

# **AGRICULTURE AND GRAZING**

## **Goals**

**Economic Development.** Diversify and strengthen the state's economy by increasing the availability of competitively priced Alaska food products:

1. Encourage expanded production and availability of competitively priced farm products from existing agricultural lands.
2. Increase the acreage available for agricultural production.
3. Preserve the future option to use potential agricultural lands for agricultural uses.

**Agrarian Lifestyle.** Provide the opportunity for Alaskans to pursue an agrarian lifestyle.

**Conservation of Agricultural Resources and Protection of the Environment.** Design all agricultural projects so that the productive capability of the soil and the quality of the natural environment are maintained or enhanced.

## **Management Guidelines - Agriculture**

**A. Conveyance of Agricultural Rights.** Agricultural rights only will be conveyed to private ownership when the department sells lands that are designated for agricultural purposes.

**B. Farm Development Schedules and Conservation Plans.** When agricultural rights are conveyed, the terms of conveyance will include the requirement to comply with a farm conservation plan. Conservation plans will be approved by DNR in consultation with the Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) before farm development. The plans will incorporate soil, water, and wildlife conservation practices as developed by the Soil Conservation Service (SCS) and other affected agencies. ADF&G's technical assistance to farmers and Soil and Water Conservation Districts in the preparation of farm conservation plans will be the primary means of incorporating fish and wildlife concerns into these plans. A farm development plan may also be required.

**C. Agriculture Conveyance Program.** In the Copper River Basin, most agricultural lands are small, scattered parcels (less than 2,000 generally contiguous acres). Therefore, these lands should be considered for disposal under the agricultural homestead or small scale agricultural sale programs.

**D. Protecting Options for Agricultural Development.** Potential agricultural lands classified resource management will be available for uses that do not preclude agricultural development or impact other primary resource values. Such uses include habitat protection and enhancement, recreation, oil and gas, and forestry management.

**E. Protection of Wetlands, Lakes, and Streams.** A minimum buffer width of 100 feet (publicly owned or reserved as an easement or covenant) shall apply to all agricultural land sales. See Wetlands, Stream Corridor and Lakeshore sections of this chapter.

**F. Timber Salvage on Agricultural Lands.** See forestry guidelines page 2-13.

**G. Depredation.** Depredation of crops by wildlife will be minimized by avoiding agricultural disposals in areas where depredation is likely to be a major problem and integrating game movement corridors into the design of agricultural projects. When depredation does occur on agricultural land, nonlethal means of wildlife control are preferred and may be required.

**H. Floodplains.** DNR generally will avoid agricultural disposals in the 10-year flood plain. Where the 10-year floodplain has not been identified, the best available information will be used to identify areas where flooding is likely to severely limit agriculture. Agricultural disposals in such areas will be avoided.

**I. Suitability for Agriculture.** Designated agricultural areas can be offered under the settlement programs (such as nonagricultural homesteads or subdivisions) if found unsuitable for agriculture.

## **Management Guidelines - Grazing**

**A. Grazing in Remote Areas.** In the Copper River Basin, grazing is generally discouraged in roadless areas that have low natural grazing potential and in areas where there are no feasible farm headquarters sites. This policy directs DNR's leasing and permit program and range management plans to areas where grazing is economically feasible and minimizes the impacts of grazing on soil stability, water quality, and habitat.

**B. Grazing on Important Habitat Lands.** Grazing generally should be prohibited in the following habitat types unless DNR determines, in consultation with ADF&G, that impacts can be mitigated through specific management guidelines:

- Dall sheep range
- Brown bear concentration areas
- Habitats of endangered species and species afforded special protection, if such species would be threatened by grazing
- Moose winter concentration areas
- Caribou calving areas
- Other important habitats identified on a case-by-case basis by DNR in consultation with ADF&G

### **C. Multiple-use Management of Grazing Lands**

1. Grazing lands will be managed as multiple use lands to support a variety of public benefits in addition to livestock production, including:
  - Fish and wildlife maintenance
  - Water quality maintenance
  - Public recreation
  - Timber
  - Soil conservation
  - Oil and gas
2. Grazing lands will be managed to ensure sustainable forage for domestic stock and wildlife.
3. Public access across and public use of grazing lands may not be limited by persons holding grazing leases or permits unless approved as part of a grazing operations plan.

**D. Grazing Permits and Leases.** A grazing lease or permit issued by DNR is required for any person who releases livestock on state lands. Permits may be granted for 1 to 5 years. Permits may be issued wherever grazing is not prohibited if fish and wildlife and other significant resources or uses are not adversely affected.

1. Permits or short-term leases rather than long-term leases should be issued in areas especially susceptible to soil erosion or water quality degradation, environmentally sensitive areas, areas with potentially conflicting uses, or areas where the level of activity and investment by the lessee does not require a long-term commitment of the land. These areas will be identified through DNR's range management plans or through management plans.
2. Long-term leases (6 to 25 years) may be issued where the level of activity and investment by the lessee is significant enough to require a long-term commitment of the land. Leases will establish reasonable use standards that, if not met, may be cause for cancellation of the lease.

Long-term leases may be issued unless the best interest finding determines that significant impacts to important fish and wildlife or other resources and uses cannot be adequately mitigated in the terms and conditions of the lease.

3. The requirements stated in these guidelines will be implemented through appropriate lease and permit stipulations. In addition, standards in permits or leases will follow the fencing guidelines developed cooperatively by the DNR, SCS and ADF&G to minimize impacts to fish, wildlife, and recreation uses.

Provisions of existing grazing leases and permits are not affected by these guidelines. In areas where grazing leases and permits have been issued previously, new permits may be issued, and existing leases may be renewed before range management plans are completed. However, such permits or leases will be subject to these management guidelines.

**E. Range Management Plans.** Where grazing is anticipated to be a significant, widespread land use with potential for creating environmental harm, DNR will develop range management plans (RMPs) separately or as part of a general land management plan as described before issuing grazing leases or permits. RMPs will be developed by the Division of Land and Water Management, in consultation with the Divisions of Agriculture and Forestry, ADF&G, SCS, and Soil and Water Conservation Districts. The provisions of RMPs, listed below, will provide the basis for approval of grazing operations plans (see below) and of stipulations to be included in grazing leases and permits. RMPs will not be required where grazing is a minor use with a few animals and little land area involved. DNR will determine where range management plans are appropriate, based on consultation with other affected agencies, including ADF&G.

1. Stocking Densities. The state shall use standard United States Department of Agriculture range assessment procedures or other scientifically acceptable methods to identify the abundance, distribution, annual productivity, nutrition, and seasonal availability of range vegetation available for grazing. Forage availability, expressed as animal unit months (AUMs), and grazing schedules shall be used to establish maximum allowable stocking densities. Stocking densities will also consider wildlife forage requirements and will not exceed the sustainable range production level.
2. Water Quality Protection. Range management plans will state how anadromous fish streams, other waterways, and lakes will be protected from the

adverse impacts of grazing. Fencing may be required to protect portions of waterbodies and their riparian habitat. Identification of specific watering sites, feeding stations, headquarter sites, or other improvements, may be required to minimize the adverse impacts of grazing.

3. Annual Grazing Schedule. Range management plans will establish spring and fall dates for release and removal of stock on grazing lands. This may be necessary to protect the range and to minimize competition between stock and wildlife.
4. Map of Proposed Grazing Areas. Range management plans will include a map that shows the location, acreages, and configurations of proposed lease and permit areas.
5. Physical Improvements. Range management plans will show proposed feed lot sites, stock watering sites, supplemental feeding stations, farm headquarters sites, fences, and other improvements necessary to minimize conflicts between grazing and other resource values. Range management plans shall include, where appropriate, guidelines for the design, location, or use of roads, trails, bridges, and other improvements or actions that may be necessary or incidental to grazing operations.
6. Environmental Monitoring. Range management plans will establish procedures to monitor the impacts of grazing on wildlife, vegetation, and soil stability and establish conditions under which a lessee's or permittee's grazing operations plan may be modified to prevent environmental degradation.
7. Livestock-predator Conflicts. Range management plans will establish measures necessary to minimize livestock-predator conflicts. The state will not be responsible for loss of livestock to predators.
8. Examination For Disease. All livestock shall be examined by a state licensed veterinarian for diseases and parasites. All livestock will be free of visible symptoms of any infectious or contagious disease and parasites before placing stock on the permit or lease area. Livestock that carry an infectious or contagious disease will be restricted from placement on the range for a 60-day period to allow for treatment and retesting by a licensed veterinarian. Diseased livestock will not be released.
9. Parasite Treatment. Before release, all livestock will be treated for ectoparasites and endoparasites with an approved anthelmintic. Diseased livestock will not be released.
10. Modification of Vegetation. Artificial modification of natural vegetation (for example, clearing, burning, crushing, or seeding) will be permitted only in the locations and under the guidelines specified by applicable range management plans.

**F. Grazing Operations Plans.** Before receiving a grazing permit or lease, a person must have an approved grazing operations plan that will become part of the lease or permit. DNR will assist a lessee or permittee in preparing a plan in consultation with ADF&G and SCS. Minimum requirements of a grazing operations plan are listed below.

1. The lessee will have a cooperative agreement with the appropriate Soil and Water Conservation District.

2. A physical resource map will identify the location, acreage, and configuration of the proposed lease or permit area(s); the proposed feedlot sites, stock watering sites, and supplemental feeding stations; and the farm headquarters site, outbuildings, fences, and other proposed improvements.
3. A statement of the lessee's proposed management activities will include range management practices considered essential or desirable, including clearing and modification of vegetation; livestock species to be stocked; annual grazing schedule and forage balance sheet.
4. A maximum stocking density will be based on DNR's range management plan for the area concerned (if such a plan exists). A minimum stocking density with a schedule for achieving it will also be established as a part of each grazing operations plan to ensure efficient use of state grazing land.

**G. Standards of Approval for Grazing Operation Plans.** A grazing operations plan will be approved only when it complies with an applicable range management plan. Where there is no range management plan in effect, approval will be based on consideration of the potential effects of grazing on water quality, riparian lands, soil stability, disease transmission, livestock-predator conflicts, stocking density, and competition between wildlife and stock for forage. DNR, in consultation with affected agencies, may require that appropriate measures be specified in a grazing operations plan to minimize adverse impacts.

**H. Modification of Grazing Operations Plan.** Modifications of grazing operations plans may be required if grazing activities are determined to cause significant degradation to the range or wildlife habitat, including but not limited to, water quality, soil stability, or sustainable forage for stock and wildlife. Modifications may also be made to accommodate greater carrying capacity. Determination that modification of a grazing operations plan is necessary will be made by DNR in consultation with the lease or permit holder, the Department of Environmental Conservation, and ADF&G.

**I. Other Guidelines Affecting Agriculture.** Several other guidelines may affect agricultural development. See the following sections of this chapter:

- Fish and wildlife habitat
- Forestry
- Materials
- Subsurface resources
- Transportation
- Lakeshore management
- Public access
- Stream corridors and instream flow
- Trail management
- Wetlands management

## **Land Allocation Summary**

Agricultural land offerings will be made in areas with agricultural potential (defined by SCS Soil Survey) and near existing transportation. Agricultural offerings will be agricultural homesteads or small agricultural projects. Large scale agricultural projects are not proposed. Specific areas to be offered under agricultural programs are listed below:

<u>Area</u>	<u>Approximate Net Acres</u>
Tonsina North (mixed ag, nonag)	*
Tonsina North Addition	2,000
Tazlina - across the pipeline	3,000
Klutina South - state-owned land southwest of Copper Center	1,000
Kenny Lake - between Edgerton Highway and Tonsina River	<u>undetermined</u>
<b>Total Agricultural Offerings</b>	<b>6,000</b>

\*Acreage included under settlement listing, p. 2-30.

Most of the other state lands that have agricultural potential are included in a resource management category. These lands cannot be feasibly developed at this time because access is difficult or they are in areas with conflicting land status. Resource management lands are retained with the option for their eventual use by agriculture or forestry.

The acreages of any area can be adjusted up or down based on the amount of land determined suitable for offering during the land disposal planning process. The total acres of settlement and agricultural land offered in the basin will not exceed 18,000 acres.