WILD AND SCENIC RIVER VALUES

KOBUK RIVER | Alaska | Fall 2018

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

The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act and The Kobuk 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 380-mile-long Kobuk River originates in the Endicott Mountains in the Brooks Range and flows west to Kotzebue Sound. The river's wide valley, exceptional rapids, and outstanding biota provide remarkable natural resources. In order to protect the Kobuk's free-flowing characteristics, water quality, and outstandingly remarkable values, the 110 miles from its headwaters within Gates of the Arctic National Park—including Walker Lake—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. The designated reach of the Kobuk is the "portion within the Gates of the Arctic National Park" (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.

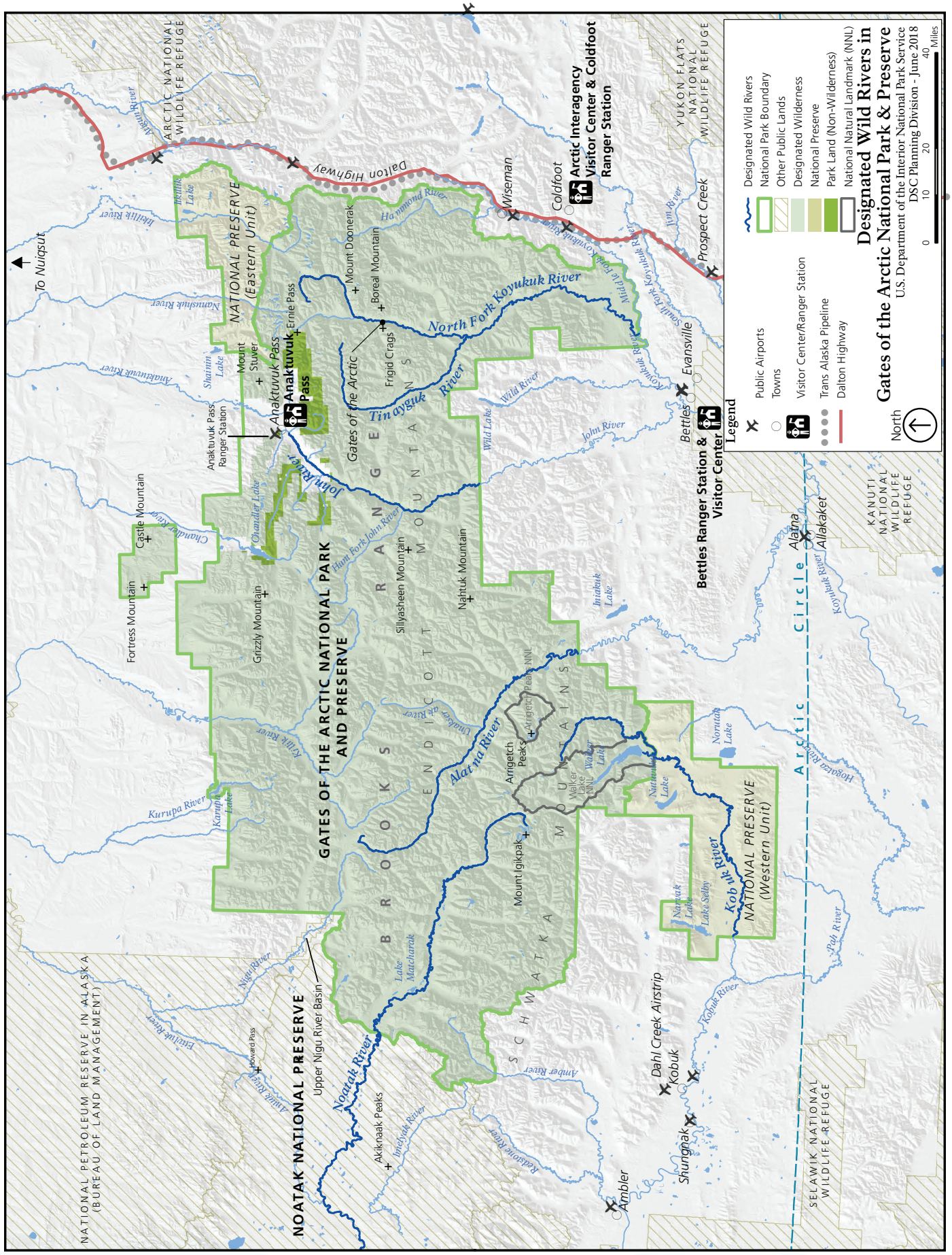
Outstandingly Remarkable Values

Free-flowing Condition

Water Quality

Wild and Scenic River Values

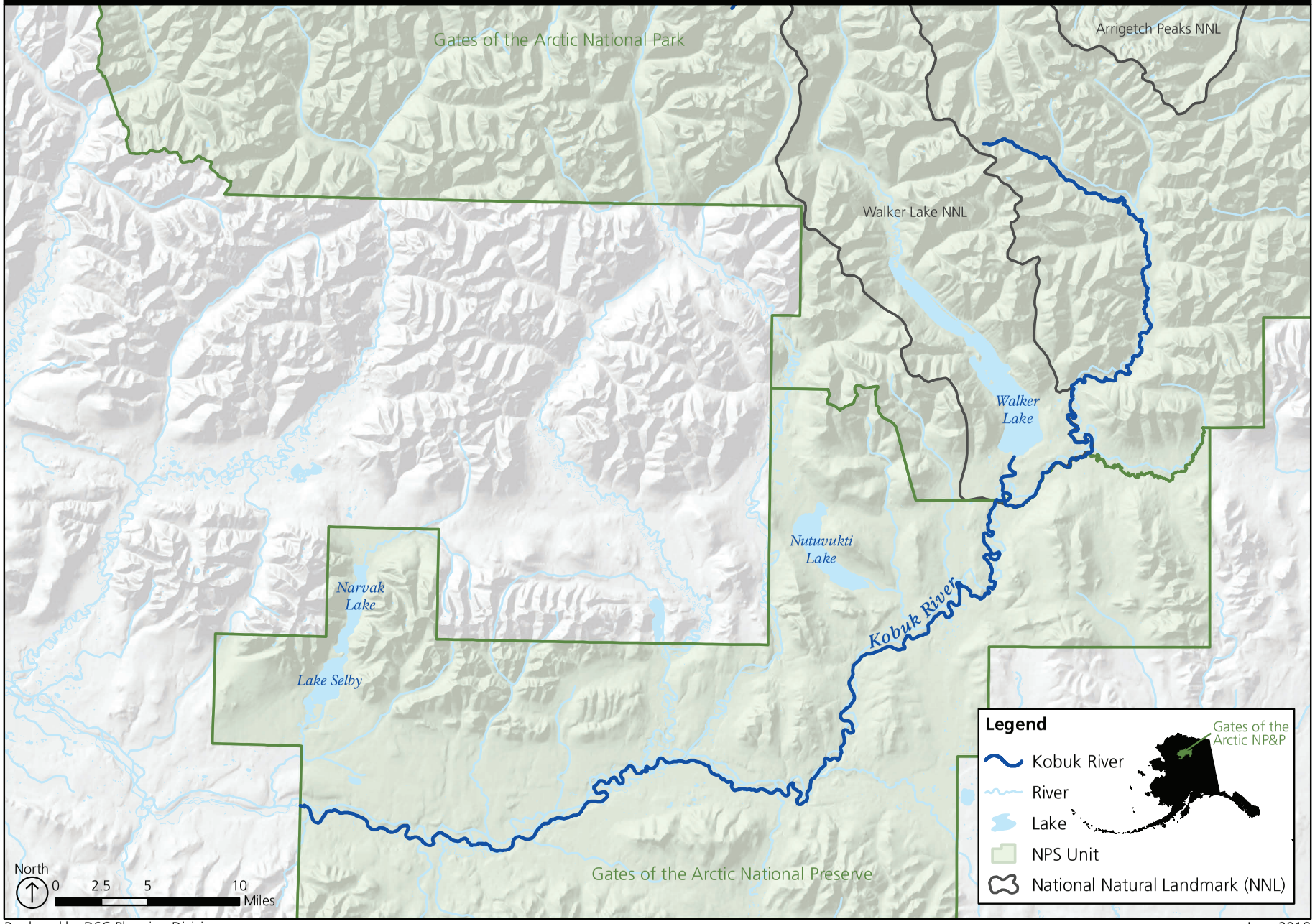
Each river in the national system is administered with the goal of protecting and enhancing the values that caused it to be designated. Outstandingly remarkable values, free-flowing condition, and water quality form the three pillars of protection under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.


Gates of the Arctic National Park & Preserve
Designated Wild Rivers
National Park Boundary
Other Public Lands
Designated Wilderness
National Preserve
Park Land (Non-Wilderness)
National Natural Landmark (NNL)
Public Airports
Towns
Visitor Center/Ranger Station
Trans Alaska Pipeline
Dalton Highway
Legend
North
0 10 20 40 Miles
U.S. Department of the Interior National Park Service
DSC Planning Division - June 2018
GATES OF THE ARCTIC NATIONAL PARK AND PRESERVE
NOATAK NATIONAL PRESERVE
NATIONAL PRESERVE (Eastern Unit)
NATIONAL PRESERVE (Western Unit)
BROOKS RANGE
ENDICOTT MOUNTAINS
SCHWATKA MOUNTAINS
Gates of the Arctic
Tinayguk River
North Fork Koyukuk River
Alatna River
Kobuk River
Noatak River
John River
Dalton Highway
Arctic Interagency Visitor Center & Coldfoot Ranger Station
Bettles Ranger Station & Visitor Center
Anaktuvuk Pass Ranger Station
Anaktuvuk Pass
Wiseman
Coldfoot
Bettles
Evansville
Prospect Creek
Alatna
Allakaket
Kobuk
Ambler
Shungnak
Dahl Creek Airstrip
Upper Nigu River Basin
Akiknak Peaks
Howard Pass
Castle Mountain
Fortress Mountain
Grizzly Mountain
Mount Stuver
Ernie Pass
Mount Doonerak
Boreal Mountain
Frigid Crags
Sillyasheen Mountain
Nahtuk Mountain
Mount Igikpak
Arrigetch Peak
Arrigetch Peak NNL
Walker Lake NNL
Chandler Lake
Shainin Lake
Ikkillik Lake
Matcharak Lake
Inidakuk Lake
Narvuk Lake
Lake Selby
Norutak Lake
Walker Lake
Wild Lake
Karupa Lake
Circle
Arctic
NATIONAL PETROLEUM RESERVE IN ALASKA (BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT)
ARCTIC NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE
YUKON FLATS NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE
KANUTI NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE
SELAWIK NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE
To Nuiqsut

Kobuk Wild River

Alaska

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Produced by DSC Planning Division

June 2018

PIONEER
SOAR

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.

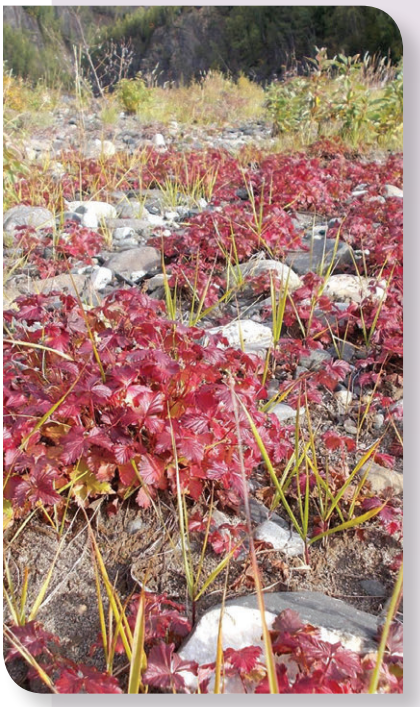


Table 1. Outstandingly Remarkable Value Criteria for the Wild Rivers in Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve

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	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).
Fish Values	Fish values may be judged on the relative merits of fish populations, habitat, or a combination of these river-related conditions. **Populations** 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." **Habitat** 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."

Concept/ Category	Outstandingly Remarkable Value Criteria
Wildlife Values	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. **Populations** 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." **Habitat** 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."

Concept/ Category	Outstandingly Remarkable Value Criteria
Cultural and Historic Values	**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. **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. **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.

Based on these criteria and a careful analysis of the designated reaches of the Kobuk 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 Kobuk River has a diverse range of scenery, from the dramatic headwaters at Walker Lake to the interior lowlands.

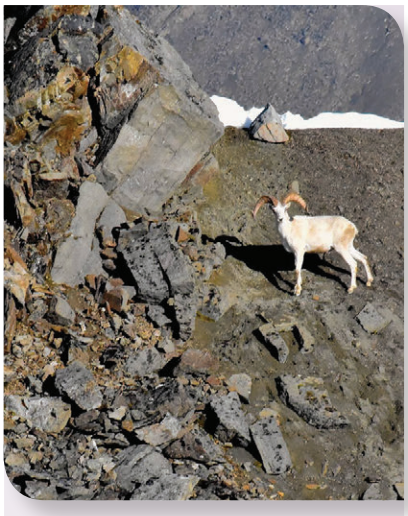
Walker Lake, part of the headwaters of the Kobuk River, is the largest lake in the Brooks Range and is a national natural landmark. It is a picturesque, glacially carved lake that is surrounded by the dramatic topography for which the central Brooks Range is famous. Two canyons, the Upper Kobuk and the Lower Kobuk, provide visitors with unique scenic opportunities. Bluffs 100 to 200 feet tall exemplify the Upper Kobuk Canyon, while the Lower Kobuk Canyon is punctuated by large sandstone boulders and narrow canyon walls. Relatively low mountains and a notably wide valley surrounding the Kobuk provide views through a remarkable vista. Reduced spruce densities also allow unobstructed views of uniquely colored landforms adjacent to the river's edge.

Recreational Values

The Kobuk River is the setting for an internationally renowned trophy sheefish sportfishery as well as a diverse, exciting float trip.

The Kobuk is highly desirable among anglers for its sheefish fishery, particularly for its trophy sheefish, and accounts for more than half of northwestern Alaska's sport sheefish harvest. Additionally, chum salmon, arctic grayling, and whitefish can be caught along portions of the Kobuk River.

The Kobuk River provides exceptional opportunities for novice and experienced rafters alike. The highly variable surroundings of the remainder of the Kobuk corridor provide an interesting and ever-changing float experience as the river flows from Walker Lake and the Arctic mountains to lowland boreal forest. The river provides a range of unique conditions along 125 miles of floatable river, including Class I to Class V rapids. The outlet river from Walker Lake provides significant drops along a 1/3-mile stretch of Class V rapids that can present a challenging float trip. From below these rapids to the Kobuk River is a small section of Class II rapids that require maneuvering. Portions of the main Kobuk within the Lower Kobuk Canyon require greater skill and methodical maneuvering due to uniquely intensive conditions such as Class III-V rapids, strong currents, rocks, and large drops.



Geologic Values

The headwaters of the Kobuk River include Walker Lake, a Natural National Landmark, and downstream are a series of canyons made of near vertical sheets of shale.

Walker Lake, a 12-mile-long lake located north of the Kobuk River, is in the National Register of Natural Landmarks. The Upper and Lower Kobuk Canyons, as well as the Endicott Mountains, are unique geologic features characterizing the Kobuk River region. Within the Lower Kobuk Canyon, bedrock covers the canyon floor with nearly vertical sheets of shale along the banks. Quartz and jasper or jade, in conjunction with shale, are also viewable.

Fish Values

The Kobuk River protects crucial spawning habitat for an important population of sheefish, as well as having a rich assemblage of fish species in general.

The Kobuk River is one of only two major spawning grounds for the Kobuk/Selawik population of sheefish. The Kobuk is inhabited by relatively large sheefish, with individuals exceeding 40 pounds. Many other fish species also inhabit the Kobuk, including grayling, arctic char, whitefish, chum salmon, and lake trout. The Kobuk is a major chum salmon spawning ground, believed to support more than half of the Kotzebue District's commercial chum salmon. Additionally, the Kobuk provides several Eskimo villages with subsistence fishing for sheefish, whitefish, and chum salmon, which spawn in the upper portion of the river.

Cultural Values – Archeological

The Kobuk River contains rich archeological resources that document the river's role as a convergence zone for inland and coastal cultures.

The Kobuk River contains an exceptionally rich record of past human activity that spans at least 10,000 years. Within Gates of the Arctic, the river corridor contains at least 172 historic and prehistoric archeological sites that represent Paleoarctic, Northern Archaic, Arctic Small Tool, Late Prehistoric, and Historic Periods. Site types include villages, camps, hunting overlooks, portages, and resource-extraction locations. The valley was a major east-west travel corridor connecting coastal areas around the Bering Strait to northern interior Alaska. These interactions are demonstrated by the frequent occurrence of obsidian, jade, and other exotic raw materials in ethnographic accounts and archeological sites on the Kobuk River. The river was a particularly important path of distribution for obsidian derived from a major source on the Koyukuk River some 150 miles to the southwest, and the only known source of jade in mainland Alaska. Hundreds of traditional place names carpet this landscape and attest to local residents' detailed knowledge of and intimate relationship with the land and its resources.

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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