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# SOUTH PARKS HIGHWAY SUBREGION



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

## 1. SUBREGION OVERVIEW

### Background

The subregion encompasses the area from Chulitna Pass south to near Little Willow Creek, west to the Susitna and Chulitna Rivers and east to the foothills of the Talkeetna Mountains. It includes a strip of land along the Susitna River and Alaska Railroad in the foothills of the Talkeetna Mountains just east of Denali State Park. The lower portions of several river drainages also are included — Montana Creek, Sheep River and Sheep Creek, the Talkeetna River, and the North Fork and mainstream of the Kashwitna River. The Parks Highway south of the Susitna River bridge is included in this subregion. (North of the bridge, it is within the Petersville Road Subregion.)

The subregion contains approximately 496,600 acres, of which approximately 61% is owned or selected by the State of Alaska, 13% is owned or selected by the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, and 7% is owned or selected by Native corporations. Past state and borough land sales (including agricultural sales) and other private land accounts for the remaining 19%.

The presence or proximity of the Parks Highway, the Talkeetna Spur Road and the Alaska Railroad makes much of the land in this subregion relatively accessible. However, little of the state-owned land is accessible by road. In addition to the railroad, Parks Highway, and Talkeetna Spur Road, this subregion includes local roads (e.g., Caswell Lakes Road), trails (particularly in the Talkeetna area), and airstrips at Montana and Talkeetna.

This subregion receives a high level of recreation use. Rivers in the area are important salmon producers for the Cook Inlet commercial fishery and also support some of the most popular sport fishing in the study

area, especially where the Parks Highway crosses anadromous fish streams such as Sheep and Montana creeks. These drainages also are important for commercial trapping. Other recreational activities include hunting, hiking, camping, boating, dog mushing, snowmobiling and cross-country skiing. Mining activity is less than it was in the past, but there are still concentrations of claims just north of Talkeetna along Chuilna Creek and at Gold Creek. Coal potential in the area is low to very low and oil and gas potential is unknown.

Much of the subregion, especially along the Talkeetna Spur Road, has agricultural potential. The state and borough have sold agricultural lands at Talkeetna and Bartlett Hills, and agricultural homesteads at Chase III. Potential grazing land has been identified just east of the subregion in the foothills of the Talkeetna Mountains. Much of the land with agricultural potential also has potential for settlement and commercial or personal use forestry. A number of state land disposals have taken place in the subregion in recent years including Talkeetna Bluffs, Talkeetna Bluffs Addition, Bald Mountain Remote, Bald Mountain and Bald Mountain South subdivisions, Chase, Chase II remote and sub-division, Bartlett Hills subdivision, and Indian River subdivision and remote parcel area.

### Management Summary

The overall management goal for this subregion is to preserve much of the character of the area by retaining habitat and recreation lands, protecting visual quality along the highway, and maintaining low population densities in some settlement areas, while providing for future growth in the area. Because of the large amount of private land on or adjacent to the Parks Highway, most of the little remaining state-owned land near the highway will be retained in public ownership to provide recreation sites, material sites, woodlots and open spaces, and to maintain visual quality along the highway. A substantial percentage of other public lands further from the highway will be retained in public ownership for forestry, fish and wildlife habitat and recreation. A moderate amount of state land will be offered for disposal for settlement, including fee simple (i.e., ownership of all surface rights) and agricultural homesteads. Most borough land will be designated borough land bank which signifies that the areas will be retained in borough ownership at least in the near term and managed for various public uses including recreation, wildlife habitat and forestry. In the long term, however, many of these areas may be

used for settlement or agriculture. Some borough land is designated for long term retention (including land along the Susitna River, along Birch Slough, and north of Goose Creek). A small amount is designated for settlement near Larson Lake.

**Settlement**

The majority of the public lands at lower elevations have high potential for near term settlement due to their relative proximity to access and existing communities. More than 52,000 acres in the subregion (over 10%) already have been offered for settlement by the state and borough.

A summary of the acreage proposed for future disposal in the subregion is shown in Table 1. Approximately 10,330 acres of state land are recommended for disposal over the next twenty years. Most of the offerings will be subdivisions or non-agricultural homesteads, with approximately 3,620 acres to be offered as agricultural homesteads. Approximately 1,870 acres of borough land are proposed for sale, and 54,000 acres of land are designated borough land bank.

Portions of this subregion are within the current boundaries of the borough’s Talkeetna Mountains Special Use District (TMSUD). A borough ordinance regulates uses in this area. The TMSUD ordinance allows land sales but requires a permit before construction of a cabin. Limitations on residential uses imposed by the ordinance include restrictions on subdivision, the size and appearance of cabins, allowable water systems, and the methods for sanitary waste disposal. Conditions for issuance of a specific permit may be modified on a case-by-case basis.

**Agriculture and Grazing**

No additional state land in this subregion will be offered for sale for commercial agriculture. However, a gross area of approximately 6,040 acres (estimated net area = 3,620 acres) of state land have been identified as agricultural homesteads. This is in an area east of Caswell Lake.

An estimated gross area of 25,680 acres of borough land are suitable for agriculture. The largest block of borough land with agricultural potential, over 14,000 acres, is located between the Susitna and Chulitna Rivers. Most of the potential agricultural lands owned by the borough, including this area, will be designated borough land bank. (See explanation of borough land bank in the introductory paragraph of the management summary for this subregion.)

**Forestry**

This subregion has potential for both commercial and personal use forestry. A substantial amount of state land will be retained in long term public ownership to support these uses. One area encompassing 75,280 acres is recommended for legislative designation as multiple use forest land. This area is in the southeastern portion of the subregion, extending from just north of Little Willow Creek to the Middle Fork of Montana Creek and from near timberline of the Talkeetna Mountains west about five miles. Publicly owned river corridors in the area also will be available for timber harvests wherever this does not impair the value of the corridors for habitat and recreation. All areas designated for forestry also will be managed for their habitat and public recreation values.

**Fish and Wildlife**

This subregion is important as habitat for a variety of fish and wildlife species and important for hunting and fishing due to its relatively good access. Since much of the land east of the Parks Highway from Wasilla to Talkeetna, including land along river corridors, is at least partially in private ownership, and since this area will be subjected to increased demands for recreation, hunting and other public uses, the plan attempts to secure a corridor of public land between the Talkeetna Mountains and the Susitna River. This will provide for a variety of public uses — personal use and commercial forestry, open space amid the otherwise uninterrupted development along the Parks Highway, and a movement corridor for animals, especially moose. Even though no uninterrupted corridor remains in public ownership, the best place to accomplish this is between Sheep Creek and Montana Creek. In November, 1983, the borough offered agricultural land for sale in this area, but is committed to long term

Table 1

**Acreage Identified for Settlement and Agriculture**

<b>STATE LAND</b>	<b>GROSS AREA (ac)</b>	<b>NET AREA (ac)</b>
New Offerings	31,980	6,710
Reofferings within Past Disposal Areas	6,400	—0—
Agriculture (Homesteads)	6,040	3,620
<b>STATE TOTAL</b>	<b>44,420</b>	<b>10,330</b>
<b>BOROUGH LAND</b>		
New Offerings	8,000	1,870
<b>BOROUGH TOTAL</b>	<b>8,000</b>	<b>1,870</b>
<b>STATE AND BOROUGH TOTAL</b>	<b>52,420</b>	<b>12,200</b>

retention of the remainder of their lands in the corridor (Management Unit 11, mostly in T23N R4W S.M.).

Most of the little remaining public land along rivers and creeks — such as Montana, Sheep, and Goose creeks, and the Talkeetna River — will be retained in public ownership. The few small sites of state land along the highway will be retained in public ownership to provide access to fishing and hunting areas. In addition, consideration should be given to purchase of valuable habitat and access points at the mouths of some streams from willing private owners. This is of particular importance on those streams that are heavily fished, such as Montana Creek. In addition, the areas proposed for retention and legislative designation mentioned in the forestry section will be available for habitat management and human use of wild-life resources.

### **Recreation**

This subregion receives intense and growing pressure for a variety of recreational activities, including fishing, tent and RV camping, picnicking, cross-country skiing and snowmobiling. Many of these activities require campsites, parking areas, pulloffs along the highway, or other developed facilities. The existing facilities to handle these demands are inadequate, and the state and borough must cooperate to meet this demand. The Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation currently is acquiring private land at Montana Creek to enlarge the recreation site, and consideration should be given to developing new campgrounds at other sites. Two important objectives in this category are development of an Alaska Range viewsite on the hill just south of Talkeetna and development of improved access and a boat launch facility on the Susitna River.

Hiking, cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, etc. require large, undeveloped areas. The large blocks of land retained in public ownership for forestry and fish and wildlife also will be managed to accommodate these uses. A corridor of 27,440 acres along the Talkeetna River is recommended for legislative designation as a state recreation river. (A portion of this corridor is in the Talkeetna Mountains Subregion.) In addition, the plan recommends funding be provided for construction of public use cabins (such as those built and maintained by the U.S. Forest Service on the Kenai Peninsula) in various backcountry areas of this subregion. Finally, an area near Montana Creek has been identified as an ecological reserve. It has high forestry, fisheries and wildlife habitat values and has been proposed as an experimental forest.

### **Subsurface**

Mining and mineral exploration are and will continue to be very important activities in this subregion. The great majority of public lands will remain open to mineral entry and available for coal leasing, although densely settled areas and agricultural areas will be closed to mineral location and unavailable for coal leasing, as will homesteading areas until staking is completed. Other areas, such as developed recreation sites and certain river corridors (e.g., the proposed Talkeetna state recreation river and portions of Montana, Clear, and Sheep creeks) also will be closed. All public land in this subregion is open to exploration and development of oil and gas. In the Talkeetna River corridor, specific mitigation measures will be established to protect habitat and recreation values. Coal values in this subregion generally are low to very low.

### **Transportation**

Proposed transportation routes within the subregion include road access to the Larson Lake area and the Chase III area. A route into the proposed state forest in the southeast portion of the subregion has been identified for further study. The borough currently is requesting legislative funding for a road to Larson Lake which would run north from Answer Creek and the Bartlett Hills area. A 300' right-of-way which runs east from the railroad north of Talkeetna to the Chase area has been platted but not constructed. Additional rights-of-way are proposed for access within the Chase project. Access to the proposed state forest could run south from the Bartlett Hills area, east and north from the Caswell Lake area, or enter both by both routes. See the transportation section of Chapter 4 for additional information on these routes.