

Chapter 1

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Introduction and Background

Purpose of the Plan

The role of state land use plans was established by state statute (AS 38.04.005). It is the policy of the State of Alaska “...to establish a balanced combination of land available for both public and private purposes. The choice of land best suited for public and private use shall be determined through the inventory, planning, and classification processes...”

The Northeast Alaska Area Plan (NEAAP) is the land use plan for state-owned, state-selected and top-filed lands in the Northeast part of Interior Alaska. As such, it provides the basis for management of state lands and resources and affects all authorizations issued by the Alaska Department of Natural Resources (DNR). The planning area is separated into four individual management regions that occupy areas with similar characteristics and management direction. For these regions the plan establishes goals, objectives, management guidelines, and land classifications with management intent that apply to all state lands.

This plan establishes a balanced combination of land available for both public and private purposes through the identification of primary uses of state lands and waters. This plan establishes policy for the Department to manage principles of multiple use and sustained yield on all public domain lands. It does not manage land uses for private, borough, Native, Mental Health Trust, University, or federal land. Because general state lands are managed for multiple use, this plan establishes guidelines that allow various uses to occur and minimize conflict.

Planning Area

The Northeast Alaska Area Plan includes all state-owned and state-selected uplands and shorelands within the area depicted on Map 1. The plan boundary covers approximately 37.9 million acres of land from northeast of Fairbanks north to the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and stretching from the Dalton Highway east to the Canadian border. The southern border of the NEAAP plan area abuts the Yukon Tanana, Eastern Tanana, and Upper Yukon Area Plans. Major drainages within the NEAAP boundary include the Yukon, Teedriinjik (Chandalar), Porcupine, and Charley rivers.

The NEAAP directs how DNR will manage general state uplands and shorelands within the planning area. The following is a summary of the acreage to which the plan will apply:

Area	Acreage
State-owned uplands	3.1 Million
State-owned shorelands	616,546
Total State-owned Acreage	3.7 Million

NOTE: There are two Legislatively Designated Areas (LDA) which encompass approximately 12 million acres within the planning area. While the NEAAP establishes land classifications and management intent for state lands within the LDAs, adjudicators shall also refer to the statutes, regulations, and management plans applicable to each LDA. Refer to the LDA region description at the end of this chapter, and defined in the Glossary, for more details.

Physiography

The Yukon Flats, a flat wetland complex centrally located in the planning area, is surrounded by the Brooks Range to the North, the White Mountains to the South, and the Ogilvie Mountains to the East. The Brooks Range spans about 700 miles with a peak elevation of 8,976 feet. The White Mountains are a 71-mile range, with a peak elevation of 3,176 feet, composed of white limestone. The Ogilvie Mountains reach into Alaska from Canada's Yukon Territory, and are characterized by their granite peaks, with a maximum elevation of 7,749 feet. Most drainage is toward the Yukon River, which generally flows northwest to Fort Yukon, before turning west and eventually emptying into the Bering Sea.

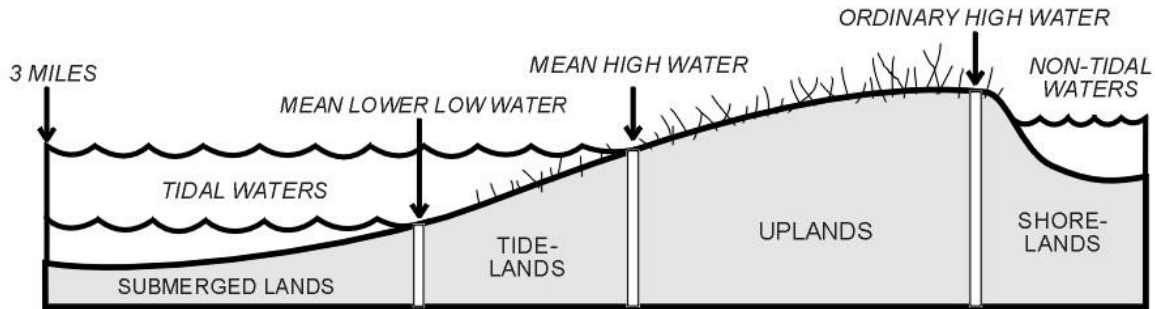
The Yukon Flats are underlain by discontinuous permafrost – some ground remains below 32 degrees Fahrenheit year-round while other areas thaw for weeks or months. Permafrost in Interior Alaska, near the planning area, has warmed by about 1 degree Fahrenheit each decade since about 1978. Thawing permafrost is more prone to erosion, excessive wetting, plasticity, and instability. The impacts of thawing permafrost may become more pronounced during the life of the planning period and may create significant landscape changes in the planning area.

Uplands and Shorelands as Described in This Plan

Figure 1-1 depicts those areas typically owned by the state and affected by area plans. This planning area does not include tidelands or submerged lands, only that portion of the figure that depicts uplands and shorelands apply. As listed in AS 38.05.965(23), “shoreland” means land belonging to the state which is covered by nontidal water that is navigable under the laws of the United States up to ordinary high water mark as modified by accretion, erosion,

or reliction. Uplands include all other land above ordinary high water in non-tidal areas. These definitions are also found in the Glossary.

Figure 1-1: Submerged lands, tidelands, uplands, and shorelands as described in this plan



Land Ownership and Land Status

The Northeast Alaska planning area consists of a mixed ownership pattern of state land, private land, Native land, and federal land; the United States is the principal landowner. There are approximately 3 million acres of state-owned uplands within this area. Since the area plan is within the unorganized borough, there are no borough lands. Table 1-1 summarizes the distribution of land ownership in the planning area.

Table 1-1: Land Ownership Summary

Land Owner	Acreage
State-owned uplands	3,121,017
State-owned shorelands	616,546
Federal	28,812,957
(state selected or top-filed federal lands)	(1,616,266)
Private	68,228
Native	5,288,897
Total	37.9 M

**Note: Plan recommendations do not apply to Native, federal, or private land.*

General Domain Land. Most state land consists of general domain land, which is governed by AS 38 statutory requirements and by associated Alaska Administrative Code (11 AAC 96). This land is to be managed for multiple use and sustained yield of the area’s renewable resources, although state land use plans can direct this management toward particular uses. While not withdrawn from the public domain, the two Legislatively

Designated Areas (LDAs) within the planning area have special management guidelines set out in statute.

Legislatively Designated Areas. Management requirements pertaining to the LDA:

- The James Dalton Highway LDA is managed under AS 19.40. This section of statute requires that state-owned land within five miles of the Dalton Highway right-of-way may not be disposed of, with exceptions. These exceptions include the ability to reauthorize leases that were in effect on January 1, 1994 and to allow nonresidential development within the Coldfoot development node. This statute also states that off-road vehicles are prohibited in the highway corridor, with some exceptions.
- The Arctic National Wildlife Range State Game Refuge was established under AS 16.20. This section of statute designates the area to be a game refuge. The value to the state and the nation of the unspoiled habitat and the game characteristics of the area are recognized by designating it as a state game refuge, whereas it was a Wildlife Refuge at the time that Alaska achieved statehood.

How the Plan is Organized

Chapter 1 - Introduction includes a summary and purpose of the plan, description of the planning area, how and why the plan was developed, what the plan does and does not cover, and a summary of plan actions.

Chapter 2 - Areawide Land Management Policies includes goals, objectives, and management guidelines for the major resources affected by the plan. These policies are specific directives that will be applied to land and water management decisions as resource use and development occurs.

Chapter 3 - Land Management Policies for Each Management Unit includes an explanation of plan designations, general management intent for state land, descriptions of the four planning regions, and a detailed listing of management units and major waters. It also provides a summary of management constraints and considerations based on existing plans, legislative designations, and other management constraints that significantly affect resource management.

The bulk of this chapter consists of descriptions of background information on land status, natural resources, and the uses of state land for each of the four regions. A management summary is also included that provides an overview of the management direction within each region; this is augmented by a description of specific management considerations that apply to development authorizations. Specific management intent for planning units are contained within a Resource Allocation Table (RAT) for each region. Regions in the plan are divided into spatial areas called “units.” These units range in size from small lots or tracts to very large areas that generally have common location, access, use, or resource characteristics. The RAT

Map 1: Planning Area and Generalized Land Status

identifies land designations, background information on resources and uses, and management intent for each unit. These correspond to the management units identified on the plan maps.

Chapter 4 - Implementation and Recommendations discusses specific actions necessary to implement the plan. These include a description of how land use designations convert into classifications, a description of designations and classifications used in the plan, and acreages associated with each classification type. Procedures for changing the plan are also discussed.

Appendices include a glossary, a land classification order, two appendices related to mineral orders, the Public Trust Doctrine, and information on reservations of water.

The Mandate

The Department of Natural Resources is responsible for managing the general domain lands that are owned by the State of Alaska across Northeast Alaska. There are approximately 3.7 million acres of state-owned uplands and shorelands within the planning area. The majority of these lands are general domain land managed under AS 38.04 and 38.05. Although this plan focuses on the management of the general domain state land, designations and classifications are also provided for lands within the portion of the James Dalton Highway LDA that is contained in the planning boundary.

Alaska Statute (AS 38.04.065) requires the Commissioner of the Alaska Department of Natural Resources to “adopt, maintain, and when appropriate, revise regional land use plans that provide for the use and management of state-owned land.” To ensure that these lands are properly managed, DNR has developed this plan for all state uplands and shorelands within the planning area.

The planning process provides a means of openly reviewing resource information and public concerns before making long-term decisions about public land management. The planning process resolves conflicting ideas on land use and informs the public about what choices were made and why. Decisions are made on a comprehensive basis, rather than case-by-case, providing consistency and consideration of the wide diversity of resources and uses within the planning area. This process provides for more efficient use and protection of the area’s resources.

Why This Plan Was Developed

The planning area is rich in natural resources, contains a mixture of developed and undeveloped land, and there are competing demands for the use of state land. There are many different ideas about how these resources should be used or protected. Although some proposed uses might conflict with each other, many different uses can occur throughout the planning area while protecting vital resources, providing the uses are properly managed.

This plan establishes the land use designations and classifications for state land and describes their intended uses. The plan directs which state lands will be retained by the state and which should be sold to private citizens, used for public recreation, or used for other purposes. It also identifies management guidelines for major resources and land uses within the planning area as well as guidelines for the development and use of resources for specific parcels.

With an area plan, state permits and permit review processes become more efficient for the government and the public. The area plan guides DNR decisions for leases, sales, and permits that authorize use of state lands. Preparation of land use plans for state lands (except for State Park System lands) is required under Title 38 of Alaska Statutes. DNR's actions will be based on the area plan.

How This Plan Will be Used

The NEAAP is intended to provide an overall management strategy for state lands and resources within the planning area, as well as specific management strategies for individual management units and is the expression of how DNR will pursue this management. Much of the use of this plan is by the DNR Division of Mining, Land and Water (DMLW). Adjudicators will use this plan when reviewing and making decisions on authorizations for use of state land, including permits, leases, sales, conveyances, and rights-of-way.

Planning Period

The plan reflects land management decisions and allocations based on the best available information on the demand for use of state land and resources projected over the next 20 years. Social, environmental, economic, and technological factors have been assessed through public input and agency review prior to the adoption of the plan. The plan guides state land use and resource decisions for the next 20 years, or until it is revised.

Process of Plan Preparation

The following process was used to develop this area plan:

- identify issues in the planning area;
- map and analyze resources and uses;
- conduct public meetings to identify land use issues;
- prepare the Public Review Draft (PRD) based in part on comments previously received from the public and from agencies;
- public review of the PRD;

- review all public and agency comments and prepare an Issue Response Summary (IRS) that addresses issues raised in comments;
- The Commissioner adopts the plan as DNR's management intent for state lands in the planning area.

Who Developed the Plan?

The DNR planning staff directed the planning process, including data collection, drafting the area plan, preparing response to public and agency comments, and final plan preparation. State agencies reviewed the preliminary draft of the Public Review Draft (PRD) and provided land use and resource recommendations to aid in refining initial plan recommendations. Following the review of the public comments on the PRD and Issue Response Summary (IRS), the DNR Commissioner formally adopted the Northeast Alaska Area Plan.

Public Participation in the Planning Process

The Northeast Alaska Area Plan is the product of a planning process conducted by the Alaska Department of Natural Resources, Division of Mining, Land & Water. Other Divisions within DNR, state and federal agencies, Native corporations and tribal groups, local governments, public interest groups, and the public have also played a pivotal role in the planning process. A first round of public meetings occurred in August 2024 and focused on a description of the planning process, planning area, and issue identification. A second round of public meetings was held in the fall of 2025. These meetings focused on the PRD with information provided on proposed plan designations and management intent, and on plan implementation. The results of these discussions and the subsequent review of public comments submitted on the PRD formed the basis for revisions, if required, to the draft plan, which are included in an IRS. The Commissioner adopted the final plan as amended by the Recommended Revisions on February 25, 2026.

What the Plan Will Do

The plan will form the basis for the management of land and waters that are state-owned or state-selected. The plan will help ensure that state resource management considers the sustained yield of renewable resources, that development is balanced with environmental concerns, and that public access to state land is provided. The plan encourages cooperation with other landowners to better address conflicts caused by irregular land ownership patterns. The plan also supersedes all existing classifications and reclassifies all state lands within the planning area. Finally, the plan also documents the State's intent for land management so that both public and private interests know and understand how the State intends to manage lands over the lifetime of the plan.

What the Plan Will Not Do

The Northeast Alaska Area Plan is not the only way in which land management goals are implemented. While the plan provides an overall basis for state decision making, there are limits on its authority and constraints on its application. The plan is coordinated with various programs and projects implemented by DNR and other state agencies. The following are some important aspects of land and resource management that are beyond the scope of this plan:

- **Non-DNR Lands.** This plan does not apply to federal, Native, or private lands (including Native Allotments, Mental Health Trust, and University lands).
- **Fish and Wildlife.** Management, maintenance, and protection of fish and wildlife resources are the responsibility of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game. Allocation of fish and game stocks and regulation of harvest methods, means, and timing are the responsibility of the state boards of Fisheries and Game.
- **Generally Allowed Uses (GAUs).** The area plan does not regulate activities that do not require a written authorization on state land, such as hiking, camping, boating, hunting, and fishing. GAUs are identified in 11 AAC 96.020 and the conditions for GAUs are provided in 11 AAC 96.025.
- **Legislatively Designated Areas (LDAs).** The plan does not apply to state parks, refuges, public use areas, and other areas that are legislatively designated, with the exception of providing land classifications for LDAs that are not totally reserved from the public domain.¹
- **Decisions on Specific Applications.** While this plan provides general management intent for state lands, the plan does not make decisions about specific land use authorizations. These decisions are made through the application review process and must be consistent with the plan and existing laws and regulations.
- **Actions by Other Agencies.** The plan does not provide management intent for prescribing actions and policies for agencies and governments other than DNR.

Uses and Resources Within the Planning Area

Uses of State Land. The plan outlines management goals, objectives, and guidelines for state land. This includes describing what resources and valid existing uses should be protected, and what uses are most suitable for development or protection on state land during the planning period.

State-selected and Top-filed Land. Some federal lands within the planning boundary have been selected by the State for potential conveyance in fulfillment of the State's land entitlement provided by the Alaska Statehood Act. Future selection applications have been

¹ See "Land Use Designation" in the glossary for a further description of authorities.

filed for other federal lands consistent with the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) Section 906(e). These “top-filed” lands are within the Dalton Highway corridor. The plan provides management intent for selected and top-filed lands in anticipation of the state receiving title to some or all of these lands.

Shorelands. This plan provides management intent for lands beneath non-tidal fresh waters. These land areas are defined in AS 38.05.965(23).

Land Sales. The planning process reviewed the state land holdings to determine which undeveloped lands may be suitable for settlement uses and land disposal. This plan recommends new settlement areas.

Roads, Trails, and Access. The plan considers access across state lands, including existing and proposed roads, trails, easements, and rights-of-way.

Materials. The plan reviews existing state-owned material sites and makes recommendations for further studies in areas where material site development may be appropriate. Areas with significant material resources are designated as Materials.

Mineral and Coal Development. The plan reviews the mineral and coal potential within the planning area and describes the statutory authorities that affect mining and coal development. Mineral and coal development can occur consistent with resource presence and statutory restrictions. This plan maintains all current mineral closures and recommends a single additional mineral order for lands identified for land disposals and designated Settlement areas. Coal and oil and gas development can occur in the planning area; however, development in the LDAs are subject to the management plans specific to those areas.

Oil and Gas Leasing. The plan does not provide land use designations for oil and gas leasing. AS 38.04.065 was amended in 1987 to recognize that oil and gas leasing undergo a separate planning process under AS 38.05.180.

Forest Resources. There are some forest resources in the southern portions of the planning area. The plan identifies these areas and designates them Forestry.

Recreation. Recreation is a popular use of state land. The plan proposes designations to manage lands for recreation in several locations where recreational use is extensive. Where appropriate, these uses are recognized in the management intent statement for a unit where recreation is particularly significant and widespread or where it is important to recognize this use. Those areas with a significant recreation use or potential use are designated Public Recreation-Dispersed.

Fish and Wildlife Habitat. The plan documents important fish and wildlife habitat areas and provides management intent and guidelines for these resources and uses. Areas with particularly significant habitat, wildlife, or fisheries values are designated Habitat.

Subsistence and Harvest. Fishing, hunting, trapping, and other natural resource gathering activities are vital to Alaska’s economy and culture, especially for rural families who rely on harvest for food and traditional practices. State subsistence take is open to all Alaskans under the state constitution regardless of residency. The plan provides management goals and guidelines to maintain harvest opportunities consistent with applicable laws and land ownership.

Water Resources. DNR is responsible for allocating water resources on all lands within the State of Alaska (AS 46.15). The plan designates areas to be managed for their water resource values and describes management guidelines for instream flow reservations. Areas with water resource values are primarily associated with the maintenance of rivers and streams, which are extensively distributed throughout the planning area.

Summary of Plan Actions

Management Intent

The planning area consists of four regions: Arctic Region, Dalton Corridor Region, Yukon Flats Region, and Interior Highlands Region. Each of the four regions include state-owned and state-selected uplands and shorelands that are generally adjacent to each other. Area plans, as a matter of course, include designations and management intent for federal lands selected by the state for conveyance under the various types of land entitlement programs since it is likely that some or all of the land will eventually be conveyed. When such federal land is conveyed, the classifications within this plan will automatically attach.

The plan presents management intent that explains the Department’s overall resource management goals, objectives, and management guidelines for each region and unit, and provides resource and use information for land managers. This information is presented in Chapter 3.

Management Guidelines

According to the Alaska Constitution, state lands are to be managed for multiple uses. As defined in AS 38.04.910(5), multiple use means “the management of state lands and its various resource values so that it is used in the combination that will best meet the present and future needs of the people of Alaska, making the most judicious use of the land for some or all of these resources or related services over areas large enough to provide sufficient latitude for periodic adjustments in use to conform to changing needs and conditions.” Management guidelines are intended to ensure that primary and secondary resource uses will be compatible to the maximum extent possible. When potentially conflicting uses are designated in a unit, the plan provides guidelines to allow various uses to occur with minimal

conflict. Guidelines that apply to the entire planning area are identified in Chapter 2. Management guidelines for specific management units are given in Chapter 3.

Land Use Designations and Land Classifications

General state lands are classified by identifying the resources and uses present in order to designate primary and secondary uses for individual units. Each unit identifies up to three designations representing the uses and resources for which that area will be managed. Plan designations are identified and described in Chapter 3 along with the Resource Allocation Tables that contain the designations assigned to individual units. A more complete description of compatible uses is found in the management intent statement and guidelines for each specific planning unit. These designations are then implemented through land classifications as defined by 11 AAC 55.20-277. Up to three classifications are allowable on individual management units. The Land Classification Order (LCO) that is to be adopted with this plan is included as Appendix B. Table 4-2 in Chapter 4 shows how designations convert to classifications.

Plan Implementation and Modification

The plan is implemented through the LCO and serves as the final finding for land classification. The plan sets forth policy for the Department in administering actions such as leases, permits, and land conveyances. Chapter 4 presents the details of plan implementation recommendations and procedures.

Economic and social conditions in Alaska and the planning area are sure to change and the plan must be flexible enough to change with them. The plan will be reviewed periodically to monitor progress in implementing the plan and to identify issues that may require amendment or modification.

Specific modifications may be made whenever conditions warrant them, though a request for these changes must follow certain procedures (11 AAC 55.240). The plan may be amended after approval by the Commissioner of DNR following public review and consultation with the appropriate agencies. Special exceptions and minor changes must follow certain procedures. See Chapter 4 for a more detailed description of procedures for plan modifications.

Chapter 1: Summary of Plan Actions