

UNIT 8A**YAKUTAT -
UPLANDS & SHORELANDS;****UNIT 8B****SOUTHEASTERN YAKUTAT BAY -
TIDELANDS & SUBMERGED LANDS**

The uplands and tidelands within Unit 8 are described separately to allow more detailed description of local and state land ownership and developed areas around Yakutat. Discussion of upland and shoreland subunits begins here and continues to page 3-187; tideland and submerged land subunits are discussed on pages 3-188 to 3-199.

■ Unit 8A - uplands and shorelands

Background

Unit 8A includes the community of Yakutat and the uplands and shorelands within approximately five miles of the town center. This unit is the social, cultural, and economic heart of the planning area and is home to more than 75 percent of the residents in the planning area. In September 1992, the City of Yakutat reorganized and expanded its boundaries to become the City and Borough of Yakutat, which extends from Cape Fairweather to the 44th meridian near Icy Bay. The 1990 census counted 534 residents within the City of Yakutat, and an additional 171 residents in the rest of the area incorporated as a Borough.

Yakutat is the primary service center for most of the planning area. Over 60 percent of the local economy is derived from commercial fishing and seafood processing. Tourism and government spending comprise most of the rest of Yakutat's economic base.

Physical features

Yakutat was originally settled for its strategic location for trade between the Athapaskan and Tlingit Indians. At least 14 historic or prehistoric sites, primarily camp sites and old settlements, have been identified within Unit 8. This unit presents majestic views of the Malaspina Glacier and St. Elias Mountains. Other significant features include the old-growth forest along Ophir Creek, the rich estuaries of the Ankau Saltchuck and the beaches along the coast and islands.

Land status

The Department of Natural Resources owns approximately 2,550 acres of uplands in Unit 8A. DNR land encircles the developed part of the community and stretches down Ophir Creek to the Gulf of Alaska. Approximately 1,000 acres of DNR land were harvested for timber in the 1960s and 1970s. The DNR Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation (DPOR) has applied for management authority of DNR land near Kardy Lake that includes the New Russia historical site.

The Yakutat airport is managed by the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities. The airport lands are excluded from this area plan.

Yak-tat Kwaan, the largest local landholder, owns 23,040 acres of uplands in Unit 8, including the nearshore islands, Phipps Peninsula/Ankau Saltchuck, industrial zoned land in Monti Bay, and larger tracts surrounding DNR land to the east and south. The City and Borough of Yakutat currently owns approximately 500 acres near the city center, with a pending conveyance of 138 acres. The Mental Health Trust owns 501 acres along Airport Road. Approximately 550 acres are in other private ownership.

Access

Yakutat receives daily jet service from Anchorage and Juneau. Several air charter operators are based in Yakutat. There is a float plane dock at the small boat harbor. Wheel planes are the predominant form of small aircraft used in the Yakutat vicinity.

A road system of approximately 30 miles connects the town to the airport, the boat harbor, the Ankau Saltchuck, the upper Situk River, and Harlequin Lake (Forest Highway 10). However, the road system does not connect to other regions. Travel outside the Yakutat forelands is by boat or airplane. Most residential areas within the community are accessible by road. The abandoned Yakutat and Southern Railroad formerly provided transportation between the Situk River commercial fishery and the cannery in Yakutat.

Resources and uses

Residential areas are concentrated near the head of Monti Bay, with other sites scattered along parts of the road system. Commercial and industrial activities are centered near the Monti Bay waterfront.

Sitka spruce is the predominant forest species. Most of the high value state and Native forested lands have been harvested except lower Ophir Creek, the Phipps Peninsula, and the nearshore islands.

Important upland habitat in this unit includes: several small anadromous fish streams, including Ophir Creek; eagle and trumpeter swan wintering areas; and waterfowl and shorebird migration areas on Phipps Peninsula. The upland vegetation provides habitat for moose, deer, and bear. Waterfowl, deer, and moose are hunted primarily by local residents. Community harvest is an important element of the local lifestyle and culture.

Management considerations

The demand for land for residential and commercial uses is high in the Yakutat vicinity. The major landowners who own land with the potential to support settlement include the City and Borough of Yakutat, DNR, Yak-tat Kwaan, the Mental Health Trust, and the Evangelical Covenant Church. Considerations for local land sales and development include: local zoning ordinances; a relatively high water table; location of roads and utilities; potential amenities such as views; and coordination with other landowners.

The newly-incorporated City and Borough of Yakutat will prepare a Borough Comprehensive Plan and local Alaska Coastal District Management Plan. Zoning and other land use guidelines adopted through these local plans may impact state lands within the Borough.

The newly-incorporated City and Borough of Yakutat is entitled to select ten percent of the vacant, unappropriated, and unreserved (VUU)¹ state land within its boundaries. This entitlement is 138 acres.² No state land sales are currently planned.

Water volumes in Ophir Creek have significantly declined in recent years, causing a reduction in fish production. CBY and DFG are attempting to enhance spawning habitat. The effects of nearby land management activities, such as timber harvest, on water flows are unclear.

CBY has identified Ophir Creek, Ankau Saltchuck, and Shipyard Cove as Special Management Areas in the 1995 draft Yakutat District Coastal Management Program. CBY has proposed guidelines for these Special Management Areas.

1 See Glossary in Appendix A.

2 Under the December 1994 settlement agreement, DNR agreed to convey 103.54 acres under AS 38.05.810, without any revisionary interest, based on public interest finding required by AS 38.05.810(g). The remaining acreage under the 138 entitlement (34.46 acres) will be conveyed under AS 29.65.

Unit 8A - Yakutat - uplands & shorelands resource allocation summary

Forestry

Availability. Timber harvest at Ophir Creek will be limited to selective cutting for local use under small commercial or private timber sales. This will meet the local demand for timber and enable the state to realize an economic return while protecting other primary values.

In other subunits suited for forestry, DNR has logged 50 to 90 percent of the timber. Some of these units will be designated for other uses to meet community development needs. This reduction in the state's timber base should not affect sustained yield calculations for other state timber harvests because Yakutat timber is separate from Yakataga, and because the volume at Yakutat is too small for sustained commercial yield.

Fish and wildlife harvest

The three subunits with the most concentrated community and sport harvest were designated HV. The beds of Ophir Creek and Summit Lake are closed to new mineral entry to protect fish productivity, thereby protecting opportunities for fishing and other food-gathering. Retention of uplands at Aka and Kardy Lakes will ensure overland public access for sport and community harvest in the Ankaou saltchucks.

Fish and wildlife habitat

The two subunits with most concentrated habitat values are designated H. The beds of Ophir Creek and Summit Lake will be closed to new mineral entry to protect fish productivity. Mineral leasehold location will be applied to the shorelands and tidelands of the Ankaou saltchucks, Aka Lake, and Kardy Lake to protect fish productivity. The plan prohibits commercial recreation leasing at Ophir Creek in part to preserve old growth habitat.

Minerals development

All state uplands in Unit 8 will remain open to mineral entry until and unless proposed for disposal. The state-owned shorelands of Ophir Creek and Summit Lake are closed to mineral entry in order to protect anadromous fish habitat. The shorelands of Aka Lake, Kardy Lake, and Ankaou Saltchucks are open to mineral entry only under leasehold location, in order to protect productive anadromous fish habitats.

Recreation and tourism

The plan assigns a recreation designation to the three subunits with relatively high recreation and tourism values and use. The plan states DNR's intent to retain Puget Cove waterfront and uplands to ensure public recreation access to Yakutat Bay. A guideline protects scenic qualities at Puget Cove. DNR has encouraged the USFS's and CBY's efforts to recreate a former canoe route parallel to the coast, and DNR will minimize impacts to the scenic, cultural, and recreational values along the route. The plan supports small-scale commercial recreation leasing that is consistent with public use at Puget Cove and Aka Lake. At Ophir Creek commercial recreation leasing is prohibited to protect high fish and wildlife habitat and community harvest.

Unit 8A - Yakutat - uplands & shorelands resource allocation summary

Settlement

To meet the community and state interest in balanced private and public ownership, six subunits are designated for settlement or general uses for potential residential and commercial expansion. These subunits adjoin developed areas and are road-accessible, thus meeting the state's goal of efficient community expansion. Under the MHT settlement DNR will convey ownership of Subunit 8a-4 to the Mental Health Trust.

Transportation

The area plan has guidelines for retaining access corridors in public ownership before disposing of lands.

Waterfront development

The plan designates uplands near the docks along Monti Bay for general uses in order to meet future development needs along the industrial waterfront.

Other resources

General uses. Two tracts with no dominant resource values are designated for general uses to allow a mix of appropriate uses on a first come, first served basis.

Heritage resources. The New Russia site is designated heritage resources (HR). Other cultural sites will be protected under existing DNR regulations through the oversight of the State Historic Preservation Office.

Aquatic farming. DNR did not designate uplands for support of aquatic farming because operators of potential farming sites can commute from town or use floating facilities.

Subunit 8a-1 - Puget Cove uplands

■ Designation

Settlement and dispersed recreation (S, RD1)

■ Management intent

Promote sale, leasing, or permitting of state lands or transfer to the Borough to allow private commercial, or residential uses, or community uses, to the extent consistent with management for dispersed recreation.

Protect or enhance conditions for dispersed recreation, particularly boating, camping, fishing, day use, and scenic values both from the water and the uplands, and access. All activities will, to the extent feasible and prudent, avoid significant adverse impacts to these recreation activities and values.

Recreation development at Puget Cove should maintain or enhance public recreation access to Yakutat Bay because these are the only state uplands along the bay. Small-scale commercial recreation may be compatible with the public recreation potential of the site.

To ensure maximum public benefits, DNR will retain in state ownership appropriate lands within this unit to protect scenic values and public access to and along the waterfront for recreation, including camping and fishing. Retention of some state lands for public recreation is important because (a) these are the only state lands along Yakutat Bay, (b) these lands have high scenic values and easy access by water or overland from town, and (c) most of the waterfront in the vicinity of town is unavailable or less desirable for public recreation because it is privately owned, or zoned for development, or has been logged.

■ Guidelines:

Scenic protection Screening for upland development, including disposals, should be provided in order to minimize impacts to the natural scenic qualities from the water and shore of Puget Cove. Retention of natural terrain and vegetation for screening is desirable.

■ General information

The current boundary of Subunit 8a-1, the designation, and the classification for Settlement and Public recreation, are in accordance with the December 1994 settlement agreement.

The rolling terrain affords spectacular westward views, with the barrier islands as foreground and Malaspina Glacier and Mount St. Elias as a backdrop. Forested hills at the water's edge conceal the clearcut areas on the bench south and east of Puget Cove.

Easy access via a short boat ride in sheltered waters, or via a short walk from the road system, heightens the recreation and harvest opportunities at Puget Cove. Community harvest of fish and crabs is relatively heavy: this cove rates with the Ankau as the two top marine harvest areas for local residents. Current recreation uses include shore casting and trolling. Puget Cove receives heavy boat traffic offshore to water depths of about 35 feet.

There are a few small coho spawning streams, moderate herring spawning, and eel grass at the head of Puget Cove.

This parcel is zoned "conservation" in the 1983 *Yakutat Comprehensive Development Plan*.

See also the table at the end of this unit and Appendix F.

Subunit 8a-2 - north Forest Highway

■ Designation

Settlement (S)

■ Management Intent

Promote sale, leasing, or permitting of state lands to allow private commercial, industrial, or residential uses, or community uses.

Commercial recreation leasing is allowed in this subunit.

■ **Guidelines:** None. There are no guidelines specific to this subunit.

■ General information

The portion of this subunit within Section 19 (Township 27 South, Range 34 East) (south of Puget Cove) was formerly in Subunit 8a-1. DNR has designated and classified this portion for Settlement in accordance with the December 1994 settlement agreement.

This parcel is near existing residential subdivisions and has highway access to town.

Subunit 8a-3 - south Forest Highway, Glacier Bear area

■ Designation

Settlement (S)

■ Management intent

Promote sale, leasing, or permitting of state lands to allow private commercial, industrial, or residential uses, or community uses.

Commercial recreation leasing is allowed in this subunit.

■ **Guidelines:** None. There are no guidelines specific to this subunit.

■ General information

This area adjoins the Glacier Bear Lodge and Restaurant. The land is road accessible and level. There is a visual buffer of mature trees between the clear-cut areas and the highway.

Subunit 8a-4 - Airport Road

Note: This parcel is no longer managed by DNR. It is being [or has been] conveyed to the Mental Health Trust. Lands held by the MHT are not subject to the land use designations or guidelines in this plan.

■ General information

This parcel is near existing residential subdivisions and has highway access to town. DNR had previously designated and classified it for settlement, which was consistent with subsequent transfer to the MHT.

DNR surveyed approximately 500 acres for a residential subdivision in 1984 (ASLS 84-89). The sale was halted by opposition from the City of Yakutat. Local residents expressed mixed opposition and support.

Subunit 8a-5 - road junction

■ Designation

Settlement (S)

■ Management intent

Promote sale, leasing, or permitting of state lands to allow private commercial, industrial, or residential uses, or community uses.

■ Guidelines:

Mineral closure The bed of Ophir Creek is closed to new mineral entry in order to protect high quality anadromous fish habitat and to avoid impacts to water quality that is essential for sustaining the productivity of the Yakataga area's commercial, sport, and community harvest fisheries. See Appendix B for a map of the areas closed to new mineral entry.

■ General information

This parcel is hilly and mostly forested.

State land east of the airport road is zoned Residential Reserve in the *Yakutat Comprehensive Development Plan* (1983). State land east of the airport road is zoned Conservation.

Subunit 8a-6 - Ophir Creek uplands & shorelands, and Summit Lake shorelands

■ Designation

Habitat, harvest, dispersed recreation, and forestry (H1, HV1, RD1, F2)

■ Management intent

Protect or enhance fish and wildlife habitat and harvest, particularly anadromous fish habitat, swan and eagle wintering habitat, and community harvest. Protect or enhance conditions for dispersed recreation, particularly scenic characteristics and public day use opportunities.

All activities will, to the extent feasible and prudent, avoid significant adverse impacts to the fish and wildlife habitat and harvest and dispersed recreation. DNR encourages efforts of the USFS and the City and Borough of Yakutat to designate and develop the historic canoe route parallel to the coast. Because uplands in Unit 8a-6 are important to the natural setting for the canoe route, DNR will ensure that activities in Unit 8a-6 avoid significant adverse impacts to the scenic, cultural, and recreational values of the canoe route.

Maintain opportunities for forest management.³ Limit timber harvest to selective cutting for local use under small commercial or personal use timber sales in order to protect the character of the old growth forest habitat, community fish and wildlife harvest, and recreation opportunities.

³ Local residents have demonstrated an ongoing need for personal use timber harvest near the town. Illegal harvest of state timber is recurrent in this subunit. The secondary designation for Forestry (F2) is intended to allow DNR to manage this use eventually.

YAKATAGA AREA PLAN

DNR will manage this subunit consistent with the Yakutat Coastal District's guidelines for the proposed Ophir Creek special management area (printed in the *Yakutat District Coastal Management Program*).

■ Guidelines:

Mineral closure DNR adopted Mineral Order No. 712 to close to new mineral entry the state-owned shorelands and tidelands of anadromous portions of Ophir Creek and the shorelands of Summit Lake in order to protect high quality anadromous fish habitat and to avoid impacts to water quality that is essential for sustaining the productivity of the Yakataga planning area's commercial, sport, and community harvest fisheries. See Appendix B for a map of the areas closed to new mineral entry.

■ General information

Historically, Ophir Creek has been an important community harvest area, particularly for late-running coho salmon. The creek's water volumes have dwindled in recent years and coho production has dropped sharply. The cause of the hydrological and biological change remains undetermined. Possible causes include: clear cut timber harvest in the upper drainages; isostatic rebound and resultant changes to the water table; and materials sales. DFG and CBY are undertaking a fisheries enhancement program to restore the salmon run in Ophir Creek.

Several gravel roads wind through the logged areas. The parcel has potential to support small-scale local timber needs.

Subunit 8a-7 - west Yakutat

■ Designation

General uses (G)

■ Management intent

Allow general multiple uses.

Commercial recreation leasing is allowed in this subunit.

■ **Guidelines:** None. There are no guidelines specific to this subunit.

■ General information

This subunit is hilly and forested, with numerous poorly-drained vales and swales. It adjoins CBY land and Yak-tat Kwaan land zoned for industrial uses (petroleum facility development).

Subunit 8a-8 - Aka Lake uplands and submerged lands

■ Designation

Habitat, harvest, heritage resources, and dispersed recreation (H1, HV1, HR, RD1)

■ Management intent

Protect or enhance fish and wildlife habitat and harvest, particularly waterfowl habitat and intensive community fishing and sport fishing. Protect or enhance heritage resources, particularly the Russian site. Protect or enhance conditions for dispersed recreation, including day use, camping, access and scenic values of the coastal fringe for hiking, ATVs, and beachcombing.

All activities will, to the extent feasible and prudent, avoid significant adverse impacts to the fish and wildlife habitat and harvest uses, heritage resources, and dispersed recreation.

Small-scale commercial recreation may be compatible with protecting and enhancing the public recreation potential and heritage values of this site.

DNR encourages the efforts of the USFS and City and Borough of Yakutat to designate and develop the historic canoe route parallel to the coast as a recreation and cultural attraction. DNR will ensure that activities in Unit 8a-8 avoid significant adverse impacts to the scenic, cultural, and recreational values of the canoe route.

Lands in this subunit will be retained in state ownership to protect public access and the historical value of heritage resources.

■ Guidelines:

Mineral leasehold location In the bed of Aka Lake, new mineral entry will be allowed only by leasehold location in order to protect high quality anadromous fish habitat and to avoid impacts to water quality that is essential for sustaining the productivity of the Yakataga planning area's commercial, sport, and community harvest fisheries. See Appendix B for a map of the leasehold location areas.

■ General information

Locals and visitors drive to Aka Lake for shore-based sport fishing. This parcel is the only state-owned land on the outer coast near Yakutat. The combined access to the beach and the lake offer high recreation potential.

The area contains the site of the first Russian settlement on the coast: a garrison, stockade, and farming site dating back to 1796. In 1805, Tlingits attacked and burned the New Russia settlement, killing all but a few of the settlers. Today, there is little physical evidence of the site of the ill-fated colony. The site is a National Historic Land mark. The Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation has applied for an Interagency Land Management Agreement to protect the historic site.

Subunit 8a-8 has the habitat characteristics for waterfowl migratory staging and/or nesting and/or overwintering. The Ankau and nearby lakes support a high concentration of eagles. US Forest Service studies have documented trumpeter swans overwintering in this area. DNR may need more detailed information on habitat values before authorizing uses.

A DPOR inventory (*Recreation, Scenic and Heritage Areas of Particular Concern*) noted that the area's wildlife includes nesting waterfowl, moose, Sitka black-tailed deer, brown bear, black bear, eagles, wolf, beaver, marten, weasel, land otter and marmot. The rich variety of wildlife amidst a changing landscape makes this area significant for wildlife viewing.

Subunit 8a-9 - eastern airport tract

■ Designation

Settlement (S)

■ Management intent

Promote sale, leasing or permitting of state lands to allow commercial or industrial uses, consistent with the use and development of the Yakutat airport.

■ Guidelines:

Commercial recreation leasing Commercial recreation leasing is allowed in this unit.

■ General Information

These relatively small, isolated parcels were selected from Tongass National Forest under National Forest Community Grant #209. They are bordered by the airport and by Native selections.

■ Unit 8B - tidelands & submerged lands

Background

Unit 8B encompasses the heavily-used tidelands and submerged lands within a few miles of Yakutat including Monti Bay, and parts of Yakutat Bay and the Gulf of Alaska.

Physical features

This unit includes the only deep-water anchorage protected from storms between Cordova (225 miles north) and Cross Sound (150 miles south). The relatively sheltered waters provide rich habitat for an abundance of marine life. Several bays, coves, passages, and lagoons provide protected waters for fishermen, subsistence harvesters, and recreationists. Monti Bay is adjacent to the industrial and main population center of Yakutat.

Land status

State land in Unit 8B is limited to the tidelands and submerged lands near Yakutat. The City and Borough of Yakutat owns approximately 258 acres of tidelands and submerged lands along the eastern shore of Monti Bay adjacent to the dock and several waterfront residences. DNR owns all other tidelands and submerged lands in the unit. Leases for commercial and industrial uses have been issued in south Monti Bay.

Adjoining lands

Adjacent upland owners include the City and Borough of Yakutat, DNR, Yak-tat Kwaan, and a few other private parties.

Access

The docks and anchorage in Monti Bay provide a marine transportation link between Yakutat and other Pacific ports. State ferry service is limited to a few times per year but barge and freight service is more frequent. Besides Monti Bay, several bays and coves provide protected anchorage for fishing boats and other smaller craft. The boat harbor in Shipyard Cove is managed by the Department of Transportation & Public Facilities (DOTPF). It provides docking facilities for boats and float planes and has a launch ramp connected to the local road system. The timber transfer facility at Broken Oar Cove is another marine access point.

Resources and uses

Local residents, commercial fishermen, and an increasing number of visitors harvest and or observe the diverse and abundant marine life in Unit 8B. Harbor seals, sea otters, and a variety of waterfowl, salmon, crab, clams, and seaweeds are commonly harvested and observed. The Ankau Saltchucks have exceptional habitat and harvest values for waterfowl, shellfish, and salmon. They are highly popular for community harvest and, increasingly, sport harvest. Puget Cove is intensively used for community crab and salmon harvest. Knight Island and Chicago Harbor are popular destinations for weekend boating, particularly for fishing and community harvest. Khantaak Island is a favorite day-trip destination for boating and for community harvest of a variety of seafood.