

Don't Forget Your Boots!



**A Beginner's Guide to the
Chugach National Forest**

Welcome to the Chugach National Forest!

The Chugach National Forest is 5.4 MILLION acres of public land, making it one of the largest national forests in the United States. The forest is roughly the same size as the state of New Hampshire—that’s a lot of land to explore! With that much forest, there are many opportunities for exploring. We hope this guide will help you get out, have fun, and explore your national forest safely.

How to Use This Guide

- Pick one of the outdoor activities listed.
- Follow the useful tips and tricks provided in this guide—and add some of your own.
- Enjoy the beginning of many amazing outdoor adventures.
- Repeat as many times as you like!

While this guide can’t possibly answer every question you might have, it should provide you with the basic information you need to get outside.

Please Include an Adult on All Your Adventures.

Table of Contents

Be Prepared

Dress for Cold Weather 4

Dress for Warm Weather 5

Add Your Favorite Gear to go Exploring 6

Activity: Go Hiking

Hiking Basics..... 9

Make Your Own Trail Mix 10

Best First Hikes 12

Activity: Go Camping

Camping Basics..... 15

Bear Safety..... 16

Best Places for First Time Campers..... 18

Activity: Go Fishing

Fishing Basics 21

Fishing Rods, Lures, and Flies 22

Best First Fishing Spots 24

Life Jackets 25

Welcome to the Great Outdoors

How do we keep the outdoors great?

- **Plan ahead and prepare:** Know where you're going and share your plans. Bring a map of the area and know how to read it.
- **Travel on durable surfaces:** Stick to the trail so that the nearby plants, land, and waterways don't get damaged.
- **Dispose of waste properly:** Pack out all trash and leftover food.
- **Leave what you find:** Leave rocks, plants, and other natural objects as you find them so others can enjoy them too.
- **Minimize campfire impacts:** Use the campfire ring at campsites when fires are allowed
- **Respect wildlife:** Observe wildlife from a distance, don't get closer, and never feed them.
- **Be considerate of others:** Be kind to other adventurers so that everyone can enjoy the outdoors!

Don't Forget to Prepare!

Exploring the Chugach National Forest in Alaska is exciting! You can hike through forests, fish in the many lakes, and camp in valleys carved by glaciers. But, before you head out, it's super important to be prepared so you can stay safe and have the maximum amount of fun!

Know where you're going: Make sure you have a map (either on your phone/device or go old school and grab a map) and you know how to read it.

Share your plans: Let someone know where you're going and when you plan on getting back. That way if something happens, people will know where to look for you

Pack smart: It can be pretty helpful to bring a backpack with these items:

- Snacks
- First aid kit
- Extra jacket

Dress like an onion! Onions have layers and you should too when adventuring outside—the weather can change quickly in Alaska. Be sure to include warm layers as well as a weatherproof outer layer.

Dress for Cold Weather



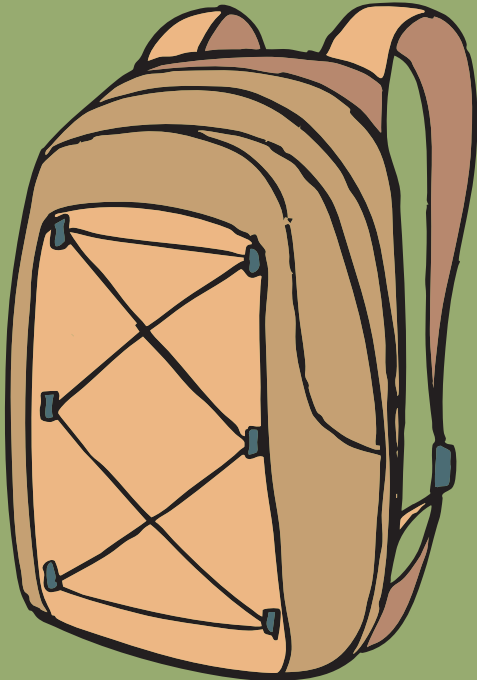
4

Dress for Warm Weather



5

Add Your Favorite
Gear to Go Exploring



day pack



hiking poles



water
bottle

Activity: Go Hiking



Don't Forget Your Boots!

The Chugach National Forest is filled with many exciting hiking trails. Some take you to viewpoints of glaciers while others may take you to the top of a mountain. Before you set out on your hike, let's cover the basics:

Hiking Basics

Choose the right trail: Start with an easy trail that's not too long. Talk with an adult to figure out what you might want to see or do on your hike. It could be anything from spotting wildflowers to chasing waterfalls!

Stay safe in the wild: Make noise while you hike so animals know you're coming—talk, sing, or clap. Don't approach wild animals and never feed them. If you see wildlife, stay calm, back away slowly, and don't run.

Bring what you need: Don't forget your backpack with snacks, water, extra layers, first aid kit and map! Sunscreen and bug spray can be helpful in the summer.

Hike with a buddy: Always hike with an adult or a friend. Stay together and keep an eye on each other. Take breaks when you need to enjoy being in nature!

Don't Forget a Snack!

Healthy snacks help fuel our bodies—shake up your own special trail mix for your next outdoor adventure. Try to pick foods from at least 3 of the categories below:

- **Carbohydrates** such as dry cereal, pretzels, or crackers
- **Healthy fats** such as nuts, coconut chips, or yogurt melts
- **Protein** such as small seeds, nuts, or chopped up soft protein bars
- **Dried fruit** or freeze-dried fruit such as cranberries, raisins, blueberries, or mangoes

Add a small amount of each to your container or snack bag and mix gently.



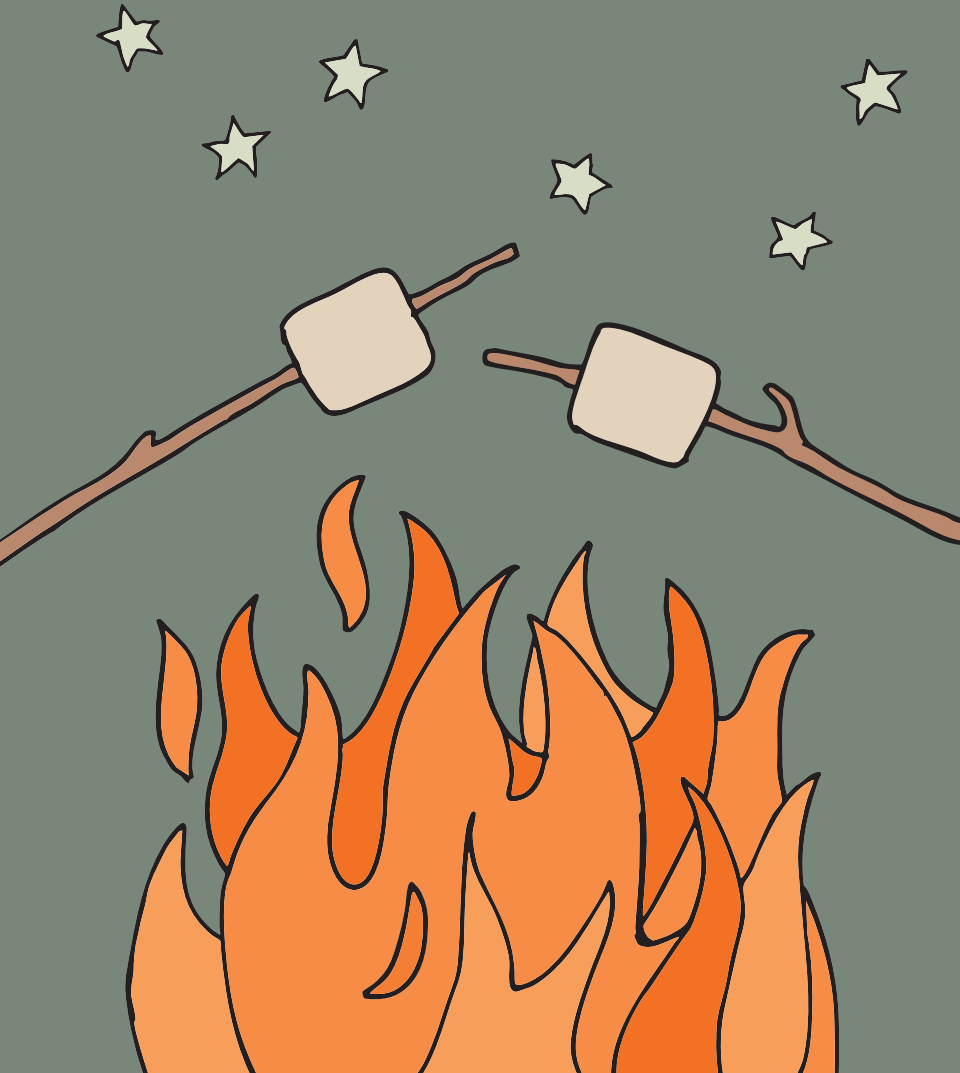
My Favorite Trail Mix Recipe

Best First Hikes

- **Trail of Blue Ice** (*Portage, AK*): This 5-mile trail winds along Portage Valley with views of several glaciers and creeks. There are several areas to start and end your hike to make it shorter.
- **Byron Glacier Trail** (*Portage, AK*): This 1.4 mile trail offers an easy walk for all ages. It allows a close-up view of a glacier with rugged mountains in all directions.
- **Williwaw Nature Trail** (*Portage, AK*): A 2-mile trail that begins at the Williwaw Fish Viewing Platform, passes under the highway bridge and follows Williwaw Creek to a series of ponds.
- **Lower Winner Creek Trail** (*Girdwood, AK*): An easy 3-mile hike that begins behind the Alyeska Tram building and ends at Glacier Creek.
- **Haystack Trail** (*Cordova, AK*): This is an easy 0.8-mile boardwalk trail with lots of stairs. The boardwalk leads to overlook of the Copper River Delta.
- **Russian River Angler Trail** (*Cooper Landing, AK*): A scenic trail that most use to access the Russian River. Be mindful that this place will be busy with bears and anglers when the salmon start swimming upstream.



Activity: Go Camping



Don't Forget Your Tent!

Camping in the Chugach National Forest is a great way to enjoy the outdoors. You can sleep in a tent, roast marshmallows, tell stories by a fire, and wake up to the sounds of nature!

Camping Basics

Pick the right spot: When you're starting out, it's nice to choose a campground that has bathrooms, water, fire pits, and a table.

Be campfire safe: Only build a fire in a fire ring, when it's allowed. Keep water nearby to fully put the fire out when you're done. Never leave a fire burning when you're leaving the campsite or going to sleep.

Food is for humans, not animals: Keep all food, toothpaste, trash, and smelly items in a bear proof container or in a car. Never store these items in your tent.

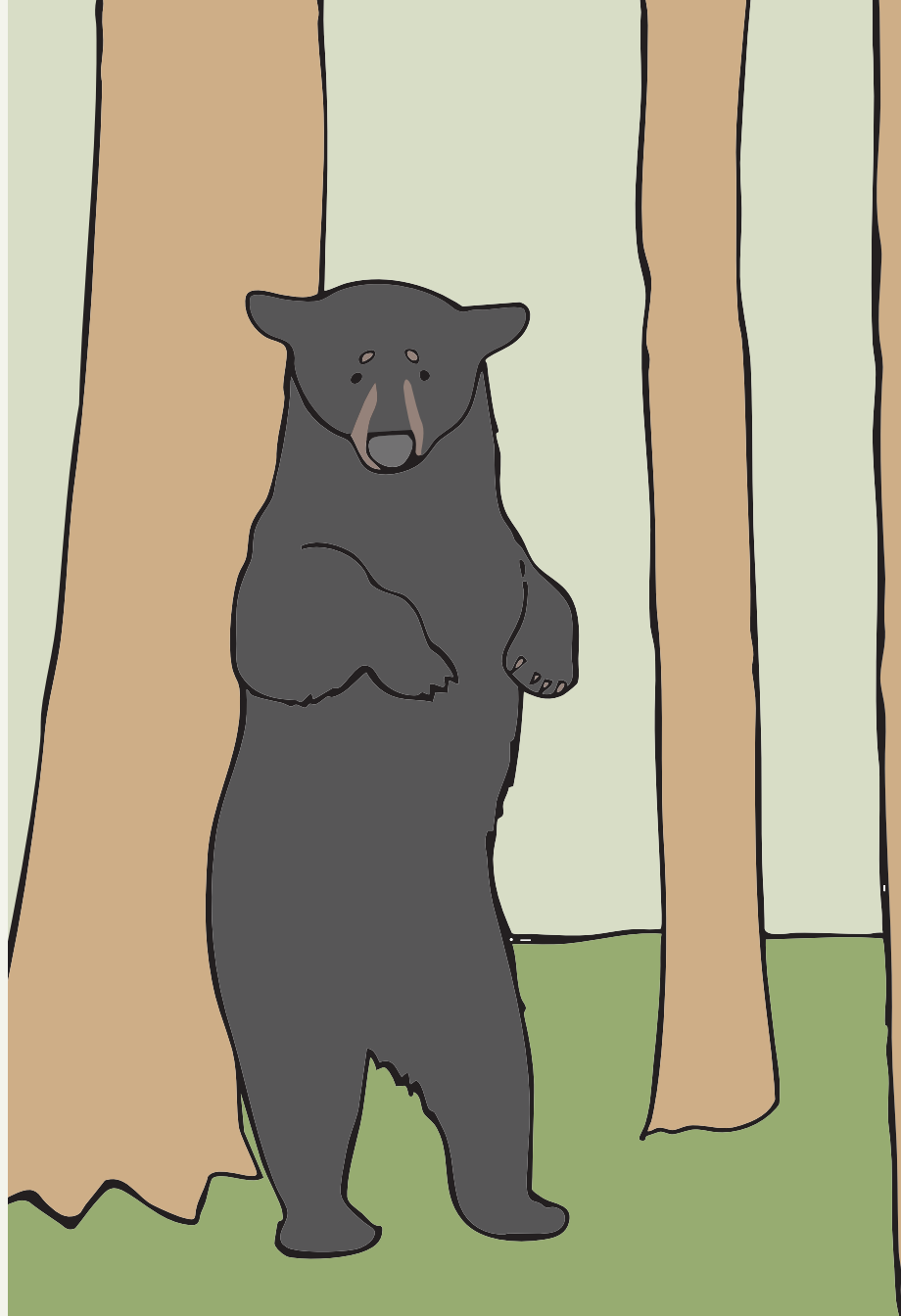
What to Bring Camping:

- Tent
- Sleeping bag
- Sleeping pad/mattress
- Flashlight/headlamp/lanterns
- Food, water, cooking & cleaning supplies

Don't Forget Your Bear Spray!

The Chugach National Forest is home to both Black bears and Brown bears. Most of the time, bears want to stay away from people, but it's important to know what to do if you do see one.

- **Make noise:** When you're adventuring in the national forest, talk, sing, or clap your hands. This helps bears (and other animals) know you're around. Surprising a bear is when trouble can happen.
- **Never run from a bear:** If you see a bear, stay calm! Don't run, it might naturally want to chase you even if it doesn't want to hurt you. Instead, back away slowly and talk calmly to the bear.
- **Keep food and smells put away:** Bears have a super strong sense of smell. Make sure you keep food, trash, and smelly items like toothpaste in a bear container or a car.
- **Know the signs:** If a bear stands up, it's usually just trying to get a better look or smell what you are. If it huffs, stomps, or lowers its head, it might feel scared. That's your cue to back away slowly and give it space.
- **Bring an adult with bear spray!** Make sure they adult knows how to use the bear spray and that it isn't expired.



Best Places for First Time Campers:

- **Williwaw Campground** (*Portage, AK*): Located about one mile from Begich, Boggs Visitor Center and nearby salmon viewing.
- **Childs Glacier Campground** (*Cordova, AK*): Lovely views of two nearby glaciers and the historic Million Dollar Bridge.
- **Porcupine Campground** (*Hope, AK*): Porcupine Campground offers a spectacular view of Turnagain Arm.
- **Quartz Creek Campground** (*Cooper Landing, AK*): Located at the northern end of Kenai Lake.
- **Tenderfoot Creek Campground** (*Summit Lake, AK*): On the shore of Summit Lake surrounded by spruce and hemlock forest.
- **Trail River Campground** (*Moose Pass, AK*): Views of Kenai Lake, Trail River, and nearby hiking.



Activity: Go Fishing



Don't Forget the Fishing Rod!

Fishing is a fun way to enjoy the Chugach National Forest's many lakes and rivers. You can catch salmon or trout in most areas of the Forest.

Get the Right Gear:

- A fishing rod and reel
- Fishing line and hooks
- Bait or lures (ask what works best for the area you're going)
- A life jacket if you're near deeper water or on a boat

Take an adult: They can help you handle gear, follow the rules, and stay safe. Never fish alone, especially near deep or fast-moving water

Know the rules: In Alaska, there are special fishing rules to protect the fish and their habitat. You may need a fishing license (your adult will know).

Respect the fish and nature: If you catch a fish you can't keep, gently release it back into the water. Wet your hands first so you don't hurt its scales. Never leave behind fishing line or hooks—these can hurt animals or other forest users.

Fishing Rods, Lures, and Flies – Oh My!

There are different kinds of fishing rods and different ways to catch fish, like using lures or flies.

Types of Fishing Rods

Spinning rod: This is most common fishing rod—and great for learning to fish! It has a reel that hangs underneath the rod and is easy to cast. You can use it with lures to catch all kinds of fish from trout in lakes to salmon in rivers.

Fly rod: This rod is long and flexible and is used for fly fishing. With this rod, you use fake bugs called flies to get the fish to bite your hook.

Lures vs. Flies

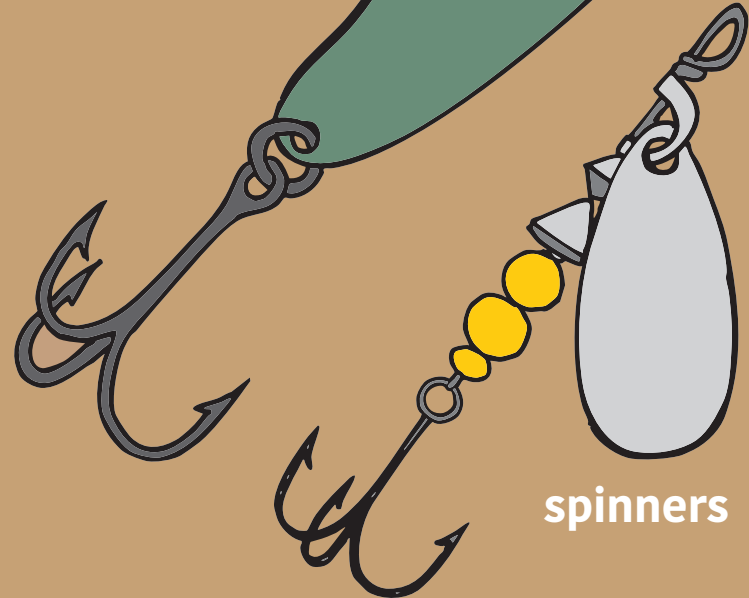
Lures are fake fish or bugs made from plastic, metal, or rubber. They come in bright colors and shiny shapes to get the fish's attention. You cast them into the water and reel them back to make them look alive.

Flies are small, light, and made with feathers, fur and string. They look like insects or tiny fish. Fly fishing is all about gently landing the fly on the water's surface just like a real bug would do.

flies



spoons



spinners

Best First Fishing Spots

- **Tangle Pond** (*Portage, AK*): Rainbow Trout
- **Alder Pond** (*Portage, AK*): Rainbow Trout
- **Willow Pond** (*Portage, AK*): Rainbow Trout
- **Jerome Lake** (*Moose Pass, AK*): Rainbow Trout/Dolly Varden
- **Lower Summit Lake** (*Moose Pass, AK*): Rainbow Trout
- **Kenai Lake** (*Moose Pass, AK*): Grayling
- **Kenai River** (*Cooper Landing AK*): Salmon
- **Eyak River** (*Cordova, AK*): Cutthroat Trout, Dolly Varden, Salmon
- **Pipeline Lakes** (*Cordova, AK*): Cutthroat Trout, Dolly Varden

Don't Forget Your Life Jacket!

Rivers and lakes are great places to explore, fish, and play on the Chugach National Forest—but they can also be dangerous if you're not careful. The water can be cold, deep, and fast. Here's how to stay safe when exploring around water.

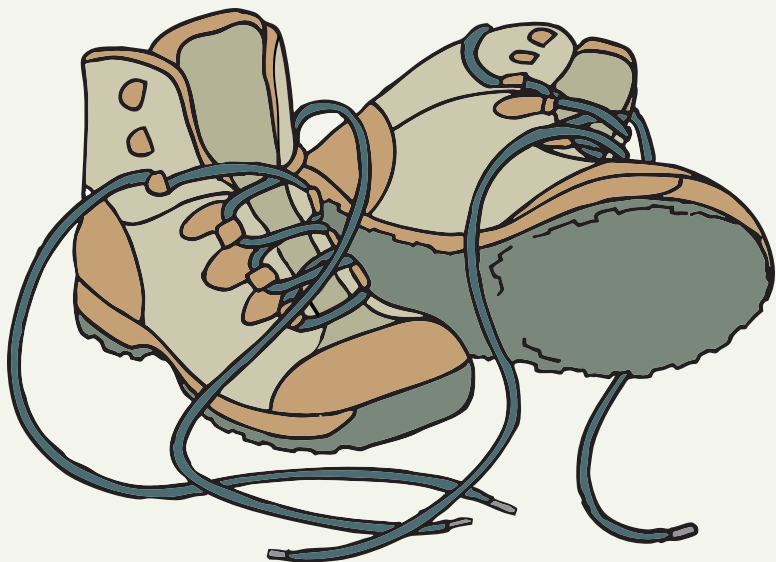
Always take an adult: Whether your skipping rocks, fishing, or hiking near water, adults can help you spot danger and help when needed.

Wear a life a jacket if you're near deep water, on a boat, dock, or raft. Even if you're a good swimmer, cold water can slow down your reactions and the water can be moving faster than it looks.

Watch your step: Rocks and riverbanks can be slippery, muddy, or loose. Walk carefully and don't run near the edge. One wrong step could send you into the water.

If you fall in:

- Stay calm
- Float on your back with your feet up
- Try to grab something or swim to shore
- Yell for help—don't try to fight the current



Alaska Geographic is the official education and fundraising non-profit partner to Alaska's public lands.

Your purchases, donations, and membership directly support education, science, and research and help protect these special places.

Learn more at akgeo.org



©2025 Alaska Geographic
Published by Alaska Geographic in cooperation with the
Forest Service
U.S. Department of Agriculture

