



# Subsistence



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**A subsistence lifestyle frequently involves many family members and multiple generations participating in the taking and processing of natural resources.**

*When you step in tandem with nature's cycles of abundance and scarcity, you gain respect for and oneness with the land.*

—Penny Green

*Subsistence is the one thread that ties all Athabaskan people together.*

—Wilson Justin

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Once Nick had the flat-bottomed boat purring down the South Fork of the Kuskokwim away from Nikolai, his family knew they were really going to fish camp. They had been looking forward to fish camp all year. They would stay there as long as the fish were running. While they would catch fish with nets and floats set in the river, the July journey to fish camp also allows them to visit with other family members, recount stories of previous summers at camp, and gather around the campfire where Olene cooks the freshly-filleted fish and the gathered wild greens.

At fish camp, they live mostly outside, practicing a subsistence lifestyle away from the stresses of the village. Young grandson Josh learns that fish camp is a source of pride and enjoyment. Helping with the fish rack or playing with a bow and arrow at fish camp helps reinforce his Native identity. Tradition is being passed to the next generation.

For many rural residents, such as Nick and his family, but also for many rural non-Natives utilizing natural resources in and near Denali National Park and Preserve, subsistence ensures more than survival. It sustains a way of life.

## **Subsistence and land conservation in Alaska**

On December 2, 1980, the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) was signed into law. This sweeping legislation was significant for Alaska because it provided for the “enduring protection” of 100 million acres in Alaska, by adding them to the public lands managed by federal land agencies across the state. Thus, ANILCA added “new park” and “preserve” areas to the former Mt. McKinley National Park, tripling the size of what the National Park Service manages at Denali National Park and Preserve.

ANILCA ensured that local rural residents who had engaged in a subsistence way of life would be provided the opportunity to continue to do so. Thus, rural residents continue to have priority opportunities for subsistence activities in Denali’s new park and preserve lands.

## **Subsistence activities in Alaska parks**

The National Park Service recognizes the important connection between people and the land in Alaska and make provision for its continuance. Once ANILCA was enacted, NPS established a Subsistence Resource Commission for each Alaska park to



encourage local involvement and participation associated with subsistence management.

A key component of subsistence management in national parks is to ensure the conservation of *natural and healthy populations* of fish and wildlife. NPS recognizes that natural systems can be different on ANILCA lands—people can be part of the ecosystem.



The goal is to incorporate scientific data and principles, together with traditional knowledge and cultural values, to keep these life-giving ecosystems unimpaired. In this way, traditional subsistence activities such as hunting, fishing, trapping, timber use for cabin construction can be perpetuated.



Denali's 1980 enabling legislation specifies how opportunities for subsistence activities will be recognized and provided for in Denali's new park and preserve areas, but such activities are not allowed in the "old park" wilderness.

**Who is eligible to practice subsistence in Denali?**

To obtain a subsistence hunting permit for Denali (new park and preserve), one must be a rural Alaska resident within a designated resident zone community or have a special subsistence use permit. The resident must demonstrate that subsistence activities have been customary and traditional for the family.



Denali has four designated resident zone communities: the villages of Cantwell, Lake Minchumina, Nikolai, and Telida (see table

Village	2009 Population	% Native Alaskan	Primary Subsistence Activities	Special Notes
Cantwell	200	27%	hunting	must live within 3 miles of post office
Lake Minchumina	17	<5%	trapping, hunting, fishing	residents also garden and work part time
Nikolai	87	81%	fishing	
Telida	3 (one family)	100%	trapping	some now live in Nikolai

based on the State of Alaska community database). Residents of these communities are eligible as subsistence users of Denali without a special subsistence use permit. No permit is required for the subsistence gathering of fruit, berries, mushrooms, and other plant materials in the ANILCA additions.

**Access for subsistence in Denali**

ANILCA authorizes use of some motorized surface transportation methods (e.g., motorboats, snowmobiles) for subsistence activities in the new park and preserve—if these methods have been traditionally employed. In Denali, off-highway vehicles (OHVs) can be used in those areas where they have been traditionally used for subsistence purposes, and only on designated trails where it has been determined that such use will not adversely affect the natural or scenic values of the park.

**Denali's Subsistence Resource Commission**

The Subsistence Resource Commission (SRC) for Denali meets twice a year and is made up of nine local people who have been active subsistence users of the park. The purpose of the SRC is to recommend to the Governor of Alaska and the Secretary of the Interior a program of subsistence in Denali. Recommendations are developed to address such issues as access, *customary and traditional* determinations, seasonal harvest limits, eligibility for subsistence activities, cabin use, needed research, and how to reduce or avoid user conflicts.



Fish camp is an example of how subsistence is more than an activity (e.g., fishing), in that it combines an outdoor lifestyle with family traditions and cultural values.

The SRC also prepares proposals to change federal subsistence regulations and comments on other proposals that affect Denali. Denali's SRC wants to uphold ANILCA's provisions for subsistence to ensure that subsistence activities will continue to be available to rural residents like Nick and his family, for as long as Kuskokwim flows and boats can skim the river waters toward fish camp.

**For more information**

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**Subsistence activities include: (from top to bottom) hunting, catching and preparing fish, trapping, berrypicking, and cutting timbers for cabin construction for subsistence use.**

