

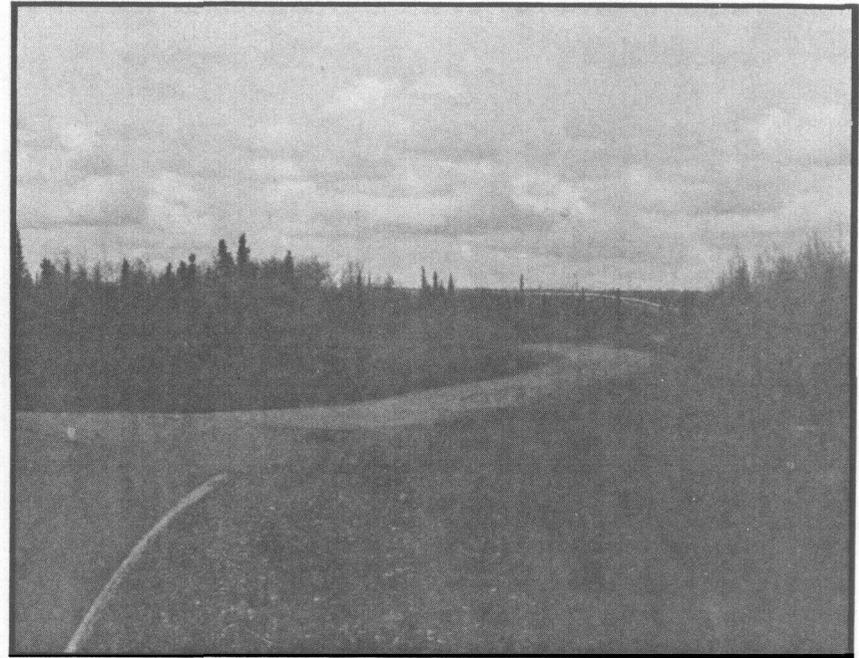
Management Unit 14

Sourdough

General Description

Management Unit 14 begins approximately six miles north of Sourdough and extends nine miles south to milepost 145. The road corridor is semi-enclosed by mixed upland spruce and hardwood forests so lateral views are limited. The landscape immediately adjacent to the road contains many small lakes and clearings which add diversity to the foreground viewing experience. The distant Alaska Range is often seen on the northern horizon, and while traveling south, the Chugach Mountains define the distant horizon. There are also occasional, often filtered, views of the Wrangell Mountains to the east, and one nice view of the Gulkana River.

Scenic resource values in this unit are fairly moderate except for one outstanding panorama of the Gulkana River, Alaska Range, and Trans-Alaska Pipeline which opens just as travelers enter Sourdough from the south. The visual absorption capability is fairly high due to gentle topography and dense roadside vegetation. Existing land uses do not significantly detract from the area's scenic quality.

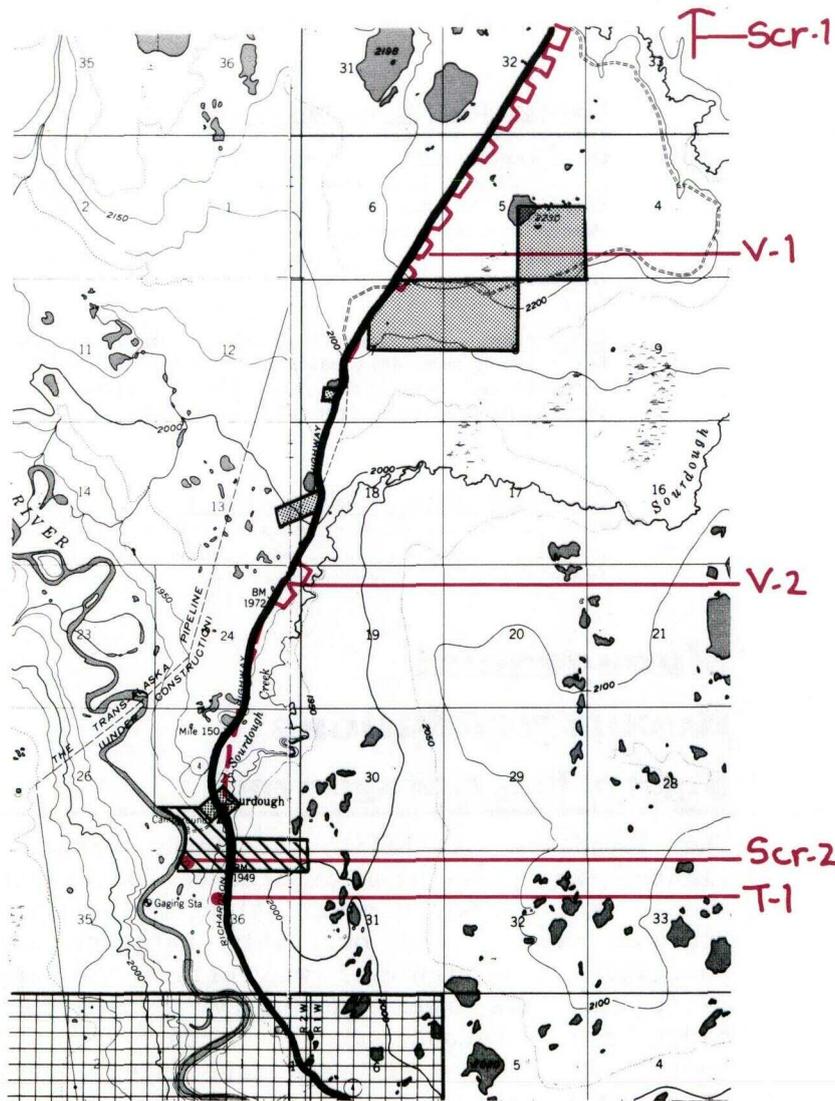
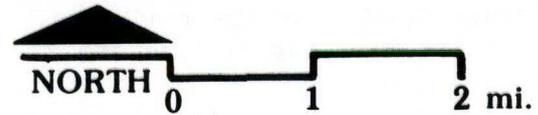


Periodic views of the Trans-Alaska Pipeline snaking across the horizon add visual interest and a human scale element to the drive through the gently rolling terrain along the central Richardson Highway.

The road in Unit 14 follows the gently rolling landscape creating a pleasant and varied driving experience. DOTPF has plans to straighten many of the existing curves, which would diminish the road's visual interest and recreational qualities. The right of way in the northern portion of the unit has a pleasant feathered edge created by brush and tree vegetation growing close to the road. Recent clearing of roadside vegetation in the right-of-way has severely impacted the road edge south of Sourdough.

14 Sourdough

Assessment Units R20 – R24



KEY

- Scr- Screening
- V- View Management
- T- Turnout
- Realignment Proposals
- State Owned Land
- Native Corp. Land
- Federal Land
- Private Land

Most existing land use is concentrated around Sourdough. There, a memorable manmade element is the historic Sourdough Roadhouse, which is Alaska's oldest roadhouse still operating in its original structure. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) operates a small campground across Sourdough Creek from the roadhouse. The creek is popular for grayling fishing and the area around Sourdough Campground is an important put in take out site for float trips on the Gulkana River. The State of Alaska DNR has a sixty acre land sale planned across the road from Sourdough Campground. Residential structures are a common feature all along the Richardson Highway in Management Unit 14. In addition, the Trans-Alaska Pipeline and its associated access roads and clearings are dominant and intriguing landscape elements.

Land Ownership & Management Responsibility

The primary landowner in Unit 14 is the BLM. Interspersed with federal land are three large Native allotments and several parcels of private land adjacent to the road. Alyeska Pipeline Company manages the right-of-way and other lands associated with the pipeline which parallels the road throughout this unit. The State of Alaska has one parcel of land across from the Sourdough campground, sixty acres of which are scheduled for disposal. The state DOTPF manages a 300 foot right-of-way along the road.

Visual Resource Management Objectives

Due to the complicated land ownership patterns and the road's multiple use character, visual

resource management objectives for Management Unit 14 relate to sensitive land use and development, enhancement, and appropriate right-of-way management.

Sensitive Land Use and Development: To encourage appropriate private land development that maintains sensitivity to scenic resource values, and to coordinate land management decisions and actions of the various public and private landowners and managing agencies within this area to maintain and enhance existing scenic resource values.

Enhancement: To improve existing opportunities for viewing memorable natural and human landscape elements and reduce the visibility of those features which detract from the quality of the visual experience.

Appropriate Right-of-Way Management: To manage land within the right-of-way to create a natural road edge, open up views, and screen unattractive landscape or development elements.

Management Recommendations

Right-of-Way Management

The immediate visibility of lands within the right-of-way gives them importance for effective scenic resource management. Along the Richardson Highway, where land ownership patterns are a patchwork, the right-of-way offers the opportunity to give some continuity to the driving experience. Because the Richardson is a high speed, high volume highway, more intensive roadside management is needed to provide good visibility, provide space for snow removal and other maintenance, and to minimize wildlife road kills.

Still, this can and should be done in a manner that is sensitive to the special scenic values of the road near Sourdough. Already, the right-of-way north of Sourdough is reasonably well managed. Brush and tree vegetation grow close to the roadbed, creating a natural edge. This practice of retaining natural vegetation should continue. South of Sourdough, on the other hand, recent clearings have resulted in unsightly swathes; these edges are in need of revegetation. In the future, right of way management practices should prohibit such wholesale clearing. Recommendations for appropriate management include the following:

- Retain as much natural vegetation as possible close to the road, except where needed to open views.
- Routine roadside maintenance and clearing activities should be tailored to the site specific situation in each unit, such as providing visibility around certain curves, opening up views, etc. The yearly maintenance program should be based on an assessment of these needs and existing landscape characteristics to determine the necessary maintenance strip width and type of cutting.
- Where intensive cutting has taken place (i.e., south of Sourdough), the area should be revegetated with low lying plants.
- Remove all slash from existing or new clearings.
- Minimize the number of clearings across the right-of-way for access roads.
- Locate all visually disruptive uses, such as gravel pits, outside the right-of-way.

Greenbelts

Due to mixed ownership patterns and diverse management interests, greenbelts can be an effective scenic resource management tool for public lands adjacent to the highway. State and federal land managers should adopt a 100 foot wide greenbelt beyond the road right-of-way. The DOTPF and BLM should develop and implement guidelines to coordinate management practices on right-of-way and greenbelt lands to provide enough land for the maintenance and enhancement of scenic resource values. Their actions would serve as an example to adjacent private landowners who would be encouraged to respond in a similar fashion.

Within the greenbelt the following management guidelines should be applied:

- Minimize cutting or thinning the natural vegetation except where needed to open views
- Locate permanent structures outside the greenbelt; if siting within the greenbelt is unavoidable, locate the structure so that it is screened from the road by vegetation or landforms
- Design access roads through the greenbelts to take advantage of existing landforms and vegetation to minimize the visual disturbance

Land Use & Development (LU)

Because of the mixed ownership pattern and the pattern of existing development, it is both probable and appropriate that land development will continue in this unit. Permanent and recreational residential construction will likely be the predominant forms of any new land use activity. As already mentioned, existing development does not detract from scenic values and, in many

cases, enhances the visual diversity of the drive. The following considerations should apply when developing roadside lands:

- Attempt to concentrate development around existing nodes rather than dispersing it. The area north of Sourdough is one which would be appropriate for additional development.
- Discourage development in the Sourdough area. Due to the vista point just south of Sourdough and the recreational use and historic significance of the area, further development immediately around Sourdough would be undesirable from a scenic resource and recreational perspective.
- Encourage more intensive development to locate in areas with high visual absorption capability and set these uses back from the road to minimize visibility.
- Allow some dispersed recreational cabins and residences along the remainder of the road in this unit to add variety and visual interest to the drive. The design of the structures should be compatible with the natural and historic flavor of the area. Clearings for these developments could open up views.
- Encourage the development of additional recreation related facilities to accommodate peak season demands for camping and fishing opportunities.

Proposed Road Realignments

Road realignments are proposed for this portion of the Richardson Highway in order to straighten curves and upgrade the road to high speed highway standards. Because the location of the road through the landscape has such a large influence on the travelers' experience of the landscape, these realignments will significantly reduce the



Proposed road realignments would straighten curves on portions of the central Richardson. However in this relatively flat terrain, long, straight road tangents also increase visual monotony.

scenic and recreational pleasure of the drive. It is recommended that the individual realignment proposals be reevaluated to consider their impact on the scenic and recreational values in addition to industrial and other multiple use highway needs. Where realignments are found to be necessary, they should be designed and constructed with as much sensitivity to scenic resource values as possible. Vegetation between the old and new alignments should be retained to help screen the unused alignment from view. Abandoned pavement should be removed to allow vegetation to

quickly reclaim the old road bed. During realignment construction, highway crews should take the opportunity to use the road equipment to open views towards the Wrangell Mountains by selectively thinning vegetation in those areas identified under "View Management."

Recreation

The area near Sourdough, as already mentioned, is extremely popular for a variety of recreation activities including camping, fishing, photographing the roadhouse, and river float trips. During the peak summer season, the campground is inadequate to meet demands for camping and picnicking. Additional facilities should be provided, either as an expansion of the existing campground, or on nearby public or private lands.

The electric generator now used at the roadhouse causes considerable noise around the campground and thus it would be appropriate to locate any new recreation facilities at some distance from the roadhouse. It is also recommended that a sound barrier or berm be placed around the generator to help reduce the noise impact.

A proposed realignment of the Richardson Highway would bypass Sourdough. From the point of view of the scenic driving experience, it is recommended that the existing alignment be retained. However, if the new alignment is built, vegetation on the northeast bank of Sourdough Creek should be selectively thinned in order to retain views of this historic landmark. Additionally, the existing alignment should be maintained as a safe entrance to the roadhouse and campground, with signs provided on the new road alignment noting the campground and historic site.

Screening (Scr)

The Trans-Alaska Pipeline is the dominant man-made feature in this unit. Although the pipeline is a unique element of great visual interest, associated land uses such as access roads, service buildings, and clearings have significantly disrupted the natural and scenic character of the landscape. Specifically, the following two areas require mitigation actions:

Scr-1 Pipeline Road Crossing: This crossing and an adjacent materials site located on the south end of Hogan Hill together create a highly visible scar which is in strong contrast to surrounding landforms, colors, and land covers. This area is located in Management Unit 13, but is visible from the northern portions of this unit. This site should be actively screened and reclaimed. Detailed reclamation recommendations are included in Management Unit 13.

Scr-2 Pipeline Access Road: This gravel access road is visible from the Richardson Highway on the hill just south of Sourdough. The road is a blight in one of the most significant views in this unit. Visibility of the access road could be considerably reduced by planting a row of trees along its eastern edge.

Turnouts (T)

There is an overall shortage of turnouts along the central Richardson Highway. This is particularly critical on this high speed, industrial thoroughfare where one must be off the road to safely enjoy a view or take a driving break. One scenic turnout is recommended for development in this unit:

T - 1 This site offers one of the most spectacular views to the north along this portion of the Richardson Highway. The surprise view reveals

the Gulkana River, Sourdough, the Alaska Range, and the first clear views of the pipeline north of Glennallen. This site is presently undeveloped, so it would require clearing, grading, and surfacing. The view to the northwest could be enhanced with selective thinning of foreground trees and tall brush.

help design the site to minimize the visual impacts of development. Any structures should be set back from the road at least 100 feet and vegetation should be left intact to help screen development. Access should be limited to one road.

View Management (V)

Views from the Richardson Highway in this unit can be enhanced by sensitive vegetation management in several locations:

- V - 1 Views towards the Wrangell Mountains could be opened up through selective thinning on the east side of the road.
- V - 2 The opportunity exists here to open a long view east towards the Wrangells by carefully thinning and trimming some roadside vegetation.

State Land Sale

The State DNR is planning to dispose of sixty acres across the road from Sourdough Campground. This is a high recreation use area and is also visible as part of the most scenic panorama along this portion of the Richardson Highway. Because this parcel of land is visible from the road, its particularly important scenic values should be considered in the design and construction of any proposed development. Successful land purchasers are encouraged to use a landscape architect to

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