
Part One

Background Information

"There is one other asset of the Territory not yet enumerated, imponderable, and difficult to appraise, yet one of the chief assets of Alaska, if not the greatest. This is the scenery...its grandeur is more valuable than the gold or the fish or the timber, for it will never be exhausted...If you are old, go by all means; but if you are young, wait. The scenery of Alaska is much grander than anything else of the kind in the world, and it is not well to dull one's capacity for enjoyment by seeing the finest first."

**--Henry Gannett, Member of the
Harriman Expedition to Alaska 1899**

Introduction

This report describes scenic and recreational resource values and recommends how they should be managed along the 335 mile highway corridor between Denali and Wrangell-St. Elias national parks. The integration of scenic resource considerations into land planning and management decisions is a relatively recent occurrence. Before, visual resource values were viewed as too subjective to assess in a meaningful way, impossible to measure quantifiably and integrate with other resource values, too costly to inventory, and of considerably less importance than other resource information, such as commercial timber inventories, soil surveys, market demand analyses, etc. Finally, scenery was often considered to be unmanageable--the visible landscape included millions of acres of land with such a complex pattern of ownership and development interests that meaningful agreement and coordination appeared impossible.

These attitudes are changing. Public officials, land managers and the public at large are coming to recognize both the economic and more intangible values associated with maintaining the visual quality of the landscape around them, and they are taking action to protect these resources. In certain instances, such as this study, scenic and recreational resource values are considered to be of primary importance and require an in-depth assessment. Moreover, research into viewer preferences and systematic assessment techniques have taken much of the subjectivity out of scenic resource evaluations. This information can now be recorded in a variety of tabular and graphic ways to facilitate its comparison with other

resource data. The existence of a wider range of inventory and analysis techniques along with the assistance of current technology (computer programs, photographic techniques, inexpensive graphic reproduction methods, etc.) contributes to greater precision and lower costs.

Finally, it has been demonstrated that scenery is manageable. Planning the location of visually objectionable land uses--such as landfills, gravel pits and mines--can take advantage of distance, landform and vegetation to reduce their visibility. Roadside maintenance activities and greenbelts can enhance the driving experience by framing views or retaining desirable vegetation. Sensitive road alignment can create an interesting driving experience and take advantage of special viewing opportunities. Design assistance can be given to private landowners so their land use practices and developments are in visual harmony with their surroundings.

Scenic resource management is not a question of aesthetic considerations precluding other uses; rather it is a question of using or developing the land in manners that respect the existing scenic resource values. This requires some fore-thought in locating structures and land uses, selecting materials, determining the nature and extent of land clearing, defining the type of maintenance program, etc. This report outlines a range of management tools and recommended practices which retain, restore and enhance roadside scenic resource values for some of Alaska's most visually dramatic landscapes, while at the same time respecting the need for use and development.