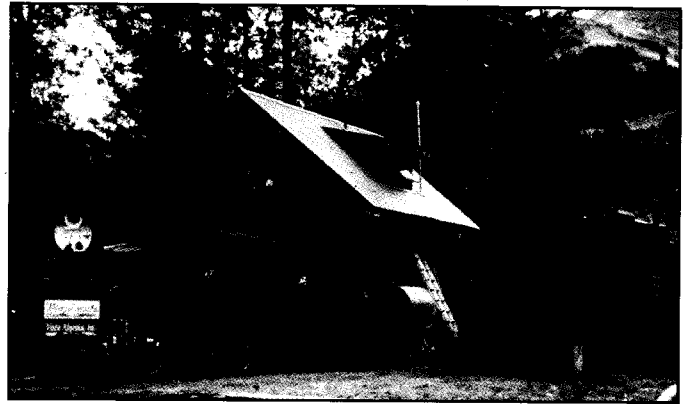


Chapter 6

*Current Land Use Pattern,  
Ownership, and Suitability*



A CROWD GATHERED AT GIRWOOD FOR THE OPENING DEDICATION OF THE SEWARD HIGHWAY ON OCTOBER 19, 1951. THE OPENING OF THE HIGHWAY PROVIDED MUCH EASIER ACCESS TO GIRWOOD FROM ANCHORAGE, WHICH LATER LED TO INCREASING INTEREST IN THE VALLEY'S RECREATIONAL POTENTIAL.



*New townsite area.*

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Three important factors that will influence future development are: existing land uses and development pattern; current and anticipated land ownership; and the physical features that will allow or constrain development.

### *Existing Land Use Pattern*

Girdwood is an extended community that originally started at tidewater, then began to extend up valley toward Crow Creek, and later diverted across the valley to the ski area at Mount Alyeska. Following the 1964 earthquake, the townsite was relocated from one floodplain to another. Today, the community of Girdwood is spread out, and is divided and surrounded by natural hazard areas. There is only one road outlet from the valley, with development most concentrated at the upper end below Mount Alyeska.

Girdwood's existing development is the result of its past history and the valley's geographical features. While the location of development was most influenced by siting of the early road connecting the Crow Creek mines to tidewater, and the establishment of skiing facilities on Mount Alyeska, the development pattern was heavily influenced by public land disposals and subsequent subdivision of those lands.

#### **OLD GIRWOOD TOWNSITE**

The earliest subdivision and land disposal occurred at the original townsite. Platted in 1916, the original townsite is laid out in a rectangular grid. Streets are straight and evenly spaced. Although varying in size, most lots are very small, typically between 3,600 and 6,000 square feet in area.

The original townsite area is only partially developed, with more lots currently vacant than in use. Existing development includes a mix of uses, with the most prominent use being the Girdwood Station, a small commercial mall at the corner of Seward and Alyeska Highways. Other uses in the area consist of a small number of residences and some light industrial uses (storage/warehousing), as well as two utility facilities.

Recent development in the townsite area has been hampered by the small lot sizes coupled with the lack of an adequate sewer system. This situation will change, however, with the planned extension of a sewer trunk line to the area in the near future.

**ALYESKA HIGHWAY/WEST VALLEY AREA**

This area, which extends from the lower portion of Crow Creek Road down to the original townsite along what is now the Alyeska Highway, was platted by U.S. Bureau of Land Management in the early 1950's as part of its homesite land disposal program. Original lot sizes generally ranged from 1 to 3 acres, with direct access provided from each fronting lot onto Alyeska Highway. One of the minimum development requirements imposed by the Bureau of Land Management was the construction of a livable 10-foot by 12-foot structure on the lot.

Many lots have remained as they were originally platted, while others have been further subdivided into various lot sizes and configurations. One of the consequences of this early subdivision and land disposal is the many closely spaced driveways accessing directly onto Alyeska Highway. Some of the old "livable" structures still remain.

The predominant form of land use along this stretch of Girdwood is residential, with single-family homes being the primary form of housing. Several lots have more than one dwelling. There are also a handful of small commercial establishments. Those which regularly generate the most traffic are the bar/restaurants on Crow Creek Road.

**NEW GIRDWOOD TOWNSITE**

The remaining development patterns in Girdwood derived from the establishment of the ski resort and relocation of the townsite area. These actions resulted in three separate public land disposals in the 1960's, which in turn led to three major subdivisions.

Following the 1964 earthquake, a new townsite area was platted between Glacier and California Creeks next to Alyeska Highway, then being built to the ski resort. The commercial portion, located on the north side of the highway, focused on a small version of the traditional town square design. Small business lots, about 6,000 square feet each, surround a small internal town square park. Other lots were platted across Hightower Road, closer to Glacier Creek.

The new Girdwood townsite retains a mix of commercial and residential uses today. Residential uses include a small trailer park, a 15-unit condominium, and a few single-family homes. Businesses include a small convenience store, two restaurants and a few other commercial services. Girdwood's Post Office, a focal point in the community, is also located here.

There is a small-town quaintness to the area; however, it is limited in its ability to function on its own as Girdwood's commercial core. Its size is constrained by floodplains on the east and west sides, by the Alyeska Highway to the south, and the Girdwood school to the north. It is further constrained at the present time by a well site reserve area, which surrounds the townsite's water source.

**Table 8  
Existing Land Use and Vacant Land**

Developed Land	Land Area (acres)
<b>Residential</b>	253
One- & Two-family	(236)
Multi-family	(15)
Mobile Home Park	(2)
<b>Commercial</b>	64
<b>Commercial Recreation</b>	1,494
<b>Industrial</b>	154
<b>Transportation</b>	174
<b>Utilities</b>	10
<b>Public Lands and Institutions</b>	47
<b>Parks</b>	41
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2,237</b>
<b>Undeveloped Land</b>	<b>Acres</b>
<b>Municipal</b>	5,182
<b>State</b>	6,390
<b>Private</b>	288
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>11,860</b>



*Aerial Photograph - Girdwood Valley*

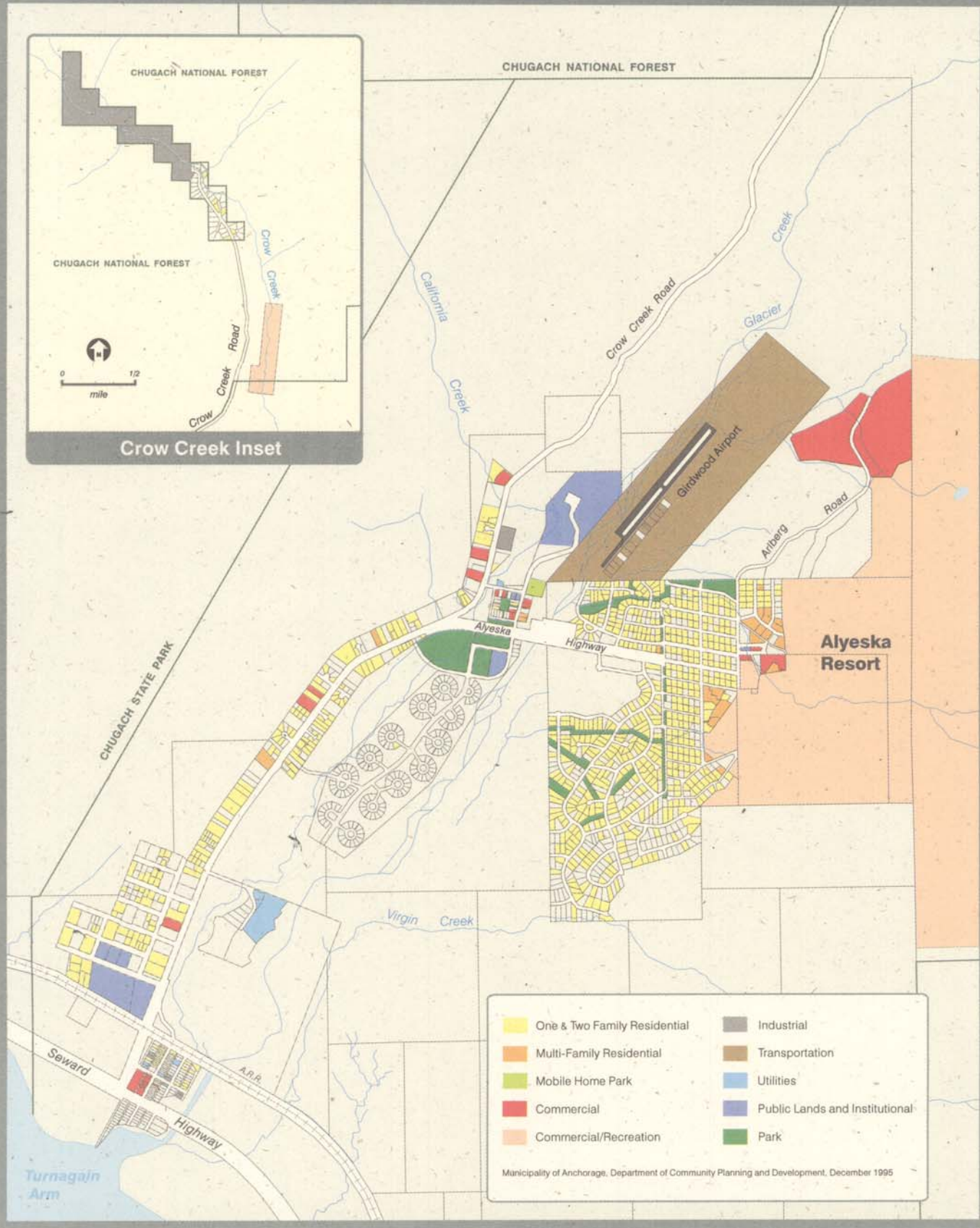
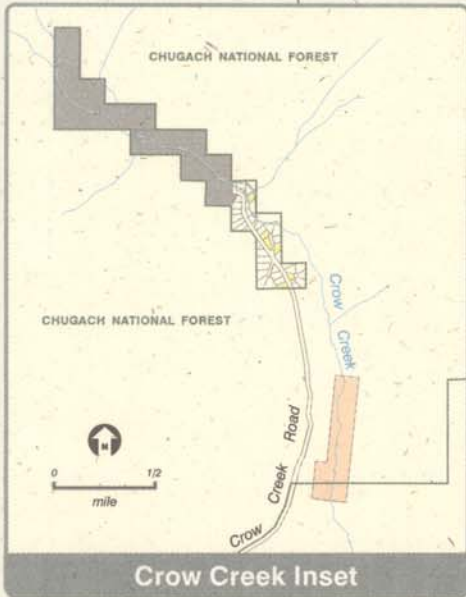


Date of Photography: July 1991

Municipality of Anchorage, Department of Community Planning  
and Development, December 1995



# Existing Land Use



One & Two Family Residential	Industrial
Multi-Family Residential	Transportation
Mobile Home Park	Utilities
Commercial	Public Lands and Institutional
Commercial/Recreation	Park

Municipality of Anchorage, Department of Community Planning and Development, December 1995

The residential portion of the new Girdwood townsite was platted on the south side of Alyeska Highway as a cluster subdivision. The pattern took the form of several small circular clusters. Each small lot shared common open space on one side, and a shared cul-de-sac driveway on the opposite side. Although lots in the commercial area were sold in public auction, the residential portion was not. With the exception of three lots, the residential portion, commonly known as the "squirrel cage," remains in public ownership in the Heritage Land Bank.

### **ALYESKA SUBDIVISIONS**

The other two subdivisions initially created in the 1960's were Alyeska Subdivision and Alyeska Basin Subdivision. Alyeska Subdivision, located immediately adjacent to the ski resort, has a standardized grid of uniform streets and lots. Most lots average 12,500 square feet in size and are developed with single-family homes. The exceptions are two areas next to the resort, where lot sizes vary and where mid- and high-density multi-family housing prevails.

Alyeska Basin Subdivision is primarily developed with single-family homes. Lots vary in size from under 9,000 to over 20,000 square feet, with the average being from 14,000 to 16,000 square feet. Like Alyeska Subdivision, Alyeska Basin was developed with its own community water system, which was later acquired and upgraded by Anchorage Water and Wastewater Utility.

Unlike other subdivided areas in Girdwood, Alyeska Basin Subdivision was designed with a curvilinear street system, taking into account the natural features in the area. The street design, however, has led to a funneling of local traffic onto Timberline Drive, the subdivision's only roadway connector to Alyeska Highway on the south side.

Alyeska Basin also contains two large unsubdivided areas. One is at the southeast corner where the mountainside topography steepens and where future residential development will be limited. The other unsubdivided area is at the northwestern corner of Alyeska Highway and Timberline Drive. Most of the area is wetlands, with limited stands of spruce/hemlock and a grove of cottonwoods along the highway.

### **RESORT AREA**

Alyeska Resort facilities were initially built at the base of Mount Alyeska, near the terminus of Alyeska Highway. Although a new day lodge was constructed in this area a short while ago, the focus of resort activity, particularly for overnight destination visitors, is shifting northward about four-fifths mile to the site of the new Alyeska Prince Hotel and tramway. The two areas are connected by Arlberg Road. Between the new and old resort base facilities, Alyeska Resort has also acquired two tracts of land for future additional resort lodging.

Over the years, a number of public facilities have been provided in Girdwood that have had a bearing on the way land use patterns have developed. The most obvious is Alyeska Highway. However, a significant facility in land area is Girdwood Airport. Following the 1964 earthquake, the state-owned airport was relocated from the old townsite area site seaward of the Seward Highway to the very center of the valley between Glacier Creek and Alyeska Resort.

The present airport occupies 174 acres. Together, the Moose Meadows wetland, airport and Girdwood School site have created a barrier to community expansion up valley, except along mountainsides.

## **CROW CREEK**

The only development up valley is in the Crow Creek area. Just below the trailhead for the popular Crow Pass Trail is the Girdwood Mining Company, which has a commercial placer mining operation on approximately 140 acres. Immediately below the mining company property is Raven Mountain Estates Subdivision, created in 1966 from part of an old patented federal mineral survey. Although the subdivision is now nearly 30 years old, it is remote. Only 6 of the 44 lots have been developed, all with single-family homes.

Below Raven Mountain Estates Subdivision is the Crow Creek Mine. Today the mine is owned and managed by a local family, who operate it as a recreational/historical enterprise. Many of the original structures and equipment from the early mining days have been preserved on site.

The Crow Creek area is still somewhat remote. Access is provided by a narrow unimproved gravel roadway. No utilities have been extended to this area of the valley. Major concerns with future development, however, will focus on the high avalanche hazard potential that is present over much of the area.

## *Land Ownership*

The community of Girdwood, as well as the resort, has been built upon public land disposals of the past. This method of community and resort growth will continue in the future. Although there are more than 300 remaining undeveloped privately owned parcels in the Girdwood area (including Crow Creek), future community growth and resort/recreational development will require further disposals of land from the public domain.

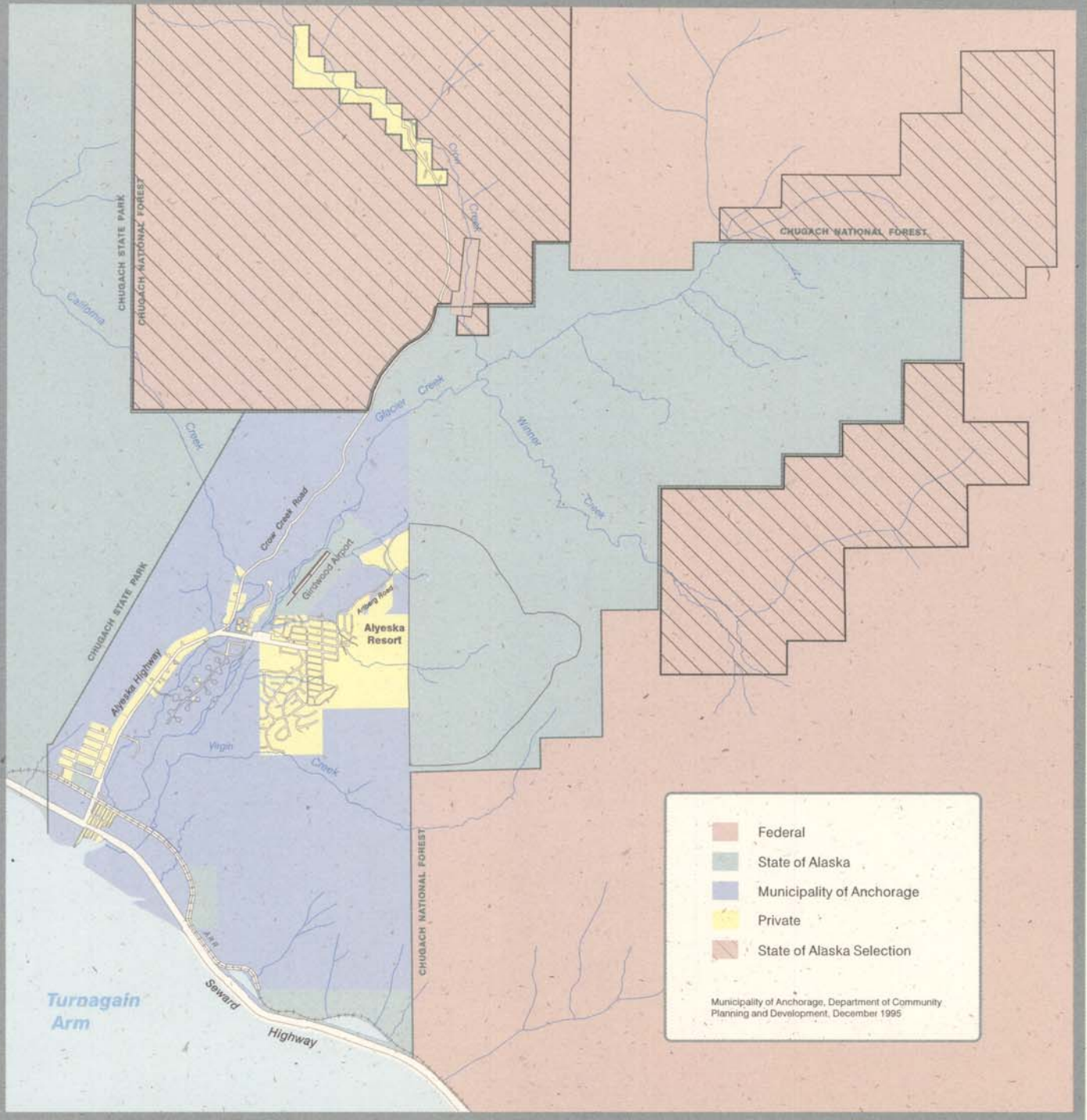
Map 8, Current Land Status, depicts the status of land ownership in the Girdwood valley. Undeveloped private land comprises less than three percent of the land supply. Most undeveloped/uncommitted land (leased or permitted lands are committed) is owned by the State or the Municipality. Most of the proposed future development areas are currently municipally-owned lands in the lower portion of the valley, surrounding the Girdwood community.

Nearly all of the state lands are located in the upper valley, including the mountain massif located between Glacier and Winner Creeks. The Municipality, however, is eligible to select another 1,000 acres of state land in the upper valley. The municipal land selection will focus on the valley bottom where future resort/recreational base facilities are most likely to be located. The State will retain the mountain slopes where additional alpine skiing facilities may be located.

The State has also selected National Forest land encompassing Crow Creek valley and the upper portion of Winner Creek. These selections, however, have not yet been finalized.

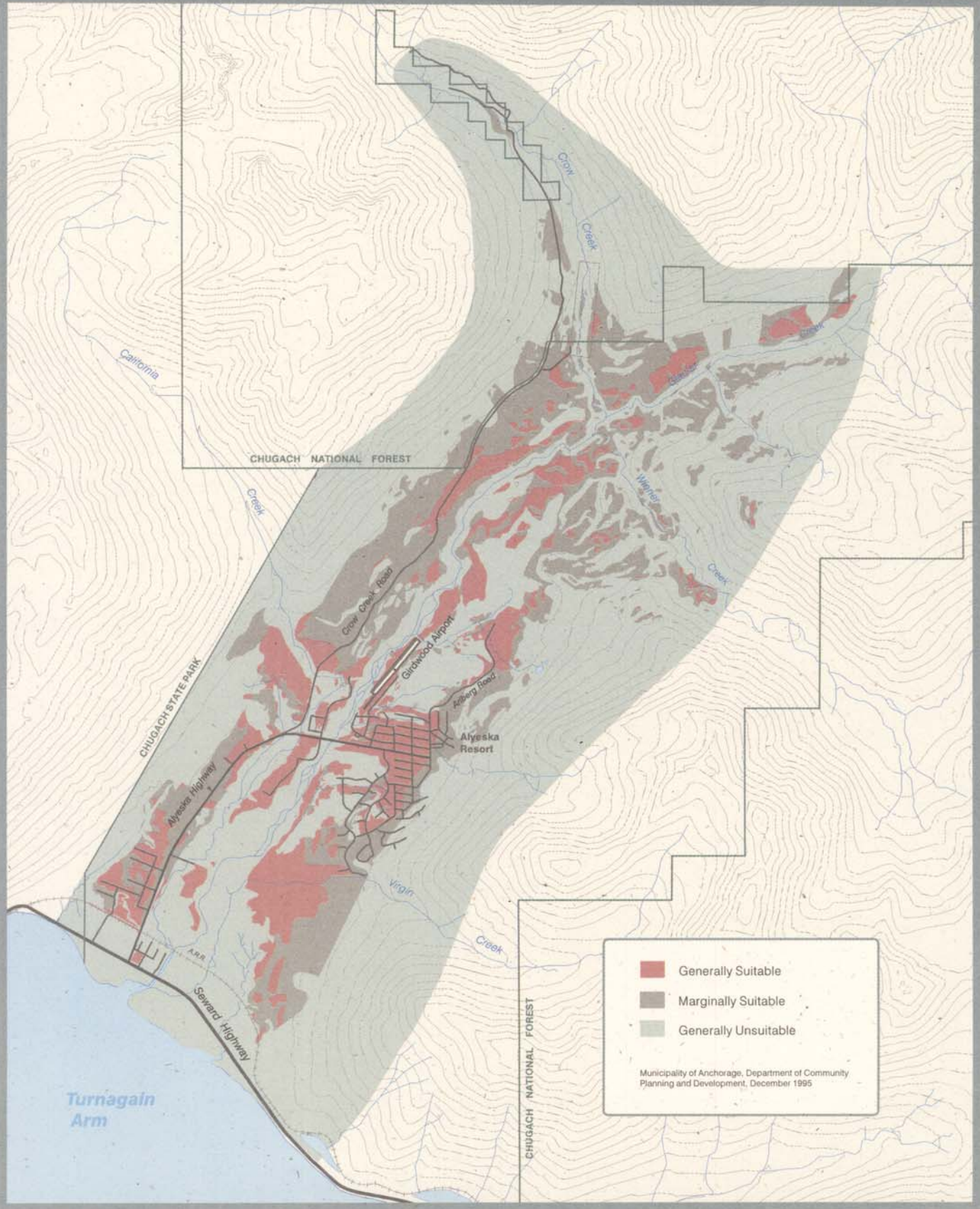


# Current Land Status





# Community Development Suitability



## *Land Suitability*

In order to foster a successful mountain resort community, care needs to be taken to preserve those natural features which give the area its scenic and open space identity. Development should be located where it can take place with minimal cost and disturbance, free of natural hazards.

As noted previously, the Girdwood valley has many natural features that, individually or in conjunction with others, may pose significant problems to development. Map 9, Community Development Suitability, contains a general classification of the physical suitability of the valley area for community development (i.e., roads, utilities, and structures). Physical features that were considered included soil and groundwater conditions, slope, wetlands, and natural hazards such as floods, avalanches, and other mass-wasting events.

The Community Development Suitability Map is intended to be generalized and not site-specific. Many physical conditions can vary within a short distance. However, it gives an overall picture of where new development should be directed, as well as those areas which should be avoided.

Areas identified as being generally suitable have characteristics that would allow development to occur with a minimal amount of cost, environmental disturbance or hazard. Areas identified as marginally suitable may be developable, but contain certain features that will require a greater degree of specialty design.

Much of the area, for example, shown as marginally suitable is associated with moderately-sloping terrain. In such areas, extra care needs to be taken to address soil stabilization, and erosion and sedimentation control. Additional disturbance with cut-and-fill operations may also occur; and there may be a moderate degree of hazard that requires specific siting and design measures be taken.

For the most part, those areas identified as generally unsuitable should be avoided and left in a natural state. Costs of development, environmental disturbance, or high exposure to natural hazard would make development undesirable. However, there may be certain instances where the benefit of development may outweigh the cost, and the environmental disturbance or hazard may be satisfactorily mitigated. Such instances should generally be considered the exception rather than the rule.