

**UNIT 5****ICY BAY -  
TIDELANDS & SUBMERGED LANDS****Background**

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Unit 5 is comprised of state-owned tidelands, submerged lands, and navigable waters in upper Icy Bay. This unit is defined by topography and by the limited access.

**Physical features**

Icy Bay is an iceberg-studded fiord with a stunning glacier and mountain backdrop. Mount St. Elias (18,008 feet) towers on the horizon only four miles from tidewater at the head of the bay. At the entrance to Icy Bay, an encircling sand spit (Riou Spit) shelters several anchorages. The entrance is underlain by the terminal moraine of a glacier that once filled Icy Bay. Water depths in the lower bay probably do not exceed 300 feet. At the head of Icy Bay, recent glacial retreat over bedrock has created many waterfalls.

The upper bay is choked with icebergs in summer from the retreating tidewater glaciers. The icebergs provide a haven for seal pupping and molting, while the newly-deglaciated moraines and ponds attract nesting shorebirds. The scenery and wildlife viewing opportunities rival those in better-known Glacier Bay, one of the top tourist destinations in southeast Alaska.

The Karr Hills are extremely steep, with early successional vegetation.

Uplands along the eastern shore of Unit 5 are low-lying moraines with immature cottonwood, spruce, and alders.

**Access**

Wheeled aircraft land at Kageet Point. A former beach landing area at Karr Hills has become overgrown. The relatively protected waters and a general absence of ice make Kageet Point the only reliable anchorage and airstrip for recreation access.

Other airstrips on non-state land in the Icy Bay area include: an alpine bowl on the southeast side of Tyndall Glacier (used for hiking access to Mount St. Elias), two airstrips at Caetani River, one each at Moraine and Riou bays, and two on the Yahtse River.

Moraine and Riou bays are the only safe anchorages along the open coast between Yakutat Bay and Controller Bay (west of the planning area). These anchorages are frequent havens for commercial fishing boats, fish processors, barges, freighters, and recreation boats. Riou Bay is reportedly better protected from prevailing winds and waves than Moraine Bay.

Moraine Bay has served as a log transfer site for state timber from the Yakataga forelands. The log storage facility permitted by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (COE) to Wasser and Winter Corporation at Moraine Bay was extended to 1994. Wasser and Winter holds a COE permit for two mooring buoys just south of Moraine Bay. DNR approved a tideland permit application from Chugach Alaska Corporation for a log transfer and storage facility in Moraine Bay that would cover 12 acres of tidelands and submerged lands. This would be the second log storage area in Moraine Bay. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has determined that if a new LTF is authorized, 140 acres of water 25-50 feet deep will still be available for anchorage, with a 1,500-foot wide entrance to Icy Bay.

**Land status**

In Unit 5 the state owns only tidelands, submerged lands, and navigable waters.

### **Adjoining lands**

The uplands around northern Icy Bay are within designated wilderness in Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve. Most of the eastern uplands around Taan Fiord and eastern Icy Bay are owned or selected by Chugach Alaska Corporation. There are five or six Native allotments in this area.

### **Resources and uses**

Recreation and tourism are growing rapidly in Icy Bay. Since the first known commercial kayak trip in 1984, there are now at least seven commercial trips per year. Camping and hiking are occurring at Karr Hills and Kageet Point. Karr Hills is an important wildlife viewing area. Kageet Point is the most common staging area, although both commercial and independent recreationists use Riou or Moraine bays as staging areas. Flightseeing is popular over Icy Bay, and several cruise ship companies currently visit Icy Bay.

The population of harbor seals in Icy Bay has been estimated to be as high as 3,500. Several hundred seals give birth to their pups on the floating ice in upper Icy Bay, generally between late May and mid-July. Seals with newborn or young pups are particularly sensitive to human disturbance. Disturbances that separate mothers and young pups may result in permanent separation and the death of the pup. Seals are also sensitive to disturbance during the molt, which occurs between June and early October, with the highest proportion of animals molting in late July. Seals may drift with the ice as far south as Claybluff Point.

There is a relatively-high concentration of fish and wildlife habitat and harvest in the lower bay: waterfowl and shorebirds, seabird and eagle nesting, sea otters, commercial and community harvest of fish and shellfish, and waterfowl hunting. Icy Bay has a high concentration of shorebirds and seabirds, including marbled and Kittlitz's murrelets, and gull and tern nesting colonies on Riou Spit, Gull Island, and adjacent to Karr Hills and Taan Fiord. Other nesting sites and migratory staging areas are likely to exist but have not yet been documented.

Chugach Alaska Corporation plans to harvest timber on the eastern shore.

The log transfer facilities and anchorage at Moraine and Riou bays are described under *Access*, above.

### **Management considerations**

Use of Moraine Bay and Riou Bay as an anchorage and resource transfer facility is likely to increase.

Use of Kageet Point for tourism and recreation is also likely to increase. The economic value of Icy Bay for tourism and recreation lies in the natural scenery and wildland characteristics.

### **Other**

The Kageet Point airstrip, anchorage, and camping areas are very important for public access for recreation and tourism in the upper bay. Kageet Point is currently selected by Chugach Alaska Corporation. The area has no known potential for mineral resources.

The United Nations Environmental, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has designated this coastal region as a World Heritage Site. This United Nations' designation encompasses Wrangell-St. Elias National Park & Preserve, Glacier Bay National Park & Preserve, Kluane National Park (Canada), and Tatshenshini-Alsek Provincial Park (Canada).

## Unit 5 - Icy Bay - tidelands & submerged lands resource allocation summary

### Forestry

The state owns no forest land in Unit 5.

**Access.** The plan promotes continued use of log transfer facilities on state tidelands at Moraine Bay and Riou Bay which will support forestry on state and MHT lands in the western planning area.

### Fish and wildlife habitat

The plan applies the H1 designation to three of four subunits (all tidelands and submerged lands). The plan commits DNR to consider specific protection for harbor seals during pupping and molting. Commercial recreation leasing on Gull Island tidelands is not allowed in order to protect seabird nesting. Several guidelines for Unit 5 will minimize recreation impacts to wildlife.

### Fish and wildlife harvest

The plan designates most tidelands and submerged lands in Unit 5 for harvest to protect commercial fishing and community harvest.

**Access.** The plan ensures storm shelter for fishing boats by protecting anchorage capacity in Riou and Moraine Bays. Vessel maneuvering room for harvest of fish and shellfish may be reduced in Riou and Moraine Bays if the demand for anchorage, resource transfer, and waterfront development increases.

### Minerals development

All of the Unit 5 is open to mineral entry. There are no recorded mineral prospects.

### Recreation and tourism

Dispersed recreation is a designated use in the upper bay. Commercial recreation leasing (of the tidelands and submerged lands) in the upper bay is prohibited to protect the natural setting for dispersed, primitive recreation.

**Access.** In the lower bay, recreation access is protected by guidelines to maintain the anchorage capacity. Commercial recreation leasing is allowed on most tidelands in the lower bay if it does not reduce use of the anchorage.

### Settlement

There are no state uplands in this unit.

### Transportation

The plan has guidelines to ensure the coexistence of resource transfer facilities and anchorage capacity at Riou and Moraine Bays.

### Waterfront development

Riou and Moraine Bays are designated for waterfront development. This is the most sheltered and most suitable site for resource transfer along a ninety-mile stretch of coast. The site serves the development needs of the private landowner in Unit 5 (Chugach Alaska Corporation) as well as development on state lands.

## **Subunit 5a - tidelands and submerged lands in Icy Bay - most areas**

### ■ Designation

Habitat and dispersed recreation (H1, RD1)

### ■ Management Intent

Protect or enhance fish and wildlife habitat particularly for seals, tern nesting, otters, shorebirds, and waterfowl. All activities will, to the extent feasible and prudent, avoid significant adverse impacts to these habitat resources. To avoid disturbance to seals, stipulations may be required for activities near areas of floating ice during pupping and molting.

Protect or enhance conditions for dispersed recreation, particularly kayaking, camping, boating, hiking, and wildlife viewing. All activities will, to the extent feasible and prudent, avoid significant adverse impacts to the recreation uses.

### ■ Guidelines:

<b>Commercial recreation leasing</b>	Commercial recreation leasing is prohibited north of Township 22 South to avoid disturbance to seal pupping and molting on nearshore ice floes, to maintain natural viewsheds, and to maintain a primitive recreation setting consistent with the surrounding National Park Service wilderness areas.
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### ■ General information

See information on seal pupping and molting at the beginning of this unit. Hikers follow unimproved trails along the base of Karr Hills to the edge of the Yahtse Glacier. This is one of the few level hiking areas. The uplands overlook areas of floating ice where seals haul out during pupping and molting. During these stages seals are particularly sensitive to human disturbance.

Dense floating ice limits navigation at the head of Icy Bay and drifts in dwindling concentrations to the mouth of the bay.

Kageet Point is an important public access site for recreation and tourism. The waters are generally ice-free (enabling float plane access and boat anchorage) and the uplands are suitable for wheel plane access and camping.

## **Subunit 5b - tidelands and submerged lands at Point Riou Spit**

### ■ Designation

Habitat and public use site recreation (H1, RP1)

### ■ Management intent

Protect or enhance fish and wildlife habitat, particularly for otters, seabird nesting, waterfowl, and shorebirds. All activities will, to the extent feasible and prudent, avoid significant adverse impacts to these habitat resources.

Protect or promote public access to the anchorage and to the tidelands for recreation, particularly beachcombing and wildlife viewing. All activities will avoid significant adverse impacts to opportunities for access and the recreation activities listed above.

### ■ Guidelines:

<b>Maintain natural siltation conditions</b>	Activities which may disrupt natural siltation or accelerate erosion at Riou Spit will not be allowed. The intent is to maintain the marine deposition that replenishes the spit and provides a breakwater.
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### ■ General Information

Riou Spit is a natural breakwater against prevailing seas from the Gulf of Alaska. Foul rocks and reefs limit Riou Bay as a desirable anchorage.

Riou Spit is a prime site for scavengers and beachcombers seeking flotsam from the Gulf.

## **Subunit 5c - tidelands and submerged lands at Riou Bay and Moraine bays**

### ■ Designation

Waterfront development and public use site recreation (WD, RP2)

### ■ Management Intent

Promote use of tidelands and submerged lands for water-dependent or water-related facilities, particularly for industrial or commercial purposes. All activities will, to the extent feasible and prudent, avoid significant adverse impacts to opportunities for waterfront development for the above purposes.

Maintain the capacity of the anchorage and access for multiple users, including recreation uses, consistent with waterfront development. All activities will minimize significant adverse impacts to the use and capacity of the anchorage.

### ■ Guidelines:

#### **Consolidation of resource transfer facilities**

Consider stipulations for resource transfer facilities that allow joint use of a site and promote maximum use of the site through design and scheduling in order to minimize the total number of sites needed. Before DNR will authorize additional resource transfer facilities (RTFs), the applicant should demonstrate to the satisfaction of DNR that it is not feasible and prudent to consolidate uses at existing RTFs.

#### **Maintain anchorage capacity and access**

Uses authorized by DNR must be sited and designed to maintain or enhance anchorage capacity and public access to the anchorage. DNR will not allow uses that reduce the anchorage capacity in Riou and Moraine Bay below 1994 levels.

#### **Commercial recreation leasing**

Commercial recreation leasing is allowed provided it is consistent with DNR's intent to promote resource transfer and public access to the anchorage.

### ■ General information

There are limited sites within this bay that offer the shoreline, water depths, and wind protection desired for log transfer.

There are few alternate anchorages between Yakutat Bay and Prince William Sound. Gale conditions in the northern Gulf of Alaska often force commercial fishing boats, fish processors, freighters, and recreational boats to the nearest sheltered waters. The best anchorage is east of Moraine Island (US Coast Pilot). Moving icebergs limit anchorage between Moraine Island and Gull Island. There is a good anchorage northeast of Moraine Reef.

Chugach Alaska Corporation has been issued tideland permits for a log transfer facility (small log slide) and log storage area at Moraine Bay.

## **Subunit 5d - tidelands and submerged lands at Gull Island**

### ■ Designation

Habitat (H1)

### ■ Management intent

Protect or enhance fish and wildlife habitat, particularly seabird nesting habitat. All activities will, to the extent feasible and prudent, avoid significant adverse impacts to seabird nesting.

### ■ Guidelines:

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| <b>Seabird habitat</b>               | More information on the timing of the nesting season and the sensitivity of seabirds to disturbance should be gathered prior to authorization of uses of tidelands and submerged lands adjacent to Gull Island. |
| <b>Commercial recreation leasing</b> | Commercial recreation leasing is prohibited in order to protect seabird habitat.  |

### ■ General information

The tidelands have shoals and reefs that create poor anchorage conditions.

Gull Island is low-lying, treeless, and relatively small, and seabirds are reported to use most available nesting space.

## Unit 5 - Icy Bay - tidelands & submerged lands

Unit # & name	Designation	Resource or Use (See the resource maps and reports or more complete information)	Background
<b>5a tidelands &amp; submerged lands in Icy Bay - most areas</b>	H1 RD1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ guided and recreational kayaking, camping, hiking, sailboat destination</li> <li>■ commercial shrimping and crabbing south of Independence Point</li> <li>■ icebergs provide important harbor seal pupping and molting from May - July and molting from June - October</li> <li>■ subsistence seal hunting in upper and eastern Icy Bay</li> <li>■ anchorage at Kageet Point</li> <li>■ major migratory route for waterfowl and shorebirds (Pacific flyway)</li> <li>■ arctic tern nesting colony</li> <li>■ sea otter established population</li> <li>■ marbled and Kittlitz's murrelet feeding areas</li> <li>■ eagle nesting on adjoining uplands</li> <li>■ seabird nesting colony along Taan Fiord:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>arctic terns</li> </ul> </li> <li>■ access via boat for community harvest</li> <li>■ goat hunting</li> <li>■ community harvest: waterfowl, fish, goose molting</li> <li>■ commercial salmon set nets along eastern shore</li> <li>■ The entire bay is used for dispersed recreation. Use is limited by the area's remote location, but is increasing.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Uplands in the upper bay are within Wrangell-St. Elias National Park.</li> <li>■ Chugach Alaska Corporation owns the forelands along lower eastern Icy Bay.</li> <li>■ The glaciers that flow into Icy Bay and its tributary fiords are rapidly receding. The large amount of floating ice in the upper reaches of the bay creates a hazard to navigation and limits the use of these upper reaches.</li> </ul>
<b>5b tidelands &amp; submerged lands at Point Riou Spit</b>	H1 RP1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ sea otter habitat</li> <li>■ seabird nesting colonies</li> <li>■ black and brown bear summer/fall concentration area</li> <li>■ seabird nesting colony: Aleutian and arctic terns; (1974 pop. est. at 1,000)</li> <li>■ murrelets near shore along Pt. Riou</li> <li>■ existing log ship loading facility</li> <li>■ protected anchorage</li> <li>■ waterfowl and shorebirds spring and fall concentration area</li> <li>■ community harvest: fish, waterfowl, and seals</li> <li>■ commercial salmon set nets at south end of Riou Bay</li> <li>■ commercial tanner crab harvest</li> <li>■ commercial shrimp trawl harvest</li> <li>■ recreation: kayaking, beachcombing, wildlife viewing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Uplands are owned by Chugach Alaska Corporation.</li> </ul>

**Unit 5 - Icy Bay - tidelands & submerged lands**

Unit # & name	Designation	Resource or Use (See the resource maps and reports or more complete information)	Background
<p><b>5c</b> tidelands &amp; submerged lands at Riou &amp; Moraine bays</p>	<p>WD RP2</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ log transfer facility at Moraine Bay</li> <li>■ protected anchorages at Moraine and Riou bays are important haven for commercial fishing boats, processors, and recreation boats.</li> <li>■ commercial set nets at south end of Riou and Moraine bays</li> <li>■ in-water log storage</li> <li>■ waterfowl and shorebirds spring and fall concentration area</li> <li>■ sea otter established populations</li> <li>■ marbled and Kittlitz's murrelet feeding areas</li> <li>■ brown bear summer/fall concentration area</li> <li>■ community harvest: fish, waterfowl, and seals</li> <li>■ recreation: kayaking, wildlife viewing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Uplands owned by Chugach Alaska Corporation</li> <li>■ There are few alternate anchorages between Yakutat Bay and Prince William Sound.</li> </ul>
<p><b>5d</b> tidelands &amp; submerged lands at Gull Island</p>	<p>H1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ seabird nesting colony on low-lying treeless island</li> <li>■ commercial tanner crab and shrimp-trawl harvest</li> <li>■ community waterfowl and seal harvest</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Island owned by Chugach Alaska Corporation.</li> </ul>