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Chapter 1 : Introduction and Background

Purpose of the Plan

The Matanuska Valley Moose Range (Moose Range or Range) is an area rich in natural resource values. The lands within the Moose Range support abundant fish and wildlife populations, contain timber, non-timber forest products and high-valued coal reserves, and provide a variety of outdoor recreational and cultural opportunities.

In response to the increasing need to both utilize and protect natural resources in the area, the Alaska State Legislature passed the act which created the Matanuska Valley Moose Range in 1984. The Moose Range was established to maintain, improve, and enhance moose populations and habitat and other wildlife resources of the area, and to perpetuate public multiple uses of the area, including fishing, grazing, forest management, hunting, trapping, mineral and coal entry and development, and other forms of public uses of public land not incompatible with the purposes stated (Alaska Statute (AS) 16.20.340).

The enabling legislation requires the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to develop and adopt a management plan for the Moose Range in cooperation and concurrence with the Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G). The first management plan was completed in 1986, however since that time much has changed. Coal has been extracted and surface mines have been reclaimed, additional coal leases have been issued and mines permitted, and the population of Alaska and Matanuska-Susitna Borough (MSB) has expanded, greatly increasing the demand for outdoor recreation opportunities in the area.

Although a multitude of uses coexisted for many years, conflicts have increased in the last decade near Palmer, the Buffalo Mine community, and the community of Sutton as more people are using the area. The reclaimed site of the Jonesville Mine, Slipper Lake, and nearby trails have received the heaviest amount of public recreation use including hiking, ATV riding, snow-machining, horseback riding, school outings, target shooting, camping/RVing, hunting, fishing, and trapping. Additionally, there are significant public health and safety concerns in the Jonesville area due to a variety of illegal, destructive, and unsafe uses that are incompatible with outdoor recreation activities enjoyed by the public. The most concerning of these are dangerous and unlawful operation of motor vehicles, the detonation of explosives, and illegal discharge of firearms.

In response to these concerns, the Alaska Legislature created the Jonesville Public Use Area (JPUA) in AS 41.23.280-289. The purpose of the JPUA is to (1) protect, maintain, enhance, and perpetuate year-round public recreation; (2) protect and maintain fish and wildlife habitat so that the public may continue to enjoy traditional uses of the JPUA; (3) provide opportunities for the public to enjoy the area through a full spectrum of public uses, including the maintenance and enhancement of off-road vehicle and nonmotorized recreational opportunities for the public; and (4) allow continued mineral exploration and development activities, motorized access to private property (including subsurface rights), and other compatible public uses.

37 The designation of the JPUA almost entirely within the Moose Range, with specific guidance for managing
38 multiple resource uses, provides the opportunity to develop an improved framework for DNR and other
39 managing agencies to manage incompatible uses, minimize impacts to resources, and enforce subsequent
40 regulations.

41 The Moose Range and the JPUA, due to their overlapping boundaries and similar purposes, will be
42 managed through one management plan. The JPUA and lands adjacent to the JPUA will be managed as
43 the Jonesville Subunit of the Moose Range and includes unit-specific management guidelines that
44 implement the intent of the JPUA enabling legislation.

45 Organization of the Plan

46 The plan is organized in four main chapters.

47 Chapter 1: Introduction

48 Provides the reader with the general purpose and organization of the management plan, and an overall
49 description of the management area.

50 Chapter 2: Areawide Goals and Management Guidelines

51 Provides a brief description of the resources within the Moose Range and JPUA and describes the
52 areawide land management policies that will apply to the Moose Range and JPUA.

53 Chapter 3: Land Management Guidelines for Individual Subunits

54 Describes the management intent and subunit specific land management policies for each of the four
55 management subunits.

56 Chapter 4: Implementation

57 This implementation chapter describes the priorities for actions agencies need to take to manage the
58 Moose Range and JPUA including a preliminary description of regulations that will need to be promulgated
59 to implement the plan.

60 The appendices, located at the end of the document, include a glossary, the enabling legislation, a list of
61 acronyms, a land classification order, and a summary of public involvement.

62 The Planning Area

63 See Map 1: Land Status

64 Matanuska Valley Moose Range

65 The Moose Range in Southcentral Alaska is a Legislatively Designated Area (LDA) that is nestled in the
66 southern foothills of the Talkeetna Mountains east of the Little Susitna River and north of the Glenn
67 Highway. The Moose Range is located northeast of Palmer, Alaska and adjacent to the Glenn Highway
68 between Mile Posts (MP) 59 and MP 80. The Moose Range consists of portions of the Moose, Eska,

69 Granite, Young, California and Boulder Creek drainages, as well as the Kings and Chickaloon River
70 drainages. The rural communities of Sutton and Chickaloon are located within the area.

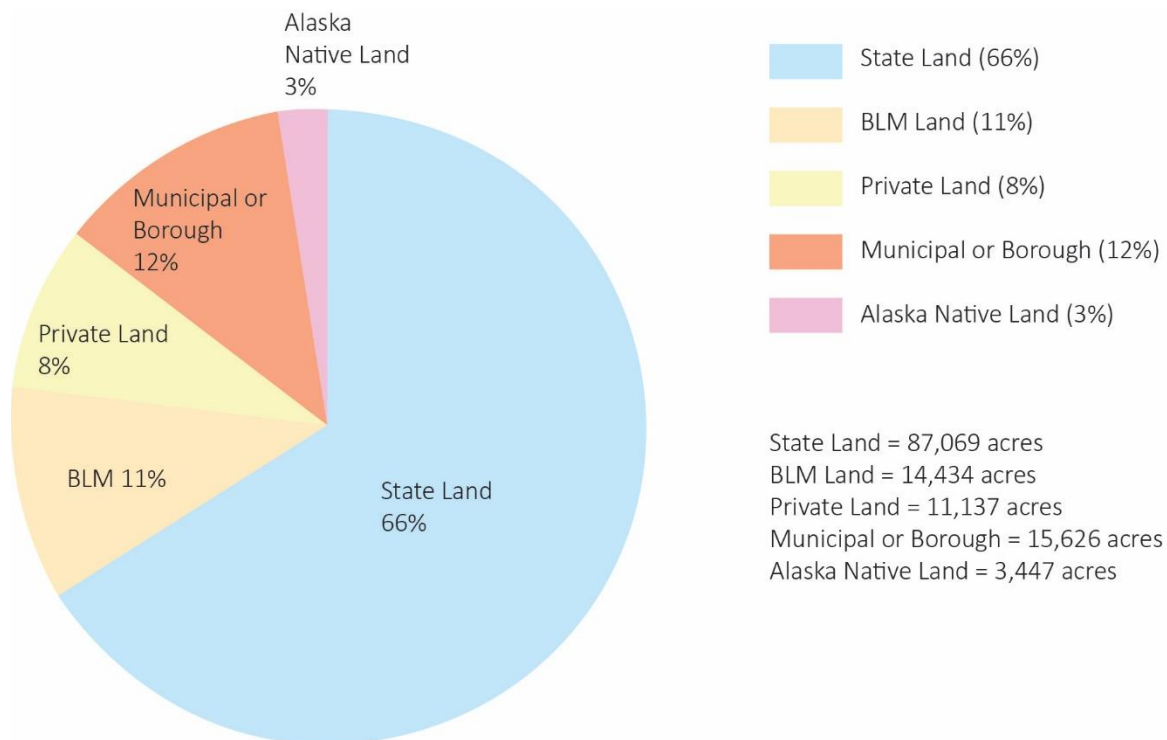
71 **Jonesville Public Use Area**

72 The Jonesville Public Use Area is located almost entirely within the Moose Range and consists of 14,614
73 acres. The area is accessed by N. Jonesville Mine Road north of the Glenn Highway in Sutton near MP 61
74 and other access points between MP 57 and MP 62 and is a highly accessible recreation spot, within a 1-
75 2-hour drive of most Alaskans in southcentral Alaska. With acres of rugged countryside, lakes, creeks and
76 waterfalls, abundant wildlife and established trails, the area has long provided a wide variety of
77 recreational opportunities. The JPUA includes the Eska Creek Drainage, Slipper Lake, Wishbone Lake, and
78 the majority of authorized subsurface coal resources in the area.

79 **Land Ownership**

80 There are just over 131,700 acres of land within the Moose Range and JPUA. The Moose Range contains
81 lands owned by the State of AK, MSB, private citizens, Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and Alaska
82 Native organizations. The policies in this plan apply only to state land. A breakdown of the acreage owned
83 by each organization is shown in Figure 1. Note that the BLM land, in many cases, is selected by the State
84 and/or Alaska Native organizations and is yet to be transferred.

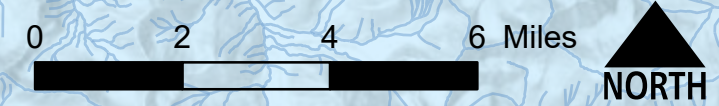
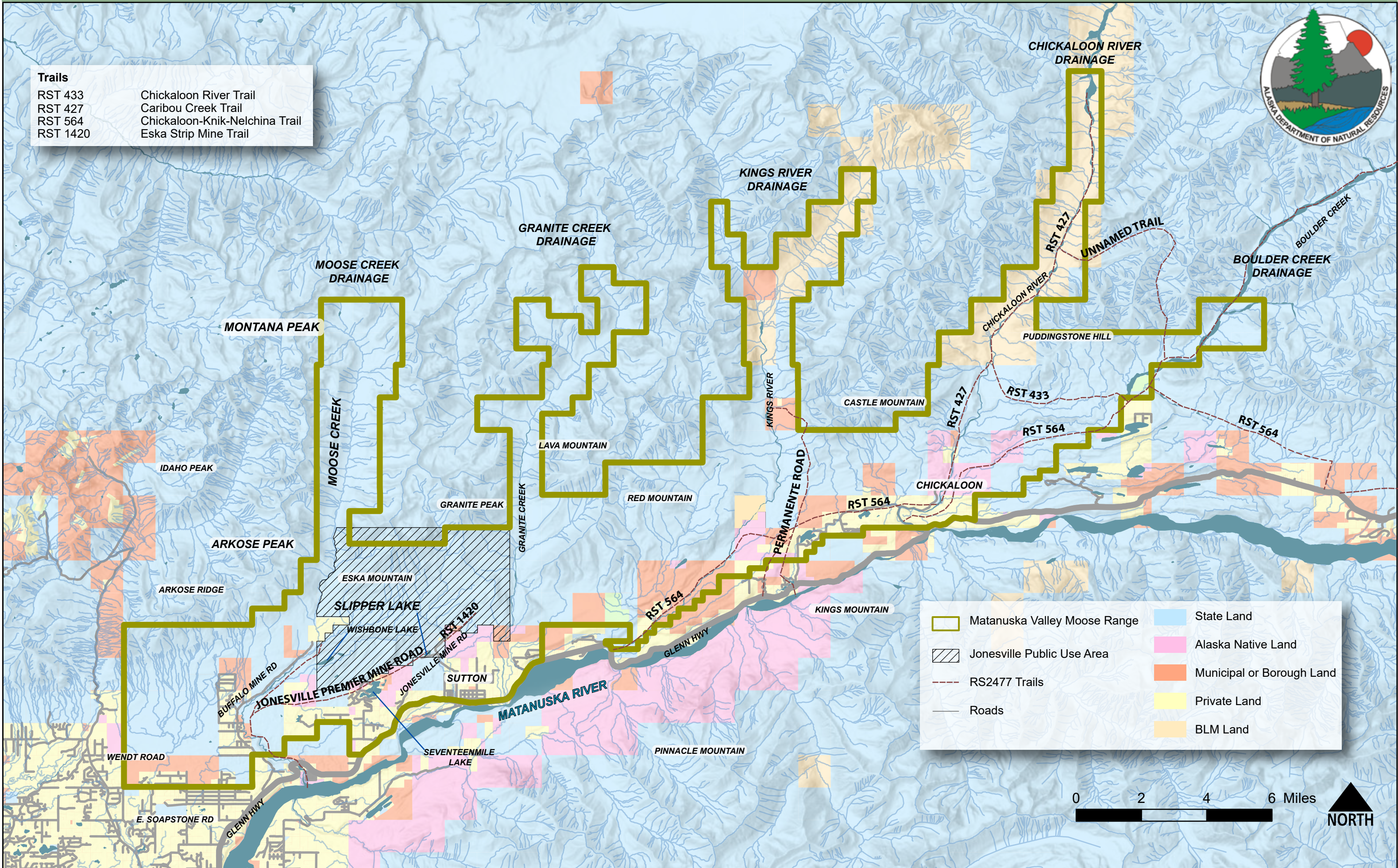
85 **FIGURE 1: LAND OWNERSHIP SUMMARY**



86



Trails	
RST 433	Chickaloon River Trail
RST 427	Caribou Creek Trail
RST 564	Chickaloon-Knik-Nelchina Trail
RST 1420	Eska Strip Mine Trail



90 Planning Process

91 How the Plan Was Developed

92 The major steps used in developing the Moose Range and Jonesville Public Use Area Management Plan
93 are as follows:

- 94 1. Public Issues Identified. In September of 2022, public scoping meetings were held in Sutton,
95 Anchorage, Chickaloon, Wasilla, and virtually to learn about local knowledge of the Moose Range
96 and JPUA, local problems, land use preferences, and concerns about uses of state lands.
97 Approximately 54 people participated in the scoping meetings and more than 200 individuals
98 submitted more than 450 individual comments.
- 99 2. Information Gathered and Analyzed. Information about natural resources, existing land uses, land
100 ownership, economic and social characteristics was gathered, mapped, and analyzed. A summary
101 of this information is in Chapter 2. This step was completed in September 2022.
- 102 3. Management Recommendations Prepared. Management recommendations for use of the
103 resources in the Moose Range were developed. These plans were based on legislative intent,
104 existing state policies, public comments, and resource characteristics.
- 105 4. Draft Management Plan for State Lands Prepared. Using public and agency comments gathered
106 during the scoping period, the draft management plan was developed. Public review of the draft
107 management plan will take place in the fall of 2023.
- 108 5. Public Draft Plan Reviewed. Agencies, stakeholders, and the public will have 7 weeks to review
109 and provide comments on the draft management plan. Meetings will be held in Sutton, Palmer,
110 Chickaloon, and virtually in October 2023.
- 111 6. Final Plan Prepared. The final plan recommending management actions and management
112 guidelines will be developed in winter of 2023-2024 based on agency and public comments.
- 113 7. Plan is Adopted and Implemented. The Commissioners of the DNR and ADF&G will approve and
114 adopt the final plan. All uses of the State's land and resources in the Moose Range and JPUA must
115 be consistent with the plan or its amendments for the next twenty years, the expected life of this
116 management plan.

117 Management Plan Goals

118 The overarching goals of this management plan include:

- 119 1. Provide overall guidance to DNR, ADF&G, and other land managers as management decisions are
120 made for the planning area. Actions taken by DNR, ADF&G, and other land managers must be
121 consistent with this plan.
- 122 2. Recommend facilities to meet the current and future needs of the public.
- 123 3. Identify compatible and incompatible uses on which to base management guidelines and
124 recommendations.
- 125 4. Provide relevant resources and use information on which DNR can base decisions.
- 126 5. Provide the public and stakeholders with a meaningful opportunity to participate in the
127 development of the Moose Range and JPUA management plan.

128 What this Plan Will Do

129 The Moose Range and JPUA will form the basis for the management of land and waters that are State-
130 owned. When adopted, this plan is the basis for DNR and ADF&G decision making for State land and
131 resources. The plan will help ensure that State land and resource managers consider the sustained yield
132 of renewable resources, that development is balanced with environmental concerns, and that public
133 multiple use of and access to state land is provided. Finally, the plan documents the State’s intent for land
134 management so that the public knows how the state intends to manage lands over the period the plan is
135 in effect.

136 Specifically, this management plan for the Moose Range and JPUA will:

- 137 • Provide for the management of State land as provided in the implementing legislation (AS
138 16.20.340-360 and AS 41.23.280-41.23.289).
- 139 • A small section of State land was legislatively designated as the JPUA but was not within the
140 boundary of the Moose Range (see Map 2). This management plan will supersede all current
141 management direction now provided by the Susitna Matanuska Area Plan (SMAP) for the small
142 area of State land added to the JPUA. This plan will also reclassify State lands previously classified
143 by area plans within the boundaries of the Moose Range and JPUA.
- 144 • Address trails management and other natural resource protection measures in the Moose Range
145 and JPUA.
- 146 • Recommend designated areas for shooting ranges.
- 147 • Provide the basis for development of regulations necessary to implement the plan.
- 148 • Make recommendations for limits on some activities that are more restrictive than Generally
149 Allowed Uses (GAUs). GAUs are identified in 11 AAC 96.020 and the conditions for GAUs are
150 provided in 11 AAC 96.025.

151 What this Plan Will Not Do

152 The Moose Range and JPUA Management Plan is not the only way in which land management goals are
153 implemented. While the Plan provides an overall basis for State decision making, it is important to
154 recognize that there are limits on its authority and constraints on its application. The following are some
155 important aspects of land and resource management that are beyond the scope of this plan:

- 156 • This Plan does not apply to Federal, Native, private lands, University of Alaska, Alaska Department
157 of Transportation and Public Facilities, or Mental Health Trust Land.
- 158 • Management, maintenance, and protection of fish and wildlife are the responsibility of ADF&G.
159 Allocation of fish and game stocks and regulation of harvest methods, means, and timing are the
160 responsibility of the State Boards of Fisheries and Game.
- 161 • While this Plan provides general management intent for State lands, the Plan does not make
162 decisions about specific land-use authorizations. These decisions are made by land and resource
163 managers through the application review process. Decisions and their stipulations must be
164 consistent with the Plan and existing laws and regulations.

- 165 • This Plan does not provide management intent for prescribing actions and policies for agencies
166 and governments other than DNR and ADF&G.
- 167 • This Plan does not provide recommendations for the management of subsurface resources.

168 Planning Context

169 Relationship of the Moose Range and JPUA Enabling Legislation to Other Statutes

170 The legislation that created the Moose Range intends to maintain, improve, and enhance moose
171 populations and habitat and other wildlife resources of the area while perpetuating public multiple use.
172 The JPUA legislation intends to perpetuate and enhance public recreation and public enjoyment of fish and
173 wildlife and to protect and maintain fish and wildlife and their habitat. All management actions by the
174 implementing agency must be consistent with Alaska Statutes AS 16.20.340-360 (Moose Range) and AS
175 41.23.280-41.23.289 (JPUA).

176 In the absence of more specific guidance contained in the legislation for the Moose Range and JPUA, other
177 provisions of Title 38 (public land) and Title 16 (fish & game) may apply. In addition, other provisions of
178 State and federal laws and MSB code may also apply to the area.

179 Other State laws applicable to resource management in the Moose Range and JPUA include but are not
180 limited to:

- 181 1. Alaska Forest Resources and Practices Act (AS 41.17). The Alaska Forest Resources and Practices
182 Act (AFRP) governs how timber harvesting, reforestation, and timber access occur on state,
183 private, and municipal land. The act is designed to protect fish habitat and water quality and
184 ensure prompt reforestation of forest land while providing for a healthy timber industry.

185 Relationship to Other Plans and Agreements

186 Land within the Moose Range and JPUA has historically been guided by the Matanuska Valley Moose
187 Range Management Plan that was adopted in 1986. The Moose Range Management Plan is consistent
188 with other state, federal, and MSB plans and statutes, described below, that provide additional
189 overarching guidance that have been considered during the development of this plan.

190 Federal Laws and Programs

191 The Federal Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act was signed into law on August 3, 1977 to regulate
192 surface coal mining and reclamation nationwide. In May of 1983, the State of Alaska took primacy of the
193 Abandoned Mine Lands (AML) program which is charged with cleaning up coal mines that were
194 abandoned prior to 1977. The AML program is funded by the AML Trust Fund, which is administered by
195 the Federal Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement (OSMRE). In addition to the AML
196 program, the State of Alaska also took over the Regulatory program from OSMRE. The Regulatory program
197 is responsible for current coal mining operations on state, borough, and private lands in Alaska.

198 These federal laws and programs guide coal mining authorizations and reclamation projects in the Moose
199 Range and JPUA.

200 Matanuska-Susitna Borough Plans

- 201 1. Matanuska-Susitna Borough Comprehensive Development Plan. The 2005 Matanuska-Susitna
202 Borough Comprehensive Development Plan (MSBCDP) consists of a variety of plans addressing
203 MSB and community needs and issues. The comprehensive plan provides general goals and policy
204 recommendations to help guide future development of MSB lands.
- 205 2. Matanuska-Susitna Borough Jonesville Public Use Area Management Plan. In October of 2021, the
206 Mat-Su Borough Community Development Department finalized a management plan for the
207 Jonesville Public Use Area. The Mat-Su Borough Assembly adopted the management plan by
208 ordinance (OR 21-118) on December 21, 2021. The MSB management plan only applies to MSB
209 lands within JPUA. By Alaska Statute and regulations, DNR is required to adopt, maintain, and
210 revise land use plans for the use and management of state-owned land. DNR has considered and
211 included appropriate elements of the MSB plan as part of this planning effort as a significant
212 amount of public engagement and community consensus-building went into the development of
213 the Borough’s plan. However, Jonesville’s context as part of the larger Matanuska Valley Moose
214 Range required DNR to complete a larger, more comprehensive update to the Moose Range
215 Management Plan to ensure that the Moose Range and JPUA Management Plan adequately
216 recognizes and protects state interests.
- 217 3. Sutton Comprehensive Plan. The 2009 Sutton Comprehensive Plan is an element of the MSBCDP
218 and includes the following recommendations relevant to the Moose Range and JPUA:
 - 219 • Encourage a balance between motorized and non-motorized use, particularly in sensitive
220 areas.
 - 221 • Maintain and operate public facilities in the JPUA including restrooms and trash cans.
 - 222 • Develop lake access improvements for Slipper and Coyote lakes.
 - 223 • Manage and protect public safety and health at public facilities and recreation areas.
 - 224 • Encourage the Borough, State, and private stakeholders to take an active role in the planning,
225 construction, maintenance and operation of the facilities and trails.
 - 226 • Encourage enforcement of regulations and laws that address nuisance, noise, trash,
227 vandalism, and other criminal activity.
 - 228 • Solicit input from the Sutton Community Council and trail users.
 - 229 • Support private contracts between the Borough, State, and other governmental and private
230 entities to build, monitor and maintain facilities.
 - 231 • Consider opportunities such as park hosts for these facilities.
 - 232 • Identify opportunities for public and private partnerships for the appropriate location and
233 development of organized shooting opportunities. Such facilities should be conditionally
234 permitted to allow adequate input on safety, hours of operation, lighting, etc.

235 Summary of Plan Actions

236 Management Intent

237 The planning area consists of two Legislatively Designated Areas, the Moose Range and the JPUA. The
238 planning area has been further divided into four management subunits. The Plan presents management

239 intent for each subunit and explains the overall land and resource management goals for each subunit.
240 This information is presented in Chapter 3.

241 Management Guidelines

242 When potentially conflicting uses are designated in a management unit, the plan provides guidelines to
243 allow various uses to occur without unacceptable consequences. Management guidelines for specific
244 management units are given in Chapter 3. Guidelines that apply to the entire planning area are identified
245 in Chapter 2.

246 Land Use Designations and Land Classifications

247 State lands in the planning area will be classified consistent with the land use designations established
248 and described in Chapter 3 of this Plan. A table that shows how designations convert to classifications can
249 be found in Chapter 4. Each of the four management subunits identifies up to three designations
250 representing the uses and resources for which the area will be managed. These designations are then
251 implemented through land classifications as defined by 11 AAC 55.020-277. Land Classification Order SC-
252 23-001 supersedes all classifications within the planning area. The Land Classification Order (LCO) that is
253 to be adopted with this plan is included as Appendix B.

254 Plan Implementation and Modification

255 The plan is implemented through subsequent regulations and the LCO which serves as the final finding for
256 land classification. The plan sets forth policy for DNR in administering land authorizations in consultation
257 with ADF&G. Chapter 4 presents the details of plan implementation recommendations and procedures.

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

261 Specific modifications may be made whenever conditions warrant them, though a request for these
262 changes must follow certain procedures (11 AAC 55.030). The plan may be amended after approval by the
263 Commissioners of DNR and ADF&G following public review and consultation with the appropriate
264 agencies. See Chapter 4 for a more detailed description of procedures for plan modifications,
265 amendments, special exceptions, and minor changes.

266