



Whittier: A Gateway to Wildlife Wonders

Often described as the western gateway to Prince William Sound, Whittier boasts a spectacular setting, many recreational activities and, if you arrive by road or train, a 2.5 mile trip through North America's longest tunnel.

Though Whittier and its tunnel date from the 1940s, the area has long been used for passage to Southcentral and Interior Alaska. The Chugach people came through on their way to what is now Cook Inlet. European and American explorers and miners later followed this route as well. The U.S. Army built a port and railroad terminus at the present town site during World War II. Two large buildings that dominate Whittier were built for soldiers after the war. The Begich Towers are now condominiums housing most of Whittier's residents. The Buckner Building is abandoned.

Whittier suffered heavy damage in a tsunami after the 1964 earthquake but rebuilt and is today a popular destination for Anchorage residents, tourists, anglers and hunters.



For information on lodging and tours, visit the Greater Whittier Chamber of Commerce website at www.whittieralaskachamber.org or email the chamber at whittiercoc@gmail.com.



From the shorebirds of Cordova to the brown bears of Kodiak Island, from the caribou of Cold Bay to the whales of Unalaska, the South Coastal segment of the Alaska Coastal Wildlife Viewing Trail highlights dozens of wildlife viewing sites in and around the communities of Cordova, Valdez, Whittier, Kodiak, Sand Point, Chignik, Cold Bay, False Pass and Unalaska. Pick up community brochures along the coastal trail and check for [Alaska's South Coastal Wildlife Viewing Guide](#) in stores and online.



For more information on wildlife viewing across Alaska, visit www.wildlifeviewing.alaska.gov.



Photos

Bald eagle cover & kittiwake rookery ©Gerry Sanger • Eagle w/chick ©Bob Armstrong • All other photos © ADF&G.

WHITTIER


Wildlife Viewing Guide





www.wildlifeviewing.alaska.gov


Alaska Department of Fish and Game
Watch Our Wildlife


Wildlife Viewing Tips

 **Keep a Low Profile.** Enjoy watching animals' natural behaviors and try not to attract their attention with sounds. If your presence is causing an animal to stop feeding or act restless, give it more space. Be especially respectful of nesting and denning areas, rookeries and calving grounds, and critical feeding areas. With whales, avoid causing them to change their behavior; approach no closer than 100 yards.

 **Time it Right.** Dawn and dusk are when many wildlife species are most active. Midday warmth energizes dragonflies and butterflies and creates thermals for eagles and hawks. Low tides expose tide pools and a wealth of food for birds and mammals.

 **Look for Clues.** Tracks, droppings, trails and twigs tell stories of wildlife: what they are eating, where they live and when they passed through. Noticing and reading these clues adds richness to wildlife viewing. Tracking books and workshops will help you learn.

 **Help Keep Wildlife Wild.** Never feed wild animals. Doing so can cause them to associate people with food, which can cause trouble (it's illegal too). Human food can also make animals sick.

 **Be Considerate of Others.** People use and enjoy Alaska's wildlife in a variety of ways. Respect private property and give hunters, anglers and others plenty of space.



A cloud of kittiwakes lifts off from the seabird colony.



Wildlife Viewing Fun Facts

A bed of sticks: Look high up into the branches of the tallest spruce trees growing along rivers and coastline. If you spot what looks like a giant jumble of sticks, it may be a bald eagle nest. Nest trees are usually close to the water, have good flight access and allow for a clear view of the surrounding area. A typical nest is about 5 ft in diameter but over the years it can reach up to 9 ft across and weigh as much as two tons. Bald eagles often use and rebuild the same nest every year. They begin nest building in April.

The female lays two, sometimes three, eggs then male and female eagles incubate the eggs for just over a month. Sibling rivalry is common among the young, and the weaker younger chick is often killed or starved. The surviving young leave the nest after about 75 days and do not attain adult plumage or breed for another 4 or 5 years. Most bald eagles winter in southern Alaska though some move further south in winter.



Coho Silver! Five species of Pacific salmon spawn in Alaskan waters but it seems like many more if you're counting names. Every species has at least 2 monikers and some have even more. Coho salmon (left) are called silvers, sockeye salmon are reds, Chinook salmon are kings or blackmouth, chum salmon are dogs, and pink salmon are humpbacks (or humpies) because of the enormous hump males develop before spawning. There's even a special name for landlocked sockeye; they're called kokanee.



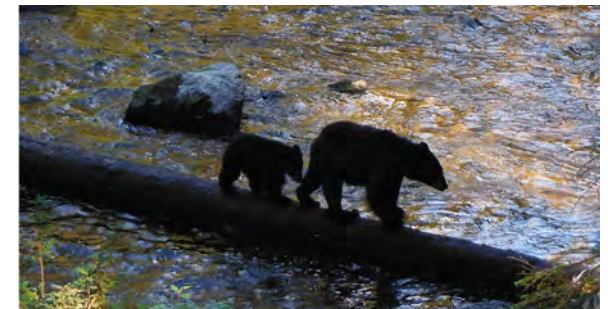
Traveling Safely in Bear Country

Make noise (sing, clap, talk) while you travel to reduce your chances of surprising a bear. Be especially alert along noisy streams, in thick brush and when visibility is poor. Always keep your belongings (backpack, food, fish, etc.) with you or in bear-resistant storage.

If you see a bear, **stay calm**. If the bear does not notice you, leave quietly, keeping your eyes on the bear. If it does notice you, face the bear, wave your arms and talk to it calmly. If it approaches you, stand your ground.

Never run from a bear, you may provoke a chase. Also, if a bear is surprised at close distance, it may feel threatened and act defensively, especially if it has cubs or food.

If a bear strikes, play dead or fight back. The choice depends on whether the bear is acting defensively or considering you as prey. For a defensive bear, lie on your front, keep your backpack on, protect your face and neck, and remain still. In the rare instance of a predatory bear, fight back. To learn more, visit www.alaskabears.alaska.gov.



STAY SAFE!

The mountains, trails, islands and waterways of the Alaska Coastal Wildlife Viewing Trail are wild lands. For safety, take a guided tour or bring a companion, let someone know your plans and be prepared for emergencies with spare clothes, a first aid kit and a means of communication. Visit the Alaska State Parks' Staying Safe web page for details: www.dnr.state.ak.us/parks/safety.

Wildlife Viewing Sites



Portage Pass Trail 1 offers hikers spectacular views of Portage Glacier, in fact it's the area's only established trail that still has a view of the receding ice. To find the trailhead, cross the railroad tracks near the Whittier-side tunnel staging area and follow the signs. The trail, an old mining road, begins in dense lowland thickets and climbs for about a mile to a promontory with bird's-eye views of the glacier to the west and Passage Canal to the east. It then descends half a mile to Divide Lake where a beaver dam occupies the lake's far edge and harlequin ducks may be seen diving for food. Intrepid hikers ready to hoof it another mile down to Portage Lake should veer left after Divide Lake. Veer right and the trail soon ends at the edge of a clear mountain stream. Look for mountain goats on nearby hillsides, listen for the marmot's whistle and enjoy the songs of yellow-rumped and Wilson's warbler, hermit and varied thrush and fox and golden-crowned sparrow. Black-legged kittiwakes and glaucous-winged gulls often travel back and forth between their Passage Canal colony and Portage Lake. During spring migration, many species of birds stream through Portage Pass crossing the coastal mountains into western Alaska. Listen for the unearthly cries of sandhill cranes among the migrating flocks. Due to the elevation gain, snows may persist on the trail into late spring or early summer.

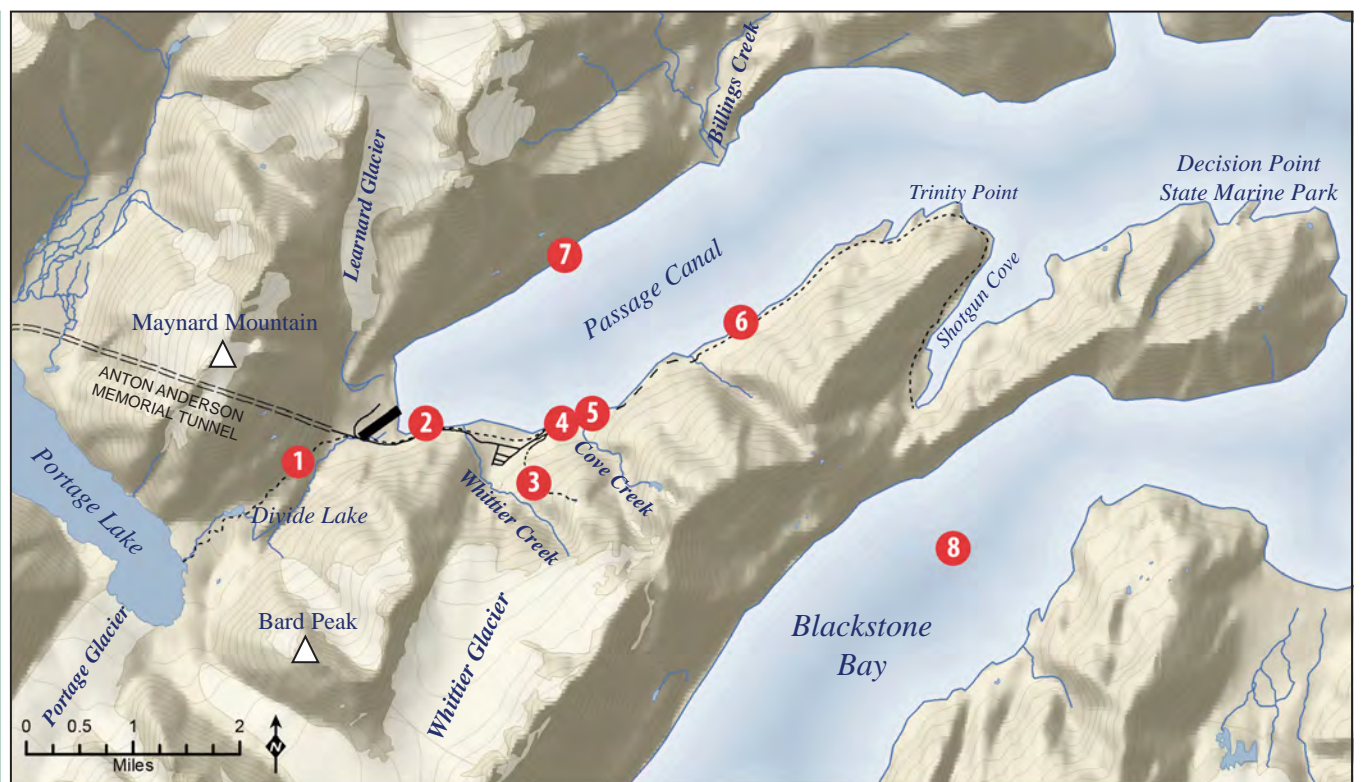
A **multi-use path 2** begins near the tunnel entrance, winds around the head of the bay and runs through town alongside the small boat harbor. Marine mammals, including harbor porpoises and killer and humpback whales, occasionally cruise up Passage Canal where depths dive dramatically from 35 feet to 600 feet. Humpbacks have been known to chase a ball of herring to the head of the bay in spring. Harbor seals and sea otters are commonly seen in the harbor. Black-legged kittiwakes, Arctic terns, red-necked phalaropes and sea ducks including scoters, harlequin and goldeneyes forage offshore. Glaucous-winged gulls and pigeon guillemots nest nearby. Across the railroad tracks, look for an eagle's large stick nest among the spruce trees above Whittier Creek. You can see the eagles nesting throughout the summer and watch the eaglets as they fledge in July. Rufous hummingbirds are a common sight in town. Chinook (king) and coho salmon smolts (100,000 of each) are reared in net pens off Cove Creek and released in the Whittier harbor in spring. Adult kings return from May through early July and coho come in late July through mid-September.

A small platform at the end of **Horsetail Falls Trail 3** offers tremendous views of Passage Canal, the Whittier harbor and a number of waterfalls (including Horsetail Falls) cascading off the surrounding mountainsides. To find the trailhead, follow Blackstone Road past the abandoned cement barracks (called the Buckner Building), veer right onto the gravel Shotgun Cove Road, then take the first right heading uphill on Cove Creek Road. Park at a yellow gate at the top of the hill and follow an old road bed which quickly turns into a boardwalk trail. A steady, approximately one mile climb through forest and across boggy meadows ends at an overlook at about the 700 foot elevation. Listen for the persistent song of the hermit thrush and other small forest birds. By mid to late summer, the abundant blueberry and salmonberry bushes will be ripening. Watch for black bears that may be foraging in berry patches.

The three-mile **Shotgun Cove Road 4** which begins just past the Buckner Building, has several turnouts where you can take in lovely views of glacier-studded mountains. About $\frac{3}{4}$



Portage Glacier from Portage Pass Trail



1. Portage Pass Trail 3 hrs-half day*

2. Multi Use Path 2 hrs

3. Horsetail Falls Trail 3 hrs

4. Shotgun Cove Road 1 hr

5. Lu Young Park 0.5 hr

6. Emerald Cove Trail half to full day

7. Seabird Colony half day

8. Blackstone Bay full day or more

———— paved road

- - - - gravel road

- - - - trail

Map is for locator reference only, not for navigational use.

Hiking Trails

Camping

Scenic Views

* Suggested time at location.

of a mile in, just before Cove Creek 2 Bridge, is **Lu Young Park 5**. This sheltered picnic area with trash cans and pit toilets is a tranquil spot with a small overlook above the creek. Pink salmon returning to spawn in late August and September attract bald eagles and the occasional black bear. From the park, look east about halfway up the hillside to see a bald eagle nest. Just beyond the park, a viewpoint at Mile 1 faces across Passage Canal to the kittiwake colony (you'll need a spotting scope to see the action though).

Emerald Cove Trail 6, approximately six miles round-trip, has relatively easy terrain and minimal elevation gain, however, you must forge two creeks to access the trail.

This crossing may be difficult or impassable if creeks are swollen! The trailhead begins just beyond the end of Shotgun Cove Road. Rubber boots are recommended as some sections are unimproved and can be quite muddy. Hugging the coastline, the trail offers excellent views and crosses open sedge meadows, spruce and hemlock rainforest and several streams. Blueberry and salmonberry patches are prolific. About a mile in, stone steps lead down to a secluded rocky beach. Look for sea ducks and listen for songbirds like chestnut-backed chickadees and fox sparrows and the belted kingfisher with its piercing rattle. Black bears may be browsing berry patches or foraging at salmon streams.

Many visitors arrive in Whittier only to leave immediately—aboard a boat. Options for exploring the marine waters of Prince William Sound include speedy catamarans that daily haul hundreds of passengers deep into glacier-studded fjords. Charter boat companies offer more varied and leisurely tours—some specializing in wildlife viewing and photography—that range from a half or full day to a week on the water. Kayak companies offer rentals and tours for a more intimate experience on the water. And finally, the state ferry

makes regular round-trip voyages to Valdez and Cordova. It would take several lifetimes to fully explore wildlife in the sound but a **seabird colony 7** just across Passage Canal from Whittier is a popular viewing spot that is fairly close to town. An estimated 8,000 black-legged kittiwakes and a few pigeon guillemots and glaucous-winged gulls nest on these dramatic cliffs bracketed by waterfalls. Bald eagles also nest in nearby trees and, like the gulls, often prey on seabird eggs, chicks and adults. For a close-up view of the colony, your best bet is a sightseeing cruise, charter boat tour or guided paddle.

Blackstone Bay 8 with its two tidewater and many hanging glaciers is another popular and relatively accessible fjord that's about an hour motor boat ride from Whittier. Look for rafts of sea otters, harbor seals hauled out on icebergs or popping their heads above water, and a kittiwake colony between Northland and Blackstone glaciers. Minke whales have an inconspicuous blow but are found in and near the mouth of the bay. Eagles perch in spruce and hemlock, black oystercatchers are known to nest near shore and enormous schools of fish draw frenzied flocks of gulls. You may see black bears grazing at tidewater or fishing at the mouths of salmon streams and mountain goats on surrounding slopes. As summer progresses, the goats climb higher following the snow melt and greening vegetation.

The sound boasts significant numbers of Kittlitz's murrelets, a small seabird that resembles the more common marbled murrelet but is often found along glaciated fjords near the

terminus of tidewater glaciers. Pigeon guillemots, harlequin ducks, large rafts of mixed white-winged and surf scoters, and common mergansers are commonly sighted. Some years spring migration is a birder's dream when great numbers of north-bound birds, including phalaropes, black brant, Pacific and common loons, and parasitic jaegers, are massing along the coastal mountains waiting for a break in the weather to cross to their nesting areas beyond.



Barnacles grow on a humpback's flukes.