

Informal State of Alaska comments submitted to

Kathy Liska  
Glennallen Field Office  
Bureau of Land Management  
P.O. Box 147  
Glennallen, Alaska 99588-0147

## **Denali Highway Interpretative Master Plan**

February 6, 2001

### **From the Alaska Department of Natural Resources**

#### General Comments

In 1994 the State Selections Project Team selected 3.2 million acres land along the Denali Highway. This land was selected in part because of its mineral potential and existing infrastructure (Denali Highway and existing trail systems). This area has also been referred to over the years as Southcentral Alaska's breadbasket because it is the home range for the Nelchina Caribou herd. Residents from the Anchorage and Fairbanks areas use this region extensively for hunting and recreation. The Region has a long mining history that extends back to the turn of the century, starting with gold discoveries at Valdez Creek and Windy Creek, copper discoveries on the upper McClaren River, and gold at Eureka Creek and Broxson Gulch.

In some respects it is premature to initiate a planning effort when the state has not yet received conveyance of lands selected in this region.

The plan is high in fluff factor. Admittedly BLM is in a difficult situation given that much of the land is owned by the State and potential changes in status are anticipated. They recognized this problem up front but should present a more detailed description of land ownership/status.

The plan does a pretty good job of considering the entire resource and taking a look at the audience that will be utilizing the interpretation. It presents a workable framework for developing an interpretive program that is well spaced and of an appropriate magnitude for the present use of the resource. The assessment of the needs of the visitors for orientation was accurate and the suggested approach of providing orientation at five locations along the distance of the highway a sound idea. The topics presented seemed appropriate, and the use of self guided interpretive panels is the best medium for this remote area.

The graphic depiction of a visitor standing in front of a safety information panel indicates a very large panel displayed in a substantial structure. These are an inappropriate scale for the area. Large panels are much more expensive to replace than smaller ones. This is a major concern for a remote facility, which is susceptible to vandalism. Small kiosks with smaller displays would more appropriate. We also question the viability of the use of brochures as an effective medium. They require constant maintenance and are susceptible to vandalism. Someone has to continue

supplying the brochure rack. In our experience this strategy is often suggested and tried, yet is seldom maintained. Racks are empty more often than useful.

The plan generally lays out a interpretive plan that utilizes media and strategies appropriate for the area, and has considered the major elements necessary.

### Specific Comments

Page 30 – The discussion of the Denali highway area should also mention that the area has some active mining and considerable mineral exploration activity. In addition to being a historic activity, the report should also recognize that mining is a present and future use of the area.

Page 31, section 3.2 – Delete item "e," it repeats what is in item "a."

Page 75 – Valdez mine overlook. The panel states Valdez Creek Mine area is State selected. This is the only panel that makes this statement. No other panel acknowledges that adjacent lands are state selected. This needs to be added to all of the proposed panels to make users aware of state selections. This interpretative site should also talk about why the area's geology is favorable for mineral discoveries and what types of minerals are known to occur.

Page 113 – B-3 Paragraph implies BLM will continue management of the area covered by the Archeological District. The district lies within a state selected area of high priority and the paragraph should note that it will be managed by the state once conveyance occurs.

Pages 123-127 – Resource Inventory. There is a large amount of published geologic and mineral information on the Denali block. BLM needs to include or cite studies that have been published by the State of Alaska, US Bureau of Mines, and the US Geological Survey. There are significant known mineral resources within the region and considerable potential for new discoveries in the future.

### **From the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Subsistence Division**

- 1) Proceeding with this or some sort of interpretive plan definitely should be a partnership effort. At least some of the ideas for displays, information panels, etc. might be something the NPS already has done at Denali Park, for example. No sense in reinventing the wheel. The state should offer support when and where it can.
- 2) Focusing on the beginning and ending points of the Denali Hwy makes the most sense for displays by linking up with the NPS, other agencies, local businesses and communities. It also reduces initial expenditures and maintenance costs, and obviously catches the most visitors.
- 3) We appreciate acknowledgement in the plan that subsistence uses have occurred and still take place in the highway corridor. The plan would educate visitors about subsistence (good), but without appropriate consultation might focus too much on historic practices and perpetuate stereotypes (not good).

- 4) Consultation with Denali Park staff (and probably DNR's Office of History and Archaeology) is essential for determining what kinds of materials might already be available for educating the public about cultural and archaeological resources in the general vicinity of the Denali Highway. This seems to be another area of particular emphasis in the plan and can best be addressed by a interagency group.

Submitted electronically by:

Sally Gibert

State CSU Coordinator

Division of Governmental Coordination