

Susitna Valley Forest Management Plan

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

DIVISION OF FORESTRY & FIRE PROTECTION

July 14, 2026

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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 Alaska Native land users. This discussion is intended to capture the perspective of Alaska Native 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: Alaska Native Entities 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?

- Michelle Schmidt: Land manager for Cook Inlet Region Inc., based in Anchorage Office. Summer goals to visit CIRI forest parcels, but running into logistical constraints this summer. Initiating some projects and developing management plans for CIRI, one plan in coordination with Kenai Peninsula borough. Looking for more information about state forest management planning policy.

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?*)

- Mostly familiar with Kenai Peninsula Borough activities. Generally, the activities that I've been a part of in that area have been focused on spruce beetle mitigation and some invasive plants and fish removal.
- Curious if spruce beetle is an issue/ongoing in Mat-Su Borough. CIRI has done some timber harvest on areas affected by spruce beetle, but that's been the majority of timber harvest activity on CIRI lands in the last decade or so. Looking to learn more about management policy from coordinating with state planning efforts.
 - Summaries of spruce beetle activity and other forest health information are available through Alaska's [Forest Health Program](#)

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

- Mat-Su valley area contains parcels that are used for subsistence practices, like hunting moose, fishing, or trapping small game. Interest in improving the habitat in those areas to support subsistence uses.

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?

- Examples provided by DFFP Staff: Access provided by development of roads, timber harvest strategies (partial harvest vs. even-age harvest), fuels management.

- Coordination with utilities, concerns about issues with woody debris left onsite after clearing utility lines of hazard trees. Woody debris left onsite became target of arson. Very focused on fuels reduction projects on Kenai peninsula in coordination with some villages, not as much effort towards Mat-Su lands.
- CIRI would be supportive of fire fuels mitigation
- Interest in deeper inventory of potential invasive species issues in Mat-Su valley
- There may be opportunity to add information about this project to CIRI newsletter-if possible, DFFP staff are interested in this opportunity.

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
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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.