

North Misty Province

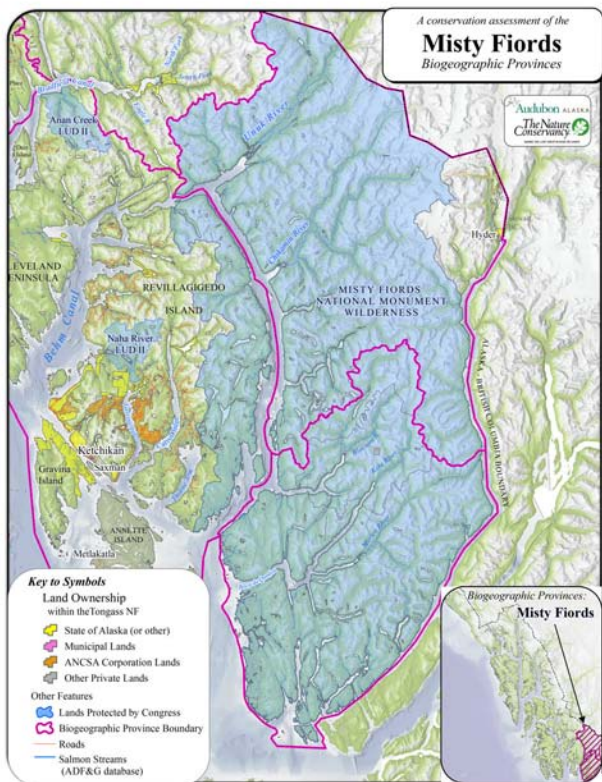


FIG 1. North Misty Province.

North Misty Fiords Province occurs along the southern mainland and splits Misty Fiords National Monument and Wilderness nearly in half with the northern part slightly larger (Fig 1). North Misty Fiords is dominated by steep-walled granitic fiords and narrow valleys with highly fragmented stringers of conifer forest. It has the lowest percentage of productive old growth (POG)—17%—of any province except the four northernmost mainland provinces. Ninety percent of the province is designated National Monument/Wilderness, and is typical of these wilderness reserves in having very high scenic and very low timber values.

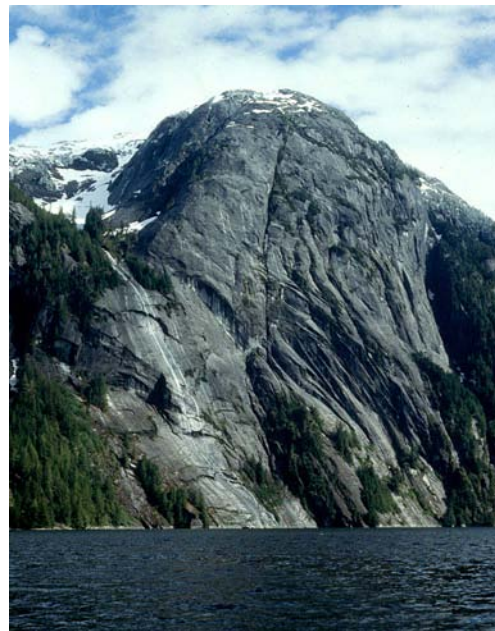


FIG 2. View of a steep-walled, rocky fiord in North Misty Fiords. This province has rugged topography and a limited abundance of productive forest land. (John Schoen photo)

The Unuk River drains about 900 mi² (2,300 km²) of interior British Columbia. Its watershed, while much smaller than that of the three principle mountain-penetrating rivers of Southeast—the Stikine, Taku, and Alsek/Tatshenshini—does merit the name “transboundary,” as it connects to B C through a low-elevation valley.

North Misty Fiords contains 575 mi (920 km) of anadromous salmon streams. Based on this conservation assessment, the Unuk watershed has the highest value salmon habitat (all species combined) of any watershed south of the Stikine. The Chickamin scores almost as high. The East Behm pink salmon stock group encompassing this area has the highest median annual escapement—about a million fish—of any management unit in Southeast (Zadina et. al. 2003).

The Unuk River Watershed has an estimated coho salmon smolt capability of 194,460 fish (Flanders et al. 1998), the 5th highest-producing watershed in Southeast, exceeded only by systems on the Yakutat Forelands and Stikine River. Likewise, this study's combined salmon habitat values ranked the Unuk watershed (#8) in Southeast's top 10.

The Chickamin is the second most important river of the province. Draining Canadian icefields, it is less significant as a wildlife corridor but has an abundance of deciduous and large-tree coniferous forest on the flood plain, supporting a wide variety of songbirds. The Chickamin River has more linear miles (km) of salmon habitat than the Unuk within the US portion of its watershed, but is divided into four separate VCUs. Merging the scores for these units would rank Chickamin above the Unuk for salmon production.

A stock of very large chum salmon occurs in Fish Creek, near Hyder. Average size of these fish is nearly 20 lbs (9 kg), about twice that of normal chums. These fish spend longer at sea than other populations. The bear-viewing facility on this creek is one of the few places in Southeast where visitors can drive to an observatory from which both black and brown bears can be seen (Figs 3, 4).



FIG 3. Both black and brown bears may be seen from the Fish Creek viewing area, near Hyder. (Richard Carstensen)

A major lava flow on Blue River had only just cooled when the boundary survey teams passed through in 1909 (Baichtal and Streveler 2000). This is the most recent lava flow in Southeast. Climate is colder here than in the South Misty Province, and topography is more rugged. Elevations reach 6,000 ft (1,830 m) above the Soule Glacier near Hyder. Subalpine fir is extensive along the Canadian border. The large streams and rivers of this province tend to be brown bear watersheds, although both black and

brown bears occur throughout mainland watersheds. This conservation assessment ranked the bear habitat values of the Unuk and Chickamin among the top 12 watersheds in Southeast. Brown bear populations are generally much lower on the mainland than the ABCs (Admiralty, Baranof and Chichagof Islands). ADF&G statistics on brown bear kills by sport hunters between



FIG 4. Bear-viewing on Fish Creek. (Richard Carstensen)

1985 and 1994 indicate that seven brown bears were killed in both the Unuk and Chickamin Rivers (Flanders et al. 1998). While this is quite high for mainland watersheds, it doesn't compare to many watersheds on Admiralty and Chichagof for hunter success.

Deer habitat values for North Misty are relatively low, like much of the mainland coast which has lower quality forest habitat and deeper snow accumulation than islands to the west. A small population of moose occur in the Unuk River drainage. Mountain goats occur throughout this province in high-elevation, steep rocky habitat.

There has been no substantial timber harvest in this province and the habitat values for the focal species addressed in this assessment range between 95-100% of their original values. Over 95% of the province is protected in watershed-scale reserves. Considering the significant habitat protection measures provided by Wilderness designation, the long-term conservation of this province is assured.

Forest types, historical logging, and roads are mapped within the North Misty Province in Figure 5. Refer to the Arc Reader GIS database in Appendix C of this report to review detailed mapped information on location of large-tree stands, past timber harvest, roads, forest reserves, protected areas, and regions of core ecological values.

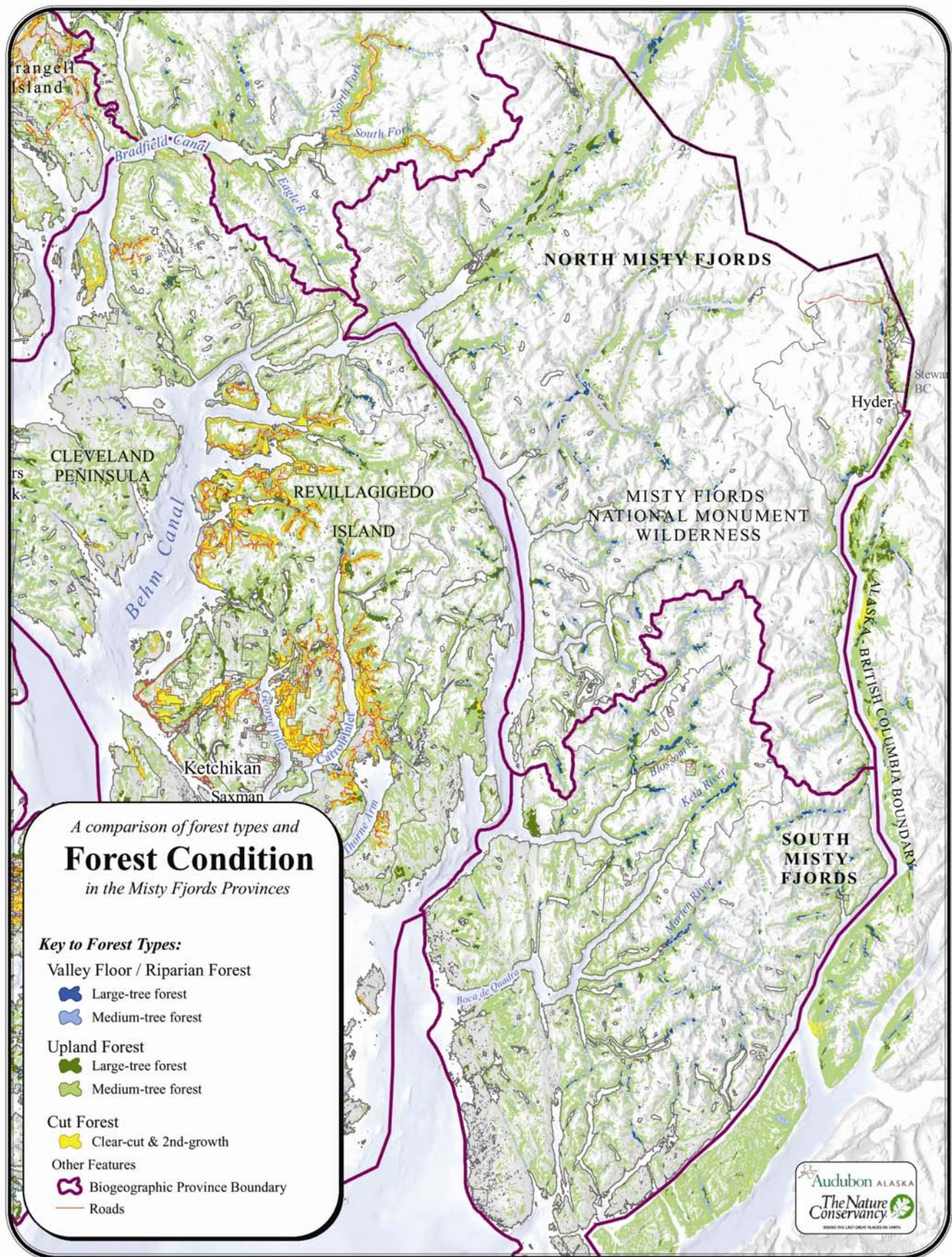


FIG 5. A comparison of forest types and forest condition within the North Misty Province of southeastern Alaska.