



Wildlife, Fisheries, Ecology, Watershed & Subsistence

Wildlife

Animals rare elsewhere, such as brown bears, mountain goats, wolverines, bald eagles, black oystercatchers and trumpeter swans thrive in the vastness of Alaska's National Forests. On the Tongass National Forest, the islands of the Alexander Archipelago uniquely influence species distribution and abundance. On the Chugach National Forest, the eastern side of the Kenai Peninsula



supports a diverse array of habitats adjacent to Alaska's largest population center, and a healthy population of moose. The Region includes premier Key Coastal Wetlands across the Copper River Delta, Yakutat Forelands, and the lower Stikine River, supporting millions of migratory shorebirds and nesting seabirds.

Wildlife biologists in the Alaska Region conduct a variety of wildlife projects associated with habitat restoration and stewardship, population inventory and monitoring, and providing NatureWatch sites, unique opportunities and settings for people to use, enjoy, and learn about wildlife.

Botany

Plants abound in Alaska's national forests. These forests, because of their large size and variety of habitats, host a tremendous abundance and diversity of plant life. A wide array of mosses and liverworts carpet the floor of the region's temperate rain forests, where massive conifer trees dominate. Colorful arrays of wildflowers enliven expansive beach meadows, peat bogs, and subalpine meadows. Many species of berries and other plants offer a bounty of edible delights.

An important aspect of our botany program is analyzing proposed projects to determine if the activities may affect rare plants and if so, our botanists make recommendations to avoid or mitigate the effects. Other key program components include surveying, monitoring, and managing rare plants; developing native plant sources for re-vegetating disturbed areas; and, facilitating public appreciation and enjoyment of wild plants through special Celebrating Wildflowers events.

Watershed & Air

Water defines Alaska's national forests. The Tongass and Chugach National Forests include 6,137,027 acres of wetlands. Water originates as rainfall and melting snow and ice. As it moves to the rivers and eventually to the sea, it is slowed and purified as it passes through meadows and wetlands. Undisturbed soils, stable slopes, and natural water flow patterns are essential for healthy watersheds and, in turn, for maintaining water quality. Air quality in the Alaska Region is generally pristine. Because lichens are sensitive bioindicators, the Tongass and Chugach National Forests use them to monitor air quality.

Specialists in the Alaska Region monitor and evaluate watershed functions and conditions including erosion, stream channel conditions, and the quality and quantity of water. Soil scientists and hydrologists evaluate impacts of management activities and develop projects to restore and enhance watersheds and stream channels. While most watersheds in the Alaska Region are in fully functioning

condition, past mining activities on the Chugach and logging on the Tongass have left some watersheds in need of restoration to regain their function, productivity, and resilience. The Alaska Region is realizing progress in these watersheds by coordinating restoration investments across programs and years and by enlisting assistance from partner organizations.

Subsistence

Subsistence is a way of life in Alaska. Many Alaskans use wild plants and animals, especially fish, to put food on the table. This reliance on nutritious wild foods, called “subsistence,” is critical in rural areas where store-bought food may be unavailable or unaffordable. For Alaska Natives in particular, gathering, preparing, and sharing wild foods are integral to the history, culture, and health of individuals and communities.

The Forest Service and other federal agencies share responsibility for managing subsistence resources and uses on federal lands and waters throughout Alaska. The Alaska Region’s subsistence management program includes a variety of cooperative projects for studying and monitoring subsistence resources, documenting customary and traditional uses, and enhancing opportunities for users to meet their needs.

Ecosystems

The ecosystems of coastal Alaska contain the northern-most extent of temperate rainforest occurring along Pacific shores from northern California to Alaska. Abundant moisture in the form of rainfall and snow, along with mild coastal temperatures set the stage for landscapes shaped by water and wind. In contrast, the Kenai Peninsula with cold winters and warmer, drier summers contains boreal forest communities, with fire an important factor. Forests, wetlands, and alpine plant communities on the Tongass and Chugach National Forests provide a variety of ecosystem services to both humans and animals. Among the many ecological goods and services are high quality wildlife habitats, functioning watersheds with abundant clean water and air, carbon storage in our forests and wetlands, timber resources, and a landscape rich in aesthetics and recreational opportunities.

Fisheries

Located along the fisheries-rich Gulf of Alaska, the Chugach and Tongass National Forests are among the world’s greatest providers of freshwater habitats for the five species of Pacific salmon. Rainfall averaging 120 inches per year feeds 32,000 miles of streams and 189,000 acres of lakes across the forests. The quality habitat found in these waters helps sustain major fisheries for subsistence, commercial, and sport uses. A significant percentage of the state’s salmon catch comes from stocks that rely on habitat within the National Forests for part of their life history.



Fish habitat protection is a high priority. Forest plans provide the highest standards for protecting habitat and fisheries values in forest management. In addition, fisheries biologists continue to complete projects designed to improve and restore degraded fish habitat. In recent years, our restoration program has focused on larger scale in-stream work

with the goal of improving habitat that was degraded by historic land use activities. Our restoration and enhancement program invests about \$2,000,000 on the ground each year.

Invasive Species

Invasive species threaten the integrity of functioning ecosystems by displacing native species and altering habitats. While Alaska has fewer invasive species than the lower 48 states, coastal environments are at highest risk from marine and freshwater invasive species transported by large ships in ballast water. Fisherman and boaters may transport invasive species on boots, equipment, and boats. Areas of human settlement and activity have the highest occurrence of invasive plants in the Chugach and Tongass National Forests. Multiple efforts are underway to prevent the spread of invasive species in the national forests and adjacent lands. These efforts include outreach and education, hosting community weed pulls, organizing volunteer and youth activities around invasive species themes, conducting inventories, and controlling priority invasive plant populations across the Chugach and Tongass National Forests. Partnerships with state, federal, and non-governmental organizations are central to the invasive species work done in the region.

More Information

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