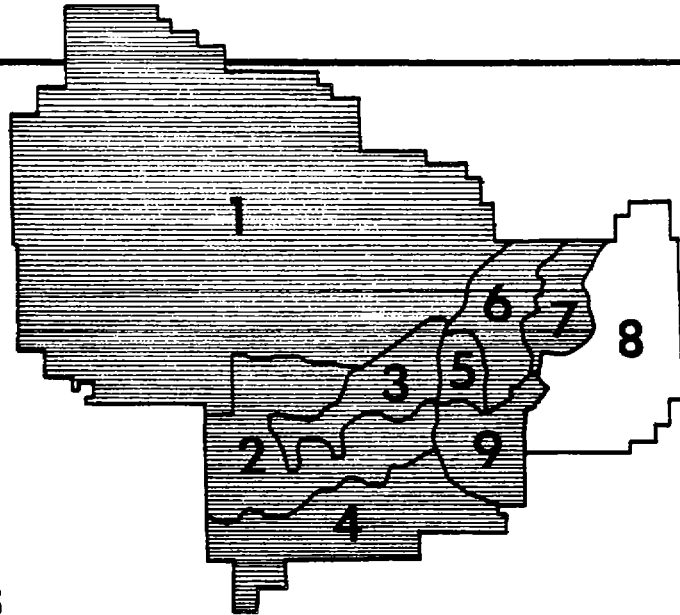


VIII. Little Susitna



A. LAND USE DESIGNATIONS

- Primary Use: Recreation, Grazing in Section B, Water Resources (See Map 6, page 196)
- Secondary Use: Fish and Wildlife Habitat (refer to land use plan map)
- Prohibited Uses: Commercial Recreation Leases, Settlement, Remote Cabin Permits, Grazing in Section A (See Map 3, pages 116/117)
- Mining: Open except for a corridor along the Little Susitna River

B. BACKGROUND

This scenic, glacially carved valley is used primarily for wilderness-type activities, such as foot travel, skiing, snowmachining, horseback riding and ptarmigan hunting. Rock and ice climbing, mountaineering classes and year-round glacial travel are also popular. A loop route is used by skilled skiers and glacier travelers between the upper Little Susitna Valley and Reed Lakes. This rugged backcountry, which can be reached by hikers or skiers in one day, provides the opportunity for a weekend wilderness-type experience. A hut built by the Mountaineering Club of Alaska is located near Mint Glacier, at the head of the valley.

The valley is within the general sheep distribution range and there are moose in the lower valley. Trapping and ptarmigan hunting are traditional uses in the valley in fall and winter. Spawning king and coho salmon are found in the Little Susitna River within this subunit and there is sport fishing for Dolly Varden. This valley contains the headwaters of the Little Susitna River and has high value for downstream fisheries, wildlife habitat, riparian habitat and watershed.

Lode gold mining potential is high. Small scale placer mining occurs in the lower Little Susitna valley; there is a chance that a deep pre-glacial placer deposit underlies the river. (Refer to Chapter 2, page 70, Subsurface Resources for more information on placer potential.)

The primitive trail known as the Gold Mint Road was originally constructed to provide access to the Lonesome Mine on the east side of the river. It is an unmaintained state road approximately four miles long. A derelict foot bridge is still in place at the river crossing. No other trails are known to occur in this rugged valley.

The legislature has designated the river corridor as the Hatcher Pass Public Use Area (see Map 12). To protect scenic, recreational and fisheries values, it has been closed to mineral entry.

The valley is steep and mountainous with many unstable surficial geologic features, an active fault system and glaciers. The valley floor has some avalanche potential and the rest of the area has high avalanche potential.

The lower valley has moderate value grass resources and has been leased for grazing for 25 years; however, it has not been grazed the past two years. Herd management is easy due to the natural boundaries provided by the mountains and the swift, rocky rivers.

C. MANAGEMENT INTENT

The overall Hatcher Pass management scheme is to provide a variety of dispersed, wilderness-type, recreational opportunities to a wide variety of users. This subunit is the only one where a quiet, backcountry experience is available from a road access point.

This unit will be managed primarily for low density, non-motorized use and dispersed recreation, including hunting and trapping. Keeping options open for future lode mineral development of the valley walls has a high priority. Within Section "A", grazing is a high priority and will be managed so it is compatible with recreation.

D. PLANNED ACTIONS

1. MINING

A mineral closing order will be placed on the Little Susitna River headwaters lake to protect the public recreation and fisheries values. Most of the rest of the river has been closed to mineral entry by the Legislature in SB 334 which created the Hatcher Pass Public Use Area (see Map 12).

2. RECREATION

- a. Non-Motorized Special Use Area. The portion of this subunit within the Hatcher Pass Public Use Area and its proposed additions will be closed to motorized use (including aircraft landing) for recreational purposes in both winter and summer. Permits for motorized access will be issued to those who can demonstrate an economic interest (other than recreation) in this valley on which they are economically dependent (e.g., a mining claim, grazing lease, or trapline), or for grooming of a winter ski trail. No permit is required for emergency rescue. A permit may be issued if there is a finding that the proposed motorized use will provide a clear public benefit.
- b. Footbridge. Replace the old footbridge over the Little Susitna with a safe one. The bridge may be built to also accommodate cattle access to rangeland west of the river.
- c. Archangel Bridge. DOT/PF has found the bridge over Archangel Creek on the Gold Mint Road to be unsafe for motorized use. Necessary repairs should be done to allow continued foot, horse and cattle access, but it will be closed to vehicle use.
- d. Public Use Cabin. The existing cabin on Mint Glacier should be converted to a public use cabin. Agreements with recreational groups may be negotiated for its maintenance and provisions made for reserved use by the recreational group at certain times of the year.
- e. Trails/Routes. The following are routes which may be identified on a map and/or brushed out:
 - * Upper Little Susitna Trail, 8 miles (13 km)
 - * Mother Lode Lodge to Arkose Ridge, (3 km)
 - * Lonesome Mine/Arkose Ridge, 3 miles (5 km)
 - * Moose Creek overlook, 3 miles (5 km)
- e. Additions to the Hatcher Pass Public Use Area. The valley floor in section 3 and Mint Glacier are proposed for inclusion in the legislatively designated Hatcher Pass Public Use Area, due to high public recreation and fisheries values. This will provide the same protection and management status for the headwaters of the Little Susitna River as for the rest of the river within the management unit (except that Mint Glacier will remain open to mineral entry).

E. GUIDELINES

1. GRAZING

- a. Vegetation Studies. The existing grazing lease shall be used to establish baseline vegetation studies for range trend analysis, utilization trends, livestock forage preference and other grazing related issues.

- b. Lease Area Reduction. Leasing should be continued; however, the lease area shall be reduced to the best grass producing area as identified by Soil Conservation Service (see Unit B on Map 6) upon expiration of the existing lease, or prior to that time by concurrence of the lessee.
 - c. Recovery of Resource. The area at the confluence of Archangel Creek and Little Susitna River will be fenced off to allow recovery and protection of this sensitive area. Grazing will be excluded from this site due to fisheries and recreational values which are negatively impacted by livestock-induced bank erosion.
 - d. Archangel Creek Limits. Establish upper limit of grazing on Archangel Creek. Fence to contain the herd.
 - e. Lone Tree Creek Limits. Establish upper limit of grazing on Little Susitna River by fence, near mouth of Lone Tree Creek.
 - f. Bridge. Bridge the Little Susitna for livestock and recreation crossing near Lonesome Mine Road.
 - g. Guidelines. Guidelines from the management plan will be incorporated into the existing grazing lease upon renewal or by concurrence of the lessee prior to lease expiration.
 1. Compatibility with Recreation: Herd management and fencing techniques should be made compatible with recreational uses of the area to the extent feasible and possible.
2. ACCESS
- a. Trail. Access development will be limited to trails.
 - b. Mining Access Roads. If a new access road is required for mining, the road will not be open to general motorized public use.
3. RECREATION OPPORTUNITY SPECTRUM
- a. Setting. The intended recreational setting described in Part "a" is for the purpose of guidance to land managers who must adjudicate land use requests. It is not intended to be a hard and fast set of rules.
 - (1) Physical Setting: Unmodified natural environment
 - (2) Social Setting: Low interaction between users
 - (3) Managerial Setting: Minimum of site controls near entry point, none evident after entry except possible brushed trails or information signs

- (4) Access and Mode of Travel: non-motorized and cross-country foot or ski travel
 - (5) Vegetative Alterations and Duration of Impacts: Minor loss of vegetation in travel routes, most impacts recover on an annual basis
 - (6) Type of Experience: Very high probability of experiencing solitude, freedom, closeness to nature, self reliance, challenge and risk
- b. Facilities. The purpose of this section is to describe the intended level of recreation facility development. Where no facilities are proposed, this does not mean it is a prohibited use.
- (1) Public Facilities: None planned
 - (2) Camp Sites: None planned
 - (3) Picnic Sites: None planned
 - (4) Water Supply: None planned
 - (5) Sanitation: None planned
 - (6) Signs: Non-motorized and safety information signs only
 - (7) Water Crossings: Foot bridges over Archangel Creek and Little Susitna River
 - (8) Interpretative: Interpretation by self-discovery
- c. Guidelines for Appropriate Commercial or Other Private Uses to be Authorized by Lease or Permit:
- (1) Commercial Uses and Other Private Uses: None by lease. Generally permitted activities will not be affected. Other permit applications will be considered on a case-by-case basis if they are compatible with management intent and guidelines.
 - (2) Stipulations on Private Uses: They must provide a clear public benefit and not negatively impact the wilderness-type setting described in part "a" and "b".

4. MATERIAL SITES (See Map 11)

Site #6. This site should only be developed if sites 10 or 11 prove inadequate as a source of material supply. After material extraction, the low lying area adjacent to the Little Susitna River should be trenched and contoured into side channels and ponds for fish spawning and rearing areas. If this pit is developed, a bridge crossing over the Little Susitna River would be required. This bridge could also serve as access for grazing and recreation. Rehabilitation to a natural appearance and for revegetation to grass and/or moose browse has a high priority in this location.

Sites #7 & #8. These sites should only be developed if and when road access is needed for mineral development in the upper Little Susitna Valley. Rehabilitation should include fisheries enhancement based on consultation with ADF&G.