# United States Department of the Interior

**National Park Service**

**Lake Clark National Park and Preserve**

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## Program Updates Summer 2026

Lake Clark National Park and Preserve

Southwest Area Inventory and Monitoring Network (SWAN)

### SUBSISTENCE DIVISION, LIZA RUPP (907) 644-3648

***Lake Clark National Park Subsistence Resource Commission***

- The Lake Clark Subsistence Resource Commission (SRC) met both in person in Iliamna and via teleconference on September 27, 2025. The SRC met via teleconference only on February 7, 2026, to discuss the Secretarial review of the Federal Subsistence Management Program. The spring meeting will be held in person in Nondalton or via teleconference on April 18, 2026.

### NATURAL RESOURCES DIVISION, BUCK MANGIPANE (907) 644-3635

***Coastal Bear Projects***

- In 2026, park staff will conduct bear trend counts of coastal salt marsh areas in June, July, and August. Trend counts began in 2003 and have been conducted annually since then. In 2025, three surveys were conducted, one on June 24, one July 15, and one August 5. There were 224, 134, and 36 brown bears observed on the June, July, and August surveys, respectively.

***Moose Population Survey***

- Moose surveys are planned for March 2026, with both the interior and coastal regions of Lake Clark included. Data collected will allow an assessment of changes in moose abundance and distribution.

***Dall's Sheep Survey***

- A Dall's sheep survey is planned for July 2026, with a goal of covering all sheep habitat within the park and preserve. A parkwide survey was completed in July 2025 and results indicated the sheep population in LACL had potentially declined by greater than 50% since 2019. This decline followed a period of population increase and stability between 2012 and 2019. Additional survey data will help validate the observed decline and understand how the population may be responding to this change.

***Newhalen River Counting Tower***

- The park will be monitoring the Newhalen River sockeye salmon escapement again this summer. Monitoring on the Newhalen River has been ongoing since 2000 and provides information on salmon escapement, run timing, and population characteristics. The 2025 estimated escapement was about 428,000 sockeye salmon, which was approximately 14% of the total Kvichak River return of 3.0 million. This year's escapement to the Newhalen River was relatively early with the mid-point on 7/17, 5 days earlier than average. Preliminary assessment of age and size data indicates the run was primarily comprised of older, 3-ocean salmon. This is consistent with accounts from local subsistence users who indicated the salmon were early, bright, and large.

***Telaquana River Weir***

- This summer the park will be operating the Telaquana River weir, in collaboration with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game. This was the 16th year of this collaborative project with the state of Alaska and provides a reliable estimate of salmon escapement to one of the few lake-rearing sockeye salmon populations in the Kuskokwim River drainage. This year's return to Telaquana was 117,522 sockeye salmon representing 13% of the total estimated escapement past the Kuskokwim River sonar and was 24% below the 10-year average. Estimated escapement for Chum salmon and Chinook salmon were 119 and 56, 30% and 10% higher than average respectively. Similar to the Newhalen, the timing of the migration past the weir was 3 days earlier than average with the mid-point on 7/21.

***Cold-Water Refuges***

- In 2026, LACL and SWAN will continue the cold-water refuge work begun in 2024. Cold-water refuges are important freshwater locations where fish species can find relief as water temperatures approach or exceed thermal thresholds. Efforts in 2024 and 2025 consisted of flying aerial surveys with an infrared camera to map the spatial distribution of thermal refuges, thermal image processing which identified more than 300 cold-water refuges, and deployment of temperature loggers at a subset of these identified refuges to help characterize their extent and persistence over time. This year, we will outfit additional refuge sites with water temperature loggers; fly additional aerial surveys; and retrieve deployed loggers to download data.

SOUTHWEST ALASKA INVENTORY AND MONITORING NETWORK, HEATHER COLETTI (907) 644-3688

***Water Quality Monitoring***

- Lake temperature has been monitored year-round in Lake Clark since 2006, and in Kijik Lake since 2010. In 2017, temperature monitoring also began in Telaquana Lake. In 2026, monitoring will continue at all three sites. The monitoring uses data loggers attached at various depths to moored vertical temperature arrays. Data from the temperature arrays allow tracking of freeze-up and break-up dates, lake stratification, and large-scale wind events, all of which influence lake productivity. Additional water quality measurements – including pH, dissolved oxygen, specific conductivity, and turbidity – are measured at the outlet of Lake Clark during summer (June-September), and at multiple points on the lake once per summer (July). A separate set of temperature loggers at a number of stream and beach locations in the Lake Clark basin measure water temperatures where sockeye salmon spawn. In 2025, we also plan to conduct summer measurements of water quality parameters at several smaller lakes, including Lower and Upper Tazimina and Kontrashibuna lakes. Time permitting, we might also conduct measurements at one or more other small lakes (i.e., Lower and Upper Twin, Turquoise, Telaquana, and Two lakes).

***Surface Hydrology Monitoring***

- Streamflow near the outlet of Lake Clark has been estimated since 2009, and near the outlet of Kijik Lake since 2014, by measuring water levels hourly during the ice-free portion of the year. This work will continue during the 2026 field season. The data are useful for understanding patterns observed in aquatic systems because streamflow affects many processes, from nutrient loading to the timing and success of fish spawning.

***Lake Trout Fishing Survey***

- Dr. Peyton Thomas, at the University of Colorado Boulder, requests your help by completing a short survey about how climate change may impact lake trout fishing in your community. This survey is intended for people that fish in lakes within or near Alaska's National Parks. Results of the survey will be used to help estimate future fish growth rate, size, and reproduction (such as how many eggs lake trout produce) and will be shared with community members. Please stay tuned for more information.

***Bald Eagle Surveys***

- Lake Clark supports large populations of bald eagles. Their breeding success is influenced by habitat integrity and food availability, among other factors. Bald eagle surveys conducted in LACL show that nest occupancy has been highly variable since surveys were initiated in 1992.

In 2026, bald eagle surveys will again be flown in May and June-July to determine how many eagle nests are occupied by eagles, and how many chicks are observed in each nest.

***Vegetation Monitoring***

- Vegetation monitoring in Lake Clark provides information regarding long-term changes in species richness, cover and diversity across a range of vegetation types. Monitoring in 2026 is planned to occur in forest, shrub, and alpine habitats, primarily in June and July.

***Weather Stations***

- Lake Clark's five weather stations (Chigmit, Silver Salmon Creek, Snipe, Port Alsworth, Stoney) *may* receive annual maintenance between May and August 2026, depending on staffing.

## INTERPRETATION, EDUCATION, PARTNERSHIPS, AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS, CHELSEA NILES (907) 644-3637

***Youth Programming***

- Youth Camps: We will be reaching out to tribal councils and administrators over the next few months to hear how best to provide youth programs in communities this summer. The park plans to hold in-person day camp programs in two communities between July and August.
- Junior Ranger Programming: The park will host weekly Junior Ranger programs throughout the summer in Port Alsworth.
- School Programs: In person and virtual education opportunities are available on request. Please reach out to schedule!

***Projects***

- Park Film(s): The feature-length film *K'etniyi: The Land is Speaking to Us*, was released in fall of 2025, with an award-winning premiere at the Anchorage International Film Festival. In 2026, the park will continue to offer premieres of this feature in addition to finalizing a short version to be used in the visitor center, AAPLIC, and in educational programming.

## FACILITIES MANAGEMENT, WARREN HILL (907) 644-3383

***Backcountry Facility Improvements***

- Planned work includes deferred maintenance at the ranger cabins at Chinitna Bay and Silver Salmon Creek on the Cook Inlet coast, and general improvements to the Weissers Cabin at Upper Twin Lakes for administrative use.

***Public Use Cabin Maintenance***

- The facilities team will undertake general maintenance and repairs to the Priest Rock and Joe Thompson public use cabins.

***Hansen Cabin Improvements***

- Park staff will make minor improvements to the structures and conduct a general clean-up of the area to facilitate potential use of the site as a public use cabin or campsite associated with a future Water Trail on Lake Clark.

For questions relating to the Visitor and Resource Protection Division please contact Chief Ranger Joe Dallemolle at (907) 644-3647.