



# Arctic National Wildlife Refuge Public Use

The Arctic Refuge manages for a full range of public uses, including hunting, subsistence activities, and wildlife- and wilderness-dependent recreation. This public use management is guided by the Public Land Order that protects the Refuge's unique recreational values; the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) which identifies access rights and other guaranteed use provisions; the Wilderness Act which preserves natural conditions; the Refuge Improvement Act which encourages wildlife-dependent activities; and other applicable federal regulations.

**Public use** of the Refuge includes activities by **visitors (both recreational and general hunting uses)**, and by **rural residents** who rely upon the Refuge for subsistence uses, including subsistence hunting. Subsistence use of the Refuge is not considered "visitor use." In some cases, visitors and subsistence users have different legal status (such as allowable subsistence access provisions, and harvest priorities in times of shortage) so management efforts differ between subsistence users and visitors on these points.

### Partial Glossary of Public Users on Arctic Refuge:

**Public user**—Visitors (including recreational and general hunting and fishing visitors), and federally-qualified rural residents engaged in subsistence activities.

**Visitor**—Any person who takes part in recreational, general hunting, and general fishing activities.

**Recreational visitor**—A visitor who engages in recreational activities other than general hunting and fishing.

**General hunting visitor**—A visitor engaged in hunting under the State of Alaska hunting regulations.

**General fishing visitor**—A visitor engaged in fishing under the State of Alaska fishing regulations.

**Subsistence user**—A Refuge user engaged in subsistence activities who is a federally-qualified rural resident qualified to harvest wildlife or fish on federal public lands or waters in accordance with the annual Federal Subsistence Management regulations for harvest of wildlife or fish.

**Commercially-supported user**—A public user who is either guided, taxied, or transported by a commercial permittee of the Refuge onto Refuge lands or waters.

**Non-commercial user**—A public user who does not rely on commercial guides, air operations, or any other commercial services during their stay on the Refuge.

**Permittee**—An individual whose activities are authorized by a Special Use Permit. Categories include:

**Commercial Recreation** [guides]—Recreational guides must limit group size and follow other special conditions.

**Commercial Big Game Hunting** [guides]—Hunting guides compete for limited permits which are subject to conditions in their competitive application. Each hunting guide is limited to a specific geographic area and restricted to a specified number of hunting clients.

**Commercial Air Operations**—There are two types of air transportation services offered on Arctic Refuge, and a single business may hold permits for both:

**Air taxi services**—Provide point-to-point air transportation for all types of public users, with fees based on time and distance flown. Users determine the drop-off and pick-up locations.

**Transporter services**—Provide services only to general hunters. A fixed rate is paid by each hunter for all transportation services including that of gear and game meat, no matter how many flights are required. The transporter is usually responsible for determining the hunting location, but is not allowed to accompany hunters in the field.

**Scientific Research**—For non-Refuge research activities on the Refuge.

**Miscellaneous Activities**—Permit issued for activities, conducted by organized entities, that are not profit-oriented.

### Early Use Patterns

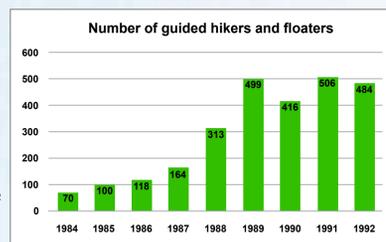
The lands, waters, plants, and animals living in what is now the Arctic Refuge have for thousands of years supported Gwich'in Athabaskan Indians of interior Alaska, and Inupiat Eskimos along the northern coast.

From the 1840s through the 1950s, small numbers of fur trappers, whalers, explorers, geologists, and miners made their way to the area.

When the 8.9 million acre Arctic National Wildlife Range was established in 1960 there was little recreational use of the area, although it was occasionally visited by hunters, backpackers, and hikers.

In the 1970s, Arctic Alaska and the Brooks Range received increased attention because of the 1968 discovery of oil at Prudhoe Bay, and the resulting public land proposals. Dall sheep hunting was becoming especially popular in the Range, although recreational visitors and general hunters were estimated to spend fewer than 1,000 days there each year. A public use study estimated 281 people visited the Range in 1975, over half of whom were hunters. Backpackers had the greatest number of use days, much of them in the upper Hulahula and Okpilak River valleys.

ANILCA turned the Range into the 19-million-acre Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in 1980. Visitation continued to increase into the decade. Reports from nine active air taxi operators conservatively estimated 515 people were flown into the Refuge in 1986. Dramatic increases occurred between 1987 and 1989. Permits were issued to 7 recreational guides in 1980. By 1989 the number increased to 21 guides, who conducted a total of 48 float or river-based backpacking trips.



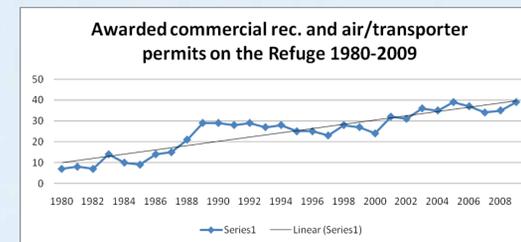
### Recent Visitor Use patterns

Compared to other land conservation units, the Arctic Refuge is geographically remote and is managed to protect its wilderness qualities. A study of visitors in 2009 indicated their greatest positive influence came from experiencing the components of wilderness (92%), a sense of vastness (92%), remoteness and isolation (89%), a sense of adventure (84%), and natural conditions (84%). The Refuge purposes most frequently rated as "very important" were wildlife (97%) and wilderness (96%).

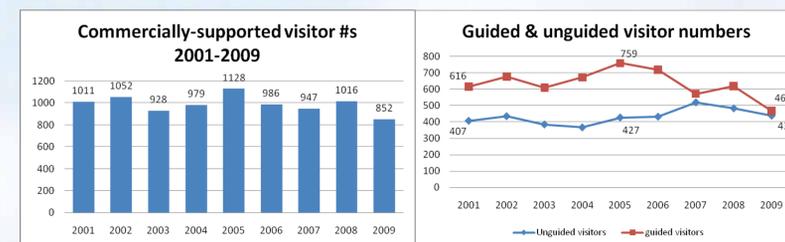
With no direct visitor registration system, and no way to contact each entrant, Refuge staff is not able to conclusively document total visitor numbers, nor know from where its visitors originate. Throughout the past 10 years, visitor use data has primarily come from client use reports submitted by guides and air taxi companies as part of their permit requirements. Voluntary reports of public use also are collected yearly at nearby locations such as the Arctic Interagency Visitor Center in Coldfoot and the Toolik Research Station north of Galbraith Lake.



Total known Refuge visitation for the past decade, as reported by all sources.

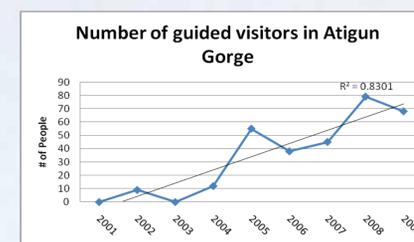


Number of commercially-guided recreation and air taxi / transporter permits

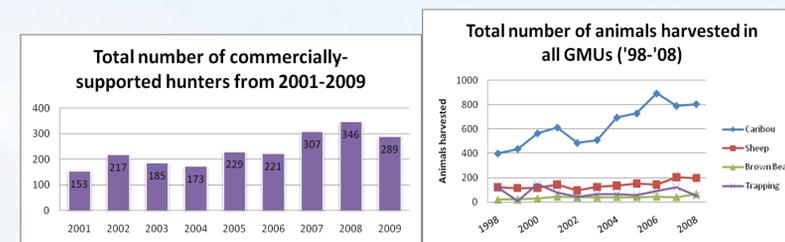


Number of Refuge visitors commercially-guided and/or flown

The Dalton Highway was opened to the public in 1995, and since then has experienced steady increases in visitation. The highway serves as a significant access corridor to the Refuge, which is situated less than a mile away at Atigun Gorge, an area of scenic grandeur and substantial biological value. Only commercial use numbers are available, but non-commercial use may be increasing in the gorge even more than is commercial use.



Number of commercially-guided visitors into Atigun Gorge



Numbers of commercially-supported guided and unguided hunters, as well as animals harvested (right-hand graph: Alaska Department of Fish and Game information from Game Management Units 25A, 26B, and 26C)

The majority of visitor use on the Refuge occurs during summer and fall on the north side of the Brooks Range. River corridors which received the most use from 2001 to 2009 include: Kongakut (21%), Canning (13%), Sheenjek (9%), Hulahula (9%), Jago (5%), Coleen (4%), Aichilik (3%), Atigun (3%), and Ivishak (3%).

**What management strategies should we consider, to protect the fragile landscape while causing minimum intrusion to users?**



In the Fog - Craig Roberts