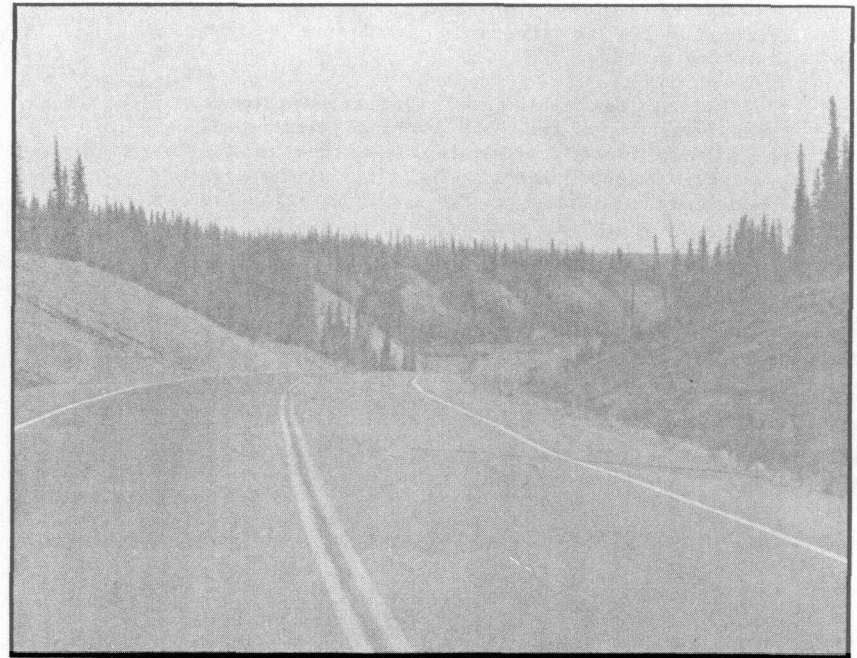


Gulkana River - Bear Creek



The Gulkana River crossing offers memorable expansive views of the river lowlands and the Wrangell Mountains beyond.

General Description

Management Unit 16 begins about one mile north of Gulkana Village, crosses the Gulkana River and extends south 1/2 mile beyond the Bear Creek crossing. This area offers highly scenic views, which are particularly impressive at the peak of changing seasons. The traveler's views are oriented across the lowlands of the Gulkana and Copper Rivers to the Wrangell and Chugach Mountains, as well as up and down the Gulkana River and Bear Creek.

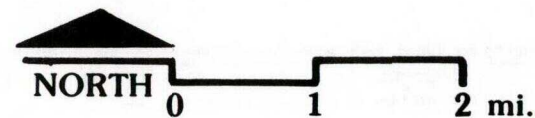
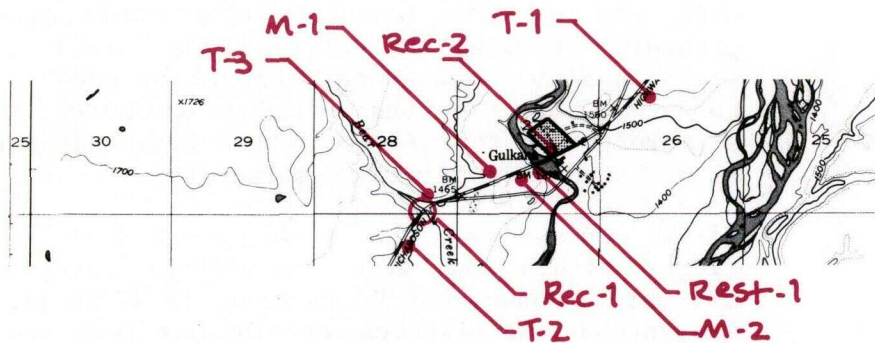
There is a large amount of land use activity concentrated within this unit. Recreational activities are popular at both the Gulkana River

and Bear Creek. Gulkana Village, a small native settlement, is situated about 1/4 mile from the highway on the northeast bank of the Gulkana River. Industrial uses, such as gravel extraction, can be found along the river bottomlands.

The area's scenic and recreational resources should be considered a high priority for retention through visual resource management. The primary concerns are related to the intensity and impact of recreational use along the Gulkana River and Bear Creek as well as the developments and uses at Gulkana Village.



16 Gulkana River - Bear Creek

Assessment Units R36 – R37



KEY

- T- Turnout
- Rec- Recreation
- M- Impact Mitigation
- Rest- Rest Area

-  Federal Land
-  Private Land

Land Ownership & Management Responsibility

Most of the land adjacent to the highway is in interim conveyance to the Gulkana Village Corporation. Small areas on the northwest corner of the Gulkana River crossing and all land immediately adjacent to Bear Creek are already in private ownership. DOTPF manages a 300 foot right-of-way along the highway within this unit.

Visual Resource Management Objectives

The management recommendations presented for this unit focus on the themes of retention, enhancement, impact mitigation, and sensitive land use and development.

Retention: To retain those scenic elements which make this area particularly attractive

to recreational users, local residents and other highway travelers.

Enhancement: To enhance the driving and recreational experience by providing adequate roadside facilities and by instituting view management practices.

Impact Mitigation: To reduce the visual impact of existing land uses which detract from the distinctive visual quality of this area.

Sensitive Land Use and Development: To encourage all development to respond sensitively to the scenic resources within this area.

Management Recommendations

Greenbelts

In keeping with the visual resource management objectives for this unit, greenbelts can serve as appropriate management tools. However, since there are no means to formally designate or implement greenbelts on private lands, these are recommendations only. Because of the road's elevated position in the landscape, roadside lands are highly visible; therefore a 100 foot greenbelt would establish a setback from the road to reduce the magnitude of development visibility. Within this greenbelt, large scale clearings should be discouraged and no more than 25% of the vegetation should be removed in any one area. Access roads should follow contours as much as possible.

R64

Land Use & Development (LU)

Since all of the land within this unit is privately owned and situated close to the existing community of Gulkana Village, there is a great potential for future development. It is important that land uses and development take full advantage of the visual absorption capability of this land and site landscape alterations appropriately in order to maintain the area's high scenic quality. Landowners should be encouraged to respond to the considerations outlined under greenbelts and to the recommended greenbelt width as a setback for permanent structures.

It is recommended that development take place either within the existing village settlement area or in Management Units 15 or 17 where visual absorption capabilities are higher and scenic quality is lower.

Turnouts (T)

Currently, there are no existing roadside turnouts which take advantage of the scenic view potential of this area. Two sites have been identified as potential scenic viewpoints and another as a recreational parking area.

T - 1 As the traveler approaches from the north, a surprise and spectacular view is opened up at the top of the hill overlooking the Gulkana River and extending to the Wrangell Mountains. Development of a small gravel widening for pulling off the road is recommended. An existing level area on the east side of the road could be graded and graveled, although a turnout on the west side would be safer for southbound travellers who are more likely to use the site. Development on the

west side, however, will involve more extensive grading in the right-of-way. Signing on the highway is recommended to alert travelers to the turnout location.

T - 2 A small gravel widening at this site would provide northbound travelers with a place to get off the road and take pictures of the spectacular view across the Copper River lowlands to the Wrangell Mountains.

T - 3 This existing paved turnout near Bear Creek has very limited scenic views, especially considering the potential for views nearby. However, it is located close enough to Bear Creek that it should be maintained as a recreational use parking area.

- Reduce the amount of parking in this clearing and encourage use of the former material site for parking, as outlined in Impact Mitigation (M - 2).

- Include an interpretive display with information regarding the Gulkana and Copper River valleys and Wrangell Mountains, as well as the history of Gulkana Village.

- Provide information regarding the location of the Gulkana Village Campground.

Recreation Sites (Rec)

The following recreation sites are recommended

Rest Area / Interpretive Sites (Rest)

The Gulkana River Crossing is an area with significant scenic resource values and the potential for considerable recreational usage. To provide day use facilities and landscape interpretation information, a rest area should be developed on the southeast bank of the river.

Rest-1 This site is already disturbed with a large gravel-surfaced clearing extending almost to the river's edge, which appears to currently be used as parking for recreational use. Recommended reclamation and development measures include the following:

- Replant portions of the clearing to break up the expansiveness and provide trees for wind and sun relief.
- Provide picnic facilities and rest rooms, sited so as to minimize their visibility from the road.



The Bear Creek and Gulkana River crossings are attractive to recreational users and should be developed and maintained to promote this use while retaining the area's scenic qualities.

for attention:

- Rec-1 Bear Creek. At present, there is very little disturbance from recreational fishing use at Bear Creek. This undisturbed character should be retained. Roadside parking should be restricted to the existing nearby turnout as outlined under Turnouts (T-3).
- Rec-2 Gulkana Village Campground. The campground which is managed by Gulkana Village, is located on the northwest bank of the Gulkana River immediately adjacent to the highway. The site's exposure to the highway could be reduced by increasing the density of vegetation in the right-of-way between the campground and the road. Signing should be provided on the highway for this site, alerting campers to its location.

Impact Mitigation (M) / Reclamation (R)

The gravel extraction sites which are located near the Gulkana River crossing have a negative visual impact on this scenic area. Two sites, one on either side of the road, are very distracting due to their high contrast, large scale and the duration of views from and proximity to a high use area. The following measures are recommended for reducing some of the impacts.

- M - 1 Westside. Provide a dense vegetation screen within the right-of-way to reduce the visibility of this site from the riverbanks.
- M - 2 Eastside. Regrade this former material site and develop it as the main parking area for the day use facilities and rest area proposed on the southeast bank of the Gulkana River. In addition, a dense vegetation screen should be provided within the right-of-way to reduce visibility from the highway.

Gulkana Village

This native settlement is located on the north-east bank of the Gulkana River about 1/2 mile from the highway. Distant views of the village from the highway could be enhanced by careful landscape management in the large clearing between the highway and the village. Approximately 1/4 acre of this clearing could be established as an entry way landscaped with natural planting—trees, shrubs, wildflowers. This would provide a strong element of foreground interest framing the views of the village as well as reducing the visual impact of the clearing.

Right-of-Way Management

The exposed soil and the sharp color, line and form contrasts of the cut banks and fill slopes in the right-of-way create a strong, negative visual impression. The cut banks could be made to conform to the natural character of the surroundings by regrading them to reflect the shape and contours of the banks along the Gulkana River. The visual impact could also be significantly and positively improved if low growing shrubs and flowering plants, such as vetch or lupine were established on the cut banks and taller brush, alder or willow was established on the fill slopes. Encouraging revegetation may require reducing the roadcut slope or terracing.

