



# Denali National Park and Preserve Backcountry Camping Guide



Michael Larson Photo

## Getting Started

This brochure contains information vital to the success of your backcountry trip in Denali National Park and Preserve. The following paragraphs will outline the Denali backcountry permit system, the steps required to obtain your permit, and some important tips for a safe and memorable wilderness experience.

### Denali's Trailless Wilderness

Traveling and camping in this expansive terrain is special. The lack of developed trails, bridges, or campsites means that you are free to determine your own route and discover Denali for yourself. However, with this freedom comes responsibility – responsibility for yourself and for the wilderness. Self-reliance is paramount. You must be prepared to travel crosscountry through remote terrain in harsh weather, and rescue yourself in the event of problems. It is also your responsibility to help protect the special resources and opportunities that are present at Denali by carefully following the principles of Leave No Trace so that your travels do not diminish the experience of those who follow you.

### Backcountry Unit System

The 6 million acres of Denali National Park and Preserve is divided into 87 separate backcountry units (see map on reverse side). Forty one units within the Denali Wilderness have a limit on the number of individual people that can camp in each unit per night. During peak summer visitation many of these units are heavily used, so please come to the Backcountry Desk with several alternative trip itineraries. Don't become discouraged if your first choice is not available. Remember, there are 6 million acres to choose from, and all of the units offer excellent wilderness trips!

Pay attention to the following requirements when planning a trek through Denali's backcountry:

- Forty-one backcountry units within the Denali Wilderness have a specific quota.
- Unit availability determines where you may camp each night and you must camp in the unit for which you have a permit.
- Maximum 7 consecutive nights in a single unit.
- Maximum 30 nights in the backcountry (various units).
- Permits are issued only in person (no telephone reservations), and no more than 24 hours in advance of the first day of your trip.
- All party members must be present to receive a permit.
- Permits are not required for day hiking in the backcountry.

## Wildlife of Denali



Karen Ward Photo

### Bears

Symbolic of the Alaska wilderness, both grizzly bears and black bears inhabit the park and may be encountered in the backcountry. To keep these magnificent creatures wild and enhance your personal safety, keep the following in mind:

- Make noise while hiking to alert bears of your presence.
- Use Bear Resistant Food Containers and store them 100 yards (meters) from cooking areas and tent sites.
- Be alert for bears and alter your activities to avoid them.
- Never run from a bear.
- Pepper spray can be carried as an added precaution. However, it is useful only as a last resort in the event of an emergency, and should not be viewed as substitute for proper backcountry behavior.

When you visit the Backcountry Desk, you will be provided with more detailed information about hiking in bear country.

### Wildlife

Denali is home to sheep, caribou, wolves, foxes, bears, moose, eagles, ptarmigan, and other wildlife that you are very likely to encounter in the backcountry. Please keep Denali's animals wild by following these guidelines when encountering wildlife:

- Do not feed or allow wildlife to obtain human foods.
- Maintain a **minimum 1/4-mile (.7 km) distance from bears.**
- Do not approach or follow wildlife. Maintain a **minimum 75 foot (23 meter) distance from all other animals.**
- If your presence alters an animal's behavior, you are too close.

### Bear Resistant Food Container (BRFC)

These hard plastic portable containers are a vital part of Denali's bear/human conflict management program. You must store all food, garbage, and scented items in a BRFC when camping overnight in units where they are required. Their consistent use has resulted in a bear population that does not associate humans or their property with food sources. A small BRFC weighs 3 lbs. and holds 3-5 days of food for one person, and the larger BRFC weighs 5 lbs. and carries 7-10 days of food. BRFCs are issued free of charge with backcountry permits and must be returned within 48 hours following a trip. If the BRFC is lost or damaged, you may be held responsible for its replacement. Kevlar or bear-resistant bags are not permitted.

### Critical Wildlife Closures

There are both permanent and temporary wildlife closures every year in Denali. These areas are restricted to all entry and exist for the mutual protection of humans and critical wildlife species. It is your responsibility to recognize and respect the boundaries of these closures. Ask a ranger at the Backcountry Desk for recent closure information. Failure to avoid closures may result in a citation.

## Getting a Permit

Permits are available at the Backcountry Desk located in the Visitor Access Center (VAC) at the Riley Creek Entrance Area.

### Step 1: Plan Your Itinerary

Visit [www.nps.gov/dena/home/hiking](http://www.nps.gov/dena/home/hiking) to preplan several alternative itineraries prior to your arrival in the park. Building flexibility in your plans is very important because certain units may be unavailable at the time you actually wish to obtain your permit. Remember to be conservative when predicting your daily mileage. There are no trails, and travel can be slow and difficult in brushy areas or when fording glacier rivers. Upon your arrival at the Backcountry Desk at the VAC, several additional resources, such as unit description guides, local maps, and knowledgeable staff, will be available to assist you in planning your trip.

### Step 2: Watch Backcountry Video

This informative 30-minute video program is presented at the VAC and will answer many questions you will have about negotiating the Denali backcountry. It covers topics such as campsite selection, bear and wildlife encounters, river crossings, Leave No Trace principles, Bear Resistant Food Containers (BRFCs), and much more. All members of your party must view this program.

### Step 3: Attend Safety Talk

Following the video, all party members must be present for a brief safety talk to receive the backcountry permit and the Bear Resistant Food Containers (BRFC) that is required for proper food storage. You must sign your permit in recogni-

tion that you understand all backcountry rules and regulations. Violations of the conditions of the permit may result in adverse impacts to park resources and legal consequences.

### Step 4: Delineate Your Map

Unit boundaries and wildlife closures are not marked in the backcountry. It is your responsibility to know their location. Fifteen minute (1 inch = 1 mile) USGS topographic quad maps are strongly recommended and are available for purchase at the VAC bookstore. After obtaining the proper map(s), delineate unit boundaries and wildlife closure boundaries so that you will know where to hike and camp during your trip.

### Step 5: Obtain Camper Bus Ticket

Access to most park backcountry units requires use of the Visitor Transportation System (VTS). Special Camper Buses that are built to accommodate people and their large gear packs depart the VAC several times a day. To secure space for your party, you should purchase tickets at the VAC soon after obtaining your backcountry permit. This bus system will take you to the start of your hike. When your trip is finished, or if you wish to move to another part of the park during the course of your trip, simply return to the park road and the next available VTS bus will pick you up.

For more information on the park Visitor Transportation System (VTS), visit [www.nps.gov/dena/home/roadtour](http://www.nps.gov/dena/home/roadtour).

## Terrain of Denali

There are five major terrain categories in the Denali backcountry. Here's what you can expect:

- **Gravel River Bars:** these flat, rocky surfaces characterize most major rivers in the park and provide good travel routes.
- **Wet Tundra:** this terrain is marshy and interspersed with hummocks. Travel can be slow and tiring.
- **Dry Tundra:** dry tundra generally exists at higher elevations and affords good, solid footing and limited brush.
- **Brushy Tundra:** typically occurs in bands or thickets between 2500-3500 feet, and often limits visibility and travel speed.
- **Glacial Moraine:** located at the base of glaciers and often denoted on maps by stippled areas, a moraine consists of ice covered with dirt and debris. Travel is rough and time-consuming.

Understandably, many of the most popular units are predominately Dry Tundra terrain. However, permits for these units are also the most difficult to obtain, and sightings of other hikers are more common. We recommend you consider other less requested units that may require an initial extra effort to climb above the Brushy Tundra, but then typically also offer large areas of Dry Tundra, as well as exceptional opportunities for solitude.

### River Crossings

There are no bridges across rivers in the backcountry. You must negotiate your own river crossing and pack gear accordingly to keep dry in the event of an accidental swim. Water temperature is approximately 36° F (2° C), and a cold immersion may result in high risk of hypothermia. Try to cross where the river is braided and dispersed, rather than concentrated into a single deep, narrow channel. Due to the high silt content of the water, it is often difficult to ascertain the true depth of the water. River

depths can also vary widely during a trip depending on rainfall and temperatures. Glacial rivers generally run lower in early morning hours, so plan accordingly.



Kenan Ward Photo

### Glacier Crossings

Glaciers present numerous hazards, and any form of glacier travel will require extra preparation. If you plan to traverse the upper ice and snow portions of a glacier, carry appropriate equipment, such as ice axe and crampons and know how to use them. Crossing glacial moraines also present many potential hazards, such as debris slides, ice caves, and uneven terrain.

## Other Information

### Bicycle Camping

If you wish to travel the park road and hike from your bicycle, you must still camp at least 1/2-mile (1.3 km) from the road and not be visible from it. Bicycles must be stored at designated bike racks at established campgrounds, the Visitor Access Center, Toklat Road Camp, or Eielson Visitor Center while you hike. Reservations are required if you wish to stay overnight in campgrounds along the park road. To make reservations, call 1-800-622-7275. Each Camper Bus can accommodate two bicycles.



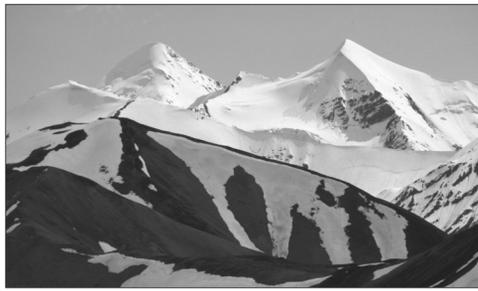
Kenan Ward Photo

### Caching

For extended backcountry treks, you may cache food and supplies in bear-proof food lockers located at any established campground area, the Visitor Access Center, Toklat Road Camp, or Eielson Visitor Center. Label food/supplies with party name and date you intend to retrieve it. Denali National Park is not responsible for caches.

### Mountaineering

If you intend to ascend Mt. McKinley or Mt. Foraker, contact the Talkeetna Ranger Station at 907-733-2231 or visit [www.nps.gov/dena/home/mountaineering](http://www.nps.gov/dena/home/mountaineering). Applications for permits must be received at least 60 days in advance of your expedition date. Registration is also recommended for other climbs.



Bob Butterfield Photo

## Leave No Trace and Safety

### Camping

There are no established campsites in the Denali backcountry. Use the following guidelines when selecting your campsite:

- Your tent must be at least **1/2-mile (1.3 km) away from the park road and not visible from it.**
- **Camp on durable surfaces whenever possible** such as gravel river bars, and avoid damaging fragile tundra.
- In pristine areas like Denali, **avoid camping where others have camped.**
- **Do not move rocks or plants;** leave the area as you found it so that future hikers do not see signs of your use.



Kim Heacox Photo

### Cooking

Fires are not permitted in the Denali Wilderness. Fuel for portable camp stoves is available for purchase at the Denali convenience store, located in the immediate vicinity of the VAC. When cooking, remain alert for bears; be ready to pack up and move quickly.

### Drinking Water

Giardia and Cryptosporidia are bacteria found in unfiltered water and present serious health risks. Take one of the following precautions before drinking water from a natural source:

- Boil for 1 minute.
- Use a water filter.
- Treat with iodine tablets.

If you use a water filter, remember that many of Denali's rivers carry glacial silt. This silt will quickly clog your water filter and render it inoperable. The addition of silt-stopper devices is highly recommended for any water filter.

### Sanitation

Neither pit nor chemical toilets are available in the backcountry. You must follow these rules for proper waste disposal:

- Dig a hole at least 6 inches deep (15 centimeters) and at least 100 feet (30 meters) away from water for fecal waste disposal.
- Pack out all sanitation products.

### Minimum Impact Hiking

To keep the Denali backcountry in pristine condition for others, please take care in how you hike.

- **Hike on durable surfaces wherever possible**, such as gravel river bars.
- **Avoid hiking single file;** spread out and disperse to prevent the formation of social trails.

### Gear Checklist

The following equipment is highly recommended when venturing out into the Denali backcountry:

- Hiking boots (waterproofed) and wool socks.
- Neoprene socks and gaiters for river crossings.
- Rain parka and pants (ponchos not recommended).
- Polypropylene, nylon, or wool clothing (avoid cotton). Be prepared for temperatures ranging from 30° to 80° F (-1° to 27° C) in the summer months.
- Stove, fuel, cookware and water bottles.
- Water filter (preferably equipped with silt stopper device).
- Compass and map (maps available at Visitor Access Center).
- Toilet paper and trowel.
- Tent with rain fly and waterproof floor (bivouacking is not recommended).
- Sleeping bag and pad (for any overnight summer trip, protection to 20° F (-7° C) is suggested).
- Insect repellent and/or head net.
- Emergency gear, such as first aid kit, knife, and a signaling device such as a whistle, signal mirror, or flare.
- Large plastic or waterproof bags to protect the gear inside your pack.



### For more information contact:

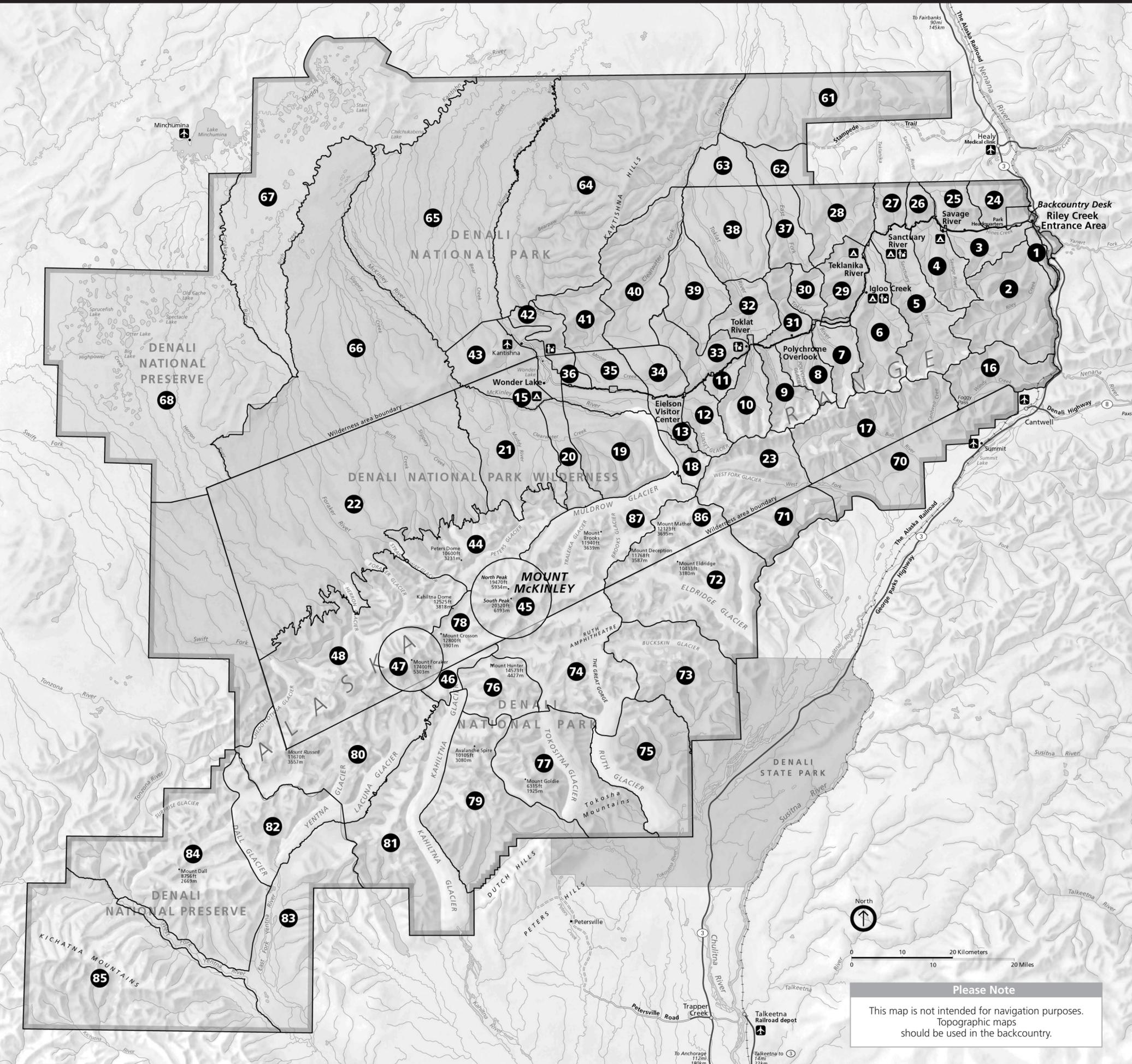


Backcountry Operations  
Denali National Park and Preserve  
PO Box 9  
Denali Park, AK 99755

**Phone:** May - Sept. 907-683-9510  
Oct. - April 907-683-2294  
**Fax:** 907-683-9617  
**Email:** [denali\\_info@nps.gov](mailto:denali_info@nps.gov)

**Backcountry Internet Site:**  
[www.nps.gov/dena/home/hiking/index.html](http://www.nps.gov/dena/home/hiking/index.html)

# Backcountry Units



**Please Note**  
 This map is not intended for navigation purposes. Topographic maps should be used in the backcountry.

No.	Name	BRFC	Quota	Acreage
1	Triple Lakes	Req	12	6,567
2	Riley Creek	Req	12	79,533
3	Jenny Creek	Req	4	22,740
4	Upper Savage	Req	6	32,578
5	Upper Sanctuary	Req	6	67,066
6	Upper Teklanika	Req	6	54,011
7	Upper East Fork	Req	4	24,255
8	Polychrome Glaciers	Req	6	23,379
9	East Branch Upper Toklat	Req	6	26,250
10	West Branch Upper Toklat	Req	6	31,432
11	Stony Dome	Req	2	8,693
12	Sunset / Sunrise Glaciers	Req	4	21,077
13	Mount Eielson	Req	4	14,851
14	McKinley Bar East	Req	4	17,432
15	McKinley Bar West	Req	4	21,094
16	Windy Creek	Req	8	39,076
17	Foggy and Easy Pass	Req	8	88,405
18	Upper Glacier Creek	Req	4	12,471
19	Pirate Creek	Req	4	69,236
20	McGonagall Pass	Req	4	25,079
21	Muddy River	Req	8	81,830
22	Upper Foraker	Rec	—	371,494
23	West Fork Glacier	Rec	—	64,848
24	Mount Healy	Req	4	20,424
25	Healy Ridge	Req	4	20,403
26	Primrose Ridge	Req	4	9,679

No.	Name	BRFC	Quota	Acreage
27	Mount Wright	Req	4	14,412
28	Sushana River	Req	8	45,457
29	Igloo Mountain	Req	4	27,763
30	Tributary Creek	Req	4	14,960
31	Polychrome Mountain	Req	6	18,788
32	Middle Toklat	Req	4	29,421
33	Stony Hill	Req	4	30,119
34	Mount Galen	Req	4	22,769
35	Moose Creek	Req	4	19,732
36	Jumbo Creek	Req	2	8,195
37	Lower East Fork	Req	6	29,421
38	Lower Toklat	Req	6	68,476
39	Stony Creek	Req	4	45,130
40	Clearwater Fork	Req	12	82,532
41	Spruce Peak	Req	12	32,317
42	Eureka Creek	Req	12	16,127
43	Eldorado Creek	Req	12	32,542
44	Peters Glacier	—	—	75,233
45	Mount McKinley	—	—	50,011
46	Upper Kahiltna	Rec	—	24,480
47	Mount Foraker	—	—	32,008
48	Herron Glacier	—	—	177,513
61	Stampede	Rec	—	121,934
62	Southeast Stampede	Rec	—	21,864
63	Southwest Stampede	Rec	—	25,367
64	Kantishna Hills	Rec	—	322,355

No.	Name	BRFC	Quota	Acreage
65	Moose-McKinley	Rec	—	312,189
66	McKinley-Birch	Rec	—	311,395
67	Birch-Foraker Preserve	Rec	—	282,635
68	Heron-Highpower Preserve	Rec	—	410,396
69	Swift Fork	Rec	—	155,143
70	Bull River	Rec	—	84,464
71	Ohio Creek	Rec	—	39,887
72	Eldridge Glacier	—	—	177,309
73	Buckskin Glacier	—	—	99,896
74	Upper Ruth	—	—	104,656
75	Lower Ruth	—	—	96,070
76	Mount Hunter	—	—	39,752
77	Tokositna Glacier	—	—	144,861
78	Middle Kahiltna	Rec	—	11,905
79	Little Switzerland	—	—	121,150
80	Upper Yentna-Lacuna	—	—	124,748
81	Lower Kahiltna	Rec	—	144,403
82	Dall-Yentna Preserve	—	—	69,480
83	Yentna River Preserve	Rec	—	130,689
84	Mount Dall Preserve	Rec	—	197,565
85	Kitchatna Preserve	Rec	—	247,423
86	Mount Mather	—	—	41,368
87	Mount Brooks	—	—	97,065

BRFC = Bear Resistant Food Container    Req = Required  
 Rec = Recommended