

Yukon-Charley Rivers

Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve
Alaska

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Winter enthusiasts can travel along the frozen Yukon. Many follow the trail of the Yukon Quest sled dog race, held in early February, until ice starts to deteriorate in April.



Above: Experienced wilderness travelers can explore the preserve's vast and wild mountainous terrain. Left: The preserve has one of the largest breeding populations of peregrine falcons in North America.



Fishwheels have been used in or around the preserve since the 1800s to capture salmon swimming up the Yukon to spawn. They are typically used from late July into August.



Adventurers run the Charley River, which is swifter and descends more rapidly than the Yukon. It is the only wild and scenic river in the United States that has its entire watershed protected.



Boaters can exercise their legs while hiking the historic trail up Coal Creek. It passes this dredge and other remnants of large-scale gold mining. You can explore the dredge on your own or with a ranger-guided tour.

Timeless Rivers of Interior Alaska

Deep in Alaska, the great Yukon River strikes through bluffs and mountains of an ancient landscape. The Charley River and many streams tumble from the highlands, providing additional passageways into these wild lands. Congress set aside these 2.5 million acres in 1980 to protect the rivers, fish and wildlife populations and habitat, the area's cultural heritage, and to allow people to continue hunting and fishing as they have for thousands of years.

THE RIVERS

The Yukon runs 2,000 miles from its headwaters in Canada across Alaska to the Bering Sea, flowing about 130 miles through the preserve. During the short summer, silt from glaciers turns the water brown. The river deposits the silt, along with gravel, at points along its path while wearing away at rock in other places. In winter, the water runs clear beneath ice that can be six feet thick.

Shorter and steeper than the Yukon, the Charley drops over 3,000 feet before broadening into a floodplain and emptying into the Yukon. People who want to float the 106-mile-long river usually fly to an airstrip near its source. They are rewarded with a spectacular trip where each bend presents another view of unspoiled, wild country. The Charley is the only national wild and scenic river with its entire watershed—1.1 million acres—protected.

THE PLACE

At its northernmost point, Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve lies about 50 miles from the Arctic Circle. It is a haven for life that can withstand long, cold, dark winters and prosper during the perpetual daylight and warmth of the short summers. Migrating caribou browse on fast-growing sedges, grasses, and other vegetation. The Fortymile herd also gives birth here. Songbirds and shore-

birds migrate from tropical winter homes to nest. Peregrine falcons, once endangered, thrive here. King and chum salmon swim up the Yukon to their spawning beds. For generations, people have gathered at fish camps to capture the salmon that will help sustain their families and sled dogs through winter.

THE PEOPLE

Ancient people traveled the unglaciated Yukon corridor during the ice ages to take advantage of abundant plants and wildlife. They traversed thickets of willow and alder, dense stands of white spruce and cottonwood, and across boggy flats as they moved upward. The higher elevation forest of white spruce, birch, and aspen gave way to brush as the hunters climbed to the low, dry tundra on rocky ridges in search of prey. These ancestors of the Han Athabascans eventually settled in this land.

The gold rushes of the late 1800s brought thousands of gold seekers to the region. Circle, population currently around 100 people, gained a reputation as "the largest log-cabin city in the world" and earned the nickname "Paris of the North" because of its opera house. Eagle, population now also around 100, swelled to over 1,000 people. Pokes (small bags) of gold were legal tender. This wild time lives on in the writings of Jack London and Robert Service.

Most newcomers left almost as quickly as they arrived. Those who remained adopted the practices of the Alaska natives who already called this place home—trapping, hunting, fishing, and gathering plants in order to survive.

Today the preserve is wilder and less populated than it was during the gold-rush days. Life, in all its flintiness, persists as it has for ages. Welcome to this timeless land.

What to See and Do

At Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve, you can explore remnants of Alaska history, observe a variety of wildlife, and travel through remote country by river or overland. Obtain information about all of these opportunities from the preserve website, Alaska Public Lands Information Center in Fairbanks, or the Eagle Visitor Center (open daily in summer).

Most visitors come here during the brief summer to experience the Yukon or Charley rivers. Both require wilderness experience, appropriate equipment, and current maps. Other options include: • Exploring the historic Coal Creek drainage. • Dog mushing, crosscountry skiing, snowmachining, snowshoeing, and other forms of winter travel. • Hunting and fishing. • Visiting the historic towns near the preserve.

Weather In summer (mid-June to mid-August), expect hot days and cool nights. Watch out for thunderstorms that bring lightning, downpours, and high winds. During dry years, wildland fires may be burning. Rivers begin freezing in October. Winter brings snow and extreme cold. Ice on the Yukon River breaks up in mid-May, making travel impossible until the ice floes have dissipated (which can take a couple weeks).



Plan Ahead Start with the website, which has planning details and tips. • The preserve is not directly connected to the state road system. You can drive to Circle year-round, and to Eagle mid-April to mid-October. • Limited services and supplies are available in these and other small towns along the way. • Eagle has year-round commercial air service. • Air taxis and authorized guides can take you into the preserve. • In the preserve, you are on your own. Park staff are usually at Slaven's Roadhouse and Coal Creek Camp mid-June to mid-September.

You Must Be Self-Reliant No services or supplies are available inside the preserve, except for public-use cabins, which are free and first-come, first-served. • Bring sturdy outdoor clothing and gear in good condition: weather-resistant outerwear, thermal layers, rain gear, tents with rainflies and mosquito netting that can withstand strong winds. • Insect repellent, head nets, and sunscreen are highly recom-

mended. • Always carry emergency food rations in case you or your scheduled pick-up are delayed by weather.

Keep Food from Bears Black and grizzly bears live here and will be attracted to food and scented items. Use bear-resistant food containers (BRFCs) to store these items. The Alaska Public Lands Information Center and Eagle Visitor Center have BRFCs you can use for free. • Other bear safety tips are on the website.

Travel Safely Do not use the map in this brochure for travel planning. Use US Geological Survey topographic maps that cover the preserve: Eagle, Circle, Charley River, Big Delta. • Read the safety tips on the website. • Know how to prevent or avoid encounters with moose and bears. • Always filter or treat drinking water. • Adjust travel plans to the level of the least experienced member of your group. • Always leave a travel plan with a trusted

person, and check-in with them when you get back. • There is no cell phone coverage here. Consider renting a satellite phone for your trip.

Respect Private Property Many rural Alaskans live a subsistence way of life. Their camps, fishnets, traps, and equipment are private property. • Native Corporation and private lands exist in the preserve. They are not open to the public.

Know the Rules Park regulations, including those for firearms, fishing, and hunting, are on the preserve website.

Accessibility The NPS strives to make its facilities, services, and programs accessible to all. For information go to the visitor center, ask a ranger, call, or check the preserve website.

Emergencies Call 907-683-2276 to reach emergency dispatch at the Alaska Regional Communication Center.

MORE INFORMATION
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Eagle, AK 99738
907-547-2233
www.nps.gov/yuch

Fairbanks Alaska Public Lands
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101 Dunkel St. #110
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