



# Wilderness and Wilderness Study Area

## Alaska Region Wilderness

Congressionally-designated wilderness makes up one-third of the lands on the Tongass National Forest. In addition, the Chugach National Forest manages the Nellie Juan-College Fiord Wilderness Study Area, which encompasses over one-third of that forest.

## Background

The Tongass National Forest has 19 units that are part of the National Wilderness Preservation System, encompassing approximately 5.8 million acres. Two of those wildernesses—Admiralty Island and Misty Fiords—are within national monuments. These wilderness areas and national monuments were designated by two pieces of legislation: the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act of 1980 (ANILCA) and the Tongass Timber Reform Act of 1990 (TTRA).

The Chugach National Forest manages the 2.1 million acre wilderness study area to maintain its wilderness character. The wilderness study area was created in 1980 by ANILCA. The 2002 Revised Chugach Forest Plan recommends that 1.4 million acres of the study area be designated as wilderness.

The wildernesses and wilderness study area in the Alaska Region are unique landscapes that include forested islands, thousands of miles of shoreline, magnificent glaciers, ice fields, deep fiords, major river systems, and vegetation ranging from dense spruce/hemlock rain forests to alpine settings. Elevations range from sea level to over 13,000 feet. World-class opportunities for solitude, remoteness, primitive and unconfined recreation, and challenge and risk in a natural setting abound. The magnificence and scenic beauty of these landscapes, along with their values as intact ecosystems, make these areas important for local residents, visitors, recreationists, subsistence hunters and fishers, scientists and researchers.

## Wilderness Policy

Along with other federal agencies in Alaska, the Tongass and Chugach national forests share the unique and complex challenge of managing wilderness under both the Wilderness Act of 1964 and ANILCA which allows for exceptions in wilderness. These ANILCA exceptions include subsistence policies, special access (including motorized use), in-holding access, public use cabins, aquaculture activities, and temporary facilities for the taking of fish and game. There are also some unique provisions in ANILCA addressing commercial visitor services and historic, local, and Native corporation preference.

## Management Challenges

Wilderness managers are striving to maintain a wilderness presence and meet the minimum stewardship requirements for wilderness. The Region is committed to keeping Alaska wilderness wild. The Chief's Ten-Year Wilderness Stewardship Challenge is focused on bringing all wilderness areas in the nation to standard by the year 2014. The wilderness managers continue to make progress toward meeting the Chief's Challenge. In 2010, thirteen of the nineteen wilderness areas on the Tongass National Forest were managed to the minimum stewardship level.

## More Information

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