

Copper River Basin Area Plan for State Lands



Plan Summary

INTRODUCTION

This plan describes how the Alaska Department of Natural Resources will manage approximately 3.3 million acres of state-owned lands in the Copper River Basin. The plan will guide the management of these state lands for the next 20 years. The plan does not make decisions for private, university, or federal lands.

In September 1984, the Alaska Department of Natural Resources (DNR) began preparing this plan. DNR's Copper River Basin planning team held public meetings in November 1984 to talk about the plan. At those meetings people spoke about issues in the area and how they would like to see state land used. These suggestions were incorporated into the planning process.

Using this information, the planning team developed three alternative plans for the use of state lands in the basin. Each alternative represented a different approach to solving important land use issues. These alternatives were reviewed by the public in Spring 1986. The planning team developed a draft plan based on comments received on these alternatives. Public meetings regarding the draft plan were held in 14 communities and public comments were accepted through November 1986. These comments were used as the basis for revisions which resulted in this final plan.

To Receive a Copy of the Plan

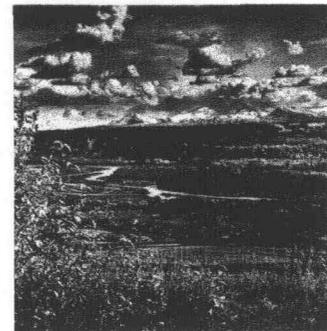
Copies of the complete plan are available at DNR offices in Tazlina (Mile 110, Richardson Highway), Anchorage, and Fairbanks. The plan has also been sent to libraries, village councils, interest groups, and most lodges in the Copper River Basin.

SUMMARY OF LAND MANAGEMENT GOALS AND POLICIES

The following is a summary of the plan. The direction of the final plan is based upon an analysis of the comments received from the public on the draft plan, plan alternatives, the assessment of the impacts of the alternatives, and policies of the Department of Natural Resources. The map on the reverse depicts land use designations for each management unit. The plan includes land use designations for all state-owned and state-selected land. Some of the state-selected land is also selected by Native corporations and may not become state land. The plan will apply only to the use of land the state eventually owns.

General Theme of Plan

The plan leaves state land available for resource development while providing protection to sensitive fish and wildlife habitats and recreation resources. The plan allows for the development of minerals, forests, and other resources. Very few uses are prohibited, although some activities are restricted to protect trumpeter swan nesting habitat and certain recreation resources. Land offerings will be limited primarily to relatively good quality land located near existing roads or easily accessible by airplane or trails.



POLICIES BY RESOURCE

Land Offerings

The Copper River Basin Area Plan determines what state land may be offered for private ownership through the homestead, subdivision and other disposal programs during the next twenty years. DNR may offer approximately 18,000 acres of land under the settlement and agricultural programs. The areas proposed for land offerings meet the following criteria:

- The land is of relatively good quality.
- The land is relatively accessible.
- The land is state owned or is likely to be state owned.
- Conflicts with wildlife and recreation are less than in other areas which are good for settlement.
- The public has expressed some support for land offerings in that area.

Settlement

The areas which would be offered under non-agricultural settlement programs are shown below.

Settlement Areas	Potential Net Acres
Glenn Highway - scattered parcels	250
Glennallen odd tracts	500
Tonsina Plateau	2,000
Tonsina North (mixed agricultural-non-agricultural)	2,000
Tolsona Ridge/Ridgeview	2,500
Meiers Lake-Paxson area	400
Squirrel Creek	500
Fireweed Mountain II (450 acres delayed until after 1996)	900
Crosswind Lake - south and east	250
North of Nelchina River	500
Tiekel Block/Richardson Highway	500
Klutina Lake Area (depends on land ownership)	500
Northwest of Gulkana Airport	200
Reofferings	1,000
Total Nonagricultural Projects	12,000

A few additional areas which could be considered for land offerings are listed below. These areas are under dual selections by the state and Native corporations. If they are eventually transferred into state ownership, they could be offered for settlement in lieu of acreage from other areas.

- Edgerton Highway 1,000 acres
- Klutina South area (SE of Copper Center) mixed agricultural/nonagricultural 500 - 1,000 acres
- Mankomen Lake 500 acres

Agriculture

Agricultural land offerings will be made on areas with agricultural potential (defined by the U.S. Soil Conservation Service preliminary 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:

Area	Approximate Net Acres
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	undetermined
Total Agricultural Offerings	6,000
Total Land Offerings	18,000

Most other state land with agricultural potential is included in a resource management category. It is not feasible to develop these lands in the near future because of difficult access or conflicting land status. The resource management designation means the land will be retained in public ownership. If access is improved or the state gets ownership of these parcels, they will be reevaluated for agriculture, forestry, settlement, or other uses.

General guidelines for land offerings include:

- The acreages offered in any given area can be adjusted up or down based on the amount of land determined suitable for offering during the land disposal planning process. However, the total acreage to be offered in the basin will not exceed 18,000 acres.
- Potential agricultural areas can be offered under the settlement programs (nonagricultural homesteads or subdivisions) if found not to be suitable for agriculture.
- The Fireweed Mountain, Paxson, and Tonsina Plateau disposals will be offered in phases to lessen impacts on existing communities or resources.
- The plan contains guidelines for stream buffers, trail protection, wetland protection and other design standards which apply to all land offerings.

Surface Leasing Surface land leases, including commercial and industrial leases, are allowed case by case except in the trumpeter swan habitat, and within 1 mile of St. Anne, Tonsina, High, Kaina, and southern Tazlina Lakes.

Remote Private Cabins DNR can issue permits (valid for up to 25 years) to individuals to build temporary cabins in remote areas. Up to a total of 30 remote cabins will be allowed in these areas:

- Manker and Greyling Creek drainage - 2 cabins
- Ahel Creek drainage - 5 cabins
- Indian Creek drainage - 7 cabins
- East Fork Chistochina drainage - 8 cabins
- Chistochina River drainage - 10 cabins
- Sinona Creek and Lake drainage - 8 cabins
- Gakona River - Excelsior Creek drainage - 10 cabins

Most of these cabins are in areas to which the department has assigned the lowest priority of fire protection. There may be no response to wildfires in these areas.

Trapping Cabins Trapping cabins will be allowed consistent with existing regulations except within recommended legislative designations at Kettlehole Lakes - Mendeltna Creek, Thompson Pass, and in the Nelchina-Tazlina recreation river corridor.

Public Use Cabins Public use cabins are built or acquired by the state and available for public use. Public use cabins may be built or acquired, contingent on funding, at these locations:

- North end of Tonsina Lake (at least 1/2 mile from lake outlet)
- Tazlina Lake
- Kaina Lake and upper Kaina Valley
- Upper Klutina Valley

Forestry

Most large blocks of forest lands will be retained in state ownership with forestry designated as a primary use. The major uses of these lands probably will be for personal use and small sales. Forestry, dispersed recreation, and wildlife habitat are generally compatible uses. Timber harvest activities in the trumpeter swan habitats (west of St. Anne Lake) will be subject to seasonal restrictions. In all other areas, forestry (including cutting houselogs, firewood, and commercial timber sales) is generally allowed.

Sand and Gravel

Existing gravel pits will be retained in state ownership. Most areas identified as having high or very high potential for additional sand and gravel resources will be retained in public ownership and available for use.

Recreation

Most high value recreation lands will be retained in public ownership and managed for multiple use including public recreation. State land around Kaina Lake, southern Tazlina Lake, Tonsina Lake, High Lake, St. Anne Lake, and Old Man Lake will be managed to protect wilderness values. No land offerings or surface leasing will occur around these lakes. State land around Paxson Lake, Meiers Lake, Summit Lake, Mankomen Lake, and Carlson Lake will be managed for recreation.

Three areas which will be actively managed for recreation are the Kettlehole Lakes-Mendeltna Creek area, Nelchina-Tazlina recreation rivers and Thompson Pass. The Alaska Legislature should consider special designation of these areas to ensure long-term public ownership and management for recreation. The plan explicitly provides for transportation and utility routes through the Thompson Pass area. Local advisory boards should be established to develop proposals for the legislature. The department will continue to maintain existing recreation sites in the basin and will expand a few sites which are now too small. State-owned land under the Gulkana River will be designated as a state wild and scenic river to complement the National Wild and Scenic River designation managed by the Bureau of Land Management.

Transportation

New roads and airstrips are allowed subject to the general guidelines in the plan. The proposed routes of the Copper River Highway could be built across state land; however, the proposed routes cross very little state land.

POLICIES BY RESOURCE

Trails

Uses of most trails in the basin will not be restricted by this plan. Use of off-road vehicles which require a permit will be restricted in trumpeter swan nesting habitat from May until September (most trails in this area are impassable during this season).

Specific trail recommendations are made for these trails:

- Crosswind Lake Trail
- Mud Lake Trail
- Ewan Lake Trail
- Tazlina River Trail
- Valdez to Copper Center Trail around Klutina Lake
- Tonsina Lake Trail
- Squaw Creek Trail to Tonsina Lake
- Gulkana River trail easements between Gulkana and Sourdough
- Swede Lake Trail
- Chistochina River Trails
- Slana River Access
- O'Brien Creek near Chittina

In addition, the trailheads of these important easements should be marked:

- Hudson Lake Trail (off Klutina River Trail)
- Copper River Access Trail, north of Gulkana airport between the Richardson Highway and Copper River
- Klawasi Trail, East of Copper Center
- Klutina River Trail
- Bernard Creek Trail
- Swan Lake Trail

Subsurface Resources

Minerals Mining is a primary use in the Slate Creek and Chisna River mining area which is the only state land with extensive mining activity at present. Most other mining claims and most lands with mineral potential in the basin are found on Native lands or private claims in the Wrangell Mountains. Approximately 3.15 million acres (97 percent) of the state land in the basin remain open to mineral entry. Approximately 110,000 acres (3 percent) of the state land in the basin are closed to mineral entry to protect certain recreation, archaeological, and fish resources. Additional acreage (approximately 36,000 acres or another 1 percent) would be closed for land disposals prior to offering. The streams listed below are closed to new mineral entry, as are the Kettlehole Lakes - Mendeltna recreation area and corridor through Thompson Pass. The north shore of Tazlina Lake is closed to new mineral entry to protect archaeological resources. All other land remains open to mineral entry.

Streams closed to new mineral entry to protect important salmon spawning and rearing areas, resident fish habitat, recreation, and scenic resources, include:

- Mendeltna Creek and Old Man Lake
- Tolsona Creek
- Kaina Lake and Creek
- St. Anne Creek
- Klutina Lake and River above Manker Creek
- Mahlo River
- Manker Creek
- Tonsina Lake and River above Rainbow Creek
- Greyling Creek
- Bernard Creek
- Long Lake and Long Lake outlet
- Nizina River - Dan Creek to Spruce Point
- Slana River (above Lost Creek)
- Ahel Creek (to 2 1/2 miles above Flat Creek)
- East Fork Chistochina River (below Mankomen Lake)
- unnamed tributary to Gakona River near Alder Lake and Swampy Lake
- Spring Creek
- Gulkana River
- Paxson Lake
- Summit Lake
- Gunn Creek and Gunn Lakes
- Fish Creek and Fish Lakes
- Crosswind Lake

State-owned uplands within 200 feet of mean high water on these streams are closed to new mineral entry. Existing valid mining claims are not affected by these closures. There are very few active or patented claims on these streams.

Oil and Gas All state land is available for oil and gas exploration and leasing except state-owned shorelands under the Gulkana River. The Gulkana River is a National Wild and Scenic River, and adjacent federal lands are withdrawn from leasing. Seasonal restrictions may be applied to oil and gas activities in the trumpeter swan habitat areas.

Other Leasable Minerals (coal, sedimentary uranium, potassium, sodium, oil shale, and geothermal). Any leases will be dealt with case by case consistent with the intent of the appropriate management unit.

Fish and Wildlife

Trumpeter Swan Nesting and Concentration Areas These areas will be managed to protect nesting habitat and to minimize disturbance to swans. Land sales and private remote cabins are not allowed in these areas.

General guidelines that apply to permits and leases in these areas are summarized below:

- Surface leasing (other than for oil and gas activities) is prohibited unless ADF&G determines that the proposed use will be compatible with the protection of trumpeter swans and swan habitat, or DNR determines it is not feasible and prudent to prohibit the activity.
- Oil and gas and mineral exploration activities are allowed, and surface leasing that support oil and gas activities may be allowed; access and certain other activities that would disturb swans will be restricted from May 1 to August 31.
- Overland access regulated by permit and other activities that require permits will be prohibited from May 1 to August 31 unless ADF&G determines the activity is compatible with the protection of trumpeter swans and swan habitat or DNR determines it is not feasible and prudent to prohibit these activities. Most overland access is difficult or impossible during this period because of the amount of standing water.
- If an activity is permitted to occur, DNR will coordinate with ADF&G to determine which of the following restrictions apply (see Chapter 2 of Final CRBAP for details of this guideline).

Activities that may damage swan nesting habitat which require permits should be restricted or prohibited from May 1 through August 31 within at least 1/4 mile of current or potential swan nesting or staging ponds, marshes, or lakes. Activities requiring permits that may cause visual or noise disturbance should be restricted or prohibited from May 1 through August 31 within at least 1/4 mile of occupied swan nesting or staging ponds, marshes, or lakes. This includes actions that may not in themselves be damaging or disturbing to swans, but which are dependent on activities that may be damaging or disturbing (for example, air access, off-road vehicles, or use of motorboats). Particular activities may be restricted or prohibited in a wider area if their potential level of damage or disturbance warrants doing so.

Note: Many activities that now occur in this area do not require permits and are not regulated by this guideline. Aircraft and floatplane landings, hunting, and fishing in traditionally used areas are not affected by this guideline.

The Alaska Legislature should consider designating the trumpeter swan habitat areas as a critical habitat area to retain the land in public ownership and provide greater long-term protection to the trumpeter swans. Existing DNR authorities can adequately protect trumpeter swan habitat in the near-term.

Fish Fish and wildlife habitat and harvest are identified as the primary use of most anadromous streams and streams and lakes with important resident fish populations. In order to protect important salmon spawning and rearing areas and important resident fish populations, certain streams and lakes will be closed to new mineral entry. These are identified under Minerals.

Wildlife The plan recognizes that state land in the basin provides habitat for moose, caribou, bear, furbearers, and other animals and that these resources are used by people from throughout Alaska and outside Alaska. Wildlife habitat is designated a primary use on all lands important for wildlife habitat or used for hunting or wildlife viewing except in areas identified for land offerings or areas designated resource management - high value.



SELECTIONS AND RELINQUISHMENTS

The state can choose more land for state ownership from vacant, unappropriated, and unreserved federal lands. In the basin, most land managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is eligible for state selection. The state, however, has a limit on the total number of acres it can select. Furthermore, the state should relinquish previously selected areas which do not have high resource values, would be difficult to manage, or would be better managed by the federal government.

The state will select 218,700 acres of land in these areas:

- Mount Billy Mitchell area and Tsina River valley - for the Thompson Pass recreation area
- Tonsina Plateau - for future settlement
- Richardson Highway Corridor, Tonsina to Tsina River - for settlement and transportation corridor
- Paxson to Meiers Lake - for settlement and transportation corridor
- Between Meiers Lake and Sourdough - for recreation and transportation corridor
- Denali Highway - for recreation and wildlife habitat
- Edgerton Highway, Lower Tonsina River - for settlement, forestry, recreation and habitat values.

The state would relinquish about 151,000 acres of land in these areas:

- Northwest of Gulkana River - more efficiently managed by BLM
- Between Gulkana River and Richardson Highway - low resource values
- Near Fish Lake - to allow BLM to manage trumpeter swan habitat

Some of these relinquishments are contingent on BLM agreeing to convey lands in the utility corridor to the state. These lands are currently withdrawn from state selection.

The state may relinquish additional selections south of Ewan Lake and east of Crosswind Lake if land adjacent to this area eventually falls under BLM management.

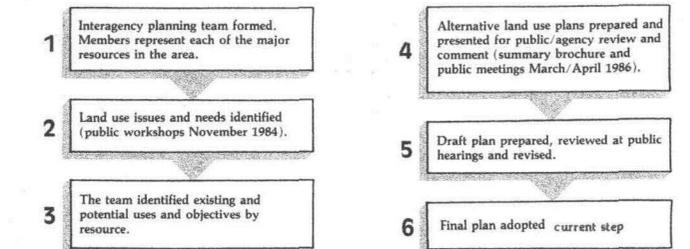
RECOMMENDED LEGISLATIVE DESIGNATIONS

The Alaska Legislature should consider designating certain state land for long-term retention in public ownership. Four areas would be managed for recreation. Areas proposed for recreation designations are:

- Kettlehole Lakes - Mendeltna Creek Area
- Thompson Pass Area
- Nelchina and Tazlina Rivers and corridor
- Gulkana River (state-owned submerged lands and water column)

The high-value trumpeter swan nesting and staging areas should be considered by the legislature for designation as a critical habitat area.

THE PLANNING PROCESS

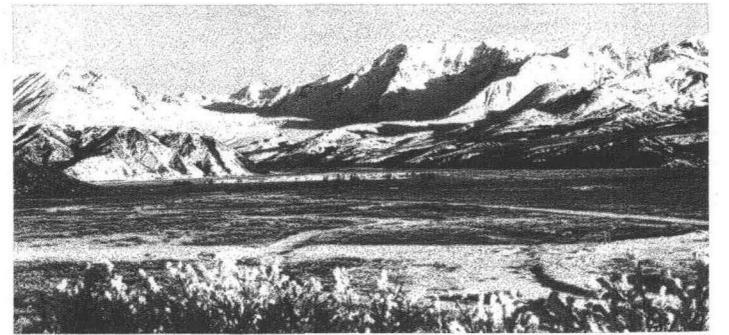


SUMMARY OF PROCESS FOR MODIFYING THE PLAN

The Copper River Basin Area Plan must be a flexible tool to the extent that it can be updated as economic and social conditions change.

The plan will be reviewed every five years to determine if revisions are required.

The plan may be amended upon approval by the Commissioner of DNR, with public review, and following consultation with appropriate agencies. A minor change to the plan, such as clarifying intent or correcting an inconsistency, does not require public review. Special exceptions to the plan are also possible in cases where plan compliance is impossible or impractical. A request for a special exception must follow certain review procedures.



COPPER RIVER BASIN AREA PLAN - for State Lands

Land Use Designations

PRIMARY SURFACE LAND USE DESIGNATIONS

MULTIPLE USE LAND - OPEN TO MINERAL ENTRY

Lands to be retained in state ownership and managed for multiple use.

-  Public Recreation
-  Wildlife Habitat
-  Wildlife Habitat/Public Recreation
-  Wildlife Hab./Public Rec./Forestry
-  Mining / Wildlife Habitat
-  Resource Management
-  Heritage Resource / Wildlife Hab./Public Rec.
-  Transportation Corridor

LAND OFFERING AREAS

Areas where the state will offer land for private ownership. In most areas, only part of the areas shown will be transferred to private ownership.

These areas will be closed to mineral entry prior to offering.

-  Proposed Settlement Offerings
-  Proposed Agricultural or Mixed Offerings
-  Settlement/ Forestry or Habitat
-  Past State Land Offerings

AREAS TO BE CLOSED TO MINERAL ENTRY

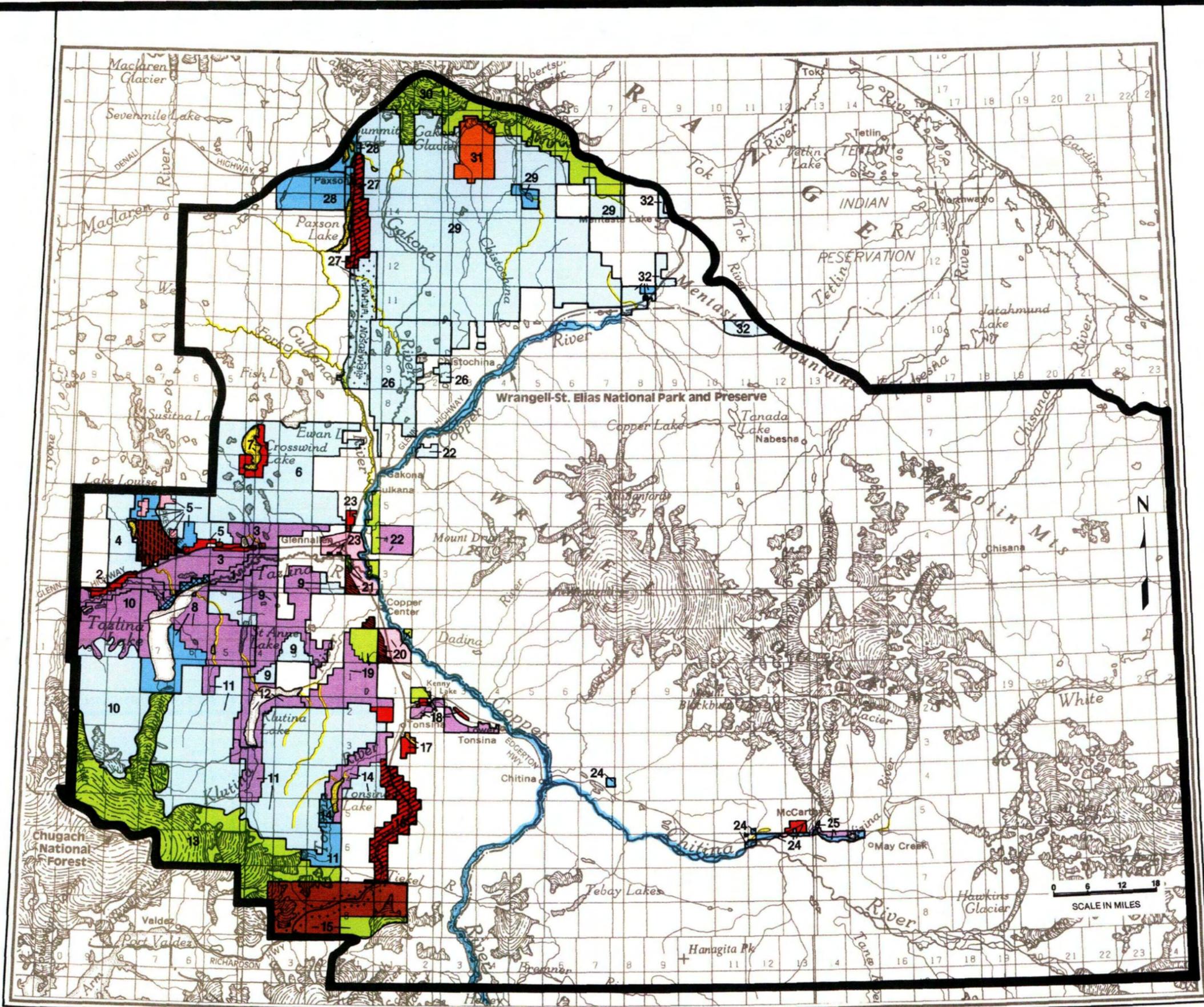
All land is open to mineral entry unless otherwise specified.

-  Streams & lakes closed to new mineral entry
-  Area closed to new mineral entry

 Management Units

This map shows generalized land use designations. Only the primary surface designations are shown. The primary uses are not the only uses that will be permitted; the large majority of publicly retained lands are multiple use areas where a variety of other uses, including mining, are allowed. See the Draft Plan for land management guidelines that apply to the whole planning area and a complete statement of management intent for each location.

The map also includes designations for land which is selected by both the state and native corporations. These land use designations only apply if the land is conveyed to the state. The map also does not show small privately owned parcels of land. The plan does not apply to private lands.



December 1986

