

## Chapter 1: Introduction



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### PLAN PURPOSE

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The plan is intended to help the Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation achieve its mission of providing a broad spectrum of outdoor recreation opportunities, while protecting the area's natural values. The purpose of this plan is to provide general guidance for management of the Chena River State Recreation Area (SRA). The plan serves as a guide for anyone involved in the SRA, either as visitor, commercial operator, Northern Area Citizens Advisory Board member or area manager. Background material included in this document will also serve as a comprehensive source of information on the SRA.

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### PLAN OVERVIEW

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State Parks' overall goal is to manage the Chena River State Recreation Area for a wide range of recreation uses, based on its natural values, use patterns, and ability to support uses without significant adverse effects to this natural area. State Parks will maintain existing patterns of recreation use while managing for increased uses in developed, high-use areas and maintaining dispersed uses in less-developed, low-use areas. State Parks will keep impacts to a minimum through a variety of methods, such as by developing information and education programs; involving volunteers and user groups; monitoring and research programs; site improvements and hardening; seasonal restrictions, and other techniques.

This plan sets forth guidelines for the management of the Recreation Area's varied resources and makes recommendations on the development of recreation facilities. The Recreation Area is divided into six management units. Unit boundaries are based upon topography, resources, and the character of the unit. Each unit has a statement of management intent, program recommendations, and management guidelines for recreational development. This plan revision builds on the guidelines set forth in the original 1984 plan, making changes only where needed to adapt to the changes in use or conditions that have occurred since that time.

Provisions for revising or changing this plan have been incorporated into this document to ensure that the plan will remain flexible and adaptable to public preferences, changing conditions, and management needs.

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## THE PLANNING AREA

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Lying twenty-six miles east of Fairbanks, the Chena River State Recreation Area encompasses more than a quarter-million acres of rolling hills and river country of Interior Alaska (see Map 1-1). The Chena River SRA occupies an important niche in the Fairbanks area by providing regional recreation opportunities. Traditionally known for its excellent grayling fishing on the upper Chena River, the Recreation Area's diversity is recognized for the wide spectrum of summer and winter recreation opportunities available to local residents. Also, out-of-region visitors are discovering the area in increasing numbers.

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## ESTABLISHMENT OF THE RECREATION AREA

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Impetus for the establishment of the Chena River State Recreation Area came from farsighted individuals within the Fairbanks Garden Club, Tanana Valley Sportsmen Association, the Alaska Conservation Society and others who were concerned about increasing land development in the Chena River Valley and the resulting loss of traditional outdoor recreation opportunities. After the Recreation Area was established, the Citizens Advisory Board and other public entities served a key role in helping with determining the management direction of the SRA.

The Chena River State Recreation Area was created by two separate legislative actions:

- Senate Bill 101, June 18, 1967, designated 15,360 acres of state land along the Chena River and the Chena Hot Springs Road as the Chena River State Recreation Area;
- House Bill 152, May 13, 1975, expanded the SRA to its current size: 254,080 acres.

These two bills were codified as AS 41.21.475-490 (see Appendix B). These statutes mandate that all state-owned and -acquired land and water in the SRA would be:

- Reserved from all uses incompatible with its primary function as public recreational land.
- Assigned to the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation for control, development and maintenance.

Additionally, the legislation states that:

- The state may not acquire private inholdings by eminent domain unless it is to provide necessary access to state land.
- The Department may adopt zoning regulations for private inholdings (in accordance with AS 44.62).
- The Commissioner may designate, and by regulation, prohibit or restrict incompatible uses within the area as provided by legislation. However, these regulations may not prohibit:
  - Work on valid mineral leases or mining claims;
  - The legal taking of fur-bearing animals;
  - The traditional use of roads and trails by any means of transportation, including a vehicle propelled by machinery, if the use occurred regularly in or around the current Recreation Area before June 18, 1967, and
  - Cutting of dead and down or burnt timber.

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## **SRA MANAGEMENT PLANNING PROCESS, 1984 ORIGINAL AND 2006 REVISED**

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After this enabling legislation, with extensive public involvement, Alaska State Parks developed a management plan and regulations that assisted with implementing the plan and the enabling legislation. These regulations are included in Appendix B. There are other statewide statutes under Title 41 and regulations under Title 11 that apply to all units of the State Park System that also apply to the SRA that are not included in this Appendix.

Many program recommendations in the original 1984 plan have been implemented during the intervening two decades, including:

- Convened a Citizen Advisory Board as a liaison between the public and the agency;
- Initiated the public use cabin program, installing 2 road-accessible and 5 backcountry cabins;
- Developed a maintenance shop and storage shed;
- Installed volunteer facilities to house & support 6 – 8 volunteers;
- Acquired property to protect the Chena Hot Springs Winter Trail use and access;
- Developed a year-round 15-mile loop trail, the Stiles Creek Trail;
- Constructed 3 emergency shelter cabins on backcountry hiking trails;
- Developed several new trails – Angel Rocks to Chena Hot Springs, Tors Trail short loop; Compeau Trail, Mist Creek Trail, and major upgrades to several others;
- Installed several interpretive displays at milepost 27, 36, 39.5, and 48;
- Developed information flyers and brochures for cabins & trailheads; published the Chena Trailmarker newspaper for area-wide information;
- Provided significant upgrades to several campgrounds and trailheads; and
- Most recently, constructed the 18-mile Compeau Trail.

Though many other recommended tasks remain, the plan revision was initiated in 2003 in response to public concerns about various management issues. Population growth and technological advances in recreational equipment brought conflicting use patterns and new recreational demands. Public land managers needed clear, consistent guidelines for their decisions, based upon an open public process of airing concerns and gathering salient information.

Public participation is an essential part of the planning process. The plan revision process advertised and conducted 2 different series of community meetings – May 2003 and January 2004 – at which more than 250 people attended. Their comments were addressed in the final plan, which again offered a chance for comment in late 2004. The final plan garnered 120 individual letters and 515 form letters. Throughout the planning process, members of the planning staff met with representatives from many agencies and community and user groups, to inform them of the plan's progress and provide them the opportunity to review information and proposals. Information gathered at these meetings and the written comments were instrumental in identifying important issues, gathering data on local resource values, developing and evaluating alternatives, and shaping the final plan.

Table 1-1: The Planning Process

Date	Planning Stage
April 2003	<b>Planning Process Announced</b> Outlined process, major issues, public meeting dates; Letters & emails to agencies, organizations, and individuals inviting participation.
May 2003	<b>Issues Identified</b> Public meetings advertised and held in Fairbanks and Two Rivers; written comments solicited.
July 2003	<b>Public Comments Summarized</b> #1 Newsletter summarized public comments; distributed hard copy; posted on website.
Summer 2003	<b>Information Gathering Began</b> Researched resource uses, economy, trends. Continued throughout planning process. Many experts consulted.
Fall 2003	<b>Draft Plan Prepared</b> Agency Review Draft circulated October 2003; Public Review Draft written & distributed December 2003.
Jan 2004	<b>Draft Plan Available for Comment</b> #2 Newsletter distributed – draft plan available for comment; Public Meetings advertised and held in Fairbanks and Two Rivers. Citizen Advisory Board continued monthly meetings on plan issues.
April 2004	<b>Public Comments Summarized</b> Newsletter #3 summarized public comments.
July 2004	<b>Public Comment Report Distributed</b> Full comment and summary reports available online Newsletter #4 notified public of the plan delay.
Fall 2004	<b>Final Intent to Adopt Plan Prepared</b> Public comments incorporated; changes made to draft plan.
Nov 2004	<b>Intent to Adopt Final Plan Distributed</b> Newsletter #5 announces public comment period and summarizes final ITA Plan.
October 2006	<b>Public Comments on Final ITA Plan Summarized &amp; Final Plan Re-issued for Final Comment</b> Newsletter #6 summarized public comments on Final ITA Plan. Final plan made re-available for comment.
November 2006	<b>Final Plan Adopted</b> Commissioner reviews final comments, makes changes if needed. Plan provides state policy for public land management in the Chena River State Recreation Area.
	<b>Plan Implemented</b>

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## ALASKA STATE PARKS SYSTEM'S STATEWIDE FRAMEWORK PLAN

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A management plan for the entire state park system, titled the *Alaska State Park System's Statewide Framework Plan*, adopted in 1982, defines the differences between state recreation areas and other state park units such as state parks and state recreation sites. The Framework Plan defines state recreation areas as follows:

*"A state recreation area is a relatively spacious unit and possesses a diversity of outdoor recreational opportunities. The dominant management objective of the unit is to provide a maximum level of outdoor recreational opportunities based on the natural values of the unit and its ability to sustain use without significant adverse effects on natural systems."*

The Statewide Framework also provides general direction for developments and activities within state recreation areas:

*"The management of a state recreation area allows for carefully planned and controlled resource modification to enhance outdoor recreational opportunities as long as the intensity of modification does not diminish the unit's natural and cultural values. Such modifications must be based upon a formal decision to enhance public enjoyment of the state recreation area's natural values or to provide for site-appropriate outdoor recreation activities. Lands within the unit will be developed to provide diverse, high quality outdoor recreational experiences in keeping with regional use patterns and preferences. Other than state recreation sites, recreation areas are generally the most intensively developed type of unit in the State Park System."*

Federal laws also help guide the management of the SRA. This plan acknowledges the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act. Consistent with this law, Alaska State Parks will not exclude an individual with a disability whom with or without reasonable modifications can participate in the outdoor recreation opportunities and activities that the Chena River State Recreation Area provides.

## **MAP 1-1: REGION LOCATION**

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## **GOALS, MISSION AND OBJECTIVES**

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In combination with the statutory intent language included in the previous section, management intent for the area also derives from other plans adopted by DNR and the overall mission of Alaska State Parks.

The Tanana Basin Area Plan adopted by the Department of Natural Resources in 1991 has three main goals for recreation for all state lands in the Tanana Basin. These are:

- Recreation Opportunities: Provide the full spectrum of accessible, developed, and undeveloped recreation opportunities for Alaskans and visitors.
- Resource Protection: Protect ecologic, scenic, and other recreation resources for present and future generations.
- Economic Development: Manage Alaska's recreation resources to support a tourism industry that supplies jobs, income and revenue.

The Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation's mission is to provide outdoor recreation opportunities, and conserve and interpret natural, cultural and historic resources for the use, enjoyment and welfare of the people.

Specific goals established for the Chena River State Recreation Area established by this plan, based on the Division's Statewide Framework Plan, are:

- Provide recreational opportunities appropriate to the regional setting and physical character and compatible with the natural significances of the Recreation Area;
- Protect, manage and interpret the area's natural and scenic character, cultural and historical significance and recreational values;
- Provide adequate maintenance and operation stewardship to ensure resource protection, to meet human health and safety concerns and to meet public service needs; and,
- Pursue marketing and cost-effective economic strategies to increase efficiency and effectiveness in the management of the park system and contribute to the role of recreation and tourism to the regional economy.

Specific objectives to be achieved by this management plan are:

- To provide for a spectrum of recreation opportunities and users;
- To analyze existing and anticipated trends of regional outdoor recreational use and demands; and determine the role of the Chena River State Recreation Area and the Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation in satisfying those demands;
- To make specific recommendations concerning the development of facilities within the Recreation Area;
- To serve as a basis for capital and operation budget requests;
- To provide management and operational guidelines; and
- To establish management flexibility in meeting changing conditions, needs and opportunities.