

FRED Reports

KENAI RIVER BUFFER ZONES AND BOAT ACCESS

by
Lowell S. Barrick

Number 43



Alaska Department of Fish & Game
Division of Fisheries Rehabilitation,
Enhancement and Development

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1. FOREWORD

The field data for this report was collected during the fall of 1983 when the Kenai riverbank erosion study was conducted. Time constraints for the erosion study did not allow this material to be included in that report. However, as this material is relevant to the erosion study, it has been prepared as a supplement to the Kenai Riverbank Erosion Study (FRED Report Number 41). The material in this report is most applicable to Section 7.3.2.2, Riparian Land-Bank Buffer Zone(s) and Section 7.3.2.3, River Access of FRED Report Number 41.

2. BUFFER ZONES (Section 7.3.2.2 in FRED Report Number 41)

Numerous governmental agencies have developed criteria for establishing buffer zones along rivers, streams, and lakes. These criteria are based on the following primary conditions: (1) slope of the land, (2) severity of the erosion problem, (3) kinds of existing vegetation, and (4) the type of development expected. Both the United States Forest Service (USFS) and the United States Agricultural Service (USAS) have buffer-zone criteria that are adaptable for use on the Kenai River; other systems for specifying buffer-zone limits may also be applicable. These systems do, however, require taking an inventory of the riparian topography: an action that will require the expenditure of manpower, finances, and most critical -- time.

There are many justifiable reasons why buffer zones should be established, and each reason could result in specifying zones of differing dimensions. As the riverbank environment provides critical habitat for the rearing of juvenile salmon and because of the rapid development that is occurring along the river, this writer feels that buffer zones need to be established right away. The proper way to establish buffer zone limits is to take an inventory of the 100 miles of riverbank between Skilak Lake and Cook Inlet, and then, using criteria that has been developed by the USFS or the USAS, establish limits for buffer zones on the Kenai River. Completing the inventory will take time, and because the Kenai River Management Authority is just becoming organized, it is suggested that provisional buffer zones be established on an interim basis while the buffer-zone criteria are being

established. This writer suggests using the following dimensions for the provisional buffer zones:

1. Low banks (less than 5' high) - 75' wide buffer zones
2. Medium banks (5' to 20' high) - 125' wide buffer zones
3. High banks (over 20' high) - 200' wide buffer zones

The purpose of the buffer zone is to maintain the riparian habitat in its natural state; therefore, heavy use such as house building, road construction, and vehicle traffic must be prohibited in the buffer zones. Light use such as tent camping and foot traffic may be permitted under controlled conditions; i.e., no tree cutting will be allowed and foot traffic will be permitted on designated trails only. The riverbanks must be protected.

3. RIVER ACCESS (Section 7.3.2.3 in FRED Report Number 41)

According to the Kenai River State Park Units Master Plan, 66 percent of the riverfront property between Skilak Lake and Cook Inlet is owned by individuals or private enterprises. Local governments own 15 percent, the State of Alaska owns 14 percent, and the federal government owns the remaining 5 percent. River access for boats is highly desired, and field inspections are continually revealing the construction of private boat-launching facilities. FRED Report Number 41 emphasizes that the ever increasing number of boat-launching sites and other bank alterations are having a deleterious affect on the riparian habitat. FRED Report #41 makes the point that the construction of hundreds of private boat-launching facilities and other bank alteration projects are not desireable from the standpoint of maintaining bank stability. Instead, boat access should be provided by a limited number of public constructed and operated launching facilities and by any commercial facilities authorized by the Kenai River Special Management Area Advisory Board. The reason for this recommendation is because a few (20-30) well-sited, well-constructed, and well-maintained

public boat-launching sites will provide the necessary access at a much less cost in destroyed riverbank habitat than will access systems comprised of dozens or possibly even hundreds of private facilities.

The following descriptions of potential boat-launching sites are based on cursory field inspections; i.e., the inspections were made on a visual basis only and without the benefit of topographical surveys or soils investigations. For these reasons and because the land value of private property is not known, there has been no attempt to estimate the project costs in developing launching facilities at those sites. The primary concern was locating sites where construction activities would have minimum impact on the adjacent habitat. If these sites are indeed selected for further study, then consideration must also be given to such factors as the possible impact on waterfowl and salmon rearing, the effects on the shore and boat fisheries, land availability, and regulatory matters such as construction permits. It is not expected that all 23 described sites will meet all the necessary development criteria. If construction is programmed for any of these sites, it is recommended that construction commence at sites that are already in use; i.e., improvement projects. Future development should proceed cautiously with construction at new (undisturbed) sites occurring only after all the sites, presently in use, have been developed to their full potential. This cautionary note is made with the conviction that the course of action to follow in protecting the Kenai River habitat and the salmon resource it nurtures is to disturb the riparian habitat as little as possible.

In the following site figures, the term RM refers to the site's approximate rivermile upstream of the river's mouth at Cook Inlet. Left and right bank are in reference to the river viewed downstream.

Boat-Launching Site 1 (Figure 1):

This site is located on the left bank, on the downstream side of the Warren Ames Bridge (RM 5.1), in Section 16, T5N, R11W, Seward Meridian. It is the site of an existing vehicle pull-off. It would be a relatively simple matter to enlarge the pull-off and to construct a boat-launching ramp. From

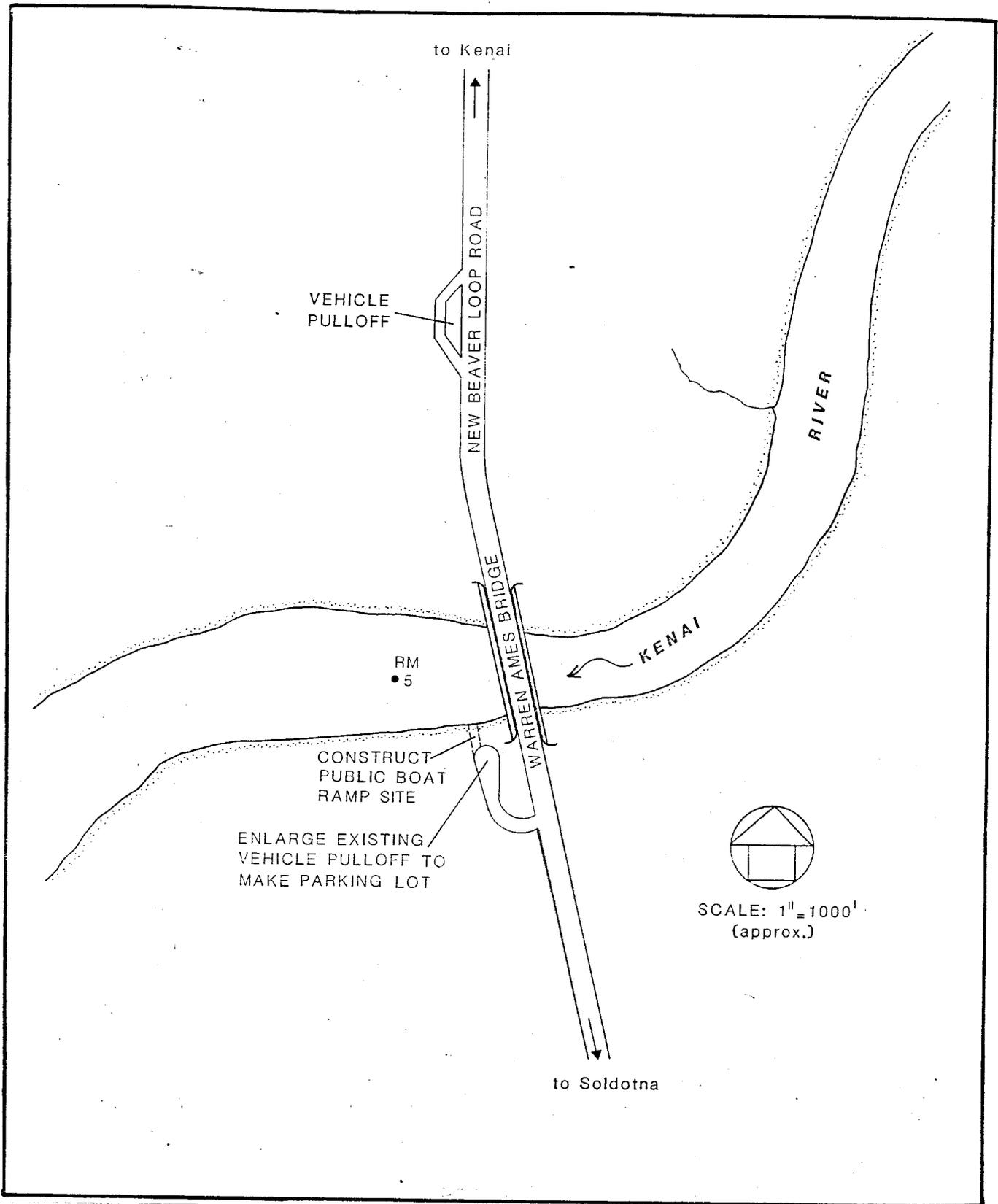


Figure 1. Boat launching site 1, located near RM 5.1.

this location, it is a short run for fishermen going to the Big Bend Drift fishery at RM 8.5. This site is state property, and land acquisition should not be a problem.

Boat-Launching Site 2 (Figure 2):

This site is located on the right bank, near RM 6.5, in Section 10, T5N, R11W, Seward Meridian and is within Cunningham Park, which is a Kenai Peninsula Borough facility. There is an existing primitive boat-launching facility at the park, but it needs major modifications to make it functional. The construction of a launching ramp would necessitate the purchase of adjacent private property to accommodate increased vehicle/trailer parking. A boat-launching facility at this location would put Kenai City fishermen in close proximity to the Big Bend Drift fishery at RM 8.5.

Boat-Launching Site 3 (Figure 3):

This site is located on the right bank of Beaver Creek, about 1/4 mile upstream from its outlet on the Kenai River; it is in Section 11, T5N, R11W, Seward Meridian. The preferred site is in the area where Ames Avenue joins Angler Drive. Two or three lots would have to be purchased in the Anglers Acres subdivision for this facility, but it would provide good vehicle access to the Beaver Loop Road and good boat access to the Kenai River at RM 10. If a public boat launch facility is constructed at Cunningham Park (Site 2), then this site will not be needed.

Boat-Launching Site 4 (Figure 4):

This location is known as Eagle Rock and is on the right bank, near RM 11.5, in Section 6, T5N, R10W, Seward Meridian. The site is on private property and there is an existing commercial boat-launching operation which is destroying the riverbank environment. A well-designed, well-maintained, and well-operated facility would accommodate many more users and would have much less detrimental impact on the riverbank environment.

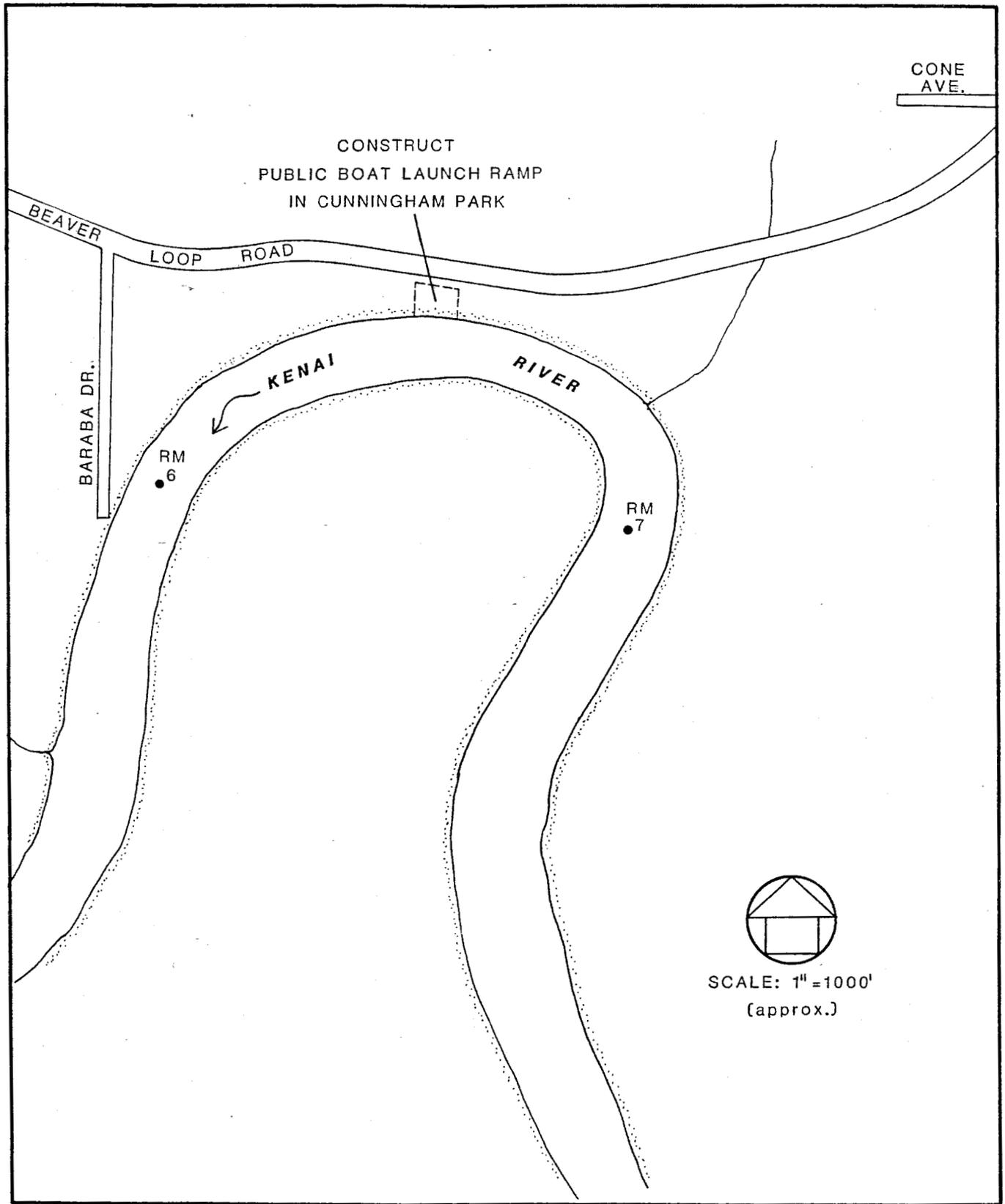


Figure 2. Boat launching site 2, located near RM 6.5.

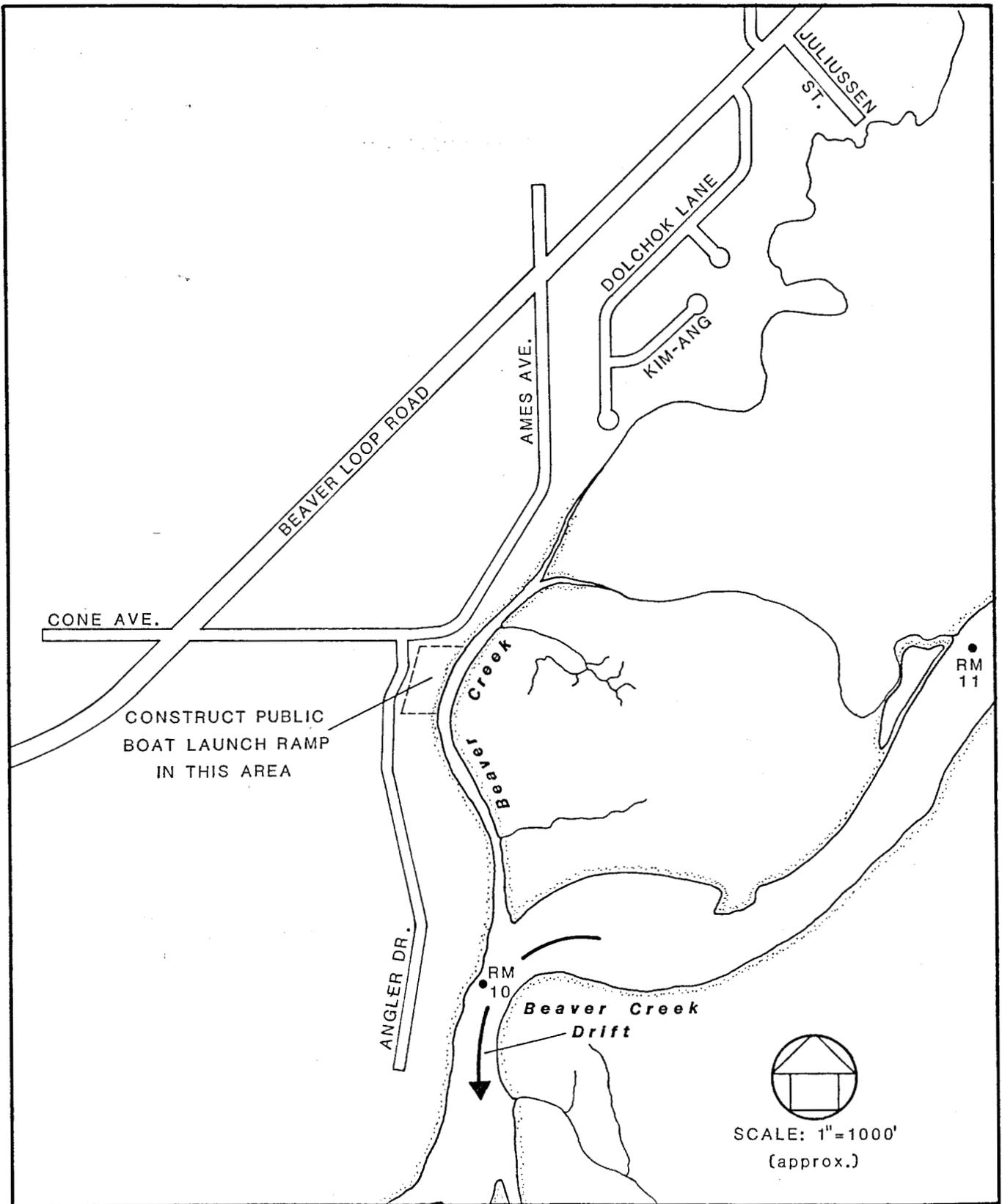


Figure 3. Boat launching site 3, located on Beaver Creek near RM 10.

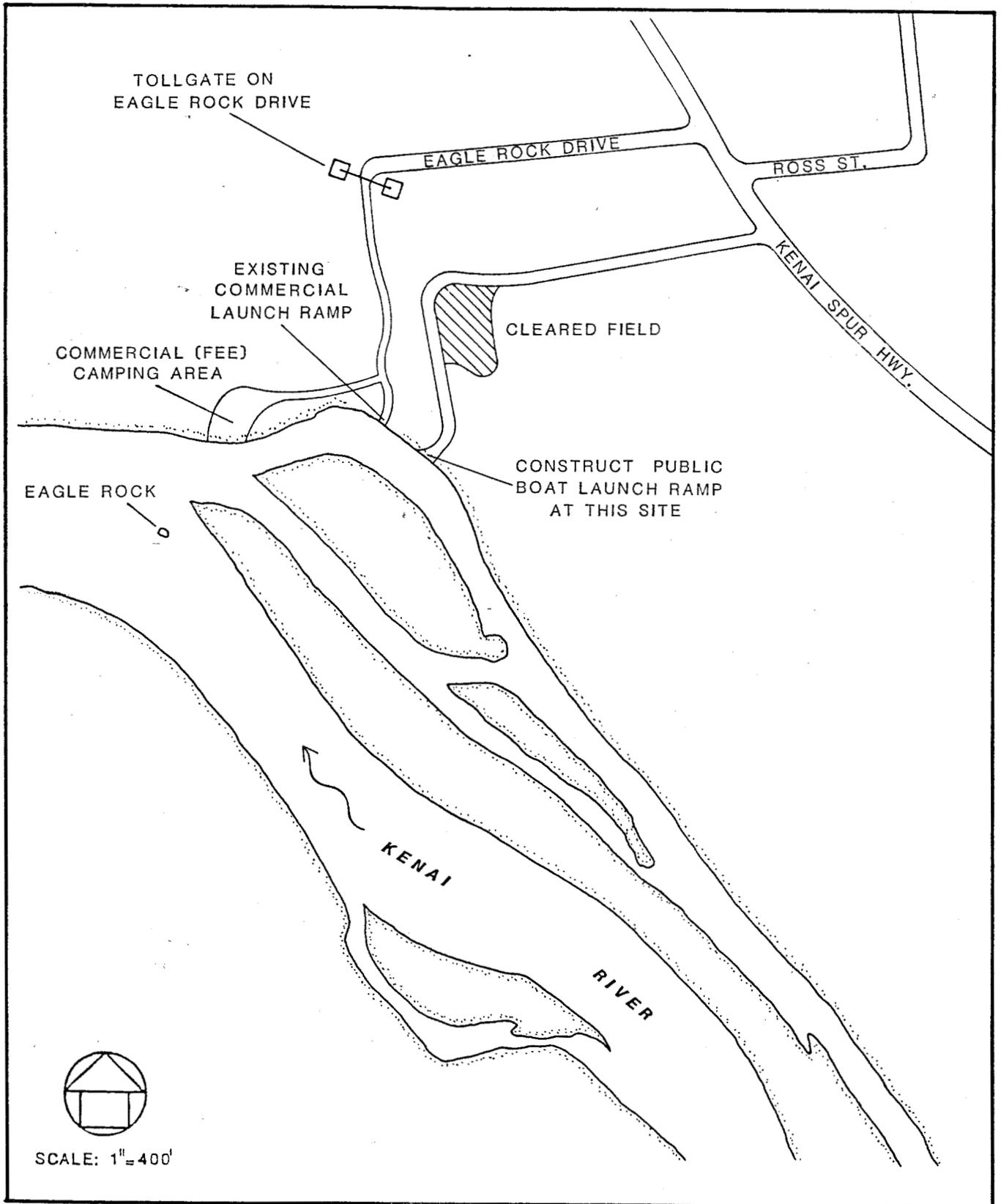


Figure 4. Boat launching site 4, located near RM 11.5.

If this site cannot be obtained for a public facility, then the present operator should be required to bring the facility up to standards, established by the Kenai River Special Management Area Advisory Board, or a public facility could be developed just upstream of the commercial site.

Boat-Launching Site 5 (Figure 5):

This site is located on the left bank, near RM 11.8, in Section 7, T5N, R10W, Seward Meridian. As with Site 4, this private property is undergoing commercial development. A camper park and boat-launching facility was being developed in July/August 1984. This is a good boat-launching site, but initial observations indicate that development has proceeded in a doze and fill manner; i.e., doze overburden off the roadways and fill in the river. It may be too late for a governmental agency to develop a launching facility at this site, but the present developer's actions need to be regulated.

Boat-Launching Site 6 (Figure 6):

This site is located on the right bank, near RM 12.2, in Section 7, T5N, R10W, Seward Meridian. It is on private property, and both access roads are closed by gates, which are located just off the Kenai Spur Highway. If the necessary property were purchased and proper access obtained, this site would be readily available to users from the Kenai Spur Highway. This site would be best suited for car top boaters (canoes/inflatables) as the access is a shallow channel. Provisions could possibly be made to accommodate a shore-based fishery.

Boat-Launching Site 7 (Figure 7):

This site is located on the right bank, near RM 13, in Section 18, T5N, R10W, Seward Meridian. It is on private property, and access is by the same road system described for Site 6. The proposed site is a small pond that is known locally as Honeymoon Cove. Honeymoon Cove is reported to be a feeding area for wild fowl, and it is a rearing area for juvenile salmon. For these reasons, this location may be unsuitable for boat launching operations. As

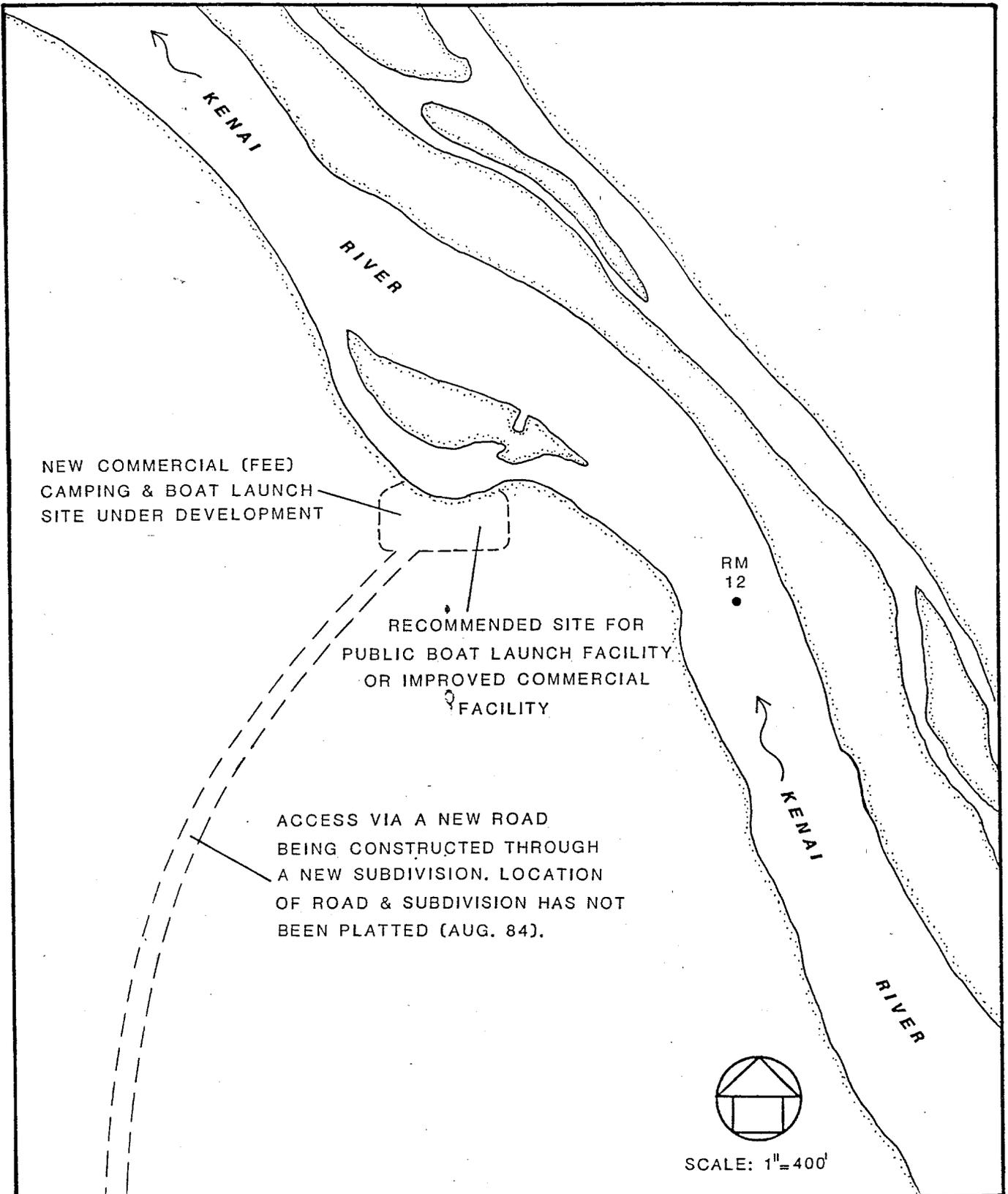


Figure 5. Boat launching site 5, located near RM 11.8.

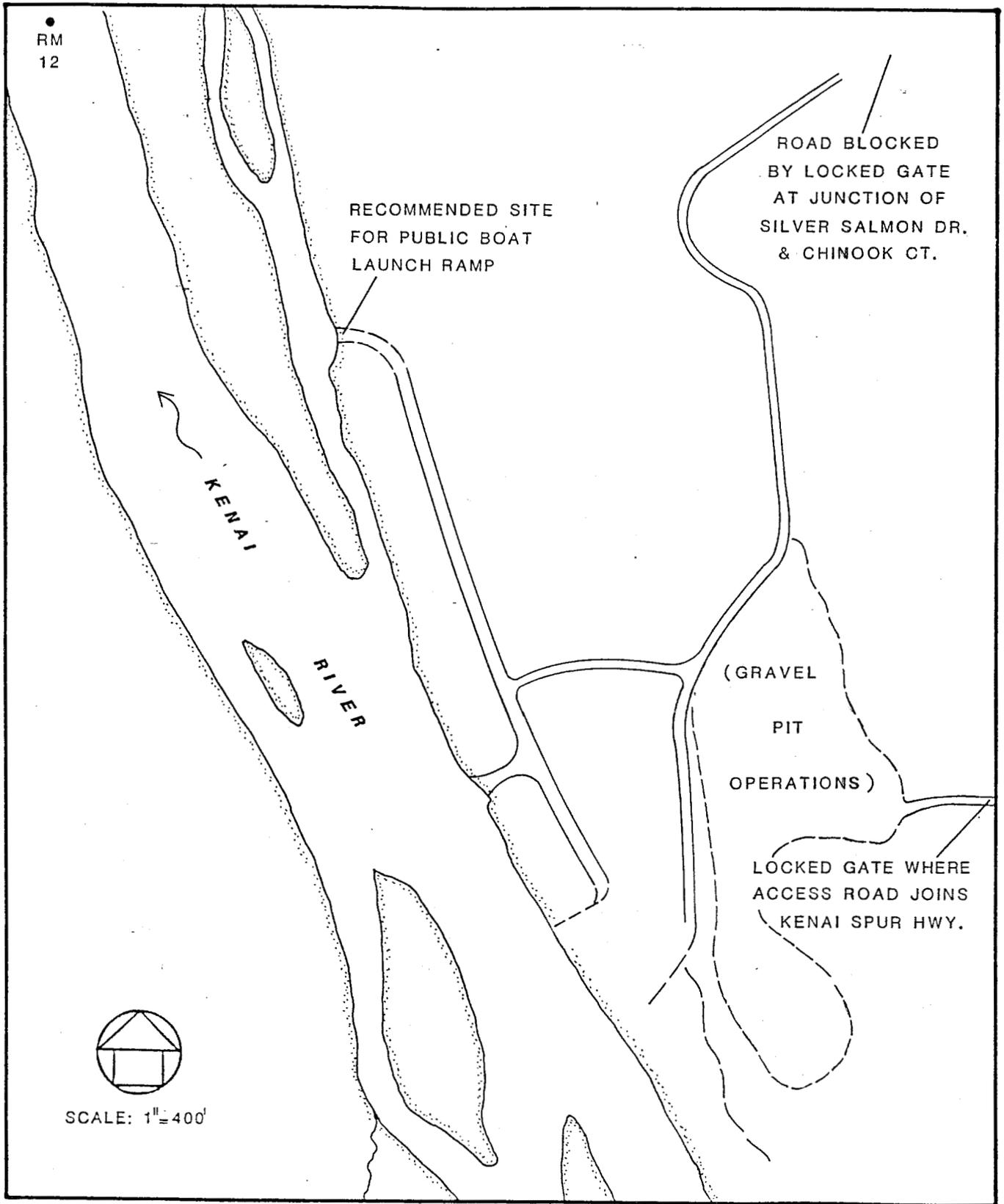


Figure 6. Boat launching site 6, located near RM 12.2.

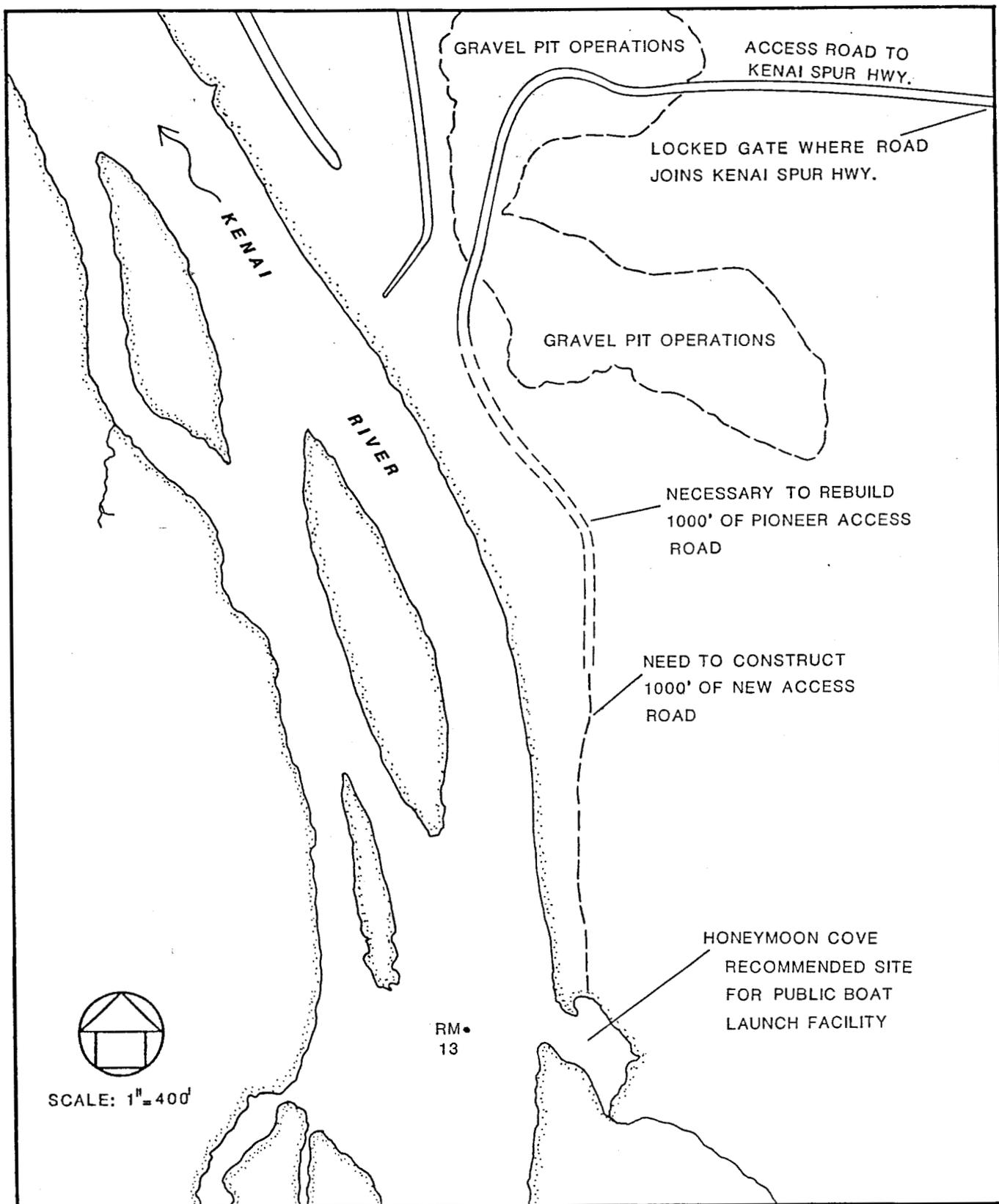


Figure 7. Boat launching site 7, located near RM 13.

Sites 6 and 7 are less than one mile apart, it would not be necessary to develop both sites. The choice of which site to develop would depend upon field data yet to be obtained.

Boat-Launching Site 8 (Figure 8):

This site is located on the left bank, near RM 15.5, in Section 24, T5N, R11W, Seward Meridian. This is the location of the Ciechanski State Recreational Site. The Department of Natural Resources owns this land and has plans for developing it for recreational purposes. The property fronts on a relatively fast section of the river, so it is not particularly well suited for a boat-launching facility. However, the river is on a straight reach at this point, and the bank appears to be stable, so a launching site for light boats, such as rubber rafts and canoes for downstream float trips, may be feasible. Access would be via Ciechanski Road and Porter Road.

Boat-Launching Site 9 (Figure 9):

This site is located on the right bank, near RM 15.6, in Section 24, T5N, R11W, Seward Meridian. The proposed launching site is on the same meander loop as the Big Eddy State Recreational Site but is north of it and would open onto the river in the lee of a large island. The launching site would be across the Kenai River, south of the southwest corner of the Ciechanski State Recreational Site. Access could be through the Big Eddy State Recreational Site or, perhaps, developed by extending Riverside Lane or Birch Circle. Acquiring land and constructing an access road and vehicle parking may prove troublesome, but the location would make a good launching site.

Boat-Launching Site 10 (Figure 10):

This proposed site is located on the left bank, near RM 19, in Section 36, T5N, R11W, Seward Meridian. It is inside the Slikok Creek State Recreational Site. The launching site would be at the mouth of Slikok

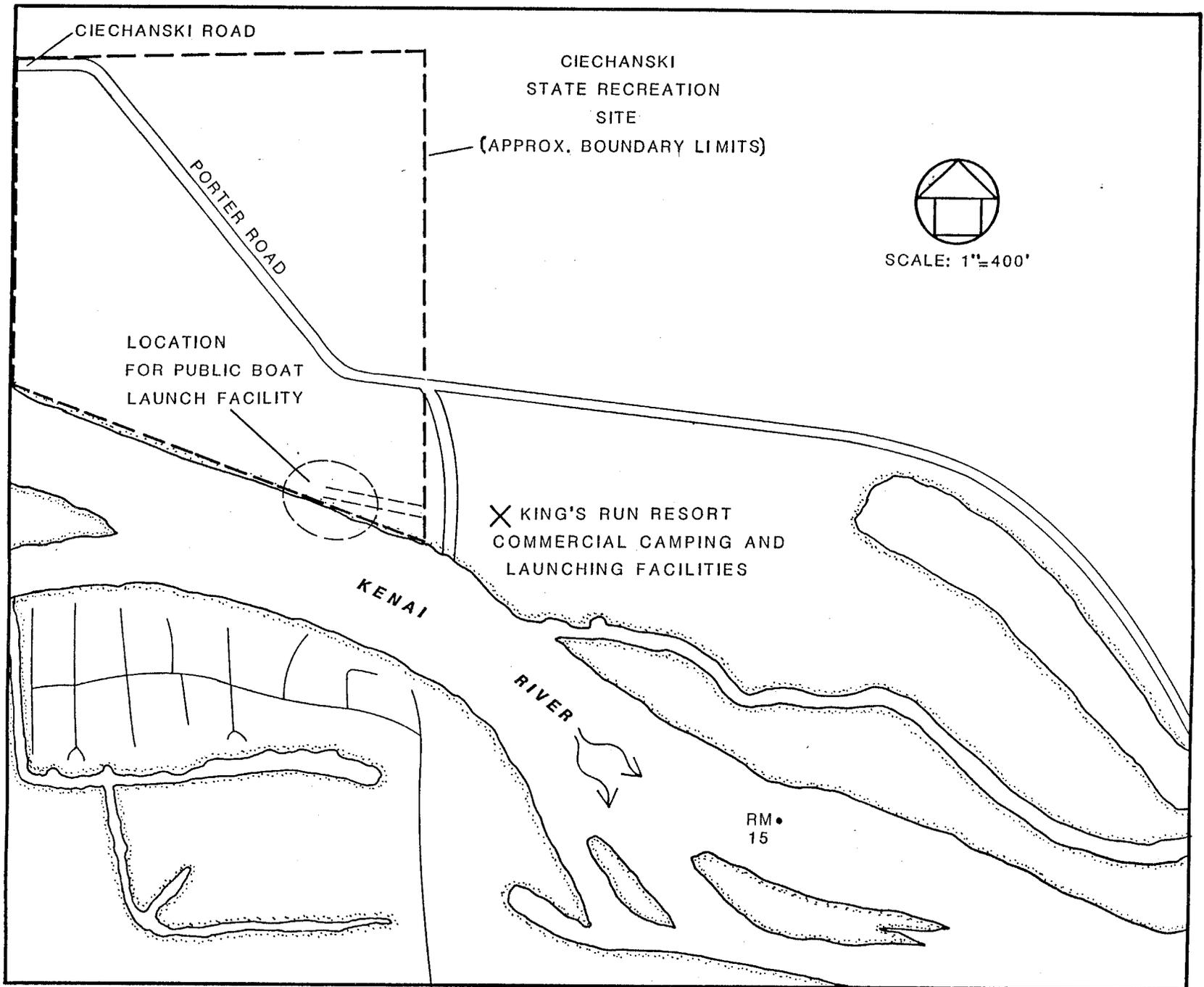


Figure 8. Boat launching site 8, located near RM 15.5.

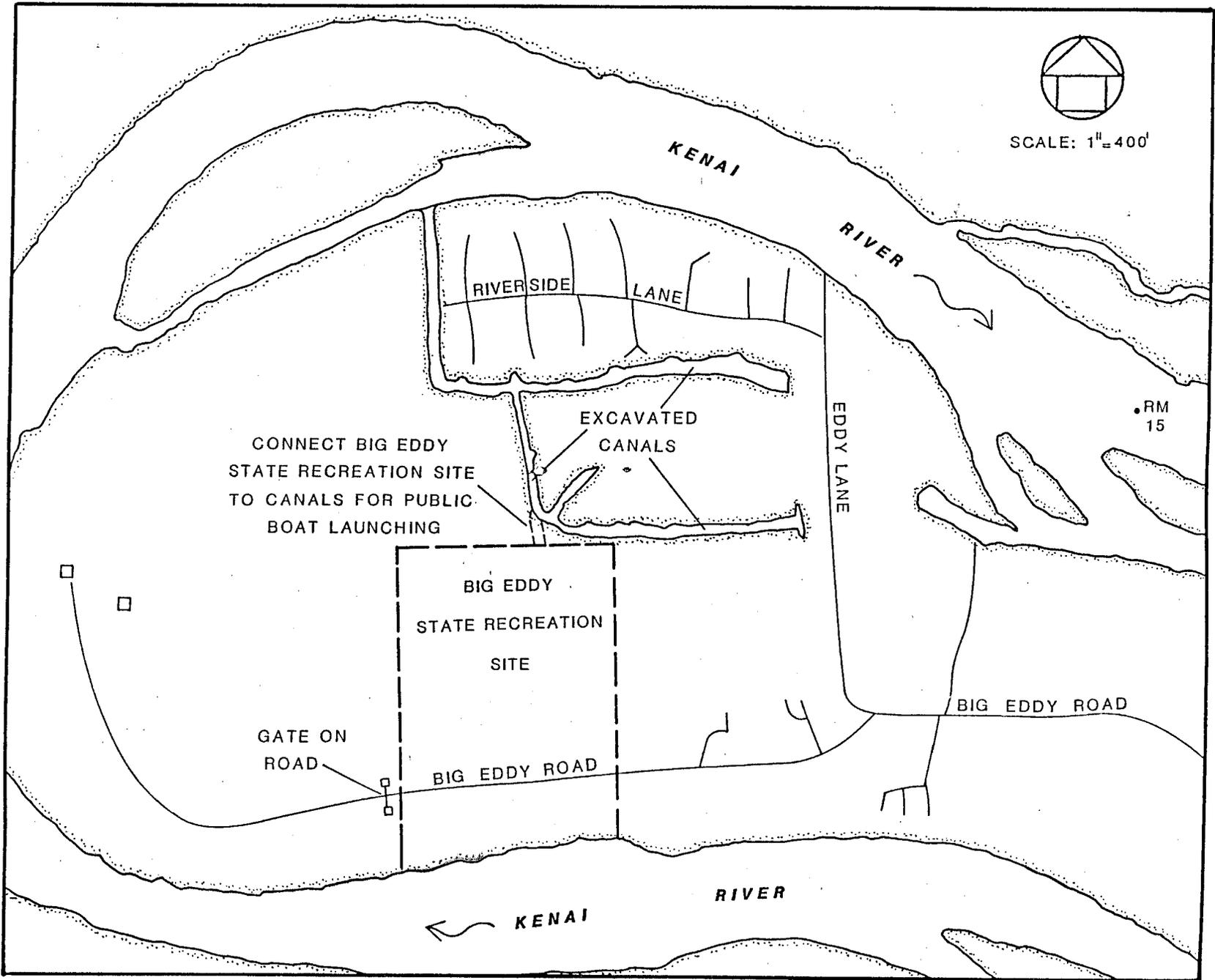


Figure 9. Boat launching site 9, located near RM 15.6.

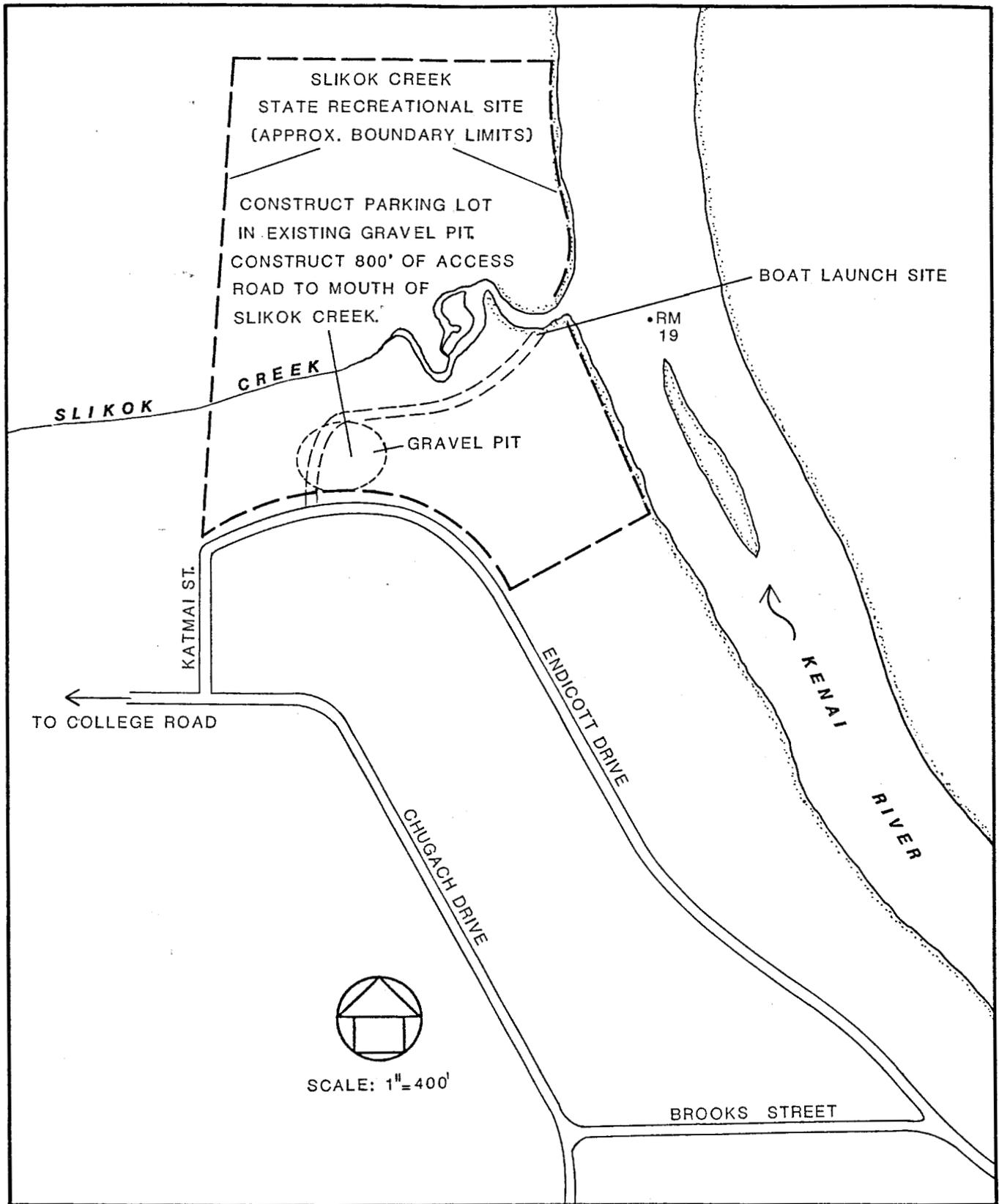


Figure 10. Boat launching site 10, located near RM 19.

Creek, and it would require constructing 700-800 feet of access road to a car/trailer parking area to be constructed in an existing gravel pit at the top of a 40 foot high bluff.

Boat-Launching Site 11 (Figure 11):

This proposed site is located on the left bank, near RM 21.5, in Section 32, T5N, R10W, Seward Meridian. This is private property located in the Derkovorkian Subdivision. Access is from Harbor Terrace Avenue off of Airport Road. There is an existing private boat-launching facility that could be improved and expanded at nominal cost.

Boat-Launching Site 12 (Figure 12):

This proposed site is located on the right bank, near RM 23, in Section 33, T5N, R10W, Seward Meridian. It is in the city of Soldotna's Swiftwater Campground. In spite of the name, the existing launch site could easily be made into a good launching facility. The launch site is sheltered by an island and by a man-made groin. There is sufficient land to construct a parking lot, and access is available from existing campground roads.

Boat-Launching Site 13 (Figure 13):

This proposed site is located on the left bank, near RM 30.5, in Section 28, T5N, R9W, Seward Meridian. It is also the location of the Funny River State Recreational Site. The Department of Natural Resources owns the land on both sides of the launch site (mouth of Funny River) and is in the process of acquiring the launch-site land. There is good access and it can readily be made into a public facility.

Boat-Launching Site 14 (Figure 14):

This proposed site is located on the right bank, near RM 30.9, in Section 28, T5N, R9W, Seward Meridian. It is in the 300-acre Morgan's Landing State Recreation Area. There is an existing boat-launching ramp at this location,

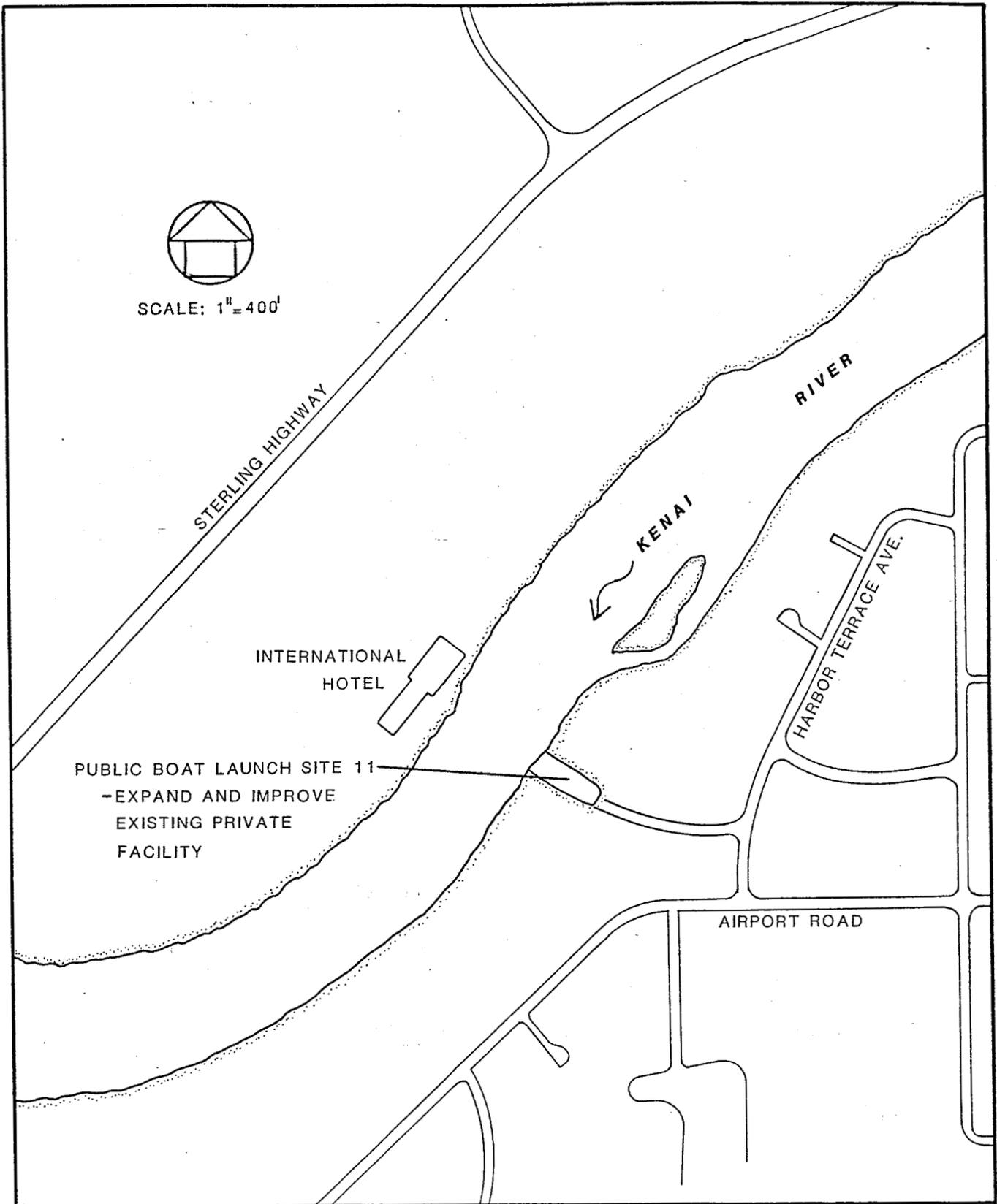


Figure 11. Boat launching site 11, located near RM 21.5.

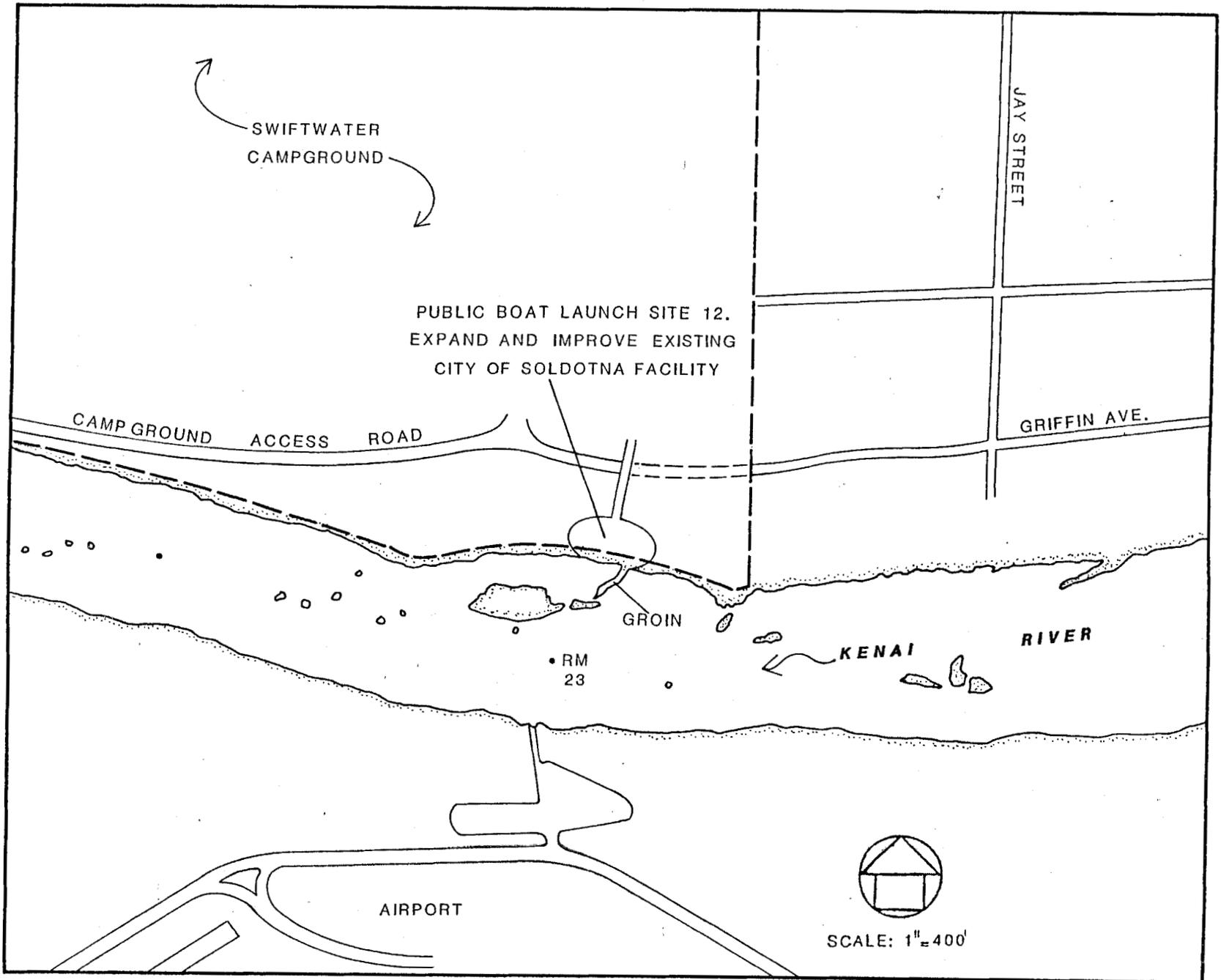


Figure 12. Boat launching site 12, located near RM 23.

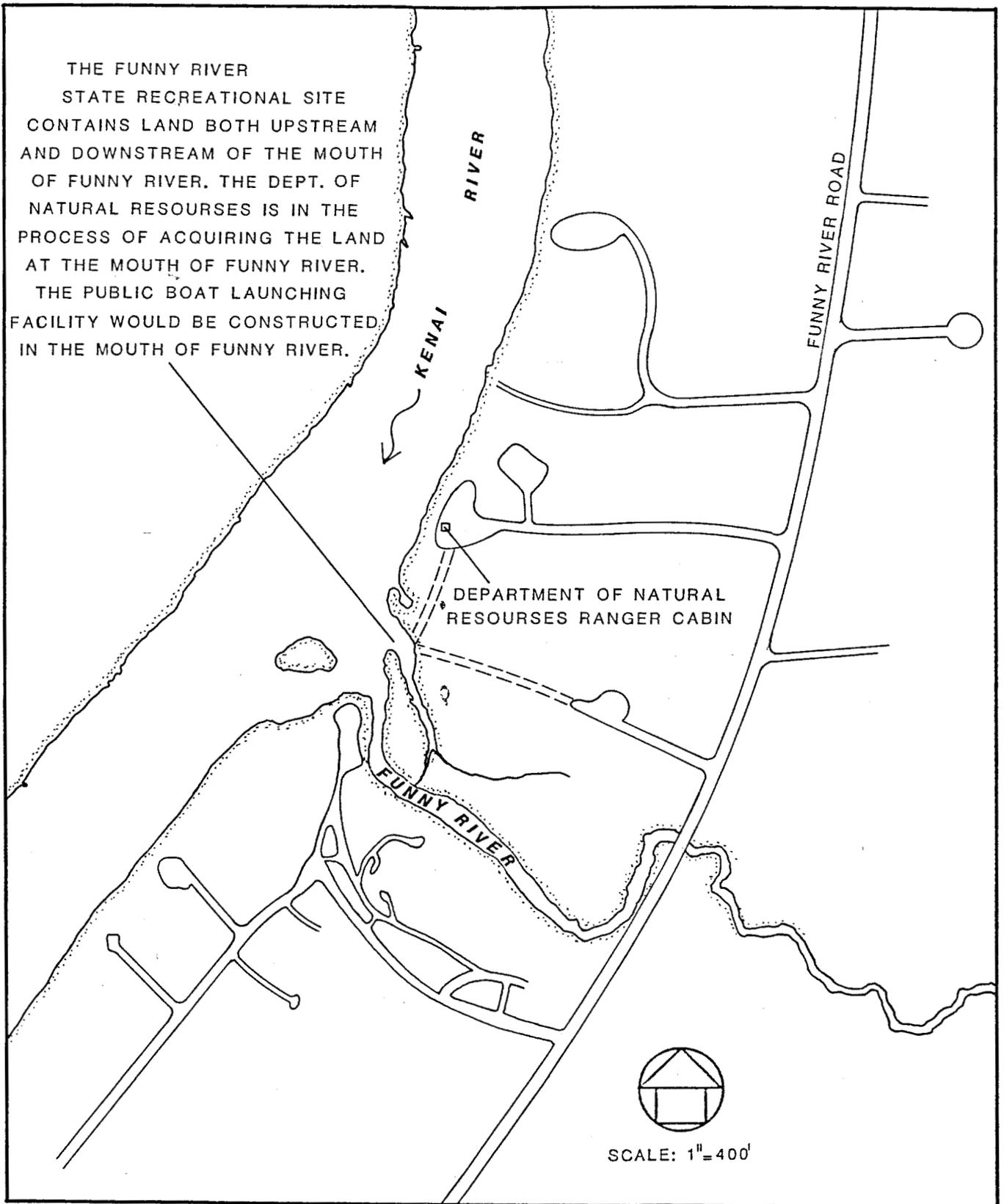


Figure 13. Boat launching site 13, located near RM 30.5.

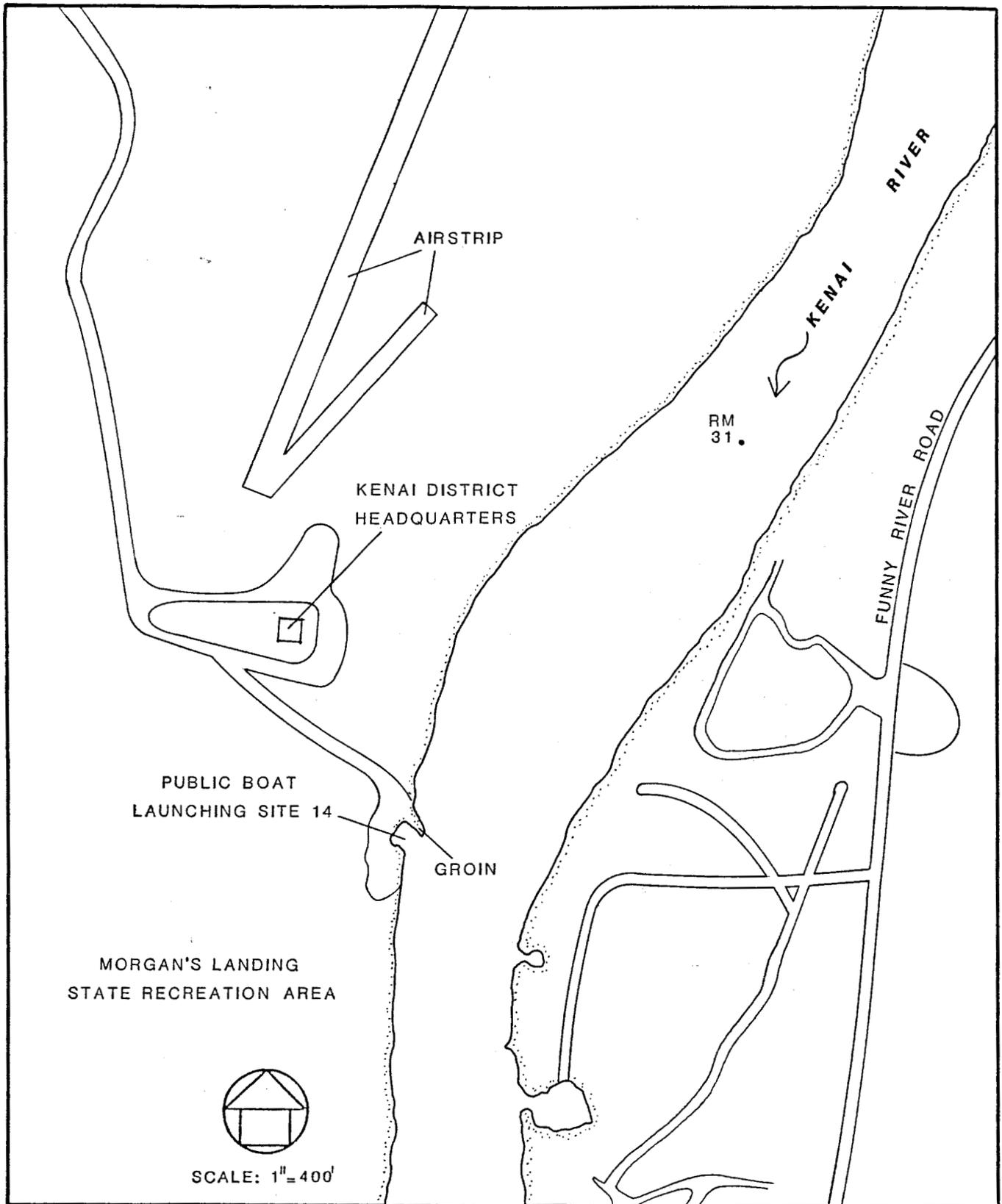


Figure 14. Boat launching site 14, located near RM 30.9.

but it is in need of expansion and upgrading. About 600-700 feet of existing road needs to be upgraded to lessen the gradient from the parking lot (on a bluff) to the river.

Boat-Launching Site 15 (Figure 15):

This proposed site is located on the left bank, near RM 33, on the line common to Sections 22/23, T5N, R9W, Seward Meridian. It is on road right-of-way property, but it would likely require purchase of the private lots on either side of the launch site for the construction of a parking lot. Access would be via Silver Salmon Street, Rainbow Avenue, and Grayling Street.

Boat-Launching Site 16 (Figure 16):

This proposed site is located on the right bank, near RM 33, on the line common to Sections 22/23, T5N, R9W, Seward Meridian. It is on road right-of-way property, but like site 15, additional land, adjacent to the launch site, would be needed for vehicle/trailer parking. There is an existing, privately owned boat-launch site on the upstream side of the proposed site. Perhaps this site could be purchased for a public launching facility and the right-of-way property could be used for parking. Presently, there is an access problem to this site because Mr. Lew Fields has installed a gate across the road where it crosses his property, and Betty Lou Drive is barricaded about 1/2 mile east of the proposed launch site. Presently, all traffic proceeds through Mr. Field's gate only with Mr. Field's permission. Public access to the site would, of course, have to be arranged before the site could be developed.

Boat-Launching Site 17 (Figure 17):

This site is located on the right bank, near RM 34, on the line common to Sections 23/24, T5N, R9W, Seward Meridian. It is on road right-of-way property and is now being used by the public for boat-launching. This site is not as desirable as Site 16, but it would be a back-up in the event that access to Site 16 could not be obtained. It has good access to Scout Lake

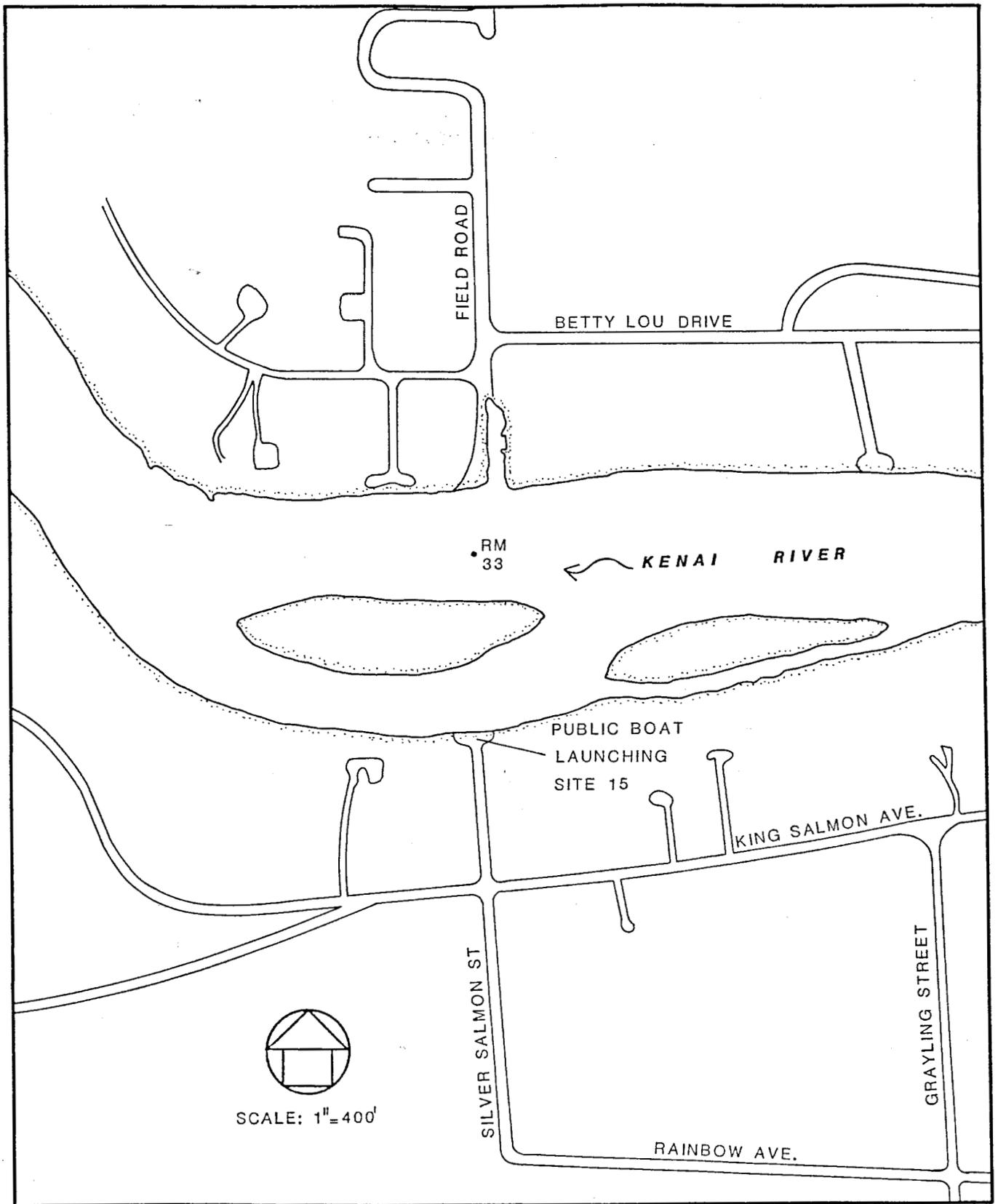


Figure 15. Boat launching site 15, located near RM 33.

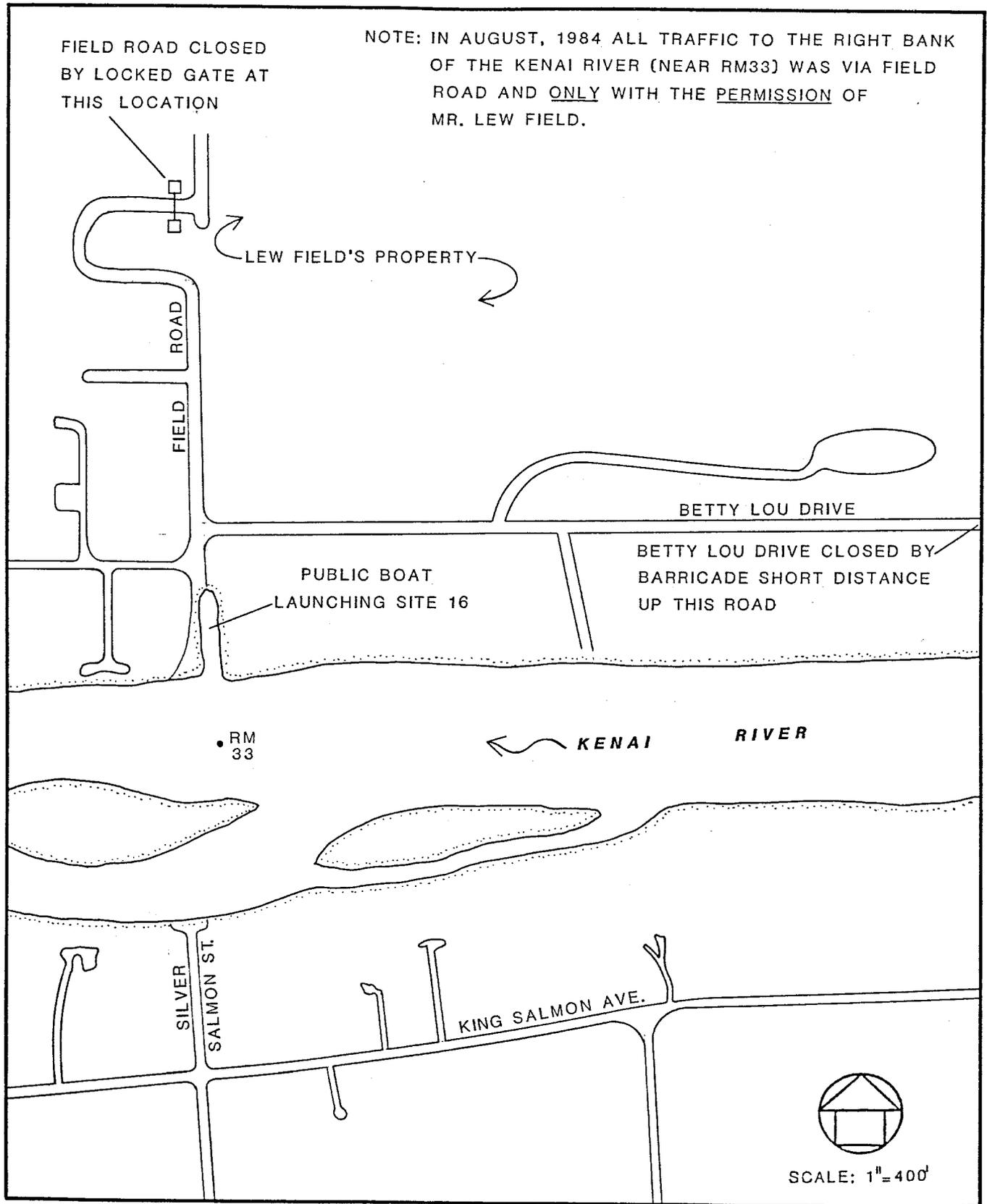


Figure 16. Boat launching site 16, located near RM 33.

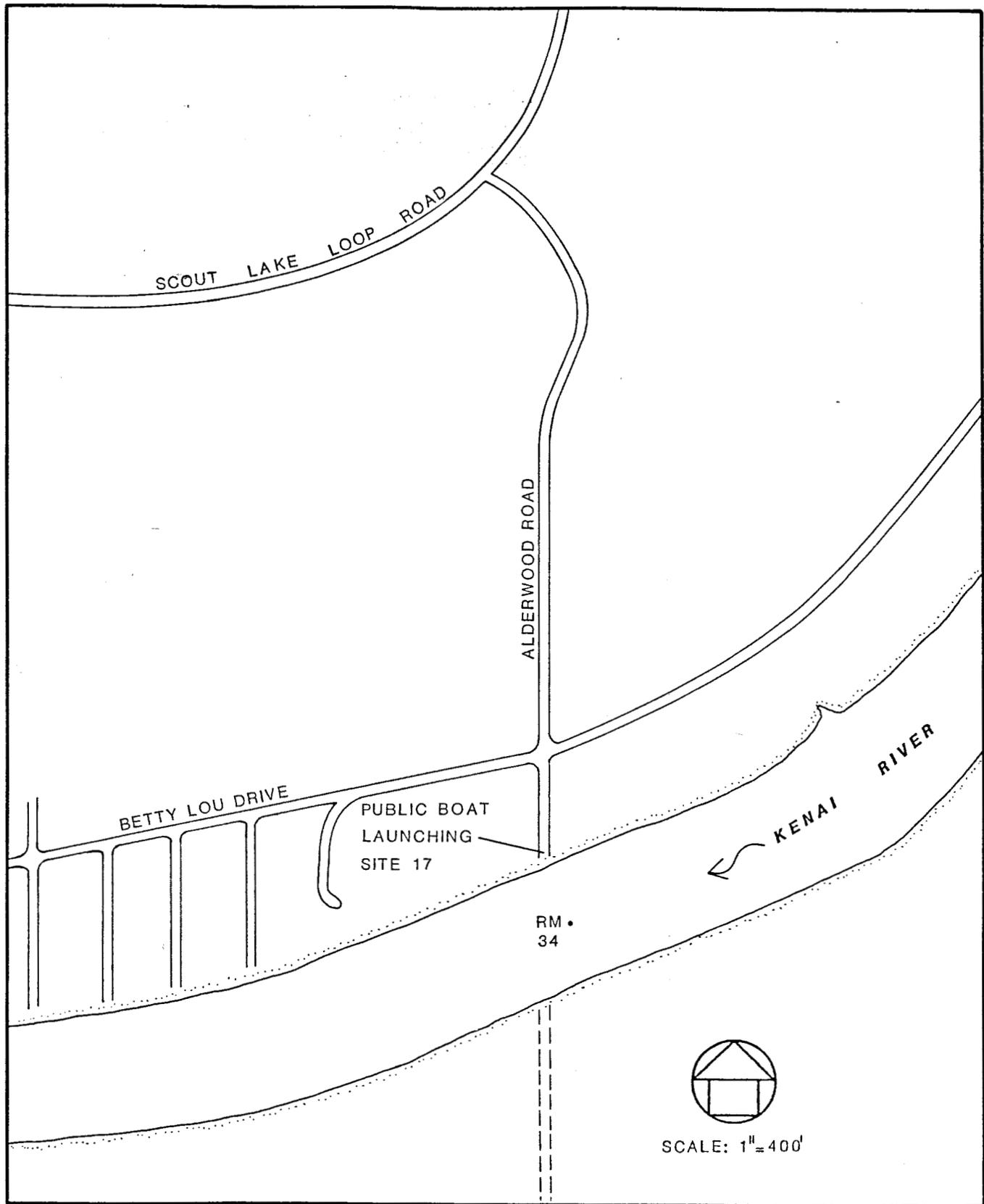


Figure 17. Boat launching site 17, located near RM 34.

Road via Alderwood Road. There is, however, a rumor that the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities may select this site for a bridge crossing of the Kenai River.

Boat-Launching Site 18 (Figure 18):

This site is located on the right bank, near mile 36.3, in Section 7, T5N, R8W, Seward Meridian and is within the Izaak Walton State Recreation Site. There is an existing launching ramp, but it needs to be upgraded and parking added.

Boat-Launching Site 19 (Figure 19):

This site is located on the right bank, near RM 39.5, in Section 21, T5N, R8W, Seward Meridian. This location is also the Bing's Landing State Recreation Site. This is not a good launching site, because it is located in swift water on the cutting side of a bend and because it is only about 700 feet upstream of the Naptowne Rapids, which are dangerous to boat operations. However, the location is in a state recreational site, which is presently used for boat-launching, so it should be given consideration. The existing launching ramp is, however, very primitive and requires considerable upgrading. A much better launching site is located about 1,000 feet upstream, but it is land that is owned by "Peninsula Furs", and it is understood that this land is not for sale.

Boat-Launching Site 20 (Figure 20):

This site is located on the left bank, near RM 41.7, in Section 27, T5N, R8W, Seward Meridian. The proposed location is in a side slough about 700 feet inland from the Kenai River. Because of the still water and the good road access, this would make an ideal launching site. It is, however, in an area where a lot of houses have been built, and it is expected that local property owners would resist the development of a public boat-launching facility at this location.

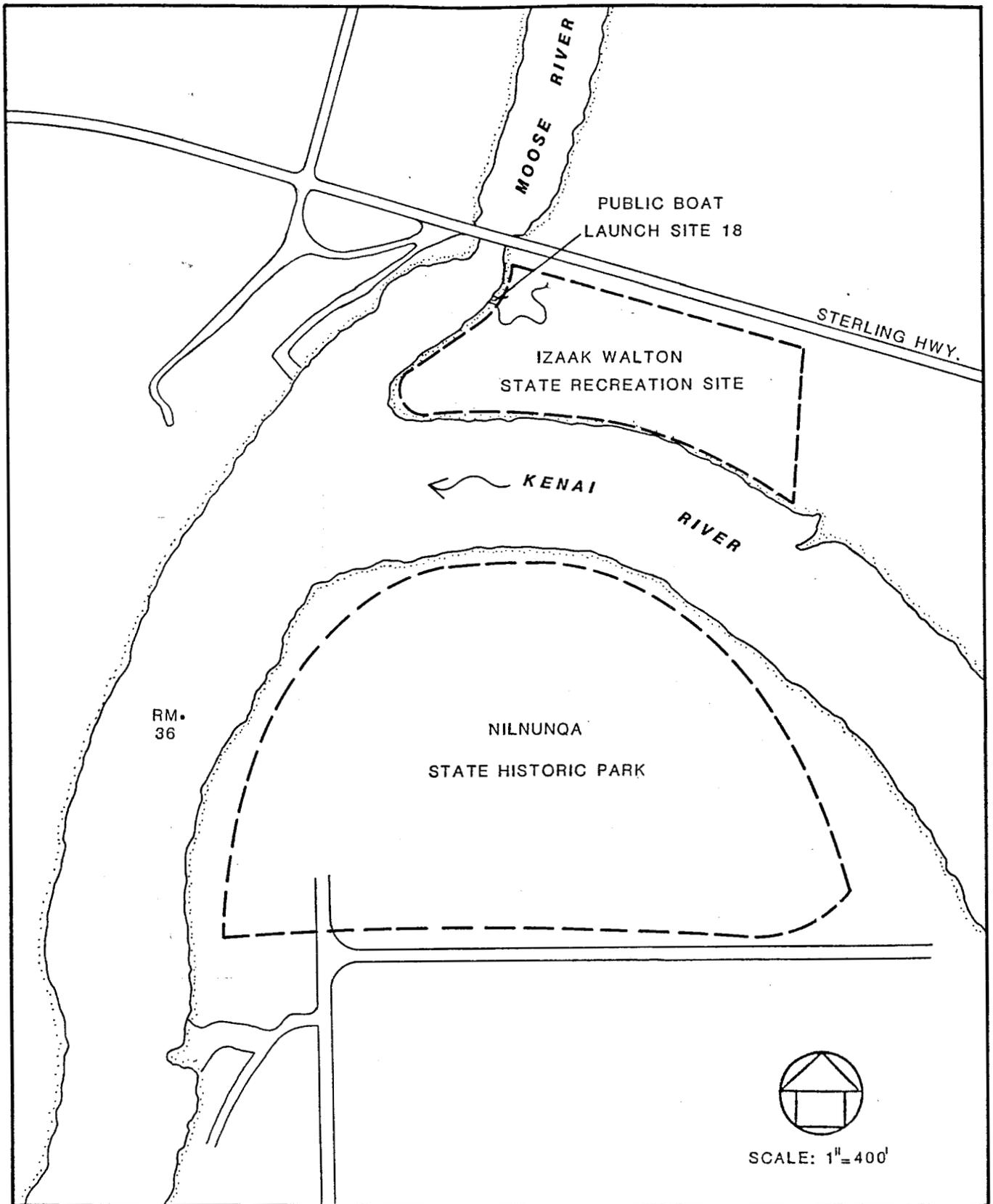


Figure 18. Boat launching site 18, located near RM 36.3.

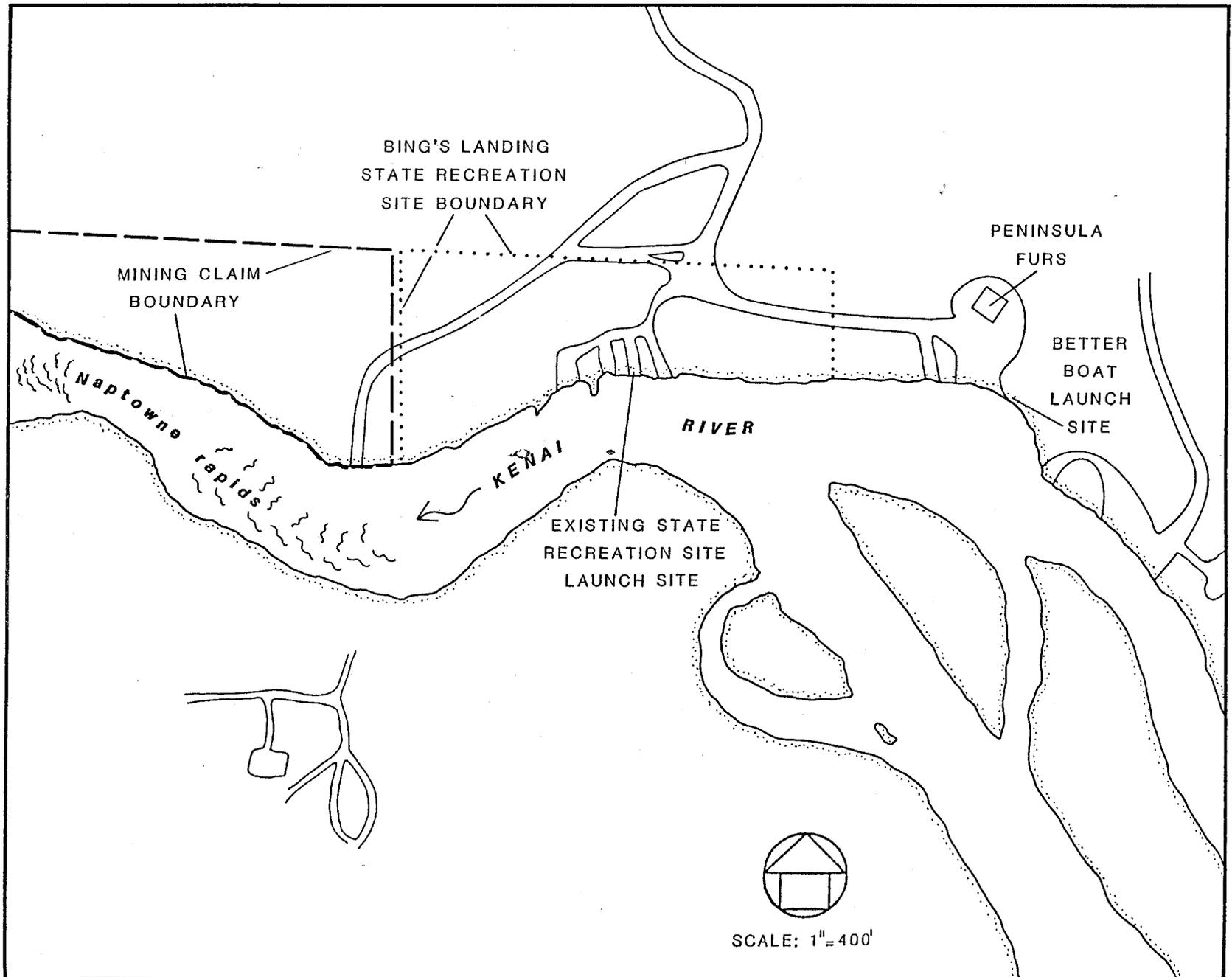


Figure 19. Boat launching site 19, located near RM 39.5.

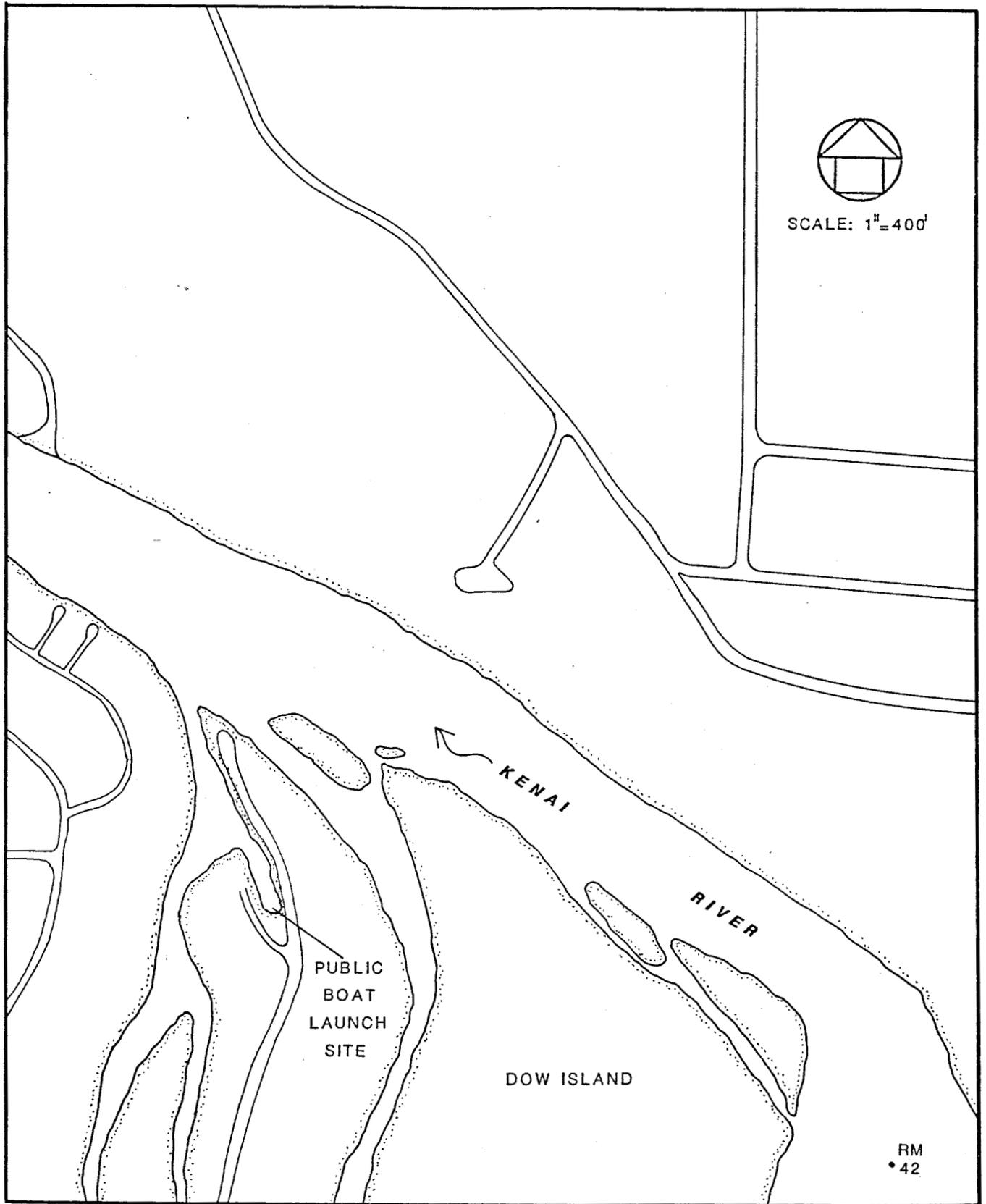


Figure 20. Boat launching site 20, located near RM 41.7.

Boat-Launching Site 21 (Figure 21):

This site is located on the right bank, near RM 42.6, in Section 26, T5N, R8W, Seward Meridian. It is in a side slough that appears to have been created by excavation activities associated with land development. At any rate, the surrounding land is privately owned, and land for the launching site would have to be purchased. There is presently a feud being waged by two property owners. The person at the eastern end of the peninsula has blocked the road access to the property owner on the tip of the peninsula. The person living at the tip of the peninsula has in turn blocked off boat access to the slough with a foot bridge. The foot bridge would have to be removed before this site would be useful as a public facility.

Boat-Launching Site 22 (Figure 22):

This site is located on the left bank, near RM 44, in Section 35, T5N, R8W, Seward Meridian. It is on the left bank of the Killey River. The site would have to be within 300 feet of the mouth of the Killey River as the river gets shallow very quickly. This is private property, and lot survey stakes were in evidence in August 1984. The survey markers indicated that an access road would be located behind the riverfront lots, so future access should not be a problem.

Boat-Launching Site 23 (Figure 23):

This site is located on the right bank, near RM 45.2, in Section 36, T5N, R8W, Seward Meridian and is in the Kenai Keys State Recreation Area. The launching site would be at the mouth of the northern outlet of Torpedo Lake. As yet, the Department of Natural Resources has not begun to develop this 192 acre park. The construction of a boat ramp, by itself, would be very expensive because of the 3/4 mile of access road that would have to be built. The construction of a boat-launch site at this location should be delayed to coincide with the Department of Natural Resources' plans for the development of this state recreation area.

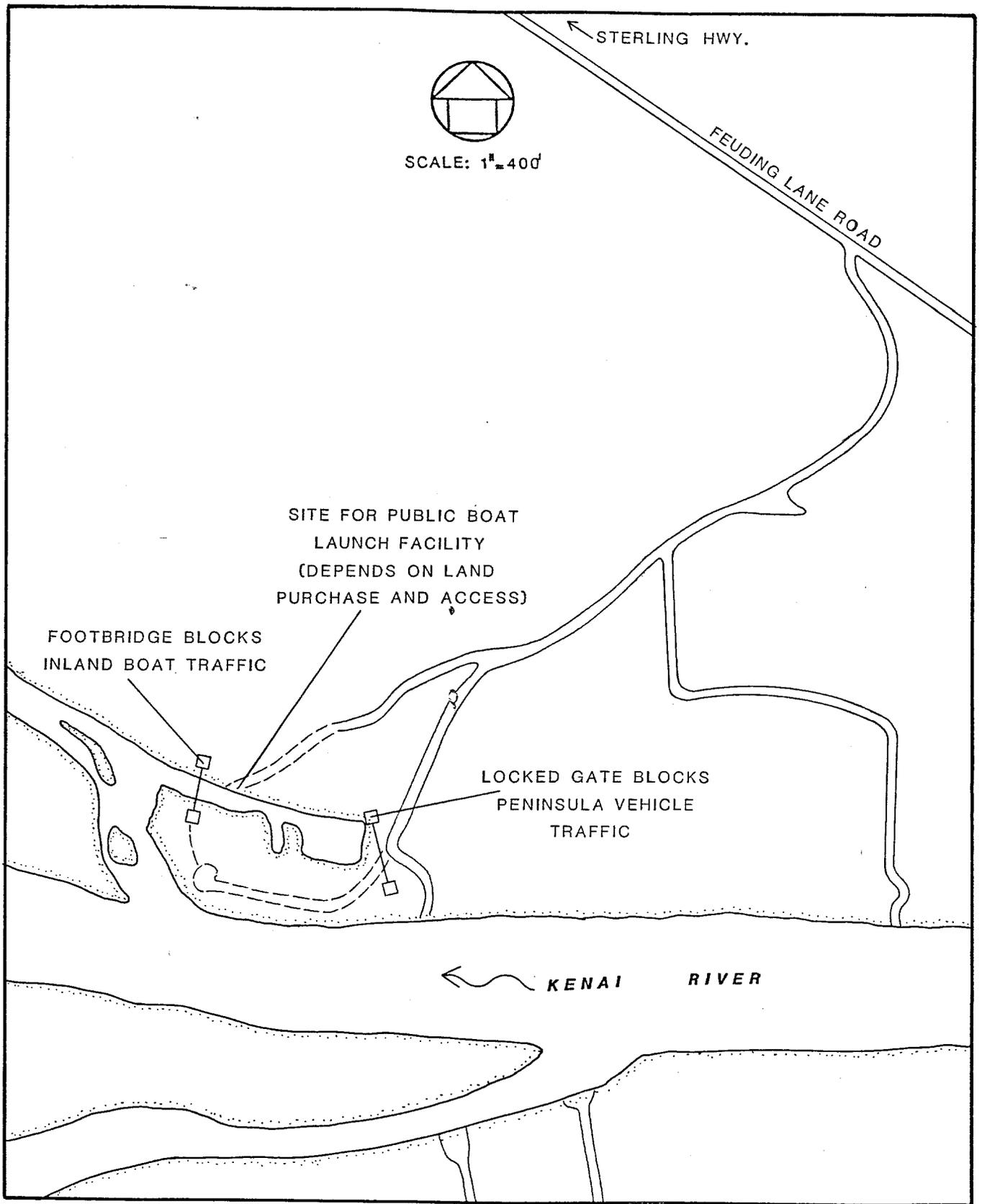


Figure 21. Boat launching site 21, located near RM 42.6.

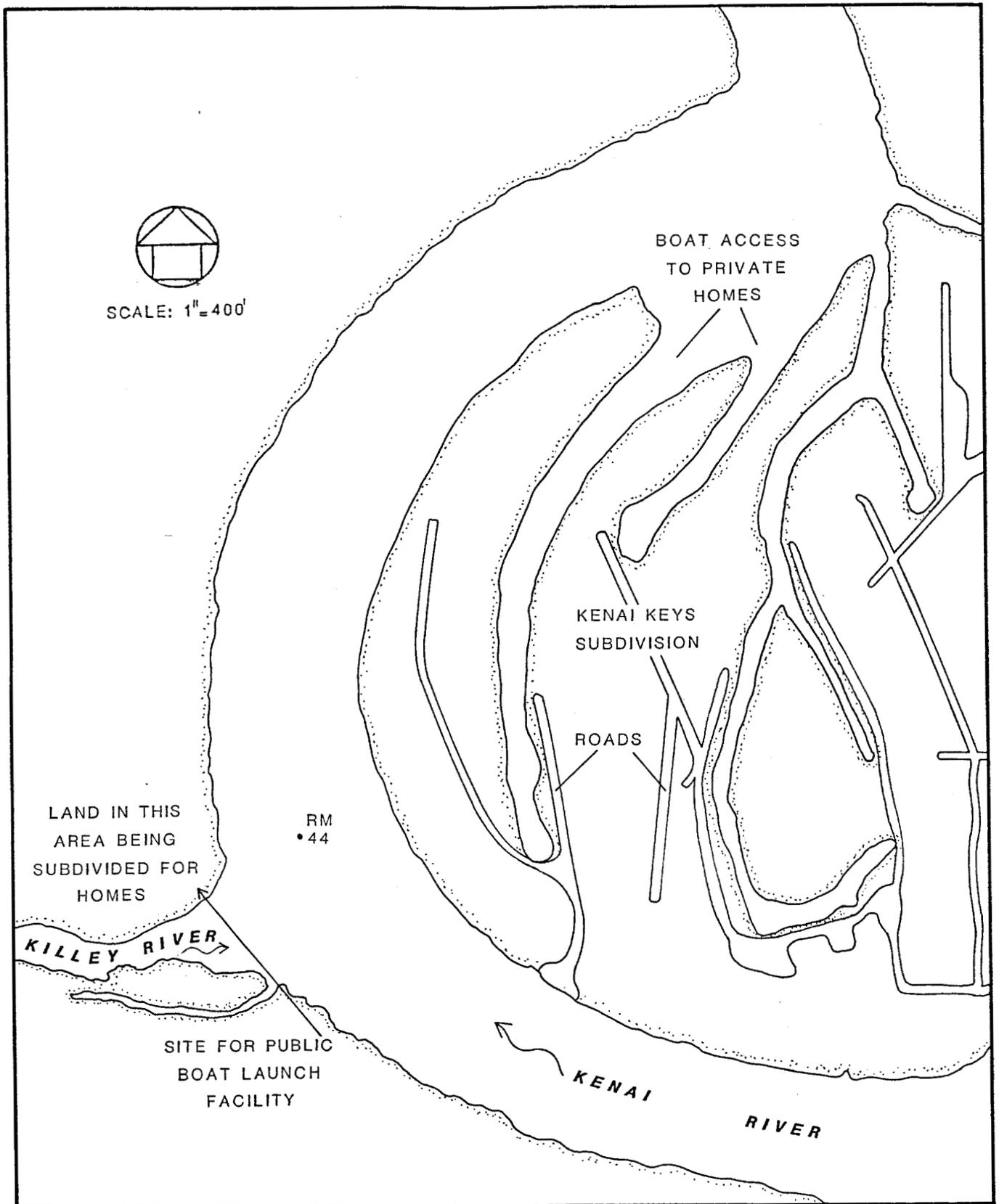


Figure 22. Boat launching site 22, located near RM 44.

stakes were in evidence in August 1984. The survey markers indicated that an access road would be located behind the riverfront lots, so future access should not be a problem.

Boat-Launching Site 23 (Figure 23):

This site is located on the right bank, near RM 45.2, in Section 36, T5N, R8W, Seward Meridian and is in the Kenai Keys State Recreation Area. The launching site would be at the mouth of the northern outlet of Torpedo Lake. As yet, the Department of Natural Resources has not begun to develop this 192 acre park. The construction of a boat ramp, by itself, would be very expensive because of the 3/4 mile of access road that would have to be built. The construction of a boat launch site at this location should be delayed to coincide with the Department of Natural Resources' plans for the development of this state recreation area.

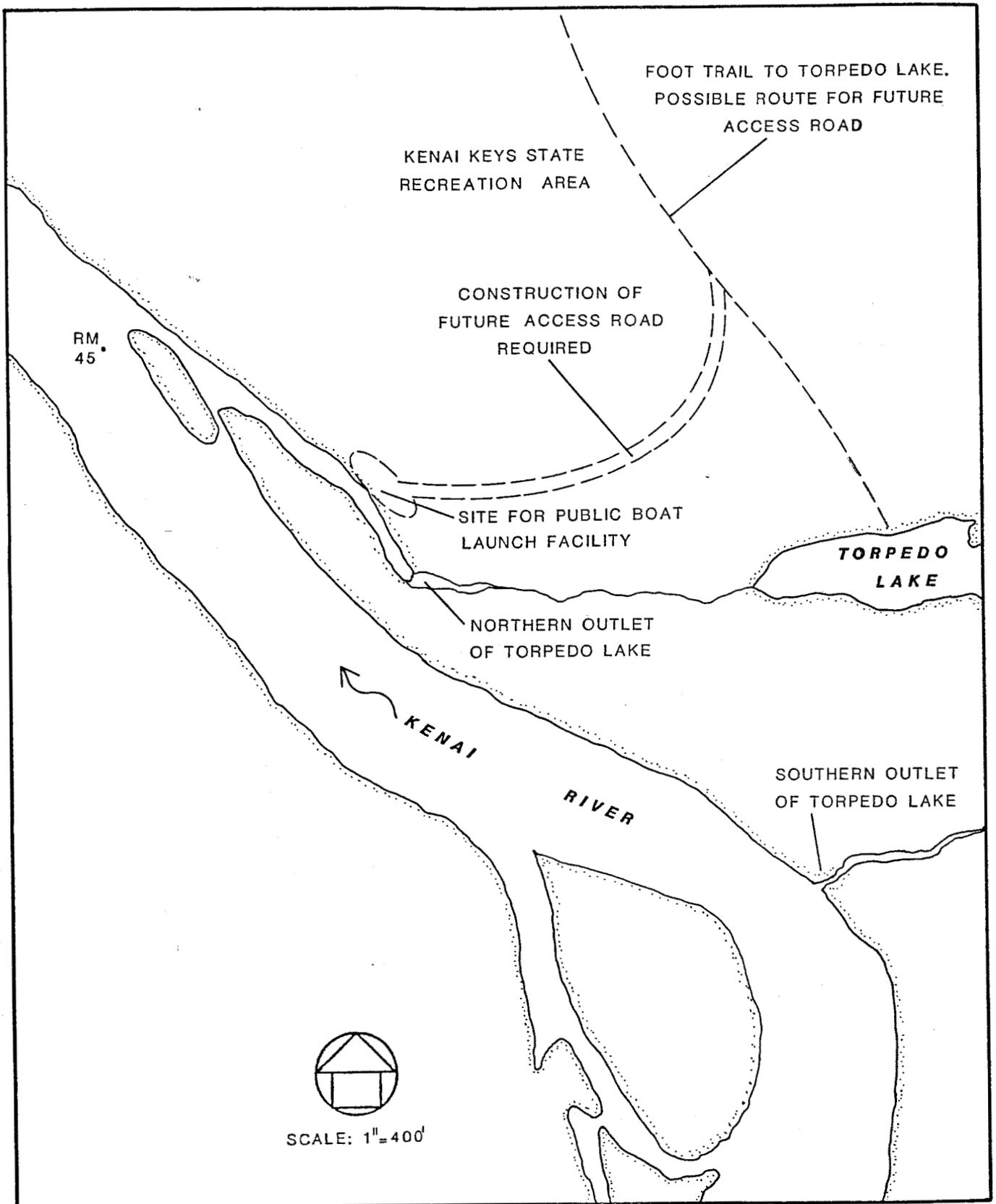


Figure 23. Boat launching site 23, located near RM 45.2.

4. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

So many people within the divisions of Commercial Fisheries, FRED, Habitat, and Sport Fish contributed helpful information that it is impractical to list them individually. However, because Katherine Aschaffenburg, Carol Schneiderhan, and George Cunningham contributed so much extra time with the typing, drafting, and field work it is only appropriate that their efforts be duly recognized. Thank you everyone, your help was needed and your contributions are appreciated.

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