be considered until the plan is revised through a comprehensive plan revision process.

J. Coordination with Borough Forest Management Plans and Programs. Prior to the preparation of the (annual) Five Year Schedule of Timber Sales and the development of a Forest Land Use Plan, DNR should coordinate with the Borough's forest management program and plan to obtain maximum efficiencies and avoid management conflicts over the harvesting of timber and land use.

Figure 2-1
Lands to be Considered for Legislative
Designation as a State Forest



K. Development of Forest Resources Management Plan. A substantial portion of the planning area, totaling approximately 683,000 acres, in the Susitna Valley is classified Forestry in this plan. This area mostly occupies the more central parts of the Susitna Valley. These lands, under Title 38, are required to be managed in a sustained manner while providing for multiple uses and protection of the environment. Multiple uses include public recreation, the maintenance of public access, water resources, and wildlife/fisheries resources and their associated habitat. While this plan assigns a Forestry designation to this area and provides some management for timber harvest, it is largely silent on other aspects of the management of this large area. Given the importance of this area's varied resources, DOF and DMLW, in consultation with ADF&G, will jointly prepare a forest resources management plan for this area in order for its resources to be more comprehensively and effectively managed, consistent with the concept of a 'working forest'. A component of this plan is to be related to the maintenance of public access throughout the planning area, with the idea of identifying access facilities related to changing demand for public access caused by changes in the type and level of public use, and to avoid the need for closures to public access or means of existing access. The development of a forest resources management plan is consistent with the recommendation in this plan to establish, through legislation, a Susitna State Forest; the backbone of which would be those areas designated Forestry in this plan and in the 2008 Southeast Susitna Area Plan. However, such a plan is considered appropriate whether or not a state forest is legislatively designated within the areas designated Forestry in this plan. When adopted, the forest resources management plan will supersede the Susitna Forest Guidelines.

L. Other Guidelines Affecting Forestry. Other guidelines may affect management practices for timber development support facilities and forestry. See other sections of this chapter.