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West Chichagof-Yakobi Wilderness

In 1980, the United States Congress designated 265,286 acres as the West Chichagof – Yakobi Wilderness. Located on the western portion of Yakobi and Chichagof islands and midway between Hoonah and Sitka and across an inlet from the small village of Pelican, the West Chichagof – Yakobi Wilderness can be accessed by floatplane, motorboat or paddle boat. Rest assure for 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 outfitter 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.

Wilderness Character

Mother Nature uses her pacific winds and open ocean swells as enemy invaders on these wilderness promontory walls. This constant westward attack only allows the adventurous, skilled and courageous of visitors into this wilderness castle. Once crossing over these walls it becomes a sanctuary with its intricate bays, flushing lagoons, estuarine vegetation, muskeg meadows and even natural hot springs. It is a waterfowls dream vacation and with a third of the wilderness being covered with Western hemlock and Sitka spruce it is not uncommon to see furbearers, black-tailed deer or brown bears. It also contains reminisce of historical silver and gold mining, so do not forget a panning dish. Being is this wilderness sanctuary away from pollution, traffic noise, and developed structures, you might feel like you hit gold, even if you never find a nugget.

Facilities

There are four public recreation cabins, six established hiking trails, and one geothermal hot spring in this wilderness. The majority of West Chichagof – Yakobi Wilderness is administered by the Sitka Ranger District.





Wilderness Challenges

People are lured into Alaska for its beauty and excitement but remember it is also very unforgiving. West Chichagof – Yakobi 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 brown bears so store food and trash properly. During the summer months, be especially careful around salmon spawning streams. If traveling by boat, be aware that the outside waters are unprotected and can be very dangerous.

Leave No Trace

Tongass National Forest is the largest, intact coastal rainforest in America. The West Chichagof–Yakobi 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. Besides the areas around public recreation cabins and trails, this wilderness is managed as a pristine area. Disperse use to prevent the creation of campsites and trails.
- ◆ Dispose of waste properly. **Pack out** all trash, leftover food, and toilet paper. On the marine shore 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. West Chichagof still has evidence of old mining operations. 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. Illegal use of public recreation cabins, illegal storage of commercial fishing equipment, illegal motorized use, and resource damage by cutting of trees, littering, and damaging of flora are the major 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 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, West Chichagof - Yakobi 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.