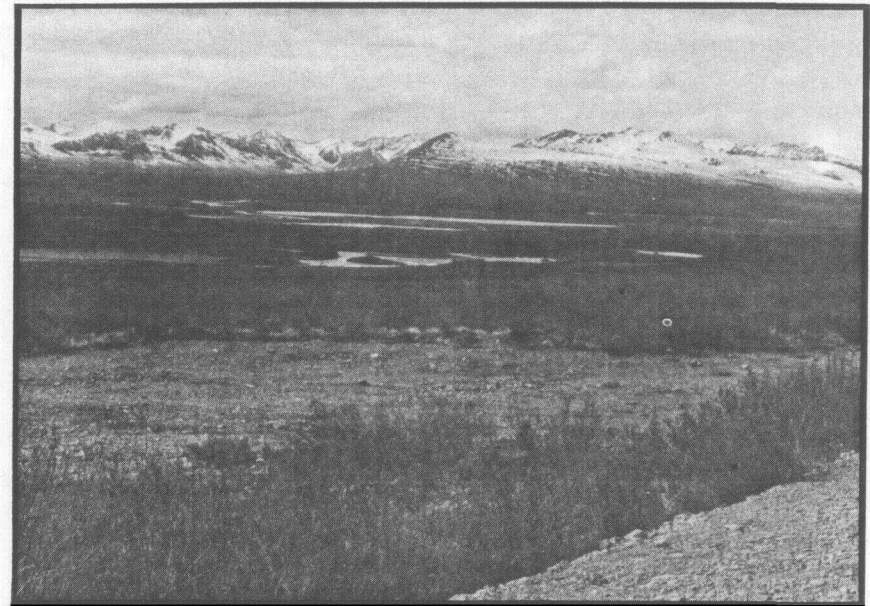


## Management Unit 7

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# Maclaren River to Maclaren Pass



*Numerous gravel pits next to the road detract from the panoramic views across the Maclaren River Valley to the Clearwater Mountains. Some of these sites can be reclaimed as turnouts. Others, such as this one, should be revegetated.*

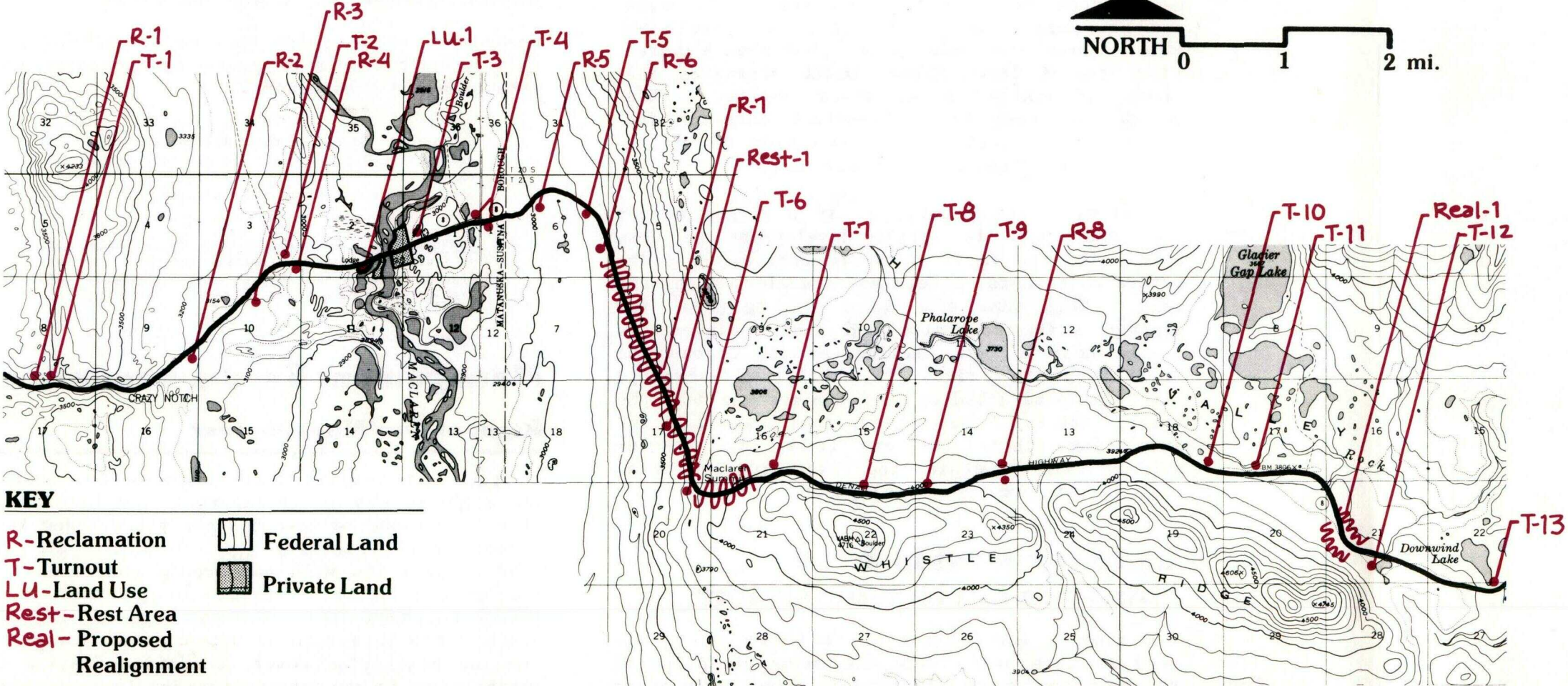
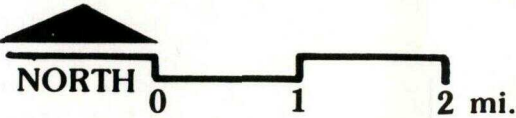
### General Description

The road in Management Unit 7 passes through Crazy Notch and then travels for 18.9 miles across the Maclaren River Valley, climbs the valley wall to Maclaren Summit, and then skirts the base of Whistle Ridge through the pass. Incomparable landform variety and incredible scenery characterize the unit. Generally open, flat terrain surrounds the road, extending to the base of the distant mountains. Landcover in the area varies from low brush, to tundra, to barren slopes. Together, the flat foreground terrain and low lying vegetation open the distant panoramas. At the same time this means the unit's visual absorption capability is very low.

Throughout Unit 7 there are numerous opportunities to experience a wide variety of distinctive glacial features, major mountain ranges and spectacular peaks. Foreground glacial features have a more subtle character, but are expressive of the geological forces that formed them. Crazy Notch is a natural gap in a lateral moraine and is one of the highlights of the drive. Kettle lakes, sinkholes, pingoes and moraines are other notable features immediately adjacent to the road. The variety of these elements makes the area an unusually good location for interpreting the effects of massive glaciation on the land.

# 7 Maclaren River to Maclaren Pass

Assessment Units D41 – D50



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Along the drive, dramatic mountain ranges dominate northerly views. The Clearwater Mountains, the Alaska Range and the Amphitheater Mountains follow each other in succession on the horizon. The almost perpetually snow covered peaks of the Alaska Range provide some of the more spectacular views in the unit at the head of the Maclaren River Valley. The panorama includes Mt. Moffitt, Mt. Shand and Aurora Peak. On clear days one may be treated to glimpses of Mt. Hayes and Mt. Hess. Large glaciers, too, are visible. From the base of the Maclaren Glacier flows the Maclaren River, which dominates the broad, glacially carved river valley. This meandering river is an important corridor for recreation as well as transportation to mining areas in the Clearwater Mountains.

In spite of its beauty, it is a rugged barren area and there is little development in this unit. At the Maclaren River crossing a lodge caters to fishers, miners and travelers along the road. This same site is a staging area for mining in the mountains and some equipment is stored near a small helicopter pad across the river from the lodge. A small, well-screened airstrip is situated on top of a moraine near the river. Not far from the lodge and nestled in the undulating glacial terrain is a small recreational cabin. Outside the river crossing area, there is no permanent development.

## **Land Ownership & Management Responsibility**

BLM manages essentially all the land along the road in this unit, with the major exception of the Maclaren River crossing. Three corners of

the river are private holdings and the northwest corner is a recreation withdrawal. The DOTPF manages one material site just to the east of Crazy Notch along with a 300 foot right-of-way throughout the unit.

## **Visual Resource Management Objectives**

Management of the high quality scenic resources in this unit should be guided by two objectives; retention and enhancement.

Retention: To retain the pristine scenic quality and spectacular vistas of the glacial terrain and distinctive mountain ranges in this unit by minimizing visible landscape disturbance.

Enhancement: To enhance the opportunity for visitors to gain a better understanding of glacial processes through the provision of well-placed interpretive pullouts.

## **Management Recommendations**

### **Right-of-Way Management**

In the open terrain that characterizes Unit 7, the right-of-way is an important and highly visible foreground to more distant views. How it is managed will determine the extent to which the road retains its wild and scenic qualities. At the present time, native, low-growing brushy plants encroach close upon the edge of the road, giving it a very natural appearance. Because of the low vegetative cover, roadside clearing for visibility, is not necessary; and in fact, there

is little evidence of active right-of-way management. In fact, only a small amount of disturbance can have severe repercussions since plant regeneration is extremely slow in these areas of low brush or alpine tundra, and earth scars are difficult to heal. (A good example of this problem is noted on the map at Real-1, where clearing for curve realignment has led to ponding and scarification of the tundra). The following right-of-way management practices are recommended:

- Continue to allow low brush vegetation to encroach upon the road edge, which will help blend the road with its natural, wild surroundings and minimize all disturbance or cutting of the roadside vegetation.

## **Greenbelts**

Effective scenic resource management in this unit cannot rely on right-of-way management alone because of the open and expansive terrain. Most all activities outside the immediate R.O.W. will also have a significant impact on the scenic quality. In this unit, therefore, it is highly appropriate to use the greenbelt as a management tool in conjunction with proper right-of-way management. As the major land owner in the unit, BLM can establish a greenbelt as part of their plan for the Denali Block lands along with visual management guidelines.

Because of the openness of the landscape and the very high scenic values in this unit, a narrow greenbelt would be inadequate to provide reasonable protection of the resource. Thus, a viewshed greenbelt is recommended for the entire unit. This means that all lands visible from the

road would be included within the designated greenbelt and subject to guidelines designed to protect scenic resource values. Unlike the more typical application of a greenbelt this is not intended as a complete "hands-off" area. Rather, all land uses proposed for the viewshed should be prefaced by a visual impact study and submitted to BLM. The purpose of this disclosure would be twofold, both to identify the impact and also to determine alternative methods or development approaches that would ensure protection of the unit's high scenic quality. In general, the following standards should be applied in the viewshed:

- Minimize landcover disturbance
- Minimize development in the viewshed
- Any development of facilities for mining or mineral leasing should be located in such a way that lessens their visibility. In general, the number of access roads off the Denali Road should also be kept to a minimum.
- Some additional development within the immediate viewshed could occur at the Maclaren River crossing where development presently exists and is screened by glacial landforms.

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

The material extraction necessary for road maintenance along this segment of the Denali often takes place immediately next to the road within the right-of-way because the glacial moraines are a readily available source of sand and gravel. It is apparent by their location that little consideration was given to the visual impact of this activity and most of the sites are a highly negative feature along the drive.

Three aspects of material extraction are of concern here: (1) Siting future gravel sources, (2) Managing existing active sites, and (3) Reclamation of old sites.

All new sites should be located to minimize their visibility from the road. These sites should be outside the right-of-way, and therefore, DOTPF should work with the BLM to identify a site or series of sites that will adequately meet road maintenance needs. Gravel extracted from morainal landforms which parallel the road should be taken from the side opposite the road. As a rule, sites should also be located on the side of the road away from the dominant view. In all cases, the site should be in a location that can be screened from view by means of berms or brush vegetation. Care should be given to aligning access roads so they conform to the local landforms and are also sited to minimize their visual impact.

Existing active sites adjacent to the road should be screened with berms and brush vegetation where possible. Access to the site should be camouflaged. The mitigation approach should be guided by the intended future use of the site—either as a turnout/rest area or reclaimed—once it is no longer needed. This should dictate the type of efforts and cost for appropriate interim action.

Surplussed or unused sites should either be developed as a roadside turnout or reclaimed through recontouring or closing access and allowing the area to revegetate.

The following site specific recommendations do not cover all the sites requiring attention.

Some of the judgements on sites requiring screening or reclamation will have to be made as part of a yearly maintenance plan.

R-1 This gravel pit on the west side of Crazy Notch needs some grading and vegetation to improve its appearance from the road. The site could be reclaimed as a turnout, but is not a high priority in this area. Thus returning the site to more natural conditions is preferable.

R-2 This larger material site is located off the road in a reasonably inconspicuous and well-screened location. A ramshackle orange litter barrel is located at the corner of the access road. This would be a good site for recontouring and reclamation as a pull off. A new litter barrel, painted dark green or brown should be sited in the turnout and the access should be posted.

R-3 This gravel site is also recommended for reclamation as a turnout. A turnout here could take advantage of good southern views of the broad glacial valley and distant ridges. It is well-screened behind dense roadside brush and a drive through access loop could be constructed for minimal cost. The site itself would need some grading and the entrance/exit should be signed. This would make an attractive turnout.

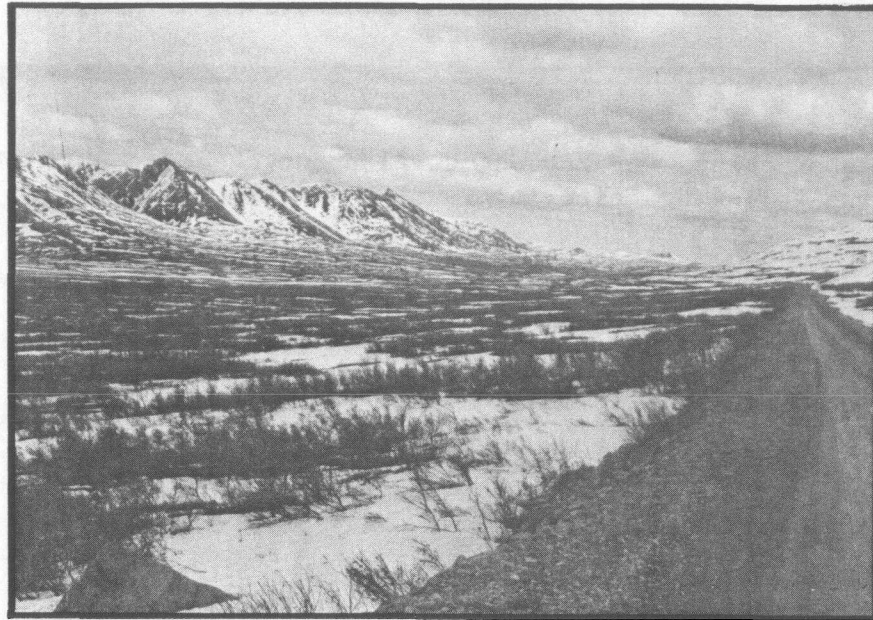
R-4 An old gravel extraction site is located slightly below the road surface and is partially reclaimed. It should be graded and filled so that it is level with the road. The cut bank should be contoured to a more natural angle to soften the edge.

R-5 This rather large gravel site is immediately next to the road and cluttered with junk. It is a flat site and would be easy to retain as a turnout, but offers no views or other amenities. If it is still in active use, some berming and brush screening would help minimize its impact; however, if it is no longer in use, the greater part of the site should be revegetated leaving a small area for a pull-off or turnaround. The junk that presently clutters the site should be removed.

R-6 The gravel pit here is located above the road and is a highly visible scar. Because it has nice panoramic views of the valley and safe access, it should be reclaimed as a turnout. If still in use, the site edges should be bermed for screening.

R-7 The entire roadside area in Assessment Unit 46 as it climbs up the hill to Maclaren Summit is scarred by gravel pits and other poor right-of-way management practices. This area should receive priority for reclamation attention by recontouring and revegetating as it is an important link between the Maclaren valley and pass areas.

R-8 Another large material site, this one covers both sides of the road. The south side consists of large piles of gravel that are in stark contrast to the low tundra vegetation. The site on the north side of the road could be recontoured as a needed turnout providing a good view across the pass area. The active site will be difficult to screen, but berming may mitigate some of the impact.



*Skirting one edge of Maclaren Pass, the road alignment is sensitive to the broad, glacially carved landscape and views to the mountains.*

## **Turnouts (T) & Rest Areas (Rest)**

In this unit, which is noted for its spectacular scenery, there are few places to safely pull off the road and enjoy the view. As a rule, the turnouts that do exist are poorly maintained and many of these are gravel pads of former material sites that have been graded to be more or less level. Thus the location was not dictated by the location of select views or safety, but because it provided a convenient gravel source. Furthermore, access to the turnouts is made difficult by current road grading practices which leave deep gravel furrows that block the entire entrance. For those turnouts with litter barrels, the orange barrels are usually placed in the center, interrupting the view. Bullet

holes riddle most of them. A series of appropriate turnouts should be identified. The turnouts destined for retention should be properly designed and maintained, while the others should be cleaned up and reclaimed by returning them to more natural contours and revegetating where appropriate. One criteria for siting a turnout is the presence of good views or other significant natural features. The Denali Highway Information Plan recommends a total of six turnouts in this management unit, all for the purpose of interpreting the area's unique geologic features. Of these six, three are recommended as being appropriate for turnout development. Each of these is discussed in more detail in the site specific discussions.

Sites appropriate for turnout development should meet the following criteria:

- Presence of impressive views or other interesting natural or human feature, or
- Area requiring a turnout due to distance from next closest turnout
- Site has safe access/egress
- Development of the site will be cost effective
- Turnout will be easy to maintain
- Space is adequate to accommodate 2 to 3 cars

Turnout maintenance is also important along the Denali. For those turnouts that are to be retained, the entrances should be smoothly graded as part of the regular road maintenance program. Also, litter receptacles should be properly designed and located near the turnout entrance so as to minimize their visual intrusion on the landscape. Decrepit barrels should be replaced.

The following sites are recommended as turnouts in Unit 7:

T - 1 Crazy Notch Interpretive Turnout. This potential turnout is located just inside the west end of Crazy Notch. It is a good location for an interpretive sign and turnout because the traveller is still in the notch, yet a site here will not detract from the opportunity to experience the Notch in its undisturbed, natural condition. At the same time, the traveler is close enough to the feature so interpretive information can relate to the immediately visible landscape. The Denali Highway Information Plan also recommends this site to interpret this unusual feature. Some slight clearing and grading are needed to improve the site, as well as signing.

T - 2 Maclaren Glacier View. BLM proposes this site as a turnout to take advantage of excellent views of the Maclaren Glacier. This site was not evaluated in enough detail to comment on the recommendation.

T - 3 Sinkhole Turnout. This existing gravel widening is an excellent site to develop a turnout with a sign interpreting the nearby sinkhole and kettle lakes. The turnout is immediately next to a sinkhole and it is possible to develop trails on the surrounding moraines for additional views of the kettle lakes and the Maclaren River. This is an excellent location and requires only grading and signing to develop it. This site was recommended for the same purpose in the Denali Highway Information Plan.

T - 4 Pingo Turnout. Next to the road here is one half of an exposed pingo formed when moisture upwelling through the permafrost froze and created a frostboil. Now a small pond has formed in front of the pingo and is good waterfowl habitat. The site is appropriate for interpreting these features which are characteristic of the Maclaren River Valley landscape. The Denali Plan includes this site, and proposes filling a portion of the surrounding marsh to create a parking area. Instead of disturbing the marsh, a pull off with parking should be developed at an existing widening on the moraine .1 mile to the west, with a marked walkway back to the pingo and the interpretive information.

T - 5 This small existing turnout has moderately good views of the valley from the base of the hill. It requires grading and some contouring to enhance it as a turnout, and the litter barrel should be replaced and relocated more inconspicuously.

T - 6 This existing pull out provides an excellent overlook of the Maclaren Valley from its vantage point just below Maclaren Summit. The site needs some grading to make access easier, and the litter barrel should be replaced and relocated in a semi-screened spot.

T - 7 This viewpoint at Maclaren Summit offers a magnificent panorama of the Clearwater Mountains, the Alaska Range, Amphitheater Mountains and Maclaren River and Pass. Particularly impressive are the peaks of the Alaska Range—Mt. Moffitt, Aurora Peak and Mt. Hayes. Because of its outstanding views of the Alaska Range, the Denali Plan proposes this as an interpretive site on mountain building processes in the Alaska Range. However, because the road is raised above the alpine tundra, site development would require extensive fill and constitutes a significant visual disruption of the expansive pass area. For this reason, a major turnout is not recommended here at this time. A small widening could be constructed at less expense.

T - 8 This small existing turnout requires some enlarging, grading and smoothing but it has excellent views of Mt. Hayes and Mt. Moffitt as well as other peaks in the Alaska Range. Access and egress is also safe at slow speeds.

T - 9 The DOTPF proposes a turnout at this location. Because a turnout does not exist and would require landfill while other sites exist nearby, development of this site is not recommended.

T - 10 This site has an excellent view of Glacier Gap across the Maclaren Pass and it could be developed as an adequate turnout with minimal grading. Access is also safe. The DOTPF also recommended a turnout at this location in

their Denali upgrading plan. Development of this site should receive priority.

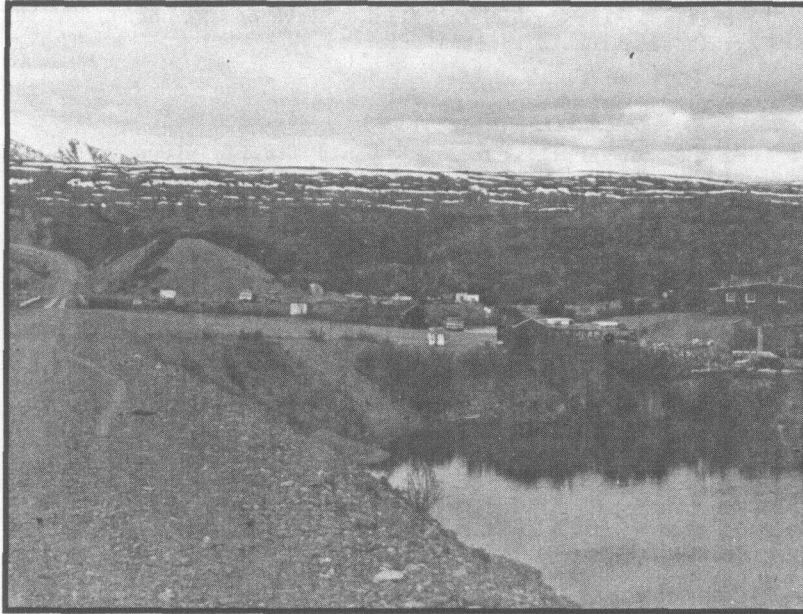
T - 11 A turnout at this location would provide views to the south, including a surprise view beyond Whistle Ridge to the Wrangell Mountains. The size is adequate for a turnout and minimal grading would be required.

T - 12 Located on the south side of the road near a small lake, this proposed turnout is oriented towards Whistle Ridge, Maclaren Pass and Glacier Gap. The site is large and would have safe and clearly visible access. The DOTPF also recommends a turnout at this location which should receive priority for development.

T - 13 Also recommended by the DOTPF, this proposed turnout overlooking Downwind Lake has good development possibilities and reasonably good access. T-12 is preferred over this site.

Rest - 1 A rest area/interpretive site is also recommended in this unit. This existing pullout just below Maclaren Summit offers a full panorama of the Clearwater/Amphitheater Mountains character type with the glaciated river valley below and mountain ranges dominating the horizon. A broad range of landform, waterform and landcover types are clearly visible. This location has ample room to provide a rest area with picnic and toilet facilities. Trails can be developed up the hill to the Maclaren Summit as well as along the ridge on the west side of the road for views of the valley and nearby kettle lakes. This is another site proposed in the Denali Information Plan as an interpretive site for the Maclaren River and Valley. It should receive high priority for development. While extensive cutting or filling is not required, site design and development for a major rest area will be necessary.





*Development at the Maclaren River crossing does not pose major visual problems because of its location in the glacial landforms.*

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

This highly scenic, extremely open area is also sensitive to development intrusion. Therefore, in order to retain the area's wild and scenic values, development should generally be discouraged in Unit 7. It is recommended that BLM incorporate these recommendations in their plan for the Denali Block. While properly sited access corridors to mining and mineral leasing could be considered, settlement along this fragile portion of the Denali Road should not be. Any development actions that do take place

should be evaluated for their impact on the areas scenic quality and follow specific guidelines designed to protect the quality of the scenic resources.

The one exception to these recommendations is the existing lodge and other uses at the Maclaren River crossing. Because of its location, these uses are only visible from the immediate area. The services provided here are needed along the road and thus continued use of the area as a commercial/recreational service node is appropriate. Some expansion in the immediate vicinity, if subject to design guidelines, would also be in keeping with maintaining the road's wild quality while ensuring travelers' needs are met.

LU-1 Maclaren River Lodge. Located close to the road in an area of no vegetative screening capacity, the site's appearance would benefit from cleaning up the clutter of automobiles and other paraphernalia that are scattered around. A trailer across the road on the recreation withdrawal would be somewhat improved with screening. Construction of a permanent structure in keeping with the road's wild and rustic theme is desired if the use is permanent.

## **Road Realignmentments (Real)**

The DOTPF proposes two realignments in this unit. The first is the apparent reconstruction of the Maclaren River bridge slightly to the north of the current bridge. This would require cutting in steep banks along the north side of the road and a major construction effort. The current bridge and road alignment seem more than

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adequate to handle existing traffic. From the standpoint of protecting the scenic values, this study recommends keeping the existing alignment and bridge and upgrading these if necessary for other reasons. Additional research on this question is in order. The other realignment is located in the east portion of Maclaren Pass.

Real-1 A minor curve realignment is proposed here which will not have a major impact on changing the experience of driving through this open landscape. From a driving standpoint it does not appear to be a necessary upgrade. However, in preparation for this action, roadside clean-up has already created unsightly scars. Now that the damage is done, care should be taken to reclaim the old alignment and allow it to revegetate once the realignment is complete. In alpine tundra this will be a lengthy process.