

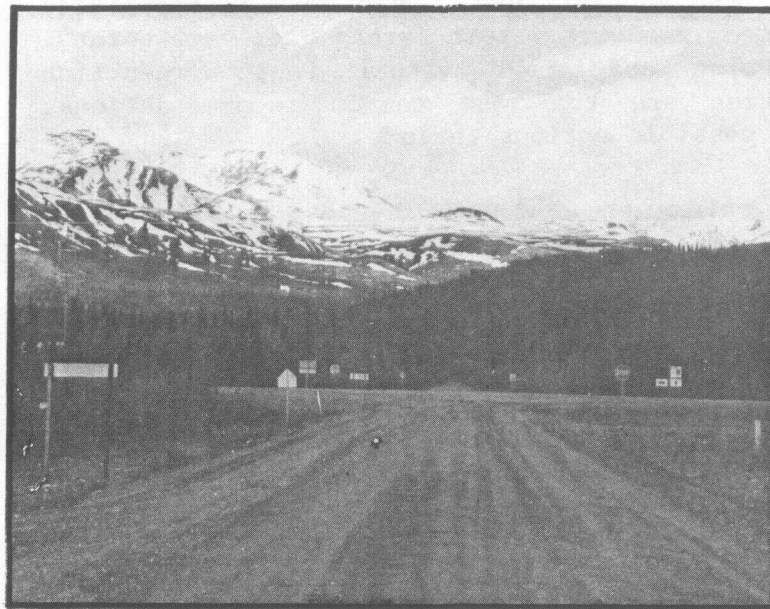
# Management Unit 1

## Cantwell Area

### General Description

Management Unit one includes the first five miles of the Denali Wild and Scenic Road near the community of Cantwell. Traveling east from the junction with the George Parks Highway, the road follows the nearly level lower terraces of the Jack River through dense stands of bottomland spruce-poplar forest. Beyond Drashner Lake it climbs slightly onto rolling uplands where semi-open stands of spruce are inter-mixed with wet tundra and alpine tundra. This very broad, open valley is an extension of the Broad Pass depression immediately to the southwest. The road skirts the base of the Reindeer Hills to the north which play a strong visual role due to their proximity to the viewer. More distant landforms associated with the Talkeetna Mountains, the Alaska Range and Broad Pass are typically visible throughout the management unit. Mt. McKinley is a dominant landmark visible from the eastern parts of this management unit on clear days.

Scenic resource values are moderately high and are affected by the considerable amount of land development and visibility of management activities in this unit. Residential development is generally in scale with the



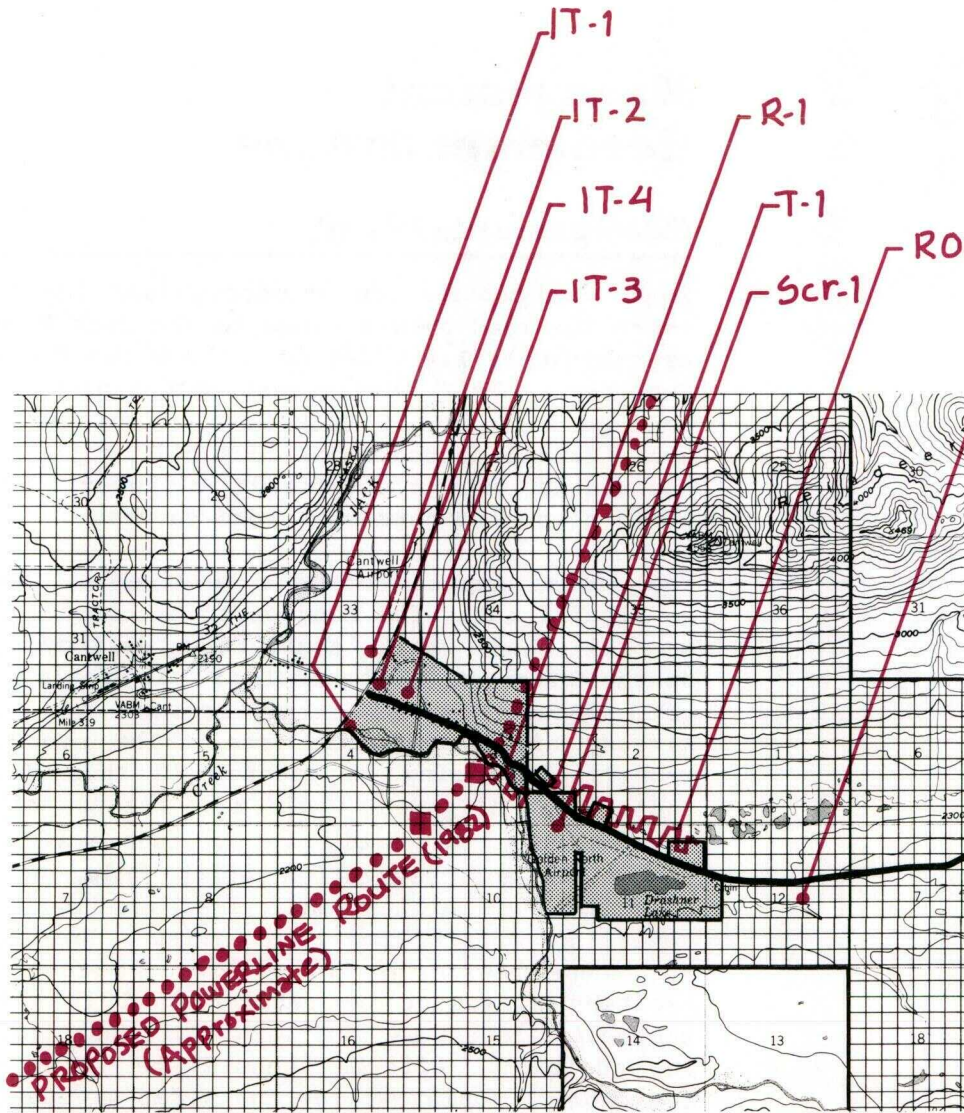
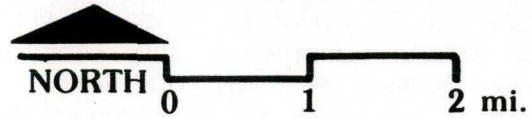
*A dramatic Alaskan Range backdrop and a confusing array of signs mark the west end of the Denali Wild and Scenic Road. An information turnout here would organize the provision of road information and create a visual symbol of the road entrance.*

surrounding landscape. It is located some distance from the road and there is adequate retention of the natural landcover to minimize visual impacts. The strongest negative scenic impacts result from road construction and maintenance activities - particularly near Jack River and the local dump. The visual absorption capability of this area is variable: it is generally high on the level, densely forested Jack River terrace and low on the open tundra uplands typical of the eastern portion of this unit.



# 1 Cantwell Area

Assessment Units D1 - D2



## KEY

- IT - Information Turnout
- R - Reclamation
- Scr - Screening
- ROW - Right-of-Way Mgt.
- Rest - Rest Area

- Native Corp. Land
- Federal Land
- Private Land

---

## Land Ownership & Management Responsibility

Ownership adjacent to the road is a mixture of large and small privately owned parcels with the remainder to be owned by Cantwell Village Inc. The DOTPF manages a 300 foot wide right-of-way through most of the unit. The right-of-way is narrower in some areas where private land abuts the road.

## Visual Resource Management Objectives.

Visual resource management objectives recommended for this unit relate to three broad themes: sensitive development, impact mitigation, and Denali Wild and Scenic Road entrance.

Sensitive Development: To encourage landowners and managers to recognize the distinctive scenic resource values associated with this area and to take appropriate measures to minimize potential negative visual impacts resulting from developments and uses.

Impact Mitigation: To take necessary actions to reduce the negative visual impacts associated with road construction and maintenance and other land uses which have resulted in a deterioration of the scenic and experiential quality of this area.

Entrance Experience: To create an appropriate entrance/exit experience that is in character with the wild and scenic theme of the Denali

Road and also serves as a recreational link with Denali National Park.

## Management Recommendations

### Realignments (Real)

Road realignments are proposed along the area where the road passes close to the Jack River, approximately 1.4 miles from the Parks Highway Junction. This realignment would place the road on fill on the Jack River floodplain to avoid landslide and slope instability problems associated with the present alignment. It would also eliminate some road curves.

The visual impacts of this realignment would be significant. The road would be constructed on fill and would completely destroy the sparse river edge vegetation. It would add yet another level of disturbance to this already highly impacted area. The proposed powerline crossing is located in this unit, and the new alignment would make the powerline more visible. It would move the road away from the hills and vegetation which help screen powerline visibility and, instead, increase powerline visibility and view duration. For these reasons it is recommended that the existing alignment be retained and that the unstable slopes be cut back and stabilized. In addition, efforts should be made to reestablish poplar-willow and alder vegetation along the south (river) side of the road.

---

## **Intertie Powerline Routing**

---

The proposed powerline route would follow the upper western slope of the Reindeer Hills and cross the Denali Wild and Scenic Road near where it passes close to the Jack River. Visual impacts of this powerline would be high while traveling in both directions. Heading east from the Parks Highway Junction, the line and towers would either be on the horizon or just below it and visible for the first mile of the road. Traveling west on the existing alignment, the line would only be visible for a brief time as the viewer comes around a corner and passes under it. While view duration would be short, the visual impact would be high due to the size of the tower, its proximity to the viewer and its surprise effect. Moreover, the line crossing the open Jack River floodplain and extending towards Broad Pass would be highly visible. It is assumed that this routing cannot be changed. However, it is recommended that this area be considered a priority for employing appropriate measures to reduce adverse visual impacts. The following considerations are suggested to help accomplish this:

- Careful selection of the towers used in this area. Tower design (shape, height, materials, color) should try to minimize contrast with the alpine tundra vegetation of the Reindeer Hills during the time of most intensive recreation and driving use (mid-June through mid-September).
- Special consideration given to the tower to be located on the Jack River floodplain immediately adjacent to the road. Preliminary alignments suggest that a "pivotal" tower would be necessary because this is a point where the powerline changes direction. From a visual management perspective, a tower located

on the hills above the road would have less impact-particularly for travelers heading west. Retention of as much of the existing river edge tree and shrub vegetation should be considered a priority in this area, as well as some replanting to help reduce visibility of both the tower and the line heading towards Broad Pass.

- Helicopter construction and maintenance should be used for all towers on Reindeer Hills and along the Jack River to eliminate potential scars and clearings between towers associated with road construction and maintenance.
- Location of the line over Reindeer Hills so it is below the "ridge" of the hill as seen from the Parks Highway and the first portion of the Denali Wild and Scenic Road when heading east.
- Coordination of specific powerline routing and design with road realignment and roadside land reclamation and revegetation plans to minimize landscape disturbances and take maximum advantage of the screening potential of existing landforms and vegetation. A landscape architect should work with the DOTPF, Alaska Power Authority, and Native Corporation representatives to coordinate land use and development plans for this highly sensitive area.

## **Land Use & Development (LU)**

---

Because of this unit's private ownership pattern and its proximity to existing development and services along the Parks Highway, it is reasonable to assume that the area will be a focus of community growth in the future. Very likely the greatest pressure will be for residences near the road - either permanent residences or recreational homesites for part year occupancy. As already noted existing development is not highly visible and in a number of cases adds to the road's visual interest. The existing development patterns of

large setbacks from the road and minimal land clearing and disturbance near the road should be encouraged to continue. The following general recommendations point out ways to minimize visual impacts associated with development and respond to the goals and objectives already outlined:

- Concentrate road related commercial development near existing commercial activity--near the junction of the Parks Highway and Denali Wild and Scenic Road.
- Encourage smaller lot development in those areas with high visual absorption capability (on nearly level, densely vegetated river terraces), while using the open uplands for more dispersed development and land use. In these more open areas, development setbacks from the road and sensitive use of topography changes can be useful tools to minimize visual impacts.
- Minimize the number of access roads to individual parcels from the highway itself. Feeder roads and collector streets are preferable to numerous driveways which are not only visually disruptive but also create problems for safe entry and exit, drainage, and maintenance.
- Encourage developers to use trained architects and/or landscape architects as consultants for in private land developments larger than single residences. As noted in other parts of this report, the state should provide financial aid or other incentives for such professional assistance on developments adjacent to the Denali as well as other scenic roads.
- Avoid further development on the north side of the road from the existing dump access road to just past Drashner Lake. Here the road overlooks a small valley and lakes with the Reindeer Hills as a backdrop, and it is a particularly attractive view. Development on the opposite (south) side of the road would be preferable and have much less visual impact.

- Adopt greenbelt width and management recommendations for all roadside lands.

## **Greenbelts (G)**

---

Through privately owned lands roadside greenbelts can be a useful tool to help maintain scenic resource values as well as a means of buffering private landowners from road noise, dust and loss of privacy. Within this management unit three types of greenbelts are recommended:

- Along existing private landholdings with road frontage, it is recommended that a 25 foot wide greenbelt management strip beyond the road right-of-way be adopted. Within this area, the general objective is to retain a "naturally" appearing edge to the roadscape. Selective tree and brush clearing could take place in accordance with the individual landowner's needs as long as the alterations do not significantly modify the natural character. Structures within this area would not be appropriate.
- On roadside lands to be owned by Cantwell Village Inc., it is recommended that a 100 foot wide greenbelt management strip adjacent to the right of way be established. The first 25 feet of this greenbelt would be subject to the same considerations outlined above. Within the remaining 75 feet vegetation clearing and landform modification would be acceptable, however, no permanent structures would be encouraged in this area. This functions as a setback to help keep development away from the road.
- Where the highway passes near the Jack River a 100 foot wide greenbelt beyond the right of way should be established along the south side of the road. No vegetation clearing or landform alteration is desirable here in order to help preserve a naturally appearing foreground for views towards Broad Pass. (See management unit map, area R-1)



## **Right-of-Way Management (ROW)**

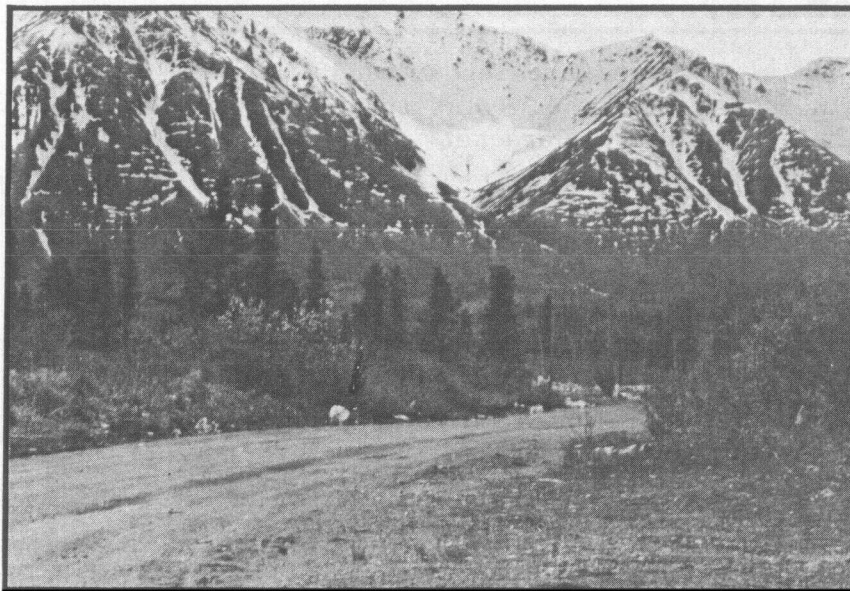
Because of extensive private land ownership within this unit, the greatest opportunity and responsibility for effective scenic resource management rests with the DOTPF. Right-of-way management should strive to minimize the visual impact of the road itself and also provide a natural and visually pleasing foreground from which to view the surrounding mountains. This is best accomplished through a minimum of roadside brush control measures and by encouraging the natural landcover to encroach upon the road edge as close as possible. At the same time, right-of-way management should be coordinated with greenbelt management so management actions within the two areas are directed towards the same end:

- ROW-1 Within this area, right-of-way management should encourage viewer attention and focus to the north, across a low creek valley with small lakes. Vegetation on the south side of the road should be trees and shrubs to screen views in that direction. Right of way vegetation on the north side of the road should be scattered trees and low shrubs to allow views while retaining the natural appearing character.

## **Impact Mitigation (M)**

The following sites require special attention to mitigate significant visual impacts.

- R-1 Reclamation This area where the road passes the Jack River and its floodplain has been severely disturbed by road construction and maintenance activities. As noted under the discussion for road realignments, the existing alignment is preferred. Efforts need to be directed at reestablishing riparian vegetation adjacent to the south side of the road (poplars, willows and alders). Roadcuts on the north side need to be stabilized and vegetation established where possible.



*The addition of a landscaped berm and regular maintenance would minimize the visual impact of this unattractive garbage dump. All similar facilities should be better screened and located further from scenic roadways.*

Because of the proposed powerline routing through this area road turnout development is not recommended. Existing gravel turnout areas should be revegetated now to promote natural reclamation.

- Scr -1 Screening The existing dump is highly visible and only 1/8 mile from the road. Garbage overflow and windblown trash adds to the negative impact. Effort should be devoted to containing garbage at the present site; but in addition, it is desirable to relocate the dump away from the road in a lower, more sheltered location. Proper solid waste management practices should be adopted to contain trash within the site and provide for regular removal. The existing dump should be screened by a berm at the edge of the right-of-way to minimize its negative impacts. The berm could be designed and planted to visually blend with adjacent landforms and vegetation.

---

## Turnouts (T)

Two types of turnouts are recommended in Unit 1, including a rest area - interpretive site for the landscape character type and a roadside pull off.

**Rest-1 Rest Area** This general area has been identified by the DOTPF as a turnout and by the Denali Highway Information Plan as a visitor center site. The site noted here is recommended for development as a roadside rest area with an interpretive theme related to the Broad Pass landscape. This site provides views of Mt. McKinley on clear days in addition to panoramic views of all surrounding landscape features and the development around Drashner Lake and Cantwell in the distance. Safe traffic entry and exit from both directions is possible due to site location on a hillslope and the long straight road alignment. Facilities should include rest rooms, some picnic sites and an interpretive display. This display should identify where to look for Mt. McKinley as well as name other visible landscape features. There is also the opportunity to develop a trail connecting with another trail easement to the east which could provide travelers with the opportunity to hike down to the Jack River.

The one limitation on site development here is the open nature of the landscape. Not only can rest area development have a significant visual impact on the surrounding area, but also the development of adjacent private lands can impact the views from the turnout. The layout of the rest area and the design of the structures must be sensitive to the high visibility of the area. In addition, a 300 foot wide greenbelt management strip should be established around the rest area site to keep development at a distance and to retain an undisturbed foreground for the panoramic views.

**T-1 Turnout** This site has been identified for turnout development by DOTPF. It would be used primarily by travelers heading west since it is on the north side of the road and

entry-exit for eastbound vehicles is poor. While this site does provide for pleasing views out over the small creek valley and towards Reindeer Hills, its major problem is its proximity to the local dump. While this site could be a pleasant small turnout that is relatively easy to develop because it is already a gravel surfaced, graded area turnout use is not encouraged as long as the dump remains in its present location.

## Information Turnouts (IT)

Two development alternatives for information turnouts are possible around the junction of the Parks Highway and the Denali Wild and Scenic Road. The first is to establish three small turnouts within the road right of way, one for travelers arriving at the junction from each direction (Sites I T 1, 2, and 3). The second alternative is to develop a single information turnout for all travelers (site I T 4). This alternative would require the greatest amount of land, could not be done within the right of way alone, and would be the most costly due to land acquisition costs.

**IT-1** The information turnout for travelers arriving from the south along the Parks Highway would be located just beyond the crossing of the Jack River on the east side of the highway. This site offers good visibility for exit and return to the road, is visible from the junction, and provides some views up the Jack River. Its proximity to development would help reduce vandalism. Traffic is slower here as it is approaching the junction and the presence of roadside activity also helps to slow vehicles. Existing roadside vegetation adequately screens adjacent development and some of it near the Jack River could be selectively cleared to open up better views. The primary problem with the development of this site would be its proximity to

commercial roadside development. However, if the small turnout area and information board is kept as close to the bridge as possible and special care is taken with respect to right of way management this problem can be easily overcome.

An alternative site would be near the south side of the bridge over the Jack River. Here the views are much better up towards the Denali Road and there is more space for development. gravel extraction has severely impacted this site, and it would require considerable reclamation in order to make it into a comfortable turnout.

IT-2 This information turnout is recommended for travelers on the Parks Highway arriving from the north. It is located just north of milepost 210, or .2 mile from the actual junction on the west side of the Parks Highway. There are no amenities or distinctive views--its primary attribute is its proximity to the actual junction. Development would consist of a road widening to provide turnout and stopping space for 2 to 3 vehicles and an information board. Development would be within the existing right of way. Proper planting and vegetation management within the right of way could provide adequate screening from adjacent land development. The major limitation to the development of this site would stem from intensive commercial development of adjacent private lands resulting in numerous access roads and signage which could conflict with the visibility and functioning of the information turnout.

One alternative site is an existing paved turnout approximately 1 mile north of the highway junction. This site could be readily developed at minimal cost since only an information board would need to be added. Its shortcomings stem from its distance from the actual junction, assuming travelers prefer road information close to the actual decision point.

IT-3 For travelers arriving from the east this information turnout is recommended. It is approximately .2 mile from the junction and on the north side of the Denali Road. Development would be within the road right of way and

consist of a small gravel area providing stopping space for 2-3 vehicles and an information board. Landscaping would be needed to effectively screen and separate the turnout from adjacent land developments.

IT-4 This information turnout which could be developed to meet the information needs of travelers arriving from all directions could be developed on vacant land at the northeast corner of the actual road junction. This corner lot would need to be purchased since the right of way alone would be inadequate. Primary entry and exit should be from the Denali Road rather than the Parks Highway in order to minimize safety hazards. The site has no particularly distinctive viewing opportunities or other amenities other than its central and visible location. Because it would be designed to service travelers arriving from all directions, the design of the circulation system and information boards would be more complex and costly and more extensive parking would need to be provided. In addition, the site would require landscaping to make it visually attractive. In spite of these limitations, it would be a useful travel information center--including restrooms, telephones and trash receptacles--and would undoubtedly receive considerable use.