

Statement of Significance

Denali Highway

Prepared for

**Alaska Department of
Transportation and Public
Facilities**

December 2014

*DOT&PF Note October 2015:
Rept does not address integrity;
NRHP eligibility status not determined*

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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 Denali Highway. It summarizes these important themes to place the development of the Denali Highway within an appropriate historic context to evaluate its historical significance.

2. Description of Road

The Denali Highway (Alaska Heritage Resources Survey [AHRs] numbers HEA-00450 and XMH-01428; Coordinated Data System [CDS] number 140000) is approximately 135 miles long and runs from the Richardson Highway at Paxson west to Cantwell Road at the George Parks Highway. The road is owned by the Alaska DOT&PF and is located within the Denali and Matanuska-Susitna Boroughs, as well as the Valdez-Cordova Census Area of the Alaska Unorganized Borough. Although the names are similar, the Denali Highway is separate from the Denali Park Road.¹

The Alaska Road Commission (ARC) began preliminary surveys for the highway in 1948. Beginning in 1949 the road was constructed using stage construction, a technique refined by the ARC throughout the first half of the twentieth century, in which segments of roadway were allowed to settle for at least one season between preliminary grading and final surfacing to account for settling in permafrost areas. Constructed by the ARC crews and private contractors, the highway was opened to the public in 1957.

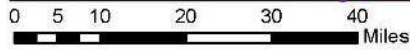
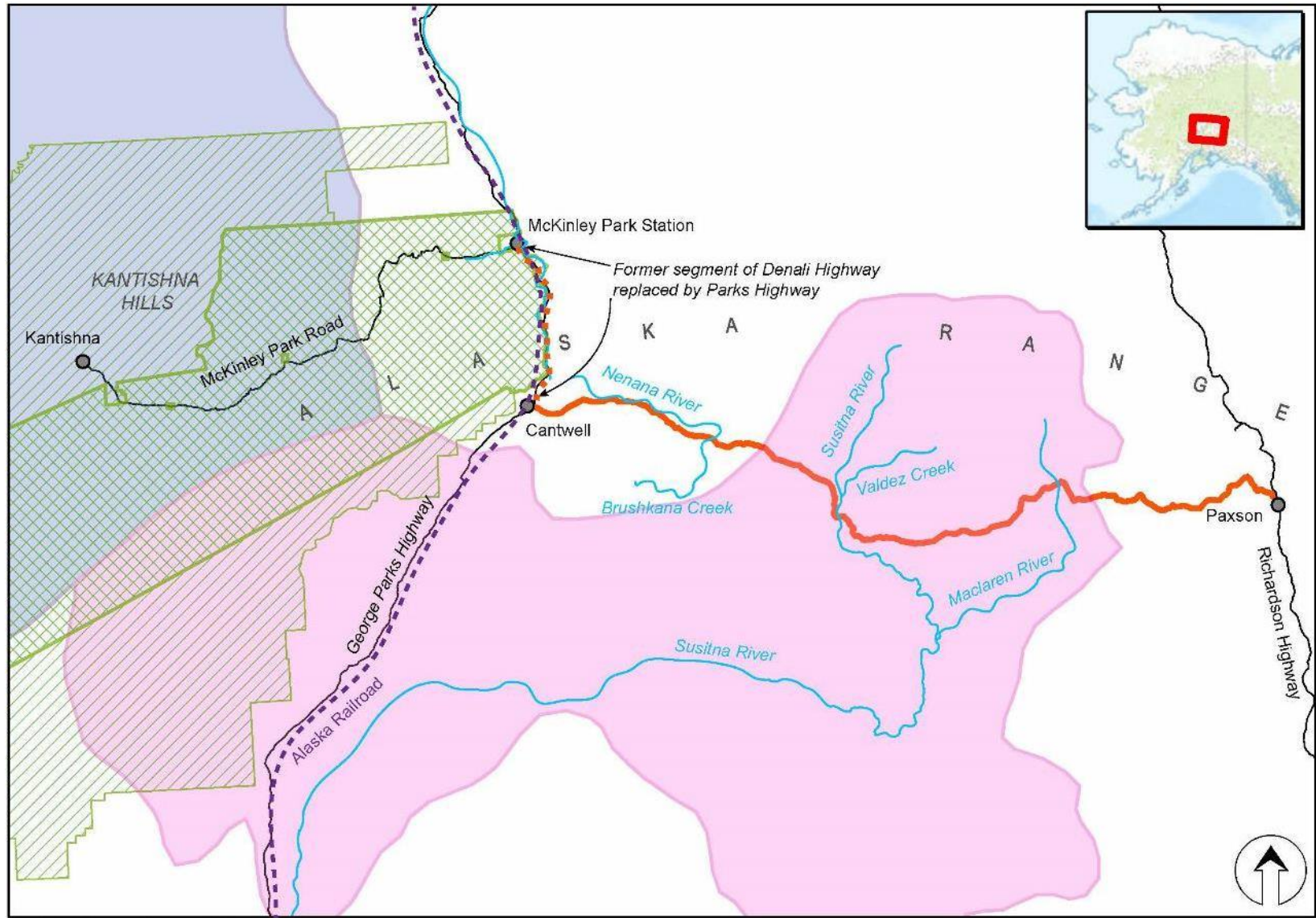
The highway runs west from the Richardson Highway along the southern flank of the Alaska Range, crossing the Susitna and Maclaren Rivers, until reaching the vicinity of Cantwell, a community roughly 30 miles south of the entrance to Denali National Park and Preserve, formerly Mt. McKinley National Park. The highway originally turned north at this point providing direct access to the park entrance. With the construction of the George Parks Highway in 1971, the final 29 miles in the area between Cantwell and McKinley Park Station were subsumed by the George Parks Highway.² Approximately 21 miles of the Denali Highway west from Paxson and 3 miles east from Cantwell are paved; the remainder of the road is a two-lane, gravel surfaced highway and not maintained during the winter.

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

¹ The Denali Park Road is the current name for the former McKinley Park Road.

² This portion of the Denali Highway began at the current intersection with the George Parks Highway and continued north. Research did not yield any evidence that Cantwell Road, running from the current western terminus of the Denali Highway to the community of Cantwell west of the railroad, was part of the original alignment of the Denali Highway.

Section 2
Description of the Road



Base map Sources: Esri, DeLorme, NAVTEQ, TomTom, Intermap, increment P Corp., GEBCO, USGS, FAO, NPS,

- Denali National Park & Preserve
- Historic Boundary, Mt. McKinley National Park
- Kantishna Mining District
- Valdez Creek Mining District
- Current Denali Highway
- Alaska Railroad

3. Historic Context

Gold was discovered in the early 1900s at locations near Denali, as was the case in many areas of Alaska.³ While attempting to climb the iconic mountain, Fairbanks judge James Wickersham and his companions discovered gold at Chitsia Creek in 1903. Upon his return to Fairbanks, word soon spread and other prospectors began to explore the streams in the area. Following several additional discoveries, a modest gold rush brought nearly 1,000 newcomers to the area, establishing the Kantishna Mining District. Although the rush subsided within a year, several dozen miners remained, most living in relative isolation in the years leading up to World War I.⁴ During the same period, discoveries of placer gold near Valdez Creek, a tributary of the Susitna River roughly 50 miles east of Cantwell, brought a small stampede of miners to the area, establishing the Valdez Creek Mining District.⁵ By 1908 a trail had been cut from Paxson's road house on the Richardson Highway westward to Valdez Creek through the southern foothills of the Alaska Range.⁶ A wagon road from the Richardson Highway to Valdez Creek was desired to replace the trail as early as 1909, but the route was not constructed at that time.⁷

The concept of a national park in the vicinity of Denali dates to 1908, when naturalist Charles Sheldon first made a winter visit to the Alaskan interior near the mountain. Following President Howard Taft's 1912 authorization of the construction of the government-funded Alaska Railroad from Seward to Fairbanks, Sheldon began to lobby members of Congress and the Department of the Interior to establish a national park. Fearing the access provided by the railroad would negatively affect the natural qualities of the area, he enlisted the aid of James Wickersham, then the Alaska delegate to Congress. Wickersham agreed to back a bill designating a national park, provided that the Kantishna Mining District was excluded and that miners outside the district were allowed to locate claims within the park's boundaries. President Woodrow Wilson signed the bill in 1917, and the 2,200-square-mile Mt. McKinley National Park was the first national park created under the National Park Service, which was established a year earlier.⁸

³ Most Alaskans use Denali, the traditional Athabascan name for Mt. McKinley, to refer to both the mountain and the park. This document refers to the peak by its traditional name throughout and refers to the park as Mt. McKinley National Park, the official name for the park throughout the historic period until 1980, when it was combined with Denali National Monument and renamed Denali National Park and Preserve with the passage of Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA).

⁴ Frank B. Norris, *Crown Jewel of the North: An Administrative History of Denali National Park and Preserve*, Vol. 2 (Anchorage, Alaska: Alaska Regional Office, National Park Service, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 2008), 325.

⁵ Ralph Tuck, *The Valdez Creek Mining District, Alaska, in 1936*, U.S. Geological Survey Bulletin 897-B (Washington, D.C.: US GPO, 1938), 113.

⁶ Fred H. Moffit, "Mining in the Kotsina-Chitina, Chistochina, and Valdez Creek Regions," extract from *Mineral Resources of Alaska*, U.S. Geological Survey Bulletin 379 (Washington, D.C.: US GPO), 158.

⁷ Board of Road Commissioners for Alaska, *Annual Report of the Board of Road Commissioners for Alaska, 1909*, in U.S. House of Representatives Document 864, 61st Congress, 2nd Session (Washington, D.C.: US GPO, 1909), 5.

⁸ Frank B. Norris, "A Lone Voice in the Wilderness: The National Park Service in Alaska, 1917-1969," *Environmental History*, October 1996, 68. Yellowstone National Park, established in 1872, is the first National Park in the United States, although the National Park Service was not created until 1916.

Construction of the Alaska Railroad began two years prior to the park's creation, when the Alaska Engineering Commission established its headquarters in Anchorage in 1915. By 1922 the rail line was complete except for the bridge over the Tanana River at Nenana. Park superintendent Henry Karstens selected a site near Riley Creek as a railroad depot to provide access for the park. McKinley Park Station, as it was named, served as the gateway to the park, and Karstens located the park headquarters nearby.⁹ Small-scale mining continued in the Kantishna Mining District during this period, and saw a resurgence at the end of World War I. Hand-mining of placer deposits began to give way to hydraulic operations. These were not immediately successful, but additional discoveries within the park at Copper Mountain (now known as Mt. Eielson) brought additional prospectors in the 1920s and 1930s.¹⁰

The 1920s and 1930s saw the construction of a gravel road into the park. Begun in 1923, the McKinley Park Road provided access into the park's interior from the railroad depot at McKinley Park Station, reaching Kantishna in 1938. Visitors could arrive by rail and experience the park's scenic beauty from tour buses traveling along the McKinley Park Road; motorists who wished to bring their own cars had to ship their vehicles by flatbed railcar. Road access to the area from the McKinley Park Station, coupled with a sharp increase in the price of gold several years prior, also led to increased mining development in the Kantishna Mining District. While the McKinley Park Road improved access to areas west of the rail line, additional road-building efforts during this period also pushed east from Cantwell into the Valdez Creek district, where both placer and lode mining continued throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Cantwell was the railroad stop nearest to Valdez Creek, and by 1930 the ARC maintained a sled trail from the railroad stop at Cantwell east to Valdez Creek. In 1935 this was improved to a summer tractor road, and within a year the improved portion consisted of 30 miles of dirt road and bridges across the Jack and Brushkana Rivers.¹¹ This route was used to move heavy freight in the winter and during summer the road transported passengers and freight from Cantwell to as far as the Brushkana River and then further east to Valdez Creek by airplane via a string of three airfields.¹² As was the case elsewhere in Alaska, however, World War II halted most gold mining operations. By this time the Valdez Creek Mining District was practically abandoned, and few miners returned to their claims after the war's end.¹³ However, commercial ventures in the Kantishna Mining District did resume after the war, ranging in size from one-man operations to 14-person crews; most were mechanized and used draglines and/or bulldozers.¹⁴

⁹ Norris, *Crown Jewel of the North: An Administrative History of Denali National Park and Preserve*, Vol. 1, 29-30.

¹⁰ Norris, *Crown Jewel of the North: An Administrative History of Denali National Park and Preserve*, Vol. 2 329; John C. Reed, *The Mount Eielson District, Alaska*, U.S. Geological Survey Bulletin 849-d, (Washington, D.C.: US GPO, 1933) 270-271.

¹¹ Tuck, 111; Alaska Road Commission, *Annual Report 1935*, 12.

¹² Tuck, 111.

¹³ Dessauer, Peter F., and David W. Harvey, *An Historical Resource Study of the Valdez Creek Mining District, Alaska, 1977*, reprinted February, 1997 ed., Recreation Program of the U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, Anchorage District Office, Anchorage, Alaska, and Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE), Boulder, Colorado, 75-78.

¹⁴ Norris, *Crown Jewel of the North: An Administrative History of Denali National Park and Preserve*, Vol. 2, 336-337.

In the period after World War II, the ARC began an ambitious program to improve existing highways and construct new ones. In 1949 the ARC's *A Plan for Alaska Roads* outlined the agency's priorities for 1953 through 1958. The plan included substantial upgrades to the Richardson, Alaska, and Tok Cutoff Highways, and the construction of other routes including the Taylor Highway and a new highway to connect Mt. McKinley National Park to the main road system.¹⁵ Previously, the park was only accessible via rail and air.¹⁶ When complete, the new highway was to be 162 miles long and would connect the park to the Richardson Highway; it would travel from McKinley Park Station via Cantwell, 29 miles south along the railroad, and then east to Paxson. The route would also pass through areas of known mineral potential, which the ARC expected to be more accessible for additional exploration following the completion of the highway.¹⁷

Construction of the route between Paxson and Cantwell began in 1949, and crews working from either end completed a total of 34 miles that year.¹⁸ The highway was constructed using stage construction, a practice employed by the ARC throughout the first half of the twentieth century to manage the effects of permafrost on road construction. The technique allowed newly cleared segments of roadway to settle for at least one season between preliminary grading and final surfacing. Work continued in the early 1950s, and by 1953 the 29-mile section from Cantwell to McKinley Park Station (later incorporated into the George Parks Highway) was passable, linking the park with Summit Airfield, located several miles south of Cantwell, and providing "access to scheduled air transportation."¹⁹ Work continued to progress from Cantwell and Paxson towards the middle of the route; at the end of the 1955 fiscal year, stage construction was underway 58 miles east from Cantwell and 42 miles west from Paxson, and funding had been provided for bridges across the Maclaren and Susitna Rivers. These two segments under construction were built by ARC forces, while the remaining 39-mile segment to provide a through overland connection was let for contract in 1956.²⁰

The highway opened to the public for its entire length in 1957, providing the first motor vehicle access to the nation's second-largest national park.²¹ Within the first month of the opening of the highway, 438 visitors drove to the park over a road "in good condition [over which] motorists can average about 30

¹⁵ 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 1, 1.

¹⁶ Alaska Road Commission, *Annual Report of the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1955* (Juneau, Alaska: U.S. Department of the Interior, Office of Territories, 1955), 34.

¹⁷ Alaska Road Commission, *Annual Report for the Fiscal year 1953* (Juneau, Alaska: U.S. Department of the Interior, 1953), 23.

¹⁸ Noyes, 20; Alaska Road Commission, *Annual Report of the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1956* (Juneau, Alaska: U.S. Department of the Interior, Office of Territories, 1956), 23.

¹⁹ Alaska Road Commission, *Annual Report for the Fiscal year 1953*, 23.

²⁰ Alaska Road Commission, *Annual Report of the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1955*, 32; Alaska Road Commission, *Annual Report of the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1956*, 23. The ARC was absorbed by the Bureau of Public Roads (BPR) in September of 1956, and the BPR oversaw completion of the final segment by contract forces.

²¹ Alaska Road Commission, *Annual Report of the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1955*, 32, 34.

miles an hour on the gravel.”²² The effects of the highway on park visitation were immediate; in 1956 the total number of visitors was just over 5,000 for the calendar year, and in 1957 this number more than doubled, despite the fact that the road was opened late in the park’s visitor season. In 1958, the first full year that the road was open to the public, almost 26,000 people visited the park, an increase of over 500 percent from the 1956 totals. For the first time, visitors could experience the park road in their own vehicles without having to ship them in by rail, and the park was able to capitalize on the huge postwar increase in automobile tourism.²³

The highway provided direct access to recreational and wilderness areas long known for their rich wild game resources. Although hunting was prohibited within the Denali National Park boundary at that time, the opening of the Denali Highway was critical in opening the area between Paxson and Cantwell for seasonal recreational hunting and fishing.²⁴ Following its completion, the corridor attracted big-game hunters from Fairbanks, Anchorage, and the Matanuska-Susitna Valley as it was one of few “remote” wilderness areas to be accessed from the highway system.²⁵ The highway also provided access for subsistence activities, including fishing, moose and caribou hunting, and berry picking.²⁶

The opening of the Denali Highway also provided vehicular access to the Kantishna and Valdez Creek Mining Districts, as well as to newfound copper deposits along the MacLaren River. While sources suggest that the MacLaren copper deposits were known as early as the 1910s, a 1952 prospecting expedition had rediscovered copper-bearing quartz veins, renewing interest in the area as the highway was under construction. A 1958 area map shows the location of seven claims, along with the Kathleen-Margaret Mine and an associated camp. At that time, an airstrip provided primary access to these claims, although they could also be reached from the Denali Highway by foot or amphibious vehicle.²⁷ By 1964, however, the Kathleen-Margaret Mine was abandoned and no copper prospects reported production.²⁸ While some small operations in the Kantishna Mining District continued into the 1960s, by 1968 no mining activity was reported. The total production of the district through 1960 is estimated to be a modest quantity, between 45,000 and 50,000 fine ounces (as compared to the 7.55 million fine ounces produced

²² Norris, *Crown Jewel of the North: An Administrative History of Denali National Park and Preserve*, Vol.1, 157.

²³ Norris, *Crown Jewel of the North: An Administrative History of Denali National Park and Preserve*, Vol.1, 158, 283.

²⁴ William E. Simeone, “Wild Resource Harvests and Uses by Residents of Cantwell, Alaska,” 2000, Technical Paper 272 (Juneau, Alaska: Alaska Department of Fish and Game, 2002), 1.

²⁵ Simeone, 14.

²⁶ Simeone, 40.

²⁷ Robert H. Saunders, *Supplementary Report on the K-M Copper Prospect on the Maclaren River, Mt. Hayes Quadrangle*, Alaska Territorial Department of Mines Prospect Evaluation 68-2 (n.p.: Territory of Alaska, Department of Mines, 1957), 1; MacKevett, E.M., Jr., *Ore Controls at the Kathleen-Margaret (Maclaren River) Copper Deposit, Alaska*, geological survey research, 1964: U.S. Geological Survey Professional Paper 501-C, 117.

²⁸ MacKevett, 117-120; Joseph M. Kurtak, Michael D. Balen, and Steven A. Fechner, *Results of 1987 Bureau of Mines Investigations in the Valdez Creek Mining District, Alaska* (n.p.: U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Mines, 1988), 4.

in the Fairbanks district during the same time).²⁹ The total placer gold production of the Valdez Creek area in this period is equally modest; when placer mining was revived at several locations in the 1980s, the output of a single mine from 1984 to 1987 exceeded the total production of the district prior to that time.³⁰

Although visitor counts subsided slightly after the initial surge following the opening of the Denali Highway, overall visitation continued to trend upward. This trend was augmented with the completion of the George Parks Highway in 1971, which provided a more direct route to the park from Anchorage and Fairbanks and created another surge in visitor counts. With the completion of the George Parks Highway, which was paved, visitor totals jumped into the six-figure range and the Denali Highway was no longer the sole or most important vehicular access to the park.³¹ In the early 2000s more rail-based package tours became available; as of 2004, slightly over 160,000 visitors still accessed the park by rail, accounting for roughly 40 percent of the total visitor count.³²

Today the Denali Highway continues to provide seasonal access to the national park as well as various outdoor recreational opportunities established or made accessible along the route, such as hunting, fishing, hiking, and canoeing. The Bureau of Land Management maintains a campground at Brushkana Creek, and a number of lodges and roadhouses serve tourists along the highway.³³ In addition to the direct access provided by the highway, even more areas are accessible via trails branching from the highway by the use of off-road vehicles such as snow machines and all-terrain vehicles (ATV). Off-road vehicle use has increased substantially since the 1970s, enabling hunters to travel further from the road and haul fish and game out more easily.³⁴ The completion of the George Parks Highway and increase in the state's overall population following the oil boom led to a growing number of hunters, and the Denali Highway remains a heavily used corridor for hunting and fishing.³⁵

²⁹ Edward Cobb, *Placer Deposits of Alaska*, U.S. Geological Survey Bulletin 1374 (Washington, D.C.: US GPO, 1973), 128, 154.

³⁰ Kurtak et al., 5.

³¹ Norris, *Crown Jewel of the North: An Administrative History of Denali National Park and Preserve*, Vol. 1, 283.

³² National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, *Denali National Park and Preserve Final South Denali Implementation Plan And Environmental Impact Statement* Produced by Denali National Park and Preserve, April 2006, <http://www.nps.gov/dena/parkmgmt/statistics.htm> (accessed 10 July 2014), 312.

³³ The Milepost, "Denali Highway," http://www.milepost.com/highway_info/denali_highway (accessed 10 July 2014).

³⁴ Simeone, 15.

³⁵ Many year-round residents of Cantwell continue to utilize the highway corridor for subsistence activities such as hunting, fishing, and gathering berries and are permitted to hunt within portions of Denali National Park and Preserve; Simeone, 40.

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 Denali Highway has an association with *Transportation* because it provided the first vehicular access to the nation's second-largest national park. The completion of the Denali Highway linked Mt. McKinley National Park to the Richardson Highway, providing automobile connectivity with the rest of the Alaskan highway system and the lower 48 states for the first time. 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.

Entertainment/Recreation and Conservation

The Denali Highway is significant in the area of *Entertainment/Recreation* and *Conservation* at the state level as it provided initial direct vehicular access and led to a large increase in the number of visitors able to access and experience an important national park. Although Mt. McKinley National Park was initially served by the railroad and later by plane, the construction of the highway had an immediate and substantial impact on visitation totals. The period of significance is 1957 to 1971, and encompasses the period of postwar automobile tourism during which the Denali Highway was the only vehicular route to the park. The period of significance begins with the completion of the Denali Highway in 1957 and ends with the opening of the George Parks Highway in 1971, which provided an alternative automobile route to the park.

The Denali Highway also meets the requirement for significance in the area of *Entertainment/Recreation* and *Conservation* at the state level for providing direct access to once remote areas for hunting and fishing outside of the park. With the opening of the Denali Highway, the area between Paxson and Cantwell was now accessible seasonally for recreational hunting and fishing.³⁶ Following its completion, the Denali Highway corridor attracted big-game hunters from Fairbanks, Anchorage, and the Matanuska-Susitna Valley as it was one of few "remote" areas providing critical public access from the highway system.³⁷ As such, the Denali Highway meets the threshold for National Register significance in the area of *Entertainment/Recreation* and *Conservation*. The use of the highway to access these activities has increased, and the recreation, hunting, and fishing activities along the Denali Highway corridor continues

³⁶ William E. Simeone, "Wild Resource Harvests and Uses by Residents of Cantwell, Alaska, 2000, Technical Paper 272, (Juneau, Alaska: Alaska Department of Fish and Game, 2002), 1.

³⁷ Simeone, 14.

to the present. The period of significance is 1957-1964 beginning with the completion of the Denali Highway and ending at the 50-year guidance of the National Register. Recreational and hunting and fishing activities have historically continued to be important and continues to the present day. Research has not revealed an appropriate date to serve as the ending date of the period of significance; as a result the 50-year ending date is defined to end the period of significance following National Register guidance.

Industry

The Denali Highway does not meet the threshold for significance in the area of *Industry* for its role in mining. Mining in the Kantishna and Valdez Creek Mining Districts commenced over 50 years before the highway was completed. The districts produced a relatively minor quantity of gold and were served by the railroad and by airplane prior to the Denali Highway's construction. The McKinley Park Road provided vehicular access to the Kantishna Mining District and an earlier dirt road provided summer access to portions of the Valdez Creek Mining District. While the highway opened up access to the copper deposits of the MacLaren River Valley, the area also failed to develop into a significant copper production region. The Valdez Creek Mining District had declined before World War II and the district did not further develop as a result of the highway's construction until recently; a new and productive period of gold mining occurred in the mid-1980s, but is outside the historic period and does not meet *Criteria Consideration G*.³⁸

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 Denali 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 road type.

The construction of the Denali Highway occurred in a period when the ARC had already established a body of institutional knowledge of road construction in Alaska. The route of the Denali Highway was initially planned in 1948, construction commenced in 1949, and the highway opened in 1957. Although the ARC employed stage construction techniques to address areas of permafrost, by that time the agency had already constructed numerous other highways and had decades of experience building roads through permafrost. A review of the ARC's annual reports and other materials from the period in which the highway was constructed yielded no evidence of any engineering design or construction features

³⁸ Kurtak et al., 4-5.

important in road engineering that serve to distinguish it from other roads. The highway does not represent extraordinary challenges or solutions that transcend normal methods of road construction and there is no indication that there are segments of the road that are a surviving example of a rare road type. 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 innovative developments in highway construction. The Denali 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 Denali 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 Denali Highway possesses significance at the state level under *Criterion A* for its direct and important association with *Transportation* and under the supplemental area of significance of *Entertainment/Recreation* and *Conservation*.

The Denali Highway has an association with *Transportation* because it provided the first vehicular access to the nation's second-largest national park and its completion linked Mt. McKinley National Park to the Richardson Highway, providing automobile connectivity with the rest of the Alaskan highway system and the lower 48 states for the first time.

The Denali Highway is significant in the area of *Entertainment/Recreation* and *Conservation* at the state level as it provided initial direct vehicular access and led to a large increase in the number of visitors able to access and experience an important national park. The period of significance for this theme under *Entertainment/Recreation* and *Conservation* extends from 1957-1971, beginning with the completion of the highway in 1957 and ending with the opening of the George Parks Highway in 1971, which provided an alternative automobile route to the park.

The Denali Highway also meets the requirement for significance in the area of *Entertainment/ Recreation* and *Conservation* at the state level for providing direct access to once remote areas for hunting and fishing outside of the park. The period of significance is 1957-1964 beginning with the completion of the Denali Highway and ending at the 50-year guidance of the National Register since recreational and hunting and fishing activities have historically continued to be important and continues to the present day. Research has not revealed an appropriate date to serve as the ending date of the period of significance; as a result the 50-year ending date is defined to end the period of significance following National Register guidance.

The Denali Highway does not possess significance under *Criteria B, C, or D*.

Since the Denali Highway possesses significance under *Criterion A*, **identification of essential physical features and an assessment of integrity is needed to determine National Register eligibility.**