

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Gallatin National Forest, in cooperation with the University of Montana, recently completed an updated wilderness character monitoring report for the Hyalite Porcupine Buffalo Horn Wilderness Study Area (HPBH WSA). The Forest has been engaged in documenting changes to wilderness character for over a decade, in preparation for revisions to the Gallatin National Forest Travel Management Plan. This report builds on Schlenker (2003) to better articulate baseline data describing wilderness character in the HPBH WSA.

Recent efforts to standardize wilderness character monitoring (e.g. Landres et al. 2005; Landres et al. 2008) have provided an improved structure and template for building wilderness character monitoring assessments. These efforts are guided by the 1964 Wilderness Act itself, using the statutory language of the Act to identify four qualities of wilderness: “untrammeled”, “natural”, “undeveloped” and “solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation”. These four qualities, with associated indicators and measures, structured and informed the wilderness character monitoring efforts reported here for the HPBH WSA. Additionally, the Forest Service Northern Region recently provided an interpretation of “baseline” wilderness character measures appropriate for designated Wilderness in the Northern Region that are largely applicable to the Region’s WSAs as well. This interpretation was also used to identify measures and structure reporting for the HPBH WSA. The ultimate intent of this assessment is to employ standardized monitoring protocols for a set of measures that address each monitoring question and indicator, are easily replicated, and capitalize on readily available data from ongoing monitoring efforts across the Greater Yellowstone Area.

This report makes no attempt to characterize trend. Rather, this effort clearly establishes a “baseline” of wilderness conditions in the HPBH WSA as a snapshot in time. Historic data that mirrors this protocol is largely lacking for most elements, so trend assessments are not yet possible. Additionally, prior to assessing trend following the next round of monitoring, the Forest will need to establish what constitutes “significant change” thresholds, and assign weights for each measure that reflect local and regional importance. Table 3 in this report sets up the format for aggregating data following subsequent monitoring efforts. Please refer to Table 8 in *Keeping it Wild* (Landres et al. 2008) for an example of a populated wilderness character monitoring trend summary.

This monitoring effort makes no decisions, but rather is simply an aggregation of what was learned through on-the-ground monitoring efforts in 2011, combined with existing data relevant to the specific measures. This report provides a solid basis for documenting future changes in wilderness character across this landscape, and can help inform proposed managerial actions and quantify their impact on the wilderness character of the HPBH WSA.