

## USDA Forest Service Botany in the News

### Finding the elusive Wright's filmy fern on the Tongass National Forest.

**Who (*partners*):** Tongass National Forest, Petersburg Ranger District, Sitka Ranger District, Iowa State University, National Park Service, Federal Aviation Administration (Biorka Island).

**What (*species*):** Wright's filmy fern (*Hymenophyllum wrightii*).

**When:** Summer 2006.

**Where:** Alaska Region, Tongass National Forest.

**How:** This tiny fern grows in Japan and Korea and the temperate rain forests of the northwest coast of North America. In North America moss experts discovered the fern in British Columbia in 1957 and in Alaska in 1965. It is rare in British Columbia, and until the survey this year known from only two places in Alaska, near Sitka and Petersburg. On British Columbia's Queen Charlotte Islands the fern grows as a sporophyte (looks like a tiny delicate fern), otherwise only the gametophyte generation has been found (gametophytes look like mats of tiny mosses).

During July a team of botanists, armed with flashlights and magnifying glasses, conducted concentrated surveys to relocate the fern in southeastern Alaska where it had last been found in the 1960s, and to see if it grows elsewhere in southeast Alaska. An authority on filmy ferns, Don Farrar of Iowa State University, participated in the surveys and taught the botanists how to search for and identify the fern. The botanists found the plant (as a gametophyte) at 15 places near Petersburg and Sitka. In 2006, botanists have found the fern (more gametophytes) at 40 other locations in southeastern Alaska.

**Why:** The purpose of this project was to determine if Wright's filmy fern is indeed extremely rare, or simply a more common plant that is much overlooked due to its small size and resemblance to mosses.

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Searching for Wright's filmy fern on a Sitka spruce tree, near Sitka, Alaska.



Gametophyte of Wright's filmy fern. The plant pictured here is about 1/3 inch wide.