

MCNEIL RIVER PACKING LIST

Recommended by the Alaska Department of Fish & Game

REQUIRED DOCUMENTS

- A copy of your McNeil River State Game Sanctuary Guided Viewing or Standby Viewing Permit
- Photo ID (driver's license or passport)

CLOTHING & FOOTWEAR

- Base layers (synthetic or wool long underwear tops & bottoms)
- Mid layers (synthetic or wool sweaters or heavy fleece for insulation)
- Warm, insulated jacket or puffy (for wind and cold at McNeil Falls)
- Windproof & waterproof outer layers (high-quality raincoat and rain pants)
- Warm hat, brimmed rain/sun hat
- Warm gloves (waterproof neoprene/rubber with liners + non-waterproof pair)
- Several changes of clothing (including extra socks)
- Chest waders (with sturdy, well-fitting wading boots; no felt soles)
- Hiking boots or camp shoes to wear at the McNeil Falls platform or around camp.
- Optional: Disposable hand & foot warmers

CAMPING GEAR

- Storm-proof, low-profile 3-4 season tent (with rain fly, stakes, tie-down cords, ground tarp, repair kit)
- Sleeping bag (warm enough for 40°F nights)
- Sleeping pad (air mattress or foam pad for graveled tent sites)
- River dry bags, waterproof duffle, or lined bags for transporting gear (to keep dry during rain and floatplane transfers)
- Backpack (large enough for daily gear: camera, food, water, layers; waterproof or with dry bag)
- Portable solar chargers or power banks for charging your camera/phone. There's no electricity.



Example of a low-profile tent

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COOKING & FOOD

- Plates, bowls, cups, utensils, coffee brewing devices (cooking stoves, propane, and basic pots/pans are provided)
- Water bottles (recommended 2 liters)
- Water filter/treatment method required (gravity or pump filter recommended) (creek water only)
- Food for your entire stay plus 1–2 extra days (in case of weather delays)
- Snacks and lunch items for bear viewing (minimal packaging)

PERSONAL ITEMS

- Toilet paper and wet wipes
- Personal medications
- Basic First-Aid supplies
- Sealable plastic bags (for used paper products during field viewing)
- Toiletries (personal biodegradable soap, shampoo, toothpaste, towel, washcloth, etc.)
- Insect repellent and head net
- Sunglasses and sunscreen
- Headlamp or flashlight (with extra batteries)

EXTRAS

- Binoculars
- Walking poles (can be very muddy and slick in some parts)
- Photography equipment (camera, lenses, tripod, SD cards, extra batteries)
- Fishing gear and fishing license (fishing opportunities are limited and will be at the discretion of the staff)
- Alaska in the summer can have prolonged hours of daylight, consider bringing a sleep mask and earplugs if you are a light sleeper.

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AVAILABLE AT CAMP (NO NEED TO BRING)

- Camp chairs and packable chairs (for viewing areas)
- Propane cooking stoves and a supply of basic pots, pans, knives, coffee pour-overs, and cutting boards.
- Lighters
- Biodegradable soap in the cook cabin and the sauna
- Library: Field guides, bear literature, Alaska literature, puzzles, and games.

NOTES

- Temperatures typically range 40°F (wind, rain) to 60°F (sun) – pack layers for all conditions.
- Avoid cotton (doesn't retain warmth when wet).
- Coolers are allowed but confirm with your air carrier for weight limits.
- Bears can be as close as 20 feet (most often 75–200 feet).

USEFUL INFORMATION

- Gear Rental Options: If you do not own camping gear, there are rental options in Homer where you can rent bags, tents, waders, sleeping bags, sleeping pads, cutlery, water purifier systems, and more.
- Waders: For July & August, chest waders are recommended. In June, you can get away with just hip waders. For under your waders, we recommend wearing synthetic pants suitable for hiking.
- Food: You can bring anything from freeze-dried meals to fresh food. Freeze-dried meals are often more convenient and less perishable than fresh food, but some people prefer fresh food. Bring your own cooler if you have space.

DAILY SCHEDULE

9:00 AM	MEETING IN COOK CABIN WITH STAFF	10 minutes meeting with staff to discuss the plans for the viewing day.
10:00 - 10:30 AM	LEAVE CAMP FOR BEAR VIEWING	Bring your daypack with the recommended packing list below.
7:00 - 10:00 PM	TIME PERIOD RETURNING FROM BEAR VIEWING	Actual travel times may vary, depending on the tide and weather.

DAY PACK LIST:

- Backpack
- Raingear (wearing or packed)
- Hats (for warmth or the sun)
- Gloves
- Neck Gaiter
- Extra shoes (if you don't want to spend the day in waders)
- Food and snacks for the day
- Water bottle with 1-2 liters of filtered water
- Sunscreen
- Bug Spray/Bug Net
- Sunglasses
- Camera, accessories, and extra batteries
- Binoculars



Example of someone's day pack

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

HOW MANY ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH & GAME EMPLOYEES WILL BE WITH US?



There are three Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G) employees that work at McNeil River State Game Sanctuary. During the bear viewing portion of the day, there will be at least one employee that leads the group and one employee that works in camp.

WHAT DO WE DO IF THERE IS A BEAR IN CAMP?

Air horns are available in the cook cabin. You can take one with you around the camp or keep it in your tent. If you encounter a bear within the designated campground area, sound the horn three times, and the staff will address the situation.



Air horns in cook cabin

HAS THERE EVER BEEN A BEAR-RELATED INCIDENT AT MCNEIL RIVER GAME SANCTUARY?

We have an excellent safety record at McNeil River State Game Sanctuary and no one has ever been injured by a bear. ADF&G staff accompany visitors when bear viewing.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

CAN I BRING BEAR SPRAY/FIREARMS?

ADF&G staff carry a firearm while leading visitors in the sanctuary. We advise against carrying personal firearms or bear spray. These items can be a hazard if not handled properly. If you do bring bear spray, give it to your pilot to be placed in the floats of the plane before your flight.

CAN I FISH?

Alaska requires individuals to obtain a fishing license before fishing. Fishing opportunities are minimal and will be at the discretion of the staff. If you are interested in fishing, please let a staff member know. We avoid fishing if there is bear activity in the area.

WHAT ABOUT GARBAGE?

Trash management is handled by sanctuary staff and flown out of the sanctuary. Please try to keep garbage to a minimum. While we appreciate the gesture, do not leave excess gear items (boots, tarps, rain gear, water bottles, etc.) at the sanctuary for donation without conferring with the ADF&G staff.



Garbage in the cook cabin

WHERE DO I USE THE RESTROOM?

There are two outhouses in the camp area. Please bring your own toilet paper! While bear viewing, notify a staff member, and they will direct you to where it is safe to use the bathroom. Bring a plastic bag to dispose of your toilet paper while out bear viewing.



Outhouses located in the camp area

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

WHAT IS AVAILABLE AT THE COOK CABIN?

The 16' x 24' cook cabin is the center of activity for McNeil visitors.

Thanks to the Friends of McNeil River, we have various pots, pans, cups, cutlery, water bottles, and cutting boards for your use! However, you will need to bring your own plates, cups, bowls, utensils, and any other specialty equipment (e.g., a coffee brewing device).



Each visitor will receive a tote bag that they can personalize with their name, and this is where you will store all your food, scented items, and toiletries.



The cook cabin has tables, benches, and a collection of natural history literature; as well as a wood stove that will allow you to dry clothing and warm up.



There are two 3-burner propane stoves and propane provided for cooking. Please do not bring a camp stove or fuel.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

WHAT IS THE DRINKING WATER SITUATION?

Untreated water will be collected by visitors and a staff member from a nearby creek for drinking. Visitors need to filter or treat their drinking water. Please bring your own water filter or treatment.

IS THERE ANYWHERE I CAN RENT GEAR INSTEAD OF BUYING?

Yes! This is a good option for those traveling from out of state. There are rental options located in Homer for everything you need: bags, tents, waders, sleeping bags, sleeping pads, water bottles, cutlery, power banks, water filters, and more. Call ahead of your visit and reserve your gear.

WHAT PHOTOGRAPHY GEAR SHOULD I BRING?

Excellent photographs often can be obtained without specialized equipment. Some bears may approach very closely while at the viewing sites and may be as close as 20 feet, but generally are 75-200 feet away. Lenses such as 70 – 210 zoom and 400mm provide good focal lengths for close up bear photos. People often bring tripods as well.

WHAT IS THE SAUNA SITUATION?



Picture of the sauna

After a long day of bear viewing, the sauna offers a great place to warm up or freshen up. A staff member will start and heat the sauna so it will be ready when you return. Inside the sauna, you'll find biodegradable soap available for your use. There is a metal pot placed on top of the stove to warm water. Additionally, there are two buckets filled with cold water.

Guests often fill the metal pan (located above the metal pot) with a mix of warm and cold water to achieve their desired temperature. Bring a pack towel to dry off with. Typically, guests enjoy using the sauna by themselves.

PHOTOS



9:00 AM morning meeting



Campsites



At high tide, sometimes staff will pick up visitors in a boat to transport them.



The campgrounds on a sunny day.

PHOTOS



An example of wading through the water on the way to view bears in July.



Carts and wheelbarrows are available to move your gear to and from the plane.



The outside of the cook cabin.



Visitors record wildlife observations during the season.

AERIAL VIEW OF CAMP



QUESTIONS?

Lottery, Viewing Program & Permits

Alaska Dept. of Fish and Game
Division of Wildlife Conservation
Attn: McNeil River State Game Sanctuary
333 Raspberry Rd
Anchorage, AK 99518-1599
(907) 267-2189
dfg.dwc.mcneil-info@alaska.gov

State Game Sanctuary and Refuge Management

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TO LEARN MORE, VISIT WWW.ADFG.ALASKA.GOV