

Animals of the Tongass National Forest

Spanning 17 million acres, the Tongass National Forest is the world's largest remaining temperate rain forest. The islands, fjords, glaciers and muskegs which all make up the Tongass are home to some of the most rare ecosystems on the planet. It is one of the few places left on earth that maintains a delicate balance between land, water, wildlife and human activity. Thirty percent of the world's remaining old growth forest is in the Tongass. According to the U.S.



Forest Service, within the Tongass there are 17,000 miles of clean, undammed creeks, rivers and lakes. These pristine waterways are home to several important kinds of fish including five species of salmon — chinook, coho, sockeye, pink and chum—

and several varieties of trout. The forest is also home to brown and black bear, Sitka black-tailed deer, bald eagles, wolves and many other types of animals.

Salmon of the Tongass

The Tongass is frequently referred to as America's Salmon Forest and is one of the few places left where salmon populations thrive. According to the U.S. Forest Service, the Tongass includes roughly 17,000 miles of clean, undammed creeks, rivers and lakes that provide optimal spawning and rearing conditions for the region's copious wild Pacific salmon and trout. All five of North America's Pacific salmon species are found in the Tongass National Forest: chinook, coho, pink, sockeye and chum. The Tongass is able to support such abundant salmon numbers due to the large trees standing along the thousands of inlets that make up the forest's coastline. These streams are kept cool and clean by the trees, allowing the salmon to return from the sea to lay their eggs in the same place where they once hatched. As these fish move upstream, they bring important nutrients from the ocean into the forest. Once the salmon spawn, they die, and their eggs and carcasses provide massive plugs of nutrients to the forests. These nutrients work their way into algae, riparian



By the Numbers

- The average wingspan of a bald eagle is between **6 and 7.5 feet**.
CLASSROOM ACTION: Have your students measure their own 'wingspan' to see how it compares.
- The Tongass is home to all **5 species** of Pacific Salmon.
CLASSROOM ACTION: Assign groups and have each group research one of these species.
- The Tongass is home to the highest density of nesting bald eagles in the world with an estimated 7,000.
CLASSROOM ACTION: Ask students to research what a bald eagle eats.
- Brown bears can run up to **35 mph**.
CLASSROOM ACTION: have your students research animals they think may be faster.

grasses and alders until the salmon and the forest seemingly are intertwined together as one for all eternity. The plants and animals in the area all depend on those nutrients brought upstream by the fish. Fish are very important to the people of the Tongass as well. These fish have cultural significance to many. In addition, the survival and health of these fish is important for the local economy. Approximately 7,300 fish related jobs depend on a healthy Tongass. Despite their importance, 65% of Tongass salmon and trout habitat has not been protected by Congress at the watershed level.



Bears

The Tongass National Forest is a place where bears outnumber people. There are two types of bear in the Tongass, the brown bear and the black bear. Brown bears, also known as grizzly bears, are omnivorous and will eat a wide range of foods including grasses, roots, berries, insects, fish, carrion, and sometimes even moose, caribou, elk and salmon. Every winter brown bears hibernate for five to eight months. They spend their summers and falls building up their fat reserves in preparation for the long winter hibernation. Grizzly bears are estimated to number 30,000 strong in the Tongass. In the summer, when salmon are plentiful, they eat 80 to 90 pounds of fish a day to fatten up for the winter ahead. During this warm weather binge, they can gain up to 40 pounds of fat every week. With more than 1,500 bears on Admiralty Island, they outnumber island residents by 3 to 1. On Admiralty Island you will find the highest density of brown bears in North America. The bears are able to thrive in the Tongass due in part to the abundant food supplies

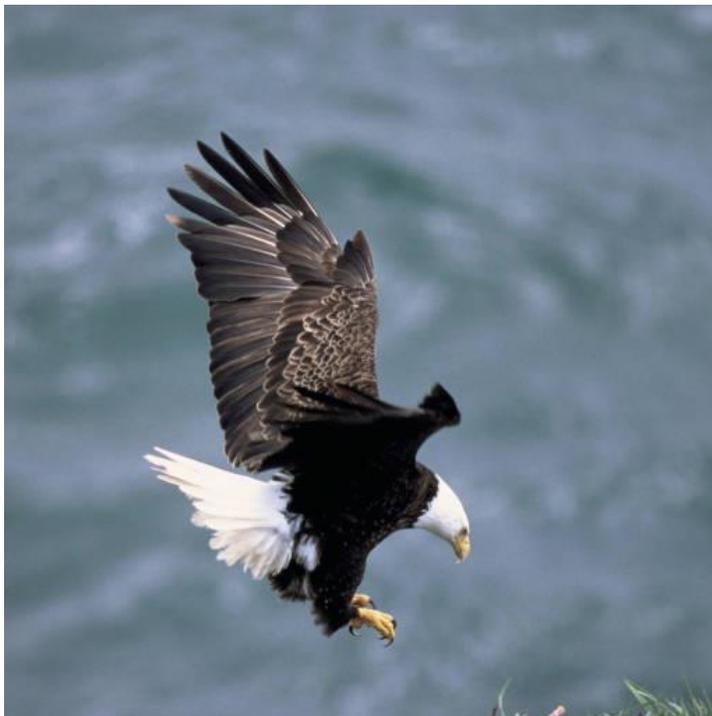


While the mother bear fished her cubs played in the trees

including berries, insects, and perhaps most importantly, salmon. Despite their name, black bears can be recognized by their black fur and the additional brown markings on their muzzles and chests. A black bear's diet is similar to that of brown bears, and includes plants, fruits, nuts, insects, honey, salmon, small mammals and carrion, but due to their smaller size they usually don't eat the moose, caribou or elk that Brown Bears eat.

Bald Eagles

The world's largest concentration of bald eagles lives in the Tongass. Drawn by salmon runs and prime nesting sites in towering trees, as many as 2,000 bald eagles gather in some parts of the



forest each spring. This easily recognized bird received its name, the bald eagle, from American colonists for its distinctive white head. They don't display this distinct coloring, the white head and yellow beak, until they are fully matured. Bald eagles can weigh between eight and 14 lbs. and their wingspan can reach up to seven and a half feet. With about 30,000 birds, Alaska has more bald eagles than any other place in America. Bald eagles mostly eat fish. Depending on their location, they eat herring, salmon, flounder, and pollock. They can carry about four lbs. of food in their talons at a time.

Sitka Black-Tailed Deer

The Sitka black-tailed deer is a subspecies of the mule deer and an important part of the Tongass. In the summer these beautiful deer are a reddish-brown color, but in the winter their fur turns a darker brownish-grey. Sitka black-tailed deer spend their summers foraging for food to survive the winter. They feed on herbaceous vegetation, green shrubs, woody browse and evergreen forbs. Deer populations are susceptible to large and sudden changes in number. In Alaska, the Sitka black-tailed deer face threat from some of the effects of logging.



Wolves

Wolves in Alaska can be found in a range of colors from black to white, with many shades of grey and tan in between. Grey and black are the most common colors. These beautiful animals can weigh between 75 and 115 lbs. Wolves usually live in packs of six to eight wolves. Each pack has a mother and father figure. These two wolves are called alphas. To communicate, wolves bark, whine, growl and howl. Wolves eat moose, caribou, sheep, squirrels, snowshoe hares, beaver, and occasionally birds and fish, making them carnivores. In the Tongass specifically, they'll eat Sitka black-tailed deer, mountain goats, beaver and small mammals. Wolves also sometimes scavenge, meaning they'll sometimes eat animals that have died of other causes.