State's Summary of Reasons for RDI Application:
4. Alatna River

Introduction

The RDI Application is for the length of the Alatna River from an Unnamed Lake (locally known as Gaedeke Lake) to its confluence with the Koyukuk River. This summary considers the navigability of the Alatna River from Unnamed Lake (Gaedeke Lake) through T. 22 N., R. 24 E., KRM. The documented pre-statehood use of the Alatna River offers strong evidence of navigability, reinforced by the substantial post statehood use. Physical characteristics indicate a high potential for navigability based on other rivers similar physical characteristics.

Rationale

1. **Tidal Influence.**

   These segments are not tidally influenced.

2. **BLM Determinations.**

- The BLM has not always been consistent with its determinations for the Alatna River; but the non-navigability determinations were overturned in later determinations.
  1980/04/15 – BLM Land Report Nav Recommendations on State Selections – Alatna River determined navigable in T. 17 N., R. 24 E. KRM.
  1980/07/24 – BLM Land Report Nav Recommendations on State Selections – Alatna River determined navigable in T. 18 N., R. 25 E., KRM.
  1980/08/04 – BLM navigability recommendations – State Selections – Alatna River determined navigable in T. 17 N., R. 24 E., KRM.
  1980/09/08 – BLM Land Report Nav Recommendations on State Selections – Alatna River determined non-navigable in T. 21 N., R. 24 E., KRM. This determination is overturned by the determination dated 1980/10/24.
  1980/09/11 – BLM FDO State Selection Report – Alatna River determined navigable in T. 15 N., R. 26 E., KRM.; T. 15 N., R. 25 E., KRM.; and T. 16 N., R. 25 E., KRM.
  1980/10/04 – BLM Land Report, Nav Recommendations on State Selections – Alatna River determined navigable in T. 17 N., R. 24 E., KRM; while all waters including the Alatna River were determined non-navigable in T. 18 N., R. 24 E., KRM. The non-navigable determination is overturned by the 1980/11/04 Navigability Review – State Selection F15193.
  1980/10/22 – BLM Land Report, Nav Recommendations on State Selections – Alatna River determined navigable in T. 15 N., R. 26 E., KRM.; and T. 15 N., R. 25 E., KRM.
  1980/10/24 – BLM Land report, Nav Recommendations on State Selections – Alatna River determined navigable in T. 19 N., R. 25 E., KRM.; T. 19 N., R. 26 E., KRM.; T. 19 N., R. 25 E., KRM.
  1980/11/04 – BLM Navigability Review – State Selection F15193 supplemental – Alatna River determined navigable in T. 18 N., R. 24 E., KRM.

1980/12/30 –BLM Land Report, Nav Recommendations on State Selections – Alatna River determined navigable in T. 21 N., R. 24 E., KRM.; and T. 22 N., R. 24 E., KRM.
1981/01/27 – BLM Decision; Lands Proper for Selection Tentative Approval Given G-15197; Alatna River determined navigable and excluded from. - T. 19 N., R. 25 E., KRM; T. 20 N., R. 25E., KRM; and T. 19 N., R. 26 E., KRM.
1983/07/12 – Final Navigability Determination for State Selections in the Upper Koyukuk Drainage Area – Determined Alatna River navigable in T. 15 N., R. 27 E., KRM.; T. 21 N., R. 24 E., KRM.; T. 22 N., R. 24 E., KRM.;
1984/02/21 – Final Navigability Determination for K'oyit'ots'ina Ltd. (Villages of Alatna and Allakaket) and Doyon, Limited in Bettles/Hughes Quadrangles. Determined the Alatna River navigable within the selection area; T. 22 N., R. 25 W., KRM.; T. 21 N., R. 25 W., KRM.; T. 21 N., R. 23 W., KRM.; and T. 20 N., R. 24 W., KRM.
1987/03/09 – Navigability Determinations for Water Bodies in the Alatna River Group Survey Area (282), Window 1653 – Alatna River where 198 feet wide is not determined. This determination applies to the Alatna River within: T. 16-18 N., R. 24 E., KRM.; T. 21 N., R. 24 E., KRM.; T. 18-20 N., R. 25 E., KRM.; and T. 19 N., R., 26 E., KRM. The state believes earlier determinations apply.
2008/04/01 – ANV F-93246 B –Section 32, T. 23 N., R. 24 E., KRM., Decision describing BLM field inspection by boat with outboard motor. BLM could not convey this parcel due to being in the wilderness area of Gates of the Arctic.

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

3. Pre-Statehood evidence of use.

- Jasper N. Wyman was among hundreds of prospectors who stampeded up the Koyukuk River in 1898. He and five of his partners built two poling boats and took them up the Alatna River by poling and lining. After sixty miles they had to stop and wait for the rain to stop and the river to go down. Wyman was a photographer who took many pictures of mining and other activity in the Koyukuk region. One of the photos, taken in fall 1898, shows men lining a poling boat up Helpmejack Creek, an upper tributary of the Alatna River.[1]

- Walter Mendenhall of the USGS ascended the Alatna River in 1901 on a trip over the portage to the Noatak River. The party used Peterborough canoes. They had little trouble ascending both the Alatna River and Helpmejack Creek, lining where necessary.[2]

- In 1911, Philip Smith of the USGS conducted a reconnaissance of the Alatna and Noatak basins. Smith reported that the river was navigable under ordinary conditions by canoe up to twenty-five miles below the head (likely near Gull Creek). The last twenty-five miles were a succession

[1] Jasper N. Wyman, Journey to the Koyukuk: The Photos of J.N. Wyman, 1898-1899 (Missoula, Mont: Pictorial Histories Pub. Co, 1988), 40, 127.
[2] Walter C. Mendenhall, *Reconnaissance from Fort Hamlin to Kotzebue Sound, Alaska, by Way of Dall, Kanuti, Allen, and Kowak Rivers*, USGS Professional Paper No. 10 no. 10 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1902), 9.

of riffles that made navigation more difficult.[3]

- In 1931, Robert Marshall and Ernie Johnson took Johnson's 25-foot poling boat, equipped with a 10-horsepower outboard motor, up the Alatna River. The boat measured 29 feet long, was 16 inches wide at the bottom, with a flare of 14 inches every 12 inches in depth. They loaded the boat for the 50-day journey which took them up the Alatna River to the mouth of the Kutuk River. It took six days to ascend the river, using the motor, lining the boat, or pulling it. The return trip downriver was easy and took three days.[4]

4. Post-Statehood evidence of use.

- Letter to ERTEC NW from Brooks Range Expeditions. This letter describes drop off and pickup locations of waterbodies, including Alatna River. "Alatna - Drop off at "Circle Lake" adjacent to the Alatna, pickup at "Helpmejack Hills." – Distance, about 70 miles..."[5]

- The 1986 Park Plan: Recreational, visitor float accounted for 42% of the recreational access. The Alatna River is one of the most heavily used areas. The Alatna River accounted for 29% of the trips taken. Commercial visitor services are also discussed including guided raft trips, and guided raft trips are the most popular of guided activities in the park. The Alatna River and Arrigetch Peaks is listed as one of the many rivers with guided river tips.[6]

- Jettmar did not rate the upper river; only noting that there is a class II – III rapid (can be lined or portaged) just above Ram Creek. She does describe the river "from headwater lakes as shallow, rocky, and very fast", possibly to shallow to float and lining is recommended. Below this upper 25-mile section, she indicates the addition of sweepers and small rapids in the next 15 miles. There is no discussion of conditions for the 37-mile section of river between Ram Creek and Circle Lake (near Arrigetch Peaks). Below Circle Lake the river meanders to Takahula Lake where great oxbows begin to form. From Gaedeke Lake lining is recommended to the confluence with Weyahok River, and the upper river is recommended for experienced paddlers. The section below Circle Lake to Alatna and Allakaket are described as a good family float.[7]

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[3] Philip S. Smith, "The Alatna-Noatak Region," in U.S. Geological Survey, *Mineral Resources of Alaska, Report on Progress of Investigations of 1911,* U.S. Geological Survey Bulletin 520 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1912), 316.

[4] Robert Marshall, *Alaska Wilderness: Exploring the Central Brooks Range.* Edited by George Marshall. 3rd ed. Berkeley, Cal.: University of California Press, 1991, 82-87, 88, 96; Robert Marshall, "Robert Marshall's Journal - Beginning of Alatna Trip - Alaska, July 6-11, 1931," 1931, 3, Robert Marshall Papers, Collection number BANC MSS 79/94 pz, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, Box 15, Folder 1:4 Field Journal Aug-Sept. 1938.

[5] Brooks Range Expeditions to Dian Gudgel-Holmes, Ertek Northwest, Inc., Attached.

[6] USDOI, NPS, Gates of the Arctic NPP, Alaska, General Management Plan, Land Protection Plan, Wilderness Suitability Review (USDOI, NPS, 1986), 78-89.

[7] Karen Jettmar, *The Alaska River Guide, Canoeing, Kayaking, and Rafting in the Last Frontier* (Birmingham, AL; Menasha Ridge Press; 2008), 86-89.

- Trip origination points from the online sources, the Unnamed Lake (Gaedeke Lake) and Circle Lake are typical put in locations.[8,9,10,11] Trips originating at Gaedeke Lake usually require packing or lining boats and gear to Weyahok River. Circle Lake requires portage to the Alatna River. Take out locations for various trips are Circle Lake, Takahula Lake and the Village of Allakaket.[12,13]

- Most guided trips begin at Circle Lake.[14,15,16]

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

- **Alatna River**
  Location at confluence with Koyukuk River
  Latitude: 66 ° 37' 35" N
  Longitude: 152° 37' 35" W
  Basin area: 3494 square miles
  Elevation at source: 4025 feet
  Main channel length: 223 miles
  Average channel slope: 16 feet/mile
  Stream Order: **4-6**
  Channel type: Braided to meandering
  Calculated flows: 5424 to 10453 CFS

- **Alatna River to confluence with Pingaluk River**
  Basin area: 1,022 square miles
  Channel type: Braided
  Stream Order: **4** river mile 221-184, **5** starting at river mile 184
  Calculated flows: 1893 to 3977 CFS

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[8] Aussies on the Alatna, Aussies on the Alatna, accessed 9/29/2026.
[9] Things to Luc At & Triple Point Training, "Gates of the Arctic Traverse," https://thingstolucat.com/gates-of-the-arctic-traverse/, accessed August 20, 2026.
[10] American Whitewater, https://www.americanwhitewater.org/content/River/view/river-detail/3155/main, accessed 9/4/2026.
[11] Yule M. Chaffin, A Worrier in the Wilderness, Alaska Sportsman, June 1965.
[12] Aussies on the Alatna, Aussies on the Alatna, accessed 9/29/2026.
[13] [13] American Whitewater, https://www.americanwhitewater.org/content/River/view/river-detail/3155/main, accessed 9/4/2026.
[14] Alatna River Packrafting Trip, Best Alaska Adventure Trips & Guided Hiking Tours | Expeditions Alaska, accessed 9/29/2026.
[15] Arrigetch Peaks Packraft, Arctic Wild, https://arcticwild.com/trip/packraft/gates-arrigetch-alatna-packraft-2027/, accessed 9/29/2026.
[16]Arrigetch-Alatna Pack Raft – Gates of the Arctic National Park, https://alaskaalpineadventures.com/tour/arrigetch-alatna-pack-raft-gates-of-the-arctic-national-park/ accessed 9/29/2026.

Conclusion

The BLM has determined the Alatna River navigable within conveyance selection areas. The determinations were not always consistent, and the BLM reversed those earlier determinations. The BLM determined the Alatna River navigable from the Koyukuk River upstream through T. 22 N., R. 24 E., KRM. Evidence of boat use on the Alatna River is documented in both pre- and post-statehood sources. Thus, demonstrating that the upper Alatna River was navigable at the time of Alaska's statehood. The historic record supports use up into its headwaters where trips begin at Gaedeke Lake, Weyahok River and many other locations down to Ram Creek and beyond. The Alatna river exhibits similar physical characteristics and flow patterns to other rivers determined navigable by the BLM further supporting this conclusion.