

# Kootznoowoo Wilderness



## Wilderness Character

The Tlingit-speakers of Southeast Alaska, call Admiralty Island Kootznoowoo, the “Bear Fort” or “Fortress of the Bears”. Coastal forests of massive Sitka spruce and western hemlock dominate this 100 mile long island at the northern end of the fabled Inside Passage. The British named the island “Admiralty” but the Russians called it Ostrov Kutsnoi, “Fear Island”, probably because Alaskan brown bears (grizzly) outnumber the human inhabitants. Sitka black tailed deer generally stay hidden in the dense forest but bald eagles are easily found in treetops along most beaches. Harbor Seals, Stellar sea lions, and humpback whales feed near rafts of sea ducks such as Scoters and Harlequins. The forest floor lays thickly covered with mosses and blueberry, and openings of muskeg, sedge, and sphagnum bogs. Rocky spires form the high crest of the island at 3,000 feet above sea level.

In 1980, the United States Congress designated 956,255 acres of the Admiralty Island National Monument as wilderness. In a 1990 amendment to the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA), the Wilderness was renamed the Kootznoowoo Wilderness. While only 15 miles southeast of Juneau, this wilderness is used by many surrounding communities for recreation and subsistence uses. The city of Angoon is located on the southwest portion of Admiralty Island and has its history and culture intertwined with this wilderness. Primary access to this Wilderness is by boat or floatplane, but canoes and kayaks can also be used. With its salmon-filled creeks, hundreds of spectacular mountain lakes, and towering alpine peaks, Kootznoowoo can provide for the ultimate wilderness experience. The Tongass National Forest manages this undeveloped, enduring set of ecosystems to preserve them for the enjoyment of present and future generations

## Wilderness Management Direction

Management direction for the wilderness comes from the Wilderness Act, the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA), and the Tongass Land and Resource Management Plan, as amended, 2008. The Wilderness Act prescribes the general management direction, but ANILCA provides for some specific exceptions. Direction includes:

- The Wilderness Act prohibits commercial uses with the exception of what may be allowed as necessary for visitor services.
- The Wilderness Act prohibits the use of motorized equipment, but ANILCA Section 1316 can allow for the continued use of traditional equipment directly necessary for the taking of fish and game (subject to regulation and compatibility).
- The Wilderness Act prohibits mechanized form of transport (i.e. bicycles, wheelbarrows), but ANILCA Section 811 can allow for the continued use of traditional equipment used for subsistence activities by rural Alaska residents (subject to regulation and compatibility)
- While the Wilderness Act prohibits the use of aircraft, ANILCA Section 1110 allows for the use of airplanes, motorboats, and snow-machines (during periods of adequate snow cover). Helicopters are not specifically identified in the ANILCA exception and their use is prohibited.
- The Tongass Plan identifies **group size limit of no more than 12 persons** for commercial or general public use within this wilderness.

These regulations are established for the wilderness character to remain undeveloped, natural and untrammeled for future use.



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## Wilderness Challenges

People are lured to Alaska for its beauty and excitement, but environmental conditions can be very unforgiving. Kootznoowoo Wilderness is within a temperate rainforest where the average summer temperatures are between 45-65°F. Be prepared with the appropriate clothing, safety equipment, shelter supplies, and water purifying devices for a cool and frequently overcast climate. This wilderness also contains a high density of brown bears so store food and trash properly. During the summer months, be especially careful around salmon spawning streams. Boaters and paddlers should be especially cautious when traveling in this area. Pay special attention to tides particularly inside inlets and watch for unmarked rocks and reefs.

## Leave No Trace

To insure that this area is left unimpaired for future use, practice the following Leave No Trace principles.

- Plan ahead and prepare for extreme weather conditions, hazards, and emergencies.
- Clean equipment and gear **before** going to the field to avoid the potential spread of invasive plants or seeds.
- Travel and camp on durable surfaces. When possible, disperse use to prevent the creation of campsites and trails.
- Dispose of waste properly. **Pack out** all trash, leftover food, and toilet paper. At appropriate conditions dispose of human waste in the intertidal zone. If camping in upland forests dispose of solid waste by digging a cat hole 6 to 8 inches deep located at least 200 feet from water or campsite.
- Leave what you find. Examine but do not touch the historical structures or artifacts.
- Minimize campfire impacts. Use a lightweight stove when possible. When a campfire is necessary, keep fires small. Build a fire below mean high tide, or when in a forested area, build a mound fire or use a fire pan to avoid damaging the ground vegetation. Stay away from boulders or tree bases to avoid long lasting black scars.
- Respect wildlife and be considerate of other visitors.

## Wilderness Facilities

There are 14 public recreation cabins, ten three-sided shelters, the Cross Island Canoe route, several small portaging trails, and three hiking trails in the Kootznoowoo Wilderness. Several of the cabins and shelters are found on the canoe route.

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## Threats and Benefits

While designated wilderness areas have the most protections of any other public lands, there are still threats that degrade the wilderness resource. Threats include illegal outfitting and guiding, harassing wildlife, illegal storage of commercial fishing equipment, and resource damage by improperly disposed of human waste and litter, trespass structures, and damaging of flora are the major human threats to this wilderness. Building awareness and a better understanding of designated wilderness areas is the key foundation to ensure that these areas stay wild.

Along with providing recreational opportunities, designated wilderness areas protect natural ecosystems. They provide us with clean air and clean water, and allow the natural processes to continue without the permanent presence of humans. Due to the action of Congress in 1980, Kootznoowoo Wilderness will remain protected for future generations.