



# Parks, Trails and Recreational Facilities

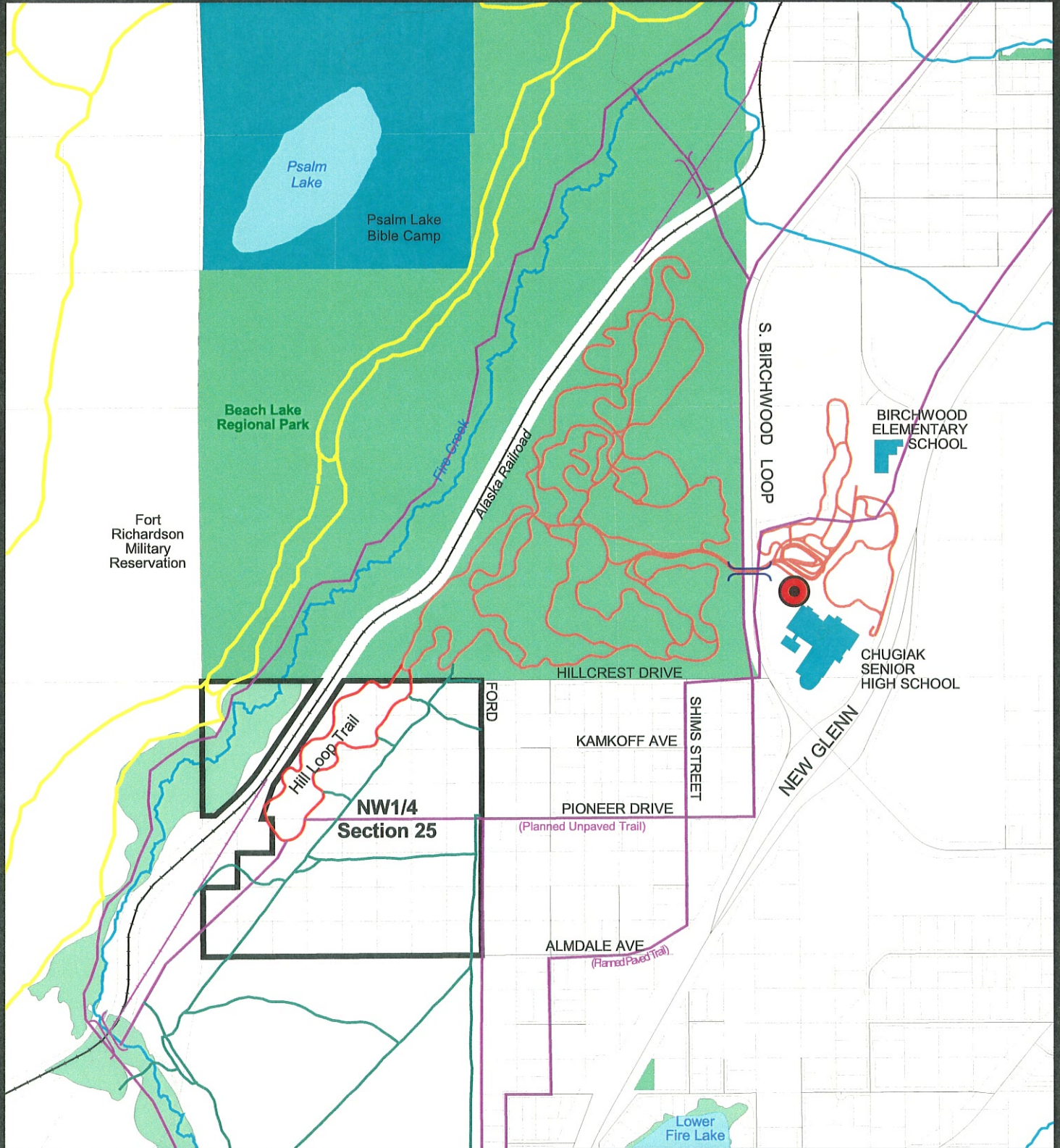
## Multi-Use / Cross-country Ski Trails

- Existing, Dedicated Trail
- Existing, Permitted Use Trail
- Planned Trails (Areawide Trails Plan)
- Informal Trails

- Mushing Trails (Approx. Location)
- Existing Railroad Track
- Proposed Railroad Track
- Dedicated, Grade Separated Crossing
- Planned, Grade Separated Crossing

- Trail Head Parking
- Parks
- Fire Creek Greenbelt Easement
- Psalm Lake Bible Camp

Study Area Boundary





## Transportation and Site Access

The Transportation and Site Access Map illustrates the Study Area's proximity to South Birchwood Loop Road and the North Birchwood Interchange of the New Glenn Highway. South Birchwood Loop Road, a two-lane residential collector, is the main north-south corridor for Birchwood. It empties into the New Glenn at Chugiak High School.

The northern portions of Beach Lake Regional Park are accessible from South Birchwood Loop by a gravel road maintained by the rural road service area. Road and trail access to the main park will improve in the near future as part of the Alaska Railroad alignment straightening project. The southeastern park and trails are accessed from the student parking lot at Chugiak High School.

Public Transit Route 76 travels from the Peters Creek Trading Post, with stops at Birchwood Loop, Chugiak High School, Eagle River Transit Center on Business Boulevard, the Fort Richardson Interchange, and Mountain View before terminating at the Transit Center in downtown Anchorage. Its Chugiak High School stop is one-half mile from the Study Area. Across the street from the school, the North Birchwood Park & Ride Lot marks the interchange between Route 76 and Route 102, which travels on the Glenn Highway to Anchorage.

Areawide connectivity south of the North Birchwood Interchange is limited to Shims Street, a north-south neighborhood collector street with a 60-foot right-of-way easement connecting to South Birchwood Loop Road. Shims Street changes names as it winds southward toward the North Eagle River Interchange, providing a likely future access south to the Powder Reserve.

The most direct route to the Study Area is Hillcrest Drive, an east-west, dead-end, local street. Hillcrest is unimproved west of Shims and has as little as 35 feet of right-of-way south of the park boundary. However, Hillcrest is within a 100-foot wide Section Line Easement along the park boundary. Thirteen residential properties front along the south side of Hillcrest Drive. Pioneer Drive, a second dead-end street two blocks south of Hillcrest, provides neighborhood access to the central plain of the Study Area. Pioneer is an improved street with adequate right-of-way, and is unhindered by rugged terrain. Thirty residential properties front the Pioneer Drive route from South Birchwood Loop to the Study Area. The southeastern ridge of the Study Area would receive access via Almdale Avenue.

As shown on the Transportation Map, Almdale Avenue and other existing roads further south are likely access points into the Powder Reserve development area. A master plan or internal circulation plan for the anticipated 1,500-acre Powder Reserve development area was not available at the time of this study.



## Utilities

A de-energized, three-phase electrical transmission power line owned by MEA traverses the Study Area in a southwest-northeast direction. There is no load as far south as the Study Area, so the line here has not been maintained for 15 years. Local two-phase distribution lines in the residential neighborhood to the east could be extended to serve any future local area needs of residential, park, or other uses in the Study Area. A school facility in the Study Area may require extension of a three-phase line using the existing distribution line easements through the residential neighborhood.

The Anchorage Water & Wastewater Utility (AWWU) Eklutna Transmission Main water pipeline from the Eklutna Water Treatment Plant runs along the east boundary of the Study Area. There is no local water service access to this water pipeline. Residences in the large-lot neighborhood east of the Study Area have on-site water and septic systems. Chugiak High School and Birchwood Elementary School also use on-site systems, although a future connection to serve the high school is planned.

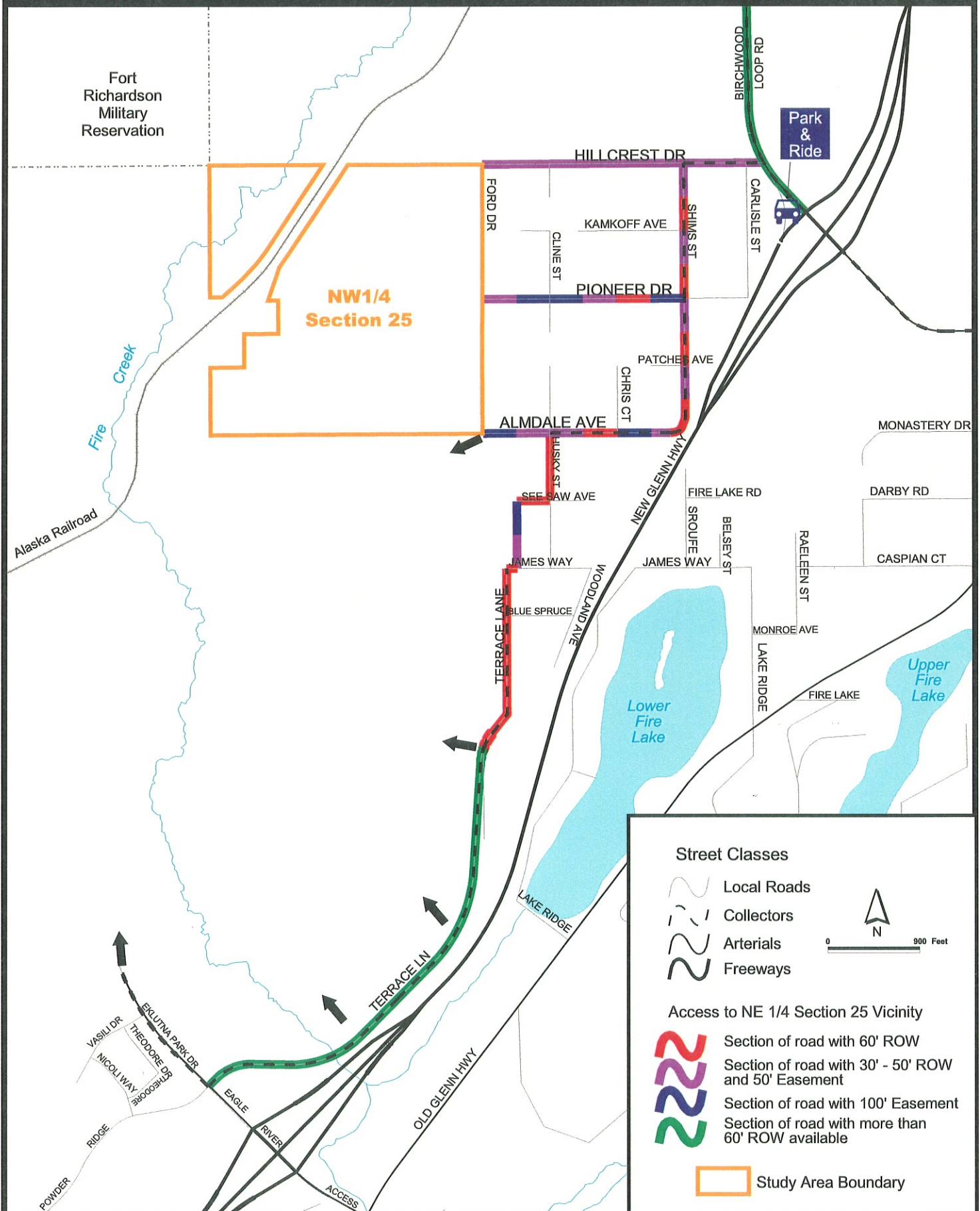
There are two inspection vaults on the water pipeline in the vicinity, from which there is potential to attach a water main to serve the area. One inspection vault is at the intersection of Birchwood Loop and Hillcrest Drive at Chugiak High School, one-half mile east of the Study Area.

The Powder Reserve will receive water service via a main line attached to a second inspection vault near the Powder Ridge subdivision, about three miles south of the Study Area. Eklutna, Inc., intends to provide water to the Powder Reserve subdivisions, building its system to AWWU standards, with a capacity adequate for the development. While it might be physically possible for these water lines to eventually serve the Study Area from the south, Eklutna may size its lift station to serve only Powder Reserve developments. Limits to future water delivery from the south depend on the size of the lift station, and on whether the Powder Reserve develops to maximum capacity.

There are no existing sewer lines in the vicinity west of the New Glenn Highway. Sewer lines exist as far north as Lower Fire Lake. There is a sewer line connection to developments at Powder Ridge, more than one mile south of the Study Area. As with its water service, Eklutna, Inc., intends to provide sewer to the Powder Reserve subdivisions, building its system to AWWU standards, with a capacity adequate for the Powder Reserve at build-out.



# Transportation and Site Access





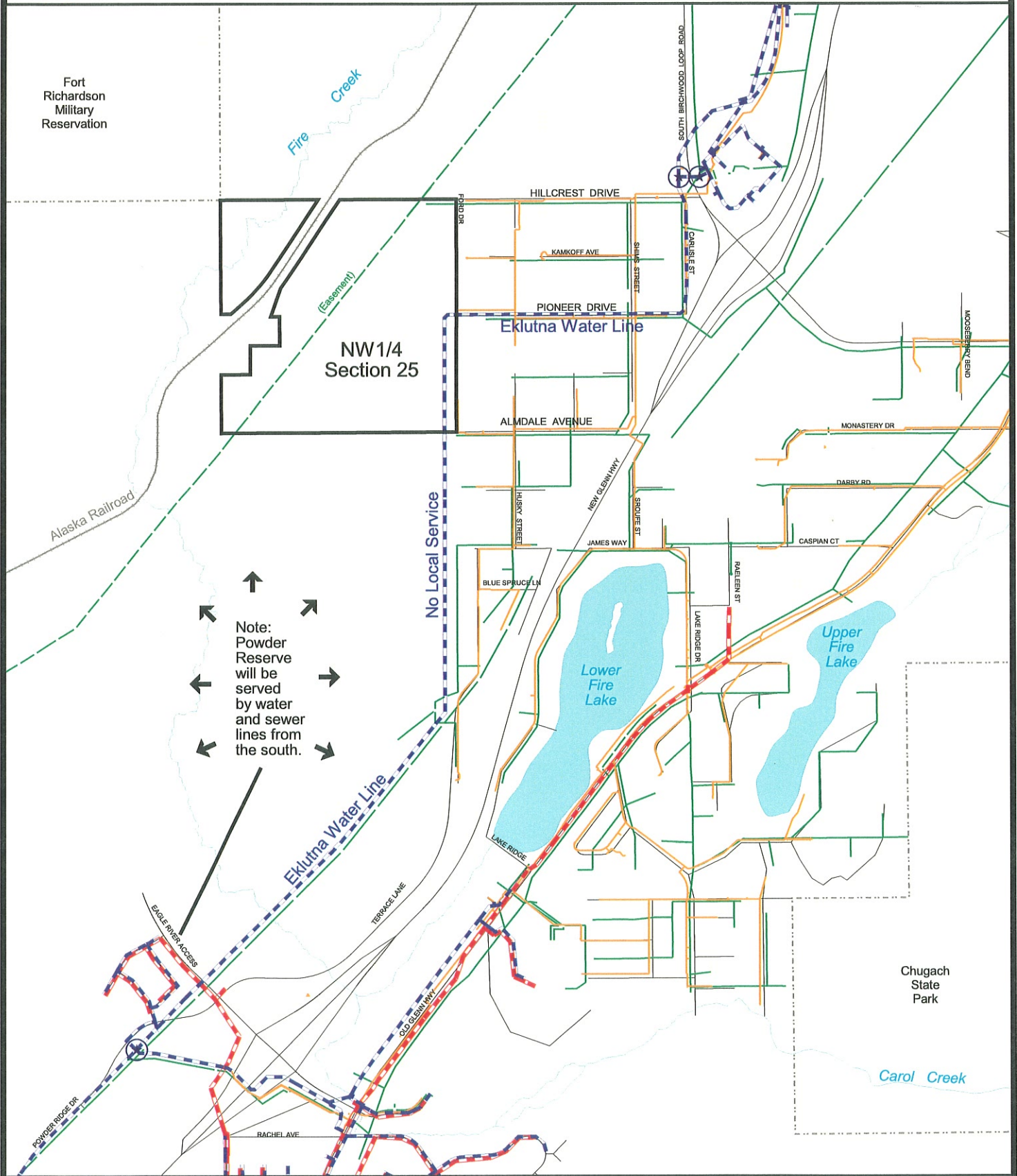




# Utilities

-  Water Vaults (AWWU)
-  Water Lines (AWWU)
-  Sewer Lines (AWWU)

-  Electric Lines (MEA)
-  Gas Lines (Enstar)





## Related Plans and Policies

Following is a review of plans that are related to the Study Area, to address the need for consistency with appropriate policies and recommendations.

### Chugiak – Eagle River Comprehensive Plan

Adopted in 1993, the *Chugiak–Eagle River Comprehensive Plan* is intended to be a guide for community development. The *Comprehensive Plan* designates the NW¼ Section 25, as Residential/Park, with Environmentally Sensitive Lands in the Fire Creek Floodplain, as shown on the following map. The *Comprehensive Plan* does not specify which areas should be a certain use, nor what density of residential dwellings per acre that NW¼ Section 25 should support.

The *Comprehensive Plan* designates lands east of the Study Area as Residential, with a recommended density of less than one dwelling unit per acre. The Powder Reserve is designated Mixed Use – a mix of interrelated residential, commercial, institutional, open space, or light industrial uses – with no recommended density of residential dwellings. A large tract of land in the Powder Reserve is designated Transportation Related. This land is planned for exchange with Eklutna, Inc.

The *Comprehensive Plan* establishes goals for parks and recreation facilities in Chugiak–Eagle River. These include: (a) establish an integrated open space and greenways network which effectively links parks, recreational facilities, schools, residential and commercial areas, and which includes ecologically valuable open space lands; (b) establish a system of parks, from the neighborhood to the regional level, to serve all segments of the community, and (C) provide a wide range of recreational opportunities to all segments of the community. Specific objectives, policies, and strategies for parks and recreation related to the Study Area include:

- Protect open space corridors along streams, rivers, and ridge crests.
- Meet community needs for park space by bringing the area up to National Recreation and Parks Association standards for parks
- Provide a continuous system of creek greenbelts with pedestrian trails to link schools, parks, and residential neighborhoods.
- Neighborhood and community park land shall be acquired in anticipation of population growth and community development.
- Provide large field areas for sports, such as soccer and additional facilities, at the Fire Lake Recreation Center.
- Update the *Edmonds Lake Park* and *Beach Lake Park Master Plans*.

The *Comprehensive Plan* also provides direction for evaluating large undesignated HLB lands in Chugiak–Eagle River. Its specific criteria for a land use study in reference to the NW¼ Section 25 are detailed in Chapter 1.



## **Anchorage Coastal Management Plan**

The intent of this plan is to benefit the general public by guiding the development and protection of areas within the Anchorage coastal boundary. Adopted in 1979, it designates Fire Creek as a Class II/III waters, and the adjacent lands as River Floodplain. Class II and III waters have the following public values: propagation of fish, water quality, recreation, management, aesthetics, parks, open space, greenbelts, fishing, and environmental considerations.

## **Anchorage Wetlands Management Plan**

The purpose of this document, updated in 1996, is to identify those wetlands that provide important ecological or hydrological functions and to provide a management plan for their protection. The Plan identifies an "A" (Preservation) Wetland for preservation in the Fire Creek floodplain, and a "C" (Developable) Wetland in the northwest corner of the Study Area. The "C" wetland is developable under General Permit authorization from the Municipality.

## **Anchorage Park, Greenbelt, and Recreational Facility Plan: Volume 2, Eagle River-Chugiak-Eklutna**

This document was adopted by the Assembly in 1985. Together with the *Areawide Trails Plan*, it provides the basic planning framework for parks and greenways in Chugiak-Eagle River. Elements of this plan that apply to the Study Area are discussed in the Parks and Recreation section of Chapter 3.

## **Areawide Trails Plan**

Adopted in 1996, the *Areawide Trails Plan* is a component of the *Chugiak-Eagle River Comprehensive Plan* that guides the development of trail facilities as part of the overall transportation system. The *Areawide Trails Plan* recommends a number of improvements for non-motorized trails in the Beach Lake Park area. The Parks, Trails, and Recreational Facilities Map shows the planned trails.

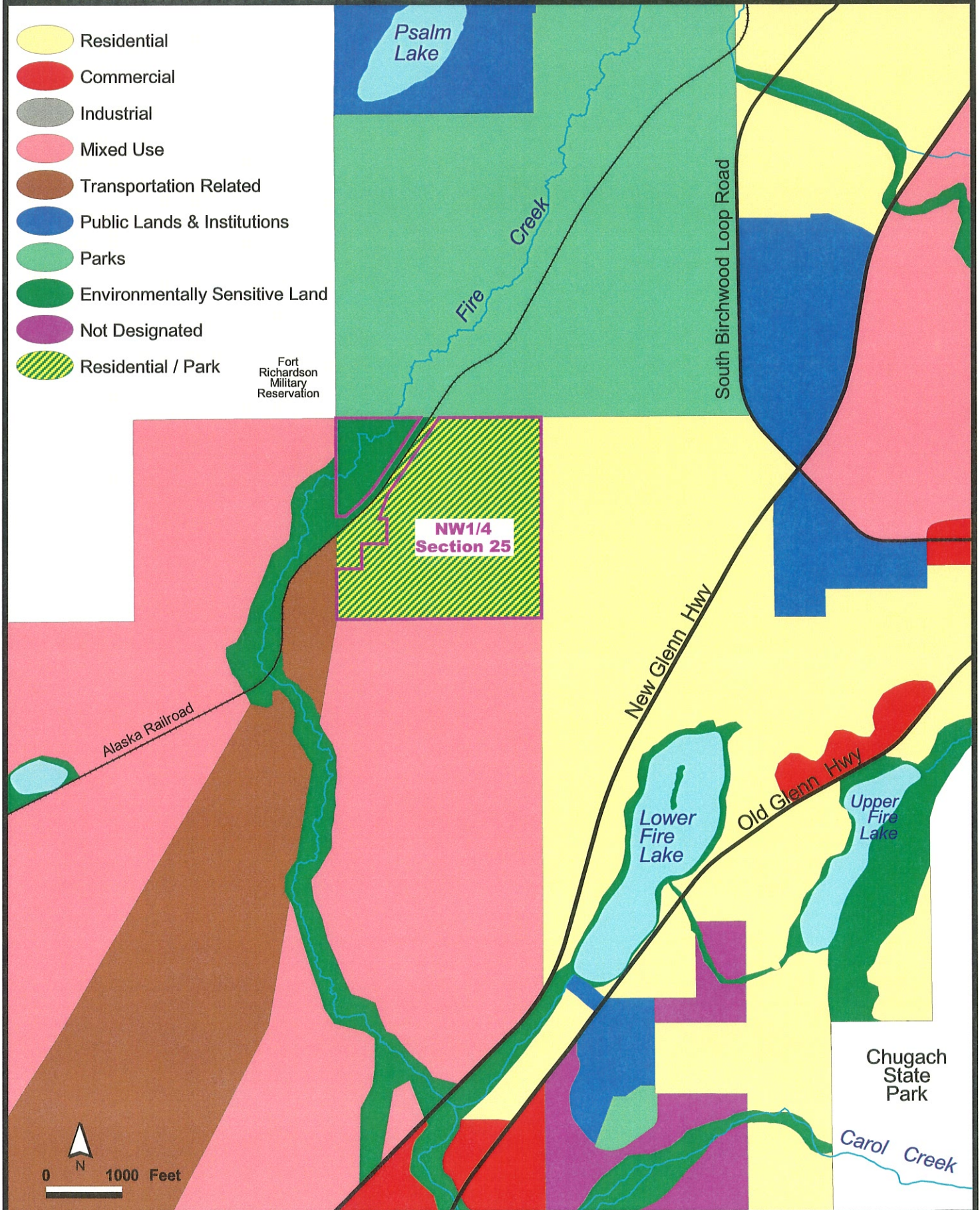
A paved multi-use recreational trail along Fire Creek is recommended as a regional connection to Beach Lake Park and the planned coastal trail in the northern Municipality. Priorities for construction of ski trails include connections from the Hill Loop Trail to Fire Creek Greenbelt. The *Areawide Trails Plan Map* shows a planned grade-separated crossing allowing greenbelt trail access across the Railroad at the beaver dams, ¼ mile south of the Study Area. That map also shows a planned, unpaved multi-use trail through the Study Area from the Hill Loop Trail to Pioneer Drive.



# Chugiak - Eagle River Comprehensive Plan: Recommended Land Uses



Planning Department  
Municipality of Anchorage





The *Areawide Trails Plan* recommends that the integrity of the ski trails at Beach Lake Park, including the Hill Loop Trail which loops into the Study Area, be protected. The Hill Loop appears, although not to true scale and location, on the *Areawide Trails Plan Map* as a protected, dedicated multi-use recreational trail.

According to the *Trails Plan*, the trail system and visitors center and staging area within Beach Lake Park should continue to be designated by the Municipality for dog mushing. The plan states that while joint use of an area may be possible where sight distance would allow visibility, the topography and vegetation prevent adequate sight distance in Beach Lake Park. The railroad provides a strong demarcation between the users and it is recommended that the railroad be maintained as the separation between skiers and mushers within Beach Lake Park. The plan recommends that the loops of trail extending out of Beach Lake Park south to Clunie Lake, which cross through the northwestern corner of the Study Area, be dedicated for dog sled mushing use.

## **Beach Lake Regional Park Master Plan**

This plan was approved in June 1973 by the Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Advisory Board and the Greater Anchorage Area Borough (GAAB) Assembly. Its recommendations include a swimming beach with related facilities at Beach Lake, future road access at the north end of the park, and an integrated park trail system. Because the plan predates municipal unification, its recommendations were based on the now outdated condition that Beach Lake Park was outside of the parks service area. Its recommendations related to trail improvements were superseded by the *Areawide Trails Plan*.

## **Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP)**

One of several implementation tools of the *Comprehensive Plan*, the *LRTP* guides the development and implementation of transportation system improvements. Near-term implementation of goals, objectives, and strategies in the *LRTP* occurs through the *Official Streets & Highways Plan (OS&HP)*. The *OS&HP* for Chugiak-Eagle River is scheduled to be updated by December 2001.

The road connectivity policy contained in the *LRTP* for Chugiak-Eagle River is: “to provide an interconnected network of streets for ease and variety of travel. Connections between new and existing subdivisions should be required except in the following cases: excess slope, the presence of a wetland or other body of water which cannot be bridged or crossed, existing development on adjacent property prevents a street connection, or the presence of a freeway or railroad.”



## **North Anchorage Land Exchange Agreement (NALA)**

The *North Anchorage Land Agreement (NALA)* is a contract that was signed by the State, the Municipality, and Eklutna, Inc., in 1982. The intent of *NALA* is to implement provisions of Section 1425 of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA), enacted by Congress in 1980.

Section 1425 provided for resolution of a number of land interests among the three parties, including planned use of Fort Richardson lands in the event these lands are declared excess to military needs. Under the *NALA* contract, the State will receive certain specific areas, while the Municipality and Eklutna, Inc., will receive land as tenants in common until specific conveyances are identified through a land use planning effort. The land use planning effort will address appropriate areas for residential, commercial, and industrial development; for roads and other transportation needs; and for public facilities, such as schools, parks, and recreation areas.

## **Powder Reserve Master Development Plan**

The current master plan for Tract A of the Powder Reserve is expected to be superceded by a new plan encompassing a much wider area. The anticipated plan for the 1,500-acre Powder Reserve is not yet available at the time of this study.

The current master plan may be of use for projecting what may occur in the expanded Powder Reserve. For example, it is likely that an updated plan will designate specific areas for parks, open spaces, and local schools. However, the locations of these facilities that appear on the current master plan are subject to change. Moreover, the new proposal may abandon the Planned Community district in favor of traditional zoning and lower gross residential densities.

## **Legal Encumbrances**

### **Utility Easements**

Patent #817 conveyed the Study Area to the Anchorage Borough in 1968 with several reservations and exceptions, including a 100-foot wide electrical transmission line easement, owned by MEA, which traverses the Study Area in a northeast-southwest direction. In addition, a public utility easement runs along the southern half of the eastern boundary of the Study Area. The centerline of this 40-foot public utility easement is located 130 feet from the eastern boundary of the Study Area. The AWWU Eklutna Transmission Main and a Matanuska Telephone Association fiber optic telephone cable are buried in this easement.



## **Free Use Permit for Gravel Extraction**

A Free Use Gravel Permit (ADL Serial 33019) was issued to the state Department of Highways (now ADOT&PF) for an “indefinite term”. The area affected includes Lots 15 through 22, 39 through 46, 63 through 78, 95 through 110, and the NW¼NW¼ portion lying southerly and easterly of the Alaska Railroad right-of-way. The Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (ADOT&PF) inherited the Free Use Gravel Permit.

The Study Area has long been known to hold a plentiful source of good quality gravel. The municipal Department of Public Works failed twice in attempting to gain approval to use the NW¼ Section 25 as a gravel material site. In 1976, Public Works appealed the decision of the Planning and Zoning Commission (PZC) to the Assembly. The Assembly remanded the case to the PZC for a second public hearing (Case P77-50). After the public hearing was closed, PZC postponed their decision to allow Public Works to respond to new gravel extraction criteria. The case was never rescheduled with the Commission.

At the time of Public Works’ initial application, the State Department of Highways objected, claiming they had exclusive rights to the gravel material under the Free Use Permit. Neither the State nor the Municipality has resolved this longstanding issue. It is the Municipality’s position, as owner of the property, that the permit may be revoked pursuant to its terms, if it appears in the best interests of the Municipality to do so.

## **AMC 21.40.020 – Conditional Use Permit**

The Study Area is zoned PLI Public Lands and Institutions. Natural resource extraction is a conditional use in the PLI district, subject to the land use regulations contained in AMC Title 21. Alaska State Statutes, Title 35.30.010 - 040 makes state agencies such as ADOT&PF subject to municipal zoning regulations, including conditional use regulations. Recommendations in this land use study should be considered as municipal conditions of approval for gravel extraction under a conditional use application review.

Any proposal to extract gravel will have to establish satisfactory access for gravel hauling. According to AMC 21.50.070(B)(1), conditional use standards for natural resource extractions, principal access to gravel sites shall minimize the use of residential streets. At this time, only residential streets are available to access the gravel.



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