

The George Parks Highway Scenic Byway

Corridor Partnership Plan

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Parks Highway

The George Parks Highway, usually simply called the Parks Highway, runs 323 miles from the Glenn Highway in the Matanuska Valley to Fairbanks in the Alaska Interior. Completed in 1971, the Parks Highway is one of the most important roads in Alaska. Linking the state's two largest cities—Anchorage and Fairbanks—with spectacular natural surroundings and unparalleled recreation opportunities, this highway winds through the kind of scenery that typifies the Alaskan Interior: the continent's highest peaks and largest glaciers, alpine tundra, taiga forests, wild rivers, and vast expanses inhabited only by wildlife.

It is a common misconception that the name "Parks Highway" comes from the route's proximity to parklands. In fact, it is in honor of George Alexander Parks, governor of the Territory of Alaska from 1925 to 1933. However, the aptness of the name was recognized when it was chosen. The Parks Highway penetrates the wilderness of Interior Alaska, providing access to the region's two largest protected areas: Denali National Park and Preserve and Denali State Park. At these two parks, travelers can indulge in myriad recreation activities during all seasons. Cultural experiences also beckon byway travelers. Rural communities, rich in frontier ethos and infused with pioneer history, provide visitors with opportunities to experience the Alaskan way of life amidst the inspiring backdrop of the Alaska Range.

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. This entire 323-mile 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).

To date, the 116-mile middle segment of highway from milepost 132-248 is the only section designated as an Alaska State Scenic Byway and thus is the primary focus of this Corridor Partnership Plan. This highway segment, the George Parks Highway Scenic Byway, will hereafter be referred to as the Parks Byway in this plan. There is substantial support to extend the state designation both north and south to encompass the entire highway. 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 highway were omitted from this planning effort. This Corridor Partnership Plan should be updated in the future to include the additional highway segments if the current designation is extended.

Recognition, not Regulation

The Parks Highway Scenic Byway Corridor Partnership Plan is intended to assist businesses, local governments, and landowners along the middle segment of the route plan for the long-term economic future of the region. This segment crosses two boroughs—the Matanuska-Susitna and Denali boroughs and contains the communities of Cantwell and McKinley Village. The small communities of Trapper Creek and Talkeetna act as the corridor’s southern gateway; Healy provides a similar function on the byway’s northern boundary (Fig. 1).

The fundamental focus of this plan is to strengthen the economic base of the corridor through support of the tourism economy by integrating corridor improvements with traveler’s basic needs. This plan is not a regulatory document. It does not address land use regulations, nor does it seek to limit landowner rights. Rather, grant monies obtained through state and national byway designations will improve the local economy by providing better services for visitors and residents. Elected officials, landowners, and business owners strongly support the byway concept, evidenced by this collaborative planning effort.

This plan serves both residents and the increasing number of visitors and meets the requirements of the National Scenic Byway Program as well as local needs. It provides a blueprint for future infrastructure, marketing, and interpretive investments in order to bolster economic development in the region while improving the experience of traveling on the Parks Byway. The Parks Byway Corridor Partnership Plan documents the uniqueness of the route, the resources it contains, and highlights the pride that local residents have in their area. The major strategies identified in the plan include:

- Once finalized, primary strategies will be added here

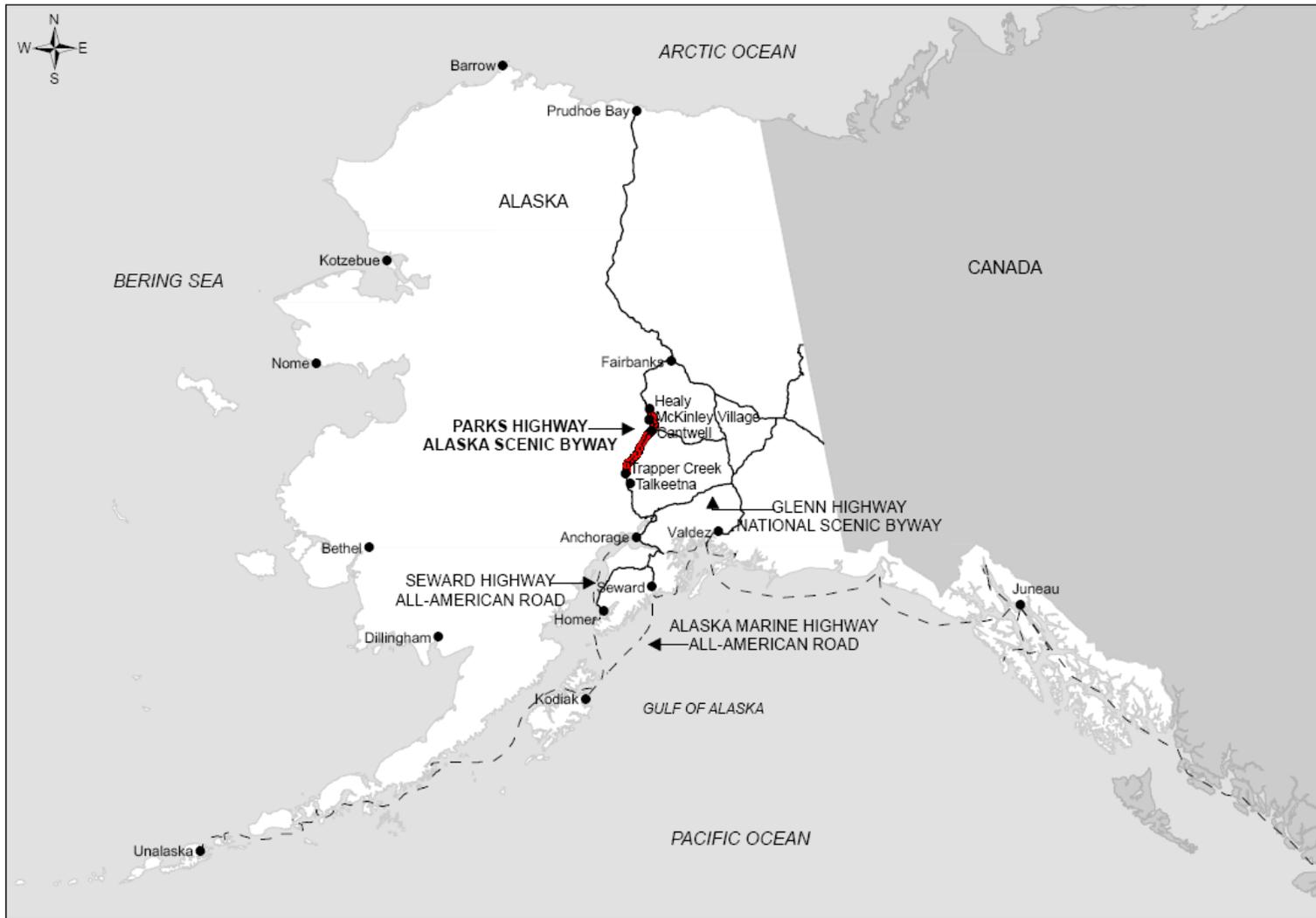


Figure 1. The George Parks Highway Alaska Scenic Byway

2. BACKGROUND ON BYWAYS

Alaska Scenic Byways Program

In 1993, Alaska established a scenic byways program to recognize and celebrate the most scenic travel corridors in the state. 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, recreational, cultural, and historic resources.

Alaska's state byway designation starts at the local level with a grassroots citizen's organization. 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 projects identified in the Corridor Partnership Plan that will enhance and promote the byway's special qualities. The corridor also becomes eligible to apply for national byway designation under the National Scenic Byway Program

National Scenic Byways Program

Congress created the National Scenic Byways Program in 1991. Under this program, the U.S. Secretary of Transportation recognizes certain outstanding roads as National Scenic Byways or All-American Roads. Designation as a National Byway indicates that the route possesses distinctive cultural, recreational, historic, natural, or other 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 and is a destination unto itself.

The National Scenic Byways Program is voluntary and about recognition, not regulation. It promotes tourism and economic development in the communities along the byways and educates the traveling public about our environment, history, and culture. The program is designed to work within existing state and local regulations. The byway program does not require significant local financial investment nor does it infringe upon individual private property rights.

One of the key benefits of the National Scenic Byways 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 expand the number of visitors to an area, which 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.

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 All-American Road. It is developed locally and is intended to be a practical tool for local governments and citizens along the byway. Its purpose is to identify the key resources along the route and methods to protect, enhance, and promote those resources over time. A Corridor Partnership Plan is not intended to be an exhaustive plan for each tract of land along the route. Instead, it elucidates how local residents will assume responsibility for the long-term management and promotion of the byway's resources. No one is better positioned to make informed choices about the byway than local citizens.

Besides increasing funding availability, preparation of a Corridor Partnership Plan has many other benefits. It supports realization of community visions, tourism promotions, stewardship efforts, and projects such as visitor facilities and wayside improvements. By defining goals for the byway, it can also guide local decision makers in protecting and enhancing sensitive and unique byway resources.

In order to meet the requirements for federal funding or national designation, a Corridor Partnership Plan must include all of the following 14 elements:

1. A map identifying the corridor boundaries and the location of intrinsic qualities and different land uses within the corridor.
2. An assessment of the intrinsic qualities and their context.
3. A strategy for maintaining and enhancing those intrinsic qualities.
4. A schedule and a listing of all agency, group, and individual responsibilities in the implementation of the Corridor Partnership Plan.
5. A strategy describing how existing development might be enhanced and new development might be accommodated while still preserving the intrinsic qualities of the corridor.
6. A plan to assure ongoing public participation in the implementation of corridor management objectives.
7. A general review of the Byway's safety and accident record to identify any correctable faults in highway design, maintenance, or operation.
8. A plan to accommodate commerce while maintaining a safe and efficient level of Byway service, including convenient user facilities.
9. A demonstration that intrusions on the visitor experience have been minimized to the extent feasible, and a plan for making improvements to enhance that experience.
10. A demonstration of compliance with all existing local, state, and federal laws on the control of outdoor advertising.
11. A signage plan that demonstrates how the state will insure and make the number and placement of signs more supportive of the visitor experience.
12. A narrative describing how the byway will be positioned for marketing.
13. A discussion of design standards relating to any proposed modification of the roadway. This discussion should include an evaluation of how the proposed changes may affect the intrinsic qualities of the byway corridor.
14. A description of plans to interpret the significant resources of the byway.

Achieving National Byway Status

National designation requires submittal of an application that must include a Corridor Partnership Plan. Nominations are solicited by the Federal Highway Administration every 3-5 years. A selection committee composed of tourism, highway, design, and other professionals from around the nation identify which byways are deserving of national status. If chosen by the committee, the Secretary of Transportation then reviews the application and makes a final decision on inclusion into the National Scenic Byway Program. One nationally designated byway is eligible to apply for funding from the National Scenic Byways Program for qualified projects like interpretative displays, recreation access, and signage. Non-monetary benefits are also available to National Scenic Byways in the form of increased pride and cooperation among byway communities and marketing through the Federal Highway Administration and other entities.

National byway designation falls into one of two categories. The first is National Scenic Byway status, the most basic designation, and the second is the highest level of byway designation, All-American Road status. The most common is the former; there are four National Scenic Byways for every All-American Road. A National Scenic Byway must demonstrate that it has resources along the route that are of significance under at least one of the following categories: natural, recreational, cultural, historic, scenic, or archeological. An All-American road must demonstrate significance under two or more categories and be a destination unto itself.

3. PLANNING PROCESS AND PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

This project brought communities, businesses, Alaska Native corporations, non-profit agencies, landowners, and tourism and natural resource interests together across two boroughs to create a comprehensive plan (Appendix A). Public involvement was the driving process for completing this plan. Prior to the start of this project, a Public Involvement Plan (PIP) was crafted (Appendix B), the purpose of which was to clearly describe public involvement and communications goals for the Parks Highway Scenic Byway Corridor Partnership Plan. The PIP enabled all potential 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 both the Matanuska-Susitna and Denali Boroughs of the project inception. These organizations helped to coordinate public meetings in Healy, Cantwell, Trapper Creek, and McKinley Village. Meeting attendees 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, areas in need of upgrades, potential interpretive stories to share with the public, and ways in which the visitor's experience could be enhanced. In general, meeting attendees were supportive of the project and felt that developing a Corridor Partnership Plan for the Parks Byway was a worthwhile endeavor that would be useful to the communities along the corridor. The primary concern the outreach effort encountered related to the responsibility of future facilities' maintenance costs and the reluctance to saddle future generations with these expenses. At the conclusion of each meeting, attendees were given the opportunity to provide further guidance on the plan by volunteering to serve on the newly formed citizens group, the Parks Byway Corridor Partnership.

Additional public input was obtained in detail during subsequent Parks Byway Corridor Partnership meetings, which were held to create the plan's goals, objectives, and implementation strategies, and to verify the corridor inventory produced by the consulting team. No opposition or concern was expressed and public support grew with each public meeting.

This Scenic Byway Corridor Partnership Plan is an integration of numerous 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 Parks Service, the Alaska Department of Natural Resources, the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, and others (Appendix C).

The Parks Byway Community Partnership

The Parks Byway Community Partnership chose to maintain an informal structure. The XX currently serves as the fiscal agent for the byway. The Partnership will meet semi-

annually to prioritize enhancements along the byway and to apply for project grant funding.

Implementation Responsibilities

The following entities will be responsible for various categories of actions that are likely to result from this Corridor Partnership Plan:

Signage – The Alaska Department of Transportation.

Interpretation – The Parks Byway Community Partnership. A byway interpretive committee will be established that will direct interpretive planning. Representatives will include interpretive specialists from the National Park Service and the Alaska Department of Natural Resources.

Marketing – The Parks Byway Community Partnership. A byway marketing committee will be established to pursue byway marketing. Representatives will include local Chambers of Commerce and gateway Convention and Visitors Bureaus.

Byway Improvements –The Alaska Department of Transportation.

Facility Maintenance –The Matanuska-Susitna and Denali boroughs.

Project Funding – The Parks Byway Community Partnership (however, it is important to note that any entity can apply for byway grants).The Partnership will develop a prioritized project list and will oversee grant application processes. Special grant sub-committees will be established as needed.

4. INTRINSIC QUALITY ASSESSMENT AND MANAGEMENT

Introduction

The National Scenic Byways Program identifies six intrinsic qualities that serve to capture the spirit of adventure and sense of magic found on American roads: scenery, nature, history, culture, archeology, and recreation. In the case of the Parks Byway, while all six qualities recognized by the National Scenic Byways Program are exemplified (Table 1) it is especially the natural and recreational resources that are world-class (Fig. 2). Scenic opportunities and cultural and historic experiences also abound as exceptional secondary intrinsic qualities. A statewide survey conducted in 2002 by Alaska Pacific University on 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 an exceptional diversity of interrelated intrinsic qualities. This chapter reviews these qualities and the degree to which regional and/or national significance is demonstrated.

In general, byway resources are effectively managed and need little additional assistance beyond what is already being done by local organizations, governments, and land agencies. Obtaining additional funding during times of shrinking budgets for new projects and maintenance costs may be the greatest challenge. Although there are some important issues to address regarding intrinsic quality management, none of these poses a threat to the overall quality of the byway or the lifestyle of those that live along the route. By addressing how the byway organization and other stakeholders will work together to conserve the byway's valuable resources, future generations will have the opportunity to experience and appreciate the same qualities we do today.

Natural

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 features reveal minimal disturbances (FHWA Policy 5.18.95).

Vast Protected Area. Large tracks of undisturbed public land surround the Parks Byway (Fig. 2). The byway passes by Denali National Park and Preserve, which is comprised of over six million acres, two million which have been in protected status since 1917. The United Nations Man and Biosphere Program designated the park an International Biosphere Reserve in order to internationally recognize the exceptional health and integrity of this immense ecological system. Adjacent to the national park is Denali State Park (325,240 acres) and its associated State Recreation Areas (1,470 areas), an integral part of this spectacular region. Together, these parks create a Massachusetts sized protected area that enables an array of flora and fauna to co-exist in a pristine natural environment. This segment of the Parks Byway provides visitors with superb opportunities to experience a complete subarctic ecosystem in settings primarily undisturbed by humans, while offering a phenomenon surprisingly rare in Alaska: road-accessible wilderness.

Mountain Ranges, High Peaks, and Passes. The Alaska Range, one of the greatest mountain uplifts on the continent, dominates this landscape. The range is non-volcanic, yet formed by the collision of the Pacific and North American plates it is a part of the Pacific Ring of Fire. Nestled within the range is Mt. McKinley, North America's highest peak, with its summit at 20,320 feet. This beautiful, snow-capped giant, the largest granitic body in the world, shares close company with the second two largest peaks in the range, Mt. Hunter and Mt. Foraker. Piercing the central plain of Alaska at latitude 63° N, Mt. McKinley is unique among the mountains of the world in that it is the highest point near the Arctic Circle. This results in extreme weather patterns as the mountain is buffeted by storms from both the Gulf of Alaska and the Bering Sea; in few mountain locales of the world does the weather change so precipitously and dramatically. Referred to by some as the most frigid mountain in the world, the intense cold is another unique feature of Mt. McKinley, comparable only to the Antarctic ranges.

Just south of Cantwell, the Parks Byway travels across undeveloped, unforested Broad Pass, probably one of the most beautiful areas on this highway, with its broad alpine valleys and mountain peaks on either side. Although the pass is one of the lowest passes along the North American mountain system, expansive views provide travelers a top-of-the world feeling. This long, wide basin, a major caribou migration route, affords panoramic views of Mt. McKinley and the Alaska Range and the imposing 30-mile spine of Curry and Kusugi ridges in the Talkeetna Range. Uniquely situated on the divide between the Cook Inlet and Yukon River watersheds, Broad Pass is noteworthy in that it separates the Chulitna and Nenana river basins and divides the Susitna and Yukon river watersheds.

Water and Ice. Alpine glaciers flow from the heights of Mt. McKinley and its companion peaks. These glaciers, from 14 to 38 miles long and up to 4 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, through drumlin fields, and snakes around kettle lakes, eskers, and outwash plains.

This is river country at its finest. The Parks Byway crosses pristine creeks and rivers that drain the Alaska and Talkeetna ranges including Troublesome Creek, Panguinge Creek, Birch Creek, Fish Creek, Pass Creek, the Jack River, and the roaring Nenana.

Alaska's 'Big Five'. The Parks Byway provides access to trails and waterways that lead to opportunities to experience the more than 200 wildlife species found along the byway and surrounding public lands. This region offers possibilities to observe 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 vehicles, visitors can see caribou resting on a snow patch to avoid insects, moose browsing in stands of willow, Dall's sheep 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 houses thousands of lakes that provide diverse avian habitat, which attracts more than 130 bird species from all over the world.

Subarctic Vegetation. This byway transports travelers through rich and varied plant communities characteristic of the subarctic: alpine tundra, shrub-scrub tundra, mixed spruce-birch woodlands, taiga, wetlands, and extensive riparian areas. These subarctic plant communities are unique in that they have adapted to long, bitterly cold winters. Despite the extreme conditions, a diversity of flowering plants inhabits the slopes and valleys of the region, presenting summer and fall travelers with curtains of color draped over the mountains.

Fossils. The Denali region is emerging as a site of interesting 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, shedding light into the roaming habits of prehistoric creatures and supporting the theory that dinosaurs migrated to Alaska from Asia across the Bering Land Bridge. Visitors can view samples of these tracks and more at Denali's Murie Science and Learning Center.

Stewardship Strategy for Natural Resources

There is little to be recommended in terms of improvement to this already impressive effort at preservation of undisturbed lands and natural features. The majority of undisturbed lands surrounding the Parks Byway fall under protection of the National Park Service and the Alaska Department of Parks and Recreation, agencies that actively manage these lands in the public's best interests.

The Denali Citizen's Council is a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting the integrity of Denali National Park and Preserve by supporting the ecological and wilderness values of the park and responsible planning in adjacent communities. Their goals include preserving wilderness values, preserving the intact ecosystem, and promoting sustainable development on local, state, and private lands in the Denali Borough. The byway organization should work closely with the Denali Citizen's Council and other agencies and organizations to advance projects that minimize adverse impact on natural resources.

* crane preserve for sandhill migration, which would also be used for other migrating bird species.

Recreational

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).

The Parks Byway's extensive natural landscape supplies excellent recreational opportunities for local residents as well as visitors from all over the world (Fig. 2). Those traveling on the byway can partake in a plethora of activities depending on the season. In winter, travelers can choose from aurora viewing, snowmachining, showshoeing, dog mushing, cross-country and backcountry skiing, winter camping, warming up in public-use cabins, and ice-fishing. In spring, summer, and fall, warm-weather recreation opportunities abound, including hiking, camping, kayaking, biking, hunting, fishing, flightseeing, river rafting, wildlife viewing, glacier trekking, backpacking, fall-color viewing, berry picking, and more.

This region sports once-in-a-lifetime mountaineering opportunities. Mt. McKinley, the summit of which is approximately 35 miles as the crow flies from the southern portion of the Parks Byway, is part of the world renowned "Seven Summits Challenge" to climb the highest peak on each of the seven continents. This soaring goliath has captured the imagination of mountaineers from all over the world. Typically about 1,300 people a year attempt to climb Mt. McKinley, with roughly half reaching the summit. Other peaks in the range, such as Mt. Foraker and Mt. Hunter, also draw technical climbers.

This byway offers some of Alaska's best hiking. Denali National Park and Preserve offers outstanding backpacking opportunities across the trail-free tundra, while its neighbor Denali State Park has over 100 miles of trails for hikers who prefer established routes. Here, adventurous walkers can find endless choices of inviting walks, up gravel river bars or steeper mountain valleys, over tundra, and along mountain ridges.

Numerous outfitting and tour companies offer a variety of excursions within the region depending on visitors' recreation priorities, from flightseeing trips over Mt. McKinley to white water rafting down the Nenana River to dog mushing on frozen rivers. Flightseeing and glacier landing trips are steadily growing in popularity. About 40 companies advertise air tours of the Denali region. Most companies are located in Talkeetna, but some operate out of Anchorage, McKinley Village, and Fairbanks. Both package tour and independent travelers have the ability to explore the wilderness by visiting Denali National Park and Preserve and Denali State Park. These parks have many visitor facilities including trails, public use cabins, wildlife viewing opportunities, fishing access, campgrounds, and RV facilities.

Stewardship Strategies for Recreational Resources

Since most recreational facilities are on public lands, the greatest threat to the recreational resources of the Parks Byway is marginal funding provided to state and federal parks given the ever growing demand for recreational resources. Throughout the byway, the problem of rising visitation and insufficient funds to maintain year-round restrooms and other basic services is 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 excellent example of this type of partnership between public and private organizations.

The proposed South Denali Visitor Center in Denali State Park will enhance recreation opportunities in the area by providing year-round activities for both motorized and non-motorized users. This facility will offer visitors unparalleled opportunities for immersion into the tundra. Short trails and boardwalks will 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 such places as the Denali Princess Wilderness Lodge and the Byers Lake Campground. This visitor complex will be a destination in itself and have sufficient activities and amenities for a visitor to spend days experiencing Interior Alaska. The byway organization should work closely with project planners to incorporate the byway's themes into the visitor center's design and interpretive projects and programs.

Additional recreational opportunities that would enhance the travel experience include [see Figure X]:

- separated bike paths along the entire route and the Petersville Road;
- restoration of the original '59ers trail;
- trailheads at E. Fork Chulitna Wayside and Hurricane Gulch
- a walkway across Hurricane Gulch;
- improvement of unused roadside gravel pits like the Antler Creek gravel pit into campgrounds;
- a picnic site at Horseshoe Creek;
- better river access at the E. Fork of the Chulitna and Troublesome Creek;
- waysides at mileposts 234.2 and 220.5; and
- a destination facility at 8-mile Lake.

Scenic

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).

Rated one of the top ten scenic highway segments in Alaska in a statewide survey, the Parks Byway shares with travelers some of the state's most memorable scenery (Fig. 3). Visitors can view the continent's highest peaks, active glaciers, churning rivers, muskeg bogs, and tranquil black spruce forests. Seasonal changes bring scenic variety; in fall, the

tundra converts into a kaleidoscope of brilliant color. 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 the condition for outstanding daytime views and excellent night sky visibility in fall, winter, and spring.

The Parks Byway provides travelers with an exceptionally pleasant driving experience. As the road curves through rolling topography with expansive views in all directions, travelers can feast their eyes upon unique and diverse landform features. Mt. McKinley and the Alaska Range, the imposing spines of Curry and Kusugi ridges, the picturesque eroded cliffs above the East Fork Chulitna River, the steep-walled gorges of Hurricane Gulch and the Nenana Canyon, and the panoramic vastness of Broad Pass together leave a lasting impression on visitors.

Stewardship Strategy for Scenic Resources

Scenic viewing can be improved by clearing overgrown brush in established viewing areas that interfere with viewsheds, such as the Denali View Point wayside and the northbound pullout at milepost 216.5. Additional brush clearing may serve to open up additional viewing areas. The area between mileposts 141-142 could provide great views of the Alaska Range if opened up to the west.- [bring this to the group for confirmation]. [add to the goals if they want it.]

Working with federal and state agencies and local governments to create consistent design and color standards for signage, public facilities, and interpretive exhibits will help to create a more aesthetically pleasing travel experience. Facilities, such as visitor centers, waysides, cell phone towers, power lines, and telephone lines should be encouraged to blend into the landscape to preserve the scenic integrity of the region.

Cultural

Cultural Quality is evidence and expressions of the customs or traditions of a distinct group of people. Cultural features including, but 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).

The Parks Byway functions to connect the culture of Alaska with its scenery (Fig. 4). The Dena'ina Athabascan, who once lived on the area's rich resources, traditionally occupied the Susitna River basin and hills along the southern flank of the Alaska Range. This byway transports travelers through areas still inhabited by Alaska's indigenous people. In places like Trapper Creek and Cantwell, Alaska Natives make up roughly 35% of the population. Communities along the Parks Byway retain strong Native traditions, with subsistence values remaining an integral part of the lifestyle. Wild food harvests are a primary source of these values and are crucial for maintaining important cultural traditions. Residents of the Denali Borough, particularly 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.

The Parks Byway provides travelers with the opportunity to experience a unique frontier culture, discernible by modern-day trappers, explorers, mountaineers, and homesteaders. The communities of the Parks Byway are rich in this shared culture born of the quintessential Alaskan theme of undeveloped wilderness and characterized by self-sustainability and traditional values. The following is a brief summary of how the communities of Trapper Creek, Cantwell, and Healy contribute to this corridor's unique cultural atmosphere.

A lively homesteading community, Trapper Creek has a real Alaskan flavor. Groups of homesteaders arrived from the 1940s to as late as the 1980s. Trapper Creek has a strong local spirit, and celebrates the end of winter by holding a "Cabin Fever Reliever" with pie-eating contests, blindfolded snowmobile races, and an award to the most community-spirited person.

Cantwell, which includes the federally recognized Native Village of Cantwell, originated as a flag stop on the Alaska Railroad. Gold mining provided an early boom to this wilderness town, now supported largely by income generated from the tourism industry.

Healy is a quaint mining and railroad town. In 1918, the Usibelli Coal Mine developed Healy, which has grown to become Alaska's largest coal mining operation. Just outside of Healy are the mining settlements of Suntrana and Usibelli. This town offers an excellent starting point for exploring Denali Park without the crowds and congestion found at the park gate.

Roadhouses in these communities and along the byway, including Mary's McKinley View Lodge, Byers Creek Lodge, the Cantwell Lodge, the Talkeetna Roadhouse, the Backcountry Lodge, and the Totem Inn, provide a feeling of stepping back in time. The original Cantwell Roadhouse was erected in the 1950s, approximately twenty years before Parks Byway was even built. Other lodges have offered travelers meals and lodging since the road was constructed in 1971.

The regional Winterfest Celebration [where is it held?] 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 story-telling.

Stewardship Strategy for Cultural Resources

The Matanuska-Susitna and the Denali borough's goal to develop town centers in Trapper Creek, Cantwell, and Healy should help to support the need for local availability of services and products that encourage year-round economic activity while preserving the cultural distinctiveness of these communities. Plans to incorporate design standards that encourage and maintain the rural character and small-town feel will serve to safeguard the frontier culture of these communities. ADOT&PF is investigating bypass and interchange options in Cantwell, McKinley Village, and Nenana Canyon that would allow the character of the byway corridor to remain the same, or even be improved.

In a place like the infamous commercial center of Nenana Canyon, the issue of national franchises and how the presence of these entities fit into the byway community should be addressed by local governing bodies. This plan does not make recommendations with regard to land uses and the types of businesses that might establish themselves along the byway. Comprehensive plans from the Matanuska-Susitna and Denali boroughs should also help clarify this issue.

The cultural distinctiveness of the byway should be encouraged by means of support to roadhouses, festivals, special events, and businesses that bolster the cultural identity of the area. The preservation and promotion of heritage activities that highlight local traditions, handiwork, and arts and crafts will serve to highlight the self-sufficiency and ingenuity of area residents. By providing a comprehensive list of cultural activities in marketing packets, visitors to the region will receive a taste of what the area has to offer. There are also relatively untapped opportunities for cultural history interpretation, particularly Alaska Native and pioneer culture.

Historic

Historic Quality encompasses legacies of the past that are 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).

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 archeological sites to a rich history of stalwart adventurers. People have traveled through and inhabited this area for nearly 12,000 years. Over 100 archeological sites dating back to more than 10,000 years confirms the use of the area by Native Alaskans for trade and subsistence. Non-native people first explored Interior Alaska following the territory's purchase from Russia in 1867. Many of the place names along the Parks are derived from this period's explorers and military men such as Lt. John C. Cantwell and Captain Michael J. Healy. The first 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. His accounts of a possible route up Mt. McKinley enticed the legendary Judge Wickersham to lead the first ascent of the peak in 1903. Around this time, naturalist

Charles Sheldon was introduced to the Denali area. His efforts for preservation of Denali's wilderness and wildlife culminated in the original establishment of Denali National Park and Preserve in 1917.

Coal mining is an active industry in the region and played an important role in the corridor's history (Fig. 4). The Healy River Coal Company first commercially mined 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. Healy coal continues to be a major contributor to the area's economy and the rest of the state; in 1981, coal mining was heralded as the second largest export business in Alaska. The area's mining history can be experienced with a visit to the old mining settlement of Suntrana. This historic area features smoking hills, caused by the perpetual natural burning of underground coal deposits.

Stewardship Strategy for Historic Resources

An inventory and preservation plan should be developed for the historic structures in the corridor, such as early homesteading houses and roadhouses. Funding to restore and renovation important historic structures along the route, such as the Rabideaux Cabin, should be pursued as well as listing on national and/or state historic register listing.

The byway organization should work with local and state governments and historical societies to identify and develop sites that highlight historic events along the corridor. Developing an interpretive plan would provide historic highlights of the corridor, promote the area's history, and aid in development of interpretive materials.

Archaeological

Archeological 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 archeological 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 Athabascan groups and major prehistoric sites such as the Teklanika Archeological District, a property listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The byway organization should join efforts with area archeologists to ensure that protection of these sensitive resources remains unchanged.

Table 1: Parks Highway Scenic Byway Corridor Resource Inventory

| E = Existing P=Planned O=Opportunity NB=Northbound SB=Southbound B=Both sides **open year-round 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 | Toilets | Parking | Interpretive Sites | Picnic Areas | Scenic Viewing | Trailhead | Camping | Comments |
| 114.8 | Trapper Creek ** | CULT; REC; HIST; SV | | E | E | E | E | E | E | E | E | Gateway community; museum; historic lodges |
| 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 - rainbows and grayling |
| 133 | Gravel pull-off | REC | SB | | | E | | | | | | Short walk leads down to Chulitna River |
| 133 | Princess Wilderness Lodge | REC; SV | NB | E | E | E | E | E | E | E | | Hiking, flightseeing, rafting, horseback riding; views from scenic pull-off on access road |
| 134.5 | Mary's McKinley View Lodge | CULT; SV; HIST; REC | SB | | E | E | E | | E | | | Mary is an area legend; great views; heli-tours, boat trips, guided hiking, fishing, horseback riding |
| 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 | | | Paved campsites; picnic area; great views of Alaska Range |
| 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 | Toilets | 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 | 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 | | Viewing scopes; limited camping; winter trail to Byers Lake |
| 156.3 | Gravel pull-offs | SV | B | | | E | O | | | | | Vacant buildings on NB side; good views of Kusugi 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 | Toilets | 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 | | | F 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; WIDE RUMBLE STRIPS HAMPER SHOULDER BIKE USE | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 165.5 | Paved pull-offs | REC | B | | | E | | | | | | Creek; good berry picking |
| 168 | Denali State Park boundary | | B | | | | | | | | | Northern park boundary; leaving sign NB; need entering sign SB |
| <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 | Toilets | 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 | Toilets | 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 city | CULT | NB | | | E | | | | | | Status unknown |
| 190 | Gravel pullout | | 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 | | | | | WWII history; Mustang fighter base; summit airstrip |
| 202.1 | Borough boundaries | | B | | | | O | | | | | Boundary of Mat-Su and Denali boroughs; interpretive opportunity |
| 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 | Toilets | 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 |
| 209.9 | Backwoods Lodge ** | CULT; HIST | NB | | E | E | | | | E | | Just off the Denail Hwy; trail around lake |
| 210 | Cantwell ** | CULT; HIST | SB | | E | E | E | E | E | | E | Town is 2 miles west of Parks Hwy; 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 |
| 212.7 | Gravel pull-off | | SB | | | E | | | | | | Small area |
| <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 |
| 215.5 | 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; WIDENING SHOULDERS AT RAIL CROSSING SHOULD IMPROVE SAFETY | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 216 | Gravel pull-off | | SB | | | | | | | | | Small area |

| MP | Resource | Intrinsic Quality | Side of Hwy. | Rec. Water Access | Toilets | Parking | Interpretive Sites | Picnic Areas | Scenic Viewing | Trailhead | Camping | Comments |
|--|--------------------------------|-------------------|--------------|-------------------|---------|---------|--------------------|--------------|----------------|-----------|---------|--|
| 216.5 | Paved pull-off | NAT; SV | NB | | | E | O | | E | | | 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 |
| 223.5 | Gravel pull-off | | NB | | | E | | | | | | Very small area |
| 224 | Carlo Creek | | | | | | | | | | | Visitor services here - food, lodging |
| 224.1 | Rick Swenson's sled-dog school | CULT | | | | | | | | | | Rick's an Iditarod champion |
| 224.5 | Gravel pit | | SB | | | | | | | | | DOT gravel pit area |
| 224.8 | Gravel pull-off | SV | SB | | | E | | | E | | | No overnight camping sign; good views to the south |
| <i>Note: Interesting views of Fang Mountain and erosion pillars to the west around mile 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 | Toilets | Parking | Interpretive Sites | Picnic Areas | Scenic Viewing | Trailhead | Camping | Comments |
|---|-------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------|-------------------|---------|---------|--------------------|--------------|----------------|-----------|---------|---|
| 230 | Husky Homestead Tours | REC; CULT | NB | | | | | | | | | Dog mushing from Jeff King, 4-time Iditarod champion |
| 229.2 | Denali Air, Inc ** | REC | NB | | | | | | | | | Flightseeing & glacier landing tours |
| 231.1 | Kantishna Wilderness Trails Tour | REC | NB | | | | | | | | | Tours through the national park |
| 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 entrance | 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--looks like 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 "Glitter Gulch" | 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 |
| 238 | Nenana Raft Adventures | REC | NB | E | E | E | | | | | | Guided whitewater rafting kayaking |

| MP | Resource | Intrinsic Quality | Side of Hwy. | Rec. Water Access | Toilets | Parking | Interpretive Sites | Picnic Areas | Scenic Viewing | Trailhead | Camping | Comments |
|---|---|-------------------|--------------|-------------------|---------|---------|--------------------|--------------|----------------|-----------|---------|---|
| ROAD CONDITIONS: 2-4 LANE; AREA OF INTENSIVE COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT; NEEDS LANDSCAPING, BICYCLE/PEDESTRIAN FACILITIES, AND TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 238.5 | Denali Princess Wilderness Lodge | REC | SB | | E | E | | | E | | | Park tours; rafting; horseback riding |
| 238.6 | Alaska Denali Gold Company | REC | NB | | | | | | | | | Gold panning |
| 238.9 | Alaska Raft Adventures | REC | SB | E | E | E | | | | | | Guided rafting; area shuttle service |
| 240 | Iceworm Gulch | SV | SB | | | | | | | | | Large, open area where rock debris is deposited opportunity for a rest area and/or campground |
| 240 | Denali Outdoor Center/campground | REC | SB | E | E | E | | E | E | | E | Whitewater rafting tours; scenic floats trips; biking; boat rentals |
| 240 | Denali Riverside RV Park | REC | SB | E | E | E | | E | E | | E | Local tours sales; picnic area |
| 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 Nenena River; interpretive opportunities |
| 242.3 | Dragonfly Creek Bridge | | SB | | | E | O | | E | | | Unsigned; parking lot south of bridge; interpretive opportunities (AK Railroad and geology); best view of Nenana Canyon |
| 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 |

| MP | Resource | Intrinsic Quality | Side of Hwy. | Rec. Water Access | Toilets | Parking | Interpretive Sites | Picnic Areas | Scenic Viewing | Trailhead | Camping | Comments |
|------------|--|-------------------|--------------|-------------------|---------|---------|--------------------|--------------|----------------|-----------|---------|--|
| 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; excellent windflower & Dall's sheep area |
| 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 | Denali ATV tours | REC | NB | | | | | | | | | Guided, narrated ATV tours of the area |
| 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 | | | | | | | | | This is the only sign that actually says 'scenic byway AK' |
| 248.7 | Totem Inn ** | CULT; HIST | NB | | E | E | | | | | | Quirky inn; live music |
| Off MP 249 | Healy Chamber of Commerce and Visitor Center | HIST | NB | | E | E | | | | | | Info of local area businesses provided; .4 miles down Healy Rd. |

| MP | Resource | Intrinsic Quality | Side of Hwy. | Rec. Water Access | Toilets | Parking | Interpretive Sites | Picnic Areas | Scenic Viewing | Trailhead | Camping | Comments |
|--|-----------------------|--------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|----------------|----------------|---------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|------------------|----------------|--|
| Off MP 249 | Usibelli Coal Mine ** | CULT; HIST | NB | | | | O | | | | | Interpretive opportunity of the significance of mining in the area; 3.5 miles down Healy Rd. |
| Off MP 251 | Denali Saddle Safaris | REC; CULT | SB | | | | | | | | | Guided horseback rides; 4 miles down the Stampede Rd. |
| ROAD CONDITIONS: 2 LANE; PAVED SHOULDERS 7-8 FEET WIDE; WIDE RUMBLE STRIPS HAMPER BIKE USE OF SHOULDERS; SEVERAL BRIDGES HAVE NARROW SHOULDERS | | | | | | | | | | | | |

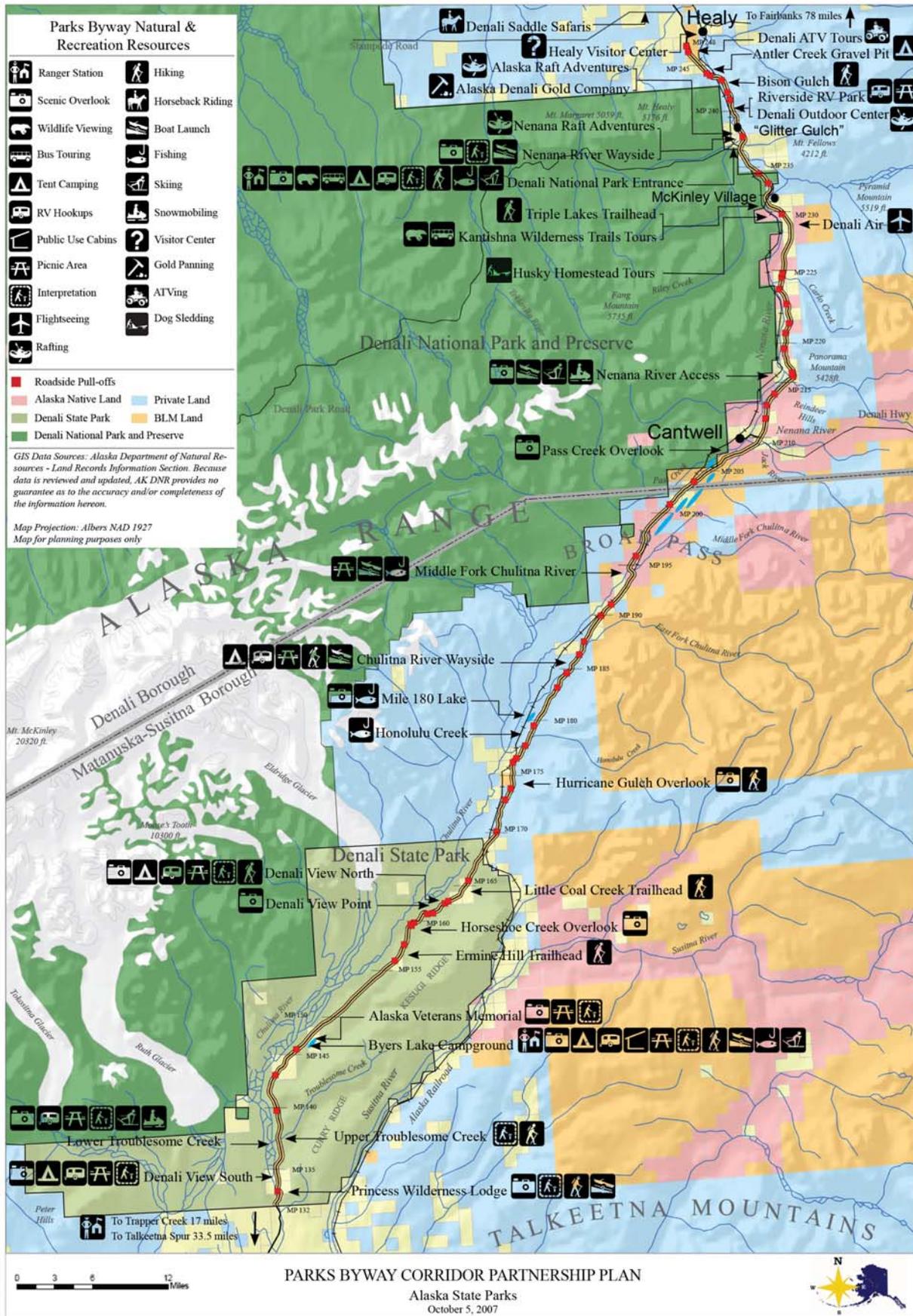


Figure 2. Parks Highway Scenic Byway Natural and Recreation Resources

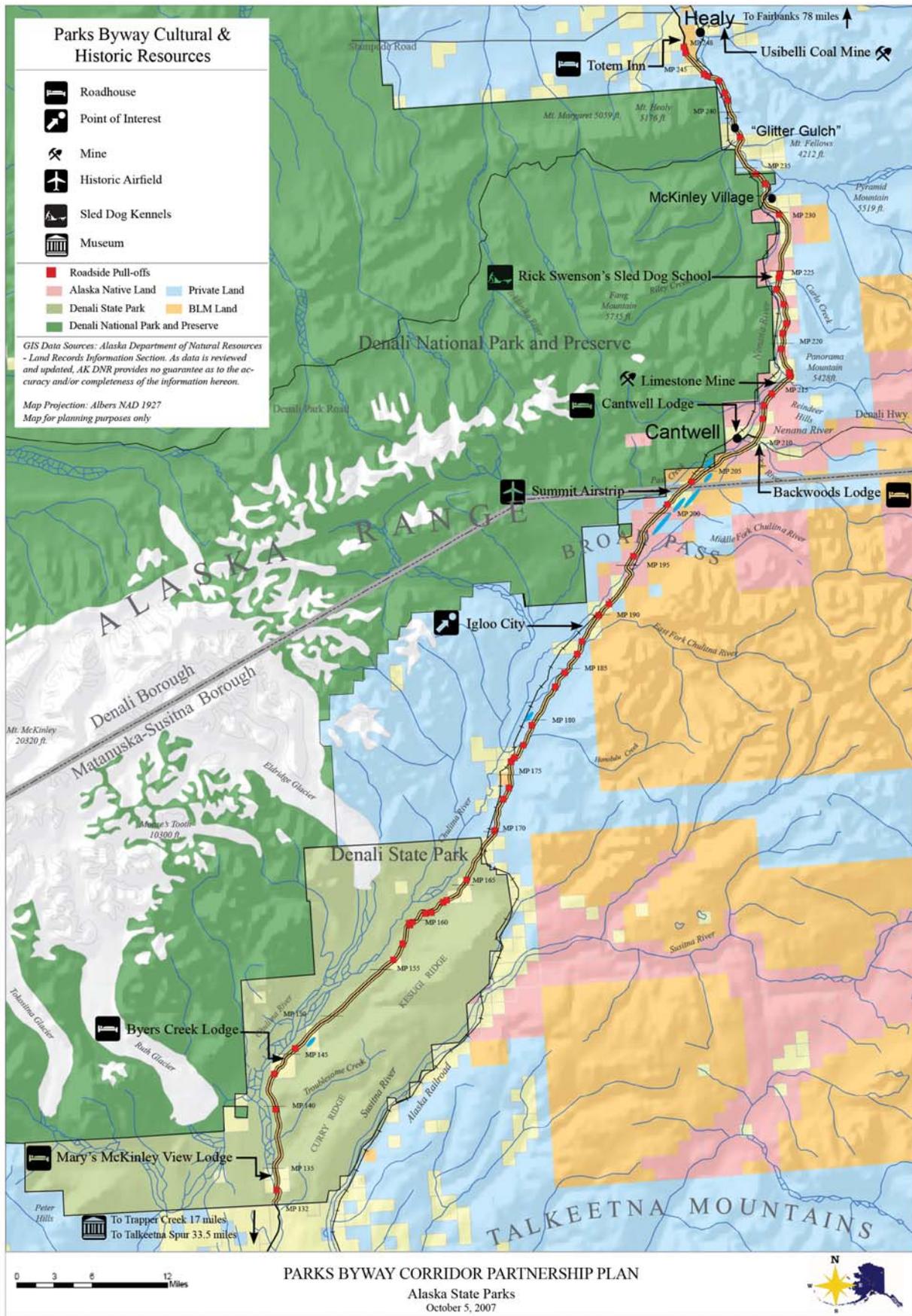


Figure 4. Parks Highway Scenic Byway Cultural and Historic Resources

5. TRANSPORTATION AND SAFETY

Introduction

This chapter presents an overview of the transportation system in interior Alaska and how the Parks Byway fits into this system. Topics required by the National Scenic Byway Program that could influence the visitor's experience are addressed here: traffic conditions and signs, commercial traffic, outdoor advertising, air and rail service, bus and shuttle service, bicycle and pedestrian travel, and recommended improvements. Transportation system goals and objectives are provided that incorporate and build upon past planning efforts undertaken by the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (ADOT&PF).

Transportation System Overview

The Parks Byway is the backbone of the transportation system through central Alaska. It is a vital transportation 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 Interior Alaska 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. There are no alternate routes through this region.

The entire length of the route is a two-lane road with varying paved shoulders. Mileposts along the Parks Byway do not begin with zero. Instead, they begin with milepost 35, continuing the milepost numbering of the Glenn Highway where the two highways intersect near Palmer. Thus, mileposts along the Parks Highway reflect distance from Anchorage, which is not actually on the Parks Highway.

This corridor serves a wide variety of regional transportation purposes. The Parks Byway is important to local citizens along the route, serving as the main street for most of the interior communities it passes through, including slower local traffic within and between communities. Other travelers make use of the byway for commuter purposes to travel to Anchorage, Fairbanks, and other job locations. Yet others employ the route for private and commercial through traffic to Fairbanks, Anchorage, and destinations in, between, or beyond. On any given weekend or holiday, recreation traffic increases sharply due to people traveling to destinations such as key trailheads or fish streams. In summer, tourism traffic is evident in the large number of recreational vehicles, pedestrians crossing the street, and fast-moving tour buses. The corridor right-of-way adjacent to the byway also provides for many functions, including pullouts, rest areas, recreation access, bike trails, public and commercial establishment parking, switch-over stops for truckers, raft launches, trailheads, and camping.

Most of the concerns identified by ADOT&PF in this corridor relate to summer traffic flow and the mix of recreational and residential traffic. Some travelers avail themselves of the Parks Byway to recreate while others are using the corridor to get from one place to another.

Traffic Volumes

On this segment of the Parks Highway, average daily traffic ranges are quite low—from between 989 and 2862 vehicles per day (see Table 2). This data is from 2004, the most recently compiled year. 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 recreational use areas along the corridor. In 2000, increases of over 100% were recorded during summer in some areas.

Table 2: 2004 Parks Highway Scenic Byway Traffic Volumes

| Milepost | Feature | Average Daily Volumes |
|-----------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 132.7 | Chulitna River bridge | 989 |
| 146 | Byers Lake Campground entrance | 1102 |
| 185 | East Fork Chulitna River | 1380 |
| 209.9 | Jct. with Denali Hwy | 1912 |
| 237.3 | Jct. with Denali Park road | 2862 |
| 249 | Jct. with Healy spur road | 1979 |

Source: ADOT&PF, 2004. Alaska Highway Data section of ADOT&PF website.

Safety and Accident Record

In general, the Scenic Byway segment of the Parks Highway (MP 132-248) 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. The overwhelming majority of these accidents resulted in property damage or minor injuries (see Table 3). 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. Certain grades and alignments require extra caution during winter, especially the hills of Honolulu Creek and the East Fork of the Chulitna River.

Moose and other wildlife on the roadway account for a small percentage of traffic accidents each year. 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.

Table 3: 2005 Parks Highway Scenic Byway Accident Data (Milepost 232-248)

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

Source: ADOT&PF, 2005 Accident Report

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 that the traveler is on a state byway. These signs should be replaced with signs that clearly identify the designated section of the Parks Byway as an Alaska Scenic Byway.

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 will present the byway as a unified, continuous route. Additional signage should easily mark communities and direct visitors to recreation areas and trailheads. Overall, signage is satisfactory but minor improvements could be made.

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 ADOT&PF Right-of-Way Section enforces outdoor advertising within the travel corridor. Given the existing laws, outdoor advertising will not be a significant issue along the Parks Byway.

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 is also a direct route to the economically vital oil fields of the North Slope region 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. As such, 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 are capable 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.

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 and Denali National Park and Preserve. In Talkeetna, visitors can board the Hurricane Turn Train, which has delivered Alaskan locals to their homesteads since 1923, and get off the train anywhere to hike, fish, or journey to a remote cabin. In winter, travelers can pursue cold-weather recreation activities by debarking the Aurora Winter or the Hurricane Turn Winter trains in remote locations.

Bus and Shuttle Travel

A variety of bus and shuttle services transports visitors in and around Denali National Park and Preserve. There are two narrated bus tours provided for park visitors, the Tundra Wilderness Tour and the Natural History Tour, which operate from hotels and then into the park. In addition to tour buses, there is also 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 also transport visitors from their establishments along the byway to and around the park. This particular service is 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 Demonstration Shuttle, and the Riley Creek Loop Shuttle, are concession-operated. A consolidated shuttle bus/transit system serving Parks Byway communities and managed as a partnership between the National Park Service, the business community, and potentially local government is currently undergoing development.

Bicycle and Pedestrian Travel

In the absence of separated trails along the majority of the byway, bicycling quality depends on the width of the byway shoulder, which in most cases is of adequate width to accommodate cycling. Currently two sections of byway have excessively wide rumble strips in the paved shoulders that interfere with bike traffic (milepost 133-164 and milepost 243-249). All bridges meet minimum safety requirements to accommodate bicycles or pedestrians, although Hurricane Gulch, the East and Middle forks of the

Chulitna River, Pass Creek, and Jack River bridges just meet minimum standards. Bicycling through these sections requires more care, but many cyclists use this route nonetheless. Installing pedestrian bridges at these and other crossings would improve bicycle and pedestrian travel.

In 2001, ADOT&PF adopted a policy that states that the shoulder width on the Parks Highway should be at least 4 feet wide to accommodate bicycle travel. In developed areas such as the Nenana Canyon commercial area, ADOT&PF has constructed separated bike paths and separated trails as part of improvement projects. The addition of a separated bike path along the entire length of the byway would greatly improve bicycle travel on the corridor.

Aside from separated trails, the byway offers a great number of hiking and walking trails. Denali National Park and Preserve offers route finding across the tundra, while Denali State Park has over 100 miles of trails for hikers who prefer established routes. An extensive trail system is in the planning process as part of the proposed South Denali Visitor Center complex.

Recommended Improvements

ADOT&PF has 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. Based on 2030 traffic projections identified in the visioning document, the following future improvements were recommended along the 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-moving and turning traffic viewing Mt. McKinley and the 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 through 2030, although a short bypass of Cantwell also is being evaluated.

Carlo Creek – McKinley Village. 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 Village. 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 Village – Nenana Canyon. The heart of this section is Nenana Canyon, otherwise known as ‘Glitter Gulch’ a high volume, 1-mile segment just north of the entrance to Denali National Park. Plans for an interim safety project are underway, while additional efforts are on the table to identify the mid- to long-term solution. That solution could be one of several bypass options within the canyon, some type of cut-and-cover design in the canyon, or a bypass to the east around Sugar Loaf Mountain. Recently, the Denali Borough reviewed a plan for a bypass of Nenana Canyon and found that such a project may be unfeasible due to high engineering costs associated with unfavorable soil conditions. More data are needed regarding the growth rate of the canyon and the national park, and possible transportation solutions for Nenana Canyon to determine how access in the rural segment south of Nenana Canyon will be managed. If the Sugar Loaf Mountain Bypass were to be built, this rural section would be bypassed and these improvements may not be needed.

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 an existing need for passing lanes and climbing lanes on this section of the byway. It is probable that an upgraded two-lane section outfitted with passing and climbing lanes and an interchange at the road to Anderson will be adequate for the 2030.

6. TOURISM AND MARKETING

Introduction

This chapter presents an overview of the tourism environment and how the Parks Byway fits into this environment. Visitor profiles and marketing strategies for the byway are included in this chapter.

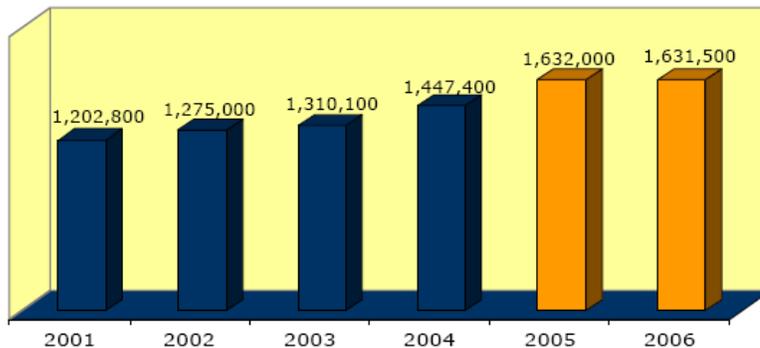
Tourism is an important part of the broader concern of economic stability in the corridor. One of the primary goals of this plan is to enhance the economic vitality of local communities along the byway through a more developed tourism strategy. Most of the communities along the byway rely on the economic benefits derived from tourism and recreational travel-related activities. As such, 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, numerous opportunities exist for Parks Byway communities to capture additional tourist markets through expansion of marketing and promotional activities.

Roughly two-thirds of all visitors to the state do not venture into Interior Alaska. Since every \$1 spent of Alaska's tourism marketing returns an estimated \$168, enticing these visitors to add the Parks Byway to their travel itineraries through affordable marketing and promotional tools will result in substantial economic benefits for the region. Creation of a marketing and promotional plan is recommended in this plan's implementation strategies to promote the byway's resources to visitors and tourists from outside the region.

The Tourism Environment

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

Figure 2: 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.).

The number of summer visitors to Alaska is steadily increasing (see Fig. 2). Cruise travel fueled most of this growth in the last decade. The cruise ship industry does not limit visitors to water-based excursions. Rather, the tours they market to Alaskan visitors include “Land Only” and “CruiseTours” (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. Princess Tours represents a major tourism interest on the byway, with two wilderness lodges on the route holding over 600 rooms each. Princess Tours brings over 100,000 people up the Parks Byway annually, with a goal of increasing this number to 125,000 visitors per year. Holland America and Cook Inlet Region, Inc. are planning additional guest facilities in upcoming years that together will offer an additional 800 rooms.

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 the summer months, seasonal, 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, 86% of the Borough's revenues, the money that helps pay for public services such as schools and road maintenance.

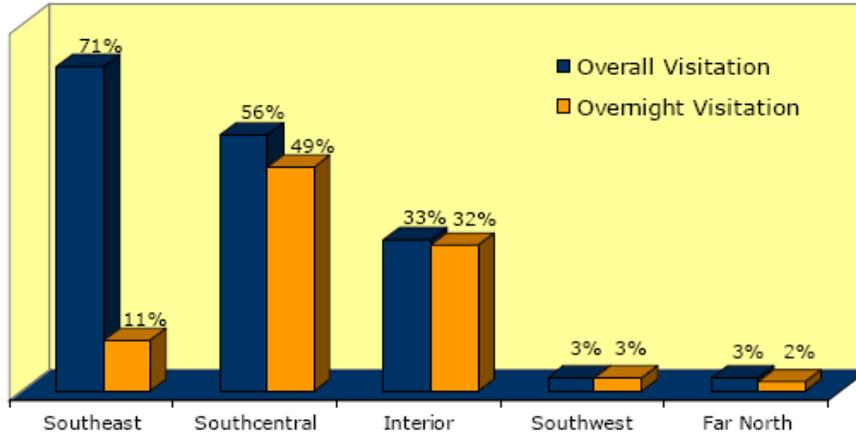
One option for expanding capacity, and potentially the benefits of tourism, is to increase tourism beyond the months of June through August. Options include strengthening the shoulder season to extend beyond May and September, and establishing new avenues for winter activities such as skiing, dog sledding, 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 recreational 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.

Visitor Profiles

The majority of visitors that enter the state do not travel up the Parks Byway (see Fig. 3). According to the Alaska Visitor Statistics Program, in summer of 2006, Southeast Alaska attracted 71% of all visitors and Southcentral 56%; Interior Alaska drew roughly 33%. Of the visitors to the Interior, 50% traveled to the region by train and 44% by vehicle (rental, personal, and/or RV). The majority (61%) purchased some type of multi-day package tour and bought wilderness lodge and rail package tours more than visitors to other regions did.

Visitors to Interior Alaska tend to stay longer in the state than travelers to other regions, approximately 13 nights versus a statewide average of 9 nights. They are more likely to camp than visitors to other regions and are more interested in viewing wildlife and in cultural and historic attractions. Almost 70 percent of visitors to this region research their trips online.

Figure 3: Regional Visitation, Summer 2006



Even though overall visitation to the state is increasing, visitation to the Interior is slightly dropping (see Table 4). There exists a great opportunity to entice additional visitors to travel the Interior via the Parks Byway, especially visitors already in the Southcentral region. Reaching out to these visitors 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 and enjoy their trip more.

Table 4: Alaska Visitor Trends

| Regions Visited | 1993 | 2001 | 2006 |
|-------------------|------|------|------|
| Southeast | 60% | 84% | 71% |
| Southcentral | 68 | 62 | 56 |
| Interior/Northern | 35 | 39 | 33 |
| Southwest | 6 | 17 | 3 |

Source: Alaska Visitor Statistics Program, Summer 2006

Marketing Strategies

Developing and implementing a byway marketing plan is essential to realizing tourism and the economic development benefits of the byway. The marketing plan should include promotional strategies that will serve to increase the number of visitors exploring the byway and the amount of time travelers spend in the region. Creation of a byway brand, visitor brochure, press releases, audio tour, and website are tested ways of accomplishing these goals. Offering improved visitor services, such as year-round restrooms, and expanding the tourist season will make the byway more accessible to established tourist industries, thereby strengthening the corridor's economy.

The Parks Byway is fortunate to have many active players interested in its success. Strategic alliances with local chambers of commerce, the Alaska Travel Industry Association, the Alaska Wilderness Recreation and Tourism Association, other byway organizations, and state and federal agencies will allow available marketing funds to be used with a singular, organized purpose. Coordination with other ongoing planning efforts, such as the proposed South Denali Visitor Center, will ensure consistency of message and provide an integrated, regional marketing strategy.

7. INTERPRETATION

Introduction

This chapter highlights the existing Parks Byway interpretive experience and details interpretive goals to enhance opportunities along the byway. Along with interpretive stories, there are also important informative messages about safety and resource protection that should be conveyed to travelers to enhance their enjoyment of the region and to protect the resources they have come to 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 Interpretive Experience

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

Trapper Creek Museum. This locally owned and managed historical museum highlights Alaska's earliest pioneers amidst many artifacts, pictures, and stories depicting the rugged life of local gold miners, fur trappers, homesteaders, and other adventurers. The museum is housed in a log cabin built by the Donaldson family, members of the Michigan 59'ers, a group of latter-day pioneers. The gift shop inside the Trapper Creek Museum features many antique collectibles, reproductions, and local crafts.

Mount McKinley Princess Lodge. Denali State Park interpreters provide multiple interpretive programs each day at the lodge seven day a week. 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. This privately owned historic lodge was homesteaded in the early 1960s by the Late Mary Cary, regionally proclaimed historian, author, adventurer, and pioneer. 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. Campsites and potable water are also available and wayside hosts live onsite to answer visitors' questions. In summer, State Park volunteers give informal oral presentations.

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

Upper Troublesome Creek. A double-sided kiosk with minimal interpretation provided at the trailhead presents information on Denali State Park bears, scenic viewing, and safety concerns. Adding interpretive materials would provide visitors with an enhanced experience.

Byers Lake Campground. This Denali State Park visitor facility has a number of kiosks and bulletin boards containing outdated interpretive and informational displays. Topics currently explored include the history of the area, birds, safety information, bears, Mt. McKinley, glaciers, and winter activities. Given the high use of this site, updated, professional interpretive offerings would greatly improve the experience of a large number of people. Interpretation of what one can do along the corridor would orient visitors and be useful to local business.

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 interpretive sculptures and an alcove with a semi-circle of five 20-foot-tall concrete panels, one for each branch of service. A non-profit friends group manages a summer-operated visitor, staffed by volunteers who give informal oral presentations.

Denali View North Campground. This Denali State Park facility features camping and picnic sites. This site offers visitors spotting scopes, a nature 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 information on bears, moose, plants, and safety concerns.

Pass Creek Bridge. This scenic viewpoint includes a blank interpretive sign. Posting an interpretive panel on natural history topics such as caribou or blueberries would make this wayside more interesting to visitors.

Cantwell. Cantwell shares with visitors the story of the Alaskan frontier through modern-day pioneers. Many residents still depend on subsistence hunting, fishing, trapping, and gathering. These themes could be developed through interpretive materials and services that would enhance the visitor experience and encourage visitors to spend more time in the region.

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

Talkeetna Ranger Station, 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 on the west side of the byway that leads south to the Denali Park entrance. An interpretive kiosk provides information on natural and cultural history topics.

Nenana River Canyon “Glitter Gulch”. Most Denali Park visitors stop for services in this commercial area. A variety of visitor services are offered including scenic viewpoints, guided river running trips, guided helicopter tours, and lodging. Interpretive materials and programs highlighting the corridor’s themes would enhance the visitor experience.

Healy. Healy provides visitors with many opportunities to learn about the rich cultural and natural history of the area, especially mining history, and offers a chance for visitors to participate in guided flight-seeing, horseback riding, dog mushing, and river running tours.

Defining Byway Interpretive Themes

The subsequent 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. Interpretive messages along the byway should incorporate the national park’s tested themes and theme statements:

Intact Natural Ecosystems. This healthy, functioning ecosystem provides the opportunity to discover and experience a wisdom that offers insights into our natural heritage and the world at large.

Wildlife and Wildlife Habitat. The size and ecological integrity of the area preserves a home of unequalled quality for populations of large northern mammals, birds, and other wildlife, where they continue to live in community with one another as they have through time.

Mountain Massif and Geologic Processes. Towering above this northern landscape, Mount McKinley and the Alaska Range embodies power and beauty that captivates human imagination, and inspires 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 and the broader topics of connections and the Alaskan way of life. Potential themes might include:

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

Outside 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.

Information and Orientation

Information differs from interpretation in presentation style – information is a dispersal of facts while interpretation reveals a story or larger message. Orientation is a crucial information service that leads visitors to a site easily and safely. Current information and orientation through on-board and on-route components are limited, and in some cases missing altogether. An information and orientation system linked to interpretation is needed to accomplish several objectives for byways: to orient travelers, to provide travelers with information on byway opportunities, and to encourage visitors to frequent local businesses and attractions. Orientation and information panels and bulletins boards should have a uniform appearance similar in style to interpretive panels in order to link byway interpretation with visitor information and orientation. It is recommended that the byway organization work with the Alaska Scenic Byways Program to install interpretive and other signage that incorporates standards developed by the state program.

* *Recommend specific interpretive projects here* [map recommended projects]

8. VISION, GOALS, AND STRATEGIES – This section is incomplete

Vision Statement

“The Parks Highway Scenic Byway is an incomparable journey that travels through Interior Alaska to the foot of Denali, North America’s highest peak. This byway grants unparalleled opportunities for road-accessible recreational experiences and is an open invitation to the area’s natural, scenic, cultural, and historic resources. Planning philosophies along the corridor promote sustainable future development and year-round recreational experiences and facilities with the ultimate goal of providing a safe, comfortable, and enjoyable adventure for all who visit. The Parks Byway Community Partnership is dedicated to making travelers welcome and insuring opportunities are available to experience the unique character of the region.”

Intrinsic Quality Goals and Strategies

Goal 1: Do no harm.

Strategy A: Ensure that future byway projects can be maintained to appropriate standards.

Strategy B: Ensure that future byway projects have the full support of nearby property owners.

Strategy C: Encourage Partnership communities to identify local intrinsic qualities that may be threatened by additional tourism.

Strategy D: Encourage land management agencies to protect resources from overuse through comprehensive site planning.

Goal 2: Preserve and enhance the natural resources of the byway.

Strategy A: Develop interpretive materials that highlight natural resources along the corridor.

Strategy B: Cooperate with all agencies on long range planning.

Strategy C: Encourage land management agencies to concentrate development to maintain open space.

Goal 3: Preserve and enhance the recreational resources of the byway.

Strategy A: Pursue funding to maintain public facilities through partnerships developed under the byway umbrella.

Strategy B: Pursue the development of additional recreational resources to enhance the traveler’s byway experience.

Strategy C: Pursue partnerships in order to improve river access at the E. Fork of the Chulitna and Troublesome Creek

Strategy D: Develop a year-round recreation calendar.

Strategy E: Encourage DOT & PF to install a separated bike path along the entire route

Strategy F: Install trailheads at E. Fork of the Chultina and Hurricane Gulch.

Strategy G: Encourage the state to improve unused roadside gravel pits into campgrounds and picnic sites.

Action: Campground at Antler Creek

Action: Improved picnic site at Horseshoe Creek

Strategy H: Work with South Denali planners to ensure the byway's recreational goals are incorporated into the visitor complex's design and programs.

Strategy I: ---

Strategy J: Encourage ADOT&PF to construct a walkway across Hurricane Gulch.

Strategy K: Encourage the appropriate entities to develop waysides at mileposts 234.2 and 220.5.

Strategy L: Support development of a destination facility at 8-mile Lake.

Goal 4: Preserve and enhance the scenic resources of the byway.

Strategy A: Work with partners to ensure the installation and development of public facilities, signage, cell phone towers, interpretive exhibits, and power and telephone lines blends into the natural setting.

Strategy B: Develop design and color standards for signage, facilities, and interpretive exhibits to create an aesthetically pleasing travel experience.

Strategy C: Improve scenic viewing by clearing overgrown brush on roadsides.

Goal 5: Preserve and enhance the cultural resources of the byway.

Strategy A: Preserve the cultural distinctiveness of rural communities by supporting and promoting the development of town centers.

Strategy B: Bolster cultural identity by support of roadhouses, festivals, and special events.

Strategy C: Encourage the promotion and preservation of heritage activities that highlight local traditions, handiwork, arts, and crafts.

Strategy D: Develop a comprehensive list of cultural activities to include in marketing packets

Strategy E: Develop interpretive materials that highlight cultural resources.

Goal 6: Preserve and enhance the historic resources of the byway.

Strategy A: Develop an inventory and preservation plan to facilitate renovation of historic structures.

Strategy B: Work to identify and develop sites that highlight historic events along the corridor.

Strategy C: Develop interpretive materials that provide historic highlights of the corridor.

Goal X: Preserve the archeological resources of the byway.

Strategy: Work with area archaeologists to ensure that protection of these resources remains unchanged.

Goal 7: Work closely with partners and land managers to assist other planning efforts in avoiding negative impacts on the byway's intrinsic qualities.

Strategy A: Work with the Denali Citizen's Council to advance projects that minimize adverse impact on natural resources.

Strategy B: Coordinate with South Denali Visitor Center planners to ensure a synchronized effort in preserving and enhancing the byways resources.

Transportation System Goals and Strategies

Goal 8: Provide a safe traveling experience for all byway users.

Strategy A: Coordinate planning involvement among byway partners to address safety, maintenance, and signage issues.

Strategy B: Encourage ADOT&PF to construct or improve shoulders, auxiliary lanes, and wayside and trailhead parking if warranted by safety concerns.

Strategy C: Encourage ADOT&PF to install traffic warning and informational signage in locations where it does not exist or is currently insufficient.

Strategy D: Encourage ADOT&PF to take steps to clear blind areas of brush and trees.

Strategy E: Provide information in the form of brochures, maps, kiosks, signs, etc. that informs travelers about available services, safety concerns, and other byway information.

Goal 9: Improve transportation services between communities along the Parks Byway.

Strategy A: Take steps to provide a transportation service that enables both visitors and residents to travel efficiently within and between communities.

Goal 10: Encourage DOT & PF to accommodate non-vehicular traffic in a safe manner.

Strategy A: Encourage DOT & PF to provide a separated trail along the byway.

Strategy B: ---

Strategy C: Coordinate with ADOT&PF and partners to construct pedestrian bridges at key crossings.

Actions: Install pedestrian bridges at Hurricane Gulch, the E. and Middle forks of the Chulitna River, Pass Creek, and the Jack River.

Goal 11: Improve signage.

Strategy A: Coordinate with ADOT&PF and the Mat-Su and Denali boroughs to install signage that better directs travelers to recreation areas and trailheads.

Strategy B: Coordinate with the Mat-Su and Denali boroughs to install signage that is consistent across boroughs.

Strategy C: Coordinate with ADOT&PF and the Mat-Su and Denali boroughs to install byway signs that leave no doubt to travelers that they are on a byway.

Strategy D: Coordinate with ADOT&PF, the Mat-Su and Denali boroughs, and/or community leaders to install signage that welcomes travelers to byway communities.

Tourism and Marketing Goals and Strategies

Goal 12: Increase and improve marketing of Parks Byway communities.

Strategy A: Develop a marketing plan that enlightens visitors to opportunities in byway communities and positions the byway in national and international markets.

Strategy B: Seek additional funding through cooperative marketing with other factions to support expanded marketing and promotional activities.

Goal 13: Increase the number of visitors exploring the byway.

Strategy A: Create a byway brand to capture visitors' imagination and make the byway stand out in byway and travel literature.

Strategy B: Promote the Parks Byway as a destination to the cruise ship and railroad industries.

Strategy C: Prepare and distribute a byway brochure.

Strategy D: Write press releases for local newspapers and radio stations about the byway and highlight the fascinating byway side trips.

Goal 14: Increase visitor length-of-stay in the byway corridor.

Strategy A: Produce an audio tour that will heighten visitor interest in the byway's natural, recreational, scenic, cultural, and historic resources.

Strategy B: Develop a byway brochure based on interpretive themes that provides half-day, 1-day, and 2-day itineraries that will encourage travelers to extend their stay and visit local businesses.

Strategy C: Host a website to provide information about the byway's resources and available visitor services to make it easier for people to include the byway in their itineraries.

Goal 15: Expand winter and off-season use of the byway.

Strategy A: Promote the development of year-round visitor service, including restroom and interpretation facilities.

Strategy B: Improve byway trail systems and encourage year-round use.

Interpretive Goals and Strategies

Goal 16: Create a Parks Byway interpretive program that both supports communities and enhances the corridor experience.

Strategy A: Establish an interpretive committee that provides interpretive planning direction.

Strategy B: Develop an interpretive plan that supports tourism and marketing goals.

Strategy C: Seek funding to implement interpretive goals.

Goal 17: Link byway interpretation to an information and orientation system that orients travelers, provides additional opportunities, and encourages visitation to local businesses.

Strategy A: Work with the Alaska Scenic Byways Program to install interpretive and other signage that incorporates standards developed by the state program.

STRATEGY MAPPING

This section will include maps that show the locations of on-the-ground strategies.

9. CONCLUSION

This section is incomplete.

APPENDIX A: ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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APPENDIX B: PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PLAN

This section is incomplete.

APPENDIX C: RELATED STUDIES AND REFERENCES

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