

# Tanana Basin Area Plan Amendment: Volkmar Bluffs RNA

## Background

This amendment to the Tanana Basin Area Plan creates a new subunit within Subunit 7D4 of the Tanana Basin Area Plan. The northeast ¼ of Section 28, T9S R13E, Fairbanks Meridian, will be renamed 7D5. The new subunit lies adjacent to Tanana Valley State Forest Subunit 10B, the Volkmar Bluffs Research Natural Area (see Map of RNA 10B). This quarter-section of land within the Tanana Basin planning area encompasses a large prairie feature that appears to be part of the prairie system in the adjacent Tanana Valley State Forest research natural area. This amendment is designed to expand the research natural area to include the remainder of that prairie system.

The Volkmar Bluffs Research Natural Area is a unique hill prairie with especially gentle slopes that support several uncommon plant species. The bluffs may be maintained on such a gentle slope in a non-forested condition by 1) thin, rocky soils, 2) extreme rain shadow effect and low annual precipitation, and 3) active and relatively recent fire history. Because it is relatively hot and dry, compared to surrounding sites, this area may be a good representation of how plant communities would respond to global warming.

The northwest corner of the research natural area within the Tanana Valley State Forest includes a small part of a large prairie feature, but the rest of the feature lies to the west of the RNA. By expanding the research natural area into Tanana Basin Area Plan land, it will include the remainder of that prairie system.

## Amendment

Additions to the original Tanana Basin Area Plan (1991 Update) are underlined; deletions are ~~struck out~~.

Tanana Basin Area Plan, p. 3-215, paragraph 1

## Management Intent

General. ~~This~~ Most of this management unit will be retained in public ownership and managed for multiple use, with an emphasis on recreation and fish and wildlife values. Subunit 7D5, formerly the northeast ¼ of Section 28, T9S R13E in Subunit 7D4, is recommended to be added to the Tanana Valley State Forest, and will be managed for scientific research values. Except for Subunit 7D5, ~~the~~ unit will remain open to mineral entry. The lower Goodpaster River corridor (Subunit 7D1) will be managed to maintain and enhance the recreational and scenic values of the river. The upper Goodpaster River corridor (Subunit 7D2) will be managed to maintain and enhance the habitat values of the river.

p. 3-216, add after paragraph 1

Scientific Resources. Subunit 7D5, formerly the northeast ¼ of Section 28, T9S R13E in Subunit 7D4, is recommended to be added to the Tanana Valley State Forest, and will be managed as part of the adjacent research natural area in the Tanana Valley State Forest. This

quarter section of land encompasses a large prairie feature that appears to be part of the prairie system in the adjacent Tanana Valley State Forest research natural area.

The Volkmar Bluffs Research Natural Area is a unique hill prairie with especially gentle slopes that support several uncommon plant species. The bluffs may be maintained on such a gentle slope in a non-forested condition by 1) thin, rocky soils, 2) extreme rain shadow effect and low annual precipitation, and 3) active and relatively recent fire history. Because it is relatively hot and dry, compared to surrounding sites, this area may be a good representation of how plant communities would respond to global warming. The guidelines for research natural areas are found in the Scientific Resources section of Chapter 2 in the Tanana Valley State Forest Management Plan (2000 Update), and are included in the following Management Guidelines section.

p. 3-216, add after Visual Impacts section

Scientific Resources. Subunit 7D5, formerly the northeast ¼ of Section 28, T9S R13E in Subunit 7D4, will be managed as part of the adjacent research natural area in the Tanana Valley State Forest. The guidelines for research natural areas from the TVSF Management Plan are as follows:

#### **A. Research Natural Areas**

Research natural areas are intended to provide sites within which baseline ecological research and education can be conducted. It is intended that these areas be maintained in their natural state as much as possible.

##### **1. Incompatible Activities and Uses**

The following activities will typically not be authorized unless they are found to be consistent with the management intent for the area. Authorizations will be conditioned to protect research natural areas from incompatible activities.

1. Timber harvest
2. Material extraction
3. Developed recreation
4. Improved pasture or unimproved grazing
5. Trapping cabins
6. Introduction of species not native to the area

Currently, DOF does not expect incidental individual activities to impair research natural areas. However, if Generally Allowed Uses (11 AAC 96) threaten the integrity of a research natural area, DNR may establish a Special Use Land designation (under 11 AAC 96.010) in the future to regulate individuals' activities within RNAs. The Special Use Land designation is consistent with the TVSF Management Plan, and may be established without an amendment to this plan. Examples of activities that may be regulated include:

1. Use of all motorized ground vehicles, such as snowmachines, tracked vehicles, four-wheel drive vehicles, pickup trucks, automobiles, and motorcycles off established rights-of-way.
2. Campfires and warming fires.
3. Gathering of dead and down wood, and collection of other plant materials.
4. Camping on vegetated sites.
5. Digging or excavating.

6. Disturbance or removal of vegetation including brushing survey lines or trails, cutting or removing vegetation.
7. Driving livestock or grazing domesticated animals.
8. Placing of markers or stakes.

**2. Access through Research Natural Areas**

A research natural area shall not block access to or use of other resources. When access through a research natural area is necessary (if there is no other feasible and prudent access route to resources beyond the RNA), roads will be designed and located to protect the features for which the RNA was designated, as much as possible. Roads will be designed in consultation with researchers or research agencies with a known interest in the RNA.

If research is being done in the RNA, the researcher must be consulted before any authorizations are issued to avoid impacts to research. Access through the research natural area will be designed to avoid impacts to the research site whenever possible.

The entity building the road will be required to sign the entry and exit points from the RNA.

**3. Posting of Incompatible Activities**

Signs will be posted at likely entry points to research natural areas. The signs will list activities that are regulated or are incompatible with the RNA.

**4. Mineral Exploration**

Mineral exploration will be conducted in research natural areas so that scientific values are minimally disrupted. Surface geophysical or geochemical surveys must show positive results before heavy equipment is permitted to operate within prospecting sites or mineral claims. Results of such surveys will be made available to the general public.

**5. Fire Management**

The Division of Forestry will consult with appropriate research agencies in planning fire suppression activities, except for initial attack, within research natural areas.

**6. Hunting and Trapping**

Research natural areas are open to hunting and trapping. Hunting and trapping of certain animal species of scientific interest may be restricted temporarily during periods of study.

**7. Research Notification**

Researchers are encouraged to notify the Division of Forestry of the location of their research area, and the type of research being done. A permit is not required for research that only involves Generally Allowed Uses. However, if DOF has been notified, the research site can be protected from disturbance by development activities.

p. 3-217, add to summary chart after 7D4 row:

| Subunit  | Primary Surface Uses | Secondary Surface Uses               | Subsurface   | Prohibited Surface Uses   | Comments   |
|--|----------------------|--------------------------------------|--|---|--|
| <u>7D5:<br/>NE ¼<br/>Sec. 28,<br/>T9S<br/>R13E</u> | <u>Watershed</u>     | <u>Forestry<br/>Wildlife habitat</u> | <u>Locatable:<br/>Open, but<br/>restricted<br/><br/>Leasehold:<br/>Available<br/>for leasing</u> | <u>Commercial leases<br/>Developed recreation<br/>Material extraction<br/>Remote cabins<br/>Timber harvest<br/>Trapping cabins<br/>Introduction of non-</u> | <u>Proposed<br/>for addition<br/>to Tanana<br/>Valley<br/>State<br/>Forest</u> |

|  |  |  |  |                        |  |
|--|--|--|--|------------------------|--|
|  |  |  |  | <u>endemic species</u> |  |
|--|--|--|--|------------------------|--|

p. 4-15, add to end of Research and Monitoring section:

The prairie feature in the Subunit 7D5, formerly the northeast ¼ of Section 28, T9S R13E in Subunit 7D4, is recommended to be added to the Tanana Valley State Forest, and will be managed as part of the adjacent research natural area in the Tanana Valley State Forest. Incompatible activities and uses for this area are listed in Chapter 3, in the Management Guidelines for Unit 7.