

Wilderness.net's San Juan Wilderness Fact Sheet



Introduction

The United States Congress designated the San Juan Wilderness in 1976 and it now has a total of 353 acres. All of the wilderness is in Washington and is managed by the Fish and Wildlife Service.

Description

The tips of submerged mountains collectively thrust above the sea where two straits--Georgia and Juan de Fuca--meet up with Puget Sound, forming the San Juan Islands. Of the 700 or so islands, islets, rocks, and reefs that make up the San Juan Islands, fewer than 200 have garnered official names. The large islands of San Juan, Lopez, Orcas, and Shaw make up more than 80 percent of the landmass. Of the rest of the land, much of it wave-drenched, 83 pieces are included in the San Juan Islands National Wildlife Refuge, a sanctuary for gulls, cormorants, guillemots, puffins, brants, oystercatchers, auklets, bald eagles, and harbor seals. Of these 83 specks of land above the line of mean high water, 80 have been designated Wilderness: Aleck Rocks, Bare Island, Barren Island, Battleship Island, Bird Rock, Black Rock, Boulder Island, Brown Rock, Buck Island, Castle Island, Center Reef, Clements Reef, Colville Island, Crab Island, Davidson Rock, Eliza Rock, Flattop Island, Flower Island, Fortress Island, Four Bird Rocks, Gull Reef, Gull Rock, Half Tide Rock, Hall Island, Harbor Rock, Lawson Rock, Little Sister Island, two named Low Island, Matia Island (with the exception of the five acres camping area managed under an Memorandum of Understanding with Washington State Parks), Mouatt Reef, Mummy Rocks, Nob Island, North Pacific Rock, North Peapod Rocks, Parker Reef, Peapod Rocks, Pointer Island, Puffin Island, Rim and Rum Islands, Ripple Island, Secar Rock, Sentinel Island, Shag Rock, Shark Reef, Skipjack Island, Skull Island, Small Island, South Peapod Rocks, Swirl Island, The Sisters, Three Williamson Rocks, Tift Rocks, Turn Rock, Viti Rocks, White Rocks, and Willow Island, along with various unnamed islands, islets, rocks, and reefs.

Leave No Trace

How to follow the seven standard Leave No Trace principles differs in different parts of the country (desert vs. Rocky Mountains). Click on any of the principles listed below to learn more about how they apply in the San Juan Wilderness.

1. [Plan Ahead and Prepare](#)
2. [Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces](#)
3. [Dispose of Waste Properly](#)
4. [Leave What You Find](#)
5. [Minimize Campfire Impacts](#)
6. [Respect Wildlife](#)
7. [Be Considerate of Other Visitors](#)

For more information on Leave No Trace, [Visit the Leave No Trace, Inc. website.](#)

Area Management

The San Juan Wilderness is part of the 109 million acre National Wilderness Preservation System. This System of lands provides clean air, water, and habitat critical for rare and endangered plants and animals. In wilderness, you can enjoy challenging recreational activities like hiking, backpacking, climbing, kayaking, canoeing, rafting, horse packing, bird watching, stargazing, and extraordinary opportunities for solitude. You play an important role in helping to *"secure for the American people of present and future generations the benefits of an enduring resource of wilderness"* as called for by the Congress of the United States through the Wilderness Act of 1964. Please follow the requirements outlined below and use Leave No Trace techniques when visiting the San Juan Wilderness to ensure protection of this unique area.

To provide undisturbed habitat, boaters are requested to stay 200 yards away from all refuge islands while observing wildlife. Public entry to the Wilderness is not permitted, with the exception of Matia Island, which is accessed by a dock at Rolfe cove. Here you will find a 5-acre campground with a limited number of campsites, and the trailhead to a 1-mile walk through the Wilderness.

Contacts

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Links to Other Websites

[Map of San Juan Islands and Protection Island](#)

[Matia Island State Park](#)

Provides current information on facilities, regulations, and fees for Matia Island State Park.

[San Juan Islands National Wildlife Refuge](#)

Links on Wilderness.net

[National, Regional and Local Wilderness Organizations \(NGOs\)](#)

A listing of societies, organizations, coalitions and other wilderness-related advocacy and stewardship groups.

[Career and Volunteer Opportunities](#)

A listing of sites providing information about wilderness- and environmentally-related career and volunteer opportunities.

Applicable Wilderness Law(s)

Law	Date	Acreage Change (in acres)
Public Law 94-557	October 19, 1976	350

(No official title, designates Fish and Wildlife Service wildernesses) - Public law 94-557 (10/19/1976) To designate certain lands as components of the National Wilderness Preservation System and to provide designation for certain lands as Wilderness Study Areas

— [download 94-557](#)

Recreational Opportunities

San Juan Wilderness consists of islands. The waters surrounding the islands are outside the Wilderness and are open to boating. To provide undisturbed habitat, boaters are asked to stay 200 yards away from the islands while observing wildlife.

Most of the Wilderness is closed. However, the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission operates 5 acres on Matia Island as Matia Island State Park, with two buoys, a dock, a ramp, and a campground. A 1-mile hiking trail from the campground allows visitors to walk through the Wilderness. Please stay on the designated trail.

Matia Island State Park is reachable only by boat. It is located 2.5 miles north of Orcas Island and 1.5 miles east of Sucia Island. The closest launch sites are in Blaine, Obstruction Pass on Orcas Island, Squalicum Harbor in Bellingham, and in Anacortes. The only access is a dock at Roche Cove. The dock is in place from April to mid-October. All other shoreline areas are closed. The campground has 6 campsites, a sandy beach, a picnic site, and a composting toilet. There is no potable water on Matia Island. The nearest potable water, on Sucia Island, is available from April to September. Garbage must be packed out. For further information on regulations, hours, moorage fees, and camping fees, please see Matia Island State Park's Web site ([http://www.parks.wa.gov/parks/?selectedpark=Matia Island](http://www.parks.wa.gov/parks/?selectedpark=Matia%20Island)) or call 360-902-8844.

Climate and Special Equipment Needs

Matia Island temperatures are moderate, rarely exceeding 80 degrees in the summer or falling below 30 degrees in the winter. Ocean conditions can be challenging at any time of the year, but especially from mid-October to the end of March. Annual rainfall averages 25-28 inches. The driest months are June, July, and August.

Safety and Current Conditions

Boating safety should be foremost in the minds of visitors in the waters surrounding the islands. Check for National Weather Service storm warnings at <http://www.weather.gov/>, and always wear personal flotation devices. Visitors to Matia Island should be especially fire cautious during the dry summer months.