

West Chichagof–Yakobi Wilderness



Wilderness Character

Pacific winds and open ocean swells are the only forces that transgress these wilderness promontories on these islands. This constant westward attack allows only the most adventurous, skilled and courageous of visitors into this wilderness. Once accessed one can discover a sanctuary of intricate bays, lagoons and estuaries, muskeg meadows and natural hot springs. It is a waterfowl paradise. One third of these Wilderness areas are covered with Western hemlock and Sitka spruce. It is not uncommon to see minks and martens, Sitka black tailed deer, or brown bears. The area also contains historic traces of silver and gold mining, so be cautious where you hike and be aware of possible hazards. Being in these Wilderness areas away from traffic noise and developed structures, you might feel like you hit wilderness gold.

In 1980, the United States Congress designated 265,286 acres as the West Chichagof–Yakobi Wilderness. Located on the western portion of Yakobi and Chichagof islands and midway between Hoonah and Sitka and across an inlet from the small village of Pelican, the West Chichagof–Yakobi Wilderness can be accessed by floatplane, motorboat or paddle boat. 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 untrammled 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

Wilderness Challenges

People are lured into Alaska for its beauty and excitement, but environmental conditions can be very unforgiving. West Chichagof–Yakobi 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 brown bears, so store food and trash properly. During the summer months, be especially careful around salmon spawning streams. If traveling by boat, be aware that the outside waters are unprotected and can be very dangerous.

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 four public recreation cabins, six established hiking trails, and one geothermal hot spring in this wilderness. The West Chichagof–Yakobi Wilderness is jointly managed by the Hoonah and Sitka Ranger Districts.



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 use of public recreation cabins, illegal storage of commercial fishing equipment, illegal motorized use, and resource damage by cutting of trees, littering, and damaging of flora and heritage sites are the major 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, West Chichagof–Yakobi Wilderness will remain protected for future generations.