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Chapter 1

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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
 8 policy of the State of Alaska "...to establish a balanced combination of land available for
 9 both public and private purposes. The choice of land best suited for public and private use
 10 shall be 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 Susitna-Matanuska Area Plan (SMAP) directs how the Alaska Department of Natural
 19 Resources (DNR) will manage general state uplands and shorelands within the planning
 20 boundary. The following is a summary of the acreage to which the plan will apply:

Area	Acres
State-owned uplands	8,795,709
State-owned shorelands	83,663
Total Acreage	8,879,372

21

22

23

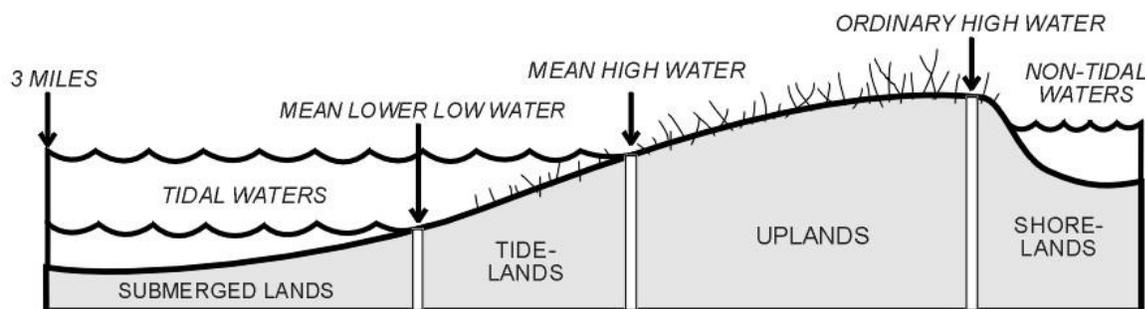
24

25 **NOTE:** There are seven Legislatively Designated Areas (LDA) within the planning area
 26 which encompass approximately 3 million acres. The SMAP establishes land use
 27 designations for all of these areas except for state park units, but management intent is found
 28 in the statutes, regulations and management plans applicable to each LDA. Refer to the LDA
 29 region description at the end of this chapter, and defined 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 2010 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. Map 3-1 at the beginning of chapter 3 depicts the plan boundary and the planning regions within this boundary for the 2010 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

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

17
18 The Land Classification Order that accompanies this revision revises and supersedes all
19 previous land classifications. Current mineral orders and leasehold location orders however
20 remain in effect and are not modified by this revision.

21 22 23 **Planning Area**

24
25 The planning boundary of the Susitna Matanuska Area Plan includes all state owned and
26 state selected uplands and shore lands within the area depicted on Map 3-1 at the beginning
27 of Chapter 3. This extensive area consists of vast areas of mountainous terrain associated
28 with the Chugach Mountains in the east, the Talkeetna Mountains and Alaska Range in the
29 north, and the Tordillo Mountains in the west, which are also part of the Alaska Range.
30 Interspersed between these areas is the expanse of the lowlands of the Susitna Valley and
31 portions of the Matanuska Valley. This area coincides with the boundary of the Matanuska
32 Susitna Borough in the west and much of the north, but all of the planning area occurs within
33 the corporate boundary of this borough. Significantly, the planning area does not include the
34 more central and heavily used lowlands that are included as part of the Southeast Susitna
35 Area Plan, the westward extension of the Knik Glacier, and the mountainous area associated
36 with the Hatcher Pass management area. The area of the Knik Glacier and Knik River are
37 managed under the Knik River Public Use Area Management Plan and the area of Hatcher
38 Pass, by the Hatcher Pass Management Plan. Consult these three plans for management
39 requirements on the state lands that they affect. Within this planning area are a number of
40 large Legislatively Designated Areas (LDAs), which total 3,049,211 acres, and include: the
41 Nelchina Public Use Area, Susitna Basin Recreation Rivers, Denali State Park, Matanuska
42 Valley Moose Range, Caribou Creek Recreational Mining Area and the Petersville
43 Recreational Mining Area. The recommendations of this plan pertain to the state-owned and
44 state-selected land not within the LDAs, a total of about 6 million acres.

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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.

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

1 might be in conflict with each other, many different uses can occur throughout the planning
2 area while protecting vital resources, providing the uses are properly managed.

3
4 This plan establishes the land use designation for state land and describes their intended uses.
5 The plan directs which state lands will be retained by the state and which should be sold to
6 private citizens, used for public recreation, or used for other purposes. It also identifies
7 general management guidelines for major resources and land uses within the planning area as
8 well as guidelines for the development and use of resources for specific parcels.

9
10 With an area plan, state permits and permit review processes become more efficient for the
11 government and the public. The area plan guides DNR decisions for leases, sales, and
12 permits that authorize use of state lands. Preparation of land use plans for state lands (except
13 for State Park System lands) is required under Title 38 of Alaska Statutes. DNR's actions
14 will be based on the area plan.

15 16 17 **The Mandate**

18
19 The state is responsible for the management of those lands it owns and the Department of
20 Natural Resources is that agency specifically responsible for this management. There are
21 about 9 million acres of uplands within the planning boundary and over 83,663 acres of
22 shorelands associated with the Susitna, Matanuska and Chulitna Rivers. Of the uplands,
23 nearly 33% of all state land within the planning area is associated with Legislatively
24 Designated Areas; the remainder of state land (6 million acres) is associated with general
25 domain land managed under AS 38.04 and 38.05. This plan focuses on the management of
26 the general state land, although plan designations are identified for the LDAs in order to
27 permit leases and other disposal of less than the fee estate to occur.

28
29 Alaska Statute (AS 38.04.065) requires the Commissioner of the Department of Natural
30 Resources (DNR) to “adopt, maintain, and when appropriate, revise regional land use plans
31 that provide for the use and management of state-owned land.” To ensure that these lands
32 are properly managed, the Department of Natural Resources has developed this plan for all
33 state lands, both uplands and shorelands in the planning area.

34
35 The planning process provides a means of openly reviewing resource information and public
36 concerns before making long-term decisions about public land management. The planning
37 process resolves conflicting ideas on land use and informs the public about what choices
38 were made and why. Decisions are made on a comprehensive basis, rather than case-by-
39 case,

40

1 providing consistency and consideration of the wide diversity of resources and uses within
2 the planning area. This process provides for more efficient use and protection of the area's
3 resources.
4
5

6 **What the Plan Will Do**

7

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

16 **How This Plan is Used**

17

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

26 **Public Participation in Planning Process**

27

28 The Susitna Matanuska Area Plan is the product of a two year planning process conducted by
29 the Division Mining, Land, and Water (DMLW) of the Department of Natural Resources
30 (DNR); other divisions within DNR; state and federal agencies (primarily ADF&G); local
31 government (Matanuska-Susitna Borough); interest groups, and the public. A first round of
32 public meetings focused on a description of the planning process and planning area and on
33 issue identification and scoping. A second round of public meetings is to be held in the
34 planning area in the spring of 2010. These meetings are to focus on the Public Review Draft
35 with information to be provided on proposed plan designations and management intent (for
36 specific management units) and on plan implementation. The results of these discussions
37 and the subsequent review of public comments submitted on the Public Review Draft will
38 form the basis for revisions to the draft plan, which are to be included in an issue response
39 summary.
40
41

42 **Process of Plan Preparation**

43

44 The following process was used to develop this area plan:

- 1 • identify issues in the planning area;
- 2 • map and analyze resources and uses;
- 3 • conduct public meetings to identify land use issues;
- 4 • prepare the Public Review Draft (PRD) based in part on comments previously
- 5 received from the public and from agencies;
- 6 • public reviews the PRD¹;
- 7 • prepare an Issue/Response summary of all public comments on the PRD;
- 8 • based on the results of the Issue/Response Summary, prepare an Intent to Adopt
- 9 (ITA) draft of the plan;
- 10 • the Commissioner signs the plan and adopts it as DNR's management intent for state
- 11 lands in the planning area.
- 12
- 13

14 **Who Developed the Plan?**

15
16 The DNR planning staff directs the planning process, including data collection, drafting the
17 plan, response to public and agency comments, and final plan preparation. A number of
18 local, state, and federal agencies review the preliminary draft of the PRD and provide land
19 use and resource recommendations that are valuable in refining initial plan
20 recommendations. The Commissioner of the Department of Natural Resources formally
21 adopts the Susitna Matanuska Area Plan, which is scheduled to occur following the review of
22 public and agency comments on the PRD.
23
24

25 **Uses and Resources Within the Planning Area**

26
27 **Uses of State Land.** The plan outlines management objectives for state land. This includes
28 describing what resources and valid existing uses should be protected, and what uses are
29 most suitable for development or protection on state land during the planning horizon.
30

31 **State-selected Land and Land Susceptible to Navigation.** Some lands have been selected
32 but not yet been conveyed to the state. Other lands are under waterbodies that, if determined
33 navigable, are state-owned. In both cases, the plan determines how to manage these lands if
34 they are state-owned.
35

36 **Land Sales.** The state has offered land for sale to Alaskan citizens. The planning process
37 reviewed the state land holdings to determine which undeveloped lands are suitable for
38 settlement uses or agricultural land disposal.
39

¹ This is the current phase of plan preparation.

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

5 **Roads, Trails, and Access.** The plan considers access across state lands, including existing
6 and proposed roads, trails, easements, and rights-of-way.
7

8 **Mining, Coal Leasing, and Oil and Gas Development.** The plan reviews the mineral, coal,
9 and oil and gas potential within the planning area and describes the statutory authorities that
10 affect mining, coal development, and oil and gas extraction. The 1985 area plan
11 implemented a number of mineral closing orders and leasehold location orders; these
12 primarily affected areas proposed for settlement and for designation as state recreation rivers.
13 (The recommendations on recreation rivers were subsequently implemented through a
14 Legislatively Designated Area designation.) This revision maintains all of the current
15 closures but does not recommend any further closures to mineral entry and development.
16 The more critical areas have been adequately covered by the 1985 mineral closures. Other
17 than the 1985 closures, all state owned lands are open to mineral entry. Coal and oil and gas
18 development can occur throughout the planning area, although certain stipulations on these
19 types of uses are proscribed in the Susitna Basin Recreation Rivers Management Plan.
20

21 **Forest Resources.** Extensive forest resources exist within the planning area. These are
22 scattered throughout the eastern, central, and western portions of the planning area, and total
23 over 689,704 acres. The plan identifies these areas and specifies the areas considered
24 appropriate for inclusion in the sustained yield calculations that are made by the Division of
25 Forestry. Those areas with forest resource potential that are designated Forestry in the area
26 plan are considered appropriate for inclusion in a state forest, should the legislature consider
27 the creation of a state forest within the planning area.
28

29 **Recreation.** Recreation is a popular use of state land. The plan proposes designations to
30 manage lands for recreation in several locations where winter recreation is extensive. Many
31 areas that are designated either Habitat or Water Resources are also widely used for winter
32 recreation and this use is recognized in the management intent of a number of parcels.
33

34 **Fish and Wildlife Habitat.** The plan documents important fish and wildlife habitat areas
35 and provides management intent and guidelines for these resources and uses.
36
37

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

6 7 8 **What the Plan Won't Do**

9
10 The Susitna Matanuska Area Plan is not the only way in which land management goals are
11 implemented. The area plan is coordinated with a variety of other programs and projects
12 implemented by the DNR and other state agencies. The following are some important issues
13 that are not addressed in this plan:

14
15 **Non-DNR Lands.** This plan does not apply to federal, municipal, private, University of
16 Alaska, Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, or Mental Health Trust
17 lands.

18
19 **Fish and Wildlife.** Allocation of fish and game stocks and regulating methods and means of
20 harvest are the responsibility of the state boards of Fisheries and Game.

21
22 **Generally Allowed Uses (GAU).** The area plan does not regulate activities that do not
23 require a written authorization on state land, such as hiking, camping, boating, hunting, and
24 fishing. Generally allowed uses are identified in 11 AAC 09.030 and 11 AAC 96; these
25 sections also indicate the requirements, if any, affecting such uses.

26
27 **Legislatively Designated Areas.** The plan does not apply to state parks, refuges, public use
28 areas, and recreation areas that are legislatively designated. It also does not apply to the
29 Matanuska Valley Moose Range.

30
31 **Decisions on Specific Applications.** While this plan provides general management intent
32 for state lands, the plan does not make decisions about specific land-use authorizations.
33 These decisions are made through the application review process. Land-use authorizations
34 must, however, be consistent with the plan, and existing laws and regulations.

35
36 **Actions by agencies other than DNR.** The plan does not provide management intent for
37 prescribing actions and policies for agencies and governments other than DNR.

1 **Planning Period**

2
3 This plan reflects land management decisions and allocations based on the best available
4 information on the demand for use of state land and resources projected over the next
5 20 years. It is also based on a specific set of social, environmental, economic, and
6 technological assumptions. The plan guides state land use and resource decisions for the
7 next 20 years or until the plan is revised.
8
9

10 **Summary of Plan Actions**

11 **Management Intent**

12
13
14 The planning area consists of ten regions that primarily contain uplands and a single region
15 that encompasses seven LDAs. The regions are composed of state-owned and state-selected
16 lands that are contiguous to each other, have similar characteristics, and are thought of as
17 distinct parts of the local community. The plan presents management intent that explains the
18 department's overall resource management objectives for each region and unit, and provides
19 resource and use information for land managers. This information is presented in Chapter 3.
20
21

22 **Land Use Designations**

23
24 Each unit identifies one or more designations representing the uses and resources for which
25 the area will be managed. Plan designations are identified and described in Chapter 3 along
26 with Resource Allocation Tables that contains the designations specific to individual units.
27
28

29 **Management Guidelines**

30
31 According to the Alaska Constitution, state lands are to be managed for multiple uses. When
32 potentially conflicting uses are designated in a parcel, the plan provides guidelines to allow
33 various uses to occur without unacceptable consequences. Management guidelines for
34 specific management units are given in Chapter 3. Guidelines that apply to the entire
35 planning area are identified in Chapter 2.
36
37

38 **Classifications**

39
40 All state lands in the planning area will be classified consistent with the land use
41 designations in this plan. Classifications made by the plan will be noted to the state's Land
42 Status Plats. Table 4-2 in Chapter 4 shows how designations convert to classifications. The
43 Land
44

1 Classification Order (LCO) that is to be adopted with this plan is included as Appendix B.
2 The LCO actually enacts and imposes the classifications that are identified as designations in
3 the area plan.

4
5

6 **Summary of Plan Implementation and Modification**

7

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

12

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

17

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