



LES PALMER

The state this year began a study to assess anglers' satisfaction with their experiences on the Kenai River, but critics question how the collected information will be used.

STATE USES GPS TECHNOLOGY TO TRACK KENAI RIVER USE

SOLDOTNA—On June 1, the state Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation began a two-month study of how people feel about their fishing experiences on Alaska's most popular fishing stream.

This isn't the first time the agency has tried to measure angler satisfaction. In 1992, the agency conducted a Kenai River angler "carrying capacity" study that used onsite and mailed surveys.

In addition to angler surveys, the latest study included video footage of the more popular fishing holes during July, the most crowded month. Another new twist: In an attempt to get a complete picture of what people are doing on the river, some anglers' boats were fitted with Global Positioning System units similar to those used to track caribou and other wildlife.

Not everyone liked the study. Joe Connors, president of the Kenai River Professional Guides Association, told the *Peninsula Clarion* he objected to the way it was being conducted. He said he was concerned about how the parks agency will use the data, and that it would make an issue of guided, powerboat anglers.

Chris Degernes, Kenai area superintendent of state parks, said crowding on the Kenai River was a major complaint and that the public had asked for the study.

"It would be irresponsible not to do this," Degernes said.

The GPS units allow boats' positions to be plotted on a map. The data from the research may provide some insights about when and where congestion occurs and what might be done about it, she said.

The study area was limited to the 50 miles of the Kenai downstream from Skilak Lake. The work was being done on a shoestring budget of about \$5,000. College student volunteers at boat launches did the survey work, Degernes said.

The project was designed so that it could be repeated in future years and moved to other sections of the river.