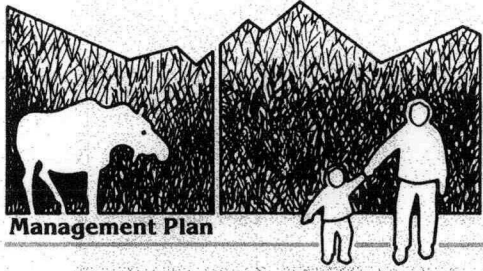


# Matanuska Valley Moose Range



Alaska Department of Natural Resources  
Division of Land and Water Management  
Southcentral Regional Office  
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## Introduction

The 130,000 acre Matanuska Valley Moose Range was established by the Alaska legislature and signed into law by Governor Sheffield in June 1984. In creating the Moose Range lawmakers stated that its primary purposes were to "Maintain, improve and enhance moose populations and habitat and other wildlife resources of the area, and to perpetuate public multiple use of the area..."

Under the legislation, the Alaska Department of Natural Resources (DNR) in cooperation with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) are charged with the responsibility to prepare a land use plan for the Moose Range to guide its management for the next two decades.

DNR's Susitna Area Plan identified primary land uses for the Moose Range: wildlife habitat, coal, forestry and public recreation, with grazing as a secondary land use.

These designated uses will direct land use within the state Moose Range.

Included within the Moose Range boundaries are state-owned lands within the drainages of Wasilla, Moose, Eska, Granite and Boulder Creeks and the Kings and Chickaloon Rivers. Several management jurisdictions exist within portions of the Moose Range boundaries and are subject to guidelines from DNR's Susitna Area Plan and the Willow Sub-Basin Area Plan. Additionally, some sections are included in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough's Talkeetna Mountains and Moose Creek Reserves Special Use Districts and Coastal Zone Management area. Developing one management plan for the entire unit will coordinate and simplify management of state lands. Borough, private and university lands within the Moose Range will not be directly affected by the plan.



Photograph by Pete Martin

## Why A Plan?

The legislation that created the Moose Range called for a management plan to be developed by 1987 to assure that there would be a framework for rational, orderly use and protection of the area's resources. This need arose because recent large population increases in Southcentral Alaska have placed greater demands on natural resources in the area.

A comprehensive plan that defines land use allocations and management guidelines will play an essential role in orderly use and protection of those resources, and future actions of DNR and Fish and Game will be based on the approved management plan.

## What Will the Management Plan Include?

The final product is a document that describes intended uses of state lands. The plan will:

- 1) Include a natural resource inventory of timber, minerals, wildlife habitat, social and economic data and other information.
- 2) Identify, develop and select land use management alternatives for the entire Moose Range.

- 3) Specify guidelines for management of each resource.
- 4) Describe necessary state actions.
- 5) Identify methods for future revisions.

## Who is Developing the Plan?

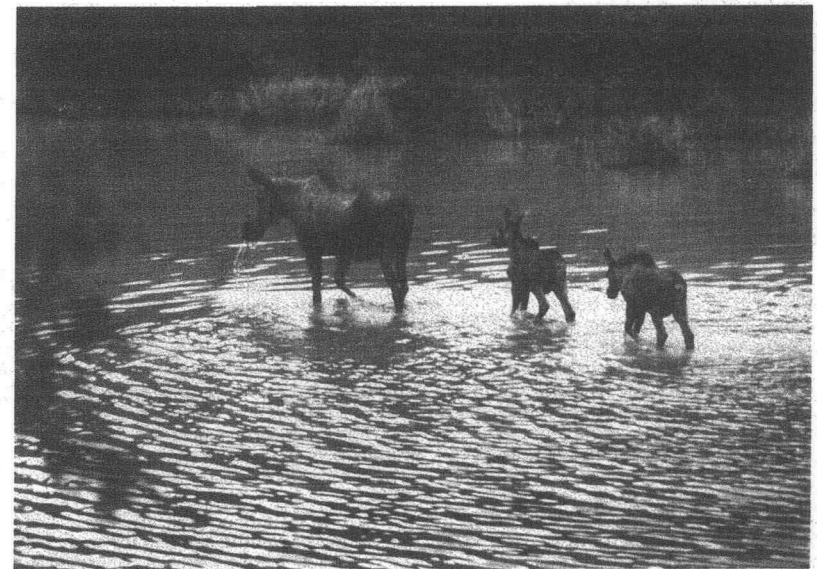
Agencies represented on the planning team preparing the Matanuska Valley Moose Range Management Plan include:

**Alaska Department of Natural Resources**  
Division of Land and Water Management  
Division of Mining  
Division of Agriculture  
Division of Forestry  
Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation  
**Alaska Department of Fish and Game**  
Division of Habitat  
Division of Game

Technical assistance and cooperative planning efforts will be provided by:

**Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation**  
**Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities**  
**Matanuska-Susitna Borough**

Citizens, interest groups, private organizations and other state and local agencies are invited to participate in the planning process to help develop the plan.



Photograph by Mike Lee

## How Will the Plan be Prepared?

The plan will be prepared through a process which collects the best available data and then reviews and evaluates this information and public concerns. Individuals,

citizen's groups, private landowners and local and state governments will be involved throughout the process.

### Major Steps in Developing the Plan:

**Public Issues are Identified:** Public meetings are held to learn about local knowledge of the area, local problems, land use preferences, and concerns about uses of state lands.

**Final Plan is Prepared:** A final plan recommending management actions and management guidelines is developed, based on agency and public comments.

**Information is Gathered and Analyzed:** Information about natural resources, existing land uses, land ownership, economic and social characteristics is gathered, mapped and analyzed. Public input is an important part of this step.

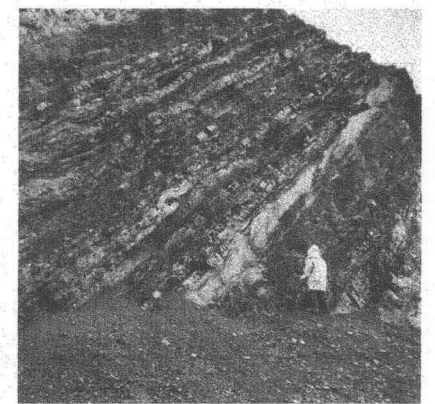
**Plan is Adopted and Implemented:** The commissioners of the DNR and Fish and Game approve and adopt the final plan. The plan guides the state's land and resource management decisions in the Matanuska Valley Moose Range.

**Management Alternatives are Prepared:** Different plans for use of the resources in the Moose Range are developed. These alternative plans will be based on legislative intent, existing state policies, public comments and resource characteristics.

**Public Alternatives are Reviewed:** Public comments and preferences on the alternatives are obtained at public meetings.

**Draft Plan for State Lands is Prepared:** Using public and agency comments, land uses are determined and a draft management plan is developed.

**Public Draft Plan is Reviewed:** Public hearings are held to obtain final comments on the draft management plan.



Photograph by Pat Beckley

## How Can You Participate?

Public involvement is an important part of the planning process. You are encouraged to:

- Attend planning team meetings
- Participate in public meetings, workshops and hearings throughout the planning process
- Meet with interest groups
- Attend meetings with local governments or communities
- Write or phone the planning team staff if you have any comments or suggestions.

If you would like to be added to the mailing list, please contact the project manager by mail or telephone:

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# History

The Matanuska River Valley has served as the primary hunting and trapping grounds and as a transportation corridor for the people in the area. The earliest known inhabitants of the Matanuska River region were Tanania Indians who lived along the Chikaloon River and near the mouth of the Matanuska River. They were ingenious fishers who used the Eskimo kayak as well as birch-bark canoes. The Alaska natives from the Copper River Plateau would travel the river to the head of Knik Arm to trade, then return home along the Matanuska River by a foot trail. Russian fur traders also used the trail up the Matanuska Valley in the mid-1800's.

With the discovery of gold at Hope in 1888, Willow Creek in 1898, and Hatcher Pass in 1906, more white people settled in southcentral Alaska, yet the mid-Matanuska Valley still remained on the fringes of major settlement. In 1898 U.S. Army exploration parties, one led by Lt. E.F. Glenn, traversed the entire region in search of a route to the Yukon River. This was the first official U.S. military activity in the area.

By 1905 the community of Knik, at the upper end of navigability in Cook Inlet, had become a supply and transportation hub for gold seekers. From Knik, transportation trails radiated in all directions, one of which led not to gold but to coal. W.C. Mendenhall, a geologist with the 1898 exploration party, was the first to note a large seam of coal in the Chikaloon River drainage. However, transportation of the coal to Knik, the distribution point, involved a 2 1/2 day horse trip, which made mining impractical at that time.

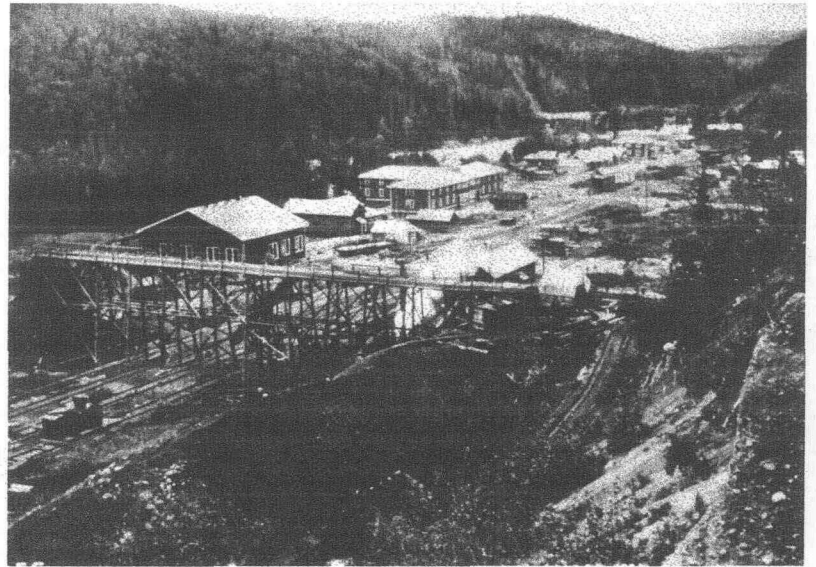
Coal miners needed a railroad for transport and the railroad needed coal to fire its steam engines. That bond of mutual dependence helped develop and settle the mid-Matanuska Valley. In the early 1900's the Matanuska coal lands attracted national interest, and a mining camp was set up in 1913 at Eska Creek by the federal government.

In 1915 a rail line was built from Seward to Fairbanks and in 1917 a 38 mile spur line to Chickaloon was added. During this time the navy built a "government" town at the Chickaloon coal mines but despite the extensive townsite development and plant construction, Chickaloon's mines did not go into production because a more readily available fuel began to flow from California's oil fields. When the Navy decided to fuel its ships with oil rather than coal, it withdrew from Chickaloon and most people left. For the few residents who remained, the main source of income came from running pack trains from the railhead to the Nelchina gold fields. Today all that remains of the Chickaloon government town is the concrete foundation of the powerplant.

Meanwhile the mines of the Sutton area continued to supply coal for the railroad and many miners of the area filed for homesteads. With the arrival of the Matanuska colonists in 1935, much of the best agricultural land was settled. Clearing mature timber for homesteads and agriculture created excellent moose browse. Willow and aspen revegetated the cleared and abandoned areas and the valley's moose population expanded to all-time highs.

World War II brought increased activity in the coal fields. Population growth at Fort Richardson, Elmendorf Air Force Base and Anchorage, created a greater demand for coal to power electric generators, to provide heat, and as fuel for the railroad. A route connecting Palmer and the Richardson Highway became necessary for military purposes and the Glenn Highway, named after the earlier explorer, was completed in 1944.

Following the war the demand for coal declined. The Alaska Railroad converted its engines to diesel fuel, and in 1967 the military bases converted from coal to natural gas. Larger mines closed almost immediately and the last mine closed in 1971. In the early 1980's, however, the market changed once more and intensive



U.S. Navy coal mining town at Chickaloon, Matanuska Valley circa 1920. Photograph courtesy of Bunnell Collection, University of Alaska Archives.

exploration for coal began again. The state sale of three coal lease sites in 1984 and proposed plans for a major coal mine and power plant in the Sutton area may once again open up the coal industry in the valley.

Significant increases in the human population of the lower Matanuska Valley altered moose habitat during the 1970's. Areas that once provided winter moose habitat became subdivisions and as development continued, the outlook for the future of moose habitat in the valley was poor.

In 1979 the Alaska Department of Natural Resources designated 30,000 acres of state land in the Matanuska Valley to be managed for wildlife habitat and public recreation. Later that year the Matanuska-Susitna

Borough designated the same area as the Moose Creek Reserve Special Use District, to ensure the continuing presence of moose. Finally, in 1984, the Alaska legislature created the Matanuska Valley Moose Range to maintain, improve and enhance moose populations and to perpetuate public multiple uses of the natural resources.

