



**Alaska Department of Fish and Game**  
**Commissioner's Policy**  
(revised June 2009)

**PROCEDURES AND SELECTION CRITERIA FOR SPECIAL ACCESS PERMITS**  
**AT THE MCNEIL RIVER STATE GAME SANCTUARY**

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Under Alaska State Statute 16.20.163 and regulations adopted by the Department of Fish and Game, all access to the McNeil River State Game Sanctuary requires authorization from the department in the form of an Access Permit (5 AAC 92.065 and 93.030). These permits include:

1. **Guided Viewing Access Permits (aka Regular Permits)** are issued by lottery, through which all applicants have an equal opportunity of being selected. For the period of June 7-August 25, 185 individual permits (each for a 4-day period) are available (740 permit-days possible).
2. **Camp-Standby Viewing Access Permits (aka Standby Permits)** are issued by lottery and are utilized to fill vacancies that occur when visitors holding regular permits fail to use their permit. Visitors holding standby permits are allowed to stay in the sanctuary campground. A total of 57 standby permits are issued each year, 3 for each time block (171 permit-days possible).
3. **Special Access Permits** are issued for bear-viewing opportunities and include:
  - a. **Scientific, Educational and Media Permits** to visit the sanctuary during the period June 7-August 25 and are issued by the Commissioner following review of proposals by the McNeil River Permit Review Panel which makes recommendations to the Commissioner. Generally no more than 10 permits (40 permit-days) may be allocated for scientific, educational or media purposes.
  - b. **Commissioner's Permits** are issued at the discretion of the Commissioner. Generally no more than 5 permits (20 permit-days) may be allocated to Commissioner's Permits.
4. **Non-viewing Access Permits** are issued for purposes other than viewing bears and are unlimited provided they do not detract from the purposes for which the sanctuary was established. These are issued at the discretion of the DWC Regional Supervisor (or their designee) under the designated authority of the Commissioner.
5. **Transporter Access Permits (aka Commercial Operator Permits)** are issued to guides, air taxi operators, boat taxi operator or lodge owners for purposes of providing access to individuals in designated areas of the sanctuary.

## SPECIAL ACCESS PERMITS

The following procedures and selection criteria were developed by the Division of Wildlife Conservation to evaluate applications for scientific, educational, media and commissioner's permits to the McNeil River State Game Sanctuary.

**Intent of Special Access Permits:** The McNeil River State Game Sanctuary was established by statute (AS 16.20.170) to:

1. provide permanent protection for brown bear and other fish and wildlife populations and their habitat, so that these resources may be preserved for scientific, aesthetic, and educational purposes;
2. manage human use and activities in a way that is compatible with paragraph (1), and to maintain and enhance the unique bear viewing opportunities within the sanctuary, and
3. provide opportunities compatible with paragraph (1), for wildlife viewing, fisheries enhancement, and fishing, for temporary safe anchorage, and for other activities.

To accomplish these objectives the Department of Fish and Game has developed procedures under which all visitors desiring to visit the sanctuary during the bear concentration period have an equal opportunity to obtain access permits through a lottery. However, there are circumstances where it is in the best interests of the sanctuary and the State of Alaska to provide permits based on merit rather than chance. The Alaska Board of Game has authorized the department to allocate up to 15 four-day permits (or 60 permit-days per season) to be utilized for such purposes (5 AAC 92.065).

The intent of this policy is to establish the selection criteria under which these special access permits will be issued. These criteria are designed to assure that only highly qualified projects that are clearly in the best interests of the State of Alaska and fish and wildlife resources will receive special access permits. This high standard will mean that all available special access permit slots may not be utilized. It is also the intent of these procedures to allocate special access permits prior to the regular permit lottery so that unallocated special access permit slots can be made available to the general public through the permit lottery.

Increased publicity for the McNeil River sanctuary will not be considered adequate justification for granting a special access permit. For-profit film-makers/photographers will not generally be considered for scientific, educational or media permits unless exceptional benefits to the sanctuary, bear conservation or management, wildlife management in Alaska, or to the State of Alaska can be demonstrated.

### **Definitions:**

A permit allows an individual to access the sanctuary and visit a bear viewing area for a specified number of days (typically 4).

A permit-day is a permit for 1 individual to stay in the sanctuary for 1 day.

A time block is one of the 20 pre-established 4 day periods between June 7 and August 25.

Lottery and special access permit applicants must specify the time block for which they desire to receive a permit.

## **Scientific, Educational and Media Permits**

### **Procedures:**

1. Applications for scientific, educational and media permits must be received by a date determined by the department of the calendar year preceding the summer season the applicant desires to visit the sanctuary. Applications must be sent to the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Division of Wildlife Conservation, McNeil River Permit Review Panel, 333 Raspberry Rd., Anchorage, AK 99518-1599.
2. A maximum of ten 4-day permits (40 permit-days) will generally be available for scientific, educational and media applications. These permits will normally be issued for the following time blocks: June 15-18, June 23-26, July 13-16, July 25-28, and August 6-9. No more than 12 permit-days (3 individuals for a 4-day period) will be allocated to scientific, educational and media permits for any one time block. Unallocated permit-days will be made available for Commissioner's Permits (described below) and regular lottery applicants.
3. Applicants who receive a scientific, educational or media permit will not be eligible for any other form of McNeil River sanctuary access permit for the calendar year of their permit (except off-season permits).
4. Unsuccessful applicants for scientific, educational and media permits may apply for regular and standby permits issued through the lottery.
5. Scientific, educational and media permits may be granted for a maximum of 3 persons during a 4-day time block. The function and need for each of these persons must be fully explained and the review panel may recommend issuing permits for fewer individuals or fewer permit-days than requested.
6. The Special Access Permit Review Panel will make recommendations to the Commissioner regarding the qualifications of each application. The Commissioner will consider the panel's recommendations and may accept or reject all or a portion of them. Applicants will be notified of results, and successful applicants will be issued their permits, by a date determined by the department.

**General Selection Criteria:** Recipients of scientific, educational and media permits must demonstrate that their work will provide significant benefits to:

1. wildlife conservation in Alaska,
2. the McNeil River State Game Sanctuary,
3. bear conservation and management, or
4. the State of Alaska.

Recipients must also demonstrate that their objectives may best be accomplished at the McNeil River sanctuary rather than at another location.

The permit review panel will set a high standard for successful applicants to assure there is a high return of scientific, educational and media values. This high standard will mean that all available scientific, educational and media permits may not be allocated. Letters of endorsement from recognized scientific, educational or media authorities will strengthen applications.

**Scientific Selection Criteria:** In addition to the above general criteria, permit applicants for scientific purposes must demonstrate that:

1. their work will contribute to the scientific knowledge or conservation of bears, and/or
2. their work will increase the understanding of ecological or behavioral processes that exist at the McNeil River sanctuary and that this knowledge would enhance visitor satisfaction or help preserve the characteristics that make the McNeil River sanctuary valuable to people, bears, or other wildlife.

**Educational Selection Criteria:** In addition to the above general criteria, permit applicants for educational purposes must demonstrate that:

1. that knowledge gained at the sanctuary by educators or representatives of educational institutions will further the objectives for which the sanctuary was established; and/or
2. they are managers of proposed or existing bear viewing facilities elsewhere who require first-hand experience with the features that have made the McNeil River program successful. Generally, visitors who receive Special Access Permits on this basis should be the actual in-field managers of the facilities. Less consideration will be given to administrative and support staff for such facilities; and/or
3. they are managers of an organization or agency charged with oversight of bear conservation or research, land or program management, or other managerial duties that will influence a wide range of programs affecting wildlife management.

**Media Selection Criteria:** In addition to the above general criteria, permit applicants for media purposes (including *public or artistic media and for-profit communications*) must demonstrate that:

1. their work as photographers, film makers or in other forms of public or artistic media or in communications have demonstrated a record of high quality productions that make significant and scientifically accurate contributions to public knowledge of natural history topics. Samples of previous work demonstrating this level of competence will strengthen their application; and/or
2. there are significant public policy issues concerning the McNeil River sanctuary about which the public and policy makers deserve first-hand, objective information from print, television or other media reporters. Special consideration will be given to applicants whose projects will have the greatest circulation. Applicants should demonstrate their willingness to share their projects by attaching letters of agreement from each outlet or media type that will be using their reports.

## Commissioner's Permits

**Intent:** Commissioner's Permits may be issued to an individual or entity at the discretion of the Commissioner when it is determined to be in the best interest of the McNeil River sanctuary, wildlife conservation in Alaska, bear management or conservation, or the State of Alaska.

### **Procedures:**

1. The Commissioner may allocate commissioner's permits slots remaining unfilled by scientific, educational and media permits.
2. Applicants who receive a Commissioner's permit will not be eligible for any other form of McNeil River sanctuary access permit for the calendar year of their permit (except off-season permits).

**Selection Criteria:** Commissioner's permits may be issued at the Commissioner's discretion. Examples of categories for which the commissioner will consider issuing permits include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. Elected or appointed officials who are, or are likely to be, involved in a legislative or regulatory decisions on issues affecting the sanctuary, bear management of conservation, or wildlife management in Alaska.
2. Individuals who have provided, or intend to provide, significant financial or other types of support to wildlife conservation in Alaska or to the McNeil River program.
3. Honoraria designed to recognize highly significant contributions to wildlife conservation, education, viewing or similar programs, or for humanitarian reasons.
4. Staff of the Department of Fish and Game when the granting of such permits is deemed necessary or desirable for improving policy decisions or management/administrative support for the program, or in recognition of outstanding service to the department.
5. Any individual or entity when the Commissioner determines it is in the best interest of the sanctuary, wildlife management in Alaska, bear conservation and management, or the State of Alaska.
6. The Commissioner may provide up to 2 permits to a non-profit organization for use in fundraising activities if the Commissioner determines that the organization's use will complement the mission and goals of the department and all funds raised by the organization through the use of these permits are utilized for that purpose.

Adopted:

  
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Denby S. Lloyd, Commissioner

7-2-09  
Date