

KENAI MOUNTAINS – TURNAGAIN ARM NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA

ALASKA OUTDOOR SCHOOL TEACHER GUIDE



Alaska Outdoor School is a collaborative program operated by KMTA NHA and supported by a diverse network of federal, state, and local partners.

KMTA NHA welcomes students and participants of any race, color, national and ethnic origin, religion, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, military or marital status, age, sensory, physical, or mental disability to all the rights, privileges, programs, and activities generally accorded or made available to students and participants at Alaska Outdoor School. KMTA NHA does not discriminate based on race, color, national and ethnic origin, religion, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, military or marital status, age, sensory, physical, or mental disability in administration of its educational policies, admissions policies, scholarship and loan programs, and other administered programs.

Welcome!

At Alaska Outdoor School, our mission is to cultivate lifelong stewardship of public lands in Alaska through immersive, place-based outdoor education for Alaskan youth. By connecting students with the curiosity and wonder that only outdoor spaces can inspire, even the simple and joyous act of skipping a rock on Portage Lake can be deeply impactful and powerful experience.

We are excited to welcome you to Alaska Outdoor School at the Begich, Boggs Visitor Center this year. This Teacher Guide includes everything you will need to plan your trip and prepare your students, parents, and chaperones for the experience. **This guide has been updated for the 2023-2024 school year so please read through carefully and recycle any old materials that you may have.**

Summary of Updates for 2023-2024:

1. Family Information Night

NEW! This year we are happy to participate in or host an Outdoor School Family Night to offer some insight about our program and answer parent/guardian questions. Please contact our staff for scheduling!

2. Additions to “Other Important Information”

We have added new sections covering phone policy, visitor policy, and day students.

3. Revised Teacher Checklist

NEW! Program rosters, den groups, and field study group forms will now be completed online. These forms will be shared with school staff and edit access granted until 2 weeks before your program. Any changes after that will have to be submitted to KMTA Education staff via email.

4. Revised Parent/Guardian Letter and Packing List

This Teacher Guide includes the following sections to help you organize your trip:

- General Program Information
- Teacher Planning Information

We are looking forward to a fantastic Alaska Outdoor School week with you and your school! Please do not hesitate to reach out if you have any questions or need more information. Current KMTA education staff contact information is provided below:

Sarah Schuh, Education Programs Manager	sarahschuh@kmtacorridor.org
Josh Vantrease, Outdoor Education Programs Coordinator	jvantrease@kmtacorridor.org

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Curriculum and Instruction

What do students learn at Alaska Outdoor School?

Alaska Outdoor School is **Education through Adventure**! Students reap the mental and physical benefits of being outdoors and engage directly with the natural world to learn outdoor skills, natural and cultural history, science, recreation activities, career options, and social-emotional skills. This student- and nature-centered learning model enables students to:

- Develop an appreciation for Alaska's public lands and natural resources;
- Think critically about big questions;
- And build resiliency in our ever-changing world.

We hope all students leave Alaska Outdoor School with new or renewed knowledge and connections to themselves, their peers, and the land.

The learning plan for each field study group will be developed by their instructor, using the following resources:

1. Alaska State Standards for 5th grade Health & Physical Education and Science
2. A session theme drawn from instructor personal interests, seasonal resources, or the essential theme of "interconnectedness."
3. Place-based curriculum resources from the AOS curriculum library (see below).
4. Student responses during a pre-visit assessment activity.

In this way, student learning experiences will be directed by grade-level concepts, instructor knowledge, and student interests.

Guiding Principles of Alaska Outdoor School

AOS is committed to an instructional model that includes outdoor adventure, scientific thinking, and self-discovery. We do this by:

1. Extending multidisciplinary instruction beyond the classroom to stimulate learning & provide students with opportunities to have positive outdoor experiences while strengthening outdoor skills.
2. Improving students' knowledge and appreciation of Alaska's natural beauty and resources by exposing students to nature through adventurous learning.
3. Partnering with government agencies, school districts, businesses, and nonprofit organizations.
4. Exposing students to diverse career pathways by utilizing experts in their field as program instructors.

Alaska Outdoor School Curriculum Resources

- *Alaska Wildlife Curriculum*, Alaska Department of Fish & Game
- *K-8 Environmental Education Activity Guide*, Project Learning Tree
- *Outdoor Science Experiences*, BEETLES Project
- *Custom lesson plans & learning resources*, Alaska Outdoor School partners: Anchorage School District, Anchorage Museum, US Forest Service, US Fish & Wildlife Service, National Park Service, University of Alaska Anchorage, and GeocacheAlaska!

Alaska Outdoor School Curriculum Outline

Field Study Topic	Overview	Theme Statement	Enduring Understanding
Awesome Aquatics	<p>The water field study explores the hydrosphere that is present in Portage Valley and Portage Creek. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> life within the creek water cycles watersheds <p>Additional topics could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Salmon water quality and/or water dynamics weather 	Water field study examines the cycles that exist within the hydrosphere in Portage Valley.	<p>Students will understand that the Portage Valley ecosystem is interdependent with abiotic and biotic components.</p> <p>Students will understand that water is cyclical and dynamic, and that water is an essential part of Alaskan natural and cultural ecosystems.</p>
Sense of Place	<p>The Sense of Place field study explores the unique and defining characteristics of Portage Valley. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> geographic location physical geography human-environment interactions <p>Additional topics may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> human history and cultures soundscapes land uses 	Sense of Place field study examines the unique history and characteristics of Portage Valley that distinguish it from other places in Alaska.	<p>Students will understand where Portage Valley is in Alaska.</p> <p>Students will understand the physical geography of Portage Valley and how the physical landscape has influenced humans' interactions with the land through time.</p>
Glorious Glaciers	<p>The Glaciers and Geology field study will explore the specifics of the glaciers and geologic processes that are present in Portage Valley. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> recipe for a glacier glacial geology <p>Additional topics may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> properties of ice and icebergs erosion other geologic processes 	Glaciers and Geology field study examines the formation of Portage Valley through geologic processes.	<p>Students will understand that Portage Valley has been shaped by several geologic processes.</p> <p>Landscapes are not stagnant- they are dynamic and always being changed by abiotic, biotic, and cultural forces.</p>
Chugach Forest Explorers	<p>The Forest Field study explores the unique and dynamic characteristics of the forest ecosystem in Portage Valley. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> native flora & fauna ecosystem interconnections seasonal change <p>Additional topics may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> life cycles predator/prey interactions succession adaptations 	Forest field study examines the interdependence that exists within the plant and animal communities in the forest of Portage Valley.	<p>Students will understand that the functions of the forest in Portage Valley are cyclical and dynamic- not static.</p> <p>Students will understand that the Portage Valley ecosystem is interdependent with abiotic and biotic components.</p>

Program Schedule

Day 1 (Wednesday)

10:30 – 11:00	Arrive at Begich, Boggs Visitor Center in Portage Valley
11:15 – 12:15	AOS Orientation & BBVC Tour
12:15 – 1:00	Lunch
1:00 – 3:15	Field Study 1
3:15 – 3:30	Snack
3:30 – 5:00	Recreation time
5:00 – 6:00	Move into dens + den time
6:00 – 7:00	Dinner
7:00 – 8:30	Campfire
8:30 - 9:30	Den time
9:30	Lights out

Day 2 (Thursday)

7:30 – 8:00	Breakfast + Announcements
8:30 – 9:30	Morning circle
9:45 – 12:00	Field Study 2
12:00 – 1:00	Lunch & Recess
1:00 – 3:15	Field Study 3
3:15 – 3:30	Snack
3:30 – 5:00	Recreation time
5:00 – 6:00	Den Time
6:00 – 7:00	Dinner
7:00 – 8:30	Campfire
8:30 - 9:00	Den time
9:00	Lights out

Day 3 (Friday)

7:00	Breakfast + Pack
8:00 – 8:45	Morning circle
8:45 – 11:00	Field Study 4
11:00 – 11:30	Lunch
11:30 – 12:00	Closing Ceremony Load bus + Depart



Facility Information

Lodging

Students, school staff, and chaperones will sleep in the Visitor Center complex in four separate areas. The Forest Service bunkhouse, about .25 miles from the Visitor Center, will house all KMTA staff and Alaska Outdoor School volunteers who stay overnight. The bunkhouse provides an accessible shower/bathroom and a laundry room.

Facilities

Alaska Outdoor School takes place in Portage Valley, Alaska at the Begich, Boggs Visitor Center. Nestled on the terminal moraine left behind by Portage Glacier, the [Begich, Boggs Visitor Center](#) hosts educational programs and information about the glacier and Chugach National Forest.

The Visitor Center operates from Memorial Day through Labor Day for the public and is plowed and maintained through the winter. The Forest Service will rent out the Visitor Center and adjacent Portage Valley Learning Center, a multipurpose classroom, for the Alaska Outdoor School program. Other key areas at the site include a campfire area, the [Trail of Blue Ice](#), [Byron Glacier Trail](#), [Williwaw Nature Trail](#), and the salmon viewing platform at Williwaw Campground.

Meals

Balanced, healthy meals are part of the Outdoor School experience. Students and staff will eat meals together in the classroom area and students will be assigned roles to assist meal set-up and clean-up. ASD will provide regular school breakfasts and lunches for Title I and CEP schools. These meals will be transported to the BBVC site in large boxes on the school bus with the students — All other meals and snacks will be provided or catered for students and staff.

Note: school staff and chaperones food is provided by Outdoor School and different from student breakfast and lunch.

Risk During Alaska Outdoor School

Alaska Outdoor School involves hiking on trails and being outside for extended periods of time. While instructors make every effort to exercise caution to prevent mishaps, participants must assume full responsibility for their individual safety and must provide their own health and accident insurance. Keep in mind that we are sharing the outdoors with wildlife, inclement weather, and other unpredictable natural elements. Protective clothing, sunscreen, raingear, and insect repellent are advised.

IMPORTANT! Teachers are responsible for checking that all forms are filled out completely and have all the necessary signatures. If a student arrives with incomplete paperwork, you as the teacher will be asked to complete and sign all necessary forms after receiving verbal permission from the parent/guardian. If that is not possible, the student will be sent home.

Contact Information

For additional program information, please visit us online at [Alaska Outdoor School | KMTA \(kmtacorridor.org\)](https://kmtacorridor.org) or contact the KMTA education team (contact information provided on page 1).

In the event of an emergency, schools and families can reach teachers and program staff by calling the Begich, Boggs Visitor Center at (907) 783-2474 or the Glacier Ranger Station at (907) 783-3242.

Directions to Alaska Outdoor School

Alaska Outdoor School is hosted at the Boggs Visitor Center in Portage Valley. Portage Valley is part of the Chugach National Forest and Kenai Mountains – Turnagain Arm National Heritage Area. KMTA will cover the cost of school bus transportation for participating schools. We will work closely with school administrators to ensure the appropriate billing information is provided when reserving buses. **It is the responsibility of schools to book their Outdoor School transportation.**

Directions

From Anchorage: head south out of Anchorage via the Seward Highway. Travel approximately 50 miles on the Seward Highway. After passing the Alaska Wildlife Conservation Center (which will be on your right), turn left onto Portage Glacier Road. Travel for 5 miles and follow the signs for the Begich, Boggs Visitor Center. Turn right onto Portage Lake Loop and follow the signs for Visitor Center parking. The Visitor Center's address is 800 Portage Lake Loop, Anchorage, AK 99587.

Gas Stations

We recommend leaving Anchorage with a full tank of gas. There are no gas services in Portage Valley. The closest gas station is in Girdwood, about 15 miles from the Visitor Center.

IMPORTANT! One chaperone or staff member from your school group must drive separately so that a vehicle will be at the Visitor Center in the event a student must leave early, or an emergency should occur.

Other Important Information

Arrival & Departure

We would like schools to arrive at the Begich, Boggs Visitor Center between 10:30 and 11:00am. If you cannot arrive by 11:00am, please contact the Visitor Center at (907) 783-2474 or the Glacier Ranger Station at (907) 783-3242. Keep in mind that most cell phones do not work at the Visitor Center. Please contact the Visitor Center if any member of our group plans to arrive separately from the rest of the group. The Visitor Center is closed to the public for the duration of Outdoor School and a Visitor Center staff member will greet any late arrivals.

We suggest that schools depart from the Visitor Center between 11:30am-12:00pm. If you would like to adjust your departure time from the suggested time, please let us know so that we can plan our programs accordingly.

Phones

There is extremely poor cell service in Portage Valley. Most cell phones do not work reliably within a few miles of exiting onto Portage Glacier Road. There is wi-fi at the Visitor Center for adult access only.

Student cell phones (and smart watches) are not allowed at Outdoor School. The cell phone service in Portage is spotty and there is no way for students to charge these devices. Please let guardians know the following things.

- If Guardians need to contact their student while they are at Outdoor School, they should call the main phone number provided in the facility information section.
- School staff members, chaperones, and KMTA staff know where every student is at all times of the day and night and can quickly reach any students in case of an emergency back home.
- Calling to check in on students is discouraged, as this hinders the growth of students' independence and may lead to homesickness. Our staff will call Guardians if there are any health or major disciplinary concerns with their children.
- Arrangements can be made with site supervisors (prior to arrival) for special circumstances such as phones with glucose monitors etc.

Visitor policy

Due to background check requirements, we do not allow visitors on site (except for pick up and drop off). Guardians who are approved by KMTA staff to attend AOS with students due to medical or special circumstances will need to complete a background check. School District employees may visit with advance notice.

Day students

Our program is designed to be fully immersive and serve students overnight for 3 days and 2 nights. While we strive to serve all students in this way, we understand that there are circumstances that would make this difficult for some students and families (ex. medical, physical, and religious reasons). If you have a student(s) who would benefit from day only attendance, please reach out to KMTA's Education Programs Manager to make arrangements for guardians to pick up / drop off their students as needed.

Program Guidelines for Adults

Guidelines

1. ASD requires a student to chaperone ratio of 5:1 for overnight field trips. During activities (field studies, recreation time, meals) we require a minimum of one adult (teacher/chaperone) for every 8-12 students. See the **Group Responsibility Checklist** for additional information.
2. A minimum of one chaperone or staff member from your school group must drive separately so that a vehicle will be at the Visitor Center in the event a student must leave early, or an emergency should occur.
3. Teachers and chaperones are responsible for student supervision and agree to follow the terms of ASD Form J, "District-Sponsored Trips Policy for Travel with Students."

Responsibilities

1. Overall preparedness- Help students be prepared for all activities and facilitate transitions between activities.
2. Field Studies- Be an active participant in the field study group by modeling appropriate behavior. Follow the lead of the field study instructor. Encourage student inquiry and active participation from all students in the field study group. Teachers and chaperones should be physically able to hike 1-3 miles each day and should be prepared to spend the whole day outside.
3. Medications- Alaska Outdoor School staff are unable to distribute student medications. Please follow your school/school district policy and be prepared to assist students with medication as needed.
4. Mealtimes- Help our staff facilitate an orderly mealtime; assist staff with crowd control and mealtime expectations. Assist students and staff with clean up after meals.
5. Free time- Teachers and chaperone free time will be staggered throughout the day to ensure students are always supervised. It is up to the teachers and school staff to coordinate with chaperones to ensure adequate student supervision if additional free time during Outdoor School is needed.
6. Sleeping quarters- Supervise students in sleeping spaces and enforce lights out.
7. Be a role model- Come to Outdoor School ready to participate with enthusiasm and a good attitude. Remember that your main role is to provide supervision to, and interact with, all students.
8. Illness- It is expected that all students will participate in all daily activities unless physically ill. If a student is ill, they will need to be supervised by a teacher or chaperone, or else be sent home.

Program Guidelines for Students

Alaska Outdoor School Expectations

1. **Be SAFE**
2. **Be RESPECTFUL**
3. **Be CURIOUS**
4. **Have FUN!**

Alaska Outdoor School Rules

While AOS may seem different than any school you've ever been to, it is still school and many of the same apply in and around the Visitor Center.

1. **Wear your wood cookie!!** This is your Outdoor School ID and is our way of identifying who is (and isn't) a part of the program.
2. **Rule of 3's:** Students must be with at least one other student and an adult when leaving the group or moving between areas/activities.
3. **Follow all directions** given by field instructors, teachers, chaperones, and other Outdoor School and Visitor Center staff.

Den Guidelines

1. **No electronics** (cell phones, radios, iPods, computer games, etc.), knives, hair dryers, candy, gum, or money are allowed at Alaska Outdoor School.
2. **Quiet time is 9:00pm to 7:00am.** Lights out by 9:30pm at the latest.
3. Teachers will make den assignments prior to arrive at Alaska Outdoor School.
4. **No food or drinks (except water) are allowed in the Visitor Center.**

Scheduling Checklist

Teachers, please use this checklist to ensure your school group's information is received by KMTA Education staff well in advance of your arrival.

All forms can be found in your school's OneDrive folder.

6 weeks prior	
	Print & send home Parent Letter, Release Form, and Packing List (found in Forms to Send Home Folder)
	Select chaperones and send them the Chaperone Letter (found in Chaperone Folder)
	Schedule pre- and post-visits with Program Coordinator: jvantrease@kmtacorridor.org
	Schedule school bus transportation - email Program Coordinator for billing information
	Fill out Group Information form (found in Group Information Folder)
2 weeks prior	
	Fill out Food Service Information form (found in Group Information Folder) and contact Program Coordinator to discuss special dietary restrictions
	Assign students to Field Study groups (form found in Group Information Folder)
	Assign students to Den groups (form found in Group Information Folder)
	Assign and communicate to adult chaperones their responsibilities using the Group Responsibilities Checklist (Found in Chaperone's Folder)
	Communicate student gear needs to Program Coordinator via email (same as above)
Bring to Outdoor School	
	All Liability Release forms (students, school staff, and chaperones)
	Updated copy of Participant Roster (found on Group Information form). Upon arrival the lead teacher will meet with the Program Coordinator to confirm participant #s and discuss any changes to the roster.
Before Departure	
	Fill out Teacher and Chaperone program evaluations

Group Responsibility Checklist

Daily Responsibilities	
	Lead Teacher attends morning meeting with Outdoor School staff (prior to morning circle).
	Adults assigned to Den Groups and scheduled for den supervision after classes and meals. Den Groups are single gender. Female den groups: Marmot and Coyote Male den groups: Fox and Wolf
	Adult scheduled for each clean-up crew shift. Wednesday dinner: Marmot Thursday breakfast: Fox Thursday dinner: Coyote Friday breakfast: Wolf
Daily Activities	
	At least one adult assigned to each Field Study group to provide behavior management support and assist Field Instructor (maximum of 1 adult per 8 students during Field Studies). Field Study groups are: Wind, River, Earth and Fire.
	At least one adult scheduled to either lead or help supervise recreation time activities (minimum one adult for every 8-10 students). Recreation time activity options could include: geocaching, art, journaling, fly tying, rope making, outdoor games, survival skills, and more!
	Adults scheduled to supervise and help lead campfire program (minimum one adult for every 10-12 students).

Den Time: All den supervision is the responsibility of the adults who accompany each group. Students are not allowed in the den spaces at any time without adult supervision. We will have some board games, cards, and books and encourage you to bring activities for students to do during this time.

Clean-up Crew: Each den group will have one clean-up crew shift. One adult is required to accompany the clean-up crew. At the end of each meal, the clean-up crew will stay for an extra 15 minutes after the meal to wipe tables, sweep the floor, and assist with other clean up tasks.

Field Studies: During the 2 to 2.5-hour field study blocks we ask for a minimum of one adult per group and a maximum of 1 adult for every 8 students.

Recreation Time: During the 1.5-hour recreation time we ask for a minimum of one adult for every 8-10 students. We have a variety of activities and equipment available on site if teachers or chaperones wish to lead an activity during this time.

Campfire: Campfire is one of the most beloved aspects of Outdoor School. We strongly encourage all adults to attend and actively participate in the campfire programs, but ask for a minimum of 1 adult or every 10-12 students.