

Susitna Valley Forest Management Plan

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

DIVISION OF FORESTRY & FIRE PROTECTION

June 30, 2026

Contact: Trevor DoBell-Carlsson, Cooperative Forestry Programs Manager & Forest Planner trevor.dobell@alaska.gov

Agenda

Framing the discussion

Group Expectations

Group discussion

Identify next steps

Project Background

The Division of Forestry and Fire Protection is establishing a new Susitna Valley Forest management plan. This plan is created to replace the Susitna Forestry guidelines created in 1991. The 1991 guidelines, being over 30 years old, need to be revised. The intention was to supersede the 1991 Guidelines sooner, within 10 years, but that never happened. Other than forestry land use, the area also has mineral resources that have been mined for decades. Rivers and lakes make great opportunities for recreation such as hunting, fishing, rafting, hiking and camping in these areas, along with other land-based recreation.

Purpose: To provide stakeholders local to the area an opportunity to contribute considerations and recommendations regarding the management of forest resources within the Susitna Valley and to include this perspective in the development of a management plan draft prior to the public review period.

Expected outcome: A summary of recommendations and considerations related to forest management within the Susitna Valley from the perspective of the local recreation users. This discussion is intended to capture the perspective of recreation entities in the area regarding the management of land and resources, and values and uses that are important to this group and your constituents.

Topic: Recreation focus group. What solutions or concepts can facilitate the co-existence of forestry activities and other uses within the Susitna Valley?

Rules of Engagement (adapted from National Coalition of Dialogue and Deliberation frameworks)

- The moderator will guide the discussion but refrain from participating.
- Everyone is encouraged to participate. Once you have shared, wait for two others to contribute before weighing in again.
- The discussion stays focused on the issue at hand (forest management policy within the Susitna Valley).

- Maintain an atmosphere for discussion and analysis of our options. This is a discussion, not a debate.
- Ask questions to gain understanding/clarity.
- Give constructive feedback. We are here to talk about ideas, not people.
- We will work together toward describing balanced resource management within the Susitna Valley.
- We may not make it through all the discussion questions today. Is the group open to following up virtually?

Discussion Questions

Introductions: What is your name and what is one thing you hope to accomplish in this conversation today?

- this is Becky Long in Talkeetna I'm a board member of the Susitna River Coalition and I was originally a member of the citizens advisory committee back in the end of the 80s beginning of the 90s for the Susitna Forestry Guidelines. And I also was a member of the Susitna Valley Association that was formed in response to the state logging plan.
- You speak about a draft coming out and I hope it does not come out in the summer because people will not have a chance to really look at it very robustly in the summer and also I would hope that the comment period is like 3 months. Especially if it comes out in the summer or the fall we're going to need a lot of time and so that's one of the things. What I hope to get out of this is just to learn a lot about where you guys are going with the plan and hearing other stakeholders.
- Susitna Forestry Guidelines is unique in the state and it was formed because division of forestry came out with some extensive logging plans that people got upset about and you know I'm not into debating about it right now but I'm just saying there was a real robust process that division of forestry created it was really awesome and it was a long process and they tried get everybody's opinion
- I agree with what the guidelines say: that the plan serves as one of the most precautionary structures to conserve salmon habitat and corresponding recreational and other uses. It's really an awesome plan.
- in my scoping comments I had approximately 21 questions and I could have had more just to understand what has happened in the ensuing 30 years I mean you have a list of research stations or research places in the forest you have. Statements about the research stuff, you have statements like single tree selection and harvesting is not is what we're going to be using in harvesting and you know there are statements in there that that I hope that the draft plan will answer
- The recreation in the [Susitna Forestry Guidelines] was handled under recreation and scenic resources and under appendix D. It had to do with management of special areas. There are a lot of places in there that were not intended for harvest: Next to Willow Creek, next to Chulitna Creek, next to Chulitna River. These places would not be harvested because of the recreational values. Of course we need to figure out what these are under the Susitna Manatuska Area Plan. But I would want

an update when you publish the plan [draft] on how that has worked out or if those policies would remain.

- My other question is what's happening with the recent timber inventory
 - as far as the inventory goes you know we're still running off the 2014 inventory. There's been a recent effort to relook at that or revisit the forest vegetation types. The data came out recently. There's more to come on that process.
- this is Melis Coady likewise I'm with Susitna River Coalition and I was hoping there'd be maybe a broader range of stakeholders here and although I'm joining from the perspective of the Susitna River Coalition and I'm also not representing that organization right now but I'm on the board of the Mat-Su Parks and Trails Foundation. I would love to spend a little more time making sure that people that are stakeholders in recreation get circulated these questions so that you have a really good data set to move forward in making this plan.
- My goal was to learn a lot from this group but now that it seems kind of weighted heavily towards Becky and I participating from the Susitna river coalition. I'd like to better understand process and goals: I'm a little confused. the forest management plan would need to be in place if there was a Susitna Valley State Forest. But because that isn't legislatively designated yet and it's not required to be in place till at least within 3 years of that designation I'm unclear on what the authority is for this process.
 - This is connected to the fact that the Susitna Forest Guidelines that were created in 1991 were intended to be a temporary forest management tool and while the division has certainly missed the mark on superseding that document with updated information after 10 years, we're at a point now where we have staff and funding capacity to take on that project and update the forest management policy. We have some pretty explicit direction in the Susitna Matanuska Area Plan that regardless of whether or not a state forest is established, DNR has the intention of creating an updated forest management policy document for the forest classified lands in the Susitna valley. Regardless of whether the state forest is currently designated it's still in our best interest to have up-to-date forest management policy for the forest resources in the Susitna valley.
 - Revision efforts are also taking place in the Tanana Valley State Forest Management Plan and the Haines State Forest Resource Management Area. This effort to update forest management information is not targeted in the Susitna valley.
- I appreciate the existing plan can have revisions, but after reviewing statute and regulation, I'm not clear on what the statute instrument for creating a forest management plan in an area that's not a designated state forest.
 - the Division of forestry and Fire Protection is delegated the management authority for forest resources on any forest classified state-owned lands and resource management lands. So the division of Mining Land and Water has recommended DFFP create specific forestry guidelines for the forest

classified lands in this area and the planning team is choosing to follow the procedural outlines for state forest management plans because they involve a robust and structured public process that we want to include to facilitate the kind of discussion and transparency that would be given to a state forest management plan.

- the last map that I saw at a public form said you the proposed management plan would guide 770,000 acres of land in the Susitna valley and then more recently with this announcement that number is much smaller what guided. That change in lands that this plan would manage?
 - The planning area is 770,000 acres with 440,800 acres of merchantable timber within that planning area.
- Are there other areas in the state that are not in the state forest but have a forestry management plan?
 - Not on a regional scale like this. There's areas like the Homer demonstration forest is not legislatively designated but it has a forest management plan. But this is unique to the Susitna valley to have this level of detail for the forest management policy outside of a legislatively designated area.

Identify Impacts: How is this group affected by forest management activities? (Consider an additional question: *How has this group been affected by past forest management activities?*)

- The Susitna valley is vital for recreation which I guess is the focus of this group and so it includes. You know in this part of Alaska Southcentral Alaska it's kind of a hub for hunting and fishing and rafting and hiking. And so it's been really essential that timber harvest schedules specifically avoid high use recreation areas and windows so I'm not sure in your draft forest management plan like what solutions or concepts you have for like buffers or seasonal restrictions to facilitate a coexistence of forestry activities in the activities of recreational users.
- There were good statements in the Susitna forestry guidelines about places where timber harvesting needs to consider recreational and viewshed from the air and this and that and I wanted to find out if they actually got implemented I mean there's some really good stuff in the forestry guidelines and I don't even know if it happens. I was hoping that the division would be able to enlighten me: did it work out that there's not a lot of harvesting near these places? Did it work out so we know that if it's a good idea to recommend that in management plan.
 - As we develop the SV FMP draft, there are some components from the original guidelines that we are working to incorporate into the new plan, and we are looking for ways to do that that include flexibility to respond to future needs. If that is your recommendation now, it's an excellent idea to include that in your comments.
- Buffers and retention areas that are described in the Forest Resources and Practices Act are smaller than what is described in the 1991 SFG and seem less focused on recreation and wildlife habitat.

- Designing buffers and timber retention areas will be site specific in a lot of cases. Sharing information with the planning staff about specific areas of concern is helpful as we write this document.
- Are there reports from ADF&G that address the effectiveness of buffers around streams and rivers?
 - The state Board of Forestry does effectiveness monitoring for timber sales within the state. This information is reported to the Governor's office annually.
 - We don't have a specific report for this project or this project area, but the planning team is referencing an ADFG publication related to Managing for combined timber and wildlife goals in interior Alaska (https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/static/lands/habitatrestoration/pdfs/managing_boreal_forest_timber_wildlife_tanana_valley_wtb.pdf)
- Is there any statute language that holds resource managers to that document?
 - No, this publication is a recommendation from ADFG to DFFP. There's not statutory authority connected to it.
- Interest in a Citizen's Advisory Committee for the SV FMP
 - DFFP is open to forming a CAC for this project, but DFFP has not taken steps toward that yet.

Considerations: What resources, uses or areas would you like the Division to consider as we are developing management policy for this area?

- Careful considerations to remote areas (Phase 2 and 3 in 1991 SFG). Careful consideration of how future activities might affect recreation and habitat in areas that were off limits under the 1991 guidelines.
- Some of those areas are the backbone of our salmon and wildlife habitat and the Mat-Su is experiencing exponential growth, which also impacts fish and wildlife populations.
- Concerns about climate change
- The undeveloped areas of the Mat-Su provide refuge to fish and wildlife and including those areas on an official Five Year Schedule of Timber Sales is concerning.
- Interested in accessing GIS data related to this project and planning area
- Each agency looks at plans/projects through their own lens, but there is not clear evidence of the analysis of the cumulative impacts on an area.
 - Interactive map of the planning area is available on the project website under the menu item "how you can participate": <https://forestry.alaska.gov/SusitnaValleyFP/>
 - DFFP GIS office publishes data online as well: <https://forestrymaps-soa-dnr.hub.arcgis.com/>

Recommendations: What would it look like for forest management activities to be conducted in this area in a way that includes meeting the needs of this group and your constituents?

- Concerns over the ability of 2014 Forest Inventory to capture widespread forest conditions after recent spruce beetle outbreaks
- Value local access to, harvest, and use of timber. For example, building sheds, home heating, local artisans, potential for forest products industry to diversify local economy
- Concerns over political force, should the area become designated as a state forest: concern that legislative designation will place other uses in competition with primary purpose of management for timber
- Concern that the amount of marketable timber and level of wildfire risk do not warrant an increased priority of timber management over wildlife habitat and recreation uses
- Concerns over proposed timber leasing bill and reductions in public process related to timber sale planning in timber leasing context, perception that public best interest could become too narrowly defined
- One of the biggest forest management concerns is creation of roads into undeveloped areas and the cumulative impacts that are likely to follow road development
- Recommend helicopter logging in remote areas over creation of new roads
- Perception of relaxed standards for permanent roads when they are converted from temporary forestry roads
- It's difficult to balance desire for economic development for the state with potential negative impacts to fisheries and wildlife populations
- Fish and wildlife populations are already negatively impacted by climate change
- Desire to see forest management activities planned and conducted in a manner that considers how roads are going to impact an area, even where a road is located

Additional Comments

- Desire to circulate discussion questions among other recreation users that could not attend the meeting

Next Steps

If we could not address all the questions in this outline today, the Division will coordinate a follow-up meeting, provided the group agrees to do so. If members of this group would like to share additional information that was not captured by this discussion opportunity, please feel free to share those comments in writing by email to dnr.dof.matsuplanning@alaska.gov or by mail to:

Alaska Division of Forestry & Fire Protection
ATTN: Forest Planning
500 W 7th Ave. Ste 1450
Anchorage, AK 99501-3566

Next opportunities for comment will be during the public review period, although we are happy to talk about the project whenever you have questions or want to give us feedback. Upcoming benchmarks include the public review period later this year.

In the meantime, more information is available on the project webpage:

[Susitna Valley Forest Management Plan](#)

Please share your comments or questions with the planning team by sending a message to: dnr.dof.matsuplanning@alaska.gov.