

# South Baranof Wilderness



## Wilderness Character

Bounded on the west by the Gulf of Alaska, the scenery is stunningly picturesque with glacier-scored granite mountains, long saltwater fjords and hanging valleys containing lakes. On the east side of the Wilderness, the saltwater coastline along Chatham Strait is less rugged and there is greater snow accumulation over the whole area. Mount Ada at 4,528 feet is on the east side of the island and is the highest peak in the Wilderness. Permanent snowfields and active glaciers blanket the high country above 2,000 feet, giving way to dense undergrowth in a coastal forest of spruce and hemlock. Wildlife in this area includes brown bears, Sitka black tail deer, mink, marten and river otters, trout and salmon, as well as eagles and shorebirds. Seals, sea lions, whales, and a large population of sea otters are often seen offshore, and crab, shrimp, herring, salmon and halibut are harvested from the sea. The western bays and fjords can experience 100 mile-per hour winds from the open Pacific Ocean. The more tame waters and winds off the South Baranof Island Wilderness can be a haven for boats and the human spirit.

In 1980, the United States Congress designated 319,568 acres as the South Baranof Wilderness. Located 20 miles south of Sitka on the southern half of Baranof Island, this Wilderness is accessible by boat or floatplane. 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 untrammelled for future use.



Tongass National Forest



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

Forest Service  
Alaska Region

Tongass National Forest  
Sitka Ranger District  
204 Siginaka Way  
Sitka, AK 99835

Phone: 907.747.6671  
Fax: 907.747.4253  
[www.fs.fed.us/r10/tongass](http://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. South Baranof Wilderness is within a temperate rainforest where the average annual rainfall is over 200 inches and temperatures range from 25 -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 bears so store food and trash properly. During the summer months, be aware of bears congregating around salmon spawning streams. If traveling by boat, caution should be taken on the open ocean where winds could exceed 100 mph.

## 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 three public recreation cabins that are accessible by foot or floatplane, and one primitive hiking trail in South Baranof Wilderness.

This flyer was printed with the help of recreation fee money.  
USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.



## 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. Unauthorized trespass structures, litter, conflicts between user groups, loss of solitude, and construction of illegal trails are the major human problems 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, South Baranof Wilderness will remain protected for future generations.