

5b. Talachulitna River Canyon Subunit

Background

MILES OF RIVER/RIVER CHARACTERISTICS, RM 2.8 to RM 18.3

This subunit extends the length of the Talachulitna River canyon. The channel width is 40 to 60 feet, and the current is relatively swift. The uplands include steep hillsides and cliffs. Less than five percent of the subunit is wetlands.

LAND OWNERSHIP

State	10,570 acres
1 Private Parcel	5 acres
Total	10,575 acres

WILDLIFE

Black bears concentrate along the river throughout this subunit during salmon season. There are three bald eagle nests in the canyon (RM 7, 8, and 13), and a swan nest at the south end of the subunit (RM 17).

CAMPING

The canyon is a frequent overnight stop-over point for float trips. However, there are fewer campsites than on the upper segments, because of the steep walls of the canyon.

The following undeveloped campsites were identified in this subunit.

Primary campsites	2
Secondary campsites	30
Marginal campsites	15

ACCESS

There is one off-road vehicle trail in this subunit around Dog Lake (RM 5). There is also a foot trail from Lake 430' (RM 3) to the river at RM 2.8. Because of the Class III rapids, boat use is primarily by raft or kayak. Dog Lake (RM 5) is used by floatplanes. A lake at RM 3, adjacent to the subunit, is used by floatplanes to access private cabins. A small landing area at RM 6.8 is used to access private land and fishing areas.

Management Intent

Class I. Because of its remote setting and difficult access, this subunit receives only moderate use by floaters during the snow-free season. This subunit features scenic floating, fishing, and camping opportunities. There is also potential for an adventurous powerboating opportunity during periods of high water. The area is remote, undeveloped, and has important wilderness, and fish and wildlife values. Two sets of Class II-III rapids enhance risk values associated when floating the river. The subunit will be managed to

provide and enhance recreation opportunities and fisheries values while protecting the primitive qualities of the area. Maintaining an essentially unmodified natural environment will be the focus of management attention. Social interaction levels will also be managed for low encounters to protect the quality of users' experiences. Maintaining public use sites will be a high priority. There are seasonal motor restrictions in the southern part of this subunit to provide a non-motorized experience.

Management Guidelines

Boating Restrictions. See management guidelines for the Talachulitna River Management Unit described earlier in this section.

Landing Area in Canyon. A large gravel bar at RM 6.8 is used by wheelplanes for landing. This landing area should remain unimproved and continue to be available for wheelplane access.

Standards for Interaction Impacts. The non-motorized sections of the Talachulitna Creek and Talachulitna Canyon subunits have among the lowest use levels on the Recreation Rivers. They also offer one of the most remote, wilderness-oriented float trips in the planning area. The cost, logistics, and technical skill required to float the river limits use to experienced whitewater floaters. Among these users, there is strong consensus about the type of experience offered on Talachulitna Creek and in the canyon, the impact levels acceptable for that experience, and the need for a permit system if impacts rise above those defined levels.

Key indicators for the type of experience desired by these floaters include camp encounters (or camp sharing -- the percentage of nights camping within sight or sound of another party) and river encounters (the number of other parties seen on the river). Users define the Talachulitna as a remote, wilderness-like, whitewater float trip. Excessive river and camp encounters would detract from this experience.

In order to provide for the type of experience Talachulitna floaters currently receive and prefer, prescribed standards for these impacts are:

1. No camp encounters on Talachulitna Creek (Subunit 5d) and in Talachulitna Canyon (Subunit 5b).
2. Less than three river encounters per day in the above two subunits.

Monitoring these impacts, and establishing a relationship between them and use levels, can be administratively difficult. However, through a monitoring program, it is possible to generate the necessary information.

At current use levels, these standards are rarely exceeded. However, use is increasing, and competition is anticipated in the near future. If this occurs, and the users are forced to share camps or more than three groups per day on more than twenty percent of trips, a use limit system should be developed and implemented.

Voluntary Trip Scheduling Program. For most users, current use levels do not cause impacts greater than the standards described above. However, a minority of trips experience greater impact levels than users consider acceptable, particularly at public use sites. If use increases, this problem will continue until a use limit is developed. To prevent the mandatory trip scheduling associated with a use limit, a voluntary trip scheduling program administered by DNR should be implemented for the Talachulitna Canyon (Subunit 5b) and Talachulitna Creek (Subunit 5d) before limits are implemented.

Commercial and private trip leaders will be encouraged to register proposed trips as soon as they have been planned. DNR will maintain a list and notify trip leaders when more than one trip has been scheduled for the same day (experience indicates that paired launches result in unacceptable impacts). It will be the trip leaders' responsibility to reschedule or otherwise alter trips if they so desire.

Public Use Sites

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

- PU 5b.1** **Landing Area (RM 6.8).** The natural gravel bar at this site is flat and frequently used by pilots as a landing strip. The landing area should continue to be available for public use.
- PU 5b.2** **Thursday Creek Junction (RM 9).** This site receives high public use for camping and fishing. It is a well-known destination point for float trips down the river.
- PU 5b.3** **Deep Creek Junction (RM 14).** This site receives high public use for camping and fishing. It is a well-known destination point for float trips down the river.
- PU 5b.4** **Friday Creek Junction (RM 16).** This site receives high public use for camping and fishing. It is a well-known destination point for float trips down the river.
- PU 5b.5** **Fishing Hole (RM 16.5).** This site includes a popular fishing hole.
- PU 5b.6** **Hell's Gate (RM 18).** This rapid is usually portaged all season because of the large, narrow drop. The site is highly scenic with high walls and large rapids. A portage trail follows the west bank. Floaters camp both above and below the drop. Powerboaters tie up just above the drop and walk down to Friday Creek to fish.

Special Management Areas

See *Special Management Areas* in Chapter 2 for management guidelines. Specific locations of sites are shown on the map at the end of this unit.

- SMA 5b.1** **Primitive Landing Area (RM 6.8).** This area includes a primitive landing area used by wheelplanes to access private land and by the public to access fishing areas. Extensive camping also occurs in the area. The Special Management Area will be managed as a Class II area. Class II area management intent and guidelines will apply. The area will be managed to accommodate uses associated with private lands in the SMA while providing for and enhancing public recreation opportunities and fish and wildlife habitat.