COLVILLE RIVER

Colville River Special Area

From mountains to sea, Colville River is a braided river of recreation opportunities.

ALASKA WILDERNESS LEAGUE

About

Along the **southeast border of the Western Arctic** runs the Colville River. The Colville River **headwaters begin up in the Brooks Range and the river ends nearly 400 miles downstream** in a **massive alluvial fan and delta plain** stretching out toward the Beaufort Sea – ***the largest and most productive river delta in northern Alaska.***

An EPA-designated Aquatic Resource of National Importance, **the Colville River Special Area encompasses 2.44 million acres and incorporates two miles on either side of the Colville** as well as two of its major tributaries – the **Kikiakrorak and Kogosukruk rivers.**

The Colville River flows for 391 miles through the Colville River Special Area, the entirety of which lies north of Alaska's Brooks Range.

Photo: Paxson Woelber, Expedition Arguk

This Special Area is known for its high density of raptors. Along the exposed Lower Cretaceous cliff banks of the Colville are **nesting peregrine falcons, golden eagles, rough-legged hawks and gyrfalcons.** Like Teshekpuk Lake, ***the delta is a globally-recognized Important Bird Area*** where **a world-class gathering of shorebirds and waterfowl raise their chicks.**

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Wolf densities along the Colville River corridor are also higher than anywhere along Alaska's northern coastal plain and the bluffs in the region contain the **world's most extensive polar-region collection of dinosaur and other fossils.**

Alaska Native communities rely on the health of the Colville River for subsistence, traditional and customary use activities. The Colville River supports **the only substantial overwintering habitat for Arctic cisco,** an important subsistence fish species. Additional fish species found in the Colville River include **round whitefish, lake trout, northern pike, long nose sucker, Alaska blackfish and various species of salmon.**

The Colville River also **provides summer habitat for the Western Arctic caribou herd** as it seeks food and insect relief, while the **Teshekpuk Lake caribou herd and Central Arctic caribou herd** may sometimes use the Colville River as winter habitat.

Fish Creek, a tributary of the Colville River **crucial to subsistence, provides rare wildlife habitat and subsistence opportunities** and is also **currently under threat from development.**

Photo: Paxson Woelber, Expedition Arguk

Threats to this Special Area

OIL AND GAS DEVELOPMENT

Oil and gas development, which includes **drilling pads, pipelines, roads, energy generation, hazardous chemicals and wastes, human wastes and gravel pits...**

...are having measurable negative impacts on Arctic wildlife, particularly to caribou and nesting bird populations.

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ConocoPhillips' Colville Delta-5 (CD-5) project, located near the Colville River **is already producing oil and ConocoPhillips is rapidly ramping up additional development plans,** moving forward with projects in the Reserve at its **Greater Mooses Tooth 1 and 2 (GMT1 & GMT2) sites, as well as its Willow project.** GMT1 includes a **gravel drilling pad, an eight-mile road, plus pipeline and associated facilities for nine initial development wells.** Add to that the potential footprints of GMT2 and Willow, and **the spider web of development that was just a theory** prior to CD- 5 is **now being constructed.**

CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change is also having a **profound effect** on the region.

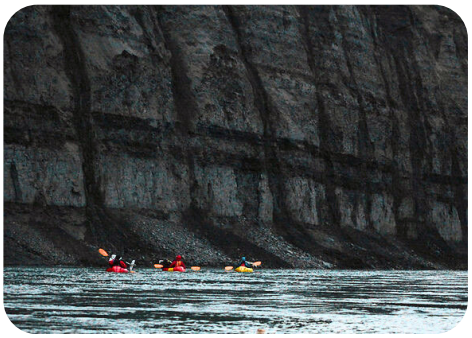

Photo: Paxson Woelber, Expedition Arguk

The rapid warming of the Arctic is leaving the Colville River thawed for more months out of the year than ever before.

This poses **challenges to local communities** in safely navigating the land and in **collecting food.**

Thawing and runoff from **longer periods of warmer temperatures causes erosion** which **limits boat travel to these remote areas,** otherwise only reachable by plane, and **the added sediment from the collapsing of riverbanks causes water quality problems for fish populations.**

Photo: Paxson Woelber, Expedition Arguk