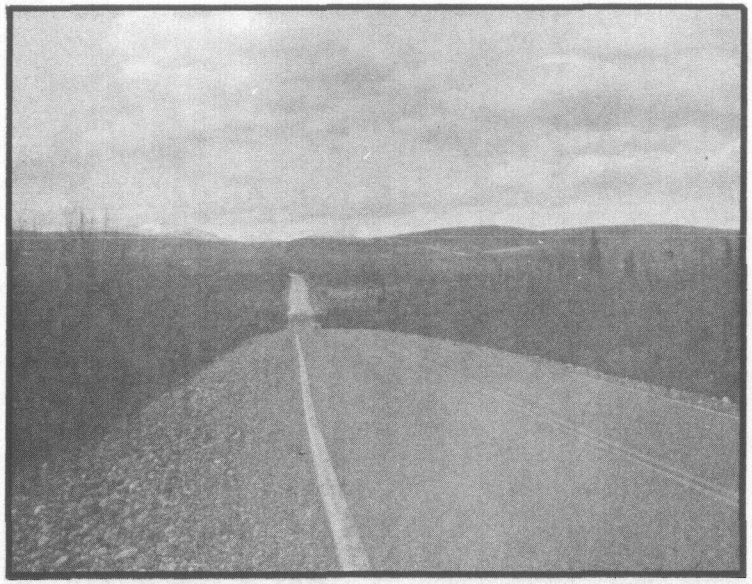
Meiers Lake

General Description

Management Unit 12 begins at Paxson Lake Campground and extends south for 13.3 miles. The road winds across the gently rolling terrain of the Gulkana River Uplands, covered primarily by spruce forests. Many lakes, including Meiers Lake, highlight the driving experience, and the landcover around these lakes adds another element of visual diversity. The setting is framed by rolling foothills and low peaks and ridges with Mt. Paxson located nearby. Distant views of the Wrangell and Chugach mountains enrich the southbound driving experience while the Alaska Range lines the distant horizon in the northbound direction. Visual quality ratings for this portion of the central Richardson Highway are slightly above average. Because of spruce and brush vegetation and gently sloping terrain, the visual absorption capability is high for most of the unit. However, the area surrounding Meiers Lake has lower vegetation and steeper slopes and therefore could not absorb development as readily.

The road design conforms well with the surrounding topography, and the somewhat winding road with frequent changes in point of view creates a visually interesting and enjoyable drive. The road edge is softened by good right-of-way management practices which allow vegetation to grow close to the roadbed. A key issue in this unit is the proposed upgrading to major highway standards which would straighten out most curves and increase traffic speed and volume.



Proposed realignments to straighten and widen the road, as in this photo, would create a less visually interesting driving experience across the gently rolling terrain. Views of the pipeline, seen here, are among the highlights along the highway.

Land uses in Unit 12 are predominately industrial and recreational. The most visually dominant land use in this unit is the Trans-Alaska Pipeline and associated clearings and right-of-ways. The pipeline itself is an interesting

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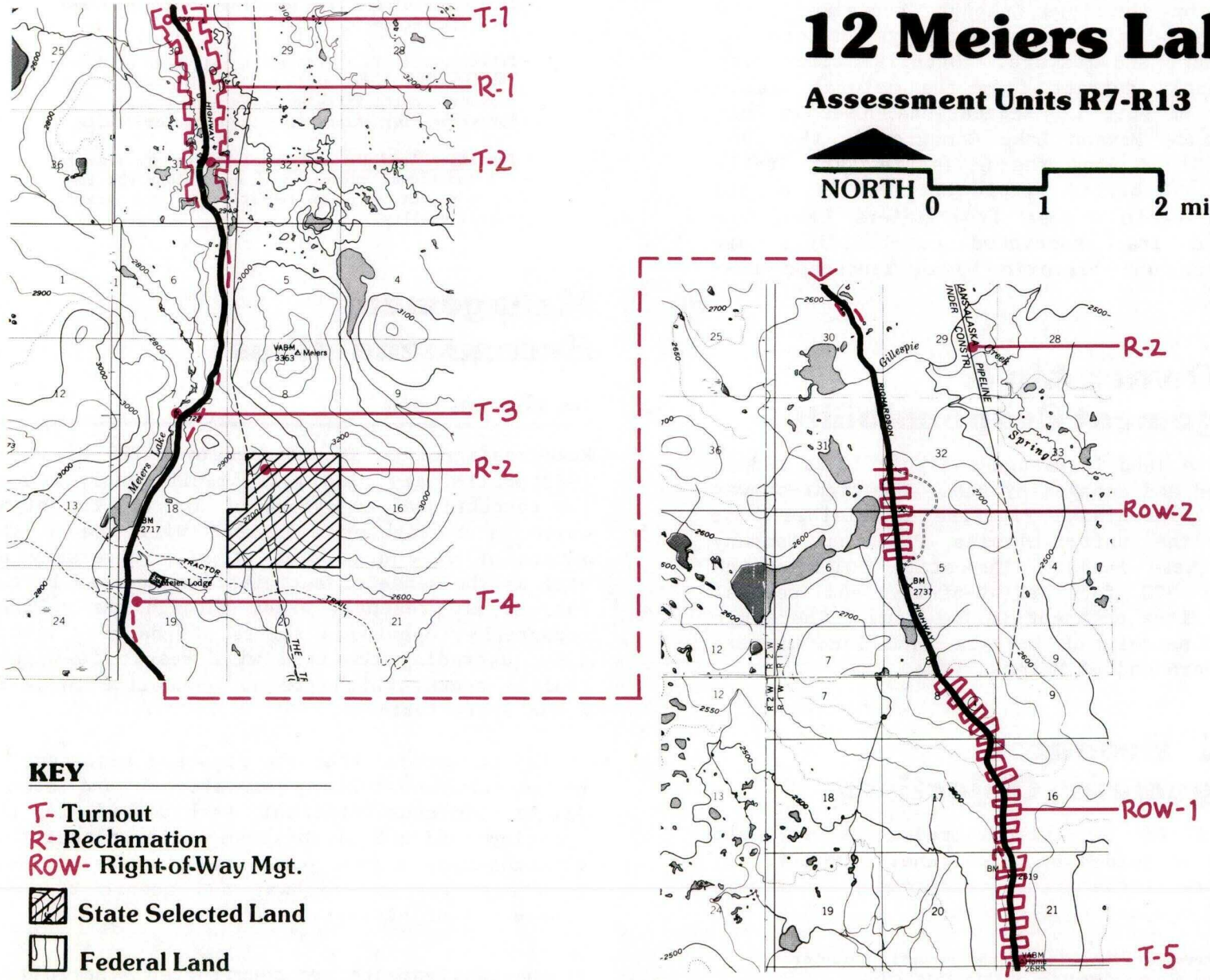
Assessment Units R7-R13



KEY

T- Turnout
R- Reclamation
ROW- Right-of-Way Mgt.

State Selected Land

Federal Land

element in the landscape, but many of the old construction clearings (though "reclaimed") are in contrast with their surroundings in terms of line, color, and texture. Material sites also significantly detract from the natural scenic character of Unit 12. Recreational uses in this unit include Paxson Lake Campground, the June Lake Trailhead, and the Gillespie Lake Trailhead. Also located within Unit 12 is an old abandoned cabin across from Meiers Lake; the cabin and its associated out-buildings are interesting and historic human landscape features.

Land Ownership & Management Responsibility

Most of the land in Management Unit 12 is federally owned and managed by BLM. The right-of-way for the Trans-Alaska Pipeline is visible from much of the unit; Alyeska Pipeline Company manages these lands. The state DOTPF administers a 300 foot right-of-way and several material sites adjacent to the road. There are also two parcels of private land located near the southern end of Meiers Lake.

Visual Resource Management Objectives

Management of the visual resources in Unit 12 should be guided by these general objectives: maintenance, reclamation, enhancement and sensitive land use and development.

Maintenance: To maintain the natural character of the scenic resources within this unit.

Reclamation: To reduce the adverse visual impacts resulting from pipeline construction and material extraction.

Enhancement: To increase the enjoyment of driving through this unit by creating additional viewing opportunities while screening unpleasant landscape disruptions from the traveler's view.

Sensitive Land Use and Development: To provide for additional recreational uses along the road in a manner that is sensitive to the area's scenic quality.

Management Recommendations

Realignments

Road realignments as proposed by DOTPF in a May 1982 preliminary plan will significantly reduce the recreational enjoyment of driving the highway. A straighter alignment will reduce the amount of view and point of view diversity as well as the sense of anticipation created by the road as it presently winds through the rolling topography, opening a series of changing views. Also, upgrading the road will result in higher traffic speeds which are not conducive to landscape appreciation.

It is recommended that the proposed realignments be reevaluated taking recreational and scenic values into consideration. Perhaps widening the existing road and slightly smoothing rather than straightening curves would be adequate to meet both multiple use highway and scenic resource management objectives.

If the realignments are constructed, the follow-

ing actions should be implemented to minimize the loss of scenic and recreational values:

- Remove pavement from old road sections and encourage revegetation.
- Leave as much natural vegetation intact as possible between old and new road alignments.
- Plant tall brush and trees between old and new alignments where additional screening is necessary.
- Where appropriate, utilize the old road alignment to provide turnout opportunities (see turnout recommendations).

Right-of-Way Management (ROW)

The right-of-way in this unit is generally well managed. Low plants and brush are allowed to grow close to the road edge which minimizes the intrusion of the road upon the landscape. This practice should be continued. Other guidelines for future right-of-way management include:

- Adopt selective clearing practices for roadside vegetation to maintain safe visibility and open up views.
- Vary the height and depth of vegetation cuts along the road to produce a visually interesting right-of-way edge.
- Develop a yearly Richardson Highway right-of-way maintenance program involving the operations and maintenance supervisor in conjunction with a landscape architect.

Site specific recommendations are as follows:

ROW-1 The right-of-way in the southernmost Assessment Unit (R-13) has several sections which are significantly impacted with spill-over gravel. The gravel should be removed and the edge more naturally contoured to encourage revegetation.

ROW-2 This straight, somewhat monotonous, section of the road which is visible as it climbs the face of a long hill, could be made more attractive with the addition of tall vegetation adjacent to the road edge.

Greenbelts

Greenbelts can be an important tool to use in conjunction with right-of-way management to maintain and enhance scenic resource values.

In this unit, because of its natural and recreational character, sloping topography, and less than dense vegetation, a 100 foot greenbelt is recommended on all public lands. Within this 100 feet, the following considerations should guide management actions:

- Minimize vegetation cutting in the greenbelt.
- Allow cutting and selective vegetation clearing for view management purposes.
- Locate development and permanent structures beyond the greenbelt edge.
- Limit access roads through the greenbelt. Those which are constructed should be sensitive to the surrounding landforms and scenic resource values.

Land Use & Development

Presently this area is one of the least developed portions of the central Richardson. Because of the importance of the road's natural character to its scenic and recreational values, it is recommended that the undeveloped nature of the unit be retained. Commercial, industrial and residental development should be

discouraged from locating in this unit, and, instead located along other segments of the highway. Some additional recreational development would be appropriate, including scattered recreational homesites. However, such development should conform to guidelines which respect scenic values:

- Place development outside the right-of-way and greenbelt in a manner that minimizes visibility from the road.
- Sensitively design and construct structures to conform to the rustic character of the area.
- Retain natural vegetation as undisturbed as is practical.
- Limit access routes.
- Provide recreational development signs that are small and preferably constructed of wood.
- Limit development in areas which have low screening potential such as the Meiers Lake vicinity.

Turnouts (T)

Because the Richardson Highway is a high-speed, high-volume thoroughfare, it is particularly important that an adequate number of turnouts be provided for safe stopping. Turnouts are used for emergency stopping, resting, viewing scenery, picnicking, walking the dog, and a variety of other things. Presently there is a shortage of such sites along the highway. This study has identified three turnouts which could be inexpensively developed by retaining old road alignments if realignments are constructed, and two existing turnouts which require certain management actions.

T - 1 This high priority site would be created by a curve realignment and thereby provide nice views of Paxson Lake. There is good visibility for safe entry and exit.

T - 2 This site has lower priority than (T-1) but could provide a nice parking area for Dick Lake. There is an opportunity to construct a trail around the lake.

T - 3 This large curve could be retained to provide a nice overlook of Meier's Lake, which is one of the most scenic features of this unit. The site is a high priority for meeting additional turnout and recreational demands. A fairly long foot trail could be constructed around Meier's Lake. Garbage receptacles would be appropriate at this large potential turnout.

T - 4 This existing turnout requires signing for safer access and requires trash clean up.

T - 5 This unpaved turnout loop offers no significant views for this area, is littered, and creates more negative visual impacts than benefits. It is recommended that this site be closed to vehicular access and encouraged to revegetate.

Material Sites & Reclamation (R)

Although essential for road maintenance and construction, material sites are the most unattractive land uses in this unit. The numerous material sites are in stark contrast to the surrounding lines, colors, and textures characteristic of the area's rolling hills and dense vegetation. Because the occurrence of these sites is so frequent they are not addressed individually. The following general guidelines should be implemented by DOTPF maintenance and operations crews.

Active Material Sites:

- Provide vegetative screening along the road edge and the edges of the site itself.
- Where appropriate, construct berms along the road edge to screen the site from view. These berms should be planted to minimize their visual

contrasts. A good example of this technique exists in this unit where a berm at R-1 very effectively blocks the material sites from view.

- Park large highway equipment in those locations which offer the most screening potential from the road.
- Design material site access routes to minimize visual impacts. One road should access a material site rather than leaving the whole face cleared and exposed to view from the road.

Old Material Sites:

- Close vehicular access and encourage the sites to revegetate.
- Regrade to contours which blend well with surrounding landforms and are conducive to vegetation growth.
- Enhance the revegetation of pipeline associated clearings with active brush planting.
- If appropriate, plant tall brush adjacent to the road to help screen the old site until other reclamation activities have reduced its impacts.

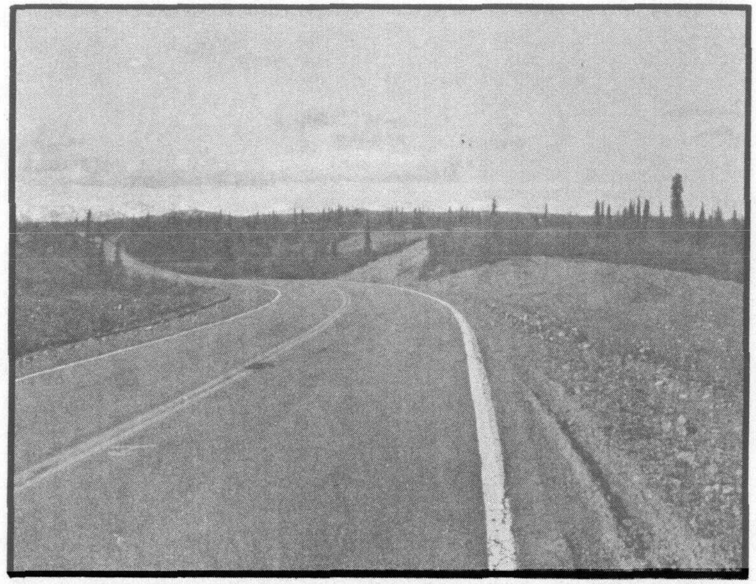
New Material Sites

- Locate new sites outside the right-of-way and. to the extent possible, outside the greenbelt.
- Utilize existing landforms and vegetation to screen new material sites and the access to these sites.

icularly significant areas have been
or reclamation:

R - 1 There are numerous small gravel extraction sites located in the northernmost assessment unit. These material sites severely impact the scenic and recreational character of this portion of the road. Recommendations pertaining to active and old material sites should be applied in this area where negative impacts are particularly severe.

R - 2 Scars associated with pipeline construction clearing create strongly contrasting lines, colors, and textures on visible hillsides. Reclamation efforts have successfully decreased the contrasts somewhat, but the planted grasses do not blend well with surrounding landcovers. Brush and other native vegetation should be planted and trees should be established to help heal these scars.



Numerous small gravel sites at the road edge and bare road cuts diminish the natural character of the landscape. These areas can be contoured and revegetated to blend with their surroundings and add to the appreciation of subtle landscape changes.