

Potter Marsh Watershed Park Master Plan



PUBLIC OPEN HOUSE

DREAMING UP THE FUTURE OF THE PARK!

Potter Marsh Watershed Park was established in December 2024 through a partnership between Great Land Trust and the Municipality of Anchorage. Situated directly above Potter Marsh and adjacent to the Anchorage Coastal Wildlife Refuge and Chugach State Park, the park creates a vital corridor for wildlife conservation and public recreation.

This park is a valuable and productive habitat, encompassing coastal forest, meadows, streams, springs, and wetlands. Its watershed feeds the south end of Potter Marsh. The park provides opportunities for education and passive recreation, supports wildlife habitat, and contributes to clean water recharge for Potter Marsh.

The development of Potter Marsh Watershed Park offers new opportunities for residents and visitors to enjoy passive outdoor recreation. The park also provides broader benefits, including reducing flood risk, protecting valuable wildlife habitat, and conserving unfragmented forest, woodland, wetlands, and waterways that are critical to the water quality of Potter Marsh.

Great Land Trust holds the Potter Marsh Watershed Park Conservation Easement which permanently restricts the uses and development of the park. The Conservation Easement divides the park into two zones, with the majority of the park designated as a Resource Protection Area. Four Limited Development Areas are also specified where compatible land use and development may occur, subject to specific limitations and restrictions.

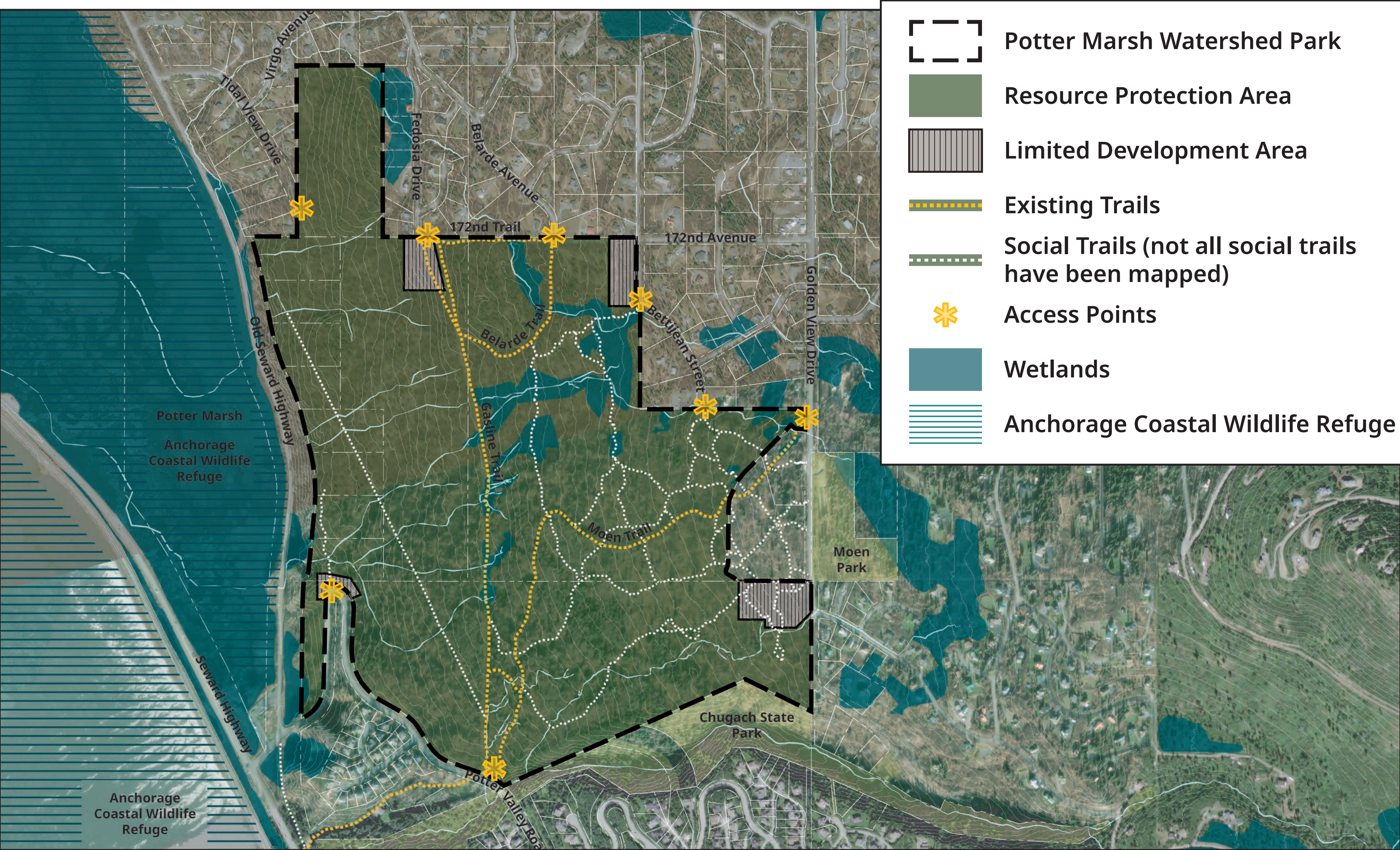
GOALS OF THE CONSERVATION EASEMENT

RESOURCE PROTECTION AREA

Protect natural resources within the Resource Protection Area and scenic views of and across the park by limiting and locating development and uses within this area so as to promote and maintain a mostly undisturbed state.

LIMITED DEVELOPMENT AREA

Promote compatible land use and development within the Limited Development Area(s) so that these areas will be available for certain activities, uses and Additional Improvements subject to the minimal constraints necessary to achieve the Conservation Purposes.



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CONSERVATION VALUES AND PURPOSES

The Conservation Easement identifies Conservation Values within the park to include its relatively natural habitat, open space, and recreation and education. The park is of a size and character that these Conservation Values are likely to remain intact and become even more important as the neighboring properties are developed.

The Conservation Purposes are the park’s protection objectives and goals. The following summarizes the Conservation Values and Conservation Purposes (or protection objectives) as described in the Conservation Easement.

RELATIVELY NATURAL HABITAT

Topographically diverse terrain that consists of upland forest, open meadows, riverine, riparian, and wetland areas that directly contribute to the health of the ecosystems in the region.

Protection Objective

Protect the quality of relatively natural habitat in the park, including specifically the following natural resources:

FOREST AND WOODLAND RESOURCES

- Large intact forested and woodland area that promotes biological diversity, allowing for the growth of a healthy and contiguous resource.
- Continuous canopy and mosaic of native vegetation communities, including trees, shrubs, wildflowers, and grasses, supports wildlife habitat and provides vital corridors for wildlife migration.
- Forested riparian buffers play an essential role in protecting the water quality that supplies the downstream ecosystems.
- Forested scenic backdrop to the adjacent Potter Marsh.

Protection Objective

Perpetuate and foster growth of a healthy and unfragmented forest; maintain a continuous canopy of vegetation with multi-tiered understory of trees, shrubs, wildflowers and grasses; maintain watershed functions and support healthy ecosystem processes; and trap air pollution particulates for healthier air and sequester carbon in trees and soil in order to mitigate rising atmospheric carbon levels.

WILDLIFE RESOURCES

- Provides suitable habitat for wildlife species including moose, bear, fox, snowshoe hare, and other Native Species.
- Combination of forested uplands, meadows, riparian corridors, streams, seeps, and wetlands provides a diverse mosaic of natural habitats that support breeding, nesting, rearing, and foraging for multiple species of birds and wildlife with different habitat requirements (including resident and migratory Native Species such as the great horned owl, rusty blackbird, varied thrush, and black-capped chickadee).

Protection Objective

Maintain and improve the quality of wildlife habitat; to protect breeding sites; to promote biodiversity and Native Species; to preserve large intact areas of wildlife habitat, and to connect patches of wildlife habitat and secure migration corridors.

WATER RESOURCES

- Complex area of uplands, wetlands, and streams on a west-southwest facing slope that directs groundwater from the slopes of the Chugach Mountains to Potter Marsh, Little Survival Creek, Potter Creek, and then to Cook Inlet.
- Springs and seeps emerge throughout the park.
- Wetlands and riparian areas created by the seeps, springs, and streams provide exceptional habitat for birds and mammals throughout the park.

Protection Objective

Maintain and improve the quality of riparian, wetland and other water resources within, around, and downstream of the park.

CONTRIBUTION TO ECOSYSTEM HEALTH

- Water resources in the park have critical hydrologic connection to wetlands, including Potter Marsh.
- Three recharge sources for Potter Marsh include naturally occurring channelized flow, surface runoff and overland flow, and subsurface flow that maintains the Potter Marsh water table or erupts in springs adjacent to and within Potter Marsh.
- Direct contributions to the hydrological function and health of Potter Marsh’s nesting, feeding, rearing, and resting habitat for migratory and coastal-dependent birds and a productive Pacific salmon spawning habitat (salmon provide a food source for the Cook Inlet beluga whales).
- Important natural habitat connection from Chugach State Park in the Chugach Mountains to the Anchorage Coastal Wildlife Refuge on the shores of the Cook Inlet.

OPEN SPACE

Large tract of undeveloped land containing a scenic viewshed of contiguous naturally forested uplands.

- Visible by the public from all direction and provides a unique scenic backdrop of high importance for the adjacent Potter Marsh in the Anchorage Coastal Wildlife Refuge and for the Seward Highway, designated USDA Forest Service Scenic Byway, Alaska Scenic Byway, and All-American Road, and for the Alaska Railroad.
- Part of a significant regional landscape that attracts tourism to Anchorage.
- Views from the property encompass the Anchorage Coastal Wildlife Refuge, Turnagain Arm, and northern portion of the volcanic Aleutian arc.

Protection Objective

Retain the park forever in a predominantly open space condition for the scenic enjoyment of the public and to yield a significant public benefit. Protect open space resources on the property, including scenic resources by preserving the relationship of scenic resources within the park to natural and scenic resources in its surrounds. Protect scenic vistas visible from the public rights-of-way and other public properties in the vicinity of the park.



RECREATION AND EDUCATION

Provides outdoor recreational and educational opportunities for the public.

- Forested uplands provide excellent opportunities for Passive Recreation trails for traversing the park to appreciate the natural environment and scenic views.
- Expansive views to and from the park, the topography, and the diversity of ecosystems support Passive Recreation year-round.
- Unique geological formations, multiple habitat types, and views of the surrounding area provide excellent opportunities for educational activities.
- Located directly adjacent to Potter Marsh, one of Anchorage’s most popular destinations for wildlife viewing and Passive Recreation, and to Chugach State Park, another popular destination for recreation.
- Location, adjacencies, and undeveloped status provide opportunities for future connections to local and regional trail networks.

Protection Objective

Preserve the park for outdoor Passive Recreation by, or the education of, the general public. Seeks to facilitate outdoor recreation and education by providing for public access onto and within the park.



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PERMITTED USES & DEVELOPMENT WITHIN THE PARK

Activities, uses, and development (improvements) within the park are limited to those permitted by the Conservation Easement. All other activities, uses, and improvements are prohibited.

Below is an abbreviated summary of the permitted uses and improvements allowed within the two zones – Resource Protection Area & Limited Development Area – defined in the Conservation Easement.

RESOURCE PROTECTION AREA

Non-motorized, Passive Recreation and open space activities such as walking, biking, horseback riding on trails, cross-country skiing, bird watching, nature study or appreciation, berry picking, or educational or scientific activities consistent with the furtherance of the Conservation Purposes are permitted within the Resource Protection Area. Improvements within the Resource Protection Area are limited by the following categories:

EXISTING IMPROVEMENTS

Existing Improvements are improvements located on the park as of the Easement Date as identified in the Baseline report. An example of Existing Improvements include the Gasline, Belarde, and Moen Homestead Trails. An Existing Improvement may be maintained, repaired or replaced in its existing location, so long as it is consistent with maintenance of attainment of the Conservation Purposes.



Example images of Existing Improvements located in the park.

ADDITIONAL IMPROVEMENTS

The following new improvements are permitted as long as they are consistent with the Conservation Purposes and not intended to promote uses inconsistent with maintenance of the Conservation Values:

- Regulatory and educational signs
- Habitat enhancement devices such as bird houses or bat houses
- Benches
- Park-style trash receptacles meant for trash disposal that are wildlife-proof.
- Any structures used to control access
- Trails, designed and constructed for Passive Recreation and Non-Motorized Use. Trails and all other related Improvements should be limited in density and in impacts on the Conservation Values to avoid habitat fragmentation and to support Passive Recreation and shall be located to protect sensitive habitat in the Resource Protection Area. Further trail improvement requirements include:
 - Trail tread will be soft surface and may be covered (if at all) by wood chips, gravel, or another highly porous natural material surface.
 - Trail tread does not exceed 36” width. Total trail clearance does not exceed 72” width. In exceptional circumstances, where necessary for safety and visibility, the total trail clearance may be increased to a maximum 96” width.
 - Gasline, Belarde, and Moen Homestead Trails may be maintained, repaired, and replaced. These trails may be expanded to tread not to exceed 96” width and total trail clearance of 132” width.
 - Trails to be constructed in a manner that does not unnecessarily augment natural grade (i.e., no embankments, dirt jumps, or ramps, or Improvements that are not required for accessibility or Conservation Purposes).
 - Trails are designed and constructed to avoid Wet Areas. Wet Areas are defined per the Conservation Easement as watercourses, springs, seeps, ponds, and wetlands and areas within 25 feet of their edge.

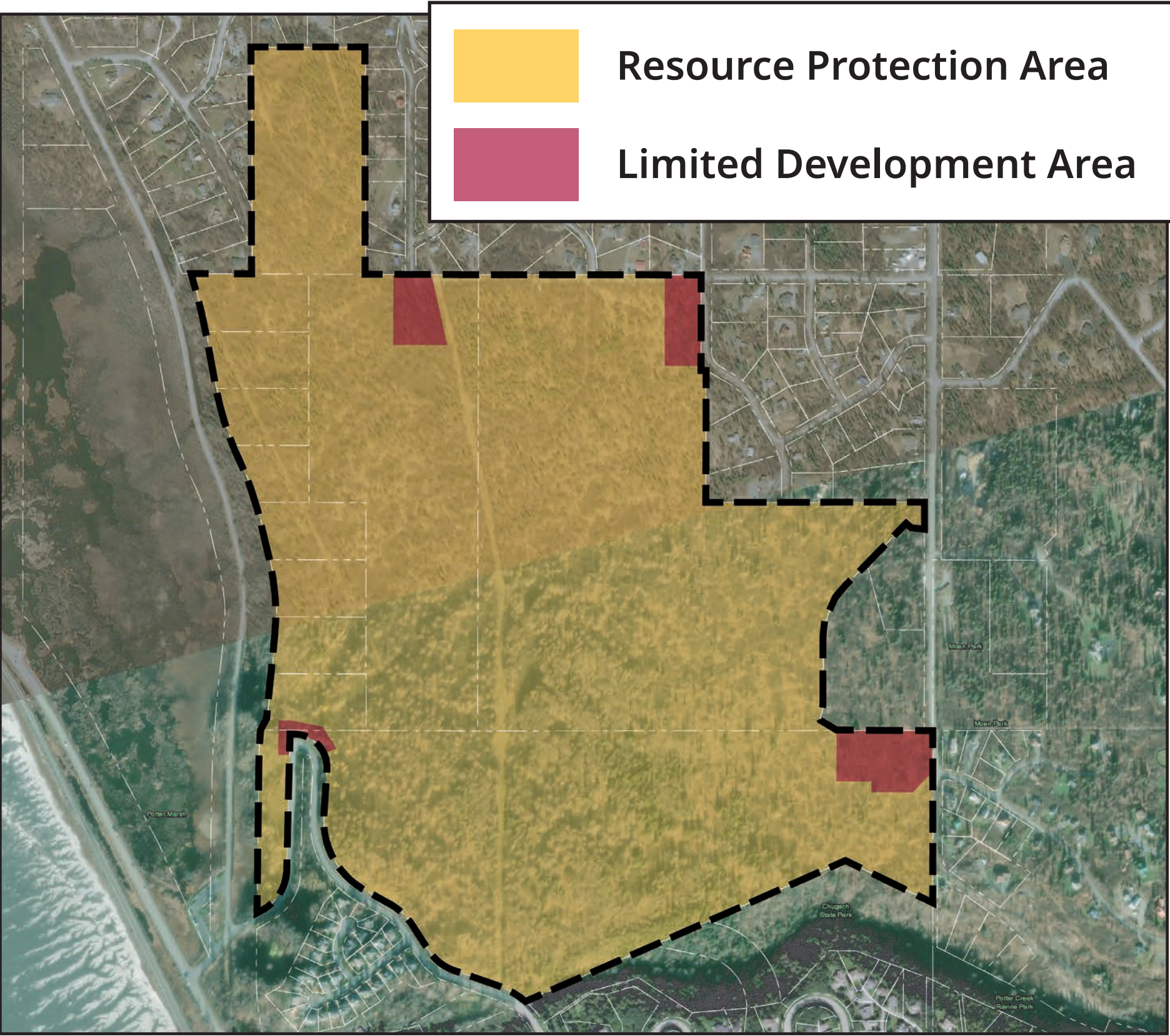
- If trails cross Wet Areas: footbridge, boardwalk, or other appropriate improvement shall be constructed to allow for crossing in a manner that minimizes impacts to Conservation Values. Width and design shall match design and intent of connecting trail or Improvement.
- One connector trail may be designed and constructed between Golden View Drive Limited Development Area and Moen Homestead Trail. One connected trail may be designed and constructed between Bettijeau Street Limited Development Area and Belarde Trail. Trail tread not to exceed 96” width and clearance of 132”.
- One bluff trail, or Turnagain Arm Trail connection, or Coastal Trail connection, with related Improvements such as wide paved surfaces, retaining walls, additional grading, cantilevered boardwalk or platform, or stairs may be allowed if Great Land Trust approves.
- Fences, walls, gates, or similar barrier structures. Improvement should be designed to allow for wildlife passage and so that scenic views over and across the park are obscured to the smallest possible degree.
- Improvements design to protect the Conservation Values.
- Viewing overlooks or other associated Improvements to provide viewing of Potter Marsh or other scenic, natural features. Shall be limited in size and shall be located to protect sensitive habitat and scenic views of the park, and designed and constructed in a manner that blends with the natural setting.
- Passive Recreation and open space activities such as walking, biking, horseback riding on trails, cross-country skiing, bird watching, nature study or appreciation, berry picking, or educational or scientific activities consistent with and in furtherance of the Conservation Purposes.

LIMITED DEVELOPMENT AREA

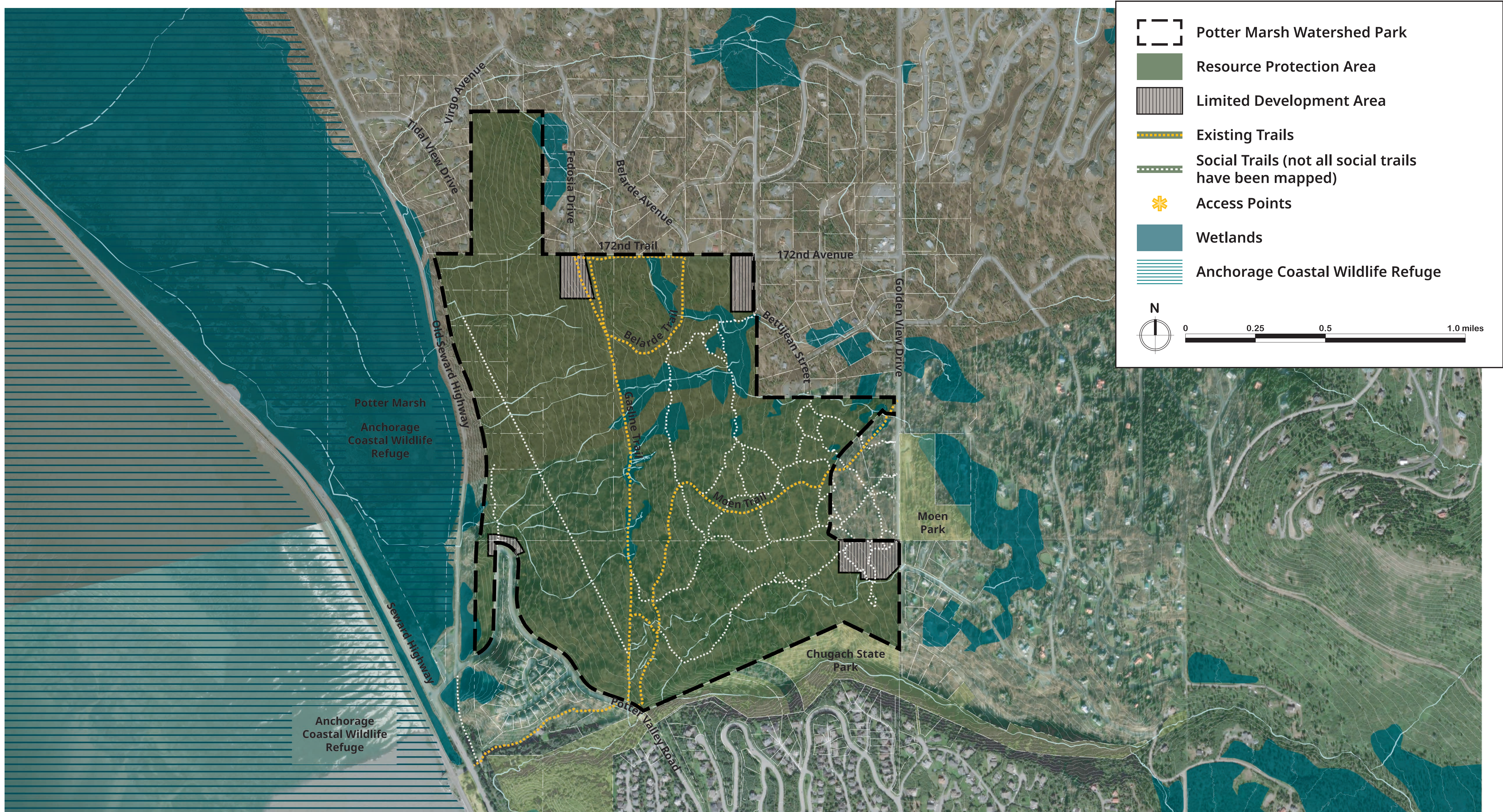
Any use or improvement permitted in the Resource Protection Area is permitted in the Limited Development Area. Additional allowances include:

ADDITIONAL IMPROVEMENTS

- Improvements necessary or useful to promote or support Passive Recreation activities, such as paved parking lots; Access Drives; landscape treatments; restrooms or other similar facilities; kiosks; picnic tables; pavilions or other similar structures; viewing overlooks; a park host camping spot or caretaker cabin and accessory Improvements; and any other similar Improvement.
- Trails for Non-Motorized use, of any cleared width, designed with any type of surface, such as paved trails.
- Utility Improvements, including for Renewable Energy, servicing activities, uses or Improvements permitted within the Limited Development Area(s).
- Outdoor lighting should be designed to limit light pollution impacts on the nighttime scenic views of the Park.



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POTTER MARSH WATERSHED PARK

SITE INVENTORY PLAN

