

FSH 1909.12 - LAND MANAGEMENT PLANNING HANDBOOK CHAPTER 70 - WILDERNESS EVALUATION

See section 72.5 for guidelines on establishing, adjusting, and mapping boundaries of areas recommended for wilderness designation.

71.3 - Numbering of Potential Wilderness Areas

Assign a numerical identifier and name to each potential wilderness area. Use a logical sequencing to identify each unique area and to differentiate among areas within a region. Where a potential wilderness area borders a potential wilderness area in a neighboring unit, it is important that the same name is used and that the number for the adjacent area be noted in the evaluation write-up.

72 - EVALUATION OF POTENTIAL WILDERNESS

Carefully evaluate potential wilderness areas as potential additions to the National Wilderness Preservation System to determine the mix of land and resource uses that best meet public needs. An area recommended as suitable for wilderness must meet the tests of capability, availability, and need. In addition to the inherent wilderness quality it possesses, an area must provide opportunities and experiences that are dependent upon or enhanced by a wilderness environment. Also consider the ability of the Forest Service to manage the area as wilderness.

72.1 - Capability

The capability of a potential wilderness is the degree to which that area contains the basic characteristics that make it suitable for wilderness recommendation without regard to its availability for or need as wilderness. The combinations of basic natural characteristics are of infinite variety. No two areas possess these characteristics in the same measure. The combinations that may be appraised in one section of the country as being highly desirable for wilderness recommendation might be appraised as nominal in another. The principal wilderness characteristics, as identified in the Wilderness Act, that follow are generally, but not necessarily, listed in order of importance or desirability. Consider these characteristics in analyzing the quality of the wilderness resource of a potential wilderness area. If these characteristics are determined to be important, describe and refer to them in trade-off analyses when pertinent.

1. Natural. Determine whether the area's ecological systems are substantially free from the effects of modern civilization and generally appear to have been affected primarily by forces of nature. Consider such factors as:
 - a. The presence of non-native species that alter the composition of natural plant and animal communities (such as non-native plants, animals, fish, livestock, invertebrates, and pathogens).
 - b. Developments that degrade the free-flowing condition of rivers and streams (such as dams or other water diversions and impoundments).

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- c. The presence of light pollution that degrades night sky quality and night sky quality related values
 - d. The presence of pollutants that degrade water quality; and
 - e. The health of ecosystems, plant communities, and plant species that are rare or at risk.
2. Undeveloped. Determine the degree to which the area is without permanent improvements or human habitation. A measure of undeveloped is the level of human occupation and modification of the area including evidence of structures, construction, habitations, or other forms of human presence, use, and occupation.

3. Outstanding Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation. Determine an area's capability of providing solitude or primitive and unconfined types of recreation. This includes providing a wide range of experiential opportunities such as: physical and mental challenge, adventure and self-reliance, feelings of solitude, isolation, self-awareness, and inspiration.

Solitude is the opportunity to experience isolation from sights, sounds, and the presence of others from the developments and evidence of humans. To determine opportunities for solitude, look at the size of the area, presence of screening, distance from impacts, and degree of permanent intrusions.

The opportunity to experience isolation from the evidence of humans, to feel a part of nature, to have a vastness of scale, and a degree of challenge and risk while using outdoor skills are measures of primitive and unconfined recreation. Primitive-type recreation activities include hiking, backpacking, horseback riding, fishing, hunting, floating, kayaking, cross-country skiing, camping, and enjoying nature.

4. Special Features and Values. Determine the area's capability to provide other values such as those with ecologic, geologic, scientific, educational, scenic, historical, or cultural significance. Examples include unique fish and wildlife species, unique plants or plant communities, connectivity, potential or existing research natural areas, outstanding landscape features, and significant cultural resource sites. Identify and describe any such values and their contribution to wilderness character.

5. Manageability. In determining capability, consider the ability to manage an area as wilderness as required by the Wilderness Act. Section 2(c) of the Wilderness Act defines Wilderness as an area that “. . . (3) has at least 5,000 acres of land or is of sufficient size to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition. . . .” Forest Service ability to manage an area as an enduring resource of wilderness, untrammelled by humans, retaining its primeval character, and to protect and manage its natural character are all factors to consider. Consider such factors as size, shape, and juxtaposition to external influences.

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Evaluate how boundaries affect manageability of an area. In the most desirable situations:

- a. Boundary locations avoid conflict with important existing or potential public uses outside the boundary that might result in demands to allow nonconforming structures and activities in the wilderness.
- b. It is possible to readily and accurately describe, establish, and recognize boundaries on the ground.
- c. Boundaries, where possible, conform with terrain or other features that constitute a barrier to prohibited use.
- d. Boundaries provide adequate opportunity for access and traveler transfer facilities.

72.11 - Additional Capability Characteristics for Areas East of the 100th Meridian

National forests, grasslands, prairies, and other comparable administrative units east of the 100th meridian may contain limited nonconforming uses and/or nonconforming structures and improvements while retaining capability for wilderness recommendation. Criteria for desirable capability characteristics east of the 100th meridian include:

1. Nonconforming uses are of such a nature that they can be effectively mitigated or terminated. Examples include a variety of uses such as logging, special-use facilities, vegetation treatment, that can be terminated and the improvements easily removed or ignored because they are rapidly disappearing through natural deterioration.
2. Nonconforming structures and improvements, except range improvements, are generally lacking. If present, they are rapidly disappearing through natural processes, or it would be practical to remove them and permit the site to return to a near-natural condition. Examples include log or frame cabins, abandoned powerlines, or unauthorized and temporary roads that, if closed, would recover naturally.

72.2 - Availability

All National Forest System (NFS) lands determined to meet wilderness capability requirements are considered potentially available for wilderness designation. However, the determination of availability is conditioned by the value of and need for the wilderness resource compared to the value of and need for other resources. In evaluating availability, describe the other resource demands and uses that the area under evaluation could satisfy. Include all other resource potentials—pertinent quantitative and qualitative information including current use, outputs, trends, and potential future use, and outputs of the various resources involved.