

GOVERNMENT PEAK (Chapter Four, Section IX of original plan)

A. LAND USE DESIGNATIONS

Primary Use: **Recreation, Water Resources, [SECTIONS A AND B]*, Fish and Wildlife Habitat [IN UNIT A]*** (If an alpine ski area/four-season resort is established, fish and wildlife habitat then becomes a secondary use.)

Secondary Use: **[FISH AND WILDLIFE HABITAT IN SECTION B*,] Grazing [(SEE MAP 3, PAGES 116/117)]** in Section C*, and in portions of Subunit B (T19N R1E Sections 28, 29, and below the 1500-foot level in Section 30).

Prohibited Uses: **Lard Disposal, Remote Cabin Permits, Grazing** outside designated areas (see Map 11 in original plan)

Mining: **Closed**

- site of potential alpine ski area and four-season resort (10-year closure only unless a feasible ski area development proposal has been received by DNR within that time); and
- the Little Susitna River corridor; and
- the upper road corridor area (see Map 11 in original plan).

Open

- Arkose Ridge, portions of Government Peak and Bald Mountain Ridge.

* see Map 6, page 196/197 in original plan.

Classification:

Outside resort lease and Area E on amendment Map 3: Public Recreation, Water Resources, Wildlife Habitat.

Within resort lease: Public Recreation, Water Resources.

B. BACKGROUND

Subunit A, east side of Government Peak. The slopes adjacent to the Hatcher Pass Road attract high use for all winter sports including skiing, snowmachining, bobsledding, and ptarmigan hunting. It is also used for mountaineering classes. There [ARE TWO EXISTING LEASE APPLICATIONS FOR RECREATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND] is considerable [OTHER] private sector interest in a variety of recreation and tourism related businesses. The northeastern slopes of Government Peak and Bald Mountain Ridge contain [THE ONLY] suitable terrain for

alpine skiing [IN THE MANAGEMENT UNIT.] There is high potential for all-season trail development and use. [THIS ENTIRE UNIT] Subunit A is visible from the Hatcher Pass Road and has high scenic viewing value.

Moose are abundant year round below 3000 feet on the eastern and southern sides of Government Peak. Several moose and black bear are harvested annually in this area. It is also a ptarmigan habitat and hunting area.

Placer claims occur along Fishhook Creek and the Little Susitna River. There is a conflict between public enjoyment of the road corridor's scenic values and the visual appearance of the placer camps along the road. A description of mineral potential on Government Peak is given in Chapter Two, Subsurface Resources. There are no claims nor past mineral activity in the Government Peak area.

The river corridor has been legislatively designated as the Hatcher Pass Public Use Area and closed to mineral entry and land sales.

This subunit has important watershed values for commercial uses and mining and for the fisheries resources, especially salmon spawning and rearing, and downstream fisheries values.

All of the upper area has high avalanche potential and most areas in the lower portion have some avalanche potential. Government Peak has unstable slopes, areas of potentially unstable glacial till material, fracture zones and rock glaciers.

Subunit B has a rich variety of natural resources, and demands on these resources are expected to increase significantly as private lands adjacent to the southern border are settled. This is important moose habitat for both winter and summer. A significant moose harvest occurs here. It is also a black bear, small game and furbearer area.

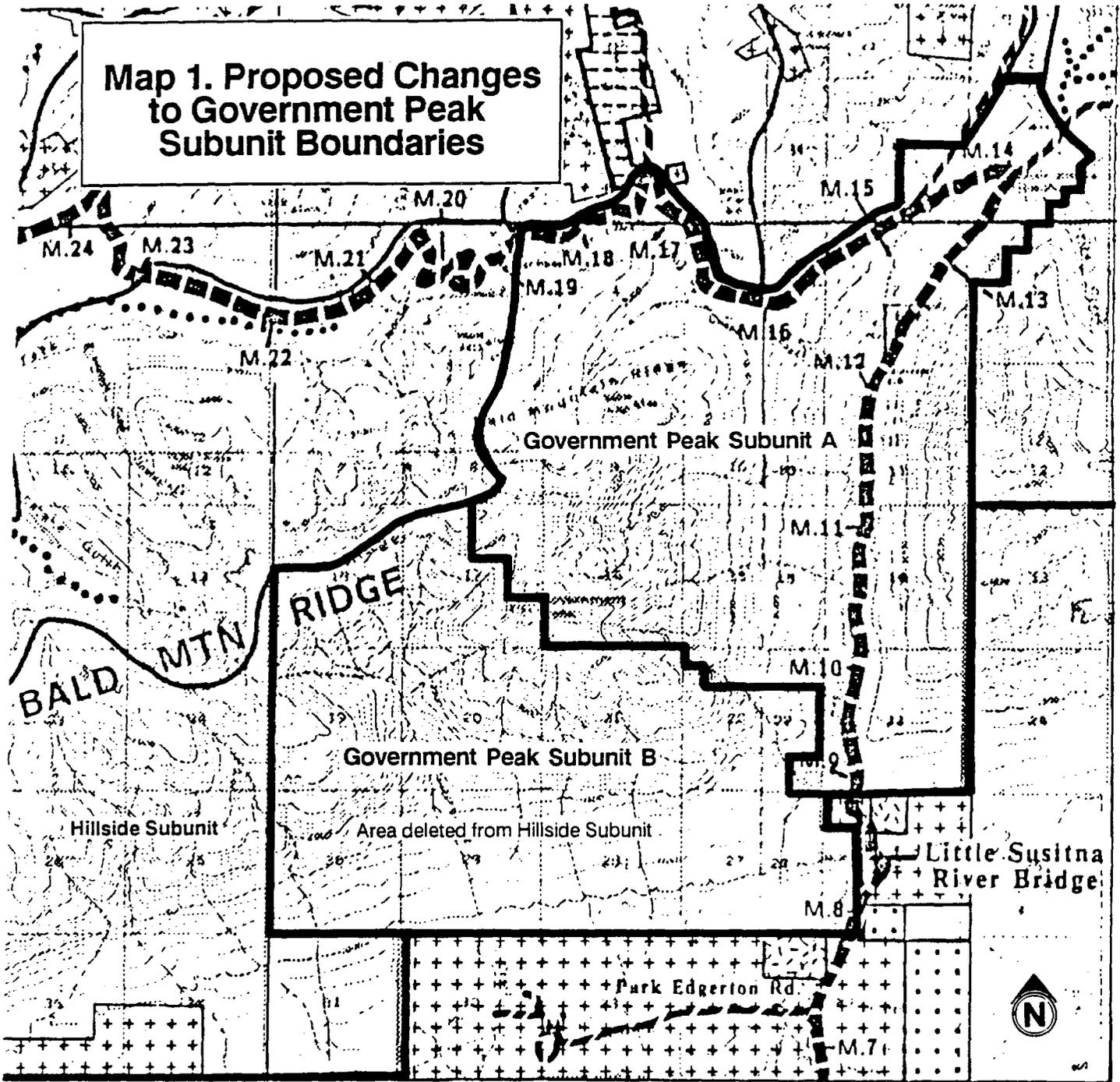
The forested areas in this subunit have high potential for creating productive, replacement moose habitat for summer and winter range lost to development on adjacent private lands.

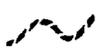
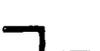
Recreational use is light at present due to limited access. Current use is for hunting, trapping, horseback riding, hiking, skiing and snow machining. Potential for a variety of recreation uses is high, either for cross country ski trails and dispersed recreational trails or for more developed recreation.

Open woodlands with bluejoint understory provide high grazing potential across the unit.

Mineral potential is moderate to low; no claims exist at present and no past mining activity is known.

Map 1. Proposed Changes to Government Peak Subunit Boundaries



-  HATCHER PASS ROAD
-  LOCAL ACCESS ROADS
-  TRAILS
-  SUBUNIT BOUNDARIES
-  PLANNING UNIT BOUNDARY

LAND OWNERSHIP

-  STATE
-  PRIVATE
-  MAT-SU BOROUGH
-  STATE SELECTED
-  NATIVE (PRIVATE)
-  INDEPENDENCE MINE STATE HISTORICAL PARK
-  MENTAL HEALTH LAND

Streams in this subunit are lateral tributaries to the Little Susitna River. Water quality in the streams in this subunit is assumed (although not proven) to be important in the protection and maintenance of the downstream fisheries resource in the Little Susitna River. The subunit is important as a watershed for the populated area south of the subunit.

The upper area has unstable slopes, fracture zones and potentially unstable materials. There is high avalanche potential along almost the entire upper slope; lower portions have some potential. An active fault system crosses the lower Hillside, and there are scattered areas of unstable material. Water is near the surface in many of the lower areas of the subunit; careful engineering is necessary in these areas where roads and trails may be constructed to prevent water ponding and drainage problems.

C. MANAGEMENT INTENT

This area is to be managed for intensive recreation and as a tourism destination point in a manner which preserves the option for a downhill ski area and four-season resort development and protects the scenic values of this subunit. This unit will be one of two focal points for four-season developed, commercial and non-commercial recreation options in the Hatcher Pass area including, but not limited to, a downhill ski area, a sledding run, snowmobile, equestrian, and pedestrian trails, parking, picnic and camping areas. A variety of motorized and non-motorized trails will be established in most of the unit. In designing these developments, attention will be paid to minimizing or mitigating moose and ptarmigan habitat loss to the extent feasible, to avalanche safety planning, and to alleviating road congestion. Hunting will be maintained where possible.

While the intent for this subunit is to concentrate intensive recreational use and provide additional future recreational opportunities, the emphasis is to retain the high scenic values of the river corridor and open mountain slopes. The narrow river corridor has a limited ability to accept change brought about by facilities construction and still maintain the open, natural beauty. To protect the existing scenic values, major commercial development will be authorized only [AT THE POTENTIAL ALPINE SKI SITE] on the east and south slopes [SIDE] of Government Peak and Bald Mountain Ridge (see Map 1 in this document). [(SEE APPENDIX VI FOR A COPY OF THE ALPINE SKI SITES STUDY)]. Subunit B (the south slopes of Government Peak and Bald Mountain Ridge) is important moose habitat and valuable public open space and recreation land, adjacent to the private land base in the Matanuska Valley. Siting and design of structures, access, and parking associated with the resort development [SKI AREA] will be carefully done to complement the natural landscape and to leave as much open space and moose habitat as is feasible. Consideration should be given to location of a major sledding hill in conjunction with an alpine ski area. The area north of the junction of the Gold Mint Road with the Hatcher Pass Road at Milepost (MP) 14 will be an intensive use area for small-scale developments such as a bobsled run and a rope tow or poma lift. These facilities will complement the existing public recreational uses and will not include structures other than a warm-up facility or maintenance building. No private commercial recreational uses of state land will be authorized outside these two areas with the possible exception of a site for tourism gold panning.

The alpine ski area site will be closed to mineral entry because mineral development is incompatible with commercial recreational development at this site: mineral claims could hinder

the ability of the private sector to obtain financing; mine roads and structures would hinder design and use of the slopes for ski runs.

Alpine Ski Area/Four-Season Resort. In response to interest in locating a downhill ski facility in Hatcher Pass, the Division of Geological and Geophysical Surveys managed a study that analyzed the area and determined that the only location that has the right kind of slope is the east slope of Government Peak (see Appendix VI for a copy of the alpine ski sites study). Public response to a proposed ski development at this site was mixed. It is clear that a majority of users want some type of downhill ski facility, but there is disagreement over how large a facility is desired. There was little support for a winter village. However, there was testimony given that a day-use only development may not be economically feasible.

Subsequently, DNR solicited bids for the development of an alpine ski resort and ultimately issued a lease to Mitsui, Inc., USA. The lease only included development rights for a portion of Subunit A because commercial development was not allowed in the rest of the subunit under the Hatcher Pass Management Plan in effect at the time the lease was issued. Mitsui is interested in developing an international-scale, destination four-season resort with alpine skiing. In a survey commissioned in the fall of 1988 by DNR, the majority of respondents indicated that they supported Mitsui's proposed development. At public meetings held in the spring of 1989 on the proposed amendment, the majority indicated again that they supported amending the plan to allow a four-season resort in Subunit B. Many of the supporters also stressed the need to carry out the development carefully. Those who opposed a four-season resort were concerned with environmental impacts, noise, and effects on existing recreational uses of the adjacent areas.

In response to this public input, the Department of Natural Resources has developed the guidelines outlined in this section. The option to develop an international-scale, destination alpine ski area/four season resort in this unit will be made available. This plan does not make a final decision on the scale of the development but the intent is that, to the extent feasible, it be a compact-type development with buildings located in one or more [A] clusters. [THERE WILL BE NO VILLAGE]. Overnight accommodations including hotel and resort housing (which may include condominiums) are allowed. Location and design must consider public safety and efficient use of land (see resort guidelines). The management intent for resort housing is that it is for the use of visitors to the resort facility. (See alpine ski area guidelines, page 253 for type of developments allowed). Public hearings will be held in the Matanuska Valley and Anchorage before a final decision is made on the scale and specifics of the development and the final decision will reflect public comment.

D. PLANNED ACTIONS

1. MINING

a. Little Susitna River. The Little Susitna River has been closed to mineral entry ½ mile to the west and ¼ mile to the east of mean high water through the Hatcher Pass Public Use Area Legislation.