

What About Designated Wilderness?

A required piece of the forest plan revision process is to examine Forest Service lands to determine if there are any areas that may qualify for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. Lands must have a high degree of undeveloped and natural characteristics, among other qualifying elements. The first step of the process is to broadly inventory the landscape. The second step is to evaluate the areas that generally fit into this process in order to identify the locations that have wilderness characteristics. The forest plan will include areas the Forest Service recommends for designation as wilderness. **It takes further action by Congress to designate these areas as Wilderness.**

We heard strong support for and strong criticism against recommending additional wilderness areas on the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests. Alternatives represent the range of views by varying the amount of recommended wilderness in each of the proposed alternatives. Additionally, we have listed below some myths and truths about designated Wilderness.

| Wilderness MYTH | Wilderness TRUTH |
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| <i>If a wildfire in the wilderness is threatening property, then the FS can't use the necessary equipment to put it out.</i> | Motorized equipment can be authorized to suppress wildfires in wilderness areas when there is a threat to life and property. In addition, it can be authorized for other reasons, such as preventing the spread of insects and diseases that threaten adjacent property. Traditional tools such as crosscut saws and fire rakes are utilized in fighting fire in wilderness areas, with the intent to preserve the wilderness character of the area. These tools have proven effective in more remote settings in which hiking longer distances with heavy equipment is a consideration. |
| <i>If someone is lost or injured in the wilderness, the designation prevents using motorized vehicles for rescue.</i> | Human safety is our first priority. The use of motorized equipment (ATVs, helicopters, etc.) can be authorized for search and rescue operations in life threatening situations. Counties and their local Forest Service Ranger Districts work together to develop a Wilderness emergency response plan. |
| <i>Wilderness designation damages our local economy by locking up the timber.</i> | It is true commercial logging is not allowed in designated Wilderness areas, nor are some other forms of commercial endeavors, such as commercial filming, that would impact the wilderness character of the area or primitive recreation experiences. Much of the land designated Wilderness is steep, inoperable terrain and would not otherwise be logged. Outdoor recreation economies often benefit from nearby Wilderness. |
| <i>Wilderness designation is about keeping people out of our public lands.</i> | The goal is not to keep people out of Wilderness areas, rather these areas are set aside to provide a primitive recreation experience as a keystone to the original concept of designating wilderness areas. Some key objectives of the National Wilderness Act are to provide opportunities for education, research and primitive forms of recreation, inviting people in to explore, learn and challenge themselves in more primitive settings. Mechanical transportation including wheeled vehicles such as wagons, carts, bicycles and other vehicles are explicitly prohibited by the Wilderness Act with the intent of preserving the wilderness experience and character of the areas. |

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| <p><i>The public hasn't had a say in the wilderness discussion.</i></p> | <p>The public has been actively involved in every step of the wilderness analysis process. The Forest Service has considered all feedback provided. Public comments on Wilderness were carefully considered and significant in the development of the action alternatives in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement.</p> |
| <p><i>The wilderness recommendation has already been made, my input won't make a difference.</i></p> | <p>The recommendation has not yet been made nor has a decision. Any input can still make a difference in the outcome. The wilderness evaluations and proposed recommendations have been based on a broad range of input, expertise and requirements. Public input has helped shape how Wilderness was addressed in the proposed alternatives. Areas to be recommended will be finalized when the final forest plan is signed, though they would still require an act of Congress for formal designation.</p> |
| <p><i>Wilderness areas have recently been added to the forests by the Forest Service.</i></p> | <p>Six wilderness areas currently exist in the Nantahala and Pisgah NFs, all of which were <u>congressionally designated</u>. Two were designated in 1964, two in 1975, and two in 1984. Currently the forest has 5 congressionally designated wilderness study areas, all of which were designated in 1984. And we manage WSAs to preserve wilderness characteristics, but we don't manage them "as wilderness". In total, the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests have 66,337 acres of congressionally designated wilderness and 27,907 acres of congressionally designated wilderness study areas, which are managed as wilderness, out of the 1.1 million total acres.</p> |