

A photograph of a winter landscape. A snow-covered road or path leads from the foreground into the distance. To the right, there are dark, leafless trees and bushes. In the background, a large, snow-capped mountain peak rises against a sky with soft, golden light from a low sun, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The overall scene is serene and cold.

# **Unit 395 Land Use Master Plan**

**September 2023**

Prepared for the Kenai  
Peninsula Borough



Prepared for the **Kenai Peninsula Borough**

Prepared by **RESPEC** with support from **Corvus Design**,  
**Information Insights**, and **Northern Economics**

Submitted September 2023





# Executive Summary

The Unit 395 Land Use Master Plan contains guidelines for future land use on Unit 395, a 1,000-acre parcel of land located northwest of Cooper Landing. The parcel, which is owned by the Kenai Peninsula Borough (KPB) and within the Cooper Landing Advisory Planning Commission (CLAPC) boundary, is largely undeveloped and presents numerous opportunities for the Cooper Landing community. The goal of this plan is to protect the resources and values of the land and community while retaining opportunities for future land uses.

Unit 395, shown in Figure 1-1, is recommended for classification for recreation and resource management, with considerations for wildlife management and cultural preservation and facilitation. There are also areas within the parcel that should be considered for eventual reclassification to residential, pending additional study of land suitability. These recommendations were developed based on a comprehensive review of relevant planning documents, analysis of geophysical data, and input from public engagement and stakeholder interviews.

This document includes conceptual designs and layouts for recreational facilities and residential subdivisions, which are intended to illustrate options and opportunities for Unit 395. This plan does not propose that these designs be adopted and developed without further investigation and public engagement. The public feedback that was received based on these and other concepts is summarized in the body of the plan.



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# 1. Introduction

This Land Use Master Plan contains guidelines for future land use on Unit 395, a 1,000-acre parcel of land located northwest of Cooper Landing. The parcel, which is owned by the Kenai Peninsula Borough (KPB) and within the Cooper Landing Advisory Planning Commission (CLAPC) boundary, is largely undeveloped and presents numerous opportunities for the Cooper Landing community. The goal of this plan is to protect the resources and values of the land and community while retaining opportunities for future land uses. These guidelines were developed after a comprehensive review of relevant planning documents, analysis of geophysical data, and input from public engagement and stakeholder interviews.

Cooper Landing has a population of just over 200 people and 297 housing units. According to the 2021 American Community Survey [U.S. Census Bureau, 2021], 212 of those housing units (71 percent) are vacant for seasonal, recreational, or occasional use; only 85 housing units are reported as being occupied year-round. The need for housing for year-round residents and seasonal workers who would like to be year-round residents was expressed repeatedly during the public engagement process for this plan. It is unlikely that residential development will occur on Unit 395 in the near term, but the research for this plan revealed locations within the parcel that would likely be suitable for residential subdivisions. In the meantime, three locations within Cooper Landing were identified by the KPB as more likely to be developed in the coming years: Campus Drive, Quartz Creek, and Birch and Grouse Ridge.

Since the parcel was first recommended for selection as part of the Alaska Municipal Entitlement Process in 1996, residents of Cooper Landing have been opposed to the development of access roads from the new Sterling Highway bypass into the parcel. This plan does not have authority over the design and construction of the Sterling Highway Mile Post (MP) 45-60 realignment project, but it respects the voice of the community and the recommendations of the CLAPC by recommending regular, public access to Unit 395 only comes from the existing Sterling Highway. Emergency or maintenance access may be necessary.

Alongside this master planning effort, a standalone report was developed to evaluate the status of housing in Chugach National Forest communities within the KPB and provide recommendations for making housing more affordable. This report can be found in Appendix A.

“

*It will have an outsized influence on the community for the rest of the community's existence, and with that comes a lot of opportunities and a lot of question marks.*

*–CLAPC member*

# Plan Contents

This plan provides guidance for future land use decision-making on Unit 395. The guidance and recommendations presented in Chapter 5.0 are based on the review of relevant plans and studies (Chapter 2.0), input from the public and key stakeholders (Chapter 3.0), and a geotechnical analysis of the parcel and other engineering analyses (Chapter 4.0). An affordable housing report was developed in tandem with this plan; the outcomes of the report were also considered when creating the recommendations for Unit 395.

*September 20, 2022 at the Cooper Landing Brewing Company*



## 2. Existing Plan Review

The Existing Plan Review was conducted at the start of the project to understand the context and guidance available for land planning on Unit 395 and was updated as needed throughout the project. The following eight plans, studies, and other documents were identified as relevant to this project:

- / *Community Recommendations on a Land Use Plan for Borough Lands – Cooper Landing* [KPB-CLAPC, 1992]
- / *Cooper Landing Land Use Classification Plan for Borough-owned and Borough-selected Lands* [KPB-CLAPC, 1996]
- / *Kenai Area Plan* [Alaska Department of Natural Resources, 2001]
- / *Delineation of Landscape Linkages in the Cooper Landing Planning Area* [Kenai National Wildlife Refuge and Chugach National Forest, 2010]
- / *Final, Finding & Decision for Region 4 of the Kenai Peninsula Borough* [Department of Natural Resources – Division of Mining, Land and Water, 2014]
- / *Sterling Highway MP 45-60 Final EIS and Final Section 4(f) Evaluation* [Alaska DOT&PF, 2018]
- / *Kenai Peninsula Borough Comprehensive Plan* [Agnew::Beck, 2019]
- / *Chugach National Forest Land Management Plan* [U.S. Forest Service, 2020]
- / *Sterling Highway MP 45-60 Phases 1A/B Through 6 95% Design* [Alaska DOT&PF, 2023]
- / *Alaska State Land Survey No 2020-47 Plan of Survey* [Department of Natural Resources – Division of Mining, Land and Water, 2023]


Review of these plans revealed an emphasis on the rural character and aesthetic of Cooper Landing and the broader region, as well as the importance of wildlife habitat and corridors in and near the project area. Several plans also stressed the community's opposition to allowing access to Unit 395 from the Sterling Highway bypass (Sterling Highway MP 45-60 realignment). The following summary is from the Existing Plan Review, which is attached in full as Appendix B.

### Themes and Considerations

#### Access

The *Cooper Landing Land Use Classification* document [KPB-CLAPC, 1996] clearly and strongly states that the community is opposed to creating ramps or spur roads off the Sterling Highway bypass that would provide access to Unit 395. The *Sterling Highway MP*





*45-60 Final EIS and Final Selection 4(f) Evaluation* [DOT&PF, 2018] reflects this opposition by stating that the development of driveways or side roads off the highway realignment will not be permitted. Emergency and maintenance access to Unit 395 from the bypass may be necessary.

The *Delineation of Landscape Linkages* report [KNWR and CNF, 2010] advises against the construction of new roads within the Juneau-Cooper Creeks Landscape Connection. Because the landscape connection extends through most of the area between Unit 395 and the existing Sterling Highway, this suggestion should be considered if new road access is planned.

## **Character**

The character of Cooper Landing, Unit 395, and surrounding areas is described as scenic, rural, and natural. Several of the reviewed plans and documents stress the importance of maintaining the aesthetic quality and character of the region.

The *Cooper Landing Land Use Classification* plan [KPB-CLAPC, 1996] indicates that Unit 395 should be developed as a residential subdivision and the creation of a new commercial district should be avoided.

## **Wildlife and Vegetation**

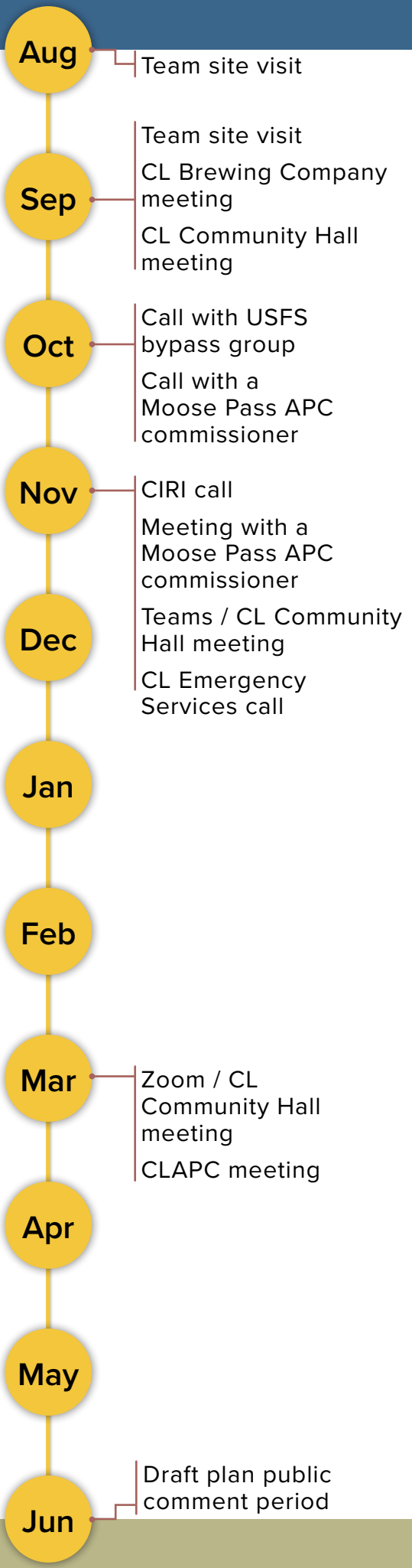
Unit 395 and the surrounding area contain wildlife habitat and linkages for a variety of species, including black bears, brown bears, moose, lynx, Dall sheep, and wolverine. The *Sterling Highway MP 45-60 Final EIS and Final Selection 4(f) Evaluation* [DOT&PF, 2018] identified both needle-leaved forest and needle broad-leaved forest within Unit 395; the vegetation inventory was completed for a buffer around the highway realignment and does not necessarily reflect the entire parcel.

Construction of the bypass will include the creation of wildlife crossing features at various locations along the bypass, including Alaska's first wildlife overpass to the west of Unit 395 and a crossing at the Juneau Creek Bridge to the east.

## **Character of Surrounding Lands**

Unit 395 is surrounded by the Chugach National Forest, bordered on two sides by the Juneau-Cooper Creeks Landscape Connection, and overlapped by the Sqiilantnu Archaeological District. Each of these areas has its own guidance or regulations intended to minimize degradation. The Chugach National Forest Land Management Plan [USFS, 2020] and the *Delineation of Landscape Linkages in the Cooper Landing Planning Area* [KNWR and CNF, 2010] do not restrict activities or development in or access to Unit 395; however, they do signify that the areas surrounding Unit 395 will remain largely undeveloped.





# 3. Public Involvement and Stakeholder Engagement

## Public Involvement

The project team conducted extensive public outreach throughout the duration of the project. This included public workshops (in person and online), attendance and presentations at CLAPC meetings, a project website, a story map, and announcements via the Cooper Landing Community Crier and local Facebook groups.

In addition to announcing meetings, the project team posted in the Cooper Landing Community Crier and local Facebook groups to announce website updates, request photographs of the parcel, and request community “stories” about the parcel.

The project website was updated within a week of each public workshop to include a summary of the feedback and activities from the workshop. Draft deliverables, maps, and concept drawings were also posted on the website as they were approved to be made public.

The digital story map contained additional details about the project and photographs of the project site, providing a virtual “tour” of Unit 395. Finally, a draft of this plan was released for public comment from June 7 to July 22, 2023; more details about the public comment period are discussed later in this plan.

## Stakeholder Engagement

In addition to engaging the public to gather input, the project team conducted targeted outreach to and meetings with key stakeholders, including the U.S. Department of Agriculture U.S. Forest Service (USFS); Cooper Landing Emergency Services; Cook Inlet Region, Inc.; the Kenaitze Indian Tribe; and the Cooper Landing and Moose Pass Advisory Planning Commissions.

## Key Takeaways

Members of the public disagreed on specific details of presented materials at each workshop; however, many overarching themes were consistent across individuals and workshops. Conversations prior to the public comment period tended to center around the following themes:

### / Housing

- » Agreement: there is insufficient housing (insufficient housing stock, unaffordable costs) for many of the people who work in Cooper Landing to also live in Cooper Landing year-round
- » Disagreement: where on Unit 395 housing should be allowed, whether housing should be developed on Unit 395 at all, how to create affordable housing, and desired lot size

### / Recreation

- » Agreement: recreation is vital to Cooper Landing's economy and character; residents and visitors value recreational opportunities very highly
- » Disagreement: the scale and types of facilities that should be developed (i.e., maintaining trails and trailheads, creating day-use facilities, or developing adequate facilities to host events such as Nordic ski or mountain bike competitions)

*September 21, 2022 at the Cooper Landing Community Hall*





## / Wildlife

- » Agreement: wildlife habitat and movement corridors should be considered when planning housing developments and land uses more generally
- » Disagreement: how to prioritize wildlife habitat and corridors alongside other considerations, such as cost of development

## / Access

- » Agreement: there should be limited access from the bypass to Unit 395
- » Disagreement: some members of the public were amenable to gated emergency access ramps within Unit 395, while others were opposed to any type of access from the bypass

## / Economy

- » Agreement: Cooper Landing has a highly seasonal economy, which makes living there year-round challenging; there is a desire for more stability for local businesses and opposition to large chains coming into their community
- » Disagreement: whether Unit 395 should be used in any capacity to support the local economy (i.e., by allowing commercial development on the parcel)

## / Vision

- » Agreement: Unit 395 is important to Cooper Landing's identity and its uses will impact Cooper Landing's future
- » Disagreement: how to balance and prioritize specific values and goals to create a cohesive vision for Unit 395

Information gathered through the engagement process was incorporated into each iteration of the maps and plans presented to the public.


## **KPB Planning Commission and Assembly Involvement**

The KPB Planning Commission and KPB Assembly Lands Committee were updated on the progress of this project on February 13 and 21, respectively. The Assembly expressed that development and community expansion were key priorities for the borough on Unit 395 and that limitations should not be placed on development within the parcel.

## **Public Comment Period**

A draft of this plan was made available for public comment from June 7 to July 22, 2023. The draft plan and appendices A, B, and C were posted to the project website as PDFs and announcements were made on Facebook, in the Cooper Landing Community Crier, and





during a CLAPC meeting. The public was able to submit comments via the website or by emailing the consultant team.

Nine comments were received during the comment period and logged in a comment tracker spreadsheet. A table with the comments and the project team's responses can be found in Appendix D.

The comments received reinforced the community's prioritization of recreation and wildlife management, with five comments emphasizing the importance and value of the natural environment and four mentioning the importance of recreation.

Many of the comments indicated that the commenters were opposed to residential development on Unit 395. Three comments were fully opposed to housing on Unit 395 and three more indicated that the commenters would strongly prefer no development on Unit 395. Five commenters mentioned affordable housing, with most indicating that they would prefer to see affordable housing developed closer to the existing infrastructure in Cooper Landing. One comment said the plan is a good balance of residential and recreational uses.

Three comments indicated opposition to commercial classification.

The USFS also submitted a letter that detailed their concerns and provided references to information about the impacts of development in this area. The changes made to this plan in response to the USFS letter are outlined in Appendix D and the letter itself is included in Appendix E.





# 4. Related Deliverables

## Geotechnical Report

Engineers from the consultant team conducted subsurface explorations at Unit 395 in September 2022, with a total of 40 test pits excavated to depths ranging from 2 feet to 16 feet. Soil from 31 test pits were collected for laboratory testing.

Analysis of the test pits and soil samples revealed conditions suitable for residential development. Some areas are prone to frost, but this is a common challenge that could be addressed in the design of future structures on the parcel. The area near test pits TP21-27 (see Figure 4-1) was identified as a potential material source, but the report recommends additional studies to verify. Permitting for additional exploration of this area is in progress as of the writing of this plan.

The data collected for the geotechnical analysis were consistent with the data collected by DOT&PF for the Sterling Highway MP45-60 project. The full geotechnical report can be found in Appendix C.

Figure 4-1 Geotechnical Analysis Test Pit Locations

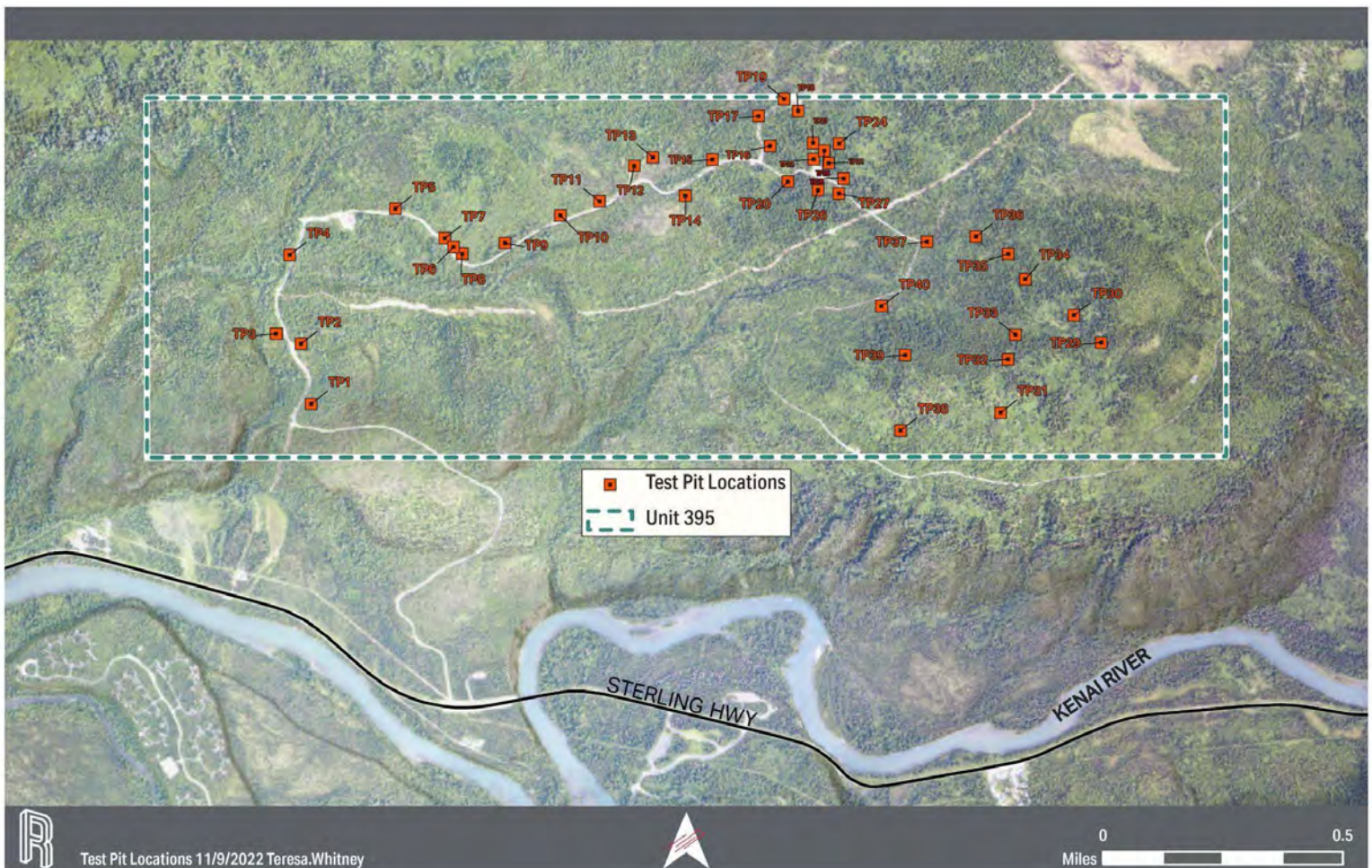


Figure 1. Approximate Test Pit Locations.





## Constraints Mapping

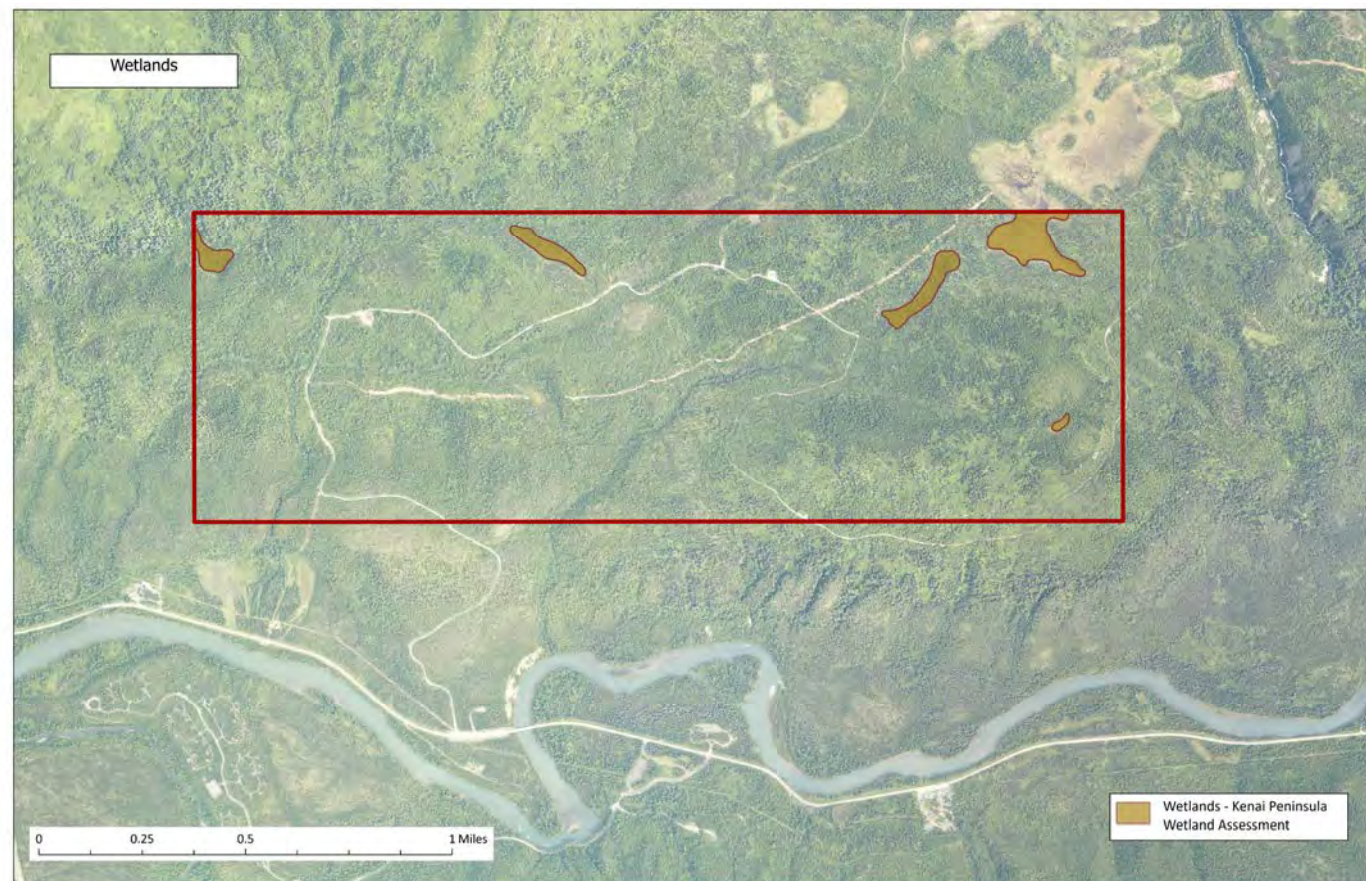
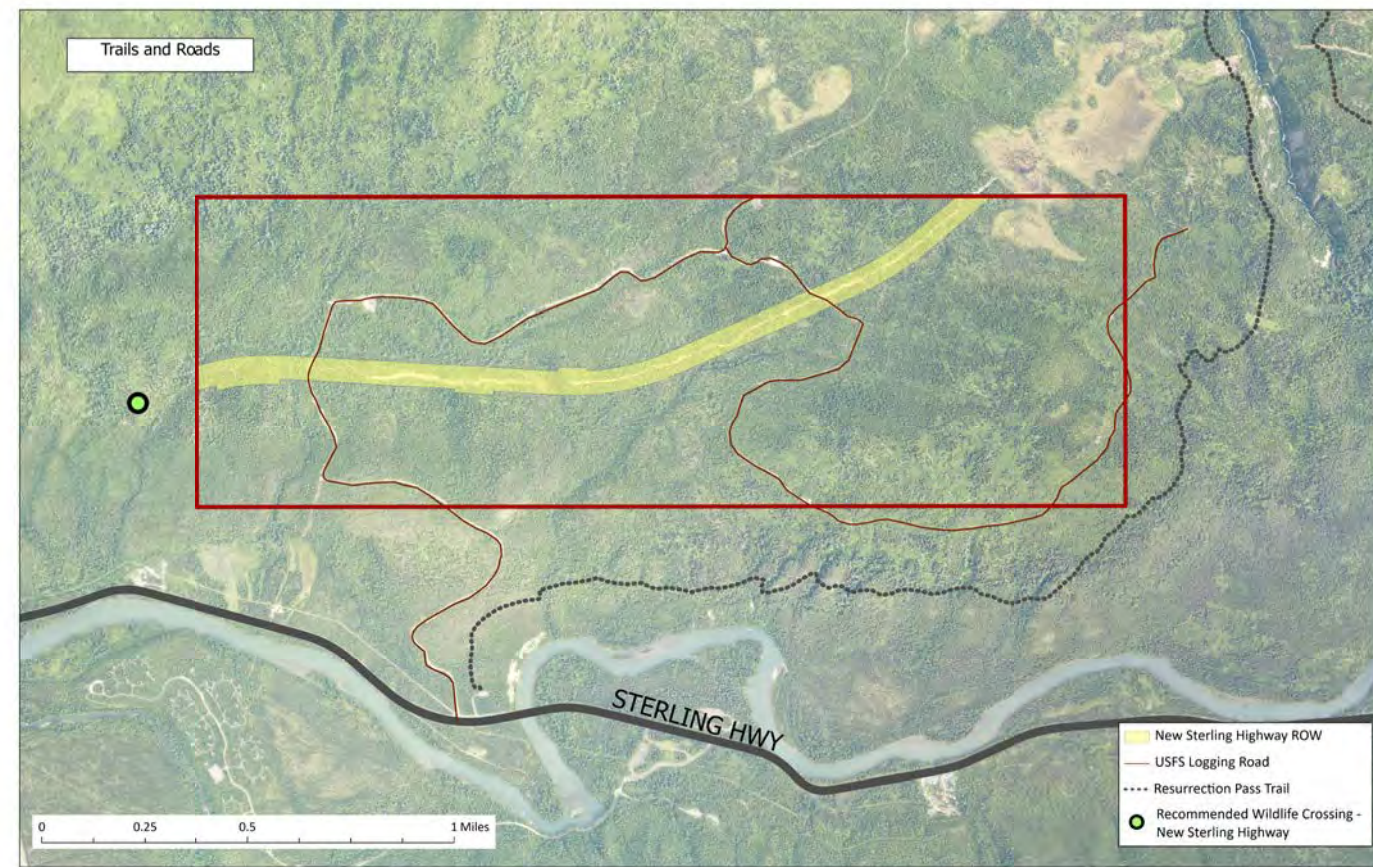
The consulting firm used ArcGIS mapping to identify potential constraints to land uses on Unit 395. Figure 4-1 shows maps with four key constraints. The area's topography and wetlands limit where infrastructure, roads, and recreation trails can be developed and impacts cost of development. The existing USFS logging roads determine how the parcel will be accessed (via West Juneau Road off the existing Sterling Highway) and influence which areas of the parcel are most immediately available for development. Finally, the fourth map shows the Sqilantnu Archaeological District, which encompasses roughly half of Unit 395 and likely contains artifacts similar to those found during the Sterling Highway MP 45-60 construction project. Please refer to the Alaska Section 106 Tribal Consultation process for more information.

These maps do not show information about wildlife habitat or movements; this information was gathered from maps provided in Delineation of Landscape Linkages in the Cooper Landing Planning Area [KNWR and CNF, 2010] and the Sterling Highway MP 45-60 Final EIS and Final Section 4(f) Evaluation.

The maps developed by the consultant team are based on data that were available at the time of this planning project and the information should be verified on the ground before any development. These are not the only constraints that are relevant to development on Unit 395, but rather the key elements that were highlighted at public meetings. Additional constraints and considerations are discussed in Chapter 5.







**Figure 4-1 Constraints Map**



## Road Access to Southeast Corner

Development in the southeast corner of Unit 395, which has gentler slopes than most of the parcel, would require a spur road off West Juneau Road or Chunkwood Road. Based on an estimate from the consultant’s engineers, constructing a 1.25-mile road from West Juneau Road would cost approximately \$1.5 million. This estimate does not include the roads that would be developed within the subdivision.

West Juneau Road, which is currently used to access Unit 395 from the existing Sterling Highway, is owned by USFS. Ownership of West Juneau Road would need to be transferred to KPB prior to development in the parcel.

*Table 4-1. Access Road Construction Cost Estimate*

Description	Quantity	Pay Unit	Unit Price	Amount
Clearing and Grubbing	17.4	AC	\$10,000	\$174,000
Unclassified Excavation	9,830	CUBIC YARD	\$15	\$147,450
Borrow, Selected Material Type A	11,222	TON	\$36	\$403,974
Aggregate Base Course, D-1	2,668	TON	\$30	\$80,025
Aggregate Surface Course, E-1	1,167	TON	\$36	\$42,012
CSP 24 Inch	450	LF	\$300	\$135,000
Mobilization and Demobilization	ALL REQUIRED	LUMP SUM	5%	\$49,123
Erosion and Pollution Control Administration	ALL REQUIRED	LUMP SUM	1%	\$9,825
Temporary Erosion and Pollution Control	ALL REQUIRED	LUMP SUM	2%	\$19,649
Construction Surveying	ALL REQUIRED	LUMP SUM	3%	\$29,474
Traffic Maintenance	ALL REQUIRED	LUMP SUM	3%	\$29,474
			Construction Cost	\$1,120,006
			Contingency (30%)	\$336,002
			<b>Construction Cost</b>	<b>\$1,456,007</b>

## Utilities

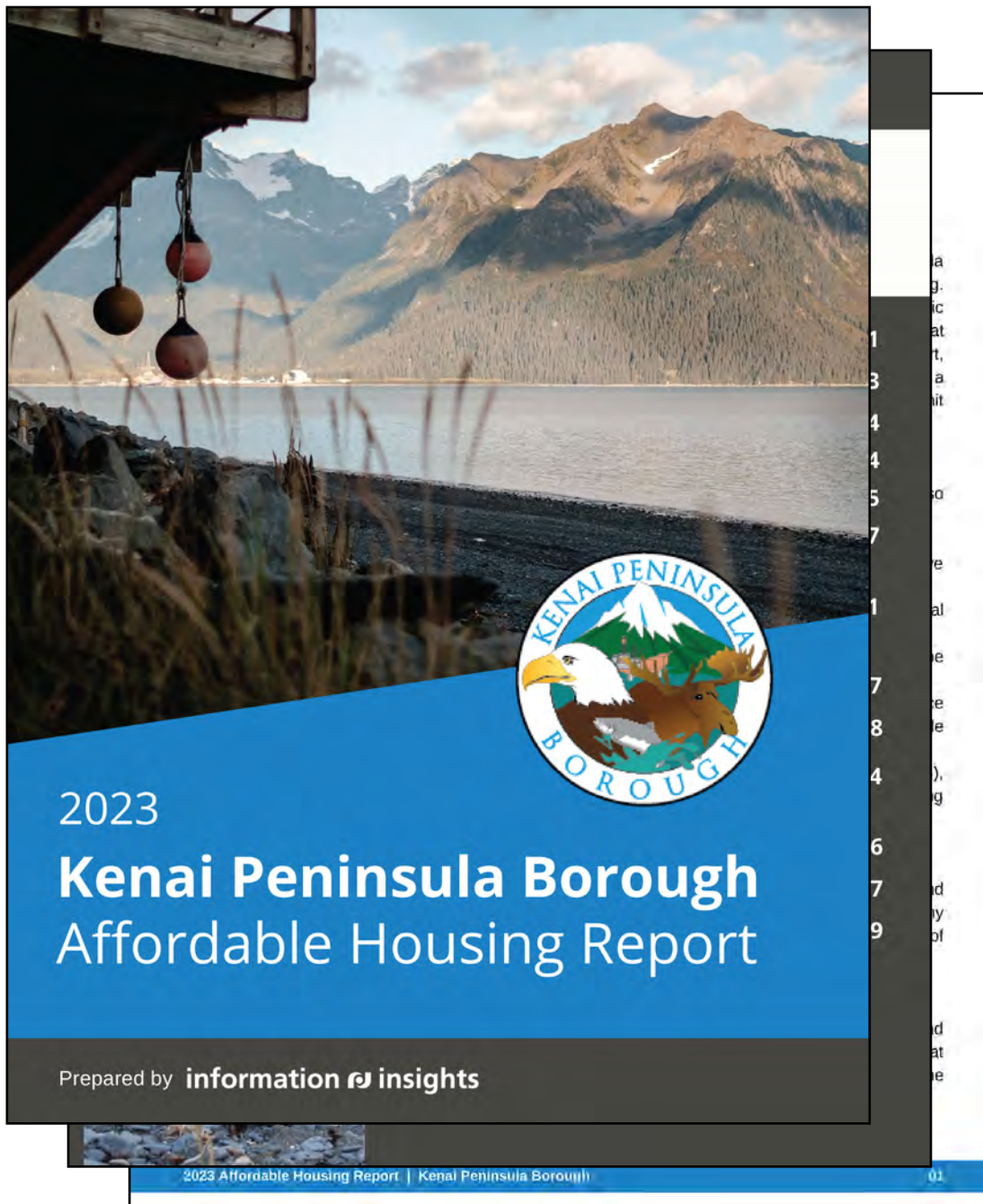
Residential development on Unit 395 will require communications, power, water, and wastewater utilities. Electricity can likely be accessed via the power lines on the existing Sterling Highway, though the cost and feasibility would need to be evaluated in cooperation with Chugach Electric. Potable water would need to be accessed through either single-household wells on individual lots or a community well. Either option would require site-specific survey and design when the location of the development is determined. Similarly, a residential development could opt for a shared septic system, which would make smaller lot sizes more feasible than individual septic systems. Both a shared well and a shared septic system would be considered a “community system” and would require plan and design approval, as well as the formation of an entity responsible for the maintenance and operation of each system.



# Affordable Housing Report

An affordable housing report was developed as part of the same effort as the Unit 395 Land Use Master Plan, though it is a standalone report that encompasses a broader area. The report evaluates housing practices in the KPB and other municipalities in Alaska and the Lower 48, as well as information from a public survey of Cooper Landing and Moose Pass residents and an interview with Kenai Peninsula Housing Initiatives. Based on this evaluation, it provides recommendations for creating more affordable housing in communities in the Chugach National Forest.

The full report can be found in Appendix A.



# Benefit-Cost Analysis

A benefit-cost analysis was performed to provide additional context to the development possibilities of Unit 395. The following is an excerpt from the memo included in Appendix F.

*As part of the land planning process, KPB has partnered with local community and business partners to assess development opportunities for Unit 395, including residential, commercial, and mixed-use. The quantifiable scope of this analysis estimates the costs and benefits of developing two subdivisions and a materials extraction site. Potential benefits outside of the quantifiable scope of this cost-benefit analysis include additional residential and mixed-use developments, fees such as parking or other user fees from trailheads and cabins, concession and rental fees from public facilities, and benefits to nearby businesses from the additional population and recreational use in the area.*

*Using a discount rate of 7 percent, the net present value of project benefits is \$12.0 million, and costs are \$1.9 million. The KPB Land Planning Unit 395 project therefore has a benefit-cost ratio of 6.2, as shown in Table 4-2. The benefits by fund are shown in Table 4-3.*

Table 4-2. Benefit-Cost Ratio

Category	Net Present Value (7% discount rate)
<b>Benefits</b>	
Sales of residential lots	\$10,914,515
Property tax receipts from residential lots sold	\$1,019,818
Royalties from material extraction	\$132,851
<i>Total Benefits</i>	<i>\$12,067,184</i>
<b>Costs</b>	
Construction of access road to southeast corner	\$1,456,007
Construction of powerlines along access road	\$410,000
Road Maintenance (RSA)	\$90,013
<i>Total Costs</i>	<i>\$1,956,020</i>
<b>Benefit-Cost Ratio</b>	<b>6.2</b>

Table 4-2. Benefit-Cost Ratio

Category	Benefit/Cost Source	Net Present Value (7% discount rate)
<b>Benefits</b>		
Land Trust Fund	Sales of residential lots & Royalties	\$11,047,365
KPB Road Service Area	RSA Tax Receipt	\$90,013
KPB General Fund	Property Tax Receipts	\$929,806
<i>Total Benefits</i>		<i>\$12,067,184</i>
<b>Costs</b>		
Land Trust Fund	Construction of access road and Powerlines	\$1,866,007
KPB Road Service Area	Road Maintenance (RSA)	\$90,013
KPB General Fund	N/A	
<i>Total Costs</i>		<i>\$1,956,020</i>

# 5. Development Recommendations

The primary goal of this plan is to protect the resources and values of Unit 395 while retaining opportunities for future land uses. Unit 395 is recommended to be classified for resource management and recreation. Management of the parcel under these classifications should emphasize the importance of cultural preservation and facilitation, wildlife habitat and movements, and maintaining future development opportunities alongside recreation and resource extraction activities.

Currently, three locations have been identified for material extraction: a gravel site north of the bypass and two hard rock sites south of the bypass, one on each side of West Juneau Road, as shown in Figure 5-1. The gravel site north of the bypass is in the process of being permitted for exploration as of the writing of this plan. The site is anticipated to yield up to 50,000 cubic yards of material over 2 years if it is permitted for mining. Currently, there are no near-term plans for permits at either hard rock site.

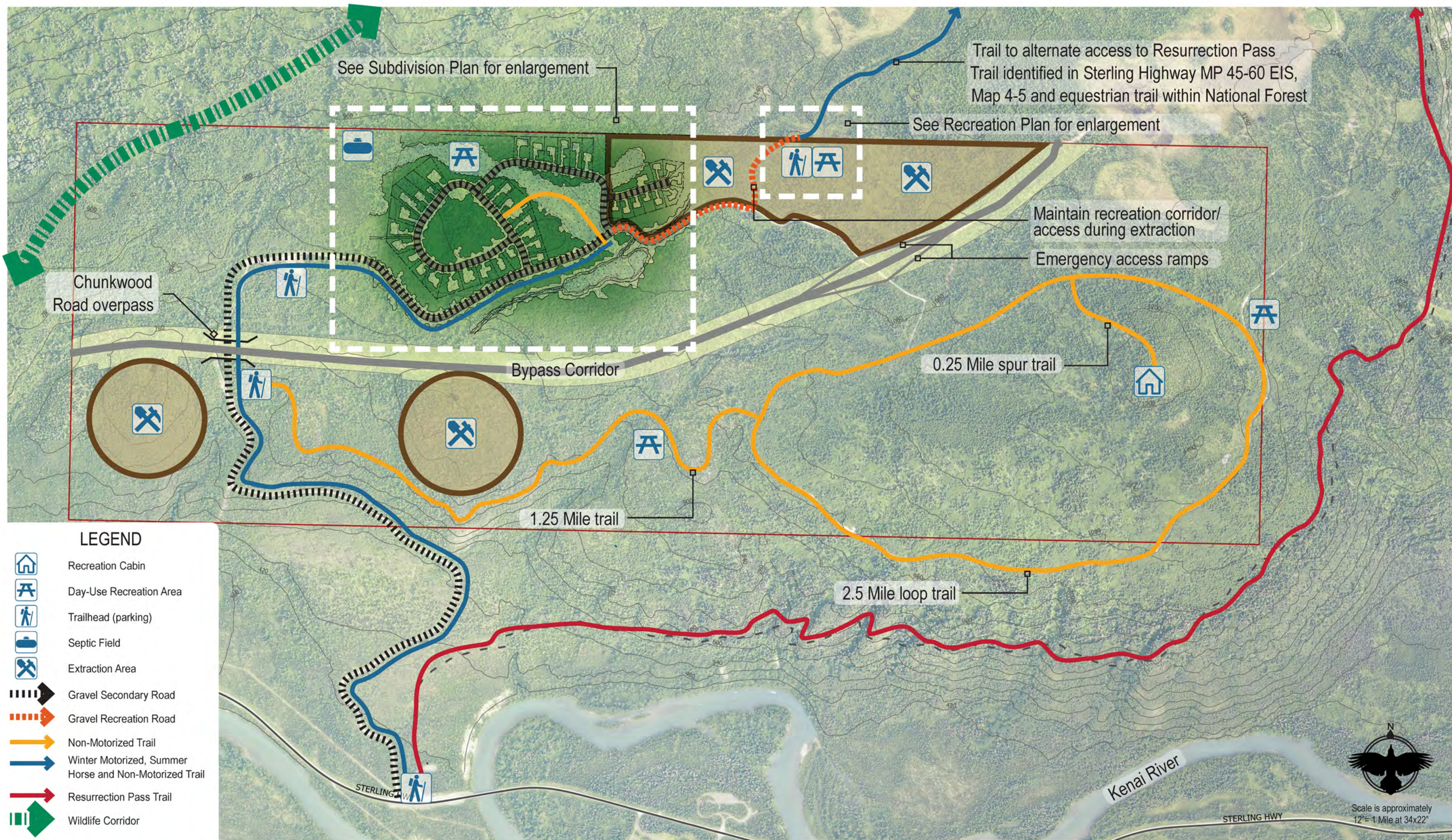


Two areas, the area north of the bypass shown in Figure 5-1 and the southeast corner shown in Figure 5-2, should be considered for residential reclassification pending future suitability studies. The hard rock material site east of West Juneau Road could also be suitable for residential development after mining has been completed and the area has been stabilized (see Figure 5-2). The area north of the bypass and the recreational facilities in Figure 5-1 are shown in more detail in Figures 5-3 and 5-4. These concept maps are meant to provide an idea of the possibilities for this parcel and are not proposed plans for development.



Resource management, recreation, cultural preservation and facilitation, and wildlife management should be seen as immediate and ongoing priorities, whereas residential development on the parcel is a mid- to long-term goal. Development of affordable housing should be prioritized on other KPB-owned parcels within and nearer to existing infrastructure in Cooper Landing. The next three sections outline the factors that should be considered when developing infrastructure on the parcel, as well as specific steps necessary for recreational or residential development.





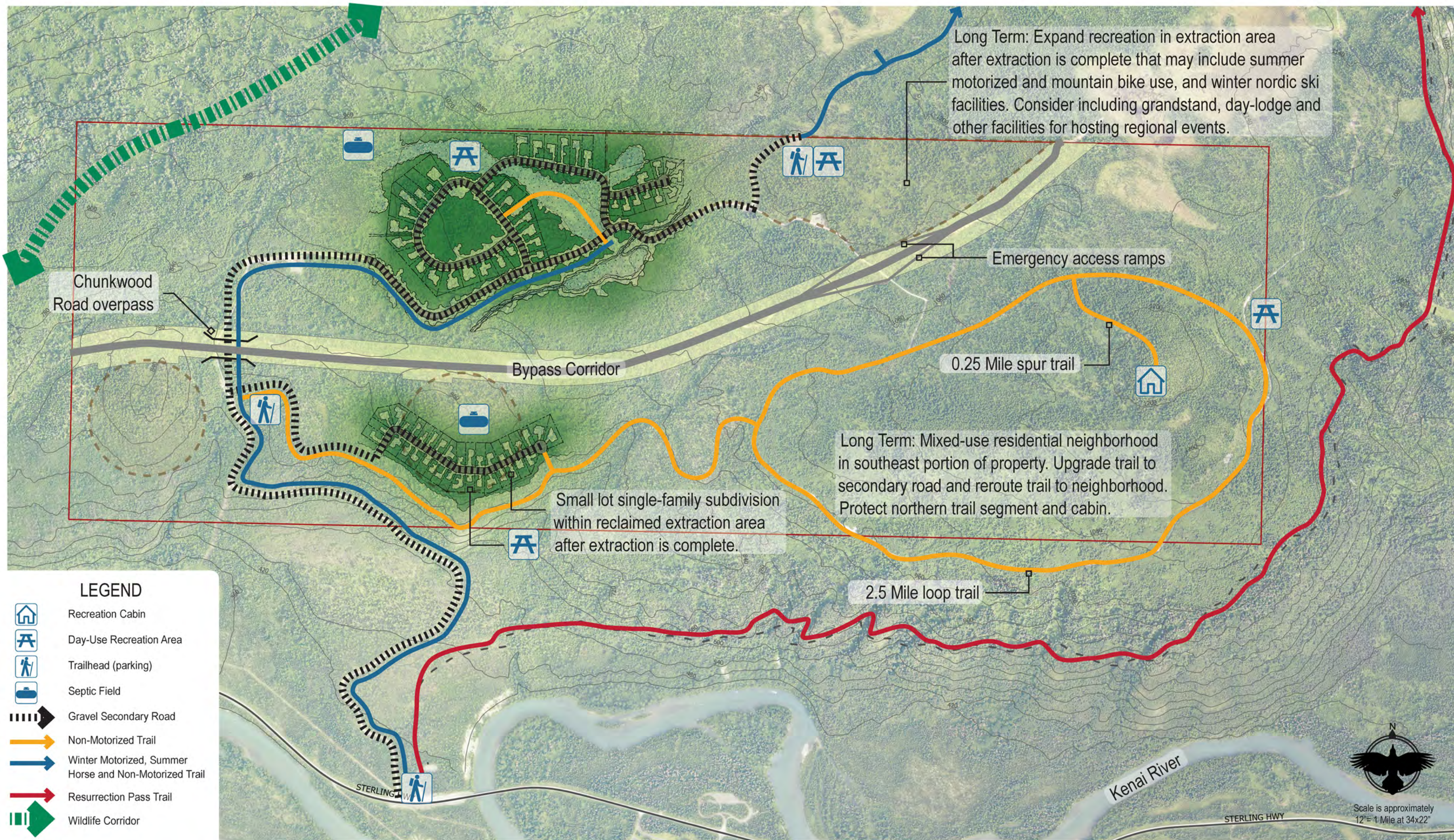
**Figure 5-1**

# Development Possibilities

REV: 08/17/2023







**Figure 5-2**

# Long Term Development Possibilities

REV: 08/17/2023







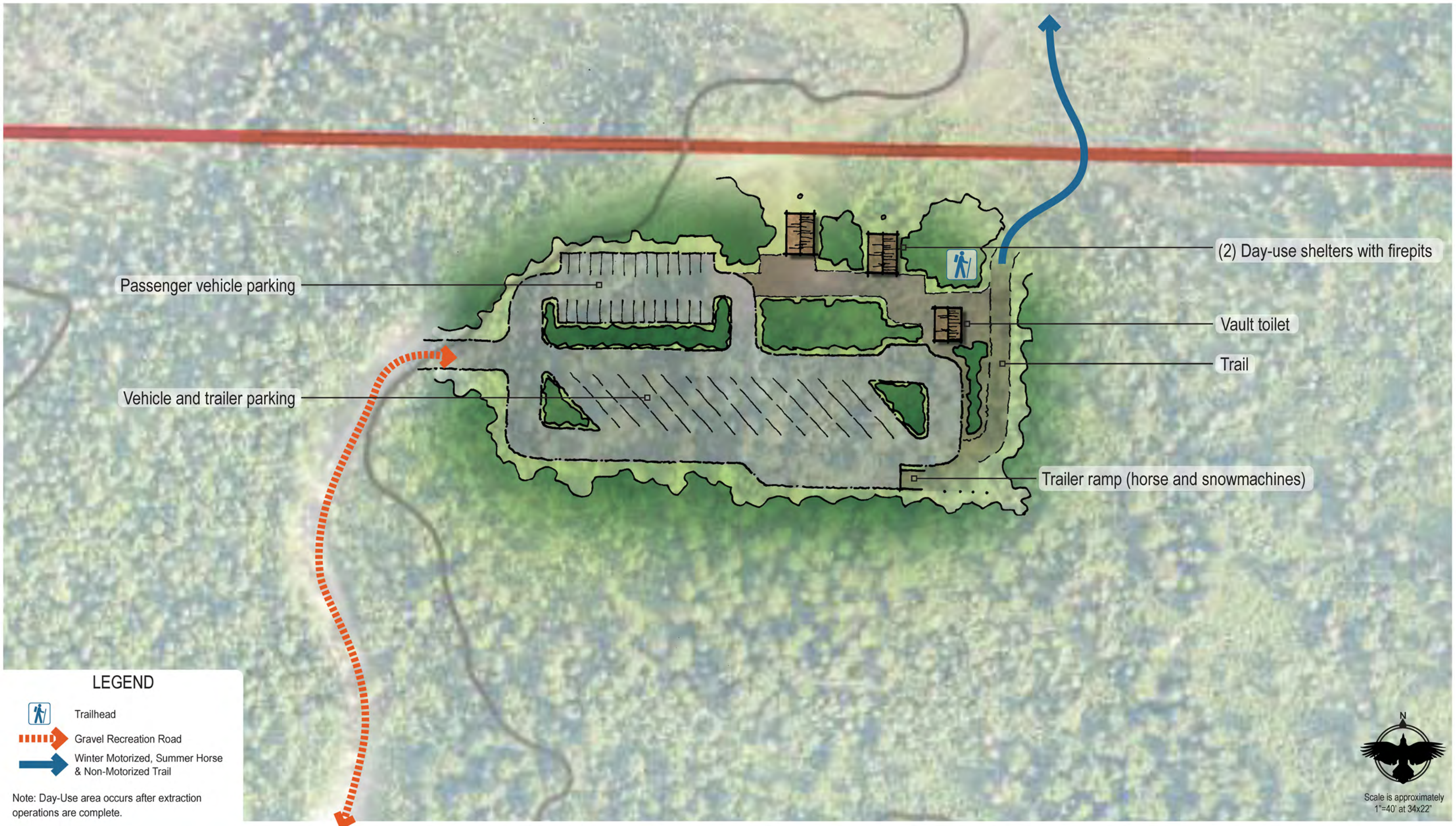
**Figure 5-3**

# Residential Subdivision Plan

REV: 08/17/2023







**Figure 5-4**

# Recreation Day-Use Plan

REV: 08/17/2023





## General Considerations for Development

Disposal of KPB lands for private development is a standard practice that has yielded and continues to yield significant social and economic benefits to the Cooper Landing community. For example, the Cooper Landing Senior Housing, the Post Office, and many private homes were built on lands previously owned by KPB, and the Cooper Landing Gun Club is currently seeking to move their gun range to KPB land. The Cooper Landing Brewing Company, where the first public event was held for this project, was also built on former KPB land. Development on Unit 395 would follow the same procedure as these past examples, including opportunities for public comment.

The remainder of this plan identifies topics and concerns that were raised throughout this project that should be considered before and during any future development on Unit 395.

### Coordination with Other Entities

Any development on Unit 395 should be planned in consultation with relevant entities and organizations in and near Cooper Landing. Table 5-1 on the following page provides examples, though it should not be considered a complete list.

*Aerial image taken by Alaska DOT&PF*





Table 5-1. Future Consultation and Coordination Needs

Entity	Potential Involvement
CIRI	Should be consulted prior to development on Unit 395, especially regarding development that may occur within the Sqilantnu Archaeological District.
CLAPC	Should be engaged and informed throughout the planning and design phases of any development on Unit 395.
Cooper Landing Emergency Services	Should be consulted regarding adequate access for emergency vehicles and capacity for increased emergency responses.
Community organizations	Organizations such as the Cooper Landing Community Club, the Cooper Landing "Walkable Community" Project, the Cooper Landing Gun Club, etc. should be engaged throughout the planning and design phases of development on Unit 395.
DEC	Should be consulted in the planning and design of onsite septic systems.
Kenaitze Indian Tribe	Should be consulted prior to development on Unit 395, especially regarding development that may occur within the Sqilantnu Archaeological District.
KPB	Will be involved in planning, development, and land disposal within Unit 395.
Private developers	Will likely be involved in residential development on Unit 395.
Members of the public	Should be engaged and informed throughout the planning and design phases of any development on Unit 395.
SHPO	Should be consulted prior to development on Unit 395, especially development that may occur within the Sqilantnu Archaeological District.
USFS	Should be consulted regarding access to recreation features on USFS land, impacts of development on wildlife movement, strategies to mitigate human-wildlife interactions, and any other logistical matters that may arise from developing sites encompassed by USFS land. Will also need to be involved in the ownership transfer of West Juneau Road to provide public access to Unit 395.
Utility providers	Should be engaged to identify costs, feasibility, and potential challenges of extending utilities (e.g., electricity, internet access) to Unit 395.



## Community Priorities

Cooper Landing values its small-town feel. Although the area transforms into a tourist destination for fishing and recreation during the summer months, it is generally a quiet and closely connected community. Residents and CLAPC have expressed a desire for Cooper Landing to maintain its character and sense of community and would oppose development that threatens to disrupt the community or its economy.

The themes identified in Section 4.3 should be used as a starting point for discussions around future developments on Unit 395 to aid further public engagement efforts.

## Material Sites

Material extracted from sites within Unit 395 could possibly be used to develop infrastructure within the parcel. KPB should consider material site development that supports and enhances overall and neighboring development rather than impeding or detracting from those long-term development goals. End-state reclamation plans should point to future use goals, such as development for residential or recreation use or restoration to wildlife habitat.

The material sites within Unit 395 could be important for local residential development uses as well as public projects and road and highway maintenance, including winter sand. Rock materials should be characterized and tested using DOT and/or USACE standards and specifications for rip-rap and aggregate to determine usefulness and importance.

## Recreation

Cooper Landing is well-known for its sport fishing, transforming the quiet community into a bustling hotspot during the summer months. Cooper Landing also offers float trips down the Kenai River, campsites, and hiking and skiing trails, among other recreational opportunities. The south trailhead for Resurrection Pass Trail, which attracts hundreds of visitors each year, is located along Sterling Highway near the start of West Juneau Road. In the winter, West Juneau Road is currently unmaintained and serves as the Winter Trail Route for the Resurrection Pass Trail. The winter trailhead could be moved to the north side of Unit 395 to provide better trail access and snow conditions due to the elevation gain.

Outdoor recreation is vital to Cooper Landing's economy and beloved by its residents. Feedback from the public indicated that recreation should be a priority on Unit 395, with ideas for new facilities ranging from looped trails for mountain biking to a Nordic ski competition stadium.

## Roadways

Within Cooper Landing, the roads are narrow and the speed lowers to 35 miles per hour to increase safety, especially during the summer months when Cooper Landing becomes a hotspot for tourism and fishing. The Sterling Highway MP 45-60 bypass project aims to reduce congestion and provide travelers with an alternate route of travel. The bypass will bisect Unit 395 and include a bridge east of the parcel over Juneau Creek. Construction of

the bypass will require DOT&PF and construction teams to take care and consideration for the archaeological district and provide adequate crossings for animals to reduce animal-vehicle collisions. Alaska's first wildlife overpass will be located on the Sterling Highway bypass just outside the western boundary of Unit 395.

Construction of the Sterling Highway MP 45-60 Project is scheduled to continue through 2027. Most of the construction that will directly impact Unit 395 will occur during Phase 4 of the bypass project (2022-2024) with final construction efforts for the entire bypass occurring during Phase 6 (2026-2027). Presence of construction equipment and activities will temporarily restrict access to some areas of Unit 395 and the opening of the highway will redirect north-south navigation for recreational users to safe, designated crossings. The highway will also create a new source of noise pollution that should be considered when developing either residential or recreational facilities.

According to the 1996 Cooper Landing Land Use Classification Plan and public comments from the development of the current plan, residents of Cooper Landing are opposed to access to Unit 395 from the Sterling Highway bypass. Maintenance and emergency access to the parcel from the bypass may be necessary, but regular public access should originate from the existing Sterling Highway alignment via West Juneau Road.

Both West Juneau Road and Chunkwood Road, which is located within the parcel, are currently USFS roads. The USFS has indicated that, if development on the parcel will result in West Juneau Road being used by the public, they will expect to transfer ownership of the road to the KPB. A Road Service Area would need to be created and a Road Maintenance Application would need to be filed with the borough. This will require West Juneau Road to meet the appropriate KPB road construction standards (width, grade, drainage, etc.). Upgrades to the road as part of the Sterling Highway MP 45-60 project will likely help the road meet or near some of these requirements, but additional upgrades and/or exceptions due to infeasibility to meet standards will be needed.

Roads within the subdivision(s) would need to meet Category III or Category IV standards per KPB Code Section 14.06. Category III roads, which serve 21-50 lots, must be at least 24 feet wide and Category IV roads, which serve more than 50 lots, must be at least 26 feet wide. Subdivision roads must not exceed 28 feet in width and grade standards are not to exceed 10%. All future road designs to or within Unit 395 should consider pedestrian infrastructure in their designs.



*West Juneau Road*



## **Sqilantnu Archaeological District**

The following description of the Sqilantnu Archaeological District was provided by the Kenaitze Indian Tribe for inclusion in this plan.

The Kenaitze Indian Tribe is a federally recognized tribe with about 1,900 members, many who live on the Kenai Peninsula, or Yaghanen (“the good land”). Our people, the Kahtnuht’ana Dena’ina (meaning the People of the Kenai River), have inhabited the Kenai Peninsula since time immemorial. Today, the Tribe delivers many services to our people in the area, including operating the Dena’ina Wellness Center in Kenai, providing early childhood education and social services, and offering various housing assistance programs. The Tribe also operates the K’Beq’ (Footprints) Cultural and Heritage Site near the confluence of the Upper Kenai River and the Russian River, and also inside the Sqilantnu archaeological district which teaches visitors about the history of this land and our people and culture. We operate this Site in partnership with the U.S. Forest Service.

The Dena’ina word for the area around the Upper Kenai River is Sqilantnu. There were traditional Kenaitze villages in this area until early in the 20th century. This area includes the Sqilantnu Archaeological District, and half of Unit 395 is contained within the District. The Sqilantnu Archaeological District contains hundreds of archaeological sites, including remnants from early Dena’ina occupation. Our people lived off this land since time immemorial and continue to do so and depend on its resources for medicine, food, and so much more. In exchange, we were good stewards of this land, ensuring these resources remain available to future generations.

The Tribe partners with Cook Inlet Region, Inc., the U.S. Forest Service, and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service to manage the natural and cultural resources located here. For instance, the Tribe has been working with the State of Alaska Department of Transportation during the Sterling Highway construction project, to ensure that artifacts and human remains are properly respected and preserved. During the 2021 construction season, workers found hearths and cache pits from Dena’ina homes, animal remains, and tools and blades. It is likely that many of these same artifacts can be found within Unit 395.

## **Wildlife and Environment**

Unit 395 is surrounded by the Chugach National Forest and the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge. Development on the parcel will need to be mindful of the presence and movement of wildlife, particularly along the western side of the parcel, to minimize further disruption of north-south navigability for wildlife. The Sterling Highway MP 45-60 project will include a wildlife overpass just outside the western edge of Unit 395, and it is anticipated that wildlife, including moose, black bears, Dall sheep, wolverines, and Canadian lynx, will redirect their movements to that overpass. Development can also cause habitat fragmentation that increases human-wildlife interactions in recreational and residential areas. USFS should be consulted during the planning stages of development to mitigate harmful impacts to wildlife and wildlife movements.



Unit 395 also contains wetlands, as indicated in Figure 5-1, and is known to contain trees affected by the spruce bark beetle. Wetlands may impact feasibility of development in certain areas and the presence of the spruce bark beetle may create specific clearing requirements for any projects in the area. Management efforts for the spruce bark beetle are ongoing across Cooper Landing. Recently, nearby Devil’s Creek trailhead was closed to allow heavy machinery to remove nearly 85 percent of the dead or dying spruce trees because they posed a fall hazard or blocked the pathway for recreational users. In addition to the at-risk spruce, there are mountain hemlock stands throughout Unit 395. Mountain hemlocks are particularly revered and are valuable to conserve.

The parcel is located within a fire-adapted forest ecology, which means that wildfires are a recurring natural phenomenon that should be considered during development. Public and private infrastructure can mitigate risks of wildfires by implementing firewise practices to reduce ground fuels and ladder fuels, create fuel breaks, and use fire resistant construction materials and methods.

*A moose spotted in Unit 395*





# Recreation Infrastructure Development

This plan presents a wide range of all-season recreation opportunities that could be pursued by organizations and partners in the area. The KPB does not have a parks and recreation department to develop these facilities at this time, but they were included in this plan to reserve space for development by future partners given the importance of recreation to not only Cooper Landing residents, but all residents of and visitors to the Kenai Peninsula.

Concepts for new recreation infrastructure shown in Figures 5-1, 5-2, and 5-3 include hiking trails, day use recreation facilities, public use cabins, winter motorized trails, equestrian trails, mountain biking trails, and the long-term vision for a regional Nordic ski race facility. These facilities are consistent with the desires of the community and existing recreation uses. They would also support and expand recreation opportunities found in the surrounding Chugach National Forest, especially the neighboring Resurrection Pass Trail, which is one of the most popular hiking trails on the Kenai Peninsula and hosts winter snowmachining and skiing.

These concepts are preliminary in nature but capture the desired infrastructure. Planning and design refinement for these facilities should follow recreation standards developed by the USFS and those used by the Chugach National Forest. The USFS provides most of the recreation infrastructure in the immediate area. Following USFS guidelines will provide a consistent user experience, construction means, and maintenance strategy that will create uniformity in the development of the new recreation opportunities and continuity when linking to existing recreation networks. Next steps for recreation infrastructure development are presented in the following sections.

## Partnerships

Working with partners and obtaining funding is essential for successful implementation of these concepts. Organizations that would like to develop recreational infrastructure on Unit 395 must consult and partner with USFS (Chugach National Forest-Recreation), Federal Highway Administration, State of Alaska (Department of Natural Resources, DOT&PF), Alaska Congressional

### Driving Distance from Possible Subdivision

#### Recreation Sites

Destination	Miles
Juneau Falls Trailhead	10.1
Resurrection Pass Trailhead (South)	2.4
Resurrection Pass Trailhead (North)	57.2
Russian River Falls Trailhead	3.9
Devils Pass Trailhead	21.1
Sportsmen's Landing	4.1
Seward Boat Harbor	53.7
Anchorage Airport	109.3
Homer Boat Harbor	123.3
Jim's Landing	7.9
Rifle Range (New)	15.1
Rifle Range (Old)	8.8



Delegation, Rasmuson Foundation, KPB, and any other agencies who may provide support and funding to understand agency requirements, required funding match, and garner preliminary support of projects. Beyond funding, partnerships can be established for management and maintenance of recreation facilities, especially those that are local and where new recreation facilities would support their mission.

Any infrastructure, including trails, that would be wholly or partially on USFS land would require a Special Use Permit to be obtained prior to construction. Future updates to USFS land use & recreation plans are encouraged to promote cross-boundary partnerships with KPB to connect recreation infrastructure and enhance their benefits.

“

*I've gone hiking in the area extensively and have always appreciated how I can get away from the bustle of Cooper Landing and contemplate everything going on in my life. One summer, I hiked in the area every single day with my dog. It was a special time in my life, and I hope that the area remains untouched and free of development in the future.*

*—Cooper Landing Resident, via email*

## Funding

Public use recreation facilities could be funded through partnerships, as described above. Projects could also be listed on KPB, USFS, and State Capital Improvement Programs (CIP) for Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP), Federal Aid (FHWA programs) and Alaska Capital budget, and ranked for funding consideration. Potential funding programs include the following:

- / Great America Outdoors Act
- / Federal Land Access Program (FLAP)
- / National Forest Foundation
- / Recreation Trails Program (RTP)
- / Pittman-Robertson Hunter Access Program
- / Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)
- / Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP)
- / Alaska Snowmobile Trail Development Program
- / Rasmuson Foundation
- / Mountain Bike Alliance



## Additional Design: Next Steps


Facilities shown in this plan are only conceptual and require design refinement for establishing partnership, funding, and installation, which should adhere to USFS standards for Alaska. A “Design Narrative” based on the USFS template should be developed for each facility to refine location and conceptual layout of recreation facilities, followed by conceptual level construction estimates and the identification of possible permitting issues. Design for each facility should include plans to integrate it into the larger network of existing and planned recreation infrastructure in the area.

After partnerships and funding have been established, more detailed design and engineering will be required. This process should include geotechnical, civil, and structural engineers and landscape architects, as needed, in addition to local subject matter experts and community members.

*Consultants hiking in Unit 395*







Ensure design and engineering is developed by those with local and Alaska recreation design experience in the following areas:

- / Nonmotorized trails, trailheads, and signage
- / Winter trail and summer equestrian support facilities (e.g., ramps, parking)
- / Recreation cabins (develop partnerships for their management)
- / Mountain bike trails and trailheads
- / Long-term: Nordic ski race facility and winter lodge and summer mountain bike race facility

## **Management and Maintenance**

Outside funding is typically unavailable for maintenance and management of recreation facilities; the organization responsible for the facilities should develop a plan for maintenance prior to construction of the infrastructure. The following are common strategies for maintaining recreation facilities:

- / Working with existing local and regional non-profits, organizations, and businesses for the management and maintenance of recreation funding
- / Hosting an annual volunteer day for trails and recreation facilities cleanup and maintenance
- / Developing agreements with federal agencies for facilities that access federal land and are designed and constructed to USFS standards
- / Establishing agreements with homeowner associations for management of recreation facilities within residential developments

Funding for management and maintenance can also occur through the collection of general user fees for facilities. Where appropriate, allow commercial use of recreation facilities through a permit program and collect user fees and establish conditions and regulations for use (e.g., number of users, timing of use, how facilities are accessed, triggers for when commercial use impacts local use). Organizations may also collect donations and host fund raising through nonprofit organizations for the maintenance and upgrade of recreation facilities. Additionally, local groups and agencies may enter into Community Trail Management Agreements with KPB in order to develop and manage publicly accessible recreational features on KPB lands.

# Residential Development

GIS and geotechnical analyses of Unit 395 indicate that there are areas within Unit 395 that could be suitable for residential development, though additional study would be required before development. Additional study should include a survey of the selected site, assessment for the feasibility of individual or shared water and wastewater systems, a plan for extending power lines from Sterling Highway into the parcel, and either the verification of the subdivision concepts presented in this plan or the development of a new subdivision layout by a professional engineer. These efforts should include cost estimates to allow for informed decision-making, as well as a public engagement process specific to the proposed development.

Comments received for this plan indicated that residents want the impact to recreational areas (noise pollution and viewsheds) to be a key consideration when choosing a location for residential development. Given the housing market in the area, many people also expressed a desire for incorporating affordable housing practices into future housing developments. The public comment period summary in Section 3 and the comment-response table in Appendix D provide additional insight into public opinion on development within Unit 395.

## Driving Distance from Possible Subdivisions

### Services and Amenities

Destination	Miles
Wildmans	7.9
Cooper Landing Brewery	10.6
Cooper Landing Community Hall	8.5
Central Peninsula Hospital	44.1
Seward	54.5
Cooper Landing Emergency Services	7.5
Cooper Landing Museum	6.8

The subdivision concept layouts presented in Figures 5-1 through 5-3 are intended to demonstrate possible options and are not design proposals but could be used in future planning as a starting point for designs and discussions. Planning for subdivision development should include consultation with CLAPC, the Kenaitze Indian Tribe, the USFS, U.S. Fish and Wildlife, Cooper Landing Emergency Services, and any other local or regional entities that may be impacted by or have input on development.



*My biggest thing is, we need to address it so that there is an option for families to continue living in this town.*

*–Cooper Landing Resident, at the November public meeting*





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