

DRAFT

STUDY

To Determine the Desirability of Creating

**The Denali
National Scenic Highway**

**An Interagency Study
Prepared under the Direction
of the
Alaska Land Use Council**

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SUMMARY

Section 1311 of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) requires that a study be completed to determine the desirability of creating a Denali National Scenic Highway System in Alaska. This report analyses a study area which includes nearly 500 miles of existing highways in Alaska and makes recommendations based on that analysis.

The objectives of the study are specified in the legislation. Giving special consideration to the scenic and recreational values of the area, and to their protection, the study is to determine if it is desirable to designate a National Scenic Highway for the purposes of (1) enhancing the experience of persons traveling between national parks in southcentral Alaska and; (2) providing a symbolic and actual physical connection between those parks. The study recommendations pertain only to Federally-managed public lands in Alaska.

The responsibility for this interagency study was assigned to the Alaska Land Use Council (ALUC). This group was created under Section 1201 of ANILCA to foster cooperative land management and planning between Federal, State and other agencies in Alaska. A specific function of the Council is to conduct cooperative studies. A Study Group was appointed by the council to oversee the completion of this study.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Parks, Richardson and Edgerton Highways - No Designation

This recommendation stems primarily from the fact that little Federal public land exists along these routes. This recommendation was unanimous among all members of the Study Group.

2. McCarthy Road - No Designation

This recommendation was based on:

- a. the lack of significant contiguous Federal public lands;
- b. the ability to manage this road corridor for its natural, scenic and recreational values using existing Federal and State authority;
- c. a cooperative planning effort between management agencies, under the direction of the Alaska Land Use Council, could effectively manage this area for its natural values without a Federal designation; and
- d. public comments were adverse to the creation of this route, or any other route, as a part of a National Scenic Highway System.

This recommendation was unanimous among all members of the Study Group. See page 55 for a more detailed analysis.

3. Denali Highway - No Designation

While this segment contains the greatest contiguous stretches of Federally-managed public lands, this recommendation was made for the same reasons as stated in #2 through #4 above. See page 46 for a detailed analysis.

This was the recommendation of all study group members with one exception (see page 47).

Pursuant to Section 1311(a), all Federal public lands within one mile on either side of centerline of all highways located within the study corridor (see page 67) were withdrawn from all forms of entry or appropriation under the mining laws and from operation of the mineral leasing laws of the United States. Based on the preceding recommendations, it is also recommended that this withdrawal be cancelled.

PREFACE

The purpose of this study is to recommend to Congress the desirability of establishing a Denali Scenic Highway in Alaska.

There is little doubt that the corridor withdrawn for this study is truly "scenic." Regardless of formal designations, the majestic scenery along most of the corridor will probably remain far longer than the highway corridor, or those who use it.

The question appears to be, then, given the fact that most of the 500 mile study corridor is indeed "scenic," what did Congress have in mind when it mandated this study which is required by Section 1311 of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA)?

The Act did not define the term "scenic highway." Furthermore, there is no generic predecessor that can be used to define "scenic highway." While there are scenic highways and parkways at a Federal level, and scenic highways managed by several states, the management and purposes differ. Therefore, no specific criteria exist upon which to base recommendations in this report, although the study team has drawn heavily on the experience gained by other similar studies or designations.

The objectives of the study are briefly described in the legislation. In conducting the study, the study team, when making their recommendations, was directed to consider:

- the scenic and recreational values of the lands withdrawn for this study;
- the desirability of enhancing the experience of persons traveling between national parks in Alaska; and

-the desirability of providing a symbolic and actual physical connection between those parks.

The questions then, that this study will address are, first, whether a national designation is desirable or necessary to protect these values, given that the management priorities of public (Federal) lands are subject to change and, second, if such a designation is recommended along any part or all of the study corridor, what shall be the intent and extent of that designation?

This is not a management plan. Rather, it is a study mandated by Congress to determine the feasibility and desirability of establishing a national scenic highway along certain existing highways in Alaska. If Congress decides to create such a scenic highway, then, at that time, a management plan would be written.

The study that follows, then, results from the combination of (1) statements of purpose and goals described in the legislation and its history, (2) the experience and lessons learned by examining other scenic highways and their management, (3) the survey of resources and factors that relate to or may be affected by a scenic highway designation, and (4) an analysis of the effects of making a particular designation. The report and recommendations resulting from the study are to be given to the President so that he may report to Congress.

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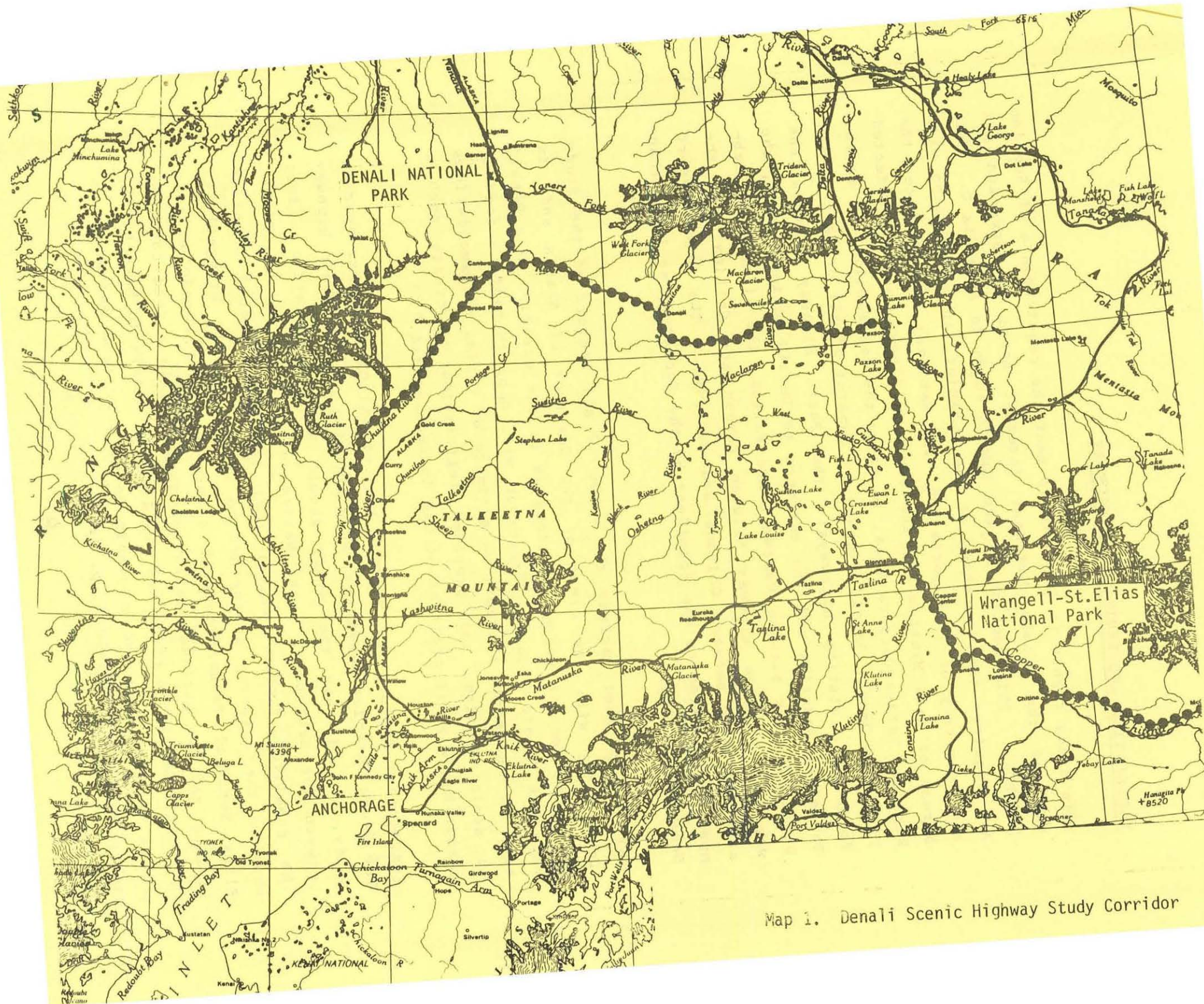
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I. INTRODUCTION



Map 1. Denali Scenic Highway Study Corridor

LEGISLATION AND LEGISLATIVE HISTORY

This study report is intended to meet the requirements of Section 1311 of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA). This section of the law is shown in Appendix C. This Act requires the Secretary of the Interior, in conjunction with the Secretary of Transportation, the National Park Service, the Bureau of Land Management, the State of Alaska, and the affected Regional Native Corporations, to study the desirability of establishing a Denali Scenic Highway to consist of all or part of the following existing highways: the Parks Highway between the Talkeetna Junction and the entrance to Denali National Park, the Denali Highway between Cantwell and Paxson, the Richardson Highway and Edgerton Highway between Paxson and Chitina, and the existing road between Chitina and McCarthy. The study report must be submitted to the President by the Secretary no later than December 2, 1983.

This report must include the views of all members of the Study Team along with the views of the Governor of Alaska and, in addition, contain recommendations as to the creation of a Denali National Scenic Highway, "together with maps thereof, a definition of boundaries thereof, an estimate of costs, recommendations on administration, and proposed legislation to create such a scenic highway, if creation of one is recommended."

Legislative History for Section 1311 of ANILCA is rather sparse. The House Interior Committee, when speaking of the Scenic Highway Study, stated that the study should be a cooperative effort between the Secretary, local Native Corporations and the State. The committee further stated that the study should consider whether the existing approaches to Denali and the Wrangell-St. Elias National Parks/Preserves should become a scenic highway linking the two national parks and thus provide a road corridor that would enable tourists and residents of Alaska to have better access to the parks and a scenic round trip from Anchorage to each park. (Report #95-1045, p. 221).

The Senate Energy Committee (Report #96-413 pp. 306 & 307) also addressed the Scenic Highway Study contained in HR 39 and stated:

The committee does not intend that this study affect existing businesses, residences or other occupancies along the study route. It is the intent of the study that the scenic highway serve to promote tourism between the two park system units. The withdrawal during the study relates only to mining and mineral leasing and will not affect existing residences, businesses or other occupancies.

Additionally, the House Congressional Record speaks to the issue of minor road realignment and maintenance on p. H-10549, which specifically states that "minor" realignment and maintenance is not to be construed so as to allow widening or substantial upgrading of the "primitive" McCarthy Road.

STUDY ORGANIZATION

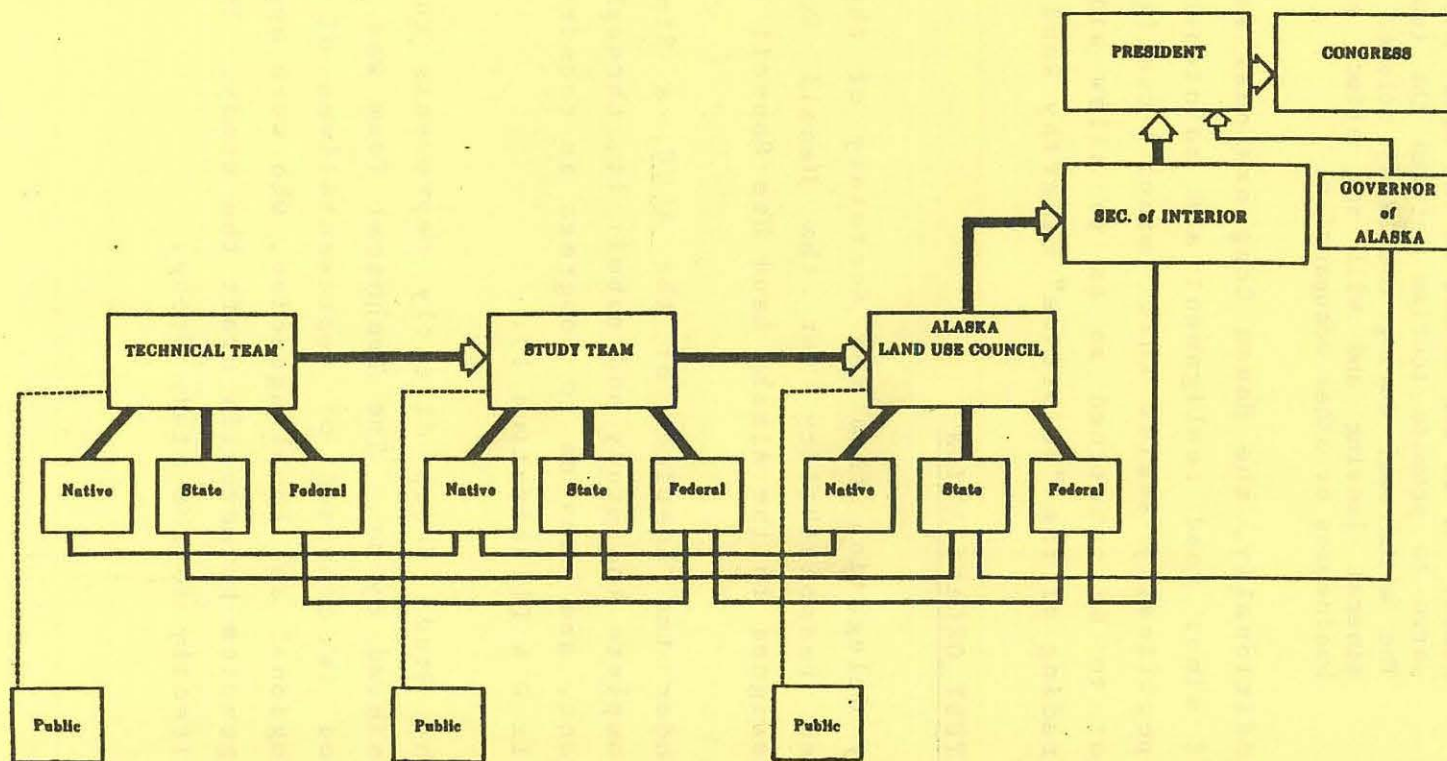
By delegation from the Secretary of the Interior, overall lead and responsibility for the Denali Scenic Highway Study was assigned to the Alaska Land Use Council (ALUC).

Under the auspices of the ALUC, a Study Group was created to complete the study and submit it, through the ALUC, to the President, and then on to Congress as required by the Act (see Appendix D & Illustration 1).

The Study Group directly represents the ALUC and has been appointed by it. The Technical Team was also created by the ALUC and is composed of representatives of various Federal, State, Regional and local agencies, who were appointed by the respective agencies to actually draft the study. The Technical Team reports directly to the Study Group.

Illustration 1

DENALI NATIONAL SCENIC HIGHWAY FEASIBILITY STUDY ORGANIZATION CHART



GOAL OF STUDY

The goal of this study is to determine the desirability of creating a Denali National Scenic Highway along any, all, or none of nearly 500 miles of existing highways in Alaska.

The study objectives are outlined in ANILCA. While completing the study, the Study Team was directed to consider:

the scenic and recreational values of the lands withdrawn under this section, the importance of providing protection to those values, the desirability of providing a symbolic and actual physical connection between the national parks in Southcentral Alaska, and the desirability of enhancing the experience of persons traveling between those parks by motor vehicles. (Section 1311, ANILCA)

CRITICAL ISSUES

In light of the discussion above, it is necessary to determine which lands the Act requires be studied, what these lands are to be studied for, and what objectives should be considered in this study. Consequently, land status, scenic highway definition, and symbolic and physical connection are critical issues. Also, a cooperative approach to management of existing highway corridors is discussed whereby various land management agencies could consolidate their planning efforts in order to achieve unified, common management goals.

Land Status

Section 1311 of ANILCA requires that all public lands within the designated corridor be studied and recommendations be made regarding designation as a National Scenic Highway. Public lands are defined in ANILCA as Federal lands which have not been selected by the State of Alaska under the Statehood Act or by Native Corporations under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA). Since recommendations are only to be made for these Federal public lands, land ownership is a major consideration.

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Land status along the study corridor is quite varied. The Federal Government, the State of Alaska, the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, various Native corporations and numerous private individuals all own or manage land in the study area. (See Appendix C). The corridor is approximately 472 miles long. Of this approximately 24 percent is in Federal ownership, 33 percent in State ownership, 6 percent in Mat-Su Borough ownership, 29 percent in Native corporation ownership and 8 percent in private ownership (Table 1). These percentages include State and Native corporation selected lands as well as those lands which have been conveyed under ANCSA and the Statehood Act.

ANILCA withdraws all Federal "public" lands located one mile on either side of centerline during the course of the Study. Since the selected lands, described above, are not "public lands", they are not withdrawn under Section 1311. The withdrawal contained in Section 1311 applies only to new mineral entry or leasing. Consequently, valid existing mining claims are not affected by this study. Additionally, other forms of use of the "public lands" are not affected by the withdrawal.

Table 1. Denali National Scenic Highway Study Corridor
Estimated Length and Generalized Ownership

<u>Federal</u>	<u>Parks Highway(%)</u>		<u>Denali Highway(%)</u>		<u>Richardson Highway(%)</u>		<u>Edgerton Highway(%)</u>		<u>McCarthy Road(%)</u>		<u>Total(%)</u>
BLM	-	-	88 mi.	65%	9 mi.	9%	-	-	-	-	97 mi. 21%
NPS	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	7 mi.	11%	7 mi. 1%
ARR	10 mi.	7%	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	10 mi. 2%
<u>State *</u>	75 mi.	54%	16 mi.	12%	44 mi.	42%	-	-	20 mi.	32%	155 mi. 33%
<u>Borough</u>	26 mi.	19%	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	26 mi. 6%
<u>Native *</u>	20 mi.	15%	29 mi.	21%	37 mi.	36%	20 mi.	60%	33 mi.	52%	139 mi. 29%
<u>Private</u>	7 mi.	5%	2 mi.	2%	13 mi.	13%	13 mi.	40%	3 mi.	5%	38 mi. 8%
TOTAL	138 mi.		135 mi.		103 mi.		33 mi.		63 mi.		472 mi.

* Includes conveyed and selected lands

Symbolic and Physical Connection

The Act requires that the "desirability of providing a symbolic and actual physical connection between the national parks in Southcentral Alaska" be studied. Regardless of whether any of the corridor is designated as a National Scenic Highway, the fact remains that the Denali National Park and Preserve and the Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve are physically connected by the Parks, Denali, Richardson and Edgerton Highways and the McCarthy Road.

The question of a symbolic connection is somewhat more difficult. What was intended by this term cannot be ascertained from the Act nor from the legislative history. It would appear that a symbolic link would not necessarily be a true link, i.e., "actual physical." Consequently, a symbolic link could theoretically only include a portion of the entire 500-mile corridor.

The symbolic connection mentioned by Congress would be desirable if the two parks had some development theme in common, and if many tourists really do travel between the two parks by motor vehicle. Denali National Park is a popular tourist destination by motor vehicle partly because of its central location between Anchorage and Fairbanks and because its relatively established tourist facilities are only a few miles off of one of the State's major intercity arterials (the Parks Highway). Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve has not developed tourist facilities and the National Park Service has indicated that they intend to manage it as a wilderness park, with few motor vehicle/tourist related facilities. The Park Service has not decided yet where the main access to the park will be, but the McCarthy Road in its present condition could not serve a large number of motor vehicles.

Table 2.

Comparison of State Scenic Highway Systems

STATE	1 Existing Roads	2 New Construction	3 Criteria Yes, No (Y,N)	4 State Legislature	5 DOT or Board	6 Local Government	7 Signs Only	8 Restrictions	9 Protections	COMMENTS
Arizona	X		Y	X				X	X	<i>Includes</i> 1) Scenic Roads, Historic Roads & Parkways 2) Restricted access (driveways & intersections) 3) Allows acquisition of easements
Arkansas	X		Y	X			X			
California	X	X	Y		X	X		X	X	1) Advertising signs restricted 2) Requires protection plan from local government
Colorado	X		Y	X				X		1) Criteria are general 2) Advertising signs restricted
Maine			Y		X			X		1) Preservation actions developed on site specific basis
Massachusetts	X		N	X			X			1) State recognizes local designations 2) Maintenance restrictions (tree cutting, fence removal)
Mississippi	X		N	X			X			
Nebraska					X	X		X		1) Maintenance Standards relaxed in case of conflict
New Jersey	X	X	N	X				X		1) "Parkway" system, restricted use & access
New York						X				1) No Statewide System
Ohio	X		Y		X			X		1) Criteria & protection are general in nature
Oregon	X				X			X		1) Restrictions on signs & junkyards
South Dakota	X	X		X						1) Commits fixed amount of money to system's construction
Tennessee				X	X			X	X	1) Parkway System 2) Protection measures to be studied 3) Increased maintenance
Vermont	X		Y			X		X		1) Roadside maintenance restrictions
Virginia	X		Y		X			X		1) Protection based on local zoning 2) Authority to buy easements

This information was compiled from the material sent by each state, and shows the variability among state programs. Columns 1 and 2 indicate the type of road included in the system. Column 3 indicates whether any criteria are used in route selection. Columns 4, 5, and 6 indicate the level of government making the route selection. Column 7 is marked if the designation means no more than posting the route as scenic, and Columns 8 and 9 indicate whether there are any activity restrictions associated with the designation, or special protection measures of any of the values associated with the designation.

It appears that the two park units at present have no common bond other than both being National Parks in Alaska. The need for a symbolic connection between the two National Parks has not been demonstrated.

Range of Definitions

Before examining the desirability of a scenic highway designation, it is necessary to know what that designation means and what criteria must be considered before such designation is made. In short, the term "scenic highway" must be defined. To do so, the Study Group examined other Federal and State efforts to develop scenic highways.

Two relatively comprehensive Federal references are A Proposed Program for Scenic Roads and Parkways prepared by the U.S. Department of Commerce for the President's Council on Recreation and Natural Beauty, published June 1966, and the Manual: National Scenic Highway Study 1974, prepared by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), U.S. Department of Transportation. Federal Scenic Highways include the multistate Great River Road and various scenic highways through National Forests and lands administered by the U.S. Forest Service, such as the Highland Scenic Highway, the Tellecho Plains-Robbinsville Road and the Kancamagus Scenic Road. Finally, the Parkways of the National Park Service were briefly examined to determine their applicability to this study.

Information on state scenic highways was requested from each state to determine what has occurred on a state level that might provide useful information. Thirty-eight (38) states responded, and of those 15 reported some kind of scenic highway system. Table 2 summarizes the nature of the state scenic highway systems.

This research indicates that there is no single, accepted set of definitive criteria which a scenic highway must meet. In some

states, a scenic highway designation is strictly a legislative process without any explicit criteria. At the other extreme, at least one state requires a survey, in one-tenth mile increments, detailing about 30 positive and negative elements of the landscape. Common to the criteria studied is the concept of outstanding and unique scenic beauty. One set of criteria that was referenced by several sources was found in the 1974 Manual prepared by the FHWA. The range of factors considered includes:

- the scenic quality of the corridor;
- service to major population centers;
- economic feasibility;
- availability and variety of complementary facilities
- availability of other scenic routes and recreation resources in the area;
- access to parks and recreation areas;
- providing connectivity among recreation facilities;
- access to major highways-commuter and nonrecreation travel needs;
- potential for conserving energy and meeting user needs;
- protection of corridor and ecology;
- public demand for development; and
- suitability for use by other modes.

These criteria were developed to apply to all of the states. They offer a useful expansion of the issues that were presented in Section 1311 of ANILCA, i.e.:

- the scenic and recreational values of the land;
- the importance of providing protection to those values;
- the desirability of providing a symbolic and physical link between parks; and
- the desirability of enhancing the experience of people traveling between parks by motor vehicles.

The range of management considerations for scenic highways was also examined. In general, state-authorized scenic highways are existing multipurpose roads with little difference in management from that of other highways. Federal efforts in the past have tended to involve more new construction and to be more dedicated to recreational use. Minimal implementation of both Federal and State scenic highway systems may be simply marking the highway as a scenic route. Colorado has restrictions on advertising signs

and Oregon also restricts junkyards in designated scenic areas. Massachusetts and Vermont have restrictions on roadside maintenance activities like tree-cutting and fence removal. Several states, including Arizona and California, are authorized to buy scenic easements or obtain property in fee title through purchase or gift. Several responses from states without scenic highway systems indicated that scenic and recreation values along their highways receive similar protection through department policies or local zoning restrictions.

At another level of development, the Federal Government is providing money to Mississippi River states for improvements to roads in the Great River Road system along the Mississippi. The improvements being funded include general pavement and alignment upgrading, and the provision of turnout and roadside recreation facilities. About \$250 million has been authorized for Great River Road projects through 1983. The funds are appropriated by Congress as a line item under the Federal-Aid to Highways Act. An extreme example of a scenic highway is a Parkway administered by the National Park Service such as the Blue Ridge Parkway and the Natchez Trace Parkway. The entire corridor along such a road is managed primarily for its scenic and recreational values, as a part of the National Park system. Travel may be restricted to non-commercial use and entrance fees may be charged. A Parkway, being a linear National Park, is recognized as a distinct classification; there is no evidence either in ANILCA or the legislative history that Congress intended such a designation for the Denali Corridor.

Since there has been no uniform application of the designation "scenic highway," this study will not adopt any single specific descriptive definition, criteria, or management plan. For the purposes of this study, the foregoing discussion of the range of management options will serve as defining what a scenic highway in Alaska may be. Each segment of the corridor will be studied with this range of alternatives in mind.

Cooperative Management

There are a number of agencies which currently have responsibilities and interests in lands and resources adjacent to the highways within the study corridor.

Regionally, numerous plans exist or are proposed which, if implemented, could impact land uses or resources along these highways. Locally, many of those who own or manage lands or resources directly adjacent to the highways within the study corridor have plans, either existing or proposed, on how those resources should best be managed.

Because of the existing and potential impact of these planning efforts at both a regional and local level, the agency representatives in the Study Group (Appendix D) recognized the need for a means to coordinate planning efforts and land management. Therefore, a position paper, separate from this document, will be prepared and presented to the Alaska Land Use Council (ALUC) on how to best plan for and manage these and other resources within the study area.

The ALUC has statutory authority to establish cooperative planning zones in which the management of lands or resources by one agency may significantly affect the management of lands or resources of other agencies [ANILCA Section 1201(j)]. As cooperative planning would appear to be particularly appropriate for this study area, this paper will examine how Federal, State, regional and local agencies can cooperatively manage those lands and resources within the study area to protect and enhance the recreational and scenic opportunities. This proposal will not be submitted as a part of this study but will be submitted separately to the ALUC for their evaluation and action.

PARKS, RICHARDSON AND EDGERTON HIGHWAYS

Because of numerous similarities, the most notable of which is land status, the Parks, Richardson and Edgerton Highways are discussed together, and one recommendation is made for all three.

PARKS HIGHWAY

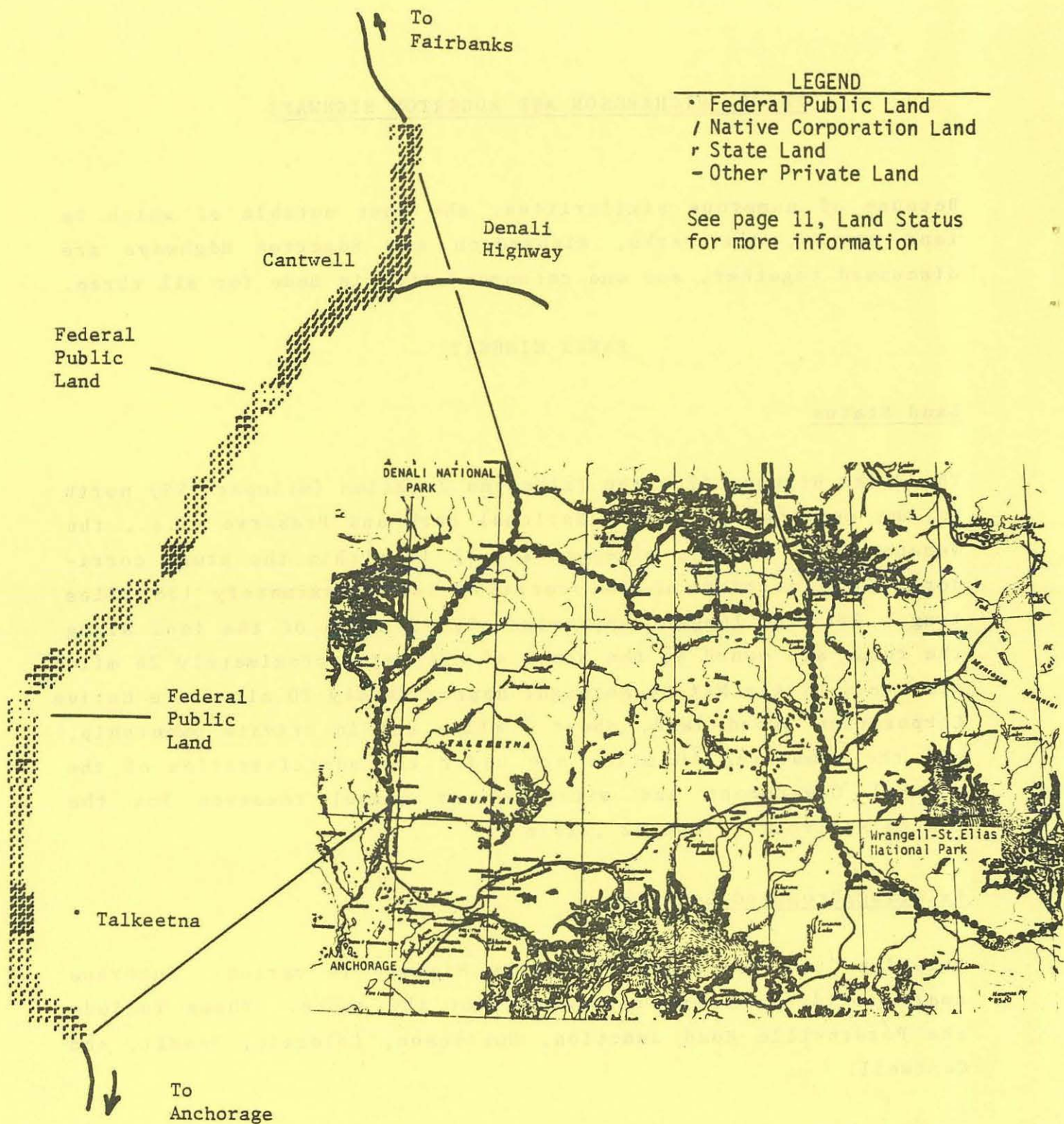
Land Status

The Parks Highway from the Talkeetna Junction (milepost 99) north to the entrance of Denali National Park and Preserve (i.e., the Nenana River Bridge, milepost 231.1) is within the study corridor. This section of the corridor is approximately 138 miles long. Of this length, approximately 75 miles of the land along the roads are owned by the State of Alaska; approximately 26 miles are owned by the Mat-Su Borough; approximately 20 miles are Native Corporation owned land, about 7 miles are in private ownership, and the remaining 10 miles are under the administration of the Federal Government and withdrawn as gravel reserves for the Alaska Railroad. (Map #2 ,Table 1)

Existing/Proposed Land Use

Existing land use along the Parks Highway is varied. Numerous small settlements and businesses dot the route. These include the Petersville Road Junction, Hurricane, Colorado, Summit, and Cantwell.

From milepost 132 to milepost 169, the Parks Highway passes through the Denali State Park; however, there are scattered inholdings of private land. Activities within most of the Park are restricted to non-motorized uses. Discharging of firearms is not allowed in the Park.



Map 2. Parks Highway Land Status

Several parcels of State owned land north of the Denali State Park have been tentatively identified as being available for settlement under the State's land disposal program. These parcels may or may not be disposed of, depending upon public interest.

Although not the alternative preferred by the Alaska Power Authority (APA), an access route to the proposed Susitna Hydro Project has been studied from Hurricane (milepost 174) east, and therefore, it could become a possible access route to that area pending the outcome of APA's study and review process.

Except for the extreme northerly portion of the Parks Highway, the entire study corridor is within the Mat-Su Borough. The corridor area has not been zoned; thus the Mat-Su Borough exercises little regulatory control over the area although it has legislative authority to do so. However, along approximately 26 miles of the corridor from Talkeetna junction northward, the Mat-Su Borough owns lands that are being considered in the Borough-wide Comprehensive Plan and have tentatively been identified for disposal.

Scenic and Recreational Resources

The scenic resources of the Parks Highway were inventoried in 1978 by the Alaska Department of Natural Resources (DNR). The DNR study, entitled "Scenic Resources Along the Parks Highway," divided the highway into segments based on character types, and subdivided the character types into assessment units no longer than three miles. The "intrinsic visual quality" of each assessment unit was rated according to its various components, including patterns of form, line, color, and texture. Also assessed for each unit was a "composite visual quality" rating which added or subtracted the effect of development on the intrinsic visual quality. The potential for screening development areas with vegetation was also rated. Unless otherwise stated, the values and ratings referred to are the "composite visual quality."

According to this study, scenic values along the Parks Highway range from low to exceptional. Excluding the portion of the highway passing through Denali State Park, about 25% of the segment rated low, 15% moderate, and the remainder high to exceptionally high in scenic value. The largest block of Federal land, managed by the Alaska Railroad near Hurricane, was rated as exceptionally scenic. The roadway there curves through a rolling topography with many unobstructed views of Denali National Park and Mount McKinley. The foreground lands have a low capability to absorb visual impact.

Recreational opportunities in this area of Federal land include a paved viewpoint at milepost 170.3 and a rest area at Hurricane Gulch that includes a trail with several scenic views and good berry picking. Other scenic features along the Parks Highway include:

- dense stands of birch-spruce forest on gently rolling topography;
- views of Mount McKinley, the Alaska Range, and their numerous glaciers; and the
- canyons and bluffs of the Chulitna River, Hurricane Gulch, and Honolulu Creek.

Other recreational opportunities include:

- developed and undeveloped rest areas and turnouts, including some at specific viewpoints;
- fishing in feeder streams of the Susitna River and the Chulitna River and in various lakes in the area;
- camping at Honolulu Creek or in the Denali State Park;

- picnicking at Byers Lake or any of a number of rest areas;
- boating at Byers Lake;
- berry picking at Coal Creek and other turnouts;
- hiking at Denali State Park; and
- hunting and trapping between Talkeetna Junction and the entrance to Denali State Park.

Other Considerations

The corridor passes through or near several mineralized provinces. Near Broad Pass are many mining claims, with known deposits of gold, lead, copper, and zinc in the area. Other minerals found along the corridor include silver, platinum, nickel, chromium, and molybdenum. Non-metallic resources include coal, sand, gravel, and a low potential for oil and gas. The commercial value of these resources is unknown. Water power sites inventoried by the Alaska Power Authority include two sites on the Chulitna River, as well as the sites being developed on the Susitna River. Additionally, APA's Willow-Healy Intertie Project parallels the Parks Highway for much of its length.

The Parks Highway is a major transportation link and connects the State's two most populous cities: Anchorage and Fairbanks. The Parks Highway also provides a vital commercial link between the port facilities in Anchorage and interior Alaska. The Parks Highway meets Federal-Aid Highway standards. Because of its importance as a transportation corridor, it has also been designated as a part of the Interstate Highway system.

RICHARDSON HIGHWAY

Land Status

That portion of the Richardson Highway that is within this study corridor is approximately 103 miles in length. Of this about 44 miles is either State selected or conveyed to the State under the Statehood Act, and about 37 miles is either Native Corporation selected or conveyed to various Alaska Native Corporations under ANCSA. There are private parcels scattered along the highway with concentrations at Paxson, Gakona Junction, Glenn Highway Junction, Copper Center and Edgerton Highway Junction. These private lands encompass approximately 13 miles of the study corridor. The remaining 9 miles are Federal public lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management. (Map #3, Table 1)

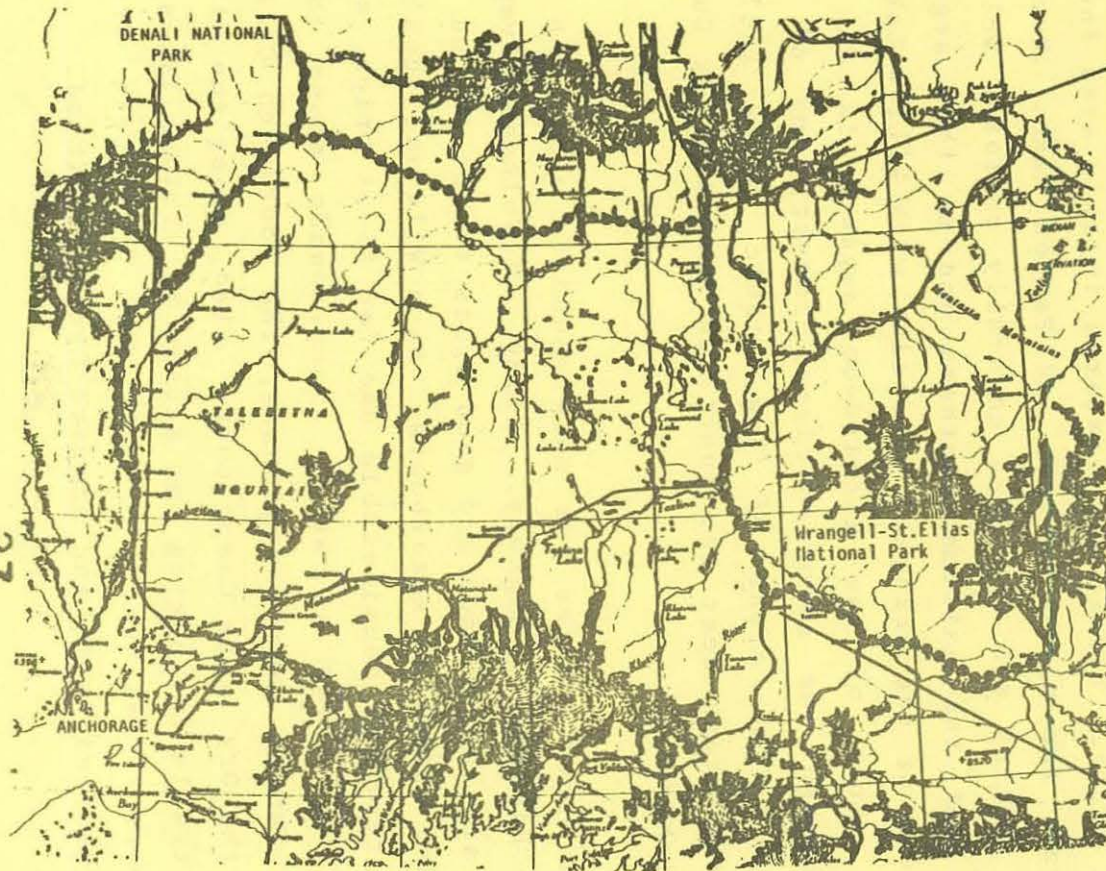
Existing/Proposed Land Use

As is typical of highways in the State of Alaska, the Richardson Highway has numerous small businesses scattered along its length. For the most part the businesses are concentrated where the private lands are concentrated. Several historic roadhouses are located within the study corridor. The most notable of these is the Sourdough Roadhouse at Mile 147, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Additionally, the Trans-Alaska Pipeline parallels the Richardson Highway for the entire length of the study corridor. Within this section of the study corridor, numerous access roads and material sites exist associated with the construction and operation of the pipeline.

This section of the Richardson Highway is located outside of any organized Borough. Therefore, the area has not been zoned by the

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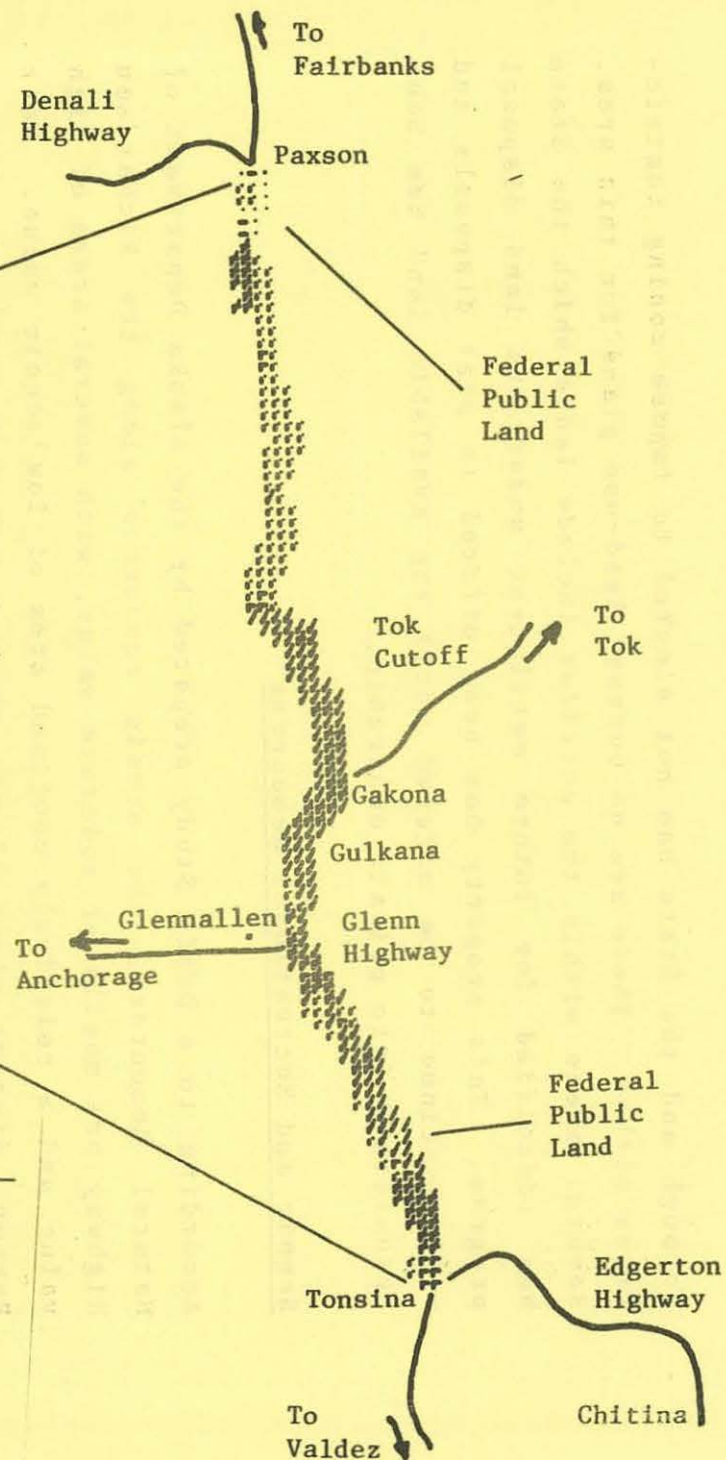


LEGEND

- Federal Public Land
- / Native Corporation Land
- State Land
- Other Private Land

Map 3. Richardson Highway
Land Status

See page 11, Land Status
for more information



Borough and the State has not elected to impose zoning restrictions either. There are no current land-use plans for this area. Several areas within the corridor include lands which the State has identified for future settlement under its land disposal program. This property has been offered in past disposals and will continue to be offered until the available land has been transferred into private ownership.

Scenic and Recreational Resources

According to a Draft Study prepared by the Alaska Department of Natural Resources, the scenic resources along the Richardson Highway are mostly of moderate value, with several areas of high value and a relatively confined area of low scenic value. Near Paxson, distant views of the Chugach and Wrangell Mountains to the south and the Alaska Range to the north contribute to the high scenic value. Foreground features in this area include the Gulkana River, the river valley, and Paxson Lake. Much of the terrain is rolling and the road generally conforms well to the topography. At the extreme southern end of this segment are stunning views of the Wrangell Mountains with Willow Lake in the foreground. Much of the Richardson segment is an enclosed corridor through the spruce/hardwood forest, and of moderate scenic value. The areas of low scenic value include the more-populated areas near the junctions with the Tok Cutoff and the Glenn Highway.

Recreational opportunities are more abundant along the northern half of the Richardson Highway. Along the Gulkana River and at Paxson Lake are campgrounds and good spots to put in and take out rafts, canoes, kayaks or motorboats. As a Wild and Scenic River, the Gulkana receives considerable use for float trips, and it is a good fishing river as well. Campgrounds along the route include two Paxson Lake Campgrounds, the Sourdough Creek Campground, and the Dry Creek Campground. Also, along the Richardson Highway are trails for hiking and access to various lakes and the Gulkana River. Trailheads include the June Lake Trailhead, Gillespie Lake Trailhead, and Haggard Creek Trailhead.

Other Considerations

The area along the Richardson Highway is not as heavily mineralized as other segments of the study corridor. There are several isolated mines, and the area around Paxson Lake is noted as a mineralized province containing molybdenum, gold, and copper. At the extreme south end of the Richardson segment is a highly mineralized area, containing chromium, nickel, copper, and platinum. Sand and gravel are exposed along the Copper River, and the Copper River Petroleum Basin has a low potential for oil or gas deposits.

Caribou and moose may be found along this segment. A fall caribou migration route crosses the highway about midway between Paxson and Gulkana. During the winter, moose will concentrate along the Gulkana and Copper Rivers. There is a moderate concentration of furbearers within the area.

The Richardson Highway, like the Parks Highway, is a major transportation and commercial link to Interior Alaska. Valdez, the southern terminus of the Richardson Highway, is the site of the northernmost year-round ice-free deepwater port in the State. (This was the major reason for selecting Valdez as the terminus of the Trans-Alaska Oil Pipeline.) That part of the Richardson Highway between the Glenn Highway Junction and Gakona Junction has been designated an Interstate route and the remainder of the Richardson Highway is a Federal-Aid primary route.

EDGERTON HIGHWAY

Land Status

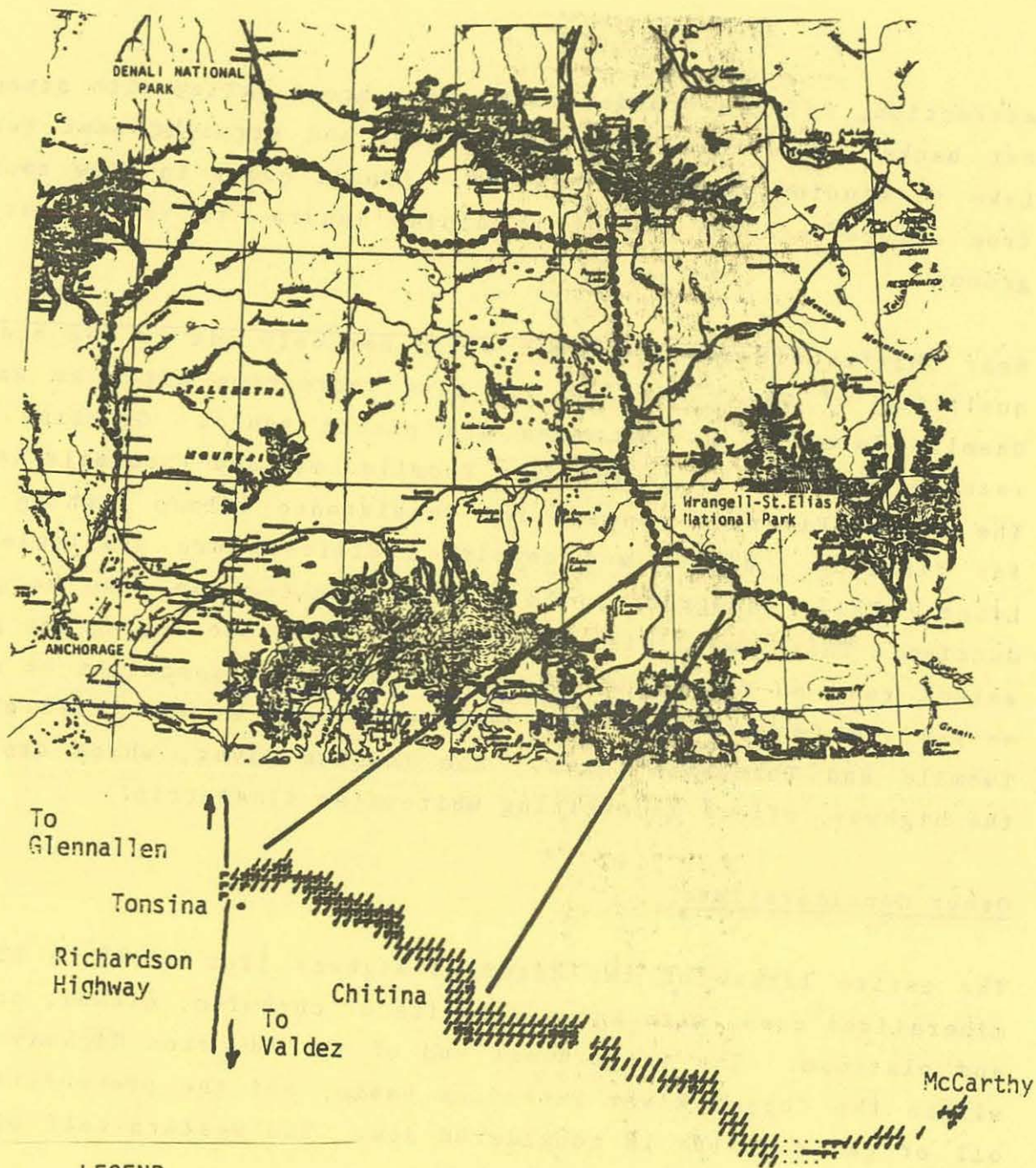
The Edgerton Highway is approximately 33 miles long. The entire length is within the study corridor. About 20 miles is either Native-selected or conveyed, while 13 miles is in private ownership. There are no Federal public lands on this segment (Map #4, Table 1). Lands in private ownership were predominantly patented under the Homestead Act, and farming remains the livelihood of many of those along the route, particularly between the small communities of Kenny Lake and Lower Tonsina. There are a few small parcels of State land. The Liberty Falls Campground, although belonging to the State, continues to be managed by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) through a cooperative agreement.

Existing/Proposed Land-Use

The Edgerton Highway is not within any local governmental unit. Land-use planning is virtually non-existent. Future land-use of the area will in large measure be determined by the major land-owners; e.g., the appropriate Native corporations. The highway is a Federal-Aid Secondary route.

Scenic and Recreational Resources

Using the numerical rating system of the DNR consultant, the Edgerton Highway is one of the most scenic of any of the segments. Except for short lengths with moderate ratings, the entire road is highly scenic. Mount Drum, Mount Sanford, Mount Blackburn, and Mount Wrangell offer the backdrop for small farms and homesteads along the road. According to the study, the farms and homesteads are generally neat, and add to the character and quality of the view. The Copper River is also a scenic



LEGEND

Federal Public Land
Native Corporation Land
State Land
Other Private Land

See page 11, Land Status
for more information

Map 4. Edgerton Highway Land Status

There is no Federal Public Land in this segment.

attraction, being a braided river in a broad valley with steeply cut banks. The road varies from flat and straight near Kenny Lake to winding nearer to Chitina. Ground cover in view ranges from spruce/hardwood forest to alpine tundra, to rocky, barren ground.

Near Chitina are several lakes which not only add to the scenic qualities of the road, but are good recreation sites as well. Onemile lake has a rest area and picnic table. Grayling and rainbow trout can be caught from Twomile Lake and Threemile Lake. The Copper River is popular for subsistence salmon fishing and for floating. Hiking and camping facilities are available at Liberty Falls Campground, where berry picking can also be productive. These facilities receive very heavy use during the peak salmon runs on the Copper River. Buffalo can sometimes be seen across the Copper River, and mountain sheep in the hills above Twomile and Threemile Lakes. The Tonsina River, which crosses the highway, offers an exciting whitewater float-trip.

Other Considerations

The entire length of the Edgerton Highway lies within a highly mineralized area, with known deposits of chromium, nickel, copper and platinum. The westernmost end of the Edgerton Highway lies within the Copper River Petroleum Basin, but the probability of oil or gas deposits is considered low. The western half of the corridor area is mostly agricultural.

Moose and furbearers may be present anywhere along the Edgerton Highway, but are not known to be concentrated there. Black bear will concentrate along the Copper River.

Of particular significance is the fact that there are virtually no Federal lands along the Edgerton Highway.

PARKS, RICHARDSON AND EDGERTON HIGHWAYS RECOMMENDATION AND RATIONALE:

No Designation

The Study Group concurred unanimously that it is undesirable to recommend that these highway segments be designated as part of a National Scenic Highway (NSH) System. The rationale behind this conclusion includes the following points:

1. Land Ownership - Section 1311 of ANILCA (Appendix C) mandates that recommendations be made to Congress on "public" (Federal) lands. The Parks, Richardson and Edgerton Highways traverse lands that are almost entirely non-Federally owned or managed. Therefore, it would be inappropriate to make a recommendation to create a NSH on these highway segments.
2. Commercial Use - The Parks and Richardson Highways are major commercial corridors in Alaska. As a principal intent of Congress was that a scenic highway serve to promote tourism, a potential conflict exists between a national designation and the existing reliance on these highways as commercial routes.
3. Public Opinion - Over 25 public meetings were held in Alaska to seek out comments and concerns relating to creation of a National Scenic Highway System in Alaska (see Appendix B). It was apparent from those meetings that there was overwhelming opposition to any such Federal designation in Alaska.
4. Existing Authority - The State of Alaska has existing authority to create and manage a State Scenic Highway System, if they so choose.

5. Cooperative Management - There is a recognized need among land managers (Federal, State, local and private) in Alaska that an opportunity exists to consolidate and coordinate management efforts on their lands to address common management goals, especially for those lands adjacent to transportation corridors in Alaska (See Discussion on Page 19). An interagency effort will be undertaken to address these management goals and issues such as the management of recreational and scenic values along existing highways. The Study Group concluded that this is a more desirable approach to protection of scenic and recreational values, and enhancement of tourism than a National Scenic Highway designation.

DENALI HIGHWAY

Land Status

The entire length (135 miles) of the Denali Highway is within the study corridor. This highway provides the east-west link between Cantwell, on the Parks Highway, and Paxson, on the Richardson Highway. Until completion of the Denali Highway in 1957, the only access to Denali National Park (formerly Mt. McKinley National Park) was via the Alaska Railroad. The Denali Highway remained the only vehicle access to the National Park until the opening of the George Parks Highway in 1972.

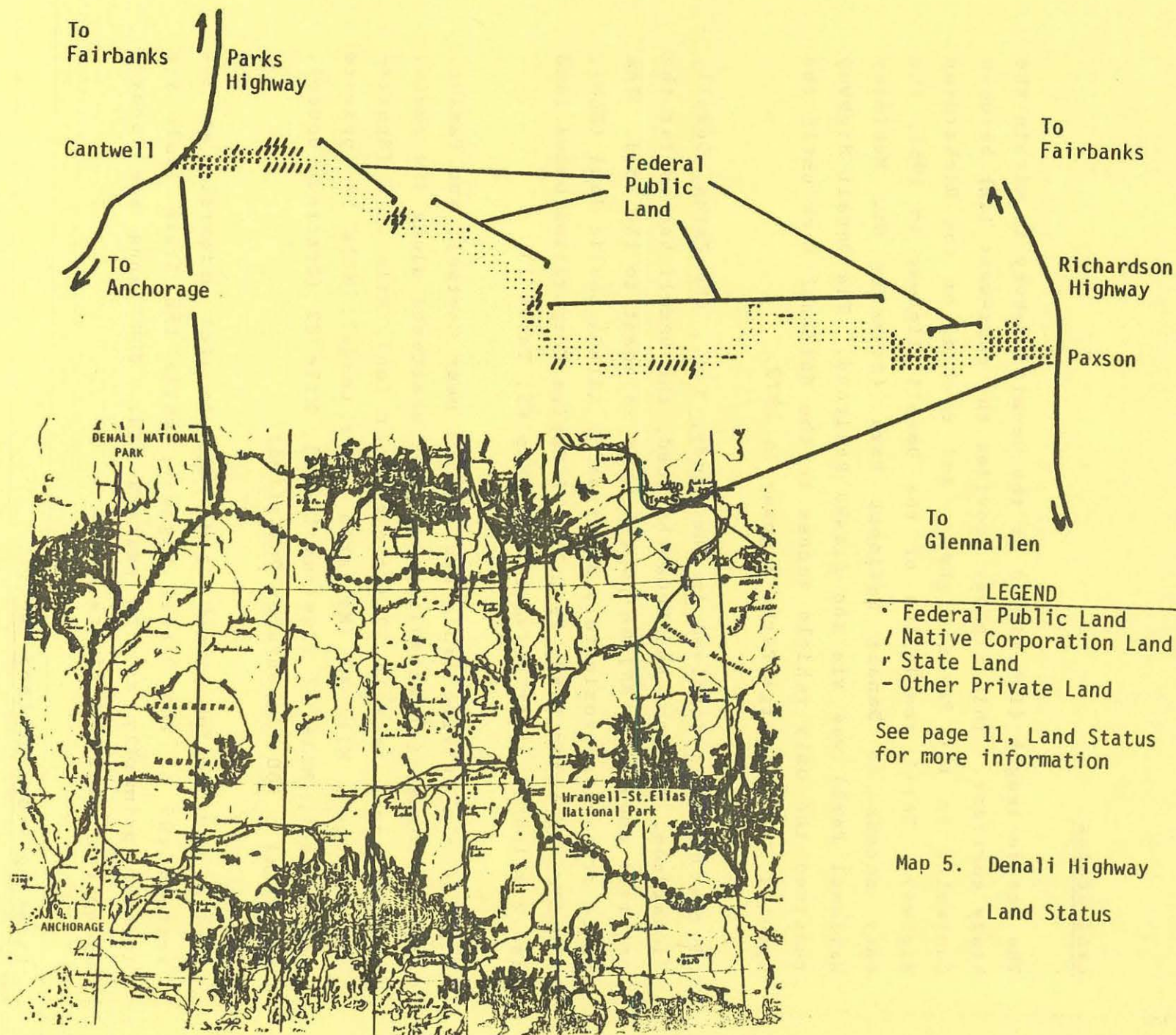
Of the highways involved in the study, i.e., the Parks, Denali, Richardson, Edgerton and McCarthy Road, the Denali has by far the greatest amount of ANILCA public land adjacent to the road. The route crosses approximately 88 miles of ANILCA public land (BLM), 16 miles of State land, 29 miles of Native Corporation owned land and 2 miles of other private land (Map #5, Table 1).

Most of the private lands are located near Cantwell and Paxson. Several commercial establishments are scattered along the route, for instance, at Mile 20 (Tangle River Inn), Mile 22.6 (Sportsman's Lodge), Mile 42 (Maclaren River Lodge), Mile 52 (private campground), Mile 77 (Susitna Lodge), Mile 82 (Gracious House), and at Mile 100 (Adventures Unlimited).

Native Corporation owned lands are located primarily at the western end of the Denali Highway, while the State lands are located primarily at the eastern end. BLM lands are located along the remainder of the route.

Existing/Proposed Land-Use

The Denali Highway traverses the BLM Denali planning block. The Denali planning block is part of the larger Southcentral Planning



Unit. A land-use plan for this unit was completed by BLM in 1980. The passage of ANILCA in late 1980 prompted an amendment to the original plan. This amendment, pertaining to the Denali planning block, was completed in July 1982.

The major provisions of the amendment allow mineral activities to take place in the planning block. However, the Denali Scenic Highway Study Corridor was specifically excluded from the opening order which allows mineral exploration, leasing, and location. By the same token none of the lands within the Denali study corridor were opened to settlement under the Alaska Settlement laws or designated for lease or sale under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act. These decisions were postponed to allow for completion of the Denali Scenic Highway Feasibility Study as well as for completion of the Matanuska-Susitna-Beluga Corporative Planning Program being prepared jointly by the Matanuska-Susitna Borough and the State of Alaska.

Basically, the Denali Highway west of the Maclaren River and approximately 20 miles east of Cantwell is within the Matanuska-Susitna Borough; i.e. Milepost 40 to Milepost 107. The joint plan for the area is not scheduled for completion until late 1983. Therefore, recommendations on future settlement are pending.

That portion of the Denali Highway which transects the Mat-Su Borough is within the Talkeetna Mountains Special Use District. The intent of the ordinance establishing this District is to provide the Borough with a Multiple Use Management Tool. Allowed uses of the district are "recreational, mining, grazing, timber harvest, guiding, hunting, fishing, trapping, water resource use and enterprise activity."

Scenic and Recreational Resources

The scenic resources of the Denali Highway (and the remainder of the Corridor being studied) were inventoried by the Alaska

Department of Natural Resources in 1982. The work was done under the same project manager and consultant who prepared the Parks Highway report. The following description is taken from the draft report.

The Denali Road is characterized by very high visual resource values. This is due to the numerous distinctive landscape elements along its length and the constantly unfolding views that are expressive of the full range and diversity of the five landscape character types. At the western end of the road, views across forested uplands to the Nenana River encompass the Talkeetna Mountains and the Alaska Range, including the glaciated peaks of Mt. McKinley, Mt. Deborah, Mt. Hess and Mt. Hayes. The Susitna River dominates a broad valley landscape enclosed by the Alaska Range, Talkeetna Mountains and the Clearwater Mountains. Expansive vistas across glacial topography with associated features of moraines, eskers, kettle lakes and pingoes are defined along the edges by mountain ranges, including the Clearwater, the Amphitheater Mountains and glimpses of the more distant Wrangells.

The road alignment generally conforms to the surrounding topography, resulting in a route that provides continually changing views and orientations. In addition its general location on the mountain foothills provides a series of composite views that include the full range of landform, waterform and landcover elements for each unit. While some areas along the Denali have a truly superlative scenic quality, the entire length of the highway is a rich scenic resource.

The richness of the views is also due in part to the openness of the landscape. Along most of the highway the vegetation is low brush or tundra; there are few trees to obscure views. In addition, the flat to rolling glaciated valleys yield broad views that can almost reach from horizon to horizon, adding a sense of immensity to the landscape that is only bounded by steep mountains.

The area, therefore, is exceptional for sightseeing and photography, not only because of the beautiful views, but also because of the opportunity to see wildlife and to view unique geological features such as a melting pingo, kettle lakes and eskers. From the Denali Highway there are opportunities to see caribou, (part of the Nelchina herd crosses the area in late August, early September), moose, bear, beaver, porcupine, ptarmigan, and swans. The probability of seeing these animals is greater than

on other State highways because there is less traffic, and the views are generally unobstructed along the Denali. Spawning salmon can be seen from the bridge over the Gulkana River in August and September.

A photographer or hiker may also be interested in the historic sites near the road. The Tangle Lakes Archeological District is entered on the National Register of Historic Places. Some of the artifacts there are among the oldest found in Alaska, and the area may contain evidence of essentially continuous human use for about 10,000 years. Close to the Susitna River is the townsite of Denali, near which gold was discovered in 1903. Gold mining continues there today.

Tangle Lakes and many of the small streams along the Denali Highway offer good fishing for grayling. The Tangle Lakes are the headwaters for the Delta River, a National Wild and Scenic River. The Delta River Canoe Trail can be reached from the Tangle Lakes campground. Access to the Upper Tangle Lakes Wilderness Canoe Trail is from the Tangle River Boat Launch. There are trails in the area which can be used for recreation. Examples of such trails include Swede Lake Trail, Landmark Gap Lake Trail, Roosevelt Lake Trail, and Snodgrass Lake Trail. Other trails have been used for mining purposes. Some trails are open to off-road vehicle (ORV) use, although the Clearwater Controlled Use Area prohibits the use of motorized vehicles for hunting. In some areas, berry picking can be fruitful. BLM campgrounds are maintained at Brushkana Creek and Tangle Lakes. Several of the lodges offer guide service as well as lodging.

These resources are important not only to the tourists driving the highway, but to Alaskan residents as well. The Denali Highway area has been an important hunting location for Alaskan residents even before the highway was completed. Hunter check stations were operated by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Alaska Dept.

of Fish and Game on the highway beginning in 1954. (Table 3 shows the numbers of hunters counted between 1960 and 1971.) They also recognized the importance of the surrounding habitat and established caribou range stations along the Denali Highway that have been studied since the early 1960's. The attractiveness of the area for hunters probably stems from several interrelated characteristics which are duplicated by only a few other locations in Alaska. First, the area possesses a diversity of moderately abundant wildlife populations, including moose, caribou, grizzly bears, ptarmigan, spruce grouse, waterfowl, snowshoe hares, and furbearers. Of special importance is a reasonable opportunity of success for hunters pursuing caribou from the Nelchina herd. Second, Denali Highway junctions are located between, and within reasonable driving distances of, the major population centers of Alaska. Third, a large portion of the highway is located above timberline, a characteristic which enhances some aspects of hunting. Fourth, the road seems to have had little impact on migrations by either caribou or moose and provides the hunter with the opportunity for a relaxed drive (in part due to low numbers of other vehicles) while searching for a location to stop and glass the surrounding country side. Fifth, the 128 mile distance from Paxson to Cantwell and accompanying spur trails, rivers, and lakes can accommodate a relatively large number of hunters using a variety of equipment, thereby minimizing competition among them. Sixth, the location is ideal for family outings because of the presence and the variety of game as well as berries and fish provide a broad spectrum of outdoor activities.

Table 3. ADF&G Denali Highway hunter check station results, 1960-71.

<u>Year</u>	<u>Dates of Operation</u>	<u>Number of hunters</u>
1960	8/20-10/03	1892
1961	8/20-10/05	3694
1962	8/12-10/21	5271
1963	8/17-10/28	4814
1964	8/12-10/12	5052
1965	8/14-10/10	3088
1966	8/15-10/10	2799
1967	8/14-10/09	2977
1968	8/10-10/02	3238
1969	8/10-10/13	4029
1970	8/10-10/02	2176
1971	8/10-09/23	3247

Although hunting and other recreational interests are usually biologically compatible, the two different types of users are frequently intolerant of each other. In situations where the two different user groups come in frequent contact conflicts do occur and managers have usually responded by restricting hunters. This need not always be the case however, as Canadian Park authorities have demonstrated by excluding non-hunters from portions of their Parks during open hunting seasons.

Regardless of whether or not a scenic highway designation is made, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) plans to enhance recreational resources along the Denali Highway. In its 1980 Management Framework Plan (MFP), which covers the Denali area, BLM outlines its management approach for the next 10 years. Included in the MFP are the following projects:

- a. develop water trails in addition to those already completed, Maclaren River to Susitna River to Tyone River to Lake Louise;
- b. rehabilitate campgrounds at Tangle Lakes and Brushkana Creek;
- c. develop three-family-unit waysides every 10 miles along Denali Highway;
- d. develop 10-unit family campgrounds near the Clearwater River;
- e. develop an interpretive program using the Denali Highway Information Plan as the base study. The Denali Highway Information Plan was prepared by the Colorado State University in 1976. It discusses information signs, pamphlet programs, visitor information centers, and interpretive pullouts (e.g., for geologic points of interest such as eskers or a melting pingo, for wildlife viewpoints and scenic viewpoints, for identification, and for education);

- f. develop or maintain foot trails for extended hikes or day hikes, e.g., Tangle Lakes Campground to Sourdough Campground, Tangle Lakes Campground to Cantwell via historic route, Denali Highway north along Maclaren River, and Denali Highway along Brushkana Creek to intersect Cantwell trail; and
- g. develop winter-use trails out of Paxson.

Implementation of any of these projects is subject to funding levels.

The outstanding scenic resources of the area were recognized in the Management Framework Plan (MFP). Specifically, the Sugarloaf Mountains, the Talkeetna Mountains, the Alaska Range, the Maclaren River, the Clearwater River, and the Monahan Flats were identified as highly scenic. As such, these areas should be managed in accordance with BLM guidelines, which suggest that "changes in any of the basic elements (form, line, color and texture) caused by proposed activities should not be evident in the characteristic landscape. A contrast may be seen, but should not attract attention."

Other Considerations

Of significance are Alaska Power Authority's (APA) plans for development of the Susitna Hydroelectric Project. Present plans call for the construction of the Watana Dam first, and later another dam at Devil's canyon, both on the Susitna River. Proposed access to these sites is via the Denali Highway at a point approximately 21 miles east of Cantwell on Federal public land, where APA proposes construction of an access road south to the Watana Dam site. This road would be of approximately the same width and quality as the Denali Highway. Additionally, APA proposes the construction of a temporary (20 years) overhead 150 KV transmission line. The exact location of this line is not

known; however, location within the viewshed of the Denali Highway could have a significant effect on existing scenic quality. Additionally, upgrading of the Denali Highway from Cantwell east approximately 21 miles to the junction of the proposed Watana Dam access road is planned. Another APA project, the Fairbanks-Anchorage intertie (a power transmission project), is proposed to cross the west end of the Denali Highway on private Native Corporation owned lands.

In a letter dated December 21, 1982, the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities reported that they have:

several proposals to upgrade the Denali Highway. These include reconstruction or rehabilitation possibly with paving or without paving. There are many variables and factors involved in establishing any definitive plans or time schedule for this work. The only preparations to date are the completion of a Location Study Report and Environmental Assessment evaluating reconstruction of the Denali Highway including recommendations; and preliminary engineering work for reconstruction of the Denali Highway from the Parks Highway to Seattle Creek. At this time we haven't decided whether or not to pave the Parks-Seattle Creek segment. It is entirely possible that we would reconstruct only certain segments of the highway and rehabilitate others or rehabilitate a section and postpone its reconstruction. Again, traffic forecasts, costs and other factors will influence our ultimate decisions.

Even with the upgrading, the State is not, at this time, proposing year-round (winter) maintenance. The State has a 300-foot right-of-way along most of the Denali Highway, and the vast majority of realignments and other upgrading would take place within the existing right-of-way.

The effect of the State's plans on the resources along the Denali Highway is unknown. The State projects a 4 percent per year increase in traffic along the route through 1985 and 3 percent per year thereafter through 2005. Whether a scenic highway designation will cause greater rates of increase in traffic volume is not known, but is generally assumed.

Commercial land use is at present very limited on the Denali Highway, and consists of the various lodges along the route and a few active mining claims, the most notable of which are at Valdez Creek and the old townsite of Denali near Milepost 79. Should the Denali Highway become the access route for construction of the Watana Dam, then commercial traffic will increase dramatically on the portion of the highway east of Cantwell approximately 20 miles.

Active mining occurs not only around the old townsite of Denali, but also elsewhere along the road, as much of the area is mineralized. Major metallic minerals are gold, molybdenum, and copper. Other minerals in the area are platinum, nickel, and chromium. As mentioned earlier, it is likely that the traveler will see wildlife from the Denali Highway, and the area is used by local hunters and those from Anchorage and Fairbanks. There is concern that an increase in traffic which may accompany an upgrading of the road and scenic highway designation may cause the Nelchina caribou herd to avoid parts of their present range. Unfortunately, there is no data which will allow prediction of the effect a scenic highway designation will have on traffic levels, but it is generally thought that an upgrading of the road would have a greater effect on traffic levels than designation alone.

As with the other highway segments the entire range of alternatives for a scenic highway were considered under the "designation" alternative.

Regardless of which alternative Congress may choose pursuant to section 1311 of ANILCA, there is recognized need in Alaska to manage the outstanding resource values found along the 135 mile Denali Highway. A cooperative planning effort is being undertaken within Alaska to coordinate land use plans and concerns within various Federal, State, local and private agencies.

ALTERNATIVES

Alternative 1 - No designation.

Alternative 2 - Designation

The cost associated with this Alternative (upgrading the highway without paving) is \$88,000,000. This cost is for reconstruction to a safe and modern standard without paving. Paving would add approximately \$20,000,000 to this figure.

PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE AND RATIONALE

Alternative 1

No Designation

The Study Team concluded that a "no designation" alternative was most desirable for this segment of the study corridor for the following reasons:

1. Cooperative Management - The Study Team felt that under the auspices and direction of the Alaska Land Use Council (ALUC) the existing land manager along the Denali Highway should consolidate their planning and management efforts so that common concerns and goals are attained (See Page 19). It was felt that the direction for this effort could be coordinated by the ALUC and would be more desirable than a Federal designation along this route.
2. Existing Authority - As with the other highways within the study corridor, there is existing State authority to manage the right of way with consideration of scenic and recreational values without a Federal designation. Further, the major land manager of the lands adjacent to this highway, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has completed management plans which recognize the need to manage their lands for

their scenic and recreational values. The cooperative management approach, discussed above, would then consolidate their management planning with these of the State and other adjacent land owners to achieve a common objective.

3. Public Concern - There has been overwhelming public opposition to the creation of a Federal Scenic Highway System in Alaska (See Appendix B).

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The Study Group was not unanimous in this recommendation. In a letter received on February 14, 1983, Ahtna Incorporated's position was set forth. That letter is as follows:

It is Ahtna, Incorporated position that there is a need to designate a Federally recognized scenic highway link between Denali National Park and Wrangell-St. Elias National Park.

Ahtna recommends that the Denali Highway be designated a modified scenic highway that would take into consideration commercial use while at the same time providing for the upgrading of the Denali to a primary highway that could be used extensively during the summer months for tourism and recreational travel. We recommend that the Denali Highway be realigned and paved to Federal highway standards at the earliest possible date.

Areas that have high scenic value could be identified and protected through a procedure that considers the views of all the land holders in the area. We feel that developed areas could continue their operations without further government intervention and regulations.

Ahtna recommends that the State designate the highways between Paxson and McCarthy as a scenic State Highway without adding any additional regulations on adjacent land owners or hinder State ability to upgrade the road system.

McCARTHY ROAD

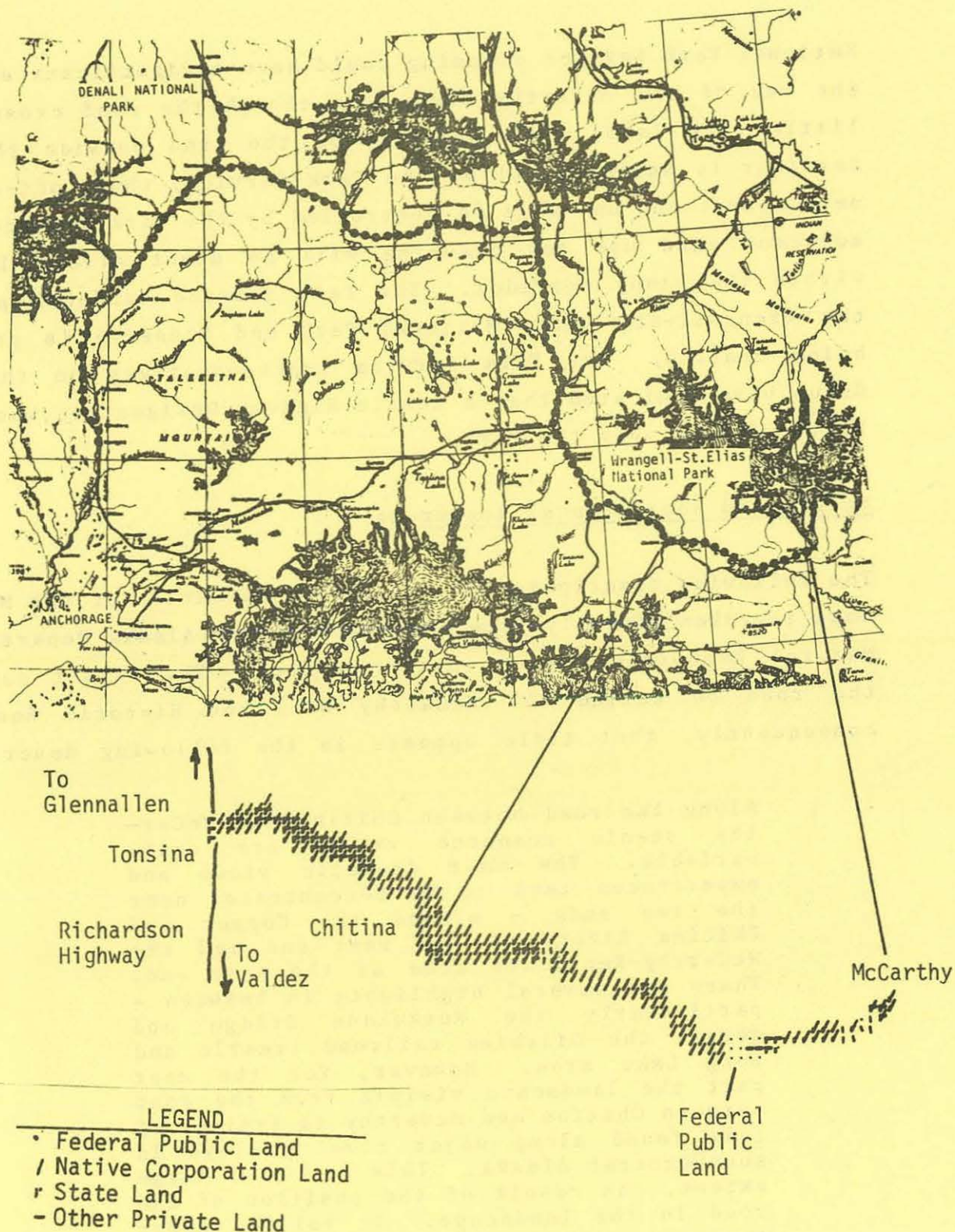
Land Status

The McCarthy Road is 63 miles long and connects the small towns of Chitina and McCarthy. Approximately 33 miles of the road cross Native Corporation owned land, 20 miles cross State land, 3 miles cross private lands, and about 7 miles cross National Park Service lands. With the exception of the westernmost mile, the entire road is within the external boundary of the Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve (Map #6, Table 1). The amount of land administered by the National Park Service along the route could increase significantly if a proposed State of Alaska/ National Park Service land exchange is consummated. A block of land between Long Lake and the Kennecott River along approximately 12 miles of the road would be affected.

The road for the most part follows the old Copper River and Northwestern Railway Company right-of-way. This right-of-way was granted in the early 1900's. The railroad was built to haul supplies to and copper ore from the Kennecott copper mines near McCarthy to the ice-free port at Cordova. The State claims ownership of this right-of-way by virtue of a quit-claim deed from the U.S. Department of Commerce to the State of Alaska pursuant to the Alaska Omnibus Act (PL 86-70).

Existing/Proposed Land-Use

Future land use, to a large extent, will depend upon the land-use plans adopted by the State of Alaska, the various Native Corporations and the National Park Service. The area is not within any organized borough or other local governmental unit; therefore, local governmental land-use controls are non-existent.



Map 6. McCarthy Road Land Status

National Park Service planning could have a significant effect on the use of the McCarthy Road even though the road crosses very little Park land. The majority of the land outside the study corridor is administered by the Park Service; thus, off-corridor development and use will be controlled by the Park Service. This adjacent land use and planning will no doubt affect land use within the study corridor. The Park Service land-use plan for the Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve is presently being drafted. The Park Service representatives on the Study Group have indicated that a Scenic Highway Designation would have little impact upon the Park.

Scenic and Recreational Resources

The following description of the scenic resources of the McCarthy Road is taken directly from the draft of the Alaska Department of Natural Resources report quoted earlier. That draft suggested the road be called the McCarthy Wild and Historic Road, and consequently, that title appears in the following description.

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 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 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.

There are few developed recreational resources along the road. The photographer will find the scenic resources of interest and the railroad buff or historian will be interested in what remains from the Copper River and Northwestern Railroad. Sculpin, Van and Strelna Lakes are stocked with rainbow trout and coho salmon, and, of course, the Copper River provides several runs of salmon. Other streams have low productions of Dolly Varden, grayling and salmon. Long Lake has grayling, rainbow/steelhead, whitefish, burbot, Dolly Varden, Lake trout, red and coho salmon. Long Lake produces an escapement of 4 to 46,000 red salmon annually with an estimated equal number caught in the commercial fishery. Campsites are available at one or more lodges along the route.

The McCarthy Road has never had the abundance of wildlife that is present along the Denali Highway. Major wildlife species include moose, brown and grizzly bear, black bear, spruce grouse, hares, and furbearers. Sheep and goats are located in nearby mountains but are rarely seen from the road itself. During 1981 18 moose hunters reported hunting on the McCarthy Road killing 7 moose. These figures no doubt underestimate the numbers of moose hunters (no hunter check stations have been operated) but in relative importance, the McCarthy road is not as important for moose hunting area as many other areas in Alaska except of course to local hunters. During some years, snowshoe hare populations have been quite high on the McCarthy road while other more northerly hare populations have already crashed. During those years a relatively large number of snowshoe hare hunters may travel to the McCarthy Road, but this phenomenon cannot be expected to re-occur more often than every 9 to 10 years. The McCarthy Road does offer transportation to the McCarthy airstrip where fly-in hunters for sheep, goat, brown/ grizzly bear, black bear and bison depart for the remote parts of the Wrangell-St. Elias Preserve.

Other Considerations

The McCarthy Road is in extremely poor condition. Road maintenance at present is minimal. Be that as it may, the McCarthy Road is the only vehicular access to the town of McCarthy and to numerous private residences along the road. It carries a certain amount of traffic in spite of the fact that the Kennecott River immediately west of town can only be crossed by use of a hand-cable tram because the two bridges have washed away and have not been replaced.

For the McCarthy Road to remain eligible for Federal-Aid Highway money, it must retain its status as a "major collector." Unlike the Denali Highway, the McCarthy Road is considered an "unconstructed" road. Therefore, if the State classifies the road as a "major collector", (the State is currently revising its functional classification system), it must commit to construct the road as a secondary route. Construction to secondary standards would certainly change the scenic and recreational experiences the road now offers. Improving the quality of the driving surface and bridges may be considered a beneficial change by some, but not others. The consultant working on the DNR scenic resources inventory judged that making significant changes in the road, such as drastically altering the alignment or significantly widening the road and clearing vegetation, could have a negative impact on the scenic values and the recreational experience of driving the road. Construction and maintenance as a secondary highway would almost certainly increase traffic on the road.

The McCarthy area is a highly mineralized area, as evidenced by the Kennecott Copper Mine (now inactive) and numerous gold mines. Nearer to Chitina is a mineralized area containing chromium, nickel, copper and platinum. There are no large scale mining operations at present. The known remaining copper deposits are generally high quality-low quantity or high quantity-low quality. There is low probability of another Kennecott. In general, the

other mineral deposits around McCarthy are small and well scattered. However, as the price of these minerals rises, so does the likelihood that mining claims will be more strongly exploited.

There is very limited grazing or farming in the area due to the nature of the soil and climate. Some of the forest may potentially be of commercial quality. The impacts of any harvesting are unknown, but heavy truck traffic would affect the condition of the road.

A Scenic Highway designation should not interfere with the operation or management of the Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve. Planning for the Park is ongoing, and the wilderness areas of the Park are away from the road. If at some future time the National Park Service were to select a primary entrance and develop a visitor facility inside the Park, a Scenic Highway designation on the McCarthy Road may influence that decision.

Finally, if a scenic highway designation causes traffic on the road to increase significantly, it will negatively impact the seclusion sought by many of those now living there.

As with the other highway segments the entire range of alternatives for a scenic highway were considered under the "designation" alternative.

Regardless of which alternative Congress may choose pursuant to section 1311 of ANILCA, there is a recognized need in Alaska to manage the outstanding historic resource values found along the 63 mile McCarthy Road. A cooperative planning effort is being undertaken within Alaska to coordinate land use plans and concerns within various Federal, State, local and private agencies.

ALTERNATIVES

Alternative 1 - No designation.

Alternative 2 - Designation.

The cost associated with this alternative is \$45,000,000 in 1985 dollars. It is an estimate for construction to a safe and modern standard without paving, and includes replacement of deficient bridges.

PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE & RATIONALE

Alternative 1 No Designation.

The Study Group unanimously agreed that the McCarthy Road should not be recommended as a National Scenic Highway for the following reasons:

1. Land Ownership - while almost entirely within the external boundaries of Wrangel-St. Elias National Park, the ownership of the lands immediately adjacent to the road (See Table 1 and Map 6) are, infact, predominately non-Federal.
2. Existing Authority - From a Federal perspective the National Park Service (NPS) has the authority and is mandated by law to manage this park as a wilderness park. As such, it is the intent of the NPS to manage the park lands adjacent to the McCarthy Road for their natural scenic and recreational values. Further, the State of Alaska has existing authority to manage the road and its right-of-way as they so choose.
3. Cooperative Management - As is the case with the other highway corridors in their study, an effort to initiate cooperative managment of this highway segment among

various land managers is underway. It was felt by the Study Group that this method of interagency, cooperative planning and management could enhance the scenic and recreational opportunities along these routes without a requirement of a formal Federal designation. The effort should be directed, it was felt, under the auspices of the Alaska Land Use Council.

4. Public Comment - During numerous public meetings held in communities adjacent to the study corridor, there was overwhelming public opposition to creation of a National Scenic Highway System in Alaska (See Appendix B).

It is, therefore, the unanimous recommendation of the Study Group that the McCarthy Road not be designated a National Scenic Highway.

APPENDIX A

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APPENDIX B

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The public involvement process employed in the Denali Scenic Highway Study was first outlined by a scoping team working under the auspices and direction of the Alaska Land Use Council (ALUC). That plan consisted of five basic components:

- ° inform the public of the study and solicit comments and questions in an effort to have those concerned participate in the project,
- ° analyze and use those comments received,
- ° distribute the draft study report to the public,
- ° conduct formal public hearings to gather comments, and
- ° analyze and respond to those comments in the final study report.

The first step, informing the public and requesting input, was done in conjunction with the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) and the National Park Service (NPS). It included printing and distributing an information brochure and questionnaire, compiling a mailing list, and holding public meetings in communities along the route. The questionnaires were distributed by, and returned to, the DOT&PF, and the public meetings were held in association with the DOT&PF's public meetings for regional planning. A schedule of the meetings held is in Table B-1. The formal public hearings, to elicit comments on the draft study and the accompanying environmental statement, were to be held at Cantwell and Copper Center.

The first series of public meetings showed very strong and widespread opposition to a Federal scenic highway in any form. The

overriding feeling expressed by those attending the meetings was that people fear that a Federal designation will ultimately lead to land use restrictions and loss of private properties, regardless of assurances to the contrary. Therefore, nearly everyone attending the meetings was very much against the scenic highway designation. General distrust of the Federal Government was voiced. A petition was signed by almost 500 people against a scenic highway designation because "the proposed withdrawal will cause severe hardships to long time residents, hunters, fishermen, and campers who love these lands and care for them." The most vocal, overwhelming rejections of a scenic highway designation came from the communities of Paxson, Chitina, and Glennallen. Representatives from Paxson traveled over 150 miles to an ALUC meeting in Anchorage strictly to voice opposition to the designation.

There were many questions raised about what effect a scenic highway designation would have. While some voiced the feeling that their input would have no impact on the final recommendation and decision most people were anxious to be kept informed and to have continued input into the study efforts.

Nevertheless, most people recognized a need for better road maintenance, and agreed that these roads (as well as most roads in Alaska) are scenic. Also, several lodge owners and workers indicated that they would welcome more tourism, and that the poor condition of the Denali Highway was a definite deterrent to visitors. Others noted a need for more dump facilities and "cleaning up" after tourists.

The questionnaire which was distributed at the meetings and mailed out was prepared to determine what people thought a scenic highway was or should be, and what qualities and impacts people associated with such a scenic highway. A number of those who attended the public meetings objected, because many of the

questions assumed the existence of a scenic highway, and they expressed the fear that any answer could be interpreted as support for a designation. It was made clear that they weren't interested in saying what a national scenic highway should be, only that they didn't want one. Approximately 350 of the questionnaires were returned, and while they have not been analyzed statistically, each one has been read. The following summarizes the information from the responses.

The most objectionable land use along a scenic highway is a large scale commercial development such as a shopping center or factory, whereas small scale commercial developments (e.g. stores, gas stations or restaurants) are quite acceptable. The Denali Highway and the McCarthy Road were considered by most to "qualify" as scenic highways, even though a national designation may be undesirable. The Richardson and Edgerton Highways were generally considered much less scenic. The majority of respondents could see both advantages and disadvantages for corridor residents of a scenic highway designation, but corridor residents envisioned threats to their existing lifestyle more often than they envisioned advantages. For the tourist, a scenic highway designation was seen also as having both advantages and disadvantages. About half of the respondents not living in or near the corridor agreed that long term protection of the significant qualities or resource values in the corridor would enhance the experience of tourists, while almost no one from the corridor agreed with that viewpoint. Nearly half of those living in the corridor added strong comments against a national designation.

As a result of these first public meetings, the public involvement plan was strengthened by scheduling public meetings in the communities virtually every other month. Public meetings were also held in Anchorage and Fairbanks. In response to the concern and questions raised during the first series of public meetings, a video tape was produced in which the Federal Co-chairman of the ALUC, the Commissioner of the DOT&PF, the Regional Director of the NPS, Ahtna's General Manager and others responded to some of the most commonly asked questions.

At more recent public meetings, even though opposition to a Federal scenic highway still was predominant, some individuals noted that on Federal lands, such a designation may be preferable to other decisions (i.e., National Park classification) that would affect their lifestyle more adversely.

In summary, there was significant opposition to any Federal designation for the following reasons:

- A.) Basic distrust of the Federal Government
- B.) "National" designations in Alaska have already brought significant and unwelcomed land use restrictions.

Table B-1, Schedule of Public Meetings

<u>DATE</u>	<u>PLACE</u>
June 14, 1982	Gakona, Alaska
June 15	Copper Center
June 15	Glennallen
June 16	Chitina
June 17	Kenny Lake
June 22	Paxson
June 23	Cantwell
June 29	McCarthy
Sept 27	McKinley Park Village
October 1	Paxson
October 4	Glennallen
October 5	Chitina
October 6	Kenny Lake
October 8	Fairbanks
October 12	McCarthy
November 9	Fairbanks
November 11	Anchorage
December 15	Glennallen
December 16	Kenny Lake
February 17, 1983	Talkeetna
March 11	Fairbanks
March 12	Cantwell
March 14	Anchorage
March 16	Glennallen
March 17	Paxson
March 21	Chitina
March 22	Kenny Lake

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SCENIC HIGHWAY STUDY

SEC. 1311. (a) **WITHDRAWAL.**—Subject to valid existing rights, all public lands within an area, the centerline of which is the centerline of the Parks Highway from the entrance to Denali National Park to the Talkeetna junction which is one hundred and thirty-six miles south of Cantwell, the Denali Highway between Cantwell and Paxson, the Richardson Highway and Edgerton Highway between Paxson and Chitina, and the existing road between Chitina and McCarthy (as those highways and road are depicted on the official maps of the department of transportation of the State of Alaska) and the boundaries of which are parallel to the centerline and one mile distant therefrom on either side, are hereby withdrawn from all forms of entry or appropriation under the mining laws and from operation of the mineral leasing laws of the United States. Nothing in this section shall be construed to preclude minor road realignment, minor road improvement, or the extraction of gravel for such purposes from lands withdrawn or affected by the study mandated herein. 16 USC 3200.

(b) **STUDY.**—During the three-year period beginning on the date of enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall study the desirability of establishing a Denali Scenic Highway to consist of all or part of the lands described in subsection (a) of this section. In conducting the studies, the Secretary, through a study team which includes representatives of the Secretary of Transportation, the National Park Service, the Bureau of Land Management, the State, and of each Regional Corporation within whose area of operation the lands described in subsection (a) are located, shall consider the scenic and recreational values of the lands withdrawn under this section, the importance of providing protection to those values, the desirability of providing a symbolic and actual physical connection between the national parks in south central Alaska, and the desirability of enhancing the experience of persons traveling between those parks by motor vehicles. Members of the study team who are not Federal employees shall receive from the Secretary per diem (in lieu of expenses) and travel allowances at the rates provided for employees of the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Alaska in grade GS-15.

(c) **COOPERATION NOTICE HEARINGS.**—In conducting the studies required by this section, the Secretary shall cooperate with the State and shall consult with each Village Corporation within whose area of operation lands described in this section are located and to the maximum extent practicable with the owner of any lands adjoining the lands described in subsection (a) concerning the desirability of establishing a Denali Scenic Highway. The Secretary, through the National Park Service, shall also give such public notice of the study as he deems appropriate, including at least publication in a newspaper or newspapers having general circulation in the area or areas of the lands described in subsection (a), and shall hold a public hearing or hearings at one or more locations convenient to the areas affected.

(d) **REPORT.**—Within three years after the date of enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall report to the President the results of the studies carried out pursuant to this section together with his recommendation as to whether the scenic highway studied should be established and, if his recommendation is to establish the scenic highway, the lands described in subsection (a) which should be included therein. Such report shall include the views and recommendations of all members of the study team. The President shall advise the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives of his recommendations and those of the Governor of Alaska with respect to creation of the scenic highways, together with maps thereof, a definition of boundaries thereof, an estimate of costs, recommendations on administration, and proposed legislation to create such a scenic highway, if creation of one is recommended.

(e) **PERIOD OF WITHDRAWAL.**—The lands withdrawn under subsection (a) of this section shall remain withdrawn until such time as the Congress acts on the President's recommendation, but not to exceed two years after the recommendation is transmitted to the Congress.

APPENDIX D

STUDY ORGANIZATION

Study Group

Wayne Boden	-U.S. Bureau of Land Management (Chairman)
Chuck Budge	-National Park Service
Chuck Chappell	-Federal Highway Administration
Robert Venusti	-Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities
Reed Stoops	-Alaska Department of Natural Resources
Sterling Eide	-Alaska Department of Fish and Game
Charles Hubbard	-Cantwell Shareholder Association
Martin Finnesand	-Chitna Native Corporation
Herbert Smelcer	-Athna, Inc.
Mac Stevens	-Matanuska-Susitna Borough

Technical Team

Cary Brown	-U.S. Bureau of Land Management (Project Leader)
Joan Gidlund	-National Park Service
Charles Howard	-Federal Highway Administration
John Martin	-Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities
Dave Watsjold	-Alaska Department of Fish and Game
Al Meiners	-Alaska Department of Natural Resources
Bill Beaty	-Alaska Department of Natural Resources
Lee Adler	-Ahtna, Inc.

APPENDIX E

BOUNDARIES, ADMINISTRATION, COSTS, AND LEGISLATION

The Act required that the boundaries, the administration, the cost, and appropriate legislation be provided if a recommendation was made for the designation of a National Scenic Highway. Since the Study Group has not recommended National designation the above information is unnecessary and therefore is not included in this report.