

Fish and Numbered Lakes Recreation Management Plan

May 2007

Prepared for Matanuska-Susitna Borough, Community Development Department
by Agnew::Beck Consulting

Assembly Review Draft



Fish and Numbered Lakes Recreation Management Plan

Assembly Draft – May, 2007

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INTRODUCTION TO THE COMMUNITY COUNCIL-APPROVED PLAN

The attached plan represents many hundreds of hours of work of community members, borough and consulting staff. The plan also represents a strong and broad community consensus on residents' value of their access to outdoor recreation and natural areas, and their desire to hold onto these opportunities into the future. The plan, which was approved by Talkeetna Community Council, Inc in December 06, is now ready to be moved onto formal Borough approval and implementation.

Highlights of plan policies are presented below:

Fish Lake Recreation Area

- Provide for a new public access at the west end of the lake, to serve the same functions and replace the traditional (but private) access point that has been used in the past.
- At the new west access, develop a small parking lot off the Spur Road, and short trail from this lot to a new lakefront access point, including a bridge over Gator Creek. Ultimately develop a road over this same route to serve a lake front day use area.
- Develop low impact trails within the Recreation Area, for hiking, biking and winter use.
- Shift the route of the existing, undeveloped ROW that crosses the Fish Lake Recreation Area – move it to the north to a more favorable alignment; ultimately construct a road and perhaps a trail system along this ROW.
- Close Fish Lake Recreation Area to motorized use other than for the access corridor to the lake at the west end and to private property at the east end, and perhaps along the future road. Fish Lake itself, which is outside of the Park, remains open to snowmachines.
- Allow for informal “backcountry” camping away from trailheads.

Numbered Lakes Natural Area

- The goal for this area is to retain and protect its undeveloped natural character, while providing limited, well-designed facilities for people to enjoy this attractive and unusual natural landscape.
- In the near term, develop two access points into the natural area; one north and one south. Each of these access points will include a small parking lot, and a short walking trail into a view point.
- Only develop trails in the remainder of the area as required to respond to future use and reduce impacts; in general, aim to keep this area a place for exploring a small “backyard wilderness”.
- Close the area to motorized use.
- Retain the option in the future for certain more developed uses, particularly as management capacity increases, including camping and, on the eastern side of the parcel, biking and equestrian uses.

Addressing Community-Wide Issues Raised by the Fish & Numbered Lakes Plan

The large majority of those who participated in the Fish and Numbered Lakes planning process support the management policies presented in the plan and summarized above. However, it is important to point out that some participants believe these two areas should not be closed to snowmachines, and in particular, that these areas should provide accessible places for younger riders

to use their machines. There were also some people who expressed a general concern regarding the need for a broader range of recreation uses in Talkeetna, from wild places with no facilities, to more developed areas. A great deal of discussion took place on these two issues. While no solutions were found that satisfied all parties, and the large majority of the community supports this plan as written, the discussion made clear the importance of these issues and created a sincere, community-wide desire to find solutions. Key steps and recommendations to keep this process moving ahead are described below.

Foundation: Agreement on Community-Wide Goals

There is broad agreement on many of the elements of the snow machine issue for the Talkeetna Community Council area as a whole, including the goals below:

- Legal trails should be reserved and improved, for utilitarian snowmachine use by local residents, for example, for hauling supplies, gathering firewood, traveling from homes to downtown, or access to remote, roadless cabins and homes.
- Places should be provided for local residents – particularly for youth – for safe recreational snowmachining.
- Talkeetna should not be a major destination for out of town snow machiners; however, there is a need to establish multipurpose corridors from Talkeetna into adjacent appropriate snow machine use areas.

There is also broad agreement (and frustration) over the fact that traditional but undedicated trails for snowmachines, skiing, dog mushing and other trail uses in and around Talkeetna are being lost as public lands are sold into private ownership, and as private land is developed. There is also frustration over the fact that some public lands are now closed to snowmachines, and, on other hand, that growing snowmachine use on some public lands has displaced non-motorized users. The unmet need for a quality trail system affects everyone - trail users and non-users alike. It has led to trespass on posted private property, safety hazards, conflicts between trail users and between users and neighborhood residents, and an overall reduction in the pleasure of living in Talkeetna.

There is also broad agreement on the need to offer a more diverse array of recreation experiences within the community, for residents and non residents.

Steps Toward Solutions

Local residents and Borough staff have worked for years to try to retain traditional trails. There have been some successes, but overall the system of trails and the areas open to meet diverse recreation uses is declining. Although the Talkeetna Comprehensive Plan considers community wide recreation needs, a more complete and comprehensive plan is needed. In light of these challenges, several steps have been identified to move ahead with recreation and trail planning:

- Community Wide Recreation Plan – While progress is being made in planning for individual parcels of land, including this project, before planning is done for additional sites there is a need for a community-wide recreational plan. This should be broadly inclusive of the needs of all recreational users.

- Community-Wide Trails System Plan – Trail issues can best be resolved through a comprehensive look at trail needs community-wide. Particular needs include: a utilitarian, north south multipurpose trail; a downtown area loop trail; and trail corridors leading out of town. This “plan” should include both the identification of needed trails, and tangible actions to reserve and improve these trails.
- “United We Stand” – Motorized and non-motorized trail users will each be more successful if they pool their energies and work cooperatively on projects that benefit their specific recreation needs and the needs of the full community.
- Borough and Agency Support – Strong community support for the process is necessary, and exists today. However, for community efforts to succeed the Borough must be a very active partner. To be successful, this recreation project will require resources for planning, coordination among multiple agencies, negotiations with landowners, surveying, mapping, extensive public participation, possible revisions to subdivision and platting policy, and other tasks that severely challenge a small group of volunteers, even those as energetic and determined as Talkeetna residents.
- Right Process – Developing real solutions to these issues will not be quick or easy. Sufficient time needs to be devoted, and the process has to be structured to ensure all voices are heard.

A variety of past actions have started the processes listed above. In particular, ongoing activity by local trail advocates, recent work by the Talkeetna Parks Advisory Committee (TPAC), and the “meeting-in-a-box” process, has created real momentum on these issues. It is critical now to broaden and strengthen these efforts. While the challenges are great, these issues will only be harder to solve in the future. The right effort right now could create a system of trails and recreation areas that could make Talkeetna a much better place to live and visit for generations to come.

PROJECT BACKGROUND & OVERVIEW

The 1998 Talkeetna Comprehensive Plan recommends that certain Matanuska-Susitna Borough (MSB) lands in the Talkeetna vicinity be reserved for “parks and preservation.”¹ The specific areas identified were “a portion of State and Borough lands around X, Y, Z and Tigger Lakes, a portion of contiguous Borough land north of Fish Lake, and a portion of Borough land around Numbered Lakes.” In October 2005, the Talkeetna Community Council requested that the MSB classify a portion of the Numbered Lakes and Fish Lake areas as “Park and Preserve,” and develop a park and preserve master plan for the area. In early 2006, Agnew::Beck Consulting, LLC of Anchorage was awarded the contract to work with MSB staff and the community to prepare Recreation Management Plans for these lands (see “Project Area” map on page 5). The MSB lands identified in this planning effort remain unclassified, with the exception of one parcel (the southwestern-most 40 acre parcel that straddles the Spur Road, which is classified as “material land”). After evaluating site characteristics and use patterns, and considering public opinion, this planning effort identifies the appropriate land use classification for the MSB lands at Fish and Numbered Lakes.

The Fish and Numbered Lakes plan builds upon the foundation of previously adopted plans for the Talkeetna area. These include: The Talkeetna Comprehensive Plan, The Talkeetna Lakes (XYZ Lakes) Recreation Plan, 2003; a Land Use Plan and Economic Development Strategy for the Talkeetna Riverfront Park, 2003; and a Lake Management Plan for the Question, Little Question, Lake Five and Unnamed Lakes, 1998. (See the references page at the end of this document for a complete listing of past planning efforts, ecological studies and background information.)

¹ Talkeetna Comprehensive Plan, 1998, Matanuska-Susitna Borough (pages 6-38, 6-40)

PLANNING PROCESS

The planning process allows community members to submit and review information about the land and resources; set goals for land management; and work with the consultants and Borough staff to determine what, if any, improvements (e.g. trails, signs or parking) or management strategies (e.g. controls on type of trail use) are appropriate to reach these goals.

The planning process for Fish and Numbered Lakes is summarized in a chart below.

Planning Steps and Timeline

Date	Action
1998	The Talkeetna Comprehensive Plan recommends portions of MSB land around Fish and Numbered Lakes be reserved for “park and preservation.”
October 2005	The Talkeetna Community Council requests the MSB to reclassify the land as “Park and Preserve,” and develop a park and preserve master plan for the area.
February ‘06	Agnew::Beck was awarded a contract to prepare a Recreation Plan.
February ‘06	Publicity of the project began with a flyer posted around community and informational ‘postcards’ sent to over 200 adjacent landowners.
March 8 ‘06	Initial site visit and meeting with the local Parks Advisory Committee and interested community members.
March ‘06	The first draft of the plan, titled <i>Issues and Preliminary Recommendations</i> , was distributed for review by MSB staff, Parks Advisory Committee, key stakeholders, and the public
April 5 ‘06	Community Workshop #1 featured discussion of the above draft
April ‘06	Revisions were made to the preliminary recommendations; and the second draft of the plan, titled <i>Round 2 Revisions and New Options</i> , was distributed for community review
May ‘06	Public comments on <i>Round 2</i> were summarized, distributed, and then discussed at Community Workshop #2
July-October ‘06	Public comments were reviewed and revisions made to create the <i>Fish and Numbered Lakes Recreation Management Plan, Final Draft</i>
Nov ‘06	Public review of the <i>Final Draft</i>
November 29 ‘06	Community Workshop #3 to discuss the <i>Final Draft</i>
Nov – Dec. 6, ‘06	Public comments were submitted, revisions made to the <i>Draft Plan</i>
Dec ‘07	TPAC, Community Council meets to approve Plan
Feb – May ‘07	Matanuska-Susitna Borough Advisory Boards, Planning Commission and Assembly hold Public Hearings to review and approve Plan

Policy drafts and revisions, as well as public comment summaries compiled for this plan, are listed in Appendix A.

An initial public meeting, held in Talkeetna on March 8, 2006, invited participants to identify the area's physical characteristics, natural habitat, current uses and access routes. Meeting attendants also conveyed some initial goals and their vision for the future of the areas.

Community Workshop #1, held April 5, 2006, elicited discussion on the first planning document, titled *Issues and Preliminary Recommendations*. There was a substantial degree of consensus among workshop participants for the following goals: retaining the natural character of the Fish and Numbered Lakes areas; protecting habitat; providing careful public access that does not stimulate greatly increased use; and accommodating low-intensity non-motorized recreation. In the comment period following Community Workshop #1, the consultants received a heavy volume of comments. About 20 percent of the commenter's expressed concerns that the planning process is not adequately addressing the needs in Talkeetna for developed recreation facilities, recreation for persons with disabilities, and motorized recreation. About 80 percent of commenter's endorsed in general the *Preliminary Recommendations* for Fish and Numbered Lakes, which focused on maintaining a largely natural setting with low-impact, non-motorized, non-commercial recreation..

The next draft, *Round 2 Revisions and Options*, presented a second round of more refined policy proposals, reflecting the diverse community feedback. Key topics addressed included: group use; small-scale commercial use; camping; potential for developed recreation sites; and locally-oriented snowmachine use. Meeting participants discussed these topics in small groups at Community Workshop #2 held May 24th, 2006. There was an additional comment period that extended until June 15. The general participant sentiment was that most of the above-mentioned uses were too intensive or high-impact for the Fish and Numbered Lakes parcels, and those uses could be better served on other public lands in or near Talkeetna. The meeting participants discussed a matrix and map of community-wide recreation locations and potential recreation uses, and confirmed that Fish and Numbered Lakes appear best suited for low-intensity recreation (see Appendix B). To find the best locations for some of the higher-impact recreation uses, the Talkeetna Parks Advisory Committee formed a task force for area-wide recreation planning (formed May 2006, with its work ongoing).

The *Final Draft* of the *Fish and Numbered Lakes Recreation Management Plan, Revised December 8, 2006*, incorporates comments and information from all stages of the planning process. Reflecting community and MSB interests, this plan has policies to improve public recreation and access for local residents at Fish and Numbered Lakes, while protecting the natural setting, habitat, and wildlife from negative impacts. A version titled *Final Draft November 2006* was reviewed at Community Workshop #3 on November 29, 2006. Written comments were collected through December 6 and resulted in additional revisions.

Subject to additional revisions, this document will be presented to the Talkeetna Community Council for their review and approval. After the Community Council approves this plan, the plan will pass to the Matanuska-Susitna Borough Parks and Recreation Advisory Board, Real Property Asset Management Advisory Board, the Matanuska-Susitna Borough Planning Commission, and Assembly for final review and approval.

Who is involved?

- Talkeetna Parks Advisory Committee.
- Talkeetna Community Council, Inc (often referred to as “the Community Council”).

- Residents and landowners near study area, and anyone interested.
- Matanuska-Susitna Borough, Community Development Department.
- Agnew::Beck Consulting, working as the prime consultant.

Role of the Advisory Committee

The MSB establishes local Advisory Committees whenever there are diverse views on best management of a public recreation area. As stated in the Talkeetna Comprehensive Plan, “it is recommended that a citizens’ Park Advisory Board be created to guide the management of these and other area parks in order to maximize both their wildlife habitat and compatible recreation values.”

The Talkeetna Parks Advisory Committee (TPAC) served as the advisory committee for this project. TPAC is a committee of the Community Council comprised of a ‘core group’ and an ‘at-large’ group. This committee guides the planning for recreation management and improvements to the area. TPAC makes recommendations to the Community Council, which in turn makes recommendations to the Borough.

Affected Agencies

- State of Alaska Department of Natural Resources (DNR) own tracts of land adjacent to the study areas.
- Cook Inlet Regional Inc. (CIRI) owns a large area of land east of the study areas.
- The University of Alaska owns tracts of land adjacent to the study areas.
- State of Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) may be involved with any parking improvements and maintenance along Talkeetna Spur Road (commonly called just the Spur Road).

PROJECT AREA FEATURES & USE²

The lands considered in this plan are owned and managed by the Matanuska-Susitna Borough and are located within the Talkeetna Community Council area. Talkeetna is an unincorporated community.

Fish Lake Recreation Area consists of 270 acres north of Fish Lake. Numbered Lakes Natural Area consists of approximately 740 acres around several of the Numbered Lakes. (See Map 1 on page 6 for the location of study area parcels.)

Other Public Lands in the Area

Talkeetna has a variety of public lands that serve as parks or are used for recreational activities (see Map 2 on page 7 and Appendix B). Decisions on the future use of the Fish and Numbered Lakes areas will need to reflect their place in the spectrum of recreational options in the community.

Close to downtown is the Village and Riverfront Park which is small but heavily-used, both by residents and summer tourists. Amenities include overnight camping, picnicking, fishing, year-round trail and river access, parking, and boat launch facilities. This area is owned by the Alaska Railroad, the state and the MSB. This is the most heavily-used, extensively-developed recreation site in the Talkeetna area.

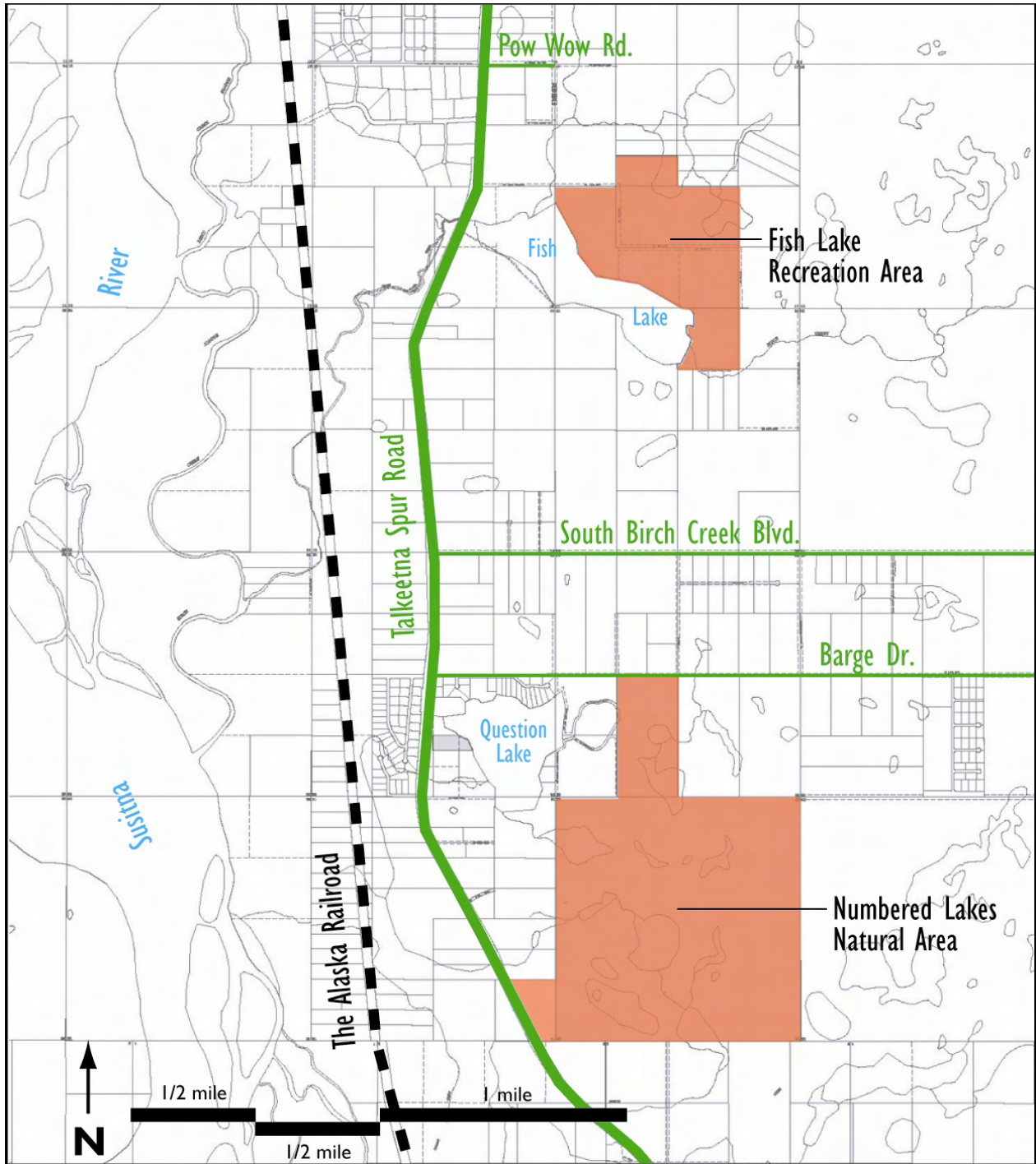
About a mile-and-a-half southeast of downtown is Christiansen Lake Park, a large day-use park that principally provides fishing, boating and swimming. A mile farther south is a larger MSB park, Talkeetna Lakes Park (also known as the X, Y, Z Lakes). This park is road-accessible, yet largely undeveloped. Only non-motorized activities are permitted, which attracts activities such as skiing, fishing, dog mushing, mountain biking, hiking, canoeing and camping. This area lies a few miles north of Fish Lake. Improvements underway or planned in this area include a walking, biking and ski trail system and associated trailhead parking areas.

These areas have been used for generations by the local community. Not until recently have these areas been formally identified as parks, and infrastructure and recreational development has been established. Separate plans for Riverfront Park and Talkeetna Lakes Park were completed in 2003.

The MSB also owns approximately 10 acres of land on the west shore of Question Lake, just west of the Numbered Lakes parcel, and adjacent to Talkeetna Spur Road. The Question Lake parcel was initially included in this plan because of its potential to provide access from the Spur Road to the lakefront for both public recreation and water access to private lakefront parcels. However, responding to public testimony, the MSB agreed that while there is a need to investigate means to improve public access to Question Lake, any changes in access or recreation development on the MSB parcel should be decided NOT through this plan, but through a separate public process and/or amendments to the existing Lake Management Plan.

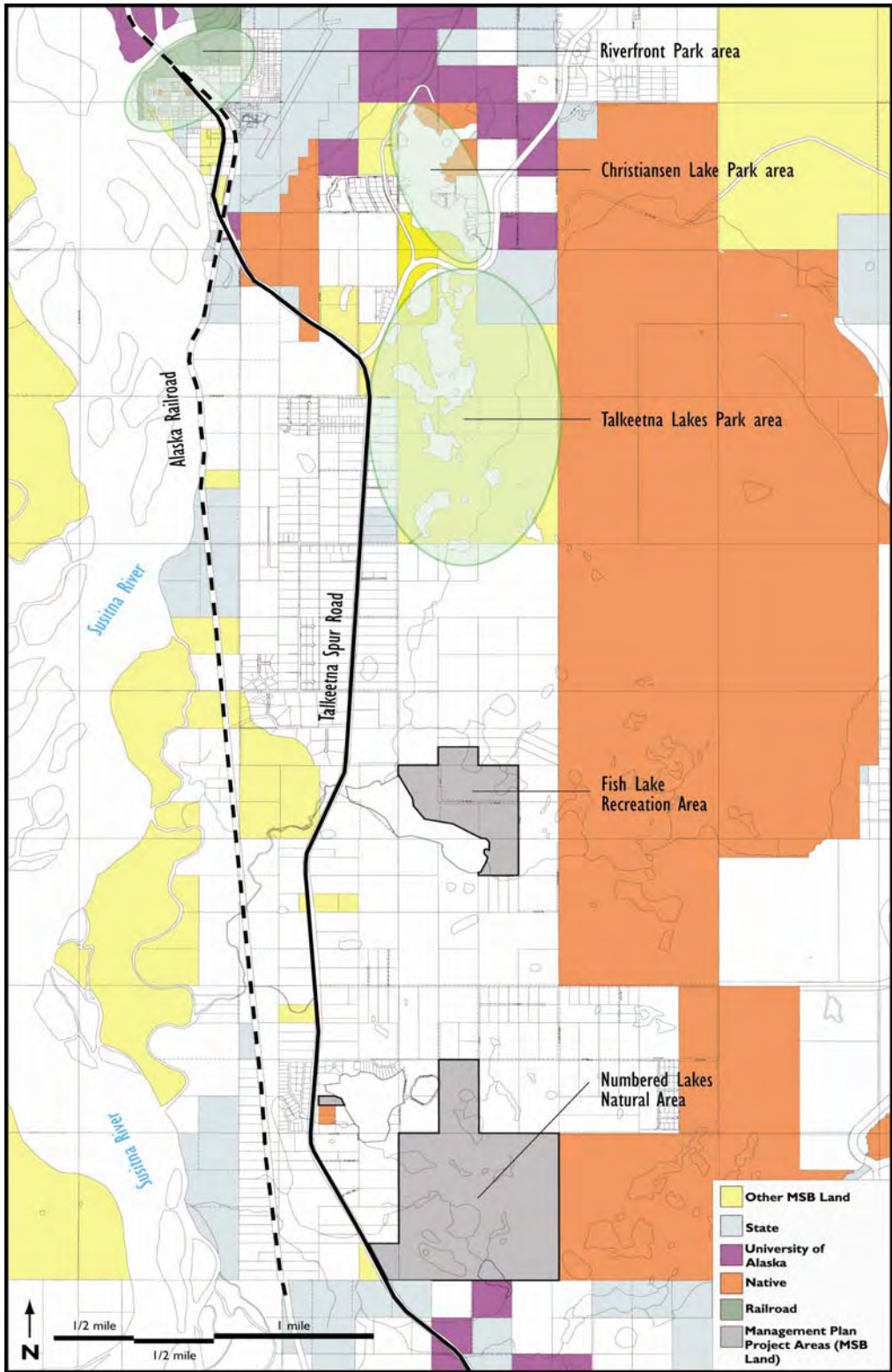
² This plan uses USGS and MSB base maps. Data on natural features is general and descriptive rather than technical or quantified. Environmental information in this report reflects a combination of local knowledge, brief site investigations by the project consulting team, and regional scale information, Community residents collectively described human use patterns and edited each others' accounts.

Map 1 – Project Area



Map Source: Matanuska-Susitna Borough & Agnew::Beck

Map 2 – Public Parks and Recreation Areas in Talkeetna



Map Source: Matanuska-Susitna Borough & Agnew::Beck

FISH LAKE AREA

Fish Lake is located at approximately Mile 9 of the Talkeetna Spur Road, slightly east of the road. Downtown Talkeetna is approximately 5 miles northwest. The MSB parcel that is the focus of this plan covers approximately 270 acres.

Land Ownership and Land Use in the Surrounding Area

The MSB land at Fish Lake is bordered by private property and Fish Lake itself (see Map 3 on page 10 – Land Ownership.) As discussed below, Fish Lake is a popular public recreation destination. Currently, nearly all recreation users reach Fish Lake by crossing the private lands between the Spur Road and the west end of the lake.

Adjoining private property is primarily used for low-density residential uses, both for year-round and second homes. About half the parcels in the immediate vicinity of the Fish Lake parcel have been developed. There is a cluster of parcels with homes or cabins at the southeastern end of Fish Lake, and a few developed parcels on the north, east and west sides of the MSB parcel.

Access to the Area

The MSB parcel at Fish Lake is surrounded by private property, with no public roads yet constructed to any portion of the MSB land. Users reach the MSB land from their own adjoining property, private driveways, other people's private property or along undeveloped public rights-of-way (ROW). The owner of the land between the Spur Road and Fish Lake (and his lessees) have traditionally allowed people to park on and cross through his property to reach the lake. The lake is the main travel corridor to MSB land and to several private properties adjoining the lake. Some landowners have cabins on roadless land east of the MSB lands. They travel by boat to an informal trailhead at the east end of the lake at which point they hike through the MSB parcel to their cabins. There is a potential overland connection across MSB land to these cabins east of Fish Lake along an undeveloped public ROW that extends east from the Spur Road.

Residents south of Fish Lake enter the area on a private "driveway" that heads north from South Birch Creek Blvd. As discussed further below, the low land along the southeast side of Fish Lake is primarily wetlands. In winter, the frozen wetland area is used for access; but in summer, the wetland area is a barrier to travel.

Physical Environment

Topography

The Fish Lake parcel has generally gently rolling, variable, glacial-created topography with a complex pattern of mounds, ridges and fairly level areas (see Map 5 on page 12 – Topography). In general, the land slopes south towards the lake, with a relatively steep slope along the shoreline, creating a pleasant sunny, southern exposure

Hydrology

Portions of two ponds, named Heart Pond and Pilgrim's Pond, extend into the northeast portion of the MSB parcel. The soils map (see Map 4 on page 11) depicts parts of their shorelines as wetlands.

A small anadromous salmon stream (locally called Gator Creek) flows just west of the MSB boundary, southward into Fish Lake. The most accessible public ROW, mentioned in the *Access to the Area* section earlier in this chapter, crosses this creek channel.

Upper Birch Creek flows west from the Bartlett Hills into Fish Lake, passing through extensive wetlands at the southeast end of the MSB parcel. It then drains from the western end of lake and is called Lower Birch Creek, which discharges into the Susitna River. The Citizens Water Monitoring Group began monitoring upper and lower Birch Creek in 2001, accumulating 5 years of data at the time of this plan.

Map 5 on page 12 provides a general depiction of the streams and lakes in the area; and Map 4 on page 11 shows the boundaries of the wetlands.

Vegetation

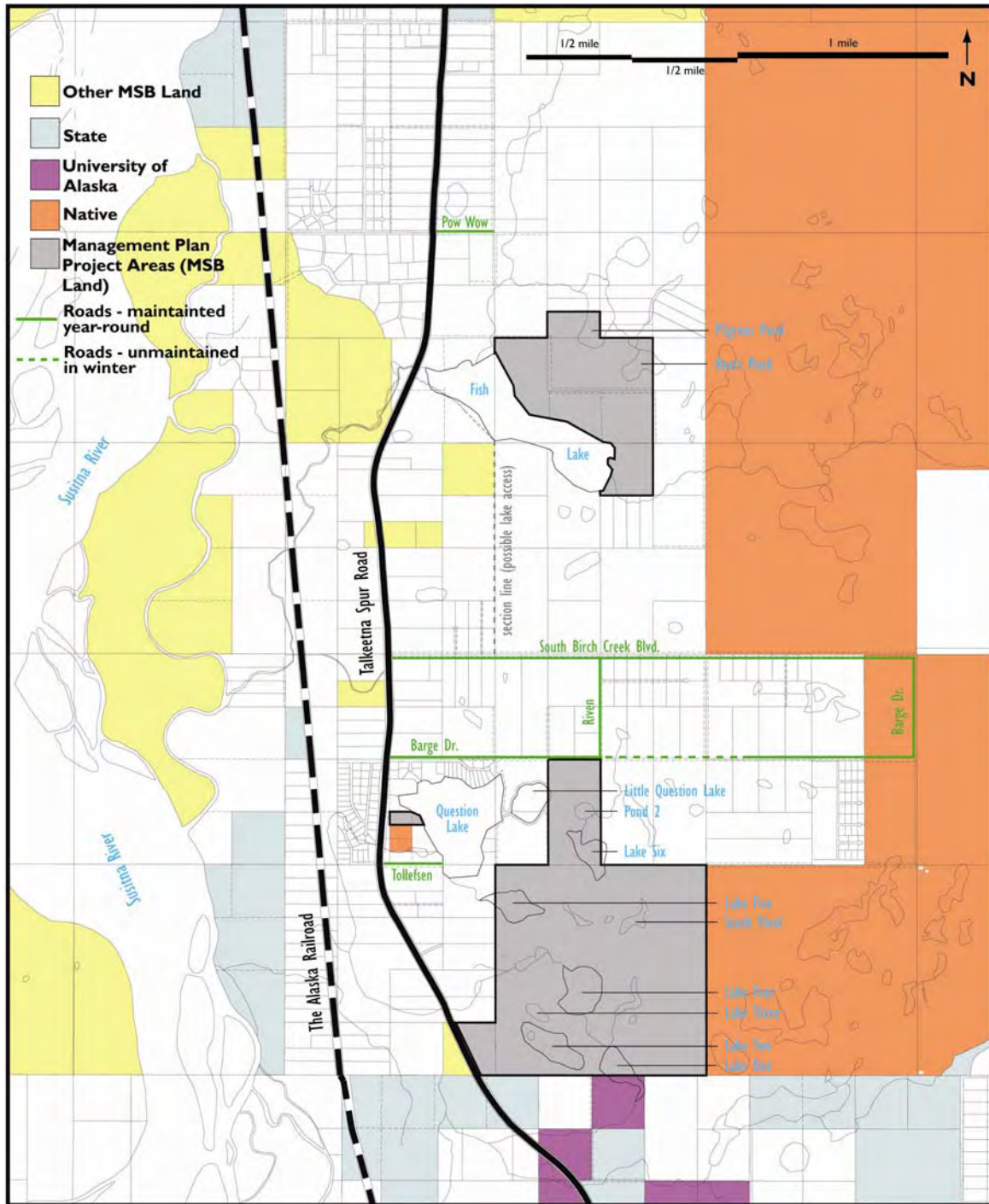
Vegetation includes a mix of upland forest and wetland vegetation types. The forest is relatively open and walkable in some areas but thick with devil's club, high bush cranberries, rusty menziesia and additional dense understory in other sections. Black spruce and mixed birch are the dominant trees; alder and willow shrubs are also found. The wetland areas are primarily muskeg (peat bog) with plant species that thrive in wet, acid soil; sphagnum moss is the mainstay. This interspersal of forests and wetlands contribute to the area's significant habitat values.

Wildlife

This area is home to a variety of wildlife and also provides migratory corridors for a number of species. Wildlife found in the area includes beaver, river otter, bear, moose and fox. Nesting birds in the area include trumpeter swans, great-horned owls, red-necked grebes, common loons, common goldeneyes, belted kingfishers, and other species of ducks and perching birds. Migratory birds seen in the spring include scoters and long-tailed ducks, northern shovelers, northern pintails, and buffleheads. Fish in the area include: coho salmon, Chinook salmon, sockeye salmon, rainbow trout, Dolly Varden, long-nose suckers and sticklebacks. Unlike a number of other lakes in the Talkeetna area, Fish Lake and the smaller lakes to north are not stocked by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G).

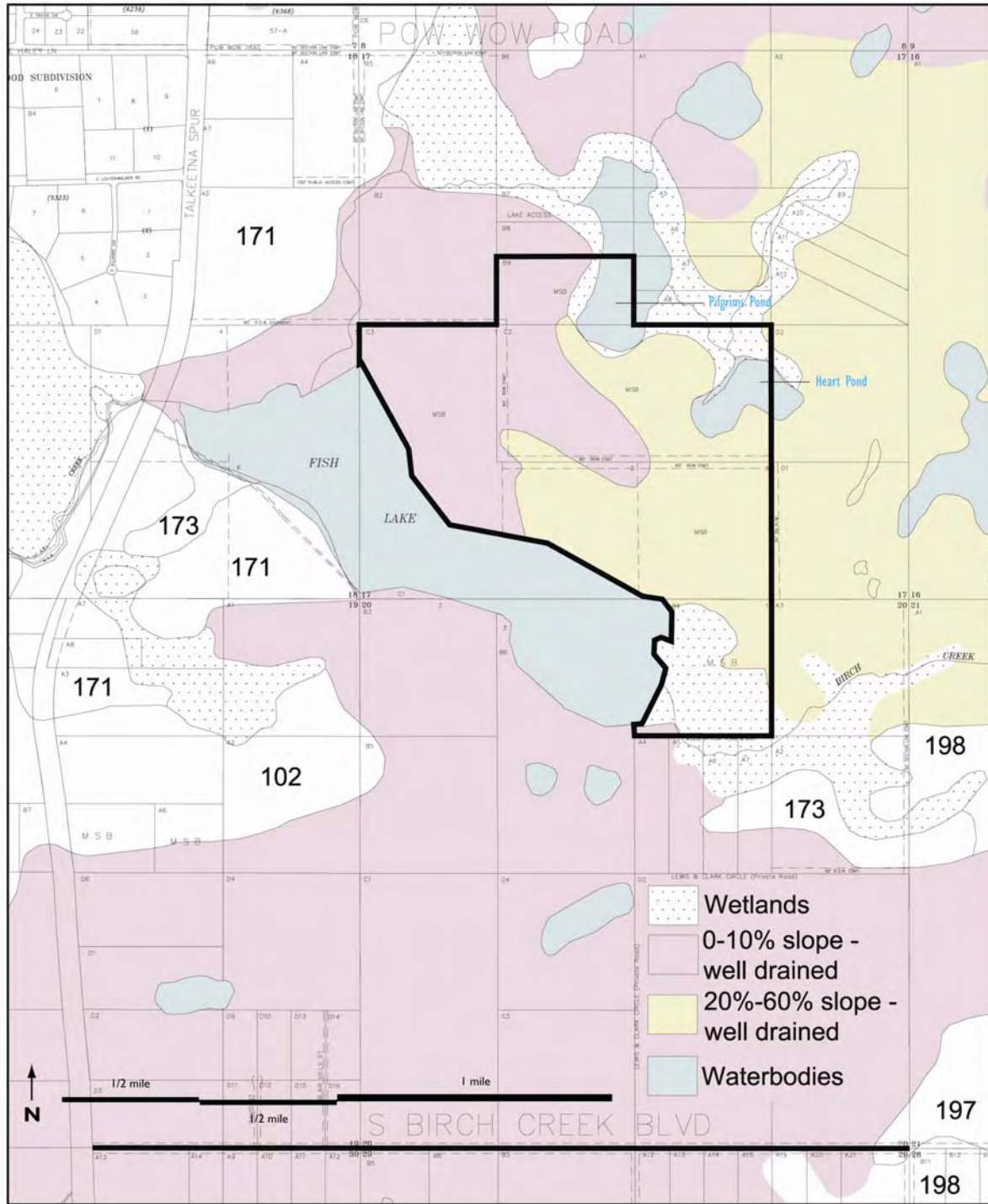
The Fish Lake parcel has a strategic location between the paths of two anadromous fish stream systems: Gator Creek to the north and Upper and Lower Birch Creeks to the east and west. As a result, this area functions as an important wildlife corridor for black and brown bears and other species, linking the Bartlett Hills to the Susitna River.

Map 3 – Land Ownership



Map Source: Matanuska-Susitna Borough & Agnew::Beck Consulting

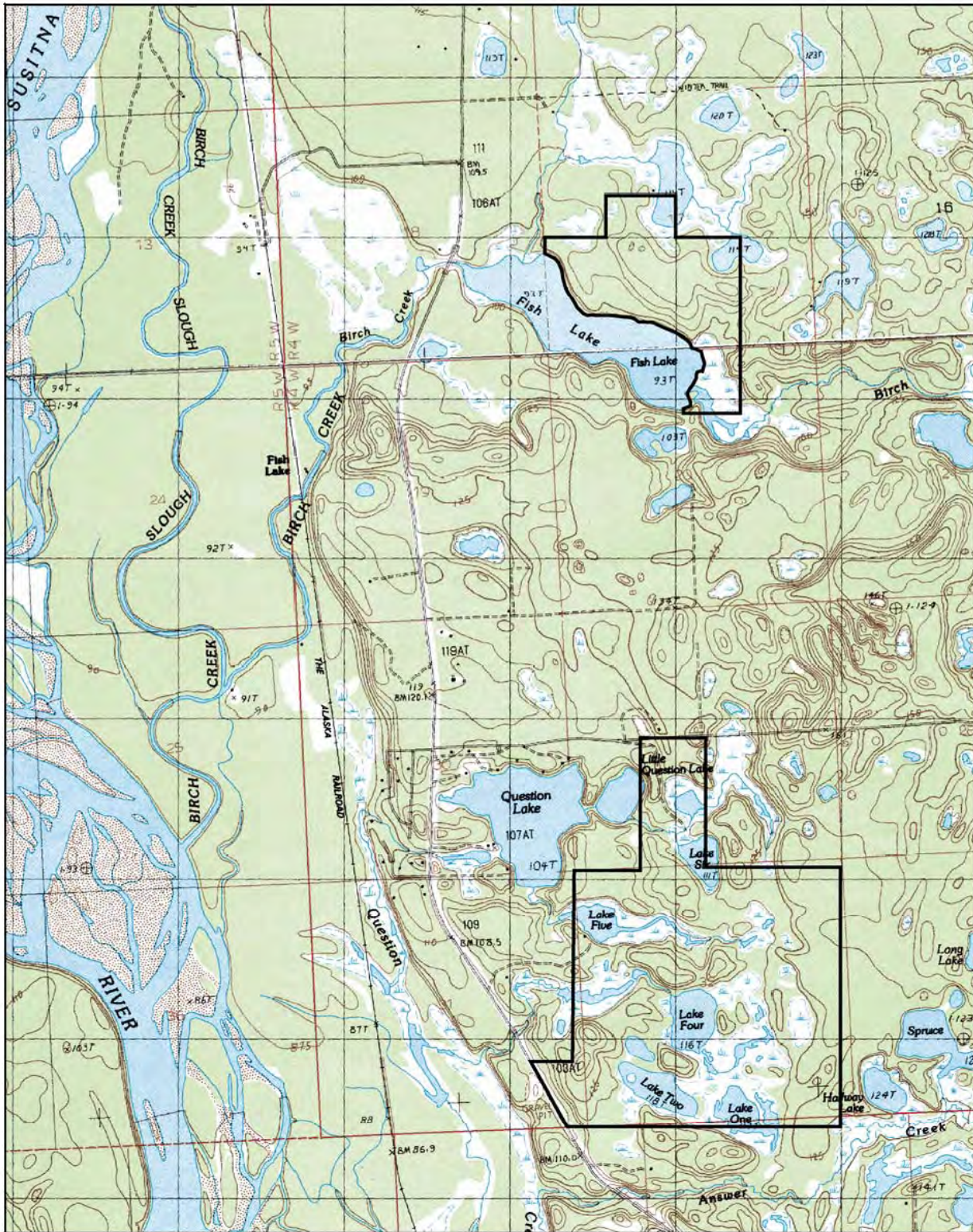
Map 4 – Soils in the Fish Lake Area



Map Source: Matanuska-Susitna Borough

This map is a general overview of conditions and should not be used for detailed site development decisions.

Map 5 – Topography in the Fish and Numbered Lakes Area



Map Source: USGS Quad Map created with TOPO! © 2006 National Geographic © 2005 Tele Atlas

Current Human Uses in the Fish Lake Area

Summer

Residents report that there is some form of recreational or transportation use daily at Fish Lake except during winter freeze-up and spring break-up. The Fish Lake area is used primarily by local residents for fishing, swimming and boating. Boating is primarily non-motorized, although a few boaters use skiffs and canoes powered by small outboard engines.

Transportation uses include float plane use and boaters landing at the east end of the lake and crossing Borough land to reach their cabins. Fish Lake and Christensen Lake to the north are the two primary take-off and landing areas for float plane use in the Talkeetna area. The lake's proximity to the Spur Road allows for easy access, and the lake's size and orientation make it work well for float planes. The landowner on the west side of the lake leases land to four different float plane operators. Float plane activity has approached a level that is beginning to concern some locals who use the lake to boat, canoe, kayak or swim. While residents say that float plane use and recreation use currently are compatible, several have expressed concerns about noise, and concern that an increase in these uses could present a "significant safety hazard."

The MSB land to the north of the lake is used on a limited basis for walking, hiking, bird watching and hunting. This area sees far less use than the lake itself and is largely undeveloped and natural.

Other than float plane operators, only one other commercial business operates in the area: rental cabins on the east side of the lake.

Winter

The area is used primarily by local residents in the winter, with the lake itself as the center of activity. Recreation includes: skiing on groomed freestyle and classic ski trails along the lake's edge, dog mushing, snow machining and ice skating. The MSB land north of the lake is used for snow shoeing, skiing, hunting and trapping. As in summer, the MSB land attracts far less use than the lake itself. Snowmachines in the Talkeetna area are used primarily for transportation rather than for recreational use, but Fish Lake is one area that attracts recreational snowmachine users, because the lake allows for high-speed driving and is easily reached from the Spur Road.

Evidence of Impacts of Use

Currently, there is little evidence of human impacts to the natural environment of the Fish Lake parcel. As mentioned earlier, float planes can be heard using the lake, and there is a boat landing and summer trail to private cabins on the east side of the Borough parcel.

Future Human Uses in the Fish Lake Area

Trends in Settlement

Population is rising in the Talkeetna area, along with the rest of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough. The MSB is the fastest-growing area in Alaska, with a nearly 50% increase from 1990 to 2000. The 2006 population of Talkeetna is 873, a 13% increase from the 772 residents in 2000.³ Talkeetna serves as the social and business center for the area's population.

³ State of Alaska Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development

The majority of land in the Talkeetna area is privately-owned and undeveloped, including extensive acreage owned by CIRI Native Corporation. The percentage of private property sets the stage for not only population and recreation increases, but a shift of recreation use from undeveloped private land onto public land.

One residential subdivision, underway in 2006, involves approximately 50-acres just east of the Spur Road and directly adjoining the Borough Land at Fish Lake. The owner is proposing a development that would subdivide that area into 27 lots. There is a trend toward smaller lots around Talkeetna – of the nearly 300 acres close to Fish Lake that have been subdivided in recent years, nearly half are two acres or less, the rest are about five acres.

Trends in Tourism and Commercial Recreation

Talkeetna is a popular Alaska tourist destination. Tourism in the area has steadily grown over the years, owing to the proximity of Denali National Park, which lures nearly half of all the tourists that come to Alaska. Talkeetna itself offers a picturesque and charming downtown, popular boating and flight opportunities, and recently-constructed major hotels. It is also the launching point for mountaineers and McKinley climbers and a popular stop for tour companies. Currently, 70% of the revenues generated by the MSB bed tax come from the Upper Susitna Valley. Commercial recreation and float plane business (recreational and utilitarian) are on the rise in Talkeetna.

Demand and Potential Impacts of Increased Use

The biggest demand for the Fish Lake area is public lake access – for float planes, swimmers, canoers, skiers, boaters, snowmachiners, property owners across the lake, etc.

As stated earlier, private property owners and lessees along the Spur Road currently allow members of the public to park and reach the lake by crossing their property. This access depends on the good will of the private landowners and tenants, and is therefore tenuous. To ensure continued, convenient public access to the lakefront, permanent public access must be established.

Float plane operators worry that the few sizeable lakes around Talkeetna will not be able to handle the predicted increase in float plane demand. Increasing float plane traffic may create conflicts with residential and recreation uses at Fish Lake.

Another concern is protection of sensitive lakefront and wetland habitat areas. In particular, there is concern about impacts on concentration sites for birds during migration, nesting and brood-rearing. Residents voiced concern that sensitive species such as nesting swans may abandon Fish Lake. Repeated boat landings and concentrated shore use may cause bank compaction and erosion, water quality degradation, and disturbance of salmon fry and their habitat.

Some of the biggest potential impacts to upland recreation could result from the eventual construction of a road into or across the Fish Lake parcel. Likely positive impacts for recreation will include permanent public access, a scenic driving experience, and potential for developed recreation sites along the new road. Potential adverse impacts of improved access and the consequent increases in human activity include:

- environmental and noise pollution, primarily from snowmachines and vehicles.
- impacts on wetlands, from pedestrians, from boats and boaters at landing points, and from all terrain vehicles (ATVs).
- increased fire danger from campfires.

- trailhead misuse: more users typically results more and/or inconsiderate disposal of trash and human waste.
- disturbance or displacement of wildlife.
- conflicts between different types of users, e.g. noise and trail damage.

NUMBERED LAKES NATURAL AREA

The Numbered Lakes area is located approximately seven miles south of Talkeetna, east of the Spur Road. The area discussed in this plan covers approximately 740 acres.

Land Ownership and Land Use in the Surrounding Area

The southern portion of the Numbered Lakes area adjoins state, private and University of Alaska property. To the east lies a large amount of CIRI (Cook Inlet Regional Inc.) property. Private property adjoins the north and west perimeters.

Access to the Area

Some of the most-frequent recreation users of the Numbered Lakes area are neighboring owners, who enter the Borough land directly from their private property. Other users enter via Barge Drive, which runs east from the Spur Road and runs along the northern boundary of the Numbered Lakes area. A privately-funded road was constructed in spring 2006 along the southern boundary, which is a section line. The section line along the eastern boundary of the MSB parcel is undeveloped.

Physical Environment

Topography

Maps 5 and 6 present soils and topographic information. Topography in the area is a complex mix of relatively flat to hilly terrain, separated by lake and wetland areas. Soils are a mix of marshy and better-drained soil. The shorelines are a mix of low gradient and relatively steep slopes (often with overhanging banks). The majority of the wetlands within the Numbered Lakes area are connected to streams and lakes that support salmon.

Hydrology

The MSB land in the Numbered Lakes area includes six named lakes, a number of smaller unnamed ponds, and spring-fed palustrine⁴ streams. For Talkeetna, this ecosystem is unusual for its complex topography, concentrated system of small lakes, and springs with open, flowing water year-round. There are no surface tributaries to these waterbodies: precipitation and springs are the sole source of water for all lakes, ponds and wetlands in the area. Drainage from the area heads in several directions. Lakes Five and Six drain north and west into Question Lake and Little Question Lake respectively, then into Question Creek. Lakes One and Three drain into Lake Four. The outlet stream of Lake Four flows west into a wetlands area which is drained by an unnamed creek that flows under the Spur Road eventually joins Answer Creek. Answer Creek then flows south into Sunshine Creek and ultimately the Susitna River.

This lake system provides an estimated 200 acres of open water habitat with an estimated 40% of the surface area composed of lakes and associated wetlands. Resident beavers are continually building dams and lodges, changing the water levels of ponds, lakes and streams, and consequently altering the distribution of plants and bird species. Hydrology and limnotic⁵ ecology are influenced

⁴ Palustrine areas include vegetated wetlands traditionally called by such names as marsh, swamp, bog, fen. It also includes the small, shallow, permanent or intermittent water bodies typically called ponds.

⁵ Limnotic refers to ecological systems tied to lakes and streams

by climate change, which is contributing to a statewide pattern of shrinking ponds; and by the natural post-glacial succession of muskeg wetlands, which gradually fill in and begin to support upland vegetation.

Vegetation

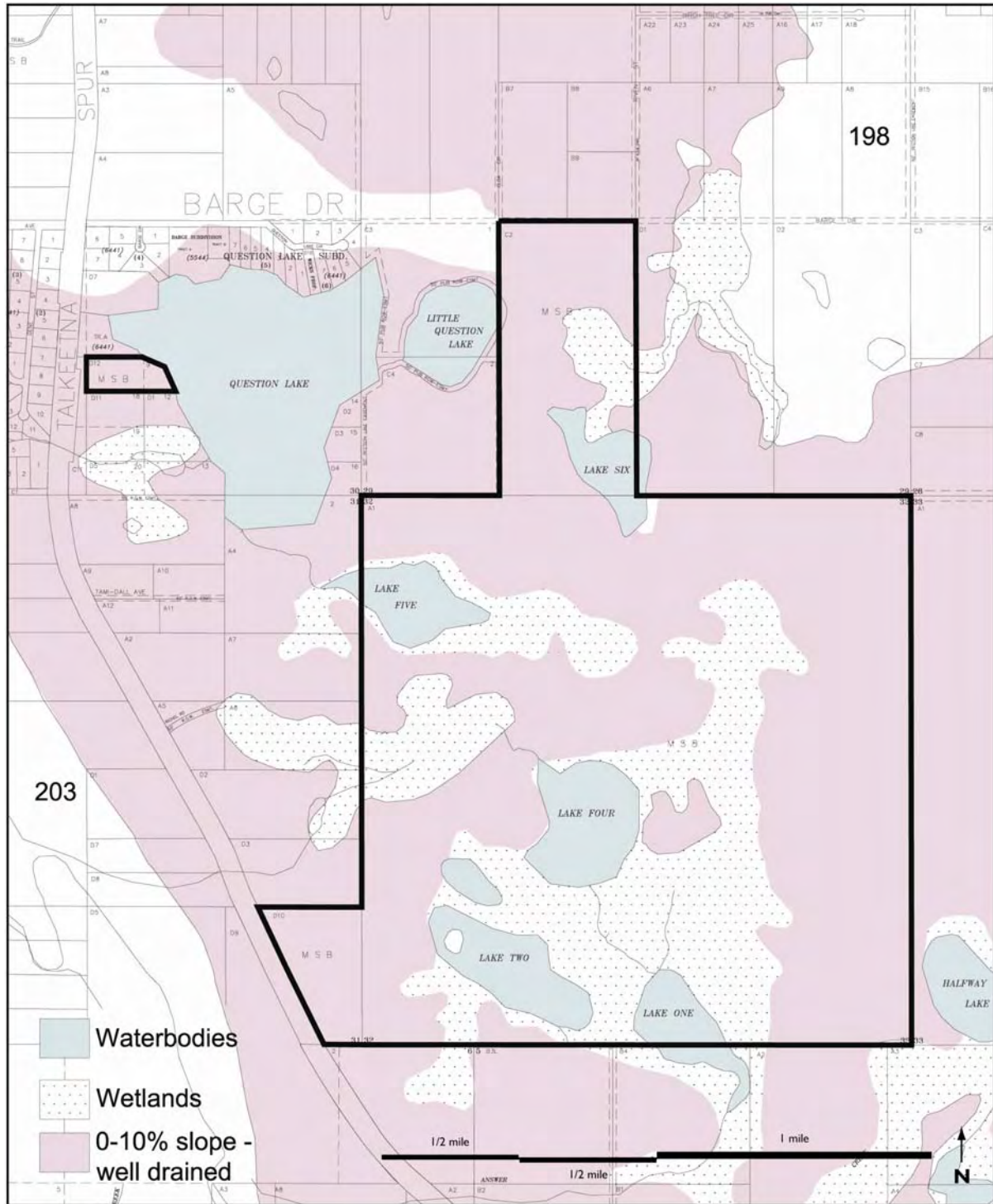
Like the Fish Lake area, vegetation around the Numbered Lakes includes a mix of upland forests and wetland plant communities. The forested areas are a mix of black spruce and birch – uncharacteristically open and walkable, relatively uncluttered with devil’s club and other brush. The marshy areas, on the other hand, are wet, difficult to cross in the summer months, and prone to disruption if crossed when vegetation is exposed. The wetland areas are primarily muskeg (peat bog) which provides a home for an abundance of plants that thrive in wet, acid soil.

Wildlife

This area is home to a variety of wildlife and also provides migratory corridors for a number of species. Mammals found in the area include beaver, river otter, bear, moose, fox and coyotes.

Salmon spawn in the spring-fed waters of this area. Many of the slow-flowing streams in the area are productive for spawning and rearing habitat for young salmon. The presence of fish supports a diversity of other wildlife in the area. Fish species in the general area include: Coho salmon, Chinook salmon, sockeye salmon, rainbow trout, Dolly Varden, long-nose suckers and sticklebacks. None of the lakes is stocked by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G).

Map 6 –Soils in the Numbered Lakes Area



Map Source: Matanuska-Susitna Borough

This map may contain errors, may not be current, and may omit important information. This map is a general overview of conditions and should not be used for detailed land management decisions.

Because of the springs and open water system, this ecosystem provides resting and feeding habitat for many species of waterfowl. The ponds and lakes attract both migrating and nesting waterfowl. "Nesting birds in the area include sandhill cranes, ring-necked ducks, greater and lesser yellowlegs, Bonaparte's gulls, Arctic terns, sharp-shinned hawks, American dippers, rusty blackbirds, yellow-rumped warblers, and many other perching birds. Birds seen during spring migration include horned grebes, canvasbacks, and rednecked phalaropes. Birds linger and concentrate in the area during spring when this area has the only open water in the vicinity."⁶ (This is not true of fall migration).

Past and Current Human Uses

While some parcels bordering the Numbered Lakes area have been developed with homes, the predominate character of the area is undeveloped and natural. Currently the area is used primarily by nearby residents, owing in part to the lack of identified access or marked trails. The only readily discernible trail is an overgrown access road across the northern panhandle of the MSB parcel.

During the planning process for Fish and Numbered Lakes, many planning process participants stressed that the value of the Numbered Lakes is for their pristine natural state and their high productivity for fish and wildlife. Recreation values emphasized include opportunities for quiet and solitude, informal exploration, wildlife viewing, and general appreciation of nature close to home.

Summer

Summer activities include hiking, swimming, fishing, bird watching, wildlife viewing, and berry picking. Other than the trail mentioned above, the only obvious trails are those created by wildlife, although blazes, trapsets and in some areas remnants of the Hugo Tollefson's trapline trail can still be found. Residents report that there is no motorized use in summer.

Winter

Winter activities include cross country skiing, snowshoeing, snowmachining and ice skating when the conditions permit. Hunters and trappers report using the area. Overall use is light. Nearby residents occasionally bring snowmachines here but the open waters and lack of large open spaces are not a highly-attractive draw for most snowmachine riders looking for a destination experience.

Evidence of Impact

Because this area is visited by few people, very little evidence of impact currently exists in 2006. The area is clean and pristine with no evidence of fire pits, trash and trails. There have been some very recent concerns raised about potential increase in snowmachine use, and its impacts on the natural aesthetic qualities appreciated by other users of the area. No commercial operators use the Numbered Lakes.

Future Human Uses in the Number Lakes Area

Trends in Settlement

Population growth seems certain; but the magnitude and timing is hard to predict. In the Lower Susitna Valley, Wasilla grew approximately ten-fold (from 700 residents to over 7,000) during the period from the 1970s to the 2000s. Even if Talkeetna maintains a relatively rural residential density

⁶ Based on knowledge of local birder, Deb Brocke, in her comments on the 11-06 draft plan.

of 1- to 5-acre lots, the surrounding private lands could host hundreds of new homes and cabins within a generation. During the planning process, numerous Talkeetna residents expressed their vision that Numbered Lakes Natural Area may someday be a remnant wildland within a widespread residential area, serving as an oasis for wildlife and people.

Trends in Tourism and Commercial Recreation

As this document described for Fish Lake, tourism is growing in Upper Susitna Valley and Talkeetna, and is likely to include more demand for accessible outdoor recreation sites. While no commercial recreation business currently uses the Numbered Lakes area, commercial guides lead nature-oriented tours such as wildlife viewing at other sites in the Talkeetna area.

Demand and Potential Impacts of Increased Use

As large tracts of private land are developed in the Talkeetna area, free-ranging types of recreation like horse-riding, dog mushing, cross country skiing and snowmachining will find their traditional use patterns changing, and will become concentrated on public lands and rights-of-way.

Rights-of-way along the perimeter of the Numbered Lakes Area may become travel corridors, whether or not developed as roads. This raises the possibility of additional entry points into the MSB lands by people, vehicles and pets.

Increased residential development and recreation poses the following potential impacts to recreation and habitat values on MSB lands at Numbered Lakes:

- changes to the hydrology from surrounding development.
- air, water and noise pollution (primarily from vehicles but also potentially from bordering residential uses).
- disturbance to wetlands and wildlife from either illegal use or legal but excessive recreation use.
- increased fire danger (camping and campfires).
- trash and trailhead misuse.
- conflicts among different types of recreation users.

POLICY BACKGROUND

This chapter presents management policies for the Fish Lake and Numbered Lakes areas. This chapter includes the following sections:

- Existing Adopted Policies
- Talkeetna Parks Advisory Committee - Community-Wide Recreation Analysis
- Community Views And Values
- Recreation and Open Space Issues
- Management Issues
- Management Alternatives

Existing Adopted Policies

As mentioned in the introduction to this document, the Talkeetna Comprehensive Plan includes a clear statement that these two parcels be used for “parks and preservation.”⁷ The specific areas identified were “a portion of State and Borough lands around X, Y, Z and Tigger Lakes, a portion of contiguous Borough land north of Fish Lake, and a portion of Borough land around Numbered Lakes.”

The Talkeetna Comprehensive Plan includes these Land Use and Community Development Goals (pg. vii):

- 1) To guide development in a manner which enhances Talkeetna's natural appeal
- 2) To protect and conserve the wilderness values and natural resources of the lands surrounding Talkeetna.
- 3) To maintain Talkeetna's major recreation and ecologically sound tourism economy and avoid conflicting activities.

Talkeetna Parks Advisory Committee (TPAC) – Community-Wide Recreation Analysis

The preliminary discussions about management of the Fish and Numbered Lake parcels sparked discussion of deeper issues: respect for all users, compatibility of uses, and fair allocation of public lands community-wide. Recognizing that the full range of Talkeetna’s recreation needs cannot be met at Fish and Numbered Lakes, in Spring 2006 the Talkeetna Parks Advisory Committee initiated a separate but parallel recreation planning effort. A key goal of this effort is to include views from the full, diverse range of Talkeetna recreation interests. This process set out to tackle challenging community-wide recreation issues, including:

- What is the full spectrum of recreation needs in the community?
- What public lands are available to meet these needs?
- What is the best long-term allocation and development of recreation lands community-wide?

⁷ Talkeetna Comprehensive Plan, 1998, Matanuska-Susitna Borough (pages 6-38, 6-40)

Initial steps in this process included “meeting in a box” gatherings in several homes to foster broad grassroots participation. This effort brought together small groups of residents to talk about their views on these issues.

One of TPAC’s analysis tools is a map and matrix that identifies the main blocks of MSB land in the area, and describes the general current and intended use of these parcels. This matrix and an associated map, presented in Appendix B of this plan, are not formally adopted policy, nor do they imply easy solutions to meeting all recreation needs. However, this material was reviewed and discussed by a wide range of community members, and provides a helpful reference when considering current and possible future recreation/open space-related uses of MSB lands in the area.

Planning Participants Recreation and Open Space Views and Values

This section outlines perspectives regarding recreation and open space issues in Talkeetna in general, and in the project area. These points were developed over the course of the community participation process. There is a list of broad assumptions, followed by lists of values more specifically tied to the Fish and Numbered Lakes parcels.

Assumptions that Set the Context for Talkeetna Recreation Management Decisions

- Talkeetna will grow.
- As the community grows, use of public land will increase, and the Borough and Talkeetna will have to become more active recreation managers, with more facilities and more rules.
- The Talkeetna community is committed to meeting the diverse needs of many types of recreation users.
- Residents greatly value the natural setting of Talkeetna.
- Residents greatly value neighborly relations and a sense of community cooperation.
- Decisions about recreation management need to reflect a realistic view of the capacity of the MSB and Talkeetna to manage recreation use on public lands.

Values that Directly Apply in Fish and Numbered Lakes

During the March, April, and May community meetings in spring 2006, participants voiced an unusual level of consensus about the importance of keeping these public lands in their natural state, and maintaining these qualities for future generations. Many residents choose to live in Talkeetna because of the natural setting and the easy access to a wide range of outdoor activities that connect them to that setting.

People who attended the March, April, and May community meetings identified the following important characteristics of the Fish and Numbered Lakes parcels:

- Highly productive fish and wildlife habitat, resulting from
 - natural hydrology and high water quality
 - waterbody connectivity for fish spawning and rearing

- low levels of human use and impacts
- Upland habitat connectivity that allows wildlife movement parallel to creeks between the Bartlett Hills and the Susitna River
- Diversity of landforms and vegetation, such as clearings and mature forest, wetlands, waterbodies of varying depths
- Specific natural features, such as the year-round open waters at Numbered Lakes and the solar exposure of the north shore of Fish Lake.
- Convenient location for community use
 - “backyard” natural area for current and future residents
 - not highly publicized; not currently a well known destination for visitors from outside of Talkeetna
- Specific recreation opportunities that are tied to the natural features:
 - swimming and paddling at various lakes
 - low levels of human impacts: a pristine setting
 - winter exploration, primarily by skis and snowshoes, but including occasional use by snowmachines
 - summertime wandering through clearings and forested islands at Numbered Lakes
 - viewing wildlife and nature in all seasons

In addition to the above discussion at community meetings, residents expressed their values and views on managing these lands through phone calls, letters, and e-mails throughout the course of the project.

The large majority of submitted public comments echoed the majority sentiments voiced at the community meetings. A strong minority perspectives was presented, focused on the need to keep these areas open to uses that have been possible in the past, including camping and snowmachining. Some commenters also requested more developed recreation facilities and improved access. These concerns triggered the extension of the planning process, and further review and discussion of these views.

While the development of the plan will clearly be shaped by local views, the best way to make decisions on public lands is through analysis and discussion rather than a “vote”. This planning process has recorded and responded⁸ to minority as well as majority perspectives that arose during the public comment period. All comments were considered on their merits, whether coming from a lone voice or echoed by many other people.

This plan reflects the diversity of public comments through detailed summaries in this Views and Value section, and with management-related comments under the Background provided for the Objectives and Policies Sections. To review the original public comments and meeting notes from the March-April, June-July and November-December comment periods, refer to a list of these comments in Appendix A.

⁸ “Response” to comments means that the project staff analyzed all views on issues, and, included them in the plan either through a comment summary or sometimes through changes to the Plan.. “Response” does not mean that every request or suggestion was, or can be, met by this plan and these two parcels of MSB land.

Management Issues

This section presents a summary of issues to be addressed regarding management of Fish and Numbered Lakes:

- Increased number of users as local and regional population grows – Recreation demand will increase with increases in the number of local residents and tourists.
- Increased concentration of recreation uses on public land – Recreation use is likely to shift to public lands as private lands are developed and become unavailable for traditional uses.
- Limits on supply of public lands – Much of the recreation use in Talkeetna, uses such as snow machining, cross country skiing and dog mushing, is very land intensive. Continuing to providing space for such traditional uses, without user conflicts, will be challenging.
- Changing access – New roads, residences, and subdivisions are being constructed at or near the boundaries of these MSB lands. This will increase demand for access, increase numbers of recreation users and potentially change the setting and types of recreation use.
- Uncertainty of existing access – Access to Fish Lake has long depended on the generosity of one private landowner who allows public parking and traversing of his private property. This arrangement does not guarantee future public access to the lake shore.
- Request for roads – There are private property owners east of both Question Lake and Fish Lake who have indicated a desire for road access across the Borough land to their properties.
- Effect of publicity – Development of new access points, facilities, and management plans may attract new users that currently don't know about these public lands.
- Impacts from not adding any facilities – Not developing access points and facilities to accommodate increasing use may result in negative impacts:
 - damage to sensitive habitat
 - disruption to wildlife
 - nuisances to adjoining land owners.
- Impacts from adding facilities – Facilities may displace users who are drawn primarily to an untouched natural setting. Facilities will concentrate users to some degree.
- Place of refuge for wildlife – Over time, as development of surrounding private land reduces habitat, these Borough lands will play an increased role in sustaining fish and wildlife populations in the Talkeetna area.
- Lack of data – Lack of detailed habitat mapping or species documentation makes it harder to reach definitive conclusions regarding habitat and other natural values, or predict the impacts of proposed management policies or facilities on habitat productivity.
- Concern that adopting restrictive policies for public lands will close options for traditional recreation uses
- Motorized recreation – A need for snowmachine riding areas, in town or easily reached from town, particularly for younger riders.

- Access and other improvements – some residents feel that lack of improvements to these lands unfairly deters community users. Other residents feel that improvements might – and should not – create a magnet for out-of-town use.
- The need for facilities – As the community grows and the use of public lands increases, more improvements – trails, parking, day use, sports fields, etc. - will likely be required. Facilities will become more necessary to accommodate users and to guide use to protect resources from misuse. The finite financial and human resources of the Borough and community must be considered when choosing how elaborate the facilities can be.
- The need for management – Many of the issues and solutions considered here are dependent on high quality, attentive, on-the-ground public management. The Borough is expanding its field management capacity. Further expansion of this capacity is needed, including partnering with local communities and local organizations.

Management Alternatives

The planning process leading to this final plan considered a broad spectrum of management alternatives. This document does not reproduce those earlier alternatives, but instead presents just the concluding policies.

Anyone interested in the evolution of these policies, and the related discussions of their costs and benefits, should review the documents that preceded this final plan. Alternatives on issues such as road access, parking, and day use areas were evaluated in matrix form in an earlier draft, “*Issues and Preliminary Recommendations*” (March 2006). Additional options were presented in a second draft, “*Round 2 Revisions & New Options*” (May 2006).

MANAGEMENT GOALS FOR FISH AND NUMBERED LAKES

This section presents overall goals for the management of these two Borough parcels.

As stated in the Talkeetna Comprehensive Plan, and re-stated often during this planning process by residents, there is a strong desire to maintain Talkeetna's natural setting and the easy connection for residents to outdoor recreation areas. A number of planning process participants explicitly endorsed the concept of retaining patches of wild land in the midst of rapidly-growing Talkeetna. Several residents expressed this as "keeping Talkeetna the way it is."

Some residents have also proposed that habitat protection is the over-arching goal for the Numbered Lakes. MSB Borough staff pointed out that the Borough does not classify land for the primary goal of protecting habitat – such lands should be held by the State of Alaska and managed by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game. The public's desire to protect habitat is expressed in Goal 2 as one, but not the only goal, for these areas.

Goal 1. Maintain the predominately natural, undeveloped character of these areas.

Goal 2. Protect the integrity and healthy functioning of area watersheds and the productivity of fish and wildlife habitat.

Goal 3. Provide opportunities for public enjoyment and improved access consistent with the first two goals.

Goal 4. Aim for low to moderate levels of recreation uses consistent with the first two goals. Recreation use will be non-motorized except as specified in the Fish Lake area, for access to nearby private property.

Goal 5. Actively manage and monitor recreation use to ensure resource and open space values are protected.

OBJECTIVES & POLICIES FOR FISH LAKE RECREATION AREA

Summary of Management Intent

Consistent with the goals expressed above, the overall intent for Fish Lake Recreation Area is to retain the land in Borough ownership and manage the area to protect its natural character and habitat productivity and to accommodate low-intensity recreation uses, such as walking, bird watching, snowshoeing, cross country skiing, with limited development of facilities⁹ for swimming and picnicking. Snowmachine access to roadless private properties will be accommodated in or along the existing but undeveloped ROW beginning near the western end of the parcel, and along a corridor across the eastern end of the parcel until other overland access is available. Snow machine access to Fish Lake itself will follow the anticipated trail or road along this ROW from Spur Road to the lakefront. Otherwise, motorized recreation uses should be prohibited because of the potential for impacts to other recreation and habitat values in a relatively small park¹⁰. Improved public access to the lake should be developed at certain limited locations, while discouraged or restricted in areas of steep terrain, wetlands, and sensitive habit. Recreation use should be guided to minimize potential impacts on private lands adjoining this parcel.

The recommended Borough land classification is Public Recreation/Watershed lands.

This draft identifies four policies and related management recommendations for Fish Lake:

1. Access and parking
2. Lakefront facilities
3. Trails
4. Rules

1. Access and Parking at Fish Lake Recreation Area

Background on Access

Recreation users must currently cross private land to reach the shore of Fish Lake. The landowner and lessee at the west end of Fish Lake have traditionally allowed local residents to park on this site, and cross it to the lake shore. This access depends entirely on the land owner's and lessee's permission and thus future public access at the west end of Fish Lake is site is not guaranteed.¹¹

Permanent public access to the shore of Fish Lake is a common desire of Talkeetna residents, who want to continue their tradition of both winter and summer use of Fish Lake itself.

⁹ In this plan, the term 'facilities' means something that is built, installed, or established to serve a purpose. It does not imply any particular degree or level of improvement. Trails are considered to be facilities.

¹⁰ The 270 acres owned by the Borough is largely tree covered. Open areas encompass ponds, creeks, and small wetlands, so that the terrain suited for wide-ranging types of recreation is considerably smaller than the gross acreage.

¹¹ In November 2006, the leaseholder of private property located at the west end of Fish lake told the Chair of TPAC that, effective summer 2007, he will no longer allow summer access for the public across his leased property to the lakefront.

Establishing a new route to the lake shore will require analysis of the site conditions, including terrain, soils, wetlands and streams. This plan concludes that that an access route is needed and also reaches the preliminary conclusion that such a route is technically and environmentally feasible. However, the details of the alignment, engineering, design and cost of the access facilities will need to be determined in a project analysis before construction, working in consultation with the community.

A long-established, but undeveloped and unused right of way crosses the Recreation Area. The ROW follows a stair-step alignment without reference to underlying topographic conditions. The existing alignment offers theoretical legal access to properties east of the Fish Creek parcel, but not necessarily the most cost-effective or lowest-impact route.

Several private property owners on the east side of the lake currently cross Fish Lake as a means to reach their properties. It is unpredictable if or when these property owners might seek to use or develop the ROW that crosses the Recreation Area. The policies here assume development of the ROW is costly and not imminent. As discussed below, the plan does conclude that a foot-trail and foot-bridge should be developed along the western portion of the ROW to allow the public legal, improved access from the Spur Road to the lakefront at the western edge of Recreation Area. Until and unless a vehicle ROW is developed across the Recreation Area, the plan presumes private property owners east of the lake will continue to have the option to reach their parcels by crossing the lake. Owing to the sensitive wetlands and wildlife activity at the east end of the lake, policy 1F creates corridors and rules for access across that part of the Recreation Area.

Fish Lake Recreation Area Policy 1: Access and parking

1A. Access at Lake outlet. The community should continue to work to secure an option for public access across private land at the lake outlet. This option would allow a continuation of traditional use patterns, concentrating lakefront use in a previously developed spot with easy launching for small boats; and reduce or eliminate the need for developing a new lakefront use area. This will need to be a community initiative, as the Borough is highly unlikely to have resources needed to acquire or trade for an access rights.

1B. Re-align the ROW and design access to be compatible with recreation values. Shift the alignment of the existing public right-of-way so that it no longer crosses the middle of Fish Lake Recreation Area. Shift this ROW northward to follow more accommodating topography near the north boundary of the Recreation Area. Final alignment and design of an access road or trail should be reviewed by the Talkeetna Parks Advisory Committee to ensure that the road or trail has minimum negative impacts to the natural character and community recreation use of Fish Lake Recreation Area. The Borough and TPAC should apply the following criteria to evaluate the alignment and design of the access road or trail:

- minimize fragmentation of the Fish Lake parcel by not bisecting potential trail areas or other recreation use areas
- minimize impacts to wildlife habitat, especially by avoiding wetlands and animal travel corridors, and by blocking off-road vehicle use.
- minimize visual impacts to natural terrain features such as prominent knolls and meadows

- create opportunities for public enjoyment e.g., provide viewpoint of ponds from road pullout.
- Consider the design features that will create a rural parkway-type road, rather than a typical subdivision road. Grades, curves, and vegetation retention should be considered as ways to discourage high-speed driving and allow appreciation of the surrounding parkland by both road users and users near the road.
- At the time the road is developed, consider placement of a parallel non-motorized path on one side of the road, and a trail for snowmachines on the other side, with a link onto Fish Lake if compatible with any future Lake Management Plan for Fish Lake. The decision on including a trail along the road requires evaluating the feasibility of extending this trail beyond the Fish Lake Recreation area to points east.
- Consider, at the time the ROW may be developed as a road, the option for developed recreation facilities in the western portion of the parcel. Examples of such facilities might include developed campgrounds or other public recreation facilities.
- As with any major change or new facility in the Park, provide the community a meaningful opportunity to discuss the costs and benefits and design of the possible future and to guide the decision on development of developed recreation, parking, trails or similar facilities.

1C. Develop primary public lake access using the route of the ROW. Use the western portion of the existing 60-foot-wide Borough right-of-way to provide new public access from the Spur Road east into the Recreation Area and then south to the lakefront. The intent is to provide public access comparable to what is currently available on private land at the lake’s west end, including access for walkers and swimmers, winter snow machine access, and launching of canoes.

- Start the process now to provide legal public access to the lake front on Borough lands unless it is clear that public access has been secured across the private property at the west end of Fish Lake
- Develop access incrementally. Start with a small parking area off the Spur Road (see below), and a foot trail and a foot bridge across Gator Creek, with the trail turning south to the western end of Fish Lake; later expand if needed to provide auto access closer to Fish Lake
- While this access route is expected to be primarily for pedestrian access in the near term, it will need to accommodate motorized winter access from the Spur Road to the western edge of the lake. This would serve recreation users, and also serve “east end” land and cabin owners needing to cross the lake to reach their parcels. Likewise this route may be needed to provide a means for the same group of landowners to take small boats from the Spur Road to the lake.
- Design and locate the trail/road to protect natural features and maintain the largely undeveloped character of the area. This will include the design for a simple foot bridge over Gator Creek, and providing basic improvements at the lake edge.

- Design the bridge and trail to the lakefront with features to support use by pedestrians and the occasional small boat launch (e.g. wide enough to push across a canoe on a cart). As noted above, this route may also need to accommodate snow machines and other winter users on their way to the lake, at least during the portion of the season when Gator Creek is not sufficiently frozen to allow safe, low impact crossings. The trail should be designed and posted as a slow-speed zone with the utilitarian purpose of access to a recreation destination (the lake). The trail design should include safety features for potential joint use by snowmachines and other winter visitors:
 - Extend the trail route approximately ¼ mile east of Gator Creek before turning south, in order to leave an undisturbed corridor along the creek for bears and other species
 - Features to require slow snowmachine travel, such as choke points.
 - Adequate sight lines for both oncoming and overtaking traffic, based on the speed limit.
 - Use of terrain features, barriers, and signs to keep snowmachines on the corridor.
 - Pull-outs to allow passing.

1D. Parking. There is a near term need for public parking to replace parking at the private lease site at the west end of Fish Lake. Parking can be legally accommodated within 60-foot-wide ROW that extends east from Spur Road.

- Parking location: parking should be close to the Spur Road but screened from sight of the Spur Road behind a natural vegetation buffer 25-50 feet wide.
- Parking size: provide space for approximately 6 cars, with the option to double this capacity in the future.
- Use barriers and signs to deter unauthorized vehicle entry onto foot-trails. Given the proximity of Gator Creek, which is a salmon spawning stream, it is important to prevent off-road vehicles from proceeding past the parking lot until and unless a vehicle access road is built.
- Potential for gate: the parking area should be designed so that a gate could be installed and “closing hours” could be posted and enforced if problems developed with inappropriate late-night or overnight use.
- Parking timing: development of parking should be contingent on: a realistic plan for and allocation of funding and scheduling of maintenance, including trash pick-up; and funding and maintenance capability for a foot trail and foot bridge across Gator Creek to avoid environmental degradation.

1E. Trail connections from neighborhoods. Encourage reservation and construction of pedestrian trail connections from adjoining neighborhoods into Fish Lake Recreation Area. This will reduce the need for neighbors to drive and park, and will provide an amenity to these residential areas. Several adjacent lands are currently targeted for subdivision. The section line easement

approaching from South Birch Creek Road offers legal access but is hilly, and probably not practical for hauling in a canoe; other access easements may be desirable from this neighborhood..

1F. Access across east end of Recreation Area. Until a vehicle road or trail provides overland access to properties east of the Recreation Area, private property users can continue traditional access across the east end of the Recreation Area under conditions that will minimize environmental impacts to habitat and wildlife activities, and meet the other goals of this plan.

- A winter access corridor will be marked for snowmachine access to private properties east of the lake. Signs will be posted stating rules of use, including but not limited to: snowmachine use is limited to periods of adequate snow cover and ice-depth to protect the underlying vegetation and soils (which varies according to local conditions but is: generally 10 to 24 inches of packed snow depth (per standards of Alaska State Parks); speed limit of 20 mph; and users must stay on the marked corridor. Such restrictions will need to apply at both the western and eastern sections of the route to the east end users. Less snow depth will be required on the improved, permanent trail at the west end.
- Impacts from the winter access trail should be monitored and the trail may be relocated or closed to snowmachines if necessary to curtail damage to the wetlands or creek channels.
- A summer access corridor at the east end of the lake will be reserved. This route will be aligned and marked across uplands with well-drained soils and minimal creek crossings. The landing at the east end of the lake should have a place to tie or beach several small boats, a hardened area for loading and staging, and be posted with leave-no-trace rules. To protect the wetlands, wildlife, and wildlife viewing in the vicinity, motorized use is not allowed on this summer access corridor.

2. Lakefront facilities¹² at Fish Lake Recreation Area

Background on lakefront facilities

Plan process participants expressed the vision of Fish Lake as an informal, primarily local recreation area for day use only. They prefer that Fish Lake remain less developed and less frequented than other public waterfront lands in and around Talkeetna which are being developed for more intensive public recreation.

When public pedestrian access is developed to the shore of Fish Lake, some level of signs and facilities will be needed to minimize impacts to the lake. This is expected to take the form of modest day-use facilities (benches, trashcans, picnic tables, shore landing spots) can help visitors to enjoy the area and concentrate visitors in spots that are deemed appropriate, away from sensitive natural areas.

¹² In this plan, the term facilities means something that is built, installed, or established to serve a purpose. It does not imply any particular degree or level of improvement. Trails are considered to be facilities.

The soils along lakeshores are vulnerable to erosion. Even low levels of day use, concentrated at one spot, can cause trampling of vegetation and siltation into the lake. In addition, people and pets naturally like to wander along the shore, which can cause an expanding zone of soil compaction, vegetation loss, and siltation. These impacts to the shore and water quality can be avoided by facilities such as those listed below.

Fish Lake Recreation Area Policy 2: Lakefront Facilities.

2A. Timing. Fish Lake lakefront facilities will be developed as needed to provide for enjoyable use of the lake and to ensure human safety, avoid user conflicts, provide for sanitation, and protect the shoreline, habitat values and water quality.

The decision to build lakefront facilities will be “criteria driven”, that is, the decision will be determined by a set of criteria that help guide the timing and the character of improvements. The Borough will work with the local Parks Advisory Committee in making this decision. As noted above, in the near term lake access will be by foot from the parking area described above, crossing the creek and then extending south to the lake. If the private land at the lake’s west end is closed, the new lakefront access point will need to accommodate the launching of small boats such as canoes. Over the longer term, a short spur road may be developed over Gator Creek, to bring users closer to the Lake.

Criteria governing the timing and pace of lakefront improvements include:

Evidence of demand:

- Crowding at other public lakefronts,
- Significant neighborhood growth,
- Multiple groups and activities occurring in the same area of Fish Lake,
- Unsanctioned activities needing enforcement (campfires, underage parties),
- Loss of existing lake access options.

Evidence of impacts from human use:

- Loss of vegetation or bank erosion at entry points into the water,
- Disturbance or displacement of wildlife,
- Trash,
- Human or pet waste,
- Multiple entry points or informal trails developing along a short segment of shoreline,
- Conflicts among users.

2C. Funding. Facilities for human use should not be installed without funding for regular maintenance.

2D. Design guidelines. The Talkeetna Parks Advisory Committee shall be provided a timely and meaningful opportunity to review and comment on proposed designs for facilities and shoreline

protection at future lakefront public use site. Considerations in reviewing planned improvements include:

- Sanitation. Toilets and trash cans shall be sited to serve only the recreation users, and not become a roadside “pit stop”. Trash cans must be bear-proof. Because a lakefront site concentrates users who may stay for a number of hours, it is advisable to have toilets and trash cans at picnic and swimming sites, at least during peak seasons and events.
- Signs. A sign shall be posted to advise against common high-impact uses, such as feeding waterfowl, campfires, etc.
- Shore paths shall be set back at least 25 feet from the water’s edge, be no wider than necessary to meet disabled access requirements, and have rock or log bollards to discourage ATV riding.
- Natural vegetation barriers should be used to define entry points into the water. For example, retention of devil’s club, plantings of spruce between the shoreline path and the water’s edge.
- Other shore stabilization or protection might include placement of logs, rocks, wood chips from trail construction.
- Picnic tables and or benches should be set back 25-50 feet from the water’s edge, to avoid conflicts with canoe launch and swimming.
- Gravel pad and or dock – If a boat launch is provided, separate the area designated for boat launching from other uses (wading, swimming, passive viewing). Two gravel pads with 20 linear feet of shoreline, separated by a 20- to 60- foot vegetated area would create a 60- to 100-foot wide lakefront use site.

3. Trails at Fish Lake

Background on Trails at Fish Lake

There are currently no developed trails on the Borough lands at Fish Lake. Residents say that few people pass through these forested uplands, even though the light undergrowth makes it relatively easy to find one’s way without trails, particularly in winter. Talkeetna-area skiers and hikers are drawn to developed trails at nearby locations. Snowmachiners and ATV riders are likewise attracted to other areas with more open or challenging terrain and do not currently frequent these Borough lands.

However, it is likely that public lands such as those at Fish Lake will be increasingly important places for trail recreation. Many trails around Talkeetna are not on public land, and are lost to public use when the land is developed or when a private owner prohibits trail use. In addition, climate change and less-reliable winter ice may shift winter trail use away from lakes and onto uplands.

Fish Lake Recreation Area Policy 3: Trails

3A. Timing of trails at Fish Lake. Low impact trails for walking and single-track cross-country skiing are permitted, in response to the community's desire for expanding community trail systems. The terrain at Fish Lake is varied enough to offer several levels of trail challenge that would serve a broad cross-section of the community. As described in policy 1B, a multi-use trail may be developed along the route of the relocated ROW. For this roadside trail to be developed, the route will need to be linked to reserved trail routes extending outside the Fish Lake Recreation area boundaries.

3B. Trail design guidelines. The Recreation Area is suitable for narrow, low-impact all-season non-motorized trails for hiking, running, biking, skiing and equestrian use. All-season trails should be located to avoid sensitive summer habitat, wetlands or unsuitable soils.

Trails shall be designed to minimize impacts to the natural setting. Winter ski trails shall be designed as narrow ("single-track") trails, rather than, wider trails that require more clearing and change to the landscape. Trails will be 4 to 6 feet wide to allow for grooming for cross-country skiing, with minimal evidence of the trails' existence in summer. Choke points should be created to make winter trails difficult for snowmachines to use in order to avoid damage to groomed surfaces and safety issues.

3C. Upgrading trails. Over time, trails at Fish Lake may be upgraded to improve quality of recreation, while retaining the area's generally natural setting and habitat.

3D. Align trails to discourage random access to the lakefront. Trails that approach or parallel the north side of the lake should have views of the lake but be designed (through retention of brush or careful alignment) to deter random access down the steep slopes to the waterfront, in order to protect the banks from erosion and protect sensitive shoreline habitat.

3E. Align trails to discourage bear conflicts, for example minimize trails within ¼ mile of Gator Creek unless a biologist determines there would be minimal impact to bears (e.g. winter trails may pose no conflict.)

4. Rules and Other Management Actions at Fish Lake

General Background on Rules for Fish Lake Recreation Area

Enforceability of rules is an important issue at both Fish and Numbered Lakes. Most important is that rules are widely accepted by community members. Social pressure – parents and residents asking others to obey the rules – can sometimes be effective. As the community grows, there is greater likelihood that borough staff and/or local volunteers will need to become active in enforcing the rules. It is better to have rules, with general conformity and progress towards enforcement, than to forego rules until enforcement is 100% assured. It can be hard to apply rules after certain practices become common.

The following rules will ensure that recreation uses do not conflict and are in keeping with the overarching goals set out for Fish Lake Recreation Area.

Background on motorized use (applicable to both Fish and Numbered Lakes). On the issue of motorized recreation, there is consensus among nearly all residents on several points:

- Snow machines are widely used by residents as a means to get around in the winter. A smaller subset of residents use snow machines on a regular basis for recreation.
- Neither the Fish Lake uplands (nor the Numbered Lakes area) has a history of summer motorized use. Neither parcel is well-suited for such use because of compact size, forest cover, wetlands and habitat sensitivity. While a very few comments suggested otherwise, there appears to be broad agreement that the Numbered and Fish Lakes areas are not appropriate for summer ATV use.
- Borough lands at Fish Lake have attracted little to no snowmachine use, except for use of Fish Lake itself and a travel corridor across the east end of the Borough parcel to several private cabins.
- Snowmachine activity at Numbered Lakes traditionally has been infrequent. Almost all use that does occur is by neighbors. The majority of winter activity in the Numbered Lakes area, especially recent winters, has been exploration on skis and snowshoes, also primarily by neighbors.
- With few exceptions, existing levels of snowmachine use (in recent years, including 2006) have caused scant physical evidence beyond occasional tracks.
- Snowmachine use at these parcels is limited by their compact size, forest cover, hilly terrain, and areas of sensitive habitat. Year-round open water channels at Numbered Lakes further limit snowmachining riding opportunities. Neither of these parcels meets the local or regional interest in long-distance, challenging snowmachining. Both areas do have some terrain that is occasionally used by local snowmachines, primarily youth.
- Patterns of winter recreation are changing. Continued privatization and development of land in the area is narrowing opportunities for traditional recreational uses – both motorized and non motorized – in Talkeetna and throughout the Borough. Snowmachine riders can cover vast terrain and they fear the shrinkage of their riding areas through closures of private land and/or restrictions on public lands. There is demand among non-motorized recreationists for separate recreation areas, away from the disruption seen to be caused by snow machines.
- In the Talkeetna area, there are three types of snowmachine use that should be addressed:
 - utilitarian use, for hauling supplies, traveling short distances, or access to remote, roadless cabins and homes;
 - youth and family snowmachine recreation, generally done not far from the kids' homes without trailering; and
 - adult snowmachine recreation, which generally takes place out of town where open spaces, snow depth, and challenging terrain allow high-speed and high-skill driving.
- There is a general consensus that Talkeetna should not become a major destination for out-of-town snow machine riding due to the terrain, vegetation, and property ownership

patterns. Other places, such as the land off the Petersville Road and Parks Highway, offer more appropriate terrain and public land to serve as snowmachine destinations.

In addition to the above points of general consensus, there are several common but polarized viewpoints in the debate. There is widespread feeling among non-motorized users of being displaced by snowmachines in many traditional natural settings, and a sense that the vast majority of public lands are open to motorized use. There is a frustration among some snowmachine users that they have already been closed out of some public lands in Talkeetna, and the proposed closure of these parcels without some guarantee of other local riding opportunities implies disregard or disrespect for motorized recreation.

Background on camping. For many residents, camping is part of the Talkeetna tradition of connection to the natural setting. Some residents desire the opportunity for spontaneous, informal camping close to home. Other residents feel that camping is a high impact use that may displace day users and cause lasting environmental impacts. Residents mentioned that these impacts at other camping areas have included tree cutting for fires, improper disposal of human waste, and food or garbage mismanagement that attracts bears. Several residents stated that the impacts of camping are largely a function of management, and that active management can minimize potential impacts from camping. While public land management capacity at the Fish Lake Recreation Area is limited, it appears that the low level of use and the varied topography can accommodate informal camping, at least in the near term.

Background on group use. Talkeetna residents voiced concern that recreation by organized groups of users in the two areas may conflict with the intended goals of low-impact, dispersed recreation use that does not impair the natural setting or habitat. The large majority of Talkeetna residents expressed support of group use for educational purposes but not for commercial purposes. Commercial purposes are defined in this instance as for-profit use, such as guided trips for a fee. As one person stated, commercial groups create impacts to the recreation area and to other users with out direct public benefit; whereas educational groups provide the benefit of fostering awareness of the natural world and teaching good stewardship and leave-no-trace practices.

Group use has the potential – depending on the size of groups and frequency of use – to create a more intense pattern of human activity than has traditionally occurred at either Fish Lake Recreation Area or Numbered Lakes Natural Area. To maintain the natural setting and largely undeveloped character of these areas, plan participants favor restrictions for group use.

The impact of commercial and non-commercial educational/institutional group users varies greatly, depending on the scale and frequency of activity. Impacts from human use can be controlled in numerous ways:

- Frequency of visits and total number of visits;
- Size of group;
- Concentration or dispersal of users: limited routes and hardened sites; or requiring guides to rotate among alternate routes;
- Off-limits areas to protect sensitive habitat;

- Leave No Trace techniques;
- Selection of concessionaires;
- Monitoring of impacts.

Some members of the public strongly advocate a permit system for groups using either Fish or Numbered Lakes. They believe a permit system would hold group leaders accountable if resources are damaged and would minimize the cumulative impacts of groups by controlling the frequency and routes of their excursions. However, it is likely that group use will be infrequent, and the MSB staff feel that a permit system for group use is currently unnecessary and an inefficient use of their management funds. This does not preclude instituting a permit system for group use in the future under changed circumstances.

Fish Lake Recreation Area Policy 4: Rules and Other Management Actions

4A. Motorized use. Summer motorized use of the entire parcel, including uplands, wetlands, and narrow water channels at the lake inlet within the Fish Lake Recreation Area, is prohibited due to the concerns listed below:

- Disturbance to wetlands, soils, and wildlife use patterns; particularly spring concentrations of birds and wildlife; nesting or brood-rearing of waterfowl; salmon spawning and rearing areas; and seasonal bear and moose feeding concentration areas.
- Conflicts with non-motorized use on fairly compact acreage; particularly safety on narrow trails, noise, dust, exhaust, interference with wildlife viewing.

4A.1 Access corridor. Winter motorized use of Fish Lake Recreation Area is allowed within the east- and west end access corridors under the guidelines described below, in keeping with traditional use of snowmachines on Fish Lake for recreation and for access to roadless private properties east of the lake.

- Access corridor to private properties. A winter access corridor will be marked for snowmachine access to private properties east of the lake. The MSB will align the corridor to minimize disturbance of vegetation and to follow areas where the snowpack or ice is most stable and long-lasting. This serves to allow a longer season of use and also respects the natural geographic pattern of spring thawing.
- Signs will be posted stating rules of use, including but not limited to:
 - snowmachine use is limited to periods of adequate snow cover and ice-depth to protect the underlying vegetation and soils (which varies according to local conditions but for the east end, winter only route, is generally 10 to 24 inches of packed snow depth (per standards of Alaska State Parks);
 - this is an access trail to private lands;
 - users must stay in the marked corridor;
 - observe speed limit of 20 mph.

- Trimming of brush may be permitted within the winter access corridor to create safe riding conditions, based on an initial field determination when the MSB marks the corridor that such trimming will have minimal impacts on habitat and minimum noticeability in summer. Trimming should be limited to a single-track width of six feet and a height above ground of 10 inches to correspond to the required minimum depth of snowpack for winter riding.
- Impacts from the winter access trail should be monitored and the trail may be relocated or closed to snowmachines if necessary to curtail damage to the wetlands or creek channels.
- The corridor may be discontinued if alternative overland access becomes available to the private properties east of the lake.
- If snowmachine use on Fish Lake is regulated through a Lake Management Plan (e.g. if hours for riding on the Lake are limited) snowmachine use on Borough lands at Fish Lake Recreation Area will follow these same limits. The snowmachine use at the Recreation Area is intended to enhance use on the Lake, not replace it or create an enforcement dilemma.

4A.2 Access from Spur Road to the lake. If public snowmachine access to the lake across private lands at the Fish Lake outlet is discontinued, the access corridor provided under 1C would be opened to snowmachines to enable riders to reach the lake. Snowmachine riders and non-motorized users would share the segment of trail from Spur Road to the lake, while other trails at Fish Lake Recreation Area would remain non-motorized. The following rules of use would apply on the shared-use trail:

- Posted speed limit;
- Posted safety rules for shared use of the trail by snowmachine riders and other users;
- If a future Fish Lake Management Plan creates rules for snowmachine use on the lake itself, these rules will be posted at the trailhead at Fish Lake Recreation Area;
- Season for riding depends on adequate snow depth to protect underlying soils, as determined and posted by MSB.

Impacts from the snowmachine use should be monitored, and the trail may be relocated or closed to snowmachines if necessary to curtail damage to wetlands or Gator Creek.

4B Leave-no-trace practices. Signs for leave-no-trace practices should be placed at the trailhead and at any future lakefront public use sites.

4C. Prohibit fires. All open fires are prohibited because of wildfire danger, burn scars, and the temptation of firewood gathering at the site, which degrades the natural setting.

4D. Camping

- Overnight camping is prohibited at or near trailheads or parking areas, except for a possible park host (typically a volunteer who stays in an RV at the parking lot and reports any misuse of the area).

- There will be no developed campgrounds, in order to retain the pattern of dispersed, low impact recreation.
- Informal recreational camping is allowed further into the Recreation Area, subject to the following rules:
 - a. Campsites shall be out-of-sight from trailheads or parking areas.
 - b. Campsites shall be set back 200 feet from lakes or creeks to protect water quality and 100 feet from developed trails to maintain the natural setting for day users.
 - c. Campers must follow Leave-No-Trace practices. Signs for Leave-No-Trace use and campsite setbacks from the lake should be placed at the main trailhead and at any future lakefront public use sites.
 - d. Camping will be limited to three nights per site to avoid squatter camping and to avoid displacing day users.
 - e. Overnight camping is prohibited on wetlands or sensitive shoreline at the east end of the lake. A sign should be placed at the Birch Creek inlet channel to advise protection of sensitive habitat and species. Eventually, sensitive shoreline areas should be mapped by a qualified habitat professional and posted “no camping” in the field.
 - f. If camping results in abuses or lasting damage (such as trash dumping or tree-cutting), Talkeetna Parks Advisory Committee may recommend that the Borough further limit or suspend camping at Fish Lake Recreation Area, and this will not require an amendment to this plan.

4E. Purpose and size for group uses. Limits on the size and type of groups at Fish Lake Recreation Area will protect undeveloped sites from degradation, reduce disruptions to individual users, and ensure that the natural setting is a primary part of the group members’ experience.

- Groups for nature-based activities: groups should be limited to activities that depend on and do not diminish the natural setting, such as bird watching, hiking, skiing and nature study. In general, educational and research groups, and non-profit groups (e.g. orienteering or ski club outings) are allowed.
- Commercial groups: commercial groups are not allowed, although this may be revised if the public and land managers find that non-commercial groups are well-managed and their level of impacts is low.
- Group size: along unimproved routes, the maximum group size will be 6, with 1 leader per 5 followers. Along trails or at improved sites, maximum group size will be 16, with 1 leader per 7 followers.
- Leave-No-Trace. Group leaders shall be responsible for teaching and overseeing Leave-No-Trace techniques (which will be posted at entry points to the Natural Area). Groups are not permitted to erect structures or leave equipment or supplies at the Natural Area.

4F. Firewood cutting. In general, firewood cutting or gathering is prohibited in order to maintain the natural character of the Recreation Area. Firewood may be gathered only by permit as a salvage action subsequent to Borough-approved land management activities such as reduction of hazard

trees or trail clearing. Transport of firewood may not involve off-road use of motor vehicles unless snow cover is adequate to protect underlying vegetation and soils (10 to 24 inches by Alaska State Parks standards).

4G. No collecting of plants or animals. This rule does not apply to hunting, fishing, or trapping in accordance with state regulations; sustainable harvests of traditional crops (berries, mushrooms, herbs) for personal use; and scientific sampling of the biota for scientific research approved by the MSB.

4H. Closures to protect trails. Under MSB Code 2.85.020, the Borough may temporarily close trails to certain uses to protect wet soils, particularly during spring breakup.

4I. Wildlife protection zones. When more detailed field information on sensitive habitat becomes available, protection zones and rules for use may be applied to sensitive habitat or wildlife use areas; for example trail setbacks from bird nesting or migratory concentration areas.

4J. Private permits, leases, or use agreements. In keeping with the prohibition on commercial group use, private permits, leases, or use agreements (e.g., a private dock or airplane tie-down, or a canoe rental operation) are not allowed because of the potential displacement of the general public.

OBJECTIVES & POLICIES FOR NUMBERED LAKES NATURAL AREA

Summary of Management Intent

Consistent with the goals expressed above, the overall intent for Numbered Lakes Natural Area (the Natural Area) is to retain Borough ownership and manage it to protect its natural character and habitat and to support low-intensity recreation tied to the natural setting, such as walking, bird watching, snowshoeing and cross-country skiing. The Natural Area is intended to remain largely undeveloped. Facilities will be designed to broaden opportunities to enjoy and to appreciate the area's unique features, while not degrading the area's natural character; and to respond to and guide demand but not to actively promote new use.

Motorized uses are prohibited in Numbered Lakes Natural Area because of the potential impacts of existing and growing future use levels to other recreation users and to habitat in an area with limited open areas and sensitive terrain.

The recommended Borough land classification is Public Recreation/Watershed lands.

This draft identifies five preliminary policies and related management recommendations for Numbered Lakes Natural Area:

1. Access and parking,
2. Habitat protection,
3. Future facilities,
4. Trails,
5. Rules,
6. Other actions to support goals of the Natural Area.

This plan has presented background information relevant to Numbered Lakes in the previous Fish Lake section. For brevity, it is not reprinted here. See the explanations on motorized use, camping, and group use on pages 35-37.

1. Access and Parking at Numbered Lakes Natural Area

Background on access

A large majority of participants in this planning process want to manage access to Numbered Lakes Natural Area in ways that will minimize disruption to the area's natural character, habitat and wildlife.

The Natural Area is not well-known outside of the local community because it is not visible from main roads and there are no signs to indicate access to public land. Those who participated in this planning process voiced a strong sentiment against improving access in ways that direct substantial new use to the Natural Area.

Recreational users currently filter into the Natural Area from surrounding neighborhoods, often on foot. Those who arrive by vehicle park along the shoulders of residential access roads. Informal parking had not resulted in significant problems at the time of this plan. Unsupervised and unmanaged parking can create the following problems:

- trespass onto private property,
- trash and human waste,
- blockage of public's access by poor parking or overnight use,
- campfires, and
- damage to trees and soils.

An access road was constructed by an individual in Spring 2006 along part of the section line that marks the south boundary of the Numbered Lakes parcel. Further access improvements are likely along the borders of the Natural Area.

A large majority of those who participated in the 2006 planning process asserted that roads are not needed or desired within the Numbered Lakes area.

The public endorsed the concept of adding to the Natural Area a Borough parcel that adjoins the Spur Road. The intent is to retain the natural terrain and vegetation of this parcel as a buffer between the Spur Road and a future parking and entry site near the southwest corner of the Natural Area. This parcel is currently classified Materials, and it appears that Materials extraction or other development would be incompatible with the intended uses of the Natural Area.

Numbered Lakes Natural Area Policy 1: Access and Parking

1A. Roadless area. Roads will not be built within or through the Natural Area with the possible exception of short (less than 300 feet), “dead end” roads to reach parking or trailheads that may be developed within the area in the future.

1B. Parking. The scale and design of parking areas and trail entry points into the Natural Area will be limited, consistent with the management intent of low-intensity recreation based on the natural setting.

- To respond to inevitable growth pressures and make this area a community facility, two small entry point parking sites and short entry trails should be developed in the near term (See Numbered Lake Trails Policy 4A). The purpose is to provide for an appropriate level of use and deter users from parking at multiple, unintended entry points, leading to site damage and unsafe roadside parking. One parking site will be located on Barge Drive with a trail extending south to an appropriate destination feature, for example Lake Six. The other parking site will be near the southwest corner of the Natural Area, uphill and out of

sight from the Spur Highway, likewise with a trail to an appropriate destination, such as a wetland viewing area, or north to the top of the small hill. Precise final alignment of these entry points will be determined through field inspection and public input.

- Parking sites will accommodate four to six vehicles, with the option to grow modestly in the future if demand warrants. They will be fringed with natural barriers such as boulders to discourage ATVs or vehicles from venturing into the parcel. Wildlife-proof trash receptacles will be provided. Signs for Leave No Trace practices will be posted.
- A third entry point may be developed in the future, to produce no more than three parking areas in total. When road access or residential development occurs east of Numbered Lakes Natural Area, this third parking area may be added at a suitable location along the Natural Area's eastern boundary.

1C. Add MSB parcel to southwest corner of the Natural Area. The parcel of Borough land that lies east of Spur Road and adjoins the southwest end of the Numbered Lakes parcel will be reclassified from Materials to Public Recreation Land and added to the Natural Area. Incorporating this parcel into the Natural Area and retaining its natural terrain and vegetation is intended to provide a full visual buffer between the Spur Road and proposed parking site to be located within the southwest corner of the original Natural Area.

2. Protection of Habitat and the Natural Setting at Numbered Lakes Natural Area

Background on habitat protection issues

Participants in this planning process placed a high priority on protecting the natural functions and the long-term habitat productivity of Numbered Lakes Natural Area. This public priority is reflected in the goals and general management intent for this plan.

At the time of this plan, there were no definitive ecological baseline studies or wildlife surveys of the Numbered Lakes ecosystem to guide habitat protection. The Borough does not currently have staff or resources for habitat studies. Data collection and future scientific ecological studies would be useful to help land managers and the public to measure or predict human impacts on habitat productivity and other natural resource values in the Natural Area, and adjust management policy accordingly. To ensure that new data is credible and relevant to management choices, research intended to guide management of the Natural Area should be planned and conducted in consultation with appropriate resource agencies. Data should be collected through accepted professional techniques. Agency involvement and professional research techniques will give credibility to privately-sponsored or volunteer research.

Numbered Lakes Natural Area Policy 3: Protection of Habitat and the Natural Setting

3A. Habitat protection. When approving rules, facilities, and management actions for the Numbered Lakes Natural Area, the Borough will consider and apply the best available data and field

observations of the hydrology, wildlife and human use, with the intent to protect long-term habitat productivity and the natural setting.

3B. Future habitat research and monitoring. The Borough recognizes the value of additional research and monitoring to guide habitat protection, and will support community-based efforts, guided or vetted by responsible resource agencies, to carry out scientific evaluation and research related to the Numbered Lakes Natural Area.

3. Facilities at Numbered Lakes Natural Area

Background on facilities

Public lands in the Talkeetna area offer a spectrum of recreation opportunities, from developed recreation areas to natural areas.¹³ The large majority of borough lands in the area are designated for limited development. For example the Talkeetna Lakes Park is intended to remain largely a natural area, with limited development of trails and day use facilities. The majority of participants in this planning process want to keep Numbered Lakes Natural Area near the wild and pristine end of the public lands spectrum, as a location for exploration and nature appreciation in an undeveloped natural setting.

Numbered Lakes Natural Area Policy 3: Future Facilities

3A. Near term facilities. Near term facilities shall be limited to the two access points, short trails and viewing sites discussed in the preceding and following sections.

3B. Timing, prerequisites and character of other future facilities. Additional facilities should only be developed if needed to meet and manage demand rather than to actively promote increased use. The general standards of approval for future facilities are:

- The proposed facilities are necessary to avoid negative impacts to the habitat and wildlife, given levels of existing or expected use
- The scale and design of these facilities is compatible with the natural setting
- There is a plan for on-going maintenance and management

Future facilities should enhance the visitor's experience of the natural setting rather than be primary attractions. Examples of enhancements include:

- Small parking areas
- Signs and interpretive displays
- Fences, gates and other devices for site security

¹³ The Talkeetna Parks Advisory Committee has ongoing efforts to plan for underserved recreation types and groups, including efforts to obtain snowmachine corridors.

- Viewing blinds or platforms
- Benches
- Toilets
- Bear-proof trash receptacles

3C. High intensity facilities are not allowed. Future facilities that serve high-intensity recreation or create a large area of infrastructure are not appropriate within Numbered Lakes Natural Area. Facilities such as play fields or sports courts, playgrounds, and campgrounds are needed in the community, but should be located in other locations.

4. Trails at Numbered Lakes Natural Area

Background on Trails at Numbered Lakes

The large majority of participants in public workshops and meetings asserted that there was little or no need for developed trails in this area. Participants in the planning process asserted that trails would diminish the tradition of wandering and exploring this small but intricate complex of meadows and copses. Current users testified to the ease of finding one's own route through Numbered Lakes Natural Area. They described how the labyrinth of clearings and low hills, and the distant views of landmarks such as Bald Mountain, make it fun to get lost and easy to regain one's bearings.

The pattern of highly dispersed use has not created visible wear and tear on the wetlands or uplands as of 2006. However, hiking and summer uses are likely to become more frequent or more concentrated; and consequently these uses may impact the soils and waterways through soil compaction and denuding, erosion, and water pollution.

Development of trails could contain and reduce adverse human impacts by leading people along less-sensitive routes to contained observation sites. Trails would offer a trade-off: a slightly less natural setting for free-ranging recreation; but protection of the habitat, specifically protection of water quality and fragile wetlands and shoreline habitat.

Numbered Lakes Natural Area Policy 4: Trails

4A. Timing and extent of trails at Numbered Lakes Natural Area.

In the near term, develop two narrow entry trails (approximately four-feet-wide) from the planned parking sites along resilient terrain to viewing sites or other destination features. Visitor log books may be placed at entry trailheads to collect information on patterns and types of uses as well as visitor observations. Construction of these short entry trails will meet this plan's goals by:

- a) providing reasonable access to the natural setting, particularly for educational activities and for people who don't have the skills or fitness to explore trail-less terrain, and
- b) respecting the value of the Natural Area as a largely natural area for informal exploration and individual discovery.

Other than the two spur trails for access, the policy is not to construct formal trails until such time as recreation uses increase or become concentrated to a level that poses unacceptable impacts to habitat or the natural setting. Indicators of the need to develop additional trails include: loss of vegetation or bank erosion along ponds and waterways, and a pervasive network of informal trails.

4B. Trail design standards. Any future trails shall be designed to increase the enjoyment of public users, and to minimize impacts on fish and wildlife habitat and populations, wetlands and waterbodies, natural quiet and open space.

Trails should be designed to meet "sustainability" standards, which means designed to support current and future recreation use efficiently and without long-term degradation of the area's natural systems and habitat productivity. Specific sustainability standards include:

1. Incorporate low-impact but functional crossings for water bodies or wetlands, such as boardwalks or small bridges, in order to protect water quality and habitat.
2. Produce negligible soil loss or movement while protecting natural vegetation.
3. Minimize removal of vegetation, including tree cutting; but recognize that pruning or removal of certain plants may be necessary for maintenance.
4. Minimize the long-term needs for maintenance.
5. Avoid the need for re-routing in the foreseeable future.
6. Foster enforcement of this plan's policies (e.g., use boulders as barriers around parking areas to prevent incursion by ATVs).

If summer trails become necessary, they should be constructed as "rustic trails" with the following design standards:

7. No closer than 15 feet from the ordinary high watermark of any water body, with a continuous buffer of undisturbed vegetation, except at crossing points or constructed viewing points.
8. Width of trail should be relatively narrow – not designed for high speed travel.
9. Trails should be routed on well-drained soils and constructed of a permeable surface.
10. Boardwalks and bridges across wetlands should be designed for minimal impacts on hydrology.

If winter trails are developed, they should be constructed as seasonal trails with minimal evidence of their existence in summer, using the following design standards:

11. Trails shall follow natural contours and clearings, with only incidental tree cutting or brush clearing.
12. Width of trails should not generally exceed 4 to 6 feet, with the intent to accommodate single-file classical skiing and snowshoeing.
13. Packing or grooming by mechanical means is not allowed, in order to provide alternatives to groomed trails at other areas and to favor dispersed winter use of the Natural Area.
14. Choke points (short sections of trail that are very narrow, irregular or curved) should be created to deter snowmachine uses on winter trails.

4C. Trail Alignment. In addition to MSB’s existing development setbacks along waterbodies, the following policies will guide trail location in the Numbered Lakes Natural Area.

15. Trails shall not encroach on specific points or features that are especially sensitive to development (e.g., salmon spawning waters). These will need to be identified in the field and mapped.
16. Trails shall direct visitors in a way that protects fragile habitat.
17. Trails shall respect wildlife movement patterns.
18. Trails shall avoid directing visitors onto private property.
19. Trails should promote the feeling of being in a natural area.

4D. Future trail connections from neighborhoods. As surrounding lands are developed, MSB and the Parks Advisory Committee shall encourage the platting and development of pedestrian trail connections through adjoining lands to trailheads at Numbered Lakes Natural Area. The intent is to encourage neighborhood users to arrive on foot rather than by car, and to channel most users onto trails that are designed to accommodate regular use.

5. Rules and other management actions at Numbered Lakes Natural Area

Background on rules for recreational use at Numbered Lakes

During the planning process, the public and the planning staff engaged in lengthy and detailed discussion of several recreational uses with potential for moderate to high impacts at Numbered Lakes Natural Area, including motorized use, camping, bike and equestrian use, and group use.

Motorized use. Motorized use is an infrequent but noted use at the Numbered Lakes area. The Natural Area lacks the acreage or physical features to serve as a desirable destination for out-of-town motorized recreation users. Furthermore, the wetlands and wildlife species are vulnerable to disturbance by motorized use. Throughout this planning process, a sizeable majority of Talkeetna residents voiced a desire to designate Numbered Lakes Natural Area as a non-motorized recreation area, citing the impact of motorized use on other recreation uses, safety, and potential damage to the natural resources. Motorized as well as non-motorized recreationists legitimately state that areas for their mode of recreation are being constrained by development. In May 2006, the Talkeetna Parks Advisory Committee initiated a planning process to provide for future locations and facilities for a diversity of recreation in the Talkeetna Community Council area, including motorized recreation. Motorized recreation can and will be provided for on other, more physically suitable, public lands and easements in the Council area.

Group use. Participants in the planning process voiced broad opposition to allowing commercial groups use the Natural Area for several reasons: displacement of individual users; pressure for developed facilities; and difficulty in monitoring and managing the cumulative impacts of group use at Numbered Lakes. Some people support educational groups but not commercial groups, believing that the educational groups benefit the community and are thus worth some degree of accommodation; and that educational groups are easier to re-schedule or reduce in size than commercial groups if groups are impacting the natural setting. Some members of the public

strongly advocate a permit system for groups using the Natural Area. They believe a permit system would hold group leaders accountable if resources are damaged and would minimize the cumulative impacts of groups by controlling the frequency and routes of their excursions. However, it is likely that group use will be infrequent, and the MSB staff feel that a permit system for group use is therefore unnecessary and an inefficient use of their management funds. This does not preclude the possibility of instituting a permit system for group use in the future under changed circumstances.

Camping or overnight use. At the time of this plan, camping was infrequent at the Natural Area and had little or no visible impact. Residents are concerned that camping will lead to overuse and damage to the natural setting with impacts such as litter, fire, clearings, and human waste. Participants at the public meetings favored prohibiting camping at Numbered Lakes Natural Area.

Bike and equestrian use. The majority (but not all) participants in the planning process felt that bicycles and horses could cause lasting damage to the wetlands and water crossings in the area. Some residents suggested that approximately 200 acres of relatively high ground at the east side of Numbered Lakes Natural Area may be suitable for trail development that could serve bicyclists and equestrians. More research is needed on the suitability of this east side area for trail development, biking and horse riding.

Numbered Lakes Natural Area Policy 5: Rules and Management Actions

5A. Motorized use. Motorized vehicle use is not allowed within the Numbered Lakes Natural Area, except when authorized by the Community Development Director for monitoring or maintenance. On the south and east perimeter of the Natural Area, the muskegs and meadows adjacent to the public rights-of-way may create a temptation for off-road vehicle incursions. The Borough should work with developers who construct access in these rights-of-way to place natural barriers along the boundary of the Natural Area.

5B. Biking and equestrian use is not currently allowed. Biking and equestrian use is not allowed within Numbered Lakes Natural Area because of likely impacts to wet soils, vegetation, and water quality. As the Natural Area is further mapped and studied, and if routes on resilient terrain are found, trails may be developed to serve bicyclists and equestrians on dry uplands in the eastern part of Numbered Lakes Natural Area.

5C. Camping or overnight uses are not allowed. While not a concern if only an irregular activity, widespread camping in the area has potential for significant impacts and there are currently no practical means for monitoring camping to prevent impacts. Therefore, camping is currently not compatible with the goal of protecting the habitat and natural setting. This policy can be revisited if public demand for camping sites changes, if ecosystem assessments identify areas such as the higher terrain on the eastern side where camping would have little potential impact, and if monitoring and management can be assured.

5D. Purpose and size limits for group use. Limits on the size and type of groups at Numbered Lakes will help to maintain a low-level, dispersed pattern of recreation. These limits will protect undeveloped sites from degradation, reduce disruptions to individual users, and ensure that the natural setting is a primary part of the group members' experience.

- Groups for nature-based activities: groups should be limited to activities that depend on and do not diminish the natural setting, such as bird watching, hiking, skiing and nature study. In general, educational and research groups, and non-profit groups (e.g. orienteering or ski club outings) are allowed.
- Commercial groups: commercial groups are not allowed, although this may be revisited if the public and land managers find that non-commercial groups are well-managed and their level of impacts is low and if management and monitoring can be assured. With small group size, limited frequency of use, adequate oversight and the opportunity for local review of proposed commercial activities, limited commercial use may well have no more impacts than non-commercial activities.
- Group size: along unimproved routes, the maximum group size will be 6, with 1 leader per 5 followers. Along trails or at improved sites, maximum group size will be 16, with 1 leader per 7 followers.
- Leave-No-Trace. Group leaders shall be responsible for teaching and overseeing Leave-No-Trace techniques (which will be posted at entry points to the Natural Area). Groups are not permitted to erect structures or leave equipment or supplies at the Natural Area.

5E. Private permits, leases, or use agreements. In keeping with the prohibition on commercial group use, private permits, leases, or use agreements are not allowed because of the potential displacement of the general public.

5F. No collecting of firewood or plants or animals. This rule does not apply to hunting, fishing, and trapping in accordance with state regulations; sustainable harvests of traditional crops (berries, mushrooms, herbs) for personal use; and scientific sampling of the biota for scientific research approved by the MSB.

5G. Seasonal trail and site closures to protect resources. At the discretion of the Borough, trails may be closed to protect thawing soils during breakup. No-entry protection zones may be imposed around highly sensitive sites such as swan nests during hatching and brood rearing.

5H. Visitor logbooks. Visitors will be encouraged to sign visitor logs at the main entry points to the Natural Area. This will give managers and stewards information on use patterns and visitors' observations on the natural setting, which may be relevant to policies on the timing of future facilities and levels of acceptable change.

6. Other actions to support the goals for Numbered Lakes Natural Area

Background on other actions to support the goals

Through adoption of this plan, the Borough endorses research and active stewardship of Numbered Lakes Natural Area to achieve the goals of long-term protection of the habitat and the natural setting. However, this plan does not commit the Borough to funding research and stewardship. Several actions are outlined here to invite individuals, the community, and other agencies to collaborate with the Borough on active stewardship for Numbered Lakes Natural Area. The Borough may adopt these strategies and any forthcoming stewardship proposals as implementation tools for this plan.

Some residents expressed interest in delegation of some of the MSB's management responsibilities for the Natural Area to a yet-undefined local group, which could boost management efforts with their intimate local knowledge of the site, an on-site presence, and volunteer time. Specifically, there were suggestions that a local group could oversee permitting and monitoring for certain uses. At the least, local residents request that TPAC and the Talkeetna Community Council have a meaningful opportunity to influence major management decisions such as the timing and design of future facilities. The borough would welcome local volunteer support for management of the area, as long as this is done in a manner consistent with goals of this plan, and the general need to manage this area for public use and benefit.

6A. Extension of the Natural Area to include a more complete ecosystem. Implementation might involve conservation easements, access easements, or land acquisition from willing owners of adjacent properties.

6B. Research plan. In consultation with natural resource agencies, such as the State of Alaska, outline the priorities for habitat mapping, hydrology studies, soils, geology, microclimates, and baseline wildlife surveys that are relevant to the management goals and policies of the Natural Area. Baseline data is necessary to meet the primary goal of identifying the most sensitive areas and maintaining habitat productivity and relatively untouched natural systems. Research that increases knowledge of the ecosystem is important for sound management decisions. Liaisons or scientific advisors from natural resource agencies are important to ensure that research produces credible, relevant findings.

6C. Levels of acceptable change to key resources. Surveys and ecological assessments, if validated by natural resource agencies can be used to develop levels of acceptable change, which the Borough could use to determine the point at which additional rules or facilities would be implemented.

6D. Stewardship Committee. A volunteer stewardship committee, formed under the umbrella of the Talkeetna Parks Advisory Committee or Community Council, is recommended to provide local support to Borough management. This Committee could take on numerous responsibilities such as:

- working with appropriate agency guidance, seek funding for research and propose and conduct research projects to collect data;

- initiate programs to enhance public knowledge and appreciation of the Natural Area,
- establish non-profit status in order to receive grants and other funding similar to Parks Foundation groups established in other communities.
- assist the borough with on-site monitoring and management of use

6E. Educational programs. Promote nature observations and introduce students to the concept and value of biodiversity.

6F. Community-wide recreation planning. Support planning and funding for recreation uses such as field-based sports and motor sports that are underserved in the Talkeetna Community Council Area. This effort may reduce pressure to accommodate intensive recreation uses in the Natural Area, where this plan has determined that intensive recreation is not compatible with the natural setting, habitat, and low-intensity recreation that the public wants to maintain.

■ REFERENCES

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State of Alaska Department of Natural Resources Division of Lands, Right of Way Permit, form No. DL 72, ADL No.45978, July 31, 1970

The Aquatic Restoration and Research Institute, An Ecological Description of the Numbered Lakes Ecosystem and Potential Development Impact Assessment, 2006

Citizens of Talkeetna, Concept: Talkeetna Numbered Lakes Natural Area. Spring 2006.

■ APPENDIX A - PUBLIC PARTICIPATION SUMMARY & LIST OF DOCUMENTS

The following community workshop notes and public comment compilations are available for review at the MSB Community Development Department offices in Palmer or at Agnew::Beck Consulting offices in Anchorage.

Scoping Meeting Notes - Wednesday, March 8, 2006

Public meeting in Talkeetna with 40 people attending. Generally, the goal of this meeting was to compile a profile of the project area and issues by identifying physical characteristics, current uses (recreational and developmental), identifying access (current and potential) and potential conflicts and impacts to avoid.

Community Workshop #1 Notes - Wednesday, April 8 2006

Public meeting in Talkeetna with 45-50 people attending. Generally, the purpose was to confirm goals and discuss *Issues and Preliminary Recommendations* (March 2006 draft).

Summary of comments: Most attendees supported the general direction of the *Issues and Preliminary Recommendations*, and the group endorsed the main goals with no one objecting. The group decided to defer Question Lake access to another planning process. Through discussion and compromise, the group reached consensus on several access and management issues. On a few issues such as commercial uses and trail design, general intent was agreed to, but details of the “criteria-based” approach were not resolved. While motorized uses and other more developed recreation uses were discussed, no one expressed support for these uses at the workshop.

Community Workshop #2 Notes - Wednesday, May 24, 2006

Public meeting in Talkeetna with 40-45 people attending. Generally, the format was to discuss these complicated issues in small groups:

1. Community-Wide Pattern of Recreation Lands
2. Group use: commercial and educational
3. Motorized winter use – snowmachines

The overall purpose was to continue the public discussion on draft policies for Fish and Numbered Lakes. The majority sentiments of the those who participated were confirmed regarding the desire not to have motorized use or commercial use at these sites but to continue other planning efforts in a spirit of neighborly cooperation to find locations for all types of recreation in the community. Non-commercial group use received a lot of discussion about group size, location, etc. and tight regulation was generally favored.

Community Workshop #3 Notes- Wednesday, November 29, 2006

Meeting held in Talkeetna with 45+ people attending: notes will be posted on www.agnewbeck.com in December 2006.

The majority affirmed these recommended policies: no motorized or commercial use; plans for initial parking and entry points; and habitat protection at Numbered Lakes. The group raised

previously- discussed issues of motorized recreation. Attendees discussed whether this plan succeeds at providing maximum benefits to as many user groups as possible. Several participants felt that Talkeetna has not achieved a local balance of recreation opportunities, while others felt that this plan helps to rectify the regional lack of non-motorized areas. There was discussion of the importance of objective data and analysis, both in this plan and in future research that will guide management decisions. Further discussion of trail standards resulted in a decision not to have mechanized packing and grooming for winter trails at Numbered Lakes.

Update and Summary (four pages) of Public Comments on “Issues and Preliminary Recommendations” (March 2006 draft)

Complete compilation (86 pages) of Public Comments on “Issues and Preliminary Recommendations” (March 2006 draft)

This compilation is organized by name of commenter and includes comments in their entirety received by email. Hardcopy comments (received by fax or mail) are included at the end of this document and are organized by date received. A summary and a table of abbreviated comments has been compiled and can be viewed online at www.agnewbeck.com. Workshop notes that also contain the public’s opinions can also be found online.

Complete compilation (14 pages) of Public Comments on “Round 2 Revisions and New Options” (May 2006 draft)

This compilation includes comments in their entirety.

Complete Compilation (approximately 60 pages) of Public Comments on “Fish and Numbered Lakes Recreation Management Plan - Final Draft” (November 2006 Draft)

This compilation includes comments in their entirety received from November through Dec 6, 2006.

APPENDIX B - COMMUNITY-WIDE RECREATION ANALYSIS

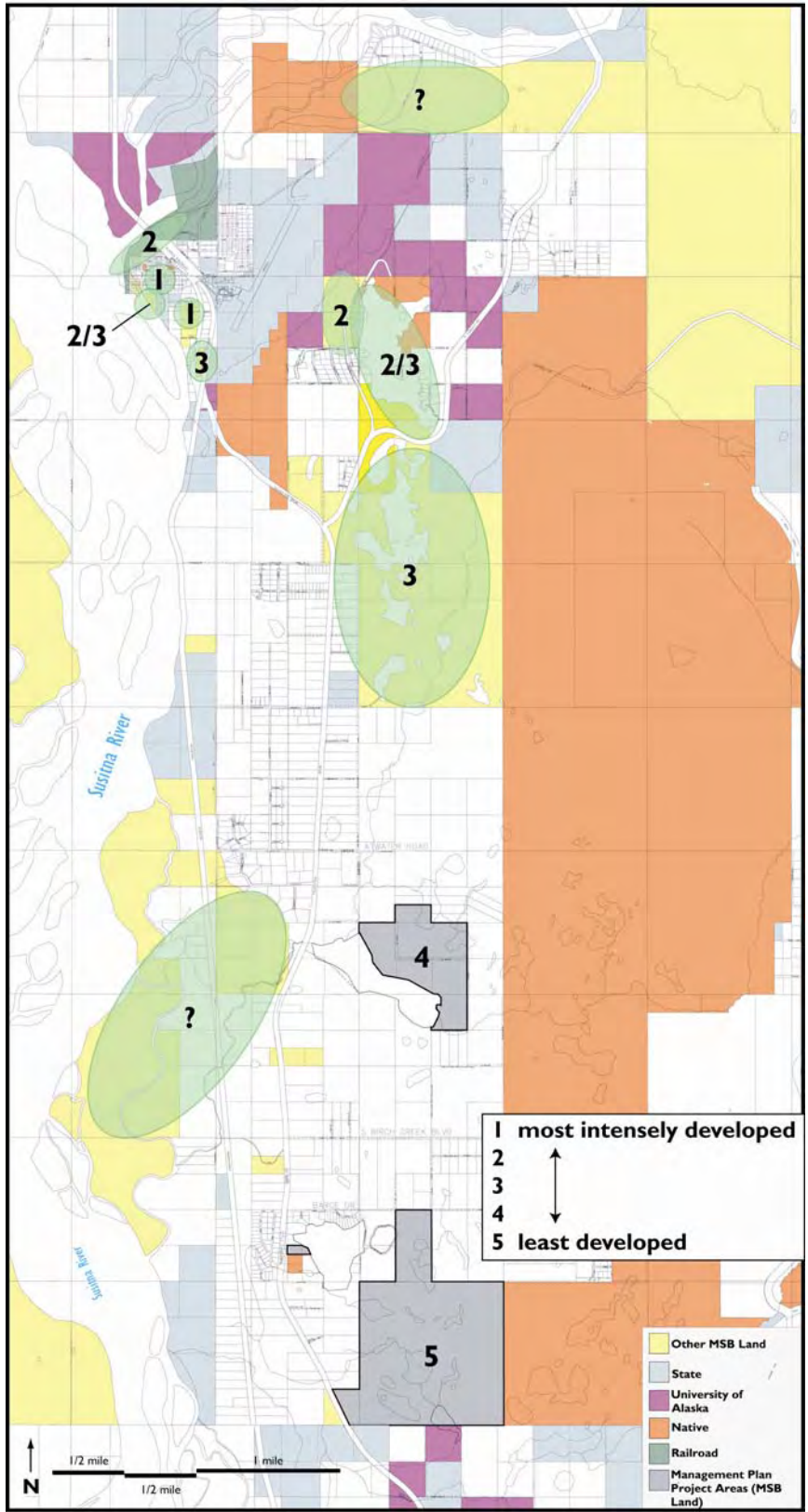
Talkeetna area recreation matrix

A detailed community-wide inventory of recreation needs and resources is beyond the scope of the Fish and Numbered Lakes plan. However, some of the pieces of this puzzle are currently in hand. This information is briefly summarized below. In general, areas intended for more intense use and development are located at the northern end of the community, where residents, businesses and visitors are concentrated.

Location	Intensity of Dev.	Status – Intended Use
Downtown	1	<i>Adopted Plan</i> – reserves softball field
Village Park	1	<i>Adopted Plan?</i> – picnic, events (management issues)
Downtown Riverfront Park	2	<i>Adopted Plan</i> – west side: includes day use, camping, parking for residents, visitors, businesses; east side: boat launch, leased land for camping and associated uses, some undeveloped & unleased land
East Talkeetna MSB Land south of the Talkeetna River	2/3?	No adopted plan, classified public recreation – past community discussions suggest this area may be suited for multi-use recreation activities, including motorized recreation uses. More planning needed.
Elementary School/Library	1	Playground, ballfield, ice skating, hokey rink, tennis in summer – option for more facilities?
Christensen Lake (several parcels)	2/3?	Classified Public Recreation - offers a well-used day use park for boating, fishing, and swimming.
Talkeetna Lakes ("XYZ lakes")	3	<i>Adopted Plan</i> – canoeing, camping, fishing, extensive trail development for summer hiking, biking, groomed ski trails in winter; option for equestrian uses & day use facilities; motorized recreation not permitted; limited commercial use is allowed.
Christensen Lake West of Road	2?	With its proximity to town, this general area may be suited for developed recreation, such as a ballfield or camping area
Fish Lake area, parcels west of Spur Road, south of Light Wood Subdivision	3	No adopted plan, classification? – mix of wetland and forested landscapes, more planning needed.
Government Lot 9 Park		?
Susitna River Parcels at Lower Birch Creek	?	<i>Unclassified, much of this area is wet and /or floodplain land</i>
Fish Lake Parcel	4	<i>Plan in progress:</i> – keep in natural state, small parking areas, trail system, lake access
Numbered Lakes Parcel	5	<i>Plan in progress:</i> general direction – keep in natural state, small parking areas and limited development
Community Trail System	mix of uses	<i>Adopted Borough Recreational Trails Plan</i> – addresses some but not all important trails. Work is needed to reserve key trails, including north-south "utility trail"; snow machine trails that provide access to the Bald Mountain area & to the Talkeetna, Susitna and Chulitna

		Rivers. Key existing trails include bike trail along Spur Road (non-motorized, mixed-use), Ski Hill trails, Talkeetna Loop Trail System
Other, smaller MSB Parcels; various lakes	mix of uses	Mix of options; lakes provide summer boating and winter snowmachining and skiing.

Map 7 –Community-wide Recreation Resources



Map Source: Matanuska-Susitna Borough and Agnew::Beck

Fish and Numbered Lakes Recreation Management Plan

■ PROPOSED APPENDIX C - LEAVE NO TRACE PRINCIPLES

The Fish and Numbered Lakes Management Plan includes policies to minimize recreation impacts to the natural setting. The policies include publicizing and encouraging low-impact recreation practices known as “Leave No Trace”.

Below are detailed Leave No Trace practices listed by the Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics, headquartered in Boulder Colorado (www.LNT.com). The Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics is an international nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting and inspiring responsible outdoor recreation through education, research and partnerships. Leave No Trace builds awareness, appreciation and respect for wildlands.

Seven Principles

1. Plan Ahead and Prepare
2. Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces
3. Dispose of Waste Properly
4. Leave What You Find
5. Minimize Campfire Impacts
6. Respect Wildlife
7. Be Considerate of Other Visitors

Detailed Practices:

Plan Ahead and Prepare

- Know the regulations and special concerns for the area you'll visit.
- Prepare for extreme weather, hazards, and emergencies.
- Schedule your trip to avoid times of high use.
- Visit in small groups. Split larger parties into groups of 4-6.
- Repackage food to minimize waste.
- Use a map and compass to eliminate the use of marking paint, rock cairns or flagging.

Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces

- Durable surfaces include established trails and campsites, rock, gravel, dry grasses or snow.
- Protect riparian areas by camping at least 200 feet from lakes and streams.
- Good campsites are found, not made. Altering a site is not necessary.
- In popular areas:
 - Concentrate use on existing trails and campsites.
 - Walk single file in the middle of the trail, even when wet or muddy.
 - Keep campsites small. Focus activity in areas where vegetation is absent.
- In pristine areas:
 - Disperse use to prevent the creation of campsites and trails.

- Avoid places where impacts are just beginning.

Dispose of Waste Properly

- Pack it in, pack it out. Inspect your campsite and rest areas for trash or spilled foods. Pack out all trash, leftover food, and litter.
- Deposit solid human waste in catholes dug 6 to 8 inches deep at least 200 feet from water, camp, and trails. Cover and disguise the cathole when finished.
- Pack out toilet paper and hygiene products.
- To wash yourself or your dishes, carry water 200 feet away from streams or lakes and use small amounts of biodegradable soap. Scatter strained dishwater.

Leave What You Find

- Preserve the past: examine, but do not touch, cultural or historic structures and artifacts.
- Leave rocks, plants and other natural objects as you find them.
- Avoid introducing or transporting non-native species.
- Do not build structures, furniture, or dig trenches.

Minimize Campfire Impacts

- Campfires can cause lasting impacts to the backcountry. Use a lightweight stove for cooking and enjoy a candle lantern for light.
- Where fires are permitted, use established fire rings, fire pans, or mound fires.
- Keep fires small. Only use sticks from the ground that can be broken by hand.
- Burn all wood and coals to ash, put out campfires completely, then scatter cool ashes.

Respect Wildlife

- Observe wildlife from a distance. Do not follow or approach them.
- Never feed animals. Feeding wildlife damages their health, alters natural behaviors, and exposes them to predators and other dangers.
- Protect wildlife and your food by storing rations and trash securely.
- Control pets at all times, or leave them at home.
- Avoid wildlife during sensitive times: mating, nesting, raising young, or winter.

Be Considerate of Other Visitors

- Respect other visitors and protect the quality of their experience.
- Be courteous. Yield to other users on the trail.
- Step to the downhill side of the trail when encountering pack stock.
- Take breaks and camp away from trails and other visitors.
- Let nature's sounds prevail. Avoid loud voices and noises.

■ APPENDIX D

Community Council, Advisory Board, and Planning Commission Recommendations

- Talkeetna Community Council, Inc.
- Parks, Recreation, and Trails Advisory Board
- Real Property Asset Management Board
- Planning Commission