



**U.S. Forest Service
Pacific Southwest Region**



December 2015

Frequently Asked Questions Wilderness Evaluations for the Inyo, Sequoia and Sierra National Forests

Is the Forest Service designating wilderness areas right now?

No, only the Congress can take that action. We are revising the Inyo, Sequoia and Sierra National Forests' land and resource management plans (forest plans) as directed by the 2012 Planning Rule. This rule requires us to identify and evaluate lands that may be suitable for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. There are four steps in this process: inventory, evaluation, analysis and recommendation. We are following guidance outlined in the 2012 Planning Rule Directives, Forest Service Handbook 1909.12 Chapter 70, and the Wilderness Act of 1964.

What information is the Forest Service sharing now?

In an effort to keep the public updated and engage in the forest plan revision process, we are sharing several documents regarding our wilderness evaluation process. One document is the draft wilderness evaluation report which summarizes the wilderness characteristics of each polygon listed in our final wilderness inventory. We are also sharing maps for each forest that display designated wilderness areas and those areas that are under consideration for inclusion as potential recommended wilderness. We are also sharing a set of two tables for each forest; one table provides an overview of the designated wilderness, recommended wilderness, and potential recommended wilderness by alternative in the draft environmental impact statement we are completing. The other table provides a summary of the wilderness polygons under consideration across alternatives.

What is a wilderness evaluation narrative?

A wilderness evaluation narrative summarizes the wilderness characteristics of each polygon listed in the final wilderness inventory. The narrative also lists factors that could affect manageability of the area as wilderness. The evaluation narrative contains the factual information that is being used to identify areas, or portions of areas, to move forward for further analysis in the draft environmental impact statement (EIS) as potential recommended wilderness. Each polygon's evaluation narrative includes a general description, descriptions of its wilderness characteristics, description of factors affecting manageability, and a summary of its potential suitability for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System.

What is the process for identifying and evaluating areas for potential wilderness recommendation?

After we have a final inventory of areas that meet specific criteria outlined in the 2012 Planning Rule Directives, Forest Service Handbook 1909.12 Chapter 70, and the Wilderness Act of 1964, we then review or "evaluate" each area to document its wilderness characteristics and factors that affect its ability to potentially be managed as wilderness. Next, this information, along with input provided by the public,

is used to identify which areas, or portions of areas, will be moved forward for analysis as potential recommended wilderness in the draft EIS we are completing as part of revising these forest plans. In September 2015, we shared our process for identifying and evaluating areas that we may consider for potential wilderness recommendation. Please visit [our website](#) for a more detailed explanation.

Is the wilderness evaluation complete for these three national forests?

Not yet. In August 2014, we shared our wilderness inventory with the public to gather feedback on the lands that we'd inventoried. Next, we evaluated each area's wilderness characteristics and manageability. Using this information, public feedback, and our resource specialists' knowledge, we began to identify areas to consider for analysis as recommended wilderness. In May 2015, we shared our progress on the wilderness evaluation process on 10 polygons. Since then, we have continued our analysis of potential areas to include for wilderness consideration.

We are sharing our evaluation narratives for the entire set of polygons that appear in our final wilderness inventory, and are asking you to review them prior to our completing the selection of areas to be included in the analysis for the draft EIS. Once that selection has been made, those areas will be added to the 10 polygons we shared in May 2015 for analysis as areas for potential wilderness recommendation. This entire subset and our evaluation of their wilderness characteristics will appear as an appendix in the draft EIS we are completing as part of these forest plan revisions.

What does "polygon" mean in the process outlined here?

We use the term "polygon" to refer to an area identified on a forest map during the first step of our wilderness evaluation process, the inventory step. During the inventory step, we identified those lands that meet size and improvement requirements for possible inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. Check out our [wilderness evaluation and identification process](#) Web site for more details.

Are these the final polygons the Forest Service will analyze for the draft EIS?

No. These are not the final polygons we will analyze in the draft environmental impact statement. Some of those listed in the evaluation may move forward and others may not. Those polygons that do move forward may have refined boundaries to better reflect wilderness characteristics, manageability, and more easily identifiable and locatable boundaries. The comments we gather from the public now will help shape what is in the alternatives we release in the draft EIS.

Which polygons will the Forest Service move from the evaluation phase into the analysis for the draft EIS?

The polygons we are currently proposing to analyze in the draft EIS are listed in the accompanying tables and displayed in the accompanying maps. These tables show which polygons we are currently proposing to analyze and in which alternative they are proposed to be included. The boundaries of these polygons may be refined further in our analysis as well. The public is invited to provide feedback on the polygons currently being considered for analysis.

Can I provide feedback on the wilderness evaluation documents?

Yes, we are looking for your input on these wilderness evaluation narratives to supplement each polygon's general description, wilderness characteristics, manageability, existing uses, and summary of potential suitability for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. If you have questions or concerns about our wilderness evaluations please contact Christina Boston at 707-562-8837 or submit

your input via Web-form at: <http://tinyurl.com/earlyadoptersfpr> . Feedback is most useful if received by February 1, 2016. You will also have an opportunity to review and comment on our evaluation and analysis when the draft EIS is released. The wilderness evaluation will appear as an appendix in the draft EIS and the analysis will be in chapter 3 of the draft EIS.

Can I provide feedback to the areas being considered for analysis?

Yes, we are looking for your feedback on the areas we are considering for analysis in the draft EIS. The most useful input includes details that help us determine if there are evaluation polygons, or portions of them, that should or should not be considered for analysis in the draft EIS. If you have questions or concerns please contact Christina Boston at 707-562-8837 or submit your input via Web-form at: <http://tinyurl.com/earlyadoptersfpr>. Feedback is most useful if received by February 1, 2016. You will also have an opportunity to review and comment on our analysis when the draft EIS is released. The wilderness analysis will appear as an appendix in the draft EIS.

What are suitable uses in recommended wilderness areas?

When developing plan components for recommended wilderness areas, the Forest Service can implement a range of management options based on 16 USC 1122(d) and FSM 1923.03(3) in Chapter 70 of the Forest Service Handbook. All plan components applicable to a recommended area must protect and maintain the social and ecological characteristics that provide the basis for wilderness recommendation. In addition, the plan may include one or more plan component for a recommended wilderness area that:

- Enhance the ecological and social characteristics that provide the basis for wilderness designations
- Continue existing uses, only if such uses do not prevent the protection and maintenance of the social and ecological characteristics that provide the basis for wilderness designation
- Alter existing uses, subject to valid existing rights
- Eliminate existing uses, except those uses subject to valid existing rights

How will the feedback I provide now be used?

We will consider all the public feedback we receive now as public participation during the wilderness evaluation process. We will review the feedback we receive and give consideration to it as we work to refine the wilderness evaluations narratives and make a final determination about which areas to include in one or more alternatives of the draft EIS for analysis as potential recommended wilderness.

How is the Forest Service collaborating with the public?

This is our first opportunity to use the 2012 Planning Rule, so many of its requirements are new to us. We appreciate your patience and participation; we are sharing information and engaging with the public as we can. In the past year, we've convened public discussions on several plan revision topics as we have information available, including:

- *June 2014*: Preliminary wilderness inventory, step one of the wilderness evaluation process
- *August 2014*: Began National Environmental Policy Act process for forest plan revisions; shared our final wilderness inventory
- *November 2014*: Shared issues and concerns heard during public scoping
- *January 2015*: Sierra Cascade Dialog session about monitoring programs

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- *May 2015:* Update on our wilderness evaluation progress
- *June 2015:* Inyo National Forest hosted a wilderness evaluation public workshop
- *July 2015:* Released draft proposed species of conservation concern lists
- *September 2015:* Shared our process for wilderness evaluation and identifying areas for potential wilderness recommendation; Invited public feedback on our proposed draft monitoring programs
- *October 2015:* Sierra Cascade Dialog session about wilderness, wild and scenic rivers, species of conservation concern, and the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail
- *December 2015:* Shared our Wild and Scenic Rivers inventory and eligibility findings and additional information on draft proposed Species of Conservation Concern lists; invited public feedback

How can I obtain more information about forest plan revisions?

There are several ways you can find more information about forest plan revision efforts, including:

- Visiting our Web site: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/goto/r5/FPR>
- Subscribing to our mailing list
https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/USDAFS/subscriber/new?topic_id=NEPA_3375_S
- Contacting your local Forest Service office.

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