The K’elt’aeni

2 Something for Everyone

Whether it’s hiking on a glacier, flying over the park in a small plane or looking for the elusive Dall Sheep, there is an array of activities that anyone can enjoy while visiting the park. Check out the variety of recreational opportunities this park has to offer.

10 Napesna Road Guide

The northern area of the park receives far less traffic and people as opposed to the Kennecott area. A picturesque and mountain viewing drive awaits the traveler who ventures down this road. A road guide helps a traveler discover the mysteries of Napesna.

12 McCarthy Road Guide

The road into the southern area of the park follows the old railroad bed to the historic McCarthy Kennecott area. An adventurous drive awaits the traveler who ventures down this road. A road guide helps a traveler discover the secrets of McCarthy-Kennecott.

Wrangell-St. Elias - America’s Largest National Park

THE 13.2 MILLION ACRES WHICH COMPRISE Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve have for centuries served as a crossroads of human activity. Russians began to enter the area in the late 1700s. The subsequent United States purchase of Alaska in the 1800s further spurred expeditions, but all of these endeavors came long after people became active in this region more than 8,000 years ago.

Humans were drawn here to trade with other groups for materials unavailable in their own territories and by dreams of fur trapping, mineral riches, and rivers teeming with salmon. They initially were lured into this wild country of jagged peaks and immense glaciers, swift, cold rivers and active volcanoes to make a livelihood. Now they are also attracted to Wrangell-St. Elias to find solitude, inspiration, and adventure, to test their wilderness skills, and to bring back memories to last a lifetime from America’s last frontier.

Since establishment of the park and preserve in 1980, human activities have slowly evolved. Many residents still engage in traditional subsistence hunting and fishing, but many others who visit our largest national park come for recreation or to learn. They come to face wilderness challenges, such as fording glacial streams or topping an ice-clad mountain. They come to monitor species of concern, such as Kittlitz’s murrelets or Chisana caribou. They come to see the largest glaciers in North America, or to study evidence of past human activity along their receding margins. They come to experience the Kennecott Mill Town, which once extracted the world’s richest copper ore, to follow in the footsteps of early stampeders along the Richardson Highway, or to feel the quiet passage of time among the ruins of Chisana City.

All who visit Wrangell-St. Elias are amazed and inspired by the unrelenting efforts of humans throughout history to experience, understand, and benefit from one of the most rugged, yet alluring, landscapes on earth. All who visit can savor a taste of this vast, visually stunning, untamed land.

Welcome to YOUR Park

WELCOME TO WRANGELL-ST. ELIAS National Park and Preserve. Encompassing over 13 million acres, this is the nation’s largest national park and is larger than the states of Vermont, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island combined! We are pleased you have chosen to visit us.

Here you have the opportunity to experience a wild corner of Alaska on a grand scale. Natural processes are at work all around you: glacial ice carves mountain valleys; caribou, moose and other wildlife roam freely; volcanic activity shapes the land; and rivulets of glacial meltwater converge to form wide braided rivers that flow to the sea. Here you have the opportunity to experience wilderness on a scale you are unlikely to experience elsewhere.

Human beings have been a part of this landscape for millennia. Much of this land has long been home to the Ahtna, Upper Tanana, Eyak and Tlingit peoples, who continue to this day to hunt, fish, and gather foods from the land. Miners passed through, working the land in the search for copper and gold, and their camps and mine buildings are a fascinating reminder of the challenges of that time. Settlers and pioneers followed, and today the park has many friendly Alaskan neighbors you may meet in your travels.

Please travel safely in this “Great Land,” and may this visit be only one in a lifetime of exploration at Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve.

Meg Jensen
Superintendent
Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve
Weather and Climate

The high peaks of the coastal Chugach Range intercept ocean storms and provide a barrier to warmer marine air masses. As a result, with the exception of the coastal strip near Yakutat (150 inches of rain/year), the park has an interior dry continental climate characterized by long, frigid winters followed by short, warm summers. Average snowfall is 50 inches, yet it holds little moisture. Annual precipitation (rain and snow) adds up to only 11 inches.

WINTERS here are long, dark, and extremely cold with highs of 5-7°F and nighttime lows dipping as low as -50°F! Daytime skies are usually clear and on many nights the aurora dances overhead. The temperature may not rise above freezing for more than five months! Exceptionally dry snow covers the ground to a depth of two feet.

SPRING daylight hours lengthen and the sun’s warmth quickly breaks winter’s hold. By late April, “breakup” is in full swing. Snowmelt has nowhere to go over frozen ground and the resulting flooded landscape briefly makes travel a challenge.

SUMMERS are some of the warmest and driest in Alaska with highs sometimes reaching into the 80s during June and July. But average yearly precipitation is only 11”. Mosquitoes are at their peak during June, but usually begin to dissipate by mid July. Prime backcountry season is June 15-September 15 due to snow depths at higher elevations.

FALL arrives early; willows and aspens begin to change color by mid-August. This season can be delightfully clear, spectacular, and mosquito-free, but often too short. First snows often fall in September and “stick” by late October.

AVERAGE TEMPERATURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>SUMMER</th>
<th>WINTER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Glennallen</td>
<td>66 / 44</td>
<td>7 / -11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McCarthy</td>
<td>63 / 39</td>
<td>14 / -5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siana</td>
<td>67 / 42</td>
<td>10 / -8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yakutat</td>
<td>59 / 46</td>
<td>34 / 21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Western Regional Climate Center
WRANGLER-ST. ELIAS NATIONAL PARK AND PRESERVE HAS VARIOUS visitor contact points. Each of these facilities is staffed by interpretive park rangers who can assist you with a variety of services. The rangers are equipped to assist you and your visit to the park. Their first-hand knowledge of the park is a great asset to you as you plan activities and learn about the unique features of the area.

JOIN A RANGER
A full range of interpretive activities are offered throughout the summer. Join a ranger for a guided walk, talk, or evening program. Check the activity schedule posted at all visitor centers.

**Park H.Q. & Main Visitor Center**
- **Location**: Mile 106.8 Richardson Highway (10 miles south of Glennallen, AK)
- **Hours**: Winter: 9:00 am-4:00 pm Mon-Fri
  Summer: 9:00 am-6:00 pm daily
- **Highlights**: Exhibit building, nature trail, large park relief map, park orientation film, ranger programs, bookstore, restrooms, picnic tables, trip planning, information desk, subsistence permits.

**Kennecott Visitor Center**
- **Location**: Historic Kennecott Mill Town
  907-822-7476
- **Hours**: Summer: 9:00 am-5:30 pm daily
- **Highlights**: Located in historic general store and post office building within the Kennecott Mill Town. Exhibits, park films, trip planning, trails, backcountry information, ranger programs, and bookstore.

**McCarthy Road Info Station**
- **Location**: Mile 59 McCarthy Road
  (1/2 mile before the end of the road)
- **Hours**: Information available 24 hours. Staffed occasionally.
- **Highlights**: McCarthy-Kennecott area trip planning, maps, and information on local services.
- **Free day-parking.**

**Chitina Ranger Station**
- **Location**: Chitina, Mile 33 Edgerton Highway
  907-823-2205
- **Hours**: Summer: 9:00 am-5:00 pm Thur-Mon
- **Highlights**: Historic log cabin. Park information, park movie, McCarthy Road conditions, backcountry information, trip planning, picnic table, subsistence permits.

**Slana Ranger Station**
- **Location**: Mile 0.2 Nabesna Road
  907-822-7401
- **Hours**: Summer: 8:00 am-5:00 pm daily
  Winter: call for hours
- **Highlights**: Park Information, trip planning, exhibits, ranger programs, park orientation, ATV permits, subsistence permits, bookstore, public phone, restrooms.

**Yakutat Ranger Station**
- **Location**: Mallott Avenue, Yakutat
  907-784-3295
- **Hours**: All year: Hours Vary
- **Highlights**: Exhibits, information, park video, bookstore, and trip planning.

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**Junior Ranger**

Young people of all ages can become a Wrangell-St. Elias National Park & Preserve Junior Ranger! Stop by one of the visitor centers in the park or ask a park ranger for the Junior Ranger Activity Book. Complete the required sections, state the official pledge with a ranger, and you will earn your own badge and certificate.

If you cannot visit the park in person and you have internet access, you can become a National Park Service Web Ranger. Visit the park website at [www.nps.gov/wrst](http://www.nps.gov/wrst)

**Be a WebRanger!**

Now you can be a Junior Ranger even if you are not able to visit a national park. You will become a member of a growing group of young people who are interested in the world around them and involved with their nation’s heritage... The WebRangers! [www.nps.gov/webrangers](http://www.nps.gov/webrangers)
Now That You’re Here...What Should You Do?

There are many activities that are available to every visitor who visits Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve. It really is a matter of how much time you plan to spend in the area. For some guidance you may want to partake in the following itineraries.

**One Day**
Begin your visit by stopping by the Headquarters Visitor Center, located 10 miles south of Glennallen. Explore the exhibits, browse the bookstore, stroll the short nature trail, see the Wrangell Mountains, and enjoy the 22-minute park movie, Crown of the Continent. Park Rangers are available to help you discover the park and surrounding area and plan your visit. Interpretive programs are offered daily during the summer. For splendid scenery, drive south to the historic town of Chitina (57 miles). Along the way, stretch your legs on the Tonsina River Trail or the Liberty Falls Trail and enjoy a panorama of the park’s high peaks. Please contact a Ranger at the Visitor Center to get detailed information about these hikes and their location. Stop by the Chitina Ranger Station open most days during the summer to view historic photos of Chitina. After exploring Chitina, continue to the nearby bridge over the mighty Copper River where in summer you can watch busy Alaskans harvesting salmon with traditional fishwheels and dipnets. Another option is to book a flight with a local air taxi service at the Chitina airport for a daytrip to McCarthy and Kennecott.

**Three Days**
With more time to spend, you can explore the major roads more thoroughly and still have time for some hiking. One option is a drive along the Nabesna Road which will take you to remote corners of the park with great camping, hiking, and wildlife viewing. See the Nabesna Road Guide in this publication for more details. Several opportunities to hike a variety of trails exist right from the road. Make sure that you stop at the Slana Ranger Station to get latest trail and road conditions. Another option is to take a trip along the McCarthy Road which allows for a leisurely explorations of a rural Alaskan town and the Kennecott Mines National Historic Landmark. Along the way, crossing a one lane bridge and a stop at a historic trestle are some of the highlights while driving the McCarthy Road. A short easy hike around mile 35 is the Crystalline Hills. See the McCarthy Road Guide in this publication for more details. Once in Kennecott, an easy hike along the Root Glacier Trail brings you up close and personal with the area’s rich history and the mighty river of ice. More strenuous hikes lead to the mountainside Bonanza and Jumbo Mines. Join a local guide/outfitter service for glacier hikes, mill building tours, and river rafting trips. An flightseeing excursion among the glaciers and mountains will give you a whole new appreciation for the size, wilderness, and magnificence of Wrangell-St. Elias. Park Rangers at any visitor center can help you plan such an adventure.

**One Week**
With a week or more to spend, the whole park is open to you. You will have time to drive and explore both roads in the park but also to visit more remote locations. The backcountry of Wrangell-St. Elias contains some of the world’s most spectacular wilderness. A short flight on an air taxi from Nabesna, Glennallen, Chitina, or McCarthy can transport you into the heart of the park, where hiking and camping possibilities are virtually endless. There are many multi-day backcountry trips that can start from the Nabesna or McCarthy roads or by flying into many of the park’s airstrips. Several airstrips offer a backcountry cabin that is available on a first come first serve basis. Stop by any park visitor center to discuss potential trips with a ranger.

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From the Mountains to the Sea

WRANGELL-ST. ELIAS IS AMERICA’S LARGEST National Park that covers over 20,500 square miles! The park is home to some of the tallest mountains in North America. Yet, the park also has 122 miles of coastline within its boundaries and a glacier called Hubbard that is actually surging into the Pacific Ocean. A little fishing village called Yakutat is the hub for activity along the Wrangell-St. Elias coast.

With a mere 600 residents, Yakutat may be small in size but has most amenities of a small rural Alaskan community. Getting to Yakutat is either by plane or boat; no roads connect Yakutat to the main portion of the park. However, flying into the southern sections of the park is truly a grand adventure.

Kayaking among the seals and seabirds while trying to avoid icebergs in Icy Bay is an amazing trip. Yakutat boasts that it has some of the best surfing in the western hemisphere. Where else can you surf the waters of the Pacific Ocean and view the 4th tallest peak in North America, Mount St. Elias? World class steelhead trout fishing is also a favorite pastime for many visitors to Yakutat. The Situk River just outside of town produces one of the best steelhead runs in the fall.

Visitors to this coastal community will also notice a strong native presence. The Tlingit people are the native inhabitants of this part of Alaska. They have thrived for thousands of years harvesting the bountiful resources that populate the coastal waters and forests of Wrangell-St. Elias.

So if you are ready for an adventure into a seldom visited part of the park, Yakutat is for you. It just requires a little more planning and patience to get there but it is well worth effort.

For more information contact the Yakutat Ranger Station at 907-784-3295

Camping along the Nabesna Road

Unlike other National Parks, Wrangell-St. Elias has no developed Park Service campgrounds...but there are still many great places to camp! One of the best areas is in the northern part of the park, along the Nabesna Road. Here, you will find many pullouts along the roadside that are perfect for a small or medium RV, camper trailer, pickup camper, or tent camping. All sites are primitive and available on a first come, first served basis. No potable water is available after leaving Slana.

Remember, treat or boil all water, dispose of trash properly, store food safely and be extremely careful with fire. All State of Alaska fishing regulations apply in Wrangell-St. Elias.
WRANGELL-ST. ELIAS NATIONAL PARK AND PRESERVE IS A VAST WILDERNESS WITH JUST A HANDFUL OF TRAILS OR ROUTES THAT HAVE BEEN ESTABLISHED. A BACKPACKING TRIP IN THE PARK CAN BE AN EXCITING AND REWARDING WILDERNESS EXPERIENCE IF YOU ARE PREPARED FOR THE DIFFICULTIES AND HAZARDS OF TRAVELING THROUGH RUGGED, UDEVELOPED LAND. HERE, YOU WILL EXPERIENCE SOLITUDE, SELF-RELIANCE, AND UNALTERED NATURE TO AN EXTENT Seldom FOUND ELSEWHERE. HOWEVER, IF TIME IS SHORT, THERE ARE ALTERNATIVES TO STRETCH YOUR LEGS. THE FOLLOWING IS A SMALL SAMPLING OF SHORTER HIKES AND EASIER WALKS FOUND IN VARIOUS PARTS OF THE PARK. ASK A RANGER FOR MORE DETAILS ON THESE ROUTES, OR TO LEARN ABOUT EVEN MORE HIKING OPPORTUNITIES.

### TRAILS TO FOLLOW

**TRAIL NAME** | **TRAIL LENGTH** | **TRAIL DESCRIPTION** | **TRAILHEAD LOCATION**
---|---|---|---
**Hikes near Copper Center**
Boreal Forest Trail | 0.5 Miles Roundtrip | An easy loop trail with interpretive panels that describe the area. A self-guiding brochure is available at the visitor center. | Behind the Exhibit Hall at the Visitor Center
Aspen Interpretive Trail | 1.0 Mile Roundtrip | An easy loop trail through aspen/spruce forest with interpretive panels that describe the area. A self-guiding brochure is available at the visitor center. | In Glennallen look for the Aspen Trail sign on the Glenn Highway #1. Trailhead is on Co-op Road.
Tonsina River Trail | 2.0 Miles Roundtrip | An easy level trail through aspen/spruce forest with the destination of an overlook of the Tonsina River. Can be muddy if recent rainfall. | South from the visitor center on the Richardson Highway (20 miles) turn left onto the Edgerton Highway to Kenny Lake. Just past mile marker 12, trailhead parking area is on the right.
Liberty Falls Trail | 2.5 Miles Roundtrip | A few short steep sections of trail give way to breathtaking views of the Wrangell and Chugach Mountains. To view the falls, travel to the campground parking area for a short hike. | South from the visitor center on the Richardson Highway (20 miles) turn left onto the Edgerton Highway to Kenny Lake. Continue to almost mile marker 23.3, trailhead parking area is on the right.
O’Brien to Haley Creek Trail | 10.0 Miles Roundtrip | A level trail with some stream crossings along the old railroad bed with a destination of Haley Creek. Can be muddy if recent rainfall. | South from the visitor center on the Richardson Highway (20 miles) turn left onto the Edgerton Highway to Kenny Lake. Turn right onto O’Brien Creek Road for about 2.5 miles to reach trailhead parking area.

**Hikes in Nabesna Area**

Caribou Creek Trail | 8.0 Miles Roundtrip | The trail gains about 800 feet in four miles with some stream crossings along the way. The trail is also an ATV route. Nice views along the way and many wildflowers. | From the Slana Ranger Station follow the Nabesna Road for about 19 miles. Trailhead parking is on the left. Proceed 1/4 mile down the road to the start of the trail.
Sookum Volcano Trail | 5.0 Miles Roundtrip | The trail gains 2500 feet in 2.5 miles with some difficult footing along the way. The trail climbs through tangled geologic formations with stunning views. Look for Dall Sheep. | From the Slana Ranger Station follow the Nabesna Road for about 37 miles. Trailhead parking is on the right.
Rambler Mine Trail | 2.0 Miles Roundtrip | The trail gains about 400 feet in a half mile with some spectacular views. The trail leads to an abandoned gold mine. | From the Slana Ranger Station follow the Nabesna Road for about 42 miles. Drive past Devil’s Mountain Lodge for 1/4 mile with trailhead parking on the right. Walk 1/3 of mile for the start of the trail.

**Hikes in Kennecott Area**
Crystalline Hills Trail | 2.5 Miles Roundtrip | A few short steep sections of trail give way to nice views of the Chitina River valley and Chugach Mountains. | From the Chitina Ranger Station follow the McCarthy Road for about 36 miles. Trailhead parking is on the left.
Root Glacier Trail | 4.0 Miles Roundtrip | An easy level trail through aspen/spruce forest with the destination of Root Glacier. Watch your step when descending to the glacier. | From the Kennecott Visitor Center follow the road through town for about 1/4 mile. Trail begins at the end of the road. Follow the Root Glacier Trail to the glacier. Cross the glacier to pick up the trail across the basin. Check the Visitor Center for camping availability and locations to camp.
Donoho Basin | Overnight Backpack | Requires crossing the Root Glacier. The trail passes lakes and has limited camping options. Due to high bear concentration, groups of 8 or more are required to register their group prior to camping in Donoho Basin. | From the Kennecott Visitor Center follow the road through town for about 1/4 mile. Trail begins at the junction of the Root Glacier Trail. Turn right and follow the road and turn left at the Jumbo Mine sign.
Jumbo Mine Trail | 10.0 Miles Roundtrip | The trail gains 3400 feet in 5 miles with some difficult footing along the way. The trail climbs through tangled vegetation with stunning views once above treeline and follows abandoned roads near the old mine buildings. | From the Kennecott Visitor Center follow the road through town for about 1/4 mile. Trail begins at the junction of the Root Glacier Trail. Turn right and follow the road and turn left at the Jumbo Mine sign.

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**Hikes in Nabesna Area**
**Hikes in Kennecott Area**
**Hikes near Copper Center**

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**More details on these routes, or to learn about even more hiking opportunities.**

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6 K’elt’aeni
Hazards of the Wild!

BEING SAFE IN BEAR COUNTRY

BOTH BLACK BEARS (URSUS AMERICANUS) AND GRIZZLY/BROWN BEARS (Ursus arctos) are found throughout Wrangell-St. Elias. A few simple precautions can keep you safe while camping and hiking, and protect the bears. Once a bear learns to identify hikers, campsites, or cabins as a source for food, there is rarely a happy ending.

AVOID ALL ENCOUNTERS

• Watch for signs of bears such as tracks and scat.
• Be alert to potential food sources such as carrion, salmon spawning streams, and berry patches.
• Make noise, particularly where visibility is limited. Your voice is best—bear bells are not very effective.
• Travel in groups. Groups are noisier and easier for bears to detect.
• Store food, trash, and personal hygiene products by using bear-resistant storage containers.
• Never store them in your tent.
• Cook and store food at least 100 yards from your tent.

PEPPER SPRAY

Containers containing capsaicin, a red pepper extract, is an effective, non-lethal deterrent against attacks by aggressive wildlife. Sprays have a maximum range of about six to eight yards. If discharged upwind or in a vehicle, they can disable the person using them. Use sprays approved by the EPA that contain at least eight ounces of deterrent.

FIREARMS

Weapons are allowed in Wrangell-St. Elias, but should never be used as an alternative to common-sense approaches to bear encounters. You are allowed to carry a concealed weapon in the park however, some buildings are designated with a sign prohibiting the possession of a firearm within that facility. If you are inexperienced, you are more likely to be injured by a gun than a bear, and any misplaced shot may enrage the bear further, prolonging an attack. A rifle of at least .30 caliber or a 12-gauge shotgun with slugs is recommended. Alaska law makes provisions for shooting a bear in self defense if there is no alternative and the attack was unprovoked. The hide and skull must be salvaged and turned over to authorities.

FOOD STORAGE

Appropriate food storage is required in Wrangell-St Elias National Park and Preserve. You can borrow NPS-approved bear-resistant containers (BRFCs) at park visitor centers for backcountry use. A refundable deposit is required.

IF YOU DO ENCOUNTER A BEAR

• If the bear is unaware of you, detour away quietly.
• If the bear sees you, stop where you are. Wave your arms and talk to the bear in a calm voice. Retreat slowly, keeping the bear in sight.
• If the bear follows you, stand your ground.
• If contact by a grizzly bear is imminent, play dead. Lie flat on the ground, face down and legs apart. Protect your neck. Leave your pack on to protect your back and strive to remain face down. If the attack is prolonged, fight back vigorously.
• If it’s a black bear, do not play dead, fight back vigorously.

PLEASE REPORT ALL BEAR ENCOUNTERS TO A RANGER!

River Crossings

Challenging conditions make river crossings one of the most hazardous elements of backcountry travel in this park. These crossings can be VERY dangerous without preparation, patience, and planning. You must carefully evaluate conditions at each river crossing. Never let a deadline rush you into making a poor decision, and always be willing to turn back or wait for a more suitable time if a crossing seems too risky.

PREPARE:

Pack sleeping bags and extra clothing in plastic bags or dry-bags inside your pack. Choose polypropylene or nylon clothes that dry quickly and won’t trap silt. Leave your boots on—don’t cross in socks or bare feet. Loosen pack straps before crossing so that you can slip out of your pack quickly in case of a fall. Change out of wet clothing as soon as possible.

TIME:

Area rivers are fed by glaciers and volume can fluctuate dramatically. The safest time to cross is during the cool hours of early morning. As the day progresses, sunlight and warm temperatures increase glacial melt causing water-level to rise.

PLACE:

Choose the widest or most braided section for crossing rivers and look for slow-moving water flowing over level ground. These are usually indications of relatively shallow water. Straight channels generally have uniform water flow and depth, while bends often have deep cut banks and swiftly moving water. Stay alert to changing conditions and be prepared to alter your plans. Always proceed with caution; silt obscures visibility making any crossing of a glacial river extremely hazardous.

Remember:
If a crossing appears too risky It probably is!
Why this Park is Significant

OUR NATIONAL PARKS HAVE BEEN SET ASIDE BY THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS TO PRESERVE AND PROTECT OUR nation’s unique natural and cultural history and also provide opportunities for people to enjoy them. Each park represents a distinctive piece of America. Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve was set aside for multiple reasons.

Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve contains major river systems with more miles (over 1,000) of scenic, free-flowing, glacial rivers in their natural state than are found in any other protected area in the United States.

Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve provides superlative scenic beauty.

The vast undeveloped expanse of Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve contains diverse aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems, ranging from alpine to marine, and providing natural habitat for populations of Alaskan flora and fauna.

The purpose of Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve is to maintain the natural scenic beauty of the diverse geologic, glacial, and riparian dominated landscapes, and to protect the attendant wildlife populations and their habitats; to ensure continued access for a wide range of wilderness-based recreational opportunities; to provide continued opportunities for subsistence use.

Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve encompasses the nation’s largest protected active glacial complex.
The Wrangell-St. Elias Wilderness is the largest unit of the National Wilderness Preservation System, encompassing nearly 10 million acres of remote and geographically diverse mountainous landscapes.

Encompassing portions of three major mountain ranges, Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve contains vast areas of scenic high mountain terrain from sea level to 18,000 feet and includes nine of the sixteen highest peaks in North America.

The Wrangell-St. Elias Wilderness is an inhabited area where local communities and traditional human activities remain integrated with the wilderness setting.

Preserved within Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve is abundant evidence of more than 3000 years of cultural and technological development. This long history reveals a range of human adaptations to changing climates, environments, and economic circumstances.
The Nabesna Road offers a unique opportunity to explore interior Alaska and the northern reaches of the park. The road begins at mile 60 of the Glenn Highway (Tok Cutoff), and soon becomes gravel as it winds 42 miles into the park. The drive is an adventure in the midst of the Wrangell, Mentasta, and Nutzotin Mountains. Along the way, you will find primitive campsites, lakes and streams for fishing, hiking routes, and opportunities for wildlife and bird watching. But you won’t find many people. So if you like taking the road less traveled, the Nabesna Road may be right for you.

A drive on the 42-mile long Nabesna Road is much the same today as it was when it was built by the Alaska Road Commission in 1934 to connect Nabesna Mine to the port in Valdez. Today, Nabesna Road provides access to the less visited northern part of the park offering the chance to experience true Alaska wilderness.

Before beginning your trip, stop at the Slana Ranger Station to check on current road conditions. Generally, the road is passable by any two-wheel drive vehicle, even most RV’s. At times, high clearance and four-wheel drive are recommended beyond Mile 29, where you encounter the first of three creek crossings. Following spring runoff or a heavy rain, these intermittent stream crossings can temporarily become impassable due to high water and deep channels. Please be aware that private property adjoins many parts of the road and that the Nabesna Mine is private. Ask a ranger for information on area commercial services, federal land access, and private property locations.

Pick up your free copy of the Nabesna Road Audio Tour! This is a narrated tour that plays in your vehicle’s cd player.
5.6 Preserve to Park
The north side of the road is “National Preserve” whereas the south side is “National Park.” Sport hunting is allowed in the National Preserve but not in the National Park. However, subsistence hunting is allowed in both the National Park and Preserve.

6.1 Rufus Creek primitive campsite (picnic table)
This is a 12-mile trail with access to Copper Lake. Copper Lake has opportunities for Lake Trout, Grayling, and Burbot fishing. The first 2.5 miles are suitable for hiking, then the trail crosses Tanada Creek, which can be high and fast, and trail conditions deteriorate.

15 Views of the Wrangell Mountains
Over the next few miles, enjoy the splendid views of high snow-clad volcanoes of the Wrangell Mountains. Mt. Sanford (16,237’) is the tallest mountain that can be seen from the Nabesna Road. To the left of Sanford is the rounded, icy dome of Mt. Wrangell (14,163’). It is the park’s only active volcano and occasionally steam can be seen rising from the summit. Wrangell’s broad sloping profile is an excellent example of a shield volcano. The jagged summits of Tanada Peak to the left of Mt. Wrangell and Capital Mountain to the right of Mt. Sanford are actually highly eroded remnants of once massive shield volcanoes.

16.6 Kettle Lake primitive campsite (picnic table)

17.8 Dead Dog Hill Rest Area
This is a great site to take a break for some wildlife viewing or bird watching. There are views of wetlands, a small lake, and boreal forest. Moose are often seen here and caribou migrate through this area in the spring and fall. During spring and summer, look for nesting ducks and trumpeter swans.

19.2 Caribou Creek Trail
Park at the gravel pit at mile 18.9. The trailhead is at mile 19.2. The trail is approximately 4 miles long and offers awesome views of the Wrangell Mountains and the tangles of lakes and rivers below. The trail ends at a cabin, but you could easily make this a longer trip by following game trails or striking out on your own.

21.8 Rock Lake Rest Area & primitive campsite (outhouse, picnic table, trash bin)
Access to Viking Lodge Public Use Cabin Reservations are required for use of Viking Lodge. Contact the Slana Ranger Station to sign up for this public use cabin. The 1/4-mile trail to the cabin is on the north side of the road.

24.7 Watershed Divide (3,320ft)
You have reached the highest point on the Nabesna Road, and crossed a major watershed divide. All waters flowing west and south from the divide are carried by the Copper River to the Gulf of Alaska. All waters flowing to the east enter the Nabesna River, the Tanana, the Yukon, and ultimately the Bering Sea.

27.8 Twin Lakes Camp Area (picnic tables, outhouse, trash bins)
Several picnic tables, vault toilet, fire rings, and ten informal campsites provide a nice spot for primitive camping. Twin Lakes is a great place to fish and view wildlife. A hike of about a half-mile to the south and over the ridge will take you to Jack Lake and more beautiful views of the Wrangell Mountains.

28.1 National Preserve
Both sides of the road are now “National Preserve.” Sport hunting is allowed.

BEFORE YOU CONTINUE
Road conditions can deteriorate beyond Twin Lakes.
Trail Creek (Mile 29), Lost Creek (Mile 30.8), and Boyden Creek (Mile 34.3) may become impassable.

35.3 Jack Creek Rest Area & primitive campsite (picnic tables, trash receptacle, outhouse)
Several nice campsites with picnic tables and fishing along Jack Creek.

Dall Sheep Habitat
Dall sheep inhabit high altitude ridges, meadows, and extremely rugged “escape terrain.” Sheep use these areas for feeding, resting, and to escape predators. Although they usually stay at higher elevations, in this area they are known to descend to springs and mineral licks and even cross the road. Careful observers can usually spot small flocks on the mountainsides over the next few miles.

36.2 Skookum Volcano Trail (hiking trail only)
The Skookum Volcano Trail/route is 2.5 miles one-way to a beautiful high pass. This trail leads through an extinct, deeply eroded volcanic system with fascinating geology. The elevation at the trailhead is 3,000’ and rises to an elevation of 5,800’ at the pass. Hikers can explore other routes or expand this hike into a multiple-day trip.

40.2 Reeve’s Field Trailhead
This is a multiple use trail (4.5 miles) with access to the Nabesna River. During 1941, trucks hauled equipment from Valdez to a rustic strip along the river. Pilot Bob Reeve cut everything into pieces, loaded it into his Boeing Trimotor, flew them to Northway, about 40 miles north, and then had them re-welded. This effort was organized to build the Northway Airport, a critical stopover in ferrying lend-lease aircraft to the Soviet Union during WWII. By November, he had transported all the materials for a full-scale airport. It was good timing. One month later, the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor gave Northway new relevance, and it became a critical element in the defense of Alaska.

42 End of maintained road
The Ellis family lives here. Please respect their property and privacy. Stay alert, and be careful not to park on the airstrip. From here on, the road provides access to private lands at Nabesna Mine, and is not regularly maintained. During wet weather, this section may require four-wheel drive, or become impassable.

Continue on Foot: Approximately 1/4 mile beyond the Ellis property, there is a gravel parking area. If you’d like to explore further, this is the best place to park your vehicle, as the road is not maintained beyond this point.

Rambler Mine
Approximately 1/4-mile past the lodge, a trail leads south towards the remains of the abandoned Rambler Mine, an area that was active after WWII. The one-mile trail is steep, but the effort rewards you with superlative views of the Nabesna River and Nutzotin Mountains.

46 Nabesna Gold Mine
Carl Whitham staked the claims that became Nabesna Gold Mine in 1925. The mine operated until 1945. By that time over 73,000 tons of gold ore valued at $1,870,000 had been shipped to the Tacoma, Washington smelter. Limited, small scale mineral extraction has occurred since that time. Nabesna Mine is privately owned.
Chitina
Pronounced, “Chit-Na,” this railroad town sprang to life in 1910. Busy during the summer fishing season, this town was once bustling as the major stopover and service point for the trains that carried ore from Kennecott to waiting ships in Cordova. Restrooms and informational panels can be found at the downtown wayside.

During the summer months, the historic Chitina Ranger Station may be staffed by a Park Ranger. This log cabin, which was constructed in 1910 by the Ed S. Orr Stage Company to house its local superintendent, serves as an enduring reminder of Alaska’s colorful transportation history. One of Chitina’s oldest surviving buildings, it was recently rehabilitated by the National Park Service and now serves as a visitor contact station. Stop in for road updates and park information. Be aware that Chitina is the last chance to obtain fuel and supplies before you enter Wrangell-St. Elias.

Copper River Bridge
Several small pullouts here provide great views of the confluence of the mighty Copper and Chitina Rivers. The Copper is the only waterway that cuts through the rugged coastal Chugach Mountains. At this point the Copper is about 1/2-mile wide, while the width of the Chitina is over one mile!
0 Crossing the Bridge

As you cross the bridge, you will notice that these rivers are dirty...but they are not polluted. These flowing waters begin as flowing “rivers of ice.” Millions of tons of rock dust are scoured off of distant mountains by glaciers and carried downriver each year. The resulting silty waters hide salmon swimming up these rivers to spawn.

As you cross the bridge, you will notice that wherever you look, you see salmon. Copper River “Reds” (sockeye salmon) are world-renowned. In summer, look for busy Alaskan residents catching red, silver, and king salmon with dipnets and fishwheels. How well do you think these fishing methods would work in a crystal clear river?

The large snow covered mountain visible to the north is volcanic Mount Drum (12,010’), part of the Wrangell Mountains.

5.0 Chitina River Scenic Vista

Stop here and enjoy the view. The Copper and its tributaries (including the Chitina) drain an area of approximately 24,000 square miles. Much of this drainage basin lies within Wrangell-St. Elias National Park & Preserve and almost 25% of it is covered by glaciers. Because of this glacial influence, high water in the Copper River typically occurs not during the snowmelt of spring, but summer hot spells that cause rapid ice melting. Low water usually occurs in late winter when everything is frozen. The Chitina River is a popular rafting trip from McCarthy. Several rafting companies operate out of McCarthy.

10 Strelna Lake Trail

A small pullout on the left provides access to a 1/2-mile trail to Strelna Lake. The Alaska Dept. of Fish & Game stocks this lake with rainbow trout.

10.7 Silver Lake

Foot access to Silver Lake for trout fishing.

14.5 Backcountry Trailheads

The access road on the left leads 2.5 miles to the trailheads for Nugget Creek and Dixie Pass. These primitive routes offer abundant wilderness adventure. Ask a park ranger for more information and route descriptions. Nearby Strelna was once a bustling supply stop.

15.9 Entering Federal Land

The road is now entering Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve.

17 Kuskulana River Canyon & Bridge

A spectacular achievement, the Kuskulana Bridge was constructed during the winter of 1910. Imagine riding high in a heavily loaded ore train across the two icy rails. Perched 238 feet above the raging Kuskulana River, this single-lane railroad bridge is for many the most hair-raising part of the entire drive. The muddy Kuskulana River reflects its origins from melting glaciers that drain Mt. Blackburn. The Kuskulana Wayside 0.1 miles up from the bridge offers toilets and exhibits.

29 Gilahina Trestle

This wooden structure was originally 890 feet long and 90 feet high, required one-half million board feet of timber, and was completed in eight days in the winter of 1911. Due to the rugged landscape, over 15% of the entire railway was built on trestles such as this. A wayside here offers toilets and exhibits.

34.7 Crystalline Hills Trail

A trailhead on the left marks the start of this 2.5 mile loop trail through dense spruce forest to the base of the Crystalline Hills and a nice view of the Chitina River Valley.

44 Entering Non-Federal Land

The road is leaving Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve.

55 State Wayside (toilets and exhibits)

59.2 Kennicott River-Road’s End

You’ve made it to the end of the road, but in many ways, your adventure is just beginning.

McCarthy

Homesteaded in 1906, McCarthy quickly grew into a lively community with a story all its own. McCarthy served as the supply and recreation stop for the entire Kennecott mining district. Town history is well portrayed by the local museum and guide services. Today, McCarthy retains much of its original flavor. Accommodations, dining, guide services, and air taxis are just some of the services available here.

Kennecott Mines National Historic Landmark

Like a time capsule, the impressive structures and artifacts left behind when the mines were depleted represent an ambitious time of exploration, discovery, and technological innovation. Currently, the National Park Service is stabilizing and rehabilitating many of the old buildings.

A National Park Service Visitor Center is located within the Kennecott Mill Town. Park Rangers and local guide services conduct history programs and building tours daily. This area is overflowing with history. Trails lead to the Root Glacier and the remains of several mountains.
ONCE YOU’VE SUCCESSFULLY NEGOTIATED THE 60-MILE MCCARTHY ROAD, YOUR ADVENTURE IN MANY WAYS IS JUST BEGINNING. THE ROAD ENDS at the banks of the raging Kennicott River. The town of McCarthy lies one-half mile beyond, and the Kennecott Mines National Historic Landmark is another five miles up the old railroad grade. It can be confusing. Where should I park? Where can I camp? Is there a shuttle to Kennecott? What land is park? What land is private? We suggest making the McCarthy Road Information Station your first stop.

McCarthy Road Information Station
Upon arrival, up-to-date information on parking, shuttles, Kennecott, McCarthy, park access, and activities can be found at the McCarthy Road Information Station. Located at Mile 59 McCarthy Road, this site also has day-use parking and restrooms. Park Rangers may be available to help you plan a visit to McCarthy and Kennecott.

Parking
Free public day-use parking is available at the McCarthy Road Information Station. Overnight parking is available for a fee in one of several private parking lots near the end of the road. Generally, parking is less expensive the further from the footbridge you park. Regardless of where you park your car, all passengers and luggage may be dropped off at the footbridge.

Kennicott River Footbridges
Two footbridges span the east and west channels of the Kennicott River. Except during the annual glacial outburst flood, the east channel is dry and the road travels through its bed. To cross the footbridges, drop off passengers and luggage directly in front of the footbridge. There you will find hand carts to help haul your luggage across the river.

Shuttle Service
Private companies operate shuttle services from the footbridge to McCarthy and Kennecott. Current shuttle schedules can be found at the McCarthy Road Information Station, the shuttle stop and other locations around town. Walking to the shuttle stop and purchasing your ticket directly from the next shuttle to arrive, rather than purchasing tickets from vendors on the west side of the Kennicott River, may be the most efficient way to arrange transportation. Shuttle tickets are approximately $5/one-way.

Lodge Guests:
Lodges on the other side of the river generally provide transportation for their guests. Follow the lodge’s directions for contacting them.
Climate Change

WHAT IS HAPPENING IN WRANGELL-ST. ELIAS?

CHANGE IS A DYNAMIC FORCE OF NATURE, EVER PRESENT AND CONSTANT. OFTEN WE DEPEND ON IT, LIKE THE CHANGING SEASONS, THE RISING and setting of the sun, and the passage of time. The natural world displays incredible versatility and adaptation to these changes that have occurred over the millennia. In today’s news we are hearing about Climate Change and its effects on the environment. Scientists say that climate change is happening and that there are consequences for our national parks, people and the planet. Since climate change is happening at such an unprecedented pace, the planet does not have time to adapt, and ultimately, survival may be at stake.

In Alaska’s National Parks, there has been substantial and ongoing research, with national significance, which involves studying climate change. Scientists with the National Park Service recognize that monitoring the climate is critical to understanding the condition of park ecosystems. They also recognize that parks need to work together to achieve needed results.

Wrangell-St. Elias National Park & Preserve holds icefields, high-country areas cloaked with snow year-round, and the nation’s largest system of glaciers. In fact over 25 percent, or approximately 5,000 square miles, of the park is covered with ice. Near the coast, the Malaspina Glacier is North America’s largest piedmont glacier, which is a type of glacier that is formed at the base of a mountain rather than enclosed by a valley. Covering an area of 1,500 square miles, the Malaspina Glacier is so large that it can only be seen entirely from the air.

If warmer winters and longer, more intense melting seasons continue, we may no longer be able to claim these amazing resources. Taking action to monitor, manage, and decrease the impacts of climate change will have positive benefits for our park and its resources. By dealing successfully with climate change, the National Park Service will be moving towards a way of life that is in harmony with the natural processes and changes that operate on our planet.

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Kennecott view from the mill building today. Notice how the glacier has shrunk.