

North Access VISITOR FACILITIES STUDY

A Cooperative Study
between the
National Park Service
and the
Alaska Department of Natural Resources

August 2004





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August 2004

Dear Reader:

We are pleased to announce the completion of the North Access Visitor Facilities Study. This study is the result of a successful partnership between the National Park Service and the Alaska Department of Natural Resources. We invited the public to participate throughout the planning process and we received valuable input from individuals and organizations that contributed to the content and organization of this study.

We hope the information in this study proves beneficial to future planning efforts at the federal, state and borough levels. The supplemental information provides a summary of the existing natural and cultural environment that should prove useful to individuals and organizations interested in the northern portion of Denali National Park and Preserve and the state land just west of Healy that borders the national park.

The North Access Visitor Facilities Study demonstrates how a cooperative relationship between the National Park Service and Department of Natural Resources can benefit both agencies and the public.

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NORTH ACCESS

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Executive Summary

Purpose of the Study

To meet Congressional direction, the National Park Service and the Alaska Department of Natural Resources completed a visitor facilities study to “explore options for the location of campgrounds, trails, and other visitor facilities along the Stampede Road alignment” (Senate Report 106-312, page 37). This study reviews the Stampede Road alignment, considers appropriate types of and distances between visitor facilities along a 90-mile corridor, identifies soils types, explores opportunities for natural and cultural interpretation along the corridor, and discusses land status. This study also includes information on the natural and cultural environment of the study area.

Scenarios

Ideas for a new north access route have included both a road and a railroad; therefore, the visitor facilities study explores locations along the Stampede Road alignment for both a road scenario and a railroad scenario. A third scenario explores locations, or ideas, for visitor facilities that could enhance the existing situation and recreational activities that presently occur within the study area, whether or not a north access road or railroad is developed. For each scenario, the Stampede Road alignment serves as the common reference point from which locations for visitor facilities were explored.

Locations

The locations discussed throughout the study (and their approximate milepost along the Stampede Road alignment) include:

1. George Parks Highway (Milepost 0)
2. Eight Mile Lake (Milepost 8)
3. Savage/Teklanika Rivers (Milepost 18)
4. Teklanike-Sushana Divide (Milepost 21)
5. Sushana River (Milepost 28)
6. Toklat-East Fork (Milepost 42)
7. Toklat-Clearwater Fork (Milepost 51)
8. Stampede Mine (Milepost 56)
9. Myrtle-Willow Divide (Milepost 75)
10. Kantishna/Wonder Lake (Milepost 90)

The locations, or “nodes of development,” encompass a general area as opposed to a specific geographical site defined by acreage and definitive boundaries. Maps and descriptions of each location are provided in the study. Visitor facilities within these nodes of development could serve travelers along a road or railroad transportation corridor. A comprehensive environmental analysis would be required for access to and development at any of these locations.

Types of Visitor Facilities Considered

Various combinations of visitor facilities are presented for the different locations, and the types of visitor facilities tend to vary among the scenarios. The types of visitor facilities considered include:

- Visitor information center
- Train depot
- Campground
- Dispersed campsites
- Restroom facilities
- Trails
- Public use cabins
- Lodge
- Picnic tables and shelters
- Waysides
- Interpretive exhibits and trails
- Viewing platforms
- Informational/Interpretive Kiosks
- Footbridges
- Fee station
- Food service facility

Refer to the summary table on the following page for an overview of the visitor facilities considered at the ten locations for each of the three scenarios.

Natural and Human Resource Conditions

Appendix E of the study provides an overview of the existing natural and human resource conditions found along the Stampede Road alignment, including soils, climate, wildlife, vegetation and cultural resources.

Summary of Scenarios: Optional Locations and Visitor Facilities

	Road Scenario	Railroad Scenario	Existing Situation
Location 1 - George Parks Highway	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visitor Info Center • Parking area • Tent/RV Campground • Dispersed campsites • Interpretation • Hiking trails • Picnic tables/shelter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visitor Info Center/ Train Depot • Parking area • Tent/RV campground • Interpretation • Hiking trails • Railroad Interchange Facility • Picnic tables/shelter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interpretive signing • Hiking trail • Parking area
Location 2 - Eight Mile Lake	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parking area • Tent/RV campground • Dispersed campsites • Restroom facilities • Trailhead & trails • Wayside • Interpretive signing • Picnic tables/shelter • Lake access • Fee station • Public use cabin(s) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parking area • Tent/RV campground • Dispersed campsites • Restroom facilities • Trailhead & trails • Wayside • Interpretive signing • Picnic tables/shelter • Lake access • Public use cabin(s) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved parking • Restroom facilities • Campground • Dispersed campsites • Trailhead and trails • Interpretive opportunities • Picnic tables/shelter • Lake access • Public use cabin(s)
Location 3 - Savage/Teklanika Rivers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parking area • Campground • Dispersed campsites • Restroom facilities • Trailhead & trails • Wayside • Interpretive signing • Picnic tables/shelter • River access 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trails 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dispersed campsites • Interpretive signing • Wildlife viewing opportunities • Trails • Public use cabin(s)
Location 4 - Teklanika-Sushana Divide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wayside • Restroom facilities • Interpretive signing • Picnic tables • Hiking trail • River access 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trails 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designated trail • Interpretive opportunities
Location 5 - Sushana River	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parking area • Campground • Dispersed campsites • Restroom facilities • Trailhead & trails • Interpretive signing • Picnic tables/shelter • Public use cabins • Fee station • River access 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Camping, cabins, lodge • Restroom facilities • Train stop • Trailhead and trails • Interpretive signing • Picnic tables/shelter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designated trail • Dispersed campsites • Interpretive signing • Public use cabin(s)

	Road Scenario	Railroad Scenario	Enhancement of the Existing Situation
Location 6 - Toklat-East Fork	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wayside • Restroom facilities • Interpretive signing • Picnic tables • Hiking trail 	<i>Not applicable</i>	<i>Not applicable</i>
Location 7 - Toklat-Clearwater Fork	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wayside • Restroom facilities • Interpretive signing • Picnic tables • Hiking trail 	<i>Not applicable</i>	<i>Not applicable</i>
Location 8 - Stampede Mine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parking area • Campground • Dispersed campsites • Restroom facilities • Trailhead & trails • Interpretive signing • Picnic tables/shelter • Information kiosk • Small admin. cabin 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Campground • Dispersed campsites • Restroom facilities • Train stop • Interpretive loop trail • Interpretive signing • Picnic tables/shelter • Small admin. cabin 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dispersed campsites • Interpretive trail • Interpretive signing • Picnic tables/shelter • Information kiosks • Small admin. cabin
Location 9 - Myrtle-Willow Divide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parking area • Restroom facilities • Interpretive signing • Viewing platform • Trailhead and trails • Small loop trail • Small nature center 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Train stop • Restroom facilities • Trailhead and trails • Interpretive signing • Viewing platform 	<i>Not applicable</i>
Location 10 - Kantishna/Wonder Lake	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parking area • Campground • Restroom facilities • Trailhead & trails • Interpretive signing • Picnic tables/shelter • Visitor Info Center • Intermodal facility • Food service facility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interchange facility • Visitor Info Center • Parking area • Camping/Lodging • Restroom facilities • Trailhead and trails • Interpretive signing • Picnic tables/shelter • Food service facility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designated trail system • Interpretive signing • Picnic tables/shelters • Restroom facilities • Information kiosks

North Access Visitor Facilities Study

Introduction

The 2001 Department of the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill included the following directive for the National Park Service:

Funds provided in fiscal year 2000 for design of a visitor center at Glacier Bay NP [National Park] shall be reprogrammed for a cooperative study with the State of Alaska to explore options for the location of campgrounds, trails, and other visitor facilities along the Stampede Road alignment.

Senate Report 106-312, page 37

Construction of a new north access route to the interior of Denali National Park and Preserve has been a topic of consideration for a number of years. Generally, ideas for a new north access route suggest a 90-mile road or railroad that would begin at the George Parks Highway just north of Healy, follow or parallel the 1961 Stampede Road corridor that extends 56 miles to the Stampede airstrip, and continue from the Stampede airstrip to the Kantishna/Wonder Lake area. (Kantishna is the terminus of the existing park road.) The corridor corresponds to a historic corridor that originated at the historic railroad station of Lignite and ended at the mining settlement of Kantishna. The first portion of this corridor, approximately 30 miles, is located on state land, except for approximately one mile of the Stampede Road alignment that dips into the national park near the confluence of the Savage and Teklanika Rivers. The remaining portion of the route, approximately 60 miles, traverses land that became part of Denali National Park in 1980 with the passage of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA). This Visitor Facilities Study explores options for the location of visitor facilities along this 90-mile corridor.

Definition of the “Stampede Road Alignment”

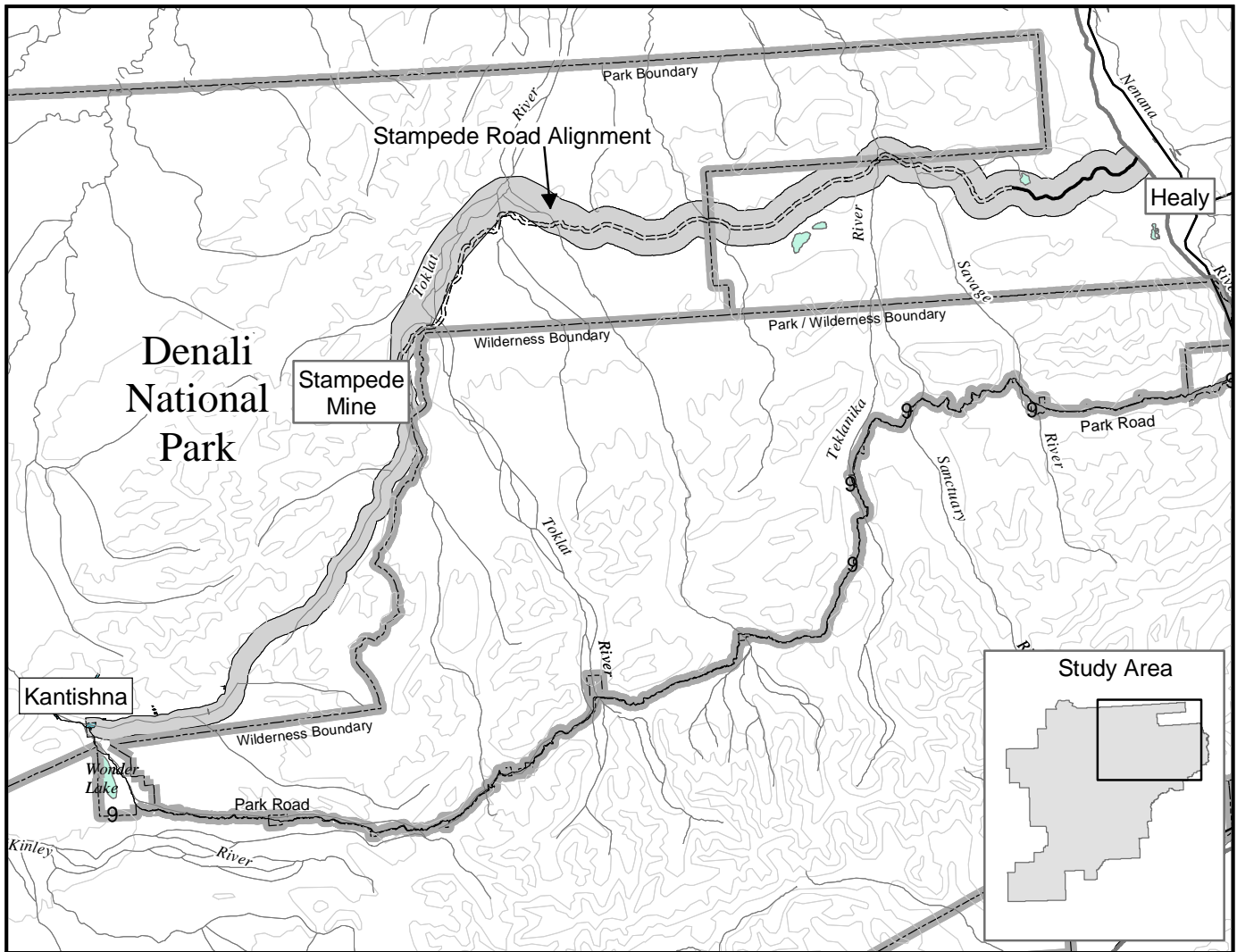
The Congressional direction for the visitor facilities study specified the “Stampede Road alignment.” For the purposes of this study, the “Stampede Road alignment” is defined as a corridor extending from the George Parks Highway north of Healy to Kantishna. This corridor includes the maintained portion of the Stampede Road (approximately eight miles) and the remnants of the road constructed in 1961 to access the Stampede Mine. Beyond the Stampede airstrip, the corridor generally includes the Clearwater Fork Valley, tributary valleys connecting the Clearwater and Moose Creeks, and the Moose Creek Valley downstream to Kantishna. This definition of the “Stampede Road alignment” is consistent with the 1993 *Alternative Transportation Modes Feasibility Study* as depicted and labeled on several of the document’s maps and the 1997 *North Access Feasibility Study*.

The definition of the “Stampede Road alignment” meets the intent of the Congressional direction of the study; it is not meant to suggest that a road either currently or historically existed over the length of the 90-mile corridor. Technically, the Stampede Road alignment does not extend past the Stampede airstrip, the termination of the 56-mile pioneer road constructed in 1961 to access

the Stampede Mine. Upon its completion, the 56-mile road received no maintenance and degraded rapidly. Today, approximately eight miles of the Stampede Road is maintained. The first four miles were chip-sealed in 2001 and the remaining portion is gravel.

There is strong public sentiment against using the term “Stampede Road alignment” because it perpetuates a misconception that an actual road exists between Healy and Kantishna. To remain consistent with the Congressional direction for this study, however, the term “Stampede Road alignment” will be used throughout this document.

Study Area Map



Map of the Stampede Road alignment as defined for the purposes of this study.

Purpose of the Visitor Facilities Study

The purpose and unique challenge of the Visitor Facilities Study is to “explore options for the location of campgrounds, trails, and other visitor facilities” along a “road alignment” where no road exists, except for the first eight miles of the Stampede Road. In essence, this study explores locations for visitor facilities where there is currently no vehicle transportation corridor, road or railroad, to facilitate access to any location or visitor facility between Eight Mile Lake (the end of the maintained portion of the Stampede Road) and the Kantishna/Wonder Lake area.

This study reviews the Stampede Road alignment, considers appropriate types of and distances between visitor facilities along a 90-mile corridor, identifies soils types, explores opportunities for natural and cultural interpretation along the corridor, and discusses land status. This study also includes information on the natural and cultural environment of the study area. A summary of the public involvement process and comments received is provided in appendix A.

Identifying optional route locations for a new road or railroad between Healy and the Kantishna/Wonder Lake area would require extensive research and an in-depth environmental analysis, and it is outside the scope of this study. As such, this study is confined to considering locations for visitor facilities along the 90-mile Stampede Road alignment.

Land Management

The Alaska Department of Natural Resources (DNR) manages land along the first 30 miles of the corridor and the National Park Service (NPS) manages land along the remaining 60 miles. Each agency manages its lands according to specific legislative direction and management guidelines.

Purposes of Denali National Park and Preserve

The purposes of Denali National Park and Preserve have evolved from the time Congress established the original Mount McKinley National Park to present. The 1980 Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) expanded the original national park, added national preserve lands, and designated most of the original Mount McKinley National Park as wilderness.

Mount McKinley National Park

In 1917, Congress established Mount McKinley National Park as a “game refuge” to “set apart as a public park for the benefit and enjoyment of the people . . . for recreation purposes by the public and for the preservation of animals, birds, and fish and for the preservation of the natural curiosities and scenic beauties thereof . . .” (39 Statute 938).

Denali National Monument

Separate but adjacent to Mount McKinley National Park, Denali National Monument was established by Presidential Proclamation on December 1, 1978. This and other Alaska proclamations temporarily preserved areas during the legislative process to pass the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act.

Denali National Park and Preserve

In 1980, Congress passed the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA), which combined Mount McKinley National Park and Denali National Monument and renamed them as Denali National Park and Preserve. Section 101 of ANILCA describes the broad purposes of the new conservation system units throughout Alaska, including enlarged national parks and preserves, such as Denali. These include the following:

- Preserve lands and waters for the benefit, use, education, and inspiration of present and future generations.
- Preserve unrivaled scenic and geologic values associated with natural landscapes.
- Maintain sound populations of, and habitat for, wildlife species.
- Preserve extensive, unaltered ecosystems in their natural state.
- Protect resources related to subsistence needs.
- Protect historic and archeological sites.
- Preserve wilderness resource values and related recreational opportunities, such as hiking, canoeing, fishing, and sport hunting.
- Maintain opportunities for scientific research in undisturbed ecosystems.
- Provide the opportunity for rural residents to engage in a subsistence way of life.

Section 202 states that the park additions and preserve are to be managed for the following additional purposes:

- To protect and interpret the entire mountain massif and the additional scenic mountain peaks and formations.
- To protect habitat for, and populations of, fish and wildlife including, but not limited to, brown/grizzly bears, moose, caribou, Dall sheep, wolves, swans, and other waterfowl.
- To provide continued opportunities, including reasonable access, for mountain climbing, mountaineering, and other wilderness recreation activities.

Legislative Intent

Senate Report #96-413 on ANILCA (page 166) referenced the north park additions:

The prime resource for which the north addition is established is the critical range necessary to support populations of moose, wolf, and caribou as part of an integral ecosystem. Public enjoyment of these outstanding wildlife values would thus continue to be assured.

General Management Plan and Wilderness Suitability Review

The 1986 General Management Plan recommended against the construction of a new north access route. The Wilderness Suitability Review, completed in conjunction with the General Management Plan, identified the north park additions (which include the national park lands within the study area of the Visitor Facilities Study) as suitable for wilderness designation. According to *Management Policies 2001*, the National Park Service will take no action to diminish the suitability of an area until the legislative process by Congress has been completed.

Refer to appendix B for NPS policies pertaining to visitor facilities and transportation.

Purposes of State Land within the Study Area

When Alaska became a state in 1959, it was granted more than 100 million acres of land. At statehood, the Alaska Legislature charged the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) with the complex job of managing the state-owned lands for the “maximum public benefit.” DNR’s goal is to contribute to Alaska’s economic health and quality of life by protecting and maintaining the state’s resources, and encouraging wise development of these resources by making them available for public use.

There is a wide range of possibilities for how state land could be used; however, not all desired uses of state lands can occur compatibly in the same place at the same time. Wherever possible, DNR establishes guidelines that allow for multiple use. Through resource planning, DNR works with the public to determine how the land can be used for the maximum public benefit. When DNR developed the Tanana Basin Area Plan (TBAP) in 1991, which applies to state land within the study area, the goal of the planning process was to ensure that all resources were considered and evaluated.

Within the study area, the land in State ownership (land not privately owned) essentially extends from the George Parks Highway to the Sushana River. All of the state land (including the beds of navigable waters and public water bodies) in the corridor west of the Panguingue Creek subdivision is managed by DNR and is included in Subregion 4E in TBAP. The plan directs that the state lands in that unit be retained in public ownership with public recreation and wildlife habitat as the primary surface uses. Land disposals are prohibited in this subunit, but material sales, leases, and permits that are not specifically prohibited may be allowed. The state lands between the subdivision and the George Parks Highway are similarly designated, although a large, long-term grazing lease covers much of this land. The Panguingue Creek subdivision was designated as settlement in the 1991 TBAP and has since been conveyed to the Denali Borough and private landowners. "Open to Entry" landholders are dispersed throughout the area, including land near Eight Mile Lake. Most of the state land from the George Parks Highway to the Eight Mile Lake area has been selected by the Denali Borough as part of its 50,000-acre entitlement. Most of the land south of Dry Creek is in private ownership.

Tanana Basin Area Plan

The 1991 *Tanana Basin Area Plan* identifies the following management intent for state land along the Stampede Trail, Management Unit 4E:

General. State land in this unit is to be retained in public ownership for multiple use management. The emphasis is on managing recreation and maintaining fish and wildlife habitat. All state land in this unit is open to mineral entry.

Fish and Wildlife. Fish and wildlife habitat is designated a primary use in subunit 4E1 (area west of Panguingue Creek subdivision). The western half of this subunit is extremely high value habitat as a calving and winter range for the McKinley caribou herd. The remaining area is prime-rated habitat for caribou, moose, grizzly bear, and furbearers. Other important activities are big game hunting, trapping, and wildlife viewing.

Minerals. The area between Dry Creek and the Teklanika River has potential for coal bearing formations. Proximity to Denali National Park may inhibit mineral development; however, mineral entry, coal prospecting, and leasing will be allowed.

Recreation. Recreation is designated a primary use in this unit. Important recreation sites include Eight Mile Lake and Stampede Road Historic Trail. Activities include backpacking, camping, and hunting.

At the time of this writing, DNR has begun the revision process for the Tanana Basin Area Plan.

North Access: History and Background Information

The visitor facilities study is undeniably associated with the north access issue, which has been discussed and debated for years. Below is an abbreviated chronology of the north access issue.

1917	Mount McKinley National Park was established on February 26. In September, a group of Kantishna residents petitioned for a road to be built north of the park from the railroad at Lignite Creek to their district.
1920	After surveying both the Lignite route and the “Riley Creek route,” Hawley Sterling, an Alaska Road Commission engineer, recommended locating the park road (which also serves as the Kantishna access road) in its present-day location.
1922-1938	The park road was constructed to Kantishna by the Alaska Road Commission using monies appropriated by Congress to the National Park Service.
1935-1970	Earl Pilgrim developed the Stampede Mine for antimony production. He established an overland trail from Lignite to Stampede (the Stampede Trail) that he used in winter to haul sledges with 40 tons of antimony per trip. During the late 1940s he established a 4,600-foot airstrip at Stampede and flew out his antimony ore in 6-ton loads with Norsemen aircraft. Operations at the mine ceased in 1970. The Stampede Road was constructed in 1961 under the state’s Pioneer Road Program to support the transport of minerals from the Stampede Mine to the Alaska Railroad. Upon its completion, the road received no maintenance and degraded rapidly.
1978	Denali National Monument was established by Presidential Proclamation on December 1. This and other Alaska proclamations temporarily preserved areas during the legislative process to pass the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act.
1980	The Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) expanded the national park to the north to ensure the protection of wilderness and ecosystem values, giving specific mention to establishing sufficient habitat to sustain the park’s large mammal populations of moose, wolf, and caribou. Mount McKinley National Park, with its ANILCA additions, was renamed Denali National Park and Preserve.
1986	The <i>General Management Plan</i> for Denali National Park and Preserve recommended against construction of a new north access route. The <i>Wilderness Suitability Review</i> identified the north park additions as suitable for wilderness designation.
1992	The National Park Service assembled the Access Task Force, a group of senior National Park Service officials, to consider alternative access to Kantishna. The task force reviewed the existing situation and held local meetings to gather input. Among its recommendations, the report stated “there is no need for an additional gravel or paved road into the Kantishna area of Denali National Park and Preserve,” but further study of alternative transportation technology, such as railroads or a monorail, is warranted.

<p>1993</p>	<p>The State of Alaska was given \$1.5 million to study and design a new road to McGrath with a spur road to Kantishna. The State Department of Transportation held public open houses and did preliminary investigations for the route; however, the study was halted because the anticipated increase in federal funding never materialized and the department’s program emphasis changed. Approximately \$250,000 was expended and the remainder of the funds returned.</p> <p>The <i>Alternative Transportation Modes Feasibility Study</i> investigated ways to improve access into the park. Both a road and railroad following the Stampede Road corridor were among its initial alternatives. The railroad option was eliminated prior to detailed assessment. The study concluded that a new road along the Stampede Road corridor “does not represent an effective investment for visitor access to Denali.”</p>
<p>1994</p>	<p>The Secretary of the Interior established the Denali Task Force to evaluate and make recommendations about transportation, Kantishna, and the south side of Denali. The task force did not reach a consensus on either a new northern road or rail system. The National Park System Advisory Board approved the overall report with an “amendment for endorsement of establishing a new northern railroad route contingent upon prior stakeholder agreements on the extent and nature of development in the immediate Wonder Lake area.”</p>
<p>1997</p>	<p>In response to Congressional direction, a <i>North Access Feasibility Study</i> was completed by the National Park Service and the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities. The study included an evaluation of the feasibility of two transportation modes, road and railroad, within the Stampede Road corridor. The study determined that standard construction practice for Interior and Arctic Alaska is sufficient to construct a road from the Parks Highway to the Kantishna/Wonder Lake area along the Stampede corridor, and neither terrain nor topography would preclude construction of a railroad. The study concluded that construction of a road or railroad would cost \$90 to \$250 million depending on the route and transportation method selected.</p> <p>The Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) identified \$1.5 million for the State of Alaska to “construct a Denali North Access.” The intent of the TEA-21 language was later clarified to indicate that an environmental impact statement would need to be completed prior to construction of a north access route.</p> <p>The <i>Final Entrance Area and Road Corridor Development Concept Plan</i> was completed. Most of the area immediately surrounding Wonder Lake was designated a Backcountry Day Use Zone. Establishment of a new northern transportation route to Kantishna was an impact topic and alternative considered but not addressed in the plan.</p>
<p>2001</p>	<p>Congress reprogrammed National Park Service funds for a cooperative study with the State of Alaska to explore options for the location of campgrounds, trails, and other visitor facilities along the Stampede Road alignment, thus funding the North Access Visitor Facilities Study.</p>

<p>2002</p>	<p>In January, the Alaska State Legislature overrode the Governor’s veto of HB 244 that provides for “a grant of state land to the Denali Borough for a railroad and utility corridor and a railroad development project” across state land in the Denali Borough.</p> <p>In March, the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) and the Denali Borough signed a Transfer of Responsibilities Agreement (TORA). With the TORA, the Denali Borough assumed the primary responsibility for completing the North Access Reconnaissance Study (NARS).</p>
<p>2003</p>	<p>In January, the Denali Borough conducted agency/public scoping meetings for the North Access Reconnaissance Study (NARS). The Phase 1 Report was completed in April.</p> <p>Governor Murkowski, in the State of the State Address in January 2003, stated, “we need a northern route into the 6-million-acre Denali National Park, the state’s number one tourist destination.”</p> <p>On March 12, 2003, the Denali Borough Assembly passed “a resolution expressing the need for the Denali Borough to wait for the results of the North Denali Access Study before proceeding with the provisions of HB 244.”</p> <p>The <i>Draft Backcountry Management Plan</i> identified Denali North Access as an issue and impact topic considered but not addressed: “Pending further decisions and actions on north access, the backcountry areas that might be affected by north access proposals need to be managed the same as the rest of the park additions.”</p> <p>In June, the National Park Service and Alaska Department of Natural Resources co-hosted public open houses to request comments for the North Access Visitor Facilities Study.</p>
<p>2004</p>	<p>In March, the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOTPF) and the Denali Borough signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) that essentially nullified the 2002 TORA. Through the MOA, the DOTPF resumed primary responsibility for completing the North Access Reconnaissance Study with the Denali Borough serving in an advisory capacity.</p> <p>The Draft North Access Visitor Facilities Study was released for public comment in April. Public comments were reviewed and the study was finalized in August.</p>

The information in the above table was derived from NPS and DNR management documents and archival information. Refer to the references for a listing of those documents.

Study Approach: Scenarios, Working Assumptions, and Locations

This study explores locations for visitor facilities along a 90-mile corridor that begins at the George Parks Highway just north of Healy and ends in the Kantishna/Wonder Lake area.

Scenarios

Ideas for a new north access route have included both a road and a railroad; therefore, the visitor facilities study explores locations along the Stampede Road alignment for both a road scenario and a railroad scenario. A third scenario explores locations, or ideas, for visitor facilities that could enhance the existing situation and recreational activities that presently occur within the study area, whether or not a north access road or railroad is developed. Since this is a study, as opposed to an environmental impact statement with a proposed action and a range of alternatives, it is not necessary or required to include a “no action alternative.”

For each scenario, the Stampede Road alignment (as defined on page 1) serves as the common reference point from which locations for visitor facilities are explored. The Stampede Road alignment is identified as the reference point because the Congressional language specifically states “Stampede Road alignment” and, in the absence of a site-specific route proposal, exploring locations away from the Stampede Road alignment would be haphazard at best. The locations identified in this study, however, could serve as potential destinations along a transportation corridor even if the majority of a road or railroad route did not follow the Stampede Road alignment.

Working Assumptions

Having outlined the scenarios and defined the Stampede Road alignment as the reference point for the study, some working assumptions became necessary. Recognizing that two of the three scenarios are based on “what if” situations, the study needed assumptions to establish some parameters within each scenario. As much as practical, the working assumptions of this study are consistent with NPS and DNR regulations, agency policies, and approved management plans. The working assumptions are outlined within the scenario discussions.

Locations Explored and Discussed throughout the Visitor Facilities Study

Congress directed the National Park Service to conduct a cooperative study with the State of Alaska to “explore options for locations for campgrounds, trails, and other visitor facilities along the Stampede Road alignment.” The locations identified and discussed in this study incorporate ideas submitted by members of the public during the comment period.

Refer to the map on page 12 for an overview of the locations identified along the 90-mile corridor. These locations, or “nodes of development,” encompass a general area as opposed to a specific geographical site defined by acreage and definitive boundaries. Visitor facilities within these nodes of development could serve travelers along a road or railroad transportation corridor. A comprehensive environmental analysis would be required for access to and development at any of these locations

Each location has some natural and/or cultural feature(s) that could be highlighted through interpretation or facility design. For example, the location that encompasses the Stampede Mine would logically

highlight the history of mining and the unique qualities and contributions of the Stampede Mine. Although a proposal for a north access road or railroad would likely follow a route other than the Stampede Road alignment, the Stampede Mine area and other locations identified in the study could serve as potential destinations along either a road or railroad transportation corridor, even if the majority of the route did not follow the Stampede Road alignment.

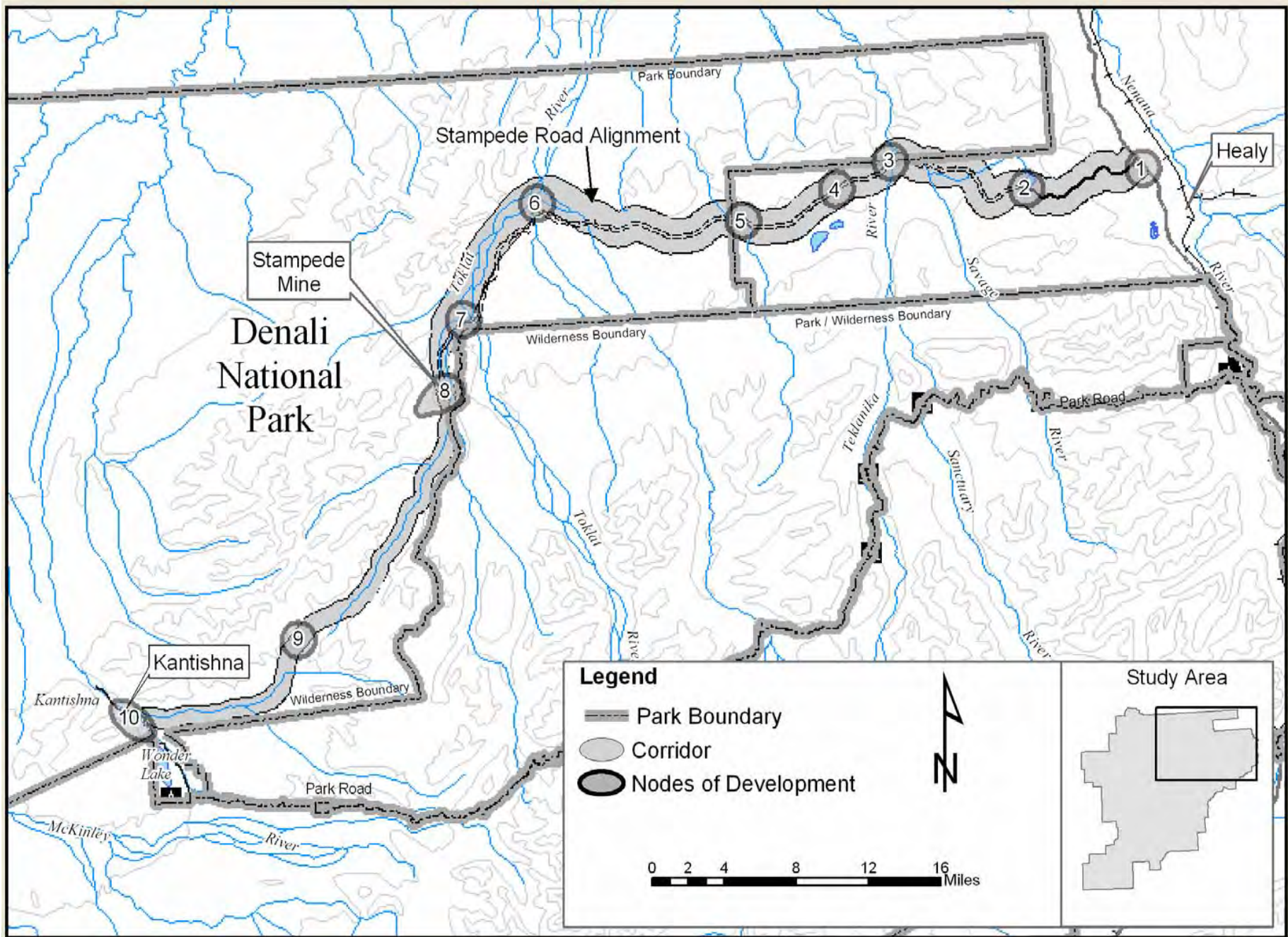
The locations discussed throughout the study are listed in the table below. Not all locations, however, apply to each scenario. The types of visitor facilities associated with each location are dependent on the type and extent of transportation access. Facility considerations, such as costs and design factors, are outlined in appendix C. See appendix D for a discussion of the criteria considered in selecting these locations.

Table – Locations for Visitor Facilities Study

LOCATION #	LOCATION NAME	MILEPOST (approximate)
1	George Parks Highway	0
2	Eight Mile Lake	8
3	Savage/Teklanika Rivers	18
4	Teklanika-Sushana Divide	21
5	Sushana River	28
6	Toklat-East Fork	42
7	Toklat-Clearwater Fork	51
8	Stampede Mine	56
9	Myrtle-Willow Divide	75
10	Kantishna/Wonder Lake	90

The map on the following page provides an overview of the locations along the Stampede Road alignment. A brief description and topographical map of each location are found on pages 13-22. The scenario discussions begin on page 23 and provide greater detail about the types of visitor facilities considered at each location.

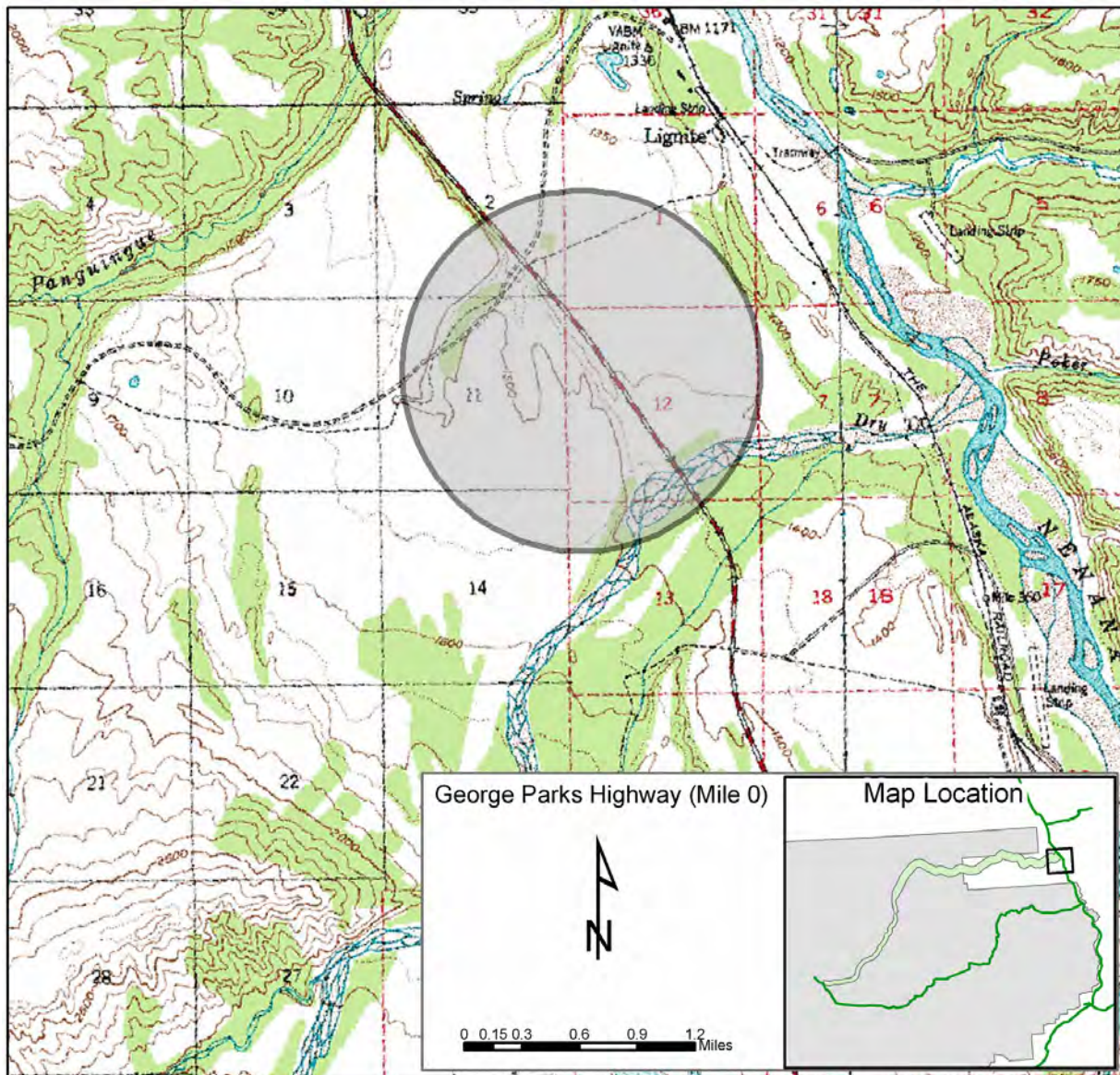
Refer to appendix E for an overview of the natural and human conditions found within the study area.



Map – Locations along the Stampede Road alignment

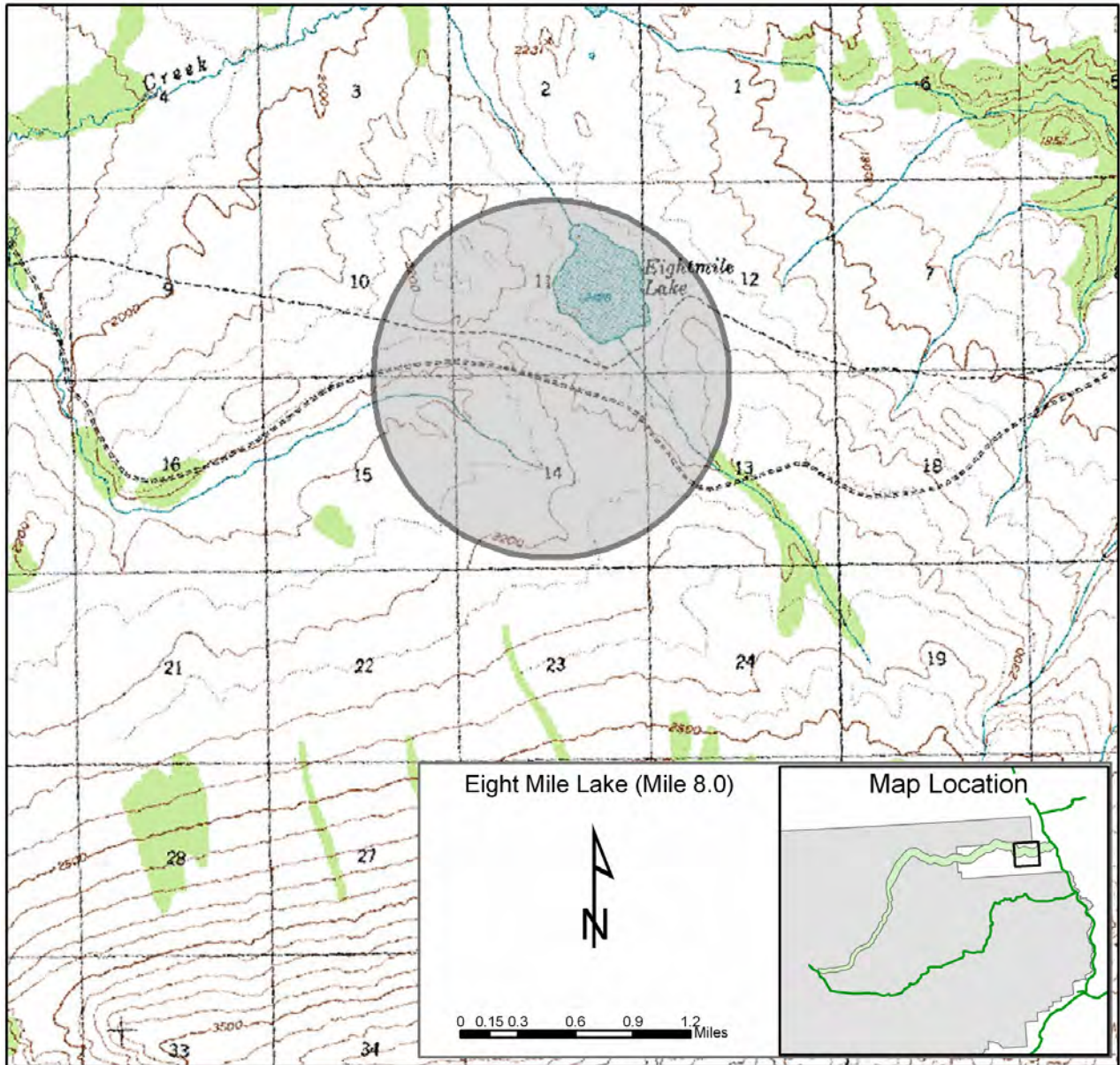
Location 1 – George Parks Highway (Mile 0)

Location 1 refers to a general area located along the George Parks Highway near the intersection of the highway and Stampede Road, possibly north of Dry Creek and south of the Stampede Road. A facility along the George Parks Highway would provide convenient access for both northbound and southbound traffic. This location has been identified as a potential visitor contact facility/information center for both the road and railroad scenario. This location could feature interpretation of the nearby archeological site along Dry Creek and become a destination for visitors interested in the region's cultural history. The facility for the railroad scenario would require a larger "footprint" on the land than would a visitor/welcome center for the road scenario because land would be needed to park trains overnight and for loading and unloading passengers. Also, the railroad scenario would require a larger parking area because visitors boarding a train would need to park their vehicles for a longer time period than visitors stopping by a visitor/welcome center for information and then leaving in their vehicles to drive a 90-mile road.



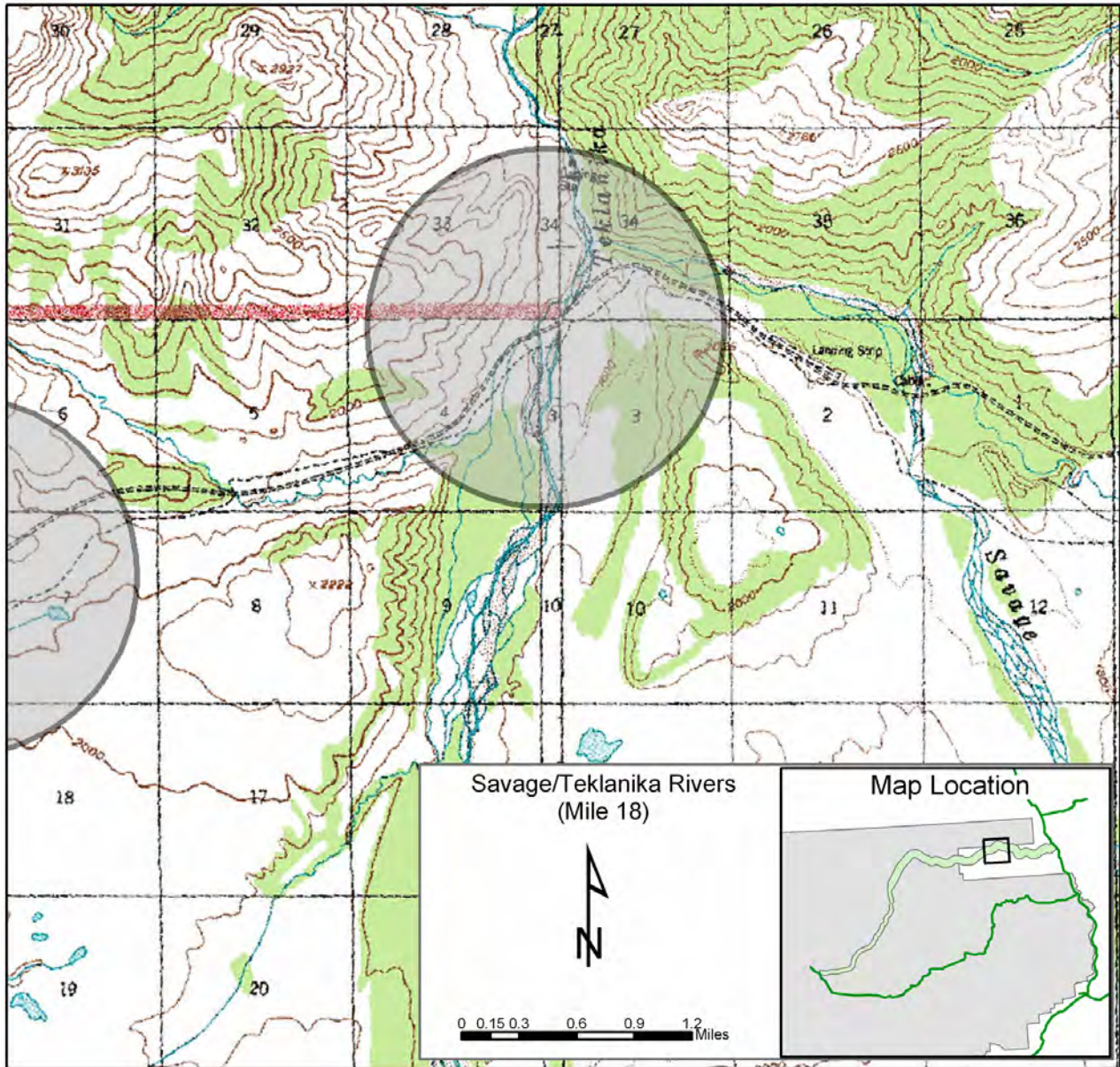
Location 2 – Eight Mile Lake (Mile 8.0)

Eight Mile Lake marks the end of the maintained portion of the Stampede Road and currently serves as an undeveloped parking area/trailhead and dispersed camping location. This area is identified under all three scenarios. Visitor facilities could include camping facilities, improved parking, restroom facilities, and lake access. Communication and coordination with landowners would be necessary for any development.



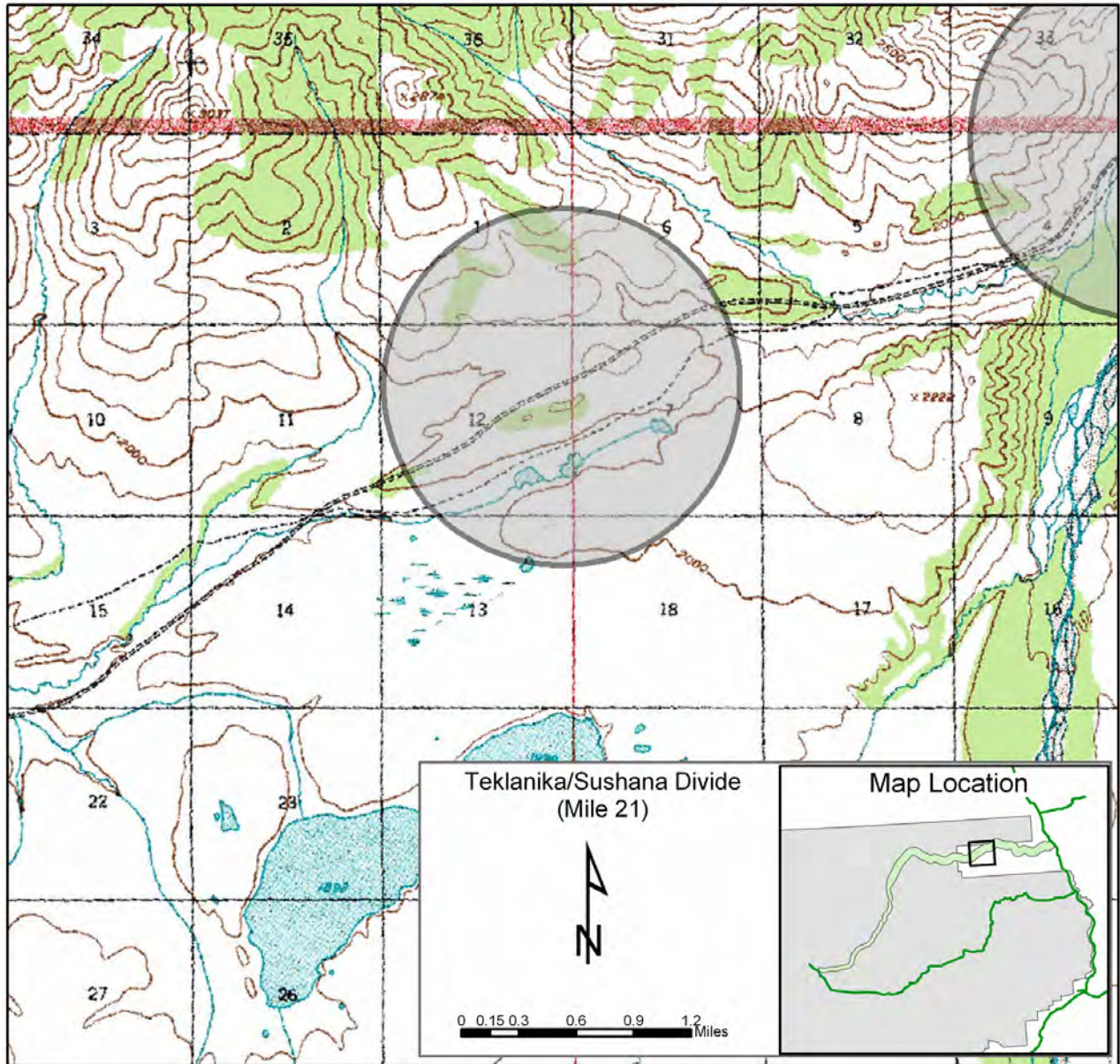
Location 3 – Savage/Teklanika Rivers (Mile 18)

The Savage and Teklanika Rivers were identified by the public as possible locations for visitor facilities. Some of the comments pertaining to this area, which encompasses the confluence of the Savage and Teklanika Rivers, included the following facilities: a parking area, a picnic area, restrooms, an interpretive loop trail to a historic cabin site, a trailhead for a destination/connector trail with the existing Savage River Trail within the national park, a campground, and designated dispersed campsites. This location includes both state and national park lands.



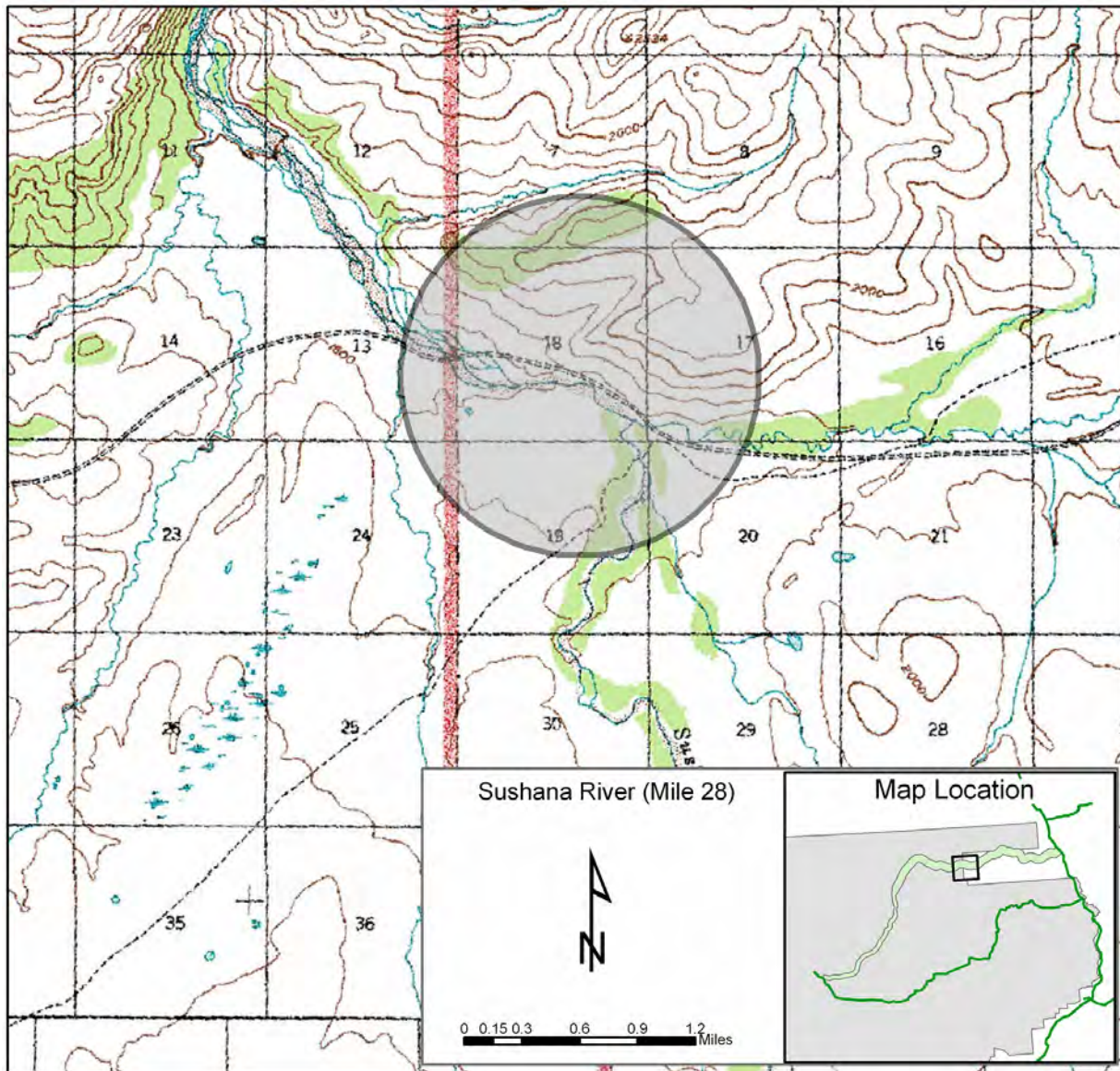
Location 4 – Teklanika-Sushana Divide (Mile 21)

After crossing the Teklanika River, the road alignment rises to an elevation of 2000 feet and an expansive view of the landscape provides the visitors with a distant view of Mount McKinley, approximately 80 miles to the southwest. Visitor facilities at this location could highlight the scenic vista and interpret the surrounding landscape.



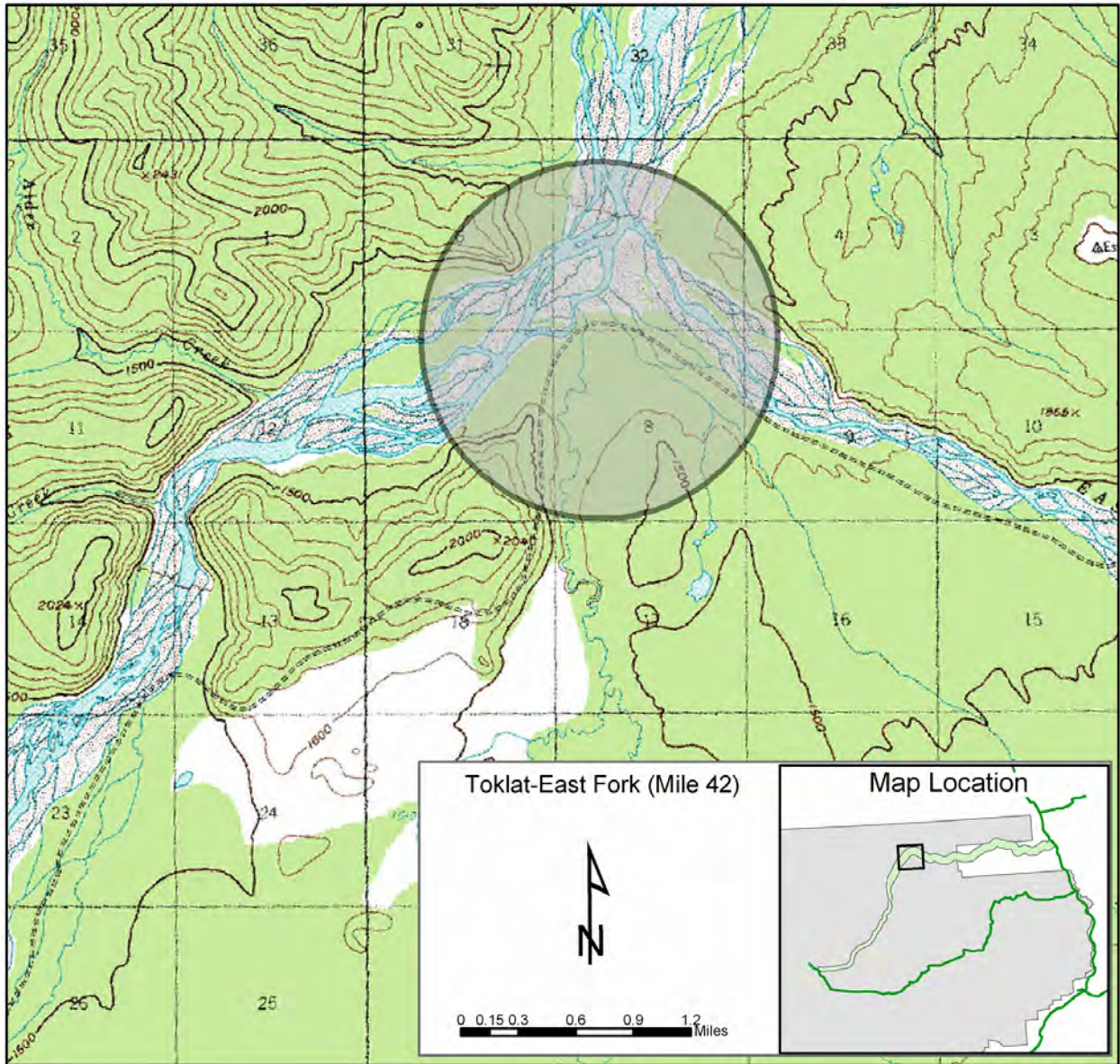
Location 5 – Sushana River (Mile 28)

The Sushana River location would be the farthest west location for facility development on state land. This area offers opportunities to explore the Sushana River and two remote lakes. This location includes the former Fairbanks City bus mentioned in Jon Krakauer's 1996 book, *Into the Wild*, that told of Chris McCandless' fateful trip to Alaska. While opinions about the bus's future vary, the bus has nonetheless become a noted landmark and destination attraction for many people. The Stampede Road alignment enters national park land at the west end of this location.



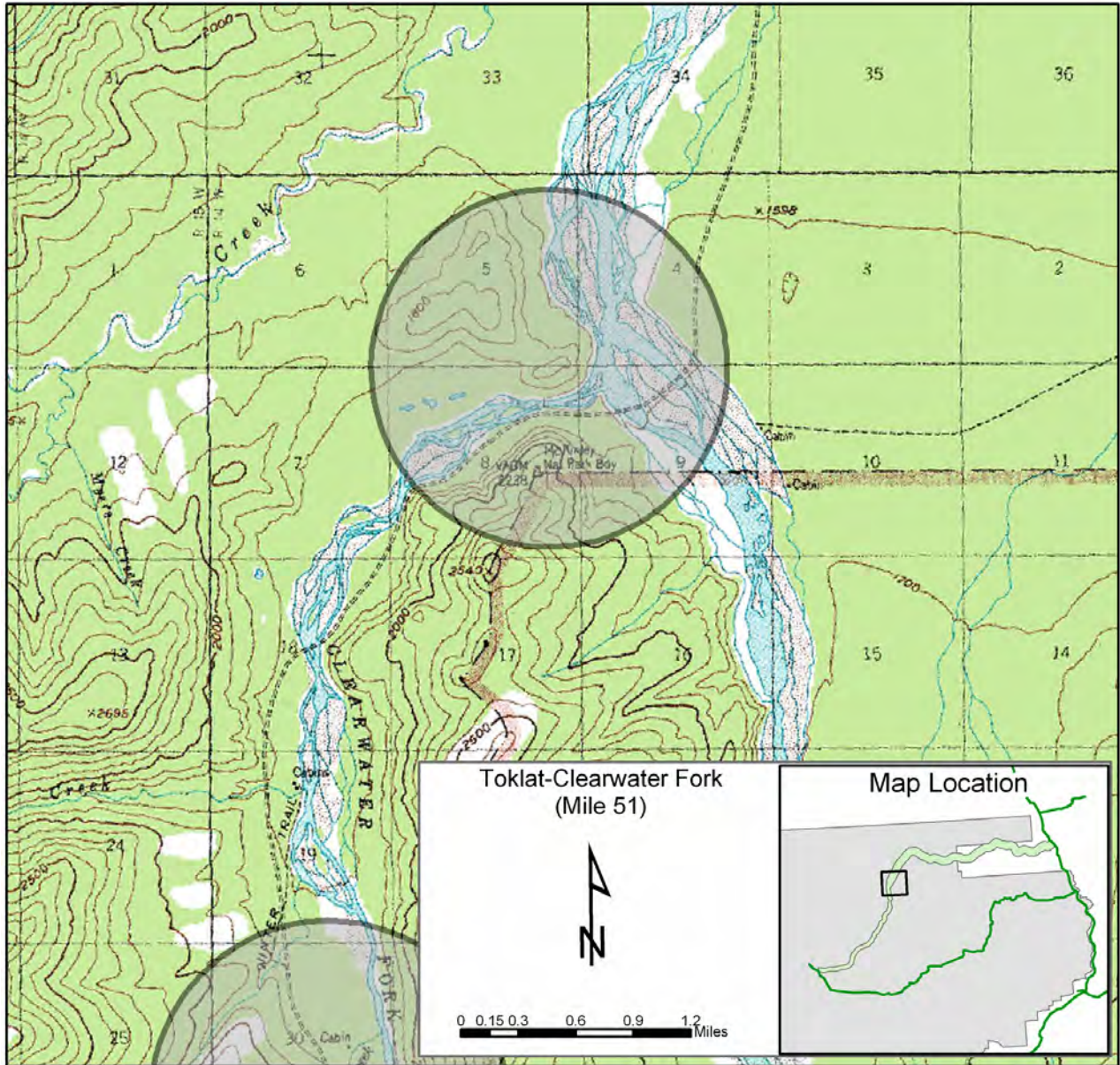
Location 6 – Toklat-East Fork (Mile 42)

The confluence of the Toklat and East Fork Rivers would offer visitors an opportunity to explore and hike along the rivers. Visitor facilities along a road corridor could include a wayside with restroom facilities, interpretive signs and a hiking trail.



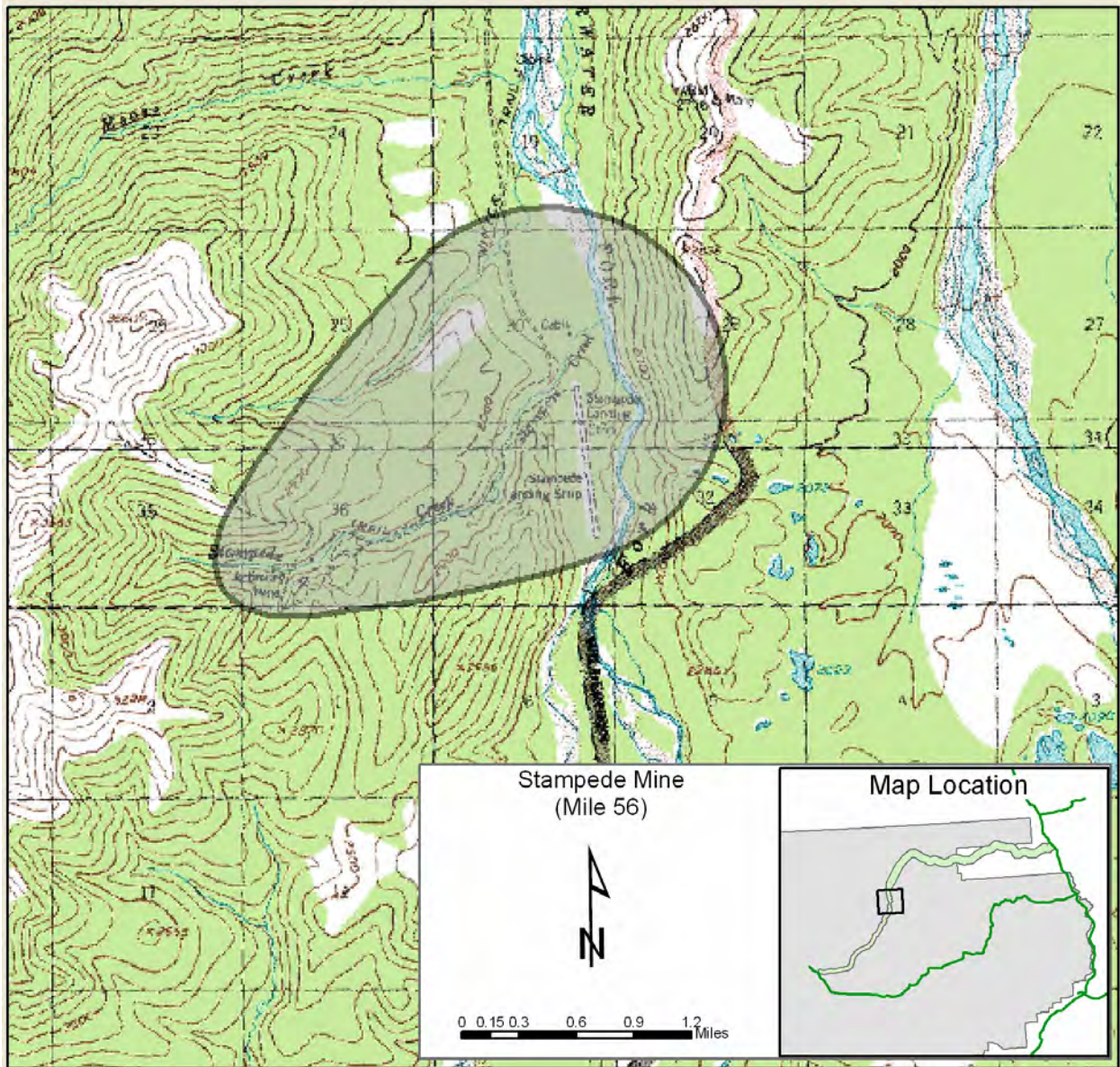
Location 7 – Toklat-Clearwater Fork (Mile 51)

Visitor facilities at a river crossing near the Toklat and Clearwater Fork Rivers could provide another rest stop and viewing area for visitors traveling along a road corridor.



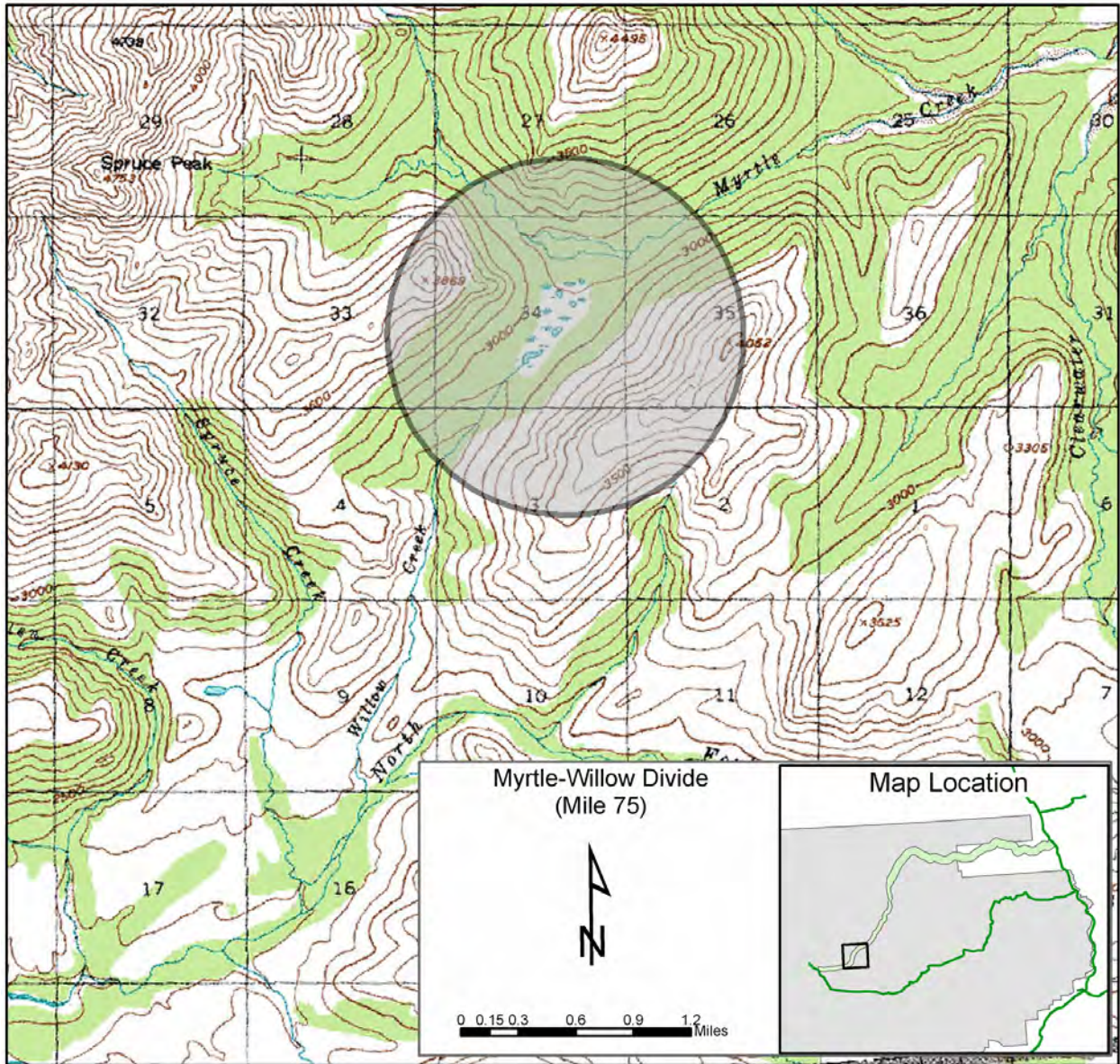
Location 8 – Stampede Mine (Mile 56)

The historic Stampede Mine offers various interpretive opportunities. Visitor facilities could highlight the history of mining and the unique qualities and contributions of the Stampede Mine to the region’s history. Communication and coordination with the two private inholders would be necessary for any development.



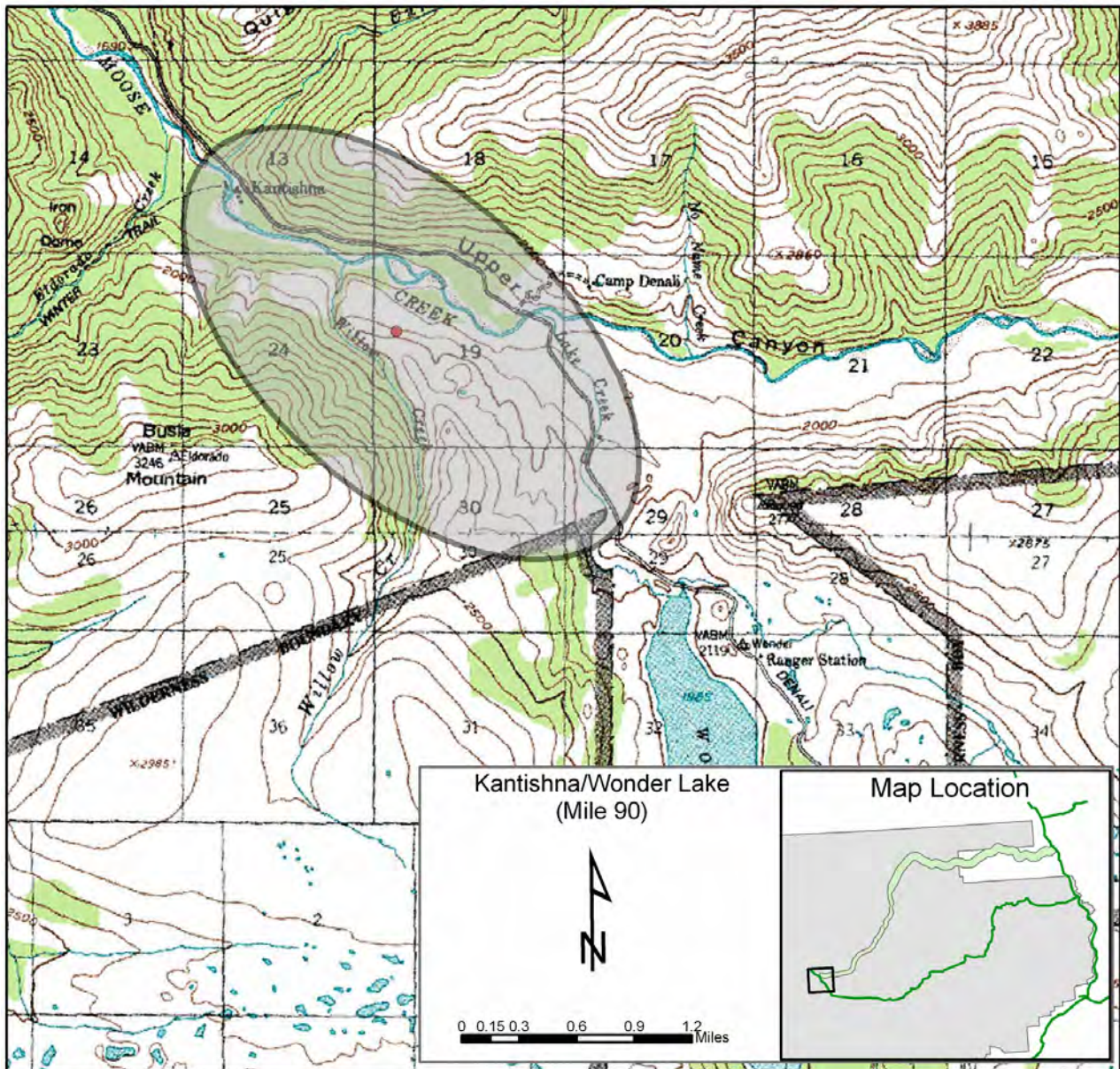
Location 9 – Myrtle-Willow Divide (Mile 75)

A spectacular view of Mount McKinley occurs at the Myrtle-Willow Divide. This viewpoint suggests a prime location for a stop along a road or railroad to allow travelers an opportunity to enjoy the view and take photos.



Location 10 – Kantishna/Wonder Lake (Mile 90)

The Kantishna/Wonder Lake area would be the terminus for a new road and a railroad. Kantishna is comprised of numerous historic mine sites and interesting natural features, such as the Quigley Cabin, Little Annie Mine and Wickersham Dome. Lodging and flightseeing services are offered during the summer season. The existing facilities at Wonder Lake consist of a Ranger Station that serves as a small information center, a 28-site campground for tent campers only (no private vehicle access) and a trail system. Expansion of the existing facilities/services and some new development would likely be needed to meet the needs of the increased number of visitors traveling to the Kantishna/Wonder Lake area via a new road or railroad.



Scenario: Road

Introduction

The road scenario explores locations for visitor facilities that would serve travelers along a 90-mile road. In order to explore locations for visitor facilities along a road corridor, working assumptions were developed.

Working Assumptions

1. Among the three scenarios, a 90-mile road corridor would require the greatest number of locations for visitor facilities. As such, the road scenario incorporates all the key locations with an understanding that additional locations may be necessary for less-developed visitor facilities, such as additional waysides and scenic pull-offs. Without an actual route identified on the ground, the locations identified in this study for visitor facilities may or may not be desirable or applicable to future studies pertaining to a north access road proposal, but are discussed as the potentially viable locations given the framework of speculation surrounding this study.
2. The existing park road would continue to operate in the same manner as it does today, consistent with regulations that guide vehicle use limits and preserve the road character and the unique visitor experience. Since the majority of today's bus traffic turns around at the Eielson Visitor Center, the environmental consequences of increased bus traffic on the existing park road between Eielson and Wonder Lake/Kantishna would need to be analyzed.
3. The entire length of a new road would be a two-way road and would be available for vehicle traffic to and from Kantishna. Vehicle restrictions or use limits could become necessary in the future.
4. The Denali National Park bus system (shuttle and tours) would incorporate a new road to Kantishna into their visitor transportation services, thereby expanding current operations.
5. The portion of a new road constructed within the national park boundary would not be maintained during winter, but would remain open while weather conditions permitted safe travel. Once snow and ice posed a safety hazard, the road would be closed within the boundary of the national park, similar to the manner in which the park road is managed past the Denali Headquarters at mile 3.
6. When the portion of a road on national park lands is closed in winter due to weather conditions, the road corridor could be available for winter recreation.
7. Increasing private vehicle access to Kantishna would require establishing vehicle restrictions in the Kantishna area, resulting in the need for a large parking area and an expanded visitor contact/orientation station at the terminus of a new north access road.

The road system in the Kantishna/Wonder Lake area would likely need improvement to accommodate large numbers of private vehicles.

8. Increased visitor access to Kantishna and Wonder Lake would result in a greater demand and/or need for additional overnight facilities (i.e., campgrounds, hostel, cabins).
9. Any increased demand for overnight lodging in Healy would be provided by local private businesses.
10. Both Federal and State agencies would seek partnerships with the private sector to provide services to the public, such as in the operation and maintenance of campgrounds.
11. A National Park Service entrance fee (consistent with the National Park Service fee system) or a state fee may be charged to private vehicles traveling a new road to the Kantishna/Wonder Lake area. A multi-agency road pass could be developed.

Locations and Types of Visitor Facilities along a New Road

The locations, and their associated visitor facilities, along a 90-mile road corridor are discussed below.

Location 1 – George Parks Highway

A new 90-mile road corridor to the Wonder Lake/Kantishna area would require some type of visitor information center to welcome visitors, provide information, and orient people to the roadway and points of interest. A Visitor Center could be located along the west side of the highway, near the intersection of the George Parks Highway and the Stampede Road. The visitor center could provide similar services to those being offered at the facilities near the entrance area of Denali, such as providing interpretive programs, issuing backcountry permits, selling bus tickets, and making reservations for campgrounds and the visitor transportation system. Ample parking for automobiles, RVs and buses would be provided. A location along the George Parks Highway would provide easy access for visitors traveling from the north or the south, and would accommodate bus tours as well. Visitor facilities along the George Parks Highway could include:

- Visitor Information/Welcome Center
- Defined parking area for automobiles, RVs and buses
- Developed campground for tent and RV campers
- Dispersed campsites
- Cultural and natural interpretation
- Hiking trails
- Picnic tables and shelter
- Intermodal transportation center for park buses, hotel buses, and private vehicles

Location 2 – Eight Mile Lake

Eight Mile Lake marks the end of the maintained portion of today's Stampede Road and currently serves as an undeveloped parking area/trailhead and dispersed camping location. This area could continue to serve as a trailhead and parking area with consideration given to

expanding visitor facilities to serve travelers along a 90-mile road. Visitor facilities at Eight Mile Lake could include:

- Defined parking area for automobiles, RVs and buses
- Developed campground accommodating tent and RV campers
- Dispersed campsites
- Restroom facilities
- Trailhead for a trail system:
 - East trailhead for a Lake-to-Lake Trail (Eight Mile Lake to Wonder Lake)
 - Trail paralleling Stampede Road alignment to Savage River and beyond
 - Trails north and south to nearby ridges and foothills
- Wayside
- Interpretive signing/wildlife viewing
- Picnic tables and/or shelter
- Lake access
- Fee station (alternate location for a fee station is Location 4 – Sushana River)
- Public use cabins/ hut-to-hut system

Communication and coordination with nearby landowners would be necessary prior to any future improvement or development at Eight Mile Lake.

Location 3 – Savage/Teklanika Rivers

River waysides could be developed, historic cabin site(s) and historic use of the area could be interpreted, and opportunities for wildlife viewing (i.e., moose and beaver) could be highlighted near the confluence of the Savage and Teklanika Rivers. This stop along a 90-mile road could consider the following visitor facilities:

- Defined parking area for automobiles, RVs and buses
- Dispersed campsites or a developed campground
- Restroom facilities
- Trailhead for a trail system:
 - Connector to a Lake-to-Lake Trail (Eight Mile Lake to Wonder Lake)
 - Trail south to connect with the existing Savage River Trail in Denali National Park
 - Small interpretive loop trail to nearby historic cabins and mining sites
- Wayside
- Interpretive signing
- Picnic tables and/or shelter
- River access

Location 4 – Teklanika-Sushana Divide

After crossing the Teklanika River, the road alignment rises to an elevation of 2000 feet and an expansive view of the landscape provides the visitors with a distant view of Mount McKinley, approximately 80 miles to the southwest. Visitor facilities at this location could highlight the scenic vista and interpret the surrounding landscape and include:

- Wayside
- Restroom facilities
- Interpretive signing

- Picnic tables
- Hiking trail
- River access

Location 5 – Sushana River

The Sushana River location would be the farthest west location for facility development on state land. This location includes the bus mentioned in Jon Krakauer’s 1996 book, *Into the Wild*, that told of Chris McCandless’ fateful trip to Alaska. While opinions about the bus’s future vary, the bus has nonetheless become a noted landmark and destination attraction for many people.

Visitor facilities at this location could include:

- Defined parking area for automobiles, RVs and buses
- Dispersed campsites or a developed campground
- Restroom facilities
- Trailhead for a trail system:
 - Connector to a Lake-to-Lake Trail (Eight Mile Lake to Wonder Lake)
 - Destination trail to “the bus”
 - Destination or loop trail to the two, remote lakes (Sushana Lakes) on state land
- Interpretive signing
- Picnic tables and/or shelter
- Public use cabins
- Fee station (alternate location for a fee station is Location 2 – Eight Mile Lake)
- River access

Location 6 – Toklat-East Fork

The confluence of the Toklat and East Fork Rivers would offer visitors an opportunity to explore and hike along the rivers. Visitor facilities along a road corridor could include:

- Wayside
- Restroom facilities
- Interpretive signing
- Picnic tables
- Hiking trail

Location 7 – Toklat-Clearwater Fork

Visitor facilities at a river crossing near the Toklat and Clearwater Fork Rivers could provide another rest stop and viewing area for visitors traveling along a road corridor. Visitor facilities could include:

- Wayside
- Restroom facilities
- Interpretive signing
- Picnic tables
- Hiking trail

Location 8 – Stampede Mine

The historic Stampede Mine would offer the visitor a unique, interpretive opportunity. Visitor facilities could highlight the unique qualities and contributions of the Stampede Mine as it

pertains to Alaska's mining history. The Stampede Mine airstrip would continue to be open to the public and may require improvements. The following types of visitor facilities could be considered:

- Defined parking area for automobiles, RVs and buses
- Dispersed campsites or a small, developed campground
- Restroom facilities
- Trailhead for a trail system:
 - Connector to a Lake-to-Lake Trail (Eight Mile Lake to Wonder Lake)
 - Interpretive loop trail through historic Stampede Mine site (hardened trails around historic buildings)
- Interpretive signing
- Picnic tables and/or shelter
- Airstrip-associated facilities, such as an information kiosk and interpretive signing
- A small administrative facility (i.e., a ranger cabin/welcome center) could also be considered

Location 9 – Myrtle-Willow Divide

A spectacular view of Mount McKinley occurs at Myrtle-Willow divide. This viewpoint would suggest a prime location for a wayside to allow travelers the opportunity to enjoy the view and take photos. Visitor facilities at this scenic viewpoint could include:

- Defined parking area for automobiles, RVs and buses
- Restroom facilities
- Interpretive signs
- Viewing platform
- Small, interpretive loop trail
- Trailhead for a trail to Kantishna and connection to a Kantishna Hills trail system
- Small visitor center (similar to Eielson Visitor Center located at mile 66 along the park road)

Location 10 – Kantishna/Wonder Lake

The Kantishna/Wonder Lake area would be the terminus for a new road. With the increase of private vehicle access from a new road, the existing facilities and infrastructure would not meet the needs of increased traffic and visitors. The existing facilities could be expanded, such as the ranger station/welcome center, parking, campground, and trail system. As the existing Wonder Lake Campground currently allows only tent camping, any campground expansion or new development would likely need to accommodate both vehicle and RV camping. The need to provide for increased visitors could also lead to opportunities for private development or expansion of existing accommodations in Kantishna.

Kantishna is comprised of numerous historic mine sites and interesting natural features, such as the Little Annie Mine and Wickersham Dome. A trail system stemming from the terminus of a new road could connect to these and other interesting sites in and around Kantishna. The Fannie Quigley cabin has been restored by the National Park Service and could be the starting point for a Kantishna interpretive/historic trail system.

Visitor facilities at the terminus of a 90-mile road include:

- Defined parking area for automobiles, RVs and buses

- Developed campground to accommodate automobiles and RVs
- Additional restroom facilities
- Trailhead for trail system
 - Connector to a Lake-to-Lake Trail (Eight Mile Lake to Wonder Lake)
 - Connector to existing trails at Wonder Lake and Kantishna
- Interpretive signing
- Picnic tables and/or shelter
- Expanded Visitor Information Center
- Intermodal transportation center for park buses, hotel buses, and private vehicles
- Restaurant/Food Service Facility

Note: This study does not assess the cumulative effects of a road proposal; however, it is important to note that the Kantishna/Wonder Lake area presently offers a remote experience that would be changed by a new road and its associated increase in vehicles and visitors. An analysis would be necessary to assess the costs and benefits of changing the remote character and experience that is currently sought at Kantishna and Wonder Lake.

Additional Locations Needed along a Road Corridor

As stated in the first assumption, a 90-mile road corridor scenario would require a greater number of locations for visitor facilities than the other two scenarios. In addition to the locations identified and discussed above, additional locations may be appropriate to provide for additional waysides, scenic vistas, and wildlife viewing opportunities for travelers. Identifying locations for these visitor facilities would be more prudent in conjunction with a formal road proposal. However, waysides along a road would likely occur at least every ten miles. These waysides or pull-offs could include parking and restroom facilities and could also include interpretive signs and short loop trails.

Administrative Support Facilities

A 90-mile road with visitor facilities would require administrative support facilities and additional infrastructure. A road camp, similar to the Toklat Road Camp along the existing park road, would need to be developed to provide road and facility maintenance operations and house employees. At least one seasonal ranger station for law enforcement and emergency services would need to be constructed and staffed. Gravel acquisition locations for construction and maintenance would need to be identified. A comprehensive analysis of administrative needs, support facilities, staffing, and their associated costs would need to be completed in conjunction with any future road or facility proposals. These and other administrative facilities would be addressed in an environmental impact statement.

Refer to appendix C for a discussion of additional visitor facility factors, such as costs and design considerations.

Scenario: Railroad

Introduction

The railroad scenario explores locations for visitor facilities that would service travelers along a 90-mile railroad corridor between the George Parks Highway just north of Healy and the Kantishna/Wonder Lake area. In order to explore locations for visitor facilities along a railroad corridor, some working assumptions were developed.

Working Assumptions

1. A railroad would require fewer visitor facility locations than a road, but the individual “footprint” of the visitor facilities for a railroad, at both the beginning and the terminus of the railroad, would be greater than those for a road.
2. The Stampede Road would continue to be maintained to Eight Mile Lake.
3. Although a north access railroad would likely follow a route other than the Stampede Road alignment, the Stampede Mine area and other locations identified in the study could serve as potential destinations along a railroad transportation corridor.
4. The existing park road would continue to operate in the same manner as it does today, keeping with the same management guidelines and vehicle use limits. This assumption is based on the desire to preserve the road character and the unique visitor experience that the road currently provides.
5. Rail service and the existing bus system (shuttle and tours) could offer a combined train-bus trip for visitors. Since the majority of today’s bus traffic turns around at the Eielson Visitor Center, the environmental consequences of increased bus traffic on the existing park road between Eielson and Wonder Lake/Kantishna would need to be analyzed.
6. The terminus for a railroad would be in the vicinity of the Kantishna/Wonder Lake area.
7. An interchange facility at the terminus of the railroad would facilitate passenger transfers from bus travel to train travel, and vice versa.
8. A railroad to the Kantishna/Wonder Lake area would be a single rail system with the potential for operating more than one train per day. Sidings (short stretches of railroad track used to enable trains on the same line to pass) would be located at intervals along the railroad route to allow for trains to pass one another along the single track.
9. A railroad system could establish a system similar to the existing visitor transportation system, providing both tour and shuttle services for passengers. A “whistle stop” type of system could be established to allow hikers and backpackers the opportunity to get on and off the train at established locations along the railroad corridor.

10. The rail system would be capable of transporting up to 700 people per train.
11. The operation and maintenance of a railroad would offer opportunities for private-public partnerships.
12. Any increased demand for overnight lodging in Healy would be provided by local private businesses.
13. Both Federal and State agencies would seek partnerships with the private sector to provide services to the public, such as in the operation and maintenance of campgrounds.
14. Increased visitor access to Wonder Lake and Kantishna would result in a higher demand and/or need for additional overnight facilities (i.e., campground, hostel, cabins).
15. Coordination would be needed between the existing bus reservation/ticketing system and a train reservation system.

Locations and Types of Visitor Facilities along a Railroad

The locations, and their associated visitor facilities, along a 90-mile railroad corridor are discussed below.

Location 1 – George Parks Highway

A new 90-mile railroad corridor to the Kantishna/Wonder Lake area would require some type of visitor information center to orient people to the train trip and sell tickets. Similar to the road scenario, a visitor center/train depot could be located near the intersection of the George Parks Highway and the Stampede Road to welcome visitors and provide information. The visitor center could issue backcountry permits and make reservations. Ample overnight parking for automobiles, RVs and buses would be provided. A location along the George Parks Highway would provide easy access for visitors traveling from the north or the south, and would accommodate bus tours. An interchange with the current Alaska Railroad could be considered for this scenario. Visitor facilities along the George Parks Highway could include:

- Visitor Information/Welcome Center/Train Depot
- Defined parking area for automobiles, RVs and buses
- Developed campground for tent and RV campers
- Cultural and natural interpretation
- Hiking trails
- Picnic tables and shelter

Location 2 – Eight Mile Lake

Eight Mile Lake marks the end of the maintained portion of today's Stampede Road and currently serves as an undeveloped parking area/trailhead and dispersed camping location. This location could be the first train stop for travelers departing from the George Parks Highway. Since Eight Mile Lake would still be accessible via the Stampede Road, visitor facilities could be similar to those considered for the road scenario and include:

- Defined parking area for automobiles, RVs and buses

- Developed campground accommodating tent and RV campers
- Dispersed campsites
- Restroom facilities
- Trailhead for a trail system:
- Wayside
- Interpretive signing/wildlife viewing
- Picnic tables and/or shelter
- Lake access
- Public use cabins/hut-to-hut system

Communication and coordination with nearby landowners would be necessary prior to any future improvement or development at Eight Mile Lake.

Location 3 – Savage/Teklanika Rivers

Visitor facilities at the Savage and Teklanika Rivers, if any, would be fewer than those for a road corridor. This area could be a train stop for travelers. No major visitor facilities are envisioned at this location under this scenario, however, a trail system could be considered.

Location 4 – Teklanika-Sushana Divide

A train stop at this location could provide visitors with an opportunity to enjoy the view of Mount McKinley, approximately 80 miles southwest, and connect to a state trail system.

Location 5 – Sushana River

The Sushana River location would be the farthest west location for facility development on state land. This location provides an opportunity to provide a remote, overnight experience for travelers. Visitor facilities serving train travelers at this location could include:

- Dispersed campsites, a developed campground, public use cabins, or a lodge
- Restroom facilities
- A train stop allowing travelers the opportunity to recreate in the area:
 - destination trail to “the bus”
 - destination or loop trail to the two remote lakes (Sushana Lakes) on state land
- Interpretive signing
- Picnic tables and/or shelter

Location 6 – Toklat-East Fork

Location 6 is not applicable to the railroad scenario. Visitor facility development, including trails, would be consistent with the Denali Backcountry Management Plan.

Location 7 – Toklat-Clearwater Fork

Location 7 is not applicable to the railroad scenario. Visitor facility development, including trails, would be consistent with the Denali Backcountry Management Plan.

Location 8 – Stampede Mine

The historic Stampede Mine would offer the visitor a unique, interpretive stop along the railroad corridor and, therefore, a train stop could be located near the Stampede Mine. Similar to the road scenario, visitor facilities could highlight the unique qualities and contributions of the Stampede

Mine as it pertains to Alaska's mining history. The Stampede Mine airstrip would continue to be open to the public and may require improvements. The following types of visitor facilities could be considered:

- Dispersed campsites or a small, developed campground
- Restroom facilities
- Trail to the Stampede Mine that connects to an interpretive trail through the historic mine site
- Interpretive signing
- Picnic tables and/or shelter
- Small information/welcome center
- Airstrip-associated facilities, such as an information kiosk and interpretive signing
- A small administrative facility (i.e., a ranger cabin) could also be considered

Location 9 – Myrtle-Willow Divide

A spectacular view of Mount McKinley occurs at Myrtle-Willow Divide. If the train did not cross the divide at this location, a trail to the Myrtle-Willow Divide's mountain vista (or a similar vista) could be developed. The train could stop at a trailhead and allow visitors an opportunity to disembark and hike to this location. Visitor facilities at this scenic viewpoint could include:

- Restroom facilities
- Trailhead and trail between the railroad stop and the mountain vista
- A trail to Kantishna
- Interpretive signs
- Viewing platform

Location 10 – Kantishna/Wonder Lake

The Kantishna/Wonder Lake area would be the terminus for a railroad. With the capacity of up to 700 passengers per train, the existing facilities would not meet the needs of the increased number of visitors. A system would need to be established to coordinate the transfer of travelers from the bus system to the train, and vice versa. This "interchange facility" could incorporate a small visitor center to orient visitors and provide information and interpretive programs.

Additional overnight facilities would likely be necessary to meet the increased demand from the train travelers. Some potential options for additional overnight accommodations include: developing a new campground, providing railcar lodging by parking "sleepercars" throughout the season at the end of the railroad tracks, or adding a hostel or cabins. The need to provide for increased visitors could also lead to opportunities for private development or expansion of existing accommodations in Kantishna.

Kantishna is comprised of numerous historic mine sites and interesting natural features, such as the Quigly Cabin, Little Annie Mine and Wickersham Dome. A trail system stemming from the terminus of a railroad could connect to these and other interesting sites in and around Kantishna. The Fannie Quigley cabin has been restored by the National Park Service and could be the starting point for a Kantishna interpretive/historic trail system.

Wonder Lake is located approximately five miles from Kantishna and, on a clear day, offers a spectacular view of Mount McKinley. The existing facilities at Wonder Lake include a Ranger

Station that serves as a small visitor information center, a 28-site campground for tent campers only (no private vehicle access), and a trail system. A railroad could result in the expansion of existing facilities (i.e., additional campsites, improved welcome center) and some new development (i.e., additional restroom facilities) to meet the needs of the increased number of visitors.

Visitor facilities at the terminus of a 90-mile railroad could include:

- An interchange facility to facilitate passenger transfers from bus travel to train travel, and vice versa
- Defined parking area for buses to facilitate passenger transfers
- Campground and/or overnight lodging facilities
- Additional restroom facilities
- Trail system connecting to existing trails at Wonder Lake and Kantishna
- Interpretive signing
- Picnic tables and/or shelter
- Expanded Visitor Information Center
- Restaurant/Food Service Facility

Note: This study does not assess the cumulative effects of a railroad proposal; however, it is important to note that the Kantishna/Wonder Lake area presently offers a remote experience that would be changed by a railroad and its associated increase in visitors. An analysis would be necessary to assess the costs and benefits of changing the remote character and experience that is currently sought at Kantishna and Wonder Lake.

Refer to appendix C for a discussion of additional visitor facility factors, such as costs and design considerations.

Scenario: Existing Situation

Introduction

As stated previously, ideas for a new north access route suggest a 90-mile road or railroad between the George Parks Highway just north of Healy to the Kantishna/Wonder Lake area. Because there has been no in-depth environmental analysis or decision regarding a north access road or railroad proposal, the visitor facilities study considers a scenario that addresses the existing situation regardless of whether or not a new north access route is developed.

This scenario considers the activities currently occurring and the existing condition of the resource, and whether or not visitor facilities could enhance the existing situation. The main focus of this scenario is on the state land along the first portion of the Stampede Road alignment, but also includes the Stampede Mine and Kantishna. Management of the national park lands would be guided by the 1986 *General Management Plan* as amended by the backcountry management plan, which is being drafted at the time of this writing.

Current uses of the state land within the study area include: camping, horseback riding, dog mushing, cross-country skiing, hunting, trapping, fishing, hiking, mountain biking and riding ATVs and snowmobiles. Other uses include material sales (i.e., sand and gravel), scientific study, a grazing permit, settlement and private land development. Public comments submitted during for this study indicated that people have a strong attachment to this area. Many commenters wanted the area left just as it is today; however, several commenters expressed a concern for resource impacts occurring in the area. For example, trails are widening in wet areas and user-created trails appear to be increasing, which can cause increased soil erosion and damage vegetation and wetlands. Several people suggested ways in which the existing situation could be enhanced, such as adding restrooms, designating camping areas (dispersed campsites to developed campgrounds), developing and maintaining a trail system, and providing interpretive opportunities.

Working Assumptions

1. Rehabilitating and maintaining existing trails could improve the existing resource conditions and recreational experiences without increasing facility development.
2. The Stampede Road would continue to be maintained to Eight Mile Lake.
3. Some level of management is needed along the Stampede Road alignment to assess and monitor resource conditions.
4. Based on the amount of use, some visitor facilities (i.e., restroom facilities, designated camp sites) could reduce impacts to the environment.
5. Both Federal and State agencies would seek partnerships with the private sector to provide services to the public, such as in the operation and maintenance of campgrounds.

List of Ideas for the Existing Situation

Location 1 – George Parks Highway

Small, low-scale facilities could highlight interpretation of the nearby archeological site along Dry Creek and become a stop along the George Parks Highway for visitors interested in the region's cultural history. Visitor facilities could include:

- Interpretive signing
- Short hiking trail
- Small parking area

Location 2 – Eight Mile Lake

Eight Mile Lake marks the end of the maintained portion of the Stampede Road and currently serves as an undeveloped parking area/trailhead and dispersed camping location. Several commenters suggested various ways to enhance the conditions in this area. The following possibilities could be explored:

- Improved parking area
- Restroom facilities
- Designated campsites or a small campground
- Designated trailhead and trail system
- Interpretive opportunities
- Picnic tables and/or shelter
- Lake access
- Recreation public use cabins (hut-to-hut system) on state land

Communication and coordination with nearby landowners would be necessary prior to any future improvement or development at Eight Mile Lake.

Location 3 – Savage/Teklanika Rivers

The Savage and Teklanika Rivers were identified by the public as areas for possible visitor facilities. Some of the facility ideas for the road scenario could be considered for this scenario. Ideas for visitor facilities include:

- Dispersed campsites
- Interpretive signing/wildlife viewing opportunities
- Designated trails to nearby historic cabins and mining sites
- Public use cabin(s) as part of a hut-to-hut system
- Footbridge(s) to allow safe river crossings

Location 4 – Teklanika-Sushana Divide

After crossing the Teklanika River, the road alignment rises to an elevation of 2000 feet and an expansive view of the landscape provides the visitors with a distant view of Mount McKinley, approximately 80 miles to the southwest. This vista could be incorporated into a designated trail system to afford recreational trail users the opportunity to experience the landscape. Therefore, visitor facilities could include:

- Designated trail along this divide

- Interpretive opportunities/signing

Location 5 – Sushana River

The Sushana River location would be the farthest west location for facility development on state land. This location includes the former Fairbanks City bus mentioned in Jon Krakauer’s 1996 book, *Into the Wild*, that told of Chris McCandless’ fateful trip to Alaska. While opinions about the bus’s future vary, the bus has nonetheless become a noted landmark and destination attraction for many people. Ideas for visitor facilities at this location could include:

- Destination trail to the Sushana River and the bus (part of a greater, designated trail system)
- Dispersed campsites
- Interpretive signing
- Public use cabin(s) as part of a hut-to-hut system

Location 6 – Toklat-East Fork

Not applicable to this scenario. Visitor facility development, including trails, would be consistent with the Denali Backcountry Management Plan.

Location 7 – Toklat-Clearwater Fork

Not applicable to this scenario. Visitor facility development, including trails, would be consistent with the Denali Backcountry Management Plan.

Location 8 – Stampede Mine

The historic Stampede Mine has the potential to be a destination location for backcountry users traveling from either Eight Mile Lake or Kantishna. The Stampede airstrip allows for visitor access by small planes. Similar to the other two scenarios, visitor facilities could highlight the unique qualities and contributions of the Stampede Mine as it pertains to Alaska’s mining history. The Stampede Mine airstrip would continue to be open to the public and may require improvements. The following types of visitor facilities could be considered:

- Dispersed campsites
- Interpretive loop trail through historic Stampede Mine site
- Interpretive signing
- Picnic tables and/or shelter
- Airstrip-associated facilities, such as an information kiosk and interpretive signing
- A small administrative facility (i.e., a ranger cabin) could also be considered

Location 9 – Myrtle-Willow Divide

Not applicable to the Enhancement Scenario. Visitor facility development, including trails, would be consistent with the Denali Backcountry Management Plan.

Location 10 – Kantishna/Wonder Lake

Kantishna is the terminus of the existing park road. Regardless of whether a second road or a railroad is constructed to provide additional access, some enhancements could be made to better serve the visitors. Kantishna is comprised of numerous historic mine sites and interesting natural features, such as the Quigley Cabin, Little Annie Mine and Wickersham Dome. The Quigley Cabin has been restored by the National Park Service and could be the starting point for a Kantishna interpretive/historic trail system. Lodging and flightseeing services are offered during

the summer season. The existing facilities at Wonder Lake consist of a Ranger Station that serves as a small information center, a 28-site campground for tent campers only (no private vehicle access) and a trail system. The following enhancements could be considered:

- Designated trail system (hiking and mountain biking)
- Interpretive signing (cultural and natural interpretation)
- Picnic tables and/or shelters
- Additional restroom facilities
- Information kiosks

Additional Ideas to Enhance the Existing Situation

- Form a community/interagency recreation and trails planning work group to assess needs and develop a recreation plan and multiple-use trails system.
- Conduct a “visioning” workshop with the community and user groups to identify/define a “desired future condition” for the state lands along the Stampede Road.
- Inventory and map all trails branching from the Stampede Road alignment. The National Park Service obtained recent aerial photographs of the Stampede Road alignment from Eight Mile Lake to the park’s eastern boundary that could provide an overview of the existing condition.
- Establish a designated, multiple-use trail system, addressing both motorized and non-motorized trails.
- Explore public-private partnership opportunities to provide services and/or visitor facilities to enhance the existing condition while avoiding needless duplication of services.
- Conduct a community survey to gather information on the current level and types of uses within the study area.

Summary of Scenarios: Optional Locations and Visitor Facilities

	Road Scenario	Railroad Scenario	Existing Situation
Location 1 - George Parks Highway	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visitor Info Center • Parking area • Tent/RV Campground • Dispersed campsites • Interpretation • Hiking trails • Picnic tables/shelter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visitor Info Center/ Train Depot • Parking area • Tent/RV campground • Interpretation • Hiking trails • Railroad Interchange Facility • Picnic tables/shelter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interpretive signing • Hiking trail • Parking area
Location 2 - Eight Mile Lake	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parking area • Tent/RV campground • Dispersed campsites • Restroom facilities • Trailhead & trails • Wayside • Interpretive signing • Picnic tables/shelter • Lake access • Fee station • Public use cabin(s) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parking area • Tent/RV campground • Dispersed campsites • Restroom facilities • Trailhead & trails • Wayside • Interpretive signing • Picnic tables/shelter • Lake access • Public use cabin(s) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved parking • Restroom facilities • Campground • Dispersed campsites • Trailhead and trails • Interpretive opportunities • Picnic tables/shelter • Lake access • Public use cabin(s)
Location 3 - Savage/Teklanika Rivers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parking area • Campground • Dispersed campsites • Restroom facilities • Trailhead & trails • Wayside • Interpretive signing • Picnic tables/shelter • River access 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trails 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dispersed campsites • Interpretive signing • Wildlife viewing opportunities • Trails • Public use cabin(s)
Location 4 - Teklanika-Sushana Divide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wayside • Restroom facilities • Interpretive signing • Picnic tables • Hiking trail • River access 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trails 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designated trail • Interpretive opportunities
Location 5 - Sushana River	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parking area • Campground • Dispersed campsites • Restroom facilities • Trailhead & trails • Interpretive signing • Picnic tables/shelter • Public use cabins • Fee station • River access 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Camping, cabins, lodge • Restroom facilities • Train stop • Trailhead and trails • Interpretive signing • Picnic tables/shelter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designated trail • Dispersed campsites • Interpretive signing • Public use cabin(s)

	Road Scenario	Railroad Scenario	Enhancement of the Existing Situation
Location 6 - Toklat-East Fork	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wayside • Restroom facilities • Interpretive signing • Picnic tables • Hiking trail 	<i>Not applicable</i>	<i>Not applicable</i>
Location 7 - Toklat-Clearwater Fork	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wayside • Restroom facilities • Interpretive signing • Picnic tables • Hiking trail 	<i>Not applicable</i>	<i>Not applicable</i>
Location 8 - Stampede Mine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parking area • Campground • Dispersed campsites • Restroom facilities • Trailhead & trails • Interpretive signing • Picnic tables/shelter • Information kiosk • Small admin. cabin 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Campground • Dispersed campsites • Restroom facilities • Train stop • Interpretive loop trail • Interpretive signing • Picnic tables/shelter • Small admin. cabin 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dispersed campsites • Interpretive trail • Interpretive signing • Picnic tables/shelter • Information kiosks • Small admin. cabin
Location 9 - Myrtle-Willow Divide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parking area • Restroom facilities • Interpretive signing • Viewing platform • Trailhead and trails • Small loop trail • Small nature center 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Train stop • Restroom facilities • Trailhead and trails • Interpretive signing • Viewing platform 	<i>Not applicable</i>
Location 10 - Kantishna/Wonder Lake	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parking area • Campground • Restroom facilities • Trailhead & trails • Interpretive signing • Picnic tables/shelter • Visitor Info Center • Intermodal facility • Food service facility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interchange facility • Visitor Info Center • Parking area • Camping/Lodging • Restroom facilities • Trailhead and trails • Interpretive signing • Picnic tables/shelter • Food service facility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designated trail system • Interpretive signing • Picnic tables/shelters • Restroom facilities • Information kiosks

