



A Word about fishing regulations . . .

CONSULT CURRENT FISHING REGULATIONS

BEFORE setting out on any fishing trip . . .

Regulation booklets are available at all Alaska

Department of Fish and Game offices

and most license vendors. 



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Sport fishing along the Dalton Highway

Alaska
Department
of Fish
and
Game



Sport fishing along the Dalton Highway

THE DALTON HIGHWAY made it possible to travel north of the Arctic Circle and to reach some of the most remote areas in North America with relative ease and minimum expense. Prudhoe Bay marks the northernmost point in North America that can be reached by road. Travelers should be aware that access by road to the Arctic Ocean in the Prudhoe Bay industrial area is restricted to special authorization and licensed organized tours. Unauthorized private vehicles are not allowed in the oilfield complex.

The Dalton Highway, also known as the Haul Road, extends 414 miles north from Livengood to the Prudhoe Bay industrial area on the Arctic Ocean. The unpaved road has been maintained by the State of Alaska since 1978. Until 1980, sport fishing was prohibited within the pipeline corridor, a 10-mile strip centered on the highway. Sport fishing within the pipeline corridor was partially opened when the road was opened for public use in 1980, and at the present time fishing for all species except salmon is allowed within the pipeline corridor.

This brochure will acquaint anglers with roadside fishing opportunities along the Dalton Highway. *The Milepost*, published by Northwest Books, is a complete guide to the Dalton Highway and should be consulted by those seeking information about points of interest and commercial services along the route.

The best fishing opportunities along the road are between July and mid-September. Many streams are turbid from snowmelt runoff throughout much of June.

The abundance and variety of freshwater fish diminish with increasing latitude and altitude, so

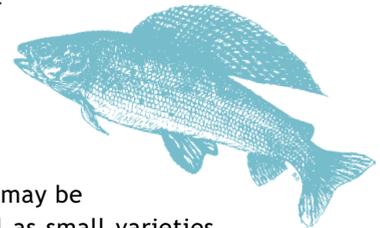
the combination of more northerly latitude and proximity to headwaters means that fewer fish inhabit these waters than in more southerly and coastal areas of Alaska. Nevertheless, when timing and conditions are right, you can find good fishing for Arctic grayling, Dolly Varden, burbot, and northern pike. Lake trout also inhabit some lakes of the North Slope, but are restricted to catch-and-release-only fishing. **All lake trout caught within the pipeline corridor must be released unharmed.**

A few chinook (king) and chum (dog) salmon spawn in many of the highway's streams, providing limited viewing opportunities during spawning season. However, **sport fishing for salmon is prohibited in the Dalton Highway corridor, except at the mouth of the Ray River.**

All fish in the streams are wild, native stocks—no effort has been made to stock hatchery fish or non-native fish into the area.

This is not a complete list of all flowing water crossed by the highway or of all lakes that might be accessible from the road. Anglers should be aware that Arctic grayling, in particular, are found in virtually all flowing waters—at least at certain times of the year—and that exploration of small, unnamed creeks can sometimes pay off with excellent fishing results. As a general rule, fishing success in this area, as in almost any area, improves with distance from the road crossings.

Be prepared to walk a modest distance up or down the stream to find better fishing, but keep in mind that large animals (bears) may be present, as well as small varieties (mosquitoes) that can make life challenging or uncomfortable.



A word of caution to those intending to stop and fish along the Dalton Highway: remember that the highway exists primarily to serve industrial transportation needs. On a typical summer day, dozens of loaded 18-wheel trucks speed along the narrow roadway in both directions. Parking along the highway is not recommended because of the large truck traffic, the dusty conditions, and flying rocks created by traffic. Find parking places that are well off the roadway. Also be aware that many stream crossing turnouts are used by water trucks belonging to the Alaska Department of Transportation (ADOT). They use the turnouts to fill up before proceeding with maintenance work on the road. Park so as not to impede tanker filling.

In this guide, we list stream crossings and lakes by name and distance in miles (approximate) northward, from the start of the Dalton Highway near Livengood.

Hess Creek—24 mi.

Hess Creek is the largest stream between the Elliott Highway and the Yukon River bridge. The creek supports resident populations of Arctic grayling, whitefish, and northern pike. There is a good turnout and a gravel bar for parking. A gravel site, reached by an access road about 500 feet north of the Hess Creek crossing, can be used as a campsite. The stream may be navigable downstream by canoe or raft, though occasional logjams do occur. A motor is necessary to travel back upstream to the Yukon bridge (about 31 miles) after reaching the mouth of Hess Creek. You will find sheefish, burbot, and northern pike near the mouth of Hess Creek.

Yukon River—56 mi.

A boat launching ramp is available on the northwest side of the river. Except for burbot fishing, essentially no sport fishing is done on the mainstem of the Yukon River because of water's turbidity. Chinook and chum salmon, northern pike, sheefish, Arctic grayling, whitefish, and burbot all live in the river.

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Streams along the Dalton Highway have been fished regularly by anglers for more than 20 years since the trans-Alaska pipeline was completed in 1978. Personnel stationed at State of Alaska road maintenance camps, pipeline pump stations, and in the oil fields, as well as long-haul truck drivers and the general public, have all participated in the fishery. Fishing quality, as judged by average size and catch rates, has declined in many streams and lakes accessible from the highway since the pipeline corridor was opened for sport fishing. Fish and game animals have been harvested for generations by subsistence hunters and fishermen residing nearby, but their demands were light, and use was spread out over a vast roadless area. Now, roads tend to concentrate effort in a few locations.

Because fish grow and reproduce more slowly at high latitudes and elevations, the fish populations in these regions are particularly susceptible to overharvest. Average size and abundance can decrease quite rapidly in response to fishing pressure. Lake populations of Arctic grayling, Dolly Varden, and lake trout are especially vulnerable to overfishing, though stream stocks are also sensitive to fishing pressure. We encourage anglers to practice catch-and-release techniques and to use barbless hooks.



Burbot fishing is popular in the fall before freeze-up and in the winter through the ice. During summer months, commercial and subsistence gillnets, as well as operating fish wheels, may be seen near the bridge. The Ray River mouth, about 2 miles downstream of the crossing, can be a good fishing spot for northern pike and sheefish during summer.

Ray River—69 mi.

Turnouts at mile 69 and 70 provide overlooks of the Ray River, which joins the Yukon River about 2 miles downstream of the Yukon River bridge. The road does not cross the the Ray River — a steep walk is required to reach it. The river is usually fordable on foot, with gravel bars to fish from for Arctic grayling, sheefish, burbot, northern pike, and whitefish. In some years, salmon may be taken in the mouth of the Ray River. This is the only place within the pipeline corridor where salmon harvest is occasionally permitted. Consult current year's regulations.

No Name Creek—80 mi. (a/k/a north fork of Ray River)

This small stream is a branch of the Ray River. There is a turnout at the bridge. The creek has undercut banks with overhanging brush in many places. Fishing can be good in May or June for Arctic grayling, but water levels normally decline in midsummer.

Kanuti River—107 mi.

This is the first tributary of the Koyukuk River crossed by the highway. There is a turnout on the southeast side of the bridge. The Kanuti River contains Arctic grayling, burbot, whitefish, and northern pike. It flows through the Kanuti National Wildlife Refuge and joins the Koyukuk about 80 miles downstream. Near the bridge crossing, the water is slightly humic-stained, making the river the color of tea.

Adventurous types might try paddling or walking a canoe upstream while fishing, then floating back to the bridge.

Fish Creek—115 mi.

Fish Creek joins Bonanza Creek and flows about 30 miles before reaching the South Fork Koyukuk River. There is a small turnout on the northeast side of the bridge. The stream is small and usually clear in summer. Whitefish are present, and you can find good fishing for Arctic grayling—but walking and wading might be difficult because of the brushy banks and occasional logjams.

Bonanza Creek South Fork and North Fork—123 mi and 124 mi.

Both creeks contain Arctic grayling, burbot, and whitefish. There is a good turnout on the southeast side of the bridge on the South Fork, with room for a few campsites. The North Fork has a small turnout on the northeast side of the bridge. Both forks join, then meet Fish Creek before flowing to the South Fork of the Koyukuk River. The North Fork carries a higher volume of water than the South Fork.

Prospect Creek—135 mi.

Prospect Creek contains Arctic grayling, northern pike, and whitefish. Turnouts at the bridge are poor to nonexistent, but a materials site access road 1/4 mile to the south provides access to the creek and is a safe turnout. There is a small pond here created by gravel extraction, and the area next to it is a good campsite. Prospect Creek joins the Jim River within 3 miles of the road crossing, and Jim River flows into the South Fork of the Koyukuk River.



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◆ **Jim River: No. 1 bridge—140 mi.
No. 2 bridge—141 mi.
No. 3 bridge—144 mi.**

No. 3 bridge crosses the largest of the three branches of Jim River. A good turnout for parking is on the southeast side of the bridge. Chinook and chum salmon, Arctic grayling, burbot, whitefish and northern pike are all found in the Jim River. In fact, this river is probably the most productive fisheries stream crossed by the Dalton Highway. After being joined by Prospect Creek, the Jim River flows into the South Fork of the Koyukuk River.

The road parallels the river for about 10 miles from No. 1 bridge to the junction of the Bettles winter access road near Pump Station 5 (Prospect Camp). The winter access road leaves the Dalton Highway about one mile north of the Prospect Creek crossing and leads to the old Prospect Pipeline Camp and the Jim River. Campsites are available here. A nice daytrip by canoe or raft begins at any of the bridge crossings, with a haulout destination at the Bettles winter access road. You can also reach the Jim River if you park near the Douglas Creek bridge and walk to the stream.

◆ **Grayling Lake—149 mi.**

This 80-acre lake is relatively shallow, but constitutes an important rearing area for Arctic grayling. The outlet stream enters the Jim River. Excellent fishing for Arctic grayling is available at times. The turnout area at 149 mi. is substantial but can get busy during hunting season when float planes land to pick up passengers and gear. A canoe, raft, or small power boat would be handy but not essential.

◆ **South Fork Koyukuk R.—157 mi.**

Juvenile chinook and chum salmon, and adult Arctic grayling and whitefish are present in the vicinity of the bridge. At the turnouts on the south side of the bridge it's possible to launch boats under certain water level conditions. The South Fork joins the Middle Fork Koyukuk River

between rocky shallow riffles and pools, making navigation by powered boat difficult. Excellent fishing for Arctic grayling is within walking distance of the bridge.

◆ **Slate Creek—174 mi.**

This stream enters the Middle Fork Koyukuk River at Coldfoot. Dolly Varden, Arctic grayling, and whitefish all can be found, and both chinook and chum salmon have been reported in the stream. Resident Dolly Varden are small, nonanadromous, and not abundant. Stream banks are brushy, and turnouts are small.

◆ **Marion Creek—179 mi.**

There are Arctic grayling and small Dolly Varden in the creek. Marion Creek joins the Middle Fork Koyukuk River to the west of the road.

◆ **Minnie Creek—186 mi.**

Arctic grayling, burbot, and whitefish live in this small stream. Turnouts are provided on both the northwest and southwest sides of the bridge.

◆ **Middle Fork Koyukuk River—
four bridge crossings from
189 mi. to 205 mi.**

This river is also accessible from the north end of the airstrip at Coldfoot, where boat launching is possible under good conditions. The road parallels the river for several miles. Chinook and chum salmon, Dolly Varden, Arctic grayling and whitefish live in the river. The river flows south where it is joined by the North Fork Koyukuk and the South Fork Koyukuk. Fishing can be good under clearwater conditions, but the water is usually silt-laden. The best road turnout is at bridge #3 (204 mi.), which has toilets and litter barrels on the northeast side. Fish from many of the smaller tributary streams probably drop back into the Middle Fork for overwintering. A good canoe or raft trip starts at one of the Middle Fork bridges and takes out at Coldfoot. Power boating in the Middle Fork requires shallow operation capabilities. Props are not recommended.

Dietrich River—207 mi.

Dolly Varden, Arctic grayling, burbot, and whitefish live in this river. The road parallels the river for about 25 miles as it goes up the Dietrich River valley. This highly braided river meanders through a broad floodplain, and rain tends to bring water to high and muddy levels within a short time. The river can be reached from the road in many places along the route. There is a turnout on the southwest side of the bridge, where canoes or rafts can be launched for travel down the lower Dietrich River and the Middle Fork Koyukuk River. The Dietrich River joins the Bettles River near 208 mi. to form the Middle Fork Koyukuk River. Normally, fish move upstream in the spring and summer to spawn and feed, and downstream in fall to overwinter in the lower Dietrich or Middle Fork Koyukuk River.

Atigun River—bridge crossings at 253 mi. and 271 mi.

Arctic grayling, Dolly Varden, burbot, and whitefish inhabit the Atigun River, and Arctic grayling range throughout the upper Atigun and many of its tributaries. Several miles of stream are accessible from the Dalton Highway as far north as the second bridge at 271 mi. Only very small turnouts are available at the bridge crossings, but if you park safely on the Dalton Highway shoulders and walk a short way, you can reach many stretches of river. Flyfishing for small to medium (6- to 11-inch) Arctic grayling can be fun when clearwater conditions prevail during summer.

Tea Lake—270 mi.

Located near the highway and the access road to Pump Station 4, Tea Lake contains Arctic grayling and burbot. Resident lake trout are available, but **fishing is restricted to catch-and-release only**. A short downhill trail to the west side of the road over slightly wet ground leads to the lake shore. Fishing success is enhanced by using a boat or raft, but the craft has to be carried down to the lake.

Galbraith Lake—276 mi.

Arctic grayling, Dolly Varden, lake trout, burbot, and whitefish all reside in Galbraith Lake. The maximum depth in this 1,030-acre lake is 23 feet, and its water is slightly turbid. You can see Galbraith Lake to the west of Dalton Highway, and an access road runs to an active airstrip about 1¹/₂ miles from the highway, but there is no road to the lake itself. The access road crosses one of the inlet streams 1¹/₂ miles above the lake. Lake trout are sometimes found in the lower inlet stream in fall, but they don't travel as far upstream as the access road. To fish on the lake you can hike overland through semi-wet tundra or hike down the inlet stream. Because of the effort required to reach it, Galbraith Lake receives less fishing pressure than more accessible Dalton Highway waters. A lake outlet stream enters the Atigun River about 200 yards upstream of Atigun bridge #2.

Island Lake—279 mi.

Arctic char, Arctic grayling, lake trout, and whitefish live in Island Lake. It is located a short distance to the west and downhill of Dalton Highway and is not directly accessible by road. It has no active inlet or outlet streams, and current fish populations are very sparse compared to prior years.

Toolik Lake—284 mi.

Toolik Lake contains Arctic grayling, lake trout, and whitefish. It drains northward into the Kuparuk River. A marked access road, about a mile west of the highway, leads to this 358-acre lake. Here, the University of Alaska Fairbanks, Institute of Arctic Biology, operates the Toolik Field Station within the Toolik Lake Research Natural Area (RNA). The site of many Arctic biology research projects, the Toolik Lake RNA includes the lake and 82,800 acres of surrounding land. Fishing is permitted in the lake, but camping is prohibited within the RNA. The maximum lake depth is 77 feet, so a boat facilitates fishing.

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... Toolik Lake (continued)

Lake trout fishing is best at breakup and just before freeze-up in the fall. Toolik Lake has inlet and outlet streams, and many other small lakes upstream and downstream are accessible by foot. Several of these are good fishing opportunities for those willing to make the effort to get there.

◆ Horizon Lake—288 mi.

Arctic char live in this small lake, which has no active inlet or outlet streams. It lies less than a mile east of the Dalton Highway but is not visible from the road. Resident char populations in small lakes such as this are likely to be extremely sensitive to overfishing. The population has probably been isolated for a long time.

◆ Kuparuk River—290 mi.

Arctic grayling inhabit this far upstream branch of the east fork of the river. Water is slightly humic-stained. There are turnouts on the road and north of the bridge on the east side. A pipeline access road is present on the east side of the road that extends a little way upstream.

◆ Oksrukuyik Creek—298 mi.

Arctic grayling and burbot are present. This stream, which drains the Campsite Lakes 5 miles south of the road, also crosses the road at 310 mi., just north of Pump Station Number 3. Anglers may wish to try walking a short distance to the mouth of the creek at its junction with the Sagavanirktok River. There is good fishing for grayling and burbot at the mouth of the creek.

◆ Dan Creek—331 mi.

Arctic grayling are present. This swift small stream flows into the Sagavanirktok River. Shoulder parking for three or four cars is available on the west side of the road at the bridge. Be careful parking because of steep hills on either side of the crossing. Park well off the road.

◆ Happy Valley Creek—334 mi.

Arctic grayling are present. Burbot and Dolly Varden are available in late August–early September. Turnouts to the east and west provide ample parking for any size vehicle. Happy Valley Creek flows into the Sagavanirktok River at the north end of the Happy Valley airstrip.

◆ Sagavanirktok River

There are no highway crossings of the Sagavanirktok River, but the river parallels the road for about 100 miles as it flows north to Prudhoe Bay and the Arctic Ocean. The river contains Arctic grayling, Dolly Varden, burbot, and whitefish. Arctic grayling are year-round residents in the river, but most of the Dolly Varden leave to feed in the ocean during the open water months. They return, beginning in late August, to spawn and overwinter in the river and some of its tributaries. Dolly Varden more than 10 lb are not uncommon, but their average adult size is 3 to 6 lb. Fishing success in the river is limited to those periods when the adults are making their spawning migration in late summer.

The river can be reached by foot or vehicle from many points where the road comes in close proximity to it. One of the first such locations is just north of Pump Station Number 3 at 311 mi. Another convenient access point is near the Ice Cut at 325 mi., and the Happy Valley airstrip at 334 mi. provides another. Other good access points are located just outside of Deadhorse where the road swings very close to the river. The Sagavanirktok River also offers good opportunities for boating, rafting and canoeing in conjunction with fishing trips. Float trips are facilitated by the multitude of road access points. ❖

How to practice careful catch-and-release fishing techniques

Tackle

- Use strong line to land your catch quickly.
- Fish caught with flies or lures survive at a higher rate than fish caught with bait.
- Use hooks appropriate to the size of the fish. Overly large hooks can damage mouth parts or eyes, and small hooks can be taken deeply.
- Use single hook lures instead of treble hooks.
- Use pliers to pinch down barbs.

When you follow these guidelines, your released fish has the best chance at survival. And when you keep a fish, you assure its best quality.

Landing your catch

- Land your fish carefully and quickly.
- Use a landing net made with soft or knotless mesh.
- Do not drag the fish up onto the gravel beach if fishing from shore.
- Avoid removing the fish from the water.
- Do not let fish flop in shallow water, over rocks, or on dry land.

Handling your catch

- Cradle the fish gently with both hands, one under its belly, one near its tail.
- **Keep your fingers out of and away from its gills and eyes.**
- Use wet cloth gloves, or wet your hands when handling the fish.
- **Never squeeze the fish.**
- If you want a memento, support the fish in the water while someone takes your picture.



Removing the hook

- Use long-nosed pliers to back out the hook.
- Remove the hook quickly and gently, **keeping the fish under water.**
- When a fish is hooked deeply, cut the line near the hook.



- **Use steel hooks that will quickly rust out: avoid stainless steel hooks.**

Reviving your catch

- Point your fish into a slow current or gently move it back and forth until its gills are working properly and it maintains its balance.
- When the fish recovers and attempts to swim out of your hands, let it go.
- Large fish may take some time to revive.

How to identify some of the fish species found in the Dalton Highway corridor

Anglers frequently confuse the following three CHAR species. Fishing regulations differ among these species, so be sure you identify them correctly.

LAKE TROUT: The lake trout is a char. Lake trout can be distinguished from other char by numerous white-yellow spots covering the head, the entire tail, back and sides. No other Alaskan char species has spots on its face and tail. The lake trout also has a deeply forked tail, unlike most other char. True to its name, the lake trout is primarily a lake inhabitant, but it is also found sometimes in northern Alaska rivers.



ARCTIC CHAR: The Arctic char has light-colored spots, typically larger than its pupil, on a brown to olive background that fades along its sides to a pale belly. Spawning colors are often brilliant orange or red and underbody fins have bright white leading edges. Arctic char tend to have a shorter head than Dolly Varden. Its tail has a slight fork, not as severe as the lake trout's, and the base of its tail is narrower than the Dolly Varden's. Arctic char of the Dalton Highway corridor are strictly lake-dwelling species.



DOLLY VARDEN CHAR: Bluish gray or silver background with small, light spots. No spots on head or tail. Easily confused with Arctic char, but the Dolly Varden has a more squared-off tail, a more elongated head (especially spawning males) and a wider tail base. Dolly Varden are the only char species found in rivers and streams of the Dalton Highway corridor.



ARCTIC GRAYLING: Light copper to dark purple back, fading to bluish gray with black spots on sides. Large, sail-like dorsal fin with red and aqua to violet spots, iridescent in large fish. Dorsal fins of mature males extend to or past the adipose fin; females have much shorter dorsal fins. Pelvic fins often have orange stripes.



NORTHERN PIKE: A large, voracious, predatory fish. Back and sides are greenish with yellow-white irregularly shaped spots. The head is flattened, with alligator-like jaws containing many large, sharp teeth. Fins are tinged with orange.



BURBOT: The only freshwater cod in North America, the burbot is a prehistoric-looking fish with a slim, elongated, mottled brownish-black body and smooth skin. Dorsal and anal fins run from mid-body to tail. It has a flattened head and wide mouth with many small teeth and one barbel (whisker-like extension) hanging from its lower jaw.



WHITEFISH Like chars and grayling, whitefish are members of the salmon family. Five species inhabit waterways of the Dalton Highway corridor, and hybrids occasionally occur. Some whitefish are difficult to distinguish from each other. Typically, they have prominent silver scales and no spots. Most whitefish are harvested in subsistence fisheries—they are not easily caught with sportfishing tackle. The sheefish (below), however, is one whitefish that is an important sport fish.

SHEEFISH: This is the largest member of the whitefish family. It has large jaws, and the lower jaw extends past the upper. Its tail is deeply forked. Sheefish are uncommon in Dalton Highway waters north of the Yukon crossing.

