

Bear Creek to Dry Creek



The wide, straight highway alignment creates a relatively monotonous view of this landscape.

General Description

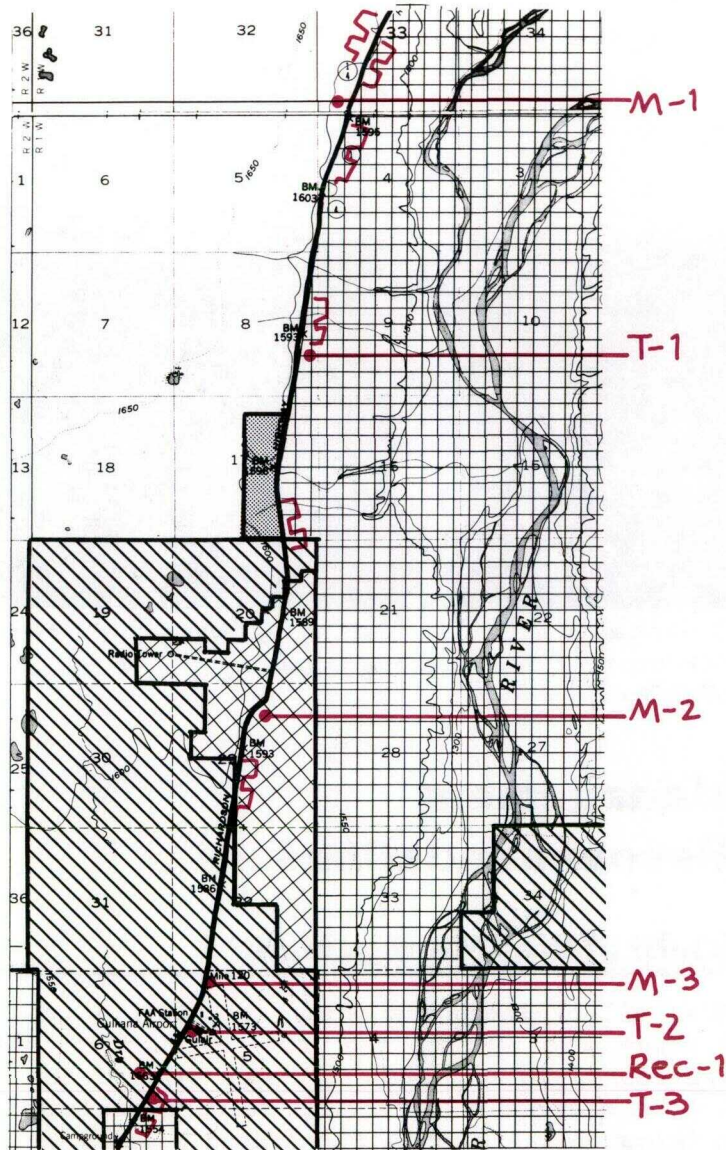
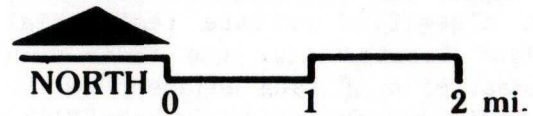
Management Unit 17 is an 8.4 mile stretch of the central Richardson Highway between Bear Creek and Dry Creek. It is a relatively straight, wide corridor through dense spruce and spruce-hardwood forests that parallels the Copper River located 1 to 2 miles to the east. Despite the proximity of the Copper River, the traveler has limited views beyond the densely forested right-of-way edge. The Gulkana Airfield clearing offers the only expansive view to the Copper River basin and the Wrangell Mountains to the east. The Chugach Mountains to the south and the Alaska Range to the north line the horizon for forward views along the highway.

All noticeable land uses - besides powerlines, a radio tower and the highway itself - are concentrated at the Gulkana Airfield. Dry Creek Campground is located on the southern end of this unit, but it is not visible from the highway.

In summary, this is not a particularly scenic part of the central Richardson Highway. However, the driving experience could be enhanced through sensitive land use, development and view management.

17 Bear Creek to Dry Creek

Assessment Units R38 – R43



KEY

- M - Impact Mitigation
- T - Turnout
- Rec - Recreation
- View Management
- State Owned Land
- Native Corp. Land
- Native Selected Land
- Federal Land
- Private Land

Land Ownership & Management Responsibility

Most of the land surrounding the highway in this unit is managed by the BLM or the State. There are Native village and regional corporation selected lands and one Native allotment, as well as State classified private residential/recreational land located near the radio tower. The northernmost mile of land adjacent to the highway is in interim conveyance to Gulkana Village. The Gulkana Airfield is located on state land. A total of approximately four miles of the highway are bordered by future Native and other private lands. DOTPF manages a 300 foot right-of-way throughout this management unit.

Visual Resource Management Objectives

The management recommendations for this unit focus on the themes of enhancement, appropriate roadside management and sensitive land use and development.

Enhancement: To respond to the many opportunities to enhance the visual experience of this landscape's natural and man made features.

Appropriate Roadside Management: To adopt right-of-way management practices which will create a positive visual impression of the landscape for the highway traveler.

Sensitive Land Use And Development: To encourage sensitive land use and development which will increase visual interest and diversity and minimize negative visual impacts along the highway.



The Gulkana Airfield clearing offers travelers the opportunity for expansive views of the Wrangell Mountains.

Management Recommendations

Right-of-Way Management

Most all of the lands which are visible from the highway are within the right-of-way corridor. Therefore, DOTPF plays the most significant role in the management of scenic resources along this portion of the central Richardson Highway and has the opportunity to maintain and enhance the traveler's experience of these resources.

Currently, the practice of completely clearing a wide (35-50 foot) strip of land on either side of the highway accentuates the enclosed, linear, and monotonous character of the road and sets the highway apart from the surrounding landscape. Cleared slash left in the right-of-way is an additional distraction and a fire hazard as well. The drainage clearings left from the recent highway upgrading project are also cluttered with cleared slash and leave an abrupt edge where natural vegetation begins.

Right-of-way management within this unit should provide for safe and efficient travel while maintaining the natural character of the landscape and enhancing the traveler's driving experience. The following recommendations for better management practices are designed to accomplish this objective:

- Vary the widths of vegetation clearing in the right-of-way to respond to site specific conditions (e.g. wider clearings on the inside edge of curves, deeper clearing in areas of known moose movement, etc.). Where the road alignment consists of very long tangents and sweeping curves, the field of view should be sufficient so that excessively wide clearings are not necessary.
- Remove or burn cleared slash from the right-of-way.
- Allow trees to intrude on the cleared areas - both scattered and in masses - to break up the linear character of the highway corridor.
- Encourage low brush and flowering plants in the right-of-way, removing only the taller vegetation where greater visibility is needed. Strive for a gradation of vegetation heights from the road to the edge of the management strip.

- Where visibility and protection of the pavement do not necessitate wider clearings, allow the right-of-way vegetation to grow as close as 15 feet from the road edge.
- Except where managed for viewing opportunities, maintain a minimum of 75 feet of natural vegetation within the right-of-way to serve as a buffer for adjacent lands and as a reinforcement to the recommended green-belt.
- Selectively thin additional individual trees around stark-edged clearings to "feather" the edge.

View Management (V)

Due to the enclosed character of this unit and its close proximity to the Copper River, the management of roadside vegetation to open distant views can be a particularly useful scenic resource management tool. Sensitive and selective thinning and clearing can create excellent lateral views east across the Copper River to the Wrangell Mountains or northwest to the Alaska Range. The small clearings that were made for drainage purposes within the right-of-way now provide very brief, filtered views to the Wrangells. More selective clearing and thinning could further open these views and soften their blunt edges, mitigating their negative impacts and adding interest to the driving experience. Several specific locations for recommended view management practices have been identified on the unit map.

In addition, clearings which are the result of development can provide very positive viewing opportunities, such as the one at the Gulkana Airfield. Therefore, as discussed under Land Use

and Development, sensitively sited clearings are encouraged.

Greenbelts (G)

Within this densely forested area, a narrow (25 foot) greenbelt beyond the right-of-way edge would be sufficient to maintain the natural character of the landscape in most of the unit. However, at the Dry Creek crossing, a 100 foot wide greenbelt should extend along either side of the creek for 1/8 mile. At the Gulkana Airfield, where views are open for a great distance and the airfield is immediately adjacent to the highway, a greenbelt would be inappropriate and unnecessary.

Since a significant portion of the lands adjacent to the highway are Native owned, there are no means to consistently implement a greenbelt recommendation throughout the entire management unit. However, the Bureau of Land Management and the State have an excellent opportunity to set an example for future development by implementing the greenbelt recommendations on public lands, particularly those which are classified for disposal private residential/recreational use but have not yet been developed. Native regional and village Corporations have the option to voluntarily designate an appropriate greenbelt setback on their lands and establish guidelines in the future development of these lands.

The following management guidelines are recommended for the greenbelt lands within this unit:

- No permanent structures should be located within the greenbelt.

- No more than 50% of the natural vegetation should be removed, except where managed for scenic views.
- Retain deciduous trees to provide filtered views.
- Retain spruce trees to screen undesirable views, such as near parking areas.

Land Use & Development (LU)

The overall visual experience and diversity within this unit could be improved with the addition of man-made features which are sensitively sited and designed to blend with or complement the landscape. Due to the proximity of this area to the established community of Glennallen, the potential for future development can be expected to be relatively high. Although the visual absorption capability of the land adjacent to the highway is high and some new development could add visual diversity and interest, excessively large scale developments or insensitive siting could create significant negative visual impacts. Therefore, the following guidelines are appropriate for future development:

- Encourage the development of small scale residential, commercial and recreational uses on land immediately adjacent to the highway.
- Discourage larger scale or higher density development near the highway; instead, locate these uses further from the road edge in order to minimize visual congestion and clutter as well as traffic hazards.
- Use the guidelines set forth in the greenbelt recommendations to identify the appropriate development setback and vegetation management practices.

Encourage desirable large clearings - such as farms on the east side of the highway where there are opportunities to open expansive and distinctive views.

Utilize colors, materials and building forms which complement or blend in with the surrounding landscape.

Utilize right-of-way and greenbelt vegetation to screen parking areas of commercial establishments and to frame views toward the focus of the establishment.

Gulkana Airfield

The Gulkana Airfield is an excellent example of an area where the visual experience from the road was enhanced by opening expansive views. The airfield clearing provides an open view across the Copper River Lowlands to the Wrangell Mountains. Additionally, the activity at the airfield itself is an attraction to many travelers. These site amenities should be retained and enhanced to maximize their experiential qualities. The following minor modifications are recommended to enhance this site:

Litter Control: The turbulent winds created by the airplanes appear to scatter litter which is alongside the road. Stricter litter control should be enforced at the airfield and there should be routine roadside litter cleanup.

Airfield-Related Structures: The apparent lack of on-site maintenance around the residences at the north end of the field has created a cluttered appearance. The unnecessary clutter should be removed and the structures should be painted. Landscaping around the buildings would also improve the overall site appearance.

Scenic Turnout: A small turnout should be constructed on the east side of the highway to



Recent construction and upgrading have left visible scars in the right of way.

give travelers the opportunity to stop and appreciate both the airfield activity and the scenic views. (See Turnouts, T-2).

Turnouts (T) & Recreation (Rec)

The following roadside turnouts are recommended in Unit 17:

T-1 **Existing Gravel Turnout.** Although this turnout does not offer any scenic views or on-site scenic

amenities, it is recommended that it be maintained as a turnout for emergency stopping, turning around, etc.

- T-2 Potential Scenic Turnout - Gulkana Airfield. The Gulkana Airfield offers the first expansive views when traveling north from Glennallen. The activity at the airfield is also a special attraction to many travelers. It is recommended that a small gravel widening (accommodating 2 to 3 cars) be established on the east side of the highway. Additional on-site analysis and consultation with the airfield manager will be necessary to designate the best turnout location to provide memorable views yet avoid conflict with airfield operations.
- T-3 Existing Gravel Turnout. This existing turnout offers an excellent view of Mt. Drum, however, entry and exit visibility is relatively poor. This turnout should be maintained but signs should be posted next to the highway on either side of the turnout alerting travelers of its location. Paving would reduce the difficulty of entry from the highway. In addition, an information sign could be posted at the turnout noting the facilities available at Dry Creek Campground just to the north.
- Rec-1 Dry Creek Campground. Dry Creek Campground is a state managed campground with 58 camping units. This facility is a good example of sensitive siting which eliminates any visual impact on the road.

provide an element of visual interest and provide soil conditioning until taller and denser vegetation is established.

- M-2 The Vacated Road Alignment: This area is visually distracting because of its contrast with the surrounding dense vegetation. Since another turnout is not needed along this stretch of highway, it should be blocked from vehicular access and revegetation should be encouraged. Particular attention should be given to establishing vegetation (tall trees and shrubs) on the strip of land between the two alignments to screen the vacated segment.
- M-3 Construction Staging Area and Scales: This site appears to have been temporarily established for road construction activity. Regrading and revegetation should be anticipated for the time when the site is no longer in use. This would help blend the gravel surfaced clearing in with the existing low shrub vegetation at the roadside near the airfield clearing.

Impact Mitigation (M)

The following sites require management attention to mitigate their negative visual impacts:

- M-1 Road Intersection: The large clearing at this road intersection is out of character with the surrounding landscape and appears much larger than necessary. Natural revegetation at the edges of the site should be encouraged to reduce its visual impact. Introduction of flowering plants, such as lupine, vetch and fireweed would

