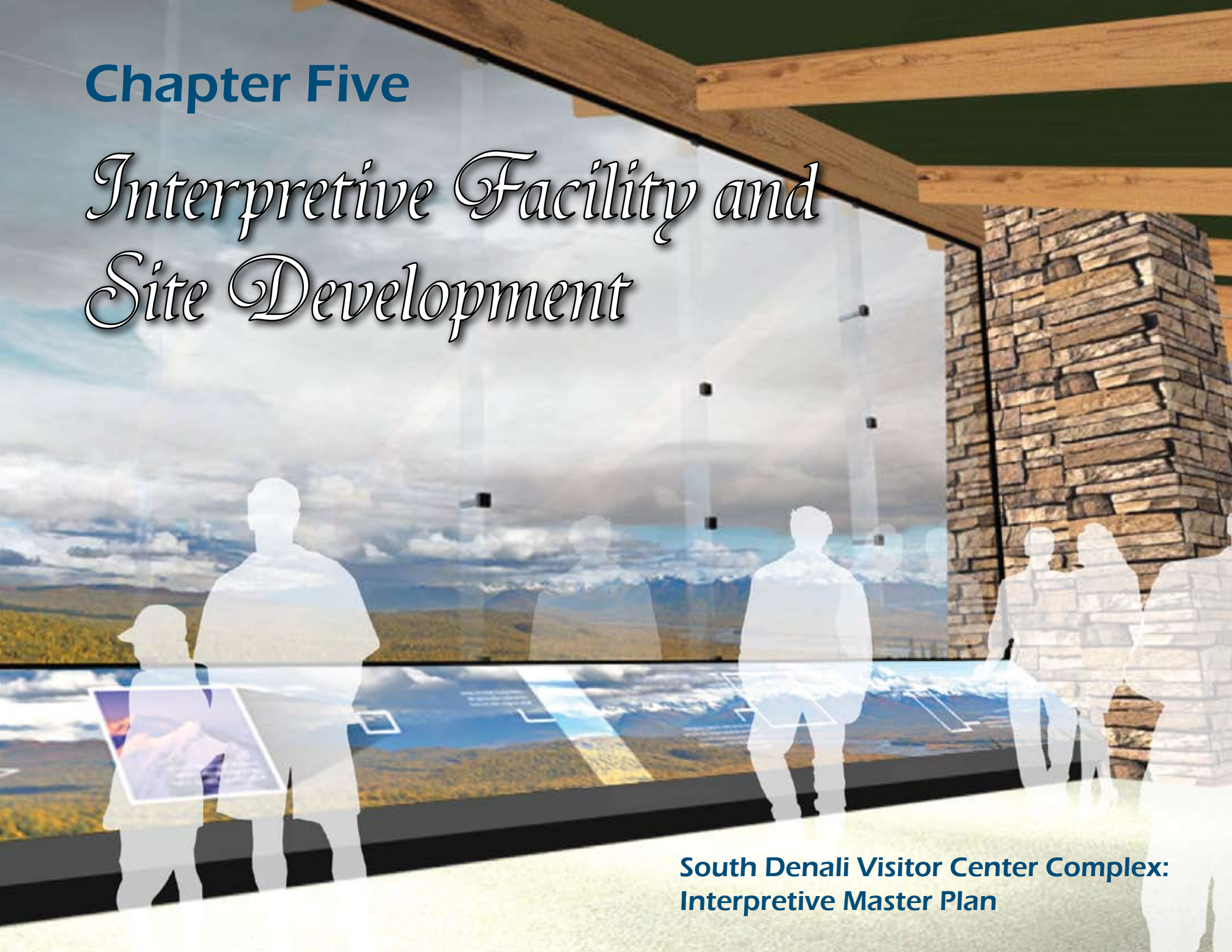


Chapter Five

Interpretive Facility and Site Development



**South Denali Visitor Center Complex:
Interpretive Master Plan**

Visitor Center Site

The South Denali Visitor Center will serve as a gateway and hub to the Alaska outdoors. Visitors who have meaningful experiences at the site will take home not only fond memories, but also a deeper intellectual and emotional understanding of the region. Effective planning of the site and facilities based on interpretation has a positive effect on visitors, garnering future support for the agencies and organizations that manage Alaska's natural resources.

Rationale for Site Location on Curry Ridge

The location of the South Denali Visitor Center must maximize interpretive experiences, while minimizing ecological and visual impacts. The most effective site identified within the study area is a flat, rocky overlook north of Lake 1787 marked with a prominent erratic boulder. The area is just above dense thickets of alder on a north brow of the Ridge.

The following sections describe rationale for this location as an ideal visitor experience.

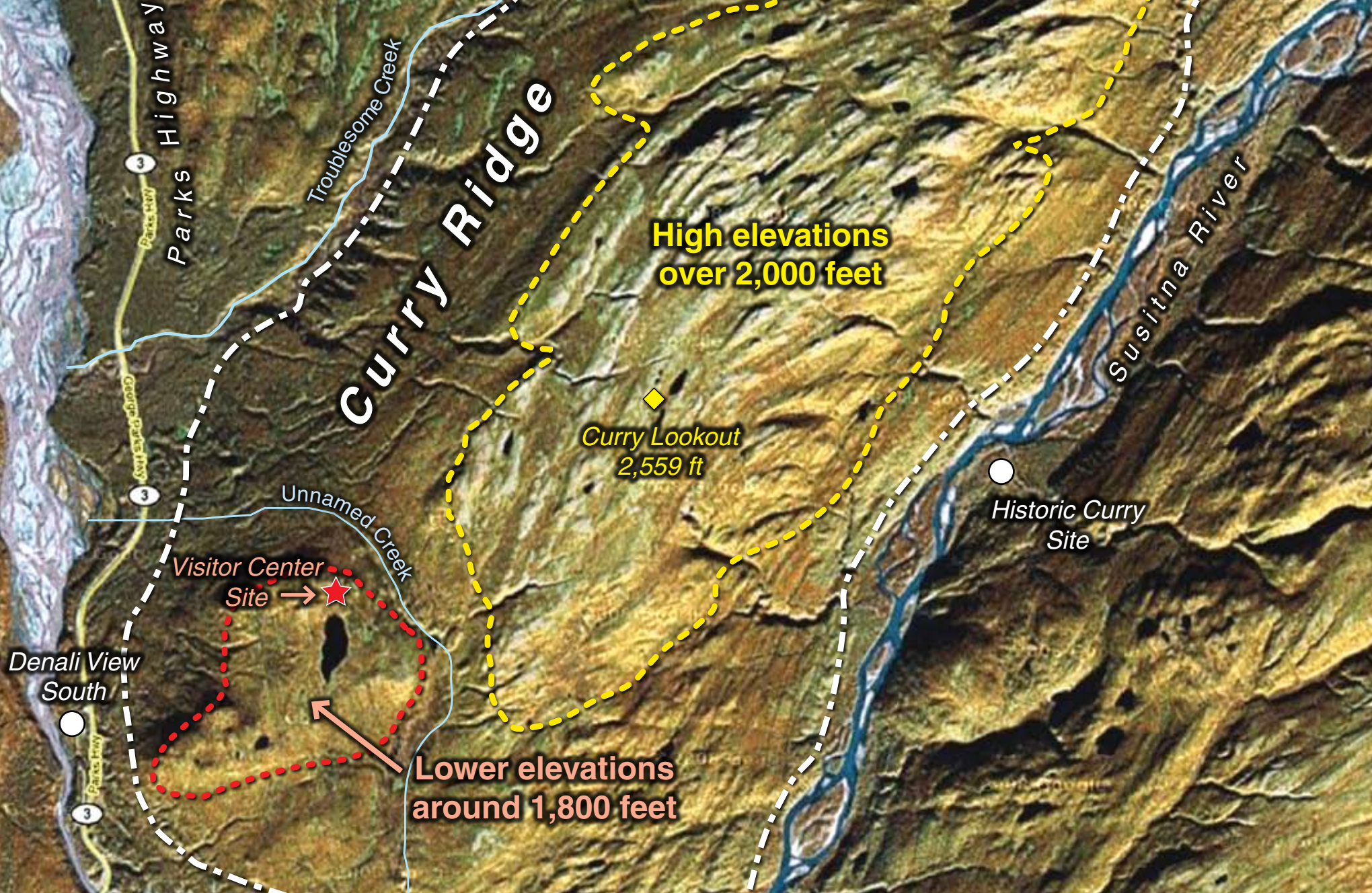
Note: The exact building site location may be subject to change pending geotechnical information, land surveys, and other preliminary studies.

Location on Curry Ridge that reduces impact on the site

The visitor center site is nestled on a small east-west arcing lip of Curry Ridge. It is perched above a valley that divides the Ridge into a small discrete, lower elevation knoll to the southwest (where the visitor center will be constructed) and a long, higher elevation ridge to the northeast.

- Majority of Curry Ridge remains in natural state:** The location of the building on the discrete southwest portion of Curry Ridge leaves the majority of the ridge available in a natural state for backcountry use. Due to its lower elevation, the visitor center will be hidden from view at the Curry Lookout. Only users who continue down the ridge (southwest) from the Lookout will be able to see the visitor center when they approach the descent into the valley. Currently, the most popular backcountry trail in the area is along K'esugi Ridge, where the visitor center will always be hidden from view.
- Resilient habitat around center:** The habitat of this site at about 1,800 feet is a relatively resilient mixture of high brush, alpine tundra, spruce trees, alders, and willows. Dense stands of alder and willow and pockets of wetlands channel hikers along corridors and assist trail planners in directing traffic. The site has the best potential to provide easy access to portions of tundra habitat while protecting it from extreme disturbance. In contrast, the vast tundra at the top of Curry Ridge above 2,000 feet (northeast of the site, separated by a valley) is far more sensitive to disturbance; footprints and snowmobile tracks are evident throughout. The distance from the proposed visitor center site (3-4 miles) and the difficult terrain (steep valleys and slopes), however, will limit the number of visitors who can access this more fragile area.
- Reduced visual impact:** The visitor center's orientation to the north completely hides the building from traffic driving on the Parks Highway south of Denali View South. The rugged, high topography of K'esugi Ridge, Troublesome Creek, and Curry Ridge proper north of the site will also minimize the view of the building for Parks Highway travelers north of Denali View South.

Visitor Center Site in Relation to Greater Curry Ridge



- **Limited access to sensitive Curry Ridge habitats:** The visitor center will serve as a hub to recreational activities in the Curry Ridge backcountry. Its proposed location, however, will effectively limit the number of visitors that can reach the more sensitive alpine tundra habitats. The majority of use will be concentrated around the visitor center area. A few hardy adventurers can choose to follow a rustic trail down the dividing valley slope, over beaver streams, and up a steep incline to access the higher elevations of Curry Ridge and the Curry Lookout.
- **Screened parking areas:** Ample space would be available in close proximity east of this site for shoulder season parking. Topography and spruce trees would help to hide the lot from

the interpretive center, Curry Ridge hiking trails, and the Parks Highway below.

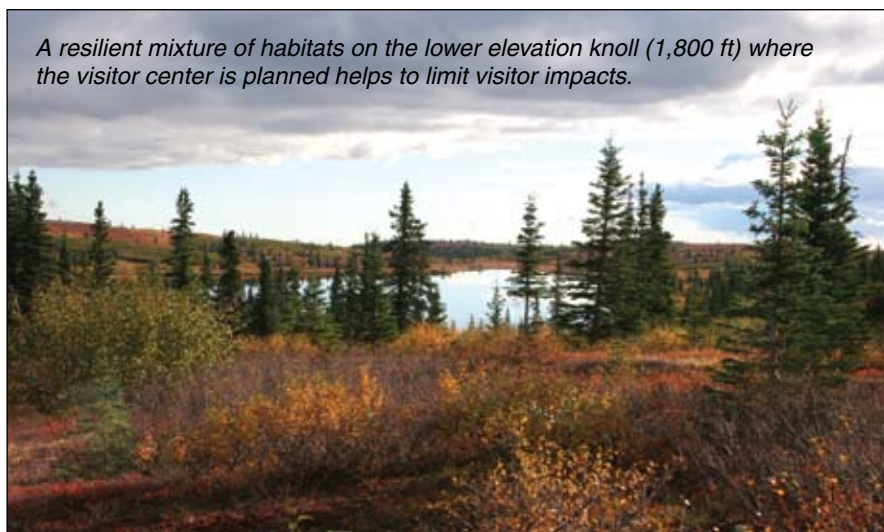
Excellent views of Denali/Mt. McKinley and the Alaska Range

- **Denali:** The site offers spectacular views of Denali, the icon that many seek to “experience.” The view of the mountain here dramatizes Denali’s astounding 18,000 foot vertical elevation above the surrounding landscape. This unique view emphasizes that it has the most dramatic local relief of any of the world’s tallest mountains.
- **Dynamic scenes:** Viewers are engulfed in mountain sunlight, cool air, and panoramic vistas.

Unlike exhibits or audio-visual presentations, this scene is dynamic; storms blow in, eagles soar, or sunlight illuminates the mountain peaks. It can be a rich and serendipitous experience that is more valuable because it cannot be guaranteed.

- **Natural and cultural stories:** The vistas permit people to see the historic routes that expeditions and climbers have taken to Denali. The vantage point provides an overview of geologic landforms like glaciers, outwash plains, rivers, cirques, and U-shaped valleys. This is an excellent staging area to connect viewers to the sweeping stories of geology and the adventures of explorers, pioneers, and climbing expeditions.

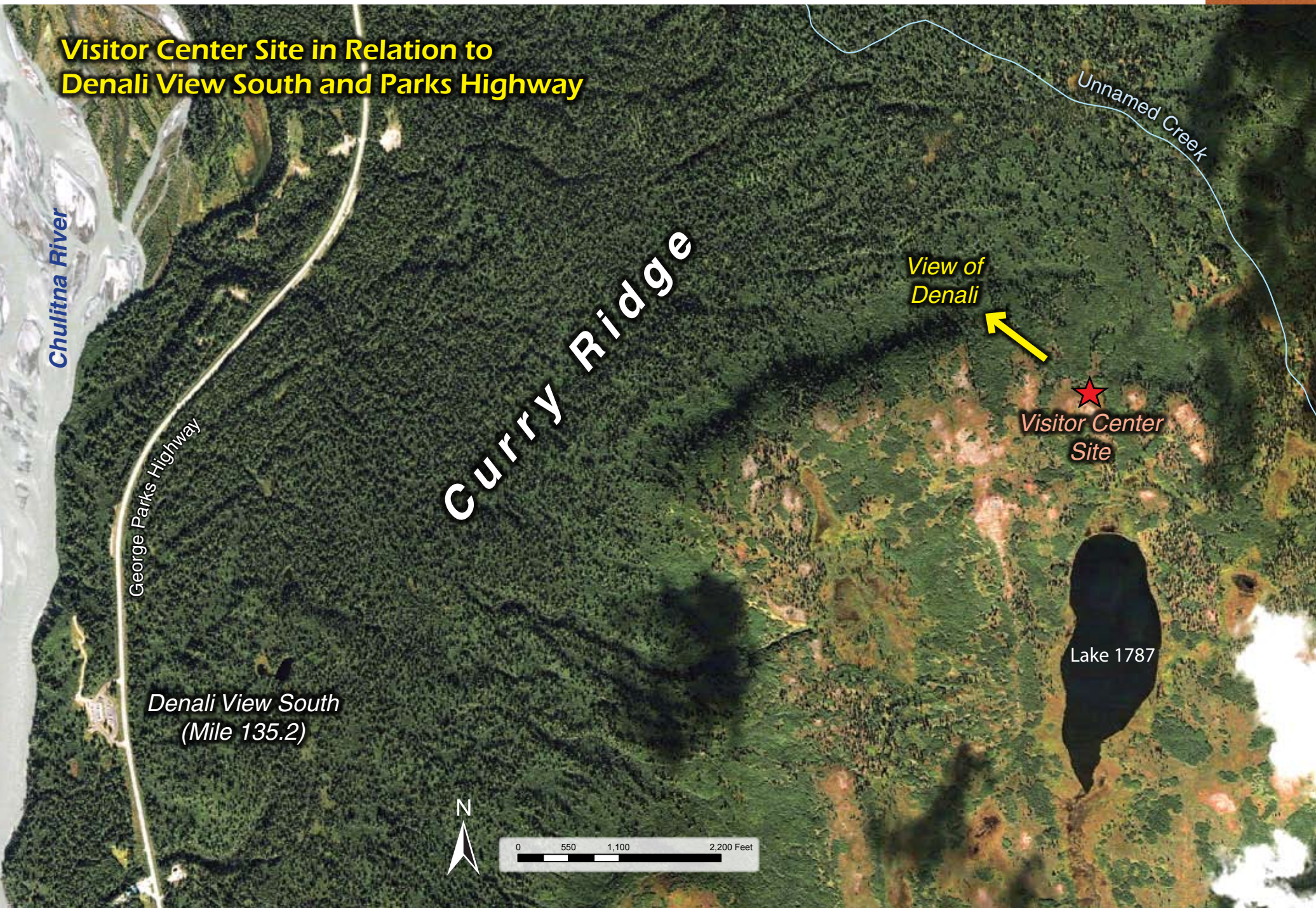
A resilient mixture of habitats on the lower elevation knoll (1,800 ft) where the visitor center is planned helps to limit visitor impacts.

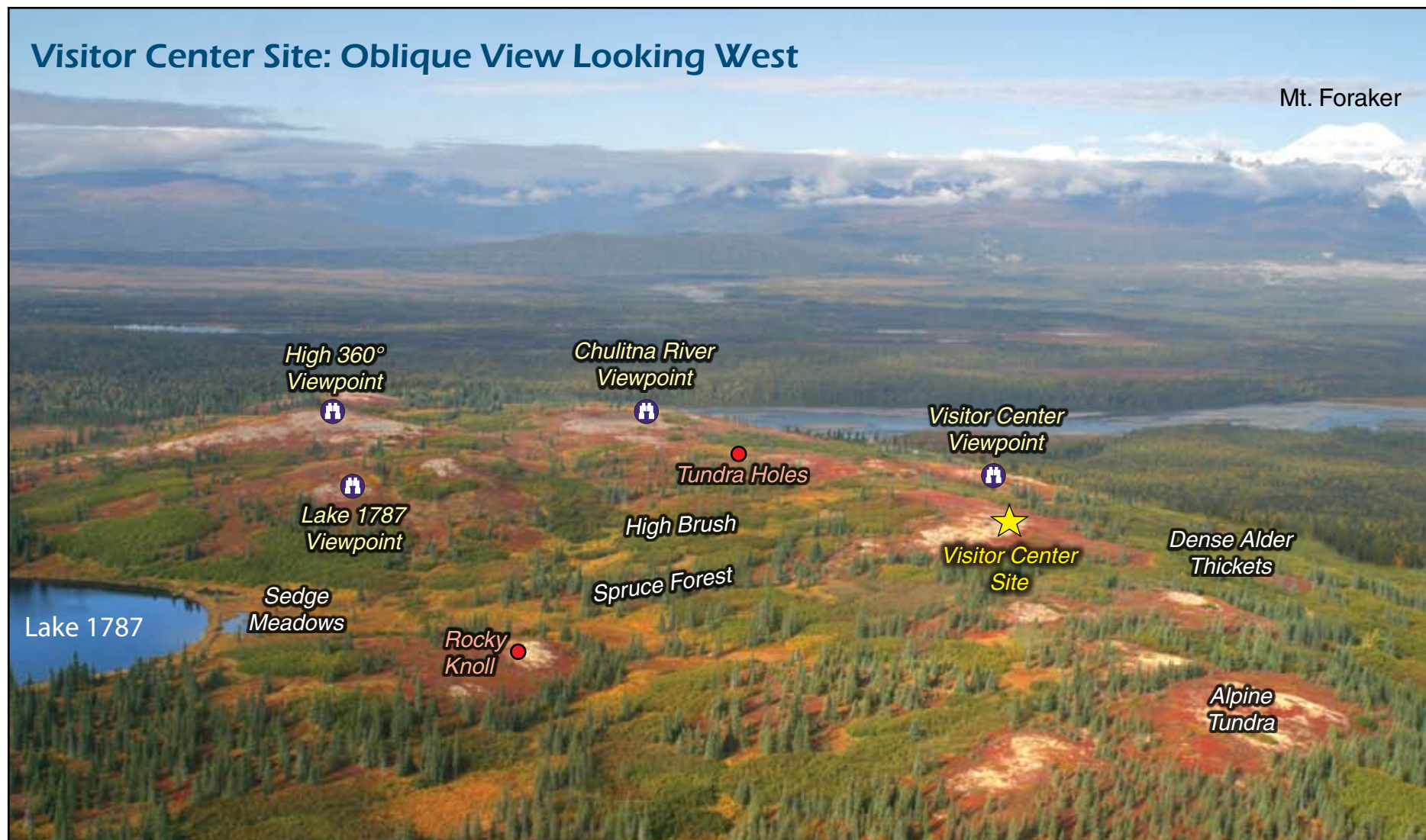


The vast tundra areas on the higher elevations of Curry Ridge (2,500 ft) are more fragile; the isolated knoll of the visitor center site limits access.



Visitor Center Site in Relation to Denali View South and Parks Highway





- **Natural observation areas:** High vantage points will naturally attract visitors who want a better view. Several overlooks are in close proximity to the site, including a knoll west of the site (providing 360 degree panoramic views), a rocky overlook northwest

of Lake 1787 (with an impressive view of the entire lake), and a 1,980 foot hill southeast of Lake 1787 (spectacular view of the lake with Mt. McKinley rising behind). Well constructed trails can be built connecting these high points with

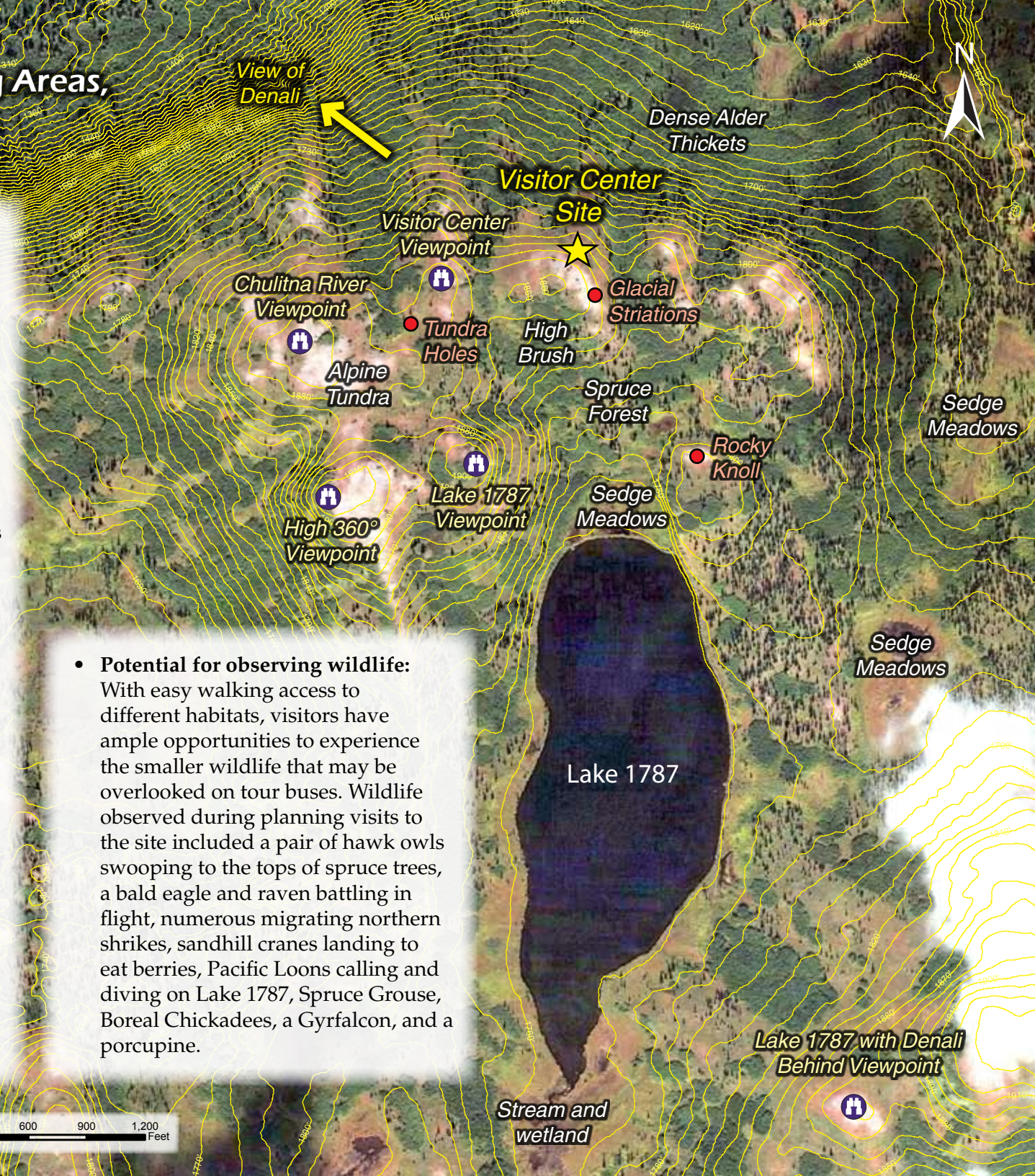
the interpretive facility to avoid trampling of the tundra habitat. In addition, the Parks Highway is less visible from this vantage point than other similar lookouts.

Visitor Center Site, Viewing Areas, and Natural Features

Universal access to diverse habitats and significant resources

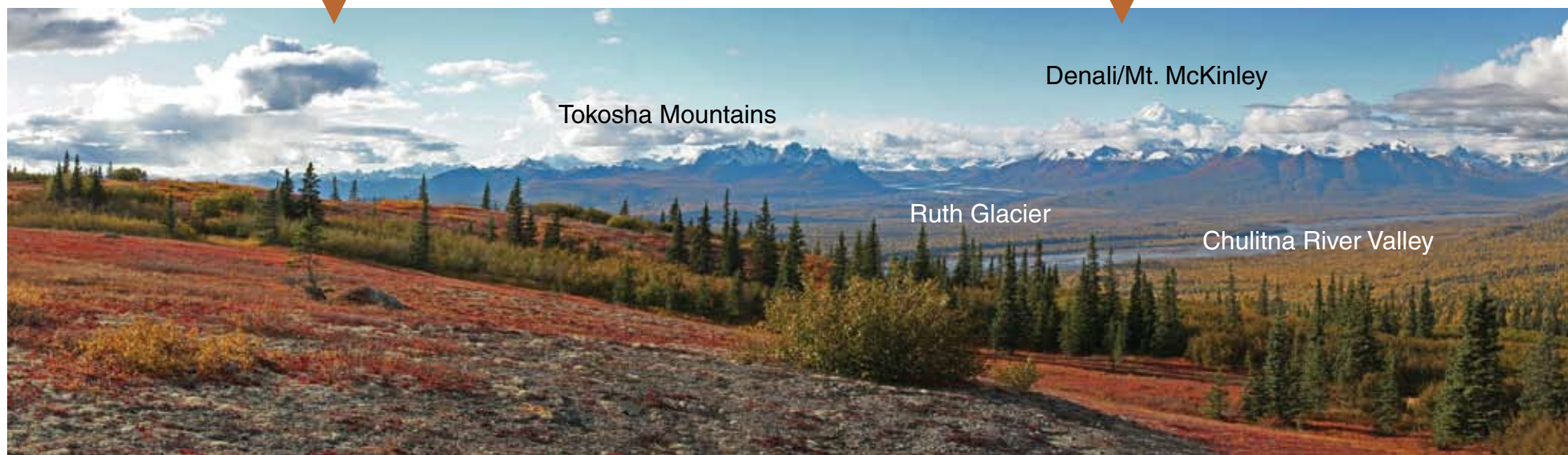
- **Intimate habitats:** On days when Denali is veiled by clouds, a visitor's attention is refocused to the rich colors and textures of the rocky, subalpine vegetation on Curry Ridge. The grand scenery becomes subordinate to the intricate micro-environments of the lush habitat surrounding the visitor center. This site is an ideal area to connect visitors with the local landscape, beyond the grand views or anticipation of large mammals. This is an area where visitors can experience the sounds, colors, and textures of the Alaska/Denali habitat and the complex interplay of plants, animals, geology, and hydrology.
- **Unique natural features:** This site is in close proximity (about a half mile to mile loop trail) to significant natural features, including rocky knolls with 360 degree views, the alpine Lake 1787, spruce forests, diverse sedge meadows and other wetlands, protective thickets of alder and willow, active beaver ponds and streams, miniature worlds of alpine tundra, large erratic boulders, glacial striations, and deep potholes.

- **Potential for observing wildlife:** With easy walking access to different habitats, visitors have ample opportunities to experience the smaller wildlife that may be overlooked on tour buses. Wildlife observed during planning visits to the site included a pair of hawk owls swooping to the tops of spruce trees, a bald eagle and raven battling in flight, numerous migrating northern shrikes, sandhill cranes landing to eat berries, Pacific Loons calling and diving on Lake 1787, Spruce Grouse, Boreal Chickadees, a Gyrfalcon, and a porcupine.

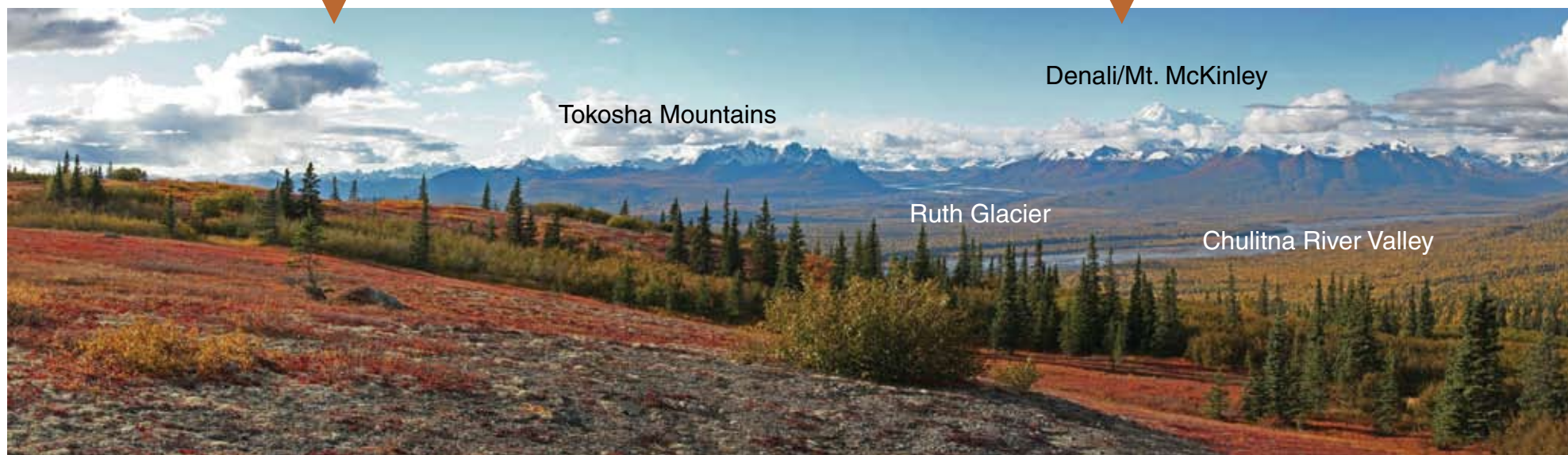


Panoramic Views from the Visitor Center Site

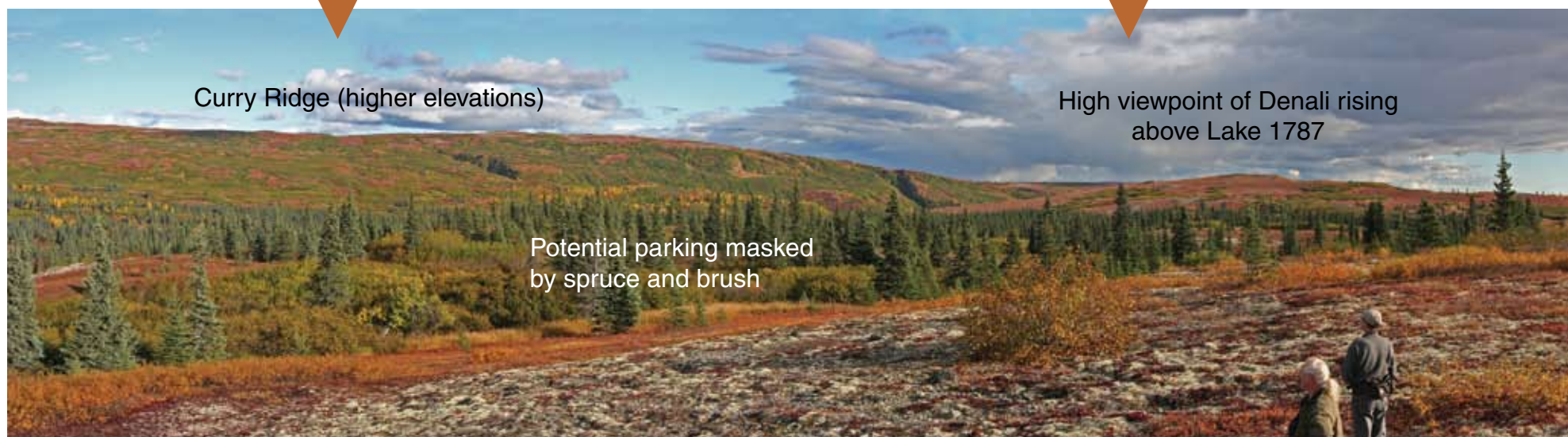
Looking West



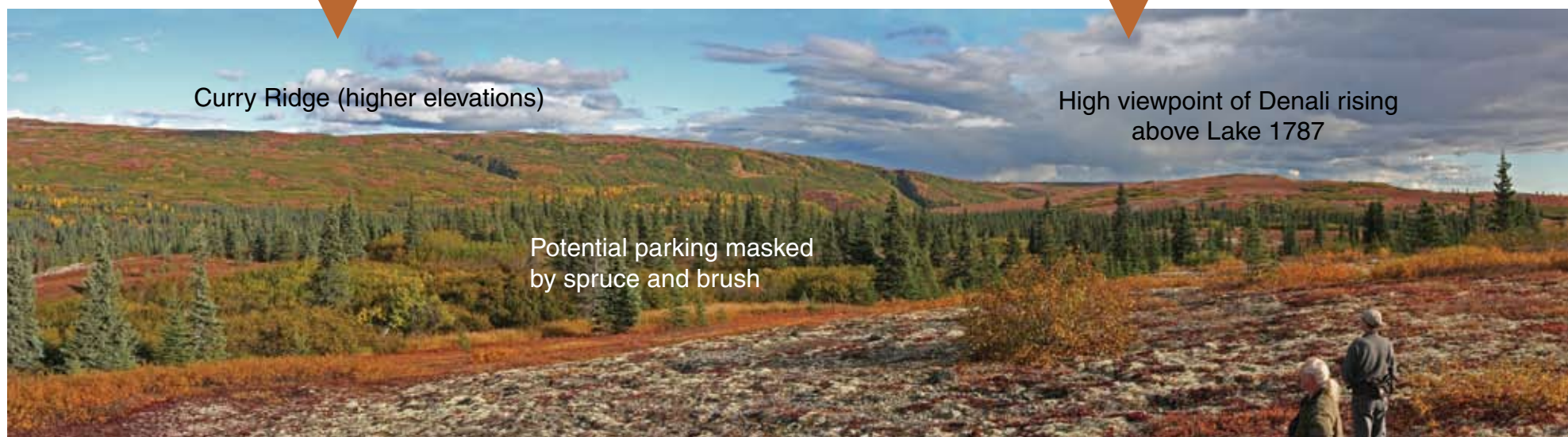
Looking Northwest



Looking East

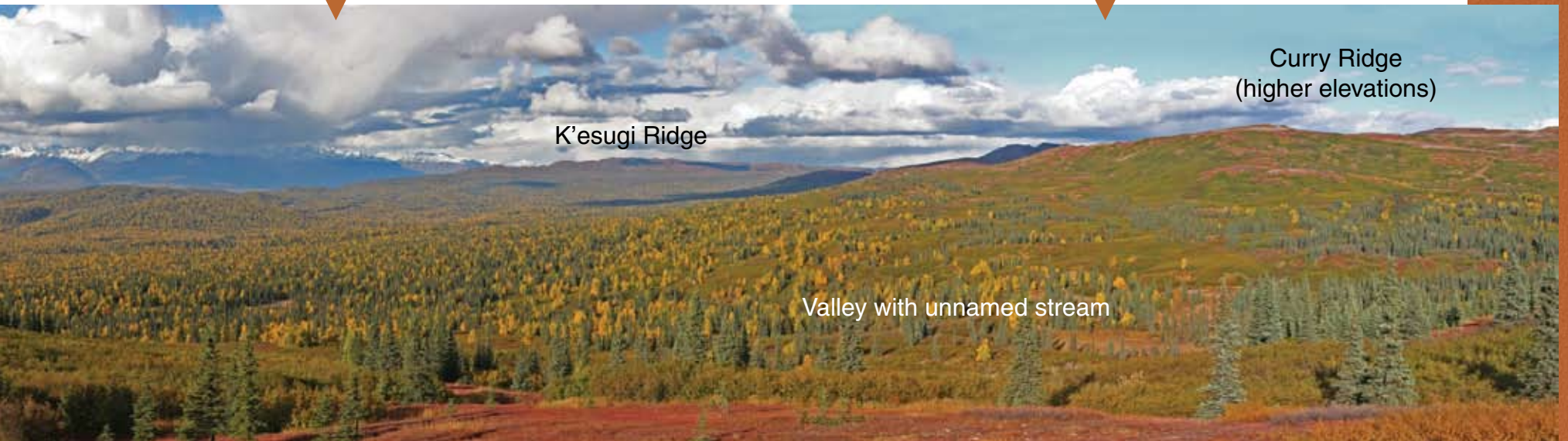


Looking Southeast



Looking North

Looking Northeast



K'esugi Ridge

Curry Ridge
(higher elevations)

Valley with unnamed stream

Looking South

Looking Southwest



Lake 1787

Lake 1787
viewpoint



This trailhead structure in Knochan Crag National Nature Reserve, Scotland, harmonizes with the stone and heather of this mountain environment.



Homesteads in Alaska are creatively constructed of locally available materials. This cabin showcases rough log construction, a metal roof, and a traditional cache. August, 2007

Visitor Center Design

Alaska is America's Frontier. It is, in the collective minds of Americans, the symbol of wilderness and vast open landscapes. It contains examples of architecture that compliment the scale and the materials seen in the landscape. Many classic Alaskan buildings blend with their settings.

The South Denali Visitor Center should grow from its surroundings and synthesize rustic building practices with today's needs and technology. Native and vernacular materials should be used when feasible but even when other materials are utilized, they should harmonize with the surroundings, be durable, consume less energy, and invite visitation.

The visitor center will serve as a gateway and hub to the real experience out on the site, concentrating intense visitor use within a limited area. This portal will serve as a filter that buffers on-site use of the area. It will provide for visitors' physical comforts and needs, orient them, and prepare people to experience the spirit of this place.

Architectural Precedents in the Curry Ridge Region

When buildings are designed and constructed in response to the inherent virtues and limitations of a particular site, visitors and residents can develop deeper connections to the region's unique sense of place.

There is a strong heritage and local affinity for rustic architecture and design in the Curry Ridge region. Distinct architectural styles include:

- Rough log construction with locally available materials is the rule. Available timber is relatively small diameter and therefore beam construction is usually round, not squared or sawn.
- Vernacular stone design. Geology is varied. Where stone is available it has been used for the first few feet of the first story to avoid snow accumulating on log footings and bases where rot might occur. Stone fireplaces and chimneys are common and firewood stacks were and still are seasonal fixtures in most rural Alaska homes.
- Sod and earthen roofs have been used on some rustic cabins. Metal roofs are quite common. Rooflines tend to be steep to reduce snow loads. Building

placement often takes advantage of windbreaks and available sun.

- Traditional vernacular buildings included outhouses and elevated caches near homes. Often antlers are displayed over doors and in roof peaks. Satellite dishes are a recent addition to home exteriors.
- Railroads shaped the landscape and influenced settlement and commerce. They became a dominant cultural force in modifying the natural environment. Bridges, grades, avalanche sheds, and tunnels are noticeable landscape features in Alaska. The railroads also ferried commercial building materials into once remote areas.
- Quonset huts and other temporary structures became familiar sights here during WWII and in the post war era. Many still persist.
- Federal land agencies like the National Parks, Forests, or Bureau of Land Management have erected numerous wilderness and park structures that emulate the classic, rustic park design of the 1930s. Alaskans and visitors are accustomed to seeing these structures in natural settings.
- Mining is an architectural and landscape influence in the region.

- Tourism, which has been traditionally concentrated in the summer season, has greatly influenced transportation, lodging, and dining facilities. Services are measured out by bus loads. Corporate motels and restaurants have replaced mom and pop businesses along the Parks Highway. Mega lodges with full service tourist packages are expanding in this region.

Ecological Influences on Curry Ridge

The visitor center site is a broad windswept ridge top, at times washed by intense sunlight and at other times muted by cool, gray clouds. Weather conditions, topography, and natural communities are diverse, and can influence the design of the visitor center.

Some ecological considerations include:

- Seasonally strong and abundant sunlight countered with long, dark winters. Clear bright skies or cold, wet and cloudy days.
- Intense freeze-thaw cycles
- Dramatic and dynamic geology (exposed rock, glaciers, outwash plains etc.)

- Vast landscapes that provide little sense of enclosure or shelter. Alpine areas are particularly windy, bright, and, exhibit contrasting extremes of hot or cold.
- Thin mountain soils are unable to retain moisture or to support lush vegetation.
- Some of the most mountainous and wild terrain in North America surrounds the building site.
- Migrations of large flocks of birds and large mammals that may seasonally cross and travel trails and roadways.



In Alaska, people can experience natural forces of weather and geology on a colossal scale. September, 2007

Architectural Guidelines for the Curry Ridge Visitor Complex

Based on the region's cultural and ecological considerations, as well as the visions of the partnering agencies, the desires and concerns of Alaska residents, and the needs of Alaska tourists, the following concepts will guide the development of the South Denali Visitor Center Complex.

- Respect the local climate, topography, and ecosystems, both natural and human.
 - Locate structures below the brow of hills and mountains
 - Place buildings on the edges of clearings and other transitional zones
 - Attempt to duplicate the forms and rhythms of the landscape in built structures
- Size and scale of structures should be appropriate to the wild grandness of the mountain terrain.
 - Maintain a low profile in treeless areas
 - Design the structure to appear rustic and substantial
 - Break up the mass of larger buildings with unified smaller shapes and elements
 - Repeat simple forms to increase a unified appearance
- Place the building below the brow of the ridge to keep it harmonious with the site and inconspicuous from the Parks Highway
- Materials should reflect the natural characteristics of the site and be themed to the culture and natural heritage of the region
 - Use stone as a base for walls to compliment the region's rugged geology, to visually tie the building to the ground, and to protect the wall from snow and moisture
 - Use building materials that are in scale with the site. Large rock is proportional to the mountainous terrain, while the fine vegetation textures of the alpine tundra can be repeated as the roof covering
 - Make windows large enough to invite views of the panoramic scenery and take advantage of the cherished sunlight
 - Place entrances in protected locations, such as the leeward side of the building, and provide a vestibule or porch for inclement weather.
 - Avoid skylights or place them near the roof peak and isolate them from large mammals like bears or moose that may have seasonal access to the roof
- Unify all signage, bridges, viewing platforms, benches, and other landscape elements by using key features of the building's architecture, such as stone blocks and wood
- Use elements of the natural environment in all walkways, signs, and landscape elements
- Celebrate wood but use it only where appropriate and use local wood sources whenever possible
- Building and landscape color should be consciously planned with regard to the site's seasonal color palette
 - Muted earth tones are appropriate to blend a facility into a natural site
 - Color values should be kept in the medium range in Alaska as a response to frequent grey skies and overcast weather
 - Use light colors indoors to optimize ambient light reflection
 - Coordinate the colors of the exterior and interior of the building and the site

Sustainable Design

A program of comprehensive sustainable (green) design that is most appropriate to the site and location should be applied to the planning, construction, and operation of the Curry Ridge Visitor Complex.

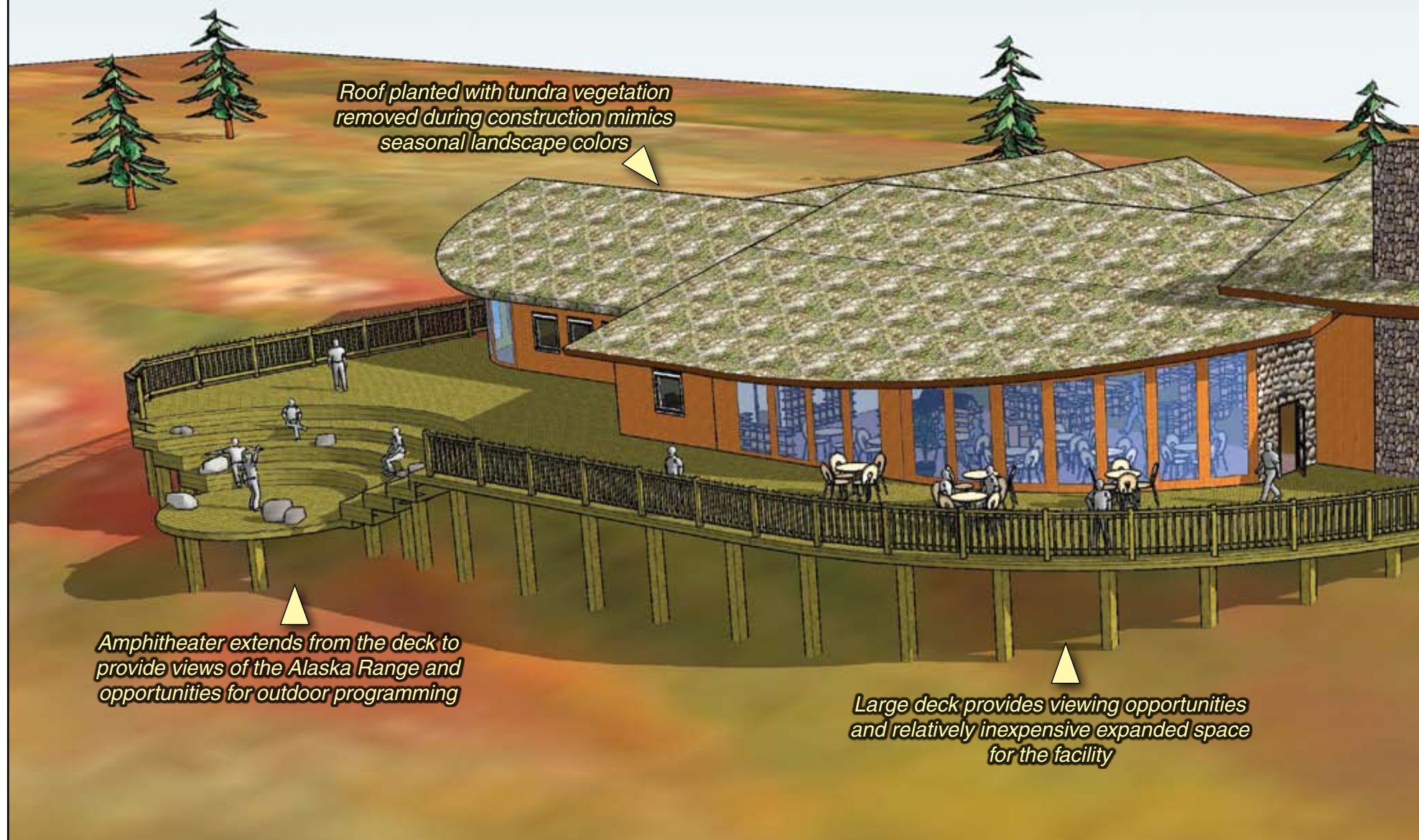
Sustainable design has many precedents in Alaska. Two rating systems are used to achieve long-term cost savings and environmental benefits: LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) and the Interior Alaska Green Building Initiative. Both award points that result in bronze/certified, silver, gold, or platinum ratings for sustainable site development, water savings, energy efficiency, materials selection, and indoor environmental quality. Some local architects cite weaknesses in the LEED rating system which they believe tends to focus more on an arbitrary point system rather than real achievement in appropriate design for efficiency in remote areas of Alaska. The Curry Ridge Visitor Center should strive for the highest possible rating, but temper design decisions with a rational approach with respect for balancing the specific demands of the site, visitor needs, and agency budgets. Building a site specific, sustainable facility should be the goal and a good rating will result.

Model sustainable design projects include:

- Eielson Visitor Center in Denali National Park (RIM, Architects) which incorporated an earth-sheltered envelope, green (reclaimed tundra) roof, energy efficient lighting and appliances coupled with solar panel and micro-hydroelectric systems, and recycled materials from the old building. The goal is to achieve a LEED Platinum rating.
 - Homer Public Library (ECI/Hyer Inc., Architects) achieved a LEED silver rating by using almost exclusively local and recycled materials.
 - Cold Climate Housing Research Center at UA Fairbanks used a ceramic heater coupled with hydronic heating coils, a vegetated green roof, a clerestory for lighting, a water recycling system, and many other green design features. The building itself is a testing facility for cold climate design.
- A partial listing of potential sustainable design features:
- Build on a frost protected shallow foundation
 - Apply a green roof using the plants removed from the construction site
 - Use natural day lighting, perhaps with clerestory windows or a wide overhanging roof that minimizes greenhouse heating through glass windows
 - Heat with a natural stone surfaced ceramic heater/fireplace coupled with hydronic heating coils. Use local wood fuels
 - Create natural cross-ventilation throughout
 - Use local wood and stone construction materials
 - Use Alaska manufactured cabinets, insulation materials, and other fixtures
 - Use efficient toilets and faucets; recycle gray water; consider a composting toilet system; have an on-site water source
 - Use efficient lighting and appliances
 - Create the least site disturbance for the building and access roads
 - Consider constructing a net zero energy building, perhaps incorporating a hybrid micro energy system for electricity generation that eliminates the need for running power lines to the site
 - Use the Residential Exterior Membrane Outside-insulation Technique (REMOTE) developed by the Cold Climate Housing Research Center which minimizes energy loss and moisture build-up on interior walls

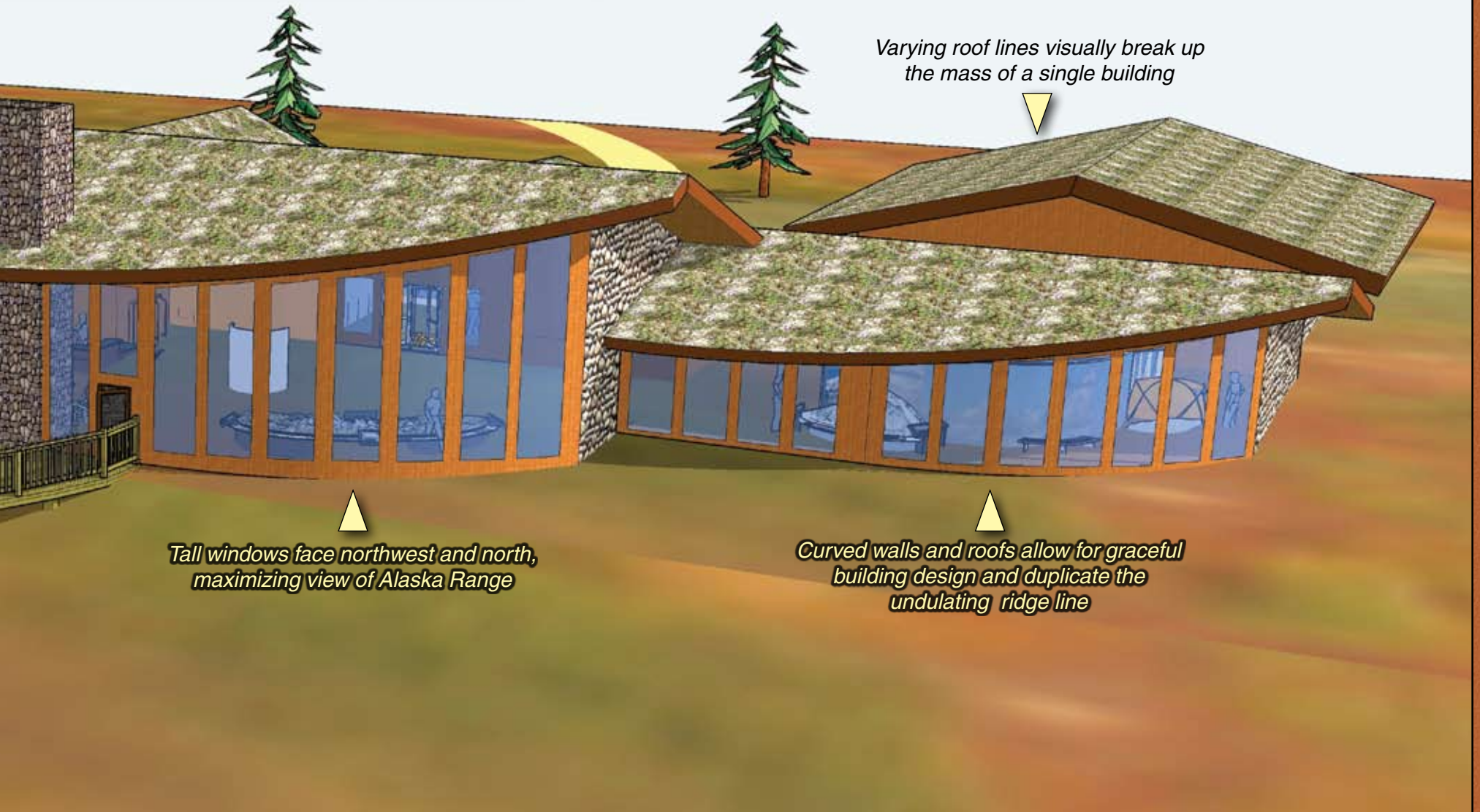
Visitor Center Conceptual Design

Looking southeast



Long, low profile building minimizes visual impact and blends into the ridge line

Varying roof lines visually break up the mass of a single building

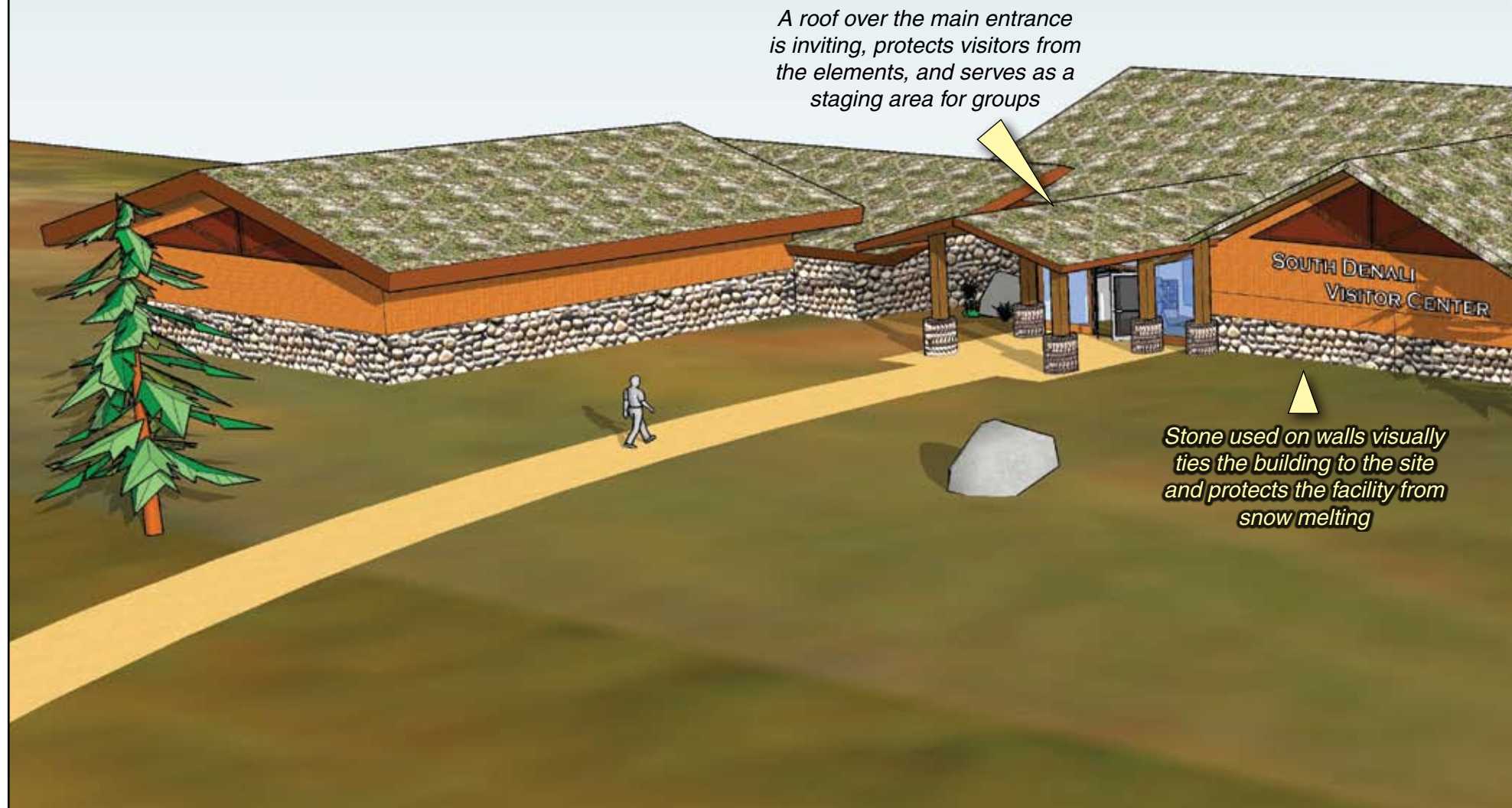


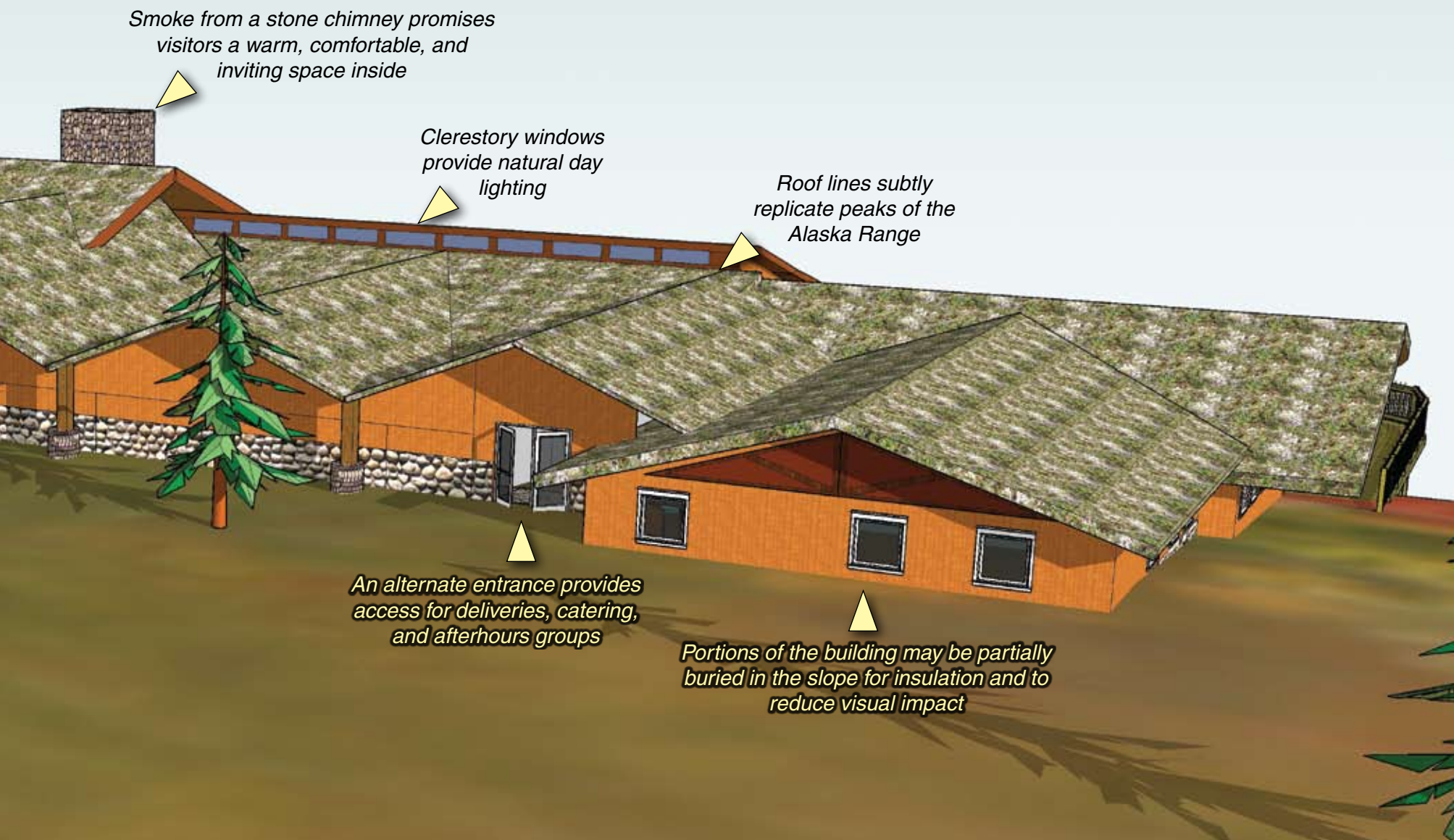
Tall windows face northwest and north, maximizing view of Alaska Range

Curved walls and roofs allow for graceful building design and duplicate the undulating ridge line

Visitor Center Conceptual Design

Looking northwest





Smoke from a stone chimney promises visitors a warm, comfortable, and inviting space inside

Clerestory windows provide natural day lighting

Roof lines subtly replicate peaks of the Alaska Range

An alternate entrance provides access for deliveries, catering, and afterhours groups

Portions of the building may be partially buried in the slope for insulation and to reduce visual impact

Exterior of the Visitor Center

Vehicle Access and Parking

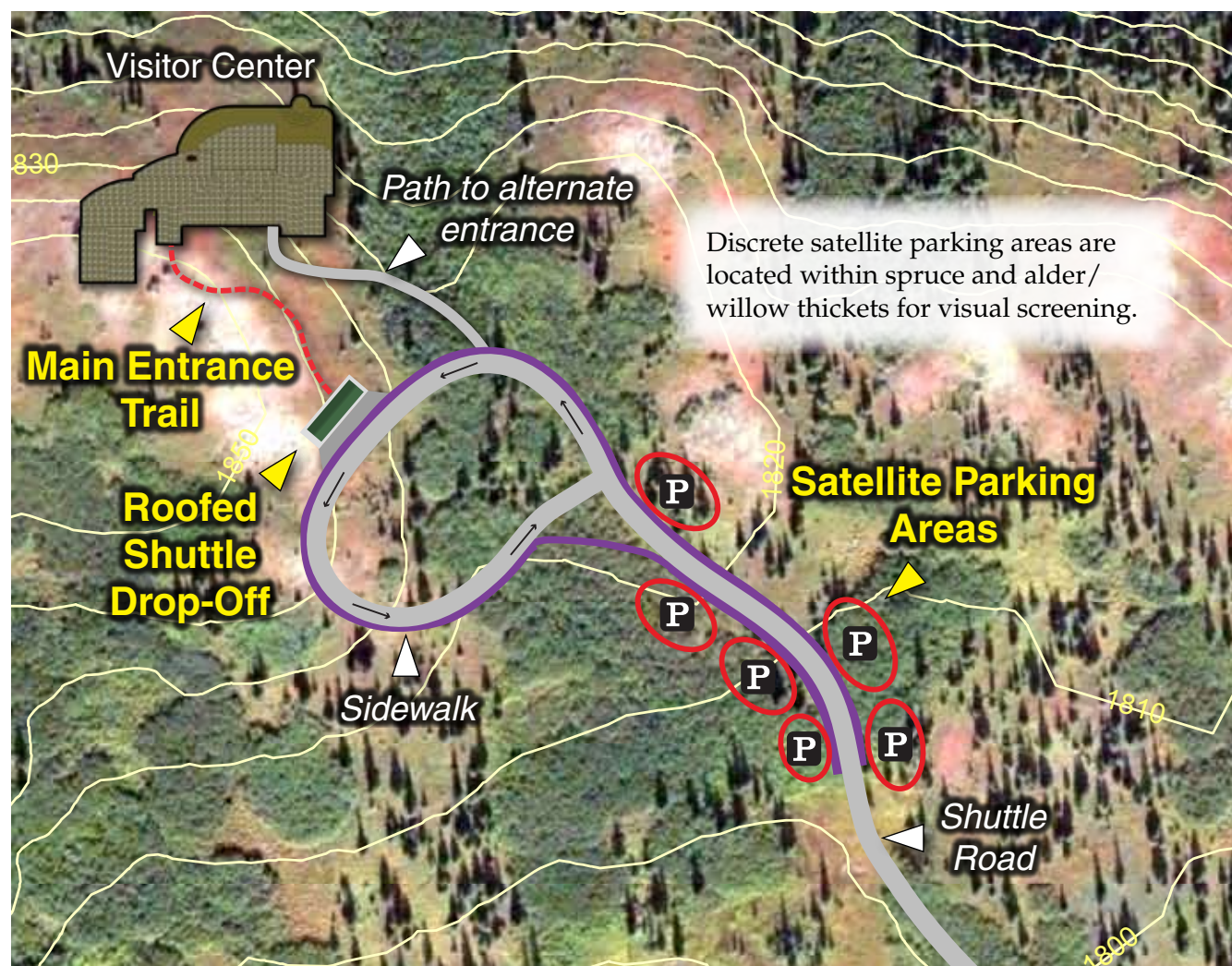
Only shuttle tram traffic will be permitted on the main ridge road during the summer season. Official State Park vehicles should be limited to emergency and maintenance duties. Staff can carpool to the site or take the shuttle when not opening or closing the facility.

The spirit of the Curry Ridge site emanates from its wilderness qualities—its opportunities for solitude, quiet, and observing wildlife. The shuttle system serves as an important transition that prepares visitors for this type of experience. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that tour buses not be permitted to drive up the ridge road. People on the buses would miss a significant portion of the holistic experience (the educational shuttle ride), and increased large vehicle traffic would cause noise pollution detrimental to the qualities of the site.

During the “shoulder seasons,” when out-of-state visitation decreases and Alaska resident visitation increases, private cars will be allowed to drive on the road and access the visitor center site. This provides maximum recreational opportunities for Alaska residents, an important mission of the state parks.

Parking areas will be in the form of small satellite lots that are discreetly clustered in spruce stands staggered along each side of the road east of the visitor center. These lots should be of a porous nature with stone barriers defining them. Trails should connect these lots to the center.

The lots must be carefully planned to utilize the natural vegetative screening of spruce trees and alder/willow thickets. This will minimize visual impacts from viewpoints around the visitor center and from the higher elevations of Curry Ridge.



Entrance from Shuttle Tram

The visitor center building is hidden beneath the brow of the ridge. Travelers on the shuttle tram may catch fleeting glimpses of the viewing windows soaring above them as they climb the final crest of the ridge. Lake 1787 steals the view as it is briefly unveiled behind spruce stands to the south. Then the shuttle stops just below the crest of the bald ridge. There are no cars or parking lots to be seen—only people walking.

A sod roofed kiosk with stone supports welcomes the arriving shuttles and provides a sheltering portal from the elements. A textured concrete walkway gently sweeps through the alpine to the visitor center, which appears to emerge organically from the ridge. As visitors walk to the building, they pass a large glacial boulder that rests provocatively out of place in the mountain meadow. A

rustic timber and iron kiosk announces this as a major trailhead.

Approaching the front entrance to the building, the walkway widens to accommodate gathering groups. A large sod covered canopy extends out over the front door and invites visitors to enter through wide glass doors into a sunlit portico.



Interior Design of the Visitor Center

The interior design of the visitor center must assure that there is a smooth flow of visitor traffic from the entry, throughout the building, and onto the trail system. It must permit a sense of openness that invites and allows people to move freely from one use area to another.

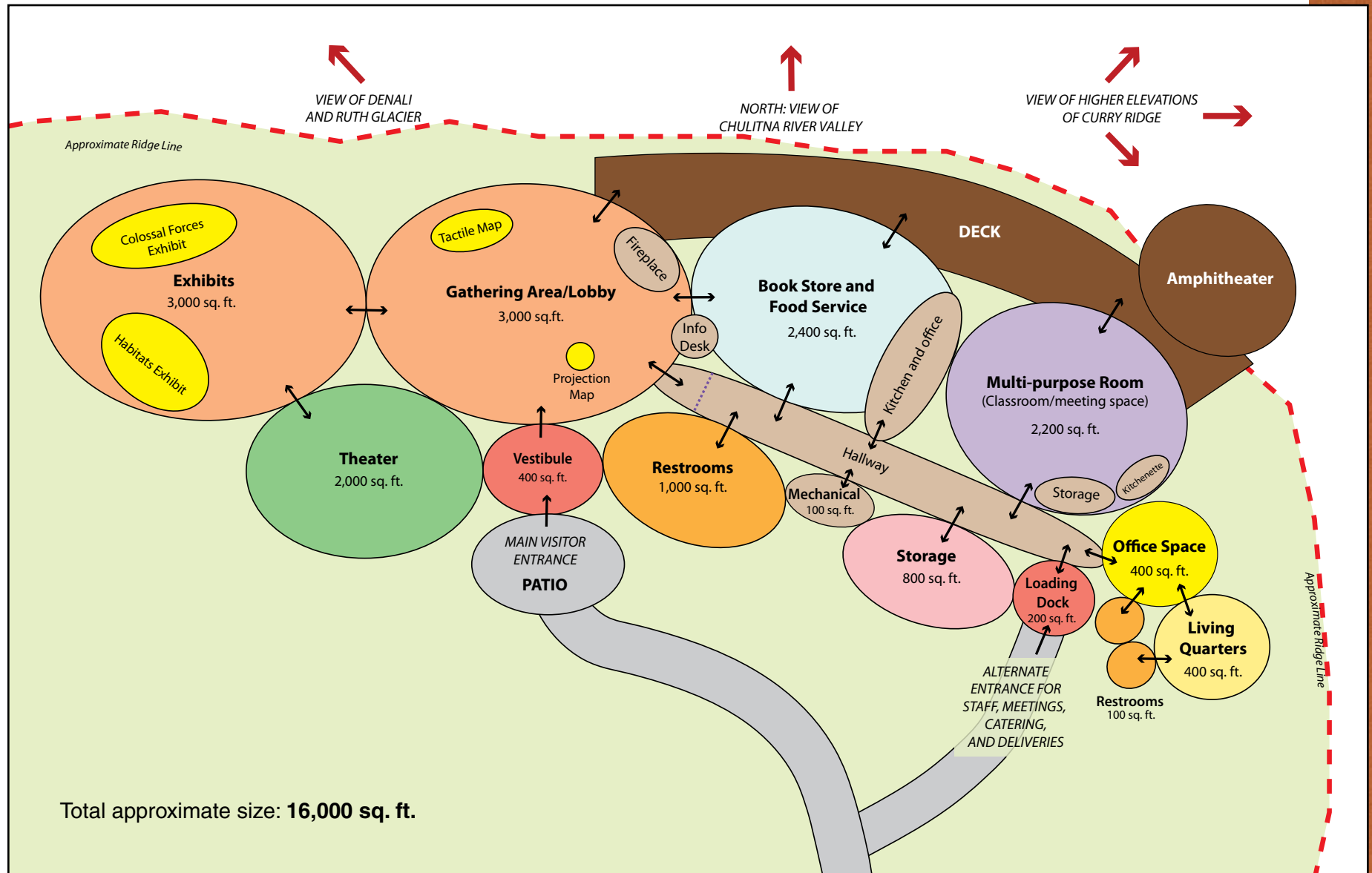
The interior of the building should encourage visitors to explore, to move quickly through some areas and linger in other spaces. Unobstructed views of the Alaska Range and Chulitna Valley should be provided throughout the interior.

Bubble Diagram

Bubble diagrams show the general sizes and relationships between various components of the visitor center, based on the specifications outlined in this chapter. They allow planners to consider the pros and cons of various alternatives of traffic flow and dedicated spaces before committing to more architectural details. Architects use the diagram as a foundation for developing an actual floor plan.

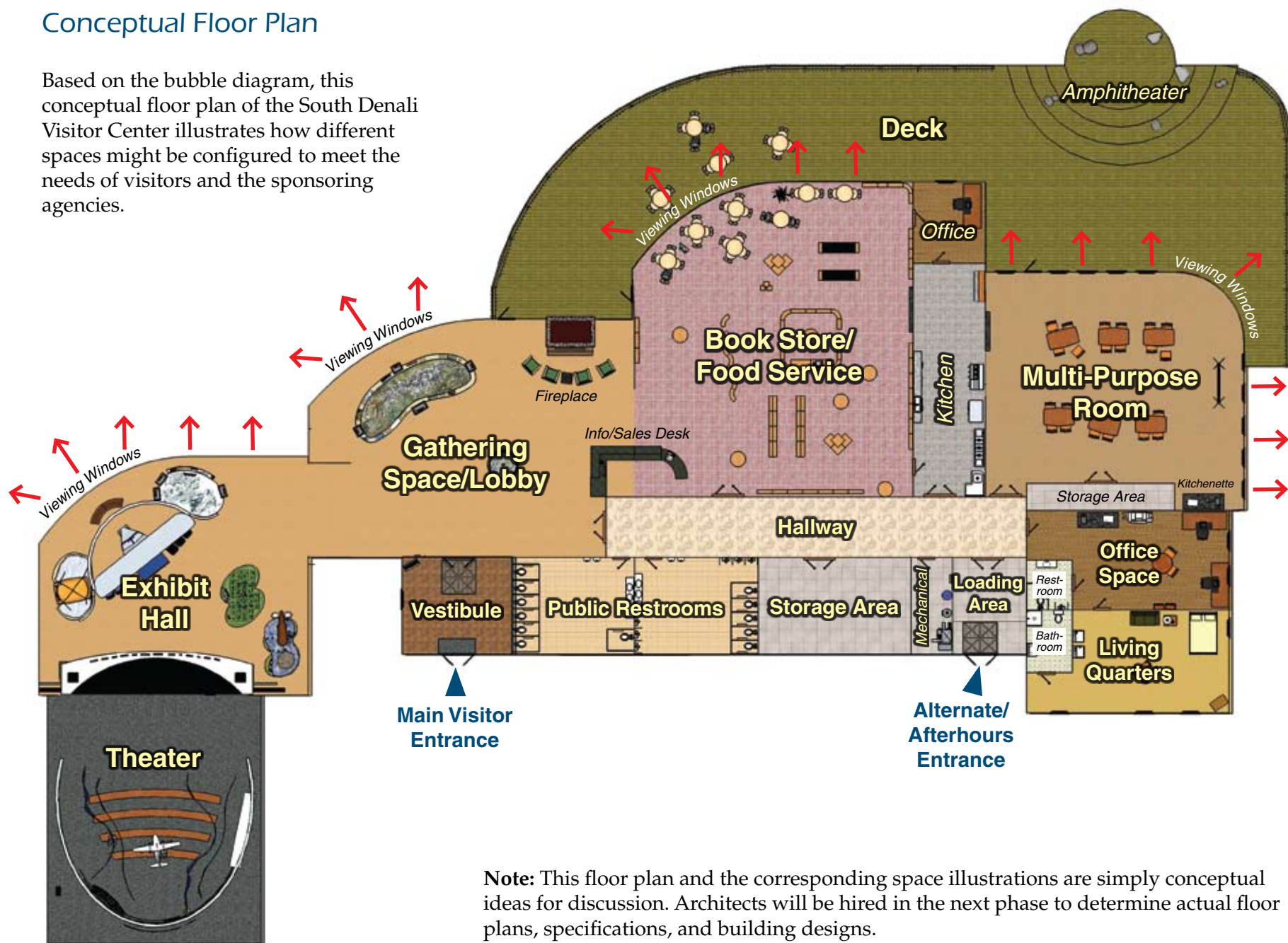
Circles represent the relative size of spaces, while arrows indicate the primary direction of visitor flow.

Bubble Diagram: South Denali Visitor Center



Conceptual Floor Plan

Based on the bubble diagram, this conceptual floor plan of the South Denali Visitor Center illustrates how different spaces might be configured to meet the needs of visitors and the sponsoring agencies.

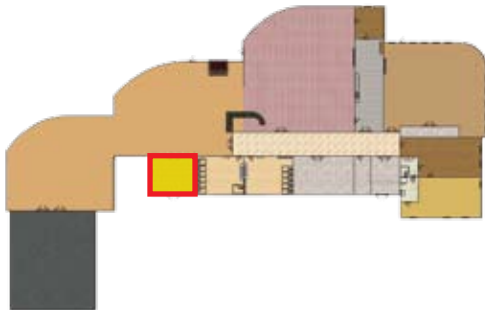


Note: This floor plan and the corresponding space illustrations are simply conceptual ideas for discussion. Architects will be hired in the next phase to determine actual floor plans, specifications, and building designs.

Main Visitor Entrance: Patio and Vestibule

The wide walkway **patio** at the front doors is located so that it will be sheltered from prevailing winds and be warmed by sunlight from the south. It should be recognizable as a public entrance and be wide enough to invite large numbers of visitors to pass in each direction.

Glass side lights and doors will allow views into and out of the **vestibule** (400 square feet) and help to blend the interior with the out of doors. An air lock is needed to buffer the blustery wind and cold on the ridge. This entrance is an appropriate location to install shoe cleaning grates which will minimize mud and snow entering the building from the trails. The vestibule could be locked and after hour's access to restrooms can be provided at the other end of the east-west hallway near the caretaker's quarters. Twenty-four hour emergency telephones will be available here as well as safety information.



Gathering Area/Lobby and Information Desk

The main entrance provides a clear line of sight through the spacious **lobby** (3,000 square feet) to Mount McKinley. The glass wall will soar to its maximum height at this location offering a panoramic view of the Alaska Range looming above the Chulitna River Valley. This dramatic scene will draw visitors across the room so it is imperative that this lobby area be expansive and open to allow viewers to circulate in an unobstructed manner. This grand, central chamber of the building sets visitors expectations and serves as an open hub for unimpeded travel to other destinations in the building. When visitors are near the viewing windows, they will see that adjoining rooms have similar panoramic windows. When the building is crowded, the natural human tendency will be to spread into the other less crowded spaces in the adjacent rooms. The purpose of this room is to welcome and orient visitors to the site in both a personal and cognitive fashion.

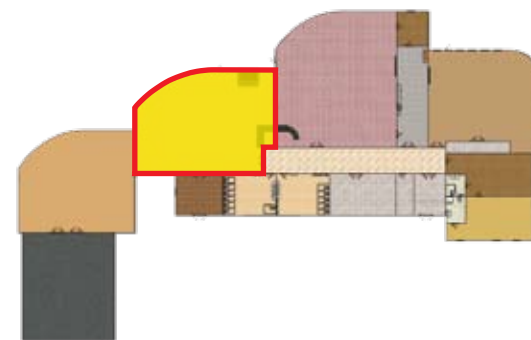
A large scale **relief map** featuring Denali and the Alaska Range is placed near the windows for orientation to the real peaks seen beyond. When clouds veil portions of the Range, viewers can study the relief map and determine if McKinley is visible in relation to peaks they may be seeing

out the window and they can identify them by referencing the corresponding features on the map and by accessing touch screen computers found at each end of this large three dimensional map.

A smaller **map of Denali State Park** is located in the center of the room near the information desk. When accessed via push buttons, it illuminates boundaries, trails, camp sites and interpretive points of interest within the park.

A large stone **fireplace** provides a cozy corner for returning hikers on cool days. This technology works efficiently, burning limited volumes of small diameter wood fuel which is locally available. Comfortable seating and thematic books invite visitors to linger.

For special events in the off season, this spacious room can serve as an elegant hall where groups can gather socially. The large multi-purpose meeting room down the hall can be set for meals or other more formal functions while this magnificent room provides a place for casual mixing while enjoying stunning views of the Chulitna Valley, Ruth Glacier, and Mount McKinley.



The **information/reception desk** will be well illuminated, barrier free, and centrally located. It allows one staff person to observe as much of the public area as possible. During slow visitation periods, it should serve the multiple functions of reception desk and sales area checkout. It must be large enough to accommodate several staff members during crowded periods.

A layered information delivery system supplements the personal interactions of the reception staff. An interactive map of Denali State Park will be located near the desk, along with photographs of trail destinations and significant features. Wayfinding signs (to restrooms, gift shop, exhibits, theater, meeting room) answer visitor's orientation questions when the desk staff is busy with others. Brochures and other handouts should be readily available but should be limited to pertinent site information.



Relief Map of Alaska Range

Access to
Viewing Deck

Fireplace Sitting Area

Universally Accessible
Information Desk

Projection Map of
Denali State Park

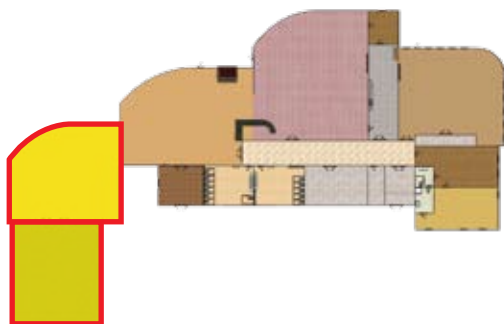


Exhibit Hall and Spirit of Alaska Theater

Exhibit Hall

The viewing windows continue to be a major focus in the exhibit hall (3,000 square feet). This room contains pods and islands of engaging, three-dimensional exhibits that assist people in understanding the special qualities of the place they are visiting. Exhibits will interpret the unique aspects of the South Denali region.

Themes in the hall may include such topics as the dynamics of the area's geologic processes. Media will be designed for optimal visitor involvement. For example, at one exhibit visitors are challenged to physically uplift a mountain range by turning a sluggish crank and watching the resulting simulated fault rise in the exhibit. Other exhibits interpret the adaptations that plants and animals have in order to survive in this beautiful, harsh environment.

The exhibit hall's location next to the theater entry promotes extended visitor interaction while they wait for the next film cycle.

More information about specific media that will be included in the exhibit hall is located in **Chapter 6: Interpretive Media**.

Spirit of Alaska Theater

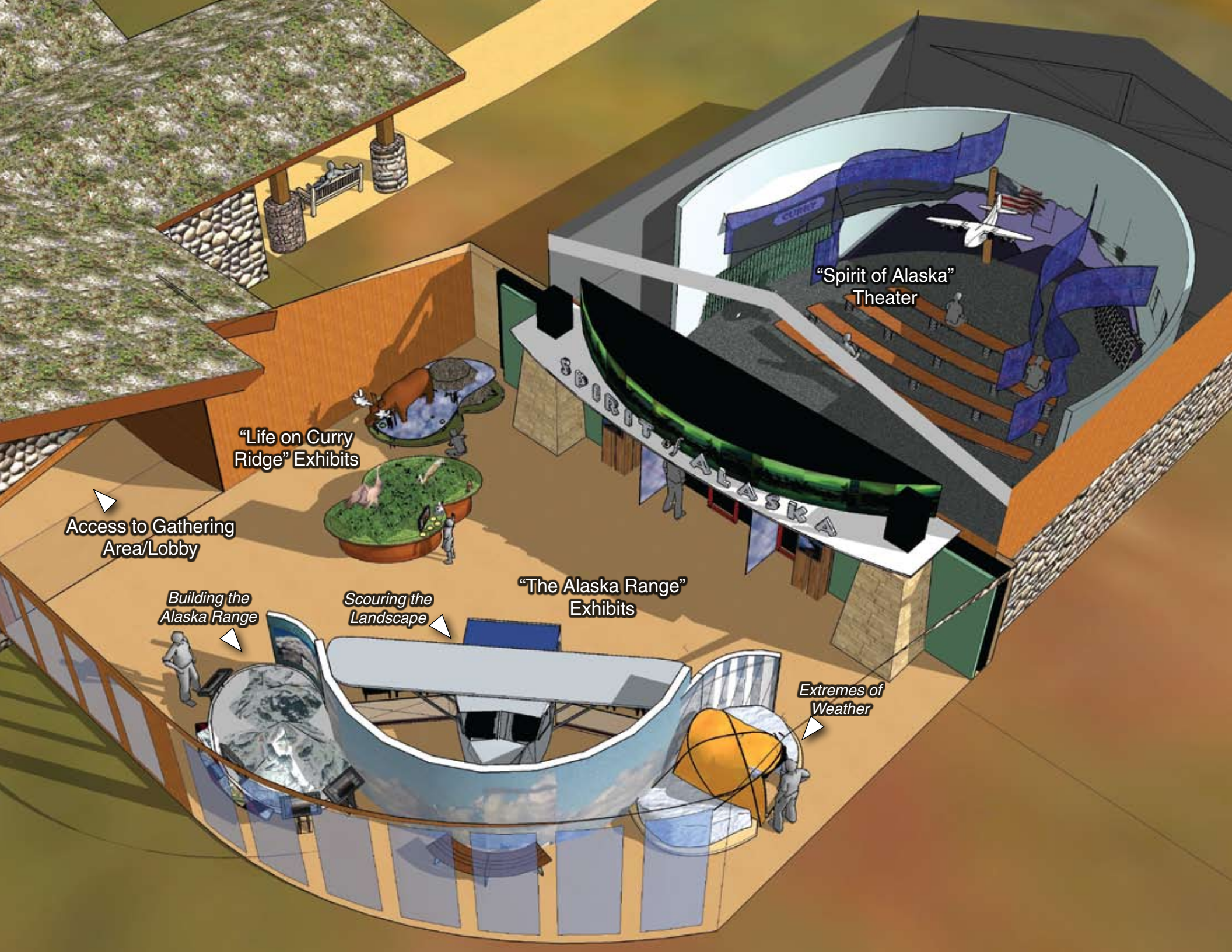
A multi-sensory object theater experience immerses visitors in the dramatic geological, ecological, and cultural stories of the Alaska Range and Curry Ridge. This dramatic sensory presentation brings stories to life and underscores the possibilities awaiting visitors out on the trails.

Object theaters are dynamic presentations that blend moving pictures and audio with real artifacts and objects artistically revealed during the presentation. Special effects, such as surround sound, colored lights, opening curtains, vibrating seats, spray misters, and fans help bring the production to life.

A theater production is the most involving way to tell a complex story, make mythology relevant, and engage the imagination of the viewer.

The theater size of 2,000 square feet should accommodate approximately 60 adults, the size of a full tour bus.

More information about the Spirit of Alaska Theater experience is located in **Chapter 6: Interpretive Media**.



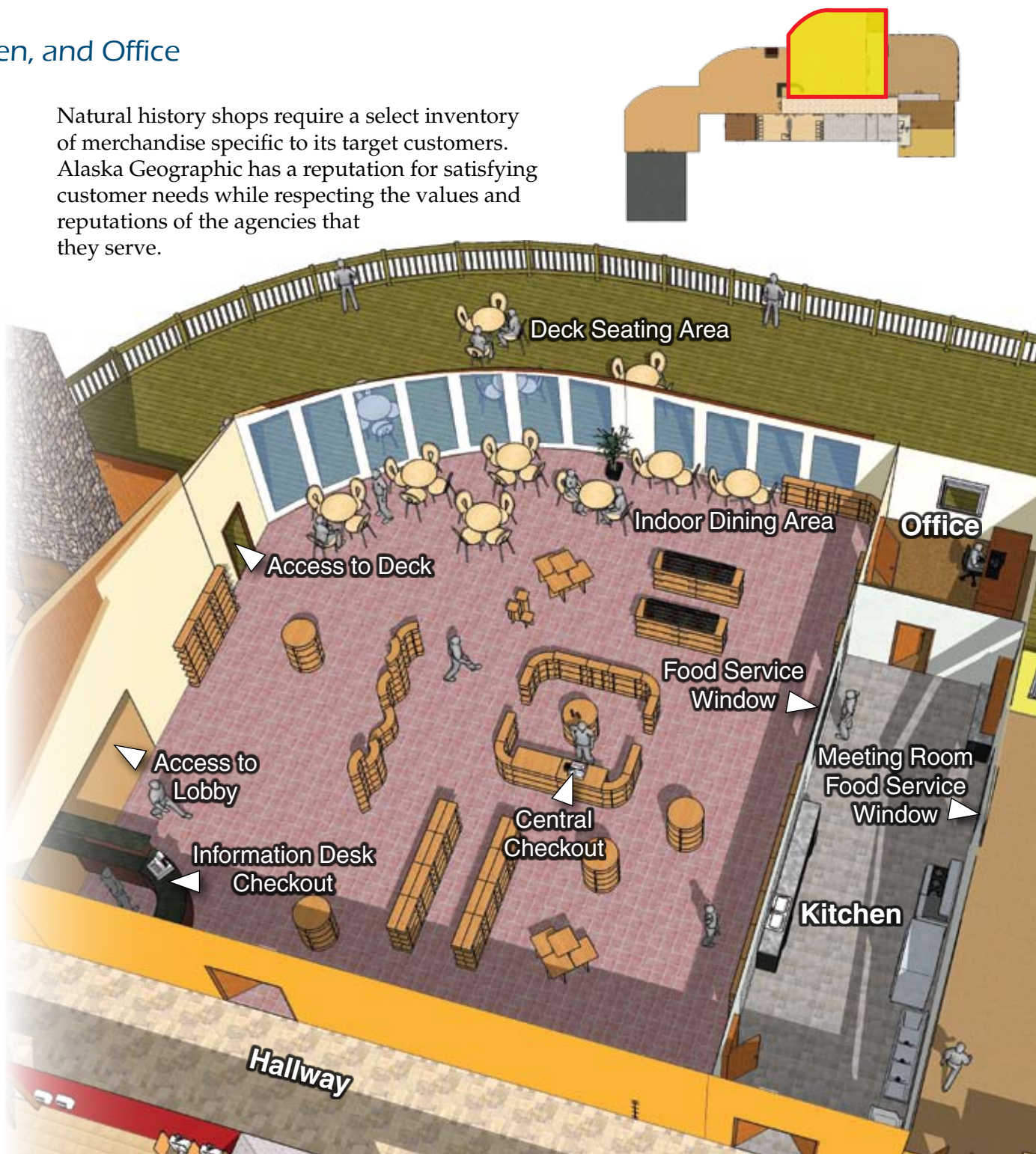
Book Store/Food Service, Kitchen, and Office

The **book store/dining area** (2,400 square feet) also offers sweeping views of the Alaska Range. It is adjacent to and very visible from the lobby and the front desk. During the shoulder seasons one person can greet visitors and watch the sales area from this location. Peak visitation periods will require that the sales counter be staffed at another location away from this high traffic lobby.

The sales area is integral to the visitor experience. It offers the possibility for profits but also serves crucial public relations needs and can be an effective educational tool. This sales space is large to accommodate surges of customers and to encourage leisurely shopping. Locally produced items can help connect visitors to the site and the community's sense of place.

A small **kitchen** facilitates limited food preparation by a concessionaire and serves as a staging area for catering special events and meetings in the multi-purpose room. It is centrally located for efficient transportation of food to the meeting room, deck, and indoor dining space. It is located near an exterior wall for access to deliveries from the hallway. The small **office** adjacent to the kitchen is used by the sales manager for counting cash and other business transactions.

Natural history shops require a select inventory of merchandise specific to its target customers. Alaska Geographic has a reputation for satisfying customer needs while respecting the values and reputations of the agencies that they serve.



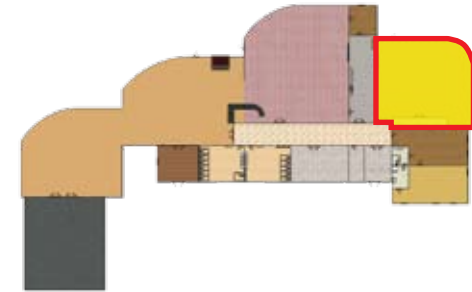
Multi-Purpose Room

The **multi-purpose room** is designed for maximum versatility. It can be divided for use as two classrooms for school visits or used for “breakout sessions” in workshops. It can serve community events, be used for formal meetings, and it functions well for catered events. Special “traveling exhibits” of artwork or select natural history topics can be displayed here. It should have the following features:

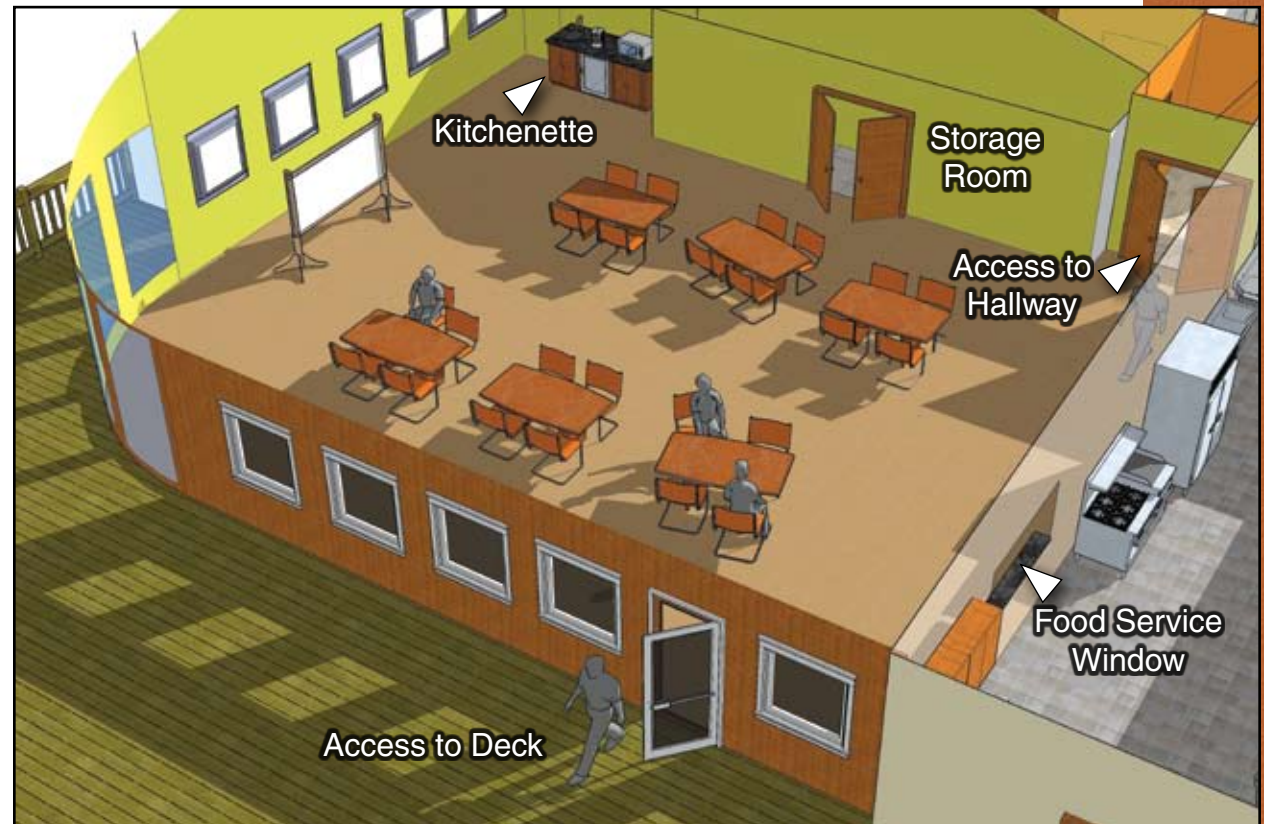
- A high ceiling, proportional to the room size that facilitates projection onto a large screen.
- Windows and doors for scenic views and access to the deck; light blocking shades on all windows
- Sound proof room divider and sound absorbing floor and ceiling surfaces
- **Storage space** for tables and chairs
- **Kitchenette** counters and sink for light food and beverage service. Service window to kitchen to allow for catered meals
- Appropriate number of electrical outlets for audiovisual and computer service and to provide lighting for special events and exhibits
- **Access to the deck** for breaks and outdoor sessions

At a size of 2,200 square feet, the multi-purpose room would be large enough to accommodate about 200 people with just chairs, or 150 people with tables and chairs.

Meetings and workshops held in the multi-purpose room will require food that is prepared off site and catered to the building. These specialized and regulated services are best provided by



private entrepreneurs who will assume responsibility for employee hiring, training, and management of services.

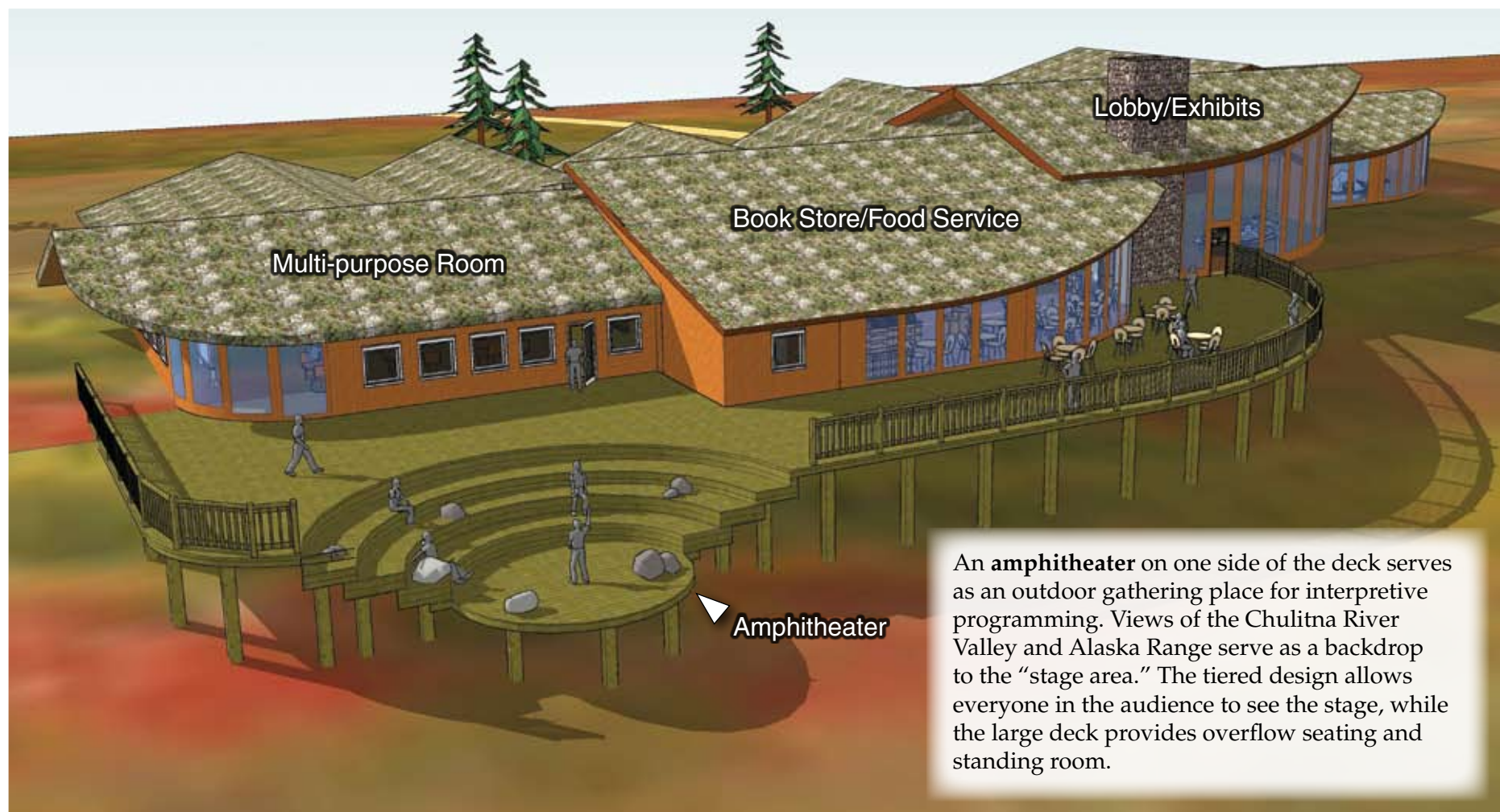


Deck and Amphitheater

A **deck** sweeps along the north glass wall of the sales area and past the meeting room windows. It is accessible from the lobby, book store, and multi-purpose room. This deck connects the outdoor vistas to the building's interior.

During mild weather and peak visitation, it provides a comfortable space for eating, relaxing, and participating in public programs. It allows large outdoor gatherings without fear of trampling vegetation. Its placement permits views

of Denali without crowds of people blocking the panorama. This deck is a highly desirable area for visitors to gather in good weather so it must be large. It is inexpensive overflow space that will receive optimal use during peak periods of visitation.



An **amphitheater** on one side of the deck serves as an outdoor gathering place for interpretive programming. Views of the Chulitna River Valley and Alaska Range serve as a backdrop to the "stage area." The tiered design allows everyone in the audience to see the stage, while the large deck provides overflow seating and standing room.

Office Space and Living Quarters

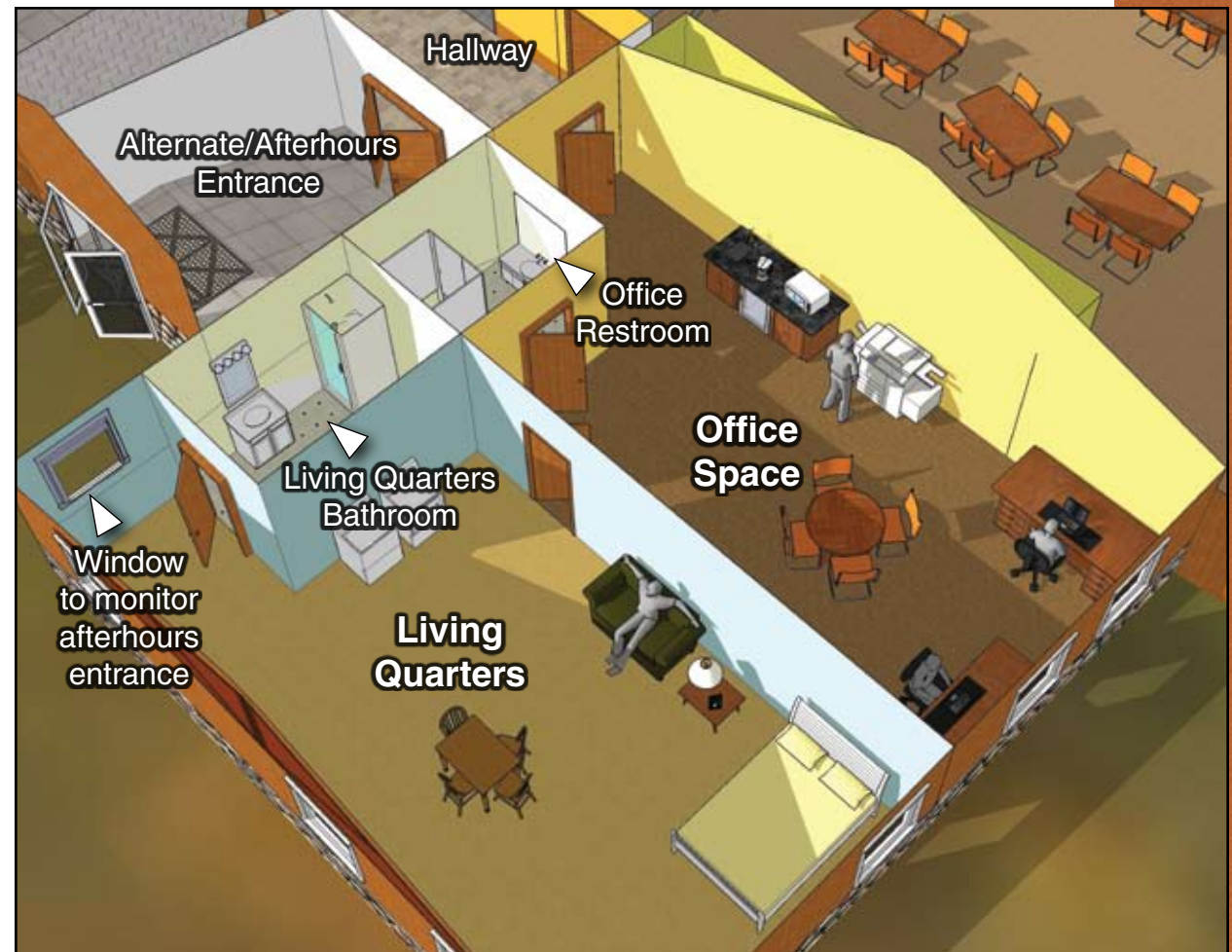
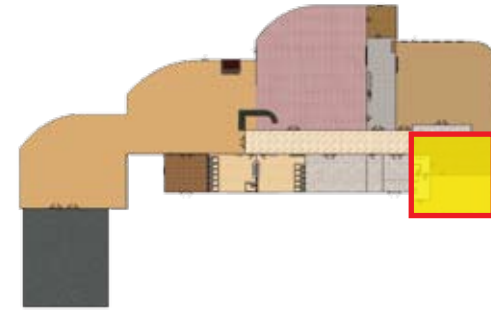
The **office space** (400 square feet) serves the seasonal and permanent program staff for the visitor center. It is adjacent to a small **efficiency apartment** (400 square feet) for an on-site caretaker and functions as an off-season contact station. These facilities are strategically located to provide views of the parking area, shuttle tram loop, and trailheads so that staff can better monitor activity at the site.

The office space and living quarters are discreetly separated since there may be daytime staff working in the office but not living on site. Two small bathrooms serve these areas; additional plumbing is a minimal expense since these restrooms are back to back.

The open concept office space allows for maximum flexibility in arranging and rearranging this room to meet the changing seasonal needs of staff. The location at the far end of the hall from the lobby and exhibit space reduces noise and commotion that might deter staff from their office responsibilities.

In the living quarters, a small window with blinds faces the loading area doorway allowing rangers to access and anticipate the needs of afterhours visitors. In case of emergency, a buzzer and telephone system connects visitors to

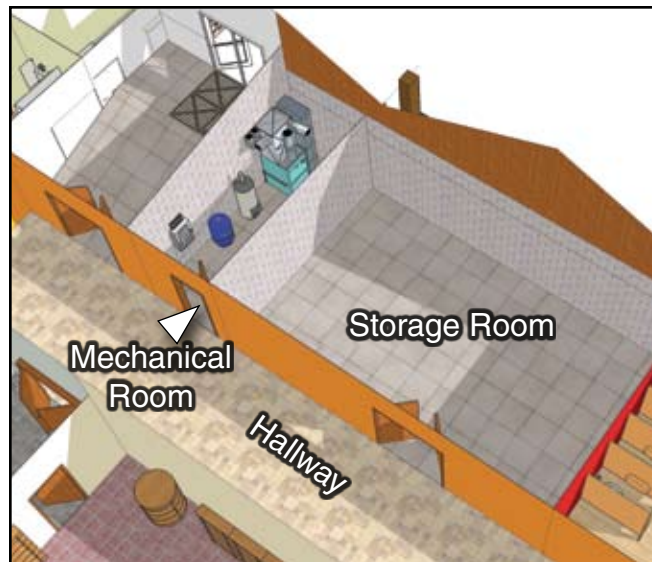
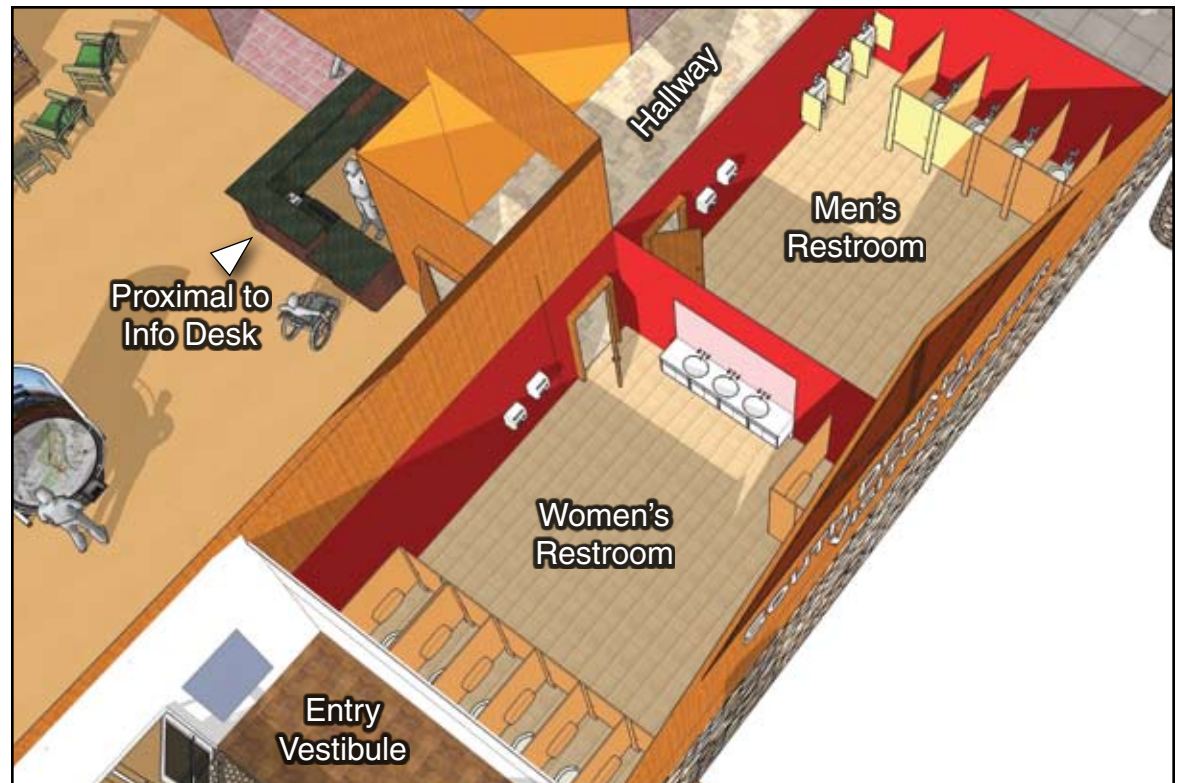
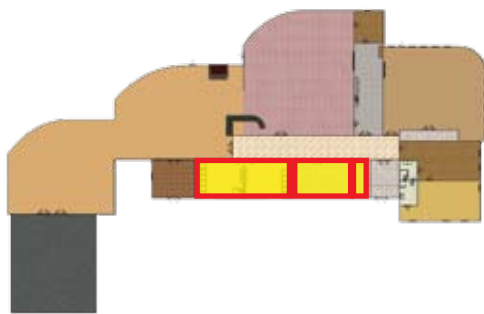
rangers stationed in the visitor center or down below in the Transportation Hub. This is a logical location to keep first aid equipment since trained staff will be here and it is the probable entry where people with emergencies will seek assistance.



Public Restrooms, Storage Room, and Mechanical Room

The pulse of traffic into and out of this facility will be driven by the shuttle schedules. Bathroom use will be concentrated around the arrival and departure of these vehicles.

The **restrooms** (1,000 square feet) must have enough toilets, urinals, and sinks to accommodate multiple tour groups without long lines. The lower visitor services hub should be designed to alleviate some of the demands on these restrooms. As recommended in the section on sustainable design, a priority should be given to water efficiency/ recycling technologies and waterless and composting toilets. Ambient light should be used during the summer and self dimming lights should be incorporated for winter use. This is an excellent room to provide interpretive signage about sustainable concepts that are concentrated here and that can be seen throughout the building.



Storage is the most under planned area in interpretive facilities according to surveys of site and facility managers. This 800 square foot **storage room** can be divided into discrete areas for housing store merchandise, kitchen inventory, and program materials. It is easily accessed from the central hallway via double doors. Its proximity to the kitchen, sales area, and the multi-purpose room eliminate the need for hauling items great distances through the building. A system of heavy duty shelving and a moveable staircase are desirable for maximizing the vertical space in this room.

Alternate Entrance/Loading Area and Hallway

The **alternate entrance** permits people to access the multi-purpose room, staff office, and kitchen area without using the public entry into the lobby. This eliminates congestion at the public entry and facilitates delivery of sales inventory, food, and provides access to staff areas. A main **hallway** offers access or closure to most rooms. In the off-season or at night, this entrance provides a secure afterhours

doorway to the restrooms and emergency assistance from on-site staff.

The **vestibule** (200 square feet) should be equipped with a buzzer system to alert staff to the presence of people needing assistance. It should have a telephone for communicating with the Transportation Hub when this facility is not staffed. A window in the ranger residence will

allow surveillance of the entry area.

The entry should be universally accessible for wheelchairs and delivery dollies. It should have floor grates to reduce mud and snow from being tracked into the building. Large glass doors and windows will be south facing and should be useful in helping to heat the space.



Curry Ridge Trails

The South Denali Visitor Center is the gateway to Curry Ridge. To really experience the site, visitors must get outdoors and explore the ridge for themselves. A carefully planned trail network provide opportunities for visitors to experience different habitats of Curry Ridge, observe wildlife in their natural surroundings, and climb to scenic viewing areas, while discouraging off-trail trampling.

Three trails are proposed for varying degrees of access into the site.

1. **Denali Vistas Interpretive Trail:** The short main loop connects the visitor center to panoramic viewing points and Lake 1787. The trail provides universal access and wayside exhibits.
2. **Beaver Meadows Trail:** This longer trail encircles Lake 1787 and parallels scenic beaver ponds and streams. It provides opportunities for visitors to experience the Alaska wilderness, while still being in relatively close proximity to the visitor center.
3. **Curry Lookout Trail:** This long wilderness trail climbs the steep slope of Curry Ridge to the northeast and connects to the historic Curry Lookout. It requires preparation and a full-day of hiking.

Trail Design Guidelines

The following recommendations will guide the design and layout of the South Denali trail system.

- The visitor center will serve as the heart of a looped, circulatory trail system that is designed to serve concentrations of visitors near the building and provide a continuum of increasingly wild experiences for hikers as they disperse out into the park. Visitors will self-select from a series of experiences that satisfy their schedules, physical abilities, and interests.
- Trail experiences in high use areas near the building will be designed to protect fragile alpine and wetland habitats with boardwalks, bridges, railings, and other barriers that limit human traffic to specific corridors. Trail designers will utilize preexisting natural site barriers as much as possible by routing trails near alder and willow thickets, dense concentrations of ground shrubs, wet swampy areas, and boulders. This site contains a diversity of vegetation and topography that dictates corridors of travel and discourages the creation of shortcuts and off-trail travel.
- Trails will be developed to optimize opportunities to explore the mystery, variety, and beauty of the Ridge. Trails will be routed to showcase the diversity of this site. High lookouts will provide panoramic views and offer safe opportunities to see big game. Sheltered, leeward microenvironments on a trail will permit intimate views of plants and small animals. Trails will be designed to offer glimpses of prominent features and destinations, but that also conceal some mysteries that lie ahead.
- Visitors will be encouraged to better appreciate and protect this environment through outdoor interpretive media designed to help connect their interests to the meanings of this unique place.
- Outdoor media materials need to be resistant to the extremes of weather that the Ridge experiences; powerful high-altitude UV sunlight, high winds carrying abrasive dirt and rocks, frigid sub-zero temperatures, and heavy loads of snow and ice.

Denali Vistas Trail
(0.3-2 mi loops)

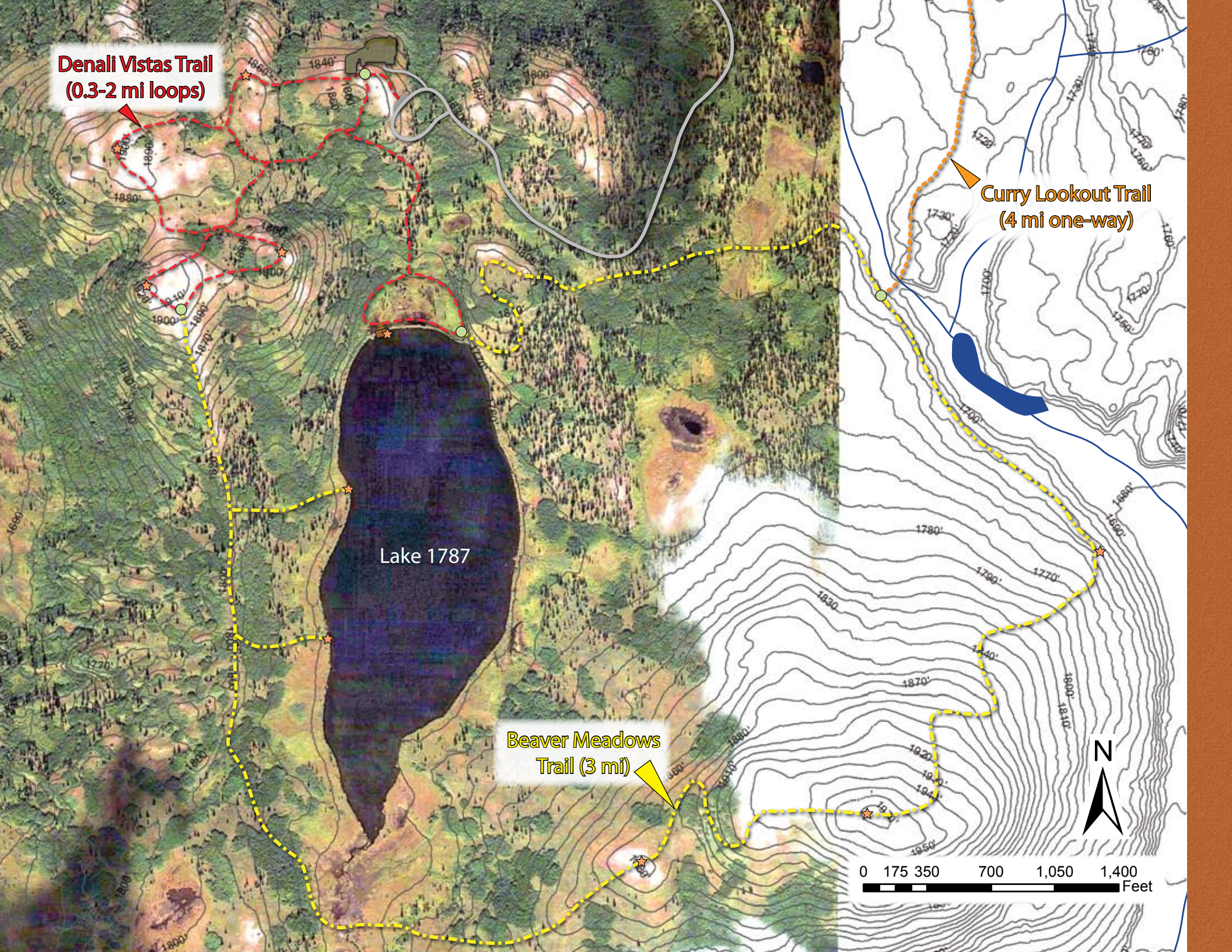
Curry Lookout Trail
(4 mi one-way)

Lake 1787

Beaver Meadows Trail
(3 mi)



0 175 350 700 1,050 1,400 Feet





View of Denali from High Panorama Viewpoint



Lake 1787 Viewpoint



Walking through spruce forests to Lake 1787

Denali Vistas Interpretive Trail

Interpretive Loops, 0.35-2 mile loops

A series of short trail loops that start at the visitor center provide universal access to the natural habitats and observation points of Curry Ridge. Named Denali Vistas Trail, the path promises visitors dramatic views of Mount McKinley, Ruth Glacier, the Alaska Range, and the Chulitna River Valley. A trail spur also takes them down for an intimate view of Lake 1787.

The varied topography around the visitor center offers a highly diverse experience in a relatively short walk. The trail traverses a variety of alpine plant communities from ridge top to muskeg. Visitors are invited to explore high bare rock ridges, alpine tundra, muskeg holes, thickets of alder and willow, spruce forests, swampy lake shores, and beaver meadows.

Most visitors to the South Denali Visitor Center will likely walk at least portions of this trail. Loops of varying lengths (0.35 mile, 0.7 mile, and 1 mile to the viewpoints; 1 mile to the lake and back) provide visitors with choices. All segments of this trail will be designed for universal access.

Boardwalks and hard surfaces are required to protect the tundra and provide universal access for visitors.

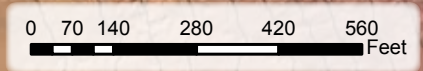
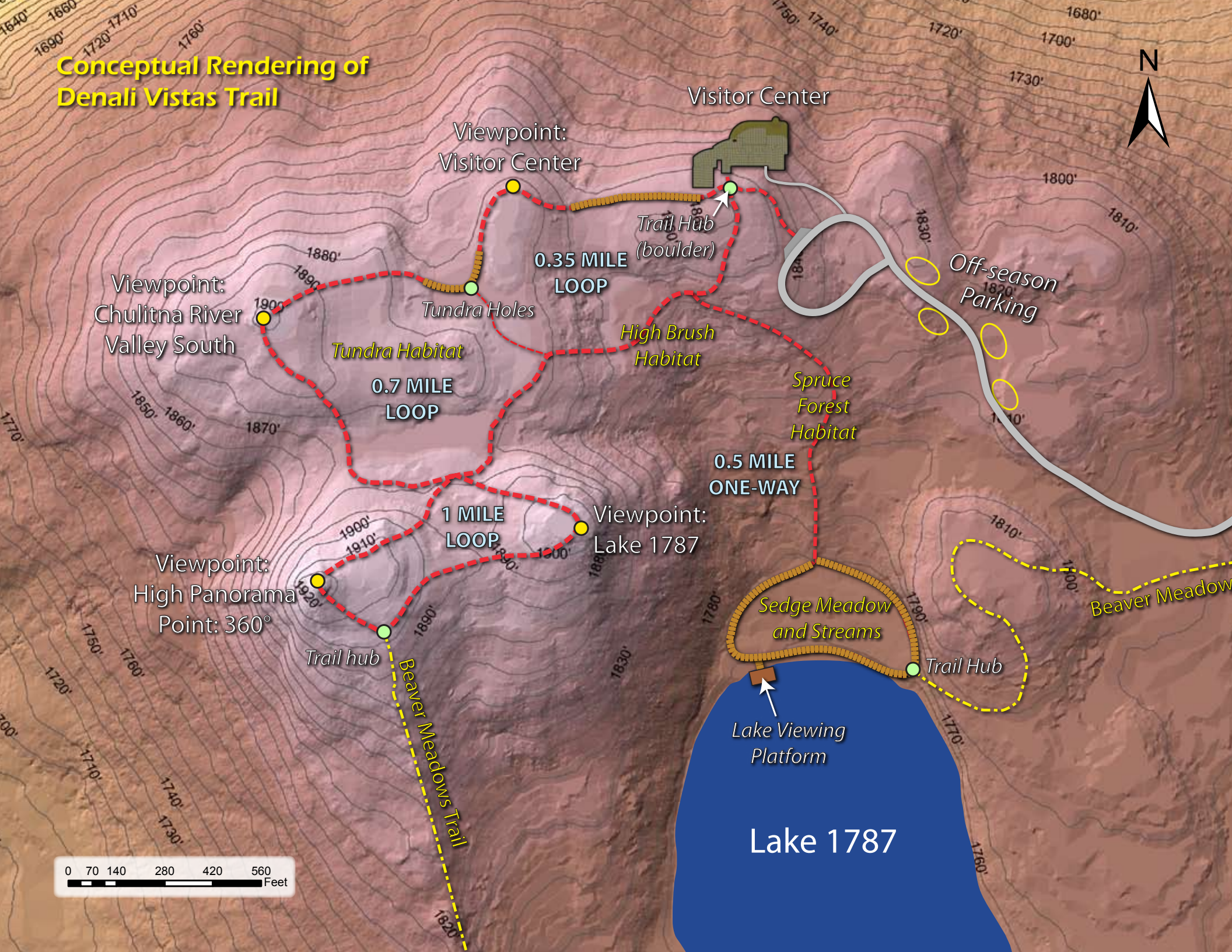
Effective trail layout should use natural site features, like brush thickets, boulders, and wet areas, as barriers to keep visitors within the defined corridor. The best viewing points and most direct routes to access them should be identified early in the process, so trails can be planned to avoid cutting. In wide open areas with low vegetation (like the higher viewpoints), structures such as decks, boardwalks, and viewing platforms should be built to limit trampling.

Wayside exhibits along the trail will interpret the flora and fauna that are adapted to the harsh extremes of the ridge. Three viewpoints are included on the loop which will have rustic benches to encourage visitors to linger and enjoy the vista. A lakeside platform will have built-in seating for observing wildlife on Lake 1787.

Muskeg hole



Conceptual Rendering of Denali Vistas Trail





Crossing braided streams of Lake 1787 outlet



View of Denali rising above Lake 1787



Rushing stream through beaver meadows

Beaver Meadows Trail

Nature Hiking Loop, 3 miles

This longer trail rewards hikers with opportunities to exercise, glimpse wildlife, and climb a ridge for an unparalleled view of Denali. It requires a greater investment of time and energy than the Denali Vistas Trail and allows hikers to get away from other visitors to experience the solitude of the site.

The trail follows a ridgeline to the west of Lake 1787, offering unique views of the lake from a high vantage. Two trail spurs connect to wildlife viewing blinds on the west shore of the lake. Crossing the southern outlet of the lake, hikers experience a diverse complex of streams, muskeg holes, and sedge meadows. Southeast of the lake, a 200-foot promontory offers a dramatic view of Mt. McKinley and the Ruth Glacier rising above Lake 1787. The trail parallels an unnamed stream on the east with views of active beaver lodges, dams, and ponds, before returning to the north edge of the lake through a large sedge meadow.

This trail is expected to have moderate use compared to the Denali Vistas Trail near the visitor center, but it is short enough that many groups will still be able to fit the hike into their schedule. The trail will be widened for comfortable walking in groups and improved with a gravel surface. Boardwalks will be built

over wetland areas. It will not be strictly ADA compliant, but will be available as a more challenging recreational trail for people in wheelchairs.

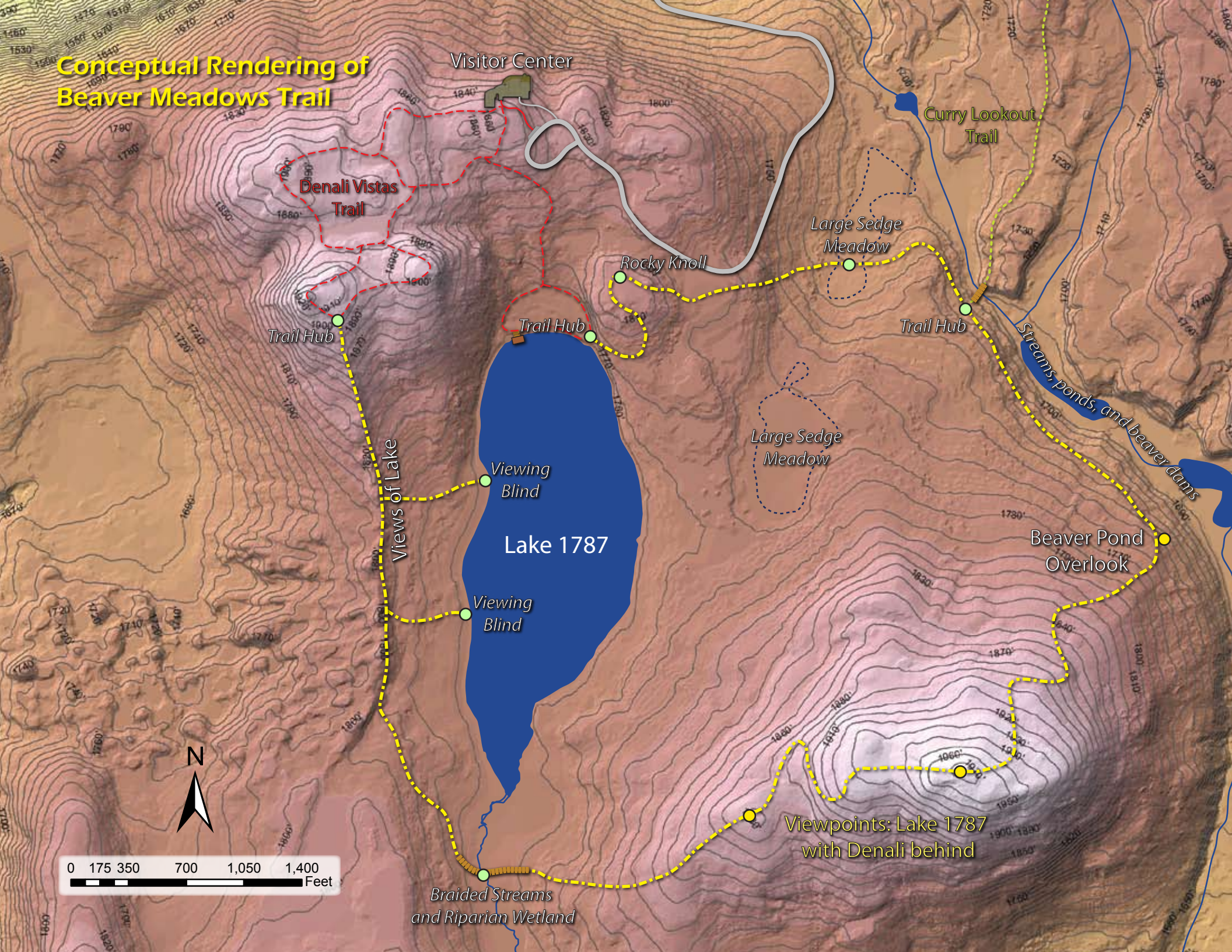
Wayfinding is important on this trail, as some visitors may feel uncomfortable venturing so far from the visitor center. Maps and direction signs will reassure them that they are on the correct path. This trail intersects the Denali Vistas Trail at two locations; trailhead map panels will be provided at these junctures.

Limited wayside exhibits may be placed at natural gathering points (viewing areas, beaver ponds and dams, sedge meadows) to connect visitors with a more holistic story.



Scenic streams and ponds in beaver meadows

Conceptual Rendering of Beaver Meadows Trail





Pleasant wooded ridge after crossing stream



Steep, wide valley between Lake 1787 (in the background) and the high elevations of Curry Ridge



Curry Lookout shelter

Curry Lookout Trail

Wilderness Trail, 4 miles one-way

This rustic wilderness trail connects the visitor center to Curry Lookout shelter to the northeast. A spur from the Beaver Meadows Trail climbs steeply about 800 feet to the higher elevation top of Curry Ridge. Once at the top, visitors are rewarded with spectacular views of the Alaska Range and an “other worldly” feel of being in the barren, high elevation tundra punctuated by unique rock formations and blue alpine lakes.

Due to its relatively long length and steep climbs, this trail is expected to have much lower use than the others. It is a day-long adventure that requires a degree of preparation and a commitment to hiking.

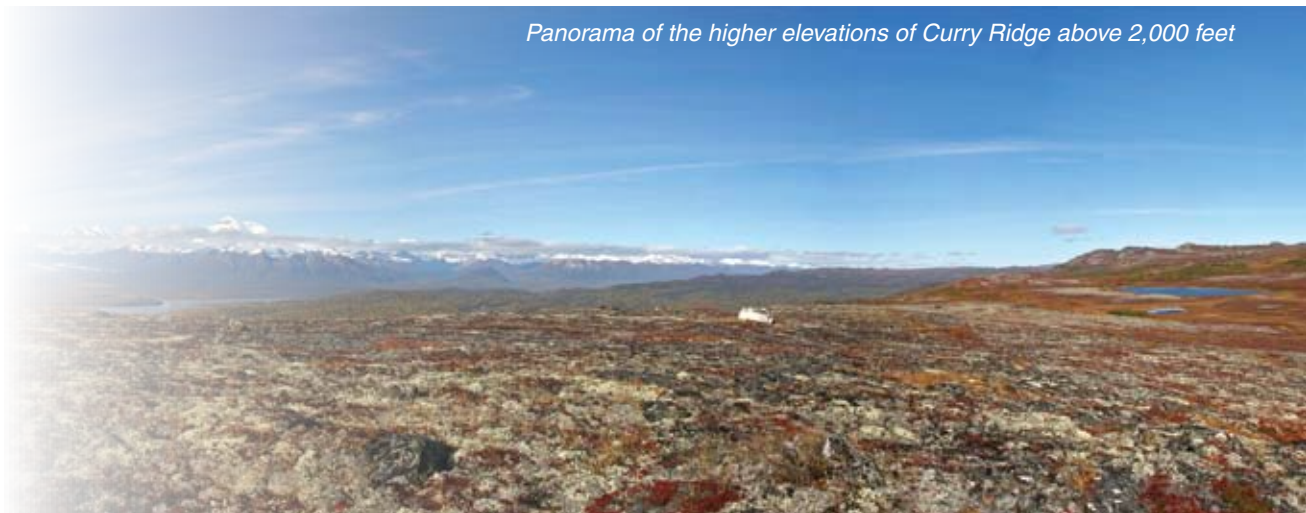
This wilderness trail has few improvements other than minimal wayfinding information such as trail maps and stone cairns across the tundra.

Visitors do need to know how much further the Curry Lookout is as distances can be deceiving.

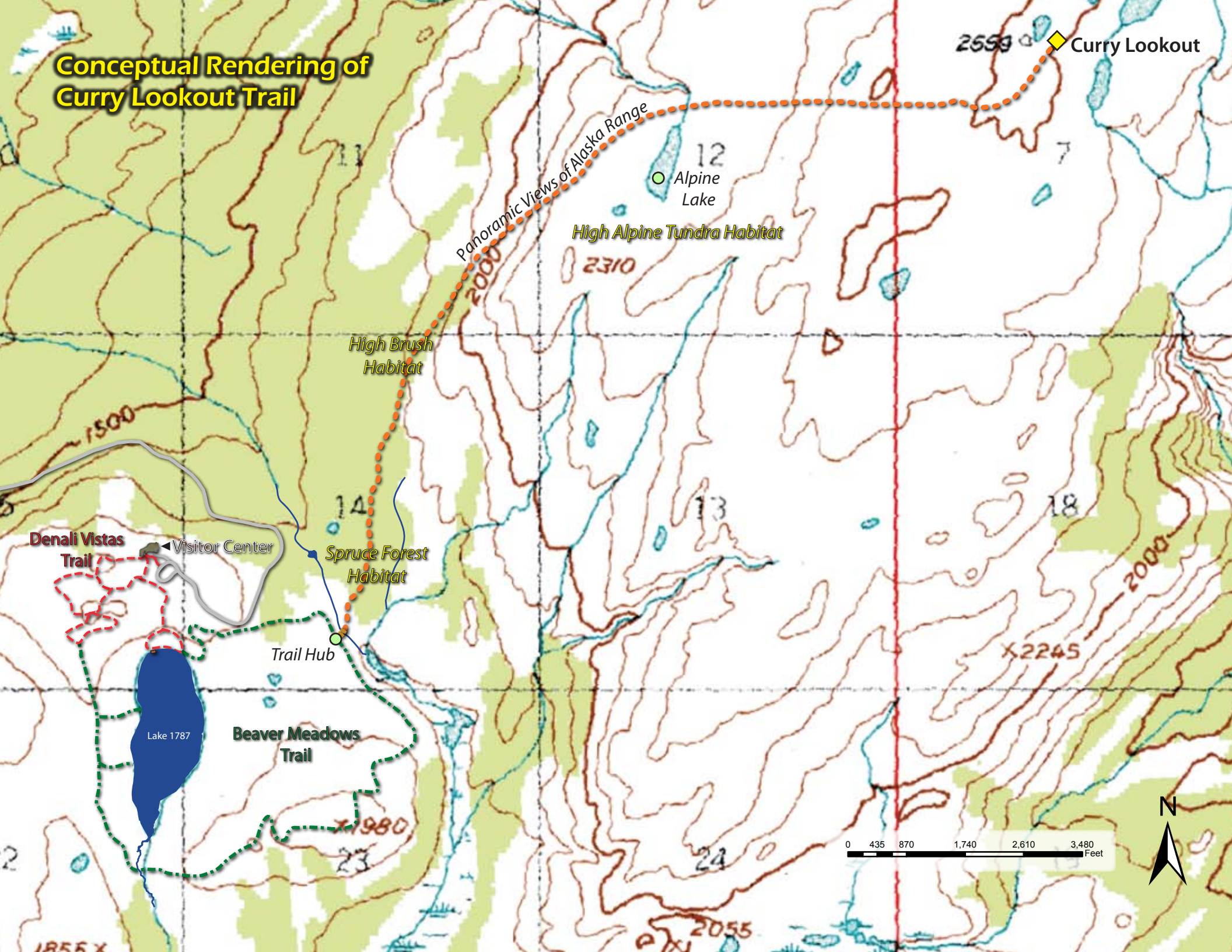
A trailhead map panel will be provided where the trail intersects with the interpretive loop. The Curry Lookout Shelter will discreetly house some interior panels with historic photographs of the town of Curry, the bridge that led to the Lookout Trail, and pictures and interpretation of early hikers from the railroad station and hotel.

Future plans call for trails that will connect Curry Lookout with existing paths along K’esugi Ridge. Discussions have also been conducted with Alaska Railroad representatives to potentially rebuild a trail between Curry Lookout and the historic Curry site on the east side of the Susitna River. At present, there is no crossing over the river.

Panorama of the higher elevations of Curry Ridge above 2,000 feet



Conceptual Rendering of Curry Lookout Trail





Rustic stone overlook, Knockan Crag NNR, Scotland



Themed wooden bench, Jordan's Custom Sculptures, Indian, Alaska



Boardwalks with grate surfaces allow water and sunlight to pass through. Islands & Ocean Visitor Center, Homer

Trail Structures and Amenities

The core adventure on Curry Ridge is found outside the walls of the visitor center on the trails and in exploring the wild ridge top and saddles. The potential of a peak trail experience is enhanced by the wonderful diversity of the landscape traversed by the trails.

Trail design adds to this heightened sense of discovery. A well designed trail helps hikers explore the mystery, variety, and beauty of a site. The trail surfaces can magnify the sense of changing landscapes; boardwalks can lift a traveler over boggy wetlands, beaver meadows, or present a fresh perspective from above a miniature alpine flower garden.

On the rocky ridge tops, stone should be incorporated into the design of low profile walls that subtly define the edges of scenic overlooks. Boulder benches and stacked stone should be used for seating that is harmonious with the location. In forested areas, rustic carved wood benches that reflect the themes of the trail should be used. For example, at the beaver meadow overlook, a bench with beavers carved in relief and accented with simulated beaver gnawing around the edges would be appropriate.

Trail surfaces and boardwalk treads should blend with the landscape as well. Interlocking concrete pavers formed

and stained to resemble rock can reduce erosion and trampling on the heavily used main loop. Rough cut, treated lumber provides a nonskid boardwalk surface on the stream crossings at the south end of Lake 1787. Boardwalks with grate surfaces allow rain and sunlight to reach the ground; this may be a good solution in alpine tundra areas where vegetation can continue to grow under the tread.

A floating platform that lies low on the water at the north shore of Lake 1787 invites discovery. Underwater viewing scopes installed on the platform provide unique glimpses into the clear alpine waters of the lake. Permanently mounted spotting scopes will invite visitors to study the distant views from the ridges and to focus in on moose in wetlands and loons on the lake.

Other viewing platforms on the west side of the lake serve as wildlife blinds, thematically camouflaged with a layer of sticks and logs from an old beaver lodge.

