



Kanuti National Wildlife Refuge

Kanuti Refuge (1.6 million acres) lies deep in Alaska's interior in a vast wetland basin formed by the Kanuti and Koyukuk rivers. This refuge provides safety for hundreds of thousands of waterfowl when drought conditions occur in the lower-48 and Canada. A wild land little changed by humans — its major purpose is to provide habitat for a wide diversity of wildlife and breeding migratory birds.

Wild Heritage

The landscape features a striking mosaic of placid streams, wetlands and muskeg with hundreds of lakes of every size and shape. The central part of the refuge is dominated by the Kanuti wetlands (Kanuti Flats). Mosses, sedges and grass intermix with black spruce and shrubs in the poorly drained areas. Birch and poplar grow in gentle folds across broad meadows. Boreal forests (taiga) and stands of white spruce dot the uplands. The land is generally low lying with elevation ranging from five hundred feet to three thousand feet.

The Koyukuk (third longest river in Alaska) comprises the heart of the refuge. This scenic river winds its way through the refuge eventually meeting the massive Yukon. The Koyukuk is historically significant and it has several names. The first recorded name was "Kukukak" a Koyukan Indian word. Others include Yunaka, Kuiuk, Kuyaak and Coyukuk. Humans have used these lands for at least twelve thousand years and perhaps longer.

Diversity of Wildlife

The refuge provides space and isolation for a rich pageant of wildlife. This array includes large mammals (moose, wolves, bear and caribou); small mammals (otter, wolverine, marten, fox, beaver and voles); waterbirds (swan, geese, ducks, loons, grebes, sandhill cranes and shorebirds); and other resident and migratory birds (eagles, hawks, owls, ravens, grouse and ptarmigan). Over a hundred species of birds use the refuge.

Thousands of white-fronted and Canadian geese stage and feed on several large lakes as they prepare for their journey south. These geese and other migratory birds breed, nest and raise their young in the productive wetlands. Most birds common to Alaska's interior (148 species) are usually present on Kanuti. So far, 105 species (38 passerines) have been observed on the refuge.

Sixteen species of fish inhabit the lakes and rivers — chinook, coho and chum salmon, sheefish, whitefish, grayling, northern pike, Dolly Varden and burbot. Northern pike are most common in the larger lakes and rivers while grayling are more abundant in smaller streams.

Special Places

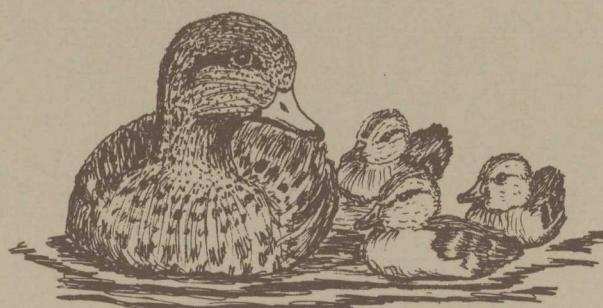
- The Kanuti River canyon (southern area) is especially scenic. Rocky cliffs (100-400 feet high) tower above its banks providing special habitat to peregrine falcons and other raptors.
- The Kanuti River supports an unusual community of plantlife — wet taiga on the northern slopes and desert plants on the southern side.
- Hulgothen Bluffs — A rich fossil bed exposed by the erosive action of Fish Creek.
- Pre-Athabaskan and Athabaskan sites and turn-of-the-century mining sites are located in various areas on the refuge. Four mining camps were productive from 1897 to 1906.
- The Arctic Circle is an imaginary line that marks the beginning of the land of midnight sun. The Arctic Circle crosses near the center of the refuge.



Visiting the Refuge

Sportfishing, hunting and subsistence use is allowed on the refuge in accordance with state regulations. The refuge is within Game Management Unit 24. Subsistence and recreational uses are allowed as long as they are compatible with wildlife and their habitat.

- Temperatures are challenging and display an incredible range — 100 above in the summer to 70 below in the winter. The rivers freeze in early October. River breakup usually occurs in early to mid-May. Lake ice disappears in early June.
- No roads lead to the refuge, however, daily flights are available from Fairbanks to Evansville/Bettles and Allakaket/Alatna. Air charters are available in Bettles to lakes and gravel bars — then you depend on boat or foot travel. The nature of the wet terrain does not lend itself to hiking.
- Be prepared for changeable weather and mosquitoes. Bring warm clothing, rain gear and repellent. In this water-dominated area, a ceaseless battle is waged between people and insects.
- Limited food or camping equipment is available in nearby villages. Guiding services are available in Bettles/Evansville, Anchorage and Fairbanks.
- No villages exist within the boundaries of the refuge. However, four villages comprising two communities are located outside the refuge border: Allakaket, Alatna and Bettles/Evansville. Many residents of these communities are Athabascan or Eskimo origin. They have used the land for centuries. They depend on the land today as they have in the past — fishing, hunting, gathering firewood, cutting house logs and picking berries.
- Thousands of acres (about one-fourth of the refuge) is private property. These lands include cemeteries and other irreplaceable historical sites. Do not use these private lands without permission. If you are uncertain about land ownership, contact the refuge manager.
- Do not disturb cabins or food caches unless confronted with an emergency. Someone may be depending on these supplies.
- Precautions should be taken to avoid unwanted encounters with bears. Be especially cautious when encountering animals with offspring. Make noise when hiking or walking. Keep a clean campsite and store food outside of tents and out-of-bear reach.
- Carry a topographic map (Bettles quadrangle) and a compass for safety. Information on these maps is available from U.S. Geological Survey — telephone: 907-271-4307 (Anchorage).
- Dead or downed trees may be for firewood. Be alert for grass and forest fires especially in dry years.
- Pack out what you pack in — do not bury garbage or debris.
- Leave a travel plan describing your trip with a friend; notify them when you return.
- Boil or chemically purify water before drinking. Giardiasis, a waterborne intestinal disease, is common in Alaska.



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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
UNITED STATES

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Kanuti National Wildlife Refuge

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Alaska Department of Fish and Game

Information on regulations or licensing:

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Alaska Department of Fish and Game

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1,635,000 Acres



USGS Maps: Bettles
Tanana

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MILES