



Fishing on the Lower Kenai Peninsula Roadside Streams

Chinook and coho salmon, Dolly Varden, and steelhead fishing in the Anchor and Ninilchik rivers, and Deep and Stariski creeks.



The roadside streams on the lower Kenai Peninsula provide a diversity of sport fishing opportunities from May through October that are unique to any other fishing experience in Alaska. These streams are not crowded in comparison to other places on the Kenai Peninsula where you might experience “combat fishing.” They are easily accessed, small, and almost always wadable. They are ideal streams for new anglers to learn to fish for salmon and Dolly Varden, as well as challenge experienced anglers with large king salmon and steelhead. These streams drain directly into Cook Inlet and provide anglers a chance to catch king salmon, coho salmon, Dolly Varden, and steelhead as these anadromous fish are first entering freshwater. Small runs of pink salmon are also found most years in these streams. When fishing these streams, most anglers wear chest waders or hip boots to allow them to stand in the water to fish or walk within the stream to different fishing locations.

Lower Kenai Peninsula Streams Access

The lower Kenai Peninsula roadside streams include all streams from the community of Ninilchik south to Anchor Point. These roadside streams include the Anchor River, Stariski Creek, Deep Creek, and Ninilchik River. These are small, productive systems that are non-glacial

and without large lakes. The Sterling Highway intersects each one of them, which provides anglers with plenty of road accessible sport fishing opportunities. The lower sections of these streams are open to salmon fishing during regulatory openings, while the upper sections do not open until August 1 and are always closed to salmon fishing and the use of bait. Please review the current Southcentral Alaska Sport Fishing Regulations Summary booklet for regulations. Don't forget to check for advisory announcements and emergency orders on the ADF&G website at www.adfg.alaska.gov.



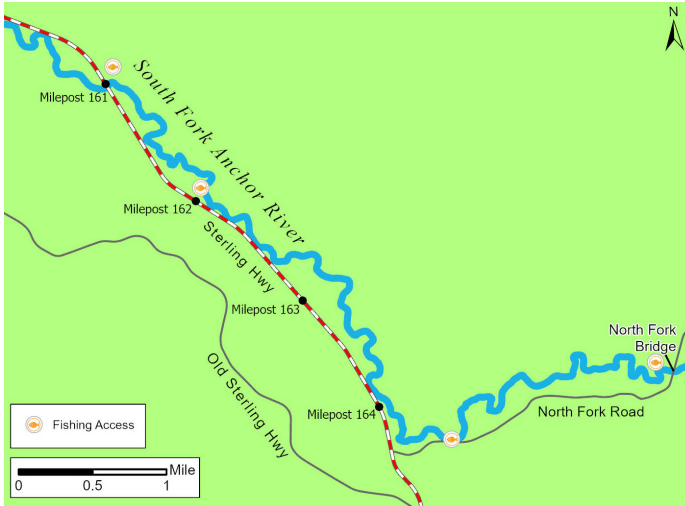
Anchor River

Lower Section (downstream of the North and South forks confluence near the Old Sterling Highway bridge): The lower Anchor River is accessed from the community of Anchor Point and has the most improved public access with Alaska State Parks campgrounds, day use facilities, and worn angler trails along the stream. Anglers also can drive a 4-wheel drive vehicle or ATV along the beach to access the tidal section and the mouth of the Anchor River. There are a number of good fishing locations accessible from each of the campgrounds.

Upper Section: The upper section of the Anchor River consists of the smaller, North and South forks, which



is the most accessible upper section of the lower Kenai Peninsula roadside streams. The furthest downstream access point for both forks is the trail that begins at the Old Sterling Highway bridge in Anchor Point and leads to the confluence and the weir site on the South Fork. The North Fork of the Anchor River can also be reached from the Sterling Highway bridge and the bridge .5 miles down the north end of the North Fork Road. Be courteous of private property in this section.



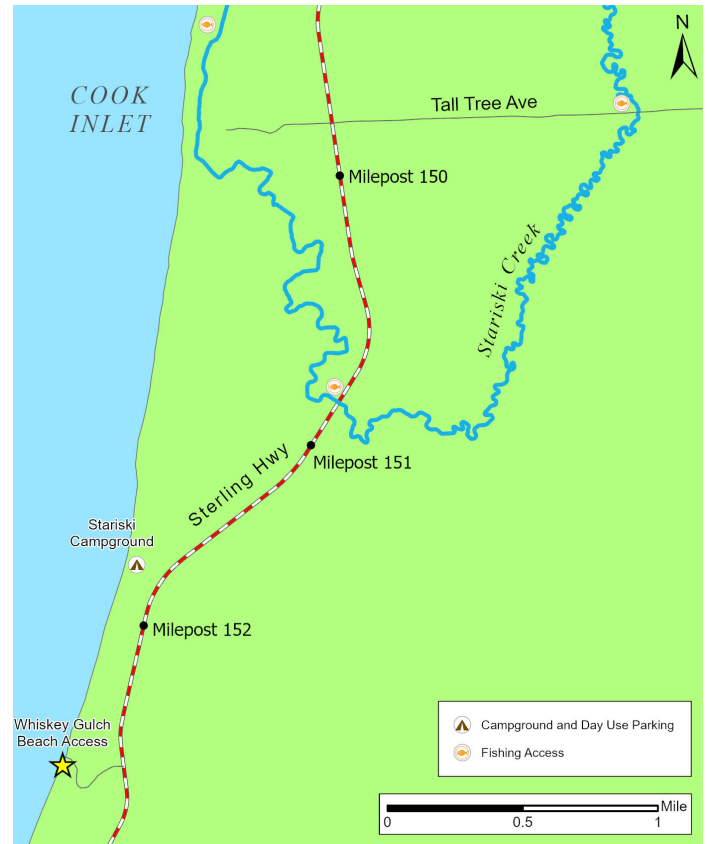
The next access point on the South Fork is at “the powerlines” near mile post 159 of the Sterling Highway. It requires a steep walk down to the river from the parking area on an unmaintained and often muddy trail. Continuing upstream on the South Fork, or south towards Homer, there are numerous pullouts between mile post 160 and 162 of the Sterling Highway where the highway crosses or nears the South Fork Anchor River. Anglers can access the South Fork of the river off the south end of the North Fork Road too. There are two pullouts on the left prior to reaching the bridge approximately 2.5 miles down the road.



Stariski Creek

Lower Section (downstream of the Sterling Highway Bridge): Lower Stariski Creek can be accessed from the

parking area at the Sterling Highway bridge. This section can be difficult to fish and anglers are primarily confined to walk along the stream to access fishing locations because there are no angler trails. The lagoon area at the mouth of Stariski Creek is more easily accessed by traveling north on the beach from the Whiskey Gulch access point. Given the steepness of the beach there, this is best done with an ATV. Pay close attention to the height of the tide as well - on really large high tides, access back to the Whiskey Gulch parking area may not be possible. There is also an Alaska State Parks campground on the the Sterling Highway near mile post 152.

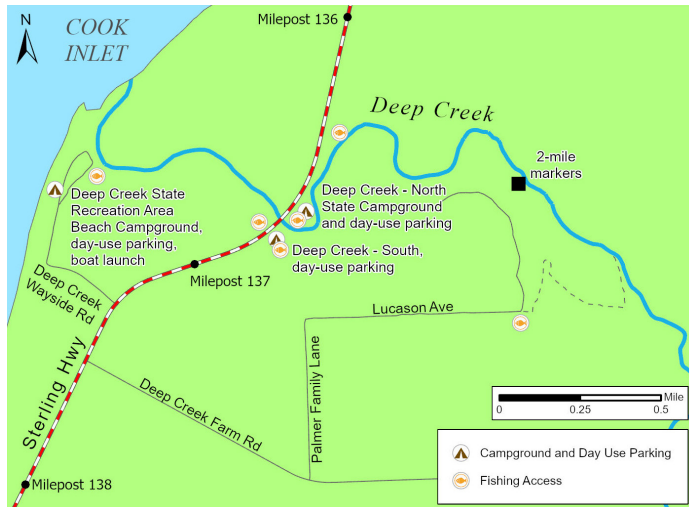


Upper Section: The upper section of Stariski Creek can be accessed from the Sterling Highway bridge or from Tall Tree Avenue. Drive south on the Sterling Highway, Tall Tree Avenue is on the left between mile post 149 and 150. The bridge is approximately one mile down Tall Tree.



Deep Creek

Lower Section (downstream of markers located approximately one mile upstream of the Sterling Highway bridge): The lower section of Deep Creek is best accessed from the Alaska State Parks day-use parking areas on the north and south sides of the Sterling Highway bridge. From there, anglers can walk upstream to a number of fishing locations until they reach the two mile markers. There's also a popular parking area on the ocean side of the highway just south of the Sterling Highway bridge where anglers can walk downstream. Access to the Deep Creek mouth is also available from the Alaska State Parks Deep Creek Beach Campground.



Upper Section: Many anglers access the upper section of Deep Creek by walking upstream from the Sterling Highway access. There is also public access from a parcel of land ADF&G purchased in 2020. It can be found by turning left (while driving south on the Sterling Highway) onto Deep Creek Road. After approximately one mile, turn left onto Palmer Family Lane. Follow that road to the top of the hill and turn right at the top. Follow that road down the hill to the parking area straight ahead under the powerlines. A 4-wheeler path begins there that is approximately 2/3 of a mile to the river. The path meets the river approximately 1/3 of a mile upstream of the two mile markers. Anglers can walk downstream to access the lower section or continue upstream for miles. Upstream of this access location is mostly surrounded by private property.



Ninilchik River

Lower Section (downstream of markers located approximately 300 yards upstream of Garrison Ridge Road bridge): The lower Ninilchik River can be accessed from the Alaska State Parks Ninilchik River day-use area, a handful of pullouts on Mission Avenue downstream of the Sterling Highway bridge, and from Garrison Ridge Road. Please be mindful of private property at the Garrison Ridge Road access location. There is a rough angler trail that follows the stream from Garrison Ridge Road to the Sterling Highway bridge. The mouth of the Ninilchik and the Ninilchik harbor are also accessible to fishing from Beach Access Road at the Sterling Highway Bridge. There are several Alaska State Parks campgrounds in the area as well.



Upper Section: The upper Ninilchik can be accessed by walking upstream from the Garrison Ridge Road bridge, or from the Brody Road bridge. Garrison Ridge Road is 0.5 miles east on Oil Well Road on the left and Brody Road is three miles east on Oil Well Road on the left. There is very little public land in this section and walking through the stream can be difficult.

Trip Planning

There are a handful of things to consider when planning a trip to these streams, including: the regulations (which streams are open and what gear is allowed), which species are in season, the water levels, the tides, and the weather forecast. Some resources to help with planning are listed below, or don't hesitate to reach out to the Homer ADF&G office to ask for recommendations.

The regulations for the streams can be found in the Kenai Peninsula Fresh Water section of the annually published Southcentral Alaska Sport Fishing Regulations Summary booklet.

Emergency orders for these streams can be found under the Southern Kenai Peninsula section of the Emergency Orders and Press Releases page on the ADF&G webpage at www.adfg.alaska.gov/sf/EONR/index.cfm?ADFG=area.list&Year=2020&AreaID=8.



The sport fishing opportunities in streams from the Ninilchik River south to Homer are managed by the Division of Sport Fish in the Homer office. More information about fishing opportunities in the area and the research conducted by Sport Fish in these streams can be found at www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=ByAreaSouthcentralLowerCookInlet.main.

The salmon and Dolly Varden counts from the weirs on the Anchor River and Ninilchik River can be found at www.adfg.alaska.gov/sf/FishCounts/.

There are hydrographs online for the Anchor and Ninilchik rivers. It helps to check those before going fishing. The hydrographs are particularly useful in the fall when rains can commonly cause minor flooding.

King and Coho Salmon Fishing in the Anchor River, Deep Creek, Ninilchik River, and Stariski Creek.

Chinook Salmon

Chinook or king salmon are a world-famous sport fish for a good reason - they're a challenge and a thrill to catch,



and delicious to eat. Landing a large, ocean fresh king salmon out of one of these small streams on the Kenai Peninsula is a unique experience that will thrill new and experienced anglers. The king salmon that return to these streams spend one year rearing in freshwater and between one and four years in the ocean. Most are 10 to 30 pounds.



Those that return after one year are called “jacks” and typically weigh just a few pounds. Both hatchery and wild Chinook salmon return to the Ninilchik River. Hatchery king salmon are distinguishable from wild because they're missing their adipose fin. The Anchor River has the largest king salmon run of the three streams - escapement, which has ranged from 2,500 to 12,000 fish, has been monitored annually with a weir since 2003.

When to Catch Them

The Anchor River, Deep Creek, and Ninilchik River all provide Chinook salmon fishing opportunity in the spring. Stariski Creek is closed to king salmon fishing. Typically, the Anchor River opens up first, beginning the weekend before Memorial Day and stretching five more weekends and Wednesdays into mid-June. Both Ninilchik River and Deep Creek are open for three three-day weekends beginning Memorial Day weekend. The Ninilchik River re-opens on June 16 continuously for hatchery Chinook salmon only and also hosts a youth only fishery on the second Wednesday after Memorial Day.

Run timing can be variable from year to year but the best fishing typically occurs in early June. The water conditions in these streams may not be conducive to catching king salmon during the early part of the season due to snow melt



causing high and muddy conditions. Fishing will improve as water conditions improve. Fishing is typically best around daybreak, but can also be good on the incoming or ebbing tide, particularly near the mouth. Based on video weir escapement monitoring, Chinook salmon in these streams are most active between midnight and 4 a.m. Many anglers also have success fishing at midnight on the Saturday morning openers.

How to Catch Them

Rod n' Reel

Spin, bait casting, and fly rods are all used to effectively target king salmon on these streams. A medium to medium-heavy action rod with a mid-sized spinning or bait casting reel lined with at least 100 yards of 20 lb. or greater braid or monofilament is a typical setup. An 8wt fly rod is a good place to start for fly anglers.

Tackle

Roe - When bait is allowed, cured salmon roe suspended under a bobber is the most popular setup. Slip bobbers are popular for quick and easy adjustment of the bait so it's suspended just off the bottom. Eggs can be secured to the hook with an egg loop knot.



A typical setup would use a 4/0 or 5/0 hook with an egg loop knot and a cluster of salmon roe about the size of a silver dollar. The amount of split shot should vary based on water depth and speed (more for deeper, less for shallower and slower), but two size 4 split shot about 12 to 18 inches above the egg loop is a good place to start - adjust as needed to make sure your bait is near the bottom. The leader should be about 24 inches long and can be attached to the main line with a barrel swivel. A 1/4 to

1/2 ounce slip bobber is a good match for this amount of bait and split shot. This setup also needs a bobber stop on the main line above the bobber. The barrel swivel between the main line and the leader can work as the bobber stop for the bottom - a bead between the two will help protect the bobber from cracking on the swivel. Remember, there are lots of variations on this type of setup.

Herring - Anglers are also successful with dead-drifting or swinging troll-sized herring. For more spin to entice a bite, the herring could be plug-cut or rigged up in plastic bait holder. It's important to use plenty of weight to ensure the herring is close to the bottom. The use of a bobber can help to maintain keeping the herring close to the bottom but may hinder the presentation when swinging.



Flies - Swinging and dead drifting chartreuse or pink flies can be very effective. Heavily weighted wooly buggers, bunny leaches, and marabou streamers all will work. Think big, in your face, and close to the bottom to get a strike.

Other Tackle - When gear is limited to single-hook artificial lures, the most effective tackle color is typically hot pink or chartreuse. Try a spinner in size 3, 4, or 5. Smaller sizes work best when the water is low and clear. Plugs, marabou jigs, and corkie and yarn are also great tools to have in your tackle box.

Where to Catch Them

Chinook salmon like to hold in deep pools and always hug the bottom of the river. Look for slower moving water after a fast section, and make sure your bait or tackle is bumping along the bottom. Try fishing the seams of current throughout the pool.





Coho Salmon

Coho or silver salmon are notoriously fun fish to fight, but their finicky bite can make them a real challenge. Most coho salmon in these streams spend two years rearing in freshwater and one year feeding in the ocean. They range from about 4 to 12 lbs. Coho salmon escapement has been monitored intermittently on the Anchor River since the late 1980s - escapements have ranged from about 2,000 to 20,000 fish.



When to Catch Them

The streams are open seven days a week when coho salmon begin to return in early August. The runs typically peak in late August. Coho salmon are best fished for at daybreak, but anglers also have good success fishing the flooding or ebbing tides near the mouth, and fishing in the evening. A high tide just before daybreak in August could result in exceptional early morning fishing. Fishing the streams as the water level begins to rise, but before they're blown out and un-fishable, can also be spectacular. Most anglers target coho salmon in August, when bait is allowed, although fresh coho salmon are still entering these streams through early September.

How to Catch Them

Rod n' Reel

Rod and reel setups similar to those used for king salmon will work well. Sizing down the rod, reel, and line is an option. A medium-light action rod and no less than 12 lb. test line will work. A 6 or 7wt fly rod would suffice, but the larger king-sized rods will work too.

Tackle

Almost everything that works for Chinook salmon will work for coho, but it's best to size it all down a little bit. Bait is allowed in the lower sections of the streams in August, and is not allowed in September or October.

Roe - Drifting cured salmon eggs under a slip bobber is a popular and effective method. The glob of eggs should be smaller than clusters used for Chinook salmon and about the diameter of a quarter. Sometimes for really picky bites, a really small piece of bait is all that you need. A ¼ ounce or smaller slip bobber is a good fit.

Other Tackle - Similar to king salmon, herring will also work for coho salmon. Spinners can be very effective as they seem to entice some aggressive bites from otherwise reluctant fish. Be sure you aren't using tackle that's too large. A size 5 spinner or swinging a huge fly will just scare fish away if the stream is low and clear.

Where to Catch Them

Coho salmon hold in similar places as king salmon and are usually brushing the river bottom as well. Often they will sit in shallower water, particularly the tailouts of the deeper pools. Fishing the mouths of these streams, including the lagoon waters of Stariski Creek near its mouth, can be a great choice on the incoming or outgoing tide. Remember, only the lower two miles of the streams are open to salmon fishing.





Steelhead Trout

These notoriously hard-to-catch fish are an adrenaline rush for experienced and novice anglers alike. Steelhead enter these streams in the fall, spend the winter in the river, and spawn in the spring. Unlike salmon, they can live after they spawn and return to the stream to spawn up to four times total. Steelhead that are returning to spawn for their first time are typically 20 to 25 inches long, while steelhead that are on their third or fourth spawning trip can be greater than 34 inches in these streams. Steelhead have been monitored at times in the Anchor River since the late 1980s, but the only complete weir count occurred in 2020. Based on that year and incomplete counts, a typical run size is likely approximately 1,000 fish, with runs ranging from a few hundred to about 3,000.

When to Catch Them

Steelhead begin entering the streams in August, but usually not in fair numbers until September. The peak of the run is typically mid- to late-September, but this can vary with water levels from fall rains. The fishing typically remains fair to good until ice-up, or the last day of the season which is October 31.

Steelhead “kelts” (post spawning fish heading back out to the ocean) are often caught in the spring Chinook salmon fishery; they’re lethargic compared to the impressive strength and energy they display in the fall, so please take extra care to release them quickly.

How to Catch Them

Remember, steelhead are catch-and-release only in these streams, so please practice good handling techniques to land and release your catch. Don’t remove the fish from

the water to take a picture with it and be prepared to remove the hook.

Rod n’ Reel

A 7wt or larger fly rod or a medium-light to medium action rod with a medium sized spinning reel are both typical setups. Fly leaders or fishing line (braided or monofilament) should be at least 15 lb. test.



Tackle

Beads - Beads are the most common and most popular way to fish for steelhead on these streams - and rightfully so, they work well! An 8 or 10 mm bead is the most common size, but sizes that work can range from 6 mm to 14 mm. Colors that work are all over the map too, but varieties of orange and pink in solid, mottled, or frosted all work at times. The setup is otherwise very similar to the bead setup described in the Dolly Varden section, with the exception of hook size. A size 4 or 6 hook is a better match for a steelhead.

Flies - Swinging flesh flies and streamers can all be great choices, too.

Other Tackle - Plugs, marabou jigs suspended under a slip bobber, and spinners all work, too. Pink is usually the top choice for any steelhead tackle.





Where to Catch Them

Steelhead have plenty of nicknames that allude to their difficulty to catch - ghost fish, unicorns, the fish of 1000 casts. So be prepared to do some looking when you go steelhead fishing. They're found throughout the lower two mile sections of the streams, as well as miles above those markers into the upstream sections. Sometimes you can find them in "pocket water" sitting behind boulders, but often you'll find them sitting in current seams and riffles within deeper pools.

Dolly Varden

Dolly Varden or dollies, are fun and often easy to catch. Dollies in these streams are anadromous, and are bright silver with light yellow spots when they first enter the streams in July. By August they've begun to adopt some of their spawning colors, and by September or October they're intensely colored with orange spots and lips, bright white leading edges on their fins, and brilliant green backs. Dollies in these streams range from about 10 inches to well over 20 inches. The life history behavior of the dollies in these streams is not as well-understood as salmon, but they enter freshwater in the summer, spawn in the fall and some may overwinter within the streams. Dollies are able to return to spawn multiple times, and may use many of the streams in the region for feeding or over-wintering. Dollies have been monitored intermittently in the Anchor River since the late 1980s - counts have ranged from approximately 1,000 to 20,000 fish.

When to Catch Them

Dollies begin entering the streams in early to mid-July. The fishing in the lower two miles can be quite good as dollies move in on incoming tides. By August 1, when the upper sections of the streams open to fishing, Dolly Varden are typically spread throughout the stream following the Chinook salmon that are preparing to spawn.

As with most fishing, Dolly Varden fishing is somewhat better in the morning, but not remarkably so, and can actually improve as the day warms up, along with the water, later in the season.

How to Catch Them

Occasionally, anglers will keep fresh Dolly Varden from the lower river - and they are delicious - but most often, dollies are treated as a catch-and-release fish. Please use your best handling techniques when releasing.

Rod n' Reel

Catching dollies on a 3 to 5wt fly rod is a wonderful introduction to fly fishing. Fly leader should be somewhere around 6 lbs. Spinning gear is popular and works well, too. To make it more fun, you'll want a light action rod with a small spinning reel and somewhere around 6 lb. monofilament for the line.



Tackle

Beads -The most popular and the go-to way to fish for dollies is by using a bead that mimics a salmon egg. Beads are typically fished with fly gear, but spinning gear can be set up to fish a bead with a slip bobber as well. The bead can either be free sliding on the leader, or pegged within two inches of the hook. Use a small hook (think 4, 6 or 8). The most typical bead size is 10 mm, especially in August near the king salmon spawn, but anything from a 6 mm to a 12 mm bead may work. Pink, peach, and orange, with mottled or frosted coloration are all good bets. You'll also want split shot about 12 to 18 inches above the bead - remember you want enough that the bead plinks along the bottom, but not so much that your bead is constantly snagging or dragging much slower than the current. A strike indicator above the split shot will help you know when you've got a bite. It should be set at



the appropriate depth (around 1.5 times the water depth) so the bead can plink along the bottom below the strike indicator but not so deep that the bead drags behind.

Other Tackle - Besides beads, spoons and small spinners (size 0, 1, or 2) can work amazingly well. Smolt patterns can be really effective in the lower river in July. On warm summer evenings, dollys may start feeding from the surface, providing one of the somewhat-few dry fly stream fishing opportunities in Alaska. Try to match the hatch- a mosquito may work, or if the hatch is quite small, something like a Griffith's gnat could do the trick.



Where to Catch Them

Dollys tend to follow salmon around waiting for a stray egg to drift their way and can be found in a variety of locations. Keep an eye out for them pushing into freshwater on big high tides in mid-July and try fishing the tidally influenced sections of these streams then. As the tide ebbs and the water levels drop, fresh ocean-bright dollys can be found in riffles and tail-outs of pools.

By August, they've spread out throughout the stream and are typically more likely to be found in the upstream sections. Dollys are often found upstream of the Old Sterling Highway bridge on the South Fork Anchor River, near the Blackwater Bend area, and near the bridge on the south end (Homer side) of the North Fork Road. Try fishing around in these sections until you bump into some. The tell-tale flash while feeding from the depths helps give them away as well.

Healthy Bank Stewardship

Most people understand healthy river systems are important for strong and healthy salmon populations. However, it is important to ensure that clean, healthy rivers don't stop at the water's edge. In fact, protecting and managing healthy streambanks and adjacent riparian areas are critical components to the overall health of a river system.

Vegetation along streambanks helps keep river water clean by filtering out sediment and pollutants from surface and storm runoff, reduces peak flows during rain and runoff

events, slows flood waters, stabilizes streambanks from excessive erosion, and helps moderate stream temperatures. Vegetated streambanks also provide food and nutrients to fish and other aquatic organisms, as well as, provide critical habitat for rearing juvenile salmon. Any alteration to the streambank area reduces its ability to carry out these important functions, this includes repeat trampling of the vegetation while trying to get to your favorite fishing spot. While out on the river, please be respectful and follow any requirements landowners may have. By following the simple steps listed below, you can help maintain important habitat for salmon and be good stewards of the land.

- Use established trails to reach the river.
- Use established entry and exit points to get in and out of the river.
- Respect and abide by signs that close areas to fishing from the bank.
- Stand in the river to fish and don't place your pack or other gear on the vegetation.
- Pack out what you pack in, including discarded fishing line and tackle.
- Use the restroom in the provided facilities.



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