

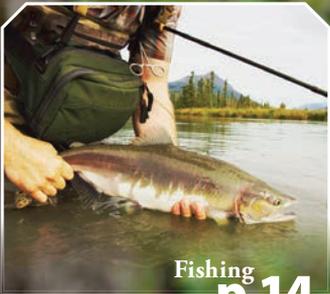
Kenai National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Guide



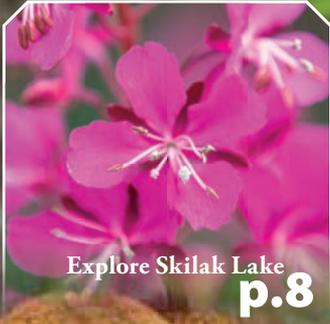
Swan Lake
Fire
Edition



Fire Safety Tips
p.4



Fishing
p.14



Explore Skilak Lake
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Visitors Guide Swan Lake Fire Edition

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Produced and Designed by



**Alaska
Geographic**

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Wild North Photography.

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Welcome to the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge

This special edition of *Refuge Reflections* includes safety information, maps and recommendations for visitors specific to the newly burned area in the years following the Swan Lake Fire of 2019. Many refuge roads and recreation sites were affected in some way by the fire. Be aware that trails were burned, leaving weakened trees that can fall. In addition, deep ash pits that look like solid ground, but will collapse under foot, are present, and exposed roots, holes and other tripping hazards are a real danger. Campgrounds were protected by dedicated firefighters, but access roads may be affected by falling trees, and because of rain and snowmelt, this danger is still active on these roads.

Finally, new opportunities for mushroom foraging exist in the burned area, bringing with it a new set of challenges in a landscape where many hazards still remain even after the flames disappear. Details provided in this visitor guide will help when making plans to visit, camp, hike or drive through the Swan Lake Fire burned area.



Personalized visitor information is available at the Refuge Visitor Center in Soldotna, which provides year-round educational programming, hiking/ski trails and community events. Call or stop by to start planning your adventure on the Kenai.

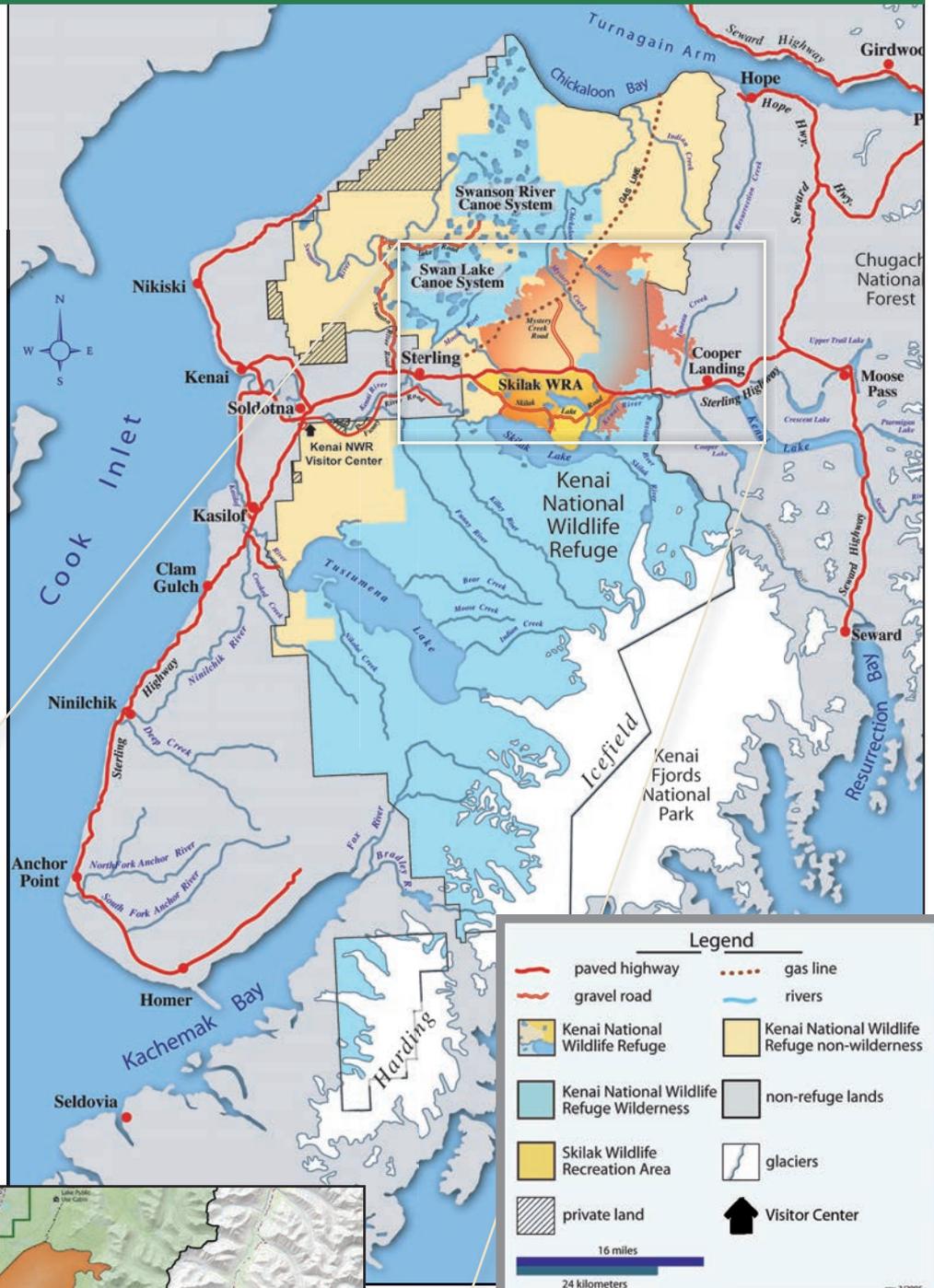
The Kenai Peninsula

2019 Swan Lake Fire Impact

Where is the Burned Area?

The map (below) of the 2019 Swan Lake Fire perimeter does not show the details of its burn scar. The Swan Lake Fire burned with a variety of intensities over the four months it was active on the Kenai Peninsula, burning hot through black spruce stands while dancing lightly around wetlands.

Wildfire in Alaska's forests creates a mosaic of different landscapes. Before visiting the burned area, consider hazards and include alternatives to your plan in case conditions in the "burn area" make it inaccessible.

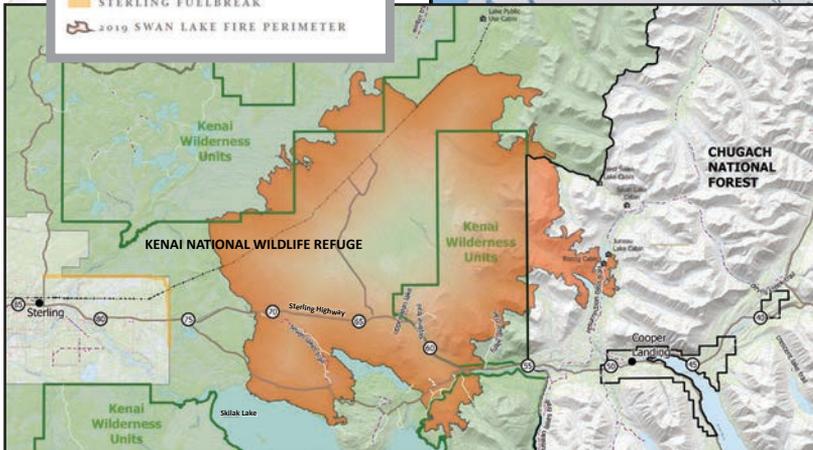


2019 Swan Lake Fire Perimeter

March 1, 2020 167,182 Acres



- 2019 SWAN LAKE FIRE PERIMETER
- TRAILS
- PIPELINE
- MILEPOSTS
- KENAI NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE
- KENAI WILDERNESS UNITS
- CHUGACH NATIONAL FOREST
- STERLING FUELBREAK
- 2019 SWAN LAKE FIRE PERIMETER



What about Wildlife?

Animals in this fire-adapted ecosystem react to smoke just as humans do, moving away and seeking shelter in safe zones like wetlands and lakes. Though some individual animals may not avoid harm, their species' population benefits as a whole from the forest's rebirth after fire.

Traveling In Forested Areas After A Fire

Walking On Dangerous Ground

Hazard Trees

The duff that held tree roots in place has now been burned away leaving trees very unstable.

Duff layer. A layer of moderately to highly decomposed leaves, needles, fine twigs, and other organic material found between the mineral soil surface and litter layer of forest soil.



SAFETY TIPS

- Look up, down and around!
- Be aware of your surroundings at all times.
- Do not walk on trails during windy days.
- Share your hiking plans with friends and family.
- Plan your trip! Avoid areas with hazard trees after storms.

Ash Pits

Ash pits may look like solid ground on the surface, but underneath can be inches to feet deep of smoldering ash.

Ash Pit. A hole in the ground filled with ash, possibly containing hot embers beneath. It may be imperceptible from the ground above, and can remain dangerous long after flames and smoke are no longer visible.



SAFETY TIPS

- Stay on designated trails.
- Keep Pets on trails.
- Do not allow children to play in burned areas.
- Carry a hiking stick to check the ground for ash pits.

Trip Hazards

Fire has burned underneath trails in many areas leaving holes in and alongside of trails. Exposed roots have also been left behind since duff has been burned away.



SAFETY TIPS

- Be aware of trail conditions
- Watch your step!
- Use caution on trails affected by fire

Wildlife Viewing and Safety

Where to Look

Alpine Tundra:

In the mountains above treeline, low growing plants provide food for Dall sheep, caribou, and marmots. Golden eagles hunt small mammals from the air. Brown bears feast on berries in late summer.

Boreal Forest:

Spruce and hardwoods such as birch, aspen, and cottonwood are home to songbirds, spruce grouse, red squirrels, owls, lynx, moose, and black bear.

Wetland:

Bogs, marshes, and muskeg are nesting areas for migratory waterfowl and shorebirds. Caribou and moose eat dwarf birch and willows. Bears can be seen in these areas hunting for moose calves in spring.

Aquatic:

Areas around rivers, lakes, and ponds are home to beaver, muskrat, loons, trumpeter swans, and spawning salmon. Trout and salmon, attract bald eagles, bears, and river otters.



If You Encounter A Moose

- 🐾 **Move away!** Maintain a space of 75 feet or more between yourself and a moose.
- 🐾 **Watch for body language.** If the moose lowers its head and ears, and the hair on its back and neck stands up, back off.
- 🐾 **If a moose charges, retreat behind a large tree or rock.** Most moose charges are bluffs and getting behind something solid offers important protection from their sharp, powerful hooves.
- 🐾 Remember, keeping your distance from moose is the best way to avoid a negative encounter.

Traveling in Bear Country

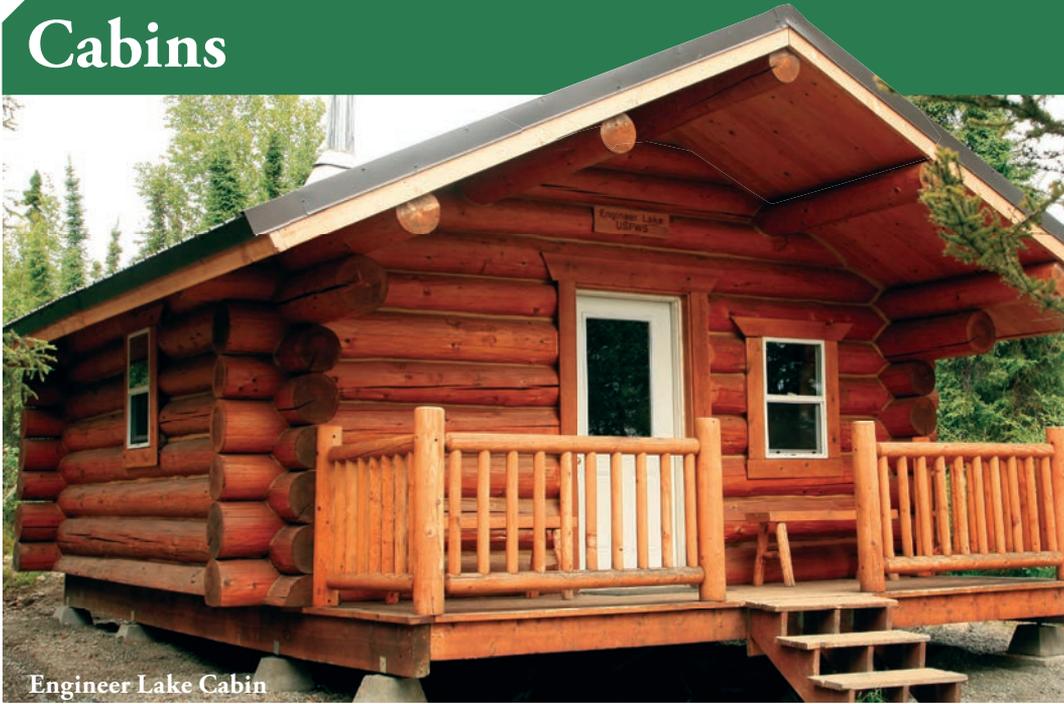
- 🐾 Consider carrying accessible bear spray and be prepared to use it.
- 🐾 Black and brown bears are found throughout the refuge. Be alert and use your senses to evaluate fresh bear sign such as tracks, scat, claw marks, and strong scents.
- 🐾 Make noise to avoid surprising a bear. Be especially careful along noisy streams, in thick brush, and where visibility is poor.
- 🐾 If you see a bear—stay calm. If the bear does not notice you,

quietly leave the area from the same direction you arrived. Keep your eyes on the bear.

- 🐾 If a bear does notice you, prepare your deterrent, face the bear, wave your arms, and talk to it calmly. Try to appear larger by standing close to your group.
- 🐾 If a bear approaches you, stand still. Do not run!
- 🐾 If a bear attacks, fall to the ground and play dead. Lie flat on your stomach, with your hands behind your head.
Keep your pack on.



Cabins



Engineer Lake Cabin

Cabins for your use

There are 16 public use cabins located in the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge. Getting there can be a thrilling adventure in itself, as most require the use of boats, aircraft, hiking, or skiing.

CABINS: Have bunk beds, wood heating stove, table, benches, and an outhouse. Some cabins on front country lakes are equipped with row boats for recreation during summer months.

BRING: Sleeping bags and pads, cook stove and gear, water purification, first aid, extra food, garbage bags and toilet paper.

FIREWOOD: Bring dry kindling and prepared firewood. You may collect dead and down wood, but availability may be limited.

PACK OUT: All trash and secure food, garbage and supplies from bears.

SLEEPS:

2-4, depending on cabin size

STAY LIMIT:

7 nights

COST:

\$35-\$45 per night, plus booking fee

2 cabins - Trapper Joe & Emma Lake are first-come, first-serve & no fee

RESERVATIONS:

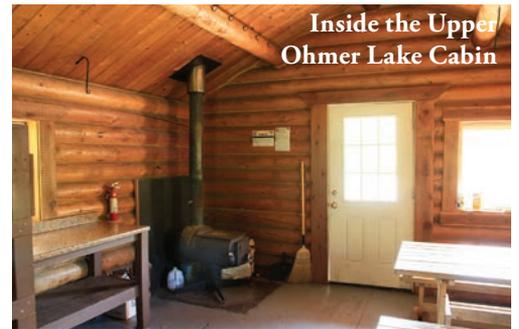
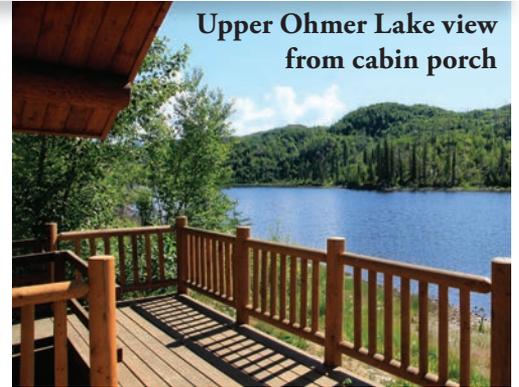
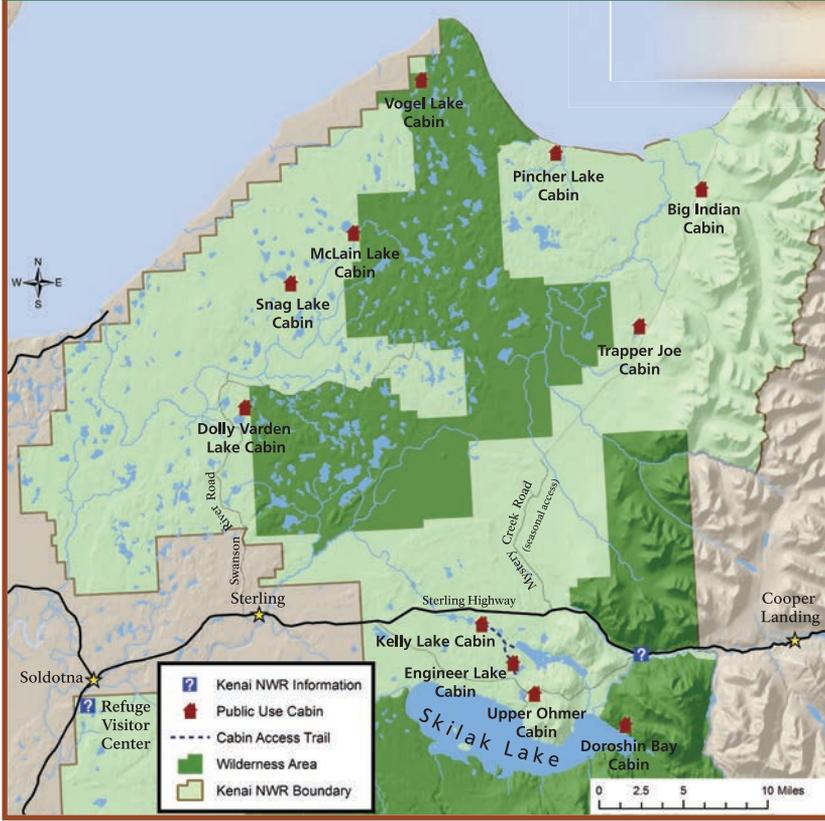
Call 877-444-6777 or Search for *Kenai National Wildlife Refuge Cabins* at www.recreation.gov



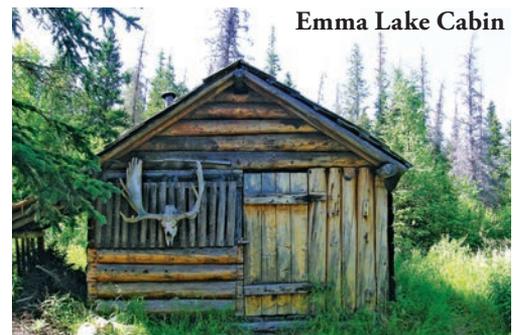
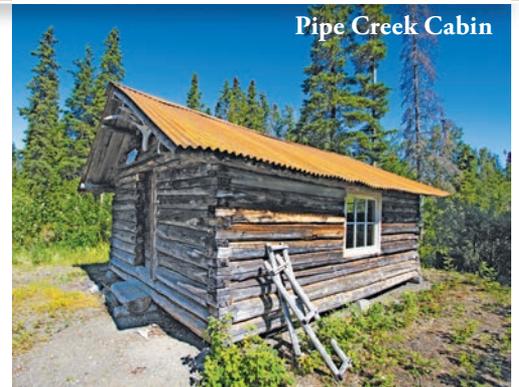
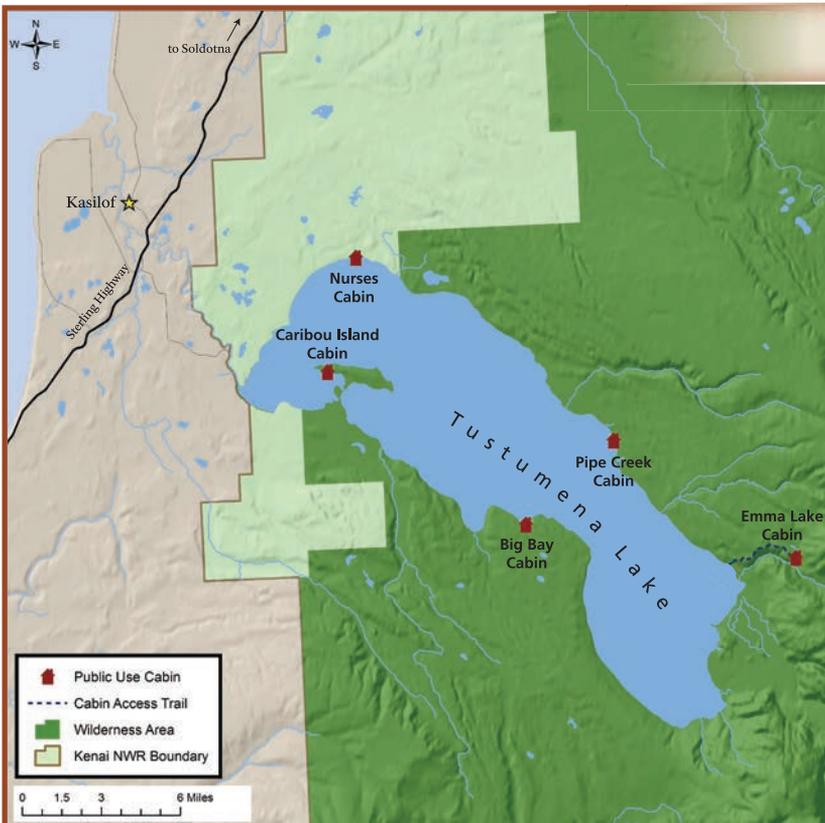
Trapper Joe Cabin

16 Cabins For Reservation

North Refuge Cabins



South Refuge Cabins



Skilak Wildlife Recreation Area



Legend

- | | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| paved highway | gate |
| gravel road | rivers |
| refuge trail | 1 mile / 1.6 km |
| boat launch | trailhead |
| parking | restroom |
| public cabin | campground |
| Skilak Wildlife Recreation Area | Kenai National Wildlife Refuge Wilderness |
| Kenai National Wildlife Refuge | Chugach National Forest |

KENAI WILDERNESS (MYSTERY HILLS UNIT)

CHUGACH
NATIONAL
FOREST



Popular Day Hikes

Difficulty	Trail	Length (Roundtrip)	Hiking Time (Roundtrip)	Location
Easy to Moderate	Burney's Trail	1.2 miles	1 hour	Hidden Lake Campground
	Egumen Lake	0.6 miles	45 min	Sterling Hwy, mile 70.4
	Hidden Creek	2.6 miles	2 hours	Skilak Lake Rd, mile 4.6
	Lower Kenai River	4.6 miles	2-4 hours	Skilak Lake Rd, mile 2.3
	Seven Lakes	8.8 miles	4-6 hours	Skilak Lake Rd, mile 9.4
	Upper Kenai River	5.6 miles	3-5 hours	Skilak Lake Rd, mile .6
	Marsh Lake	6.0 miles	2 hours	Skilak Lake Rd, mile 16.6
Moderate	Bear Mountain	1.6 miles	2 hours	Skilak Lake Rd, mile 6.0
	Hideout Trail	1.5 miles	2 hours	Skilak Lake Rd, mile 1.9
	Skilak Lookout	4.0 miles	3-4 hours	Skilak Lake Rd, mile 5.4
Strenuous	Fuller Lakes	5.8 miles	4-6 hours	Sterling Hwy, mile 57
	Vista Trail	3.0 miles	2-3 hours	Upper Skilak Campground
Very Strenuous	Skyline	2.0 miles	3-5 hours	Sterling Hwy, mile 61

Skilak Wildlife Recreation Area

Fire Affected Areas

Fire Affected Areas

Mile East to west	Interest Point	Comments
 0.1	Jim's Landing	View bald eagles in tall cottonwoods on the south shore of the Kenai River. Busy boat ramp for drift boat and raft trips. Last boat launch "take-out" before Skilak Lake.
 0.6	Kenai River Trail (East)	Hike in 1/2 mile for a scenic view of the Kenai River Canyon.
 1.9	Hideout Trail	This 1.5 mile roundtrip hike offers spectacular views of the Kenai River and Skilak Lake.
 2.3	Kenai River Trail (West)	Hike in to see regrowth from the 1991 Pothole Lake Fire. Good area for viewing moose.
3.6	Hidden Lake Campground	Largest and most developed refuge campground. For a 1.2 mile roundtrip scenic hike, take Burney's Trail across from site #7, Skyview Campground Loop. Park in the amphitheater lot. Nice picnic area by lake boat ramp.
4.6	Hidden Creek Trail	Origin of the 1996 Hidden Creek Fire which burned 5,200 acres. Nice cobble beach for picnicking at the end of the trail by Skilak Lake (3 miles roundtrip; lower section of the trail may be wet).
5.1	Hidden Creek Overlook	Outstanding view of Hidden Creek Flats, Kenai River, Skilak Lake, and the glacial outwash area of the Skilak Glacier.
5.4	Skilak Lookout Trail	Hike through the heart of the forest regenerated after the 1996 Hidden Creek Fire. From the alpine zone at the end of the trail, look down to Skilak Lake for a view of gull and cormorant rookeries on the lake's rocky islands (4 miles roundtrip).
6.0	Bear Mountain Trail	Gains elevation quickly for a scenic view of Skilak Lake at trail's end (2 miles roundtrip).
 8.4	Upper Skilak Campground	Excellent picnic site with views of Skilak Lake and the Kenai Mountains. Campground with vehicle sites and walk-in tent sites. Boat launch for Skilak Lake and Vista Trail (3 miles roundtrip).
 8.5	Lower Ohmer Lake Campground	Small developed campground with vehicle and tent sites. Nice canoeing and fishing for rainbow trout. Look for moose, loons, and beaver.
 9.3	Engineer Lake Overlook	Scenic view of Engineer Lake and west end of Hidden Lake.
 9.4	Engineer Lake Campground	Small undeveloped campground area and trailhead for Seven Lakes Trail (8.8 miles roundtrip). Nice lake for canoeing. Access to Engineer Lake Public Use Cabin.
 13.6	Lower Skilak Campground	Moderate-sized campground with 14 primitive sites. Popular boat launch for Skilak Lake and Kenai River fishing activities. Overflow parking lots available for boat trailers.
 16.6	Marsh Lake Trail	Once a fuel break from the 2016 Card Street Fire, this trail offers a unique view of surrounding mountains that includes a large man-made clearing. Good for wildlife viewing. Trail ends at Marsh Lake. (6 miles round trip)

Camping

Roadside Campgrounds

Kenai National Wildlife Refuge has a variety of roadside campgrounds. All campsites are on a first-come, first-serve basis. There is no reservation system for refuge campgrounds. Federal Interagency Senior and Access Passes reduce camping fees by 50% in refuge campgrounds.

Requirements: Camping may not exceed 14 days in a 30-day period anywhere on the refuge. Stay limits are two days at the Russian River Access Area or seven consecutive days at Hidden Lake Campground.

Fires in developed campgrounds are allowed but restricted to grates, barbeques, or stoves. Campers may cut

firewood, but only dead or down wood may be collected. Attend fires at all times. Completely put out fires before you leave.

Pets must be on a leash no longer than nine feet. Owners must be in control of pets at all times and must clean up pet waste.



The burned area, found just outside campsites in some cases, can be very dangerous for free roaming dogs.

Backcountry Camping

Backcountry camping is permitted 1/4-mile away from the Sterling Highway and Skilak Lake Road. Please practice *Leave No Trace* ethics.

Skilak Wildlife Recreation Area Camping (see map on pages 8-9)

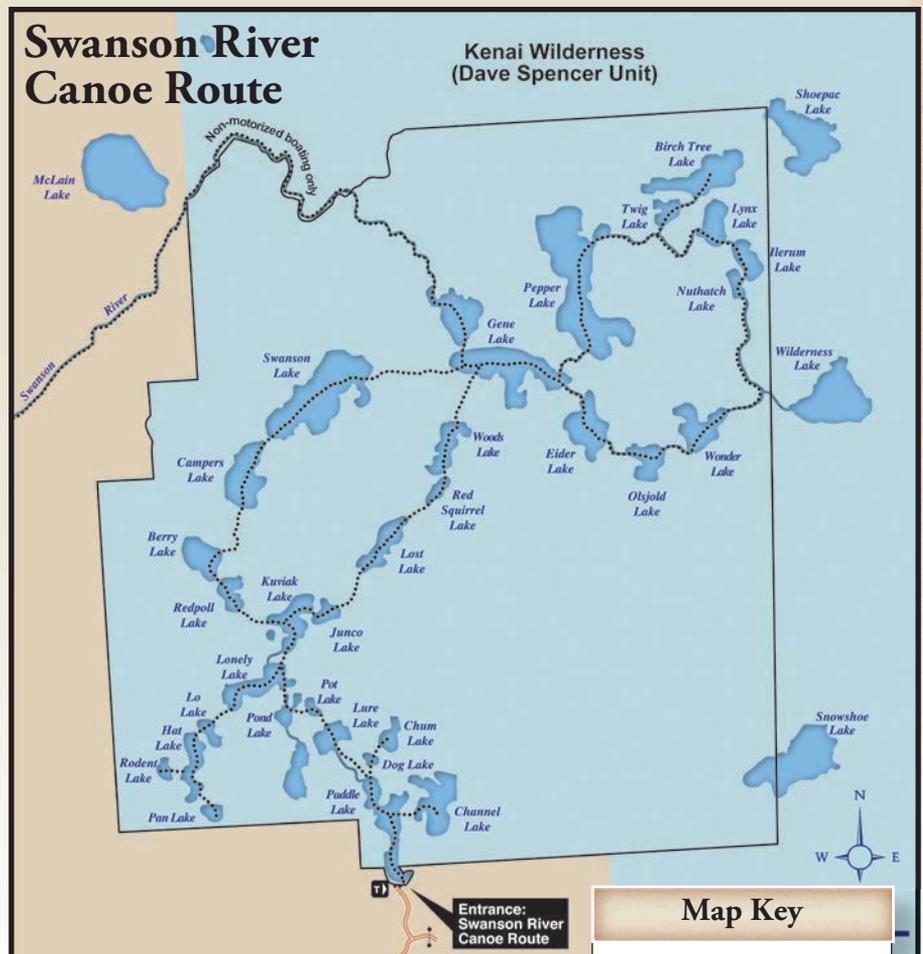
Campgrounds	Number of Units	Toilets	Boat Launch	Nightly Fee
Engineer Lake	4	✓	✓	Free
Hidden Lake	44	✓	✓	\$10
Kelly Lake	3	✓	✓	Free
Lower Ohmer Lake	4	✓	Canoe	Free
Lower Skilak Lake	14	✓	✓	Free
Petersen Lake	3	✓	✓	Free
Upper Skilak Lake	25	✓	✓	\$5-\$10
Watson Lake	3	✓	✓	Free



Canoeing in the Refuge

What To Expect

- Lakes typically break up in mid-May and remain open until mid-October. Lake waters are cold (50-60 degrees F).
- Portages range from several hundred yards to a mile or more. Travel light and use a good canoe yoke. Realize you hike as much as you paddle on the canoe routes. Carry an extra paddle to ensure safety.
- Biting insects are often present on portages and at campsites. Bring repellent and head nets.
- Narrow rivers, like Swanson and Moose, require paddlers to maneuver tight oxbows and to avoid rocks and brush. These rivers require intermediate level canoeing skills.
- Campsites are not designated. To reduce impact, choose sites that have been previously developed.



Canoe System Regulations

- Canoeists must register at the entrance where they embark.
- Group size is limited to 15 people. Smaller groups of 2 to 8 are recommended to reduce impact.
- State boating and life jacket regulations apply.
- No motorized watercraft.
- Wheeled vehicles such as canoe carts and mountain bikes are not allowed in wilderness areas.
- Power equipment, such as electric boat motors, generators and chain saws, is not allowed in designated wilderness areas.
- Fishing and hunting in season are permitted.
- Fireworks are prohibited.

Map Key

- canoe trail (non-motorized, year-round)
- rivers
- paved highway
- gravel road
- gate
- T trailhead
- boat launch
- ▲ campground
- Kenai National Wildlife Refuge Wilderness
- Kenai National Wildlife Refuge
- Skilak Wildlife Recreation Area
- private land
- non-refuge lands

Fishing and Hunting

Getting Started

Fishing

Fishing on the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge is a great angling challenge as each body of water has its own unique fish ecology and regulations.

Obtain a current copy of the **Sport Fishing Regulations Summary for Southcentral Alaska** and keep it handy while fishing. The key to using this booklet is to first locate where you want to fish, and then follow the regulations that apply to each specific area.

Alaska residents ages 18 and older and nonresidents ages 16 and older must purchase a valid sport fishing license. These are available at local sporting goods and grocery stores. They can also be purchased online at www.adfg.state.ak.us/license

If you have detailed questions on fishing regulations, please contact the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) office in Soldotna at **907-262-9368**.

For information on the status of fish concentrations and emergency closures use the ADF&G Soldotna Fishery Hotline (updated weekly) at **907-262-2737**.

Fishing Away From the Crowds

Good areas for quiet fishing near the road system are found in small lakes such as Lower Ohmer, Watson, Kelly, Petersen, Forest, Dolly Varden, Rainbow, Paddle, and many areas of the Swan Lake and Swanson River canoe systems. Fishing from a canoe or small inflatable boat is highly recommended to successfully fish for rainbow trout in these waters.

One of the few areas to fish for grayling is Lower Fuller Lake, a steep 1.5-mile hike from mile 57 of the Sterling Highway.



Hunting

Hunting is an important wildlife management tool that we recognize as a healthy, traditional, outdoor pastime, deeply rooted in America's heritage. Hunting can instill a unique understanding and appreciation of wildlife, their behavior, and their habitat needs.

As practiced on refuges, hunting, trapping, and fishing do not pose a threat to wildlife populations and, in some instances, are necessary for sound wildlife management. Refer to both the current State of Alaska and refuge-specific hunting regulations when planning your hunt.

Much of the refuge's two million acres is open to hunting. Areas on the refuge that are closed to hunting and trapping include areas around our administrative, visitor center, and educational facilities; hiking trails on Ski

Hill Road; and the Moose Research Center on Swan Lake Road. Discharge of firearms is not permitted within ¼ mile of all refuge facilities, including trailheads, parking lots, cabins, campgrounds, roads, waysides, and buildings.

Hunting in the **Skilak Wildlife Recreation Area** has its own set of rules and regulations. For current guidance, consult the refuge website at <http://kenai.fws.gov> or contact refuge headquarters for more information at **907-262-7021**.

Fishing Etiquette in Bear Country

- If a bear approaches you while you have a fish on the line, cut the line and leave the area.
- Fish remains attract bears. Cut fish carcasses into small pieces and toss into deep, fast-moving water. Do not put fish waste in dumpsters or on shore.
- Carry fish out in sealed plastic bags to decrease odors that could attract bears to paths and trails.
- Store all food, bait, line and tackle, fishy clothes, and garbage in bear-resistant containers in your vehicle.
- Avoid fishing during times of low visibility (dawn, dusk, and at night) to prevent bear encounters.
- Always keep your dog on a leash and under control to prevent negative bear encounters.
- Carry accessible bear spray and be prepared to use it.



Photo by Fabrice Simon

Stay Connected

As the official nonprofit education partner of the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge, Alaska Geographic connects people with Alaska's magnificent wildlands through the creation and delivery of exceptional educational products and programs. Alaska Geographic supports youth camps and expeditions, mentorship, stewardship projects, and adult field courses. Together with public land partners, Alaska Geographic is dedicated to sharing Alaska's rich natural and cultural heritage.

Alaska Geographic operates stores across the state, including the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center in Soldotna. A portion of every purchase made at this Alaska Geographic store directly supports the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge by funding educational and interpretive programs and projects. Since 1959, Alaska Geographic has donated more than \$20 million to Alaska's public lands.

Please consider supporting Alaska's public lands by becoming a member of Alaska Geographic. To learn more about our work and the benefits of membership, or to browse our selection of Alaska books, maps, films, and more, visit one of our stores or point your web browser to akgeo.org



Alaska
Geographic

To Learn More

Stop by the refuge visitor center in Soldotna to find these useful guides, plus other Alaska books, maps, journals, posters, and more.



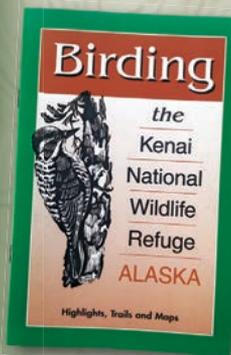
Pins, patches, hats, and other products featuring this unique Kenai National Wildlife Refuge design are available exclusively from Alaska Geographic.



Kenai Trails

A collection of regional weather, flora and fauna, and trail access information, as well as safety tips, equipment lists, topographical maps, and a brief history of Kenai Peninsula trails.

\$7.95



Birding the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge

Part birding guide, part hiking guide, this indispensable book highlights commonly sighted birds and where they can be found. Includes detailed descriptions of trails in the refuge.

\$5.95

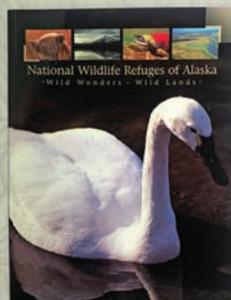


Kenai NWR Water Bottle

Discover Alaska Collection

Show your support for Kenai National Wildlife Refuge and stay hydrated on your next adventure with this Nalgene® water bottle.

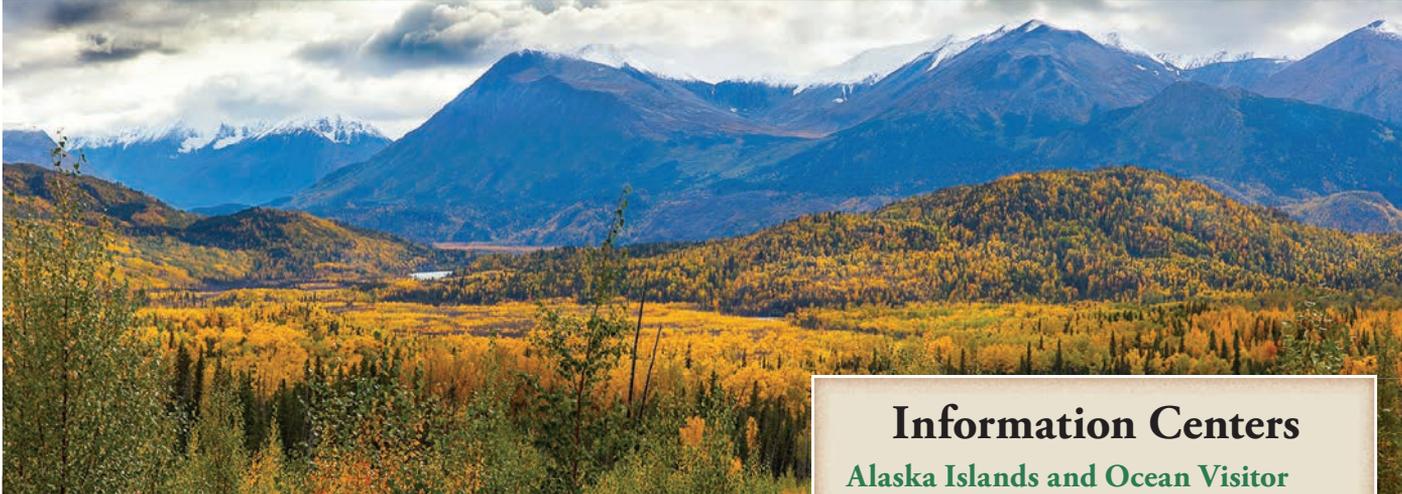
\$19.95



National Wildlife Refuges of Alaska

Alaska's 16 national wildlife refuges are a legacy in trust for animals and people. Containing 77 million acres of refuge lands, their wildlife and wild wonders are unmatched.

\$9.95



Kenai National Wildlife Refuge

<http://kenai.fws.gov>
www.facebook.com/kenainationalwildliferefuge
907-262-7021
Mailing Address:
P.O. Box 2139
Soldotna, AK 99669

Refuge Visitor Center 907-260-2820
Physical Location (not for mailing):
33398 Ski Hill Road
Soldotna, AK 99669

For More Information
<http://kenai.fws.gov>

State of Alaska

- Department of Fish and Game 907-262-9368
- Fish and Wildlife Protection 907-262-4573
- Fishery Hotline (Soldotna) 907-262-2737
- State Forestry 907-260-4200
- State Parks 907-262-5581
- State Troopers (non-emergency) 907-262-4453



Information Centers

Alaska Islands and Ocean Visitor Center - AK Maritime NWR
www.islandsandocean.org
Homer
907-235-6961

Alaska Public Lands Information Center
www.alaskacenters.gov/anchorage.cfm
Anchorage
907-644-3678

Begich, Boggs Visitor Center, Chugach National Forest
www.fs.fed.us/r10/chugach
Portage
907-783-2326, 907-288-3178

Kenai Fjords National Park
www.nps.gov/kefj
Seward
907-422-0500

Kenai Visitor and Cultural Center
www.visitkenai.com
Kenai
907-283-1991

Soldotna Visitor Information Center
www.soldotnachamber.com
Soldotna
907-262-9814

Emergency Services: 911