

## Chapter Seven

# *Base Transportation Facility, Site, and Media Development*



## Development of the Base Transportation Facility

The Curry Ridge Visitor Center and ridge-top trail experiences are the premier attractions for visitors to South Denali. To preserve the wild and pristine quality of the experience, quiet and efficient shuttle trams will transport visitors 3.5 miles up to the center from a transportation hub. This base facility will include a transportation center, campground, ranger living quarters, nature trail, and other facilities to enhance the visitor experience. It will be built on a spruce/hardwood plateau just off the George Parks Highway across from the popular Denali View South Wayside.

The philosophy applied to the base transportation facility development is that it should function as a transition from viewing the landscape from cars and motor coaches to an immersive outdoor Alaska experience.

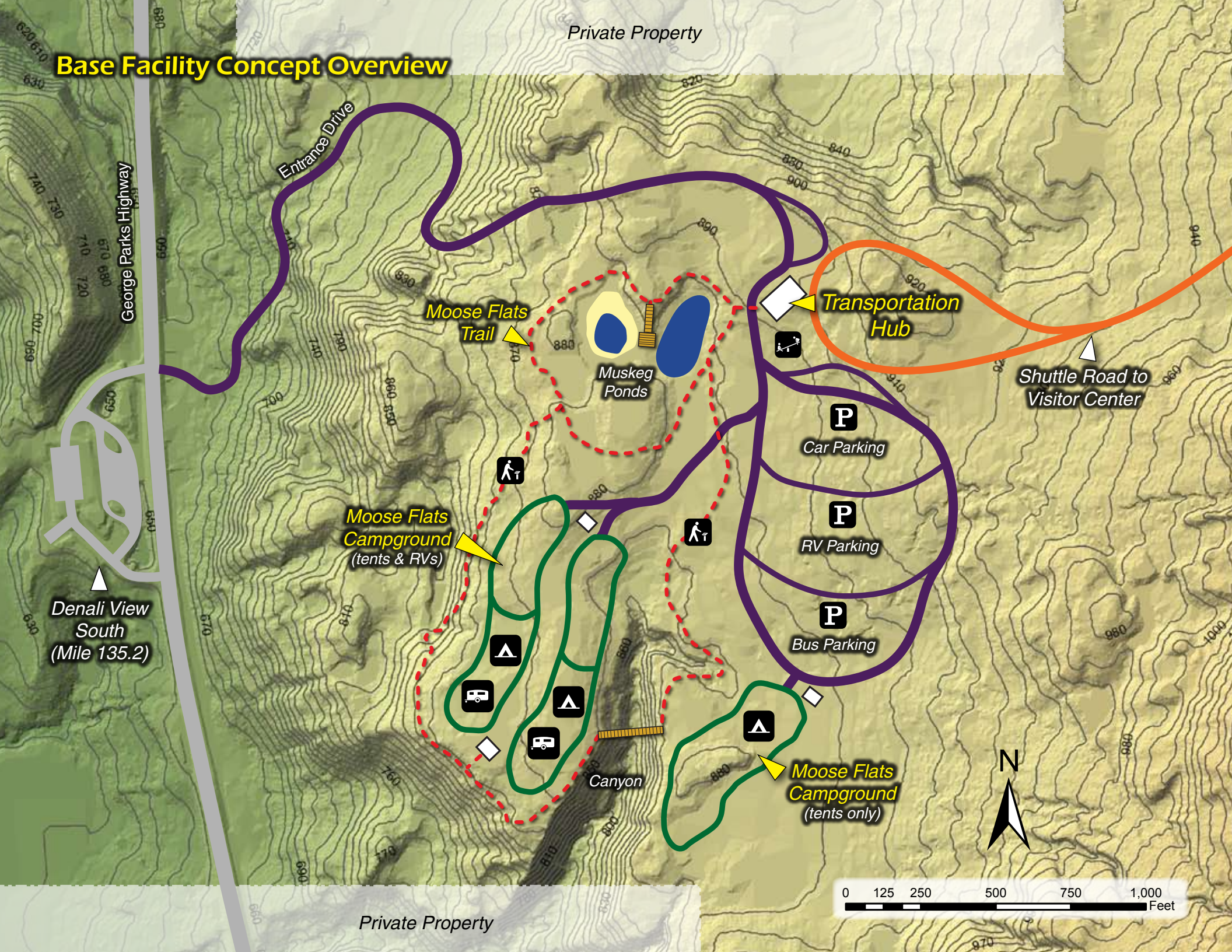
The **Transportation Hub** building will orient visitors to the ridge-top opportunities for dramatic views, wilderness trails, and exhibits that interpret the landscape and its people. The hub will also provide information on attractions and opportunities available along the George Parks Highway Scenic Byway allowing visitors to plan other experiences after they leave Curry Ridge.

The “**Moose Flats Campground**” will offer tent and RV camping in a quiet forest setting. Campers will have easy access to wilderness trails where they can spend days exploring Curry Ridge.

The “**Moose Flats Trail**” will begin at a transportation hub kiosk and encircle the campground, then return to the hub. This trail features a diverse landscape that will provide rewarding discoveries and wildlife viewing opportunities.



# Base Facility Concept Overview





## Entry into the South Denali Visitor Center Complex

### Entrance Signage

Alaska visitors on the Parks Highway are traveling fast. They make instantaneous decisions based on symbolic cues, a few words on a sign, and the look and feel of an intersection and a park entrance.

A well designed entrance quickly sets visitor expectations about the quality and purpose of a park visit. Signage must be appropriate to the site; it must be easily seen and understood by someone passing by at highway speeds and should naturally convey the theme and mood of this unique place. The size and scale of this structure should be commensurate with the grand scenery and the visitor experience. The sign and the surrounding landscaping must make a bold sculptural statement about the significance of this park. Highway signage, both north and south of this location should alert and prepare travelers as they are approaching the park entrance.

The sign supports and panel should harmonize with the natural materials found on site. The sign should incorporate other architectural elements used in the buildings and should be unified with a family of signs in the park. Some elemental materials that reflect the

site include stone, timber, and flat iron. It is anticipated that these materials will be used in the buildings, benches, and other trail sign supports. Repetitions of design (size, texture, color, and typeface) provide a reassuring and familiar patterns that subliminally guide first time visitors through this vast landscape. The sign should be unique but should incorporate elements of other state park entry signs; perhaps utilizing the same typeface, color, or supports. The state parks logo and the symbolic identities of other partners should be included, either on the sign panel or in an auxiliary location on the stone supports. It should prominently indicate that this is an information center for the George Parks Highway Scenic Byway.

Letter styles have character; each font has a unique personality. The clean sans-serif typeface used on many Alaska State Park signs conveys a visual message to motorists that is easily read and understood at a glance.

The conceptual drawing of an entry sign is designed to communicate that this is a high quality, nature related site. The powerful outline of Mount McKinley, coupled with a pair of northern hawk owls is intended to convey a dynamic

visual image to the casual viewer. To those with a natural history background, the hawk owl represents a true northern species, seldom seen in the lower 48 but common on Curry Ridge. This symbol promises visitors the possibility of encountering wildlife, but not necessarily the mega fauna of Denali National Park.

The stone wall anchors the sign to the site both visually and thematically and leads the eye from the roadway to the entry drive. The durable sign panel should convey a sense of rustic artistry that is reminiscent of earlier park architecture and yet compatible with other park signage. The owls, produced in relief and attached, provide dimension to the panel and can be readily removed or replaced if damaged.

The large stone pillar has a twofold purpose. It grounds the structure to the landscape, ending the visual movement of a viewer's eye along the rock wall, and in a practical way, it provides an appropriate support for displaying the brands or logos of participating partners without competing with the dominant focal points on the sign panel.



## South Denali Main Entrance Sign Conceptual Design





## Entry Drive

The drive into the park should prepare people for the ensuing experience and create a sense of anticipation. It should visually promise visitors a safe but exciting adventure. Scenic views and a meandering roadway are intended to gently ease motorists from the fast pace on the Parks Highway into a more relaxed mood.

The road way should seemingly undulate with the landscape and not appear to be cut and imposed into the terrain. The obligatory road cuts through this steep terrain should be softened and healed with stone and native plants. Objectionable views and artificial structures should be screened, and some road curves should be planned to give fleeting glimpses of mountain peaks and the river valley. Planners should consider cutting views into the forest and should design the roadway for opportunities to increase the mystery, variety, and beauty of this site to travelers.

The dramatic cycle of freezing and thawing in this country must be considered when designing this road. North facing slopes can present hazards

of ice retention and buildup. Prevailing winds blowing hard across the river valley can deposit excessive snow drifts in deep swales exposed to the west. Views of the transportation center should be revealed to visitors and they should feel as if they are discovering it. They

should not have to negotiate a crowded parking area on their journey to the building. It should be a culmination of their trip from the entry. Parking then becomes a simple event that does not detract from the excitement of discovering the center.



*A curving entry road serves as a transition from the fast-paced Parks Highway to the natural experiences of South Denali.*



## Parking Areas

Large parking areas that accommodate RVs, tour buses, and cars should be buffered by islands of vegetation that screen the view of pavement and parked vehicles and reduce the perceived size of the paved areas. A series of smaller lots with screened landscaping is preferable to a large lot of continuous hard surface. Views from the Transportation Building should be screened so that cars and buses don't dominate the setting. The vegetation should include plantings of spruce trees to function as visual screens and sound buffers throughout the seasons.

Porous parking surfaces that permit water infiltration and reduce runoff should be considered. Perimeter and interior swales of landscaping should be considered for bio-retention filter areas that cleanse storm water runoff. Vegetation should be selected for their resilience to the effects of road salt, flooding, and sediment deposition. A drop-off loop near the transportation building should permit the unloading of buses, access by mobility impaired individuals, or passengers during inclement weather. It should approach the building without transecting the parking areas to avoid congestion and detracting from the experience of arriving at the center.



*To minimize physical and visual impact, parking lots should be buffered with vegetation and incorporate porous parking surfaces, like this one at the River Legacy Living Science Center in Arlington, Texas.*

Lighting should be kept to a minimum and directed downward to avoid light pollution. Media should be created that interprets the sustainable design practices used in the landscaping and engineering of the parking area and entrance road.



## Transportation Hub Building

This facility will serve as a portal that buffers and regulates the concentrated visitation expected at this site. The purpose of the transportation hub is threefold. First, during the summer tourist season, it must function as a welcoming facility for large numbers of travelers who are waiting to take a shuttle tram to the top of Curry Ridge. They are in need of orientation, information, and inspiration to prepare them for their upcoming adventure. Secondly, this building must function as an off-season lodge, visitor center, and meeting facility. It should also contain living quarters for an on-site ranger. Finally, the building must serve “drop in travelers” on the George Parks Highway National Scenic Byway.

The transportation center is a gateway to South Denali. It sets the tone and forges visitors’ expectations for their entire experience. For many, a visit to Curry Ridge may be the only contact they have with Alaska State Parks and the National Park Service. This initial welcome must inspire and motivate visitors to take the shuttle up Curry Ridge to the visitor center. Facilities should suggest that this is a world class experience that is well worth their valuable time and expense. The exhibits in this area should accomplish four things: create an atmosphere that engenders a sense of

place; interpret the George Parks Scenic Byway; entice people to want to take the shuttle tram to the top of Curry Ridge for more immersive experiences; and inform people about the recreational opportunities in the park.

The image and design of this structure should draw from the rustic heritage of Alaska’s buildings while using today’s environmentally sensitive knowledge and technology. This building should harmonize with its surroundings, not dominate them. It should be designed in the same style as the visitor center on the top of Curry Ridge. There should be a repetition of design elements and materials that unite the two buildings and the trail structures and media at each site. It should promise visitors a quality experience, while enticing them to invest time and money in taking the shuttle to the top. Visitors should be so favorably impressed that they want to see more.

The nature of the diverse activities and audiences at this site require that this structure be versatile and able to change. It must be able to accommodate peak summer visitation of “drop in” highway travelers and scheduled tour coaches. It must also be a safe and warm winter lodge that is inviting to skiers and people accessing nearby trails with snow machines.



# Transportation Hub Concept Site Map







*The Denali National Park Visitor Center respects the "spirit of Alaska" in its architecture.*

The hub building and media design are based on the following criteria:

- The building will pay homage to traditional Alaska design and a "spirit of Alaska" that will be further developed in the Curry Ridge visitor center. There should be an investment in quality landscape and architectural elements. The expediency that is often seen in seasonal tourism infrastructures should not be in evidence on this year-round site.
- The building will welcome and accommodate large numbers of visitors arriving in tour buses and private vehicles, which then pass through to the ridge-top shuttle trams. Organized tour groups should be segregated and channeled to a separate part of the loading ramp to better serve their needs.
- Shuttle loading and drop off platforms should be separated for optimal traffic flow. Bus and passenger delivery and pickup loops should be designed to facilitate safe and efficient group arrival and departure. Pedestrian crossings of the entry road should be minimized or nonexistent.
- The building will serve as a transition to the ridge-top experiences and have facilities limited to information media and services, bathrooms to accommodate peak visitation, and snack/beverage service. It will provide for visitor comfort and safety and will serve as an invitation to explore the park in greater depth.
- The building will provide staff housing and office space.
- A small kitchen will serve the public as well as luncheon preparation and staging area for the visitor center meeting room on Curry Ridge.
- The rustic interior and outdoor design will be accented with hand carved furnishings (chairs and tables), chainsaw animal sculptures, and authentic Alaska homestead cabin artifacts (e.g.: gold pans, traps and furs, snowshoes, caribou and moose antlers, etc.).
- Space will be dedicated to information services for the George Park Highway Scenic Byway Corridor with supplemental information available from staff at the reception desk.
- This building will be versatile to meet summer and winter uses and changing visitor needs.
- This building site must be designed to accommodate change and expansion (perhaps a campus of buildings) for future visitation.



## Interior Design of the Transportation Hub

This building must be designed to accommodate peak numbers of visitors arriving in tour buses and private vehicles and be versatile enough to serve as a winter lodge and meeting room during the non-tourist seasons. It must contain very large, open, and multi-purpose space. Visitors must feel welcomed by both the warm architecture and the sense that they know where to go. Wayfinding is paramount to this building functioning successfully. A fluid circulation of visitor traffic is essential throughout this facility if people are to have a satisfying experience here. No matter how crowded the lobby, there should be corridors (interior and decks outside the main lobby) available to permit unrestricted flow to the shuttle tram waiting areas and to restrooms. Roofed decks, porches, and shuttle tram stations should invite visitors to relax in relative comfort while absorbing the overflow of peak visitation crowds.

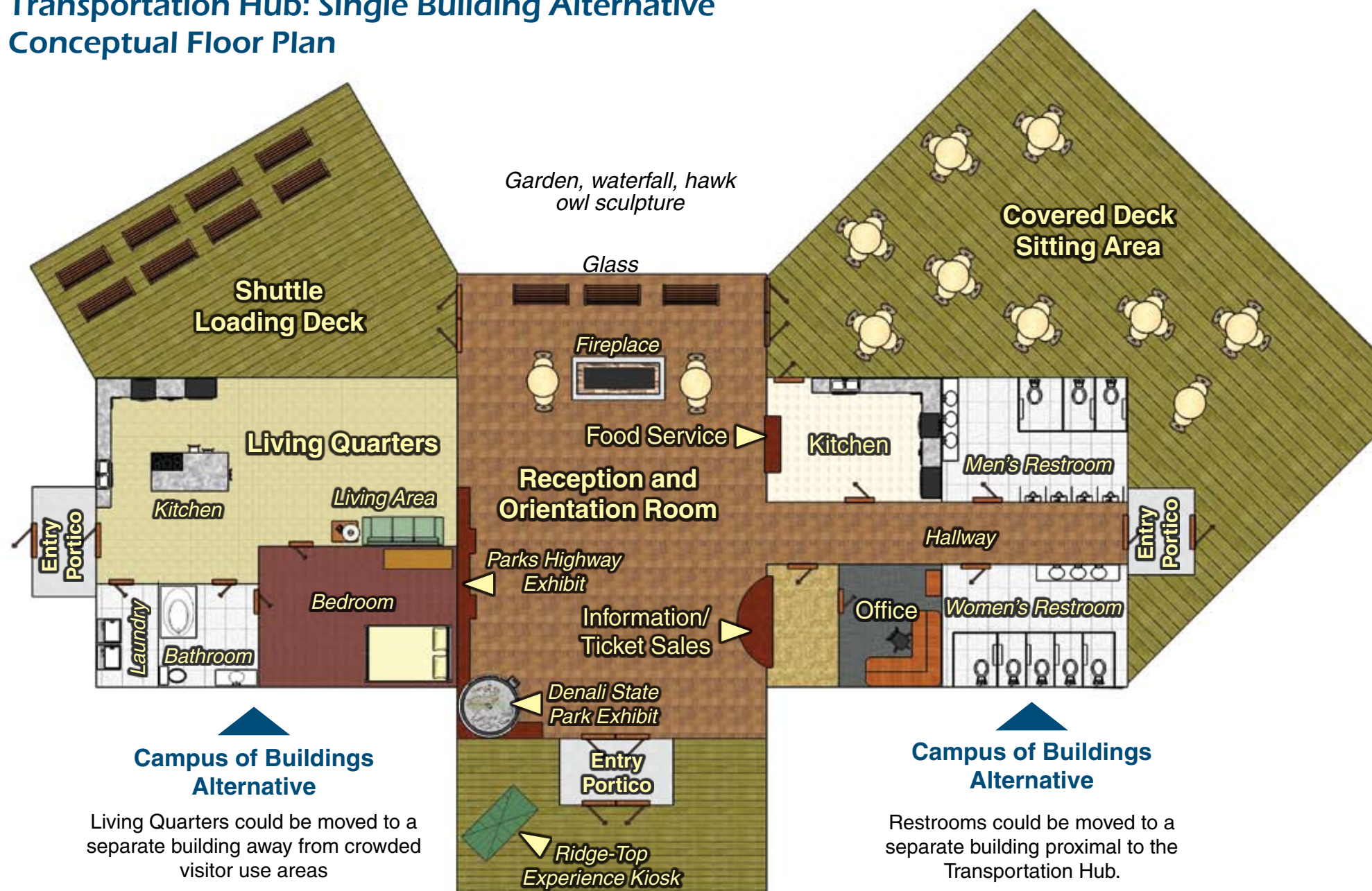
Restrooms must be easily seen, accessible from multiple entries and exits, and capable of serving coach-sized groups of visitors. People returning from the shuttle tram, waiting outdoors, or coming off trails should have access to restrooms without reentering the main lobby area.

*Large, spacious areas, like this lobby at the Everglades National Park Visitor Center, are essential for serving crowds of people at peak visitation times.*





## Transportation Hub: Single Building Alternative Conceptual Floor Plan



Living Quarters could be moved to a separate building away from crowded visitor use areas

Restrooms could be moved to a separate building proximal to the Transportation Hub.

Total approximate size: **3,300 sq. ft.**



## Entry Portico

This initial entry to the building must be spacious and be visually inviting to arriving visitors. It should offer a direct line of sight into the grand lobby. This sunny vestibule will serve as an airlock and buffer in cold winter conditions. It should be universally accessible with wheelchair accessible ramps, doors, and a hard surface that provides safe traction even during icy conditions. A floor grid is essential for collecting mud and snow before people traverse the lobby. If possible, direct solar heat should be incorporated to help heat this room. The floor and walls should be designed as an absorbing heat mass.

A covered walkway leading to this portico will permit rapid entry and provide a space for people to shake off umbrellas and other wet raingear. It also assures a dry safe walkway during the lingering seasons of sleet and wet snows. Trail lights, directed down over the walkway, should be designed for winter use.

## Restrooms

A restroom visit is a priority for travelers. The most frequently asked question at a visitor center desk is, “where are your restrooms?” Ideally this question should be answered by direct visual wayfinding. A new arrival should see the door immediately and not have to ask an attendant for directions.

Restrooms are excellent demonstration and education sites. Every opportunity for sustainable design should be incorporated here. Waterless urinals, low flow flush toilets, and even a satellite toilet building with composting capabilities should be considered for use at this location. Light meters that dim when there is sufficient daylight should be used. Efficient blower hand dryers should be used for energy efficiency.

There must be multiple entrances and exits to these restrooms to serve the surges of users that are dropped off in groups from travel coaches and shuttles. Restroom capacity must be based on visitation peaks and not averages.



*The restroom entrances at Wrangell-St. Elias National Park include a bulletin board, roofed seating, and drinking fountains.*



*A high ceiling and open floor plan, like the Wrangell-St. Elias National Park Visitor Center, convey a sense of spaciousness even during crowded periods. Rustic architecture reflect the themes of South Denali.*

## Reception and Orientation Room

This room must be spacious. A high ceiling will help to create a sense of openness even when people crowd the floor surface. Stone pillars, walls, and wood timbers or log beams should accent the interior and be reminiscent of rustic architecture of the 1920s and 30s era of grand park design. A sense of place should be created with photos and objects (described in detail in media section).

If possible, large windows should feature a framed view of Denali. In the least, a large painted mural of the mountain as seen from this perspective should be a focal point in this grand room. Directional signage and wayfinding cues should be designed for maximum crowd conditions and placed high above the heads of people standing in the room. Primary circulatory routes through this room should be anticipated and kept free from exhibits, furniture, and other points of interest that can cause congestion. Doors for restrooms and shuttle tram loading platforms must be clearly identified and easily accessed. The food service counter should be signed in the same manner as the restrooms, shuttle deck and information desk.

A reception desk, with a wheelchair accessible area, should be far enough away from the door to avoid creating a

traffic barrier but easily seen by anyone entering the room. It must be well lit and be able to permit multiple staff members to interact with visitors when needed. Signage hanging above it should assure that it is identifiable even when the room is filled with visitors. An office should be proximal to this desk to facilitate daily cash counting and other business that is best done behind a locked door.

Chainsaw art benches and rustic tables should be considered for the lobby and waiting areas. This will add to the “Alaskan sense of place” and the rustic early park style of architecture and the ambiance that is introduced by the entry sign, the winding drive in that hugs the topography, and the organic nature of the building itself. There is timelessness to the wood that is carved for each unique piece of furniture.



*If possible, viewing windows in the reception area should frame a view of Denali. Princess McKinley Lodge.*



## Service Counter and Kitchen

A snack bar and coffee service will be operated by a private concession. The kitchen will be equipped with minimal food preparation equipment beyond a refrigerator, microwave oven, and coffee makers. Bakery and other food products will be prepared off-site and simply warmed or kept refrigerated here.

A serving window to the interior lobby should also be close to exits to permit easy access to the extensive decks and shuttle waiting areas outside. Tables, both inside near the fireplace and on the decks should encourage a relaxed environment for casual food consumption.

The operation of snack bars/coffee service and food catering is a specialized service that is most efficiently managed by private contractors. There are successful local bakeries and restaurants that are capable of expanding their services to meet the needs of this concentrated market of potential customers gathering at the Transportation Hub and Visitor Center. It is expected that many people waiting for the shuttle trams will welcome the opportunity to purchase coffee, tea, and rolls.

## Ranger Living Quarters

The two basic theories of building design are to either maintain a campus of buildings including free standing restroom buildings and a separate structure for a ranger residence, or to maintain a smaller but more concentrated footprint with only one heated building, a large structure with select rooms to be unheated unless occupied. The latter is the most efficient in terms of energy use and construction materials and costs. Having the ranger quarters proximal to other plumbing that require heat reduces the off season need for heating large spaces.

In either circumstance, the living quarters should be buffered from the public areas of the facility. It must be accessible to after hour's visitors and should be positioned to permit the resident to visually monitor the site.



*Wrangell-St. Elias National Park used a campus concept for their visitor center development, with separate buildings for the information center, exhibits, meeting room, and restrooms. This is an alternative that could be considered for the transportation hub.*



*An outdoor eating area, like this one at Denali National Park, should be provided adjacent to the base facility snack bar.*

## Media for Transportation Hub

The transportation hub is a gateway to South Denali; it should serve as a transitional experience that prepares people for a personal and sensory experience in the environment. It must be a portal that excites people about the possible adventures that can be found here, that orients them to the site, and prepares them to be environmentally responsible guests.

This hub is not intended to compete with the more immersive adventure

that awaits them at the visitor center on top of Curry Ridge. The landscape and architecture should include visual organizers and subliminal cues that infer that this is a premier Alaska experience. Posters, videos, and other media should “advertise” the Curry Ridge adventure.

The South Denali Visitor Center on Curry Ridge will house major exhibitions, an object theater, and trails that will be a premier attraction for regional visitors.

Interpretive media for the transportation hub will be limited to four purposes:

- To provide information on the George Parks Highway Scenic Byway
- To engender a sense of place for South Denali
- To orient visitors to the ridge-top experiences
- To provide information on Denali State Park





## George Parks Highway Scenic Byway Exhibit

### Purpose:

As stated in the Corridor Partnership Plan, "An information system linked to interpretation would accomplish several objectives for the byway: To orient travelers, to provide travelers with information on byway opportunities, and to encourage visitors to frequent local businesses and attractions" (page 54).

### Themes and Messages Interpreted:

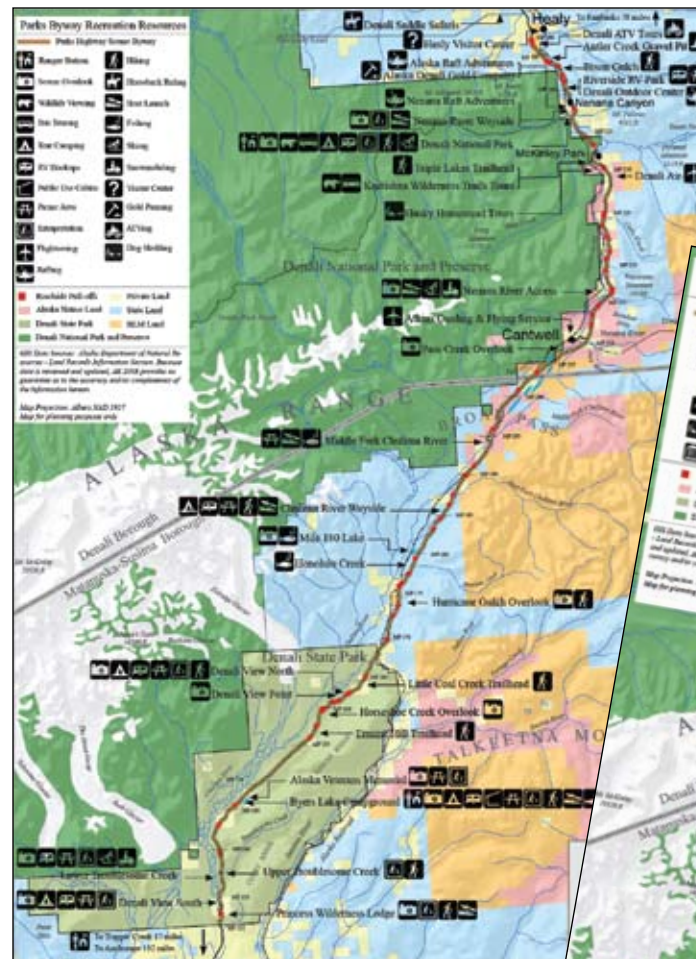
Sub-Theme 7, Messages 7.5 a-h

### Objectives:

- Visitors will use the interactive map, brochures and touch screen computer to learn about the recreational opportunities along the byway.
- Visitors will be introduced to the cultural and physical geography of the byway.

### Description:

A large interactive wall map will engage visitors in exploring the opportunities on the scenic byway. This media will include an interactive push-button map of the byway, a rack filled with brochures of attractions along the byway, a photo montage, and a touch-screen information system. This will be supplemented by information services at the front desk.



*These maps of the George Parks Highway Scenic Byway will serve as the basis for an interactive wall map.*





Artifacts in the Trapper Creek Museum engender a "sense of place" in this region.

## A Sense of Place in South Denali

### Purpose:

These objects and photos will engender a "sense of place" associated with South Denali and the George Parks Highway Scenic Byway.

### Themes and Messages Interpreted:

Sub-Theme 7, Messages 7.4, 7.6

### Objectives:

- Visitors will perceive those characteristics that make South Denali special or unique.
- Visitors will feel like they are visiting the "real Alaska" that drew them here as tourists.

### Description:

Large wildlife photos and mounted specimens along with artifacts such as snowshoes, moose and caribou antlers, a beaver pelt on a willow frame stretcher, hand tools, gold pans, traps and furs, and photos of homestead cabins will festoon the wall opposite the restrooms, information desk, and snack concession. A large photo mural or painting of Mt. McKinley as seen from Curry Ridge with Lake 1787 will be mounted on the fireplace as a focal point and as an incentive to see that view for one's self.

The "theater posters" recommended for the entrance to the "Spirit of Alaska" theater could be replicated here. These interpretive panels are illustrated with dramatic headlines, concise text, photos and graphics that encapsulate the human stories of the South Denali Region: "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."



Touchable objects at the Denali State Park Information Desk in the Mt. McKinley Princess Lodge provide participatory activities for visitors.



## Preparation for Ridge-Top Experience

### Purpose:

These media components will provide advance organizers for the visitor experience on Curry Ridge. They introduce the site, list planning considerations, and provide justification for the investment of time and money.

### Themes and Messages Interpreted:

Primary Theme Statement

### Objectives:

- Visitors will be oriented to the recreational opportunities on Curry Ridge.
- Visitors will feel a trip to the top is a worthwhile investment of time and money.

### Description:

A kiosk on the front deck will greet visitors as they enter the building. This kiosk will provide photos and information that show the opportunities and experiences on Curry Ridge. The structure will be a standard upright panel with a small roof.

Two large flat screen monitors on the right and left of the fireplace will provide captioned (no sound) views of the ridge-top experience. As visitors enjoy a beverage and snack, they will see dramatic scenes of the shuttle ride up,

trails, scenery, wildlife, and the services and media in the visitor center. The video monitors will show a continuously looping program limited to 8 minutes or less.

A series of panels should be developed for the shuttle tram waiting area that prepare people for their ridge-top experience. One panel should focus on the trails with photos of scenic views, encounters with wildlife, and beautiful flora. It should inform people what they will need to bring with them for a trail adventure (this is their last chance to grab something from their vehicle).

Another panel should inform people about the “can’t miss” experiences in the visitor center, such as the exciting object theater, building the mountains of the Alaska Range, and flying over the Chulitna River.

A final panel should positively focus on safety, alerting visitors to potentially dangerous encounters with wildlife (black bears, grizzly bears, moose) and how to avoid them, as well as preparing for weather conditions that can change quickly.

*Waiting areas, such as the train platform at Denali National Park, are excellent places for interpretive media.*





## 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.



## Amenities Near Transportation Hub

### Wildlife Sculptures

Visitors to this site are seeking ways to document their visit through photographs. A picture of themselves with Mount McKinley as a background is probably the most sought after souvenir. Photos of charismatic mega fauna like bears, wolves, and moose are highly valuable but difficult to obtain. The simulated bronze wildlife sculptures at the Mt. McKinley Princess Lodge (Mile 130, Parks Highway) are extremely popular photographic subjects for visitors to pose with.

Large bronze sculptures express a sense of elegant importance attributed to the chosen subject. Moose are resident wildlife common to Denali State Park and symbolic of wild Alaska. A graceful sculpture of a moose in front of this transportation center could provide an iconic focal point to welcome arriving visitors. It would also be a photo documentation station for visitors waiting for the shuttle.

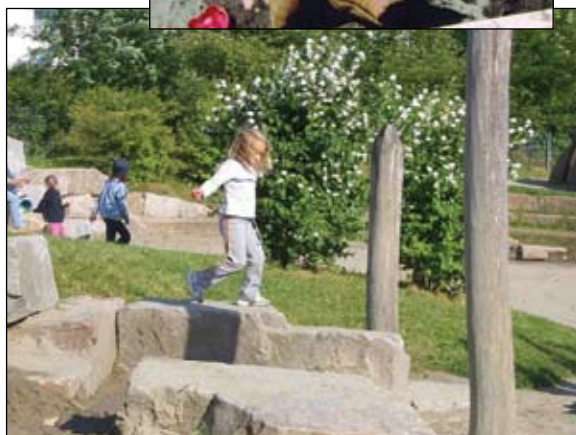
The view from the Transportation Hub out to the shuttle loading area is softened by a tranquil natural garden of native shrubs and wildflowers, bird feeders, a small pool of recycling water, and a graceful bronze statue of a pair

of hawk owls. An interpretive panel gives suggestions for attracting wildlife to backyard plantings and feeders and addresses the unique species, like hawk owls, that are found on Curry Ridge. Visitors waiting for the shuttle tram while enjoying a cup of coffee can learn about the special creatures adapted to living on the Ridge. Species like hawk owls are an uncommon northern species

that will excite birdwatchers. They are also an animal that can be rendered gracefully in the tops of sculptural trees. Sandhill cranes are yet another Curry Ridge bird suitable as a sculptural subject. These sculptures are an appropriate blend of artistry and science that makes a statement about the quality of this site and experience.



*A traveler to Cody, Wyoming poses for a picture with a bronze moose sculpture. Wildlife sculptures reinforce the themes of South Denali, while providing photo opportunities for visitors.*



Examples of natural playground elements

## Natural Playgrounds

There is a growing trend to incorporate nature, rather than manufactured equipment, into children's playgrounds. This park setting offers an excellent opportunity to create a nature based playground that reinforces the ecological theme of this special place and that will instill in children fond memories of playing in a beautiful natural setting in the shadow of the Alaska Range while they wait for a shuttle or camp on site.

A body of research that shows a direct link between exposure to nature and the physical, mental, and emotional well being of children. Some recent surveys show that kids prefer to play in open ended natural environments rather than in structured playgrounds with equipment. When given a choice between playing on a playground jungle gym or climbing around a boulder amphitheater on a woodland hillside, kids invariably choose the stone circle. The amphitheater has more possible uses for varied play and it contains countless little things that can be touched, climbed, slid down, or hidden in. And it changes all the time!

Something as basic as a large, unrestricted pile of sand offers children unlimited creative possibilities. When given the freedom to play in a big pile of sand, not a tiny contained table, kids can build a mountain range, a road

system into Denali, run water and watch a river develop, or create a canyon. They can learn about slumping, about the solar heating of sand and the coolness of digging down into it. They will see the uniqueness of tiny granules, their colors, textures, and shapes. Sand can be a physically involving sensual experience where kids learn to control their bodies when they're kneeling, crawling, or sitting in the sand.

Play areas can contain other imaginative building materials like logs and sticks to build houses and forts, they can include "caves," or have walkways that span slopes to tree houses.

Nature playgrounds are safe, sustainable, and cost less than traditional equipment laden play areas. These natural play areas have a smaller carbon footprint than traditional ones because the total carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases emitted during manufacture, transportation and eventually the disposal of equipment is many times less with a natural play area. There are a number of compelling reasons to consider the creation of a nature playground here.



## Moose Flats Trail

The “Moose Flats Trail” will begin at a transportation hub kiosk and encircle the campground, then return to the hub. The figure eight layout of the trail system permits both long (a 1 mile loop) and shortened (a 0.4 mile loop) walks depending on the weather, available time, and physical ability and stamina of the users. It will offer a forest trail alternative to the timberline Curry Ridge trails above. This trail is intended to be a serendipitous exploration with surprising views of Mount McKinley and the Alaska Range. It should be designed to maximize visitor opportunities to experience the mystery, variety, and beauty found on this mountain slope by wandering through clearings, out onto the brink of the slope, over a deep ravine, and on boardwalk trails that traverse muskeg and sedge meadows.

Campers and visitors waiting for their shuttle tram to the top of Curry Ridge will be the primary users in summer. Travelers on the George Parks Scenic Byway will be dropping in seeking information about the Byway and may take the opportunity to stretch their legs and experience this rich environment in greater detail.

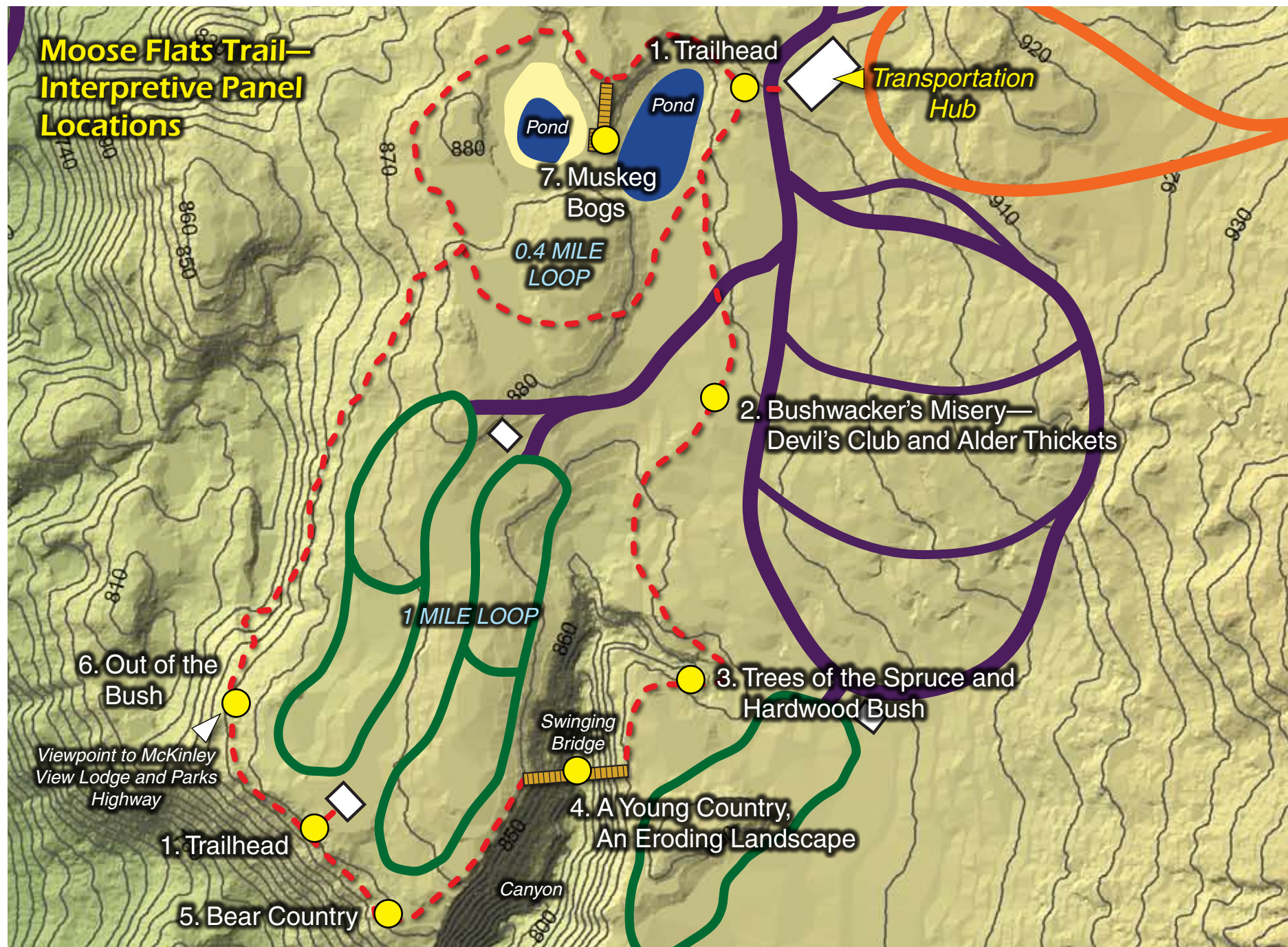
In the winter it will be a snowshoe trail for Alaska residents. This universally accessible interpretive trail will focus on the “Alaska Bush,” a term that represents wild Alaska outside the urban

areas. The trail traverses on boardwalks through alder thickets, wetland meadows and muskeg bogs, over a forested ravine on a swinging bridge, and through upland spruce-hardwood forest.



*The Moose Flats Trail traverses beautiful forested landscapes that offer a contrast to the habitats surrounding the visitor center site.*









## 2. Bushwacker's Misery—Devil's Club and Alder Thickets

**Location:** Alder thicket

**Themes and Messages Interpreted:**

Sub-Theme 1, Messages 1.2 a;  
Sub-Theme 4, 4.2

**Description:**

A boardwalk will take visitors from the trailhead through alder thickets and across a wetland area. This panel will interpret the infamous, almost impenetrable alder thickets that grow horizontally and vertically with spiny devil's club interspersed. Devil's club has been described as "festering leaves of horror" reflected in its scientific name *Oplopanax horridus*. These thickets are the bane of hunters and hikers in the Alaska bush. On the other hand, they have redeeming qualities that need to be pointed out.



## 3. Trees of the Spruce and Hardwood Bush

**Location:** Upland near "canyon"

**Themes and Messages Interpreted:**

Sub-Theme 1, Messages 1.4 a-c

**Description:**

Spruce and hardwood forest is one of three major habitat zones in Alaska. Much of the interior of Alaska has this habitat type comprised of white spruce and hardwood trees such as birch, aspen and poplar. Mature spruce and birch line the rim of this canyon and very large aspen and poplar can be seen in the canyon.

## 4. A Young Country, An Eroding Landscape

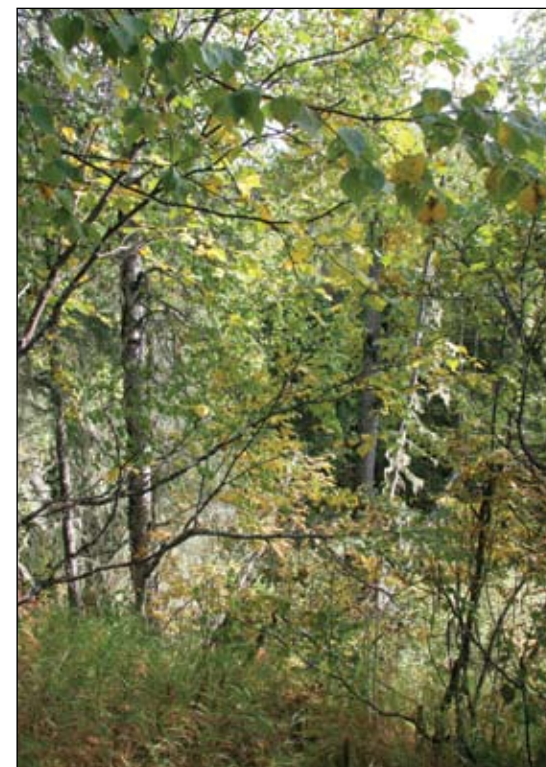
**Location:** Suspension bridge over "canyon"

**Themes and Messages Interpreted:**

Sub-Theme 2, 2.4

**Description:**

This canyon is evidence of water erosion in a landscape recently freed from glacial ice. This geologic story is the subject of this panel.





## 5. Bear Country

**Location:** Back of campground area

**Themes and Messages Interpreted:**  
Sub-Theme 8, 8.3

**Description:**

This panel will inform visitors about the presence of bears, their habits and how to avoid conflicts with them. Black and grizzly bears inhabit all of Denali State Park above and below timberline. Wildlife, particularly bears, can be dangerous. Never approach wild animals closely, especially those with young. To avoid surprises, warn animals of your presence by making noise, singing, or carrying bells when in the bush.



## 6. Out of the Bush—Mary Carey's McKinley View Lodge and the Parks Highway

**Location:** Overlook platform with trees cut to open the view

**Themes and Messages Interpreted:**  
Sub-Theme 7, 7.4, 7.5

**Description:**

This panel will tell the story of the development of the highway connecting Anchorage and Fairbanks. It will tell of the 59'ers and Mary's McKinley View Lodge and how she and others fought for the completion of the road to bring them "out of the bush."

## 7. Muskeg Bogs

**Location:** Boardwalk between two bog ponds

**Themes and Messages Interpreted:**  
Sub-Theme 1, Messages 1.5 b

**Description:**

This panel should relate to the message from "Boggy Soggy Muskeg" on the Denali Vistas Trail: "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!"



## Moose Flats Campgrounds

Two campgrounds are planned for the South Denali base facility. The main campground west of the ravine will serve both RV and tent campers. A smaller campground east of the ravine will be for tent campers only.

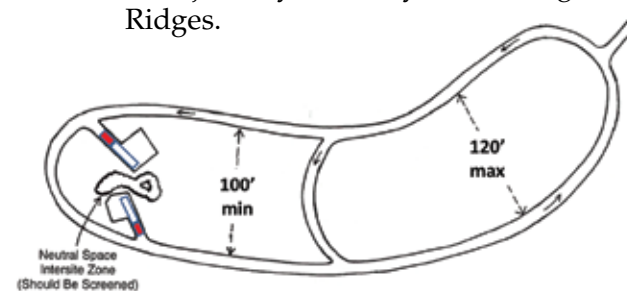
The following criteria should be applied to the development of these campgrounds:

- They should be sited on dry uplands adjacent to the “canyon” ravine.
- They should be served by a series of loop roads.
- For the best use of limited space, campground loops should be narrow and shaped to fit the topography. Separate entrances to each loop provides options for closing an area during the shoulder seasons.
- The campgrounds should be served by bath/toilet/refuse storage facilities near the entrance to the loop roads. A campground host station should be provided near this facility.
- Avoid placing amenities (restrooms, shower building, shelter building) inside of campground loops—this leads to unwanted trails and site cutting.

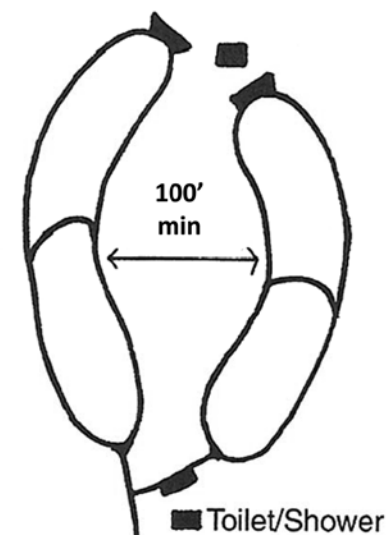
Amenities should be located at each end of a loop, naturally directing pedestrians along the road.

- Privacy should be maintained by separating sites and shielding them with natural cover.
- A vegetative buffer should separate campsites and the interpretive trail. A trailhead hub at the south end of the campground loops provides access for campers.
- The minimum space for each RV campsite should be 20 feet in width and 40 feet in length. The drive-through spaces should be 15 feet in width and 60 feet in length.
- Where possible, campsites should be designed for universal access with low slopes, no barriers between parking spur and living space, hardened surfaces, and extended picnic tables. These sites are beneficial for all campers—not just people in wheelchairs.
- The majority of campsites should be designed as “back in” sites, which surveys indicate most visitors prefer. However, at least 1/3 of the main campground sites should be “pull-through,” which are easier for campers with large RV rigs to navigate.

- Moose Flats Campground should be maintained as a rustic campground with no hook-ups. Generators will be permitted only during specified hours.
- The “tents only” campground should include some secluded walk-in campsites for backpackers who may be starting or ending their journey on Curry and K’esugi Ridges.



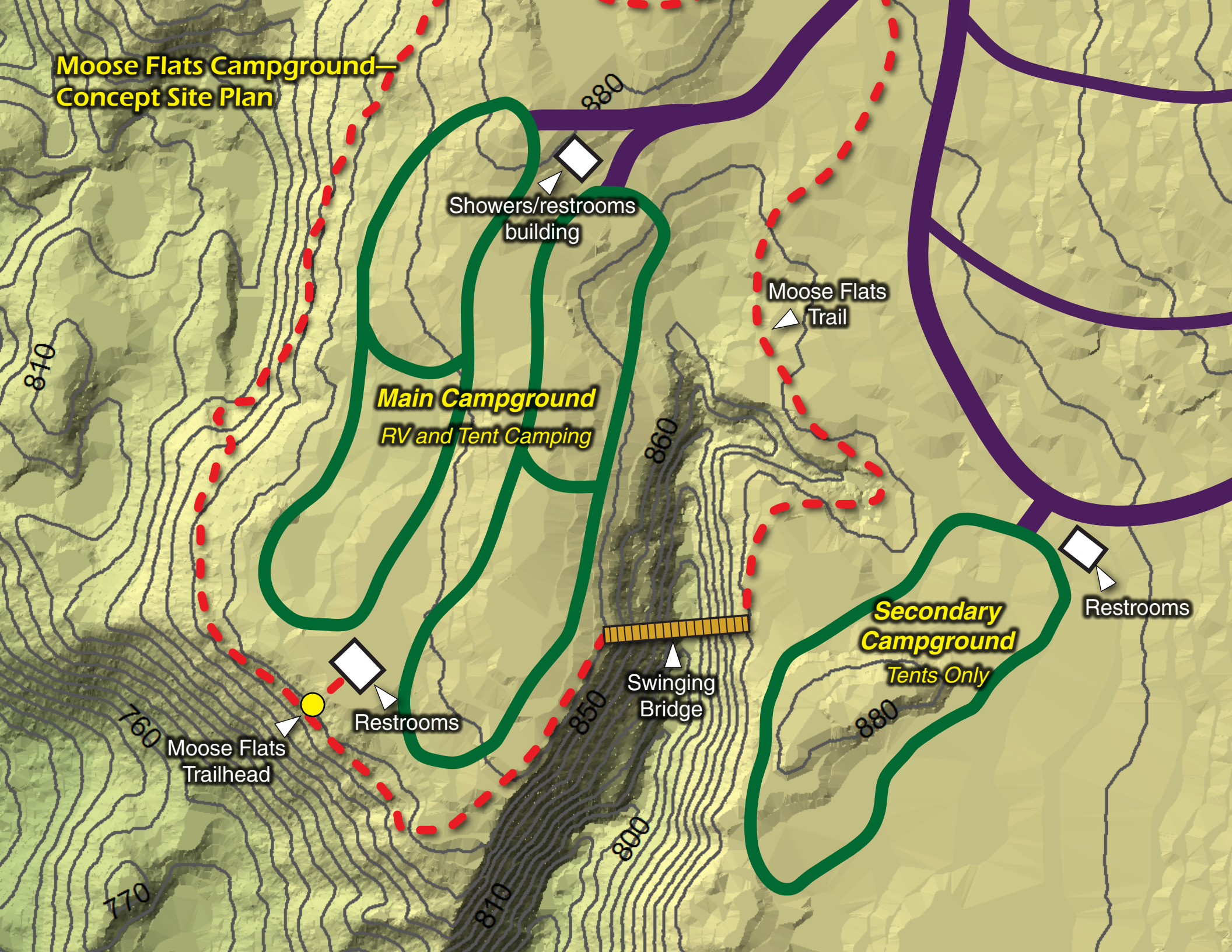
*Recommended measurements for campground loops to maximize space, while still providing sufficient buffer between sites.*



*Source: Planning Parks for People by Richard Hultsman, 1998*



# Moose Flats Campground— Concept Site Plan



## Connecting the Base Facility to the Visitor Center

### The Shuttle Tram



Shuttle tram photo courtesy of Northwest Trek.

An efficient transportation system is needed to keep tour coaches on schedule and prevent long waiting times at the transportation hub or visitor center. During the peak visitation months of June, July and August, an estimated 2,000 daily visitors will need to be accommodated (data in Chapter 3). A separate loading zone will be required for cruise package and independent tourists (about 1,000 per day for each target group). This allows speedy processing of pre-ticketed groups and keeps them on their tour schedules. It also limits congestion at the loading area.

Northwest Trek, a wildlife park in Washington, uses an 85 passenger three-car propane shuttle tram. Each has a “naturalist driver” who interprets the experience. This is a potential model for Denali State Park. Interpretive training for drivers could be provided by the park staff. The shuttle will traverse through various life zones with chance wildlife encounters that could be interpreted by the driver.

This facility will project a philosophy of sustainability and respect for the

environment. Therefore, every effort must be made to communicate that message to visitors. An energy-efficient shuttle tram system is a silent reminder to users of our commitment to “living lightly” on the landscape. It also minimizes the impact of noise and fumes on the site and visitors. A quiet and efficient shuttle will greatly enhance the aesthetic quality of the visitor experience.

Trams International™ of Bell Gardens, California is a major manufacturer of shuttle trams including those used at the Princess lodges in Alaska. They offer propane, electric and diesel drive train options. Engineers for the firm were consulted regarding the best option for Curry Ridge at an average 6% slope. After deliberation, they concluded that neither propane nor electric would have enough power for this application, but recommend the diesel engine they use as a quiet and emission free option. Bio-diesel fuel should be considered as an environmentally friendly action that also makes a statement.



## Waiting for the Shuttle Tram

Visitors have a variety of choices available to them as they wait for their shuttle tram to the top of Curry Ridge. For some a cup of coffee and a roll while sitting on the deck may serve their needs. These spacious decks, some with partial roofs, invite casual dining, social interaction, and begin to prepare people for a leisurely pace as they explore Curry Ridge. The decks are surrounded by shrubs and native flowers, a pool with a small, whispering waterfall, and bird feeders. Car traffic and parking areas are screened and buffered with native vegetation.

The nature playground is adjacent to one deck, allowing parents to watch children as they explore the caves, boulders, and tree house. Interpretive panels and posters alert visitors to a menu of Curry Ridge.

For those that seek some exercise, the Moose Flats interpretive trail promises some memorable experiences with overlooks of the Chulitna River Valley, a suspension bridge, and a boardwalk between muskeg ponds and sedge meadows.

When rain or cold drives the crowds inside, there is an interactive map to help you plan your trip in Denali State Park. There is a series of exhibits on points

of interest on the George Parks Scenic Byway, and streaming video footage of what you'll experience on the Ridge.

## The Shuttle Tram Experience

The shuttle ride to the crest of Curry Ridge is not just another "bus ride." It is an exhilarating outdoor excursion to a mountaintop. Along the way a passenger may be treated to the fragrance of the alpine forest, the fleeting sight of a moose or bear, and unsurpassed views of the sunlit snowy peaks of the Alaska Range.

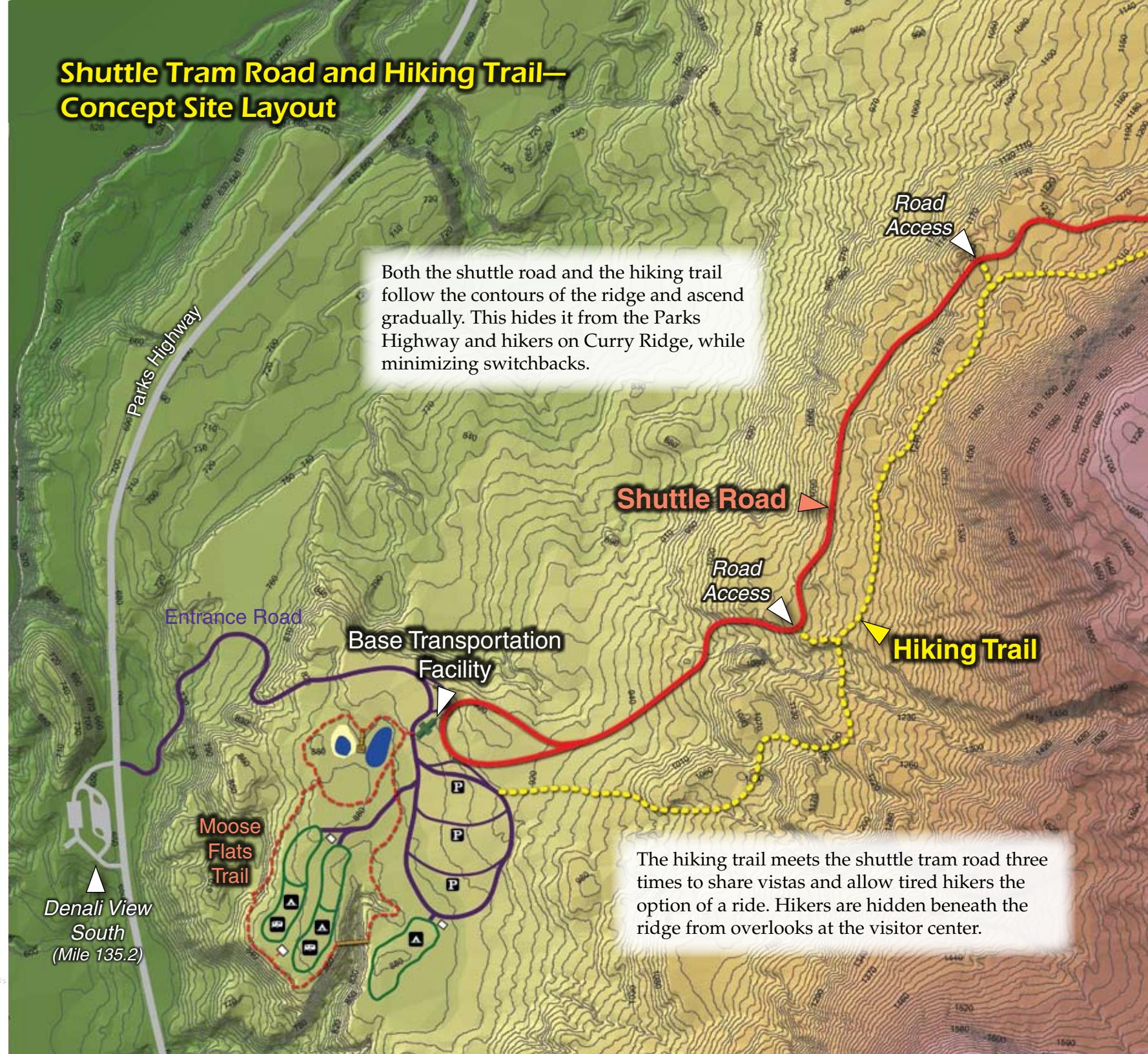
The 20 minute, open air ride gives travelers a chance to decompress from the fast pace of the Parks Highway and an opportunity to prepare for a quiet, natural experience. The shuttle tram road hugs the contours of the bluff as it meanders through shaded forests and into sunny meadows with distant vistas out over the valleys to the north. There are a few select pullouts where the shuttle stops on clear days for opportunities to photograph Mount McKinley. The quiet ride accentuates the silence of the vast surrounding wilderness and creates a sense of humility in many. Because the hillside hides the destination, there is a sense of mystery and anticipation.



*The shuttle tram experience would include scenic pullouts with views of Mt. McKinley on clear days. Shuttle tram photo courtesy of Northwest Trek.*



## Shuttle Tram Road and Hiking Trail— Concept Site Layout



Both the shuttle road and the hiking trail follow the contours of the ridge and ascend gradually. This hides it from the Parks Highway and hikers on Curry Ridge, while minimizing switchbacks.

**Shuttle Road**

Road Access

Road Access

**Hiking Trail**

Base Transportation Facility

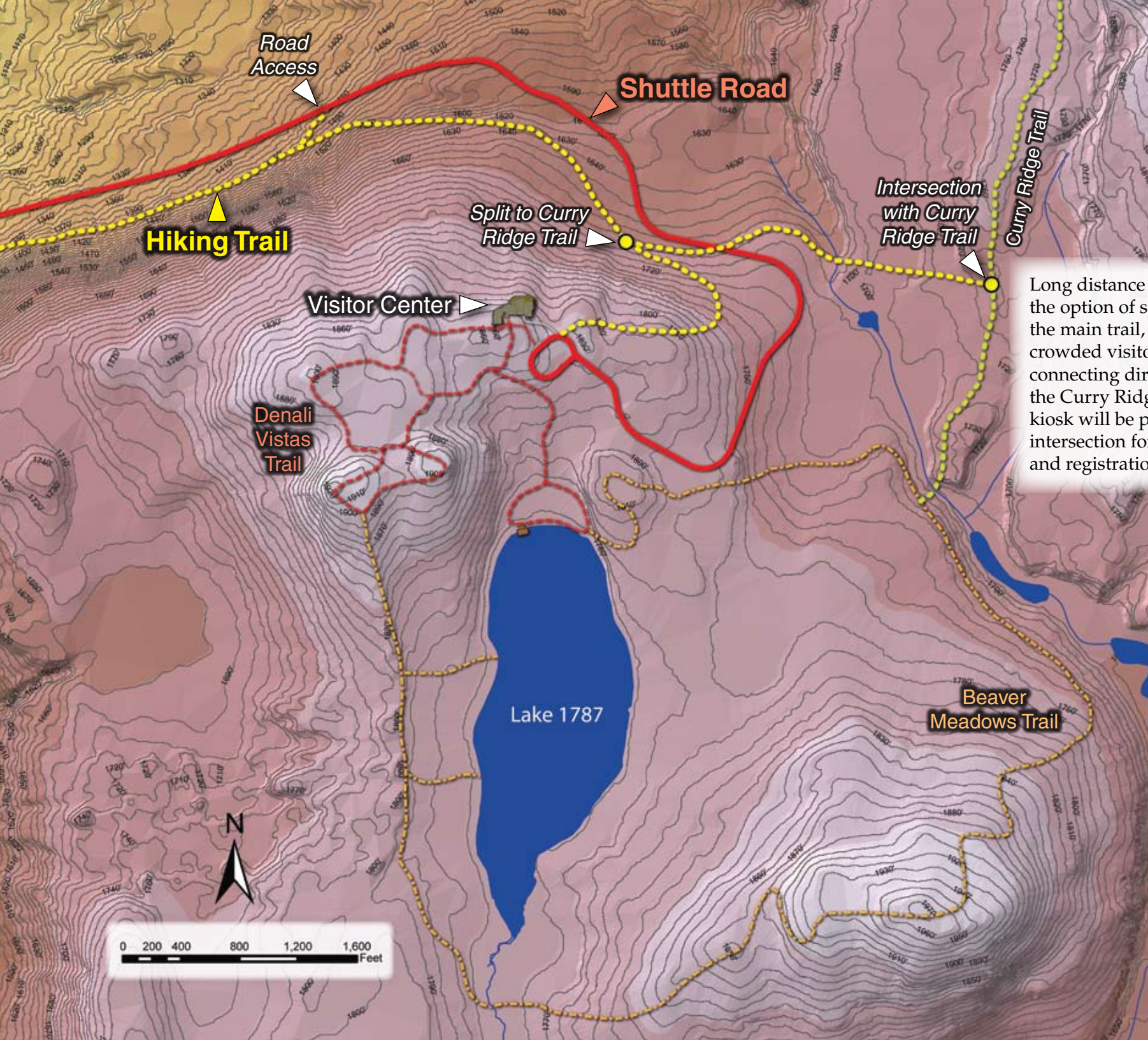
Entrance Road

**Moose Flats Trail**

Denali View South  
(Mile 135.2)

The hiking trail meets the shuttle tram road three times to share vistas and allow tired hikers the option of a ride. Hikers are hidden beneath the ridge from overlooks at the visitor center.





Long distance hikers have the option of splitting from the main trail, avoiding the crowded visitor center, and connecting directly with the Curry Ridge Trail. A kiosk will be placed at the intersection for information and registration.



## Pedestrian and Biking Trails to Visitor Center

The shuttle tram will be the primary means of getting to the visitor center for most people but alternative modes of traveling up or back will also be available to hikers and bicyclists. For those who are seeking a more personal and physical adventure in getting to the site, a trail will be available.

Visitors have an option to hike up and/or down Curry Ridge when accessing the visitor center and trails on the ridge. The trailhead, located near the shuttle drop off, is visible from the base transportation facility. It is a rustic kiosk which is thematically designed to resemble other structures in the compound.

It will contain large scale colored maps which correspond to folding publications with safety and orientation information that can be carried by hikers. This location permits easy access to the parking areas, water, and bathrooms. It can be seen from the waiting areas.

The trail is wide enough to permit two hikers to walk side by side or for groups to pass by as they meet each other. It parallels the shuttle tram roadway but only crosses it when topography demands it. There are numerous opportunities to look out over the Chulitna River Valley and to view the Alaska Range. The trail should alternate

alluringly through mountain meadows and through the forest to maximize diversity of habitats. Trail structures like bridges and benches are thematically rustic log and stone structures. Only hikers are permitted to use this trail so it meanders to a walkers speed, with inviting surprise views down into ravines and out across the no name creek watershed. At several strategic places, it intercepts scenic vistas where the shuttle tram stops. These places permit reluctant hikers the assurance that they have an option of riding the shuttle or of seeking assistance if needed.

### Biking Alternative

The 3.5 mile climb averages a challenging 6% incline. Maximum road grades for the shuttle will be 9% or less. While this is a moderately challenging climb for hikers, it is a challenging workout for bikers. It is a fair assumption that most people will prefer to coast down the grade on bicycles rather than laboriously peddling up the long, steep slope. Provisions and policies should be made that address transporting bicycles to the top of the ridge on the shuttles and that facilitate their safe storage in racks on site at the visitor center. There are precedents for similar cycling adventures at other park locations such as in Hawaii Volcanoes National Park. There, commercial

companies transport visitors to the top of the roadway where they mount their rented bicycles and coast down the long mountain highway. There is potential for creating a similar, if shorter, biking experience on Curry Ridge if it is deemed an appropriate recreational experience.

Conflicts between bicyclists and hikers are a major controversy on multiple use trails. The more natural and narrow the trail, the greater the potential conflict and the frustration of the users. While most encounters between hikers and bicyclists do not result in injuries, the steep topography, dense understory, and narrow trails on Curry Ridge are problematic. Wherever possible, these uses should be separated. The safest and most economical bike route up and down the ridge is the shuttle roadway that can also serve as a bike corridor. Bicycles will be speeding down the steep slope and need clear lines of sight, room to maneuver, and a good braking surface that this asphalt roadway provides. This improves both the biking and hiking experience if a less expensive foot trail is developed parallel to the roadway to accommodate hikers. Hikers seek a more intimate and quietly reflective experience than they can find on the roadway. Eliminating the fast moving bikes adds to the pedestrian's sense of seclusion and safety.



If bike trails are developed on the lower slopes of Curry Ridge, they should be segregated from hiking trails. The main loop system from the visitor center should be maintained as discreet walking trails in order to allow quiet reflection and passive encounters with wildlife. Bike trails in alpine habitats will invite harmful incursions into the fragile environment. It would be desirable to develop the vast majority of bike trails in the lower terraces of the site, nearer the transportation hub.

The planners have some safety concerns about cyclists as they careen down trails along the ridge. The area is home to a significant population of both black and brown bears. The instinctive behavior of these omnivores is to chase fleeing prey. There have been attacks on bicyclists on Anchorage trails in less brushy and enclosed areas than Curry Ridge. The potential of inciting encounters should be investigated by surveying similar Alaskan sites and calculating the potential risks.

If a series of cycling trails are developed, local cycling clubs should be invited to join the planning process. This will facilitate communications and support with the user group, result in better trails, and will set the groundwork for self regulation and long-term trust and cooperation with agencies.



*Meandering front-country hiking trail in Denali National Park.*

