



# Bear Viewing 2008

Eyes widen and the heartbeat quickens at the sight of a 1,000 pound grizzly as it lumbers to the river in search of food. Where there are salmon, there are bears... and in Alaska that means lots of bears and big bears. Alaska is bear country and home to the largest concentrations of bears in the world. It is these bruins that draw thousands of tourists to Alaska.

Polar bears are tenacious predators found in the arctic regions of Alaska. That these white bears depend upon drifting ice makes polar bears an important indicator of global warming and its effects in the Arctic. There are approximately 4,700 of these predators ranging the pack-ice and coasts of northern Alaska, Canada, and Russia.

Brown bears are also big and powerful predators, but are as likely to be found eating berries and grass as ground squirrels or moose. There are approximately 35,000–45,000 of these giants roaming throughout Alaska. They are the most popular species for bear viewing.

Black bears are the most numerous and the smallest of Alaska's bears. They are found throughout southeast, southcentral and interior Alaska. Numbering over 50,000, they are the most likely bear to be seen in an urban setting. Black bears have been seen wandering downtown Anchorage in search of food.

You do not have to travel far to see bears in Alaska, so any outdoor activity

needs to take bear safety into account. This in mind, it should also be noted that bear attacks are very rare in Alaska. Most bears (other than polar bears) do not consider humans as food and try to avoid human contact. With proper bear safety precautions, your experience in the outdoors should be a safe and rewarding adventure.

The following areas are known for their concentrations of bears and quality of bear viewing. In addition, many flight-seeing and fly-in fishing companies will take you to undeveloped, lesser known bear viewing areas.

## McNeil River State Game Sanctuary

**What You See:** Brown bears fishing for salmon and interacting with each other

**Best Viewing Times:** Mid-June (at Mikfik Creek) or July to mid-August (at McNeil River)

**Location:** On the Alaska Peninsula, southwest of Anchorage across Cook Inlet, adjacent to Katmai National Park and Preserve

**Access:** By charter air service (access is tide dependent)

**Management:** Alaska Department of Fish & Game

**Facilities:** Primitive camping in designated camping area only. Four mile (6.4 km) round-trip hike to bear-viewing pad. Bring your own tent, sleeping bag and pad, hip boots, cookstove and cooking gear, clothes



**Bear Resistant Food Containers have greatly reduced incidents of damage to property by bears.**

and food. Good physical condition is essential. Because of the hike and confinement to the viewing pad, traveling with children is NOT recommended. Pets are not allowed. **Reservations: Permits are required and awarded by a lottery drawing.** Applications are available in January of each year. Applications must be received by March 1st and include a nonrefundable fee. Your name may only appear on one application. Applications must be mailed; they will not be accepted in person or by fax. Up to three persons may apply as a party. Winners of the lottery pay a user fee. Through the standard application, you can also apply for a standby permit which allows access to the viewing pad if a regular permit holder decides to stay in camp, but access is not guaranteed. There is a fee for applications for standby permits.

**Information:** McNeil River Sanctuary Manager; Alaska Dept. of Fish & Game; 333 Raspberry Road; Anchorage, AK 99518-1599. Phone: (907) 267-2257  
[http://www.wildlife.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=mcneil\\_river.main](http://www.wildlife.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=mcneil_river.main)

## Brooks Falls

### Katmai National Park

**What You See:** Brown bears fishing for salmon and interacting with each other

**Best Viewing Times:** Peaks in mid-July and again in September (but be prepared for cool, wet weather)

**Location:** Alaska Peninsula, southwest of Anchorage across the Cook Inlet

**Access:** Charter air service directly to Brooks Camp or take commercial air service to King Salmon, then charter air to Brooks Camp

**Management:** National Park Service

**Facilities:** All visitors to Brooks Camp, including lodge guests, day visitors, and campers, must pay a user fee. The National Park campground is about one mile (1.6 km) from Brooks Falls by trail. Backcountry users are not charged a day use fee. Reservations for both camping and day use must be made prior to your visit through the National Parks Reservation Service. From the U.S. or Canada call toll-free 1-877-444-6777; outside those areas call 1-518-885-3639; or reserve through

[www.recreation.gov](http://www.recreation.gov)

**Caution:** Allow for delays in departure due to bear activity

Brooks Lodge, with private accommodations and food service, is about ½ mile (1 km) from Brooks Falls. Reservations are required for Brooks Lodge: Contact Katmailand, Inc. at 1-800-544-0551 or (907) 243-5448.

**Information:** Katmai National Park; PO Box 7; King Salmon, AK 99613-0007. Phone (907) 246-3305, fax (907) 246-2116

<http://www.nps.gov/katm>

## Alaska Student Education



Each year the Alaska Public Lands Information Center distributes thousands of bear safety decals to Alaskan students.



The National Park Service in Alaska is the home of the GeoBear project, a travelling bear assisting teachers in learning about Alaskan animals. Contact Joanne\_Welch@nps.gov for more information.

## Pack Creek-Stan Price State Wildlife Sanctuary

**What You See:** Brown bears fishing for salmon and interacting with each other

**Best Viewing Times:** July and August

**Location:** Admiralty Island National Monument/Kootznoowoo Wilderness Area  
**Access:** By charter boat or floatplane from Juneau

**Management:** This U.S Forest Service area is co-managed with the Alaska Department of Fish & Game.

**Facilities:** A bear-viewing tower is accessible by trail one mile (1.6 km) from the beach. The main bearviewing area is on the creek bank about ½ mile (1 km) from the beach. This is a designated Wilderness Area. No camping is allowed in the viewing area. There are no overnight accommodations, developed campsites, outhouses, picnic tables or other facilities. Leave No Trace camping is allowed on nearby Windfall Island and Swan Island. You must have your own boat to camp on the islands.

**Reservations:** Advanced reservations for permits are required between July 5 and August 25 when the number of persons allowed each day is limited. Half-price discounts are available for seniors and juniors. Applications, with attached check or money order, may be postmarked no sooner than February 20 (Feb. 10 from overseas). Permits are awarded on a first-come, first-served basis after March 1 and are for a 3-day maximum stay. From June 1-July 4 and August 26-September 10, permits are still required but do not require advanced reservation. Visitors can also hire an authorized guide and avoid the permit reservation process. Contact the Forest Service for a list of authorized guides and costs.

**Information:** Forest Service Information Center, Juneau Ranger District (907) 586-8800

Applications are available online:  
[http://www.fs.fed.us/r10/tongass/recreation/rec\\_facilities/mistyrec.shtml#fishcreek](http://www.fs.fed.us/r10/tongass/recreation/rec_facilities/mistyrec.shtml#fishcreek)

## Misty Fiords Ranger District near the town of Hyder

**What You See:** Brown and black bear fishing for salmon in Fish Creek, harlequin ducks, herons, eagles, beavers

**Best Viewing Times:** July and August

**Location:** Three miles outside the town of Hyder in Southeast Alaska

**Access:** The Cassiar Highway provides road access from British Columbia, Canada. Access also by charter aircraft.

**Management:** U.S. Forest Service

**Facilities:** Wildlife observation deck provides opportunities for viewing and photographing bears. A parking lot is located 200 feet north of the deck. Forest Service interpreters are on-site to assist with questions.

**Information:** Southeast Alaska Discovery Center, 50 Main Street, Ketchikan, AK 99901. Phone (907)228-6214, Fax (907)228-6234, TDD (907)228-6237.

[http://www.fs.fed.us/r10/tongass/recreation/rec\\_facilities/mistyrec.shtml#fishcreek](http://www.fs.fed.us/r10/tongass/recreation/rec_facilities/mistyrec.shtml#fishcreek)

**Special Notes:** To reduce disturbance to bears, please do not park or leave your car unattended on the side of the road. Food is not permitted at the viewing site. Bears are wild and unpredictable, so keep your distance and respect their need for space. Read and observe all bear safety information provided on site.

## Anan Wildlife Observatory Tongass National Forest

**What You See:** Black and sometimes brown bears fishing for salmon; various birds, bald eagles, mink and marine mammals. Close encounters with bears are not uncommon.

**Best Viewing Times:** July through mid to late August

**Location:** Anan Creek is 31 miles south of Wrangell, on the mainland of the Cleveland Peninsula in Southeast Alaska.

**Access:** By boat or floatplane from Wrangell or Ketchikan. There is no road access. Contact the Wrangell Ranger District for a list of authorized

guides and approximate costs.

**Management:** U.S. Forest Service During the main viewing season, interpreters staff the trailhead and the observatory.

**Facilities:** The half-mile (1km) trail to the observatory begins at the red and white diamond-shaped trailhead marker just above the rocky beach at the mouth of Anan Lagoon. The beach can have treacherous footing. The trail is partial board-walk, moderately steep, and has many staircases and bridges which are slippery when wet. The observatory consists of a deck overlooking the falls, covered shelter, and nearby outhouse. The following are not allowed: camping, pets, food or beverages (except for water), and off-trail travel.

**Suggested trail behavior:** Talk or make noise along the trail to alert bears of your presence, stay in tight groups, and do not approach bears.

**Reservations:** Anan has gone to a permitting system for the period July 5 to August 25. Permits are limited to 60 permits per day including guide services. Four extra daily passes are provided to Anan public cabin renters. Call the number below for more details on permits. Guide services are available from Wrangell and Ketchikan.



Traveling through bear country can be an enjoyable and memorable experience. Please read and obey any posted signs. These signs are to ensure the safety for both bear and humans in the future.

The Anan Bay public recreation cabin can be reserved up to 180 days in advance by calling (877) 444-6777 or visiting <http://www.recreation.gov>

**Information:** Contact the U.S. Forest Service; Wrangell Ranger District; 525 Bennett Street, Wrangell, AK 99929. Phone: (907) 874-2323 Fax: (907) 874-7595.

[http://www.fs.fed.us/r10/tongass/recreation/wildlife\\_viewing/ananobservatory.shtml](http://www.fs.fed.us/r10/tongass/recreation/wildlife_viewing/ananobservatory.shtml)

## Kodiak National Wildlife Refuge South Frazer Lake Cabin

**What You See:** Brown bears fishing for salmon along Dog Salmon Creek

**Best Viewing Times:** Early July to early August, although seeing bears is not guaranteed

**Location:** Kodiak Island

**Access:** By commercial air service or ferry to Kodiak, then by charter air service from Kodiak (70 miles, about 40 minutes flying time). There is no road access.

**Management:** U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

**Facilities:** Public use cabin (12' x 20') sleeps 6; has kerosene heater, outhouse; there is no electricity, plumbing, or cookstove. Bring your own food, fuel, camping and cooking gear. A boat or a moderately strenuous hike is required for access to bear viewing along Dog Salmon Creek.

**Reservations:** Cabin reservations are scheduled by lottery. Deadline for applications is March 30 for dates in July, August and September. The drawing is held on April 2. One application allowed per party. Applications containing duplicate names will be disqualified.

**Information:** Other public cabins on the refuge have some bear-viewing opportunities as well. Contact Kodiak National Wildlife Refuge; 1390 Buskin River Road; Kodiak, AK 99615. Phone: (907) 487-2600.

<http://kodiak.fws.gov/>

## Barrow & Kaktovik Polar Bear Viewing

**What You See:** Possibility, though infrequent and highly unpredictable, of seeing polar bears in or near the villages

**Best Viewing Times:** Spring and fall whaling season (whale carcasses may attract polar bears). In fall, the presence of bears also depends on the formation of the pack ice, which varies from year to year but usually occurs in late September or October.

**Location:** Coast of the Arctic Ocean, extreme northern Alaska.

**Access:** By commercial air service from Fairbanks or Anchorage. There is no road access to Barrow or Kaktovik.

**Management:** U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

**Facilities:** Hotel accommodations available in Barrow. Taxi service or local residents may take visitors to locations where bears have been seen. Modest accommodations available in Kaktovik as well as a small general store and laundromat, but there are no restaurants or other visitor services.



As the rule of thumb, polar bears are not seen in Alaska during the summer months.

**WARNING:** Polar bears are extremely dangerous. There have been several deaths and maulings by polar bears coming directly into villages and field camps. A standard passenger vehicle is not a guarantee of safety against polar bears. They are unafraid of humans and may attack them as prey. At this time there are no special facilities or vehicles for safely viewing polar bears in these communities.

**Information:** City of Barrow, PO Box 629, Barrow, AK 99723. Phone (907) 852-5211, fax 852-5871. City of Kaktovik; PO Box 27; Kaktovik, AK 99747. Phone (907) 640-6313, fax 640-6314.

## Denali National Park

**What you see:** Grizzly bears, usually individuals or small family groups in interior Alaska's alpine tundra habitat. Bears are often visible only at a distance.

**Best Viewing Times:** Late May through September

**Access:** By road on the George Parks Highway (Alaska Highway #3)

**Management:** National Park Service

**Facilities:** Seven campgrounds in the

park. Many hotels, cabins, and B&Bs in neighboring communities. Park concessionaire operates shuttle buses daily which take visitors into the park. **Reservations:** Shuttle bus tickets and campsites are available by advanced reservation. Mail or fax your request to:

Doyon/ARAMARK Joint Venture  
2445 West Dunlap Avenue  
Phoenix, Arizona 85021;

By phone:

Nationwide: 1(800)622-7275  
International: 1(907)272-7275  
Anchorage: 272-7275  
Fax (907)264-4684

<http://www.reservedenali.com>

**Information:** Denali National Park;  
PO Box 9; Denali Park, AK 99755.  
Phone (907) 683-2294 or

<http://www.nps.gov/dena>

## Wolverine Creek Cove Redoubt Bay State Critical Habitat Area

**What you see:** Brown and black bears fishing for salmon

**Best Viewing Times:** Mid-June through Mid-August

**Location:** Western side of Cook Inlet, east of Lake Clark Pass

**Access:** By plane and then by boat. Flights are available from Anchorage, Ninilchik and Homer and many locations in between. Check with local visitor bureaus for more information.

**Management:** Alaska Department of Fish and Game

**Facilities:** None

**Information:**

<http://wildlife.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=wolverinecreek.main>

## Other Viewing Opportunities

Many commercial guides and outfitters offer one-day or multi-day bear viewing and wildlife photography excursions. For listings of these tour operators and others, ask for a free copy of the "Official Alaska State Vacation Planner." Call (907) 929-2200 x201 or (800) 862-5275.