
McCarthy Wild & Historic Road

Findings & Recommendations

McCarthy Wild & Historic Road

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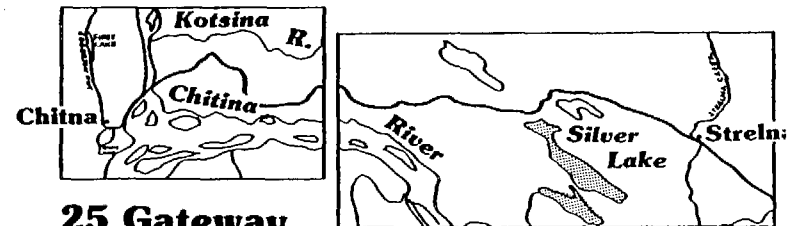
General Description

The road between Chitina and McCarthy, now commonly referred to as the "McCarthy Road," closely follows the old grade and alignment of the Copper River and Northwestern Railroad. This railroad, built between 1908 and 1911, connected Cordova on the Gulf of Alaska with the Kennecott Copper Mines near McCarthy. This privately built and operated railroad ran until 1938 when, after falling copper prices and a threatened strike, the mine closed. Almost immediately efforts were made by citizen groups in Cordova, Chitina and McCarthy to convert the railroad alignment into a vehicular road since this was the only form of transportation connecting these small communities. However, such plans were never fully realized due to problems ranging from frequent washouts to lack of funding and political support.

It was not until 1971 that a highway bridge across the Copper River was completed, facilitating vehicle access to much of the McCarthy Road. However, the remainder of the road was plagued by continual bridge and trestle washouts and only for a short period of time could people actually drive all the way from Chitina to McCarthy. Today, the steel span Kuskulana Bridge is the only remaining functional railroad structure and the Gilahina Trestle is the last standing wooden railroad trestle. The old trestle is rapidly deteriorating and it will be a race against time to see if restoration efforts can begin before decay has progressed too far.

Today the McCarthy road connects the two small communities of Chitina and McCarthy and provides

access to numerous scattered residences and recreational homesites. Even by Alaskan standards Chitina and McCarthy are small. In 1970, Chitina had a population of 50 and McCarthy's year round population is considerably less. Chokosna, a small dot on most maps, is nothing more than one family and numerous undeveloped lots clustered around an airstrip. Strelna, another name commonly seen on maps, has a number of scattered homestead-style developments and little else. Native allotments and homesteads are found all along the road, with the largest concentration around the Long Lake--Lakina River area, near McCarthy, and west of



**25 Gateway
McCarthy Wild
& Historic Road**

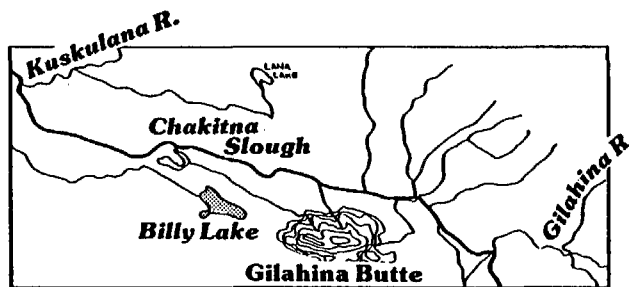
**26 Silver Lake-
Strelna**

Strelna. The only commercial/recreational developments, aside from those at Chitina and McCarthy-Kennicott, are the lodge-campground at Silver Lake about 10 miles east of Chitina and a small private campground nearby. While some mining activity still occurs up the Kuskulana River and east of McCarthy, it is not visible from the road and road use for hauling supplies and ore is limited.

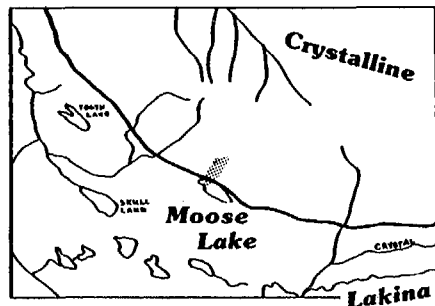
The McCarthy Road follows the upland terraces above the Chitina River and, to avoid grade changes, gradually climbs from an elevation of approximately 500 feet at Chitina to close to

1500 feet at McCarthy. It is within a spruce-hardwood forest where natural openings occur within poorly drained bogs and around the numerous lakes. The Chitina Glacier sculptured the local topography. It carved out the valley; created the numerous shallow lake depressions; and deposited the moraines and various materials which are the basis for the present variable patterns of soils and vegetation communities. The landscape is generally typical of a river valley in Southcentral Alaska, and the surrounding distinctive mountains are distant and only visibly dominant at the road's eastern (near McCarthy) and western (near Chitina) ends.

Management Units- McCarthy Wild & Historic Road



**27 Kuskulana &
Gilahina**

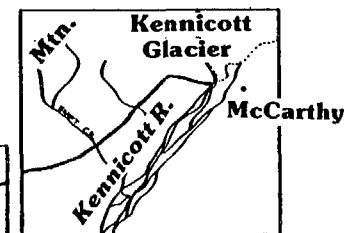


28 Moose Lake

29 Lakina River-Long Lake



**30 Roads End-
McCarthy**



Issues & Concerns

● McCarthy Road Realignment Proposal

The use of the former Copper River and Northwestern railroad bed for vehicle traffic has created numerous problems. Areas with unstable slopes, poor soil conditions and inadequate water drainage have led to high maintenance costs, difficult driving conditions and frequent road blockages. In addition, the very narrow, winding, dirt surfaced road does not meet commonly accepted standards for public roads. Because cars have more flexibility and mobility than trains, many problem areas could be readily avoided by moving the road so that low lying areas, creeks and rivers could be crossed more efficiently. Consequently, there has been interest in realignment of the road and upgrading it to state standards for secondary highways. Specific plans were outlined in the Chitina - McCarthy Highway Environmental Impact Statement (1973); however, no action was taken until the federal land status issue was resolved. While no formal alignment and road upgrading plans have yet been proposed, there is interest, particularly on the part of the DOTPF to minimize maintenance costs, reduce potential hazards and permit greater public use of the road. Therefore realignments and road upgrading remain issues. (See the general discussion on Road Design and Alignment and Management Units 25 through 30.)

● Access to McCarthy

Crossing the Kennicott River to get to McCarthy has always been a challenge and a problem. Vehicular access was only possible for a short time up to the early 1970's when there were

bridges over both forks of the Kennicott River. While most people agree that the current method (as of August, 1982) of crossing these river forks via old, hand operated cable trams is unacceptable, there is considerable disagreement on whether vehicular access into McCarthy should be provided. Since the process of getting into McCarthy is such a fundamental aspect of the recreational use of this road, it seems important to evaluate the various access modes with respect to their effects on scenic and experiential qualities. (See the general discussion on McCarthy Access and Management Unit 30.)

● Services for Travelers

Presently the McCarthy Road has few amenities and services to meet traveler needs. Increased recreational use may require that roadway information turnouts, scenic viewpoints, passing and turnaround pullouts as well as rest areas and picnic sites be developed. The location and character of such facilities should take advantage of site opportunities and amenities and be sensitive to the goals and objectives recommended for the road. (See Management Units 25 through 30).

● Mining

The mineral resources within the Chitina River Valley have always attracted people to the area. While mining activity in the future may be limited because of the national park and preserve status, the numerous existing claims and considerable Native corporation landholdings suggest that it will continue to be an important land use. Mining activity will, for the most part, continue to be distant from the road. However, increased use of the McCarthy road as a haul road for materials and ore could significantly alter

its character and impact scenic and recreational resource values. (See the general discussion on mining as well as the discussion on Land Use and development for each management unit.)

● Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve

The McCarthy Road is one of two access roads into Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve. The location and character of park related recreational facilities--information signage, campgrounds, trailheads and visitors centers--need to be sensitive to scenic resource values, be located at appropriate sites and contribute to the quality of the recreational driving experience. (See the general discussion for the McCarthy Wild and Historic Road as well as Management Units 25 through 30.)

● Railroad Remnants

Numerous remnants of former railroad days can be found along the road and are essential to the experience of driving the McCarthy Road. Most of these are being covered by soil or hidden by vegetation, removed, or simply deteriorating in place. Within a number of years all visible traces of railroad activity could disappear without active restoration efforts. (See the general discussion on Railroad Remnants, and Management Units 27, 29 and 30.)

● Recreational Use of River Crossings

As with most roads in Alaska, the road crossings of rivers are attractive areas for intensive recreational use and development. Along the McCarthy Road these activity nodes occur at the Copper, Kuskulana, Gilahina, Lakina and Kennicott

River crossings. (See Management Units 25, 27, 29 and 30.)

● Fireweed Mountain State Land Disposal

The proposed Fireweed Mountain state land disposal, a residential subdivision, would be accessible from the McCarthy road. The potential visual impacts of this proposal needs to be evaluated as well as the desirability of additional state land disposals along the road corridor. (See the general discussion for the McCarthy Wild and Historic Road, as well as Management Unit 29.)

● Land Use and Development

While the McCarthy Road is nominally within the Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve, there are considerable roadside private landholdings throughout its length. New land use patterns brought about by individual developments will have an effect on visually sensitive roadside land. In addition, the large blocks of Native land may be subject to special development pressure in the future in order to generate corporate revenue. (See the general discussion on Land Use and Development and Greenbelts for the McCarthy Wild and Historic Road as well as those for Management Units 25 through 30.)

● Right-of-Way Management

Currently the road maintenance crews are engaged in extensive brush clearing of the road right-of-way along some portions of the McCarthy Road, resulting in considerable visual impacts. Other stretches of the road receive little maintenance--so there is poor visibility around

curves and overhanging branches impede traffic movement. Right-of-way management practices, particularly roadside brush clearing, can be more responsive to site specific conditions and reinforce scenic and recreational values, (See the general discussion on right-of-way management as well as that for Management Units 25 through 30.)

Findings & Recommendations

Summary of Scenic Resource Values

Along the road between Chitina and McCarthy scenic resource values are quite variable. The most dramatic views and experiences tend to be concentrated near the two ends - around the Copper and Chitina Rivers at the west end and the McCarthy-Kennicott area at the east end. There are several highlights in between - particularly the Kuskulana Bridge and gorge, the Gilahina railroad trestle and the Long Lake area. However, for the most part the landscape visible from the road between Chitina and McCarthy is typical of that found along major river valleys in southcentral Alaska. This is, to a large extent, the result of the position of the road in the landscape. It follows upper terraces on the north side of the Chitina River valley, through dense, predominantly spruce-hardwood forest. This location limits good views to the Chitina River itself and to the higher Wrangell Mountains

to the north and east, which are either too distant or hidden by nearby lower mountains.

In spite of this, the McCarthy Wild and Historic Road does provide a visually interesting and, at times, memorable scenic driving experience due to a combination of factors which enhance and complement the inherent visual opportunities within the landscape. First, there is the spatial definition. The road, in passing through the predominantly dense forest landcover, offers an interesting range of spatial experiences - from "tunnels" created by unmaintained roadside vegetation completely enclosing the road, to places where natural and man-made openings offer opportunities for panoramic views, to numerous places where variations between these two extremes exist.

Second, the character of the road is a source of interest. It is narrow, generally unmaintained, with small bridges, potholes, wet spots and drainage channels crossing its surface. These tend to slow the traveler and are a constant focus of attention. The road is in many ways a challenge to drive, creating a unique experience not found on many other commonly traveled roads.

Third, land use and development adds to the visual interest. Since the scenery is oftentimes not particularly distinctive, the land uses along the road become an important addition, either opening up distant views across their clearings or by calling attention to picturesque homesteads or to remnants of the bygone railroad era. The railroad features are of special significance and visual interest even though some are being removed and the remainder are deteriorating or

becoming overgrown with vegetation and are not highly visible.

Fourth, there is a sense of destination associated with this road. Most people drive it to get to the McCarthy-Kennicott area, not to pause and spend time along the way. Thus there is a real sense of anticipation and a greater emphasis on the destination rather than the experience of getting there. While all roads to a certain degree instill this feeling of destination, it is particularly strong along this one because there are few intermediate stops.

These four conditions - spatial definition, road character, land use, and sense of destination - work together to make this 63 mile long road visually and experientially rich. The absence of any of these elements could significantly impact the scenic resource values. Management concepts should respond to these characteristics; retaining and reinforcing those which already work while attempting to sensitively manage and change those characteristics which could use improvement.

Management Theme

The Chitina to McCarthy road is recommended for official designation as the "McCarthy Wild and Historic Road." These three words - wild, historic and road - suggest the desired character and set the theme for scenic resource management goals and recommended actions.

Wild

This refers to the existing character of the road and suggests the type of driving or traveling experience which should be retained. The "wildness" comes both from the landscape, which is remote and relatively undeveloped, and from the road itself. For people who live along the road this wildness reinforces the image of being in a remote area, removed from easy contact with many of the generally available comforts, services and conveniences. For visitors, the wildness of the road becomes a challenge and an essential ingredient in the experience itself. The potholes, narrow bridges, railroad spikes and non-vehicular access into the McCarthy-Kennicott area, along with the minimal maintenance, are what make the drive exciting. While the scenery is often typical for southcentral Alaska, the wildness and remoteness of the road and landscape is fundamental to this as a recreational driving experience. It is a character which should be retained to the greatest degree possible.

Historic

In addition to its wild character, the road has historic significance. Most of the route follows the old Copper River and Northwestern Railroad alignment and grade. Two remaining structures from the railroad era - the Kuskulana River Bridge and the Gilahina Trestle are notable visual and experiential features.

Additionally, there are numerous other railroad era relics - partial trestles, buildings, railbeds, ties, rails and spikes scattered along the road. With the exception of the Kuskulana River Bridge, these features are in poor repair and it

is only a matter of time before road maintenance, firewood scavenging and vegetation growth will completely erase all visible traces of the railroad and its role in opening the Chitina River Valley. These historic railroad remnants significantly add to the road's visual interest and are a reminder of the era when mining trains, not cars, traveled this route. As an essential ingredient in the driving experience, these historic features should be retained and preserved.

Road

The distinction needs to be made that this is a "road" and not a "highway." The word highway has certain images, including those of a modern, paved, high speed travel route for moving large volumes of people and goods between various destinations. Such an image does not apply to the rugged route between Chitina and McCarthy, nor will it be appropriate in the foreseeable future. The concept of a "highway" also conflicts with the road's wild and historic themes as outlined above. Thus it is recommended that this continue to be called a road and that road design standards, maintenance practices and roadside land use and development be scaled to such a designation.

Scenic Resource Management Goals

Five primary goals provide direction for the management recommendations that follow.

M10

- To retain those qualities of the McCarthy Road which contribute to its wild character, both as a wild environment where the visual impact of human use and development is minimal and as a wild driving experience.
- To restore essential railroad remnants, particularly the Gilahina Trestle and the Kuskulana Bridge, which give the road its historic character, and protect other remaining railroad relics from further deterioration, removal or decay.
- To adopt appropriate road design standards and right-of-way management practices which support the image of this as a wild and historic road.
- To encourage land uses and roadside developments which are sensitive to the overall theme of the road and which enhance rather than detract from the scenic resource values and driving experience.
- To create an appropriate entrance experience into Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve and make roadway design and adjacent land use and development decisions which support the goals and objectives of the park.

Implementation: Land Ownership & Management Responsibility

There are three levels to scenic resource management actions and responsibilities along the McCarthy Wild and Historic Road depending upon how far the land is from the road centerline. First, there is the road and its right-of-way managed by the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOTPF).

Although its responsibilities are carried out by separate divisions, which sometimes makes it difficult to coordinate policy and actions, overall the department has both the greatest responsibility and greatest opportunity for consistent and effective management of scenic resources along this road. Actions, policies and decisions regarding scenic resource management should be coordinated among the separate departmental divisions - ranging from the planners in Anchorage, to the engineers in Fairbanks, to the maintenance crews in Chitina. Right-of-way management decisions should be based upon an



The road and its right-of-way managed by the State Department of Transportation and Public Facilities offers the greatest opportunity for effective scenic resource management.

understanding and acceptance of the goals outlined here along with the general and specific management recommendations which follow. In addition to this intra-agency coordination, the DOTPF should encourage development and uses beyond the right-of-way to be consistent with plans, policies and practices adopted for the right-of-way.

The second level of responsibility and influence on scenic resource management relates to lands adjacent to the right-of-way. Here, the AHTNA Regional and Chitina Village corporations own large blocks of land and numerous private individuals own other small parcels. Native-owned roadside land is concentrated along the western third of the road. Non-Native private lands tend to be concentrated at the east end of the road near McCarthy and around the Lakina River-Long Lake, Chokosna and Strelna areas. Interspersed are state lands, managed by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and a smaller amount of federal land managed by the National Park Service (NPS). Because these private lands are outside of organized boroughs or local governments scenic resource management recommendations are difficult to implement. This places the major responsibility on managers of public lands adjacent to the right-of-way to set appropriate examples with respect to land use and development.

These government agencies should explore methods for encouraging private landowners, particularly Native corporations, to include scenic resource management goals and development guidelines in their decisions related to the development and use of roadside lands. Here, the most critical actor is the state DNR. This agency's policies

and land management actions, particularly with respect to state land disposals in the area, could have a significant impact on whether or not goals related to maintaining this as a wild and historic road are realized. Further discussion of this may be found under the land use and development section that follows.

The National Park Service manages only a few parcels of land next to the road. NPS actions will affect the corridor primarily by how it decides to use this corridor as an entrance to the park and how it develops its roadside lands for park related facilities such as a visitor's center, campgrounds and trailheads.

The third level of responsibility and influence related to scenic resource management deals with land more distant from the road corridor itself. The National Park Service manages most of this land except for scattered mining claims. Because of the distance from the viewer and location within a national park, no real problems or conflicts with identified scenic resource management goals appear to exist.

Road Design & Alignment

The design and alignment of the road are two of the most important considerations for fulfilling the scenic resource management goals for the McCarthy Wild and Historic Road. This study compared the existing alignment with changes proposed in the Chitina-McCarthy Highway Environmental Impact Statement (1973). It was assumed that these realignment proposals still represent likely responses to the numerous problems associ-

ated with the existing alignment. In general they were proposed to avoid unstable slopes, wet areas, and other places with high road maintenance costs as well as to reduce the number and sharpness of curves and promote long straight tangents.

Based upon scenic resource values, the existing alignment is preferred to the proposed changes in every case but one. While it is clear that some actions need to be taken to alleviate the maintenance costs and hazards associated with the present alignment, present problems should be resolved through proper engineering and design responses within the existing alignment. The proposed realignments would unnecessarily "tame" the road and draw away from most of the historic features associated with the railroad. The road would then resemble a highway rather than a road.

Only in one area was it determined that a realignment might be desirable (Management Unit 28-Moose Lake area). Here, other alternatives would create even greater visual diversity and are preferable to both the existing alignment and the DOTPF proposal. (See Management Units 25 through 30 for more detailed discussions of each realignment proposal.)

In addition to alignment, the actual design of the road--its width, surfacing material, design speed, shoulder characteristics, drainage, etc.--merit attention. Overall, it is recommended that the McCarthy Road remain a gravel road open primarily during the summer, generally wide enough for two vehicles (18 to 22 feet) with a design speed of 25 to 30 m.p.h. Some difficult driving conditions should be acceptable. Road drainage should be primarily through the gravel and dirt surface rather than through roadside ditches

which require considerable grading and clearing. This would help retain the narrow visual appearance of the road and promote the wild roadside edges which are common along the road today.

Road design should include numerous small widenings to allow people to stop, turn around or permit other vehicles to pass, thus retaining the narrow, two lane character of the road. Any material sites or staging areas needed for construction or maintenance should be beyond the right-of-way and screened from view. All of these considerations are important to preserving the road's wild and historic character while maintaining it as public access for local residents and visitors.

It is possible to design and maintain the road for slightly higher speeds and greater volumes of traffic as far as Strelna in order to better accommodate the local residents and respond to the predominantly private land ownership pattern. Beyond this point, however, the road should conform to the standards outlined above.

Right-of-Way Management

After road design and alignment, right-of-way management and maintenance can have the greatest impact on scenic resource values. This is particularly true through areas of predominantly private ownership. At present, two extremes characterize right-of-way management along the McCarthy Road - over management and no management. Over management refers to the practice of indiscriminate tree and brush clearing from the road edge right up to the right-of-way edge. This commonly results in a visually wide road

corridor, severe landscape disturbance, piles of slash and disturbed soil, increases in vehicle speeds, monotonous spatial experiences and dramatic contrasts between the character of the roadscape and the adjacent landscape. No management refers to those stretches of the roadway which are heavily overgrown to the degree that branches impede vehicle passage and create poor visibility around curves. What is needed and recommended are right-of-way maintenance practices which respond to the needs for safety, adequate visibility, cost effective procedures and roadbed protection, while at the same time being sensitive to and maintaining the road's wild and historic qualities.

Instituting more appropriate right-of-way management actions will require the DOTPF to adopt new policies and operating procedures as well as establish better coordination between departmental divisions. Some of these policy changes should include the following:

- Adoption of a policy and practice of varying roadside treatment and actions to respond to site specific situations and conditions rather than using the same techniques over large areas.
- Using a landscape architect working in the field with the maintenance station supervisor or foreman to develop a program for each year's field maintenance activities on roads identified for their scenic and recreational resource values.
- Development of procedures which use existing machinery in ways that are more conducive to variable and selective maintenance actions, and purchase and use of maintenance machinery that are versatile enough to allow for variable and selective maintenance actions.
- Acceptance that some right-of-way management practices may be more labor intensive and costly in order to achieve the desired effect and allocate funds to cover these costs.

Along the McCarthy Road right-of-way maintenance consists primarily of brush control. As a matter of standard policy brush control practices should not introduce visually disruptive elements but should create greater visual interest by opening more views and enhancing spatial variety. Existing management practices fail to do either of these. Presently brush clearing is done by machines which evenly cut off all brush between one and two feet above ground level, creating visually disturbing and monotonous roadside edges. Moreover, this machinery tends to tear the brush rather than evenly cut it, leaving broken stubs and stripped trees. Finally the slash is commonly left along the road. Such practices should not be acceptable for this road. The following guidelines can be used for more visually sensitive brush control:

- Adopt selective clearing and thinning practices. This is preferred to "clear cutting," and all slash and clearing debris should be removed.
- Minimize disturbance of soil cover and existing grades. In some cases it may be beneficial to create bare soil and thus encourage the invasion of early successional stage plants such as lupines, fireweed and horsetails which add color and variety and can be visually distinctive. However, such practices need to be carefully designed and properly maintained.
- Phased clearing over time and over different areas. Roadside clearing can be phased and spaced so some areas are cleared one year and adjacent areas left until succeeding years. This would reduce the visual impact of wholesale right-of-way clearing.
- Imaginative use of existing machinery. Existing machinery which clips off everything at a given height could be used to clip areas at different heights and at variable distances from the road edge, creating a more natural appearing edge.

- Clean cutting of vegetation. Machinery should be kept sharp and properly operated to cut rather than tear brush.
- Irregular right-of-way clearing widths. Allow trees and shrubs to invade the cleared right-of-way so that there is not a severe break or delineation between the active management area near the road and the lands beyond. For better visibility, the inside of a curve can be cut lower and deeper than the outside edge of the curve.
- No clearing areas. In some areas thin only the overhanging branches that interfere with safe and easy vehicle movement and leave the dense trees and brush. This will create a vegetation "tunnel" effect which, when used in alternation with cleared or more intensively managed areas, can provide considerable visual interest and spatial variety.
- Management for desired species. Some visually striking effects can be obtained by selectively clearing a mixed spruce-hardwood forest so that all birch or aspen will predominate.
- Encouragement of right-of-way vegetation which blends in with surrounding vegetation. Constant clearing and management leads to an apparent change in the composition and nature of the right-of-way vegetation and that of the lands beyond. A prime example of this is where the gravelly road edge is invaded by willows and poplars while the land immediately beyond has completely different vegetation. In such cases clearing the poplars and willows results in a more natural appearing roadside environment.

McCarthy-Kennicott Access

For many travelers on this road, the McCarthy-Kennicott area is the prime destination. As already mentioned, the "wild" character of the road is essential to the trip; yet how one gets into McCarthy is a critical ingredient in this

overall experience. Presently (August, 1982) there is no vehicular access. The adventurous can walk across the glacier at the head of the Kennicott River; otherwise one must cross the two forks of the Kennicott River by two hand operated tram rides. Since both routes can be dangerous and are unacceptable to many people, determining the appropriate form of access into McCarthy is a key issue. If the road's scenic and recreational values are given priority, it is recommended that pedestrian-only access into McCarthy be retained. Just as the wild nature of the road and the existing historic features are vital to the overall driving experience, the challenge of crossing the two forks of the Kennicott River is part of the experience of entering McCarthy. Additionally, the scale and character of McCarthy would be lost if vehicular access were developed.

Though functional and of historic significance, the existing trams are neither safe nor convenient. While there are many ways of providing access into McCarthy, the following recommendations combining auto and pedestrian bridges provide for safe and convenient access and still maintain the scenic, wild and historic experience. A one lane vehicular bridge across the west fork of the Kennicott River would bring cars onto the large island. Parking and a rest area would be developed in the trees on the high ground above the floodplain. From here a pedestrian suspension bridge would take people across the east fork of the Kennicott River 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

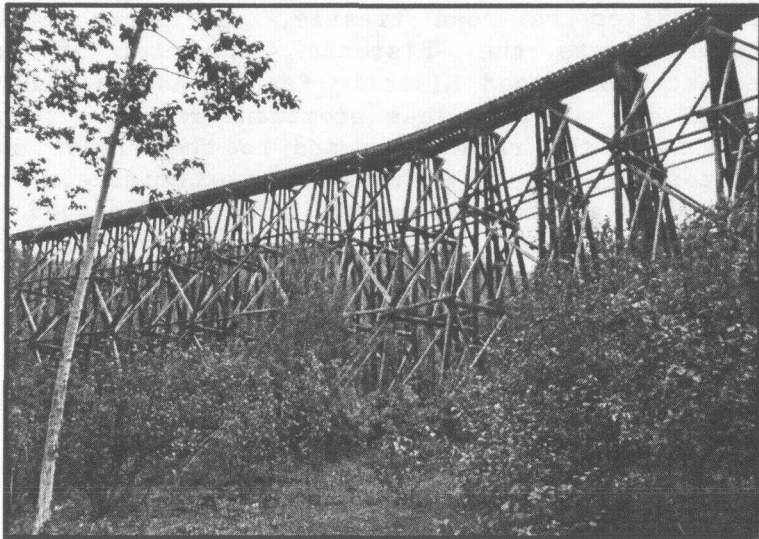
important historic transport mode throughout the area. Finally, so as not to lose completely the experience and challenge of hand powered trams, it is recommended that a new tram be installed across McCarthy Creek. This would open up the areas beyond to pedestrian and recreation use. (See Management Unit 30.)

Railroad Remnants

Between Chitina and McCarthy-Kennicott the few remaining railroad remnants are the only features of both visual and historic significance. Two of these, the Kuskulana River bridge and the Gilahina River railroad trestle, are particularly important to the "historic" character of the McCarthy Wild and Historic Road. Additionally, there are numerous less prominent remnants found all along the road which add to the visual and historic interest of the driving experience. The following general recommendations are designed to retain these relics as an important part of the road's character:

- Research needs to be done regarding ownership and responsibility for the remaining railroad remnants, including the trestles, buildings and rails.
- As a high priority, restore and stabilize the Gilahina River railroad trestle and integrate it with a rest area visitors center developed at this location. (See Management Unit 27.)
- Retain the Kuskulana River bridge as a one-lane bridge with the existing approach experience from the west.

- For National Park facilities and other public buildings adjacent to the road, utilize the former railroad buildings where possible or construct new buildings which reflect the size, style, color and character of the old railroad buildings.
- Protect the remaining railroad remnants so they remain as visible features of historic interest for as long as possible. Scavenging for firewood should no longer be permitted. Some embankments should be cleared of invading vegetation and some standing trestle supports should be stabilized and kept standing. Rails, ties, spikes and roadbeds should all be left undisturbed whenever possible as these are continual reminders of the railroad era.
- Establish a place where railroad history can be interpreted for visitors. Such a display could form an integral part of the recommended Gilahina River rest area visitors center development as described in Management Unit 27.



Stabilization and possible restoration of the Gilahina River trestle should be considered a priority.

Greenbelts

Along the McCarthy Wild and Historic Road, greenbelts can be an effective scenic resource management tool for lands beyond the road right-of-way. In conjunction with appropriate right-of-way management, greenbelts can help to retain the natural appearance of the road corridor and reinforce the image of a "wild and historic" road. While the primary objective of greenbelts would be to set back and screen land uses and developments, they can also be used as a view management tool. Some clearing can be encouraged to open up views or to create filtered or framed views. Greenbelts can also help to retain a natural appearing foreground around turnouts, trailheads and rest areas.

On private lands adjacent to the roadway, greenbelts can buffer developments and users from the noise, dust and intrusion of the road and help maintain the image of living in a wild and remote area. The main limitation facing the use of greenbelts along the McCarthy Wild and Historic Road is that there presently is no mechanism to apply them to private lands outside of organized boroughs or local governments. With the significant amount of private land adjacent to the road it means that conformance to the recommended greenbelt guidelines would be voluntary in these areas.

Greenbelts recommended for the McCarthy road fall into two classes: 25 feet wide and 100 feet wide management strips beyond the right-of-way. Specific use and development guidelines for lands within these greenbelts are discussed within each management unit since they depend on the overall scenic resource management objectives specific to

the unit. The following considerations relate to the selection, management and implementation of the greenbelt concept for this road.

- Implement greenbelt recommendations on public lands and use these as an example for private landowners.
- Coordinate the DOTPF right-of-way management practices with greenbelt management so the two roadside management strips are used most effectively.
- Along any new road alignments through public land, establish a road right-of-way and a greenbelt strip beyond it--both of which would be managed jointly by the DOTPF and the adjacent land managing agency to meet scenic resource management goals and objectives.

The National Park Service, in conjunction with the Department of Natural Resources, should develop land use guidelines and performance standards for their own lands within the recommended greenbelts and encourage private landowners to adopt these on their roadside lands.

Public information programming is necessary to give private landowners and residents a better understanding of the greenbelt concept and how it works as a management tool. The fact that it is flexible and may include land use and development should be emphasized. Benefits to landowners adjacent to the road should be explained, including reducing impacts of road noise, dust and lack of privacy.

View Management

The McCarthy Wild and Historic Road passes, for the most part, through spruce-hardwood forest. While some natural openings do occur in bogs,

around lakes and at river crossings, the forest is an effective barrier to middleground and distant views. It is one of the reasons that portions of the road received moderate scenic quality ratings. At the same time this dense vegetation is an extremely effective tool to create spatial diversity when traveling along the road. For example, a foreground "tunnel" of trees might open up to filtered views, then suddenly open completely to a panoramic vista and finally return to a highly enclosed space. It is this variety in the spatial experience which contributes significantly to scenic resource values along the road. Also, there are numerous places where views could be opened up, filtered, or framed through careful manipulation of the right-of-way and, in some cases, the lands beyond. Within each management unit specific locations for view management actions and the type of action recommended are identified. View management along this road needs to be an ongoing process, and it should be integrated into the annual right-of-way management field work plan developed by a landscape architect in conjunction with the maintenance foreman as noted previously.

Turnouts & Roadside Recreation

On the relatively narrow McCarthy Wild and Historic Road, turnouts are essential to allow travelers to stop safely outside of the moving traffic lanes. Presently roadside turnouts are highly inadequate for stopping or turning around. In response to this, as well as general traveler needs, three types of roadside turnouts have been recommended: an information turnout,

two rest areas which also provide interpretive information, and numerous small turnouts to allow the traveler to stop briefly to take advantage of views and points of interest along the road.

Roadway Information Turnout

Within the right-of-way adjacent to the existing state operated campground on the east side of the Copper River highway bridge, a roadway information turnout has been recommended. This would alert travelers to road conditions, emergency and commercial services, and recreation opportunities. Because of the area's remoteness such information is important for most travelers venturing beyond this point. Development would consist of space for two cars to pull out of moving traffic lanes and an information kiosk. (See Management Unit 25 for additional information.)

Rest Areas

Two rest area/interpretive centers are recommended for the McCarthy Wild and Historic Road. One is near the half-way point at the Gilahina River crossing and the other is near McCarthy.

● GILAHINA RIVER REST AREA

This rest area would be a day use facility adjacent to the Gilahina River, located at the existing intensively used pullout. This would be part of a larger recreation facility complex recommended for this area including drive-in and tent campsites, trails, and a Wrangell-St. Elias National Park visitors center. The interpretive theme of the center would be the early railroad

and mining activity in the area. As already mentioned, an essential prerequisite for development at this site is the restoration and stabilization of the railroad trestle. (See Management Unit 27 for additional information.)

● ROAD'S END REST AREA

Since vehicular access into McCarthy is not recommended, a parking facility is needed for people visiting the McCarthy-Kennicott area. Besides parking, it is recommended that additional facilities be developed to respond to traveler's needs on the west side of the Kennicott River. These would include litter receptacles, rest rooms (out-houses), and an information kiosk with interpretive information related to the natural features visible from this site (Kennicott Glacier, Regal Mountain, Bonanza Ridge, etc.). In addition, a wooden lookout tower would be desirable to provide a better view of the setting of McCarthy and Kennicott and surrounding landscape features.

Two options for this rest area development are presented so it will conform to the type of vehicle access provided to McCarthy. First, if a vehicle bridge across the west fork of the Kennicott River is constructed, then the rest area should be located on the east side of the island between the two river forks and within the forested area above the active floodplain. If only pedestrian access is provided across both forks of the Kennicott River, the rest area should be located above the active floodplain within the forested area. Overnight use should be encouraged at a campground recommended along the old materials site road approximately one mile west of the river. (See Management Unit 30 for additional information.)

Turnouts

Appropriate sites for turnout development along the road are also identified. These recommended sites are, for the most part, places where the traveler can view some of the beautiful natural features as well as historic sites associated

with the railroad. Recommended development consists primarily of small road widenings to accommodate two to three vehicles and some selective brush clearing to improve views. Turnout site development should be minimal to retain the wild and historic character of the road and keep the visual impact from the road low. Locations and descriptions of recommended turnouts are found within each management unit.

Land Use & Development

Because Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve begins at the east side of the Copper River, people traveling the McCarthy Wild and Historic Road have the expectation of being within a national park surrounded by spectacular high mountain scenery. Unfortunately these expectations may not be fulfilled. Along the road the scenery is generally typical of that found in many southcentral Alaskan river valleys with the most spectacular mountain views at the road's ends around Chitina and McCarthy-Kennicott. The extensive private landholdings all along the road coupled with several large blocks of state land mean that in only a relatively few places is the traveler actually surrounded by Wrangell-St. Elias National Park land while traveling on the road.

This suggests that land uses adjacent to the road will be an important factor in maintaining an experience appropriate to a major national park, retaining the road's wild and historic character, and retaining and enhancing existing scenic resource values.

This ownership pattern could be looked on as either an opportunity or a problem for scenic resource management. As an opportunity, land clearing which opened views and sensitively sited and developed residences that blended with and complemented the surroundings would add visual interest and diversity. In some places it could help provide desirable and necessary commercial services, particularly around Chitina and McCarthy.

However development could also compromise the wild and historic themes of the road and the impression of being within a national park. Numerous roadside commercial services would direct attention away from the landscape and disrupt the natural sequential experience so important to this road. Extensive residential development could result in demands for road upgrading and increased traffic, making this much like other southcentral Alaskan roads. Intensive resource development, particularly mining, could transform it into a truck haul road which would require widening and introduce considerable noise, dust and potential hazards, not to mention destroying its wild and historic character. Clearly, both sensitive road design and maintenance and appropriate adjacent land use and development are critical to meeting the scenic resource management goals identified for the McCarthy Road.

Residential Development

In general, large lot, homestead-style residential development is visually compatible with the goals and objectives for this road.

More intensive residential developments, such as subdivisions with relatively small lots (5 acres or less), should be encouraged only near Chitina and, to a lesser extent, near McCarthy. As a matter of policy, there should be no state land disposals accessible from or adjacent to this road. All private land developers should be encouraged to use the generally high visual absorption capability of roadside lands to reduce development visibility. Native village and regional corporations should incorporate the recommended greenbelt policies in the development of their roadside lands and emphasize recreational homesites and cabins as primary uses. As a general rule, development should be completely screened or dispersed and set back far enough from the road so as to not be visually prominent. Areas particularly sensitive to intrusion and where development is discouraged include the confluence of the Cooper and Chitina rivers (Management Unit 25), the Kuskulana and Gilahina rivers (Management Unit 27) and the entrance to McCarthy (Management Unit 30). Additional development around the Crystal Lake and Long Lake areas should not be encouraged beyond that which already exists.

Recreational Development

Commercial recreational facilities (lodges, hostels, campgrounds, stores, gas stations, and guide services) should continue to be concentrated around Chitina and the McCarthy-Kennicott area. Public recreation nodes are recommended at the Gilahina River crossing and the east end of the road near McCarthy. Some limited private recreational developments might occur around Chokosna. Other recommended recreational

developments consist of numerous small turnouts and viewpoints all along the road where only restrooms or interpretive information should be provided.

Commercial Development

Roadside commercial development is visually incompatible with the goals of retaining this as a wild and historic road and should not be encouraged. Such development should occur as part of existing community growth in Chitina and within McCarthy and Kennicott.



Recreational use is concentrated around the Copper River bridge during summer salmon runs.

Mining and Other Resource Developments

Historically, mining has been a common land use within this area. Actual mining activity usually takes place at some distance from the road and thus would not have a significant visual impact. The potential conflict lies with the increased use of the road to haul materials and ore. Road standards needed for a mining haul road would be incompatible with those recommended for a wild and historic road. Consequently, other access routes and alternative transportation modes for mining developments need to be considered when assessing the feasibility of increased mining activity in the area.