

# **Proposed Susitna State Forest Management Plan Framework**

## **Executive Summary**

**March 20, 2014**

**State of Alaska**

**Department of Natural Resources**

**Division of Forestry**



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## **Chapter 1 Introduction**

### **Purpose of the Susitna State Forest**

The 687,000 acre Susitna State Forest will be managed as part of the State Forest System under AS 41.17.200-.230. While the primary purpose for the Susitna State Forest is timber production, these state lands will continue to be open for public use and access, including wildlife habitat management and harvest and other recreational activities. These uses are protected for the long-term, as these state lands will be retained in state ownership. The state forest boundaries were designed to encompass forested lands with the potential for commercial value. Public access to state forest lands will increase over time as new forest roads are constructed.

AS 41.17.200-.400 provides additional direction on the management of the state forest. The law directs the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to prepare a management plan for the state forest that "must consider and permit the uses described in AS 38.05.112(c)." These uses include:

- "commercial timber harvesting, including related activities;"
- "harvesting of forest products for personal use;"
- "fish and wildlife habitat, including"
  - "identification and protection of important wildlife habitat;"
  - "retention of riparian, wetland, and ocean-shoreline vegetation critical for fish and wildlife habitat;"
  - "the use of silvicultural practices, commercial timber harvest, and related activities to maintain and enhance the quality of fish and game habitat;"
- "uses of forest land for non-timber purposes, including"
  - "recreation, tourism, and related activities;"
  - "mining, mining claims, mineral leaseholds, and material extraction;"
  - "uses of fish and wildlife;"
  - "other resources and uses appropriate to the area, including compatible traditional uses;"
- "water quality," and "watershed management."

### **Management Overview**

Initially, the Susitna State Forest will be managed consistent with the management intent found within the current Matanuska Susitna and Southeast Susitna area plans. Changes to management intent require public and interagency review through adoption of a State Forest Management Plan under AS 41.17.230. The Alaska Forest Resources and Practices Act (AS 41.17.010 - .955.) applies to timber management activities on the forest. The Act is designed to protect fish habitat and water quality, and ensure reforestation occurs after a timber harvest.

Long-term, the forest will be managed for multiple uses and the sustained yield of renewable resources. DNR will manage the State Forest to maintain the range of forest types and stand ages characteristic of the forest in South Central Alaska to

- sustain the full range of resources and uses of the forest,
- ensure a high level of productivity of renewable resources,
- contribute to the regional economy and employment, and
- perpetuate biological diversity.

Decisions on managing the State Forest will be made in accordance with applicable statutes and regulations, and in consideration of biological, economic, and social conditions. The public will be involved in these decisions through planning processes and public review of the Division of Forestry's Five Year Schedule of Timber Sales and Forest Land Use Plans prior to conducting timber sales. See also the "Citizens' Advisory Committee" described in Chapter 4.

### **Relationship of this Plan to Other DNR Plans**

Until the Department of Natural Resources' Commissioner formally adopts the new Susitna State Forest Management Plan, the 1991 Susitna Forestry Guidelines, along with the Matanuska Susitna and Southeast Susitna area plans, will guide forest management on these state lands. Upon adoption, this forest management plan will replace the Susitna Forestry Guidelines and the two area plans' management intent for these legislatively designated areas. The Alaska Interagency Wildland Fire Management Plan will guide the level of fire suppression activities taking place within the state forest.

### **Planning Process**

The Susitna State Forest Management Plan is the product of extensive outreach to the public and various levels of government agencies. The planning process is outlined below:

1. Public and agencies identified issues (scoping).
2. Public-agency working groups developed recommendations to resolve the issues.
3. Interagency planning team prepared a draft plan
4. Draft plan was reviewed by the public; community meetings held
5. Final plan was prepared.
6. Commissioner adopts Management Plan; Division of Forestry implements plan

To assist with plan implementation, and future plan revisions, this new management plan establishes a "Citizens' Advisory Committee" modeled after the twelve member committee created for the Tanana Valley State Forest. Details are located in Chapter 4.

## **Chapter 2 Forest-wide Management Policies**

### **Introduction**

This chapter contains management policies for major resource or land use categories affected by the plan: timber management and protection, fish and wildlife habitat, public access and recreation, subsurface materials, private lands and transportation.

### **Timber Management and Forest Protection**

- Actively manage the State Forest to provide for production, utilization, and replenishment of timber resources through silvicultural practices. Ensure a high level of sustained productivity of timber by maintaining a mosaic of forest types and stand ages. This strategy will also sustain other renewable resources that depend on forest vegetation.
- A forest inventory was completed in 2010 for approximately 75% of the acreage and work is ongoing to complete the project.
- Consistent with AS 41.15.010 and AS 41.15.020, forest resources in the forest will be protected from destructive agents commensurate with the values needing protection.

### **Fish and Wildlife Habitat**

- The wildlife management objective of the Susitna State Forest is the production of wildlife for a high level of sustained yield for human use through habitat improvement techniques to the extent consistent with the primary purpose of this state forest.
- Ensure access to public lands and waters to promote or enhance responsible public use and enjoyment of fish and wildlife resources. Access improvements should be designed to match the public use objectives for the area under consideration.
- Enhance the value of habitat to fish and wildlife species through vegetation manipulation, including burning, crushing, timber harvest, and other management practices.

### **Transportation System and Trails**

- Ensure continued opportunities for public use of important recreation, public access, and historic trails of regional and statewide significance.
- Assist in establishing local trail systems that provide access to community recreation areas; protect or establish trail corridors to meet projected future use requirements and protect current use.
- As all areas of the forest are brought into active management the transportation system will

be expanded by using a variety of road systems. At some point in the future, all areas will have access via an all season or winter road system.

- Develop a transportation system that has the lowest possible long-range cost, including construction, operations, and maintenance. Avoid unnecessary duplication of transportation facilities; consider West Susitna Surface Access Reconnaissance Study.
- Develop a transportation system with minimal adverse impact on the environment, aesthetic and cultural features, and other users. See Conceptual Transportation Plan map at end.

### **Public Access and Recreation**

- The plan's goal is to maintain, enhance, or provide adequate access to publicly-owned land and resources within the state forest.
- When an access route is constructed for resource development, existing public access will not be displaced or rendered unusable by new construction. Various uses of resource development roads shall not restrict the purpose for which the roads were constructed.
- Where feasible and within the limits of available funding, full public rights of access should be provided when roads are constructed by state or local governments for purposes other than forest operations. Perpetual exclusive easements should be acquired and recorded when the state acquires access rights across property in other ownerships adjacent to the State Forest.
- Recreational use of the State Forest is recognized and protected in the State Forest enabling legislation, AS 41.17.230(a), consistent with the purpose of the establishment of the State Forest (AS 41.17.200).

### **Subsurface Materials**

- Make metallic and nonmetallic minerals, coal, oil and gas, materials, and geothermal resources available to contribute to the energy and mineral supplies and independence of the United States and Alaska. All lands that are open to mineral entry are multiple use areas where mineral development will be accommodated and encouraged. There are no proposed mineral closures within the forest.

### **Private Land**

- The management goal is to minimize negative impacts of State Forest activities on adjacent private land.
- During the public review process for the proposed activity, DNR will attempt to contact all private landowners whose land adjoins a proposed timber sale area, road, or other state-initiated development project.



## **Chapter 3 Management Policies for Each Block and Parcel**

### **Introduction**

The primary purpose for the Susitna State Forest is timber production, and this primary purpose extends to each of the management units. Unique characteristics and other special concerns for each of the forest's twenty units will be discussed within the management policies for the unit. In addition, each unit's existing resources and uses will be listed and described, when present, e.g., cultural resources; fish and wildlife habitat; private or leased lands; scientific resources; subsurface resources; timber; and transportation and access. Management guidelines for each unit will address: minerals; recreational facilities; streamside management; timber sales; trails and transportation.

In general, forest units closest to existing surface transportation will be developed first for timber production that serves the area's timber operators and for meeting local demand for firewood. Timber will generally be accessed by winter roads and ice bridges. Public access may be enhanced seasonally with winter timber roads, and year-round when all-season mainline timber roads are constructed.

See the Proposed Susitna State Forest Map at end of plan for locations of the following forest blocks. The table below lists the name of each forest block, its size in acres, and its timber inventory expressed as volume in cubic feet.

<b>Forest Block</b>	<b>Size in Acres</b>	<b>Timber Volume (cubic feet)</b>
East Petersville	18,100	22,061,683
West Petersville	52,900	47,653,894
Yentna	41,900	34,959,849
West Skwentna	54,200	40,802,010
South Skwentna	24,200	6,988,020
East Skwentna	119,300	100,022,217
Mount Susitna	189,500	171,371,881
Alexander Creek	16,100	18,230,484
Susitna	156,300	161,152,244
Red Shirt Lake	14,300	16,380,251
<b>Totals</b>	<b>686,800 acres</b>	<b>619,622,534 cubic feet</b>

## **Chapter 4 Implementation**

### **Agency Land Management Responsibilities**

Agency responsibilities for land management within the Susitna State Forest remain largely the same as those for other State lands. The chief exception is that the Division of Forestry has overall land management authority within state forests. The Division of Forestry will coordinate multiple use planning in the State Forest and is responsible for timber management. The DNR Division of Mining, Land and Water will continue to be responsible for adjudicating land and water use applications and mineral permitting within the state forest.

### **Citizens Advisory Committee for Susitna State Forest**

A Citizens' Advisory Committee (CAC) for the Susitna State Forest (SuSF) is established by this plan. The Committee, in an advisory capacity, will provide recommendations to the Division of Forestry on forest management issues on state forest lands. The Committee does not conflict with the Board of Forestry established by Alaska Statute 41.17.041. The Committee's purpose is to:

- Review and provide Committee recommendations to the Division of Forestry on updates and amendments to the SuSF Management Plan and Five-Year Schedules of Timber Sales (including reforestation and transportation schedules). Site specific Forest Land Use Plans (FLUPs) will be made available to each member for review, during the established review period, however, the Committee is not required to make recommendations on these documents.
- Provide a forum for gathering public opinion on management of state forested land, help to develop a regional consensus on forest management, and provide management recommendations to the Director, Division of Forestry. When consensus cannot be reached on a Committee recommendation, the Committee should forward the majority's recommendation and any different views not represented by the majority's recommendation to the Division.
- Review issues and activities on DNR-managed forested land and recommend management policies to the Director, Division of Forestry.
- Help disseminate information about the SuSF to the public.

Each member should represent the full range of interests within his or her constituency. All CAC members should work to establish two-way communications with other groups and individuals within the interest they represent. Members are expected to bring their constituencies' interests and concerns to the CAC. However, when the Committee makes recommendations, all members should act in consideration of the whole community and the statewide public interest, not just the interest of their immediate constituency.

The CAC consists of the following twelve members appointed by and serving at the pleasure of the Director, Division of Forestry. The term of office is three years. The Director, Division of Forestry will make committee appointments so that four expire each year on a revolving basis. The Director, Division of Forestry will review all applications received from individuals seeking appointment to the CAC without requiring recommendations from the current committee.

***SuSF Citizens' Advisory Committee constituencies.***

<b>Seat</b>	<b>Constituency</b>
Forest Industry	Represents businesses involved in harvesting and/or processing timber resources.
Value-Added Processing	Represents businesses involved in the manufacture of finished wood products and minor forest products.
Environmental Interests	Represents environmental organizations and individuals with environmental interests.
Private Forest User	Represents the incidental forest user for consumptive and non-consumptive activities including subsistence and personal use.
Forest Science	Represents the forest science community. Background should include training, experience and a current knowledge of multiple forestry specialties related to forest ecosystem management to insure adequate representation of the forest science community. Representative should be a forest scientist not currently employed by a state agency other than the University.
Native Community	Represents both individual Alaska Natives and Native organizations in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough area who use the forest or will be directly impacted by forest management actions.
Recreation	Represents the non-commercial users who visit the forest and take advantage of both consumptive and non-consumptive benefits for pleasure and enrichment of life.
Tourism Industry	Represents the commercial operators who directly use forest lands as well as those whose customers are incidentally exposed.
Fish and Wildlife Interests	Represents the full range of interests in fish and wildlife, including sport, and commercial users.
Mining Industry	Represents organizations and individuals involved in the mineral exploration, extraction, and processing industries.
Mat-Su Borough Government	Represents the Matanuska-Susitna Borough's interests.
Other Local Government	Represents, on a rotating basis, one of the local governments or community councils located within or adjoining the State Forest.

When appointing CAC members, the Director, Division of Forestry will seek region-wide geographic representation. The CAC will elect its own presiding officer. The CAC will adopt its own by-laws subject to approval by the Director, Division of Forestry.

## **Process for Reviewing Applications for Permits, Leases, Rights-of Way**

For timber sales, the Forest Land Use Plans will identify proposed access routes and materials sites both within and outside the Susitna State Forest. Temporary routes will be authorized by the Division of Forestry through the FLUP process. Long-term routes will be authorized through a right-of-way (ROW). The Division of Forestry will identify the proposed ROW in the FLUP. Following FLUP review, DOF will submit the ROW application to the Division of Mining, Land and Water (DMLW) to authorize and record the route on the status plats.

Other land management proposals may be initiated by other agencies or private individuals and may include requests for rights-of-way, commercial leases, timber or material sales, or permits for mineral activity, trapping cabins, or grazing. The following process will be used to review these permit or conveyance requests. All applications for use of State Forest land, including mining or prospecting, will be forwarded to the South-central Regional Office of the Division of Mining, Land and Water. The Division of Mining, Land and Water will distribute applications for review by agencies, including the Coastal Regional Office of the Division of Forestry. The Division of Forestry will review applications for consistency with this plan and other existing laws and policies. The Division of Forestry will then return applications to the Division of Mining, Land and Water with stipulations for processing. The Division of Forestry may also require additional review of applications after interagency or public comment. Although preliminary decisions or final findings will continue to be made by the Division of Mining, Land and Water, applications must be consistent with the stipulations given by the Division of Forestry. No permits, leases, disposals, or rights-of-way will be authorized for use of State Forest land that are not consistent with stipulations from the Division of Forestry.

For mining operations, temporary routes will be authorized by the DMLW through its Miscellaneous Land Use Permit (MLUP). For long-term routes, DMLW will issue a ROW.

## **Plan Modification**

The land use designations, policies, implementation actions, and management guidelines of this plan may be changed periodically as new data and new technologies become available and as changing economic, social, and environmental conditions place different demands on public lands.

### ***A. Review***

The plan will be reviewed when significant new issues suggest revisions are necessary. An interagency planning team chaired by the Division of Forestry will coordinate this review at the request of the Department of Natural Resources Commissioner. The plan review will include meetings with interested groups and the general public.

### ***B. Procedures for Plan Changes***

Three kinds of changes are allowed by regulations in 11 AAC 55.030. "A revision to a land use plan is subject to the planning process requirements of AS 38.04.065. For the purposes of this section and AS 38.04.065, a 'revision' is an amendment or special exception to a land use plan as follows:"

1. "An 'amendment' permanently changes the land use plan by adding to or modifying the basic management intent for one or more of the plan's subunits or by changing its allowed or prohibited uses, policies, or guidelines."

A proposal to remove an area from the commercial timber base, to harvest the timber from an area where it is prohibited, or to close an area not identified in this plan to mineral entry are examples of changes requiring amendment. However, amending the Forest Practices Regulations, for example, and inserting those changes in this plan do not require an amendment of the plan. Amendments require public notice, public hearings, and approval by the Commissioner. Amendments may be proposed by agencies, municipalities, or members of the public. Requests for amendments are submitted to the Coastal Regional Office of the Division of Forestry. The Director of the Division of Forestry determines what constitutes an amendment or just a minor change.

2. "A 'special exception' does not permanently change the provisions of a land use plan and cannot be used as the basis for a reclassification of the subunit. Instead, it allows a one-time, limited-purpose variance of the plan's provisions, without changing the plan's general management intent or guidelines. For example, a special exception might be used to grant an eligible applicant a preference right under AS 38.05.035 to purchase land in a subunit designated for retention in public ownership. A special exception might be made if complying with the plan would be excessively burdensome or impractical or if compliance would be inequitable to a third party, and if the purposes and spirit of the plan can be achieved despite the exception."

3. "A minor change to a land use plan is not considered a revision under AS 38.04.065. A 'minor change' is a change that does not modify or add to the plan's basic intent, and that serves only to clarify the plan, make it consistent, facilitate its implementation, or make technical corrections. Authority: AS 38.04.065, AS 38.04.900, AS 38.05.020, AS 38.05.300."

## **Appendices**

### **Glossary**

**Allowable cut:** The volume of timber that may be cut from a forest under optimum sustained- yield management (Stoddard and Stoddard, 1987).

**Diameter at breast height (DBH):** The diameter of the stem of a tree measured at breast height (4.5 feet) from the ground. On sloping ground, the measurement is taken from the uphill side (Society of American Foresters, 1998).

**Forest land:** Land stocked or having been stocked with forest trees of any size and not currently developed for nonforest use, regardless of whether presently available or accessible for commercial purposes (AS 41.17.950 (5)). Regarding land classification, land classified “forest land” is land that is or has been forested and is suited for forest management because of its physical, climatic, and vegetative conditions (11 AAC 55.070).

**Ice bridge:** A bridge of ice across a lake, river, or stream, either natural or constructed to a specified thickness to safely accommodate specified vehicle loads.

**Multiple use:** The term “multiple use” as defined in the Alaska Forest Resources and Practices Act means:

1. The management of all the various resources of forest land so that they are used in the combination that will best meet the needs of the citizens of the state, making the most judicious use of the land for some or all of these resources or related values, benefits, and services over areas large enough to provide sufficient latitude for periodic adjustment in use to conform to changing needs and conditions;
2. That some land will be used for less than all of the resources; and
3. Harmonious and coordinated management of the various resources, each with the other, without significant impairment of the productivity of the land and water, with consideration being given to the relative values of the various resources, and not necessarily the combination of uses that will give the greatest dollar return or the greatest unit output (AS 41.17.950 (8)).

**Primary all-season road:** Regarding timber access, an all-season road which generally provides access to within five miles of timber resources. Built to a higher standard than secondary all-season roads

**Primary winter road:** Regarding timber access, a road built and used during the winter. Built to a higher standard than secondary winter roads. See also ‘winter road’.

**Sawtimber:** Trees that will yield logs suitable in size and quality for the production of lumber. Spruce must be at least 9 inches and hardwoods 11 inches diameter at breast height.

**Scarification:** 1. Mechanical removal of competing vegetation or interfering debris, or disturbance of the soil surface, to enhance reforestation. 2. Chemical, mechanical, heat, or moisture treatment of seeds to make the seed coat permeable and improve germination (Society of American Foresters, 1998).

**Secondary all-season road:** Regarding timber access, an all-season road which generally provides access to within ¼ mile of timber resources. Built to a lesser standard than primary all-season roads, but to a higher standard than spur roads.

**Secondary winter road:** Regarding timber access, a road built and used during the winter. Built to a lesser standard than primary winter roads. See also 'winter road'.

**Spur road:** A short, low-standard road that supports a low level of traffic such as serving one or two landings (Society of American Foresters, 1998). Spur roads are generally built within harvest units.

**Stand:** A contiguous group of trees sufficiently uniform in age-class distribution, composition, and structure, and growing on a site of sufficiently uniform quality, to be a distinguishable unit (Society of American Foresters, 1998).

**State forest:** An area designated by the legislature and retained in state ownership in order to a) provide a base for sustained yield management of renewable resources; and b) permit a variety of beneficial uses (AS 41.17.950 (16)).

**State lands:** All lands, including shore, tide and submerged lands, or resources belonging to or acquired by the state (AS 38.05.965 (20)).

**Sustained yield:** The achievement and maintenance in perpetuity of a high level annual or regular periodic output of the various renewable resources of forest land and water without significant impairment of the productivity of the land and water, but does not require that timber be harvested in a non-declining yield basis over a rotation period (AS 41.17.950 (17)). Another definition of sustained yield is in AS 38.04.910 (12) and should be applied in the context of AS 38.04 authorities and requirements.

**Water bar:** A shallow channel or raised barrier of soil or other material laid diagonally across the surface of a road or skid trail to lead water off the road and prevent soil erosion (Society of American Foresters, 1998). Often used to put a road to bed.

**Winter road:** A road that can normally support regular logging vehicle traffic only during winter months that has a load-bearing capacity derived from a combination of frost, snow, or ice (11 AAC 95.900(90)).

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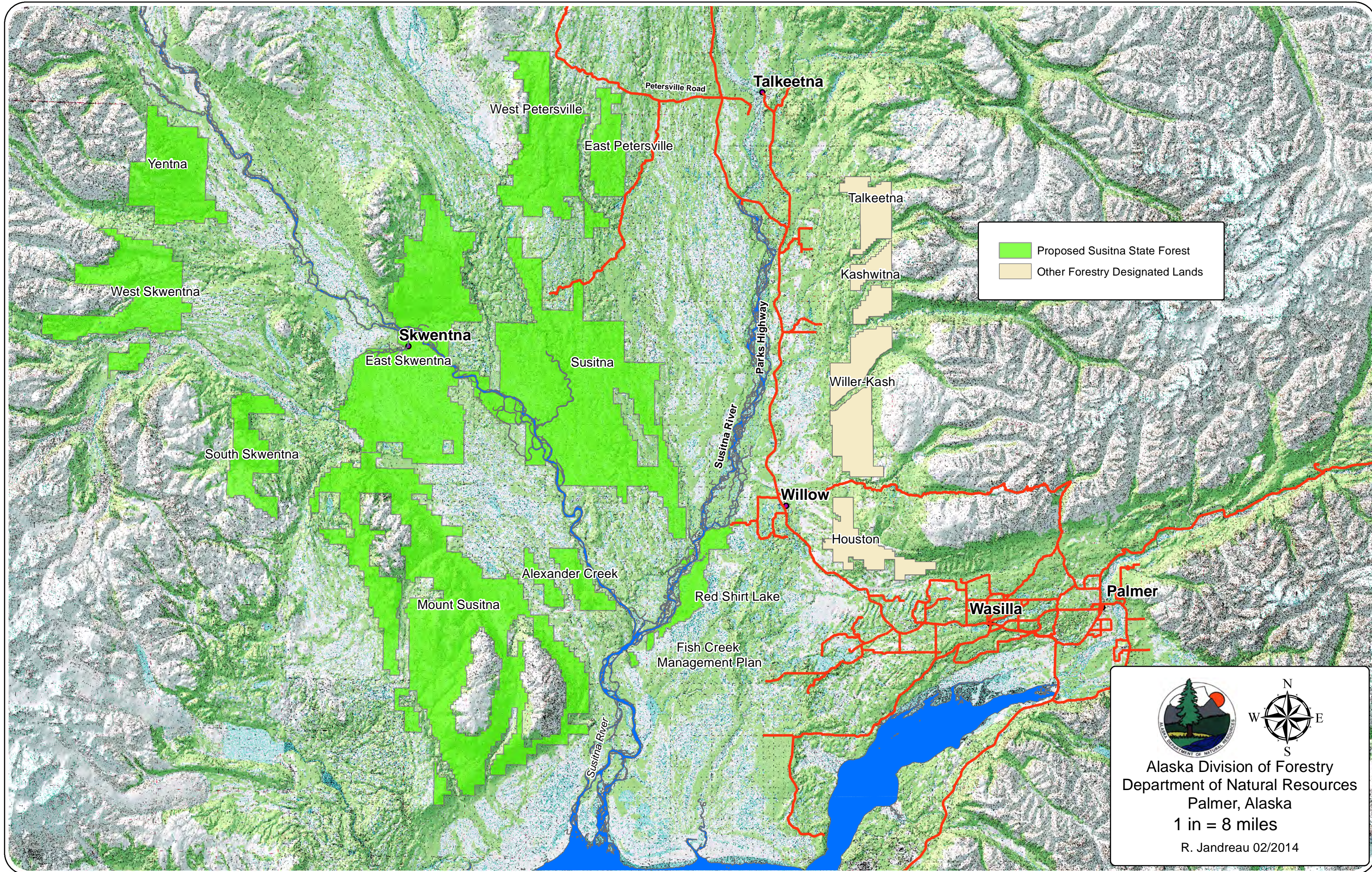
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## **Map of Proposed Susitna State Forest Blocks and Units**

## **Map of Conceptual Transportation Plan for the Proposed Susitna State Forest**





Proposed Susitna State Forest

Other Forestry Designated Lands



Alaska Division of Forestry  
Department of Natural Resources  
Palmer, Alaska  
1 in = 8 miles  
R. Jandreau 02/2014



# Map of Conceptual Transportation Plan for the Proposed Susitna State Forest

