Pacific Coastal Temperate Rainforest of North America

Extending 2,500 miles in a narrow coastal corridor from the far edge of Prince William Sound in southcentral Alaska, along coastal British Columbia, through Portland, Oregon and Seattle, Washington, and to northern California, the Pacific coastal temperate rainforest of North America represents the largest area of coastal temperate rainforest in the world.¹

A coastal temperate rainforest is defined by the following characteristics:²

- Location within 93 miles of the coast
- High annual precipitation (33 inches - 105"
- Over 100 days of precipitation seasonally, with 10% during the summer months
- Dominance by numerous coniferous species
- Some of the greatest biomass accumulation and highest productivity levels of any rainforest in the world--temperate, tropical, or boreal

Biodiversity

The Pacific coastal temperate rainforest of North America is rich in biodiversity--home to approximately:³

- 350 bird and mammal species
- 48 species of amphibians and reptiles
- 25 tree species
- Hundreds of species of fungi and lichens
- Thousands of species of insects, mites, spiders, and other soil organisms

Figure 1: Current status of the Pacific coastal temperate rainforest of North America
Current State of Forest Intactness
Alaska and British Columbia have 90% and 68% of their respective coastal temperate rainforest regions still intact. The southern end of the Pacific coastal temperate rainforest of North America (Washington, Oregon, and California) contains 5% of its original coverage.  

Ecosystem Services
From southcentral Alaska to northern California, the Pacific coastal temperate rainforest of North America provides communities with a wide range of valuable services. For example, the biome offers a vibrant habitat for returning salmon and these nutrient rich fish provide nutrition for surrounding communities and wildlife. In return forests reap the benefits of important nutrients such as the nitrogen and phosphorous these fish provide. Numerous ecotourism companies take advantage of the breath-taking scenery of the region. The indigenous people of this region, including the Tlingit, Haida, Comox, Chehalis, Takelma, Pomo, have turned to the forests for centuries for subsistence, medicine, and spiritual enlightenment.

Policy and Management
Political boundaries in the Pacific coastal temperate rainforest of North America require that ecosystem management decisions are linked between various federal, state/provincial, and local governments.

- Over 90% of land in southeast Alaska is public land and is managed for public use.
- British Columbia has five million acres protected under historic land use agreements with 19 million acres under strict land use management.
- The Northwest Forest Plan covers 24.5 million acres in Oregon, Washington, and northern California that are managed by a variety of Federal agencies.

Tree species
The Pacific coastal temperate rainforest of North America is primarily inhabited by coniferous species, species dominance varies based on location:

- Alaska to Vancouver Island: Sitka spruce, western hemlock, and mountain hemlock
- Vancouver Island to Oregon: Douglas fir, red cedar, Sitka spruce, and western hemlock
- Oregon to California: Douglas fir and redwoods

Cover Photo: Deception Pass, Washington, © Steve Brown
Back Photo: Fireweed © Bruce McKay (left), CTRF in Oregon Sam Beebe (center), Red Columbine © Tim Samoff (right)

Figure 2: Historic, current, and protected areas in the Pacific coastal temperate rainforest of North America