

1a. Lower Little Susitna River Subunit

Background

MILES OF RIVER/RIVER CHARACTERISTICS, RM 33.2 to RM 65.5 and Nancy Lake Creek RM 0 to RM 5.5

The subunit extends from the Susitna Flats Game Refuge to the City of Houston western boundary. It also includes the lower 5.5 miles of Nancy Lake Creek.

The river meanders through this subunit, and moves slower than in the subunits upstream. Contiguous wetlands cover 75 to 80 percent of the subunit above Nancy Lake Creek, and 15 to 20 percent of the area in the lower third of the subunit.

LAND OWNERSHIP

State	10,945 acres
State/Mental Health	2,400 acres
Matanuska-Susitna Borough	1,680 acres
Total	15,025 acres

CAMPING

The following numbers of undeveloped campsites along the river were identified in a 1989 survey:

Primary Campsites ¹	1
Secondary Campsites	38
Marginal Campsites	30

ACCESS

There are three roads that provide access to this part of the Little Susitna River and its tributary, Nancy Lake Creek. The Little Susitna Access Road, to the south of the subunit, serves as the primary access and boat launch for the lower

river. Floaters also take out there. Considerable pedestrian and off-road vehicle traffic extends up the river from this road. The George Parks Highway, just above this subunit, also provides access for boats and off-road vehicles that use this subunit. Finally, a road at RM 7 on Nancy Lake Creek provides boat access to the creek.

The Matanuska-Susitna Borough proposes to extend the South Big Lake Road to the Little Susitna River at the lower end of the subunit. This may eventually cross the Little Susitna River and connect to the proposed Winnebago Road and areas west of the river.

Two float plane landing areas are located adjacent to the subunit at Hock and Yohn Lakes. Primitive foot trails connect the river with these lakes. The river is too narrow and shallow to accommodate floatplanes.

The frozen Little Susitna River and Nancy Lake Creek are used for winter travel. There are interconnecting winter trails in the subunit between Nancy Lakes, Houston, Willow, and Big Lake that are used primarily by snowmachines and dog teams. The trails follow seismic lines, powerlines, or open swamps west of the Parks Highway. The Iditarod race trail crosses the Little Susitna River near Yohn Lake.

HERITAGE RESOURCES

This section of the river is particularly rich in traditionally-harvested resources and the potential for heritage sites is very high. The Iditarod National Historic Trail, which crosses this subunit, was the winter route used to transport mail and supplies from Seward to Nome during the early part of this century.

Management Intent

Class I. This subunit is used by a variety of users year-round, because of its proximity to the railbelt and because it is rich in Recreation Resources.

The subunit features high quality fishing, hunting and camping opportunities for powerboaters, floaters, and bank fishermen in a relatively remote, undeveloped setting. In the winter, the

¹ See glossary for definition of primary, secondary, and marginal campsites.

subunit features numerous snowmachine, dog-mushing, and cross-country skiing trails. It also includes winter moose habitat and salmon spawning habitat. The subunit will be managed to provide and enhance these recreation opportunities and fish and wildlife habitat. Maintaining levels of low development and an essentially unmodified natural environment will be the focus of management. Maintaining public use sites is a high priority. While Class I intent is generally defined as having low levels of social interaction between users, higher levels of use are accessible in this popular subunit, including accommodating road

access at the upper and lower ends of this subunit and on Upper Nancy Lake Creek. Management of this subunit is expected to be higher than in other Class I areas because of the level of public use. Management includes some seasonal restrictions on powerboat and floatboat use in order to provide both motorized and non-motorized recreation opportunities.

Borough Lands. Borough lands in this subunit are classified "Public Recreation." For management intent on borough lands, contact the Matanuska-Susitna Borough.

Management Guidelines

Boating Restrictions. See management guidelines for the Little Susitna River Management Unit in this chapter.

South Big Lake Road Extension. The Matanuska-Susitna Borough is evaluating the feasibility of building a boat launch and campground on the Little Susitna River at the terminus of the proposed South Big Lake Road extension (RM 39.5). The construction of the road and eventual bridging of the river are compatible with the management intent for this area and consistent with guidelines in Chapter 2 (*Upland Access, Roads and Shoreline Development, Bridges*).

A boat launch that can accommodate powerboats on trailers is not compatible in this subunit for the following reasons:

1. **Existing Boat Launch.** There is already a powerboat launch within eight river miles of the proposed location of the bridge.
2. **Safety.** The river depth in the vicinity of the proposed boat launch is shallow. Encouraging large boats to use this area by building a boat launch would result in numerous groundings and more boats using constricted river channels.
3. **Salmon.** Additional powerboats in this area would affect salmon spawning and schooling behavior. The increased success of powerboat anglers in this area may also result in fewer fishing opportunities upriver.

If the proposed road is built, the public will attempt to launch boats with or without a developed boat launch. The resulting congestion on the road-

way may be hazardous. To mitigate this, a small-scale, walk-in boat launch may be authorized. In addition, a small parking area should be provided to prevent parking along the roadway.

After the road is completed, increased public use of this area is likely. To protect natural resource values from degradation, developed sanitation facilities, foot paths, and a modestly sized campground are recommended for this area. A kiosk and signs should be constructed to provide information on the Little Susitna Recreation River.

Iditarod Trail. The Iditarod Race Trail and Iditarod National Historic Trail cross this subunit on borough lands near Yohn Lake. The race trail route varies from year-to-year and may one day cross state land. For guidelines on activities near these trails on state lands see Chapter 2: *Trails, Iditarod Race Trail and Heritage Resources, Iditarod National Historic Trail*.

Heritage Resources. Historic and prehistoric sites in this subunit should be evaluated for their interpretative values for tourism or general interest sites because of easy public access and the concentration of sites.

Unauthorized Cabin. An unauthorized cabin is located on state land just northwest of the confluence of Nancy Lake Creek and the Little Susitna River. Its use and condition should be evaluated consistent with public use cabin guidelines on Chapter 2 and removed if necessary.

Public Information. At both the Little Susitna River Access Road and the South Big Lake Extension Road a kiosk should be established to pro-

vide information on the Recreation Rivers. A sign should also mark the lower limit of the Recreation River near RM 33.2.

Additions to and Deletions from the Recreation River.

1. *Nancy Lakes State Recreation Area:* There is an inadvertent overlap between the Little Susitna Recreation River Management Unit and the Nancy Lakes State Recreation Area. This error should be corrected in the statutes. Areas that remain in the Recreation Rivers should be managed consistent with this sub-unit.
2. *Upper Nancy Lake Creek:* Because of its values for sport fishing, habitat, and recreation, state land and water on upper Nancy Lake Creek, a 480-acre parcel, is recommended for addition to the Recreation Rivers. Recommending adding these borough-selected lands to the Recreation Rivers is pending the adjudication of the borough entitlement.

3. *Susitna Flats State Game Refuge:* When the plan is updated, DNR and DFG should consider whether the lower Little Susitna River on the Susitna Flats State Game Refuge should be recommended for designation as a Recreation River. Also see Chapter 4, *Areas Recommended for Designation as Recreation Rivers, Upper Nancy Lake Creek and Other Recommendations, Future Additions, Upper Nancy Lake Creek.*

Regulations in the Nancy Lakes State Recreation Area. DNR shall promulgate boating regulations that can be enforced by both DLW and DOPOR for the Little Susitna River flowing through the Nancy Lakes State Recreation Area. This river segment has dual designation as a Recreation River and a State Recreation Area. Boating regulations shall be consistent with those proposed for the Little Susitna River non-motorized zone. DNR shall also adopt camping regulations for the areas within one-half mile of the Little Susitna River in the Nancy Lakes State Recreation Area. Regulations shall be consistent with the four-day camping regulations proposed for all the Recreation Rivers.

Public Use Sites

See *Public Use Sites* in Chapter 2 for management guidelines. Specific locations are shown on maps at the end of this unit.

- PU 1a.1 **Iditarod Trail Crossing (RM 34).** This is a popular campsite.
- PU 1a.2 **Hock Lake Trail (RM 39.5).** This is a well-used access point to Hock Lake.
- PU 1a.3 **Papoose Creek (RM 47.5).** This is a popular area for camping and fishing.
- PU 1a.4 **Skeetna Lake Portage (RM 55).** This site includes the trail portage to Skeetna Lake in the Nancy Lakes Recreation Area. This is also a popular camping spot.
- PU 1a.5 **Campsite by the Big Rock Fishing Hole (RM 60).** This is a popular fishing hole and camping area.
- PU 1a.6 **Nancy Lake Creek Junction (RM 61.5).** This is a popular area for fishing and camping. Red salmon linger at this confluence before ascending Lake Creek to Nancy Lake where they spawn.
- PU 1a.7 **Miller's Reach Boat Launch (RM 65.5).** This site includes a side road in this subdivision that is used as a powerboat launch.
- PU 1a.8 **Nancy Lake Creek Bridge (RM 7).** This area is in a proposed addition to the Recreation Rivers. The bridge site is used for access to fishing and launching small boats on Nancy Lake. Nearby roadside pull-offs are used for car camping

Special Management Areas

See *Special Management Areas* in Chapter 2 for management guidelines. The specific location of this site is shown on the maps at the end of this unit.

SMA 1a.1 Proposed South Big Lake Extension Road (RM 36.5). This Special Management Area includes the state-owned shorelands and water adjacent to the proposed South Big Lake Extension Road crossing. The SMA will be managed as a Class II area. Class II area guidelines will apply.

The management of the SMA is to accommodate limited public facility development associated with the proposed road while providing for and enhancing public recreation values, and fish and wildlife habitat. Seasonal restrictions on powerboats and floatboats apply within the SMA. The location of the SMA is only approximate because alternate road locations are being considered at this time. The SMA will apply to the final location of the road without a plan amendment.

Recommendations for this Subunit

Cooperative Management Agreement. The DLW, DOPOR, DFG, and the borough should work cooperatively on recreation management along the Little Susitna River between Hock Lake and the Little Susitna River Access Road. High public use and the close proximity of the boat launch, campground, refuge, weir, harvest survey station, proposed road extension, and borough lands warrant cooperative recreation management in the area. Cooperative management agreements should address issues such as facility maintenance, regulations, use of facilities and equipment, funding, and field staff responsibilities. Also see Chapter 4, *Agency Responsibilities*.

Additions to the Recreation Rivers. Because of high recreation use, the lower Little Susitna River on the Susitna Flats State Game Refuge may be considered for recommended designation as a Recreation River when the plan is updated. Also see *Other Recommendations, Future Additions* in Chapter 4.