



The Central Kenai Peninsula saltwater and freshwater fisheries

Saltwater fishing near Anchor
Point, Deep Creek, and
Whiskey Gulch

Fishing in the fresh waters of
Anchor River, Deep Creek,
Stariski Creek
and the Ninilchik River

Fishing in Kasilof River &
Crooked Creek



The Ninilchik River

Overview and management

The streams of the Central and Lower Kenai Peninsula are crossed by the Sterling Highway, which begins 90 miles south of Anchorage at its junction with the Seward Highway, and travels 142.5 miles west and south to the Kachemak Bay community of Homer. There are many services available along the Sterling Highway — motels, bed & breakfasts, restaurants, private and public camping, boat launches, and parking areas.

This area is a very popular sport fishing area. The creeks and rivers support runs of king, silver, red, and pink salmon; both freshwater and sea-run Dolly Varden char; and both freshwater rainbow trout and sea-run steelhead trout.

For opening dates, daily limits, regulations,
and special tackle restrictions, consult the
Southcentral Alaska regulation booklet.

Marine waters provide additional fishing opportunities for king and silver salmon as well as halibut.

The Division of Sport Fish office in Homer (907-235-8191) manages the saltwater and freshwater fisheries south of the Kasilof River. Visit their web site at www.sf.adfg.state.ak.us/Region2/areas/homer/hom-home.cfm. More information about the fisheries of the Homer area is also published in the Kenai Peninsula Recreational Fishing Series brochure “Kachemak Bay,” available on the web, or by request to ADF&G. The Homer office also manages the razor clamming on Kenai Peninsula beaches. Download the “Razor Clam” brochure, or request a copy from ADF&G.

The Division of Sport Fish office in Soldotna (907-262-9368) manages the Kasilof River. Visit their web site at www.sf.adfg.state.ak.us/Region2/areas/kenai/kenhome.cfm. The Soldotna office also manages the Kenai and Russian rivers. For more information, request the “Kenai River,” or “Russian River” brochures, or download them from the web.



Deep Creek marine boat launch

saltwaters of Anchor Point, Whiskey Gulch, and Deep Creek by late April. Anglers begin targeting early run kings in mid-April, and concentrate their fishing efforts in a corridor 1 mile from shore, from Anchor Point to Deep Creek. There are special regulations for this area, so please check the regulation booklet before going fishing.

The best fishing occurs during the later part of May, and success declines by mid-June, probably because forage fish -- eulachon and herring -- are no longer concentrated in nearshore locations. The feeder kings disperse, and the mature kings

move on toward their spawning streams.

The Division of Sport Fish manages fisheries for sustainability, often under management plans given to us by the Alaska Board of Fisheries. Regulations may change by Emergency Order if the sustainability of a stock is at risk, or if additional fishing opportunities are available.

The Division sends Emergency Orders to newspapers, radio and television stations, other agencies, telephone hotlines, and posts them right away on our web site under "Emergency Orders and News."

Anglers can also call the Anchorage Sport Fish Southcentral Region Information Center at (907) 267-2218, or e-mail to sfreg2@fishgame.state.ak.us. In season, the Division also maintains 24-hour hotline recordings at (907) 267-2502 (Anchorage), (907) 262-2737 (Soldotna) or (907) 235-6930 (Homer), or check our web pages at www.sf.adfg.state.ak.us.

Saltwater fisheries

King salmon

Early run king salmon are available in the nearshore

The late run kings arrive in late June, peak by mid-July, and are no longer available after late July or early August. Trolling is the best method to use while fishing for king salmon in these marine waters. Lures alone, or herring rigs alone, or some combination of lures and bait are used.

Anglers have greater success fishing the high tide, when the kings come close to shore. In fact, most of the kings are caught within 1/4-mile of shore.

The area also offers fishing for king salmon nicknamed "winter kings" or "feeder kings." These are king salmon that are not yet ready to return to their home streams to spawn. Feeder kings may stay in marine waters from one to six years to feed and grow. Since they are not returning to spawn, there is no "run" for these fish. Anglers often catch them by looking for schools of baitfish, then trolling under or around them.

Saltwater fishing for silver salmon

Silver salmon are also taken by trolling off the beaches of Deep Creek, Whiskey Gulch and the An-



These opportunities
funded in part by Federal
Aid in Sport Fish and
Wildlife Restoration.

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If you believe you have been discriminated against in any program, activity, or facility, or if you desire further information please write to ADF&G, P.O. Box 115526, Juneau, AK 99811-5526; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 4040 N. Fairfax Drive, Suite 300 Webb, Arlington, VA 22203; or O.E.O., U.S. Department of the Interior, Washington DC 20240.

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chor River. The technique is similar to that used when trolling for king salmon. For those anglers without a boat, silvers may also be caught by surf casting at high tide. Lures such as Tee-spoons® and Pixees® are commonly used.

Fish taken in these areas during the early run (mid-July through August) are bound for local streams, other streams in the Northern Cook Inlet area, as well as the Kenai and Kasilof rivers. Returning silver salmon, unlike king salmon, are predominately of one age class. Typically, silvers spend two years in fresh waters and one year in the ocean before returning to spawn.

Halibut

Halibut are usually found throughout lower Cook Inlet, but they do migrate in- and offshore, depending on the time of year. Fish are more readily found in Cook Inlet from April through September. They feed in relatively shallower nearshore waters of Cook Inlet in the spring and summer, and move back to the deep waters of the Gulf of Alaska in the fall. Visit our informative halibut web site at www.sf.adfg.state.ak.us/region2/groundfish/gfhome.cfm

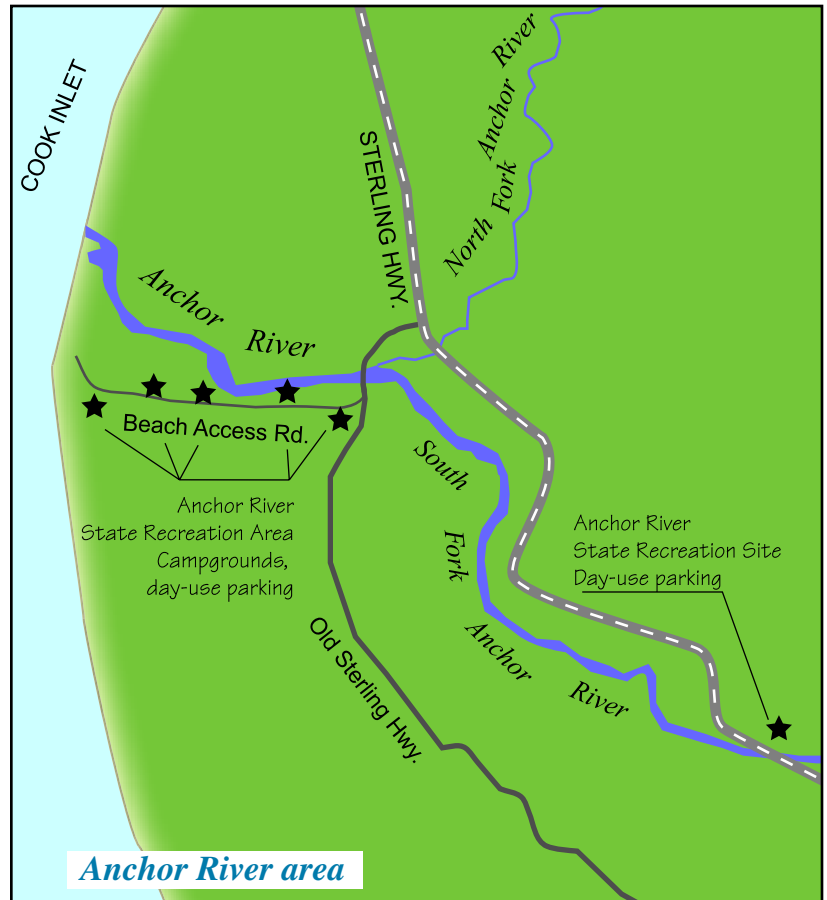
In early spring, anglers target halibut in those areas seasonally open to fishing near the beaches of Deep Creek, Anchor River and Whiskey Gulch. Check the regulation booklet for opening dates.

Herring is the most popular halibut bait, and various jigs also work well. Some halibut can weigh up to several hundred pounds, so use a stout rod with line testing at 60 to 100 pounds. The amount of weight required to hold the bait on the bottom is usually 12 to 32 oz., depending on depth and speed of the current. To avoid using heavy weights, many anglers fish only during slack tide. Drifting is popular, but anchoring is often more effective. Holding the bait in one spot distributes a scent pattern down current that attracts fish.

For tide information, local Chamber of Commerce of visitor's center web sites often post local tides, or visit the National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administrations' Alaska tides website at <http://tidesonline.nos.noaa.gov>

Look out for commercial fishing boats!

Cook Inlet supports a busy commercial fishery. Sport anglers should be alert for commercial salmon drift gillnetters throughout the course of the summer. You must



move out of the path of the commercial boat. The law requires that there be no interference with commercial gear.

Drift gillnet boats are not very maneuverable and their reaction time is slow, especially when their nets are in the water. A fishing net may engulf and sink an anchored or slower drifting boat before either has time to fully react.

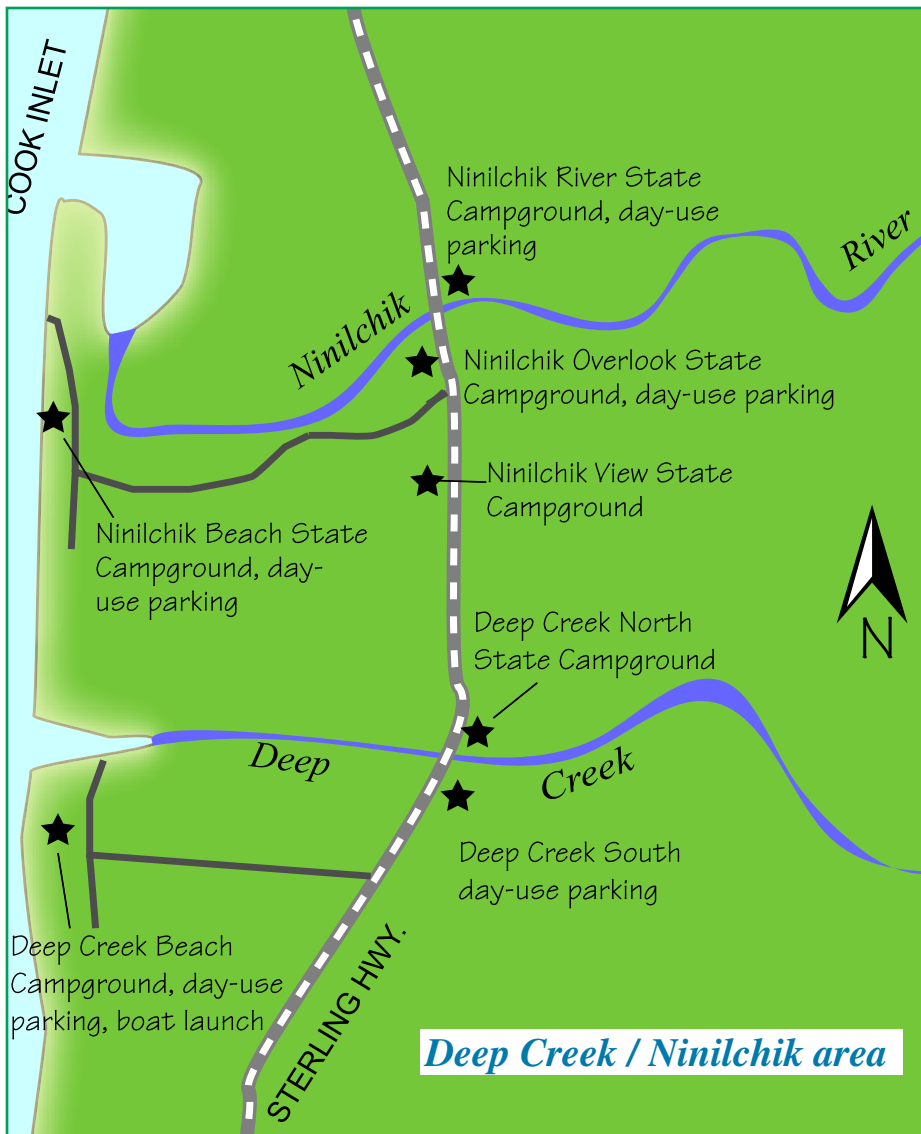
Commercial openings are recorded at (907) 262-9611 (Soldotna), and posted at www.cf.adfg.state.ak.us/region2/finfish/salmon/salmhom2.php#announcement

Central Kenai Peninsula freshwater fishing

King salmon

Most Kenai Peninsula king salmon spend one year in fresh water, then migrate to sea when they are about 4" long. The length of time in salt water, how much food they find, and the genetic composition of the fish interplay to determine their final size.

Some kings return after only one year in salt water. These fish weigh only a few pounds and are almost



number of flashy spoons or spinners will induce a king salmon to strike.

Expect to find crowded conditions in these areas, with the best fishing early in the morning.

The best fishing conditions on the Ninilchik River usually start Memorial Day weekend, and the following weekend on the Anchor River and Deep Creek.

Kasilof River kings

This river supports both an early and late king salmon return.

The early run is heading back to Crooked Creek, which crosses the Sterling Highway about one mile past the Sterling Highway bridge over the Kasilof River. Crooked Creek itself is closed to fishing for king salmon, including catch-and-release, so most early run king fishing occurs in the Kasilof River at its confluence with Crooked Creek. Special regulations apply, so please read the regulation booklet before going fishing.

Most anglers head for the Department of Natural Resources' Crooked Creek Campground off Cohoe Loop Road, Mile 111 of the Sterling Highway.

always fertile males. Others return after two years and weigh 10-20 pounds. Most of these, too, are male. The majority of Southcentral kings return after three and four years at sea, and weigh 25-60 pounds.

King salmon of the same age will also vary in size from stream to stream, perhaps due to genetics. A "four-ocean" fish in lower Peninsula streams will rarely grow to (and only a few exceed) 40 pounds.

Anchor River, Deep Creek, and Ninilchik River kings

These three very popular streams share the honor for the oldest and most traditional recreational king salmon fisheries on the Kenai Peninsula. Since the streams are so narrow, fishing occurs from the banks. Many anglers prefer a medium to heavy action fly rod, using either flies, lures such as Spin-N-Glos®, or salmon eggs (when legal) as the preferred terminal tackle.

Other anglers choose a spinning rod, since any

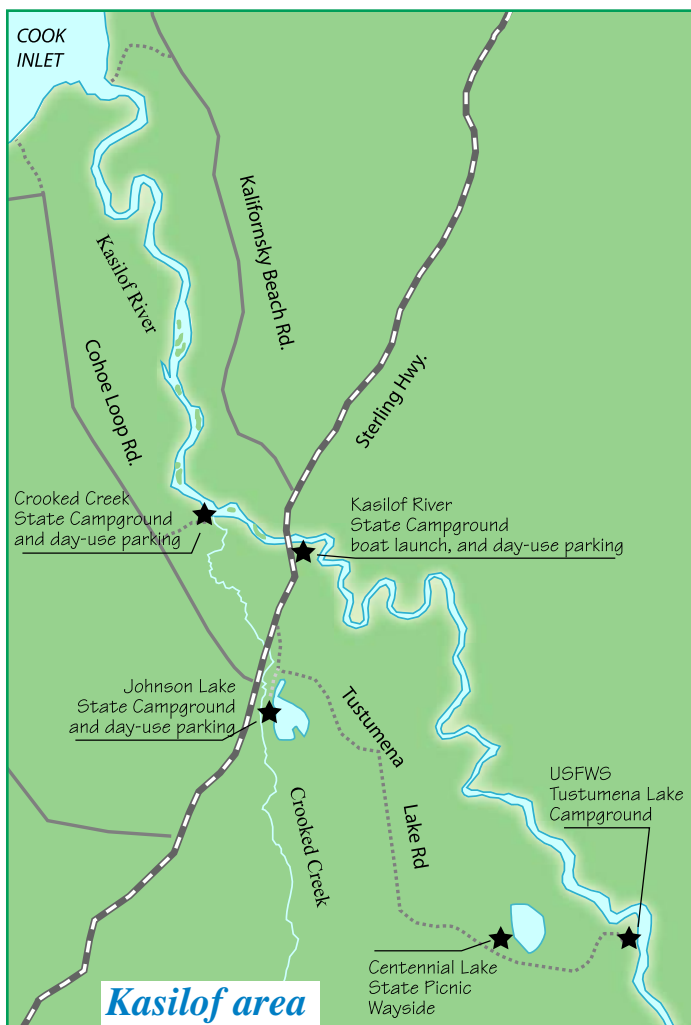
Expect crowded conditions: on those years when large numbers of fish return, Kasilof River anglers have made an average of over 34,000 trips to catch about 7,000 king salmon. Please exercise patience and courtesy.

The first king salmon of the season are usually caught in mid-May; the peak of the early run occurs in mid-June, and the run is done by the first week of July. Tackle is your choice: both fly and spinning rods are used.

Late run king salmon usually enter the river about July 1, and most fish have completed their migration by the time the season closes on July 31. These fish spawn in the mainstem Kasilof River (unlike the early run entering Crooked Creek).

Silver salmon

Returning silver salmon, unlike king salmon, are usually the same age (same age class). Typically, silvers spend two years in freshwater and one year in the ocean before



returning to spawn.

Silvers in the Anchor River, Deep Creek, and the Ninilchik River

Silver salmon begin to enter these fresh waters in late July, with the runs continuing through mid-September.

Silvers readily strike lures, wet flies, or bait (when legal). Best fishing is usually in early morning.

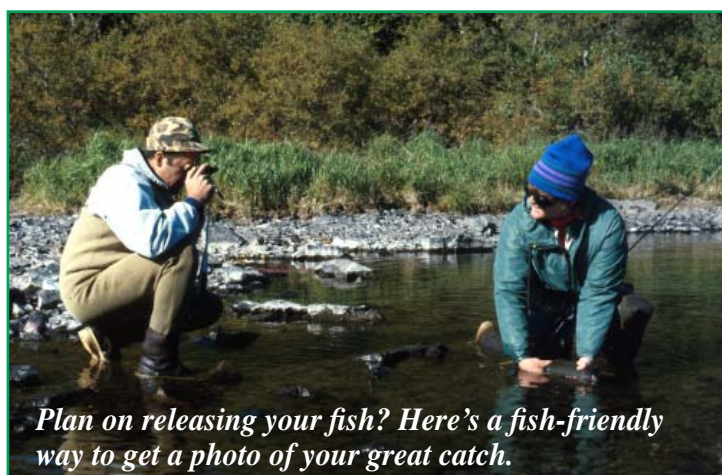
Kasilof River and Crooked Creek silvers

These streams support earlier silver salmon returns. Fish of Kasilof River origin spawn in streams tributary to Tustumena Lake. The first fish are usually caught in late July or early August at the confluence of Crooked Creek and the Kasilof River. The run here peaks in mid-August and is generally complete by early September.

Since the Kasilof is glacial and silty, many anglers choose salmon egg clusters, but silvers may also be taken with wet flies and assorted spoons and spinners.

Freshwater Red Salmon

As a general rule, red (sockeye) salmon spawn only in those river systems that have lakes, which rules out the Anchor River, Deep Creek, and Ninilchik River, leaving only the Kasilof River. Red salmon usually spawn in the

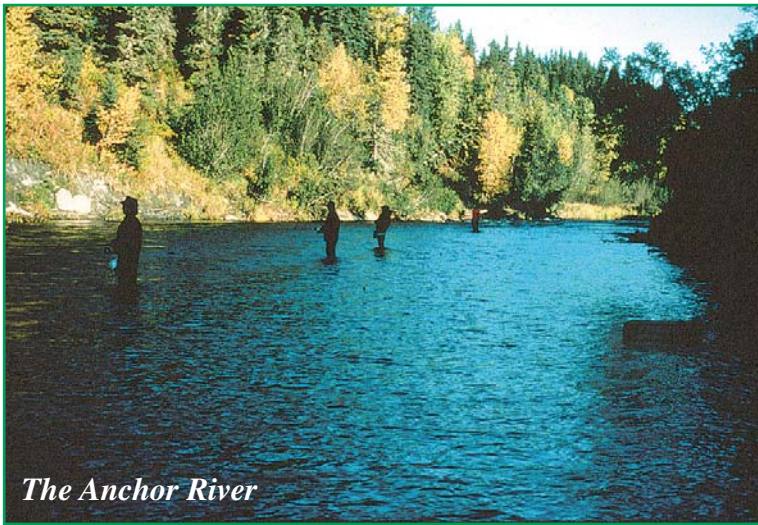


Catch and Release

Snagging or trying to snag a fish is illegal in all fresh waters of Alaska. Also, in some Alaskan fisheries, if you plan to release a fish, you may not remove it from the water, even to take a photo. In these fisheries, once you remove a fish from the water, it's counted as your harvest. Check the regulations carefully before going fishing.

At one time or another, almost everyone accidentally foul-hooks or "snags" a fish. The fish must be released immediately, and if released correctly, will suffer little permanent injury and will spawn successfully. Here are some suggestions that minimize harm to fish:

1. Land the fish as quickly as possible. Playing the fish to complete exhaustion takes away the energy it needs for spawning. Do not remove the fish from the water
2. Never place anything --hands, fingers, hooks -- under the fish's gill covers. This injures fragile gill arches and causes almost certain death.
3. Gently grasp the fish around its body to remove the hook. A long-nosed pliers is excellent for this task.
4. Don't wet your hands: it makes the fish more difficult to handle.
5. If the hook cannot be easily removed, cut the line as close as possible to the fly, and leave it in the fish. Do this if it appears that removing the hook will cause more damage than leaving it in.
6. Immediately return the fish to the water and point it upstream. Gently cradle it in this position until it swims on its own.



Be kind to the fish!

River banks are crucial to the long term health of your fisheries. Trampled banks are a certain way to reduce the fish population!

Vegetation slows runoff and erosion, provides cover for juvenile fish, cools the water, and slows the current. Do your part to preserve your rivers for generations to come.

- ❖ Do not cut brush or trees within 10 feet of waterline.
- ❖ Use established trails to reach the river, and established entry and exit points.
- ❖ Stand in the river, away from fragile vegetation.
- ❖ Pack out what you pack in, including discarded fishing line and tackle.
- ❖ Respect and abide by signs that close certain critical areas to bank fishing.

stream, grow to smolt size in a lake, and then migrate to sea where they remain for 2 to 3 years before returning to their parent stream to spawn and die.

The Kasilof River supports a major return of red salmon, often numbering in the hundreds of thousands. These fish enter the river in late June, peak in mid-July, and are complete by early August.

The Alaska Board of Fisheries has allocated red salmon to commercial fisherman, and the management to the Division of Commercial Fisheries. The Division operates a sonar project just above the Sterling Highway bridge on the Kasilof, and sport anglers can find daily sonar estimates on their web site at <http://csfish.adfg.state.ak.us/mariner/uci/uciesc.php>

Because of the silty water, the sport harvest is usually fewer than 5,000 fish. Anglers have found that streamer flies or egg clusters will sometimes induce these fish to strike. Again, most anglers fish the Kasilof from State Park's Crooked Creek Campground.

Rainbow / Steelhead Trout

On the Anchor River, Deep Creek, Ninilchik River, and on the Kasilof River downstream of the Sterling Highway bridge:

RAINBOW/STEELHEAD TROUT MAY NOT BE REMOVED FROM THE WATER AND MUST BE RELEASED IMMEDIATELY

Many steelhead and rainbow trout anglers adopted a voluntary catch-and-release program even before catch-and-release became mandatory. In 1978, a creel census conducted by ADF&G revealed that 65% of the steelhead landed were retained, but by 1988, the retention rate had declined to about 25%.

Steelhead are rainbow trout that migrate to sea (anadromous). Like Pacific salmon, steelhead spawn and rear in fresh waters. They migrate to sea for a variable number of years before returning to fresh water to spawn. Unlike Pacific salmon, however, steelhead may not die after spawning.

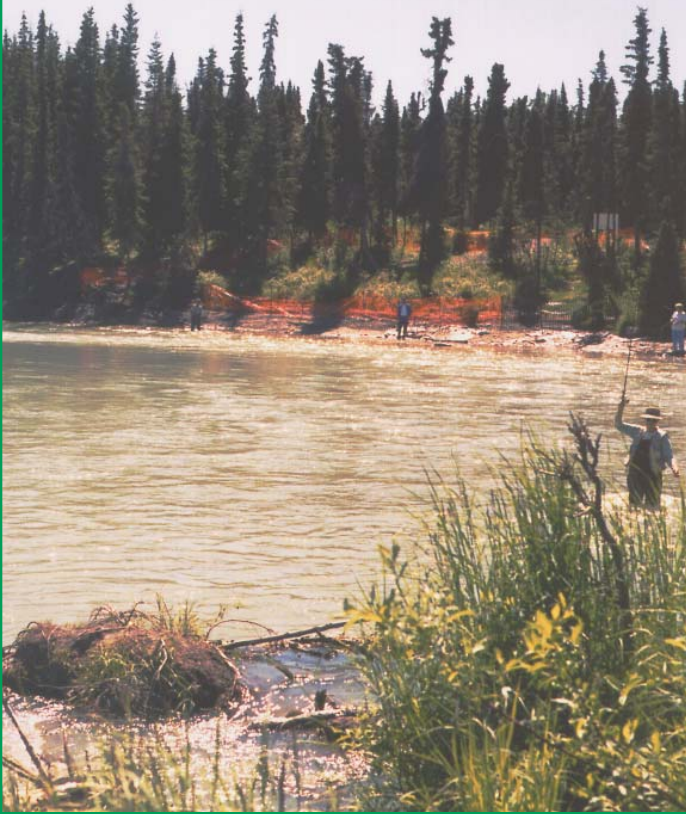
Steelhead trout in Central Peninsula streams are at or near the northern limit of their natural range. Young steelhead trout cannot be distinguished from resident rainbow trout (those that do not migrate to saltwater and back), and both are present whenever the lower Kenai Peninsula streams are open to fishing.

To protect spawning fish, the Anchor River, Deep Creek and Ninilchik River are closed to all fishing during the spring in-migration of this species. Out-migrating rainbow/steelhead, however, may be available in early June.

The fall steelhead in-migration is the one most anglers fish, beginning in early August on the Anchor River, with the peak of the run occurring in mid- to late September.

Although the whole lengths of the Anchor River, Deep Creek, and Ninilchik River are open during the fall

The Kasilof River at the Crooked Creek confluence, during spring high water.



steelhead run, the most productive fishing is in the lower reaches of the rivers. Most anglers use a fly rod and a variety of wet & dry patterns. Spinners are also used. Best fishing is usually in the morning, but fish may be taken throughout the day.

Kasilof River and Crooked Creek rainbow/steelhead trout

Crooked Creek once had a very small native steelhead run, but it did not support a viable fishery. To increase the numbers of steelhead returning, and to create additional fishing opportunities, over 15 years ago, ADF&G began a steelhead stocking program here.

However, Crooked Creek steelhead from this stocking program strayed into the Kenai River. Some of these tagged steelhead were caught by anglers at the outlet of Skilak Lake, a known Kenai River rainbow trout spawning area.

This was undesirable, as hatchery steelhead could spawn with wild rainbow trout and thus alter the gene pool, which is against ADF&G statutory mandate. Young steelhead in the Kenai River could also compete with young silver and king salmon for food and space, thus negatively impacting the sustainability of the wild stocks.

Because of these risks, the Crooked Creek steelhead stocking program was discontinued in 1992. The last large return of stocked fish was over 10 years ago, and the now small fishery is supported by the progeny of steelhead which spawn naturally in Crooked Creek.

Kasilof River/Crooked Creek rainbow/steelhead trout may be available in April and May, and then again in August. These streams have special regulations, including special open seasons and tackle restrictions, so please check the regulation booklet carefully before fishing.

Dolly Varden

To protect this resource while still providing fishing opportunities, daily limits for Dollies are restrictive in the Anchor River, Deep Creek, Stariski Creek, and Ninilchik River.

Southern Peninsula streams support both fresh water and sea-run Dolly Varden, with the anadromous population the most numerous. These fish begin to enter fresh water in early July and continue to enter the streams through October.

Dolly Varden may be caught with lures, flies, or bait, when bait is allowed. Check regulations closely since streams have special opening and closing dates and tackle restrictions.

Access, accommodations, services, camping, and charter operators

Many uplands (above the ordinary high water mark) are private property. Please get permission from private landowners before accessing their lands in any way, including getting in and out of rivers to fish. Please respect private property as if it were your own.

The Sterling Highway crosses the **Kasilof River** at Mile 109.5, about 15 miles south of Soldotna. There's a state-operated wayside just south of the bridge, with boat launching, day-use parking, limited picnic facilities.

The Alaska Department of Natural Resources - State Parks operates the **Crooked Creek** Campground off Coho Loop Road, which intersects the Sterling Hwy. at Mile 111. The turnoff to the campground is 1.8 miles up Coho Lp. Rd. The Crooked Creek campground offers 80 campsites and 36 day-use parking sites.

Crooked Creek crosses under the Sterling Hwy. at Mile 110.8. There's a paved pullout.

The Kasilof is a swift, glacial river that is very rocky

and shallow in places. Shore anglers have good success, although some anglers fish from drift boats or even from river boats with jet units. Special boating restrictions apply, so please check the regulation booklet.

On Memorial Day weekend, which is the traditional opening for king salmon fishing, Ninilchik has been called the “Third Biggest City in Alaska.” To access the **Ninilchik Beach**, there’s a DNR-State Parks facility at Sterling Hwy. Mile 135, with day-use parking, camping and a foot trail to the river.

Another state campground to access the upstream area of the **Ninilchik River** is located at Sterling Hwy Mile 134.5 A little further down the road, DNR-State Parks operates a small campground called Ninilchik View, at Mile 135.7. A stairway leads down the bluff to the beach.

The DNR-State Parks **Deep Creek** State Recreation Site is at Mile 137.3 of the Sterling Hwy. There is public parking and river access at the Deep Creek North Scenic Overlook at Mile 137.

The Deep Creek area also hosts bald eagles and moose year-round, and sandhill cranes and other shorebirds in May. Whales, seals, and otters are sometimes seen offshore.

The **Stariski Creek** bridge is at Mile 150.9, but land in this area is all privately-owned. There’s a DNR-State Parks facility at Mile 151.9, with 9 campsites.

Whiskey Gulch at Mile 154.8 has public access but no boat ramp. Anglers fishing Whiskey Gulch usually launch at the mouth of Anchor River.

The DNR-State Parks’ **Anchor River State Recreation Area** has over 160 camp sites, at Mile 157 of the Sterling Hwy.

Visitor information about the **Anchor River** area is in the old log cabin just off the Sterling Hwy. at Mile 156.7 The Anchor River beach road turnoff is at Mile 156.9. Steelhead/trout anglers often take the North Fork Road, at Mile 164.3

Visitors to the Anchor River can also find abundant bald eagles, ducks, harbor seals, sea otters, and the occasional beluga whale. Anchor Point, where the Anchor River State Recreation Area is located, is the most westerly point on the U.S. Highway system.

Mile 168.3 is the site of the DNR- State Parks’ South District Office, with visitor information.

When in doubt about land ownership, check with DNR-State Parks or with the Kenai Peninsula Borough before accessing fishing areas. The borough can be reached in Soldotna at (907) 262-4441, or on the web at www.borough.kenai.ak.us/

For more information about **public** campgrounds and day use areas, contact

State of Alaska
Department of Natural Resources
Division of Parks and Recreation
P.O. Box 1247
Soldotna, AK 99669,
(907) 262-5581
www.dnr.state.ak.us/parks

For information about private campgrounds, accommodations, and fishing charters, contact:

Anchor Point Chamber of Commerce
P.O. Box 610
Anchor Point, AK 99556
(907) 235-2600

Homer Chamber of Commerce
P.O. Box 541
Homer, AK 99603
(907) 235-7740
[website: homer.alaska.org](http://website.homer.alaska.org)

Ninilchik Chamber of Commerce
P.O. Box 164
Ninilchik, AK 99639
(907) 567-3571

For information about camping, accommodations, fishing guides, and other visitor services, contact the agencies listed in this publication, or the Alaska Travel Industry Association at 2600 Cordova Street, Suite 201, Anchorage, Alaska, 99503
web: www.travelalaska.com email: info@AlaskaTIA.org



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www.state.ak.us/adfg Click on Sport Fish, then Southcentral Region

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