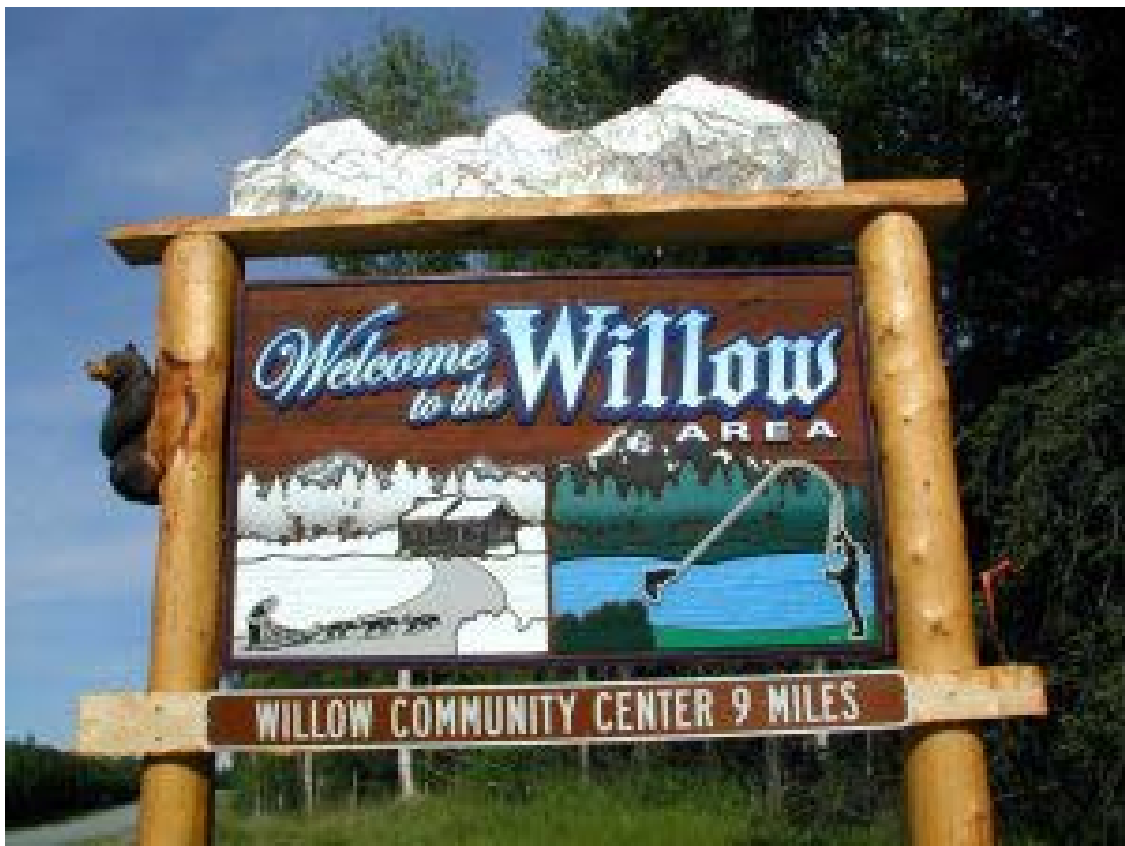


Willow Area Community Comprehensive Plan



**Approved by WACO May 2013
Adopted by Assembly August 2013**

CODE ORDINANCE

By: Borough Manager
Introduced: 08/06/13
Public Hearing: 08/20/13
Adopted: 08/20/13

**MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH
ORDINANCE SERIAL NO. 13-109**

AN ORDINANCE OF THE MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH ASSEMBLY AMENDING MSB 15.24.030 ADOPTING THE WILLOW AREA COMMUNITY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN.

WHEREAS, the residents and property owners in the Willow Area Community Organization requested Borough assistance with drafting a community comprehensive plan; and

WHEREAS, a planning team was formed for the purpose of drafting the plan; and

WHEREAS, monthly planning team meetings were held from November 2007 through December 2012 to draft the plan; and

WHEREAS, the draft plan was circulated for a 45-day public review period, and amendments were made to address comments received; and

WHEREAS, the Willow Area Community Organization held four meetings to review the plan and approved the plan; and

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission adopted a resolution recommending Assembly adoption of the plan.

BE IT ENACTED:

Section 1. Classification. This ordinance is of a general and permanent nature and shall become a part of the Borough Code.


Section 2. Adoption of Plan. The Matanuska-Susitna Borough Assembly hereby adopts the Willow Area Community Comprehensive Plan 2013.

Section 3. Amendment of subsection. MSB 15.24.030(B) is hereby amended to read as follows:

**(33) Willow Area Community Comprehensive
Plan, adopted August 20, 2013.**


Section 4. Effective Date. This ordinance shall take effect upon adoption.

ADOPTED by the Matanuska-Susitna Borough Assembly this 20 day of August, 2013.



LARRY DEVILBISS, Borough Mayor

ATTEST:



LONNIE R. McKECHNIE, CMC, Borough Clerk
(SEAL)

PASSED UNANIMOUSLY: Keogh, Woods, Arvin, Colligan, Salmon,
Colver, and Halter

Willow Area Community Comprehensive Plan

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1. INTRODUCTION

NOTE TO READER:

The Willow Area Community Comprehensive Plan is a vision for the community. This plan will be reviewed and considered by the Borough and State when projects and plans are considered within the Willow Area. The goals and recommendations in this plan are intended to guide policy makers and property owners, not control them.

Vision

The Willow Area Community Comprehensive Plan is intended to provide for planned and orderly growth in the Willow Area while enhancing economic opportunities, respecting individual property rights, and preserving the area's scenic, recreational, rural, agricultural and residential qualities. The community will work together to respond to both the challenges and opportunities posed by future growth.

The plan is a living document requiring periodic updates to remain current.

Overall Goals

- Preserve the rural character of Willow;
- Encourage the moderate expansion of job opportunities;
- Encourage sustainable economic development, balancing private property rights, use of natural resources, and the protection of our natural environment;
- Identify and protect public investment in community facilities and services;
- Respect existing private property rights while minimizing impacts to neighboring property owners; and
- Preserve the area's scenic, recreational, and quiet residential qualities.

Scope and Purpose

The Willow Area Community Comprehensive Plan (the Plan) is an official public document that provides the framework for long-range decision making in the community. The Plan serves to guide the community's growth and development through the year 2033, by addressing the multitude of issues facing the community, ranging from land use to economic development to public facilities and beyond. Borough and State officials can use the document to make policy

decisions that effectively provide a coordinated approach for future growth. Thus, by setting a course of action to guide the community's development over the next 20 years, the community and its residents are much more likely to realize desired outcomes.

Alaska Statute Title 29.40.030 requires that the assembly of a second-class borough adopt a comprehensive plan by ordinance. The Matanuska-Susitna Borough was incorporated as a second-class borough in 1964. Alaska Statute defines a comprehensive plan as "a compilation for policy statements, goals, standards, and maps for guiding the physical, social, and economic development, both private and public" of an area. The comprehensive plan may include, but is not limited, to statements of policies, goals, standards, a land use plan, a community facilities plan, and recommendations for implementation of the comprehensive plan.

Matanuska-Susitna Borough Title 15.24.030 requires the Borough Assembly to prepare comprehensive plans designed to:

- Promote safety for vehicular and pedestrian traffic, prevent congestion and preserve the function of roads;
- Secure safety from fire, flood, pollution, and other dangers;
- Promote health and general welfare;
- Provide for orderly development with a range of population densities, in harmony with the ability to provide services efficiently, while avoiding overcrowding of population;
- Provide adequate light and air;
- Preserve the natural resources;
- Preserve property values;
- Promote economic development; and
- Facilitate adequate provision for transportation, water, waste disposal, schools, recreation, and other public requirements. Moreover, each community can reap other benefits from developing and implementing a comprehensive plan. These can include predictability for future development and preservation.

Community comprehensive plans in the Borough often also provide the following:

- Vision for quality of life and economic health;
- Qualification for State and federal funding;
- Direction for related government actions and activities (such as regulations, capital improvements, and programs);
- Public involvement and information;
- Integration of different kinds of community planning (for example, land use and transportation); and
- Opportunities to work on key issues with nearby communities.

A comprehensive plan provides coordinated goals, policies, maps, and strategies regarding the community's development, investment, and quality of life. It takes a broad, not necessarily detailed, perspective for a 20-year period and incorporates future needs for population and employment growth. The purpose of planning is to provide the residents, property owners, elected leaders and other members of the community the ability to make effective decisions about the needs and goals of their community.

Project Area

The Plan project area consists of 467 square miles, defined by the Willow Area Community Organization Boundary (see the “Land Ownership” map on the following page). It includes land on both sides of the Parks Highway from about mile 61 to around mile 88.7. The community is bounded on the west by the Susitna River and on the east by the Talkeetna Mountain Range. The Susitna Community Council defines the northern boundary. The Big Lake, Meadow Lakes, and Tanaina Community Councils and the City of Houston form the southern boundary.

Who Prepared The Plan?

The community of Willow formed a planning team with a broad range of community representation (i.e. residents, property owners, local business owners, etc.).

The Matanuska-Susitna Borough helped the planning team prepare this plan by providing technical assistance, background information, and staff support.¹

Planning team members agreed to the following commitments:

- Will make the voluntary commitment of time to be available for meetings during the planning effort;
- Will consider compromises that will help manage conflict between competing segments of the community;
- Will listen to and consider testimony from the public and other government agencies as it affects the comprehensive plan;
- Will commit to develop a comprehensive plan that will represent the entire planning area; and
- Will commit to distribute accurate information to other community members and clarify misunderstandings.

¹MSB Planning Commission Resolution 09-14

Figure 1: Willow Area Land Ownership

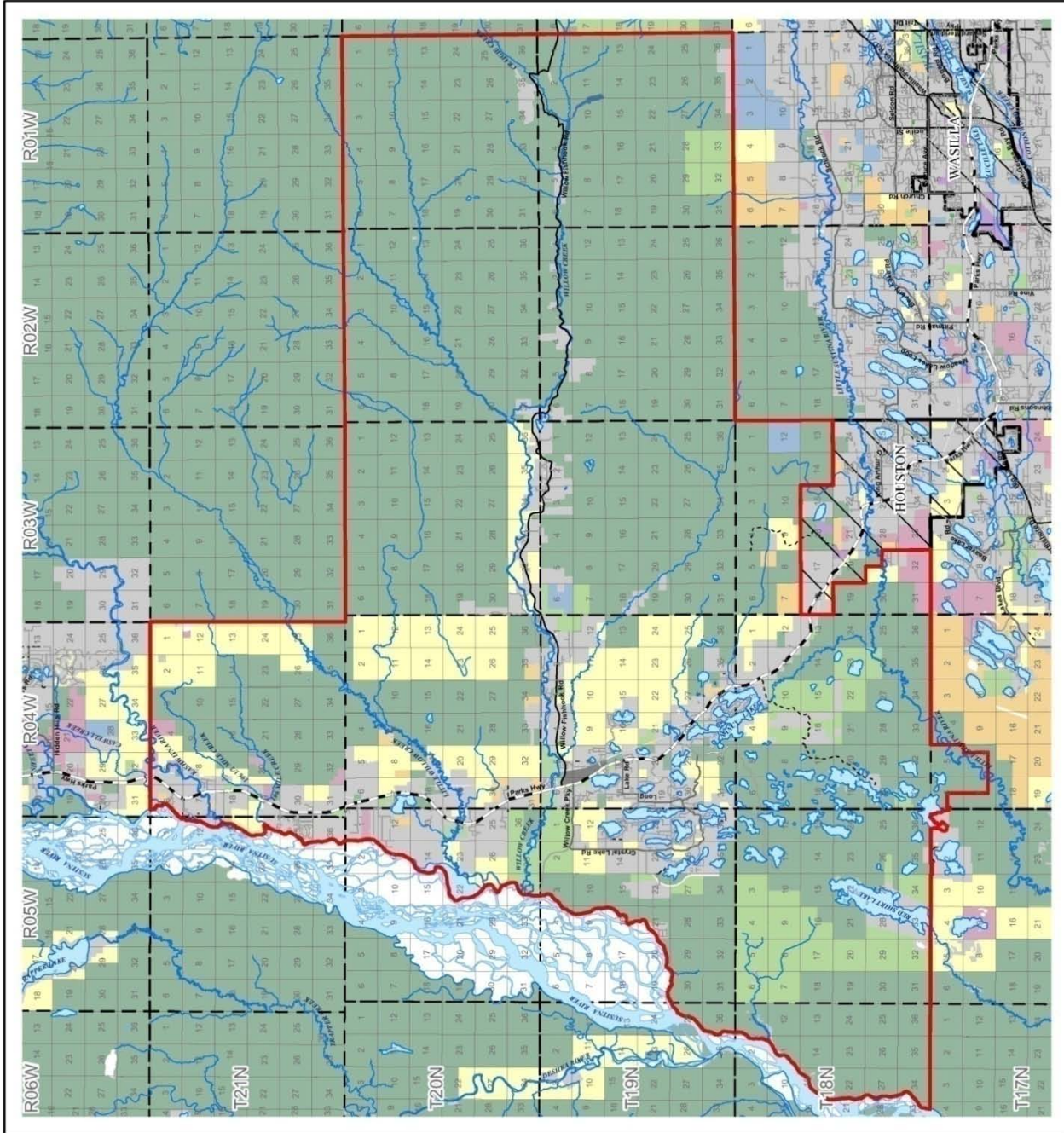
**WILLOW AREA
COMMUNITY
ORGANIZATION
w/ GENERAL OWNERSHIP**

- Legend**
- Community Council
 - Road Classification**
 - Highway
 - Major
 - Medium
 - Minor
 - Primitive
 - Private
 - City Boundary
 - General Ownership**
 - Borough
 - City
 - Cooperative
 - Federal
 - Mental Health
 - Native Corp
 - Private
 - Public University
 - State
 - Untracked Ownership - Likely State
 - Tax Id Mismatch



MSB IT Dept - GIS Division
January 2012

This map is solely for informational purposes only. The Borough makes no express or implied warranties with respect to the character, function, or capabilities of the map or the suitability of the map for any particular purpose. The user assumes all responsibility for the accuracy of the information regarding the full disclaimer and policies related to acceptable uses of this map. Please contact the Information Systems GIS Division at 907.745-4801.



Links to Previous and Current Plans, and Links to State and Borough Policy

This Comprehensive Plan serves as an update to Willow's portion of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough Comprehensive Plan.

The Matanuska-Susitna Borough Comprehensive Plan (1970) includes a description of the community of Willow that highlights what many residents and property owners value about the area: sparsely populated area rich with natural recreation assets.

Population growth in the Borough and the Willow Area has spiked in the last two decades. In 1970, with a current population of 38, the Willow Area was predicted to have 500 residents by 1985. Population in 1985 was estimated to be 212. From 1990 to 2010, the population of the area doubled nearly four times. Even with the recent increases in population, many of the goals and objectives in this plan are in line with the recommendations of the 1970 Comprehensive Plan – *Develop the Town Center; Develop the secondary road network; and Protect the Willow Airport from encroachment.*

The Matanuska-Susitna Borough Comprehensive Plan (1970) was amended in 2005 to update the section addressing Borough-wide growth and development issues.

Other major planning documents affecting the Willow Area are listed below:

State of Alaska

- Susitna Area Plan
 - Southeast Susitna Area Plan

The Southeast Susitna Area Plan (2008) revised the entire Willow Sub-Basin Area Plan of the Susitna Area Plan (1985).

- Parks Highway Visioning Document

The Vision for the Parks Highway (2006) estimates that traffic in 2030 may be as high as 13,500 vehicles a day traveling on the highway in and through Willow. That level of traffic would justify widening the highway to four lanes and may include frontage roads and restricted access (on- and off-ramps). The document indicates that development density in the Willow Area is unlikely to warrant a highway bypass.

Matanuska-Susitna Borough

- Long Range Transportation Plan
- Public Facilities Plan
- Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan
- Recreational Trails Plan

Willow Area Community Organization

- Winter Trails Plan
- Summer Trails Plan

Level of Authority

Even though comprehensive plans include priorities and recommendations for action, they are not manuals dictating detailed implementation of community goals. A comprehensive plan sets out general goals and objectives. On almost all subjects addressed by the plan, more detailed implementation actions are required before any specific action called for in the plan takes place.

A comprehensive plan is a vision for community's future with milestones and guidelines to help the residents realize the vision. The comprehensive plan is not a step toward becoming an incorporated city. The Plan does not and cannot require anyone to change the way private property is used.

Benefits of a Comprehensive Plan

A comprehensive plan requires a significant investment of community time and community resources. Some of the benefits of a comprehensive plan that justify this investment are outlined below:

1. *Funding* – The plan allows the community to prioritize projects. Once documented in the plan, the community has much better odds of getting the resources needed to carry out these projects, both with agencies and grant-giving foundations. Many funding organizations will not fund projects until a community has an adopted plan.
2. *Influence* – An approved comprehensive plan allows the Community of Willow to speak with a unified voice to agencies and other interests from outside the community, thereby gaining more influence over decisions affecting the community.
3. *Thinking Ahead* – The comprehensive plan process provides the chance to take actions on issues before they become problems. For example, setting aside public land for public facilities, trails or a road, rather than waiting until the need is urgent, land costs are prohibitive, or land is unavailable.
4. *Information and Agreement* – The process of developing a comprehensive plan provides opportunities for productive public debate about issues of community-wide significance, and a forum for building community-wide agreement.

The Importance of Community Input

The value of a comprehensive plan is based on capturing and conveying community wishes. Involving community members in the process, building consensus among them, and incorporating these ideas into the plan is the cornerstone of the planning process.

To this end, the Willow Area Community Comprehensive Plan process incorporates multiple opportunities for public involvement. The community has been asked both to help provide important background information and to prepare, review and comment on draft plan chapters.

Summary of Community Input Used to Develop This Plan

The process for developing a comprehensive plan requires in-depth public involvement. Often plans take years from beginning stages to final draft and approval. The Borough Assembly recognizes that public involvement and knowledge of community desires are keys to a successful comprehensive plan.

A. Coordination and Discussions with the Willow Area Planning Team

A volunteer group of residents and property owners appointed by the MSB Planning Commission – the Willow Area Planning Team – were pivotal in obtaining local input by coordinating meetings, working to involve residents and major interest groups and gathering information. These volunteers were crucial in creating, refining and clarifying the community's goals and strategies to implement these goals. By the conclusion of this process, 30 Planning Team meetings will have been held.

B. Release of Draft Plan for Community Review

In January 2012, the first draft of the Plan was completed and released for public review and comment. Drafts of the Plan were dispersed to local businesses and public locations in the Willow Area, emailed to Planning Team members and made available online at www.matsugov.us/planning. The Plan was also presented during the Willow Winter Carnival. The draft Plan was revised by the Planning Team based on the comments received during the public review period and also posted online.

C. Formal Review, Revision and Adoption of the Plan

After the public review, the Willow Planning Team again reviewed and revised the draft Plan. The team the revised plan through 2012 and then passed on to the Willow Area Community Organization for the next level of approval. This level of approval consisted of four meetings where qualified people voted on the Plan. Now that the Plan has been approved at the local level, the Matanuska-Susitna Borough's Planning Commission will review and approve the Plan. Finally, the Comprehensive Plan, accompanied by a code ordinance, will be presented to the Borough Assembly for review and adoption. The code ordinance will make the Plan part of Borough code. A copy of the code ordinance adopting the Plan will also be included in the final plan.

Once adopted, it will be the responsibility of WACO as well as the residents and landowners in the Willow Area to work on implementing the Plan. The Organization will work with others in the community and the Matanuska-Susitna Borough to take steps to accomplish the goals of this plan. Since comprehensive plans are long-term (typically 20 years) planning documents, they are often reviewed and revised every five years to identify successes and changes in implementing the plan. Changes to the Plan require local approval as well as review and approval by the Borough Planning Commission and Assembly.

History of the Willow Area

Today, Willow is a quiet community of about 2,000 residents, 70 road miles from Anchorage and straddling the Parks Highway. Willow's claim to fame came on Nov. 2, 1976 when Alaskan voters chose a Willow location to be the new capital of Alaska. The capital move was never funded and Willow remains a residential area cherished by a growing number of retired residents and recreation-minded people who prefer a simpler, uncomplicated lifestyle.

Willow's first residents were people of the Den'aina Indian tribe or Athabascans. There was a large influx of White men in the 1800s, mostly Russians and some Scandinavians that traded

with the natives, and trapped or prospected for gold. In the late 1800s Alaska became the property of the U.S. Government and that brought a new wave of exploration.

In 1897 gold was discovered near Grubstake Gulch in the soon-to-be Willow Creek Mining District. Willow became a strategic location along the supply lines to the Talkeetna Mountains. Stern wheelers frequented the mouth of Willow Creek to offload supplies. Supplies and equipment arrived by boat in Knik and from there were transported over land. A 26-mile summer trail went northwest, up Cottonwood Creek, and across Bald Mountain to Willow Creek. The winter sled trail went north, crossing the present line of the Alaska Railroad at Houston, and up the west end of Bald Mountain for 30 miles. This trail, dubbed the "Double Ender Sled Trail," is still being used by skiers, hunters, backpackers and snowmobile enthusiasts. The sleds then followed a trail along Willow Creek in an easterly direction, now Hatcher Pass Road. The Talkeetna Trail also passed through Willow and was used by dog teams and pack horses. Cabins to accommodate freighters and mail carriers were located at Nancy Lake, Willow and other points north.

In 1920 the railroad was completed to Willow including a railroad station house. The regular year round accessibility lured new pioneers. Homesteading began here slowly from 1920 to 1942. In 1942 the U.S. Government bought three homesteads to build the Willow Airport and a radar warning station.

When Alaska became a state in 1959 there began a huge land rush to the Willow Area.

Scores of new young families came to make Willow their home. In 1959 a small Quonset hut became Willow's first school.

Thirty-four children, grades 1-8 shared that first building. The next year with even more new families the enrollment jumped to 108.

In 1959 the Parks Highway was begun and soon after Willow finally had an accessible year round road.

The first business to open in Willow was Trails End Lodge in 1947 but it closed in 1948 and its operator Zoa Nichols became the first Postmistress at the same location. In 1951 the Willow Trading Post opened. In the late 1950s a grocery store and small gas station were built. Those businesses were later moved away from the railroad tracks and Willow Station Road to the Parks Highway at the site of Willow Hardware.

Willow has had many businesses come and go through the years. For the most part any business with any tenure has had several owners. Local, State or federal agencies have been the most reliable sources of employment. The U.S. Post Office has operated in Willow since 1948, the school has been in Willow since 1959, the State Highway Department since 1960. The Alaska State Parks employees have been in Willow since 1968, the State Troopers since 1969 and the Fire Department since 1974. The Library has operated since the late 1960s and the Willow Transfer Station has operated since 1992.

The Willow Area Civic Organization was founded in 1960 with a very large percentage of area residents (39) participating. It was voted unanimously to form the organization, whose objectives were to "Work for the betterment of the community and promote an active interest in residents of the area in projects which would have an effect on their welfare." Later the word "civic" was

changed to "community" and the objectives broadened to more mirror that of a community council.

Through the years Willow has grown slowly with little industry and no large businesses or government entities that could have brought about uncontrolled development. Homesteading brought 117 students in a three-year period to Willow. Even with the last 46 years of development, including the Parks Highway, the elementary school enrollment is 139 (as of 2012).

Certainly the population of Willow has not dropped significantly since 1961 but the demographics have changed drastically. Perhaps by further studying our past we can better shape our future.

(Provided by Jim Huston, president, WHWF.)

2. LAND USE

This chapter presents background information and policies to guide development in the Willow Area.

The community, by and large, agrees that the following characteristics are worth maintaining:

- Magnificent views of wilderness;
- Miles of trails;
- Sense of community;
- Wealth of recreational opportunities;
- Rural character;
- Economic opportunities; and
- Farms.

These characteristics are what drew many of the current residents here today. The potential change associated with future growth is what compelled this community to begin writing a community comprehensive plan.

Willow Area Community Vision Statement

To provide for planned and orderly growth in the Willow Area while enhancing economic opportunities, respecting individual property rights, and preserving the area's scenic, recreational, rural, agricultural and residential qualities.

The Willow Area Comprehensive Plan is not a book of regulations restricting an individual's property rights. It is a snapshot of the community's self-image and a description of the direction the community wants to move in the future. People living in the Willow Area have long been polarized on issues relating to growth. Traditional planning methods have been largely ineffective in helping the community come to consensus on development recommendations. This plan seeks to provide guidance where unrestricted property uses remain. The first land use goal represents an overall land use policy while other goals are more specific for various aspects of land use in Willow.

Summary of Goals (Note: order of goals does not reflect priority.)

GOAL 1: Maintain the rural character of Willow;

GOAL 2: Respect existing private property rights while minimizing impacts to neighboring property owners;

GOAL 3: Maintain the area's scenic, recreational, and residential qualities;

GOAL 4: Encourage development of the Town Center, to enhance the feeling of community;

GOAL 5: Maintain the quality of Willow's natural environment and scenic beauty, while allowing for necessary improvements to support growth; and

GOAL 6: Protect and preserve cultural resources wherever possible.

Land Use in Willow

The current land use distribution is largely a result of sporadic subdivision for recreational, residential, and agricultural development that in some cases conflicts with existing or desired future use patterns.

Recreation is one of the area's major land uses. The planning area includes State recreation areas, such as the Nancy Lakes State Recreation Area and the Willow Creek State Recreation Area. Land and water bodies in the area are also commonly used for hunting and fishing.

Land Use and Growth in Willow and Environs

The community of Willow is growing and it is likely to continue to grow. As stated previously in this plan, future growth will be driven by factors including changes in the overall economy of Alaska, the pace of growth in the visitor industry and – probably the most difficult to forecast – the growth of Willow as a quality-of-life community for retirees, baby boomers and other “footloose” residents. If Willow becomes a “hot” residential destination, then it can grow, at least in some dimensions, more or less independently of changes in the conventional economic base.

Background & Community Values

Part of what residents like about the Willow Area is the lack of rules and regulations often found in bigger towns and cities. Residents understandably want to keep as much of this freedom as possible. At the same time, residents want to maintain the character of the area, and recognize that without some guidance, these qualities could be lost.

Goals for Land Use

GOAL 1: Maintain the rural character of Willow.

What is rural character?

Rural character is many times a perception unique to the individual.

Regardless of anyone's idea of rural character, it remains true that as more people are attracted to rural areas, preserving the unique character of an area becomes more of a challenge.

Ultimately, it is the community's own definition of rural character that is the single most important part of its preservation. It is up to each community to decide what its rural character is and subsequently, how it can be maintained.

Recommendations

- a. Guide Willow's growth while protecting important environmental resources and community character, encourage development at the existing Town Center, make efficient use of roads and buildings, and support a healthy local economy.

- b. Promote a pattern of growth characterized by a concentrated mixed-use center, a surrounding ring of moderate-to-high density residential and mixed-use areas, with lower densities in outlying areas.

Many of the community's most important goals are tied to the amount and location of growth, both in the existing Town Center and the "greater Willow" area. These goals include protecting environmental quality, creating a walkable (pedestrian-friendly) community, and efficiently providing public services and facilities. The broad recommendations behind this goal are to encourage concentrated residential and business growth in the Town Center, with densities decreasing in outlying areas. The existing pattern of development in the community will allow this same quantity of growth to spread over a much wider area – which works against all these goals.

While concentrating land uses brings many benefits, many residents want to maintain a sense of wilderness and privacy that is often associated with lower density development, particularly in residential areas. As a result, this objective of concentrated growth should be accompanied by a set of standards that ensure housing and commercial areas are well designed and match Willow's styles and traditions. The remainder of this section presents more details on the location and the character of new development.

GOAL 2: Respect existing private property rights while minimizing impacts to neighboring property owners.

Most Willow residents understand that private property rights can be strong, but only up to the point where exercising them does not have a negative effect on the rest of the community. Residents in Willow recognize the need to plan their community's course to include some common goals and desires such as valuable community parks, public squares, historic buildings or landmarks, and community infrastructure.

"As more people live in an area, more rules are needed for them all to get along." Ed McCain, Willow Planning Team Member

Recommendations

- a. Encourage a fair and reasonable balance between private property rights and community interests.
- b. Work with the Borough to ensure land use regulations are consistent with this comprehensive plan.
- c. Encourage Willow Area residents to be active in the planning process to ensure their interests and rights are adequately protected.
- d. Recognize the importance of general aviation to the community by supporting the existence of private airstrips and discouraging encroachment that would impact their use.

GOAL 3: Maintain the area’s scenic, recreational, and residential qualities.

Safeguarding the Willow Area’s aesthetically pleasing visual environment can be supported by promoting development that is sensitive and complementary to natural settings. Waterfront or hillside development should maintain the natural qualities and character of terrain, vegetation, trees, habitat, and water quality.

Recommendations

- a. Support development on hillsides and along roads and waterways that is visually unobtrusive and that addresses the importance of protecting the scenic vistas and environment.
- b. Encourage residential, industrial, and commercial areas to develop and/or maintain visual buffers.
- c. Protect scenic and visual corridors and green areas.
- d. Reserve enough high-quality public land to meet future community needs for public uses, such as schools, public safety buildings, trails, and parks.
 - i. Form a local committee, and work with Borough staff to identify parcels of MSB land for sale.
- e. Retain the undeveloped character of land along the Willow Freeway bypass portion of the Parks Highway, with substantial “green spaces” separating developed areas. Specific recommendations include:
 - i. Encourage the State and Borough to dedicate land along the Willow Freeway bypass portion of the Parks Highway as undeveloped land and separated motorized and non-motorized trails.
 - ii. Public land sales should occur close enough to the highway to make road access practical, but sufficiently set back as to not be visible from the Willow Freeway bypass portion of the Parks Highway.

GOAL 4: Encourage development of the Town Center, to enhance the feeling of community.

A town center is the heart of the community. How people feel about their town is directly related to how they feel about their community. A vital town center projects the image of a proud and prosperous community.

A vital town center -

- provides a stable economic base;
- supports local businesses and services;

- offers opportunity for local entrepreneurs;
- increases community support;
- identifies where infrastructure is necessary for the type of development desired;
- protects property values;
- retains profits in town; and
- provides an opportunity for historic-themed tourism.

The existing Town Center, illustrated in Figure 2, includes the Willow Townsite, Elementary School, and Community Center. Land in the Town Center is comprised of 192 parcels totaling 588 acres. About 100 structures have been built in the Town Center, including 75 residences, 19 commercial/industrial buildings, one gas station, the post office, community center, library, and elementary school. The identified Town Center is not to be construed as city limits.

Number of Structures	Use
75	Residential
19	Commercial/industrial
4	Public
1	Religious

Private ownership accounts for about 175 of the parcels, 70 of which are vacant. About 78 acres are owned by the Borough or the State accounting for roughly 13% of the land. The Town Center is comprised of a mix of residential and commercial development. The community center, library, elementary school and fire station are closely located on the west side of the highway. A paved trail, that runs parallel to the highway, passes through the town center and by each facility.

The intent of the following recommendations is to refine the Town Center:

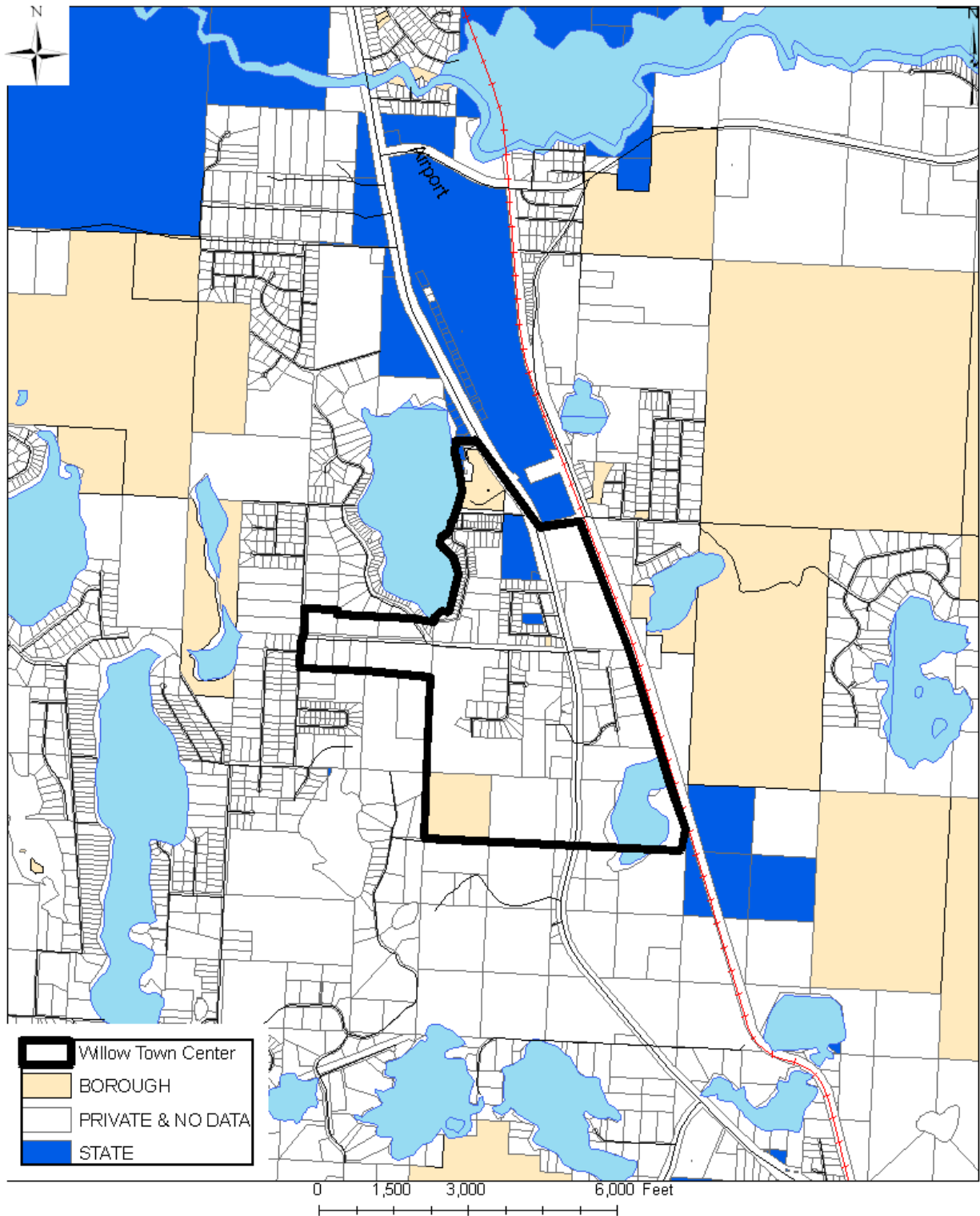
Recommendations

- Create a pedestrian-oriented, mixed-use town center, to include places to meet friends and neighbors, venues for events and community meetings, a farmers market, and commercial services.

- i. Work with land owners and volunteer organizations (i.e., Lions Club) to create and maintain a grassy area suitable for picnics, farmer markets, and small events in the existing Town Center.
 - ii. Provide utilities to support higher density development.
- b. Encourage infill development. Infill development reuses abandoned buildings or empty lots in a town center to increase density in the center, while maintaining the rural areas of the community.
- c. Work with adjacent landowners to create trail easements to increase walkability (pedestrian-oriented features) of the existing Town Center.
- d. Work with the State and Borough to develop a connector road or Parks Highway bypass near White's Crossing to Kashwitna Lake that bypasses the Willow Town Center.
- e. Guide growth in the Willow Area to protect community character, make efficient use of roads, buildings, and utilities, and support a healthy local economy.

Figure 2

Draft Willow Area Town Center



GOAL 5: Maintain the quality of Willow’s natural environment and scenic beauty, while allowing for necessary improvements to support growth.

Development can affect our everyday lives - our homes, our health, our schools, the taxes we pay, our daily commute, the natural environment around us, economic growth in our community, and opportunities to achieve our dreams and goals. What, where, and how communities build will affect our lives for generations to come. Most Willow property owners and residents will agree that one of the reasons they live there is because of the area’s natural beauty and the scenic views of and access to wilderness.

Recommendations

- a. Retain land suitable for parks and natural undeveloped areas.
- b. Encourage the State and the Borough to sell smaller (5-10 acre) parcels for agricultural use.
- c. Protect wildlife corridors.
- d. Identify and enhance the quality of the community’s watersheds, groundwater, fish and wildlife habitat, vegetation, and clean air resources.
- e. Provide tax relief for landowners who guarantee retention of undeveloped land parcels including but not limited to farmed land.
- f. Update and maintain a green infrastructure map for the Willow Area that includes environmental features such as soils and salmon streams.

An interconnected network of natural areas includes trails and important wildlife corridors. Trails in the Willow Area are an important part of the community’s identity. Identifying and protecting green infrastructure can enhance the trails in Willow, which are vital to outdoor recreational activities. Protecting and improving local trails provides economic benefits to the community. In addition, many people in the Willow Area depend on the trails to access their property off the road system.

Options for preserving these lands could include conservation easements, or other creative incentives, particularly for areas held in private ownership.

GOAL 6: Protect and preserve cultural resources wherever possible.

Cultural resources such as historic buildings and archaeological sites are statements of Willow’s identity. Once an historic or archaeological property is destroyed, it is lost forever.

This element of the Willow Area Community Comprehensive Plan sets forth recommendations for the preservation and treatment of these historic and archaeological resources. The Plan reflects local attitudes toward historic preservation, establishes preservation as public policy and puts these values into writing.

Definition of Cultural Resources

A large part of Willow's special identity and civic pride is derived from its heritage. From the Native Alaskans who first established trading centers to the continuing waves of newcomers from around the world, all have left their mark. Cultural resources are those buildings, structures, sites or associations left behind by a group of people and are generally over 50 years old. Cultural resources consist of three types of properties, namely historic, traditional cultural, and archaeological.

Historic Properties

Cultural resources include historic structures and landscapes engineered and built by humans. The following are in the Willow Area:

- a) Historic buildings – Shem Pete's Cabin, Willow Post Office, etc.
- b) Historic structures – Willow Creek Bridge, Willow Airport, etc.
- c) Historic districts – Willow Creek Mining District.
- d) Historic objects – statues, monuments, and sculptures.
- e) Landscapes – gardens and parks (urban and rural).

Traditional Cultural Properties and Archaeological Sites

Cultural resources include properties that were held in spiritual or ceremonial honor or by a cultural group or tribe. Cultural resources include properties, which may no longer show evidence of man-made structures, but retain a historical association with an event or period. Examples of traditional cultural properties and archaeological sites include: campsites, cemeteries, burial sites, rock carvings, pictographs, trails, village sites, fishing sites, trading sites, religious and ceremonial sites.

Note: The specific location of these sites is often very sensitive in nature. Gathering information concerning these properties should be undertaken with careful consideration and involvement of the cultural group involved.

Recommendations

- a. Refer to the current versions of the Willow Historic Preservation Plan and the Matanuska-Susitna Borough Historic Preservation Plan for specific goals, objectives, and recommendations pertaining to cultural resource preservation and protection.
- b. Nominate cultural resources to the local, State and national Historic Registers. The Cultural Resources Inventory should be used as a reference in the identification of significant structures and places eligible for nomination.
- c. Encourage review of land use actions to ensure they are sensitive and give consideration to protection of cultural resources.

- d. Develop methods to link cultural resource preservation with local economic development strategies, such as rehabilitation of commercial buildings, neighborhood revitalization and tourism.
- e. Promote a wide variety of community involvement in preservation issues by linking the public with preservation groups and resources.
- f. Support the Borough developing and promoting a program which encourages property owners to donate cultural resources to agencies or organizations that will preserve them in perpetuity.

3. HAZARD MITIGATION

The Matanuska-Susitna Borough Hazard Mitigation Plan (MSB HMP) was adopted in 2008 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 MSB HMP are to:

- 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 will include 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.

The potential disasters in the Willow Area identified by planning team members include:

- Wildfire;
- Flooding;
- Earthquakes;
- Communication blackout;
- Parks Hwy interruptions;
- Train derailment or semi-trailer accident resulting in hazardous materials release; and
- Two existing dynamite storage areas.

Strategies to implement the goals of the MSB HMP:

- Ensure the community center is provisioned and capable of providing shelter during an emergency.
- Improve and maintain the Willow Airport to allow C-130-sized aircraft to land;
- Identify and develop fire breaks and fire escapes, and pursue funding to maintain;
- Encourage residents to plan on being self-sufficient during a disaster (see Appendix B);
- Encourage building defensible spaces around structures according to the Firewise Program;
- Construct secondary transportation routes where the Parks Highway is the only existing route for evacuation;
- Encourage the maintenance of the Hatcher Pass Road to Palmer as an evacuation route;
- Encourage FEMA to expand and improve the flood hazard mapping in the Willow Area;
- Encourage residents to conform to the flood hazard area development requirements where necessary.

Recommendations

- a. Work with MSB Department of Emergency Services to ensure the community is prepared to respond to any of these disasters.
- b. Work with MSB Department of Emergency Services to identify appropriate hazard mitigation measures and a cost/benefit analysis of each measure.
- c. Identify opportunities for funding to implement hazard mitigation measures for potential natural disasters.
- d. Construction of pump houses to support fire suppression.
- e. Develop and maintain access to lakes and waterways near roadways for emergency water supplies.
- f. Construct a secondary transportation route across Little Willow and Willow Creeks, and the Kashwitna River.
- g. As the population grows, identify and construct additional facilities that could be used as emergency relief centers.
- h. Encourage local electrical production.
- i. Encourage residents to be self-sufficient (see Appendix B).
- j. Encourage the Borough to develop hazardous materials response teams.

4. RECREATION

Gold, the railroad, fur and homesteading initially drew people to the Willow Area in the mid-1900s and with them, the trails necessary for transportation and livelihoods. Their “highways” included the Lucky Shot Trail to Hatcher Pass and the Willow Mining District, the Herning Trail towards Talkeetna and the many trapline trails scattered throughout the forested areas of Willow. Emil Stancec and Mike Ardaw were some of the early trappers in the area. Emil came to Willow as a railroad employee in 1948, having requested Willow for his assignment because of the great fishing he had heard about in Willow Creek. It seems recreation in Willow began with its earliest residents.

More trails were made in the next two decades by the military and early homesteaders. The convenience of the railroad depot brought mechanized equipment to the area for building of the Willow Airport and military maneuvers and training. Homesteaders brought their own equipment to access and clear their parcels of land.

With the opening of the Parks Highway in 1970 giving easy access to the area from Anchorage, Willow has seen steady growth in residents, landowners and visitors, many of which are seeking rural living and recreational opportunities. Many of those “highways” of yesterday are now the recreational trails of today.

The Willow Area is home to spectacular beauty and natural resources. Mountains, lakes, clear water streams, forests, wetlands and vast open country surround the community. These tremendous natural assets provide a boundless playground for Alaskans and visitors throughout the year. Recreation is one of the main reasons families locate to Willow where they can enjoy the many outdoor activities the area has to offer; fishing, hunting, boating, hiking, dog mushing, skiing and snowmachining to name a few.

Recreation and trails not only enhance this quality of life, but they also provide economic benefits to the area by helping local businesses and creating employment opportunities. Further, it has been well documented that property values increase when access to recreational areas and trails is available.

The following is a summary of the managed recreational areas within the Willow Area:

Nancy Lake State Recreation Area

Managed by Alaska State Parks, this area is located off Mile 67.3 of the Parks Highway, the Nancy Lake State Recreation Area (SRA) is 36 square miles (22,500 acres) of lake-studded land set aside for recreation. The lakes in the area are ringed with forests, and provide tranquil settings for canoeing, fishing, hiking and camping. In winter, the rolling topography is ideal for cross-country skiing, dog mushing and snowmachining.

Popular features of the Nancy Lake SRA include its 16-mile canoe system, one of two canoe trails within the state. The 99-site South Rolly Campground at the end of the six-mile parkway road is the most popular campground in the State Parks, Mat-Su District. Scattered throughout lakes and ponds of the area are 13 Public Use Cabins which are very popular with visitors to the area.

Willow Creek State Recreation Area

Also managed by Alaska State Parks and Outdoor Recreation, the Willow Creek State Recreation Area (WCSRA) is one of the State's premier fishing areas. This six square mile area located at Mile 71 of the Parks Highway is home to four species of salmon and is considered by many a blue ribbon rainbow trout stream.

A June or early July weekend will find hundreds of "combat" fisherman lining the banks at the mouth of Willow Creek casting for the huge king salmon for which the creek is famous. An increasingly popular recreational activity is floating the creek from the upper reaches to the 100-site campground at the mouth. The WCSRA provides opportunities for independent anglers and local fishing and river guiding businesses. Several winter trail systems utilize the WCSRA as a part of the larger Willow trails network.

Nancy Lake State Recreational Site

Also managed by Alaska State Parks, this is a popular wayside attraction with a large boat launching facility, day use picnic area, and a large campground. This is an important public access point for both summer and winter trail users wanting to access Nancy Lake and the surrounding park for recreational use. This use comes in the form of canoes, jet skis and motorboats in the summer, and Nordic skis and snowmachines in the winter.

Hatcher Pass Management Area

The Hatcher Pass Management Area is located along the far eastern region of the WACO boundaries. From Willow, it is accessed by the Willow Fishhook Road that continues over the Pass towards Independence Mine State Historical Park and eventually to Palmer.

Open, rolling terrain, steep-walled valleys and jagged peaks provide for a variety of recreation opportunities. Many visitors drive to the area for sight seeing. Other popular summer uses include photography, four-wheeling, hiking, mountaineering, hunting, kayaking, hang-gliding, picnicking, rock-hounding, wildflower viewing, and berry picking. Deep powder snow, which comes early in the fall and remains late into spring, attracts snowmachiners, skiers, and dog mushers.

Weathered mine buildings and portals can be seen on many of the steep valley walls and contribute to the sense of history and character of the rugged Hatcher Pass area. The Lucky Shot, War Baby and Gold Bullion mines are evidence of Alaska's hard rock mining heritage.

Although recreational use at Hatcher Pass has increased dramatically in the past few years, many of the unique scenic and recreational resources of the area are underutilized due to limited access and visitor facilities.

Specific goals for the Hatcher Pass Management Area are included in the Willow Area Trail Plan.

Following is a summary of multi-use winter trails in the Willow Area:

West Gateway Trail System

Winter is a popular time of year with abundant snowfall and lots of open spaces. A winter weekend on the Parks Highway will see thousands of vehicles heading north with snowmachines, dog teams, and skiers. Among these trail users are Willow residents, weekend visitors, tourists, adults, kids, seniors, racers, business owners, guides and their clients.

Many people come to their recreational cabin in Willow to enjoy the many miles of multi-use trails throughout the area. Also, Willow's location makes it the most popular jumping off point for people traveling west to back country cabins and lodges among the Susitna, Deshka, and Yentna Rivers, and on to Skwentna. The Susitna Valley Winter Trail bisects the West Gateway recreational area. This 120-mile long trail connecting the Big Lake trails to Denali State Park is maintained by four local trail committees including the Willow Trail Committee.

The West Gateway Trail System is the venue for many organized events. The Willow Winter Carnival hosts many snowmachine, sled dog, skiing and skijoring races each year and the Iditarod Dog Sled Race Restart uses these trails for the initial step to Nome. Other events include the Klondike 400, Aurora 200 snowmachine races, the Junior Iditarod, Don Bowers 200/300, and Klondike 300 dog sled races.

Specific goals for the West Gateway Trail System are included in the Willow Area Trails Plan.

Haessler/Norris Trail System

The Haessler-Norris Trail System has its primary roots in freighting, trapping, dog mushing and mining. It lies east of the Parks Highway; its boundaries are the Little Susitna River to the south, Hatcher Pass Road to the north and Hatcher Pass Recreation Area to the east.

The southern portion of the Haessler-Norris System includes the Willow Creek Sled Trail; otherwise known as the Herning Trail. This trail was an original route from Knik to the gold fields in Hatcher Pass. Hatcher Pass Road to the north was formerly a heavily used freight trail also leading to the gold mines. Trapline trails following the Nancy Creek drainage past Windy Lake to Deception Creek were the origin of many other trails in the system.

The Haessler-Norris Trail System was named for dog mushing pioneers in the area. Lloyd Haessler was a local trapper and musher who established "Lloyd's Trapline," one of the several trails documented in the Deception Creek Management Plan. Earl and Natalie Norris, sprint dog mushers who homesteaded in Anchorage in the 1940s, were instrumental in establishing sled dog racing in Anchorage. Earl was cofounder of the Fur Rondy Sled Dog Race in 1946. Due to development in Anchorage, they moved to Willow where they helped expand and improve the existing trails.

Primarily used by mushers today, this system provides an important training circuit for Iditarod, mid-distance, sprint and recreational teams as well as excellent trails for the growing tourism business in the area.

Specific goals for the Haessler/Norris Trail System are included in the Willow Area Trails Plan.

Emil Stancec Trail System

This recreational area is located to the east of the Parks Highway and bordered by Willow Creek to the south and the Kashwitna River on the north and to the foothills of Hatcher Pass bearing east. The Kashwitna Management Area, State land managed primarily for forestry, is located in the center of this area.

Emil Stancec worked for the Alaska Railroad and trapped for a living. His trap lines provided many corridors that are now a part of the trail system. Earlier development of these trails was done by early supply routes to Talkeetna and the Cache Creek Mining District. The U.S. military conducting maneuvers also contributed to the present trail system including the “Tank Trail.” This area is also a popular winter training and recreation area for mushers and snowmachiners, and in the fall for hunters.

Specific goals for the Emil Stancec Trail System are included in the Willow Area Trails Plan.

Goals for Recreation

- GOAL 1:** Encourage the community to inventory natural and scenic resources as well as cultural and historical areas needed to meet present and future public recreation needs.

Public land in the Willow Area is a shrinking resource. Public land suitable for recreation needs to be identified by the community as quickly as possible in order to preserve the recreation opportunities of the future.

Recommendations

- a. Public landholders should consult the community and this plan before classifying or disposing of land in the Willow Area.
- b. WACO should develop a recreation plan that includes future parks, trails, and other recreation resources. A list of recreation resources for the community to consider is included in Appendix A of this Plan.
- c. The inventory should include, but not be limited to, the following resources: fish and wildlife habitats; ecologically and scientifically significant natural areas; outstanding scenic views and sites; hydrological resources such as wetlands, watersheds, and groundwater; wilderness areas; historic areas, sites, structures and objects; cultural areas; existing and future recreation trails, parks and recreation sites.
- d. Where conflicting uses are identified concerning a natural, cultural or scenic resource proposal, the recreational, environmental and economic impacts will be resolved by representatives from the community organizations (i.e., Recreation Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Trails Committee, etc.).
- e. If a transportation corridor such as a highway or railroad is proposed, impacts to recreation resources and the environment should be minimized by the corridor location and design.

GOAL 2: Protect water bodies, watersheds and wetland areas for their recreational and economic value.

The Willow Area contains an abundance of water. The many lakes and streams are complemented by vast areas of wetlands and forests around Willow. Water quality is vital to the health of Willow's wildlife and fish habitat that sustain a portion of Willow's economic goals of encouraging tourism and maintaining recreational resources. Wetlands contribute to Willow's water quality and the winter-trail systems, and provide recreational opportunities for residents and visitors. Population growth and development bring increased threats to lake and stream water quality, watersheds and wetlands.

Recommendations

- a. Encourage the State and the Borough to retain wetlands in public domain through identification, mapping, and reservation.
- b. Support the monitoring of lake and stream water quality.
- c. Retain existing setbacks and buffers on public lakes, streams and wetlands necessary to preserve health and function and recreational value.
- d. Promote winter trail signage and gating to minimize inappropriate summertime use of winter trails.
- e. Promote trail signage and education to encourage trail sustainability and prevent damage to wetlands during break up and heavy use.
- f. Limit use to appropriate winter and summer recreational activities that minimize impacts to natural, scenic, and cultural resources.
- g. Restore recreation resources negatively affected by heavy use.

GOAL 3: Establish and maintain a community summer recreational trail system and recreational facilities.

Like many rural Alaskan communities, Willow residents do not have easy access to business and public facilities beyond the use of a motor vehicle. There are no sidewalks, parks or bike trail systems that many American communities enjoy. All pedestrian and bike traffic are either directly on the roadways or in the right-of-way alongside roadways. Summer trails will provide the community with recreational opportunities, safer streets and alternative transportation choices (other than automobiles) while promoting wellness through physical activity.

Recommendations

- a. Develop a comprehensive trail plan to be used as a guide in creating coordinated recreation and alternative transportation systems.
- b. Encourage construction of safe and accessible corridors for walking, running, biking, horse and ATV riding, connecting neighborhoods and businesses, public and medical facilities, senior centers, parks and greenbelt areas.

- c. Encourage the creation of connections, where feasible, between parks, streams, and woodlands to establish an interconnected network. These connections may be paths within protected buffers along streams, through existing wooded areas, or even along protected easements in developed areas. This system of land based “greenways” and water based “blueways” can provide access to a variety of different but connected resource areas.
- d. Develop community parks or open field areas that will provide a destination point for those seeking recreational activities. Such an area can provide activities such as bicycle skills trails, interpretive trails, picnic areas, ball fields and trailheads that connect with adjacent corridors.
- e. Include roadside trails as part of construction or improvement of all future major collector roads.
- f. Develop a trail along the Parks Highway north of Willow Creek.
- g. Place an emphasis on multi-use trails while supporting the development of limited use trails when necessary for safety, need and/or environmental protection.
- h. Encourage improvement and maintenance and appropriate signage of public lake access, and in some instances neighborhood parks and child play facilities, and development of a community lakefront beach park.
- i. Support lake management planning that addresses lake recreation issues.
- j. Encourage maintenance and improvement of existing and future recreation resources with an organized strategy to obtain capital and maintenance funds.
- k. Encourage individuals, groups, and businesses to “Adopt a Trail” or park in cooperation with the Willow Trails Committee.
- l. The Willow Area Trails Plan and the Willow Summer Trails Plan should be used as references for specific goals and recommendations. The two trails plans are separate documents and are not incorporated by reference into this Plan.

GOAL 4: Maintain and expand the winter recreational trail system and recreational facilities.

In response to the increasing popularity of winter trail sports and the pressure on recreational trails to conflicting land use, the Willow Trail Committee (WTC) was formed in 1996. Presently, the committee is a standing committee of the Willow Area Community Organization (WACO).

Recommendations

- a. Identify historic and currently used trails and, if regionally significant, nominate for inclusion in the Mat-Su Trail Plan.
- b. Obtain easements for existing and future recreational trails and trailheads.

- c. Establish corridor trails to safely and efficiently connect residential and commercial areas with recreation resources.
- d. Encourage individuals, groups, and businesses to “Adopt a Trail” in cooperation with the Willow Trails Committee.
- e. Encourage public safety education and trail etiquette.
- f. Place an emphasis on multi-use trails while supporting the development of limited use trails when necessary for safety or need.
- g. Groom, sign and maintain trails with public access using State adopted standards.
- h. Encourage seasonal signs to be posted to inform the public when trails are closed due to unfit conditions.
- i. Coordinate with the Borough and State DOT to improve the safety of trail crossings on public roads, preferably using over or underpass crossings. Roads with major trail crossings include the Parks Highway, Willow Fishhook Road, Willow Creek Parkway, Crystal Lake and Lakes O’ the Su Road.
- j. Coordinate with the Borough, State and trail user groups to create a process for providing trail information, trail conditions and current weather conditions to the public.
- k. If a railroad, highway or a public road is proposed that crosses, displaces or otherwise impacts a legally recognized recreational trail (those with an established easement), appropriate trails crossings or relocation will be provided to maintain trail continuity.
- l. The Willow Area Trails Plan and the Willow Summer Trails Plan should be used as references for specific goals and strategies for each recreational region. The two trails plans are separate documents and are not incorporated by reference into this Plan.

GOAL 5: Support and strengthen the relationship between the State of Alaska, Department of Natural Resources, Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation and the Community in meeting the recreational needs of the Willow Area.

Alaska State Parks manages four recreational areas within Willow while overseeing recreation on all State lands. To obtain the highest quality recreation opportunities, State Parks, Department of Natural Resources and other State agencies will need to be full partners with the Willow Community in planning and developing recreational facilities and trails.

Recommendations

- a. Develop community trails and trailheads to provide safe and accessible connections between residential, business, public facilities, public land and State recreational areas.
- b. Encourage increased level of recreational and resource management of the Hatcher Pass Management Area. This includes development of dispersed campsites and trailheads, the development of sustainable multi-use trails and the funding necessary to manage the area.

- c. Encourage stocking of the waterbodies in Willow with fish.
- d. Support adequate State funding for maintenance, facility improvements and staffing in the Nancy Lake and Willow Creek State Recreation Areas.
- e. Encourage State Parks funding for continued recreational trail maintenance.

GOAL 6: Support and encourage recreational based businesses to locate in the Willow Area in support of recreational activities.

- a. Encourage development of a downhill and Nordic ski area along the Willow side of Hatcher Pass.

GOAL 7: Encourage Alaska Department of Fish and Game and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service to pursue higher escapement rates for the anadromous fish returning to upper Cook Inlet.

5. WATER QUALITY AND WATERSHED PROTECTION

This chapter presents background information and goals to protect water resources in the Willow Area.

A watershed, or drainage area, is a geographic area where all rainwater, snowmelt, and any other type of precipitation drain into lakes, rivers, or other bodies of water. The boundaries of these areas are defined by the movement of water throughout a region. Watersheds provide a number of essential services to communities. They are necessary for water supply and filtration, flow regulation, and erosion and sedimentation control. Properly functioning watersheds can reduce the need for constructing and operating expensive infrastructure systems to provide these services. Healthy watersheds also provide the benefits of water quality, flood damage prevention, habitat protection, biodiversity, agriculture, fishing and forestry industries, aesthetic enjoyment, and recreation. Increasing populations, land conversion, and other economic activities are posing greater challenges to protecting watershed resources and maintaining a healthy environment for local communities. The population of the Borough relies on surface and ground water for drinking water, magnifying the importance of watershed protection.

The activities taking place in proximity to a watershed greatly affect its condition and quality. Some common activities that negatively impact watersheds include development activities (building new homes, paving roads, etc.), excessive application of fertilizers and pesticides, removal of natural vegetation, overworked farm and forest land, wastewater discharges, failing septic and sewer systems, transportation, and industrial discharges. The activities listed above can result in habitat loss and degradation, water quantity and flow modification, chemical pollution, excessive amounts of nutrients and sediments present in the watershed, introduction of pathogens and invasive species, and altered temperatures.

The preservation, restoration, and maintenance of a watershed requires communities to establish a balance among needs for water supply, water quality, flood control, navigation, hydropower generation, fisheries, biodiversity, habitat conservation, and recreation. Watersheds containing higher proportions of forest lands, wetlands, vegetation, and other permeable surfaces provide greater capacity for filtering pollutants, moderating water flow, and erosion and sedimentation control. Maintaining greater proportions of forest land, wetlands, and other vegetated areas provide wildlife habitat and increased biodiversity. Increased vegetation can also assist in climate stabilization by providing more shade.

The Willow Area Community Organization boundary includes a portion of the following watersheds:

- Little Susitna River Watershed;
- Fish Creek Watershed;
- Kashwitna Watershed;
- Susitna Watershed; and the
- Willow Creek Watershed.

The watersheds are shown on Figure 3. Assessments of these watersheds were not available during the drafting of this plan. The watersheds cross multiple community council boundaries

and are affected by activities and development policies of neighboring and up-gradient communities.

Watersheds that occur in the Willow Area also exist within the Big Lake, Buffalo Mine/Soapstone, Fishhook, Meadow Lakes, Point MacKenzie, Susitna, and Tanaina Community Councils. The Willow Creek Watershed covers the largest area within Willow and also exists outside of an established community council. These nearby communities and the Borough are encouraged to adopt and implement the goals presented in this chapter to help protect the water resources of the Willow Area, as well as their own.

Goals for Water Quality and Watershed Protection

GOAL 1: Encourage the Borough, State, and the U.S. Geological Survey to map the aquifers that provide or contribute to existing and potential future drinking water supplies.

Recommendations

- a. Identify and characterize major aquifers and aquifer systems.
- b. Determine the connectivity between shallow aquifers and surface water bodies.
- c. Assess current water quality conditions.
- d. Utilize local existing well log data to map aquifers.

GOAL 2: Develop, adopt and implement watershed management plans for the watersheds within the community.

Effective management of watersheds will require the community's recognition of it as a complex issue. Communities typically include a cursory inventory of water bodies and wetlands with a comprehensive plan. To be effective, watershed issues must receive more serious attention as a part of land use planning. The current resources should be analyzed with respect to the expected pressure for development in coming years. Based on this information, planners can work with the public to establish goals, objectives, and policies for the plan, and then suggest alternative, more suitable locations for expected growth or qualitative changes in the types of growth allowed. Less direct, comprehensive plans also may identify areas where development and redevelopment can be encouraged.

Recommendations

- a. Encourage the organization of concerned individuals into watershed management groups that will draft watershed management plans.

The watershed management plans should include the identification of problems and sources of watershed pollution, critical areas within the watersheds, improvement and protection goals, necessary best management practices to implement, and a plan to monitor effectiveness. It is critical for communities to collaborate on watershed management particularly when watersheds span multiple jurisdictions.

GOAL 3: Raise public awareness of the impacts of development on watersheds to protect water quality.

Recommendations

- a. Collaborate with surrounding communities that share watersheds to implement watershed management plans across community council boundaries.
- b. Educate landowners on the negative effects of impervious surfaces, encourage open space, and promote compact development to provide better watershed protection.
 - i. Identify incompatible land uses and activities for identified critical drinking water supply recharge areas.
 - ii. Identify appropriate densities of residential development for critical drinking water supply recharge areas.
 - iii. Recommend requiring conditional use permits for development likely to cause negative effects within particularly sensitive areas.
 - iv. Recommend creating an overlay district to establish additional specialized land use guidelines for areas of critical drinking water supply recharge.
- c. Establish use areas that correspond with watershed boundaries.
- d. Encourage appropriate lot sizes in sensitive areas to minimize negative effects of runoff.
- e. Encourage the State or Borough to establish performance-based requirements for runoff management and other issues.
 - i. Encourage vegetated filter strips or buffers between a pollutant source and wetlands or surface water bodies to provide runoff treatment and prevent soil erosion.
 - ii. Encourage erosion control measures during and following construction.
- f. Encourage local officials to direct the location of infrastructure (public facilities and roads) in areas that are suited for significant growth and development and away from sensitive watershed areas.
- g. Encourage conservation easements on public or private land where limited development would have a positive effect on community resources such as green infrastructure and significant drinking water recharge areas.

GOAL 4: Involve the public by encouraging voluntary action on private lands.

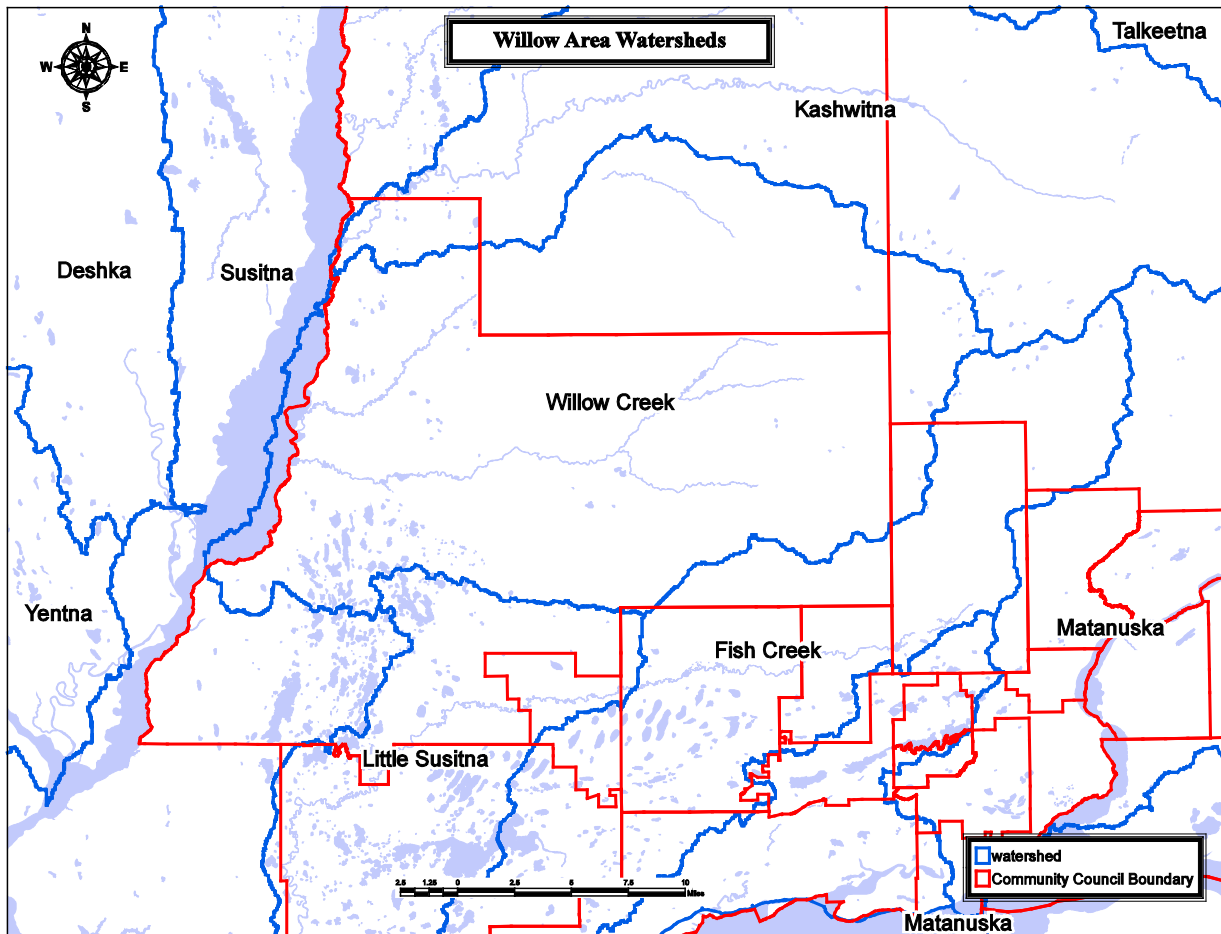
Public education and voluntary action are the key components in maintaining important natural resources.

Public participation in the planning process and implementation of management strategies will create more awareness and ownership of the solutions. Public education also is a critical

component of non-regulatory strategies based on voluntary action such as land or easement donation and wise management practices on privately owned land. Increasing public interest and improving public understanding of natural resource protection and habitat conservation will help create awareness among private landowners. Public education can be accomplished in a variety of ways based on community needs, including press releases, brochures, fair booths, newsletters, meetings and workshops, direct mail, and collaborative efforts with the media.

Because wetlands are a part of complex watersheds, it will also be necessary for local, State, and federal agencies, non-governmental organizations, private businesses, policy makers, and a variety of other stakeholders to create partnerships to collaborate on and advance wetland protection initiatives.

Figure 3: Willow Area Watersheds



6. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Economic development in the Willow Area has matured from a dropping off point for gold miners in 1897 to a homesteading destination during the land rush of 1959 to a resource extraction and tourism retirement/recreational destination today. Willow has had many businesses come and go through the years. The primary transportation corridor through the community is the Parks Highway, providing a direct link between Anchorage and Fairbanks, where the majority of the State's commercial and industrial activities are located.

As of 2010, Willow's 2,102 residents were employed by the private sector, local businesses, and State and local government (U.S. Census 2010; DCCED, 2009). About one-third of the Willow work force travel outside the area for employment; about a third are employed locally, be that as a farmer, gas station or hardware store attendant, barista, craftsman, fishing guide, construction worker, minister, aviator, or miner; and a third of Willow residents are retired with an income from investments and pensions. There has been significant economic development throughout the Willow Area.

Public actions addressed in this Plan can contribute to economic opportunities, for example, through improving infrastructure such as roads and trails, improving marketing, encouraging development of a town center to help increase tourist spending, or maintaining stream quality and views that support recreation. Tourist traffic to the Matanuska-Susitna Borough is up, making tourism a growing sector of the local economy.

Summary of Economic Development Goals (Note: order of goals does not reflect priority.)

GOAL 1: Encourage the expansion of job opportunities in the Willow Area while maintaining the rural character of the community.

GOAL 2: Promote economic opportunities through recreational development and maintain recreational resources that benefit both residents and visitors.

GOAL 3: Guide the character and location of commercial and industrial development to minimize off-site impacts, especially those potential impacts on scenic views.

GOAL 4: Encourage land uses that support economic development, including a town center/business district, and an industrial park.

GOAL 5: Encourage local agriculture and sale/consumption of local agricultural products.

GOAL 6: Encourage development of an environment that will attract and support retirees and seniors within the Willow Area.

Goals for Economic Development

GOAL 1: Encourage the expansion of job opportunities in the Willow Area while maintaining the rural character of the community.

Residents of Willow are seeking expansion of local economic opportunities. Residents want to create more reasons for children to stay in the area as they grow up, and to attract new residents. Such growth will help the community maintain needed public services. Neighboring communities are developing job opportunities as one strategy to keep the local schools open. At the same time, residents want to balance the benefits of economic development with the equally important goal of maintaining what attracted residents to the area in the first place. These qualities include rural character, knowing your neighbors, ready access to nearby hunting and fishing, more open space than development, and a small rural community with a tradition of farming and making a living from local resources.

Because the Parks Highway serves as a conduit linking residents to other larger communities, and visitors frequently travel through the area, Willow has a variety of options for increasing local job opportunities.

Recommendations

- a. Encourage expansion of local employment and business opportunities. Focus on forms of economic development that are small scale, locally based, and that create incentives to maintain environmental quality and community character.
- b. Encourage the scale, type and locations of tourism in Willow that create broad community benefits, but retain the community's character and environmental quality.
- c. Encourage the State and the Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District to expand the school-to-work programs to all high schools.

Specific strategies to reach this broad goal are listed below:

- i. Target Markets – Encourage more visits by independent and small groups of travelers, in addition to large volume, package travel. Independent travelers will be more likely to spend time and money with locally owned businesses, such as B&Bs.
- ii. Infrastructure – Encourage new community services and facilities (such as senior complex including a pool, transit service to benefit the community) that attract target markets and benefit residents. High priority examples include improved power and communications. Require new public infrastructure developments (e.g., new parking areas and trailheads) be accompanied by a commitment for adequate maintenance.
- iii. Partnerships – Collaborate with the Borough, State of Alaska, National Park Service, the Mat-Su Convention and Visitors Bureau, local businesses, and major tourism developers to shape tourism growth to benefit Willow. Working with these entities will assist the community in getting the new services and facilities needed to handle growing visitor activities, while ensuring the community has a meaningful role in decisions about major new facilities that will impact the community.
- iv. Package Visitor Spending – To the degree desired by the community, work with tour companies to bring more of their visitors to shop and otherwise spend money in the Willow Area.

- v. Town Center – Develop the Willow Town Center (*See goal 4 of the Land Use chapter*). Create the necessary concentrated, critical mass of stores and restaurants that will attract more tourism spending. Include better venues for visitors to buy crafts and products produced in Willow.
- vi. Work with the Alaska Railroad to re-establish a whistle stop at Willow to allow visitors to visit (sight-seeing, shopping, hiking, fishing, flight-seeing). Construct a covered pavilion as an initial depot for rail passengers to congregate while waiting for a shuttle to Willow destinations or to re-board the train.
 - Support development of a train station at the appropriate location in the Town Center.
 - Encourage the State of Alaska to sell the Airport parcels south of Willow Station Road for commercial development and a train depot.
- vii. Work with the Alaska Railroad and neighboring communities to establish commuter rail service from the valley to Anchorage as the need arises.
- viii. Encourage development of commuter air service and non-scheduled air service, with long term parking located near the rail depot.
- ix. Environment – Maintain the visual and environmental quality of the community, in particular the road corridors, through controls on use of public land.
- x. Promotion – Encourage the Willow Chamber of Commerce to set up business development and marketing programs to promote local businesses, and create a stronger, positive image for Willow.
- xi. Vocational and Technical Education Schools – Additional schools and school to work programs are needed to help create a young workforce with local job opportunities. A vocational or technical education school located in Willow, similar to the one in the core area, is supported by the community.
- d. Encourage the Willow Chamber of Commerce to maintain the community resource directory that includes all businesses, services, and facilities located in Willow.
- e. Encourage businesses to give youth in the area opportunities to gain job experience such as mentoring or internships.
- f. Build local capacity for local and regional work. Invest time and resources in the community and surrounding area, schools, libraries and training programs to prepare workers for current and future job opportunities.

GOAL 2: Promote economic opportunities through recreational development and maintain recreational resources that benefit both residents and visitors.

The chapter on Recreation addresses this goal in greater detail. The following recommendations identify some ways to attract out-of-town visitors to appropriate Willow Area recreational resources.

Recommendations

- a. Encourage development of recreation-related businesses.

This should be a high priority for agencies that assist with small business development. Recreation-related businesses that could be targeted include bait and tackle shops, paddle boat rentals, etc.

- b. Encourage development of privately owned campgrounds that target visitors.

This approach serves the dual purpose of supporting the local economy/creating local jobs and creating recreational areas that are appropriate for visitors. In promoting these areas, Willow can work with the Borough and Mat-Su Borough Convention & Visitors Bureau.

- c. Identify appropriate seasonal events/attractions to encourage visitors to stay in the Willow Area, to participate in events, to utilize local services, and to buy products locally.

- d. Invite the Iditarod Headquarters to relocate to the Willow Area.

The community should work with the Borough, State, and Iditarod Headquarters to evaluate the potential commitment of public land for a race re-start location as well as the new location for the headquarters.

- e. Encourage businesses community-wide to volunteer one day a year (or more) to clean-up, repair, and improve the recreational resources throughout the community.

An adopt-a-park program could be developed that would allow local organizations or businesses to take pride in specific recreation areas.

- f. Post signs identifying recreational areas.

Post standardized signs at trailheads, lakes, fishing areas, and other recreation spots to identify and promote these resources to residents and visitors. Signs that encourage responsible usage should be posted at parking areas and trailheads.

- g. Attract visitors to recreational resources who will also utilize other local services and buy local products; encourage visitors to slow down, stop, stay, and spend money locally; in order to attract specific visitors to the area, efforts to target appropriate markets should be made.

- h. Encourage user fees as a means for maintaining and improving recreational resources.

- i. Encourage the establishment of a Willow Visitor Center.

GOAL 3: Guide the character and location of commercial and industrial development to minimize off-site impacts, especially those impacts on scenic views.

Strategies on this topic are outlined in the Land Use chapter (*See Goal 1, page 11*).

GOAL 4: Encourage land uses that support economic development, including a town center/business district, and an industrial park.

Recommendations

- a. Encourage Town Center/business district development.

The quality of commercial areas – the mix of stores and attractions they offer, their public spaces, appearance and connection to other recreation activities – significantly affects the amount of time and money spent in the community. As a result, developing a successful Town Center is an important economic development strategy for Willow. The Town Center should serve both residents and visitors, with visitors in effect subsidizing services and facilities beyond what residents themselves can support. The intent is not to prohibit or discourage commercial activities outside the Town Center. Specific elements recommended for the Town Center can include:

- Venue for local craft sales; space for a farmers market selling local produce and crafts.
- A sufficient concentration of stores, and an attractive appearance, that draws more visitors to spend money in the community.
- Links to trails and other recreation amenities, to help draw visitors to the area.
- Pedestrian friendly, walkable layout that encourages both residents and visitors to spend time in the Town Center walking between destinations.
- Continued and expanded presence of public facilities to create year round reasons for residents to use the Town Center area.
- Access by rail and road while not encroaching on the airport.

(See pages 11-19 for the goals and strategies in the Land Use chapter.)

- b. Encourage development of an industrial park.

GOAL 5: Encourage local agriculture and sale/consumption of local agricultural products.

Agriculture played a formative role in the history of Willow and should still be encouraged. A number of residents are active in different agricultural pursuits, including raising hay, vegetables, seed crops, and animals. Agriculture in the area is primarily practiced at a modest scale. Products are for home use, local consumption, and for retail sales.

Recommendations

- a. Encourage the continuation of agricultural activities in the area.
- b. Encourage development of an improved venue for selling local agricultural products, such as a farmers market in the Town Center area.
- c. Retain lands sold with agricultural covenants for agricultural use.
- d. Outside of the Town Center area, reserve public land with high agricultural values for agricultural use.

GOAL 6: Encourage development of an environment that will attract and support retirees and seniors within the Willow Area.

By attracting seniors we are building a base of citizens that are looking to be involved in building a community, buying staples, building houses, running small businesses, volunteering, working part time, and paying taxes. Seniors are likely to spend some of their money at local facilities and events. Seniors are involved in local volunteer groups and are often involved in teaching and caring for our children.

Recommendations

- a. Encourage development of senior housing, assisted living facilities, and a senior complex within or near the Town Center.

Senior gated communities and low cost private complexes are already being talked about for the Willow Area. Existing State of Alaska programs will help in building or expanding senior housing and senior facilities like meeting halls and kitchens. The State has many programs that can be tapped to help seniors such as assisted living programs, fuel and heat programs.

- b. Encourage senior service providers to locate in the Town Center.

A senior meeting room, fitness center, recreation center, golf course, craft shops, wood shop, machine shop and auto repair shops should be encouraged to help seniors keep in contact and care for each other. Facilities for senior meals, ambulance and security help, a food bank and the fire department need to be expanded. Additional lands near the existing senior housing could be set aside and funding secured to build such a senior center.

- c. Encourage annual community events supported by volunteers.

Calendar events, like the Christmas Fair, the Winter Carnival, Oktoberfest, Fourth of July parade and picnic, and others could not happen without significant community involvement that includes many seniors. Many groups help run events that showcase and welcome others to this community. Events like the weekly farmer's market draw seniors and keep them active in our community. Such events should be encouraged, expanded, and supported through any means possible.

- d. Encourage funding of community-based school programs.

Programs designed to attract people of all ages including seniors can be provided in the community. These programs are easily transported around the education system and should be encouraged for the Willow community. Seniors could be mentors and could pass their knowledge and skills on to the community.

- e. Encourage development of a Senior Help Center.

A center could be established and promoted in Willow. This center could coordinate with businesses to provide services such as snowplowing, tree cutting, property maintenance, building maintenance, firewood delivery, gardening, financial advice, Meals-on-Wheels, empty-house security, and a Willow Welcome Committee.

7. TRANSPORTATION

Transportation affects almost every aspect of a person's life. It involves the different methods used to move people, animals, and goods from one place to another. Transportation consists of infrastructure and vehicles. Infrastructure includes roads, trails, waterways, airways, railways, as well as facilities like airports and bus stations. Transportation vehicles include planes, trains, automobiles, all-terrain vehicles, watercraft, snowmachines, dog sleds, horses and foot traffic.

Careful coordination of transportation planning with land use planning at a state, regional, and local level is essential.

Willow is served by major transportation facilities such as the George Parks Highway, and the Alaska Railroad regional rail line. The transportation system consists primarily of roads, supplemented by trails for pedestrians, and one bus route. While most of the system is adequate, a number of problems exist which will be discussed throughout this chapter.

Vehicular access to Willow is from the Parks Highway. Local road maintenance is performed by both the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities and the Borough. From the Parks Highway, the area has access to the statewide highway system and the transportation facilities of Wasilla, Palmer and Anchorage.

There is one public airport, a State-owned 4,400' long by 75' wide gravel airstrip at Mile Post (MP) 69.7 of the Parks Highway and a seaplane facility on Willow Lake. Further south are additional public airports at Big Lake MP 52 and Wasilla MP 46. There are several private air strips. General aviation resources are discussed in the aviation chapter of this plan.

The following list of transportation issues facing the community needs to be considered during implementation of the plan:

Illegal Trails	Winter Trails
River Planning	Summer Trails
Emergency Access	Float Plane Operation
Forestry Management	Eminent Domain
Civil Defense	Coordinating Plans Existing and Future
Road Maintenance	Grandfather Rights for Existing Uses
ARRC Crossings	Extensions and Upgrades
State and Borough Land Sales	Section Line Easements
ATV Safety	ATV Paths
Bike Path	Pedestrian Safety
Utilities	Whistle Stops
Seniors/Youth	Access to Road-less Areas
Dog Team / Snow Machines	Underserved Areas
Funding	Golf Carts
Roadway Amenities	Communication
Core Area Boundaries	Economic Plan
Population Growth	Pollution
Flood Plains	Iditarod re-Start
Creek Crossings	Fire

Public and Private Transit	Mineral Subsurface Rights
Airports and Airstrips	Natural Hazard Mitigation

Based on community input, the following transportation goals were identified.

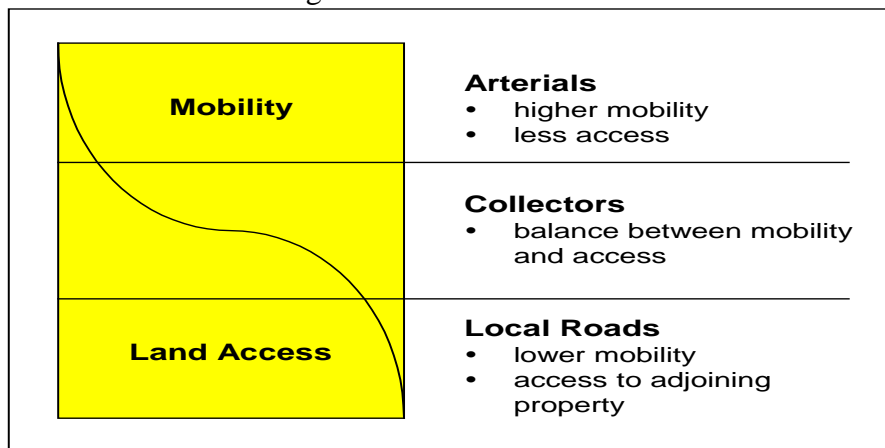
These goals focus on maintaining current transportation facilities in Willow, and improving and upgrading existing roads and trails. The MSB’s “Subdivision Construction Manual” provides further information about road design criteria and guidelines.

Summary of Goals (Note: order of goals does not reflect priority.)

- GOAL 1:** Reserve routes, and as the need arises, design and build an interconnected system of secondary roads;
- GOAL 2:** Identify potential road improvement/construction projects;
- GOAL 3:** Establish, improve, and maintain appropriate roadside trails/pedestrian paths;
- GOAL 4:** Improve the circulation system to support the Town Center location;
- GOAL 5:** Encourage development of a public transit system to transport people from hubs in the community to the Town Center and Wasilla.

Road Functional Classification

The Borough’s 2007 Long Range Transportation Plan uses the following definitions for roads within the Matanuska-Susitna Borough.



Source: Safety Effectiveness of Highway Design Features, Vol. 1 FHWA, 1992

Interstate

Primary purpose is to provide corridor movement with trip length and density suitable for substantial statewide or interstate travel. Access is controlled.

Major Arterial

Primary purpose is to provide through traffic movement within and across the Borough with few restrictions which would interrupt traffic momentum. These roads carry most of the traffic

entering and leaving the Borough or moving between communities. Movement of traffic is more important than access to abutting land.

Minor Arterial

Primary purpose is to provide movement and linkage between principal arterials and collector roads. Minor arterials provide for relatively high travel speeds and minimum interference to through-traffic movement. These roads can interconnect with and augment the highway system. They can also link major traffic generators within the Borough. Generally, arterials do not penetrate neighborhoods.

Major Collector

Primary purpose is to move traffic from one neighborhood to another, from neighborhoods to arterials, or from one neighborhood to other areas of the community. Predominant travel distances are shorter than on arterial routes and consequently, more moderate speeds may be typical. Residential frontage is limited and/or restricted to encourage mobility and enhance safety.

Minor Collector

Primary purpose is to collect traffic from local roads and bring all developed areas within reasonable distances of collector roads. Through traffic movement is discouraged, though may occur, until a full collector network is in place.

Local Roads

Primary purpose is to provide access to adjacent land. Local roads provide the lowest level of traffic mobility and serve relatively short distances. Local roads provide individual residences access to the community street network via providing a connection to collector-level roads. Through traffic movement is discouraged, though may occur, until a full collector network is in place.

GEORGE PARKS HIGHWAY

The George Parks Highway (Alaska Route 3), commonly referred to as the Parks Highway, runs 323 miles from the Glenn Highway 35 miles north of Anchorage to Fairbanks in the Alaska Interior.

The highway, which mostly parallels the Alaska Railroad, is one of the most important roads in Alaska. It is the main route between Anchorage and Fairbanks (Alaska's two largest metropolitan areas), the principal access to Denali National Park and Preserve and Denali State Park, and the main highway in the Susitna Valley.

Most Willow Area residents commute to the south on the Parks Highway. The area's population densities are changing as new residents build homes in clusters. There are many platted lots in the Willow area ready for growth. Willow is the third area along the highway corridor with existing congestion. The Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (ADOT&PF) completed a Parks Highway Visioning Document in 2006.

Additional expansion of the Parks Highway through Willow would further squeeze the already geographically limited Town Center and further restrict access to Town Center businesses. Furthermore, highway expansion would threaten the Willow Airport and restrict access between the airport and Willow Lake. Therefore, should future traffic projections indicate the need for Parks Highway expansion, Willow residents prefer the construction of a Parks Highway Bypass that directs through traffic around the Willow Town Center. One proposed bypass route could be from White's Crossing northbound along the east side of the railroad tracks, rejoining the current highway near Kashwitna Lake. This bypass, or a similar route, could serve the community several ways:

- Reduce traffic through the Willow Town Center, obviating the need to restrict access with a frontage road and the need to take more valuable real estate in the Town Center area.
- Provide a second transportation route across Willow and Little Willow Creeks in the event the existing bridges are damaged or destroyed.
- Improve access to property on the east side of the railroad tracks currently restricted by railroad crossing availability.
- Take Willow "off the beaten path," furthering the ability of Willow to remain a rural community.
- Preserve the valuable relationship between Willow Airport and Willow Lake.

Although traffic forecasts may not indicate the need for highway expansion for many years to come, the State Department of Transportation should take immediate action to identify and secure the right of way for a bypass, before more property is developed.

WILLOW AIRPORT

Willow Airport is an important road accessible airport in south central Alaska, with significant numbers of based aircraft and a number of commercial leases. It also includes a commercial floatplane facility, which has generated significant controversy in recent years. A noise study was completed for the Willow Lake seaplane facility and showed aircraft noise to be significant at the location. The State has plans to conduct an airport master plan for the Willow Airport.

The Willow Airport is owned by ADOT&PF and is located on the east side of the Parks Highway on the north side of the city of Willow. The airport is used primarily by general aviation traffic. The airport includes a gravel runway and a large gravel apron with lease lots and several hangars. Self-serve fuel is available 24 hours/day. There are two non-precision instrument approaches available for the airport.

Goals for Transportation

- GOAL 1:** Reserve routes, and as the need arises, design and build an interconnected system of secondary roads.

Recommendations

- a. Provide a second means of access for emergencies and significant natural disasters that may block or sever the existing single-access route.
 - i. Construct a connector road or bypass, east of the railroad, starting near White's Crossing and ending near Kashwitna Lake that bypasses the Willow Town Center.
 - ii. Extend Emsweiler Road North to Willow Creek Parkway and straighten and improve West Long Lake Road between Crystal Lake Road and Nancy Lake Parkway.
- b. Provide collector-level roads in areas that are likely sites for future growth.
- c. Establish future roads in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough's Official Streets and Highways Plan in order and ensure that appropriate easements are reserved.

GOAL 2: Identify potential road improvement/construction projects.

Recommendations

- a. Work with the State and Borough to identify appropriate road improvement and construction projects within the Willow Area.
 - i. Construct a connector road or bypass, east of the railroad, starting near White's Crossing and ending near Kashwitna Lake that bypasses the Willow Town Center.
 - ii. Discourage expansion of the Parks Highway through the Willow Town Center.
 - iii. Upgrade collector roads to collector road standards, including but not limited to the following:
 1. West Long Lake Road (Nancy Lake Parkway to Long Lake Road)
 2. Extend Emsweiler Road to Willow Creek Parkway
 3. Willow-Fishhook Road
 4. Buckingham Palace
 5. Kime Lane
 6. Long Lake Road
 7. West Crystal Lake Road
 8. Wilderness Rim
 - iv. Improve local roads:
 1. that have access to more than 10 dwellings to a gravel surface.
 2. that serve more than 30 dwellings to a chip seal or pavement surface.
- b. Projects identified in the LRTP (Long Range Transportation Plan) shall be recognized as potential road improvement/construction projects.
- c. Address intersection safety improvements.

GOAL 3: Establish, improve, and maintain appropriate roadside trails/pedestrian paths.

Recommendations

- a. The Willow Summer Trails Plan should be used as a reference for specific goals and recommendations. The Willow Summer Trails Plan is a separate document and is not incorporated by reference into this Plan.
- b. Appropriately sign trails to inform users for what types of uses the trail is designated.

GOAL 4: Improve the circulation system to support the Town Center location.

Recommendations

- a. Encourage street and trail connectivity. Encourage new developments to integrate street and trail connectivity as a component of their proposal.
- b. Work with ADOT&PF and the Borough to improve roadside trails, in particular those along the Parks Highway. Future road projects should include motorized and pedestrian roadside trails.
- c. Support existing and establish new pedestrian/bicycle paths and safe access for other modes of transportation.

GOAL 5: Encourage development of a public transit system to transport people from hubs in the community to the Town Center, Wasilla, and Anchorage.

Recommendations

- a. Encourage development of a mass transit center (park and ride) where it's accessible by the rail, airport, and the Parks Highway.

8. AVIATION

General aviation is one of the defining characteristics of the Willow community.

General aviation, which includes all aviation other than military and scheduled airline operations, is a uniquely efficient means of moving people and goods between thousands of communities nationwide. It creates jobs, increases productivity, and provides life-saving services. Aviation has played a huge role in the development of the State of Alaska. The Willow Airport and adjacent radar station were constructed by the Army in 1942 in anticipation of a Japanese attack on the United States. It was utilized as an alternate airport for Army Air Corps aircraft from Elmendorf Air Force Base, and an emergency landing strip for all aircraft. Today, the Willow Airport is a preferred “jumping off point” for commercial and private aircraft operators to access the remote areas of South Central Alaska.

The Matanuska-Susitna Borough has the highest concentration of airports, public and private, anywhere in the United States. Willow is no exception. The 2008 MSB Regional Airport Systems Plan (RASP; 2008) identified 11 charted public and private airstrips in the Willow Area, and eight additional probable airstrips. The Federal Aviation Administration airport database lists five seaplane bases and the RASP identified one probable seaplane base. Airport information available for the Willow Area is summarized in Table 1.

Summary of Aviation Goals (Note: order of goals does not reflect priority.)

GOAL 1: Preserve our community’s open and relatively unrestricted access to public and private aviation facilities.

GOAL 2: Plan effectively to minimize encroachment on airstrips by non-compatible development.

GOAL 3: Enhance and improve the Willow Airport with improved services and facilities.

GOAL 4: Minimize the adverse impact aviation activities may have on airport neighbors.

GOAL 5: Develop and pursue strategies that market the Willow Airport.

GOAL 6: Develop public access and parking facilities at Kashwitna Lake and designate landing and takeoff approach vectors.

A majority of the area in South Central Alaska is only accessible by airplane, snowmobile or boat. Willow residents enjoy access to remote residential and recreational property because of the easy access to aviation facilities. Conversely, the Willow Airport and other nearby strips and lakes provide access to businesses and services for hundreds of bush residents. Many Willow residents are licensed pilots and operate their aircraft from the Willow Airport, or from the many airstrips and lakes in the area. Approximately 400 licensed pilots live in Willow, and roughly 112 private aircraft are based at Willow airports.

Table 1

Site Number	Type	Location ID	City	Facility Name	Ownership	Use
50877.25*A	AIRPORT	02AK	WILLOW	RUSTIC WILDERNESS	Private	PR
50877.27*A	AIRPORT	25AK	WILLOW	HONEYBEE LAKE AERO PARK	Private	PR
50877.26*A	AIRPORT	3AK1	WILLOW	DESHKA LANDING	Public	PR
50877.*A	AIRPORT	AK08	WILLOW	THOMAS STRIP	Private	PR
50877.34*A	AIRPORT	AK10	WILLOW	ERNIES AIRSTRIP	Private	PR
50325.01*A	AIRPORT	AK29	HOUSTON	REIDS LANDING	Private	PR
50877.31*A	AIRPORT	AK67	WILLOW	SKID MARKS	Private	PR
50877.28*A	AIRPORT	AK68	WILLOW	MINUTEMAN STRIP	Private	PR
50877.3*A	AIRPORT	AK69	WILLOW	LONG LAKE	Private	PR
50877.2*A	AIRPORT	AK90	WILLOW	SHIRLEY LAKE	Private	PR
50878.*A	AIRPORT	UUO	WILLOW	WILLOW	Public	PU
Unregistered - Possible	AIRPORT					PR
Unregistered	AIRPORT					PR
Unregistered	AIRPORT			TED BARRY		PR
Unregistered	AIRPORT					PR
Unregistered	AIRPORT					PR
Unregistered	AIRPORT					PR
Unregistered	AIRPORT					PR
Unregistered	AIRPORT					PR
50877.01*C	SEAPLANE BASE	2X2	WILLOW	WILLOW SPB	Public	PU
50519.5*C	SEAPLANE BASE	78Z	NANCY LAKE	NANCY LAKE	Private	PU
50877.24*C	SEAPLANE BASE	AK34	WILLOW	KASHWITNA LAKE	Private	PR
50877.29*C	SEAPLANE BASE	AK57	WILLOW	LONG LAKE	Private	PR
50877.32*C	SEAPLANE BASE	MFN	WILLOW	MINUTEMAN LAKE	Private	PU
Unregistered	SEAPLANE BASE			REDSHIRT LAKE		PU

Alaskan communities tend to develop around their airports, which eventually forces the airport to relocate. These airports no longer provide convenient access to community services.

Community growth tends to squeeze out general aviation. In the Lower 48, airports are closing at the rate of approximately one per month. This trend is due to:

- Encroachment in areas adjacent to airports by non-compatible, noise sensitive development;
- Rising real estate values that make airport property more economically viable for other uses; and
- A lack of appreciation for the value a thriving airport brings to a community.

It is recognized that not all Willow residents, present or future, are aviation enthusiasts, and that for everyone to coexist peacefully, the aviation community must be sensitive to the needs of neighbors and to minimize the adverse impacts that aviation may produce.

Two significant aviation assets in Willow include the Willow Airport (PAUO) and the seaplane base across the Parks Highway at Willow Lake.

The Willow Airport is located east of the Parks Highway at approximately mile 70. The existing Willow Airport is operated by ADOT&PF and is located on approximately 464 acres of land and 146 acres of water (Willow Lake). The State of Alaska currently holds all the lands necessary to complete the long-term development plans at the Willow Airport. The ADOT&PF contracted to update the Willow Airport layout plan during the drafting of this comprehensive plan.

Since there is no aircraft control tower at the Willow Airport, estimates of aircraft operations were based on the fleet of current users and current schedules and the Airport Master Record (FAA Form 5010).

The FAA Form 5010 reports the following data for annual aircraft operations:

Operation	Number of Trips
Air Taxi	1,500
GA Local	1,500
GA Itinerant	4,500
Military	200
Total	7,700

Historically, the correlation between population growth and the growth in enplaned passengers and number of operations has been closely correlated. The Community of Willow covers a significant area and contains several small private airstrips and lakes as well as other public airstrips that are utilized by the population. The future operations will be based on a growth rate of approximately half the average community growth rate for the last 50 years. Forecast of future

operations at the Willow Airport will be based on an annual approximate growth rate of 4.0 percent.

Table 2: Forecast of Future Operations

Item	1998	2002	2007	2012	2020
Total Annual Operations	7700	9000	10950	13330	19730
Annual Local Operations	1500	1750	2130	2590	3840
Annual Itinerant Operations	4500	5260	6400	7790	11530
Annual Enplanements	1594	1830	2260	2760	4080
Based Aircraft	67	78	95	116	171

Willow Lake is registered with the Federal Aviation Administration as a publicly-owned seaplane base. There is no public dock on the lake. A public gravel ramp on the northeast shore of the lake is available for seaplane haul-out and a lot south of the ramp for vehicle operation. All other ramps and property are privately owned or controlled. The lake is also a popular recreation destination, surrounded by primarily residential development. There are about 125 lots within 500 feet of Willow Lake, 58 of which have residential structures. General consensus on how to address the lake in this plan was not reached and should be sought during the regular update of the comprehensive plan.

The Borough RASP (2008) identified the Big Lake Airport and the Willow Airport as the only airports in the Borough that have access to a lake or floatplane pond. The need for a public floatplane base has been mentioned repeatedly over the past 20 years. The connection of Willow Airport to Willow Lake is relatively unique and should be preserved. Future development of the Parks Highway should preserve this connection.

Goals for Aviation

GOAL 1: Preserve our community’s open and relatively unrestricted access to public and private aviation facilities.

Recommendation

- a. Discourage government action and restrictions that would limit aircraft access to community lakes and to landing strips.

GOAL 2: Plan effectively to minimize encroachment on airstrips by non-compatible development.

Recommendations

- a. Encourage owners/operators of private airstrips to register them with the FAA.
- b. Make the location of all airstrips available to the general public.
- c. Encourage sellers, developers and real estate agents to inform buyers of the location of nearby existing airstrips and float plane activity on lakes and streams.
- d. Require private airstrips to be identified in the platting process.
- e. Promote compatible land use planning on and around Willow Airport and privately owned airports to prevent construction of public infrastructure (overhead utilities, libraries, residential housing, schools, and roads) that interfere or are not compatible with airport operations.
- f. Encourage the use of clearly visible and standardized airstrip demarcation signs to deter unsafe and unauthorized usage.
- g. Preserve the connection of the Willow Airport to Willow Lake.

GOAL 3: Enhance and improve the Willow Airport with improved services and facilities.

Recommendations

- a. Encourage enhancement of the facilities and capabilities of the State owned and operated Willow Airport. Develop a capital improvement plan in the Willow Airport Master Plan.
- b. Preserve the access between Willow Lake and Willow Airport.
- c. Encourage development of long-term parking.
- d. Encourage provision of commuter air service.

GOAL 4: Minimize the adverse effects aviation activities may have on airport neighbors.

Recommendations

- a. Encourage aircraft operators to follow noise abatement procedures to minimize noise footprint in takeoff and landing corridors.
- b. Encourage developers to adopt construction standards for private airport developments that minimize the negative effects airport operations have on adjacent property owners.

GOAL 5: Develop and pursue strategies that market the Willow Airport.

Recommendations

- a. Encourage the State to be in compliance with Federal Aviation Administration grant assurances for continued access to Airport Improvement Grant Funds.

- b. Encourage the State to market the airport. Willow Airport is an economic engine for the community.
 - i. Publish community businesses nearby the Willow Airport in the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA) directory.
 - ii. Attend and market the airport at local trade shows.
 - iii. Publish businesses nearby the Willow Airport in the Air/Nav directory.
 - iv. Identify and market businesses that would provide support services at the airport (pick up clients, etc.).
 - v. Update the Airport Layout Plan and show lease lots currently used by or available for both the State and private lessees for aeronautical and non-aeronautical development. Market available lease lots and allowable uses.
 - vi. Develop facilities that will encourage the public to continue using Willow Airport (electricity at tie downs, rental t-hangars, etc.).
 - vii. Highlight Willow Airport's unique access to nearby services (fuel, groceries, medical facilities, post office, etc.).
- c. Encourage fly-ins and aviation-related community events to increase community involvement and promote understanding.

GOAL 6: Develop public access and parking facilities at Kashwitna Lake and designate landing and takeoff approach vectors.

9. PUBLIC SERVICES AND FACILITIES

The Borough adopted a borough-wide Public Facilities Plan in 1984 with a partial revision in 1987. At the time of this Willow Community Comprehensive Plan, in 2013, the Borough Public Facilities Plan is once again being updated.

This section will cover a list of existing facilities, services, and utilities, and, when necessary, make a community recommendation on each.

Proposed improvements to services and facilities must occur within the capacity of the community to operate and maintain such improvements, acknowledging the limited financial and volunteer resources in the area. As an unincorporated area, the community relies heavily on the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, partnerships with adjoining communities, and state and federal agencies for many of the services and facilities it requires. This community plan provides a tool that Willow residents have used to prioritize needs and to assess their ability to operate and maintain and to leverage support for developing public services and facilities.

The following public facilities and services were identified by the community, as potential future needs:

Wastewater treatment facility;	Recreational center;
Community park;	Cemetery;
Hospital or 24-hour care facility;	Maintained trailheads;
Additional senior housing;	Transportation service – from outlying areas to business centers;
Carpool lot;	Disability transportation service;
Iditarod parking area;	Natural gas service;
Fish hatchery;	Passenger train depot;
Additional school sites;	Communication service enhancements;
Expanded emergency services;	Fiber optic communication lines.
Swimming pool;	
Fire stations;	

Summary of Goals (Note: order of goals does not reflect priority.)

Overall goal:

- Identify and encourage public investment in community facilities and services.

GOAL 1: Continue to encourage operation, maintenance, and improvements to the Willow Community Center.

GOAL 2: Continue to encourage improvement and expansion of educational facilities and opportunities in the community.

GOAL 3: Improve and expand the fire and emergency services.

GOAL 4: Improve and expand the library services.

GOAL 5: Improve and expand future and existing parks and playgrounds.

GOAL 6: Require the Borough to work with the community to identify and reserve parcels for future public facility development.

GOAL 7: Sustainably operate and maintain all public services and facilities.

Background and Community Values

Willow has a core of public facilities located near the intersection of the Parks Highway and Willow Fishhook Road. Current facilities include a library, fire station and ambulance garage, a post office, K-6 school, community center, health clinic, airport, senior housing, and a solid waste transfer site. Some public facilities are located in nearby communities and shared with a larger population. These include a senior center, a State Trooper sub-station, and a middle and high school, located in the city of Houston.

Public services in the Willow Area include electrical power service provided by Matanuska Electric Association (MEA) and telephone service provided by Matanuska Telephone Association (MTA). Community enrichment programs at the Willow Elementary School, library, and community center are currently offering a variety of classes for youth and adults.

The Matanuska-Susitna Borough, as part of Willow Road Service Area #20, provides road maintenance in the Willow Area. The Borough also provides solid waste disposal, emergency medical services, and operates the school. The Matanuska-Susitna Borough also serves as the area's planning authority.

Water and sewer provision is mostly provided through individual well and septic systems. According to US Census data, 19% of Willow households lack complete plumbing. Willow Emergency Services, a part of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough Emergency Services Department, provides fire, rescue, and emergency medical services.

Landline telephone service extends up the Parks Highway to mile 121. Telephone service is available in outlying areas through a fixed wireless service. 12% of households in Willow lack phone service. Willow residents have access to DSL internet service, but not other forms of high-speed internet access.

Most Willow residents, like rural residents everywhere, accept the tradeoffs required when living in outlying, low population areas. They enjoy the pleasures of an attractive natural setting, the ready access to outdoor recreation amenities, and the absence of many of the headaches of city life. Most residents accept that they will not receive the full range of public services and facilities found in more densely populated areas. However, they do expect that some services and facilities should be adequate to their needs, while other services should be excellent, regardless of where one lives.

Willow Area Public Services & Facilities Matrix

Summary of Existing Services; Priorities for Improvements

Service	Needs	Provider	Current Facilities	Issues
Fire	Improve services & build new building	MSB	Station 12-1 Mi 69.5 Parks Hwy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimal coverage in high population density area. About 18 volunteers. Additional wildfire coverage provided by Alaska Division of Forestry.
K-6	Keep school open	MSB	W. Elementary School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The elementary school has K – 6th grades. Active pre-school program.
K-12		MSB	Beryozava Russian School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Standard Normal curriculum with Russian language requirement. Need additional enrollment to increase available funding for janitorial and maintenance services.
Middle School		MSB	Houston	<ul style="list-style-type: none">
High School		MSB	Houston	<ul style="list-style-type: none">
High School		MSB	Su Valley	<ul style="list-style-type: none">
EMS (Emergency Medical Service)	Improve services & build new building	MSB		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides ETT and EMT training for local volunteers. About 20 EMS personnel in the area.
Library	Improve services & expand or build new building	MSB	Attached to Community Center	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shares lobby with Community Center building. Employs one full-time librarian and two part-time employees.
Power	Extend grid & three phase power	MEA		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Service disruptions common due to weather, maintenance issues. Power lines should be buried to the extent feasible. Encourage self-reliance for emergency power supply (see Appendix B).

Service	Needs	Provider	Current Facilities	Issues
Telephone/ Internet	Expand, improve quality & reliability	MTA, AT&T		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MTA offers a combination of landline, wireless and fixed wireless services. • Many disruptions in service due to weather.
Youth Activities & Programs	Grant Funds, Expand	MSB (Community Enrichment)	W Elementary School, library, Community Center	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WACO was issued a grant for their CE Program last fall. This grant reimburses them for administration costs, teacher, coordinator, etc. These programs rely on grants.
Community Center	Update electrical wiring; new air exchanger; solar panels	MSB/WACO	Community Center	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The community building is owned by the MSB and managed by the WACO. • Building is used for community meetings, including Community Council, Road Board, and Library Board. Individuals can hold private events or parties there. • Playground, picnic, basketball courts in back.
Health Care	Improve access & reinstate the mobile clinic		Sunshine Clinic Willow Branch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health care services are available at the Sunshine Clinic and in the southern portion of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough • While services are available in the Core Area of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, distance and transportation costs often limit services in outlying communities. Lack of health insurance and ineligibility for Medicaid are also significant barriers to adequate health care provision. • New clinic opened 2012.
Senior Housing	Expand	Alaska AHFC	Willow Haven Senior Housing complex	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need transportation to senior activities. • Consider a community shuttle that would transport to the community center and health clinic.
Parks & Playground	Improve and expand existing parks		Willow Elementary, Community Center	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need new parks and playgrounds.
Solid Waste	Hazardous waste collection	MSB	Transfer site	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transfer site is about 2 miles off the Parks Highway. • Adequate – MSB removes junk vehicles and appliances when called. • Container capacity may be increased from 40 yards to 120 yards.

	Service	Needs	Provider	Current Facilities	Issues
	Water & Sewer		Individuals	Well & Septic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Setback land for future wastewater treatment facility to service the Town Center. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ This should be paid for by the land owners serviced. ○ Encourage private development of a water station.
	Police	Increased coverage	State Troopers	Mat-Su West, Wasilla	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inadequate - some would like to see an increase in the amount of troopers serving the Willow Area.
	Post Office	Increase staff and hours	USPS	Mi 69.5 Parks Hwy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Considered inadequate.
	Airport	Protection from encroachment	ADOT	Willow Airport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-airport uses jeopardize state and federal funding availability.
	Natural Gas	Local distribution	Enstar	Limited	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expansion of local distribution options would reduce the cost of living in Willow.

Goals for Public Services and Facilities

GOAL 1: Continue to encourage operation, maintenance, and improvements to the Willow Community Center.

The facility is located on the wonderful Willow Lake with a playground, and large picnic area. The building is located on Borough land and is managed and operated by WACO. The building is free to be used by the WACO Committee, Community recognized groups, and Community enrichment programs. There is a monthly schedule available on the WACO website with planned events and detailed information. The facility fire code allows a maximum of 580 persons.

The community center is designated as an emergency shelter.

The community center building was expanded in 1993 when the relocation of the Library was completed. The community center has been completely refurbished recently, from paint and carpet to stage work, roofing, and siding.

There are many great uses for the facility allowing us to come together as a community.

Recommendations

- a. Research and apply for grants and other sources of funding for operation, maintenance, and improvements.
- b. Expand ways to use facility to generate funding.
- c. Encourage community group involvement.

GOAL 2: Continue to encourage improvement and expansion of educational facilities and opportunities in the community.

The Willow Elementary School serves students in kindergarten through 6th grade. The school is one of the community's most valued assets. The school enrollment has been declining over the last ten years. Keeping the school open is a high priority.

Willow Area students in grades 7-12 travel to Houston or to Su Valley to attend Middle and High School.

Community enrichment programs are also available at the community center.

Recommendations

- a. Encourage growth in job opportunities and therefore numbers of families with school-aged children residing in the community.
- b. Encourage the sale of more public lands into private ownership for residential and agricultural uses.
- c. Host more community functions at the school to raise money to support community enrichment activities.
- d. Encourage an increase in the school's availability for after-hours community use.

- e. Work with the Borough to identify potential future school sites.

GOAL 3: Improve and expand the fire and emergency services.

The members of the Willow Fire Department and Willow Emergency Medical Services (EMS) have gained recognition from the community and surrounding areas for the amazing and enormous services they provide. The Willow Area is a very large and remote part of Alaska. There are currently zones without coverage in the Willow Area. They could always use more volunteers and an upgraded training program.

Willow Fire Department-18 members
Willow Service Area 35
Established: January 3, 1984

Willow Emergency Medical-20 members
Services (EMS) District 5
Established: February 19, 1976

Current Facilities:

Station 12-1 Mi 69.5 Parks Highway

- Main complex with water and septic
- Training classroom with no water or septic
- Storage shed and 6,000 gal. water tank w/well, 225GPM flow rate

Station 12-2 Mi 9.8 Willow Fishhook Road

- No water or septic
- 20K gal. buried water tank (not used)

Recommendations

- a. Support the Fire Service Board recommendations for new fire stations and emergency services sites in the Willow Area to help develop the new locations.
- b. Encourage increased application for grant funding to ensure response abilities.
- c. Ensure grant training is available for young and upcoming volunteers, paid on-call staff and community development.
- d. Establish pumper truck sites at lakes along major roadways.
- e. Establish fire breaks throughout the Willow Area.
- f. Secure additional funding to purchase needed equipment for emergency services team.
- g. Continue to train and support the volunteer emergency services team.

GOAL 4: Improve and expand the library services.

Willow Public Library has a long-standing history within the community. The Willow Library Association meets during the winter months to discuss ways the facility can enhance and provide more services for the community. One full-time Librarian and two part-time employees make up the work force. The demand for the services the library offers is outgrowing the capacity of the library facility. The current space is cramped, and an expansion is clearly needed.

The library has been in the current location, connected to the Willow Community Center, for over 15 years. The two facilities share lobby area, restrooms, parking, playground, and other miscellaneous cost.

Recommendations

- a. Find and secure federal, State, and Borough funding to support the library.
- b. Ensure the public library can provide the best service to the community with qualified staff.
- c. Research funding needs for library expansion or relocation.
- d. Expand services to benefit different age groups (teens, kids, adults, seniors).
 - i. Expand internet availability.
- e. Improve youth services to benefit all in the community.
- f. Continue to support the library services and community enrichment programs.

GOAL 5: Improve and expand future and existing parks and playgrounds.

See Goal 3 of the Recreation Chapter on page 26.

Willow is a largely rural community and most outdoor recreation is in the form of fishing, hunting, mushing, skiing, or riding snowmachines. As the community matures, however, the need for more structured outdoor play facilities will continue to grow.

Currently the community has a small, popular playground adjoining the existing community center. While some playground equipment has been installed, additional work to the area is needed.

Recommendations

- a. Apply for funding for park planning and development; for example, the Alaska Department of Community Commerce and Economic Development (ADCCED) mini-grant program and MSB bed tax program.
- b. Encourage continued local volunteer support to develop and maintain local recreation facilities.
- c. Identify sites for future parks and playgrounds (see Appendix A).
- d. Look for sites that can be utilized year-round.
- e. Encourage local community groups' participation in the construction, operation, and maintenance of existing and future parks and playgrounds.

GOAL 6: Require the Borough to work with the community to identify and reserve parcels for future public facility development.

Background and Community Values

As of the date this plan was drafted, local population growth does not warrant extensive development of Borough land for residential development, community facilities, or other uses. However, the plan recommends reserving key Borough parcels today for the facilities that will likely be needed in the future. This opportunity has been lost in communities in the Core Area where development has occurred rapidly, and public land is no longer available. By reserving

parcels well ahead of development pressures, Willow will ensure public facilities are centrally located and be able to influence the future development patterns of the community.

To the greatest extent possible, new and expanded community facilities should be located in relatively concentrated areas.

Recommendation

- a. Reserve land for the following:
 - i. Emergency services;
 - ii. A new school;
 - iii. A new library;
 - iv. Recreational parking and trails;
 - v. A sewage treatment facility to support a town center;
 - vi. New parks and playgrounds;
 - vii. A park and ride.

GOAL 7: Sustainably operate and maintain all public services and facilities.

Background and Community Values

With many of the strategies identified in this section, an entity is required to own, operate, and manage the recommended programs, services, and facilities. Funds such as grants typically pay for start-up or construction costs, not building maintenance or operation costs. The Willow Area Community Organization is currently evaluating several options for increasing their capacity to pay for, develop, and operate the community services and facilities that are identified in this plan. Making this decision will greatly influence how the Organization pursues the strategies proposed in this section.

Some strategies that have been tried in other areas include:

- Requiring the State, Borough or other agencies and private interests to pay the full operations costs associated with new facilities and services they develop. For example, if new roadside parking is built, agencies will provide funding for restrooms, trash, etc.
- Assessing visitors and recreation users a fee for use of local facilities. For example, charge a modest parking fee to cover costs of maintaining trailhead parking and restrooms.

10. IMPLEMENTATION

The Willow Area Community Comprehensive Plan provides an overall guide and framework for the future of the community. It both anticipates and accommodates opportunities for focused growth in the area, while at the same time working to protect the area's sensitive natural features, historic resources, and community character. The Plan sets the stage for the specific actions and collaborative work that will be required for the community and all of its partners to implement the Plan's recommendations.

Coordinated planning efforts will make the most of opportunities to direct development, investment, and activity to specific areas and to ensure that initiatives occur in ways that support existing neighborhoods. Deliberate, cooperative steps to implement this Plan's goals, objectives, and policies will help work towards a bright future for the Willow Area.

This Plan will be used as a primary reference for evaluating and influencing future change in the Willow Area. The procedures and actions in this chapter provide guidance for the use of this Plan by the MSB Planning Commission, Platting Board, Parks Recreation and Trails Advisory Board, Assembly and staff of the Borough, and State Agencies.

Alaska Statute 29.40.030 defines a Comprehensive Plan as:

(a) The comprehensive plan is a compilation of policy statements, goals, standards, and maps for guiding the physical, social, and economic development, both private and public, of the first or second class borough, and may include, but is not limited to, the following:

- (1) statements of policies, goals, and standards;
- (2) a land use plan;
- (3) a community facilities plan;
- (4) a transportation plan; and
- (5) recommendations for implementation of the comprehensive plan.

This chapter includes information, goals and strategies for increasing the community's capacity to control its future and to accomplish comprehensive plan goals and projects. Examples of approaches include gaining a better understanding of funding options and finding ways to partner with the Borough, the State and other established governing bodies. As the community looks forward, major concerns include the following:

- Communication between governing bodies and community members – Like all elected bodies, there are times when WACO is at odds with some community members. There are also times when WACO and community members do not agree with Borough approaches to handling key issues in Willow. Community members hope to streamline communications between all governing bodies and to better articulate their needs to the Borough Assembly, State legislature and congressional delegation.
- Capacity to generate funds for local projects – The community wants to better understand existing streams of revenue and funding cycles that affect community and Borough-wide projects.

Table 3: Recommended Implementation Actions

Category	Recommended Program or Action	Implementation Timeframe	Responsibility
Further Planning Efforts	Update this Comprehensive Plan.	2018-2020	Community Organization (WACO), Borough, Public
	Town Center Master Plan	2015	Community Organization, Public
Land Use	Working in close coordination with the Willow Area Community Organization and public, amend Borough land use and subdivision ordinances to help implement the recommendations of this Plan.	2014-2018	Borough Planning and Land Use Department, Community Organization and Public
Hazard Mitigation	Work with MSB Emergency Services to identify appropriate hazard mitigation measures and a cost/benefit analysis of each measure.	2016	Borough Emergency Services and Community Development Dept. and Community Organization
	Construct a secondary transportation route across Little Willow and Willow Creeks, and the Kashwitna River.	2018-2023	ADOT, MSB, WACO, Public
	Change the emergency shelter designation from the school to the community center.	2014	Borough Emergency Services
	Identify and develop fire breaks and fire escapes, and pursue funding to maintain.	2014-2029	WACO, Public, Borough Emergency Services, ADNR
Recreation	WACO should draft a Recreation Plan.	2014-2019	WACO, Public
	Support the trails committee in securing easements for existing and future trails.	Ongoing	Community Organization
	Retain public land suitable for parks and natural undeveloped areas.	Ongoing	Borough Community Development Dept.
	Protect private land and interests near public use areas including lakes, trails, and rivers. Installation of signage illustrating public land and guidelines for its use.	2014-2019	Borough Community Development Dept.

Category	Recommended Program or Action	Implementation Timeframe	Responsibility
	Encourage enforcement of regulations and laws that address nuisance, noise, trash, vandalism and other criminal activity.	2014-2029	Alaska State Troopers, Dept. of Natural Resources, Borough Code Compliance, WACO
Water Quality and Watershed Protection	Improve monitoring of surface and groundwater quality; ensure that water flowing into the Willow Area from upstream is clean and suitable for fish and wildlife.	2014-2029	Borough Environmental Division, ADNR, Community
	Map the aquifers that provide or contribute to existing and future drinking water supplies.	2014-2029	Borough, ADNR, USGS
Economic Development	Develop the Town Center.	2014-2029	Community Organization, Public, Borough Planning and Land Use and Community Development Dept.
	Create a grassy area for picnics, outdoor markets, and small events in the Town Center.	2014-2019	Lions Club, WACO, Chamber of Commerce, Public
	Ensure that local utilities and other infrastructure improvements are developed in a way that meet the energy needs of the Willow Area and will increase economic opportunities.	2014-2029	MEA, MTA, Enstar, Chugach Electric, AGDC, Borough Planning and Land Use and Community Development Dept., WACO, Public
	Construct natural gas distribution lines.	2014-2029	
	Support development of the Willow Airport and protect it from being surrounded by noise sensitive uses.	2014-2029	WACO, ADOT, Borough Planning and Land Use Dept.
	Incorporate recommendations from the Plan into the Borough Long and Short Range Transportation Plans.	2014-2019 (annually)	Borough Planning and Land Use Dept.
Transportation	Construct a connector road or bypass, east of the railroad, starting near White's Crossing and ending near Kashwitna Lake that bypasses the Willow Town Center.	2020	ADOT, Borough Public Works, WACO

Category	Recommended Program or Action	Implementation Timeframe	Responsibility
	Extend Emsweiler Road north to Willow Creek Parkway and straighten and improve West Long Lake Road between Crystal Lake Road and Nancy Lake Parkway.	2016	ADOT, Borough
	Increase transportation options for those without access to vehicles and link residents to programs.	2014-2019	Borough Planning and Land Use Dept., ADOT
	Improve the secondary road network to support the Town Center and preserve the connection of Willow Lake to Willow Airport.	2024	Borough Planning and Land Use Dept., ADOT, and local RSA.
	Encourage development of a mass transit center where it is accessible by the rail, airport, and Parks Highway (park and ride).	2016	ADOT and Borough
	Continue to work with residents on improving fire and emergency service delivery.	2014-2019	Borough Emergency Services Dept.
Public Facilities and Services	Adopt and annually amend 3-year Capital Improvement Plan based on long range capital facilities needs identified in this Plan.	2014 (updated annually)	Borough Administration
	Identify and designate Borough land for future public facilities.	2016	Borough Planning and Land Use and Community Development Dept.
Aviation	Include the Willow Airport in the Town Center Master Plan; ensure it coordinates with ADOT Airport Layout Plan.	2016	Community Organization, Public
	Improve and maintain the airport to allow C-130-sized aircraft to land.	2014-2019	ADOT

PLAN MONITORING, AMENDMENTS, AND UPDATE

The Borough should regularly evaluate its progress towards achieving the recommendations of the Comprehensive Plan. This section suggests recommended criteria and procedures for using, monitoring, amending, and updating the Plan.

1. PLAN MONITORING AND USE

The Matanuska-Susitna Borough should constantly evaluate its decisions on private development proposals, public investments, regulations, incentives, and other actions against the

recommendations of this Comprehensive Plan. These recommendations and time frames suggested in Table 3 on the previous pages should provide a good starting point for budgeting and work program planning.

Members of the Willow Planning Team, formed to provide technical assistance and input throughout the comprehensive planning process, are encouraged to continue to meet to monitor performance. At a minimum, members of this Team should meet on an annual basis (perhaps in Spring) to review Borough and local decisions on private development proposals over the previous year against the recommendations of this Plan. Members of the team may also discuss appropriate amendments to the Plan at these annual meetings. These actions will help keep this Plan a “living document.”

This Plan will be used to guide local and Borough decisions on future development requests. Before submitting a formal application for subdivision approval to the Borough, the Borough urges petitioners to first:

- Review the recommendations of this community comprehensive plan.
- Review zoning, subdivision, and other land development regulations.
- Meet with Borough staff to learn about the process.
- Discuss the request conceptually and informally with the Planning Commission.

Conceptual review almost always results in an improved development product and can save the community time and money.

2. PLAN AMENDMENTS

Amendments to this Plan may be appropriate in the years following initial Plan adoption. “Amendments” are generally defined as minor changes to the Plan maps or text. Frequent amendments to accommodate specific development proposals should be avoided.

Borough comprehensive planning policy requires that the same basic process be used to amend, add to, or update the Plan as used to initially adopt the Plan. This does not mean that new vision statements are needed or old committees need to be reformed. It does mean that the procedures defined in Planning Commission Resolution 09-014: Guidelines for the Development or Update of Community Based Comprehensive Plans need to be followed. Specifically, the community should use the following procedure to amend the Willow Community Comprehensive Plan:

- a. **Request:** The request for development or update of a community comprehensive plan shall be initiated upon written request by WACO.
- b. **Scheduling:** Community-based planning efforts will be scheduled on an individual case by case basis, and will be undertaken considering staff availability and work load. Efforts should be made to complete the process within twenty-four (24) months of commencement, but may vary depending upon complexity of the issues and the plan.
- c. **Commission approval of start-up:** Once the request is scheduled, staff assistance for the planning effort and the boundaries of the affected area shall be reviewed and approved by the Commission.
- d. **Notice and planning team appointment:** Upon Planning Commission approval of a planning effort, a general notice will be mailed to the area’s property owners and

registered voters (if available) notifying them of the planning effort, the proposed schedule, purpose of the effort, request for planning team nominations, and the contact staff person. At the same time an advertisement will be placed in the newspaper of general circulation also requesting nominations for the planning team. The applications for planning team representatives will be reviewed by a subcommittee of the Commission, consisting of the commissioner from the subject area, WACO chair or designee, and the staff project manager. The subcommittee's recommendations will be forwarded to the Commission for review and comment.

- e. **Planning team meetings and public outreach:** Planning team meetings will be public meetings held in a facility within the community. They will be facilitated by Borough staff and public input will be received at a designated time during the meeting.
- f. **Draft document is produced:** Once a draft document is prepared by the planning team, it will be made available at a minimum, at the nearest library and on the Borough website. A second general notice will be mailed to all property owners and registered voters of the area notifying them and requesting their comments on the draft. A notice will also be advertised in the newspaper of general circulation. At least one public meeting will be held to obtain comments on the plan update.
- g. **WACO review:** The Community Organization shall thoroughly review and make a recommendation to the Planning Commission, on each specific chapter of the plan.
- h. **Public hearings:** A public hearing will be held by the Planning Commission prior to making a recommendation to the Assembly on a community plan. The public hearing is to allow the public the opportunity to voice their support or objections prior to the Commission's final decision.

GOAL 1: Explore options for better communication within the community, as well as between the community and outside interests.

Communities are stronger when it is easy for everyone to be involved and to be aware of important community issues. It is also helpful to set up systems that make it simple for community members to communicate effectively with entities like the Borough and the State Legislature. Small Alaskan communities deal with these issues in a variety of ways; some options are listed below.

Recommendations

- a. Broadcast WACO meetings.
- b. Create an online community forum to promote dialogue.
- c. Develop a better method (legislative sub-committee?) for assessing and communicating community legislative priorities to legislators and to the Borough.
- d. Regularly update and publish the Guide to Willow with information for people who are considering living or starting a business in Willow.

GOAL 2: Explore organizational structures / funding options for creating greater capacity to carry out community goals and projects.

Willow Community members are interested in exploring different organizational and funding options that would enhance the administrative and financial capacity of the community; both for funding and managing priority projects for the community (e.g., library overhaul).

Currently, the community of Willow relies on the Borough's existing tax structure and organized status for funding community projects and most services (including fire protection, road maintenance, recreation and land use). In more specific terms, the Borough collects property taxes from local residents (14.719 mills, 2010) and an accommodations tax (5 percent) from visitors to fund a myriad of community needs and services.

As outlined in the Community Overview (Chapter 1), the most current assessment of Willow parcels indicates a low land assessment of zero dollars (outlier parcels that have no value because they sit on existing wetlands or for other reasons) and a high of \$305,200, with an average assessed value of \$23,514.

Building assessments for Willow also range from a low of zero dollars (indicates no building) to a high of \$863,500, with an average assessment of \$72,239. This data does not include buildings or lands held by the State, Borough, Native Corporations, or University of Alaska. Over 3,637 parcels of Willow's total 5,687 parcels have no buildings (and therefore are not assessed for any improvements).

Expanding community capacity is a large topic and one that can generate strong views. Perhaps the most important point on this subject is that unincorporated communities have a number of options other than incorporation to increase their control over their futures.

Below for discussion is a set of possible strategies for increasing local administrative capacity and for increasing local options for funding that have not or cannot be met through the community's relationship with the Borough:

Recommendations

- a. Complete this comprehensive plan – produce a plan that expresses broadly shared community goals and sets out practical strategies to reach these goals. Many funders require communities to have an approved plan as a condition of applying for grants.
- b. Research options for strengthening the local Chamber of Commerce, to promote Willow, advocate on behalf of the community, and carry out projects of importance to the local business community.
- c. Research specific potential grant and partnership opportunities – unincorporated communities have access to a wide range of funding sources, if they are well organized and can demonstrate they have the capacity to manage project funds.
- d. Research user fees and fine options – Are there options for the local community to raise funds for community projects through establishing user fees and/or fines, for example, for parking or other services the community might provide?

APPENDIX A

Maps are included illustrating the proposed park areas.

1. Little Willow Creek at Susitna River to protect fishing area and use of Willow Creek as a canoe trail to Big Su River. Also land to connect to Willow Creek campground area. T20NR5W #23, 400 acre park.
2. Deception Creek, T19NR3W #28, 27, 34, 22, 400 acre park and drinking water reservoir.
3. Deception Creek, mouth with Willow Creek, 10 acres T19NR4W #5.
4. Red Shirt Lake, T18NR5W #15, 200 acres inside Nancy Lake Park for bird sanctuary.
5. Lynx Lake on lake with access for fire trucks, T18NR4W #18, 20 acres.
6. Butterfly Lake T18NR4W #31, 6, 20 acre lake access.
7. Cow Lake to Red Shirt Lake connecting trail and habitat protection, bird sanctuary, 200 acre park.
8. East City Park, Ruth Lake, T19NR4W #16, 10 acres for trailhead parking, fire access to lake water.
9. Willow swamp loop trailhead, T19NR5W #21, 10 acre park trailhead and business center.
10. T18NR4W #3, 10 to 20 acre park, Nancy Lake stream outlet and trailhead.
11. Lynn Lake and Honeybee Lake connection. For trail and protection of waterway, T19NR4W #29.
12. T19NR4W #26, area for trails, future freeway pass thru, trailhead in area for trail access.
13. Kashwitna Lake south, T20NR4W #18, 10 acre swamp area, road pullout and airplane take off area not over houses.
14. Little Willow Creek at Highway, T20WR5W #24, 10 acre park, snow machine trailhead and habitat protection.
15. Eastgate Center trailhead, T20WR4W #36, 10 acre park, river park, bridge, trailhead business area. Also, another 10 acre park and trailhead on the south side of Willow-Fishhook Road should be set back for access to that trail system. T20NR3W #6.

APPENDIX A

16. Almond Lake, 200 acres, T19NR5 #11, #12, dog area, snow machine trailhead, habitat protection.
17. Crystal Lake to Vera Lake trail and swamp land protection, T19NR5W #26, 30 acres.
18. EMS Whiller Slew, 30 acres of swamp, T19R4 #18, #7 trails and swamp land.
19. Willow Creek Falls, 20 acres with a parking area and walking path to the bottom of the falls, T20NR3W #33; on top of the hill a smaller dam can be built for water control and for adding a petcock water/electrical generation facility.
20. Nancy Lake, north 40 acres for future public facility, T19NR4W #29.
21. Upper Willow Creek at Bridge, 20 acres for large parking area, and park and trailhead, T19NR2W #5, 20 acres.
22. Public land from road to river near Kashwitna River and Big Su River, T21NR4W #19, 18 and T21NR5W #13, #24, 200 acres for park.
23. Purchase Creek area, 3000 acres for hydro project. Also for trails and downhill ski resort. Major tourist attraction possible. Hydro electric and drinking water development as a minimum. T20NR2W #s15, 16, 17, 22, 21, 20, 19, 27, 28, 29, 30, and 32.
24. T19NR3W #11, nice lake, very scenic on top of hill.
25. T21NR3W, whole section for Little Willow Creek protection and wildlife protection of area.

Appendix A


WILLOW

Community Council

INDEX MAP

Legend

 COMMUNITY COUNCIL

 FUTURE PARK

 CITY BOUNDARY

 MAP INDEX

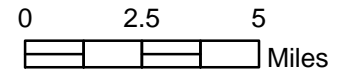
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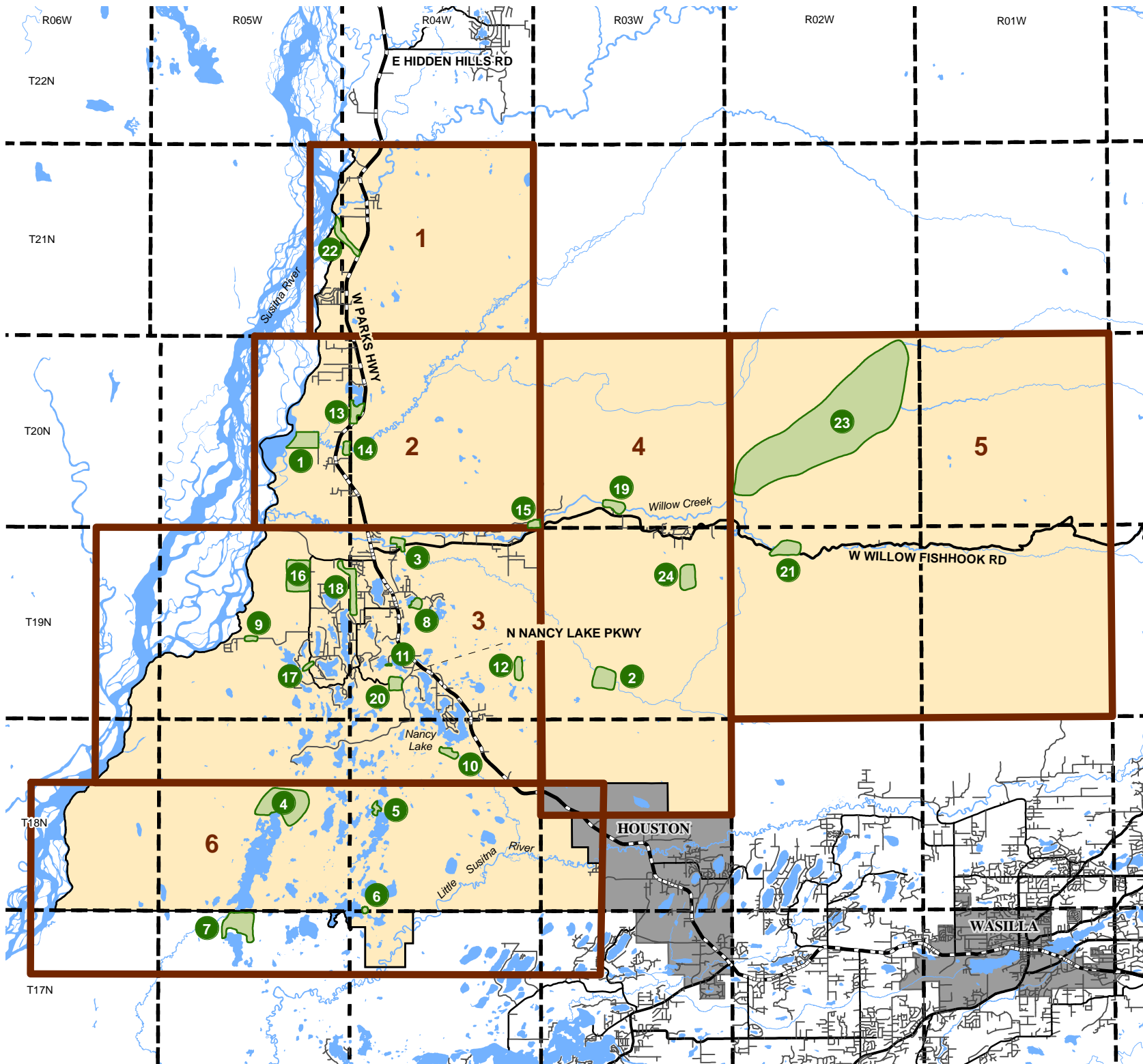
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 MEDIUM

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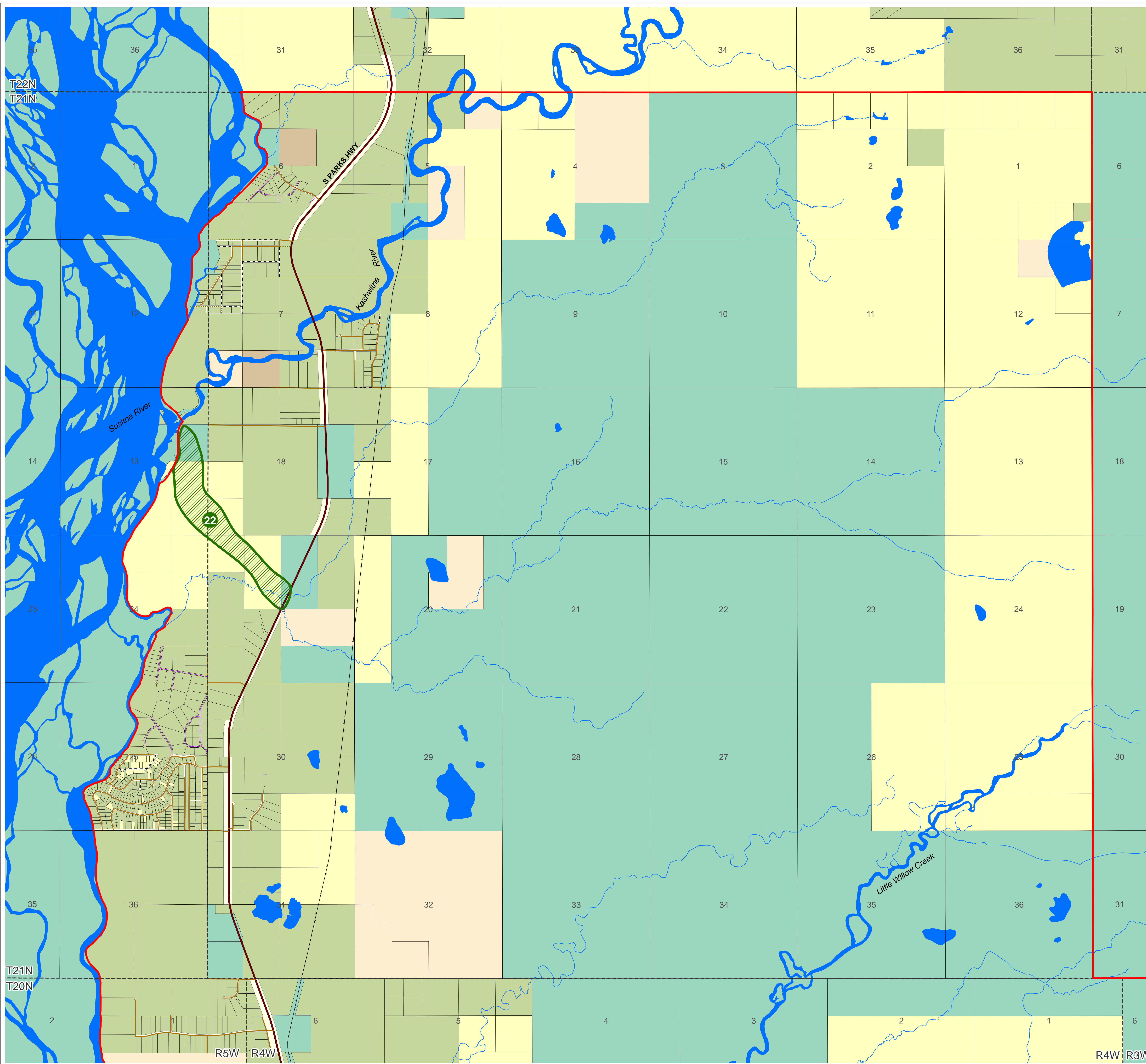


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WILLOW COMMUNITY COUNCIL Map 1

Appendix A



Legend

COMMUNITY COUNCIL BOUNDARY

FUTURE PARK

Ownership

BOROUGH

CITY

COOPERATIVE

FEDERAL

MENTAL HEALTH

NATIVE CORP

PRIVATE

PUBLIC UNIVERSITY

STATE

Road Classification

HIGHWAY

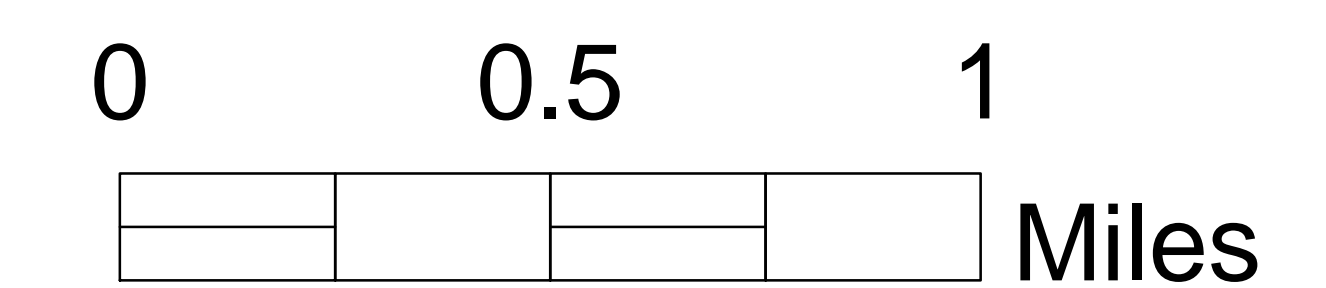
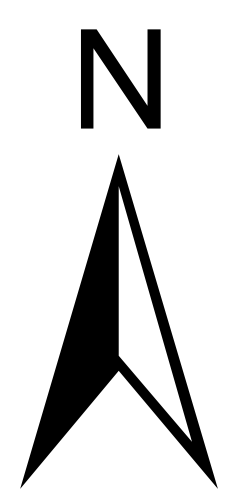
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MINOR

NOT CONST'D

PRIMITIVE

PRIVATE

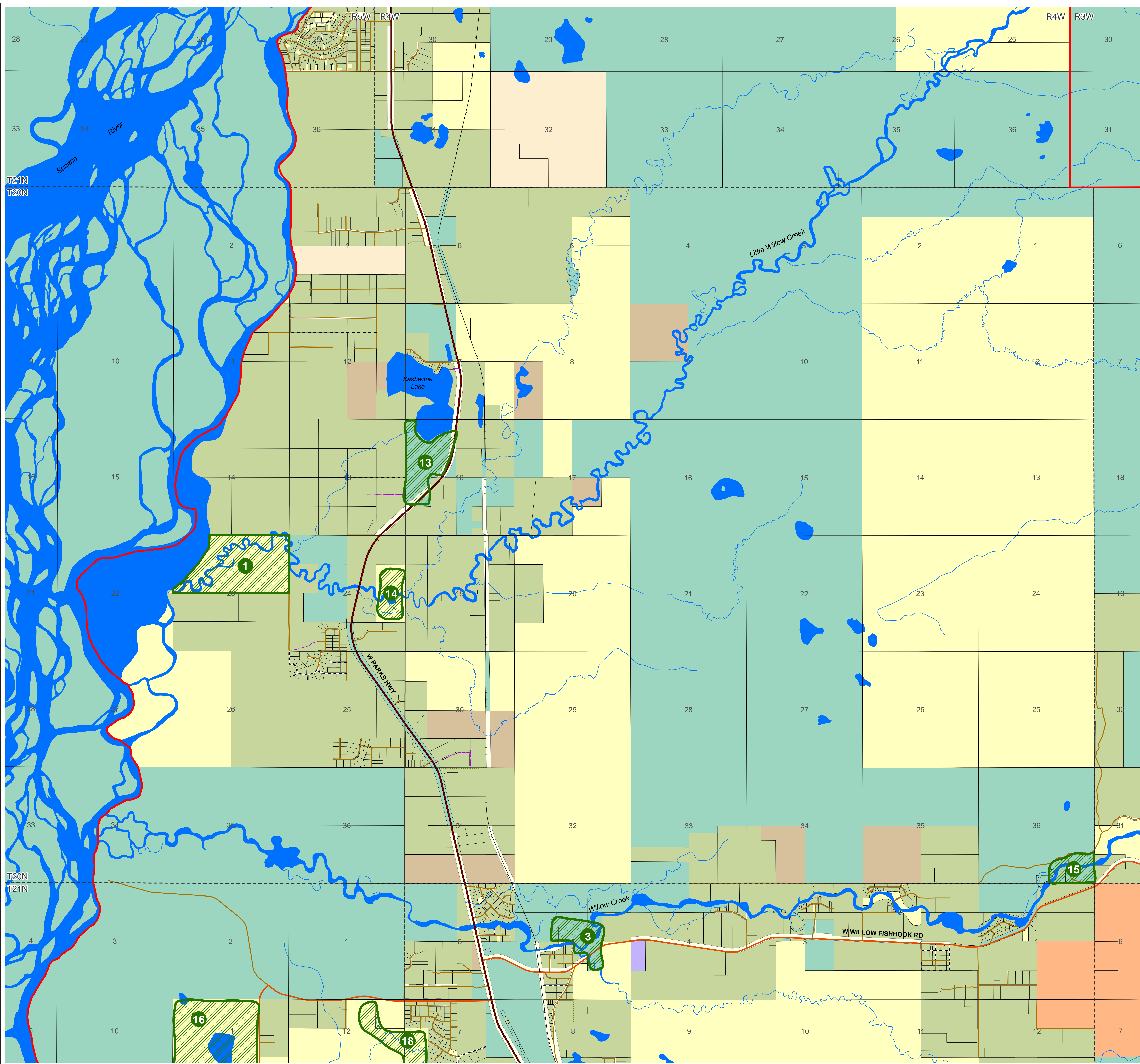


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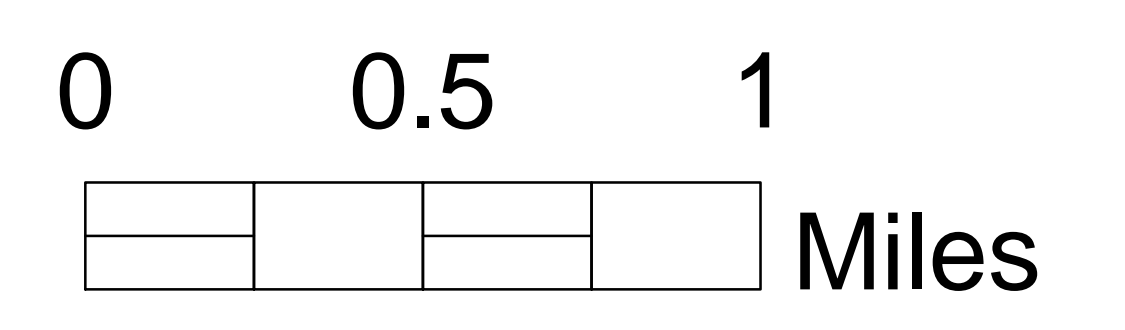
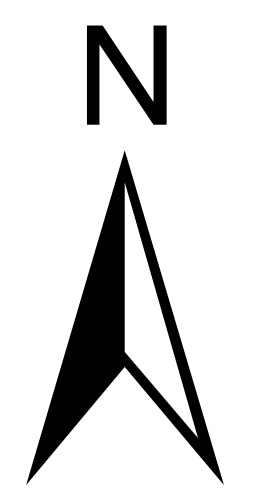
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WILLOW COMMUNITY COUNCIL Map 2

Appendix A



- Legend**
- COMMUNITY COUNCIL BOUNDARY
 - FUTURE PARK
- Ownership**
- BOROUGH
 - CITY
 - COOPERATIVE
 - FEDERAL
 - MENTAL HEALTH
 - NATIVE CORP
 - PRIVATE
 - PUBLIC UNIVERSITY
 - STATE
- Road Classification**
- HIGHWAY
 - SECONDARY
 - MINOR
 - NOT CONST'D
 - PRIMITIVE
 - PRIVATE

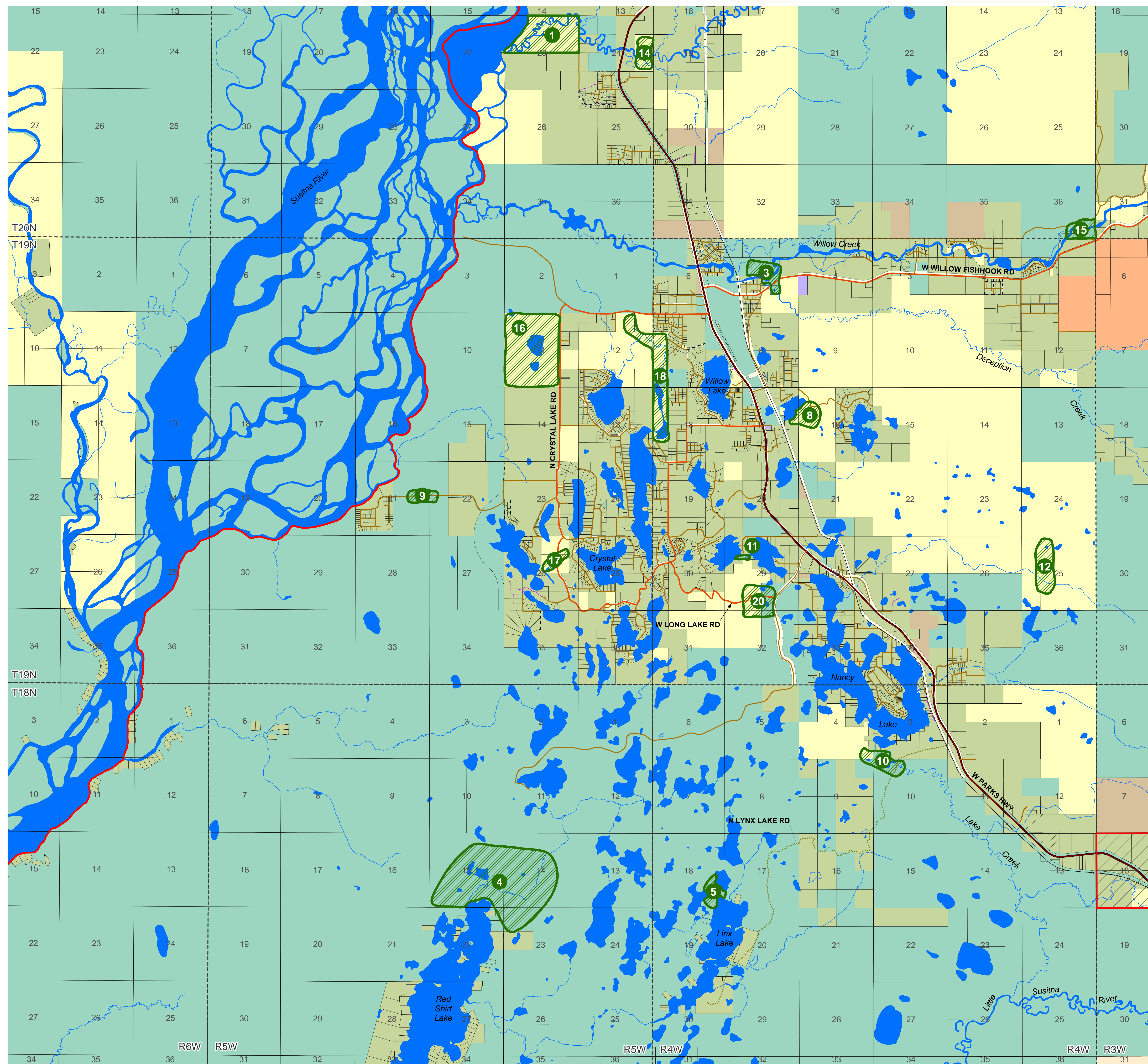


Source: MSB Assessment Dept.

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WILLOW COMMUNITY COUNCIL Map 3

Appendix A



Legend

COMMUNITY COUNCIL BOUNDARY

CITY BOUNDARY

FUTURE PARK

Ownership

BOROUGH

CITY

COOPERATIVE

FEDERAL

MENTAL HEALTH

NATIVE CORP

PRIVATE

PUBLIC UNIVERSITY

STATE

Road Classification

HIGHWAY

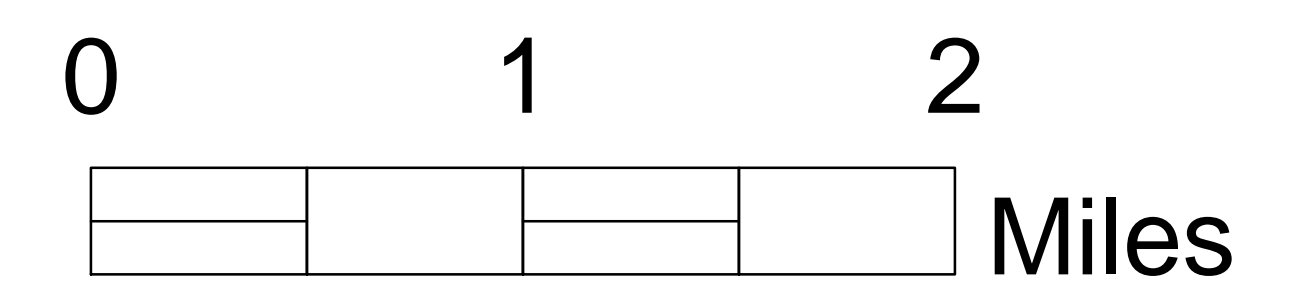
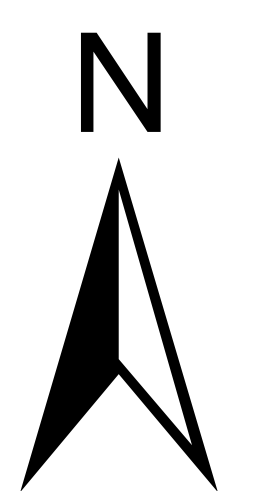
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MINOR

NOT CONST'D

PRIMITIVE

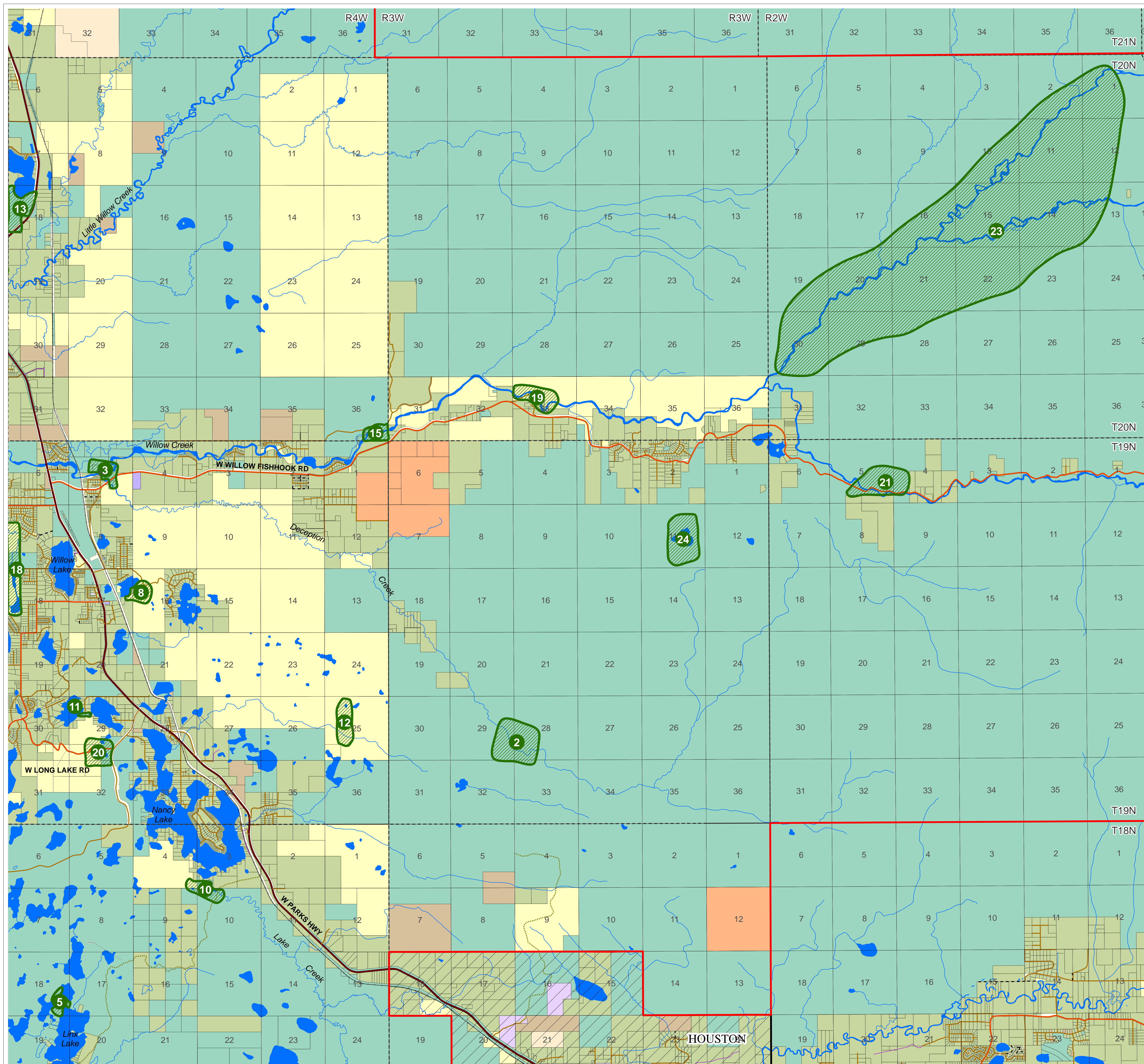
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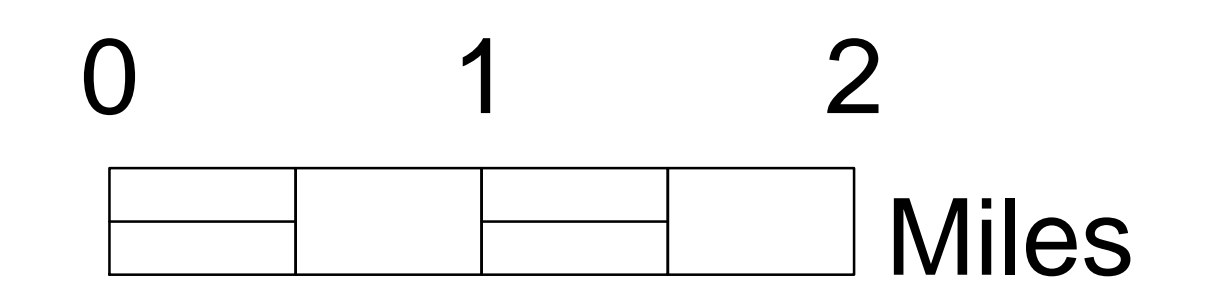
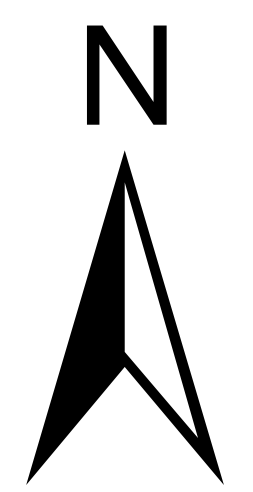
Source: MSB Assessment Dept.

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WILLOW COMMUNITY COUNCIL Map 4 Appendix A



- Legend**
- COMMUNITY COUNCIL BOUNDARY
 - CITY BOUNDARY
 - FUTURE PARK
- Ownership**
- BOROUGH
 - CITY
 - COOPERATIVE
 - FEDERAL
 - MENTAL HEALTH
 - NATIVE CORP
 - PRIVATE
 - PUBLIC UNIVERSITY
 - STATE
- Road Classification**
- HIGHWAY
 - SECONDARY
 - MINOR
 - NOT CONST'D
 - PRIMITIVE
 - PRIVATE



Source: MSB Assessment Dept.

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WILLOW COMMUNITY COUNCIL Map 5

Appendix A

Legend

 COMMUNITY COUNCIL BOUNDARY

 FUTURE PARK

Ownership

 BOROUGH

 CITY

 COOPERATIVE

 FEDERAL

 MENTAL HEALTH

 NATIVE CORP

 PRIVATE

 PUBLIC UNIVERSITY

 STATE

Road Classification

 HIGHWAY

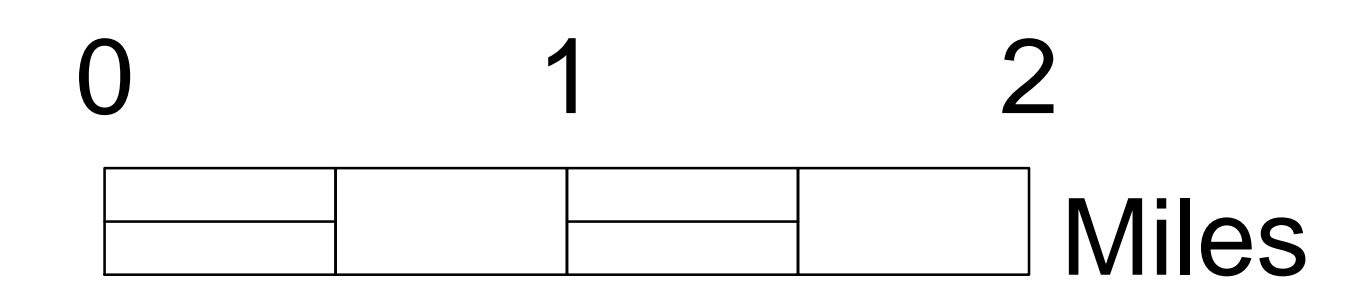
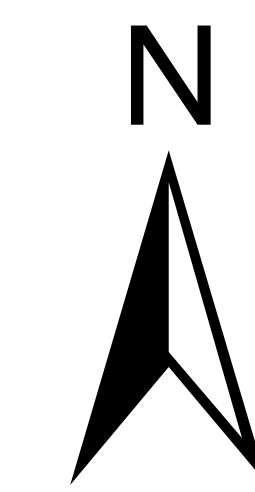
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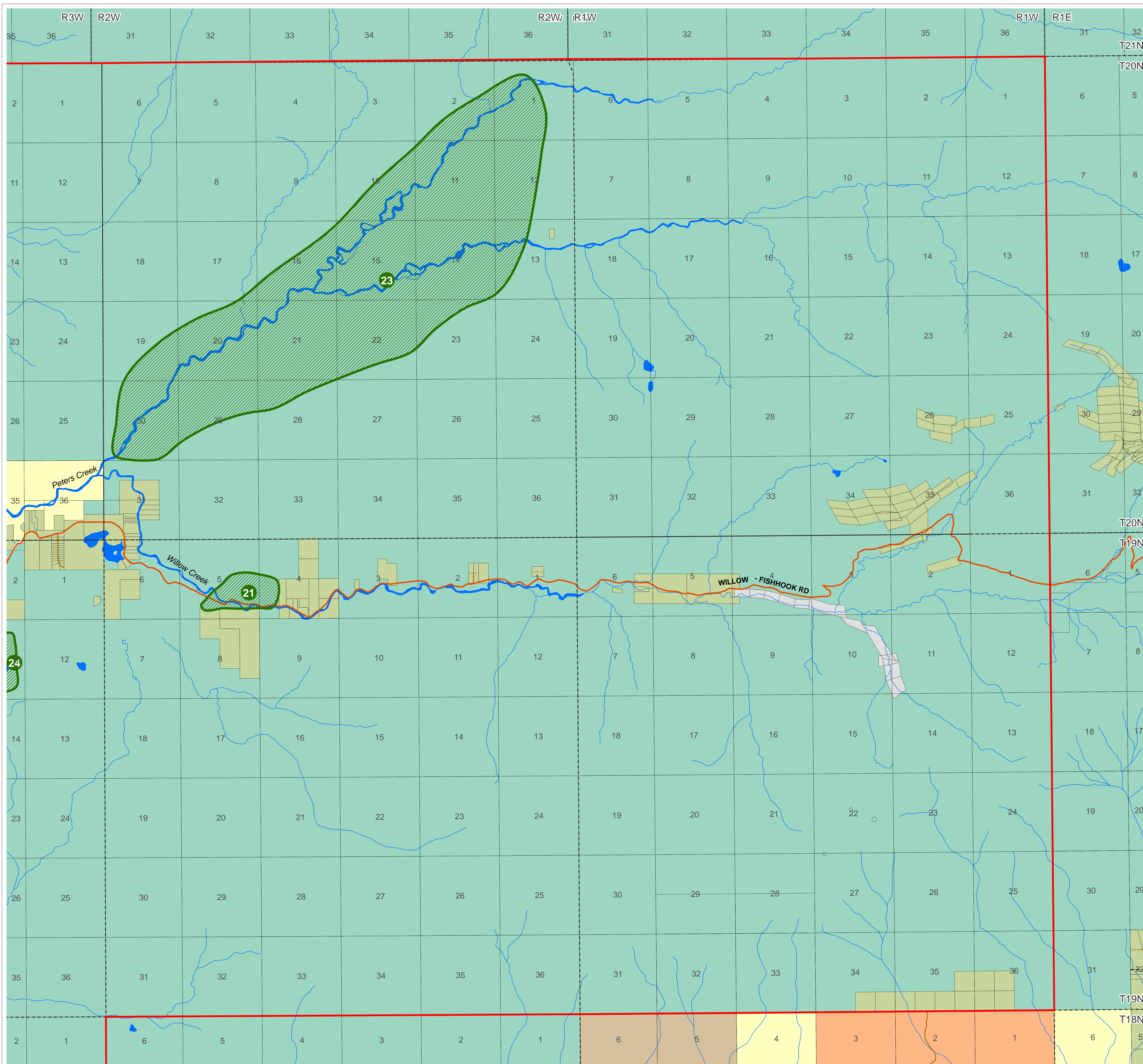
 PRIMITIVE

 PRIVATE



Source: MSB Assessment Dept.

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WILLOW COMMUNITY COUNCIL Map 6

Appendix A

Legend

COMMUNITY COUNCIL BOUNDARY

CITY BOUNDARY

FUTURE PARK

Ownership

BOROUGH

CITY

COOPERATIVE

FEDERAL

MENTAL HEALTH

NATIVE CORP

PRIVATE

PUBLIC UNIVERSITY

STATE

Road Classification

HIGHWAY

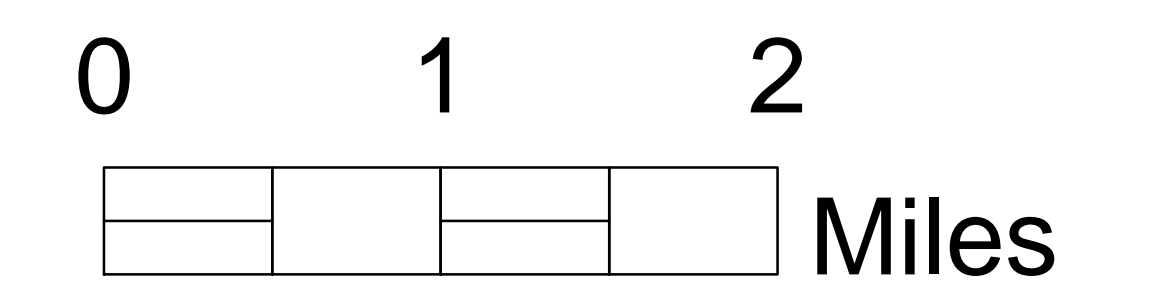
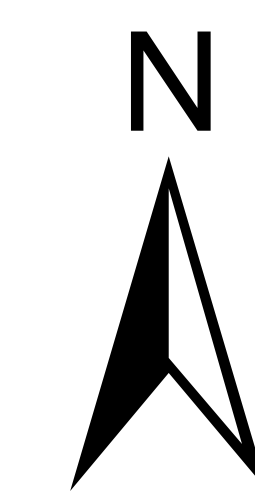
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MINOR

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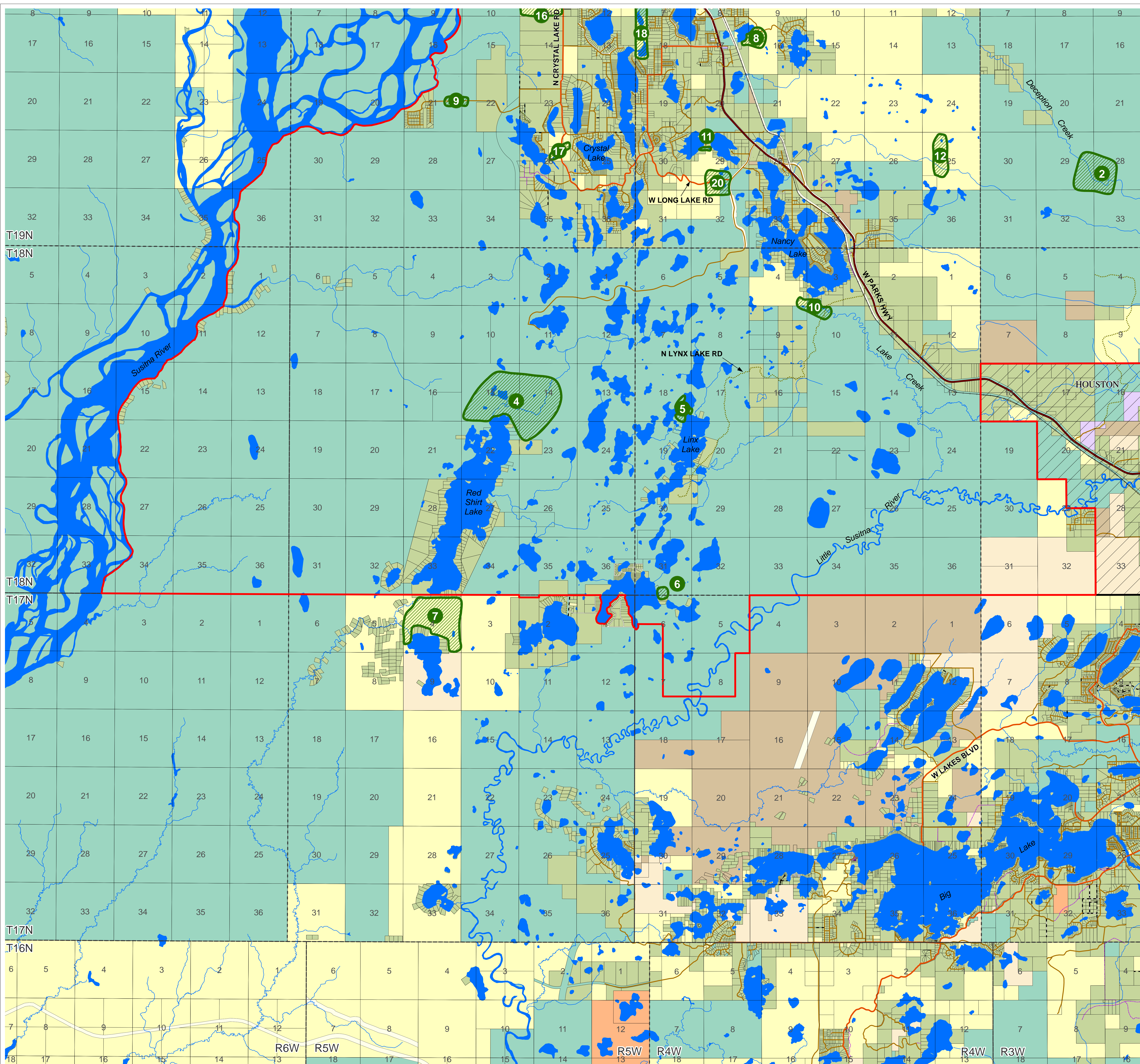
PRIMITIVE

PRIVATE



Source: MSB Assessment Dept.

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CODE OF THE WEST



It is important for you to know that life in the country is different from life in the city. Borough governments are not able to provide the same level of service that city governments provide. To that end, we are providing you with the following information to help you make an educated and informed decision to purchase rural land.



ROADS AND ACCESS

The fact that you can drive to your property does not necessarily guarantee that you, your guests and emergency service vehicles can achieve that same level of access at all times. Consider the following:

Emergency Response - Response times by law enforcement, fire suppression and medical emergency services may vary due, in part, to the Borough's geography, road conditions in bad weather, and the inadequacies of rural addressing. Emergency response to outlying areas can also be extremely slow and expensive.

Legal access - The existence of an unobstructed road to your property does not guarantee the road will remain open in the future or that you will have unlimited access. The road may cross another property. With the assistance of a title company or private attorney, verify existing easements and ensure that all necessary ingress/egress easements are in place.

Road Maintenance - The Borough maintains about 1,014 miles of roads. Many rural properties are accessed by public easements, which are not maintained by the Borough Public Works Department. Some public easements are not maintained on a regular basis or maintained by

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anyone! It is very important to know if your property is accessed by a public easement or a Borough maintained road, what type of maintenance to expect, and who will maintain it.

Private Road Standards - Emergency service and large construction vehicles may encounter problems navigating small narrow roads. To address this issue, the Borough adopted code requiring access roads to be built to a certain standard. For more information, contact the Borough Public Works Department or check out the website www.matsugov.us or call (907) 745-9802.

Extreme Weather Driving - In extreme weather conditions, roads (including Borough maintained roads) can become impassable. You may need a four-wheel drive vehicle and/or chains for all four tires to travel safely during storms, which can last for several days.

Natural Disasters - Natural disasters, especially floods, can destroy roads. A frozen creek can become a raging torrent and wash out roads, bridges and culverts. Property owners served by private roads and subdivision roads are responsible for the repair and reconstruction of damaged roads and structures, which can be very expensive.

Paving - If an existing road is unpaved, it is highly unlikely that the Borough will pave it in the foreseeable future. If the seller of any property indicated that the road will be paved - be careful! Contact the Borough Public Works Department to verify the status of the road and any future plans for the road.

Vehicle “Wear and Tear” - Because unpaved roads are typically rough and slippery in wet weather, vehicle maintenance costs may increase when you regularly travel on these roads.

Construction Costs/Delays - It may be more expensive and time consuming to build a rural residence due to delivery fees.

Mail, Newspaper and Parcel Delivery - Regular mail, newspaper and/or parcel delivery may not be available in all areas of the Borough. Check with the postmaster, local newspaper office and parcel delivery services in your area. Delivery fees may also be higher than within a city.

School Buses - School buses travel only on roads that have been designated as school bus routes by the school district. It may be necessary to drive your children to the nearest publicly maintained road to catch the school bus. Check with the school district to determine the appropriate school bus route for your area.

UTILITY SERVICES

Utility services, such as water, sewer, electric and telephone may be unavailable in rural areas or may operate at a lesser standard than in cities. Also, repairs and maintenance may take longer and could be more expensive.

Electric Service - Electric service is not available to all areas of the Borough. Because costs to extend power lines can be prohibitive in certain areas, some property owners use a generator or alternative power sources such as solar or wind-powered systems. The cost of electric service

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includes a fee to tie in to the existing utility system and a monthly usage charge from the local utility company. There may also be underground trenching costs, material costs and electrician fees. In some cases, it is necessary to cross your neighbor's property to bring power to your property (either overhead or underground lines). It is important to verify the existence of existing easements, or to obtain the proper easements prior to construction of the power lines. It is important to determine your power needs and level of service availability. Also, due to ongoing development and limited utility line capacity, electric power that is available today may not be available when you decide to build. If you are purchasing land with the plan to build at a future date, there is a possibility that electric lines (and other utilities) may not be large enough to accommodate you, if others connect during the time you wait to build.

Power Outages - Power outages can occur in outlying areas more often than in more developed areas. Loss of electricity can interrupt your well water supply, interrupt your communications systems, cause food to spoil in refrigerators and freezers and possibly damage computer and electronics equipment. It is important to be able to survive in rural areas without utilities for at least a week in severe cold weather.

Water - Treated domestic water service is not available in Willow. The most common means is to drill a private well. Some residences also rely on hauling water or have it delivered by a commercial outfit. Hauling water can be an arduous task and requires a vehicle and/or a trailer large enough to carry a very large water tank. Depending on how much water your family uses, the tank may have to be filled frequently.

Sewer/Septic Service - Sewer service is not available in most rural areas. Since sewer service is not available, you will need an approved septic system or other treatment process. The type of soil available for a leach field is very important in determining the cost and function of a new septic system. In some cases, a standard septic system will not work (based on soil conditions) and an alternative septic system is required. Alternative systems can be very expensive (they could exceed \$20,000). If there is an existing septic system on the property, it should be checked by a reliable sanitation service. Some existing septic systems may have been installed without the required permits and, therefore, could be inadequate. You are strongly urged to work with a private engineer and the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (www.alaska.gov) to determine the adequacy of an existing system, the type of new system you might need and associated costs.

Telephone Service - Rural telephone services can range from full telephone service, to cellular phone service only, to no service at all. It may also be difficult to obtain additional telephone lines for fax or computer modem use.

Trash Removal - Trash removal can be a challenge in a rural area. In some cases you may be able to contract with a private solid waste hauler, or there may be a dumpster located within an acceptable distance from your home. In more remote areas, the most viable option may be to haul your trash to a landfill or a solid waste transfer station. It is important to know that it is illegal to create your own trash dump, even on your own property. Residential recycling pick-up is not available in most rural areas.

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WIDE OPEN SPACES

There are many issues that can affect your decision to purchase a piece of property. It is important to research these items prior to your purchase.

Easements - Existing easements on your property may require you to allow construction of roads or power lines across your land. These existing easements may also prevent you from building your residence, accessory buildings, or fences where you want to locate them. All legally recorded easements should be disclosed in your title report. Check with your real estate agent, title company, or the State Recorder's Office to identify all existing recorded easements.

Mineral Rights - Many property owners do not own the mineral rights on/under their property. This information may be included in your deed or in your title report. Owners of these rights can change the surface characteristics in order to extract mineral deposits. Much of the land in the Borough can be used for mining. A special review by the Planning Commissioners is usually required.

Property Plat/Registered Survey - The only way to verify the location of property lines is by having a registered land surveyor survey and mark the property corners. Before building permanent structures, it is the property owner's responsibility to accurately identify property lines.

Fences - Fences that separate properties are often not aligned accurately with the property lines and should not be relied on to identify property boundaries. Again, the survey done by a Registered Land Surveyor is the only way to confirm the location of your property lines.

Deed Restrictions/Covenants, Conditions and Restrictions (CC&Rs) - Some subdivisions and individual parcels have covenants and/or deed restrictions that limit the use of the property. These documents are private agreements and are not enforceable by the Borough. It is important to obtain a copy of the covenants/deed restrictions (or verify that there are none) and determine if you can live with the rules.

Homeowners Associations - Homeowners associations typically establish bylaws that outline how the organization operates and they may set monthly or annual dues. In some cases, they also enforce CC&Rs. You may be legally required to join the association, which often takes care of common elements, roads, open space, etc. A poorly managed homeowner association or poorly written covenants can result in problems for the property owner. Check with neighbors who have belonged to the association for a long time to determine its effectiveness.

The Future of Your Property - What surrounds your property now is not a good indicator of what the surroundings will look like in the future. Spectacular views can be replaced by structures if neighboring private parcels are developed. There is also no guarantee that surrounding public lands will remain undeveloped. Check with the State and Borough to find out what future developments may be in the planning stages.

Floodplains - Before you decide to build your home near a stream or river, consider the potential danger to your family and property. All surface water channels have an associated floodplain but

APPENDIX B

only larger ones have been studied and mapped. Consult the Borough Planning and Land Use Department regarding potential flood and drainage issues with your land. If there is an existing channel across your property, there is a possibility that it floods.

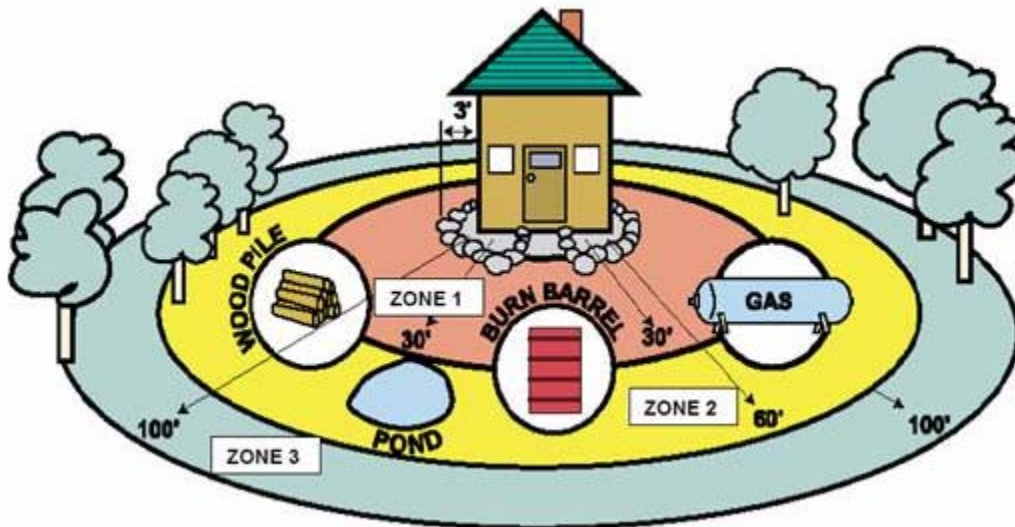
Streams - Water flowing in a stream may be subject to an existing water right. Do not assume that because water flows across your land, you can use it. Check with your neighbors and the State Water Rights Division to determine specific water rights.

MOTHER NATURE

Residents of rural areas may experience unique problems when the elements and the earth turn unfriendly. Here are some thoughts for your consideration.

Characteristics of Your Property - The physical characteristics of your property can be both positive and negative. Forested areas are a wonderful environmental amenity, but they can also increase the risk of your home becoming involved in a catastrophic forest fire. Defensible perimeters are very helpful in protecting buildings from forest fires and can also protect the forest from igniting if your house catches on fire. Building in a forested area can be as dangerous as building in a floodplain.

Fire Protection - Rural dwellers are expected to show a measure of self-reliance in protecting their home from fire. Protecting your home from wildfire starts with YOU. Please look around your home and see which of these FIREWISE fundamentals apply to you.



- **Be easy to find.** Have a readable address.
- **Be accessible.** Driveways and roads need to be able to accommodate emergency vehicles.
- **Create defensible space around your house.** Remove tall vegetation and keep ground cover low and remove other flammables within at least 30 feet of the house.
- **Cut down trees to create open space around your house.** By ensuring that trees or clumps of trees are properly spaced (suggested 20 feet apart at the canopy); you can help prevent flames from traveling from tree to tree in a solid front-or crown fire. Properly thinning trees within 100 feet of your home and eliminating those branches that overhang the roof can improve the chances of protecting your home from an advancing wildfire.

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- **Remove tall, dry grasses from the surrounding property.** Tall, dry grasses provide a path for fire that can lead directly to a house.
- **Remove leaves and pine needles from your roof and gutters.** During a fire, debris on the roof and/or in the gutters could be ignited by flying embers.
- **Remove “ladder fuels.”** Prune tree limbs so the lowest is between 6’-10’ from the ground. Fire burning through tall, dry grass could ignite these limbs and climb to the top of the tree with relative ease.
- **Check your gas-powered equipment and garden hoses to be sure they are in good repair.** Yard equipment needs annual maintenance and proper fueling. During wildland fire season, fuel your lawn mower properly—away from dry, flammable grasses. Hoses develop leaks and deteriorate with age and exposure.
- **Prune bushes and shrubs regularly.** Remove excess growth as well as dead leaves and branches to decrease their flammability and the threat they could pose during a wildland fire.

Dust - Because of the Borough’s climate, dust is a common rural characteristic. Large amounts of windborne dust can be generated from unpaved dirt or gravel roads. If you or anyone in your family suffers from respiratory ailments, it is important to consider how the dust may affect your health. Dust will always be a reality in rural areas.

Snow Accumulation - North facing slopes may rarely see direct sunlight in the winter. There is a possibility that large amounts of snow will accumulate and not blow away throughout the winter. In these conditions, keeping an access road open can be difficult and expensive.

Topography - The topography of the land can tell you where water will drain during rain storms and snow melt conditions. When property owners fill in washes, the natural drainage may be rerouted toward your house or your neighbor’s.



Wildlife - Nature provides us with some wonderful neighbors. Most, such as salmon and eagles are positive additions. However, animals can cross the road unexpectedly and cause serious traffic accidents. If you do not handle your pets and trash properly, they could cause problems for you and the wildlife that lives around you. Rural development encroaches on the traditional habitat of coyotes, black and brown bears, moose, mosquitoes and other animals that can be dangerous to humans. Generally speaking, it is best to enjoy wildlife from a distance. Alaska Department of Fish and Game offers many free publications on living with wildlife.

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IN CONCLUSION

Even though you pay property taxes to the Borough, the amount of tax collected does not cover the cost of services provided to rural residents.

Since the rural areas of the Borough will not change immediately to accommodate your lifestyle or expectations, you should be prepared to adapt accordingly. You are encouraged to be vigilant in exploring and thoroughly examining any issues related to a rural existence that could affect your decision to relocate to this area. The information presented in the Code of the West is not intended to discourage you, only to give you a true and accurate picture of rural living in the Willow Area of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, Alaska.