



## GOALS, POLICIES AND MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES - SUBSURFACE RESOURCES

### GOALS

1. Resource Development: the development of subsurface mineral and energy resources to contribute to the local and state economies and to meet local, regional and national needs:
  - a. to develop the infrastructure - roads, rail, ports, processing facilities, etc. - needed to acquire, process and market subsurface resources
  - b. to insure that policies or guidelines affecting the development of subsurface resources are consistent, simple and predictable
2. Environmental Protection: minimum adverse impacts of subsurface resource development on surface resources and land uses
3. Socioeconomic Impacts: minimum adverse social, fiscal, and economic impacts on communities

## IMPLEMENTATION POLICIES

### 1. The Effects of the Plan on Opportunities to Explore and Develop Subsurface Resources on State-owned Subsurface Land\*

The large majority of state-owned subsurface areas in the Willow Sub-basin are currently open to exploration and development of subsurface resources and will remain open under this land use plan. However, an important effect of this plan is that it closes certain areas to specific types of subsurface resource exploration and development. The following section describes the areas closed by the plan. It is important to note that these mineral closures and other policies resulting from this plan do not alter or replace existing regulations, nor do they affect any existing mineral closures in the area. The areas closed to mining described below are closed only to new exploration or development activities; any existing leases, prospecting permits, or claims will not be affected. (Mineral closing orders will be prepared for those areas in compliance with AS 38.05.185.)

a. Areas closed both to mineral leasing and to locatable mineral entry by this plan\*\*

The Little Susitna River Corridor Management Unit is closed to all mineral leasing and to locatable mineral entry.

b. Areas closed only to locatable mineral entry by this plan

Under current department policy, areas sold by the state for residential or agricultural purposes -- including those indentified by this plan -- are closed to all locatable mineral entry. (These sale areas may, on a case-by-case basis, be open to development of leasable minerals.)

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\* The State retains subsurface rights when it transfers land to local governments or private owners. Consequently all subsurface rights in the sub-basin, with two notable exceptions, are held by the State and are subject to the policies in this plan. The first exception is certain private lands that were homesteaded and passed directly from federal to private ownership. Private land of this type comprises a relatively small percentage of the sub-basin's area, less than 5 percent (mostly in the Willow and Wasilla areas). The second exception is lands granted to Native regional and village corporations. Under the terms of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, Native Corporations received both surface and subsurface rights. These lands make up about 1 percent of the sub-basin's area.

\*\* "Leasable" minerals include oil and gas, coal, and geothermal resources. Development rights are acquired either at a lease sale, (the method always used for oil and gas) or non-competitively (by applying for a prospecting permit). Mineral such as gold, silver, copper, iron, asbestos, and uranium, are "locatable;" rights to these minerals are acquired by staking a mining claim.

c. Areas Closed to Coal Prospecting

Certain areas with exceptionally high surface resource values are closed to the issuance of coal prospecting permits\*; these areas are described below.

-Large blocks of class II and III soils: The Point MacKenzie project and potential agricultural areas in Fish Creek and Susitna Corridor Management Units.

-River Corridors: Little Susitna River, Little Willow Creek, Willow Creek, and the Big Susitna River.

The Little Susitna River: all of the Little Susitna River Management Unit and a corridor 300 feet on either side of the river over the remainder of the river's course.

Little Willow Creek: the portion of Little Willow Creek Management Unit east of where the railroad crosses the river and a corridor 300 feet on either side of the river over the remainder of the river's course.

Willow Creek: Willow Creek Management Unit and a corridor 300 feet on either side of the river over the remainder of the river's course.

Big Susitna River: a corridor at least  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile on either side of the river (note: the eastern bank of the river forms the boundary to the study area).

-Recreation sites identified on the recreation map of this plan (Appendix 2). (These are primarily small sites -- less than 160 acres -- used for campgrounds, waysides, boat launches and access sites on water bodies and along trails.)

-A corridor 300 feet wide on either side of the Parks Highway right-of-way to protect visual quality.

-Nancy Lake State Recreation Area.

-The proposed state capital site at Willow.

-All past and planned (through 1987) state subdivisions and the portions of state remote parcel sales areas likely to be staked.

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\* Under State law, once a coal prospecting permit is issued, the state is required to grant the permit holder a coal lease if coal is found in commercial quantities. Any coal mining that occurs after a lease is issued would be subject to state, federal and local mining regulations.

2. Protection of Streams and Stream Corridors

Protection of fish and wildlife and recreation values is the primary management objective within the portions of Little Willow Creek, Willow Creek, and the Little Susitna River described below. These three areas will be open to leasehold location under AS 38.05.205. In "leasehold location" areas, a mining claim is staked in the usual fashion, but must be converted to a lease before it can be put into production. Lease stipulations will be used to protect fish and wildlife and recreational values. (A mineral leasing order will be prepared for these areas in compliance with AS 38.05.85.)

Little Willow Creek: the portion of Little Willow Creek Management Unit east to where the railroad crosses the river and a corridor 300 feet on either side of the river between the railroad and the Big Susitna River.

Willow Creek: Willow Creek Management Unit and a corridor 300 feet on either side of the river between the western edge of the management unit and the Big Susitna River.

Little Susitna River: a corridor 300 feet on either side of the river between the eastern edge of the Little Susitna Corridor Management Unit and the bridge on the road to Hatcher Pass.

3. Mining in Community Centers

Permits, leasehold stipulations, or other controls affecting subsurface development in Wasilla, Big Lake, Houston, Knik, and Willow shall be prepared with the consultation of borough and city governments and be consistent with local or borough land use plans. The boundaries within which this policy will apply are city limits or community planning areas defined by the Matanuska-Susitna Borough. The state shall consider local government recommendations when considering or issuing development leases or permits.

4. Coal Prospecting and Mining

Coal prospecting will occur in a manner that minimizes adverse impacts on the natural environment including effects on vegetation, water quality, fish, bird, and animal life, etc. (See guidelines sections.)

Prospecting for coal is allowed adjacent to anadromous fish streams (other than those protected in specific corridors); however, surface entry up to 500 feet from the stream may be restricted if a lease is eventually granted. This policy is limited to the anadromous fish streams depicted on the Fish and Wildlife map (Map 13) shown in Appendix 2. Decisions on surface entry adjacent to streams will be made with the consultation of Division of Parks and ADF&G.

5. Incorporating Area Plan Policies And Guidelines into Mining Permits and Leases

Permits and leases required for mining will continue to be issued on a case-by-case basis coordinated by the Division of Minerals and Energy Management (DMEM), with involvement by the Department of Fish and Game, Department of Environmental Conservation, the Division of Land and Water Management (DL&WM), the Division of Forestry (DOF), and the Division of Parks. Prior to issuing miscellaneous land use permits or leases, the DL&WM will review the management intent, land use designations, and specific management guidelines applying to the area affected by the proposed mining operation and see that these considerations are incorporated into the miscellaneous land use permit or lease. (See Management Guidelines Section for specific criteria).

6. Promotion of Subsurface Resources Development

- a. Infrastructure. This land use plan can principally affect necessary infrastructure development through identification of needed roads. Specific roads proposed by this plan are shown in the Transportation Section of Appendix 2.
- b. Conflicts Between Mining and Other Uses: A detailed management plan for the Hatcher Pass area is being prepared by DNR in 1983. This planning effort will develop guidelines to reduce conflicts between other uses occurring in the area (recreation, grazing, etc.) and mining.
- c. Coal Development: It is the state's policy to promote coal development through:
  - 1) developing a coal strip mining reclamation program based on Alaskan conditions;
  - 2) assisting in the development of the environmental and social data base required for permits; and
  - 3) encouraging the marketing of Alaskan coal.

7. Anadromous Fish Streams

Overall water and streambed quality necessary to support existing levels of use of anadromous fish within the sub-basin (sport, subsistence, and commercial) shall not be diminished as a result of mining activities.

8. Sand and Gravel

See Goals, Policies and Management Guidelines; Transportation, this chapter.

## MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES

### 1. Standard Stipulations

Permits\* and lease plans of operations will always address, at minimum, the following issues: timing and methods of access and related impacts, disposal of overburden and tailings, disposal of combustible and noncombustible waste, disposal of sewage and waste water, sediment control, and fuel and oil storage and spills. (These are currently applied to all Miscellaneous Land Use Permits (MLUP) issued by DMEM and are included here primarily to inform prospective miners of the types of requirements they will have to meet and to formalize existing procedure).

### 2. Erosion Control Adjacent to and Upland from Anadromous Fish Streams

Stipulations in mining permits or in plans of operations associated with leases will insure that anadromous fish streams are protected from siltation that may be caused by mining activities. On a case-by-case basis, with the consultation of the Department of Fish and Game, stipulations should be prepared to address:

- a. location of tailings and overburden
- b. alteration of natural vegetation and natural contours
- c. impacts on non-anadromous fish tributaries that affect water quality downstream
- d. ~~revegetation of disturbed areas~~

- e. maintenance of a buffer of undisturbed vegetation adjacent to streams.

### 3. Reclamation

The Miscellaneous Land Use Permit or plan of operations associated with a lease will specify that land must be returned to a useful state. Determination of the specific type of reclamation will be done in consultation with the agency responsible for the primary land use value(s) in the affected area.

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\* Under the existing permit process a miner who has staked and intends to work a claim must submit a triagency permit application to the Department of Natural Resources. The application includes sufficient information to issue the permits required to develop the claim; water quality (ADEC), anadromous fish (Title 16-ADF&G) and miscellaneous land use (ADNR).

4. Control of Visual Impacts

Guidelines will be developed as necessary through the Miscellaneous Land Use Permit or leasing process to minimize the adverse visual impacts of mining in settled areas, recreation areas, and in areas viewed from roads. In such areas guidelines will address, at a minimum, the following items: control of solid wastes; removal of vegetation; siting of mining structures, tailings and overburden; roads; and rehabilitation of mining sites.

5. Access for Mineral Development

- a. Access to tundra, wetlands, and other environmentally sensitive areas should occur in a manner at a time that minimizes damage. (See Goals, Policies, and Management Guidelines; Transportation, this chapter.)
- b. Existing roads and trails should be used to provide access to mine sites wherever possible.

6. Public Access

See Policies and Management Guidelines: Public Access, this chapter.