

Stikine–LeConte Wilderness



In 1980, the United States Congress designated 448,926 acres as the Stikine–LeConte Wilderness. Located on the mainland midway between Wrangell and Petersburg, this Wilderness is home to the Stikine River, fastest free-flowing navigable river in the U.S. and the LeConte Glacier, the southernmost tidewater glacier on the Pacific Coast. From hikers to paddlers, birders to ice climbers, this Wilderness has an adventure for just about any outdoor enthusiast. The Tongass National Forest manages this undeveloped, enduring set of ecosystems to preserve them for the enjoyment of present and future generations.

Wilderness Management Direction

Management direction for the wilderness comes from the Wilderness Act, the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA), and the Tongass land and Resource Management Plan, as amended, 2008. The Wilderness Act prescribes the general management direction, but ANILCA provides for some specific exceptions. Direction includes:

- The Wilderness Act prohibits commercial uses with the exception of what may be allowed as necessary for visitor services.
- The Wilderness Act prohibits the use of motorized equipment, but ANILCA Section 1316 can allow for the continued use of traditional equipment directly necessary for the taking of fish and game (subject to regulation and compatibility).
- The Wilderness Act prohibits mechanized form of transport (i.e. bicycles, wheelbarrows), but ANILCA Section 811 can allow for the continued use of traditional equipment used for subsistence activities by rural Alaska residents (subject to regulation and compatibility).
- While the Wilderness Act prohibits the use of aircraft, ANILCA Section 1110 allows for the use of airplanes, motorboats, and snow-machines (during periods of adequate snow cover). Helicopters are not specifically identified in the ANILCA exception and their use is prohibited.
- The Tongass Plan identifies **group size limit of no more than 12 persons for commercial or general public use except for the Stikine River valley and tidal estuary below 100 feet elevation but not including the area above Shakes Lake outlet.**
- These regulations are established for the wilderness character to remain undeveloped, natural and untrammelled for future use.

Wilderness Character

Drift. This one word defines the Stikine–LeConte Wilderness. In the winter, snowdrifts can easily cover a sixteen foot cabin. When spring comes, sediments drift over 300 miles from the Canadian headwaters and form a broad 17 mile wide tidal flat in the United States. Thousands of migratory birds drift in and out of this Pacific Flyway estuary every spring on their way north. Eulachon smelt and five species of salmon drift up the Stikine River in the spring and summer with sea lions, harbor seals, and bald eagles close on their tails. Once the summer starts, icebergs from the LeConte Glacier crash into the sea and can drift all the way into Frederick Sound after hosting numerous seal pups in the spring. Moose can be seen drifting through the orange and red fall foliage of willow and cottonwood trees. Throughout the year humans drift in and out on snowmobiles, motor boats, floatplanes, canoes, and kayaks to get a glimpse and experience the aura of this forever changing and protected wilderness.



Tongass National Forest



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Wilderness Challenges

People are lured into Alaska for its beauty and excitement, but environmental conditions can be very unforgiving. The Stikine-LeConte Wilderness is within a temperate rainforest where the average summer temperatures are between 35-65°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 brown and black bears, so store food and trash properly. During the summer months, be especially careful around salmon spawning streams. If traveling by boat, be aware of the tides because the river delta is highly braided and has often trapped boaters on the mudflats overnight.

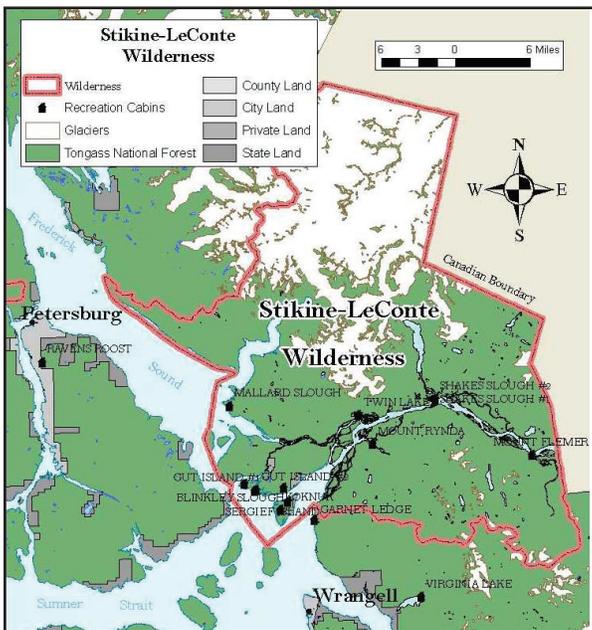
Leave No Trace

To insure that this area is left unimpaired for future use, practice the following Leave No Trace principles.

- Plan ahead and prepare for extreme weather conditions, hazards, and emergencies.
- Clean equipment and gear **before** going to the field to avoid the potential spread of invasive plants or seeds.
- Travel and camp on durable surfaces. When possible, disperse use to prevent the creation of campsites and trails.
- Dispose of waste properly. **Pack out** all trash, leftover food, and toilet paper. At appropriate conditions dispose of human waste in the intertidal zone. If camping in upland forests dispose of solid waste by digging a cat hole 6 to 8 inches deep located at least 200 feet from water or campsite.
- Leave what you find. Examine but do not touch the historical structures or artifacts.
- 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 be considerate of other visitors.

Wilderness Facilities

There are 12 Forest Service recreation cabins, two half-mile trails and two hot springs bathing structures within the Stikine-LeConte Wilderness.



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. Litter, illegal motorized use, illegal hunting, social impacts caused by heavy boat traffic disturbing visitor's solitude, and resource damage by campfire scars, invasive species, trespass structures and damaged flora are the major human threats to this wilderness. Building awareness and a better understanding of designated wilderness areas is the key foundation to ensure that these areas stay wild.

Along with providing recreational opportunities, designated wilderness areas protect natural ecosystems. They provide us with clean air and clean water, and allow the natural processes to continue without the permanent presence of humans. Due to the action of Congress in 1980, Stikine-LeConte Wilderness will remain protected for future generations.