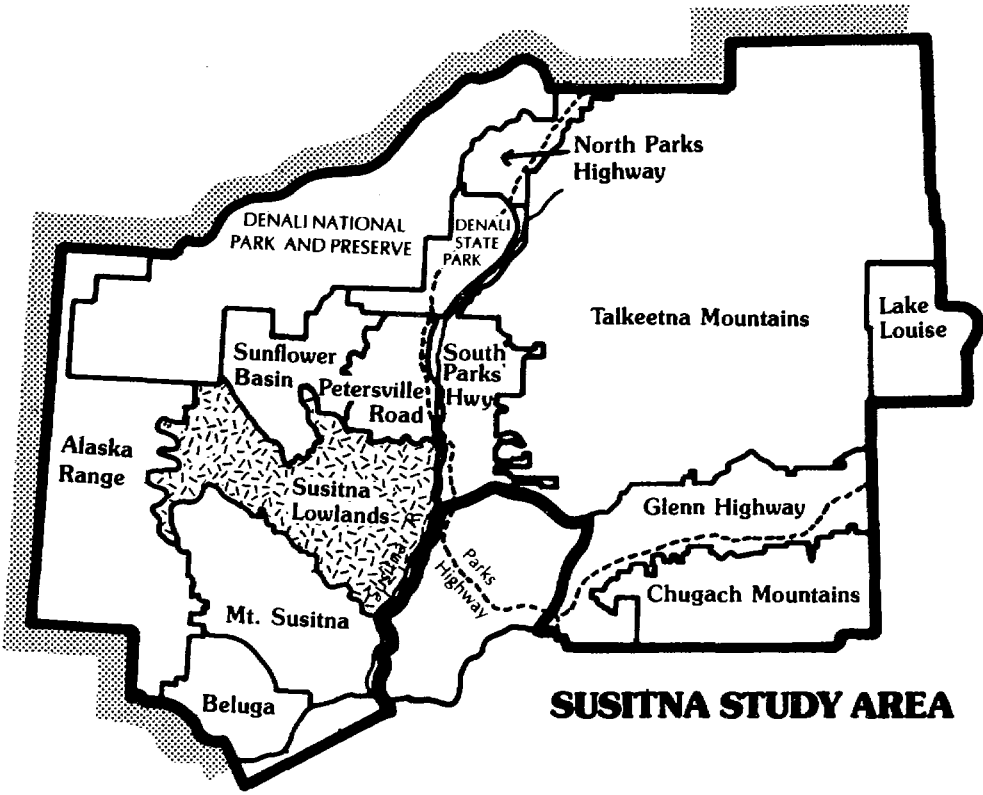


SUSITNA LOWLANDS SUBREGION



LOWLANDS

SUSITNA LOWLANDS SUBREGION

The following section describes land use policy in the Susitna Lowlands subregion. It is divided into two parts. The first is an overview of resources and their management for the subregion as a whole. The second presents specific statements of management intent, land use designations, prohibited uses, and management guidelines for each of the subregion's fourteen management units. Maps showing land ownership in the subregion and boundaries of management units and subunits are presented at the end of the second part.

1. SUBREGION OVERVIEW

Background

This area contains the greatest untapped wealth of surface resources within the planning area. The subregion has the potential to provide large amounts of forest and agricultural products. It presently provides substantial hunting, fishing and recreational opportunities which could expand with improved access, better facilities and habitat enhancement. It also has potential to support growth in year-round and seasonal or recreational settlement.

This subregion is bounded on the east by the Big Susitna River, and on the west by the lowlands north of Mt. Susitna and Mt. Beluga. The north boundary follows the Yentna River southeast for approximately 20 miles, then turns north at the confluence of the Yentna and Kichatna Rivers to the line separating Townships 25 and 26 North which forms the northern boundary. This area comprises approximately 1,200,000 acres.

The great majority of lands within the Susitna Lowlands Subregion is owned or selected by the State of Alaska. The Matanuska-Susitna Borough owns approximately 51,000 acres.

There are numerous small parcels in private ownership (10,000-15,000 acres total) which were purchased under the state's open-to-entry program and more recent land disposal programs. Most of these parcels are located on or near water. A small amount of land — approximately 1,500 acres — is in Native ownership.

The Susitna Lowlands area is currently reached by air or trail. In this area there are public landing strips at Eightmile Lake and Skwentna and at least three private landing strips: at Yenlo Lake, Trail Ridge, and Alexander Lake. Gravel bars along the major rivers and

many of the lakes scattered throughout the region provide additional fly-in access. Boat access from Anchorage or the Parks highway is possible via the Skwentna, Yentna and Susitna Rivers, and other lateral streams.

There are no year-round roads within this subregion. Winter and/or four-wheel drive roads provide access to Shulin Lake, to the Amber Lakes just outside the northeastern boundary of the subregion, and to lands within the Beluga Subregion adjacent to the southern tip of the Susitna Lowlands. Primary trails include 60 miles of the Iditarod Trail, another winter trail running southward from Oilwell Road that connects with the Iditarod, and a 30-mile winter tractor trail from the Parks Highway near Trapper Creek south to the Delta Island area on the Susitna River. In addition, seismic lines crossing the area are used as winter trails.

Management Summary

The Susitna Lowlands Subregion is inaccessible by year-round road, rendering large-scale development in the next 5 years unlikely. The wealth of resources in the subregion and the potential for development in the longer term argue strongly that land use designations should:

- Protect important public resources such as critical habitats, wetlands, and prime recreational rivers;
- Allocate sufficient land that is relatively near existing access to forestry and settlement to encourage expansion of the road system into the subregion;
- Protect the options for future resource development on remote lands; and
- Provide some lands for private ownership near recreational attractions and future development centers.

The management intent for each of the major resources and land uses in the subregion (settlement, agriculture, forestry, fish and wildlife, recreation, subsurface resources, and transportation) is summarized in the following sections.

Settlement

Lands will be sold for settlement in association with resource development and to provide opportunities for private recreation. Over the long term, land offerings may include a large proportion of borough

holdings. Some land also will be offered by the state to complement future agriculture and forestry development and to offer some private recreational sites. Most of the near term state sales will be homesteads in remote regions. In order to provide for efficient development patterns and minimize adverse impacts of settlement, the majority of sales will be within areas where lands have been offered previously. Sales associated with resource development likely will be subdivisions. These will not be offered until road access is available. In addition, several areas will be open to remote cabin permits.

A summary of the acreage proposed for sale is shown in Table 1. Approximately 37,700 acres of state subdivision and fee simple homestead parcels will be offered for sale in the Susitna Lowlands subregion over the next twenty years. Sales will be offered in a number of locations along the Yentna and Kahiltna Rivers; near Lockwood, Sucker, Neil, Shell and Onestone Lakes; between the Skwentna and Kichatna Rivers in the western part of the subregion; and near the confluence of the Skwentna and Hayes Rivers on the south side of the Skwentna River. Much of the land is within the boundaries of past remote parcel areas. In addition, over 900 surveyed lots (approximately 6000 ac.) in existing subdivisions are available for sale over-the-counter.

TABLE 1

Acreage Identified for Settlement*

STATE LAND	GROSS AREA (ac)	NET AREA (ac)
New Offerings	36,990	7,735
Reofferings within Past Disposal Areas	165,420	29,970
Agriculture Homesteads	10,640	6,040
TOTAL	213,050	43,745

Approximately 39,000 acres are designated resource management, and 14,600 acres are included in the borough land bank. Resource management areas include Dëshka Flats, the southern portion of the past Lake Creek — McDougal remote parcel offering between Lake Creek and the Kahiltna River, lands between Alexander Creek and Sucker Lake, and lands south of Sevenmile Lake. Land bank designations cover parcels around Sevenmile, Lockwood, Whitsol, and Witsoe Lakes; and at the confluence of the Yentna and Susitna Rivers. Some of these areas may be available for settlement in the long term, but there are

*In addition to the sales listed above, approximately 900 surveyed parcels in existing subdivisions are currently available for sale over-the-counter. These parcels total approximately 6,000 acres.

no immediate plans for sale. When these lands are reevaluated to determine their best long term use, their high values for forestry, wildlife habitat, agriculture, and public recreation will be considered in addition to their settlement potential.

Agriculture

This subregion is presently inaccessible, but has the potential to become a productive agricultural area. Approximately 18,000 acres of land with commercial potential are designated for agriculture in the Kashwitna Knobs area. An additional 10,640 acres are designated for agricultural homesteads in smaller blocks of land just west of Kroto Creek and southeast of Lockwood Lake. In addition, to protect the option for future agricultural development in more remote areas, including Dëshka Flats, approximately 39,000 acres of land are designated resource management and 14,600 acres are in the borough land bank (see description of location in settlement section above). There are no grazing lands identified in this subregion.

Forestry

Inaccessibility makes most forest development in this subregion unlikely in the next few years, although access can be provided by winter roads to some timberlands. Long term forestry values are high enough to justify retention of several large areas for forest management, however. Designation of lands for forestry will encourage development of access that will support other land uses. Forestry is designated a primary use on approximately 283,600 acres of state and borough land of which approximately half has high or moderate potential for commercial timber management. These lands are primarily between the Yentna and Susitna Rivers south and west of Parker Lake, along Trail Ridge, and between Lake Creek and the Yenlo Hills. 141,400 acres of this land are proposed for legislative or administrative designation to provide for long-term timber management as well as other forest uses. Forestry is a secondary use on an additional 465,000 acres of land retained in public ownership including 125,000 acres of timberland along the Yentna and Susitna Rivers and Alexander, Kroto and Moose Creeks, where public recreation and fish and wildlife habitat are the primary uses.

Habitat and Recreation

The Susitna Lowlands Subregion contains extremely valuable habitat. Most of the existing recreational use of the area centers around fish and wildlife use, although the river corridors such as Lake Creek, Kroto Creek, and Alexander Creek are also important for floating and canoeing.

Much of the highly valuable habitat land is retained in public ownership, and several areas are identified for special designation. The Lake Creek, Kroto Creek, Moose Creek, and Alexander Creek corridors will be retained entirely in public ownership and proposed for legislative or administrative designation to provide for habitat management and protect public recreation opportunities. Lands along the Yentna and Susitna Rivers and near their confluence also are proposed for legislative or administrative designation primarily to protect their habitat values. The forested lands identified in section 3 above also will serve to protect important moose winter range and recreation opportunities.

Mining

a. Mining Claims

Mineral values are relatively low in this subregion, with existing, often inactive mining claims occurring primarily along Lake Creek and the Nakochna, Kichatna and Kahiltna rivers. Areas designated for settlement or agriculture will be closed to mineral location, as will the Lake, Kroto, Moose, and Alexander Creek corridors, and one recreation site on the Kahiltna River. Chijuk Creek, an important tributary of Kroto Creek, also will be closed to mineral location. The remainder of the area will be open to mineral location.

b. Coal

The potential for coal development is low to very low throughout most of the subregion. A limited amount of land with high and moderate coal potential occurs in the far western part of the area, and there are existing coal leases on this site. There is also moderate coal potential in a small area in the southern tip of the subregion.

Nearly all the land with high to moderate coal potential will be retained in public ownership and managed to permit exploration and development of these resources.

Coal leasing is permitted throughout the area except in densely settled areas and the Lake Creek, Kroto Creek, Moose Creek, and Alexander Creek corridors.

c. Oil and gas

There is some potential for future oil and gas development in the subregion, although little exploration or development is currently underway. All areas will be available for oil and gas leasing. However, within the Lake, Kroto, Moose, and Alexander Creek corridors specific mitigation measures

will be established to protect public recreation and habitat values.

Resource Management

Several large areas are designated resource management in this subregion. These are areas that are valuable for a number of different and potentially conflicting land uses. Because these areas presently are not accessible, resource development is not likely in the near term. Therefore, they will be managed for existing uses in the near term (primarily habitat, recreation, and some timber harvesting) and reevaluated in the future to determine whether their best long term use is for public resource management or sale for residential or agricultural development. The location of these areas is described in the settlement section above.

Transportation

A priority for implementation of the Susitna Area Plan will be to improve road access into the Susitna Lowlands by extending roads south from Petersville Road. Road access is necessary for forestry and agricultural development and for most residential use.

Main routes proposed in this subregion are, (1) a north-south road connecting the Amber Lakes area (Oilwell Road extension) and Fish Creek agricultural development in the Willow Sub-basin, including a Susitna River bridge at the south end of the road, and (2) extension and upgrading of the Shulin Lake winter trail across the Kahiltna River and Lake Creek. Construction of the northern half of the first route could occur in the near to mid term and would provide access to borough lands with forestry and agricultural potential in Management Unit 10 and state and borough lands in Management Units 11, 12, 13 and 14. The Shulin Lake route is a longer term project that eventually could provide access to settlement and forestry lands on both sides of the Kahiltna and open up large areas to hunting and other recreational activities.