Chilkat River Field Notes

The Chilkat River runs for about fifty miles from the coast mountains to the sea near Haines, Alaska. Its wide gravel flats stay partly free of ice through the early winter, which is why thousands of bald eagles gather there each November.

Our survey team counted eagles along the lower river on three mornings. The counts are recorded on the following pages together with the weather on each day.

DAY ONE: UPPER CHILKAT FLATS

Clear and cold, minus eight degrees at dawn. We counted 412 eagles between the highway bridge and the mouth of the Tsirku. Most were on the gravel bars; a few dozen sat in the cottonwoods along the south bank.

A note on names: the river is sometimes spelled chilkat in older records, and the valley people are the Jilkaat Kwaan.

Day Two: Lower River

Light snow. The count fell to 288, probably because the fish run on the Chilkat was thinning. Two tagged birds from the previous year were identified by their leg bands.

Day Three

Overcast and mild. We counted 356 eagles, and for the first time saw a pair on the ice shelf opposite the campground, well away from the main concentration.