

Chapter 1: Introduction

Regional Characteristics and Planning Area Overview

Located on the southern end of the Kenai Peninsula in Southcentral Alaska, Kachemak Bay extends 40 miles easterly along the base of the Kenai Mountains on the east side of Lower Cook Inlet. The uplands on the north side of the bay are in the Cook Inlet basin ecological region of the Alaska Range transition, characterized by rolling forested hills sloping down to the bay. In contrast, on the south side of the bay, the snowcapped Kenai Mountains, rise dramatically, to heights of over 5,000 feet sheltering Kachemak Bay before descending to the cool hypermaritime forests of the Gulf of Alaska coastal ecological region. Heavily forested forelands, steep rocky slopes, and glacially scoured fjords continue uninterrupted as Kachemak Bay merges into lower Cook Inlet and onto the rugged outer coast on the Gulf of Alaska.

On May 9, 1970, the Legislature approved 105,387 acres as Kachemak Bay State Park (KBSP). The Legislature set aside these lands as special purpose to “protect and preserve ... [its] unique and exceptional scenic nature.” Two years later, the Legislature added nearly 200,000 acres of remote and rugged land and waters adjacent to KBSP to the state park system through creation of the Kachemak Bay State Wilderness Park (KBSWP). Today, augmented by several legislative additions, these two park units encompass about 371,000 acres (see Map 1: General Boundaries and Appendix B: Statutes and Regulations). In 1993, the Legislature established the Kachemak Bay Critical Habitat Area that partially overlaps with KBSP. The purpose of critical habitat areas is to protect and preserve habitat especially crucial to the perpetuation of fish and wildlife. This is the only area in Alaska where a park area and a critical habitat area overlap.

Located also within the boundaries of the KBSP and the KBSWP are 201 privately owned parcels totaling approximately 845 acres of land. Another 189 acres (7 parcels) are owned by the University of Alaska, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Seldovia Native Association, and Bureau of Land Management (BLM). While these private and agency owned lands are within the planning area, the plan policies and recommendations do not apply to them.

Land Acquisition

In 1989 the Cottonwood/Eastland parcels on the north shore of Kachemak Bay were added to Kachemak Bay State Park. A small purchase of 153 acres in 1995 brought the total unit size to about 2,500 acres with an estimated 4.9 miles of shoreline. Mathison/Hopkins parcels were added to the park in 2016.

1 In 1998, the Exxon Valdez Trustee Council funded the State acquisition of two parcels on the
2 north side of Kachemak Bay with significant natural habitat values. These parcels included
3 Overlook Park State Recreation Site and most of Diamond Creek State Recreation Site.
4 These parcels are under the authority of Alaska DNR as State Park units but not as part of
5 legislatively designated Kachemak Bay State Park. The Overlook Park State Recreation Site
6 is managed by Kachemak Bay Conservation Society through an MOU with the DPOR.

7
8 Additionally, the State received a donation of 79 acres above McNeil Canyon in 2002 in
9 what has become known as Eveline State Recreation Site. These parcels have individual
10 Management Plans and a different level of protection than Kachemak Bay State Park.

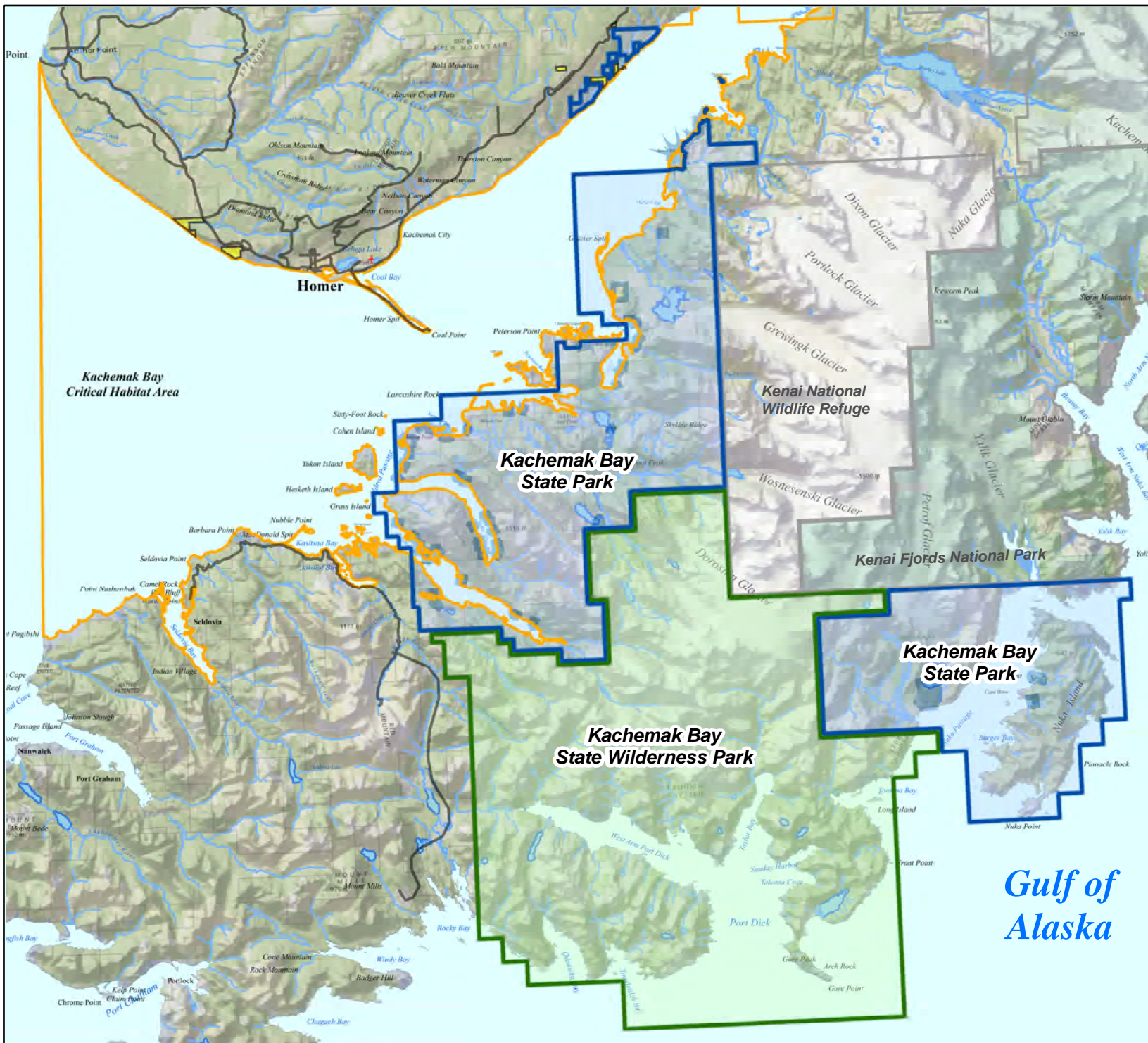
11 12 13 **Plan Scope and Purpose**

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15 Management responsibility for the park units is assigned to the Department of Natural
16 Resources (DNR), Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation (DPOR) for the purposes of
17 control, development and maintenance. The purpose of this management plan is to provide
18 management direction that facilitates recreational use opportunities while conserving the
19 natural and cultural resources through a set of policies and recommendations that guide
20 permitting activities, uses, facilities, and trail development on all the state owned and
21 managed land and waters within KBSP and KBSWP. In addition to the above described park
22 units, the Management Plan (the plan) for the Kachemak Bay State Park and Kachemak Bay
23 State Wilderness Park addresses several small administratively designated park system units
24 located on the north side of Kachemak Bay. These State Recreation Sites (SRS) include the
25 Eveline SRS, Diamond Creek SRS, Overlook Park SRS, and two relatively small State-
26 owned parcels directly adjacent to the KBSP (see Map 2: General Land Ownership). The
27 term “park units” used in this plan refers to all the lands within KBSP, KBSWP, and the
28 smaller park units and recreation areas.

29
30 Management issues or opportunities to be addressed in the park units are identified and
31 facility and management recommendations are provided. This plan provides a framework for
32 management and permitting decisions made by DPOR staff. The plan is intended to be a
33 twenty-year document; therefore, it should be periodically reviewed to determine the
34 effectiveness of management recommendations and adapted to reflect changing use
35 characteristics and new issues that affect resources, management, and public use of the park
36 units.

37 38 39 **Reason for Revision**

40
41 Plans are more than a tool to address issues – the planning process allows DPOR to reassess
42 its management policies to determine if they are meeting the needs of the recreating public
43 while ensuring that uses and activities are not significantly impacting the natural and cultural



Kachemak Bay State Park & State Wilderness Park

Map 1: General Boundaries

- State Park (AS 41.21.131)
- State Wilderness Park (AS 41.21.140)
- State Park Managed Areas
- State Critical Habitat Area
- Roads



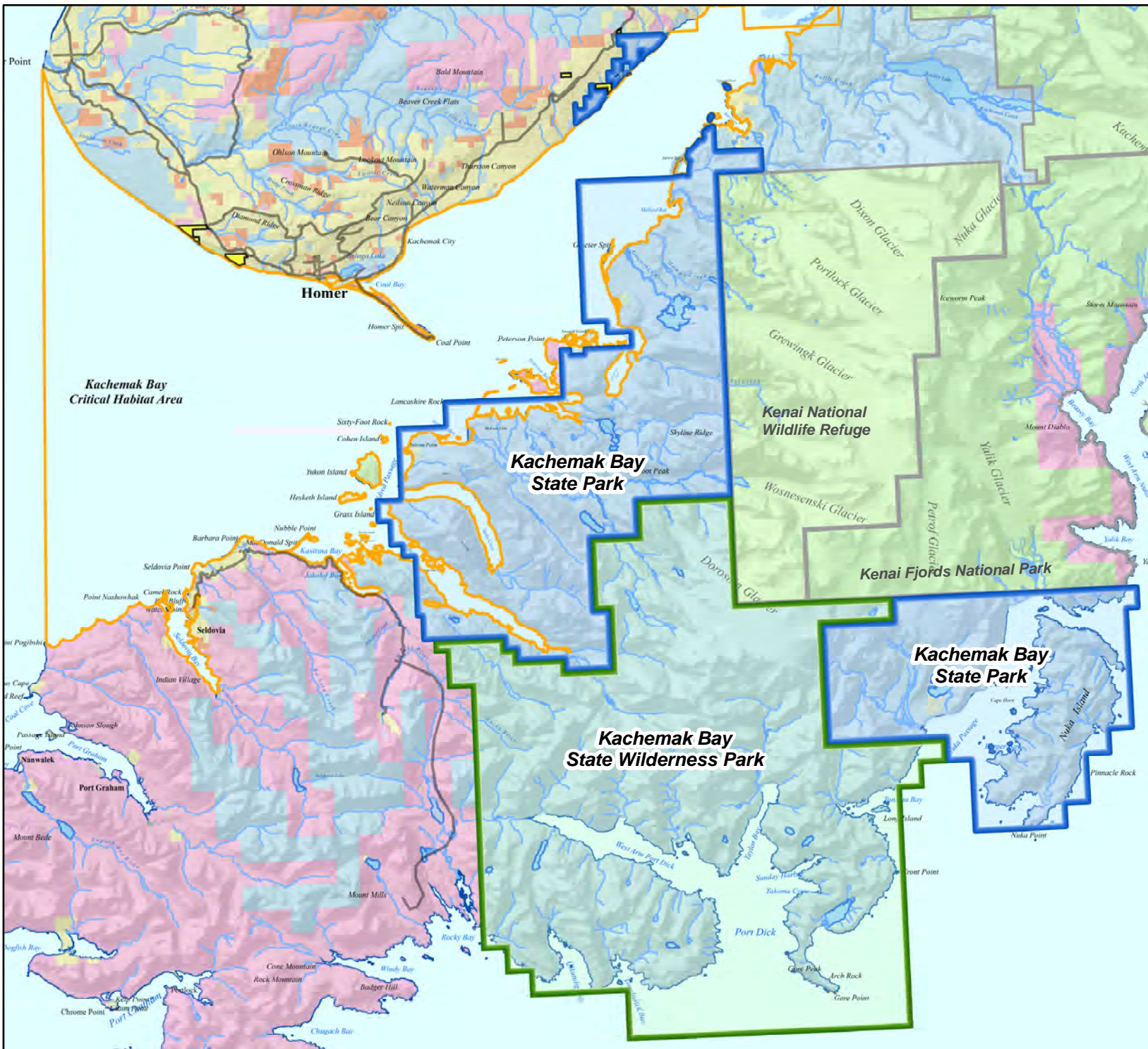
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Created: August 2020
IJE, DNR, DMLW, RADS
Projected Coordinate System: NAD 1983
UTM Zone 6 North



0 1 2 4 6 8
Miles

1
2



Kachemak Bay State Park & State Wilderness Park

Map 2: General Land Ownership



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0 1 2 4 6 8 Miles

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resources. This plan, therefore, addresses several significant issues that have arisen since the last management plan. The primary reason for revising the management plan is to update the management guidelines and trail and facility recommendations where necessary to support an increasing number of visitors to the park units and to provide diverse recreational opportunities consistent with the mission of the agency and the purposes of the units.

State Park Unit Purpose

Kachemak Bay State Park and Kachemak Bay State Wilderness Park were created via legislation in the early 1970s. The founding statute for KBSP provides that it was created to “...protect and preserve this land and water for its unique and exceptional scenic value, the park is established and shall be managed as a scenic park.” (Alaska Statute (AS) 41.21.131) A scenic park is defined in statute as:

“...relatively spacious areas of outstanding natural significance, where major values are in their natural geological, faunal, or floral characteristics, the purpose of which is directed primarily toward the preservation of its outstanding natural features and where development is minimal and only for the purpose of making the areas available for public enjoyment in a manner consistent with the preservation of the natural values such as camping, picnicking, sightseeing, nature study, hiking, riding, and related activities which involve no major modification of the land, forests, or waters, and without extensive introduction of artificial features or forms of recreational development that are primarily of urban character.”¹

The founding statute for KBSWP provides that it was created to “...protect and preserve this land and water for its unique and exceptional wilderness value, the park is established and shall be managed as a wilderness park.” (AS 41.21.140) A wilderness park is defined in statute as:

“...an area whose predominant character is the result of the interplay of natural processes, large enough and so situated as to be unaffected, except in minor ways, by what takes place in the non-wilderness around it, a physical condition which activates the innermost emotions of the observer and where development of man-made objects will be strictly limited and depend entirely on good taste and judgment so that the wilderness values are not lost.”²

¹ AS 41.21.990(1)

² AS 41.21.990(2)

State Recreation Site Purpose

In addition to KBSP and KBSWP, this plan also provides management direction for several relatively small SRSs on the north side of the bay. Because the Diamond Creek, Overlook Park, and Eveline State Recreation Sites were created administratively, and not by an act of the Legislature, they lack a purpose statement or unit-specific statutes.³ The Alaska Statewide Framework defines the types of state park units and establishes goals and policies for the management of the State Park System. In the absence of legislative intent for these units, this document provides guidance for how these types of units should be managed. On page 11, the Framework document defines a State Recreation Site as:

“...a relatively small area and provides one or more outdoor recreational opportunities. A state recreation site may also be established to provide access to outdoor recreational lands and opportunities not managed as part of the State Park System.”

Management objectives are to be site specific and emphasize “...recreational use over resource protection.”

“The management of a state recreation site allows for resource modification to enhance outdoor recreational opportunities as long as natural and cultural resources are protected. Activities and developments will vary according to the intent and purpose for which the unit is designated. Developments and activities which may be found at state recreation sites include – but are not limited to – picnic areas, campgrounds, parking lots, boat launches and scenic overlooks.”

Planning Process

The decision to revise the plan was made in 2012, and planning staff began to identify the range of agency issues the plan would address. Research and review of available information and data sources began, and staff-initiated development of a public contact list.

In November 2013, DNR released a two-part questionnaire seeking public input regarding recreational use, access, and facilities for KBSP and KBSWP. Part A consisted of ten questions related to recreation and facilities in the park units; Part B consisted of six questions that were specific to those who own the land within or adjacent to the park units. The purpose of landowner specific questions was to better understand how private property is being used and accessed.

³ Subsequent to administrative creation, management of the Overlook Park Site was assigned to the Kachemak Bay Conservation Society, and, while still listed as a State Recreation Site, it is more closely aligned with the purposes of a State Preservation Area. As such, management intent for Overlook Park is addressed in Chapter 6.

1 The planning team held a series of ‘open house’ format public meetings in spring 2014 in the
2 communities of Homer, Seldovia, Port Graham, Nanwalek, and Anchorage. Meeting
3 participants voiced many issues at the public meetings (captured by facilitators) and
4 completed and submitted 122 questionnaires to DNR planning staff.

6 The public scoping written comment period was open from November 13, 2013 through May
7 15, 2014. After the public scoping period, a series of public stakeholder meetings were held
8 in May 2016. Meetings were scheduled to gain additional information from stakeholders
9 who had detailed knowledge of the area’s recreational uses and public impact. Stakeholder
10 groups were provided with customized questionnaires and given the opportunity to present
11 their ideas/perceptions at the meeting. Following the stakeholder presentations, the planning
12 team, parks staff, and other stakeholders convened a round table discussion.

14 The Public Review Draft (PRD) of this plan was released September 19, 2018 with a
15 deadline for public comments to be received by October 19, 2018. The public comment
16 period was later extended to November 16, 2018. Public meetings on the PRD were held in
17 Homer in October and November of 2018. Due to public input, the number of changes, and
18 shifts in policy direction from the PRD version, an Intent to Adopt (ITA) version of the plan
19 was issued for public review and comment. Once the input on the Intent to Adopt version is
20 considered, a Final Plan will be presented to the Commissioner for adoption.

22 The public process outreach associated with this planning effort was typical for management
23 plans of this type and involved multiple opportunities for the public and non-governmental
24 agencies to interact directly with planning and management staff to provide input on the
25 future management of these popular park units.

28 Plan Organization

30 The plan is organized to provide a broad scale overview in the first chapter, then successively
31 more detailed information and management intent and recommendations in subsequent
32 chapters. Chapter 1 provides an overview of the planning area; the statutes and guidance that
33 established and defined the units; and an overview of the planning process. Chapter 2
34 presents information on the natural and cultural resources; Chapter 3 provides area-wide and
35 unit-specific goals and objectives for the park units; Chapter 4 provides information on uses
36 within the park units and issues identified through this planning process. Chapters 5 and 6
37 provide area-wide management direction and guidelines and unit-specific management,
38 respectively. Finally, Chapter 7 presents implementation, review and modification
39 information. The appendices contain a glossary of terms; statutes and regulations related to
40 the parks; lists of mammal and bird species in the parks; the associated Kachemak Bay Trails
41 Management Plan for the park units; and the ADF&G/DNR Cooperative Agreement for the
42 Kachemak Bay Critical Habitat Area.

Relationship to Other Plans

Other plans in the area were reviewed during the preparation of this plan. Adopted in January 2000 the DNR Kenai Area Plan (KAP) guides management of the general domain state lands on the Kenai Peninsula. Because the KBSP and KBSWP park units were removed from the public domain, the KAP does not classify or provide management intent for these lands. Lands within the State Recreation Sites, however, are not withdrawn from the public domain and the KAP does classify and provide management intent for those lands. Should DPOR decide to withdraw from current Interagency Land Management Agreements for these lands, the management intent and classification provided in the KAP will guide management of the lands. The Cook Inlet Regional Salmon Enhancement Plan was completed in 2007 and meant to coordinate efforts to enhance the resource through 2025.

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) adopted the latest version of the Kachemak Bay and Fox River Flats Critical Habitat Areas (CHA) Management Plan in 1993. These areas are legislatively designated. The CHA Management Plan contains goals and policies which ADF&G uses when determining whether proposed activities are compatible with the protection of fish and wildlife, their habitats, and public use.⁴ The CHA management plan area overlaps this plan for approximately 21,439 acres of tide and submerged lands on the south side of the bay (see Map 1: General Boundaries). DPOR has co-management responsibilities with ADF&G where the CHA and state park areas overlap. DPOR and ADF&G consult and advise each other on management plans and changes to regulations and major park policies. (See Appendix F: Cooperative Agreement.)

⁴ 5 AAC 95.610. Kachemak Bay and Fox River Flats Critical Habitat Areas Management Plan