

# BRISTOL BAY BOROUGH

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The Bristol Bay Borough, Alaska's first borough, contains the communities of Naknek, South Naknek, and King Salmon. Situated in the Bristol Bay region at the mouths of the Naknek and Kvichak Rivers, the borough has tremendous natural resources. The massive runs of red salmon that pass through borough waters are vital to commercial and subsistence fishermen. The salmon and their spawn also help sustain the region's famous brown bear and sport fish populations.

The maps on this side of the profile represent some of the borough's most important natural resources and cultural features. The text on the reverse side describes other resources and points of interest in the borough.

**Fish** - The Bristol Bay drainages support the largest red (sockeye) salmon runs in the world. While the runs were at low levels in the early 1970's, they reached staggering proportions by the end of the decade. Approximately 40.4 million reds entered Bristol Bay in 1979. Runs for 1980 and 1981 were 62.4 million and 34.6 million, respectively.

Between 1971 and 1981, escapement of red salmon into the Naknek River drainage averaged 1.4 million. The run peaks in early July. Most reds migrate along the south bank of the river and spawn in August in the Brooks River drainage.

King (chinook) salmon entering the Naknek River in June and early July provide excellent fishing. Silver (coho) salmon are caught in August and early September. The smaller numbers of pink and chum salmon that enter the river in July and early August are of less importance to anglers and subsistence fishermen.

Rainbow trout, Dolly Varden/arctic char, grayling, northern pike, whitefish, smelt, and burbot are present throughout the drainage.

**Mammals** - During the salmon season, brown bears are abundant along the upper Naknek River and its tributaries. The rich diet of salmon causes the bears to become particularly large. Bears go to higher altitudes in late summer for berries. They enter their dens in early winter where cubs are born in late January or February. They leave the den in April or May and roam the lowlands for food.

Moose are found throughout the borough. During the winter, they concentrate along King Salmon Creek, Smelt Creek, Big Creek, and Paul's Creek. Calving occurs in the first part of

June at higher elevations between King Salmon Creek and Paul's Creek and along the lower reaches of King Salmon Creek and Big Creek. Currently, the populations are low due in part to over-browsed habitat.

The Alaska Peninsula caribou herd ranges south of the Naknek River. Biologists estimate that there are between 15,000 and 20,000 animals in the herd. The caribou are dispersed during late summer and mid-winter. In late winter and early spring, they begin to aggregate and move toward the calving grounds near Port Heiden. After calving the herd scatters. Males go to the foothills and females with calves go to the lowlands. By late August, the herd begins moving north to the wintering grounds between Eggeik and the Naknek River. There appears to be a separate small herd (50 caribou) on the north side of the river. Reportedly, these animals migrate north in the winter and spend the summer west of King Salmon Creek.

A variety of fur-bearers and small game animals inhabit the area. Red fox, porcupines, and short-tailed weasels (ermine) prefer brushy areas in broken terrain. Open areas attract least weasels, lemmings, shrews, voles, arctic ground squirrels, and tundra hares. Mink, beaver, muskrat, and land otter are found in or near water. Snowshoe hares prefer riparian areas with brushy understorey. Wolverine are distributed throughout the area. Wolves are not abundant, but they do range throughout the Alaska Peninsula in packs of two to 30 animals.

**Birds** - Hundreds of thousands of waterfowl, on their way to and from northern nesting areas, stop on the tundra, lakes, and intertidal areas of Bristol Bay. Nearly all of the North American black brant population and essentially all the world's population of emperor and cackling Canada geese fly through the region.

The Kvichak River is a major migration corridor for sandhill cranes and whistling swans. Snow geese stop in the area during the fall migration and white-fronted geese, Canada geese, and loons stop in both the spring and fall. Some birds stay to nest and molt. Aerial surveys of the Bristol Bay region have recorded a breeding population of 32 ducks and 1.2 swans per square mile of the lowlands and a total of 141 species of waterfowl.

Many millions of shorebirds use the same habitats and flyways as the waterfowl. Bald eagles fish and nest along the Naknek River and other streams in the area. Other raptors present in the area include peregrine falcons, ospreys, and short-eared owls. Various passerine birds, such as lapland longspurs and snow buntings, frequent beaches and villages. Bank swallows, savanna sparrows, and dippers are common along streams.

Only a few species, such as white-tailed, willow, and rock ptarmigan and ravens, spend their winters in the area. Sea birds move offshore and most other birds fly south.

