

2a. Mouth of Deshka River Subunit

Background

MILES OF RIVER/RIVER CHARACTERISTICS, Susitna River Confluence (RM 0.0) to RM 1.9

This subunit extends from above the confluence of the Deshka and Susitna rivers to 0.5 miles above the DFG camp.

Contiguous wetlands comprise ninety percent of the area along the river between RM 0 and RM 1. Most of the dry terrain is in private ownership. From RM 1 to RM 1.9, wetlands occur in the areas between river channels.

LAND OWNERSHIP

State	1,270 acres
Matanuska/Susitna Borough	811 acres
10 Private Parcels	60 acres
Total	2,090 acres

Private Land

Several parcels of private land are located along the west bank of the river near the mouth. There is also private land on the east bank, including the land on which Deshka River Lodge is located. DFG and Fish & Wildlife Protection cabins are located on sites authorized by an Interim Land Management Agreement with DNR. They are surrounded by state land.

FISHERIES

During peak season, the mouth of the Deshka River can receive as much as 80 percent of the daily fishing use for the entire Deshka River.

WILDLIFE

A bald eagle nest is located just east of the subunit, on the Susitna River east of RM 1.5. Active trumpeter swan nests have not been sighted in recent surveys of this subunit.

CAMPING

There have been well over 100 camps set up at the mouth during the fishing season. The borough

now maintains a campground at the mouth and issues permits to camp on its land.

The following undeveloped campsites have been identified:

Primary campsites	4
Secondary campsites	7
Marginal Campsites	0

DEVELOPMENT

Upland Structures and Improvements

There is extensive development in this subunit. All of the private parcels have some level of development. There are three commercial lodges and nine cabins in this subunit. Lodges include the Deshka River Lodge, Silver King Lodge, and Mike and Mert's. There are also two cabins just outside the boundary downstream on the Susitna River. The DFG and Fish and Wildlife Protection each have cabins.

Prior to 1990, there were numerous unauthorized temporary camps in this subunit, primarily on the large bar on the east side of the Susitna River, on the islands in the Deshka, and along the east bank of the Deshka River. Most of these camps were located on borough land. However, a significant number were located on state land. Temporary camps are established in May as soon as ice leaves the river. These camps remain through the summer and many improvements are left through the winter. There are also a number of camps established for just one to three nights peaks during king salmon season. These camps are often located away from the river in less desirable places because of the lack of space on the shoreline. The same areas used for camps are used for boat and equipment storage. Many river users are flown to the mouth of the Deshka, or charter larger boats to access the area and use smaller boats stored in the subunit to travel along the river. Some of the abandoned and stored debris is washed away by spring flooding. However, these storage areas are not flooded on a regular basis and abandoned boats and camps that have accumulated over the years. The borough established a campground in

1990 and now requires a permit for camping in the remainder of the area. This has altered the use patterns and largely eliminated the practice of abandoning camps and equipment on public lands.

Water-Dependent Structures

Five docks are associated with cabins and lodges in this subunit. Many of the cabins and lodges have small shelters or storage areas adjacent to the river for equipment and gasoline. There are also some access stairways, particularly along the steep west banks of the river. A large stone wall to reduce erosion is located in front of the Deshka River Lodge. In the past, the Alaska Boating Association has maintained buoys signs for a voluntary no-wake area.

ACCESS

Foot and off-road vehicle trails have been established in the subunit. Most are associated with structures on private land or the campsites along the east bank of the Deshka River. Access to the area is by airplane or boat. The mouth of the river is used as a pick-up point for float trips and by

fishermen. Most powerboats that use the river are launched from the Deshka Landing. The most congested section of the Deshka River for boats is below RM 0.4 which offers the best fishing opportunities.

Floatplanes and wheelplanes land near the mouth of the river. An airstrip is located at the Silver King Lodge (at the Susitna River confluence). Floatplanes also frequently land on the Susitna and Deshka rivers. There are also primitive landing areas on gravel bars.

HERITAGE RESOURCES

There is a high probability of locating additional heritage resources sites in the subunit. Known sites are on private land.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

Small-scale timber cutting has occurred in this area to clear the two airstrips, and for firewood and houselogs. There is also extensive wood gathering by campers.

Management Intent

Class III. This subunit is notable for its high concentration of anglers in a relatively small area during the king and silver salmon runs. The subunit features high quality fishing and camping opportunities for powerboaters, floaters, and bank users in an accessible moderately developed area. Lodges and residences are located on either side of the river. With good wheel and floatplane access, this subunit receives more air traffic than any other area in the Recreation Rivers. Winter use is by snowmachiners, skiers, and dog mushers. The subunit will be managed to provide and enhance these recreation opportunities, and fish and wildlife habitat, while accommodating uses associated with private lands. Management presence is expected to be high. Managing for concentrated public and commercial use will be the focus of management activities. Proposed actions include providing public facilities such as

a campground and privies to minimize unsanitary conditions, reducing damage to natural resources from over-use, and preventing unauthorized use of public lands. Because of the concentration of use, public education through signs and a visitor contact station is recommended. There will be a voluntary no-wake area at the mouth to protect public safety during the fishing season. There are no non-motorized areas in this subunit. Because of the proximity of state and borough lands and intense public use, cooperative management or conveyance of part of this area to the borough should be considered.

Borough Lands. Borough lands in this subunit are classified "Public Recreation." For management intent on borough lands, contact the Matanuska-Susitna Borough.

Management Guidelines

No-Wake Area. See management guidelines for the Deshka River Management Units in this chapter.

Boat Storage. A public boat storage area(s) should be designated near the mouth of the Deshka River. See *Shoreline Development, Boat Storage* in Chapter 2.

Commercial Camps. Commercial camps are prohibited on state land in this subunit. Borough use of this land for a visitor contact station, public campground, or other public facility may be authorized by permit or lease.

Camping Limits. If borough camping policies result in trespass, sanitation problems, overcrowding, threats to public safety, or resource damage on state lands DNR should work with the borough to address these problems. Limits in addition to the four-day camping limit on state land may be considered. If needed, these limits may be established by regulation, designating the area a *Special Use Area* under 11 AAC 96.010; or under the closures and use-management provisions described under *Recreation* in Chapter 2.

Floatplane Landing Area. The lower Deshka is an extremely popular fishing, boating, and recreation area. Public access is by float plane and powerboat. Because of the high density of floatplanes and boats on the river, DNR should consider establishing a floatplane landing area during the peak season, when boat and plane traffic is heaviest. DLW, DGGs, the borough, FAA and the public should be involved in the process of evaluating boat and plane use patterns, airspace, hydrology, and other variables. If the initial evaluation demonstrates that a designated landing area is feasible and prudent, a landing area should be designed. DNR should then implement needed regulations, establish signs or buoys, and notify FAA and the public of the designated landing area.

Wheelplane Landing Strips. One lodge in this subunit has authorization for a private airstrip. The only public wheelplane access is on a primitive landing area on a state-owned island at the mouth of the Deshka River, and a similar one on the other side of the Susitna River. To improve public wheelplane access and to protect the public, DNR and the borough should:

1. *Consider closing the primitive landing strip.* The primitive landing strip located on the state-owned island on the east bank of the Deshka River mouth (Landing Area "B" on Map 1a at the end of this section) has never been authorized by DNR. DNR will consider closing this airstrip. If the airstrip is closed, it will be marked by FAA-approved methods. The FAA will then be contacted and the closure noted in the Notice to Airmen, maps, and other FAA publications. DNR is not currently proposing to close the primitive undeveloped landing area ("D" on Map 1a) on the southeast side of the Susitna River.
2. *Develop a landing pattern.* To reduce the potential for midair collisions, DNR supports FAA's efforts to identify takeoff and landing patterns over the mouth of the Deshka River in their Notice to Airmen.
3. *Establish a public airstrip.* The Matanuska-Susitna Borough should provide a public-use airstrip on the east side of the Deshka River in this subunit. This area is the first choice for a public airstrip because it is adjacent to the borough campground and an area suitable for launching boats.
4. *Exercise option to convert private strip to public strip.* If the borough does not develop a public airstrip at the above-mentioned site, DNR should consider converting the airstrip on the west side of the river (currently under a private, non-exclusive right-of-way with the state) to a public airstrip. This option is less desirable because the airstrip is on the opposite side of the river from the campground. In addition, construction of a stairway and a public dock would be required to access the river.

Consistent Management of the Mouth Area. One of the goals of the plan is to provide consistent management of lands within the planning area. The Matanuska-Susitna Borough is the major landowner at the mouth of the Deshka River and has initiated a recreation management plan for their lands. The borough also had a land-use permit in 1990 and 1991 to use state lands at the mouth. If the borough agrees to manage state land in Section 35 consistent with the general

management intent for the mouth of the Deshka Subunit and it is consistent with AS 41.23.400 - 510, DNR may consider conveyance or leasing the parcel under AS 38.05.810, or entering into a management agreement. Lands that may be addressed by conveyance or lease are in Section 35, T19N, R6W, and include the two vegetated point bars east of the mouth of the Deshka River and northwest of the main channel of the Susitna River. A plan amendment is not required to convey, lease or reclassify this parcel as long as it is consistent with this intent.

Department of Fish and Game Site. DFG manages a site near RM 2 under an Interagency Land Management Agreement (ILMA) with DNR. The site will be managed consistent with the ILMA. DFG and the Division of Fish and Wildlife Protection currently have cabins on the site. Agency management cabins and storage areas should be consolidated as much as possible. Cabins for DNR field staff and equipment may be constructed near the DFG camp. Since well-drained uplands adjacent to the river in state ownership are limited within this subunit, these lands should be retained in state ownership. See guidelines for *Resource Management Camps* in Chapter 2.

Heritage Resources. Historic and prehistoric sites near the mouth should be evaluated for their interpretive values for tourism and general public interest. Since most of these sites are located on private land, this will require the cooperation of property owners.

Public Information. A sign should be placed at the mouth of the Deshka River identifying the boundary of the Recreation River. A kiosk or visitor contact station should be established in cooperation with the borough to provide information on the use of the river. In addition, a kiosk or other informational display should be located at the Susitna Landing (in cooperation with DFG) and the Deshka Landing (in cooperation with the private landowner).

Weapons. Between June 15 and August 31, discharge of weapons is prohibited within one-quarter mile of the river on state land and water between the mouth of the Deshka River and the DFG camp. See *Recreation, Use of Weapons* in Chapter 3.

Public Use Sites. Unlike other subunits where public use sites were identified, this entire subunit receives high public use and will be managed as important for access, fishing, camping, or other recreation and public use.

2b. Lower Deshka River Subunit

Background

RIVER MILES/RIVER CHARACTERISTICS, RM 1.9 to RM 6.8

This subunit extends from the DFG cabin to the Laub Homestead. The immediate upland terrain is flat to rolling with occasional 30 to 50 foot cut-banks. The river contains numerous channels and islands. The channel is 100 to 200 feet wide. The water is usually brown and relatively slow moving. Less than 25 percent of the subunit is contiguous wetlands. All wetlands are located on the east side of the river.

LAND OWNERSHIP

State	2,084 acres
Matanuska/Susitna Borough	686 acres
3 Private Parcels	254 acres
Total	3,020 acres

FISHERIES

This segment contains at least two popular fishing areas, although visitor use here is lower than at the mouth of the river. The DFG data suggests 9 to 20 percent of the total Deshka River use occurs within this subunit.