

In 1980, the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act designated the upper stretch of the Delta River, all of the Tangle Lakes, and the Tangle River as part of the National Wild and Scenic River System. There are 25 rivers in Alaska that are part of this system and the Bureau of Land Management manages six of them.

Tangle Lakes, Tangle River and the Delta River were recognized for their outstanding scenery and natural and cultural values and classified either as wild, scenic or recreational.

A wild river is free of impoundments, generally inaccessible except by trail, and has exceptionally clean waters. Scenic classifications apply to sections that are free of impoundments, have shorelines that are largely undeveloped but are accessible by road. Recreational segments are accessible by road and may have some development along their shorelines.

Lower Tangle Lake.



The Delta National Wild and Scenic River

The Setting

The Delta River watershed is located in the Alaska Range in Southcentral Alaska. Access is along the Denali Highway about 21 miles west of Paxson. The watershed drains an area of about 150,000 acres and contains a network of 160 miles of streams and 21 lakes. The Tangle River flows through and connects several lakes in the Tangle Lakes system, then drains into the Delta River. The Delta flows north through the Alaska Range and joins the Tanana River which joins the Yukon River.

The terrain around the Tangle Lakes is predominantly tundra-covered rolling hills with glacial features such as moraines, eskers and kettles. Gravel benches above Lower Tangle Lake indicate that the lake was at one time about 50 feet higher than its current level. The land adjacent to the upper Delta

River includes steep alluvial slopes, rock cliffs and spectacular geologic features.

Elevations average 2,800 feet at the Tangle Lakes; the drainage falls 650 feet in 51 river miles. The land adjacent to the upper Delta River includes steep alluvial slopes, rock cliffs and spectacular geologic features.

Plants

Vegetation includes various plant associations ranging from arctic tundra to spruce-poplar forests. Grasses, sedges and forbs grow on the highest, most exposed slopes and above the brush line. Willows grow on moist lowland sites and in the many brushy draws draining the side slopes.

Dwarf birch occupies the drier sites associated with well drained soils. Alder is found on the steep

slopes of hillsides and canyon walls. Forests of white and black spruce occur below an elevation of 3,200 feet in small pockets along the river and on some hillsides. Open spruce-poplar forests are found on lowland sites along the river and on some midslope hillsides adjacent to the river.

Understory plants are varied and abundant. Fireweed, bistort, rose, mountain avens, burnet, and shrubby cinquefoil are just some of the many plants found in the area. Many people travel to Tangle Lakes to pick blueberries in August. Other berries found near the Delta River include crowberry, alpine bearberry, cranberry and red currant.

Season and Climate

The river running season generally begins in early-to mid-June, depending on ice breakup and precipitation. Average annual precipitation, measured at Paxson, is 11 inches of rain and 120 inches of snow. July is commonly the wettest month. During the summer, temperatures range from 35F to 70F with occasional highs in the 80s. By mid-September, the shorter daylight and colder temperatures bring the river recreation season to an end.

Animals

Wildlife provides opportunities for sport hunting, trapping, photography and viewing. Hunters seek moose, caribou, bear, Dall sheep, ptarmigan, waterfowl and snowshoe hare. Trappers concentrate on taking beaver, fox, wolf, marten, lynx, wolverine, otter, muskrat and mink.

Most of the 110 species of birds identified in this area are summer residents (May to September). Waterfowl are hunted on the Tangle Lakes in autumn. Ptarmigan are hunted among the low hills and valleys of the area in autumn and late winter. Nesting bald eagles can be observed along the river from Tangle Lakes to the lower Delta River during the summers.

Wildlife viewing is best in the early morning.

History and Prehistory

Native people may have lived in this area as long ago as the end of the last ice age (about 10,000 years ago). Approximately 226,660 acres in the Tangle Lakes area are designated as the Tangle Lakes Archaeological District. Hundreds of archaeological sites exist in this area which is now listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The first recorded use of the Delta River was a route of exploration by the U. S. Army in 1898. A gold strike along Rainy Creek led to the establishment of the Eureka Creek Mining District; as many as 250 people worked there between 1900 and 1910. (*Collection or disturbance of any historic or prehistoric remains is against the law.*)

Fishing

Tangle Lakes and the Delta River contain grayling, round whitefish, lake trout, burbot and longnose suckers. Most fishing is for grayling, but good lake trout fishing is available in late winter and early spring.

Salmon are not found in the Delta due to the 15-foot-high falls and the heavy silt load entering from Eureka Creek.

For more information on fishing, obtain a copy of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game Fishing Regulations and the BLM brochure *Alaska Freshwater Fishing*.

Land Use

There are a number of active mining claims in the Rainy Creek area along the lower end of the Delta River.

The trans-Alaska pipeline, built in the mid-1970s, is visible from the river for 3 miles before the take-out on the Richardson Highway at Mile 212.5.

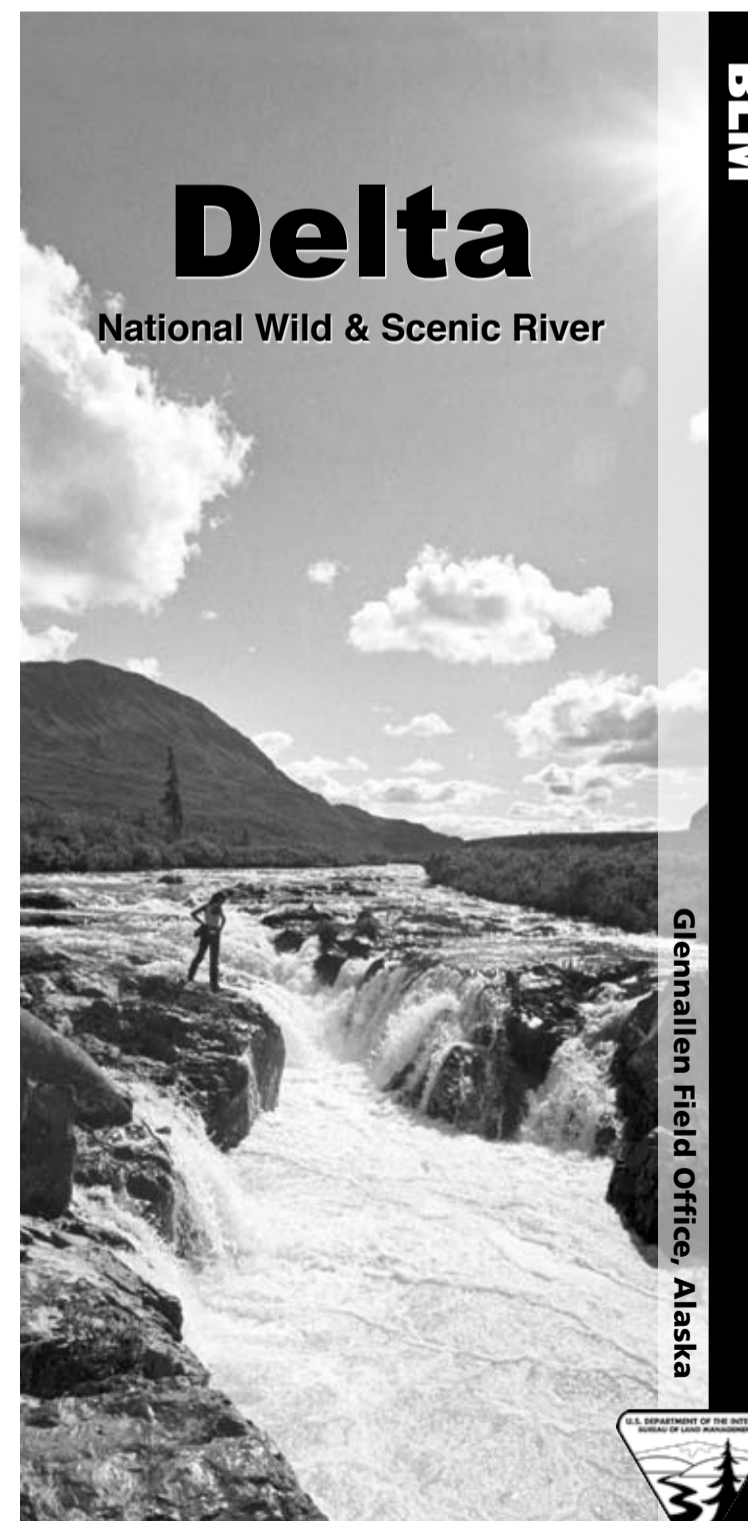
Cover: The falls of the Delta River must be by-passed by way of a half-mile portage.

U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management

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Delta

National Wild & Scenic River

BLM

Glennallen Field Office, Alaska



BLM Recreation Guide

Adventures on the Delta National Wild and Scenic River

Upper Tangle Lakes

To explore the Upper Tangle Lakes (see inset map), use the boat launch at the Delta National Wild and Scenic River Wayside at mile 21.5 of the Denali Highway. The first two lakes, separated by a 1/2-mile, relatively flat portage, offer easily accessible day trips with opportunities for wildlife viewing, berry picking and short hikes on winding esker ridges.

One more short portage takes you to an unnamed muddy, shallow lake. Three routes may be taken from there:

(1) continue across the lake which then drains into the Tangle River and loops back to the first lake; or (2) two more short portages and a 1-mile-long portage to the south will take you to Dickey Lake (which flows into the Middle Fork of the Gulkana River); or (3) travel/line up the Tangle River out of the muddy lake and paddle to the 1-mile portage above Dickey Lake.

NOTE: Portage trails are not marked or maintained in the Upper Tangle Lakes. Float planes may land at Dickey Lake and the Tangle Lakes. For additional information on the Middle Fork trip, refer to the BLM brochure *The Gulkana National Wild River*.

Lower Tangle Lakes and Upper Delta River

Begin your 2-to-3 day trip at the Tangle Lakes Campground at mile 21, Denali Highway where you will find a boat launch and campsites.

From Round Tangle Lake, follow the Tangle Lakes north. The first 9 miles of the trip goes through three of the Tangle Lakes which are all connected by shallow channels of slow-moving water. During low water levels, lining canoes and rafts might be necessary for short distances. Ice can remain on the lakes until early to mid June. The Delta River flows north from Lower Tangle Lake and continues through the Amphitheater Mountains and the foothills of the Alaska Range. It is 20 miles from this outlet to the take-out point. The first 1 1/4 miles of river are shallow and rocky Class II water.

Following this first section, there is a portage around unnavigable waterfalls. The river portage take-out is on the right side of the river and marked with a sign. The 1/2-mile maintained portage trail leads you across steep, rocky terrain.

Below the falls, the river narrows to approximately 60 feet and the velocity increases significantly. Boaters must have whitewater experience to successfully float this 1-mile section of shallow, rocky, Class II-III rapids. The next 12 miles of river are slow, meandering Class I water.

At the confluence of Eureka Creek, the river changes to cold, silty glacial water. The last 7 miles are often shallow and braided with numerous channels and gravel bars; the water is swift and generally Class II.

Nearly everyone who floats the Delta takes out just north of Phelan Creek at mile 212.5 on the Richardson Highway. The exact take-out location varies from year to year due to changes in the river channel. Parking is available adjacent to the river and the take-out is marked with a large yellow sign. The vehicle shuttle distance from the Tangle Lakes launch point to the take-out is 49 miles one way.

Lower Delta River

If you are an experienced kayaker or whitewater rafter, you can continue north 18 more miles downstream past Black Rapids Glacier. After the MP 212 take-out, the Delta River becomes very swift with high standing waves and glacial silt. It is not recommended for open canoes and is rated Class IV. There is no designated take-out point for this trip but the Richardson Highway parallels the river in numerous locations.

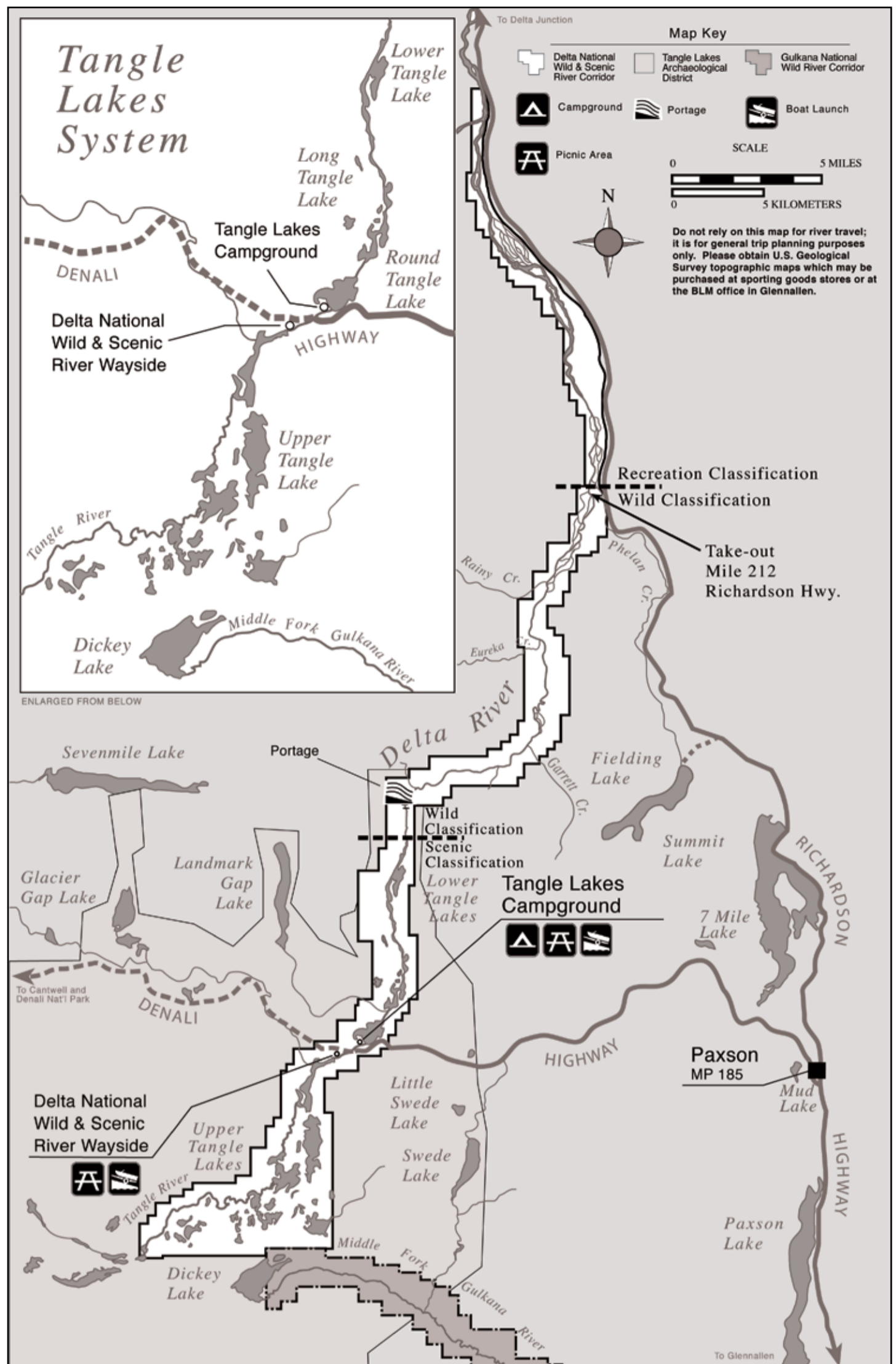
Emergency contacts:

Alaska State Troopers
(907) 822-3263

Crossroads Medical Center
(907) 822-3203 or 911

Report river incidents and accidents to the BLM Glennallen Field Office: (907) 822-3217. Report wildfires at (907) 822-5533.

Please provide your trip information at register stands located at the launch points or at the portage.



Travel Safely

Trips on the Delta River and Tangle Lakes are wilderness adventures known for their spectacular scenery. If you choose to travel them, you are responsible for maintaining their wild character for all who follow. Here are a few ways you can help do your part.

Use existing campsites.

Stay on existing trails.

Dispose of gray water away from river and lakes. You don't have to use soap in the wilderness, but if you do, be sure it is biodegradable.

Carry a portable toilet system to pack out all human waste. If absolutely necessary, bury human waste at least 6" deep, 200' away from waterways, trails or campsites.

Pick up litter and carry out all garbage. Garbage attracts animals. If you pack it in full, you can pack it out empty.

This includes all burned trash.

Firewood is not available in the tundra. Use a camp stove for cooking or bring firewood or charcoal. Never cut green trees or limbs. If you must build a fire, use only down and dead wood.

Extinguish fires completely. Use a firepan or existing firepits. Observe any fire restrictions. Fireworks are not permitted.

Leave plants, minerals, wildlife and other natural features undisturbed for others to enjoy.

Do not harass eagles or other raptors.

Know your limits

The Delta River is not a place for the novice boater! Always travel with at least two boats in your group; solo travel is not recommended and always wear a personal floatation device (PFD, or life jacket) when in or near the water. Remember,

accidents can occur in seconds and emergency assistance can take many hours.

Use restrictions

Powerboats greater than 15 hp are not recommended. Aircraft are not recommended in the wild river corridor.

Water

Drink only boiled, filtered or chemically-treated water. Untreated water can make you sick.

Avoiding bears

Keep your campsites extremely clean. Cook and keep food away from tents. Store food in airtight containers so bears can't smell it. Pack out all trash including unburned items from the firepit.

Watch for hazards

Be alert for approaching hazards such as boulders, jagged

rocks, large holes and fallen trees. Scout the rapids below the portage. Also scout the confluence of Eureka Creek: there could be a strong cross-current that could capsize a canoe. Stay low in your canoe for stability or line your canoe up the creek and paddle into the main current.

Suggested equipment

- lifejackets: type III or V for each person
- first aid kit
- boat repair kit
- shovel
- spare oars or paddles
- warm clothing in a "dry bag"
- throwbags or throw cushions
- rain gear
- insect repellent and head net
- air pump (for inflatable boats)
- bailing device
- matches in water tight container