



FSH 1909.12 - LAND MANAGEMENT PLANNING HANDBOOK
CHAPTER 70 - WILDERNESS EVALUATION

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70 – Revises chapter in its entirety. Removes codes, captions, and obsolete direction and establishes codes, captions, and sets forth new direction throughout the chapter.

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This chapter describes the process for identifying and evaluating lands that may be suitable for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS) and determine whether to recommend any such lands for wilderness designation.

70.1 - Authority

The purpose of wilderness and the broad direction for managing wilderness are in the Wilderness Act of 1964 (16 U.S.C. 1131–1136, 78 Stat 890) and the Eastern Wilderness Act of 1975 (16 U.S.C. 1132). Land Management Planning process requirements are in Title 36, Code of Federal Regulations, section 219.7 (36 CFR 219.7), and FSM 1923.

In developing a proposed new plan or proposed plan revision, the responsible official shall:

...

(v) Identify and evaluate lands that may be suitable for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System and determine whether to recommend any such lands for wilderness designation. (36 CFR 219.7(c)(2))

70.5 - Definitions

Forest road. A road wholly or partly within or adjacent to and serving the National Forest System (NFS) that the Forest Service determines is necessary for the protection, administration, and utilization of the NFS and the use and development of its resources. (36 CFR 212.1)

Maintenance levels. the level of service provided by, and maintenance required for, a specific road. (FSH 7709.59, ch. 60, (62.3))

1. LEVEL 1. These are roads that have been placed in storage between intermittent uses. The period of storage must exceed 1 year. Basic custodial maintenance is performed to prevent damage to adjacent resources and to perpetuate the road for future resource management needs. Emphasis is normally given to maintaining drainage facilities and runoff patterns. Planned road deterioration may occur at this level. Appropriate traffic management strategies are to "prohibit" and "eliminate" all traffic. These roads are not shown on motor vehicle use maps.

Roads receiving level 1 maintenance may be of any type, class, or construction standard, and may be managed at any other maintenance level during the time they are open for traffic. However, while being maintained at level 1, they are closed to vehicular traffic but may be available and suitable for nonmotorized uses.

2. LEVEL 2. Assigned to roads open for use by high clearance vehicles. Passenger car traffic, user comfort, and user convenience are not considerations. Warning signs

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and traffic control devices are not provided with the exception that some signing, such as W-18-1 “No Traffic Signs,” may be posted at intersections. Motorists should have no expectations of being alerted to potential hazards while driving these roads. Traffic is normally minor, usually consisting of one or a combination of administrative, permitted, dispersed recreation, or other specialized uses. Log haul may occur at this level. Appropriate traffic management strategies are either to “discourage” or “prohibit” passenger cars. “Accept” or “discourage” strategies may be employed for high clearance vehicles.

3. LEVEL 3. Assigned to roads open and maintained for travel by a prudent driver in a standard passenger car. User comfort and convenience are not considered priorities. The Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) is applicable. Warning signs and traffic control devices are provided to alert motorists of situations that may violate expectations.

Roads in this maintenance level are typically low speed with single lanes and turnouts. Appropriate traffic management strategies are either to "encourage" or "accept" passenger cars. "Discourage" or "prohibit" strategies may be employed for certain classes of vehicles or users.

4. LEVEL 4. Assigned to roads that provide a moderate degree of user comfort and convenience at moderate travel speeds. Most roads are double lane and aggregate surfaced. However, some roads may be single lane. Some roads may be paved and/or dust abated. MUTCD is applicable. The most appropriate traffic management strategy is to "encourage" passenger cars. However, the "prohibit" strategy may apply to specific classes of vehicles or users at certain times.

5. LEVEL 5. Assigned to roads that provide a high degree of user comfort and convenience. These roads are normally double lane, paved facilities. Some may be aggregate surfaced and dust abated. MUTCD is applicable. The appropriate traffic management strategy is to "encourage" passenger cars.

70.6 - Process

Responsible official shall use the following process for identifying and evaluating lands that may be suitable for inclusion in the NWPS and determine whether to recommend any such lands for wilderness designation. All plan revisions or new plans must complete this process (36 CFR 219.7 (c)(2)(v)).

This process has a sequence of steps: identification and inventory, evaluation, analysis, and decision.

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1. Inventory (sec. 71): The responsible official shall identify and create an inventory of all lands that may be suitable for inclusion in the NWPS. The inventory must be broad and inclusive. To develop the inventory, the responsible official shall identify lands based on a set of inventory criteria. In addition, the responsible official shall review information provided during the assessment (FSH 1909.12, ch. 10). Inclusion in the inventory is not a designation that conveys or requires a particular kind of management. Lands included in the inventory must be documented and identified on a map. This map will be available for public participation opportunities during the plan revision or development process.
2. Evaluation (sec. 72): The responsible official shall evaluate the wilderness characteristics of each area in the inventory using a set of criteria based on the Wilderness Act of 1964 and document each of the evaluations completed. The responsible official shall include the documentation of the inventory and evaluation of these areas in the planning record. This documentation will be available for public participation opportunities during the plan revision or development process.
3. Analysis (sec. 73): The responsible official shall consider the areas evaluated and determine, based upon the evaluations and input from the public, which specific areas to carry forward in the applicable National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) document for further analysis and public participation opportunities. These areas must be identified within the applicable NEPA document as part of one or more alternatives. Not all lands included in the inventory and subsequent evaluations are required to be carried forward for further analysis.
4. Decision (sec. 74): The responsible official shall decide, based upon the analysis disclosed in the applicable NEPA document and input from the public, which areas, if any, to recommend for inclusion in the NWPS, and shall identify any such lands in the final decision document for the plan.

The responsible official should use the public participation opportunities provided as part of the broader planning process (FSH 1909.12, ch. 40) to engage the public and other governments to provide feedback and input on the inventory, evaluation, and analysis of areas for wilderness recommendation, and may provide additional participation opportunities specifically on this topic as necessary.

71 - IDENTIFICATION AND INVENTORY OF AREAS THAT MAY BE SUITABLE FOR INCLUSION IN THE NATIONAL WILDERNESS PRESERVATION SYSTEM

The primary function of the identification and inventory step is to comprehensively identify all lands that may have wilderness characteristics within the plan area, using a transparent process. Lands included in the inventory will be carried forward for further evaluation. Inclusion in the inventory is not a designation that conveys or requires a particular kind of management.

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The inventory is intended to be broad and inclusive, based on a set of inventory criteria and additional information provided to the responsible official during the assessment (FSH 1909.12, ch. 10). The responsible official will document the inventory and make a map of the lands included in the inventory available to the public during the public participation process and as part of the applicable NEPA documents.

71.1 - Inventory

Start the inventory by considering all lands within the planning area. For these lands, identify and create an inventory of all lands that may be suitable for inclusion in the NWPS using the criteria and steps outlined in section 71.2.

71.2 - Inventory Criteria**71.21 - Size Criteria**

Include areas meeting one of the following criteria:

1. The area contains 5,000 acres or more.
2. The area contains less than 5,000 acres but is of sufficient size as to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition. Examples of such areas can be as small as a self-contained island or canyon, or large enough to be effectively managed as a separate unit of the NWPS.
3. Areas contiguous to existing wilderness, primitive areas, administratively recommended wilderness, or wilderness inventories of other Federal ownership, regardless of their size.

71.22 - Improvements Criteria**71.22a - Roads Improvements**

When considering road-related criteria, the responsible official shall use existing information about roads and routes within the plan area.

1. Include in the inventory, areas that contain the following improvements:
 - a. Areas that contain forest roads maintained to level 1;
 - b. Areas with any routes that are unauthorized or temporary, or forest roads that are identified for decommissioning;

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- c. Areas with forest roads that are anticipated during other planning processes for disinvesting future road maintenance activities to a level 1;
 - d. Areas with historical wagon routes, historical mining routes, or other settlement era transportation features considered part of the historical and cultural landscape of the area.
2. Except as provided in (1)(b) or (c) above, exclude from the inventory areas that contain:
 - a. Permanently authorized roads validated by a Federal court or the Department of the Interior for which a valid easement or interest has been properly recorded, or
 - b. Forest roads maintained to levels 3, 4, or 5.
 3. Evaluate areas that contain forest roads maintained to level 2, or levels 3, 4 or 5 where those roads are anticipated to be disinvested to a level 2. Include such areas in the inventory unless they are clearly unsuitable for inclusion in the NWPS, based on one or more of the following factors:
 - a. The road has been improved and is maintained by mechanical means to ensure relatively regular and continuous use.
 - b. Road density is so high that either wilderness character is clearly not present, or future preservation of the area as wilderness would not be possible.
 - c. A project level decision supported by NEPA analysis has been made in favor of continuous public access to and use of the road.
 - d. Other on-the-ground knowledge of the level 2 road that would preclude evaluation and consideration of the area during the public participation process as potentially suitable for wilderness recommendation.

71.22b - Other Improvements

Include in the inventory areas with other improvements as follows:

1. Airstrips and heliports.
2. Vegetation treatments that are not substantially noticeable, or if wilderness character can be maintained or restored through appropriate management actions. This can include plantations or plantings where the use of mechanical equipment or evidence of vegetative manipulation (cultivation, terrain contouring, and vegetative type conversions) is present from past management practices.

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3. Timber harvest areas where logging and prior road construction are not substantially noticeable, or if wilderness character can be maintained or restored through appropriate management actions.
4. Permanently installed vertical structures, such as electronic installations including cell towers, television, radio, and telephone repeaters, and the like, provided their impact, as well as their maintenance and access needs, is minimal.
5. Areas of historic mining where impacts are not substantially noticeable or if wilderness character can be maintained or restored through appropriate management actions.
6. Areas of mining activity where impacts are not substantially noticeable, or if wilderness character can be maintained or restored through appropriate management actions.
7. Range improvement areas (FSM 2240.5), involving minor structural improvements (for example, fences or water troughs) and nonstructural improvements (chaining, burning, spraying, potholing, and so forth) that are not substantially noticeable, or if wilderness character can be maintained or restored through appropriate management actions.
8. Recreation improvements, such as occupancy spots, or minor hunting, or outfitter camps. As a general rule, do not include developed sites. Areas with minor, easily removable recreation developments may be included.
9. Ground-return telephone lines, electric lines, and power lines if a right-of-way has not been cleared. Exclude power lines with cleared right-of-ways, pipelines, and other permanently installed linear right-of-way structures.
10. Watershed treatment areas (contouring, diking, channeling) that are not substantially noticeable, or if wilderness character can be maintained or restored through appropriate management actions. Areas may include minor watershed treatments that have been accomplished manually such as small hand-constructed gully plugs.
11. Lands adjacent to development or activities that impact opportunities for solitude. The fact that non-wilderness activities or uses can be seen or heard from within any portion of the area, shall not, of itself, preclude inclusion in the inventory. It is appropriate to extend boundaries to the edges of development for purposes of inclusion in the inventory.
12. Structures, dwellings, and other relics of past occupation when they are considered part of the historical and cultural landscape of the area.

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Review the information provided as part of the planning assessment done pursuant to FSH 1909.12, chapter 10 to determine whether any areas in addition to those identified in 71.2 should be included in the inventory for the purpose of carrying them forward to the evaluation stage.

71.4 - Documentation for the Identified and Inventoried Areas

The responsible official shall document the process used to identify and inventory areas. The purpose is to present a transparent description of how the inventory process was conducted.

Record each area included in the inventory on a map of the planning area. In addition, identify on the same map (or a series of maps), at a minimum, the following lands:

1. Existing designated wilderness and primitive areas.
2. Congressionally designated wilderness study areas, and any wilderness proposals pending before Congress. Indicate relevant statutory dates, if any.
3. Areas identified in the Forest Service Roadless Area Conservation Final Environmental Impact Statement (Volume 2, November 2000), or in a Forest Service State-specific roadless rule, or identified as undeveloped or for primitive non-motorized management in the current land management plan.
4. Areas that are undeveloped but which did not meet the inventory criteria in section 71.2 (for example, because the area is less than 5,000 acres and is not of sufficient size to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition, or because a vegetation treatment is substantially noticeable).
5. NFS lands statutorily designated for management for non-wilderness purposes. Indicate effective dates, if any.
6. Other areas that the responsible official determines would be useful to show on the map to facilitate effective and transparent public participation and input on this topic.

72 - EVALUATION

The primary function of the evaluation step is to comprehensively evaluate, pursuant to criteria set forth in the Wilderness Act of 1964, the wilderness characteristics of each area identified during the inventory process outlined in section 71. The responsible official shall provide opportunities for public participation when evaluating lands identified in the inventory. Not all

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lands evaluated are required to be carried forward for further NEPA analysis for potential recommendation for inclusion in the NWPS (secs. 73 and 74).

72.1 - Evaluation of Wilderness Characteristics

For each area identified and inventoried as outlined and documented in section 71, evaluate its potential suitability for inclusion in the NWPS using criteria included in the Wilderness Act of 1964, section 2 (c), as follows:

1. Evaluate the degree to which the area generally appears to be affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprints of man's work substantially unnoticeable (naturalness). Consider such factors as:
 - a. The composition of plant and animal communities;
 - b. The extent to which the area reflects ecological conditions that would normally be associated with the area absent human intervention; and
 - c. The extent to which improvements included in the inventory (sec. 71.22) represent a departure from naturalness.
2. Evaluate the degree to which the area has outstanding opportunities for solitude or for a primitive and unconfined type of recreation. The word "or" means that an area only has to possess one or the other. The area does not have to possess outstanding opportunities for both elements, nor does it need to have outstanding opportunities on every acre.

Consider impacts that are pervasive and that influence a visitor's opportunity for solitude. Factors that may be considered include topography, presence of screening, distance from impacts, degree of permanent intrusions, and sights and sounds from outside the area.

Consider the opportunity to engage in primitive-type or unconfined recreation activities that lead to a visitor's ability to feel a part of nature. Factors that may be considered include the degree of challenge or risk while using outdoor skills. Examples of primitive-type recreation activities include wildlife observation, hiking, backpacking, horseback riding, fishing, hunting, floating, kayaking, cross-country skiing, camping, and enjoying nature.

3. Evaluate how an area less than 5,000 acres is of sufficient size as to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition.
4. Evaluate the degree to which the area may also contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value. These values are not required to be present in an area for the area to be recommended for inclusion in the

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NWPS, but their presence should be identified and evaluated where they exist. Such features or values may include:

- a. Rare plant or animal communities or rare ecosystems. Rare can be determined locally, regionally, nationally, or within the system of protected designations.
 - b. Outstanding landscape features such as waterfalls, mountains, viewpoints, water bodies, or geologic features.
 - c. Historic and cultural resource sites.
 - d. Potential or existing research natural areas.
 - e. High quality water resources or important watershed features.
5. Evaluate the degree to which the area may be managed to preserve its wilderness characteristics. Consider such factors as:
- a. Shape and configuration of the area;
 - b. Legally established rights or uses within the area;
 - c. Specific Federal or state laws that may be relevant to availability of the area for wilderness or the ability to manage the area to protect wilderness characteristics; and
 - d. The presence and amount of non-Federal land in the area.

72.2 - Documentation for Evaluated Areas

Document the evaluation and include this documentation, along with the map(s) required by section 71.4, in the planning record. The intent is to ensure that the process for inventory and evaluation is transparent and accessible to the public for input and feedback. This documentation will be available for public participation opportunities during the plan revision or development process.

73 - ANALYSIS

Based on the evaluation and input from the public participation opportunities, the responsible official shall identify which specific areas, or portions thereof, from the evaluation to carry forward in the applicable NEPA document (36 CFR 219, FSM 1920, and FSH 1909.15). These areas must be identified within the applicable NEPA document as part of one or more alternatives of lands to be included in a recommendation for wilderness. Not all lands included in the inventory and subsequent evaluations are required to be carried forward in an alternative.

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These documents will be made available for public review and comment and include, at a minimum:

1. Name and number of acres included in the area to be considered for recommendation.
2. Location and a description of a recommended boundary for each area. To identify a clearly defined boundary for each area, evaluate how the location of the boundary will support management of the area for wilderness and other adjacent uses. Where possible, boundaries should be easy to identify and to locate on the ground. Potential boundaries can be identified as follows, listed in descending order of desirability:
 - a. Use of natural features that are locatable both on the map and on the ground. Examples include, but are not limited to perennial streams, well-defined ridges, mountain peaks, and well-defined natural lake shorelines. If a stream is used, note whether the thread (centerline of a stream) or either bank (to mean high water line) has been used.
 - b. Use of human-made features that are locatable on the map and on the ground. Examples include, but are not limited to roads, trails, dams, powerlines, pipelines, and bridges. Where a human-made feature is used, note whether the feature itself forms the boundary or whether the boundary has been set back from the feature, and by what distance. Setbacks should be used only where necessary for future maintenance of the human-made feature.
 - c. Use of previously surveyed lines or legally determined lines such as section and township lines, section subdivision lines, metes and bounds property lines, county or State boundaries, or national park or Indian reservation boundaries.
 - d. Use of a straight line from one locatable point to another. These points should normally be high points in the landscape as they must be visible to be effective.
 - e. Use of a series of bearings and distances between locatable points as in a metes and bounds survey. Use this technique when other methods are not available or practicable.
3. A brief description of the general geography, topography, and vegetation of the recommended area.
4. A brief description of the current uses and management of the area.
5. A description of the area's wilderness characteristics and the ability to protect and manage the area so as to preserve its wilderness characteristics.

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6. A brief summary of the factors considered and the process used in evaluating the area and developing the alternative(s).

74 - DECISION

A decision on specific areas to recommend for inclusion in the NWPS will be made by the responsible official based on the analysis disclosed in the applicable NEPA document and input received during public participation opportunities. This decision will be included in the final decision document for the plan. The final decision document will identify the wilderness recommendation proposal as a “preliminary administrative recommendation” and qualify it by stating that:

This recommendation is a preliminary administrative recommendation. The Congress has reserved the authority to make final decisions on wilderness designation. Plan implementation is not dependent on final outcome of the areas recommended for wilderness designation.

The decision must include a summary of the information required in steps 1-6 in section 73 for each area recommended for inclusion in the NWPS. Furthermore, the plan must include plan components to provide for the management of areas recommended for wilderness designation to protect and maintain the ecological and social characteristics that provide the basis for their suitability for wilderness designation 36 CFR 219.10 (b) (iv) and FSH 1909.12, chapter 20).

Additionally, the final decision document must recognize lands in the inventory and evaluation which were not recommended for inclusion in the NWPS and briefly identify or describe what management direction is provided in the plan for those lands.

Once a final decision has been made and documented as outlined in section 74, a notification letter documenting the recommendation made through the land management planning process will be prepared and submitted to Congress.