

Recommended Wilderness in Land and Resource Management Plans

Topic: Recommended Wilderness in Forest Plan Revision

Purpose: During plan revision, the national forests and grasslands will be evaluating the areas that were recommended for wilderness designation in the first round of planning to determine if they should still be recommended. They also will be conducting a rigorous assessment of all other inventoried roadless areas to determine if they should also be recommended. For all of these areas, the planning team needs to determine, through the wilderness evaluation process, whether an area is capable of wilderness designation and if it is available for wilderness consideration. The availability assessment determines the best future recreation use of that area.

Guidance: If it is determined that the area is best suited to wilderness designation, the desired condition (dc) and standards should support those conclusions by restricting uses that would jeopardize the capability and availability of the area. If there are existing uses that may threaten the capability and availability of the area, forests should choose to implement one of the following actions:

1. Eliminate those uses that threaten the capability and availability either through a standard in the forest plan or a subsequent record of decision.
2. Adjust the management area boundary to eliminate the area with established uses,
3. Not recommend the area for wilderness designation.

Background: FSM 1923.03 provides direction on management of recommended wilderness:

“A roadless area being evaluated and ultimately recommended for wilderness or wilderness study is not available for any use or activity that may reduce the area’s wilderness potential. Activities currently permitted may continue, pending designation, if the activities do not compromise wilderness values of the roadless area.”

Through the first round of planning, approximately 1.3 million acres of inventoried roadless was recommended for wilderness designation in R1. The plan standards for most of those areas allowed for existing uses to continue as long as they did not degrade wilderness character. These standards are vague and have resulted in problems:

- **Lack of understanding of wilderness characteristics.** There has been some confusion over how wilderness characteristics are defined and what activities or what level of use would result in degradation of wilderness characteristics. In some areas, uses have changed or certain types of uses have increased significantly, possibly degrading wilderness characteristics. In most cases, use has not been monitored closely enough, if at all, to make a call on how use has changed over the years.
- **Inconsistent management of recommended wilderness across the region.** Some areas are managed by more than one unit and the units have different management approaches, particularly for motorized recreation. This results in public confusion and can result in encroachments of illegal activities on to the adjacent forest.

- **Loss of opportunity to consider areas for wilderness recommendation.** In some areas, uses have become established over the years that have now precluded the area from being recommended. Certain segments of the public come to expect those uses will continue and there is a perceived economic dependency by local communities on those uses. A management scheme that protects the areas capability and availability needs to be implemented and expectations that the use will be long term should not be established.