

Context Map

Figure 2-1, The proposed Glenn Highway National Scenic Byway is approximately 135 miles long ends and near the border of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough in the area of Gunsight Mountain. It follows the natural corridor carved by glaciers between the Chugach and Talkeetna Mountain ranges, and links the coast with Alaska's vast interior plain.



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To adequately discuss the myriad of features that line the corridor, it has been divided into segments. One common and uniting theme across the entire Byway is the geographic complexity; more specifically the distinct impact glaciers have had on this young land. This unique Byway gives the traveler a glimpse into the workings of geologic time. Not only is there ample evidence of glacier activity throughout the corridor, the corridor provides access and views of the very glaciers responsible for the shaping of the land! From the moraines of Anchorage and Elmendorf Air Force Base, to the rich fertile farm fields in Palmer, to the glacial striations on rocks and boulders, to the braided Matanuska River with steep canyon walls, evidence abounds confirming the impact of the massive rivers of ice retreating and advancing over the last 10,000 years. But the best evidence of the glaciers' impacts is to view the glaciers themselves. The Glenn Highway Scenic Byway provides access to and views of the glaciers that formed this amazing landscape.

Urban Streets and Mountain Shadows: Anchorage to Eklutna (Segment One)

The Glenn Highway begins in Anchorage, the commercial and transportation center of Alaska, and extends out to the Native Village of Eklutna, where Segment One ends. The first 3 miles within Anchorage are urban with a stunning backdrop of the Chugach Mountains. To the north, on a clear day, one can see Mt. McKinley, Mt. Foraker, and surrounding peaks in the Alaska Range, as well as Sleeping Lady (Mount Susitna) to the west. On the way out of town, the road passes Merrill Field, the largest and busiest general aviation airport in the United States. This hub airport serves to emphasize the important historic role aviation played in Alaska, and its current role of connecting the remote areas of this vast state with Anchorage, its commercial and service center. Merrill Field's many commercial air charter and air taxi services allow residents, visitors, and sports enthusiasts a quick escape to some of the most scenic country in the world, as well as to fantastic fishing, hunting, and photographic opportunities. One can choose a 1-hour flight-seeing tour of Mt. McKinley or charter an air taxi for a weekend getaway, complete with private cabin or campsite many of miles from the nearest habitation.

Continuing on, the traveler leaves downtown Anchorage and enters a project area where the Alaska DOT is working toward increasing the capacity of the highway while, at the same time, beautifying and increasing neighborhood connectivity. Future projects include

Photo courtesy of Aeromap

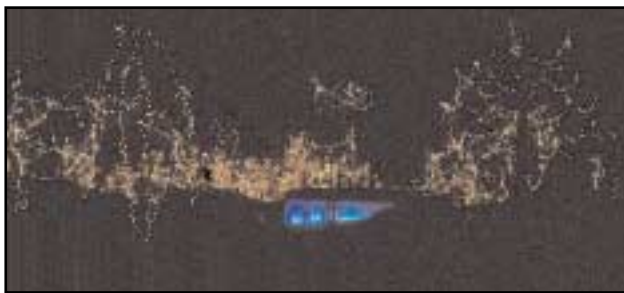
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Urban amenities of downtown Anchorage

Photo courtesy of LDN



Anchorage's Town Square and the celebration of winter lights

Photo courtesy of LDN

As we continue out of the Anchorage area, the Chugach Mountains and Chugach State Park—never more than a turn of the head from view, even in downtown Anchorage—come into full view.



North Slope Restaurant

Photo courtesy of LDN

adding another vehicle lane and adding pedestrian connections and bicycle trail facilities to complete an important recreational bicycling system within Anchorage. Attention will also be paid to the details of landscaping, beautification, and gateway treatments in the project area.

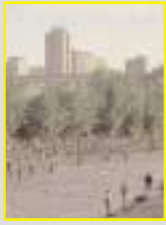
As we continue out of the Anchorage area, the Chugach Mountains and Chugach State Park—never more than a turn of the head from view, even in downtown Anchorage—come into full view. From here, the Chugach Mountains parallel the Byway for its entire distance. To the west are Elmendorf Air Force Base and Fort Richardson Army Post, both strategic holdings for the United States. The land that they encompass provides a scenic buffer to north Anchorage, provides many recreational opportunities to bowl residents and surrounds the highway on both sides. The bases serve as a reminder of the rich military history Alaska has had from its purchase through the tremendous buildup during World War II and again during the Cold War. The corridor gives access to Site Summit on the Fort Richardson base that was, in 1979, one of the last Nike Hercules Missile Installations to be deactivated. The military played an important role in developing the road for vehicle travel. A move is currently underway to have the site preserved and interpreted through listing in the National Register of Historic Places. Site Summit represents a valuable part of our heritage as Americans and the historical development of Alaska.

Further north, the community of Eagle River nestles into a narrow river valley with the peaks of the Chugach Mountains rising above the town. The Glenn used to be the main street for the community, but was rerouted, returning this appropriately named "Old Glenn Highway" to the community. The town is appropriately named, as bald eagles commonly perch above the river and are visible from the highway. Further up this narrow, glacier-carved valley is the Eagle River Nature Center, a very popular local attraction that draws visitors from all over the world. This area functions as a trailhead for approximately 100 miles of trails within the 500,000-



Settlements and Features along the Glenn Highway

SEGMENT ONE



Anchorage
MP 0 - Settlement began in 1915 when railroad construction midpoint headquarters were established here.
Population - 250,000



Eagle River - Chugiak
MP 11 to 20 - Settlement began in 1930's by homesteaders.
Population - 28,000



Eklutna
MP 26 - Native Athabascans have occupied this area for hundreds of years.
Population - 394

SEGMENT TWO



Palmer
MP 42 - Settlement in 1914 by farmers, railroad workers and failed gold miners.
Population - 4,385



Chickaloon Village
MP 55 / 61 - The Village owns 69,000 acres of land and provides governmental services for its 250 +/- members.



Sutton
MP 61 - In 1918 a rail station was developed for coal export at Sutton, which was closed just a few years later.

SEGMENT THREE



Chickaloon
MP 76 - In 1916, coal resources brought non-natives into the area after the place became terminus of an Alaskan Railroad Spur. Population - 213



King Mountain
MP 76 to 82 - The King Mountain Lodge, built in 1947 is located in the area and boasts its own resident ghost.



Long Lake
MP 85 - A small settlement and recreational cabins are situated in this spectacular location. Winter ice fishing for burbot is very good.



Hicks Creek
MP 96.5 - Named by Captain Glenn in 1898 in honor of his guide, this area has a historic Lodge built on a construction camp site from the 1940's.



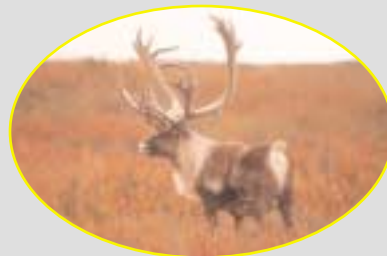
Matanuska Glacier
MP 101 - The Glacier area has lodges, a community school, diverse recreational opportunities and great views!



Sheep Mountain
MP 113 - The Sheep Mountain Lodge is an Alaskan landmark, built in 1946. The area also is home to wild Dall Sheep.

SEGMENT FOUR

Gunsight Mountain
MP 125 - Westbound views to the mountain's notch, or gunsight. East bound views of Mt. Sanford, Mt. Drum, Mt. Wrangell, and Mt. Blackburn.



Caribou Crossing
MP 127 - The Nelchina Caribou Herd crosses here between October and November.

Eureka Summit
MP 129 - Highest point on the Glenn Highway, at elevation 3,322 ft. Views of the Nelchina Glacier. Historic Eureka Lodge established in 1939.

Photo Credits: Palmer - Alaska Division of Tourism, Caribou Crossing, Copyright Mark Wayne, Alaska Division of Tourism. Data Source: 2000 U.S. Census; Alaska Department of Community and Economic Development; The Milepost, Morris Communications, 2001; http://www.palmerchamber.org/palmer_profile.htm; Chickaloon Village Tribal Council, Nay'dini'aa History Unit, Student Reading Part Three, Chickaloon Village Today.

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acre Chugach State Park. At the headwaters of the Eagle River is Eagle Glacier accessible by trail including the historic Iditarod Trail. Further on, the highway offers access to Mirror Lake for picnicking or swimming, or to Thunderbird Falls for hiking enthusiasts. All along this stretch of highway from the Muldoon interchange to the North Birchwood interchange, approximately 20 miles, is a multi-use paved pathway that accommodates walkers, joggers, bikers and rollerbladers. In the wintertime the trail is groomed for cross-country skiing.

At the end of the segment is the Native Village of Eklutna. The Eklutna Natives, of the Dena'ina Athabascans, have a rich history and culture to share with travelers on the Byway. One of the first inhabitants of the area, their trade with the Ahtna in the Copper River/Gulkana area helped to carve the trails out of the wilderness that eventually became the Glenn Highway. After contact with Russian explorers, their traditions mixed with the Russian Orthodox religion practiced by the early fur trappers and settlers to make a very unique culture. Eklutna Lake in Chugach State Park provides a variety of summer and winter outdoor recreational opportunities for Alaska's major population. Hiking, snow machining, cross country skiing, and other recreational opportunities, as well as being able to view the effects of a glacier up close, can also be found at Eklutna Lake. This area offers extensive hiking opportunities and has a well-developed trail to the face of the Eklutna Glacier. Segment one ends with a beautiful view of Pioneer Peak, the famous landmark of the Matanuska Valley.

Colonists and Miners:

The Matanuska Valley (Segment Two)

From urban Anchorage and the shadowing peaks of Eagle River, Peter's Creek, and Chugiak, the land around segment two opens up as the Glenn Highway enters the alluvial outwash plain created by the Matanuska and Knik Rivers. Coffee Point, just north of Eklutna was the location of George Palmer's first store, before this Matanuska Valley pioneer moved to the community that now bears his name.

In the summer it is usual to see bald eagles, owls, geese, swan, and sandhill cranes, along with several species of duck that are supported by the alluvial plain and its wetland ecosystem. To the north, one can see the Talkeetna Mountain Range, with Bald Mountain and Hatcher Pass. To the south and east, one can see the Chugach Mountain Range, including Lazy Mountain, Matanuska Peak and Wolverine Peak, as well as Twin Peaks and Pioneer Peak, the main landmark of the Valley. The mountains recede as the road enters this broad valley over the Palmer Hay Flats. Across the Matanuska River sits the Bodenburg Butte. One of the only true buttes in Alaska with its steep sides and weathered top, the butte is a local landmark that when climbed provides awesome 360 degree views of the Matanuska Valley.

The Palmer Hay Flats is a State Game Refuge and the winter migration ground for moose in the area. It is also a waterfowl enhancement area. The Hay Flats area is important ecologically as a staging area for migrating waterfowl, shorebirds, and for salmon rearing and spawning, and historically, as it grew the wild hay and straw that was used for livestock in the early days of the Palmer Colony settlement.

Evidence of the Great Alaska Earthquake of 1964 can be seen across the Flats. The area dropped dramatically in elevation and many trees died due to being submerged in the water table. Groves of dead trees or "Ghost Forests" can still be seen from the highway today. Another victim of nature was the original farming colony of Matanuska. Founded early in the 20th Century, it was the center for the first farmers to the valley. Farmers were frustrated by the weather, cold soils, floods, and inadequate transportation of their crops to market. When the Matanuska River changed its course, as it has twice since, it was the beginning of the end for that community.

Just above Spring Creek on the Hay Flats, the highway intersects with the Parks Highway. Beyond this intersection, the Glenn Highway changes from a four-lane divided freeway-type facility to a two-lane



highway as it enters the community of Palmer. Just up the hill is the Kepler Bradley Lakes State Recreation Area. These lakes are deep water-filled crevasses created by the receding glacier and offer convenient fishing, hiking, and canoeing activities in the summer and ice fishing and ice skating opportunities in the winter. The hiking trails connect with the Mat-Su Borough Crevasse-Moraine Trail System. Next, the Alaska State Fairgrounds front the corridor, and in late August and early September, the area comes alive with midway barkers, quilting competitions, food vendors, and a seemingly endless array of entertainment opportunities from farm products and livestock competitions to rock concerts.

An important aspect of this highway is its present and historic role it plays in the continuing development of Alaska. Just south of the Alaska State Fairgrounds are two of Alaska's largest gravel extraction operations. The retreating Matanuska Glacier deposited a vast quantity of glacial till in this vicinity. Matanuska Valley gravel has played a pivotal in the infrastructure development of south central Alaska.

The community of Palmer is home to a living history of the area's early settlement and colonization as part of President Roosevelt's New Deal Program. Two hundred Depression-era families from Minnesota, Michigan, and Wisconsin were relocated to Palmer in 1935 and given undeveloped land to convert into productive farms. The famous Matanuska Valley is the breadbasket of Alaska, with its rich loess and volcanic soil that varies in depth from 3 to 30 feet and the giant, world-famous vegetables grown there. Many of the early colony buildings are still in existence and the Palmer Visitor's Center has many resources for touring and viewing this rich local history of the valley.

Continuing up the corridor, the highway begins to parallel the Matanuska River and enters a very dynamic river canyon environment that becomes the dominant feature of the drive for the next 60 miles. The road passes Chickaloon Village, a collection of

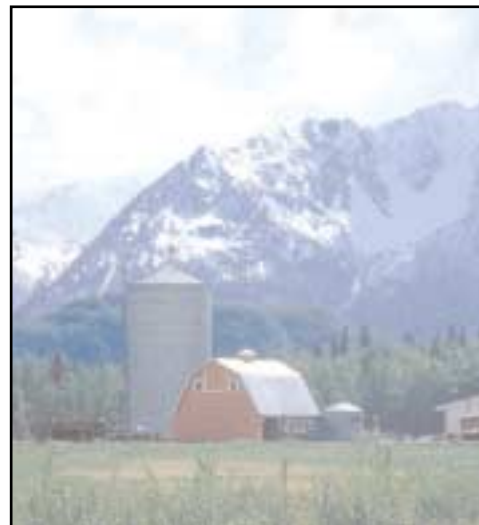


Photo courtesy of LDN

One of the Matanuska Valley's historic farms



Photo courtesy of Anchorage Daily News

In 1960, then U.S. Senator John F. Kennedy opened his presidential campaign with a visit to Palmer, Alaska where he was given a giant cabbage by local residents.

The famous Matanuska Valley is the breadbasket of Alaska, with its rich glacial silt and volcanic soil that varies in depth from 3 to 30 feet and the giant, world-famous vegetables grown there.

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Katie's Wall

The larger-than-life landscape of the Glenn Highway entrances visitors. At a smaller scale, corridor residents' gardens, flowers, landscaping, cabins and homes also add to the scenic experience . . .

As an example, in the early decades of the Glenn Highway, people would drive from all over to see the display of flowers planted in "Katie's Rock Wall", pictured below. The wall was started in 1959 at MP 55.5 by Katie Wade, in response to a drainage problem along her driveway. One day, Katie said "Why don't we build a rock garden?" and began involving anyone who was willing—her family, tribe, neighbors, and visitors in the work of gathering "the biggest rocks they could carry" from Moose Creek. As the wall grew from year to year, rich soil was carried up the hill, and colorful flowers were planted. It stands today as a scenic element of the road and stands as a testament to Katie Wade's approach: when life offers you drainage problems, make a flower garden!

Text Source: Patricia Wade, Katie's daughter.



Photo courtesy of Tom Brannen

brightly painted buildings that house the administrative offices for the Chickaloon Native Tribe. Down the driveway for the offices is Katie's wall, clearly visible for northbound travelers. This rock structure has stood for over 60 years and is part of tribal history. Many of the original perennials that were planted in the wall as it was constructed still bloom in the summer.

Passing by Moose Creek at MP 55, one can see evidence of the old railroad trestle and railbed crossing the creek below the highway. This is a remnant of the early coal mines that were in the area, which used narrow gauge rail cars to transport equipment and product to and from the mines in Chickaloon and Sutton. Several impressive views of the river and the mountains surrounding the river are available in established pull-off areas. The Matanuska River is a glacially -fed, "braided" river that is a remnant of the glacier that carved the valley through which the road travels.

Segment two ends in the community of Sutton. This community, nestled in the mineral-rich Talkeetna Mountains, is historic in the settlement of Alaska. Athabaskan Natives were the first known inhabitants of the area; later, Russian fur trappers moved in and traded with the Athabaskan people. In June of 1898, the U.S. military began an expedition over Portage Glacier and on to Knik to carve a route in a northeasterly direction to the Tanana River. Captain Edwin F. Glenn sought the help of Athabaskan guides as the trail was developed.

Once the trail was formally established, coal reserves were discovered and extracted for use in U.S. Navy ships. The ruins of the Sutton Coal Washing Plant are still present and the Alpine Heritage and Cultural Center offers information on the area. On display are the ruins of the coal washing facility, narrow-gauge rail cars that were used in the transport of coal, and several other historic buildings. The Railroad extended up to Chickaloon but was abandoned in the 1940s when the highway was constructed. Coal



mining has been active in the area off and on through the 1950s. While mining activities have presently ceased, there are still several active coal leases along the highway today.

Water and Stone:

The Matanuska River Corridor (Segment Three)

Segment three is the longest segment on the corridor, stretching from Sutton to Sheep Mountain Lodge. Approximately 52 miles long, this segment provides spectacular views as the highway winds its way through the remainder of the Matanuska River Canyon, bordered on the north by the older, weathered Talkeetna Mountains and to the south by the younger, taller, glacier-capped Chugach Mountains. Here, the traveler is truly "in the mountains." Each turn of the road presents a dramatic view of the river, the glacier peaks of the Chugach Mountains, or the violently folded Talkeetna Mountains.

Hearty souls can book a backpacking, glacier climbing, or mountain climbing trip, or take a whitewater rafting adventure and experience this segment from the river bottom up. For those who prefer a more leisurely pace, local outfitters provide guided horseback tours and camping in the higher regions by horseback. Along this segment, the traveler experiences the real character of Alaska from its pristine views to its roadhouse restaurants and lodges. This segment has five historically significant lodges: King Mountain, Hicks Creek Inn, Meekins Road House at Caribou Creek, Long Rifle, and Sheep Mountain. Each of these areas, with the exception of Long Rifle, began with the building of the highway and were used as highway construction camps in the late 1940s, and later as roadhouses for travelers and mail carriers as they were located approximately a day's travel apart.

The views in this area are beyond compare as the highway rises from the river on the valley floor up the steep mountainside and winds through the rugged terrain. Breath-taking views can be seen around

Here, the traveler is truly "in the mountains." Each turn of the road presents a dramatic view of the river, the glacier peaks of the Chugach Mountains, or the violently folded Talkeetna Mountains.



Photo courtesy of Bill Evans

The glacier peaks of the Chugach Mountains



Photo courtesy of HDR

The violently folded Talkeetna Mountains

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Athabascan PLACE NAMES

All along the Glenn Highway there are sites with Athabascan names, many of which tell a story of the Athabascan's long history in the territory, and of their journeys—on foot, by boat and by sled—through the region.

Chidaq'ashla Bena *"Grandmother's Little Place"* **(Wishbone Hill)**

There is a story of a giant who lives here who has feet that are turned backwards. It is said that sometimes hunters got lost in this area . . . perhaps because they were following in the giant's footsteps?

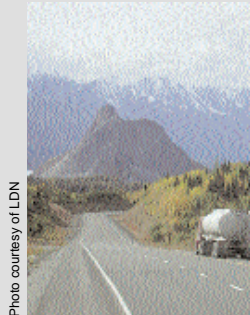


Photo courtesy of LDN

Tssisyu Ts'akae *"Paint Clan Women"* and also *"Three Sisters"* **(Lion's Head)**

The Athabascans say three sisters and a baby were traveling from their home near the Copper River, toward the Cook Inlet. The sisters had been told never to look back as they travelled. One sister who was carrying her baby was tired and stopped to rest. Overwhelmed with homesickness she looked back over her shoulder and she and the baby were turned into stone.

Source: Chickaloon Village Council approved materials, and Shem Pete's Alaska, 1987.

almost every bend in the road. Often it is possible to view Dall sheep feeding on steep cliffs above the road. Along the Matanuska River, there are several areas where Pacific salmon spawn. In the late summer and fall, travelers who park in one of the pullouts along the river are likely to see silver salmon spawning, or maybe even a pesky rainbow trout trying to steal the freshly laid salmon eggs. Long Lake State Recreation Area allows camping, fishing, and hiking opportunities within this canyon environment. This area is teeming with life and until the 1960's was used as a place to commercially hunt and fish. Modern game management practices ensure that hunting and fishing opportunities are balanced with conservation of wildlife resources. Many Alaskans still hunt and fish in this area, so abundant are its resources.

Further into the segment sits the Matanuska Glacier. The glacier is a stunning sight for long-term Alaskans and visitor alike. The Alaska Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation (Alaska State Parks) has recently dedicated a scenic overlook with outstanding views and an interpretive area at the Matanuska Glacier State Recreation Site. A private campground and restaurant allow the traveler to be right next to the glacier. The State Department of Natural Resources, Division of Mining, Land, and Water, maintains the Caribou Creek Recreational Mining Area at MP 106. A long and steep mountain trail provides access down to the creek bed. Just past Caribou Creek, a steep rock face is designated as a no sheep hunting area providing views of Dall sheep directly above the highway. The segment ends with views of Lion's Head Mountain (MP 107.8), also known as Tssisyu Ts'akae or Paint Clan Women by the Athabascan Natives, and Sheep Mountain Lodge (MP 113.5) and leaves the coastal mountain zone environment for the interior of Alaska.

Wide Open Spaces: **Interior Alaska (Segment Four)**

This segment takes us into the interior of Alaska. Gone are the steep mountain walls and narrow passageways of the Matanuska River Canyon.

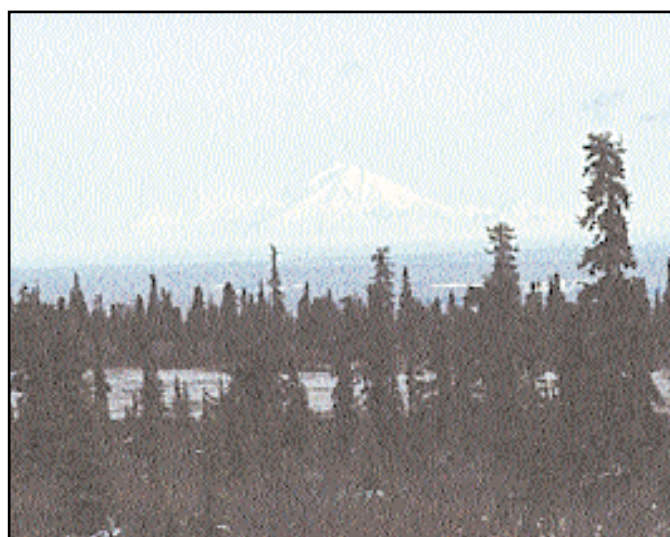


They have been replaced with a vast, open plateau, “Taiga”, characterized by muskeg swamps, and forests of spindle-like black spruce trees struggling for survival in the wet tundra underlain by acres of permafrost. This segment has views of several unique geologic features, including Gunsight Mountain, so named for a square notch carved out of its top by erosive forces. The MP 118 area is recognized as a raptor migration site and the Audubon Society has been leading viewing trips here for 15 years. The Nelchina Glacier can be seen from a roadside pull-off area close to the end of the Byway.

This area, while quite remote and wild in appearance, provides some of the best winter recreation in the State. Wildlife viewing, cross country skiing, snow shoeing, and snow machining, as well as relaxing in a friendly environment next to a warm fire, are all popular wintertime activities. This area has many lodges, cabins, and resorts that are open year-round and cater to summer and winter recreationalists. The Nelchina caribou herd frequents this area as part of its annual migration route and it is the calving area for the Nelchina herd.

This segment, the second shortest at only 30 miles in length, ends with views of Mount Sanford rising 16,237 feet in the Wrangell-Saint Elias National Park and Preserve. From several viewpoints toward the end of the Byway at Mile 135, the traveler can see four of Alaska's 17 mountain ranges: the Alaska Range to the north, the Chugach Mountains to the south, the Wrangell-St. Elias Mountains to the east, and the Talkeetna Mountains to the west.

Segment Four takes us into the interior of Alaska. Gone are the steep mountain walls and narrow passageways of the Matanuska River Canyon. They have been replaced with a vast, open plateau, “taiga”, characterized by muskeg swamps, and forests of spindle-like black spruce trees struggling for survival.



Mt. Sanford—a beautiful marker of the end of the corridor

Photo courtesy of HDR



Dall Sheep can be viewed from the highway in Segment Three

Photo courtesy of Bill Evans

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