

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.

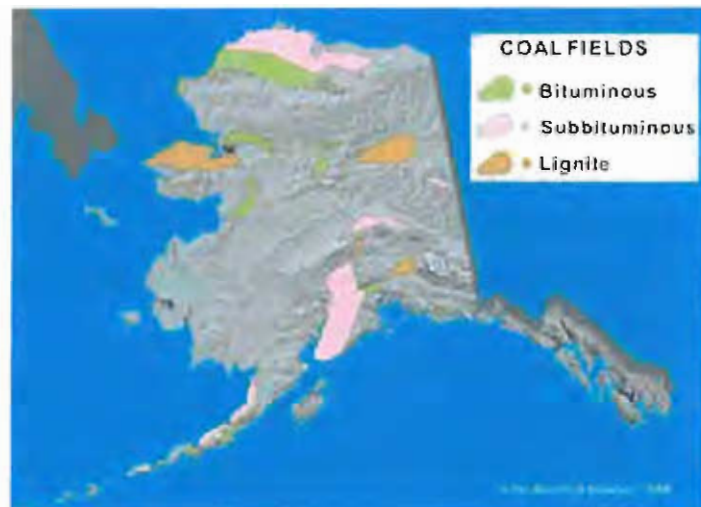
This policy proposes a set of strategies that, pursued in concert, will help perpetuate Sutton's farming tradition and assist farm enterprises to realize their full economic potential while also fulfilling public goals. Possible strategies include:

- 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.**