

24. VISUAL RESOURCES

24.1 Introduction

The visual analysis was performed to evaluate the existing landscape character and quality in the Pebble Project mine and transportation-corridor study areas in the Bristol Bay drainages (Figure 1-4 in Chapter 1).

Five landscape analysis units were identified for these study areas: Talarik Creeks, Groundhog and Sharp Mountains, Iliamna, Pedro Bay, and the Chigmit Mountains. Each unit represents a unique set of landscape characteristics and components with respect to its scenic attractiveness and scenic integrity. The landscape analysis units were divided into subunits based on variations in scenic class, scenic attractiveness, distance zones, concern levels, and scenic integrity.

Landscape visibility and scenic attractiveness, and their derivative scenic classes, are used to assess the existing visual condition. Mapping for the scenic inventory takes into account the landscape visibility, the concern levels of users/residents, scenic attractiveness, scenic class, and scenic integrity. Scenic attractiveness measures the scenic importance of a landscape based on human perceptions, and scenic integrity is a measure of the completeness of a landscape.

The research was done in summer 2004 following the methodology outlined in the U.S. Forest Service document *Landscape Aesthetics, A Handbook for Scenery Management* (USFS, 1995). Researchers traveled by helicopter to document landscape character and views.

24.2 Results and Discussion

The study areas are a mix of contrasting landscapes, some of striking visual quality, others quite muted. Of particular note is that much of the landscape is undisturbed and much is little used or seen by people. The landscape in the mine study area located near and west of Sharp and Groundhog mountains is characterized by low landforms with heavily patterned vegetation that ranges from low shrubs and lichen to sparse stands of spruce. This is in marked contrast to the transportation-corridor study area, which extends eastward to the drainage boundary between the Bristol Bay drainages and Cook Inlet drainages and which is characterized by incised valleys and complex serrated peaks, as well as rounded valley bottoms with winding clear-water streams.

Viewers of the landscapes comprise residents of the communities in the study areas and tourists and recreationists that visit Lake Clark National Park and Preserve or fish camps, lodges, or hunting camps located in the area. The area is also used for subsistence purposes; thus, hunters and gatherers are also a constituent group. Aircraft fly over the study areas, and aircraft passengers are a user group as well. Portions of the study areas are visible to motor-

vehicle traffic on the Williamsport-Pile Bay Road and in the vicinity of Iliamna and Newhalen, and to boats and floatplanes on Iliamna Lake. All of these viewers have a high level of concern about changes to the existing landscape.

Scenic attractiveness is categorized into three classes: Class A—distinctive, Class B—common, and Class C—indistinctive. The landscape in the study areas covers a range of classes for scenic attractiveness. The landscape varies from the common (Class B) landscape of muted hills among tundra that extends for hundreds of miles to the west to the distinctive (Class A) peaks, valleys, and water forms in the eastern portion of the study areas.

Almost all units in the study areas have a very high rating of scenic integrity where the landscape is intact and whole. Exceptions include the areas of the communities of Iliamna, Newhalen, Nondalton, and Pedro Bay and some camps in remote locations along creeks and the Iliamna Lake shoreline. Also, the Newhalen River Road and the Williamsport-Pile Bay Road are existing intrusions into what is otherwise a fully intact landscape.

Scenic class is a measure of the value of scenery using a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 being the highest value. Scenic class considers scenic attractiveness, landscape visibility, and public concern level. The ratings in the study areas are either Class 1 or Class 2.

24.3 References

U.S. Forest Service (USFS). 1995. Landscape Aesthetics: A Handbook for Scenery Management.

Visual Resources—Bristol Bay Drainages



Unit 1, Talarik Creeks: View of Lower Talarik Creek.



Unit 2, Groundhog and Sharp Mountains: View of Pig Mountain.



Unit 3, Iliamna: View of the Newhalen River.

Visual Resources—Bristol Bay Drainages



Unit 4, Pedro Bay: View of Community of Pedro Bay.



Unit 5, Chigmit Mountains: View of Summit Lakes.