

Kenai National Wildlife Refuge Summer Activity Guide

Kenai National Wildlife Refuge, often called “Alaska in miniature” for its diversity of wildlife and habitats, is 1.92 million acres in size. The refuge exists to protect all of its wildlife and the habitat these creatures need to survive. The refuge also preserves 1.35 million acres of designated federal wilderness.

Popular summer recreation activities include wildlife viewing, hiking, camping, and fishing.



Wildlife Viewing



Best wildlife viewing times are early morning and late evening. Look for wildlife in their habitat areas – Dall sheep in alpine meadows, owls in spruce forests, moose in birch thickets, and eagles by salmon streams. Moose and bald eagles are the most frequently seen large animals on the refuge.

Skilak Lake Road - The Refuge Wildlife “Drive”

Located in the Skilak Wildlife Recreation Area, Skilak Lake Road mileage reads from east to west.

Mile	Location	Points of Interest
0	Skilak Lake Road (East Entrance)	Leaves the Sterling Highway at Milepost 58.
0.1	Jim’s Landing	Major boat launch on the Kenai River. Eagle viewing area.
0.6	Kenai River Trail (East Trailhead)	Hike in ½ mile for view of Kenai River Canyon.
1.9	Hideout Trail	Trail provides views of Kenai River and Skilak Lake.
2.3	Kenai River Trail (West Trailhead)	Trail goes through 1991 fire area to Kenai River.
2.4	Pothole Lake Fire Overlook	View of 1991 Pothole Lake Fire (8,700 acres burned).
3.6	Hidden Lake Campground	Burney’s Trail gives good views of Hidden Lake.
4.6	Hidden Creek Trail	Nice cobble beach for picnics at trail’s end on Skilak Lake.
5.1	Hidden Creek Overlook	Outstanding views of Hidden Creek and Skilak Lake.
5.4	Skilak Lookout Trail	Hike in 1996 Hidden Lake Fire area to Skilak Lake vista.
6.0	Bear Mountain Trail	Ascend quickly for a scenic view of Skilak Lake.
8.4	Upper Skilak Campground	Vista Trail gives panoramic lake & mountain views.
8.5	Lower Ohmer Campground	Nice canoeing and rainbow trout fishing.
9.3	Engineer Lake Overlook	Scenic views of Engineer and Hidden Lakes.
9.4	Engineer Lake Campground	Trailhead for Seven Lakes Trail. Nice lake for canoeing.
13.6	Lower Skilak Campground	Moderate sized campground with Skilak Lake boat launch.
19.1	Skilak Lake Road (West Entrance)	Rejoins the Sterling Highway at Milepost 75.

Summer Wildlife Sightings



Often See

Moose
Bald Eagle
Red Squirrel
Grouse
Salmon

Might See

Black Bear
Brown Bear
Caribou
Dall Sheep
Loon

Seldom See

Lynx
Wolf
Wolverine
Great Gray Owl
Trumpeter Swan

Hiking

Most refuge trails are short day hikes. However, rugged conditions and the potential for hypothermia require careful, organized planning to ensure safe and successful hiking experiences.

Day Hiker's Checklist

- Water** – Bring 2 quarts. Giardia occurs in the refuge waters, so purify all open water.
- Food** - Take high calorie foods. Avoid foods that are smelly, so you won't attract bears.
- Clothing** - Wear sturdy shoes with comfortable socks. Bring hat, gloves, and rain gear.
- Skin Protection** – Bring insect repellent, head net, sunglasses and sunscreen.
- Toilet Paper & Plastic Bags** - Pack out all toilet paper and litter in sealed plastic bags.
- Orientation Equipment** – Take a map and compass. Know your location.
- Emergency Gear** - Bring a first aid kit, waterproof fire starter, whistle, knife, and signals.



Popular Day Hikes

Trail	Length (One Way)	Elevation Gain	Location	Difficulty
Bear Mountain	0.8 mile	400 ft.	Skilak Lake Road, mi. 6	Moderate
Burney's	0.6 mile	200 ft.	Hidden Lake Campground, Across from Skyview site 7. Park in day use parking.	Easy
Hidden Creek	1.3 miles	300 ft.	Skilak Lake Road, mi. 4.6	Easy
Hideout	0.75 mile	500 ft.	Skilak Lake Road, mi. 1.9	Moderate
Fuller Lakes	2.9 miles	1400 ft.	Sterling Highway, mi. 57	Strenuous
Skilak Lookout	2.0 miles	700 ft.	Skilak Lake Road, mi. 5.4	Moderate
Vista	1.5 miles	1000 ft.	Upper Skilak Campground, Across from outhouses in "A" Loop. Park in Day Use Area.	Strenuous

How to Behave in Bear Country - Be alert. Black and brown bears are found throughout the refuge. Use your senses to evaluate fresh bear sign – tracks, scat, claw marks, and strong scents. Birds such as magpies, ravens, and eagles often indicate bear foods such as salmon concentrations and carrion are nearby. Retreat if you encounter bear signs.

Tips for Hikers

- Never approach bears.
- Hike in groups.
- Make noise in brushy areas.
- Stay alert for bear signs.
- If bears are nearby, retreat.



Tips for Campers

- Wash dishes after use.
- Secure food in vehicle trunk.
- Secure coolers in trunk.
- Put trash in bear proof dumpsters.
- Keep all food out of your tent.

Camping



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. Hidden Lake, Upper Skilak, and Russian River Access Area have campsites and restrooms accessible for wheelchair users.

Camping may not exceed 14 days in a 30-day period anywhere on the refuge. Campers may not spend more than 2 consecutive days at the Russian River Access Area and 7 consecutive days at Hidden Lake.

Campground Facilities

Campground Name	Sites	Potable Water Pumps	Toilets (Outhouses)	Trash Service	Boat Launch	Fee	Location
Kelly Lake	4	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	None	Sterling Hwy., mi. 68.1
Petersen Lake	4	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	None	Sterling Hwy., mi. 68.1
Russian River	180	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	\$8-12	Sterling Hwy., mi. 35
Watson Lake	4	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	None	Sterling Hwy., mi. 71
Engineer Lake	4	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	None	Skilak Lake Rd., mi. 9.3
Hidden Lake	44	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	\$10	Skilak Lake Rd., mi. 3.6
Lower Ohmer Lake	5	No	Yes	No	Canoe Only	None	Skilak Lake Rd., mi. 8.5
Lower Skilak Lake	14	No	Yes	No	Yes	None	Skilak Lake Rd., mi. 13.6
Upper Skilak Lake	24	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	\$5-10	Skilak Lake Rd., mi. 8.4
Dolly Varden Lake	12	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	None	Swanson R. Rd., mi. 14
Rainbow Lake	3	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	None	Swanson R. Rd., mi. 15.5
Swanson River	4	Yes	Yes	No	Canoe Only	None	Swanson R. Rd., mi. 17.6

Golden Age & Golden Access Passports reduce camping fees by 50% in refuge campgrounds. Alaska State Park Camping Passes do not apply to federal campgrounds (refuge, forest service, bureau of land management, and national park).



Fire Use - In developed campgrounds fires are restricted to refuge provided grates or portable, self-contained, metal fire equipment (i.e. - barbecues). Firewood cutting is permitted for use when camping, but only dead, down wood may be collected. Attend fires at all times. Completely put out fires before you leave.



Pets - In campgrounds all pets must be on a leash no longer than 9 feet. Owners must be in control of pets at all times. Owners are responsible to clean up their pet's waste.



Backcountry Camping - Backcountry camping is permitted ¼ mile away from the Sterling Highway, Skilak Lake Road, and Ski Hill Road. Portable stoves are recommended.



Practice Leave No Trace Skills especially in dealing with human waste when away from established toilets. Dig a 6-8" deep cat hole at least 200 feet from all water sources. Deposit waste and cover with soil. Pack out toilet paper and all trash in sealed plastic bags.

Camping Fun!

Stop at the entrance kiosks at Hidden Lake and Upper Skilak Lake Campgrounds for summer campfire and discovery hike program schedules.

Kids, ask camp hosts about the Jr. Ranger Program!



Fishing



Getting Started

Fishing on the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge is complex. Each water body has its own unique fish ecology. As a result, regulations and bag limits vary widely in different waters.

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

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

You must purchase a valid fishing license. These are available at local sporting goods and grocery stores. They can also be purchased on line from ADF&G at www.admin.adfg.state.ak.us/license

For information on the status of fish concentrations and emergency closures use the **ADF&G Soldotna Fishery Hotline (updated weekly) at 907-262-2737**. Another excellent resource is the **Alaska Department of Fish & Game website at www.sf.adfg.state.ak.us/statewide/sf_home.cfm**

If boating, check with Kenai National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center in Soldotna for horsepower limits and access areas.



Russian River Access Area & Russian River Ferry

Located at mile 55, Sterling Highway, the Russian River Access Area is the most popular fishing area on Kenai NWR. Two red salmon runs occur separately in June and July and a silver salmon run in August. This bank fishing area is accessed by foot or by ferry. The Russian River Ferry (powered by the Kenai River's current) takes people across the river, so they can 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 called "combat fishing" for good reason. When salmon runs peak, people fish shoulder to shoulder to land 5-12 pound red salmon every 20 to 30 minutes. 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. Golden Age and Golden Access passport cardholders receive discounts on 24-hour parking and ferry fees, but not on boat launch fees.

Preventing Bear Encounters while Fishing:



- Periodically look around for bears.
- If you see a bear, stop fishing and slowly leave the area.
- Cut your line if a bear gets your fish.
- Discard fish guts in flowing water.
- Store fish in sealed plastic bags before hiking them out.
- Avoid fishing during low visibility times – dusk, night & dawn.

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 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 areas in Moose Range Meadows to fish from July 1 to August 15.**

For more information, contact Kenai National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center:

**P. O. Box 2139/Ski Hill Rd.
Soldotna, AK 99669
Phone: 907-262-7021
Website: kenai.fws.gov**

