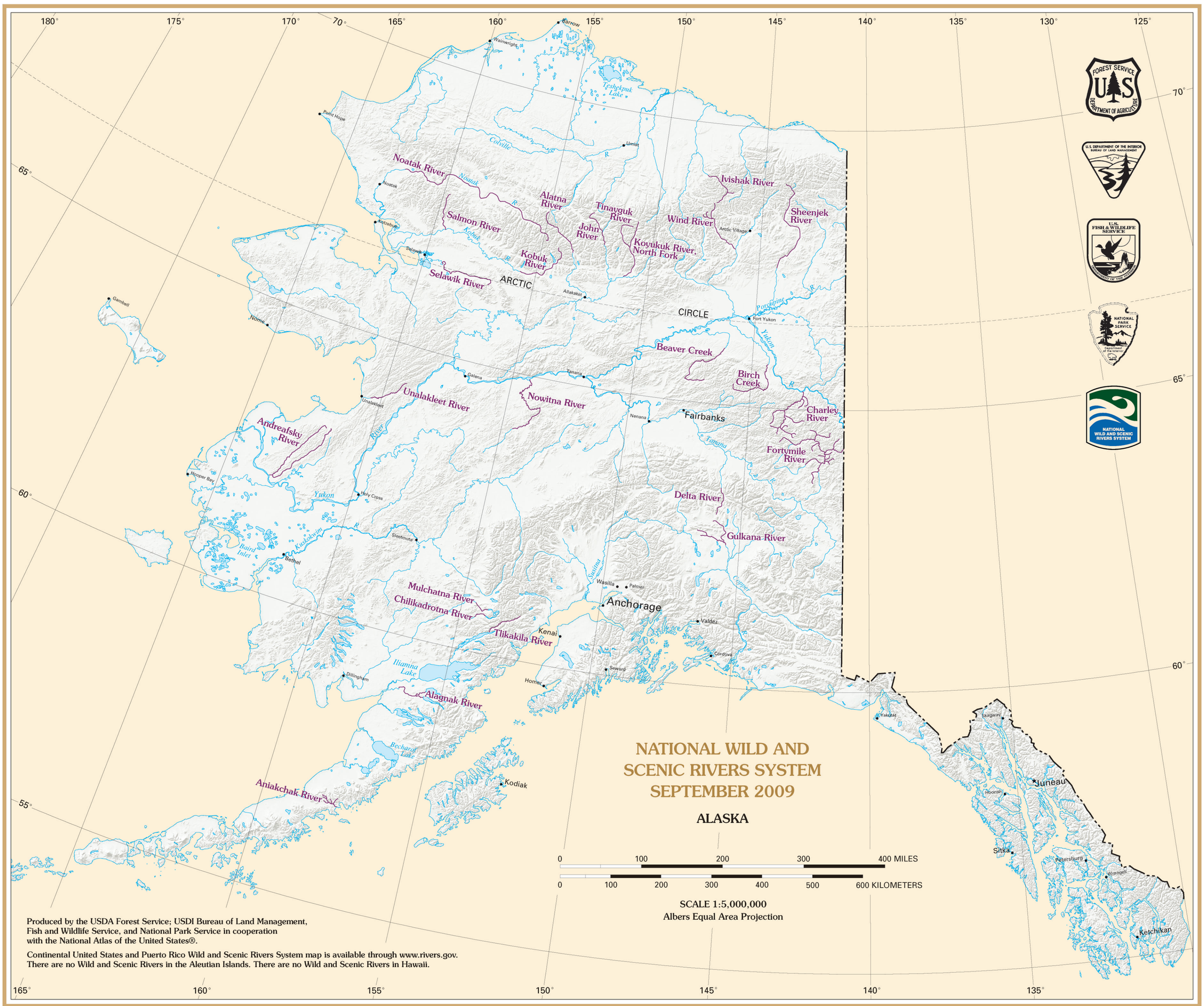

Produced by the USDA Forest Service; USDI Bureau of Land Management, Fish and Wildlife Service, and National Park Service in cooperation with the National Atlas of the United States®.

Continental United States and Puerto Rico Wild and Scenic Rivers System map is available through www.rivers.gov. There are no Wild and Scenic Rivers in the Aleutian Islands. There are no Wild and Scenic Rivers in Hawaii.

THE NATIONAL WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS SYSTEM

www.rivers.gov

The National Wild and Scenic Rivers System was created by Congress in 1968 (Public Law 90-542; 16 U.S.C. 1271 et seq.) to preserve certain rivers with outstanding natural, cultural, and recreational values in a free-flowing condition for the enjoyment of present and future generations. The Act is notable for safeguarding the special character of these rivers, while also recognizing the potential for their appropriate use and development. It encourages river management that crosses political boundaries and promotes public participation in developing goals for river protection.

Rivers may be designated by Congress or, if certain requirements are met, the Secretary of the Interior. Each river is administered by either a federal or state agency. Designated segments need not include the entire river and may include tributaries. For federally administered rivers, the designated boundaries generally average one-quarter mile on either bank in the lower 48 states and one-half mile on rivers outside national parks in Alaska in order to protect river-related values.

Rivers are classified as wild, scenic, or recreational.

(1) Wild river areas — Those rivers or sections of rivers that are free of impoundments and generally inaccessible except by trail, with watersheds or shorelines essentially primitive and waters unpolluted. These represent vestiges of primitive America.

(2) Scenic river areas — Those rivers or sections of rivers that are free of impoundments, with shorelines or watersheds still largely primitive and shorelines largely undeveloped, but accessible in places by roads.

(3) Recreational river areas — Those rivers or sections of rivers that are readily accessible by road or railroad, that may have some development along their shorelines, and that may have undergone some impoundment or diversion in the past.

Regardless of classification, each river in the National System is administered with the goal of protecting and enhancing the values that caused it to be designated. Designation neither prohibits development nor gives the federal government control over private property. Recreation, agricultural practices, residential development, and other uses may continue. Protection of the river is provided through voluntary stewardship by landowners and river users and through regulation and programs of federal, state, local, or tribal governments. In most cases not all land within boundaries is, or will be, publicly owned, and the Act limits how much land the federal government is allowed to acquire from willing sellers. Visitors to these rivers are cautioned to be aware of and respect private property rights.

The Act purposefully strives to balance dam and other construction at appropriate sections of rivers with permanent protection for some of the country's most outstanding free-flowing rivers. To accomplish this, it prohibits federal support for actions, such as the construction of dams or other instream activities, that would harm the river's free-flowing condition, water quality, or outstanding resource values. However, designation does not affect existing water rights or the existing jurisdiction of states and the federal government over waters as determined by established principles of law.

With the passage of the Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009, the National System protects more than 12,500 miles of 203 rivers in 39 states and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico; this is a little more than one-third of one percent of the nation's rivers. By comparison, more than 75,000 large dams across the country have modified at least 600,000 miles, or about 17%, of American rivers.

For general questions concerning the wild and scenic rivers program, refer to the Interagency Wild and Scenic Rivers Coordinating Council website at **www.rivers.gov** or contact one of the following:

USDA Forest Service
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Wilderness and Wild and Scenic Rivers
201 - 14th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Bureau of Land Management
U.S. Department of the Interior
National Landscape Conservation Service
1620 L Street, NW
Washington, DC 20036

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
National Wildlife Refuge System
Division of Natural Resources
4401 North Fairfax Drive (ARL-670)
Arlington, VA 22303

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
Conservation and Outdoor Recreation
1849 C Street, NW
Org Code - 2240
Washington, DC 20240

“In a country where nature has been so lavish and where we have been so spendthrift of indigenous beauty, to set aside a few rivers in their natural state should be considered an obligation.”

—Frank Church, Senator from Idaho