

CHAPTER TWO: LAND USE PLAN



SUTTON COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

OVERALL GOAL

“The Sutton Planning Area is a scenic, rural small town community. It is the desire of the community to preserve the area’s scenic and residential qualities including air and water quality, quiet atmosphere and outdoor recreation opportunities.”

Growth and development is encouraged and fostered where a balance exists between private property rights, use of natural resources, public investment in community facilities and services, and the protection of our natural environment for our continued sustenance.”

The recent 2007 community survey showed continued support for the Sutton Comprehensive Plan’s overall goal.

LAND USE PLAN

The residents of Sutton have made a decision to live in the area not as a matter of convenience, but of choice. Sutton's population resides in the planning area despite the lack of natural gas and other utilities, the lack of commercial amenities provided in a more urban environment, and often despite the need to work far from their residence. From 1990 to 2008, the population grew from 308 individuals to approximately 1,318 residents. The overriding attraction of this area includes its incredibly scenic views, quiet atmosphere, low traffic volumes, clean environment and outdoor recreation opportunities. The desire of this community to preserve these qualities is readily evident in its vocal and widespread opposition to a major electrical transmission intertie proposed first in the late eighties and then again in the mid nineties. Recent issues, such as the proposed Alaska Natural Gas Pipeline, coal exploration and mining leases, subdivisions of large parcels for dense housing developments, coal bed methane, and concerns about water quality and availability prompted the update to the Sutton Comprehensive Plan.



Granite Peak; photo provided by Jessica Dryden-Winnestaffer

It is the desire of the community to preserve the residential qualities that have made Sutton such an attractive place to live, yet not to diminish the viability of attracting the amenities and development that are desirable to the community.

GENERAL GOALS

The community, through a public planning process, has chosen not to promote new regulations for those land uses that, individually, have low or moderate impact on identified desirable residential qualities. Any proposed land use restrictions focus on future development that would

be most detrimental to the qualities the Sutton community wants to preserve. It is not the desire of the community to “change the rules” for those businesses that are already established.

Recommendation:

- **The planning team has recommended regulating only those land uses that, individually, are potentially most detrimental to the area’s high quality of life.**
- **Existing development should not be subject to a change in the regulations and should have “grandfather privileges.”**
- **Protect air, water, wildlife and land quality while reducing impacts to nearby properties from traffic, noise, pollution, lighting, etc.**
- **Protect recreation opportunities and enhance the quality of life for Sutton residents.**
- **Ensure future development is compatible with adjacent properties.**

LAND OWNERSHIP

PUBLIC LANDS

Public lands (which include Matanuska-Susitna Borough, State of Alaska, and Federal lands) represent approximately 51* percent of the land in the Sutton boundaries, or 11,872 acres (18.5 square miles).

[* Sutton CC Boundary is 23,415 acres in size. Private land=43 percent, public land=51 percent, remaining percentages fall into the categories of ROW or water bodies.]



“Mountain View in Summer” provided by Wendy Zake at <http://visitalaska.wordpress.com/sutton>

Recommendations:

- **As infrastructure needs and demands increase throughout the area, consider expanding the planning area to accommodate this growth. Many individuals gain access to recreational areas and properties through the Sutton area.**
- **Changes in land classifications and designations, proposed sales, and platting actions should be closely examined. The Sutton Community Council and residents should be alerted by federal, state, and Borough agencies when these actions occur.**
- **Retain State of Alaska lands within the Matanuska-Susitna Valley Moose Range as public recreational and wildlife habitat lands (Susitna Area Plan, page 372).**
- **Ensure that natural resource development occurs consistent with the recommendations in this chapter.**

Table A: Public Lands

Lot Size (Acres)	<i>Number of Lots</i>	Percent of Lots	Improved Lots	% of Improved Lots
>160	20	19%	0	0%
160 to >100	14	14%	0	0%
100 to >40	12	12%	1	8%
40 to >20	10	10%	0	0%
20 to >10	6	6%	1	17%
10 to >5	6	6%	1	17%
5 to >2	11	11%	5	45%
2 to >1	4	4%	1	25%
1 to >0	19	18%	4	21%
	102		13	

Source: May 2007, MSB GIS Department.

PRIVATE LANDS

Privately owned lands (which include Alaska Mental Health Trust and Alaska Native corporation lands) represent approximately 43* percent of the land in the Sutton boundaries, or 9,974 acres (15.6 square miles). Table B shows a summary of privately owned lot size and improvement status in Sutton. [*Sutton CC Boundary is 23,415 acres in size. Private land=43 percent, public land=51 percent, remaining percentages fall into the categories of ROW or water bodies.]

Table B: Private Lands

Lot Size (Acres)	Number of Lots	Percent of Lots	Improved Lots	% of Improved Lots
>160	5	0%	0	0%
160 to >100	12	1%	7	58%
100 to >40	29	3%	10	34%
40 to >20	75	8%	43	57%
20 to >10	52	6%	31	60%
10 to >5	86	9%	51	59%
5 to >2	130	14%	85	65%
2 to >1	161	17%	71	44%
1 to >0	391	42%	132	34%
	941		430	

RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT

One of the qualities that residents enjoy and which supports some of the attractions of the area (scenic views, quiet atmosphere, low traffic volumes) is the variety of opportunities that exist with the current development pattern. This includes the smaller lots and higher density that generally is most prevalent in the central portion of the community, and the more rural, low density atmosphere in much of the remainder of the area.

Recommendations:

- **Encourage the continuation of the existing development pattern: higher density and concentration in the central area of the Sutton community, and larger lot size, lower density in the remainder of the area.**
- **Identify areas appropriate for development.**
- **Protect water quality, prevent soil erosion, and ensure that development can adequately provide infrastructure needs such as roads, emergency access and other related concerns.**
- **Provide for a variety of lot sizes and development patterns throughout the community utilizing conservation subdivision design, cluster development and development incentives to retain the low density rural lifestyle.**

COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Currently, there is minimal commercial development within the planning area. The majority of existing commercial development is composed of a few stores serving the local population and several small highway-oriented businesses. There is also a significant and growing number of home occupations ranging from the production of handmade crafts to auto repair. Although it is the desire of the community that the Glenn Highway does not become a series of strip malls, and that the aesthetics of this corridor be preserved, the planning team estimates that there is not sufficient community support for restricting or zoning commercial development within the Sutton area. Respondents to the 2007 community survey did not want large scale commercial and “big box” stores in the area. However, support was indicated for the following services: daycare, grocery store, restaurant, hardware, small-scale commercial, small-scale retail, small home-based businesses and tourism.

Recommendations:

- **Determine commercial development standards based on the impacts to land, wildlife, air and water quality (e.g. traffic, noise, lighting pollution, increased impervious surfaces, and compatibility).**

- **Establish growth boundaries where higher concentrations of development will occur while designating other areas as more development restrictive.**
- **Protect residential neighborhoods and associated values.**
- **Develop vegetative buffers or other screening techniques to shield properties from incompatible uses.**

INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT

Of the three basic land uses (residential, commercial, and industrial), the industrial land uses are often of most concern to a small community. Heavy industrial development often has significant impacts related to noise, visual qualities, dust and air-quality, and traffic safety and volume. Currently, there are Borough regulations pertaining to the establishment of incinerators, industrial processing and fuel burning equipment (MSB 8.30.125 & 8.30.130), interim materials district (gravel/natural resource extraction – MSB 17.28), conditional use permit for earth materials extraction activities (MSB 17.30), Borough wide conditional uses (MSB 17.60), conditional use permit for coal bed methane exploration and development (MSB 17.62), and conditional use permit for waste incineration (MSB 17.64). The Borough Wide Comprehensive Plan 2005 Update encourages commercial and industrial development that is compatible with residential development and local community desires. There is a strong community desire in Sutton to protect residential areas and the scenic Glenn Highway from the impacts of heavy industrial development.

Industrial uses have the ability to provide significant economic benefit to the community. A local gravel source may be beneficial to local infrastructure and economy. However, there is a need and a desire for the community to express its concerns regarding proposed industrial land uses and to require developers to mitigate any severe negative impacts. Heavy industrial uses will be evaluated on a case by case basis and be allowed only if it is possible to mitigate any severe negative impacts.

Recommendation:

- **Heavy industrial uses may be allowed only if they meet conditional permitting requirements. In order to maintain air, water, land quality, and reduce impacts from noise and lighting pollution to residential areas and the natural environment, and minimize visual impact along the Glenn Highway, heavy industrial uses may be allowed only if they meet conditional permitting requirements.**

NATURAL RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

There is a long history of natural resource development in the community of Sutton, starting with coal mines in the early 1900's. Historic coal mining altered forest resources, utilized and altered water resources, and altered soils by removing the vegetative soil mat and creating steep erodible slopes. Also historic gold mining occurred in the upper Moose Creek valley. In recent history there has been minimal natural resource development. Many people gather firewood on private property or in permitted areas of public property, however this impact has been minimal on the resource to date. In addition, several private and public gravel pits have been in operation in the Sutton planning area.



Mining for Gold in Alaska. Horses helped. Photo found at http://www.mccarthy lodge.com/specgallery.php?id_alb=7

Since 1984 the Alaska Abandoned Mine Lands Program of the Alaska Department of Natural Resources, Division of Mining Land and Water, has worked to rehabilitate historic coal mine sites in Sutton for public safety purposes. Land and water eligible for reclamation with Alaska AML funds are those that were mined or affected by mining and abandoned or left in an inadequate reclamation status before August 3, 1977, and for which there is no continuing reclamation responsibility under State or federal law. The Alaska AML Program has worked in the Sutton planning area to close numerous underground mine adits (horizontal passageways) and shafts (vertical or sloped passageways), remove water impoundments, reduce steep slopes, remove highwalls (the unexcavated face of exposed overburden and coal in a surface mine), and extinguish underground fires of burning spoils (waste material from mining).



Sutton Coal Wash Plant Sign from <http://alpinehistoricalpark.org>

Recommendations:

- **Protect residential neighborhoods and associated property values.**
- **Natural Resource development should be allowed as a conditional use, to allow for community input and placement of conditions of approval (such as noise, lighting, air quality, and times of operation restrictions) to ensure protection of the quality of life Sutton residents enjoy.**
- **Identify, protect, and enhance the quantity and quality of the community's watersheds and groundwater; prevent degradation of fish and wildlife habitat, vegetation, and clean air resources.**
- **Protect natural systems and features from potentially negative impacts of human activities such as natural resource development.**
- **Provide site restoration if land surface modification violates Borough, state, or federal regulations or development does not occur within a reasonable amount of time.**
- **Protect natural systems and features including water and soils from potentially negative impacts of site restoration and reclamation activities.**
- **Minimize the impact of natural resource development on recreational uses in the area.**
- **Potential natural resource development will occur in the order of development preference as outlined in the Matanuska Valley Moose Range Plan (page 82).**
- **Limit construction site run off both during construction and long-term operation.**
- **Identify and mitigate disturbance and impacts on culturally or historically relevant sites or resources.**

The following provides specific recommendations for Water Resources, Soils, Forest Resources, Gravel Extraction, and Coal Bed Methane Development.

Water Resources – Recommendations:

- **Limit development in floodplains, wetlands and other water bodies.**
- **Monitor water quality and water availability during natural resource development.**
- **Protect and improve steep slopes and prevent erosion along water bodies.**
- **Provide a natural, vegetated buffer along water bodies and corridors.**

Soils - Recommendations

- **Safeguard soils by reducing soil erosion, especially near water bodies.**
- **Protect steep or erodible slopes.**

- To the extent possible, consider avoiding development in high risk earthquake zones (fault areas).

Forest Resources – Recommendations:

- After natural resource development, provide restoration of forest resources.
- Restore native species of vegetation.

Gravel Extraction – Recommendations:

- Protect groundwater supplies, water quality, and water availability.
- Prohibit gravel extraction within floodplains and flood hazard areas or near water bodies.
- Prohibit gravel mining into groundwater table.
- Provide visual screening and buffers.
- Provide noise mitigation.
- Identify and protect natural and cultural resources.
- After gravel extraction is completed, provide site reclamation; place sufficient organic material (i.e. organic soils) onto reclaimed surface and restore native species of vegetation.

Coal Bed Methane Development – Recommendation:

- Protect and mitigate negative impacts to surface property characteristics and values.
- Protect groundwater supplies, water quality and water availability.
- Protect soils, air quality, vegetation and wildlife.
- Provide visual screening and buffers.
- Provide noise mitigation.
- Provide fire hazard mitigation.
- When methane extraction ceases, provide site reclamation and revegetation with indigenous species.

AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

Although the abundance of farmland in Sutton is not as prevalent as in the Core Area, community members still value the open space and green infrastructure that farmland provides, and want to investigate options for retaining the rural, small town character it provides.

There are three larger farms in the Sutton area. The Bannons, which currently produces potatoes, the Callisons, which leases out its fields for hay farming, and the Wallaces, on Mile 58 road, which also produces hay.

The Callison property is also the location of the recently constructed cell tower, which provided a necessary communication link in an area with otherwise sporadic cell phone reception. In addition there are several smaller commercial gardens and greenhouses that produce vegetables for distribution in the Valley and Anchorage.



*Agricultural Equipment photo from
<http://alpinehistoricalpark.org>*

Goal: Promote the continued viability of local agriculture.

Recommendations:

- **Establish priorities for conservation and acquisition of agricultural lands.**

Discussion: Agriculture is an important economic activity and land use in the Sutton area and an important part of local heritage. Farmlands enhance the “rural, small town character” that appeals to Sutton residents. Many residents agree that funds should be spent to preserve agricultural lands and to preserve open spaces.

As land prices rise and development pressures intensify, agricultural land will be increasingly in demand for settlement uses. State law (AS 29.45.060) requires the Borough to assess farmlands at “farm use value” rather than full market value. This helps maintain the economic viability of farmlands in general.

Beyond that, the Borough has limited financial resources to purchase or conserve agricultural lands as open space and natural areas or for other public purposes.

This policy proposes that the Borough inventory and prioritize large-acreage agricultural tracts according to their potential value as public open space, natural areas, and wildlife habitat. Based on that information, the Borough can then target its efforts and resources on the agricultural lands with greatest value as open space.

- Pursue a multi-pronged approach to enhance the continuation and economic success of local agriculture.

Discussion: Population growth and economic changes are altering the economics of agriculture in the Matanuska-Susitna Valley. These changes are eroding the viability of traditional large-scale, stand-alone agriculture. At the same time, agriculture’s potential value is rising as a feature of Sutton’s historic heritage, as a local source of high-quality foodstuffs, as open space and habitat, and as an element of a variety of other productive economic activities.

This policy proposes a set of strategies that, pursued in concert, will help perpetuate Sutton’s farming tradition and assist farm enterprises to realize their full economic potential while also fulfilling public goals. Possible strategies include:

- Purchase of a variety of development rights to conserve open space, natural habitat, and historic buildings consistent with the continuation of active private agriculture
- Encouragement of small farms geared to production of high-value crops and specialized crops (e.g., organic foods) for local and regional markets
- Promotion of a community gardens program to enable residents to rent small tracts of farmland for family use

COAL MINING

One of the most likely heavy industrial land uses to be developed in the Sutton area is coal mining. Usibelli Coal Mine Inc., Sutton Partners LLC (Knoll Acres LLC), Alaska Mental Health Trust and Randy Hobbs own coal leases within the Sutton planning area, and Alaska Earth Sciences has recently been drilling test holes for coal exploration in the area.

Several times during the last decade coal mining activities appeared likely to be renewed in the



Alaska Coal Bed Map By Brian Yanity

planning area. The Sutton community recognizes that there may be local employment benefits from coal mining activities but has also stated concerns about some of the probable impacts. The most common community concern regards a hazard to public safety of transporting coal down Jonesville Road in the center of Sutton and on the Glenn Highway to Palmer. Truck-hauled coal would rely on the Glenn Highway, as it is the only road connecting Sutton to neighboring areas of Palmer and the rest of south-central Alaska. However, as such it is also the only road for area residents to use for grocery shopping or other regular activities, including work, for many residents. The community has voiced public safety concerns about the possibility of sharing a narrow, often icy highway with large coal trucks.

Alaska's coal industry, which must comply with federal standards, is administered by the State of Alaska Department of Natural Resources, Division of Mining, Land and Water. The Division of Mining, Land and Water implements the Alaska Coal Mining and Reclamation Act including the regulations for coal mining on private, municipal, state, and federal lands. These regulations pertain to almost all aspects of coal mining activity from exploration through final reclamation, and are particularly stringent regarding impacts on local communities. Coal exploration and mining should be treated as heavy industrial use and community input should be specifically requested before any permit approval.

The Alaska Railroad Corporation has mentioned a slight interest in re-establishing the Palmer to Sutton railroad line with either locomotive service or a conveyor system; the Alaska Railroad Corporation has retained ownership of this rail line corridor. It is the opinion of the planning team that such a land use should be treated as a heavy industrial use and the community should be allowed input on the proposal.

Recommendations:

- **In as much as it is possible, any permitting requirements the Borough initiates relating to coal mining should co-ordinate with the state's permitting process.**
- **The Borough, state, and private developers should work together to develop alternative road access to coal mines and other heavy industrial sites if extensive truck hauling is required.**
- **Land uses that require significant heavy truck traffic should be required to undergo a public review as part of a conditional permitting requirement.**
- **Heavy industrial uses utilizing the road system for extensive heavy truck traffic should mitigate the associated noise, road maintenance and traffic safety impacts resulting from truck traffic. Suggestions offered for mitigating the impact of heavy truck traffic on Jonesville Road include:**

- **A flashing light at appropriate intersections.**
- **An acceleration lane for trucks wherever extensive heavy truck traffic would enter the Glenn Highway.**
- **Upgrading any sub-standard roads to withstand heavy truck traffic.**
- **Providing some sort of acoustic buffer between heavy industrial uses including extensive heavy truck traffic and residential areas.**
- **Limiting heavy industrial uses and extensive heavy truck traffic to certain hours of operation, where it conflicts with existing residential uses and quality of life.**
- **The Sutton community should be involved in identifying the need for, and scope of, work regarding mine reclamation efforts.**
- **All mining activities will take efforts to protect land, air, wildlife, and water quality, as well as the community's quality of life.**

TOWER STRUCTURES

Other industrial type land uses which have been a concern to Sutton residents include the controversial Sutton to Glennallen Intertie Project. The proposed route for this project was from the Glenn Highway north adjacent to Jonesville Road for 1.3 miles and then east by northeast up the Matanuska River Valley. The height of the proposed project was 55-100 feet. This project would have dramatically altered the pristine appearance of the valley and was heavily opposed by Matanuska Valley residents. The Borough regulates structures in excess of 100 feet. The Borough does not regulate transmission lines, cellular towers or other tower structures less than 100 feet in height. Although the project is not currently progressing and is no longer an imminent threat to the area, continued community concern over the proposal remains. The Special Land Use District regulations for Sutton, MSB 17.27.060, require a conditional use permit for construction of structures over 50 feet in the Sutton area.

Recommendation:

- **Proposals to construct major electrical transmission lines, radio, cellular towers and other manmade structures exceeding 50 feet in height or major electrical transmission lines, radio and cellular towers that are visible from the Glenn Highway or residentially developed areas must undergo a public review and must obtain a conditional use permit prior to construction.**
- **Develop facility standards that protect the land, air, wildlife and water quality of the area.**

- **Protect and enhance viewsheds.**
- **Protect residential neighborhoods and associate property values.**

JUNKYARDS, JUNK, AND TRASH

Junkyards are a land use which can have detrimental effect on an area. The Borough regulates commercial junkyards as conditional uses (MSB 17.27.60) and also regulates noncommercial accumulation of junk and trash that is visible from the public roads or which creates a public nuisance (MSB 8.50). These rules are effective Borough wide. Actually achieving removal of junk and trash violations can be problematic if the property owners refuse to clean the site up. Citations for violation may be issued and other legal action (such as requests for restraining orders and injunctions) may be taken, however the legal process takes months or years for court action.

Extensive storage of junk and trash can create groundwater and surface water contamination problems that threaten residential drinking water supplies and salmon streams. It is the opinion of the planning team that the outdoor storage of large quantities of junk and trash that is unsightly or creates a public nuisance and a public hazard should be regulated whether or not Borough-wide regulations are in place.

Recommendations:

- **Regulate storage of extensive quantities of junk and trash in order to prevent a public nuisance and health and safety problems.**
- **Protect and enhance natural resources including watershed, groundwater supplies and viewsheds.**
- **Protect residential neighborhoods and associate property values by encouraging the removal of junk and trash.**
- **Encourage coordination between the Borough, the National Guard and other entities to choose Sutton as an environmental community project.**
- **Encourage expansion of the free junk car removal program offered by the Borough.**
- **Offer conveniently located dumpsters for trash disposal.**
- **Offer convenient hours of operation for the community dump transfer station.**
- **Encourage low-cost Mat-Su Borough dump fees.**
- **Encourage a community recycling transfer site or service.**

INCARCERATION AND REHABILITATION FACILITIES

The Palmer Correctional Center, located within the Sutton planning boundary, is now, and has consistently been, proposed for expansion by the Alaska Department of Corrections because it is the least costly



Palmer Correctional Center, photo from <http://www.correct.state.ak.us/corrections/institutions/pcc/pcc.jsf>

facility able to provide additional medium security beds. The

improvements proposed as part of the expansion will mitigate some of the existing and potential impacts of this facility. Incarceration centers, including jails, juvenile detention centers, prisons, and similar facilities, are land uses that raise unique concerns when compared to other land uses. Chief among the concerns is the safety of the surrounding community. In 1997 a community survey performed by the Alpine Civic Club (the precursor to the Sutton Community Council) revealed that the majority of the community is opposed to expanding the existing Palmer Correctional Center. In addition, the April 2007 community survey also indicated Sutton residents have continued concerns about prison expansion and community safety.

Another concern of the community is that there is an inadequate backstop for the Correctional Center's shooting range. Because the negative impacts on the community of Sutton increase proportionally with the size of a correctional facility, a prison population in excess of 700 inmates is not recommended. The planning team opposes the construction of any new prison facilities within the planning area. Expansion of the existing facility is acceptable only when certain conditions are met.

Recommendations:

- **Prohibit all types of incarceration facilities within the Sutton Planning Area.**
- **The existing Palmer Correctional Facility is “grandfathered” and may be allowed to expand if and when certain conditions are met that will reduce the impact on the surrounding community. These conditions include:**

- **Substantially reducing the glare from light fixtures emanating off-site or into the night sky using the best available technology, and**
- **Enclosing all inmate facilities with perimeter fencing and adequate security systems, and**
- **Constructing other improvements needed to assure the safety of the surrounding community, including improved safety measures to the existing shooting range, and**
- **Limiting the hours of operation of the prison's rifle range to normal business hours; 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday, and**
- **Adhering to other measures to mitigate existing and potential negative impacts on the surrounding community.**
- **Developing and implementing regulations that protect water, land, and air quality.**
- **Protecting water availability and water quality.**
- **Protecting residential neighborhoods and associate property values.**
- **Limiting prison population to no more than 700.**

In addition, Department of Correction's personnel have indicated that the Palmer Correctional Center will never be converted to a maximum security prison. The community of Sutton has historically and continues to adamantly oppose any large, medium or maximum security facility being established in the Sutton Planning Area.

Recommendations:

- **Prohibit the conversion of the existing facility to a maximum security facility.**
- **Prohibit large, medium security facilities.**

The 620-acre site of the Palmer Correctional Center was also considered as the site of an additional privately operated prison facility. While a site at Point MacKenzie was selected for the Borough's future prison site, the temptation of a for-profit organization to make cost-cutting concessions sacrificing the safety of the surrounding community was deemed inappropriate by the planning team. Public agencies such as the Department of Corrections are more directly responsible to the public and to the community of Sutton than privately run facilities.

Recommendations:

- **The community of Sutton continues to oppose and desires to prohibit privately run incarceration facilities, including conversion of the existing Palmer Correctional Center to private management or operation.**
- **Protect the Sutton area from future prison site selection.**

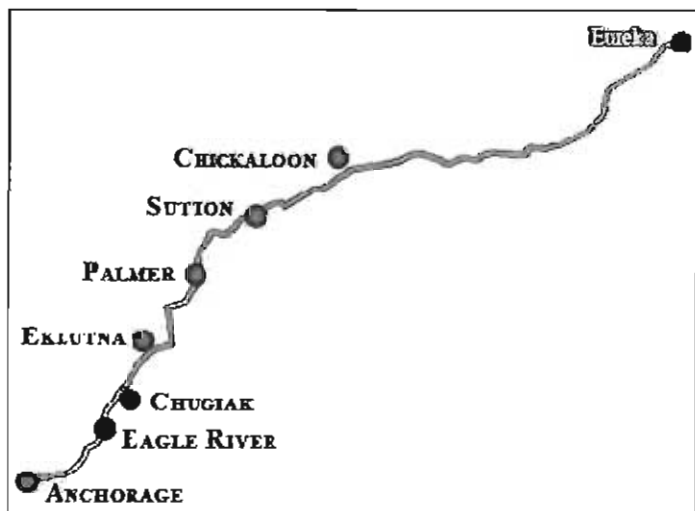
Rehabilitation centers including community residential correctional centers (halfway houses) and other facilities for which the treatment of drug or alcohol addiction may be mandated to the facility’s participants have raised similar safety concerns to incarceration facilities. The community of Sutton is especially ill suited to the needs of a community residential center which must be in close proximity to jobs and other facilities to allow residents to lead a semi-autonomous but supervised transition to a productive working life. The rural community of Sutton lacks the job opportunities, public services, and other community infrastructure necessary for such a facility to be successful; however, it recognizes that some type of treatment facility may be appropriate, with adequate public input and safeguards.

Recommendation:

- **Community Residential Correctional Centers (halfway houses) and drug and alcohol rehabilitation centers catering to individuals mandated to seek drug and alcohol rehabilitation should be conditionally permitted in the Sutton Planning Area.**

DEVELOPMENT ADJACENT TO THROUGH ROAD CORRIDORS

The Glenn Highway is the only road within the planning area connecting Sutton with communities and services outside the planning area. The Glenn is of special importance because of its link to the more developed areas of the Mat-Su Borough and Anchorage. Residents in the Sutton area must rely on this transportation corridor for emergency services and, in many instances, shopping and commuting. Hence, the functionality of this highway is especially important. Development and



Glenn Highway Map
Found at <http://glennhighway.org>

access along the highway can have significant effects on safety and traffic flow, yet these effects can be significantly mitigated. Furthermore, it is a community desire to maintain the aesthetics of this route. The Glenn Highway is designated as a National Scenic Byway from Anchorage, through Sutton, to Gunsight Mountain. A scenic byway designation makes the Glenn Highway eligible for funding for scenic highway improvements such as waysides, interpretive signage, rest areas, etc.

Recommendation:

- **The community should support the development of a corridor management plan for the Glenn Highway to preserve the efficiency of the highway and protect the scenic highway designation.**
- **Promote safe ingress and egress onto the Glenn Highway from the Sutton area.**
- **Provide an efficient transportation network within the Sutton area by continuing to develop a collector road system enabling residents to access businesses and public facilities.**
- **Guide development along the Glenn Highway to minimize traffic, safety, and land, air, and water quality impacts.**
- **Provide appropriate, adequate and separated non-motorized use paths along the Glenn Highway.**
- **Encourage property owners adjacent to the Glenn Highway to maintain property to enhance the scenic byway designation.**

The majority of the highway frontage is privately owned. However, it is recommended that portions of existing public lands along the highway be retained in public ownership to maintain some undeveloped lands adjacent to the highway.

Recommendation:

- **Where appropriate, preserve a scenic buffer of public lands adjacent to the Glenn Highway along the few areas where public lands currently exist.**
- **Provide and maintain rest areas, restrooms, and trash containers as appropriate along the Glenn Highway.**

CHAPTER THREE:

PUBLIC FACILITIES PLAN

PUBLIC FACILITIES IN GENERAL

One of the general Land Use goals in this plan is to: *Ensure future development is compatible with adjacent properties.* To be consistent with this goal, and existing commercial development and public facilities in Sutton, the community would benefit from co-location of certain facilities when practical, or design of facilities to accommodate multiple community needs. Existing public facilities are located in the core area, and this complements the desire to develop a community “town center” where commercial and public activities can be concentrated. This type of concentrated development is also conducive to providing a location for a public transportation hub in Sutton, as identified in the transportation chapter. Land in the town center area should be closely evaluated for its appropriateness for public facilities development and retention or acquisition as necessary.

Recommendations:

- **When possible, design and locate public facilities to reduce construction, operating, maintenance costs, and potential impacts to land, air, and water quality, by co-location, design that accommodates multiple uses, and by utilizing LEED (Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design) standards (see Sutton Library).**
- **Identify and acquire or reserve the necessary land for future public facilities.**

SUTTON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

The educational services for the Sutton planning area are administered by the Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District. Sutton Elementary had an enrollment of 64 students as of May 2008, and an unknown number of home school students. This enrollment figure is down from a high of 108 in May of 1997. The school is designed for a capacity of up to 250 school children. Sutton Elementary School serves Kindergarten through fifth grades. The service area of Sutton Elementary School includes portions east of the planning area and extends from Moose Creek at Mile 55 on the Glenn Highway to King Mountain Lodge at Mile 76.

There is no middle or high school in the planning area. Currently, students are bused to Palmer Junior Middle School and Palmer High School. A small number of survey respondents noted a need for a Junior Middle School and a High School in Sutton.

Recommendation:

- **Provide public schools to meet the needs of Sutton residents in the future.**

SUTTON LIBRARY

The Sutton Public Library was established in the early 1970's by volunteers. Located first in a post office, then in a local store, it was finally given a home by Phil and Jean O'Neill who donated the property (0.74 acres) on Jonesville Road where the library is now. The current library building was Sutton's first fire hall. It was constructed in 1980 with an addition added in the late eighties



Sutton Public Library, photo found at <http://www.matsulibraries.org/sutton>

and is approximately 2,400 square ft. The library houses a collection of approximately 20,000 titles including books, audio and video material creating a facility filled to capacity. In addition, there is one small reading room which serves multiple functions: a study space, craft area, program area, reading room, public meeting space and more.

The Sutton Library primarily services Mat-Su Borough residents who reside in the communities of Sutton, Chickaloon, Glacier View and Lake Louise. As a part of the Matanuska-Susitna Library Network, the Sutton Library shares its collection with all residents of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough and receives the benefit of collaborating with other Borough and city libraries.

The 2007 community survey showed strong community support for expanding the Sutton Public Library. The current library site is too small for building expansion so, in support of a new library building for Sutton, the Borough has purchased property to provide a building site near the Sutton Post Office and the Alpine Historical Park. Preliminary library and landscape designs suggest a shared parking lot for the library and the historical park.

In an effort to create public facilities with nurturing physical environments that maximize unique natural features of any building site and to create highly energy efficient buildings, the Mat-Su

Borough Assembly requires that any new Borough facility be constructed to LEED Certification Silver Standards. LEED stands for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design. Buildings that meet LEED certification rank high on a rating system that addresses the following components: water efficiency, energy efficiency, non-toxic building materials and sustainably procured building materials, indoor environmental air quality, innovation of the design process, and the sustainability of the building site including landscaping.

Recommendations:

- **Seek grant funding and other revenue sources for expanding the Sutton Public Library facility and services.**
- **Ensure the new library is constructed in accordance with LEED Silver Standards.**

SUTTON COMMUNITY HALL update 

The original Sutton Community Hall is located on Jonesville Road just across from the current Sutton Public Library and near the Jonesville Road/Glenn Highway intersection. The land was donated by Phil and Jean O’Neill, and is adjacent to Eska Creek. The building is eligible to register as a historic building



Sutton Community Hall, photo found at http://www.sacboard.com/sac_006.htm

under the 1966 National Historic Preservation Act. It was constructed in 1927 and used as a mess hall and dormitory at the Eklutna Hydroelectric Project until 1930. Between 1930 and 1956 it remained unused at Eklutna. It was moved to Sutton in 1956, where it became important in the development of civic life for area residents.

In preparation for the building’s relocation to Sutton, when coal miners finished their shifts at the mine, they hauled water and mixed concrete by hand to construct a concrete basement and foundation for the building. When the basement and foundation were complete, the building was moved from Eklutna to the site in two pieces. The hall was then welcomed by area residents and used as a social hall, public meeting site, a voting location, for educational activities, community schools activities, social and music festivals, and an emergency shelter.

The building, which is an estimated 2,000 square feet, is an important asset to the community. However, its condition has deteriorated and it has not been actively used for several years. To

meet safety regulations it needs many improvements or replacement. Encroachment onto the adjacent property, owned by the Alaska Railroad Corporation (historic railroad right-of-way), is relied upon for parking and outdoor activities. The building's proximity to Eska Creek is conducive to providing a community park adjacent to the creek.

Recommendations:

- **Negotiate with Alaska Railroad Corporation for a permit to use the properties already relied upon for parking and outdoor events.**
- **Evaluate the feasibility of acquiring property north of the community hall which is also relied upon for parking and outdoor events.**
- **Seek grant funding and other revenue sources for performing major upgrades to or replacement of the existing community hall.**
- **Design a community center that creates, fosters, and maintains the small-town atmosphere found in Sutton.**
- **Create a community park with access to Eska Creek.**

THE GATHERING PLACE

The Gathering Place is a Sutton project proposed by the Chickaloon Village Traditional Council. The Gathering Place would be a building to better serve our community by creating a space that nurtures and fosters the health of rural residents in communities from Sutton to Glacier View. The facility may include a Community Health Clinic (for Native and Non-native residents), Community Wellness Center, 6-10 Assisted Living Apartments, Elder's Food Program, Community Kitchen, and education/conference room.

Recommendation:

- **Support and encourage the Chickaloon Village Traditional Council's project known as The Gathering Place to provide services for all residents within the greater community (residents of Sutton, Chickaloon, and Glacier View).**

THE SUTTON MANOR AND ANNEX

The Sutton Manor and Annex are independent living, handicap-accessible facilities for low-income seniors. They consist of eight apartments in two buildings located in the core area of Sutton.

SUTTON POST OFFICE

The new Sutton Post Office opened in December of 1995. It is located on Chickaloon Way approximately 1/8 mile north of mile 61.5 of the Glenn Highway. The post office currently contains 480 post office boxes. The community survey indicated a desire to expand the post office facilities. While the post office is a federal facility and not a Borough public facility, the planning team supports appropriate development and planning of such a public facility.

Recommendation:

- **Consider appropriate development and the possible expansion of the post office.**

CEMETERY SITE

Planning team members stated a need and desire for a cemetery in the Sutton Planning Area. Currently, there is one privately established cemetery within the Sutton planning area, the Hillside Cemetery Association at Mile 57.5 of the Glenn Highway. Also, there are known Alaska Native burial sites in the Sutton area, including the core area. State law allows the burial of individuals on private property rather than an established cemetery, but transfers of land ownership often create problems if a new property owner is interested in development. Also, care and access are not assured without establishing a cemetery trust fund and cemetery organization. State law exempts up to 80 acres of cemetery land from taxation if the property is transferred to a non-profit cemetery association. The Matanuska-Susitna Borough has a general policy of not owning, managing or operating cemeteries.

Recommendation:

- **The community supports and respects the Chickaloon Native community's efforts to secure existing Alaska Native grave sites from disturbance and ensure future access for worship and maintenance.**
- **The community, Borough and/or state should acquire or set aside sufficient lands to meet future cemetery needs in Sutton.**

FIRE/AMBULANCE SERVICE

The Sutton Fire Service Area (SFSA) includes most but not all of the planning area. Near the eastern and western portion of the planning area, development exists north of the SFSA within the planning area. Fire, vehicle rescue and ambulance service for the planning area is provided from the Sutton Public Safety Building. This building is centrally located in Sutton on the Glenn

Highway at Mile 61 across from Jonesville Road. This facility has Emergency Medical Service (EMS) personnel and equipment available to serve the planning area, as well as a 911-emergency phone on the outside of the building providing immediate access to 911 operators. The fire rating for Sutton is 8B, which means if you live beyond 1,000 feet of a fire hydrant but within 5 miles of a fire station, you receive a Class 8B rating.

The Sutton Fire Service Area is the smallest and least developed fire service area in the Borough. Because of the limited property tax base for the fire service area, the SFSA mil rate is approximately double the Borough average for fire service areas. Other funding sources include state revenue sharing, Borough rental of ambulance space and matching grants from state forestry. Fire service area funds do not provide for capital improvements to the Sutton Public Safety Building or vehicles which are usually obtained with state grants. The areas surrounding the SFSA do not have fire protection services partly because of the expense of providing this service in low density areas. Fire service areas have a policy of not responding to home fires outside their boundaries since this service is paid for by fire service area property owners.

Due to substandard public and private roads, some developing areas in the SFSA are not accessible by emergency vehicles. Within the planning area, a significant amount of development has occurred near Seventeen Mile Lake north and east of the Palmer Correctional Center. This area has many small residential sized lots and is likely to attract more development. Seventeen Mile Lake Road is steep and difficult to negotiate by most emergency vehicles. Additionally, several other public and private roads and numerous driveways within the planning area cannot be accessed by large emergency vehicles. The reliance on substandard roads to access certain developed areas increases the cost of providing fire protection services and reduces its effectiveness.

One of the most important factors in responding to an emergency is being able to quickly arrive at the site. Highly visible street signs and house or driveway numbers are needed. This is especially important in areas such as Sutton where a wrong turn down one of numerous dead ends, substandard roads and long driveways can effectively trap large emergency vehicles.

A storage building is needed for fire apparatus, command vehicles and the rescue boat to provide security and protection from the weather. In addition, several of the emergency vehicles included in the SFSA fleet are past the time period for refurbishing. Emergency vehicles are recommended for refurbishment or replacement every 15 years.

Recommendations:

- **Install highly visible street signs and house or driveway numbers.**
- **Encourage construction of through streets and loops rather than dead ends on public streets.**
- **Encourage the construction of adequately sized turnabouts on dead end streets, long driveways and other areas that would otherwise trap a large emergency vehicle.**
- **Acquire or reserve a site for the eventual establishment of a fire substation along Seventeen Mile Lake Road as soon as possible to accommodate future development.**
- **Encourage future large developments to occur in a way that does not have a negative impact on the ability of wells to adequately recharge.**
- **Encourage and coordinate with the Borough to complete a comprehensive 911 mapping system.**
- **Plan for emergency access when prioritizing and developing road improvement projects and allocating road maintenance funds.**
- **Plan for emergency access and egress during the subdivision development process.**
- **Encourage the installation of water sources for fire protection such as holding tanks in new subdivisions and in difficult to access locations.**
- **Work toward the construction of an additional storage building for unprotected fire vehicles, fire apparatus and the rescue boat.**

PUBLIC SAFETY – POLICE

Public safety for the planning area is provided by the Alaska State Troopers stationed in Palmer. The Troopers stationed in Palmer currently respond to calls from the Knik River Bridge to Mile 100 of the Glenn Highway, and to Mile 64 of the Parks Highway. Generally, there are four Troopers per shift serving this entire area, not counting investigators, etc. The Trooper response time is, therefore, often unsatisfactory due to travel distance. It is not anticipated that this situation will change in the foreseeable future. The community survey respondents noted a need for additional public safety.

Currently, the Palmer Correctional Center notifies a group of residents living around the prison of any immediate safety concerns at the prison. It is the community's desire that this prompt notification continue.

Recommendations:

- **Provide and enhance the public safety, health and welfare of Sutton residents.**
- **Develop public safety awareness and education.**
- **Support the prison's continued immediate notification of key residents regarding prison safety concerns.**

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

In the summer of 2009 the Sutton Community Council incorporated as a non-profit organization. While this incorporation does not officially establish the community as a "city" recognized by the local boundary commission, it does provide the possibility for the community to be the recipient of certain funding opportunities. The local governing body is still the Matanuska-Susitna Borough Assembly. The Borough recognizes the Sutton Community Council as an advisory entity.

The prospect of incorporating as a city was discussed in the spring of 1996 at a community meeting with a state official from the local boundary commission. At that time, there was very little support expressed for incorporation. The concern among the residents was that this would lead to excessive government and more taxation.

To encourage community participation, leadership, and sound community decision making policies, the following recommendations are encouraged:

Recommendations:

- **Improve communication among the Sutton Community Council, Sutton residents, prison officials, and Borough, state, tribal, and federal entities.**
- **Maintain communication with residents by maintaining a collection of e-mail addresses to receive regular updates on community issues (i.e. electronic newsletter). Coordinate community information with the Borough website.**
- **Maintain and strengthen the advisory capacity of the community to represent community-wide agreed upon policies and goals on Borough, state and federal issues.**
- **Changes in land classifications and designations, proposed sales and platting actions should be closely examined. The Sutton Community Council and residents should be alerted by federal, state, and Borough agencies when these or any actions affecting Sutton residents occur.**

PUBLIC UTILITIES

Community utilities, where available, are provided through member-owned cooperatives, private commercial utilities, or private homeowner's groups. Community utilities available include electricity and communications (telephone/TV/Internet). There are no publicly owned community water systems in the Sutton planning area. There are no community sewer systems in the planning area. However, the central area of Sutton, where smaller lots exist and density is higher, could eventually be an area appropriate for options such as wind or solar energy or a community water/sewer system.

Electrical

Matanuska Electric Association (MEA) provides electricity to the area. MEA has periodically explored an electrical intertie with other electrical utilities through Sutton. The intertie would provide a more consistent power supply but the proposal involves large towers which some residents find both prominent and unsightly. Currently, "electrical transmission lines designed for the purpose of transporting or carrying electric power in quantities equal to or greater than 100,000 volts" in the Sutton SpUD boundaries would be required to go through a conditional use process.

Natural Gas

Enstar Natural Gas currently does not provide natural gas within the Sutton planning area. The Alaska Natural Gas Development Authority (ANGDA) is currently in a design and permitting phase of construction of a natural gas spur line from Glennallen to Palmer. The proposed route parallels the Talkeetna Mountains from Palmer to the Chickaloon River, bisecting the Sutton planning area. From the Chickaloon River the proposed natural gas spur line would go north up Boulder Creek into the Talkeetna Mountains to Chitna Pass, then from Chitna Creek to Caribou Creek, up stream to Eureka and on to Glennallen.

Residents of Sutton and Chickaloon (during the right-of-way permitting process) expressed concerns about the gas line corridor drastically increasing access to the neighboring wilderness, increasing the potential for private property trespass along the gas line corridor, and greatly increasing the hunting pressure on local game animals. Many residents suggested that the natural gas line corridor follow the Glenn Highway right of way or the Parks Highway right of way to minimize the impacts of a new access corridor in the wilderness. Additionally residents

commented on the need for a natural gas supply line from Prudhoe Bay to Glennallen before any gas is delivered through the proposed ANGDA spur line. With no current proposal for such a supply line to be built, residents feel it is hasty to build the spur line first.

ANGDA informed residents that the proposed natural gas spur line through the Sutton area was going to be underground. However, if it is above ground it will potentially compromise animal migration patterns and pristine viewsheds. Additionally, above-ground utilities are at increased risk for vandalism. Containment is another concern expressed with above ground gas lines. In 2007 Enstar Natural Gas, a private company, proposed construction of a natural gas “bullet” line from Prudhoe Bay to Wasilla following the Parks Highway right of way.

Recommendations:

- **Provide underground utilities wherever feasible to reduce utility visibility, animal migration barriers, the probability of vandalism and the risk of a natural gas leak.**
- **Support a bullet line along the Parks Highway right of way.**
- **Support efforts to provide natural gas through options that are generally accepted by the community.**
- **Continue to explore options to provide low cost and environmentally friendly alternate energy when possible.**

CHAPTER FOUR:
PARKS, RECREATION and
GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

Residents in Sutton enjoy the many amenities the area offers, such as the quiet rural atmosphere; clean air and water; easy accessibility to public land, lakes and rivers; trails and recreational opportunities; and abundance of wildlife. Retaining and protecting these



*Photo of Brian Winnestaffer and Jeremiah Millan
provided by Jessica Dryden-Winnestaffer*

amenities and their connectivity is foremost in the minds of residents. In order to provide this protection, it is important to identify the existing features and offer suggestions for methods to retain them. The many outside or historic influences, as well as future impacts of increased recreational usage, should also be identified while making recommendations on how to retain these valued features.

This chapter addresses parks and public recreation sites, trails and public access, and green infrastructure, and the interconnectivity of wildlife corridors, recreational trails, forests, wetlands, waterways, parks, open spaces and other natural areas.

**PARKS AND PUBLIC
RECREATION SITES**

ALPINE HISTORICAL PARK

The Alpine Historical Park is located on the site of the former Sutton Coal Washery. Phil and Jean O’Neill exchanged the 6.5-acre site and home with the Borough for the purpose of illustrating the community’s rich



Alpine Historical Park photo found at www.AlpineHistoricalPark.org

coal mining history. Most of the old mining buildings have been removed. Equipment from several of the surrounding mines has been donated to the Alpine Historical Park where it is exhibited by the Alpine Historical Society. Within the grounds of the park, situated on their original location, stand the ruins of the Navy Coal Wash Plant in testament to the unfulfilled dreams of the Navy's investment in Sutton and Chickaloon. Also in its original location stands the small powder house which harbored the dynamite used in blasting through the rock cliffs during the Eska and Chickaloon mining operations. The powder magazine was used, years later, for explosives during the construction of the Glenn Highway. A self-guided tour of the park will acquaint the visitor with the region's geologic, Alaska Native, mining and colonial histories.

The park has picnic tables, public restrooms, and a playground. The former Chickaloon Mine bunkhouse has been renovated to display historical photos and artifacts. An Athabascan winter lodge exhibit, the first Sutton Post Office, and the Old Timers Hall of Fame, honoring the miners and other people associated with the coal industry, are also on the grounds.

Some of the current projects that the Alpine Historical Society is working on include the renovation of the second floor of the Lucas Home, development of the Athabascan culture exhibit, development of a fossil exhibit focusing on the geology in the area, and development of a center open year round which contains a crafts shop and promotes the park exhibits and the Glenn Highway National Scenic Byway.

The Chickaloon Village Traditional Council is anticipating receiving artifacts removed from their native lands. The organization is looking for a facility to house the collection. Even without the Chickaloon artifacts, there is a need for more indoor exhibit space.

Recommendation:

- **Encourage and support efforts to improve the quality of life for community residents and to preserve the unique cultural history of the area.**
- **Support efforts to renovate the existing Alpine Historical Park buildings and obtain a new building for indoor exhibit space, as necessary.**
- **Support efforts to locate the new library/community center at the corner of Chickaloon Way and McPherson Avenue, adjacent to the Alpine Historic Park.**

MOOSE CREEK STATE RECREATION SITE

Moose Creek State Recreation Site is located on the western boundary of the planning area adjacent to Moose Creek. The site consists of approximately 37 acres with a parking pullout. In 1995, the restroom and campsites were removed. The State Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation removed the facilities for several reasons. The most significant reason was the lack of funds for maintaining the facilities. Other reasons included the incessant vandalism and crime that occurred on site and a desire not to compete with private campgrounds in the area. The site continues to be used by campers, but remains unmaintained by the state. Unfortunately it is often used as an illegal garbage dumping grounds.



*Moose Creek Hut photo provided by
Jessica Dryden-Winnestaffer*

Recommendations:

- **Re-establish Moose Creek State Recreation site as a rest area.**
- **Encourage coordination between state parks and the State Troopers for law enforcement and public safety.**
- **Encourage the use of public garbage disposal areas.**
- **Support private contracts between the Borough, state, and other governmental and private entities to build, monitor and maintain facilities.**

KINGS RIVER AREA

This area immediately adjacent to the Glenn Highway is state land but not within the Moose Range. The boundary of the Moose Range is several hundred feet from the Glenn Highway and management decisions are guided by the Moose Range Management Plan. This land is under the jurisdiction of the Department of Natural Resources. Although this area is informally used for camping, it is not managed by the state as an official campground. This is also the trailhead of the Kings River Trail which provides access to Ruby Lake and several other trails on the west side of Kings River, and during times of low-water or freeze up, provides trail access to

recreational areas on the east side of the Kings River. The trail had formerly relied on trespass on private lands but was relocated to a dedicated public access easement. Unfortunately in recent years the trail use has greatly increased and trail degradation has become extreme. The planning team recommends improving Kings River camping area before Moose Creek camping area.

Recommendation:

- **Encourage the development and maintenance of a wayside including trailhead and public restrooms at the Kings River.**
- **Protect private land and interests near the trail.**
- **Encourage enforcement of appropriate and sustainable use on and along trails.**
- **Encourage trail marking and trail maintenance to ensure it remains usable and sustainable for all trail users.**
- **Encourage enforcement of regulations and laws that address nuisance, noise, trash, vandalism and other criminal activity.**
- **Encourage a separated non-motorized use/pedestrian path from Granite Creek to Kings River adjacent to the Glenn Highway.**

COYOTE LAKES/SLIPPER LAKE

The Borough-owned park at Coyote Lake has an excellent view of the Matanuska Valley. The state-owned property around Slipper Lake is an established recreation area. These two facilities need maintenance programs. The community recognizes the need to maintain and operate a public facility at Coyote Lakes and Slipper Lake, e.g. restroom, garbage pick up and clean water supply. Access to the lakes should be improved. The current access has not been maintained and the road is now trail access only for ATV's and foot traffic. A private contractor would have an opportunity to manage the site to its fullest potential and could charge park fees, have a park attendant to monitor activities, enhance public safety and provide oversight of the parks. Revenue could benefit park improvements and the maintenance of public land. Vandalism and indiscriminate shooting has been an ongoing problem with the operation of this park. During the recent mine reclamation efforts by the Abandoned Mine Reclamation Program, fire rings were installed along the edge of Slipper Lake; however, they are not being monitored or maintained. There is local support for private or public monitoring and maintenance of the facilities.

The area north of both Coyote Lake and Upper Coyote Lake within the Matanuska Valley Moose Range has undergone an extensive reclamation effort as part of the State of Alaska Abandoned Mine Land Project. Remnant mine pits and steep slopes, which could present a danger to recreational users, were filled and recontoured and underground fires were put out for public safety by the Abandoned Mine Lands Program.

Recommendations:

- **Manage and protect public safety and health at public facilities and recreation areas.**
- **Encourage the Borough, state, and private stakeholders to take an active role in the planning, construction, maintenance and operation of the facilities and trails.**
- **Encourage enforcement of regulations and laws that address nuisance, noise, trash, vandalism and other criminal activity.**
- **Solicit input from the Sutton Community Council and trail users.**
- **Support private contracts between the Borough, state, and other governmental and private entities to build, monitor and maintain facilities.**
- **Seek possible opportunities such as park hosts for these facilities.**
- **Identify opportunities for public and private partnerships for the appropriate location and development of organized shooting opportunities. Such facilities should be conditionally permitted to allow adequate input on safety, hours of operation, lighting, etc.**

SEVENTEEN MILE LAKE

Seventeen Mile Lake is located north east of the Palmer Correctional Center and has access from the Glenn Highway via Mile 58 Road and several subdivision roads. The lake is the largest in the Sutton planning area and is stocked by the State of Alaska Department of Fish and Game with rainbow trout and grayling. Public access to 17 Mile Lake is at the terminus of Wishbone Place Road on the western shore of the lake. With the exception of the public access point, the shoreline is privately owned. Several lots on 17 Mile Lake are only accessible by boat. Property owners adjacent to the lake have expressed concerns regarding the impact of trash left by lake users and extensive recreational use on the lake. Suggestions included quiet hours and horsepower limitations. The Borough's process for regulating how the surface of the lake is used (through the lake management plan process) requires a petition from a portion of the surrounding landowners to initiate the process for determining what regulations should apply to the surface use of the lake. The following recommendations are consistent with the 2007 survey results:

Recommendations:

- **Petition the Borough to initiate a lake management plan to address issues such as horse power limitations on watercraft, quiet hours, shoreline erosion and protection of waterfowl and loon nesting sites.**
- **Implement quiet hours of 10:00 p.m. to 8:00 a.m.**
- **Provide signage at the public access point and information to property owners to alert lake users of waterfowl nesting sites and to avoid their disturbance.**
- **Provide and maintain trash containers at the public access point.**
- **Encourage the use of less polluting four-stroke motors.**

TRAILS AND PUBLIC ACCESS

The Sutton Planning Area contains spectacular scenery and excellent recreational opportunities. Many residents and visitors enjoy access to world class recreational opportunities literally “right out the back door” of Sutton. However, easy access to the back country can also have a negative impact, by increasing the potential for private property trespass, vandalism, illegal trash dumping and trail degradation. Access to public land



Wishbone Hill photo found at <http://crust.outlookalaska.com/Skiing2008>

takes place via a variety of roads, trails and trail heads, some of which are legally established and some of which are not. Some have been identified as year round and some can be used only seasonally. Winter motorized use has less of a negative impact on the trails than summer motorized use. Many of the existing trails crossing private land have no dedicated public access. Unless dedicated public access is obtained, it is likely these trails will eventually be blocked or closed by a present or future landowner.

Historic mining and timber harvesting around Sutton created a network of trails, many of which continue to be used today for recreation and access to public lands. Many of the trails in the mining areas of Jonesville and Wishbone Hill are former mining roads. Some of the routes are likely to be used for heavy equipment travel and portions of the area are likely to be altered if coal mining is again pursued in the planning area. Additionally, some public and private properties and some existing roads and trails could be closed to public access to prevent accidents with heavy machinery and other hazards at the mine site. Recent coal exploration and mining leases in the Chickaloon and Sutton areas have created community concerns over protecting natural resources, mitigating potential traffic, safety and health impacts, and preserving water quality. While the Sutton community has expressed a desire to preserve and enhance trails and other outdoor recreational opportunities in the planning area, they recognize the need to balance that goal with the protection of natural resources, water quality and water availability, as indicated in the April 2007 community survey.

In 2000 the Borough adopted the MSB Recreational Trails Plan. The MSB recreational trails planning process began in 1995 through an extensive planning and public involvement process. The resulting overall goal of the trails plan is:

Within the Matanuska-Susitna Borough there exists awe inspiring landscapes and world class recreational opportunities. Many of these areas and recreational opportunities require trails for access and enhanced enjoyment. It is the desire of the Borough to provide exciting trail recreation opportunities for visitors and residents alike in conjunction with the desires of its populace.

The local desire and initiative for trail development and maintenance already exists and is producing significant results. It is not the Borough's desire to usurp these trail development efforts but rather to complement these efforts and provide local government support.

The Borough should work in cooperation with community councils, cities, the state of Alaska, businesses, property owners and trail advocacy groups to provide a system of trails throughout the Borough to enable the public to engage in outdoor recreation activities and to ensure future preservation of trails. The Borough should work to coordinate the numerous local trail development efforts into an effective and efficient recreational trail system and preserve the existing popular recreational trails. Trail facilities are to provide for the ever increasing outdoor recreation needs of the resident population and recreation industry.

The plan goes on further to establish goals, policies and objectives on the specific topics of primitive trails, separated paths, legal access, impacts on private property, liability, management recommendations (reduce conflicts and degradation), trail information, trail funding and the

evolution of trails into roadways. Trails in and around the Sutton area that were identified in the 2000 plan are Kings River Trail, Young's Creek Trail and Permanente Road/Castle Mountain Trail. At the time of this plan update, the trails plan is also undergoing an update, and additional trails could be nominated to be included in the trails plan.

The Sutton Trails Map included with this plan in Chapter Eight also shows the Premier-Baxter Mine Trail and Loop, Wishbone Trail system (lake, hill and strip mine), Seventeen Mile Lake Trail, Eska Falls Trail, Red Mountain Trail, Young's Creek Trail, and the beginning of the Kings River Trail also known as Chickaloon-Knik-Nelchina Trail. Numerous other trails exist in the planning area. The Borough and state should work to preserve public access along those trails identified on the Sutton Trails Map.

There are several threats to the existing primitive (unpaved) trails within the planning area including:

- Closure of trails by private landowners;
- Closure of trails due to mining activities on public lands;
- Degradation of trails due to erosion and mud resulting from overuse or misuse; and
- Degradation of trails due to overuse by motorized vehicles.

TRAIL AND ACCESS RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Establish a recreation and trails committee in the community to examine trail maintenance and funding.**
- **Engage residents to take an active role in the maintenance of existing public trails.**
- **Update and inventory trails within the Sutton Area. Consider a trails master plan.**
- **Inventory, maintain, and protect existing trail uses (both motorized and non-motorized), public access points and public facilities.**
- **Solicit input from community members on trail concerns and issues.**
- **Ensure sustainability of trails.**
- **Seek trail designation for a balance of motorized and non-motorized uses.**
- **Encourage coordination with Borough, state, and federal entities to ensure that reclamation efforts include developing and dedicating trails on former mined lands.**
- **Ensure that exploration, mining and mining reclamation efforts maintain access to recreational trails and uses, as much as possible. When access must be limited, the company should be encouraged to create temporary alternate routes.**

- **Work with the proposed mining operations and the State of Alaska to preserve the area’s recreational trail opportunities possibly by constructing temporary, alternative trails around proposed mine operations on state lands.**
- **Ensure that reclamation efforts (revegetation and recontouring) occur in a timely manner following mining activity, to ensure safety of trail users, prevention of erosion, maintenance of high water quality and restoration of habitats for wildlife. Trails should be rerouted off of private property whenever possible.**
- **The Borough and the community of Sutton should negotiate with private landowners to obtain voluntary dedications of public access.**
- **The community should work with the Borough and Alaska DNR to identify funding opportunities to legalize trails and trail heads, maintain trails, and enforce appropriate trail use.**
- **The community and the Borough should work to identify financial incentives such as tax deductions or other measures that may encourage property owners to dedicate a trail.**

SPECIFIC TRAIL RECOMMENDATIONS:

KINGS RIVER TRAIL

Recently private landowners donated a public access easement along the historic route of the Chickaloon-Knik-Nelchina Trail near Kings River. This critical link assures public access to popular state recreational land in the Kings River Valley and provides the Borough or the state sufficient public interest to more actively manage the trail. This is currently the only commonly used trail taking off from the Glenn Highway in the Sutton area that does not trespass across private lands. The Kings River trailhead area receives very heavy use from campers and day users and is in a degraded and unsanitary condition. Additionally, the trail is in a degraded condition from heavy motorized use, with significant trail erosion and mud.

Recommendations:

- **Encourage the state to develop and maintain a wayside including a dedicated trailhead, public restrooms and trash receptacles at the Kings River Trailhead.**
- **Designate the ski trails at Kings River, which have been constructed and maintained for human powered uses (such as hiking, biking and skiing), as a non-motorized trails system.**

YOUNG'S CREEK TRAIL/CHAIN LAKES TRAIL

This trail is an offshoot of the trails leading to Red Mountain, Ruby Lake and the Kings River Trail. The Young's Creek Trail accesses a high alpine meadow. The topography is such that an ATV can travel anywhere through this meadow region, on or off the trail. There is community concern that this sensitive, alpine meadow could be damaged by ATV and off-road vehicle traffic. Additionally, the route immediately beyond Ruby Lake is well suited for hiking but is currently difficult to negotiate with an ATV and is an unsuitable habitat for ATV use including sensitive, alpine meadows.

Recommendations:

- **Motorized ATV use should be limited to the existing trail system and posted in the Young's Creek, Chain Lakes and Ruby Lake areas. A map should be posted just beyond Ruby Lake on the trail leading to the alpine meadows depicting the existing trails system.**
- **Manage activities affecting air, water and land to maintain or improve environmental quality, to preserve wildlife habitat, to prevent degradation or loss of natural features and functions and to limit risks to life and property.**
- **Encourage a balance between motorized and non-motorized use, particularly in the high alpine, sensitive areas.**

RAILROAD TRAIL

The Borough has expressed an interest in improving and formally dedicating the rough trail along the old railroad bed from Moose Creek to Sutton. Although, portions of the railroad right-of-way between Moose Creek and Sutton have completely eroded away, this section of the railroad right-of-way could accommodate winter recreational use when the bank of the Matanuska River has frozen. Since the last Sutton Comprehensive Plan edition, the Alaska Railroad granted permission to establish a trail along the old railroad bed between Moose Creek and Palmer.

Recommendations:

- **Support efforts and coordination with the Borough and local trails groups to continue maintenance and construction of the trail established along the old railroad bed between Moose Creek and Palmer.**

MOOSE CREEK TRAIL

The former state Moose Creek Recreation Site and Campground is an ideal trailhead location. If a trail is established along the railroad bed between Palmer and Moose Creek, then it is desirable for the campground area to be connected. Currently, there is a historic trail leading north from the former campground site and then crossing Moose Creek and fading into game trails. A trail could be constructed to connect the Moose Creek Campground into the Jonesville/Buffalo Mine Trail passing on the south side of Wishbone Hill, which once served as a mining road.

Recommendation:

- **Encourage the Borough and local trail groups to construct a legal route from the Moose Creek Recreation site to the Jonesville/Buffalo Mine Trail.**

ESKA FALLS TRAIL

Eska Falls Trail is a 2.5-mile long trail reached via Jonesville Road and then by reclaimed mining roads on state land. The Matanuska-Susitna Borough and Alaska DNR have a cooperative management agreement for the easement and lands along this trail. The Borough Parks, Recreation and Trails Board passed a resolution in early 2006



Picking blueberries beneath Eska Falls;
photo provided by Jessica Dryden-Winnestaffer

to close the trail to motorized use due to the extreme damage to the trail and surrounding areas from very heavy off-road vehicle use. The Sutton

Community Council also passed a resolution to close the upper, alpine portion of the trail to motorized use (ATV and off-road vehicle use, between breakup and adequate snowfall, approximately May 1 and October 30).

A series of public meetings held by Alaska DNR in Sutton in 2006 and 2007 polled users of the trail. Management and enforcement of laws was favored by the community of Sutton to prevent

continued destruction of wetlands, wildlife habitat and watersheds, and to protect steep and sensitive terrain, soils and vegetation from unsuitable and inappropriate ATV and off-road vehicle use.

This area is Sutton's backyard and is a beautiful and cherished asset to our community. Protection to ensure its continued sustainable use is greatly desired by the community of Sutton.

Recommendation:

- **Encourage a balance between motorized and non-motorized use, particularly in the sensitive areas.**

PAVED TRAILS

Paved trails are an important aspect of any community plan as they provide a safe transportation alternative and recreation opportunities. Paved trails are most commonly funded through the State Transportation Improvement Program.

The Glenn Highway needs a paved, separated path for both local pedestrian and bicycle traffic from Palmer to Sutton and from Granite Creek to Kings River. During DOT's Glenn Highway Rehabilitation Project from Milepost 55 to 61, construction included a paved separated path along the north side of the highway from Jonesville Road to Granite Creek. The Glenn Highway itself does not accommodate safe bicycle or pedestrian traffic.

In addition to construction of a paved path from Palmer to Kings River, the planning team recommends that separated paths be constructed along the following routes for public safety:

- Chickaloon Way/Wright Way, between the Glenn Highway and the Sutton Elementary School.
- During the realignment process of the Glenn Highway over the Moose Creek Bridge, beginning at about Mile 54, highway planning should include a separated paved path from Mile 54 to Kings River. The paved path should connect to the existing bike path at Mile 61, should include a separate bridge for trail use over the three creeks (Moose Creek, Eska Creek, and Granite Creek) and end at Kings River.

Recommendations:

- **Encourage DOT to construct a paved, separated path for pedestrian and bicycle traffic from Palmer to Sutton and from Granite Creek to Kings River.**
- **Encourage the construction of paved, separated paths for pedestrian and bicycle traffic along Chickaloon Way and Wright Way.**

PUBLIC LAND AND TRAIL DEGRADATION

Trails can degrade from overuse or misuse to the point that they are no longer useable or they can only accommodate certain forms of trail recreation. The increased weight, power and terrain capabilities of ATV's and other off-road vehicles often increase the rate of trail degradation and can require much more intensive trail maintenance to keep the trail in condition suitable for hikers, mountain bikers, and other trail users. There is a community desire to provide non-motorized trails that are separated from the detrimental effects of motorized recreation. Most of the existing trails in the Sutton planning area are commonly used by motorized recreational traffic including ATVs, snowmachines, and four-wheel drive vehicles.

Some of the area's roads have been subject to extensive heavy equipment use and earth moving as a part of federally-funded mine reclamation efforts of the Abandoned Mine Lands (AML) Program. Many of these reclamation efforts occurred 30-70 years after mine closure. Community concern has been expressed that some of the past reclamation efforts have not benefited the environment or the trails since they occurred well after the area had naturally revegetated and soil had stabilized. Much of the past AML reclamation efforts have increased the mud and erosion of these trails, and softened the trail/road surfaces to the extent that they are impassible in some areas.

Recommendations:

- **Encourage the designing, construction and designation of some new trails for minimum impact non-motorized activities such as hiking, biking and skiing.**
- **Encourage government to design a network of trails and trail systems, where appropriate, that meets the needs of diverse users.**
- **Encourage outreach and education to trail users to explain the impact of their activity and encourage responsible recreation.**

GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

Just as communities benefit from planning their “grey infrastructure” (roads, subdivisions, schools, fire stations, utilities), communities can benefit from interconnected wildlife corridors, recreational trails, forests, wetlands, waterways, parks, open spaces, and other natural areas, also known as “green infrastructure.”

An interconnected system of open space such as forests, agricultural lands, farms, wetlands, wildlife corridors and parks can help to preserve the community’s natural resources and assets, and provide benefits to the residents, resources and wildlife. It helps filter pollutants from entering water bodies, absorbs storm water runoff and reduces the costs for man-made drainage systems. It can also provide flood prevention and mitigation, and helps prevent soil erosion and sedimentation of water bodies. By preserving this interconnected system, clean air, water quality, and natural resources can be sustained for future generations and enhance the quality of life in Sutton.

As land is subdivided and converted, open space is often fragmented into smaller and more isolated patches which can alter the way natural systems, such as wetlands, function. As these natural areas diminish, habitat diversity declines and the degradation of water, natural resources, and fish and wildlife populations occurs. The goal is to place development and open space where it is most needed and most appropriate, and to design development to minimize the long term impacts.

Identifying and maintaining the green infrastructure in Sutton is a much easier task than in, for example, the Core Area between Palmer and Wasilla, or Meadow Lakes, where rapid development has already threatened the infrastructure. Wildlife corridors and hunting opportunities near the urban centers have diminished, major drainage systems have been blocked or re-routed causing flooding and traditional trails are no longer available. Those denser areas are now struggling to regain some of the connectivity, trails, water sources and corridors that have been lost. By identifying these significant features in this Sutton Comprehensive Plan update, protection measures can be put in place to ensure that future development occurs in a way that minimizes negative impact to the land, the wildlife and the community’s quality of life.

Proactive planning can help guide future land development decisions, accommodating population growth while protecting community assets and natural resources. It is important to

understand that preserving environmental resources, such as water quality and water availability, does not require or imply public ownership of all of the land in the system.

Chickaloon Village Traditional Council is currently creating the Matanuska Watershed Ecosystem Based Plan (EBP). The primary goal of ecosystem based planning is to ensure the integrity of local ecosystems. Secondary goals are: protecting cultural activities; maintaining and building healthy and unified communities; and developing diverse, community based economies. The EBP focuses on lands currently owned by Chickaloon Native Village, but encompasses the entire Matanuska Valley, which are ecologically inseparable. The project is designed to help bridge the gap between Native and non-Native communities by serving both the Tribal community of Chickaloon Village and the larger community of the Matanuska Valley. Project findings from the Matanuska Watershed EBP may assist Sutton residents, landowners and business owners define, understand and address some green infrastructure issues. Additional information about the Matanuska Watershed Ecosystem-based Plan is available on the Chickaloon Village Traditional Council's website, www.chickaloon.org.

Recommendations:

- **Provide property owners with information about development options that enhance environmental features and that minimize negative impacts to wildlife corridors.**
- **Identify development options that protect natural functions, (such as the recharge of ground and surface water supplies, and wildlife habitat and corridors) while respecting the needs and desires of the landowners and other stakeholders, such as the open-space subdivision option, outlined in Title 27 - Subdivisions.**
- **Encourage the use of Chickaloon Village Traditional Council's Ecosystem Based Plan as a planning tool which identified and mapped waterways, wildlife habitat and corridors, wetlands, forests, natural hazards, erosion and fire prone areas.**
- **Encourage mapping of outdoor recreation and trail networks.**
- **Encourage protection of local natural resources of community importance.**
- **Protect natural systems prior to development.**
- **Where possible, link waterways, wildlife habitat and corridors, trails, etc. to create an interconnected system of natural corridors in Sutton.**
- **Participate in planning for any further reclamation efforts related to historic mining activities. Reclamation efforts should not damage natural revegetation that has already occurred.**
- **Ensure that additional mining reclamation efforts be coordinated with the input of the community of Sutton and the Borough.**

- **Ensure thoughtful community consideration of attempts to reclassify, lease or sell public lands for mining and natural resource extraction.**
- **Manage activities affecting air, water and land to maintain or improve environmental quality, to preserve wildlife habitat, to prevent degradation or loss of natural features and functions, and to limit risks to life and property.**
- **Identify, monitor, protect, and enhance the quantity and quality of the available watersheds, clean air resources and groundwater. Best available technology should be used.**
- **Encourage site-specific development that preserves environmental quality such as air, water, scenic viewshed, night sky and land quality. Site design that carefully takes into account open space, soils, slope, erosion and pollution should be considered.**
- **Encourage the use of the conservation subdivision concept and open-space subdivision incentives to ensure protection of the area's natural features.**
- **Encourage the Borough to develop a method to compensate private property owners (e.g. tax incentives) for conservation efforts.**

CHAPTER FIVE: TRANSPORTATION PLAN

STATE ROADS AND HIGHWAY

The Glenn Highway is a state owned and maintained transportation route providing the only road access through the Sutton planning area. The most recent (2005) estimate of traffic volume data collected along the Glenn Highway immediately east of the intersection with Jonesville Road indicates an average of 1,512 automobiles per day.

Reconstruction of the Glenn Highway from Mile 55 to 60 (Moose Creek to Jonesville Road) was completed in 2000. Mile 60 to Mile 68 (Jonesville Road to Kings River) was completed in 2003. Improvements that were part of this highway rehabilitation included new bridges at Eska and Granite Creeks, passing and climbing lanes in several locations, an acceleration lane heading

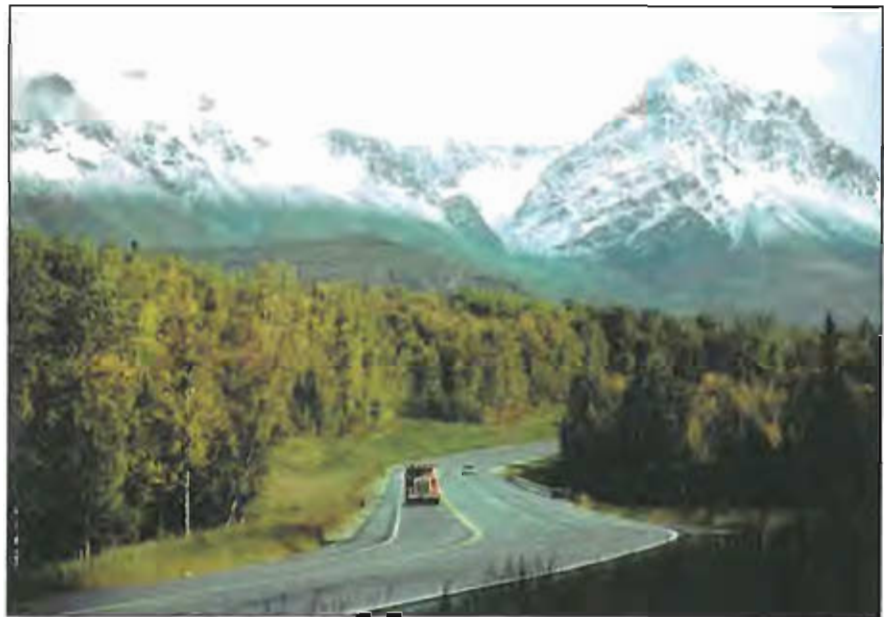
west from Eska Creek, 6-foot shoulders and a separated path along the highway from the Eska Creek bridge to Granite Creek bridge. Additional improvements included two scenic pullouts and two standard pullouts where sections of the old highway alignment and pavement remain after curves were realigned and straightened. In 2000 the access from Eska Creek road onto the Glenn Highway was relocated away from the Eska Creek bridge to increase public safety which was a recommendation reflected in the 2000 plan.

There are only two other state maintained roads within the planning area, Jonesville Road and Mile 58 Road leading to the state-run Palmer Correctional Center.



Glenn Highway map found at
<http://www.dot.state.ak.us/stwdplng/scenic/byways-glenn.shtml>

Recent coal exploration and mining proposals have caused significant community concern regarding increased heavy truck traffic on crucial road corridors. While the railroad was the main transportation method used in early coal mining days, the railbed's deterioration over the last 60 years makes that option unreasonable (the railroad to Sutton stopped in 1943). Between Palmer and Moose Creek, a local group has been given permission by the railroad to make improvements to create a non-motorized trail. From Moose Creek to Sutton, much of the original railbed has been consumed by Matanuska River erosion. In 2008, it was estimated that approximately 40 truck trips per day would be generated once the proposed Usibelli Mine in Sutton achieved full production. A number of residents have expressed continued concern regarding noise, safety and road maintenance impacts of heavy truck traffic on Jonesville Road and the Glenn Highway. Jonesville Road has a very thin asphalt surface which will not hold up to the rigors of heavy truck traffic and can be expected to be in disrepair within a relatively short period of time.



Glenn Highway photo by Larry Workman

The permit acquired by Usibelli Coal Mine, Inc. to mine coal in the Wishbone Hill area proposes a new road be developed leading generally north from the Glenn Highway at approximately Mile 55.5 and circumnavigate the Palmer Correctional Center. Coal mining operations appear to be reliant, at least in the short term, on trucking coal southwest along the Glenn Highway to the rail-loading facility south of Palmer.

The trail along the rail right-of-way between the City of Palmer and Moose Creek has proven to be a popular trail and, as more people become aware of it, its use is increasing. To provide a continuous route separated slightly from the highway between Palmer and ultimately, Kings River, the Sutton community would like to see additional improvements to the Glenn Highway include accommodations for a continuous bike trail, beginning in Palmer, connecting with the existing bike trails through the Sutton core area, and continuing to Kings River.

The Moose Creek Bridge, and the sharp bends in the Glenn Highway through Moose Creek, are slated by DOT for replacement and realignment in the near future. The project will straighten and reduce the grade to the highway between approximately Mile 54 and Mile 56 and replace the old narrow bridge with a wider and safer bridge.

There is a desire to ensure that opportunities are available that will reduce the need for individual travel from Sutton to the general business area near Palmer and Wasilla, and provide transportation for those without vehicles or unable to drive, particularly during the winter months. Alternate transportation options could be developed by identifying potential transit stops at one or more locations in the central area of Sutton and by working with the local transit service, currently MASCOT, to expand existing services.

Due to Sutton's proximity to the Castle Mountain fault, it is possible that an earthquake could cause damage to any of the community's bridges, essentially cutting off road traffic to and from many emergency services and supplies. The transportation chapter of this plan addresses emergency aviation access in the event of damage to the bridge. In addition, it would be desirable for the community to identify a location in the community to gather should the bridge be damaged and evacuation is necessary.

Recommendations:

- **Should future coal mining occur, encourage consideration of alternate transportation methods and routes that will minimize impacts to local traffic and roads.**
- **Heavy industrial uses utilizing the road system for extensive heavy truck traffic should mitigate the associated noise, road maintenance and traffic safety impacts. Some suggestions proposed for mitigating the impact of this heavy truck traffic on Jonesville Road and the Glenn Highway include:**
 - **A flashing light at appropriate intersections,**
 - **An acceleration lane for trucks wherever extensive heavy truck traffic would enter the Glenn Highway,**
 - **Upgrading all sub-standard roads to withstand heavy truck traffic,**
 - **Providing some sort of audible buffer between heavy industrial uses including extensive heavy truck traffic and residential areas, and**
 - **Limiting heavy industrial uses and extensive heavy truck traffic to certain hours of operation where they conflict with existing residential uses and quality of life.**
- **When road improvements or new development construction are proposed, adequate access for emergency vehicles and services should be considered.**

- Encourage minimizing individual highway driveway accesses onto the Glenn Highway.
- Encourage development with interconnectivity of roads.
- To improve vehicular safety and traffic circulation, provide adequate right-of-way, appropriate road design, road access, lighting, signage, speed limits and possible bus turn-around locations.
- Encourage cooperation between state, Borough, and Tribal entities to improve road maintenance such as grading, snow removal/plowing, dust management, surface improvements, vegetation removal and chip seal.
- Work with the state in planning improvements to the Glenn Highway to include a separated bike path between Palmer and Kings River.
- Construct and improve roads in a way that protects air, water, wildlife and land quality.
- Accommodate a pedestrian/non-motorized path in the new Moose Creek bridge project.
- Improve and maintain the state-owned portion of Mile 58 Road (approximately 1 mile) as students currently need to come to the highway to catch the school bus because the first hill on the road is too dangerous for a school bus.
- Improvements to state roads should take into consideration community desires.
- Identify a gathering place should evacuation be necessary as a result of damage to the bridge.
- Recommend that one or more transit stops be identified in the core area of Sutton.

BOROUGH ROADS

Other publicly maintained roads in the Sutton planning area include subdivision roads the Borough has accepted for maintenance. Borough maintenance is contracted to private firms from Alpine Road Service Area (ARSA) funds. Decisions about allocation of Alpine Road Service Area funds are made with input from a local citizens advisory board.

Currently, proposed subdivisions must adhere to the road construction standards identified in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough Subdivision Construction Manual unless the proposed subdivision would create no more than four new parcels of property, each of which is five acres or larger and has dedicated (not necessarily constructed) legal access. A number of the public roads within the Alpine Road Service Area have not been constructed to current Borough standards. Most of these substandard subdivision roads were created prior to the adoption of the current standard.

Adequate road construction standards better enable emergency responders to quickly access life threatening situations. Other public services also are not ensured if a road is substandard or not maintained. A number of common problems specific to the planning area are inadequate ditches for snow storage, snow drifting, undersized cul-de-sacs for emergency vehicle turnaround, only one access point in and out of a subdivision, and excessively steep grades.

Snow drifting is a significant problem within the planning area during winter due to the strong Matanuska winds. Under adverse conditions some of the roads can be impassible due to snow drifting within an hour of clearing. Borough acceptance of road maintenance responsibilities may be conditioned upon design considerations to minimize drifting such as clearing, alignment, and raising the road surface to facilitate wind scouring. The Borough has avoided assuming maintenance responsibilities for poorly designed roads prone to significant snow drifting problems.

A common difficulty near the foothills of the Talkeetna Mountains is new subdivisions that are accessible only by roads exceeding the maximum allowable grade for residential collector roads. The maximum allowable grade for residential collector roads is seven or ten percent. Depending on the residential classification of the road, grades of up to fifteen percent may be allowed in the subdivision process. School bus routes are limited to areas less than ten percent grade.

The community has not identified a need to revise the road construction standards; however, other recommendations previously stated encourage construction of multiple access points and adequate vehicle turnabouts.

The Borough's Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) was recently revised. Borough roads in the Sutton area are identified in Chapter 4.4, Rural Area Road System. The LRTP says, in part;

“The road system outside the central area of the Borough is not included in the transportation modeling process. Population and employment in the rural areas are widely distributed and the road system is functioning well with a few exceptions. Rural road needs tend to be based on providing access to new neighborhoods and a second connection to larger developed areas for the sake of emergency access and convenience. During the development of comprehensive plans for the Mat-Su communities, local transportation needs are examined and projects and other improvements are recommended. The approved comprehensive plans plus those in the final stages of development and approval were reviewed for transportation related recommendations.”

The LRTP defers to local community comprehensive plans for recommendations outside of the core area.

Recommendations:

- **The community recommends construction of through streets and loops rather than dead ends on public streets.**
- **The community recommends the construction of adequately-sized turnabouts on dead end streets, long driveways and other areas that would otherwise trap a large emergency vehicle.**
- **Identify potential road improvement/construction projects through the Borough's Community Improvement Project (CIP) process.**
- **Regularly nominate and update Sutton's transportation projects and priorities.**
- **Encourage coordination of transportation planning efforts with the state, Borough, and Tribal entities.**
- **Provide regularly for residents' input regarding road expenditures in the Alpine Road Service Area.**
 - **Improve public access to 17 Mile Lake.**
 - **Improve Borough roads that are not constructed to current Borough specifications to provide safe routes for public needs, such as buses and fire trucks.**
 - **Maintain subdivision roads more frequently.**
 - **Provide pedestrian/non-motorized bridge over Eska Creek.**
 - **Provide a pedestrian bridge at Granite Creek.**
 - **Provide public access to Kings River Recreation Area.**
 - **Provide a separated bicycle and pedestrian path from Palmer to Kings River.**
 - **Encourage construction of fish friendly bridges and culverts.**

GLENN HIGHWAY, SCENIC BYWAY

On June 30, 2000, the Glenn Highway was designated as a State Scenic Byway and on June 13, 2003 it was designated as a National Scenic Byway. The area covered by the designation begins at Mile 0 in Anchorage and ends at Mile 137.5 at the eastern border of the Matanuska Susitna Borough, which includes the entire portion of the highway within Sutton planning area. A Glenn Highway National Scenic Byway Interpretive Plan was produced to establish planning



guidelines and a long-range vision for maintaining and developing interpretive sites and services along the historic pathway. The designation focuses not on regulation but on recognition and funding opportunities. The interpretive plan recommends implementing projects that:

- Enhance existing facilities along the Byway;
- Enhance travelers' experiences by offering more interpretive opportunities and adequate rest areas;
- Provide travelers with information about Byway resources;
- Provide travelers with opportunities to learn about the Byway's natural, scenic, cultural, historic, recreational and archaeological qualities;
- Encourage local communities, businesses and residents to take ownership in the Byway and its resources; and
- Benefit Byway businesses.

Goals and objectives listed in the interpretive plan include:

- Present interpretive themes in a way that visitors understand their meaning and how they fit together to tell the stories of the Byway;
- Maintain interpretive sites and services so travelers may enjoy updating of interpretive sites;
- Provide high-quality interpretive displays relevant to Byway themes;
- Enhance scenic views and maintain scenic character along the corridor;
- Promote safe and responsible use of the Byway and its resources;
- Promote community involvement and ownership of the Byway and its resources; and
- Develop and coordinate a spectrum of programs, facilities and media.

Recommendations:

- **The Glenn Highway should be improved and maintained consistent with safety, in keeping with the scenic values and rural character of the area.**
- **Take advantage of the Scenic Byway designation to provide more interpretive scenic improvements during Glenn Highway improvement projects.**
- **Create a Scenic Byway informational display at the Alpine Historical Park.**

AVIATION

In 2007, the Matanuska-Susitna Borough Assembly adopted the Regional Aviation Systems Plan (RASP), which consisted of two components. The first component was to identify the current state of aviation in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, how that might change over the next 20 years, and any actions that should be taken to ensure aviation can grow in a positive way for MSB citizens. Part of this component was to take an inventory of existing air strips, both registered and unregistered, within the Borough. The second component of the plan was to identify potential locations for additional public airports or airstrips in the Borough, including a public seaplane base for float planes.

Within the RASP, the only registered airstrip identified in the Sutton area is the strip at Slipper Lake, near the Jonesville Mine. FAA records show it is a private strip, owned by Canadian Mine & Smelting Co. While not listed in the RASP or registered with FAA, local residents also identified a small number of private airstrips throughout the area. In addition, residents and property owners around 17 Mile Lake report that float planes occasionally use that lake for aviation activity.

While no public airstrip or helicopter landing is identified in Sutton, the local emergency response personnel have developed a listing of areas along the Glenn Highway, identified by mile marker, that would be appropriate for emergency aircraft landing should the need arise. This is particularly important in light of the fact that, should significant damage occur to the Moose Creek bridge, the community could be cut off from essential emergency services and supplies. This listing and map is located in the emergency response vehicles, with the responders, and at the Sutton Fire Station.

Recommendations:

- **Sutton should continue to be aware of the need for emergency aircraft landing sites and maintain an active list of potential sites or investigate other options for a permanent landing site.**

CHAPTER SIX:

NATURAL HAZARD MITIGATION

The Borough has recently finalized the Matanuska-Susitna Borough Hazard Mitigation Plan (HMP), to meet requirements of the Hazard Mitigation Act of 2000. The plan is intended as a guide for reducing losses, both human and economic, due to natural disasters. The document follows the required processes of identification of hazards, mapping the potentially impacted areas, tallying risks and vulnerabilities, and presenting mitigation strategies. The primary goals of the plan are:

- Minimize injuries and loss of life;
- Minimize damages;
- Facilitate post-disaster restoration of public services; and
- Promote economic development.

To attain the goals, the MSB HMP includes measures to:

- Save lives and reduce injuries;
- Prevent or reduce property damage;
- Reduce economic losses;
- Minimize social dislocation and stress;
- Maintain critical facilities in functional order;
- Protect infrastructure from damage; and
- Protect legal liability of government and public officials.



*Wildfire Photo by
Alaska Fire Service*

The Chickaloon Village Traditional Council has recently completed an extensive Eco System Based Plan which inventoried the area's environment and produced maps that will be helpful in identifying areas of potential natural hazards. The community should use all available tools, including maps from this plan, in their hazard mitigation planning efforts.

In the event of certain natural disasters, Sutton has the potential of being "cut off" from Palmer and Wasilla should there be damage to the Moose Creek Bridge. Additionally, Granite Creek, Eska Creek, and Kings River also pose potential transportation challenges to Sutton and communities beyond, should any of those bridges be damaged. The community should be

prepared with an alternate emergency transportation plan, should the need arise. See the transportation chapter for further discussion on emergency aviation accommodations.

The potential natural disasters in the Sutton area identified by planning team members include:

- Rock slides
- Snow slides
- Wildfire
- Flooding
- Earthquakes
(Castle Mt. Fault runs north of the Glenn Highway through Sutton)
- Volcanic ash
- Erosion
- Severe weather conditions



The Matanuska River forms the southern boundary of the Sutton Community Council. The

river moves actively across its wide braid plain, changing channels and causing erosion of land and loss of property and

structures. Recently, the Borough (using funds from the Natural Resources Conservation Service) acquired property and removed structures from three at-risk parcels along the river in the Sutton area. Similar erosion actively occurs further down river, in the Butte area as well. Recommendations in this chapter identify how the community should monitor and address this natural hazard.

*Matanuska River Photo provided
by Jessica Dryden-Winnestaffer*

Recommendations:

- **Work with MSB emergency services to ensure the community is prepared to respond to any of these natural disasters.**
- **Work with MSB emergency services to identify appropriate natural hazard mitigation measures and a cost/benefit analysis of each measure.**
- **Incorporate natural hazard information into the community's long term planning efforts.**
- **Identify alternate transportation options should there be damage to any bridges in the Sutton area.**

- **Identify opportunities for funding to implement hazard mitigation measures for potential natural disasters.**
- **Develop and disseminate information about natural hazard areas to inform property owners of at-risk areas.**
- **The community should actively participate in efforts to address river erosion at the local, state and federal level in order to bring resources to community members in at-risk areas.**