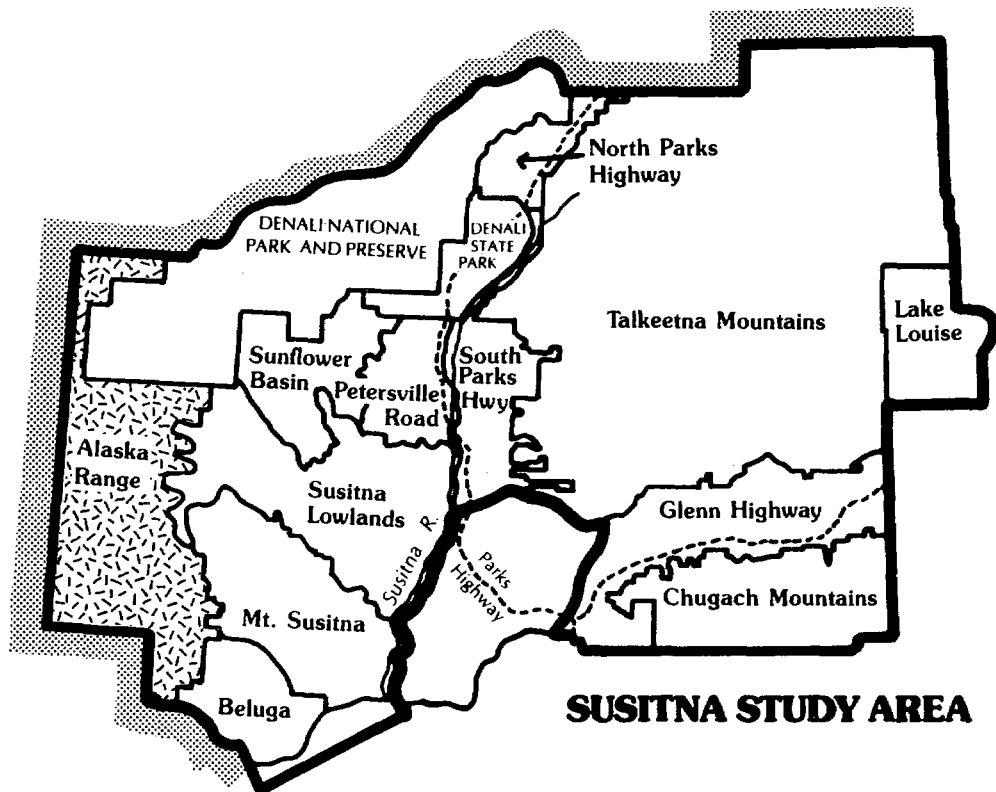


ALASKA RANGE SUBREGION



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The following section describes land use policy within the Alaska Range Subregion. It is divided into two parts. The first part is a general overview of resources and their management for the entire subdivision. The second part presents specific statements of management intent, land use designations, prohibited uses, and management guidelines. This entire subregion is treated as one management unit. Maps showing land ownership in the subregion and boundaries of the management unit and subunits are presented at the end of the second part.

1. SUBREGION OVERVIEW

Background

This remote, mountainous, glaciated portion of the study area is bounded by Denali National Park and Preserve to the north, the Kenai Peninsula Borough and Chakachatna River to the south, the Matanuska-Susitna Borough boundary to the west, and approximately the 1500 foot elevation contour to the east. The subregion encompasses approximately 1,510,000 acres. Almost all the land within this subregion is owned by the State of Alaska with the exception of T16N, R19 and 20W, and T21N R16W, S.M., which are state selected, and T16N, R21W, S.M., which is federal land within Lake Clark National Park and Preserve.

Mining, commercial guiding for big game, trapping, non-guided hunting and recreational activities are the primary uses within this subregion. The amount of use this area receives in comparison to other portions of the study area is light, however, and occurs primarily during the summer months. Placer mining claims are found along such streams as Johnson Creek and the Kichatna River. The unit also has good potential for hardrock metallic minerals — molybdenum, copper, silver, gold, etc. The unit provides habitat for a variety of animals. Moose, sheep, caribou, black and brown bear are hunted in the area. The Kichatna, Skwentna, and Happy rivers plus their tributaries are major anadromous fish streams which produce salmon for the Cook Inlet fisheries. The unit also offers a variety of recreational uses in addition to hunting. The Iditarod Trail bisects the unit and is used annually for the Iditarod sled dog race. Flightseeing is popular along this stretch of the Alaska Range.

Settlement in the unit is primarily confined to the Happy River and Skwentna River drainages with a small nucleus of people at Rainy Pass, a popular hunting lodge. Future uses in this subregion are, for the most

part, expected to be an extension of existing uses, i.e., recreation, fish and wildlife use, and mineral extraction. An increase in these activities will be dependent to a large degree upon provision of access.

Access to the area at present is along the Iditarod Trail and smaller local trails; via air to several privately owned landing strips, some fly-in lakes and gravel bars; and to a limited degree by boat on the Skwentna River. As shown on the land use designation map, the Iditarod Trail, a national historic trail, follows the Skwentna River to Shirley Lake and then heads northwest through Rainy Pass. Two of the privately owned landing strips are located at Puntilla Lake near Rainy Pass; one provides float plane access and the other is a ground strip. Fly-in access is often hampered by weather conditions.

Management Summary

This unit is expected to remain largely undeveloped and roadless for years. The great majority of the area will be retained in public ownership and managed as a multiple use area emphasizing the existing uses: mining, wildlife habitat and recreation. Further details of management intent by resource are presented below.

Settlement

Land sales and remote cabin permits generally are considered very low priority in this unit due to the unsuitability of terrain and difficult access. However, select areas along the Happy and Skwentna Rivers will be offered for homestead sales and remote cabin permits. A net acreage of approximately 3,330 will be offered for sale. The gross acreage is approximately 23,700. The objective of land sales in this area is to provide seasonal recreation homesteads. The Skwentna River provides only limited boat access up to Emerald Creek. The sand bars along its braided channel provide some wheel plane access, although conditions are often dangerous. Primary access is expected to be by plane to Shirley Lake and an unnamed lake south of the Skwentna River in T22N R18W S.M., section 25.

Agriculture

There will be no agricultural sales or homesteads. There is little potential for agriculture due to the soils, topography and climate of the area.

Forestry

Slow growth rates and uncertainties regarding results

of regeneration following timber harvest limit forest management opportunities in this subregion. The scarce forest resources will be managed to provide wood for personal use. Timber management practices will be designed to minimize impacts on habitat and recreation values.

Fish and Wildlife

This subregion is important for a variety of fish and wildlife species. The vast majority of this area will be retained in public ownership to protect habitat values and human use of wildlife including guiding and hunting. The Skwentna, Happy, and Kichatna rivers are major anadromous fish streams which flow through the subregion.

A number of smaller streams and rivers also support populations of anadromous fish. Most riparian lands will be retained in public ownership; fish habitat and water quality will be protected when land is sold by retaining publicly owned buffers on either side of the waterway.

Recreation

In order to protect public recreational opportunities, most land will be retained in public ownership and managed for recreation in addition to mining and wildlife habitat. Due to the historical and recreational significance of the Iditarod Trail, a wide publicly owned corridor will be retained along its length.

Subsurface

Mining and mineral exploration are and will continue to be important uses of this subregion. The subregion will remain open to mineral entry, except for one area along the Happy and Skwentna rivers which will be offered for sale. This subunit will be closed to mineral entry prior to land sales.

There is little potential for oil, gas or coal. All public land in this subregion is open to exploration and development of oil and gas. Coal leasing and prospecting are permitted throughout the subregion with the exception of the area that will be available for land disposal. Geothermal leasing has occurred on Mt. Spurr and is an allowed use in this area.

Transportation

There are no immediate plans to increase access to this subregion. The Department of Transportation and Public Facilities has identified a potential long-term access route across the Susitna River through Rainy Pass into McGrath. This would provide access to some mineral deposits in the Alaska Range just outside the

study area that may have economic potential. Additionally, if the coal lease north of the Skwentna River in the adjoining Susitna Lowlands subregion ever is developed, a spur road or rail line may be built to provide access to this lease. The possibility of these routes being funded and developed within the next twenty years appears to be very remote at this time.