

Scenic Resource Assessment Methodology

A team composed of landscape architects and resource planners was assembled to execute this study. Approximately five weeks were spent in the field for on-site evaluation of the scenic and recreational resources and assessment of conditions which influence these values and the appropriate management responses. The methodology employed was based upon an inventory system developed for the Parks Highway between Anchorage and Fairbanks. An overview of the study methodology and a discussion of some of the important guiding concepts and assumptions follow. Sample field inventory sheets for one assessment unit are included on pages 6 and 7. A more detailed description of the inventory process and criteria, and a complete set of the original field inventory worksheets and supporting color slides and black and white photographs are on file at the BLM Alaska Resources Library in Anchorage.

• Viewer Expectations and Concerns

Each person traveling in the study corridor has an individual motivation for the journey coupled with their own personal expectations and concerns. Some people live near the road and are intimately familiar with a portion of it. Some people use it frequently for their work; others may only travel it once during their lifetime during a carefully planned vacation. As a means of assessing the scenic resources and determining the appropriateness of the corridor for a special scenic highway designation, this

study looked at the road primarily through the eyes of the traveler using the road for recreation purposes. Such travelers usually expect to see and experience a wild landscape, preferring views of high mountains, glaciers, pristine lakes and rivers and the opportunity to see wildlife. They enjoy a diversity of settings and experiences and demonstrate a dislike for seeing extensive development associated with urbanization and population concentrations. This does not mean such viewers would find all development visually undesirable. On the contrary, most travelers welcome a view of interesting and unique human uses--such as the Trans-Alaska Pipeline, a homestead, native community or roadhouse--especially where the uses are a highlight in an otherwise long stretch of natural, undisturbed landscape, such as along the Denali Highway. To the extent possible, this resource evaluation was done from this perspective.

• Viewer Point of View

Scenic resource values discussed here are based upon the "view from the road," or the perception of the landscape while traveling in a moving vehicle. Travel in both directions was considered. The evaluation not only covered the views or what is seen, it also attempted to include an assessment of the experience of traveling through the landscape. Other factors considered include the sequence of views, the changing position of the viewer, and the diversity of spatial experiences. In certain instances--such as at some turnouts and around high use recreation sites adjacent to the road--the analysis was done from the perspective of someone standing or walking around the area rather than from inside a moving vehicle.

● Integration with Other Resource Values and Concerns

This report focuses on the assessment and management of scenic resources and roadside recreational uses. It is assumed that these considerations are of primary importance for the areas under study. However, final management decisions must balance these resources with other values, human uses and concerns. While the recommendations contained in this report attempt to accommodate other developments and uses, they may require some additional thought and possible modification to balance them with other resource demands. This is the responsibility of the planning team which has access to more information and more time as well as the responsibility for preparing plans, policies and implementation strategies representing all interests and concerns.

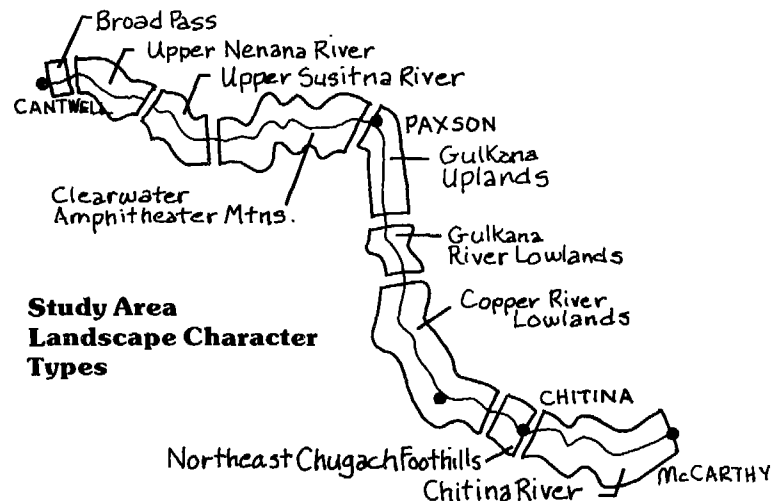
● Focus of Management Area Recommendations

The field inventory and management recommendations focus on the foreground--that portion of the seen area closest to the viewer. It is the foreground which is generally the most critical to the quality of the viewing experience. Foreground areas can create spaces, define views and screen visually undesirable features and areas. Foreground lands create variety and visual change in the perception of the landscape from a moving car, more so than the less dynamic middleground and background which appear to remain stationary and exhibit only gradual changes. It is the foreground areas which most often invite the viewer to stop, rest and participate in the environment. And, foreground lands can either "make or break" a view. For example, most people would prefer a panoramic

vista of Mt. McKinley or the Copper River framed by a quiet lake, trees and a cabin, rather than one dominated by an open gravel pit or a jumbled array of signs, parking lots and commercial establishments. Finally, by concentrating on the foreground lands, land managers can concentrate on the small but most important portion of the thousands of acres that are visible from within the highway corridor.

● Landscape Character Types

The study area is divided into visual Landscape Character Types. A character type is an area of land that has common distinguishing visual characteristics of landform, rock formations, waterforms, and vegetation patterns. Based primarily on physiographic and vegetative divisions, character types are used as a frame of reference to classify specific highway stretches according to their visual qualities. The study area between Cantwell and McCarthy traverses nine landscape character types ranging in length from a minimum of nine to over 65 miles. (Note accompanying map.)

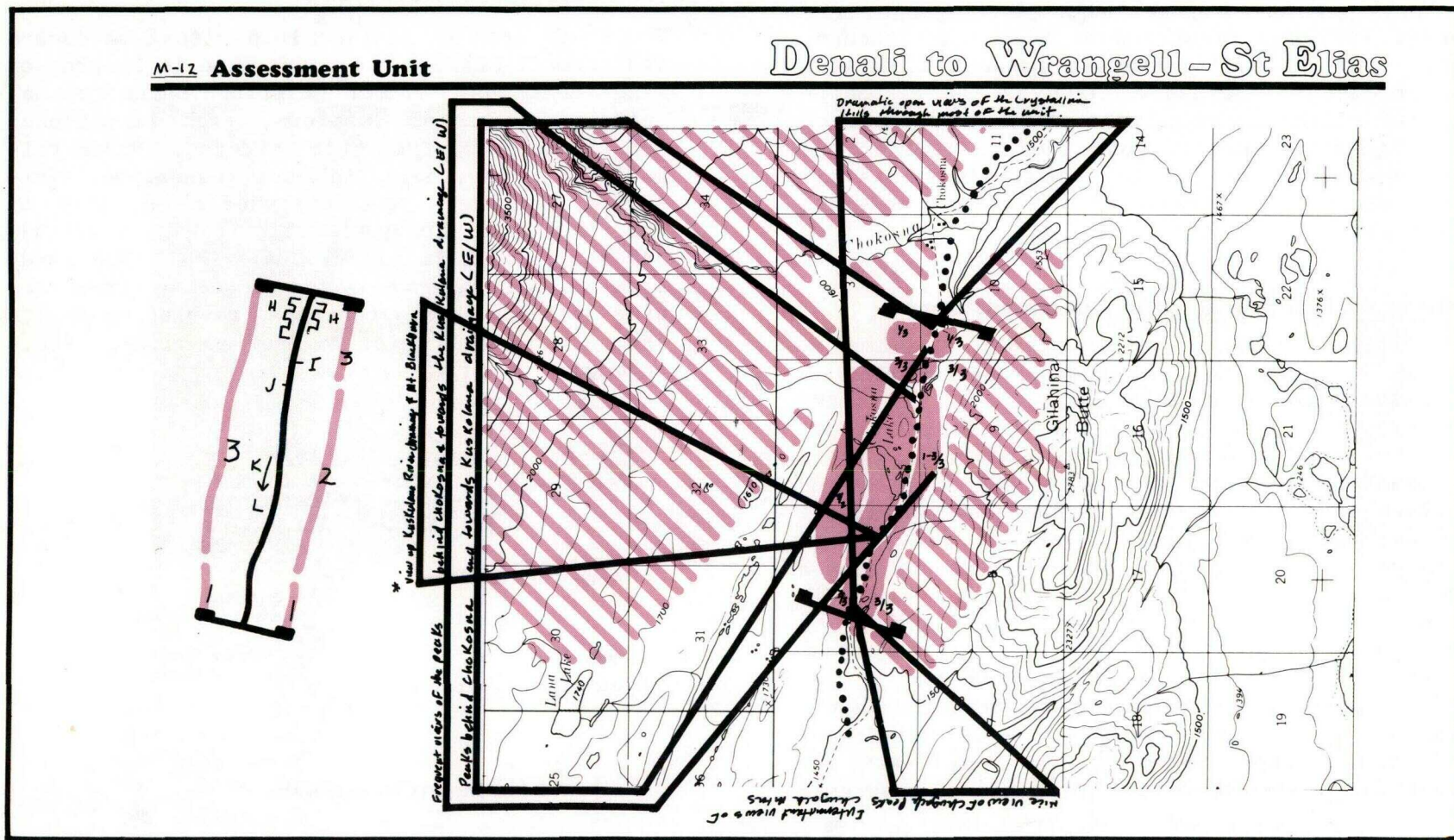


● Assessment Units

The landscape character types are further divided into Assessment Units. An assessment unit is a small highway section, commonly two to three miles long, that has distinct visual characteristics. It was used as the basic field analysis unit. For example, between Cantwell and Chitina there are 153 assessment units, with another 29 along the Chitina to McCarthy road.

● Intrinsic Visual Quality

Each assessment unit is evaluated for its Intrinsic Visual Quality. Intrinsic visual quality is defined as the degree of expression exhibited by a landscape through the interplay of its various components or elements: the landscape's ability to create visually distinctive and pleasing patterns of form, line, color, and texture. An underlying assumption is that



diversity plays a major role in creating visually distinctive landscape experiences. Thus, those landscapes exhibiting greater variety in their combination of natural elements (land-sky interface, landform, landcover and waterform) generally have a higher intrinsic visual quality. These elements are evaluated from predetermined criteria for each landscape character type. Other factors used to determine the intrinsic visual quality of an assessment unit

include surprise, anticipation, sequential diversity, and views. To the extent possible, the intrinsic visual quality is evaluated as if the landscape were in its natural state.

Land Use and Development

Human activities visible from the road are inventoried with respect to location, intensity and visual impact. These include residential,


Scenic Resource Inventory

intrinsic visual quality	east/south		west/north	
	left	rating	left	rating
land-sky interface		3		2
landform		3		3
landcover		3		3
waterform		3		3
surprise	D	3		3
anticipation		0		3
sequential diversity		3		3
point of view-forward		E		E
point of view-lateral	E	E	E	E
spatial expression		V		V
lateral views	E	3	F	4
unique natural visual elements	D	1	C	1
intrinsic visual quality		22		24

character type Chitina River date 6/20/82
 unit description through generally open, level to gently sloping weather partly cloudy
poorly drained with large and smaller lakes and marshes right of way width _____
 land ownership adjacent to road _____

ISSUES Road realignment (DOT 1973 realignment closely follows recorded by kuklok/heikkala
overlying alignment except near ends of the assessment unit.

A. View of first lake heading west and mountains around Kuskutana River
 B. Filtered views which gradually prepare viewer for very nice view of Chokona Lake
 C. Small and large lakes
 D. Mt Blackburn and high Wrangells through Kuskutana River valley
 E. Continuous lateral views across lakes towards distant mountains to north including Mt. Blackburn
 F. Small lake
 G. Road along long tangents which do not reflect landforms or water features.



Looking east across marsh

management concepts notes & observations

land use & development	east/south			
	back	middle	left	right
residential				
commercial-institutional				
recreational				
industrial				
historical/cultural sites				
management activities				
visual clutter				
other man-made visual elements				
total				0

roadway characteristics	east/south	
	left	rating
right-of-way management	0-10	0
road design impact		4
signage & structures		0
total		0

overall visual quality rating **225**

visual quality ratings

intrinsic visual quality	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	travelling east
<input type="checkbox"/>	travelling west
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	land-sky interface
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	landform
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	landcover
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	waterform
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	surprise
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	anticipation <small>depends on constant of road widening and low maintenance</small>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	sequential diversity
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	lateral views
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	unique natural visual elements
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Overall change in intrinsic visual quality rating

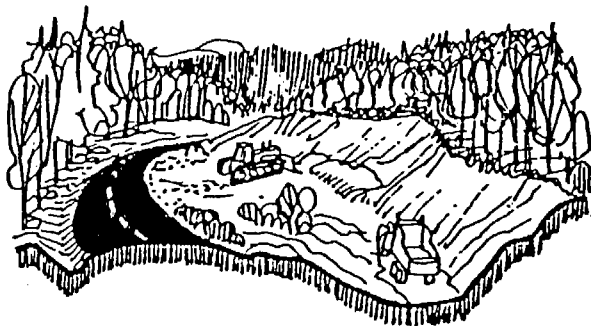
land use & development	
<input type="checkbox"/>	residential
<input type="checkbox"/>	commercial-institutional
<input type="checkbox"/>	recreational
<input type="checkbox"/>	industrial
<input type="checkbox"/>	historical/cultural sites
<input type="checkbox"/>	management activities
<input type="checkbox"/>	visual clutter
<input type="checkbox"/>	other man-made visual elements

roadway characteristics	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	right-of-way management <small>depends on DOT policy and funding</small>
<input type="checkbox"/>	road design impact <small>Road widening and alignment would come about in clearing lake - make visibility of road itself greater</small>
<input type="checkbox"/>	signage & structures
<input type="checkbox"/>	total higher ratings
<input type="checkbox"/>	total lower ratings
<input type="checkbox"/>	total no-change ratings
<input type="checkbox"/>	total 'need further study' ratings

McCarthy road realignment

greenbelts/screening traveling west, At K a very nice sequence occurs where very brief filtered views of the lake change to views of longer duration until finally it is visible and a nice view back. This sequence should continue. right-of-way management At "H" and other areas within this unit clearing of road edge brush (predominantly willow) could open up views and blend in roadside edge better into the landscape. At "I" selective clearing could open up better views, turnouts / rest areas towards small lake. At "J", surprised to see lake as come around turn. Good place for waterfall observation, though poor soil conditions means any turnout would have to be on fill. Any road widening should be to the south side of road to avoid further encroachment on the wetlands.

reclamation/mitigation concepts At "L" a very good scenic turnout site with excellent views across the lake and toward Mt Blackburn and the higher Wrangells. Visibility of site is good, and there is enough high ground for a small turnout development, issue responses though not a lot of space for extensive facilities development. The primary impact of realignment proposals within this assessment unit would result from the design and maintenance of the road itself. More study as to actual vertical alignment is necessary to know how much higher than the surrounding lowland lakes and marshes the road will be. Existing road is low and narrow and visually subordinate to the surrounding Unit M-12 landscape even though it follows a nearly straight alignment. Any road work within this area should strive to provide visual access to the lakes and open lowlands without encroaching upon them.



commercial, institutional and industrial developments as well as recreational land use and land management activities such as timber harvesting, mining and material site development. Unique man-made visual elements (historical and cultural sites) are also assessed, as is the visibility of trash, junked vehicles, signs, or other visual clutter.

• Roadway Characteristics

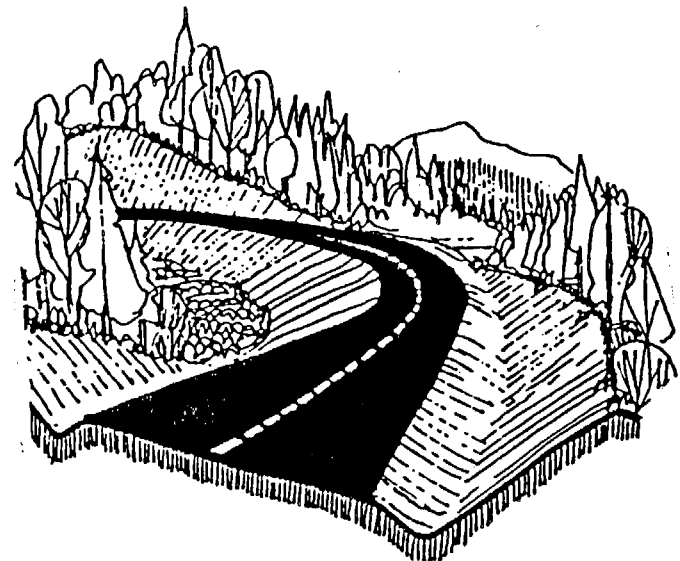
For the roadway characteristics evaluation, the affect of the immediate highway right-of-way area on the visual experience is assessed. Three factors are considered: right-of-way management, visual impacts of the road's design and highway signs and other structures within the right-of-way.

• Overall Visual Quality Rating

The overall visual quality rating is a measure of the assessment unit's existing visual quality. It is the numerical sum of the assessment unit's intrinsic visual quality, the land use and development impacts and the roadway characteristics impacts. It is a relative rating, used for comparison with the overall visual quality ratings for other assessment units.

• Ownership, Issues and Right-of-Way Width

It is important to be aware of the land ownership patterns immediately adjacent to the road, the width of the highway right-of-way, and any specific issues and concerns associated with the assessment unit under consideration. Consequently this information is researched and recorded on inventory sheets prior to the actual



field work. This helps to insure that on-site observations focus on conditions related to specific management issues and that preliminary recommendations respond to particular ownership responsibilities. Since the greatest potential for consistent scenic resource management practices over long distances is within the right-of-way, it is important that this factor be clearly understood.

● Management Concepts

The field observations and ratings are translated into specific recommendations that employ a variety of land management concepts to preserve or enhance identified scenic resource values. Consequently, appropriate management concepts based upon observations of actual site conditions are identified for each assessment unit. These are divided into five categories: greenbelts and screening immediately beyond the right-of-way, management within the right-of-way, potential for development of turnouts and rest areas, landscape reclamation of severely disturbed sites visible from the roadway, and potential responses to identified issues.

● Site Specific Observations

Many factors related to a scenic resource inventory and final management guidelines are best recorded and communicated on maps. These include a depiction of the seen area or viewshed from within the assessment unit, the location and description of distant views and the ability of different portions of the seen area to accommodate modification (visual absorption capability) based upon the vegetation screening potential and the slope of the land with respect to

the viewer (visual magnitude). Maps are also used to show the location and boundaries of assessment units and the location of potentially significant sites for scenic resource management considerations (material sites, existing turn-outs etc.).

Finally, the location of variable management concepts such as differing greenbelt widths and variable right-of-way management strategies are recorded on the unit maps.

● McCarthy Road Realignment

One particular issue related to this study is the potential realignment of the Chitina to McCarthy road. Presently, the road follows the old railroad alignment and is under consideration for upgrading and possible realignment to better accommodate vehicular traffic. An assessment of potential changes in visual quality ratings (intrinsic visual quality, land use and development, roadway characteristics) comparing the existing alignment with the proposed realignments was completed. This analysis suggested which alignments would be preferred from a scenic quality perspective.