



Reflections

VISITOR GUIDE



Hiking.....page 5



Wildlife.....page 6



Explore Skilak.....page 10

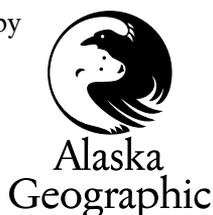
Contents

Camping in the Refuge	4
Backcountry Safety	5
Wildlife Viewing	6
Skilak Wildlife Recreation Area	8
Exploring Skilak Wildlife Recreation Area	10
Fishing	12
Canoeing	14
Trip Planning	15
Visitor Services	16

Reflections

Refuge Coordinator: Candace Ward
Contributors: Dave Kenagy, Michelle
Ostrowski, Kevin Painter, Candace Ward.

Produced and Designed by



All photos and maps courtesy of U.S. Fish
and Wildlife unless otherwise noted.

Printed by the Anchorage Daily News on
recycled paper using soy-based inks.

Reflections is published by the Alaska
Geographic Association in cooperation
with Kenai National Wildlife Refuge. It is
funded by revenue generated from Alaska
Geographic bookstore sales.

© Alaska Geographic Association

Welcome to the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge

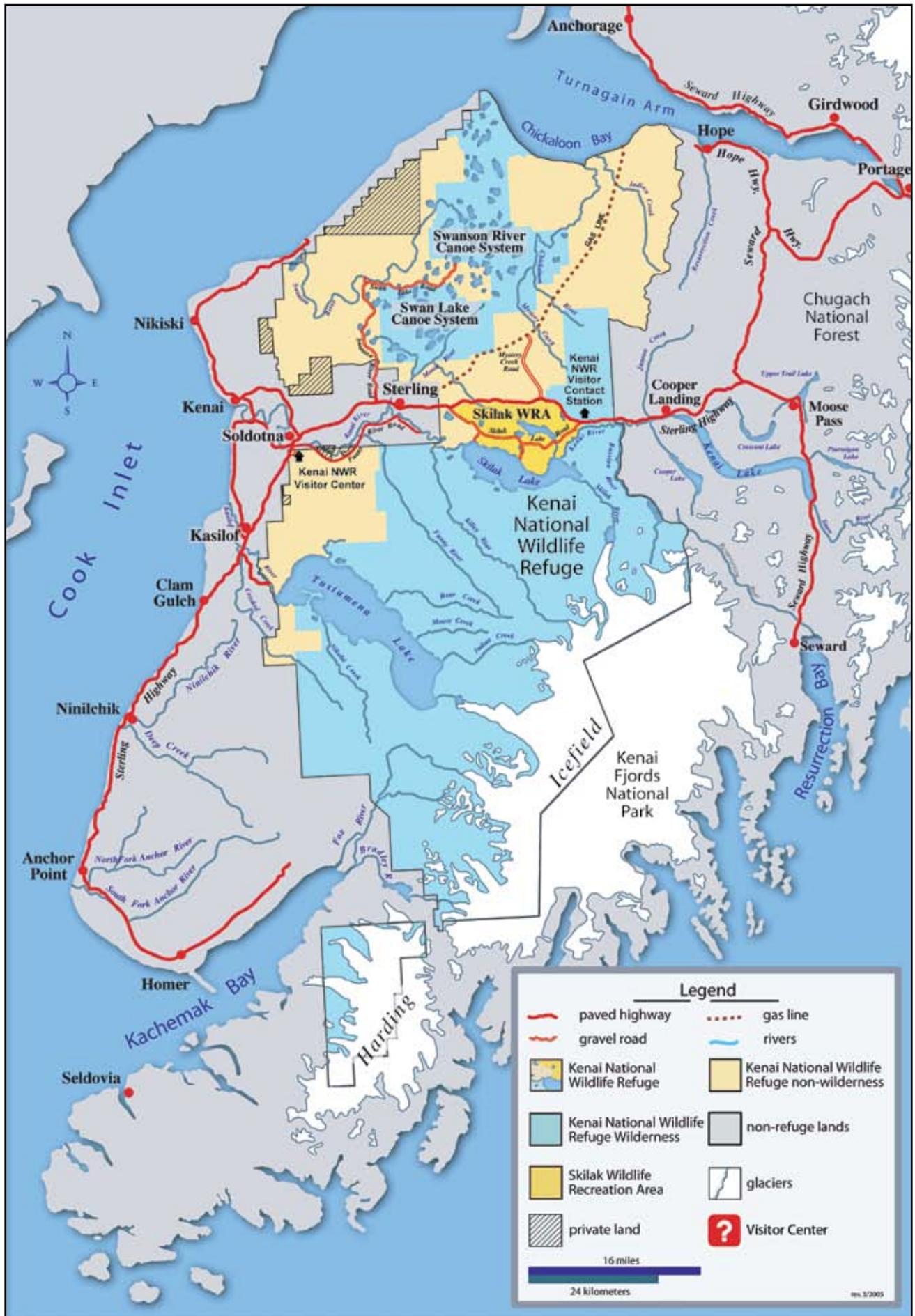
Nearly two million acres in size, this is the most visited refuge in Alaska and is characterized by its diverse habitats and wildlife. Moose, bears, wolves, trumpeter swans, and salmon are just a sampling of the variety of wildlife that calls this area home. Wildlife viewing is one of the refuge's key attractions and visitors can observe these animals in alpine tundra, wetlands, and boreal forest.

World-class fishing, camping, and hiking opportunities also draw visitors both from around the world and around Alaska. The Swanson River and Swan Lake canoe systems are one of only two canoe systems in the United States that provide an opportunity to really get into the backcountry and observe wilderness at its most pristine.

Kenai National Wildlife Refuge was first established as the Kenai National Moose Range in 1941 to protect moose. In 1980, the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) changed the name and purpose of the refuge. The refuge now exists to protect wildlife populations, the variety of habitats they need to survive, and for you, the visitor, to enjoy.

We hope you will use this guide to get the most out of your visit to the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge.





Camping and Cabins

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.

Camping may not exceed 14 days in a 30-day period anywhere on the refuge. More restrictive regulations apply to the Russian River and Hidden Lake areas. Campers may not spend more than 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, barbecues, 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.

Backcountry Camping is permitted 1/4-mile away from the Sterling Highway, Skilak Lake Road, Swanson River Road, and Swan Lake Road. Please practice Leave No Trace ethics.

Public Use Cabins are also available for rent with a reservation. More than a dozen cabins are available. For more information visit the refuge visitor center, call 907-262-7021 or go to <http://kenai.fws.gov/cabin.htm>

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.

Skilak Wildlife Recreation Area Camping

(see map on page 8)

Campgrounds	Number of Units	Drinking Water	Toilets	Boat Launch	Nightly Fee
Engineer Lake	4	✓	✓	✓	Free
Hidden Lake	44	✓	✓	✓	\$10
Kelly Lake	3	✓	✓	✓	Free
Kenai Russian River	180	✓	✓	✓	\$8-\$10
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



Hiking

What to Bring

Water: carry two quarts. Giardia occurs on the refuge so purify all water.

Food: take high calorie foods. Avoid strong smelling foods that could attract bears.

Clothing: wear sturdy footwear with comfortable socks. Bring hat, gloves, and rain gear.

Skin Protection: bring insect repellent, head net, sun glasses, and sunscreen.

Orientation Equipment: know how to use a map and compass. Know your route and location.

Emergency Gear: a first aid kit, waterproof fire starter, whistle, knife, and signals. Carry a thermal blanket and a cell phone.

Toilet Paper: Pack out all your toilet paper and litter in sealed plastic bags.



Backcountry Guide



LEAVE NO TRACE

- Plan Ahead and Prepare
- Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces
- Dispose of Waste Properly
- Leave What You Find
- Minimize Campfire Impacts
- Respect Wildlife
- Be Considerate of Other Visitors

Be prepared: Carry extra food, water, insect repellent, a map, compass, a pocketknife, waterproof matches, and emergency supplies with you.

Don't take scented, spiced or smoked foods with you as they attract bears.

Pack out: Toilet paper, used pads, tampons and garbage.

Plan ahead: Always let someone know where you are going and when you expect to return. Have a backup plan and a flexible schedule.

Take a friend: Traveling alone increases your risk dramatically. Traveling in groups is recommended.

Dress properly: Leave your cotton at home; synthetic pile or wool are best. Rain gear is a necessity. Bring a hat and gloves—even in the summer.

Changing weather: Always take rain gear and warm clothing no matter how nice it looks when you start. Remember weather changes rapidly. Heavy rain or snow and strong winds can occur at any time.

Watch out: Alaska waters are cold even in the summer and avalanches can occur any time of the year. Be aware of your surroundings and know how to evaluate conditions.

Wildlife Viewing

Where to Look

Alpine Tundra: In treeless areas starting at 1,500 to 2,000 feet along the eastern portion of the refuge, low growing grasses and 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. These birds depend on the abundant insect life found in summer wetlands to feed their young. Caribou and moose eat dwarf birch and willows. Wolves and 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. Fish, including trout and salmon, attract bald eagles, bears, and river otters.



Viewing Safely

Keep Your Distance: If an animal alters its behavior because of your presence, you are too close. Responsible visitors use binoculars and spotting scopes to observe an animal's normal behavior.

Respect the Animals: Animals often respond to repeated interference by abandoning their home, nesting sites, and even their young. Remember that we are the visitors.

Never Feed Wildlife: Animals that become accustomed to human food become problem animals that need to be removed from the area. Don't leave backpacks, trash, or food where an animal might find it.

Drive Safely: When you see wildlife, stop to view them from a safe pullout, not from the roadway. Please do not follow an animal at close distance in your vehicle. Be alert for animals crossing the road, especially at dawn, dusk, and at night.

Help Protect the Refuge: Remind others of their ethical responsibility when viewing wildlife.



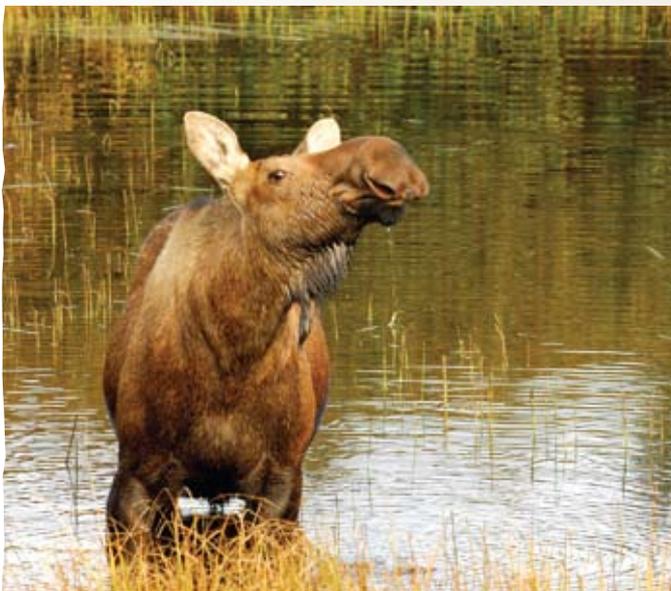


A Common Moosetake

Moose are the most commonly encountered large animal on the refuge. Moose may seem tolerant of human presence, but surprisingly there are more fatal moose encounters than bear encounters in Alaska. The power of a moose's hoof kicking with 1,000 pounds of force can prove deadly.

Moose cows and calves need extra room. In early May, females chase off their yearling calves and are very sensitive to disturbance during the last weeks of their pregnancy. From late May to early June, most calves are born and females remain very protective throughout the summer.

Dogs and moose don't mix. Dogs must be under control at all times to prevent wildlife harassment.



Traveling in Bear Country

- 🐾 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, 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, or curl up in a ball with your hands behind your head. Keep your pack on.



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.

Skilak Wildlife Recreation Area



Legend

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

Skilak Wildlife Recreation Area

Skilak Lake Road was originally built as the Sterling Highway in 1947. Many of the campgrounds along this road were built as camps for the construction crews that built the highway. Trails such as the Seven Lakes Trail were created to link the new highway to the Moose River so people could access new areas for fishing and hunting. Later, the Sterling Highway was straightened, bypassing Skilak Lake Road and creating a 19-mile loop off the present Sterling Highway.

In 1986, the Kenai Wildlife Refuge, in partnership with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, designated this area as the Skilak Wildlife Recreation Area to promote wildlife viewing opportunities.



Skilak Wildlife Recreation Area

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.
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.
2.4	Pothole Lake Fire Overlook	View of area revegetated from the 8,700-acre Pothole Lake Fire of 1991.
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. Campfire programs June through August on Friday and Saturday nights.
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	Heart of the 1996 Hidden Creek Fire. Look for wildlife using the new growth after fire—moose, snowshoe hare, and hawks. At end of trail from the alpine zone, look down to Skilak Lake for a view of gull and cormorant rookeries on the lake's rocky islands (5 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.
13.6	Lower Skilak Campground	Moderate-sized campground and important boat launch for Skilak Lake and Kenai River fishing activities.

Mileage begins at east entrance, see map on page 8.

Fishing

Getting Started

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.

You must purchase a valid sport fishing license if you are age 16 or older. These are available at local sporting goods and grocery stores. They can also be purchased online at www.admin.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.

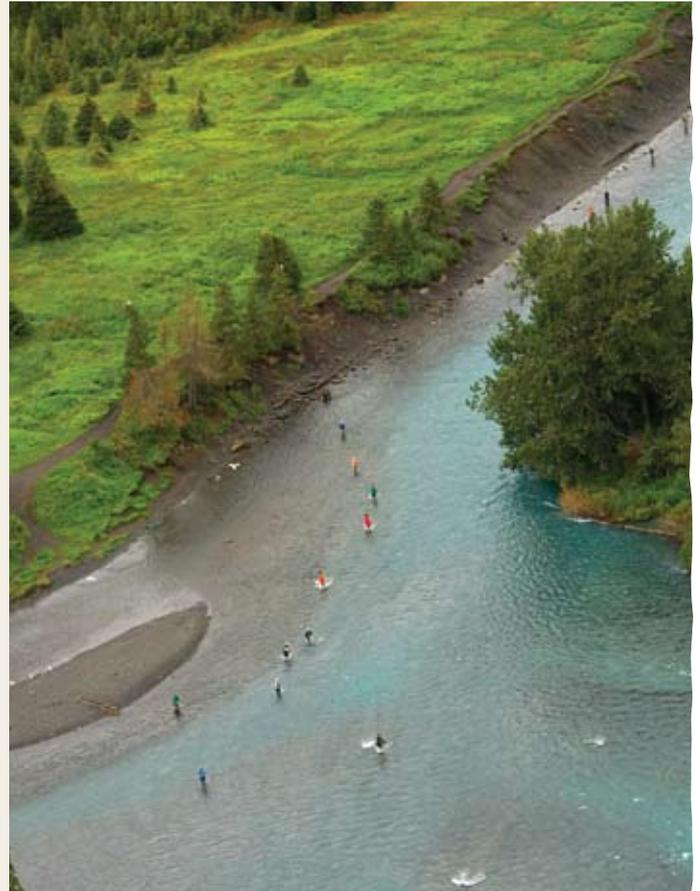
For information on the status of fish concentrations and emergency closures use the ADF&G Soldotna Fishery Hotline (updated weekly) at 907-262-2737.

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.

Hike the Fisherman's Trail upstream from the Forest Service's Russian River Campground, at mile 52.8 of the Sterling Highway, for a less crowded red salmon fishing experience.



Fishing 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. Toss all fish waste into deep, fast-moving water. Do not put in dumpsters or on shore. Cut fish carcasses into small pieces so the water current can carry and disperse them more easily.
-  When you carry fish out, store them in sealed plastic garbage bags to decrease odors that could attract bears on paths and trails.
-  Store all food, bait, line and tackle, fishy clothes, and garbage in bear-proof 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.

Russian River

Located at mile 55 on the Sterling Highway, the Russian River Access Area is the most popular fishing area on Kenai National Wildlife Refuge. Two red salmon runs occur separately in June and July, and one silver salmon run in August. This bank fishing area is accessed by foot or by ferry. The Russian River Ferry takes people across the river to fish the confluence of the Russian and Kenai rivers and along the south bank of the Kenai River. These areas have the most concentrated fish runs.

This fishery is a very social experience and is often referred to as “combat fishing.” When salmon runs peak, people fish shoulder-to-shoulder to land 5 to 12-pound red salmon. On the south bank adjacent to the ferry, a portion of the bank is reserved for mobility-challenged anglers. The Russian River Access Area, ferry, and the adjacent Sportsman’s Boat Launch are fee areas operated by a private contractor. Federal Interagency Senior and Access Pass holders receive discounts on 24-hour parking and ferry fees, but not on boat launch fees.

Moose Range Meadows

The refuge manages several fishing platforms on the north bank of the Kenai River on Keystone Drive outside Soldotna. These platforms were established to allow fishing and also to protect fragile bank habitat essential to the rearing of young salmon. Platforms open to salmon fishing beginning July 1 each year. From Kenai River mile 25 to 27.3, these platforms are the only legal fishing areas in Moose Range Meadows to fish from July 1 to August 15.

For More Information

Kenai National Wildlife Refuge
P.O. Box 2139
Ski Hill Road
Soldotna, AK 99669
907-262-7021
<http://kenai.fws.gov>



Canoeing in the Refuge

The Swan Lake and Swanson River canoe systems (see map page 3) cover over 100 miles in the northern lowlands of the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge. One of the best ways to see the refuge and its wildlife is to paddle one of the many routes offered here. From easy family weekend trips to weeklong adventures, paddlers of all abilities and ages will enjoy this unique wilderness experience.

What To Expect

- Lakes break up in mid-May and stay open until mid-October. Lake waters are cold (50-60 degrees F). Canoeists need to be prepared if they capsize in cold water.
- Head for shore during high wind conditions and be prepared to wait for better weather.
- 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 insure 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 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 human impact.
- State boating 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.
- Fishing and hunting in season are permitted on the canoe systems.
- Fireworks are prohibited.

For detailed trip-planning, information, and maps, visit the refuge visitor centers. See the back page for more information.



Partners

As the primary nonprofit education partner of Kenai National Wildlife Refuge, Alaska Geographic connects people to Alaska's magnificent wildlands through experiential education, award-winning books and maps, and by directly supporting the state's parks, forests, and refuges. Each year Alaska Geographic donates more than \$500,000 to help fund educational and interpretive programs throughout Alaska's public lands.

Alaska Geographic operates 48 bookstores across the state, including two locations within the refuge: the Refuge Visitor Center in Soldotna and the Visitor Contact Station at Mile 58 of the Sterling Highway. Your purchases at these locations directly support the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge—a portion of every sale helps fund educational and interpretive programs throughout the refuge.

To find out more, become a member, or browse our selection of Alaska books, maps, and films, stop by any Alaska Geographic bookstore or visit our website at www.alaskageographic.org



**Alaska
Geographic**

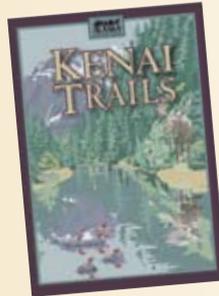
Alaska Geographic
810 East Ninth Avenue
Anchorage, AK 99501
907-274-8440 or toll-free at 866-AK-PARKS
www.alaskageographic.org



Discover Alaska Collector Series
Pins, patches, hats, and other products featuring this unique Kenai National Wildlife Refuge design. Exclusively from Alaska Geographic.

Planning Your Trip

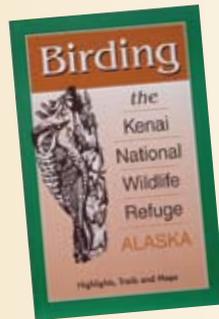
Stop by the refuge visitor center in Soldotna to find these useful guides. In addition to books, visitors will also find maps, journals, posters, and more.



Kenai Trails
By Alaska Geographic

Explore the magnificent Kenai Peninsula with this comprehensive trail guide. The 26 featured hikes range from short strolls to ambitious day hikes. Each entry includes a full-color topographic map, plus detailed information on distance, access, elevation change, local flora and fauna, history, and more.

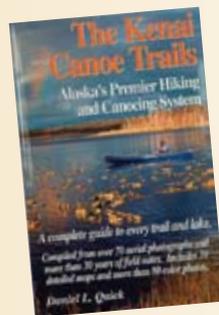
\$7.95



Birding the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge
By Alaska Geographic

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 Canoe Trails
By Daniel Quick

Explore the vast network of canoe trails in the refuge with this definitive resource. The guide includes aerial and color photographs, field notes, detailed maps, and descriptions of every lake and trail in the system.

\$18.95



Kenai National Wildlife Refuge Map
National Geographic

This comprehensive topographic map of the entire refuge indicates public-use cabins, campgrounds, hiking trails, access points, and other recreational opportunities. An essential planning resource, this durable plastic map also includes portions of adjacent Chugach National Forest.

\$9.95

Also available online at www.alaskageographic.org



Kenai National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center

P.O. Box 2139, Ski Hill Road
Soldotna, AK 99669
907-262-7021, <http://kenai.fws.gov>

Open: June through August
weekdays: 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
weekends: 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

September through May
weekdays: 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
weekends: 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

State of Alaska

Department of Fish and Game.....907-262-9368
Fish and Wildlife Protection..... 907-262-4573
Fishery Hotline.....907-262-2737
State Forestry..... 907-260-4200
State Parks..... 907-262-5581
State Troopers.....907-262-4453



Kenai National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Contact Station

Mile 58 Sterling Highway
Open: Mid-June through mid-August
10 a.m. to 4 p.m. daily

Information Centers

Alaska Islands and Ocean Visitor Center
Homer.....907-235-6961
<http://islandsandocean.org>

Alaska Public Lands Information Center
Anchorage.....907-271-2737
www.nps.gov/aplic/center

Chugach National Forest
Seward.....907-224-3374
www.fs.fed.us/r10/chugach

Kenai Fjords National Park
Seward.....907-224-7500
www.nps.gov/kefj

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

Soldotna Visitor Information Center.....907-262-1337
www.soldotnachamber.com

Emergency Services: 911