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Russell Fiord Wilderness

In 1980, the United States Congress designated 348,701 acres as the Russell Fiord Wilderness. Bordering several glaciers to the east, and looking out onto Wrangell St. Elias National Park, Russell Fiord Wilderness is located 15 miles northeast of Yakutat and can be accessed by boat, on foot, float or wheel plane, and snowmobiles during adequate snow cover. It is strategically managed to continue the preservation of this undeveloped, enduring ecosystem for the enjoyment of present and future generations.



Wilderness Laws

The Wilderness Act, ANILCA, and the Tongass Land and Resource Management Plan of 2008 (TLMP) give direction to designated wilderness areas in the Tongass National Forest. The Wilderness Act, ANILCA and/or TLMP **prohibit** the following:

- ◆ Commercial enterprise (except for outfitters and guides)
- ◆ Permanent and temporary roads
- ◆ Use of motor vehicles and motorized equipment (except snowmobiles, motorboats, and fixed wing airplanes)
- ◆ Mechanized form of transport (i.e. bicycles, wheelbarrows)
- ◆ Damaging of live trees
- ◆ Construction of structures and installations
- ◆ Landing of helicopters

Under ANILCA and TLMP temporary structures are allowed but are limited to a 14-day stay at any one location. TLMP also mandates a group size limit of no more than 12 persons for commercial **or** general public use within this wilderness. These regulations are established for the wilderness character to remain undeveloped and natural for future use.

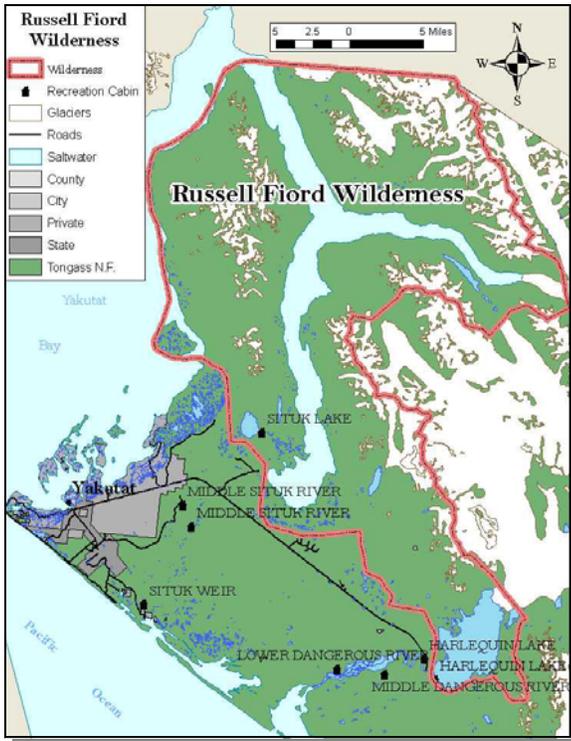
Facilities

There are three established hiking trails leading into this wilderness, along with two public recreation cabins on freshwater lakes that can be accessed by foot or plane.

Wilderness Character

No need to jump in a boat or hop in a plane because Russell Fiord Wilderness can be accessed by foot off of the Yakutat road system. This is the only wilderness on the Tongass National Forest where a car can bring an adventurer feet away from a wilderness boundary. Hike to the numerous glaciers, climb to the snowcapped peaks or fish along the forested river valleys. Besides glaciers and ocean, there is another natural blue element within this wilderness. Rare black bears of “blue” coloring, also known as glacier bears, could be seen roaming within this area. Take a boating or floatplane trip into the y-shaped waterway that was created by the spectacular Nunatak and Russell Fiords. Do it soon though because speculation of the Russell Fiord turning into Russell Lake has been made due to the recent advancing of Hubbard Glacier. If Picasso had visited this wilderness, blue would have made him think of anything but depression.





Wilderness Challenges

People are lured into Alaska for its beauty and excitement but remember it is also very unforgiving. Russell Fiord Wilderness is within a temperate rainforest where the average summer temperatures are between 45-65°F. Be prepared with the appropriate clothing, safety equipment, shelter supplies, and water purifying devices for a cool and frequently overcast climate. This wilderness also contains black, brown, and “blue” bears so store food and trash properly. During the summer months, be especially careful around salmon spawning streams. If traveling by boat near the fiords, have someone onboard who is knowledgeable about the area.

Leave No Trace

Tongass National Forest is the largest, intact coastal rainforest in America. The Russell Fiord Wilderness is a piece of this treasure and is set aside for all visitors – now and in the future. To insure that this area is left unimpaired for future use, practice the following Leave No Trace principles.

- ◆ Plan ahead and be prepared for extreme weather conditions, and emergencies.
- ◆ Travel and camp on durable surfaces. Stay on trails and sleep in the cabins when possible. When camping or hiking in a pristine area, disperse use to prevent the creation of campsites and trails and avoid places where impacts are just beginning.
- ◆ Dispose of waste properly. **Pack out** all trash, leftover food, and toilet paper. Use bathroom facilities when available. During appropriate conditions dispose of human waste in the intertidal zone. If camping in upland forests dispose of solid waste by digging a cathole 6 to 8 inches deep located at least 200 feet from water or campsite.
- ◆ Leave what you find. Examine but do not touch cultural or historical structures and artifacts. Do not build structures or furniture with live trees.
- ◆ Minimize campfire impacts. Use a lightweight stove when possible. When a campfire is necessary, keep fires small. Build a fire below mean high tide, or when in a forested area, build a mound fire or use a fire pan to avoid damaging the ground vegetation. Stay away from boulders or tree bases to avoid long lasting black scars.
- ◆ Respect wildlife and other visitors in the surrounding area.

Threats and Benefits

While designated wilderness areas have the most protections of any other public lands, there are still threats that degrade the wilderness resource.

Name the threats to this wilderness. These should be listed in your Wilderness Education Plan.

Building awareness and a better understanding of designated wilderness areas is the key foundation to ensure that these areas stay wild.

Along with providing excellent recreational opportunities, designated wilderness areas protect natural ecosystems from being manipulated or developed. They provide us with clean air and clean water, and allow the natural processes to continue without the permanent presence of humans. As the current laws continue to give management direction, no wilderness on the Tongass will have a commercial timber harvest or construction of permanent roads. Due to the action of Congress in 1980, Russell Fiord Wilderness will remain protected for future generations.

This flyer was printed with the help of recreation fee money. USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.