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1. Little Susitna River Management Unit

1a. Lower Little Susitna River Subunit..... 3 - 13
1b. Middle Little Susitna River Subunit 3 - 16
1c. Upper Little Susitna River Subunit..... 3 - 18

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2 **1. Little Susitna River Management Unit**

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4 **Background**

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6 **Miles of River**

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8 This unit includes approximately 67 river miles of the Little Susitna River and 5.5 miles of
9 Nancy Lake Creek. The management unit extends from the northern Susitna Flats Game
10 Refuge boundary (RM 33.2) to the south boundary of the Hatcher Pass Management Area
11 (RM 100).

12
13 **Land Ownership**

14	State	14,598 acres
	Matanuska-Susitna Borough	1,581 acres
	Mental Health Trust	838 acres
	Native	284 acres
	Private & Other	80 acres
	Total	17,381 acres

15
16 **River Characteristics**

17
18 From the headwaters to the mouth, the Little Susitna River changes from a clear, rushing
19 mountain stream to a slowly meandering muddy river draining marshy lowlands. Channel
20 widths range from 75 to 200 feet. The ice-free season is generally from May through
21 October. The average streamflow at the Fishhook Road crossing (RM 99.5) ranges from a
22 winter low of 21 cubic feet per second (cfs), to a summer high flow averaging 669 cfs. The
23 100-year floodplain ranges in width from 1,200 feet to 4,000 feet and is of considerable
24 width in the Houston area.

25
26 The terrain within the Little Susitna Recreation River ranges from steep hillsides on the
27 upper river to flat and rolling lowlands on the lower river. Contiguous wetlands are the
28 prevalent land feature in middle sections, particularly in the Nancy Lake Creek area.

29
30 Scenic values are highest on the upper river where the water is clear and there are views of
31 the Talkeetna Mountains. The lower river is silty and slow-moving and visibility is reduced
32 by rolling terrain and tall trees. In the middle reaches, near the Parks Highway, the visual
33 quality is diminished by powerlines, bridges, and other structures.

1 **Fisheries**

2

3 *Species Present*

4

Arctic Lamprey	Dolly Varden
Burbot	Pink salmon
Chinook salmon	Rainbow trout
Chum salmon	Sockeye salmon
Coho salmon	Whitefish

5

6 Chinook, coho, and chum salmon spawn throughout the management unit. Pink salmon are
7 common below the Parks Highway. Sockeye salmon spawn in many lakes draining into the
8 river, including Nancy Lake. They are not found in large numbers above Nancy Lake Creek.
9 Burbot and whitefish are found in the lower river. Resident Dolly Varden are present in the
10 upper reaches of the management unit. Small numbers of rainbow trout can be found
11 throughout the ice-free season. Arctic lamprey are present in the Little Susitna River near
12 RM 42. Invasive northern pike have been identified within several lakes adjacent to the Little
13 Susitna River.

14

15 *Sport Fishing*

16

17 The Little Susitna River receives the highest angling effort of the six rivers because it is
18 easily accessible and is closest to population centers in Southcentral Alaska. The peak
19 recreation and fishing activities on the Little Susitna River correspond with the Chinook and
20 coho salmon runs. These are approximately May 21 to July 4, and July 10 to September 1.
21 Sockeye salmon are also caught in small numbers, approximately July 15 to August 30.
22 Rainbow trout are caught throughout the ice-free season.

23

24 The most popular fishing area on the river is adjacent to the Little Susitna Public Use Facility
25 at approximately RM 28. Although most of this use occurs on the Susitna Flats State Game
26 Refuge, some extends into the lower part of Subunit 1a in the Recreation River. Fishing is
27 also popular at the mouth of Nancy Lake Creek and adjacent to the Parks Highway Bridge.

28

29 *Special Regulations*

30

31 The Little Susitna River is closed to salmon fishing above the Parks Highway.

32

33 **Wildlife**

34

35 *Moose*

36

37 Because of their importance as game and for wildlife viewing, moose are the most
38 economically important wildlife species in the planning area. They are particularly important
39 in this management unit because the Little Susitna River is relatively accessible. The unit
40 provides moose with food, forest cover, and water. Associated wetlands are critical for

1 moose calving in the spring. Riparian habitat is critical to winter survival of moose and also
2 provides travel corridors. Upland coniferous forests provide thermal cover and shallower
3 snow depths.

4
5 *Bear*

6
7 Because brown bear are less tolerant of human modifications to the environment, black bear
8 are more common in this drainage than brown bear. Black bear begin to frequent the
9 lowlands and river flats in early May. High spring densities can be found near the mouth of
10 the river. During June and July, bear are attracted to the river due to increased presence of
11 salmon. The river also provides travel corridors which are an important component of brown
12 bear habitat.

13
14 *Bald Eagles*

15
16 Eagles are known to feed on spawning salmon and perch in trees within the unit. Several
17 nesting sites are documented along the lower and upper subunits of the river corridor.

18
19 *Trumpeter Swans*

20
21 Lakes with suitable nesting habitat, occur within the corridor. Trumpeter swan nesting sites
22 have been documented within the lower and middle Little Susitna River subunits.

23
24 *Hunting*

25
26 The most heavily hunted areas are road-accessible areas, followed by off-road vehicle, boat,
27 and aircraft-accessible areas. The Parks Highway and the Little Susitna River Access are the
28 primary access points to the Little Susitna River. Moose and black bear are the primary
29 species harvested. A significant amount of the black bear harvest within Game Management
30 Subunit 14A occurs along the Little Susitna River. Most of this harvest occurs in May, June,
31 and September with June being the peak harvest period.

32
33 *Trapping*

34
35 Recreational trapping for beaver, coyote, fox, mink, and muskrat occurs in the corridor
36 during spring and winter open seasons.

37
38 **Camping**

39
40 Recreational use of this unit is high, due to access for fishing. Day use is more common than
41 overnight use. There are two commercial campgrounds and one public campground in
42 Houston. There are numerous undeveloped campsites along the river. Most are located at
43 trail and creek junctions.

1 **Access**

2
3 The Little Susitna River is accessible by several roads. Boats are widely used on the Little
4 Susitna River. Power boats and jet boats are common below the Parks Highway. Use of rafts
5 and canoes is common below Schrock Road. Power boats gain access from the Little Susitna
6 Public Use Facility, the Parks Highway access, or across Cook Inlet from Anchorage.
7 Floaters often begin at the Parks Highway and float to the Nancy Lake State Recreation Area
8 portage or to the Little Susitna River Access Road. Kayaks are common in the spring on the
9 upper river above the Edgerton-Parks Road. Airboat use is infrequent.

10
11
12 **Management Guidelines for the Unit**

13
14 **Boating Restrictions**

- 15
1. *Voluntary no-wake area*
From the oxbow just below the railroad bridge to the Parks Highway Bridge (RM 67.5 - 0-69.6).
Season: May 15 - August 20
Justification: The boat launch in this area is heavily used. The area is also heavily used by bank anglers. The voluntary no-wake area reduces conflicts between powerboaters and bank anglers and reduce safety risks between power-boaters. The river segment is narrow and includes several blind bends. The upper and lower limits of the zone were designed to include the area where heavy powerboat and bank angling use overlap. Signs identifying the voluntary no-wake area may be established.

 2. *Non-motorized area*
From the Plan Boundary above the Little Susitna Access Road (RM 33.1) to the rock one river-mile below Nancy Lake Creek (RM 60.4).
Weekends: The first and third weekends of each month. (12:01 a.m. Saturday to midnight Sunday).
Season: May 15 to August 20
Power-boats-only area
River segment is the same as above non-motorized area.
Weekends: The second and fourth weekends of each month (12:01 a.m. on Saturday to midnight Sunday).
Justification This area is popular with both powerboaters and floaters, particularly during the salmon runs. The “alternating weekends”

provide high quality float and powerboat opportunities regularly through the summer and reduces user conflicts. The fifth weekend of each month and weekdays from May 15 - August 20 have no restrictions.

The restrictions end in mid-August when there are fewer boaters and fewer conflicts on the river.

The upper limit of the non-motorized area is at a rock below Nancy Lake Creek which is a popular fishing hole. The non-motorized area does not constrain the area above the fishing hole that is traditionally used by powerboats from Houston and Miller’s Reach.

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1a. Lower Little Susitna River Subunit

Background

Miles of River/River Characteristics, RM 33.2 to RM 65.5 and Nancy Lake Creek RM 0 to RM 5.5

The subunit extends from the Susitna Flats Game Refuge to the City of Houston western boundary. It also includes the lower 5.5 miles of Nancy Lake Creek.

The river meanders through this subunit and moves slower than in the subunits upstream. Contiguous wetlands cover 75 to 80 percent of the subunit above Nancy Lake Creek, and 15 to 20 percent of the area in the lower third of the subunit.

Land Ownership

State	12,728 acres
Mental Health Trust	838 acres
Matanuska-Susitna Borough	1,581 acres
Total	15,147 acres

Wildlife

Eagles are known to feed on spawning salmon and perch in trees within the subunit. Several nesting sites are documented along the lower portions of the river corridor. Lakes with suitable nesting habitat, occur within the corridor. Trumpeter swan nesting sites have been documented within the lower subunits.

1 **Access**

2
3 There are three roads that provide access to this part of the Little Susitna River and its
4 tributary, Nancy Lake Creek. The Little Susitna Access Road, to the south of the subunit,
5 serves as the primary access and boat launch for the lower river. Floaters also take out there.
6 Considerable pedestrian and off-road vehicle traffic extends up the river from this road. The
7 George Parks Highway, just above this subunit, also provides access for boats and off-road
8 vehicles that use this subunit. Finally, a road at RM 7 on Nancy Lake Creek provides boat
9 access to the creek.

10
11 Two float plane landing areas are located adjacent to the subunit at Hock and Yohn Lakes.
12 Primitive foot trails connect the river with these lakes. The river is too narrow and shallow to
13 accommodate floatplanes.

14
15 The frozen Little Susitna River and Nancy Lake Creek are used for winter travel. There are
16 interconnecting winter trails in the subunit between Nancy Lake, Houston, Willow, and Big
17 Lake that are used primarily by snowmachines and dog teams. The trails follow seismic lines,
18 powerlines, or open swamps west of the Parks Highway. The Iditarod National Historic Trail
19 crosses the Little Susitna River near Yohn Lake. The Susitna 500 and Little Su 50k winter
20 wilderness races parallel and cross portions of the Little Susitna River in Subunit 1a.

21
22 **Heritage Resources**

23
24 There are just a few known heritage sites in this subunit, but this section of the river is
25 particularly rich in traditionally-harvested resources and the potential for more heritage sites
26 is very high. The Iditarod National Historic Trail, which crosses this subunit, was the winter
27 route used to transport mail and supplies from Seward to Nome during the early part of this
28 century.

29
30
31 **Management Intent**

32
33 **Class I.** This subunit is used by a variety of users year-round, because of its proximity to the
34 railbelt and because it is rich in Recreation Resources.

35
36 The subunit features high quality fishing, hunting and camping opportunities for
37 powerboaters, floaters, and bank fishermen in a relatively remote, undeveloped setting. In the
38 winter, the subunit features numerous snowmachine, dog mushing, and cross-country skiing
39 trails. It also includes winter moose habitat and salmon spawning habitat. The subunit will be
40 managed to provide and enhance these recreation opportunities and fish and wildlife habitat.
41 Maintaining levels of low development and an essentially unmodified natural environment
42 will be the focus of management. Maintaining public use sites is a high priority. While Class
43 I intent is generally defined as having low levels of social interaction between users, higher
44 levels of use are accessible in this popular subunit, including accommodating road access at
45 the upper and lower ends of this subunit and on Upper Nancy Lake Creek. Management of

1 this subunit is expected to be higher than in other Class I areas because of the level of public
2 use. Management includes some seasonal restrictions on powerboat and floatboat use in
3 order to provide both motorized and non-motorized recreation opportunities.
4

5
6 **Management Guidelines**

7
8 **Boating Restrictions.** See management guidelines for the Little Susitna River Management
9 Unit in this chapter.

10
11 **Iditarod Trail.** The Iditarod National Historic Trail crosses this subunit on borough lands
12 near Yohn Lake. For guidelines on activities near these trails on state lands see Chapter 2:
13 *Trails, Iditarod Race Trail and Heritage Resources, Iditarod National Historic Trail.*

14
15 **Heritage Resources.** Historic and prehistoric sites in this subunit should be evaluated for
16 their interpretative values for tourism or general interest sites because of easy public access
17 and the concentration of sites.

18
19 **Public Information.** At the Little Susitna River Access Road a kiosk may be established to
20 provide information on the Recreation Rivers. A sign may also mark the lower limit of the
21 Recreation River near RM 33.2.

22
23 **Overlap between Management Unit & Nancy Lake State Recreation Area.** There is an
24 inadvertent overlap between the Little Susitna Recreation River Management Unit and the
25 Nancy Lake State Recreation Area. This error should be corrected in the statutes. Areas that
26 remain in the Recreation Rivers, outside of the state recreation area, should be managed
27 consistent with this subunit.

28
29 **Regulations in the Nancy Lake State Recreation Area.** This river segment has dual
30 designation as a Recreation River and a State Recreation Area. Boating regulations are
31 consistent with those for the Little Susitna River non-motorized zone. ADNR also adopted
32 camping regulations for the areas within one-half mile of the Little Susitna River in the
33 Nancy Lake State Recreation Area. Regulations are consistent with the four-day camping
34 regulations for all the Recreation Rivers.

35
36
37 **Public Use Sites**

38
39 See *Public Use Sites* in Chapter 2 for management guidelines. Specific locations are shown
40 on maps at the end of this unit.

41
PU 1a.1 Iditarod National Historic Trail Crossing (RM 34). This is a popular
campsite.

- PU 1a.2 Hock Lake Trail** (RM 39.5). This is a well-used access point to Hock Lake. ADF&G has a weir camp located at this site.
- PU 1a.3 Papoose Creek** (RM 47.5). This is a popular area for camping, hunting and fishing. Site is adjacent to pipeline corridor.
- PU 1a.4 Skeetna Lake Portage** (RM 55). This site includes the trail portage to Skeetna Lake in the Nancy Lake Recreation Area. This is also a popular camping spot.
- PU 1a.5 Campsite by the Big Rock Fishing Hole** (RM 60). This is a popular fishing hole and camping area.
- PU 1a.6 Nancy Lake Creek Junction** (RM 61.5). This is a popular area for fishing and camping. Red salmon linger at this confluence before ascending Lake Creek to Nancy Lake where they spawn. Utility corridor goes through this site.
- PU 1a.7 Miller’s Reach Boat Launch** (RM 65.5). This site includes a side road in this subdivision that is used as a powerboat launch.

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2
3 **Recommendations for this Subunit**
4

5 **Cooperative Management Agreement.** The DMLW, DPOR, ADF&G, and the borough
6 may work cooperatively on recreation management along the Little Susitna River between
7 Hock Lake and the Little Susitna River Access Road. High public use and the close
8 proximity of the boat launch, campground, refuge, weir, harvest survey station, and borough
9 lands warrant cooperative recreation management in the area. Cooperative management
10 agreements should address issues such as facility maintenance, regulations, use of facilities
11 and equipment, funding, and field staff responsibilities. Also see Chapter 4, *Agency*
12 *Responsibilities*.
13
14

15 **1b. Middle Little Susitna River Subunit**
16

17 **Background**
18

19 Miles of River/River Characteristics, RM 65.5 to RM 74
20

21 This subunit includes that portion of the Little Susitna River within the city of Houston
22 boundaries. The subunit is shorelands with no associated uplands, this segment of the river is
23 about 50 feet wide. The upland tract in this subunit has little dry land; it is 60 to 75 percent
24 contiguous wetland, and three- to five-percent non-contiguous wetland.
25
26

1 **Land Ownership**

2
3 This subunit is state-owned shorelands with no associated uplands. The land ownership
4 surrounding the corridor is primarily private with an approximately mile wide stretch of
5 borough land neighboring the corridor and a small amount of state-owned land as well.
6

7 **Wildlife**

8
9 No known nesting sites for bald eagles or trumpeter swans have been recently surveyed
10 within this subunit.
11

12 **Camping**

13
14 There are three developed campgrounds adjacent to this subunit. One is run by the city of
15 Houston and two by businesses.
16

17 **Development**

18
19 There are numerous homes and businesses adjacent to this subunit. The George Parks
20 Highway and Alaska Railroad bridges cross the river, two major boat launches are located in
21 the vicinity of the Parks Highway bridge.
22

23 **Access**

24
25 The George Parks Highway crosses the river at RM 69.5 and parallels the river for about a
26 mile.
27
28

29 **Management Intent**

30
31 **Class II.** Because of its proximity to the George Parks Highway, the City of Houston, and
32 recreation areas, this subunit receives high public use year-round. In the summer there are
33 high quality fishing and camping opportunities for powerboaters, floaters, and bank users in
34 an accessible, moderately developed natural area. In the winter, the subunit is used by
35 snowmachiners, dog mushers, and skiers. Salmon spawning habitat is located in this subunit.
36 The subunit will be managed to provide and enhance recreation opportunities, and fish and
37 wildlife habitat while accommodating uses associated with private lands adjacent to the
38 subunit. Maintaining public use sites is a high priority. Because of high public use,
39 maintaining existing public use sites and facilities will be the management focus. There are
40 many residences and businesses in the Houston area adjacent to the subunit. There are no
41 non-motorized areas in this subunit. A voluntary no-wake area is located near Houston to
42 protect public safety.
43
44
45

1 **Management Guidelines**

2
3 **Voluntary No-wake Area.** See management guidelines for the Little Susitna River
4 Management Unit in this chapter.

5
6 **Trails.** To discourage trespass on private lands, public pedestrian access should be clearly
7 marked adjacent to the George Parks Highway. Heavily used trails that are causing erosion or
8 bank failure may need to be relocated or reconstructed.

9
10 **Public Information.** In coordination with the Alaska Department of Transportation & Public
11 Facilities, a kiosk may be established which displays information on the Recreation Rivers at
12 the public parking area adjacent to the George Parks Highway. Signs may also be placed on
13 the north and south side of the George Parks Highway Bridge identifying it as a Recreation
14 River.

15
16
17 **Public Use Sites**

18
19 See *Public Use Sites* in Chapter 2 for management guidelines. Specific locations are shown
20 on maps at the end of this unit.

21
22 **PU 1b.1 George Parks Highway Bridge (RM 69.8).** Public use is heavy on both
23 sides of the road between the highway and railroad bridges. There are two
24 developed parking facilities on the north side of the highway bridge. Day use
25 is popular. Floatboats are also launched from the parking areas.

26 **PU 1b.2 Houston Campground (RM 70.5).** The river banks in this area are used for
27 fishing and day use.

28
29
30 **1c. Upper Little Susitna River Subunit**

31 **Background**

32 Miles of River/River Characteristics, RM 74 to RM 100

33 The subunit extends from the City of Houston’s east boundary to the Hatcher Pass
34 Management Unit, just above the Hatcher Pass Bridge. The majority of this subunit is state-
35 owned shorelands with little associated uplands. The river is generally shallow and relatively
36 swift in this subunit. Below RM 81.4 the river becomes silty. The uplands within this subunit
contain no significant wetlands.

1 **Land Ownership**

2

State	1,870 acres
Native	284 acres
Private & Other	80 acres
Total	2,234 acres

3
4 **Wildlife**

5
6 In recent USFWS surveys, occupied bald eagle nests have been observed within this subunit
7 as well as several unoccupied nests.

8
9 **Camping**

10
11 Due to access provided by Schrock, Schrock-Pittman, Fishhook, and Wasilla-Fishhook
12 Roads, there are several popular day-use sites along the river.

13
14 **Development**

15
16 There are many homes and associated structures adjacent to the subunit located on private
17 parcels. Several bridges cross the river in this subunit. The Sushana bridge is the only
18 location where there are state-owned uplands. There may be other bridges that span the Little
19 Susitna shorelands and water column but the adjacent uplands are not state-owned.

20
21 **Access**

22
23 This subunit is accessible from three paved, well-traveled roads. Schrock Road and Fishhook
24 Road are important routes between Wasilla and Palmer and are key residential areas in the
25 Matanuska Valley. A series of unpaved roads parallel the river outside the subunit to the
26 north and south, with many spur roads to access private residences. Boat traffic is minimal.
27 Float boats can launch at Schrock Road or Fishhook Road. The upper portion of the river is
28 too rocky for powerboats. It is used by white-water kayakers when the water is high enough.
29 The lower portion of the subunit is seldom used by powerboaters because of log jams and the
30 closure to salmon fishing.

31
32 Winter use of the area is primarily by snowmachine on or adjacent to the river. Several off-
33 road vehicle trails and seismic lines cross the subunit.

34
35 **Heritage Resources**

36
37 While only one known site exists in this subunit, the potential for more is high. Considerable
38 historic mining activity has occurred in the area.

39
40

1 **Other Activities**

2
3 There is an ADOT/PF gravel pit located within the subunit at RM 84.5. Car dumps are
4 located near the subunit on both sides of the river.
5

6
7 **Management Intent**

8
9 **Class II.** This subunit includes mostly shorelands and the water column bounded by private
10 land. It features fishing (trout and Dolly Varden only) and camping opportunities for
11 powerboaters, floaters, and bank users in an accessible, moderately developed area. It also
12 features salmon spawning habitat and winter moose habitat. Numerous developed and
13 undeveloped private parcels are adjacent to the subunit. The subunit will be managed to
14 maintain and enhance these recreation opportunities, and fish and wildlife habitat, while
15 accommodating uses associated with private lands in the subunit. Maintaining public use
16 sites will be a high priority. There are no non-motorized areas in this subunit.
17

18
19 **Management Guidelines**

20
21 **Boating Restrictions.** None.
22

23 **Personal-Use Forestry.** The Division of Forestry & Fire Protection may designate personal-
24 use cutting areas on the upland parcel just south of Bench Lake in sections 15, 16, and 17 on
25 the upper Little Susitna River. See *Forestry, Personal Use in Road-Accessible Areas*.
26

27 **Public Information.** Signs should be placed on either side of the Hatcher Pass bridge,
28 identifying the Little Susitna Recreation River.
29

30 **ADOT/PF Materials Site.** There is an existing ADOT/PF material site in this subunit near
31 RM 14. ADOT/PF manages this site under an interagency land management transfer (ILMT)
32 from ADNR (ADL 59287). The site will be managed consistent with the ILMT which allows
33 ADOT/PF to construct, maintain or improve, and remove buildings, roads, airports, and
34 works of any description, and to use or remove sand, gravel, timber, or other materials
35 necessary to make use of the lands for public purposes. Plan guidelines and management
36 intent do not apply to this site. However, management of the site must be consistent with the
37 Recreation Rivers Act. After materials extraction is completed, the site will be rehabilitated
38 consistent with the ADOT/PF standards. If surface jurisdiction and management of the site
39 returns to ADNR, it will be managed consistent with the plan guidelines and management
40 intent for the subunit.
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1 **Public Use Sites**

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3 See *Public Use Sites* in Chapter 2 for management guidelines. Specific locations are shown
4 on maps at the end of this unit.

5

PU 1c.1 Day Use Site (RM 81). This site is accessed by road on the south side of the river and is used for fishing and camping.

PU 1c.2 Schrock Road (RM 84.5). This road crossing is used for accessing the river, launching floatboats, fishing, and day use. There is a cleared area adjacent to the bridge used by vehicles for overnight camping.

PU 1c.3 Sushana Road Bridge (RM 87.7). This is a popular camping spot.

PU 1c.4 Carney Road Bridge (RM 90.5). This is a popular fishing spot.

PU 1c.5 Welch Road Bridge (RM 92.8). This site is popular for fishing.

PU 1c.6 Hatcher Pass Bridge (RM 99.5). This is the entrance to the scenic Little Susitna River canyon, running through the Hatcher Pass Public Use Area. Sightseeing from the bridge is popular, and ADOT/PF has recently provided a parking area for sightseers. The banks adjacent to the bridge are also used for taking out kayaks.

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Location Map: Little Susitna River Management Unit

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Map 1: Little Susitna River

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Map 2: Little Susitna River

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Map 3: Little Susitna River

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Map 4: Little Susitna River

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Map 5: Little Susitna River

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