

## **MANAGEMENT UNIT 33: Copper and Chitina Rivers, Other Navigable Tributaries**

### **Background**

This management unit consists of state-owned shorelands under the Copper River, Chitina River, and other navigable tributaries of the Copper River that are not included in other management units. The state owns land under the beds of navigable waterways (these are called shorelands) as defined under federal law. A determination of navigability is made when land is transferred out of federal ownership or when requested by a federal land manager or DNR.

The Copper River is navigable upstream from the delta through T. 10 N., R. 7 E., CRM, near Slana. The Copper River delta and lower river are in the Prince William Sound Planning Area. The Chitina River has been determined to be navigable from the Copper River upstream through T. 5 S., R. 7 E., CRM, and is likely to meet the navigability requirements upstream to the Nizina or Tana River. The Nizina River may also be navigable (and therefore state owned) upstream to the Chitistone River.

The Copper and Chitina rivers are glacier fed and carry enormous sediment loads, particularly in summer months. They are also subject to floods from glacial outburst lakes in their headwaters or tributaries.

The entire Chitina River is within the Wrangell - St. Elias National Park and Preserve. The National Park Service draft General Management Plan for the park and preserve states that the Park Service will oppose any 'actions activities, or uses... that will alter the beds of these lands or the natural meandering of river channels or result in adverse effects on water quality or the abundance and diversity of fish and wildlife species.'

These rivers are used for recreation (primarily river floating), fishing, and winter transportation routes. The river corridors provide important moose habitat, although very little of the vegetated riparian habitat is state owned. State ownership is largely confined to the riverbeds and gravel bars. The state owns land east of the Copper River near Tazlina and Gulkana (see MU 21D and MU 22A) and along the Chitina and Nizina Rivers near McCarthy (see MU 24 and MU 25). Most of the land along the Copper River from south of Chitina all the way to Indian River is owned by Native corporations or other private landowners. Access has been reserved across Native lands to the river at some key points under Section 17(b) of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA).

### **Management Intent**

The state will manage the Chitina River and any navigable tributaries for multiple use with emphasis on public recreation. Due to annual flooding from glacier-dammed outburst lakes and frequently shifting river channels, no permits or leases should be issued that allow for structures to be built in the river or on state-owned gravel bars.

The state will manage the Copper River and any navigable tributaries for multiple use with emphasis on recreation, fishing, and transportation. These lands will remain open to mineral entry.

## **Management Guidelines**

**Access to Copper River at Chitina - O'Brien Creek.** The state should ensure that the public is provided adequate access to the Copper River at O'Brien Creek for fishing and other uses. Four options exist:

1. Encourage Chitina Native Corp. to continue the current policy of providing access with a user fee charged.
2. Acquire, through purchase, a public easement for access and use.
3. Acquire ownership of the land through a land exchange.
4. Assert an RS 2477 right-of-way (this may result in litigation).

**Shorelands within Wrangell - St. Elias National Park (Chitina River and other navigable waters).** DNR will notify the Superintendent of the Wrangell - St. Elias National Park and Preserve of any requests for permits, leases, or other authorizations for use of state shorelands within the boundary of the national park and preserve and provide an opportunity for comment on these proposals.

**Anadromous Fish Protection.** Mining activity in the Copper and Chitina Rivers and most navigable streams would be subject to provisions of Alaska Statutes Title 16 which protect anadromous fish. The National Park Service has suggested that these streams be closed to mineral location to protect water quality and due to access problems. Such closures are not needed to protect water quality because natural sediments are high. The National Park Service also has regulations that govern access within the park.

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  
Stream corridors and instream flow

# LAND USE DESIGNATION SUMMARY

## MANAGEMENT UNIT: 33 - Copper and Chitina Rivers, Other Navigable Tributaries

SUBUNIT	LAND OWNERSHIP (GENERALIZED)	LAND USE DESIGNATIONS				PROHIBITED SURFACE USE(S)*	COMMENTS
		SURFACE		SUBSURFACE			
		PRIMARY USE(S)	SECONDARY USE(S)	LOCATABLE MINERALS	LEASEABLE MINERALS		
33	State navigable waters	Public recreation Water resources Wildlife habitat	Transportation	Open to mineral entry	Available for leasing	Grazing Land offerings Remote cabins	

\* 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.

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# RESOURCE INFORMATION SUMMARY

## Management Unit 33 - Copper River and Chitina Rivers, Other Navigable Tributaries

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RESOURCE	SUBUNIT
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Fish	salmon - s/r/m steelhead
Forestry	N/A
Historic-Cultural	sites along riverbanks
Minerals	outside of known mineral terraces
Oil and Gas	unknown
Recreation	high along Copper River and Chitina River for floating and Copper River below Chitina
Sand and Gravel	extensive resources
Settlement Suitability	N/A
Transportation	Copper River & Chitina River - navigable
Wildlife	A-2 habitat - moose

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Important trails, access: Numerous easements and rights-of-way to Copper River. Access to Chitina River is via boat or overland.

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