

Chapter 1

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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 all state lands in the planning area.

Description of the Planning Area

The Yukon Tanana Area Plan (YTAP) 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:

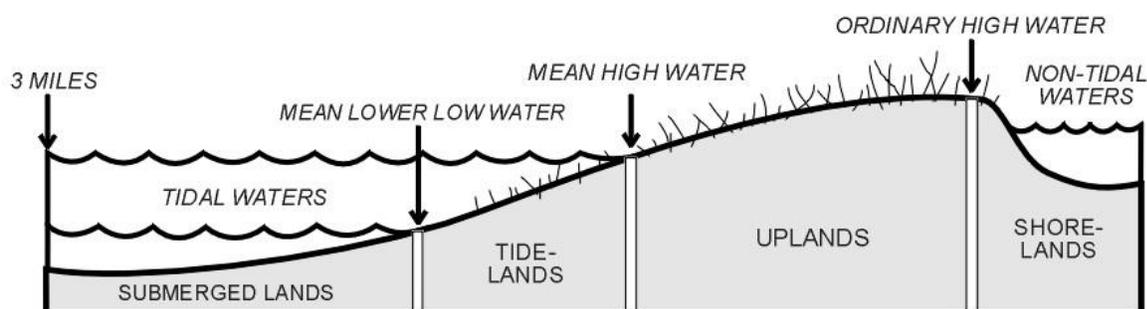
Area	Acres
State-owned uplands	9,068,010
State-owned shorelands	110,245
Total Acreage	9,178,354

NOTE: There are three Legislatively Designated Areas (LDA) within the planning area which encompass approximately 919,929 acres. The YTAP establishes land use designations for all of these areas, 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 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 Tanana Basin Area Plan

The original Tanana Basin Area Plan was prepared in the early 1980s and was adopted in 1985. A revision to a portion of the plan was undertaken and adopted in September, 1991. That plan forms the basis for this plan revision, although significant departures from the original plan are included in the 2014 Revision in order to deal with changes in land ownership and changed patterns of development.

This revision also makes several changes in the planning boundary. Most importantly, the original planning area of the Tanana Basin Area Plan is divided into two separate area plans, and there are important additions and deletions to the original planning area as well. The original planning area was divided into two separate area plans in the 2014 revision process, consisting of the Yukon Tanana Area Plan (YTAP) and the Eastern Tanana Area Plan (ETAP). The boundary between the two plans was generally derived from the western boundary of the Fairbanks North Star Borough and the eastern boundary of the Denali Borough. The original planning area of over 12 million acres was separated into two area plans in the revision process in order to expedite the plan revision process and to reflect significant changes in land ownership and land use patterns, natural resources, and plan management. This plan only includes those regions that are part of YTAP.

The YTAP planning area includes both additions and deletions to the original planning area. It does not include the following regions that were included in the original Tanana Basin Area Plan: Fairbanks North Star Borough, East Alaska Range, Upper Tanana, Delta Salcha, and Remnant Rivers; these regions are now included and addressed in the ETAP. However, over 2,250,061 acres of land were added to the northern region of the original planning area. The additional land encompasses state owned and state selected land that surrounds the Yukon River. The land located along that Yukon River, east of the planning area, is primarily federally and native owned, with very few, small scattered state owned parcels, which are located within the Yukon Flats National Wildlife Refuge. The boundary shift resulted in the inclusion of over 4 million acres of the Denali National Park and Preserve within the planning area. Map 1-1 depicts the plan boundary and the planning regions within this boundary for the 2014 YTAP.

Since the adoption of the Tanana Basin Area Plan in 1985, much has changed in the Tanana Basin Valley, with much of the populated area along the Parks, Elliot and Dalton Highways becoming more 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. The Elliot Highway is slated for expansion to provide a land route to Nome from Fairbanks. 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 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 Denali Borough, Fairbanks North Star Borough, Doyon Ltd. Regional Corporation, 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 Yukon Tanana Area Plan includes all state owned and state selected uplands and shore lands within the area depicted on Map 3-1 at the beginning of Chapter 3. This extensive area consists of mixed topography that consists of vast areas of mountainous terrain associated with the Alaska Range in the south, the Kuskokwim

Mountains in the west, and the Yukon-Tanana Uplands in the north. Interspersed between these areas is the expanse of the lowlands and wetlands of the Yukon and Tanana valleys. The entirety of the Denali Borough is included in this plan and a portion of the eastern boundary is shared with the Fairbanks North Star Borough. Over 4 million acres of the Denali National Park is located within the southwestern area of the plan. This planning area is bordered by Yukon Flats National Wildlife Refuge to the northeast, the Nowitna National Wildlife Refuge to the west, and the Denali National Park and Preserve to the south. Within this planning area are three large Legislatively Designated Areas (LDAs), which total 919,929 acres, and include: the Tanana Valley State Forest, Minto Flats State Game Refuge, and James Dalton Legislative Designated Area. The recommendations of this plan pertain to the state-owned and state-selected land not within the LDAs, a total of about 9,178,354 acres. See Map 1-1 for a depiction of the planning area.

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 three 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 274 upland units and 3 shoreland units along the Nenana, Yukon and Tanana 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.

Map 1-1: Planning Area and Regions

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 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 is that agency specifically responsible for this management. There are about 10 million acres of uplands within the planning boundary and over 110,345 acres of shorelands associated with the Nenana, Yukon and Tanana Rivers. Of the uplands, nearly 9% of all state land within the planning area is associated with Legislatively Designated Areas; the remainder of state land (over 9 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 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 the Department of Natural Resources (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, the Department of Natural Resources 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 provided. 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 intends to manage lands over the period the plan is in effect.

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 Yukon Tanana Area Plan is the product of a three 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 governments (Denali Borough and Fairbanks North Star Borough); interest groups, and the public. A first round of public meetings occurred in the Spring of 2009 and focused on a

description of the planning process and planning area and on issue identification and scoping. A second round of public meetings is to be held in the planning area in the Fall of 2012. These meetings are to focus on the Public Review Draft with information to be 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 will form the basis for revisions to the draft plan, which are to be included in an issue response summary.

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, prepare an Intent to Adopt (ITA) draft of the plan;
- after review of the changes to the ITA, the Commissioner signs the plan and adopts it 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 review the preliminary draft of the PRD and provide land use and resource recommendations that are valuable in refining initial plan recommendations. The Commissioner of the Department of Natural Resources formally adopts the Yukon Tanana Area Plan, this occurred on January 3, 2014.

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. This plan recommends the retention of the settlement designation of many existing settlement areas in addition to new settlement areas.

Municipal Land Conveyance. The municipal entitlement of the Fairbanks North Star Borough has been completed and that of the Denali Borough is nearly complete, although 8,000 acres remains to be adjudicated. This plan provides direction to the adjudication of the remaining Denali Borough selections.

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. This revision maintains all of the current mineral closures but does not recommend any further closures to mineral entry and development. A Leasehold Location Order will affect all land designated for land disposals that is not currently closed to mineral entry. The more critical areas have been adequately covered by the mineral closures that pre-date this plan. Coal and oil and gas development can occur throughout the planning area; however, development in the LDA's is subject to the management plans specific for those areas.

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 over 700,000 acres, including areas of the Tanana State Valley Forest. 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 values that are designated Forestry are to be the basis for those calculations and some of these areas are considered appropriate for inclusion in a state forest, should the legislature consider the expansion of the Tanana Valley State Forest within the planning area. Note: additional areas of potential expansion are identified in the Eastern Tanana Area Plan.

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 General Use, 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. Those areas with a significant recreation use or potential use are designated Public Recreation-Dispersed.

Fish and Wildlife Habitat. The plan documents important fish and wildlife habitat areas and provides management intent and guidelines for these resources and uses. Areas with particularly significant habitat, wildlife, or fisheries values are designated Habitat or co-designated with Habitat if there is another significant use or value.

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 instream 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 Yukon Tanana 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 federal, municipal, private, University of Alaska, Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, or Mental Health Trust lands.

Fish and Wildlife. Management, maintenance, and protection of fish and wildlife resources are the responsibility of the Department of Fish and Game. Allocation of fish and game stocks and regulation of harvest methods, means, and timing are the responsibility of the state board 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 other areas that are legislatively designated.

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 three regions that contain both uplands and lowlands as well as a single region that encompasses three LDAs. The three regions are composed of state-owned and state-selected lands that are contiguous to each other and have similar characteristics. 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.