

# Wilderness.net's Katmai Wilderness Fact Sheet



## Introduction

The United States Congress designated the Katmai Wilderness in 1980 and it now has a total of 3,384,358 acres. All of the wilderness is in Alaska and is managed by the National Park Service.

## Description

The Katmai Wilderness, located within Katmai National Park and Preserve, is characterized by active volcanoes, pristine lakes and rivers, glaciated peaks, and rugged coastline. The area contains the famed Valley of Ten Thousand Smokes, a spectacular forty square mile, 100 to 700 foot deep ash flow deposited by Novarupta Volcano in June of 1912 during a major cataclysmic eruption. In addition to Novarupta, the Katmai Wilderness contains many other active volcanoes, including Katmai, Trident, Mageik, Martin, and Fourpeaked.

The area is home to an abundance of wildlife. The most widely known is the brown bear, which resides throughout the coastal and lake regions of the Wilderness. Other land mammals that call Katmai home include moose, caribou, red fox, wolf, lynx, wolverine, river otter, mink, marten, weasel, porcupine, snowshoe hare, red squirrel, and beaver. Along the coast and offshore islands are sea lions, sea otters, and hair seals. The lake edges and marshes serve as nesting sites for tundra swans, ducks, loons, grebes, and arctic terns. Sea birds abound along the coast, grouse and ptarmigan inhabit the uplands, and migratory songbirds nest within the spruce and birch forests and alder thickets. Seacoast rock pinnacles and treetops along lakeshores provide nesting sites for bald eagles, hawks, falcons, and owls.

The Katmai Wilderness also contains many large pristine lakes and rivers. Major lakes include Brooks, Coville, Grosvenor, and the Iliuk Arm of Naknek Lake. The major rivers within the area include the Savonoski, Katmai, Kamishak, Swikshak, and Big Rivers. These lakes and rivers provide excellent habitat for salmon, trout, and other species of fish. In turn, the fish provide a primary food source for brown bears and other animals.

The Katmai Wilderness also has a rich cultural and historic significance ranging from the remnants of homes and villages left by native Alaskans over the last several thousand years to early 20th century Russian, European, and American trappers, miners, and clambers.

## 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 Katmai 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 Katmai Wilderness is within Katmai National Park & Preserve, located on the Alaska Peninsula approximately 290 air miles southwest of Anchorage. The majority of visitors that experience the Katmai Wilderness arrive at Brooks Camp via floatplane. From Brooks Camp, visitors can be transported by bus to the Valley of Ten Thousand Smokes, one of the more popular Katmai Wilderness destinations.

The Katmai Wilderness may be directly accessed via air taxi flights chartered from Anchorage, King Salmon, Iliamna, Kodiak, Soldotna, Port Alsworth, or other nearby Alaska towns and villages. Regularly scheduled commercial flights are available from Anchorage to King Salmon, which serves as the Katmai National Park and Preserve administrative headquarters. Boats can access the Katmai coast from villages and towns along the Pacific Ocean coastline and wilderness locations along the Naknek River drainage can be reached by boat from the villages of Naknek and King Salmon.

## Area Management

The Katmai 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 Katmai Wilderness to ensure protection of this unique area.

### Visitor Management:

Visitor use of the Katmai Wilderness is governed by applicable provisions of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act, National Park Service regulations in 36 CFR (Code of Federal Regulations) Part 13, Department of the Interior regulations in 43 CFR Part 36, and the Katmai Superintendent's Compendium ([http://www.nps.gov/akso/management/current\\_compendiums.cfm](http://www.nps.gov/akso/management/current_compendiums.cfm)).

No fees are required to access the Katmai Wilderness. Visitors may complete a Backcountry Planner in Brooks Camp. Bear Resistant Containers (BRC) must be used and can be checked out in King Salmon or Brooks Camp. A permit is required to overnight at Fure's Cabin, located near the Bay of Islands on the North Arm of Naknek Lake. Permits are obtained at the Katmai National Park and Preserve headquarters in King Salmon. The headquarters may be reached at (907) 246-3305.

The following regulations and guidelines apply to backcountry travel within the Katmai Wilderness:

- Stay 50 yards or more from any bear or other large animal.
- Food and food containers, garbage, and fish must be stored in approved bear resistant containers (BRC) or lockable section of a vessel

or aircraft. BRCs are available for free checkout at the King Salmon or Brooks Camp Visitor Centers. Coolers are NOT bear resistant. • Pack out all garbage. • Dispose of human wastes in holes 6 to 8 inches deep and at least 100 feet from any freshwater source. Toilet paper must be removed as garbage. • Do not disturb, deface, dig, or alter any archeological sites, historical structures, or remains. • Disturbing or damaging plants and wildlife and collecting plants, wildlife, rocks and pumice, and fossils are prohibited. • Edible fruits, berries, and nuts may be collected for personal consumption. • Camping is NOT permitted within 1.5 miles of Brooks River Falls except in the designated campground on Naknek Lake. Camping is NOT permitted in the core Hallo Bay Meadows from April 1-October 31. • Camping is limited to 14 consecutive nights in any one location. Each new camp must be at least two miles away from the preceding camp. • Campfires are permitted. Utilize previously used sites, employ a fire pan, or choose durable surfaces to reduce impacts. Collection of dead and down wood is permitted for use in campfires. Keep fires small and break up fire rings before leaving the area. • Fish should be immediately cleaned and consumed or stored in a BRC. Fish remains should be deposited in swift flowing or deep water. All fish caught and retained within the Brooks Camp area must be immediately placed in a plastic bag (available at the Brooks Camp Visitor Center) and carried directly to the Fish Freezing building located adjacent to the Brooks Lodge Office. • A valid state license is required to hunt, fish, or clam. • Explosives and fireworks are not permitted within Katmai National Park and Preserve. Firearms are prohibited in federally owned or leased buildings.

#### Natural Resources Management:

Each natural resource within the wilderness is a critical, defining element and is managed within the context of the whole ecosystem. Natural resources management in the Katmai Wilderness is guided by a coordinated program of scientific inventory, monitoring, and research.

In evaluating environmental impacts from natural resource management activities, the National Park Service considers wilderness characteristics and values, including the primeval character and influence of the wilderness, the preservation of natural conditions, and assurances that there will be outstanding opportunities for solitude.

## Contacts

**Katmai National Park and Preserve Headquarters**  
P.O. Box 7  
#1 King Salmon Mall  
King Salmon, AK 99613

Phone: 907-246-3305  
Fax: 907-246-2116

## Links to Other Websites

[Katmai 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>3,473,000</b>
Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act - Public Law 96-487 (12/2/1980) Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act		

 [download 96-487](#)

## General Trip Planning Information

Trip planning to Katmai is part of the challenge of the wilderness of Katmai. Katmai National Park and Preserve is off the Alaska road system and accessible only by air or water. The Trails Illustrated Map of Katmai NP&P is a good start, but it is recommended that you carry topo maps, a map & compass, and GPS unit.

Check our website [www.nps.gov/katm](http://www.nps.gov/katm) for a list of approved flying and guiding services.

## Recreational Opportunities

### Bear Viewing:

Katmai is one of the premier brown bear viewing areas in the world. There are many opportunities within and outside of the wilderness to view Alaska Brown Bears. Katmai's coastal bays provide exceptional areas to view brown bears. Due to food availability, brown bears frequent specific areas at different times.

### Sport-fishing:

Before Katmai was known for bear viewing activities, most visitors came to the park for its world-renown sport-fishing opportunities. Sockeye (red) and coho (silver) salmon, rainbow trout, grayling, and Dolly Varden are found in many wilderness lakes and streams. The more popular wilderness areas to sport-fish include the Big, Kamishak, Kafia, and Swikshak Rivers, which are located along the Katmai coast

### Hiking:

The Valley of Ten Thousand Smokes, a 40 square mile ash-filled valley formed by the June 1912 eruption of Novarupta Volcano, is a popular area to hike within the Katmai Wilderness.

For those seeking solitude, hikes beyond the Valley of 10000 Smokes include hiking to Katmai pass, Katmai Crater and limited hiking opportunities on the Katmai coast. Canoeing/Kayaking:

On the park's interior waters, the 40-mile Savonoski Loop provides visitors with spectacular views of Naknek Lake, the Bay of Islands, Lake Grosvenor, and the Savonoski River. The canoe/kayak trail starts and ends at Brooks Camp.

For the more advanced and adventurous kayakers, the Katmai coast offers some of the most isolated

and challenging waters in Alaska. These areas are usually accessible by float plane.

Visit Katmai's website at [www.nps.gov/katm](http://www.nps.gov/katm) to get a list of guiding and flying services.

## **Climate and Special Equipment Needs**

Climate:

Precipitation and air temperature vary in Katmai depending on location. The mean air temperature ranges from -15° F in January to 55° F in July within the interior areas of Katmai west of the Aleutian Mountains. For the coastal areas of Katmai, mean air temperature ranges from 30° F in January to 55° F in July. The park's higher elevations (Aleutian Mountains) experience much lower temperatures, depending on altitude. Most precipitation falls as rain from May through September. Visitors should be prepared for extreme temperature changes, heavy precipitation, and high winds along the interior portions and coastal areas of Katmai.

Special Equipment Needs:

In addition to the general equipment recommended for Wilderness travel and camping, the following special equipment is required when camping within the backcountry of Katmai National Park and Preserve:

Bear Resistant Containers (BRC) are required to store food, food containers, garbage, and fish. BRCs are available first come/first served basis at the King Salmon or Brooks Camp Visitor Centers. A list of approved BRCs are available at [www.lwwf.org](http://www.lwwf.org). Large groups should plan on bringing their own LWWF-approved containers.

In addition, it is recommended that Wilderness campers utilize tents designed to withstand high winds (50 mph+), synthetic clothing and sleeping bags, and an electric perimeter fence when establishing camp to minimize encounters with brown bears.

## **Safety and Current Conditions**

Wilderness trips should be based on skill level and the ability to traverse a rugged environment.

The vast majority of the Katmai Wilderness is without trails and traversing these areas may take longer than hiking trailed areas.

Leave detailed trip plans and emergency contact information with a responsible person. The National Park Service will not initiate a search unless someone reports a person(s) as overdue. A note about SPOT and other personal locator beacon devices -- these devices are an adjunct to your safety in the wilderness, not an excuse for poor planning. Even after activating an emergency button, it may be hours before help arrives.

Weather at Katmai can change rapidly and be very wet and cold during any time of the year. Be prepared for extreme weather, hazards, and emergencies and know the warning signs of hypothermia and how to treat them.

Visitors should be able to travel safely in brown bear country and know how to prevent and react to encounters with bears.

Many river crossings can be dangerous. Follow these tips for a safe crossing: • Watch the water's surface and cross where you see small ripples (not waves), indicating shallow water. • Cross early in

the morning. • Release your belt and straps so you can drop your pack. • Wear shoes—don't cross in socks or barefoot. • Allow yourself a retreat; don't commit to one route.

Giardia is found within the waters of Katmai. Treat or filter all drinking water.

Visitors traversing the Valley of Ten Thousand Smokes should wear eye protection during high winds.

To receive current park conditions, please contact the Katmai National Park and Preserve headquarters office at (907) 246-3305 or email [KATM\\_Visitor\\_Information@nps.gov](mailto:KATM_Visitor_Information@nps.gov).