

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-grade 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 uses of public land compatible 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 Alaska 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 the 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, biking, winter biking, skiing, 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.

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

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

Organization of the Plan

The plan is organized in four main chapters.

Chapter 1: Introduction

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

Chapter 2: Areawide Goals and Management Guidelines

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

Chapter 3: Land Management Guidelines for Individual Subunits

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

Chapter 4: Implementation

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

The appendices, located at the end of the document, include a Glossary, a Land Classification Order, a description of the Trail Management Plan Process, and Enabling Legislation for both the Moose Range and the JPUA.

The Planning Area

See Map 1: Land Status (page 1-5)

Matanuska Valley Moose Range

The Moose Range in Southcentral Alaska is a Legislatively Designated Area (LDA) that is nestled in the southern foothills of the Talkeetna Mountains east of the Little Susitna River and north of the Glenn Highway. The Moose Range is located northeast of Palmer, Alaska and adjacent to the Glenn Highway

between Mile Posts (MP) 59 and MP 80. The Moose Range consists of portions of the Moose, Eska, Granite, Young, California and Boulder Creek drainages, as well as the Kings and Chickaloon River drainages. The rural communities of Sutton and Chickaloon are located within the area.

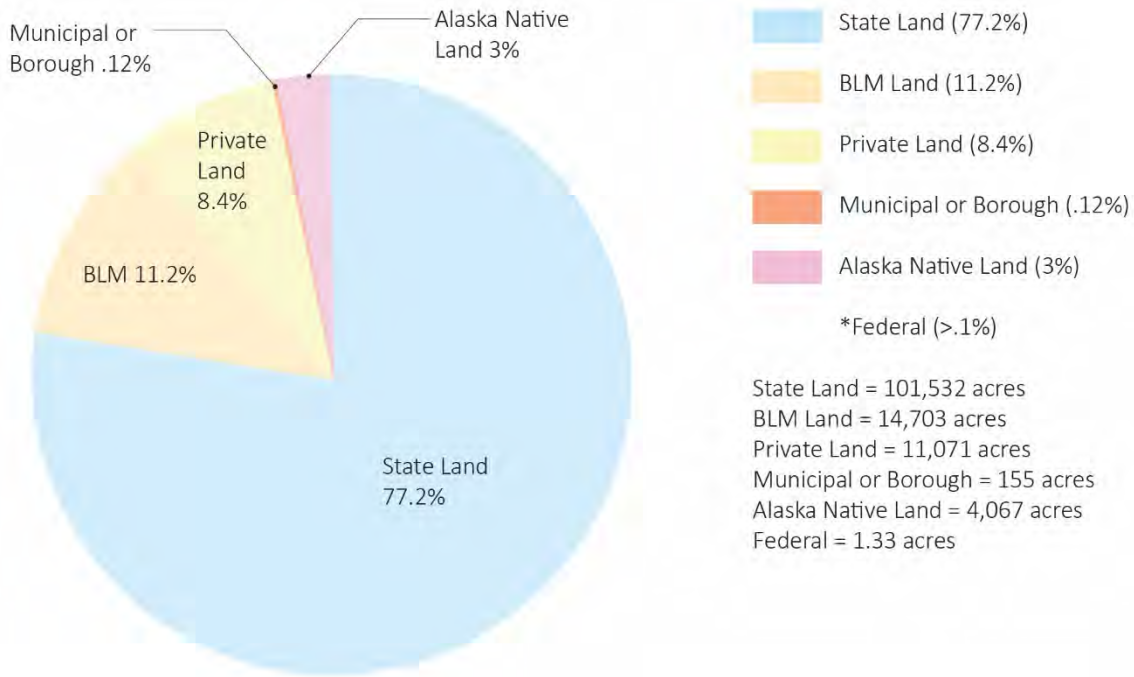
Jonesville Public Use Area

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

Land Ownership

There are just over 131,500 acres of land within the Moose Range and JPUA. The Moose Range contains lands owned by the State of Alaska, MSB, private citizens, Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and Alaska Native organizations. The policies in this plan apply only to state land. A breakdown of the acreage owned by each organization is shown in Figure 1. Note that the BLM land, in many cases, is selected by the state and/or Alaska Native organizations and is yet to be transferred.

FIGURE 1: LAND OWNERSHIP SUMMARY



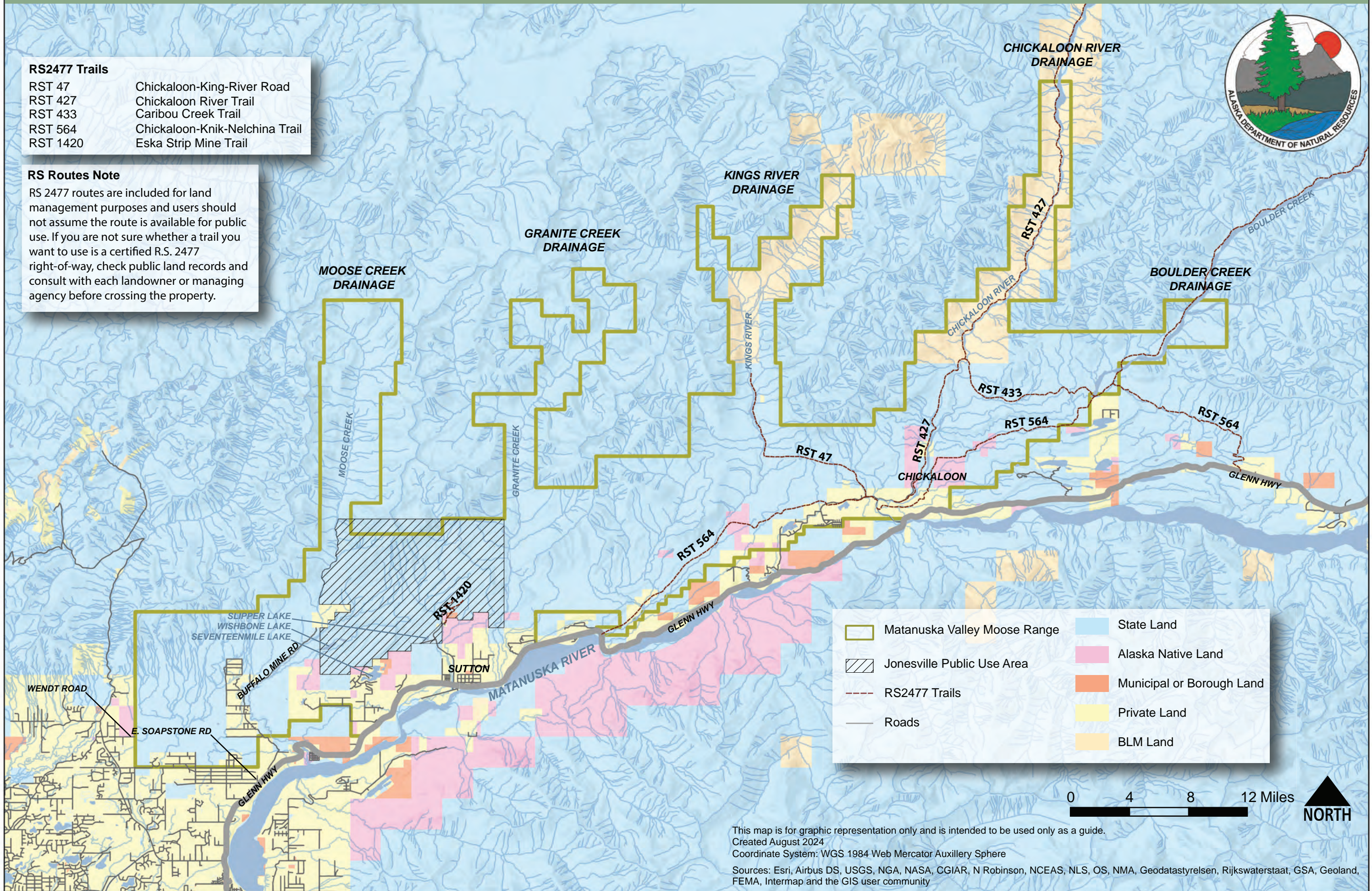
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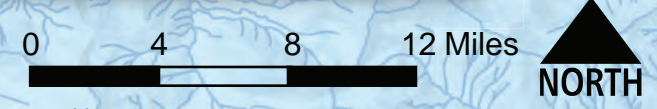
RS2477 Trails

RST 47	Chickaloon-King-River Road
RST 427	Chickaloon River Trail
RST 433	Caribou Creek Trail
RST 564	Chickaloon-Knik-Nelchina Trail
RST 1420	Eska Strip Mine Trail

RS Routes Note
 RS 2477 routes are included for land management purposes and users should not assume the route is available for public use. If you are not sure whether a trail you want to use is a certified R.S. 2477 right-of-way, check public land records and consult with each landowner or managing agency before crossing the property.



Matanuska Valley Moose Range	State Land
Jonesville Public Use Area	Alaska Native Land
RS2477 Trails	Municipal or Borough Land
Roads	Private Land
	BLM Land



This map is for graphic representation only and is intended to be used only as a guide.
 Created August 2024
 Coordinate System: WGS 1984 Web Mercator Auxillary Sphere
 Sources: Esri, Airbus DS, USGS, NGA, NASA, CGIAR, N Robinson, NCEAS, NLS, OS, NMA, Geodatastyrelsen, Rijkswaterstaat, GSA, Geoland, FEMA, Intermap and the GIS user community

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Planning Process

How the Plan Was Developed

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

1. Public Issues Identified. In September 2022, public scoping meetings were held in Sutton, Anchorage, Chickaloon, Wasilla, and virtually to learn about local knowledge of the Moose Range and JPUA, local problems, land use preferences, and concerns about uses of state lands. Approximately 54 people participated in the scoping meetings and more than 200 individuals submitted more than 450 individual comments.
2. Information Gathered and Analyzed. Information about natural resources, existing land uses, land ownership, economic and social characteristics was gathered, mapped, and analyzed. A summary of this information is in Chapter 2. This step was completed in September 2022.
3. Management Recommendations Prepared. Management recommendations for use of the resources in the Moose Range were developed. These plans were based on legislative intent, existing state policies, public comments, and resource characteristics.
4. Draft Management Plan for State Lands Prepared. Using public and agency comments gathered during the scoping period, the draft management plan was developed.
5. Public Draft Plan Reviewed. Agencies, stakeholders, and the public reviewed and provided comments on the draft management plan. Meetings were held in Sutton, Palmer, Chickaloon, and virtually in October 2023.
6. Final Plan Prepared. The final plan recommending management actions and management guidelines was developed in the winter and spring of 2023-2024 based on agency and public comments.
7. Plan is Adopted and Implemented. The Commissioners of the DNR and ADF&G adopted the final plan on July 2, 2024. All uses of the state's land and resources in the Moose Range and JPUA must be consistent with the plan or its amendments for the life of this management plan, estimated at 20 years.

Management Plan Goals

The overarching goals of this management plan include:

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

What this Plan Will Do

The Moose Range and JPUA management plan directs DNR and ADF&G decision making for state-owned land and waters and resources within the plan boundary. The plan will help ensure that state land and resource managers consider the sustained yield of renewable resources, that development is balanced with environmental concerns, and that public multiple use of and access to state land is provided. Finally, the plan documents the state's intent for land management so that the public knows how the state intends to manage land over the period the plan is in effect.

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

- Provide for the management of state land as provided in the implementing legislation (AS 16.20.340-360 and AS 41.23.280-41.23.289).
- This management plan will supersede all current management direction previously provided by the Susitna Matanuska Area Plan (SMAP). This plan will also reclassify state lands previously classified by area plans within the boundaries of the Moose Range and JPUA.
- A small section of state land was legislatively designated as the JPUA but was not within the boundary of the Moose Range (see Map 6, page 3-20). This plan will supersede all other management direction previously provided by other plans.
- Address trails management and other natural resource protection measures in the Moose Range and JPUA.
- Recommend designated areas for shooting ranges.
- Provide the basis for development of regulations necessary to implement the plan.
- Make recommendations for limits on some activities that are more restrictive than Generally Allowed Uses (GAUs). GAUs are identified in 11 AAC 96.020 and the conditions for GAUs are provided in 11 AAC 96.025.

What this Plan Will Not Do

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

- This Plan does not apply to Federal, Native, private lands, University of Alaska, Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, or Mental Health Trust Land.
- Management, maintenance, and protection of fish and wildlife are the responsibility of ADF&G. 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.
- 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 by land and resource managers through the application review process. Decisions and their stipulations must be consistent with the Plan and existing laws and regulations.

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

Planning Context

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

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

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

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

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

Relationship to Other Plans and Agreements

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

Federal Laws and Programs

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

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

Matanuska-Susitna Borough Plans

1. Matanuska-Susitna Borough Comprehensive Development Plan. The 2005 Matanuska-Susitna Borough Comprehensive Development Plan (MSBCDP) consists of a variety of plans addressing MSB and community needs and issues. The comprehensive plan provides general goals and policy recommendations to help guide future development of MSB lands.
2. Matanuska-Susitna Borough Jonesville Public Use Area Management Plan. In October of 2021, the Mat-Su Borough Community Development Department finalized a management plan for the Jonesville Public Use Area. The Mat-Su Borough Assembly adopted the management plan by ordinance (OR 21-118) on December 21, 2021. The MSB management plan only applies to MSB lands within JPUA. By Alaska Statute and regulations, DNR is required to adopt, maintain, and revise land use plans for the use and management of state-owned land. DNR has considered and included appropriate elements of the MSB plan as part of this planning effort as a significant amount of public engagement and community consensus-building went into the development of the borough's plan. However, Jonesville's context as part of the larger Matanuska Valley Moose Range required DNR to complete a larger, more comprehensive update to the Moose Range Management Plan to ensure that the Moose Range and JPUA Management Plan adequately recognizes and protects state interests.
3. Sutton Comprehensive Plan. The 2009 Sutton Comprehensive Plan is an element of the MSBCDP and includes the following recommendations relevant to the Moose Range and JPUA:
 - Encourage a balance between motorized and non-motorized use, particularly in sensitive areas.
 - Maintain and operate public facilities in the JPUA including restrooms and trash cans.
 - Develop lake access improvements for Slipper and Coyote lakes.
 - Manage and protect public safety and health at public facilities and recreation areas.
 - Encourage the borough, state, and private stakeholders to take an active role in the planning, construction, maintenance and operation of the facilities and trails.
 - Encourage enforcement of regulations and laws that address nuisance, noise, trash, vandalism, and other criminal activity.
 - Solicit input from the Sutton Community Council and trail users.
 - Support private contracts between the borough, state, and other governmental and private entities to build, monitor and maintain facilities.
 - Consider opportunities such as park hosts for these facilities.
 - Identify opportunities for public and private partnerships for the appropriate location and development of organized shooting opportunities. Such facilities should be conditionally permitted to allow adequate input on safety, hours of operation, lighting, etc.
4. Chickaloon Community Comprehensive Plan. The 2008 Chickaloon Community Comprehensive Plan contains the following recommendations relevant to the Moose Range and JPUA Management Plan:

- Open space and natural areas are preferable to large clearings and filled in wetlands.
 - Gravel roads, fresh air, clean water, quiet neighborhoods, access to traditional hunting areas, and access to public lands and water are essential in supporting what residents define as the rural character of the area.
 - Chickaloon supports the reservation and development of trails that connect open areas to residential and commercial areas.
 - Build and maintain a trailhead facility at Kings River to protect the river and provide safe access.
 - Relocate trails to avoid private property conflicts.
 - Protect important historical sites and trails.
 - Pursue National Historic designation for the Chickaloon-Knik-Nelchina Trail.
5. Fishhook Community Comprehensive Plan. The 2017 Fishhook Community Comprehensive Plan contains the following recommendations relevant to the Moose Range and JPUA Management Plan:
- Maintain access to public open space.
 - The Moose Range is important for water quantity and quality as an aquifer recharge area, migratory bird habitat, hunting, year-round recreation, and salmon production and activities.
 - Manage trail user conflicts using enforcement, signage, and user education.
 - Encourage the State of AK to defend RS2477 trails.
 - Work cooperatively with DNR to develop and maintain a multi-use trail system within the Matanuska Valley Moose Range and revise a management plan to benefit all user groups as well as fish and wildlife.

Summary of Plan Actions

Management Intent

The planning area consists of two Legislatively Designated Areas, the Moose Range and the JPUA. The planning area has been further divided into four management subunits. The Plan presents management intent for each subunit and explains the overall land and resource management goals for each subunit. This information is presented in Chapter 3.

Management Guidelines

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

Land Use Designations and Land Classifications

State lands in the planning area will be classified consistent with the land use designations established and described in Chapter 3 of this Plan. A table that shows how designations convert to classifications can be found in Chapter 4. Each of the four management subunits identifies up to three designations representing the uses and resources for which the area will be managed. These designations are then implemented through land classifications as defined by 11 AAC 55.020-277. Land Classification Order SC-

23-001 supersedes all classifications within the planning area. The Land Classification Order (LCO) that is to be adopted with this plan is included as Appendix B.

Plan Implementation and Modification

The plan is implemented through subsequent regulations and the LCO which serves as the final finding for land classification. The plan sets forth policy for DNR in administering land authorizations in consultation with ADF&G. 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 55.030). The plan may be amended after approval by the Commissioners of DNR and ADF&G following public review and consultation with the appropriate agencies. See Chapter 4 for a more detailed description of procedures for plan modifications, amendments, special exceptions, and minor changes.