Statement of Significance

Copper River Highway

Prepared for

Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities

December 2014

DOT&PF Note:
Analysis resulted in recommendation of Not Eligible for NRHP.
SHPO concurrence 2/19/15.

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Prepared by

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1. Introduction

This statement of significance was prepared as a component of the Applied Historic Context of Alaska Roads Project completed in 2012-2014 for the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF). The project began with the development of the *Alaska Roads Historic Overview: Applied Historic Context of Alaska's Roads* (Roads Overview) (February 2014) and the *Methodology for Assessing National Register of Historic Places Eligibility* (Roads Methodology) (December 2014).

For the project a select number of roads with potential for individual National Register of Historic Places (National Register) eligibility were identified for evaluation of significance. This study is limited to the evaluation of the road's significance. If a road meets one or more areas of significance, identification of essential physical features and an assessment of integrity needs to be completed to determine National Register eligibility. These statements of significance apply the Roads Methodology and utilize contextual information from the Roads Overview. The Roads Methodology outlines that the entire length of a road should be considered when evaluating significance. The entire length of the road was considered in the development of this statement of significance.

This report identifies and describes the important historic themes associated with the Copper River Highway. It summarizes these important themes to place the development of the Copper River Highway within an appropriate historic context to evaluate its historical significance.

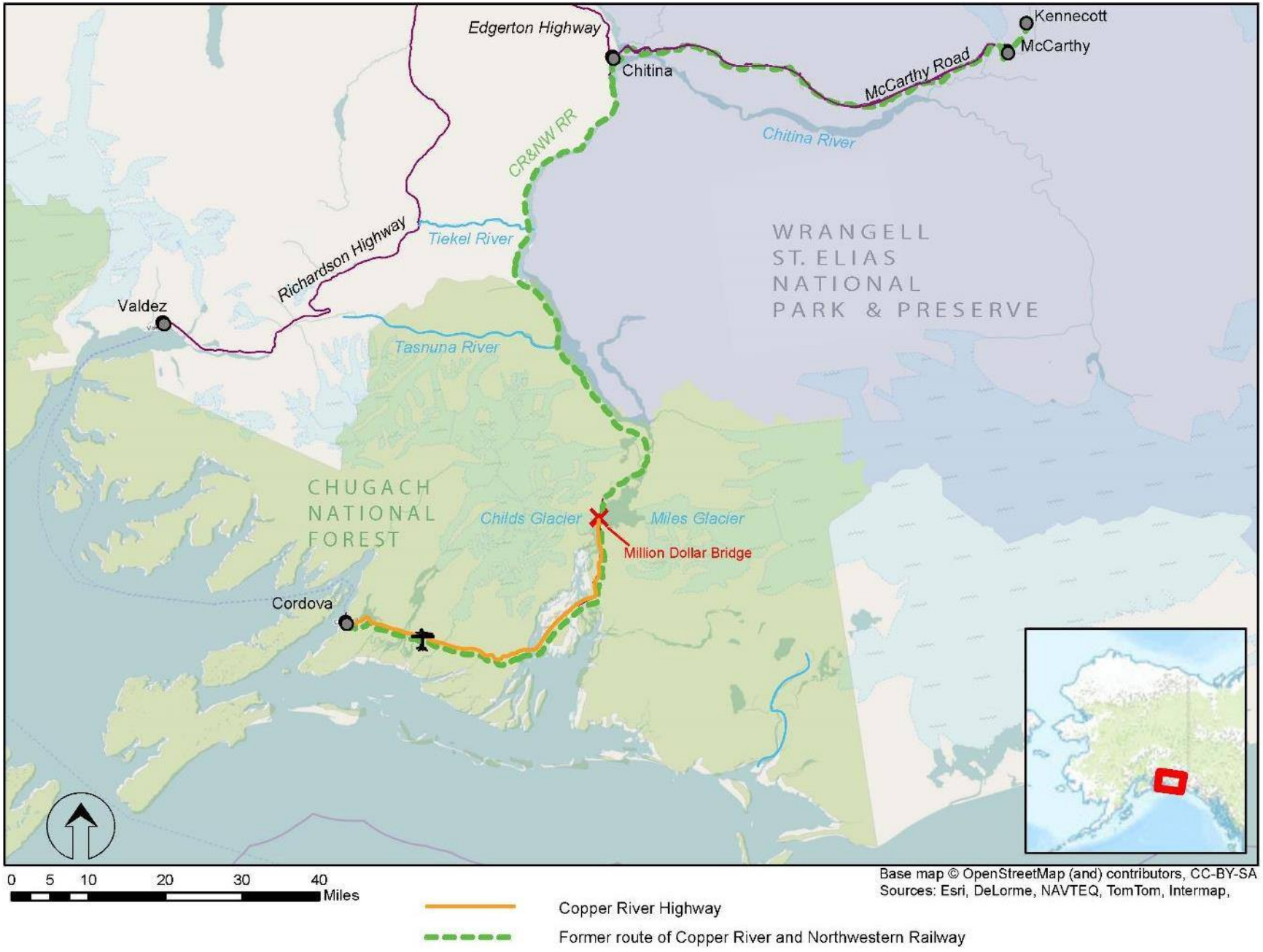
2. Description of the Road

The Copper River Highway (Alaska Heritage Resources Survey [AHRS] number COR-00576; Coordinated Data System [CDS] number 153000) is approximately 49.5 miles long and runs from downtown Cordova to the north side of the Million Dollar Bridge at Miles Glacier. The highway is owned by the Alaska DOT&PF and is within the Valdez-Cordova Census Area of the Alaska Unorganized Borough and the Chugach National Forest.

The highway begins in Cordova at Ferry Terminal Road and continues east for several miles along the south side of Eyak Lake, providing access to the Merle K. (Mudhole) Smith Airport near Mile 13. The highway then crosses the Copper River Delta and follows the river north to the Miles Glacier and the Million Dollar Bridge. The route comprises the southern half of Alaska Route 10, which is non-continuous and also includes the Edgerton Highway between Chitina and the Richardson Highway.

The Copper River Highway was constructed between 1945 and 1964, utilizing a portion of the alignment of the abandoned Copper River & Northwestern Railway grade. The highway is asphalt surfaced for the first 13 miles west from Cordova, beyond which it is surfaced with gravel. The railroad ran from Cordova via Chitina to serve copper mining operations at Kennecott until 1938, when the mine closed and railroad service ceased. Following World War II, a portion of the railroad grade north from Cordova was converted for vehicular use and gradually improved to a point just beyond the Million Dollar Bridge, which spans the Copper River at Miles Glacier; as part of these efforts, the Million Dollar Bridge was also converted for vehicular use. The highway was completed to its current northern terminus in 1964. The railbed was intended to be converted to vehicular use as far as Chitina, providing an overland link between Cordova and the Richardson Highway via the Edgerton Highway, although this connection was never realized. Two additional segments of the railroad grade have been converted for vehicular use; these include the northern segment of the railroad grade from McCarthy west, now known as the McCarthy Road, and a short segment south from Chitina, known as the Copper River Spur. Neither of these segments are part of the Copper River Highway.

A map illustrating the location of the Copper River Highway in relation to other major features is provided on the next page.


Edgerton Highway
Chitina
Kennecott
McCarthy
McCarthy Road
Chitina River
CR&NW RR
Tiekel River
Richardson Highway
Valdez
Tasnuna River
WRANGELL
ST. ELIAS
NATIONAL
PARK & PRESERVE
CHUGACH
NATIONAL
FOREST
Childs Glacier
Miles Glacier
Million Dollar Bridge
Cordova
0 5 10 20 30 40
Miles
Base map © OpenStreetMap (and) contributors, CC-BY-SA
Sources: Esri, DeLorme, NAVTEQ, TomTom, Intermap,
Copper River Highway
Former route of Copper River and Northwestern Railway

3. Historic Context

Though salmon fishing and canning comprised the first commercial industry at the mouth of the Copper River, rich mineral deposits lay inland. Early traders noted that the indigenous people of the Copper River area used copper implements. When a U.S. Army expedition successfully ascended the Copper River in 1885, its personnel met with an Ahtna tribal leader who indicated the location of copper deposits near the Nizina River.[1] In the spring of 1898, gold discoveries on the Klondike brought a rush of prospectors to Valdez, and the U.S. government authorized a survey of the Valdez-Copper River area. A century earlier, Russian explorers recognized the river as a corridor to access the interior, although they failed to develop transportation routes along it. In the 1890s Klondike-bound prospectors began to search for an "All-American" route from the coast to the gold fields that would enable them to avoid Canadian regulations.[2] Rather than utilizing the Copper River corridor, a party led by Captain W.R. Abercrombie between 1898 and 1899 established a military road from Valdez as far north as Copper Center, and geologists attached to the expedition studied and described the mineral potential of the region.[3] Around the same time, prospectors began to locate claims in the area near present-day McCarthy, and the rich copper deposits at Bonanza Creek (approximately 60 miles northeast of McCarthy) were discovered in 1900.

Combined with the discovery of coal fields in the Bering River region nearby, the mineral wealth of the region drew the interest of J.P. Morgan and Daniel Guggenheim, who formed the Alaska Syndicate and purchased controlling interests in the copper deposit in 1905.[4] The syndicate bought up many claims in the area, consolidating them into the Kennecott Mines Company in 1908.[5] Planned coal operations near the Bering River were expected to provide a cheap local fuel source for copper mining operations, including smelters at the Kennecott Mines, but President Theodore Roosevelt's 1906 withdrawal of the coal fields halted private development of these deposits.[6]

Despite this setback, the Alaska Syndicate began construction of a railroad to reach the copper mines in 1908. Cordova was established as the southern terminus, as its location provided a natural harbor for shipping.[7] The site was developed close to the canneries near the existing village of Eyak, and railroad

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[1] William C. Douglass, *A History of the Kennecott Mines, Kennecott, Alaska*, prepared for Alaska Division of Mines and Minerals, October 1964, 2.

[2] Rolfe G. Buzzell, Steven R. Posgate, J. David McMahan, and Mark E. Pipkin, *Copper River Highway Cultural Resources Reconnaissance Survey, 1992*, prepared for the Alaska Department of Natural Resources, Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation, Office of History and Archaeology, June 1993, 12.

[3] Douglass, 3.

[4] National Register of Historic Places, Copper River & Northwestern Railway, Chitina, Valdez-Cordova Census Area, Alaska, National Register #73002275, 5.

[5] Douglass, 5.

[6] George Otis Smith, *The Classification of the Public Lands*, USGS Bulletin 537 (Washington, D.C.: US GPO, 1913), 36.

[7] Rolfe G. Buzzell, *Cordova Historic Building Survey for the First Street Sidewalk Improvement Project and the Copper River Highway Bicycle and Pedestrian Path, Mile 0-10.7*, prepared for the Alaska Department of Natural Resources, Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation, Office of History and Archaeology, February 2002, 14.

developer Michael J. Heney renamed the town Cordova.[8] The line reached Chitina in 1910 following the construction of the Million Dollar Bridge (so named for its high construction cost), a 1,500-foot, four-span through-truss bridge that crossed the Copper River. The following year the line was completed to Kennecott. The Copper River & Northwestern (CR&NW) Railway provided the first year-round link to mining operations at Kennecott from the ice-free port at Cordova. Although the rail line itself operated at a loss, the connection was vital to the success of the mine. With the withdrawal of the coal lands, the syndicate had to import fuel and was therefore forced to abandon plans for an on-site smelter; with no smelter nearby, all copper had to be shipped to Tacoma, Washington, for processing.[9] As a result, the Kennecott was the only substantial mine to develop in the area; smaller operations could not compete with the Alaska Syndicate, which owned the Kennecott Mines, the railroad, and the territory's largest shipping company, the Alaska Steamship Company, thus dominating the entire network of copper production and transportation.[10]

In 1912 President Howard Taft established the Alaska Railway Commission in order to determine the best route for a government-funded railroad. Consideration was given to ensure that the final route provided access from a year-round port to interior Alaska by way of one of the two major coal deposits, located in the Bering River and Matanuska River regions. A number of possibilities, including a Valdez-Fairbanks route, were discarded as they did not meet this last criterion. Initially a Cordova-Fairbanks route was preferred over a Seward-Fairbanks route. The Alaska Syndicate attempted to sell the CR&NW to the federal government repeatedly, and the commission determined that the Cordova route would provide the benefit of far lower freight costs for moving coal, as the existing CR&NW rail line was less than 40 miles from the heart of the deposit. While construction of both routes was recommended, the government ultimately elected to construct the Seward-Fairbanks route instead, as the Cordova route would bypass agricultural lands in the lower Susitna River valley and would not provide sufficient connection to inland waterways. This ended hopes that the CR&NW would develop into the major route to the Alaskan interior, leaving the line to function primarily as the Kennecott Mine's private ore train between Kennecott and Cordova.[11]

The fortunes of the Kennecott Mine and the CR&NW rose and fell with copper prices, resulting in a boom during World War I and a downturn during the Great Depression. The mines closed between 1933 and 1934, although the railroad continued to provide limited passenger service for residents, and reopened the following year when copper prices doubled. The Kennecott Mines closed permanently in 1938, and the last train from the mine arrived in Cordova in November of that year.[12]

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[8] Cathy R. Sherman, *Cordova* (Charleston, S.C.: Arcadia Publishing, 2012), 28; Buzzell, *Cordova Historic Building Survey for the First Street Sidewalk Improvement Project and the Copper River Highway Bicycle and Pedestrian Path, Mile 0-10.7*, 15.

[9] National Register of Historic Places, Copper River & Northwestern Railway, 8, 10-11.

[10] State of Alaska, Department of Highways, *Copper River Highway Feasibility Study*, 1967, 14; National Register of Historic Places, Copper River & Northwestern Railway, 5.

[11] "Report of the Alaska Railroad Commission," *Engineering News*, 20 March, 1913, 564-566; CR&NW nomination, 9.

[12] National Register of Historic Places, Copper River & Northwestern Railway, 13.

Following the closure of the railroad, military personnel, local residents, hunters, trappers, and fishermen continued to utilize the corridor. In addition to foot traffic along the line, hand cars and small motorized speeders (similar to automobiles equipped for use on rails) were used for local travel. During World War II the Civil Aeronautics Administration (CAA) operated an airbase near Cordova, located at Mile 13 along the railroad. As a result, the U.S. Army utilized the first 13 miles of the railroad, using speeders to provide service between the air base and Cordova until the military performed railbed maintenance and introduced a diesel locomotive. At the time, the Kennecott Corporation had not formally abandoned the right of way, but did so in 1945 after military need for the line had ceased at the war's end.[13] The CAA continued to operate the airport, and once the right-of-way had been turned over to the government, the CAA received authorization to convert the railbed to a one-lane road between the airport and town, a distance of 13 miles out of the railroad's overall length of 196 miles, and a contractor performed the work during the summer of 1945.[14] The CAA's effort marked the beginning of a decades-long attempt to convert the abandoned railroad line to a vehicular highway.

The conversion of the railroad in this area spurred residential development along the route. The U.S. Forest Service designated the CAA's 13-mile road as Route 32 of the Alaska Forest Highway System in 1947, and the Bureau of Public Roads (BPR) assumed maintenance responsibility in the same year. In response to applications from local residents who wished to establish summer homes along Eyak Lake, the Forest Service created four groups of homesite lots along the highway between Mile 2.76 and Mile 8. The first buildings constructed at these sites were recreational cabins or hunting shacks. By the 1950s some had become year-round residences and several commercial fisherman who operated on the lower Eyak River built boathouses in the easternmost area, adjacent to their fishing grounds.[15]

Although the road and subsequent development was limited to the area around Cordova during this period, the Alaska Road Commission (ARC) desired to convert the entire route to a vehicular highway providing a connection to the Richardson Highway and the rest of Alaska's highway network.[16] Congressional appropriations for Alaskan roads skyrocketed after World War II as the territory continued to be a strategic defense priority, and the ARC developed an ambitious six-year territory-wide plan to upgrade and expand the existing highway system between 1953 and 1958. In the preliminary plan published in 1952, a number of major projects had already been approved, including upgrades to the Richardson, Glenn, and Alaska Highways, and the construction of the Seward and Sterling Highways.

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[13] Rolfe G. Buzzell, Steven R. Posgate, J. David McMahan, and Mark E. Pipkin, *Copper River Highway Cultural Resources Reconnaissance Survey, 1992*, prepared for the Alaska Department of Natural Resources, Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation, Office of History and Archaeology, June 1993, 24.

[14] Buzzell, 35-36.

[15] Buzzell, 36-37.

[16] Contemporaneous development also occurred along the northern portion of the rail corridor, between Chitina and McCarthy, during this time. This portion of the rail line was not on the route between Cordova and the Richardson Highway via the Edgerton Cutoff, and was developed separately into the McCarthy Road. This segment is not covered by this document, which focuses on the current Copper River Highway between Cordova and the Million-Dollar Bridge.

Among those not yet approved, a Cordova-Richardson Highway route was the top priority.[17] The ARC conducted investigations of the route in the early 1950s, and in 1953 began construction extending the road east from Cordova to Mile 19 using contract forces.[18] The ARC and BPR cooperated on the design work, and subsequent mileage was constructed by contractors under BPR supervision.[19]

In addition to providing a land link between Cordova and the rest of the Alaskan highway system, the plan to convert the CR&NW railbed was expected to open up new mineral areas for exploration and development. Along with interest in known mineral resources in the lower Copper River and the Chitina area, by 1953 active oil prospecting had begun in the coastal area near the mouths of the Bering and Copper Rivers, where oil seepages had been noted since the 1900s.[20] The new highway would also help to link the oil fields of the Bering River area with the port at Cordova.[21] Work continued as far as Mile 22 under BPR supervision the following year, and by 1955 the road was classified as a feeder road.[22]

After Alaska achieved statehood in 1959, responsibility for the state's highways transferred to the Alaska Department of Highways.[23] By this time, nearly 50 miles of roadway had been constructed north from Cordova.[24] In 1961 rehabilitation and conversion of the Million Dollar Bridge was completed, including the installation of a concrete deck for vehicular travel.[25] Additional improvements were made to portions of the highway near Cordova in the early 1960s, as well as continuing new construction north towards

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[17] John R. Noyes, *Report of Operations of the Alaska Road Commission for the Fiscal years 1949, 1950 & 1951* (Juneau, Alaska: Department of the Interior, 1951), Appendix 2, p.2.

[18] United States Department of the Interior, *Alaska Road Commission, Annual Report for the Fiscal Year 1953*, (Juneau, Alaska: Alaska Road Commission, 1953), 16, 21.

[19] United States Department of the Interior, *Alaska Road Commission, Annual Report for the Fiscal Year 1954*, (Juneau, Alaska: Alaska Road Commission, 1954), 17.

[20] United States Department of the Interior, *Alaska Road Commission, Annual Report for the Fiscal Year 1953*, 21; George C. Martin, *The Petroleum Fields of the Pacific Coast of Alaska*, U.S. Geological Survey Bulletin 250 (Washington, D.C.: US GPO, 1905), 22.

[21] United States Department of the Interior, *Alaska Road Commission, Annual Report for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1956* (Juneau, Alaska.: Department of the Interior, Office of Territories, 1956), 12.

[22] United States Department of the Interior, *Alaska Road Commission, Annual Report for the Fiscal Year 1954*, 23; United States Department of the Interior, *Alaska Road Commission, Annual Report for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1955* (Juneau, Alaska.: Department of the Interior, Office of Territories, 1955), 30.

[23] After statehood, Alaska's state highway agency changed names three times, from the Department of Public Works, Division of Highways (1959-1961) to the Alaska Department of Highways (1962-1976) and finally to the current Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities (1977-present). For the sake of simplicity, this document refers to the agency as "the Department" throughout the period from 1959 to the present.

[24] State of Alaska, Department of Highways, *Copper River Highway Feasibility Study*, 17.

[25] State of Alaska, Department of Public Works, Division of Highways, *Annual Report 1961*, (Juneau, Alaska: Department of Public Works, Division of Highways, 1961), 14.

Chitina.[26] The Department continued to work toward its goal of providing access to what they described as a "wonderland of mountains, glaciers, and brown bears."[27]

Although the Copper River Highway did not provide connectivity with other markets and population centers, Cordova residents used the highway to access recreational activities such as fishing, hunting, and pleasure driving in the area south of the Million Dollar Bridge.[28] In the absence of an overland connection, tourists, Cordova residents, and the local seafood industry continued to rely on air- and water-based transportation. However, the region's attractions, such as the scenic areas near the Miles and Childs Glaciers, required access by vehicle. Beginning in 1963, the MV Chilkat provided passenger and automobile ferry service between Valdez and Cordova as part of the Alaska Marine Highway, linking Cordova with the highway system via the Richardson Highway. The ferry did not encourage large numbers of tourists to come to Cordova and the nearby area, however, as its capacity was limited to 15 passenger automobiles and 51 passengers, making only two round-trips per week.[29]

The 1964 Good Friday Earthquake was the largest earthquake in North American history to date, causing extensive damage to the road system of south-central Alaska.[30] At the time of the quake, over half of the total paved mileage in Alaska was located within the damage radius.[31] The Richardson, Copper River, and Seward Highways, located near the epicenter, experienced the most damage.[32] The segment of the Copper River Highway north of Mile 49 was still under construction in 1964 when the earthquake struck, and the highway sustained damage to much of its length. Of the 52 bridges along the Copper River Highway, 34 were destroyed or damaged beyond repair. The earthquake shattered one of the piers supporting the north truss of the Million Dollar Bridge, dropping one end of the span into the Copper River. The Department announced with regret that it was not salvageable and that the structure would have to be abandoned. Emergency repair work on the road began immediately, and within three months the reconstruction of Miles 5 to 13 was completed, restoring access between Cordova and the airport.[33]

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[26] State of Alaska, Department of Public Works, Division of Highways, *Annual Report 1961*, 14; State of Alaska, Department of Highways, *Annual Report 1964*, (Juneau, Alaska: Department of Highways, 1964), 20.

[27] State of Alaska, Department of Highways, *Annual Report 1964*, 10.

[28] State of Alaska, Department of Highways, *Copper River Highway Feasibility Study*, 82.

[29] State of Alaska, Department of Highways, *Copper River Highway Feasibility Study*, 74, 76.

[30] There are conflicting sources on the magnitude of the 1964 earthquake, ranging from 8.3 to 9.2 on the Richter scale. According to the U.S. Geological Survey, the 1964 Prince William Sound earthquake was the largest in the United States, measuring at 9.2; see U.S. Geological Survey, "Largest Earthquakes in the United States," *Earthquake Hazards Program*, http://earthquake.usgs.gov/earthquakes/states/10_largest_us.php (accessed 7 December 2012).

[31] Gary G. Sturman, "The Alaska Highway System," in *The Great Alaska Earthquake of 1964,* (Washington, D.C.: National Academy of Sciences, 1973), 987.

[32] John Galvin, "Great Alaskan Earthquake and Tsunami: Alaska, March 1964," *Popular Mechanics*, n.p., http://www.popularmechanics.com/science/environment/natural-disasters/4219868 (accessed 7 December 2012); Gary G. Sturman, "The Alaska Highway System," in *The Great Alaska Earthquake of 1964* (Washington, D.C.: National Academy of Sciences, 1973), 989-992, 999.

[33] State of Alaska, Department of Highways, *Annual Report 1964*, 7, 11, 31.

The earthquake effectively halted any further new construction on the highway. Due to the substantial loss of roadway and bridges, the Department began a long-range study to reevaluate various routes to link Cordova to the Alaskan highway system.[34] In addition to route surveys, the study also investigated the various socioeconomic impacts the proposed highway would have on the Cordova area. Repair work on the southern portion of the highway continued for several years, and by 1967 the Copper River Highway was the last major incomplete infrastructure repair project after the earthquake.[35] The bridge at Mile 27 remained impassable until after 1970, cutting off vehicular access to scenic areas upstream near the Million Dollar Bridge and the Miles and Childs Glaciers.[36]

At the time of the earthquake, expectations that the highway would open areas to mineral development had thus far been unfulfilled. Significant deposits either remained inaccessible or relied on other methods of transportation. The retreat of a small glacier near Kennecott had exposed new copper deposits, the ore from which was transported by air from McCarthy to Chitina and then trucked to Vancouver for processing. Other known deposits of metallic minerals in the region were deemed too small or too low-grade to be considered for development. In the opinion of the U.S. Geological Survey, none of these deposits were substantial enough to justify the construction of a road solely for resource extraction purposes. Petroleum exploration had also been unsuccessful, and the test wells drilled by several major oil companies in the Bering River area were unproductive. Japanese firms expressed interest in the Bering River coal field, but exploitation of the deposit would require new construction of a road or railroad east from the existing highway to the east side of the Copper River delta.[37]

While the final version of the feasibility study published in 1970 remained circumspect regarding mineral resource extraction potential, the report emphasized the clear opportunities for tourism and recreation that the highway could provide. The nationwide tourist activity that had begun after World War II continued to grow as the average American's wages and vacation time increased in the 1960s. However, the estimated number of recreational visitors to the Cordova area was relatively small in 1965, approximately 2,750 for the year.[38] At that time, a second ferry line had been added; the MV Tustumena was capable of carrying 262 passengers and up to 60 automobiles, but service was limited to one trip per week. The Department noted that levels of recreational visitors remained low due to the relatively high cost ($84 in 1970) of transporting a family of four and an automobile between Valdez and Cordova by ferry.[39] Based on automobile tourism statistics for other areas in the state, the Department believed that the number of visitors to Cordova and the Copper River region would have been far greater had the highway been completed and open to tourist traffic. Traffic counts at Mile 27 prior to the earthquake indicated that the average annual daily traffic on the Copper River Highway, while less than 50 vehicles,

[34] State of Alaska, Department of Highways, *Annual Report 1965* (Juneau, Alaska: Department of Highways, 1965), 13.

[35] State of Alaska, Department of Highways, *Annual Report 1967* (Juneau, Alaska: Department of Highways, 1967), 32.

[36] State of Alaska, Department of Highways, *Copper River Highway Feasibility Study*, 82.

[37] State of Alaska, Department of Highways, *Copper River Highway Feasibility Study*, 68-69.

[38] State of Alaska, Department of Highways, *Copper River Highway Feasibility Study*, 38-39.

[39] State of Alaska, Department of Highways, *Copper River Highway Feasibility Study*, 76, 78.

was higher than on the Elliott Highway at Livengood, the Steese Highway at Montana Creek, and the Haines Highway at the Canadian Border.[40] Expansion of the connected highway system into the area would improve access to numerous activities, including hunting, fishing, boating, camping, and sightseeing at the many historic sites along the former CR&NW railbed. In addition, plans were already underway to establish what would become Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve, although the designation did not occur until 1980.[41]

The 1970 study proposed three possible routes for completion of the Copper River Highway. The first route followed the original concept of using the old railroad grade from Cordova to Chitina, connecting to the Richardson Highway via the Edgerton Cutoff. The two other routes also made use of part of the railroad grade, departing from it at Miles 82 and 100, respectively, to connect directly to the Richardson Highway.[42] None of the proposed routes were completed for vehicular use; aside from the existing mileage, a portion of the railbed south from Chitina was converted to a one-lane dirt road, and north of the Million Dollar Bridge access was limited to a primitive four-wheel-drive road that extended only a short distance beyond the bridge.[43] Beginning in 1970 the Department undertook a major effort to reconstruct the many bridges across the Copper River. By 1978 the Department restored access across the delta, and installed a ramp to enable vehicles to cross the damaged span of the Million Dollar Bridge and reach the opposite bank.[44]

Following the passage of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act in 1971, much of the land south of the Tiekel River was transferred to the Chugach Alaska Corporation and village corporations for Eyak and Tatitlek.[45] Cordova remained the largest population center served by the highway, and the population increased by more than 60 percent over the course of the 1970s.[46] Gradual improvement of the first 13 miles between Cordova and the airport led to additional settlement along the south shore of Eyak Lake. By 1984 this development prompted the City of Cordova to construct a sewage treatment plant at Mile 2.6. In 1994 the City annexed the area from Mile 2 to the airport, now known as the Merle K. (Mudhole)

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[40] State of Alaska, Department of Highways, *Copper River Highway Feasibility Study*, 39, 82.

[41] Geoffrey T. Bleakley, *Contested Ground: Administrative History of Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve 1978–2001* (Anchorage, Alaska: National Park Service, Alaska System Support Office, 2002), 13-22.

[42] State of Alaska, Department of Highways, *Copper River Highway Feasibility Study*, 95-96.

[43] Buzzell et al., *Copper River Highway Cultural Resources Reconnaissance Survey, 1992*, 25.

[44] Timothy P. Brabets and Jeffrey S. Conaway, Application of the Multi-Dimensional Surface Water Modeling System at Bridge 339, Copper River Highway, Alaska, U.S. Geological Survey Open-File Report 2009-1237, 6; Buzzell et al., *Copper River Highway Cultural Resources Reconnaissance Survey, 1992*, 25; Timothy P. Brabets, *Scour Assessment At Bridges From Flag Point to Million Dollar Bridge, Copper River Highway, Alaska* (Anchorage, Alaska: U.S. Department of the Interior, U.S. Geological Survey), 1994, 2.

[45] Buzzell et al., *Copper River Highway Cultural Resources Reconnaissance Survey, 1992*, 25.

[46] United States Census Bureau, Census of Population and Housing 1970, http://www.census.gov/prod/www/decennial.html (accessed 21 July 2014); United States Census Bureau, Census of Population and Housing 1980, http://www.census.gov/prod/www/decennial.html (accessed 21 July 2014).

Smith Airport.[47] The portion of the highway now within the city limits remains the only paved segment.[48] Desire to complete the road still remained, and during this period the State of Alaska initiated another corridor study. The Alaska DOT&PF continued to consider three inland routes, generally similar to those of the 1970 feasibility study, as well as a fourth coastal route connecting Cordova directly to Valdez.[49]

The fishing industry continues to support much of Cordova's economy. The 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill also affected Cordova heavily; the disaster disrupted commercial fishing activity, and over the following decade one-third of fishing families left the city.[50] The tourist industry has grown, with a marked increase in ferry passengers following the introduction of a new fast ferry in 2006, but is hindered by limitations to vehicular access.[51] The Copper River Highway remains the only conduit for vehicular tourism, and recent closures have affected access. Following a major river channel shift in 2001, scour damage to Bridge 339 led to the closure of the highway at Mile 36 in 2011; the highway currently remains closed beyond this point as Alaska DOT&PF project engineers continue to investigate solutions to reopen the highway crossing.[52] The closure of the bridge limits access to recreation and subsistence areas north of Mile 36, and local tourist-related business reported losses of over 30 percent in 2013. The closure underscored the economic importance of access to scenic areas such as Childs Glacier and the area near the Million Dollar Bridge, which remain important attractions for Cordova's tourist industry.[53]

[47] Buzzell, 37.

[48] The Milepost, "Copper River Highway," http://www.milepost.com/highway_info/copper_river_highway (accessed 21 July 2014).

[49] Roy L. Glass, *Glaciers Along Proposed Routes Extending the Copper River Highway, Alaska*, U.S. Geological Survey, Water Resources Investigations Report 96-4074, Department of the Interior, 1996, 2.

[50] Buzzell, 19-20.

[51] Ginny Fay, *Prince William Sound Tourism Economic Indicators*, prepared for National Wildlife Federation, Alaska Office, April 2008, 8.

[52] Brabets and Conaway, 1; Jennifer Gibbins, "A Troubled Bridge Over Bountiful Waters of Alaska's Copper River," *Cordova Times*, 12 May 2013.

[53] Jennifer Gibbins, "Many Cordova Residents Feeling Impact of Bridge 339's Demise," *Cordova Times*, 21 July 2013.

4. Significance

The Roads Methodology provides guidance on the application of the National Register Criteria for Evaluation, identifying areas of significance, and evaluating significance under *Criteria A, B, C*, and *D*.

A. *Criterion A: Events*

To meet the threshold for significance under *Criterion A,* a road must possess a direct and important association in one or more supplemental areas of significance as identified in the Roads Methodology in addition to *Transportation*. This evaluation of significance under *Criterion A* considered all potential areas of significance identified in the Roads Methodology. Based on research and context development, only the applicable areas of significance for this road are addressed below.

Transportation

The Copper River Highway has an association with *Transportation*; however, it had limited connectivity, which resulted in the road providing routine access to common types of destinations and services. Although planned to provide Cordova and the lower Copper River region with the first vehicular link to the Richardson Highway and the rest of the Alaskan highway system, this full connection was never realized. Beginning in 1961 the highway connected Cordova to the terminus north of the Million Dollar bridge, a distance of approximately 49.5 miles, and provided access to local recreational and subsistence areas and to the airport from Cordova. The access the road provided was limited by the 1964 earthquake, which essentially made the road unusable beyond Mile 27 until the damage was repaired between 1970 and 1978. The period of significance for *Transportation* will relate to the historical purpose this road had in the conveyance of people and goods as defined in one or more supplemental areas of significance that meet *Criterion A*.

Industry

The Copper River Highway does not meet the requirement for significance in the area of *Industry* for its associations with the area's fishing or mining activities. Commercial fishing at Cordova and near the Copper River Delta is served by water-based transportation and the highway did not play a role in the development of this industry. The copper mining industry pre-dates the construction of the highway with activity at the Kennecott Mines ceasing in 1938. The mine was served by the railroad and was defunct before the conversion of portions of the railbed to vehicular use. The construction of the highway did not lead to further mineral development in the region.

Community Planning and Development

The Copper River Highway does not meet the requirement for significance in the area of *Community Planning and Development*. This area of significance focuses on roads that play a crucial role in the development pattern within a community. The Copper River Highway was planned to provide a link to the Richardson Highway, and research did not reveal that it was constructed directly to improve the physical structure within specific communities or that its establishment played a crucial role in subsequent community development. The initial establishment of Cordova is related to the fishing industry and mining and railroad activities that predate the vehicular road. Cordova expanded at the western terminus of the highway, but this occurred gradually after the highway was completed. Research did not reveal a specific role the road provided in improving the physical structure within the community of Cordova.

Entertainment/Recreation and Conservation

The Copper River Highway does not meet the requirement for significance in the area of *Entertainment/ Recreation and Conservation*. This area of significance focuses on the specific use of roads to provide critical and direct access to important entertainment or recreational facilities and conservation activities. The highway was intended to create an overland link to the Richardson Highway. Following its construction, recreational facilities, tourism, and areas of scenic, natural, and historical importance were developed by the access provided by the Copper River Highway, such as scenic viewing areas near the Miles and Childs Glaciers and recreational fishing. However, many regional and state highways in Alaska frequently led to the development of recreational activities and points of interest due to the access a transportation corridor could provide. In addition, most of the tourist development in the region has occurred since 1970 and much of it is tied to improvements in marine access, including ferries and the cruise ship industry. Research did not reveal that the road provided critical and direct public access to activities such as hunting for recreational purposes or areas deemed critical for the management of natural resources that would transcend normal activities and meet National Register significance in the area of *Entertainment/Recreation* and *Conservation*.

B. *Criterion B: Persons*

As outlined in the Roads Methodology, a road is not likely to qualify for National Register significance under *Criterion B* for association with a significant person. To qualify under *Criterion B*, the road would need to best exemplify a person's contribution to history. Mere association with a road, such as involvement in design or construction, or roads named for an individual that is commemorative in nature, would not render a road significant under *Criterion B*. No individuals were identified through research to have played a significant role in the Copper River Highway that would qualify it under *Criterion B*.

C. *Criterion C: Design/Construction*

The Roads Methodology explains how a road would meet the threshold for significance under *Criterion C*. Roads will generally reflect patterns of features common to a particular road type, and under the Roads Methodology this does not convey significance on its own. In order to possess significance, a road must also reflect other important or distinctive design features and/or construction practices or be a surviving example of a rare type.

The Copper River Highway was constructed using the existing alignment of the CR&NW Railway and incorporates the Million Dollar Bridge, which is listed in the National Register. Although the initial construction of the railroad involved overcoming engineering challenges, these achievements predate the conversion of the route to vehicular use. The vehicular highway construction occurred in a period when the ARC had already established a body of institutional knowledge of road construction in Alaska. A review of the ARC's annual reports and other materials from the period in which the conversion efforts occurred, between 1945 and 1961, yielded no evidence of any extraordinary challenges or solutions that transcend normal methods of road construction. Nothing in the literature noted any engineering significance; the highway's design and construction appear to fall within the ARC's established standard practices of the time and it does not represent any significant or innovative developments in highway construction. In addition, based on the literature, there are no segments of the road that appear to be a

surviving example of a rare road type. The Copper River Highway does not meet the threshold for significance in the area of *Engineering*.

D. *Criterion D: Information Potential*

Criterion D is most often applied to archaeological properties. As outlined in the Roads Methodology, roads in vehicular use are not likely to be significant under *Criterion D* for the ability to yield information. The Copper River Highway is in vehicular use and remains an above-ground property type. No evidence was found for potential significance under *Criterion D*.

5. Recommendation

The Copper River Highway does not possess significance under *Criteria A, B, C, or D* and therefore is not eligible for listing in the National Register at this time.