

# GLENN HIGHWAY SUBREGION



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The following section describes land use policy within the Glenn Highway Subregion. It is divided into two parts. The first part provides an overview of resources and their management intent for the subregion as a whole. The second part presents specific statements of management intent, land use designations, prohibited uses and management guidelines for each of the subregion's twelve management units. Maps showing land ownership in the subregion and boundaries of management units and subunits are presented at the end of the second part.

## 1. SUBREGION OVERVIEW

### Background

The Glenn Highway Subregion encompasses land along the highway from the boundary of the planning area near Palmer to where the highway crosses the Little Nelchina River. The southern boundary of the subregion is loosely defined as the line where the valley ends and the mountains begin. This line approximately follows the 2500' contour in the western half of the subregion and the 3500' contour in the eastern half of the subregion. The northern boundary of the subregion generally follows the northern edge of the Matanuska River drainage. The western portion of the subregion also includes the lower-lying portions of the Knik River drainage and the Jim-Swan Lakes area.

This subregion contains approximately 1,060,000 acres. Of this, roughly 70% is state-owned or selected. Native corporations own or have selected approximately 10% or roughly 100,000 acres. Most of the Native land west of the Matanuska Glacier has been patented or interimly conveyed to Native regional or village corporations. A large block of land near Tahnetta Pass is part of Ahtna Corporation's extensive over-selection of lands and may or may not ultimately go into Native ownership. Of the remaining 20% of the lands in the subregion, most is in private ownership with a small portion in borough ownership. Although the state owns the majority of the land, much of the accessible, developable land is in private or native ownership. See the maps at the end of the next section for more information.

Despite the relative abundance of state land in this unit there has been only a single state land sale — the Bench Lake Subdivision near the Matanuska Glacier. Another action affecting state land in this subregion was the creation of the 130,000 acre Matanuska Valley Moose Range. This area was created by the Alaska legislature in 1984 in order to protect and enhance

moose habitat while permitting a variety of other land uses.

The Glenn Highway area is unique in that it possesses an abundance of valuable resources and is accessible by road within a short drive of the majority of the state's population. The area offers beautiful mountain scenery; excellent hunting, hiking, snowmobiling and cross-country skiing; good land for settlement; potential for forestry; and high value mineral, coal and other energy resources. Another unusual characteristic is that, unlike most road accessible areas relatively near population centers, it contains significant amounts of state-owned land.

The key management issues to be resolved in this area revolve around the goal of preserving its more vulnerable characteristics — scenic quality, hunting and other recreation opportunities, and existing community character — while taking advantage of the area's potential for resource development and settlement. Access improvements are another key issue, including the possible upgrade of the Glenn Highway and development and/or protection of access from the highway into backcountry hunting and recreation areas and timber, coal mining and settlement areas.

### Management Summary

The overall management intent for this area is to protect and improve recreation, fish and wildlife, and visual values while developing the area's coal and timber resources and selling moderate amounts of state land. This will be achieved by careful selection of the location of settlement areas, controls on the type and pace of settlement and careful planning of timber harvests, coal mining and other development. Details of planned land management policies are presented below by resource and type of land use.

### Settlement

#### a. General Policy

The Glenn Highway Subregion contains a significant amount of accessible, state-owned land suitable for settlement. At least some of this land can be offered for sale with less severe resource conflicts than land in other parts of the planning area. Because of these two facts this area will contain a moderate number of land sales over the next twenty years. There is relatively little borough land in the Glenn Highway subregion, but this has relatively good access and physical capability for settlement and therefore should be available for land sales over the long-term.

**b. Specific Recommendations**

**Types of Sales** — Land offered will be a mixture of large parcels (20 — 40 acres) and subdivisions. The owners of large parcels are likely to be slow to subdivide and develop the parcels due to the cost of complying with borough road building requirements. In order that some land be available in the near term to meet the large demand for recreational-seasonal settlement, some land will be offered as subdivisions with road access built and initially paid for by the state but with the cost added to the price of each parcel.

Sales should be designed to minimize impacts on recreation, visual and habitat values. Land sales should not preclude access from the Glenn Highway into more remote areas used for hunting and other types of recreation. With proper siting land sales can provide opportunities to improve public access to hunting and recreation areas.

In addition to the sale of subdivisions, at least two sites in this subregion are identified for homesteads. Both are on the south side of the Matanuska River east of Kings Mountain. Lastly, several areas that are close to the highway but difficult to reach due to topography will be open to remote cabin permits.

**Location of Sales** — A major goal for this area is the protection of visual quality. This will be carried out by generally not offering land directly adjacent to the highway unless there is adequate screening by vegetation or topography. The lower two-thirds of the subregion generally can absorb more settlement without adverse visual impacts than the eastern portion of the subregion, and as a result the majority of the sales sites are located in this area. In the eastern third of the area the vegetation is sparse, the land is open, and views are more likely to be harmed by settlement.

Several parcels of publicly-owned land along the highway will be retained in public ownership to reduce costs of coal development, protect habitat, provide personal use timber, and separate and concentrate development areas in order to reduce fiscal impacts. Future sales generally are located near communities and blocks of private land and where some degree of public services and facilities are already available (e.g., Glacier View, Sutton, and Tahnetta Pass).

Generally there are not sales south of the road except for the homestead sales planned for the vicinity of the Matanuska Glacier and the Nelchina River.

**Amount and Pace of Sales** — Land sales will be distributed over the full twenty year planning period

to provide sufficient time for road construction and to lessen fiscal impacts and impacts on community character. Total net offerings over 20 years will be approximately 5,800 acres of state land and roughly 500 acres of borough land. The table below summarizes planned land disposals.

**TABLE 1**  
**ACREAGE IDENTIFIED FOR SETTLEMENT AND AGRICULTURE\***

	<b>GROSS AREA (ac)</b>	<b>NET AREA (ac)</b>
STATE LAND		
New Offerings	25,230	5,750
BOROUGH LAND		
New Offerings	1,550	470
<b>TOTAL STATE AND BOROUGH</b>	<b>26,780</b>	<b>6,220</b>

**Agriculture**

The potential for commercial crop production on public lands in this subregion is very limited. Several areas within the Moose Range west of Cascade Creek have some potential for grazing. These areas are open to grazing permits and leases under the regional guidelines presented in Chapter 2 of this plan.

**Forestry**

Lands are retained in several areas for commercial and personal use timber harvests. Personal use wood lots are located at intervals along the highway in locations with reasonable access. The Division of Forestry hopes to work with private land owners to set up joint forestry management programs in the lower portion of the subregion. The prime spot for commercial harvest is on the north side of the river within the boundaries of the Matanuska Valley Moose Range. In this area and throughout the subregion, timber sales and management programs should be designed, where possible to improve moose habitat to minimize adverse visual impacts.

**Fish and Wildlife**

Protection of fish and wildlife values is a primary management objective within the boundaries of the

\* In addition there are 26 unsold surveyed parcels available for sale as of June 1984 within the Bench Lake subdivision (subunit 10d).

Moose Range, in most areas on the south side of the Matanuska River and within most areas east of Cascade Creek where concern with visual impacts and where low capability for settlement reduce opportunities for land sales. Another area where fish and wildlife is a primary value is on state lands within the Knik River drainage and in the adjacent Jim-Swan Lakes area. The Jim-Swan area is recommended for legislative designation as a state recreation area. In all the areas described above, fish and wildlife is designated a co-primary use with forestry and/or recreation.

### **Recreation**

Opportunities for public recreation are provided through the following actions: retention of land for a number of developed campgrounds (including land for expansion of the existing recreation sites at Long Lake and Moose Creek), retention of several larger blocks of multi-purpose forestry and/or habitat lands for dispersed activities such as snowmobiling or cross-country skiing (including the Matanuska Valley Moose Range), a proposal for future legislative or administrative designation of recreation lands at Gunsight Mt., protection or improvement of access to recreation attractions when land is sold or new roads are built for other purposes, and retention in public ownership of corridors along the Nelchina and Chickaloon Trails. The plan also recommends that funding be provided to improve campsites and trails in this area.

In addition to direct provision of land for recreation use, a major objective for management of any type of land use is protection of visual quality along the highway. This will include identification of pull-offs and scenic turnouts when the planned road improvements occur, preparation of interpretive material for tourists and other people using the highway, and restriction of the amount and type of development in areas visible from the highway. ADNRC recommends that the borough undertake a program with local landowners to encourage voluntary protection of visual quality on private land. Such a program might include restrictions on removal of vegetation, incentives to remove from sight junk cars and snowmobiles, walrus heads and similar treasures. In previous sessions of the Alaska Legislature, bills to protect the visual quality along the Glenn Highway were introduced but not acted upon.

### **Coal and Other Subsurface Resources**

Mining and mineral exploration are and will continue to be important activities in the subregion. The western half of this subregion contains substantial coal reserves. The state held the first in a series of coal lease sales in this area in December 1984. The coal lessees currently are negotiating with various utility companies

with hopes of building a mine-mouth power plant and selling electricity to the utility companies.

It is anticipated there will be several additional coal lease sales over the next 3 to 4 years. The plan protects the opportunity to develop coal by locating land sales on areas with little or no coal potential and by making it clear that areas with coal potential should be managed to allow coal development.

No state land is offered for disposal in areas with high coal value as shown on maps prepared by the State Division of Geological and Geophysical Surveys. Sales are also quite limited in areas with moderate coal value. Where sales are planned in areas with moderate coal potential, the sites have been selected to minimize impacts on future costs of coal development. This has been achieved by concentrating sales and selling land in areas less likely to be developed for coal due to existing land use patterns.

The Alaska surface mining control and reclamation act requires that land be returned to a useable state after mining is complete, and that mining be regulated to minimize environmental impacts. In some areas future land sales may be possible either after mining and reclamation have taken place or after the areas have proven not to contain commercial reserves.

All public land in this subregion is open to exploration and development of oil and gas. All land is open to mineral location, except for planned settlement areas, the Jim-Swan Lakes area and several small developed public recreation sites and the land surrounding several sheep mineral licks. These latter areas are open under leasehold location.

### **Transportation and Public Access**

The Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities is currently working on preliminary engineering and environmental assessment related to upgrading and realigning the Glenn Highway from mile 35 to mile 135. There are a number of important and potentially conflicting objectives for the improvement of this stretch of the highway. These include moving people through the area as quickly and safely as possible, keeping project costs low, protecting and enhancing environmental values and views as seen from the highway and, where desirable, improving access to existing and planned uses occurring within the subregion. Additional concerns are the federal standards for interstate highways, including limits on the number of access points to the highway and a policy of strongly discouraging construction through park and recreation areas.

## Glenn Highway

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DOT/PF is considering realigning the highway along portions of its present route. Several of the sections that may require realignment pass through areas planned for land sales or public recreation areas. Park designations will not preclude realignment of the highway if realignment is required in these areas. Resolving the details of this as well as the other issues described above will require close and ongoing coordination between DOT/PF, DNR, the Matanuska-Susitna Borough and other interested parties. Subunits affected by these concerns are units 1d, 5a, 5c, 5d, 7a and 10e (planned disposal areas) and 5b, 6a, 8b and 11b (recreation areas).

Other transportation improvements that may be proposed to implement this plan include short access roads for settlement, public recreation and timber harvest in the following locations: the Moose Range, land north of Kings River, between Kings River and the Glenn Highway, Long Lake recreation area, Bonnie Lake-Sawmill Creek area, and the Lions Head, Cascade and Nelchina settlement areas.