

## Management Unit 2

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# Reindeer Hills & Pyramid Peak

### General Description

Management Unit 2 begins about 5 miles east of the Parks Highway junction and extends 14.3 miles east. The western portion of the roadway skirts the south side of the Reindeer Hills through an extension of Broad Pass, then its eastern portion follows closely along the south bank of the Nenana River. This change from Broad Pass to the Nenana River is dramatic from a visual standpoint; the traveler leaves a broad plateau contained by distant mountains and enters a narrow river corridor enclosed by nearby mountains.

The visual diversity of this unit contributes to its high scenic quality. The Alaska Range continually defines distant views, and in clear weather Mt. McKinley is visible. Reindeer Hills and Pyramid Peak dominate the middle ground, and together with the Talkeetna Mountains to the south, create a sense of enclosure. Distinctive views of the Nenana River and other small streams and lakes contribute to the overall richness of this landscape.

This is a particularly important road segment because it is the gateway to and exit from the wild



*The open plateau of Broad Pass bordered on the north by the Alaska Range is characteristic of the western end of the unit. The openness of the terrain calls for carefully landscaped turnouts.*




and scenic Denali Road. Land use and development is minimal other than gravel extraction sites associated with road maintenance. Opportunities exist for recreational and homestead development.

### Land Ownership & Management Responsibility

The Cantwell Village Corporation and AHTNA Regional Corporation own or will own the majority of the land near the roadway in approximately the

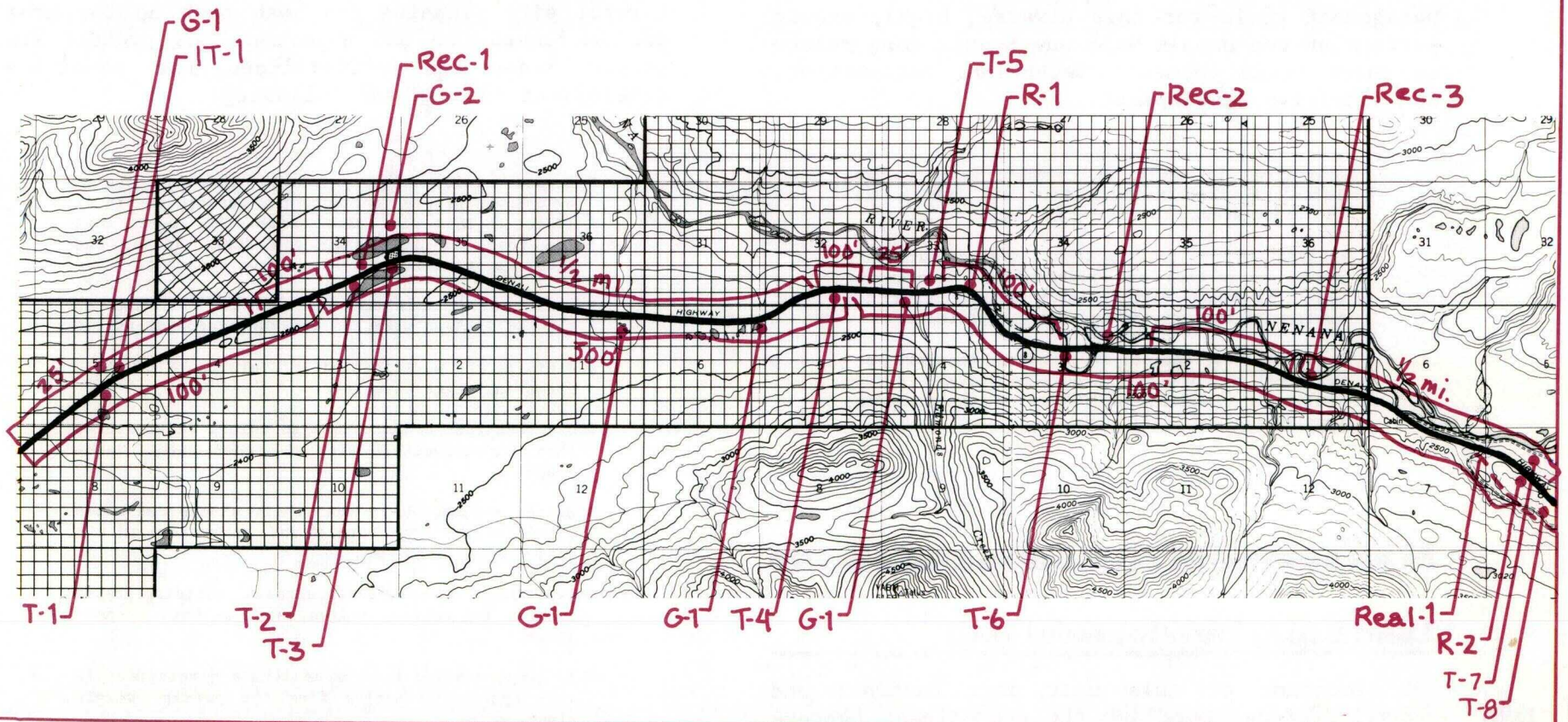
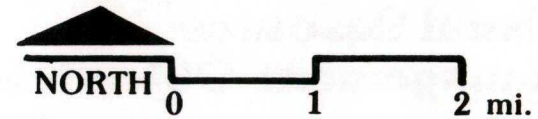
**KEY**

- T-Turnout
- G or ~~35~~-Greenbelt
- Real-Proposed Realignment
- R-Reclamation
- Rec-Recreation
- IT-Information Turnout

-  Native Corp. Land
-  Native Selected Land
-  Federal Land

# 2 Reindeer Hills & Pyramid Peak

Assessment Units D3-D8



western 12 miles of the unit. Land surrounding the eastern 2 to 3 miles is managed by the BLM. In addition, the unit contains a recreational withdrawal and several DOTPF material sites. DOTPF manages a 300 foot right-of-way (R.O.W.) throughout most of the unit.

## Visual Resource Management Objectives

Management goals for this diverse, highly scenic portion of the Denali Wild and Scenic Road relate to three broad themes: retention, reclamation, and sensitive development.

Retention: To retain and enhance those natural landscape elements which make this unit a distinctive gateway to the Denali Road.

Reclamation: To reclaim those areas disturbed by gravel extraction and right-of-way maintenance practices which significantly detract from the quality of the driving and entry experience.

Sensitive Development: To encourage sensitive development which will enhance the traveler's recreational experience and sense of entry to the Denali Wild and Scenic Road.

## Management Recommendations

### Land Use & Development (LU)

The location of this unit near Cantwell and Denali National Park and the predominant pattern

of private ownership makes it attractive for both recreational and residential development. In particular, recreational development can provide additional opportunities for hiking, camping, and fishing, thus increasing the enjoyment of the area's numerous resources. At the same time, developers should be reminded that the area's undeveloped quality is a major part of its attraction, and thus one of the area's most marketable features. Therefore, development that decreases scenic values will tend to decrease the area's popularity as well.

Careful site planning can both open up the area for increased use and enjoyment and protect its scenic resources. Guidelines for sensitive development include the following:

- Locate development away from the roadside, thereby using distance to reduce the structures visual impact. This will also reduce the impact that the road and its associated dust, noise, and other negative factors have on development.
- Locate structures behind trees or landforms so they will blend with the natural surroundings.
- Minimize the modification or disturbance of landforms and vegetative cover.
- Use construction materials in colors and textures that are compatible with the surrounding landscape.
- Design structures so that their shapes and sizes harmonize with the scale and character of the surrounding landscape.
- Use Alaskan historical/cultural building types such as log cabins, lodges, etc. as much as possible.
- In open, exposed landscapes locate development in the opposite direction from the primary scenic views.

## **Greenbelts (G)**

In this unit, separate greenbelt recommendations have been developed for private land and public land.

### **Private Land**

As stated previously, the wilderness or undeveloped character of this area is one of its most attractive features, and private land owners should consider this quality when they develop their land. A greenbelt is one management tool which can aid land owners in maintaining the existing landscape character as viewed from the road by retaining a natural strip of vegetation between the road right-of-way and the land use. These greenbelt recommendations are established for the voluntary cooperation of private land owners as a means of helping them retain the area's scenic resource values.

Appropriate greenbelt width is determined by the area's visual absorption capability, which is a function of the existing vegetation density and the slope of the land. Five greenbelt categories are recommended for this unit:

- In areas with high visual absorption capability, a 25 foot greenbelt beyond the R.O.W. is adequate.
- In areas with moderate to low visual absorption capability, a 100 foot greenbelt beyond the R.O.W. is recommended.
- In areas with a very low visual absorption capability (usually very open land with few or no trees), a 300 foot greenbelt beyond the R.O.W. is recommended.

- G1 Where stream beds cross the road, lateral views often extend far up the valleys. Greenbelts in these visually unique places are recommended to cover the entire visible creek drainage channel.
- G2 Lakeshores should be protected by a 100 foot greenbelt which allows public recreation use.

Within these greenbelts it is recommended that no structures be built, no landform alteration take place, and all vegetation be retained. Greenbelt recommendations are shown on the unit map.

Because they own large parcels of land, Native corporations could adopt these recommendations for the use of their land, hence making a significant contribution to the retention of the regions scenic character. Any future corporation land sales, leases, or other development could incorporate these standards in the form of scenic easements.

### **Public Land**

The use or development of BLM land in this unit should conform to greenbelt recommendations for adjoining lands in Management unit 3. Briefly, these recommendations are:

- A 100 foot greenbelt is recommended for areas with adequate screening potential (these areas are shown on the map).
- A 300 foot greenbelt is suggested for all areas on the south side of the road which do not have the 100 foot designation.
- A one-half mile special greenbelt is recommended for the north side of the road for all areas not having the 100 foot designation. Development may occur in this greenbelt, but must meet performance standards for minimizing visual impact.



*Roadside gravel extraction conflicts with the Denali's "wild and scenic" qualities. Existing sites such as this one should be recontoured to a natural profile and revegetated.*

## **Materials Site Location & Reclamation (R)**

Roadside gravel extraction is the major source of disruptive visual impacts in this otherwise very scenic management unit. Gravel extraction for roadway maintenance need not be incompatible with scenic quality, and the DOTPF should establish practices which meet road maintenance requirements while maintaining and enhancing visual quality.

Since the on-the-job decisions by maintenance crew supervisors and heavy equipment operators

most directly affect the appearance of the road, they should employ extraction practices which maintain visual quality. A roadside management manual for scenic resources, covering gravel extraction practices among others, should be prepared and distributed in conjunction with a training session/workshop for road maintenance crews. Guidelines for such techniques are:

- Use extraction practices that minimize the disruption of adjacent slopes and vegetation.
- Locate gravel extraction sites outside the R.O.W.
- Carefully site access roads to materials sites to minimize their visibility.
- Give a high priority to reclamation of highly visible existing materials sites.

There are too many gravel clearings and extraction sites for each to be individually mentioned in this report. However, the DOTPF should establish as standard operating procedure, policy and practices for reclaiming material sites and mitigating negative visual impacts. The following sites do merit specific attention:

- R-1 This large gravel pit and exposed bank is highly visible for 1/2 mile along the road. Reclamation at this site is a priority because it is in full view of the proposed Edmonds Creek turn out.
- R-2 Additional site analysis of this eroding roadcut is necessary to determine the source of the erosion problem and the options for mitigation.

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

Indiscriminate brush clearing within the R.O.W to reduce wildlife road kill and improve driving visibility also impacts scenic quality. In general, natural vegetation should be left to the road

edge; however, where brush clearing is necessary, the following guidelines should be used:

- Minimize the amount of trees and brush that are cleared.
- Remove all slash from the R.O.W.
- Allow and encourage low growing vegetation - low brush or herbaceous plants - to colonize cleared areas.
- Vary the width of roadside management strips to produce an uneven, more visually interesting edge.
- Vary the height of the cut vegetation to create a "feathered" edge.

## **Turnouts (T)**

Several management considerations are associated with roadside turnouts in this unit. Some existing turnouts accommodate use and do not require extensive maintenance. Others are in need of surface levelling and grading to make them fully functional. In several cases, the turnouts serve no particular need since they have neither good views, nor are they in demand as a pull off or turnaround. These latter turnouts should be closed off so that they can revegetate. There is also a need for new, sensitively designed turnouts where views are exceptional, especially to take advantage of views of Mt. McKinley. Turnouts with special facilities should have signage to alert travelers to their location.

T-1 The existing turnout at Fish Creek provides foot access to the creek. Any development in this area would be highly visible, and so development should be minimized. Maintain gravel surface on the high level area off the road. Good panoramic views are available from this clearing.



*New turnouts should be located to take advantage of attractive vistas that are expressive of the landscape character like this expansive overlook of the Nenana River near the east end of the unit.*

T-2 This existing 2 to 3 car turnout next to a lake provides nice views across the lake to the south of the Alaska Range and the Talkeetna Mountains. The turnout needs minor improvements in levelling and surfacing. The size should not be increased as it would become visually obtrusive. Large vertical elements, such as signs and tall trash barrels, should be avoided because they would detract from the view of the lake. A trail leading to the lake on the other side of the road could be added.

T-3 This wide turnout/parking lot is apparently for lake recreation. It is too large and dominates views from the road. The entry should be

narrowed to accommodate two passing cars with a five foot berm. Seed the berm, and encourage revegetation.

- T-4 This vantage point has wide panoramic views of surrounding mountains. It should be developed as a road widening for 2 cars, 12 to 15 feet wide. There is no vegetative screening potential here.
- T-5 The DOTPF's proposed turnout at Edmonds Creek is in a good location. The vehicular entrance and parking should be located a minimum of 150 feet from the creek. Provide a boardwalk or other minimal impact trail to the creek.
- T-6 This site has an exceptional view up the creek bed to a rock ravine and mountain peak. It is an ideal pullout for photography. This should be developed as a 12 to 15 foot road widening, accommodating one car.
- T-7 Of the several turnouts which have evolved in this vicinity to take advantage of particularly distinctive views of the Nenana River, this turnout appears to be the safest. It also has exceptional views of the Alaska Range. Severe erosion problems in this area require reclamation attention.
- T-8 A turnout may be developed here if the realignment on the east is constructed. (See "Real-1")

## **Information Turnouts (IT)**

Traveler information turnouts are recommended at each of the major road junctions.

- IT-1 The BLM Denali Information Plan proposes a visitor information center at this location because of its unobstructed views of Mt. McKinley. This study recommends that a similar facility be developed instead at the Parks Highway junction so travelers can get road condition and recreational facility information without driving several miles down the Denali Road. Furthermore, Cantwell Village selections may place extensive roadside development in some jeopardy. While this site is not recommended for a visitors center, it is a good candidate for scenic viewpoint.

## **Recreation (Rec)**

There is a need for improved recreation facilities in this management unit. Private land owners can provide these facilities if developed sensitively. Options for development include boat launching areas, campgrounds, or recreational home sites. There are also opportunities to develop public facilities in this unit. Because they are all located in sensitive and distinctive areas, careful site planning is necessary to protect high scenic values.

- Rec-1 This BLM recreational withdrawal could be developed for lakeside activities such as canoeing, hiking, or possibly fishing. The screening potential in this area is limited, so vertical elements and parking areas must be carefully located to minimize negative visual impacts.
- Rec-2 This DOTPF proposed boat launch could have high impact on this rare view of the Nenana River. Screened parking will be necessary. It could be located in a dense spruce grove on the east side of the site. Careful site planning is required in this sensitive area.
- Rec-3 This alternative DOTPF boat launch site is also located in a highly scenic area. If possible, parking should be located on the uphill side of the road. Again, careful site planning is vital in this sensitive riverside site.

## **Realignments (Real)**

The DOTPF has plans to upgrade and realign portions of the Denali Road. One of these realignments will have a significant effect at the eastern end of the unit:

- Real-1 This realignment is apparently proposed to avoid a severely eroding slope. The realignment could orient travelers away from some of the most memorable views of the Nenana River. However, it also provides the opportunity to develop a turnout on the knoll to its north. If properly designed, this would offer a nice viewpoint of the Nenana, particularly if the foreground vegetation is carefully thinned to open and frame views.

