

MT. SUSITNA SUBREGION



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The following section describes land use policy within the Mt. Susitna Subregion. It is divided into two parts. The first part is an overview of resources and their management for the subregion as a whole. The second part presents specific statements of management intent, land use designations, prohibited uses and management guidelines for each of the subregion's ten management units. Maps showing land ownership in the subregion and boundaries of management units and subunits are presented at the end of the second part.

1. SUBREGION OVERVIEW

Background

The Mt. Susitna Subregion is a remote area of approximately 800,000 acres containing a variety of resources, predominantly in a natural undisturbed state. Among activities presently taking place are oil and gas exploration, fishing, hunting, and boating. Public recreation is focused along the rivers, particularly the Talachulitna. The western half of the Susitna Game Flats — the number one waterfowl hunting area in the state — also falls within the subregion. There is placer mining in several streams in the area, and parts of the area have high mineral potential. Substantial portions of the area are judged to have high or moderate coal values, and one area is currently under lease. Recreational/seasonal settlement has taken place around several of the lakes and in the Alexander Creek drainage as a result of past state land disposals.

The subregion encompasses the lands between the Beluga and Skwentna rivers, including the Mt. Susitna, Little Mt. Susitna and Beluga Mt. uplands; the drainages of the Talachulitna, Theodore and Lewis rivers and the eastern edge of the Alaska Range above Hayes River Pass. The great majority of these lands is owned by the State of Alaska, although 92,000 acres in the southern portion of the subregion are owned by Cook Inlet Region Incorporated; 2,000 acres belong to Alexander Creek Village; and 16,000 acres, primarily around major lakes and along Alexander Creek, are owned by the Matanuska-Susitna Borough. Approximately 3,000 to 5,000 acres, largely parcels within the eleven past disposal areas, are in other private ownerships.

Except for a winter ice road which crosses the Susitna River and extends through the southern portion of the subregion to the Beluga area, there are no roads or major trails connecting the Mt. Susitna Subregion

to the eastern portion of the planning area. There is, however, an all-season gravel road running from the airstrip near Beluga across the Beluga and Theodore Rivers to the Lewis River in the southwestern portion of the Mt. Susitna Subregion.

Five privately owned landing strips provide access to the subregion. Three are in the Susitna Game Flats, one southwest of Mt. Susitna, and one at Alder Creek. There are also several lakes in the area used for float plane landings, including Hiline, Trinity, Judd, Coal Creek, and Stump Lake.

Management Summary

The Mt. Susitna Subregion is presently a remote area with high values for public recreation and fish and wildlife use and potential for oil and gas production. In addition there is potential for commercial forest management in the southeast portion of the subregion, for coal development, and for some extraction of placer gold and other minerals. Suitability for settlement and agriculture is relatively low, but there are some good opportunities for private recreational development just south of the Skwentna River, near Alexander Creek, and on borough and state lands adjacent to several of the area's lakes.

Because of the high public values, most of the subregion will be retained in long-term public ownership and managed for public recreation, habitat protection, timber production, and mineral development. Land adjacent to a number of rivers and lakes of prime importance for public recreation and habitat will be retained entirely in public ownership, but some waterfront areas will be made available for private purchase over the next 20 years. In addition, some of the lands with high potential for settlement or agriculture as well as public use will be placed in a resource management category for future reevaluation.

Settlement

A gross area of approximately 64,860 acres will be available for sale in the Mt. Susitna Subregion. This land is expected to yield net sales of approximately 12,230 acres (see Table 1). These areas are intended to offer opportunities for private recreation without generating demand for roads and other services. Lands available for settlement are located primarily west of the Talachulitna River near Quartz Creek, Deep Creek, and Coal Creek; along the southern side of the Skwentna River and south of Saturday Creek. In the eastern part of the study area, a disposal has been identified

along Trail Creek. Finally, approximately 350 surveyed lots (approximately 1500 ac.) currently remain available for sale within state subdivisions at Canyon Lake, High Mountain Lakes, Alexander Creek West, and Super Cub.

Approximately 19,800 acres of state land with potential for settlement are designated resource management. These lands will be retained in public ownership for the near term (5-10) years and then reevaluated to determine their best long term use. When they are reevaluated, their potential for settlement and agricultural development will be considered along with their values for forestry, fish and wildlife habitat, public recreation and mining. Resource management designations are applied to areas on Trinity Lake, east of Dinglishna Hill, and northeast of Mt. Susitna and Beluga Mountain.

A large amount of good settlement land, including land with water frontage, is in borough ownership. Approximately 6,100 acres of borough land around Hiline, Movie, Trinity and Coal Creek Lakes and 6,000 acres south of the Theodore River will be retained in a land bank with the possibility of future sales. Should these areas eventually be sold, setbacks and retention of large portions of the shoreline will be used to protect public access and recreation values (see Lakeshore Management policy in Chapter 2).

Several large areas are open to remote cabin permits. These include lands east of the Talachulitna River around Beluga Mt. and Little Mt. Susitna, lowlands west of the Talachulitna, and the foothills of the Alaska Range. Public use cabins are recommended for the Talachulitna River corridor.

Table 1

Acres Identified for Settlement and Agriculture

	GROSS AREA (ac)	NET AREA (ac)
STATE LAND		
New Offerings	26,370	6,630
Reofferings within Past Disposal Areas	37,210	4,800
Agriculture	1,280	800
STATE TOTAL	64,860	12,230

Agriculture

The lack of road access to the subregion makes large scale agricultural development infeasible for at least the next 10 years. Relatively few areas of cultivable soils exist in this area, but some areas have been identified along the northern and eastern fringes of the area and in scattered locations in the western portion of

the region. These lands, typically contain soils with good agricultural potential only in relatively small blocks (less than 160 acres in size). Some of the lands fall within prime recreation and habitat areas that are proposed for long term public ownership, such as the Talachulitna River corridor and the area around Judd Lake. In the remaining areas, however, approximately 16,500 acres of land with agricultural potential will be placed in a resource management category and 6,000 acres in the borough land bank to ensure later consideration for agricultural use. In addition, approximately 1,280 acres on the east side of Trail Creek will be available for disposal as agricultural homesteads.

Near Mt. Susitna and Little Mt. Susitna there are lands with potential for grazing. These lands will be retained in public ownership, and grazing will be permitted as a secondary use.

Forestry

There are approximately 150,000 acres with some potential for commercial forestry in the subregion. Commercial forestry values are concentrated in the southeastern part of the subregion, on the lower slopes of Mts. Susitna, Little Susitna and Beluga, and in the lowlands along the Talachulitna River. High priority areas for personal use timber harvesting also have been identified near past and proposed settlement areas, including High Mt. Lakes, Trinity-Movie Lakes, Hiline Lake, Sunday Lake Remote, Quartz Creek, lands south of the Skwentna River, and south of Mt. Susitna.

Approximately 52,000 acres of the forested lands with high or moderate commercial potential will be retained in public ownership with forestry as one of the primary uses. Most of the retained lands are within the area recommended for legislative designation around Mt. Susitna and Little Mt. Susitna. In addition, forestry is a secondary use on 23,000 acres of public land in the Talachulitna River and Creek, Susitna River, and Alexander Creek corridors. Timber harvests will be permitted when consistent with the recreation and habitat objectives for the river corridors. Another 15,000 acres of forest lands along the northeastern border of the subregion are designated resource management, and 4,000 acres of borough forest land are included in borough land bank designations.

Fish and Wildlife

Most of the Mt. Susitna Subregion has high to moderate values for fish and wildlife habitat except for the far western portion of the area and the large bogs between Talachulitna Creek and River. The Talachulitna River is one of the finest fishing streams in Alaska, drawing visitors from across the country. The

northern part of the Mt. Susitna — Little Mt. Susitna area is particularly important for hunting.

Most high and moderate value habitat lands will be retained in public ownership. The Talachulitna River and Creek corridors and the Mt. Susitna — Little Mt. Susitna area are recommended for legislative designation, with fish and wildlife habitat identified as one of the primary uses. Several lakes will be retained completely in public ownership, including Judd Lake, Talachulitna Lake, Kitty Lake, and Top Lake.

Recreation

Public recreation is focused on the Alexander and Susitna rivers, the Talachulitna River and Creek corridors and the area around Mt. Susitna. These areas are recommended for legislative designation, with public recreation one of the primary uses.

Subsurface

a. Locatable Minerals

Mining and mineral exploration are and will continue to be important activities in this subregion. The vast majority of the Mt. Susitna Subregion will remain open to mineral entry. Mineral closures will be limited to the Talachulitna River and Talachulitna Creek corridors and their major tributaries, the Alexander Creek corridor, and areas that are likely to be densely settled now or in the future. The Susitna Game Flats wildlife refuge is open to mining under the leasehold location system. The closures and leasehold location areas include relatively little land with high mineral potential. There are concentrations of existing claims on the Theodore and Lewis rivers which may contain sulfide or vein deposits. These areas and the mining areas around Mt. Susitna will remain open to mineral location.

b. Coal

Large areas of this subregion have moderate to high coal potential. Most of the area will be open to coal leasing and prospecting, with the exception of the Talachulitna River and Creek corridors, Susitna Game Flats, Alexander Creek corridor, and areas likely to be densely settled. The area proposed for legislative designation around Mt. Susitna and Little Mt. Susitna will be available for coal prospecting.

c. Oil and Gas

All public lands will be open for oil and gas leasing. In the Alexander Creek, Talachulitna River and Talachulitna Creek corridors, specific mitigation measures will be established to protect habitat and

recreation values. These corridors have little oil and gas potential.

Resource Management and Borough Land Bank

A total of 106,190 acres are designated for resource management — 86,350 acres of which are low resource value lands east of Trimble River. An additional 16,500 acres east of Beluga Mt. have high value agricultural, wildlife habitat and forest lands. The remaining 3,340 acres near Trinity Lakes and Dinglishna Hill have good potential for settlement as well as public use.

An additional 12,100 acres of Matanuska-Susitna Borough lands in the area are designated as part of the borough's land bank. These lands probably will be retained in the near term (5-10 years) and be managed for habitat, public recreation and forestry. They will be reevaluated in the future to determine their best long term use.

Water Resources

The streams, rivers, lakes and wetlands of the subregion are important for protection of water quality as well as for recreational and habitat use. Most of these areas are protected in public ownership under forestry, habitat, recreation or resource management categories. The extensive wetland area between Talachulitna River and Talachulitna Creek is classified specifically for water resource protection.

Transportation

There are two transportation corridors which have been proposed as long-term possibilities within this subregion: 1) a road or rail extension from the railbelt east of the Susitna River that crosses through this area into the Beluga vicinity; and 2) a route to transport coal out of the Canyon Creek lease area located in the northern part of the management unit. No specific right-of-way has been identified for the Canyon Creek route, and there are no plans to develop these coal deposits in the near term.

Additional road access may accompany forest development in the Mt. Susitna vicinity. Additional airstrips and trails are recommended for public access to the portion of the subregion east of the Talachulitna River corridor.