

Be properly ‘armed’ before doing ‘combat’ on upper Kenai

by Bill Kent

The 15 miles of the Kenai River upstream from Skilak Lake, known as the upper Kenai River, will open for fishing today. Many people know this area primarily for the “combat” fishing at the confluence of the Russian and Kenai Rivers and may not think about this portion of the river the same way as the lower reaches below Skilak Lake. However there are differences and similarities you should keep in mind when visiting this part of Kenai National Wildlife Refuge.

Everyone fishing the Upper Kenai should review the state fishing regulations carefully. There are restrictions on harvest limits, types of gear, and area closures which are unique to this area.

For instance, no rainbow trout may be harvested there, in keeping with the management strategy devised by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game; only unbaited, single-hook, artificial lures are allowed there as well, unless otherwise provided; the limit for sockeye salmon is six daily, except in the 1,800-yard area at the confluence of the Kenai and Russian rivers, where the bag and possession limit is three. Please, if you fish the upper Kenai, review the regulations carefully. And if you have questions, contact Fish and Game (262-9368) or refuge headquarters (262-7021).

Copies of the Regulations are available at most stores which sell fishing licenses, Fish and Game office and at refuge headquarters. The Regulations are complex, and can be expensive to violate. Fish and Game’s recorded message (262-2737) provides an excellent summary of weekly fishing conditions around the Kenai Peninsula, including the Upper Kenai River.

To get to the action fishing, take the Russian River Ferry across the Kenai River to the mouth of the Russian River. There is a sign on the Sterling Highway marking the ferry parking lot, which is newly remodeled. Parking is \$6, \$7 over vehicles longer than 20 feet. The ferry ride costs \$5 for adults and \$3 for kids (3-11) and it runs from 6a.m. to 11p.m. The boat ramp

costs \$5, which covers parking for one vehicle.

Boaters usually put in at the Kenai River Bridge in Cooper Landing, just below Kenai Lake and at the ferry. Jim’s Landing is the last takeout before the Kenai Canyon. If you pass Jim’s Landing, the next takeout is Upper Skilak Lake campground. Please note that Jim’s Landing is closed to fishing.

The riverbanks of the Upper Kenai are just as fragile as the banks below Skilak Lake. Riverbank fishing closures are scattered along the river from the bridge at Kenai Lake to Jim’s Landing. These areas are posted “Closed” with Fish and Game or refuge signs and are described in the fishing regulations.

The thousands of visitors who use the upper Kenai can generate a great deal of litter and trash. When you use this area, please take out everything you brought in, – and maybe a little bit more. If everyone carried a litter bag and picked up one extra piece of trash, the place would be spotless.

A few words about bears: they like fish, they use the Upper Kenai River, you may encounter one, and if a bear wants your fish, give it up – there are other fish. Practice bear safety anytime you are fishing anywhere on the Kenai River, but especially where human development is limited. And remember, food runs So the bottom line with bears is not to run away.

One final suggestion for those using the upper Kenai is to be courteous to others using this space. Many times we get caught up in our own endeavors and do not remember that we are ambassadors for the Kenai Peninsula and the state of Alaska. It does not matter if the person next to you is from the Kenai Peninsula, Anchorage, Kalamazoo, or Timbuktu. Treating others like you would like to be treated is just common courtesy, and goes a long way to making everyone’s experience a good one.

Bill Kent is the Supervisory Park Ranger at Kenai Refuge. He lives in Soldotna with his wife and daughter.