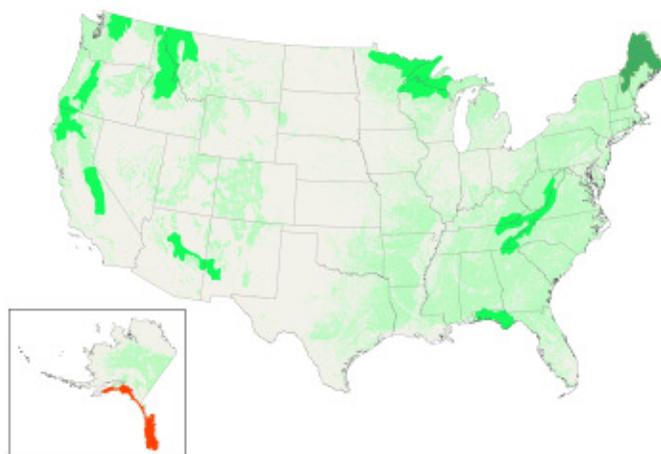


KEYSTONE FOREST



Physical Description

The northern limit of North America's coastal temperate rainforest is in Alaska. This is the rarest forest type on Earth with 38 percent of this ancient forest in Alaska. This keystone forest is part of the larger Northern Pacific Coastal forest ecoregion. Dominant tree species are Western hemlock and Sitka spruce, with some Alaska yellow cedar in the southern portion. Watersheds consist of small to very large islands numbering in the thousands, and relatively short mainland rivers with headwaters in a glaciated

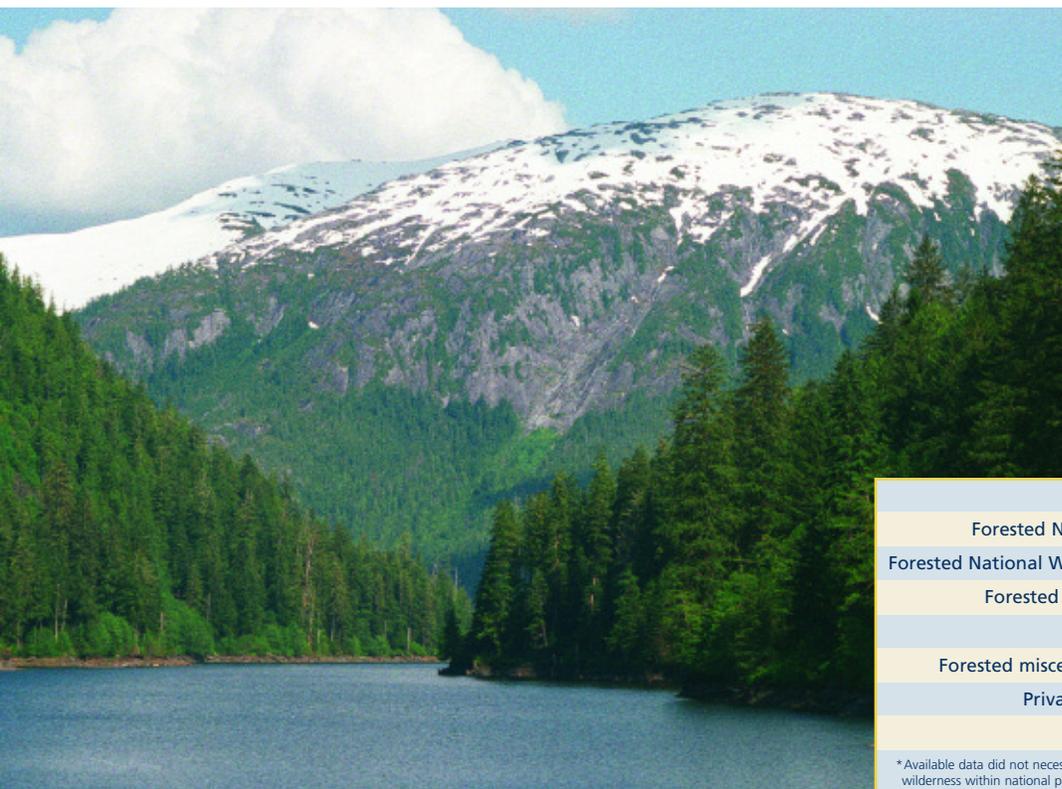
coast range hundreds of miles long that has peaks typically 5,000 to 10,000 feet in elevation, reaching to 18,000 feet. Some islands are also very mountainous and have alpine glaciers. The preponderance of land in the keystone forest is federal, nearly all of it in the Tongass and Chugach National Forests and Glacier Bay National Park. The state of Alaska, the University of Alaska, the Alaska Mental Health Trust, and a number of for-profit Native corporations have other significant landholdings.

Important wildlife includes five

species of salmon, brown and black bears, wolves, mountain goats, moose, deer and bald eagles. The area is also home to the imperiled Alexander Archipelago wolf and Queen Charlotte goshawk. There are several endemic animal populations as a result of the island geography. Many scientists believe the viability of several species in the southern part of the keystone forest is not assured beyond 100 years under current forest management practices.

Biological hotspots are estuaries and their surrounding forest, salmon streams and coarse-canopy forest (old-growth stands with large trees that have well-developed crowns and break snowfall well). Coarse-canopy forest was always rare here and now is being heavily targeted by a half-century of industrial scale logging (an estimated two-thirds has been lost). Much of the land area is non-forest (89 percent of

Tongass National Forest, Alaska.



Forested BLM Lands (non-wilderness)	972,067
Forested National Forest Lands (non-wilderness)	7,275,222
Forested National Wildlife Refuge Lands (non-wilderness)	23,875
Forested National Park Lands (non-wilderness)*	706,063
Forested Wilderness	2,989,094
Forested miscellaneous public and private preserves	0
Privately owned, unprotected forest lands	2,323,314
Total Forested Lands	14,289,635

*Available data did not necessarily distinguish wilderness from non-wilderness within national parks, so some wilderness within national parks may be included within this statistic.

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Forest Quality

- Remaining coastal temperate rainforest
- Other forested areas



Forest Ownership

- Forested BLM and national forest lands
- Forested national parks
- Forested wilderness areas
- Forested national wildlife refuges
- Misc. forested public lands and private preserves
- Privately owned forests
- Wilderness area boundaries
- National park boundaries
- National wildlife refuge boundaries
- Urban areas
- Highways

the Chugach National Forest and 54 percent of the Tongass National Forest), and much of the forested area is scrub forest. Accordingly, old-growth habitat is naturally highly fragmented, and in many places logging has dramatically increased fragmentation.

Native cultures have remained strong in this keystone forest. Sport and subsistence hunting, fishing and gathering are highly important activities in the regional culture (both native and non-native). Commercial fishing for salmon, ground fish and crab is a mainstay of the region. Tourism is also important, ranging from independent travelers who come to hike or kayak to cruise ships.

Threats

The primary threat in the southern portion of the forest is logging and associated road-building. Logging in the region is marginally economic, creating pressure to target valuable, accessible

low elevation coarse-canopy forest stands, often in roadless areas. Active plans by the state of Alaska to build a region-wide electrical intertie and to replace the existing ferry system with many short ferry hops connected by highways also present significant threats to the forest.

At present, there is no significant timber industry in the northern region. Proposed road access to the Bering coal-field presents one threat. Much of the shoreline/forest interface was damaged by the 1989 *Exxon Valdez* oil spill, and wildlife populations are stressed.

Efforts to Increase Protected Areas

Pending legislation: the Alaska Rainforest Conservation Act (H.R. 979) introduced by Rep. Rosa DeLauro (D-CT) with more than 100 cosponsors would permanently protect the remaining wildlands of the Tongass and Chugach National Forests to provide for hunting, fishing, recreation,

tourism and ecological integrity. Another area for protection includes the expansion of Kenai Fjords National Park to include portions of the Chugach National Forest on Prince William Sound.

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