

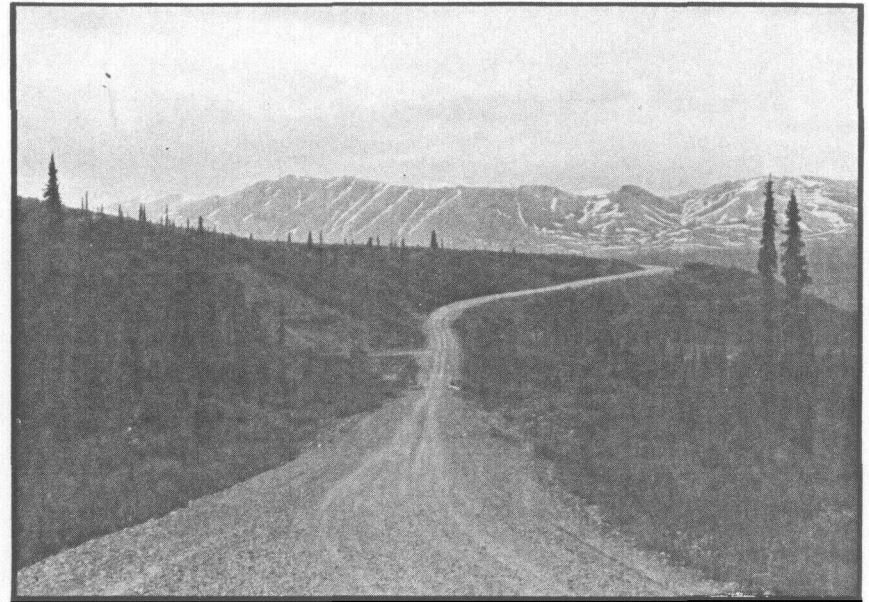
Management Unit 3

Nenana River - Monahan Flat

General Description

Management Unit 3 begins about 19 miles east of the junction of the Parks and Denali highways and extends 32.2 miles east to where the road turns south to parallel the Susitna River. In this unit, the road follows the Nenana River for about 10 miles, then travels southeast along the foothills of the Talkeetna Mountains. To the north is Monahan Flat, an expansive lowland area bordered by the Alaska Range and the Talkeetna and Clearwater Mountains.

The dominant visual features within this unit are the lower peaks of the Talkeetnas to the south and the impressive Alaska Range to the north. In the eastern portion of the unit, the Clearwater Mountains dominate the horizon. There is a dramatic display across Monahan Flat of Mt. Nenana, Mt. Deborah, Mt. Hess and associated mountains and glaciers in the eastern half of the unit.



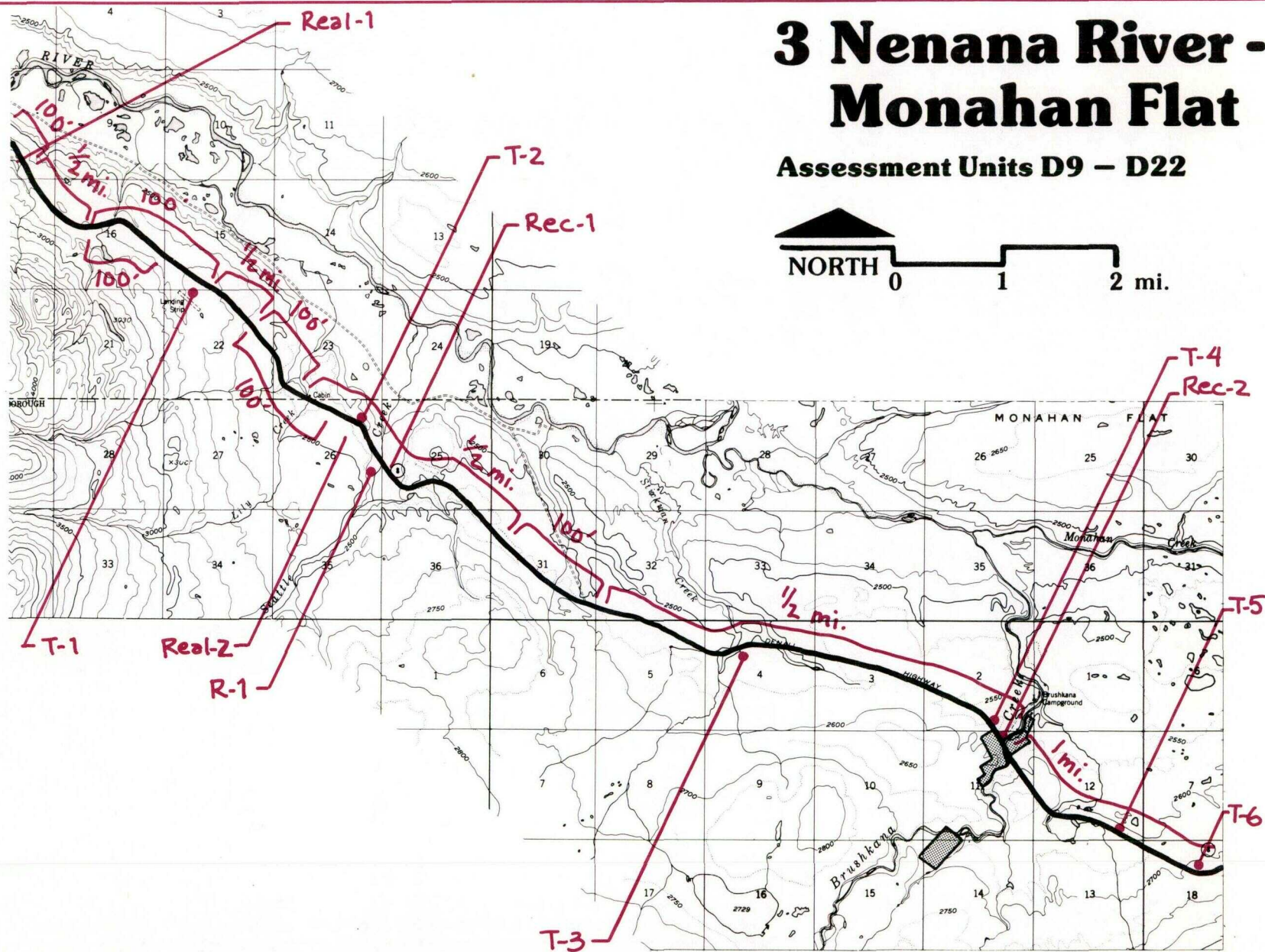
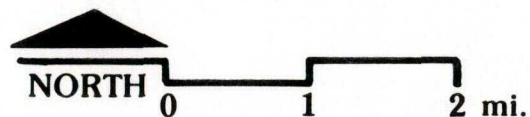
The open, sparsley vegetated landscape makes it difficult to screen management activities adjacent to the road, like this large material site near Seattle Creek, a popular recreation area.

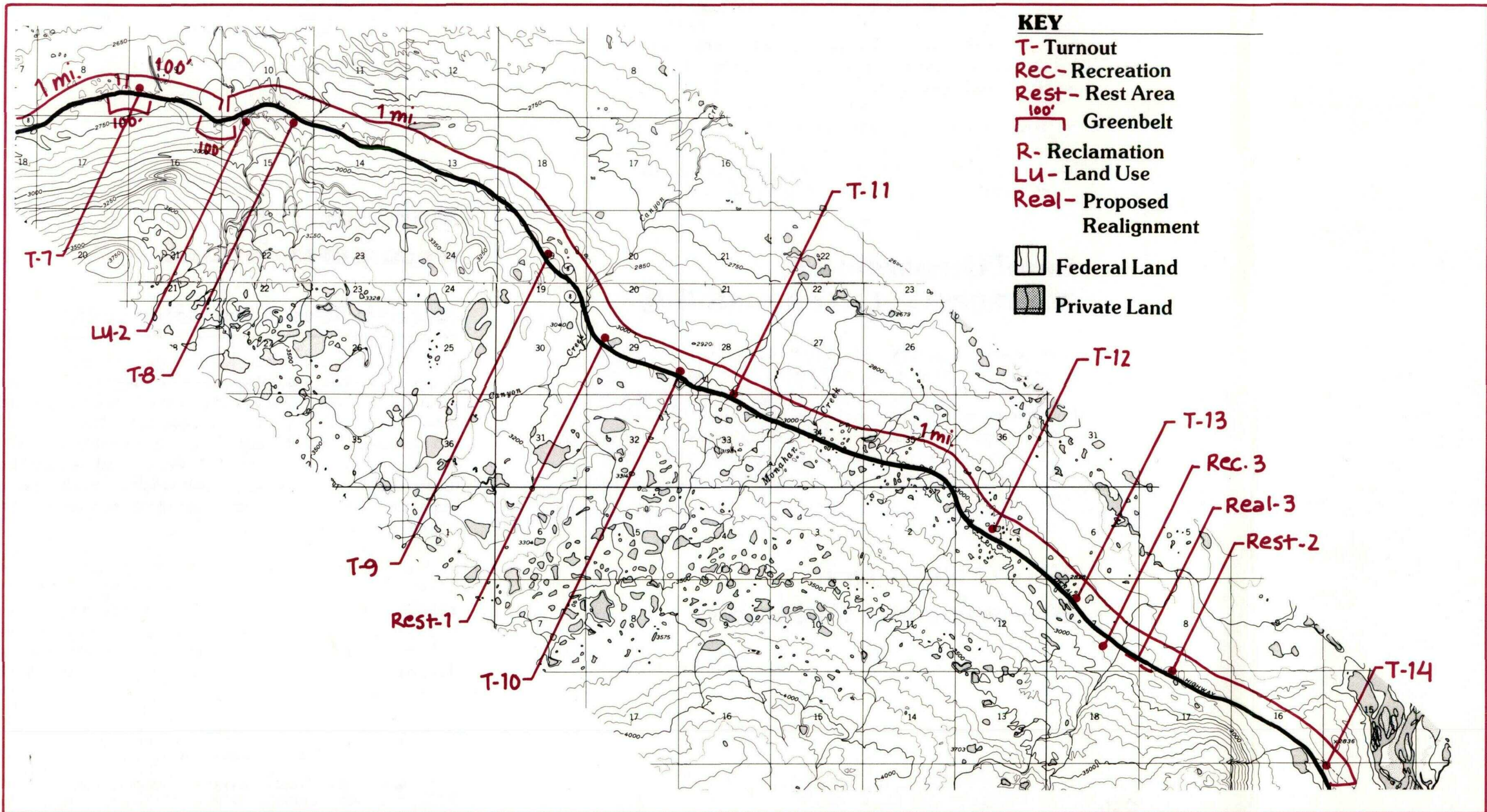
With the relatively sparse vegetation, roadside views generally encompass broad, expansive landscapes. Because of its low visual absorption capability, this landscape is particularly sensitive to development.

There has been little development in this unit. The two main nodes are located at Brushkana Creek and Adventures Unlimited Lodge. Other land uses are the roadway related gravel extraction sites and clearings

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which dot the right-of-way throughout the length of the unit. These gravel extraction sites, located immediately adjacent to the roadway, detract from the area's otherwise high visual quality.

In this broad, largely undeveloped area, wildlife is plentiful and the opportunity to observe animals in their habitat is an important part of the driving experience.

Land Ownership & Management Responsibility

The vast majority of land adjacent to this portion of the road is owned and managed by the BLM. There are two recreation withdrawals at Brushkana Creek and Canyon Creek and private land holdings at Brushkana Creek. A 300 ft. right-of-way is managed by the DOTPF and they also maintain a material site in this unit.

Visual Resource Management Objectives

Management objectives in this highly scenic and relatively undeveloped unit relate to three broad themes: reclamation, retention, and enhancement.

Reclamation: To reclaim those areas where gravel extraction has caused extensive disruption of right-of-way land.

Retention: To retain the existing wild and scenic character of the landscape through sensitive right-of-way management and land use.

Enhancement: To enhance the traveling and recreational experience by providing additional facilities to meet travelers' needs.

Management Recommendations

Material Sites & Reclamation (R)

Roadside gravel extraction and grading practices are the major cause of negative visual impacts in this otherwise very scenic management unit. Gravel extraction for roadway maintenance need not be incompatible with scenic quality. The DOTPF should establish new practices that accommodate road maintenance needs while maintaining and enhancing visual quality.

It is the actions of maintenance crew supervisors and heavy equipment operators that directly affect the appearance of the road. For this reason, training sessions should be held which teach grading techniques that support visual quality. Guidelines for such techniques are:

- Adopt grading practices that minimize disruption of adjacent slopes and vegetation.
- Restrict gravel extraction from within the R.O.W.

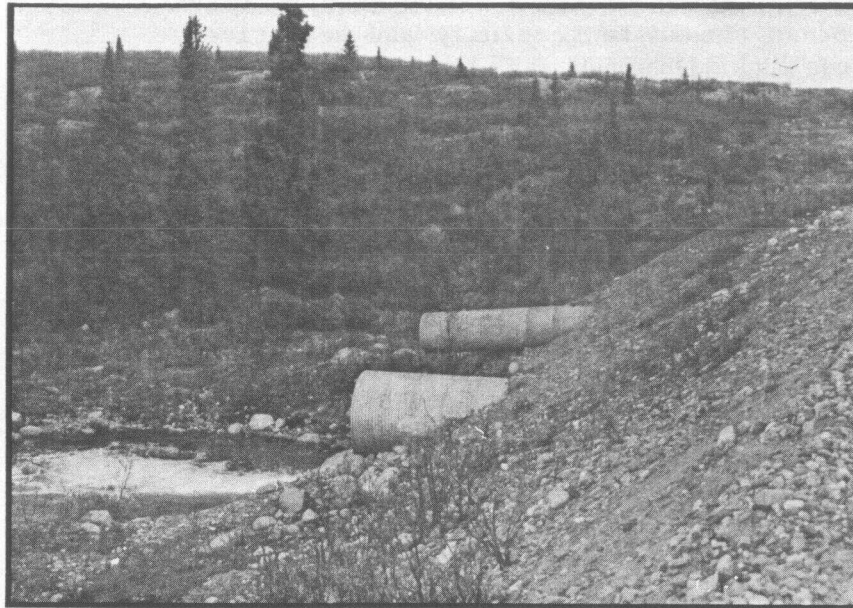
- Locate any new material sites so they are screened from view of the road.
- Screen entrances to material sites to minimize visibility.
- Give high priority for reclamation to those highly visible active material sites.

There are far too many gravel clearings and extraction sites for each to be cited in this report. Those sites which should be given a high priority for immediate reclamation are identified, but general reclamation and maintenance practices must be established to repair the extensive roadside disruption in this management unit.

R-1 The gravel extraction cuts in the hillside here severely degrade Seattle Creek's scenic quality, particularly as a recreational use node. Because of the importance of recreation at this location, gravel extraction should be discontinued and the site regraded and revegetated to conform to surrounding landforms.

R-2 Assessment Unit D-19 should be given special attention to reclaim the 14 gravel clearings immediately adjacent to the road. A rest area (Rest-1) and two turnouts (T-10 and T-11) have been recommended to reclaim three of these clearings. Those remaining should be reclaimed by grading the sites to their natural contours and revegetating them.

R-3 If this proposed material site is mined, there should be 100 feet plus the right-of-way retained for screening. Trees in this particular location offer adequate screening if the pit is properly sited and developed.



With proper placement, fill contouring, or screening, culverts can be made to be less visually obtrusive.

Right-of-Way Management

Indiscriminate brush clearing along the R.O.W. to reduce wildlife road kill and improve visibility also influences scenic quality. It often diminishes the wild and natural quality of the road by removing a broad swath of vegetation and disturbing the soil. Current practices must be re-evaluated to first determine where clearing is actually necessary and then to identify appropriate practices which provide visibility yet minimize the visual disturbance.

Where vegetation clearing is necessary, trees and brush should be carefully and selectively cleared and all slash and debris removed from the roadside. Low shrubs and ground cover should be allowed to colonize these areas. Long cleared swaths of consistent width have a very unnatural appearance and so the width of clearings should be varied to create an uneven, more natural appearing edge.

As discussed in the general recommendations for the Denali Wild and Scenic Road, a system of right-of-way management techniques can be implemented that will both maintain the road to a safe standard and also enhance the scenic quality of the area.

Turnouts (T)

There are many turnouts recommended for improvement to enhance the experience of driving this stretch of highway. At present, a large number of gravel clearings serve as unmaintained turnouts. There are so many, in fact, that they become a source of visual clutter. Those not specifically recommended for improvement should be closed to auto access and further gravel extraction so that revegetation can occur.

Turnouts with special facilities such as information and interpretive signs, trailheads or camping facilities should be signed to alert travelers to their location.

- T-1 This location offers a unique opportunity for a 360° panoramic view of the mountain landscape. There is no screening potential, therefore, this turnout should be developed as a simple road widening for one or two cars to minimize its visual impact.

- T-2 This unpaved widening has excellent panoramic views. The edge at the entrance needs regrading, and the outer edge drops off sharply. The BLM Denali Information Plan identifies a botanical point of interest near this location to illustrate the effects of permafrost, climate, altitude and aspect on plant growth. This turnout may serve this same purpose.

- T-3 This DOTPF proposed turnout at Stickwan Creek would provide an interesting view across the road and up the creek drainage channel. However, this is a fragile area with no screening potential and development should be limited to a road widening for two cars.

- T-4 This is an excellent viewpoint of the Alaska Range in close proximity to the valley floor. To reclaim this gravel extraction site, the large mound of gravel should be regraded to provide more viewing opportunities and a walking trail should be developed to a photographic point of interest. Additional vegetation, particularly at the turnout corners, would reduce the visual impact of the clearing. This may be a good location for an interpretive sign that describes the lowland landforms, plants, and wildlife.

- T-5 A road widening large enough for two cars could be provided here, offering expansive views of the Alaska Range and Monahan Flat. Development should be kept at a minimum due to the low vegetative screening potential.

- T-6 Views of the Alaska Range and a wooded portion of Monahan Flat are available from this existing small turnout. There is safe access, but the entry and surface need regrading. Planting vegetation around its edge would improve its appearance.

- T-7 This existing turnout and small campsite is nicely tucked away off the road and has pleasant mountain views. The site should be retained; however, the green and white garbage can should be moved closer to the trees to provide screening.

- T-8 This small gravel clearing next to a small lake would make a good trailhead for a short

hike to numerous lakes. Views from this turnout are similar to those in nearby turnouts, so the trail potential is the impetus for its development.

- T-9 This existing gravel clearing is proposed as a turnout by DOTPF. Its excellent views of Mt. Deborah, Mt. Hess, and the glaciated Alaska Range make it a good location for interpretive information about the mountain peaks, and the origins of the Susitna and Nenana Rivers. The site requires minimal development.
- T-10 This existing gravel clearing offers excellent views. Regrading the entrance and turnout surface is necessary.
- T-11 This DOTPF proposed turnout is a good location for views of mountain peaks across Monahan Flat. For reclamation, the existing gravel extraction and storage site needs regrading followed by revegetation to soften the edges.
- T-12 Both the Denali Highway Information Plan and the DOTPF recommend this site as a turnout. BLM identifies it as a wildlife point of interest since the nearby kettle lakes attract waterfowl, and caribou sightings are fairly common. Mountain views from here are also notable. To make the site usable, the entrance and surface should be graded and the edges of the site planted with brushy vegetation.
- T-13 This existing gravel clearing will make a good viewpoint because of its position slightly above the road. Regrading of the entry and surface is necessary.
- T-14 The BLM has proposed this area be developed as a historical/landscape interpretive point. Besides breathtaking views of Mt. Deborah, Mt. Hess and the Susitna River, the site has an excellent view of Denali—the old goldmining town. Site development would be both expensive and disruptive. The parking lot must be carved out of a glacial till deposit in an area with no screening potential, and a 600 yard trail must be constructed to the hilltop view. The trail must cross wet tundra and should be sensitively designed to minimize the impact on the terrain and the local wildlife populations. In spite of these difficulties,

the potential for views, wildlife observation, and interpretation of the placer mining process makes this a good candidate site for turnout development.

Rest Areas (Rest)

A system of rest areas is proposed along the four roads to provide travelers a place to stop for a time, have lunch, or take a short hike and also to learn about the character of the landscape they are traveling through. This requires a larger site than for a simple turnout, one that provides for a variety of facilities and the opportunity for a good expression of the landscape. Two sites have been recommended for this purpose, but only one should be selected for development.

Rest--1 This site is the preferred location for the rest area. It offers an excellent view of Mt. Nenana, Mt. Deborah, and Mt. Hess as well as foreground views of a lake and Monahan Flat. At the end of a short drive to the north, the existing clearing has room for 15-20 parking spaces. A trail leading to the nearby lake is possible. This site needs considerable reclamation—removing trash and regrading gravel piles and the driving surface. Revegetation of some of the disturbed area is also necessary since this site is exposed to storm winds which blow loose soil and create a nuisance.

Rest--2 The alternative rest area site has nice views typical of this area, however it lacks other site amenities. In addition, development here would require reclamation of the materials site, including grading and revegetation. If not developed for a rest area the site should be used as a turnout.

Recreation (Rec)

Although natural amenities abound, there are few developed recreational facilities in the unit. While this encourages travelers to independently explore the off-road area, the addition of another campground and several marked trails would make the Denali more "accessible" to visiting recreationists who feel more comfortable in developed recreation areas. Moreover, this development need not diminish the wild quality of the road. Additional study is needed to determine specific sites and site designs, but the following recommendations should form the preliminary basis for investigation:

Rec-1 Seattle Creek, which already attracts regular use from fisherman and sightseers, has additional use potential. The turnout should be located at least 200 feet from the creek, with a boardwalk constructed across the muskeg for creek access. The entire site is highly visible, and could easily appear congested with heavy use. There is a small developable area on the southeast side that could provide some screened parking. Nearby gravel clearings may serve for overflow parking. Reclamation of the disturbed area on the northeast side is necessary to maximize this site's potential.

Rec-2 The Brushkana Campground is heavily used but is sited in a well-screened location off the road. Additional planting at the entrance would make the present open clearing look more natural. A sign is needed to note the viewpoint and the trailhead in addition to the campground.

Rec-3 This well-screened area along a creek could provide a limited number of campsites. The site would require grading for access. On-site vegetation should be retained to help screen the site from the road.



In addition to the services they provide, lodges can be an important human element on the landscape. However, clutter and unscreened open storage can turn a potential attraction into an eyesore.

Land Use & Development (LU)

Most of the land adjacent to the road is managed by BLM. This, coupled with the relative remoteness of this area and harsh climate, suggest that little development will occur in this management unit in the near future. The most likely development would include mining operations, roadside recreation facilities, and, to a lesser extent, some scattered homestead developments. Because of the expansive views in this unit attributable

to the sparse vegetation and flat or gently sloping land, these activities could be highly visible. If not sensitively sited and constructed they would diminish the Denali's wild and scenic character. The following guidelines are suggested for future development in Unit 3 and could be incorporated into BLM's plan for the Denali Block.

- Give highest priority to protecting scenic, wildlife and recreational resources.
- Encourage the development of recreational facilities and scattered recreational homesites in selected nodes. Discourage the scatteration of uses visible from the road.
- Other than for recreational purposes, discourage commercial, industrial or settlement uses.
- Discourage mining and mineral leasing within one mile of the road. Access roads through the 1 mile corridor and development outside the corridor should conform to guidelines designed to protect the road's scenic quality, such as minimizing vegetation clearing, using landforms to screen structures and guide road alignment, etc.

LU-1 The Adventures Unlimited Lodge is an attractive wooden lodge structure, but the visual clutter between the lodge and the road detracts from the view of the lodge and its surroundings. Gas barrels belonging to BLM and other government agencies line the front of the building. These agencies should pay the cost of constructing a wood screen to mitigate the barrels' appearance. Other unnecessary clutter should be removed from the roadside.

Greenbelts

The land adjacent to the roadway in this management unit is predominately under the management of the BLM. The BLM is a multiple use agency and could possibly open this area to certain kinds of development. It is important that the agency establish greenbelts as a management tool to mitigate the visual impacts of future developments in this highly scenic area.

Because of generally sparse roadside vegetation, and flat or gently sloping lands which expose broad views of the landscape, this area is particularly sensitive to the visual impact of development. To respond to the special needs of this area, a unique system of greenbelts is recommended. Primary views in this unit are oriented north towards Mt. Nenana, Mt. Deborah, Mt. Hess, and their associated mountains and glaciers. Because of this, the impact on visual quality is a lower priority south of the road, and special considerations are required north of the road.

In areas which have adequate screening potential, a 100 foot greenbelt beyond the R.O.W. is recommended. In this greenbelt, no structures should be built, no landform alteration allowed, and all vegetation should be retained. Areas with this greenbelt designation are located on the management unit map.

A 300 foot greenbelt beyond the R.O.W. is recommended for all areas south of the road which do not have the 100 foot designation. Within this greenbelt, no structures should be built, no landform alteration allowed, and all vegetative cover retained.

A one half mile special greenbelt is recommended on the north side of the road from Brushkana Creek west to the end of BLM land, and a one mile special greenbelt from Brushkana Creek east to the end of the management unit are recommended for those areas where a 100 foot greenbelt is not specified.

In these greenbelts, no development of public land may occur within 500 feet of the R.O.W. In the remainder of the greenbelts, development may occur but must conform to performance standards to minimize visual impacts. Each potential developer could be required to submit a visual impact statement and show through photographs, sketches, or other visual simulation techniques, the visual impact the proposed development would have.

Techniques for minimizing visual impact, around which performance standards should be developed are:

- Site development some distance from the road.
- Site structures behind trees or landforms which would screen its view from the road.
- Use construction materials whose colors and textures blend with the surrounding landscape.
- Minimize disturbance of landforms and vegetative cover.
- Design structures so that their shapes and sizes harmonize with the scale and character of the surrounding landscape.
- Use Alaskan historical/cultural building types such as log cabins, lodges, etc.

Realignments (Real)

The DOTPF has proposed three road realignments in this unit. Their general purposes are to avoid problems of road maintenance with the existing alignment, or to straighten curves to permit faster travel.

- Real-1** This alignment was discussed in Management Unit 2.
- Real-2** This realignment straightens a low speed curve. The old alignment could be developed as a scenic turnout.
See T-2 under "Turnouts."
- Real-3** This proposed realignment would straighten a descending curve which adds a unique driving and visual experience. The proposal would most likely require additional large cuts and fills that would have significant negative visual impacts. From the standpoint of scenic quality, it is recommended that the existing alignment be retained.

