

Welcome to



# Kenai River Special Management Area

## For More Information

Kenai/Prince William Sound Area  
Headquarters and Ranger Station  
Morgans Landing State Recreation Area  
(907) 262-5581

DNR Public Information Center  
550 W 7th Ave., Suite 1260  
Anchorage, Alaska 99501  
(907) 269-8400

Kenai River Special Management Area  
P.O. Box 1247  
Soldotna, Alaska 99669  
www.alaskastateparks.org

This brochure is paid for, in part, by the  
Kenai River Sportfishing Association



Archaeologists search for artifacts to uncover the history of the people who lived here hundreds and thousands of years ago. Photos courtesy of Debbie Corbett, USFWS (above) and Dan Thompson (right)



## Area History

The Kenai River has attracted people for thousands of years. The earliest archeological sites were occupied between 8,000 and 10,000 years ago, not long after glaciers receded from the area. Intensive salmon fishing began at least 2,000 years ago by the Riverine Kachemak and later by the Kenaitze Dena'ina. Both cultures were not only attracted by salmon, but also offshore fish, moose, and caribou. The river continues to provide food for local people, other Alaskans, and the world.

Background image is a composite. Photos courtesy of Kenai River Sportfishing Association

## Fishing the Kenai

The Kenai River offers an abundance of options for anglers: bank fishing, back trolling, drifting, back bouncing, catch-and-release, personal-use dipnetting, subsistence fishing, and guided fishing are just some of the opportunities available in the fishery. Different methods are popular in different river reaches—don't buck the trend. Drift fishing through back trollers or back bouncing where others are drifting is a recipe for tangled lines, hot tempers, and accidents. Angling in the Kenai can be orderly if everyone works together and employs the same methods.

## Your Fellow Fishers

Landing a salmon on the Kenai is challenging enough without worrying about the crowds. Help out other anglers with a "fish on" by pulling in your line and steering your boat out of the way. The universal signal for "fish on" is an upraised landing net. The river is for everyone; there is no such thing as a personal fishing hole. Courtesy and common sense make everyone's experience more enjoyable.



Dipnetting on the Kenai. Photo courtesy Debbie Delker



Fishing the Kenai

## Fishing Regulations

Fishing regulations may change annually or by emergency order at any time in the season. Check for regulation updates before fishing at [www.adfg.alaska.gov](http://www.adfg.alaska.gov).

Complete your harvest records immediately for Chinook salmon.

In the personal use fishery, you must record the catch and clip the tail prior to leaving the fishing site or concealing your catch from plain view. Designated riverbanks are seasonally closed in order to conserve sensitive riparian habitat for fish and wildlife.

## Caring for Your Catch

Fish experience shock when caught, so treat fish carefully if you intend to release them. Remove the hook while the fish is underwater. If the hook cannot be removed, cut the line near the hook. An exhausted fish may need time to recover before it can swim. Cradle your catch underwater and gently move it back and forth while pointing upstream. If you're keeping your catch, care for it by cutting the gills to bleed it and keeping it in cold water.

Background photo courtesy of Kenai River Sportfishing Association



Fishing in the fog at Eagle Rock, Kenai River. Photo courtesy of Fitzgerald Photography



## Alaska State Parks

## Kenai River Guides

River guides provide a safe and easy way to get out on the Kenai for both beginners and experienced anglers. If you use a guide service, be sure they are registered with State Parks and that the vessel has current Kenai River Guide decals and a three-digit guide number. A list of permitted guides is available at the Gilman Center (907-714-2470) in Soldotna.



Fishing on the Kenai is fit for kings! Photo courtesy of Kenai River Sportfishing Association

## Identifying Fish of the Kenai

Fish of the same species can differ in color depending on when and where they are caught. Salmon are difficult to identify by color alone, and can change dramatically in color and shape when spawning. If you're not sure what species your catch is, the tail tells the tale.



**Chinook** (king) salmon: Black mouth and gums. Blue-grey back with small irregular spots and silvery sides. Small black spots across the tail.



**Coho** (silver) salmon: Black mouth with white gums. Greenish-blue back with small black spots and silvery sides. Small black spots on the upper lobe of the tail.



**Pink** (humpy) salmon: Large spots on back with very small scales. Large black oval blotches across the tail.



**Sockeye** (red) salmon: Dark blue back with no spots and silvery sides. No spots on tail.



**Chum** (dog) salmon: Dull gray back with no spots and yellowish-silver sides. They typically have vertical bands on their body after being in freshwater. Their tail has no spots and is highly forked.



**Dolly Varden**: Olive green back and body with dark-orange to red spots. Slightly forked tail with no spots.



**Steelhead/Rainbow Trout**: Although they differ in lifecycles, and slightly in color, shape, and general appearance, steelhead and rainbow trout are actually the same species. Steelhead are only in the Kenai for spawning, while rainbow trout are full-time river residents. Coloration and spotting can vary based on where the fish is found, but trout can be positively identified by the eight to 12 rays in the anal fin, a mouth that does not extend past the back of the eye, and a lack of teeth at the base of the tongue.

## Welcome

Welcome to the Kenai River Special Management Area (SMA). This is Alaska's largest sport fishery, world renowned for its record-sized Chinook salmon. The Kenai River is an angler's paradise, boasting all five species of Pacific salmon and large rainbow trout. All in all, 36 different species of fish, call the mighty Kenai River home.

Fish and anglers aren't the only ones who benefit from the remarkable Kenai; bald eagles, caribou, trumpeter swans, moose, and bears are just a few of the inhabitants that make the Kenai River a prime location for watchable wildlife.



Fishing the Kenai. Photo courtesy of Kenai River Sportfishing Association

Kenai River SMA was established in 1984 in response to increasing usage and strain on the river system's health. The SMA contains more than 105 miles of rivers and lakes and is adjacent to 16 publicly managed parks that offer prime opportunities for boating, camping, wildlife viewing, and, of course, fishing.



Fishing the Kenai

## Conserving the Kenai

The Kenai River is an irreplaceable asset to Alaskans and local wildlife, but a popular fishery cannot be maintained without careful management of the riverbank, which begins with you. Minor disturbances by thousands of anglers can have a devastating effect on the fragile ecosystem. When the riverbank is unhealthy, the young fish cannot thrive. Without healthy vegetation along the banks of the Kenai, the number of salmon would dwindle.



Photo courtesy of M. Evans

- Don't trample riverbank vegetation or stand on riverbanks to fish. Use hip waders or cast from gravel bars or public fish walks.
- Use established walkways and trails.
- Don't cut brush or trees along the river's edge.
- If you pack it in, pack it out—no exceptions.
- Dispose of your fish guts by throwing them back into swift water.
- Respect posted closures.

Background image Sitkok. Photo courtesy of Rys Miranda



Fishing on the banks of the Kenai



**Boating Regulations**

In Alaska, the International Rules apply to all boats on all navigable waters, including the Kenai River. The Rules assign tasks but never confer entitlements. For example, although vessels in certain situations should "keep out of the way" of others, the Rules never grant any vessel the "right of way." Also keep in mind that the ordinary practice of seamanship requires precaution and prudent action by all boaters, at all times, under all circumstances. Knowing the Rules is important, but boaters must be constantly vigilant of the circumstances and be prepared to depart from the Rules, if necessary, to avoid a collision. Boaters should obtain and become familiar with the complete Rules available from a link on [www.alaskaboatingsafety.org](http://www.alaskaboatingsafety.org).

It is illegal to anchor in a manner that obstructs a primary traffic channel or fishing channel of any section of the Kenai River.

Downstream from Skilak Lake, all power boats are limited to six passengers on board, including the operator. In July, guides are limited to a total of five people on board including the guide.

Both state and federal law requires that life jackets be worn at all times by children under the age of 13 when in an open boat or on deck.

Remember, you are not only responsible for your boat, but also your wake. Be sure to approach other boats, docks and riverbanks carefully. To reduce bank erosion and disturbance of spawning beds, use appropriate speeds and travel mid-river whenever possible to keep your wake low.

**Boating in the Kenai River SMA**

The Kenai is a big, fast, and cold river. You must be prepared for crowded boating conditions, natural and man-made hazards and cold water. Kenai and Skilak lakes in particular are very cold and subject to sudden high winds and big waves. Drift boats, canoes, inflatables and power boats all have a place on the Kenai, so learn the best places to launch your type of watercraft. You must be experienced at safely loading, fueling, and launching your boat.

No one ever expects boating emergencies, but they happen—so always be prepared. Most boating fatalities on the Kenai involve a combination of sudden cold water immersion and fast currents. Without a life jacket, even the best swimmers are at high risk of drowning. The first and most important step in surviving a boating emergency is to **ALWAYS wear a life jacket**.

**Area Regulations—General**

Camping is only permitted in developed campgrounds. All other undeveloped state lands, river islands and day-use facilities are closed to camping. Federal lands have different regulations so check with the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge at (907) 262-7021 or [www.fws.gov/refuge/kenai](http://www.fws.gov/refuge/kenai) and with the U.S. Forest Service at (907) 224-3374 or [www.fs.usda.gov/chugach](http://www.fs.usda.gov/chugach).

Fires are permitted only in provided metal fire rings or in metal-bottomed fire pans with sides. Use only dead and down wood. Never leave your fire unattended until the embers are cold.

Please respect private property along the river. Do not trespass, dock, bank-fish or camp on private lands without written permission.



**— Time of Year —**

TYPICAL RUN (Consult Regs.)	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December
Chinook (King)—1 <sup>st</sup> Run						Mid-May to July 31						
Chinook (King)—2 <sup>nd</sup> Run season closure July 31st							Early July to July 31					
Sockeye (Red)—1 <sup>st</sup> Run						Late May to early June						
Sockeye (Red)—2 <sup>nd</sup> Run								Mid-July to early August				
Coho (Silver)—1 <sup>st</sup> Run								Late July to late August				
Coho (Silver)—2 <sup>nd</sup> Run									Early Sept. to Sept. 30			
Pink (Humpy)—on even numbered years								Late July to mid-August				
Rainbow—							Mid-June 15 to October					
Dolly Varden—							—ENTIRE YEAR—					
Lake Trout— in lakes in the Kenai River system							—ENTIRE YEAR—					

**Kenai River Special Management Area—Amenities**

- A. Kenai City Dock
- B. Kenai River Flats
- C. Cunningham Park
- D. Eagle Rock
- E. The Pillars
- F. Ciechanski
- G. Big Eddy
- H. Slikok Creek
- I. Centennial Park
- J. Soldotna Creek
- K. Swiftwater Park
- L. Rotary Park
- M. Keystone
- N. Funny River
- O. Morgan's Landing
- P. Izaak Walton
- Q. Bings Landing
- R. Lower Skilak Lake
- S. Upper Skilak Campground
- T. Hidden Lake
- U. Jim's Landing
- V. Russian River Ferry/Sportsman's Landing
- W. Russian River Campground
- X. Cooper Creek
- Y. Cooper Landing
- Z. Quartz Creek
- AA. Trail River
- BB. Ptarmigan Creek
- CC. Primrose Campground

**Watercraft Requirements**

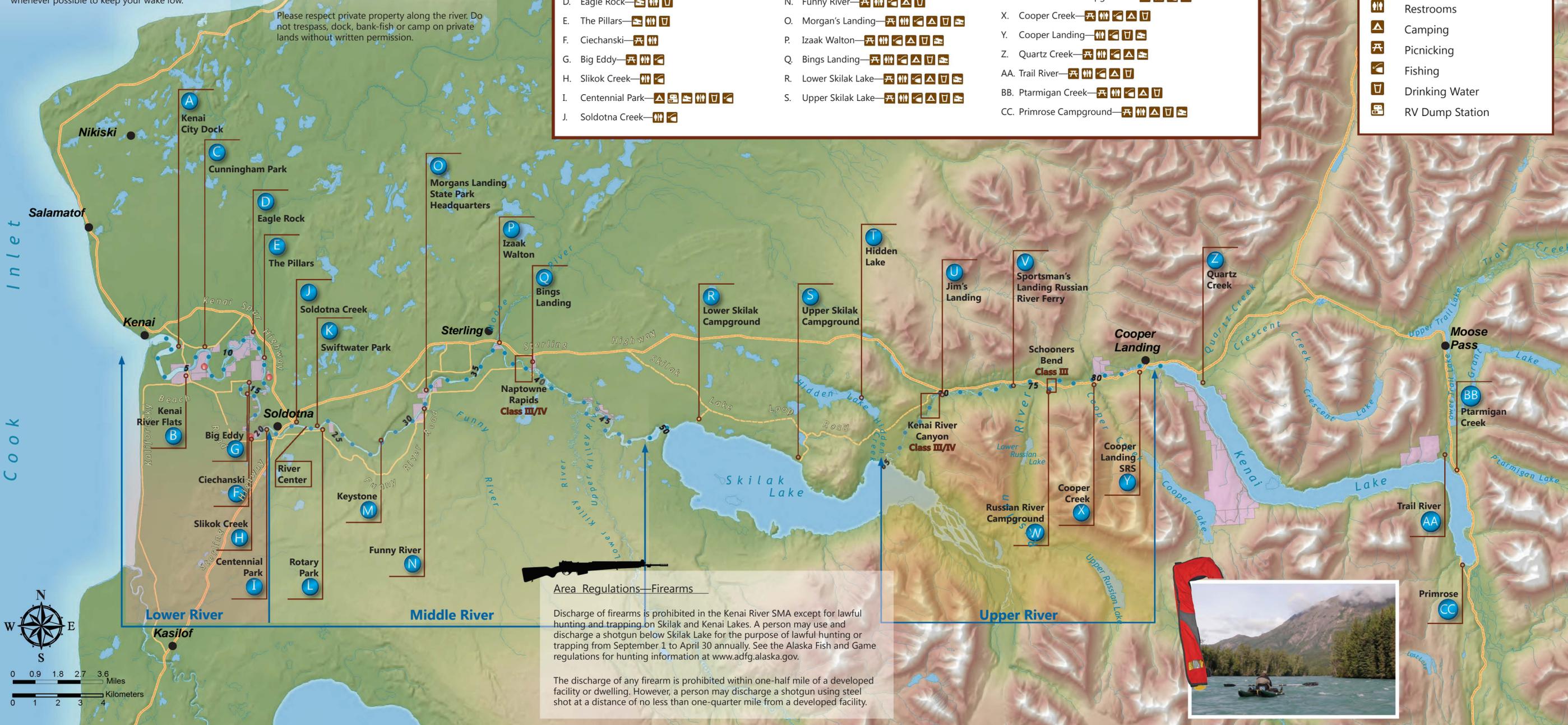
Boats operating in Kenai River SMA are limited to 21 feet in length and 106 inches in width, and a 50-horsepower motor, except on Kenai and Skilak lakes, which are unrestricted. All boat motors used within the area must be four stroke or Direct Fuel Injection (DFI) throughout the year.

Depending on the watercraft type and size, mandatory safety equipment requirements (requirements apply?) vary.

Check [www.alaskaboatingsafety.org](http://www.alaskaboatingsafety.org) for the full list of requirements.

**Legend**

- KRSMA Area Boundary
- Highway
- Road
- Gravel Road
- ADF&G Fish Sonar Counter
- ⚓ Boat Launch
- ♿ Restrooms
- ⛺ Camping
- 🏕 Picnicking
- 🎣 Fishing
- 🚰 Drinking Water
- 🗑 RV Dump Station



**Area Regulations—Firearms**

Discharge of firearms is prohibited in the Kenai River SMA except for lawful hunting and trapping on Skilak and Kenai Lakes. A person may use and discharge a shotgun below Skilak Lake for the purpose of lawful hunting or trapping from September 1 to April 30 annually. See the Alaska Fish and Game regulations for hunting information at [www.adfg.alaska.gov](http://www.adfg.alaska.gov).

The discharge of any firearm is prohibited within one-half mile of a developed facility or dwelling. However, a person may discharge a shotgun using steel shot at a distance of no less than one-quarter mile from a developed facility.

