

# Chuck River Wilderness



## Wilderness Character

Chuck River exemplifies the rise of wilderness appreciation. The local Tlingit enjoyed the bounty of nature by trapping and fishing in Windham Bay. Euroamerican settlers arrived in the 1890s seeking gold. They dug mines into the mountains, laid roads through the forests and built structures along the shore. The mining boom subsided around the 1920s and people moved on as their developments fell into disrepair. Then later, in the 1980s as timber resources were being examined for harvest, the American people began to embrace the emerging values of wilderness. Today, people treasure this Wilderness for its tranquility, scenic beauty, forests, healthy fish runs, hunting opportunities, and protected anchorages.

Congress designated the old-growth forests and streamside habitat comprising 74,900 acres in the Chuck River Wilderness in 1990. Tracy Arm - Ford's Terror Wilderness adjoins this wilderness to the north and completes the protection of the watersheds surrounding the spectacular Endicott Arm. Situated 70 miles south of Juneau at the head of Windham Bay, this area can be accessed by motor boat from Stephens Passage or floatplane from Juneau or Petersburg. 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.



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## Wilderness Challenges

People are lured to Alaska for its beauty and excitement, but environmental conditions can be very unforgiving. Chuck River 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 black bears, so store food and trash properly. During the summer months, be especially careful around salmon spawning streams.

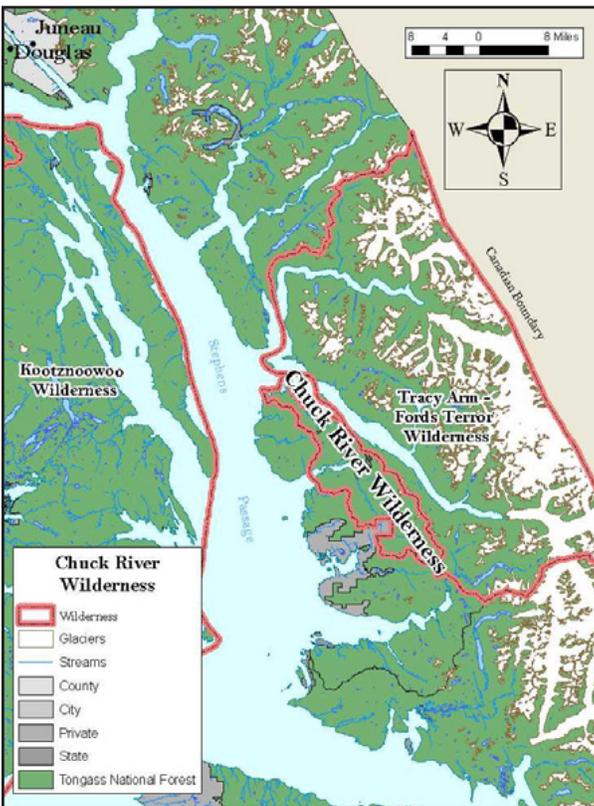
## Leave No Trace

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 no established hiking trails along the Chuck River, or public recreation cabins. This Wilderness can offer opportunities for solitude and remoteness once away from the shore lines of Windham Bay.



## Threats and Benefits

While designated wilderness areas have the most protections of any other public lands, there are still threats that can degrade the wilderness resource. Threats include littering, harassing wildlife, illegal guiding, and introductions of invasive plants. 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 1990, the Chuck River Wilderness will remain protected for future generations.