

# Tracy Arm–Fords Terror Wilderness



## Wilderness Character

Bounded by Canada on the east, this Wilderness is highlighted by two sheer-walled fiords, Tracy Arm and Endicott Arm, both narrow and deep and over 30 miles long. At the head of both fiords tidewater glaciers calve regularly into the sea, making a boat approach to their faces dangerous. Floating chunks of ice, some the size of a three-story building, can block access to the end of the fiords, especially in summer. In 1899, a naval crewman named Ford paddled into a narrow waterway connected to Endicott Arm and was trapped for six terrible hours in the ripping tidal surge; hence the name Fords Terror. Wildlife in the Wilderness area includes brown and black bears, mountain goats, wolves, a few Sitka black tailed deer, and many smaller furbearing animals. Harbor seals rear their young on ice floating in the fiords, and whales and sea lions are often seen in the water. Bald eagles and shore-birds are common near the coastline.

In 1980, the United States Congress designated 653,179 acres as the Tracy Arm-Fords Terror Wilderness. Located midway between Juneau and Petersburg, this wilderness can be accessed by motorboats, large vessels or commercial cruise boats, and floatplanes. Tracy and Endicott are two long and narrow arms of saltwater. These Arms are bordered by steep rock walls and glacier-covered mountains. At the head of each fiord is an active tidewater glacier which calves frequently, producing floating icebergs. About 75 percent of the Wilderness area is considered alpine, of which approximately 20 percent consists of glaciers and snow fields. 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



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## Wilderness Challenges

People are lured to Alaska for its beauty and excitement, but the environmental conditions can be very unforgiving. Tracy Arm-Fords Terror 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 brown and black bears, so store food and trash properly. If traveling by motorboat or kayak, be cautious when approaching the face of a glacier because of the active calving and around large icebergs that tend to flip.

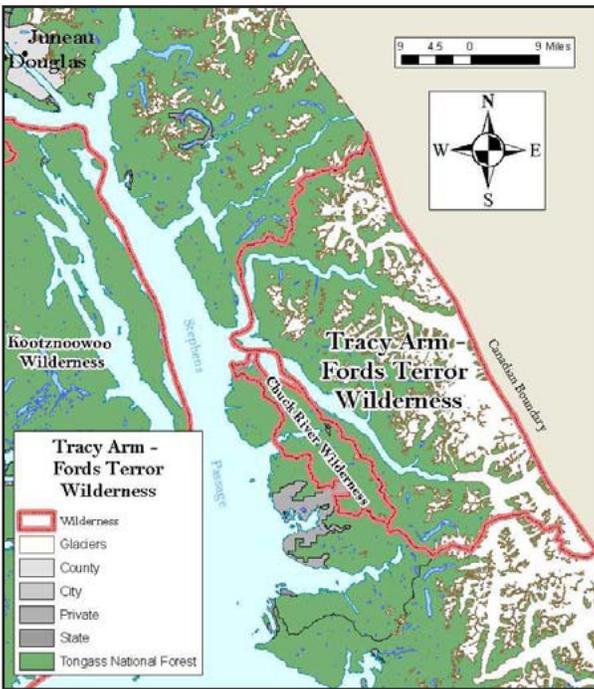
## Leave No Trace

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 Tracy Arm-Fords Terror 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. Illegal hunting, social impacts on wilderness visitors due to heavy motorized use on marine waters and crowding at limited campsites, illegal storage of commercial fishing equipment and resource damage by cutting of trees, improperly disposed of human waste and litter, and damaging of flora 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, Tracy Arm-Fords Terror Wilderness will remain protected for future generations.