

Appendix C

CARIBOU HILLS MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Caribou Hills Management Plan (CHMP) and Special Use Land Designation (SULD) were originally adopted in 1993 (ADL 226574). The Kenai Area Plan amends the CHMP and SULD boundaries and policies. These changes expand this area to include areas to the south and west of the original area (in KAP Units 266B and 267) and clarifies the CHMP and SULD intent to retain all the Caribou Hills in “public ownership.” Seven sections in Unit 45A may now be conveyable to a municipality. Also, two sections were removed from the 1993 area because they are now owned by the borough. These changes are reflected in the policies below and shown on Map C.1 at the end of this appendix and on the maps for Regions 7 and 8 in Chapter 3. The area affected now encompasses approximately 86,720 acres of state-owned land and includes all state lands within Units 45A, 45B, and 267 and portions of Units 260B and 266B,

Policies for State Land in the Caribou Hills April 1993 and Amended by the Kenai Area Plan in January 2000

INTRODUCTION

Policies for state land in Caribou Hills were developed by the Alaska Department of Natural Resources and reviewed by an inter-disciplinary planning team representing the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G), the Alaska Department of Community and Regional Affairs, the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation, the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, and the Kenai Peninsula Borough.

The purpose of this project was to address a conflict resulting from continued unauthorized construction of private recreation cabins in the area. Policies adopted through this planning process cover future cabin authorizations, management intent), and trail management within Caribou Hills.

GLOSSARY

Short-Term Use: An authorized activity, usually associated with a Miscellaneous Land Use Permit, lasting one year or less.

Generally Allowed Use: An activity conducted on state land, managed by the Division of Mining, Land and Water that is not in a special category or status. For the most part these uses are allowed for 14 days or less, and a permit is not required. Exceptions to the 14-day limit include docks and mooring buoys in front of private uplands for non-commercial personal use (see the DNR Generally Allowed Uses Fact Sheet).

Long-Term Use: An activity that takes place on state land for more than one year. The activity may be authorized by a specific type of permit, a lease, or a contract.

Land: All land and water within the planning area. All references to state land include only uplands, shorelands, tidelands, and submerged lands, and water, or resources belonging to or acquired by the state.

Special Use Land: Land identified as having special resource value(s) needing protection under 11 AAC 96.010. As a result of this designation, a permit may be required for activities that would otherwise be considered “generally allowed uses.”

Trail: A footpath or way on land or water that is open to public use as a matter of right whether or not a thoroughfare, particularly for dog sleds and mechanized snow vehicles. AS 19.30.241.

Uplands: Land above the mean high water line and ordinary high water mark.

BACKGROUND

Caribou Hills is the only large block of easily accessible, state-owned public domain land on the Kenai Peninsula. The primary public uses in Caribou Hills are snowmachining and fall hunting. Other uses include camping, hiking, mud-bog racing, Nordic skiing, dog mushing, forest management, fish and wildlife habitat, and oil and gas leasing. Oil and gas lease sale #78 is being proposed for 1994. The area lies adjacent to the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge. Land is eligible for selection by the Kenai Peninsula Borough.

One of the unique features of Caribou Hills is the expansive alpine country and the numerous trails criss-crossing the area. The combination of open space and accessibility makes the area perfect for winter recreation opportunities such as snowmachining.

Historically, cabins were erected in Caribou Hills to provide shelter from inclement weather while people engaged in subsistence activities. Now, cabins are also used as a base for recreation and hunting activities. The cabins were built without authorization from the Department of Natural Resources, Division of Mining, Land and Water. In 1985, the legislature passed a personal use cabin permit program which gave a statewide “one-time amnesty” for unauthorized cabin construction. Seventy-two cabins in Caribou Hills were authorized by the Division of Mining, Land and Water under that program. However, unauthorized cabin construction continued after 1985.

Winter recreation opportunities, like those in Caribou Hills, are very important to the quality of life of Kenai Peninsula residents and other Southcentral Alaskans.

POLICIES

Policies in this document apply to uses that require a DNR permit, contract, or lease. Policies apply to the entire Caribou Hills planning area, unless otherwise specified.

MANAGEMENT EMPHASIS

Caribou Hills will be managed for recreation and to accommodate increasing recreating use.

Caribou Hills will be managed primarily for “generally allowed” uses associated with recreation and secondarily for other recreation uses.

- a. Generally allowed uses are used that occur at one site on state land for 14 days or fewer. An authorization is not required.
- b. Caribou Hills has been designated “special use land” under 11 AAC 96.010. Generally allowed uses could, in the future, be limited to fewer than 14 days to accommodate increasing use.
- c. Uses over 14 days require a DNR permit, lease, or contract.

Non-recreation uses over 14 days may be authorized if consistent with the priority for recreation.

Applications for uses that negatively affect or foreclose the ability of the public to use land for recreation will be denied. However, temporary restrictions may be applied to protect public safety under certain authorizations or emergency situations.

OTHER SPECIFIC POLICIES

Trails:

The following trails are heavily used and should be examined periodically for resource damage:

- a. Straight-in Trail
- b. North Fork Trail
- c. Ninilchik Dome Trail
- d. Center Plateau Trail

Other trails may be identified as resource information becomes available.

To protect public access, rights-of-way will be established.

Restrictions on use on segments of trails will be applied when necessary to prevent resource damage or to meet management intent for recreation. Examples of restrictions include trail closures by season or by use.

- a. Seasonal restrictions are most likely when the ground is wet and when soil and vegetation are susceptible to damage. Closure dates may change depending on ground conditions.
- b. Trail restrictions are consistent with this document and do not require a policy revision.
- c. DNR will notify other agencies and the public about trail closures. Trail closures by the Board of Game apply to hunters only, while trail closures by DNR apply to both the

general public and hunters. DNR intends to provide active trail management for Caribou Hills using a variety of options that will maximize use while controlling impacts.

Accommodating Increasing Use:

To accommodate increasing generally allowed uses, additional authorizations for private cabins are prohibited.

- a. NOTE: The Division of Mining, Land and Water will begin removal of all unauthorized cabins within one year of adopting these policies. Unauthorized cabin owners will have an opportunity to remove their structures.
- b. The Division of Mining, Land and Water will work with cabin owners on a case-by-case basis to minimize resource damage and removal costs.
- c. Any unauthorized structures remaining on state land become the property of the state.
- d. The Division of Mining, Land and Water may use these structures for public or division use, or for commercial leasing.

To accommodate increasing recreation use and to complement development on adjacent privately owned lands, state land in Caribou Hills will not be sold but may be conveyed to a municipality if consistent with the Kenai Area Plan..

To accommodate increasing recreation use, Caribou Hills is open to commercial recreation leasing under AS 38.050.073. Leasing should be consistent with the primary management emphasis on “generally allowed” uses associated with recreation and the secondary management emphasis on other recreation uses.

Other Policies:

Policies on other issues and policies outside the Caribou Hills area may be found in the Deep Creek Area Management Plan. These policies remain effective until superseded by the Kenai Area Plan.

Additional policies on other issues relating to Caribou Hills may be discussed and adopted during the Kenai Area Plan planning process, which is currently under way.

IMPLEMENTATION

To implement policies for Caribou Hills, the area has been designated special use land under 11AAC 96.010. Resource values that lead to the special use land designation are:

- a. High public use values: snowmachining and hunting;
- b. Scenic values: forested areas and wide expanses of alpine tundra and scenic views;
- c. Accessible from large communities.

Portions of the Deep Creek Area Management Plan (June 1981) are amended in the following manner:

- a. The boundary is amended to include the entire Caribou Hills planning area as a subunit;
- b. Deep Creek Area Management Plan policies on management emphasis, cabin authorizations, and trail management within the Caribou Hill subunit are superseded by the adopted caribou hills policies.

(The CHMP is now incorporated as part of the Kenai Area Plan since KAP supersedes the DCAMP)

RECOMMENDATIONS

Trespass Cabins: It is recommended that the Division of Mining, Land and Water work with the Department of Law to develop an efficient procedure for and proceed with removing trespass cabins.

Citation Authority: It is recommended that the Division of Mining, Land and Water obtain citation authority to enforce these policies.

Volunteers: It is recommended that the Division of Mining, Land and Water use volunteers to assist with land management activities.

Cabins For Division Field Work: It is recommended that the Division of Mining, Land and Water reserve one or two trespass cabin sites for state agencies to conduct fieldwork.

Monitoring: It is recommended that DNR develop and implement a system to monitor overall use and environmental impacts in the area, to fine-tune field management. Monitoring system changes can be made by DNR through minor change provisions specified in the Kenai Area Plan.

Please click on the link for Map C.1 that shows the area covered by the Caribou Hills Management Plan and Special Use Lands designation