



Viewing Exit Glacier from the Harding Icefield Trail.
NPS



Mountain goats navigate steep-sided fjords.
NPS



Harbor seals ride ice floes in McCarty Fjord.
NPS



As Pederson Glacier retreats, fireweed colonizes the newly exposed area.
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Temperate rain forest thrives between ocean and ice.
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In summer, horned puffins and other seabirds nest on fjords' rocky ridges.
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Three Hole Point in Aialik Bay.
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Top photo: Nunataks and the Harding Icefield above McCarty Fjord. © FRED HRSCHMANN

Life on the Edge

Ice stretches as far as the eye can see, interrupted by an occasional jagged nunatak. The Harding Icefield's expanse covers over half of 669,983-acre Kenai Fjords National Park and conceals a mountain range under ice several thousand feet thick. Named for President Warren G. Harding, who visited Seward in 1923, the icefield is a relic from the last ice age. It gives us a glimpse of when ice covered much of North America, but Kenai Fjords is no static window to the past. As the ice recedes, it uncovers glacially carved valleys that fill with sea water, creating the stunning fjords (pronounced *f'yords*). You witness nature's raw power sculpting this landscape. House-sized ice masses crash from tidewater glaciers into the sea, stirring up plankton that attract throngs of hungry seabirds. Along the coast, Earth's crustal plates collide head-on: the denser Pacific Plate slips under the North American Plate. This subduction drags the Kenai Mountains into the sea and deepens the fjords. It causes frequent earthquakes, too. The 1964 Great Alaska Earthquake dropped the shoreline six feet in 3.5 minutes.

Plants and animals adapt to incredibly dynamic conditions to survive in the fjords. In this strange and wonderful place birds swim better than they fly. Ice worms exist on frozen glacier surfaces. Mammals are better adapted to life in frigid salt water than on land. Puffins, kittiwakes, otters, sea lions, orca, salmon, and sea stars: the diversity of life in these seemingly inhospitable fjords is beyond our wildest imagining. Throughout the year storms drop hundreds of inches of snow on higher elevations. Snowflakes compact into dense glacial ice and feed nearly 40 glaciers that flow from the icefield. Rivers of ice, glaciers creep downhill like giant bulldozers, carving out the bowl-shaped cirques and broad, U-shaped valleys. At Exit Glacier—the only part of the park reached by road—you can get close enough to peer into deep blue glacial crevasses. Keep a safe distance though! Although retreating, Exit Glacier is active. Large blocks of ice calve from its face without warning. The short stroll to Exit Glacier is like a trip back through time. Here the story unfolds of how plant life reclaims barren rocky land exposed by the glacier's retreat.

The Sitka spruce-and-hemlock forest you first encounter gives few clues that less than 200 years ago ice covered the area. Closer to the glacier you see earlier stages of growth—cottonwoods, alders, and willows—preparing the way for the mature forest. Finally, in the area most recently exposed, you will find pioneer plants—mosses, lichens, and bright pink fireweed—struggling to gain footholds in the aftermath of nature's great bulldozer. These colonizers start the progression from glacial till to the temperate rain forests that cloak the edges of the Kenai Fjords.

Wildlife flourishes in this narrow slice of temperate rain forest wedged between the sea and the icefield. Mountain goats pick their way on precipitous slopes. Moose browse hedges of willow and alder. Bears forage for grasses and berries. Wolverines, martens, and songbirds also make homes here. Some species span both worlds: bald eagles fish in the fjords and nest in the tops of spruce or hemlock trees.

Native peoples hunted and fished in the fjords for years. Russian fur traders and gold seekers passed through. Most evidence of these humans fell victim to this harsh environment, but the park includes a few Alaskan Native archeological sites and gold mining sites. The National Park Service manages Kenai Fjords to preserve its natural and cultural resources, ensuring that people can enjoy this dynamic place while leaving it unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations. Established as a national monument in 1978, Kenai Fjords was made a national park under the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) in 1980. But the story of Kenai Fjords is far from finished. The Earth's crustal movements keep tugging the mountains into the sea, and changes in global temperature and precipitation cause glacial advance and retreat. If you return, the park won't look quite the same—in Kenai Fjords the only constant is change. Here mountains and the sea struggle for balance, glaciers advance and retreat, wildlife adapts, and nature is always a work in progress.

About Your Visit

Getting Here

The park is south and west of Seward, which is 126 miles south of Anchorage via the Seward Highway.

There is daily bus service year-round between Anchorage and Seward and daily train service in summer. Exit Glacier can be reached in summer by paved road, about 11 miles northwest of Seward. You can get to the Harding Icefield by air or trail. Air and boat charters provide access to the fjords. Travel to Exit Glacier in winter is by cross-country skis, dogsled, snowshoes, or snowmachine (with restrictions). Flights provide views of the vast Harding Icefield. Landings can be arranged for day-skiing or expeditions. (See *Exit Glacier map on the back of this brochure.*)

Visitor Services

The Information Center in Seward offers films, maps, publications, and information. Open daily in summer. The Nature Center at Exit Glacier offers maps, publications, information, and ranger-led hikes in summer.

What to See and Do

Authorized commercial guide services offer camping, fishing, and kayaking experiences. Air charters from Seward or Homer fly over the coast for sightseeing and access to the fjords. Hire boat tours and charters in Seward. In summer boat tours ply the coast observing calving glaciers, seabirds, and marine mammals. Boat charters offer overnight fjord trips and fishing trips to the fjords and Resurrection Bay. Fish include: *saltwater* halibut, lingcod, and rockfish; *freshwater* Dolly Varden; and silver, red, chum, king, and pink salmon.

Weather and Clothing

Overcast and cool days are frequent here. May is driest, and successive months see increasing precipitation. Summer daytime temperatures range from the mid-40s to low 70s°F. September begins a wet and stormy fall. Wool or synthetic clothing and sturdy rain gear are essential.

Accommodations

The park has no food service and limited lodging. Seward offers visitor services and campgrounds. Exit Glacier has walk-in, summer-use campsites. Two summer-use coastal, backcountry,

public-use cabins in the fjords at Holgate Arm and Aialik Bay can be reached by boat, kayak, or float plane. In winter, a public-use cabin at Exit Glacier is available; public-use cabins have a three-day stay limit. Summer reservations are first-come, first-served, starting in January. Contact: Alaska Public Lands Information Center, 605 West Fourth Ave., Suite 105, Anchorage, AK 99501; toll free 866-869-6887.

Backcountry Travel

This rugged wilderness requires good physical condition, proper equipment, and reasonable precautions. If you are planning a backcountry trip with no guide, get current, specific information from the park staff before setting out. To challenge the Harding Icefield, you must be prepared to face sudden storms, blinding sunlight, high winds, and extreme changes in temperature. At Exit Glacier in winter you may face deep snow and cold temperatures. Know hypothermia symptoms and their treatment.

Wildlife

Bear and moose are commonly seen in the park. Treat them with respect for your safety and theirs. Do not approach, disturb, or feed wild-

life. Travel in groups and make noise while hiking to avoid surprising animals. Do not take pets on trails or beaches. Backcountry travelers should carry and know how to use bear pepper spray. Ask staff for wildlife safety information and report encounters with bear or moose.

Boating Safety

Know your boat and its operation. All federal and state boating regulations apply. Carry signal equipment and a survival kit that includes shelter, warm clothing, and extra food. A seaworthy craft and roughwater boating experience are absolutely required. Icy waters can lead to hypothermia and death in minutes. File a float plan with a responsible person.

Sea Kayaking

Kayak travel in the fjords is recommended for experienced paddlers only because of rough seas and strong tidal currents. Glaciers calve without warning, posing extreme danger from falling ice and cresting waves. Never approach within one-quarter mile of a tidewater glacier. Although the most experienced paddlers can travel to the fjords from Seward, most kayakers arrange charter boat drop-offs and pick-ups.

Regulations

Hunting and Fishing All lands and waters in Kenai Fjords National Park are closed to hunting and trapping. Alaska state fishing licenses are required.

Pets At Exit Glacier, dogs are allowed only in the parking lot, restrained by a leash no longer than six feet. Dogs are not permitted elsewhere in the park. Service animals are welcome.

Camping and Parking No overnight parking is allowed in the Exit Glacier parking lot. Campers in the tents-only campground must camp in established sites. There is no overflow camping. Sleeping in vehicles is prohibited.

Cooking, Food Storage, and Bears To minimize bear encounters in campgrounds, cooking is permitted only at the central cooking area. Food must be secured in the bear-proof storage locker provided. Proper food storage is mandatory in the park. All food or anything that contains food odors, including fishing catch, garbage, containers, and utensils, must be stored out of reach. Ask park staff or check our website for information.

Emergencies

Travel requires self-reliance and planning here. Emergency services may be distant and difficult to contact. A ranger can help contact medical aid. In an emergency: in the Seward area call 911; on the coast call the Coast Guard, Marine Channel 16. Rangers patrol Nuka and Aialik bays in summer. Contact them on Marine Channel 16.

More Information

Kenai Fjords National Park
P.O. Box 1727
Seward, AK 99664-1727
907-422-0500
www.nps.gov/kefj

The nonprofit Alaska Geographic Association sells detailed maps and publications at the information and nature centers. For services in the Seward area contact the Seward Chamber of Commerce, P.O. Box 749, Seward, AK 99664, 907-224-8051 or www.sewardak.org.

Kenai Fjords National Park is one of over 390 parks in the National Park System. To learn more about parks and National Park Service programs in America's communities, visit www.nps.gov.

