State's Summary of Reasons for RDI Application:

15. Ambler River

Introduction

The RDI application is for the length of the Ambler River from the Kobuk River upstream to the confluence with an unnamed stream just upstream of river mile 77. The BLM determined the Ambler River navigable through ANCSA Conveyances and State conveyances upstream through T. 22 N., R. 9 E., KRM. This summary considers the navigability of the Ambler River from near its headwaters downstream to the north boundary of T. 22 N., R. 9 E., KRM. Pre-statehood use demonstrates navigability up to and from the Nakmaktuak Pass. Post-statehood use is demonstrated from the confluence with an unnamed stream, just upriver from river mile 77, down to the Kobuk River. Physical characteristics of this waterway are substantially similar to waterways that have already been determined navigable by BLM.

Rational

1. **Tidal Influence.**

   These segments are not tidally influenced.

2. **BLM Determinations.**

- The BLM has not always been consistent with its determinations for the Ambler River. The BLM determined the river navigable from the Kobuk River upstream through T. 22 N., R. 9 E., KRM; while the state application is for waters above this location as well as those waters previously determined navigable.

  1982/06/16 – Navigability – Ambler River, FY 82. BLM determined Ambler River non-navigable within T. 24 N., R. 9 E., KRM and T. 25 N., R. 10 E., KRM. Notates steepness and lack of use of the river as factor for determination.
  1988/05/26 – Navigable Waters in Group Survey 271 and 272 (Window 923). Ambler River determined navigable through T. 22 N., R. 9 E., KRM. Excluded from conveyances in six townships: T. 20 N., R. 5 E., KRM.; T. 20 N., R. 6 E., KRM.; T. 20 N., R. 7 E., KRM.; T. 21 N., R. 7 E., KRM; T. 21 N., R. 8 E., KRM.; T. 21 N., R. 9 E., KRM.
  1990/05/15 – Navigable Waters in or along Native Allotments in Group Surveys 271 and 272. "Waters averaging 198 feet or more in width are not listed… they are segregated on the survey plats.
  1992/03/03 – Navigability Redeterminations for Isingnakmeut, Inc., Koavukmet, Inc., and Ivisaapaagmiit Corporation (Window 923, Groups 271 and 272). Discussion for item 22: Ambler River and Sloughs; previous determination June 17, 1980 (not in PAAD files), Ambler River navigable through T. 22 N., R. 9 E., KRM. The BLM excluded the Ambler River and interconnecting sloughs from ANCSA conveyances.

2005/10/18 – Navigable Waters in the Ambler, Kobuk, Shungnak Village Project Area (NANA) (NAV 1a, NAV 1b, NAV 6a, NAV 6b, NAV 11a, NAV 11b). Determined Ambler River navigable in the following townships; T. 20 N., R. 5 E., KRM (6/17/1980) (not in PAAD files), T. 20 N., R. 6 E., KRM (6/17/1980) Sloughs in secs 1, 2, 4, 9, 11 & 12 (6/17/1980), and T., 20 N., R. 7 E., Secs 4-9, T. 20 N., R. 8 E., KRM.

2006/08/17 – Final Easement Recommendations for Village and Region Conveyances at Ambler. "Navigable Waters have all been excluded by survey."

- These documents are from state files; additional determinations may exist in BLM files.

3. Pre-Statehood evidence of use.

- The Native inhabitants of the upper Kobuk district travelled north annually for their summer hunting season, following various routes north, including the Redstone, the **Ambler**, and the Kogoluktuk Rivers to cross the pass and reach the head of the Noatak for their hunts. Ethnohistorian Ernest Burch noted that to travel back, they built rafts and floated downriver to their homes. While the Reed River was the preferred route, they also rafted down to the Kobuk via the other rivers, including the Ambler.[1]

- During his 1901 travels in the Kobuk region, Mendenhall took a side trip up the **Ambler**, which he deemed as "the most important of the branches of the Kowak."[2]

4. Post-Statehood evidence of use.

- Jettmar indicates the floatable portion of the river is 80 miles long. She describes the 3-mile canyon as class III. Downstream of the canyon is rated as Class I-II. She describes put in on gravel bar of headwater streams. The section from the put in as being class II to Ulaneak Creek. She discusses sharp rocks that can damage folding kayak.[3] Based on the maps and river miles the state put in location and the location Jettmar has identified are the same.
- Strahan starts his trip information at Ulaneak Creek confluence, with take out at the Village of Ambler for a 65-mile trip length. His trips usually scheduled during hunting season discuss low water and choosing channels well in the braided sections downstream. He talks about the river upstream of Ulaneak Creek as "studded with sharp, boat-ripping rocks and is usually to shallow to float".[4]

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[1] Ernest S. Burch, *The Iñupiaq Eskimo nations of northwest Alaska*, Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 1998, 140-141.

[2] Walter C. Mendenhall, *Reconnaissance from Fort Hamlin to Kotzebue Sound, Alaska by way of Dall, Kanuti, Allen, and Kowak Rivers*, US Geological Survey Professional Paper No. 10, Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1902, 19, 26.

[3] Karen Jettmar, *The Alaska River Guide, Canoeing, Kayaking, and Rafting in the Last Frontier* (Birmingham, AL; Menasha Ridge Press; 2008), 60-61.

[4] Michael Strahan*, Float Hunting Alaska's Wild Rivers, The How-To, Where-To Manual for Success* (Fairbanks, AK; Alaska Hunter®, an imprint of Alaska Hunter® publications; 2007).

- Trip origination points from the online sources are the village of Noatak by boat, air drop off, and hiking over Nakmaktuak Pass from the Noatak River. [5, 6, 7, 8, 9] YouTube videos of floating the Ambler River are available at the footnoted links.[10]
- Most guided trips begin at the village of Ambler and travel upstream.[11]

5. Physical Characteristics supporting use, or being susceptible to use, in pre- and/or post-statehood.

- **Ambler River**
  Location at confluence with the Kobuk River
  Latitude: 67.0875835
  Longitude: 157.8459278
  Basin area: 1082 square miles
  Elevation at source: 3100 feet
  Main channel length: 84 miles
  Average channel slope: 33 feet/ mile
  Channel type: Braided from river mile 77-14 and meandering from river mile 14-0
  Stream Order: **4** from river mile 70-57 and **5** from river mile 57- 0

Conclusion

The BLM has determined the Ambler River to be navigable through T. 22 N., R. 9 E., KRM., in conveyance to the state. Evidence of boat use on the Ambler River is documented in both pre- and post-statehood sources, demonstrating that the Ambler River was navigable at the time of Alaska's statehood from the confluence just upstream of river mile 77 to the Kobuk River. The Ambler River exhibits similar physical characteristics and flow patterns to other rivers determined navigable by the BLM, further supporting this conclusion.

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[5] Things to Luc At & Triple Point Training, "Gates of the Arctic Traverse," https://thingstolucat.com/gates-of-the-arctic-traverse/, accessed August 20, 2026.
[6] https://forum.packraft.org/t/triple-a-grand-traverse-of-gates-of-the-arctic/791 Roman Dial, accessed October 14, 2026.
[7] https:alwaysnorth.co.uk/gates-of-the-arctic-anaktuvuk-pass-to-ambler-days-1-5
Always North, accessed October 14-21, 2026.
[8] Nick Jans, *Throwback: Jet-Boat Junkies* (Alaska Magazine, July 5, 2018).
[9] Nick Jans, *A Day Alone With the River* (Alaska Magazine, April 4, 2023).
[10] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tt273kMjPz8 accessed October 13, 2026.
[11] https://amblercharters.com accessed October 13, 2026.