

RECREATION

1. GOALS

A. Recreation Opportunities. Alaskans and out-of-state visitors desire and expect accessible outdoor recreational opportunities. Well designed, maintained and conveniently located recreation facilities should be provided to aid the physical and mental health of a highly competitive society. These expectations shall be realized by:

1. Developing a state park system of recreation areas, trails, historic parks, rivers and sites which provide a wide range of year-round outdoor recreation opportunities for all ages, abilities and use preferences in close proximity to population centers and major travel routes;
2. Providing recreation opportunities on land and water areas which serve multiple purposes such as habitat protection, timber management, and mineral resource extraction;
3. Assisting communities through cooperative planning, conveyance of state lands and grants-in-aid for parks and trails within population centers; and,
4. Encouraging commercial development of recreation facilities and services through land sales, leases, loans and technical assistance where public recreation needs can most effectively be provided by private enterprise.

In addition to developed recreation areas and multiple-use lands, the state will attempt to provide some minimally developed or undeveloped recreation opportunities if suitable areas are identified.

B. Resource Protection. Alaska's natural and cultural resources are the foundation for recreational activities and tourism throughout the state. Deterioration of recreation areas and cultural and historical sites, loss of fish and wildlife habitat, and loss of scenic areas must be prevented if recreation values are to be maintained over time and not lost to future generations. Long-term public appreciation of Alaska's natural and human history and perpetuation of Alaska's distinctive identity will be accomplished by:

1. Protecting and portraying natural features of regional or statewide significance and cultural features representative of major themes of Alaska history in historic sites, parks and preserves of the State Park System; and,

2. Assisting other land managing agencies to perpetuate natural and historic features on other state lands, in community park systems and on private property by providing technical assistance and grants-in-aid.

C. Economic Development. The Susitna area's scenic and recreation resources have great potential to contribute to the tourism, recreation and hospitality industry, the state's third largest. Areas managed primarily for outdoor recreation and appreciation of scenic and historic resources attract large numbers of out-of state visitors; one fifth of the visitors to Alaska's state parks come from out-of-state. Further contributions to increased recreation industry employment will be achieved by:

1. Rehabilitating and maintaining recreation facilities which enable greater appreciation of Alaska's scenic and historic resources;
2. Increasing the number of attractions through additions to the Alaska State Park System; and,
3. Developing cooperative interagency visitor information centers.

2. MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES

A. The Roles of Different Public Land Owners in Providing Public Recreational Opportunities

1. Generally the state's proper role is to retain and manage land supporting recreational opportunities of regional or statewide significance. The state and federal governments are particularly capable of providing recreational opportunities, such as hunting, dispersed wilderness hiking, or boating, that require large land areas. In general the borough's proper role is providing and managing community recreational opportunities.
2. In recognition of the borough's role in meeting community recreational needs, the state should consider eventual transfer under AS 38.05.315 of certain state recreation sites near existing communities to borough ownership. The selection of these sites shall be agreed to by the borough and the state and shall be contingent on the borough's commitment to develop and maintain the recreational values of the sites as required by AS 38.05.315.

B. Public Use Cabins. A system of public use cabins should be established in the Susitna Basin. The Department will develop administrative procedures for managing a state public use cabin program, set priorities for cabin sites, and seek a budget for construction and maintenance and for program management. Cooperation will be sought with borough or federal governments or local non-profit organizations for construction or maintenance of some cabins. Locations and priorities for cabins will be based on comprehensive and region-wide consideration of resource values and uses.

C. Private Recreational Facilities on Public Land. Lodges, tent camps, or other private facilities designed to be run as private, profitmaking recreation facilities will be permitted or leased where a management plan, land planning report or AS 38.05.035 finding shows the following:

1. Significant public recreational opportunities will not be lost or blocked by the facility.
2. The amount of use generated by the facility will not exceed the best available calculation of the recreation carrying capacity of the area. This calculation will be based on the management intent and management guidelines of this or subsequent plans for the area.
3. The facility will be sited, designed, constructed and operated in a manner that creates the least conflict with natural values and traditional uses of the area.
4. The facility will be sited and designed in accordance with stream corridor, access, wetlands, and other guidelines of this plan.

Final approval of a permit or lease for the facility will be given only after consultation with ADF&G and the Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation.

D. Promotion of Under-Utilized Areas. Promote use of under-utilized recreation areas where appropriate to take pressure off overcrowded recreation areas.

E. Maximum Use of Sites. Achieve maximum use of recreation sites consistent with maintaining high quality recreation experiences, environmental quality, and safety.

F. Other Guidelines Affecting Recreation. A number of other guidelines may affect recreation management practices. For details of these guidelines, see the following sections of this chapter:

- Fish and Wildlife Habitat
- Forestry
- Public Access
- Stream Corridors
- Trails Management
- Lakeshore Management
- Wetlands Management

3. LAND ALLOCATION SUMMARY

A. Rivers and Streams. Rivers or streams that provide public recreational opportunities generally will be protected through retention of publicly owned buffers extending at least 200 feet each side of the stream. This width of buffer will allow access to and along streams for uses such as fishing and camping. A publicly retained buffer of this width will protect recreational values on the majority of smaller streams in the study area. (See river and stream policy, this Chapter, for details.)

On rivers where a larger buffer is desired to allow a wider variety of recreational opportunities, a publicly owned buffer of between 200 feet and ¼ mile on each side of the stream is retained in public ownership. This width of buffer should provide adequate land for camping and hunting in addition to protecting visual quality, water quality and riparian habitat along the river. Examples of rivers in this category are Montana, Mendeltna, Rabideux Creeks and portions of Trapper Creek and the Kings, Upper Susitna, Little Nelchina and Tyone Rivers. Refer to Chapter 3, subregion summaries and management guidelines, for further information on corridor widths on individual waterways.

Some rivers are deemed to have such exceptional recreational values that wider corridors are desired to protect these values. Rivers in this category are proposed for legislative or administrative designation to protect their recreational uses. There are seven rivers within the Susitna area proposed for such designation along all or part of their length: Kroto/Moose Creek, Lake Creek, the Talachulitna River, Alexander Creek, Lower Yentna and Susitna Rivers, Sheep Creek, and the Talkeetna and Kashwitna Rivers. Buffer widths on these rivers range from ¼ mile to ½ mile on either side of the rivers. Land to be retained in public ownership in these seven corridors totals 250,000 acres. Refer to Chapter 3, subregion summaries, for a more detailed discussion of allowed and prohibited uses within these river corridors.

B. Lakes. Lakes with important public recreational values will be protected through retaining in public ownership at least 50% of the land within 500 feet of the lake, a significant portion of which should be suitable for recreational activities (see Lakeshore Management Policy, this Chapter, for details). The impact of this policy will be somewhat limited because a large percentage of the area's lakes — particularly the larger lakes — already are ringed with private land. However, where land surrounding lakes has been sold by the state since 1979, several blocks of lakefront property usually have been retained in public ownership to provide access to the lakes.

A special effort has been made in this plan to protect the recreational values of the largest lakes (those larger than 640 acres) in the planning area. There are few of these lakes (28) and virtually all those with potential for development already have been at least partially settled. Remaining public land surrounding the large lakes with relatively little development — notably Lake Susitna, Chelatna Lake, Tyone Lake, Alexander Lake, Strandline Lake and Old Man lake — will be retained in public ownership and managed to protect and provide public recreational opportunities. Where the decision has been made by the plan to sell additional land surrounding a lake greater than 640 acres in size (e.g., Lake Louise), those sales will be designed to minimize damage to public recreation values by retaining islands and lakefront property in public ownership, protecting public access from lakes to backcountry areas and protecting stream and trail corridors and other important open space areas.

C. Dispersed Recreation Areas. The plan designates large areas to support dispersed recreation activities such as cross-country skiing, hiking, tent camping, snowmobiling, and dog mushing. These areas also offer protection for scenic vistas, geologic features and unique ecosystems for scientific, educational and aesthetic values.

This is done in part through retention in public ownership of the majority of state owned land in the study area. These lands will be managed to support a variety of uses in addition to recreation, including mining, forestry and protection and use of fish and wildlife. Land retained for these purposes include most land in the following subregions: Sunflower Basin, Mt. Susitna, Alaska Range, Chugach Range and Talkeetna Mountains. Less land is retained in the more developed accessible subregions, but the amount of retained land suitable for recreation is nonetheless substantial. Details on specific areas are included in the subregion summaries, Chapter 3.

In addition, several large retention areas are proposed for legislative or administrative designation to protect their unique and high quality public use values. Multiple use forest/habitat/recreation lands are proposed for designations in the Peters Creek, Mt. Susitna, Kroto-Kahiltna, Lake Creek-Yenlo Hills and Kashwitna areas. These areas are intended to provide for long term management of timber resources, recreational opportunities and mineral development, and protection of fish and wildlife habitat and opportunities for human use. These proposals include large alpine areas with low or no forestry potential and some important river corridors in order to maintain the integrity of large contiguous blocks of land and to protect recreation opportunities.

Other areas proposed for legislative or administrative designation with recreation as a primary use include Jim-Swan Lakes, the Nelchina Public Use Area, the Tyone Lake-Lake Susitna Area, an expansion of the existing Long Lake recreation area, and the Gunsight Mountain public recreation area. These areas also protect important fish and wildlife habitat and opportunities for human use. Details on the amount and management of land within these designations are presented in the subregion summaries, Chapter 3.

D. Land for Developed Recreation Sites. The plan designates land to support developed recreation facilities such as campgrounds and picnic areas at sites throughout the Susitna basin. Additionally, the plan recommends purchase of land presently in private ownership in several areas where public recreation demand is particularly heavy. Capital improvement funding for recreation facilities and funding for the land purchase program are discussed in the implementation section, Chapter 4.

Details on specific sites are presented in each subregion description in Chapter 3. The general types of sites designated and some examples are outlined below.

1. Campgrounds and Picnic Sites. Land with potential for campgrounds is identified and retained by the plan at several sites along the Parks and Glenn Highways. In general, the plan follows a policy of retaining isolated blocks of public land in the more developed parts of the study area where need for campgrounds is likely to exist. Sites suitable for campgrounds also are retained in select locations in more remote parts of the study area, for example at likely bridge crossings and confluences of streams.

2. Parking/Access Sites on Lakes and Streams.

As mentioned above in the discussion of lakes and streams, the plan follows a policy of retaining in public ownership land adjacent to water bodies with important recreation values. In most cases this land may be used to construct facilities to allow greater public recreational use. (Retained land will not be available for developed facilities in those few stream corridors intended to be kept in their natural state.)

3. Other Recreation Facilities. Land is reserved in public ownership near Petersville for possible use as a base for access to the south side of Denali National Park and Preserve. (Alternatively, visitor accommodations could be built along Curry Ridge or west of the Chulitna River within Denali State Park.) Accommodations in these locations could range from a campground and trail system at the Petersville site to a four-season hotel and visitors' center near Curry Ridge.

4. Heritage Interpretation. Interpretation of the history of the area will be pursued in conjunction with development of new facilities such as waysides or campgrounds. This interpretation can emphasize the trapping history, mining history, development of the highway and/or development of the railroad. These are important aspects of the past and add a dimension to recreation developments.

E. Trails and Access. To ensure continued opportunities for public use of trails, those recreation and historic trails of regional and statewide significance generally will be protected through public ownership of trail corridors. (See Trail Management policy, this Chapter, for details.)

The Iditarod and the Chickaloon-Knik-Nelchina trails have special significance because of their historical values and present public use. They generally will be protected through a publicly owned corridor 500' each side of the centerline.

Other trails with statewide or regional significance will be protected through publicly owned corridors of at least 50' each side of the centerline. Use of these trails is likely to increase as the state's population increases. The majority of trails in the study area are in this category.

Among the many trails identified and protected by the plan are those in a proposed trail system through the Talkeetna Mountains. This trail system would link many trails used for recreation and mining in the Talkeetna Mountains to trails in the Hatcher Pass Area and to others in the west along the Susitna River.

In addition to protecting a system of trails in public ownership, the plan attempts to improve road access to a number of areas with potential for expanded public recreation. In very few instances do recreational benefits by themselves justify road construction. Therefore the plan generally proposes roads that serve a variety of uses, including settlement. Details of road improvement proposals are presented in Chapter 4. Examples of proposed improvements that will benefit recreation include extension of the Oilwell Road and road improvements in the Kings River and Chickaloon River areas of the Glenn Highway Subregion.