

Lakes Unit (Natural Land Use Zone)

Description

This unit is approximately 17,128 acres in size and consists of all of the area south of the Nancy Lake Parkway Unit. Included in this unit are numerous lakes and ponds; several of which are used as segments of the popular water trail known as the Lynx Lake Loop Canoe Trail. The majority of land within this unit is owned by the State however there are 35 private parcels totaling approximately 314 acres also within the unit. These private lands are found on Lynx, Skeetna, Butterfly, and Red Shirt lakes and the area just north of Delyndia Lake. Numerous private parcels are contiguous or adjacent to the boundary of NLSRA in the area of Nancy, Butterfly, Delyndia, and Red Shirt lakes. See Map 8 on page 7 - 13 for a depiction of this management unit.

The majority of people recreating in this unit access it by trails originating at Nancy Lake Parkway in the north. During snow free periods, hiking access is primarily conducted on two terra trails (Red Shirt Lake Summer Trail and East Red Shirt Lake Trail) that originate on the Parkway. Lynx Lake Loop Canoe Trail access is facilitated at the Tanaina Lake access site just south of the Parkway. Vehicle access to the eastern portion of the NLSRA does occur via the Lynx Lake Road. Lynx Lake Road originates at mile 63.9 of the George Parks Highway and extends south and west from the highway across private and general state land before reaching the eastern boundary of NLSRA. Within NLSRA, Lynx Lake Road continues southwesterly to the Anchorage Church of Christ property on the eastern shore of Lynx Lake. This road is only minimally maintained and public vehicle access ends at a gated turn-around area just within the eastern boundary of NLSRA. A single trail – the Chicken Lake Cross-Park Trail – connects the Lynx Lake Road to the East Red Shirt Lake Trail. Few people currently use this existing trail.

As the name suggests, this unit contains many lakes including all of the lakes traversed as part of the Lynx Lake Loop Canoe Trail. Lakes are the focal point for most of the recreation that occurs in this unit. The size of lakes and waterbodies varies widely from the almost 1,200 acre Red Shirt Lake to small ponds. Three of the four lakes that allow use of an internal combustion motorized boat use in NLSRA are located within this unit, they are: Lynx, Butterfly, and Red Shirt lakes. A segment of the Little Susitna River, a component of the Legislatively Designated State Recreation Rivers, passes through the southeastern portion of the unit. Several waterbodies are identified as anadromous in the *Atlas to the Catalogue of Waters Important for Spawning, Rearing or Migration of Anadromous Fishes*¹. Several waterbodies including Big Noluck, Little Noluck, Milo, and Tanaina lakes have been stocked previously by ADF&G.²

¹ See Map 5 on page 2 - 11 for a depiction of anadromous waterbodies cataloged at the time this plan was produced.

² See Table 3 on page 2 - 13 for a listing of waterbodies that are, or have been, stocked by ADF&G.

1 Adjacent to the lakes are rolling to steep hills and ridges left after retreat of the last glacial
2 period. Over-mature birch and spruce dominates the vegetation on the uplands while black
3 spruce alder and willow are common on the low lying areas and wetlands. Stunning views of
4 the Chugach and Talkeetna mountains to the south and east can be had from the ridge tops,
5 but views can be limited in the summer due to vegetation. Similarly, views of the expansive
6 wetlands and numerous waterbodies adjacent to the ridge can be obscured by vegetation.
7 Nature and wildlife observation opportunities are plentiful from vantage points on ridges
8 within the unit or from the edge of lakes, ponds, and wetlands. Despite the trails and other
9 developed facilities in this unit, it remains relatively natural in character and provides
10 outstanding remote recreational opportunities, particularly during snow free periods.

11 12 **Current Uses**

13 A variety of recreational opportunities and experiences are available and vary widely
14 between summer and winter. Use levels within this unit could be characterized as low in the
15 summertime, and moderate to high in the winter. In summer, use primarily occurs on the
16 Lynx Lake Loop Canoe Trail which traverses many of the largest lakes in the unit. A
17 relatively short trail, it can be completed in one lone day but may people opt to stay in one of
18 the 18 campsites or 4 public use cabins accessible by this water trail. The portages on this
19 trail are well marked but the portage dock structures and the tread of the trail have been
20 degraded by years of use. Three terra trails – Red Shirt Lake Summer Trail, East Red Shirt
21 Lake Trail, and the Chicken Lake Cross-Park Trail – provide summer hiking opportunities;
22 however, use of these trails is considered low. Some biking does occur on the existing terra
23 trails and Lynx Lake Road, but this use is currently prohibited by regulation. Other summer
24 uses include nature and wildlife viewing and photography, orienteering, bird watching, and
25 hunting.

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27 Moderate to high levels of use occurs south of the Nancy Lake Parkway during the winter.
28 When sufficient snowfall has fallen to protect the underlying vegetation, the area south of the
29 Nancy Lake Parkway is opened to the use of snowmobiles. Snowmobile use is widespread
30 once the area is opened and use occurs on all existing canoe trails and terra trails as well as
31 snow trails between lakes and wetlands. Another popular winter use, dog sledding, has a rich
32 history in the area with local mushers training for both short and long distance races on the
33 many trails that exist here in winter. Other forms of winter recreation occur in this area and
34 include skiing, snowshoeing, skijoring, fat-tire biking, ice fishing, and hiking. More or less
35 all of the winter trails south of the Parkway are multiple use trails where one could expect
36 both motorized and non-motorized uses to be occurring simultaneously.

37
38 Eight public use cabins are located in the unit. Four are located in the northern end of Red
39 Shirt Lake, one on James Lake, and three on Lynx Lake. The cabins are used throughout the
40 year with most of the use occurring on Friday through Saturday, however weekday use is
41 common. The James Lake and Lynx Lake public use cabins are accessible via the canoe trail
42 system or by walking on the Lynx Lake Road during snow free periods. The four Red Shirt
43 Lake public use cabins are accessible via hiking on the Red Shirt Lake Summer Trail then
44 canoeing to the cabins after renting a canoe from the concessionaire or by flying on a float
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1 equipped plane. Access methods expand in the winter to include snowmobiles, skiing,
2 skijoring, snowshoeing, dog sledding, and hiking. All of the public use cabins are available
3 for rent via a reservation system.
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5 Camping is a popular activity and is primarily associated with use of the Lynx Lake Loop
6 Canoe Trail during snow free periods but several cabins are accessed via a combination of
7 terra trails and boating. A total of 31 campsites are available for free on a first come-first
8 served basis. Nine camping sites are located on northwestern shore of Lynx Lake, three on
9 eastern shore of Big Noluck Lake, nine on the northwest shore of Red Shirt Lake, two on the
10 northern shore of Skeetna Lake, and a total of eight campsites on the western and eastern
11 shores of Ardaw Lake. Five of these campsites offer raised tent platforms (three at Lynx
12 Lake and two at Skeetna Lake). Bear resistant containers are provided at the Lynx Lake and
13 Red Shirt Lake campsites. All campsites have at least one pit privy.
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15 All but two of the lakes (Lynx and Butterfly) offer non-motorized boating, fishing,
16 photography, and nature and wildlife viewing opportunities in the summer. Winter use of
17 waterbodies includes both snowmobile and non-motorized uses. A popular winter time
18 activity, ice fishing occurs on many lakes. The frozen lakes are also used for skiing,
19 snowshoeing, dog sledding, skijoring, and hiking. ADF&G has previously stocked Tanaina,
20 Milo, Big Noluck, and Little Noluck lakes and the Little Susitna River to enhance fishing
21 opportunities. Like other lakes in NLSRA, the introduction of northern pike into the Susitna
22 drainage has altered natural diversity of fish species within waterbodies, including those in
23 NLSRA. Targeted fish species include trout, grayling, salmon, and pike.
24

25 Hiking typically occurs on one of four main terra trails; they are the Red Shirt Lake Summer
26 Trail, East Red Shirt Lake Trail, Chicken Lake Cross-Park Trail, and the Butterfly Lake
27 Trail. These trails have had some level of development and are used as hiking trails with
28 some bicycle use. Of these trails, the Red Shirt Lake Summer Trail receives the highest use
29 levels during snow-free periods. This is because it is the primary route for access to private
30 property on Red Shirt Lake in addition to serving as the primary access public use cabins on
31 the lake. Similarly, the Butterfly Lake Trail sees increased use during snow-free periods
32 because it also serves as a primary route for access to several private properties.
33

34 A segment of the Iditarod Trail occurs within this unit. It traverses NLSRA from east to west
35 just south of the parkway and crosses numerous waterbodies. The segment is named
36 “Susitna – Nancy” and is included in the 1977 Bureau of Outdoor Recreation study titled *The*
37 *Iditarod Trail (Seward Nome Route) and other Alaska Gold Rush Trails*. This segment did
38 not get formally recognized in 1986 Bureau of Land Management, *The Iditarod National*
39 *Historic Trail Comprehensive Management Plan*. However, this section is recognized as
40 RST 149 – Nancy Lake-Susitna³ by the Department of Natural Resources. Portions of this
41 trail are used seasonally for snowmobiling, dog sledding, skiing, and other recreational uses.
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³ “RST” is shorthand for “Revised Statute.” Revised Statute 2477 is found in section 8 of the Mining Law of 1866. It granted states and territories unrestricted right-of-ways over federal lands that had no existing reservations or private entries. The law remained in effect until Congress repealed it in 1976.

1 **Existing Facilities and Trails**

2 The following table identifies facilities and trails that are currently located in this unit. Trails
 3 are listed here to provide a comprehensive overview of unit recommendations and allow the
 4 reader to see how the proposals tie together. A fire pit and a pit privy are amenities at all
 5 campsites. A wood stove and pit privy are amenities at public use cabins. See the Trail Plan
 6 in Appendix C for detailed information on trails.

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Facility/Trail**Amenities**

Boat Access Sites <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Red Shirt Lake (Provides access for property owners and recreationists) • Lynx Lake 	Minimally developed launch area Boat storage area Pit privy Minimally developed launch on east shore
Remote Campsites <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lynx Lake • Eastern Ardaw • Western Ardaw • Big Noluck • Red Shirt Lake • Skeetna Lake 	3 tent platforms 6 campsites Bear resistant food storage container 4 campsites 4 campsites Bear resistant food storage container 3 campsites Bear resistant food storage container 9 campsites Bear resistant food storage container Volunteer host cabin 2 tent platforms Bear resistant food container
Public Use Cabins <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • James Lake • Red Shirt Lake #1 • Red Shirt Lake #2 • Red Shirt Lake #3 • Red Shirt Lake #4 • Lynx Lake #1 	6 person capacity 7 person capacity 6 person capacity 8 person capacity 8 person capacity 4 person capacity

Facility/Trail	Amenities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lynx Lake #2 	4 person capacity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lynx Lake #3 	4 person capacity
<p>Trails</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lynx Lake Loop Canoe Trail Red Shirt Lake Summer Trail East Red Shirt Lake Trail Chicken Lake Cross-Park Trail Butterfly Lake Trail 	<p>Located south of the parkway, this water trail connects many waterbodies within the unit. It offers camping and public use cabin opportunities.</p> <p>As the name implies, this trail extends from the Nancy Lake Parkway south to the western shore of Red Shirt Lake. It provides overland access to Red Shirt Lake for property owners and recreating public. Nine campsites and a backcountry host cabin are accessible at the terminus of the trail.</p> <p>This trail extends south from the Nancy Lake Parkway to the eastern side of Red Shirt Lake. This trail is located on an existing cat trail that existed prior to designation of the NLSRA. It serves as the access route to private property on Red Shirt Lake when conditions do not allow snowmobile use south of the Parkway and as a hiking trail during snow free periods. It intersects the Chicken Lake Cross-Park Trail.</p> <p>Provides the only east-west terra trail south of the parkway. This trail is mostly located on an existing road bed that was used while a test well was drilled in the area north of James Lake. It originates at the Lynx Lake Road approximately ¾ of a mile inside of the NLSRA boundary and continues generally west and north until it intersect the East Red Shirt Lake Trail. This trail intersects the Lynx Lake Loop Canoe Trail in two places.</p> <p>This trail extends generally south and west from the Anchorage Church of Christ Property on the southeast shore of Lynx Lake to a bay on the north east shore of Butterfly Lake. A Pubic Recreational Easement on the Anchorage Church of Christ property provides access to the Butterfly Lake Trail from the Terminus of the Lynx Lake Road. The trail can also be accessed via the Lynx Lake Canoe Trail.</p>

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Management Intent

The Lakes Management Unit will be managed to continue to provide low density dispersed recreation opportunities in a natural setting during snow free periods. In the winter, this area will continue to be managed to provide a wide variety of recreational opportunities to a diversity of recreational users. Facilities will be developed where multi-modal multi-season access will provide enhanced opportunities to a diversity of recreational user groups. Major

1 trails will be developed to a higher standard to facilitate current and expected future use
2 levels. Camping opportunities will be enhanced and expanded on the canoe trail and terra
3 trail systems. The high quality natural setting of this area will be maintained. Facilities will
4 be developed to blend into the natural landscape and will include visual and acoustic buffers
5 that will minimize their impact on the natural surroundings. New facilities will, to the
6 greatest extent practicable, be located away from private parcels. This will minimize the
7 impacts of increased public use on those private properties.

9 **Management Guidelines**

- 10 • Lynx Lake Road gate will remain at its current location. This gate will be used as a
11 traffic control device to limit public use on Lynx Lake Road when road conditions
12 will not allow vehicle use typically during freeze-up and break-up periods. When
13 conditions allow during snow free periods, the gate will be opened to allow access to
14 the Chicken Lake Cross-Park Trail trailhead.⁴
- 15 • Within a five year period following the adoption of this plan, DPOR shall conduct a
16 detailed study to determine if vehicle access to private properties accessible via Lynx
17 Lake Road and Butterfly Lake Trail should continue to be authorized; and if so, who
18 should be granted access and what type of vehicle access should be authorized (i.e.
19 highway vehicle and/or ORV). This study will determine if DPOR should continue
20 the current policy regarding private access, modify the current access policy (i.e.
21 expansion or restriction), or cease to authorize private access. It will be the basis for
22 future decisions regarding private access on these routes. Vehicle access on Lynx
23 Lake Road and Butterfly Lake Trail by private property owners will continue to be
24 authorized for a five year period or until the study is completed consistent with
25 current policy, but will be capped at the number permits issued for access in 2012.
- 26 • Authorizations for vehicle access on Lynx Lake Road and Butterfly Lake Trail shall
27 not be granted to private property owners on Cow Lake.
- 28 • Authorizations for vehicle access on Lynx Lake Road and Butterfly Lake Trail for
29 property owners on Delyndia Lake shall be limited to no more than six permits. This
30 is the number of authorizations issued to property owners on this lake in 2012 and can
31 only be modified based on the results of the study described above.
- 32 • Authorizations for ORV use on the East Red Shirt Lake Trail shall be limited to time
33 periods when snow and frost conditions do not allow the use of snowmobiles south of
34 the Nancy Lake Parkway but a combination of snow cover and frost effectively
35 protect the terra trail tread from degradation.
- 36 • The use of an electric trolling motor on boats shall be allowed on Tanaina Lake.
- 37 • All trails shall be developed as multiple use trails that are able to accommodate a
38 number of compatible uses.

⁴ See facilities recommendations below.

- When designing terra trails, use of a snow trail on the same alignment shall be considered. Winter uses include short-team dog sledding, skijoring, cross country skiing, snowshoeing, and fat-tire winter biking among others.

Facility and Trail Recommendations:

The following table identifies new facilities as well as existing facilities that need to be rehabilitated, improved, or redeveloped to a higher standard. Although trails are not facilities, they are listed here to provide a comprehensive overview of unit recommendations and allow the reader to see how the proposals tie together. See the Trail Plan in Appendix C for detailed information on trails.

Table 5: Lakes Unit Facility and Trail Recommendations

Ref. No.	Facilities/Trails	Desired Outcome
1	Redevelop up to three of the Lynx Lake campsites as Adirondack type shelters. These shelters will include a picnic table and a fire ring.	Provide new camping opportunities that do not currently exist at NLSRA and extend camping opportunities, particularly during shoulder seasons when camping use is typically low.
2	Relocate Ardaw Lake campsites away from portage trails and design and develop one Adirondack type shelter in the area of the east Ardaw campsites.	Enhance privacy and remote feeling by relocating existing campsites that are next to the portage trails. Also, to provide a new camping opportunity that does not currently exist at NLSRA and extend camping opportunities, particularly during shoulder seasons when camping use is typically low.
3	Relocate Big Noluck campsites away from portage trails and design and develop one of these sites as an Adirondack type shelter.	Enhance privacy and remote feeling by relocating existing campsites that are next to the portage trails. Also, to provide a new camping opportunity that does not currently exist at NLSRA and extend camping opportunities, particularly during shoulder seasons when camping use is typically low.
4	Design and develop a new camping site on the southern shore of Frazer Lake. This site will include one campsite, one Adirondack type shelter, fire rings, a pit privy, and a bear resistant food storage container.	Provide a new camping opportunity that does not currently exist at NLSRA and extend camping opportunities, particularly during shoulder seasons when camping use is typically low.

Ref.

No.	Facilities/Trails	Desired Outcome
5	Design and Develop two new campsites at the end of the East Red Shirt Lake Trail. This site will include on Adirondack type shelter and one traditional campsite, a pit privy, and a bear resistant food storage container.	Provide a new camping opportunity that does not currently exist at NLSRA and extend camping opportunities, particularly during shoulder seasons when camping use is typically low. This campsite development will also provide a destination at the terminus of the East Red Shirt Lake Trail.
6	Design and develop one public use cabin on the northwest shore of Chicken Lake.	Provide new opportunities to use a multimodal accessible public use cabin on the Lynx Lake Loop Canoe Trail.
7	Design and develop one public use cabin on the northwestern shore of Butterfly Lake.	Provide new opportunities to use a multimodal accessible public use cabin on the Lynx Lake Loop Canoe Trail in the southern portion of NLSRA.
8	Design and develop one public use cabin on the northeastern shore of Heart Lake.	Provide new opportunities to use a multimodal accessible public use cabin on the Lynx Lake Loop Canoe Trail in the southern portion of NLSRA.
9	Design and develop one public use cabin on the south or western shore of Candlestick Lake.	Provide new opportunities to use a multimodal accessible public use cabin on the Lynx Lake Loop Canoe Trail in the southern portion of NLSRA.
10	Design and develop a new small trailhead at the Chicken Lake Cross-Park Trail (Oil Well Road) intersection with Lynx Lake Road. The trailhead should include a parking area, interpretive panel, sanitation facilities, a turn-around area, and a traffic control gate.	Increase access to the existing and proposed trails and public use cabins in the southern portion of NLSRA.
11	Redevelop Lynx Lake Loop Canoe Trail to a Class 3 water trail.	Facilitate current and future recreation on the existing water trail and minimize impacts to natural resources. The focus will be on addressing portage segments of the canoe trail.
12	Develop multi-use Class 2 snowmobile trails on existing canoe trail portage segments and terra trails. These snow trails will overlie the terra and water trails where possible.	Facilitate multi-use motorized and non-motorized recreation during the winter.

Ref.

No. Facilities/Trails

Desired Outcome

13	Design and develop new looped terra trails that connect the Chicken Lake Cross-Park Trail and Butterfly Lake Trail to the East Red Shirt Lake Trail. These trails will provide access to the proposed new public use cabins at Heart, Butterfly, Candlestick, and Chicken lakes. These trails will be developed as Class 3 Terra trails designed for bicycle use.	Provide new year-round multiple use recreational opportunities. The looped trails will provide connectivity with existing terra trails and will greatly expand the terra trail system.
14	Design and develop access trails to new camping and public use cabin facilities. These may be developed as Class 2 or 3 terra trails designed for bicycle use.	Provide multi-modal access to new camping sites and Adirondack type shelters.
15	Redevelop the Red Shirt Lake Summer Trail to a higher standard terra trail. Segments of this trail may be developed as a Class 3 or 4 terra trail designed for bicycle use.	Enhance opportunities by upgrading this trail to sustainable standards and allowing multiple uses.
16	Redevelop the Butterfly Lake Trail as a Class 2 terra trail designed for ORV use.	Enhance sustainability by upgrading this trail to ORV standards and allowing multiple uses. This recommendation will only be implemented by DPOR if the public recreational easement remains on the Anchorage Church of Christ property. If the existing public easement is removed, DPOR will not expend public funds to upgrade or maintain this trail and the trail may be closed to use.
17	Redevelop Chicken Lake Cross-Park Trail as a Class 4 terra trail designed for bicycle use.	Enhance opportunities by upgrading this trail to sustainable standards and allowing multiple uses.
18	Redevelop East Red Shirt Lake Trail to a Class 4 terra trail designed for bicycle use.	Enhance opportunities by upgrading this trail to sustainable standards and allowing multiple uses.

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Map 8: Lakes Management Unit