

Wilderness: An Enduring Resource

A wide-angle landscape photograph of a mountain range. The foreground shows a rocky, reddish-brown outcrop on the left. The middle ground is a vast valley with a winding river and several smaller mountain peaks. The background features a long, continuous range of jagged, snow-capped mountain peaks under a clear blue sky. The top of the image is framed by a dark blue gradient bar.

National Wilderness
Preservation System

Wilderness: America's Legacy

Wilderness is an indispensable part of the American story. Native Americans depended on the bounty of wilderness for survival and held Earth and its wild places as sacred. The great western explorers Meriwether Lewis and William Clark were inspired by the untamed beauty of wilderness that became the forge upon which our uniquely American national character was created. But after just 200 years, the essential wildness of America virtually disappeared. As Americans realized that the long-term health and welfare of the nation were at risk, a vision for conservation emerged.

In 1964, our nation's leaders formally acknowledged the immediate and lasting benefits of wild places to the human spirit and fabric of our nation. That year, in

a nearly unanimous vote, Congress enacted landmark legislation that permanently protected some of the most natural and undisturbed places in America. The Wilderness Act established the National Wilderness Preservation System to *"...secure for the American people of present and future generations the benefits of an enduring resource of wilderness."*

A uniquely American idea, wilderness is part of our heritage and passed as a legacy to our children. Indispensable to the American past, the legacy that is wilderness will remain indispensable to the American future.

The Wilderness Act

Howard Zahniser wrote the first draft of the Wilderness Act in 1956. Although he steered the draft through 65 rewrites and 18 public hearings, he died just four months before it was signed into law on September 3, 1964, by Lyndon B. Johnson. The Act is the guiding piece of legislation for all wilderness areas and describes wilderness as:

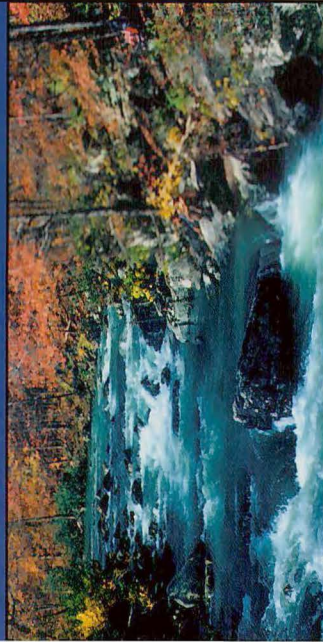


Howard Zahniser, author of the Wilderness Act

- *"...lands designated for preservation and protection in their natural condition..."*
- *"...an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man..."*
- *"...an area of undeveloped Federal land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvement or human habitation..."*
- *"...generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable..."*
- *"...has outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation..."*
- *"...shall be devoted to the public purposes of recreational, scenic, scientific, educational, conservation, and historic use."*



Glacier Bay Wilderness, Alaska



Buffalo National River Wilderness, Arkansas



Hawaii Volcanoes Wilderness, Hawaii



North McCullough Wilderness, Nevada



Superstition Wilderness, Arizona



Great Swamp Wilderness, New Jersey

Benefits of Wilderness

Wilderness areas contribute significantly to our nation's health and well-being. The benefits these areas provide are as diverse as the areas themselves and far exceed the mere acreage protected.

Yet protection does not ensure sanctuary from events that threaten wilderness character. The federal managing agencies, together with American citizens, must rise to the challenge of protecting these benefits and preserving our wilderness legacy.

Water and Air—Americans value wilderness most because these areas are sources of clean water and air. While the benefits of wilderness transcend its boundaries, they are threatened by forces outside wilderness. Pollution decreases water and air quality that people, plants and animals rely on. Preserving wilderness preserves clean water and air.

Wildlife—Americans value the wildlife that is protected in wilderness, from grizzly bears to wildflowers. Wilderness protects natural processes, including natural disturbances like fire, which give rise to rich biodiversity. Wildlife is threatened by non-native species, pollutants, and the suppression of natural processes. Preserving wilderness preserves wildlife.

Recreation—Wilderness was created for the use and enjoyment of the American people. Many people who visit wilderness are inspired and humbled by the feeling of being part of something larger than one's self. Wilderness is a haven for self-discovery and rejuvenation. Visitors must be aware that high use of sensitive areas threatens the untrammeled quality of wilderness. Preserving the integrity of wilderness ensures its unique recreational value.

Economics—Wilderness areas have a positive impact on local and regional economies and support many high quality jobs. From sales to service, the economic benefits of wilderness influence every avenue of business that relies on this resource. Diminishing wilderness character threatens the far reaching economic benefits of wilderness. Preserving wilderness helps to preserve a healthy economy.

Legacy—Americans from all walks of life value the wilderness legacy. This legacy is passed on from generation to generation by many who will never visit wilderness, yet value its undisturbed quality. Failure to preserve the untrammeled and natural conditions of these areas threatens this legacy. Preserving wilderness character preserves our wilderness legacy.



Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, MN

"If future generations are to remember us with gratitude rather than contempt, we must leave them more than the miracles of technology. We must leave them a glimpse of the world as it was in the beginning, not just after we got through with it."

-President Lyndon B. Johnson



Bridger & Fitzpatrick Wildernesses, WY



Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness, Idaho & Montana

"Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts... There is something infinitely healing in the repeated refrains of nature—the assurance that dawn comes after night, and spring after the winter. The lasting pleasures of contact with the natural world are not reserved for scientists but are available to anyone who will place himself under the influence of earth, sea, and sky, and their amazing life."

-Rachel Carson, author of Silent Spring

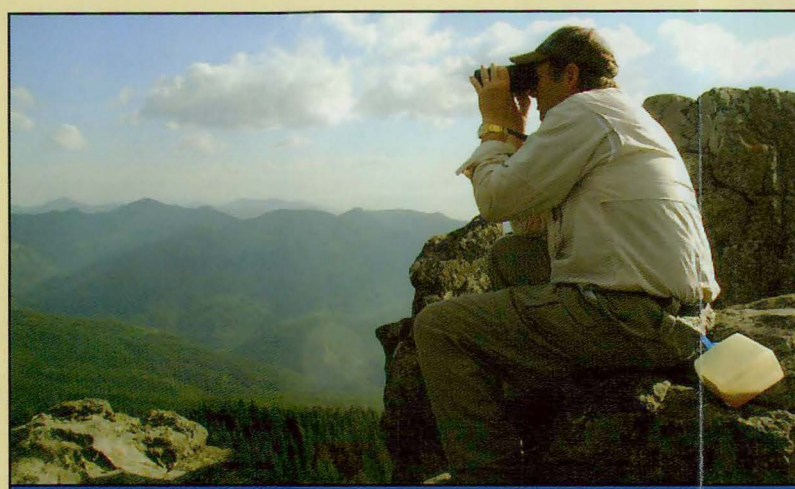


Table Rock Wilderness, Oregon

Visiting Wilderness

The Wilderness Act created wilderness for the *"use and enjoyment of the American people in such a manner as will leave them unimpaired for future use and enjoyment as wilderness."*

More than 12 million people visit wilderness each year on their own or with an outfitter or guide. Wilderness visitors climb mountains, ride horses, hunt game, fish blue-ribbon trout streams, ski snowcapped peaks, raft rivers, canoe lakes, take pictures and stargaze.

Many visitors welcome wilderness, not only for the self-reliant, challenging recreational experiences it provides, but as a haven, a refuge from our fast-paced, developed society—a place to reconnect with oneself and with the land.

Wilderness visitors are inspired and humbled by the feeling of being part of something larger than themselves. They find that going to wilderness is like going home.

To learn more about your National Wilderness Preservation System, visit www.wilderness.net.

Produced in Partnership with:



Wilderness Stewardship

Wilderness was established for the use and enjoyment of the American people today and forever. The value of wilderness depends on the degree to which it remains undeveloped—a contrast to the highly developed world in which most of us live.

The federal managing agencies, together with American citizens, work to ensure that the wilderness we have today remains wild for future generations to enjoy tomorrow. Wilderness stewardship agencies:



Bureau of Land Management

The BLM manages 6% of America's wilderness acreage.



Fish & Wildlife Service

The FWS manages 20% of America's wilderness acreage.



Forest Service

The FS manages 33% of America's wilderness acreage.



National Park Service

The NPS manages 41% of America's wilderness acreage.



Great Sand Dunes & Sangre de Cristo Wildernesses, CO