

MANAGEMENT UNIT 15: Thompson Pass

Background

This unit includes state land at Thompson Pass, Worthington Glacier and the Tsina Valley. It also includes land in the Tsina Valley and Mt. Billy Mitchell area which is in federal (Bureau of Land Management) ownership.

The unit includes mountain peaks, glaciers, and the deep glacier-carved valley of the Tsina River. The Richardson Highway runs through the Tsina Valley and over Thompson Pass. The Trans-Alaska Pipeline, Copper Valley - Valdez electric intertie, and a proposed route for a Prudhoe Bay - Valdez gas line parallel the road. The entire area has spectacular alpine scenery. Worthington Glacier is the most accessible glacier in Alaska and the most visited tourist site in the basin. Summer recreation activities such as climbing, hiking, and camping are popular; in the winter, cross country skiing, downhill skiing, and snowmobiling are popular. DPOR manages a wayside at Worthington Glacier and a campground at Blueberry Lake. The pass receives the heaviest average (measured) snowfall in Alaska, and the area is prone to powerful avalanches. The Tsina River and adjacent corridor has potential for floating and boating, although parts of the river pass through major canyons. The Tsina Valley is also very prone to avalanches.

Management Intent

The management unit should be retained in state ownership and managed for multiple use with emphasis on expanding recreation opportunities. A corridor for future transportation and utility routes will be retained through the area. If the Tielke River route is selected for the Copper River Highway to Cordova, it may be built across state land in this unit. Certain recreation activities (particularly winter recreation and off-road vehicle use) also need, or soon will need, more active management for public safety and for avoiding conflicts between users. To provide more active recreation management, DPOR and the DLWM should enter into a cooperative agreement to give DPOR authority to construct and manage recreation facilities and manage visitor activities in the area. DPOR will review all land use activities proposed for this area.

The Alaska Legislature should consider designating the Thompson Pass area for long-term retention by the state, management in accordance with this plan, and appropriate funding. This area would be suitable for designation as a state recreation area. Establishment of a legislatively designated area and subsequent development of visitor facilities in the area would encourage visitors to spend more time in the area, which would help the local economy. An advisory group of local residents should be formed by DPOR to develop the legislative recommendations. The advisory group should recommend final boundaries and propose management for the area. The group should also evaluate areas south of Thompson Pass (in the Prince William Sound planning area) for inclusion in any legislative designation.

The TAPS and the Richardson Highway corridor (approximately 1-mile wide) will be closed to new mineral location to protect future transportation options and public recreation opportunities. The TAPS right-of-way is already closed to mineral location. Although the plan does not recommend administrative mineral closures for any other state land in the Thompson Pass area, the state legislature may wish to consider closing areas included in a legislative designation.

Timber harvest is allowed in the area for salvage, disease control, and other forest management that is consistent with maintaining public recreation values. Any

legislative designation should allow for such activity, primarily along the Tiekel River.

Land in subunit 15B, located southeast of the Tsina River, should be selected by the state and managed as part of this unit. This land is an isolated tract of federal land that is outside the Chugach National Forest boundary and would be inefficient for the federal BLM to manage. It also drains into subunit 15A and could be managed along with that subunit.

Management Guidelines

Gravel Pits. Existing gravel pits will be retained in public ownership for material sites.

Scenic Values. All development along the Richardson Highway corridor should be sited and designed to minimize impacts on views from the highway.

Transportation and Utilities. Future transportation and utility lines are allowed through this unit. Provisions should be made for these purposes in any legislative designation. Only essential facilities needed to support transportation and utility uses in this unit should be allowed to protect the recreation and scenic resources of the pass. Supportive operations that can be located outside the unit, such as gas stations, are not allowed.

The complete set of management guidelines is presented in Chapter 2. Any of the guidelines could apply to uses within this management unit; however, guidelines that are most likely to apply are:

- Recreation, cultural, and scenic resources
- Subsurface and materials
- Transportation
- Trail management

LAND USE DESIGNATION SUMMARY

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SUBUNIT	LAND OWNERSHIP (GENERALIZED)	LAND USE DESIGNATIONS				PROHIBITED SURFACE USE(S)*	COMMENTS
		SURFACE		SUBSURFACE			
		PRIMARY USE(S)	SECONDARY USE(S)	LOCATABLE MINERALS	LEASEABLE MINERALS		
15A	State, BLM	Public recreation	Sand and gravel, Transportation corridor, Forestry along Tiekel River	Highway-TAPS corridor closed to entry; remainder open to mineral entry	Available for leasing	Land offerings Remote cabins Grazing	Recommended legislative designation, Select federal (BLM) land
15B	BLM	Resource management, low value	Public recreation	Open to mineral entry	Available for leasing	Land offerings Remote cabins	Select this federal (BLM) land to consolidate land ownership

* Other uses such as material sales, land leases, or permits, that are not specifically prohibited may be allowed. Such uses will be allowed if consistent with the management intent statement, the management guidelines of this unit, and the relevant management guidelines listed in Chapter 2.

RESOURCE INFORMATION SUMMARY

Management Unit 15 - Thompson Pass

RESOURCE	SUBUNIT	
	15A	15B
Fish	none documented	unsurveyed
Forestry	high w/some moderate decid. and conif. only in Tiekel Valley, otherwise few trees	no trees
Historic-Cultural	unknown	unknown
Minerals	low	low
Oil and Gas	unknown	unknown
Recreation	very high; hiking, winter sports, very scenic, Worthington Glacier, campsite at Blueberry Lake	low
Sand and Gravel	existing sites and potential areas	none identified
Settlement Suitability	unsuitable	unsuitable
Transportation	Richardson Hwy., airstrip at Worthington Glacier, Trans-Alaska Pipeline .	none identified
Wildlife	unrated, C habitat	unrated

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Important trails:

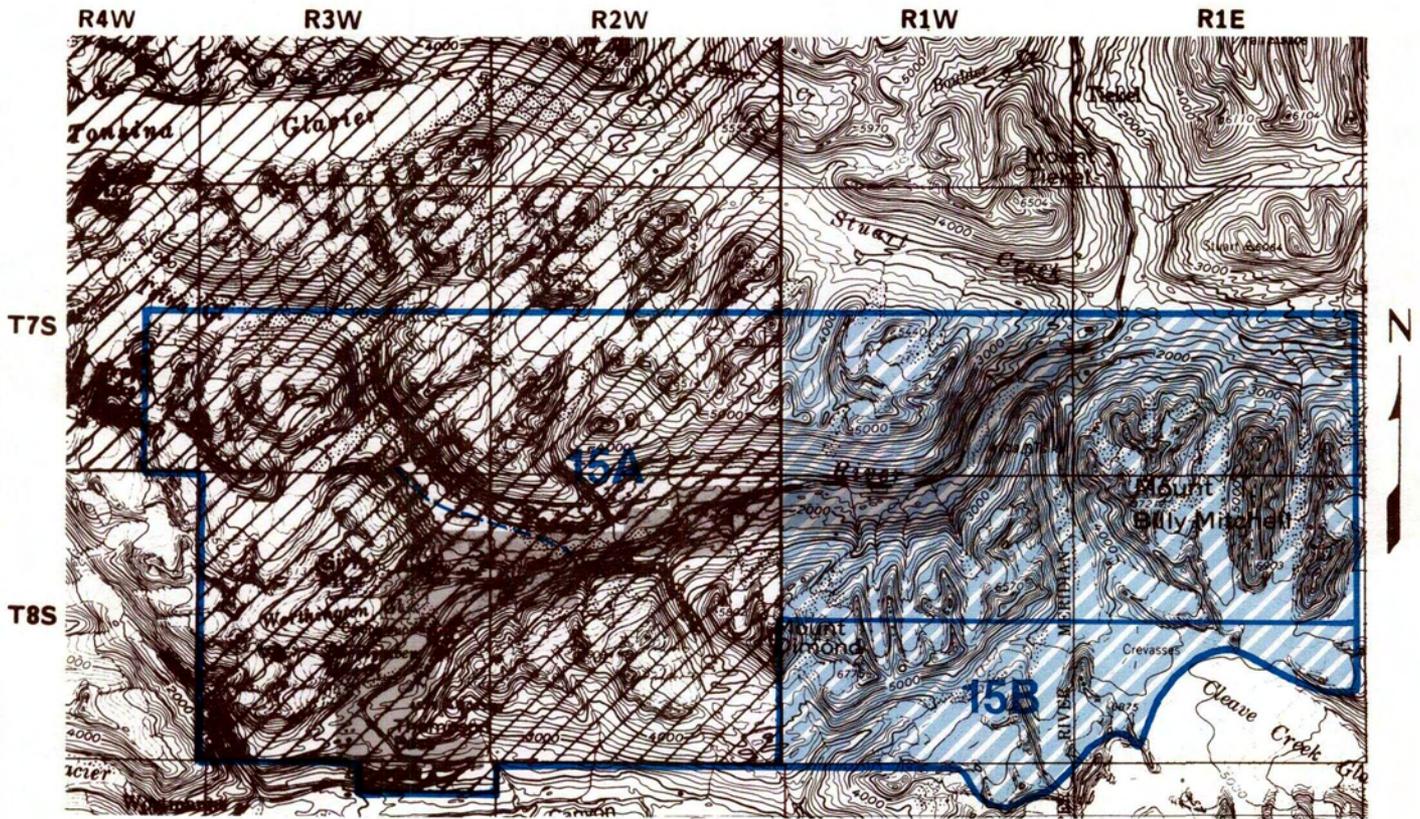
Subunit 15A: Trail from Richardson Hwy., Ptarmigan, up Tsina Valley.

Notes: Thompson Pass has been identified as a potential state park or state recreation area. Potential future gas line corridor.

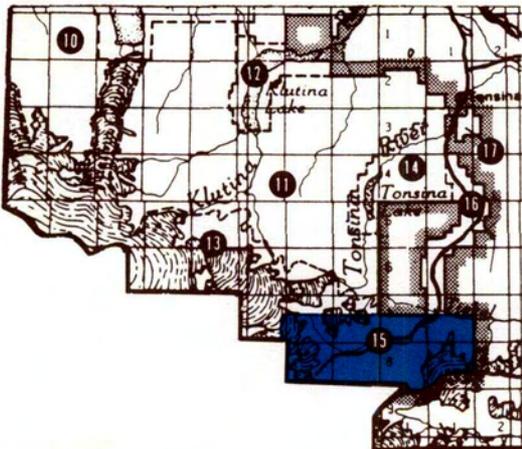
For definitions of ratings, see glossary. For more detailed information on any resources, see resource elements published under separate cover.

MANAGEMENT UNIT 15

Thompson Pass



Location Map



U.S.G.S. Quad:
Valdez

Map scale:
1:250,000

-  State Owned
-  State Selected
-  Native/Private Owned
-  Native Selected
-  Federal
-  Proposed State Selections
-  Closed to New Mineral Entry
-  Trails on public lands

Map shows approximate location of easements to state land and major trails across state land. Portions of trails may cross private lands. See appendix D.