



Susitna Basin Recreation Rivers Update on Planning Effort



FALL 2022

Newsletter #1

DEAR INTERESTED CITIZEN,

The Alaska Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has completed the first phase of the planning process, which will result in the revision of the Susitna Basin Recreation Rivers Management Plan. During the scoping phase, the planning team learned quite a bit about the issues, concerns and ideas the public has regarding the river corridors. This input helps form the basis for the scope of work and focus during the remainder of the planning process. Although the scoping phase of the public process is complete, the planning team will continue to gather information and identify issues in the months to come.

The public scoping comment period ended on August 15, 2022. During the scoping period the Recreation Rivers Planning Team held three in-person public workshops in June and a virtual public workshop in early August. The purpose of these workshops was to solicit public input on uses, resources, and issues within and adjacent to the Recreation Rivers corridors. We learned a great deal about how the public uses the rivers and would like them to be managed in the future. To view the comments submitted at the workshops as well as a recording of the virtual workshop, visit the project website: <https://dnr.alaska.gov/mlw/planning/mgtplans/susitna-revision/>.

In addition to the input received at the scoping workshops, participants submitted responses to a user questionnaire. Separate written comments were also received during the comment period from individuals, groups, and organizations.

The planning team continues to work closely with the Susitna Basin Recreation Rivers Advisory Board and state agencies to assemble resource information and analyze issues. This detailed information-gathering portion of the planning process is crucial for the planning team to fully understand issues and begin drafting preliminary alternatives and management actions.

We would like to thank everyone who made the effort to attend a workshop, complete the questionnaire, or submit scoping comments. Your participation in this process will certainly help us develop a shared vision for the future of the Recreation Rivers.

- The Recreation Rivers Planning Team



PUBLIC COMMENTS

The following is a summary of comments received from the public during the scoping phase of the planning process. Summaries are organized by major themes including:

- Fish & Wildlife Habitat
- Access
- Commercial Development
- Implementation

FISH & WILDLIFE HABITAT

SUMMARY OF FISH & WILDLIFE

HABITAT COMMENTS: A major theme from commentors was maintaining or expanding protections for fish and wildlife habitat within the corridors. The comments calling for protection of fish & wildlife habitat can be separated into several categories as highlighted below:

Habitat Degradation from Motorized Use: Concern over damage to spawning areas from motorized use was brought forth by several commentors. These concerns included motorized boats disrupting spawning beds and ATVs damaging stream corridors.

Riparian Corridors & Stream Bank

Erosion: Several commentors expressed concerns over increased rates of bank erosion within the corridors, water quality and the degradation of riparian areas.

Adverse Effects from Climate Change:

Commentors were concerned about climate change. Participants would like to see the effects on fish & wildlife species due to warming waterbodies and decreasing stream flows considered in the plan revision process. Trends from temperature monitoring studies on the Deshka River highlight the importance of cold groundwater inflows on main channel temperatures. As a result, commentors support maintaining instream flow

reservations to preserve the quantity of water that supports fish and wildlife populations.

Economic Value: Commentors highlighted the economic value of maintaining fish and wildlife habitat. One commentor said that bird-watchers are the largest group of eco-tourists and tend to stay for lengthy visits contributing to the economy of the area noting that the river corridors are a significant breeding ground for migratory birds. Sportfishing and hunting within the corridors are important recreational activities but are also great economic resources for the Mat-Su valley through guiding services, fly-in services, and lodges. A commentor stated that “Local sportfishing businesses are viable employers and economic contributors because of the healthy habitat and intact river systems of the region and the strong fish and wildlife populations they support.”

ACCESS

SUMMARY OF ACCESS COMMENTS:

The West Susitna Access Road was the focus of many comments with most participants against the development of the road. A few commentors were in favor of the road because it could potentially increase public access to the corridors. We heard from several commentors that would like to see greater public access to certain river corridors while many commentors would like to see access remain as it is now to limit environmental damage.

COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT

SUMMARY OF COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT COMMENTS:

Many comments were focused on commercial development within the corridors. Several participants expressed that they would like to see very little to no new development within the corridors; however, we also heard that thoughtful development should be considered. One participant stated “I do



not see that this Plan is an impediment to development. A close reading of the Plan shows guidelines for human development. With these guidelines, development can co-exist with fish and wildlife habitat, recreation, public enjoyment, economic use, multiple use of the uplands and accommodation of access.” Several participants were concerned about potential commercial development associated with the proposed West Susitna Access Road. Concerns over habitat degradation and impacts to water quality from the proposed Matanuska Electric Association’s Fishhook to Pittman Transmission line were also brought forth.

IMPLEMENTATION

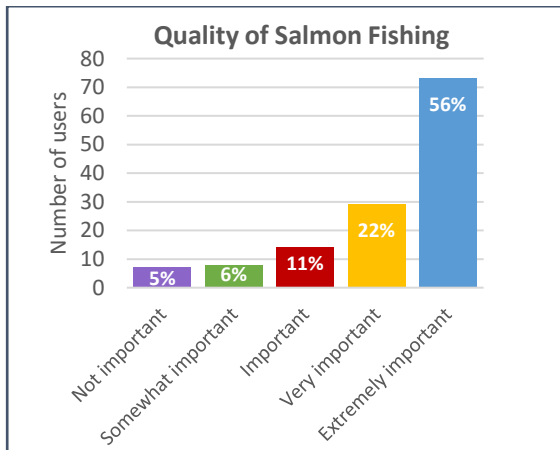
SUMMARY OF IMPLEMENTATION

COMMENTS: Several participants wondered how many of the provisions in the 1991 plan were actually implemented, particularly those related to the proposed additions to the river corridors.

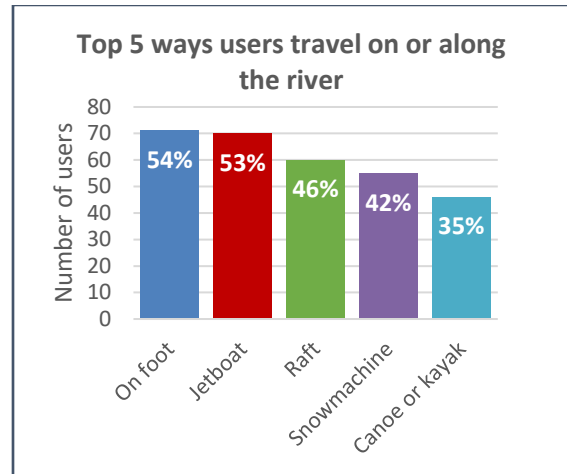
QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

The following section highlights some of the results from the user questionnaire.

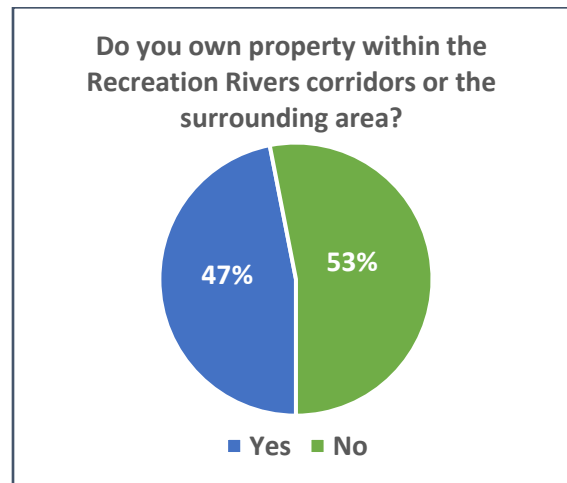
89% of participants thought that the quality of salmon fishing was important on some level while 56% ranked it as “Extremely Important”.



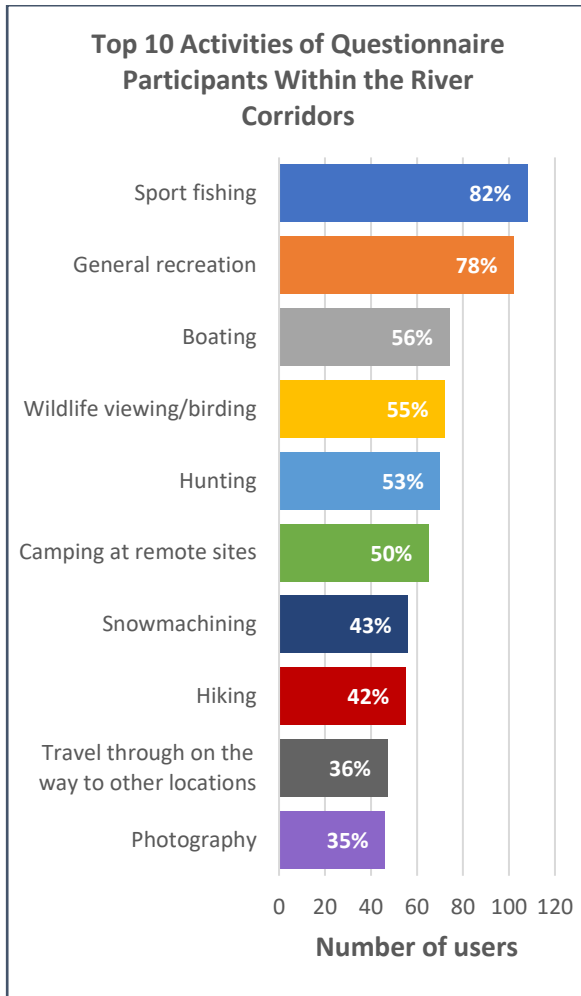
Most users traveling on or along the river corridors do so on foot or jetboat while fewer use a canoe or kayak.



Of the participants that took the survey, nearly half of them owned land within the river corridors.



The list of activities within the corridors is lengthy, but several were particularly popular. 82% of questionnaire participants utilize the river corridors for sport fishing, 53% for hunting, and 43% use the corridors for snowmachining.



PLANNING PROCESS SUMMARY & TIMELINE

1. **Scoping & Issue Identification (June - August 2022)**

Through a public involvement process, identify issues and concerns in the area.

2. **Gather Information (Current Step)**

Throughout the planning process collect information about natural resources, present and past land use, land ownership, and the local economy.

3. **Prepare and Evaluate Land Use Alternatives**

Describe possible choices for river corridor management based on public interests, local resources, and state policies. Describe the effects of each choice on goals for the management of an area.

4. **Prepare Draft Plan**

The planning team and advisory board create a draft plan that reflects resource values and public and agency goals. The agencies review the first draft and settle any land use conflicts that remain or propose the best alternatives for public review.

5. **Public Review of Draft Plan**

Hold public meetings to provide the public an opportunity to comment on the draft plan and to identify parts that need to be changed.

6. **Prepare Final Plan**

Review agency and public comments and revise the plan. Prepare the plan for publication.

7. **Approve Plan**

The Commissioner of the Department of Natural Resources approves and signs the plan.

8. **Legislature Reviews Plan**

Plan is submitted to the legislature for review within the first 10 days of the first regular session after completion of the plan by the Commissioner. The plan takes effect 100 days after submission to the legislature unless rejected by an act of the legislature.

9. **Adopt and Implement Plan**

The plan guides management decisions for state lands in the planning area.





FOR MORE INFORMATION

You can visit the project website:
<https://dnr.alaska.gov/mlw/planning/mgtplans/susitna-revision/>

The following is available on the project website:

- Newsletter #1, Fall 2022
- Scoping Workshops Public Comments, Summer 2022
- Planning Process
- Map of the River Corridors
- Susitna Basin Recreation Rivers Management Plan, August 1991

You can also contact:

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HOW CAN YOU BE INVOLVED?

Public involvement is one of the most important parts of the planning process enabling the agencies to choose land management alternatives that provide the greatest benefit for all Alaskans. You can get involved by:

- Visiting our website and reviewing existing documents and the planning process steps;
- Receiving newsletters and plan updates or notices;
- Attending Susitna Basin Recreation Rivers Advisory Board Meetings and speaking to Advisory Board members; and
- Attending future public meetings and submitting comments on future documents.

As we continue to gather information and work on plan alternatives, we will keep you updated on the progress of the planning effort through newsletters like this one. If you received this newsletter by mail or email, you are on our mailing list. If you did not receive this newsletter directly from us, please contact us so that you will receive future planning process updates.

