



Recreational Gold Mining in Alaska

Eight Stars of Gold

Gold mining is not just a part of Alaska's past, but it is still an important activity in many areas of the state. You might like to try your hand at finding some of the precious metal. A U.S. Geological Survey bulletin in 1986, "Significant Metalliferous Lode Deposits and Placer Districts of Alaska," describes all of the locations throughout the state of Alaska where metallic minerals have been found. Recreational gold panning and prospecting are permitted, with some restrictions, on most public lands in Alaska. On private lands or mining claims, the owner's permission is needed to mine even if you are just gold panning. Alaska Native villages and corporation lands are private.

Land Status

It is not easy to determine where on public lands recreational gold mining is possible and permitted. You must always check on the status of the land before beginning your activities. If you are unsure of the status of a particular area, check with the federal Bureau of Land Management. They maintain the most up to date maps and information on land status, but you will need to know the exact location of the land in which you are interested, including meridian, township, range, and sometimes section. In Alaska, there is still land with undetermined status pending state and Native Corporation claims settlements. For this reason, it is not possible for accurate maps to be widely available.

To determine if an area is open to mineral entry and if there are legal mining claims in the area, contact the State Division of Mining, or, for claims on federal lands, the Bureau of Land Management. Once you have determined land status, know that it is public land, that it is open to mineral entry, and that it has no legal claims, check with the managing agency to determine what restrictions might be in force. In many areas, suction dredges are prohibited in order to protect streams.

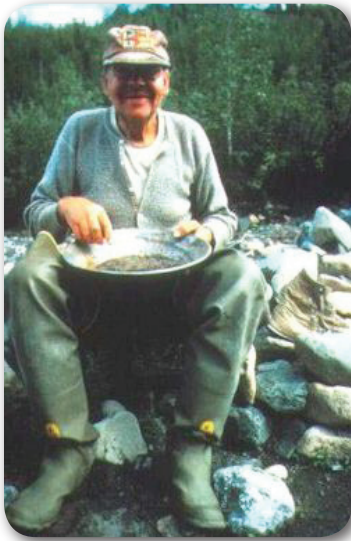
If you wish to mine in someone else's legal claim, you must first have the permission of the claimant. They may refuse permission because they are currently mining the claim and/or because of concern about liability in case of injury or vehicle problems or damage. You may take part in other activities such as hiking, camping, or berry picking on mining claims as long as you don't disturb the equipment operations. As a recreational miner without a claim, you do not have the right to prevent anyone from looking for gold in a particular area

If you want to file a mining claim, check with the Bureau of Land Management or the State Division of Mining depending on who manages the land of interest.



Equipment

In most cases, only the use of gold pans, shovels, pry bars, picks, and manually fed sluice boxes and rocker boxes are allowed in streams on public lands without a permit or authorization. In Chugach and Kenai Peninsula State Parks, (the only state parks which are presently open to any recreational mining activity) an individual is limited to one gold pan, one shovel, and one sluice box which is three (3) feet or less in length



and fifteen (15) inches in width. In national parks and preserves, only surface sampling with a hand-held gold pan is allowed. No digging tools are allowed. Regardless of land status, the use of motorized earth-moving equipment, hydraulic mining either by gravity or mechanical methods, or the use of chemicals is not permitted by recreational miners.

Motorized vehicles are limited to existing roads and some trails. In certain situations, trails and some river outwash plains may open for official travel. Sometimes off-road vehicle permits are required for cross-country travel. Check with the agency in the area of interest.

Suction Dredges

Suction dredges with a suction hose diameter of four inches or less and sixteen horsepower or less may be used under certain conditions in national forests and on BLM lands. Check with the managing agency.

If you are using a dredge of any size, you must check with the Alaska Department of Fish & Game, Sportfish Division. Streams may be restricted because anadromous fish use them for migration, spawning, and/ rearing. Some streams are restricted during certain times of the year. The list of streams is quite long and you must know which stream you are interested in working before requesting a permit.

On any land in Alaska, a suction dredge with a nozzle diameter greater than six inches or a motor with more than sixteen horsepower or which processes more than 220 cubic yards/day requires a tri-agency permit which can be obtained from the Alaska Division of Mining. Suction dredges with a suction hose diameter greater than four inches require that a "Notice of Intent" be filed with the district manager.

Environmental Considerations

A recreational miner should work only in the active stream channel or on unvegetated gravel bars. No digging or excavating should be done in the stream banks. Environmental impacts should always be considered and minimized. Mining activities in streams might be restricted or have certain time constraints to protect fish and other organisms.

Even with simple tools, damage can be done. Care should be taken to minimize scarring the terrain or destroying natural resources. Fish and the aquatic insects they eat have difficulty surviving in heavily silted streams. You should not wash soil and vegetative material directly into the stream flow, as the silt and the decay of organic matter can cut off the oxygen supply to fish eggs buried within gravel spawning beds. Digging in the gravel beds can also destroy fish eggs.

Respect archeological, paleontological, and historical objects that you may find. It is unlawful to remove such artifacts from the site. In national parks, mineral specimens, except platinum, silver, gemstones, and fossils may be collected by hand in areas not specifically closed to mineral collecting.

Commercial Enterprises

If you want to learn more about gold mining and perhaps get a little color in the pan, but you do not have the time and/or interest for the investigation into land status, then you might want to consider taking advantage of a commercial outfit. These businesses have mining claims and will often rent you a pan and give some instruction. More information on commercial enterprises is available from the local Chamber of Commerce or Visitor Center in this area.

Locations for Recreational Gold Panning

Always check to make sure that you are not on private property or on a mining claim before you start any mining activity.



Interior & Northern Alaska

Mile 16.5 Steese Highway: Felix Pedro's Discovery Claim	Mile 56 Steese Highway: Nome Creek	Steese Mile 70.5: Gravel Pit	Steese Mile 80: Bachelor Creek	Dalton Highway
<p>This site is opposite the monument to Felix Pedro, the man who's gold discovery put Fairbanks on the map. The claim is owned by an organization called the Pioneers of Alaska; they allow the public to pan there. They ask that you use only pans, no suction dredges or heavy equipment, and keep the area clean. The area was dredged several years ago, but the "fines" were left behind so you may get some color in your pan!</p>	<p>Take the turnoff to U.S. Creek road, which goes 7 miles up over a ridge to Nome Creek valley. This is part of the White Mtns Rec Area and a two-mile stretch of Nome Creek is designated for recreational gold panning. State geologists say there is a real chance of finding flakes or something bigger. There are two campgrounds in the area: Ophir Creek Campground is just 3 miles upstream. Nome Creek also offers some decent grayling fishing.</p>	<p>Look for a dirt track heading downhill on the right side of the road, marked by a white cross with black numbers (a state "materials site" marker). The gravel pit is at the bottom of the hill near the Chatanika River. Don't bother panning in the river itself: it isn't considered a good prospect.</p>	<p>If you're feeling adventurous, there's a dirt track beginning at the DOT station at Mile 80 Steese. You can hike or take a 4-wheeler about six miles into the hills to Bachelor Creek, where's there's an area free of private claims and with good prospects for gold. Pick up our map first, because there are existing claims in the area.</p>	<p>If you're heading up the Dalton, the BLM has identified several creeks north of the Yukon River open to recreational panning. Ask for our brochure on "Mineral Collection on the Dalton Highway" for details.</p>

Other Locations in Alaska

Permitted Area	Location
Petersville Rec. Mining Area	Petersville Rd, see map
Hatcher Pass Public Use Area	Near Palmer, see map
Independence Mine St. Historical Park	Near Palmer, Hatcher Pass
Kenai Area St. Parks	Various Locations, Kenai Peninsula
Chugach St. Park	Near Anchorage
Chugach National Forest	Various streams, see booklet
Caribou Creek Rec. Mining Area	Mile 104 Glenn Highway, see map
Wrangell St. Elias National Park	Various Locations, see land status maps

Note: Special rules apply for each of the recreational mining areas listed. Please ask for a fact sheet (which often includes a map) on each place, or contact the respective land managers for more information.

Addresses Useful to Recreational Gold Miners

Maps

Map Office, IARC
University of Alaska Fairbanks
Fairbanks, AK 99775
(907) 474-6960
Maps@gi.alaska.edu
<http://www.gi.alaska.edu/services/MapOffice/>

U.S.G.S. Map Distribution
Denver Federal Building, Box 25286
Denver, CO 80225
1-800-ASK-USGS
www.usgs.gov

Information on Mining

Alaska Department of Natural Resources
Division of Mining
550 W. 7th Ave., Suite 900B
Anchorage, AK 99501-3577
(907) 269-8647

Alaska Department of Natural Resources
Division of Mining
3700 Airport Way
Fairbanks, AK 99709
(907) 451-2774

Other Agencies Managing Land in Alaska

Alaska State Parks
Department of Natural Resources
550 W. 7th Ave., Suite 1380
Anchorage, AK 99501-3561
(907) 269-8700

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
1011 E. Tudor Road
Anchorage, AK 99503
(907) 786-3309

U.S. Forest Service
Chugach National Forest
3301 C St., Suite 300
Anchorage, AK 99503-3998
(907) 743-9500

National Park Service
Alaska Regional Office
2525 Gambell St., Room 107
Anchorage, AK 99503
(907) 644-3510

Information on Land Status

Bureau of Land Management
6881 Elmore Rd.
Anchorage, AK 99507
(907) 267-1246
1-800-478-1263
www.blm.gov/ak

Bureau of Land Management
1150 University Ave.
Fairbanks, AK 99709-3844
(907) 474-2200
1-800-437-7021
www.blm.gov/ak

Information on Stream Restrictions

Alaska Department of Fish & Game
Sportfish Division
1255 W. 8th Street
P.O. Box 115525
Juneau, AK 99811-5526
(907) 465-4180

Alaska Department of Fish & Game
Sportfish Division
1300 College Road
Fairbanks, AK 99701-1599
(907) 459-7207