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163



STATE OF ALASKA
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
BILL ANALYSIS

DEPARTMENT Fish and Game	DIVISION Habitat	BILL NUMBER SB163	SPONSOR Senator Kerttula
DEPARTMENT POSITION Support			
PREPARED BY Habitat Division	DATE 3/10/87	COMMISSIONER'S SIGNATURE <i>Donna Callenworth</i>	DATE 3-17-87

SUMMARY

OTHER AGENCIES AFFECTED BY BILL Department of Natural Resources	CONSTITUENT GROUP(S) AFFECTED BY BILL Hunting, fishing, trapping, recreational interests, Palmer/Wasilla area residents
ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT FOR BILL Nataruska-Susitna Borough Department of Natural Resources Environmental Organizations	ORGANIZATIONAL OPPOSITION TO BILL None known

FISCAL IMPACT: NONE FISCAL NOTE ATTACHED

BACKGROUND/LEGISLATIVE INTENT

The purpose of establishing Willow Mountain Critical Habitat Area is to protect and preserve the habitat that is most crucial to the perpetuation of fish and wildlife populations, especially moose.

ANALYSIS OF BILL/PROGRAM EFFECTS

The bill establishes Willow Mountain Critical Habitat Area. It provides for the management of the area under the State Critical Habitat Area program. It establishes the purpose for which the area is to be managed and ensures protection of essential moose habitat.

AMENOMENTS PROPOSED

PLEASE ATTACH A SEPARATE SHEET FOR ADDITIONAL COMMENTS OR ANALYSIS.

STATE OF ALASKA 1987 LEGISLATIVE SESSION
FISCAL NOTE

REQUEST: _____

Bill Version: SB163
Publish Date: 3/4/87

Revision Date: _____

Agency Affected: Fish and Game

Title: An Act establishing the Willow

BRU: _____

Mountain Critical Habitat Area

Sponsor: Kerttula

Components: _____

Requestor: _____

EXPENDITURES/REVENUES: (Thousands of Dollars)

OPERATING	FY 87	FY 88	FY 89	FY 90	FY 91	FY 92
PERSONAL SERVICES		0				
TRAVEL		0				
CONTRACTUAL		0				
SUPPLIES		0				
EQUIPMENT		0				
LAND & STRUCTURES		0				
GRANTS, CLAIMS		0				
MISCELLANEOUS		0				
TOTAL OPERATING		0				
CAPITAL		0				
REVENUE		0				

FUNDING: (Thousands of Dollars)

GENERAL FUND		0				
FEDERAL FUNDS		0				
OTHER		0				
TOTAL		0				

POSITIONS:

FULL-TIME		0				
PART-TIME		0				
TEMPORARY		0				

ANALYSIS : (Attach a separate page if necessary)

Prepared by: Bruce Baker

Phone: 465-4105

Division: Habitat

Date: 3/16/87

Approved by Commissioner: Orin Pellendworth

Date: 3-17-87

Agency: Fish and Game

Distribution (by preparer):

- Legislative Finance
- Legislative Sponsor
- Requestor
- Office of Management and Budget
- Impacted Agency(ies)
- Senate Secretary

SENATE COMMITTEE REPORT

FIRST COMMITTEE OF REFERRAL

Date of 4/10/87 5-DAY NOTICE
IN ACCORDANCE WITH UNIFORM RULE 23

FURTHER: TRANSPORTATION
RESOURCES

**FISCAL NOTE(S) ATTACHED **
IN ACCORDANCE WITH AS 24.08.035
(see below)

DATE TURNED INTO OFFICE 4/17/87

Mr. President:

C&RA Committee considered SB 153

establishing the Willow Mountain Critical Habitat Area; efd.

and recommended:

replace with CS for SB 163 (C&H) same title
 attached amendment(s) and new title

do pass

do not pass

no recommendation

individual recommendations

further referral to _____

letter of intent adopted and attached

** Committee attached or adopted fiscal note(s)
 zero fiscal impact

MEMBERS SIGNING DO PASS

OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

Rick Hatfield
Mike Symons

Antoni Stupalski Do Pass
Chairman signature and recommendation

Committee Backup Attached

STATE OF ALASKA 1987 LEGISLATIVE SESSION
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 Sponsor: Korttula
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 BRU: _____
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EXPENDITURES/REVENUES: (Thousands of Dollars)

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ANALYSIS : (Attach a separate page if necessary)

Prepared by: Bruce Baker
 Division: Habitat
 Approved by Commissioner: Orin Bellensworth
 Agency: Fish and Game

Phone: 465-4105
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- Distribution (by preparer):
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Alaska State Legislature

ARLISS STURGULEWSKI, Chairman
TIM KELLY, Vice Chairman
RICK HALFORD
MIKE SZYMANSKI
FRED ZHAROFF



P. O. BOX V
JUNEAU, ALASKA 99811
(907) 465-4989

Senate Community and Regional Affairs Committee

TO: Senate C&RA Members

April 16, 1987

FROM: Senate C&RA Staff

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be "MFA", written over the "FROM:" line.

RE: SB 163 - "An Act establishing the Willow Mountain Critical Habitat Area; and providing for an effective date."

This bill establishes the Willow Mountain Critical Habitat Area. The original bill was only a boundary description. The committee substitute adds some management language to the bill and is the result of work by the sponsor, the departments of Fish and Game and Natural Resources and committee staff. All of these parties are supportive of the CS.

Dick Bradley, of Legislative Legal Services has expressed concern that committee members understand that there are other existing statutes regarding management of critical habitat areas that will also apply to this area. A copy of those statutes are in this packet.

Also in this packet are position papers and zero fiscal notes from Fish and Game and DNR, a copy of the relevant section of the Hatcher Pass Management Plan, a letter from the mayor of the Mat-Su borough expressing the assembly unanimous support for the bill, and a map of the area.

STATE OF ALASKA

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER

STEVE COWPER, GOVERNOR

400 WILLOUGHBY AVE.
JUNEAU, ALASKA 99801-1796
PHONE: (907) 465-2400

April 16, 1987

The Honorable Arliss Sturgulewski
Chair, Senate Community & Regional
Affairs Committee
Alaska State Legislature
P.O. Box V
Juneau, AK 99811

Dear Senator Sturgulewski:

Subject: CSSB 163, establishing the Willow Mountain
Critical Habitat Area.

Background: Willow Mountain contains numerous moose and, because of its proximity to urban locations, is an important moose hunting area. The planning team agreed that the area would be managed to maintain wildlife productivity and provide opportunities for hunting, trapping and recreation. The team also agreed that the area would remain open to mineral entry and forestry operations would be limited to disease control and habitat enhancement.

Position: The Department of Natural Resources supports the conclusion of the recently adopted Hatcher Pass Management Plan that this area be legislatively designated to ensure its long-term retention in public ownership and management for wildlife habitat values and public recreation. CSSB 163 will meet the conclusion of the Hatcher Pass Management Plan.

Please let me know if you would like additional information about the Hatcher Pass Management Plan.

Sincerely,



Judith M. Brady
Commissioner

cc: Committee Members
Bill Sponsors
Rod Swope
George Sullivan
Commissioner Collinsworth

STATE OF ALASKA 1987 LEGISLATIVE SESSION
FISCAL NOTE

REQUEST: _____
 Revision Date: 4/13/87
 Title: An act establishing the Willow Mountain Critical Habitat Area
 Sponsor: Kerttula
 Requestor: Senate C&RA

Bill Version: CSSB 163
 Publish Date: _____

Agency Affected: Natural Resources
 BRU: Land and Water Management
 Components: _____

EXPENDITURES/REVENUES: (Thousands of Dollars)

OPERATING	FY 87	FY 88	FY 89	FY 90	FY 91	FY 92
PERSONAL SERVICES	0	0	0	0	0	0
TRAVEL						
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MISCELLANEOUS						
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CAPITAL	0	0	0	0	0	0
REVENUE	0	0	0	0	0	0

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FEDERAL FUNDS						
OTHER						
TOTAL	0	0	0	0	0	0

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PART-TIME						
TEMPORARY						

ANALYSIS : (Attach a separate page if necessary)

The Department of Natural Resources anticipates no additional funding requirements stemming from this legislation.

Prepared by: Carol Wilson Phone: 465-2400
 Division: Commissioner's Office Date: 4/13/87
 Approved by Commissioner: [Signature] Date: 4/14/87
 Agency: Natural Resources

Distribution (by preparer):
 Legislative Finance
 Legislative Sponsor
 Requestor
 Office of Management and Budget
 Impact Agency(ies)
 Senate Secretary



STATE OF ALASKA
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
BILL ANALYSIS

*2007-2 copies
File*

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AMENDMENTS PROPOSED

PLEASE ATTACH A SEPARATE SHEET FOR ADDITIONAL COMMENTS OR ANALYSIS



Matanuska-Susitna Borough

BOX B. PALMER, ALASKA 99645 • PHONE 745-4801

BOROUGH ASSEMBLY

February 5, 1987

FEB 9 1987

Jan Faiks, Senate President
State of Alaska
Pouch V
Juneau, AK 99811

RE: Willow Mountain Critical Habitat Area ←

Dear Senator Faiks:

The Matanuska-Susitna Borough Assembly voted unanimously on February 3, 1987 to approve and endorse legislation to create the Willow Mountain Critical Habitat Area (approximately 23,000 acres) and to express concern for ensuring that the management intent of the area stays in-tact as described in the Hatcher Pass Management Plan.

If you should have any questions or need further information, please feel free to contact my office.

Sincerely,

Dorothy A. Jones
Dorothy A. Jones, Mayor
Matanuska-Susitna Borough

DJ/clb
Enclosure

cc: Commissioner, Dept. of Fish & Game
Senators ✓Kerttula & Szymanski
Representatives Larson & Menard
Jack Didrickson

HATCHER PASS

MANAGEMENT PLAN

FINAL
OCTOBER, 1986



Prepared by:

Alaska Department of Natural Resources

In cooperation with:

Alaska Department of Fish and Game

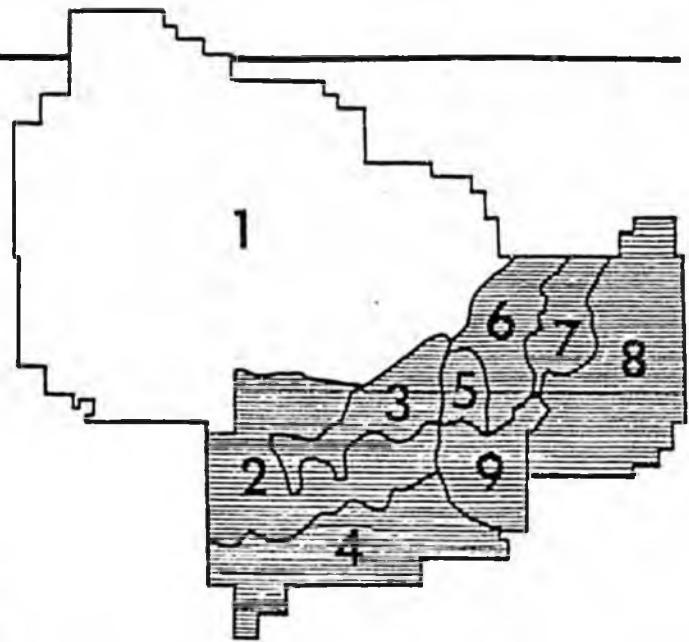
Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities

Matanuska-Susitna Borough



Alaska Department of
**NATURAL
RESOURCES**

I. Willow Mountain

A. LAND USE DESIGNATIONS

Primary Uses: Fish and Wildlife Habitat, Recreation

Secondary Uses: Grazing (see Map 11 for location)

Prohibited Uses: Settlement, Remote Cabin Permits, Commercial Recreation Development, Grazing outside designated areas (see Map 3, pages 116/117)

Mining: Open

B. BACKGROUND

The rugged peaks of the Talkeetna Mountains end in a gently sloped plateau known as Willow Mountain in this subunit. Peters, Purches and Little Willow Creeks flow out of steep-walled mountain valleys to the north and south of the Willow Mountain plateau. The lowlands portions of the subunit contain many swampy areas that make access difficult.

Willow Mountain is an important moose habitat area. Year-round populations between 1,500 and 2,000 moose occur in western portions of this unit and are among the highest in the Susitna Basin. Willow Mountain provides winter and summer moose habitat that supports breeding and calving activities. This is an important moose hunting area due to its relative accessibility to urban areas and an abundance of moose. The alpine zone (above 2,800 feet in elevation) is good bear, sheep, and caribou habitat, and brown and black bear are often seen in these areas. Furbearing animals are also common and trapping is an important use of the area. Black bear and ptarmigan hunting are popular as well.

Extensive placer claims occur along Peters and Purches Creeks; mineral potential in the eastern mountainous portion is high. However, the Willow Mountain plateau has low mineral potential.

The Willow Mountain subunit contains a significant portion of the potential range resources within the management unit. However, many portions of the Willow Mountain plateau where most of the grazing resources occur in the subunit has boggy and standing water areas, and access is difficult.

Currently, there are no roads to this subunit. Motorized access is by aircraft, snowmachine or all terrain vehicle. This is a popular snowmachining area due to extensive, wide-open terrain. A cabin built by the Mat-Su Motor Musers and used by the public is located on the southeast corner of the Willow Mountain plateau. Dog mushing also occurs in some areas. Views of the Susitna Valley and Alaska Range from Willow Mountain are spectacular. Wilderness foot travel occurs in the steep eastern portions. Bogs, brush, wetlands and creeks limit summer and fall access in the lowlands portions of this subunit. Extensive ORV trails occur in the wetlands in the southwest corner of the subunit. The Peters-Purches trail which goes over Lucky Shot Ridge receives its heaviest use during moose hunting season. However, erosion and trail widening is occurring in the steep portions and in bogs along the existing trail alignment.

There is high forestry potential on the western edge below 1000 feet where a dense white spruce forest occurs. Access for forestry to the proposed Kashwitna State Forest area west of Willow Mountain is planned in the near future.

C. MANAGEMENT INTENT

The Willow Mountain subunit will be managed primarily to maintain its exceptional wildlife productivity and to continue to provide opportunities for hunting, trapping and other dispersed recreational activities to meet existing and future demand. The entire subunit is open to mineral entry.

The management intent includes reserving the option to utilize existing grass forage resources for future grazing; however, the priority is to utilize the grasslands in the Hillside and Little Susitna subunits prior to those in the Willow Mountain subunit. In the interim, research should be conducted to determine whether grazing can take place without major adverse impact to wildlife habitat.

Forestry is an allowed use in the western perimeter of the subunit. The intent is that any forestry operations will be limited to disease control or habitat enhancement as defined by ADF&G and compatible with scenic views from the ridge above.

Motorized access is an important use for hunting, trapping, and general recreation. The intent is for these uses to continue. The management intent is to limit summer/fall use to designated trails to minimize erosion and trailmaking. An exception will be to allow retrieval of

downed big game animals. This policy will be put into effect after working with users to clearly map and sign designated trails. No highway vehicles will be allowed in the Willow Mountain Subunit (unless authorized as part of a mineral development). New trails may be established within the subunit and designated for a specific use, such as for dog mushing, ATV and snowmachine use.

D. PLANNED ACTIONS

1. HABITAT DESIGNATION

The moose concentration area on the west slope of Willow Mountain is proposed for legislative designation to ensure long term retention in public ownership and management for its wildlife values (see Map 11). ADF&G originally proposed that the plan recommend that the entire subunit be legislatively designated as a Critical Habitat Area and a portion closed to mineral entry. However, the planning team was unable to agree on this. See Appendix X for further explanation.

2. TRAIL REPAIR

Where erosion and extensive trail making in boggy areas is occurring, DNR and ADF&G should work with users to reduce trail damage, establish trail erosion prevention measures and do minimal trail improvements to maintain motorized access opportunities.

3. SNOWMACHINE USE AND MOOSE

If there is documentation that snow machine use is adversely affecting overwintering moose in certain areas, seasonal closures in these key areas may be established.

4. MOTORIZED USE MANAGEMENT POLICY

A special use area will be established for off-road vehicle use. When there is insufficient snow cover to protect the soil and vegetation from cutting and erosion, motorized use will occur on designated trails only by non-highway vehicles. An exception will be to allow retrieval of big game. This policy will be put into effect once DNR and ADF&G work with users to map and designate a trail system. See Chapter Three, ORV Management Guidelines, page 160, for more information.

5. IDENTIFY BROWN BEAR CONCENTRATIONS

ADF&G will identify brown bear concentration areas and habitat use areas and make a recommendation to DNR on when a significant potential or actual conflict with grazing may exist.

6. PUBLIC USE CABINS

The existing cabin on Willow Mountain built by the Mat-Su Motor Musers should be converted to a public use cabin. Agreements with recreational groups may be negotiated for its maintenance. Other cabins on public land in the subunit should also be evaluated for suitability as public cabins.

Other public cabins may be established at three possible backcountry locations. Potential sites are indicated on the land plan map.

7. DOG MUSHING TRAIL

Establish a 20-mile dog mushing loop trail. The location is to be determined by DNR based on consultation with ADF&G, and recreational users.

8. CROSS COUNTRY SKI TRAIL

Establish a cross-country ski trail in the forest/alpine transition zone accessible to the Hatcher Pass Road.

E. GUIDELINES1. FORESTRY/BROWSE ENHANCEMENT

Type of Forestry Cuts. Timber harvest to enhance moose habitat may occur. If this occurs cutting areas will be located on the western perimeter of this unit and must receive concurrence with ADF&G and DNR. DOF maintains the option, however, to institute emergency harvests for insect control after receiving ADF&G approval. ADF&G maintains the statutory obligation to institute habitat enhancement activities when necessary and appropriate.

2. GRAZING

a. Grazing on Important Habitat Lands. Grazing is proposed to occur on Willow Mountain only after complete utilization of the grass resources of the Little Susitna and Hillside units. The option to graze livestock in this unit shall be retained and research should be initiated and continued to determine how to make livestock and wildlife uses compatible in this area. There are approximately 8600 acres of land that is potentially feasible for grazing between Canyon

Creek and an unnamed stream in Section 24, Township 21 North, Range 3 West. About 17-20 miles of fence may be required.

- b. Grazing Season. Cattle shall be removed from the range two weeks prior to opening of the moose hunting season.
- c. Grazing in Habitat Areas. See area-wide policy in Chapter 3, page 121.

3. ACCESS

- a. Minimize Wildlife Impacts. Any new roads and trails proposed for forestry, mining, recreation or grazing within or near the subunit will be designed to minimize negative impacts to the wildlife resources and related public uses. Access routes will be centralized and of very low density. ADF&G will be consulted on location prior to authorization.
- b. Public Use of Mining Roads. The public use of access roads developed for mining will be determined on a case-by-case basis by ADF&G and DNR, based on what will be most beneficial to the management of the moose population. The options are private or public access, temporary or permanent. That is, use of the access road by highway vehicles may be restricted to mine personnel only if necessary to minimize impacts to wildlife. The mine operator may be required to remove the road upon completion of the project. The other option would be to keep it open as a public access road. Seasonal use restrictions may be authorized.
- c. Wetlands. Where an ever-widening network of trail making is occurring in the Willow Mountain subunit, DNR and ADF&G will work with user groups and/or state correctional facility labor to do primitive corduroy-type improvements to enable access through the bogs for hunting purposes. The level of damage to these wetlands should be assessed by DNR and ADF&G and recommendations made for rehabilitation and prevention of further damage.

4. RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITY SPECTRUM

- a. Setting. The intended recreational setting described in Part "a" is for the purpose of guidance to land managers who must adjudicate land use requests. It is not intended to be a hard and fast set of rules.
 - (1) Physical Setting: Predominantly natural appearing environment in western portions; unmodified, natural environment in the eastern, mountainous portions
 - (2) Social Setting: Low concentration of users except in moose season; low interaction between users

- (3) Managerial Setting: Minimum of on-site controls
 - (4) Access and Mode of Travel: Designated trails for ORV use with minimum improvements to prevent rutting and erosion in western portions; cross-country foot travel in mountains; aircraft access
 - (5) Vegetative Alterations and duration of impact: Moderate loss of vegetation and soil on major trail routes and where camping occurs, trail impacts persist from year to year. Non-trail areas should only show temporary impacts.
 - (6) Type of Experience: High probability of seeing wildlife, experiencing quiet and solitude (except for trail areas), freedom, challenge, risk, closeness to nature
- b. Facilities. The purpose of this section is to describe the intended level of recreation facility development. Where no facilities are proposed, this does not mean it is a prohibited use.
- (1) Public Facilities: Public cabins: one each in Peters and Purches below timberline, one existing Willow Mountain, one in alpine north of Dogsled Pass; parking at Peters-Purches trailhead
 - (2) Camp Sites: No developed sites
 - (3) Picnic Sites: None planned
 - (4) Water Supply: None planned
 - (5) Sanitation: Outhouses at public cabins
 - (6) Signs: Limited signing for designated trails
 - (7) Water Crossings: Ford crossings, no bridges
 - (8) Interpretative: Interpretation through self-discovery
- c. Guidelines for Appropriate Commercial or Other Private Uses to be Authorized by Lease or Permit
- (1) Commercial and Other Private Uses: None by lease; generally permitted activities as listed in the Division of Land and Water Management Policy and Procedure Manual (Chapter 5122, Section 01) will not be affected; applications for permit will be considered on a case-by-case basis if compatible with guidelines and management intent.
 - (2) Stimulations on Private Uses: It is important that private uses maintain the recreation setting as described above and provide a clear public benefit. Additionally, private recreational uses must require no roads and not negatively impact wildlife populations.

