

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

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Summary of Purpose

The goal of the Susitna Forestry Guidelines (SFG) is to ensure that state forest lands continue to contribute to the quality of life and economy in the Susitna valley by:

- ◆ providing wood for personal and commercial use
- ◆ supporting tourism, maintaining opportunities for diverse recreational activities in a variety of settings, and protecting scenic quality,
- ◆ protecting and enhancing fish and wildlife habitat, and
- ◆ protecting air, land, and water quality.

The state forest lands in the Susitna Valley will be managed to provide a balanced, sustained yield of these public benefits. To provide wood, fish, game, recreation, and other benefits, state-owned forest lands will include both natural ecosystems and actively managed forests. The guidelines in this document describe the requirements for managing timber and for mitigating negative impacts to other resources and land uses when timber is harvested from state lands.

The Susitna Forestry Guidelines:

- ◆ establish rules for timber management and timber access on state land,
- ◆ describe the areas where forestry is one of the designated uses under the current area and management plans, and
- ◆ describe the current timber volume on state lands where forestry is one of the designated uses.

These guidelines apply only to state land managed by the Department of Natural Resources where forestry is one of the designated uses. They do not apply on private, borough, mental health, or university land, nor in legislatively designated areas (state parks, recreation rivers, or refuges). These guidelines provide detailed guidance for

timber management on state lands. They do not change the land designations nor management intent from the land use plans (see *Relationship to Land Use Plans and Legislation* in this chapter). These guidelines are intended to guide forest management for the next ten years (through 2001). Changes to the guidelines may be made through amendments and special exceptions (see *Chapter 3 - Procedures for Guideline Modification*).

Relationship to Land Use Plans and Legislation

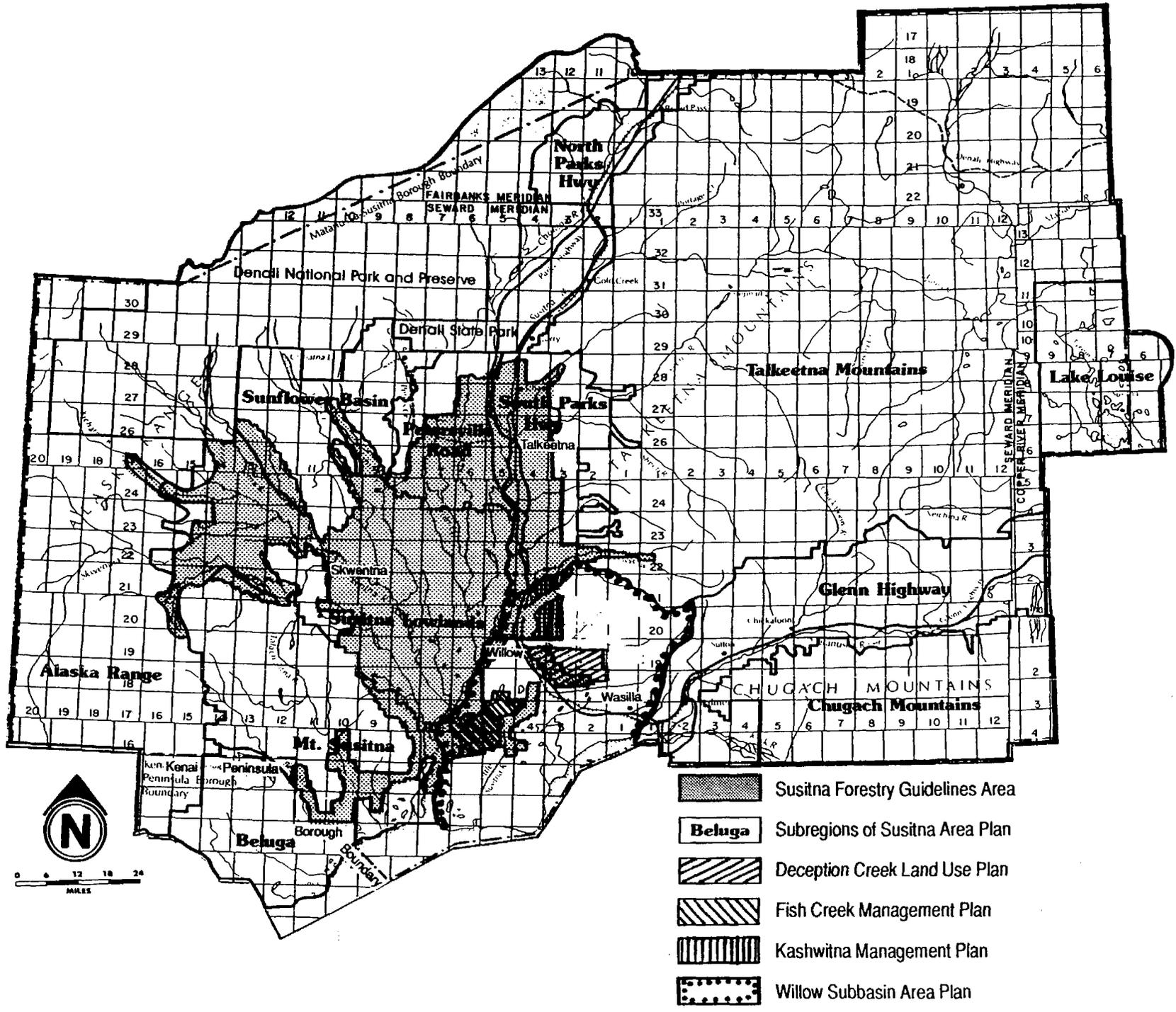
STATE LAND USE PLANS

State land use plans determine the main uses of state land. State land use plans in the Susitna Forestry Guidelines area include the -

- ⇒ Susitna Area Plan,
- ⇒ Willow Subbasin Area Plan,
- ⇒ Kashwitna Management Plan,
- ⇒ Deception Creek Land Use Plan, and
- ⇒ Fish Creek Management Plan (*see map 1*).

The designations in land use plans determine whether forestry is an allowed use, and if allowed, whether it is a primary or secondary use. These designations determine where the Susitna Forestry Guidelines apply: the guidelines apply to all units where forestry is one of the designated uses under these land use plans within the boundary on Map 1. The units referenced in these guidelines are the units established by the land use plans.

The Susitna Forestry Guidelines were developed to provide more detailed guidance on timber management within these units. Forestry issues are among the most controversial land use issues in the Susitna valley. All units designated for forestry also are designated for fish and wildlife habitat. Public recreation, water resources, resource



Map 1. Location of Planning Area

management, and agriculture are also common co-designations with forestry. The land use plans require that co-primary uses be managed to be compatible with each other. The intent of the Susitna Forestry Guidelines is to ensure that forestry is compatible with the other designated uses.

Land use plans are updated approximately every five years. The Susitna Area Plan and Willow Sub-basin Area Plan are due for updating. However, the schedule for completing these updates is uncertain because of staffing levels and other department priorities, such as completing the state land selections project. If an amendment to the area plans deletes forestry as an allowed use in a unit, the Susitna Forestry Guidelines will no longer apply to that unit. If an amendment adds forestry as an allowed use in a unit, the forest guidelines will apply to that unit. Site-specific guidelines for that unit may be developed through the land use plan amendment or through an amendment to the Susitna Forestry Guidelines.

SUSITNA BASIN RECREATION RIVERS MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Susitna Forestry Guidelines do not apply to land within the Susitna Basin State Recreation River corridors. The statute establishing the recreation rivers prohibits commercial timber harvesting in the river corridors except commercial harvesting incidental to access development or habitat enhancement (AS 41.23.470(b)). The Susitna Basin Recreation Rivers Management Plan guides harvesting in the corridors. Recreation River corridors exist along the Talkeetna, Talachulitna, Dëshka, and Little Susitna rivers and Lake, Alexander, and Clear creeks.

FOREST PRACTICES ACT

The Alaska Forest Resources and Practices Act (AS 41.17, commonly referred to as the Forest Practices Act or FPA) is the primary law governing forestry activities on state, municipal, and private land, including the Susitna Forestry Guidelines area. The Act establishes minimum statewide standards for multiple use and sustained yield management of forest lands, reforestation, protection of riparian areas, and enforcement procedures. Standards for specific sites may be increased by the Susitna Forestry Guidelines or land use plans. The Susitna Forestry Guidelines are consistent with the requirements of the Act.

FIVE-YEAR SCHEDULE OF TIMBER SALES AND FOREST LAND USE PLANS

The land use plans determine *where* timber harvesting is allowed. The Susitna Forestry Guidelines and the Forest Practices Act determine *how* timber will be managed. Detailed decisions on *when* individual timber sales will be held and *how big* each sale will be, will be made through the Five-Year Schedule of Timber Sales and the Forest Land Use Plan (FLUP) for each sale. The Five-Year Schedule and FLUPs also set stipulations for individual sales, such as the size of cutting units, means of access, and site-specific site preparation requirements.

The Forest Practices Act requires that the DNR Division of Forestry prepare a Five-Year Schedule of Timber Sales annually. This schedule will describe proposed sales, access to the sales, and reforestation plans for the next five years. Timber sales (including personal use harvest areas) must appear on the Five-Year schedule for at least two years unless exempted by regulation (AS 38.05.113(b) and (c)). DNR did not adopt regulations for exemptions prior to adoption of the SFG. If regulations are adopted in the future, the Five-Year Schedule will be consistent with the regulations. Interagency review and public notice of the schedule occurs annually.

The passage of legislation in 1991 proposed a settlement to the lawsuit between the Mental Health Trust and the State of Alaska. The legislation identified forest land in the Susitna Forest Guidelines Area as part of a land pool for possible selection by the Trust. Until these selections are complete, DNR cannot take any actions which will diminish the value of these lands to the Trust. Therefore, the Division of Forestry withdrew its draft Five-Year Schedule of Timber Sales for FY 92-96 and will not offer any timber sales or designated personal use areas in FY 92.

The Forest Practices Act also requires that the Division of Forestry prepare a Forest Land Use Plan for every timber sale. Isolated personal use harvests (i.e., harvests under individual personal use permits) do not require an FLUP. The report is a site-specific plan that describes the sale in detail, including cutting units, secondary roads, and site-specific stipulations (AS 38.05.112(a)). See *Appendix D - Forest Land Use Plan Requirements* for a list of the subjects covered in an FLUP.

Area Affected By Susitna Forestry Guidelines

The Susitna Forestry Guidelines boundary encompasses approximately two million acres in the Susitna valley (see Map 1 and the map in the back pocket). This area is referred to as the "Susitna Forestry Guidelines (SFG) area" in this document. These lands are generally below 1000' elevation and outside the main population centers in the valley.

Approximately 1.6 million acres (84%) of the land are state-owned and managed by the Department of Natural Resources. About 160,100 acres (8%) are owned by the Matanuska-Susitna Borough.

Remaining lands (9%) are owned by private individuals, Native corporations, the University of Alaska, and the Mental Health Trust Authority (see Table 1). Approximately 13,700 private parcels occur within the Susitna Forestry Guidelines area. About 1,100 of these are within subunits where forestry is one of the designated uses.²

Forestry is one of the designated uses on approximately one million acres of state land in the guidelines area (Table 2 and map in back pocket). The Susitna Forestry Guidelines apply to these lands. The remaining 0.9 million acres are non-state lands, or lands designated to other uses such as state recreation rivers, wildlife refuges, agriculture, or settlement.

**TABLE 1.
ESTIMATED ACREAGE BY LAND OWNERSHIP**

LANDOWNER	Within Guidelines Area	Percent of Guidelines Area
State ¹	1,618,500	84%
Matanuska/ Susitna Borough	160,100	8%
Native Corporations	15,600	1%
University	29,400	2%
Mental Health	1,200	<1%
Other Private	96,400	6%
TOTAL	1,921,200	100%

**TABLE 2.
ESTIMATED GROSS ACREAGE OF LAND USE DESIGNATIONS ON STATE LANDS IN THE GUIDELINES AREA**

DESIGNATION	Acreage	% State Land
Forestry Co-primary	458,600	28%
Forestry Secondary ³	352,500	22%
Forestry Personal Use ³	52,500	3%
Resource Management ³	90,700	6%
Agriculture	76,000	5%
Settlement	385,900	24%
Recreation Rivers	130,200	8%
Other	72,100	4%
TOTAL State Land*	1,618,500	100%

¹ Small, dispersed private lands are included in the state land total in Table 1. Large blocks of private land are shown as "Other Private" in Table 1.

² For more information on land ownership and land use designations in the planning area, see the background report, "Land Ownership - Susitna Region Forest Plan" published by DNR in February, 1989. Copies are available from the DNR Division of Land.

³ Note: Approximately 1,100 parcels totalling 10,600 acres of patented private land or land leased for private use are dispersed within state lands where forestry is one of the designated uses and are included in the totals.

Planning Process

PLANNING TEAM

The Susitna Forestry Guidelines were developed by an interagency team with representatives from:

- Department of Natural Resources
 - Division of Agriculture
 - Division of Forestry
 - Division of Land
 - Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation
- Department of Fish and Game
- Department of Transportation and Public Facilities
- Department of Environmental Conservation
- Department of Commerce and Economic Development
- Matanuska-Susitna Borough

The planning team developed the Susitna Forestry Guidelines in consultation with the Citizens' Advisory Committee and with technical advice from federal resource agencies and local soil and water conservation districts. Technical advisors represented the USDA Forest Service, USDA Soil Conservation Service, USDI Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Wasilla and Upper Susitna Soil and Water Conservation districts.

CITIZENS' ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The Citizens' Advisory Committee for the SFG consists of representatives from approximately 70 organizations, businesses, and local governments interested in forest management issues in the guidelines area. The committee reviewed and commented on draft guidelines and will review and comment on the public and agency review drafts of the guidelines. Periodic newsletters were sent to the committee to keep them informed on the planning process. *Appendix B* lists organizations represented on the committee.

PUBLIC REVIEW

Forest management issues were identified by the public at a series of public meetings in the fall of 1987 and through written comments on a proposed timber sale. A newsletter about the guidelines was sent to all landowners within the guidelines area. The draft guidelines were reviewed at meetings in Anchorage, Wasilla-Palmer (Cottonwood Creek), Willow, Trapper Creek, Talkeetna, Skwentna, Alexander Creek, and Tyonek in the fall of 1990. The comments were reviewed and considered in revising the draft guidelines. A summary of comments and proposed changes to the draft was sent to everyone who commented. There were 30 days for final public comments before the guidelines were adopted. Public comments on the guidelines were accepted by mail, phone, or in person throughout the process.

HOW THE GUIDELINES WERE DEVELOPED

Identify Issues. Land designations and general land use guidelines come from the land use plans for this area. The planning team identified additional issues from a public meeting on a proposed timber sale in the Susitna valley, from the Citizens' Advisory Committee, and from other public and agency comments (Spring 1988).

Collect Information. Resource information was gathered by the planning team with mapping and computer assistance from the DNR Geographic Information System Unit. Background reports were published on Timber Resources, Land Ownership, Fish and Wildlife Habitat, Public Recreation, Cultural Resources, and Transportation and Access (Summer 1988 - Winter 1989). Copies of these are available from the DNR Division of Land, Land and Resources Section. An atlas showing subunit boundaries, vegetation types, existing access, anadromous streams, and eagle and trumpeter swan nesting areas was compiled for the Susitna Forestry Guidelines project. A copy of this atlas is available for consultation at the DNR Division of Land offices in Wasilla and Anchorage, the Division of Forestry offices in Big Lake and Anchorage, the DFG Division of Habitat office in Anchorage, and the Matanuska-Susitna Borough Planning Department in Palmer.

Who Implements The Guidelines

Develop Agency Review Draft. The planning team and working groups developed draft guidelines and implementation recommendations. These proposals were reviewed by the Citizens' Advisory Committee and revised by the planning team. The proposals were reviewed by the planning team and advisory committee (Summer 1990).

Public Reviews Draft Guidelines. The draft guidelines were revised following agency and advisory committee comment. The revised draft was distributed for public review and discussed at public meetings in January, 1991.

Develop and Adopt Final Guidelines. The guidelines were revised following public comment. A summary of comments and changes to the draft guidelines were sent to the planning team, advisory committee, and mailing list. A notice of the intent to adopt the final guidelines were published, and 30 days allowed for final comment. The final guidelines were signed by the Commissioners of the Department of Natural Resources on October 23, 1991 and by the Commissioner of the Department of Fish and Game on November 4, 1991 (see *Appendix G - Acknowledgments, Planning Team, Staff, and Technical Advisors, and Signature Page*). Forest management decisions in the guidelines area must be consistent with the guidelines.

The DNR Division of Forestry is responsible for implementing the Susitna Forestry Guidelines when designing, reviewing, and offering timber sales, writing timber sale contracts, developing new access, and monitoring and enforcing timber sales. The DNR Division of Land is responsible for maintaining the guidelines, including organizing periodic updates and review of proposed amendments and special exceptions. The Division of Land also issues permits for rights-of-way, winter travel, and other uses of public domain land.