

Lakina River & Long Lake



Numerous filtered views of the Lakina River, shown here, and Long Lake are possible within this management unit.

General Description

Management Unit 29 consists of 13.5 miles of the McCarthy Road from near Ruth Lake to just beyond Tractor Creek about 6 miles from McCarthy. The road follows the old Copper River and North-western Railroad Alignment along the lower slopes of the Crystalline Hills and Fireweed Mountain. The Chitina and Nizina rivers are to the south though not visible. Major water features visible in this unit are Long Lake and the Lakina River. Landcover is predominately spruce-hardwood forest with poplar-willow communities dominating the river lowland and disturbed sites. Numerous wet tundra and black spruce dominated bogs can also be seen.

This is one of the few areas along the McCarthy road where residential development, particularly homestead style development is visible. These are for the most part in scale and visual harmony with the surrounding landscape. The few man-made clearings associated with these developments open up views and the grass cover is a visually distinctive feature during the spring and summer.

Views are dominated by nearby Fireweed Mountain and the Crystalline Hills to the north. The Chugach Mountains on the south side of the Chitina River are visible, though not as strong a visual feature. In the eastern part of the unit

KEY

ROW - Right of Way Mgt.

T - Turnout

RR - Railroad Remnants

V - View Management

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

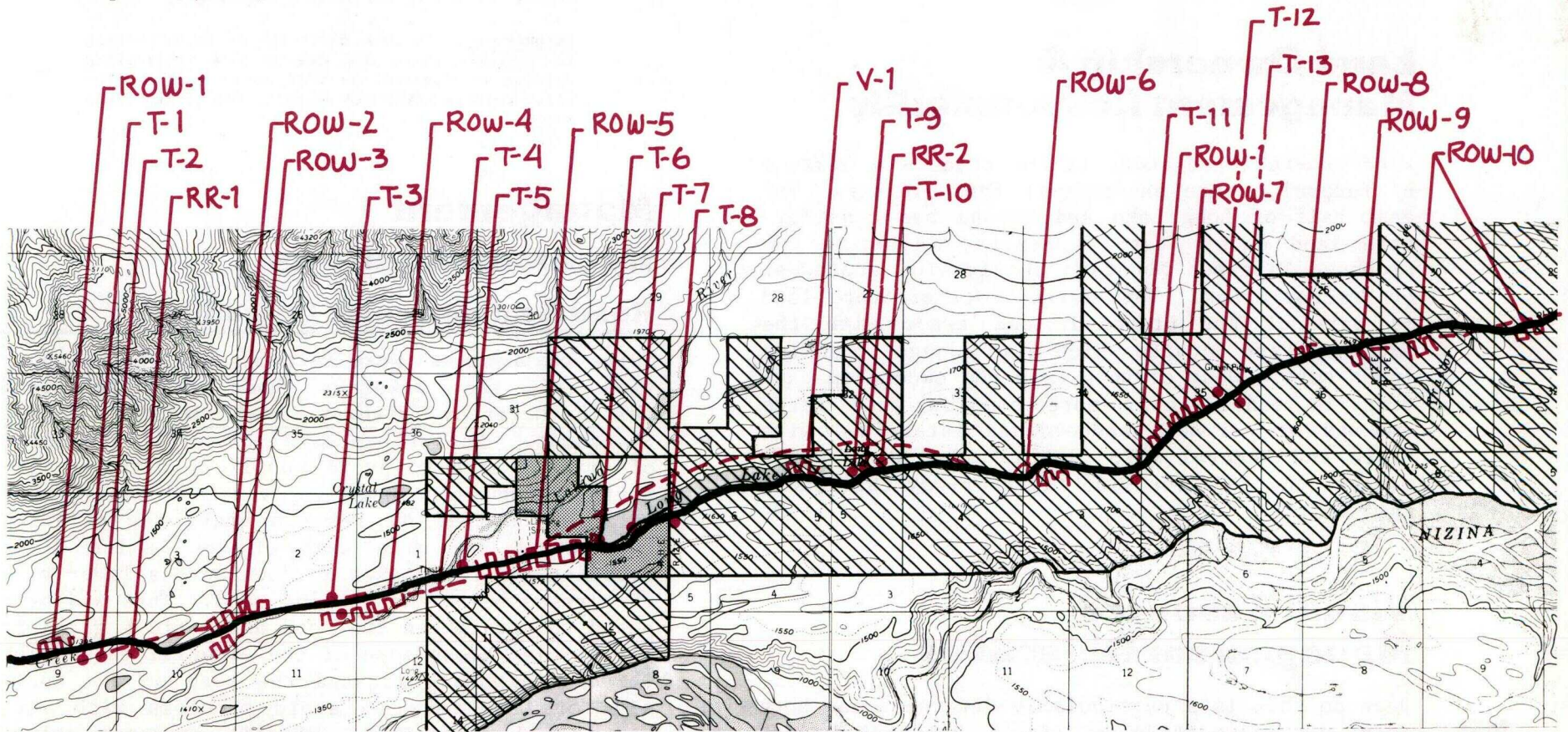
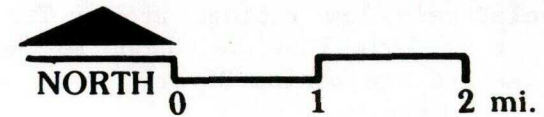
 State Owned Land

 Federal Land

 Private Land

29 Lakina River & Long Lake

Assessment Units M20 - M26



the higher ridges and mountains above McCarthy are visible (Bonanza Ridge, Sourdough Peak) however the traveler is generally unaware of their proximity to McCarthy. In only a few places are there views of the higher Wrangell Mountains to the north.

Scenic resource values are quite variable, with relatively low ratings around Tractor Creek and east of Long Lake and high ratings around Long Lake and the Lakina River.

Land Ownership & Management Responsibility

Land ownership adjacent to the road is a mixture of federal, state and private landholdings. The east half of Long Lake and beyond has considerable land under State ownership, including the proposed Fireweed Mountain subdivision southwest of Tractor Creek. This large block of State land is part of the proposed land trade with the National Park Service which also manages roadside lands here. West of Long Lake the ownership pattern is considerably more complex with large amounts of private landholdings intermixed with State and Federal (NPS) lands. The State DOTPF manages the 200 foot wide right-of-way throughout this unit.

Visual Resource Management Objectives

Because this is a particularly diverse area, both

and ownership and land use patterns, it is recommended that management objectives relate to the following three themes: sensitive land use and development, retention and enhancement.

Sensitive Land Use and Development: To encourage land uses and developments which are sensitive to scenic resource values and to the character of this as a wild and historic driving experience within a national park.

Retention: To retain those characteristics which contribute to making this a particularly rich and memorable viewing and driving experience.

Enhancement: To take advantage of opportunities to increase views and create more interesting driving experiences, as well as to enhance traveler understanding and appreciation of the landscape.

Management Recommendations

Road Realignment & Upgrading

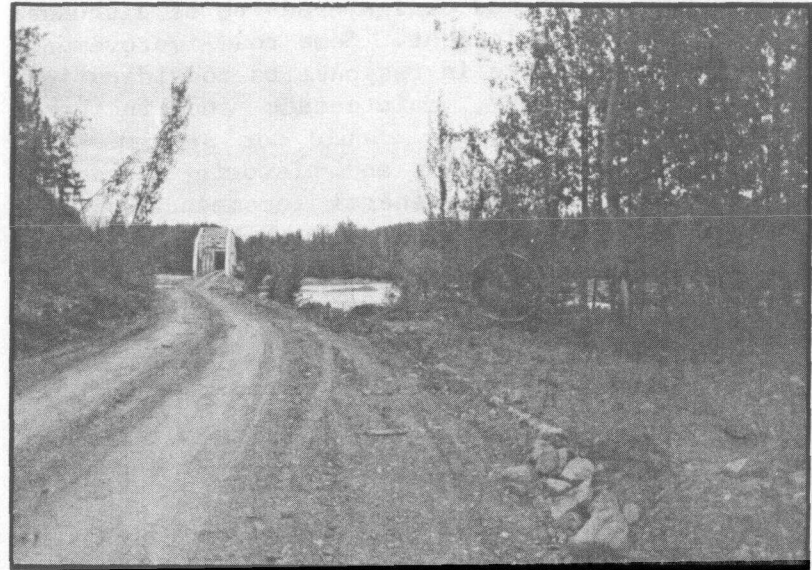
Three realignments were recommended for this portion of the McCarthy Road in the 1973 Chitina-McCarthy Highway Environmental Impact Statement. One relocates the road to the north of Crystal Lake to avoid conflicts with an airstrip expansion proposal. A second realignment locates the road on a bench above the existing road about one mile west of the Lakina River crossing and then takes it down onto a lower river terrace below the present road. This was proposed to straighten the road and avoid a glaciering problem along some of the sidehill cuts. The third realignment locates the road on the north side of Long Lake to avoid problems with wet, silty soil conditions. Scenic resource values

and driving experiences were compared for the present road and the proposed alignments. Based upon this analysis, as well as considering the wild and historic character of the road, it is recommended that the existing alignment be retained in every case within this management unit.

The Crystal Lake realignment would not increase viewing opportunities to the lake or more distant landscape features. It would also replace a series of curves with a long, nearly straight alignment, reducing the potential for changes in viewer orientation.

The realignments west of the Lakina River would have variable results. Where the road would be on a bench above the existing road the opportunity for distant views would increase. However, the road then drops down onto the lower Lakina River terrace where the tall vegetation and nearly flat topography limit views. Coupled with this, the new alignment would create a nearly two mile long straight road with some significant road cutting and filling. The existing road offers numerous lateral views and enough changes in direction to result in a visually pleasing experience. The present alignment comes closest to retaining the "wild" and "historic" character of this road.

The Long Lake realignment would definitely offer the potential for an increase in distant views since the road would follow the top of a series of linear ridges along the north side of the lake. However, once again it would result in a continuous straight alignment for over two miles, with minimal change in viewer orientation and a poor relationship to the topography. Additionally, this route would bypass the old railroad



The Lakina River crossing shown here, could become a focus for day use recreational activities (picnicking, fishing, rafting). The present one lane steel bridge is a visually distinctive feature which supports the wild and historic character of the road.

trestle at the east end of Long Lake which, though fallen down and being dismantled for firewood, still has some visual significance. The existing alignment, as it winds along the hills on the south side of Long Lake, offers a constantly changing driving experience and some of the more memorable views along the McCarthy Road. The wet soil conditions along this route do not appear to be severe enough to warrant rerouting. Indeed they may be considered an "amenity" if they can help to maintain the wild character of the road.

The question of road design needs to be discussed in addition to alignment. Some road improvements may need to be done in response to considerations related to safety, maintenance and increased use. However, changes should not significantly erode the desired wild and historic character. As discussed in the general recommendations for road design and upgrading for the McCarthy Wild and Historic Road, the following guidelines should be followed:

- Retain this segment as a relatively narrow (18-20 foot) two lane, gravel and dirt surfaced road.
- Follow former railroad alignments and grades and retain evidence of the railroad whenever possible.
- Design and maintain the road for a maximum speed of 25 to 30 mph.
- Bridges should be kept to one lane.
- Roadside brush control should be kept to a minimum.
- Some difficult driving conditions should be acceptable.

Land Use & Development

Residential development is the most common land use within this unit. Existing patterns range from recreational subdivisions around Crystal Lake (where only one lot has been developed) to large, picturesque homesteads complete with private landing strips. It seems likely that this range of land uses will continue within this area as there is considerable private land which could be developed. There is also some pressure for more land to be made available, as evidenced by

the proposed Fireweed Mountain state land disposal. Existing development either does not have a strong visual impact, as is the case with most homesites which tend to be set back from the road and screened by trees, or it has a strong positive impact, such as the neatly maintained homestead nestled amongst the trees and visible at the end of a long grassy airstrip.

The densely forested landscape and variable topography offer the opportunity to screen development, and if the landscape is used properly, future residential developments could continue to have only minimal visual impacts. However, the impact of such development would be expressed in the changing character of the road itself. Increased local use of the road would likely lead to pressures for road widening and other improvements which could be incompatible with the desired character of this as a "wild" road within a "wild" landscape and national park. As a consequence, the following recommendations are made:

- Further development in this area should not be encouraged. The primary land use should be "no use," with some scattered, large lot recreational cabins and "homestead" style residences. Further small lot residential subdivisions should not be encouraged.
- The State should avoid further land disposal activity within this area.
- Developments should be encouraged to continue to use air access to help reduce the use and dependence on the road.
- Roadside commercial activity should be discouraged. Any recreational related commercial developments (campgrounds, lodges, etc.) should be located away from the road and not visible from it. Signage should be visually subordinate to the surrounding landscape.

● The number of access roads from the McCarthy Road to adjacent developments and parcels should be kept to a minimum. Such access roads should be narrow, adequately screened from view, and service as many parcels as possible.

● Greenbelts with associated management guidelines should be adopted for all lands adjacent to the road in order to keep visual impacts of uses and developments low.

Greenbelts

Two types of greenbelt management strips and associated use guidelines are recommended for roadside lands within this management unit: a 50 foot wide greenbelt for privately owned lands and a 100 foot greenbelt for public lands. It should be noted that since this area is outside of an organized borough or local government, no implementation mechanism exists and consequently greenbelts on private lands must be considered voluntary. As a consequence public agencies (DOTPF, DNR, NPS) have a responsibility to inform private landowners as to the benefits and uses of greenbelts and to encourage them to adopt land use and development practices which conform to greenbelt recommendations.

The following guidelines apply to the 50 foot greenbelt management strip beyond the road right-of-way:

- Apply to private lands
- Limit permanent structures within this area
- Encourage retention of existing landcover within the first 25 feet next to the right-of-way, and selective clearing within the remaining 25 feet
- In some areas, encourage clearing and other actions which respond to specific opportunities or problems. For example, clearing may be encour-

aged where near or distant views may be increased. In other cases, intensive replanting may be needed to screen a view of a former material site.

On public lands, 100 foot wide greenbelts beyond the road right-of-way should be adopted. Within this area no vegetation clearing or disturbance to the existing topography should be permitted except for access roads crossing this strip. (See also the general discussion for the McCarthy Wild and Historic Road, for additional greenbelt information.)

Railroad Remnants (RR)

This unit contains numerous remaining remnants (trestles, rails, ties, spikes) of the former Copper River and Northwestern Railroad which used to follow this road alignment. As pointed out in the general discussion for the McCarthy Wild and Historic Road, these features are important visually as well as historically. While it is not recommended that actual restoration take place, it is recommended that every effort be made to maintain visibility, prevent removal, and extend their effective life as important roadside features for as long as possible.

RR-1 This former trestle over Crystal Creek still has some portions standing. Visually it functions almost like a piece of sculpture. Research should be done to explore ways to stabilize the remaining portions. Timbers should not be removed for building materials or firewood.

RR-2 This very large trestle at the east end of Long Lake only recently collapsed and is presently being scavenged for firewood and building materials. Further removal of rails and timbers should not be permitted - the remaining portions should be allowed to deteriorate naturally. (This is also a recommended site for turnouts, See T-9 and T-10.)



Between the Lakina River bridge and Long Lake the road follows a straight alignment through a dense tunnel of trees. This experience is enriched by occasional lateral views to clearings associated with homestead like development such as that shown here.

Right-of-Way Management (ROW)

Next to road alignment and design, the actual management of the right-of-way corridor can have the greatest impact on scenic resource management along roads. Within this unit, right-of-way vegetation management is presently minimal and contributes significantly to the character and quality of the driving experience. The dense vegetation close to the road creates interesting and variable spaces and plays a fundamental role in minimizing the visual impact of the road and maintaining low driving speeds.

In keeping with the recommended "wild" character of the road, right-of-way management actions, and particularly roadside brush control, should continue to be minimal and respond to specific opportunities and problems. Guidelines for right-of-way management can be found in the general discussion for the McCarthy Wild and Historic Road. The following recommendations identify site specific right-of-way management actions:

- ROW-1 Selective clearing of poplars which are invading the road's gravel edge recommended to open views and retain a more natural visual transition from the road to the adjacent bog-lake environment.
- ROW-2 Filtered lateral views towards the Crystalline Hills could be opened up through selective roadside right-of-way clearing. This could provide a welcome change of viewer orientation while traveling west.
- ROW-3 Retain the roadside strip of poplars to screen existing land clearing activity associated with the airstrip.
- ROW-4 Selective clearing is needed to open up views to the Lakina River and beyond for travelers heading west.
- ROW-5 The dense poplar-willow vegetation is important as a screen-filter for adjacent private land and to create a dramatic spatial experience. Selectively trim the trees to maintain clearance, focusing on the willows. Avoid the removal of large trees.
- ROW-6 Clear roadside vegetation on the inside of the turn to provide better visibility around the curve.
- ROW-7 Selective clearing within the right-of-way could open up filtered lateral views towards the higher Wrangell Mountains (Castle Mountain, Mt. Blackburn).
- ROW-8 Selectively clear some of the roadside shrub and tree vegetation to provide better views of the Crystalline Hills.

ROW-9 Selective clearing on the south side of the road could open up a dramatic view for travelers as they round the curve.

ROW-10 Lateral views towards near and distant mountains could be increased if selective clearing were done.

V-1 (View Management) Clearing and thinning of vegetation within and beyond the right-of-way could open up excellent lateral views across Long Lake and up the Lakina River valley towards the higher Wrangell Mountains.

Road Related Recreational Facilities

Within this management unit, numerous small turnout sites have been identified. Most of these allow the traveler to pull off the road and take advantage of desirable viewing opportunities. They can also be used as places to turn around since this road should remain relatively narrow. Some sites are suitable for day use activities such as picnicking and wildlife viewing and some are recommended for orientation information such as signs naming important landscape features. Overall development should be kept to a minimum and only day use should be encouraged. Overnight use areas and rest areas have been identified to the west at the Gilahina River crossing and at "roads end" near McCarthy to meet traveler needs.

T-1 This recommended turnout (2-3 vehicles) offers good views to the nearby Crystalline Hills and the opportunity to view Dall sheep. There is good visibility for safe entry-exit. Turnout development, which would require some fill, should take place on the south side of the road so as not to encroach on the lake and wetlands. The potential exists for trail development and for opening views to the south and east.



Former railroad trestle embankments have potential for development into small turnouts or walk-on viewpoints. This photograph shows the view from the east embankment of the old trestle over the small valley east of Long Lake.

T-2 This recommended turnout for 1-2 cars is above Crystal Creek with a northeast view and orientation towards the distant Chugach and Wrangell mountains.

T-3 Space for a small turnout (1-2 cars) exists on both sides of the road. This site has good views towards the Lakina River and more distant Wrangells to the east, as well as good visibility for safe vehicle access.

T-4 This site is along the Lakina River near the bridge. It is an area which has been widened and used for construction and maintenance activities associated with the bridge. This site offers good access to the river for fishing and picnicking. Views are not exceptional, the primary attraction is the Lakina River. Turnout entrance

visibility is adequate at present road speeds (30 mph). This area is heavily impacted by construction, with unstable slopes on the north side of the road. Erosion and slumping are evident. Any turnout or day-use recreational activity should be developed west of the present road construction staging area so as to take advantage of existing vegetation and minimize visibility of the highly disturbed areas. This turnout would be used primarily by travelers heading east.

- T-5 This site is on the northeast bank of the Lakina River bridge. It has good access and orientation to the river and good views both up and down the river. It would be a preferred site to T-4 for day use recreational activities such as picnicking and fishing. The major problem is the presence of private ownership.
- T-6 This one lane bridge over a small creek fed from Long Lake is an excellent viewpoint with views across Long Lake and towards a particularly picturesque homestead. Red salmon may be seen from this bridge during the summer. This is a particularly sensitive area due to the adjacent private land and the presence of the salmon. No turnout development is recommended. The bridge should be kept narrow to allow people to stop briefly and enjoy the views without encouraging extended use of the area.
- T-7 This existing small turnout (1-2 vehicles) has nice lateral views across Long Lake to a picturesque homestead and its associated land clearing. It should be retained as is with only periodic vegetation management to maintain the views.
- T-8 This is the best place for a Long Lake viewpoint and access from the existing road. Visibility is good for safe entry-exit. Development would require roadside clearing on the south side to allow for 2-4 vehicle parallel parking. A viewing platform is recommended over the lake. Road widening should be restricted to the uphill side to minimize disturbance to lake edge vegetation and slopes.
- T-9 Long Lake Overlook (second choice). This site is located at the west end of the old railroad trestle embankment. Site development would require clearing and grading. Trails up to a

slightly higher viewpoint as well as down to the lake could be developed. This site does offer good views of the remains of the railroad trestle which used to span this small creek valley. The primary problem facing development is poor entrance-exit visibility, since the site is on a hill and in the middle of a turn.

- T-10 Long Lake Overlook (first choice). This site is located at the east end of the railroad trestle embankment. It provides a finer vantage point for views of Long Lake and the Crystalline Hills and has a nice setting within an aspen grove. Access could be along the old railroad grade which would require some clearing and regrading, as well as signs to direct travelers to it. Vehicles should be kept back near the road and only pedestrian travel should be permitted to the viewpoint above the former railroad trestle.
- T-11 This site is recommended for development into a small (2-3 cars) turnout. It would be developed primarily for eastbound travelers and offers views to the more distant Wrangell mountains to the east (University, Bona, Churchill). Clearing nearby vegetation would be necessary to open up the views. Raising the viewer position 2-3 feet on fill would help to improve the viewing opportunities.
- T-12 This small existing turnout offers good views over the lake and, on clear days, towards the higher Wrangell Mountains (Blackburn, Castle Peak). This site is somewhat more protected than nearby T-13 described below.
- T-13 This recommended scenic turnout offers panoramic views across the lake to the Wrangell Mountains (Blackburn, Castle Peak), Fireweed Mountain and the Crystalline Hills. It is a very open, exposed site. Turnout development should consist of a widening on the south side of the road so as not to encroach any further upon the wetlands and lake. A wooden viewing platform taking people out away from the road and above the wetlands is recommended for development.

