

Wilderness Group Size FAQ's

Sandia Mountain Wilderness - Cibola National Forest



Where are there group size limits? Group size limits are in effect within the Sandia Mountain Wilderness. The “transition zone” permits up to 25 Persons At One Time (PAOT) whereas the “semi-primitive zone” permits up to 10 PAOT. Refer to [Order 03-0422](#) for a map of zones within the Sandia Mountain Wilderness.

Are there signs telling me when I’ve entered the semi-primitive /transition zone? There are no signs to indicate entry/exit from one zone to another. However, utilizing the map included with the Order, a reasonable estimate of location should be attainable. For example, the Pino Trail (#140) enters the Semi-Primitive zone shortly after entering the Sandia Mountain Wilderness boundary whereas the La Luz Trail (#137) is located entirely within the Transition zone allowing groups up to 25 PAOT.

What is wilderness? The Wilderness Act, signed into law in 1964, created the National Wilderness Preservation System and recognized wilderness as “an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain.” The Act further defined wilderness as “an area of undeveloped Federal land retaining its primeval character and influence without permanent improvements or human habitation, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions”

Why are there group size limits? Placing limits on group size is a management technique used to help maintain and protect wilderness character which is defined in part as an area with outstanding opportunities for both solitude and unconfined, primitive recreation.

Why now? The Forest Service is mandated by law to administer and manage wilderness in accordance with the Wilderness Act of 1964 which includes wilderness character. Adaptive management of wilderness includes identifying current trends of use and implementing measures to preserve wilderness character. The Sandia Mountain Wilderness receives high amounts of visitation from large groups annually which may threaten visitor’s opportunities for solitude.

But the Sandias are right next to Albuquerque, can't you "relax" the rules? The 1978 Endangered American Wilderness Act which created the Sandia Mountain Wilderness stated "these and other undeveloped national forest lands exhibiting wilderness values are immediately threatened by pressures of a growing and more mobile population, large-scale industrial and economic growth, and development and uses inconsistent with the protection, maintenance, restoration, and enhancement of their wilderness character" (Public Law 95-237, Endangered American Wilderness Act of 1978, February 24, 1978). A part of the intent in creating the Sandia Mountain Wilderness was to retain primitive lands adjacent to urban areas, and the implementation of group size regulations (as well as others) helps ensure the continued intent of designation.

Can we split up our group along the trail or into separate smaller groups? Order 03-0422 defines a group as "an organized or loosely formed group of individuals taking a wilderness trip whereby the group usually, but not always, begins and ends the trip as one collected party." Groups whether hiking as a whole or in parts must be within the designated number. However, splitting your group into smaller groups on different trails is permitted.

We don't want to split up our group so are there alternative options? Choose a non-wilderness trail. A number of trails exist outside the Sandia Mountain Wilderness that offer varying levels of challenge as well as scenic beauty.

Are there other special rules in wilderness? Yes, for example, mechanized travel (such as bicycles) is prohibited within wilderness as is the use of mechanized equipment such as chainsaws. Did you know trails in the Sandia Mountain Wilderness are maintained with crosscut saws?

STILL HAVE QUESTIONS?

LINKS TO MORE INFORMATION ON WILDERNESS:

- www.wilderness.net
- <http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/recreation/wilderness/faq/index.shtml>
- Group Use Brochure - <http://www.lnt.org/training/PDFs/Group%20Use%20Brochure.pdf>



CROSSCUT SAW – USED TO CLEAR TRAIL IN WILDERNESS

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