

Portions of the Delta River were designated for its wild, scenic, and recreational characteristics as part of the National Wild and Scenic River system by the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act in 1980. The upper stretch of the Delta River, all of the Tangle Lakes, and the Tangle River were recognized for their outstanding scenery and natural and cultural values. These Bureau of Land Management National Conservation Lands embody our vision for conserving our public lands. Open to everyone, they offer Americans the unique opportunity to explore and experience the landscapes that shaped our nation. Whether you fish, hike, hunt, or boat, these lands represent our way of life, a living link to the past and our pledge to tomorrow.

A "Wild" river is free of impoundments, generally inaccessible except by trail, and has exceptionally clean waters. "Scenic" segments are free of impoundments and have shorelines that are largely undeveloped, but are accessible by road. "Recreational" segments are accessible by road and may have some development along their shorelines.

**U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management**

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The Setting

The Delta River watershed is in the Alaska Range in Southcentral Alaska. River access is along the Denali Highway, about 22 miles west of Paxson. Year-round recreational opportunities abound throughout the river's watershed, which includes 150,000 acres of land, 160 miles of streams, and 21 lakes. The Tangle River connects several of the Tangle Lakes and then drains into the Delta River, which joins the Tanana River, before flowing into the mighty Yukon River.

The terrain around the Tangle Lakes is predominantly tundra-covered rolling hills with glacial features such as moraines, eskers and kettles. Gravel benches above Lower Tangle Lake show that the current lake was about 50 feet higher at one time. The land adjacent to the upper Delta River includes steep alluvial slopes, rock cliffs and spectacular geologic features.

Elevations average 2,800 feet at the Tangle Lakes and the drainage falls 650 feet in 51 river miles. Several hundred lakes and ponds are scattered throughout the surrounding spruce-dominated forest.



Caribou walking uphill from lakes in the Delta River watershed.



Delta Wild and Scenic River

Adventures on the Delta Wild and Scenic River

Season and Climate

The river-running season begins in early to mid-June, depending on ice breakup and precipitation. Average annual precipitation measured at Paxson is 11 inches of rain and 120 inches of snow. July is commonly the wettest month. During the summer, temperatures range from 35°F to 70°F, with occasional highs in the 80s. By mid-September, shorter days and colder temperatures bring the river running season to an end.

History and Prehistory

Native people may have lived in this area as long ago as the end of the last ice age (about 10,000 years ago). Approximately 226,660 acres in the Tangle Lakes area are designated as the Tangle Lakes Archaeological District. This area has hundreds of archaeological sites that are listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The first recorded use of the Delta River was as a route of exploration by the U. S. Army in 1898. A gold strike along Rainy Creek led to the establishment of the Eureka Creek Mining District; as many as 250 people worked in this District between 1900 and 1910.

NOTE: Collection or disturbance of any historic or prehistoric remains is against the law.

Plants

Vegetation ranges from arctic tundra to spruce-poplar forests. Grasses, sedges and forbs grow on the highest, most exposed slopes and above the brush line. Willows grow on moist lowland sites and in the many brushy draws draining the side slopes.

Dwarf birch occupies drier sites with well-drained soils. Alder grows on steep slopes of hillsides and canyon walls. Forests of white and black spruce grow in small pockets along the river, and on some hillsides below an elevation of 3,200 feet. You will find open spruce-poplar forests on lowland sites along the river and on some midslope hillsides.

Understory plants are varied and abundant. Fireweed, bistort, rose, mountain avens, burnet, and shrubby cinquefoil are just some of the many plants in the area. In August, many people travel to Tangle Lakes to pick blueberries. Other harvestable berries in the Delta River area include crowberry, alpine bearberry, cranberry and red currant.

Western arctic shooting star.



Bald Eagle overlooking Delta River.

Animals

A variety of wildlife call this area home. Wildlife provides opportunities for hunting, trapping, photography and viewing. Hunters seek moose, caribou, bear, Dall sheep, ptarmigan, waterfowl and snowshoe hare. Trappers harvest beaver, fox, wolf, marten, lynx, wolverine, otter, muskrat and mink.

Of the 110 species of birds identified in this area, most are summer residents (May to September). Nesting bald eagles can be observed from Tangle Lakes to the lower Delta River during the summers.

Wildlife viewing is best in the early morning.

Fishing

Tangle Lakes and the Delta River contain grayling, round whitefish, lake trout, burbot and longnose suckers. Most fishing is for grayling, but good lake trout fishing is available in late winter and early spring.

Salmon are not found in the Delta River due to the 15-foot-high falls and the heavy silt load entering from Eureka Creek.

You can purchase an Alaska fishing license and view sport fishing regulations online at the Alaska Department of Fish and Game Web site, www.adfg.state.ak.us, or buy in person from license agents throughout the state, including stores in Glennallen, Delta Junction and Tok.

Fishing for grayling on the Delta River.



Land Use

There are a number of active mining claims in the Rainy Creek area along the lower end of the Delta River. Near MP 212.5 of the Richardson Highway, you may see mining equipment crossing the river that is associated with state or federal mining claims.

The Trans-Alaska Pipeline System, built in the mid-1970s, is visible from the Delta River for three river miles before the take-out on the Richardson Highway at MP 212.5.



Map & Guide

Cover photo: Canoeing the Delta Wild and Scenic River.

Upper Tangle Lakes



Exploring the hills around the Upper Tangle Lakes.

To explore the Upper Tangle Lakes (see inset map), use the boat launch at the Delta Wild and Scenic River Wayside at MP 21.5 of the Denali Highway. The first two lakes, separated by a relatively flat half-mile portage, offer easily accessible day trips with opportunities for wildlife viewing, berry picking and short hikes on winding esker ridges.

One more short portage takes you to the shallow, Mud Lake. Two routes may be taken from this lake:

1. Continue across the lake, which drains into the Tangle River and loops back to the first lake; or
2. Paddle to the south end of Mud Lake and follow connecting channel to unnamed lake. Continue traveling south to the mile-long portage to Dickey Lake, which flows into the Middle Fork of the Gulkana River.

NOTE: Portage trails are not marked or maintained in the Upper Tangle Lakes. Float planes may land at Dickey Lake. For additional information on the Middle Fork trip, refer to the BLM brochure, The Gulkana Wild and Scenic River.

Lower Tangle Lakes and Upper Delta River

Begin your two-to-three day trip at the Tangle Lakes Campground, MP 21 of the Denali Highway. Here you will find a boat launch and campsites.

From Round Tangle Lake, follow the Tangle Lakes north. The initial nine-mile stretch of the trip runs through three of the Tangle Lakes, which are connected by shallow channels of slow-moving water. During low water levels, it might be necessary to line canoes and rafts for short distances. Ice can remain on the lakes until early to mid-June. The Delta River flows north from Lower Tangle Lake, then continues through the Amphitheater Mountains and the foothills of the Alaska Range. It is 20 river miles from this outlet to the take-out point. The first one and one-quarter miles of river are shallow and rocky Class II water.



Scenic views along the Delta River.

After this first section, there is a portage around unnavigable waterfalls. The river portage take-out is on the right side of the river and marked with a sign. The half-mile maintained portage trail leads across steep, rocky terrain.

Below the falls, the river narrows to approximately 60 feet and the velocity increases significantly. Boaters must have whitewater experience to successfully float this one-mile section of shallow, rocky, Class II-III rapids. After the rapids, the next 12 river miles are slow, meandering Class I water.

At the confluence of Eureka Creek, the clear river changes to cold, silty, glacial water. The last seven miles are often shallow and braided with numerous channels and gravel bars. Here, the water is swift and generally Class II.

Nearly everyone who floats the Delta River takes out just north of Phelan Creek at MP 212.5 on the Richardson Highway. The exact take-out location varies from year to year, due to changes in the river channel. Parking is available adjacent to the river, and the take-out is marked with a large yellow sign. The vehicle shuttle distance from the Tangle Lakes launch point to the take-out is 49 miles one way.

Lower Delta River

If you are an experienced kayaker or whitewater rafter, you can continue downstream 18 more river miles past Black Rapids Glacier. After the MP 212.0 take-out, the Delta River becomes very swift with high standing waves and glacial silt. This area is not recommended for open canoes, and Black Rapids is rated Class III-IV. There is no designated take-out point for the Lower Delta River trip, but the Richardson Highway parallels the river in numerous locations.

Low Impact Guidelines

Trips on the Delta River and Tangle Lakes are wilderness adventures known for their spectacular scenery. If you choose to travel them, you are responsible for maintaining their wild character for all who follow. Here are a few ways you contribute.

- Use existing campsites.
- Stay on existing trails.
- Dispose of gray water away from river and lakes. You don't have to use soap in the wilderness, but if you do, be sure it is biodegradable.
- Carry a portable toilet system to pack out all human waste.
- Pick up litter and carry out all garbage. Garbage attracts animals. If you pack it in full, you can pack it out empty. This includes all burned trash.
- Firewood is not available in the tundra. Use a camp stove for cooking, or bring firewood or charcoal. Never cut green trees or limbs. If you must build a fire, use only dead and down wood.
- Extinguish fires completely. Use a firepan or existing firepits. Observe any fire restrictions. Fireworks are illegal.
- Leave plants, minerals, wildlife and other natural features undisturbed for others to enjoy.
- Do not harass eagles or other raptors.

Travel Safely

Know Your Limits

The Delta River is not a place for the novice boater! Always travel with at least two boats in your group; solo travel is not recommended. Always wear a personal floatation device (life jacket) when in or near the water. Remember, accidents can occur in seconds and emergency assistance can take many hours.

Use Restrictions

Powerboats greater than 15 hp are not recommended. Aircraft are not recommended in the Delta River corridor.

Water

Drink only boiled, filtered or chemically treated water. Untreated water can make you sick.

Avoiding Bears

Keep your campsites extremely clean. Cook and keep food away from tents. Store food in airtight containers so bears can't smell it. Pack out all trash, including unburned items from the firepit.

Watch for Hazards

Be alert for approaching hazards such as boulders, jagged rocks, large holes and fallen trees. Scout the rapids below the portage.

Also scout the confluence of Eureka Creek. There could be a strong cross-current that could capsize a canoe. Stay low in your canoe for stability, or line your canoe up the creek and paddle into the main current.

Suggested Equipment

- life jackets: type III or V for each person
- first aid kit
- boat repair kit
- shovel
- spare oars or paddles
- warm clothing in a "dry bag"
- throwbags or throw cushions
- rain gear
- insect repellent and head net
- air pump (for inflatable boats)
- bailing device
- matches in water tight container

