

Chapter Six

Interpretive Media and Programs



South Denali Visitor Center Complex: Interpretive Master Plan



Personal interpretation is the most effective means of connecting visitors to the meanings of the resources. This ranger at Crater Lake National Park uses a tactile topographic model to orient visitors.

Interpretive Programming

Personal interpretation is the most effective technique for connecting the interests of visitors to the meaningful and unique stories found on Curry Ridge. A seasoned interpretive naturalist can help people to see and experience the environment in new and sensory ways that cannot be achieved with more passive techniques.

Since the real intent of this facility is to help people discover wild Alaska experientially on trails and ridge tops, guided trail walks are an excellent way to open visitors' eyes, hearts, and minds.

The National Park Service plans to provide some interpretive staffing that will include interpreters and environmental educators. Seasonal staff will provide some summer needs for programming. A number of interpretive needs demand a higher quality of knowledge and professional expertise than seasonal staff can be expected to deliver. It is difficult for agencies to meet the seasonal demands for both quantity and quality due to the limited training schedules and the turnover of seasonal employees.

There are entrepreneurial interpretive services that are locally available near Curry Ridge. These firms have proven experience and sound cultural and

natural history knowledge of this area. These services should be formally encouraged and integrated into the management plan of the visitor center facility.

This symbiotic relationship will assist the Park in meeting the diverse needs of this large audience while supporting the local economy. Private companies can better meet the needs of this market and be more responsive to its changing demands, numbers, and schedules than government agencies. They can also assume the financial risks and potential profits inherent in providing these services.

Standards and programmatic objectives should be defined by State Parks in order to contract with reputable guide and interpretive entities who will provide a level of visitor service not available through agency programming.

Several provisions have been incorporated into the visitor center design to facilitate interpretive programming. These include an amphitheater off the deck, a large multi-purpose room that can be divided, a large storage area for program supplies, a trail system with different sized loops, and trail gathering areas such as overlooks and a platform on the lake.

Visitor Center Exhibits

Interpretive media are non-personal forms of communication that enhance visitors' experiences by helping them make connections between the tangible resources of South Denali and the intangible meanings that these resources represent. Exhibits, theater productions, and outdoor panels are some of the vehicles that help visitors see how this place is relevant to their own lives.

Specific media components were consciously selected and developed to best interpret the significant attributes of the South Denali site: its ecology, geology, and human history. The varied modes of communication chosen for the media are intended to reach diverse learning styles and span a continuum of ages.

The **visitor center exhibits** are intended to prepare people to understand and value this unique place that they are about to experience. The media can demonstrate complex and colossal geological forces in direct ways that are understandable on a human scale. Some exhibits give visitors unique views of elusive wildlife that they may only glimpse fleetingly as they explore the site. Historic events can burst to life through dramatic theater productions that involve the emotions and intellect of viewers of all ages.

Organization of Media Concepts

Each media concept is developed as follows:

1. A brief **purpose** is provided. That explains why the exhibit concept is recommended
2. A list of **sub-themes** and **messages** that will guide interpretation for the exhibit is linked to the framework in Chapter 4.
3. **Objectives** are provided that describe what the visitor will learn (educational), what they will do (behavioral), and how they will feel (emotional connections).
4. A **description** along with graphic representations details each media concept.

Everglades National Park Visitor Center, Florida



Begich-Boggs Visitor Center, Alaska



Great River Road Visitor Center, Wisconsin



The most effective exhibits are those that involve the visitor. Tactiles, audio units, smell boxes, flip panels, mechanical devices, videos, and computer interactives are components that increase participation and enhance the success of an exhibit.

Tactile Topographic Map of Alaska Range, Curry Ridge, K'esugi Ridge and Chulitna River Valley

Purpose:

To identify the mountains and other landscape features visible from Curry Ridge and help visitors comprehend their size and relationships even when they are partially covered by clouds.

Themes and Messages Interpreted:

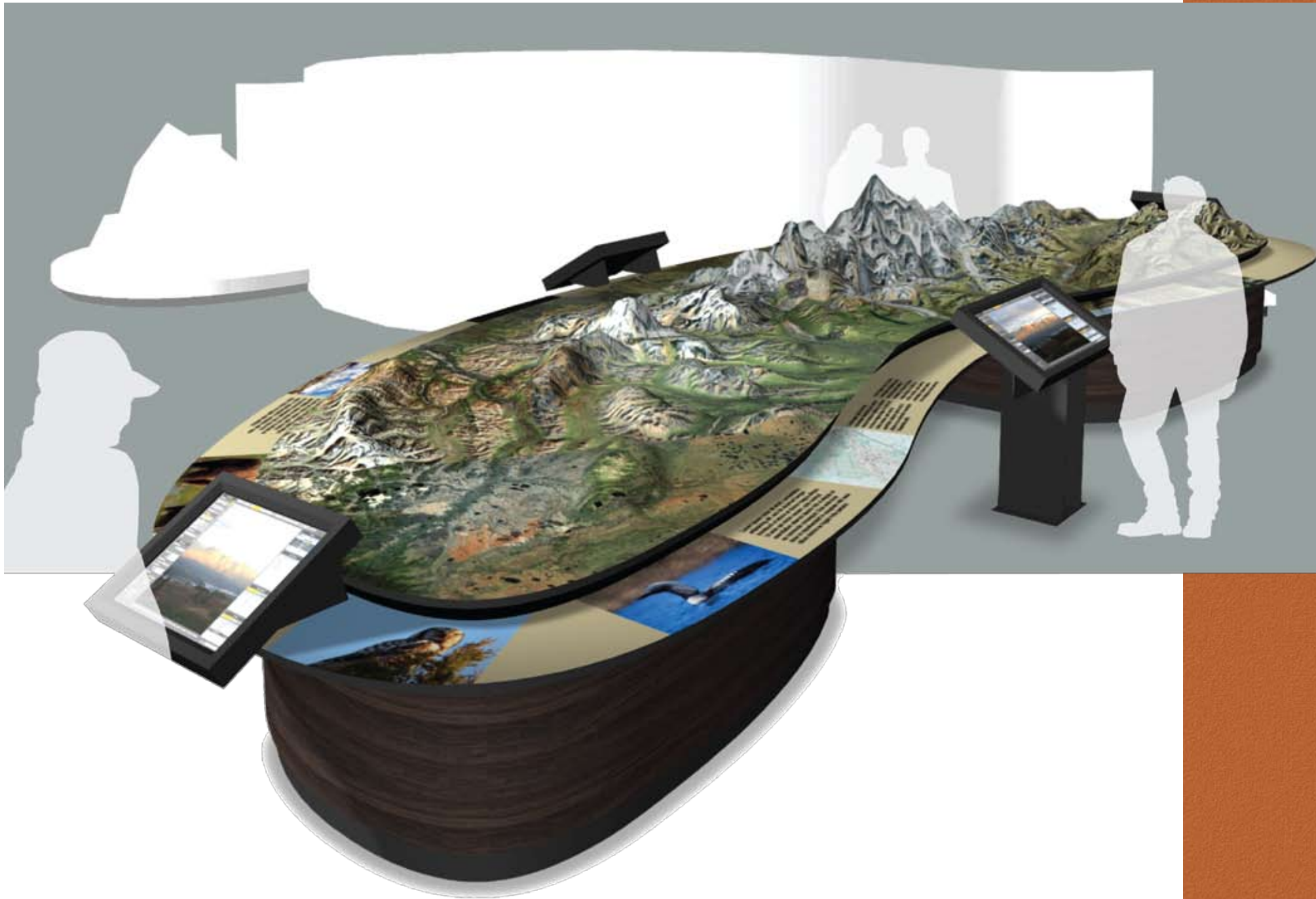
Sub-Theme 2, Messages 2.1 a-m

Objectives:

- Visitors will learn the names of the visible mountains, glaciers, rivers and ridges.
- Visitors will be encouraged to touch the physical maps as they view the real landscape scene out the window;
- Visitors will confidently explore Curry Ridge with a newly acquired cognitive map

Description:

This large free-standing topographic map of the South Denali landscape will be constructed without borders or barriers to allow visitors full tactile access to the map. The map will be placed near the viewing window so visitors can make reference to the "real thing" and interpreters can give "map talks" about the features. STM (Solid Terrain Models) is a company that makes maps fitting these criteria.



3-D Topographic Projection Map of Denali State Park

Purpose:

To provide a fun, easily understood, interactive map experience that encourages visitors to plan their visits in a holistic manner. Options will be presented based on visitors' planned length of visit, preferred activities, physical ability, etc.

Themes and Messages Interpreted:

Sub-Theme 8, Messages 8.1-8.11

Objectives:

- Visitors will learn about the range of recreation opportunities and special features of the park as they push buttons that project images such as trails, roads, boundaries, interpretive features, and access points.
- Visitors will plan their visit to the park based on the information provided.

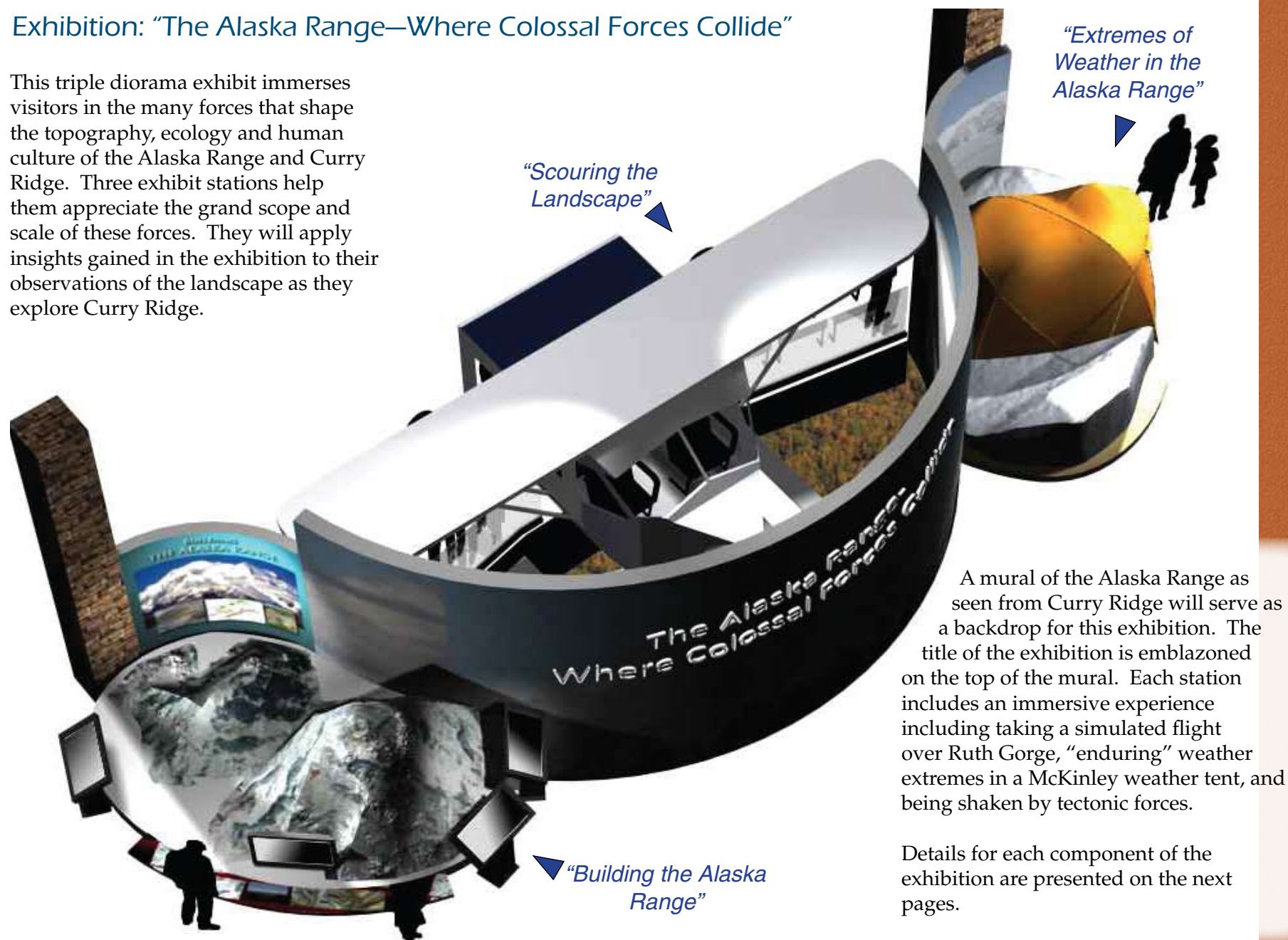
Description:

This map and its projection system will be conveniently placed in an exhibit alcove near the visitor information desk. A menu of projection options will allow visitors to choose various overlays such as fishing and hunting opportunities, camping, trails, etc. It will provide appropriate options based on length of visit and interests.



Exhibition: "The Alaska Range—Where Colossal Forces Collide"

This triple diorama exhibit immerses visitors in the many forces that shape the topography, ecology and human culture of the Alaska Range and Curry Ridge. Three exhibit stations help them appreciate the grand scope and scale of these forces. They will apply insights gained in the exhibition to their observations of the landscape as they explore Curry Ridge.



A mural of the Alaska Range as seen from Curry Ridge will serve as a backdrop for this exhibition. The title of the exhibition is emblazoned on the top of the mural. Each station includes an immersive experience including taking a simulated flight over Ruth Gorge, "enduring" weather extremes in a McKinley weather tent, and being shaken by tectonic forces.

Details for each component of the exhibition are presented on the next pages.

Exhibition: “The Alaska Range—Where Colossal Forces Collide”



Building the Alaska Range

Purpose:

To interpret the tectonic forces uplifting the Alaska Range and Curry Ridge and the rocks and minerals that make up the range.

Themes and Messages Interpreted:

Sub-Theme 2, Messages 2.3 a-c; 2.4 a-d

Objectives:

- Visitors will learn about the tectonic forces that shaped the Alaska Range
- Visitors will be physically engaged in learning the geologic history of the Alaska Range. They will view animations, operate mechanical devices, and feel rock samples.

Description:

Building the Alaska Range interprets the tectonic forces that have uplifted the Alaska Range and Curry Ridge. These concepts are interpreted around the surface of a prominent model of Mount McKinley. A 3-D animation of the forces shaping the Alaska Range is projected on a large flat-panel screen embedded in the mountain. The viewer stands in front of the screen and views the animation through 3-D glasses. A sub-woofer groans and vibrates in synchrony with colliding crustal plates,

slipping faults, and rising mountains. Near the animation, mechanical devices operated by the viewer will allow them to simulate slip-strike and vertical thrust faulting, crustal warping, and the uplift of the Mount McKinley pluton. A reading rail will have illustrations and a timeline of the building of the Alaska Range. Large samples of rocks and minerals are available for visitors to explore. This allows visitors to touch and see what makes up the Alaska Range (e.g.: Plutonic granite making up Mt. McKinley) and learn about their origins from text and graphics placed with the samples.

BUILDING THE ALASKA RANGE



Exhibition: “The Alaska Range—Where Colossal Forces Collide”



Extremes of Weather in the Alaska Range

Purpose:

To interpret how the Alaska Range intercepts moist air from the Gulf of Alaska and as the air lifts up the slopes extremes of weather are created that are dangerous to mountaineers.

Themes and Messages Interpreted:

Sub-Theme 3, 6

Messages 3.2 a-f, 6.1 a-h

Objectives

- Visitors will be surprised that, although Denali is a non-technical climb, it is one of the most dangerous due to the severe weather, avalanches and altitude sickness.
- Visitors will learn that Denali experiences some of the most severe weather in the world.
- In a game of survival, visitors will choose items that they would need for a two-week climb of Denali (with weather contingencies that could extend it to a month). They will be rewarded if they return safely.

Description:

A large mountain climber's base-camp tent is erected in a simulated glacial ice field. Visitors are lured into the tent by the frantic sounds of a two-way radio and the roar of mountain gale-force wind. The radio voice relates the drama of climbing teams stranded in relentless storms, enduring days of numbing stress from howling winds, crashing avalanches, and flapping tents. “Denali makes its own weather” has real-time readings of current weather conditions on the mountain. A flat panel screen illustrates the changing weather on Mount McKinley and adjacent peaks, especially the flow of clouds from the Gulf of Alaska up the slopes of the mountains, providing high amounts of clouds and precipitation on the windward side and low amounts on the leeward side. A graphic panel shows the relative precipitation at various points and interprets how the mountains affect the climate on the windward and leeward sides of the Alaska Range.



Exhibition: “The Alaska Range—Where Colossal Forces Collide”



Scouring the Landscape

Purpose:

Using the Chulitna River and Ruth Glacier as examples, the exhibit interprets the landscape shaping effects of glaciers and rivers.

Themes and Messages Interpreted:

Sub-Theme 2, Messages 2.5 a-g

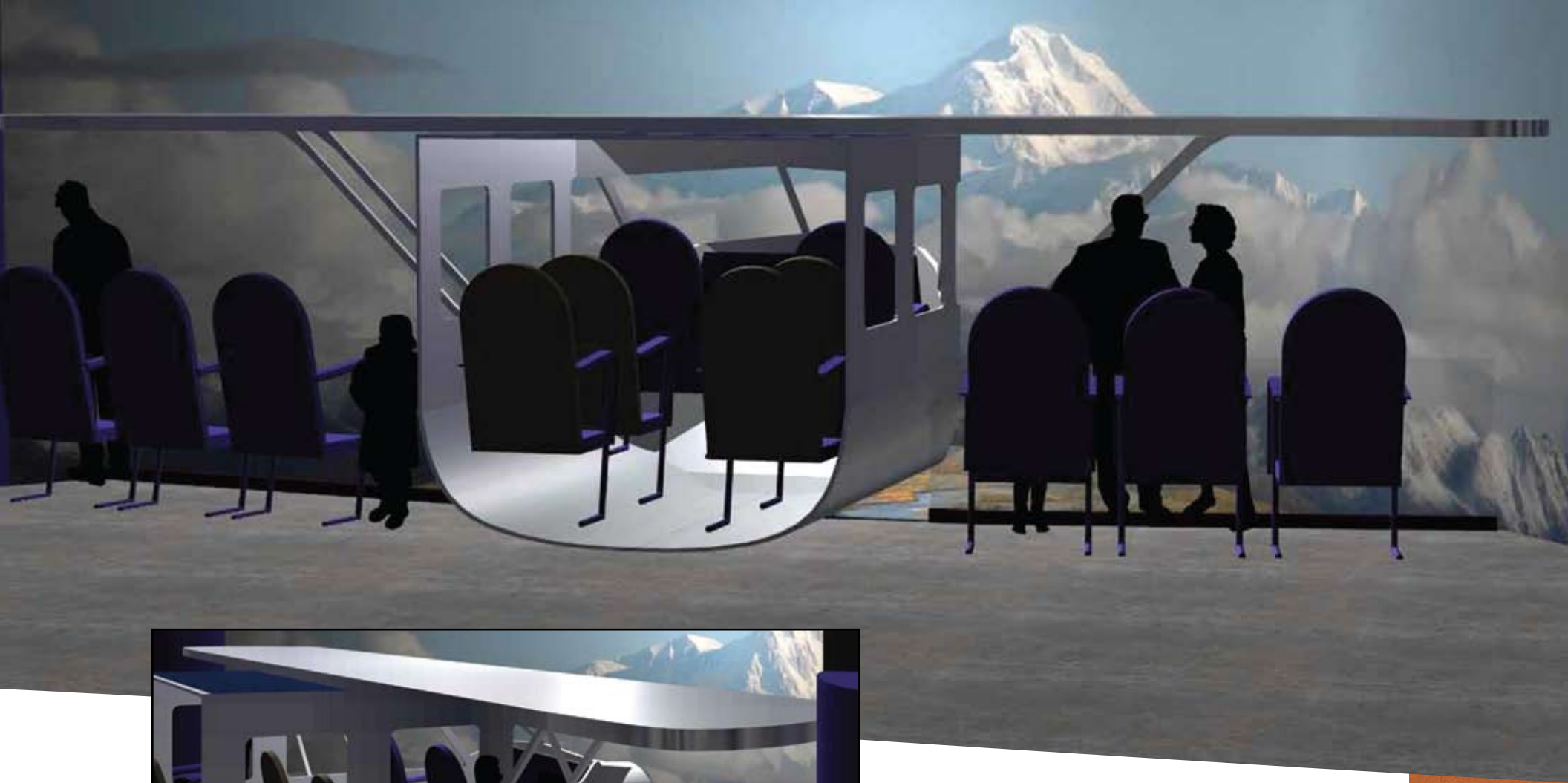
Sub-Theme 7, 7.1 a-f

Objectives:

- Visitors will feel the excitement and some of the sensations of a pilot-narrated flight-seeing trip over Curry Ridge, up the Chulitna River to Ruth Glacier, up the glacier to the Don Sheldon Amphitheater.
- Visitors will learn about how glaciers and rivers have shaped the landscape and created features such as Ruth Gorge.
- Visitors will be awestruck by the narrated facts about Ruth Glacier.
- Visitors will see glacial flour in the Chulitna River that limits opportunities for sport fishing.

Description:

An old, “authentic” Ruth Glacier flight-seeing ski plane invites visitors to “climb aboard” for a video tour of the Chulitna River and Ruth Glacier. It is positioned in front of a curved, icy, backdrop. Visitors wear headphones to hear the “pilot” narrate the tour. As the plane “takes off,” a breeze blows over the viewer’s faces and their seats vibrate to the roar of the engines. The tour begins with a flight over Curry Ridge down to the Chulitna River. The pilot relates that all of this river flow is melt water from the glaciers. He tells about the glacial flour that gives it the characteristic color. He points out that it flows through a valley that was once shaped by surging glaciers. Then it’s up Ruth Glacier through Ruth Gorge, ending with a landing in the Don Sheldon Amphitheater. As the landscape floats by, the pilot points out the features and facts of Ruth Glacier. After completing the tour, visitors can walk nearby to touch glacier etched rocks, see rock flour in water and view graphics of Alaska Range glaciers and rivers.



Narration Excerpt: *The glacier's "Great Gorge" is one mile wide and drops almost 2,000 feet over ten miles with crevasses along the surface. Above the surface on both sides are 5,000-foot granite cliffs. From the top of the cliffs to the bottom of the glacier is a height exceeding that of the Grand Canyon.*

Exhibition: Life on Curry Ridge

Three habitat islands feature dramatic scenes such as cranes in tundra leaping in courtship dance, an underwater view of a moose submerged in a beaver pond, and a spruce grouse perched in a spruce tree. Each island is surrounded by a counter-like railing of tactile objects, embedded monitors, and other features that involve

the viewer in actively experiencing and investigating each habitat.

These dioramas engage the visitor's interest and they get involved by touching, listening, smelling and reading. The unusual perspectives in these exhibits give fresh insights into

these plants and animals. When visitors encounter them on the trails, they will have new-found appreciation for them.

Details for each component of the exhibition are presented on the next pages.



Life on Curry Ridge: Mountain Pond

Purpose:

To provide interactive experiences that help visitors learn about selected animals that live in and around Lake 1787.

Themes and Messages Interpreted:

Sub-Theme 1, Messages 1.6 d; 1.8 a, c

Objectives:

- Visitors will learn that Lake 1787, an alpine lake perched on Curry Ridge near the visitor center site, attracts a diversity of wildlife in both the open water and shoreline habitats.
- Visitors will interact with various tactile elements that illustrate fun features of a variety of animals that live in and near Lake 1787. Children will be delighted to crawl into a musky beaver lodge.
- Visitors will be awestruck by the size of a moose and physically engaged with the tangible features of moose embedded on the railing.

Description:

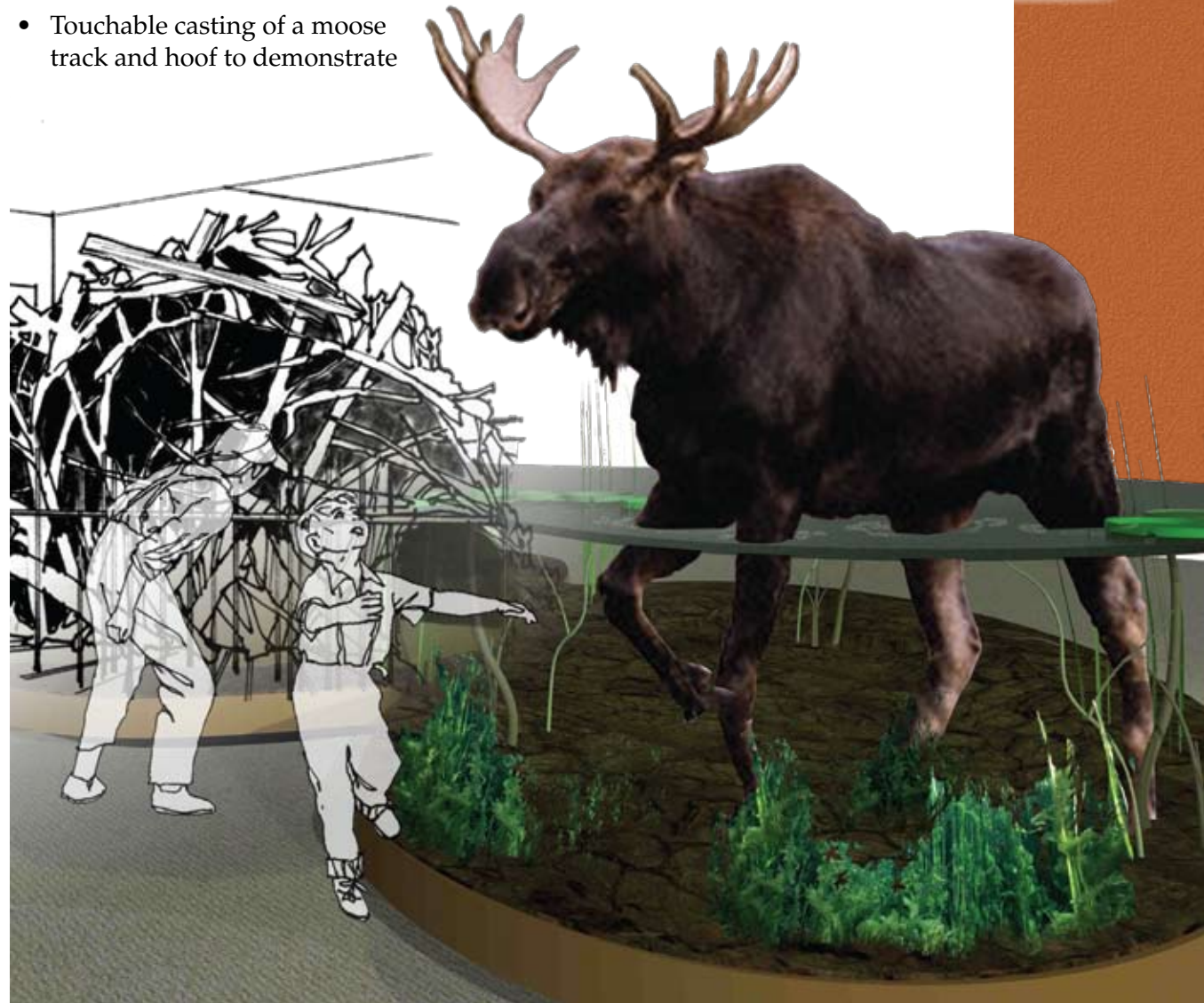
This island replicates a mountain pond environment, featuring a moose foraging near a beaver lodge. Kids can climb into the musky beaver lodge and peer out under the water.

On the rail in front are:

- Touchable relief sculpture of a wood frog, tadpole, and egg mass
- Button activated wood frog call
- Patch of moose pelt and a magnifying lens that allows viewers to touch the hair and see the hollow hairs
- Touchable casting of a moose track and hoof to demonstrate

paddle and weight-supporting abilities in snow and wetlands

- A touchable moose skull with antlers, rodent gnawing marks on it
- Touchable latex moose droppings, which change with a seasonal diet



Life on Curry Ridge: Alpine Tundra

Purpose:

To interpret tundra plants and animals and their adaptations to the harsh alpine environment of Curry Ridge.

Themes and Messages Interpreted:

Sub-Theme 1, Messages 1.1 a-j; 1.8 h

Objectives:

- Visitors will learn that alpine tundra, found in the higher elevations of Curry and K'esugi Ridges, is a miniature world of plants adapted to harsh conditions of sunlight, wind, cold, drought, and a short growing season.
- Visitors will study magnified embedded alpine plants and insect pollinators on a monitor to see and learn about adaptations for alpine survival. Visitors will push buttons to hear and learn about alpine birds including the sandhill crane and its fall visits for blueberries and "craneberries".
- Through the use of various senses to explore the exhibit, visitors will be actively engaged and rewarded with surprising information.

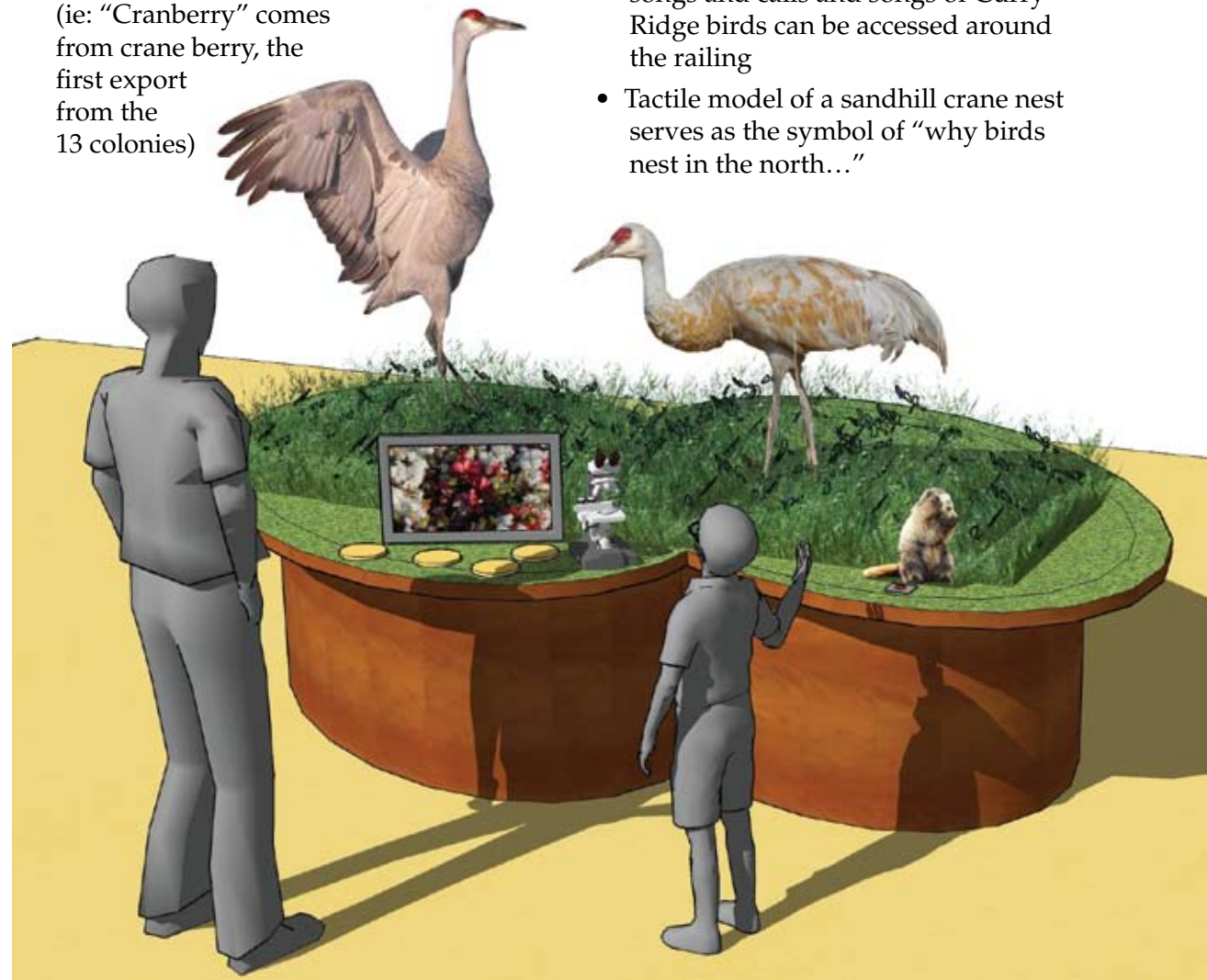
Description:

This island illustrates alpine tundra habitat, and features a pair of dancing sandhill cranes in a courtship display.

On the rail in front are:

- Tiny plants and berries embedded in resin that can be magnified on a monitor so viewers see hairy stems, waxy leaves, spreading roots, and other modifications for alpine survival. When an image shows on the monitor, interpretation relates the plant to the interests of the reader (ie: "Cranberry" comes from crane berry, the first export from the 13 colonies)

- Tundra insect pollinators embedded in resin to be viewed and projected. These include big, hairy bees and butterflies with qualities that make them successful in alpine habitats
- Touchable model of a hoary marmot with alarm call button nearby.
- Bird photographs and push-button songs and calls and songs of Curry Ridge birds can be accessed around the railing
- Tactile model of a sandhill crane nest serves as the symbol of "why birds nest in the north..."



Life on Curry Ridge: Willow, Alder, White Spruce Thickets

Purpose:

To provide interactive experiences that help visitors learn about selected animals that live in the sub-alpine thickets.

Themes and Messages Interpreted:

Sub-Theme 1, Messages 1.2 a-b; 1.3 a-b

Objectives:

- Visitors will learn that the high brush thickets and spruce forests are a transition zone between lower forests and alpine tundra that provides significant browse and cover for mammals and birds.
- Visitors will interact with tactile models of parts of a spruce grouse, hawk owl and snowshoe hare that illustrate physical adaptations of these animals to survive in this habitat.

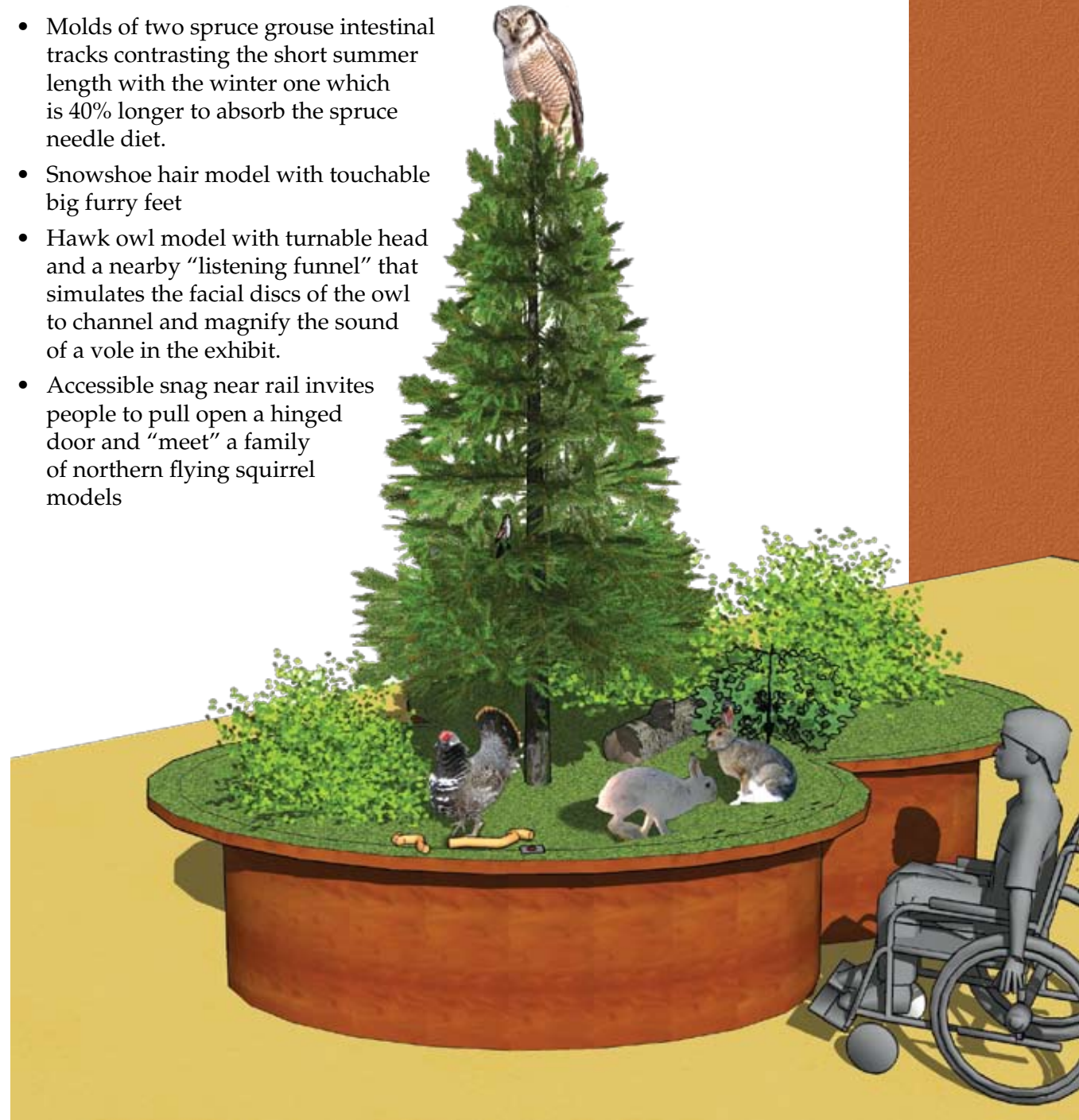
Description:

This island features a willow, alder, and white spruce thicket. Several tactile models of wildlife, such as red squirrels, spruce grouse, hawk owls, and snowshoe hares, encourage exploration.

On the rail in front are:

- Spruce grouse model with associated fringed and feathered foot, and pullout snow burrow, push-button sounds of the grouse

- Molds of two spruce grouse intestinal tracks contrasting the short summer length with the winter one which is 40% longer to absorb the spruce needle diet.
- Snowshoe hair model with touchable big furry feet
- Hawk owl model with turnable head and a nearby “listening funnel” that simulates the facial discs of the owl to channel and magnify the sound of a vole in the exhibit.
- Accessible snag near rail invites people to pull open a hinged door and “meet” a family of northern flying squirrel models



Object Theater—"Spirit of Alaska"

Purpose:

To provide an immersive theater experience that gives viewers a sweeping overview of the unforgiving Denali landscape and the people who have met the challenge. This theater is meant to surprise the audience and evoke a sense of adventure as the spirit of the Alaska Frontier unfolds around them. It is more experiential than factual. It is intended to excite people to want to see and do more during their Alaska adventure.

Themes and Messages Interpreted:

Sub-Theme 5, Messages 5.1-5.13;

Sub-Theme 6, Messages 6.1-6.4;

Sub-Theme 7, Messages 7.1-7.6

(Note: In the development of the script, specific messages will be selected that best achieve the purpose and objectives)

Objectives:

- Visitors will learn about the interior Athabaskan people and witness their spiritual connection to the land; that the promise of riches has beckoned adventurers and thrill-seekers since the late 19th century; and that the Chulitna and Susitna Rivers have been corridors for access to the Alaska interior.
- Visitors will be awed by the beauty and diversity of life in the Alaska Range and the Chulitna-Susitna River valleys and ridges.

They will feel amazement at the stories of mountain climbers, bush pilots, homesteaders and other adventurers drawn to this land.

- Visitors will be compelled to taste the spirit of Alaska by hiking the ridge, riding the river rapids, or chartering a flight.

Description:

The "object theater" has an arc of alcoves to the right, left, and above a HDTV format screen (e.g., Da-lite™ Cinema Contour 9' X 14' screen). Each alcove has a vignette of historic events complete with objects and artifacts that will be dramatically revealed through motion, lighting and sound during the course of the presentation. The alcoves are hidden behind scrims that reveal what is behind them when illuminated. The ceiling has undulating special scrims that transform the theater to a show of northern lights. A surround sound system for commercial theaters will provide the dramatic sound effects for the production ranging from roaring bush plane engines or a rushing waterfall to the gnawing sounds of a beaver or a calling family of Boreal Chickadees. The production will be stored and presented in a digital high definition format.

The audience is engulfed in an array of dreamlike experiences that give them insights into Athabaskan mythology about the "Tall One," Denali. Stories about Alaskan legends and real people personalize the history of this land. Theatrical lighting, surround sound, and dynamic video footage actively engage viewers in the presentation. The voices of sourdoughs, bush pilots, and '59ers, echo through the room. The room is filled with movement and surprises.

A veiled "stage" encircles the theater audience. As the story unfolds, lights mysteriously illuminate symbolic artifacts behind a scrim. Sounds, voices, and highlighted objects pull people's attention from one side of the room to the other. The theater is alive with the sound of life—the gurgle of a brook in one direction transitions to the roar of a bush plane in the other and the theater seats vibrate in response. A darkened room bursts into brilliant arcs of undulating color when the Aurora Borealis glows from the dancing drapery of the reflective ceiling. Periodically the large screen jumps to life with dynamic sequences of mountain sunrises or the thunder of an avalanche.



Entrances to the theater are to the right and left of a large door opening. On the corridor walls behind the opening are a series of large simulated theater posters. These interpretive panels are illustrated with dramatic headlines, text, photos

and graphics representing stories that are told in the theater: "Shem Pete's World: The Dena'ina of the Alaska Range"; "Gold Fever: Sourdoughs of Denali rivers;" "Tough as Nails: The Sourdough Expedition"; "Railroad Town: Alaska

Nellie's Curry Roadhouse"; "Bush Pilots of Talkeetna: Tales of Don Sheldon and Cliff Hudson"; "The 59er's: Staking a Claim in the Wilderness"; "The Parks Highway: Corridor to Adventure."

“Spirit of Alaska” Storyline Concept

Opening Scene—The theater lights fade and when the theater is dark and quiet, a raven call breaks the silence. A Dena’ina male voice quietly retells their ancient legend of how the Great Mountain was created. He describes the flight of a young brave who has taken a bride from the Raven Chief’s camp and paddles to escape the wrath of the chief. The audience will see the dream-like silhouettes in their peripheral vision (shadows behind a scrim). As the tale reaches its climax the ceiling bursts into a shimmering Aurora Borealis and the Alaska Range and the towering Denali begins to glow on the screen.

Scene 1—Spectacular views of the summit of Denali are accompanied by the sound and feel of wind in the theater. Fly-over views ensue of the rugged mountain terrain under a low winter sun. The audience is immersed in the vast, wild landscape. A close-up of a calving glacier’s wall is transmitted with thundering sound and vibration in the theater. The camera follows the surging melt water to a stream with the glint of a gold nugget in the gravel bed. The screen fades dark.

Scene 2—The sound of water shifts to the side where a light begins to

illuminate a moving rocker box and sluice trough. The murmur of miners escalates to excited shouts of “Gold!” The voices fade and the sound of rag-time piano draws the audience’s eyes to the screen where historic black and white images of gold-town saloons appear. An argument ensues: Tom Lloyd, Kantishna miner says, “Bill (Bill McPhee, barroom owner, standing behind the bar) you know that Dr. Cook was a liar. He didn’t make the summit and every Alaskan knows it.” (Bill): “Tom, I don’t think anyone can climb that mountain.” (Tom): “I’ll bet me and some of my boys can do it!” (Bill): “I’ve got \$500 for anyone who can make the climb and prove if that fellow Cook made the climb or not.”

Scene 3—a series of old black and white photographs are projected on-screen of historic Denali climbing parties accompanied by verbal quotes from accounts of the Sourdough Expedition (e.g.: “Those guys had to be tough as nails”). Doughnuts and a thermos are illuminated on a side alcove. A flag on a spruce pole waves in a breeze. The Sourdoughs images slowly appear behind a scrim, near the spruce pole.

Scene 4—Theater goes dark, a raven call gives way to the distant whistle of a steam locomotive. An engine headlight



"...and as the Raven Chief's spear soared over the young brave, it struck the huge wave, turning it to a great stone mountain."

breaks the darkness. The sound grows louder. The seats rumble to a passing train as the whistle shrieks from one side of the theater to the other. Light strobes onto a Curry Station sign. Vintage video footage and stills tell the story of building the Alaska Railroad. The nearby town of Curry is featured, first as a construction landing, later as an overnight stop for travelers on the railroad. Photos of President Warren Harding show he was a guest at the Curry Hotel when he drove the golden spike at Nenana. The story of Alaska Nellie and her Deadhorse Roadhouse in Curry is told as a tale of a frontier woman who exemplified the spirit of Alaska. Adventurers climbing to Curry Lookout from the Curry Hotel are testimony to the lure of frontier Alaska. The last photo in the scene is of Cliff Hudson standing in the doorway of Curry Lookout. He is identified as a pioneer bush pilot. The light fades to black.

Scene 5—The sound of an airplane engine firing to life breaks the silence. A reproduction of the 1930's McGee Airways sign "Fly an hour or walk a week—keep sled dogs off runway" is illuminated behind a scrim. The engine roars for takeoff, reverberating through the seats, from Talkeetna and you fly over the Susitna River to Curry Ridge where you circle the Curry Lookout. You

enter a cloud and a raging snowstorm and an airman's voice describes his ordeal when his C123 breaks up over the snow-covered Curry Ridge. Historic film and photos of famous Talkeetna bush pilots, Don Sheldon and Cliff Hudson provides the images (perhaps add some re-enactment footage like some airmen waving frantically from the snow fields below) for the telling of their dramatic rescue of the airmen. Bush pilots are illustrated with historic film as the link to the wilderness and a lifeline for homesteaders, miners, and trappers. Cliff Hudson is seen bringing mail and supplies to a homestead is the transition to the '59ers and earlier homesteaders.

Scene 6—Artifacts from a homesteader's cabin (a cook stove, tools, furniture, etc.) are illuminated behind the scrim. Vintage film depicting the life of homesteaders in the Alaska bush is narrated in their own words. These contemporary pioneers are representative of the true spirit of Alaska.

Scene 7—The George Parks Highway, completed in the 1970's, connected Anchorage with Fairbanks and brought civilization to Susitna and Chulitna River homesteaders. This story is told through the words of Mary Carey, who had a homestead just up the road from

South Denali Viewpoint and petitioned the Governor to build the road. ("We already have two roads in Alaska. Why do we need another one?" responded the Governor). When the road was completed she opened McKinley View Lodge. The scene ends with a photo of Mary at her lodge that dissolves.

Final Scene—A bright, present-day view of the lodge reappears on the screen and you soar away from the lodge, above the valley. A voice invites you to "Catch the spirit of Alaska". A view into the river shows rafters on the Chulitna, and suddenly you are aboard a raft surging through swirling rapids. You are lifted from the rapids and soar above Curry Ridge where join happy hikers on their way to Curry Lookout. From the top of the ridge you look to the south as a train snakes along the Susitna River. You zoom in to see people waving from an observation car. Your attention is turned to a group of birdwatchers on Lake 1787 who focus their spotting scope on Pacific loons calling on the lake. You hear the sounds of insects and your focus is turned to a meadow of mountain flowers that turn to ripened berries and the rusts and golds of fall, and finally the silence of winter snows. The light fades on Denali and the Northern Lights once again dance above you in the theater.



***President Harding drove the golden spike that symbolized the completion of the Alaska Railroad, dedicating it
“to the men who suffered cold and defied death that they might write their page in history.”***

Outdoor Interpretive Media

The South Denali Visitor Center serves as a gateway to the real Alaska outdoors. A well developed network of trails is proposed in Chapter 5: Interpretive Facility and Site Development. Signage planned along the trails provide opportunities for interpreting actual resources and events that visitors are currently experiencing on the site. This is a powerful method for connecting visitors to the stories of Curry Ridge.

Standardized trail panels and supports are desirable for visual recognition by visitors. They should blend aesthetically into the environment, while also serving as comfortable visual icons, assuring visitors that this is a well maintained and safe place.

When interpretive signs are unified and designed for a specific site, they create a sense of identity and a familiarity to visitors that makes them more user friendly. The following are some considerations for creating a “family” of related signs at the Curry Ridge site:

Sign Supports

- Flat iron supports that are thematically designed for each individual panel.
- The hard metal is harmonious with the site and resilient to weathering and vandalism
- The low angled profile matches the horizontal lines of the environment
- The sculptural cutouts cast shadows and silhouettes of animals that accentuate the strong seasonal sunlight on site and create a dynamic aspect to each sign

Sign Panels

- Fabrication material will allow for full color printing and high resolution images.
- Preferred material is exterior grade, high-pressure laminate produced through a reputable, experienced fabrication company.
- At least a ten year warranty from fading and delaminating should be included in the specifications.

Sign Face

- The design of the sign face must be a response to bright sunlight, the vibrant colors of flowers and alpine vegetation, and the dramatic seasonal variations in hues and patterns on the ridge.
- Light colored backgrounds of flat color will reflect the intense light and can make reading text difficult. A quiet wash of color and pattern that still provides a contrast between letters and their background is desirable.
- The complexity of textures at this site requires that sign panels and supports exhibit some textural complexity as well if they are to “fit” the environment.
- All messages should be conveyed visually and verbally expressed as concise inscriptions of 60 words or less in the primary paragraph.
- Each panel should be designed to present an obvious message hierarchy. Varying font and graphic sizes should represent the relative importance of each message.

Denali Vistas Trail Panel—Conceptual Design

Stylized title font develops a personality for the family of signs

Bold, unified banner creates contrast and gains attention

A hierarchy of text and graphic sizes improves readability

Colors can be changed for variety and to suit subjects



Thematic tint blocks separate sub-stories from the main ideas

Soft, thematic background reduces glare in a bright alpine environment

Audio units and tactile models provide a sensory experience

Ragged edges on photos and tint blocks mirror the vegetation and jagged lines of the alpine



Trailheads

Three trail systems are proposed near the South Denali Visitor Center. Trailhead panels will be installed at the main visitor center hub, as well as locations where different trails intersect. The panels provide basic information about each trail to visitors, while enticing them with promises of unique features and viewpoints they can experience.

Design features for the trailheads include:

- Each trailhead will be designed to express the unique features of each trail loop.
- Trailhead panels will be designed using support plates of iron and wood timbers for ease of maintenance, for a rugged appearance, and to resist weathering and vandalism.
- Positive and negative cutouts in the iron plates will reinforce the themes of each trail.
- The cutout iron images will be repeated in interpretive panels along the trails.

*The **Denali Vistas Trailhead** features a raven cutout with bird tracks and a caribou skull punched into the iron plate.*

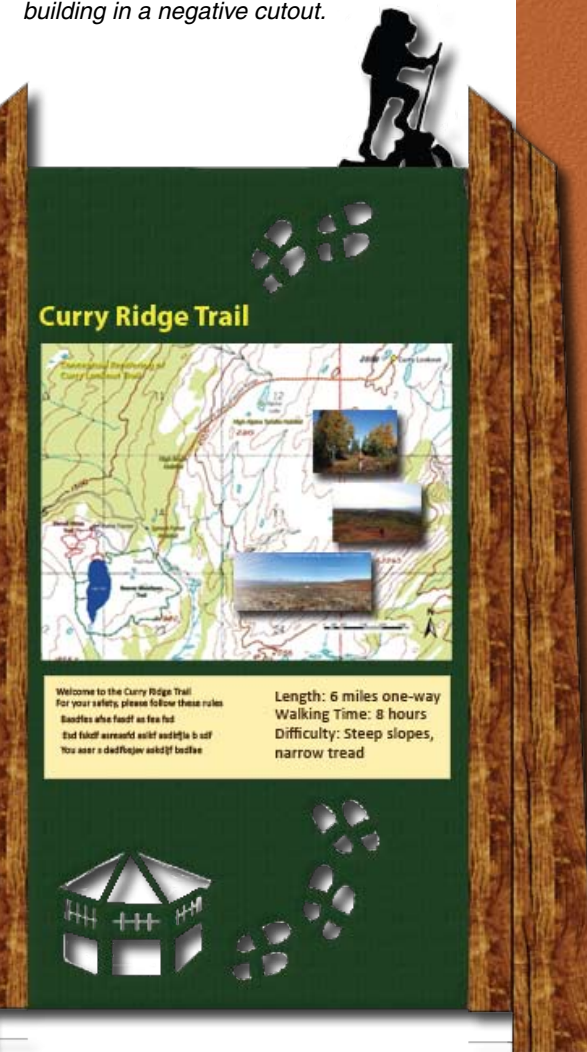
Each trailhead panel will include:

- A full color map that shows a simple trail layout and significant features. The map should be **oriented to the site** (“north” isn’t necessarily “up” on the map; instead, “up” will represent “straight ahead.”) The viewer’s current location will be clearly marked with a “You are here.”
- Basic information pertinent to hiking the trail, including length, estimated walking time, difficulty, wheelchair accessibility, elevation change, and safety precautions (wildlife encounters, changing weather, etc.)
- Photographs of trail features and a concise introduction to the theme of the trail.



The **Beaver Meadows Trailhead** is highlighted by a beaver cutout, a lodge, and a support with a beaver gnawing.

The **Curry Ridge Trailhead** shows a cutout of a hiker at the summit of the ridge and the historic Curry Ridge Lookout building in a negative cutout.



Golden Gate Canyon State Park, Colorado



Tijeras Pueblo Archaeological Site, New Mexico



The addition of tactile elements, audio units, and participatory devices on trail panels provides a memorable, multi-sensory experience for visitors.

Denali Vistas Trail Panels

The Denali Vistas Trail is a system of universally accessible trail loops that begin and end at the visitor center. It is expected that the majority of visitors will likely walk at least a portion of this trail. This is an ideal location for wayside exhibits that interpret the resources of Curry Ridge. The purpose of the trail is to connect visitors to the intangible meanings associated with the resources.

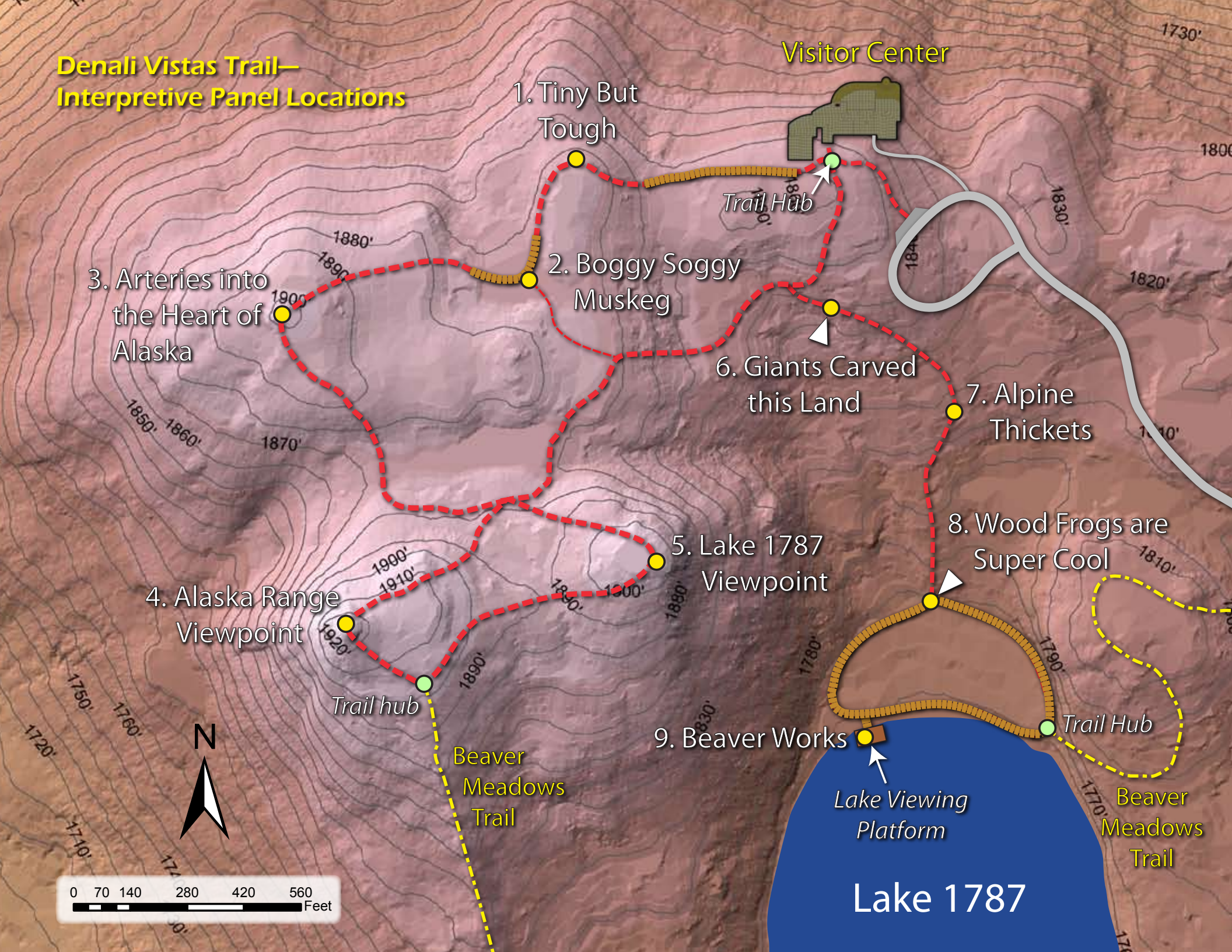
A series of 9 interpretive panels are proposed for the trail system. Each is associated with a specific viewpoint, unique feature, or habitat—places where visitors will naturally congregate.

The trail is designed to be an interactive and engaging experience for visitors. The signage should pose questions to readers, encouraging them to explore aspects of the site that may not be readily apparent. Focal point graphics and illustrations should be the primary means of telling the story, with associated concise text only where necessary. Tactile components and audio units should be incorporated into as many panels as possible, providing a sensory experience that goes beyond just sight.

Crowley's Ridge Nature Center, Arkansas



Denali Vistas Trail— Interpretive Panel Locations



Stop 1—"Tiny But Tough"

Themes and Messages Interpreted:
Sub-Theme 1, Messages 1.1 a-j

Lead Paragraph: Curry Ridge may look barren but look closely and discover a carpet of miniature plants. Welcome to the world of upland tundra.

Sub-message heading: Why are the plants so small?

These hardy little plants are adapted to dry winds, thin soil, and short growing seasons countered by cold winters. To survive these extremes, the little perennials grow slow, live long, and huddle together for shelter. Fuzzy stems, leaves, and buds protect them from freezing while their dark colors absorb warm sunlight.

Sub-message heading: A Kaleidoscope of Color

In spring, tundra plants burst into bloom to attract swarms of insect pollinators. By August, the tundra is lush with seeds and berries. By September, the ridge blazes in leafy rusts, reds and yellows as the plants prepare for winter.

Graphics: Close-up photos that illustrate the described plant adaptations. Include a photo of a krumholtz tree with the caption: Look for flag-shaped trees that have been sculpted by howling winter winds. These trees are called Krumholtz, meaning "twisted wood". Tundra animals could include ptarmigan (Alaska's state bird, affectionately called "Alaska chicken") and bears eating blueberries.

Tactile: Acrylic embedment of a representative tundra plant with labels identifying the adaptations, or bas relief models of common tundra plants.



Stop 2—"Boggy Soggy Muskeg"

Themes and Messages Interpreted:

Sub-Theme 1, Messages 1.5 b

Lead Paragraph: These tiny waterholes are windows into a small bog. Muskeg is the name given to bogs throughout the Boreal north. Muskeg is found where poor drainage, cool summers and acidic water restrict plant decomposition. Eventually a buildup of dead plants in the water becomes overgrown with sphagnum moss, small shrubs or even stunted trees. Hiking across muskeg is like walking on a giant waterbed with the added danger of suddenly disappearing into the water below!

Graphics: Photo of muskeg bog in the campground/entry area with caption: Visit the muskeg bog on the Moose Flats Trail when you return to the Transportation Center.

Tactile: Acrylic embedment of sphagnum moss with a caption describing how, over time, they form deep peat beds. Model of a full-size moose hoof print.



Stop 3—"Arteries into the Heart of Alaska"

Themes and Messages Interpreted:

Sub-Theme 1, Messages 1.5 c, 1.7 b
Sub-Theme 7, Messages 7.1 a-g, 7.2 a-c, 7.5 a-h ;

Lead Paragraph: You traveled here either on the Parks Highway through the Chulitna River valley or on the Alaska Railroad along the Susitna River. Travelers, be they fish, bird or human, have always used these rivers and valleys to access the Alaska interior.

Graphics: A map of the Alaska Range, Chulitna and Susitna Rivers, and Curry and Kesugi ridges, with the Parks Highway and Alaska Railroad corridors as prominent features.

Sub-Message: The ebb and flow of wildlife and people pulse with the seasons up and down the river valleys and through the mountain passes of the Alaska Range. Birds follow these corridors between nesting and wintering grounds. In spring, returning salmon are met in their birth creeks by indigenous bears. Winter rivers become highways for dog sleds and snow machines which surge back to rafting waters in spring. Travelers on the Alaska Railroad and

George Parks Highway follow the gentle inclines of these waterways.

Graphics: Salmon run photo on Troublesome Creek; bears fishing for salmon; birds commonly seen on Curry Ridge; dog sleds and rafts on the river.

Tactiles: Model of a salmon or a full-size black bear footprint.



Stop 4—"Alaska Range Viewpoint"

Themes and Messages Interpreted:

Sub-Theme 2, Messages 2.1 a, 2.3 a, c

Lead Paragraph: From this vista, on a clear day, you can see a line of mountains with glaciers cascading down their flanks. This narrow band of mountains, the Alaska Range, arches almost 600 miles from Lake Iliamna west of Anchorage to Canada.

Graphic: Physiographic map of Alaska highlighting the Alaska Range and indicating "you are here," Mount McKinley, Anchorage and Fairbanks.

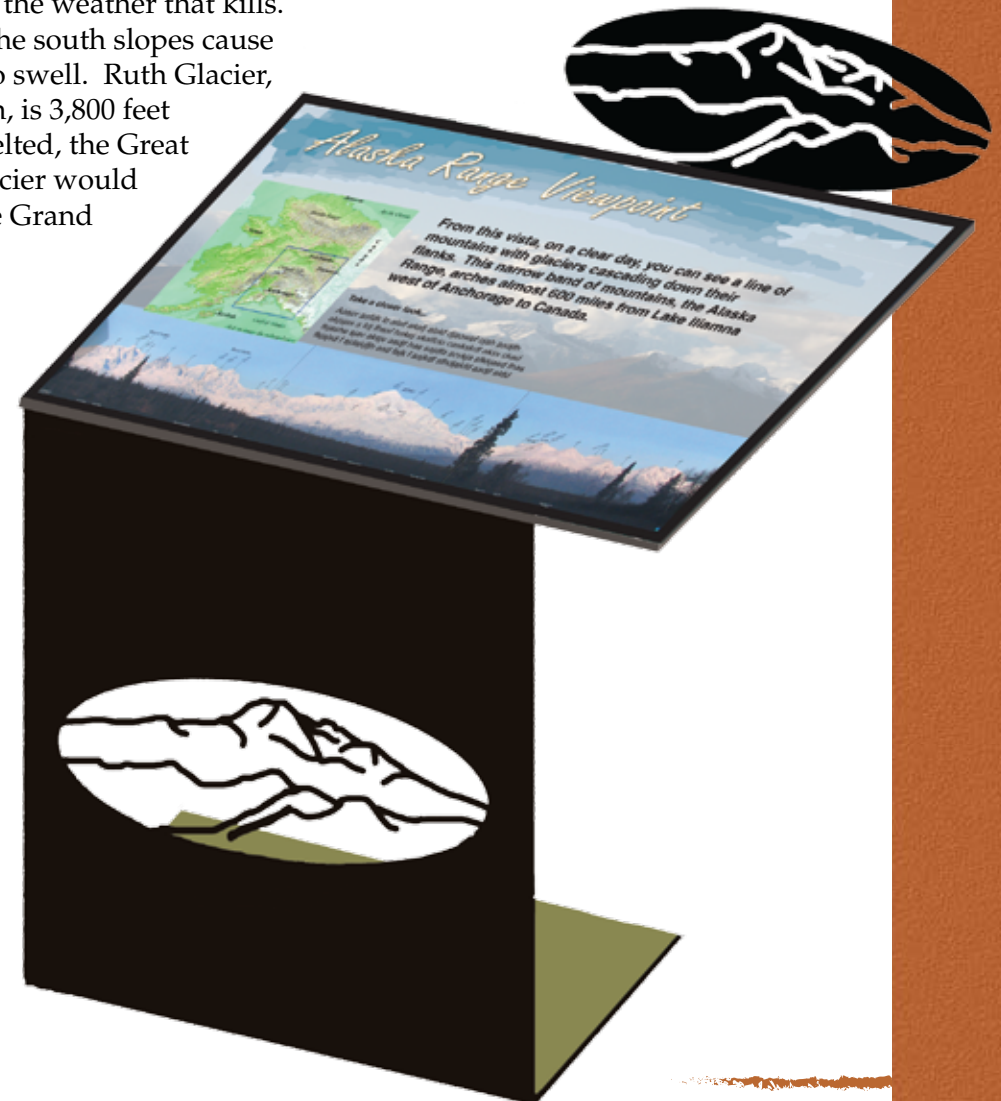
Sub-Paragraph Headline: Bumping and Shoving Builds Mountains

Earth's crust is like a giant jigsaw of puzzle pieces (called plates) floating on molten rock. When one plate bumps into another, the land warps and buckles. The Alaska Range and Curry Ridge rise up as the Pacific Plate crushes against the North American Continental Plate. The Alaska Range is rising at the same rate that your fingernails grow!

Graphic: Illustration showing the plates and movements. Include and label the Denali fault. This could be developed as a tactile by including raised panel overlays that represent the plates.

Inset Headline: What's Up with the Weather?

The Alaska Range blocks the flow of moist air from the Gulf of Alaska and creates some of the harshest weather in the world. Mountain climbers know: It isn't the climb but the weather that kills. Heavy snows on the south slopes cause massive glaciers to swell. Ruth Glacier, visible to the north, is 3,800 feet thick. If it ever melted, the Great Gorge of Ruth Glacier would be deeper than the Grand Canyon!



Stop 5—"Lake 1787 Viewpoint"

Themes and Messages Interpreted:

Sub-Theme 1, Messages 1.6 a-f

Lead Paragraph: This alpine lake is a wildlife magnet because it is surrounded by sedge meadows, flowing streams, alder and willow thickets and stands of spruce. Watch for Pacific Loons, Arctic Terns, Long-tailed Jaegers, and Trumpeter Swans attracted here. If you're lucky, you might even see a swimming black bear or wading moose.

Sub-message: An Extreme Environment, alpine lakes are cold, nutrient poor and can support only simple food chains. Scientists use these isolated, sensitive, pristine lakes as early warning systems for global environmental changes.

Inset: What's in a name? In a state as big, wild, and new as Alaska not everything is named. Map makers can't wait for every feature to receive an inspired title. Lake 1787 was christened for its elevation above sea level!

Graphics: Moose swimming in lake. Air photo of Lake 1787 showing Beaver Meadows trail. Photos of birds identified in text.

Audio: Include a sound button that plays the different calls of a Pacific Loon. Perhaps add audio for other common lake birds.



Stop 6—"Giants Carved This Land"

Sub-Theme 2, Messages 2.1 m, 2.3 d, 2.5 a

Lead Paragraph: A glacier etched its signature into this bedrock. Surging rivers of ice gouged out the Chulitna valley and sent tongues of ice licking over Curry Ridge to smooth peaks and carve out bowls like Lake 1787.

Sub-message: Glaciers flow downhill carrying embedded rocks and gravel. The tremendous weight of the ice can cause these rocks to scratch into softer layers of bedrock creating glacial striations that point the direction of the glaciers movement. Graphic: Photo of etched rocks with arrow indicating direction.

Graphic showing Ruth Glacier with labels:

- *Glaciers still shape the Denali landscape. From here, you can see Ruth Glacier flowing down Mount McKinley into the Chulitna River Valley.*
- *Rushing water and rock spew from the melting glacier snout to form a terminal moraine of mixed stones and gravel.*
- *Like a giant conveyor belt, the flowing ice carries streaks of dirt and rock.*

Tactile: Piece of rock with glacial striations.



Stop 7—"Alpine Thickets"

Themes and Messages Interpreted:

Sub-Theme 1, Messages 1.2 a-b; 1.3 a-b

Lead Paragraph: Thickets of white spruce, alder, willow and berry bushes fill the soggy swales of Curry Ridge. In summer, look for birds singing and feeding their young in these tangled perches. In fall, both Brown and Black Bears roam these thickets in search of berries. Moose browse the willow and alder in spring and fall.

Inset: Spruce grouse inhabit dense spruce forests feeding on berries and spruce needles. They are called "fools hens" because they often can be approached to within a few feet.

Graphics: Photos of common thicket shrubs (white spruce, Siberian alder, willow, etc.) and nesting birds that might be seen here (spruce grouse, juncos, warblers, white-throated sparrows, etc.)

Audio: Include a sound button that plays the normal peeping cluck call of a spruce grouse, and the low whining call of a male during breeding season.



Stop 8—"Wood Frogs are Super Cool"

Themes and Messages Interpreted:

Sub-Theme 1, Messages 1.10 a-c

Lead Paragraph: Have you seen any frogs hopping around Lake 1787? Wood frogs are the only amphibian in interior Alaska or north of the Arctic Circle! They have an incredible ability to freeze solid in winter, and then thaw out and hop away in spring.

Inset 1:

Graphic: Include a photo or illustration of a hibernating frog.

Text: How do wood frogs survive an Alaska winter? Antifreeze! Wood frogs protect their cells by pumping them full of glucose. They hibernate under leaves or soil insulated by the snow pack.

Inset 2:

Graphic: Include a photo a photo of a wood frog.

Text: Look for a small frog with a black mask and a white mustache. In early spring listen for their "quacking" call when they enter the icy water to mate and lay eggs. The rest of the summer, see them hunting insects near the lake.

Tactile and Audio: Include a model of a life-size wood frog and a sound button that plays its "quacking" call.



Stop 9—"Beaver Works"

Themes and Messages Interpreted:

Sub-Theme 1, Messages 1.9 c

Lead Paragraph: This slope was terraced by beavers. Look closely and you will see evidence of old stair-step dams that keep this ravine wet. Many animals depend on these wetland ponds.

Sub-message: Beaver dams slow the flow of water, filtering it and reducing floods and erosion. The beaver's constant pruning and tree cutting stimulates sprouts and new grow that are eaten by other wildlife.

Graphic: Photo of moose in water.

Sub-message: Diagram of a lodge with an underwater entry. Labels describe the following:

- Beavers build ponds to protect their lodges and create safe access to food. When the pond freezes they are locked in their lodges or under the ice until it thaws.
- They stick caches of aspen and willows in the muddy pond bottoms for winter food.
- The snug mud and stick lodges protect them from wolves, lynx and weather.

- On a cold winter day steam rises from a small vent hole in the roof.

Tactile: Scaly beaver tail with caption—
What use is this fat tail? It stores fat for the winter, warns the family of danger when slapped in the water, and provides a stable prop when chewing down trees.

