53. RECREATION

53.1 Introduction

The recreation study inventoried, described, quantified, and mapped the outdoor recreational resources and activities in the Cook Inlet drainages study area. The study had two objectives:

- Describe the location, use, and management status of important recreational resources in the study area.
- Describe, quantify, and map important recreational activities and their locations.

The regional study area for the recreation study in the Cook Inlet drainages comprises three overlapping study areas: the land use study area, the sportfishing study area, and the big game hunting study area (Figure 53-1). For practical reasons the regional study area's northern and southern boundaries were flexibly defined to fit the recreational resources, activities, and related databases:

- The land use study area includes the coastal strip of uplands bounded on the west by the Bristol Bay/Cook Inlet drainages boundary, on the east by Cook Inlet, on the north by Lake Clark National Park, and on the south by Katmai National Park. (The parks straddle the drainages boundary; however, because most of their recreational use occurs west of the boundary, the parks are discussed in their entirety in Chapter 25, Recreation—Bristol Bay Drainages.) The land use study area includes the islands, tidelands, and submerged lands south of Redoubt Bay to Cape Douglas.
- The sportfishing study area is based on the Alaska Department of Fish and Game's (ADF&G's) sportfishing management areas and includes the 3,044 square miles of uplands in management Area N (West Cook Inlet-West Susitna River drainages), parts of which are in national parks. It also includes all of Area N's marine waters from the west coast to the middle of Cook Inlet and from the mouth of the Susitna River on the north to Cape Douglas, south of Kamishak Bay.
- The study area for big game hunting includes ADF&G's game management unit 9A and a portion of unit 9C, which stretch along the west coast of Cook Inlet and inland to cover 4,305 square miles. Parts of this study area are within national park boundaries.

Within the regional study area is the smaller central study area, which encompasses a coastal area surrounding Iliamna and Iniskin bays and extending westward to the boundary between the Cook Inlet and Bristol Bay drainages. The central study area coincides with the Cook Inlet drainages study area depicted on Figure 1-4 in Chapter 1.

Research was conducted using the Kenai Area Plan, ADF&G resource and management reports and documents, and unpublished data records, supplemented by personal interviews,

web searches, and other unpublished sources. Unless otherwise noted, sportfishing data are from 1999 through 2005 and hunting data are from 2000 through 2006.

53.2 Results and Discussion

The regional study area is remote, unpopulated, and lacks transportation improvements. It consists of coastal uplands and extensive tidelands and submerged lands. Wildlife includes fish, otters, seals, sea lions, whales, several species of birds, brown bears, and moose. Under the Kenai Area Plan, the primary use designation for most state uplands in the land use study area is habitat management, while most tidelands and submerged lands are designated for recreation (ADNR, 2001). The main recreation activities are fresh and saltwater sportfishing, big game hunting, and wildlife viewing. Other recreational uses of state and private lands in this region—for example, backcountry camping and hiking, wildlife viewing, and flight-seeing—are not counted in any systematic way and may go unnoticed.

The ownership of the lands in the land use study area is a mix of state, federal, Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act Native corporation, Alaska Native allotment, and private ownership. All these lands are primarily undeveloped wilderness. There are four active recreational lodges in the study area, all near freshwater sportfishing locations. Two lodges feature primarily wildlife viewing. There are no other developed recreational facilities in the land use study area.

ADF&G's Sport Fish Division manages Alaska's sport fisheries. Freshwater sportfishing in the sportfishing study area was light. For example, ADF&G reported no activity or catch for Iliamna Bay. The average annual number of sportfishing days in the study area during 1999 through 2005 was 2,126 and the average annual catch totaled 13,325 fish; an annual average of 883 fish were harvested. The primary species caught were coho salmon, Dolly Varden, and chum salmon, with a minor catch of king salmon and rainbow trout. No clear freshwater sportfishing trends were established other than the erratic return of salmon species.

The sportfishing study area's marine waters support modest saltwater sportfishing. There are no developed small-boat facilities, and distances from developed facilities range between 32 and 95 miles. The primary saltwater species is Pacific halibut. In lower Cook Inlet, the average annual days fished during 1999 through 2005 were 779, average number of anglers was 526 per year, and average number of trips was 448 per year, with an average annual harvest of 801 fish. In upper Cook Inlet, the annual averages were 947 angler days, 735 anglers, and 632 trips, with an average annual harvest of 1,016 fish. Western Cook Inlet is one of the state's two major razor clam sport-harvest areas. The average annual harvest for the sportfishing study area was 20,597 during the study period. There is some harvest of hard-shell clams from bays in study area.

ADF&G's Division of Wildlife Conservation manages and regulates big game hunting in Alaska. The primary target species in the hunting study area are brown bear, moose, and caribou. Most hunters travel to hunting locations by aircraft. For management purposes, the brown bear hunt is open only in odd-numbered regulatory years. Guided hunts accounted for the majority of the bear harvest in the study area, and nonresident hunters took the majority. One hundred sixty-

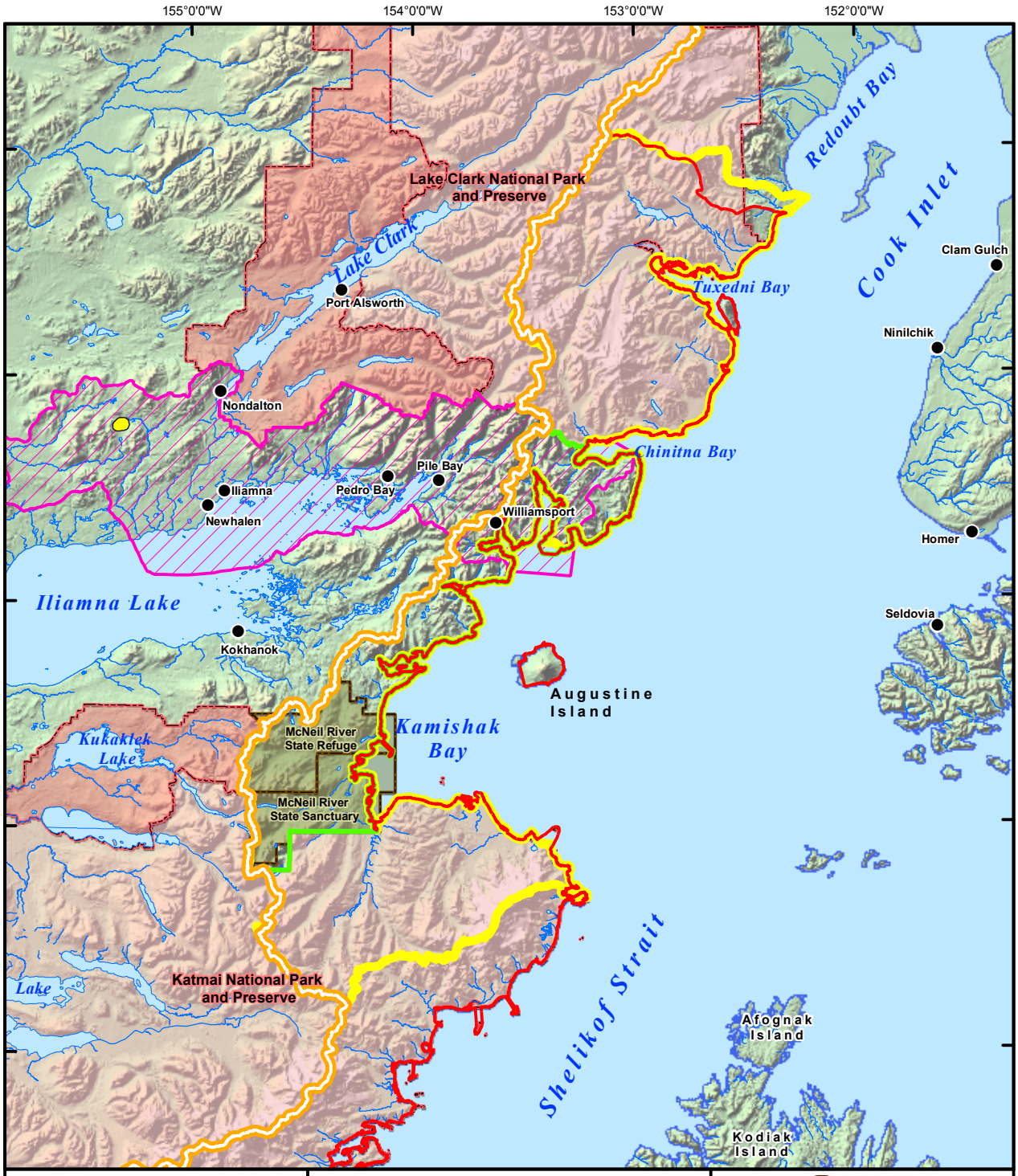
four brown bears were harvested in the study area in 2000 through 2005, and annual figures were relatively stable.

From 2000 through 2005, 105 moose hunters visited the hunting study area, and 36 moose were harvested, almost exclusively in September. Approximately two-thirds of hunters were nonresidents, and many employed guide services. Annual figures suggest a downward trend in moose hunting and harvest. The study area is outside the range of the primary regional caribou herds, so caribou hunting was light. From 2000 through 2005, 28 hunters reported a harvest of 13. Hunting activity was too low to permit analysis of any trend.

There are several destinations in the regional study area for wildlife viewing and photography, particularly of brown bears; the most important is the McNeil River State Game Sanctuary and Refuge. Public access to the sanctuary is limited and is obtained through a lottery system. In 2006, 183 lottery winners spent 970 days in the sanctuary. Visits to other bear-viewing locations are increasing, as are guided bear-viewing and photography trips and flights. The regional study area's rugged terrain limits opportunities for river sports. Because of the study area's remoteness, sport hunting for waterfowl is not popular.

53.3 References

Alaska Department of Natural Resources (ADNR). 2001. Kenai Area Plan. Division of Mining, Land, and Water, Anchorage, AK.



0 5 10 15 20 25 Miles

0 10 20 30 Kilometers

N

Scale 1:1,500,000

Alaska State Plane Zone 5 (units feet)
1983 North American Datum

Legend

- Bristol Bay/Cook Inlet Drainages Boundary
- Land Use Study Boundary
- Sportfishing Study Boundary
- Big Game Hunting Study Boundary
- Anadromous Streams
- Central Study Area
- National Park
- National Preserve
- McNeil River State Refuge and Sanctuary
- General Deposit Location
- Communities

Note: The Bristol Bay/Cook Inlet Drainage Boundary is the western boundary for all study boundaries depicted on this map.

THE pebble PARTNERSHIP

Figure 53-1
Recreation Regional Study Area
Cook Inlet Drainages
Study Boundaries for Land Use, Big Game Hunting, and Sportfishing

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