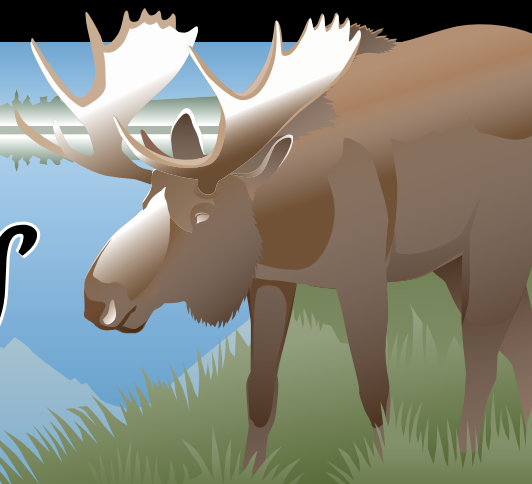




Kenai National Wildlife Refuge

# Reflections

VISITOR GUIDE



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## Reflections

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Produced and Designed by



All photos and maps courtesy of U.S. Fish  
and Wildlife unless otherwise noted.

Printed by the Anchorage Daily News on  
recycled paper using soy-based inks.

*Reflections* is published by the Alaska  
Geographic Association in cooperation  
with Kenai National Wildlife Refuge. It is  
funded by revenue generated from Alaska  
Geographic bookstore sales.

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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.

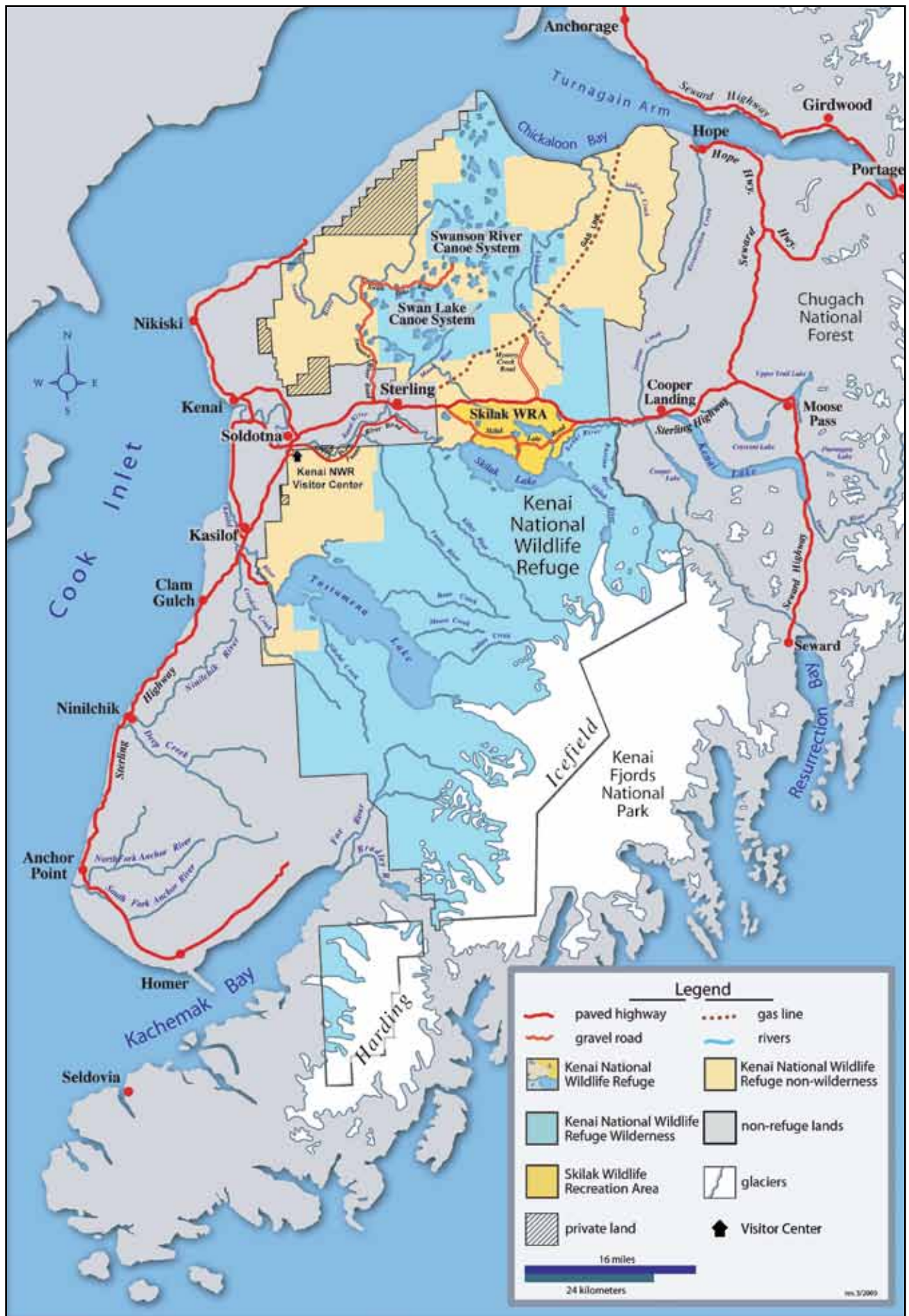
Fishing, camping, and hiking opportunities also draw visitors from Alaska and from around the world. The Swanson River and Swan Lake canoe systems provide an opportunity to really get into the backcountry and observe wilderness at its most pristine.

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.

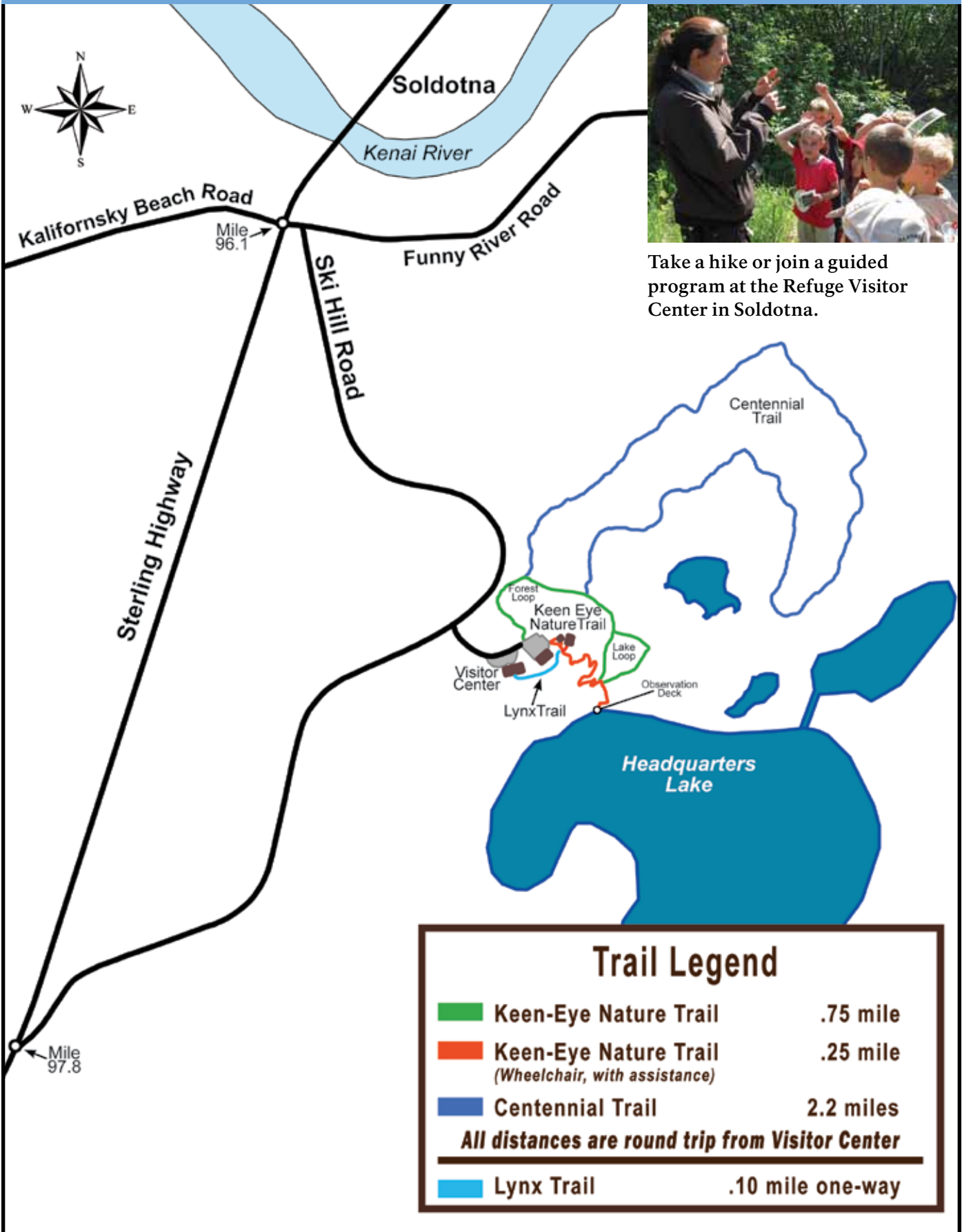
We hope you will use this guide to get the most out of your visit to the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge.







# Visitor Center Trails



Take a hike or join a guided program at the Refuge Visitor Center in Soldotna.

| Trail Legend  |  |
|---|--|
|   | Keen-Eye Nature Trail .75 mile   |
|   | Keen-Eye Nature Trail .25 mile<br><i>(Wheelchair, with assistance)</i> |
|   | Centennial Trail 2.2 miles   |
| <b>All distances are round trip from Visitor Center</b> |  |
|   | Lynx Trail .10 mile one-way  |



# 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

- 🐾 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, 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, or curl up in a ball with your hands behind your head. Keep your pack on.





# Cabins



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.

**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

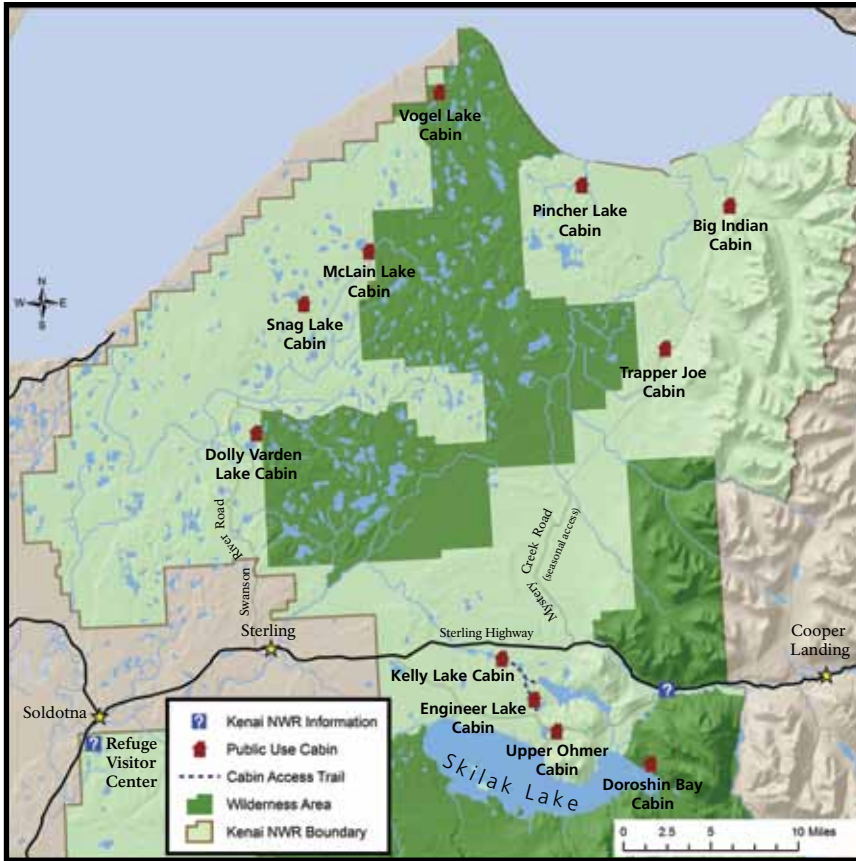
2 cabins - Trapper Joe & Emma Lake are first-come, first-serve & no fee

**RESERVATIONS:** Call 877-444-6777 or Search for Kenai National Wildlife Refuge Cabins at [www.recreation.gov](http://www.recreation.gov)

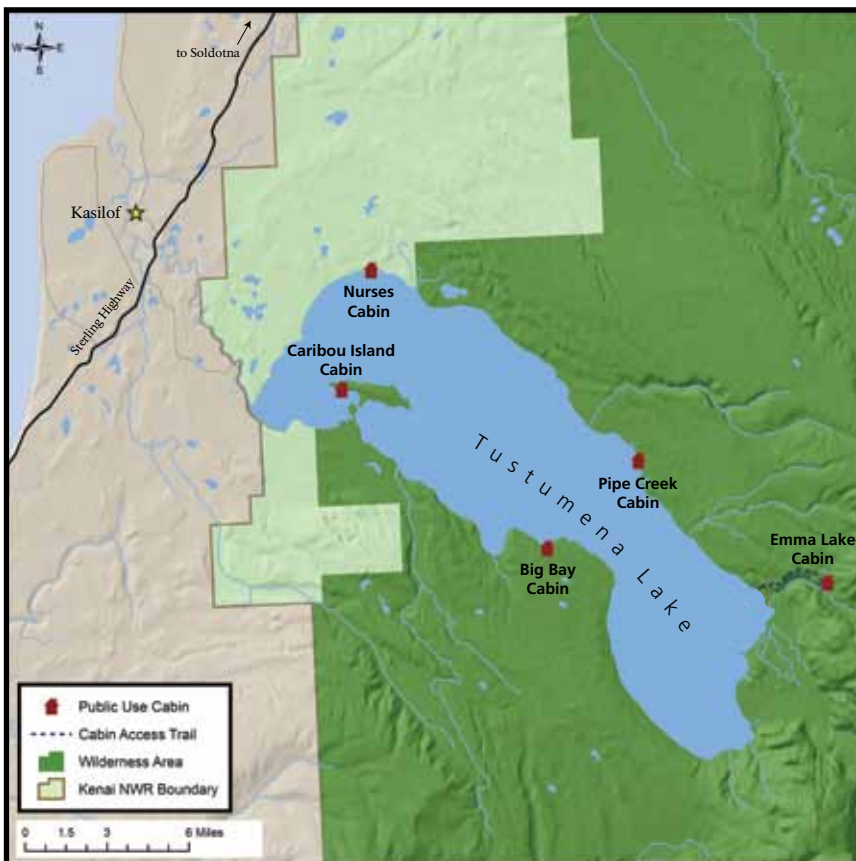




## North Refuge Cabins



## South Refuge Cabins



# Skilak Wildlife Recreation Area







# Skilak Wildlife Recreation Area

| Mile<br>East to west | 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.   |
| 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.   |
| 2.4                  | Pothole Lake Fire Overlook  | View the landscape re-vegetated after the 1991 fire.  |
| 3.6                  | Hidden Lake Campground      | Largest and most developed refuge campground. For a 1.2 mile roundtrip scenic hike, take Burney's Trail across from site #7, Skyview Campground Loop. Park in the amphitheater lot. Nice picnic area by lake boat ramp.                               |
| 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 (5 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 undeveloped campground area and trailhead for Seven Lakes Trail (8.8 miles roundtrip). Nice lake for canoeing.  |
| 13.6                 | Lower Skilak Campground     | Moderate-sized campground and important boat launch for Skilak Lake and Kenai River fishing activities.   |



# Camping

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.

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

## Skilak Wildlife Recreation Area Camping (see map on page 8)

| 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        |

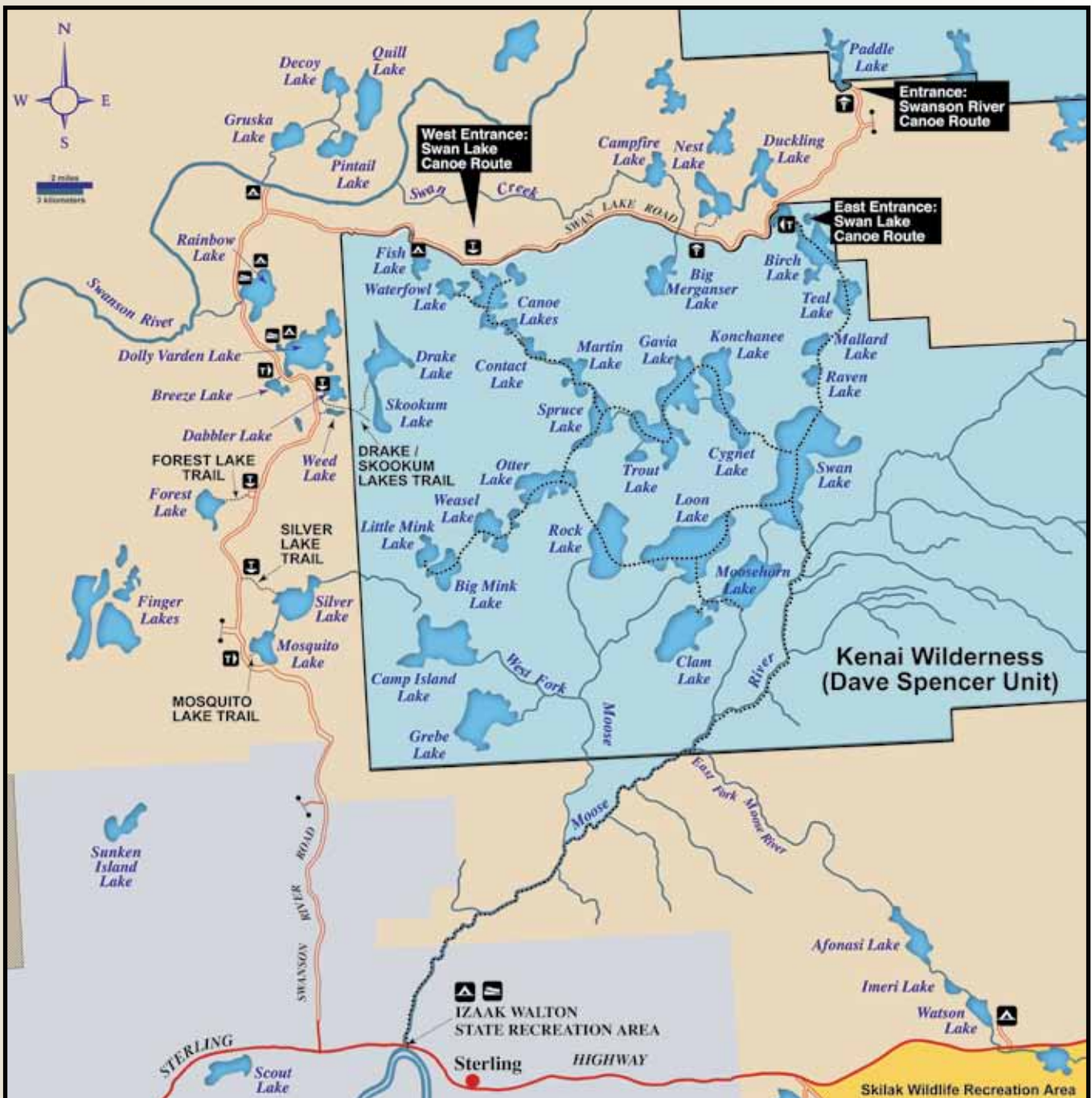


# Canoeing in the Refuge

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 weeklong adventures, paddlers of all abilities and ages will enjoy this unique wilderness experience.



## Swan Lake Canoe Route



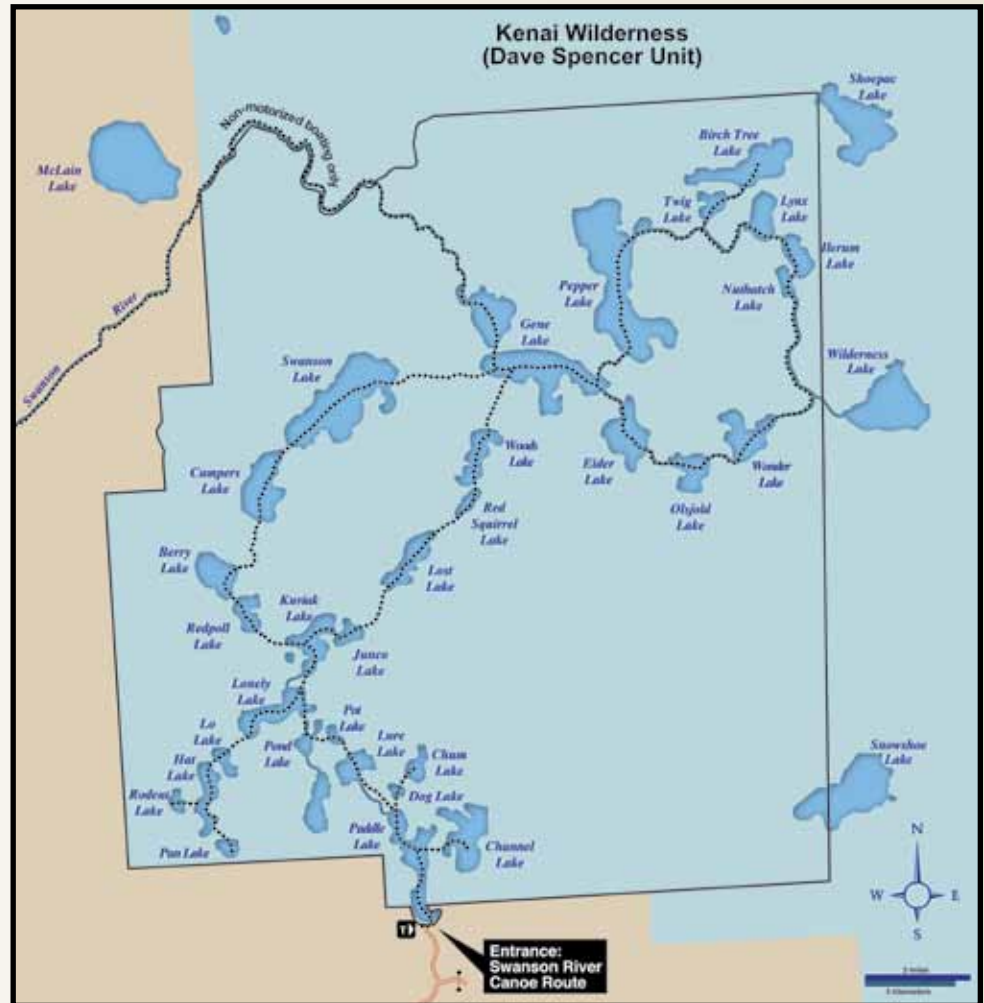




# Swanson River Canoe Route

## Key

|  |   |
|--|---|
|  | canoe trail (non-motorized, year-round)   |
|  | rivers                                    |
|  | paved highway                             |
|  | gravel road                               |
|  | gate                                      |
|  | trailhead                                 |
|  | boat launch                               |
|  | campground                                |
|  | Kenai National Wildlife Refuge Wilderness |
|  | Kenai National Wildlife Refuge            |
|  | Skilak Wildlife Recreation Area           |
|  | private land                              |
|  | non-refuge lands                          |



## What To Expect

- Lakes break up in mid-May and stay 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 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, is not allowed.
- Fishing and hunting in season are permitted.
- Fireworks are prohibited.

# Fishing

## Getting Started

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.

You must purchase a valid sport fishing license if you are age 16 or older. These are available at local sporting goods and grocery stores. They can also be purchased online at [www.admin.adfg.state.ak.us/license](http://www.admin.adfg.state.ak.us/license)

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.

## 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.

Hike the Fisherman's Trail upstream from the Forest Service's Russian River Campground, at mile 52.8 of the Sterling Highway, for a less crowded red salmon fishing experience.



## Fishing 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. Toss all fish waste into deep, fast-moving water. Do not put in dumpsters or on shore. Cut fish carcasses into small pieces so the water current can carry and disperse them more easily.
-  When you carry fish out, store them in sealed plastic garbage bags to decrease odors that could attract bears on paths and trails.
-  Store all food, bait, line and tackle, fishy clothes, and garbage in bear-proof 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.

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



# Partners

As the primary nonprofit education partner of Kenai National Wildlife Refuge, Alaska Geographic connects people to Alaska's magnificent wildlands through experiential education, award-winning books and maps, and by directly supporting the state's parks, forests, and refuges. Each year Alaska Geographic donates more than \$500,000 to help fund educational and interpretive programs throughout Alaska's public lands.

Alaska Geographic operates 48 bookstores across the state, including the Refuge Visitor Center in Soldotna. Your purchases at these locations directly support the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge—a portion of every sale helps fund educational and interpretive programs throughout the refuge.

To find out more, become a member, or browse our selection of Alaska books, maps, and films, stop by any Alaska Geographic bookstore or visit our website at [www.alaskageographic.org](http://www.alaskageographic.org)



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Stop by the refuge visitor center in Soldotna to find these useful guides, plus other Alaska books, maps, journals, posters, and more.



### Kenai Trails

A collection of regional weather, flora and fauna, and trail access information, as well as safety tips, equipment lists, topographical maps, and a brief history of Kenai Peninsula trails.

**\$7.95**

Item #10898



### Birding the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge

Part birding guide, part hiking guide, this indispensable book highlights commonly sighted birds and where they can be found. Includes detailed descriptions of trails in the refuge.

Item #10364

**\$5.95**



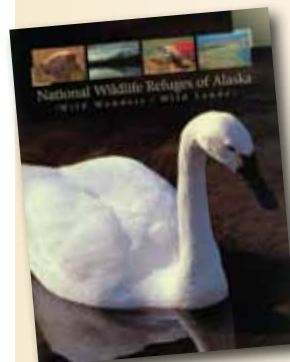
### Kenai NWR Water Bottle

*Discover Alaska Collection*

Show your support for Kenai National Wildlife Refuge with this rugged, stainless steel water bottle. Perfect for any adventure. 750 ml capacity.

Item # 61018

**\$9.95**



### National Wildlife Refuges of Alaska

Alaska's 16 national wildlife refuges are a legacy in trust for animals and people. Containing 77 million acres of refuge lands, their wild lands and wild wonders are unmatched.

Item #11081

**\$9.95**

Also available online at [www.alaskageographic.org](http://www.alaskageographic.org)



## Kenai National Wildlife Refuge

<http://kenai.fws.gov>  
[www.facebook.com/kenainationalwildliferefuge](http://www.facebook.com/kenainationalwildliferefuge)  
P.O. Box 2139, Ski Hill Road  
Soldotna, AK 99669  
907-262-7021

## State of Alaska

Department of Fish and Game.....907-262-9368  
Fish and Wildlife Protection..... 907-262-4573  
Fishery Hotline.....907-262-2737  
State Forestry..... 907-260-4200  
State Parks..... 907-262-5581  
State Troopers.....907-262-4453

## Information Centers

Alaska Islands and Ocean Visitor Center  
[www.islandsandocean.org](http://www.islandsandocean.org)  
Homer  
907-235-6961

Alaska Public Lands Information Center  
[www.alaskacenters.gov/anchorage.cfm](http://www.alaskacenters.gov/anchorage.cfm)  
Anchorage  
907-644-3678

Chugach National Forest  
[www.fs.fed.us/r10/chugach](http://www.fs.fed.us/r10/chugach)  
Seward  
907-224-3374

Kenai Fjords National Park  
[www.nps.gov/kefj](http://www.nps.gov/kefj)  
Seward  
907-224-7500

Kenai Visitor and Cultural Center  
[www.visitkenai.com](http://www.visitkenai.com)  
Kenai  
907-283-1991

Soldotna Visitor Information Center  
[www.soldotnachamber.com](http://www.soldotnachamber.com)  
Soldotna  
907-262-9814



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