

Wilderness Recreation Forums Core Team Recommendations



Region Two, Regional Forester Presentation February 20, 2007

Wilderness - the basic indicator of our nation's ecological health

Wilderness - the source of clean air and clean water

Wilderness - a refuge for native plants and animals

This reality must pervade America's heart and consciousness

Congress, the Forest Service and the American people

Must protect this unique and irreplaceable resource

Background:

At the 2006 Wilderness Managers Winter Meeting, Director Steve Sherwood and Ralph Swain met with key non-government partners (NGO) and friends groups to begin a discussion on how to mitigate the impacts of high recreation use in “magnet” Colorado Wilderness destinations. Magnet areas are defined as areas where recreation use exceeds Forest Plan standards and guidelines for visitation. The objective of this meeting was to establish a partnership between non governmental organizations (NGO)s, Friends Groups and the USFS with the common goal of developing recommendations to protect wilderness character in magnet areas.

Over the past year, the Regional Office hosted three field trips and three wilderness recreation forums. The field trips brought Forest Service line officers, wilderness managers, partners and user groups together for a closer examination of the issues related to high visitor use and the forums provided opportunities to learn about possible solutions. From the Forum participants, a volunteer Core Team was established with the task of developing recommendations to the Regional Forester on management strategies for addressing visitor use in Magnet areas.

It quickly became obvious to the Core Team that all wilderness areas in Colorado are equally important and should be managed holistically. Keeping pristine areas pristine, managing to minimize environmental impacts and the need to research social impacts are considered primary goals. At the same time, it is crucial to follow the minimum tool philosophy and use management tools strategically. Managing use in wilderness Magnet Areas must be done cautiously in order to insure continued visitor enthusiasm for wilderness and to prevent displacement of visitors to pristine areas. We further recognized that the foundation of wilderness management must be the Wilderness Act. Twenty-two percent, almost one out of every four acres, of R2 land is designated wilderness and must have adequate funding to meet the Chief’s 10-Year Wilderness Stewardship Challenge (10-Y WSC). The ecologically irreplaceable value of wilderness to Colorado and the nation must become paramount in the decision making process of Congress and the Forest Service.

Core Team Members:

Clare Bastable, Colorado Mountain Club
Julie Chaney and Sherry Snead, Back Country Horseman of Colorado
Dave Cooper, Access Colorado
Kim Fredrick, Jefferson County Open Space
Mark Hesse, Rocky Mountain Field Institute
Walt Horner, Colorado Outdoor Training Initiative
Lee Lambert, Friends of Mount Evans & Lost Creek Wildernesses
Craig Mackey, Outward Bound
Thomas Phillips, The Public
Terrence J. Rapoport, The Colorado Fourteeners Initiative
Steve Smith, The Wilderness Society
Vera Smith, The Wilderness Society
Anne Vickery, Indian Wilderness Peaks Alliance, Core Team Chair

Core Team Liaison Members:

Steve Sherwood, Region 2, Director of Recreation, Heritage and Wilderness
Ralph Swain, Region 2, Wilderness, Wild and Scenic and Trails Program
Suzi Stutzman, Intermountain Region, Lead Planner/Wilderness Coordinator, NPS
Eric Finstick, Bureau of Land Management, Wilderness Program Specialist

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Note:

After each section title, you will find the 10-Y WSC elements that the section’s recommendations speak to. A complete list of the 10-Y WSC Elements can be found in the appendix.

LANDSCAPE LEVEL PLANNING RECOMMENDATIONS:

This section speaks to 10-Y WSC 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9

Region 2

1) With the assistance of the Aldo Leopold Wilderness Research Institute (ALWRI), develop and implement a state-wide, landscape-level plan for wilderness management which adheres to the goals of the Forest Plan and which:

- Implements a consistent state-wide eco-type protocol for Wilderness Character Monitoring;
- Establishes, maintains and retains non-motorized recreational opportunities outside wilderness especially near wilderness magnet areas;
 - Uses management prescriptions to provide a variety of recreational opportunities and experiences that protects historical uses.
- Establishes a management policy that anticipates and prepares for potential impact from displacement to areas away from or adjacent to wilderness magnet areas.
- Creates a social standard for on-trail and one for off-trail where the off-trail standard emphasizes solitude;
- Creates a consistent forest management policy that focuses on the preservation of currently pristine areas.
- The lead Forest must ensure landscape- level planning and coordination with interagency involvement, i.e. wilderness and natural areas managed by other federal, state, county and local agencies;

Rationale: A comprehensive state-wide approach must be taken to ensure wilderness areas are an enduring resource for Colorado and the nation.

2) Prevent wilderness areas from degrading to a lower management prescription. (Pristine to Primitive, Primitive to Semi-Primitive, etc.)

3) Revise management prescriptions so as to maximize and increase pristine 1.11 and primitive 1.12. This is especially critical for areas adjoining magnet and corridor areas.

4) Establish a policy which manages and funds magnet areas not at the expense of the lower use, pristine and semi pristine areas.

Rationale: Magnet areas cannot be managed separately from the entire system of wild lands. A Core Team primary concern is the preservation of pristine areas and less visited Colorado wilderness.

5) Establish, through the collection of social and ecological data, a baseline for the current condition of each of Colorado wilderness area. Once established, develop and implement, by wilderness, appropriate management strategies to address current and anticipated threats, by wilderness.

Rationale: Continued population growth and wilderness recreation requires dynamic management.

6) Recommendations from the landscape-level plan should be applied to all interagency (BLM, NPS, FWS) Colorado wilderness areas to protect future ecosystem damage.

FORESTS, DISTRICTS

7) Use popular wilderness destinations or Magnet Areas to educate visitors about the value of wilderness, and the need for protection and preservation of wilderness ecosystems.

8) Recommend more areas for wilderness designation, particularly near magnet areas.

Rationale: This is one tool to mitigate affects of displacement from magnet areas.

9) Use ecosystem protection as a priority in developing and implementing management tools in magnet areas.

WILDERNESS MANAGEMENT TOOLS RECOMMENDATIONS:

Speaks to the 10-Y WSC Elements 1, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10

REGION 2

- 1) Where current conditions are outside of established standards adhere to the standards.
- 2) Management of recreational use in wilderness should closely adhere to the Forest Service minimum requirement decision guide (MRDG, i.e. minimum tool) philosophy.
Rationale: This tool requires the minimum tools necessary in order to keep wilderness wild and to prevent over development and unnecessary structures.
- 3) Establish a single, sanctioned, user friendly website for accessing wilderness regulations and visitors use information including uniform practices and protocols for securing registration materials, permits or designated campsites.

FORESTS, DISTRICTS

- 4) MOUs should be better defined and tightened with Sheriffs, County, and Search and Rescue Teams. At the same time the public needs to be educated that recreating in wilderness carries certain inherent risks.
- 5) Different magnet areas (urban, 14ers, beautiful areas) require different types of solutions. Existing management tools must be utilized as appropriate in order to reduce and/or prevent ecological damage. Tools should be chosen with emphasis on preserving visitors' primitive experience and sense of solitude;
 - education
 - increased presence of wilderness rangers and volunteers;
 - sustainable trails;
 - manipulating ease of access;
 - control parking and control access areas;
 - overnight camping permits;
 - wilderness zones (for areas with overnight permit systems);
 - fire restrictions;
 - dog policies;
 - designated campsites;
 - manage human waste;
 - group size limits;
 - length of stay limits.

Rationale: The goal is to be proactive to prevent future damage.

- 6) Require camp stoves and insulating fire blankets, fire pans or LNT "mound" fires in pristine, high altitude, ecologically sensitive and impacted areas.
- 7) For each wilderness, sign and enforce consistent dog use policies.

- 8) Utilize Required Registration as a data gathering tool. Use the data to refine management and to look for displacement impacts.
- 9) Promote the use of appropriate human waste collection bags “wag bags, Restop, etc.” and packing out toilet paper, especially in magnet areas, high use sites and above timberline.
- 10) Each Forest should be vigilant for and adaptive to new technologies and management tools which will enhance the wilderness experience, educate users and mitigate impacts.

MAGNET AREA RECOMMENDATIONS:

Speaks to 10 Y WSC 4, 5, 6, 8, 9

REGION 2

1) Science, monitoring and planning are critical to wilderness management. R2 should enlist the ALWRI to complete a comprehensive research study of magnet wilderness sites that:

- Evaluates existing data and identify data gaps utilizing, in part, a Required Registration system;
- Develops solitude/crowding studies;
- Determines the threshold and definition of magnet areas;
- Identifies ecological and visitor use current conditions;
- Establishes site specific prescriptions;
- Evaluates the costs of implementing prescriptions and maintaining them over time;
- Develops a standardized site inventory and data collection protocols.

2) Management actions that displace visitors should be analyzed collaboratively among adjacent Forest, Districts and other agencies in order to anticipate and plan for the displacement with adequate ranger and volunteer presence.

Rationale: It is inappropriate to displace use to lesser used, more pristine areas.

3) Utilizing ALWRI to conduct solitude studies v. recreation studies, the appropriate research needs to be done in order to evaluate public reaction to use numbers.

4) If after physical and social impacts to magnet areas have been studied, and the current use numbers have been found to exceed standards then the Forest Service is encouraged to consider use limits and/or permits.

FORESTS, DISTRICTS

5) Increase Forest Service personnel presence in magnet areas.

6) Wilderness Managers must be particularly careful to protect pristine 1.11 and primitive 1.12 areas from “slipping” toward management prescriptions that exhibit greater human impacts, such as semi-primitive, etc. This is especially important in Magnet Areas and in pristine and primitive lands adjacent to Magnet Areas where displacement may be an issue (see Magnet Area Recommendations # 2).

7) The Forest Service must consider the minimum tool strategy to manage use, and mitigate impacts and avoid displacing use to more pristine areas.

8) Ecosystem impacts, not just visitor use numbers, should be the basis for implementing management tools.

9) Management in the magnet areas should utilize the toolbox, as defined in Wilderness

Management Tools, to reduce and/or prevent ecological damage.

10) Forest Supervisors are encouraged to utilize their Special Order authority to protect magnet areas.

11) Dedicate a person, not the Wilderness Ranger or Manager, to analyze data in specific magnet area and implement needed management tools.

PARTNERSHIPS, VOLUNTEERS, EDUCATION RECOMMENDATIONS:

Speaks to 10 Y WSC Elements 4, 7, 10

REGION 2

- 1) The Regional Office, through the new R2 Partnership Directors, should establish formal partnerships with foundations and organizations that focus on funding of the Chief's 10-Y WSC. The National Forest Foundation (NFF) needs to give stronger consideration to projects that meet the needs of the 10-Y WSC.
- 2) Assist partners in finding grants that benefit volunteer wilderness partnerships.
- 3) Partner with other government organizations to improve, expand and implement interpretive education programs on wilderness ethics, rules, regulations and LNT principle to visitors in other natural environments, i.e. parks, open space, etc.
- 4) Work with the Colorado Tourism Office to ensure that Tourism advertising for the State of Colorado incorporates stewardship and wilderness values.
- 5) Develop a consistent education training package that can be easily disseminated to individual volunteer organizations. The package must be designed for the maximum impact and distribution of information should be consistent.

FORESTS, DISTRICTS

- 6) **BOOTS ON THE GROUND.** The Forest Service should get back in the field. The field presence of wilderness rangers must increase and be part of their job description.
Rationale: Field presence is what the public wants to see.
- 7) The Forest Service must back up the Chief's 10-Y WSC by increasing Forest Service presence and wilderness volunteers.
- 8) Every Forest Supervisor/District Ranger with wilderness responsibility ought to attend and be a graduate of line officer training held at the ACNWTC.
- 9) Every Forest must have a dedicated Wilderness Manager to oversee the forest wilderness units. Wilderness should also be embraced and advocated for by all staff.
- 10) In the job descriptions of Wilderness Managers, specify established levels of certification in wilderness management and an on-going program of wilderness management correspondence courses.
- 11) Each District wilderness ranger must be given enough time in his or her job description to properly manage their wilderness responsibilities, including supervising wilderness volunteers and partners.

12) In order to meet the needs of the wilderness, work with the local community to establish, foster and support new or existing partners. (i.e. Friends Groups, Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), stakeholders and outfitters.)

13) Provide adequate training and uniforms for backcountry volunteer partners.

Rationale: On the ground District experience has shown that wilderness rangers and trained, uniformed backcountry volunteers are the most effective method of educating visitors regarding wilderness regulations and ethics.

14) All wilderness volunteer uniforms throughout Colorado should be the same (shirts, jackets, pants, hats, etc.) to provide a consistent presence across the entire region.

15) Re-establish wilderness ranger outreach program to go to public schools – i.e. Junior Rangers.

FUNDING RECOMMENDATIONS:

Speaks to 10 Y WSC Elements 4, 5, 7, 8, 10

REGION 2

1) The Regional Forester and the Chief should request adequate appropriations from Congress to enable Wilderness Managers to protect and preserve wilderness.

Rationale: Congress, having created the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS) needs to fund wilderness.

2) Provide funding to meet the challenge outlined in the Chief's 10 -Y WSC.

3) Develop a detailed estimate of what it will cost to fund management of each Colorado wilderness to standard.

Rationale: Wilderness managers and the public need this information to assess if Congress and the Forest Service are adequately funding wilderness.

4) The regional accounting process needs to improve accountability by identifying wilderness dollars as a separate and dedicated line item.

5) NGOs and wilderness partners are doing and will continue to do as much as possible to assist in wilderness management. The Forest Service must recognize that these partners are not in an organizational or financial position to solve the Forest Service wilderness funding problems.

FORESTS, DISTRICTS

6) A greater percentage of those revenues generated during recreational activities related to wilderness (concessionaires, outfitter fees, etc.) must be returned to the wilderness for management and protection. At a minimum Outfitter and Guide fees generated from wilderness activities should be retained for wilderness funding

Appendix

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Dave Cooper, Access Colorado
Kim Fredrick, Jefferson County Open Space
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Steve Smith, The Wilderness Society
Vera Smith, The Wilderness Society
Anne Vickery, Indian Wilderness Peaks Alliance, Core Team Chair

Documents Reviewed:

Research for Determining Visitor Use Capacities of the Boundaries Water
Canoe Area
Management of South Colony Basin
Required Registration Forms
Developing Social Standards for Wilderness Encounters in Mount Rainier
National Park: Manager-Defined Versus Visitor - Defined Standards
Federal Advisory Committee Act of 1972
Conference Report on H.R. 4818, Consolidated Appropriations Act. 2
Wilderness 10 Y-WSC Challenge Guidebook and 10
The Wilderness Act Handbook, 40th Anniversary Edition
Recreation Enhancement Act

To: Colorado Wilderness Recreation Forum
c/o Mr. Ralph Swain
Rocky Mountain Regional Office
USDA Forest Service

It was my pleasure to join you in the first Colorado Wilderness Recreation Forum in Golden, this past Tuesday, April 18. The interest and energy in support of the Forest Service and management of the Colorado's 14ers was impressive. I appreciate the generous attention you showed toward my presentation of results from our book, *The Multiple Values of Wilderness* (Venture Publishing 2005). I also appreciate the efforts of Ralph Swain, Loretta McEllhiney, and Steve Sherwood in organizing the Forum. These are truly dedicated public land managers.

There are a number of points from my presentation that I would like to revisit with you as your group moves forward with additional forums and field trips. They include:

- The federal land system came about through the deliberate efforts of some key people who saw the value of reserving some of the country's natural lands for the future. From National Forests to National Parks and other federal lands, they helped shape a system of federal lands then and now unrivaled in the world. Their intention was that all Americans would share in the ownership of these lands for our mutual benefit, now and through the future.
- Although our federal lands are mostly natural, they are increasingly influenced by human use and presence. A major driver of this influence is population growth. As world population grows, so too does the United States' population. Projections to the year 2100 indicate a likely doubling of population. With greater population comes development and conversion of private lands, urban and rural, including private lands next to federal lands.
- Land development is accelerating, especially in many of the sections of the country that have high natural amenities. Often the most attractive natural amenities are the federal lands. This is certainly true of Colorado, including this state's heritage of National Forests.
- Among the federal lands, there still are areas that are mostly wild and little influenced by human activity. Many of these wild lands have been designated as areas within the National Wilderness Preservation System.
- Most Americans tell us they support designation of federal wild lands as Wilderness, and many feel we should designate even more of these lands as Wilderness. We Americans, as the joint owners of Wilderness, socially value it most for its contributions to cleaner water and air.
- Additional values held by large percentages of Americans include protection of wildlife habitat; protection of rare, threatened and endangered species; and protection so that future generations will also have wild lands.
- Economic benefits from Wilderness are of two types—on-site recreation use and passive off-site appreciation. As measured by economists, on-site recreation use is valued at \$464 million annually. This is the estimated direct benefit to recreation users of Wilderness. Off-site passive appreciation (for options to use in the future, for future generations of others to use, and for knowing simply that Wilderness exists) is valued by society at an estimated \$3.34 billion annually. Passive values are about 7 times the value of on-site recreation use.
- In addition to social and economic values, Wilderness also has ecological and intrinsic value. The key indicator of ecological value of Wilderness is its naturalness, which is the necessary condition for support of native life forms. Intrinsic value can exist whether we as humans realize it or not—it is the inherent value of wild lands to function autonomously in ways of their own "choosing".
- By statute and by social choice, Wilderness is a national resource deserving of the voice of its national owners (all Americans) when options regarding its future are being considered. While local interests and recreational use interests are important in considering options, knowing the national interests (values) of the American people are vital in decision making.

I look forward to staying in touch with you as the Forums and core group work toward a report for the Regional Forester. The presentation I offered at the Forum Tuesday can be found under "Presentations" at www.srs.fs.fed.us/trends. Please let me and my co-authors know if we can help further.

H. Ken Cordell, Senior Scientist
Forestry Sciences Laboratory
USDA Forest Service, Athens, Georgia

CHIEF'S 10-YEAR WILDERNESS STEWARDSHIP CHALLENGE ELEMENTS

The goal of the Chief's 10-Year Wilderness Stewardship Challenge is that within 10 years, every Forest Service unit of the National Wilderness Preservation System will meet at least 6 of 10 stewardship elements. Currently, only 18 percent of the FS wilderness units meet minimum standard. Following are the current stewardship elements and potential questions that must be addressed to meet the element:

1. Wilderness is covered by a fire plan that allows for the full range of management responses.
 - What are the effects of fire exclusion?
 - What are the fuels in wilderness?
 - What are the logical (natural) fire boundaries?
 - What is the pattern of lightning?
2. Wilderness is successfully treated for noxious/invasive plants.
 - Where are the invasive species?
 - What are the ecosystem effects of invasive species?
 - How do we effectively treat invasive species?
3. Air quality monitoring is conducted and baseline is established.
 - Which lakes, lichens are sensitive to acid deposition?
 - What is the special pattern of ozone? Where it forms and where it hits is important.
4. Wilderness education plans are implemented.
 - Where do we find the capacity to make visitor contacts at the trailhead and within wilderness to inform visitors about proper behavior to minimize impacts to the resource?
5. Wilderness has adequate standards, in which monitored conditions are within forest plan standards, and opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation are stable or increasing.
 - Identify quiet places, are they changing?
6. Wilderness has completed recreation site inventory.
 - What are the baseline site inventories?
 - What is the connection between use, sites and changes?
7. Outfitter and guide permit operating plans are in place that direct outfitters to model appropriate wilderness practices and incorporate appreciation for wilderness values in their interaction with clients.
 - How can we help outfitter/guides and their clients understand wilderness?
 - What is the performance of outfitter/guides in the field?
8. Wilderness has a full-range of adequate standards which prevent degradation of the wilderness resource.
 - What are the Forest Plan standards for wilderness?
9. Wilderness managers have their priority information needs addressed through data collection and corporate applications.
 - How can we get the data we already have entered and analyzed?
10. Wilderness has a baseline workforce (from workforce assessment) in place for each wilderness.
 - How do we figure out how many people are needed to accomplish the work of wilderness?

Colorado Wilderness Areas of Concern:

