

CHAPTER I

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This document is an interim land use plan for state lands within the Deception Creek management unit, the area formerly known as the Willow capital site.

A. Background

The Deception Creek management unit consists of approximately 65,700 acres of patented state land located in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough near Willow, east of the Parks Highway and west of the Hatcher Pass management unit.

In 1974 Alaska's voters passed an initiative to move the capital to one of three sites, all to be selected by a Capital Site Selection Committee. This management unit was selected as one of the three sites and in 1976, in response to a request from the Capital Site Selection Committee; the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) classified this site, and two others, as Reserved Use.

In November 1976 the voters selected Willow as the site for a new capital, but in 1982 they disapproved a proposition containing the total cost figures. This last vote suspended the capital move indefinitely.

Since the 1982 vote, the state has retained the Reserved Use classification on these lands and has not allowed activities to take place there other than those that are generally permitted on state land (e.g., hunting). The land within the capital site is some of the best remaining in state ownership. It has important wildlife resources (especially moose), but in addition, it is an accessible, contiguous block of state land that has valuable timber resources, prime development land, grazing resources, and recreation potential. Periodically, the Division of Land and Water Management (DLWM) receives requests for use of these resources but has refused these requests pending review of the classification and planning for the unit.

B. Relationship to Other Plans

Although the Deception Creek management unit is included within the boundaries of the *Willow Sub-basin Area Plan*, the plan does not address it because at the time the plan was done this area was dedicated for use as the capital site. The resource maps included in Appendix 2 of the Willow Plan do cover this area. This plan is an amendment to the *Willow Sub-basin Area Plan*.

This plan utilized the planning done by the Capital Site Planning Commission and incorporated many of its land use recommendations.

The management unit is not within a Coastal District Plan. A small part of subunit 3A is covered by the City of Houston Comprehensive Plan. See subunit 3A in Chapter III of this document.

C. What This Plan Does

The process for developing this land use plan provided an opportunity to review and revise the existing policy. The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) found general support for allowing short-term multiple uses while preserving the option to use this area, or portions of it, as a capital site or other major use not foreseen at this time. This plan preserves the aggregate value of the site but makes its resources available for limited, short-term multiple uses, such as small timber sales. DNR believes this is an appropriate interim policy until such time as the *Willow Subbasin Plan* and *Susitna Area Plan* are revised, or for a ten-year period.

The plan directs the management of state lands in the Deception Creek management unit. All DNR decisions will comply with the provisions of the plan. The plan identifies the types of development and protection that should occur on the land, the sites or areas appropriate for these uses, and the rules under which they will occur.

The types of decisions made by the plan are described below.

LAND USE DESIGNATIONS identify the primary and secondary land uses of major importance in each of the subunits.

LAND USE CLASSIFICATIONS The land use designations made on state lands in this plan are officially established in state records through the state's land classification system. The classifications will be shown on status plats. Generally, the classifications indicate the primary uses. In this plan Resource Management classification was used in some areas to indicate lands that the Matanuska-Susitna Borough is interested in acquiring if the unit is not used as the site for a capital city (see below). Users must refer to this plan for more detailed information on secondary or prohibited uses and policies for management of the area.

MANAGEMENT INTENT statements provide the land manager with an overall sense of what uses and the level of use that should occur in each subunit. This is a general policy statement intended to serve as a guide in future land use decisions.

MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES provide the rules under which uses may occur. This gives the land manager more specific direction in decision-making and lets the public know what to expect. It provides for consistency in management of the area.

This plan does not control uses on private lands.

D. Issues that this Plan Addresses

1. **Long-range versus interim uses** Among those involved in the process, there was general agreement that the Deception Creek management unit should be available for a variety of short-term uses but that no action should be taken that precludes such possible long-term uses as a capital city, university campus, or other uses not yet envisioned. Therefore, the uses designated by this plan are envisioned as interim uses.

2. **Settlement** Settlement is the term used to describe DNR's major land conveyance programs. Since the programs remove land from state management, they are necessarily long-term decisions. Therefore, settlement is a prohibited use until such time as this plan is revised or amended.
3. **Grazing and Wildlife** A preliminary analysis has identified grasslands that have grazing potential within portions of the planning area. The unit also has important wildlife habitat. This plan allows grazing outside of important brown bear and moose habitat and calls for a range survey prior to revision of the plan to better determine the location and value of grasslands. At present, the demand for grazing is low and better grasslands are available in the Hatcher Pass management unit. This plan also specifies conditions under which grazing may occur in order to minimize its negative impact on wildlife and its habitat.
4. **Mining** The capital site was closed to locatable mineral entry in 1982. This plan proposes to reopen to locatable mineral entry, under leasehold, that portion of the unit not included in the capital city core development area. Also to remain closed to new locatable mineral entry are anadromous streams and lakes and buffers along or around some of them, a stretch along the Hatcher Pass Road and Willow Creek to allow for public gold panning, and that portion of the right-of-way of the Hatcher Pass Road that lies within the unit.

The capital site was originally closed to mineral entry to prevent conflict between mining claimants and "dedicated future uses of the Willow South proposed capital site." The plan that was subsequently developed by the New Capital Site Planning Commission did not anticipate any development outside the core development area. Therefore, even if a capital city or other major development is located here at some point in the future, mining in the area proposed for reopening is not expected to be a significant conflict because it would be outside the area where development is most likely to take place.

5. **Forestry** The management unit contains important timber resources. The plan addresses how these timber resources are to be managed. Trees will be made available only for small commercial and personal use sales. The plan adopts interim guidelines governing how trees will be harvested; ultimately, the area will be subject to the guidelines in the Susitna Forest Plan. The plan also proposes specific cutting areas for 1989-1994. (See subunit 5, Middle Deception Creek.)
6. **Recreation** The management unit is currently used for hunting, snowmobiling, dogmushing, and other forms of dispersed recreation. It has the potential to be more heavily used if parts of it are intensively developed. This plan identifies and protects areas with recreation potential.

7. **Borough Selections** The Matanuska-Susitna Borough has filed selections and nominations within this management unit. Some of these selections were filed before the area was designated as a capital site. If the unit is not to be used for a capital city, the borough is interested in maintaining its selections and nominations here. This plan does not address whether or not any of the selections should go to the borough. It does identify borough interest areas and calls for classifying them Resource Management or Public Recreation. Borough interest areas are lands where the Borough believes it has valid selections. Resource Management and Public Recreation classifications are selectable and conveyable under AS 29.65. The purpose of these classifications is to keep the option open for future conveyance of these lands to the Borough in some combination under the municipal entitlement and land exchange provisions of AS 29.65. This does not constitute a decision to convey these lands to the Borough. According to state records, the State has patented and approved borough selections exceeding the Borough's entitlement by 2000 acres. Little of the patented or approved land is within the planning area. If, after survey of these lands is completed, the Borough has a remaining entitlement and decides to pursue their selections in the planning area, the plan may be amended if appropriate.

E. How this Plan Was Developed

This plan was developed by the Southcentral Regional office of Division of Land and Water Management, based on resource information supplied by the various resource agencies. A draft of the plan was prepared and circulated for review to state agencies, the Matanuska-Susitna Borough staff, and the Wasilla Soil and Water Conservation District. The draft plan presented several alternative management approaches, including a selected alternative which was the approach emphasized. The draft was then revised, based on comments from the agencies, and conflicts were resolved by an interagency planning team. A second draft of the plan was made available for public review. Public meetings were held on the plan in May and June of 1988. Following receipt of public comment, the plan was revised, based on the comments received, in consultation with other resource agencies and the Matanuska-Susitna Borough. The final plan was then adopted by the Commissioner of the Department of Natural Resources and approved by the Matanuska-Susitna Borough (Assembly Resolution 89-201).

F. How This Plan May Be Changed

Procedures to be followed for changes or special exceptions to the plan are described in Appendix III. When the *Susitna Area Plan* is revised, the *Willow Sub-basin Area Plan* will be incorporated within it. This plan, which is an amendment to the *Willow Sub-basin Area Plan*, will also be incorporated within the *Susitna Area Plan*. The policies of this plan are intended to be in effect for 10 years but may be revised earlier as a part of the *Susitna Area Plan* revision or in response to changed conditions.

G. Plan Implementation

All actions called for in this plan that require funding (e.g., laying out a timber sale) are dependent on the availability of sufficient funds. A summary of actions needed to implement this plan is presented in Chapter IV.