

**USDA Forest Service Alaska Region
Tongass National Forest Recreation Niche
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Wet, Wild & Ice - Forest of 2,000 Islands

The Tongass National Forest has a global and local responsibility to maintain the character and quality of the unique temperate rain forest ecosystem and communities throughout. Historically the Tongass has helped define the cultural, spiritual and economic lives of residents. Whether the public only knows the Tongass exists or visits it via cruise ship interpretive programs, day-use sightseeing & hikes, or overnights in saltwater cabins, it is a symbol of vastness & freedom with settings unsurpassed for scenery and remote experiences. The Forest delivers well thought out concentrated day-use recreation, remote backcountry opportunities and a strong interpretation and education program to support this incredible place!

Settings, Special Places, and Values

With over 11,000 miles the Tongass National Forest has 1/2 of the Nation's shoreline. It envelops a globally significant temperate rainforest with dense vegetation. Massive peaks dramatically drop into deep fjords and glaciers reach to the sea. Eighty percent of Southeast Alaska is national forest land sustaining communities and providing recreation opportunities for them and many thousands of national and international visitors. Much of the forest is inaccessible and traditional road transportation is limited, thus maintaining the sense of remoteness. Boating and flying are key for access.

Mountains and Icefields – Characterized by rugged peaks dropping to the sea, massive icefields, stunning fjords, and glaciers. Free flowing rivers cut through the mountains to the oceans and scattered fresh water lakes are found throughout this setting.

Inland Passage – Thousands of islands are found amidst protected waterways. Elevations range from sea level to around 3,000 feet. The marine environment contains numerous popular wildlife species with healthy habitat for many upland animals. Miles of shoreline and many coves and bays characterize the islands. Karst topography/caves are found throughout this setting.

Outside Coastal – Very remote, with open ocean from Alaska to Japan; settings are undeveloped and characterized by rough, weather-carved shorelines from sea level at the south end, up to 3,000 foot mountains on the north end.

Forelands – The Yakutat area includes vast low, flat land with meandering streams supporting fish and other wildlife. Beaches, sand dunes, alder and willow thickets characterize this unique coastal landscape.

Activities/Opportunities

The predominant activities are viewing scenery and wildlife, hiking/walking, boating, kayaking, fishing, hunting, and gathering. Access is often by boat or airplane only, so quality outfitter guides and partners are key to providing access and safe recreation opportunities. Inland water passages connect the communities and provide key access to the National Forest. Public use cabins are available throughout the Forest and are key to providing remote recreation opportunities. Nineteen Wildernesses and multiple roadless lands add to the remoteness of the forest. The communities are portals to the forest and provide a place for interpretive education and access to the forest. Flight-seeing and fly-in opportunities are available throughout the Tongass. A primary means of delivering recreation opportunities and I&E is through the use of outfitters and guides. Changes to the existing transportation system including faster and more frequent ferries in the short-term and new road construction in the next ten years provide an opportunity for the forest to partner with other agencies and communities to guide the development of well thought out day-use and remote backcountry opportunities.

Mountains and Icefields – Solitude and remoteness are easily found. Key activities include flight-seeing, visiting the Mendenhall Glacier -- the most-visited feature in SE Alaska. The Misty Fjords National Monument, Hubbard Glacier, and Tracy Arm are popular viewing destinations. The Stikine River offers hot springs and access by boat to the Canadian border.

Inland Passage – Cruise ships, ferries, and independent boaters are dominant in this setting. Some roaded areas provide inland recreation access for hunting & viewing. Admiralty Island National Monument provides prime bear viewing, canoeing, and hunting opportunities. Opportunities include viewing fish & wildlife, concentrations of bears (brown and black), guided caving on Prince of Wales Island, and independent boat travel.

Outside Coastal – Concentrated activities center around Sitka and OHV riding occurs on Kruzof Island. The rest of the setting is characterized by more remote experiences including beach-combing, remote beach camping, watching trolling and marine wildlife, as well as extreme ocean kayaking.

Forelands – Featured activities include surfing, fishing, and bear/moose viewing.

Primary Visitors

SE Alaska residents	Local people who recreate frequently on the Forest.
Independent travelers	Mixed local to international visitors who either use services or independently plan trips. They hunt, fish, stay in B and Bs and lodges, flight-see, view, boat (incl. kayak), and use outfitter guides.
Cruise ship travelers	Non-Alaskan, national, and international visitors who pass through the Forest. Many will take flightseeing and other day trips from the ship.