

# ALASKA HIGHWAY CORRIDOR

THEMATIC STRATEGY

WHITE PASS  
&  
YUKON ROUTE

WHITEHORSE  
MILE 110

YUKON

ALASKA  
HIGHWAY

CARCROSS

BRITISH

YUKON  
COLUMBIA

LAKE  
BENNETT

BENNETT

YUKON

BRITISH

WHITE PASS

GLACIER TUNNEL MT

SKAGWAY  
MILE 0



## 2.0 ALASKA HIGHWAY CORRIDOR THEMATIC STRATEGY

### 2.1 Introduction

The Alaska Highway stretches 2,395 kilometres (1,523 miles) from Dawson Creek, BC to Delta Junction, AK—although many people consider Fairbanks, AK the ‘end’ of their journey. It traverses some of the most pristine wilderness in North America.

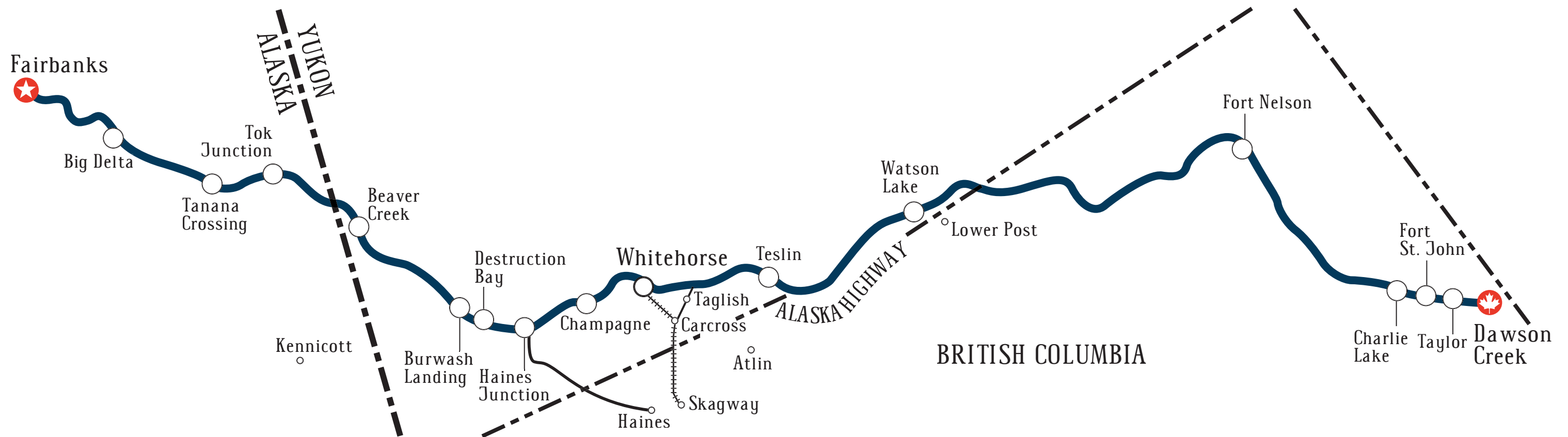
The communities it links have highway stories in common—mainly the story of building the highway and the changes the highway brought—but each community also has its own stories to tell.

The intent of this thematic strategy is to identify the stories that are being told along the highway and propose a preliminary distribution of these stories. This will prevent redundancy and help communities to develop complimentary facilities.

This thematic strategy will then inform the choice and weighting of stories told in Dawson Creek and at the Alaska Highway House.

### 2.2 Audience

Each year, approximately 320,000 visitors travel the Alaska Highway between May and September. The Northern Rockies–Alaska Highway Visitor Research Project (hereafter referred to as the Research Project), completed in January 2005, characterizes these visitors as older, travelling in self-contained vehicles and averaging about 20 nights along the highway.





### 2.2.1 Motivations for Travel

The Research Project conducted 3,276 on-site interviews and collected mail-back surveys from 1,175 visitors. One of the questions asked was: What motivated your decision to make the trip? Visitors indicated the following motivations as important or very important to their decision. These motivations will be considered in determining interpretive experiences along the highway.

- **See wildlife and wild landscapes**  
(92% very important or important)
- **Visit places I've/we've never seen before**  
(87% very important or important)
- **A journey I've/we've heard about and always wanted to make**  
(76% very important or important)
- **Enjoy outdoor activities**  
(71% very important or important)
- **Travel in places where I/we feel safe**  
(69% very important or important)
- **Learn about the history of the Alaska Highway**  
(54% very important or important)
- **Learn about the local way of life by meeting the local people**  
(54% very important or important)
- **Better understand First Nations or aboriginal culture**  
(34% very important or important)



### 2.2.2 Audience Needs

At the first visioning workshop, the group identified five distinct groups of visitors who travel the Alaska Highway corridor and listed their specific needs. These lists of needs, combined with the list of motivations for travel, give us a comprehensive picture of the types of visitors that travel the Alaska Highway. Interpretive experiences along the highway should address these needs and motivations.



### Older Travelling Couples

The Research Project found that 53% of visitors surveyed were 55 years and older (24% were 65 and older) and about 70% of these travelled as a couple. They make up the largest group identified in the study. Specific needs of this group are:

- **Ease of access.** Visitor experiences directed at this group should be easily accessible from an RV and barrier-free, as many in this group may be physically unable to access strenuous trails, stairs, etc.
- **Relevance to their own history.** Some may have been personally involved in building the highway; others may have a relative that was involved.
- **Safe danger.** This group is looking for an odyssey, but with a sense of safety.
- **Shopping.** Many will look for souvenirs of their trip to take home.
- **Animal viewing.** Although this group may not venture out on hiking trails that take them far from the highway, they expect to see wildlife as they travel the highway—and they should not be disappointed.
- **Photographic opportunities.** Visitors expect these along the highway.
- **The companionship of and interaction with local people.** This is a strong motivation for travelling the highway.
- **Education about the area** that will add value to their journey.
- **Entertainment.**



### Recreational

The Research Project found that 71% of those surveyed considered outdoor activities to be a very important or important part of their trip. In the first visioning workshop the group identified two types of outdoor recreationists: casual and specialized.

Casual recreationists require reliable, consolidated information about recreational opportunities and access to trailheads and services.

Specialized recreationists may arrive to join a guided trip or come on their own. In both cases they usually arrive with materials and knowledge, often gathered on the Internet.



### Boomers

The Research Project determined that travellers between the ages of 35 and 54 make up 32% of visitors. Characteristics of this group include:

- **Freedom to choose.** This group is likely to change their plans as they go, depending on what piques their interest.
- More likely to **travel in cars** (as apposed to RVs).
- Make more use of **hotels and B&Bs**.
- **Time constraints.** Many in this group are employed, so their time on the highway may be limited.
- This group appreciates **experiential learning**.



### Families with children

The Research Project indicates that 14% of visitors are travelling with children. This group has specific needs:

- **Something for everyone**, not just the kids.
- **Variety of activities** to choose from.
- **Easy access.** Much like the older travelling couples, this group requires activities that are easily accessible from the highway and not too strenuous.
- **Washrooms** should be close at hand.
- **Safety.** Experiences for this group should be safe for children.
- **Fun with history.** Experiences should be fun for children.
- **Novelty.** Experiences along the highway should be new to this group—unlike anything they have experienced.
- **Food** should be easily accessible.
- **Supplementary materials** to allow parents to teach/guide their children.



### Professionals/Commercial Travellers

Five per cent of respondents indicated that business was the purpose of their trip. Though this audience group is small, it has characteristics that set it apart:

- **Time constraints.** These travellers may have only a few days or hours to dedicate to attractions.
- **Need year-round services.** Many will be travelling the highway outside of peak tourism season.
- **Make repeat visits.** They may visit the region several times and therefore may be looking for new experiences each visit.



## 2.3 Goals & Objectives

In the first visioning workshop the group identified several goals and objectives for the Alaska Highway corridor, building on our discussion of audience groups, motivations and needs:

- **Increase tourism-based economic benefits** for communities along the Alaska Highway.
- Create a **cohesive experience** for visitors travelling the Alaska Highway.
- **Foster cooperation** between communities up the highway in order to link visitor experiences, ensure a balance of stories and tell highway stories at appropriate points.
- Provide visitors with a **context** for their trip up the highway.
- Encourage visitors to spend **more time** and visit **more places**.
- **Meet the needs** of each group travelling the highway.

## 2.4 Opportunities & Challenges

### 2.4.1 Opportunities

There are many existing opportunities for visitors along the Alaska Highway corridor. These opportunities were identified at the visioning workshop, gathered from previous planning documents and noted during subsequent discussions with Tourism Dawson Creek.

- **Memorandum of understanding** signed by 12 communities along the highway who have agreed to “work cooperatively to recognize the Alaska Highway as a Living Museum and to have a say in how the unique aspects of the highway are preserved for future generations.”
- **Physical fabric of the highway.** The highway itself is an interesting ‘site’ with historic bridges, milepost markers, amazing topography etc.
- Visitors have numerous opportunities to **meet local people** along the highway. This is an important motivation for travellers, as outlined in Section 2.2.1.
- The Alaska Highway runs through **First Nations** areas, which have a rich cultural history. This is also an important motivation for visitors.
- **Wildlife/scenery.** The Alaska Highway travels through fantastic, varied wilderness unlike many that visitors have ever seen. This is the top motivation for visitors.
- **A popular route.** About 320,000 visitors already make the journey from May to September each year.

### 2.4.2 Challenges

The challenges of creating a thematic strategy for the Alaska Highway corridor were identified at the visioning workshop, in previous planning documents and during discussions with Tourism Dawson Creek.

- The Alaska Highway is an international roadway and spans a great distance. **Coordination** between the highway’s far-flung communities is a challenge.
- **Process.** Any initiative that goes forward must include input from each community, giving every region a voice.
- **Stories.** Determining what stories are appropriate where, without compromising any community’s freedom to pursue its own goals and ideas, will be a challenge.
- **Funding.** It may be difficult to fund substantial projects along the highway, as most communities have small populations.



## 2.5 Thematic Structure

Why do visitors travel great distances to experience the world’s natural and cultural landmarks? They do not visit the Taj Mahal for the dining or the Serengeti for its accommodation, although both of these are important complements to the experience. They come to be transformed—to be changed. This transformation is the product of the place and its story; a combination of natural or constructed beauty and power, e.g. Grand Canyon, Statue of Liberty, etc., and the stories contained in these places. It is the interaction of our emotions, intellect and actions that constitute the essence of human experience.

A quality experience provides all of these connections in a way that provides the visitor with a special, personal and lasting experience of their own. Expressed from the visitor’s perspective:

***“When a person ‘buys’ an experience, they pay to spend time enjoying a series of memorable events that a site or facility stages to engage them in a personal way.”***

Pine and Gilmore, The Experience Economy

The role of natural and cultural heritage interpretation and tourism is to provide the necessary access to the place, and to tell its stories. In organizing the interpretation of these places it is first necessary to organize the stories in a manner that captures the site’s essence and to develop an organization that links stories to place and to other stories that will be experienced along the way (sometimes called the “chapter approach”).

The first question is: what is the single most important idea to be passed on to visitors? Other related questions include how best to organize the other themes into a structure that is intuitively clear to the visitor. What information should visitors leave with? These questions are answered by the identification of a thematic structure that will guide the storylines—the key elements that drive the actual visitor experience.

Interpretation and tourism complement one another. The key challenge for interpretation is to achieve behavioural objectives by addressing the emotional (or attitudinal) objectives in concert with the learning (or cognitive or intellectual) objectives. It is the emotional connections that are most likely to survive the visit and affect behaviour. It is, of course, essential that both approaches and objectives be addressed in the visitor experience.

Powerful, emotional experiences become part of the brain’s limbic system, our chief interface with the outside world. Cognitive experiences provide the intellectual support for those emotions. And tourism? Its role is to promote, provide and support opportunities for visitor experiences in a manner that produces tourism-based economic benefits to local communities. The final products for these two disciplines are different but supportive:

Interpretation produces visitors who...	Tourism produces visitors who...
Understand the natural and cultural heritage of this place	Extend their visit to enjoy additional experiences
Feel an emotional connection to these values	Return to relive the experience again or to explore additional places and activities
Actively seek out comparable experiences and support the sustainable management of these sites	Become champions for the place and actively encourage others to visit





### Specific Terms:

The **Theme** is the central and most important idea for any site and its interpretation. It is usually expressed as a short phrase (some advocate a complete sentence).

**Subthemes** are used as organizing elements within the overall theme, i.e., just a way to get a handle on what is often a complex story.

**Messages** are simple statements that summarize what must be interpreted to the visitor, and form the basis for objectives, e.g., The highway was built through incredibly difficult terrain for road construction: permafrost, muskeg, mud, rivers, steep hills and passes, flooding, etc.

**Stories** (or topics, or subjects) are the content that forms the body of interpretation programs and media. Understanding the highway's stories is an essential prerequisite to identifying themes. It is a circular process: initially, content determines themes; in development of programs and media, themes determine which content will be used.

### Example of the integration of Themes, Messages, and Stories:

#### **Under the subtheme:**

The Alaska Highway is the road to northern adventure

#### **Message:**

The Alaska Highway has changed a great deal since it was built

#### **Story:**

Road-building in the North

Some sections of the Alaska Highway—for example, the Yukon—are not paved with asphalt but with BST—a different process often used for back roads in the south. This process is cheap and easy to apply but needs to be redone on a regular basis.

The idea came from Ray Magnuson who became a heavy equipment operator for the Department of National Defence at Swift River in 1960. Four years later he joined the Department of Public Works when the Alaska Highway was transferred to that department. He became the road foreman in Teslin and later Haines Junction and, by 1972, was the Eastern Area Superintendent of Highways for YTG. In 1973 he reviewed the cost of paving Yukon's gravel roads and, thinking they were too high, started a test for Bituminous Surface Treatment (BST).

The process was successful in southern Canada but it was thought that permafrost would not allow its use in the north. The first test was a four-mile stretch through Teslin in 1973. He continued on through Watson Lake and north during the next two years. It was hard to convince his superiors that BST would be effective and that there was a need for it in the north. Today, over 2000 kilometres of road in the Yukon is paved with BST.

By 1981, Ray was the Director of Highway Maintenance, a position he held until retirement in December of 1990. During his tenure, the highway system expanded from 4,400 kilometres to 4,900 kilometres. Ray received the BC and Yukon National Transportation Award of Excellence in 1990 for his life time contribution to transportation in the Yukon. (Yukon Transportation Hall of Fame Awards Ceremony & Induction of New Members. June 2, 2005.)

**Non-Interpretive Themes**—The themes discussed above refer to interpretive themes that are for planning and may—or may not—ever be viewed by a visitor. Tourism usually employs another kind of “theming” which places more emphasis on attracting the visitor and catching their attention. Tourism themes are generally short phrases that are exciting and easily remembered.

### 2.5.1 Overall theme for the Alaska Highway

The challenge in determining an overall thematic structure for the highway is to address the reality of a visitor's experience which is: they can only be one place at a time. In order to give meaning to the context in which a visitor experiences the highway, it is crucial that the theme and subthemes work at any location and at any scale. This is also essential for tourism planning in order that the story make sense wherever it is encountered, and it is not repetitive.

This challenge is made somewhat easier by the great diversity of natural and cultural stories along the highway. The metaphor of "highway as river" may address this situation best. Travelling along the "Alaska Highway River" provides beautiful scenery but to really experience the place, we should land here and there along the river and explore the beauty that is hard to see while floating by.

### Theme

***The Alaska Highway connects the northern communities, cultures and natural wonders of two countries.***

The central facts of the Alaska Highway are its great length, its "dual citizenship", and its many natural and cultural stories that literally take 2,395 kilometres (1,523 miles) to tell. Like a river, the highway connects all of these places.

### Subthemes

***The Alaska Highway changed the North forever.***

History has very few examples of single events that changed so large an area so quickly, and so completely. In only eight months in 1942, northern British Columbia, southern Yukon, and southeastern Alaska changed from small, scattered communities with little contact with one another, and with the outside world, to a connected series of towns. Within five years they would acquire relatively easy access to the rest of the world, and each other. These were physical changes in the landscape of their lives; there were also emotional changes.

***The Alaska Highway was built for war.***

Like everything in wartime, the Alaska Highway was built in a hurry. Cost and manpower were little considered; the road was literally bulldozed through the wilderness with lots of 90-degree turns and 25 percent grades. Theoretically it was to follow a line of existing airfields from Edmonton to Fairbanks. In the reality of northern conditions, it followed existing winter roads, old Indian trails and rivers.

***The Alaska Highway is the road to northern adventure.***

Today, the highway is now easy travelling for much of its; asphalt and BST have covered the original corduroy and gravel, and the severe turns and grades have been corrected. But the highway is still an adventure. Along the route are artifacts, structures and other evidence of this heroic feat of engineering. The visitor now passes through and beside some of the most spectacular landscapes in the world including some of the highest mountains in North America and wildlife that has come to epitomize wilderness. Communities dot the route; some have existed since long before the highway—many of these are First Nations settlements; all have stories to tell and services to offer an Alaska Highway adventurer.



**The Alaska Highway changed the North forever.**

**The Alaska Highway was built for war.**



**The Alaska Highway is the road to northern adventure.**



**The Alaska Highway connects the northern communities, cultures and natural wonders of two countries.**

**2.5.2 Possible Interpretive Regions  
for the Alaska Highway Corridor**

The challenge for a corridor storyline is that everyone has the right to tell his or her own story. This preliminary storyline does not intrude on this right in any way. Instead, the goal of the exercise has been to look for logical thematic groupings along the highway that reflect the physical and cultural characteristics. The result is a tentative grouping of stories which are organized into four very broad Interpretive Regions. With the input of the Alaska Highway stakeholders, these regions will doubtless be further divided to more accurately reflect the diversity of stories along the highway:

**Agriculture & Energy**

Dawson Creek to Fort Nelson

**Up and Over the Rockies**

Fort Nelson to Watson Lake

**Rivers & Mountains, Gold & Sacred Places**

Watson Lake to Delta Junction

**Plains & Forests, Rivers & Lakes**

Delta Junction to Fairbanks & Beyond

**Criteria for Determining Interpretive Regions**

In preparing this storyline, the highway was assessed using a variety of criteria:

**Alaska Highway Construction:**

The Alaska Highway construction story (“Built for War”) is an important story for the entire length of the highway from Dawson Creek to Delta Junction, and is a secondary story from Delta Junction to Fairbanks. Because of its scale of story—extending the entire 2,300 kms—the construction story was not used in determining the interpretive regions.

**Services:**

Services for tourists such as food, fuel and accommodation were not used to develop the interpretive regions. These services are available in most highway communities and are, of course, most diverse in the larger centres—particularly Whitehorse and Fairbanks.

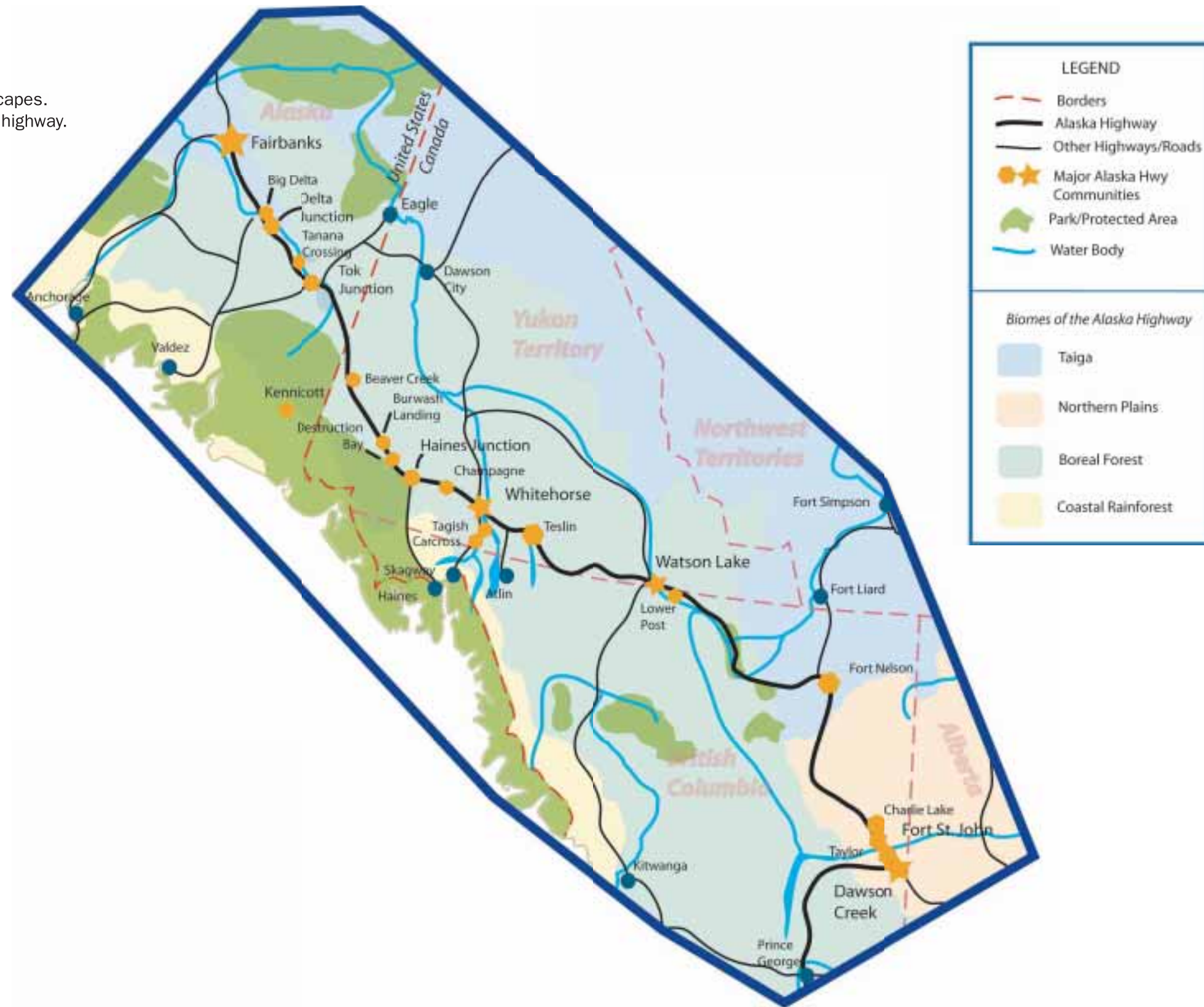
**Biophysical Characteristics:**

One measure of size and diversity is the number of life zones (biomes) that occur along or near the highway. The presence of four major zones reflects the route of the highway from southeast to northwest and the presence of major mountain ranges. Each of these zones is home to different forms of wildlife. Different terms are used to describe these zones in the United States and in Canada. The terms used here are a compromise between technical designation and visitor comprehension.

United States	Canada	This Document
Hudson Plains	Taiga Plains	Taiga
Great Plains	Boreal Plains	Northern Plains
Northwest Forested Mountains	Boreal Cordilera	Boreal Forest
Marine West Coast Forests	Pacific Maritime Forest	Coastal Rainforest

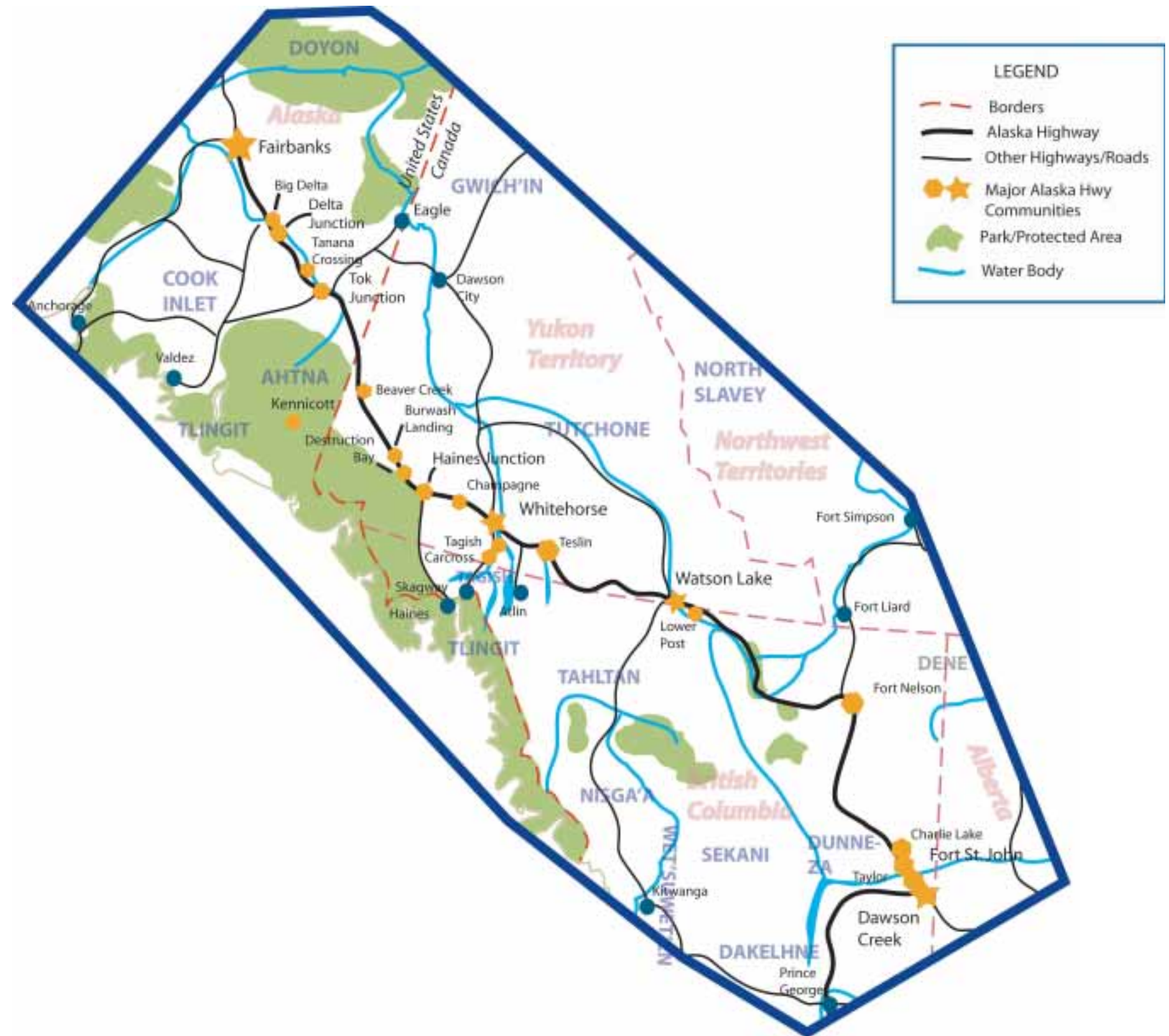
**Biomes of the Alaska Highway:**

The Alaska Highway crosses diverse landscapes. Four major biomes occur along or near the highway.



**First Nations/Native Americans:**

One of the most unique aspects of the highway is the area's continuous use as an aboriginal homeland. A trip up the Alaska Highway may be the first time a visitor encounters an aboriginal person and will almost certainly be the first time for many that they have visited communities where aboriginals are in the majority. This is an experience that surveys suggest the visitor is seeking. And it is available, at regular intervals, all along the highway. Because of the diversity of aboriginal groups and their many interactions with other groups and cultures, this was not used to identify interpretive regions. Its significance has been indicated by a map and its interpretation should be guided by the First Nations groups themselves.

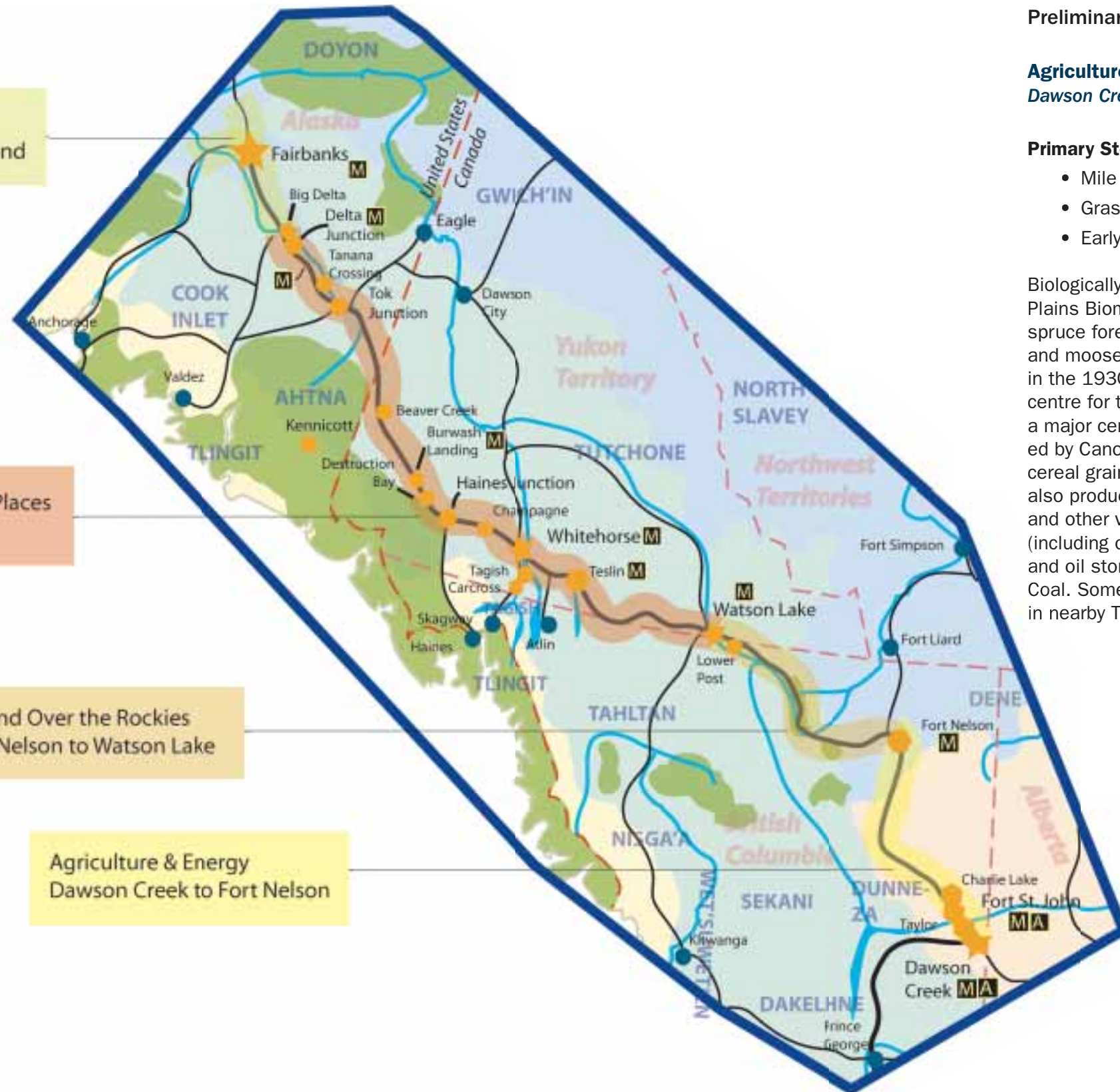




**Attractions:**

For the purpose of this exercise, attractions were defined primarily as those facilities that relate to the corridor themes. They have been divided into three broad categories: Highway Construction, Natural Features and Cultural Features. Sources for these attractions include the Milepost (2005), The Alaska Highway Historic Milepost Guide (1992), the Workshop results (2005) and a search of relevant materials and websites. The map does not distinguish these sites by category; a complete listing—colour-coded by category—is included in the appendix to this document.





Plains & Forests, Rivers and Lakes  
Delta Junction to Fairbanks & Beyond

Rivers & Mountains, Gold & Sacred Places  
Watson Lake to Delta Junction

Up and Over the Rockies  
Fort Nelson to Watson Lake

Agriculture & Energy  
Dawson Creek to Fort Nelson

**Preliminary Interpretive Regions**

**Agriculture & Energy**  
*Dawson Creek to Fort Nelson*

**Primary Stories:**

- Mile 0 and Eastern HQ for highway construction
- Grasslands and Oil
- Early road-building experiments

Biologically, this life zone is the western extent of the Northern Plains Biome. It is dominated by trembling aspen and white spruce forests, and large grasslands. It is also home to bison and moose, natural gas and coal. The Peace River Block developed in the 1930s as a farming community, then later as the economic centre for the Peace Region in the 1940s. Dawson Creek remains a major centre for agriculture and industry. Agriculture is dominated by Canola (those yellow fields), and produces most of BC's cereal grain, as well as fodder, cattle and dairy cattle. The area also produces honey, hogs, eggs and poultry, some potatoes and other vegetables. Industry is centred on resource extraction (including oil and natural gas exploration), pipeline construction and oil storage. It includes major supply centres for Northeast Coal. Some surprises include the discovery of dinosaur bones in nearby Tumbler Ridge.

**Up and Over the Rockies**  
*Fort Nelson to Watson Lake*

**Primary Stories:**

- Crossing the Rockies
- Parks
- Wildlife Viewing

This area starts at the base, or lee, of the Rocky Mountains, where the Northern Plains biome meets the Taiga biome. Taiga supports small trees that may be mixed in with wetlands, grasslands and mountains limiting their range and growth. The area is heavily forested with white spruce, poplar and aspen. Wildlife includes: beaver, wolverine, marten, black bear, caribou, stone sheep and moose (an important food source to locals and First Nations). Its mountains and rivers create a major area for provincial parks including very popular Liard Hotsprings, which is an excellent location for wildlife viewing. Particularly noteworthy is the Muskwa-Kechika Management area that was created in 1997; 4.4 million unroaded hectares preserving critical wildlife habitat while allowing controlled resource extraction (logging and mining) and oil and gas exploration to take place.

The Prophet, Muskwa and Sikanni Chief Rivers merge to form the Ft. Nelson River which flows into the Liard, which flows into the Mackenzie and finally into the Arctic Ocean. First Nations mostly belong to the Dene linguistic group. Forestry is the major industry here but this area is also the only sedimentary area in the province currently producing gas and oil; the largest gas processing plant is in Ft. Nelson.



**Rivers & Mountains, Gold & Sacred Places**  
*Watson Lake to Delta Junction*

**Primary Stories:**

- Wilderness
- Gold Rush
- First Nations
- Other Adventure Highways

This large area is the classic Canadian Boreal Forest and is dominated by white spruce and lodgepole pine forests. However, at regular and sometimes vast intervals, the forests yield to wide river valleys through rolling, windswept mountains, which in turn transition into high, jagged snow-capped peaks and huge ice fields...and the highest mountains in Canada. Just west of Watson Lake is the continental divide where two of the largest watersheds in North America, the Mackenzie and the Yukon Rivers, ultimately empty into the Beaufort Sea (Arctic Ocean) and the Bering Sea (Pacific Ocean) respectively. In this grand landscape are oversized northern ravens, moose, black bear, grizzly, Dall sheep and caribou. Accessible from this portion of the highway are other roads that lead to the Klondike, to the Arctic, to Atlin, BC, and to Skagway on the Pacific Coast. In portions of Kluane National Park & Preserve, the effects of the nearby ocean are apparent. South and west of the park are the first encounters with the Coastal Rainforest.

The First Nations of this area—Tuchone, Tlingit, Dene, Tagish, and Doyon (Alaska)—are prominent, and all were impacted significantly by the creation of the Alaska Highway. Their stories are intertwined with the land, the communities and, ultimately, the highway.

The gold rush was just the start of the quest for mineral resources here. Diamonds and emeralds are the new industries that are growing where copper and other metals once dominated. Forestry is a small but significant industry.



**Plains & Forests, Rivers & Lakes**  
*Delta Junction to Fairbanks & Beyond*

**Primary Stories:**

- Gateway to Alaska
- First Nations
- Distant mountains and points south

This area is truly the introduction to Alaska. The story here starts to leave the Alaska Highway and move on to exploring the vastness of Alaska. Wilderness and wildlife are attractions for many adventurers drawn to the United States' last frontier. The Taiga and Boreal biomes of great rivers, muskeg, grasslands, forests and permafrost create complex ecosystems that migratory and nesting birds depend on for survival.

First Nations groups have a strong presence on the land and in the communities.

The main economic drivers are the military and the gas pipeline. Agriculture is a primary industry in the Delta area. It was originally encouraged in the late 1970s. Barley is the main feed grain grown here; other crops include oats, wheat, grass seed, canola, potatoes and field peas. Some ranching, dairy farming and vegetable farming also takes place here.



### 2.5.3 Implications for Dawson Creek

It is clear that Dawson Creek has a role to play in the interpretation of all three subthemes. This is the result of its key location at the beginning of the highway, its own stories related to the highway, and its diversity of attractions both within the city and at a near distance. Dawson Creek's role may be divided into four categories:

#### Provide orientation

Dawson Creek is admirably suited and strategically located to orient visitors to the Alaska Highway experience. Orientation should include interpretation and practical travel counselling. Services should also include making valuable materials (e.g. maps, books, videos, CD-ROMs, cameras, binoculars, etc.) available for purchase by visitors.

#### Ensure accurate information

Dawson Creek is also the key location for dispensing accurate information—critically important because, by virtue of location, visitors will need to completely trust the advice that they receive here. As a gateway, the community has the opportunity to build a relationship with each visitor that will make them comfortable and excited with what lies ahead. This trust must be rewarded or the entire experience can change from positive to negative. For this reason, Dawson Creek must ensure the accuracy of its information and establish a system of communication with the other communities and government agencies that ensures the visitor receives all time-sensitive information. From a visitor's perspective, finding out that a gas station identified by Dawson Creek staff is no longer open, is breaking your trust.



#### Pre-highway history (rail hub, crossroads)

Dawson Creek has its own fascinating stories to tell as well as the services necessary to encourage longer stays. It is one of the few highway communities that were connected to the world before the highway, even if its connection was never as busy before or after the army arrived. It has long had a history of the end of steel and of its role as crossroads for the north. It was also a key base during the highway construction and endured its own tragedy. And the city is a working city with agriculture and oil resources that has let it survive and even prosper when other communities struggled.

#### Highway history—a context for exploration

From the perspective of the other highway communities along the highway, the best role for Dawson Creek is as an enthusiastic advocate for a diversity of activities along the highway. To achieve this requires more than the cheerful distribution of maps and guidebooks. It is more accurately an experience that the visitor is seeking than it is an activity—a complete sequence of events that provide context and perspective rather than one clearly definable action. In order to define the richness of experiences available, Dawson Creek must use its resources to provide samples of these experiences through a variety of media including exhibits, multimedia and programming. Fortunately, the city has the infrastructure to make this possible. And this is a classic win-win situation; providing high-quality interpretation benefits the other communities and serves as an additional incentive for spending more time in Dawson Creek.



## 2.6 Implementation

Below are the next steps extending from this analysis of the Alaska Highway corridor. Communities should:

- Maintain and strengthen their communication and cooperation initiative
- Coordinate familiarization tours for their travel counselling and interpretive staff to other portions of the highway; if cost is a deterrent, then efforts should be made for individual representatives to visit the other communities and present information
- Develop a strategy for providing a special identity and character for each region and community along the corridor that will register in visitor's minds; this document may be a useful resource in this initiative
- Create a long-term (e.g. 10 year) strategy for addressing tourism on the Alaska Highway so that the highway communities realize tourism-based economic benefits; proactively address the significant changes in audience that the next decade will bring
- Investigate the potential benefits and limitations for scenic byways legislation, or some similar designation, that would provide the highway with an elevated status and profile
- Identify funding or potential sources of funding to support these initiatives

### 2.6.1 National Scenic Byways Criteria

The American National Scenic Byways program has been very successful and could serve as an excellent model or actual process for protecting and promoting the qualities of the Alaska Highway. Included here are the "Intrinsic Qualities" required for consideration of designation by this program. The reader will note that all of these qualities are demonstrably present along the highway.

#### Archaeological

Archaeological Quality involves those characteristics of the scenic byway corridor that are physical evidence of historic or prehistoric human life or activity that are visible and capable of being inventoried and interpreted. The scenic byway corridor's archeological interest, as identified through ruins, artifacts, structural remains, and other physical evidence, have scientific significance that educate the viewer and stir an appreciation for the past.

#### Cultural

Cultural Quality is evidence and expressions of the customs or traditions of a distinct group of people. Cultural features including, but not limited to, crafts, music, dance, rituals, festivals, speech, food, special events, vernacular architecture, etc., are currently practised. The cultural qualities of the corridor could highlight one or more significant communities and/or ethnic traditions.

#### Historic

Historic Quality encompasses legacies of the past that are distinctly associated with physical elements of the landscape, whether natural or man-made, that are of such historic significance that they educate the viewer and stir an appreciation for the past. The historic elements reflect the actions of people and may include buildings, settlement patterns and other examples of human activity. Historic features can be inventoried, mapped, and interpreted. They possess integrity of location, design, setting, material, workmanship, feeling and association.

#### Natural

Natural Quality applies to those features in the visual environment that are in a relatively undisturbed state. These features predate the arrival of human populations and may include geological formations, fossils, landform, water bodies, vegetation, and wildlife. There may be evidence of human activity, but the natural features reveal minimal disturbances.

#### Recreational

Recreational Quality involves outdoor recreational activities directly associated with and dependent upon the natural and cultural elements of the corridor's landscape. The recreational activities provide opportunities for active and passive recreational experiences. They include, but are not limited to, downhill skiing, rafting, boating, fishing, biking and hiking. Driving the road itself may qualify as a pleasurable recreational experience. The recreational activities may be seasonal, but the quality and importance of the recreational activities as seasonal operations must be well recognized.

