NATIONAL CONSERVATION LANDS

Alaska

Gulkana National Wild River: Paxson Lake to Sourdough Campground

Paxson Lake to Sourdough Campground
The most popular Gulkana River trip begins at Paxson Lake and ends at Sourdough Campground at MP 147.5 on the Richardson Highway. Total distance is about 47 miles and three-four days travel time depending on your mode of travel. Access is at the Paxson Lake Campground boat launch MP 175, Richardson Highway.

Three miles of paddling across Paxson Lake brings you to the Gulkana River. Just 1 mile downstream from the confluence with the Middle Fork, the Gulkana is a shallow, rocky stream with Class II rapids and a gradient of 38 feet/mile. At low water levels occasional lining may be required.

At the confluence of the Middle Fork and the Main Branch, the Gulkana River becomes slow and meandering. You may encounter ATV or other trail users within sight of the river. Beyond Canyon Rapids, an assignated trails cross the river at this location. As you continue towards Canyon Rapids, you will notice an old cabin that was historically used by trappers in the region. There are occasional rocks and wood snags in the Class I water until reaching Canyon Rapids.

Canyon Rapids is located at approximately river mile 20. Take-out signs mark the portage trail on the left side of Canyon Rapids. The rapids are Class II or IV depending on flow, and are navigable by experienced whitewater boaters only. Scout the 1/4 mile length before attempting passage. It is often helpful, and sometimes required, to line boats through the rapids. At portage gear prior to running the rapids. At high water levels, open canoes and small rafts must be portaged. Even experienced boaters have wrapped and destroyed rafts in these rapids. There are two campsites and camping areas at Canyon Rapids. Fishing is excellent for grayling and rainbow trout in the canyon area. A one mile hiking trail leads to Canyon Lake and the Haggard Creek trail accesses the Richardson Highway approximately six miles east.

Below Canyon Rapids there are 8 1/2 miles of Class I rapids which are generally shallow and rocky. Many canoes and rafts have grounded out on the gravel in this section of the Gulkana River. Whitewater experience is helpful to successfully navigate this section of the river, as there are many rocks and small rapids. After these rapids, there is an 18-mile stretch of Class I water to Sourdough.

This map is not a comprehensive listing of all campsites within the Gulkana National Wild River corridor. This map can be used as a tool to help plan your whitewater trip by recommending and giving general descriptions of campsites along the river. This information is intended for users to determine how far down river a suitable campsite may be and Class I-III rapid locations in general terms.

Recommended Campsites

Taff ATV 4x4 Cove
N62.51.22, W145.36.55
Recommended group size/tents: 6/3
High, upland campsite with good views of the Paxson Lake outlet and surrounding hills.

Hulman's Haunt
N62.51.25, W145.36.51
Recommended group size/tents: 4/2
Nice, flat upland camping area. Please be sure to remain properly located adjacent to this campsite.

NiinhTAAN! Camp
N62.50.50, W145.40.11
Recommended group size/tents: 6/3
Shady, multiple use ATV and river campsite in a stand of spruce trees.

Moore Island
N62.50.40, W145.40.09
Recommended group size/tents: 4/3
Look for the left channel once you reach the Middle Fork confluence to access this multiple use ATV and river campsite. This campsite is located on an island; use portable river toilets.

Mear's Roadhouse
N62.50.44, W145.40.10
Recommended group size/tents: 12/6
Campsite is suitable for large groups and is accessible by river or through a short ATV trail. Firewood is scarce; please do not cut live trees.

Dewey's Cache
N62.49.31, W145.38.59
Recommended group size/tents: 8/4
The trapper cabin at this location was built in the 1920's by Barney Dewey and Al Norwood and was used for many years as a trapper's hunting shelter. Views of the Alphabet Hills can be seen to the west.

Beaver Flats
N62.48.14, W145.39.22
Recommended group size/tents: 12/6
Flat, open upland area suitable for large groups.

Sourdough Gene
N62.46.39, W145.37.42
Upland campsite nestled in spruce trees with nice views of the river.

Potty Island
N62.45.22, W145.35.14
Recommended group size/tents: 4/2
Popular island campsite named for an outhouse that was once located here. The outhouse was removed in 1997 to avoid water contamination. This campsite is on an island; use portable river toilets.

River Otter Slough
N62.45.15, W145.35.16
Recommended group size/tents: 4/2
Campsite is located on the left bank approx.other users camp at Potty Island. The site is relatively flat and offers some shade cover under large spruce trees.

Sentinel Point
N62.44.14, W145.33.54
Recommended group size/tents: 4/2
Flat, open campsite with little shade or tree cover. This is a good stop before the canyon, especially if it is late in the day.

Last Chance
N62.43.40, W145.34.07
Recommended group size/tents: 4/2
Last stop before the canyon. A good campsite for smaller groups, especially late in the day.

Portage Peak
N62.43.05, W145.35.06
Recommended group size/tents: 4/2
Look for the trail to the left halfway through the portage. This campsite is small but a convenient location.

NaghLENden
N62.43.06, W145.35.05
Recommended group size/tents: 2/1
NaghLENden in Athna means "waterfall place." A small campsite that serves as canyon overflow, not very private but will work in a pinch.

Smooth Landing
N62.42.58, W145.35.04
Recommended group size/tents: 8/4
Larger campsite that serves as the primary take-out location for all canyon floaters. Look for the trail to the left. This site is flat and can accommodate larger groups.

Spruce Hide-out
N62.42.59, W145.35.05
Recommended group size/tents: 6/4
A secluded campsite nestled back into a stand of spruce, good shade cover and access to the Canyon Lake Foot Trail. Takeout at Smooth Landing and follow the foot trail away from the river.

Salmonberry Stash
N62.42.53, W145.35.18
Recommended group size/tents: 10/5
Located just downstream from the canyon, this campsite is a good stopping point on past the portage, especially if you want to avoid the crowds. Suitable for larger groups.

Moose Rack Camp
N62.42.33, W145.36.06
Recommended group size/tents: 8/4
A combination gravel bar and upland campsite, reachable from the canyon in about a half hour's float time. Works great if the gravel bar campsite is full and both area are occupied. Flat sixth patch with nice views of the river.

Alick's Bluff
N62.41.31, W145.38.37
Recommended group size/tents: 12/6
Large, open campsite suitable for the largest groups with interesting views of the river bluffs just downstream. This site has numerous flat tent pads and easy access to the river.

Joe Secondchief
N62.38.23, W145.43.03
Recommended group size/tents: 6/3
Upland campsite with a flat, gravel bar landing area and flat tent pads.

Firewood Flats
N62.40.54, W145.41.52
Recommended group size/tents: 8/3
Look for the trail to the left when exiting on river left. Shady campsite surrounded by spruce trees.

Texas Pete Bluff
N62.40.17, W145.40.45
Recommended group size/tents: 8/4
Campsite is located across from a bluff. Look for the trail leading into the bushes, where you will find nice tent pads on fine gravel.

Moonshan Flats
N62.38.46, W145.39.28
Recommended group size/tents: 6/3
Large open upland area with an easy gravel landing.

Nickle Bar
N62.34.35, W145.37.37
Recommended group size/tents: 8/4
Large gravel bar campsite located just downstream of the West Fork confluence. This site changes each year because it gets sold out every spring.

West Fork Confluence
N62.34.17, W145.37.11
Recommended group size/tents: 12/6
Large gravel bar campsite located at the West Fork confluence. There may be other groups camped here, as it is a very popular spot for motorized users. Camping available on multiple locations on the large gravel bar.

Along the way...

Multiple Use
The Gulkana is a multiple use river. Please be courteous to other trail and waterway users on the lower stretches, especially during salmon season.

Anadromous Fish
The Gulkana River watershed supports an impressive run of Sockeye (red) salmon and Chinook (king) salmon. If you are planning a trip in July or August expect to encounter salmon in various stages of making their way to their spawning grounds.

Aurora Borealis
Fall trips along the Gulkana can offer solitude and even opportunities to view the Aurora Borealis.

Rapids
Runoff may be the time to float if you want bigger rapids and a quicker float.

Season
Running season generally begins in early to mid-June, depending on ice breakup and precipitation.

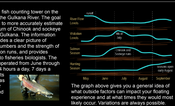
Vegetation
The major vegetation type in the Gulkana River valley is spruce forest.

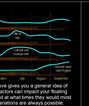
Paxson Lake Campground
50 campsites are available on a first-come basis.

Sourdough Campground
42 campsites are available on a first-come basis.

Fishing the Gulkana
The Gulkana is one of the most popular sportfishing rivers in Alaska, providing rich habitat for rainbow trout, arctic grayling, king salmon, red salmon, whitefish, longnose suckers, and lamprey. A popular river for fishing throughout the summer, this river has also played an important role in the lives of the Ahtna, providing access to subsistence resources throughout history and pre-history. During early trapping and homesteading days, it was accessible by horse and wagon and travel route from the Copper River to the Tangle Lakes and what is now known as the Denali Highway area.

The Bureau of Land Management has worked cooperatively with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game to operate and manage a fish counting tower on the Main Stem of the Gulkana River. The goal for this work is to more accurately estimate the annual return of Chinook and sockeye salmon to the Gulkana. The information collected provides a clear picture of population trends, helps in the management of returning salmon runs, and provides valuable data to fisheries biologists. The tower (left) is operated from June through mid-August, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. During the night they pass over the light colored tarp.





The graph above gives you a general idea of what outside factors can impact your floating experience and at what times they would most likely occur. Variations are always possible.

Milepost (MP)
River Mile
Road
Wild and Scenic River
Trans-Alaska Pipeline
Game Management Unit (7/1/2016)
Trail
USGS 1:63,360 Index

Map not to be used to determine federal subsistence hunting areas.

Administered Lands
- Bureau of Land Management
- Native Allotment (Private)
- Native Lands
- Private
- State of Alaska

Disclaimer: No warranty is made by the Bureau of Land Management as to the accuracy, reliability, or completeness of these data for individual or aggregate use with other data. Original data were compiled from various sources. This information may not meet National Map Accuracy Standards. This product was developed through digital means and may be updated without notification. The information displayed on this map should be used for graphic display only. For official land status information, refer to Cadastral Survey plats, Master Title Plats, and tenoltratus case files.

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Gulkana National Wild River - Main Branch

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Map Coordinate System: NAD 1983 UTM Zone 6N