

1 **Chapter 1 - Introduction**

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4 **Regional Characteristics and Planning Area Overview**

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6 Located on the southern end of the Kenai Peninsula in Southcentral Alaska, Kachemak Bay
7 extends 40 miles easterly along the base of the Kenai Mountains on the east side of Lower
8 Cook Inlet. The uplands on the north side of the bay are characterized by rolling forested
9 hills sloping down to the bay. In contrast, the snowcapped Kenai Mountains, rise
10 dramatically on the south side of the bay, to heights of over 5,000 feet. Heavily forested
11 forelands, steep rocky slopes, and glacially scoured fjords continue uninterrupted as
12 Kachemak Bay merges into lower Cook Inlet and onto the rugged outer coast on the Gulf of
13 Alaska.

14
15 On May 9, 1970, the Legislature approved 105,387 acres as Kachemak Bay State Park
16 (KBSP). The Legislature set aside these lands as special purpose to “protect and preserve ...
17 [its] unique and exceptional scenic nature.” Two years later, the Legislature added nearly
18 200,000 acres of remote and rugged land and waters adjacent to KBSP to the state park
19 system through creation of the Kachemak Bay State Wilderness Park (KBSWP). Today,
20 augmented by several legislative additions, these two park units encompass about 371,000
21 acres (see Map 1 - Boundaries on page 3 of this chapter and Appendix B – Enabling
22 Legislation).

23
24 Located also within the boundaries of the KBSP and the KBSWP are 201 privately owned
25 parcels totaling approximately 845 acres of land. Another 189 acres (7 parcels) are owned by
26 the University of Alaska, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Seldovia Native Association, and (Bureau
27 of Land Management (BLM). While these private and agency owned lands are within the
28 planning area, the plan policies and recommendations do not apply to them.

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31 **Plan Scope and Purpose**

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33 Management responsibility for the park units is assigned to the Department of Natural
34 Resources (DNR), Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation (DPOR) for the purposes of
35 control, development and maintenance. The purpose of this management plan is to provide
36 management direction that facilitates recreational use opportunities while conserving the
37 natural and cultural resources through a set of policies and recommendations that guide
38 permitting activities, uses, facilities, and trail development on all the state owned and
39 managed land and waters within KBSP and KBSWP. In addition to the above described park
40 units, the Management Plan (the plan) for the Kachemak Bay State Park and Kachemak Bay
41 State Wilderness Park addresses several small administratively designated park system units

1 located on the north side of Kachemak Bay. These State Recreation Sites (SRS) include the
2 Eveline SRS, Diamond Creek SRS, Overlook Park SRS, and two relatively small State-
3 owned parcels directly adjacent to the KBSP (see Map 2 - General Land Ownership on page
4 5 of this chapter). The term “park units” used in this plan refers to all the lands within
5 KBSP, KBSWP, and the smaller park units and recreation areas.

6
7 Management issues or opportunities to be addressed in the park units are identified and
8 facility and management recommendations are provided. This plan provides a framework for
9 management and permitting decisions made by DPOR staff. The plan is intended to be a
10 twenty-year document; therefore, it should be periodically reviewed to determine the
11 effectiveness of management recommendations and adapted to reflect changing use
12 characteristics and new issues that affect resources, management, and public use of the park
13 units.

14 15 16 **Reason for Revision**

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18 Plans are more than a tool to address issues – the planning process allows DPOR to reassess
19 its management policies to determine if they are meeting the needs of the recreating public
20 while ensuring that uses and activities are not significantly impacting the natural and cultural
21 resources. This plan, therefore, addresses several significant issues that have arisen since the
22 last management plan. The primary reason for revising the management plan is to update the
23 management guidelines and trail and facility recommendations where necessary to support an
24 increasing number of visitors to the park units and to provide diverse recreational
25 opportunities consistent with the mission of the agency and the purposes of the units.

26 27 28 **State Park Unit Purpose and Definition**

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

35
36 “...relatively spacious areas of outstanding natural significance, where major values
37 are in their natural geological, faunal, or floral characteristics, the purpose of which is
38 directed primarily toward the preservation of its outstanding natural features and
39 where development is minimal and only for the purpose of making the areas available
40 for public enjoyment in a manner consistent with the preservation of the natural
41 values such as camping, picnicking, sightseeing, nature study, hiking, riding, and
42 related activities which involve no major modification of the land, forests, or waters,
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Map 1: General Boundaries

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Map 2: General Land Ownership

1 and without extensive introduction of artificial features or forms of recreational
2 development that are primarily of urban character.”¹

3
4 The founding statute for KBSWP provides that it was created to “...protect and preserve this
5 land and water for its unique and exceptional wilderness value, the park is established and
6 shall be managed as a wilderness park.” (AS 41.21.140) A wilderness park is defined in
7 statute as:

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

15
16 The policies found on page 7 of the Alaska State Park System: Statewide Framework
17 (Framework) defines a state park as “...a relatively spacious area possessing outstanding and
18 distinct natural, cultural, scenic and/or scientific values.” The purpose of the unit, identified
19 as the dominant management objective, is to “... maintain the park’s natural and cultural
20 resources for long-term use and enjoyment by the public. A level of recreational
21 opportunities, which is compatible with the unit’s resource values, shall be provided.”

22 23 24 **State Recreation Site Definition and Purpose**

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26 In addition to KBSP and KBSWP, this plan also provides management direction for several
27 relatively small SRSSs on the north side of the bay. Because the Diamond Creek, Overlook
28 Park, and Eveline State Recreation Sites were created administratively, and not by an act of
29 the Legislature, they lack a purpose statement or unit-specific statutes.³ On page 11, the
30 Framework document defines a State Recreation Site as:

31
32 “...a relatively small area and provides one or more outdoor recreational
33 opportunities. A state recreation site may also be established to provide access to
34 outdoor recreational lands and opportunities not managed as part of the State Park
35 System.”

36
37 Management objectives are to be site specific and emphasize “...recreational use over
38 resource protection.”

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¹ AS 41.21.990(1)

² AS 41.21.990(2)

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

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11 DPOR leadership and managing staff met with DNR planners in late 2011 and early 2012 to
12 discuss known issues within the Kachemak Bay park units and discuss possible needs for
13 revising the existing 1995 management plan.
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15 The decision to revise the plan was made in 2012, and planning staff began to identify the
16 range of agency issues the plan would address. Research and review of available information
17 and data sources began, and staff initiated development of a public contact list.
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19 In November 2013, DNR released a two-part questionnaire seeking public input regrading
20 recreational use, access, and facilities for KBSP and KBSWP. Part A consisted of ten
21 questions related to recreation and facilities in the park units; Part B consisted of six
22 questions that were specific to those who own the land within or adjacent to the park units.
23 The purpose of landowner specific questions was to better understand how private property is
24 being used and accessed.
25

26 The planning team held a series of ‘open house’ format public meetings in spring 2014 in the
27 communities of Homer, Seldovia, Port Graham, Nanwalek, and Anchorage.
28

29 Meeting participants voiced many issues at the public meetings (captured by facilitators) and
30 completed and submitted 122 questionnaires to DNR planning staff.
31

32 The public scoping written comment period was open from November 13, 2013 through May
33 15, 2014. After the public scoping period, a series of public stakeholder meetings were held
34 in May 2016. Meetings were scheduled to gain additional information from stakeholders
35 who had detailed knowledge of the area’s recreational uses and public impact. Stakeholder
36 groups were provided with customized questionnaires and given the opportunity to present
37 their ideas/perceptions at the meeting. Following the stakeholder presentations, the planning
38 team, parks staff, and other stakeholders convened a round table discussion.
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40 The public process outreach associated with this planning effort was typical for management
41 plans of this type and involved multiple opportunities for the public and non-governmental
42 agencies to interact directly with planning and management staff to provide input on the
43 future management of these popular park units.
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1 **Plan Organization**

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3 The plan is organized to provide a broad scale overview in the first chapter, then successively
4 more detailed information and management intent and recommendations in subsequent
5 chapters. Chapter 1 provides an overview of the planning area; the statutes and guidance that
6 established and defined the units; and an overview of the planning process. Chapter 2
7 provides area-wide and unit-specific goals and objectives for the park units. Chapter 3
8 presents information on the natural and cultural resources; Chapter 4 provides information on
9 uses within the park units and issues identified through this planning process. Chapters 5 and
10 6 provide area-wide management direction and guidelines and unit-specific management,
11 respectively. Finally, Chapter 7 presents implementation, review and modification
12 information. The appendices contain a glossary of terms; the parks' enabling legislation; a
13 detailed catalog of species in the parks; park management guidelines; summaries of public
14 comment and historically permitted use; guidelines for future permitted use; and the
15 associated Kachemak Bay Trails Management Plan for the park units.
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18 **Relationship to Other Plans**

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20 Other plans in the area were reviewed during the preparation of this plan. Adopted in
21 January, 2000 the DNR Kenai Area Plan (KAP) guides management of the general domain
22 state lands on the Kenai Peninsula. Because the KBSP and KBSWP park units were
23 removed from the public domain, the KAP does not classify or provide management intent
24 for these lands. Lands within the State Recreation Sites, however, are not withdrawn from
25 the public domain and the KAP does classify and provide management intent for those lands.
26 Should DPOR decide to withdraw from current Interagency Land Management Agreements
27 for these lands, the management intent and classification provided in the KAP will guide
28 management of the lands.
29

30 The Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) adopted the latest version of the
31 Kachemak Bay and Fox River Flats Critical Habitat Areas (KBFRFCHA) Management Plan
32 in 1993. The KBFRFCHA management plan area overlaps this plan for approximately
33 21,439 acres of tide and submerged lands on the south side of the bay (see Map 1- General
34 Boundaries at the end of this chapter). See Appendix G – Cooperative Agreement for a
35 description of DNR's and ADF&G's agreement on managing this overlap area.