

2019 Wilderness Best Management Practices for Tracy Arm-Fords Terror Wilderness

(Including Holkham Bay, Tracy Arm, Endicott Arm, and Ford's Terror)

Agreements Regarding Vessel Operators

This program is a cooperative effort between vessel operators and the Tongass National Forest. Initiated in 2008, Wilderness Best Management Practices are intended to minimize the impacts of tourism and vessel operations in the waters adjacent to the Tracy Arm-Fords Terror Wilderness in a manner that addresses both concerns for our natural resources and operators' concerns for safety and passenger service. By actively participating in this voluntary program, operators demonstrate their commitment to a sustainable use of wilderness resources.

The following provisions will uphold wilderness values while providing for vessel safety.

RESPECT OTHERS: Operators recognize the importance of preserving an authentic Alaskan wilderness experience for all users and agree to the following measures:

- **SCHEDULES:** As practicable, commercial operators shall make their schedules available and communicate any changes to help minimize potential conflicts with other users. Operators are encouraged to share schedules via the Ship Schedules folder on the WBMP blog and through other means. Cruise ships will list their estimated inbound and outbound bar crossing times in advance on their schedules to help other operators coordinate. If an operator modifies their scheduled itinerary due to ice conditions or other factors, the operator will do their best to inform other users of their revised plans (e.g. via radio, posting on the WBMP blog, using email and/or sat phone). It is in the best interest of all users to have up-to-date itineraries and the most accurate conditions available.
- **FORDS TERROR:** Vessels with more than 250 passengers agree not to enter Fords Terror, including the portion that opens from the north shore of Endicott Arm.
- **RECOGNIZE OTHER USERS:** Tracy and Endicott Arms, Holkham Bay and Ford's Terror experience use from commercial and noncommercial users, including hunters, fishers, paddlers, boaters, hikers, photographers, wildlife viewers and wilderness recreationists. In order to facilitate the enjoyment and sustainable use of the wilderness area, all motorized vessel operators agree to maintain a safe and respectful distance from other users and to avoid them whenever possible.
- **MINIMIZE IMPACTS:** Operators agree to do their utmost to minimize impacts, including wakes, noise and operations that might affect paddlers, other boats, and wildlife such as bears, nesting birds, and hauled-out seals. A wake is an extension of a vessel's operations and can often be reduced by lowering speed. When in proximity to wildlife, motorized vessels, non-motorized vessels and sensitive areas, be mindful of wake impacts and strive to minimize disturbance. Paddlers acknowledge that use of the marine radio to announce their presence will assist motorized vessel operators in achieving these goals.

COMMUNICATE: All operators acknowledge the importance of communication to the success of this agreement and pledge the following commitments:

- **USE MARINE RADIOS** to share pertinent information such as operator intentions and updates on sea and ice conditions. Operators agree to keep communications respectful and concise. Monitor marine radio channels 16/13 and other working channels.

- MAKE SÉCURITÉ ANNOUNCEMENTS prior to crossing bars, rounding blind corners, conducting paddlecraft operations, off-loading/picking-up passengers and when appropriate to preface other navigational safety messages. Doing so will help others adjust to minimize impacts to your operations.
- POST ON THE WBMP BLOG (<http://wildernessbmp.pbworks.com/w/page/14933240/FrontPage>) to share schedule changes, ice conditions, provide feedback, or other information and concerns about Tracy Arm-Fords Terror Wilderness. The blog contains a link to request access for new users.
- INFORM OTHER OPERATORS of schedule changes, such as diverting from one Arm to another, cancelling calls altogether, or making significant timing changes, and do so in as timely a manner as possible.
- ENGAGE IN DISCUSSIONS about WBMP implementation and improvements.

PRESERVE QUIET: All operators recognize the importance of quiet and solitude and will minimize vessel announcements and signals while in the Tracy Arm-Fords Terror Wilderness. While interpretation of wilderness values and marine ecology for passengers is important, operators agree to limit their outside announcements to preserve wilderness values of others in the vicinity (see Exhibit A). Operators agree to avoid announcements prior to 8:00am whenever possible, to limit the duration of announcements to about 5 minutes, to limit the number of announcements, and to lower the volume of announcements on outside decks to the minimum required for communication and safety. Operators agree to follow the Forest Service's recommended locations for these interpretive announcements (see Exhibit B map). The Forest Service will also attempt to provide alternative methods of interpretation such as brochures, maps, and podcasts. Operators agree not to use whistles, horns or other noisemaking devices except as required for navigational, safety or emergency purposes.

MAINTAIN CLEAN AIR: All vessel operators agree to comply with the Marine Vessel Visible Emissions Standards (18 AAC 50-.070) and take all available and reasonable steps to minimize visible stack emissions while in Tracy Arm-Fords Terror Wilderness. Recognizing that the unusually cold, still air of these glacial fjords can trap persistent haze, operators agree to take proactive steps to manage visible emissions, such as seeking engineered solutions and improvements to emissions monitoring. Visible stack emissions are regulated by the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation and monitored by the US Forest Service in cooperation with Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation. Forest Service rangers will provide timely feedback to vessel operators resulting from their observations.

PROTECT WILDLIFE: All operators agree to conduct their business in a manner which, whenever possible, avoids changing the natural behavior of wildlife in their vicinity including bears, mountain goats, whales, and nesting birds such as terns and oystercatchers.

Seals: Based on research by federal and state agencies, NOAA Fisheries recommends the following guidelines for all vessel types and at all glacial areas. It may not be practicable to follow every guideline on each visit, but vessel operators should exercise caution to minimize disturbance to seals.

1. All vessels (kayaks to cruise ships) should strive to maintain 500 yards (about 0.25 mi) from seals without compromising safe navigation. Make an approach plan to avoid surprising seals. Be equally cautious to reduce disturbance when departing the fjord as arriving.
2. Minimize wake, avoid abrupt changes in course or engine pitch, and avoid loud noises (such as ice collisions) in the vicinity of seals. Consider avoiding use of PA systems on outer decks.
3. Try to avoid traveling through thick ice, which provides habitat for birthing and nursing of pups. The absence of seals on the ice doesn't mean the area isn't being used.
4. Time visits when feasible to minimize overlap with the peak numbers of seals hauled out midday. Research shows most seas are hauled out and vulnerable to disturbance between 9am and 4pm.
5. Tracy Arm guidelines May 15 to June 30:
 - During seal pupping, vessels should try to restrict travel to the southwestern half of the arm with 580 yards (approx. 0.33 mi) of the shoreline, and greater than 1250 yards (approx. 0.75 mi) from the glacier, to avoid higher seal densities along the eastern side of the arm and closest to the glacier.
 - When ice is thick, vessels should stop north of a line drawn east from Tern Point.

The complete Alaska Harbor Seal Approach Guidelines in Glacial Fjords may be found at: <https://alaskafisheries.noaa.gov/pr/harbor-seals>

EXERCISE RESTRAINT: In order to:

- Reduce impacts to wildlife, including bears, goats, seals and birds;
- Respect the wilderness experience of other users including appreciation of natural and undeveloped qualities and outstanding opportunities for solitude, and
- Honor Wilderness Act checks on technology and human agency,

WBMP signatories agree to refrain from drone use in Tracy and Endicott Arms, Holkham Bay and Ford's Terror. Each season operators may make a one-time exception for drone use after July 31st (after newborn wildlife has fledged or weaned). This exception should:

- Be of short duration,
- Occur in the absence of other users, and
- Maintain as great a distance from wildlife as possible.

As a reminder: for designated wilderness above mean high tide, it is illegal to launch, land or possess a drone in designated wilderness per 36 CFR 261.18(a).

KEEP IT ALIVE: All vessel operators agree to include these guidelines in annual training and respective policies and procedures documentation. Operators will provide feedback about compliance with the above guidelines to other operators and the appropriate agency.

Send emails/queries to:

Sean Rielly, Lead Wilderness Ranger

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EXHIBIT A: NOAA HARBOR SEAL APPROACH GUIDELINES IN GLACIAL FJORDS FOR VESSEL OPERATORS

**** 2015 map. South Sawyer Glacier position may have changed.**

Vessels advised to maintain recommended travel corridor and distance from the encountered glacial face.

NOAA Fisheries recommends the following guidelines specific to Tracy Arm May 15 to June 30:

- During seal pupping, vessels should try to restrict travel to the southwestern half of the arm with 580 yards (approx. 0.33 mi) of the shoreline, and greater than 1250 yards (approx. 0.75 mi) from the glacier, to avoid higher seal densities along the eastern side of the arm and closest to the glacier.
- When ice is thick, vessels should stop north of a line drawn east from Tern Point.

EXHIBIT B: RECOMMENDED AREAS FOR INTERPRETIVE ANNOUNCEMENTS

The following is a summary of locations where outside announcements would affect the fewest visitors: (see map)

- 1) Stephens Passage before entering Holkham Bay would be a good place to introduce Tracy Arm. Since the waterway is wide, announcements would not impact campers, kayakers, fishermen on shore, beach-walkers, hunters and other users of the wilderness area.
- 2) There is an approximate five-mile stretch beginning one mile east of the Tracy Arm elbow and ending one mile west of the first large U-shaped valley on the north shore. This would be a good area for short (5 minute) interpretive announcements to be made to guests (between N57.922776/W133.563637 and N57.915954/W133.452213).
- 3) There is another approximate four-mile stretch within the Tracy Arm S turns. It begins one mile north of the third U-shaped valley on the south shore, approximately eleven miles east of the elbow. It ends 1.5 miles west of Sawyer Island. This would be a good area for short interpretive announcements to be made to guests (between N57.887659/W133.307565 and N57.884008/W133.213526).
- 4) At the end of Tracy Arm, a few miles from South Sawyer Glacier is another area where there is an opportunity to present a short (5 minute) interpretive announcement (between N57.860754/W133.131673 and the face of the S. Sawyer Glacier). It would be preferable to leave a “quiet zone” within a few miles of Sawyer Island, to ensure a more peaceful environment for those people who may be camping on the island.
- 5) P.A. announcements are more likely to disturb visitors and wildlife in Endicott Arm due to the greater amount of islands, bays and anchorages. The recommended location for announcements in Endicott Arm is between one mile southeast of the entrance to Fords Terror and one mile northwest of the entrance to North Dawes Inlet (between N57.585560/W133.163017 and N57.515926/W133.053845)

Recommended language for PA announcement in Stephens Passage or just prior to entering Tracy/Endicott Arm, and/or for printing in ship’s daily program onboard which explains the intentions of this joint effort between all vessel operators and the USFS:

We’re about to enter one of the most pristine Alaskan environments that we’ll see on our voyage. Tracy Arm is a thirty-mile glacial fiord that reaches deep into the Coast Mountains and deep into our glacial past. With old-growth temperate rain forest here at its beginning and active tidewater glaciers at its upper reaches, our visit to Tracy Arm is a trip in time back to the Pleistocene ice age.

Tracy Arm is a special place. Recognizing its extraordinary biological, scenic, and recreational values, Congress protected the surrounding land as part of the National Wilderness Preservation System. The designation provides permanent protection for this part of the Tongass National Forest, ensuring that it remains a place of wild nature. It’s a land for wildlife, timeless forests, and the enjoyment of the American public.

To help preserve Tracy Arm’s wild character, our companies and the Tongass National Forest created a set of guidelines for visiting the area. Our cruise company helped develop the guidelines and proudly supports their goals, which include special considerations for wildlife, air quality, and other natural systems. In accordance with the agreement, we will limit our outside announcements within the fiord, helping preserve a quiet environment both for wildlife and for other visitors. During the next few hours, our naturalists will make a few announcements about the area, but otherwise we invite you to sit back and enjoy this spectacular part of our rich national heritage.

Exhibit B map: Yellow zones depict areas where public announcements might be least disruptive

