

The Downstream Edge of the Kuskokwim River Ice – 18 miles below the Johnson River. This is 8 miles further down than the same day in 2025

11.18.26 BSAR Kuskokwim River Aerial Survey—Report 2026-27 - 01*

"Behind Schedule....Again"

Summary:

In recent years we've gotten used to later freeze ups. This year people were still boating into November. We always hold our breath this month – anything can happen. In 2014, 300 miles of the frozen middle and upper Kuskokwim River broke up in November after extended warm rainy weather. Today, the weather is warm and freeze up has stalled.

For the past several years BSAR and the Kuskokwim Ice Road crew have been scheduling our first aerial freeze up survey of the Kuskokwim River on November 18th. Flying the same day each year allows us to look back at previous years for comparison.

The route flown on this first flight of the season covered the area west of Bethel to the Tundra Villages, the Johnson River to the Kuskokwim, downstream to the lower edge of the Kuskokwim River ice, then upstream to 14 miles above Kalskag. Above this point the Kuskokwim River is still flowing. We will schedule another flight after we get some colder weather.

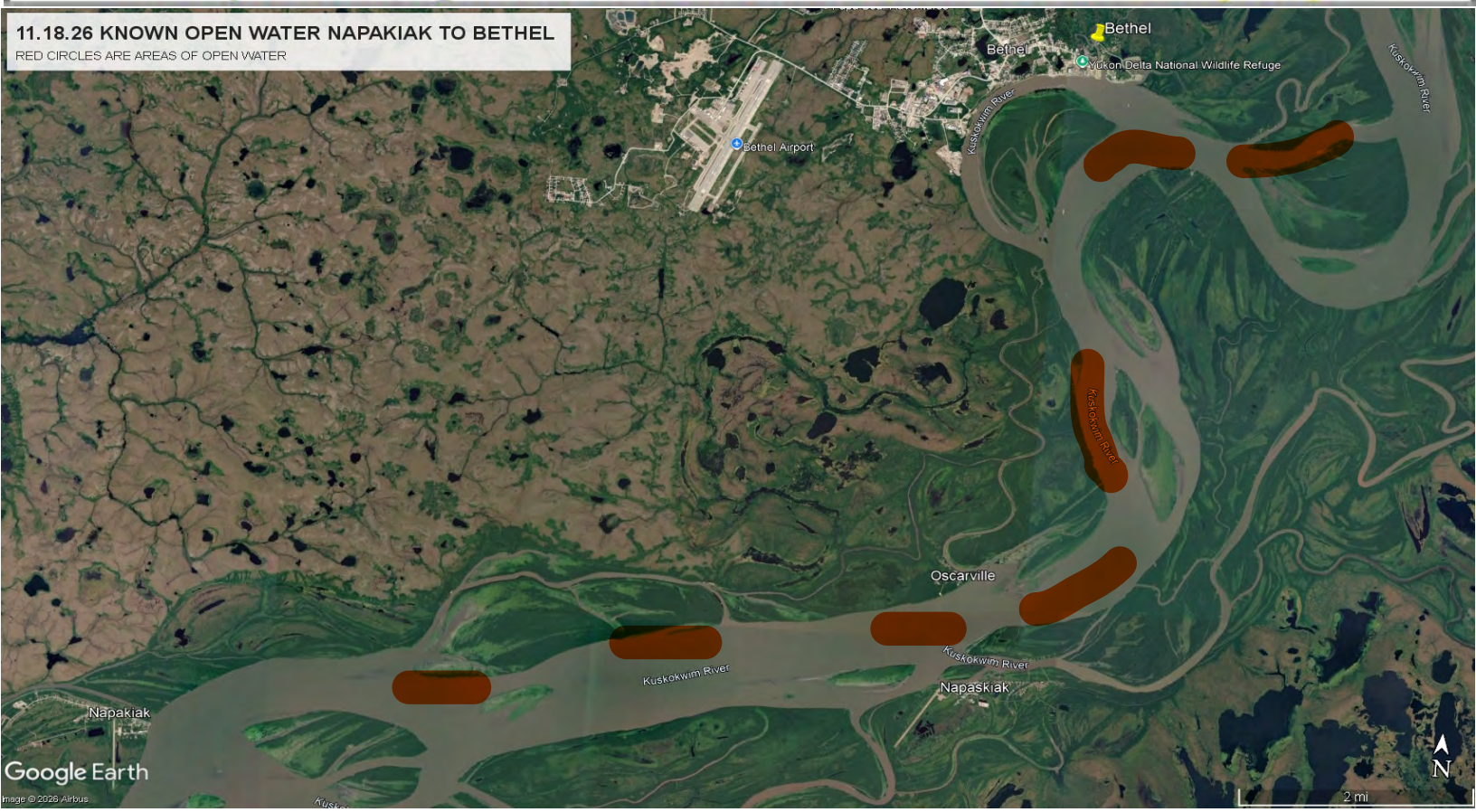
THERE IS CURRENTLY TOO MUCH OPEN WATER & THIN ICE ON THE KUSKOKWIM RIVER FOR SAFE TRAVEL

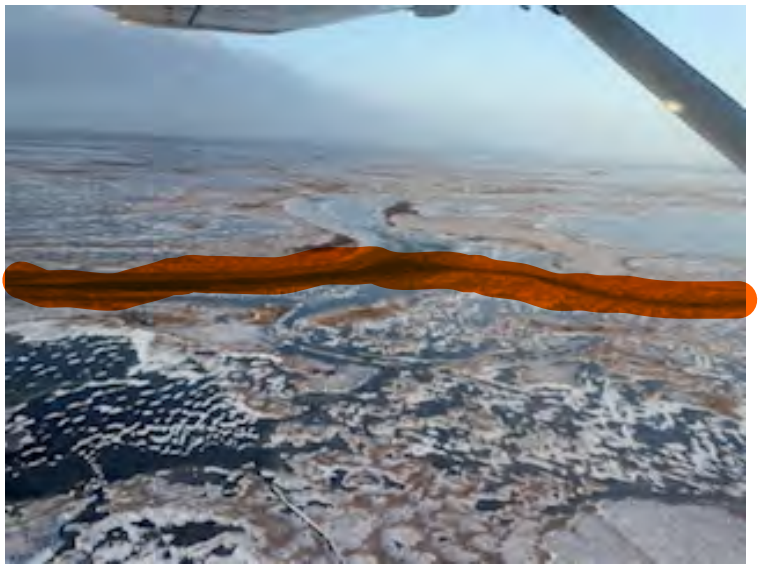
NO MAIN RIVER TRAVEL RECOMMENDED AT THIS TIME

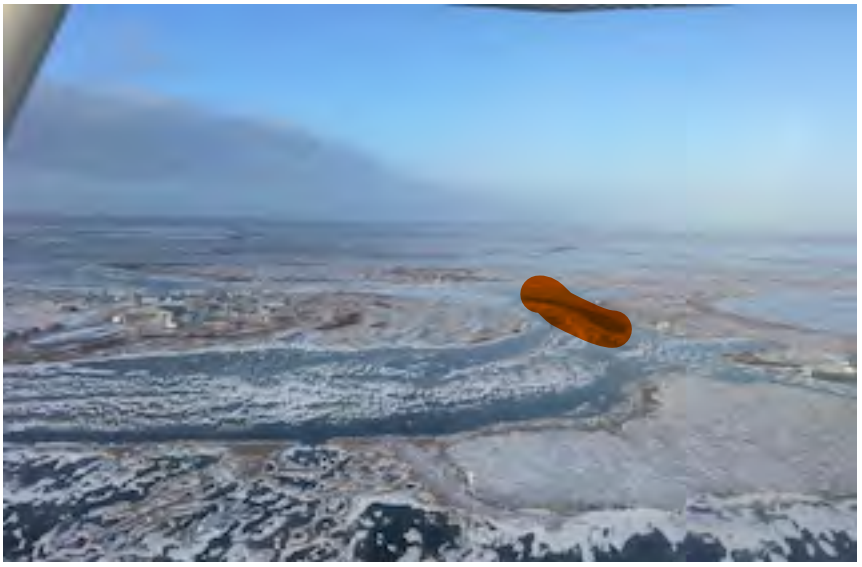
BETHEL SEARCH AND RESCUE

BOX 2633, BETHEL, ALASKA

To Report a Missing or Overdue Person Call *911* or *907-545-HELP (4357)*





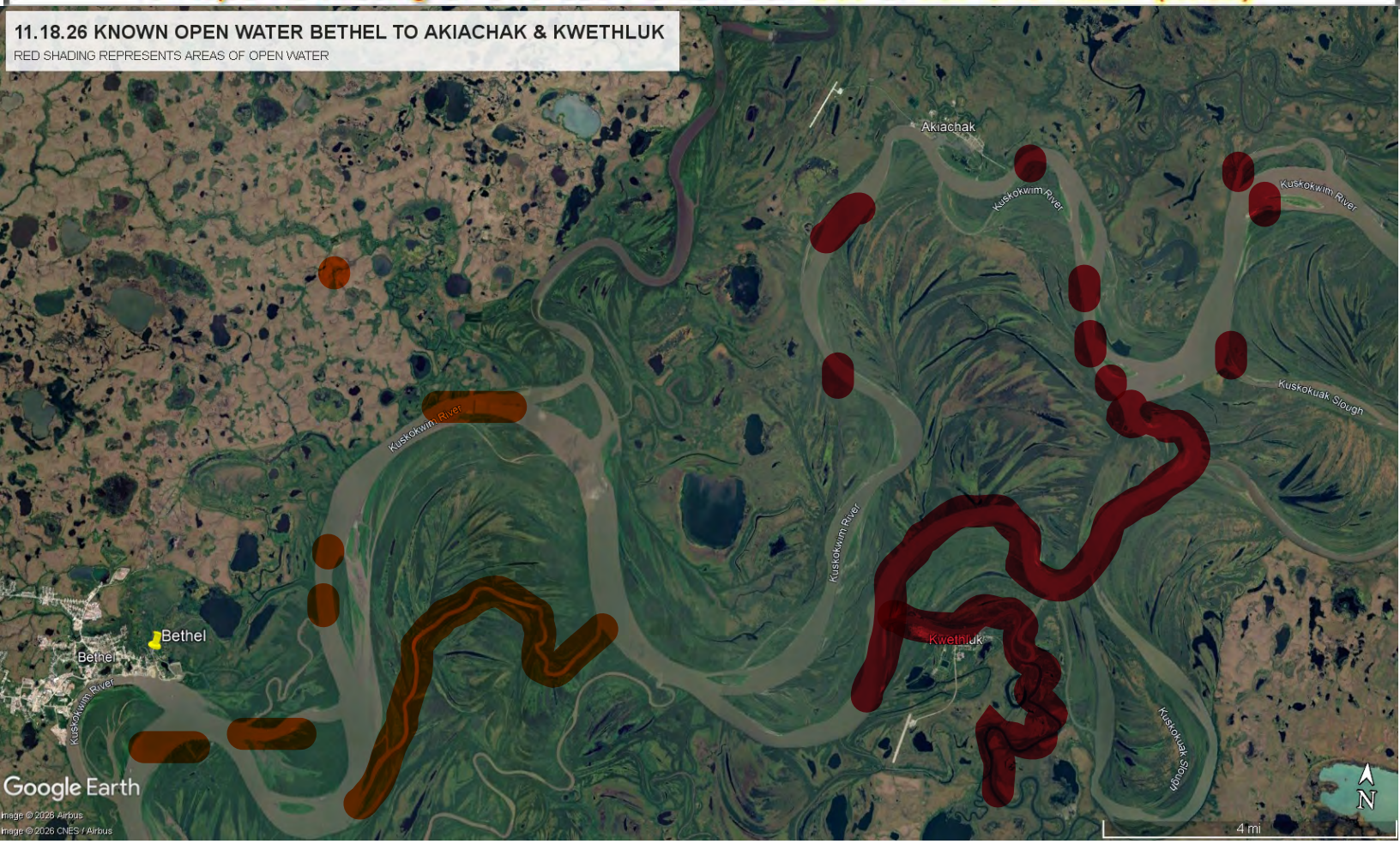


Open water near Nunapitchuk

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Large open area across from Bethel near Old Airport. 2/3rds of Straight Slough is open. Giant open area below Pavilla's Island. Church Slough has many open water areas. Kuskokuak Slough is wide open bank to bank from just below Kwethluk all the way to the upper end. Kwethluk River is wide open in front of the village and as far upstream as we could see.







Upper end of Kuskokuak Slough

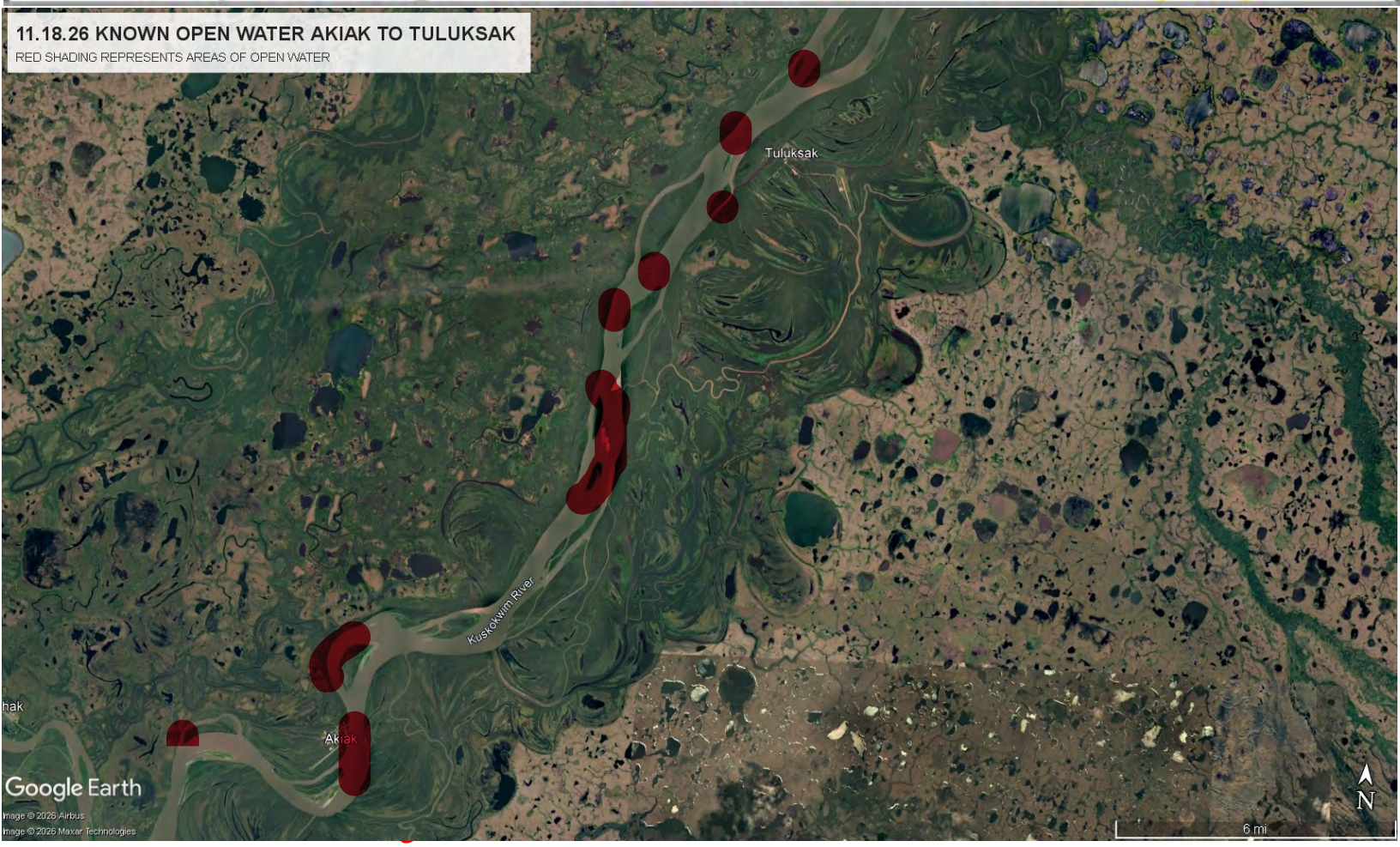
Giant open area below Pavilla's Island

Wide open Kuskokuak Slough & Kwethluk River

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Large open water in front of Akiak



Bad area at Joe Boy's below Tuluksak



Open area below Bogus



14 Miles Above Kalskag: The Upper end of the Kuskokwim River Freeze Up
The rest of the Kuskokwim River above this area is still flowing

Highlights of the 11.18.26 BSAR Aerial Survey include:

- **As of the day of our flight there has been no traffic on the trail west of Bethel to the Atmautluak**
    - **The only established trail observed was between Nunapitchuk and Kasigluk.**
- **The lower edge of the Kuskokwim River ice is 18 miles below the mouth of the Johnson River. The main channel of the Kuskokwim below this area is open with a lot of flowing ice**

- **The main channel of the Kuskokwim from the Johnson River to Napakiak appeared to be well frozen**

- **There is large area of open water & thin ice between Oscarville and Napakiak from Tim Alexie's Island to Clark's Slough**
- **There is a large area of open water and thin ice in the main channel above Napaskiak**

- **There is a long DANGEROUS area all through Straight Slough, past the Old Airport, and down the main channel along the east side of the Bethel Island**
- **There is a large area of open water at the Bethel Bluffs**
- **There are small open water areas at the mouth of the Gweek River**
- **Kwethluk River is wide open in front of the village further up as far as we could see.**
- **The entire length of Kuskokuak Slough is open from just below the mouth of Kwethluk River all the way to the upper end.**
- **There is a HUGE open hole in front of Akiak that stretches from north bank to south bank.**
- **This year the short cut slough right below Akiak is frozen and packed in with rough ice.**
- **There is another long stretch of open water below Joe Boy's old fish camp (8 miles below Tuluksak) that stretches from east bank across towards west bank**
- **Large open water in the mouth of Tuluksak River**

Closing:

This first aerial survey was shorter than usual due to the ice still running above Kalskag. We will schedule another flight to look at the River again when the weather cools down and the ice stops at least as far as Crooked Creek. Right now freeze up is tracking about the same as 2018 but with a little cooler weather things could improve quickly.

Until then we just need to be patient and continue to stay close to home. A big thank you to Fox Air pilot Nathan Traugott for a good flight. This flight was sponsored by the Native Village of Napaimute Ice Road Program through funding from the State of Alaska.

Be safe and Happy Thanksgiving from BSAR!

***This report is for informational purposes only and is not an advisory that it is safe to travel.**