

Kenai National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Guide



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Visitor Guide 2023 Edition

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Produced and Designed by



**Alaska
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Welcome to the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge

Nearly two million acres in size, the refuge is characterized by diverse habitats and wildlife. Moose, bears, bald eagles, and salmon are just a sampling of the wildlife variety here. Wildlife viewing is one of the refuge’s key attractions and visitors can observe animals in alpine tundra, wetlands, and boreal forest.

Fishing, hunting, camping, and hiking opportunities also draw visitors from Alaska and from around the world.

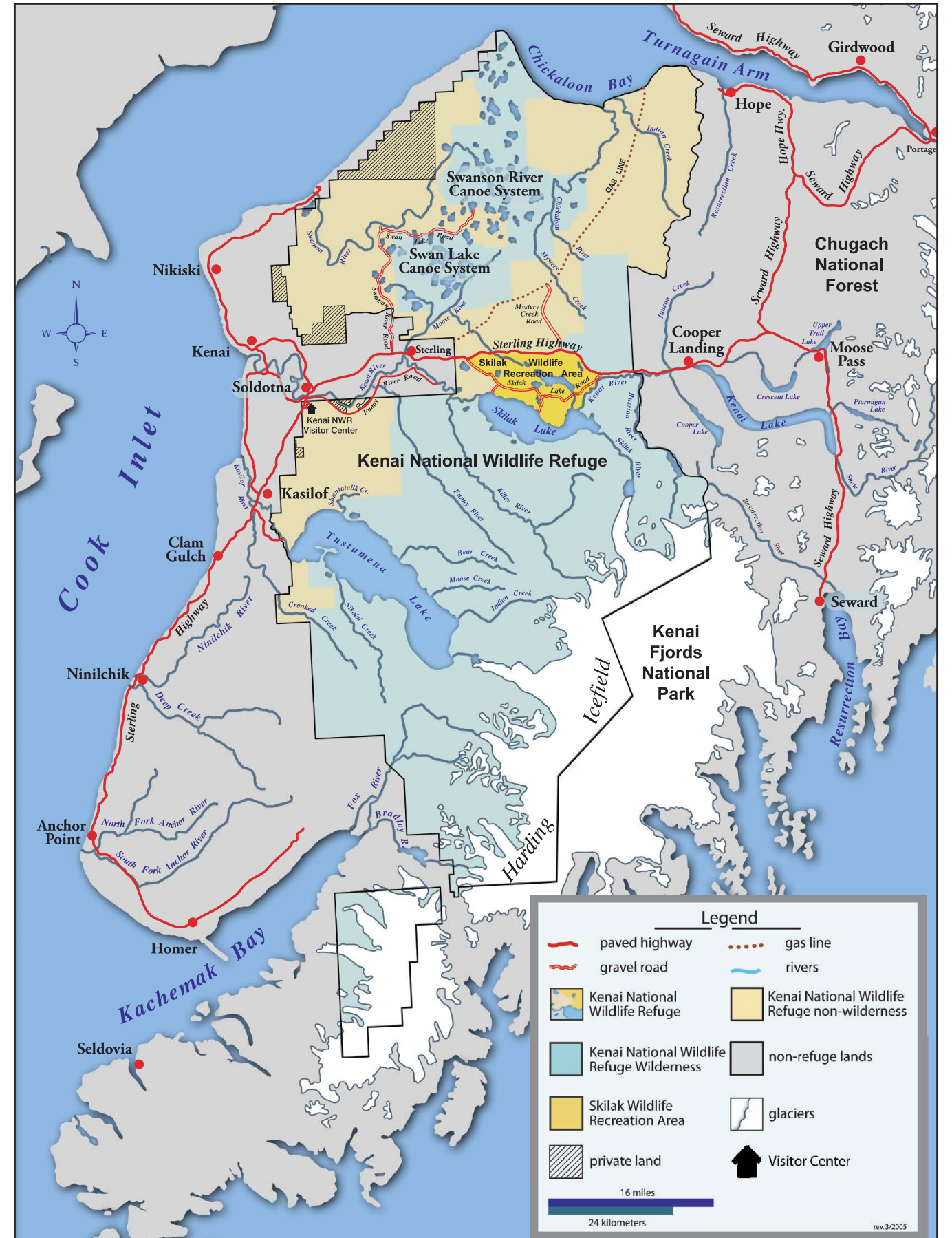
Kenai National Wildlife Refuge was first established as the Kenai National Moose Range in 1941 to protect moose. In 1980, the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) changed the name and purpose of the refuge. The refuge now exists to protect wildlife populations, the variety of habitats they need to survive, and for you, the visitor, to enjoy.

We hope you will use this guide to get the most out of your visit to the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge.

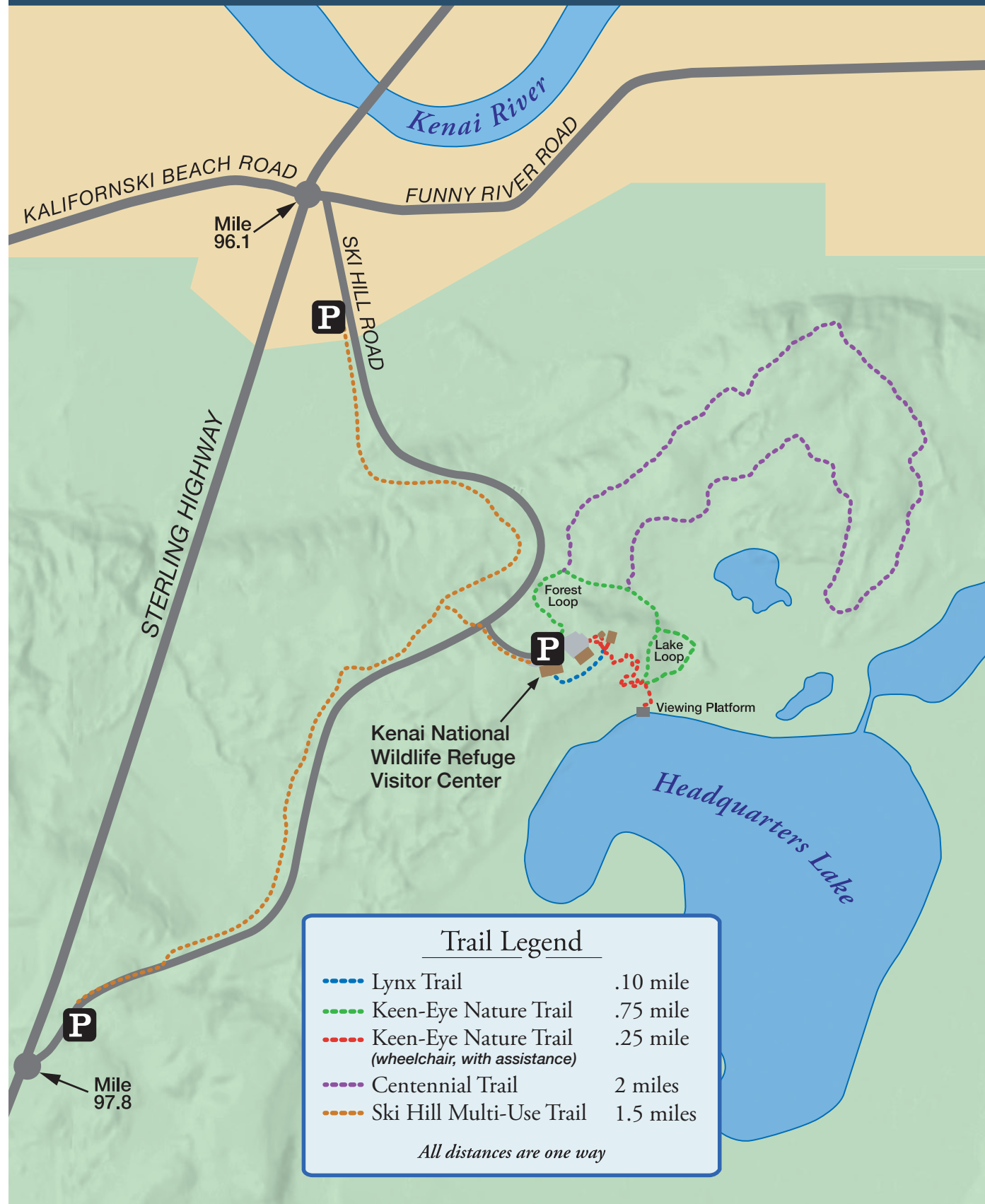


USFWS/Alii Curtis Photography

Personalized visitor information is available at the Refuge Visitor Center in Soldotna, which provides year-round educational programming, hiking/ski trails and community events. Call or stop by to start planning your adventure on the Kenai.



Visitor Center Hiking Trails



Wildlife Viewing and Safety

Where to Look

Alpine Tundra:

In the mountains above treeline, low growing plants provide food for Dall sheep, caribou, and marmots. Golden eagles hunt small mammals from the air. Brown bears feast on berries in late summer.

Boreal Forest:

Spruce and hardwoods such as birch, aspen, and cottonwood are home to songbirds, spruce grouse, red squirrels, owls, lynx, moose, and black bear.

Wetland:

Bogs, marshes, and muskeg are nesting areas for migratory waterfowl and shorebirds. Caribou and moose eat dwarf birch and willows. Bears can be seen in these areas hunting for moose calves in spring.

Aquatic:

Areas around rivers, lakes, and ponds are home to beaver, muskrat, loons, trumpeter swans, and spawning salmon. Trout and salmon, attract bald eagles, bears, and river otters.



If you Encounter a Moose

- 🔥 **Move away!** Maintain a space of 75 feet or more between yourself and a moose.
- 🔥 **Watch for body language.** If the moose lowers its head and ears, and the hair on its back and neck stands up, back off.
- 🔥 **If a moose charges, retreat behind a large tree or rock.** Most moose charges are bluffs and getting behind something solid offers important protection from their sharp, powerful hooves.
- 🔥 Remember, keeping your distance from moose is the best way to avoid a negative encounter.

Traveling in Bear Country

- 🐾 Consider carrying accessible bear spray and be prepared to use it.
- 🐾 Black and brown bears are found throughout the refuge. Be alert and use your senses to evaluate fresh bear sign such as tracks, scat, claw marks, and strong scents.
- 🐾 Make noise to avoid surprising a bear. Be especially careful along noisy streams, in thick brush, and where visibility is poor.
- 🐾 If you see a bear—stay calm. If the bear does not notice you,

quietly leave the area from the same direction you arrived. Keep your eyes on the bear.

- 🐾 If a bear does notice you, prepare your deterrent, face the bear, wave your arms, and talk to it calmly. Try to appear larger by standing close to your group.
- 🐾 If a bear approaches you, stand still. Do not run!
- 🐾 If a bear attacks, fall to the ground and play dead. Lie flat on your stomach, with your hands behind your head. *Keep your pack on.*



Cabins



Engineer Lake Cabin

Cabins for your use

There are 16 public use cabins located in the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge. Getting there can be a thrilling adventure in itself, as most require the use of boats, aircraft, hiking, or skiing.

CABINS: Have bunk beds, wood heating stove, table, benches, and an outhouse. Some cabins on front country lakes are equipped with row boats for recreation during summer months.

BRING: Sleeping bags and pads, cook stove and gear, water purification, first aid, extra food, garbage bags and toilet paper.

FIREWOOD: Bring dry kindling and prepared firewood. You may collect dead and down wood, but availability may be limited.

PACK OUT: All trash and secure food, garbage and supplies from bears.

SLEEPS:
2-4, depending on cabin size

STAY LIMIT:
7 nights

COST:
\$35-\$45 per night, plus booking fee

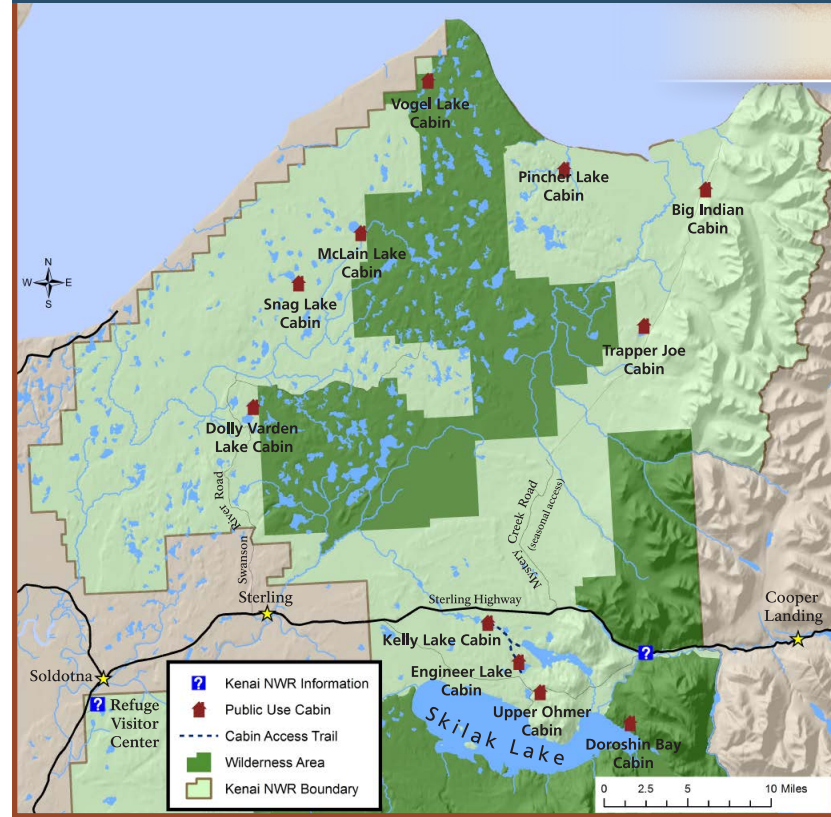
2 cabins - Trapper Joe & Emma Lake are first-come, first-serve & no fee

RESERVATIONS:
Call 877-444-6777 or Search for *Kenai National Wildlife Refuge Cabins* at www.recreation.gov



Trapper Joe Cabin

16 Cabins for Reservation



North Refuge Cabins

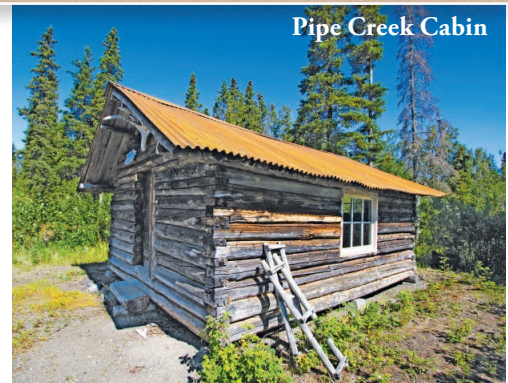
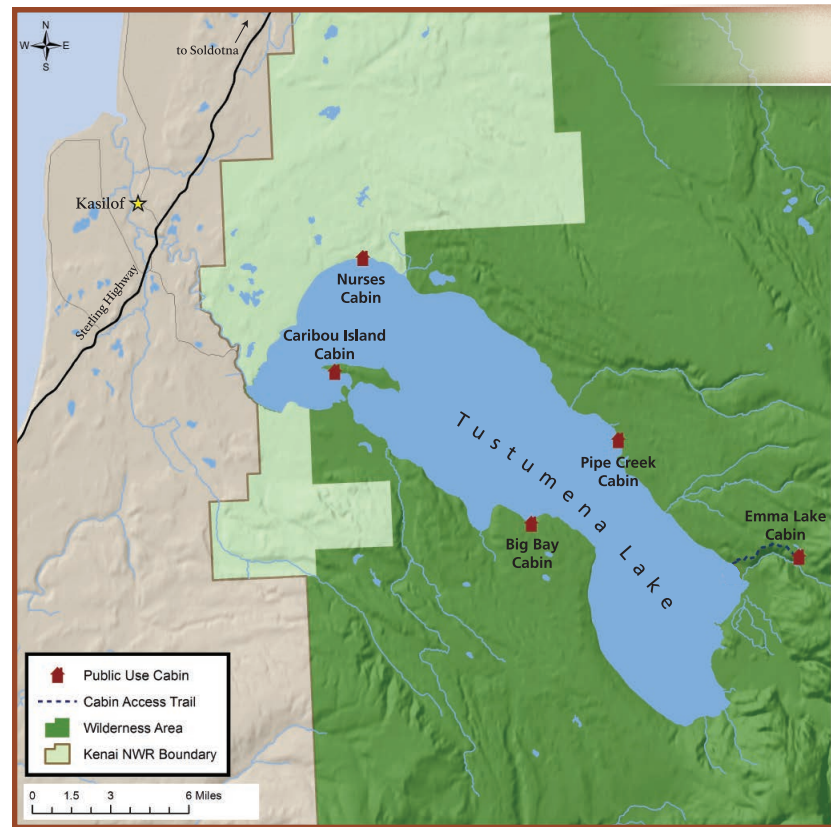


Upper Ohmer Lake view from cabin porch

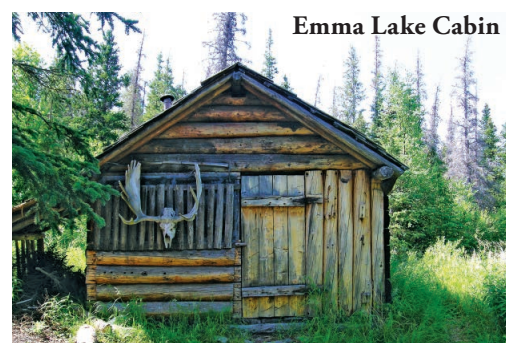


Inside the Upper Ohmer Lake Cabin

South Refuge Cabins



Pipe Creek Cabin



Emma Lake Cabin

Skilak Wildlife Recreation Area



Skilak Wildlife Recreation Area

Mile	Interest Point	Comments
0.1	Jim's Landing	View bald eagles in tall cottonwoods on the south shore of the Kenai River. Busy boat ramp for drift boat and raft trips. Last boat launch "take-out" before Skilak Lake.
0.6	Kenai River Trail (East)	Hike in 1/2 mile for a scenic view of the Kenai River Canyon.
1.9	Hideout Trail	This 1.5 mile roundtrip hike offers spectacular views of the Kenai River and Skilak Lake.
2.3	Kenai River Trail (West)	Hike in to see regrowth from the 1991 Pothole Lake Fire. Good area for viewing moose.
3.6	Hidden Lake Campground	Largest and most developed refuge campground. For a 4.6 mile roundtrip scenic hike through the 2019 Swan Lake Fire Burn Area, take Burney's Trail across from site #7, Skyview Campground Loop. Park in the amphitheater lot.
4.6	Hidden Creek Trail	Origin of the 1996 Hidden Creek Fire which burned 5,200 acres. Nice cobble beach for picnicking at the end of the trail by Skilak Lake (3 miles roundtrip; lower section of the trail may be wet).
5.1	Hidden Creek Overlook	Outstanding view of Hidden Creek Flats, Kenai River, Skilak Lake, and the glacial outwash area of the Skilak Glacier.
5.4	Skilak Lookout Trail	Hike through the heart of the forest regenerated after the 1996 Hidden Creek Fire. From the alpine zone at the end of the trail, look down to Skilak Lake for a view of gull and cormorant rookeries on the lake's rocky islands (4 miles roundtrip).
6.0	Bear Mountain Trail	Gains elevation quickly for a scenic view of Skilak Lake at trail's end (2 miles roundtrip).
8.4	Upper Skilak Campground	Excellent picnic site with views of Skilak Lake and the Kenai Mountains. Campground with vehicle sites and walk-in tent sites. Boat launch for Skilak Lake and Vista Trail (3 miles roundtrip).
8.5	Lower Ohmer Lake Campground	Small developed campground with vehicle and tent sites. Nice canoeing and fishing for rainbow trout. Look for moose, loons, and beaver.
9.3	Engineer Lake Overlook	Scenic view of Engineer Lake and west end of Hidden Lake.
9.4	Engineer Lake Campground	Small campground area and trailhead for Seven Lakes Trail (8.8 miles roundtrip) with access to Engineer Lake Public Use Cabin. Watch for wildlife in areas regrowing after the 2019 Swan Lake Fire..
13.6	Lower Skilak Campground	Moderate-sized campground with 14 primitive sites. Popular boat launch for Skilak Lake and Kenai River fishing activities. Overflow parking lots available for boat trailers.
16.6	Marsh Lake Trail	Once a fuel break from the 2016 Card Street Fire, this trail offers a unique view of surrounding mountains that includes a large man-made clearing. Good for wildlife viewing. Trail ends at Marsh Lake. (6 miles round trip)

Mileage begins at east entrance, see map on page 8.

Camping

Roadside Campgrounds

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. Federal Interagency Senior and Access Passes reduce camping fees by 50% in refuge campgrounds.

Requirements: Camping may not exceed 14 days in a 30-day period anywhere on the refuge. Stay limits are two days at the Russian River Access Area or seven consecutive days at Hidden Lake Campground.

Fires in developed campgrounds are allowed but restricted to grates, barbecues, or stoves. Campers may cut firewood, but only dead or down wood may be collected. Attend fires at all times. Completely put out fires before you leave.

Pets must be on a leash no longer than nine feet. Owners must be in control of pets at all times and must clean up pet waste.

Backcountry Camping

Backcountry camping is permitted 1/4-mile away from the Sterling Highway and Skilak Lake Road. Please practice *Leave No Trace* ethics.

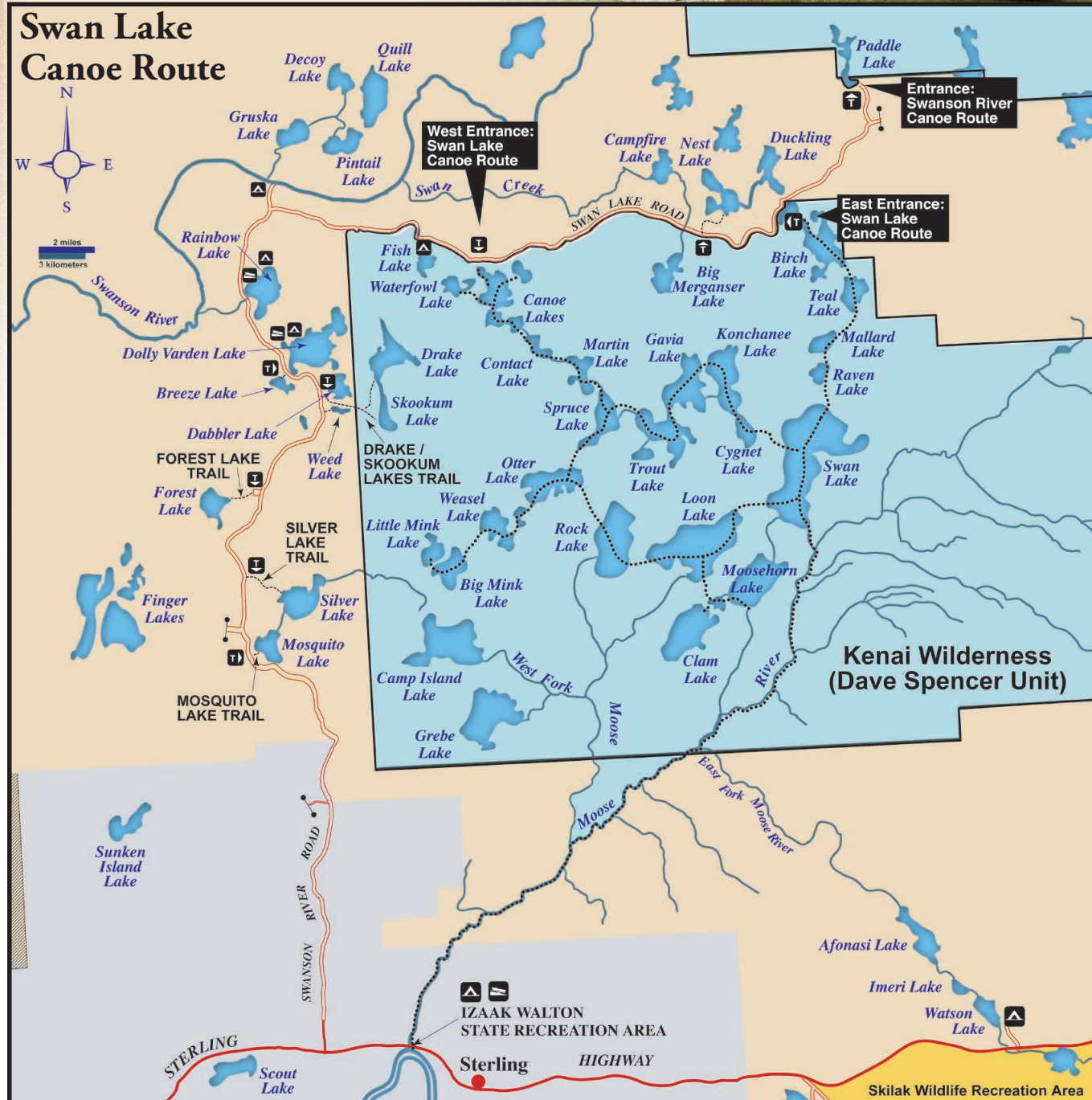
Skilak Wildlife Recreation Area Camping (see map on pages 8-9)

Campgrounds	Number of Units	Toilets	Boat Launch	Nightly Fee
Engineer Lake	4	✓	✓	Free
Hidden Lake	44	✓	✓	\$10
Kelly Lake	3	✓	✓	Free
Lower Ohmer Lake	4	✓	Canoe	Free
Lower Skilak Lake	14	✓	✓	Free
Petersen Lake	3	✓	✓	Free
Upper Skilak Lake	25	✓	✓	\$5-\$10
Watson Lake	3	✓	✓	Free



Canoeing in the Refuge

The *Swan Lake* and *Swanson River* canoe systems cover over 100 miles in the northern lowlands of the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge. From easy family weekend trips to week-long adventures, paddlers of all abilities and ages will enjoy this unique wilderness experience.



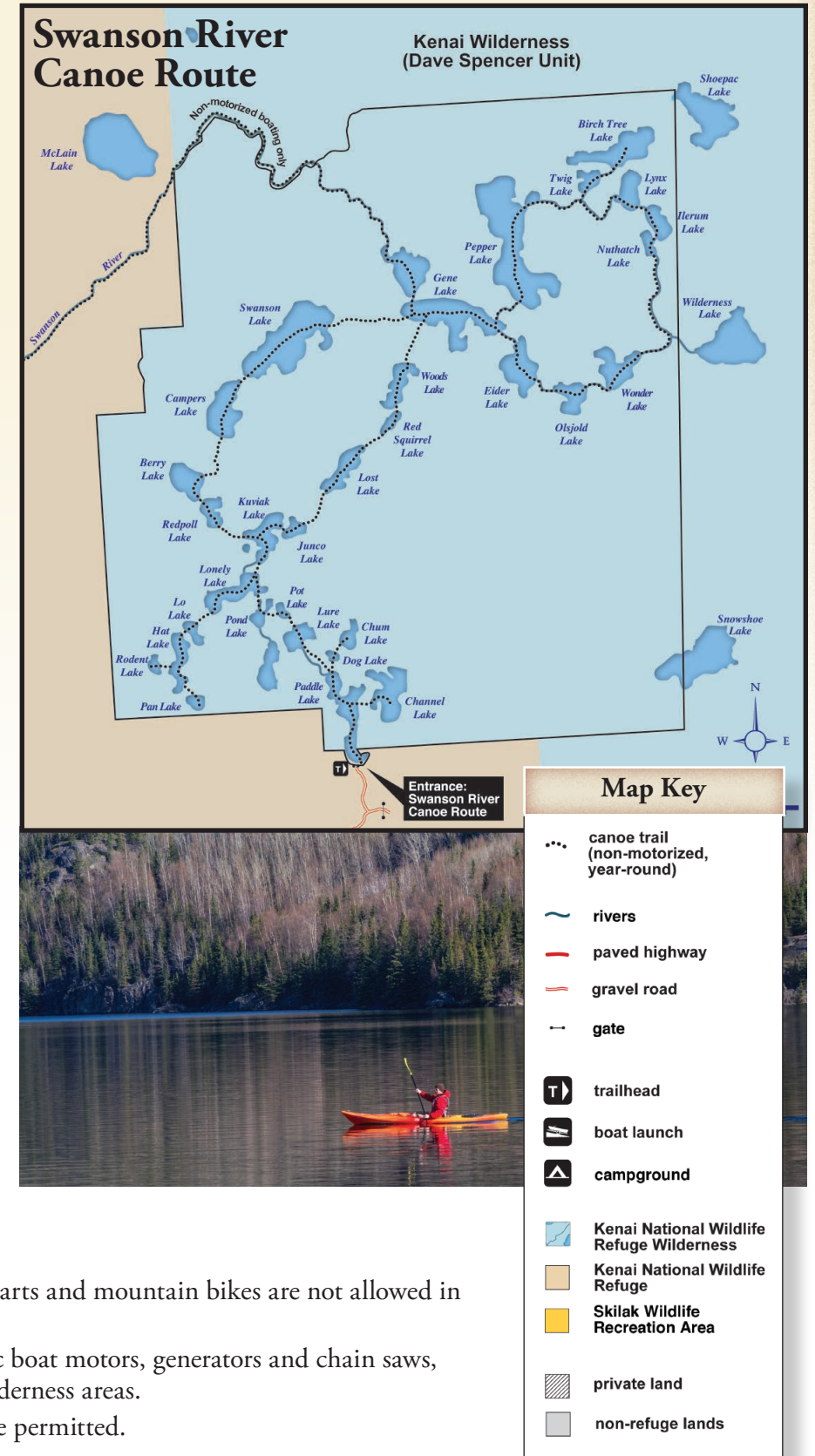
Canoeing in the Refuge

What To Expect

- Lakes typically break up in mid-May and remain open until mid-October. Lake waters are cold (50-60 degrees F).
- Portages range from several hundred yards to a mile or more. Travel light and use a good canoe yoke. Realize you hike as much as you paddle on the canoe routes. Carry an extra paddle to ensure safety.
- Biting insects are often present on portages and at campsites. Bring repellent and head nets.
- Narrow rivers, like Swanson and Moose, require paddlers to maneuver tight oxbows and to avoid rocks and brush. These rivers require intermediate level canoeing skills.
- Campsites are not designated. To reduce impact, choose sites that have been previously developed.

Canoe System Regulations

- Canoeists must register at the entrance where they embark.
- Group size is limited to 15 people. Smaller groups of 2 to 8 are recommended to reduce impact.
- State boating and life jacket regulations apply.
- No motorized watercraft.
- Wheeled vehicles such as canoe carts and mountain bikes are not allowed in wilderness areas.
- Power equipment, such as electric boat motors, generators and chain saws, are not allowed in designated wilderness areas.
- Fishing and hunting in season are permitted.
- Fireworks are prohibited.



Fishing and Hunting

Fishing

Fishing on the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge is a great angling challenge as each body of water has its own unique fish ecology and regulations.

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

Alaska residents ages 18 and older and nonresidents ages 16 and older must purchase a valid sport fishing license. These are available at local sporting goods and grocery stores. They can also be purchased online at: www.admin.adfg.state.ak.us/license

Fishing Away From the Crowds

Good areas for quiet fishing near the road system are found in small lakes such as Lower Ohmer, Watson, Kelly, Petersen, Forest, Dolly Varden, Rainbow, Paddle, and many areas of the Swan Lake and Swanson River canoe systems. Fishing from a canoe or small inflatable boat is highly recommended to successfully fish for rainbow trout in these waters.

One of the few areas to fish for grayling is Lower Fuller Lake, a steep 1.5-mile hike from mile 57 of the Sterling Highway.



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

For information on the status of fish concentrations and emergency closures use the ADF&G Soldotna Fishery Hotline (updated weekly) at **907-262-2737**.

Hunting

Hunting is an important wildlife management tool that we recognize as a healthy, traditional, outdoor pastime, deeply rooted in America's heritage. Hunting can instill a unique understanding and appreciation of wildlife, their behavior, and their habitat needs.

As practiced on refuges, hunting, trapping, and fishing do not pose a threat to wildlife populations and, in some instances, are necessary for sound wildlife management. Refer to both the current State of Alaska and refuge-specific hunting regulations when planning your hunt.

Much of the refuge's two million acres is open to hunting. Areas on the refuge that are closed to hunting and trapping include areas around our administrative, visitor center, and educational facilities; hiking trails on Ski Hill

Road; and the Moose Research Center on Swan Lake Road. Discharge of firearms is not permitted within ¼ mile of all refuge facilities, including trailheads, parking lots, cabins, campgrounds, roads, waysides, and buildings.

Hunting in the **Skilak Wildlife Recreation Area** has its own set of rules and regulations. For current guidance, consult the refuge website at <http://kenai.fws.gov> or contact refuge headquarters for more information at **907-262-7021**.

Fishing Etiquette in Bear Country

- If a bear approaches you while you have a fish on the line, cut the line and leave the area.
- Fish remains attract bears. Cut fish carcasses into small pieces and toss into deep, fast-moving water. Do not put fish waste in dumpsters or on shore.
- Carry fish out in sealed plastic bags to decrease odors that could attract bears to paths and trails.
- Store all food, bait, line and tackle, fishy clothes, and garbage in bear-resistant containers in your vehicle.
- Avoid fishing during times of low visibility (dawn, dusk, and at night) to prevent bear encounters.
- Always keep your dog on a leash and under control to prevent negative bear encounters.
- Carry accessible bear spray and be prepared to use it.



Stay Connected

As the official nonprofit education partner of the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge, Alaska Geographic connects people with Alaska's magnificent wildlands through the creation and delivery of exceptional educational products and programs. Together with public land partners, Alaska Geographic is dedicated to sharing Alaska's rich natural and cultural heritage.

Alaska Geographic operates stores across the state, including the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center in Soldotna. A portion of every purchase made at this Alaska Geographic store directly supports the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge by funding educational and interpretive programs and projects. Since 1959, Alaska Geographic has donated more than \$23 million to Alaska's public lands.

In 2023, Alaska Geographic will provide funding support for many education programs and projects, including the Earth Science "Every Kid Outdoors" Teachers Workshop, the development of new waysides, processing and cataloging nearly a decade of research reports, and the printing of this visitor guide in your hands!

Please consider supporting Alaska's public lands by becoming a member of Alaska Geographic. To learn more about our work and the benefits of membership or to browse our selection of Alaska books, maps, films, and more, visit one of our stores or akgeo.org



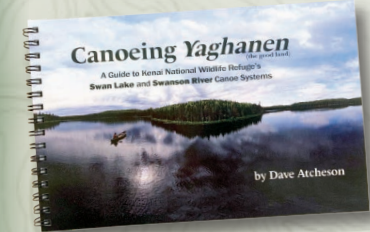
To Learn More

Stop by the refuge visitor center in Soldotna to find these products, plus a curated collection of apparel, books, maps, collectibles, and other fantastic items to commemorate your visit to this amazing place.

Pins, patches, hats, and other products featuring this unique Kenai National Wildlife Refuge design are available exclusively from Alaska Geographic.

Canoeing Yaghanen

This comprehensive guide provides an overview of the region, detailed maps of lakes and portages, suggested routes and itineraries, backcountry camping



info, packing lists, fishing tips and tactics, bear safety, and winter activities. **\$19.95**

Kenai NWR T-Shirts

Available in short and long sleeve, these soft shirts are a great way to show off your visit to the refuge. Made from 40% recycled polyester, 60% cotton, each shirt saves at least six 20oz plastic bottles from the landfill.

\$32.95 - \$39.95
Sizes S-3XL



Kenai NWR Pottery Mug

There's no better way to recall your adventure than with a handmade pottery mug, made in the USA! Kiln fired to 2150°F, each piece is durable and safe for the microwave, dishwasher, oven, and freezer. Lead-free & food safe. **\$22.95**



Trail Stickers

Over 110 miles of hiking trails traverse the Kenai Refuge, ranging from easy front-country walks perfect for families to multi-day strenuous hikes into wilderness. Show off completing the Tustumena, Skyline, Kenai River, or Skilak Lookout Trail with a 3" sticker!

\$2.99





Kenai National Wildlife Refuge

<http://kenai.fws.gov>
www.facebook.com/kenainationalwildliferefuge
907-262-7021

Mailing Address:

P.O. Box 2139
Soldotna, AK 99669

Refuge Visitor Center 907-260-2820

Physical Location (not for mailing):

33398 Ski Hill Road
Soldotna, AK 99669

For More Information
<http://kenai.fws.gov>

State of Alaska

- Department of Fish and Game 907-262-9368
- Fish and Wildlife Protection 907-262-4573
- Fishery Hotline (Soldotna) 907-262-2737
- State Forestry 907-260-4200
- State Parks 907-262-5581
- State Troopers (non-emergency) 907-262-4453



Information Centers

Alaska Islands and Ocean Visitor Center - AK Maritime NWR

www.islandsandocean.org
Homer
907-235-6961

Alaska Public Lands Information Center

www.alaskacenters.gov/anchorage.cfm
Anchorage
907-644-3678

Begich, Boggs Visitor Center, Chugach National Forest

www.fs.fed.us/r10/chugach
Portage
907-783-2326, 907-288-3178

Kenai Fjords National Park

www.nps.gov/kefj
Seward
907-422-0500

Kenai Visitor and Cultural Center

www.visitkenai.com
Kenai
907-283-1991

Soldotna Visitor Information Center

www.soldotnachamber.com
Soldotna
907-262-9814

Emergency Services: 911