

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

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This chapter includes overview information about the plan and the planning area. An overview map of the planning area is depicted on Figure 1.1.

WHY THIS PLAN WAS DEVELOPED AND LATER REVISED

This revision of the Nushagak & Mulchatna Rivers Recreation Management Plan (RRMP) retains the basic format, text, and recommendations of the initial RRMP as much as practicable. It has been revised to resolve certain problems of upland management within the planning area, establish the RRMP as a stand alone component of the Bristol Bay Area Plan (BBAP), and update sections of the 1990 RRMP that were out of date or inconsistent with current state regulations or agency policy.

Initial Plan.

The initial Nushagak & Mulchatna Rivers Recreation Management Plan (RRMP) was adopted in 1990 in response to the need to create an integrated recreation resource management strategy for the Nushagak and Mulchatna River systems. Previously the Alaska Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G), and Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (ADEC) prepared and adopted the Bristol Bay Area Plan (BBAP) in 1984. The 1984 BBAP provided the overall direction for managing state lands in the Bristol Bay region until its revision in April 2005. The Bristol Bay Coastal Management Plan, prepared by the Bristol Bay Coastal Resource Service Area (BBCRSA) and approved by the state and federal government in 1987, provides direction for managing resources in coastal areas of the region under the Alaska Coastal Zone Management Program¹. The BBCRSA adopted the RRMP as part of its Coastal Zone Management Plan.

Both the BBAP and RRMP covered the drainages of the Nushagak and Mulchatna Rivers and highlighted the importance of recreation and fish and wildlife values for commercial and noncommercial uses (including subsistence and recreation) in these drainages. Both plans directed DNR and BBCRSA to do additional planning for public use management in the Bristol Bay region. The BBCRSA was also directed to prepare an Area which Merits Special Attention (AMSA) plan, which was subsequently prepared.

In response to these plans and to public concern about subsistence use and increased recreational use in the region, DNR, ADF&G, and BBCRSA signed a cooperative agreement in the fall of 1987 to prepare the Nushagak & Mulchatna Rivers Recreation Management Plan.

¹ The BBCRSA District Plan, which includes the Area Meriting Special Attention, will remain in effect until 2006, when local District Plans are to be revised under the statutes and regulations affecting the ACMP by the legislature in 2004.

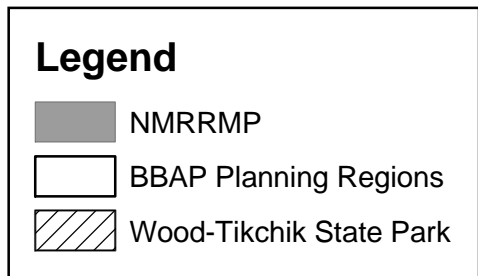
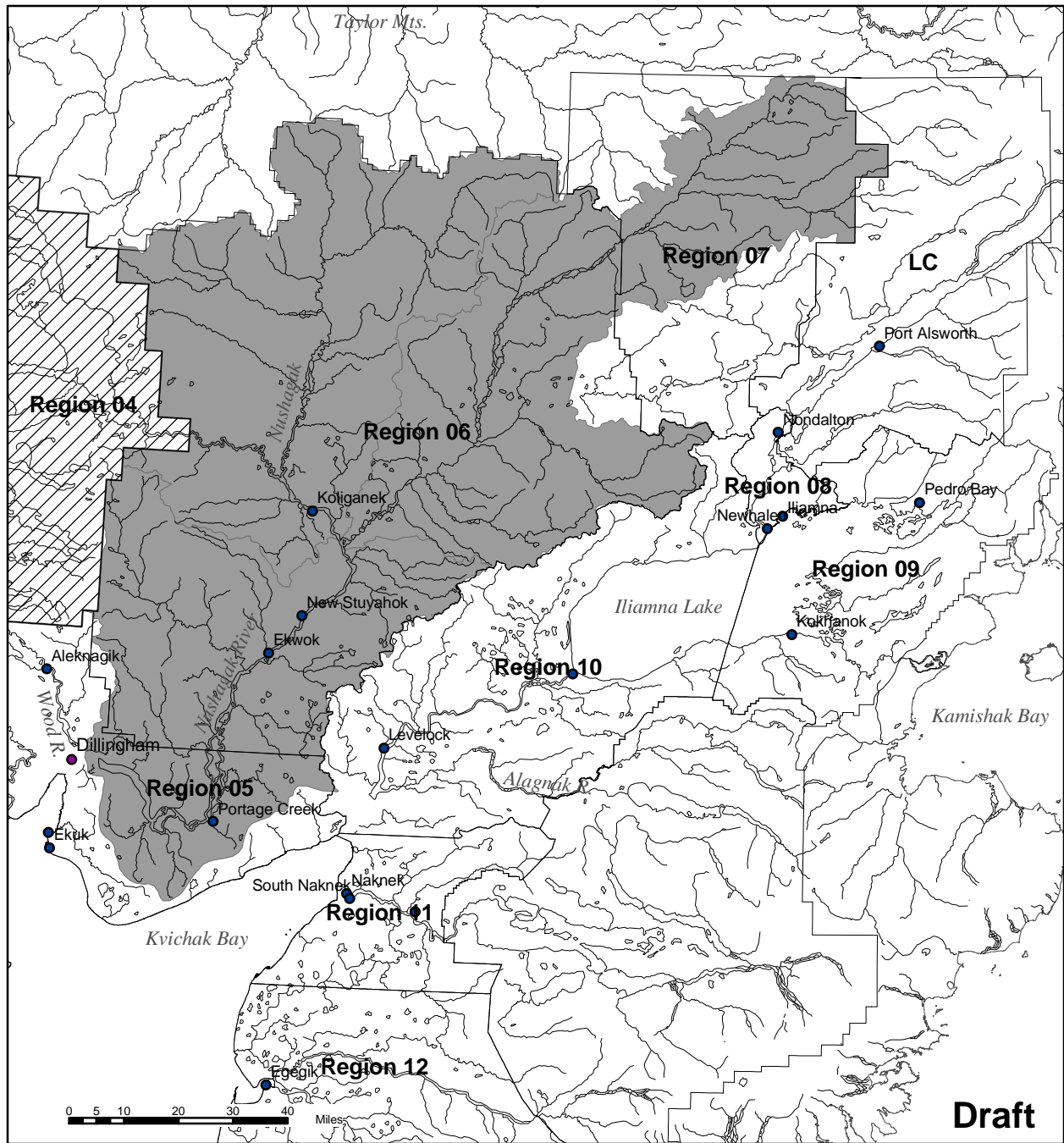


Figure 1.1
 Area of the Nushagak and Mulchatna Rivers
 Recreation Management Plan Showing Planning
 Regions of the Bristol Bay Area Plan

The initial plan was the product of over two years of work by state and local agencies that have resource management responsibilities in the planning area, interest groups, private landowners, and the public. A resource assessment was completed in August 1988. Management alternatives were prepared and reviewed in December 1988 and in January 1989 at public workshops in Anchorage, Dillingham, Ekwok, Iliamna, Koliganek, and New Stuyahok. The draft plan was prepared and reviewed during the summer and fall of 1989 at public hearings in these same locations.

The management plan was adopted by DNR in 1990 in order to provide additional specificity to the management of recreational uses within the river corridors and their adjoining uplands. The BBCRSA adopted the RRMP as the basis for its consistency reviews of potential recreational projects.

Revision of Initial Plan.

DNR revised the initial RRMP during 2004 and 2005 in order to accomplish the following objectives:

- Resolve certain problems of upland management that have been observed since the initial preparation of the RRMP in the late 1980's. This revision drops the outright prohibition on the development of commercial recreation (permanent) in certain upland management units, permitting these to occur on a case-by-case basis. These units are situated a significant distance from the riverine corridors that are the focus of this plan's management. It also revises the management direction for Management Unit 8, changing it from 'Semi-Primitive Recreation' to 'Primitive Recreation', to better protect the subsistence activities in this area.
- Establish the RRMP as a stand alone component of the Bristol Bay Area Plan. While the initial plan was, in fact, an element of the BBAP, it was also linked to the Alaska Coastal Zone Management Program. With the changes that are occurring (2004-2007) to this program, and the need to ensure the continued management of this area in the manner now provided for under the RRMP, links to the ACMP have been severed in this revision. This will not preclude the BBCRSA from revising its District Management Plan or developing, if appropriate, additional 'local' standards for the Nushagak and Mulchatna River systems that lie within their jurisdiction, which does not include areas within the corporate limits of the Lake and Peninsula Borough. Such a revision must be consistent with the new standards for establishing 'local concerns' and the stricter application area of the Habitat standards.
- Update those portions of the RRMP that are out of date or are no longer applicable. Revisions are introduced to reflect changes in resource information, statutory and regulatory changes affecting natural resource management since the initial preparation of the plan, to delete studies and recommendations that were proposed in the initial plan but were never implemented, and reflect changed methods of land management by DNR.

WHAT THIS PLAN COVERS AND DOES NOT COVER

This plan guides state land management pertaining to recreational uses and facilities by the Department of Natural Resources in the Nushagak and Mulchatna drainages. As such, it:

- 1) identifies goals, management intent, and public use sites for 25 management units in the planning area;
- 2) specifies management policies for long-term uses (uses that take place at one site on state land for longer than 14 consecutive days), including permanent and temporary facilities, trapping cabins, boat storage, airstrip development, docks, and other uses, and specifies where these uses may be allowed and where they are prohibited;
- 3) includes guidelines that provide specific management direction for the 25 management units and public use sites; and
- 4) includes implementation information, including procedures for plan changes.

This plan is consistent with the goals and guidelines of the Bristol Bay Area Plan. See the following section² for a more complete explanation of the relationship between the two plans.

This plan does *not* cover or affect:

- 1) Other management issues addressed in the Bristol Bay Area Plan: minerals development, materials extraction, settlement, remote cabins, utilities and transportation, and municipal entitlement decisions.
- 2) Fish and wildlife management. DNR manages land. ADF&G, the Board of Fisheries, and the Board of Game manage use of fish and wildlife resources. Issues raised by the public during the planning process concerning use of fish and wildlife are not addressed in this plan but are addressed by the boards. These issues include how fish and game should be allocated among user groups, hunting and fishing seasons, bag limits, means and methods of harvest, and impact of use on the availability of game.
- 3) Management policies that restrict short-term uses (uses that take place at one site on state land for 14 consecutive days or less), such as hiking, backpacking and camping, light plane and helicopter landings, use of boats, rafts, and canoes, and hunting, fishing, and trapping.
- 4) Lands not owned by the state or not selected for conveyance to the state from the federal government. Specifically, it does not apply to lands owned by private entities, Native corporations, federal lands not selected by the state, or lands owned by the University of Alaska. In many of the more southerly located units, the RRMP only applies to navigable waters. Uplands are either owned by other entities or are not affected by this plan. This situation occurs in management units 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 15, and 24.

² Relationship of Rivers Recreation Management Plan to Bristol Bay Area Plan

- 5) Lands designated Settlement or Minerals in the BBAP. The management intent and guidelines for these are derived from the Area Plan. These designations occur in management units 6, 11, 14, 17, 19, and 24.
- 6) Various aspects of a recreational experience. At this time, DNR does not have adequate authority or information to justify actions that address various aspects of a recreational experience, such as level of encounters (the number of people or groups of people seen during a specified time). For example, DNR cannot justify limiting the number of facilities in a management unit because of the impacts those facilities would have on a level of encounters. To do so requires additional statistics and information on public use and related impacts. Level of encounters is not addressed by this plan but is identified as one aspect for future management.

HOW THIS PLAN APPLIES TO FEDERAL AND PRIVATE LAND

This plan does not provide management guidelines for non-state land. It only applies to state-owned uplands and shorelands³, and to lands selected by the state from the federal government. Private landowners in the planning area may choose to use this plan as a guide for managing their lands.

RELATIONSHIP OF RIVERS RECREATION MANAGEMENT PLAN TO BRISTOL BAY AREA PLAN

The Bristol Bay Area Plan is the basic management plan for the Bristol Bay planning area. It establishes plan designations for all state-owned and state-selected uplands within this planning area and specifies the management intent and management guidelines for these uplands and tidelands. These management guidelines are provided for a wide variety of resources, including but not limited to settlement, forestry, floating facilities, cultural and historic resources, mineral and coal exploration and development, the management of fish and wildlife habitat and harvest, and certain forms of recreational activity. In addition, it establishes the basis for decisions on municipal entitlements for the three boroughs within the planning area, which include the Lake and Peninsula, Bristol Bay, and Aleutians East Boroughs.

The Rivers Recreation Management Plan (RRMP) is a component of the BBAP. The RRMP guides the management of those areas within its planning area that are related to certain forms of recreational activity. In these areas, the RRMP will serve as the basis for the management of these recreational uses and facilities and as the basis for DNR decision making. The management extent of the RRMP in its planning area is, however, *limited to the management of recreational uses that are specified in the RRMP within those areas that are designated Public Recreation and Tourism-Dispersed, General Use, Public Facilities-Retain, or co-designated*

³ Although the state does not own and does not manage uplands owned by the federal government, it does have 906(k) ANILCA concurrence authority over those lands selected for conveyance to the state. Under this section of ANILCA, proposed actions on federal land that have been selected by the state under ANILCA or Section 6 of the Alaska Statehood Act must receive concurrence from the state in order to be authorized.

Public Recreation and Tourism-Dispersed and Habitat in the BBAP. Recommendations of the RRMP do not apply to those areas that are designated Settlement or Mining, the two other designations that are applied by the BBAP within the RRMP planning boundary. In instances where there is conflict between the BBAP and the RRMP, the management guidelines of the BBAP will control. In all instances the recommendations of the BBAP that pertain to municipal entitlements will prevail.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PLANNING AREA

The planning area stretches 20 miles from the headwaters of the Mulchatna River to Bristol Bay and includes the land drained by the Nushagak and Mulchatna Rivers upstream of the Wood River. Wood-Tikchik State Park and Lake Clark National Park and Preserve are not part of the planning area. Figure 1.1 depicts the planning area and the management boundary of the Rivers Recreation Management Plan.

The planning area includes about 6.7 million acres. Approximately 5.7 million acres (85 percent of the total acreage) are state-owned or state-selected. The state also owns and manages all shorelands, tidelands, and submerged lands of the Nushagak and Mulchatna Rivers and other major waterbodies in the planning area. Uses on state land in the planning area are administered by the Department of Natural Resources, Division of Mining, Land and Water (Southcentral Region).

About 720,000 acres (11 percent of the total acreage) are owned or selected by seven Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) corporations. Most corporation land is located on the lower Nushagak River near the communities of Dillingham, Ekwok, New Stuyahok, and Koliganek.

The federal government (Bureau of Land Management - BLM) administers about 250,000 acres (4 percent of the total acreage). BLM also retains interim management authority for state and ANCSA corporation selected land. Other private ownership includes approximately 20 tracts (most of them Native allotments).

The river systems are the dominant physiographic and hydromorphic feature of the planning area. The Nushagak River headwaters in the Nushagak Hills. The drainage divide with the Kuskokwim River basin forms the northern boundary of the planning area. The Mulchatna River drains lakes of the Alaska Range in Lake Clark National Park and Preserve. Both rivers are generally clear in their upper reaches, but become increasingly muddy as they flow to the coast. Because of steeper terrain and fewer lakes in its watershed, the Mulchatna is more often subject to flooding than is the Nushagak, and often flows muddy. The river systems include important clear water tributaries: the Nuyakuk, King Salmon, Chilikadrotna, Koktuli, Stuyahok, and Kokwok Rivers.

Vegetation throughout the planning area is diverse. White spruce, aspen, birch, and cottonwood forests are generally concentrated along streams. The lower Nushagak, Nuyakuk, and upper Mulchatna rivers have large spruce stands. Much of the low rolling mountainous terrain in the northern portion of the planning area is covered with lichen shrub tundra interspersed with open low shrub tundra. The coastal lowlands adjacent to Bristol Bay have hundreds of small lakes and ponds, and large areas of open shrub tundra.

Abundant fisheries resources support important subsistence and recreational uses, and contribute to the valuable commercial fishery in Bristol Bay. Lakes and streams support five species of salmon, rainbow trout, and other freshwater fish. Sport fishing use is increasing in the planning area; much public use is guided; operators fly their clients to a place for the day from nearby lodges or base use out of camps established nearby. Subsistence use is relatively stable in harvest quantities.

Wildlife resources are substantial and support important subsistence and sport hunting, trapping, and wildlife viewing uses. There is valuable habitat for caribou, moose, brown bears, raptors, and other animals. The Mulchatna Caribou Herd has increased greatly since 1980, and hunting effort and harvest have risen sharply, particularly in the Mulchatna drainage. Subsistence use originates from local communities or is based out of cabins located near traditional hunting areas. Outfitters and guides establish camps for use by their clients.

Airplanes provide major access to the area. Reliable floatplane landing areas are distributed on lakes and rivers throughout the Nushagak basin. Gravel bars along streams and tundra-covered ridge tops provide natural landing sites for wheeled airplanes. Much airplane use originates from Dillingham, Iliamna, Port Alsworth, King Salmon, and Anchorage.

Most of the main stems of the rivers are accessible by motorboat. Motorboat traffic is heaviest on the lower Nushagak. Canoes, rafts, and kayaks provide hunting, fishing, and recreational access to smaller drainages. Important rivers for guided and unguided floating include the Chilikadrotna, upper Mulchatna, upper Nushagak, Stuyahok, Koktuli, and Nuyakuk.

The planning area is divided into 25 management units (see Plan Map 3.1 in the envelope in the back of the plan).