

Talkeetna Mountains Region

The Talkeetna Mountains Region encompasses an area of approximately 3.12 million acres and, as such, is the largest region within the planning boundary. It occupies almost uniformly mountainous terrain, except for the riparian areas adjoining the principal streams that drain this region, and is physiographically part of the Talkeetna Mountains province. The Nelchina Public Use Area makes up the majority of this region and defines the northeast and southeast boundaries. The western boundary is in the Talkeetna Foothills and the southwest boundary is the Hatcher Pass Management Plan area and the Matanuska Valley Moose Range. Refer to Figure 3-1 to locate the map of a particular area.

Distribution and Characteristics

Except for isolated private parcels and federal land within the northern part of the Nelchina Public Use Area (PUA), all of which has been selected, the state is the dominant land owner within this region. There are approximately 770,000 acres of state general domain land, and approximately 2.25 million acres of state land within the Nelchina PUA and State Recreation Rivers. Most of the state land is associated with the Nelchina PUA while the remainder is state general domain land administered under Title 38 authorities. Management of the PUA operates within Title 38 authorities but is also affected by the statutory purposes associated with this Legislatively Designated Area. Terrain is mountainous except for riverine areas associated with the seven principal streams that traverse the region; these include the Kashwitna River, Sheep Creek, Montana Creek, Sheep River, Iron Creek, and Talkeetna River. The Talkeetna River is designated as a State Recreation River for much, but not all, of its extent within the region. Riverine areas are fairly flat and are important travel corridors through this region. Within the principle river valleys a bottomland spruce-poplar forest predominates while in other locations, and with increasing elevation, this gives way to shrub and then alpine tundra and barren rock or glacier.

Access, Resources, and Uses of State Land

Access to and within the region is very limited. There are no roads and few airstrips. Access is either provided by foot travel, boat (Talkeetna River), float planes, or by a variety of local and regional trails. Most of these trails concentrate in the western half of the region, although a few provide access to and through the Nelchina PUA. Reflecting the size of the region, there are numerous RS 2477s; see *Chapter 2* for a further explanation of these routes and to access online sources that depict location and describe RS 2477 access routes.

The resources of this region, related to economic resources, are limited. The region is not conducive to grazing, agriculture, or forestry. Locatable mineral resources exist, primarily on Nelchina Creek, but the more significant deposits are situated outside of this region, particularly at Valdez Creek and the Independence Mine area of Hatcher Pass. Coal potential in the region is low and oil and gas potential is unknown but expected to be limited. Sub-bituminous coal deposits are situated outside of the region near Chickaloon and within the Matanuska Valley Moose Range, which is open to leasable coal production. Although not yet utilized, this region contains significant hydroelectric power generation potential and, depending on demand and price, may be utilized for power generation in the future.

Most of the region's resources are related to its wildlife and its associated habitat. Significant moose calving, and winter concentration areas occur within the Talkeetna foothills, while Dall sheep are present throughout much of the remainder of the unit and especially those areas that are exposed and provide escape terrain from predators. Both winter and summer caribou concentration areas occur near and east of the Talkeetna River. The prime caribou calving areas occur, however, further to the east within the Nelchina Public Use Area. All of the principal streams are anadromous.

With the presence of significant game populations and adjacent populated areas, this is one of the most heavily used big game hunting areas in the state, offering moose, Dall sheep, bear, and caribou. The majority of the range of the approximately 20,000 animals of the Nelchina caribou herd is located in this region. Its many streams and lakes offer excellent fishing for salmon, lake and rainbow trout, grayling, and other species. Recreation use of this area is limited and is mostly associated with snow-machining, particularly up the Kashwitna River drainage, hiking camping, climbing, and cross-country skiing.

Management Constraints

Several local management plans affect this region and were consulted in the development of recommendations for the South Parks Highway Region. Local plans include the Borough Comprehensive Development Plan and Coastal Management Plan. These plans contain both generalized land use recommendations and resource management requirements and were helpful in the formulation of recommendations. Borough local comprehensive plans do not affect this management unit.

There are two state land use plans that affect this unit: the 1985 Susitna Area Plan, which is being revised with this update, and the Susitna Basin Recreation Rivers Management Plan. State Recreation Rivers (SRR) in this region are managed under the latter; there are no specific requirements relating to SRRs deriving from the area plan.

The Nelchina PUA is to be managed under a separate management plan, but to date no such plan has been prepared. Until this management plan is prepared, the PUA is to be administered consistent with the statutory purposes of the PUA and with the management intent identified in this plan. See the section, *Legislatively Designated Areas*, which follows.

State land southwest of this region is managed under a separate land use plan, the Hatcher Pass Management Plan, and is being revised concurrently with the SMAP. That plan is not affected by the SMAP revision.

Management Summary

State land is to be managed consistent with the plan designations and management recommendations contained in the Resource Allocation Table for this region. Most state land will be managed in a manner similar to that inferred from its designation, which means that most will be managed for its wildlife habitat, water resource, and public recreation values. All state land within this region is to be retained.

This region is not considered appropriate for grazing, commercial timber harvest, or remote settlement – given its inaccessibility and unsuitable terrain. Locatable mineral exploration and development is appropriate within general domain land as well as within the Nelchina PUA, but any such activity must ensure that the numerous mineral licks are avoided or proper mitigation is provided.

Resource Allocation Table – Talkeetna Mountains Region⁶

Unit #	Designation(s)/ Acres	Map(s)/ MTRS	Management Intent	Description
T-01	Ha ,Wr 38,274	Map 3-5 Various	Manage to protect habitat and water resource values. Protect trails, easements and RS 2477 routes.	This unit consists of the riverine areas adjoining the six principle streams within the Talkeetna Mountains Region – Kashwitna River, Sheep Creek and Sheep River, Montana Creek, Iron Creek, and that portion of the Talkeetna River not included within the LDA designation of a State Recreation River. Riverine areas are generally flat and are mostly vegetated by a fairly dense spruce-poplar forest mix. Moose, caribou, Dall sheep, bears (black and grizzly) and other species use these areas extensively as well as waterfowl and other smaller terrestrial species. Each of these streams is anadromous. RS 2477 routes in this unit include RST 331, 1694 and 1620. Permitted trapping cabins exist in this unit.
T-02	Ha, Rd 730,984	Maps 3-1, 3-2, 3-4, 3-5 Various	<p>Manage unit to protect its habitat and recreation values. Retain land in state ownership.</p> <p>Special consideration shall be given to the protection of mineral licks. Also, authorizations involving projects that adjoin or might directly affect uses within the Nelchina Public Use Area or the Hatcher Pass Management Plan shall consider the impacts of the proposed use upon the management purposes in the Nelchina PUA and the management intent of the adjacent management region within the Hatcher Pass Management area. Proposed uses or structures determined to be inconsistent with those purposes or management intent either shall not be authorized or, if authorized, stipulations to mitigate adverse impacts upon these areas shall be included in the decision.</p> <p>Remote settlement is not considered appropriate within this region owing to the lack of access and the presence of unsuitable terrain. Grazing is considered inappropriate for the same reasons. The limited timber resources of the unit may be used for personal timber harvest. Protect trails, easements and RS 2477 routes.</p> <p>Mineral licks are considered important habitat resources. Mineral development shall ensure that these areas are avoided or that suitable mitigation be provided as part of the regulatory review of mineral or other forms of development that may be authorized by the Department.</p>	<p>This unit comprises the remainder of the Talkeetna Mountains region. It extends eastward to abut the Nelchina PUA and southward to abut the Hatcher Pass Management Plan boundary.</p> <p>This area is characteristically mountainous except for the seven prominent river valleys described in unit T-01 and T-02. These areas are fairly flat and are important travel corridors through this region. Within the principle river valleys a bottomland spruce-poplar forest predominates while in other locations, and with increasing elevation, this gives way to shrub and then alpine tundra and barren rock or glacier. Significant moose calving and winter concentration areas occur within the Talkeetna foothills, while Dall sheep are present throughout much of the remainder of the unit and especially those areas that are exposed and provide escape terrain from predators. Both winter and summer caribou concentration areas occur near and east of the Talkeetna River. The prime caribou calving areas occur, however, further to the east within the Nelchina Public Use Area. Recreation use of this area is limited and is mostly associated with snowmachining, particularly up the Kashwitna River drainage. RS 2477 routes in this unit include RST 331, 1694 and 1620. Trail easements include ADL 230040 and 201263. Permitted trapping cabins exist in this unit. Commercial recreational activities occur in this unit.</p> <p>Mineral licks have been reported in two townships: T026N001E (Sec. 25, 28, and 35) and T025N001E (Sec. 1, 2, 4, and 4). There are anadromous streams in the unit.</p>

⁶ See the Resource Allocation Table for Legislatively Designated Areas for management requirements pertaining to the Nelchina PUA.

Unit #	Designation(s)/ Acres	Map(s)/ MTRS	Management Intent	Description
T-03	Se 958	Map 3-2 C004N009W	Tracts within ASLS 82-190 are to be retained except, potentially Tract C. Further development of this tract may be appropriate. Any decision to develop this area must be evaluated in a best interest finding and a finding made that this area is appropriate for residential land disposal.	Unit consists of a developed subdivision (ASLS 82-190) on the east side of John Lake and an undeveloped area (Tract C). Terrain in this area is generally level and vegetation consists of evergreen forest in areas of better soils and both shrub and wetlands in other areas. Tracts within the subdivision include uplands and islands; most are of small size and, seemingly, function to provide access or protect a resource. Tract C, consisting of more than 400 acres, is undeveloped and it is not clear if this area was intended to be reserved for future development or retained to provide open space or protect a sensitive resource.
L01	Ha, Rd 20,162 within this region	Maps 3-1, 3-5	This unit includes State Recreation Rivers within this region. Consult the section, Legislatively Designated Areas, following, for details on management.	
L03	Ha 2,247,416	Maps 3-2, 3-3, 3-4	This unit includes the Nelchina Public Use Area. Consult the section, Legislatively Designated Areas, following, for details on management.	

Total state land within region (3 units and part of 2 LDAs) – 3,037,794 acres