

Western Arctic National Parklands

Cape Krusenstern National Monument
Kobuk Valley National Park
Noatak National Preserve
Bering Land Bridge National Preserve
Alaska

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Seal hunting remains economically important for Native Alaskans along coastal parklands. NPS photo



Annual salmon runs provide oceanic food—a sudden burst of animal protein—to inland Alaska. NPS photo



Cottongrass blossoms brighten summer tundra. Photo by Tim Thompson/ National Geographic Society



The Noatak, a river of multitudinous mountain kingdoms, runs nearly 300 miles to its mouth at the Chukchi Sea north of Kotzebue. NPS photo



Rivers provide transportation as well as food. NPS photo



Sunset on the Kobuk River mirrors golden aspen leaves. Photo by George Weurthner



Ponds typically dot moist tundra, particularly in river flats, as here along the Kobuk River. Photo by George Weurthner

Expansive Arctic and Subarctic Wildlands

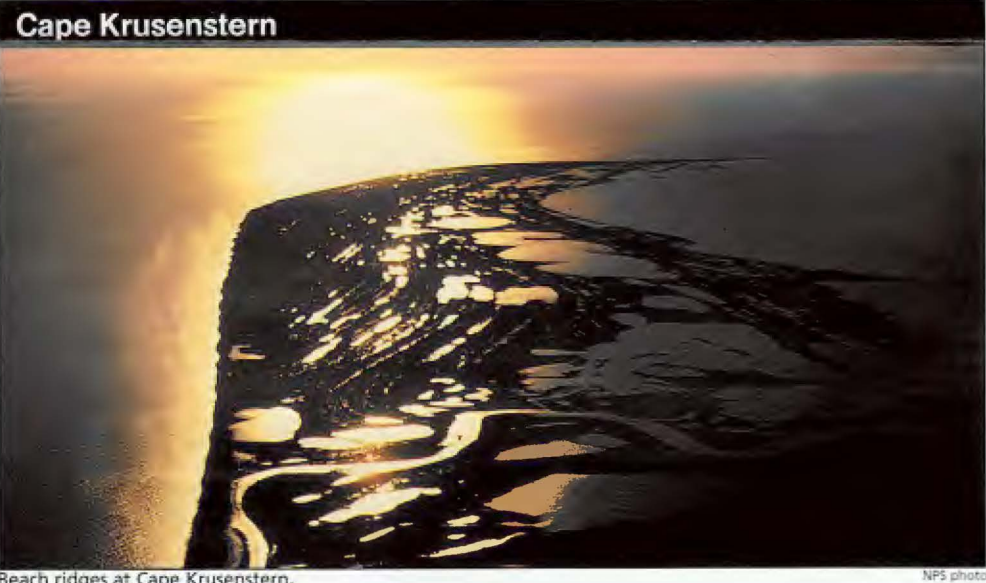
Cover: Herds of caribou roam the parklands in northwest Alaska. Photo by William Boehm

Known simply as the Western Arctic National Parklands, four units of the National Park System stretch eastward from the Chukchi Sea for some 290 miles to the upper Noatak River. Cape Krusenstern National Monument, Kobuk Valley National Park, Noatak National Preserve, and Bering Land Bridge National Preserve together protect some 11.8 million acres of subarctic and arctic wildlands. They also offer, on the Noatak and Kobuk rivers, some of North America's finest waters for wilderness expeditions. These parklands contain the western terminus of the Brooks Range, which is the northernmost extension of the Rocky Mountain Range. They trace the treeline or northern limit of tree growth as the boreal forest gives way to the tundra that stretches northward to Point Barrow on the Beaufort Sea. The

Western Arctic National Parklands protect the archeologically significant beach ridges of Cape Krusenstern, the Great Kobuk Sand Dunes, and most of the expansive watershed of the Noatak River and commemorate the people of the Americas who crossed the Bering Land Bridge in prehistoric times. With Gates of the Arctic National Park they extend 350 miles inland and encompass 19.5 million acres. Linked to this expansive topography is the wide-ranging, nomadic Western Arctic herd of barren ground caribou. In 2000 the herd numbered more than 450,000 animals. The tundra offers a thin veneer of life across which caribou must move to forage for adequate food. In summer the land is covered with a profusion of low-growing plants, including dwarfed ground willows, saxifrage, lupines, reindeer moss,

and lichens. The caribou has a strong presence in native stories of this region. Native peoples here were often semi-nomadic, following the caribou migrations. Even the coastal peoples of Cape Krusenstern ranged inland to hunt caribou and to hunt and trap other land mammals when the sea mammals so important to their lives were scarce. Throughout these parklands, local residents still pursue caribou hunting, fishing, trapping, and other subsistence activities. Many residents rely significantly on locally harvested animals, fish, and plants for satisfying basic food needs. The Inupiat people traditionally valued the land so that, through wise use over thousands of years, its resources and productivity were carefully preserved for the benefit of future generations. The National Park Service has a com-

patible mission—of stewardship of this vast reach of northwest Alaska for the use and enjoyment of this and coming generations. From the visitor centers it is difficult to imagine the extent of the Noatak River—whose name means “passage to the interior”—or the expanse of the annual caribou migrations throughout the immense area that these parks encompass. For information about the Bering Land Bridge National Preserve, please see its individual brochure.



Beach ridges at Cape Krusenstern. NPS photo

Cape Krusenstern National Monument is a coastal plain dotted with sizable lagoons and backed by gently rolling limestone hills. Treeless, the cape gives you the feeling of being able to see forever. Cape Krusenstern's bluffs and its series of 114 beach ridges record changing shorelines of the Chukchi Sea (see map). They also record in time sequence an estimated 4,000 years of prehistoric human use of this coastline. In summer a tremendous show of wildflowers colors the beach ridges and nearby hills. Huge numbers of birds come to the coastal area for nesting. Some archeological resources here are older than well-known remains of ancient Greek civilizations on the Mediterranean Sea. Shifting sea ice, ocean currents, and waves have formed—and continue to form—spits and lagoons possessing important scientific, cultural, and scenic values. In fall mi-



Noatak River—the name means “passage to the interior.” NPS photo

As one of North America's largest mountain-ringed river basins with an intact, unaltered ecosystem, the Noatak River environs feature some of the Arctic's finest arrays of plants and animals. The river offers equally superlative wilderness float-trip opportunities—from deep in the Brooks Range to tidewater of the Chukchi Sea. Noatak National Preserve lies almost completely enclosed by the Baird and De Long mountains of the Brooks Range. In this transition zone, the northern coniferous forest thins out and gradually gives way to the tundra that stretches northward to the Beaufort Sea. The Noatak basin is



Great Kobuk Sand Dunes, largest of the park's dune areas. NPS photo

Kobuk Valley National Park is also mountain-enclosed—by the Baird and Waring mountains (see map). Major natural features that the park protects include the central section of the Kobuk River, the 25-square-mile Great Kobuk Sand Dunes, and the Little Kobuk and Hunt River dunes. Additional dunes that have been stabilized by vegetation now cover much of the southern portion of the Kobuk Valley. Sand created by the grinding action of ancient glaciers has been carried to the Kobuk Valley by winds—westerly in summer and easterly the rest of the year—and by water. River bluffs, composed of sand and standing as high as 150 feet, hold permafrost ice wedges and the fossils of Ice Age mammals. Up to 1,500 feet wide, the placid Kobuk River falls a mere two to three inches per mile. Its valley provides important fall and win-

Caribou, Nomads of the North

Caribou migrations are one of the wonders of the subarctic and arctic realms. Traditionally, caribou have been among this region's chief food sources for humans, predators, and scavengers. The populations of some other animals species may even fluctuate with that of the caribou. Native peoples have depended on caribou for food, clothing, shelter, and tools, using the entire animal. For food: meat, greens from the stomach, and fat. For clothing: hides for coats called parkies, trousers, boots called mukluks, and mittens, plus sinew to sew them. For shelter: hides for tents. For tools: antler and bone for needles, sleigh brakes, fish spears, knife handles, arrowheads, hide scrapers, and snow shovels.

Life on the Tundra Truly migratory, caribou move about the tundra in constant search of plant foods to support their body weight: 150 to 300 pounds for bulls. Tundra is a mat of mostly prostrate vegetation that can grow where short summers and other conditions preclude tree growth. Wet, moist, and alpine tundra are illustrated below. Tundra is often underlain by permanently frozen ground called permafrost. The ground surfaces of wet tundra and moist tundra thaw in summer and stay

Caribou are the only members of the deer family in which both male and female have antlers. Bull antlers may extend up to 4 feet from the head and have a similar spread.



Range and Migrations Known as “nomads of the north,” caribou have lived in most of Alaska except its southeastern panhandle. In their yearly wanderings, caribou of the Western Arctic herd

range over 140,000 square miles, including the entire four parks that make up the Western Arctic National Parklands. The herd—North America's largest—is more than

450,000 at this writing. Spring migration begins in March: the herd's main body crosses the Kobuk and Noatak rivers moving northward to calving

grounds on the Arctic Coastal Plain. Many of the caribou begin to cross the Noatak southward in late August and the Kobuk in September. The winter range lies south of Kobuk Valley National Park and the Selawik National Wildlife Refuge.



Caribou migration See detail at left



Wet Tundra



Alpine Tundra



Moist Tundra

Adult bulls can accumulate fat deposits—mostly on the back and rump—that weigh 60 pounds or more in early fall. They lose the fat during the rutting, or mating, season.

Wolves and Other Predators The principal predators of the caribou are the wolf and bear. Wolverines, foxes, and eagles prey on calves. Any of the above, as well as weasels, lemmings, some hawks, ravens, gray jays, and gulls, will scavenge caribou carcasses. Some wolves, especially on North Slope calving areas, will follow the caribou herd. However, many wolves reside in specific locations. Wolves hunt

caribou by stealth and ambush, by relay running, or by culling victims of falls from running in a tightly massed herd. Healthy adult caribou can normally outrun single wolves and have the advantage on ice. Wolves have the advantage on soft tundra and in some snow conditions.



Western Arctic National Parklands



In the rutting season Dall sheep rams battle fiercely with their mighty



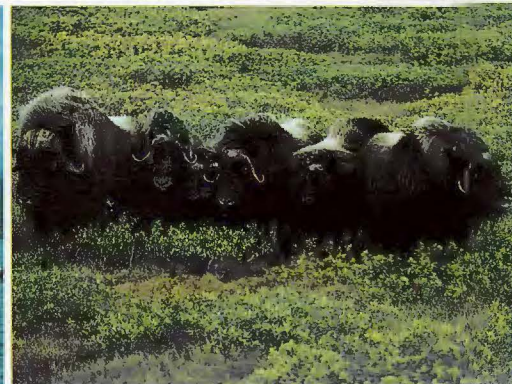
curled-back horns. Photo by George Weurthner



Pacific walrus live in both the Bering and Chukchi seas. Their



strong ivory tusks are used in fighting and climbing—and in parenting, for fetching young from ice floe crevasses. NPS photo



Kayakers float the wild Noatak River. NPS photo



Musk oxen circle up, heads out in their collective defensive posture effective against most natural predators. Photo by William Boehm



Tiny redback voles—studied here—loom large in the Arctic's food chain. Photo by L. Ayres

Access and Information

Cape Krusenstern National Monument, Kobuk Valley National Preserve, and Bering Land Bridge National Preserve together are known as the Western Arctic National Parklands. The parks' information

center and the headquarters offices in Kotzebue and Nome are open Monday through Friday. At these locations you can buy topographic maps, aeronautical charts, and books on the region, and get information on hunting and fishing regulations, location of private lands within the park units, minimum impact camping, bear safety, and other important topics. Kotzebue and Nome can be reached only by air.

These airports are served both by scheduled airlines and by many Alaska package tour companies.

Transportation. People generally reach the Western Arctic National Parklands by scheduled airlines from Fairbanks or Anchorage. Scheduled flights are available from Kotzebue and Nome to nearby villages. Check at the visitor centers for a list of the villages. Air taxi or charter flights are

available from Kotzebue, Nome, Ambler, Bettles, and Fairbanks. Write to the superintendent for a list of authorized air taxi services for Cape Krusenstern National Monument, Kobuk Valley National Park, Noatak National Preserve, and Bering Land Bridge National Preserve.

More Information Superintendent Western Arctic National Parklands National Park Service P.O. Box 1029 Kotzebue, AK 99752 907-442-3890

For a list of U.S.G.S. Topographic maps, books, and other publications, write: Alaska Natural History Association, 605 W. 4th Ave., Suite 85, Anchorage, AK 99501

Activities

There are no National Park Service developments, services, campgrounds, or trails in these park areas. Summer access to and through them includes motorized and non-motorized watercraft, aircraft, and by foot. Light aircraft land on gravel bars and tundra airstrips or on rivers, lakes, and lagoons. Floating the major rivers can be the experience of a lifetime.

At Cape Krusenstern, kayaking along the coast and through lagoons is possible. Camping, hiking, backpacking, wildlife observation, and photography are popular activities.

At Kobuk Valley, motorboats, kayaks, canoes, and rafts are used on the river. The Great Kobuk Sand Dunes, up to 150 feet high, are an easy hike from the Kobuk River.

At Noatak, fine canoeing, kayaking, and rafting opportunities abound on the Noatak River. Aircraft also provide access for fishing and backpacking.

At Bering Land Bridge, kayaking along the coast and through lagoons is possible. Camping, hiking, backpacking, wildlife observation, and photography are among many possible activities.

Regulations

Private property. Private lands are located within all four areas, generally along rivers and beaches. Respect property and privacy.

Subsistence use. Local residents engaged in a subsistence way of life are legally permitted to continue subsistence. Please do not interfere with subsistence camps, fishnets, or other equipment.

Fishing. Fishing can be good when rivers are clear and fish are running. Species include grayling, arctic char, sheefish, salmon, pike, and whitefish. An Alaska fishing license is required for all persons

16 years of age or older. Alaska fishing seasons and regulations apply.

Hunting. Sport hunting is permitted in Noatak National Preserve and Bering Land Bridge National Preserve with an Alaska hunting license. Alaska seasons and regulations apply. Kobuk Valley National Park and Cape Krusenstern National Monument are closed to sport hunting. Subsistence hunting by local residents living in identified resident zones is permitted in all four areas. State and federal subsistence hunting regulations apply.

Camping. The four park areas have no designated campgrounds. Tundra and river bars are often used for camping. Use river bars with caution: Rapid changes in river levels can occur without warning. Camp only where escape routes are available to safe higher ground. Keep gear above river level and secure boats and other floatable items.

Precautions

This is a vast area subject to harsh weather, high winds, rain, and snow. Guard against hypothermia, an all-season killer. Animals are wild and must be respected. *Before traveling in the backcountry,* review the brochures about handling wildlife encounters. These are available at the visitor centers or by mail. Mosquitoes and biting flies are prevalent; headnets and/or repellent are recommended. Drinking water should be boiled for one minute before use. *Giardia lamblia* can be a problem. You must possess good backcountry skills for wilderness survival. *Know—and test—your gear before you arrive.*

For your safety, leave your itinerary with someone and notify that person when you complete your trip. Winter travel can be recommended only to those experienced in arctic camping and survival techniques.

Bear Warning

Grizzly and black bears are common to the parks. They are unpredictable and dangerous. Never surprise or approach them closely; stay cautious and alert at all times. Make noise—loud talking, ringing a bell, shaking stones in a can, etc. If you meet a bear, yield the right-of-way by moving slowly away, not by running.

Clean camps are essential to reducing bear problems. The odors of various foods, lotions, toothpaste, shaving cream, etc., attract bears. Keep sleeping and cooking areas separate. Store food and scented articles in airtight containers. Leave scented foods such as

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