

DRAFT George Parks Highway

Scenic Byway Corridor Partnership Plan



The George Parks Highway Scenic Byway

Corridor Partnership Plan - DRAFT



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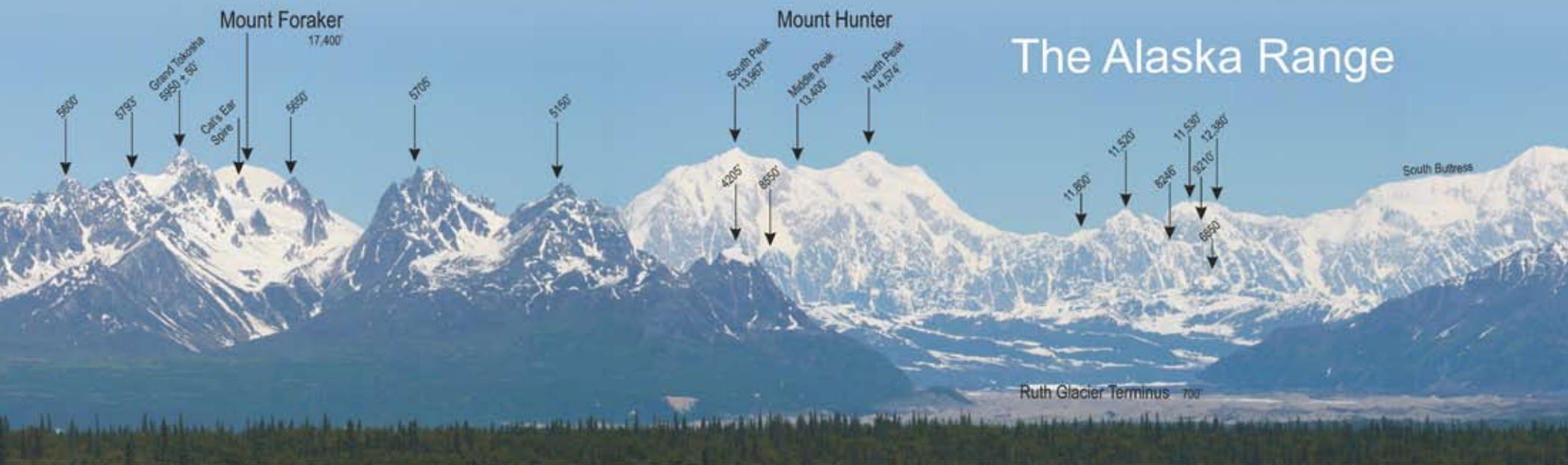
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Vision Statement

Take a journey on the Parks Byway into the wilds of Alaska. Experience breathtaking views clear to the horizon of majestic mountains, including Denali (Mt. McKinley), North America's highest peak. The Parks Highway Scenic Byway takes you from the birch and spruce forests of the Upper Susitna River Basin through the Alaska Range's wide-open alpine tundra. It passes steeply-carved hillsides, broad open plains, glacier-fed rivers, and clear water streams—a landscape carved over time by snow, ice, and other natural forces.

Through cooperative planning and continued sustainable development, the Parks Byway Community Partnership is dedicated to maintaining the scenic qualities of the byway corridor



and honoring the spirit of the last frontier by providing a safe, comfortable, and educational adventure to be enjoyed by every traveler. The Parks Byway Community Partnership further contributes to the communities and places of interest along the corridor by promoting tourism, supporting the local culture, and enhancing the economic base of the region.

The Parks Highway Scenic Byway is a place where people value their connection to the land for recreation, self-sufficiency, and continuing cultural traditions—a corridor in which the independent, frontier spirit of the people is reflected in the uniqueness of their rural communities.



1.

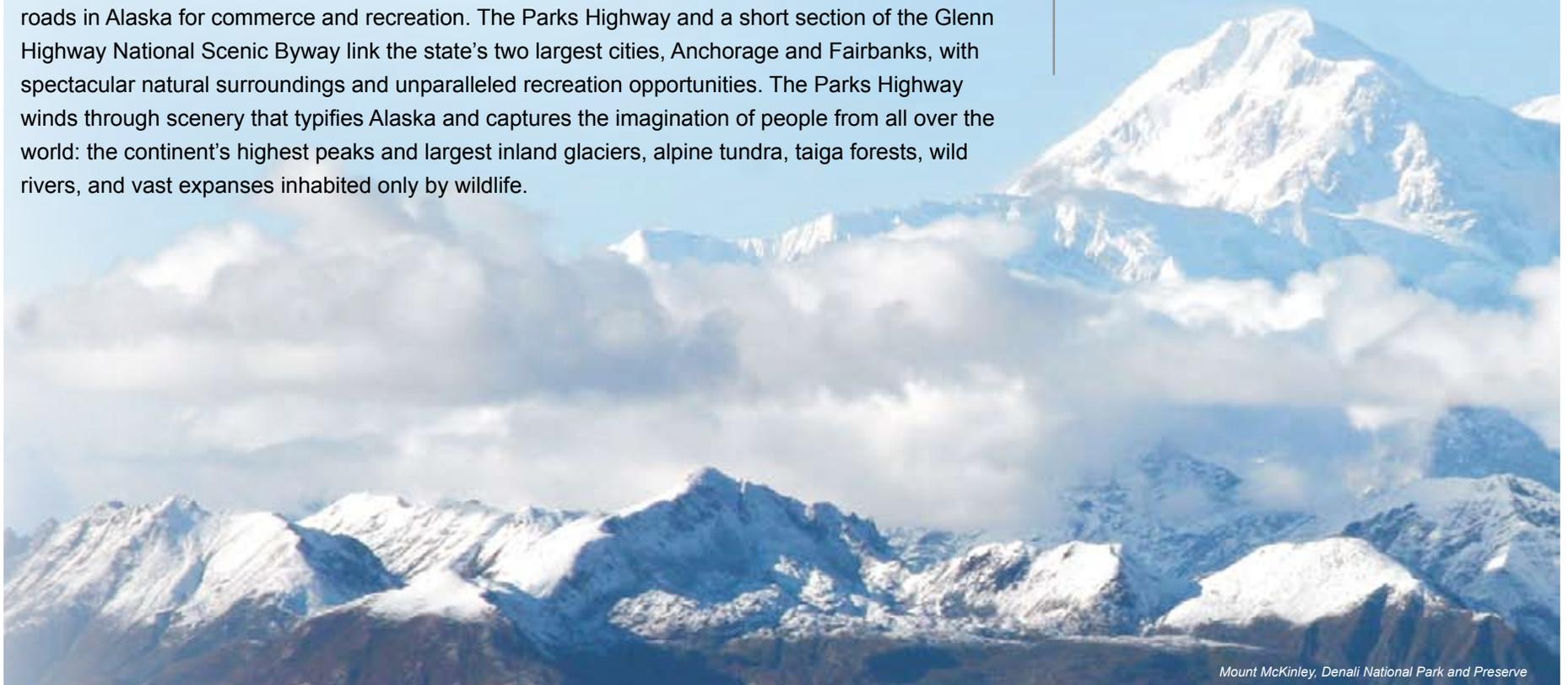
INTRODUCTION

The Parks Highway

“Have you been on the Parks yet?” If queried by visitors for insider advice on local hotspots, residents will typically ask travelers this question. A milestone journey, no trip to Alaska is considered complete without a voyage on the George Parks Highway. This route, commonly referred to as the Parks Highway, runs 323 miles from the Glenn Highway in the Matanuska Valley to Fairbanks in the Alaska Interior. Completed in 1971, this highway is one of the most important roads in Alaska for commerce and recreation. The Parks Highway and a short section of the Glenn Highway National Scenic Byway link the state’s two largest cities, Anchorage and Fairbanks, with spectacular natural surroundings and unparalleled recreation opportunities. The Parks Highway winds through scenery that typifies Alaska and captures the imagination of people from all over the world: the continent’s highest peaks and largest inland glaciers, alpine tundra, taiga forests, wild rivers, and vast expanses inhabited only by wildlife.

“It was my belief...that there is no more beautiful and magnificent, yet intricate and savage, spot on earth than the region immediately surrounding Mount McKinley.”

- Bradford Washburn (1910-2007), photographer, cartographer, and mountaineer



Mount McKinley, Denali National Park and Preserve

“Alone in an unknown wilderness hundreds of miles from civilization and high on one of the world’s most imposing mountains, I was deeply moved by the stupendous mass of the great upheaval, the vast extent of the wild areas below, the chaos of the unfinished surfaces still in process of moulding, and by the crash and roar of the mighty avalanches.”

- Charles Sheldon (1867-1928), Denali region naturalist



Nenana River

Segmenting the Parks Highway

Mileposts on the Parks Highway do not begin with zero. Instead, they begin with milepost 35, reflecting the distance from Anchorage. The route can be organized into three distinct segments:

- the highway start at the Glenn Highway junction in the Matanuska Valley to the Chulitna River Bridge (milepost 35-132);
- the Chulitna River Bridge to Healy (milepost 132-248); and
- Healy to Fairbanks (milepost 248-362).

The 116-mile middle segment of highway, from milepost 132-248, was designated as an Alaska State Scenic Byway in 1998 and is the primary focus of this Corridor Partnership Plan. This segment, the George Parks Highway Scenic Byway, will be referred to as the Parks Byway in this plan. There is local interest in extending the state byway designation both north and south to encompass the entire route. However, since highway segments not designated under state byway programs are ineligible for state and federal byway grant funding, the beginning and end segments of the Parks Highway were omitted from this planning effort. This Corridor Partnership Plan should be updated in the future to include additional highway segments if the current designation is extended.

The Parks Byway

If one byway could epitomize all that is Alaska, that byway would be the Parks Byway. Passing through Denali country, dominated by the lofty, snow-covered peaks of the Alaska Range, active glaciers, rolling tundra, boggy muskegs, and hardwood and spruce forests laced by rivers, the Parks Byway is, according to some residents, the best drive in Alaska. It winds through the heart of the last frontier, coming within fifty miles of Mt. McKinley, the highest peak in North America and the defining feature of Alaska’s terrain. Mt. McKinley soars far above the smaller peaks surrounding it. The mountain, called Denali—“The Great One”—by neighboring Athabaskan Indians, duplicates polar conditions; snow cloaks its summit year-round and glaciers radiate down its windswept slopes. According to one Alaska Native tradition, the origin of man began near “The Great One,” with the raven as creator. On lowlands below the banner mountain roam some of the largest terrestrial mammals in the northern hemisphere: caribou, bear, moose, wolf, and Dall’s sheep. Abundant boreal and migratory birds complement the panorama. In summer, the animals blend into the folds of the landscape. As migratory bands and flocks, as packs and family groups, or as solitaries, they forage the slopes, lakes, and stream courses of Denali country.

The views of snowcapped Mt. McKinley and wildlife encounters are not all an excursion on this byway offers. The Parks Byway provides adventurers and sightseers excellent opportunities to explore Alaska firsthand. Adventure-seekers can explore the Alaskan wilderness at the region's two largest protected areas, Denali National Park and Preserve and Denali State Park. At these parks, travelers can partake in almost limitless outdoor recreation activities during every season. Travelers can also whitewater raft down the roaring Nenana and Chulitna rivers, pause to observe the Alaska Veterans Memorial near Byers Lake, stop in Healy to learn more about the largest coal mining operation in Alaska, and have a home-cooked meal while learning about early adventurers and homesteaders at the historic Mary's McKinley View Lodge.

The Parks Byway crosses two boroughs—the Matanuska-Susitna and Denali—and passes through the communities of Cantwell and McKinley Park. The small community of Trapper Creek is approximately 17 miles south of the byway but serves as the corridor's southern gateway, while Healy provides a similar function on the byway's northern boundary. The byway passes through significant areas of Native Corporation land, state land, and private land representing historic mining claims, homesteads, and important Native subsistence grounds. The byway's rural communities, rich in frontier ethos

and infused with pioneer history, provide visitors with some of the state's best opportunities in to experience the Alaskan way of life, discernible by modern-day trappers, explorers, mountaineers, miners, and homesteaders. Perhaps nowhere else on earth is there still a breed of daring, rugged individualists to match the people who call Denali country home.

A journey down the Parks Byway, with its views of Mt. McKinley, surrounding state and national parklands, large mammals, outdoor recreation opportunities, frontier culture, and pioneer history, perfectly captures the spirit, grandeur, wildness, and abundance that Alaska brings to mind.



View of Mt. McKinley from Curry Ridge, Denali State Park

The George Parks Highway Scenic Byway Corridor Partnership Plan

The Parks Byway is deserving of All-American Road status due to its exceptional intrinsic qualities, especially its world-class natural and recreation resources. The Parks Highway Scenic Byway Corridor Partnership Plan meets the requirements of the National Scenic Byways Program for this designation. This plan will help local byway leaders plan for the long-term economic future of the region. This plan is not a regulatory document, but recognizes the Parks Highway for its intrinsic values of national significance. It does not address land use regulations, nor does it seek to limit landowner rights. Rather, funding obtained for the byway will be used to improve the local economy by providing better services for visitors and residents. This plan provides a blueprint for marketing, interpretive, and infrastructure investments in order to bolster economic development in the region while improving the experience of traveling on the Parks Byway. This plan documents the uniqueness of the route and the resources it contains, and highlights the pride that local residents have in their area. Elected officials, landowners, and business owners support the byway concept, as evidenced by this collaborative planning effort.



A very happy sled dog



Biking in Nenana Canyon



Curry Ridge beaver pond, Denali State Park



Figure 1. The George Parks Highway Scenic Byway

2.

BYWAY BACKGROUND

National Scenic Byways Program

The United States Congress created the National Scenic Byways Program in 1991. Under this program, the United States Secretary of Transportation recognizes certain outstanding roads as National Scenic Byways or All-American Roads. Designation as a National Scenic Byway indicates that the route possesses distinctive recreation, historic, natural, cultural, scenic, or archeological qualities that are unique to the region. Designation as an All-American Road, the higher designation of the two, indicates that the route has not only regional, but also national significance.¹

Participation in the National Scenic Byways Program is voluntary and involves recognition, not regulation. It promotes tourism and economic development in byway communities and educates the traveling public about the local environment, history, and culture. One of the key benefits of national byway recognition is the added economic opportunities provided to communities along the designated route. Promotion of the byway through national and international marketing conducted by the program can generate economic growth and increase community recognition. Other potential benefits include eligibility for federal grant funds for infrastructure improvements, development and implementation of marketing and interpretive plans, and access to resources to help byway organizations manage and market the byway corridor.²

Alaska Scenic Byways Program

In 1993, the State of Alaska established a scenic byways program to recognize and celebrate the state's most scenic travel corridors. Administered by the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (ADOT&PF), this program also recognizes routes that provide access to the state's significant natural, recreation, cultural, and historic resources.

¹ Federal Highway Administration National Scenic Byways Program. 1999. *Byway Beginnings: Understanding, Inventorying, and Evaluating a Byway's Intrinsic Qualities*. Washington D.C.: Whiteman & Taintor with the National Park Service Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program.

² Federal Highway Administration National Scenic Byways Program. 2005. *Community Guide to Planning & Managing a Scenic Byway*. Washington D.C.: R.D. Mingo & Associates.

“It is doubtful whether any roadway in the world presents such scenic grandeur as the long-awaited George Parks Highway, opening Alaska’s Shangri-la to the world. Threading through national and state parks, this easy-to-drive ribbon of asphalt presents the nation’s tallest peak at delightful intervals between Anchorage and Fairbanks.”

- Mary Carey (1913-2004), pioneer and homesteader, in her book *An Auto Trip to Alaska’s Shangri-la*

A grassroots citizen's group initiates an Alaska state byway designation at the local level. Once state designation is granted, the route becomes eligible for grant funding to develop a Corridor Partnership Plan. Once the plan is completed, the byway is eligible to receive National Scenic Byway grant funding to implement qualified projects identified in the Corridor Partnership Plan. If there is broad local support, the corridor also becomes eligible to apply for national byway designation under the National Scenic Byways Program.

The Corridor Partnership Plan

A Corridor Partnership Plan is required for state scenic byways seeking byway implementation grants or designation as a National Scenic Byway or an All-American Road. Its purpose is to assess the key resources along the route and identify methods to maintain, enhance, and promote those resources over time. It describes how byway stakeholders will assume responsibility for the long-term management and promotion of the byway's resources.

Besides increasing funding possibilities, preparation of a Corridor Partnership Plan has many other benefits. The process creates opportunities for multiple communities along the byway to work together to accomplish common goals. It supports a realization of community visions, tourism promotions, stewardship efforts,

and projects such as visitor facilities and wayside improvements.

Achieving National Byway Status

National designation requires submittal of an application that must include a Corridor Partnership Plan that meets the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) requirements and demonstrates that the byway possesses one or more intrinsic qualities that are significant on a multi-state or national level. The FHWA solicits nominations every 3-5 years. Nominations

are reviewed and approved by the ADOT&PF before they are submitted to the FHWA for national review. At the national level, a selection committee comprised of tourism, highway, and other professionals from around the nation convene to identify which nominated corridors are deserving of the National Scenic Byway or All-American Road award. The committee's recommendations are forwarded to the United States Secretary of Transportation for a final decision.



Northern Byway boundary, with Mt. Healy in the background

3.

PLANNING PROCESS AND PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

This planning process brought communities, businesses, Alaska native corporations, non-profit organizations, landowners, and tourism and natural resource interests together across three boroughs to identify a common vision and goals for the byway. Public involvement was the driving process for completing this plan. Prior to the start of this project, a Public Involvement Plan (PIP) was crafted; its purpose was to describe public involvement and communication goals. The PIP enabled stakeholders to receive background and technical information on the project in order to provide meaningful input.

The public process began with informing local governments in the Matanuska-Susitna, Denali, and Fairbanks North Star boroughs of the project inception. These organizations helped to coordinate public meetings in Healy, Cantwell, Trapper Creek, and McKinley Park. The public meetings were widely advertised in local newspapers and community online forums. Public meeting announcements also were posted in local post offices and on community bulletin boards. Thirty-two stakeholders attended the meeting in Healy, eight in Cantwell, twenty in Trapper Creek, and four in McKinley Park. Presentations on the project also were given to the Matanuska-Susitna State Parks Advisory Board and the Alaska Campground Owners' Association.

Those attending public meetings had an opportunity to hear about the state and national byways programs and to understand the process involved in the preparation of a Corridor Partnership Plan. At each meeting, information was collected on what attendees valued most about the byway, potential interpretive stories to share with the public, ways in which the visitor's experience could be enhanced, and areas in need of upgrades. In general, meeting attendees were supportive of the project and felt that developing a Corridor Partnership Plan for the Parks Byway would be useful to the communities along the corridor. The primary concern heard during the outreach effort related to the challenges associated with maintenance of current and future facilities. At the conclusion of each public meeting, attendees were given the opportunity to provide further guidance on the plan by volunteering to serve on the Parks Byway Community Partnership. Subsequent Parks Byway

“As the South Denali area appears to be on the brink of a period of rapid growth, these efforts will help to maintain current facilities, plan new ones accordingly, improve visitor experience and safety, and preserve the area’s natural and cultural character.”

- Matanuska-Susitna State Parks Citizens Advisory Board



Parks Byway Community Partnership meeting in Byers Creek

Community Partnership meetings were held to create this plan's goals, objectives, and implementation strategies, and to verify the corridor inventory produced by the consulting team. Prior to printing, another round of public meetings were held in Healy, Cantwell, and Trapper Creek to give the public a chance to review the final plan.

This Corridor Partnership Plan is an integration of local and regional planning documents, especially past plans' goals, recommendations, and projects as they relate to the corridor. Planning documents were consulted from the Matanuska-Susitna and Denali boroughs, the National Park Service, the Alaska Department of Natural Resources, the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, and others.

The Parks Byway Community Partnership

The Parks Byway Community Partnership was formed in the spring of 2007, choosing to maintain an informal structure. Composed of almost twenty stakeholders with varied interests from communities in the Mat-Su and Denali boroughs (see chapter 11), this grassroots group has been dedicated, productive, and committed to the byway's development. The biggest challenge the Partnership encountered was the difficulty in maintaining continuity in one plan for a byway that stretches over one hundred miles and involves multiple communities. Four

meetings were held in Healy, Cantwell, Byers Creek, and Denali National Park to create a byway vision statement and this corridor plan's goals and objectives. These meetings were well attended, with an average of thirteen members present at each gathering. Through cooperative planning and continued sustainable development, the Parks Byway Community Partnership is dedicated to maintaining and enhancing the intrinsic qualities of the Parks Byway by providing travelers with a safe, comfortable, and educational adventure.

“The progress made by our Parks Byway Community Partnership is not only amazing, it is refreshing.”

- Chuck Saylor, Healy resident, Parks Byway Community Partnership



Parks Byway Community Partnership meeting in Cantwell



Parks Byway Community Partnership meeting in Denali NP

4.

INTRINSIC QUALITY ASSESSMENT

Introduction

The Alaska and National Scenic Byways Program identifies six intrinsic qualities that serve to capture the spirit of adventure and sense of magic found on American roads: natural, recreational, scenic, historic, cultural, and archeological. A corridor resource inventory of these qualities can be found in the appendix. In the case of the Parks Byway, while all six qualities recognized by the National Scenic Byways Program are exemplified, it is especially the natural and recreation resources that are world-class (Figs. 2 & 3). This byway offers views of Mt. McKinley, the tallest mountain in North America, and passes through a protected subarctic ecosystem the size of Massachusetts that contains the largest inland glaciers in Alaska, a gorge deeper than the Grand Canyon, one of North America's lowest mountain passes, and fossils of national significance. Travelers come from all over the globe to sample this byway's recreation opportunities. Adventurers and athletes come to participate in world-class mountaineering activities. Others traverse the byway to view the five largest terrestrial mammals in the northern hemisphere, hike in the colorful tundra, take a sled dog ride, snowmobile in a winter wonderland, or view the northern lights.

Scenic opportunities and historical and cultural experiences also abound as exceptional secondary intrinsic qualities (Figs. 4 & 5). A statewide survey that looked at intrinsic qualities of Alaska's byways supports these claims—it was found that Alaskans believed the Parks Byway exhibited not just one or two, but a diversity of interrelated intrinsic qualities.¹ This chapter reviews these qualities and outlines the national significance of this byway.

Natural Qualities

Natural quality applies to those features in the visual environment that are in a relatively undisturbed state. These features predate the arrival of human populations and may include geological formations, fossils, landform, water bodies, vegetation, and wildlife. There may be evidence of human activity, but the natural

¹ Brown, G. 2002. Alaska Scenic Byways Statewide Study. Anchorage, AK: Alaska Pacific University.



Don Sheldon at Mt. McKinley

“See straight ahead of us there? We’re sailing out into Ruth Amphitheater—west fork to left, east fork to right, McKinley dead ahead; but you can’t see her for the peaks between. I’ve been told you could toss the Grand Canyon into this Amphitheater as an appetizer, chew it up with the Moose’s Tooth, swallow it through the gullet of the Great Gorge and spew it out and lose it in the great Alaskan wilderness.”

- Don Sheldon (1921-1974), Alaskan bush pilot

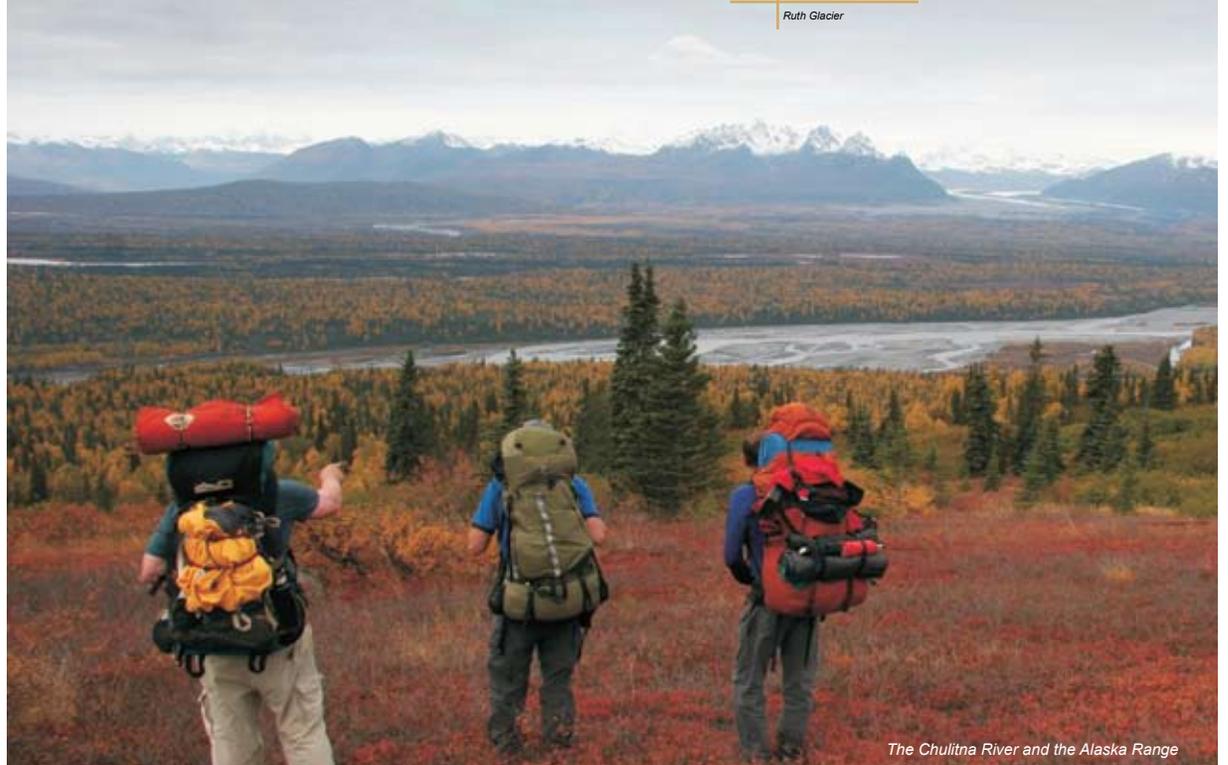
features reveal minimal disturbances (FHWA Policy 5.18.95).

Tallest Mountain in North America. The Alaska Range, one of the greatest mountain uplifts on the continent, dominates the landscape of this region. Looming above other mountains in the range is Mt. McKinley, North America's highest peak, with its summit at 20,320 feet. This beautiful ice and snow-encrusted giant is the largest granitic body in the world. Another noteworthy distinction is that Wickersham's Wall on Mt. McKinley's north face is the world's highest vertical relief in the shortest horizontal distance. Piercing the central plain of Alaska at latitude 63° N, Mt. McKinley is the world's highest point near the Arctic Circle. No other mountain in the world even comes close to its height at this high latitude. Denali is so massive that it creates its own weather systems, resulting in extreme weather patterns; only in few mountain locales in the world does the weather change so precipitously and dramatically. Mt. McKinley's height, combined with its subarctic location, makes it one of the coldest mountains on earth, if not the coldest. Even in June, nighttime temperatures on its upper slopes may reach -40 degrees F. For all these reasons, Alaska's "Great One" has earned a reputation as the ultimate challenge in North American mountaineering.

Deepest Gorge in North America. At nearly 9,000 feet deep, the Great Gorge of the Ruth Glacier, flanking Mt. McKinley, is the deepest gorge in North America and may be the deepest gorge in the world. The ice thickness of the Ruth Glacier near the almost vertical wall of Mt. Dickey (9,545 feet) is 3,770 feet, and that depth, when added to the height of the east wall of Mt. Dickey, is 8,970 feet. The Great Gorge of the Ruth Glacier is deeper than the Grand Canyon, and as the



Ruth Glacier



The Chulitna River and the Alaska Range

mountains rise, the Ruth continues to cut the valley deeper. The Great Gorge's towering granite walls provide scenery, fascinating geology, and high-angle fun for the adventurous.

Vast Protected Area. The Parks Byway provides visitors with superb opportunities to experience a complete subarctic ecosystem in settings relatively undisturbed by humans, while offering a phenomenon surprisingly rare in Alaska: road-accessible wilderness. Immense tracks of public land surround the Parks Byway. The byway lies on the eastern edge of Denali National Park and Preserve, one of the largest national parks in the United States. Two million of the park's more than six million acres have been in protected status since 1917, making the park the largest continuously protected area in the world. The United Nations Man and Biosphere Program designated the park an International Biosphere Reserve in order to recognize internationally the exceptional health and integrity of this colossal ecosystem. Wild and relatively untouched, this park is considered by some as one of the world's last great frontiers for wilderness adventure. The byway also travels through Denali State Park (325,240 acres) and its associated State Recreation Areas (1,470 areas), an integral part of this spectacular region. Together, these neighboring parks create a Massachusetts-sized protected area that enables an array of flora and fauna to coexist in an unspoiled natural environment.

Largest Inland Glaciers in Alaska. Alpine glaciers drape the heights of Mt. McKinley and its companion peaks. These glaciers, from 14 to 38 miles long and up to four miles wide, are some of the largest in North America and the largest inland glaciers in Alaska. Easily viewed from the byway, they flow from the high peaks and melt into the broad Chulitna Valley, giving the Chulitna River the milky waters and braided channels typical of a glacial stream. Glacier topography is characteristic of this region; the Parks Byway guides visitors over ground moraines and drumlin fields, and snakes around kettle lakes, eskers, and outwash plains.

One of North America's Lowest Mountain Passes. Although unforested Broad Pass is one of the lowest-elevated passes along the North American mountain system, expansive views provide travelers a top-of-the world feeling. Just south of Cantwell, Broad Pass is one of the most beautiful areas on the byway, with its broad alpine valleys and mountain peaks on either side. Loons, swans, and other waterfowl use Broad Pass as a stopover on their trip north or as breeding and brooding grounds during the summer. Caribou are temporary residents during migration season. In fall, when blueberry leaves are gold and bearberry leaves scarlet, this area is a compelling stop. This long, wide basin affords panoramic views of Mt. McKinley and the imposing 30-mile spine of Curry and Kesugi ridges in the Talkeetna Range. Uniquely

“But there is much to offer those who understand the language of the ‘great silent places,’ the ‘mighty mouthed hollow, plumb full of hush to the brim.’ To the hardy, venturesome ones there are heights to be scaled where bands of sheep and herds of caribou look with wonder and curiosity at the traveler. There are noisy mountains and glacier streams, noble crags, and precipices, master pieces of nature’s rugged architecture that have never yet been photographed. There are glaciers to cross. There are mountains to climb, from the easily ascended nearby domes to the dizzy peaks amid the everlasting snows. Eagles will be seen soaring about their breeding places among the pinnacles on the jagged sky-line. Here will be found an indescribable calm; a place to just loaf; healing to the sick mind and body, beyond reach of the present day mental and nervous and moral strain.”

- Harry Karstens (1878-1955), leader of the first ascent of Mount McKinley; first Superintendent of Denali National Park and Preserve

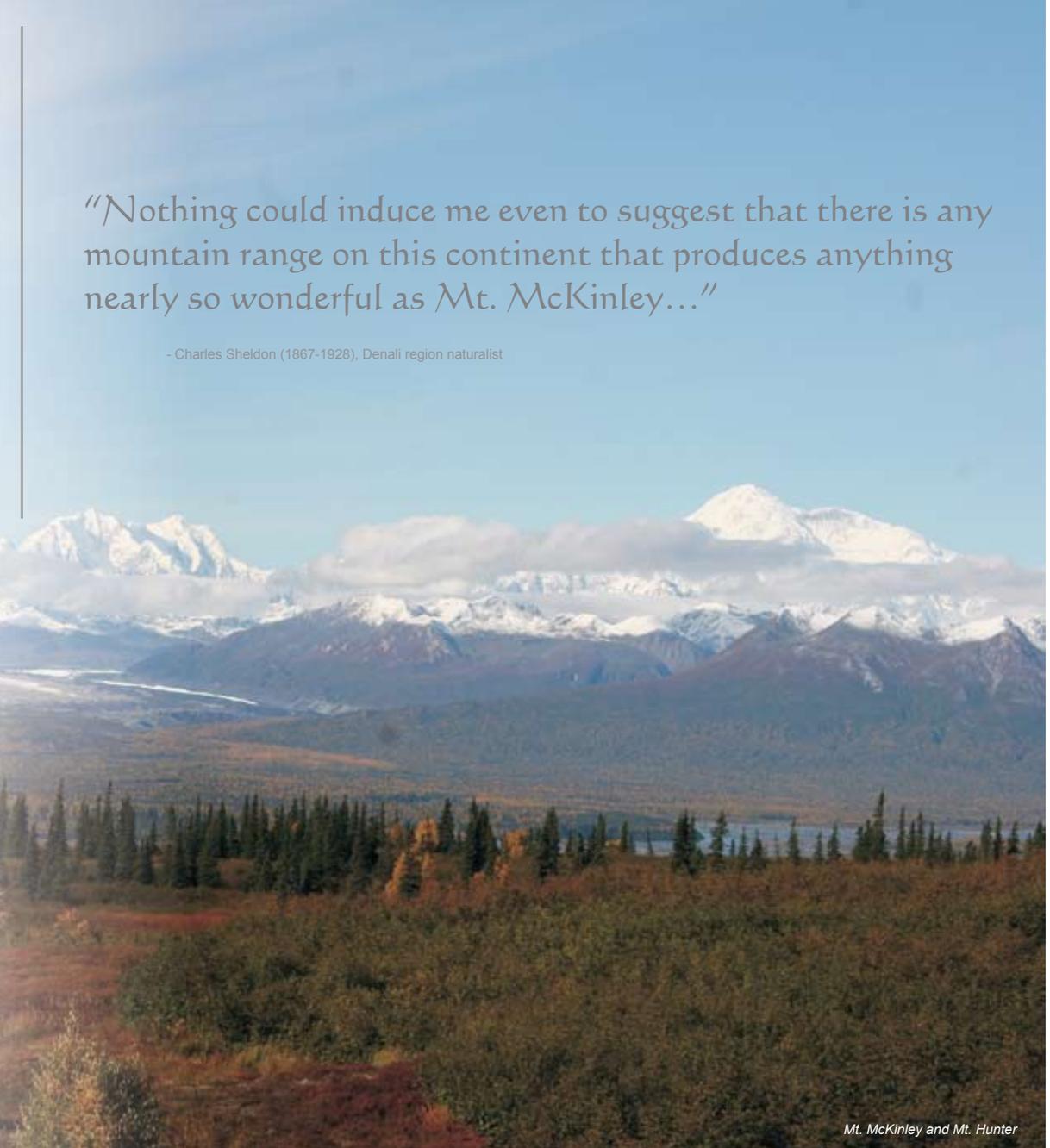
situated on the divide between the Cook Inlet and Yukon River watersheds, Broad Pass also is noteworthy for separating the Chulitna and Nenana river basins and dividing the Susitna and Yukon watersheds.

Critical Fossils Finds. The Denali region is emerging as a site of important fossils, including footprints credited with being the first evidence of prehistoric wading birds. Other fossil tracks at Denali National Park and Preserve are the first evidence of dinosaurs found in Interior Alaska. These tracks shed light on the roaming habits of prehistoric creatures and support the theory that dinosaurs migrated to Alaska from Asia across the Bering Land Bridge. Visitors can view samples of fossil tracks and more at Denali's Murie Science and Learning Center.

Natural Quality Challenges and Opportunities

One of the factors that make the Parks Byway such an extraordinarily scenic and pleasurable drive is that there is very little development. The byway's natural qualities and the fact that it winds through the backcountry of Alaska augment and enhance its other intrinsic qualities. Therefore, sustainable development and conservation of the natural qualities that make this corridor so remarkable are of high importance.

The majority of undeveloped lands surrounding the Parks Byway fall under the jurisdiction



“Nothing could induce me even to suggest that there is any mountain range on this continent that produces anything nearly so wonderful as Mt. McKinley...”

- Charles Sheldon (1867-1928), Denali region naturalist

Mt. McKinley and Mt. Hunter

of the National Park Service and the Alaska Department of Natural Resources, agencies that actively manage these lands in the public's best interests. Other land managers include the Matanuska-Susitna and Denali boroughs, the University of Alaska, and the Bureau of Land Management. There are also numerous landowners including Cook Inlet Regional Corporation and Ahtna Incorporated. There are current and pending development guidelines, such as zoning requirements and land-use designations, in place to ensure that natural resources and private properties are not compromised during future development.

Recreational Qualities

Recreational quality involves outdoor recreational activities directly associated with and dependent upon natural and cultural elements of the corridor's landscape. The recreational activities provide opportunities for active and passive recreational experiences. They include, but are not limited to, downhill skiing, rafting, boating, fishing, and hiking. Driving the road itself may qualify as a pleasurable recreational experience. The recreational activities may be seasonal, but the quality and importance of the recreational activities as seasonal operations must be well recognized (FHWA Policy 5.18.95).

World-Class Mountaineering. This region sports once in a lifetime mountaineering opportunities, considered by some to be the best in the world.

Mt. McKinley is part of the world-renowned "Seven Summits Challenge" to climb the highest peak on each of the seven continents. This soaring goliath, the tallest in North America at 20,320 feet, has captured the imagination of mountaineers from all over the world, men and women with sparkling eyes and sun-crinkled faces. Typically about 1,300 people a year attempt to climb Mt. McKinley, with roughly half reaching the summit. Other peaks in the Alaska Range, such as Mt. Foraker and Mt. Hunter, also draw experienced mountaineers and technical climbers.

Wildlife Watching and Alaska's "Big Five."

The Parks Byway provides access to trails and waterways that lead to opportunities to experience maybe the best chance to view some of the largest northern mammals in the world. Here, many travelers are able to fulfill a life-long goal of viewing Alaska's "big five" in their natural habitat. From the comfort of vehicles, Parks Byway visitors can see caribou resting on snow patches, moose browsing in stands of willow, Dall's sheep grazing high on the hillsides, wolves trotting across the tundra, or bears feeding on ripening blueberries. Bird life in the region is also especially rich. The area features thousands of lakes providing diverse avian habitat and attracting more than 130 bird species from all over the world.



Brown bear

"He ran up to her and bit her on the cheek. She ignored the cub and continued to feed. The cub then stood directly in front of her, blocking her path. Without taking any notice, she bowled him over and resumed grazing. She had sent him tumbling down a hillside, but he jumped up and ran back for a second try. He rolled on his back, wiggled his four paws in the air and tried to bite her chin. This also failed to elicit any response. When the sow walked off, he ran after her and fiercely attacked her hind legs. She was oblivious to this assault as well and continued feeding."

- Rick McIntyre, from his book *Grizzly Cub: Five Years in the Life of a Bear*



Sadler's Alaska Challenge on the Parks Highway

“Mushing dogs, with the dog fights, the trail breaking, and the wondering if the dog feed will last, is not without excitement, but what we remember about that arctic day is that trail on the creek bed. We had met a wolverine!”

- Adolph Murie, 1899-1974, from his book, *A Naturalist in Alaska*



Limitless Multi-Use Outdoor Recreation Opportunities. The Parks Byway’s extensive natural landscape supplies limitless outdoor recreation opportunities for local residents as well as visitors from all over the world. Those traveling on the byway can participate in an abundance of outdoor activities depending on the season. In winter, travelers can choose from aurora viewing, snowmobiling, showshoeing, dog mushing, cross-country and backcountry skiing, winter camping, and ice-fishing. Abounding in summer, and fall are warm-weather recreation opportunities including hiking, camping, kayaking, biking, hunting, fishing, flightseeing, river rafting, wildlife viewing, glacier trekking, backpacking, fall-color viewing, berry picking, and more.

Longest Wheelchair and Handcycle Race in the World. The Sadler’s Ultra Challenge has been referred to as the “holy grail” of wheelchair and handcycle racing—it is the longest and toughest wheelchair and handcycle race in the world. It runs between Fairbanks and Anchorage, encompassing the entire length of the byway. Athletes travel from around the globe to participate in this six-day, 267-mile test of athleticism. These incredible athletes demonstrate the “ability” of people with disabilities and inspire hope for all. When four-time Ultra Challenge winner Alejandro Albor of the United States Paralympics Team was asked why he returns every year to the Ultra Challenge,

his reply was swift and to the point: “Because it is the greatest race in the world—period.”

Unparalleled Hiking. This byway offers some of the best hiking and backpacking in the nation. In the summer months, there are over 12 hours of daylight available to enjoy the exceptional views of Mt. McKinley and the entire southern arc of the Alaska Range. Denali National Park and Preserve is predominately a trail-free park, nationally rare in this aspect, and offers outstanding route-finding backpacking opportunities across the tundra, spectacular vistas, encounters with wildlife, and the experience of traveling the land much as the first explorers did. Its neighbor Denali State Park has over 40 miles of trails for hikers who prefer established routes. The Kesugi Ridge trail system in the state park is becoming one of the most popular backpacking routes in the state. Kesugi Ridge is a long, narrow spur of geography paralleling the Alaska Range across the Chulitna River basin that offers extraordinary vistas of rugged mountains bordered by the largest inland glaciers in Alaska. In clear weather, the ridge offers the most spectacular views of Mt. McKinley in the entire area.

Dog Mushing—the Alaska State Sport. This is an Alaska adventure vacation of a lifetime for some Parks Byway visitors. While whizzing by beautiful scenery behind barking and exuberant dogs, visitors are treated to a high-speed excursion

across the frozen tundra. Many local mushers, including those at Denali National Park and Preserve, offer tours of their dog kennels, along with a variety of different dog sled rides. There also are professional outfitters along the byway that offer canine excursions. Trails along and around the byway provide mushers with a flat, smooth surface, and this, coupled with the wind and cold temperatures of winter, make for a memorable ride.

World-Class Snowmobiling. In terms of accessibility and vistas, the area around Cantwell, especially treeless Broad Pass, offers nationally significant cross-country snowmobiling conditions. While on one of the lowest-elevated mountain passes in the nation, snowmobilers can take in panoramic views of beautiful Broad Pass, including the largest mountain in North America. In the winter, Cantwell becomes a fantasy land for snowmobilers. During this time of year, pull-outs along the Parks Byway near Cantwell often are crowded with empty snowmobile trailers, their owners off playing in deep snow on wide-open tundra. Once the snow falls, these pull-outs become great jumping-off points for more remote destinations made accessible by the snow pack. Some of these areas are on private property, but can be accessed with a land-use permit. Cantwell also is a popular staging area for snowmobiling on the unmaintained Denali Highway. Denali National Park and Preserve permits the use of

snowmobiling in some areas.

Accessible Aurora Viewing. During the winter months, between September and March, when nights are long and dark, the Parks Byway is the most accessible place in Alaska to experience a remarkable phenomenon. Winter visitors are treated to the Northern Lights, or Aurora Borealis, shimmering ribbons of color that flirt and dance their way across the dark night sky in varying degrees of intensity and form. Because this byway is situated far away from city lights, which can hinder Aurora viewing, Northern Light shows are spectacular. Travelers can simply pull over, face north, and lean back to get an experience of a lifetime. One Alaska Native legend affirms that the northern lights are spirits playing ball in the sky with a walrus skull. Another legend calls them the flaming torches carried by departed souls guiding travelers to the afterlife.

Guided Excursions. Numerous outfitting and tour companies offer a variety of excursions within the region, from flightseeing trips to Mt. McKinley to rafting down the Nenana River, to dog mushing on frozen rivers. Snowmobile and aurora viewing tours are growing in popularity, as are flightseeing and glacier landing trips. About 40 companies advertise air tours of the region. Many tour companies are located in nearby Talkeetna, but some operate out of Cantwell, McKinley Park, and Healy.

“Trekking west, we watched several hundred head of the Denali caribou herd grazing on the rolling slopes above Iron Creek. Over the next couple of days, we’ll regularly see their tracks mixed with those of wolves. We’ll hear wolves at night, and we’ll howl back...”

- Daryl Miller, from the Anchorage Daily News, April 14, 1996, “We Alaskans”



Grey wolf

Recreational Quality Challenges and Opportunities

Since most recreation facilities are on public lands, the greatest threat to the recreation resources of the Parks Byway is marginal funding provided to state and federal parks given the ever-growing demand for recreation access. Throughout the byway, the problems of rising visitation and insufficient resources to maintain year-round restrooms and other basic services are echoed all around.

Local partnerships and working relationships between public and private entities can be one way to overcome management and funding issues. Additional funding to maintain public facilities may be acquired by working with other state and national byways and organizing businesses and local governments under the byway umbrella. The American Recreation Coalition is one example of this type of partnership between public and private organizations.

"I think I had a funny kind of religious experience on top of Mt. McKinley. The beauty there is overwhelming...like looking out over a vast 3-dimensional map. I walked over to the edge. And I had a vision from my old Sunday school book. I know it was clouds, but I saw God up there, with a white beard. And all I could think to say was: help me get home to see my kids again."

-Barbara Washburn, explorer, mountaineer, cartographer, and the first woman to climb Mt. McKinley



Denali State Park hikers gazing at the Chulitna River and the Alaska Range

Access to the proposed South Denali Visitor Center Complex atop Curry Ridge in Denali State Park will be at mile 134.6 of the byway. This visitor center will serve as an introduction to the byway's resources for northbound byway visitors. This project will greatly enhance recreation opportunities in the area by improving recreational access throughout the South Denali region. Year-round activities will be available, including interpretation of natural and cultural resources, viewing Mt. McKinley, hiking, camping, summer trails for non-motorized use, and winter trails for both motorized and non-motorized use.² Short trails and boardwalks are planned to guide visitors through the tundra to viewing areas. Less improved long-distance trails will carry adventurous travelers up to the Curry Lookout and down to the Susitna River. The extensive trail system will link to the Mt. McKinley Wilderness Lodge, the Byers Lake Campground, and the Kesugi Ridge trail system. Additionally, agency partners will create access from the Parks Byway to the Chulitna River downstream of the mouth of Troublesome Creek for rafts, kayaks, and other small, non-motorized watercraft. As part of this project, recreation opportunities also will be enhanced south of the byway in the Trapper Creek and Petersville area. The entire South Denali Visitor Center Complex will be a destination in itself and have sufficient activities and amenities for a visitor to spend days experiencing the region.

² National Park Service. 2006. Final South Denali Implementation Plan and Environmental Impact Statement.



Climbing Mt. McKinley



Chulitna River

Scenic Qualities

Scenic quality is the heightened visual experience derived from the view of natural and manmade elements of the visual environment of the scenic byway corridor. The characteristics of the landscape are strikingly distinct and offer a pleasing and most memorable visual experience. All elements of the landscape—landform, water, vegetation, and manmade development—contribute to the quality of the corridor’s visual environment. Everything present is in harmony and shares in the intrinsic qualities (FHWA Policy 5.18.95).

Voted One of Alaska’s Most Scenic Byways. Rated one of the top ten scenic highway segments in Alaska in a statewide survey,³ the Parks Byway shares with travelers some of the state’s most memorable scenery (Fig. 4). As visitors travel north on the highway from Anchorage, at the start of the byway at mile 132, the landscape noticeably changes, becoming more intricate and interesting. Here, travelers can catch a glimpse of Mt. McKinley, peaking above the dense forest. As the road begins to curve through rolling, undeveloped topography, expansive views of unique and diverse landform features materialize in all directions: the continent’s highest peaks, active glaciers, churning rivers, muskeg bogs, and rich boreal forests. Leaving a lasting impression on visitors are jaw-dropping views of Mt. McKinley and the Alaska Range, the imposing spines of Curry and Kesugi

³ Brown, G. 2002. Alaska Scenic Byways Statewide Study. Anchorage, AK: Alaska Pacific University.

“Now, all the country was resplendent with fall colors. A rich brown spread over the mountains, the dwarf birches were carmine, the blueberry bushes a deep scarlet, the willow leaves yellow, crimson, and various shades of green...”

- Charles Sheldon (1867-1928), Denali region naturalist



Bearberry plants during fall



Mount McKinley

ridges, the picturesque eroded cliffs above the East Fork Chulitna River, the steep-walled gorges of Hurricane Gulch and Nenana Canyon, and the panoramic vastness of Broad Pass.

A Kaleidoscope of Color. Seasonal changes bring scenic variety; in fall, the tundra converts into a kaleidoscope of color. Each fall, visitors, residents, and professional photographers make the pilgrimage up the Parks Byway to bask in the brilliant fall colors of the tundra: scarlet blueberry shrubs, sunflower-yellow willows, and pumpkin-orange shrub birch. In winter, vivid hues from Aurora dance in the sky overhead. Nationally recognized under the Clean Air Act Amendment, Denali National Park and Preserve is a designated Class I Airshed. The exceptional air quality in the region and the lack of city lights

provide conditions for outstanding daytime views and excellent night sky visibility in fall, winter, and spring.

Scenic Quality Challenges and Opportunities

The scenic qualities of the Parks Byway are magnificent. The virtually untouched, open landscape makes driving the byway a pleasure. Whenever possible, care should be taken to ensure that the scenic qualities of the byway can continue to coexist with respect to private landowners and without limiting the course of development on private lands. Preparation of a “Denali Recreation Region Study” by the Alaska Department of Natural Resources was a recommendation listed in the Denali State Park Management Plan. This study will suggest ways

to maintain the visual resources along the byway while allowing for responsible development that blends with the natural landscape to enhance tourism and recreation.

There are disturbed area species such as balsam poplar that have grown up to block views at many viewpoints. Frequent clearing of overgrown brush that interferes with viewsheds in established viewing areas would improve the scenic viewing experience on the byway. Additional brush clearing in Denali State Park, particularly at the Veterans Memorial, and along other areas of the highway also would serve to enhance scenic viewing opportunities along the corridor.



View of the Alaska Range from Denali State Park

Historic Qualities

Historic quality encompasses legacies of the past distinctly associated with physical elements of the landscape, whether natural or manmade, that are of such historic significance that they educate the viewer and stir an appreciation for the past. The historic elements reflect the actions of people and may include buildings, settlement patterns, and other examples of human activity. Historic features can be inventoried, mapped, and interpreted. They possess integrity of location, design, setting, material, workmanship, feeling, and association (FHWA Policy 5.18.95).

First Peoples. People have traveled through and inhabited this area for nearly 10,000 years; over 100 archaeological sites confirm the use of the area by Native Alaskans for trade and subsistence.⁴ The first people to enter this region were hunters, recently migrated from Asia over the Bering Land Bridge.⁵ They entered a world dominated by the brute physical facts of massive landforms, ice, roiling glacial rivers, and a climate usually frigid and only occasionally warm. The Dena'ina Athabaskan, who once lived entirely on the area's rich resources, traditionally occupied the Susitna River basin and hills along the southern flank of the Alaska Range. Today, descendents of these first peoples still reside in Parks Byway communities, maintaining their traditions through a subsistence lifestyle and using some of the same hunting grounds as their ancestors did years ago.

Early Explorers. Non-native people first explored Interior Alaska following the territory's purchase from Russia in 1867. Many of the place names along the Parks Byway are derived from this period's explorers and military men, such as Lt. John C. Cantwell and Captain Michael J. Healy. The first Caucasian explorer to rave about the beauty and wildlife of the alpine country was geographer Alfred Brooks, on a U.S. Geological Survey expedition that traversed the Alaska Range in 1902. On this journey, he wrote:

"...the broad lowland of the Susitna Valley lay spread before us, the dark greens of its spruce forest contrasting with the light greens of the open marshes and the bright gleam of small lakes and winding water courses. Beyond rose a range of highlands, and then, forming the



Nenana Native children



A. H. Brooks, posing in a creek bed

4 Kari, J. and J.A. Fall. 2003. Shem Pete's Alaska: The Territory of the Upper Cook Inlet Dena'ina. Fairbanks, AK: University of Alaska Press.

5 Brown, W.E. 1993. Denali, Symbol of the Alaskan Wild. Virginia Beach, VA: The Donning Company.

sky-line, snow-covered Alaskan mountains.”⁶

His accounts of a possible route up Mt. McKinley enticed the legendary Judge Wickersham to lead the first ascent of the peak in 1903. “Glare ice” and a “spur as sharp as a house roof rapidly rising to where it was nearly perpendicular,” as well as constant snow slides forced a retreat. Wickersham launched a heroic chapter in mountaineering, peopled by literate adventurers whose exploration and climbing accounts still captivate readers today. Of the Wickersham Wall that later carried his name, he wrote:

“Immense masses of snow and ice high on the mountainside broke loose with the report of a cannon. With rapidly accelerating speed they shot down the ice encrusted slope, gathering momentum every second... & finally striking the glacier with the roar of a hundred great guns.”⁷

The Race Up Mt. McKinley. In 1903, Dr. Frederick Cook and five partners completed the first circumnavigation of the mountain. Cook and his party made a determined attempt to climb the scantily-charted Mt. McKinley, but were checkmated at 11,300 feet by steepness, scarce provisions, and weather. In 1906, Cook returned to Alaska and successfully explored the southern approaches of the mountain. Running short of time, the expedition turned back, only on a last-minute impulse, Cook set back out with his assistant horse packer, Edward Barrill. In a two-week round-trip dash, Cook claimed to have made the summit by gaining the East Buttress (an arduous feat today and virtually impossible in Cook’s day). Newspapers around the country blazoned the headline: McKinley is Conquered! Three years later Barrill published an affidavit stating that he and Cook never got higher than ten thousand feet.⁸ C.E. Rusk, leader of the 1910 Portland Oregon Mazama Mountaineering Club expedition, in his report debunking Dr. Cook’s claim that he was the first person to reach the summit of Mt. McKinley wrote:

“...as we gazed upon the forbidding crags of the great mountain from far up the Ruth Glacier...we realized how utterly impossible and absurd was the story of this man who, carrying a single pack, claims to have started from the Tokositna on the eighth of

6 Brown, W.E. 1993. Denali, Symbol of the Alaskan Wild. Virginia Beach, VA: The Donning Company.

7 Sherwonit, B. 2000. Denali, a Literary Anthology. Seattle, WA: The Mountaineering Books.

8 Washburn, B. and P. Cheric. 2001. The Dishonorable Dr. Cook. Seattle, WA: The Mountaineers Books.

“...the most interesting object on the horizon was the massive dome that dominates the valleys of the Tanana, the Yukon, and the Koskokwim—the monarch of North American mountains—Mount McKinley.”

- Judge James Wickersham (1857-1939), author, statesman, and adventurer



Judge James Wickersham
Wickersham State Historic Site.



Dr. Frederick Cook (left)
Edward Barrill (right)

September, and to have stood on the highest point of McKinley on the sixteenth of the month. The man does not live who can perform such a feat. Let us draw the mantle of charity around him and believe, if we can, that there is a thread of insanity running through the roof of his brilliant mind...If he is mentally imbalanced, he is entitled to the pity of mankind. If he is not, there is no corner of the earth where he can hide from his past.”⁹

In 1910, four Alaskan sourdough miners decided to carry a fourteen-foot spruce flagpole up to the summit of Mt. McKinley, just to prove that they could do it. It all started with an Alaskan old-timer’s barroom boast. At Bill McPhee’s old saloon, Tom Lloyd, a Kantishna miner, stated he knew for a fact that McKinley could be climbed. McPhee said that the fifty-year-old Lloyd was too old and fat to make the climb. For two cents, Lloyd claimed he would do it himself, just to prove it could be done. McPhee countered with an offer of \$500, and Lloyd accepted the challenge. “If anyone is able to reach the summit of the mountain,” Lloyd said, “surely Alaskans can.” With no special alpine gear—not even ropes—Lloyd and his team of miners and mushers became the first to summit the North Peak, which at 19,470 feet is just slightly lower than the 20,320-foot South Peak.¹⁰

The first complete ascent of Mt. McKinley was co-led in 1913 by Hudson Stuck, Alaska’s Episcopal Archdeacon, and Sourdough Harry Karstens, who would become the first Superintendent of Denali National Park and Preserve. Native Alaskan Walter Harper and theology student Robert Tatum completed the team. Their arduous journey up the mountain took over two months and witnessed clashes of temperament and style, a tent fire, digestive problems, and oxygen deficiency. However, they made it to the top. Of the view from the summit, Stuck wrote:

“It is difficult to describe at all the scene which the top of the mountain presented, and impossible to describe it adequately. One was not occupied with the thought of description but wholly possessed with the breadth and glory of it, with its sheer, amazing immensity and scope. Only once, perhaps, in a lifetime is such vision granted...”¹¹

⁹ Dunn, R. 2001. *The Shameless Diary of an Explorer*. New York, NY: Random House, Inc.

¹⁰ Cole, T. 1985. *The Sourdough Expedition*. Anchorage, AK: Alaska Northwest Publishing Company.

¹¹ Sherwonit, B. 2000. *Denali, a Literary Anthology*. Seattle, WA: The Mountaineering Books.

“We named our great peak Mount McKinley, after William McKinley of Ohio, who had been nominated for the Presidency, and that fact was the first news we received on our way out of that wonderful wilderness. We have no doubt that this peak is the highest in North America, and estimate that it is over 20,000 feet high.”

- William A. Dickey, published in *The Sun*, Jan. 24, 1897



Archdeacon Stuck & Walter Harper, March 1917

Creation of Denali National Park. In 1906-1908, naturalist Charles Sheldon roamed the area now known as Denali National Park and Preserve. During this time, he made extensive observations of the life histories of Dall's sheep and other animals living in the area. Although he was a sport hunter, he became alarmed at the impending demise of wildlife due to overhunting by commercial hunters and aggressively worked to convince Congress to establish a national park in the area. His efforts for preservation of Denali's wilderness and wildlife culminated in the original establishment of Mt. McKinley National Park in 1917 (later renamed Denali National Park and Preserve in 1980). After Congress passed a bill to create the park, Sheldon was delegated to deliver personally the act to President Wilson. Harry Karstens said of Sheldon:

*"He was continually talking of the beauties of the country and of the variety of the game and wouldn't it make an ideal park and game preserve...He came in the following July hunting for the Biological Survey and stayed a year, during that time...we had located the limits of the caribou run. We would talk over the possible boundaries of a park and preserve which we laid out practically the same as the present park boundaries."*¹²

The Curry Hotel. The same year Denali was made a national park, the Alaska Railroad built Deadhorse Roadhouse atop Curry Ridge, known at the time as Deadhorse Hill. It was named after a bear scared a team of horses off a steep cliff. Nellie Neal Lawing, known as Alaska Nellie, ran the roadhouse. Nellie's crowning glory appears to have been in July of 1923 when she had the honor of serving President Warren G. Harding and then Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover a grand breakfast of Alaska sourdough hot cakes.¹³ The name Deadhorse was changed to Curry upon opening of a new luxurious hotel complete with a swimming pool and tennis courts. The Curry Hotel operated until it was destroyed by fire in 1958. Little can be seen where it once stood, and nature has reclaimed most of the old settlement as well.

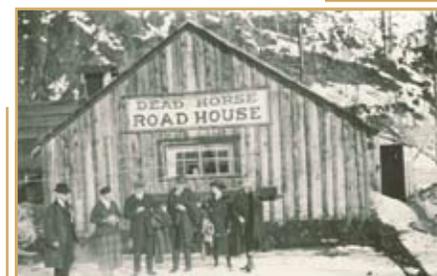
An Unlikely Partnership. It was in 1955 that legendary bush pilot Don Sheldon met the head of the surveying team from the Boston Museum of Science, Bradford Washburn. Don had recently installed a set of retractable skis to one of his SuperCubs, only the second set ever built, and this intrigued Washburn, because his team's survey work would require landing on the upper glaciers of Mt. McKinley and its neighboring peaks. The relationship between Sheldon and Washburn would

¹² Walker, T. 2005. *Kantishna: Musers, Miners, Mountaineers*. Missoula, MT: Pictorial Histories Publishing Company.

¹³ Marsh, K.L. 2002. *A River Between Us: The Upper Susitna River Valley*. Trapper Creek, AK: Trapper Creek Museum Sluice Box Productions.

"Without a doubt, the area surrounding Mount McKinley was surely traversed for generations by natives before the coming of the white men to Alaska. It bore several native names. Natives in the Yukon and Kuskokwin Rivers called it 'Denali.' Talkeetna natives called it 'Toli-ka.' It was called 'Traleika' (which means 'High Mountain') and 'Bulshoe' (meaning 'very large') by those Natives who lived along the Susitna River."

- Ken Marsh, Trapper Creek resident, in his book *A River Between Us, The Upper Susitna River Valley, A Historical Story Collection*



Nellie Neal, proprietor of Roadhouse, is second from left

continue for the next 15 years, and Sheldon would become one of the world's most proficient pilots at landing on glaciers. Washburn would become famous for his cartographic masterpieces of the McKinley Massif; his wife Barbara would become the first woman to summit the mountain. Over the years, Sheldon distinguished himself for his uncanny skills at flying his bush planes, and the stories of his lifesaving flights are too numerous to list here. Many trapped mountain climbers, hikers, and survivors of downed aircraft released sighs of relief when they heard the sputter of Sheldon's bush plane overhead. Just when everyone said no one could get through, that's when Don Sheldon would appear in his Piper Super Cub.¹⁴

The First Parks Highway Advocate. Alaska legend Mary Carey came to the Denali region as a widow in the early 1960s and promptly homesteaded 100 miles from the nearest road in what is now Denali State Park. She constantly advocated the building of the Parks Highway. When she petitioned then-governor Bill Egan to build a highway from Anchorage to Fairbanks, which would pass through the area she thought had the prettiest view of Mt. McKinley, he famously replied, "Alaska already has two roads, how many do you want in one state?"¹⁵ When the Parks Highway was finally built by her homestead in 1973, she built a lodge at mile 134, and then proceeded to write 16 books, including "Alaska—Not for a Woman" and one of the first books written about the Parks Highway, "An Auto Trip to Alaska's Shangri-la." Her family still operates her lodge today.

Historic Quality Challenges and Opportunities

Some of Alaska's richest and most interesting history can be found in stories associated with the Parks Byway, from some of the country's oldest archaeological sites to a rich history of stalwart adventurers. These stories can be preserved and enhanced through consultation and planning with byway communities and the appropriate agencies. Developing an interpretive plan would promote the area's history, highlight historic events along the corridor, and aid in development of interpretive media.

An inventory and preservation plan could be developed for the historic structures along the byway corridor, such as early homesteading houses and roadhouses. This plan could be used to apply for funding to restore and renovate important historic structures along the route and to list these special places on national and/or state historic registers.

¹⁴ Greiner, J. 1974. *Wager with the Wind. The Don Sheldon Story.* Chicago, IL: Rand McNally & Company.

¹⁵ Carey, M. 1975. *Alaska—Not for a Woman.* Austin, TX: Eakin Press.



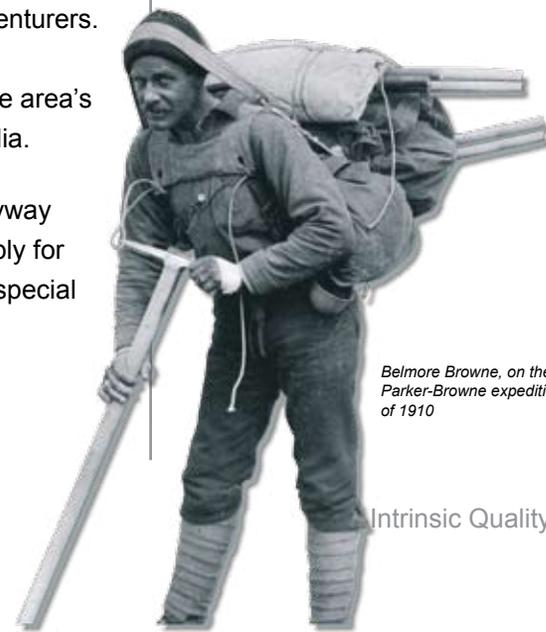
1912, hunting on north side



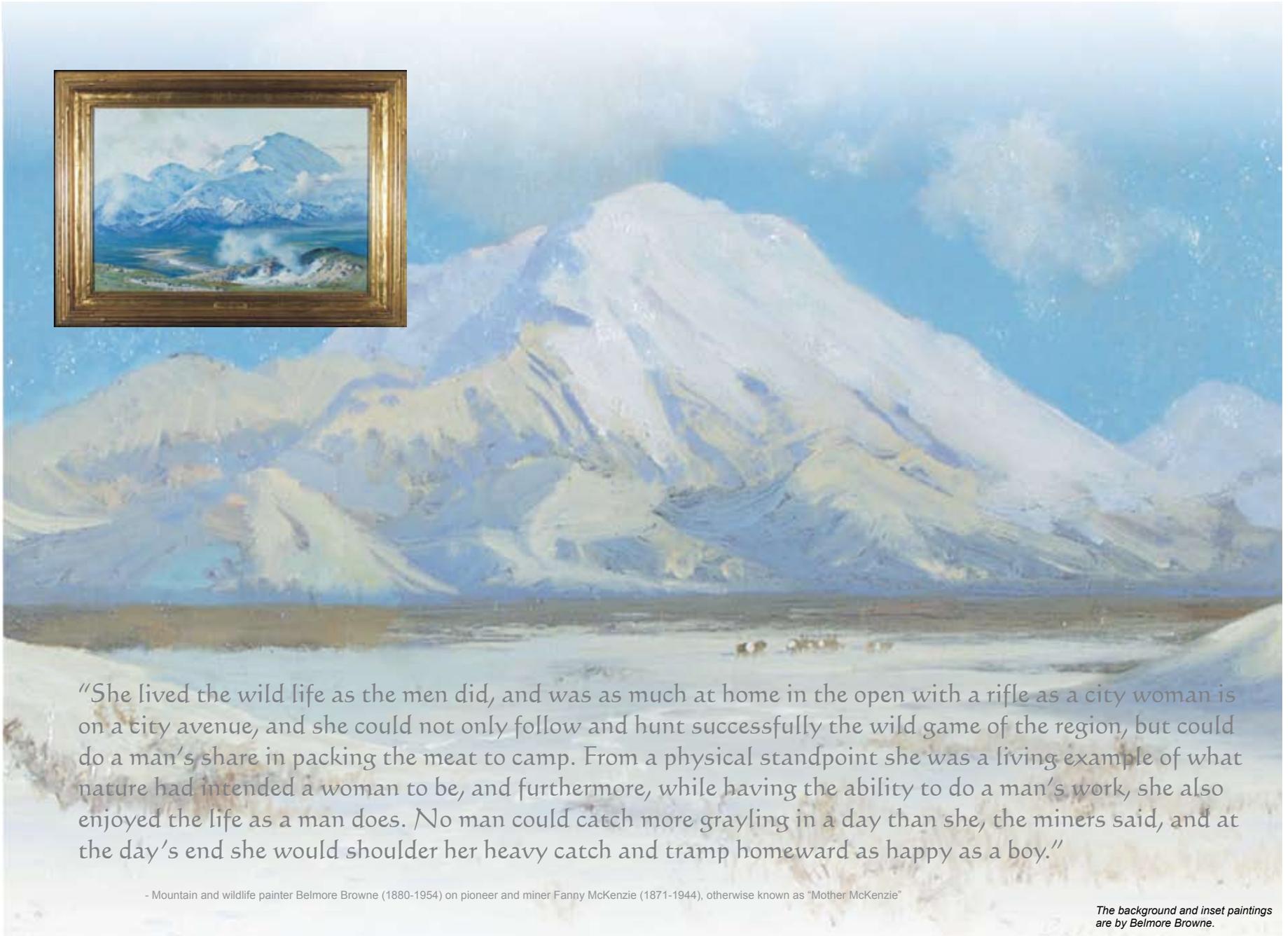
1912, tundra, north view



1910, Denali, taken from Explorers Peak



Belmore Browne, on the Parker-Browne expedition of 1910



“She lived the wild life as the men did, and was as much at home in the open with a rifle as a city woman is on a city avenue, and she could not only follow and hunt successfully the wild game of the region, but could do a man’s share in packing the meat to camp. From a physical standpoint she was a living example of what nature had intended a woman to be, and furthermore, while having the ability to do a man’s work, she also enjoyed the life as a man does. No man could catch more grayling in a day than she, the miners said, and at the day’s end she would shoulder her heavy catch and tramp homeward as happy as a boy.”

- Mountain and wildlife painter Belmore Browne (1880-1954) on pioneer and miner Fanny McKenzie (1871-1944), otherwise known as “Mother McKenzie”

The background and inset paintings are by Belmore Browne.

Cultural Qualities

Cultural quality is evidence and expressions of the customs or traditions of a distinct group of people. Cultural features include, but are not limited to, crafts, music, dance, rituals, festivals, speech, food, special events, vernacular, architecture, etc. The cultural qualities of the corridor could highlight one or more significant communities and/or ethnic traditions (FHWA Policy 5.18.95).

Unique Frontier Culture. The Parks Byway provides travelers with the opportunity to experience a unique frontier culture, discernible by modern-day trappers, explorers, mountaineers, miners, and homesteaders. The communities of the Parks Byway are rich in this shared culture born of the quintessential Alaskan theme of wilderness and characterized by self-sustainability and traditional values. Roadhouses in these communities and along the byway provide a feeling of stepping back in time. Some of these roadhouses have offered travelers meals and lodging since before the road was constructed in 1971. The following is a brief summary of how the communities of Cantwell and Healy contribute to this corridor's unique cultural atmosphere.

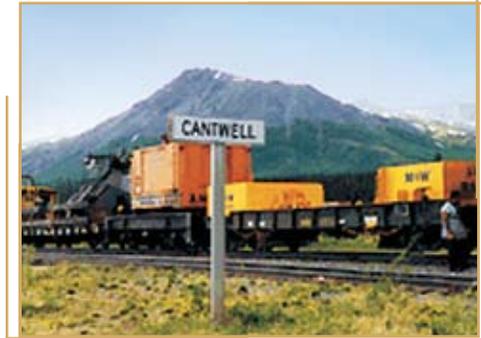
Cantwell, which includes the federally recognized Native Village of Cantwell, originated as a flag stop on the Alaska Railroad for prospectors. Prior to World War II, the Cantwell Section House was composed almost entirely of Indian women. One of the stories now legendary is the Cantwell all-woman crew of gandy dancers, laborers who drove spikes into rails to hold them in place. The rhythm of their sledgehammers, swung to a regular beat, earned them their nickname. It is said that the female crew kept the best-maintained line on the entire railroad.¹⁶

Alaska Natives make up roughly 35% of Cantwell's population today. The community retains strong Native traditions, with subsistence values remaining an integral part of the lifestyle. Wild food harvests are a primary example of these values and are crucial for maintaining important cultural traditions. Residents of the Denali Borough, including the federally qualified subsistence users of Cantwell, harvest about 260,000 pounds of wild foods per year. Over the entire borough, annual wild food harvests average 139 pounds per person.¹⁷

Healy is a quaint mining and railroad town that has evolved into a diverse community with year-

¹⁶ Carey, M. 1989. *An Auto Trip to Alaska's Shangri-la*. Tex-Alaska Press.

¹⁷ State of Alaska, Department of Commerce and Economic Development. Denali Borough Economic Overview: <http://www.dced.state.ak.us/dca/AEIS/Denali/General/Denali_General_Narrative.htm> (20 November 2007).



“Same thing that big McKinley mountain, they’re people too. All the Indians say when they [the mountain people] build fire you see their smoke—those clouds on top. All Indians will say ‘we’ll be glad they built a fire. Gonna warm up.’ And it did too.”

- John Stump, on the clouds on top of McKinley, which are said to be the smoke of the fires of the legendary mountain people

round visitor services. The Healy River Coal Company, now known as the Usibelli Coal Mine, Inc., first commercially mined in Healy in 1919. The hills near Healy produce about 1.5 million short tons of coal each year, which is exported as far away as South Korea.¹⁸ Healy coal continues to be a major contributor to the economies of the area and the rest of the state; in 1981, coal mining was heralded as the second largest export business in Alaska. Usibelli Coal Mine, Inc. was named the 2007 Governor's Exporter of the Year and is listed in Alaska Business Monthly as one of the top 49 Alaska Businesses. There are approximately 100 employees at the mine, about a third of whom are second or third generation Usibelli employees. Just north of Healy is the Stampede Road, which leads to the historic Stampede Trail, an original gold mining trail blazed in the 1930s. Much of the trail now falls within Denali National Park. The Stampede Road offers an alternative starting point to the main entrance of Denali National Park.

Multi-Community Carnival. The regional Winterfest Celebration in the Denali Borough showcases the season responsible for the corridor's frontier lifestyle with a wide range of activities that provide opportunities to safely enjoy winter and sample the amenities the area has to offer. This annual festival connects the region's culture with recreation opportunities through a variety of activities for all ages and skill levels, including dog sled rides, cross-country skiing, snow sculpting, snow bowling, dog fur spinning, avalanche safety, snow shelter building, history presentations, snowshoe walks, winter bicycling, track finding, and storytelling. Denali National Park and Preserve, the Denali Borough, and the Denali Borough School District are among the key co-sponsors of Winterfest Celebration, and all Denali Borough communities are included in the festivities.

Cultural Quality Challenges and Opportunities

There are relatively untapped opportunities for cultural history interpretation, particularly about Alaska Natives and pioneer culture. An interpretive plan could serve to highlight the uniqueness of byway communities through recommendations to share local stories in informational, educational, and interpretive media. Interpreting heritage activities that highlight local traditions would serve to communicate with visitors the self-sufficiency and ingenuity of area residents. An interpretive plan would serve to capture these cultural themes and stories and recommend the best way to share cultural qualities with byway travelers.

The Parks Byway Community Partnership supports efforts by the Matanuska-Susitna and the Denali



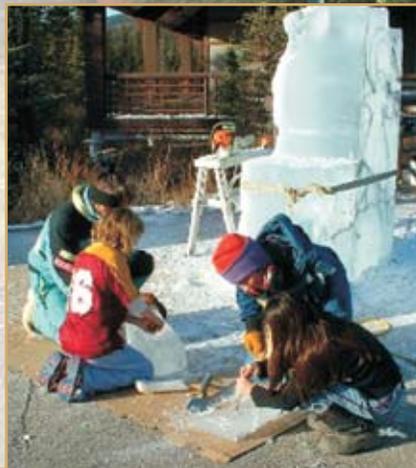
¹⁸ Denali Borough. 2005. Proceedings of the Denali Summit: Envisioning the Future of the Denali Borough Communities. Healy, AK.

boroughs to develop town centers within byway communities. Realization of this goal should help to support the need for local availability of services and products that encourage year-round economic activity, while preserving local cultural distinctiveness.

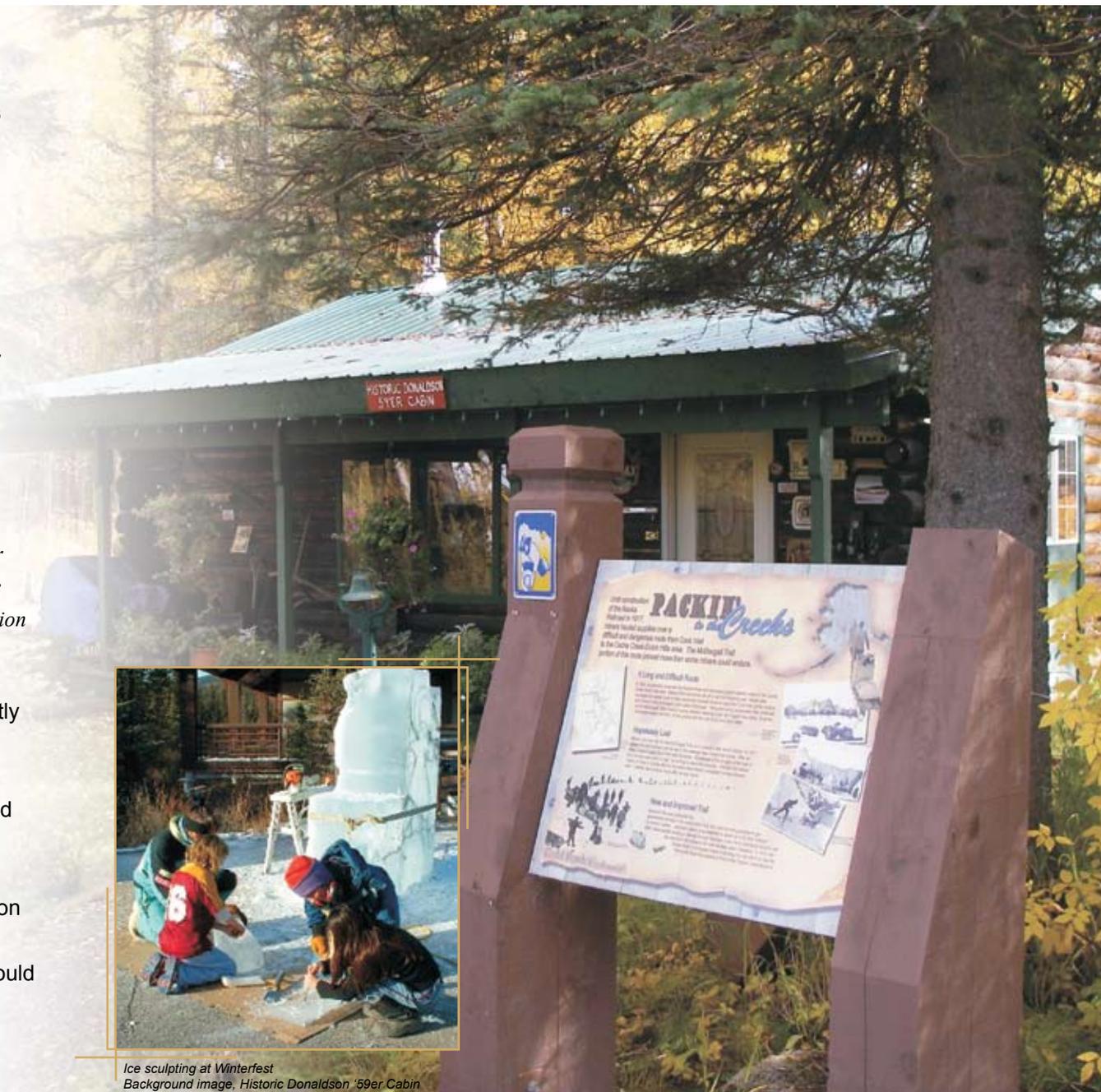
Archaeological Qualities

Archaeological quality involves those characteristics of the scenic byways corridor that are physical evidence of historic or prehistoric human life or activities that are visible and capable of being inventoried and interpreted. The scenic byway corridor's archaeological interest, as identified through ruins, artifacts, structural remains, and other physical evidence have scientific significance that educate the viewer and stir an appreciation for the past (FHWA Policy 5.18.95).

This intrinsic quality will not be significantly marketed due to the sensitivity of archaeological sites along the corridor. Known resources include sites associated with Athabaskan groups and major prehistoric sites such as the Teklanika Archaeological District, a property listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Joining efforts with area archeologists would ensure that protection of these sensitive resources remains unchanged.



Ice sculpting at Winterfest
Background image, Historic Donaldson '59er Cabin



5.

TRANSPORTATION AND SAFETY

Introduction

This chapter presents an overview of the transportation system in the Denali region and how the Parks Byway fits into this system. Topics required by the National Scenic Byways Program that could influence the visitor's experience addressed here include: traffic conditions and signs, commercial traffic, outdoor advertising, air and rail service, bus and shuttle service, and bicycle and pedestrian travel. Transportation system recommendations from the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (ADOT&PF) 2006 Parks Highway Visioning Document are provided at the end of this chapter.

Transportation System Overview

The Parks Byway is the backbone of the transportation system through central Alaska. It is a vital link connecting numerous communities in Southcentral Alaska to the northern regions of the state and is paramount for community connections and commerce on both statewide and regional levels. This link serves this region as the main trunk for a network of connector roads, city streets, destination recreation areas, local traffic, commercial establishments, and through passenger and freight traffic.¹ For many rural communities, the byway is their lifeblood. Serving as the main street for most of the communities it passes through, the byway enables local residents to get to work, school, visit friends, and recreate. Others employ the route for private and commercial through-traffic to Fairbanks, Anchorage, and destinations in, between, or beyond. There are no alternate routes through this region.

Most of the byway is a two-lane road with varying paved shoulders. There are segments of byway that have divided controlled access with frontage roads. Mileposts along the Parks Byway do not begin with zero. Instead, they begin with milepost 35, continuing the milepost numbering of the Glenn Highway National Scenic Byway where the two highways intersect near Palmer. Thus, mileposts



Broad Pass

“...completion of this sixty-five miles of highway... would cut about one hundred miles from the distance now traveled between Anchorage and Fairbanks by the motorist. This would mean a direct truck line from the docks at Seward to Fairbanks, with connecting links to all major towns in south central Alaska. It would open a circular route for the tourist whereby he could visit the more populated areas of the state without doubling back. It would give both the Alaskan and the tourist a close-up of magnificent Mt. McKinley and the virgin wilderness, with its vast potential, which would encourage economic development.”

- Mary Carey (1913-2004), pioneer and homesteader

¹ State of Alaska, Department of Transportation and Public Facilities. 2006. Parks Highway Visioning Document (AKSAS Project Number 74833). Anchorage, AK: CH2MHill.

along the Parks Highway reflect the distance from Anchorage, which is not actually on the Parks Highway.

One concern in this corridor relates to summer traffic flow and the mix of recreation and residential traffic. On any given weekend or holiday during the summer, recreation traffic increases sharply due to people traveling to destinations such as key trailheads or fish streams. Tourism traffic is evident in the large number of recreation vehicles, pedestrians, and tour buses. Land adjacent to the byway provides for many functions during all seasons, including pull-outs, recreation access, bike trails, public and commercial establishment parking, raft launches, trailheads, and camping.



The southern boundary of the byway

Traffic Volumes

Average daily traffic volumes range from between 1,203 and 2,312 vehicles (Table 1). This data is from 2006, the most recently compiled year. Traffic volumes in 2006 are up slightly from 2004, although it is interesting to note that volumes dropped at an average of over 600 vehicles per day at the entrance to Denali National Park and Preserve.

Table 1: 2004-2006 Parks Highway Scenic Byway Traffic Volumes

Milepost	Feature	Average Daily Volumes	
		2004	2006
132.7	Chulitna River bridge	989	1210
146	Byers Lake Campground entrance	1102	1203
185	East Fork Chulitna River	1380	1390
209.9	Jct. with Denali Hwy	1912	2312
237.3	Jct. with Denali Park road	2862	2225
249	Jct. with Healy spur road	1979	2166

Source: ADOT&PF Alaska Highway Data section of ADOT&PF website.

In general, traffic volumes along the corridor decrease from the Wasilla area north to the entrance of Denali National Park and Preserve, where volumes then begin to increase north to the Fairbanks area. The Parks Byway has high seasonal variations in traffic volumes in the rural and high recreation use areas along the corridor. In 2000, increases of over 100% were recorded during summer in some areas.

Safety and Accident Record

The Scenic Byway segment of the Parks Highway is a safe road and safety will only improve as planned upgrades are completed in problem areas. Accident data collected in 2005, the most recently compiled year, show 85 accidents for the year (Table 2). The overwhelming majority of these accidents resulted in property damage or minor injuries. Recent highway projects along the Parks Byway have improved general road conditions and safety, with priorities given mainly to reduction of at-grade railroad crossings, traffic control, and pedestrian access. However, there is still a need for passing, turning, and climbing lanes on some portions of the byway.²

Winter driving conditions can be challenging and account for a small percentage of traffic accidents each year. Although the ADOT&PF maintains the byway year-round, in the winter, snow, wind, and cold require extra preparation on the part of the traveler. Certain grades and alignments require caution during winter, especially the hills of Honolulu Creek and the East Fork of the Chulitna River.

² Denali Borough. 2007. Comprehensive Plan, Draft May 10, 2007.

Table 2: 2005 Parks Highway Scenic Byway Accident Data (Milepost 132-248)

Accident Severity	Number of Accident
Fatal	2
Major Injury	10
Minor Injury	22
Property Damage	51
Total Accidents	85

Source: ADOT&PF, 2005 Accident Report.

Before embarking, travelers can access a current ADOT&PF road report by phone or online.

Moose and other wildlife on the roadway cause a small number of traffic accidents annually. It is ADOT&PF policy to clear vegetation in the right-of-way to allow drivers to see wildlife before the animals reach the roadway and to install warning signs in the most concentrated wildlife crossing areas.

Signage and Outdoor Advertising

Private and commercial signage along the byway is minimal and adequate—what does exist is not intrusive or inappropriate. Private signs clustered within communities leave large tracks along the byway without signage. Signage requirements come under the jurisdiction of the ADOT&PF and the Matanuska-Susitna and Denali boroughs.

Mile markers and Alaska Scenic Byway signs dot the byway. The Alaska Scenic Byway signs

may be confusing to some visitors; most signs show only an image of a blooming fireweed and do not actually indicate through text that the traveler is on a state byway. The ADOT&PF has plans to install lettered byway signs approximately every 15 miles on the Parks Byway in 2008 and 2009.

Signs between the boroughs show a lack of continuity. Signs in the Denali Borough mark roadside parking and scenic viewpoints, while those in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough do not. Sign consistency between both boroughs would present the byway as a unified, continuous route. Overall, signage is satisfactory but minor improvements could be made. For example, additional signage is needed to better direct visitors to recreation areas and trailheads.

In 1998, Alaska voters passed one of the most restrictive outdoor advertising laws in the country by a 72 percent majority. As a result, billboards and outdoor, off-premise advertising are prohibited in the state.

The local boroughs and the ADOT&PF Right-of-Way Section enforce outdoor advertising within the byway corridor. Given the existing laws, outdoor advertising should not be a significant issue along the Parks Byway.



Denali State Park

Commercial Traffic

The Parks Byway is a critical link in Alaska’s commercial trucking network, serving a large volume of daily truck movements between Anchorage and Fairbanks. It also is a direct route to the economically vital oil fields of the North Slope region to and from Anchorage. The fundamental traffic conflict is that of speed. Generally, commercial traffic prefers higher speeds, and tourist traffic prefers a more leisurely speed to allow for unexpected stops and viewing. Therefore, the Parks Byway must continue to be oriented toward handling all forms of ground transportation, including both commercial and through-traffic, while still supporting the safe and efficient flow of localized traffic in key areas.

Air Service

The Parks Byway provides access to numerous public airfields, many of which have the capacity for expansion and future development. Tour companies operating out of offices based at these airfields offer visitors sightseeing and glacier landing tours. Countless lakes provide wilderness access for floatplanes. Talkeetna is a major hub for sightseeing tours of the Denali area. The airport is nearly equal to the size of the town, with more than five air taxis specifically in business to serve the hundreds of climbers and thousands of flightseers that visit the region each year.

Alaska Railroad State Scenic Byway

The Alaska Railroad, the main line of which parallels the entire length of the Parks Highway, provides both passenger and freight service. Flag stops along the route provide wilderness access and allow Parks Byway travelers to hop aboard at various locations to experience another method of transportation. The Alaska Railroad also offers custom trips in the region. The Denali Star Train runs between Anchorage and Fairbanks with stops at Talkeetna, Curry, and Denali National Park and Preserve.

Bus and Shuttle Travel

A variety of bus and shuttle services transport visitors in and around Denali National Park and Preserve. Three narrated bus tours are provided for park visitors, the Tundra Wilderness Tour, the Natural History Tour, and the Kantishna Experience. In addition to tour buses, there are a variety of transportation options for visitors moving around the park frontcountry and to and from communities along the Parks Byway. Courtesy vans and busses operated by local businesses transport visitors from their establishments along the byway to and around the park. Private transportation services are being refined in order to provide a more valuable alternative for adventure-seeking visitors lodging in hotels along the corridor. All bus services offered within the national park, including the Savage River Shuttle, the Dog Sled



Alaska Division of Tourism



Hurricane Gulch

Demonstration Shuttle, and the Riley Creek Loop Shuttle, are concession-operated. A consolidated shuttle bus and transit system serving Parks Byway communities and managed as a partnership between the National Park Service, the business community, and potentially local government is in the initial planning stages.³

Bicycle and Pedestrian Travel

Paved shoulders, six feet or more in width, extend the length of the byway and provide good accommodation for bicyclists. Shoulders on some bridges along the byway are narrower than highway shoulders, but still provide adequate accommodation for pedestrians and bicyclists. In developed areas such as the Nenana Canyon commercial area, the ADOT&PF has constructed separated paths and trails as part of improvement projects.⁴

2006 Parks Highway Visioning Document

The ADOT&PF recently completed a regional transportation study intended to describe a future vision for the Parks Highway. This study serves as the conceptual basis for a more detailed future planning effort. Most of the large-scale improvements suggested in the document will require additional federal funding and direction from the Alaska Department of Administration and the Alaska State Legislature. Based on 2030 traffic projections, the visioning document included the following future recommendations along the Parks Byway.

Trapper Creek–Broad Pass. There is a need for passing lanes in this area. It is likely that an upgraded, two-lane section outfitted with passing and climbing lanes with select, short, four-lane sections will be adequate to address 2030 traffic needs. There is a significant conflict between slow-

³ Denali National Park and Preserve. 2006. Needs Assessment & Feasibility Study for a Community Transportation System (Task Order Number T2000041414). Anchorage, AK: HDR Alaska.

⁴ State of Alaska, Department of Transportation and Public Facilities. 2006. Parks Highway Visioning Document (AKSAS Project Number 74833). Anchorage, AK: CH2MHill.

moving and turning traffic viewing Mt. McKinley and faster-moving through-traffic. Frontage roads may be required from the Chulitna River to Byers Creek.

Cantwell–Carlo Creek. There is a need for passing lanes and climbing lanes in this region. It is possible that an upgraded, two-lane section outfitted with passing and climbing lanes with an interchange, a short four-lane section, and frontage roads in Cantwell may be adequate if traffic volumes warrant and funding is available.

Carlo Creek–McKinley Park. There is a need for passing lanes and climbing lanes on this section of byway. Also needed are turning lanes to accommodate the numerous driveways in McKinley Park. A continuous frontage road system extending the full length of this section of the byway is the ultimate vision. This frontage road system would ideally connect to the byway at several interchanges or unsignalized, at-grade intersections. Further investigations will determine if an upgraded, two-lane section with the frontage road system will be necessary in 2030.

McKinley Park–Nenana Canyon. The heart of this section is Nenana Canyon, or the Nenana Canyon Commercial District, a high volume, one-mile segment just north of the entrance to Denali National Park. A safety project recently was completed north of the canyon. Several bypass options have been discussed as a long-

term solution to handle through-traffic in this area.

The entrance to Denali National Park needs turning lanes and other safety improvements. North of the Nenana Canyon area is a rural section with the need for passing lanes. Based on currently available volume projections, an improved two-lane section may be adequate through 2030.

Nenana Canyon–Healy. There is a need for passing and climbing lanes on this section of the byway. It is possible that an upgraded two-lane section outfitted with passing and climbing lanes and the interchange at the road to Anderson will be adequate, if traffic volumes warrant and funding is available.

Transportation System Challenges and Opportunities

There is sufficient capacity to accommodate travelers along the byway. ADOT&PF and other entities' plans will accommodate additional capacity, and increase the comfort and safety of travelers by improving signage and access to the byway's attractions. One challenge that the Parks Byway faces with regard to transportation is funding for improvements. Without additional federal and state funding beyond the current levels, the Partnership and partner agencies may not be able to implement some of the suggestions in this document.

Different seasons bring unique challenges. In winter, funding for maintaining restrooms and keeping pull-outs free from snow is a factor influencing the Parks Byway transportation system. Many restrooms are closed during the winter months because extreme cold makes pumping public restrooms impossible, and funding for insulated or heated tanks is not available. During this time of year, travelers must be strategic about their restroom stops. Trapper Creek, Cantwell, and Healy have businesses with restroom facilities. In summer, maintenance of byway pull-outs can be challenging. Several byway pull-outs lack litter receptacles. Some travelers will hold their trash until they reach a community but many byway pull-outs accumulate litter during the busy summer season. Local residents will at times take responsibility for keeping these pull-outs litter-free; however, this is not a maintainable situation.

The proposed South Denali Visitor Center in Denali State Park will go a long way in improving availability of visitor facilities and services at the southern end of the byway. This visitor complex will be open year-round, which will relieve some of the pressure to maintain additional restrooms on the byway. A similar facility at the north end of the byway and another in Cantwell would be desirable in the future.

6.

TOURISM AND MARKETING

Introduction

This chapter presents an overview of the tourism environment and how the Parks Byway fits into this environment. One of the primary goals of this plan is to enhance the economic vitality of local communities along the byway through a more developed tourism strategy. Most of the communities along the byway rely on the economic benefits derived from tourism and recreation travel-related activities. Therefore, strengthening the local tourism economy can represent an important part of the byway communities' economic development strategy. Given that tourist numbers in Alaska are climbing, opportunities exist for Parks Byway communities to capture additional tourist markets through expansion of marketing and promotional activities.

The Tourism Environment

Tourism is a major contributor to Alaska's economy, second in revenue only to oil production, and is the state's largest renewable industry.¹ Overall, the economic impact of travel and tourism stands out at more than \$1.6 billion annually, representing 5.6% of Alaska's gross state product.² According to the Alaska Tourism Satellite Account, each pleasure visitor to Alaska spends \$2,430 on average.³

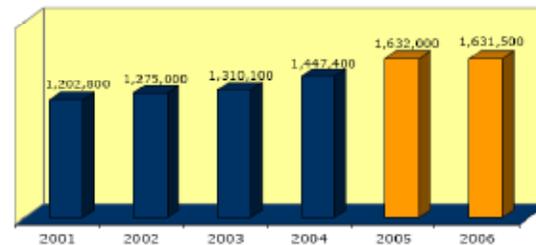
The number of summer visitors to Alaska has increased since 2001 (Fig. 6). Cruise travel fueled

¹ State of Alaska, Department of Commerce and Economic Development. 2006. The Net Return to the State of Alaska from Timber, Tourism, Minerals, and Commercial Fisheries. Report prepared for the Senate Labor & Commerce Committee.

² Alaska Travel Industry Association. 2006. Alaska's Visitor Industry 2006 Report.

³ State of Alaska, Department of Commerce and Economic Development. 2004. The Alaska Tourism Satellite Account: a Comprehensive Analysis of the Economic Contribution of Travel & Tourism. Philadelphia, PA: Global Insight.

Figure 6: Alaska Summer Visitor Volume



Sources: 2001-2004 data from Alaska Visitor Arrivals study (conducted by Northern Economics, Inc.); 2005 data based on 2006 visitor/resident ratios obtained from AVSP V (conducted by McDowell Group, Inc.).



Byers Lake, Denali State Park



Broad Pass

most of this growth in the last decade.⁴ The cruise ship industry represents a major interest on the byway and numerous tour operators utilize the byway to enhance their guest experience. The cruise ship industry does not limit visitors to water-based excursions. Rather, the tours they market to Alaskan visitors include “Land Only” and “Cruise Tours” (a combination of cruise and land travel) that combine a wide variety of experiences, destinations, and modes of travel, made available through regional hubs and partnerships with others in the travel industry. Additional guest facilities are planned in upcoming years to accommodate rising visitor numbers.

Tourist travel on the Parks Byway is largely centered on the major tourist attraction of Denali National Park and Preserve, which attracted 415,935 visitors in 2006. Tourism in Denali is intensely seasonal, concentrated in a burst of visitation between May and September. During these months, seasonal resident and non-resident workers triple the Denali Borough’s population. The communities along the Parks Byway provide extensive services to park visitors, including accommodations, guide and charter services, and restaurants. The national park continues to provide the Denali Borough with a large source of revenue. A bed tax collected by hotels at the park’s entrance supplies almost \$2 million annually, 86% of the Borough’s revenues, and helps pay for public services such as schools and road maintenance.⁵

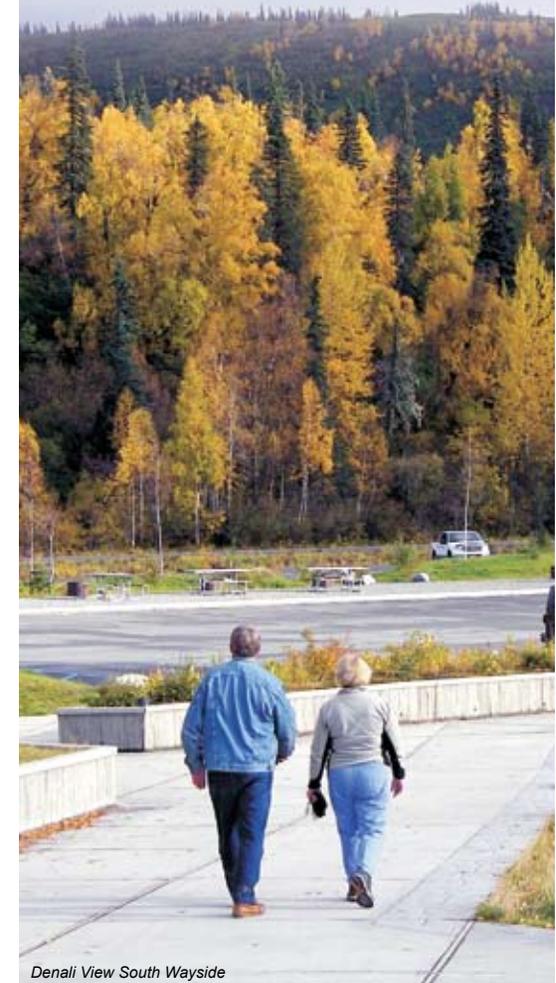
One option for expanding capacity, and potentially the benefits of tourism, is to increase tourism beyond the months of May through September. Options include strengthening the shoulder season by establishing new avenues for winter activities such as skiing, snowmobiling, dog sledding, and Northern Lights viewing. The open, snow-covered tundra makes an exceptional playground for winter recreation. Cantwell is taking advantage of this resource, marketing itself as an attraction for winter recreation pursuits like snowmobiling. Denali State Park already offers great winter access for skiing, snowmobiling, snowshoeing, dog sledding, northern lights viewing, and winter camping. The proposed South Denali Visitor Center will offer even more winter activities including winter environmental education, cultural workshops, groomed Nordic ski trails, and public use cabins and huts. Reaching out to travelers by expanding promotional activities and through partnerships with established visitor industries, such as the cruise ship and railroad industries, will encourage additional byway travelers, who will stay longer, enjoy their trip more, and keep coming back.

⁴ State of Alaska, Department of Commerce and Economic Development. 2006. Alaska Visitor Statistics Program, Alaska Visitor Volume and Profile, Summer 2006. Juneau, AK: McDowell Group.

⁵ State of Alaska, Department of Labor and Workforce Development. 2001. Alaska Economic Trends: The Denali Borough 21 (9).



Dall's sheep



Denali View South Wayside

Tourism and Marketing Challenges and Opportunities

Interpretive and travel publications and electronic media will represent the crux of the marketing strategy for the Parks Byway. The development and implementation of a byway marketing plan are essential to realizing the byway's tourism and economic development potential. This marketing plan will look at past travel trends and future projections, identify national, domestic, and international target markets, identify multi-lingual

needs, and help position the Parks Byway as a world-class drive. The plan also will recommend which marketing tools will be most appropriate to reach each of the target markets. The Denali and Matanuska-Susitna boroughs each have a chamber of commerce, and Alaska State Parks and the National Park Service operate visitor centers on the byway. The Parks Byway Community Partnership will use the resources of these and other organizations to promote and publicize the byway both locally and nationally.

One challenge influencing the tourist market is the availability of housing for seasonal employees. In the summer season, the Denali Borough experiences a shortage of accommodations for seasonal residents. Growth of the tourist market in these communities could see a parallel growth in seasonal residents. A similar challenge concerns the capacity of existing recreational facilities and visitor accommodations, many of which may be at carrying capacity. A regional assessment of



Talkeetna Mountains

existing and projected seasonal housing, recreational facilities, and visitor accommodation needs may prove valuable.

The Parks Byway is fortunate to have many active players interested in its success (see Acknowledgements chapter). Strategic alliances

with local chambers of commerce, visitor bureaus in Fairbanks and Anchorage, the Alaska Travel Industry Association, the Alaska Wilderness Recreation and Tourism Association, other byway organizations, and state and federal agencies would allow available byway funds

to be used with a singular, organized purpose. Coordination with other planning efforts for public facilities affecting the byway, such as the proposed South Denali Visitor Center Complex, would ensure a consistent message and provide an integrated, regional marketing strategy.



Mt. McKinley as seen from Denali Park Road near Stoney Pass, Denali National Park and Preserve

7.

INTERPRETATION

Introduction

This chapter highlights existing Parks Byway interpretive media and messages, and suggests additional messages that would improve the visitor experience. This chapter also looks at the byway's ability to direct travelers to byway opportunities, thus enhancing the visitor experience while at the same time supporting local businesses.

Existing Experience

Existing interpretation along the Parks Byway corridor is limited and represents only a fraction of the byway's interpretive potential. The following is a summary of interpretive sites on this segment of the Parks Byway, as they existed at the onset of the planning process. This section provides a baseline by which to justify the plan's interpretive suggestions.

Mt. McKinley Princess Lodge. Denali State Park interpreters provide multiple interpretive programs at the lodge seven days a week from mid-May through mid-September. Topics range from wildlife to geologic processes of the Alaska Range. The lodge also hosts daily talks from guest service staff on topics such as the history of Alaska, the Iditarod, and the 1964 Good Friday earthquake. All talks and presentations are open to the public.

Mary's McKinley View Lodge. The late Mary Carey, regionally proclaimed historian, author, adventurer, and pioneer, homesteaded this privately owned historic lodge in the early 1960s. The lodge provides interpretive offerings and sells local arts and crafts.

Denali View South Wayside. This Denali State Park wayside showcases scenic viewpoints, a short interpretive trail, viewing scopes, and interpretive panels on natural history topics such as Mt. McKinley's mountaineering history and Alaska Range weather. In summer, State Park volunteers give informal oral presentations.



Denali View South Wayside

“We have a very long history but we are a very young state. One idea is to make our visitors aware how truly young our state is. Many people have no idea that the Parks Highway is a relatively young road. The Windy Corner bridge across the Nenana River was completed in the early 70’s. Before that if someone in Healy wanted to go to Denali they had to drive all the way to Fairbanks around to the Richardson Highway and then use the Denali Highway to Cantwell and then back up to the park. Making what is now a 15 minute drive into an all day adventure lasting over 8 hours just to get to the park!”

- Teresa Hall, Healy resident

Lower Troublesome Creek. A double-sided kiosk provides limited interpretation on Denali State Park bears, hiking, plants, and moose.

Upper Troublesome Creek. A double-sided kiosk provides limited interpretation on Denali State Park bears, scenic viewing, and safety concerns.

Byers Lake Campground. This Denali State Park visitor facility has a number of kiosks and bulletin boards containing interpretive and informational displays. Topics currently explored

include the history of the area, birds, safety information, bears, Mt. McKinley, glaciers, and winter activities.

Alaska Veterans Memorial. This popular Denali State Park picnic spot includes a number of interpretive displays on World War II and natural and cultural history topics. The Alaska Veterans Memorial consists of monuments and an alcove with a semi-circle of five 20-foot-tall concrete panels representing the Army, Marine Corps, Navy, Air Force, and Coast Guard. At the entrance to the Memorial stands a statue

of two members of the Alaska Territorial Guard, one looking through binoculars at Mt. McKinley just 35 miles away. Additionally, the Memorial recognizes the Alaska National Guard, the Merchant Marine, and Congressional Medal of Honor recipients. A non-profit friends group manages a summer-operated visitor center, staffed by volunteers who give informal oral presentations.

Denali View North Campground. This Denali State Park facility features camping and picnic sites. The site offers spotting scopes, a nature



Denali View South Wayside

trail, and interpretive kiosks with panels on topics such as Mt. McKinley's mountaineering history, bears, Leave No Trace Techniques, and scenic viewing of the Alaska Range. State Park volunteers give informal oral presentations in summer.

Little Coal Creek Trailhead. A kiosk provides limited interpretation on bears, moose, plants, and safety concerns.

Denali National Park and Preserve. This national park provides numerous interpretive and educational facilities both onsite and offsite to visitors, families, schoolchildren, and other audiences. These resources include the Denali Center for Resources - Science and Learning, the Murie Science and Learning Center, the Denali Visitor Center, the Eielson Visitor Center, the Denali Bookstore, the Wilderness Access Center, the Backcountry Information Center, and entrance area interpretive trails. The park also sponsors natural history tours, campfire interpretive programs, guided and self-guided hikes, and sled dog demonstrations.

Nenana River Bridge Wayside. A pedestrian path begins here at milepost 238 on the west side of the byway that leads south to the Denali National Park and Preserve entrance. An interpretive kiosk provides information on natural and cultural history topics.

Existing and Potential Interpretive Themes

The following interpretive themes are those ideas, concepts, and stories central to the nature of the Parks Byway. These themes are essential to visitor understanding and appreciation, and although they do not include everything that may be interpreted, they do address those ideas that are critical to understanding and appreciating the Parks Byway's significance.

Byway interpretive themes should be unified and consistent across the corridor's parks, visitor centers, and interpretive sites. The Denali National Park and Preserve interpretive team works with a number of major interpretive themes, all of which also relate to the Parks Byway.¹ Interpretive messages along the byway could incorporate some of these tested themes and theme statements:

Intact Natural Ecosystems. This healthy, functioning ecosystem provides the opportunity to discover the connective force of nature and experience our natural heritage.

Wildlife and Wildlife Habitat. The size and ecological integrity of the area preserve a home of unequaled quality for populations of large northern mammals, birds, and other wildlife.

Mountain Massif and Geologic Processes. Towering above this northern landscape, Mt. McKinley and the Alaska Range embody a power and beauty that captivate human imagination, and inspire exploration and protection of the region's landscapes, wildlife, and wilderness.

Wilderness Values and Wilderness Recreation. The region's wilderness character and the values it embodies provide unparalleled opportunities for people to experience wild America.

People and the Land. People have interacted with this landscape through time, allowing its attributes to shape their character, lives, and values as they seek to define their relationship with the natural world.

Dynamic Change. On a scale that diminishes the human lifespan, cycles and forces tremendous in scope influence the region's landscapes and its inhabitants.

There is also the potential to branch out in other directions, to tell additional stories about the corridor through the broader topics of the Alaskan way of life, Alaskan recreation, and connections. Potential

¹ National Park Service. 2006. Denali Education Plan: A Long Range Vision for Education and Interpretation, Draft Dec. 19, 2006.

themes might include:

Denali Country Gateway. The Parks Byway and the communities along the route serve as gateways to the spectacular Denali region of Alaska.

Frontier Culture and Pioneer History. The communities of the Parks Byway are rich in a shared frontier culture discernible by past and present trappers, miners, explorers, mountaineers, and homesteaders, and characterized by self-sustainability and traditional values.

Recreation in Alaska. From extreme winter sports to berry picking to leisurely wildlife viewing, recreation in Alaska is multi-faceted and in a class all its own. What many people may call recreation is a way of life and a means of survival to rural Alaskans living along the byway.

Connections. This remote region holds interesting state, national, and global connections. From international adventurers to World War II activities, this region links to the rest of the world in surprising ways.

Interpretation Challenges and Opportunities

Developing and implementing an interpretive plan for the Parks Byway will promote stewardship, enhance visitor connections to the byway's unique landscapes and cultures, update

existing interpretation, and tie together the different resources and sites along the byway. An interpretive plan will serve to guide development of interpretive media in a meaningful, consistent way, while also addressing bilingual needs. It is recommended that the byway organization work with the Alaska Scenic Byways Program to design interpretive signage and other media consistent with state standards.

An information system linked to interpretation would accomplish several objectives for the byway: to orient travelers, to provide travelers with information on byway opportunities, and to encourage visitors to frequent local businesses

and attractions. Information panels and bulletin boards should have a uniform appearance similar in style to interpretive panels in order to link byway interpretation with visitor information and orientation.



Byers Lake Campground



Alaska Veterans Memorial, Denali State Park

8.

VISION, GOALS, AND OBJECTIVES

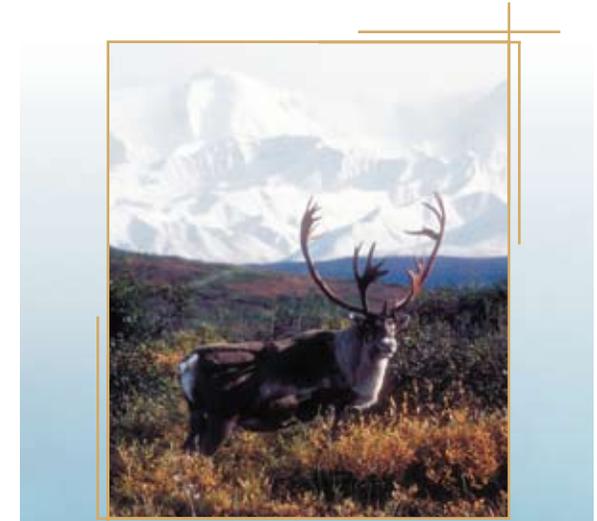
This chapter represents what the Parks Byway Community Partnership envisions for the future of the Parks Byway and documents what the group would like to accomplish with this Corridor Partnership Plan. Throughout a series of meetings, the Partnership created the following vision statement and goals and objectives, which were designed to be easy to understand and straightforward to implement.

Vision Statement

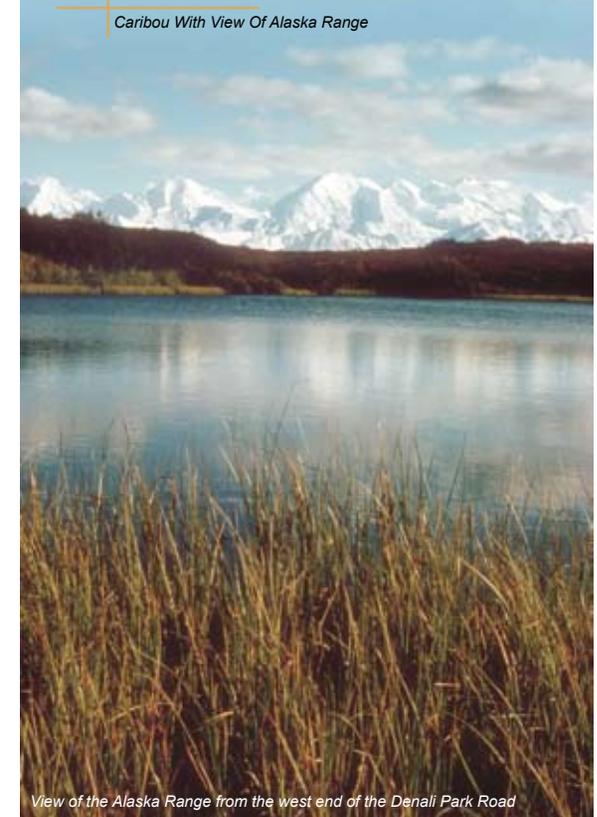
Take a journey on the Parks Byway into the wilds of Alaska. Experience breathtaking views clear to the horizon of majestic mountains, including Denali (Mt. McKinley), North America's highest peak. The Parks Highway Scenic Byway takes you from the birch and spruce forests of the Upper Susitna River Basin through the Alaska Range's wide-open alpine tundra. It passes steeply-carved hillsides, broad open plains, glacier-fed rivers, and clear water streams—a landscape carved over time by snow, ice, and other natural forces.

Through cooperative planning and continued sustainable development, the Parks Byway Community Partnership is dedicated to maintaining the scenic qualities of the byway corridor and honoring the spirit of the last frontier by providing a safe, comfortable, and educational adventure to be enjoyed by every traveler. The Parks Byway Community Partnership further contributes to the communities and places of interest along the corridor by promoting tourism, supporting the local culture, and enhancing the economic base of the region.

The Parks Highway Scenic Byway is a place where people value their connection to the land for recreation, self-sufficiency, and continuing cultural traditions—a corridor in which the independent, frontier spirit of the people is reflected in the uniqueness of their rural communities.



Caribou With View Of Alaska Range



View of the Alaska Range from the west end of the Denali Park Road

Goals and Objectives

Goal 1: Develop a sustainable Parks Byway Community Partnership to provide for the long-term viability of the Scenic Byway.

Objective A: Pursue and attain status as an All-American Road.

Objective B: Formalize the Partnership organizational structure for administrative, financial, and operational purposes.

Objective C: Strengthen and promote the Partnership through increased public and stakeholder participation in planning and implementation efforts.

Objective D: Develop methods to communicate regularly with the public and byway stakeholders on ongoing and future Partnership efforts.

Goal 2: Protect and enhance the intrinsic qualities of the byway through cooperative planning, education, and partnerships.

Objective A: Collaborate with private and public entities and agencies to protect and improve scenic viewing opportunities along the byway.

Objective B: Work with stakeholders and landowners to encourage conservation and wise development of natural resources along the byway and in gateway communities.

Objective C: Promote and support

respectful development that offers visitors and Alaskans opportunities to experience the byway's natural, cultural, and recreational resources.

Objective D: Preserve and enhance the byway's historical, cultural, and archaeological resources through consultation and planning with byway communities and appropriate agencies.

Objective E: Promote respect of private property along the corridor through improved visitor education.

Goal 3: Develop and implement an interpretive plan to promote stewardship of and connections to the byway's unique landscapes and cultures.

Objective: Use the interpretive plan to develop consistent and complimentary informational and educational materials.

Goal 4: Develop and implement a marketing plan that enlightens visitors to opportunities along the byway and in neighboring gateway communities.

Objective A: Create a multi-season marketing plan that will promote year-round use and enjoyment of the byway by Alaskan, national, and international travelers.

Objective B: Highlight the uniqueness of the byway communities by recording and including local stories in informational,

educational, and interpretive materials.

Goal 5: Support enhancing traveler services and facilities along the byway to provide a safe and enjoyable travelling experience for all users.

Objective A: Support development of a transportation service that enables both visitors and residents to travel safely and efficiently within and between communities.

Objective B: Support a multi-modal approach to the visitor experience that connects areas of the byway via air, rail, trail, river, and road.

Objective C: Engage with stakeholders and byway communities to inventory and plan for meeting travelers' basic needs during all seasons. Promote respectful and sustainable development that complements the local character.

Objective D: Work with user groups, community members, and the appropriate agencies to identify and accommodate the needs of non-vehicular byway traffic. Develop a plan for year-round, multi-use trails along the byway and in gateway communities that allows for a safe and enjoyable journey.

Objective E: Support the acquisition of private and public funding to improve and maintain byway facilities and services.

9.

IMPLEMENTATION

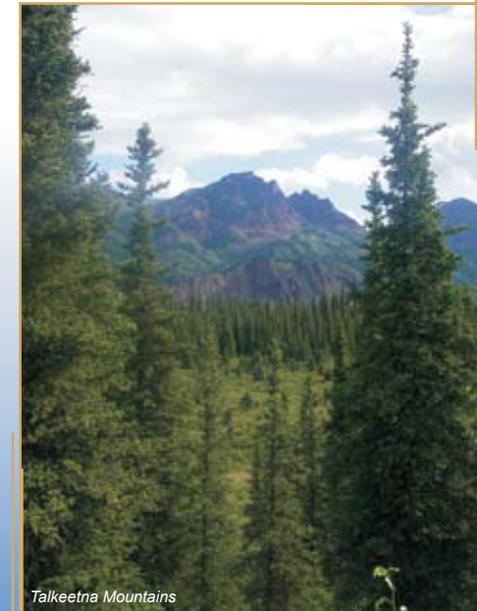
This chapter outlines implementation responsibilities to ensure that this plan’s vision, goals, and objectives are carried out. This plan is a representation of the Parks Byway Community Partnership’s vision for the Parks Byway. As such, the Partnership will play a pivotal role in overseeing implementation activities, which will require cooperation from the ADOT&PF, the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, the Denali Borough, the National Park Service, Alaska State Parks, Native organizations, Chambers of Commerce, and other agency and individual representatives as appropriate.

Parks Byway Community Partnership Responsibilities

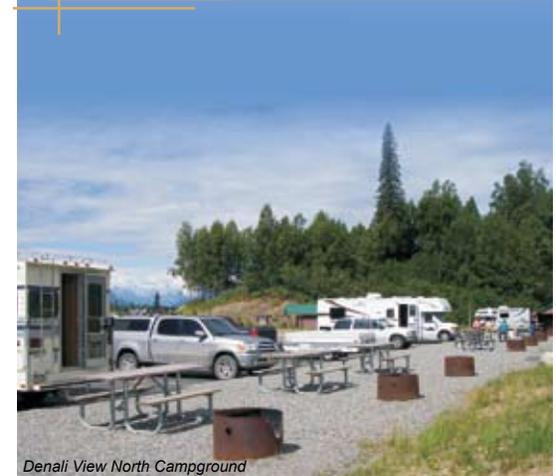
The Parks Byway Community Partnership will act as the administrative entity to implement this plan. To ensure viability of the byway, the structure and organizational framework of the Partnership will be left in place or improved once national All-American Road designation is received. The Partnership will coordinate with the ADOT&PF to maintain the intrinsic qualities of the byway, prioritize byway enhancements for grant applications, oversee grant application processes, identify significant issues over time, seek private and public funds to implement the goals and strategies identified in this plan, and if needed, establish special sub-committees. It is important to note that the Partnership can only make recommendations and suggestions—it has no authority to mandate public or private policy. As such, the Parks Byway Community Partnership will be the guiding light for the success of the Parks Byway as a nationally designated All-American Road.

Ongoing Public Participation

The public will continue to have input in the byway decision-making process. All Parks Byway Community Partnership meetings will be publicly advertised and open to the public. Outreach to new members will be encouraged. Reaching out to new partners that share the byway’s vision will ensure the vitality and longevity of the Parks Byway Community Partnership. Similarly, assuring that the implementation team is composed of stakeholders with varied interests will significantly increase the likelihood of this plan’s implementation.



Talkeetna Mountains



Denali View North Campground

10.

CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that the Parks Byway is a world treasure that is unlike any other byway in the nation. Where else can you see the tallest mountain in North America and the largest terrestrial mammals in the Northern Hemisphere? Where else can you have your pick of unique outdoor recreational activities—from adventure sports like whitewater rafting and glacier hiking to more relaxed activities like aurora watching and berry picking? Where else can you sit spellbound, while learning of the bravery and courage of early adventurers? The Parks Byway's 116 miles of wild and scenic views, multi-use outdoor recreation opportunities, and unique frontier culture and pioneer history place it among the greatest driving experiences in the United States. The Parks Byway provides tremendous opportunities for Alaskan residents and visitors to experience the spirit, grandeur, wildness, and abundance that is Alaska.

This Corridor Partnership Plan represents a strategy that acknowledges this world-class resource, while recognizing that a coordinated implementation strategy between partners is essential for the preservation and enhancement of the corridor's resources. Change is coming to the region. As the South Denali area appears to be on the brink of rapid growth, these efforts will help to maintain current facilities, plan new ones accordingly, improve visitor experience and safety, and preserve the area's natural, scenic, and cultural character.

The intrinsic qualities of the Parks Byway make traversing it an experience to treasure. It is the hope of the individuals who have cooperated in this plan that this cooperative effort maintains the unique character of this exceptional byway.



Lichens, mosses, and bearberry in the tundra

11.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Preparation of this Corridor Partnership Plan included the input of many individuals and groups as well as the residents of the communities along the Parks Byway.

Byway Corridor Partnership:

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Becky Buxton, Princess Tours

Reinhard Grenz, Denali Outpost Bed and Breakfast

Beverly Grenz, Denali Outpost Bed and Breakfast

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Chuck and Judy Saylor, Healy Residents

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Steve Jones, Denali Borough Planning Commissioner

Vernon Carlson, Denali Borough School Board

Wayne Biessel, Superintendent, Denali State Park

Further Support Given By:

The Mat-Su Convention and Visitors Bureau

Fairbanks Convention and Visitors Bureau

Murph O'Brien & Associates



Byers Lake



Byers Lake

APPENDIX: PARKS HIGHWAY SCENIC BYWAY CORRIDOR RESOURCE INVENTORY

Parks Highway Scenic Byway Corridor Resource Inventory

E = Existing P=Planned O=Opportunity NB=Northbound SB=Southbound B=Both sides **open year-round (most resources are closed in winter) NAT = Natural qualities REC = Recreation opportunity SV = Scenic viewing CULT = Cultural site HIST = Historic site												
MP	Resource	Intrinsic Quality	Side of Hwy.	Rec. Water Access	Restrooms	Parking	Interpretive Sites	Picnic Areas	Scenic Viewing	Trailhead	Camping	Comments
131.8	Scenic Byway signs		B									Signs need to be labeled 'start byway' NB and 'end byway' SB
<i>Note: Road changes quality here; good views of Mt. McKinley</i>												
132.3	Denali State Park boundary											Southern park boundary; signed
132.7	Chulitna River Bridge	REC; SV										Fishing for salmon, rainbows, and grayling
133	Gravel pull-off	REC	SB			E						Short walk leads down to Chulitna River
134.5	Mary's McKinley View Lodge	CULT; SV; HIST	SB		E	E	E		E			Historic lodge; Mary is an area legend; great views
134.6	Planned S. Denali Visitor Center	REC; NAT; SV	NB	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	Proposed road to South Denali Visitor Center; VC will bring many more opportunities to experience the corridor's resources
134.7	Denali View South	REC; NAT; SV	SB		E	E	E	E	E	E	E	Paved campsites; picnic area; great views of Alaska Range; short interpretive trail to overlook
137.3	Lower Troublesome Creek	REC; NAT	SB		E O	E	E	E		E	E	Double-ended pull-off; campsites; trail to river; fishing; winter access; need for year-round restroom

MP	Resource	Intrinsic Quality	Side of Hwy.	Rec. Water Access	Restrooms	Parking	Interpretive Sites	Picnic Areas	Scenic Viewing	Trailhead	Camping	Comments
137.7	Upper Troublesome Creek	REC; NAT	NB		E	E	E			E		15 mile hike to Byer's Lake campground; interp opportunities
140	Paved pull-off		SB			E						Small area; distance marker SB: Wasilla 98 miles, Anch. 140 miles
<i>Note: Great views of the Alaska Range to the west; potential SV and interpretation opportunity</i>												
143	Gravel pull-off		SB			E						
144	Byers Creek Lodge **	CULT; REC		E	E	E			E			Last lodge before Cantwell; unsigned
145.7	Paved pull-off		SB			E						Small pull-off
146	Byers Lake Campground	NAT; REC; SV	NB	E	E	E	E O	E	E	E	E	74 campsites; public use cabins; fishing; boating; wildlife viewing; outdated interpretive panels need replacing; State Park access
147	Alaska Veterans Memorial	REC; HIST	NB		E	E	E	E	E	E		Summer seasonal visitor center; winter trail to Byers Lake
156.3	Gravel pull-offs	SV	B			E						Vacant buildings on NB side; good views of Kesugi Ridge
156.5	Ermine Hill Trailhead	NAT; REC	NB			E				E		State Park access; information needed on trail specifics
157.7	Paved pull-off		SB			E						
159.5	Gravel pull-off	SV; NAT	NB			E			O			Good views of Kesugi Ridge
159.5	Paved pull-off		SB			E						Double-ended pull-off

MP	Resource	Intrinsic Quality	Side of Hwy.	Rec. Water Access	Restrooms	Parking	Interpretive Sites	Picnic Areas	Scenic Viewing	Trailhead	Camping	Comments
159.8	Gravel pull-off		SB			E						Undeveloped pull-off
159.9	Horseshoe Creek Scenic Overlook	REC; SV	NB	E		E		O	E			Small parking area by creek; picnic opportunity; wildlife viewing
161.1	Gravel pull-off		NB			E						Large pull-off
161.5	Gravel pit		NB			E						
162.4	Denali View Point	NAT; SV	SB			E			E O			Scenic viewing of the Alaska Range; brush clearing needed to improve views
162.7	Denali View North Campground	REC; SV; NAT; REC	SB		E	E	E	E	E	E	E	20 campsites; native plant walk; spotting scopes; views of AK Range; interpretation
162.8	Gravel pull-off		NB			E						Paved shoulder parking
163.1	Paved pull-off		SB			E						Large, double-ended pull-off
163.9	Little Coal Creek Trailhead	NAT; REC	NB		E	E	O			E		State Park access; north end of park trail system
ROAD CONDITIONS MILE 132-163: 2-LANE PAVED; SHOULDERS 7-8 FEET WIDE; BRIDGES HAVE ADEQUATE SHOULDERS												
165.5	Paved pull-offs	REC	B			E						Creek; good berry picking
168	Denali State Park boundary		B									Northern park boundary; entering sign SB; no leaving sign NB
<i>Note: Winding hilly road northbound, foliage obscures sight line</i>												
170	Paved pull-off	SV; NAT	SB			E			E			Large pull-off; scenic viewpoint; expansive views of AK Range
173	Paved pull-off	SV; NAT	SB			E			E			Scenic viewpoint; good views of AK Range; small footpath to west

MP	Resource	Intrinsic Quality	Side of Hwy.	Rec. Water Access	Restrooms	Parking	Interpretive Sites	Picnic Areas	Scenic Viewing	Trailhead	Camping	Comments
173.9	Paved pull-off		SB			E						Just south of bridge and a short walk to the gulch
174.1	Hurricane Gulch Bridge pull-off	NAT; REC; SV; HIST	SB			E	O	O	E	O		Great view of natural gorge; unmarked trail off parking lot; needs expansion, walkway across bridge and interpretation; unsigned
176	Paved pull-off		NB			E						
<i>Note: Road begins to curve as byway descends long grade northbound to Honolulu Creek</i>												
176.5	Paved pull-off	NAT; SV	SB			E			E			Narrow, doubled-ended turnout; Talkeetna mountains viewing
177.8	Paved pull-off		NB			E						Small, paved parking area
178.1	Honolulu Creek	NAT; REC	B	E		E	O					Access to creek to w. at north end of bridge; fishing; limited parking; geologic interpretive opportunities
179.5	Paved pull-off	NAT; REC; SV	SB	E		E						Turnout by Mile 180 Lake; great bird habitat; footpath to lake
180	Mile 180 Lake	NAT; REC; SV	SB	E		E	O					Double pull-off; fishing; limited parking; improvements could include increased parking & interp.
183.2	Paved pull-off	NAT; SV	SB			E			E			Double-ended pull-off; views of AK Range and the Talkeetnas
184.5	Paved pull-off		SB			E						
185	Bridge over the E. Chulitna River					E						Parking at south end of bridge; large gravel lot
185.6	Chulitna River wayside	REC; NAT; SV	NB	E	E	E	O	E		E	E	0.5 mile paved loop; overnight parking; campground host; potential trail to eroded bluffs and geologic interpretation

MP	Resource	Intrinsic Quality	Side of Hwy.	Rec. Water Access	Restrooms	Parking	Interpretive Sites	Picnic Areas	Scenic Viewing	Trailhead	Camping	Comments
186.3	Paved pull-off	NAT; SV	SB			E			E			Small pull-off; view of eroded bluffs
<i>Note: Winding upgrade northbound</i>												
187.5	Paved pull-offs	SV	B			E			E			Signed; double-ended pull-off on SB; small pull-off on NB
188.7	Igloo	CULT	NB			E						Status unknown
190	Gravel pull-out		SB			E						Double-ended; state scenic byway signs on both sides of road
191.1	Paved pull-off	REC	SB			E						Large area; snow machine parking in winter
194.5	Middle Fork Chulitna River Bridge	REC	SB	E		E				E		Gravel access to river at south end of bridge; good fishing
<i>Note: Winding roads; RR crossing</i>												
195	Broad Pass	NAT; SV				E			E			One of the lowest passes in N. America; caribou & swan viewing
195.9	Paved pull-off	NAT; SV	NB			E	O		E			Dramatic views; signed pull-off; interpretive opportunities
200.9	Paved pull-off	NAT; SV	NB			E	O		E			Unsigned; large area; great views; interpretive opportunities
201.3	Summit airstrip	HIST; SV	NB				O					WW II history; Mustang fighter base; summit airstrip
202.1	Borough boundaries		B		O	O	O	O	O			Boundary of Mat-Su and Denali boroughs; Opportunity to provide information on both boroughs
203.5	Paved pull-off	NAT; SV	NB			E						Dramatic views; large area
208	Pass Creek Bridge	REC; SV	SB			E	O		E	O		Small viewpoint at S. end of bridge; caribou; berry picking; blank interpretive sign; potential trails to falls & Eldridge Glacier

MP	Resource	Intrinsic Quality	Side of Hwy.	Rec. Water Access	Restrooms	Parking	Interpretive Sites	Picnic Areas	Scenic Viewing	Trailhead	Camping	Comments
209	Denali Hwy. distance marker		NB									"1 mile" to Denali Highway sign
209.4	Welcome to Cantwell sign		NB									
209.4	Jack River Bridge	NAT; REC; SV					O					Dramatic views; drumlins; interpretive opportunities
209.9	Denali Highway **	REC; SV; CULT; HIST	NB			E	O					Interpretive opportunities on northeast corner; Backwoods Lodge just off junction; byway loop
210	Cantwell **	CULT; HIST	SB		E	E	E	E	E		E	All amenities
210	Cantwell Lodge **	CULT; HIST	SB		E	E						Historic lodge and saloon; just off the Denali Hwy.
211.5	Paved pull-off		SB			E						Signed, double-ended pull-off
<i>Note: Highway parallels Nenana River; views of slide area - NAT and SV qualities</i>												
213.8	Paved pull-off		SB			E						Signed, double-ended pull-off; white spruce and fireweed
215	Limestone Mine view	CULT; HIST	NB				O					Only limestone mine in AK; supplied Healy coal project; potential interpretive opportunity, but would need to install wayside
215.3	Nenana River access	NAT; REC; SV	SB	O		E	O		E			Rd. leads 0.4 mile to river; jet boat tours; used by truckers
ROAD CONDITIONS MILE 163-216: 2 LANE; PAVED SHOULDERS 6-8 FEET WIDE												

MP	Resource	Intrinsic Quality	Side of Hwy.	Rec. Water Access	Restrooms	Parking	Interpretive Sites	Picnic Areas	Scenic Viewing	Trailhead	Camping	Comments
216.5	Paved pull-off	NAT; SV	NB			E			E O			Signed; expansive views of Nenana River, Panorama Mountain and wilderness area; needs brush clearing
218.5	Paved pull-off	NAT; SV	SB			E				O		Signed; great views of Nenana River and wilderness area; potential path to river
219.1	Scenic Byway sign		NB									
219.3	Scenic Byway sign		SB									
219.7	Paved pull-off		SB			E						Double-ended paved pull-off
220.5	Paved pull-off	NAT; SV	SB			E	O		E			Very large area - ends at 220.7; great views of AK Range and wilderness; potential to develop wayside here with interpretation
222.2	Paved pull-off	SV	SB			E			O			Signed; scenic viewpoint opportunity
224	Carlo Creek											Visitor services here - food, lodging
224.5	Gravel pit		SB									DOT gravel pit area
<i>Note: Interesting views of Fang Mountain and erosion pillars to the west around milepost 226 - NAT and SV qualities</i>												
229.7	Paved pull-off	SV	SB			E			E			Signed, double-ended paved pull-off

MP	Resource	Intrinsic Quality	Side of Hwy.	Rec. Water Access	Restrooms	Parking	Interpretive Sites	Picnic Areas	Scenic Viewing	Trailhead	Camping	Comments
231.4	Triple Lakes Trailhead	NAT; REC	SB			E				E		Trail ends at Denali Park depot; parking needs to be expanded
231.5	Gravel pull-off		NB			E						Small area
233.1	Gravel pull-off	NAT; SV	NB			E			E			No overnight camping sign
234.2	Paved pull-off	NAT; SV; REC	NB			E	O		E	O		Double-ended area; views of Mt. Fellows, Pyramid Peak; potential wayside with trailhead and restroom
ROAD CONDITIONS MILE 216-237: 2 LANE; PAVED SHOULDERS 7-8 FEET WIDE; AT LEAST TWO BRIDGES HAVE NARROW SHOULDERS												
237.3	Denali National Park	NAT; REC; CULT; SV	SB		E	E	E	E	E	E	E	NPS Visitor Center; sled dogs; dump station; campground; Murie Science and Learning Center; ANHA bookstore; trailheads
237.7	Paved pull-off		SB			E						NPS sign; placement is confusing to visitors because it looks like the entrance
238	Nenana River Bridge wayside	NAT; REC; SV	SB	E	E	E	E		E			Third crossing; helicopter tours and rafting to E.; pedestrian bridge on SB side of road; wayside interpretive exhibits
238-243	Nenana River Canyon	REC; NAT; SV		E	E	E	E	E	E	E		Commercial area offering diverse visitor services; all amenities; many different recreation opportunities; Dall's sheep viewing
240.3	Hornet Creek Bridge	SV				E						Double-ended parking
241.1	Gravel pull-off	NAT; REC; SV	SB			E	O		E			Walking access to Fox Creek; geologic and AK Railroad interpretive opportunities
241.2	Fox Creek Bridge											
241.6	Gravel pull-off	SV	SB			E	O					Large area; views of Nenana River; interpretive opportunities

MP	Resource	Intrinsic Quality	Side of Hwy.	Rec. Water Access	Restrooms	Parking	Interpretive Sites	Picnic Areas	Scenic Viewing	Trailhead	Camping	Comments
242.3	Dragonfly Creek Bridge		SB			E	O		E			Unsigned; parking lot south of bridge; interpretive opportunities
242.7	Paved pull-off	SV	SB			E	O			E		Double-ended turnout; interpretive opportunities (bridge history)
243	Moody Bridge (also known as Windy Bridge)	NAT; HIST; SV										Fourth Nenana crossing spanning Windy Canyon; Dall's sheep viewing
243.8	Bison Gulch Bridge	REC	NB			E				E		Small paved parking area at N. end of bridge; unofficial trailhead going up Mt. Healy on SB side of road
243.9	Gravel pull-off	REC; SV	NB			E						Narrow road leading up to flat area; used by ATVers
244	Gravel pull-off	SV	NB			E				O		Large area with abrupt edge; coal mining and geologic interpretive opportunities
244.4	Antler Creek											Creek access to W. at south end of bridge
245	Antler Creek gravel pit	REC; SV	NB			E	O		O		O	Interpretive potential; unofficial camping area; good scenic views
246.3	Gravel pull-off		NB			E						Small area
246.9	Paved pull-off	SV	NB			E						Unsigned; view of Mt. Healy
247.9	Scenic Byway end sign		NB									
248	Healy **		NB	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	Commercial area offering all visitor services
248.3	Scenic Byway sign		SB									



Front cover photo—View of Mt McKinley and the Chulitna River in the summer Interior Alaska
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Back cover photo (large)—Parks Hwy Mt McKinley Mt Foraker Interior AK summer scenic
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Page 10—Don Sheldon at Mt. McKinley, AMRC. Ward W. Wells Collection,

Page 11—AMRC-wws-1663-5, Ruth Glacier, Alaska Division of Tourism,

Page 15—Ultra Challenge Race with view of Denali, courtesy of Challenge Alaska

Page 16—Grey wolf, Robert Angell, Alaska Division of Tourism,

Page 21—Nenana Native children, Walter and Lilian Phillips Album, UAF-1985-72-107, and A. H. Brooks, posing in a creek bed, UAF-1973-66-93,

Page 22—Judge James Wickersham, Wickersham State Historic Site, Photographs, 1882-1930s. ASL-PCA-277, and Dr. Frederick Cook and Edward Barrill, both courtesy of Courtesy of the Frederick Cook Society Collection,

Page 23—Archdeacon Stuck & Walter Harper, March 1917, Frederick B. Drane Collection, UAF-1991-46-531,

Page 24—Nellie Neal, proprietor of Roadhouse, is second from left, Anchorage Museum of History and Art, B70.19.545,

Page 25—All photos courtesy of Dartmouth College Library

Page 26—Reproductions of Belmore Brownes paintings courtesy of Braarud Fine Art, LaConner, WA

Page 40—Dall's sheep, Alaska Division of Tourism

Page 42—Mt. McKinley as seen from Denali Park Road near Stoney Pass, Denali National Park and Preserve, Ernst Schneider, Alaska Division of Tourism

Page 47—Caribou With View Of Alaska Range, R. Valentine, and View of the Alaska Range from the west end of the Denali Park Road, both Alaska Division of Tourism

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