

Management Unit 26

Silver Lake - Strelna

General Description

Management Unit 26 begins approximately 5 1/2 miles east of the Copper River bridge and continues for 11 miles to the approach to the Kuskulana River bridge. Here the McCarthy Wild and Historic Road follows the old Copper River and Northwestern Railroad alignment as it moves away from the Chitina River and begins to follow the glaciated uplands. The road passes through a forested landscape of gently rolling moraines and numerous bogs and small and large lakes. The most notable natural features include Silver Lake, Strelna Lake and the Chitina River valley, none of which are visible from the road from within this unit.



Views such as this with spruce forests dominating the foreground and distant mountains in the background are typical within this management unit. Though numerous large lakes are present, the level to gently rolling topography and forested land-cover generally limit views of these water features.

While a variety of land uses and developments can be found in this area they tend to be scattered and, for the most part, not highly visible. The bar and lodge at Silver Lake receives considerable use; however its visibility is limited to a small wooden sign marking the entrance road. A few homestead style residences have resulted in large land clearings which open up views to surrounding mountains. Residential development around Strelna is not visible from the road. Visual impacts associated with human use are primarily the result of road construction and maintenance.

KEY

ROW - Right of Way Mgt.

T - Turnout

Rec - Recreation

Scr - Screening

R - Reclamation

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

 State Owned Land

 Native Corp. Land

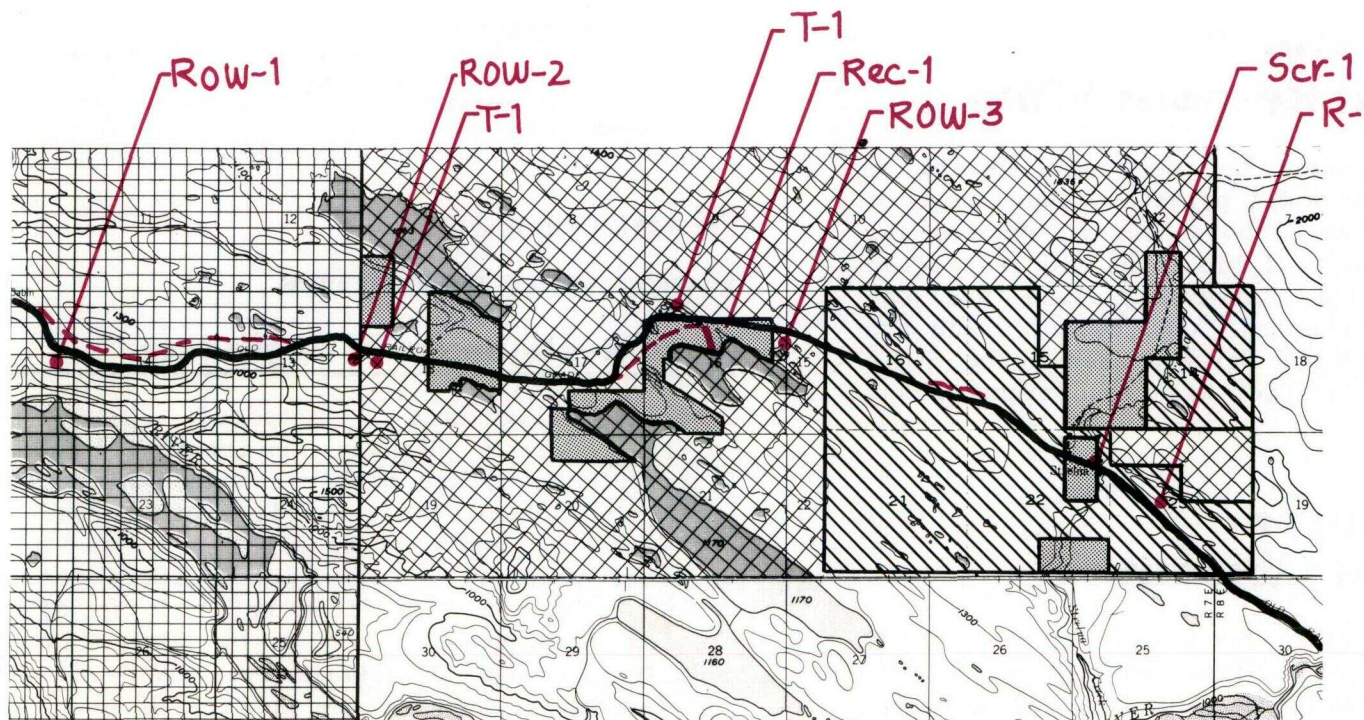
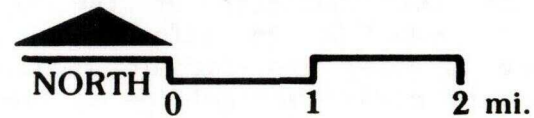
 Native Selected Land

 Federal Land

 Private Land

26 Silver Lake - Strelna

Assessment Units M5 - M8



Scenic resource values are moderate to low for this area. The forested, gently rolling topography limits views to the foreground adjacent to the road and the upper portions of the more distant mountains. Visually distinctive features such as large lakes and the Chitina River remain hidden from view. The driving experience lacks enough change in direction and variation in the character of the roadside landscape to make it an interesting drive. Right-of-way clearing has further reduced any spatial variety along this portion of the road and has tended to increase the lack of visual and experiential variety.

Land Ownership & Management Responsibility

Land ownership adjacent to the road consists of numerous relatively small privately owned parcels surrounded by Native corporation conveyances and selections. Public roadside lands are restricted to large blocks of University land and one section of State patented land, all of which are concentrated around the Strelna area. The State DOTPF manages the 200 foot wide road right-of-way through this area.

Visual Resource Management Objectives

Management of scenic resources in this unit should respond to objectives related to the following themes: sensitive land use and development, appropriate road design and right-of-way management, enhancement and impact mitigation.

Sensitive Land Use and Development: Encourage land uses and developments which are sensitive to visual resource values and are compatible with the desired character of this as a wild and historic road.

Appropriate Road Design and Right-of-Way

Management: To adopt policies and practices for the design, construction and maintenance of the road and its right-of-way which retain and reinforce its character as a "wild" driving experience as well as the primary access road to a national park.

Enhancement: To employ suitable landscape modification measures which reinforce the existing experience while opening up new and complimentary ones which provide a stronger visual awareness, understanding and appreciation of this landscape.

Impact Mitigation: To take appropriate action to mitigate the visual impacts on visual resource values which are associated with road construction and maintenance as well as roadside land uses.

Management Recommendations

Road Realignment & Upgrading

Road realignments proposed in the Chitina-McCarthy Highway Environmental Impact Statement (1973) are mostly changes which eliminate or reduce the severity of curves and increase the lengths of tangents or straight sections of roadway. In every case these realignments would not significantly increase distant viewing opportunities nor would they allow for additional views to distinctive nearby features such as Silver Lake or the Chitina River. Additionally they would tend to alter the nature of the driving experience, replacing the narrow,

winding road with one which would be straighter and wider. Such changes would conflict with the desired "wild" character of the road as recommended in this study. Consequently it is recommended that the existing alignment be retained and that any needs for upgrading or change strive to conform to this alignment as much as possible.

This portion of the McCarthy Wild and Historic Road passes through lands predominantly under private ownership. Presently the portion of the road to Strelna receives a significant amount of local use and it appears that use and consequently the needs for road improvement, will increase in the future. To respond to this it is recommended that this portion of the road, from Chitina to approximately 1/4 mile west of the Kuskulana River bridge, be designed and maintained somewhat differently than the remainder of the road to the east. This portion of the road, up to the Kuskulana bridge, would be more intensively used and managed as both a local access road and part of the McCarthy Wild and Historic Road. East of the Kuskulana bridge the primary use would be recreational and the overall character would be "wild" and "historic". Thus the Kuskulana bridge becomes a second gateway in this experience (the first being at the Copper River bridge). The following recommendations apply to the design and upgrading of the road within this management unit. Right-of-way management is discussed in the following section.

- Design speed: 30-35 mph.
- Surface: All weather, gravel
- Width: 20-24 feet including shoulder (2 traffic lanes)
- Drainage: Shallow swales, vegetated

- Turnarounds: Turnaround spaces every mile
- Alignment: Follow existing (railroad) alignment

Right-of-Way Management (ROW)

In addition to the actual design of the road, the management of the right-of-way can play a significant role in meeting the goals and objectives recommended. The relatively narrow road and the 200 foot wide right-of-way provide adequate room to meet the needs for maintenance and visibility while at the same time retaining a "wild" appearing roadscape and creating an interesting driving experience.

Present right-of-way management consists of clearing all tree and shrub vegetation back an even distance on both sides of the road, often to the right-of-way edge. Commonly, slash from clearing is left within view and the soil is severely disturbed. Furthermore, larger trees are often simply pushed over and left leaning along the right-of-way edge. Such management practices are unacceptable and inappropriate for this road. The vegetation and landscape disturbance results in a severe visual impact. The extensive clearing makes the road appear wider and tends to increase driving speeds. The uniform clearing width decreases the spatial variety of the driving experience and contributes to the general erosion of this as a "wild" driving experience through a "wild" landscape. (Refer to the general discussion for the McCarthy Wild and Historic Road for information related to appropriate and visually sensitive right-of-way management practices).



Extensive roadside clearing such as this is found throughout this management unit and has resulted in significant visual impacts. It will take many years for natural revegetation to establish a roadside landcover more compatible with scenic resource management objectives outlined here.

Several considerations are particularly important for this road. Appropriate action should be taken to mitigate the visual impacts of existing right-of-way clearing. Throughout this unit, the right-of-way vegetation and soil have been severely disturbed. Efforts need to be directed at encouraging revegetation of these areas including removal of all slash and debris, especially trees which have been partially overturned. Areas where the soil and topography have been severely disturbed should be regraded to

conform to previous grades. Roadcuts and sloped banks should be reseeded with clover or other soil building annuals to help prevent erosion and facilitate revegetation. Finally these areas should not be disturbed until they have been successfully reinvaded by adjacent trees and shrubs, at which time further maintenance activities should be directed by a landscape architect working with the DOTPF crew supervisor. Once these areas have been reclaimed they should be managed with the following considerations in mind.

- Respond to site specific conditions. Roadside clearing should respond to opportunities to open up lateral views - either to nearby natural and in some cases man-made features or to glimpses of more distant mountains. There may also be places where adjacent land uses or developments should be screened from view and any clearing should be discouraged, or where clearing around a turn is done on the inside of the curve to allow for visibility while the outside is left uncut.
- Retain and enhance "the wild" character of the roadscape. Necessary right-of-way clearing should occur in a fashion which leaves the visual impression that the landscape is unmanaged or wild. Consequently, selective removal of trees and brush should be standard operating procedure for this road, and no large areas should have all tree and shrub vegetation removed at one time.
- Use the right-of-way to create visual interest. Since, in general, visual resource values are relatively low for this management unit, the right-of-way itself needs to be manipulated to create visual interest. Within a forested, nearly level landscape such as this, considerable interest can be added by creating spacial variety such as completely enclosed spaces leading up to places open on one side to places that are completely open. This variety can be created by manipulating the right-of-way vegetation and responding to conditions beyond the right-of-way. Numerous small lakes and bogs, as well as man made clearings, offer considerable opportunity to make this a spatially and visually

rich driving experience - it only requires careful attention to right-of-way management practices.

Three sites merit specific attention:

- ROW-1 The opportunity exists at this location to open up views south and east to the Chitina River and Chugach Mountains through right-of-way clearing. Some vegetation management (selective thinning) within the greenbelt management strip would enhance views.
- ROW-2 Careful and selective tree thinning could open up views of small lakes on the south side of the road.
- ROW-3 Clearing of some of the willow at the roadside could open up views south to the Chugach Mountains.

Land Use & Development

Extensive private ownership, relatively good access, readily developable lands and some existing development all suggest that this area should continue to be a focus for residential and recreational developments along the McCarthy Road. From a scenic and recreational resource management perspective, land use and development would be preferable here, rather than to the west (Management Unit 25) or further east (Management Units 27, 28, 29, 30). This area has relatively low intrinsic visual quality ratings and it could benefit from clearings to open up views as well as some visually sensitive developments such as homesteads and cabins. Moreover, the roadside lands typically have high visual absorption capability ratings - meaning that land uses can readily be screened from view when desired. Consequently this management unit is one where roadside land uses and developments can be compatible

with the general goals for the McCarthy Wild and Historic Road and this unit's objectives. Land developments and uses should take the following into consideration in order to be sensitive to scenic resource concerns:

- Homesteads, large lot residence and recreational homesites are the types of land developments that should be encouraged adjacent to the road within this management unit. Agriculture related uses would in general be compatible with scenic resource values - particularly if the resultant clearings allowed for better views towards surrounding mountains. Resource developments, such as mining and timber harvesting, should not be located near the road nor should they be visible from it.
- Roadside commercial developments (gas stations, stores, restaurants) should not be encouraged here. Commercial nodes should remain at Chitina and McCarthy. Recreation related commercial activities (lodges, campgrounds, etc.) should follow the development pattern already established, with the site located at a distance from the road and not visible. Small, discreet signage such as that marking the Silver Lake Lodge entrance road should be encouraged. Neon, flashing or oversized signs should not be permitted.
- Access roads from the McCarthy Road to adjacent lots should be kept to a minimum. Adequately spaced (1/8 to 1/4 mile) feeder roads should be developed to provide necessary access. Vegetation clearing for these roads should be kept to a minimum and they should be maintained as one lane roads whenever possible. Finally, roads which curve and follow the topography rather than run perpendicular to the McCarthy Road are visually and experientially more attractive.
- All roadside development should take advantage of the generally high visual absorption capability to reduce the visual impacts of clearings, roads, and buildings associated with the particular use. In addition, landowners adjacent to the road should adopt the greenbelt recommendations outlined below.

Greenbelts (G)

While the design and management of the road and its right-of-way clearly are the most important factors on ensuring that scenic resource management responds to the goals recommended for the McCarthy Wild and Historic Road and this unit, the use and development of adjacent lands also requires attention. Greenbelt management strips are the most commonly employed tool for management of scenic resources along roads. However, due to the extensive private landholdings and the fact that this area is outside an organized borough or local government, no implementation mechanism for greenbelt recommendations exists. Consequently, greenbelt implementation should be considered voluntary on private land. At the same time, concerted efforts would need to be made by public agencies (DNR and NPS) to communicate to private landowners the benefits of such greenbelt areas and ways to use greenbelts to help meet specific goals and objectives. In this respect, the Native corporations who will own large blocks of roadside land should be encouraged to take the lead and adopt greenbelt recommendations for their lands, thus serving as an example of visually sensitive management and development practices for adjacent private landowners.

Greenbelt recommendations consist of two parts - a management strip width and guidelines for the use of this area. Two types of greenbelts are recommended for this management unit.

25 Foot Greenbelts. These relatively narrow management strips are recommended for existing private landholdings other than large blocks of Native corporation land. Within this area vegetation clearing would not be encouraged except for some selective clearing around

residences and as needed for access roads. Clearings for agricultural use would be acceptable, and generally desirable. No new permanent structures would be allowed within this area. The primary objective of such a greenbelt is to screen the visibility of uses and developments from the road and to retain a natural, undeveloped character to the area. In some cases, the greenbelt is used for view management - where selective clearing in the right-of-way and greenbelt opens up more distant views.

100 Foot Greenbelts. These management strips beyond the right-of-way are recommended for lands owned by Native corporations as well as for State and University lands. The wider strip allows for more effective scenic resource management. Within this area management guidelines would be the same as those outlined for the 25 foot wide greenbelts. These should be formally adopted for State owned lands and University lands. The Native corporations should be encouraged to adopt these and include them as conditions for future uses of these lands as well as conditions of sales and leases made of these lands.

Road Related Recreational Facilities

Road related recreational facilities for this management unit consist of turnouts (T) and a recreational access road (Rec). Considerably more roadside recreational development is recommended in Management Unit 25 to the west and Management Unit 27 to the east as these areas have much greater potential for such developments.

Rec-1 Recreation Access Road: Access to the large lake north of Silver Lake may be developed along the existing right-of-way. Facilities for some day use recreational activities such as picnicking and boating should be provided at the lake if enough land can be obtained. Otherwise, a boat launch, turn around and parking area should be provided at the lake edge. This access road would require adequate signage to indicate its location.

T-1 This is a series of small turnouts recommended to allow vehicles to pull off the road and turn around. In order to retain the relatively narrow character of the road, it is necessary to provide adequate turnout-turn around opportunities. These two sites also allow for viewing waterfowl and wildlife since they are adjacent to small lakes and wetlands. Other turnout-turn around sites need to be identified in order to provide one such site every mile.

Impact Mitigation (M)

Visual impacts requiring mitigation for this management unit are almost exclusively the result of right-of-way management practices and have been discussed above. Two additional sites need reclamation (R) or screening (Scr) attention.

R-1 This materials site has moderate visual impact. Some regrading and revegetation is recommended.

Scr-1 The visibility of culverts at Strelna Creek needs to be reduced. Large rocks for partial screening and painting of culverts to reduce contrast is recommended.