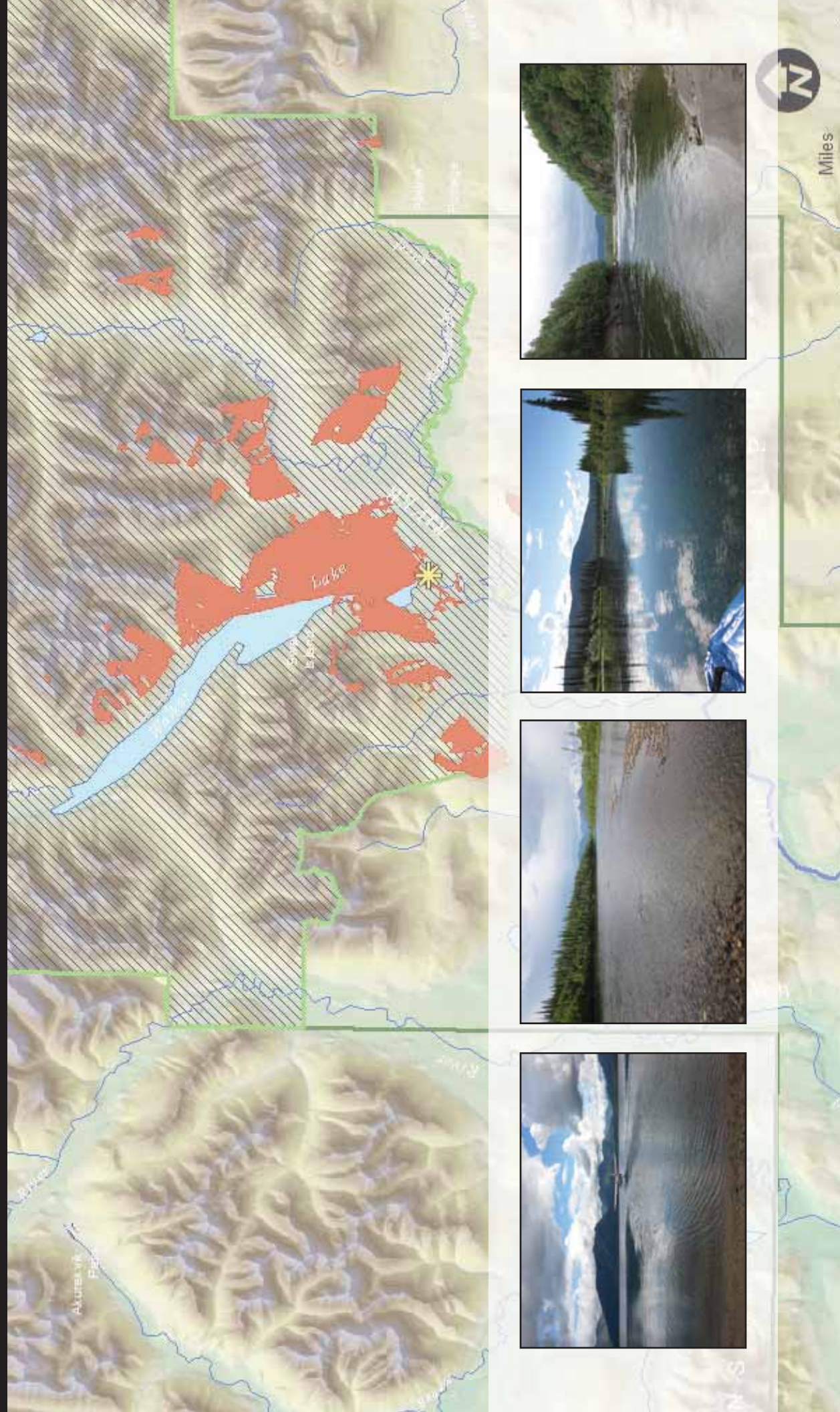


Kobuk Wild and Scenic River

Visual Resource Inventory and Assessment

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
Gates of the Arctic National Park
and Preserve



Kobuk Wild and Scenic River
Visual Resource Inventory
Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve



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INTRODUCTION

The National Park Service Organic Act of 1916 states that units of the national park system are established to “conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as to leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.” This statement represents the most basic mission of Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve.

In 1971 Native claims were resolved by passage of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA). This act, in addition to Native land claims, also provided for withdrawal of 80 million acres for possible designation as national parks, fish and wildlife refuges, national forests, and wild and scenic rivers. Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve is among those park areas first established in 1978 by Presidential Proclamation by President Carter when he withdrew over 100 million acres of federal land, including 56 million acres as national monuments. Most of the national parks in Alaska, including Gates of the Arctic

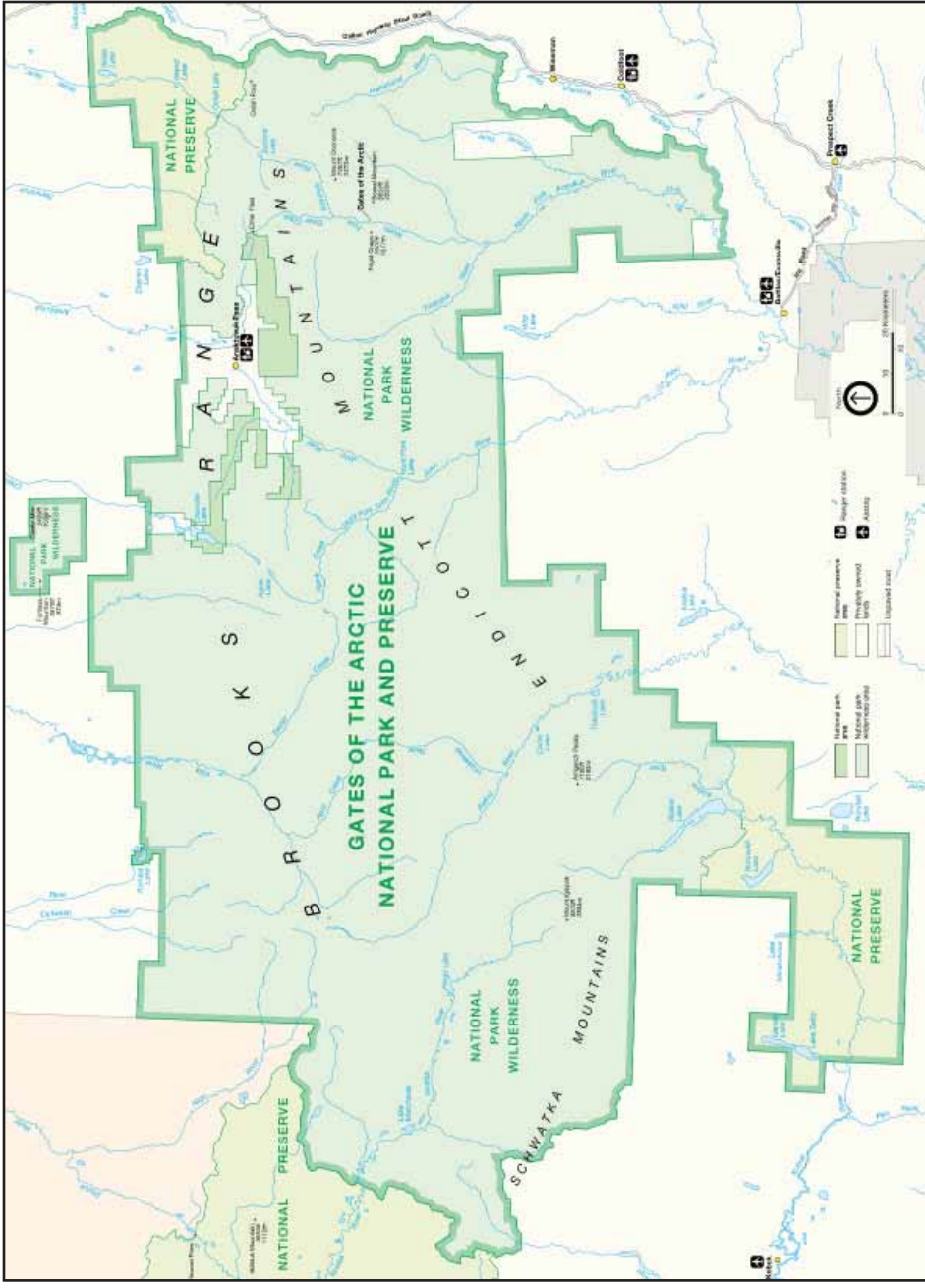
National Park and Preserve, were established or expanded under the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA), which was adopted on December 2, 1980. ANILCA’s passage culminated more than 20 years of deliberation on federal land claims after Alaska statehood. ANILCA also established six Wild and Scenic Rivers in Gates of the Arctic National Park & Preserve (601). The park Foundation Statement further describes the purpose of the park as well as the significance and fundamental resources and values pertaining to the six wild rivers.

BACKGROUND

Purpose Statement

The purpose of Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve is to preserve the vast, wild, undeveloped character and environmental integrity of Alaska's central Brooks Range and to provide opportunities for wilderness recreation and traditional subsistence uses (Foundation Statement, 2009). Specifically, Section 201 of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) states that the park shall be managed for the following purposes, among others:

- To maintain the wild and undeveloped character of the area, including opportunities for visitors to experience solitude, and the natural environmental integrity and scenic beauty of the mountains, forelands, rivers, lakes, and other natural features;
- to provide continued opportunities, including reasonable access, for mountain climbing, mountaineering, and other wilderness recreational activities;
- and to protect habitat for and the populations of, fish and wildlife, including, but not limited to, caribou, grizzly bears, Dall's sheep, moose, wolves, and raptorial birds.
- Subsistence uses by local residents shall be permitted in the park, where such uses are traditional, in accordance with the provisions of title VIII.



Significance Statement

One of the six significance statements from the Foundation Statement (2009) is that Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve serves as the headwaters for six Wild Rivers that support natural systems and human activities across northern Alaska. Five Fundamental Resources and Values were defined for the Wild Rivers in the park and preserve.

Fundamental Resources and Values

Traditional and Historic Routes: The park's Wild Rivers preserve traditional and historic routes of trade and transportation throughout the central Brooks Range.

Recreational Opportunities: The park's six Wild Rivers create unparalleled scenic and recreational opportunities.

Populations of Fish and Wildlife: The park's free flowing Wild Rivers support habitat which sustains natural populations of fish and wildlife.

Pristine Water : The park protects water quality through the management of its six designated Wild Rivers.

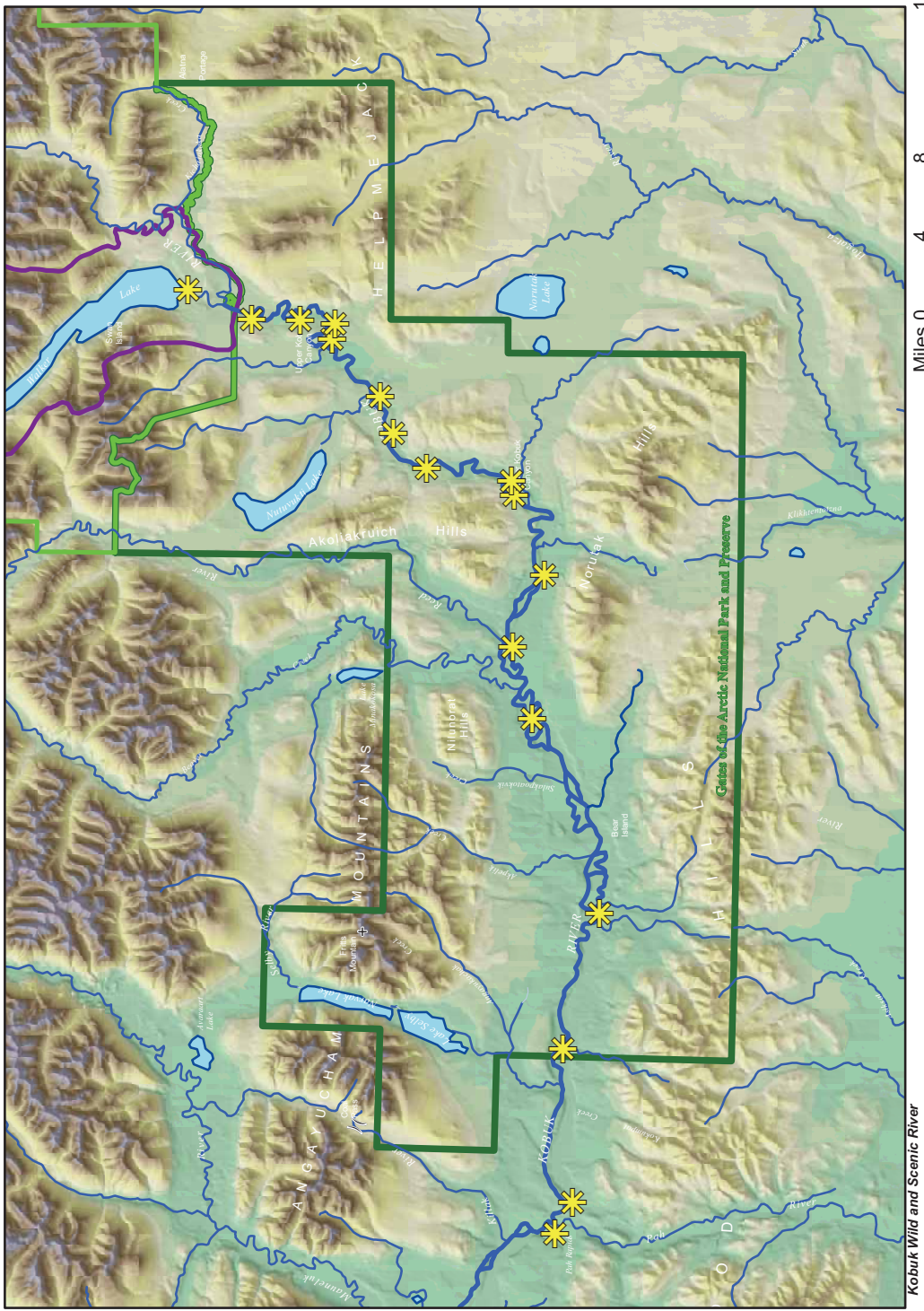
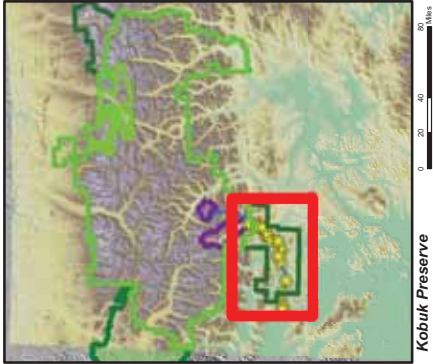
Geologic Processes: The park's Wild Rivers reveal a variety of geologic features and processes illustrating the natural history of the Brooks Range.

Surface Transportation Corridor

In addition to establishing Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve, ANILCA included a provision that allows for the development of a surface access corridor across the Kobuk Preserve portion of the unit known at the "boot" (see map). Part of this access corridor would be permitted to cross the Kobuk River, and any surface crossing would, it is assumed, require the construction of a bridge and other related developments. As part of the preparation for eventual construction of a road and bridge in the access corridor, the NPS has conducted an inventory of the visual resources of the portion of the designate Kobuk River that is subject to this access corridor.

Documenting the current conditions of the visual resources of the Kobuk River's corridor will create a baseline of visual resource to help future managers identify route preferences and develop mitigation measures as the surface access corridor is developed.

The Kobuk River is one of six designated Wild and Scenic Rivers that support natural systems and human activities across northern Alaska.



Overview of the Inventory Area

Kobuk Wild and Scenic River

- Inventory Observation Points
 - Park
 - Park/Wilderness
 - Preserve
 - Alaska National Natural Landmarks
 - Kobuk River
 - <all other values>
- HEIRARCHY**
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Kobuk Wild and Scenic River
National Park Service U.S. Department of the Interior

Produced by: NPS Alaska Regional Office Planning Team
Coordinate System: NAD 1983 Alaska Albers
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VISUAL RESOURCE ASSESSMENT OF THE KOBUK RIVER

The purpose of this study is to inventory and assess the visual resources of the Kobuk River, a national Wild & Scenic River located in Gates of Arctic National Park and Preserve (GAAR). The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act mandates the responsible federal agency to manage to preserve and enhance each designated river's River Values. The River Values are those special resources, characteristics, or uses that elevate a river's status and warranted designation by congress. One of the River Values identified for the Kobuk River is its scenery.

Overview of the Study Area/Regional Context:

The Upper Kobuk River, a stretch of watercourse 110 miles long, is designated Wild as part of the national Wild and Scenic River system. The Upper Kobuk River is contained within the boundary of Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve. The designated portion originates in these rugged, mountainous headwaters and continues through the foothills and boreal forest just upstream from the confluence with the Pah River.

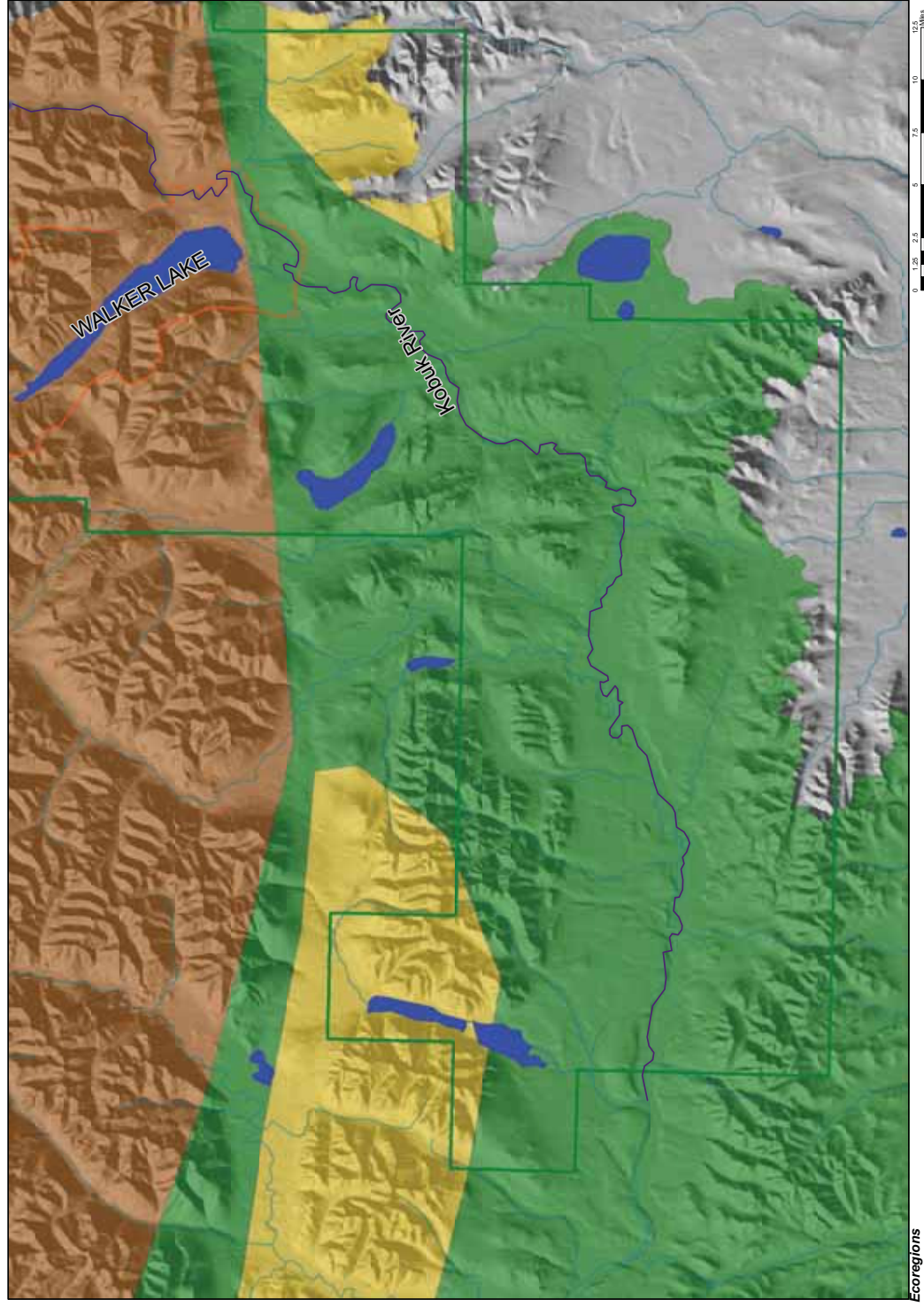
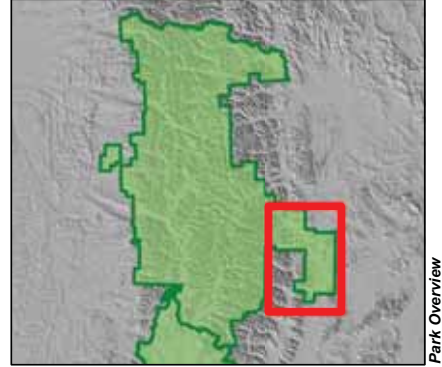
The Kobuk River's headwaters lay tucked into the dramatic peaks of Alaska's Brooks Range. Two National Natural Landmarks, Walker Lake and the Arrigetch Peaks, feed the snow melt and spring waters that flow south and then to the east for 347 miles. The entire course of the clear running river is located above the Arctic Circle.

Draining a basin with an area of 12,300 square miles, the Kobuk River is among the largest rivers in northwest Alaska with widths of up to 1500 feet and flow at a speed of 3–5 miles per hour in its lower and middle reaches. The average elevation for the Kobuk River Basin is 1,300 feet above sea level, ranging from near sea level to 11,400 feet. Topography includes low, rolling mountains, plains and lowlands, moderately high rugged mountainous land, and some gently sloped plateaus and highlands. The river contains an exceptional population of sheefish (*Stenodus leucichthys*), a large predatory whitefish within the salmon family, found throughout north-west Alaska that spawns in the river's upper reaches during the autumn.

Physiographic province: The regional landscape establishes the general visual environment of the project, but the specific visual environment upon which this assessment will focus is determined by defining landscape units and the project viewshed.

The Kobuk River has its headwaters in the central Brooks Range in northern Alaska. The headwaters include the most upper portion of the Kobuk River, but also the outlet of Walker Lake (see map). Walker Lake, the largest lake in Gates of the Arctic National Park, was formed by the scouring action of glaciers thousands of years ago. It is a National Natural Landmark. Walker Lake is also the most commonly used put-in spot for float trips, and is generally one of the most popular places for visitors in the region.

Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve serves as the headwaters for six designated Wild Rivers that support natural systems and human activities across northern Alaska.



Kobuk River Ecoregions Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve Alaska		NPS Park Atlas National Park Service U.S. Department of the Interior Produced by: NPS Alaska Regional Office Planning Division Coordinate System: NAD 1983 Alaska Albers Date Saved: 7/3/2021 12:07:18 PM Map 3 of 9	
Legend - Kobuk River Basin (Ecotone) - Interior Forested Lowlands and Uplands - Interior Highlands - Subarctic Coastal Plain - Kobuk River - Walker Lake - Alaska National Natural Landmarks - Alaska National Park		FOR INTERNAL USE ONLY	

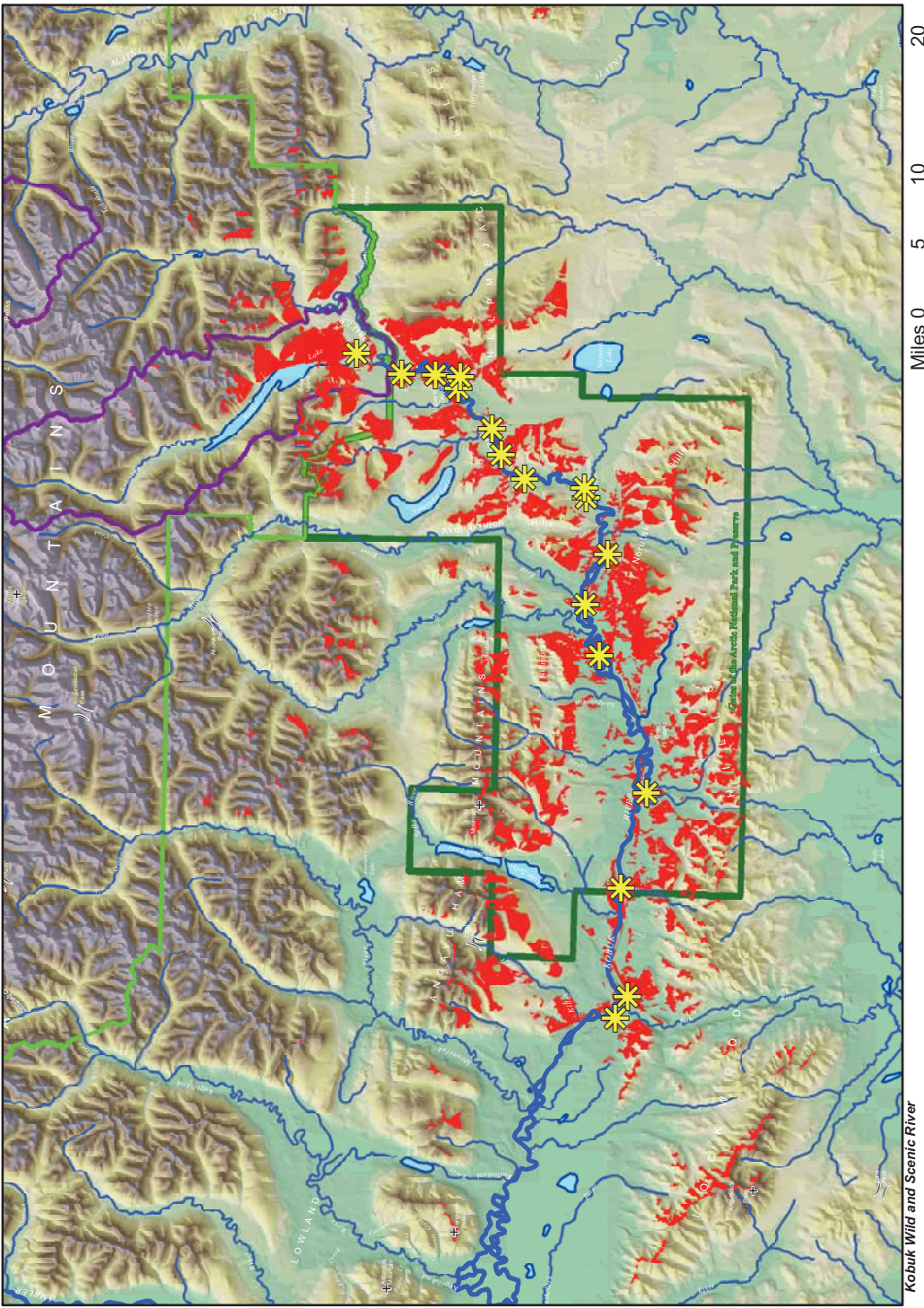
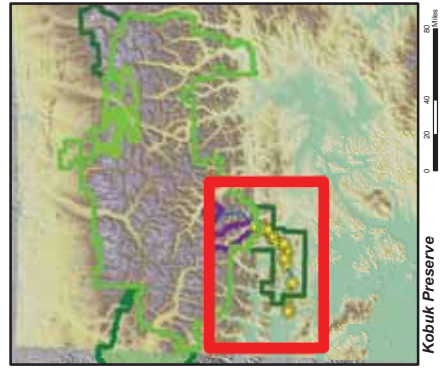
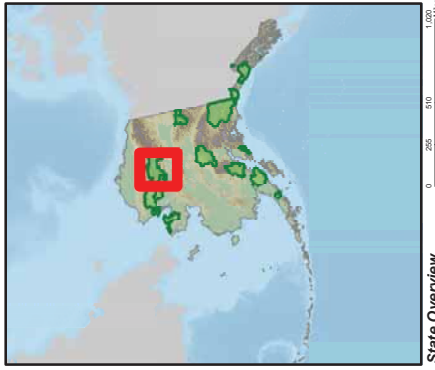
ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY

An interdisciplinary team floated the Kobuk River in July 2012. During this float, the IDT stopped at predetermined points along the course of the river to collect visual resource data. Additional points were identified in the field and inventoried. After the float was completed, the data was analyzed and the river corridor's visual resources were assessed and documented. The process used in this visual resource inventory generally follows the guidelines outlined in the publication "Visual Resource Management", Bureau of Land Management (BLM), March 1981.

Six principal steps to inventory visual resources were carried out. They are as follows:

- A. Define the project setting.
The IDT identified the regional context of the Kobuk River, placing it into specific physiographic provinces.
- B. Identify key viewpoints for visual assessment.
Using GIS and resource data, the IDT identified points along the course of the Kobuk River that would likely provide a representation sample of the corridor's visual resources. Additional points were added at several of the key features found in the river's corridor as well as the points known to be favorable for the proposed bridge crossing. A total of X Inventory Observation Points (IOPs) and X Key Observation Points (KOPs) were identified and used in the inventory.
- C. Collect data in the field.
The IDT floated the Kobuk River from July 12th-19th, 2012. The team put in at the outlet of Walker Lake and took out at the confluence of the Kobuk River with the Pah River, approximately X miles downriver from the western boundary of the Kobuk Preserve.
- D. Analyze visual resources.
The team assessed the quality of the visual resources of the Kobuk River.
- E. Assign visual inventory classes to the river corridor.
The team used this assessment to assign visual inventory classes to different stretches of river.
- F. Assign sensitivity ratings to the project corridor.
The team assigned sensitivity ratings (explain) to the different stretches of river and incorporated that into the final assessment.

The Kobuk River is one of six designated Wild and Scenic Rivers that support natural systems and human activities across northern Alaska.



Overview of the Inventory Area

Kobuk Wild and Scenic River

Inventory Observation Points

Park

Park/Wilderness Preserve

Not Visible

Visible

Alaska National Natural Landmarks

Viewshed_Combined Value

Kobuk Wild and Scenic River
National Park Service U.S. Department of the Interior

Produced by: NPS Alaska Regional Office Planning Team

Coordinate System: NAD 1983 Alaska Albers

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IOP #1: Walker Lake Outlet

Coordinates: N67.03.556 W154.18.815

Physiographic Province: Brooks Range

Scenic Quality Classification: Class A

Score: 38.5

View Type: Enclosed

Description: The outlet of the Kobuk River on the lower end of Walker Lake. This area had broad, open views that were enclosed by the mountains of the central Brooks Range. Walker Lake, the largest lake in the Brooks Range, is the visual centerpiece. The day this IOP was collected was sunny with a few scattered clouds. Two National Natural Landmarks (NNLs), Walker Lake and the Arrigetch Peaks, were visible from this IOP. Both NNLs define much of the viewshed throughout the upper portion of the designated corridor.

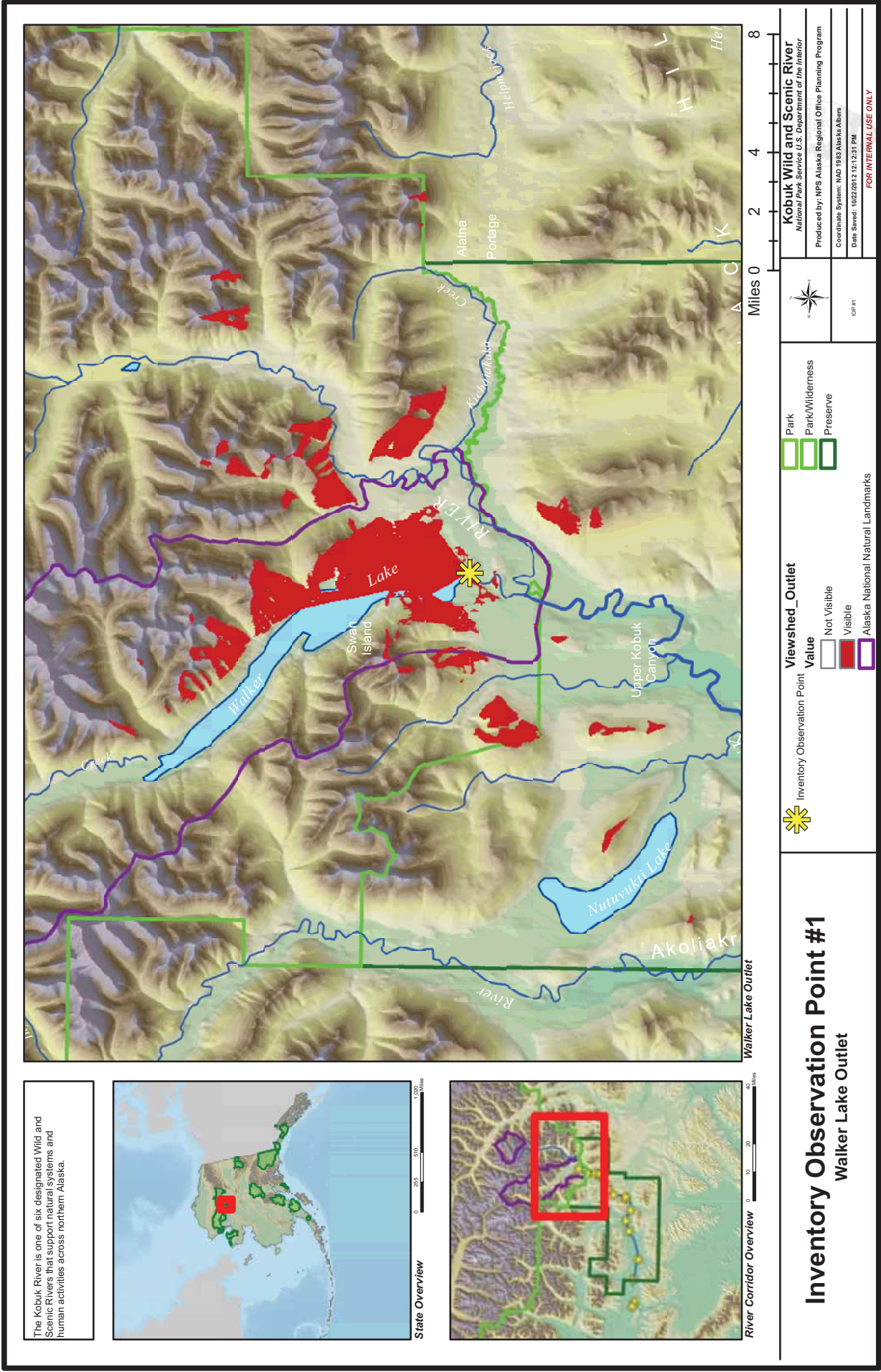
Landform/Water: Walker Lake and the river outlet are prominent in the fore and middle grounds. Tall, dramatic peaks from the surrounding mountains were large, bold, and dominating features in the background. The mountains provided a range of harmonious colors – greys, browns, reds – which was contrasted the crystal clear blue-greens of the adjacent waterbody.

Vegetation: There was lots of white spruce at the lower elevations gave the scenery sharp structure and lots of bold vertical lines. This contrasted with smooth, undulating tundra at higher elevations. In the foreground, sedge grasses saturated with color created visual interest and added soft lines. Overall, the vegetation was highly diverse in terms of form and color. Vegetation patterns based on hydrology on the slopes added visual interest in terms of texture, form, and color.

General/Other: The geology was quite complex. This created visual interest due to the variety of landforms, textures, and the play of shadows across the slopes.



Inventory Observation Point 1: Walker Lake Outlet



IOP #2: South of the Confluence

Coordinates: N 67 00.720' W 154 22.165'

Physiographic Province: Interior Forested Lowlands and Uplands

Scenic Quality Classification: A

Score: 25

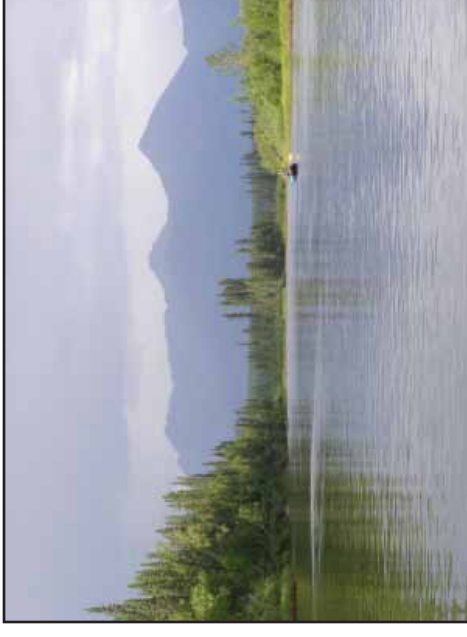
View Type: Partially enclosed, with some panoramic views to the south.

Description: IOP #2 was just south of the confluence of the main stem Kobuk River and the Walker Lake outlet stem.

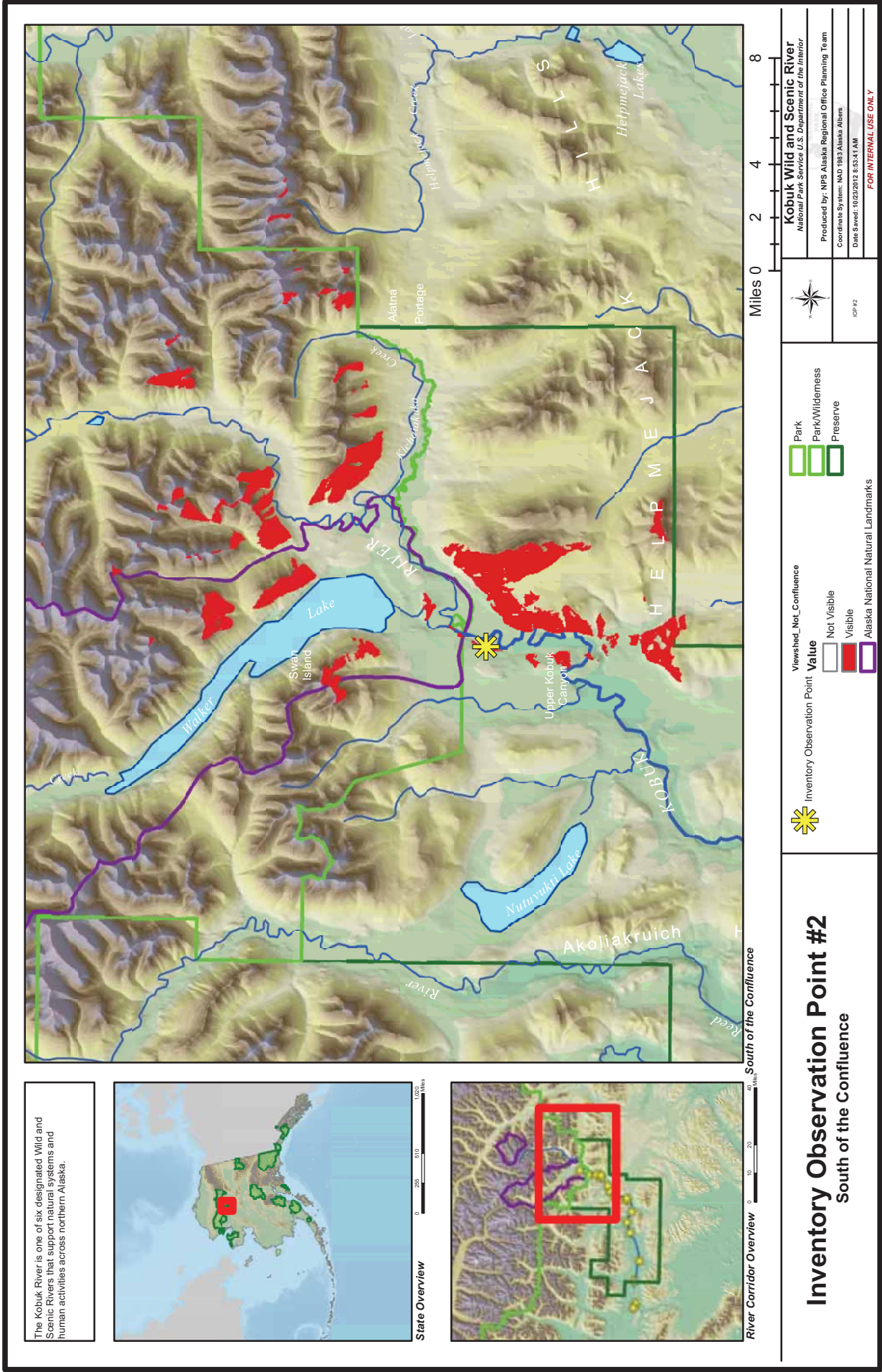
Landform/Water: Sharp, strong peaks to the north (into the Brooks Range). Rolling hills to the east contrasted with smooth features.

Vegetation: Close in were white spruce with strong, distinct forms. Old burns in the surrounding area made patches on the hills. Closer in, there were many riparian plant species, including many flowers, grasses, and red algae.

General: The distant peaks were asymmetrical but very distinct from the middle and fore ground forms. The distant peaks contrasted in color (grays, browns) with the middle and fore grounds (greens).



Inventory Observation Point 2: South of the Confluence



Inventory Observation Point #2
South of the Confluence

Inventory Observation Point #3: Snack Stop

Coordinates:

Physiographic Province: Interior Forested Lowlands and Uplands

Scenic Quality Classification: A

Score: 23

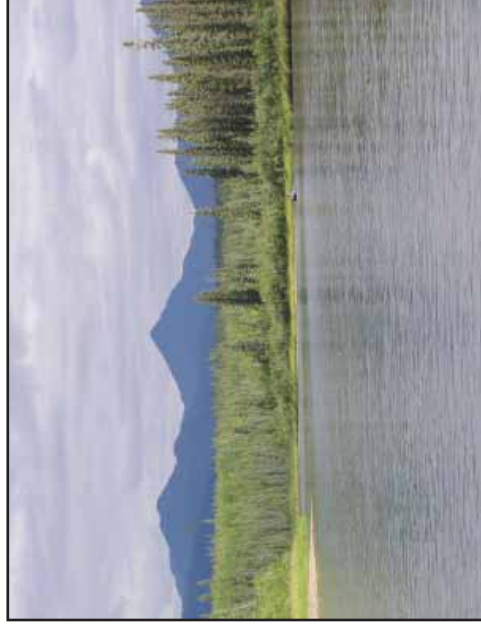
View Type: Panoramic

Description:

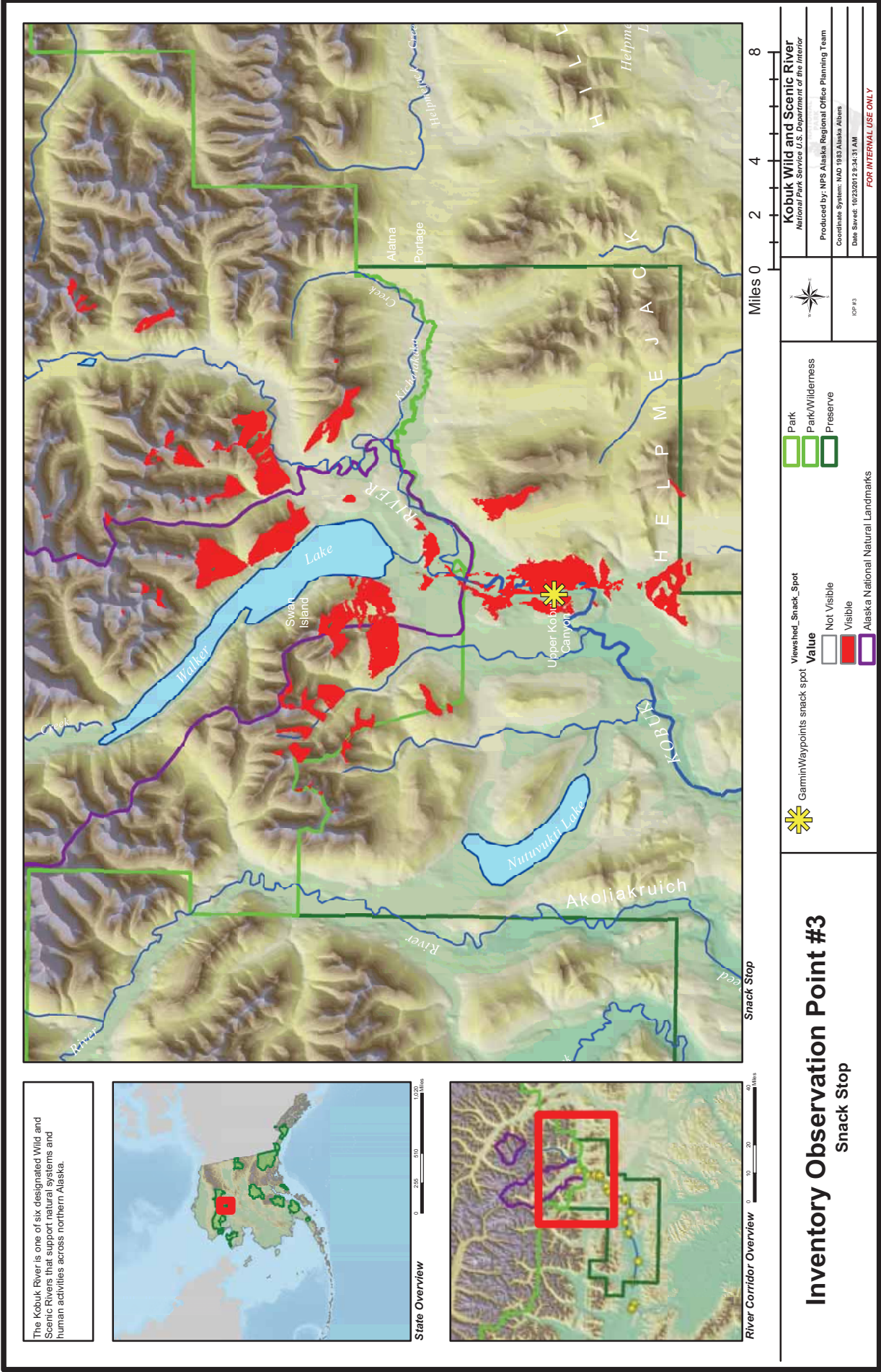
Landform/Water: Great variety, undulating between rolling hills in the middle and fore grounds and sharp peaks in the background. To the east is partial enclosure from nearby hills. The lines are bold, and frequently criss-cross, with others smooth and repeating. Colors are cool, subtle, and harmonious. Lots of contrasting texture, a mix of soft and hard, small and large.

Vegetation: Complex mix of forms and textures. A standard boreal mix with spruce, willows, and grasses along the riverbank. The vegetation up close was very dense, the outer peaks appeared to be tundra or bare.

General/Other: Some uniformity to the geology.



Inventory Observation Point #3: Snack Stop



Inventory Observation Point #4: Nutuvukti Confluence

Coordinates: N 66 55.018' W 154 30.581'

Physiographic Province: Interior Forested Lowlands and Uplands

Scenic Quality Classification: B

Score: 16

View Type: Enclosed

Description:

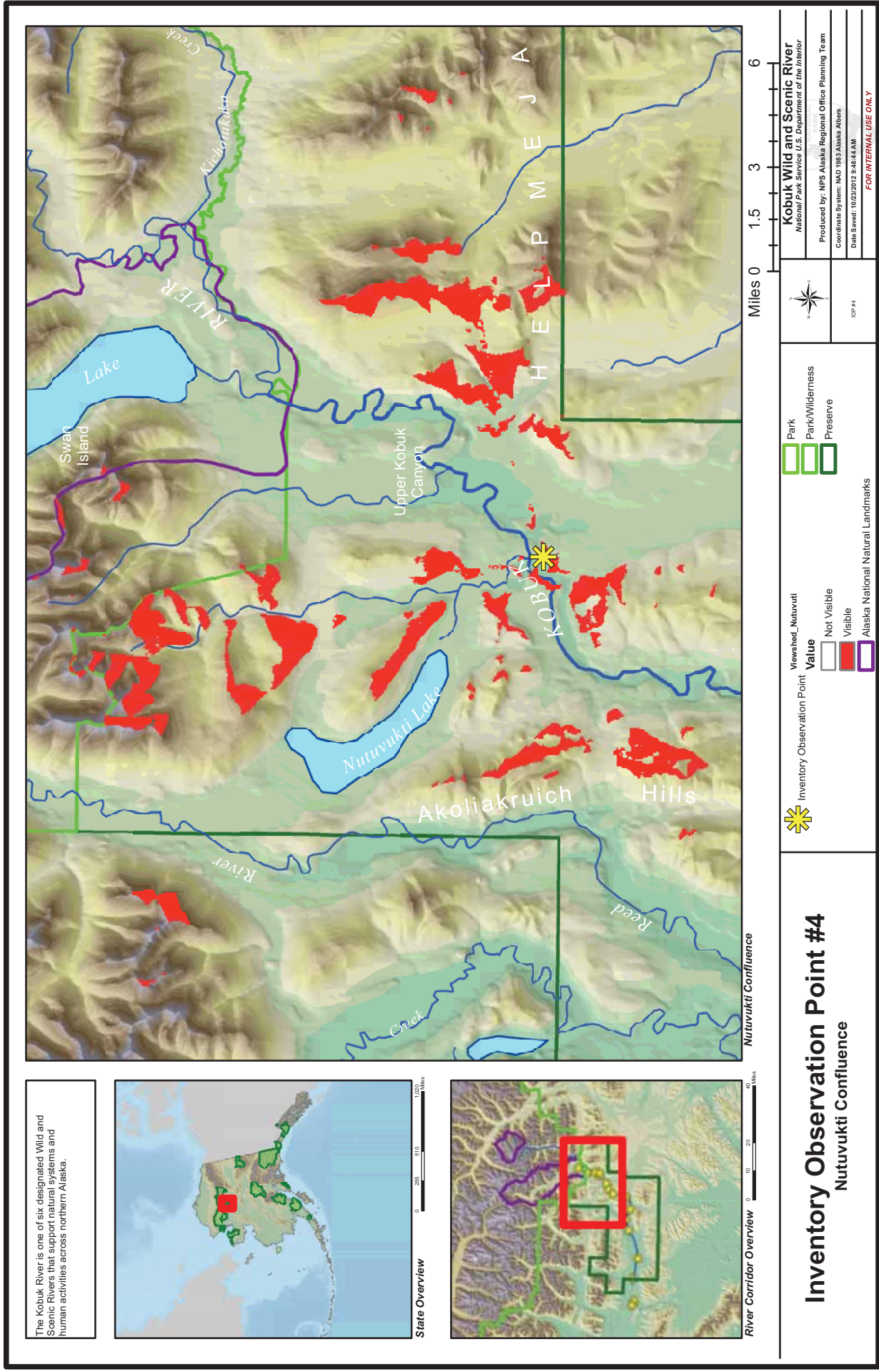
Landform/Water: Smooth, low rolling hills. The river was broad and flat with little definition. There was a low (20') cut bank on the east side of the river that offered some modest diversity. Lines were generally smooth and undulating, and not especially bold. Colors were generally bland greens and quite homogenous.

Vegetation: There was some heavy grass beds along the river banks, and the trees were a mix of spruce and birch. Greens were the primary colors, and little else other than a bit of brown on the hills and the occasional white birch trunk.

General/Other: The cut bank was one feature within the foreground of the viewshed that created visual interest.



Inventory Observation Point #4: Nutuvukti Confluence



Inventory Observation Point #5: Big Island

Coordinates:

Physiographic Province: Interior Forested Lowlands and Uplands

Scenic Quality Classification: B

Score: 14

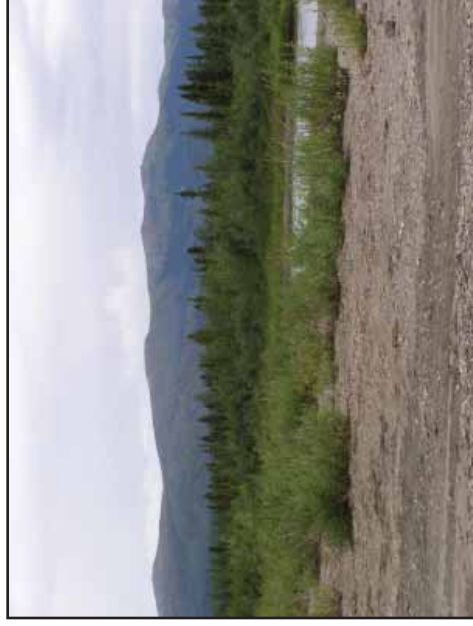
View Type: Enclosed, with some Panoramic views in the background

Description:

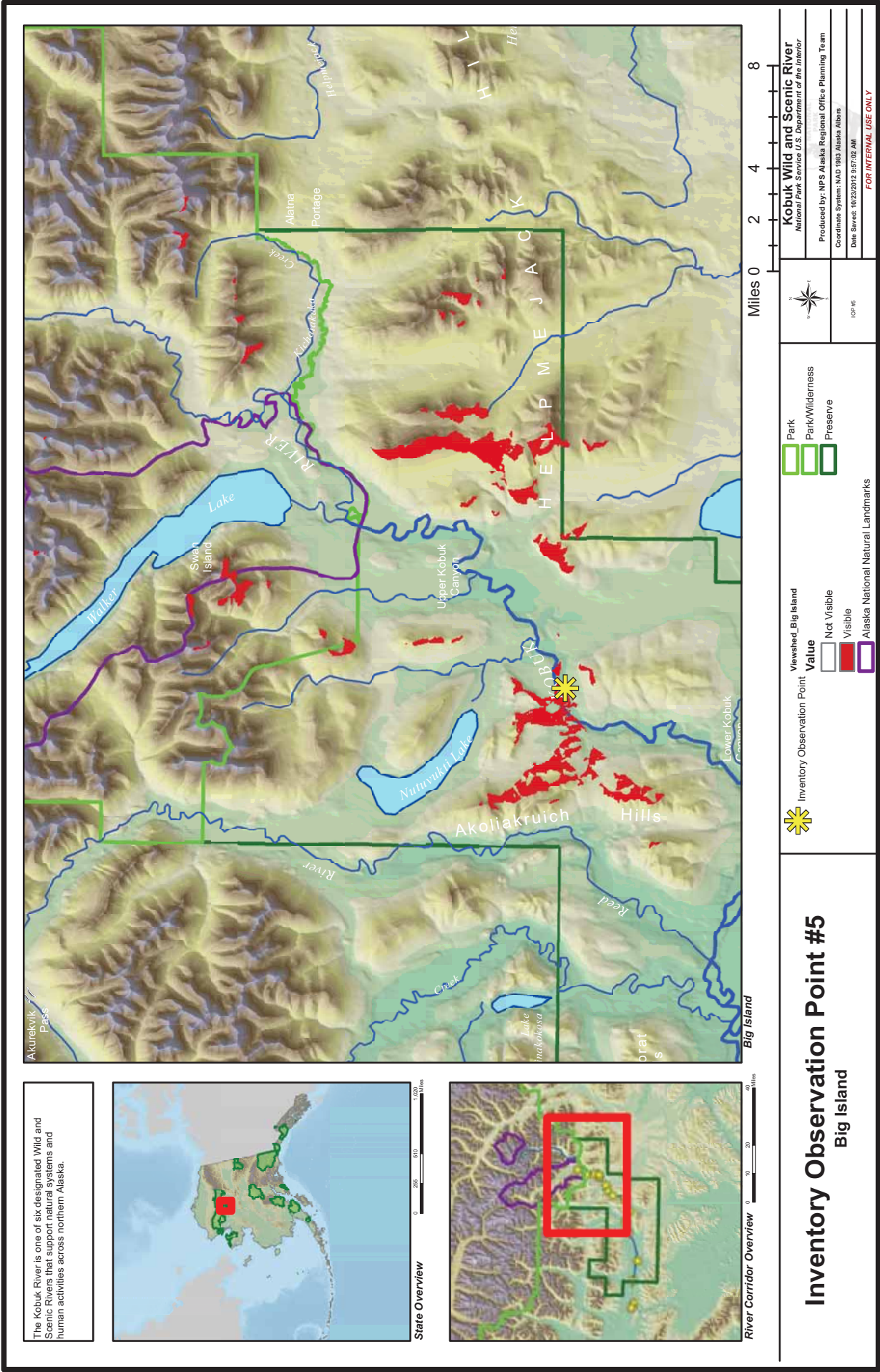
Landform/Water: The foreground is mostly flat, with a few berms and small hills. The forms are very soft. The hills increase in size as the view moves into the middle ground, and then in the far background, the hills of peaks of the Brooks Range are visible.

Vegetation: The vegetation is dominated by black spruce. There is little vertical form in the foreground and line and texture is weak. The vegetative patterns in the middle ground are a bit splotchy, and the texture appears fine but greater than in the background. Dark green is the primary color.

General/Other:



Inventory Observation Point #5: Big Island



Inventory Observation Point #6: Bridge Crossing

Coordinates: N 66 52.936' W 154 38.532'

Physiographic Province: Interior Forested Lowlands and Uplands

Scenic Quality Classification: C

Score: 11

View Type: Enclosed

Description: IOP #6 was selected because it is one of the locations that is under consideration for a bridge crossing for the road to the Ambler Mining District.

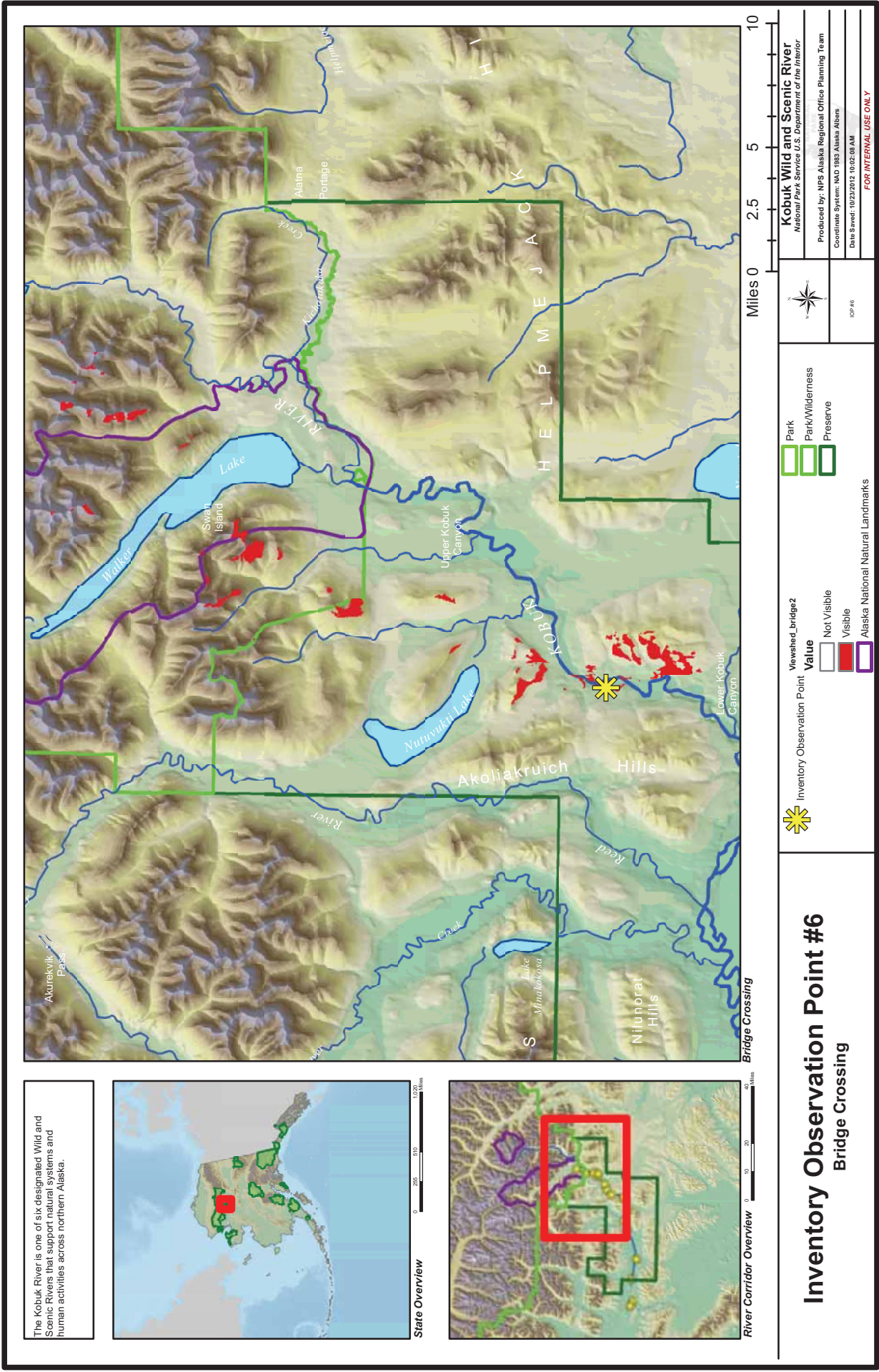
Landform/Water: The viewshed is enclosed by a small, low bluff. Lines are soft and weak. A bit of exposed bank offers a slight change in color from green to tan to the greys of the gravel at the river bank. The water color of the river is darker here.

Vegetation: The vegetation is dominated by black spruce with the occasional white spruce or birch. Very homogenous, continuous, and weak in texture, color, and line.

General/Other:



Inventory Observation Point #6: Bridge Crossing



Inventory Observation Point #7: Nice Camp

Coordinates: N 66 47.670" W 154 50.246'

Physiographic Province: Interior Forested Lowlands and Uplands

Scenic Quality Classification: A

Score: 23

View Type: Enclosed with some panoramic

Description: IOP #6 was selected because it is one of the locations that is under consideration for a bridge crossing for the road to the Ambler Mining District.

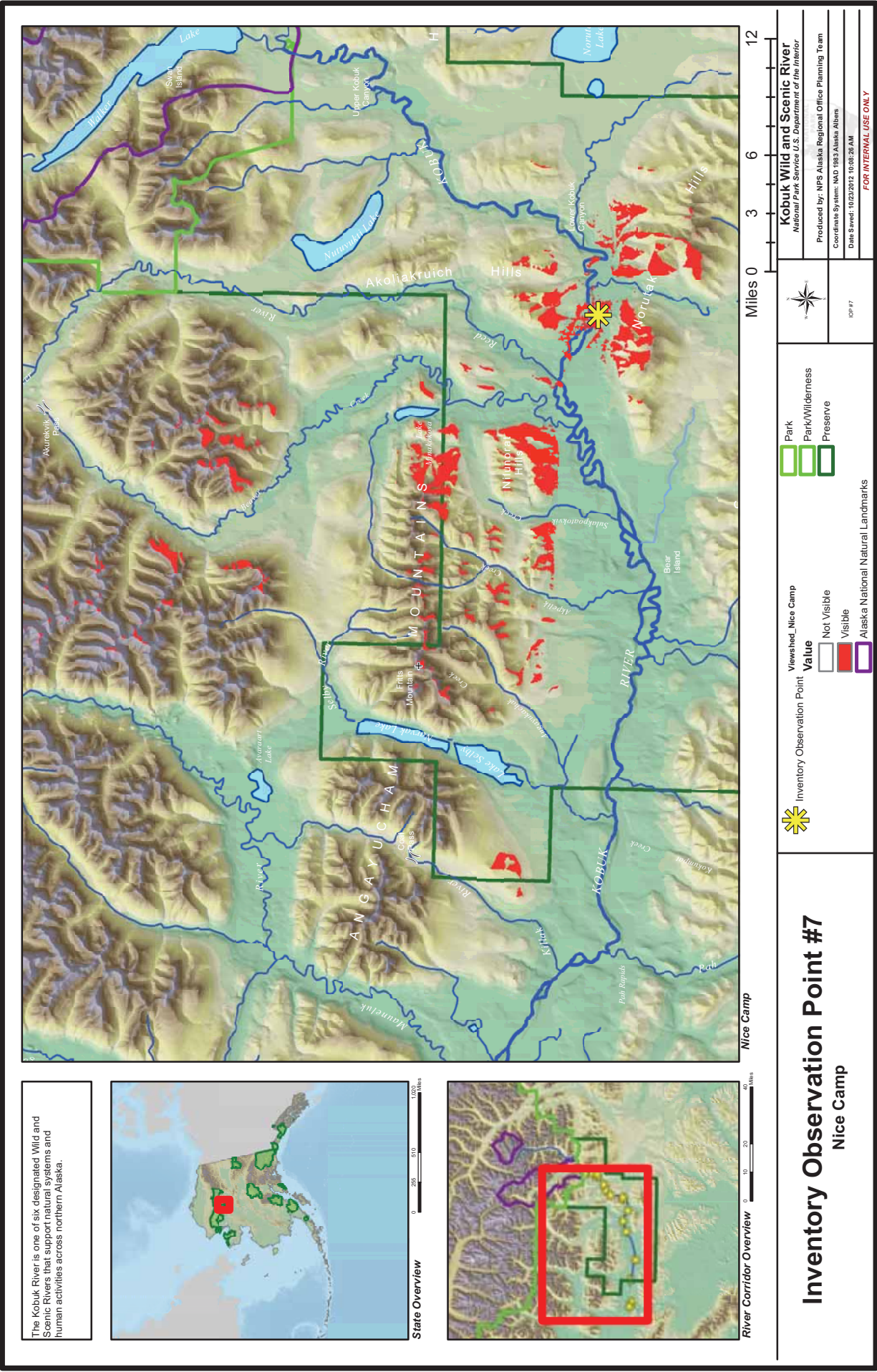
Landform/Water: The river created much of the viewshed's form in the fore and middle grounds. The river was highly braided and created all sorts of small land forms and other elements that created visual interest. The background highlighted framed views of the tall mountains to the north and south of the sight. The background had bold, strong forms and lines with very distinct features that contrasted strongly with the middle and fore grounds. The landforms and gravel beds in the foreground increased the textural value of the viewshed.

Vegetation: There was a great variety of tree species including some tall white spruce and birch. Some areas had stands of alder, and there was lots of sedges and grasses due to the diverse watercourses of this part of the river. The color of the vegetation was equally interesting with a wide hue of greens, flowers in the foreground, and some browns and greys of the tundra on the mountains in the background.

General/Other: The gravels in the foreground of this viewshed were particularly interesting and included quartz.



Inventory Observation Point #7: Nice Camp



Inventory Observation Point #8: Reed River Confluence

Coordinates: N 66 49.032' W 154 58.286'

Physiographic Province: Interior Forested Lowlands and Uplands

Scenic Quality Classification: N/A

Score: N/A

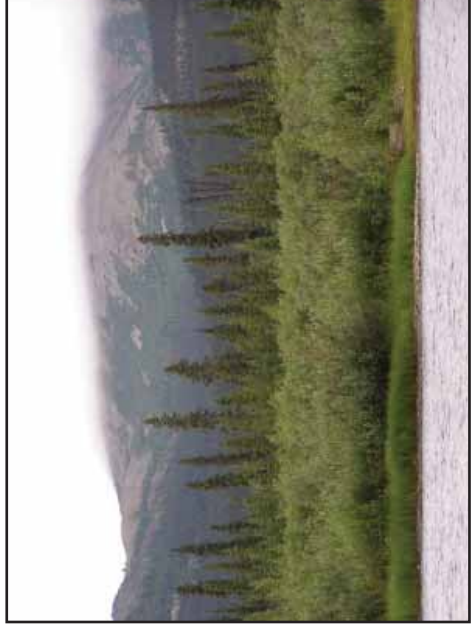
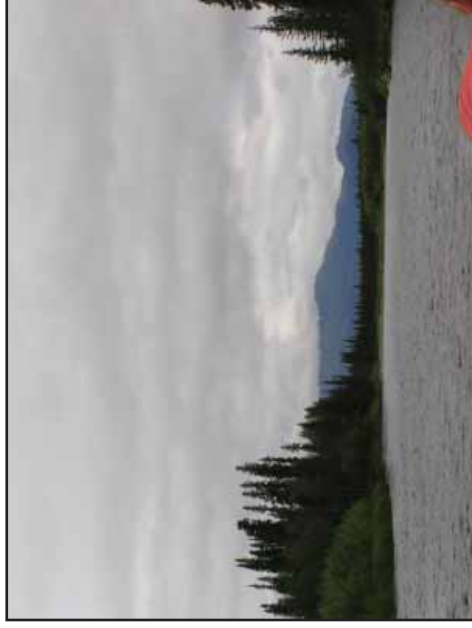
View Type: Panoramic with some mountains in the background

Description: There was a low ceiling, pockets of fog and rain for this IOP. We took additional photos nearby when the clouds broke briefly that shows what the middle and back grounds are like in this area. The scenery of this portion of the river is fairly constant for much of the length, from the outlet of the Lower canyon to the end of the designated corridor.

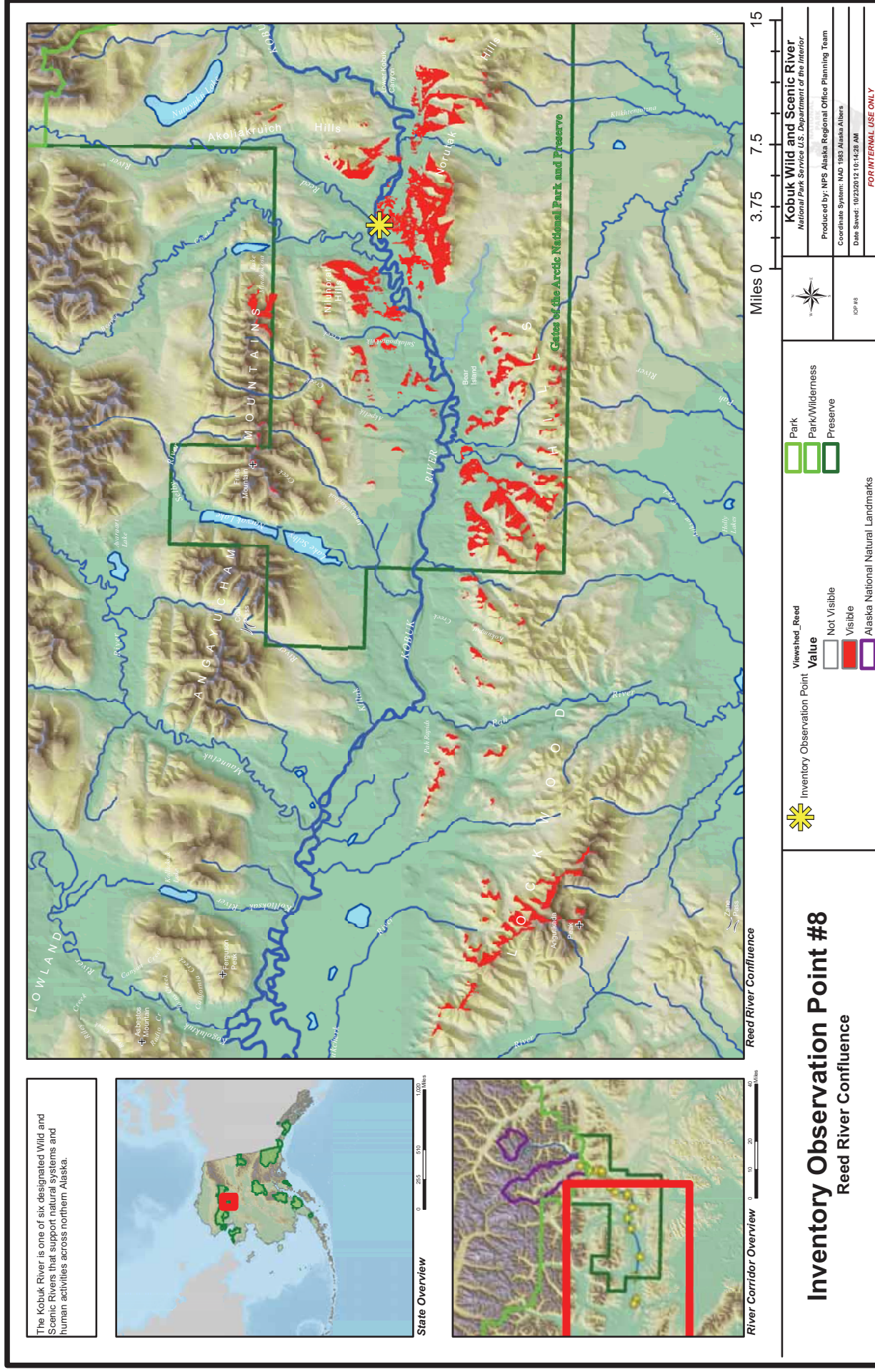
Landform/Water: The foreground was flat and sinuous, the river having lots of braids throughout this area. The lines on the landscape were quite strong, bold, and serpentine due to the morphology created by the various watercourses. The background of the viewshed includes the tall, strong, dramatic peaks typical of the Brooks Range.

Vegetation: Complex mix of forms and textures. A standard boreal mix with spruce, willows, and grasses along the riverbank. The vegetation up close is very dense, the outer peaks appear as tundra or bare.

General/Other: This section is where the river increases in volume and becomes more complex, often with multiple channels and braids.



Inventory Observation Point #8: Reed River Confluence



Inventory Observation Point #9: Beaver Creek Confluence

Coordinates: N 66 48.110" W 155 06.228'

Physiographic Province: Interior Forested Lowlands and Uplands

Scenic Quality Classification: A

Score: 21

View Type: Panoramic with some mountains in the background

Description: This IOP was located a few miles downstream from the Reed River confluence (and IOP 8).

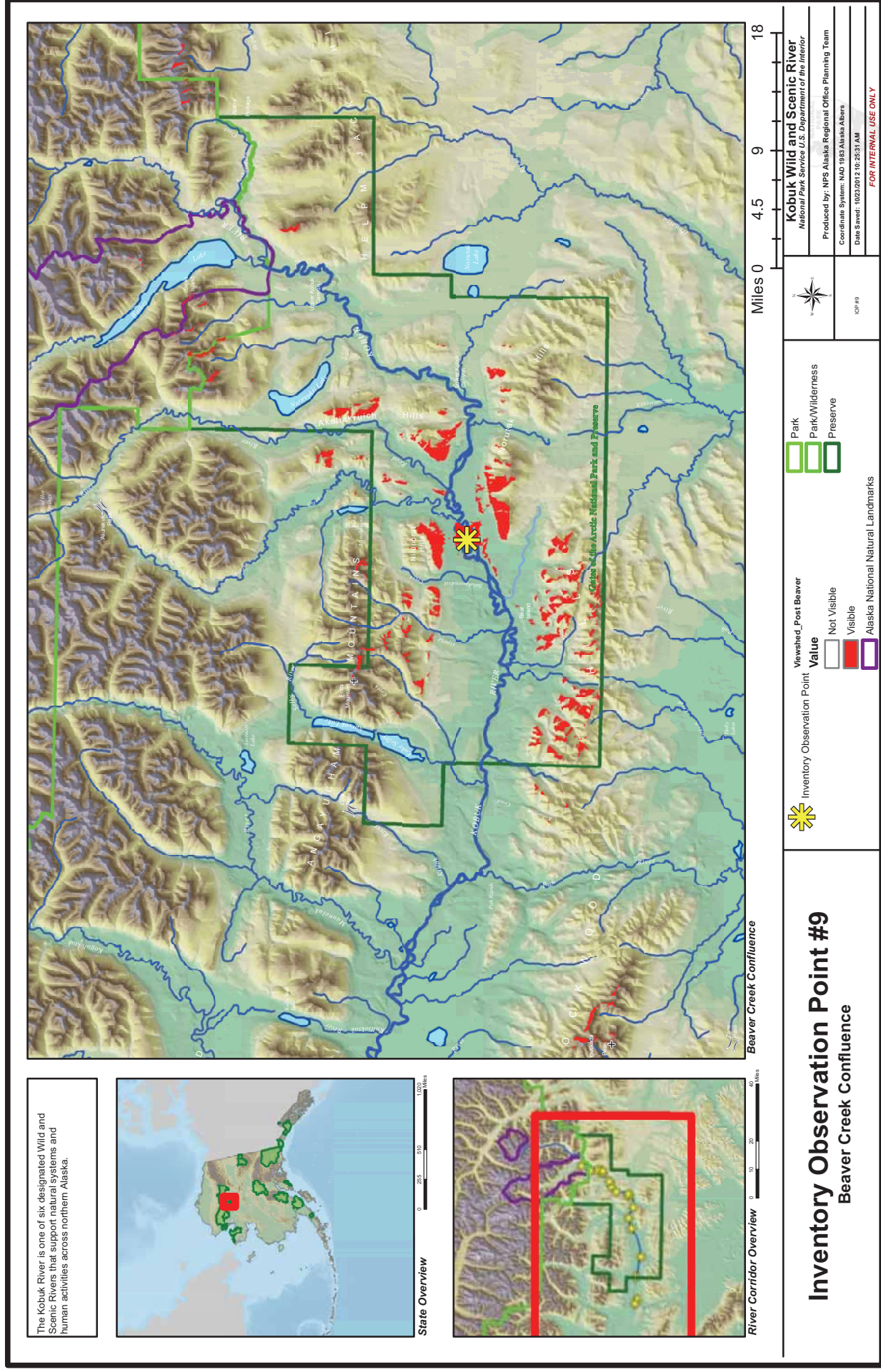
Landform/Water: The foreground was flat and sinuous, the river having lots of braids throughout this area. The lines created by the river were strong, bold, and serpentine. The background of the viewshed included the tall, strong, dramatic peaks typical of the Brooks Range.

Vegetation: A standard boreal mix with spruce, willows, and grasses along the riverbank. The vegetation up close is very dense, the outer peaks appear as tundra or bare.

General/Other: This section is where the river increases in volume and becomes more complex, often with multiple channels and braids.



Inventory Observation Point #9: Beaver Creek Confluence



Inventory Observation Point #10: Last Camp

Coordinates: N 66 44.978" W 155 27.712'

Physiographic Province: Interior Forested Lowlands and Uplands

Scenic Quality Classification: B

Score: 16

View Type: Enclosed

Description: There was fog and some low clouds, but the viewshed opened up periodically during the observation.

Landform/Water: The river was very braided and had multiple channels with gravel deposits and sloughs as well. The fore and middle grounds are mostly flat with few features except for a few hills in the middle ground. When conditions were right, large, striking mountains are visible in the background in three different directions.

Vegetation: Complex mix of forms and textures. A standard boreal mix with spruce, willows, and grasses along the riverbank. The vegetation up close is very dense, the outer peaks in the background appear as tundra or bare.

General/Other:



Inventory Observation Point #10: Last Camp

