

MANAGEMENT UNIT 27: Gulkana River - Richardson Highway

Background

This management unit includes state-owned land and state-selected land, and federal land that the state should select along the Richardson Highway from Sourdough to Paxson. It also includes state-owned shorelands under the Gulkana River and Paxson Lake. The Gulkana River upstream from Sourdough is a National Wild and Scenic River and is popular for fishing and river floating. From Sourdough to the Copper River, the Gulkana River flows through Native corporation land. The river is navigable; therefore, the land under the portion of the river that flows through the Native land conveyances is state owned. However, legal appeals on the navigability decision are pending from Ahtna, Inc. The Gulkana River and Paxson Lake are important for salmon spawning and rearing. Most land around Paxson Lake is federally owned although it has been selected by Native corporations. BLM maintains a campground on the east shore of the lake, a popular starting point for people floating the Gulkana River.

Land along the Richardson Highway is used for hunting and trapping. The Trans-Alaska Pipeline and possible routes for a future natural gas line also traverse this unit. Meiers Lake, near the Richardson Highway, is used as a camping area; it is scenic and has the only major cottonwood stands for some distance. The southern end of the lake is privately owned. Several off-road vehicle trails that provide access to the Gakona River country start at a lake to the northwest. There are wonderful views of the Wrangell Mountains and the surrounding countryside from Hogan Hill.

Federal land in the pipeline corridor has been withdrawn from state selection by the Secretary of the Interior through Public Land Order 5150. The state has requested this withdrawal be removed to select land within the corridor. BLM contends that the state should not make land selections in the pipeline corridor.

Management Intent

This entire management unit should be managed for multiple uses with emphasis on public recreation, providing a transportation and utility corridor, and protecting fish and wildlife. Meiers and Paxson Lakes will be managed as recreation lakes (see p. 2-41).

Management Subunit 27A. This is the road and pipeline corridor from Sourdough to Meiers Lake. The state should select federal land in the corridor that will be managed for multiple use, with emphasis on transportation, recreation, and wildlife habitat. State-owned land in the subunit is open to mineral entry. Additional lands conveyed to the state will be opened to mineral entry, except the TAPS right-of-way and Spring Creek. Spring Creek is closed to mineral location to protect salmon spawning habitat. This subunit lies within a major migration route for caribou. All land uses will be sited and designed so as not to impede caribou migrations.

Management Subunit 27B. This is the road and pipeline corridor from Meiers Lake to just north of Paxson. The land will be managed for multiple use, with emphasis on transportation, wildlife habitat, recreation, and settlement. The subunit is open or, on conveyance to the state, will be open to mineral entry. The TAPS right-of-way will remain closed to mineral location to protect existing and future utility uses; Spring Creek will remain closed to mineral location to protect salmon spawning habitat. Additional sites for public access to Paxson Lake should be identified and reserved. Land offerings for recreational and year-round settlement are allowed in this subunit, with an estimated net land offering of 400 acres. Land offerings will probably be in scattered parcels of land suitable for settlement along the highway,

around small lakes near Meiers Lake, or on the hillside between the highway and the TAPS line near Paxson.

Management Unit 27C. This unit consists of state-owned shorelands under Paxson Lake, the Gulkana River from Paxson Lake to its confluence with the Copper River, and navigable portions of the Middle and West Forks of the Gulkana. The Gulkana River corridor from near Sourdough is a National Wild and Scenic River, managed by BLM and has exceptional recreation and fisheries values. This land will be managed for recreation and fish production and will be closed to mineral entry to ensure protection of these resources. The river will not be available for oil and gas leasing. Surface entry for oil and gas leasing will be incompatible with the Wild River designation and adjacent federal lands have been withdrawn from oil and gas leasing. Land leases are prohibited on the river from Sourdough to Paxson Lake and on the West and Middle Forks of the Gulkana River. Below Sourdough, leases or permits related to river recreation are allowed after consultation with BLM and DPOR. Leases not related to river recreation are generally prohibited. For activities located upstream from Sourdough, permits can be issued if consistent with the federal Wild River designation.

The river will be administratively designated as a State Wild and Scenic River under Alaska Statute 38.04.070 (4) and will be suitable for the legislature to designate as a State Recreation River.

Management Unit 27D. This is state-owned and state-selected land located west of the Richardson Highway and south of the Denali Highway at the north end of Paxson Lake. The area includes the Paxson closed area--an area closed to hunting by ADF&G regulations to protect moose, bear, and caribou populations. The area will be retained in public ownership and managed for multiple use with emphasis on wildlife habitat. The area, except the Gulkana River, will be open to mineral entry. The existing gravel pit will be retained, but any expansion of the pit should only be allowed if ADF&G determines wildlife resources will not be significantly impacted.

Management Guidelines

Gulkana River Management. DNR, DOT/PF, and BLM should develop a cooperative agreement to assign BLM the responsibility for managing recreation on the entire Gulkana River. This agreement should also specify who should manage the three trail easements and three site easements reserved on Ahtna, Inc., land that lead to the river below Sourdough. It should also specify the location and management of a pull out for river floaters at the Richardson Highway bridge at Gulkana.

Shorelands within Gulkana National Wild River (Paxson Lake to Sourdough). DNR will notify the Glennallen Area Manager of BLM of any requests for permits, leases, or other authorizations for use of state shorelands within the boundary of the national wild river and provide an opportunity for comment on these proposals.

Potential Gas Line Corridor. A route for the proposed Yukon-Pacific natural gas line from Prudhoe Bay to Valdez is proposed through this unit. The route roughly parallels the TAPS line. A corridor, 1/4-mile wide on both sides of the TAPS line, should be reserved in state ownership for a possible future gas line, until a more specific route is established.

Land Offering - Guidelines.

1. The 1-mile, 10-mile, and old Meiers Lake trails that run east from the Richardson Highway will be retained in state ownership.

2. Land offerings should be located within 1/2 mile of the highway to minimize conflict with wildlife and dispersed recreational use of the area (such as hunting or snowmobiling) if the following guidelines can be met:
 - Sufficient suitable land can be found.
 - Steep slopes that glaciare in winter or may glaciare if cut can be avoided.
 - Offerings can be located so that structures would not negatively affect the views from the highway or Paxson Lake.
 - Offerings can be sufficiently separated from existing private parcels to avoid a sense of crowding.
 - The public recreation area used by Paxson area residents can be avoided.
3. Right-of-way for a potential natural gas line will also be reserved through this area.
4. Access to the BLM campsite on Paxson Lake will be retained in public ownership.
5. This land should be offered for sale and should not be offered under the homesteading program.
6. The land offering should be designed to avoid a proliferation of roads from the Richardson Highway.
7. The land offered should not all be offered at one time.
8. The land offering should be offered in a number clusters rather than all at one site.

Land Offering - Public Involvement. Specific areas to be offered for sale will be identified through the DNR land disposal planning process. Residents of Paxson and the vicinity will be consulted during the disposal planning process.

Land Offering - Classification. Specific areas to be offered for settlement have not been identified in the plan or classified along with the plan. Classifications for settlement in this area do not require plan amendment.

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

Visual Quality. Land offerings will be sited and designed to minimize adverse effects on views from the highway.

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:

- Fish and wildlife habitat
- Recreation, cultural, and scenic resources
- Settlement
- Public access
- Transportation

LAND USE DESIGNATION SUMMARY

MANAGEMENT UNIT: 27 - Gulkana River-Richardson Highway Corridor

SUBUNIT	LAND OWNERSHIP (GENERALIZED)	LAND USE DESIGNATIONS				PROHIBITED SURFACE USE(S)*	COMMENTS
		SURFACE		SUBSURFACE			
		PRIMARY USE(S)	SECONDARY USE(S)	LOCATABLE MINERALS	LEASEABLE MINERALS		
27A	State, Federal-BLM	Transportation corridor, Wildlife habitat Public recreation	Sand and gravel	Open to mineral entry except Spring Creek and TAPS R.O.W.	Available for leasing	Land offerings, Remote cabins	
27B	State, state selected	Settlement, Transportation corridor, Wildlife habitat Public recreation	Sand and gravel	Open to mineral entry except Spring Creek and TAPS R.O.W.	Available for leasing	Remote cabins, Trapping cabins	Estimated net land offering - 400 acres
27C	State (navigable waters) - Gulkana River, Paxson Lake	Public recreation, Wildlife habitat		Closed to mineral entry	Not available for leasing	Land leases in NWSR Corridor,* ² Land offerings, Sand and gravel extraction, Remote cabins	Gulkana River including West and Middle Forks, Paxson Lake
27D	State, state selected	Public recreation, Wildlife habitat	Sand and gravel	Open to mineral entry except Gulkana River	Available for leasing	Land offerings Remote cabins	

*¹ 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.

*² NWSR. National Wild and Scenic River corridor - see management guidelines for this area.

RESOURCE INFORMATION SUMMARY

Management Unit 27 - Gulkana River - Richardson Highway

RESOURCE	SUBUNIT			
	27A	27B	27C	27D
Fish	salmon-s/r steelhead-s	salmon - s/r steelhead - s	salmon - s/r steelhead - s Rainbow trout, grayling	salmon - s/r
Forestry	moderate conif.	moderate conif.	N/A	moderate conif. and decid.
Historic-Cultural	unknown	unknown	unknown	unknown
Minerals	outside of known mineral terranes	low	outside of known mineral terranes	outside of known mineral terranes
Oil and Gas	unknown	unknown	unknown	unknown
Recreation	moderate	high near Paxson Lake	very high near Paxson Lake and along Gulkana River, a National Wild & Scenic River	high near Paxson Lake
Sand and Gravel	existing sites and potential areas	existing site and potential area	unsuitable	existing site
Settlement Suitability	low	moderate	N/A	low to moderate
Transportation	Richardson Hwy., TAPS	Richardson Hwy., TAPS, McMahan airstrip	Gulkana River, Paxson Lake, navigable	Richardson Hwy.
Wildlife	A-2 habitat - caribou, moose; B-1 habitat	B-2 habitat	A-1, B-1, and B-2 habitats	A-1 habitat - caribou; B-2 habitat, Paxson closed area

Important trails:

Subunit 27A: Public crossing of TAPS line near Hogan Hill.

Recreation trail from Richardson Hwy. to Gulkana River.

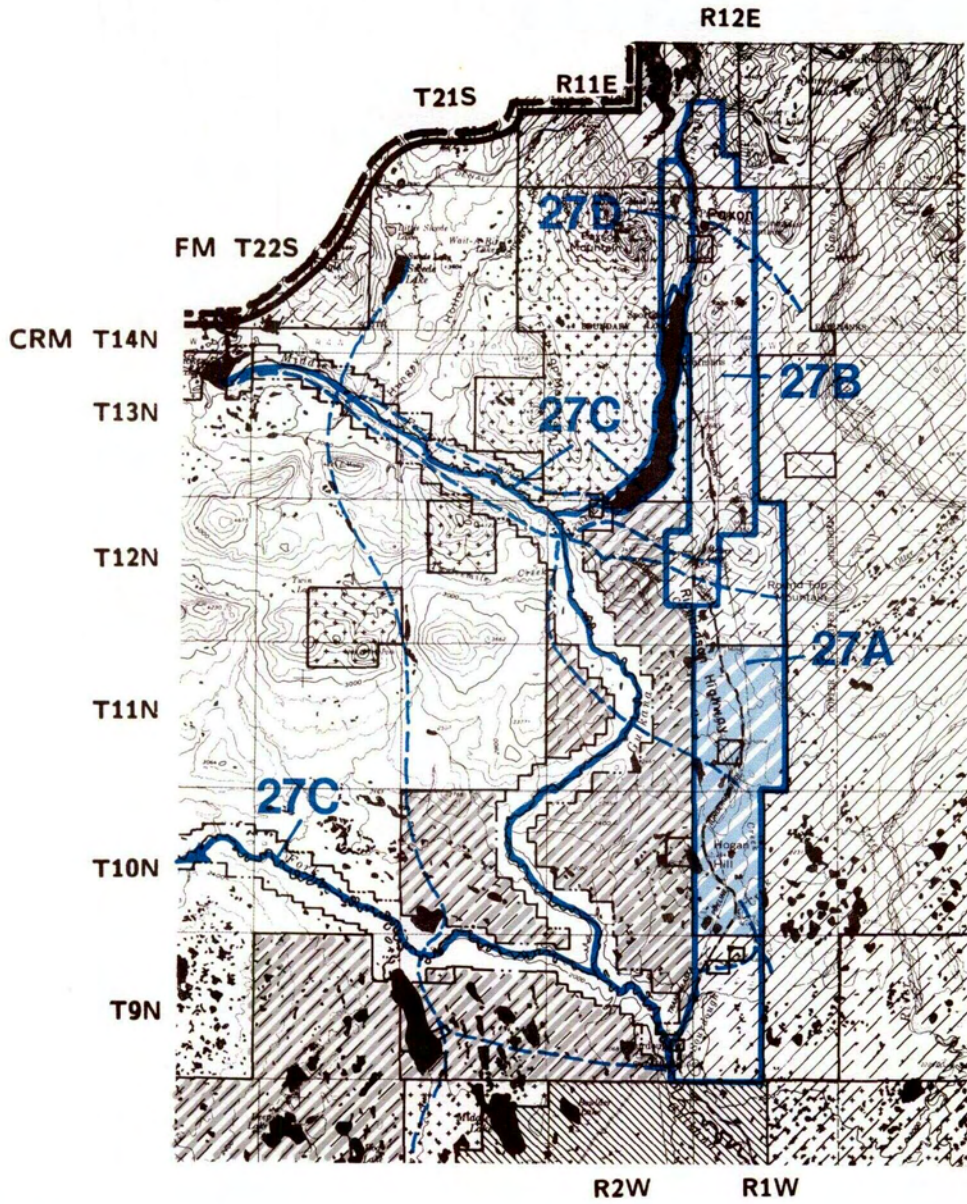
Subunit 27B: Several public crossings of TAPS line

Subunit 27C: Lower Gulkana River accessed via three 17(b) easements from Richardson Hwy.

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

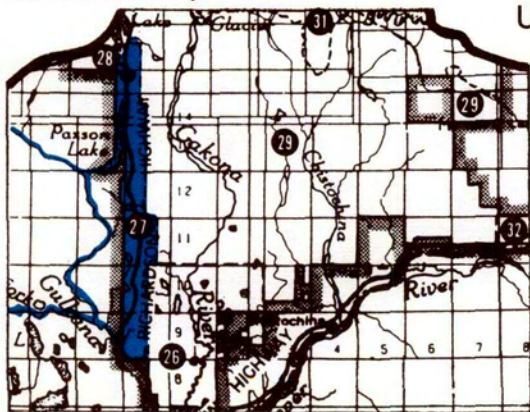
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


Unit 27C includes all navigable segments of the Gulkana River

Location Map



U.S.G.S. Quads:
Gulkana
Mt. Hayes

Map scale:
1:500,000

-  State Owned
-  State Selected
-  Native/Private Owned
-  Native Selected
-  Federal
-  Proposed State Selections
-  Proposed Relinquishments
-  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.