



Katmai National Park and Preserve and Alagnak Wild River Wilderness and Backcountry Management Plan Newsletter, March 21, 2022



Bear near Mount Kelez

Dear Friends,

Katmai National Park and Preserve and Alagnak Wild River include exceptional backcountry and wilderness areas within the national park system. The National Park Service is developing a plan to guide the future management of the Katmai and Alagnak wilderness and backcountry areas. This newsletter provides information on this plan and invites you to participate in the planning process by sharing your views. Your ideas will help us shape the future of these remarkable areas. I appreciate your interest in Katmai National Park and Preserve and Alagnak Wild River and look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,
Mark Sturm
Superintendent
Katmai National Park and Preserve and
Alagnak Wild River

Park Purpose

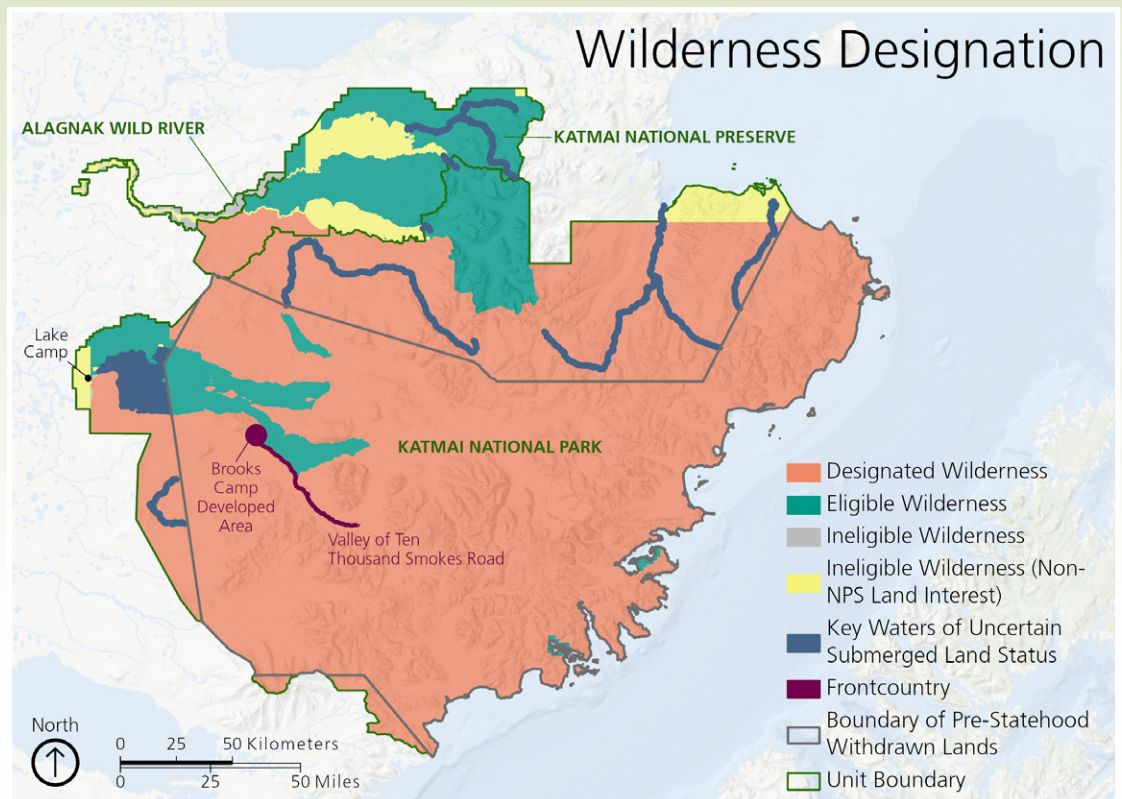
The purpose of Katmai National Park and Preserve is to protect, study, and interpret active volcanism surrounding the Valley of Ten Thousand Smokes, extensive coastal resources, habitats supporting a high concentration of salmon and brown bears, and an ongoing story of humans integrated with a dynamic subarctic ecosystem.

Park Purpose

The purpose of Alagnak Wild River is to protect and enhance the Alagnak River's outstanding fish and wildlife; scenic, recreational, and cultural values; its free-flowing condition; and its water quality for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations.

Study Area

The project area includes backcountry areas in Katmai National Preserve and Alagnak Wild River and congressionally designated wilderness and lands identified as eligible wilderness in Katmai National Park and Preserve. This plan will only apply to lands and waters that are under federal jurisdiction. The geographic scope of this plan is illustrated in the map. Please note that areas labeled as “Frontcountry” are excluded from this plan.



Distinction Between Backcountry and Wilderness

The term “backcountry” is a generic descriptor for primitive, undeveloped portions of a park unit, as distinct from highly developed frontcountry areas. Lands that are NOT highly developed with roads, parking lots, overlooks, vehicle campgrounds, and visitor centers, are considered the backcountry. Additionally, the National Park Service manages Alagnak Wild River in accordance with the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, which lays out specific management priorities that the National Park Service must consider in its strategies to manage the river corridor. Examples of frontcountry areas in Katmai include Brooks Camp or Lake Camp road and boat dock, as well as others. For this plan, “backcountry” describes areas that are not the frontcountry and areas not considered as wilderness. One example of a backcountry area is along the Alagnak River.

In contrast, lands designated by Congress as “wilderness” represent the highest standard for wild lands management. Lands and waters previously described as eligible for wilderness designation are managed by the National Park Service to preserve their eligibility status by avoiding nonconforming or incompatible uses until formal designations are considered by Congress.

In addition to other laws and policies affecting park resources, wilderness has supplemental and permanent protection under the Wilderness Act of 1964 beyond that which is normally afforded to park backcountry resources. Wilderness and backcountry may require different administrative practices because the Wilderness Act requires more extensive resource protection and limits certain kinds of uses. Some examples of wilderness areas in Katmai include Hallo Bay, Crosswinds Lake, and the Valley of Ten Thousand Smokes. While similarities exist between backcountry and wilderness, backcountry has more management discretion than the more stringent legal protection of wilderness.

For areas labeled as “key waters of uncertain submerged land status” on the map, the navigable water and submerged land ownership statuses require additional evaluation and determination. These determinations would be informed by ongoing legislation, particularly related to the Sturgeon v Frost court case. Other waters of similar uncertain status exist in the park but fall outside the scope of this plan.

Key Issues



Bears and visitors in close proximity

The NPS planning team has identified the following four key issues facing the Katmai Wilderness and the Katmai and Alagnak backcountry areas. These issues are expected to continue and are likely to intensify into the future if no action is taken. The wilderness and backcountry management plan needs to address all these issues to ensure that wilderness character is maintained, resources are protected, and opportunities are provided for a high-quality visitor experience.

1. **Impacts of Increased Concentrated Visitor Use on Wilderness and Backcountry Areas.** Increased visitation in the Katmai and Alagnak wilderness and backcountry areas has heightened concerns about the ability of the National Park Service to maintain wilderness character, protect natural resources, and provide opportunities for safe and satisfactory visitor use and experiences.
2. **Human-Wildlife Interactions and Potential Conflict.** Increasing visitation may affect animal physiology and behavior, movement patterns, compromise overall wildlife health, and diminish visitor safety.
3. **Management of Commercial Services as Visitor Demand Increases.** The growing popularity of these two park units has generated increased demand for a wide variety of commercial service opportunities. Commercial services fulfill a critical role in connecting visitors to Katmai and Alagnak and have the potential to play a key role in educating visitors on safety, stewardship, and park rules and regulations. The park wants to better manage commercial services to provide a balance between appropriate amounts and types of visitor use while carefully protecting resources.
4. **Challenges for Managing Wilderness and Backcountry Areas with Limited Staff across Millions of Acres and ANILCA Wilderness Complexities.** Managing over 4.13 million acres of wilderness and backcountry that accommodate over 40,000 visitor use days in a short visitor season each year presents challenges. Management must protect the five qualities of wilderness, the parks' fundamental resources and values, and other natural and cultural resources; consider safe and satisfactory visitor use and experience; and comply with relevant policy and regulations.

Purpose and Need for the Plan

The purpose of the wilderness and backcountry management plan is to preserve the wilderness character of Katmai's designated and eligible wilderness and guide the long-term management of visitor use and cultural and natural resources in both wilderness and backcountry areas of Katmai National Park and Preserve and Alagnak Wild River.

The plan is needed to safeguard wilderness character, address the effect of concentrated and increasing visitation, and provide guidance and direction for managing commercial and private visitor use.



Katmai rangers



Provide Input

Between March 21 and April 19, 2022, you have a variety of opportunities to provide your input:

- Submit comments on the NPS Planning, Environment, and Public Comment (PEPC) website (<https://parkplanning.nps.gov/katmai-wbmp>). Once on the website, select “Open for Comment” to provide your thoughts or ideas.
- Attend the public meetings on March 23, March 30, and April 7, 2022. Detailed information and updates about these public meetings can be found on the project website at <https://parkplanning.nps.gov/katmai-wbmp>.

To learn more about this planning effort, visit our StoryMap at <https://bit.ly/katmaistorymap>.



Alagnak River

Next Steps

Planning Activity	Timeline
Host public listening sessions and request feedback during the public comment period.	Spring 2022
Incorporate the public's feedback and develop management strategies and actions.	Summer 2022
Request feedback from the public on proposed actions and preliminary management options in the plan and associated compliance.	Fall 2022
Incorporate the public's feedback and develop the wilderness and backcountry management plan and associated compliance.	Fall–Winter 2022/2023
Request public review of the draft wilderness and backcountry management plan and associated compliance.	Spring 2023
Finalize the plan and associated compliance.	Summer–Fall 2023

Thank you for your interest in the Katmai National Park and Preserve and Alagnak Wild River Wilderness and Backcountry Management Plan!