



# 7 Strategies TO ENHANCE THE BYWAY

Designation of the Byway is simply the first step in establishing a program of on-going improvements to this corridor for both scenic and historic enhancements. Several strategies will be employed to ensure continuing enhancement of the byway over time.

## Scenic Enhancements

While the corridor is already quintessentially scenic in nature, there are several ways to enhance the vistas and viewing qualities for the traveler, whether the desire is to see wildlife, geologic formations, or wildflowers. The main objectives in enhancing the scenic quality of the corridor will be strategic brush clearing, interpretation opportunities to understand the massive forces at work that shape the scenery, and occasional diversions off the corridor to take in the wonders of Alaska on the road less traveled.

## Strategic Brush Clearing

Several stretches of byway travel through areas of incredible scenic quality, although the traveler would never know it because the trees and brush have grown so high and so close to the edge of the highway that the scenery cannot be seen. In a literal sense the "forest cannot be seen for the trees." On several roadway improvements throughout Alaska it has been found that views are greatly enhanced by ensuring a shoulder and clear zone are maintained along the road. This has been the case on the Seward Highway, the Sterling Highway, and on the Glenn Highway with the recent improvements through Sutton. As the highway is improved and the roadside vegetation is cleared, the views from the highway are opened up and safety is increased. The traveler can then see much more of the countryside and enjoy the experience. For this reason, both with new projects and maintenance activities within the corridor will include brush clearing for view enhancement

## Geologic Interpretation Areas

The scenic qualities of this corridor are, without dispute, outstanding, but there are massive and prehistoric geologic processes that are continuing to shape the land. There are very few opportunities along the corridor to learn more about how the landscape came to be. One such opportunity that exists today is at the new scenic outlook at the Matanuska Glacier State Recreation Site. This area provides information for traveler and visitor alike

Photo courtesy of Bill Evans

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***The Partnership Board will be tasked with prioritizing and developing grant applications for interpretive locations throughout the Byway, not only for geology and glaciers, but for historical points of interest as well.***



Photo courtesy of MSCVB

*An opportunity for a historic loop could be a trip to Independence Mine*



Photo courtesy of LDN

*The Alpine Heritage and Cultural Center could benefit from greater publicity*

about the glacier and the processes of glaciation that helped shape the valley, about glaciers in general, and discusses a scree hill that it characterizes as a rock glacier on a nearby mountain face.

There are many areas throughout the corridor that would provide excellent examples for additional geologic interpretation. The forces that have shaped the landscape in this particular canyon are extremely complex, and many opportunities exist to better inform and educate the traveler. The Partnership Board will be tasked with prioritizing and developing grant applications for interpretive locations throughout the byway, not only for geology and glaciers, but for historical points of interest as well.

**Historic Interpretation**

There are already several historic interpretive facilities along the byway. Beginning in Anchorage the Alaska Native Heritage Center is an excellent example of historic interpretation of the native people. The Museum at the Eklutna Village is an excellent resource that tells the story of the Eklutna Natives and their history in the region. Further up the road in Palmer and off the corridor in Hatcher's pass there are interpretive signs explaining the area's connection to the Great Alaska Gold Rush in the late 1800's. There is historic interpretation of the colony at the Palmer fairgrounds and more in Palmer. The Alpine Heritage and Cultural Center in Sutton is a resource that could be much better publicized and utilized through the byway designation process. The center tells the story of the Sutton coalfields, the historic development of the region, and their importance to the U.S. military and the push to develop transportation by rail and by road into the area. There are no other historic interpretation areas available for the public along the Byway though great opportunities exist.

There is great interest in including interpretation for the Native influences around Sutton and Chickaloon, including explaining traditional Native place names, developing additional historic resources in Palmer for the Matanuska Colony Experiment, and



throughout the corridor for interpreting its development and the role it played in the opening of the "Last Frontier." The Partnership Board will designate areas and other projects for historic interpretation, and prioritize them for grant applications.

### Establish Scenic Loop Alternatives

There are several areas along the byway where the highway has been rerouted, or there are other attractions that can serve as scenic side trips. These areas will be identified in publications discussing the scenic qualities of the byway, giving the reader the option of traveling on an old highway loop, or taking a scenic side trip to one of a number of attractions along the byway.

### Existing Development and New Development

As mentioned before, the Glenn Highway is both an extremely scenic road with a rich history and an important commercial segment of America's national highway system. As such, improvements to the highway will enhance the traveler's experience and provide needed infrastructure improvements to support commercial traffic and development along the corridor.

When discussing the development of the Glenn Scenic Byway, the extraordinary spirit of the original settlers to this land becomes real. The extremes in weather and the ruggedness of the terrain are only the obvious obstacles. Coupled with the hardships of the land was the sense of isolation and the difficulty in traveling from one area to another. Even today, many of these same impediments hinder the development of any intensive commercial growth along the Glenn Highway. This greatly benefits existing businesses and helps to maintain the intrinsic qualities of the byway.

### Challenges for New Development

Retail and often commercial development have maintained a small, intimate scale throughout the corridor. Topography, access to services for utilities, soil characteristics, land ownership patterns, remoteness, and difficult weather conditions all

## The Old Glenn Highway DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES IN EAGLE RIVER

*Eagle River, a community nestled into the Chugach Mountains, has much to offer visitors—spectacular scenery, camping, fishing and hiking, and the Eagle River Nature Center where you can join naturalists on hikes looking for animal tracks, or learn how to build a snow cave. The community also holds wonderful annual festivals.*

*Eagle River's business district on the Old Glenn Highway, however presents a "scenic challenge" and appeals little to visitors. However, a recent planning effort which involved local business owners and residents now seeks to reshape the heart of Eagle River, primarily through public infrastructure improvements, the use of incentives, and by circulating low-cost aesthetic improvement ideas that property owners can implement (for example, the cluttered signage below can be replaced with reasonably-priced attractive signage emphasizing local materials).*

*In this same spirit, the Partnership Board seeks to work with local property owners and residents as a resource to help them enhance and add value to their property along the Glenn Highway.*



Photos courtesy of LDN

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contributed to limiting the scale of development on the Glenn Byway, as large scale commercial developments find it difficult to exist under such conditions.

**Economy of the Corridor**

Byway promotional efforts are aimed at improving the business climate along the Glenn Highway. As stated in the Vision Statement for this byway plan, "The Byway further enhances communities and places of interest along the corridor, increases tourism, and adds to the local culture and economic base." An important benefit of the highway being designated an All American Road to the Partnership Board and the business owners that have been involved in development of the plan is the potential for increased tourism and business revenues without sacrificing the qualities that bring travelers and visitors to the Byway. The Byway designation also provides opportunity for other business interests along the corridor to help mitigate impacts and provides a resource through the Partnership Board to improve the highway, providing a safe facility for a mix of traffic including pedestrians and bicyclists, recreational vehicles and heavy trucks.

**Enhancing the Character of the Byway**

There is the potential for large-scale industrial mineral extraction activities along the corridor. These activities represent a potential rebirth of the rich historic mining activities of the early 1900s. To date all mining activity has taken place off the corridor and has not disrupted views on the Byway. These activities will be market-driven and enhanced with the ongoing improvements to the Glenn Highway. Such activities are not inconsistent with a National Scenic Byway or an All American Road designation. Also, this designation will not add any additional requirements or regulations for this development. Mining Companies hold leases along approximately 10% of the Byway corridor, localized around Sutton and Chickaloon.

The character of the Byway has some natural, built-in protections, as mentioned above. As development

proceeds along the Byway, the Partnership Board will invite people who wish to develop their property to join them in understanding the vision, goals, and objectives of the of the Corridor Partnership Plan to aid them in development decisions and choices. The Partnership Board will act as a resource for property owners and other development concerns wishing to enhance and add value to their property and the Byway.

This document reflects the spirit of several local advisory plans that cover the corridor from Mile 0 in Anchorage to the border of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough. Applicable plans include:

- Anchorage 2020
- Anchorage Sign Ordinance
- Eagle River & Chugiak Comprehensive Plans
- Matanuska Susitna Borough Transportation Plan
- Matanuska Susitna Borough Comprehensive Plan
- Matanuska Susitna Borough Core Area Plan
- Matanuska Susitna Borough Asset Management Plan: Parks Recreation and Open Space Plan
- City of Palmer Comprehensive Plan
- Sutton Area Comprehensive Plan\*\*
- Chickaloon Area Comprehensive Plan\*\*
- Glacier View Comprehensive Plan\*\*

\*\*These are community advisory plans to the Matanuska Susitna Borough Assembly and Planning Commission.

**Increasing the Corridor's Capacity**

At present, there is ample capacity to accommodate travelers along the Byway. Present plans of Alaska DOT will accommodate additional capacity, and increase the comfort and convenience of travelers by adding a full service rest area, making roadway improvements, widening shoulders, and improving signage and access. Further, in partnership with the Byway's board members and the goals, objectives, and vision statement of the Byway, Alaska DOT will assure successful implementation of this plan by improving signage, enhancing safety, and creating access to Byway attractions.

*Glenn Highway National Scenic Byway Corridor Partnership Plan*





# The Lion No Glacier Could Tame

*Matanuska Glacier once spanned the width of this valley, covering Lion Head by thousands of feet. The massive glacier scoured out the Matanuska Valley, yet Lion Head remains. How could that happen?*

## Lion Head or Sphinx?

Lion Head's western profile resembles a lion's head with its snout facing south. From this vantage point, locals say it looks more like a sphinx.

## This Lion is a Volcano

You're looking at the peak of an ancient volcano. About 42 million years ago, Lion Head was a chamber of fluid magma about a half-mile under ground. It cooled quickly, by geologic standards, into a rare composition of quartz porphyry andesite.

This unusually hard and massive material withstood dozens of ice advances and glacial erosion over the last 2 million years.



The geology of the corridor presents great opportunities for interpretation, such as the panel above, located at the Raptor Viewing Area at MP 118

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