

INTRODUCTION



photograph by Pete Martin

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

SUMMARY OF PURPOSE

This document is a land use plan for public lands in the Susitna Area. The plan designates the uses that are to occur on much of the public land within the Susitna Area. It shows areas to be sold for private use and areas to be retained in public ownership. The plan results in specific policies for the near term (5 years) and more general policies for the long term (20 years). It does not control uses on private land, nor does it direct land use on areas that already have been legislatively designated for specific purposes, such as parks or wildlife refuges.

Since most public lands will be managed for multiple use, the plan also establishes rules which allow various uses to occur without serious conflicts. For example, in an area intended for land disposals, the plan explains how public access to streams and trails is to be maintained.

HOW THE PLAN IS ORGANIZED

To present this information, the draft plan is organized into four chapters.

Chapter 1 provides a brief description of the planning area, explains the reasons a plan is necessary for the Susitna Area, and explains the types of decisions made by the plan. It also provides a summary of the plan's land management goals and a description of the planning process.

Chapter 2 presents an overview of the goals, management guidelines, land allocations, and implementation procedures that affect each major resource or type of land use. This chapter explains how agriculture, fish and wildlife habitat, forestry, recreation, settlement, subsurface resources, transportation, instream flow, lakeshore management, public access, remote cabin permits, stream corridors, trail management, wetlands management and "resource management/borough land bank" issues are handled by the plan throughout the planning area.

Chapter 3 is a detailed description of the land use designations in each of the plan's twelve subregions. The subregions are major geographical subdivisions of the planning area. Each subregion is further divided into management units, of which there are 78 in the plan. A management unit is an area that is generally homogeneous with respect to its resources, topography, and land ownership. For each management unit there is a statement of management intent; a chart

listing primary and secondary land uses, prohibited land uses, and subsurface resource policies; and management guidelines that are specific to that management unit. Designated land uses are shown on maps of each subregion at a scale of 1:250,000 (approximately 1 inch to 4 miles).

Chapter 4 explains how the plan will be implemented. It includes sections on administrative measures to implement the plan (land classifications, land exchanges/relinquishments and land disposal schedules), and priorities for more detailed planning. It also lists proposals for special legislative and administrative designations (e.g., state forests or recreation rivers) and recommendations for developing transportation systems within the study area.

Appendices. Detailed information on procedures for modifying or amending the plan is included in Appendix A. Appendix B is a glossary of key terms used in the plan. Appendix C presents a listing of past publications associated with this plan (e.g. information on agriculture, forestry and other resources; information on past public meetings, etc.).

Colored maps of the entire study area at a scale of 1:500,000 are enclosed on the inside of the back cover. These maps summarize surface and subsurface land use designations.

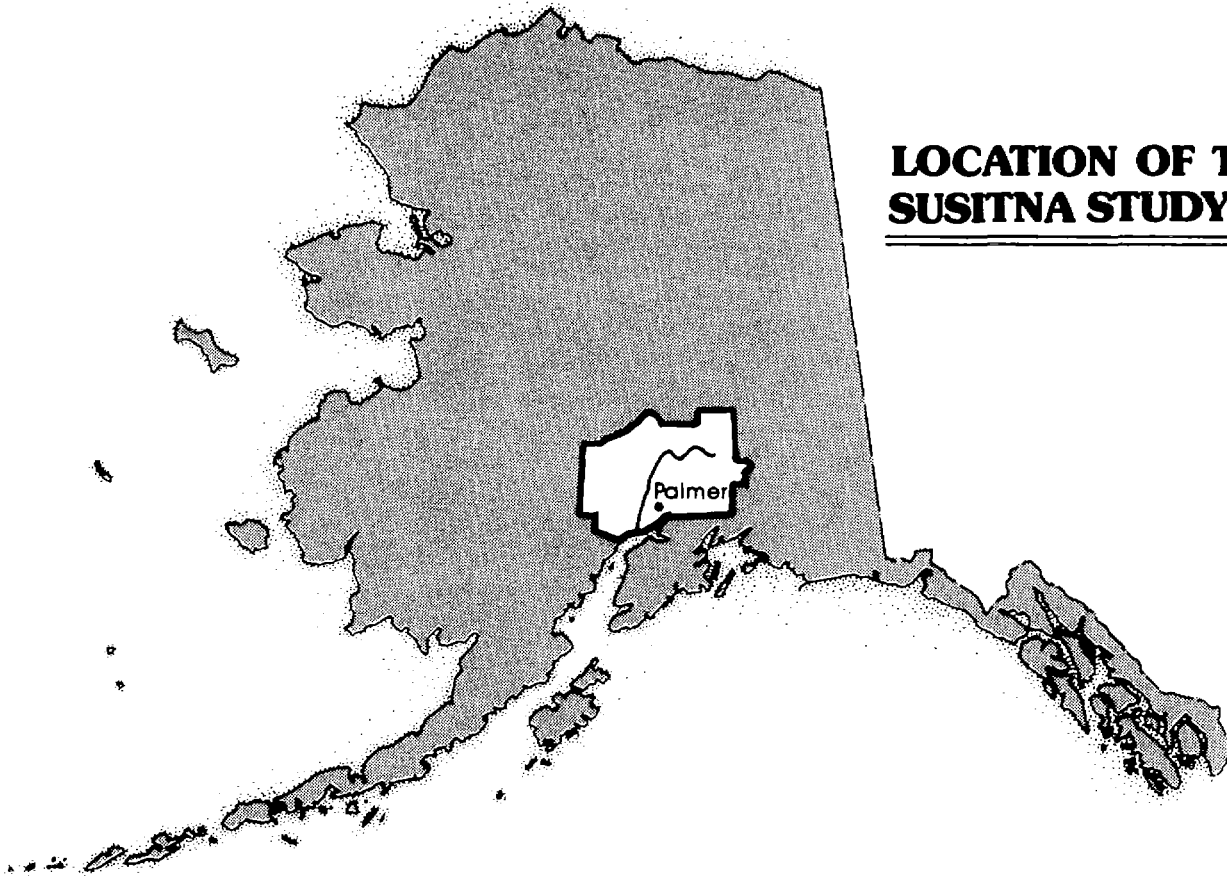
THE PLANNING AREA

The Susitna Area covers approximately 15.8 million acres in southcentral Alaska (see Maps 1 and 2). All of the lands in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough except those in the Willow Sub-basin are included in the planning area. Willow Sub-basin lands, which include land in the vicinity of Wasilla, Houston, Big Lake and Willow, were covered by a land use plan completed in 1982.* In addition, lands within the Kenai Peninsula Borough north of the Chakachatna River also are covered by this plan.

The Susitna Area is an extremely diverse region that rises from sea level at Cook Inlet to the summit of Denali. In between are the valleys of major rivers — the Susitna, Chulitna, Talkeetna, Matanuska, Kahiltna, Yentna, Skwentna, Talachulitna, and Beluga — and uncounted smaller streams. Broad, forested lowlands with abundant lakes and wetlands occupy approxi-

* Copies of this plan are available from the Anchorage office of the Department of Natural Resources, Division of Land & Water Management, Resource Allocation Section. Boundaries of this area are shown on Map 2.

LOCATION OF THE SUSITNA STUDY AREA



mately one quarter of the study area, mostly in the region west of the Susitna River. The remaining lands are generally mountainous, with parts of the Alaska Range, Talkeetna Mountains, and Chugach Mountains all included in the planning area.

The State of Alaska owns or has selected approximately 60% of the land in the study area (9.5 million acres). Another 30% (4.7 million acres) is in federal ownership. Of the remaining land, 4% is owned by the Matanuska-Susitna and Kenai Peninsula Boroughs, another 3% (0.5 million acres) by Native village and regional corporations, and 4% (0.6 million acres) is in other private ownerships. See Map 3 for a generalized land ownership map.

The 1983 population of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough was approximately 30,600. Most residents live in Palmer, Wasilla, Talkeetna, and Trapper Creek; in small communities along the Parks and Glenn Highways and Alaska Railroad; or in scattered settlements that are not on the main road system such as Skwentna, Tyonek, and Lake Louise.

Lands and resources in the Susitna Area serve a much bigger population than that residing within the planning area boundaries. The Susitna Area is close enough to Anchorage and the Houston-Wasilla area

that many people from these areas hunt or fish, harvest firewood, engage in a variety of recreational activities, or enjoy traveling within the region.

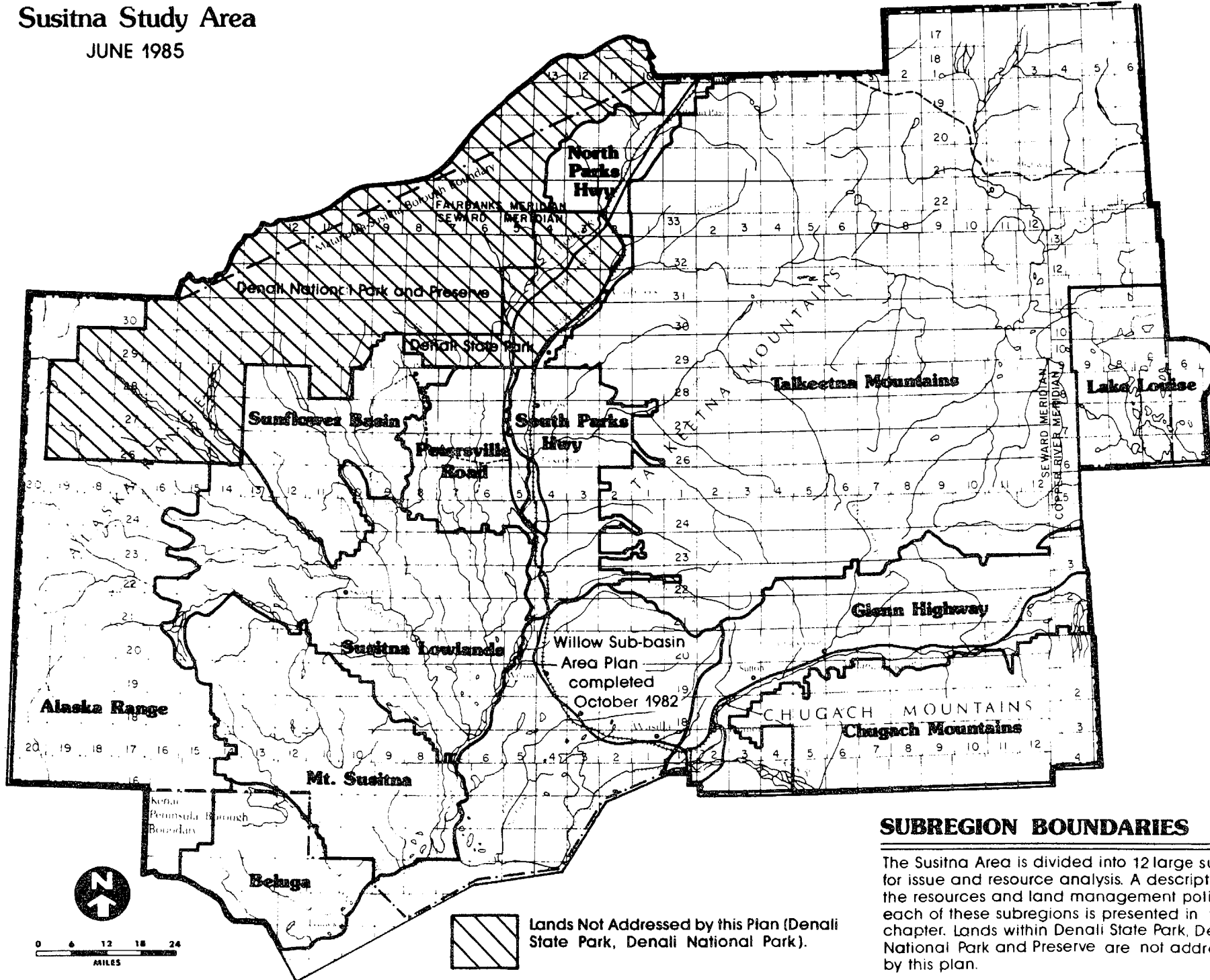
WHY PLAN FOR THE USE OF PUBLIC LAND?

Through the management of public lands, the state, borough, and federal governments greatly influence the physical development patterns and the general quality of life in the Susitna Area. Major development projects such as mining, timber harvests, or agriculture influence local job opportunities. Land sold for residential or private recreational use clearly affects the character of community life, as does land retained for hunting, fishing, and other public uses. Because the use of public land has such great effects on the physical landscape and quality of life, it is essential that there be an open public process of deciding how to manage that land.

The Susitna Area planning process is a means of openly reviewing resource information and public concerns prior to making long-range decisions about public land management. It is also a way of resolving conflicting land use objectives and making clear to the public what choices have been made and the reasons for those choices.

Susitna Study Area

JUNE 1985



SUBREGION BOUNDARIES

The Susitna Area is divided into 12 large subregions for issue and resource analysis. A description of the resources and land management policies for each of these subregions is presented in this chapter. Lands within Denali State Park, Denali National Park and Preserve are not addressed by this plan.

Land managers, who face many day-to-day decisions about land use, such as whether to issue permits for roads, timber harvests, or sand and gravel extraction, need clear and consistent guidelines for their decisions. Therefore, it is essential that land managers have a written document which establishes long-range commitments for the use of public land and provides clear policies for public land management.

A land use plan is also valuable for private landowners. If the state and borough are publicly committed to land use patterns and policies, private investors can feel more secure in making decisions about their own land. For example, if someone is contemplating developing a subdivision next to state or borough land, it is important to know whether the public land is likely to become a gravel pit or a recreation area.

THE PURPOSE OF A JOINT BOROUGH-STATE PLAN

A land use pattern which meets both local and statewide objectives is fundamentally dependent on cooperative borough and state planning. Many of the important resource lands in the planning area are in mixed borough and state ownership. These lands can be developed most productively through projects which entail joint land use commitments, joint planning for roads and other infrastructure components, coordinated disposals, etc. For example, the proposal to extend the Oilwell road into the Amber Lakes area is justified best when the state and borough make joint land use commitments in the area. Additionally, the likelihood of receiving funds to build the road is increased greatly when the state and borough both actively support the proposal.

Many of the benefits of joint planning are as obvious as they are critical to rational land management. For example, this document proposes parts of Moose Creek and Kroto Creek as undeveloped public recreation corridors. It would make little sense for the borough to pursue that intent by restricting use on one side of the river if the state were to sell land for houses on the opposite bank. In short, because what the state does with its lands affects the borough and vice versa, cooperative planning is essential.

Land disposals in particular require borough and state cooperation. The borough and state should agree on the amount and type of settlement demand and which public lands — borough or state — best meet that demand. Not only the amount of land sold, but also its location, require cooperative planning. The pattern of land disposals dramatically affects service costs, community character, feasibility of providing access, and the ability to manage adjacent lands for other

purposes, such as mining or forestry. These are important matters that should be dealt with coherently and consistently by major public land owners. In light of these considerations, the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, the Alaska Department of Natural Resources, and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game are planning jointly for the use of state and borough lands in the Susitna area.

HOW WAS THE PLAN DEVELOPED?

The Statewide Plan

The Department of Natural Resources operates under a statewide land use plan that gives guidance to planning on a regional and local scale and serves as an aid to decisions that require more than a local perspective. The statewide plan identifies general land use designations and management guidelines for all state land in Alaska. In regions such as the Susitna Area, where more detailed resource information has been collected and an area plan prepared, the land use designations and management guidelines developed in the area plan will be used to refine the statewide plan. In the Susitna Area, therefore, the land use designations in the statewide plan and area plan will be identical once the Susitna Area Plan has been officially adopted.

The Susitna Area Planning Process

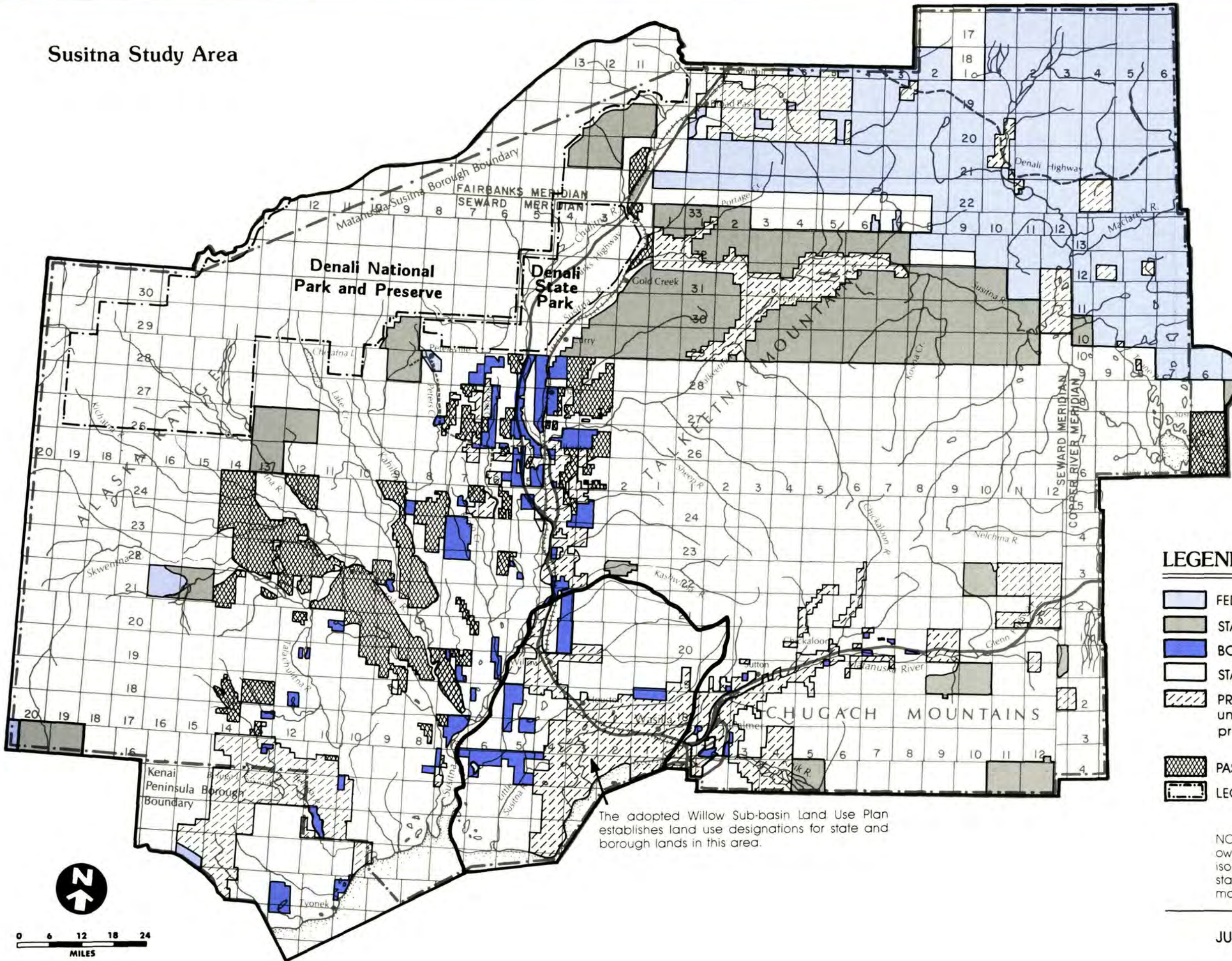
The Susitna Area Plan is the product of over three years of work by an interagency planning team and over 40 public meetings held throughout the study area. Figure 1 illustrates the planning process that led to the final plan. The following section describes the process in more detail.

In 1982, an interagency planning team was formed. Team members included representatives from the various divisions within the Department of Natural Resources and the Department of Fish and Game as well as representatives from the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities and the Matanuska-Susitna Borough. The U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Kenai Peninsula Borough, and the Bureau of Land Management participated on issues specific to their respective areas of expertise or concern.

As indicated by the planning process diagram, the planning team held public workshops in May, 1982 to identify land use issues in the study area. At the same time, the team, in conjunction with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, prepared maps and reports describing resource values and identifying existing and potential land uses throughout the planning area. The resource information and the issues identified in the public workshops were used to develop four alterna-

Susitna Study Area

GENERALIZED LAND OWNERSHIP



The adopted Willow Sub-basin Land Use Plan establishes land use designations for state and borough lands in this area.

LEGEND

- FEDERAL
- STATE SELECTED
- BOROUGH (includes selected lands)
- STATE
- PRIVATE (includes Native, Native selected, university, university selected, and other private lands)
- PAST STATE AND BOROUGH LAND SALES
- LEGISLATIVELY DESIGNATED AREA

NOTE: This information has been generalized to show ownership in blocks of 640 acres or greater. Hence, many isolated private lots are not shown, eg., lots within past state land disposals and private parcels surrounding many lakes.

tive land use options. The land use alternatives represented different ways to resolve land use issues in the Susitna Area. Each emphasized a different general theme.

The alternative themes were as follows:

- Alternative 1 — Emphasis on land sales for settlement;
- Alternative 2 — Emphasis on land sales for agriculture;
- Alternative 3 — Emphasis on fish and wildlife, recreation; and forest resources; and
- Alternative 4 — Emphasis on economic diversification.

The alternatives were presented to the public at workshops in April and May, 1983. The information from the workshops was used to evaluate the alternatives and develop a preferred alternative which was circulated for agency review in March and April 1984. This agency review draft was not the same as any one of the four alternatives, but represented a combination of parts of each of them. Following agency review of the preferred alternative, it was revised and a draft plan for public review was circulated. This draft was reviewed by the public at hearings throughout the study area during late summer 1984. Public comments were incorporated and necessary revisions made before the final plan was adopted by the Commissioner of Natural Resources and the Matanuska-Susitna Borough assembly in early spring of 1985.

Public Participation

Organization: Public participation was an essential part of the planning process. In the spring of 1982 and again in the spring of 1983, public workshops were held throughout the study area (in the communities of Lake Louise, Glacier View, Sutton, Trapper Creek, Talkeetna, Skwentna, and Tyonek) and in Anchorage, Wasilla, Willow and Cantwell. Approximately 250 people attended the 1983 workshops dealing with alternative land use plans, and written comments were received from several dozen more. Results of these workshops are summarized in a separate document available from the Department of Natural Resources (*Susitna Area Plan — Public Workshops Spring, 1983*). The hearings on the public review draft of the plan, held in August and September of 1984, were also well attended. In addition to the approximately 250 people who came to these hearings, over 100 people sent in written comments on the plan. The full set of public comments and responses is available in another DNR publication (*Susitna Area Plan — Response to Public Comments on the Draft Plan*).

Figure 1

SUSITNA AREA PLAN PLANNING PROCESS

1.

An interagency planning team was formed with state and borough members representing each of the important resources in the area: Forestry, Settlement, Agriculture, Fish and Wildlife, Recreation, Minerals and Energy (Winter, 1982).

2.

The planning team identified land use issues and planning needs through public workshops and review of existing information (Spring, 1982).

3.

Existing and potential resource values and land uses were identified and mapped by the planning team. Most of this resource information was derived from the U.S. Department of Agriculture / ADNR Susitna River Basin cooperative data inventory process (1977-1983) and meetings with special interest groups (Winter / Spring, 1982-83).

4.

Alternative land use plans showing possible resolutions to land use issues were developed by the planning team and reviewed by the public in twelve workshops (Spring, 1983).

5.

Based on response to the alternatives, a draft plan was prepared by the planning team and reviewed by affected agencies (Spring, 1984).

6.

After necessary revisions following agency review, a Public Review Draft was distributed and public hearings were held (Summer / Fall, 1984).

7.

Final revisions were made following the public hearings. The Commissioner of ADNR and the Borough Assembly approved the plan which now guides public land management decisions in the Susitna Area.

Throughout the planning process, members of the planning team and staff met informally with representatives of many special interest groups to inform them of the plan's progress and provide them an opportunity to review resource data and plan proposals. Contacts included meetings with the Alaska Miners Association, Alaska Center for The Environment, forestry associations, the Mat-Su Borough Agricultural Advisory Board, Native corporations, Fish and Game Advisory Boards, the Resource Development Council and others.

Results of the two key steps in the public participation program — review of land use alternatives and review of the draft plan — are summarized below.

Public Review of Alternative Land Use Plans: The majority of people attending the Spring 1983 public workshops put greatest importance on the goals of preserving community character and protecting environmental quality. Opinions on the goals of economic development and additional land sales were more varied but less favorable overall. Overall, the land use designations and management guidelines in the final plan approximate those presented in alternatives 3 and 4, as preferred by workshop participants. The gross area available for land sales is greater than the amount proposed in either of these alternatives, however. This reflects additional information on public opinion, including widespread interest in the homestead program at public meetings held by the Division of Land and Water Management (February, 1984), and continued strong public response to the existing disposal program.

Public Review of the Draft Plan. A large number of minor and several major issues were brought up during the public review of the draft plan. The major issues included the plan's policies on land disposal, mining and the multiple use of state lands, and designation of wilderness areas. While the overall direction of land management policy presented in the draft plan was not changed, public comments resulted in numerous specific revisions and clarifications of the plan.

SUMMARY OF LAND MANAGEMENT GOALS AND POLICIES

The major goals of the final plan are summarized in the following section. In general, the purpose of the plan is to define a set of management policies for state and borough lands that will allow these lands to produce the greatest possible public benefits.

Under this plan, the majority of state and borough lands will be retained in public ownership and managed for multiple use including forestry, develop-

ment of mineral resources, recreation, tourism, and protection and use of fish and wildlife. The majority of land with potential for agriculture will be retained in public ownership for at least the near term and classified "resource management," a category that preserves options for all possible uses until better information and/or access is available. A moderate amount of agricultural land (approximately 26,000 acres) will be offered for sale in the near term. This will allow the state and borough to observe the results of agricultural efforts on land already committed to this purpose while retaining the opportunity to expand agricultural production in the future.

Under the plan a substantial amount of land (approximately 110,000 acres of state land and 7,000 acres of borough land) will be offered for settlement over the next 20 years. Offerings will focus on providing land necessary for community expansion, land for settlement associated with resource development and high quality accessible land for recreational/seasonal use and investment. Some land also will be available in more remote areas for recreational use and self-sufficient lifestyles. If past patterns continue, most land will be used at least in the near term for recreational/seasonal or investment purposes. In addition to land sales, the plan encourages development of a public use cabin system and identifies areas for issuance of remote cabin permits.

Overall, this plan strives for development of resources on state and borough lands while emphasizing protection of environmental quality and community character. The plan proposes expanded use of the area's resources, but controls the manner and location of development so that many of the qualities that make the area attractive are protected and enhanced.

Outlined below are the plan's major economic, environmental, social and transportation goals.

Economy

The economy of the study area is at present almost exclusively dependent on government, service, retail, and construction sectors which in turn are largely based upon the state's current oil wealth. A major goal of the plan is *to use public lands for development of basic industries that can contribute to the local and regional economy when state oil revenues decline.* Analysis of different development options show that the major way this can be achieved, at least in the near term, is through the use of public land for forestry, mineral and energy resource development, hunting and fishing, recreation and tourism. Agriculture is also seen as important at gradually expanded levels.

Natural Environment

Maintaining environmental quality was rated the most important goal for management of public lands by the great majority of people attending workshops on plan alternatives held in the area and Anchorage. A primary goal of the plan is *to allow forestry, agriculture, mining and other types of development to occur but manage these uses to minimize environmental impacts*. This goal is not seen as contrary to the economic objectives because the area's economy is likely to be very dependent on opportunities for hunting, fishing, sightseeing, etc., that require high environmental quality. Protecting quality of riparian environments is a particular focus of the plan.

Social Environment and Land Sales

A major goal of the plan is to use state and borough lands *to sustain the characteristics of the region that attract people to the area: proximity to recreation opportunities, availability of local supplies of wood and fish and wildlife resources, visual quality, and plenty of open space*. To achieve this goal for as many people as possible, and simultaneously to reduce fiscal costs, the plan strives for a pattern of settlement that results in relatively concentrated settlement areas separated by large areas of open space where settlement is sparse and land is used for forestry, mining, fish and wildlife, and recreation. Another important way this goal is achieved is by developing a plan for the use of state lands with the consultation of local governments and with consideration of their goals. Finally, the overall pace of land sales will be slowed gradually under policies in this plan.

Transportation and Access

The final major goal of the plan is *to open more land in the region to a variety of public and private uses*. This is achieved in part by the pattern of land use designations in the plan. This pattern is specifically arranged to combine designated uses in a manner that makes benefits of road construction greater than the cost. For example, in the region south of Petersville Road, forestry areas are designated to encourage construction of pioneer roads that will open adjacent land to use for public and private recreation and agriculture. Another result of the plan is the preparation of a joint state and borough capital improvement budget for presentation to the state legislature. This set of transportation priorities will be coordinated with the DOT/PF's ongoing transportation planning work. Finally, the plan will require future land sales of small lots (< 10 acres) in areas near roads to meet borough requirements for construction of physical access to all parcels. This will slow the pace of land sales and increase sale prices but reduce fiscal and environmental costs.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SUSITNA AREA PLAN

The plan has been signed by the Commissioners of the Alaska Departments of Natural Resources and Fish and Game and is now state policy for the management of state lands in the Susitna Area. All ADNR and ADF&G decisions (land disposals, classifications, timber sales, road building, mineral leasing and all other actions on state lands) shall comply with the provisions of this plan. The plan also has been approved by the Matanuska-Susitna Borough Assembly and controls land use decisions on borough lands as well. All decisions on borough lands will comply with the provisions of this plan. Where land management policy is different for state and borough lands, for example, the policy dealing with the use of land with agricultural potential, these differences are described in the plan. In the case of federal lands, the Bureau of Land Management will consider the recommendations of the area plan when preparing a management plan for federal lands in the area.

The land use designations made on state lands in this plan are officially established in state records through the state's land classification system. The system is a formal record of the primary uses for which each parcel of state land will be managed. These classifications will be shown on status plats which are available for public use at various offices of the Department of Natural Resources. These plats will indicate the primary uses designated by this plan and will refer the reader to the plan for more detailed information, including statements of management intent, secondary land uses and land management guidelines. Classifications for each management unit are shown in chart form in Chapter 4.

Another important step in the implementation of this plan will be more detailed planning for specific management units or for specific issues such as trails or transportation. These detailed plans are referred to as "management plans" as distinguished from this document which is an "area plan." An area plan sets forth permitted land uses, related policies and management guidelines but at less detail than a management plan. For example, an area plan does not design individual land disposals, pinpoint the location of new roads or utility lines, or establish the schedule for timber sales. These design and scheduling decisions on state lands are addressed by management plans which implement the provisions of an area plan on a site specific basis. Chapter 4 includes a list of management plans proposed for implementation of the Susitna Area Plan.

Other important implementation actions, also addressed in Chapter 4, include proposals for legislative or administrative designation of areas possessing particularly valuable public resources (e.g., state recreation rivers, state forests, etc.), plans for protecting the routes of future roads and other possible improvements to the regional transportation system, and procedures for determining the pace of state land disposal.

presents procedures for making special exceptions to the provisions of the plan when modifications are not necessary or appropriate.

The Matanuska-Susitna Borough eventually will adopt the Susitna Plan as part of the borough comprehensive plan. The borough is currently working on its comprehensive plan; the transportation and public services components are nearly complete and the land use component is underway. The borough's comprehensive plan and the Susitna Area Plan are designed to complement one another: while the area plan deals with public lands in more remote areas, the borough's comprehensive plan focuses on the developed portions of the borough and includes consideration of uses on private lands. Together these two efforts will produce a regional land use plan covering lands in all ownerships.

MODIFICATION OF THE PLAN

A plan can never be so comprehensive and visionary as to provide solutions to all land use problems, nor should it be inflexible. Therefore, the land use designations, the policies, and the management guidelines of this plan may be changed if conditions warrant. The plan will be updated periodically as new data become available and as changing social and economic conditions place different demands on public lands. An interagency planning team will coordinate periodic review of this plan when the Alaska Department of Natural Resources and/or the Matanuska-Susitna Borough consider it necessary. The plan review will include meetings with all interested groups and the general public.

In addition to periodic review, modification of the plan or exceptions to its provisions may be proposed at any time by members of the public or government agencies. Appendix 1 presents procedures for making amendments to and minor modifications of the plan which will be followed by the Department of Natural Resources with regard to state-owned land and by the Matanuska-Susitna Borough with regard to borough-owned lands. On borough lands, the Matanuska-Susitna Borough Assembly may approve changes without requiring approval of DNR as DNR may approve changes on state lands without approval of the borough. However, each will consult with the other prior to making such changes. Appendix 1 also