

Podcast
Alaska Forest Reflections- June 9, 2011
Topic: Don Ford Forest Reflection

"Forest Reflections, a series of stories by people who have lived, worked and played in Alaska's national forests, sharing their memories of favorite forest places for this 2011 International Year of Forests."

"My name's Don Ford, and I'm the director of the National Outdoor Leadership School. My favorite place on a forest...on a national forest in Alaska is an island in Prince William Sound. When I was first getting into outdoor education back in the 70s, I saw a catalog for the school I work for now, the National Outdoor Leadership School and there was a picture and a description of Prince William Sound. While it was going to take me 10 years to get there, it was a place that I had in the back of my mind that I would really love to go see and to travel in and to work with students in.

"So that's ... my path was to get out into Prince William Sound and I eventually got there as an instructor and it's been...Prince William Sound has been for a number of years and is my favorite place.

"And there's an island out there, in the middle of the Sound that I like to go with my wife or my family and we do lots of things out there. And it's .. there's tundra up on the higher parts of that island, and as you pull in...I've got a powerboat that I can take out for a weekend and I can anchor up in a bay of this island and pop into a little kayak and we can paddle around and you look down into and see the starfish ... multicolored starfish. And when the salmon are running ...the salmon are going by and you can see them and... My youngest son, we were out fishing one day and we were looking down in the clear water of the Sound and there was all these flashing fish and it reminded me of, as a kid, just looking and trying to fish for small fish off the pier in Michigan.

"But in this case they were a good eight-pound silver salmon and my youngest son was pulling them in faster than I could off the hook, almost.

"And then as you get into shore, there...it's just incredible, having the tundra feel, hiking up to the top of this island.

"And I remember one day we were...it was after a rain and the skies had cleared and it was just absolutely stunning and crystal clear, and it was so intimate walking up through this kind of marshy, tundra-y landscape. And there's all these little water events. And it was like going and seeing them at a local store, where you see a bubbling little stream that you put in your yard as a yard ornament. They were everywhere as you walked up, each one was completely unique and each one was completely different in size, in sound and the kinds of plants that were along it. And then getting up to the top of that hill ... looking out to the vistas of the blue ocean and the sky and the horizon and the mountains in the background...the snowy mountains of the Chugach Range...the range goes up to thirteen thousand feet at its highest point and it's snow covered year-round.

"So that's...the island and getting to that island there's lots of different adventures that that one can experience out there.

"My favorite has to do with orcas, and seeing them, both sea kayaking and also in our powerboat. And one of the things that I get excited about is when our students come back from Prince William Sound and they're so excited about what they've seen and experienced, whether it's a tidewater glacier or seeing a humpback whale coming out of the water and splashing down or a pod of orcas.

"And on this particular island I've heard of three or four cases, where orcas have come up right next to a camp. It's right on the northern point on this island. And belly rubbed, right on the rocks. And these orcas are, I think, coming up ... basically they're scratching their bellies and scraping barnacles or whatever kind of thing they're trying to do. But it's amazing to see it through the eyes of one of our students, as they express what they've seen out there when these orcas came up as a whole pod, and one by one came up on the beach within feet of them, and turned and twisted and gave them an eyeball, great big old eyeball right up into their faces there and it's pretty exciting to debrief a course that's come back from Prince William Sound and seen something like that.

"But that's my...favorite spot, whether it be hiking up there or fishing or watching the birds and just seeing those vistas, it's something that, you know, honestly, just thrills my heart."

"For more information about our national forests and the International Year of Forests, please visit the links provided at www.myalaskaforest.com. Alaska Forest Reflections is produced for the U.S. Forest Service, Alaska Region, Public Affairs Office. In Juneau, I'm Bob Belongie for the U.S. forest service."