



The Tongass National Forest

A treasure to its denizens, human and otherwise

BY KERRIE FLANAGAN



Tongass National Forest

This lush understory on the Brothers Islands south of Juneau is typical of the Tongass.

THE REST OF THE WORLD AND EVEN the sky disappeared as I entered the forest near Ketchikan. A quiet stillness set in, yet I knew the verdant foliage surrounding me was very much alive. I marveled at the lichen hanging from the towering trees—western hemlock, red cedar, Sitka spruce—and the moss clinging to fallen trees and rocks. The rain tried to drip through, but the dense forest canopy blocked much of it. Berry bushes and ferns created the deep-green forest floor, and a crystal-clear creek meandered toward the Pacific Ocean. This incredible stretch of nature is part of the world's largest rain forest and the nation's largest national forest.

In the early 1900s, before Alaska was

designated as a state, Teddy Roosevelt proclaimed 16.8 million acres of Alaska's wilderness as the Tongass National Forest. Roughly the size of West Virginia, Tongass has 11,000 miles of shoreline, 15,745 miles of rivers and streams that host runs of anadromous fish, 207,000 acres of lakes and ponds, 19 wilderness areas, and the Hubbard Glacier, the largest tidewater glacier in North America. Annual rainfall varies from 2 to 25 feet, and although the Tongass is a rainforest, 42 percent of it is rock and ice. The varied terrain from high-walled fjords, rugged coastal mountains, and lush forests make the Tongass a true natural and national treasure.

Dr. Glenn Juday, professor of forest ecology at University of Alaska Fairbanks, says

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