

PART THREE: SUMMARY OF MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS  
SPECIFIC TO THE GEORGE PARKS HIGHWAY

The scenic resources of the George Parks Highway are of considerable value to Alaskans living and commuting along it as well as the thousands who travel it for business and pleasure. As with any valuable resource, some type of management strategy or planning is deemed necessary to preserve areas with very high scenic resource values, to improve those areas where man made diversity can enhance the driving experience, and to restore areas where the scenic quality has been severely eroded by landscape alteration.

How can one manage scenic resources? The visible landscape often includes thousands of acres of land. The seen area or viewshed constantly changes with the movement of the viewer. Scenic resources are often subjective, what is beautiful to one person may not be as attractive to another. Additionally, scenic resources do not stand alone. Lands with valuable scenic resources are often the very same lands with valuable stands of timber, good agricultural soils, high mineral potential, as well as subject to recreational, commercial and residential use pressures. Despite these problems, scenic resources are manageable.

Management of scenic resources is generally not a question of scenery verses mining, scenery verses residential development. Scenic resources most often lend themselves to a multiple use management strategy. Such a strategy generally focuses on how to realize land development and resource use while at the same time not destroying the scenic resource values. There are places when, in order to respect high scenic resource values, other intensive land uses such as clear cut logging or strip mining might not be allowed. At the same time there are many times where, through careful predevelopment planning and design considerations, a mine or logging may be realized and scenery not significantly devalued. For the most part, this set of recommendations strives to point out places and types of actions required to protect the unique scenic values found along the George Parks Highway while at the same time allowing other land and resource uses as deemed necessary by public demand and planning study.

Before going into detail regarding the nature of the scenic resource management recommendations, it must be mentioned that this material should be used in conjunction with other physical, biological and socio-economic data for sound land and resource planning decisions. This scenic resource data, and these recommendations need to stand side by side with soil capability and

suitability studies, vegetation maps, mineral potential, animal habitat concerns, human land use patterns and other information. A scenic resource inventory is yet another piece in the puzzle we call the environment, and an understanding of it helps to make more environmentally and socially sound decisions regarding the use of the land and resources around us.

Scenic resource management considerations regarding the lands along the George Parks Highway are closely linked to two important considerations - foreground lands and land ownership patterns. The viewshed or visible landscape perceived from a vehicle moving along the highway, is commonly divided into three zones; foreground, middleground and background. The foreground is that portion of the visible area to a distance of  $\frac{1}{4}$  to  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile from the viewer. The middleground refers to the visible area beyond the foreground to a distance of approximately 5 miles. The visible landscape beyond the middleground is referred to as the background. Of these three distance zones, in most instances it is the foreground which is most critical to the quality of the view experience. Foreground areas can create spaces, frame and define views, and screen objectionable areas. Foreground lands are where landscape details such as colors and textures are most clearly evident. Foreground lands create variety and visual change in the perception of the landscape more so than the less dynamic middleground and background distance zones. The foreground areas invite the viewer to stop, rest, and participate in the environment. And, foreground lands can either "make" or "break" a view. For example, a very pleasing view of Mt. McKinley or Mt. Susitna would undoubtedly be considered of greater value if a quiet lake, trees and a cabin define the foreground rather than if it is dominated by an open gravel pit or a jumbled array of signs, parking lots and commercial establishments.

The George Parks Highway scenic resource recommendations focus on foreground lands. Such an emphasis is logical in light of the above mentioned considerations and at the same time allows for another important consideration. It means that scenic resource management -- rather than attempting to deal with thousands of acres comprising the highway viewsheds -- can concentrate on a small but most important part of these thousands of acres.

Land ownership is the second important concern with respect to scenic resource management along the George Parks Highway. It is undoubtedly the most important factor to be considered with respect to the implementation of these or any other land and resource management recommendations. Successful implementation of most

recommendations would be relatively easy if all foreground lands were under the ownership and responsibility of a single private owner or public agency. However, the ownership patterns along the George Parks Highway are extremely complex. Ownership includes the Federal government (managed by a variety of separate agencies such as the Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, and U. S. Army) the State of Alaska (similarly with a number of separate managing agencies such as Department of Natural Resources, Department of Transportation and Public Facilities and Department of Fish and Game), local governments (three boroughs and numerous large and small communities), native village and regional corporation (AHTNA, Cook Inlet Region, Inc., Doyon Ltd., regional corporations and Cantwell, Nenana, Montana Creek village corporations), as well as hundreds of other private individual land-owners. It should be obvious that any effort to develop a consensus and unified land management direction for such a diverse array of interests and points of view would be extremely difficult - particularly with respect to something as new, subjective and of non-quantifiable economic return as scenic resources.

Along the George Parks Highway there are generally three different land ownership patterns, each with a somewhat different set of implications regarding management implementation. The first condition is where a single public agency has responsibility over a considerable contiguous portion of the foreground landscape. This condition provides the easiest opportunity for visual resource management. Examples would be stretches of road through Denail State Park (under the primary jurisdiction of the Department of Natural Resources, Division of Parks), the roadway in Mt. McKinley National Park (under the jurisdiction of the U. S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service), forested roadside uplands between Nenana and Fairbanks (under the jurisdiction of the State Department of Natural Resources) and portions of Fort Richardson Military Reservation outside of Anchorage. Since we are dealing with public lands in this case, decisions are subject to public influence and review, however, the need for considerable interagency coordination would be minimized. Unfortunately, this condition is typical only to a few portions of the highway.

The second condition is where foreground roadside lands are predominantly under the jurisdiction of two or three public agencies. In such cases, the opportunity exists for cooperative land management strategies without the intensive demands for coordination and interaction amongst a great many people. As noted above, such management decisions again would be subject

to public participation and review, however, the task is much simpler when one or two public entities are involved. Foreground portions of the highway in the Matanuska Susitna borough, where it is predominantly a mixture of state and borough ownership, offer such an opportunity for joint scenic resource management. It should be noted that this opportunity may soon be lost if either the state or borough dispose of this roadside land. It is important that actions be initiated now in these cases.

The third condition is where the foreground lands are a complex pattern involving many landowners -- particularly private individuals. Unfortunately, a large portion of the Parks Highway is this way. With respect to visual resource management, this complex ownership pattern presents the greatest challenge -- to coordinate the variety of interests, points of view and management responsibilities. Small private landowners are often not specifically concerned about scenic resources. They often feel that their individual lots are not of great significance, and they often have a poor understanding of scenic resource management options such as greenbelts, design standards and site planning techniques. Consequently, one important task of a scenic resource management strategy is that of public education -- convincing landowners and managers of the value of scenic resources and the options available to manage them for their benefit. In those areas where this complex ownership pattern exists, public meetings seem like a valuable first step in developing this public consensus regarding the sensitive management of these resources.

For purposes of making the management recommendations easier to grasp, the George Parks Highway has been divided into a series of short segments which are called visual resource management units (VRMU). Visual Resource Management Unit Number One begins in Anchorage and visual resource management unit 27 is at the George Parks highway entrance to Fairbanks. Each visual resource management unit is a stretch of highway subject to similar land management strategies and concerns. Management recommendations fall into four broad categories: scenic highway designations, design and planning considerations, opportunities, and problems.

#### 1. SCENIC HIGHWAY DESIGNATIONS

Those stretches of the George Parks Highway with the very highest scenic resource values as identified by this inventory are recommended for official designation as "scenic highway." Such a designation would need to be made by the State Legislature through the State

## SUMMARY OF SCENIC HIGHWAY RECOMMENDATIONS (FIRST PRIORITY)

LOCATION (Mileposts)	LOCATION-(DESCRIPTIVE)	LENGTH	Assessment Units	VISUAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT UNIT	LANDSCAPE CHARACTER TYPE(S)
337.2 to 349.7	Hills east of Ester	11.4 miles	180-185	27	Tanana Ridge
314.7 to 327.8	Hills northeast of Nenana	13 miles	168-174	25	Tanana Ridge
271.6 to 276.2	South of Clear-Anderson	4.4 miles	145-147	23	Nenana Uplands-Nenana River lowlands
255.7 to 264.1	North of Healy	8.0 miles	136-140	21	Nenana Uplands
247 to 248	West of Healy	1.0 miles	130	20	Nenana Uplands
244.5 to 246.5	West of Healy	2.0 miles	128	20	Nenana Uplands
237.9 to 243.4	Nenana Gorge - McKinley Park	5.5 miles	123-126	19	Nenana Gorge
194 to 217.5	Summit - Cantwell area	23.5 miles	100-113	17	Broad Pass - Alaska Range
182 to 188	Colorado	6.0 miles	93-96	15	Chulitna River - Broad Pass
169.2 to 177	Hurricane Gulch	8 miles	85-89	13	Chulitna River
97.3 to 108.9	Susitna River crossing	11.5 miles	67-73	10	Susitna River lowlands
71.4 to 78.3	Willow Creek to Kashwitna River	7.5 miles	50-54	8	Susitna River lowlands
52.5 to ~66.5	Big Lake road to Nancy Lake	17.0	39-47	6	Little Susitna River - Susitna lowlands
~23.0 to 33.6	Crossing Knik - Matanuska Rivers	13	18-24	4	Chugach Foothills - Matanuska Knik Delta
	Fire lake - Chugiak	4	12-14	2	Chugach Foothills

Department of Transportation and Public Facilities and the Department of Natural Resources. A system of signs could be posted along these stretches of roadway, alerting the public to the fact that the scenic resources along these portions of the highway are exceptionally high.

"Official designation" as a scenic highway could accomplish a number of things. First, it would be an important step towards building a public awareness of scenic resource values. It could create a public demand and expectation for special land management within these areas. Such demands and expectations would be important leverage to the implementation of roadside highway land management strategies. It could influence private landowners to take special considerations in roadside land development within these areas, as well as spurring a public pride in keeping these areas free of litter, signs and other unsightly visual clutter. Finally, such a designation would set an important precedent -- paving the way for similar designations and management strategies throughout Alaska's state highway system.

"Official designation" could also set the stage for the formation of a commission or advisory group to explore implementation strategies for scenic resource management within these areas. Team membership should be directed or coordinated by representatives from the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities and the Department of Natural Resources. One of these representatives should be a professional landscape architect with experience in visual resource management techniques. Representatives of the various public agencies and private individuals owning or managing foreground lands within these designated scenic highway areas would also be asked to participate, as well as any other interested individuals.

One of the most important tasks of this commission or team would be to develop an education-awareness program designed to inform public and private landowners and managers as to the value of scenic resources, and some of the techniques employed in managing them. These would include special zoning ordinances and development standards within boroughs and municipalities for foreground lands adjacent to highways; greenbelts and scenic easements along public lands bordering highways and along streams and rivers which highways cross; performance standards for the removal of vegetation or the alteration of topography within foreground lands adjacent to the roadway; standards for the location size and materials used in commercial signing along scenic highway stretches of roadway; retention of

development rights of lands adjacent to the roadway in state and local government land disposal programs; requiring professional design services including landscape architects for large land developments adjacent to the roadway; developing state and local government policies on the character of commercial, residential and industrial land developments adjacent to roadways; encouragement of special land development management considerations in particularly fragile areas from a scenic resource point of view (open tundra, bogs, salt marshes); integration of scenic resource data and management strategies in regional and local planning efforts. Those visual resource management units where a scenic highway designation is recommended contain additional concepts and strategies for the management of the scenic resources. The appendix to this report contains a copy of The Scenic Route, A Guide For the Official Designation of Scenic Highway, July 1975 developed by the State of California. Some of this information would be useful to implementation strategies for a similar concept in Alaska. Included in it is a sample ordinance cities and counties could use in designating a scenic highway and managing private lands adjacent to scenic highways.

## 2. LANDSCAPE DESIGN AND LAND PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

Many of the recommendations regarding the care and management of the scenic resources along the George Parks Highway might be classified as either employing a landscape design or land planning skill. While in many ways landscape design and land planning skills and techniques may be considered to overlap, for purposes of this discussion they will be dealt with separately. Landscape design may be considered to refer to all of the ways that one can conscientiously manipulate the topography, land cover and man-made objects to accomplish a "task." Some of these tasks might be to hide, to enhance, to restore, accent, or organize. Trained landscape architects are those most commonly versed in the variety of techniques related to landscape design. Land planning considerations are a bit broader in scope than the more site specific landscape design considerations. These focus more on the way lands and natural resources are used. Land planning techniques often set the stage, or provide the context where landscape design skills can be employed. Since these two concepts, land planning and landscape design (specific site planning) are complementary they are considered together here. All of the land planning and landscape design tools and techniques mentioned here are relevant to the other three recommendation categories (scenic highway designations, opportunities, and problems).

## LANDSCAPE DESIGN CONCEPTS

Descriptions of some landscape design techniques follow. Place where some of these ideas might be applied can be found within the narrative for each visual resource management unit.

Landscaping and roadside vegetation management within the existing right-of-way.

This would be one way to very quickly influence the scenic quality of the foreground lands along the George Parks Highway because right-of-way lands are entirely within the jurisdiction of a single managing agency - the State Department of Transportation and Public Facilities. The greatest impediment to implementing these types of recommendations are the generally very standardized and unimaginative right-of-way management techniques presently employed along roadways in Alaska and throughout the country. Federal highway support funds often carry with them numerous standards and restrictions. However, the following concepts, all of which are presently employed along some highways throughout the country, would not diminish the Parks Highway's utility or safety and would significantly add to the scenic quality of the particularly sensitive foreground distance zone. Some right-of-way design consideration might include:

Median strip tree and shrub plantings on divided portions of the highway. Such plantings can be especially effective with the use of native plant materials. In many cases, native vegetation will invade an area naturally if intensive measures to prevent this are not taken. Such a concept is particularly applicable along the George Parks Highway as it leaves Anchorage. It would also be a significant concern with respect to new highway construction, whereby vegetation within the median strip could be left as undisturbed as possible.

Imaginative use of wildflowers, grasses and other visually distinctive erosion control plantings on the cut and fill banks of the highway. Presently, the poppy plantings near Eklutna, and the wild iris displays near Eklutna Flats are good examples of how wildflowers add to the scenic quality of the driving experience. Such extremely colorful plantings would not be desirable everywhere because they would lose their distinctive charm and uniqueness. However, they can be

an important accent. Experimentation into the use of other flowers along the right-of-way should be conducted.

Develop more imaginative treatment of the highway right-of-way edge. Presently, the highway right-of-way is for the most part maintained equally on both sides of the road and for most of its length. The result is that visual variety is minimized. This is of particular concern where the roadway passes through level terrain with dense stands of trees on either side of the highway. Variability in the clearing and maintenance of the right-of-way could be a function of more than aesthetics; wider clearing could be done on southern edges to aid in the heating of the road surface during the spring and fall, selective clearing around common moose crossing areas could help to reduce moose kill problems, and leaving trees and shrubs closer to the roadway can in certain instances reduce drifting and blowing of snow. The key to this design concept is not to treat both sides of the road equally - rather to create spatial and experiential variety through the variable clearing and suppression of right-of-way trees and shrubs.

#### TURNOUTS AND LITTER BARREL SITES

Along the George Parks Highway there presently exists numerous roadside turnouts, some with litter disposal facilities, a few with toilets, many without any facilities. Many of these turnouts were previously used as gravel extraction or construction staging sites - suggesting that aesthetically and functionally they lack many characteristics desirable for a roadside rest area. Most of them are simply de facto rest areas, since there are at present few developed roadside rest and camping areas. Consequently, almost all places lack any sensitive site design and organization characteristics and site development often consists of no more than orange litter barrels and an active suppression of any form of vegetative cover within a poorly delineated parking area. Two things are of concern here. First, roadside rest areas and turnouts need to be a part of a system of such facilities, all properly located, sensitively designed, constructed, and maintained so as to adequately meet the demands of the traveling public. At the moment there does not exist a system of roadside rest areas all along the highway. This subject is dealt with more carefully on

the following discussion concerning "opportunities." The second concern relates to the actual site design of these rest areas and turnouts. The following basic design principles should be the basis for the development of rest areas and turnouts once they are properly and systematically planned and located.

Locate a visual and sound buffer between the roadway and the parking areas. All parking facilities, toilets, picnic tables and litter barrels should be screened from the roadway - and enough vegetation retained to reduce highway noise.

Litter barrels do not need to be highly visible from the road to be effective. For those areas where the only roadside facility is a litter barrel the simple technique of signs alerting drivers to the presence of a litter barrel is sufficient. In this way they can be more discreetly located along the road, and be less distracting to the scenery.

Rest areas should, as much as possible take on a unique character and take advantage of surrounding landscape features. Not all rest areas -turnouts should look and feel alike. They should take advantage of lakes, rivers, scenic overlooks, and unique geologic, biologic or historic features. Provision should be made to try to draw the traveler away from the vehicle for a short time to see, appreciate, and learn about the landscape he is driving through.

Rest areas and turnouts should clearly delineate where vehicles are permitted and not encourage vehicular movement beyond this area. This is particularly important along streams, rivers and lakeshores - and is at present a serious problem in many places along the George Parks Highway.

There needs to be a clear differentiation between day use and overnight use rest areas. Day use areas can be sited relatively close to the highway - and should provide limited facilities which do not encourage overnight camping. Overnight use areas should be located at least  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile away from the road. Such facilities are more properly termed campgrounds, and should be available near highway rest areas where possible.

Rest areas should take advantage of passive solar heating. In Alaska, where temperatures are almost always below the human comfort level, it is essential that rest areas are oriented to the south, that wind protection is provided, and that rain shelters, toilets, picnic tables all have a proper solar orientation and design. Trees are important design elements more to create spaces, act as windbreaks and provide visual scale and variety rather than for purposes of shade for most of the year.

## GREENBELTS

Greenbelts are relatively narrow strips of land within which special land use and management considerations are deemed necessary to protect scenery, recreational lands, wildlife, accessibility or other valuable resources or conditions. Greenbelts are most commonly associated with linear landscape features such as roads, trails, rivers or shorelines. Greenbelts are often retained in a natural condition or with a minimum of land development or alteration. However, a greenbelt is not always left untouched. At times a variety of land uses are compatible within and adjacent to greenbelts - the greenbelt designation simply alerting people that special considerations need to be taken to protect certain identified valuable resource or conditions. Consequently, it is not as simple as designating an area "green belt" - the types of land uses permissible within it need to be clearly defined. Often these uses may vary from one side of the road to the other, and from one place to another.

Along the George Parks Highway greenbelts would be a landscape management tool to help protect the sensitive foreground lands adjacent to the highway and visible waterways. The width of a greenbelt varies primarily according to the character of the topography and vegetation - in some areas a 50 to 100 ft. wide greenbelt beyond the highway right-of-way may be sufficient, in others it may extend for 300 to 1,000 ft. or more. Because of the nature of the vegetation, and the nature of surrounding views, some greenbelts should receive only minimal development. In other instances, houses, campgrounds and other more intensive land uses may occur adjacent to and within a greenbelt. Some specific considerations regarding greenbelt location, width and land uses are pointed out in the discussions regarding each visual resource management unit.

The greenbelt concept needs additional research regarding its implementation in Alaska. The State of Alaska

presently has a land classification category called greenbelt, but it has presently received little use because it is viewed as too restrictive in the land uses allowed. The legal aspects of a greenbelt designation through areas of complex ownership patterns needs to be explored. It appears that the most direct way of accomplishing a greenbelt type landscape management strategy would be through zoning laws within organized boroughs and municipalities, and through the state's zoning power in the unorganized borough. In spite of these problems, the greenbelt concept remains as potentially the single most powerful strategy for scenic resource management.

#### LAND PLANNING CONCEPTS

The above narrative focused on landscape design considerations relevant to scenic resource management. Another whole set of tools, techniques and considerations would fall under the heading of land planning. Land planning considerations are some of the most difficult to actually implement yet they can be the most effective with respect to protecting scenic resource values. Many of the existing problems, from a scenic quality point of view are the result of the improper use of lands immediately adjacent to the highway. These include improper siting of gravel extraction and construction staging activities, uncontrolled commercial, residential and recreational access to adjacent lands, inefficient strip commercial development, and a lack of an adequate mix of public and private lands adjacent to the road - particularly around existing communities and along rivers, lakes and streams. Land use problems such as these not only impact scenic resources, but numerous, uncontrolled highway intersections pose safety hazards, strip commercial development results in inefficient use of energy resources and costly provision of utilities, and a lack of public land results in trespassing and access problems as well as requiring significant expenditures of public monies to buy back lands for needed public purposes. Problems such as these can be eliminated through foresight and careful planning. The following are some of the more relevant land planning concepts relating to scenic resource management along the George Parks Highway.

#### State Land Disposals

Due to their immediate accessibility, lands adjacent to the highway are under heavy demand for private ownership and use. It should be pointed out that considerable roadside lands along the Parks Highway are already privately owned - particularly along the Lower Susitna Valley and near Anchorage and Fairbanks.

The following recommendations should be considered in any future state land disposals immediately adjacent to the roadway.

- . No state land disposals of land immediately adjacent to the highway along stretches under recommendation for scenic highway designation -not until further research into methods available to protect the sensitive foreground distance zone.
- . Agricultural development would be permissible on state lands immediately adjacent to the highway. In most instances, agricultural development is compatible with scenic resource management provided the necessary management techniques to prevent soil erosion (contour plowing, windrows) are employed.
- . State land disposals of parcels immediately adjacent to the highway and within 2 miles of existing communities should not be permitted until further study is done. Such public lands can have significance as future public open space, for a variety of future public uses, and as a means of controlling visually distracting commercial strip development.
- . Roadside land disposals should focus on those stretches of highway where greater diversity is desirable. In these areas, the most compatible roadside uses would be residential development or agriculture on lands capable of supporting this use.

#### Borough and Local Government Land Disposals

- . At this time, it is recommended that local governments should not dispose of any land it owns which is adjacent to the highway right-of-way and within an area under recommendation for scenic highway designation. Further site specific field work would need to be conducted in order to determine how to protect the valuable scenic resources and at the same time realize the best economic and social value for the local government. Along some stretches of roadway, a specific "greenbelt" width has been recommended, while along others an additional field determination needs to be made.
- . Boroughs and other local governments should retain all lands they own which are adjacent

to the roadway and within two miles of existing communities. This land should undergo careful study as to its best use. Such lands can help to create visual diversity - particularly if they remain in a natural or low development stage while surrounding lands undergo intensive development. They also may be possible future locations for parks, schools or a variety of other public facilities. Around most communities, such remaining public lands can be instrumental in controlling unsightly and inefficient commercial strip development.

Borough and other local governments land disposals should focus - to as much an extent as possible, on those stretches of highway where visual diversity is desired and where the foreground landscape has a high visual absorption capability.

Local governments should explore methods available to them for managing scenic resources within their boundaries. Local governments, through their zoning power can influence private land development. Indeed, this is probably the most direct and easily realized way that some control over scenic resources where private landowners are involved is possible. As already mentioned, the most important factor is informing the public about the value of scenic resources. Consequently public education programs would need to be a first step in this process. This could lead to the actual adoption of a zoning ordinance and performance standards for land use and development adjacent to the highway. The appendix to this report has a sample zoning ordinance developed for use in scenic highway designations in California.

#### State Land Classification

On state owned land, classification is the existing tool for management. With respect to scenic resources, a greenbelt classification could be useful. As with local government zoning, significant efforts need to be directed towards selling the public on the concept of a greenbelt. It is recommended that those stretches of highway identified for scenic highway status and under state ownership, be placed in a greenbelt classification. Widths of such greenbelts should be a minimum of 150' along those portions with a high

visual absorption capability, and field determined for portions with low visual absorption capability ratings.

#### INCORPORATION OF SCENIC RESOURCES IN LAND PLANNING STUDIES

A variety of borough and other local government, state and federal planning efforts are presently being done for lands through which the George Parks Highway passes. It is recommended that this scenic resource data and set of recommendations be made available to everyone involved in land and resource planning along the highway so that these resource values may be recognized and steps taken towards implementing or realizing the recommendations. This study should also help generate interest or demanding scenic resource data for planning efforts throughout the state and make scenic information a part of the information set commonly used in land and resource decisionmaking.

#### Visual Impact of Roadside Land Use - Guidelines for Land Planning Recommendations

To date, commercial land development and surface mining (sand and gravel extraction) have had the most significant impact on scenic resources along the highway. Two concepts can act as guidelines in encouraging - zoning - or restricting future use of roadside lands by public agencies as a result of the planning process. First, diversity is better than monotony. This principle is valid for land use as well as for ecological principles. This suggests that a mix of land uses (residential, commercial, recreational, industrial) is visually more desirable than a predominance of a single one. This is why commercial strip development has such a high visual impact - the predominance of a single type of land use over an extended portion of the visible landscape. Land planning recommendations for lands adjacent to the highway should encourage this diversity wherever appropriate. The second principle is that the visual impact of different types of land uses is quite different. In a general sense the impact may be categorized or classified into high, medium and low categories. Visually sensitive areas would be where land uses in the low visual impact category might be encouraged, while high impact land uses would most generally be located in areas of low scenic quality and/or high visual absorption capability. It must be remembered that without proper site design considerations and in extreme cases, land uses indicated as having low impact could conceivably have high impact - however, these classifications are valid for the types of land uses typically seen along the George Parks Highway today.

LAND DEVELOPMENTS	VISUAL IMPACT RATING	COMMENTS AND IMPLICATIONS
Commercial	High	Individual commercial developments can have a relatively low impact. However, when groups of unrelated commercial developments occur - the impact increases.
Industrial	High to moderate	Industrial development can have a high impact in those lands immediately around it - however, unless extensive industrial developments occur - the visual impacts can be minimized through sensitive site planning
Residential	Low to No Negative impact	
Recreational	Low to No Negative impact	

LAND DEVELOPMENTS	VISUAL IMPACT RATING	IMPLICATIONS
Surface Mining - Including Sand and gravel extraction	High	Do not permit immediately adjacent to road - leave buffer strip - preferably of dense vegetation to screen. Visually surface mining takes on visual interest and lesser impact as it becomes farther away from the viewer.
Timber Harvesting	Moderate to High	The visual impact of clearcut logging is significantly reduced in those lands beyond the foreground. Generally a buffer of 100 to 200 feet from the roadway right-of-way is desirable for clearcut activities
Intensive Agriculture row crops	Moderate to Low	Agriculture is generally compatible with scenic resource management. Smaller fields leaving hedgerows between fields and leaving poorer soil areas in a natural condition all help to reduce the visual impact of agriculture.
Less Intensive Agriculture - Grazing and Dairy Farming	Low	Viewed from the road, animals can be important to enhancing the scenic resources, particularly in Alaska where it is for the most part on nontypical land use.

## OPPORTUNITIES

Many of the scenic resource management recommendations might best be described as opportunities. Opportunities relate to areas along the highway where the existing scenic resource values, or the driving experience might be improved through some type of action. The following are some of the types of opportunities identified along the George Parks Highway as a result of this inventory.

### Rest Areas

There exists the opportunity to locate a system of highway rest areas along the George Parks Highway. While rest areas and scenic turnouts exist, they are for the most part undeveloped and not part of any system. Undoubtedly a system of developed highway rest areas will be needed along this highway sometime in the future. The opportunity exists to acquire or retain land now in appropriate locations rather than having rest areas in places which are less appropriate. The following guidelines were used to identify those ideal locations suggested in this report for future highway rest areas.

At least one developed-interpretive rest area per landscape character type. This would allow the motorists to experience first hand the variety of characteristics found in each landscape that the roadway traverses. Short trails, educational displays and other techniques can be helpful to providing added significance to this rest area. There are 13 landscape character types along the George Parks Highway. The following table identifies what should be considered as ideal locations for these rest areas.

Rest areas should be located near attractive places. The sites recommended here are either those with a good potential for views outward or near attractive landscape features such as rivers or lakes, or both.

Land ownership was not considered in the location of these rest areas. Further research needs to focus on land ownership around the sites identified

## SUMMARY OF ROADSIDE REST AREA-INTERPRETIVE CENTER RECOMMENDATIONS

LOCATION (DESCRIPTIVE)	MILEPOST (approximate)	LANDSCAPE CHARACTER TYPE	THEME	DISTANCE TO ADJACENT REST AREA	
				NORTH	SOUTH
Bridge over Chena River Entering Fairbanks	≈ 355	Chena River Lowlands	Chena-Tanana River lowland Fairbanks on floodplain - information center		
Ester - Gold Hill	≈ 349.6	Chena Ridge	gold mining		
Tanana Ridge - George Parks Memorial Plaque	≈ 344-345	Tanana Ridge	Tanana Ridge natural history		
North-South vistas along Tanana Ridge	≈ 324.5	Tanana Ridge	Tanana River natural history		
Junction of Tanana and Nenana Rivers	305.8	Nenana River Lowlands	Interior Alaska river bottom natural history - river boat transport. Nenana Ice Classic		
Bridge over Nenana River	275.5	Nenana River Lowlands	Nenana River lowlands natural history		
Healy Overlook	247.5	Nenana River Uplands	Coal mining - history of Healy, Uplands Natural history		

— NOTE GRAPH IS INCOMPLETE —

and measures taken to protect these lands if owned by the state, or acquire them if owned by other public entities or private individuals, or look for other appropriate sites.

#### Views

The opportunity exists along some portions of the roadway to manipulate the vegetation and/or landforms in a manner which could open up views from the highway. Such opportunities are particularly significant along those stretches of road with no outward views for considerable distances and where good views of special features (Mt. Susitna, Mt. McKinley, the Susitna Rivers) are presently possible but hidden by vegetation.

#### Absorption of Land Development Opportunities

There exists the opportunity to use the natural ability of the landscapes vegetation and topography to hide or absorb roadside land uses. Such areas require a minimal amount of land to protect foreground scenic resource values and should be the first choices for considering land developments adjacent to the road.

#### Create visual diversity where needed

There exists the opportunity to encourage land development in areas where presently little visual diversity exists. Appropriate land developments and uses can be encouraged in these areas in a manner which enhances the driving experience along the George Parks Highway.

#### PUBLIC OWNERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

Roadside lands are of especially high value in Alaska because of their ease of access. With so few roads, these lands can definitely be considered to be a limited resource. Already the ownership pattern around the lower Susitna Valley (Palmer-Wasilla-Willow) of almost total private ownership of roadside land is extending northward from Anchorage and southward from Fairbanks. While indeed there is a recognized need for accessible private land, similarly there is a need for some of it to remain under public ownership.

Such public lands can be important for recreational use, access to surrounding lands, provide public open space, be future sites for needed public facilities and contain natural resource values which are of statewide significance and best utilized under public management techniques. Consequently, retention of some of the public land adjacent to the road is desirable. It should be pointed out that from a scenic resource management point of view, public lands can be more easily managed under public ownership. The following points highlight some of the considerations with respect to keeping or acquiring lands adjacent to the Parks Highway.

All roadside lands suitable for agricultural development should remain under public ownership. Only agricultural development would be permitted. As already mentioned, agriculture is a land use which has low negative or generally positive visual impact and consequently would be desirable in areas suitable for farming.

Retain or acquire public lands around lakes and along riverbanks adjacent to the highway. These immediately accessible recreational lands should. At least one river bank of the four banks adjacent to highway bridges should be public should be retained. This land would be used to provide location for camping, turnouts, fishing and other recreational use. Public easements along the other banks for fishing and hiking access.

The state should retain (or acquire) lands in those areas identified in this report for roadside rest area location.

Retain roadside lands which are undevelopable or have a high development cost. Such lands have steep slopes, bogs, muskegs, mudflats, tideflats, and primary floodplains. These lands are marginal with respect to developability, and often have higher visual as well as ecological significance.

Retain under public ownership all public roadside land within 2 miles of

existing communities until further study identifies the appropriate use for such parcels.

#### PROBLEMS

The George Parks Highway scenic resource inventory identified places where existing land management and land development significantly impacts upon scenic resource values. In some places, the combinations of signs, buildings, autos and other man-made objects are so visually strong as to distract from the surrounding landscape views. The expectation of many highway travelers is high towards seeing wildlife and vast stretches of wild - undeveloped land. Such viewers are for the most part not interested in seeing familiar land developments typical of any other place. Thus where high levels of man-made visual distraction do occur, particularly in areas of high scenic value and where viewer expectations of undeveloped landscapes are present, the scenic resources can be adversely affected. This is not to suggest that all man-made land developments are visually bad or detract from the scenic resources. On the contrary, developments such as homes, towns, and stores are what most viewers feel comfortable with. Viewers remember human places (Eklutna Village, Big Susitna Lodge, Mary Carey's Mt. McKinley View Lodge, Hurricane Bridge) more so than natural untouched landscapes. It is when such developments are out of scale, inappropriate and not in harmony with viewer expectations and the surrounding landscape that it can be of a negative impact on the scenic resources.

The following set of recommendations identifies those places where land development has had a significant negative impact on the visual resource values, and suggests some steps which need to be taken to remedy the situation. It needs to be remembered that almost all of the problem areas identified here are associated with private land. This suggests that landscape reclamation and removal of visually disturbing features would be largely the responsibility of the individual landowners. The Department of Transportation and Public Facilities could have some control through highway right-of-way landscaping. However, it again suggests the need for a public awareness - education program to develop a public understanding and consideration of the visual quality of the landscape in which they live.

The following pages contain the more specific recommendations for the management of the scenic resources along the George Parks Highway. As already

mentioned, these recommendations are organized around visual resource management units (VRMU) which are stretches of highway with similar management considerations. Visual resource management Unit No. 1 begins at Anchorage, and the last VRMU, Number 28 is at Fairbanks.