

## MANAGEMENT UNIT 3: CHUITNA RIVER

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### MANAGEMENT INTENT

This management unit contains the greatest amount of public land and many of the highest surface resource values in the Beluga subregion. Key geographic features included in this unit are the Beluga and Chuitna Rivers, Congahbuna Lake, and Nikolai Ridge. Several large portions of the unit are either in native or borough ownership. The overall management intent emphasizes retention and multiple use management of public lands. A particular objective for this area is to manage land in a way that facilitates development of the area's coal and oil and gas resources. Specific lands have been set aside as possible townsites and for a port site to support possible coal development. This unit will remain open to mineral location and be available for coal leasing except for subunits 3b and 3c which are closed to mineral location to protect potential townsites and industrial and port sites. The entire unit is available for oil and gas leasing.

This management unit has been divided into six subunits primarily on the basis of land ownership and land use requirements associated with possible coal development. The subunits are the upper Chuitna River and Lone Creek drainages (3a); potential townsites (3b); the proposed Granite Point industrial and port site (3c); native lands (3d); the forested areas around the upper ends of Nikolai, Tyonek and Threemile creeks (3e); and Viapan Lake (3f). Refer to the maps at the end of this section for boundaries of these areas and the accompanying chart for a summary of land use designations in each subunit.

**Subunit 3a** contains two large coal leases, known as the Lone Ridge and Center Ridge sites. The lands in this subunit will be retained in public ownership and managed primarily for coal, oil and gas and wildlife habitat values.

**Subunit 3b** consists of four townsites that are designated reserved use to preserve future townsite options. Three of the sites are in state ownership; the fourth site is in borough ownership. In the interim, these sites will be managed for wildlife habitat and forest values.

**Subunit 3c** is a potential site for industrial and/or port development if resource development occurs in the Beluga area. This is the only public-owned port site in this area of Cook Inlet.

**Subunit 3d** is land owned by the Tyonek Native Corporation and not affected by this plan.

**Subunit 3e** is different from unit 3a only in that it is at lower elevations and has potential for commercial forestry in addition to coal, oil and gas and wildlife values. Subunit 3e contains a smaller coal lease in the vicinity of Threemile Creek.

The majority of the surface estate of **subunit 3f** is owned by the Kenai Peninsula Borough and the subsurface estate by Cook Inlet Region, Incorporated. Coal values in the subunit are high. Borough lands within this unit will be designated borough land bank and managed in the near term for present uses — primarily wildlife habitat and recreation. If coal is not developed in this unit (or after coal mining) the state recommends this area for future settlement. There are several large undeveloped lakes in this subunit which could provide attractive seasonal recreational cabin sites and land for year round residences for people who work in the area. Settlement is preferable here because it will concentrate private land holdings in one area, leaving resource development options open on other public lands.

There are several blocks of private land within this subunit, including a past state subdivision called Three Mile Lake. A number of the people who work at the adjacent Beluga Power Plant own lots and live in this subdivision. Prior to land sales in this subunit, the Kenai Borough should work with residents and landowners of this area to identify lands that should be retained in public ownership for community facilities or community open space areas.

This management unit is crossed by an extensive system of roads, most built as a result of oil and gas or timber harvesting activities. As part of the implementation of this plan, the state should investigate the status of existing rights-of-way in this management unit and attempt, where appropriate, to secure the right for their continued public use. Future public use of several well traveled roads is uncertain due to Native land selections and because many roads were built by private companies for a specific, non-public purpose.

### MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES

The complete set of areawide management guidelines is presented in Chapter 2 of this report. All of the guidelines potentially apply to uses within this management unit; however, those that are most likely to be applicable are indicated with asterisks in the list below.

Agriculture  
Fish and Wildlife Habitat

# LAND USE DESIGNATION SUMMARY

SUBREGION BelugaMANAGEMENT UNIT 3 – Chuitna River

SUBUNIT	LAND OWNERSHIP (GENERALIZED)	LAND USE DESIGNATIONS				PROHIBITED SURFACE USE(S)*	COMMENTS
		SURFACE		SUBSURFACE			
		PRIMARY USE(S)	SECONDARY USE(S)	LOCATABLE MINERALS	LEASEABLE MINERALS		
3a Chuitna River Drainage	State	Coal Oil and Gas Wildlife Habitat	Public Rec. Forestry	Open	Available for leasing	Portions closed to Grazing (see management guidelines) Remote Cabins Land Disposals Trapper Cabins	
3b Potential Townsites	State/ Kenai Peninsula Borough	Reserved Use (Potential Townsites)	—	Closed	Not available for coal leasing or prospecting	Remote Cabins Trapper Cabins	
3c Granite Point	State	Oil and Gas Settlement (Port/Industrial Site)	Wildlife Hab.	Closed	Not available for coal leasing or prospecting	Remote Cabins Trapper Cabins Land Disposals	

\*Other uses such as material sales, land leases, remote cabin permits, etc., that are not specifically prohibited may be allowed. Such uses will be allowed if consistent with the management intent statement and management guidelines of this unit, and with the relevant management guidelines in chapter 2.

# LAND USE DESIGNATION SUMMARY

SUBREGION Beluga

MANAGEMENT UNIT 3 - Chitna River

SUBUNIT	LAND OWNERSHIP (GENERALIZED)	LAND USE DESIGNATIONS				PROHIBITED SURFACE USE(S)*	COMMENTS
		SURFACE		SUBSURFACE			
		PRIMARY USE(S)	SECONDARY USE(S)	LOCATABLE MINERALS	LEASEABLE MINERALS		
3d Tyonek Village Corporation Land	Native	Primarily Private land-- Recommended Uses: Forestry, Settlement, Wildlife Habitat		—	—	—	
3e Nicolai/ Threemile	State/ Kenai Peninsula Borough	Forestry Wildlife Habitat Oil & Gas	Public Rec.	Open	Available for coal leasing and prospecting	Remote Cabins Land Disposals (portions closed to grazing--see guidelines)	
3f Viapan Lake	Kenai Peninsula Borough (subsur- face is native)	Borough Land Bank Values: Settlement, Wildlife Habitat, Forestry, Public Recreation, Oil & Gas, Coal, Minerals		Open	Available for coal leasing and prospecting	—	

\*Other uses such as material sales, land leases, remote cabin permits, etc., that are not specifically prohibited may be allowed. Such uses will be allowed if consistent with the management intent statement and management guidelines of this unit, and with the relevant management guidelines in chapter 2.

- \*Forestry
- Recreation
- \*Settlement
- Subsurface
- Transportation
- Instream Flow
- \*Lakeshore Management
- \*Public Access
- Remote Cabin Permits
- \*Stream Corridors
- Trail Management
- Wetlands Management
- Resource Management

Management guidelines that apply to this management unit only are presented below by subunit.

### **Subunit 3a (Chuitna River Drainage)**

#### **Access**

Most of the lower portion of the Chuitna River is in Native ownership. Public access to fishing areas in the publicly owned portions of the Chuitna River should be identified and reserved. This river is one of the few Cook Inlet rivers open to king salmon fishing, and its popularity is expected to increase significantly as a result. The Department of Fish and Game has rated this stream the ninth most important in the study area.

#### **Grazing**

The riparian zone along the Chuitna River and Chuit Creek will be closed to grazing. Grazing is prohibited in order to avoid conflicts with brown bears, which concentrate seasonally in this zone.

### **Subunit 3d (Tyonek Native Corporation)**

#### **Stream Corridors**

The state recommends that Cook Inlet Region, Incorporated and Tyonek Native Corporation strive to protect high value or particularly sensitive fish and wildlife habitat on their lands. Areas of particular concern include the Chuitna River, Chuitna Lake, and Third, Second, Bunka, and Kaldachabuna lakes.

### **Subunit 3e (Nikolai-Threemile)**

#### **Grazing**

The Riparian zone along the Chuitna River will be closed to grazing. Grazing is prohibited in order to avoid conflict with brown bear, which concentrate seasonally in this zone. The portions of subunit 3e within T13N R10W S.M. sections 20, 21, 28, 29, 31-33, and in T13N R11W S.M. section 36, will be closed to grazing because of their importance as moose winter range.

### **Subunit 3f (Viapan Lake)**

#### **Chuitna River**

The mouth of the Chuitna River — an important anadromous fish stream — has been identified by the Department of Fish and Game as an area where the state should investigate the possibility of buying private land in order to improve public access. Access at present is limited and a source of conflict within this unit.

#### **Stream Corridors**

The management intent for land adjacent to Three Mile Creek is to permit fishing, picnicing, camping and other active uses, and to protect water quality and riparian habitat. Consequently this land should be retained in public ownership. The final corridor width should be determined after field analysis using the policies in Chapter 2. It is recommended that recreation and habitat values be protected through retention of a corridor of at least the standard minimum buffer width (200' on both sides of the river).