

WILD AND SCENIC RIVER VALUES

ALATNA RIVER | Alaska | Fall 2018

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE • U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR



THE WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS ACT AND THE ALATNA RIVER

The national wild and scenic rivers system was created by Congress in 1968 (Public Law 90-542; 16 USC 1271 et seq.) to preserve certain rivers with outstanding natural, cultural, or recreational values in a free-flowing condition for the enjoyment of present and future generations. The act is notable for safeguarding the special character of these rivers, while also recognizing the potential for their appropriate use and development. It encourages river management that crosses political boundaries and promotes public participation in developing goals for river protection.

It is hereby declared to be the policy of the United States that certain selected rivers of the Nation which, with their immediate environments, possess outstandingly remarkable scenic, recreational, geologic, fish and wildlife, historic, cultural, or other similar values, shall be preserved in free-flowing condition, and that they and their immediate environments shall be protected for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations. The Congress declares that the established national policy of dam and other construction at appropriate sections of the rivers of the United States needs to be complemented by a policy that would preserve other selected rivers or sections thereof in their free-flowing condition to protect the water quality of such rivers and to fulfill other vital national conservation purposes.

Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, October 2, 1968

Rivers may be designated by Congress or, if certain requirements are met, the Secretary of the Interior. Each river is administered by either a federal or state agency. Designated segments need not include the entire river and may include tributaries. Rivers may be managed through a partnership with communities, special councils, and state governments.

The Alatna River flows from the Endicott Mountains 145 miles southeast to the Koyukuk River. In order to protect the Alatna’s free-flowing characteristics, water quality, and outstandingly remarkable values (ORVs), the main stem of the river within Gates of the Arctic National Park (83 miles) were designated a wild river in 1980 by the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) under the provisions of the 1968 National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (Public Law 96-487). Wild rivers are rivers that are free of impoundments and generally inaccessible except by trail, with watersheds or shorelines essentially primitive, and waters unpolluted. These represent the vestiges of primitive America.



WILD AND SCENIC RIVER VALUES

Each river in the national system is administered with the goal of protecting and enhancing the values that caused it to be designated. Outstandingly remarkable values, free-flowing condition, and water quality form the three pillars of protection under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.



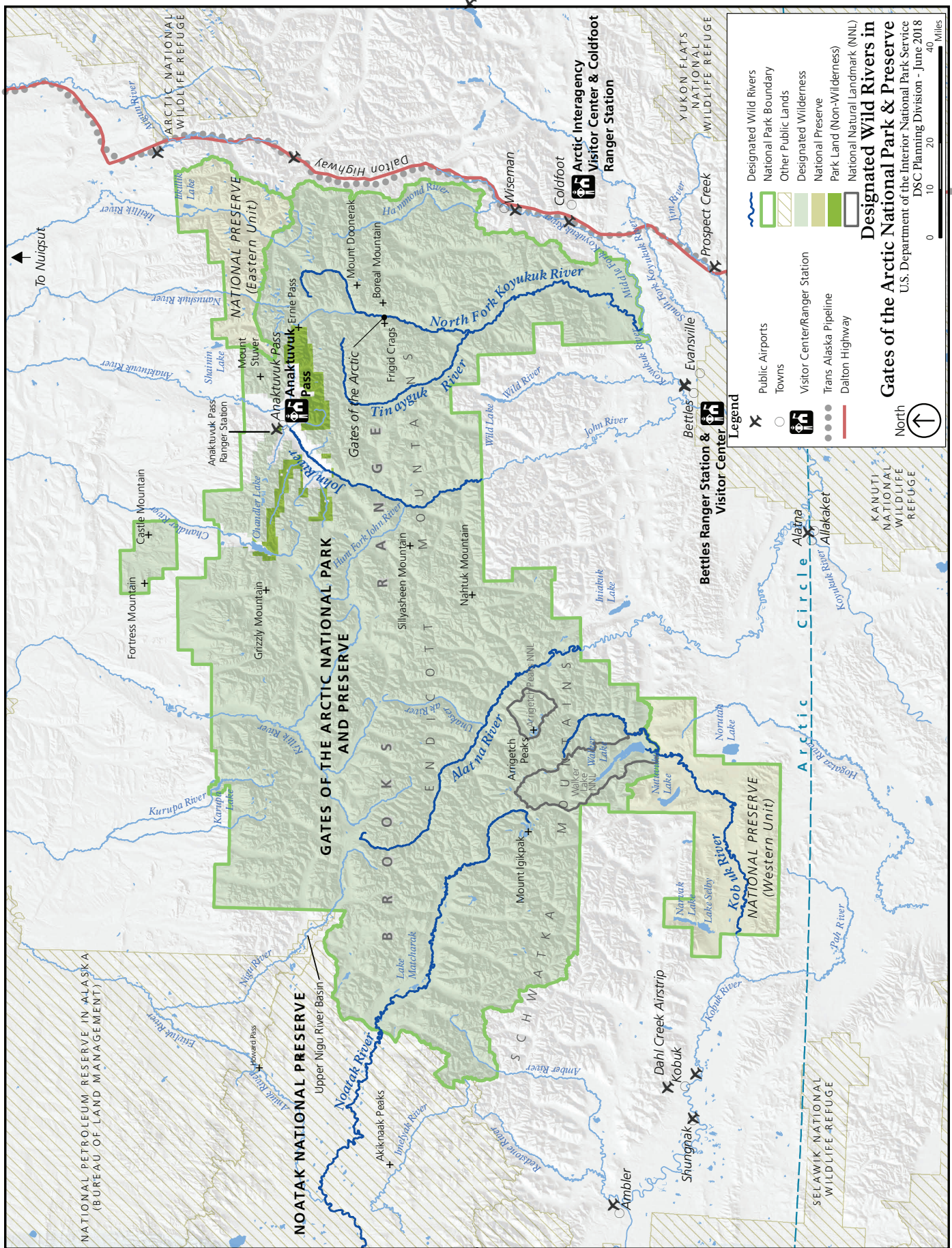
Outstandingly Remarkable Values



Free-flowing Condition



Water Quality



Designated Wild Rivers in Gates of the Arctic National Park & Preserve
 U.S. Department of the Interior National Park Service
 DSC Planning Division - June 2018

Legend

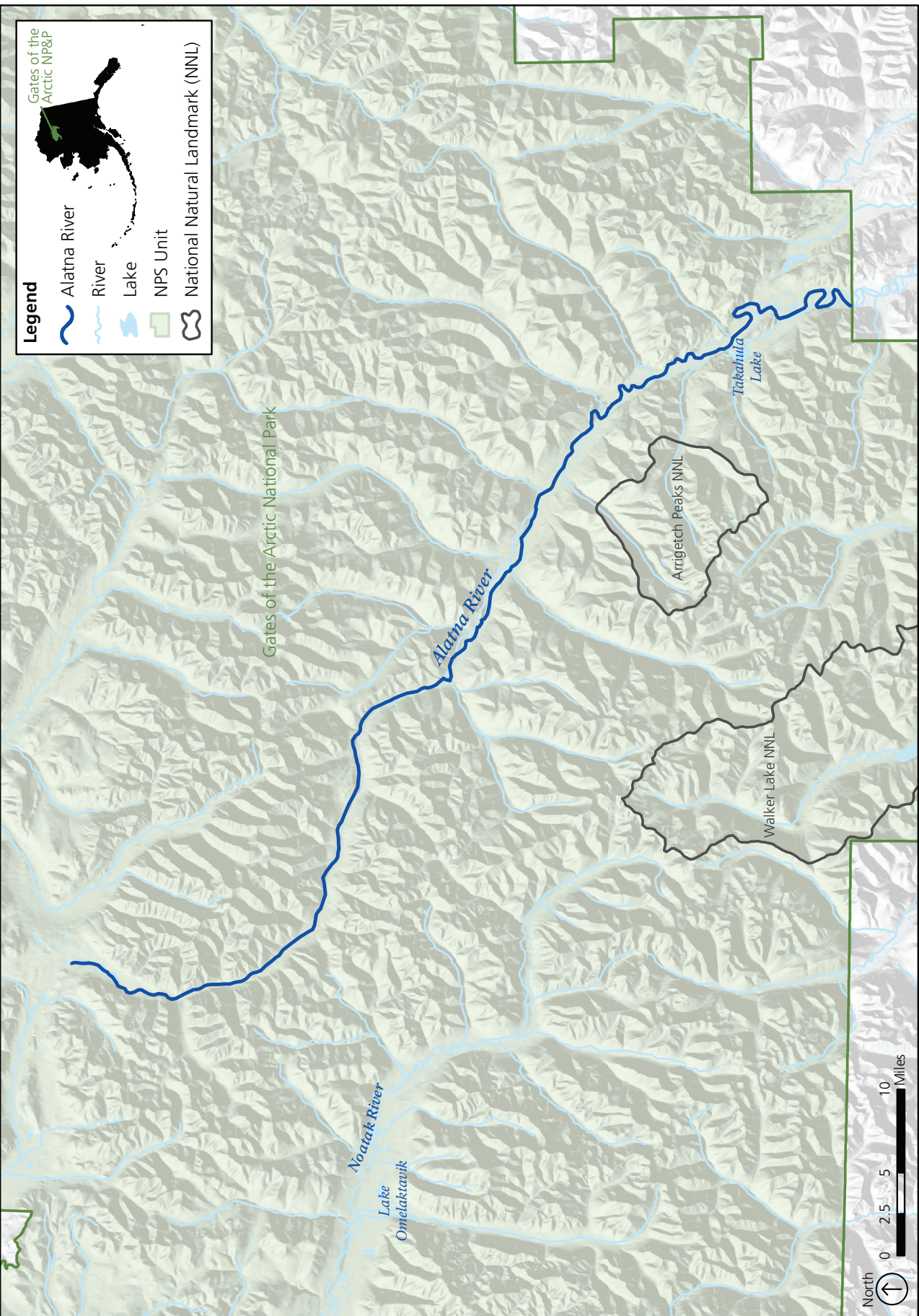
- Designated Wild Rivers (Blue line)
- National Park Boundary (Green outline)
- Other Public Lands (Yellow hatched)
- Designated Wilderness National Preserve (Light Green outline)
- Park Land (Non-Wilderness) (Dark Green outline)
- National Natural Landmark (NNL) (White outline)
- Public Airports (Airplane icon)
- Towns (Black dot)
- Visitor Center/Ranger Station (Visitor Center icon)
- Trans Alaska Pipeline (Red line)
- Dalton Highway (Red line with dots)

North ↑

0 10 20 40 Miles

Alatna Wild River Alaska

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Legend

- Alatna River
- River
- Lake
- NPS Unit
- National Natural Landmark (NNL)

Gates of the Arctic NP&P

North

0 2.5 5 10 Miles

Produced by DSC Planning Division

June 2018



OUTSTANDINGLY REMARKABLE VALUES

Outstandingly remarkable values are defined by the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act as the characteristics that make a river worthy of special protection. Thus, the foundation for wild and scenic river management is a clearly defined set of ORVs. The Interagency Wild and Scenic Rivers Coordinating Council has issued criteria for identifying and defining these values. The criteria guidance states that:

An ORV must be river related or dependent. This means that a value must

- be located in the river or on its immediate shorelands (generally within 0.25 miles on either side of the river)
- contribute substantially to the functioning of the river ecosystem
- owe its location or existence to the presence of the river

An ORV must also be rare, unique, or exemplary at a comparative regional or national scale. Such a value would be one that is a conspicuous example from among a number of similar values that are themselves uncommon or extraordinary.

The Interagency Wild and Scenic Rivers Coordinating Council provides additional criteria for assessing each ORV category listed in the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, noting that the criteria may be modified to make them more meaningful to a particular river. The council also notes that, while no specific national evaluation guidelines have been developed for the “other similar values” mentioned in the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, agencies may assess additional river-related values including, but not limited to, hydrology, paleontology, and botany. Specific criteria for identifying ORVs are included below.

Table 1. Outstandingly Remarkable Value Criteria for the Wild Rivers in Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve

Concept/ Category	Outstandingly Remarkable Value Criteria
Scenic Values	Landscape elements visible from the river and its banks result in notable views that characterize rivers in Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve. The landscape elements of landform, vegetation, water, color, and related factors result in notable or exemplary visual features and/or attractions. The area and scale used for the comparison of scenic values is typically the physiographic province. Views of iconic features may also be considered and weighed.
Recreational Values	River-related recreational opportunities attract, or have the potential to attract, visitors from throughout or beyond the region of comparison or are unique, rare, or exemplary within the region. Visitors are willing to travel long distances to use the river resources for recreational purposes. River-related opportunities could include, but are not limited to, sightseeing, wildlife observation, camping, photography, hiking, fishing, and boating.

Concept/ Category	Outstandingly Remarkable Value Criteria
Geologic Values	<p>Examples of geologic features, processes, or phenomena are unique or rare within Alaska and/or nationally, either individually or in combination. The river corridor contains at least one example of a geologic feature, process, or phenomenon that is unique or rare within the region of comparison. The feature(s) may be in an unusually active stage of development, may represent a textbook example, and/or may represent a unique or rare combination of geologic features (erosional, volcanic, glacial, or other geologic structures).</p>
Fish Values	<p>Fish values may be judged on the relative merits of fish populations, habitat, or a combination of these river-related conditions.</p> <p>Populations</p> <p>The river is nationally or regionally an important producer of resident and/or anadromous fish species. Of particular significance is the presence of wild stocks and/or federal or state listed (or candidate) threatened, endangered, or sensitive species. Diversity of species is an important consideration and could, intrinsically, lead to a determination of "outstandingly remarkable."</p> <p>Habitat</p> <p>The river provides exceptionally high-quality habitat for fish species indigenous to the region of comparison. Of particular significance is habitat for wild stocks and/or federal or state listed (or candidate) threatened, endangered, or sensitive species. Diversity of habitats is an important consideration and could, intrinsically, lead to a determination of "outstandingly remarkable."</p>



Concept/ Category	Outstandingly Remarkable Value Criteria
<p>Wildlife Values</p>	<p>The river corridor provides exceptionally high-quality and nearly continuous habitat for wildlife. Biological processes along the river corridor have exceptionally high integrity in that they are relatively intact and undisturbed throughout the entire length of the river corridor. Wildlife values may be judged on the relative merits of either terrestrial or aquatic wildlife populations, habitat, or a combination of these conditions.</p> <p>Populations</p> <p>The river corridor contains nationally or regionally important populations of indigenous wildlife species. Of particular significance are species considered to be unique and/or populations of federal or state listed (or candidate) threatened, endangered, or sensitive species. Diversity of species is an important consideration and could, intrinsically, lead to a determination of "outstandingly remarkable."</p> <p>Habitat</p> <p>The river corridor provides exceptionally high-quality habitat for wildlife of national or regional significance and/or may provide unique habitat or a critical link in habitat conditions for federal or state listed (or candidate) threatened, endangered, or sensitive species. Contiguous habitat conditions are such that the biological needs of the species are met. Diversity of habitats is an important consideration and could, intrinsically, lead to a determination of "outstandingly remarkable."</p>



Concept/ Category	Outstandingly Remarkable Value Criteria
<p>Cultural and Historic Values</p>	<p>Archeological Values The river corridor contains archeological sites and areas important to traditional cultures; these help perpetuate cultural and spiritual traditions among Native Alaskans. Several archeological sites and traditional cultural properties are listed (or are eligible for listing) in the National Register of Historic Places and have unique or rare characteristics, are regionally important for research, or tangibly link Alaska Natives to their heritage. Examples include burial grounds; petroglyphs; the oldest known human-use site in a region; and streams that support traditional agriculture, subsistence fishing, or spiritual ceremonies.</p> <p>Historic Values The river corridor contains at least one site or feature associated with a significant event, an important person, or a cultural activity of the past that was rare or unique in the region. Historic structures, buildings, and landscapes are listed (or are eligible for listing) in the National Register of Historic Places, have either national or regional significance, and do not impede or divert the free flow of the river. In most cases, a historic site or feature is at least 50 years old.</p> <p>Prehistoric Values The river corridor contains at least one site where there is evidence of occupation or use by Native Alaskans. A site must have unique or rare characteristics or exceptional human-interest value(s). A site may have national or regional importance for interpreting prehistory, may be rare and represent an area where a culture or cultural period was first identified and described, may have been used concurrently by two or more cultural groups, or may have been used by cultural groups for rare sacred purposes. Many such sites are listed in the National Register of Historic Places.</p>

Based on these criteria and a careful analysis of the designated reaches of the Alatna River, the National Park Service (NPS) has determined that the scenic and recreational ORVs are present. A set of broad statements has been developed that articulates each ORV for the entire river designation.



Scenic Values

The Alatna River corridor has stunning scenery that includes views of the Arrigetch Peaks, a granitic disturbance that is a natural national landmark.

More than half of the river provides views of magnificently adjoined snowcapped mountains. Contrasting colors and types of vegetation add diversity to the Alatna's scenery. The vegetation itself, from moist tundra on the valley floor to alpine tundra on the mountain slopes, is contrasted by steep rocky bluffs along the river's edges. Sites immediately off the river offer views of the Arrigetch Peaks, which are sometimes reflected upon the surface of alpine lakes.

Mountains flanking the Alatna provide significant geological diversity, including limestone, shale, quartzite, slate, and schist formations. Smooth granite walls rise nearly 3,000 feet along the south side of the Alatna on the rugged, ax-blade-like Arrigetch peaks, which are also included in the National Register of Natural Landmarks. These peaks are part of the granitic disturbance that separates the Alatna and Noatak River drainages.

Recreational Values

The Alatna River is an outstanding wilderness float and provides access to the excellent hiking and climbing found on and around the Arrigetch Peaks.

Access to the Alatna is by floatplane (e.g., at Circle Lake, Summit Lake, Takahula Lake) or bush plane via air services from the town of Bettles. The first 40 miles of the Alatna exhibit fast and rapid currents, but slow as the river widens, providing a relatively safe and calm rafting experience. Upstream of Ram Creek, users can experience Class III rapids. Adjacent valleys and 6,000- to 7,000-foot mountains along the river's upper portion provide the user with excellent hiking. The Alatna River is also the primary means of access for mountain climbers interested in visiting the Arrigetch Peaks, which are famous for the rugged, challenging rock climbing and mountaineering experience they offer and attract climbers from around the world.





As the nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has responsibility for most of our nationally owned public lands and natural resources. This includes fostering sound use of our land and water resources; protecting our fish, wildlife, and biological diversity; preserving the environmental and cultural values of our national parks and historic places; and providing for the enjoyment of life through outdoor recreation. The department assesses our energy and mineral resources and works to ensure that their development is in the best interests of all our people by encouraging stewardship and citizen participation in their care. The department also has a major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in island territories under U.S. administration.

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