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NATIONAL CONSERVATION LANDS

Fortymile

Wild and Scenic River

**Weather and Safety**

You can easily become disoriented in the rugged Fortymile country, where the river winds through the Tanana uplands. Carry inch-to-the-mile maps and a compass. Keep track of your position as you float because many river bends look similar. Rapids and portages are not marked. Carry maps of the surrounding area in case an accident forces you to walk out cross-country. There is no cell phone coverage in this area. Please follow Leave No Trace practices.

**Water Temperature.** The Fortymile River is cold! Wear a life jacket. A wetsuit is recommended for kayakers and canoeists planning to run the bigger rapids. Know how to recognize, prevent, and treat hypothermia.

**Water Level.** The water level can change drastically overnight in the Fortymile River drainage, so always tie your boats well above the high-water mark. Remember that good weather in your particular location does not guarantee stable water levels; rain in the headwaters can lead to significant fluctuations far downstream and change the characteristics of rapids.

**Bears.** Although there have been few problem bears on the Fortymile, there are bears in the area. Prudent campers cook and store food well away from tents and boats. Don’t bury cans or garbage; bears will find them and make a mess. Pack it in, pack it out.

**Giardia.** All water should be treated to prevent giardiasis. This intestinal parasite can leave you feeling miserable for weeks. Boiling water for at least five minutes is the best way to kill the organism.

**Fortymile History**

The Fortymile country was not always as accessible as it is today. In the past, summer travelers walked overland with packhorses or poled up the river. In the winter they traveled overland or along the river by dog sled. The Fortymile River was always a reliable thoroughfare for travelers, summer or winter.

Prospectors gave the Fortymile River its name around 1886 because it enters the Yukon River about 40 miles below the former Hudson’s Bay post of Fort Reliance.

Today’s travelers on the Fortymile can find relaxation, adventure, and a touch of the past. Many signs of mining activity, both past and present, are visible along the river. Watch for remains of old bucket-line dredges, turn-of-the-century trapper cabins, and the old townsites of Franklin, Steele Creek, and Fortymile. Remember, these structures and artifacts belong to everyone. Take only pictures, leave only footprints.

As you float the river, you will probably encounter small suction-dredge operations mounted on pontoons. You can also see evidence of more substantial mining activity with large sluice boxes, heavy machinery, and rustic log cabins.

Early foot travelers, freighters, and mail carriers followed an overland trail connecting all the communities in the Fortymile country. The trail ran south from Eagle to Liberty, over to Dome Creek, then followed O’Brien Creek to the Fortymile River and downstream to the roadhouse at the mouth of Steele Creek. From

Cover photo: Floating the Fortymile River near the U.S.-Canada border.

The Mosquito Fork Dredge and other remnants of the region’s colorful mining past can still be seen along the Fortymile Wild and Scenic River.

## Fortymile Wild & Scenic River

Running The Chute rapids.

there the trail wound up Steele Creek, over the ridge to Gilliland Creek, and down to the community of Jack Wade. It then headed west to Franklin and south again until it reached Chicken. The trip would take from 3 to 4 days by dog sled or horse-drawn wagon.

**Fortymile is gold country.** At the turn of the century, gold brought \$17 a troy ounce, and Fortymile miners removed an average \$225,000 worth of gold bullion each year. Today, when that amount of gold would be worth many millions of dollars, the abandoned dredges remind us of the excitement of those years.

**Running the River**

Early prospectors poled their boats from the Yukon River in Canada to the Fortymile River and up its tributaries and creeks. Most of the early boats were made by hand, using available materials. Quality depended on individual skills in whipsawing and carpentry. River users usually portaged even the mildest rapids rather than risk losing a whole year’s grubstake.

Today’s easier road access and high-tech gear haven’t changed the river and its challenges. Rapids on the Fortymile can be hazardous. The degree of hazard depends on your conditioning, experience, and equipment, as well as the flow rate of the water. The same river section that has smooth, slow water in a dry June can offer challenging rapids after heavy August rains.

The Fortymile River runs through a remote area of Interior Alaska. Rapids often should be portaged to prevent injury or loss of provisions far from help. Hard and fast rules for running the river are impractical because every trip is run under different conditions. You will need to maneuver around rocks or waves in nearly every bend of the river, and sweepers and snags are common. There is no substitute for good judgement and attentiveness. The following guidelines cover the significant rapids.

**Bald Eagle Rapids,** on the Middle Fork just above the confluence of the Middle and North forks, is hazardous for canoes at high water levels. It generally can be run on either side of the large rock in the center of the stream. Scouting ahead for sweepers is recommended.

Along the riverbank of the Middle Fork, you can see remnants of the Washington-Alaska Military Cable and Telegraph System. The WAMCATS line, completed in 1902, provided a communications link between Fort Egbert in Eagle and Fort Liscum near Valdez to Washington, D.C., and the rest of the United States via Seattle.

**The Chute** is about a half-mile below the confluence of the Middle and North forks, where the river straightens from a turn to the right as you face downstream. Canoes generally should portage this class III water using either bank.

**The Kink** is big water, with several drops over 3 feet and recirculating hydraulics. It should be portaged on the right bank. To recognize the approach to The Kink, note that two significant streams enter the river on the right after passing The Chute. The second of these, Hutchinson Creek, is about 10 miles below The Chute. Keep your eyes and ears open after passing Hutchinson Creek, staying close to the right bank when the river bends to the left. Before the river turns back to the right, stop and scout ahead. Walk downstream to determine just how far you can safely bring your boat before starting the portage. The portage generally is made over the trail on the higher bench.

The Kink was formed in 1898 when a group of Danish prospectors blasted away a 100-foot rock ridge to drain a 2.8-mile-long meander. The dry river bed was worked for gold, but proved to be poor ground and was abandoned by 1905. Draining the meander might be an easy task using today’s technology, but creation of The Kink was a major engineering feat in that day and time. It was accomplished

in a relatively uncharted wilderness without benefit of developed transportation or communication systems. The area is now on the National Register of Historic Places.

**The Falls** is a class II to III rapids about 2 miles above the Fortymile Bridge and can be portaged on the right.

**Deadman’s Riffle** is on the main stem of the Fortymile about 15 miles below the Fortymile Bridge. It is class III at some water levels and can be portaged on the right.

**Claghorn Rapids,** about 3 miles downstream from Deadman’s Riffle, is also class III and can be portaged on the right.

**Canyon Rapids** is in Canada, below the mouth of Bruin Creek. Very dangerous at extremely high water, Canyon Rapids is difficult to line or portage due to the steep canyon walls. At lesser flows Canyon Rapids is class II to III water and can be lined or portaged on the right.

Portaging around rapids at The Kink.



River Access

The river is a peaceful and refreshing alternative to road travel. You can select a half-day float on the Mosquito Fork, a week-long float to Eagle—or anything in between—by consulting the Distance and Floating Time Chart below. Arrangements for air taxi service to the Joseph put-in can be made in Tok. Otherwise, all put-ins are accessible from the Taylor Highway. If you are planning a trip on the lower Fortymile to either Clinton Creek or down the Yukon to Eagle, you must check in with both Canada and U.S. Customs.

Before traveling the Taylor Highway, be sure you have adequate supplies. Gas and food are available only in Chicken and Eagle.

Joseph Airstrip

This unmaintained bush airstrip is rough and narrow, but it's the easiest way into the Middle Fork and North Fork areas. A gully cuts across the airstrip near the middle; landing here requires an experienced pilot and capable aircraft. A 50-yard trail at the airstrip's eastern end leads to the river.

Fortymile Bridge Wayside

This boat landing at milepost 112 Taylor Highway is heavily used by miners and recreationists. A steep access road that often requires four-wheel drive leads to the river on the east side of the highway. It is difficult but not impossible to use boat trailers here. Leave your vehicle in the parking lot on the west side of the highway instead of on the ramp.

South Fork Bridge Wayside

This boat landing at milepost 75 Taylor Highway has a parking lot, outhouse, and boat ramp. The boat ramp is exposed to the river current and is not easy to use; four-wheel drive is generally necessary. Long-term parking is available, but overnight camping is not allowed at the South Fork Bridge Wayside.

Mosquito Fork Bridge Wayside

The Mosquito Fork is too shallow to float except during periods of high water. This float trip starts at the Mosquito Fork Bridge, milepost 64 Taylor Highway. The easiest way to get equipment to the river is to turn east off the highway just south of the bridge and drive about 100 yards to the point where a steep ramp has been installed to the water's edge. This ramp is not suited for boat trailers, but it provides a good route to carry rafts or canoes. Chicken residents use this access point to get drinking water, so please keep the area clean. Park your vehicle in the parking lot on the north side of the bridge.

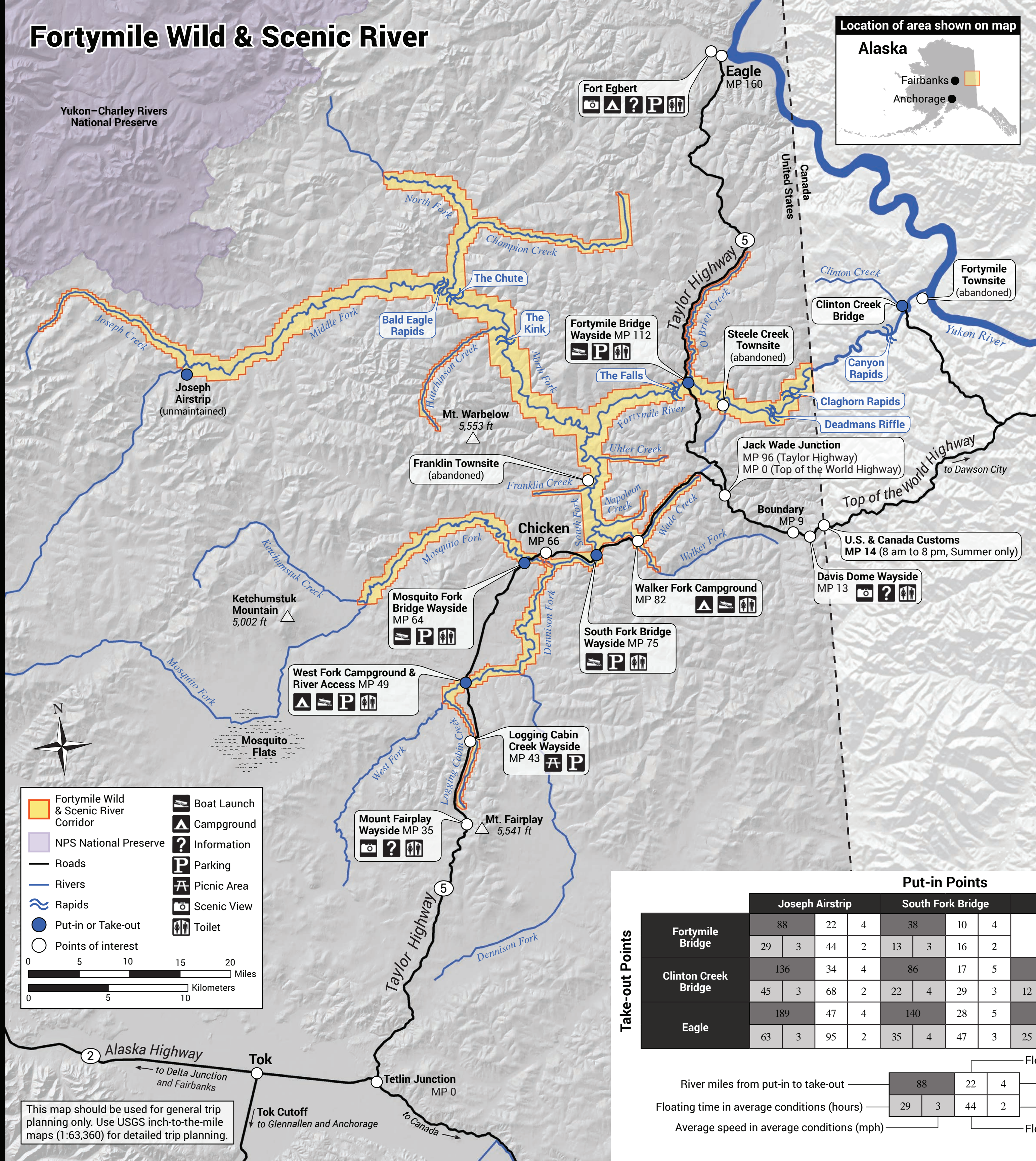
West Fork Bridge

Most of the year, the West Fork of the Dennison Fork is too shallow for pleasant canoeing or rafting. The exception is during periods of high water, especially during spring runoff. Put in at the West Fork Bridge, milepost 49 Taylor Highway. Boats must be carried about 20 yards to the water. The West Fork Campground, a quarter-mile from the bridge, has outhouses and 25 campsites. A long-term parking area lies south of the bridge.

Clinton Creek Bridge (Canada)

The old settlement of Clinton Creek was inhabited from 1967 to 1979, though little remains there today. This is the last take-out point before the Yukon River. To reach it by vehicle, drive from the U.S.-Canada border about 28 miles down the Top of the World Highway to the Clinton Creek turnoff and follow the unmaintained road for 25 miles. No facilities or services are available. Please respect private property in the area. Camp below ordinary high-water mark above the bridge on river left.

Fortymile Wild & Scenic River



Eagle

Boaters who float down the Fortymile to its confluence with the Yukon River will find their first opportunity to take out at Eagle, which has three boat landings. The first is a private landing for the sightseeing boat *Yukon Queen II*. Vehicles can be driven to the water's edge at the second landing, just downriver. The third landing requires a 20-foot climb up a steep stairway to reach downtown Eagle. Be sure to check in with U.S. Customs on arrival.

U.S. Geological Survey Maps

Travelers should have detailed maps of the specific area they are floating. The map in this brochure should be used for general trip planning only. Use USGS inch-to-the-mile maps (1:63,360) listed below for detailed float trip planning.

- Joseph to Fortymile Bridge: Eagle A-2, B-1, B-2, B-3, B-4, B-5
- South Fork Bridge to Fortymile Bridge: Eagle A-2, B-1, B-2
- Fortymile Bridge to Eagle: Eagle C-1, C-2 (U.S); Fortymile 116C/7, Cassiar 116C/8, Shell Creek 116C/9, Mount Gladman 116C/10 (Canada)
- Mosquito Fork Bridge to South Fork Bridge: Eagle A-2
- West Fork Campground to South Fork Bridge: Eagle, A-2, Tanacross D-2, D-3
- West Fork Campground to Fortymile Bridge: Eagle A-2, B-1, B-2

Brochures

The following brochures are available at BLM and APLIC offices listed on the back panel:

- Taylor Highway Travel Guide
- The Eagle-Valdez Trail
- Early Miners of the Fortymile
- Eagle – Fort Egbert: A Remnant of the Past

Distance & Floating Time Chart

These figures represent estimated averages from BLM patrol trips in varying conditions. The float time does not include portage times – only average time on the river. As in most northern rivers, high water can be expected from late May to mid-June, with a general drop toward minimal flows by September. All river users should be aware that the Fortymile can fluctuate dramatically at any time of the year. Water level can rise several feet overnight, so always secure boats well above the high-water mark. Strong headwinds on the Yukon can slow progress to a crawl. Always have enough provisions to allow for changing conditions.

For put-in on the West Fork of the Dennison Fork, add 30 miles and 10 hours to the South Fork Bridge estimates. For put-in on the Mosquito Fork, add 10 miles and 5 hours to the South Fork Bridge estimates.

		Put-in Points												estimates.							
		Joseph Airstrip			South Fork Bridge				Fortymile Bridge				Clinton Creek Bridge								
Take-out Points	Fortymile Bridge	88		22	4	38		10	4												
		29	3	44	2	13	3	16	2												
	Clinton Creek Bridge	136		34	4	86		17	5	48		10	5								
		45	3	68	2	22	4	29	3	12	4	16	3								
	Eagle	189		47	4	140		28	5	101		20	5					53		11	5
		63	3	95	2	35	4	47	3	25	4	34	3					13	4	18	3

				Floating time in high water (hours)							
River miles from put-in to take-out				88	22	4		Average speed in high water (mph)			
Floating time in average conditions (hours)				29	3	44	2	Average speed in low water (mph)			
Average speed in average conditions (mph)								Floating time in low water (hours)			