

# Unalakleet National Wild River

**Unalakleet River**  
The clear, smooth waters of the Unalakleet National Wild River meander gently among the rolling Nulato Hills and across broad expanses of arctic tundra to the seaside village of Unalakleet, Alaska, at the rocky shores of the Norton Sound. Located 400 miles from Anchorage, the village of Unalakleet has approximately 800 people and is accessible only by plane.

The headwaters of the Unalakleet River originate in the Nulato Hills. These rolling hills divide rainfall and snow melt between the Norton Sound and the Yukon River basin. At this point, the river is swift and channelized; once it reaches the valley floor it begins to meander. For most of its length, the river has a varying pool/riffle nature, which offers a great diversity of river characteristics, boating skills, and fishing opportunities.

The area's remote location in western Alaska means that visitors are unlikely to meet other recreationists while on their journey. However, travelers will likely encounter fishermen and local travelers in power boats along the lower reaches of the river.

**Katlag Portage**  
The Unalakleet River is located within the Katlag Portage, which has been an important route for travel, transportation, and trade between Norton Sound and Interior Alaska for thousands of years. It served as a vital link between the Iñupiat and Yup'ik of the coast, and the Yukon River and Athabascan groups in the interior. During the historic period, the Katlag Portage was used as a route for both the historic Iditarod Trail and the Washington-Alaska Military Cable and Telegraph System (WAMCATS).

Today, the Unalakleet River and the Katlag Portage are regularly used by local people for hunting, trapping, and subsistence access and winter travel between villages for social and family activities.

**Climate**  
The name Unalakleet is an Inupiaq word meaning "place where the east wind blows." Summer temperatures average from 40° to 60° F. Rain is common throughout the summer and varies between a light mist and a heavy downpour. Weather conditions can change quickly and summer storms can cause water levels to rise rapidly, creating potential floating hazards.

**Iditarod National Historic Trail**  
The Iditarod National Historic Trail commemorates a 2,300-mile system of winter trails that first connected ancient Alaska Native villages, opened up Alaska for the last great American gold rush, and now plays a vital role for travel and recreation in modern day Alaska.

The Iditarod National Historic Trail runs alongside the Unalakleet River to the Bering Sea coast. The trail was once used by Alaska Native hunters, Russian explorers and gold seekers.

**Public Shelter Cabin**

**Old Woman Cabin**  
Built at the base of the small mountain it is named for, this 12 ft. x 16 ft. cabin is another favorite of trail travelers. Sleeps 6 to 8. Open to all for non-exclusive (shared) use; no fee. Winter only. Approximately 35 trail miles from Unalakleet.

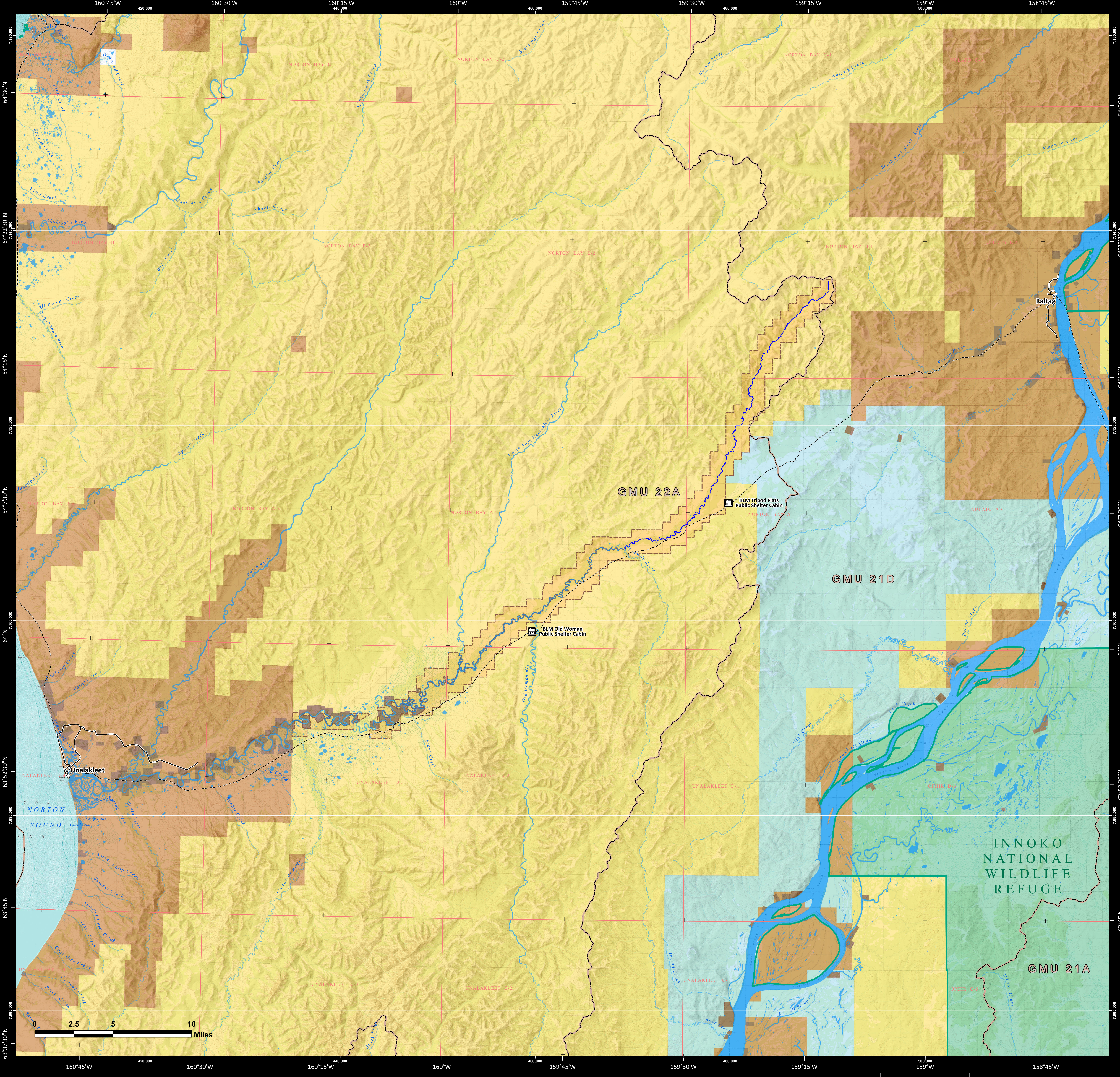
**Tripod Flats Cabin**  
This 12 ft. x 14 ft. hand-peeled and notched log cabin is located a short distance of the main trail on a south-facing hill. Sleeps 4 to 6. Open to all for non-exclusive (shared) use; no fee. Winter only. Approximately 26 trail miles from Unalakleet.

**Camping**  
There are no established campsites or public facilities along the river corridor. The Unalakleet National Wild River corridor ends at its confluence with the Chirosoy River, 24 river miles from the village of Unalakleet. In the wild river corridor and below the Chirosoy River, there are individual Native allotments which are private. Contact the Unalakleet Native Corporation for permission to camp on Alaska Native lands below the Chirosoy River.

**Fishing**  
Fishing is excellent for chinook, coho, chum and pink salmon and has unpolled waters. Dolly Varden are also plentiful.

**Summer Recreation**  
The Unalakleet River supports such activities as fishing, boating, and camping. The best time to visit is July through mid-September to take full advantage of the midnight sunshine and discover what is considered to be one of the great salmon runs in Alaska.

**Winter Recreation**  
The frozen Unalakleet River comes alive in winter with the joyful cries of sled dogs as the historic Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race parallels the frozen river en route to the finish line in Nome. Popular winter activities along the river corridor include snowmobiling, dog mushing, ice fishing, hunting and trapping.



**Resource Management**  
The upper 81 river miles of the Unalakleet are designated a National Wild River and administered by the Bureau of Land Management. A "wild river" is free of impoundments, generally inaccessible except by trail, with primitive watersheds and shorelines, and has unpolled waters. The BLM manages the Unalakleet National Wild River to provide high-quality primitive recreation opportunities, protect water quality, protect historic and archaeological values, and preserve the remarkable resources for which the river was designated.

There are approximately 3.6 million miles of streams in the United States; 1.1 million are at least five miles in length. Only 12,700 miles are protected by the Wild & Scenic Rivers Act.



**WILD & SCENIC RIVERS** 50 YEARS 1968-2018

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**Legend:**

- Road
- Iditarod National Historic Trail
- Wild and Scenic River
- Wild and Scenic River Corridor
- Game Management Unit (7/1/2016)
- USGS 1:63,360 Index

**Administered Lands:**

- Bureau of Land Management
- Fish and Wildlife Service
- Native Allotment (Private)

**Native Lands:**

- Private
- State of Alaska

Map not to be used to determine federal subsistence hunting areas.

Disclaimer: No warranty is made by the Bureau of Land Management as to the accuracy, reliability, or completeness of these data for individual or aggregate use with other data. Original data were compiled from various sources. This information may not meet National Map Accuracy Standards. This product was developed through digital means and may be updated without notification. The information displayed on this map should be used for graphic display only. For official land status information, refer to Cadastral Survey plots, Master Title Plans, and landstatus case-files.

**Contact Information**

Bureau of Land Management  
Anchorage Field Office  
4700 BLM Road  
Anchorage, AK 99507  
Phone: 907-267-1246  
<https://www.blm.gov/alaska>

Alaska Department of Fish & Game  
Fairbanks Office  
1300 College Rd  
Fairbanks, Alaska 99701-1551  
Phone: 907-459-7206  
<http://www.adfg.alaska.gov>

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Map Coordinate System: NAD 1983 UTM Zone 18N