

MANAGEMENT UNIT 11 – GUNSIGHT MOUNTAIN

MANAGEMENT INTENT

This is a large management unit which includes land 5 – 10 miles on either side of the Glenn Highway from Caribou Creek on the west to approximately six miles east of the Little Nelchina River. This area encompasses the zone of transition from “coastal” to “interior” Alaska. It ranges from the deep valley of the South Fork of the Matanuska River near Lions Head to the open, sparsely forested landscapes of Eureka Creek and the Big and Little Nelchina River drainages. This location provides unusual and popular recreation opportunities, including excellent hunting and winter recreation, quality wildlife habitat, particularly for caribou and moose, and great views both down the Matanuska drainage and east towards the Wrangell Mountains. In addition to surface values, the area also is the scene of significant past and present mining activities. Many of the popular skiing and snow machining trails in the area were originally built by miners.

Portions of this management unit are within the boundary of the proposed Nelchina public use area. Information on this area is presented in the subregion summary of the Talkeetna Mountains section of this chapter. Other portions of this unit are proposed for a separate legislative or administrative designation to protect this area’s recreation value.

The primary management intent for public land in the area is to protect and allow for the use of these recreational, visual, subsurface and wildlife values. This will be done by retaining the large majority of the land in public ownership; however, there will be one area open for land disposal in the eastern part of the management unit. To help provide for public recreation needs, this unit is one of the highest priority areas in the planning area for construction of public use cabins.

All public lands within this unit are available for oil and gas leasing. Public land in this unit will remain open to mineral location and be available for coal leasing except for land that will be offered for settlement (subunit 11a).

The area is divided into five subunits: the area between the Glenn Highway and the Big Nelchina River that is planned for settlement (11a); Gunsight Mountain and other state-owned areas planned for retention (11b); Native selected land, including a tract proposed for legislative designation as part of the Nelchina public use area (11d), the rest of the Native selected land (11c); and the Horn Mountain area also proposed for legislative designation as part of the Nelchina public use area (11e).

Land sales in **subunit 11a** will be located on the southeast facing slopes above the Nelchina River. The specific northern and western boundaries will be located so that areas sold will not be visible from the Glenn Highway; the boundary given in the plan is an estimate of where this line should be.

Subunits 11b and 11c (Gunsight Mtn. and Ahtna block) are proposed for designation by the legislature or the governor as a state recreation area. This proposed special designation is intended to provide special and lasting protection for this area’s unique public recreational value. This proposal has a lower priority than other areas in the study area proposed for legislative or administrative designation because of the general lack of land use conflicts in the area and also due to uncertainties regarding land ownership. Subunit 11c has been selected by both the state and Ahtna, The Copper River Area Native Corporation. Final determination of land ownership is unlikely for at least several years.

A large area of land within subunit 11b currently is leased for grazing. This lease was issued by the BLM prior to the state receiving title to the land and is partly within the area the plan proposes to close to grazing due to potential conflicts between livestock, Dall sheep, mountain goat and caribou. Decisions on the eventual renewal of the leases should be made in a manner consistent with the grazing policies in the Agriculture section of Chapter 2 of this plan (agriculture section) and with the land use designations in this chapter.

Subunits 11d and 11e (Nelchina public use area and Horn Mtn.) in the northern part of this management unit are recommended for legislative designation to protect caribou. Subunit 11d was selected by both the state and Ahtna Corporation; subunit 11e is state-owned.

MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES

The complete set of areawide management guidelines is presented in Chapter 2 of this plan. All of the guidelines potentially could apply to uses within this management unit; however, those that are most likely to be applicable are indicated with asterisks in the list that follows.

- Agriculture
- Fish & Wildlife Habitat
- *Forestry
- Recreation
- *Settlement

LAND USE DESIGNATION SUMMARY

SUBREGION Glenn Highway

MANAGEMENT UNIT 11 - Gunsight Mountain

SUBUNIT	LAND OWNERSHIP (GENERALIZED)	LAND USE DESIGNATIONS				PROHIBITED SURFACE USE(S)*	COMMENTS
		SURFACE		SUBSURFACE			
		PRIMARY USE(S)	SECONDARY USE(S)	LOCATABLE MINERALS	LEASEABLE MINERALS		
11a Nelchina River	State	Settlement	Public Rec. Wildlife Hab. Forestry (personal use)	Closed prior to land disposal	Not available for coal leasing or prospecting	Remote Cabins	Estimated net disposal area = 1,565 acres
11b Gunsite Mountain	State	Public Recreation Wildlife Habitat	Forestry (personal use)	Open	Available for leasing	Remote Cabins Trapper Cabins Land Disposals	Proposed for legislative or administrative designation
11c Ahtna Block	Native Selected/ State Selected	Primarily Private Land--Recommended Uses: Public Recreation, Wildlife Habitat, Forestry (personal use)		---	---	---	Proposed for legislative or administrative designation
11d Nelchina Public Use Area	Native Selected/ State Selected	Primarily Private Land--Recommended Uses: Public Recreation, Wildlife Habitat, Forestry (personal use)		---	---	---	Proposed for legislative designation
11e Horn Mountain	State	Public Recreation Wildlife Habitat		Open	Available for leasing	Grazing	Proposed for legislative designation

*Other uses such as material sales, land leases, remote cabin permits, etc., that are not specifically prohibited may be allowed. Such uses will be allowed if consistent with the management intent statement and management guidelines of this unit, and with the relevant management guidelines in chapter 2.

- Subsurface (Materials)
- *Transportation
 - Instream Flow
- *Lakeshore Management
- *Public Access
 - Remote Cabin Permits
- *Stream Corridors
 - Trail Management
- *Wetlands Management
 - Resource Management

Management guidelines that apply to this management unit only are presented below, by subunit.

Subunit 11a (Nelchina River)

Stream Corridors

The management intent for land adjacent to the streams referenced below is to permit fishing, trapping, camping and other active uses and to protect water quality and riparian habitat. Consequently this land should be retained in public ownership. Corridor widths will be set on a case-by-case basis using the policies in chapter 2. The standard minimum buffer width (200' on each side of the river) should be used on Eureka Creek, the Nelchina River and other unnamed tributaries to the Nelchina shown on the USGS 1:63,360 quads for this area. The corridor on the Little Nelchina River should be 500' on both sides of the river in order to protect the opportunity for wilderness camping and fishing in the area and to protect visual quality for people boating this river.

Protection of Transportation Routes

No detailed plans for access into this area have been made. Any land use authorizations in this unit or the vicinity should be located so they do not preclude the option for a feasible and efficient system of roads and/or trails into this area from the Glenn Highway.

Subunit 11b, 11c, 11d & 11e (Gunsight Mtn., Ahtna Block, Nelchina Public Use Area and Horn Mt.)

Timber Harvests and Visual Quality

Personal use or commercial timber harvests, where visible from the Glenn Highway, will be designed to minimize adverse visual impacts on highway views. Some site specific guidance in implementing this guideline is provided by the report *Visual Assessment Of The Glenn Highway* prepared by Environmental Services Limited. (A copy of this report is available from the Division of Land and Water Management.) This will be a particular concern in the vicinity of Caribou Creek.

Public Use Cabins

Public use cabins should be built in the vicinity of Squaw Creek and other sites north or south of the Glenn Highway within a convenient one-day ski or hike from highway trailheads.

Remote Cabins

It is recommended that a management plan be prepared for the lands in subunits 11b, 11c, 11d and 11e. The management plan will determine, among other things, whether remote cabins will be permitted in the subunits. Remote cabins permits will not be offered until and unless areas open to remote cabins are designated by a management plan.

Glenn Highway Realignment

DOT/PF currently is conducting preliminary engineering and environmental evaluations to reconstruct the Glenn Highway from mile 35 to mile 135. Portions of the highway, including the segment in this unit, may require realignment. The plan policy to establish and/or expand public recreation uses in this unit is not intended to preclude this possible realignment. A final decision on this issue should be made, however, with the consultation of DNR and after a thorough consideration of the impact of realignment on this unit's public recreational values.