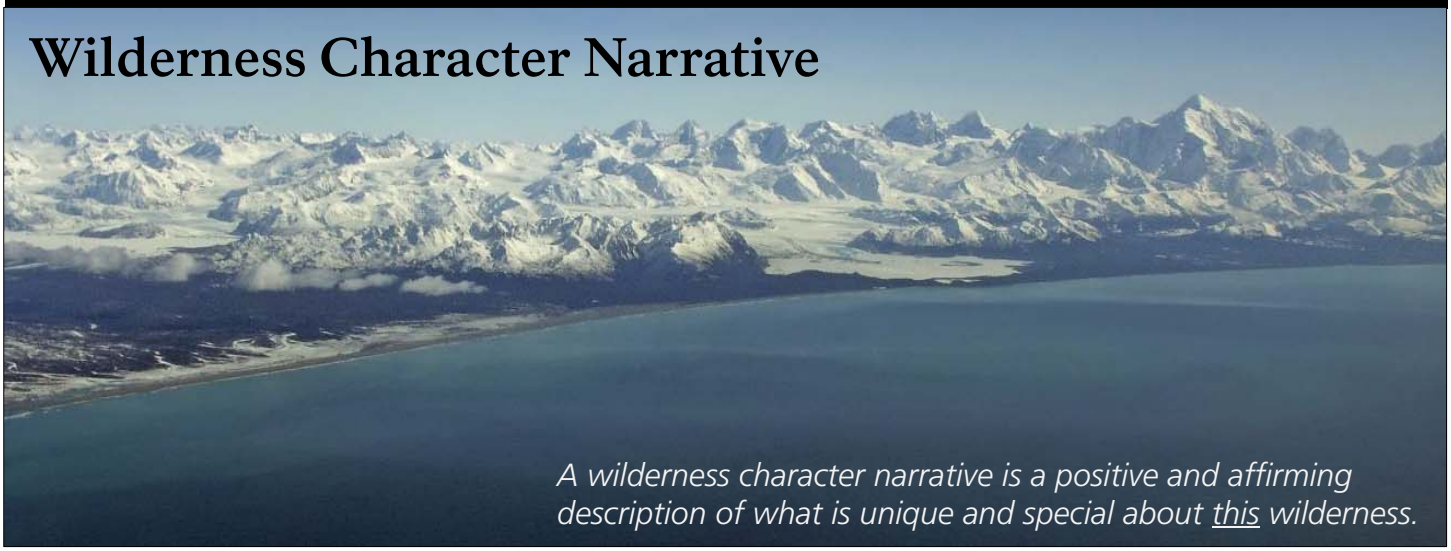
Glacier Bay

National Park and Preserve
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Wilderness Character Narrative

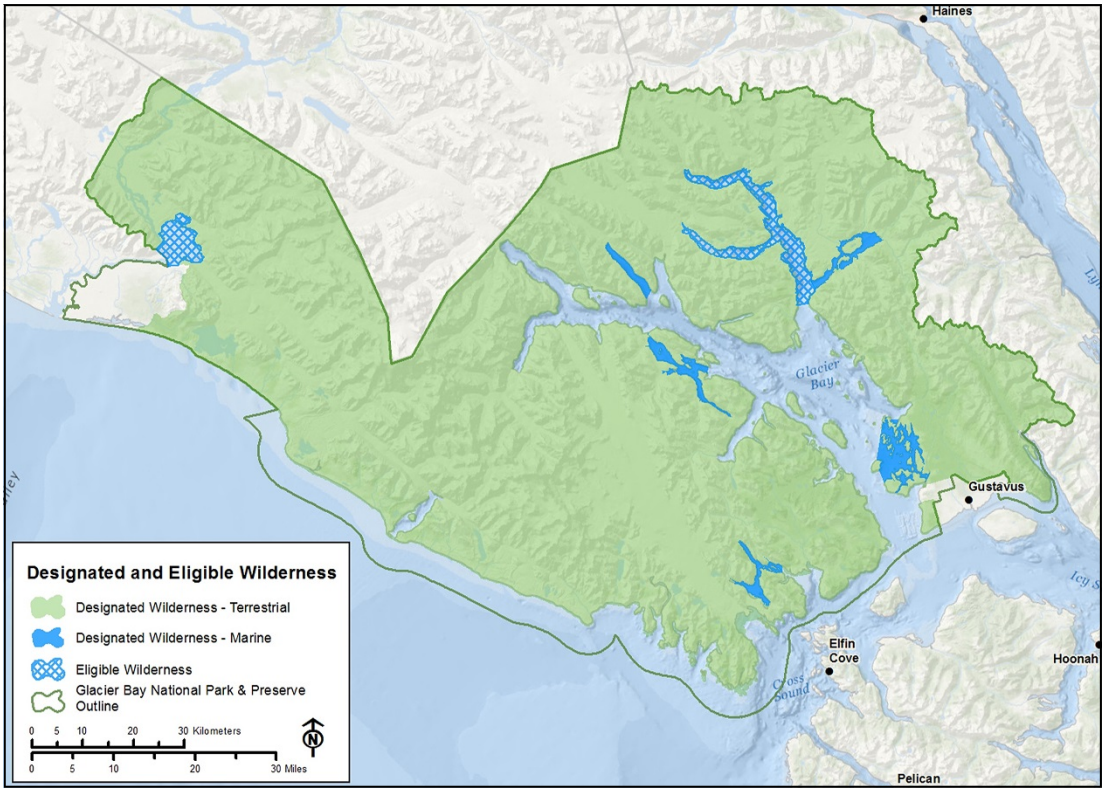


A wilderness character narrative is a positive and affirming description of what is unique and special about this wilderness.

Overview

The Wilderness of Glacier Bay National Park is forged from dynamic change in the wake of powerful seismic forces and dramatic glacial movements. Glaciers have sculpted this landscape, from the sharp brows of its mountain peaks to the deep troughs of its fjords. Even the land itself is rising as the colossal weight of the ice eases off of it. Here, it is almost as if the span of time has been condensed and then neatly unfurled across this landscape. It is a place renowned and protected for its diversity, constant change, and opportunity for study.

Dramatic change and the ebb and flow of nature occur at every scale: within centuries, seasons, and hours. The tides swell and recede dramatically twice a day, oftentimes by as much as twenty vertical feet. Long days in the summer become markedly brief in the winter, as the earth's axis slants away from the sun. Many species follow this pattern, disappearing from Glacier Bay during the winter, only to return or re-emerge in the spring. The salmon, a sustaining pillar of this ecosystem, return each year to the place of their birth to spawn, die, and dispense valuable proteins and other nutrients. Humpback whales converge on the rich feeding grounds in Glacier Bay in the summer, but in the winter range elsewhere to breed and give



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birth. People are also an inseparable part of this continuous cycle of disturbance and accommodation; the Tlingit have been here for centuries, and as the glaciers, rivers, and life have advanced and receded through the homeland, so have the clans and the Tlingit ancestors. Since its exploration by John Muir in 1879, scientists from around the world have been attracted to Glacier Bay's living laboratory of pristine ecosystems dominated by natural successional processes. Visitors congregate in the warmer summer months to witness the calving of tidewater glaciers and contemplate change, resilience, and their connection to this dynamic landscape.

The Glacier Bay Wilderness encompasses more than its namesake; the boundary extends along the Gulf of Alaska to the mouth of the glacial-fed Alsek Lake and areas surrounding the Chilkat and Fairweather Mountain Ranges. The alpine zone in the northern and western portions of the

wilderness remain covered in ice fields, a diverse range of successional communities occupy recently ice-bound areas, and unglaciated refugia enfold the park's outer coast and eastern edge. The outer coast is among the wildest coastlines in the world, and visitors there will be immersed in the purest wilderness imaginable. Glacier Bay National Park preserves one of the largest units of the national wilderness preservation system, encompassing more than 2.7 million acres of glacially influenced marine, terrestrial, and freshwater ecosystems.

This narrative describes five tangible and measurable qualities of wilderness character in Glacier Bay's Wilderness: 1) natural, 2) untrammeled, 3) undeveloped, 4) solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation, 5) marine wilderness, and 6) natural change as a foundation for scientific inquiry.

NATURAL

Wilderness maintains ecological systems that are substantially free from the effects of modern civilization

The Glacier Bay Wilderness is remarkable in its dynamism and resilience. Only 250 years ago, the bay itself was a river of ice before glaciers recoiled 55 miles into the interior. But in the short time since their withdrawal, life, in its insistent way, has inserted itself into the raw land left in their wake. Algae and lichens arrive first, creating mats that stabilize the silt and retain moisture. Strands of moss creep across stones, followed by windblown spores and seeds of scouring rush, ryegrass, *Dryas*, and fireweed. Within a few decades, thick entangled groves of willow and Sitka alder gain supremacy, depositing vital nitrogen into the soil. In places first vacated by glaciers, spruce and hemlock tower high overhead in damp temperate rainforests. The beauty of the successional process lies in its complexity and variability. Each time new life takes hold, it does so in a unique and inventive way, imparting lessons about resilience and adaptability.

As plants fall in behind retreating glaciers, so have many animals. Mountain goats and brown bears quickly moved in, while moose are more recent arrivals. Black bears lumber through the damp forests, and the glacier bear, a silvery or slightly blue tinted coloration of the black bear, is sighted periodically. Lynx and snowshoe hare can be found in the Alsek River drainage, species that have reached the coast from the interior by traveling along the river corridor. Salmon, known for returning to the place of their birth to spawn, are colonizing streams only recently buried under ice. Seabirds reap the abundance of the ocean and take advantage of the rocky shores along the coast.

The glaciers in this wilderness are not all retreating; glacial retreat continues on the east and southwest sides of the wilderness, but on the west side several glaciers are actually stable or advancing, fed by copious snowfall high in Fairweather Mountains. While glacial retreat and steep elevational gradients contribute to the diversity within Glacier Bay's wilderness, the entire wilderness was not glaciated during the Little Ice Age. Much of the outer coast and other areas of refugia have not been covered with ice for the past 12,000 years or longer, creating a profound contrast between areas of new successional growth and old-growth forests. Interstadial

trees, stumps, and wood are primeval relics of ancient interglacial forests. Temperate rainforest and alpine peaks exist beside freshwater lakes, rich estuaries, abundant intertidal zones, rocky coast, deep fjords, and open ocean. The Alsek River is a pristine and critical corridor for seasonal migrations of spawning salmon, wildlife, and plants. Despite this diversity of habitats, virtually all life here is connected ultimately to the marine environment, or to the biologically abundant coastline. In addition to, or perhaps because of, its great diversity of habitats, Glacier Bay's Wilderness possesses an exceptionally rich soundscape.

In very few places are the powerful, changing forces of nature more evident than in Glacier Bay, and rarely is the full spectrum of pioneer to climax species as apparent within a circumscribed area. But Glacier Bay is also a part of the vast Kluane/Wrangell-St. Elias/Glacier Bay/Tatshenshini-Alsek World Heritage Site; together these areas comprise one of the world's largest terrestrial protected areas.

Threats to the natural quality are both imminent and unknown.
On a local scale, the Glacier Bay Wilderness has relatively few known non-native species, but the common dandelion, perennial sowthistle, and other weeds can be found on land. Nearby commercial and recreational fisheries have caught Atlantic salmon, and while European green crabs and non-native tunicates have not yet been found in park waters, they could pose a threat in the future. Daily disturbance and pollution from cruise ships, commercial, private and administrative vessels likely impact the behavioral patterns and ecological health of the marine community. Vessel noise and close approach distances can alter wildlife behavior on land, and the threat of ship strike to marine mammals and seabirds is always present. Commercial, charter and sport fishing and hunting that occur outside of wilderness may alter natural population dynamics of the targeted species within.

Unlike most Alaska parks, Glacier Bay National Park does not allow federally authorized subsistence hunting or fishing on any of its wilderness lands or waters, and only limited State of Alaska -authorized subsistence/personal use fishing has occurred in certain areas within the wilderness. A legislative allowance for traditional gull egg harvest was recently passed, and the resulting collection of eggs will be carefully implemented and monitored to ensure the harvest is not detrimental to glaucous-winged gull populations.

Perhaps the greatest threats to the natural quality of this wilderness are the looming possibility of a large contaminants spill and the unknown effects of anthropogenic climate change. Any vessels travelling along the outer coast, through Cross Sound/Icy Strait, or up Glacier Bay each year, could accidentally dump thousands of gallons of fuel into the water - with devastating effects on the abundant resources of the park. Climate change is affecting Glacier Bay in known and unknown ways. Dynamic landscapes, by their very nature, are capable of absorbing a wide range of changes while maintaining their primary functionality. The Glacier Bay Wilderness is a system built around change, but unnatural change – especially too much of it or when it occurs too quickly - could significantly alter the naturalness of the park and the way we manage it in the future.

UNTRAMMELED

Wilderness is essentially unhindered and free from modern human actions that control or manipulate the community of life

Rarely are the wild, untamable forces of nature more strikingly evident than in Glacier Bay's wilderness. Glaciers ponderously grind through the valleys all the way to tidewater, and massive ice shards calve into the water below. At first glance, the margin of a glacier appears to be an austere relic of the Little Ice Age, locked in ice and frozen in time. Instead, it is a tumultuous din, as icebergs scrape and groan against each other. Hulking bergs spontaneously roll over with a roar, bobbing and exposing their blue underbellies as they fragment and find new equilibrium. In the distance, sonorous rumbling signals an avalanche thundering down a mountainside, quelling everything in its path. Even the earth's crust heaves and lurches on its own accord as a network of fault lines generates frequent earthquakes. Powerful storms and the occasional tsunami batter the coast. Those at sea are at the mercy of capricious weather and strong tides. Here, the earth seems to flaunt its independence.

To the extent that modern humans can manipulate the environment, the vast majority of the wilderness remains essentially untouched. The Alsek River flows freely from the mountain range to the coast, wild and unobstructed. The majority of the wilderness receives very low management, and large-scale restoration projects and other intrusive management activities are notably absent. Some wildlife marking, and hand-pulling and limited spraying of invasive weeds occur, but agency management actions that impact the untrammeled quality are rare or non-existent in most of the terrestrial wilderness.

UNDEVELOPED

Wilderness retains its primeval character and influence, and is essentially without permanent improvements or modern human occupation

The Glacier Bay Wilderness is a truly primeval place, where one can witness life starting from scratch and unfolding in succession. This is a place where one can feel a part of the community of life, of something greater where humans have not exerted their dominance over and above all other life forms. This connection with the greater community of life is ingrained in the Tlingit world view, as the spirits of all living and non-living things are equally respected.

Unlike many wilderness areas that are islands of wildness surrounded by development, Glacier Bay is a wild place within the context of equally wild and sometimes wilder surroundings. The steady force and power of the retreating and advancing glaciers puts notions of our own abilities into perspective. Human developments here are minimal, and views of the vast expanse of ocean or snowcapped mountain ranges are suitably humbling. Many mountains are unclimbed, and much of the marine wilderness lies unseen, tucked away beneath the surface of the water.

Even the Alsek River, an important corridor for historic trade routes, summer fish camps, and humans moving through the area, has never seen a permanent human presence.

Historic sites within the wilderness do exist and remind us of the pioneering spirit and the tenacity of the first explorers, homesteaders, prospectors, fox farmers, and hunters to settle here. The climate of the region make the preservation of tangible historic resources difficult, but the stories and connections of people to the land and water are a fundamental part of the fabric of the Glacier Bay Wilderness. The human experience cannot be separated from this environment. Sites like the remains of John Muir's cabin, built on a barren landscape that was then a half mile from the tidewater terminus of Muir Glacier and is now engulfed by forest and 25 miles from the ice, are a link with the geography of the past. They remind us of the sense of discovery and inquisitiveness with which people of the past approached this wilderness, values that are embraced today as we continue to study and appreciate this ever-changing landscape.

UNDEVELOPED
(continued)

Wilderness retains its primeval character and influence, and is essentially without permanent improvements or modern human occupation

Some developments do detract from the primeval influence of the wilderness, however. While research installations can provide data that ultimately improves wilderness management, installations themselves are visible signs of human dominance over the landscape. Wildlife markers and collars, in addition to impacting the untrammeled quality, also affect the undeveloped quality.

Several communication installations can be found within the wilderness, as well as abandoned mining equipment, boats, and marine debris -- evidence of the pervasiveness of human presence. Cape Spencer houses an array of active communication, weather, and other installations that detract from the undeveloped quality. Inholdings (some with valid mining claims), and their potential for development, pose another threat to this quality.

Most visitors to Glacier Bay never fully escape the sight or sound of mechanized transport. Plane landings and motorized boat use are primary threats to the undeveloped quality. And while these uses are permitted by visitors to the wilderness and wilderness waters under Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA), motorized and mechanized advantages allow us to feel dominant over the landscape rather than a part of it. In Glacier Bay proper most designated wilderness waters and some non-wilderness waters have seasonal restrictions on motorized boat use. The daily number of cruise ships, private and commercial vessels is regulated throughout the bay. Administrative vessels used in support of park management are not regulated, and this use also creates impacts. Helicopters are also used for administrative purposes, but very judiciously and only when the benefits to wilderness stewardship clearly outweigh the impacts.

Technological advances in mechanized transport may outpace the ability of managers to gauge whether its use is appropriate and legal in wilderness. Continuous technological advances in wilderness transport coupled with publicity associated with these activities will test our ability to balance preservation of the undeveloped quality of wilderness character with special provision uses allowed by ANILCA.

OPPORTUNITIES for SOLITUDE or PRIMITIVE and UNCONFINED RECREATION

Wilderness provides outstanding opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation

To look upon Glacier Bay's wilderness is like standing on the edge of the world. There is an immense, isolating, open vastness to this place, yet within a few minutes one can be enveloped in an insulating and intimate blanket of fog. This wilderness can seem both minute and grandiose, both tranquil and turbulent. In the mountains and along the shoreline, visitors face harsh, unpredictable storms and unforgiving terrain. On the water, one is compelled to pause or adjust one's schedule based on the tides, currents, and weather. Calving glaciers, avalanches, wildlife encounters, and storms can instill pure, unadulterated fear accompanied by awe and gratitude that such places still exist. This is truly a place to seek solitude and to challenge oneself against the power of nature.

Paradoxically, Glacier Bay's enabling Proclamation noted the comparative ease of accessibility to its wilderness compared to similar regions of Alaska: *"… there are around Glacier Bay on the southeast coast of Alaska a number of tidewater glaciers of the first rank in a magnificent setting of lofty peaks, and more accessible to ordinary travel…"*. The vast majority of Glacier Bay's visitors view the wilderness from the deck of a cruise ship, and never disembark in the wilderness itself. While only two cruise ships are allowed in the bay per day, this still allows a large number of people (474,000 in 2013) to travel deep into the heart of this wilderness, producing a unique paradox: some of the most remote lands in the country are experienced in relative luxury and in the company of hundreds of other people. Experience is shaped by perspective, and for many people, witnessing Glacier Bay's wilderness by cruise ship is a wild experience. Scientific findings and wilderness values are conveyed to these park visitors by park interpreters where the obvious evidence of natural change provides an illustrative backdrop. For those ashore, the sight of a cruise ship can be an intrusion on their solitude, or a startling reminder of scale as the surrounding mountains and glaciers dwarf the colossal ships.

Many of the tour vessels are allowed shore excursions with parties of 12 people or less and in this way more than 2500 visitors make landfall in Glacier Bay's wilderness annually. Additionally, 1,000 independent travelers kayak in Glacier Bay every year. Outside of the Bartlett River and Bartlett Lake trails, there are no human-made trails to concentrate use, and visitors utilize waterways, glaciers, animal trails, and sheer audacity and perseverance to move through the wilderness. However, sites are designated for kayakers being dropped off by the park's concession boat--one in each arm of Glacier Bay proper. The drop-offs, along with the tidewater glaciers as popular destinations, do concentrate use, but wilderness campers have the freedom to choose their own campsites and allow their trip to unfold as weather, whim and tides dictate. Campsites generally appear to have the time and resilience to recover between uses, although some hardened sites and trailing exist near popular areas. Outside of the shoreline of Glacier Bay proper, there are almost no signs of people. The outer coast is one of the few places in southeastern Alaska with miles of untamed beaches, yet the coastal mountains rise abruptly to over 15,000 feet within a few miles of the surf. This coast is wild and remote, and one can travel for days or weeks without seeing anyone else.

Most of the wilderness cannot be seen from the Glacier Bay waters, and here is where remoteness from the sights and sounds of motorized vessels on the waterways provides tremendous

OPPORTUNITIES for SOLITUDE or PRIMITIVE and UNCONFINED RECREATION
(continued)

Wilderness provides outstanding opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation

opportunities for solitude. Remote, rugged mountain peaks, many of which have never been climbed, lunge above the coastline and within this exceptionally unconfined zone, backpackers and mountaineers need not register or report their activities. Managerial controls allow for solitude on the Alsek River, while a number of the park's remote rivers provide uninhibited opportunities for adventurous packrafters. Most animals here do not react like those habituated to human presence, and indeed, there are many parts of this wilderness in which humans likely have never been.

Being the first human to visit a particular place is an attractive concept to some people. The Tlingit, however, come to the Glacier Bay Wilderness not to be alone, or to explore a previously unvisited place, but rather to commune with ancestral spirits and retrace the exact footsteps and actions of all those who have visited before them. An experiential connection with the homeland is a communion with ancestral spirits and an opportunity to follow in one's mother's, father's, or grandparent's footsteps. In the place that is now called wilderness, the Tlingit people are never alone, but always in the company of their living and non-living relatives; the bear people, the tree people, and all the spirits of the homeland.

Lack of information contributes to that indescribable sense of the unknown that somehow enhances the pure wildness of an area. The less one knows (or chooses to know) about a place – whether that takes the form of a detailed map, a comprehensive species list, knowledge of all the safety hazards, or a must-see checklist of natural features or phenomena – the wilder the place is to many visitors. Glacier Bay's wilderness contains an exceedingly high "mystery quotient". This wilderness is vast, remote, difficult to access, and relatively unexplored. Connectivity to real-time information is currently poor or unavailable in most areas. It is only coarsely mapped, its resources poorly inventoried, and its natural processes incompletely understood. By consequence, it is purely felt and experienced. This wilderness places a high premium on mystery, and thus surprise and delight. Even as scientists yearn to solve its richness of riddles, many wilderness visitors revel in its lack of "information pollution", its surfeit of the unknown, its overabundance of mystery. In this way, Glacier Bay's wilderness is some of the purest on the planet.

Glacier Bay's remoteness makes travel to the wilderness expensive, especially with the gear necessary to freely and safely recreate. This remoteness has protected Glacier Bay from high levels of backcountry use, but as the Alaska Marine Highway ferry connection from Juneau begins to call with regular frequency, access and opportunities for recreation have improved. If visitation increases, it may become necessary for park managers to take actions that restrict visitor behavior or movement in the wilderness in order to protect natural resources, cultural values or to reduce visitor conflict. Similarly, visitor contacts and ranger patrols can reduce the feeling of being alone and relying solely on oneself.

The most recurrent and perceptible threat to this quality, however, is the noise from administrative, commercial, and private aircraft and boats operating within and outside of wilderness.

MARINE WILDERNESS

Wilderness preserves other features that are of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value

Water is the lifeblood of this wilderness: a sustaining element and a home to many of its inhabitants. Virtually all life here depends on the ocean, or the biologically rich area that it sustains at its fringe. It is an artery for the movement of vital nutrients, animals, and people. One-fifth of the park is comprised of marine waters that are under the jurisdiction of the National Park Service. Of these, thirteen percent are designated or eligible wilderness, comprising the park's "marine wilderness".

As the ocean spills into the trough that the glaciers once carved, a complex array of underwater environments is created and life fills the bay in enigmatic succession. Each spring, humpback whales return from their wintering grounds near Hawaii and Mexico to feed in the productive near-shore waters. Gangs of sea lions prowl the bay, porpoises and killer whales search for prey and harbor seals loll on floating ice before slinking back into the water. Sea otters are relative newcomers to the bay but their population is increasing and their distribution is spreading rapidly. And while these are the charismatic creatures that visitors yearn to see, the marine productivity is driven by countless billions of tiny plant-like creatures called phytoplankton that float suspended and invisible in the stippled waters. Phytoplankton blooms create rich feeding for zooplankton, shoals of fishes prey on the zooplankton, and they in turn attract this diverse congregation of predators. But in Glacier Bay, there is much more to this story. Tidewater glaciers and innumerable snowmelt-fed streams add extremely cold, oxygen-rich fresh water to the system. The retreating glaciers left lateral, medial and terminal moraines, deep basins and constricted fjords in their wake. These underwater features obstruct the bay's powerful tidal currents, causing a daily ricochet of upwellings and tide rips. This continuous mixing results in a marine system that is inordinately productive; these waters are teeming with life, food, nutrients, and energy. The waters at the intersection of the mouth of Glacier Bay and Icy Strait are among the most biologically productive waters on the west coast of the North American continent.

Marine Wilderness is a relatively new and unfamiliar concept; it is a designation given to very few areas. Human influence on the ecosystem can be presumed to be less obvious here than in other areas of the ocean, and the wilderness waters of Glacier Bay are afforded full-time protection from commercial fishing, seasonal protections from motorized incursion, and thoughtful oversight of administrative activities. The marine environment boundaries are quite literally fluid and so events occurring hundreds of miles away can impact Glacier Bay's Marine Wilderness as surely as influences occurring more locally. Direct threats to the marine wilderness include changes in the underwater soundscape from motorized traffic and the omnipresent threat of pollution. Commercial and sport fishing harvest outside of wilderness waters has an unknown impact on unnaturally managed and finite fish stocks. Chemical changes in the marine environment wrought by climate change will bring as yet unidentified landscape-level change to Glacier Bay's ocean environment. Much remains to be studied in this diverse and changing milieu.

The Marine Wilderness of Glacier Bay and its surrounding park waters serve as an international model and provide valuable reference conditions for the ongoing study of fundamentally intact marine protected areas.

NATURAL CHANGE AS A FOUNDATION FOR SCIENTIFIC STUDY

Wilderness preserves other features that are of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value

The wilderness of Glacier Bay National Park embodies change on a potent and almost unfathomable scale. Glacier Bay's wilderness, with its rapid glacier retreat and early visibility to the scientific community, has historically been perhaps the best-studied laboratory of primary succession in the world. Across the millennia, immense glaciers have periodically swallowed or released the bay, a remarkable cycle driven by small fluctuations in temperature and precipitation patterns. The recent period of glacial retreat is the most rapid of its scale that has been documented anytime, anywhere. As these glaciers draw back, scalping the earth down to bedrock, life maneuvers its way back into place along a spatial chronosequence that is clearly visible from the mouth of the bay to the fringe of the glaciers. The patterns and processes of biological succession occur in the marine environment as well as on land.

There has been well over a century of research and scientist involvement at Glacier Bay, beginning long before the area's incorporation into the National Park System. John Muir along with glaciologist Harry Fielding Reid began recording observations of glacial processes in 1891. Pioneer ecologist William S. Cooper conducted studies of plant succession beginning in 1916, and along with eminent geologist W.O. Field was instrumental in the move to have the area protected as a national treasure. The Ecological Society of America lobbied for Glacier Bay to be set aside as a natural laboratory for studies of glaciology and associated biological and physical processes. These values are a fundamental part of this park's purpose, grounded in enabling legislation. When Glacier Bay National Monument was designated in 1925, the Presidential Proclamation included an explicit recognition of the area's value in providing "*a unique opportunity for the scientific study of glacial behavior and of resulting movements and development of flora and fauna…*". Consequently, an important management objective is to facilitate research into these processes.

Scientific research is an integral part of wilderness stewardship, and the Wilderness Act and National Park Service policy support appropriate scientific activities in wilderness. The Wilderness Act also emphasizes the preservation of wilderness character as its principle mandate, and scientific activity has the potential to impact wilderness character by increasing the number of structures and amount of mechanized transport, manipulating the environment, or decreasing solitude. The NPS is interested in working with researchers to identify research that will not only answer important scientific questions but ultimately aid in the protection of these areas and advances the intent of its enabling legislation. The NPS encourages research in wilderness when the benefits of the investigations outweigh the negative impacts to other wilderness values.

Glaciers, icefields, high latitude, and diversity of plant and animal life, combined with the magnitude of the protected area adjacent to Glacier Bay, conspire to make this wilderness an ideal, unfragmented living laboratory for many scientists. Researchers from around the world choose this place to study natural processes and the human potential to affect them.

At.óowu
the TLINGIT HOMELAND

Glacier Bay National Park is the traditional homeland of two Tlingit tribes; the Gunaaxoo Kwaan who claim the northern coastal reaches and the Huna Kawoo who settled Glacier Bay proper, Icy Strait and long stretches of the Outer Coast.

Glacier Bay is like a set of concentric circles of meaning, and to the Tlingit, a community of spirits lie at the very core. The Tlingit Clans have lived in Sít' Eeti Gheeyí, the "Bay in Place of the Glacier" and along Icy Strait and the Outer Coast for countless generations; the Tlingit say since time before memory. For them, the vast stretches of wilderness are inhabited places, alive with sentient and non-sentient beings, as well as the spirits of the living and those who have gone before. Mountains, waterways, rocks, and animals are all imbued with spirits; each is respected as an individual and an equal. A deep and enduring connection with this greater community of life is ingrained in the Tlingit world view and respectful interaction with all beings ensures community health. A traditional Tlingit tale recounts the cataclysmic events that occurred when a young woman spoke disrespectfully to a glacier and even today, the tribal members respectfully refrain from pointing at the slopes of Mt. Fairweather - Yeik Yi Aaní or"Land of the Spirits."

Humans have always been an inextricable part of Glacier Bay's web of life; the Tlingit are as closely connected to the land, the water, and the inhabitants of both as they are to each other. They believe that their continued interaction with homeland is a sustaining - indeed vital - characteristic of this place. The Tlingit come to Glacier Bay wilderness not to be alone, or to explore a previously unvisited place, but rather to be in communion with ancestral spirits and to retrace the footsteps and actions of all those who have visited before them. In a place that is now called wilderness, the Tlingit people are never alone, but always in the company of their living and non-living relatives; the bear people, the ice people, and all the spirits of the homeland. While many visitors come to Glacier Bay to witness the spectacle of a whale breaching or a glacier calving, and are understandably awed by nature's exhibitions, the Tlingit would perhaps experience the whale's breach and the crumbling ice as communication between the leviathan, the glacier, and their human clan relatives.

At.óowu
the TLINGIT HOMELAND
(continued)

Tlingit culture was shaped by, and remains dependent upon, continued interaction with homeland. Gathering food resources is a particularly important traditional activity, as the process of harvesting is not only a means of sustaining physical needs, but also a ritual for reconnecting and engaging with ancestral spirits. Southeast Alaska's abundant resources allowed the Tlingit ample leisure time to develop complex social and political systems as well as sophisticated artistic and ritualistic practices. In essence, Glacier Bay's rich array of marine and terrestrial foods made the Tlingit who they are – a highly structured society with a well-developed political, social, artistic, and spiritual tradition. Traditional foods are gathered and eaten not only to sustain the body, but also to sustain the culture itself. Restrictions and regulations that reduce opportunities to hunt, fish, and gather pose a threat not only to traditional diets and ways of life, but to the Tlingit ability to participate in the web of life and connect with the present, past, and future within their homeland. In recent years, the National Park Service has maintained an open dialogue with the Tlingit and has actively encouraged tribal members to return to the park to carry out traditional activities that are compatible with current regulations, such as berry picking, fishing, and shellfish harvesting.

The Tlingit concept of at.óowu, meaning "something owned or purchased" is central to traditional people's relationship to Glacier Bay. When an advancing glacier forced the ancestors from their homeland, a woman remained, sacrificing her life to appease the glacier. Other clans were washed out of Lituya Bay by a tidal wave that decimated their villages and drowned many inhabitants. To the Tlingit, the loss of these precious lives paid for their homeland and the stories, songs, clan crests, and regalia commemorating these losses are the Tlingit "deeds" to place.

The concept of wilderness as defined in the Wilderness Act is a modern construct that emphasizes the value of places with little evidence of human change. But the continued relationship of the Tlingit Clans with their homeland is as much a part of the wilderness character of Glacier Bay as the glaciers, the trees, and the opportunity for solitude and unconfined recreation To some, without Tlingit ties to the spirits and ancestors, the Glacier Bay Wilderness would become like a static museum. Perpetuating the Tlingit language and traditional practices ensures that the spiritual connection to this place is not lost and that the Glacier Bay wilderness remains a living community.

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