

ENVIRONMENTAL & SAFETY STANDARDS and ETHICS
For
EXPEDITIONS ON THE TATSHENSHINI AND ALSEK RIVERS
April 23, 2007 Revision

These standards have been assembled by concerned professional outfitters, from comments by private boaters, and the managing agencies (British Columbia, Champagne Aishihik First Nation, Parks Canada, the National Park Service, and the Yukon Territorial Government). Proper practices will ensure that each succeeding generation of travelers will be able to enjoy a relatively "untouched" appearance of the river.

The concerns fall into five basic categories:

- **Site impacts**
- **Interactions with others**
- **Interactions with and impacts on wildlife**
- **Safety**
- **Cultural considerations**

SITE IMPACTS

Human Waste

The combination of use in a restrictive river corridor and an environment that does not promote the speedy decomposition of waste creates a problem. It is **mandatory** that solid human waste be packed out and disposed in a proper manner. There is a human waste dump station at the take-out in Dry Bay and dump stations are also available in Haines, Haines Junction, Whitehorse and Juneau. For all expeditions ending before Dry Bay (at Lowell Lake and Turnback Canyon), all solid human waste must be flown out. For proper disposal at the dump station at Dry Bay, solid human waste must be kept in a liquid/semi-liquid state. Biodegradable deodorants and digesters are ok, but no bleach or ammonia or formaldehyde-based or bacteria-destroying chemicals are allowed. (These destroy the bacterial action in the septic system.) There are attachments for "rocket box", "Jon-ny Partner" and other portable toilets. Toilet paper may be burned in a very hot fire or carried out with the solid waste and disposed of at the dump station. No other materials should go into the toilets and the septic system at Dry Bay. Urinating on the land or in the river current does not present the same problems as solid waste. Do so away from the camp areas and preferably below the high water line so that the area is flushed annually.

Fires, Fire Rings and Firewood

Regulations specify that fire pans, blankets or boxes **must be used** to contain any fires built within 1/2 mile (800 m) of the river. Fires should not be positioned near large rocks, rock walls or logs as they leave long-lasting scars. There should be no evidence of fire rings along the river. If you find someone else's fire ring please remove it and toss any scarred rocks into the river.

While "warming fires" continue to be part of the river experience, the use of stoves is recommended for cooking to minimize impacts. Check with your air carrier regarding flight requirements for fuels. Dutch ovens should be heated on smaller fire pans. Carry and fly out any unused fuels.

All parties who utilize campfires should collect wood from drift piles while travelling on the river and bring it to camp if staying at popular campsites. Regulations prohibit cutting dead limbs or felling trees-- only dead and down wood may be used for fires.

Maintain your fire so as not to leave pieces of charred wood. Any pieces of charred wood should be taken to the next camp and used. If this isn't possible, it should be thrown into the main river current. Fine ash should be dumped out in the main current as well.

Surplus firewood should not be left in a pile. It should be carried to the next camp, laid out along the beach in a natural waterline fashion or thrown into the main current. Only at the Dry Bay take-out should firewood be left in compact piles.

Alterations to the Environment

A growing problem is the proliferation of rings of stones used as tent anchors. There are high winds along the river corridors, but with the use of strong 12" tent pegs or spikes there should be no need to move rocks to anchor tents. If stones are moved for any purpose they should be loose river stones--and they should be returned when camp is broken. The moving of stones destroys vegetation and other organisms and may retard the growth of plants and accumulation of soil on the glacial outwashes that are favored campsites. It is recommended that planks, lawn chairs and other imported items be used for seating and other purposes.

Outfitters and others have noticed that the initial impacts to a campsite happen quickly by trampling of the fragile vegetation. The spots hardest hit are the landings, kitchen areas and paths linking tents. Unless a group is very small, it is better to use a previously established campsite rather than impacting an untouched area. Sticking to existing pathways and placing tents in an existing site is helpful. Avoid wearing lug-soled boots in camp. High traffic areas such as kitchens should be located on sand/gravel or other non-vegetated sites.

If hiking on an existing trail, do not short cut. This causes unnecessary damage to the vegetation and soil. Other routes should be on level, dry ground, on rock, sand or gravel. Hike in small groups and avoid wet, erodible, vegetated areas. **Group sizes are limited to 15 persons**, but some commercial groups are currently permitted to operate with up to 25 persons.

Garbage

Conscientious garbage management is critical to avoid bear encounters with your group and the people who camp in your site the following nights. We have received many comments about "micro-trash" in the campsites—please pick up and pack out all litter and make sure lightweight items are not loose on windy days. Make a final check around any site before you leave. **All garbage must be carried along and flown out with you.** There is no garbage disposal at Dry Bay and extra food left by rafters has led to several bears becoming food conditioned and subsequently causing damage to property.

Proper garbage management begins with thorough pre-planning to minimize garbage and smells. Plan menus carefully to avoid leftovers and odiferous foods. **Nothing should be buried, nothing should remain on the land, and only strained liquid go into the river.** Carry out washed foil, other metals, glass and heavy plastics. Organics/food scraps can be burned in a hot fire and what's left carried out in a sealed odor-proof container. All strained dishwater and other gray water should go in the river rather than concentrating the food smells on shore. Oil or grease such as bacon grease must either be flared off in a hot fire or carried out in sealed container.

Remember--it is up to you to manage your garbage in order to maintain a wilderness environment and to prevent bear incidents with your group or following groups.

INTERACTIONS WITH OTHERS

With a limited season and the popularity of these rivers it is critical that all river users adhere strictly to the scheduling regulations. The permit date is the date for **arriving at Dry Bay**. We suggest scheduling your air taxi for the following day to allow time for packing and to enjoy Dry Bay.

Kluane National Park (upper Alsek): You must obtain a put-in date and camping permit. There are special restrictions and regulations. Contact Kluane wardens.

Sediments Creek: Recommended limit of two nights. Commercial trips may not stop if two other commercial trips are already at the site. Be prepared for other rafters stopping to hike and/or camp at this campsite.

Walker Glacier, Alsek Spit/Peninsula, Gateway Knob: May stay two nights at one of these three sites. Limited to one night at the other two. Be prepared for other rafters stopping to hike and/or camp at Walker Glacier.

If there are other groups at or near your site, observe reasonable "quiet hours" and be courteous when passing through another group's camp. Parties that "leapfrog" each other should communicate to work out their respective schedules.

Sensitivity should be exercised with respect to air access (Turnback Canyon, Lowell Lake) as well as fly-overs to and from Dry Bay. Ask the pilot to maintain a minimum altitude of 2000' above the river, and to not fly along the river corridor if possible. Commercial flight service companies are required to have a park use permit to land in the parks. Flying out from Alsek Lake is prohibited except in case of an emergency.

INTERACTIONS WITH AND IMPACTS ON WILDLIFE

The Tatshenshini-Alsek corridor has a large and diverse bear population. Grizzly bears in the interior, are common. Black bears, sometimes in the rare glacier or "blue" color phase, are also along the rivers.

Visitors to the river should realize that by pushing the limits of an animal's "comfort zone" you may be causing stress to that animal and also make the animal more wary of the next visitor. Use scopes, binoculars and long lenses to get good views and photos.

Look for signs of recent bear activity in any proposed campsite. Watch for bear tracks, droppings, signs of recent grazing, dug-up ground, wildlife trails and salmon-spawning areas. When hiking make lots of noise (singing, bells, etc.), avoid brushy areas and "blind" areas. Over the past several years a group of researchers working with the managing agencies have rated campsites on the Alsek and Tatshenshini according to the likelihood of a bear encounter at most of the sites on the rivers, including recommendations to reduce potential conflicts. This report is available at <http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/bcparks/explore/parkpgs/tatshens/parkinfo.html#riverraftingandkayaking>

thatAll food, cooking utensils, garbage and any other items that may smell interesting to a bear (toothpaste, soap and lotion) must be packed separately from your other camping gear. Minimize odors by your choice of foods. While in camp, the only time food should not be cached is when you are actually preparing and eating a meal. When feasible, kitchen and food storage should be at least 100' (downwind) from the sleeping area.

Storage recommendations for food, trash, beverages, and other attractants:

Option 1) Store in bear-resistant containers certified by the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee or otherwise approved by the Tat-Alsek Bear Group. ***Bear-resistant food containers are highly recommended as the most reliable method of securing food and other attractants from bears.***

Option 2) Store inside a secured dry box (latches shut), cooler (strapped closed), or rubber tote (strapped) surrounded by an activated electric fence that adheres to US Forest Service specifications (Karsky, D., K. Barber, J. Gookin, G. Kees, and J. Claar. January 2007. Specifications for portable electric fences as a potential alternative method for food storage. Recreation Tech Tips Report, Technology and Development Program, United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service.)

Option 3) Suspend at least 10 feet above the ground and 4 feet horizontally from a post, tree trunk or other object on a line or branch that will not support a bear's weight.

SAFETY

The Tatshenshini and Alsek Rivers flow through a rigorous and demanding environment. The cold water, unpredictable turbulence, large water volume and extreme weather conditions all place high demands on safety equipment, systems and knowledge. Hypothermia can kill in a very short time.

Each group must have experienced leaders. Every group should have a leader trained in Basic Trauma Life Support, river rescue, cold weather survival and wilderness group leadership. Each boat requires a skilled leader with training and experience specific to their craft in Class IV whitewater. (International scale, Class I-VI.)

Suggested equipment: rafts, 12' or larger, Class III or V PFD's (1 per person plus 1 per boat). PFD's should be worn at all times. Rigid kayaks and whitewater canoes with flotation are suitable for the river provided the paddler is

skilled in navigating Class III-IV water. Folding kayaks and open canoes are not recommended. Currently very few aircraft are available that can fly a rigid hulled boat

Emergency signaling equipment such as a PLB, EPIRB, ELT, aircraft radio and single side band radios with appropriate channels, satellite telephones, signaling panels and mirrors are required for all outfitted groups and should be carried by any group on the river. Cell phones do not work anywhere along the river.

Emergency phone numbers: BC Parks: (867) 634- 7043; RCMP at 1-800-663-3456; Kluane: (867) 634-7207; U.S. Coast Guard: 1-800-478-5555; Glacier Bay NP: (907) 697-2627, Dry Bay Ranger at (907) 784-3295 or (907) 784-3296 (radiophone).

Comprehensive First Aid Kits for advanced wilderness first aid are essential. Rescue equipment including carabiners, pulleys, rope and prussics (and the ability to use them) should be on board.

Plan to treat all of your drinking water with a mechanical or chemical system that is sufficient to remove Giardia.

Firearms

The carrying of firearms for protection purposes has not been shown to be effective in bear encounters. Canadian firearms regulations changed drastically in January 2001. **Some** of the applicable regulations are:

No handguns may be brought into Canada.

Possession of any firearm in Kluane National Park and Tatshenshini-Elsek Park by rafting groups is prohibited.

Firearms are allowed in the area of Glacier Bay National Park/Preserve along the Elsek River.

The use of bear spray (OC or pepper spray) and other non-lethal bear deterrents are suggested in case of close encounters with bears. Please check customs regulations for transport across the border. If you plan to fly with bear spray please check with your flight company for their preference on how to transport it.

CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

Throughout the Canadian portion of a Tatshenshini or Elsek River trip, travelers are in the traditional lands of the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations (Southern Tutchone and Tlingit origin). This includes the lands within the Province of British Columbia that have recently been declared a provincial park. Within the Yukon and British Columbia, the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations own large areas of rural land and have management and other interests in neighboring lands. The Alaskan portion of the river trip lies within the traditional lands of the Tlingit. You are guests on their traditional lands.

Until the early twentieth century, numerous Aboriginal fishing villages were located along the Tatshenshini River and lower Elsek River. Klukshu, Yukon is the only Aboriginal fishing village that is still occupied. Visitors are encouraged to visit Klukshu prior to their river departures to learn something of the area's rich Aboriginal cultural heritage. Close to Sha'washe (Dalton Post) at KM 163 on the Haines Road, an interpretive display on the basin's human history is available for viewing.

The departure point for most Tatshenshini River trips is at Sha'washe (Dalton Post). Sha'washe is on lands owned by the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations. Visitors must respect their land use regulations and requirements. Archeological studies of the Elsek and Tatshenshini river corridors have only recently begun. If a visitor comes across a site or artifacts of cultural significance which they believe is not widely known, they are encouraged to report its location to one of the river management agencies. **It is an offense to dig or disturb any cultural/archeological site or artifact.**

If you have any questions concerning these environmental standards, please contact one of the managing agencies.

- **Champagne and Aishihik First Nation**, Box 5309 , Haines Junction, Yukon Territory, Y0B 1L0; (867) 634-2331;
- **Glacier Bay National Park & Preserve**, Box 137, Yakutat, AK 99689, Phone: (907) 784-3295
- **Kluane National Park & Reserve**, Box 5495, Haines Junction, Yukon Y0B 1L0; (867) 634-7250
- **Tatshenshini-Alsek Park**, British Columbia Parks, Postal Bag 5000, Smithers, British Columbia VOJ 2N0; (867) 634-4248 – summer, (250) 847-7320 – winter
- **Yukon Government**, Registrar, Wilderness Tourism Licensing, P.O. Box 2703, Whitehorse, YT Y1A 2C6; (867) 667-3048

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