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# SUSITNA RIVER

**THREAT:** Road construction, mining, pollution

**STATES:** Alaska

**AT RISK:** Clean water, fish and wildlife habitat, subsistence rights, recreation

## SUMMARY

South-central Alaska's Susitna River is one of the most pristine rivers in the United States and supports the fastest growing population in the state of Alaska. Home to an abundance of fish and wildlife, the river plays an important role for Alaska Native communities and also powers a strong economy dependent on the renewable resources of fishing and hunting. But the construction of an industrial access road to allow for mining and oil and gas development threatens the area's natural wealth and all who benefit from a healthy river. We must halt federal funding and expedited permitting for this destructive road project and protect the Susitna's irreplaceable fisheries, water quality, and communities.

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## THE RIVER

From its glacial headwaters in the Alaska Range, the Susitna River flows more than 300 miles south, touching portions of Denali National Park before reaching Cook Inlet. The Susitna River watershed spans more than 20,000 square miles, a massive area nearly the size of West Virginia. The watershed encompasses a unique patchwork of land management areas, including Tribal lands, multiple unique communities, and state managed lands. More than 375,000 people visit this region annually, with many coming to experience the river's unspoiled landscapes. Crucially, the Susitna provides a vital resource for Alaskans who depend on the river for salmon harvesting, tourism, hunting, recreation, and other activities that generate thousands of jobs and millions of dollars in annual revenue. The river is home to not only five species of Pacific salmon, but critical populations of moose and both black and grizzly bears. Major tributaries of the Susitna, including the Talachulitna, Deshka, and Yentna rivers, further sustain the region by contributing to the biodiversity that underpins local economies.

## THE THREAT

The state of Alaska and private extractive companies are proposing to construct a 100-mile road to open areas of the currently roadless Susitna watershed to destructive industrial activity, including mining and oil and gas exploration. The proposed West Susitna Industrial Access Road would cross approximately 180 streams, impacting hunting, fishing, and wildlife habitat. Subsequent mining and oil and gas activities would risk contaminating the Susitna River — which supplies clean water for local communities and essential wildlife populations — creating further water and air pollution and disrupting vital salmon spawning streams. This in turn would threaten the existing sustainable economies and livelihoods of commercial fishermen, local tourism industries, and communities, including Alaska

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## TAKE ACTION:

[AMERICANRIVERS.ORG/  
SUSITNARIVER2025](https://AMERICANRIVERS.ORG/SUSITNARIVER2025)

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Native community members who rely on the river for food and cultural practices. What's more, the West Susitna River's abundant fish and terrestrial wildlife would suffer from habitat loss and fragmentation — from salmon to iconic predators, including brown bears, wolves, and lynx, to large herbivores such as moose and Dall sheep. It's possible this threat will be exacerbated by new presidential executive orders that prioritize natural gas development in Alaska and aim to expedite permitting of energy and natural resource projects in this state while limiting public participation.

## WHAT MUST BE DONE

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) is expected to review permit applications for the West Susitna Industrial Access Road in the coming year. American Rivers will join partners to call for USACE to deny all 404 permits and reject federal funding for this project so road construction does not move forward. By engaging early and often in the upcoming permit review process, the American public can join our effort and significantly influence whether or not USACE decides to greenlight the proposed access road. It will be crucial for public comments to emphasize essential clean water, Tribal consultation, cultural resources, fish migration, and the uniquely intact nature of this treasured region.