

Misty Fiords National Monument Wilderness



Wilderness Character

Seventeen thousand years ago Misty Fiords National Monument was covered with massive bodies of ice. As the ice retreated, it carved away spectacular, long, deep fiords with cliffs that now rise thousands of feet from the water's surface. Travel by boat or floatplane in Behm Canal. Sight killer whales and porpoises, and mountain goats and bears on the steep slopes and estuary shorelines. Step on the edge of the Wilderness boundary, walk upslope and be surrounded by Sitka spruce, western hemlock, and cedar trees. Unique geological features such as mineral springs and volcanic lava flows can be found deep within this Wilderness. Travel east towards the Canadian border and upstream via boat for shoreline viewing of king salmon runs, or via plane for aerial views of the glacial ice that once created this current landscape.

Misty Fiords National Monument is 2,142,243 acres on the southern tip of the Alaska Panhandle and is the largest Wilderness area on the Tongass National Forest. It is part of a vast coastal temperate rainforest and the cloud-shrouded Monument can receive 160 inches of rain annually. The region is marked by deep valleys, steep slopes and sharp intervalley ridges formed by volcanism and carved by glaciers. Numerous steep-walled inlets of the sea called fiords offer excellent sea-kayaking opportunities, although 25-foot changes in the tides and frequent storms can make boat access challenging. Ideal beach camps may be underwater two hours after pitching a tent.

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 untrammled for future use.



Tongass National Forest 

United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest Service
Alaska Region

Tongass National Forest
Ketchikan-Misty Fiords
Ranger District
3031 Tongass Avenue
Ketchikan, AK 99901

Phone: 907.225.2148
Fax: 907.225.0414
www.fs.fed.us/r10/tongass

Wilderness Challenges

People are lured to Alaska for its beauty and excitement, but environmental conditions can be very unforgiving. Misty Fiords National Monument Wilderness is in a temperate rainforest, 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 brown and black bears, so store food and trash properly. During the summer months, be especially careful around salmon spawning streams. If traveling by boat, be aware of the weather conditions around Dixon Entrance.

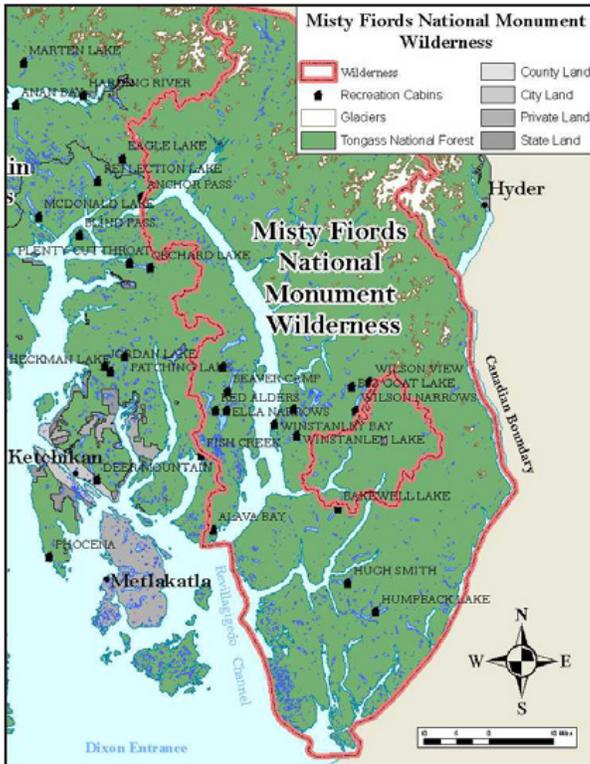
Leave No Trace

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 thirteen public recreation cabins, five three-sided shelters, and ten trails that provide twenty miles of hiking opportunities.



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. Illegal commercial use, disturbance to wildlife and cultural resources, illegal hunting, and resource damage by improper waste disposal, campfire scars, and damaged 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 where humans remain only as visitors. Due to the action of Congress in 1980, Misty Fiords National Monument Wilderness will remain protected for future generations.