

# Wilderness.net's Gates of the Arctic Wilderness Fact Sheet



## Introduction

The United States Congress designated the Gates of the Arctic Wilderness in 1980 and it now has a total of 7,167,192 acres. All of the wilderness is in Alaska and is managed by the National Park Service.

## Description

When Bob Marshall explored this region in the early 1930s, two looming peaks near the head of the North Fork of the Koyukuk River (Boreal Mountain and Frigid Crags) left a lasting impression on him. He dubbed them "The Gates of the Arctic." Straddling the central Brooks Range and looming entirely above the Arctic Circle, the Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve protects a mass of land four times larger than Yellowstone National Park. The park is managed primarily as Wilderness. On the south slopes visitors will find a sampling of thin boreal forest. The ragged, majestic peaks of the Brooks Range invite exploration and give way northward to rolling tundra, too far north for many trees to grow, where barren-ground caribou travel in huge herds and grizzly bears roam away their solitary lives. Moose, wolves, Dall sheep, black bears, and smaller mammals share the park. Eagles and hawks soar overhead. On the extreme northern verge the land is polar desert, one of the driest places on Earth.

Remote glacier-carved valleys split the range, drained by clear rivers and dotted with alpine lakes. Anglers head here for the grayling, char, and chum salmon often found in abundance in the rivers. Although no established trails exist, backpacking is becoming increasingly popular in Gates of the Arctic. Many hikers carry a firearm for protection from bears, but attacks are uncommon. Climbers are attracted to the Arrigetch Peaks and Mount Igikpak. Sport hunting and trapping is allowed on the preserve section. Although camping is unrestricted, wood is scarce and campfires are discouraged.

Waterways suitable for floating or paddling are seemingly endless and include all or part of six Wild and Scenic Rivers: all 83 miles of the Alatna River, which roars out of the Arrigetch Peaks; all 52 miles of the crystalline John River; all 110 miles of the Kobuk River, with its sweeping vistas of the Brooks Range; all 102 miles of the North Fork of the Koyukuk River, running through a glacier-carved valley; part of the 330 miles of the Noatak River, the longest member of the Wild and Scenic family in America; and all 44 miles of the remote and seldom visited Tinayguk River.

## Leave No Trace

How to follow the seven standard Leave No Trace principles differs in different parts of the country (desert vs. Rocky Mountains). Click on any of the principles listed below to learn more about how they apply in the Gates of the Arctic Wilderness.

1. [Plan Ahead and Prepare](#)
2. [Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces](#)

3. [Dispose of Waste Properly](#)
4. [Leave What You Find](#)
5. [Minimize Campfire Impacts](#)
6. [Respect Wildlife](#)
7. [Be Considerate of Other Visitors](#)

For more information on Leave No Trace, [Visit the Leave No Trace, Inc. website.](#)

## Location

The park lies entirely north of the Arctic Circle beginning at approximately 67 degrees north latitude. It straddles the central Brooks Range on both the north and south sides. The park is bordered on the east by the Trans-Alaska Pipeline, Dalton Highway and the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. On the west the park is bordered by the Noatak National Preserve and Kobuk Valley National Park. To the south the park is bordered by Kanuti National Wildlife Refuge. To the north the park is bordered by the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska. The only road accessible visitor center is located in Coldfoot, AK. From this location information can be found on where to access the park from the road. Visitor Centers are also located in Bettles and Anaktuvuk Pass, communities that are accessed by aircraft only. There are no trailheads into the Gates Wilderness. When you leave the road or aircraft behind you make your own decisions regarding navigation and pathfinding.

## Area Management

The Gates of the Arctic Wilderness is part of the 110 million acre National Wilderness Preservation System. This System of lands provides clean air, water, and habitat critical for rare and endangered plants and animals. In wilderness, you can enjoy challenging recreational activities like hiking, backpacking, climbing, kayaking, canoeing, rafting, horse packing, bird watching, stargazing, and extraordinary opportunities for solitude. You play an important role in helping to *"secure for the American people of present and future generations the benefits of an enduring resource of wilderness"* as called for by the Congress of the United States through the Wilderness Act of 1964. Please follow the requirements outlined below and use Leave No Trace techniques when visiting the Gates of the Arctic Wilderness to ensure protection of this unique area.

Bear Resistant Food Cannisters (BRFCs) are REQUIRED for overnight visits into the Park. No permits are required to enter the Gates of the Arctic. There are no fees required. The Park requests that you stop in Coldfoot, Bettles or Anaktuvuk Pass and receive a backcountry orientation. BRFCs are available to borrow and use, free of charge, to visitors on a first come first served basis.

## Contacts

**Bettles Ranger Station**  
P.O. Box 26030  
Bettles, AK 99726

Phone: 907-692-5494  
Fax: 907-692-5400

### **Anaktuvuk Pass Ranger Station**

National Park Service  
Anaktuvuk Pass, AK 99721

Phone: 907-661-3520

Fax: 907-661-3521

### **Coldfoot Ranger Station**

P.O. Box 9072  
Coldfoot, AK 99701

Phone: 907-678-2004

Fax: 907-678-2004

### **National Park Service (Fairbanks Headquarters)**

4175 Geist Rd  
Fairbanks, AK 99701

Phone: 907-457-5752

Fax: 907-692-5400

Remarks: AKP: 907-661-3520, CXF: 907-678-5209, MAR: 907-678-2004.

## **Links to Other Websites**

[Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve](#)

## **Links on Wilderness.net**

[National, Regional and Local Wilderness Organizations \(NGOs\)](#)

A listing of societies, organizations, coalitions and other wilderness-related advocacy and stewardship groups.

[Career and Volunteer Opportunities](#)

A listing of sites providing information about wilderness- and environmentally-related career and volunteer opportunities.

## **Applicable Wilderness Law(s)**

Law	Date	Acreage Change (in acres)
<b>Public Law 96-487</b>	<b>December 2, 1980</b>	<b>7,052,000</b>
Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act - Public Law 96-487 (12/2/1980) Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act		

 [download 96-487](#)

<b>Public Law 104-333</b>	<b>November 12, 1996</b>	<b>-17,168</b>
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Omnibus Parks and Public Lands Management Act of 1996 - Public Law 104-333 (11/12/1996)  
Omnibus Parks and Public Lands Management Act of 1996

*NOTE:* Approximately 56,825 acres were added and approximately 73,993 acres were removed. The 17,168 acres removed were transferred to the Noatak Wilderness.

 [download 104-333](#) - Relevant legislation found on page(s): 26-27.

## **Recreational Opportunities**

Gates of the Arctic is our nation's largest wilderness area with a management focus emphasizing self-reliance, remoteness and wilderness stewardship. Recreational opportunities abound and are usually accomplished via non-motorized watercraft or backpacking. There are six Wild and Scenic Rivers encompassed by the Park and access to them provides a high quality wilderness experience. There are incredible opportunities for solitude, wilderness camping, river travel, wildlife viewing, photography, etc. For trip planning purposes you may wish to visit the Gates of the Arctic website: [www.nps.gov/gaar](http://www.nps.gov/gaar).

## **Climate and Special Equipment Needs**

Gates of the Arctic is in an arctic and sub-arctic ecosystem. Weather is extreme in both summer and winter. Most visitors visit the park in the summer months of June through September. Summer weather can include snow and rain, or 90 degrees and drought. Winter is dark and cold with temperatures plunging to 40 degrees below zero and colder in December and January. Most visitation during winter conditions occurs in March and April when there is 12 hours and more of daylight and daytime temperatures from 20 below to 20 above. Visitors must come prepared for a wide range of temperatures and conditions at any time of the year. Be sure that you have good gear that is warm even when wet. Bring additional food in case your air taxi is delayed for several days due to poor weather. Visitors must be skilled in the use of map and compass/GPS.

## **Safety and Current Conditions**

Park Rangers are on staff at all three visitor centers to give you current conditions (if available) for the area that you are interested in visiting. However, the park is a remote wilderness and conditions are subject to rapid and unpredictable change. A backcountry safety orientation is available in person at the visitor centers, or online at [www.nps.gov/gaar](http://www.nps.gov/gaar), or through the mail with a on-loan DVD.