

DIRECTOR'S DECISION

Exit Glacier Road Special Use Lands Designation

Location

State lands within Unit 359A, located in Region 3 (Map 3A) in the Kenai Area Plan.

Proposed Action

The state lands within Unit 359A are designated as "Special Use Lands" under 11 AAC 96.010(b).

Special Use Lands are designations placed on land identified as having special resource values needing protection. The result of this designation may be to prohibit certain activities, or to require a permit for certain activities that would otherwise be considered "generally allowed" (under 11 AAC 96) in order to protect those special resource values. The state-owned uplands along Exit Glacier Road are designated as Special Use Lands because of their public recreation and tourism values. The Special Use Lands will be protected from activities that may damage the resources for which they were designated (see "Background Information" section below). The total acreage of the area is approximately 420 acres.

Authority

AS 38.05.020 and AS 38.05.035 and 11 AAC 96.010(b)

Background Information

Exit Glacier Road follows the north shore of the Resurrection River, and is the "gateway" to Kenai Fjords National Park's Exit Glacier area. The road provides outstanding views of the Resurrection River valley as it parallels the Resurrection River and passes through the Kenai Mountains. Over 100,000 visitors travel the road to the park each year. With the recent paving of the Exit Glacier Road through state land, and expected further paving, these numbers are likely to increase. In addition, the state land along Exit Glacier Road is being used intensively by campers and day users. Long-term camping here is exacerbated by the limited opportunities in nearby Seward for camping and affordable housing.

Emerging Issues

The state land near Exit Glacier Road has been used for many years as a short- and long-term camping area. Although camping in one place for 14 days or less at a site is a "generally allowed use" on state land (11AAC 96), the popularity of this area for this use warrants more intensive management. The large numbers of campers, combined with the lack of managed facilities such as trash containers and toilets, has created garbage, sanitation, and bear problems. Unsanitary conditions resulting from human waste are both a public health and aesthetic issue. Garbage left in the area has attracted bears who have become habituated to human food. This has increased the incidence of encounters between bears and visitors and nearby homeowners. These encounters increase the chances of "defense of life and property" kills of brown bears, whose population on the Kenai Peninsula is of concern. Trash, large unsightly camps, abandoned equipment, and human waste along the roadside also detracts from the visitor experience for those

who drive this otherwise scenic road. Finally, the competition between short-term campers, long-term campers, and day users for the same sites warrants a more equitable allocation of this opportunity.

Purpose of the Special Use Lands designation

Under a Special Use Lands designation, DNR will initiate a limited form of direct management to achieve certain objectives. A few initial restrictions and management actions will be instituted at this time. If more action is necessary in the future, further guidelines for managing the Special Use Lands will be developed through additional public process after the adoption of the Kenai Area Plan.

Proposed Management Actions

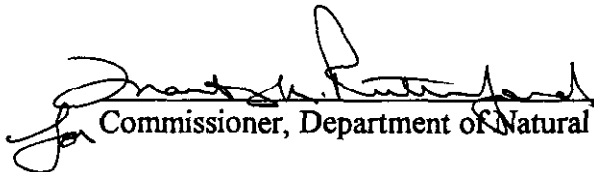
- I. Campers are limited to eight days in the Exit Glacier Road area. This restriction will 1) provide a more equitable arrangement for the short- and long-term campers and day users in the area, 2) limit the accumulation of large camps and garbage associated with them, and 3) will limit the possibility of bear habituation to long-term camps.
- II. This restriction will be posted.
- III. Sites that attract recurring problems such as long-term camping, abandoned trash and garbage, or sanitation problems (because of the high water table or proximity to Resurrection River) may be closed.

If further actions are necessary, the Division of Mining, Land, and Water may in the future, through an additional public process, explore the possibility of issuing authorizations or management agreements that allow the area to be managed as a campground, dispersed campsites, and/or a day use area. Other management options may also be considered at that time. This process will involve affected users, landowners, and other agencies. This Special Use Lands designation provides DNR with a management tool that enables land managers to quickly respond to proposed or initiated uses that are incompatible with the public recreation and tourism values for which these tidelands are designated in this plan.

Decision

A Special Use Lands designation is adopted at this time for the state lands along the Exit Glacier Road, north of the Resurrection River. The Special Use Lands designation includes restrictions on the length of camping, posting of this restriction, and if necessary, provides the Department of Natural Resources with the opportunity to close sites that have become a public nuisance. The implementation of further restrictions for this area will be developed through additional public process. Other changes or modifications to the Special Use Lands designation will be subject to public review and comment.

Under 11 AAC 96.010(a)(2) and 11 AAC 96.010(b), the lands described herein within Unit 359A are hereby designated as Special Use Lands for public recreation and tourism purposes. These lands will be known as the Exit Glacier Road Special Use Lands. I find that this designation is consistent with the Department of Natural Resources management authority and that it is in the best interest of the state.



Commissioner, Department of Natural Resources

1/11/2000
Date