

Management Unit 18

South Glenn - Richardson Jct.



Many views are limited to roadside establishments and right of way vegetation due to the flat terrain and dense spruce forest.

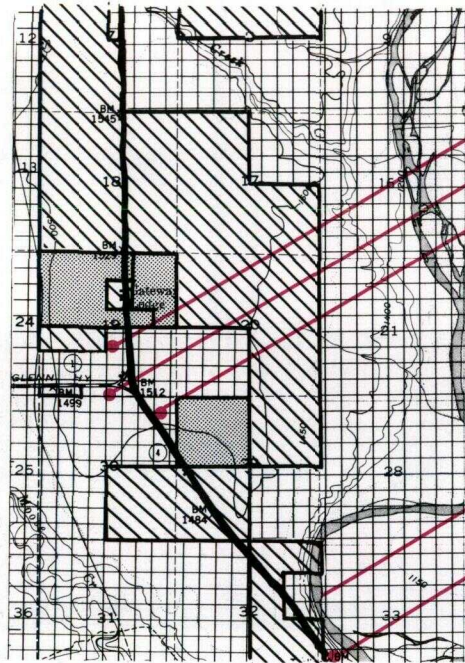
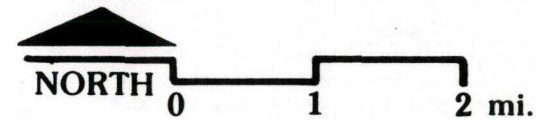
General Description

Management Unit 18 encompasses approximately 5 miles of the Richardson Highway around its junction with the Glenn Highway near Glennallen. It is within the Copper River Lowlands, the river being less than a mile to the east. Due to the generally level topography and the dense stands of predominantly white spruce vegetation, views are often restricted to the area immediately adjacent to the highway. Some of the higher distant mountains (Mt. Drum and Mt. Sanford to the east and the Chugach Mountains to the south) are occasionally visible along the road corridor, especially where tree cover has been removed.

This unit has low intrinsic visual quality due to limited views and little visible landscape diversity. The visual impacts from land developments and landscape alterations further lower the scenic resource values. The character of the vegetation and the nearly level topography result in a high visual absorption capability.

18 South Glenn - Richardson Jct.

Assessment Units R44 - R45



IT-2
IT-1
IT-3

ROW-1

T-1

KEY

IT-Information Turnout

ROW-Right of Way Mgt.

T-Turnout

 State Owned Land

 Native Corp. Land

 Private Land

This area is characterized by considerable road-side commercial development due to its proximity to Glennallen - the region's major commercial and service center - and to the fact that it is the junction of two major highways. The road has recently (1982) been widened and resurfaced to facilitate traffic movement and provide for safe access to adjacent businesses and other developments.

Land Ownership & Management Responsibility

Land ownership adjacent to the highway is mixed, with much private land, two large tracts of University land and other State lands which have been identified for land disposals. The DOTPF manages a 300 foot wide highway right-of-way along the Richardson Highway in this unit.

Visual Resource Management Objectives

Scenic resource management objectives recommended for this unit relate to two general themes: sensitive development and enhancement.

Sensitive Development: To allow for continue growth and development while trying to minimize some of the significant negative visual impacts, particularly those associated with linear commercial development along major highways.

Enhancement: To take advantage of opportunities to enhance the driving experience and scenic resource values primarily through opening distant views, imaginative right-of-way management and encouraging visually pleasing land uses and development.

Management Recommendations

Right-of-Way Management (ROW)

The right-of-way and land immediately adjacent to it are particularly important in this management unit because so much of the viewing experience is limited to these areas. Along roads, scenic resource management commonly utilizes two management strips - the right-of-way and the area immediately beyond, commonly referred to as a greenbelt. Here the right-of-way, under the management of the State DOTPF, is the area where there is the greatest potential for effective scenic resource management. Beyond the right-of-way, the diversity of land owners, their varying needs for the use of this land and the



The Glenn Highway junction could be enhanced with aspen and birch plantings within the right of way.

fact that it is outside of a borough or local government combine to make it difficult to implement land management actions such as greenbelts.

Present right-of-way management in this unit focuses primarily on vegetation control. Trees and shrubs are cleared back to the right-of-way edge and grasses are planted or encouraged to invade the area along with low growing annuals. While roadside clearing does allow for visibility and facilitate maintenance, it does not need to

be done in the same extensive and uniform manner. This practice accentuates the visual width and impact of the road, calls attention to the uniform right-of-way edge and leads to a monotonous driving experience. Guidelines for more visually sensitive right-of-way management can be found in the general discussion for the central Richardson Highway. Specific recommendations for this management unit include the following:

- Encourage trees and shrubs to invade portions of the right-of-way on the west side of the road in order to break up the strong linear appearance of this edge and introduce some visual variety. White spruce trees would be desirable on this side since they are effective screens and can help orient views to the east side of the road.
- Except for some deciduous trees and lower shrubs, selectively clear the east side of the road back to the right-of-way to open views towards the Wrangell Mountains. This practice should concentrate on areas beyond the right-of-way which are cleared or semi-open so that more distant lateral views can be created. The resultant character would be coniferous trees encroaching close to the road on the west side with a wider clearing and groups of deciduous trees on the east.
- Accent the actual highway junction with aspen and birch plantings. Such a deciduous grove would be visually distinctive yet relatively transparent. Summer color could be added by planting bulbs and flowers — such as poppies — and encouraging native wildflowers — such as lupine, fireweed and dandelions. This junction is a visual and functional focus and should receive some special land management treatment.

ROW-1 This is an area where clearing of the right of way and some selective thinning or clearing of lands immediately adjacent to it could open up filtered or open lateral views to the Wrangell Mountains. The Copper River is relatively close to the road here and its steep bank cuts could provide the best opportunity for such distant views within this management unit.

Land Use & Development (LU)

The potential of this area for development — commercial, residential and light industrial — is high because of its easy access, proximity to a regional service center (Glennallen), exposure to large volumes of traffic and readily developable lands. Land use and development that is sensitive to scenic resources can be accomplished through the following three ways:

1. Adopt the recommended greenbelts and the associated management guidelines.
2. Design visually attractive or sensitive developments (architecturally designed buildings, functional site layouts, adequate landscaping, properly scaled and located signage).
3. Institute appropriate right-of-way management to help soften the visual impacts of land clearing, regrading and other landscape alterations associated with development.

The following guidelines are recommended to help realize the objective of visually sensitive land use and development for this management unit.

- Encourage those land uses which require extensive clearing to locate on the east side of the highway so as to open views towards the Wrangell Mountains. The Gulkana Airport just north of this management unit is a good example of this. Other possible land uses and developments which would have a similar effect would be agriculture, landscape nurseries and truck gardens, various forms of light industry, and even sand and gravel extraction activities if properly screened.
- Adopt roadside greenbelts around residential development as buffers from the noise, dust and hazards associated with high volume, modern highways. These greenbelts could be developed into pedestrian-bicycle routes for local residents.

- Minimize the number of access roads from the highway. Frontage drives servicing a number of developments are preferable to numerous individual entrances. Entry roads can be highlighted by using accent plantings and sensitive signage and by creating visual breaks with right-of-way plantings between roads.
- Encourage commercial development around existing nodes (the highway junction and Glennallen) and direct more attention to reducing the visual impacts of parking and commercial signage.
- As noted in the general recommendation for this study area, the State of Alaska can establish funds to assist developers of roadside lands to engage the services of professional designers (architects, landscape architects, graphic designers) to ensure that these developments adequately respond to visual considerations.

Greenbelts

Beyond the road right-of-way, greenbelt management strips can be effective tools for realizing visual resource management objectives related to sensitive development and enhancement. A 25 foot wide greenbelt beyond the right-of-way is recommended throughout this management unit. It should be formally implemented on state and University lands, and included as a requirement on state land disposals which are adjacent to the road. On private lands it is considered voluntary since no implementation mechanism exists. However, every effort should be made to encourage private landowners - particularly Native corporations - to adopt the greenbelt widths and associated management guidelines. The following guidelines are recommended for greenbelts within this management unit:

- Retain at least 25% of the existing natural landcover and minimize the disturbance to the

soil and topography. Use the existing vegetation to help screen parking areas for commercial developments.

- Keep permanent structures back beyond the greenbelt area.
- Encourage some clearing and selective thinning of deciduous trees within greenbelts on the east side of the road to help open distant views and be consistent with recommended right-of-way management actions.
- Encourage coniferous trees (white spruce) on the west side of the road within the greenbelts to support the recommended character of the right-of-way.
- Encourage landscaping within the greenbelt around the highway junction to reinforce the special character recommended for this area. Landscaping should use birch and aspen trees and wildflowers to conform to the right-of-way plantings.

Road Related Recreational Facilities

Two types of road related recreation facilities are recommended for this management unit: Information Turnouts (IT) which are located at highway junctions to provide the traveler with information related to road conditions, services, and recreation opportunities, and Turnouts (T) which are typically small widenings in the road to allow for pulling safely off the road. At the south Glenn-Richardson highways junction, three separate information turnouts are recommended - one for travelers arriving from each direction. An alternative to this would be to develop a single information turnout using a portion of state owned land on the south side of the Glenn Highway approximately 1/2 mile west of the junction. However, poor site visibility and potential problems with safe and efficient entry and

exit suggest that this development would be less desirable than the three separate smaller turnouts described below.

IT-1 This information turnout would be for travelers arriving from the west along the Glenn Highway. It is located .3 miles west of the road junction on the south side of the highway. Development could consist of widening and paving the road shoulder to allow 4 to 5 vehicles to pull out of traffic as well as providing a telephone and an information display board. Small brochures which summarize important road and regional information should be available for people to take with them.

The site has adequate space within the right-of-way for development. While the actual junction is visible from the location, this turnout would be far enough away so as not to create congestion and safety problems at the intersection. Visibility is good for safe entry and exit. Most of the views are limited to nearby lands and developments, but Mt. Sanford can be seen towering above the Ahtna lodge to the east. Careful attention given to right-of-way plantings could adequately screen the turnout from adjacent land development, and this landscaping could be part of the "accent" plantings recommended for the highway junction area.

IT-2 This recommended information turnout is for travelers arriving from the north along the Richardson Highway. It is located .25 mile north of the junction on the west side of the highway. Development would be similar to the turnout described above. This site has excellent visibility for safe entrance and exit and could be developed within the right-of-way. The actual highway junction is visible from this site.

Development on adjacent lands poses potential problems for using this site as a turnout. Road related commercial development could introduce additional entry and exit points along the road, including signs and other features, which might conflict with the functioning and visibility of this turnout. Existing development patterns do not conflict with this proposed turnout, and if proper attention is given to vehicle circulation and site development on lands adjacent to the road such conflicts could be minimized.

IT-3 This site is located on the east side of the Richardson Highway .25 miles south of the junction. It would be used by travelers arriving from the south. Site conditions and development recommendations are similar to the other two information turnouts described here. Presently there is no development on this side of the road south of the junction. If this changed, it could create problems similar to those discussed for the other two sites.

T-1 Existing turnout with historic marker. This marker has information related to the Alaska Road Commission and bears no meaningful relationship to its location. Moreover, entering and exiting the site can be somewhat hazardous because it is within a curve and on a hill. Yet it does have potential for panoramic views across the Copper River towards the Wrangell Mountains. More appropriate information relating to the natural or cultural history of the area could replace the road commission information which could be placed at a site where the natural landscape is not such a dominant focus.

The primary recommendation is that the entry-exit conditions be investigated further to determine whether or not development and use of this site should be encouraged. Since the views are particularly significant and viewpoints over the Copper River uncommon in this area, consideration should be given to moving the turnout 1/8 to 1/4 mile north of the existing site if safer entry and exit are necessary and if such a site could still provide spectacular views. Selective thinning of roadside vegetation could enhance these views. Short walking trails to overlooks should be considered an option, although some distant views from the actual parking area are desirable. Picnicking and other day uses could be considered for this site. The primary limitation for such development would be land ownership - since trails to viewpoints, picnicking and adequate parking would require development beyond the road right-of-way and adjacent lands are either privately or University owned.