

ACTION: Iditarod National Historic Trail Comprehensive Management Plan

BACKGROUND: In 1977, the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation (BOR) submitted to Congress a report entitled "The Iditarod Trail (Seward-Nome Route) and Other Alaskan Gold Rush Trail." From this report, and the recommendations therein, Congress included the Iditarod National Historic Trail as a component of the National Trails System in November 1978.

As an adjunct to the 1977 study report, a comprehensive environmental assessment was completed by the BOR and attached to the report. The results of that assessment were that the proposed actions and recommendations for including the Iditarod within the National Trails System did not represent a major Federal undertaking as defined by the Council of Environmental Quality's guidelines. The results of that assessment are directly applicable to the comprehensive management plan as the proposal for management follows the guidelines submitted in the study report and were accepted by Congress.

FINDINGS/RECOMMENDATIONS:

The plan, by itself, has no impact on the environment and, therefore, is not considered to be a major Federal undertaking.

Individual activities recommended by this plan, prior to initiation of the activity, must be addressed through appropriate consideration to their potential environmental impact and applicability to other Federal and State legislative requirements.

DECISION: I have reviewed the environmental assessment and the recommendations on the comprehensive plan for management of the Iditarod National Historic Trail. They are technically adequate and all resource values have been considered to the best of my knowledge. The action would not have significant environmental effects on the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not required.


DISTRICT MANAGER

8/20/81
DATE

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
IN SUPPORT OF A
NEGATIVE DECLARATION

Proposed

Designation of the Iditarod Trail route
as an element of the
proposed National Trails System

Prepared by

Bureau of Outdoor Recreation
U. S. Department of the Interior

April 1977


Regional Director

SUMMARY

1. Brief Description of Action:

The Iditarod Trail Study was conducted pursuant to the National Trails System Act, Public Law 90-543. The report recommends Federal legislation to designate the historic route of the Iditarod Trail as a component of the National Trails System, within the proposed new category of National Historic Trails and Travelways, and to commemorate the historic significance of the Iditarod Gold Rush route while providing for existing and future travel, recreation, and subsistence uses. The report also includes recommendations for administration, planning, preservation, acquisition, development, marking, and public information.

2. Summary of Environmental Impact and Adverse Environmental Effects:

Implementation of study recommendations would commemorate the Iditarod Trail's historic significance; would attempt to protect significant historic structures, remains, and artifacts along the historic route; would preserve the trail from noncompatible land uses; and would provide for public recreational use. Increased public use would result in increased damage to soils, vegetation, and a greater probability of littering, user conflicts, and damage to historic remnants and artifacts. The potential exists for increased annoyance to people who live near the trail. Increased human use will create stresses on certain species of fish and wildlife. Implementation of the proposal will affect the responsible agencies in the development of transportation, energy, and mineral resources.

3. Alternatives Considered:

Alternative actions considered were: (1) no action, (2) designation of fewer route segments, (3) no reservation or acquisition of rights-of-way easements or historic resources, (4) designation as a National Scenic Trail, (5) designation as a National Recreation Trail, (6) inclusion of the route in a State trails system, and (7) inclusion of the route on the National Register of Historic Places.

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015 I. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED ACTION

016

016 PROPOSAL

017

017 This statement concerns a proposal which recommends commemoration of approxi-
018 mately 2,037 miles of historic travel routes between Seward and Nome, Alaska,
019 through designation by the Congress as the Iditarod National Historic Trail
020 within the National Trails System.

035 The proposal was developed in accordance with the National Trails System
036 Act (Public Law 90-543) which established a national trails system comprised
037 of three categories of trails: national recreation trails, national scenic
038 trails, and connecting or side trails. The Act designated two national
039 scenic trails as initial components of the system and listed 14 additional
040 routes to be studied to determine the feasibility and desirability of their
041 designation as national scenic trails. "Gold Rush Trails in Alaska" was one
042 of the routes listed for study.

043

043 In the legislative history of the National Trails System Act, reference to
044 five Alaskan "Gold Rush Trails" was made. One of these was the "Iditarod
045 Trail" from Knik to Iditarod. This segment along with related additional
046 routes, collectively known as the Seward-Nome route, was studied by the
047 Bureau of Outdoor Recreation. The study found that the Seward-Nome route
048 does not qualify for designation as a national scenic trail, but that it
049 does qualify for national recognition as a significant historic route.
050 Legislation has been proposed to amend the National

051 Trails System Act to create a new category of National Historic Trails. The
052 "Iditarod Trail" could qualify for inclusion in the National Trails System
053 within the proposed new category.

021 The Iditarod Trail proposal also recommends: overall route administration and
021 coordination by the Department of the Interior (under the umbrella of Department
022 of the Interior management, various route segments will be managed by the appro-
023 priate landowners or land management agencies); signing of historic routes near
024 population centers, acquisition of rights-of-way or easements along selected
025 segments in private ownership; retention of a right-of-way through public
026 lands; study of several segments for possible development as recreational
027 trails; protection and stabilization of significant historic structures and
028 sites along the route. The proposal further recommends that water bodies,
029 crossed by the trail after freeze-up, and existing roads and railroads be
030 included; that off-road vehicle uses along the route not be prohibited, and
031 that the rights-of-way through public lands could be used in the future
032 development of surface transportation systems.

033

033 The proposal also recommends that, upon inclusion
033 in the National Trails System, the Department of the Interior will coordinate a
034 review to determine the actual historic route, and which segments or branch
034 routes would be included. A detailed description of Iditarod route align-
034 ments will be filed with Congress.

PURPOSE

The purpose of the proposed action is to:

1. Commemorate and call national attention to the historic significance of the Alaska Gold Rush and specifically the 2,037-mile Iditarod Gold Rush route.

2. Retain a right-of-way in public ownership and acquire easements through approximately 1-1/2 miles of private lands to provide for existing and future travel, recreation, and subsistence uses.

3. Protect significant historic structures, remains, and artifacts along the historic route.

4. Provide interpretative signing along those portions of the route readily accessible from urban areas and transportation corridors.

PROPOSED AREA

The proposal includes 2,037 miles of historic routes generally located between Seward and Nome, Alaska. In addition to the 1,099-mile segment which directly connected these two towns, the proposal would include 938 miles of branch routes to the gold mining boom towns of Flat and Iditarod, routes connecting

070 Ophir and Ruby, the Yukon River from Ruby to Kaltag, an alternate route
071 through Ptarmigan Pass in the Alaska Range, several short branch routes on
072 the Kenai Peninsula, and an alternate route over Indian Pass in the Chugach
073 Mountains.

074

074 The segment (plus branch and alternate routes) between Seward and
075 Knik is largely paralleled or overlain by existing roads or railroads, or is
076 accessible by road from the Anchorage urban area. Beyond Knik, the route
077 traverses a primitive environment largely uninhabited and undeveloped and
078 accessible mainly by aircraft.

079

079 The proposal calls for national designation of the entire primary and major
080 alternate and branch routes to commemorate their historic significance.
081 Public roads, railroads, and water bodies which overlie or form part of the
082 historic routes would be included in the designation.

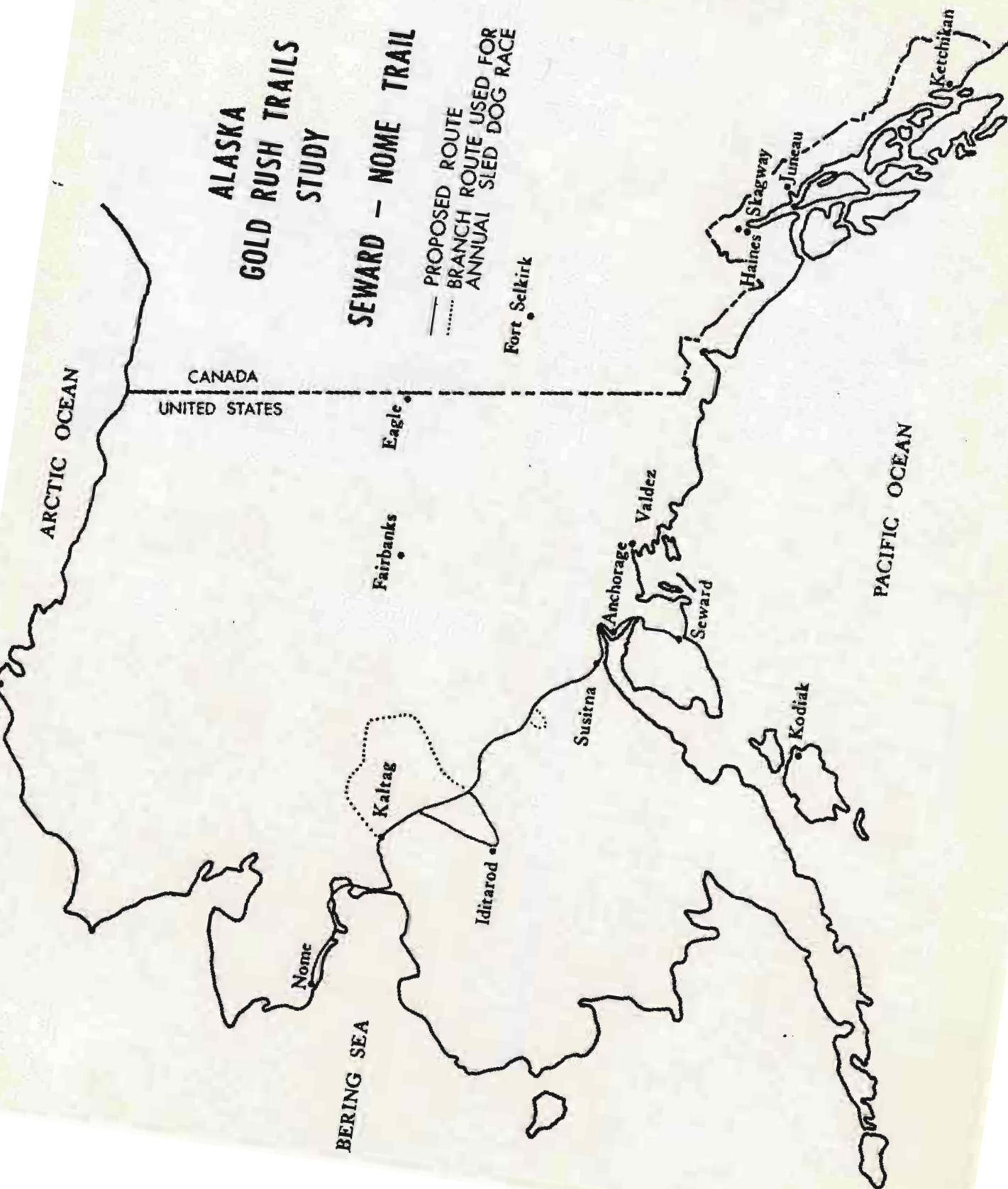
083

083 The location and width of the corridor to be retained in public ownership
084 through Federal, State, and possibly municipal-owned lands will be deter-
085 mined by the respective land managers in connection with the overall trail
086 coordinator (U. S. Department of the Interior). Where acquisition of ease-
087 ments or rights-of-way through private lands is recommended, a trail width
088 of approximately 25 feet is recommended. Historically, route alignments
089 changed up to a mile or more from year to year to avoid local adverse trail
090 conditions. Thus, a "floating corridor," which would not be limited to a
091 specific ground location, may be desirable along some segments. Additionally,

ALASKA GOLD RUSH TRAILS STUDY

SEWARD - NOME TRAIL

— PROPOSED ROUTE
..... BRANCH ROUTE USED FOR
ANNUAL SLED DOG RACE



092 such a corridor would have the advantage of avoiding localized existing
093 or future conflicts in land use.

094

094

094 ACQUISITION AND DEVELOPMENT

095

095 Virtually the entire route is presently in public ownership. Only approxi-
096 mately 1-1/2 miles of the route in the Knik area have been identified which
097 are in private ownership and which are receiving significant public use. The
098 proposal calls for acquisition of a right-of-way or easement through these
099 lands to insure continued public use along this segment of the historic
100 route. At present land values in the area,
101 acquisition of a 25-foot wide trail would cost approximately \$35,000.

102

102 The only other acquisition recommended is for those isolated small tracts
103 which may contain structures or remnants of significant historical values
104 which are in danger of destruction or degradation, and for which cooperative
105 management agreements cannot be worked out with private landowners.

106

106 This action includes no proposals for trail construction, campgrounds, or
107 other major recreational facilities. Trail markers and interpretive signing
108 are proposed along those segments of the route near major towns or along
109 existing roads or recreational trails. At an average cost of \$100
110 per sign or marker, an estimated 25 signs would cost approximately \$2,500.

111

111 The proposal calls for a study to be made of the route to assess potential
112 for future development of recreational trails, or improvements or additions
113 to existing recreational trails along the route.

114

114 To protect significant historic structures or remnants along the route,
115 rehabilitation construction, relocation, or other actions may be necessary.

116

116

116

ADMINISTRATION AND MANAGEMENT

117

117 The primary purpose of the proposal is to commemorate the historical values
118 of the Iditarod Trail, rather than development and management of an extensive
119 recreational trail system. As such, administrative actions governing most of
120 the physical route will be minor.

021

021 Under the proposal, the Department of the Interior is charged with overall
122 administration and coordination of planning and actions pertaining to the
123 designated route. In conjunction with the respective landowners or managers,
124 detailed route alignments would be located, historical structures and remnants
125 identified, protection plans formulated, a study made to identify seg-
126 ments with high potential for recreational development or improvement, and
127 acquisition of specific route segments and perhaps historic sites undertaken.
128 The survey of historic resources would also be conducted in consultation with
128 the Alaska State Historic Preservation Officer and the Advisory Council on
128 Historic Preservation.

129

129 The Bureau of Outdoor Recreation has initiated measures to comply with the
129 "Procedures for the Protection of Historic and Cultural Properties" (36 C.F.R.,
130 Part 800). The programmatic approach to meeting requirements regarding pro-
130 tection of historic and cultural resources is explained on page 62.

131

131 Management of specific route segments would be by the involved landowner or
132 manager: Federal lands by the respective Federal land manager, State lands
133 by the appropriate State agency, and municipal lands by the municipality
134 involved. Where easements have been reserved along the route through lands
135 conveyed or to be conveyed to private Native corporations, the easement would
136 be managed by the agency charged with management of adjacent public lands under
137 the umbrella of management by the Department of the Interior in close coopera-
137 tion with the involved Native corporation.

138

138 All land uses presently accepted and customary would be allowed to continue
139 along the route under the normal regulations governing the adjacent lands.
140 Motorized vehicle uses both on-road and off-road would not be prohibited.
141 Controls may be implemented along specific segments if user conflicts arise
142 or significant environmental damages occur. Hunting, fishing, trapping,
143 wood cutting, and other activities presently occurring along portions of the
144 route would continue under applicable Federal and State regulations.

145

145 In the selection of right-of-way or easement alignments through public or
146 private lands, utmost consideration will be given to avoiding conflicts with
147 existing or potential land uses.

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Of seven Gold Rush routes studied by the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation for potential inclusion in the National Trails System, only two--the Seward-Nome and the Washington-Alaska Military Cable and Telegraph System (WAMCATS) route from Mentasta Pass to Eagle, Alaska--were recommended for further in-depth study as potential candidates for inclusion.

Two of seven trails, the Chilkoot and the White Pass Trails near Skagway, Alaska, were not studied in depth or recommended for inclusion in the National Trails System because they were studied previously by the National Park Service and are currently included in a Klondike Gold Rush National Historic Park.

Under terms of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANSCA) approximately 90 million acres of public domain lands have been recommended by the Secretary of the Interior in legislation for addition to the National Park, National Wildlife Refuge, National Forest, and Wild and Scenic Rivers System. Three such proposals are located along the proposed historic route. The Innoko lowlands around Dishkakot are included in the Koyukuk National Wildlife Refuge proposal and the Kuskokwim River valley between the Alaska Range and McGrath is included in the Yukon-Kuskokwim National Forest proposal. The lands surrounding the Upper Unalakleet River are included in the Unalakleet National Wild River proposal.

170 ANCSA also provided that approximately 40 million acres of land in Alaska
171 be conveyed to Native corporations. Up to 275 miles of the route traverse
172 lands to be conveyed to Native corporations. It is expected that a public
173 use easement will be reserved along most of the route passing through these
174 Native lands.

175

175 Major segments of the route are overlain or closely paralleled by roads owned
176 and maintained by the State of Alaska. Approximately 140 miles of the route
177 utilized the frozen surface of the Yukon River which is claimed by the State
178 of Alaska. Several hundred additional miles of the route traverse lands
179 already patented or selected for ownership by the State under the terms of
180 the Alaska Statehood Act.

181

181 Over 70 miles of the route between Seward and Girdwood follow the grade of the
182 Alaska Railroad, a federally owned and managed transportation route. The U. S.
183 Forest Service manages two recreation trails along portions of the historic route

184

184 A transportation planning map developed by the State Department of Highways
185 in July 1974 shows potential long-range needs for extensions of the transpor-
186 tation system covering much of the historic route.

187

187 The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has prepared a nomination to the State
188 Historic Preservation Officer for the inclusion of the town site of Iditarod
189 on the National Register of Historic Places.

190 BLM has also prepared a nomination for the
191 inclusion of the "Iditarod Trail" on the National Register.

194 -10-

194 Each winter since 1973, a dog sled race known as the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog
195 Race has been held from Anchorage to Nome following 1,049 miles
196 of the proposed primary and branch routes. The race has attracted statewide
197 and national attention. It is the longest dog sled race in the world and
198 commemorates the historic mode of winter travel in Alaska.

199

199 The "Alaska Recreation Trail Plan," a component of the State Comprehensive
200 Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP),
201 of Parks identifies the "Iditarod Trail" as a historic trail
202 which should be studied for potential inclusion in the Alaska Trail System
203 and the National Scenic Trails System. The plan further recommends that
204 special attention be given to dedicating or acquiring rights-of-way or
205 easements for historic trails if it is determined that they are not pro-
206 tected by common law or prescriptive rights based on historic use.

207 II. DESCRIPTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT

208 REGIONAL SETTING

209 Physical Features

210 The Iditarod route from Seward to Nome spans a major portion
211 of Alaska. From the Gulf of Alaska to the Bering Sea, the route traverses two
212 major mountain ranges; several smaller ones; extensive low-lying river valley
213 "flats;" the frozen surfaces of rivers, lakes, and estuaries; and barren
214 coastlines.

215 The trail crosses or follows Alaska's two largest rivers, the Yukon and the
216 Kuskokwim. These two rivers along with the Susitna River, another major
217 Alaskan river, drain much of the land along the route.

218 Vegetation types range from Alpine tundra through mountain passes, to muskeg
219 bogs and open low-growing black spruce, to dense forests of white spruce,
220 birch, and poplar trees, to the treeless, moist tundra landscape surrounding
221 Norton Sound.

222 Fires, mostly caused by lightning, are endemic along major segments of the
223 route. Large areas show recent and past evidence of fire.

224 Most of the route is largely undeveloped except in the Anchorage urban area.
225 Little land has been cleared of its natural vegetation and evidence of man
226 is confined to small widely scattered towns and villages along the route.

228

228 The National Weather Service describes the climatic zone covering much of
229 the Seward to Nome route as "transitional." This zone is characterized by 12-
230 30 inches of precipitation annually (average 17) and mean annual temperatures
231 from 22 to 35°F (90°F maximum, -70°F minimum). Around McGrath and Galena, a
232 more continental climate is encountered with colder winter temperatures, warmer
233 summer temperatures, and less precipitation than those "transitional" regions
234 receiving more maritime influences. In the Seward area, a maritime climatic
235 zone exists. Here precipitation is considerably greater (80 inches), and winter
236 temperatures not so extreme.

237

237 Over much of the route, winters are long, dark, and severe, beginning with
238 freeze-up in October of lakes and streams and ending with break-up usually in
239 May. Snowfall averages 50-100 inches a year with accumulations averaging
240 2-5 feet depending on elevation and wind conditions. Winds along Norton Sound
241 and in the mountainous regions are common and can bring chill factors in the
242 winter down to -100°F and colder. Extended periods of -40°F to -60°F are
243 common in the interior. On the shortest day of the year, only about 4 hours of
244 daylight occur on the northern end of the route, and, on the southern end,
244 only about 6 hours.

245

245 Summers are short but warm over most of the route with temperatures often in
246 the 70's and 80's in the interior. On the longest day, sunlight averages from
247 20 to 22 hours (depending, again, on location along the trail) with twilight
247 during the remaining 2 to 4 hours. Precipitation
248 averages 4 to 6 inches in the summer months. Although freezing temperatures

249 have been reported in all months except July in most areas, a frost-free
250 season generally extends from the first of June to the end of August.
251
251 Permafrost underlays much of the route, especially north of Kuskokwim River.
252 The region from Seward to Susitna is free of permafrost and portions of the
253 Innoko valley and Kuskokwim valley are underlain with isolated masses. The
254 permafrost is discontinuous throughout the Alaska Range.

255

255 Population

256

256 The Iditarod route is located in six different census divisions with a
257 combined 1970 census population of approximately 146,000 persons. Of that
258 number, 125,000 were enumerated in the Anchorage urban area (1975 estimate:
259 168,000). Other than Anchorage, major towns and villages along the route
260 include Seward (1970 census population, 1,600), McGrath (280), Ruby (150),
261 Galena (300), Koyukuk (120), Nulato (310), Kaltag (210), Unalakleet (430),
262 Shaktolik (150), Koyuk (120), Elim (170), Golovin (120), White Mountain (90)
263 and Nome (2,500). With the exception of Anchorage and Seward, a majority of
264 the persons in these towns and villages are of Indian or Eskimo descent.
265 (Natives).

266

266 Economy

267

267 Along the route, the highest median family income in 1970 was \$13,593 within
268 the Anchorage census division compared to \$3,744 reported for the Kuskokwim
269 division, the area of lowest family income along the route. The most

270 important sectors of the economy along the route are government transporta-
271 tion, and general services, especially in the Anchorage area. Many persons
272 in the small towns and villages along the route are unemployed or employed
273 only seasonally. Activities such as hunting, fishing, trapping, and berry
274 picking contribute a substantial portion of the local subsistence economies.
275 Seasonal work such as commercial fishing, fire fighting, and trapping also
276 provides an important source of cash for fuels, snowmachines, food supplies,
277 and other needed items.

278

278 Some gold mining is presently occurring along the route in the Ophir, Flat,
279 Poorman, and Nome areas. Commercial harvesting of timber is taking place in
280 the Seward area. The degree to which this contributes to local economies
281 is not known.

292

292 Transportation

293

293 Because of the vast land area, sparse populations, and rugged topography,
294 much of the State traversed by the Iditarod route relies heavily on air
295 rather than surface transportation.

296

296 Between Seward, Anchorage, and Knik, a major highway system exists. The
297 Alaska Railroad also connects Seward and Whittier with Anchorage and Fairbanks.
298 Numerous airfields exist in the region including Anchorage International
299 Airport. Vehicular access is limited to either end of the historic
300 trail segments across Crow Pass and Indian Creek Pass.

301

301 Beyond Knik, no portion of the historic route is road accessible by
302 highway. However, short unconnected roads exist between Sterling

303 Landing just south of McGrath through Takotna to Ophir, between Iditarod and
304 Flat and Discovery, between Poorman and Ruby, and between Solomon and Nome.
305 Numerous airstrips are found at the various settlements in the area, and
306 McGrath, Galena, Unalakleet, and Nome are served by regular commercial jet
307 service. The villages along the Yukon, including Ruby and Kaltag, and the
308 villages around Norton Sound are served at least once a week by the smaller
309 commercial aircraft.

310

310 In addition to these major airfields, numerous bush strips exist over the
311 route area. Many other natural landing sites also are used by float planes,
312 ski planes, and large-tired small planes.

313

313 Both the Yukon and Kuskokwim Rivers are major navigable rivers, and villages
314 along these rivers are supplied by barges.

315

315 A planning map published by the State Department of Highways in July of 1974
316 shows possible long-range needs for extensions of the existing surface trans-
317 portation net along most of the historic route.

318

318

318 DESCRIPTION OF THE IDITAROD ROUTE

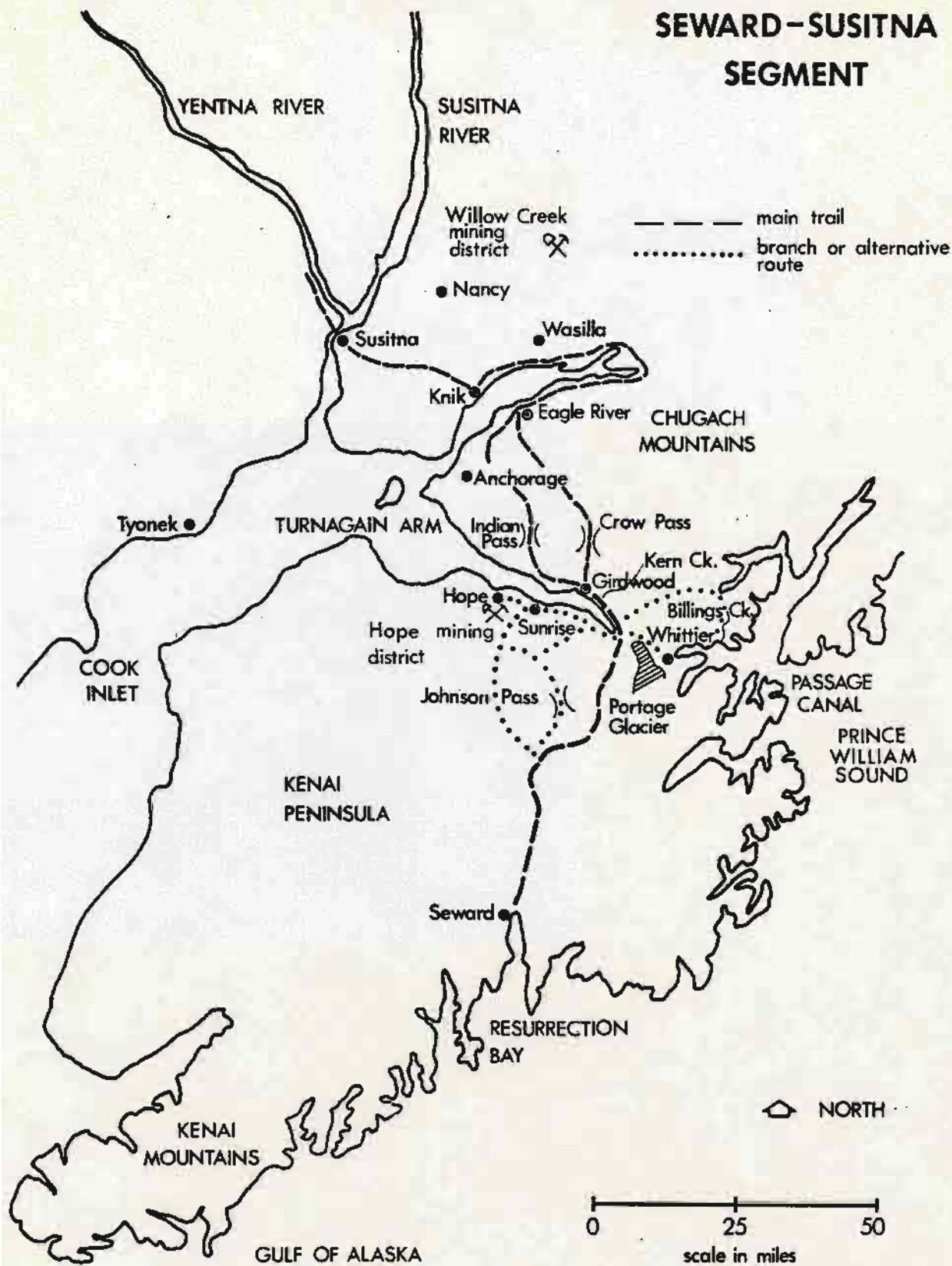
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319 Location

321

321 The trail surveyed by Goodwin in 1908 ran from mile 54 of the Alaska Railroad
322 north of Seward around Turnagain Arm, over Crow Pass, around Knik Arm to Knik,
323 to Susitna, to Happy River to Pass Creek, over Rainy Pass, down Dalzell Creek

SEWARD-SUSITNA SEGMENT

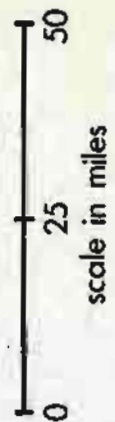


KALTAG-NOME SEGMENT

NORTH

Anvil Creek

Nome mining district
Nome
Council mining district



Koyuk mining district

NORTON SOUND

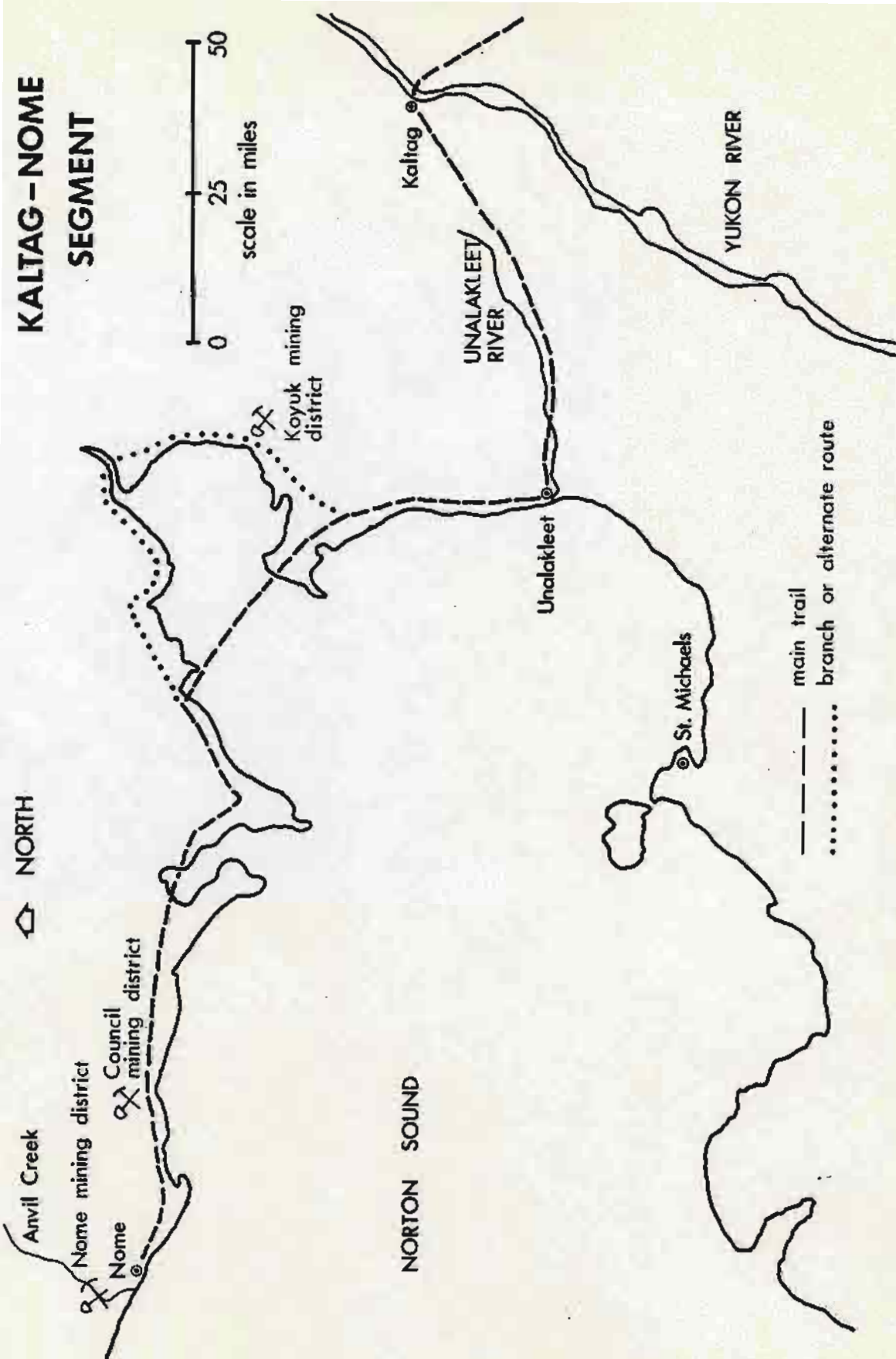
Unalakleet
St. Michaels

UNALAKLEET RIVER

Kaltag

YUKON RIVER

main trail
branch or alternate route

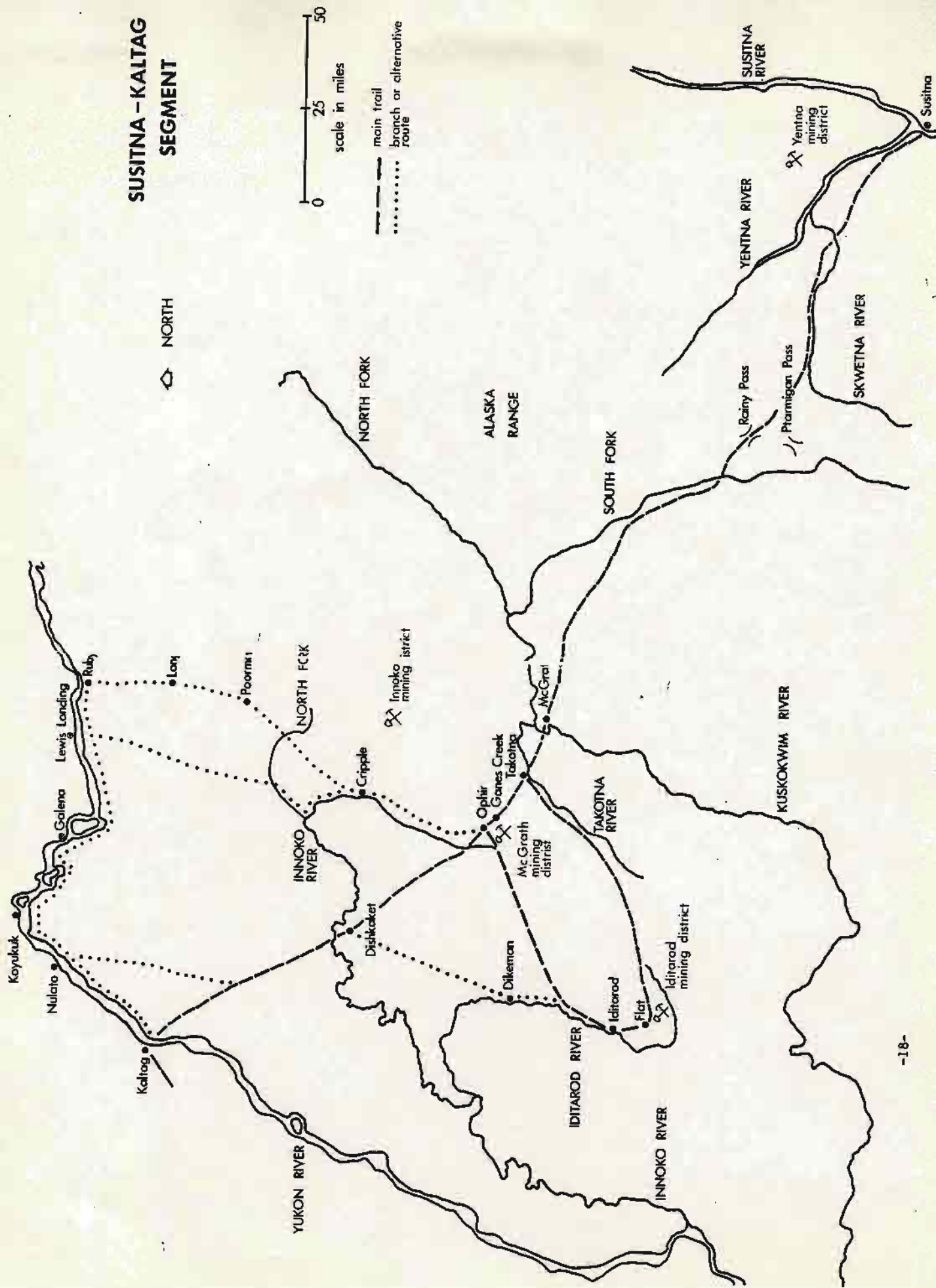


SUSITNA - KALTAG SEGMENT

NORTH

0 25 50
scale in miles

— main trail
..... branch or alternative route



324 to the Rohn River (or Tatina River), across the South Fork of the Kuskokwim
325 to Big River, to the present-day site of McGrath, to Takotna, to Ophir, to
326 Dishkaket, to Kaltag, to Unalakleet, up Norton Sound to Unigalik River, across
327 the Sound to Isaacs Roadhouse on Bald Head, and along the shoreline to Nome.

328

328 During clearing and marking of the Rainy Pass-Kaltag Trail in the winter of
329 1910-1911, some route changes were made and additional trails marked. Most
330 notable of these additions were the trail from Dishkaket to Dikeman and on to
331 Iditarod and Flat, and the trail from Iditarod up Bonanza Creek, down Fourth
332 of July Creek to Takotna. In addition to these routes, a third trail connect-
333 ing the surveyed route with the Iditarod district existed in 1910. This trail
334 provided a direct route between Ophir and Iditarod crossing the Dishna River
335 near Windy Creek and intersecting the Dikeman-Iditarod Trail near Moore Creek.

336

336 Although the surveyed route crossed Crow Pass from the present town of Girdwood,
337 a new trail was constructed from Girdwood down Turnagain Arm and over Indian
338 Creek Pass in the fall of 1908. As this route avoided the avalanche problems
339 and extreme steepness of Crow Pass, it was used and improved during construc-
340 tion of the Kaltag-Rainy Pass Trail in the winter of 1910-1911. However,
341 Goodwin rebuilt the trail through Crow Pass in the summer of 1911 avoiding some
342 of the snowslide areas. He favored this route because it was 15-20 miles
343 shorter and had only about a mile of "bad going" as opposed to 5 miles reported
344 for the Indian Creek Pass route. Both the Indian and the Crow routes were
345 used until the railroad was completed around the mountains via Anchorage in 1918.

346

346 Other branch trails include the glacier route between Whittier and Portage
347 and the route from Passage Canal down the Twentymile drainage to the railroad.

348 Two main trails were used to reach Hope and Sunrise, one crossing Moose Pass
349 from the railroad and up Quartz Creek, the other leaving the railroad grade
350 at Trail Creek, up Johnson Creek and down the Sixmile Creek drainage. A
351 trail from Mulato which intersected the Kaltag-Dishkaket trail was used as a
352 shortcut to carry mail and supplies to the Iditarod from Fairbanks. The old
353 route from Lewis Landing to Ophir followed the North Fork down to the Innoko
354 then up this river through Cripple to Ophir. When Cripple developed as a
355 mining center, a winter route was established to connect it with the Ruby-
356 Long-Poorman district to the east.

357
357 In the early twenties, summer trails were constructed linking Ophir with
358 Poorman and Ruby and linking Flat with Takotna. When the Alaska Railroad
359 was completed to Nancy, a new winter trail was built from there to Susitna.

360
360 Beginning in March of 1973, each year a sled dog race is held from Anchorage
361 to Nome. Because this race is billed as the Iditarod Trail race, the race
362 route is also shown on the accompanying maps. This route varies substantially
363 from the old Rainy Pass-Kaltag Trail in the vicinity of the Alaska Range and
364 between Ophir and Kaltag. The race route has gone through Ptarmigan Pass
365 rather than Rainy Pass reportedly to avoid avalanche danger. In order to
366 pass through Native villages along the Yukon, the race route follows the newer
367 summer trail out of Ophir through Bear Creek and Folger to Poorman, over the
368 road to Ruby, and down the Yukon through Galena, Koyukuk and Nulato to Kaltag.

369
369 In many areas, the route crosses sea and lake ice, rivers, and open tundra
370 areas. Here, no trail as such was built, but rather tripods or stakes used
371 to mark a route. Most of these were replaced every year and trail alignments
372 could vary by as much as a mile or more from year to year.

373 The originally surveyed Rainy Pass-Kaltag Trail which bypassed the Iditarod-
374 Flat area was roughly 850 miles in length from Seward to Nome. From Seward to
375 Iditarod following the most common route was approximately 540 miles; from
376 Knik, roughly 390 miles. The three "turnoffs" from the survey route to
377 Iditarod were each roughly 90 miles in length. The dog sled race route is
378 reported to be 1,049 miles long from Anchorage to Nome.

379

379 Table I gives the approximate mileage of the various trail segments.

380

380 Physical Condition of Route

381

381 Only a few miles of the hundreds of miles of the historic route are currently
382 maintained as trails. The U. S. Forest Service maintains a 4-mile summer
383 hiking trail which generally follows the old trail alignment up to Cross Pass
384 from the Girdwood area. Another 22-mile trail following the branch route up
385 Johnson Creek and down Bench Creek to the Hope-Sunrise area from the railroad
386 is also maintained by the Forest Service. A 20-mile crude winter trail exists
387 over Indian Creek Pass and a 4-mile segment up Indian Creek to the Pass has
388 recently been improved for summer use by the State Division of Parks.

389

389 A local Girl Scout Council, under the direction of the State Division of
390 Parks, has reestablished the historic trail between the Forest Service
391 Crow Pass trail and the end of the road leading up the Eagle River valley.
392 This 21-mile recreation trail is located within Chugach State Park and is
393 maintained by the Division of Parks.

436 Other segments, although not being publicly maintained, continue to be passable
437 winter trails through use. These include segments in the McGrath-Takotna area,
438 between villages along Norton Sound, between Kaltag and Unalakleet, and between
439 Knik and Susitna. In the past several years, the State Department of Highways
440 has provided local villages monies and materials for flagging and marking trails
441 between the various villages from Kaltag to Nome. Many of these routes follow
442 the historic Kaltag-Nome trail. Because of changing snow and ice conditions,
443 windfalls, and brush growth, these trails can vary in location by as much as
444 a mile or two from year to year. Unless well traveled, breaking trail along
445 these routes by foot, dog team, or snow machine can be a grueling ordeal.

446

446 The summer trails developed in the early 1920's between Ophir and Flat and
447 between Poorman and Ophir are believed to be utilized occasionally by
448 vehicles primarily involved in mining operations.

449

449 The segment over Rainy Pass through the Alaska Range is still visible in places,
450 although badly overgrown by brush and altered by snow and rock slides in places.
451 This segment is passable by foot, in summer and possibly winter. A jeep road
452 and summer trail is also utilized over a part of the old Portage Glacier route
453 from Whittier to the pass area overlooking the glacier.

454

454 Most of the remaining segments are either not readily locatable or are too
455 altered or overgrown to permit travel. Except for those segments over mountain
456 passes, virtually all remaining portions of the route are ill suited for summer
457 travel. As the historic trails make ample use of frozen lakes, rivers, muskegs,
458 and marshes, summer trail conditions are extremely poor if not non-existent.
459 Additionally, the winter snow conceals an extremely rough ground surface in

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456 passes, virtually all remaining portions of the route are ill suited for summer
457 travel. As the historic trails make ample use of frozen lakes, rivers, muskegs,
458 and marshes, summer trail conditions are extremely poor if not non-existent.
459 Additionally, the winter snow conceals an extremely rough ground surface in

460 most places due to stumps, fallen trees, low brush, frost-heaved hummocks and
461 tussocks, and other obstacles.

462

462 Topography

463

463 Topography varies from the tidewater lagoons, spits, and barrier beaches of the
464 Seward peninsula to the high rugged peaks of the Alaska Range and Chugach
465 Mountains. From Seward to Knik Arm, the route traverses narrow valleys through
466 the Kenai and Chugach Mountains. Relief is great with 3,000-5,000 foot peaks
467 rising 2,000 to 3,000 feet about the valley floors. Crow Pass is
468 approximately 3,500 feet in elevation while Indian Creek Pass is 2,300 feet.

469

469 From Knik to the south slope of the Alaska Range, gently rolling lowlands of
470 the Susitna River valley are traversed. Rainy Pass provides a comparatively
471 short gentle route through the rugged Alaska Range reaching an elevation of
472 approximately 3,350 feet. Peaks in the area exceed 5,000 feet. From Farewell
473 Lake on the north side of the Alaska Range to Takotna, the route crosses the
474 extensive Kuskokwim River valley. Relief is low and elevations range from
475 400 to 1,000 feet.

476

476 The low mountains, hills, and ridges of the Kuskokwin Mountains extend north-
477 east to southwest across the Ophir and Iditarod region in the upper Innoko
478 River drainages. Relief is moderate with most ridges and peaks between 2,000
479 and 3,000 feet dissected by broad valleys 200-1,000 feet in elevation.
480 Similar relief is encountered crossing the Kaiyuh Mountains which are
481 separated from the Kuskokwim Mountains by the low flats of the Innoko River.

482

482 After crossing the Yukon River at Kaltag, the route follows the broad
483 Unalakleet River valley through the adjacent Kaltag Mountains averaging
484 2,000-3,000 feet in elevation. After reaching Unalakleet, the trail gen-
485 erally stays at or near sea level as it skirts the barren coastline of
486 Norton Sound to Nome.

(START TAPE #2)

001 Vegetation and Timber

002

002 The different climatic zones, permafrost conditions, topography, and soils
003 encountered along the route combine to provide a wide variety of vegetative
004 ecosystems. Alpine tundra is found in the passes in the Chugach Mountains,
005 the Alaska Range, and the Kuskokwim Mountains between Ophir and Iditarod.
006 Wet tundra is found in areas around Norton Sound. Over much of the Seward
007 to Turnagain Arm area, a coastal western hemlock-Sitka spruce forest system
008 exists up to an elevation of 2,000-3,000 feet. From Knik to the Alaska Range,
009 lowland spruce-hardwood forests and bottomland spruce-poplar forests are
010 encountered.

011

011 On either side of Rainy Pass, an upland spruce-hardwood forest is present up
012 to an elevation of approximately 2,500 feet. The Kuskokwim valley is largely
013 covered with lowland spruce-hardwood forest as is the Innoko River valley.
014 The valleys through the Kuskokwim Mountains, the Kaiyuh Mountains, and Kaltag
015 Mountains are generally covered with upland spruce-hardwood forest. A major
016 high brush system is located in the Nome area.

017

017 Throughout the forest areas, many open areas of muskeg, marshes, shallow lakes,
018 and grass tussocks are found. Dense willow and alder thickets are common along
019 rivers and streams.

020

020 Commercial harvesting of Sitka spruce is occurring in the Seward area. Some
020 areas of the Susitna River and Kuskokwim River and Yukon River valleys contain
021 stands of timber of sufficient size for commercial harvesting. Commercial land
021 is defined by the U. S. Forest Service as land which is either producing, or
022 capable of producing, more than 20 cubic feet of annual growth per acre, providing
022 it has not been reserved or deferred from timber harvest. Both accessible and
023 inaccessible lands are included. Unstocked lands which are capable of the growth
023 rate are also included. No data is available on the number of acres of commer-
024 cial forest land along the trail route.

025
025 Soils

026
026 Except in the Anchorage area, very little detailed study of specific soil types
027 has been done. Thus, only very general types and distribution of soils are
028 discussed.

029
029 In the Cook Inlet area and Susitna River valley, well-drained, strongly acid
030 silt loams are found over very gravelly to loamy materials. Extremely shallow,
031 rocky soils are found in the Chugach Mountains and Alaska Range areas. Some
032 areas of the Susitna Valley also contain poorly drained soils.

033
033 Over much of the remaining route, poorly drained soils with a thick organic
034 mat and permafrost are dominant. Along the Yukon River are poorly drained,
035 moderately deep silt loam soils associated with sandy and loamy soils of low
036 terraces. In some of the higher areas, such as the Golovin area, are also
037 found well-drained thin soils with dark surface layers.

038

038 Although soil and climatic factors prohibit agricultural development over much
039 of the area, several areas have been identified as being potential for agri-
040 cultural lands. A thin corridor along the Yukon River is reported in
041 Resources of Alaska, published by the Federal-State Land Use Planning Commis-
042 sion in July 1974, to contain lands where 25-50 percent of the soils are
043 suitable for agricultural use. Both lowlands and uplands in the Kuskokwim
044 River valley near McGrath have been similarly identified. Much of the Susitna
045 River valley is reported to contain lands where more than 50 percent of the soils
046 are suitable for agriculture. Lands in the Knik and Anchorage area contain
047 25-50 percent marginal soils for agricultural uses.

048

048 Water Quality

049

049 Because the region is generally only very sparsely populated and little develop-
050 ment has taken place, the rivers and lakes along the historic route are still
051 largely free of man-caused pollution and are believed to be of high water quality.

052

052 The waters of the Yukon, Kuskokwim, and Susitna Rivers are extremely discolored
053 largely due to the presence of fine suspended materials from melting glaciers
054 in their upper drainages. Rivers flowing through extensive low-lying areas,
055 such as the Innoko, are characterized by a very dark, tea-color due to the
056 presence of decaying organic matter in the water.

057

057 Except in the Anchorage area, waters from rivers and lakes are commonly used
058 without treatment for drinking purposes and are used by most villages as the
059 primary water supply.

060

060 Fish and Wildlife Resources

061

061 Large game animals are common throughout the region, although most populations
062 are sparse in relation to land area because of the harsh climatic conditions
063 and absence of available winter food. Caribou, moose, Dall sheep, black
064 bear, brown/grizzly bear, and wolves are locally present in varying concen-
065 trations. Important waterfowl areas are located in the Innoko and Kuskokwim
066 valleys and along the shores of Norton Sound. Small fur-bearers including
067 lynx, wolverine, beaver, mink, land otter, weasel, marten, and muskrat are
068 abundant over much of the interior. Common raptors in the area include
069 northern bald eagles, golden eagles, osprey, and a variety of hawks and owls.
070 In addition, the endangered American peregrine falcon is believed to be present
071 in the area.

072

072 Sport fish species common in various areas of the route include grayling,
073 arctic char northern pike, lake trout, rainbow trout, and five species
074 of salmon. In the Norton Sound region, along the Yukon, and in the
075 Seward area, commercial and subsistence fishing of salmon plays an impor-
076 tant part in the local and regional economies.

077

077 Geology

078

078 Because the route covers such a vast area, the general geology of the route is
079 presented by the several different physiographic divisions of Alaska as described
080 in the U. S. Geological Survey Professional Paper 482 (1965), "Physiographic
081 Divisions of Alaska," by Clyde Wahrhaftig.

082

082 The Seward to Anchorage portion of the route lies within the Kenai-Chugach
083 Mountains division. The Kenai-Chugach Mountains are composed chiefly of
084 dark-grey argillite and graywacke of Mesozoic age that are mildly metamorphosed
085 and have a pronounced vertical cleavage that strikes parallel to the trend of the
086 range. A belt of Paleozoic and Mesozoic schist, greenstone, chert, and lime-
087 stone lies along the north edge of the division. All these rocks are cut by
088 granitic intrusions.

089

089 The portion from Anchorage to Skwentna lies in the Upper Cook Inlet-Susitna
090 lowland. Bedrock beneath the lowland consists mainly of poorly consolidated
091 coal-bearing rock of Tertiary Age. This rock is mantled by glacial moraine and
092 outwash and marine and lake deposits.

093

093 A short stretch between Skwentna and the Happy River is included in the Broad
094 Pass Depression. Patches of poorly consolidated Tertiary coal-bearing rocks,
095 in fault contact with older rocks of the surrounding mountains, show that this
096 depression marks a graben of Tertiary age. Most of the bedrock consists of
097 highly deformed slightly metamorphosed Paleozoic and Mesozoic rocks that are
098 also exposed in the surrounding mountains. Ground moraine mantles the lowlands.

099

099 Most of the Alaska Range (southern part) is underlain by large granitic batholiths,
100 intrusive into moderately metamorphosed and highly deformed Paleozoic and
101 Mesozoic volcanic and sedimentary rocks, which form scattered areas of lower
102 mountains. Structural trends are generally northerly, but change abruptly to
103 northeasterly and easterly northward across Rainy Pass. Well-bedded Jurassic
104 and sedimentary rocks form prominent hogbacks and cuervas dipping southward
105 off the south flank of the range toward Cook Inlet.

106 From Farewell to McGrath, the route traverses the Tanana-Kuskokwim lowland.
107 The outwash fans grade from coarse gravel near the Alaska Range to sand and
108 silt along the Kuskokwim. Parts of route area have thick loess cover. Scattered
109 low hills of granite, ultramafic rocks, and Precambrian schist rise above the
110 outwash. Tertiary conglomerate in the foothills of the Alaska Range plunges
111 beneath the lowland in a monocline, and the heads of the outwash fans may
112 rest on a pediment cut across this conglomerate.

113

113 The route(s) between McGrath and Ruby and Kaltag fall within the Kuskokwim
114 Mountains, the Innoko Lowlands, and the Koyukuk Flats along the Yukon River.
115 Most of the Kuskokwim Mountains are made of tightly folded Cretaceous rocks that
116 strike northeast. Graywacke upholds the ridges, and argillite underlies the
117 valleys. Some Paleozoic sedimentary rocks and Precambrian schist are also
118 present. The Innoko Lowlands are generally underlain by the same bedrock but are
119 mantled by river-flood plain deposits and by windborne silt. The lowlands along
120 the Yukon are also underlain by water-laid and windborne silt. Sand dunes are
121 common; northeast-trending scarplets and low rises that cross the lowland
122 presumably mark active faults.

123

123 The Nulato Hills include the route between Kaltag and Unalakleet. Almost all
124 the hills are composed of tightly folded sandstone, conglomerate, and shale
125 of Cretaceous age. The rocks are cut by northeast and north-trending
126 faults.

127

127 The bedrock in the Seward Peninsula area around Norton Sound is chiefly Paleozoic
128 schist, gneiss, marble, metamorphosed volcanic rocks, all of which are cut by
129 granitic intrusive masses. Structural trends in the metamorphic rocks are

130 chiefly northward. In exposures of beach placer deposits along the south coast,
131 layers of till are interbedded with beach and shore deposits that are both above
132 and below sea level; it is, therefore, possible to correlate glacial advances
133 in the Seward Peninsula with the history of rise and fall of sea level in late
134 Cenozoic time. Much of the coastal lowlands are underlain by Quarternary sand
135 and silt. Basalt flows and cinder cones are of Tertiary and Quarternary age.
136 Other bedrock hills consist of Cretaceous sedimentary rocks, but by early
137 Tertiary intrusions, and of crystalline rocks of unknown age.

138
139 A large segment of the route from Seward to the north side of the Alaska Range
140 was generally covered by glacial ice several times during the Pleistocene
141 ice age. Glacial advances and retreats have significantly influenced geologic
142 features throughout the region. The coastline around Norton Sound and much of
143 Interior Alaska Range were generally ice free during Pleistocene times.

143 Mineral Resources

144
145 The segment of the route between Kaltag and Nome passes through several areas
146 identified as having potential for mineral development. (Resources of Alaska,
147 A Regional Summary, Federal-State Land Use Planning Commission, 1974). In the
148 Nome area, potential development of gold, lead, zinc, silver, barium, tin,
149 antimony, and tungsten is indicated. In addition, the Unalakleet River area
150 and most of the route along the east shoreline of Norton Sound is identified
151 as having low potential for oil and gas.

152
153 The Iditarod-Ophir-Takotna region is identified as having high potential for
154 gold development. In addition to gold, tin is listed as having high potential
155 in the Poorman area.

154 An area in the Kuskokwim valley east of McGrath traversed by the route is
155 identified as having low potential for oil and gas. Although high potential
156 for gold, copper, lead, and zinc is indicated in areas to the north and south,
157 no potential is identified along the route through the Rainy Pass region.

158

158 Moderate to high potential of oil and gas locations is identified over the
159 lower Susitna River valley. Coal deposits are also indicated over this
160 region. High potential for chromium, nickel, platinum, copper, and gold
161 development is indicated in the Upper Cook Inlet and Chugach Mountain region
162 traversed by the route.

163

163 Placer gold mining is currently taking place in the Ophir, Flat, Poorman, and
164 Nome areas where numerous claims dating back to the early 1900's exist. It is
165 not known how many claims are being worked or how much gold is being produced.
166 However, except in the Nome area, less than a dozen persons are believed to be
167 involved in mining activities at each of the locations.

168

168 Land Ownership

169

169 Most of the land along the route is currently in public ownership. However, it
169 should be noted that the status of land ownership is in a transitional stage.
170 This is due to selections resulting from the Alaska Statehood Act and the Alaska
170 Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971. (Table II presents the current and
171 potential status of land along the route.) The State currently owns most of the
171 trail area from Girdwood to the Alasks Range while the remainder is in Federal
172 ownership. With the exception of the section from Seward to Girdwood which is
172 owned by the Alaska Railroad through the Chugach

TABLE I. Mileages and General Land Status of Trail Segments: Seward to Nome Route (Does not include potential public easements)

<u>SEGMENT</u>	<u>Main Route</u>	
	<u>MILES</u>	<u>LAND STATUS (in miles)</u>
Seward - Girdwood	75	75 mi. Alaska Railroad (U.S.)
Girdwood - Eagle River		40 mi. Chugach State Park
(via Indian Creek Pass)	38	7 mi. Chugach National Forest
(via Crow Pass)	44	29 mi. State highways, roads
		5 mi. U. S. Army Reservation
		1 mi. private
Eagle - Knik*	55	35 mi. State highways, roads
		20 mi. State tidelands
Knik - Susitna*	38	21.5 mi. State
		1.5 mi. private
		15.0 mi. Mat-Su Borough
Susitna - Old Skwentna	38	Virtually all in State ownership
(via Alexander Lake)		(some may be transferred to Mat-Su Borough).
Old Skwentna - Rainy Pass Lodge*	52	Virtually all in State ownership.
Rainy Pass Lodge - Farewell	52	Virtually all selected for ownership by State.
Farewell - McGrath*	80	Approx. 65 mi. proposed for inclusion in Yukon-Kuskokwim National Forest; 15 mi. withdrawn for selection by Native corporations.
McGrath - Takotna*	17	Virtually all withdrawn for selection by Native corporations.
Takotna - Ophir*	24	Virtually all overlain by State-owned road through Native and State selected lands.
Takotna - Iditarod - Ophir Loop*	185	170 mi. selected by State
		15 mi. withdrawn for Native selection

Ophir - Dishkakiet	55	Approx. 30 mi. through State selected lands; 25 mi. proposed for inclusion in Koyukuk National Wildlife Refuge.
Dishkakiet - Kaltag	66	Approx. 15 mi. withdrawn for Native selection; 15 mi. on (d)(1) lands (BLM); 36 mi. proposed for Koyukuk National Wildlife Refuge.
Kaltag - Unalakleet*	96	41 mi. withdrawn for Native selection; 50 mi. proposed for Unalakleet National Wild River (BLM); 5 mi. in (d)(1) lands (BLM).
Unalakleet - Solomon*	152	Virtually all withdrawn for Native selection.
Solomon - Nome*	<u>32</u>	Overlain by State highway through Native selected lands.
SUBTOTAL - Main Route	1,099	

Other Branch Segments

Moose Pass - Sunrise (via Summit Lake)	44	34 mi. overlain by State highway; 10 mi. Chugach National Forest
Moose Pass - Granite Creek Guard Station (via Johnson Pass)	22	Chugach National Forest
Granite Creek Guard Station - Canyon Creek	8	Overlain by State highway.
Sunrise - Hope	8	Overlain by State highway.
Whittier - Portage (via Portage Lake)	17	10 mi. Chugach National Forest
(via Twentymile)	25	7 mi. overlain by State highway Chugach National Forest
Anchorage - Fort Richardson*	12	4 mi. Anchorage Municipality 8 mi. U.S. Army reservation
Susitna - Nancy	22	15 mi. State patented land 7 mi. Mat-Su Borough land

Susitna - Old Skwentna (via Skwentna Airfield)*	50	State patented land.
Rainy Pass Lodge - Rohn (Tatina) River (via Ptarmigan Pass)*	75	State patented land.
Farewell Lake - Bear Creek (via Fairwell FAA Airfield)*	26	State patented land.
Ganes Creek - Flat (summer trail)	72	State patented land.
American Creek - Cripple Landing	26	State selected land.
Cripple Landing - Lewis Landing	60	45 mi. State selected land 15 mi. (d)(1) land (BLM)
Cripple - Folger	12	State selected land.
Dishkakot - Moose Creek (via Dikeman)	67	20 mi. (d)(2) (proposed National Wildlife Refuge-FWS); 47 mi. State selected land.
Magitchlie Creek - Nulato	52	45 mi. Native selection 7 mi. State selected land
Ophir - Folger*	40	State selected land.
Folger - Poorman*	53	State selected land.
Poorman - Ruby*	58	Overlain by State highway.
Ruby - Lewis Landing*	15	Yukon River (Statehood claim).
Lewis Landing - Galena*	36	Yukon River (Statehood claim).
Galena - Nulato*	52	Yukon River (Statehood claim).
Nulato - Kaltag*	40	Yukon River (Statehood claim).
Golovin - Topkok (via White Mountain)*	<u>36</u>	Native selected land.
SUBTOTAL - Other Branch Segments	938	
TOTAL	2,037	

*Segments utilized all or in part in the Annual Iditarod Trail Race.

TABLE II. Summary of Existing or Potential Ownership of Trail Segments

	<u>MILES</u>	<u>PERCENT</u>
<u>Federal</u>		
U. S. Forest Service	139	7
Bureau of Land Management	85	4
Fish and Wildlife Service	81	4
U. S. Army	13	1
Alaska Railroad	<u>75</u>	<u>4</u>
Subtotal	393	20
<u>State</u>	1,279.5 <u>1/</u>	63
<u>Local Governments</u>	26	1
<u>Native Corporations</u>	336 <u>2/</u>	16
<u>Other Private</u>	<u>2.5</u>	<u>+</u>
TOTAL	2,037	100

1/ Includes existing roads and highways and the Yukon riverbed.

2/ Public easements have been proposed along all or most of this distance.

173 National Forest, the federally owned segments are managed by the Bureau of
174 Land Management.

175

175 The Alaska Statehood Act and the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971
176 set in motion substantial changes in future land ownership and management in
177 Alaska. Approximately 40 million acres are to be selected for ownership by
178 Native corporations and 103 million acres by the State of Alaska. Additional
179 millions of acres of public domain lands have been recommended by the Department
180 of the Interior for addition to the National Park, National Wildlife Refuge,
181 National Forest, and Wild and Scenic Rivers Systems.

182

182 Most of the land around Norton Sound from Unalakleet and Nome has been with-
183 drawn for Native selection. Similarly, most of the land along the Yukon River
184 from Ruby to Kaltag has been withdrawn for Native selection, although the Yukon
185 River itself is claimed by the State. The villages of Takotna and McGrath are
186 selecting lands along the route in the Kuskokwim River valley. The
187 Village of Eklutna is selecting several townships through which the
188 route passed.

189

189 The State of Alaska has made land selections covering most of the route through
190 the Alaska Range and through the Kuskokwim Mountains. In addition to State lands
191 already patented in the Susitna River valley, the routes over Crow Pass and
192 Indian Creek Pass are included in Chugach State Park.

193

193 Of the millions of acres proposed for addition to the four national conserva-
194 tion systems, three proposals include lands along the route. The Innoko lowlands

195 around Dishkakot are included in the Koyukuk National Wildlife Refuge
196 proposal and the Kuskokwim River valley between the Alaska and McGrath is include
197 in the Yukon-Kuskokwim National Forest proposal. The lands surrounding the
198 upper 50 miles of the Unalakleet River are included in the Unalakleet National
199 Wild River proposal.

200

200 Most Native lands were to have been selected by December of 1975, all State
201 lands by 1985, and action on proposed additions to the national systems is
202 to be taken by December 1978.

203

203 In addition to Native lands which will be privately owned, numerous tracts are
204 in private ownership between Seward and the Knik area. Some private lands and
205 an undetermined number of mining claims also exist in the Iditarod-Flat, Ophir,
206 and Takotna areas.

207

207 Virtually all of the route was part of the territorial system of roads and
208 trails and was maintained by the Alaska Road Commission using Federal and/or
209 territorial monies. The State of Alaska maintains that a right-of-way still
210 exists in the name of the State along all such roads and trails pursuant to
211 revised Statute 2477 authorized by Congress in 1866.

212

212 The current Bureau of Land Management land status records show a reservation
213 under 44LD513 (Department of the Interior Land Decisions) for the section of
214 the route between Kaltag and Unalakleet. As such, this segment would be
215 reserved for public purposes in Federal ownership should patent be trans-
216 ferred.

217

217 Section 17(b) of the Native Claims Act directs the Secretary of the Interior to
218 reserve easements for public use and access as he determines are necessary on
219 lands selected by villages or regional corporations. The Bureau of Land
220 Management is currently receiving recommendations from various agencies and
221 the public for easements, including portions of the Seward-Nome route, across
222 lands selected by Native corporations. Easements must be identified prior to
223 the final conveyance of patent to the various corporations over the next
223 several years.

224

224 A general listing of land status by segment is found in Table II. Land
224 status has not been identified for all branch segments identified in Table
225 II. It is expected that several of the minor branch routes listed in Table
225 II will not be designated as part of the National Historic Trail.

226

226 Land Use

227

227 With the exception of few small towns and villages, most of the route is
228 located in a primitive environment with little evidence of man. Some mining
229 is taking place in the Flat, Ophir, and Poorman areas. Hunting, fishing,
230 trapping, berry-picking, and wood cutting is taking place around villages and
231 towns. Guiding operations for hunting, fishing, and hiking utilize the route
232 area in the Alaska Range and Susitna valley and probably other locations.

233

233 In and near the Anchorage urban area, substantial lands have been developed
234 for transportation, commercial, residential, and to a lesser extent, agricul-
235 tural purposes. Some timber harvesting is occurring in the Seward area. A
236 major segment of the historic route near Anchorage passes through Chugach State
237 Park and Chugach National Forest.

239

239 Some reindeer grazing may be occurring along the route on the Seward Peninsula.

312 Historic and Archeologic Resources

313 Gold Rush History

314
314 Although popularly known as the Iditarod Trail, only a portion of the Seward
315 to Nome route was constructed and used to reach the Iditarod gold fields. The
316 route is composed of trails resulting from several gold strikes occurring in
317 different areas at different times.

318
318 This route can be best discussed in three segments: Seward to Knik and
319 Susitna; Susitna to Kaltag; and Kaltag to Nome.

320
320 Seward-Susitna

321
321 Gold was first reported on the Kenai Peninsula by Russian fur traders as early
322 as 1834. However, it was not until 1888 when King found placer gold in the
323 Hope area that serious interest in prospecting and mining in the region
324 developed. Between 1888 and 1896, many claims were staked in the Hope-Sunrise
325 area and across Turnagain Arm in the area of what is now Girdwood. News of
326 strikes in the Sunrise district stimulated a rush in 1896 which brought 2,000-
327 2,500 people into upper Cook Inlet area.

328
328 Many of these people came by steamer to the Native village of Tyonek on the
329 west shore of Cook Inlet. Here they transferred to shallower-draft boats to
330 reach the settlements in the upper Inlet. Hundreds of persons also sailed to
331 Passage Canal in Prince William Sound; disembarked near the present town of
332 Whittier; and walked across the divide and Portage Glacier to the head of

333 Turnagain Arm and to Hope and Sunrise. In 1794, the English explorer,
334 Vancouver, reported this portage route being used by Russian fur traders who
335 in turn were following a route used by Natives for hundreds of years.
336
336 A second rush to the area took place in 1898, probably more as a result of the
337 Klondike Stampede and its overflow than from recent strikes in the Sunrise
338 area. The summer of 1898 brought an estimated 7,000 to 10,000 persons into
339 Cook Inlet.
340
340 Sunrise and Hope were destinations for most; however, the old fur trading center
341 of Susitna and the emerging trade center of Knik attracted many. Most came
342 directly to the area by water, but many again used the glacier trail from
343 Passage Canal. Crevasses restricted safe travel by this route to winter and
344 spring months and an alternate route on Billings Creek and down the Twentymile
345 River drainage was occasionally used in summer.
346
346 In 1898, Mendenhall explored a route from the head of Resurrection Bay near
347 the present town of Seward to the Hope-Sunrise area and then around Turnagain
348 Arm, over Crow Pass, and across Knik Arm to Knik. At this time, travel from
349 Resurrection Bay to the Hope-Sunrise area and over Crow Pass had been under-
350 taken occasionally by prospectors, but no trails as such existed.
351
351 Cook Inlet was not navigable during the winter months. Susitna, Knik, Sunrise,
352 and Hope were dependent on winter mail and supplies coming from the ice-free
353 landing sites in Passage Canal and Resurrection Bay. With the growing popula-
354 tion in the upper Inlet and with the desire to maintain communications and
355 supply lines, a system of trails soon developed.

356 Crude winter trails for pack horses and dog teams were developed through use
357 between Resurrection Bay and the Sunrise area and between Sunrise and Knik
358 and Susitna by 1900. In 1902, the first regularly scheduled mail contract
359 was let between Resurrection Bay and Sunrise and Hope.

360

360 After the strikes in 1902 and 1906 in the Yenta River and Willow Creek districts,
361 winter trails from Seward to Susitna were well established providing transpor-
362 tation for mail, supplies, and travelers.

363

363 Between 1904 and 1906, approximately 50 miles of the Alaska Central Railroad
364 were constructed from Seward towards Turnagain Arm. By 1911, the railroad,
365 then under the name of the Alaska Northern Railroad, had been completed around
366 the eastern end of Turnagain Arm to Mile 71 at Kern Creek.

367

367 Susitna-Kaltag

368

368 Travel into the upper Kuskokwim and Innoko River country before 1905 was
369 limited to a few Russian explorers in the 1830's and 1840's, to several USGS
370 and military exploration parties at the turn of the century, and to occasional
371 prospectors.

372

372 In the summer of 1906, a prospecting party led by Thomas Ganes crossed from
373 the Kuskokwim River into the upper Innoko drainage and struck gold on Ganes
374 Creek. That winter, news of the strike caused a stampede by miners mostly
375 from along the Yukon River. These early rushers crossed overland from
376 Kaltag and from the trading post of Lewis Landing on the Yukon. When naviga-
377 tion opened that summer, 800 to 900 people came down the Yukon from Fairbanks

378 and up the Innoko to the Indian settlement of Dishkaketa. Several hundred
379 persons also sailed from Nome up the Yukon and Innoko. From Dishkaketa, people
380 lined or poled up river to Ganes Creek.

381

381 During the winter of 1907-1908, men and supplies were transported overland
382 from Kaltag and Lewis Landing by dog team to the town of Moore City on Ganes
383 Creek. A strike on nearby Ophir Creek in early 1908 left Moore City deserted
384 and the new town of Ophir sprang up.

395

395 W. A. Dikeman and John Beaton descended the Innoko in late summer of 1908
396 and went up one of its major tributaries, the Haiditarod, or as it later be-
397 came known, the Iditarod. On Christmas Day 1908, it is reported that they
398 struck gold on Otter Creek. News of the Iditarod strike was slow to spread,
399 and the summer of 1909 brought only several hundred persons into the area,
400 mainly from the Innoko district and from along the Yukon River. Little
401 mining was done that summer because of poor transportation and a lack of
402 equipment and supplies, but considerable claim staking took place.

403

403 During the winter of 1909-1910, optimistic reports of rich strikes were wide-
404 spread. Approximately 2,000 people steamed up and down the Yukon and up the
405 Innoko and Iditarod Rivers when navigation opened in the summer of 1910. In
406 all, an estimated 2,500 people stampeded to the Iditarod developing the new
407 towns of Dikeman at the low water head of steamer navigation; Iditarod, at
408 the extreme head of navigation; and the mining towns of Flat, Otter, Boulder
409 (Boulder), and Discovery.

410

410 The Iditarod strike and production of gold in 1910 prompted the Alaska Road
411 Commission to begin work on the Seward to Nome trail. Surveyed by W. L.
411 Goodwin in 1908, this route was to provide a more direct winter transportation
412 route to Nome and access to the Innoko district gold strikes. During the
412 winter of 1910-11, nearly 1,000 miles of trail were marked
413 and cleared from Nome to the Alaska Northern railhead which was at
414 Kern Creek, 71 miles north of Seward. Although most of the new trail work was
415 done between the present site of McGrath and Susitna, considerable work was
416 also done marking and repairing the existing routes between Kern Creek and
417 Susitna; between Nome and the Ophir area; and the
418 branch routes to Iditarod and Flat.

419
419 This route was authorized by the Alaska Road Commission as the Rainy Pass-
420 Kaltag Trail, but because the Iditarod mining district was the most common
421 destination, it became known as the "Iditarod Trail." From 1911 to 1925,
422 hundreds of people walked and mushed over the trail between Iditarod and Knik
423 or Seward. The trail from Kaltag to Iditarod and to Ophir was used to take
424 people and supplies in from the Yukon.

425
425 As new gold districts developed in the upper Kuskokwim area and in the Long-
426 Poorman-Cripple area, various branch and connecting trails developed around
427 the Iditarod Trail. Several segments were upgraded to wagon roads, notably
428 the portage route between Takotna in the Kuskokwim drainage and Ophir on the
429 Innoko, and between Iditarod and Flat.

430
430 Kaltag-Nome

431
431 The first reports of gold on the Seward Peninsula in 1888 received little atten-
432 tion by the outside world. However, in the late fall of 1898, news of the

433 strike at Anvil Creek drew hundreds of gold seekers down the Yukon from the
434 Klondike. Steamers from other parts of Alaska and from Seattle started out for
435 the Bering Sea and the Nome area. Freeze-up caught most of the boats coming
436 down the Yukon, and most of the ocean-going vessels got no further than the
437 tip of the Alaska Peninsula.

438
438 Although most waited out the winter, several hundred persons continued down
439 the Yukon River by dog team and on foot. They left the river at the Indian
440 Village of Kaltag, crossing the historic Native portage route into the
441 Unalakleet River drainage. From the Eskimo village of Unalakleet on Norton
442 Sound, they traveled around the Sound to Nome.

443
443 In the next 2 years, thousands of people rushed to Nome, first to the placer
444 deposits in the several creeks in the area, and then in 1900 to the gold-bearing
445 sands of the Nome beach. Nome was easily reached by steamer with no overland
446 travel required.

447
447 As Nome grew quickly into Alaska's richest mining region, its population
448 swelled to 12,488 in 1900. Communication with other areas was badly needed
449 during the many months when navigation was not possible. In 1900 and 1901,
450 a telegraph line was constructed from Nome to Fort Gibbon at the Tanana-Yukon
451 confluence. Between Nome and St. Michaels, the first sea cable in Alaska was
452 installed. From St. Michaels, the line went north to Unalakleet, then over
453 the portage route to Kaltag and up the Yukon River. The sea cable was
454 replaced by the first long-distance wireless telegraph in the United States
455 by 1903.

456

456 Winter mail was also carried along the Yukon between Nome and Dawson at the
457 turn of the century. The Fairbanks gold strike in 1902, and the subsequent
458 rush to the Alaskan interior stimulated development of the mail route from
459 Valdez to Fairbanks. By the winter of 1905-1906, the trail from Valdez brought
460 mail to Fairbanks which in turn was carried down the Yukon by dog team to Kaltag,
461 over to Unalakleet, and around Norton Sound to Nome.

462

462 Historic Trail Remnants

463

463 Highways, the Alaska Railroad, wagon roads, and tractor trails have been super-
464 imposed on many old trail segments, especially in the Seward to Susitna area and
465 around Ophir and Iditarod. However, traces of the historic route are still
466 visible in the alpine areas of Indian Creek, Crow, and Rainy Passes. Although
467 very overgrown, sections can also be seen in the forested areas between Knik
468 and McGrath because of the relatively slow rate of tree growth in this region.

471

471 From Kaltag to Unalakleet, the historic trail and telegraph route can be
472 observed. Some telegraph wire and a few of the supporting tripods still can
473 be found along the route. The trail from Unalakleet to Nome generally followed
474 the barren shoreline and ice of the Norton Sound. Only a few short segments
475 which cut across peninsulas of forest or tundra are still visible. Most of
476 these are still used today by Native people traveling between villages.

477

477 Virtually the entire length of the Seward to Nome route was covered at regular
478 intervals by roadhouses. Every 15 to 30 miles (1 day's
479 hike or mush) these roadhouses provided food and lodging to mail carriers and

480 other travelers. Even before a new trail was completed, choice roadhouse
481 sites were staked along the route. As Goodwin thrashed his way through virgin
482 territory between the Kuskokwim River and Rainy Pass in the winter of 1910-11,
483 the only people he reported seeing were two men selecting sites and putting up
484 roadhouses.

485

486 South of the Alaska Range, only the old roadhouse at Skwentna has survived fire,
487 vandalism, firewood gathering, streambank erosion, and decay which claimed
488 the various roadhouses over the years. North of the Alaska Range, several
489 roadhouses are still standing. More modern trapping cabins and lodges have
490 been built at several of the old roadhouse locations such as Rainy Pass and
491 Farewell Lake. Between Kaltag and Unalakleet, some of the old telegraphic
492 relay stations and line cabins are still standing. The Cape Nome roadhouse,
493 located 14 miles east of Nome, was built around 1900 and is reported to still
494 be in good condition. At other roadhouse locations, decaying remnants of log
495 structures have been reported.

496

497 Tools, implements, and equipment hauled over the old route undoubtedly were
498 lost or abandoned over the years. Such articles dating back to the late
499 1890's may still be present along the trails because of the relatively slow
rate of oxidation and decomposition due to low precipitation and low mean
annual temperatures.

001 Related Historic Sites

002

002 Five historic sites located along or near the Seward to Nome route are listed
003 in the National Register of Historic Places. Table III lists these sites,
004 the date they were entered on the Register, and their significance.

005

005 In addition to these sites, the town site of Iditarod has been nominated to
006 the Register pending approval by Doyon, the Native Regional Corporation.
007 Iditarod is now a ghost town. Only a few buildings remain where once 600-700
008 people lived. In its heyday, the town had a telephone system, a tramway, two
009 newspapers, four hotels, three lumber companies, a fire hall, nine saloons, a
010 school, and churches.

011

011 The nearby mining town of Flat is now nearly deserted also. From a peak of
012 400 people, only a few miners live there today, most seasonally. However,
013 unlike Iditarod, many old structures are still remaining in and around Flat,
014 and both old and newer mining equipment can be seen.

015

015 Historic structures and mining implements in and around Ophir also exist,
016 although the extent and condition of these historic resources is not known.
017 No population was reported for Ophir in the 1970 census, although several
018 small gold mining operations have recently been reactivated and several people
019 are known to be living in the area.

TABLE III

Sites Associated with the SEWARD TO NOME ROUTE included on the

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

<u>Site</u>	<u>Date Entered</u>	<u>Significance</u>
Hope Historic District	4/25/72	Evidence of gold mining activity on the Kenai Peninsula dating back to 1888.
Old St. Nicholas Russian Orthodox Church, Eklutna	3/24/72	Russian missionary activity associated with fur trading in Cook Inlet dating back to mid-1800's.
Knik	7/23/73	Knik, once the largest community on Cook Inlet, served as regional trading and transportation center from about 1898 to 1917. Includes Knik Museum containing materials dating back to Knik's heyday and "Dog Mushers Hall of Fame" commemorating the long history of dog mushing in Alaska.
Iyatayet Site, Cape Denbigh Peninsula, Norton Sound	10/15/66	One of earliest such sites found, dating back to 6000 B.C., it has given definite sequential evidence of coastal occupation beginning with the Denbigh flint industry. Site has given substance to the assumption that the first people in the Americas came south from Alaska.
Anvil Creek, Nome	10/15/66	Alaska's great gold rush began when the first large gold placer strike was made here on September 20, 1898.

064 Pre-History and Archeology

065

065 For hundreds and perhaps thousands of years prior to the coming of white
066 men to Alaska, Native peoples traveled, hunted, trapped, fished, and lived
067 throughout the route area. Much of this activity was concentrated along the
068 major waterways and sea coasts where food sources were more abundant and
069 travel easier. Native dog mushers who predated the gold stampedeers by perhaps
070 thousands of years utilized portions of the route.

071

071 The segment between Kaltag and Nome is of particular anthropological and
072 archeological significance. The Seward Peninsula area is where some of the
073 earliest sites of the New World man have been found and where the most evidence
074 has been discovered of sequential migrations of people from Asia entering North
075 America via a Bering Sea land bridge. Additional archeological sites, such
076 as the one on the Cape Denbigh Peninsula undoubtedly exist in the route area
077 which could reveal more information about ancient inhabitants of the region
078 and perhaps about the origins of man in North America.

079

079 The route between Kaltag and Unalakleet was being used as a portage trail
080 between the Yukon River and Norton Sound for hundreds of years prior to the
081 Gold Rush. Eskimos from Norton Sound and Athabascan Indians from the Yukon
082 valley traded and raided over the route.

020 Identification of Historic and Archeological Resources

020

020 As mentioned in the above discussions ("Related Historic Sites" and "Pre-History
021 and Archeology"), additional sites with historical or archeological significance

021 undoubtedly exist in the route area. In order to meet the requirements of
021 Executive Order 11593 and Section 106 of
022 the National Historic Preservation Act, the following measures are proposed:*

022 1. The agency or agencies responsible for management of the trail will
022 identify properties, located within the
023 impact area of the trail, included in the National Register, including the
023 most recent supplements.

023
023 2. The management agency will conduct a complete cultural survey to
024 identify and evaluate potential National Register sites. This will be done
024 in consultation with the Alaska State Historic Preservation Officer and prior
024 to the completion of management plans.

025
025 3. Acquisition and/or protection of significant sites, structures, or
025 remnants will be necessary to help prevent theft or vandalism due to increased
025 public knowledge of the historic route and
026 related sites.

026
026 4. All other requirements of 36 C.F.R. Part 800, where applicable, will
026 be met. Consultation with the Alaska State Historic Preservation Officer will
026 continue and the management
027 agencies will afford the Advisory Council the opportunity to comment on manage-
027 ment plans. Only then will the management plans be published in the Federal
027 Register.

028 *At the time of this writing, the Alaska State Historic Preservation Officer
028 has been notified by the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation. See Appendix A for
029 his official counsel on the measures for compliance described herein.

083 Recreation

084

084 Existing Use

085

085 Most current recreational use of the route occurs in the Seward-Susitna region.
086 Between Seward and Girdwood and between Eagle River and Knik, most of this use
087 is in the form of driving for pleasure, picnicking, and sightseeing. A high-
087 way and railroad cover much of these segments.

088

088 A jeep road and trail from Whittier up through Portage Pass also receives summer
088 hiking and recreational vehicle use. The U. S. Forest Service recreational
089 trails up the Crow Pass and across the Bench Lake-Johnson Lake Pass receive
090 heavy summer use by hikers. Two public use cabins on these trails have been
091 reserved most days of the summer. Summer use of the Crow Pass trail is
092 estimated at 300 persons per week, while 50 persons per week are estimated to
093 use the Bench Lake-Johnson Lake Pass trail.

094

094 The 22-mile Bench Lake trail also receives winter use by snow machiners and
095 cross-country skiers. An avalanche destroyed the public cabin at Bench Lake
096 during March of 1975.

097

097 A hiking trail through Chugach State Park from Crow Pass down to Eagle River
098 (approximately 21 miles) also receives summer hiking use. The Eagle River
099 valley is also used heavily in the winter by cross-country skiers and snow
100 machiners. The 20-mile Indian Creek Pass section between Anchorage and Indian
101 is traversed annually by hundreds of cross-country skiers. The improved trail
102 up Indian Creek to the pass also attracts substantial summer hiking use.

103

103 Between Knik and Susitna, the many trails and seismic lines receive substantial
104 winter use by dog mushers, snowmobilers, and cross-country skiers. Most of
105 this use takes place within 10-12 miles of Knik. Some summer hiking use of
106 the historic Iditarod Trail occurs up to 4 miles from Knik.

109

109 Hiking, fishing, hunting, and berry picking are popular summer and fall
110 activities all along the road system in this area. Such activity is occurring
111 along the route, although it may not be associated with a specific trail or
112 route segment. Similarly, cross-country skiing and snow machine use occur over
113 much of the route in the winter where the highway or railroads provide access
114 to adjacent day-use areas. An annual train trip sponsored by the local ski
115 club brings hundreds of cross-country skiers into the Grandview area along
116 the railroad trail 50 miles north of Seward.

117

117 Beyond the Susitna River, recreation use is primarily non-trail oriented.
118 Fly-in fishing and hunting are the principal activities. This use is not
119 very extensive or intensive at the present time. Some hiking and wilderness
120 guiding is taking place across Rainy Pass, although the level of this use is
121 believed to be low. Some recreational hunting, fishing, and travel around
122 the several towns and villages along the route is probably taking place,
123 although most such activity is geared to a subsistence life-style. Present
124 winter recreational use is even lighter. Some recreational snow machine use
125 and cross-country skiing probably occurs in the Nome area, the McGrath area,
126 and west of the Susitna River.

127

127 An exception to this light activity is the Anchorage to Nome sled dog race.
128 Each March since 1973, approximately 40 mushers and 400 dogs have traversed

129 major portions of the Iditarod Trail, although only roughly half the entrants
130 make it to Nome.

131

131 Future Use

132

132 Recreation use along the route is expected to increase dramatically in the
133 Seward to Knik region. Hiking, cross-country skiing, and off-road vehicle
134 use will continue to rise as the population in Southcentral Alaska expands.

135

135 Use along the developed trails has increased several fold over the past 3 to
136 5 years and this trend is expected to continue. Limitations to this increase
137 will be the number of cabins available for overnight use, especially in
138 the winter, and increasingly crowded trail conditions causing people to seek
139 other recreation areas.

140

140 Sport hunting and fishing activities are expected to increase significantly
141 in most areas of the route, especially in the Susitna Valley as more people
142 travel further to find limited populations of fish and wildlife. Trail-oriented
143 activities along the historic route are not expected to increase substantially
144 due to lack of developed trails, difficult access, and harsh climatic conditions.

145

145

145 PROBABLE FUTURE ENVIRONMENT WITHOUT THE PROPOSAL

146

146 In general, the future environment of the route area is expected to vary little
147 without the proposal than with the proposal.

148

148 Without the proposal, it is probable that the few remaining historic structures
149 and implements found along the route would be destroyed or damaged by fire,
150 vandalism, natural decay, removal, and other causes.

151

151 It is possible without the proposal that public access and recreational use
152 along the historic route could be blocked in the Knik area by private land-
153 owners. Also, without the proposal, public lands along the route could be
154 disposed of and public access lost.

155 III. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT OF THE PROPOSED ACTION

156 The primary purpose of the proposal is to commemorate the historic significance
157 of the Iditarod route. Related actions would be the signing of certain seg-
158 ments, the acquisition of approximately 1-1/2 miles of the route in the Knik
159 area, the preservation and possible acquisition of several selected historic
160 sites and structures, and the retention of a right-of-way along the route
161 through publicly owned lands.

162 The impacts of the proposal are based on the following assumptions:

- 163 1. Amendment of the National Trails System Act to include
164 a category of National Historic Trails which would not
165 require the development of a continuous recreational
166 trail and which would not prohibit the use of motorized
167 vehicles along the route.
- 168 2. The State of Alaska and involved municipal (Borough)
169 governments identification and retention of a right-
170 of-way along the route through State or Borough lands.
- 171 3. Right-of-way identification across publicly owned lands
171 that would not be restricted to a particular mode of travel,
172 but could be used at some later time for construction of a
172 road, railroad, hiking trail, off-road vehicle trail, or
173 other transportation facility.
- 174 4. Native corporation's identification and actuation of a
175 right-of-way along the route through their holdings.

IMPACT ON SUBSISTENCE USES

The proposal does not affect existing jurisdiction or responsibility of the State of Alaska over fish and wildlife resources along the route for subsistence or sport purposes. Fishing, hunting, and trapping would continue under applicable Federal and State regulations. Other subsistence activities, such as berry picking, wood cutting, etc., would also continue along the route under existing permit requirements for wood and logs.

The use of power boats and snow machines, commonly used by local villagers in hunting, trapping, and fishing activities and in travel between villages would continue along the route. As is the case now on public lands, off-road vehicles could be regulated if significant environmental damage was occurring or user conflicts arose. No such controls are anticipated in those areas where subsistence uses are occurring.

IMPACT ON MINING

Placer mining is currently taking place along the proposed route in the Flat, Ophir, Poorman, and Nome areas. Most of this mining occurs on valid mining claims. No acquisition or infringement on these claims is proposed. Sufficient public land, and in most cases road right-of-way, is present in these areas to insure public access along the general route through these historic mining areas.

198 In these and perhaps other areas where potential for additional mineral
199 development is high, the location of a right-of-way along the route would be
200 designed to avoid potential conflicts with mining. Furthermore, the retention
201 of an approximately 25-foot right-of-way would not remove significant amounts
202 of land from possible mining activities.

203

203 There are several historically significant sites such as the townsites of
204 Iditarod, Flat, and Ophir where historic structures, implements, or other
205 remnants of the Gold Rush era may merit protection or rehabilitation. Some
206 of these sites or structures may be located on mining claims or privately owned
207 mining sites. Under this proposal, the land manager would first seek to work
208 with the claimant or site owner in protecting or restoring the historic remains.
209 If such a cooperative agreement could not be worked out, the site, structure, or
210 remnant would be purchased. Although such a purchase would attempt to limit
211 acquisition to the minimum necessary to protect the historic values, it is
212 possible that some small parcels of lands used in mining activities would be
213 purchased.

216

216

216 IMPACT ON TRANSPORTATION LAND USE

217

217 Several major segments of the proposed route include highways, roads, the
218 Alaska Railroad, and rivers used by barges. The proposal would not alter
219 current uses of these transportation arteries. It is proposed that several
220 signs identifying and describing the historic route be placed along portions
221 of the route overlain, parallel, or accessible by the highway net in the

222 Seward to Knik area. The impact of such signing on traffic flow is considered
223 slight.

224
224 Substantial segments of the proposed route near towns and villages are cur-
225 rently used by local people in traveling between villages; camps; and hunting,
226 trapping, and fishing areas. In the summer months, the Yukon River segment
227 included in the proposed route is used by motor boats. However, most of this
228 local use is by snow machine and, to a lesser extent, dog sled and showshoeing
229 during the winter season. The proposal will not prohibit such use and will
230 regulate off-road vehicle use along the route only if significant environmental
231 damage is occurring. No such regulations are anticipated.

232
232 The proposal also calls for the acquisition of approximately 1-1/2 miles of
233 right-of-way through private lands in the Knik area, the retention of a right-
234 of-way along the historic route through public lands, and the protection and
235 possible acquisition of significant historic sites or structures along the
236 route. The proposal also would permit the construction of roads along most
236 of the trail right-of-way if desired at some future time.

237
237 Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act of 1966 (P. L. 89-670),
237 as amended, defined as a national policy:

238
238 . . . that special effort should be made to preserve the natural
238 beauty of the countryside and public park and recreation lands,
238 wildlife and waterfowl refuges, and historic sites.

239

239 Section 4(f) specifically requires that the Secretary of Transportation:

239

239 . . . shall cooperate and consult with the Secretaries of the
240 Interior, Housing and Urban Development, and Agriculture and
240 with the States in developing transportation plans and programs
240 that include measures to maintain or enhance the natural beauty
241 of lands tranversed. After the effective date of the Federal
241 Aid Highway Act of 1968, the Sectetary (of Transportation)
241 shall not approve any program or project which requires the uses
242 of any publicly owned land from a public park, recreation area,
242 or wildlife and waterfowl refuge of national, State, or local
242 significance as determined by the Federal, State, or local officials
244 having jurisdiction thereof, or any land from an historic site of
244 national, State, or local significance as so determined by such
244 officials unless (1) there is no feasible and prudent alternative to
244 the use of such land, and (2) such program includes all possible
244 planning to minimize harm to such park, recreational area, wildlife
244 and waterfowl refuge, or historic site resulting from such use.

245

245 Although the State Department of Highways currently is not proposing any
245 construction of new roads along the proposed route, a Highway Department
246 planning map dated July 1974 identified possible long-range needs for surface
246 transportation along most of the route. Because of the linear nature of the
247 Iditarod Trail, there is some possibility that planned transportation projects
247 could conflict with the declaration
247 of national policy expressed in Section 4(f).

248

248 If a transportation project or program also:

248

248 1. required the use of public or private land from an
248 historic site;

249

249 2. required the approval of the Secretary of Transportation
249 because it was funded under the Federal Aid Highway Act or
249 other license, grant, plan, or agreement, etc., requiring
250 the approval of the Secretary of Transportation; and

250

250 3. was found to be of Federal, State, or local significance
250 as determined by the officials having jurisdiction over
250 them;

251

251 then the Secretary of Transportation could not approve it unless he first
251 consulted with the Secretaries of the Interior, Housing and Urban Develop-
252 ment, and Agriculture to secure their counsel before he determines that there
252 is no "prudent and feasible alternative" and that "all possible planning to
253 minimize harm" has been included. The assistance and guidance given to the
254 Secretary of Transportation in the consultation process help him to assure
255 that the legal provisos of Section 4(f) are being accomplished adequately.
255 The ultimate decision on the applicability of Section 4(f) rests with the
256 Secretary of Transportation (unless a Federal court intervenes).

257

257 All historic sites subsequently identified and included in this proposal
258 would involve consideration under Section 4(f) if a transportation project
259 was proposed which would impact those sites. Such considerations could

require relocation of routing of special design which could increase costs of the project or possibly preclude development in the locality if there were no feasible and prudent alternative.

Only one segment of the route could be considered a new recreation area as a result of this proposal. Acquisition of 1-1/2 miles of trail right-of-way easement through private lands in the Knik area is proposed and this section along with the remaining proposed section between Knik and the Susitna River currently receiving significant recreation use would be considered recreation lands under Section 4(f) if a transportation project were proposed along the route. Due to these considerations, construction costs could be increased and alignment of the transportation routes altered.

The other existing recreational sections are all dedicated trails within Chugach State Park and Chugach National Forest and would require consideration under 4(f) with or without the proposed action.

Over virtually all of the route west of the Susitna River, no significant historic remains of the route itself, such as wagon ruts, exist. Because no recreational development is proposed over most of the route, because only small isolated sites are proposed for historic preservation, and because the proposal specifically permits the construction and inclusion of highways and other surface transportation systems over the route, it is not intended that 4(f) considerations are applicable to the proposed route itself but only to the specific historic sites and recreation areas incorporated in the National Historic Trail designation.

281 Overall, the short-term impacts on transportation are considered slight.
282 The long-term impacts could be slight to moderate depending on the alignments
283 of surface transportation projects which might be proposed in the future.

294

294

294 IMPACT ON LAND OWNERSHIP AND USE OF LAND

295

295 It is proposed that a right-of-way or easement be acquired through approximately
296 1-1/2 miles of private land in the Knik area. It is also proposed that, should
297 it not be possible to work out a cooperative management agreement with involved
298 landowners or claimants to protect specific historic resources, such sites,
299 structures, or remnants would be purchased. A right-of-way through involved Federal,
300 State, and Borough lands would be retained in public ownership.

301

301 The precise number of privately owned historic sites that might require acqui-
301 sition, is not known, but the total area should be
302 less than 30 acres. Coupled with the 5 acres to be purchased in the Knik
303 area for trail right-of-way, a total of not more than 35 acres would be removed from
304 private ownership. The trail segment to be purchased in the Knik area is currently
305 used by recreationists, and an alignment would be chosen to avoid all
306 dwellings, agricultural areas, and other private developments. Some increase
307 in recreation use can be expected in the Knik area due to increased public
308 knowledge of the historic route brought about by the proposal. Increased
309 ,littering, trespassing, and some loss of privacy could result on private
310 lands due to this increased use.

311

311 Some historic sites may be located on private lands used for guiding, mining,
312 or residential purposes. To the extent they are acquired, some infringement
313 on these private lands and businesses could result. The amount of land
314 acquired would be minimized to that necessary to protect the historic resources
315 involved. Although public visitation of such historic sites would be low,
316 occasional inspections may result in some loss of privacy of landowners.

317

317 A right-of-way approximately 25 feet wide through the approximately 1,700
318 miles of public lands would result in the withholding of about 5,750
319 acres from future disposition to private land ownership. Approximately 500
320 miles of the route, or 1,700 acres, is overlain or closely paralleled by
321 roads, railroads, and watercourses, or is located on formally dedicated
322 State Park or National Forest land which would remain in public
323 ownership regardless of this proposal. The route traverses literally
324 millions of acres of public lands which could not be disposed of or developed by
325 the private sector, without specific Federal legislation.

329

329

329

IMPACT ON RECREATION

330

330 Near the Anchorage urban area are several existing route segments which are
331 receiving significant recreational use by hikers, cross-country
332 skiers, snow machines, and dog mushers. Publicity resulting from this action
333 will cause an undetermined increase in recreational use of these segments.
334 Increased crowding, littering, erosion, user conflicts, and other related
335 impacts could result from this increased use. It is not known to what degree
336 these impacts could be attributed to this action. Existing use is currently

337 contributing to these impacts and future use is expected to increase sub-
338 stantially with or without the proposal.

339

339 Acquisition of a trail right-of-way or easement in the Knik area will insure
340 public recreational use of that segment in the future.

341

341 The proposal calls for the study of segments for potential development as
342 recreational trails. Such a study could lead to subsequent development of
343 additional recreational trails and facilities which would contribute to satis-
344 fying the demand for trail-oriented recreation in the Anchorage urban area as
345 identified in the current State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan.

346

346 Under the proposal, significant historic sites or structures would be identi-
347 fied and protected. Increased awareness and publicity of these sites will
348 result in a small increase in recreational visitation for historic
349 interpretive purposes.

350

350 Due to the proposal, increased attention would be placed on those route seg-
351 ments not accessible from the highway system or developed as recreational trails.
352 A small increase in the amount of hiking, cross-country skiing, snow machining,
353 and dog sledding might result, especially between the Susitna River and the
354 Alaska Range.

355

355 The proposal calls for the signing of various portions of the route which
356 follow or are accessible from the existing road systems between Seward and
357 Knik. Such marking and interpretative signing will increase travelers' and
358 recreationists' appreciation of the area's history and possibly increase the
359 enjoyment of pleasure driving along the route.

360

The retention of a right-of-way through public lands and acquisition of a short segment through private lands will insure continued use of the route by the annual Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race. This race has attracted great statewide attention and even national news coverage. As a spectator sport, the economic value of the race is of statewide significance. The proposal would further increase public attention to the race.

Use of off-road vehicles could be regulated if significant environmental damage or user conflicts were occurring. Regulation of off-road vehicles is presently occurring on all but one section of the route currently receiving significant recreational use. The section between Knik and Susitna receives use by snow machiners, dog mushers, and cross-country skiers during the winter months. If significant user conflicts develop or are in existence, the land manager may propose regulations along the route in this section which would seek to alleviate these conflicts. Some loss of freedom of recreational travel may result.

IMPACT ON WATER QUALITY

Existing water quality along most of the proposed route is high. The proposal would not result in any actions that would significantly affect water quality.

Some increase in recreational use of existing trails near the Anchorage area due to the proposal might result in increased disposal of human wastes which may enter streams or lakes and erosion problems along trails possibly resulting in an increase in sediments in streams. These impacts due to the proposal are slight.

384

385

385 The retention of or acquisition of an easement or right-of-way, the protection
386 of historic resources, and signing along portions of the route will not have
387 significant impacts on scenic qualities of the route area. Signing would
388 only occur along existing roads or highways and would not impair views or
389 disturb vegetation in the area.

390

390 Increased recreational use of the few existing recreation trails along the
391 route due to this action may result in increased terrain or vegetation damage,
392 littering, and chance of fires. Such occurrences could impact local scenic
393 values. Because recreational use is expected to increase with or without the
394 proposal, and because similar impacts can occur with existing use levels as
395 well as increased levels, the impact of increased recreational use due to this
396 action on scenic values is not perceived, but is expected to be minor.

397

397

397

IMPACT ON SOILS AND VEGETATION

398

398 No actions in the proposal will result in significant disturbance or destruction
399 of existing soils and vegetation along the route. The management of the route
400 area would provide for the regulation of off-road vehicles if their use
401 resulted in significant damage to soils or vegetation along the route.

402

402 Increased use of existing recreational trails included in the proposal would
403 result from increased publicity of the route. Such use could cause increased
404 soil compaction, loss of plant cover, erosion, and threat of forest fires along
405 these existing trails.

406

406 Except for fires, such impacts would be confined to a narrow trail area already
407 receiving these impacts.

408
408
408
408 IMPACT ON TIMBER

409
409 Commercial harvesting of timber is occurring in the Seward area. Potential
410 commercial timber harvest areas have been identified along the Yukon River,
411 in the Kuskokwim River valley, and in the Susitna Valley. Firewood and house
412 logs are being cut near villages along the route. No timber is being harvested
413 along the specific route in the Seward area, which coincides with the Alaska
414 Railroad right-of-way, and no impact on timber harvesting by the proposal
415 would result in this area.

416
416 Potential timber harvesting or wood gathering within a 25-foot right-of-way
417 along the route would not necessarily be prohibited by the proposal. However,
418 whether or not permits or leases for the taking of timber were issued, the amount
419 of such timber affected within the route right-of-way or easement would be
420 minimal in relation to timber available in the surrounding region.

423
423
423 IMPACT ON FISH AND WILDLIFE

424
424 A variety of large game animals, smaller mammals, birds, and fish are found
425 throughout the route area.

426 Increased public awareness of the historic route and increased use of existing
427 recreational trails are expected due to the proposal. Such use
428 could increase disturbances of animals in the local area causing them to move
429 to different areas. Hunting is presently permitted along some trails and in-
430 creases could reduce local game populations. Increased fishing could also lead
431 to reduced numbers and size of individual fish in local populations.

432

432 The proposal will not affect the jurisdiction or responsibility of the State
433 of Alaska over fish and wildlife resources associated with the Iditarod route.
434 Fishing, hunting, and trapping would continue under applicable Federal and
434 State regulations.

435

435

435 IMPACT ON WATER RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

436

436 No proposals currently exist for water resource development projects along the
436 route. Any future proposals which would involve historic or recreational re-
437 sources of the proposed route might be required to include replacement, salvage,
437 or other mitigating actions which could increase project costs.

438

438

438 IMPACTS ON HISTORIC AND ARCHEOLOGICAL FEATURES

438

438 Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (P. L. 89-665)
438 states:

439

439 The head of any Federal agency having direct or indirect juris-
439 diction over a proposed Federal or federally assisted undertaking
440 in any State and the head of any Federal department or independent
440 agency having authority to license any undertaking shall, prior to
441 the approval of the expenditure of any Federal funds on the under-
441 taking or prior to the issuance of any license, as the case may be,
443 take into account the effect of the undertaking on any district,
443 site, building, structure, or object that is included in the National
443 Register. The head of any such Federal agency shall afford the
443 Advisory Council on Historic Preservation established under title II
443 of this Act a reasonable opportunity to comment with regard to such
443 undertaking.

444
444 The National Register of Historic Places, as published in the Federal Register
445 of February 10, 1976, contained five sites associated with the Iditarod Trail.
446 Identification of other significant historic and archeological resources along
447 the route and protection of these resources through rehabilitation and/or
448 acquisition projects is also required by Executive Order 11593, "Protection
449 and Enhancement of the Cultural Environment."

450
450 Professional surveys and an increase in public awareness of the Iditarod
451 route will probably result in the discovery of additional historic and
452 cultural resources. In some cases, increased awareness will result in the
453 maintenance of structures or remnants which might otherwise be damaged,
454 destroyed, or removed in the near future due to fire, flooding, vandalism,
454 and natural decay.

Conversely, increased publicity of the route and an increase in visitation of historic sites and structures could result in possible loss of historic remnants through vandalism and souvenir collection.

At this time, the most likely conclusion is that, if implemented, the proposal will result in an effect on sites eligible for or already on the National Register. Whether the effect will be "adverse" or "not adverse" cannot be determined at this time. Rather, this determination would be made later, if legislation is passed authorizing the trail, by the agencies responsible for implementing its management.

See Appendix A for the Alaska State Historic Preservation Officer's letter of concurrence on the methods proposed in this statement to achieve compliance with Executive Order 11593 and Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.

IMPACT ON LOCAL ECONOMY

Few, if any, resources found within the proposed 25-foot wide route corridor are currently contributing significantly to local economics.

Subsistence activities occurring within or adjacent to the proposed route, such as hunting, fishing, and trapping, would not be affected by the proposal.

Active mining areas and mining claims would be avoided in the location of the right-of-way to be retained. In most cases, a road right-of-way is currently owned by the State of Alaska through these areas.

481 Vehicle uses, both on-road and off-road presently occurring along the route,
482 which may play a role in local economies, will be permitted by this
483 proposal. Off-road vehicles could be regulated if significant environmental
484 damage or user conflicts occurred.

485

485 The proposal is expected to result in an increase in recreational use of
486 existing trails near the Anchorage urban area.

487

487 Food, gas, recreational equipment and related purchases made by these
488 additional recreationists could raise revenues of local businesses slightly.

490

490

490

IMPACT ON WILDERNESS VALUES

491

491 Large sections of the route are accessible only by airplane and are highly
492 primitive showing little evidence of man.

493

493 No developments are proposed in those areas having wilderness values. Some
494 increase in recreational use of existing trails and other route areas may
495 result in greater disturbance of soils, vegetation, and wildlife along these
496 trails. Some portions of these trails traverse areas showing little evidence
497 of man, except for the trail itself.

498

498 The proposal provides for the regulation of off-road vehicles along the route
499 if significant environmental damage occurs.

002

002 Measures to mitigate environmental impacts resulting from the proposed inclusion
003 of the Iditarod National Historic Trail in the National Trails System include
004 the following:

005

005 1. An inventory of historic resources along the proposed route and
006 acquisition and/or protection of significant sites, structures, or remnants
007 to help management agencies prevent theft or vandalism due to increased public
008 knowledge of the historic route and related sites.

009

009 2. An inventory of route segments having potential for development as new
010 recreation trails or extensions or improvements to existing recreational trails
011 is proposed. This action could lead to the development of additional recreational
012 resources which could help distribute the increase of recreational use of existing
013 trails due to the proposal. The distribution of use could also lessen the possible
014 environmental impacts of intensive or concentrated use on soils, vegetation, wild-
014 life, and recreation experience.

015

015 3. The regulation of off-road vehicles if increased use of
016 some trail segments resulting from this action caused significant environmental
017 damage or user conflicts.

018

018 4. The establishment of a right-of-way through Federal lands, the acquisition
019 of right-of-way through State and local lands, and the acquisition of right-of-way
020 or easement through private lands to minimize interference

021 or infringement on existing and potential private lands, dwellings, mining
022 sites, agricultural areas, and other developments.

023

023 5. Signing along existing road systems would be located where traffic
024 interference would be minimized and views unobstructed.

025

025 6. Multiple use of rights-of-way retained through public lands to provide
026 for development of future complimentary transportation facilities.

028

028 Minor unavoidable adverse environmental impacts will occur as a result of the
029 proposal.

030

030 1. Additional regulations to protect the existing environment and recrea-
031 tional experience from increasing numbers of recreationists using existing
032 trails along the route. Regulations on use would cause a loss of personal
033 freedom in traveling when, where, or how a person might desire.

035

035 2. Increased litter, water pollution, fire threat, soil compaction,
036 and disturbance of plant and animal communities with increased recrea-
037 tional use of existing trails cannot be fully mitigated.

038

038 3. Some loss of private lands through acquisition of trail rights-of-way
039 or easements and possible acquisition of historic sites and structure, will
040 result. Thus, prerogatives of private use of such lands or structures would be
041 removed. The property tax base would be reduced minutely. Some historic re-
042 sources may be located on mining claims and some lands utilized in mining
042 activities may be infringed upon.

043

043 4. Some removal or damage of historic resources not located or adequately
044 protected due to theft or vandalism resulting from increased public
045 awareness of the historic route and related sites may occur.

046

046 5. If future construction of roads involving Federal funding takes place
047 along some segments of the route, higher costs of transportation facilities

048 may result in order to avoid or mitigate adverse impacts on historic sites or
049 recreational areas associated with the route, in accordance with Section 4(f)
050 of the Department of Transportation Act of 1966, P. L. 89-670.

052

052 Inclusion of the Iditarod National Historic Trail in the National Trails System
053 would result in no actions foreclosing or lessening long-term productivity of
054 the included area. Existing short-term uses of the environment along the
055 route will remain substantially unaltered under the proposal.

056

056 The retention of an approximately 25-foot-wide right-of-way through public
057 lands, the acquisition of an approximately 1-1/2-mile right-of-way or easement
058 and the possible acquisition of selected historic sites or structures will
059 have minimal long-range economic impact on existing or potential private lands
060 or properties.

061 VII. IRREVERSIBLE OR IRRETRIEVABLE COMMITMENTS OF RESOURCES WHICH WOULD BE
062 INVOLVED IN THE PROPOSED ACTION

063

063 No significant physical changes to the existing environment are planned in the
064 proposal. Any uses or environmental impacts caused by the proposal, such as
065 signing, increased recreational use, and protection of historic resources,
066 would not result in irreversible or irretrievable losses of resources.

067

067 Designation of the Iditarod National Historic Trail can be modified or reversed
068 by the Congress should it be in the national interest at some future time.

070

070 Alternatives considered to the proposed designation of the Iditarod National
071 Historic Trail within the National Trails System are as follows:

072

072 1. No action.

073

073 2. Designation of fewer route segments.

074

074 3. No reservation or acquisition of rights-of-way, easements, or
075 historic resources.

076

076 4. Designation as a National Scenic Trail.

077

077 5. Designation as a National Recreation Trail.

078

078 6. Inclusion of the route in a State trails system.

079

079 7. Inclusion of the route on the National Register of Historic Places.

080

080

080 ALTERNATIVE 1 - NO ACTION

081

081 The approximately 2,037 miles of route associated with the Iditarod Trail would
082 not be designated an historic trail within the National Trails System. No
083 rights-of-way would be retained through public lands, no rights-of-way or
084 easement would be acquired along approximately 1-1/2 miles of private lands,

085 and an inventory and protection plan, including possible acquisition, would not
086 be implemented for significant historic resources along the route. Also, a
087 study of segments for potential development or improvement as recreation
088 trails would not be undertaken and signing of segments of the route would
089 not occur.

090

090 Impacts

091

091 Public knowledge and appreciation of the historic route and related sites
092 would not be as great, thus reducing the impact of increased visitation on
093 existing recreational trails and historic resources.

094

094 Public lands along the route could be disposed of at some future time. Private
095 ownership and/or development of the route could prevent public access along the
096 route which could adversely affect current uses of route segments for recrea-
097 tional, subsistence, and commercial purposes. Historical resources could
098 also be adversely affected. Some economic benefits might result from
099 private ownership of these public lands through property taxes and utilization
100 of resources along the route such as timber, agricultural production, or
101 mineral extraction.

102

102 Private lands in the Knik area would not be acquired or infringed upon thereby
103 not restricting prerogatives of individual owners. Public access could be
104 blocked in this area and substantial existing recreational uses curtailed.

105

105 Historic sites, structures, and other remnants would not be commemorated or
106 protected. Many of these structures and other remains currently found along

107 the route would be destroyed, damaged, or removed within the near future due
108 to vandalism and the forces of nature.
109
109 Potential development or improvement of selected segments as recreational
110 trails as a result of the proposed study might not occur. To the extent these
111 trails fulfilled local demand for trail-oriented recreation, no action would
112 adversely affect recreational resources.
113
113 Possible future development of roads along the route might not involve higher
114 costs or engineering problems incurred in conforming to provisions of Section
115 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act of 1966 (P. L. 89-670) to avoid
116 or mitigate impacts on historic or recreation sites identified by natural history
117 trails designation.

118

118

118 ALTERNATIVE 2 - DESIGNATION OF FEWER ROUTE SEGMENTS

119

119 All the approximately 2,037 miles of historic routes would not be designated.
120 Rather, only selected segments would receive national commemoration and pro-
121 tection of rights-of-way and historic resources. Segments considered for
122 designation were: (1) the route from Seward through Knik to the Iditarod gold
123 fields, and (2) the route from Knik to Iditarod.

124

124 Impacts of Designation of Seward-Iditarod Route

125

125 This action would commemorate and increase public appreciation of the primary
126 historic route used in connection with the rush to the Iditarod gold fields.

127 Related historic routes not designated would not be commemorated and would thus
128 receive little publicity or appreciation.

129
129 Historic sites or structures would not be identified or protected along
130 undesignated routes and would probably be damaged, destroyed, or removed in
131 the near future. Portions of the routes between Iditarod and Nome traverse
132 public lands where a right-of-way would not be reserved. If disposed of,
133 future public access along those route segments could be lost. Such existing
134 uses of the historic route, such as the annual Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race,
135 could be curtailed or altered. Any future development of resources by private
136 owners of the right-of-way area could result in some beneficial impacts on
137 local economics.

138
138 Purchase of little, if any, private land is anticipated along the route
139 between Iditarod and Nome. Thus, impacts of such acquisitions would be minimal
140 with or without the proposal along this segment.

141
141 Possible future development of roads along the route from Iditarod to Nome
142 might not involve higher costs or engineering problems incurred in conforming
143 to provisions of Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act to avoid
144 or mitigate impacts on historic sites identified by designation of that segment.

145
145 The adverse impacts of increased recreational use due to designation would not
146 change by omitting the Iditarod-Nome routes as all the existing recreational
147 trails are located within the Seward-Iditarod segment. Little difference in
148 impact would be expected in adverse impacts on historic resources due to
149 increased public awareness because a majority of historic sites and structures

150 are located in the Seward-Iditarod segment, and because those located along
151 the Iditarod-Nome segment are extremely remote.

152

152 Impacts of Designation of Knik-Iditarod Route

153

153 Impacts would be similar to those described for the Seward-Iditarod route
154 except for those associated with recreation. All existing developed recreational
155 trails are located between Seward and Knik. Without the designation, these
156 trails would probably not attract as many recreationists. Both the heightened
157 recreational experience due to historic appreciation and the adverse impacts
158 on soils, vegetation, wildlife, and other environmental components caused by
159 this increase in use would not occur.

160

160 With the possible exception of the Knik-Susitna segment, no designated seg-
161 ments of the historic route would be accessible from the existing highway
162 net. Thus, historic appreciation and recreational use of the route would be
163 more restricted and less interpretative signing would occur.

164

164

164 ALTERNATIVE 3 - DESIGNATION WITHOUT RESERVATION OR ACQUISITION
165 OF RIGHTS-OF-WAY, EASEMENTS, OR HISTORIC RESOURCES

166

166 The approximate 2,037 miles of historic routes would be designated as a National
167 Historic Trail within the National Trails System. No other actions would be
168 proposed.

169

170

170 The routes would receive commemoration and national recognition. Recreational
171 uses of existing recreational trails along the route could be expected to
172 increase and some adverse environmental impacts would occur due to this increased
173 use. Also, some increase in the quality of recreational experience due to the
174 increase in historical appreciation could be expected. Some increase in
175 spectator interest and appreciation of the annual Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race
176 might be expected.

177

177 The remaining impacts on existing and potential private lands, historic re-
178 sources, and future transportation projects would be similar to those associated
179 with the No Action alternative. Vandalism and removal of historic resources
180 along the route would be greater than with the No Action alternative because
181 public knowledge of the historic route and related resources would be greater.

182

182

182 ALTERNATIVE 4 - DESIGNATION AS A NATIONAL SCENIC TRAIL

183

183 The National Trails System Act (P. L. 90-543, 1968) created a category of
184 trails known as National Scenic Trails. National scenic trails are designated
185 only by Act of Congress. Because of their special characteristics, national
186 scenic trails should be capable of promoting interest and attracting visitors
187 throughout the United States.

188

188 National scenic trails are designed for hiking and other compatible uses. The
189 Act prohibits the use of motorized equipment on those trails. They should be

extended trails, usually several hundred miles in length, and be continuous where feasible. National scenic trails should have adequate public access at reasonable intervals to allow for trips of various lengths and they should be primarily land-based.

Thus, all or major portions of the historic route would be designated a national scenic trail and a continuous summer hiking-type trail could be constructed. Recreation sites would be developed and connecting trails either developed or improved.

Existing roads and rivers would not be included in the designation.

Impacts

The construction of a major recreational trail would increase recreational facilities and opportunities significantly. This resource would substantially increase Statewide trail-oriented recreational uses and probably would attract out-of-state visitation. Economic impacts of this recreational use could be moderate on local businesses. Historic resources would receive significant recognition and protection and would also attract significant visitation.

The construction of a trail and subsequent use would also result in disturbance of soils, vegetation, wildlife, and possibly water quality, and wilderness values along an approximately 25-foot corridor, several hundred miles long. If not adequately protected, historic resources could be readily removed or damaged by increased visitation.

211 The construction of a continuous hiking-type trail 300 miles long would cost
212 an estimated \$10,000 to \$20,000 per mile or \$3,000,000 to \$6,000,000. Maintenance
213 and management costs would run \$200 to \$300 per mile or \$60,000 to \$90,000 per
214 year. A 1,099-mile trail (Seward to Nome) would cost more than three times these
215 amounts. Such expense would have an impact on Federal monies available for
216 other projects and would contribute significantly to the local economy.

217

217 This alternative could preclude or substantially alter possible future
218 transportation development projects along the route. Such projects would
219 have to be evaluated in terms of their impact on the recreational and
220 historical facilities under provisions of Section 4(f) of the Department
221 of Transportation Act of 1966.

222

222 The National scenic trail designation would prohibit the use of vehicles
223 along the route. Sections of existing road systems would not be included
224 and would have to be avoided in the trail alignment. Off-road vehicle use
225 for subsistence, recreational, and perhaps commercial purposes is presently
226 occurring along some sections of the route. Prohibition of these uses would
227 cause significant adverse impacts on local travel between villages, on hunting,
228 trapping, fishing, and other subsistence uses, on access to mining and guiding
229 areas, and on recreational off-road vehicle use.

230

230

230 ALTERNATIVE 5 - DESIGNATION AS A NATIONAL RECREATION TRAIL

231

231 The National Trails System Act (P. L. 90-543, 1968) provided for the designa-
232 tion of National Recreation Trails. Inclusion in the National Trails

233 System as a National Recreation Trail requires approval by the Secretary of
234 the Interior (or Secretary of Agriculture if National Forest lands are involved).
235 To qualify, a trail must be ready for public use and be reasonably accessible
236 to urban areas (2-hours travel time).

237

237 Probably only the Johnson-Bench Creek Trail and the Crow Pass Trail administered
238 by the Forest Service, the Eagle River segment from Crow Pass administered by
239 the State Division of Parks, and the Indian Creek Pass Trail also managed by
240 State Parks would currently qualify as National Recreation Trails. These
241 trails have a combined mileage of approximately 67 miles. The land managers
242 must consent to the national designation.

243

243 Impacts

244

244 Most of the historic routes associated with the Iditarod Gold Rush era would
245 not be commemorated and receive national recognition. Most historic resources
246 would not be protected and would probably be destroyed, damaged, or removed
247 in the near future. Public access along most of the historic route would not
248 be insured. Potential development of additional recreational trails along the
249 route probably would not occur.

250

250 Those trails designated would receive increased publicity and use. The rec-
251 reational experience would probably be increased due to increased historic
252 appreciation. Increased use would cause some adverse impacts on soils, vegeta-
253 tion, wildlife, and other environmental components associated with the immediate
254 trail area.

255

255 Other impacts discussed for the No Action alternative would be similar to
256 those associated with the non-designated portions of the route.

257

257

257 ALTERNATIVE 6 - INCLUSION OF THE ROUTE IN A STATE TRAILS SYSTEM

258

258 No state trails system currently exists. However, the "Alaska Recreation Trail
259 Plan," (1975) part of the State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, recommends
260 a State legislatively established Alaska Trail System. The plan recommends that
261 all government agencies should identify trails of historical significance on
262 their land and accept responsibility for their management, including maintenance
263 and interpretation. It further recommends that the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation's
264 study of Alaska's Gold Rush Trails should identify those historic trails which
265 are worthy of inclusion in the National Trail System and should propose jurisdictional
266 responsibilities for the trails, and recommend appropriations of funds to
267 upgrade, interpret, and maintain them. All designated national trails in
268 Alaska should be included in the Alaska Trail System.

269

269 Impacts

270

270 Inclusion in the proposed State Trails System would be dependent on inclusion
271 in a national system. Impacts would be the same as those previously described
272 with designation as a national historic trail.

273

273 If only those segments located on state lands were included in the state
274 system, impacts would vary somewhat. Several hundred miles of routes traversing

275 Federal lands would not receive recognition, nor would any of the route receive
276 national commemoration and publicity. Historic sites on Federal lands would
277 not receive any special protection and those on State lands would not neces-
278 sarily be protected by virtue of inclusion of the route in the State Trails
279 System.

280
280 Rights-of-way through Federal lands would not necessarily be reserved and
281 could be disposed of at some later time. Public access could be denied and
282 some economic benefit from property taxes or resource developments could
283 result from private ownership of the route.

284
284 Inclusion in only a state system would probably not increase use of existing
285 recreational trails on State lands as much as national designation. Adverse
286 impacts on soils, vegetation, wildlife, and other environmental components
287 along the trails due to increased use would be less than with national desig-
288 nation.

289

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289 ALTERNATIVE 7 - INCLUSION OF THE ROUTE
290 ON THE NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

291

291 The Historic Sites Act of 1935 and the Historic Preservation Act of 1966 called
292 for a list of properties worthy of preservation for their historic value. Within
293 Alaska, nominations for inclusion on the Register are made by the State Historic
294 Preservation Officer in the State Division of Parks. The Secretary of the Interior
295 accepts these nominations of districts, sites, buildings, and structures which
296 are significant in American history in that they are associated with the events

297 that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history;
298 they embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of
299 construction; they have yielded, or may likely yield, information important
300 in prehistory or history; or other criteria.

301

301 Sites included on the National Register need not be federally owned. Regardless
302 of ownership, these sites are eligible for Federal matching grants to the State
303 for acquisition or restoration projects.

304

304 Under existing Federal and State criteria, it is not known how many sites along
305 the route, or if all or portions of the route itself, would qualify for inclusion
306 on the National Register. The Bureau of Land Management is preparing
307 a proposal to the State Liaison Officer requesting nomination of the entire
308 Seward-Nome Trail to the National Register.

319

319 Impacts

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320 If the entire route or major portions would qualify, inclusion on the National
321 Register would commemorate and give national attention to the historic resources
322 of the route. Grants could be made available for the protection of historic
323 resources. Rights-of-way through public lands would probably be retained,
324 thus insuring public access.

325

325 Emphasis would be placed on historic preservation rather than recreation use.
326 The acquisition of private lands in the Knik area would probably not occur
327 with such designation and future public access could be blocked. A study of
328 potential recreation trails along the route would not be undertaken and the

329 possibility of additional recreational facilities along the route would be
330 greatly reduced.
331
331 Only a slight increase in recreational uses of existing trails along the
332 route would be expected. Adverse environmental impact associated with an
333 increase in recreational use of trails would be minimal.
334
334 Further construction of transportation projects along the route would be
335 subject to both Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act of 1966
336 and Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (P. L. 89-
337 665). The latter Section states that any Federal agency having jurisdiction
338 over any Federal or federally assisted undertaking shall take into account
339 the effect of the undertaking on any historic resource included in the
340 National Register.
341
341 Such consideration could result in the relocation, redesign, or possibly
342 prohibition of a road or railroad which may be proposed along the route.

343 IX. CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION WITH OTHERS

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CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION IN THE DEVELOPMENT
OF PROPOSAL AND PREPARATION OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

The study of the Gold Rush trails in Alaska, and specifically the Iditarod Trail or Seward-Nome Route, was a cooperative effort under the leadership of the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation.

At an initial study meeting held in Anchorage on January 15, 1974, the following agencies were in attendance:

- Alaska State Department of Environmental Conservation
- Alaska State Department of Highways
- Alaska State Department of Fish and Game
- Alaska State Division of Parks
- Alaska State Historical Commission
- Alaska Bicentennial Commission
- Bureau of Land Management
- National Park Service
- Fish and Wildlife Service
- Federal-State Land Use Planning Commission
- U. S. Forest Service
- Office of the Governor, Planning and Research

In addition, an observer from the Alaska Federation of Natives was present.

364 During 1974 and 1975, several aerial and on-the-ground field inspections of
365 the route were made in which representatives from the following agencies
366 participated:

- 367 Bureau of Land Management
- 368 National Park Service
- 369 Alaska State Division of Parks
- 370 Office of the Secretary (Interior)
- 371

371 In November of 1974, a preliminary analysis of the Seward-Nome route
372 including findings and recommendations was distributed to over 50 Federal,
373 State, and local agencies; Native corporations; citizen groups; and private
374 individuals for review and comment.

375
375 Meetings were held in May and June of 1975 with Alaska State Division of
376 Parks, the Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, and the National
377 Park Service to discuss proposed revisions in the preliminary report.

378
378 Although there has been close coordination and consultation on the analysis
379 of the Seward-Nome route, the conclusions and recommendations are those of the
380 Bureau of Outdoor Recreation.

STATE OF ALASKA

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

DIVISION OF PARKS

JAY S. HAMMOND, GOVERNOR

323 E. 4TH AVENUE
ANCHORAGE 99501

April 8, 1976

RECEIVED
APR 15 1976

Re: 3330-1 (Iditarod Trail)

Maurice H. Lundy
Northwest Regional Director
U.S. Bureau of Outdoor Recreation
915 Second Avenue
Seattle, Washington 98174

Bureau of Outdoor Recreation
Pacific Northwest Regional Office


Dear Mr. ~~Lundy~~.

Maurice
As requested in your letter of April 2, 1976, we have reviewed the preliminary draft environmental impact statement for the proposed Iditarod National Historic Trail.

We concur with your finding that the proposed trail designation will have an effect on properties on, or eligible for, the National Register of Historic Places; and that the effect will not be adverse if the procedures described in the "Background of the Historic and Cultural Aspects of the Iditarod Trail DES" attachment to your letter are followed.

Please call or write if we can provide more information.

Sincerely,



Russell W. Cahill, Director
State Historic Preservation Officer

WSH/ml