

## Management Unit 9

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# East End – Denali Road



*Panoramic views to the Alaska Range give this unit its distinction. This area also serves as a transition from the lowlands along the Richardson Highway to the tundra landscape of the Clearwater/Amphitheater Mountains.*

### General Description

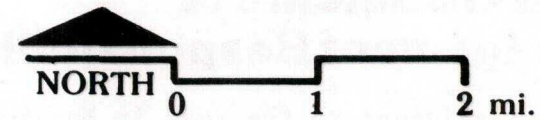
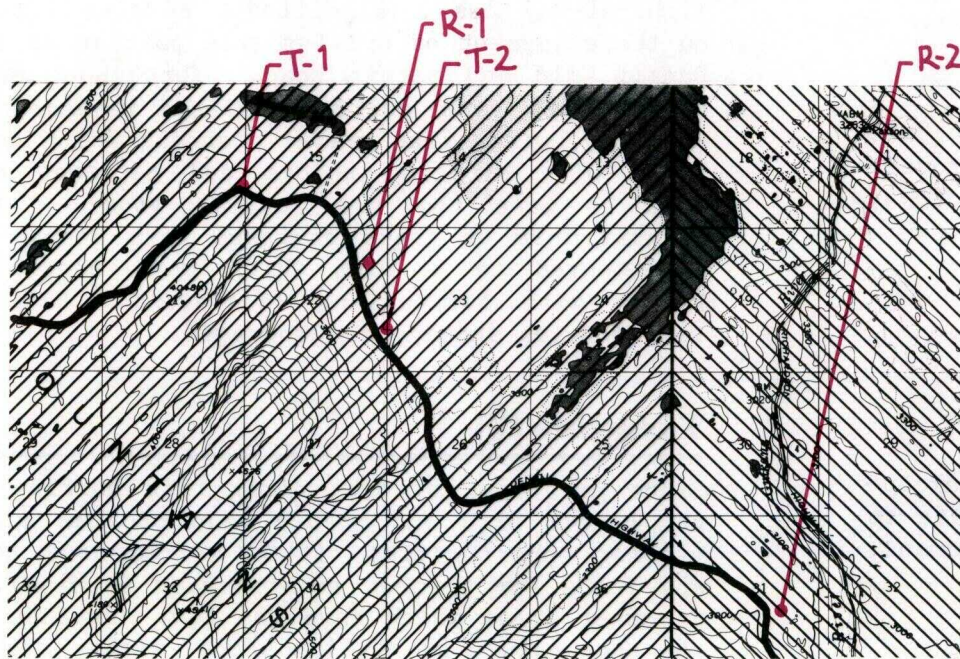
Management Unit 9 begins slightly east of 10 Mile Lake and extends 9.4 miles to just outside of Paxson. Commencing in the 10 Mile Lake basin, the road crests a hill to enter the Summit Lake basin, from where there are views east into the Gulkana River Valley. The unit offers one of the most varied and diverse driving experiences along the Denali Wild and Scenic Road. Views include a spectacular panorama of Alaska Range peaks and glaciers, Summit Lake, the Wrangell Mountains, and the foothills of the Amphitheater Mountains. The paved road winds gracefully through

undulating glacial topography, giving the viewer awareness of three different valleys and their accompanying mountains.

Land use and development is not significant in this unit, indeed, its "wild" and pristine condition is a major component of the scenic resource. The only exceptions are a few material sites and an unpleasant bench of gravel which drains the right-of-way throughout much of the unit.

# 9 East End- Denali Road


Assessment Units D62 – D65



## KEY

T- Turnout

R- Reclamation

 State Owned Land

 State Selected Land

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Scenic quality ratings for this unit are high and the primary viewer orientation is to the north. Due to open, expansive vistas and low growing vegetative land cover, the visual absorption capability of this unit is low.

## Land Ownership & Management Responsibility

All land adjacent to the road in Management Unit 9 is state selected and tentatively approved. DOTPF administers a 300 foot right-of-way throughout this unit.

## Visual Resource Management Objectives

Management objectives for the particularly exceptional scenic resources within Unit 9 relate to three general themes: retention, enhancement, and impact mitigation.

**Retention:** To retain those characteristics of the driving experience in this unit which contribute to its particularly striking visual resource values.

**Enhancement:** To enhance the driving experience by fostering a greater understanding and appreciation of the natural features which constitute the units' scenic and recreation resources.

**Impact Mitigation:** To take appropriate measures to reduce the negative impacts of distracting landscape alterations.

## Management Recommendations

### Right-of-Way Management

While distant mountain views command much of the traveler's attention, the condition of the right-of-way has a significant adverse impact on the enjoyment of driving this portion of the Denali Wild and Scenic Road. Throughout most of the unit, road surface drainage is accommodated by, wide, flat gravel channels which contrast with existing colors and textures and tend to make the road appear wider. The angular form of these drainage ways should be recontoured to a form which more naturally blends with surrounding landforms. Natural revegetation should be encouraged.

### Turnouts (T)

Since existing turnouts along this portion of the Denali Wild and Scenic Road provide ample viewing opportunities, it is recommended that any funds for turnout construction be diverted to other areas which have too few. Because of the open nature of the landscape, litter receptacles should be buried or designed to be more unobtrusive, such as a cluster of short, screened tubs. One scenic overlook in Unit 9 is notable for a memorable panorama; it is discussed below.

T - 1 Scenic Turnout: This site is located at an elevation of 3,700 feet and overlooks the Summit Lake basin below. The panoramic view encompassing the Alaska Range with the Gulkana and Gakona glaciers, numerous glacial lakes, and the southern Wrangells is one of the most

spectacular viewing opportunities along the Denali Wild and Scenic Road. This site is particularly important to eastbound travelers because the view comes as a surprise as travelers crest the hill above the turnout. As a result they are "compelled" to stop and savor the view. The site is presently a rough gravel pullout approximately two acres in size. Visibility is a problem because the overlook is located on the outside edge of a curve.

Due to the spectacular nature of the viewing experience available at this site, it is recommended that this be a high priority for interpretive signing. Appropriate information would be the identification of landscape features such as peaks, glaciers, and lakes. Interpretive signs should be designed and located so as not to conflict with the view. Safety should be improved with small signs advising travelers of the turnout's entrances. The overlook should be graded to make the driving surface more accessible to motorists.

T - 2 BLM Plan Rest Area Proposal. This site is presently a paved turnout located near the eastern end of the unit, just a few miles from Paxson. It was identified in the 1976 Denali Highway Information Plan as the site for a proposed visitor center. The site is well suited for the activities and facilities proposed (picnic area, interpretive display, and short trail to view Summit Lake) because there is plenty of developable land available and safe entry and exit visibility. This site has good views, though not as comprehensive as those from T-1. The primary purpose of BLM's proposed visitor center is to provide traveler information and orientation which this study recommends be provided by the information turnout at the Richardson Highway junction in Management Unit 10. T-2 would be a nice site to develop if sufficient funds should become available, but it would not be a high priority in the context of this study.

## **Greenbelts**

The varied and magnificent scenery of Unit 9 is not protected by vegetation or land form and must therefore be retained through careful land management. Greenbelts should be established to help ensure that the fragile scenic resource values in this area are not compromised by insensitive land use and development. Because travelers are oriented to northern views, it is recommended that a greenbelt be established and implemented on all those lands within the viewshed on the northern side of the road. Scenic resources protection should take precedence on these lands, and no potentially conflicting land use should be allowed to occur within view of the road unless screened from view. Proposed development or landscape alterations should be evaluated for their scenic resource implications.

A 1,000 foot greenbelt is recommended for those lands on the south side of the road in this unit to minimize visual impacts through distance. New land use or development should take place beyond the greenbelt. Within the greenbelt, vegetation and natural landscape features should be left undisturbed.

## **Land Use & Development**

Development or land uses which might detract from the wild and scenic character of this unit should not be discouraged. Visual resource protection should be the priority value for land management. Management Unit 10 (Paxson Junction) and Management Unit 8 (Tangle Lakes) are more appropriate locations for any development because they have lower scenic values, more private land, and are already influenced by



*Material sites, located on the road edge, like R-1 shown here, detract from the road's scenic quality. These sites should be recontoured to blend in with their natural surroundings.*

existing development. Any land development activities which do take place in Unit 9 should be extremely sensitive to the high quality scenic resources. All landscape alterations should respond to the recommended greenbelt considerations noted above and should take advantage of available topography as well as distance to soften visual impacts and minimize visibility. Because most of the outstanding views are on the north, those land uses which cannot be located in some less scenic area should be sited on the south side of the road.

## **Material Sites & Reclamation (R)**

The visual impacts of gravel extraction activity are relatively low in this management unit; only two specific sites are noted here:

- R - 1 Two highly visible, large materials sites are located on either side of the road. The site to the north is more visually dominant due to the viewer's orientation. These sites are in stark contrast to surrounding landform and landcover. Visibility could be significantly reduced by planting tall brush beside the road adjacent to the sites. If they are still in use, gravel extraction practices should attempt to return these materials sites to more natural contours which could then be revegetated when the sites are no longer in use. Following the completion of extraction activity, access should be blocked to allow natural revegetation.
- R - 2 This material site appears to be inactive and could quite easily be recontoured to reduce visual impacts and allow vegetation to grow. Natural succession should be encouraged by blocking access. Some high brush should be planted beside the road to help screen the site from view.



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