Area History

The name Chatanika is derived from the Lower Tanana Athabascan name Dradlaya Nik’a, meaning “whitefish river.” Native placenames record the geographic significance of this landscape to the Tanana Athabascans.

In 1907, the Tanana Valley Railroad began operating a route from Fairbanks to Chatanika. The town site of Olnes, just southeast of the park, served as a railhead depot and had a general store, hotel, post office, and 300 residents at its peak. Named after Nils Olnes, a Norwegian prospector, the town of Olnes served as a transportation hub for mining areas near Livengood and Tolovana. The town bustling for over a decade, but once the easy gold had been taken, mining communities dwindled. When the railroad finally shut down the Chatanika route in 1930, Olnes quickly became a ghost town. All of its buildings have since been scrapped, dismantled, or burned, the last falling in the early 1990s.

Camping

Whitefish Campground has eight campsites adjacent to the Chatanika River. If you’d like to camp near Whitefish Pond, there are 12 sites around its edge.

Campsites are equipped with fire rings, picnic tables, and nearby water and toilets. These campgrounds have no RV size limit.

Quiet hours are from 12 p.m. to 6 a.m., so no midnight rides.

Olnes Pond Campground

Whitefish Campground, in the northern part of the park, can be accessed from the Elliott Highway and offers camping and a boat launch onto the Chatanika River.

Fishing the Chatanika

This area is a local hot spot for lake and river fishing. The Chatanika River has Arctic grayling, Arctic lamprey, burbot, chum salmon, humpback whitefish, king salmon, least cisco, longnose sucker, northern pike, sauger, and yellow perch. Olnes Pond has burbot, Arctic grayling, lake chub, longnose sucker, rainbow trout, and whitefish. A boat launch onto the Chatanika River is available at Whitefish Campground. Fans of fishing the oldbay take note: Chatanika River has limited openings for spearfishing in fall. Check www.adfg.alaska.gov for regulations and information about local stocker, before you head out.

Do not ride your ATV in the river.

Sediment stirred up by tires is hazardous to fry, which means less fish for your supper.

Pike can be found taking a break from a single-rider vehicle.

Fishing the Whitefish

The Lower Chatanika River is stocked with Arctic grayling, Arctic lamprey, burbot, chum salmon, humpback whitefish, king salmon, least cisco, longnose sucker, northern pike, sauger, and yellow perch. Whitefish Campground has burbot, Arctic grayling, lake chub, longnose sucker, rainbow trout, and whitefish. A boat launch onto the Chatanika River is available at Whitefish Campground. Fans of fishing the oldbay take note: Chatanika River has limited openings for spearfishing in fall. Check www.adfg.alaska.gov for regulations and information about local stocker, before you head out.

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Access

The Olnes Pond access road is located at milepost 11 of the Elliott Highway. Access to Whitefish Campground is about a quarter mile north at mile 11.2.

A Web of Trails

Lower Chatanika River SRA is a great place for ATVs, bikers, and hikers to choose a route and explore the northern boreal forest and the banks of the Chatanika River. The trails extend from Olnes Pond in nearly every direction, toward the meandering Chatanika River. You can make a half-loop from the northern to the southern ends of the pond on the western trails that stick close to the river. Or, you can just explore the trails and see what you find.

Hazardous areas are marked on the map, so choose a route that matches your skill level. Keep in mind that conditions change seasonally and that all hazards may not be noted.

Protect Your Park

This area has long been a haven for riders. Please stay on marked and flagged trails to minimize erosion and keep this area healthy enough to support generations of riders. Many social trails crisscross and braid through the area, but using them is not recommended.

- Stay on the marked trails to reduce damage to the surrounding area and resources.
- Share the trail with other trail users by respecting other types of use and modes of travel, such as hikers and mountain bikers.
- Respect private property by staying on the trail easement when crossing private lands.