
Deshka River Management Unit

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2. *Deshka River Management Unit*

Background

MILES OF RIVER

This unit includes over 140 river miles including the *Deshka River*² from its confluence with Susitna River (RM 0.0) to (RM 82.4) and 59 miles of Kroto Creek above the Forks.

LAND OWNERSHIP

State	62,117 acres
Matanuska/Susitna Borough	10,110 acres
119 Private Parcels	1,467 acres
Total	73,694 acres

RIVER CHARACTERISTICS

The *Deshka River* meanders with mid-channel bars and riffles throughout. Channel width varies along the river. Near the mouth the normal channel width is about 300 feet, in Subunits 2b and 3c it is 100 feet, in Subunits 2d and 2e it is 50 feet, and upstream of the forks it is 30 feet. The average stream flow near the mouth is 892 cubic feet per second. Winter low flows are 200 to 300 cfs. Peak summer flows are 600 to 1500 cfs. The average depth is 2 to 8 feet. The width of the 100-year floodplain at the mouth of the *Deshka River* is approximately 1.5 miles, primarily to the east side of the river, meeting the floodplain of the Susitna River. Over half of this corridor is wetlands. Wetlands are particularly extensive near the Moose-Kroto creek confluence. The terrain in the remainder of the corridor is rolling to flat with moderately dense tree cover.

Because the view from the river is generally confined to the riverbanks, the visual quality along

² The term *Deshka River* as used in this plan to refer to Unit 2 includes both Moose Creek and Kroto Creek from the Susitna River to their headwaters. *Deshka River* is also used more specifically to include the river below the confluence of Kroto and Mosse Creeks. Above the confluence of Moose and Kroto creeks, these creeks are called by their respective names.

the *Deshka River* is moderate. However, in open areas, there are panoramic views of the Alaska Range, Denali, and the Talkeetna Mountains. The river is a dark color from tanins in the water. There are numerous camps, buildings, and docks along the river particularly near the mouth.

FISHERIES

Species Present

Chum Salmon	Pink Salmon
Arctic Grayling	Coho Salmon
Sockeye Salmon	Rainbow Trout
King Salmon	

King salmon are found from the mouth of the *Deshka* to the upper reaches of Moose and Kroto creeks. They spawn in the river beginning at approximately RM 5. A small number of sockeye salmon are found at the headwaters of Kroto Creek and near the upper limit of Moose Creek. Coho and pink salmon spawn nearly to the upper boundary of the Moose and Kroto creek subunits. Chum salmon are present in much of the river. Arctic grayling and rainbow trout are present throughout the management unit.

Sport Fishing

The level of sport fishing on the *Deshka River* is second only to the Little Susitna River in the planning area. Peaks in recreation and fishing activities on the *Deshka River* correspond with the king and coho salmon runs; approximately May 29 to July 4. Many people fish for rainbow trout from July 15 to August 15. The most popular fishing areas are the mouth of the *Deshka*, the Forks, and the mouths of Trapper and No Name creeks.

Special Regulations

Moose and Kroto creeks have been designated by DFG as a catch and release special management area for rainbow trout. They are closed to king salmon fishing.

WILDLIFE

Moose

Moose and Kroto creeks have high moose densities in the winter. Riparian habitat is critical for the winter survival of moose. Riparian willow stands provide a large portion of the winter forage. The river provides established travel corridors which are enhanced by upland coniferous forests that provide thermal cover and shallower snow depths. Radio telemetry studies conducted by DFG indicate high concentrations of moose occur in and along the corridor during late fall and winter seasons.

Bear

On the Deshka River, brown bear and black bear are equally common and are important for hunting and wildlife viewing. This river is one of the more important spring black bear harvest areas in Game Management Unit 14A. Black bear frequent the lowlands and river flats in early May. During summer, forested, riparian habitats provide food and cover. During June and July, salmon provide a significant portion of the bears' diet. Travel corridors along the river are important components of brown bear habitat.

Bald eagles

Five bald eagle nests have been identified within or immediately adjacent to the management unit. Nest trees are primarily black cottonwood, always over 50 feet tall, and usually within 20 feet of the river.

Trumpeter swans

Three trumpeter swan nests were identified in surveys taken between 1968 and 1985.

Hunting

Moose and bear are important for hunting and viewing. Hunting of moose and bear is concentrated in the road-accessible areas along the Petersville and Oilwell roads. Hunters access the mouth of the Deshka River and Moose Creek downstream of the Oilwell Road by boat. Airplanes and off-road vehicles are also used for hunting. This management unit receives some of the highest hunting use of all the Recreation Rivers because of its proximity to population centers, relative ease of access, and large moose population.

Trapping

Recreational trapping for otter, muskrat, mink, beaver, fox, coyote, and possibly marten occurs in the corridor during spring and winter seasons.

CAMPING

Because the average length of trip or stay on the Deshka River is 3 days, camping is common in this management unit. Most overnight use occurs on public land. Undeveloped campsites along the river were inventoried in a survey of the river in 1989. The number of sites are noted for each subunit.

ACCESS

Moose and Kroto creeks are accessible by automobile from the Petersville and Oilwell roads. Foot and off-road vehicle trails along the river and seismic lines also are common. Powerboats generally access the lower river from the Deshka or Susitna landings. With adequate flows, they can travel up to the confluence of Moose and Kroto creeks. Travel by powerboat is low above the confluence. Float trips originate from several locations on the upper river. Floatplanes land on the Susitna River, the lower Deshka River, and several other places along the corridor. Airplanes use several strips located along the lower river. The Deshka River is used extensively for winter travel by private property owners and other recreationists. Snowmachines are the primary method of transportation but dog mushing is also common. A commercial dog mushing business offers trips up the river.

Management Guidelines for the Unit

BOATING RESTRICTIONS

1. *Voluntary no-wake area* Confluence with Susitna River (RM 0.0) to the island.
Season: May 15 - August 20.
Justification: This is a highly congested area with high boat traffic, boats anchored in midstream, and high floatplane traffic. A no-wake area should reduce safety hazards.
2. *Warning sign:* Silver Hole (RM 3.8 - RM 4.9).
Season: May 15 - August 20.
Justification: This is a heavily used area for fishing and camping. A sign will be placed at the upper and lower reaches of this area to warn boaters to reduce speed when anglers are present. The intent is to protect public safety.
3. *Non-motorized area* From just above the forks (RM 29.7) to: just below Oilwell Road on Moose Creek (RM 54.2), and to just below Amber Lake Creek on Kroto Creek (RM 19.1).
Season: May 15 - August 20.
Justification: The non-motorized areas on Moose and Kroto creeks provide high quality float trips. Because of numerous riffles and shallows on both creeks, powerboat use is low. There is no private property in the corridor in these two river segments. To provide opportunities to harvest king salmon in a non-motorized area, lower Moose Creek will be recommended to the Board of Fisheries to be open to king salmon harvest. Also see *Other Recommendations, Fishing Regulations* in Chapter 4.
4. *Safety warning sign* East slough of Deshka River (RM 23 - RM 24.2).
Season: May 15 - August 20.
Justification: A slough forms the east branch of the Deshka River. There is concern that the slough is too narrow to accommodate both floatboats and powerboats. Signs should be placed warning powerboats to use the west branch of the river to avoid hazards in the east branch. The east branch may become the major branch of the river, in which case the signs should be removed.