

Maurelle Islands Wilderness



Wilderness Character

This wilderness is on the west coast of Prince of Wales Island, 20 miles north-west of Craig and Klawock. Made up of a group of nearly 30 islands, it offers several small coves for protection from the Pacific Ocean winds and waves. Navigating through these island passages offers excellent viewing of humpback whales, sea otters, and seals and in limited numbers on the larger islands, black bears, Sitka black tailed deer, and wolves. Explore these islands on foot, and you will find stands of stunted Sitka spruce and western hemlock battered by the winds rolling over the landscapes. During historic and modern times this Island has been used for subsistence, including fishing. Concentrated use of coves for fishing may limit solitude in these areas. While the Maurelles are the smallest Wilderness area they still offer excellent opportunities for exploration, self discovery, and fantastic Southeast Alaska scenery.

In 1980, the United States Congress designated 4,937 acres as the Maurelle Islands Wilderness. Located off the western shore of Prince of Wales Island, this Wilderness area can be accessed 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

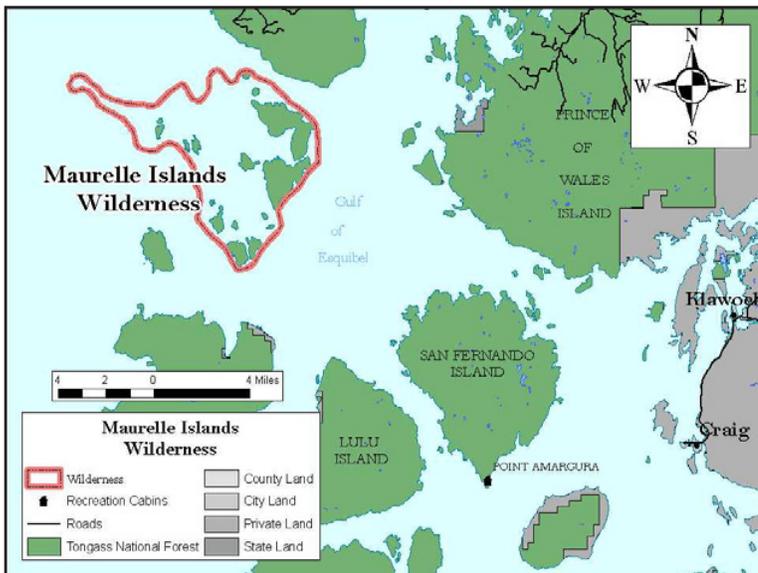


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Leave No Trace

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 Challenges

People are lured to Alaska for its beauty and excitement, but environmental conditions can be very unforgiving. Maurelle Islands Wilderness is within a temperate rainforest where the average summer temperatures are between 35-60°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. If getting dropped off, know that strong winds and rain can delay pickups, and make campfires difficult to start and maintain.

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. Damaging of cultural and historical sites, trash pollution, and resource damage by human use and the spread of invasive species 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, the Maurelle Islands Wilderness will remain protected for future generations.

Wilderness Facilities

There are no established hiking trails or public recreation facilities in the Maurelle Islands Wilderness.

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