



# Best Management Practices

## Potential Program Area:

- ❖ Building from the Best: Nature Protection, Humans, and Tourism
- ❖ The Role of Education, Training and Conflict Resolution in Stewardship of Wilderness Resources

## Summary

Tracy Arm Fords Terror Wilderness is a spectacular group of glacial fjords conveniently located along the inside passage of southeast Alaska. Their raw beauty and accessibility has attracted a ten-fold increase in cruise ship visits in the last decade that has spurred competition for the last remnants of solitude, especially with smaller “expedition class” ships. Impacts to the Wilderness character include lingering diesel haze, loud public address announcements that travel for miles, and disturbance of icebergs used by seals for pupping and molting.

The U.S. Forest Service has no jurisdiction on the marine waters traveled by any of the ships, thus a system of voluntary *Best Management Practices* is being tested for efficacy. This places the agency in an unusual facilitative role with little authority for enforcement. Advantages so far have included increased awareness of wilderness values, better communication among commercial ventures and personal empowerment for some ship captains.

Whether or not these voluntary practices will actually improve wilderness character or diminish the many impacts of industrial tourism remains to be seen. Rising fuel costs have added incentive to visit Tracy Arm as compared to more distant tidewater glaciers in Disenchantment Bay, for example. Additional constraints are also appearing such as the large amount of ice being contributed to the fjords by rapidly retreating glaciers, causing navigational challenges that displace ships to the relatively ice-free Endicott Arm. Captains of smaller ships are highly concerned with this trend and are seeking a political solution while larger cruise companies are caught between a public image challenge and a softening market for tourism.

The success of *Wilderness Best Management Practices* in Alaska depends upon unpredictable market forces such as the yet undeveloped demand for “green tourism” as well as effective monitoring by cash-strapped government agencies. This experience is similar to many less-developed regions of the world where government has little capacity for control of tourism effects on Wilderness areas.

## More Information

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