

DNR ORGANIZATION AND RESPONSIBILITIES FOR LAND AND RESOURCES PLANNING

Phase II Report to the Commissioner  
Alaska Department of Natural Resources

by

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PREFACE

Phase I of this study set forth the basis for comprehensive regional planning for Alaska's lands and resources. The report of February 9, 1979, designed an approach to regional planning oriented toward state program management and policy implementation.

Phase II focuses on organization and responsibilities for planning within DNR. The major concern of this report is on the respective roles of department-level planners, program divisions, and district offices.

Phase III will deal with planning methods and procedures for implementing Phases I and II. It will delve into the steps and elements of the planning process, detailing them in terms of what they are, how they should be prepared, by whom, and with whose participation, etc.; describing interrelationship among elements; allocating responsibility for review and decisions; etc. The relationship between various parts of the planning-management-action continuum will be thoroughly developed. Phase III will also chart ways for obtaining optimum public participation in the planning process, and will set forth procedures and methods for interagency and intergovernmental cooperation and coordination. In view of its scope and depth, Phase III will evolve the planning implementation program on a continuing basis as the regional planning program is pursued over the next couple of years.

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DNR PLANNING FOR LANDS AND RESOURCES\*

Regional planning is a process that can help the Department of Natural Resources create the necessary statewide and regional framework for land and resource management and decision making. The following are conclusions about DNR planning strategy:

1. Planning can give DNR (a) a useful policy, coordination, and management tool; (b) a common framework to guide functional plans and decisions of the various programs; and (c) a coherent basis for managing, programming, and budgeting the Department's work.
2. DNR regional planning can provide the Commissioner with the means to assure that all programs under his jurisdiction are pursued in accordance with policies established by him, the Governor, and the Legislature. It can assist in defining problems and program deficiencies, establishing policy and decision needs, and facilitating appropriate responses.
3. Recent legislation has put a heavy emphasis on planning as a foundation for land and resource management. DNR now has a well established commitment to statewide and regional planning.

\*Based on Phase I report of February 9, 1979.

4. The DNR regional planning program, now only in an embryonic state, should be consolidated at the department level. It should encompass the full scope of the Department and its programs. Only in that way can it serve the Commissioner and the entire Department as a guidance, coordination, and management tool. It is through the regional planning process that a statewide and departmentwide perspective can be infused into the various management programs.
5. A two to three year planning effort is recommended to cover the state's six macroregions. Built on a comprehensive planning basis, it will focus on all state lands and resources. The results are termed "regional resources action plans" (RRAPs) to emphasize the intensive, decision-oriented effort.
6. RRAPs will provide an overview of each region, and thus of the entire state; identification of goals, determinants, constraints, and other decision factors; inventory of state lands and resources; evaluation of carrying capability and productivity; assessment of development potentials; and analysis of alternatives.
7. RRAP product will lead to DNR program decisions and implementation: land uses and classification, disposal and retention determinations, establishment of management categories and reserves, resource disposal programs, preparation of functional plans, land exchanges, cooperative management arrangements, etc. RRAP's will also set priorities, schedules, and responsibilities for followup planning and implementation.

8. As necessary, "area resources action plans" (ARAP's) will apply the same type of regional planning process to areas targeted for special attention. Regional and area resources action plans can be pursued concurrently.
9. Cooperative arrangements with other state agencies will enhance DNR's land and resource planning program. Close liaison should be established with the regional transportation planning program of the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities. DOT/PF and DNR planning are highly complementary in concept and method; together, they are responsible for the principal components of regional development.
10. Successful action-oriented regional planning will require the closest possible participation by management program and district office staffs. The benefits will be reciprocal: planning will benefit from their particular knowledge, and their implementation of plans and programs will be more effective.

DNR PLANNING OFFICE--FUNCTIONS AND LOCATION

A Department-level planning office (PO) is proposed as the principal vehicle for regional planning and carrying out other central policy functions of the Department of Natural Resources. It functions for and in behalf of the Commissioner to assist him in carrying out state policies, directing land and resource management activities, and evaluating the quality and adequacy of the Department's work. Principal PO functions include:

- Policy analysis of issues and projects of concern to the State of Alaska, assigned to DNR or falling within its scope of jurisdiction, and requiring attention at the Commissioner level. Generally, these will be of Departmentwide concern, will involve two or more program divisions, or be interagency or intergovernmental in nature. In many instances, program units will actively participate in policy analysis with the PO.
- Coordination of programs and projects to assure that the various DNR policy, planning, management, and other activities are appropriately interrelated with each other and with policies of the State and the Commissioner.
- Program evaluation and innovation as needed to assure the Commissioner that program implementation is being carried out in accordance with departmental policies and plans. Where inadequacies are found to exist (and these may be due to lack of proper authorities and delegations, limited management or support services, budget deficiencies, or other factors), remedial action will be recommended. As program voids are discovered, appropriate new efforts can be designed.

- Planning and programming that focuses principally on (1) providing a departmentwide framework for the management of state lands and resources, (2) assuring that program division and district plans and programs conform to those of the whole Department, and (3) helping bring about a unified and balanced DNR effort for managing and developing Alaska's resources. (Elements of this category are discussed further in this report as well as in Phases I and III.)
  
- Information and research services that provide across-the-board data on lands and resources, management status, performance, and other information needed by program units, PO, and the Commissioner for planning, problem and issue analysis, monitoring and reporting, and other purposes.

All of these activities are staff functions. Accordingly, the planning office should organizationally be located at the Commissioner level rather than at the line function level with program management divisions. Such placement will accomplish several things:

- it puts the broad policy, planning, and coordination functions at the Department level, where they can most effectively serve the Commissioner in his overview responsibilities;
- it makes clear that the PO is a service arm of the Commissioner and its contacts with operating divisions are in his behalf;
- it achieves a clearer distinction and separation between the comprehensive planning and departmentwide responsibilities of P&P and the functional planning and management activities carried out by the Department's line divisions.



(I would note that is is not at all critical from the planning standpoint whether the department-level policy and planning unit is called a "division" or "office" or something else. The important thing is that the unit have a direct link to the Commissioner. It could, in fact, be considered or actually be a part of the Office of the Commissioner.)

JURISDICTIONAL ISSUES AND CONSIDERATIONS

Assuming, then, that the general policy and planning unit is placed at the Commissioner's level, we proceed to the more difficult tasks of defining the roles and responsibilities of the DNR planning office, program management divisions, and district office and establishing the relationships between them. The objectives and considerations that guide the approach to the issues are:

1. Planning should exist at each level and in each unit of the Department. Within each, planning must relate to and reflect its particular responsibilities and functions. Thus, we are at one end of the planning continuum talking about broad goals and policies and about comprehensive statewide and macroregional planning. At the other end, we are concerned with implementation planning, subdivision design for land disposal, sale or lease of specific resources, or financing capital improvements.
2. Planning at the various levels needs to function in support of the Department and its program missions. It should not unduly interfere with program operations.
3. Departmentwide planning activities, including regional planning, will in most instances require contributions of subjectmatter expertise of operating units and of the more intimate knowledge of different parts of the state by district staffs.

4. Insofar as possible, functional planning and implementation planning should occur at the level and within the unit responsible for particular functions and implementation. Such planning should be performed in the context of comprehensive regional and area resources action plans and the policies, directions, and guidelines established by them; as appropriate, it should be subject to review in order to assure appropriate conformance.
  
5. Allocation of responsibilities must be based on the best use of the Department's resources: personnel and their expertise, information systems, money, etc. In some cases, this may mean a given function is best performed on a departmentwide basis; in others, at the smallest operating unit or district level. Pertinent constraints need to be recognized: (a) occasional limited understanding and acceptance of planning its potential benefits; (b) absence or narrow scope of planning authority or direction in some program units; and (c) limited availability of personnel capable of doing effective planning: what planning staffs exist are already spread over many responsibilities, and most program staffs are similarly overextended.

Applying these objectives and limitations to actual planning and implementation processes within DNR will not result in neat definitions of roles or clean delineations of responsibilities. If anything, the focus must be on interrelationships and linkages, rather than on differences and separations. As repeatedly mentioned, we are dealing with a continuum or spectrum, from the broadest comprehensive statewide planning to specific implementation actions. This continuum should not be broken, for if it were,

planning would become meaningless and program implementation would continue to take place without any coherent framework.

Linkages between planning and implementation are highly important, both to make sure that regional planning is policy oriented and that it is also directed toward action programming. Likewise, implementation must recognize the broader framework within which individual program decisions and actions are taken. Establishing such linkages is not very easy, just as establishing a division of responsibility between planning and management units or between central and district operations is never a very clean job.

The answer, if anywhere, lies in flexibility and some overlapping of responsibility. This does not mean a duplication; rather, it means establishing some concurrent jurisdictions. Thus, at some point the work of the planning division stops, and follow-up planning and implementation becomes the responsibility of program management divisions or district offices. However, rather than this being the end of the exercise of departmental planning functions, these functions should continue on an assistance and oversight basis.

In summary, the planning-implementation continuum is characterized by interaction and interdependence. While responsibilities for certain phases and elements of this continuum can be fixed, that does not mean that the role or involvement of one unit ends when another unit takes on the responsibility for a particular stage. Rather, we are dealing with a process where more than one unit will participate in many of its components. Our principal task, therefore, is to define lead (not exclusive) responsibilities and to

clarify who participates where and how in the planning-implementation continuum.

ROLE OF PROGRAM DIVISIONS AND DISTRICT OFFICES

Line divisions and ADL district offices have different roles in the full spectrum of planning and implementation. Divisions cover a specific substantive or program area. Districts, on the other hand, have a fairly comprehensive concern for a particular geographic area.

Program Divisions

A principal purpose of regional resources action plans (RRAPs) is the designation of uses and management regimes for state lands and resources. Program divisions\* will play a crucial role in the process by -

- helping provide definitions, guidelines, criteria, and standards applicable to the subject matter covered by their programs;
- helping to determine needs and demands of their programs and to identify actions to meet such needs and demands;
- providing functional plans, insofar as these exist, as an input to the planning process;
- otherwise participating in the regional planning process, particularly in assessing potentials, determining compatibility and conflicts among prospective uses, and evaluation of alternatives.

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\* What is said here with regard to program divisions also applies to non-DNR agencies that may have special land or resource allocation needs, such as habitat protection.

Functional plans are potentially both an input to RRAPs and a result of comprehensive regional planning. Where functional plans exist (e.g., parks, oil and gas leasing), they help provide a ready point of departure for regional planning. RRAPs, in turn, will indicate how well such functional plans fit into the overall framework of state policies and regional land and resource use. Where there are no functional plans prior to the preparation of RRAPs (e.g., mining), regional plans will provide a basis for their preparation. (Eventually, RRAPs and functional plans together can provide the basis for consolidated, short-range (e.g., five year) action program covering all DNR programs and responsibilities.)

Interaction between the DNR planning office and program divisions will best take place on a one-to-one basis. The extent of involvement will depend on the needs of a line division and its interest in and potential for contributing to a particular phase of regional planning or the geographic area being planned. Unless each division has a role or interest, it should not be drawn into multi-divisional committees or other involvements that might not be productive and could result in wasteful use of their time and resources.

### District Offices

DNR's most intensive and extensive program implementation activities are carried out by district offices. They are responsible for actually managing the disposal of land and various resources, issuing permits for a variety of purposes, and managing the state public domain. The bulk of DNR's contacts with the public are handled at the district level.

District offices have complained mightily about problems and delays encountered as a result of the manner in which planning and classification have functioned in the past. Many of these difficulties will be eliminated as the planning approach of Phase I is implemented under Phase III, if for no other reason than that planning will be getting ahead of management decision making. Early delineation of use, disposal, and other management actions will eliminate the difficulties caused by ad hoc actions, particularly when these are exacerbated by inadequate staffs and communication. The following guidelines allocating roles and responsibilities should further assist in effective operations at all levels:

- Matters of departmentwide and statewide concern are principally the responsibility of the DNR planning office (PO).
- PO and RRAPs will provide the basis for district office (DO) implementation, including any guidelines needed for disposal and other district activities.
- DOs participate in PO regional planning for areas within their own districts. Their roles include major responsibility for public involvement, contracts with the private sector and local governments, and other liaison within their district boundaries. DO's will also play a part in resources inventorying, assessment of development potentials, evaluating alternatives, and other aspects of the planning process.
- DO's have lead responsibility for implementation planning and actual implementation.
- PO will have certain checkpoint or overview responsibilities to assure, on behalf of the Commissioner, that the followthrough on regional planning is in conformance with overall plans and policies. (This will apply



particularly when the Commissioner would have to take formal action on the basis of division or DO recommendations, as in the case of some land classifications.)

A grey area begins to appear at the area resource action plan (ARAP) level. In these cases, where subregional geographic units are subjected to more intensive and detailed planning, the DO role becomes yet more important. As the area of study narrows down to the community level. DO's can actually take over lead planning responsibilities, functioning within guidelines established under RRAPs and by PO.

Key to the assumption of an active planning role by DOs is the development of planning capabilities. This, of course, principally means adding qualified land use planners and site planners to district staffs.

Effective functioning of both planning and implementation activities can be facilitated by stationing a PO staff planner in each of the district offices. This will aid the flow of understanding and information, and will provide an individual within the PO who is aware of implementation requirements at the local level and can intercede on behalf of the district in the central office. The liaison planner could also help achieve better coordination between districts and statewide program divisions, a need identified at the district level.

Although an improvement in PO-DO interaction should result from the allocations of lead and participating roles according to the recommendations made in this report, real progress can only be achieved during the actual

regional planning process. Mutual involvement will lead to mutual understanding. Undertaking planning will help clarify roles, identify problems, define respective jurisdictions, and evolve further allocations of responsibilities.

Throughout, the general goal should be placing as much responsibility for planning at the district level as possible. This, however, must be done taking into account the need for statewide and departmentwide perspective, the limited program jurisdiction of district offices, and the very limited current planning capacity existing at the local level.

MATRIX OF RESPONSIBILITIES

Distribution of planning and related responsibilities among parts of the Department of Natural Resources is shown in the matrix on the following pages. The list of planning and decision activities is of necessity abbreviated; more complete details will be worked out as the program proceeds into Phase III.

Responsibilities and involvement are shown for the DNR planning office (PO), DNR's program divisions (DIV) and district offices of the Division of Forest, Land and Water Management (FLWM). (For our purposes, the specific control and other relations between FLWM and DOs is not of concern.)

Each activity on the matrix indicates what units have lead, participation, and review roles. Lead responsibilities will in all cases be based on statutory provisions, existing delegations, or assignments by the Commissioner. Resources action plans (RRAPs and ARAPs) will, as part of their products, include delineation of responsibilities for followup planning and implementation.

Participation in activities will generally be according to subject matter and area subject to planning and decision. An asterick (\*) indicates involvement of only those divisions that have a special interest or can make particular contributions. Review will generally occur as appropriate to advise the Commissioner regarding plans and actions of program units and district offices.