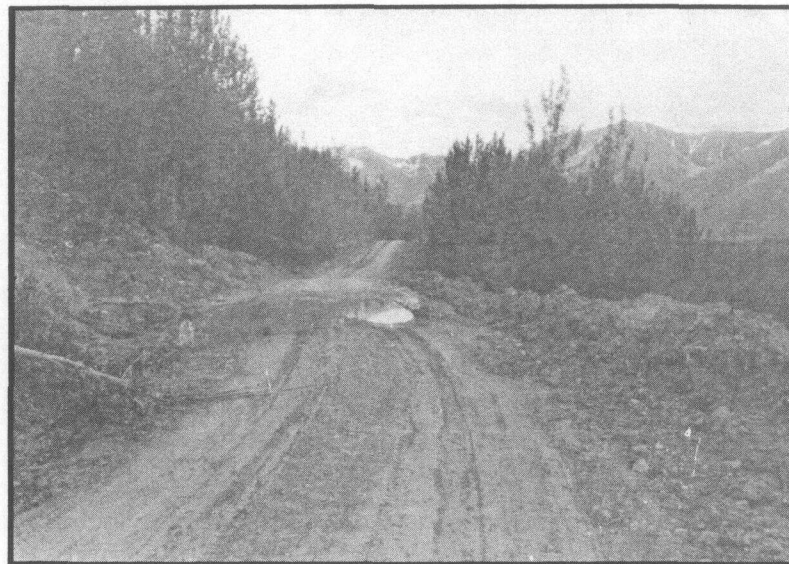


## Roads End - McCarthy



*The railroad needed to follow side slopes above the Kennicott River lower terrace in order to maintain grade. This alignment has resulted in some severe mudslide problem areas such as that shown here. At the same time it allows for numerous views out over the Kennicott River Valley towards McCarthy and creates a dramatic arrival experience.*

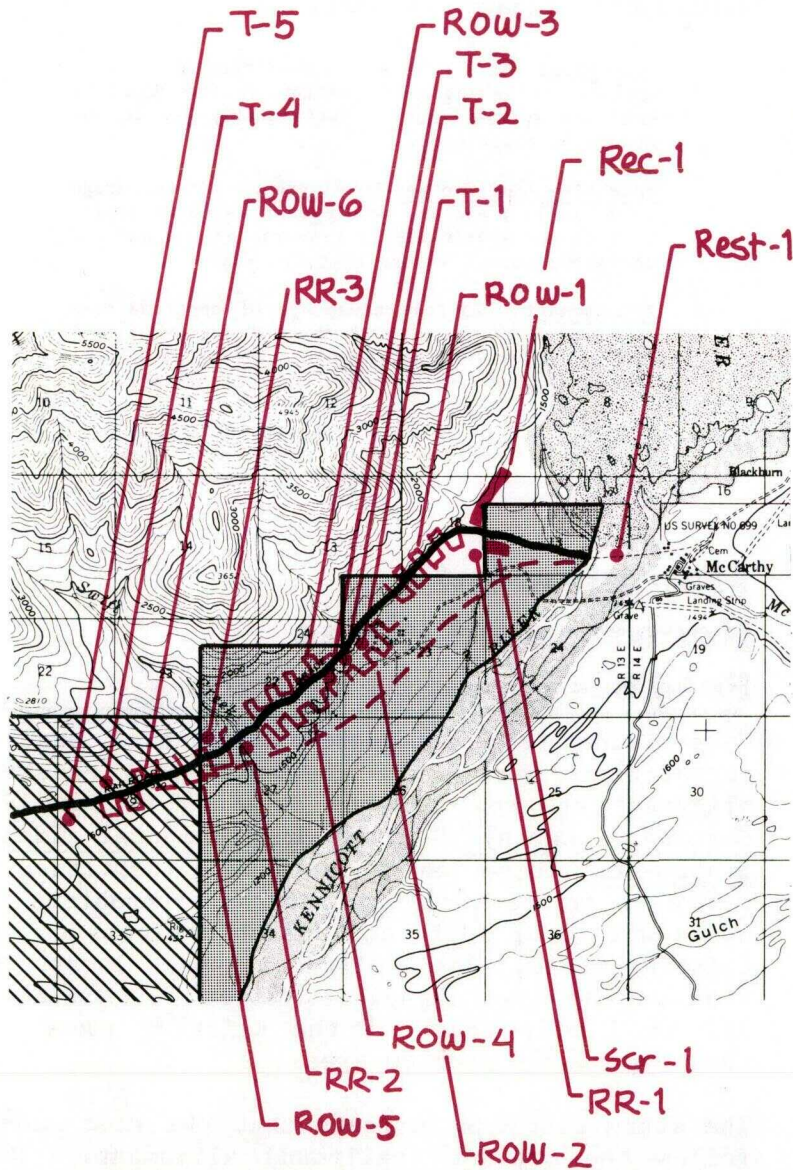
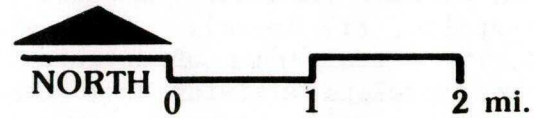
### General Description

Management Unit 30 consists of the last six miles of the McCarthy Road, ending at the West Fork Kennicott River bridge site. (The West Fork Kennicott River bridge washed out in 1981 and as of July 1982 had not been replaced. As a consequence, crossing this fork was limited to a 1940's vintage hand-operated cable tram. Crossing the East Fork of the Kennicott River has been possible only by tram since the bridge over this fork washed out in the 1970s). The road follows the Old Copper River and Northwestern Railroad alignment along the lower side slopes of

Fireweed Mountain and drops down onto the terraces of the Kennicott River. Roadside vegetation is predominantly dense stands of poplars and willows. Land development in the area is sparse and virtually not visible from the road except for distant views of McCarthy. Most of the negative visual impacts are the result of road maintenance activities, where a number of areas with poor, clayey soils and unstable slopes have necessitated frequent bank cutting, filling and debris clearing.

# 30 Roads End - McCarthy

Assessment Units M27 - M29



## KEY

ROW - Right of Way Mgt.

T - Turnout

Rec - Recreation

Rest - Rest Area

Scr - Screening

RR - Railroad Remnants

- - - D.O.T.P.F. Realignment Proposals (1973)

 Federal Land

 Private Land

 State Owned Land

Scenic resource values are high within this unit, primarily because of near and distant views and the driving experience. In spite of being within a forested landscape, the traveler is presented with numerous opportunities for filtered and open views to nearby landscape features (Fireweed Mountain, Bonanza Ridge, Regal Mountain, and the Kennicott River and Glacier) as well as more distant mountains (University Peak, Chugach Mountains, Mt. Logan). Brief views of McCarthy create a real sense of anticipation on the part of travelers arriving from the west. The narrow winding road alignment next to Fireweed Mountain which then drops down onto the Kennicott River floodplains provides a constantly changing point of view and sense of spatial enclosure which contributes to the interest of the driving experience.

## **Land Ownership & Management Responsibility**

Roadside land ownership within this management unit is predominantly private with large blocks of State land in the west part of the unit. This State land is presently being considered as part of a land trade with the National Park Service, who manages the federal land surrounding the state and private landholdings. The State DOTPF manages the 200 foot wide right-of-way centered on the former railroad alignment.

## **Visual Resource Management Objectives**

Objectives related to the themes of retention, sensitive land use and development, enhancement,

and arrival-entry are recommended to guide land use and development plans, policies and actions within this management unit.

**Retention:** To retain those qualities which contribute to making this portion of the McCarthy Wild and Historic Road a particularly scenic and memorable experience.

**Sensitive Land Use and Development:** To encourage roadside land use and development which is sensitive to the area's visual resource values and its character as a wild and historic road.

**Enhancement:** To take advantage of opportunities to enhance the quality of this as a recreational driving experience and to encourage a better understanding of the landscape and its history.

**Arrival-Entry:** To create an appropriate arrival experience into the Kennicott-McCarthy area and entrance into the heart of the Wrangell-St. Elias National Park.

## **Management Recommendations**

### **Road Realignment & Upgrading**

Comparisons from a scenic-experiential quality perspective were made between the existing alignment and realignments outlined in the 1973 Chitina McCarthy Highway Environmental Impact Statement. These realignments were identified in response to continual maintenance problems in areas with poor soils and unstable slopes on the existing route. The realignment would locate the road on the lower Kennicott River Terrace about 1/2 to 1 mile south of the existing route and thus bypass the problem areas.

The study findings indicate that the road should follow the present (railroad) alignment. This routing offers an exceptional entrance experience

into the McCarthy Kennicott area. The periodic views towards McCarthy and the narrow, winding road which provides continual changes in viewer position and orientation are all integral to this experience and would be lost if the new alignment was constructed. The unstable areas can be engineered to reduce hazards and the frequency of slope movement. Views in these places can readily be oriented towards the Kennicott River valley, further reducing the potential visual impacts of any needed slope cutting or bank stabilization structures.

As pointed out in the general discussion for the entire McCarthy Wild and Historic Road, only minimal road upgrading should take place in order to retain the "wild" character of the road and surrounding landscape. It should continue to be a seasonal, relatively narrow (18 to 20 foot wide) dirt road designed and maintained for driving speeds of 25 to 30 mph. Some difficult driving experiences such as potholes and water in the road should be acceptable and indeed, may be desirable. Roadside maintenance beyond the road edge should strive to minimize vegetation disturbance. Turnout-turn around spaces should be provided every mile in order to meet traveler's needs to stop and turn around while keeping the road just wide enough so two vehicles can safely pass. More detailed discussions related to right-of-way management and turnouts follow.

#### McCarthy Kennicott Access

Upon their arrival at the West Fork Kennicott River bridge, travelers are faced with the choice of hiking the glacier or taking the hand operated trams in order to get to McCarthy or Kennicott.

Both of these are dangerous and unacceptable to most people. The question of access into McCarthy and Kennicott is an important and controversial one; some people want to keep vehicles out of the area and others demand convenient vehicular access. Four possible alternatives exist. First, two vehicle bridges could be installed, permitting travelers to drive into McCarthy and nearby Kennicott. (Further vehicular access south of McCarthy would depend on the installation of a bridge over McCarthy Creek.) Second, one bridge over the West Fork of the Kennicott River could be installed, permitting vehicular access to the island between the two forks, with a pedestrian bridge over the east fork. Third, pedestrian bridges across both forks of the Kennicott River could be installed, keeping vehicles off the island and out of McCarthy-Kennicott. Finally, the Kennicott River could be crossed by a single bridge and a new road alignment to the south of the island. This would still necessitate either a vehicle or pedestrian bridge across McCarthy Creek to provide access into McCarthy itself. Based upon the goals and objectives recommended for this road the second alternative, a vehicle bridge-pedestrian bridge combination, is the best solution.

As discussed in the general recommendations for the McCarthy Wild and Historic Road, how one gets into McCarthy is an important consideration in the overall quality of this road as a recreational experience. Driving into McCarthy would be "too easy" and the sense of arrival would be anticlimactic. Vehicles would also destroy the scale and character of both McCarthy and Kennicott. This is a case where the cliché-- "getting there is half the fun"-- really applies and it is critical that the challenge be

maintained - even if it is walking across a pedestrian bridge into McCarthy.

This recommended combination of a vehicle bridge across the West Fork of the Kennicott River and pedestrian bridge across the East Fork provides safe, reasonably and convenient access, yet maintains the challenge and character of this as part of the overall scenic, wild and historic experience. A one lane vehicular bridge across the West Fork of the Kennicott River would allow access to the large island. Here, parking and a rest area would be developed in the trees on the higher ground above the floodplain. From here a pedestrian suspension bridge would take people across the East Fork and on into McCarthy. A suspension bridge is recommended because it offers an exciting crossing experience while still being safe and accessible to everyone. A properly designed tram for hauling goods too heavy and bulky to take on the bridge should be included to reinforce the image of this as an important historic transport means in the area and to meet local resident's needs.

Finally, so as not to lose completely the experience and challenge of hand-powered trams, it is recommended that a new tram be installed across McCarthy Creek. This would open up the areas beyond to pedestrian and recreational access.

## **Land Use & Development**

Even though this area is distant from existing population concentrations and access is difficult, the spectacular scenery, readily developable land and the location within a major national park make it attractive to many for residences and recreational homesites. There

exists considerable private land in the area which could be used in this fashion. Present development is scattered and hidden from view due to the dense vegetation that is characteristic of the area. While it is not desirable to encourage intensive development and land use in the area, it would be possible for some growth to occur without significant visual impacts. The following guidelines are presented to help encourage land uses and developments which are sensitive to scenic resource values and the desired character of the road corridor.

- No commercial development should occur adjacent to the road. Commercial activity should continue to be concentrated in McCarthy and Kennicott. Privately developed campgrounds and lodges could locate outside these centers, but they should not be visible from the road.
- Residential development should continue to be dispersed and for the most part not visible from the road. Landowners of parcels adjacent to the road should be encouraged to adopt the greenbelt management recommendations to help keep the visual impacts of development to a minimum.
- Land intensive resource developments, such as mining and timber harvesting, should not be encouraged in this area. Use of the road for mining or logging related activities would not be compatible with its primary uses for local access and as a recreational corridor. Small scale agriculture, like that associated with homesteads and subsistence, would be compatible with visual resource management objectives if it is not visually prominent.
- Public lands should remain under public ownership. Already there exist considerable private landholdings adjacent to the road throughout the road corridor. Public land should be retained to help buffer some of the possible development on these lands and to meet needs for public access and use. The proposed State land trade with the National Park Service would be compatible with the visual resource management objectives recommended here.

- Access roads from the McCarthy Road to private developments should be kept to a minimum. Collector or feeder roads servicing several, rather than individual parcels, should be encouraged in order to help reduce the number and frequency of such roads. Every effort should be made to reduce their visual intrusion by keeping these roads narrow, with minimal vegetation clearing.

## **Greenbelts**

A greenbelt management strip can be an effective tool for visual resource management beyond the road right-of-way. Greenbelt recommendations have two components - the width of the management strip, and the guidelines for how the area should be used in order to achieve certain ends. In this unit, greenbelt management recommendations relate to the visual resource management goals and objectives suggested for the entire McCarthy Wild and Historic Road. But implementation of the recommendations will be a problem because of the extensive private landholdings, coupled with the fact that this area is outside an organized borough or local government. Consequently on private lands, conformance with these recommendations is voluntary. On public lands, they should be formally adopted and every effort should be made to get local landowners to understand and adopt them. (See also the general discussion on greenbelts for the McCarthy Wild and Historic Road.)

It is recommended that a 50 foot wide greenbelt management strip be established beyond the highway right-of-way within this management unit. Within this area the following specific guidelines should be adopted.

- Except for that which is required for access roads, no vegetation clearing should occur in the

first 25 feet of the greenbelt closest to the road right-of-way. Within the remaining 25 feet, some brush clearing and selective cutting of trees would be permitted.

- No permanent structures within this greenbelt
- In certain areas some selective cutting within the greenbelt may be desirable to open up distant views in combination with DOTPF right-of-way management plans.

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

An important aspect of this road as a unique driving experience and exciting entrance into the McCarthy-Kennicott area and the heart of Wrangell-St. Elias National Park is its wild character. This wild character stems, to a large extent, from the absence of road maintenance - particularly beyond the road's edge. Thus, the road appears narrower and in scale and harmony with the surrounding landscape. This also effectively controls driving speed and increases driver caution, resulting in a relatively safe road in spite of the fact that it is narrow and one lane. These characteristics are desirable, and future right-of-way management activities should strive to retain these qualities as much as possible.

Right-of-way management does not mean that everything should be left alone. On the contrary, considerable management is needed here, but it needs to be controlled and directed. Visibility around some curves should be improved. In some cases views could be improved with selective clearing. Turnout spaces need to be graded and maintained. Disturbed banks and creek edges need to be revegetated. All this needs to be done while at the same time retaining the wild, unmanaged qualities characteristic of this road.



*Fireweed Mountain on the right and the Crystalline Hills in the distance are prominent landforms visible throughout the eastern half of the McCarthy Road. This photo illustrates how invading willows create an unnatural roadside edge and often impair views.*

Visually appropriate right-of-way management guidelines and techniques are discussed in the general discussion for the McCarthy Wild and Historic Road. Specific applications of some of these concepts follow:

- ROW-1 No clearing of vegetation should occur beyond the roadway edge at this location in order to retain the enclosed feeling and limit views out.
- ROW-2 Selective clearing is recommended here to provide periodic framed views over the valley below.
- ROW-3 Selective clearing would establish stronger views towards Fireweed Mountain.

- ROW-4 Retain dense vegetation adjacent to the road to act as a visual barrier and to orient views toward Fireweed Mountain.
- ROW-5 Retain the dense vegetation on both sides of the road up to the road's edge within the right-of-way to create an enclosed feeling.
- ROW-6 Clear the willows which are invading the road edge through this wetland area in order to open up views and to create a more natural appearing boundary between the road and adjacent wetlands.
- SC-1 Retain the invading poplars adjacent to the road in order to continue to screen the adjacent gravel pit.

## **Railroad Remnants (RR)**

The few remaining remnants of the Copper River and Northwestern Railroad are important visual features and essential to the historic character of the road. Within this management unit the following recommendations are made with respect to these railroad remnants:

- RR-1 This earth fill paralleling the road was the former railroad grade. Invading vegetation should be controlled so that it is a more visible reminder of the days when the railroad was the sole means of access to McCarthy.
- RR-2 These remnants of a small railroad trestle are still standing, however they appear to be in very poor condition and in danger of falling down. Efforts should be directed at stabilizing the standing portion and protecting those portions which have fallen down from being removed for firewood and use in local building. Because of the climate, these features can remain as visually significant elements for at least another 25 years if left alone.
- RR-3 A portion of the old railbed with ties is visible paralleling the road. Invading vegetation should be cleared to permit views of this feature and to reduce its rate of deterioration.



*Road crossings of small streams often result in considerable landscape disturbances such as that shown here. The gravelly glacial materials and steep slopes mean that natural revegetation takes a long time to soften visual impact.*

## **Road Related Recreational Facilities**

Within this management unit three types of road related recreational facilities are recommended to respond to traveler needs. A rest area (Rest) is recommended at the "roads end" as a place to park vehicles while going into the McCarthy-Kennicott area as well as provide an information-orientation point for the area. A site for a public campground (Rec) was identified to meet the needs of travelers wishing to camp in or around their vehicles. A series of turnouts (T), primarily to provide travelers with places to pull off the road and take advantage of views

have also been identified. See the management unit map for locations of sites described below.

**Rest-1** "Roads End" Rest Area. The actual location of this rest area is dependent upon the decision regarding access into McCarthy. This rest area recommendation relates to the vehicle bridge over the West Fork of the Kennicott River and pedestrian suspension bridge over the East Fork as discussed earlier. In this case, a rest area should be developed on the island between the two forks on its east side and above the active floodplain. It should be kept back within this forested upper terrace to take advantage of the existing vegetation and to reduce the visual impacts associated with vehicle parking and rest area development. Here the rest area could be developed within the existing road right-of-way with the presently cleared areas used for vehicle movement and parking. This rest area would also contain outhouses, trash receptacles and some picnic tables, as well as a ramp to the pedestrian suspension bridge. A wooden lookout within the trees would also be desirable to allow people to get high enough to begin to see the relationships between the glacier, rivers, McCarthy and other landscape features. Finally an information board should be provided which orients visitors to surrounding mountains, and includes information related to the recreational opportunities in the area.

If a different access scheme into McCarthy is chosen then further field research needs to be done to determine the best location for this type of facility. Only if vehicular access into McCarthy is provided would a "roads end" rest area not be necessary.

**Rec-1** Campground Site. Approximately one mile west of the West Fork of the Kennicott River crossing is a road following the base of the hills to a material site. This offers the best opportunity for vehicle oriented campground development near McCarthy. Development could consist of sites strung out along the road, providing privacy and dispersing use while getting people away from the main road. Potential problems with this site would be access to fresh water, limited views towards the Kennicott River and Glacier, and



---

private land ownership. In addition, it is reported to be frequented by bears. It has opportunities for a trail to the glacier and up the Fireweed Mountains to viewpoints and could encourage some recreational activity on the west side of the Kennicott River. At the moment little more than road improvement, signage, trash receptacles and outhouses would be required to make it into a usable campground. Further investigation needs to be made with respect to land ownership along this road.

- T-1 This is a small existing turnout constructed on fill above the creek. There are good distant views of the McCarthy area as well as a nice orientation to the creek. However, it is immediately adjacent to the roadcut slump areas and considerable landform disturbance is evident. This should remain as a small, turnout-turn around space with no further improvement.
- T-2 This is a recommended turnout site near a roadcut through a small hill. Site development would require additional cutting of adjacent slopes to provide adequate space to pull off the road. There are good views towards McCarthy and out across the valley of the Kennicott and Chitina Rivers from a short walk up the hill next to the road.
- T-3 This recommended turnout site is similar to T-2 described above except that there presently is adequate room for parking one to two vehicles and consequently less landform modification would be required.
- T-4 This recommended turnout overlooks an open lake and bog area with good visibility of the mountains above McCarthy (Bonanza Ridge, Sourdough Peak). A small turnout (2 cars) on the north side of the road should be developed. It would be used primarily by travelers heading west.
- T-5 This is a recommended small (2 car) turnout for travelers heading east, with good views of the lake and distant mountains.