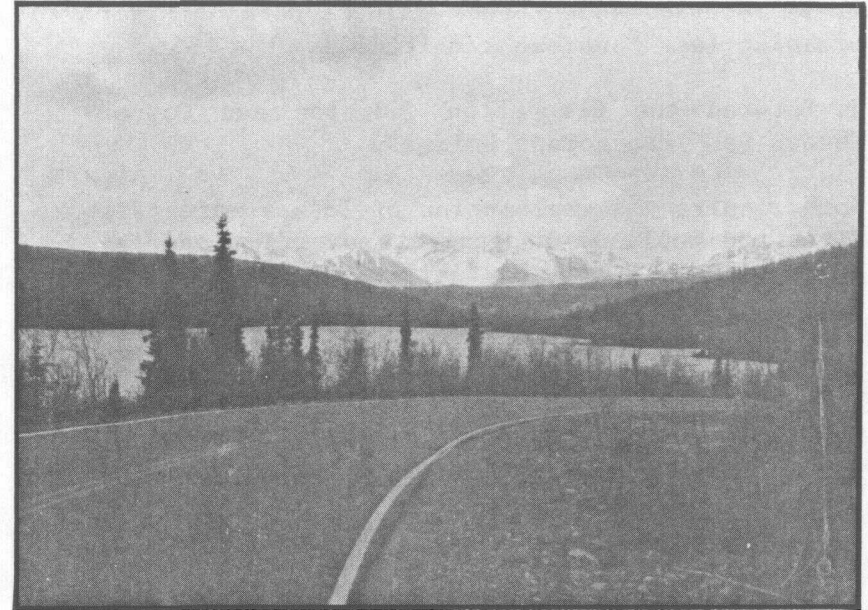


Management Unit 11

Paxson Lake



Paxson lake and the Alaska Range contribute to the outstanding scenic and recreational qualities of this unit. There is, however, a shortage of turnouts that take advantage of vistas such as this one.

General Description

Management Unit number 11 includes ten miles of the Richardson Highway as it reaches south of Paxson and parallels Paxson Lake. Views across Paxson Lake to the low ridges beyond characterize the visual experience throughout most of the unit. Mt. Paxson and distant views of the Alaska Range highlight the drive in the northbound direction. The variety of landcover changing from foreground brush and spruce to alpine tundra on the middleground slopes, also adds to the visual interest.

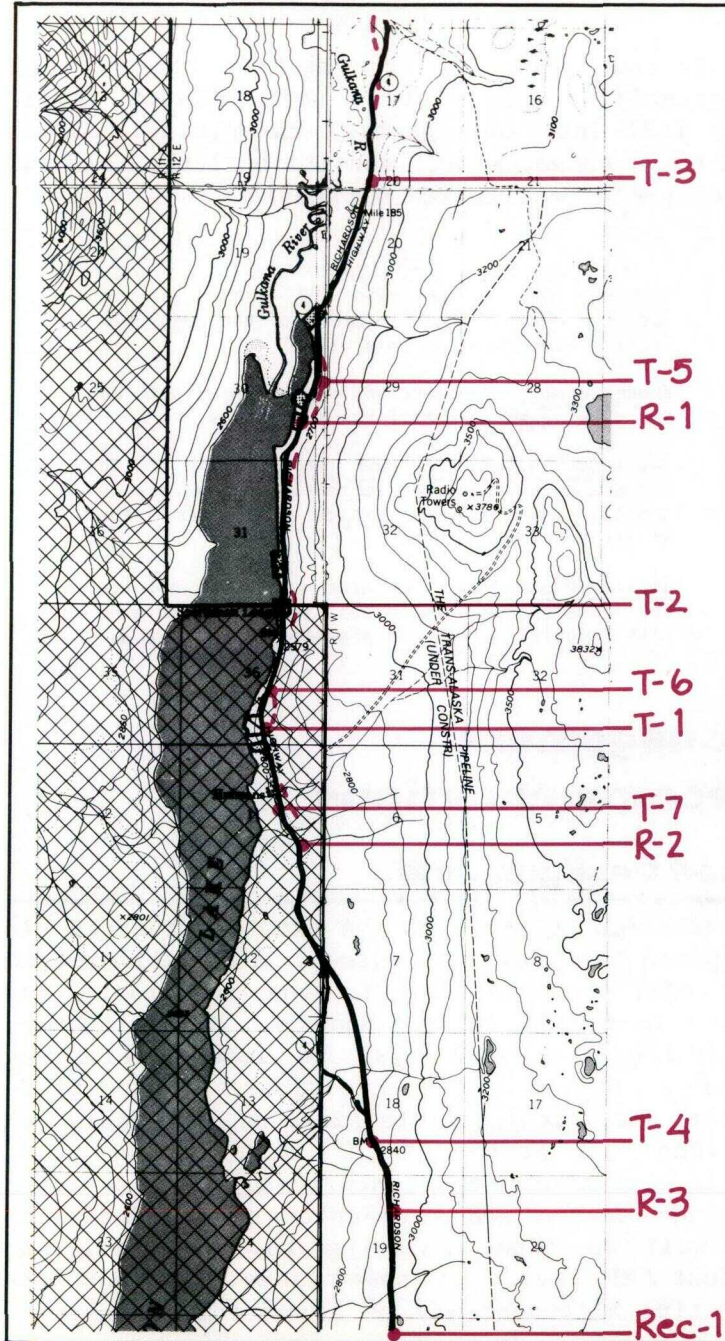
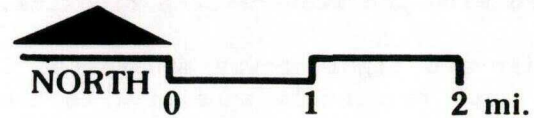
Scenic resource values were rated as fairly average for the Richardson Highway while

traveling south, and slightly higher for travelers in the northbound direction (due primarily to views of the Alaska Range on the northern horizon). Water features significantly enhance the driving experience in both directions; Paxson Lake is unusually large and beautiful.

Land uses in this unit are primarily lakeside residential and recreational dwellings which generally do not detract from the area's scenic quality and, indeed, often accentuate the visual interest. The visual absorption capability of land adjacent to the road is fairly high, so additional residential development is appropri-

11 Paxson Lake

Assessment Units R2 – R6



KEY

- T- Turnout
- R- Reclamation
- Rec- Recreation
- Realignment Proposals

- Native Selected Land
- Federal Land
- Private Land

ate if sensitively designed and constructed. The only unattractive and visually dominant land uses in Unit 11 are the gravel extraction sites adjacent to the road and the construction scars associated with the Trans-Alaska Pipeline.

Road design and right-of-way management in this unit has been reasonably sensitive to the landscape. Most of the road blends well with surrounding topography, resulting in an enjoyable drive which winds gracefully along Paxson Lake. The road alignment in the eastern two miles of the unit is straight and less interesting. Proposed realignments will straighten existing curves and thereby reduce the visual interest and the quality of the recreational driving experience on the west end of the road.

Land Ownership & Management Responsibility

The primary land owner in Unit 11 is the federal government with the BLM serving as land manager. The Trans-Alaska Pipeline is visible throughout most of the unit, and the oil and gas right-of-way associated with it is managed by the Alyeska Pipeline Company. The state DOTPF manages a 300 foot right-of-way as well as several material sites in this unit. Private land parcels are located primarily on the west side of the road above Paxson Lake.

Visual Resource Management Objectives

Management objectives for this unit reflect the need to protect and enhance visual resource

values and foster the enjoyment of recreational opportunities associated with Paxson Lake. They fall into four general categories: maintenance, enhancement, sensitive land use and development, and impact mitigation.

Maintenance: To maintain and protect scenic resource quality as it relates to the enjoyable driving experience of this unit.

Enhancement: To create additional opportunities for viewing and recreational activities.

Sensitive Land Use and Development: To encourage appropriate recreational and residential development which respects the scenic resource values.

Impact Mitigation: To make conscious efforts to reduce the negative visual impacts associated with material sites and pipeline construction.

Management Recommendations

Road Realignments

Several realignments of the existing roadbed are proposed to straighten curves, which will reduce the road's sensitivity to the topography and allow increased driving speeds. A straighter, road alignment will also be less interesting from a visual and recreational perspective. While some realignments may be necessary to provide safe travel on this multiple-use road, it is recommended that each realignment decision include scenic and recreational considerations as well as those relating to commercial and industrial use. In some cases, widening the existing alignment may be a sufficient improve-

ment and actual realignment of the road could be reserved for those curves which are clearly unsafe or otherwise in need of such action.

In those locations where realignments do occur, they should be sensitive to scenic resource values. Views of the abandoned roadbed should be screened from the new alignments by leaving as much vegetation intact as possible. In general, pavement on the old alignment should be removed and vegetation encouraged to return.

T - 1 One of the proposed realignments would create a safer entry to the Paxson Lake Wayside. It is recommended that this realignment be constructed and that the existing alignment be retained to serve as a scenic turnout and an expanded wayside entrance. This site has excellent views of Paxson Lake and is recommended as an alternative location for the proposed Gulkana Uplands Character Type Rest Area.

T - 2 Another site which, if realignment occurs would be suitable as a turnout, is the curve just north of the old Sportsman's Lodge. Although realignment is not desirable in this location, the possibility of realignment has been evaluated and the existing alignment could provide a small turnout with interpretive potential. The object of interpretation would be the historic, abandoned Sportsman's Lodge. Because the lodge is on private land where trespassing is expressly prohibited, it may be inappropriate to direct additional attention to the structure. It is possible that some negotiation with the owner could make this opportunity available, but further investigation would be necessary. The unique and historic character of Sportsman's Lodge merits some effort to create a distinctive and memorable interpretive turnout.

Greenbelts

Greenbelts can be a tool to help maintain the scenic and recreational character of the

Richardson Highway as it parallels Paxson Lake through this management unit. The visual impacts of residential and recreational development can be minimized with proper use of vegetation and distance; yet if sensitively designed, some structures can also add to the visual interest of the drive.

Because of moderately high scenic and recreational resource values, it is recommended that a 100 foot wide greenbelt be established on public lands adjacent to the highway. Within the first 25 feet it is recommended that retaining the natural road edge be the primary management goal. Selective clearing and brush removal would be allowed to open views towards the lake, but no significant alterations would be permitted. The remaining 75 feet should be an area where vegetation and landform modification is permissible, but no permanent structures constructed. Although there is no mechanism for implementing greenbelts on private lands, landowners should be informed about the advantages of adopting the greenbelt concept. Management of roadside lands under public ownership should serve as an example to private landholders.

Right-of-Way Management

The right-of-way plays a very important part in the visual driving experience through this unit. Because there are developments on private land adjacent to the road, right-of-way management is often the only visual resource management tool available to protect these values. Also, views towards Paxson Lake are often blocked, framed, or opened by vegetation within the right-of-way. On public lands, right-of-way

vegetation management can support the greenbelt concept and provide a pleasant foreground which enhances views. The right-of-way in this management unit presently has brush growing close to the road and creates a softened edge between the road and tall trees. This practice should be continued. In addition, the following guidelines should be applied:

- Avoid clearing practices which strip vegetation from the soil.
- Encourage low brush and plants to grow to the road edge and create a graduated or feathered progression to the taller trees beyond.
- Vary clearing practices along the road to add visual interest. Vary the heights of trimmed vegetation and the depth of the cut strip.
- Selectively cut and thin vegetation where views could be opened to Paxson Lake or visibility needs to be improved for road safety reasons.
- A landscape architect should be employed to work with the right-of-way maintenance supervisor to develop yearly plans which identify site specific management actions such as selective clearing, revegetation, opening views etc.
- Steep cut banks etc.

Material Sites & Reclamation (R)

There are several highly visible gravel extraction sites which disrupt the natural appearing foreground in this unit. These sites are insensitively located within full view of the road and impact scenic resources through their contrasting lines, colors, and textures. Ways to mitigate the negative impacts of existing materials sites include:

- Develop vegetated berms between the site and the road to reduce visual awareness of the site

- Contour the edges of material sites to reduce contrasting forms and promote revegetation.
- Close the sites to vehicular access to allow natural revegetation to occur

The following material sites should receive top priority in a reclamation program:

- R - 1 This site is extremely visible from the road and contains derelict elements (an old boat, trailer, etc.) which contribute to its unpleasant appearance. The clutter should be removed and access should be closed. A row of tall brush beside the road would significantly reduce the traveler's visual awareness of the site. Recontouring to soften the steep slopes would improve conditions for revegetation. A proposed road realignment adjacent to this site could alter the situation, and may entirely eliminate the visual problem.
- R - 2 This large materials site should be closed to access, encouraged to revegetate, and, to the extent practical, screened from the road with tall roadside brush.
- R - 3 This site is in severe contrast to surrounding landform and landcover. A conscious effort should be made to screen this site by planting tall brush along its edges and beside the road. When the gravel source is exhausted, the site should be closed to access and recontoured to encourage vegetative growth and reduce the contrast with surrounding landforms and landcover.

Any new material sites in this area should be located in accordance with the following visual resource management criteria:

- Locate new material sites outside the right-of-way and designated greenbelts
- Use the existing vegetative screening capacity and topography to minimize site visibility from the road

- Provide only one access road and leave the remaining foreground vegetation intact

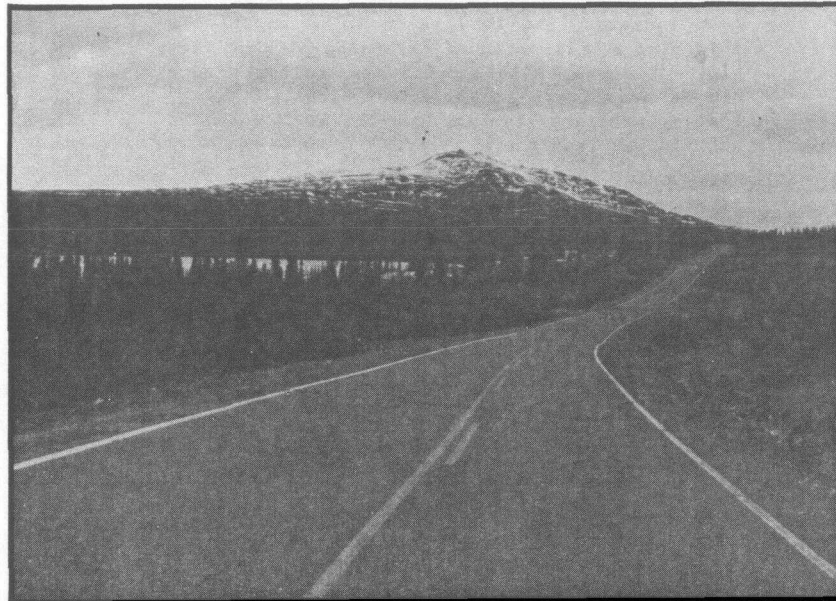
General Land Use

This area has been identified as an appropriate area for additional recreational and residential development. The following criteria should be used to guide future land use and development in this management unit:

- Locate development outside recommended greenbelt
- Screen development from view to the extent practical
- Design, locate, and construct developments in a manner which respects the scale, color, and character of the landscape and is sensitive to the scenic quality of the Richardson Highway as it passes through this area.
- Utilize existing topography to set development back from the road edge as a means of minimizing visibility and providing a buffer from road noise. The area downhill from the road as it parallels Paxson Lake would be particularly appropriate for additional recreation and residential development.
- Limit the number of access roads intersecting with the Richardson Highway.

Recreation (Rec)

Recreation is a primary land use in this area, and further development of recreational opportunities seems an appropriate future activity. The existing facilities are limited and over used, and because of the area's high visual absorption capability, existing development, and



Because of its lake access and vegetative screening capability, this unit can accommodate some additional development. Here, Huffman's Resort is set back from the road and partially screened by trees so it blends with the surrounding landscape.

inherent attractiveness, it is recommended that additional recreation and viewing opportunities be encouraged. Any recreation-related development should be sensitively designed, located, and constructed according to the same guidelines recommended under "General Land Use."

Although it is beyond the scope of this study to identify every available site for a given recreational activity, it is recommended that additional camping and picnicking facilities be provided close to the lake edge.

Rec-1 The BLM Paxson Lake campground is a very pleasant location, and it appears to be capable of absorbing a well-designed expansion without significant impact. This campground offers a number of amenities - private campsites, fishing, boating, rafting/kayaking put-in, etc. - and is not visible from the highway.

Turnouts (T)

There are many outstanding views of Paxson Lake from the road but few opportunities to safely stop to enjoy them. The few existing turnouts are not wisely located, and most need some selective vegetation removal to open up views of the lake. Two new turnouts have already been proposed under the section on road realignments (T-1 and T-2), and two more are addressed here.

T - 3 The existing paved surface of an old road alignment could easily be converted into a turnout with a nice view of Paxson Lake.

T - 4 This site is a small gravel widening with distant views of Paxson Lake, and good entry/exit visibility. This turnout should be enlarged to accommodate several cars, particularly since there is a shortage of turnouts on the eastern end of the unit.

The following existing turnouts would be much more functional with these recommended improvements:

T - 5 Maintain this turnout and enhance the viewing opportunities through careful vegetation trimming and/or removal.

T - 6 Open views of Paxson Lake by selectively clearing some vegetation.

T - 7 Maintain this turnout, but improve access safety from the south by placing an entrance sign approximately 500 feet south of the site.

