

IMPORTANT Information for Tikchik Anglers about Togiak National Wildlife Refuge

As a guest of Tikchik Narrows Lodge, you will be spending a few days fishing in the Togiak National Wildlife Refuge. Tikchik has been granted special use permits to operate in designated areas of the refuge that include our camp on the Kulukak River in the southern portion of the Refuge. The location of the camp allows us to offer our guests a great fishing experience as well as an opportunity for a wilderness overnight stay. Our guide camp on the Upper Togiak River (Kashaiak Creek) is located in the northern portion of the refuge within a designated wilderness area. To prepare you for your visit to the refuge, we have included in your Pre-Trip Planner information about this truly extraordinary place.

The Togiak National Wildlife Refuge was established in 1980 with the passage of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA). It encompasses some 4.1 million acres of land that include 1,500 miles of streams and rivers and over 500 lakes larger than 25 acres, which in turn support some of the finest remote sport fishing in the world. Five species of salmon are found in the refuge, as well as Rainbow trout, Arctic grayling, Dolly Varden and Arctic char. The northern portion of the refuge (2.3 million acres) is a designated wilderness area, one of the largest in the National Wildlife Refuge System. Tikchik has a special use permit to fly into and fish many of the lakes and streams within this wilderness area. The wilderness section of the refuge offers our guests not only world-class fishing, but (as returning Tikchik anglers already know) extraordinary wildlife viewing and a true wilderness experience.

The purposes of the Togiak Refuge, as stated in ANILCA, are to: conserve fish and wildlife populations and habitats in their natural diversity; fulfill our nation's international treaty obligations for protection of fish and wildlife resources we share with other nations; protect water quality and water quantity within refuge boundaries; and provide continuing opportunity for subsistence uses by local residents.

To understand the importance of this last purpose, it is critical to understand the role subsistence use of fish and wildlife resources plays in the lives of local residents. The Alaska Natives that live in or near the refuge are Yup'ik Eskimos, who share a common culture and language with indigenous people throughout western Alaska. There are seven villages located within or near Refuge boundaries. The economies of these villages are mixed subsistence-market economies, that is, a significant portion of residents' time is spent hunting, fishing and gathering food on which they depend for their physical and cultural survival, and these activities are supplemented with cash income. Subsistence activities are an essential component of the economic, social and cultural structure of Alaska's rural communities. In the villages of the Togiak Refuge, as much as 70% of the residents' diet is derived from foods gathered from the natural environment. The region's residents harvest an average of 600 pounds of wild foods per person annually, a significant portion of which is fish. It is the policy of Tikchik Narrows Lodge to avoid or minimize any impact we may have to subsistence activities in the region in which we operate.

In addition, as a commercial operator in the refuge, we have a set of operating stipulations that extend to our clients. We thought it would be helpful to outline some of these stipulations that will affect you as both a visitor to the refuge and as a guest at Tikchik Narrows Lodge.

Kulukak River

Our Kulukak camp is designed to be primitive, but comfortable. Maximum consideration is given to minimizing habitat impact at the camp site. We remove the camp in its entirety in the fall. We use only two boats and no greater than 40 horsepower outboard engines. (We use four-stroke—not two-stroke—engines which minimize noise and water pollution.) From July 1 through Aug 1, we put no more than four anglers a day on the river. For the balance of the season, we host up to six anglers per day.

The limit of four anglers for part of the season is designed to minimize impacts to the river's king salmon population. King salmon runs on the Kulukak are healthy. We want them to stay that way. We have established a lodge-imposed no harvest catch and release fishery. One of the goals of the Refuge is the conservation of Salmon. Kulukak River is a very small river system and we feel that not harvesting salmon will ensure strong salmon runs into the future.

The Kulukak camp is equipped with single side-band radio and/or satellite telephone communications so your guides can reach help in case of an emergency. Your guides are trained in both First Aid and CPR, and they all have U.S. Coast Guard Vessel Operator licenses. Upon your arrival at the river, your guide will give you a safety briefing.

We catch and release a large number of fish, doing so in a manner that ensures we don't kill fish unnecessarily. Your guide will instruct you in the proper techniques for releasing fish, and assist you as needed.

Boating safety is of primary concern to us. Please listen carefully and follow your guide's safety instructions. We require that you wear a life jacket at all times while fishing and boating. We have provided you with an inflatable fly fishing vest which acts as a flotation device. You will have a briefing and demonstration on the use of your life vest on your first day at the lodge.

One other lodge in addition to Tikchik is permitted to use the Kulukak, so there is a possibility of encountering other anglers on the river. We ask that you please be courteous to other anglers and practice good stream etiquette. Our guides coordinate with other guides so that we don't directly compete for the same fishing holes on the river.

Although the Kulukak River has very little subsistence use, it is possible for our anglers to view subsistence fishing on the river. Subsistence fishing is conducted by local residents using gill nets. This is legal and consistent with refuge management policy. Subsistence fishing at this level has very little impact on the resource and has priority over sport fishing.

Wilderness Area Fishing

Tikchik has a special use permit that allows us to fly our guests into the refuge on day trips to designated lakes, rivers and streams within the wilderness area. We don't use boats. We fish by wading. This is a catch-and-release fishery for our guests—all fish are released. Our catches are primarily rainbow trout, Arctic char and grayling. Again, it's important that we release fish properly to ensure that we're not killing fish. Your guide will instruct you on the proper techniques for releasing fish.

To maintain the wilderness values of this area of the refuge, we are not permitted to land on any of the smaller lakes that already have another plane parked on them. This ensures your fishing experience is protected. We can fish any single lake or stream within the wilderness area one day per week.

Upper Togiak River (Kashaiak Creek)

We are permitted to operate in the Kashaiak Creek zone of the Upper Togiak River. We use up to two boats and guide up to six anglers a day. We have a guide camp for our guides, but the camp does not accommodate our guests overnight.

The Togiak River has other commercial operators who can access this section of the river by boat and who may operate float trips. The Togiak is also open to unguided use, including visitors floating or kayaking the river. As well, the river is used for subsistence by residents of the village of Togiak who routinely fish with gill nets. As with fishing on the Kulukak, this fishing method is legal and consistent with refuge management objectives.

Other Guidelines to Keep In Mind While in the Refuge

Please don't litter. Even a small gum wrapper or a discarded lure or fly can distract from the wilderness experience for the next visitor.

While fishing in the refuge, we ask that you please be courteous to other users and observe proper stream etiquette.

It is important that all of our guests enjoy their visit to Togiak Refuge, and we have tailored our use of the refuge to help make sure this happens. We also want to ensure that our activities are in keeping with the public use management objectives of the refuge so that all visitors enjoy their experience there. The refuge belongs to all Americans, and we all have a role to play in the preservation of its resources and historical uses. It is our refuge to enjoy and to protect for future generations to experience in the same way we are able to today. Thank you for playing your part in protecting this unique place.

If you have any questions or want more information, please don't hesitate to ask any of the Tikchik pilots, guides or me.

Bud Hodson