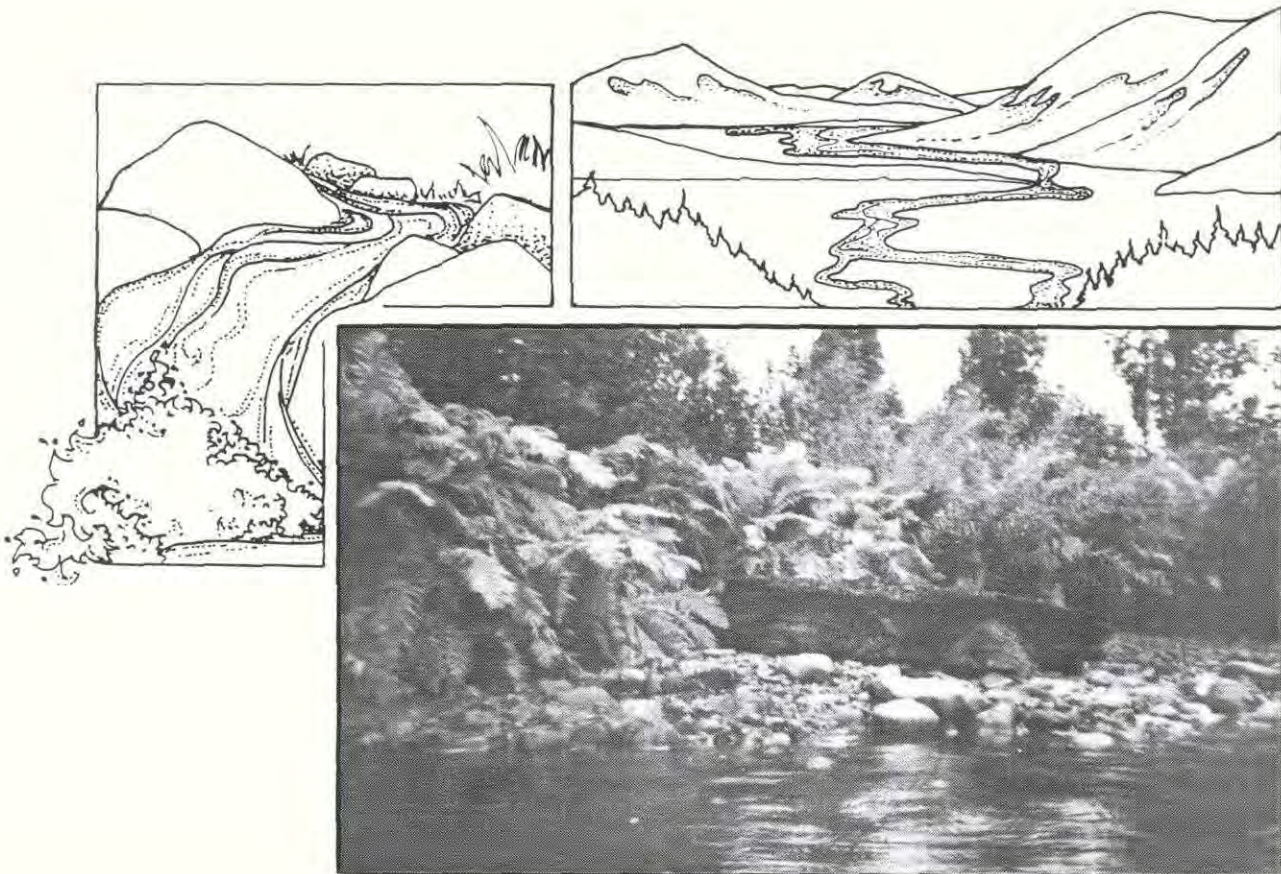


CHAPTER 1

Introduction & Background

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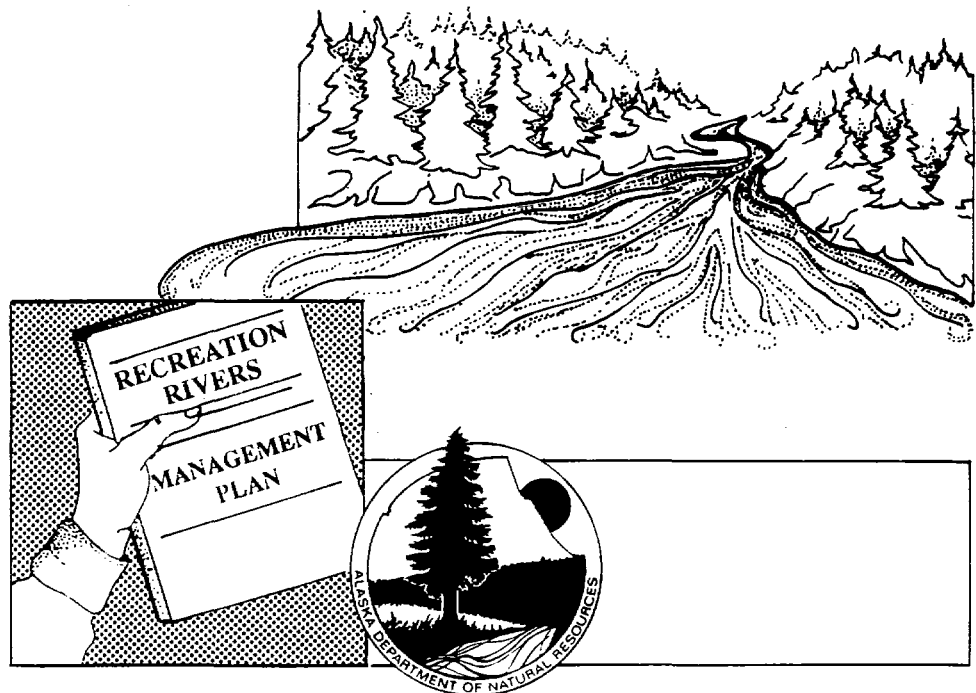


CHAPTER 1

Introduction & Background

SUMMARY OF PURPOSE

The Susitna Basin Recreation Rivers Management Plan describes how the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) will manage state land and water along six rivers including: the Little Susitna River, Deshka River, Talkeetna River, Lake Creek, Talachulitna River, and Alexander Creek. The plan determines how these six rivers will be managed over the long term including providing management intent for each river segment, new regulations for recreation and commercial use, and guidelines for leases and permits on state land.



HOW TO USE THIS PLAN

Although this plan is lengthy, it is organized for ease of use. The plan has two main sections:

Chapter 2 includes land management policies that apply throughout the Recreation Rivers. It is organized by types of land uses or resources, such as fish and wildlife, recreation, and commercial use.

Chapter 3 describes the management intent for each of the 31 subunits in the planning area. It is organized by river. Chapter 4 describes recommendations that will assist plan implementation.

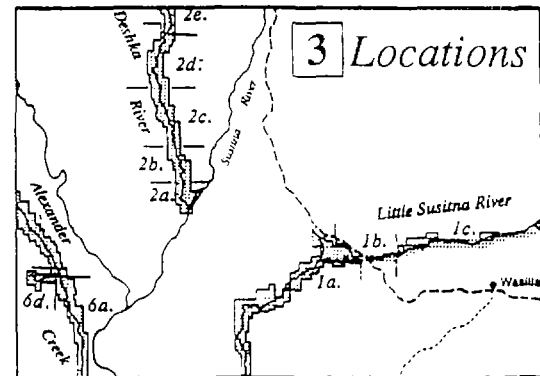
EXAMPLES OF HOW TO USE THE PLAN ARE SHOWN BELOW.

If you want to know how the plan affects a particular **land use or resource** -- for example, recreation, fish and wildlife habitat, or commercial use -- turn to **Chapter 2** for general policies that apply to the entire planning area.



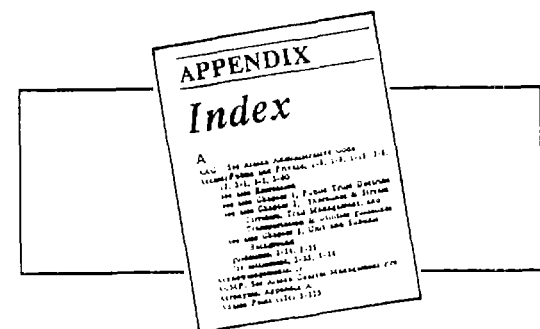
For example, under *Commercial Use*, policies are described for commercial use permits, commercial camps, and lodges.

If you want to know how the plan affects a particular **place** -- for example, the lower Deshka River -- turn to **Chapter 3**.



The planning area is divided into six management units reflecting the six Recreation Rivers. To find the map on which the lower Deshka River is shown, look at the index map at the beginning of the chapter. This map shows the page numbers where maps of each river section can be found. To find the text describing this area, see the chapter divider at the beginning of Chapter 3 for an index to the subunit page numbers.

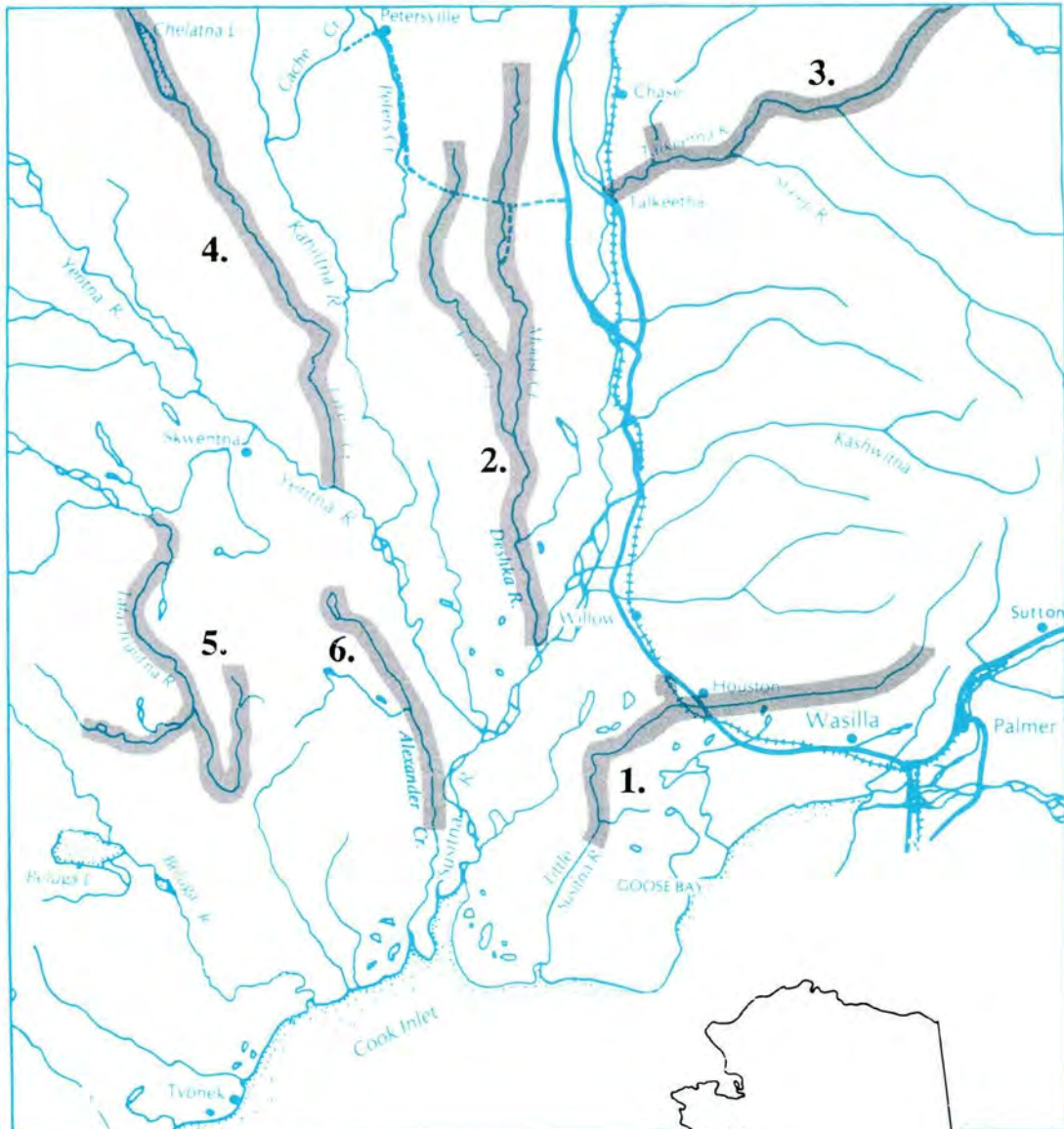
To determine if the resource, use, or area is described elsewhere in the plan, consult the index at the end of the plan.



SUSITNA BASIN RECREATION RIVERS MANAGEMENT PLAN

Location Map

Map 1.1



Management Units*

1. Little Susitna River
2. Deshka River (Kroto Creek / Moose Creek)
3. Talkeetna River
4. Lake Creek
5. Talachulitna River
6. Alexander Creek



* 1:63,360 maps of the Recreation Rivers are included in Chapter 3.

HOW THIS DOCUMENT IS ORGANIZED

Chapter 1 describes why this plan was developed, the planning area, the purpose of the plan, and the process used to develop the plan. It includes a summary of how the plan will be implemented and the process for modifying the plan after it is adopted.

Chapter 2 presents policies that guide state land management throughout the planning area. These policies are consistent with the Recreation Rivers Act. Most are also consistent with the Susitna Area Plan, which initially proposed the legislative designation. However, because this plan was developed under the legislation, and because it is based on more detailed information and public comments on the area, some policies and guidelines differ from the Susitna Area Plan. This plan supersedes and amends the Susitna Area Plan and Willow Subbasin Area Plan in the designated area.

Chapter 3 contains detailed descriptions of the plan's land and water use decisions. The Recreation Rivers are divided into six management units and 31 subunits. Each subunit contains background information, a statement of management intent, guidelines and proposed regulations specific to the subunit, and a list of public use sites.

Chapter 4 discusses specific actions needed to implement the plan: funding, field staff, research, enforcement authority, proposed additions to the Recreation Rivers, procedures for plan modification, mineral orders, classifications, recommendations to other agencies and recommended legislative actions.

Appendices

Appendix A is a glossary of terms used in the plan.

Appendix B includes a copy of the Recreation Rivers Act.

Appendix C lists publications related to the plan.

Appendix D includes a list of statutes and regulations necessary to implement the plan.

Appendix E lists the river miles by unit and subunit.

Appendix F includes a description of common types of authorizations required for use of state land.

Appendix G includes a list of priorities for plan implementation.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PLANNING AREA

The planning area lies entirely within the Susitna Basin and includes mile-wide corridors along the six rivers. The Recreation Rivers include about 460 miles of river and many lakes including Chelatna, Alexander, and Judd lakes. The total area is about 260,000 acres. Land ownership is as follows:

STATE OWNED	243,000 acres
BOROUGH OWNED	14,000 acres
PRIVATE	3,000 acres

The water column and land under rivers and lakes are entirely state owned. Approximately 430 private parcels of land are scattered throughout the corridors. Uses on state land in the planning area are administered by the Department of Natural Resources. Uses on borough land in the planning area are administered by the Matanuska-Susitna Borough.

RESOURCES & USES IN THE AREA PLAN

The Rivers

The six Recreation Rivers include the Little Susitna River, Deshka River (including Moose and Kroto creeks), Talkeetna River, Lake Creek, Talachulitna River, and Alexander Creek. These rivers are rich in resources including:

Fish

The rivers support strong runs of all five species of Pacific salmon and healthy populations of rainbow trout, Arctic grayling, and Dolly Varden. These fisheries provide excellent opportunities for sport anglers and are a mainstay for fishermen in upper Cook Inlet.

Wildlife

The corridor includes habitat for wildlife. The riparian areas and their associated uplands provide some of the best moose winter habitat in the Susitna drainage. Cottonwoods along the rivers support a number of eagle nests. Areas with open water support trumpeter swan nests. Black bear and brown bear are distributed throughout the Recreation Rivers and heavily depend on the strong fish runs and the use of the river banks as travel corridors through the region.

Recreation Opportunities

The corridors include over 460 river miles. The Recreation Rivers are unique in that they provide a remote setting for boating, fishing, hunting, camping, hiking, snowmachining, skiing, dog-mushing, and wildlife viewing. The rivers attract recreation users from across Alaska, North America, and the world and use has increased rapidly over the last decade.

Economic Opportunity

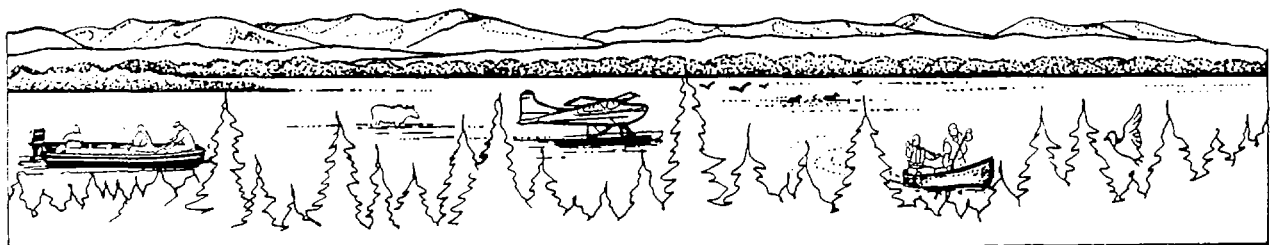
With over 100 recreation-oriented businesses and 30 lodges currently operating in the corridors, the Recreation Rivers are a focal point for the tourism and recreation industry in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough. Fish runs also help support commercial fishing in upper Cook Inlet.

Access

Because of the few roads in the region, the Recreation Rivers are transportation corridors to private lands and recreation resources. In addition, the many forms of transportation are also important forms of recreation.

Other Resources

The corridors provide other important resources including timber for personal use, placer gold, and materials. The corridors include over 400 parcels of private land which now support 150 homes and recreation cabins.



WHY THIS PLAN WAS DEVELOPED

The Concern

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game estimates that the sport fishing effort on these six rivers has increased over 300 percent between 1977 and 1988. There are several reasons for this increase. The state population increased dramatically during this time; tourism has boomed; additional road access and boat launches were built along the Susitna and Little Susitna rivers. Visitor use projections indicate that these trends will continue well into the 1990's.

The effects are apparent from accumulations of litter and human waste, crowding at fishing holes, establishment of long-term camps in popular areas where space is limited, and conflicts between users. In addition, demands on other resources such as timber, minerals, and settlement lands, in and adjacent to the corridors, have increased.

The Mandate

The six rivers' high public values and need for active management have long been recognized. In 1985, the Susitna Area Plan recommended legislative designation for five of the rivers, because of their high public values. During the following sessions, the legislature considered this recommendation and added the Little Susitna River to the proposal.

In Spring 1988, the legislature passed the Recreation Rivers Act and assigned management to the Department of Natural Resources. The Act directed the department to prepare a management plan to include long-range guidelines and management practices consistent with the Act. The Act directed the department to submit the plan to the legislature for review. The legislature completed its review and the commissioner adopted the plan as department policy in spring, 1991.

What May Happen in the Future without a plan

Without management attention existing problems are likely to increase. Projections show that sport fishing efforts on the six Recreation Rivers will meet or exceed statewide trends for yearly increases in tourism and population growth. Contributing to this is additional road access including a proposed road to the Little Susitna River. A major resort and boat launch is proposed in Talkeetna which may result in more crowding on the lower Talkeetna and Clear Creek. Additional crowding on the Kenai Peninsula and proposed reduction in guides on the Kenai River may also generate use on the Recreation Rivers. Slowly, but surely, the character of the Recreation Rivers is disappearing before our eyes. As more people begin using these rivers, the number of conflicts and damage to the resources becomes more apparent. The vexing thing is that there are no "bad guys." No one wants to damage the rivers and everyone would like their favorite fishing hole to be less crowded -- but it is happening anyway. You need only to ask long-time users of the rivers how different the rivers were in the 60's and 70's to realize that significant changes have taken place.

How the Plan Addresses these Concerns

Those working on the plan have recognized these problems and proposed methods for dealing with them. The plan is the culmination of the efforts of a wide spectrum of agencies, organizations, public, individuals, and the legislature. The plan provides a long-term blueprint for the management of these six important rivers. The plan was not developed in a vacuum; the department involved potentially affected individuals, groups, agencies, and officials throughout the process. Thousands of individuals attended public meetings, wrote letters, signed petitions, and contributed to the development of the plan alternatives and plan. As a result of this public input, significant changes were made at every step of the process. These are summarized at the end of this chapter.

HOW THIS PLAN WAS DEVELOPED

The plan is the product of over two years of work by the state, the borough, the Recreation Rivers Advisory Board, and the public.

The planning process reviewed resource information and public concerns before long-range land and water use decisions were made. The process is a way to resolve differences among possible uses. Through planning, people who use the area helped choose how the Recreation Rivers will be managed. The planning process also informs the public of what choices are made and why.

Twenty-three public meetings were held in Wasilla, Anchorage, Houston, Willow, Talkeetna, Trapper Creek, Skwentna, and Alexander Creek. In addition, a workbook and user survey were used to gather public comments and ideas. The steps in the planning process are shown in Table 1.1.

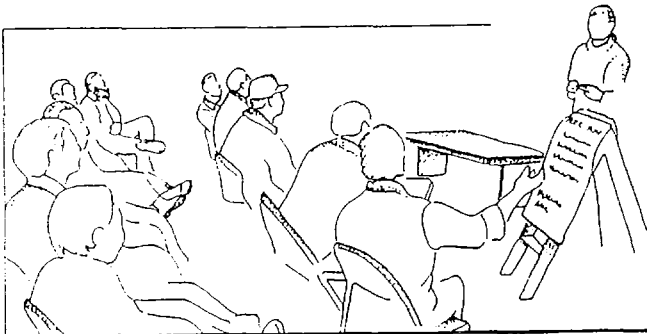


Table 1.1 THE RECREATION RIVERS PLANNING PROCESS

Step 1 - Issues are identified through public meetings to learn about interests and problems in the planning area. (Winter 1988 - 1989)

Step 2 - Information is collected on natural resources, present land and water use, land ownership, public use, and important public use sites. (1988 - 1990)

Step 3 - User Survey is administered on all six rivers. (Summer 1990)

Step 4 - Management Alternatives are prepared and reviewed by the public. (Winter 1989 - 1990)

Step 5 - Agency Review Draft is prepared and reviewed by the Recreation Rivers planning team and advisory board. (Summer 1990)

Step 6 - Public Review Draft is reviewed by the public. (Fall 1990)

Step 7 - Final Plan is prepared. (Winter 1991)

Step 8 - Plan is Proposed by the Commissioner. (Winter 1991)

Step 9 - Legislature Reviews Plan. (Spring, 1991)

Step 10 - Implementation. The plan is used

WHAT THIS PLAN COVERS & DOES NOT COVER

The authority of the plan only applies to the state land and water established as a Recreation River by the Recreation Rivers Act. The plan does not apply to federal, borough, university, or private land. DNR management decisions for authorizations such as permits, leases, and cooperative agreements, in the Recreation Rivers will follow the plan. This plan amends and supersedes the Susitna Area Plan and the Willow Subbasin Plan where these plans overlap with the Recreation

Rivers described under AS 41.22.500. The Recreation Rivers plan also includes recommendations for management actions by the borough and other agencies that have authorities or land in the Recreation Rivers. Private landowners in the planning area may choose to use this plan as a guide for managing their lands.

Although the plan addresses fish and wildlife habitat issues, it does not cover fish and wildlife

harvest regulations. Under AS 41.23.420 the plan cannot affect the authority of DFG, DEC, other agencies, municipalities, the Board of Fisheries, the Board of Game, or the Guide Licensing Board. DFG, the Board of Fisheries, and the

Board of Game manage use of fish and wildlife resources. Needs for cooperative fish and wildlife resource planning, monitoring, and research are addressed in Chapter 4.

PLANNING FOR STATE & BOROUGH LANDS

Most of the land in the planning area is state owned, but many important recreation lands are borough owned. These include the lower stretches of the Little Susitna River, Deshka River, Lake Creek, and Alexander Creek. Borough-state cooperation is necessary to ensure that adjoining lands are managed to complement each other. Tools for effective management include coordinated planning, cooperative agreements, and shared resource information. In addition, the likelihood of the borough and DNR receiving management funds is greater when both actively support proposals.

Coordinated planning is critical to rational land management. For example, high density commercial development on one agency's land may conflict with management for a primitive recreation experience on an adjacent agency's land. In light of these considerations, the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, the Alaska Department of Natural Resources, and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game will coordinate planning and plan implementation for the use of state and borough lands in the Recreation Rivers.

SUMMARY OF PLAN IMPLEMENTATION & MODIFICATION

The Recreation Rivers Plan will be implemented through administrative actions, including regulations, field staff, leases, permits, cooperative agreements, classification orders, and mineral orders. In addition, the department will make recommendations to the state legislature for funding, staffing, boundary adjustments, and additional statutes necessary to implement the plan. Land classification orders and mineral orders were adopted along with the plan. These orders are the formal record of the primary uses allowed on state lands, and are recorded on state status plats.

The plan uses a 20-year planning period to guide land management. However, conditions in the Recreation Rivers may change and the plan must be flexible enough to change with them. The department will meet with the Recreation Rivers Advisory Board and other groups periodically to review the implementa-

tion of the plan and identify any new or reoccurring problems. The Recreation Rivers Plan will be reviewed approximately every five years to determine if revisions are required. Specific revisions may be made at any time when conditions warrant. Substantive changes to the plan on state land can be made by amendment. Amendments must be approved by the commissioner of DNR, with public review, and through consultations with the advisory board and affected agencies. Special exceptions to the plan may be allowed when compliance is impossible or impractical. Special exceptions also constitute revisions and require the same process as amendments. A minor change to the plan (for example, correction of typographic or technical errors) does not require public review. See Chapter 4 for a more detailed description of implementation and modification of the plan.

SUMMARY OF CHANGES TO MAJOR PLAN PROPOSALS

The main provisions of the plan and the reasons for decisions are summarized in this section. It summarizes public concerns by issue and how the plan alternatives, draft plan, and final plan were changed to address these concerns. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 are the detailed descriptions of the resolution of these issues.

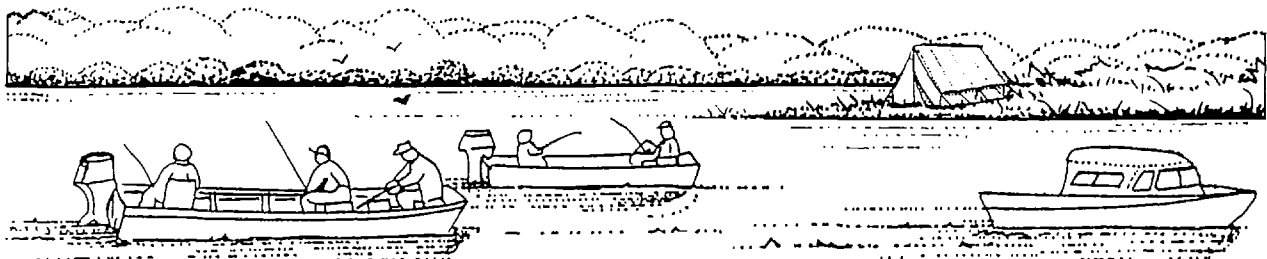
Recreation

The six rivers have seen significant increases in recreation use over the last decade. The public identified many issues that the plan should address as a result of this use. Primary concerns included littering, sanitation, long-term camps at popular campsites, abandoned property, and crowding. The public also emphasized the need for enforcement to address these issues and fish and game regulations.

To address the concerns about long-term camps dominating popular campsites and fishing holes, an alternative was presented to limit the number of days a camp could be established at one site. A large majority of users supported limits of 4 days or less. Few respondents supported the statewide 14-day limit that applied to the Recreation Rivers. The draft plan proposed a four-night limit for a given site before the camp must be disassembled and moved at least one mile.

The public was also concerned about camps that were abandoned at the end of the season, derelict boats that were unclaimed, and cars and heavy equipment that were stored or abandoned on state property. To address this issue the plan includes a time limit and proposed regulations to address non-compliance. Regulations are also proposed for littering, vandalism, and marking natural objects. Guidelines also address unauthorized cabins and recommend conversion of some to public use cabins.

To ensure that crowding does not occur on the whitewater stretches of Lake Creek, the Talachulitna River, and the Talkeetna River, a monitoring and voluntary trip scheduling program is proposed. Finally, because of the on-going concerns about the lack of information on the Recreation Rivers, the plan puts a high priority on implementing an educational program (signs, brochures, and other types of general information to address major public concerns).



Boat Access

Early in the process, several boating issues were addressed by the public. The primary issue was whether or not there was a need for additional regulations on the rivers. Horsepower restrictions on the Kenai River and non-motorized lakes in Anchorage and elsewhere were a concern to powerboaters. Safety, recreation experience, erosion of banks, and damage to fish habitat were among the issues addressed by powerboaters, floaters, property owners, bank anglers, and other river users. Although all the rivers were mentioned, the Little Susitna River was discussed most often.

Addressing these concerns was not easy. There are a variety of river users and each uses the rivers differently. Some use powerboats to access fishing holes during the salmon runs, others use floatboats to reach more remote sections of the rivers, and still others don't use boats at all but still had views on the issue. To compound the complexity of resolving this issue, the amount and type of use varies considerably between river segments, season, and even from year-to-year.

The boating working group, composed of members of the planning team and advisory board, reviewed public concerns, the existing use of the rivers, and potential effects on other resources. Early in the planning process it was determined that although there may be cases where wakes accelerate erosion, jet units disturb spawning beds, and cause physical injury to fish, there was a lack of information to justify regulations based on these potential effects. However, the effects of powerboats on the recreation experience, including safety concerns, convinced the advisory board to present alternatives on this issue. Although different alternatives for airboats and boats with kickers were initially developed, the effects on the recreation experience on river users were similar to those for all powerboats so the draft plan addressed all powerboats the same. Horsepower restrictions were also discussed. However, horsepower restrictions were not included in the draft plan because adequate horsepower is needed to stay "on step" in shallow rivers, cross fast-flowing glacial waters, and cross Cook Inlet.

In the plan alternatives, the public was asked about boater education programs, no-wake zones, and non-motorized zones. Over 80 percent of the respondents supported a boater education program. Over 90 percent supported either voluntary or

regulatory no-wake areas. When asked whether floaters should be restricted on some river segments, the majority of powerboaters and floaters opposed such restrictions. There were, however, significant differences in the responses to whether powerboat restrictions were necessary on river segments. Powerboaters were significantly more likely to oppose non-motorized zones than floaters. Powerboaters generally opposed areas where powerboats would be prohibited while floaters and bank users supported them. Most people who attended public meetings opposed any restrictions on powerboats, particularly where powerboat use occurred. Letters were mixed on this issue. Powerboaters were divided on whether kickers should be allowed in areas that may be non-motorized. Floaters opposed kickers in non-motorized areas.

The draft plan proposed non-motorized areas on parts of all six rivers. River segments proposed as non-motorized areas receive far less powerboat use than those areas where no restrictions were proposed. At the eight public meetings and from letters received, most people opposed the non-motorized zones. There were particular concerns about restrictions on the river segment from Neil Lake to the Forks on the Deshka River and the split weekend system for managing boating on the Little Susitna River. There was also concern about the length of some no-wake zones and the fact that they were regulatory rather than voluntary.

In response to public comments on the draft plan, several changes were made. These changes are summarized in Tables 1.2 and 1.3. The length of the Deshka River no-wake zones was reduced. All no-wake zones were made voluntary rather than regulatory. All non-motorized areas on the Talkeetna River and Clear Creek were dropped. The length of the non-motorized sections on Alexander Creek, the Talachulitna River, and the Deshka River were shortened. The most controversial non-motorized area (between Neil Lake and the Forks on the Deshka) was dropped. The time period for the second-most controversial non-motorized area (Little Susitna River) was changed from split weekends to alternating weekends with one weekend for powerboats and the next for float boats. This reduced the non-motorized periods on the Little Susitna River from 42 days per year to 14 days per year. The season for most non-motorized areas were also reduced from the "ice-free season" to May 15 to August 20 (June 15 - August 20 for the Talachulitna).

**TABLE 1.2
SUMMARY OF CHANGES TO BOATING LIMITS**

RIVER	SEGMENT	RIVER MILES	LIMIT OR SIGN	DATES	HOW CHANGED ¹
Little Susitna River	Parks Highway	67.5 - 69.6	No-Wake, Voluntary, One-Year Trial Basis	May 15 - August 20	No longer by regulation
Little Susitna River	Nancy Lake Creek to Game Refuge Boundary	33.2 - 60.5	Non-motorized	Alternating weekends May 15 - August 20	Alternating weekends instead of split weeks, one weekend float boats only, the next weekend powerboats only
Deshka River	Mouth	0.0 - Island	No-wake, Voluntary	May 15 - August 20	No longer by regulation, extends only up to island
Deshka River	Silver Hole	3.8 - 4.9	Place sign: "Reduce speed to 5 MPH when anglers present"	May 15 - August 20	Place sign instead of voluntary no-wake area
Deshka River	Forks to 2 mi. below Amber Lake Creek and Forks to 3 mi. below Oilwell Road	0.0 - 19.1 (Kroto Creek) 29.7 - 54.2 (Moose Creek)	Non-motorized, Recommendation to Board of Fish to open lower Moose Creek to salmon fishing	May 15 - August 20	Delete Neil Lake - Forks non-motorized area, change dates from June only to May 15 - August 20
Talkeetna River	Entire river	--	No restrictions	--	Delete non-motorized area in Talkeetna Canyon
Clear Creek	Entire creek	--	No restrictions	--	Delete non-motorized area on Upper Clear Creek
Lake Creek	Whitewater	8.1 - 51.2	Non-motorized	May 15 - August 20	No change
Lake Creek	Mouth	0.0	Establish voluntary no-wake area at the mouth on a one-year trial basis	May 15 - August 20	New
Talachulitna Creek	Lower	0.0 - 17.0	Non-motorized	June 15 - August 20	No change
Talachulitna River	Canyon	9.0 - 18.2	Non-motorized	June 15 - August 20	Non-motorized area reduced
Alexander Creek	Upper	23.0 - 38.3	Non-motorized	May 15 - August 20	Reduce length of non-motorized area on south end by two miles
Alexander Creek	Pierce Creek Confluence	7.4	Sign that cautions large boats above this point	May 15 - August 20	New

¹ With the exception of the Talachulitna River and Creek, all dates have been reduced from ice-free season to May 15 - August

Numerous letters, petitions, and phone calls were received concerning these proposed changes to the draft plan. Powerboaters focused primarily on opposing any powerboat restrictions. Floaters generally supported the proposed changes but voiced concern that some non-motorized segments were dropped or altered, particularly on the Little Susitna River where the number of non-motorized days was reduced. They still supported including the Parks Highway to the Nancy Lake Creek in the non-motorized area.

The advisory board met to discuss these comments on the proposed changes to the draft plan. They discussed whether or not to keep or delete all non-motorized areas. They did not reach consensus on this issue. The planning team listened to advisory board concerns and decided to keep these areas.

TABLE 1.3
SUMMARY OF CHANGES TO PROPOSED BOATING LIMITS
FOR AREAS MANAGED BY ADF&G OR IN PROPOSED ADDITIONS TO THE
RECREATION RIVERS¹

RIVER	SEGMENT	RIVER MILES	LIMIT OR SIGN	DATES	COMMENTS	HOW CHANGED FROM PUBLIC REVIEW DRAFT ²
Little Susitna River	Proposed South Big Lake Road Junction	Within one mile of Junction	No-wake	May 15 - August 20	Takes effect when road is built	No change
Little Susitna River	Plan boundary to Burma Road Access	28.6 - 33.1	Non-motorized	Alternating weekends May 15 - August 20	Recommendation to DF&G	Alternating weekends instead of split weeks, one weekend float boats only, the next powerboats only
Little Susitna River	Burma Road Access	27.6 - 29.5	No-wake	May 15 - August 20	Recommendation to DF&G	No change
Little Susitna River	Above Old FAA Station on Game Refuge	17.0 - 33.1	Address Safety Concerns	- -	Recommendation to DF&G	No change
Talkeetna River	Upper Canyon	- -	No restrictions	- -	- -	Delete proposed non-motorized area
Alexander Creek	Mouth	Susitna River and Alexander Creek 0.0 - 0.2	No-wake, Voluntary	May 15 - August 20	Takes effect if lower river is added to corridors	No longer by regulation

¹ The following limits are proposed for lower Alexander Creek (if the legislature adds this area to the Recreation Rivers) and DF&G (for the Susitna Flats State Game Refuge).

² All dates have been reduced from ice-free season to May 15 - August 20.

Upland Access

Although the rivers were the focus of much of the planning effort, access to uplands was a key issue. There are hundreds of parcels of private land in the corridors and thousands more along the boundaries. Roads, trails, easements, and rights-of-way exist throughout the planning areas. Management intent and guidelines for these types of improvements are contained in Chapter 2 policies and guidelines. They describe measures which ensure reasonable access to land and resources in and adjacent to the Recreation Rivers while protecting recreation, fish and wildlife habitat, and water quality.

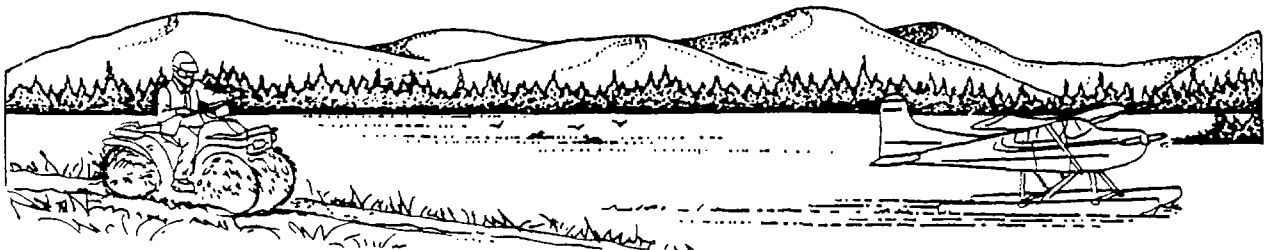
Another key issue was the use of off-road vehicles (ORV's) during the summer. In several areas, particularly adjacent to the Petersville Road, use of these types of vehicles is causing damage to soils and vegetation. In the plan alternatives, the majority of respondents supported limits on these types of vehicles where environmental damage was occurring. Respondents were evenly split on whether or not they should be limited to provide for a remote recreation experience. In the survey of river users, a slight majority of respondents felt that seeing ORV's would detract from their trips.

To address concerns about environmental damage, the plan limits use of off-road vehicles to existing trails during the snow-free season. It also recommends a trail plan to help identify trails that may be suitable for this use without causing significant damage to the environment. To address concerns about a remote experience, off-road vehicles are prohibited adjacent to the non-motorized areas during the periods when motor restrictions apply. There are, however, many exceptions to allow for reasonable access to areas with private land or mineral locations. Few specific public comments have been received on this issue. Similar to the boating issue, many people have voiced opposition to any restrictions on motor transport while those supporting motor restrictions for boats in some areas generally support restriction on upland access in these same areas.

Air Access

Aircraft are used by many floaters and bank anglers to access the rivers. They are also the principal means of access to lodges and private property on the more remote river segments. The plan addresses three air access issues: a) the need for access improvements such as airstrips and floatplane landing areas; b) restricting air access to some areas to provide for a remote recreation experience, and; c) ensuring continuing access to private lands and mineral locations. The plan includes management intent for addressing airstrips in two key areas. The mouth of the Deshka and on Chelatna Lake. To provide for a remote recreation experience, aircraft landings are prohibited along the non-motorized river segments during peak use periods. As with boat and upland access, there are exceptions to these limits to provide for reasonable access, particularly for individuals with legal interest in land.

Most comments on the issue have been from helicopter pilots and those using Super Cubs to land on small gravel bars. Other types of aircraft are generally unaffected because the non-motorized areas neither restrict lakes and rivers large enough for floatplane landings nor airstrips. However, they do affect helicopters and Super Cubs that will not be able to land in small clearings and gravel bars in non-motorized areas. At meetings, pilots opposed restrictions on aircraft. Of those supporting non-motorized areas for boats, many supported non-motorized areas for aircraft. The advisory board discussed a blanket exception for aircraft in non-motorized areas but decided it was inconsistent with the general management intent: to provide for a non-motorized experience on these river segments. Changes were made to this proposal between the draft and final plan. The number and length of the non-motorized zones was reduced consistent with the changes made for boating. Additional special management areas were designated to allow for aircraft landings.



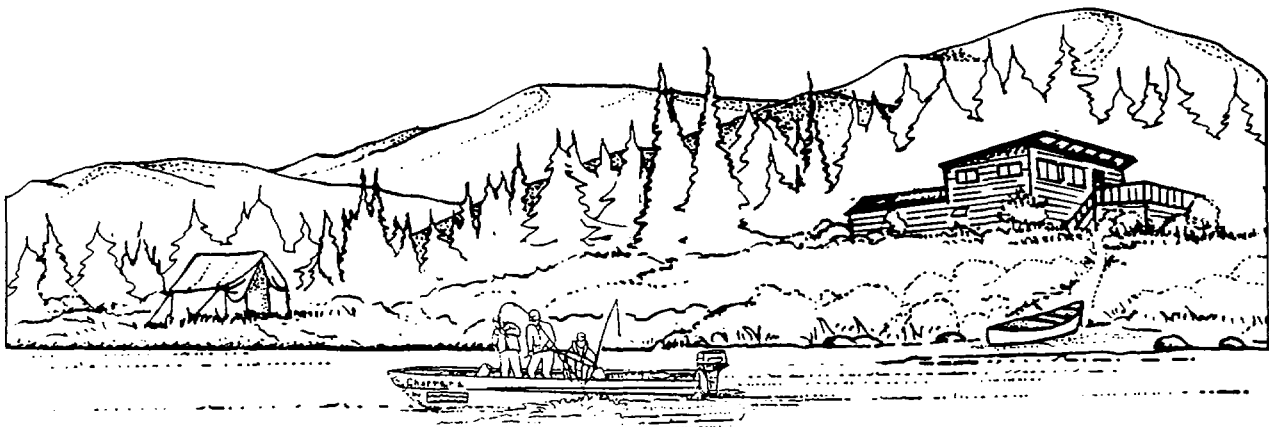
Commercial

Over one-hundred commercial operations are active in the Recreation Rivers. These include fishing guides, whitewater companies, boat taxis, air taxis and lodges. As tourism and sportfishing have increases state-wide, so has the number of recreation-oriented businesses. The number of users on the rivers who use commercial services varies widely across the rivers. On the Little Susitna River, a small minority of users employ commercial services, such as guides. However, on the Talachulitna, approximately 98 percent of the users stay at lodges, are guided, or use commercial air transportation. Currently no permit or fee is required for the commercial-recreation use on the Recreation Rivers. A license is, however, required for hunting guides and registration for fish guides.

Early in the process the public identified the need for active field presence to enforce existing laws and to address problems resulting from high public use. To generate revenues to fund part of the management program, a commercial permit fee was proposed in the plan alternatives. Fees for all users were also considered but the lack of public support and legal constraints eliminated this alternative. Another public concern was that some commercial operators or their clients were causing resource damage. Over-harvest of fish, littering, and long-term camps at popular fishing holes were among the concerns. To address these concerns, the plan includes standards for commercial operators and strict guidelines on the placement of commercial camps.

In the final plan, changes were made to the fee structure to more fairly reflect the number of clients each commercial operator serves. During the first year of the commercial permit program, there will be a set fee. In the second year of the program, there will be an additional fee based on the number of days guides accompany clients or the number of drop-offs and pick-ups (if clients are unaccompanied). The final plan also changed the grounds for suspension or revocation of permits. Also, transportation of illegally caught fish or game was added to the list of grounds for revocation or suspension of permits. Criteria for long-term commercial camps were also modified concerning fees, the viewshed within which they are located, and the number of clients allowed per camp.

Additional lodges were prohibited in both the draft and final plans. The advisory board and planning team based this decision on the fact that there are currently over 30 lodges in and adjacent to the corridors and the public opposed to any more. In addition, there are a number of undeveloped parcels of private land and many acres of undeveloped borough lands where new lodges could be built. Authorized lodges on state lands while there are no restriction on the number of lodges that may be built on private and borough lands may result in excessive crowding on the rivers.



Shoreline and Upland Development

Within the Recreation Rivers there are numerous developments including 30 lodges, 150 cabins, 30 docks, sixteen airstrips, seven major bridges, and numerous boat launches. Although much of this development occurs on the 430 parcels of private land in the corridors, many improvements are on adjacent state lands. Currently the department has over 50 applications pending for proposed developments on state land. As use increases on the rivers, more applications for use of state uplands, shorelands, and waters are likely. One of the major objectives of the planning process was to develop management intent for guidelines on how these types of development can be accommodated while mitigating potential adverse effects on other important uses and resources within the corridors. The plan does not address development on private or borough lands.

To develop intent for state lands, plan alternatives included a choice of four general levels of management for each of the 31 units. Choices offered included natural, isolated development, moderate development, and dense development. The majority of public responses favored the option that provided for the least development.

Plan alternatives listed thirty-two locations where public facilities such as campgrounds or boat launches could be located. Overall, there was more opposition to public facilities development than support for it. When provided with the option to select between a developed public facility and a primitive one, respondents always favored the primitive facility. There were some facilities, however, that received support or where opinions were divided. There was strong support for a floatplane landing area at the mouth of the Deshka River. Primitive facilities at the mouth of Nancy Lake Creek and on the Chelatna and Judd lakes were supported. A campground at the mouth of the Deshka River was also supported. A survey of river users found that there was generally more support for public facilities on river segments where use and development levels are high than where use and development levels are low.

The draft plan supported the construction of public facilities for river mouths and road-accessible areas where public use was so high that degradation of the natural environment, public health, and the recreation experience would result without management actions. Specifically, the draft plan supported designating public floatplane and wheelplane landing areas at the mouth of the Deshka River to protect public safety. The plan recognized the need for improvements on state-owned shorelands if the borough builds the Big Lake Road extension and campground on the lower Little Susitna River.

The draft plan included guidelines for a variety of types of development on state lands. Only a few types of development were specifically prohibited. These included remote cabins, trapping cabins, private airstrips, some types of erosion control structures, and floating facilities such as floating lodges and floathomes. The public thought that these types of improvements would benefit only a few individuals and could result in crowding, uses that would conflict with current recreation uses and have potential adverse effects on fish and wildlife habitat.

In response to agency and borough comments, guidelines were modified in the draft plan to eliminate redundancies with existing laws and permitting procedures and to ensure stipulations, particularly for bridges, roads, and stream crossings were not needlessly restrictive. Guidelines for private airstrips, flood control levees, and anchor buoys were also modified in the final plan to provide more flexibility to river managers when making decisions that affect river users and communities.



Subsurface

Most of the Recreation Rivers were closed to new mineral entry under the Susitna Area Plan and Willow Subbasin Plan. The Recreation Rivers Act allowed the Commissioner to consider permitting "mining leasing" under a management plan. With the exception of Lake Creek, the corridors have low potential for placer gold. In the alternatives workbook, the public was asked whether upper portions of this creek should be open to mining under the leasehold location system. Most opposed it.

The draft plan reduced the size of the leasing area and included several stipulations to protect recreation, water, and fish and wildlife resources. The public was still concerned and additional stipulations were added in the final plan. The final plan does not allow mining within 300 feet of Lake, Sunflower, and Camp creeks. All water used in a mining operation must be recycled. In addition, living quarters for new locations will not be authorized in the corridors and leases will be limited to five-year periods.



HOW YOU CAN HELP

Although the plan for the Recreation Rivers has been completed, it is only the beginning. Without public cooperation, the plan cannot be fully implemented and issues will remain unresolved. To ensure public involvement, the plan identifies a number of ways the public can help. The plan emphasizes heightening the public's awareness of the many resources in the Recreation Rivers and how to protect or enhance them. It also identifies many areas where the public, commercial operators, and other agencies may help with litter patrols, constructing facilities, and maintaining high public use sites. In addition, when the department develops regulations to implement the guidelines in the plan, we will be seeking public advice and input. We sincerely hope that those who are interested will assist in this work, because they have detailed knowledge and information about the rivers.

Because the number of river miles and the distances between the six rivers are large, it will be difficult for the department to be as responsive to problems on the river as the public would like. River managers will be looking to the public, service groups, and other agencies to assist with river management.

Please contact us if you would like to help. Further explanations and details of our work are available by contacting the: Mat-Su Area Office, Division of Land and Water, Alaska Department of Natural Resources, 1830 E. Parks Highway, Suite A-116, Wasilla, AK 99687 or by calling 376-4595.