

South Etolin Wilderness



Wilderness Character

From a spruce and hemlock forest at sea level, the South Etolin Wilderness rises above tree line to over 3,700 feet on Mount Etolin. The north end of the Wilderness consists of steep terrain with rocky peaks and mountain lakes. The southern section is forested and receives an average of 90 inches of rain per year. Several smaller islands abut South Etolin's eastern, western, and southern shorelines. Black bears, and Sitka black tailed deer are common, while brown bears are present, but not abundant. Three years before the area was designated as Wilderness, 50 elk were introduced to the island, an unusual move because these large ungulates are not indigenous. Elk now inhabit much of this area. Waterfowl and shorebirds are present in spring and fall, and harbor seals haul out on some of the beaches. Bald eagles nest along many inlets. Despite its proximity to Wrangell, Meyers Chuck, and Ketchikan, this area receives little visitation.

In 1990, the United States Congress designated 83,619 acres as the South Etolin Wilderness. Located midway between Wrangell and Ketchikan on the south end of Etolin Island, this Wilderness also encompasses many other smaller barrier islands that surround Etolin Island. 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.



Tongass National Forest 

United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest Service
Alaska Region

Tongass National Forest
Wrangell Ranger District
P.O. Box 51
Wrangell, AK 99929

Phone: 907.874-2323
Fax: 907.874.7595
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. The South Etolin 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 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 submerged rocks around the southern end of Etolin Island.

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 or public recreation facilities in South Etolin Wilderness.



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. Litter, illegal motorized use, illegal outfitting and guiding, campfire scars, invasive species, timber theft, trespass structures and damaged flora are the 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 1990, South Etolin Wilderness will remain protected for future generations.