

INDIVIDUAL ROADLESS AREA DESCRIPTION

ROADLESS AREA NAME: Thomas (203)

ACRES (NFS): 5,232

BIOGEOGRAPHIC PROVINCE: Central Coast Range

ECOLOGICAL SECTION: Inside Passage Fjordlands

2003 WILDERNESS ATTRIBUTE RATING: 18

I. Overview and Description:

(1) **Location and Access:** The area is located between Thomas Bay and Frederick Sound on the Point Agassiz Peninsula. The area is part of the coastal mainland. The area is accessed by boat and floatplane on saltwater within Thomas Bay. Anchorage is available in Thomas Bay. The shoreline along Frederick Sound is exposed and often difficult to access. There are no sites suitable for landing wheeled aircraft. There is road access from the southern end of Thomas Bay to the southern end of the roadless area. There is no ferry service or road access to the area from outside. The roadless area is approximately 10 air miles northeast of Petersburg, which is on the Alaska Marine Highway and has air service.

(2) **History:** The Thomas Bay area is in the traditional territory of the Stikine Tlingit. A variety of archaeological sites exist in the area, including prehistoric period villages, camps, petroglyphs, and culturally-modified trees. Historic period use is rather extensive, especially at Point Agassiz, where a homestead community was established during the first quarter of the twentieth century. The Gardner Shrimp Company cannery was established on Ruth Island in Thomas Bay in 1916. In 1958, logging began in the Muddy and Patterson River drainages southeast of the area. Mining activities have occurred in the Thomas Bay area.

(3) **Geography and Topography:** The area is generally characterized by gently rolling terrain with little relief. This area is peninsular and separates Frederick Sound from Thomas Bay. Though the roadless area is part of the mainland, its size, location and shape display few characteristics typical of the mainland. The terrain rises gradually from shoreline, to a height of about 400 feet near the center. Several small streams drain the area, and several small lakes lie near the center of the area. The area contains 11 miles of shoreline on saltwater with 2 acres of island. There are no acres mapped as rock, icefield, or alpine in this roadless area.

(4) **Ecosystem:**

(a) **Classification:** Biogeographic Province. The area is classified as being in the Central Coast Range Biogeographic Province. The area is characterized by broad, low-lying valleys and several steeply rising peaks. Productive forest lands exist in river bottoms and on mountain slopes. Vegetation ranges from sub-alpine to saltwater marshes. This province is warmer than the northern coast range province and the topography is less precipitous. The Stikine River system is located south of the Thomas Roadless Area in the center of the province and has a major continental influence, providing a migration corridor for plant and animal species. There are no unique plant or soil associations in the roadless area.

Ecological Section/Subsection. The Thomas Roadless Area is contained entirely within the Inside Passage Fjordlands Ecological Section (M247E). This area is represented by the Thomas Bay Outwash Plains Ecological Subsection (see table below). This subsection is characterized by a relatively smooth landscape with occasional hills resulting from glacial erosion and deposition. The majority of the subsection is below 500 feet elevation and the predominantly mineral, productive soils support hemlock-spruce forests (Nowacki et al., 2001).

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Ecological Section	Ecological Subsection	Percent of Roadless Area
Inside Passage Fjordlands	Thomas Bay Outwash Plains	100%

(b) Soils: Soils in this area are formed in a wide variety of parent material, including bedrock and glacial drift. In general, well-drained or moderately-well-drained soils are on moderate to steep mountain slopes with permeable parent materials. These soils are acidic, have cold soil temperatures, and are very high in organic matter. Rooting is largely limited to the surface organic layers and the top few inches of mineral soil. These soils are usually moist, sometimes wet, but are never dry.

More poorly-drained soils developed on less sloping areas and/or areas with impermeable soil materials. These soils have deep accumulations of organic matter and range from scrubby forested wetlands to open muskeg.

(c) Vegetation: Vegetation consists of typical spruce-hemlock forests. Muskegs are interspersed among low elevation timber stands where drainage is restricted. Approximately 158 acres of muskeg are mapped for the area; however, due to their small size and association with forested sites, accurate acreage estimates are difficult. Spruce trees are also typically found as stringers along the streams.

There are approximately 4,841 acres mapped as forest land of which 2,024 acres (42 percent) are mapped as productive old-growth forest. Of the productive old growth, 406 acres (20 percent) are mapped as high-volume old-growth forest. The productive old growth includes about 52 acres of high-volume, coarse-canopy old growth. There are about 102 acres of second growth along the shoreline from older beach logging.

(d) Fish: Important fish resources occur primarily outside the Thomas Roadless Area in and adjacent to the Spires Roadless Area. These include 13 Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) numbered salmon-producing streams present within the area. The Farragut River, the Muddy River and Dry Bay Creek are the best salmon producers. There are runs of pink, chum, coho, sockeye, and chinook salmon, as well as steelhead, rainbow, and cutthroat trout, and Dolly Varden char in the Farragut River (ADF&G, 2000). Marine and intertidal waters support significant populations of Tanner crab, Dungeness crab, king crab, and various species of shrimp and clams.

(e) Wildlife: Black bears, wolves, and Sitka black-tailed deer are found in the area, as well as an occasional brown bear and a moderate population of moose. The mountain lion is not known to be in this area, but is present in small numbers on the mainland. It is probably migrating into Southeast Alaska from Canada using the large rivers, such as the Stikine River, as corridors.

Furbearers and other small mammals include mink, river otters, beaver, marten, ermine, lynx, red squirrel, northern flying squirrel, porcupine, mice, shrew and voles. There are occasional sightings of fisher and wolverine, but they are at the edge of their range and are considered an incidental species. Bats are present during the summer months and occasionally overwinter in man-made structures.

Bald eagles, northern goshawks, merlin, red-tailed hawks, sharp-shinned hawks, great horned owls, western screech owls, saw-whet owls, and pigmy owls are found in this area. Numerous ducks, geese, sandhill cranes, trumpeter swans, marbled murrelets, and great blue herons occur on the mainland both during migration and, in some cases, nesting. Spruce grouse, blue grouse and ptarmigan are known to occur on the mainland.

Small forest-dwelling birds that are known to occur on the mainland include the red-throated, Pacific and common loon, and several plover, yellowlegs, and sandpiper species. Two swift species, one hummingbird species, four woodpecker species, three flycatcher species and five swallow species are also known on the mainland. Steller's jay, black-billed magpie, northwestern crow, and common raven occur. Chestnut-backed chickadee, red-breasted nuthatch, brown creeper, winter wren, American dipper, golden-crowned kinglet, ruby-crowned kinglet, Swainson's thrush and hermit thrush occur. The American robin, varied thrush, American pipit, cedar waxwing, northern shrike, warbling vireo, and five warbler species occur.

Additionally, the northern water thrush, common yellow throat, western tanager, dark-eyed junco, Lapland longspur, snow bunting, red-winged blackbird, rusty blackbird, brown-headed cowbird, eight sparrow species, pine grosbeak, red crossbill, white-winged crossbill, common redpoll, and pine siskin are found.

Several amphibians are known to occur on the mainland. They are rough-skinned newts, western toad, and spotted frog. The rough-skinned newt is found primarily in lacustrine, palustrine, hemlock/spruce forests, and muskeg bog ecosystems. The western toad is also found primarily in lacustrine, palustrine, hemlock/spruce forests and in clearcuts. Spotted frogs are found primarily in lacustrine, palustrine ecosystems and normally found in large river systems like the Stikine River.

Sea mammals known to inhabit the waters surrounding the mainland are the Pacific white-sided dolphin, orca whale, harbor porpoise, Dall’s porpoise, humpback whale, Steller sea lion, and harbor seal.

(5) Management Direction and Current Uses: The roadless area was allocated to two Land Use Designations (LUDs) under the 1997 Tongass Land and Resource Management Plan. These two LUDs are Scenic Viewshed and Old-growth Habitat.

LUD	Acres
Scenic Viewshed	3,854
Old-growth Habitat	1,378

The majority of the roadless area, approximately 74 percent, was allocated to one development LUD, Scenic Viewshed. The Scenic Viewshed LUD area is located along most of the peninsula and as viewed from Frederick Sound and in Thomas Bay.

The remaining 26 percent of the roadless area was allocated to a non-development LUD, Old-growth Habitat. This LUD is located along the western coast of the peninsula.

Recreation uses in the vicinity of the area include moose, deer, black bear, and waterfowl hunting; coho salmon, pink salmon, steelhead, and trout fishing; sea kayaking; boating; camping; hiking; beachcombing; sightseeing; flightseeing; tour boat use, and recreation cabin use. Thomas and Farragut Bays are frequently used by recreational boaters and commercial fishing boats. There are no commercial overnight facilities in the area. Current information indicates that some subsistence activities occur, primarily from residents of Petersburg.

The Crystal Creek Timber Sale, part of which is currently under contract, will extend the existing road system into the roadless area. The log transfer facility, most of the road construction, and the timber harvest units are currently under contract. Other timber sales are planned according to the Crystal Creek Timber Harvest FEIS (USDA Forest Service, 1998). Additional timber harvest projects in this area are on the 10-year timber sale schedule.

(6) Appearance (Apparent Naturalness): Most of the area appears unmodified. However, the timber management developments around Thomas Bay and in the Muddy and Patterson River valleys give the area a somewhat modified appearance.

(7) Surroundings (External Influences): The roadless area is located on a peninsula that has been separated from the mainland by developments on lands to the south and which forms the southern entrance to Thomas Bay. Thomas Bay is a popular recreation destination for residents of Petersburg. Relatively heavy boat traffic can occur at times. Frederick Sound is a major passage for commercial boat traffic, including Alaska State ferries. Evidence of beach logging, and adjacent and distant timber management developments is visible from parts of this roadless area. Inhabited and abandoned buildings on the private land nearby may be visible from some places in the roadless area. Jet aircraft approaching and leaving Petersburg may occasionally pass over portions of the area at elevations of less than 10,000 feet. Small aircraft frequently pass by the area.

(8) Attractions and Features of Special Interest: Thomas Bay is a destination attraction for residents of Petersburg. This roadless area makes up a substantial portion of the southern entrance to the Bay. The area contains two inventoried recreation places that cover 158 acres, or 3 percent of the roadless area. There are no trails or public recreation cabins in the area. The presence of good anchorage sites allows boaters to stay near the area overnight.

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(9) **Differences between the 1989 and 2003 Roadless Area Boundary:** The Thomas Roadless Area was included in the 1997 Forest Plan Revision in the less than 5,000-acre category. Updated mapping indicates that it is more than 5,000 acres, and since it is on a peninsula and could be managed as a separate entity, it has been included as an inventoried roadless area for the 2003 analysis. Some areas along the shore that have been beach logged but not roaded have also been added to the roadless area. Small adjustments have been made to the boundary along the developed areas between the Draft and Final SEIS to improve manageability in those areas.

II. Capability for Management as Wilderness

(1) **Natural Integrity and Apparent Naturalness:** Nearly all of the roadless area is unmodified and natural appearing. The exceptions are the areas adjacent to the southern end of the roadless area where timber management-related developments have occurred and private lands are located. The area has high natural integrity and apparent naturalness. However, the relatively small size of the area coupled with the adjacent developments, make it marginally suitable for wilderness management.

(2) **Opportunity for Solitude and Serenity, Self-reliance, Adventure, Challenging Experiences, and Primitive Recreation:** There is a low opportunity for solitude and a low opportunity for primitive recreation within the area. This is reflective of the relatively small size of the area and its ability to absorb nearby activities and associated effects. At times, low-flying airplanes or helicopters may disrupt visitors for brief periods. Passing boats going to Thomas Bay may also disrupt visitors for brief periods. Present recreation use levels are low within the area but higher in nearby areas. Generally, a person camped inland is unlikely to see others.

Accessing the roadless area by boat from the community of Petersburg requires a 1- to 2-hour crossing on exposed waters. The western coast of the area is more difficult to access while the area is much more easily accessed from Thomas Bay. The road system to the south allows relatively easy access to the area. The relatively small size with relatively easy access reduces this area's opportunity for self-reliance, adventure, and challenging experiences.

The area provides primarily semi-primitive recreation opportunities. The table below lists the acreage and percent of the various Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) classes that have been inventoried in the roadless area.

ROS Class	Acres	Percent of Total ROS
Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized (SPNM)	3,238	62%
Semi-Primitive Motorized (SPM)	1,072	20%
Roaded Modified (RM)	922	18%

The area contains two inventoried recreation places that cover 158 acres, or 3 percent of the roadless area.

ROS Class	# of Rec. Places	Total Acres
SPNM	0	0
SPM	1	156
RM	1	2

There are four public recreation cabins, two maintained trails, and two abandoned trails.

(3) **Wilderness Attribute Rating System:** In 1977, the Forest Service, along with public interest groups, developed the Wilderness Attribute Rating System (WARS), which was used to inventory the wilderness characteristics of roadless areas during the second Roadless Area Review and Evaluation process (referred to as RARE II). The purpose of WARS was to provide a measure of the area's wilderness quality, based on the key attributes of wilderness as defined in the Wilderness Act. It is largely based on the attributes described above in items 1 and 2 of this section (natural integrity, apparent naturalness, outstanding opportunity for solitude, and primitive recreation opportunities).

The inventoried roadless areas of the Tongass National Forest were rated according to this system in 1989 for the Analysis of the Management Situation developed in support of the Forest Plan Revision. At that time, the Thomas

Roadless Area was not given a rating because of its relatively small size and marginal eligibility for wilderness. The Thomas Roadless Area was evaluated in 2003 and given a rating of 18.

(4) Ecologic and Geologic Values:

(a) **Fish Resources:** The Tongass Fish and Wildlife Resource Assessment rated VCU 489, at the entrance to Thomas Bay as primary salmon producers. The VCU was not listed as primary producers of sportfish (ADF&G, 1998).

Marine and intertidal areas support high commercial, personal use, and recreational fisheries for Tanner, Dungeness, and king crab, and various species of shrimp and other shellfish.

(b) **Wildlife Resources:** Black bears, Sitka black-tailed deer, and a relatively high density of wolves are found in the general area. Waterfowl use the extensive grassflats in smaller areas around Thomas Bay, and nesting Canada geese are common near Thomas Bay. There are several northern goshawk nesting sites in the general area. The humpback whale and the Steller sea lion use the marine waters adjacent to the roadless area, although there are no sea lion haulout sites or other concentrations of marine wildlife in the vicinity of this roadless area.

(c) **Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive Species:** The only federally listed threatened and endangered species likely to occur within or adjacent to the roadless area are the humpback whale (endangered) and the Steller sea lion (threatened). Both of these species are found in adjacent marine waters. Four Forest Service Region 10 Sensitive Species are suspected or known to occur within or near the area: the trumpeter swan, osprey, Peale's peregrine falcon, and the Queen Charlotte goshawk. Trumpeter swans nest in the lowlands on small lakes and along major rivers and winter in ice-free areas throughout the Tongass. Present from April through September, ospreys are rare in southeast Alaska where they reach the northern extent of their nesting range. Feeding almost exclusively on fish, ospreys typically nest in large snags near lakes or the coast where fish are abundant. Ospreys have nested at Thomas Bay and have been seen at Swan Lake. Peale's peregrine falcons nest on cliff faces and islands and feed primarily on seabirds. Inhabitants of late seral forests, Queen Charlotte goshawks are closely associated with productive old growth. Several goshawk nests have been found in the general area. In addition, twelve sensitive plant species are known or suspected to occur in the Petersburg Ranger District.

(d) **Karst, Cave, and Other Geologic Resources:** There are no known significant or unique karst, cave or other geologic resources within the Thomas Roadless area.

(5) **Scientific and Educational Values:** The area has not been identified as a Research Natural Area, or as having high scientific or educational values.

(6) **Scenic Values:** The area exists in a mostly unmodified visual condition. Some of the foreground along Frederick Sound and as one enters Thomas Bay includes much of the roadless area, which is visible from current ferry and small cruise ship routes.

Visual Priority Routes and Use Areas identified by the Forest Plan, that are within or adjacent to the area include: Frederick Sound, a part of the Alaska Marine Highway, a tour ship route and a saltwater use area; Thomas Bay, saltwater use area; Thomas Bay, used as a boat anchorage.

About 23 percent of the area is inventoried in Variety Class B (possessing landscape diversity that is common for the character type), and the remaining 75 percent is inventoried as Class C (possessing a low degree of landscape diversity) and 2 percent is not inventoried.

The majority of this roadless area (52 percent) is in Existing Visual Condition (EVC) Type I, where only ecological change has occurred. EVC II makes up about 9 percent of the area, where changes to the landscape are not noticed by the average person unless pointed out. Another 5 percent of the area is in EVC IV in which changes to the landscape are easily noticed by the average person and may attract some attention. Another 32 percent of the area is

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in EVC Type V, where changes in the landscape are obvious to the average person, and appear to be major disturbances. Two percent of the area has not been inventoried.

(7) **Social, Cultural, and Historical Values:** The Thomas Bay area is in the traditional territory of the Stikine Tlingit. A variety of archaeological sites exist in the general area, including prehistoric period villages, camps, petroglyphs, and culturally-modified trees and historic period cabins and trails. Historic period use is rather extensive, especially at Point Agassiz, where a homestead community was established during the first quarter of the 20th century. The Gardner Shrimp Company cannery was established on Ruth Island in Thomas Bay in 1916. In 1958, logging began in the Muddy and Patterson River drainages southeast of the area. Mining activities have occurred in the Thomas Bay area. The Point Agassiz settlement was established during the first quarter of the 20th century. A schoolhouse was built in 1920 and remains there today. Several private cabins and homes are still located on private land adjacent to the roadless area. Thomas Bay is a destination attraction for residents of Petersburg. VCU 489, on the southern shore of Thomas Bay, is among the VCUs listed as highest sensitivity to disturbance of subsistence use areas. VCU 489, along Frederick Sound up to the entrance to Thomas Bay, was also listed among the VCUs in the second most important group for community use values. VCU 489 was not listed in the most important group (ADF&G, 1998).

(8) **Manageability as Wilderness and Boundaries Conditions/Changes:** The majority of the boundary is defined by saltwater. Areas developed for timber management and private land generally define portions of the eastern and southern boundaries. Feasibility of management in a wilderness condition is low, primarily due to the relatively small size of the area in conjunction with adjacent uses and activities.

III. Availability for Management as Wilderness (including effects of wilderness designation on adjacent areas)

(1) **Recreation, Including Tourism Potential:** The icefields to the east of the area have growth potential for floatplane flightseeing and helicopter tours. Tourism has been increasing in Southeast Alaska and is expected to continue to increase. Petersburg is a hub for this increase in tourism and is expected to continue. The proximity of the roadless area to Petersburg is likely to result in an increase in tourist interest in or near the roadless area. There is high potential for additional outfitter/guide permits and for additional trails, cabins, or shelters. The beauty, diversity, and accessibility of Thomas Bay make it a promising area for increased sightseeing and excursion trip opportunities.

In 1996, the Alaska Visitor Association (AVA) proposed a recreation development for Thomas Bay, which included a leased proprietary camp with a capacity of 15 tent platforms.

(2) **Subsistence Uses:** Management as a wilderness would not conflict with existing subsistence uses.

(3) **Fish Resources:** No fish enhancement projects are currently being considered in the roadless area.

(4) **Wildlife Resources:** No wildlife enhancement projects are currently being considered in the roadless area.

(5) **Timber Resources:** There are approximately 2,024 acres inventoried as productive old-growth forest in the roadless area. Second growth associated with older beach logging is mapped as 102 acres. Of these acres, approximately 1,733 acres of the area are categorized as tentatively suitable for timber harvest. Based on the Forest Plan LUDs assigned to this area (and estimated falldown and scheduling reduction factors), 480 acres (9 percent) of this roadless area are estimated to be suitable for timber production. Approximately 90 of the suitable acres are mapped as high-volume old growth; of these acres, 14 are mapped as high-volume, coarse-canopy old growth.

The potential for managing timber in this roadless area is closely linked to the existing road system immediately south and east of the area. The Crystal Creek Timber Sale is currently under contract to extend the existing road system into the roadless area.

(6) **Fire, Insects, and Disease:** The area has no significant fire history. Endemic tree diseases common to Southeast Alaska are present. There are no known epidemic disease occurrences.

- (7) **Minerals:** There has been some mineral exploration in the past outside the area. There are no known mining claims within the area.
- (8) **Transportation and Utilities:** There are no transportation or utility corridors proposed in the roadless area.
- (9) **Water Availability and Use:** There are no existing or planned hydroelectric or domestic water projects in the Thomas Roadless Area.
- (10) **Areas of Scientific Interest:** The area contains no Research Natural Areas.
- (11) **Land Use Authorizations:** No special use permits have been issued within the area. Nearby in the Spires Roadless Area, Forest Service records show that 11 outfitter/guides used this area in 2000 for 3 service days for freshwater fishing, 313 service days for remote setting nature tours, 17 service days for black bear hunting, 31 service days for mountain goat hunting, and 727 service days for helicopter landing tours.
- (12) **Land Status:** The entire area is National Forest System land. There is state and private land adjacent to the roadless area.

IV. Wilderness Evaluation (Need for Wilderness)

- (1) **Public and Congressional Interest:**
- (a) **Interest Expressed by Local Users and Residents:** Local Petersburg residents have a high degree of interest in how this area is managed. There was a strong protest when the State of Alaska considered subdividing and selling land in Thomas Bay.
- (b) **Congressional Interest:** In 1989, U.S. House of Representatives Bill HR 987 proposed to designate 23 areas as wilderness on the Tongass National Forest. This bill did not include the Thomas Roadless Area. In 2001, HR 2908 proposed that the area be designated as part of the Thomas Bay-Twin Peaks Wilderness.
- (c) **Public Input During Forest Plan Revision and Appeals:** The AVA proposed a recreation development for Thomas Bay, which included a lease proprietary camp with a capacity of 15 tent platforms. The Narrows Conservation Coalition and the Juneau Sierra Club mentioned the importance of the area for fishing, recreation, and subsistence. They also commented on the importance of protecting recreation and commercial anchorage, whale watching, tourism, and crab habitat. Some commenters stressed that the area was visible from cruise ships and should not have visible timber harvest. The timber industry wanted the area managed for timber production.
- (d) **Public Input During Roadless Area Conservation Rule and Road Management Policy Review:** This area was not specifically identified in the comments received on the Roadless Area Conservation Rule or Road Management Policy Review. However, some commenters wanted all unroaded lands in the Tongass to be protected from development.
- (e) **Public Input Expressed for Project-level EISs and Other Input:** Comments were received on the Crystal Creek Timber Harvest Project DEIS (USDA Forest Service, 1997). Thirteen persons, agencies, and organizations commented. None of the comments dealt with wilderness or roadless area issues.
- (f) **Public Input Expressed During Supplemental EIS Process:** The city of Petersburg said they were opposed to designation of this area as wilderness because of the potential long-term economic impacts on the city.

The Alaska Rainforest Campaign (a coalition of national and Alaska conservation groups) identified Roadless Areas 201, 202, 203, and 308 as a contiguous complex of roadless areas that should be considered

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one roadless area and recommended it for permanent protection as wilderness. SEACC included this area in their comments on the Cape Fanshaw/Port Houghton area.

(2) Nearby Roadless and Wilderness Areas and Uses: The Thomas Roadless Area is located about 5 miles from the Spires Roadless Area and is separated from it by an area developed primarily for timber management. The Stikine-LeConte Wilderness is located about 15 miles to the southeast, the Tracy Arm-Fords Terror and Chuck River Wildernesses about 35 miles to the north, and the Petersburg Creek-Duncan Canal Wilderness about 20 miles to the southwest.

(3) Distance From Population Centers (Accessibility): Approximate distances from population centers are as follows:

Community	Air Miles	Water Miles
Juneau (Pop. 30,711)	105	115
Petersburg (Pop. 3,224)	10	15
Wrangell (Pop. 2,308)	40	50
Ketchikan (Pop. 14,070)	125	140

Petersburg is the nearest stop on the Alaska Marine Highway.

(4) Relative Contribution to the National Wilderness Preservation System: The Thomas Roadless Area is located on the mainland on a peninsula that includes Point Agassiz and forms the southern entrance into Thomas Bay from Frederick Sound. The area is generally characterized by gently rolling terrain with little relief and elevations up to 400 feet.

The area is mostly natural appearing, but it is influenced by developments and activities in adjacent lands. The area has very high natural integrity and apparent naturalness. The opportunity for solitude and primitive recreation is low.

The area has relatively high cultural and historic values. There are no other known significant or unique wilderness attributes for this area. None of the landscape in the area is considered distinctive for the character type from a scenery standpoint.

The roadless area includes about 406 acres of high-volume, old-growth forest. Of these acres, 52 are mapped as high-volume, coarse-canopy old growth.

The Thomas Roadless Area lies within the Central Coast Range Biogeographic Province and makes up approximately 1 percent of the province. It is one of nine inventoried roadless areas found in the province that collectively make up about 59 percent of the province. Portions of the Stikine-LeConte Wilderness lie within the Central Coast Range Province and make up about 38 percent of the province.

The Thomas Roadless Area lies completely within the Inside Passage Fjordlands Ecological Section and represents 0.3 percent of the ecological section. Approximately 20 percent of the Inside Passage Fjordlands Ecological Section is in existing wilderness, 2 percent is in existing LUD II, and an additional 30 percent is protected by other existing non-development LUDs.

The Thomas Roadless Area also lies completely within the Thomas Bay Outwash Plains Ecological Subsection and represents 17 percent of the entire ecological subsection. None of this ecological subsection is located in existing wilderness, but 25 percent is protected by other existing non-development LUDs.

The Thomas Roadless Area was rated 18 out of a possible 28 points under the Wilderness Attribute Rating System (WARS). As such, its WARS rating is ranked 84th from the highest (along with eight other roadless areas) among the 109 Tongass inventoried roadless areas.

There is some local and national support for managing the area in an unroaded condition, and some support for designating the area as wilderness. Designation would create a wilderness that is very small and heavily influenced

by developments and activities on adjacent lands. The area also includes portions of a timber sale under contract in the southeast portion of the roadless area. Designation of the area as wilderness would add Congressional protection to approximately 17 percent of the Thomas Bay Outwash Plains Ecological Subsection that is not currently represented in wilderness or LUD II. Overall, the factors identified here indicate that the relative contribution of this area to the National Wilderness Preservation System would be very low.

V. Environmental Consequences

The Thomas Roadless Area would be managed under the existing Forest Plan if Alternative 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5 is implemented. Approximately 26 percent of the roadless area would be managed under non-development LUDs. Timber harvest and road development could occur in the remaining 74 percent. The land in the development LUDs provides an estimated 480 acres that are suitable for timber production (less than 1 percent of the suitable acres on the Petersburg Ranger District). Approximately 14 of the suitable acres are classified as high-volume, coarse-canopy old growth. The timber sales, recreation, and special use programs would continue. The values associated with the natural settings of the roadless area could be affected by ongoing development allowed by the Forest Plan. The cultural and historic values of the area are protected under the Forest Plan under all alternatives.

Under Alternative 6, 7, or 8, the entire roadless area would be converted to Recommended Wilderness. Timber harvest would not be allowed and the ongoing recreation, and special uses programs could be restricted. Mineral prospecting would be allowed up to the time that the area is actually designated as wilderness by Congress. Designation of the area as wilderness would add Congressional protection to approximately 17 percent of the Thomas Bay Outwash Plains Ecological Subsection that is not currently represented in wilderness or LUD II. The values associated with the natural settings of the roadless area would be provided long-term protection if designated wilderness.

Land Use Designation Allocations and Suitable Timber Lands by Alternative for Roadless Area 203 (in acres)								
Land Use Designation	Alt 1	Alt 2	Alt 3	Alt 4	Alt 5	Alt 6	Alt 7	Alt 8
Recommended Wilderness						5,232	5,232	5,232
Wilderness								
Recommended Wilderness Nat. Mon.								
Wilderness National Monument								
Non-wilderness National Monument								
Research Natural Area								
Special Interest Area								
Remote Recreation								
Enacted Municipal Watershed								
Old-growth Habitat	1,378	1,378	1,378	1,378	1,378			
Semi-remote Recreation								
Recommended LUD II								
LUD II								
Wild, Scenic, Recreational River								
Experimental Forest								
Scenic Viewshed	3,854	3,854	3,854	3,854	3,854			
Modified Landscape								
Timber Production								
TOTAL	5,232	5,232	5,232	5,232	5,232	5,232	5,232	5,232
Suitable Timber Lands	480	480	480	480	480	0	0	0