

Separating Wilderness Fact from Fiction

Myth: America already has plenty of designated Wilderness areas.

Fact: Only about 2% of the contiguous United States is currently wilderness. Even adding the Wilderness acreage in the vastness of the state of Alaska only brings that up to 4.4% of the entire United States.

Myth: Wilderness negatively impacts private property.

Fact: Only federal (public) land may be designated as Wilderness. The law allows access to private in-holdings and the value of private property near wilderness often increases.

Myth: Wilderness water rights compete with existing water rights.

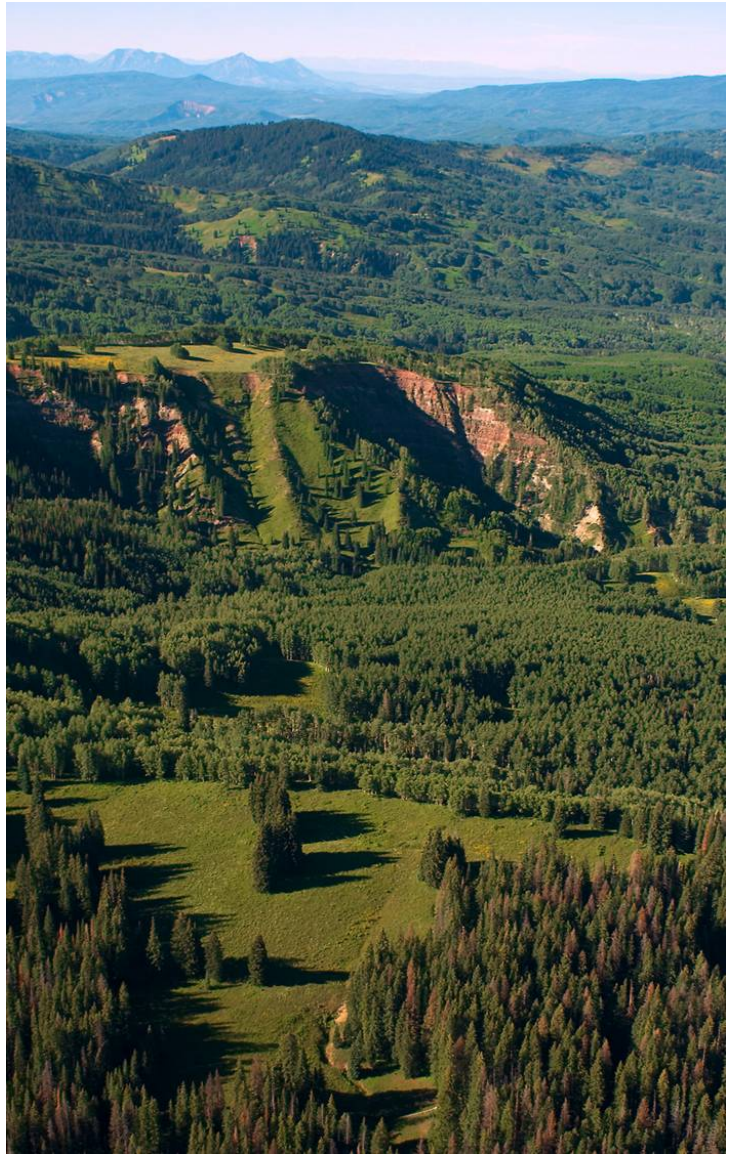
Fact: Protecting a natural flow of water is key to preserving wilderness values and the ecological health of an area. This can be accomplished in ways that protect existing uses of water and existing water rights.

Wilderness areas located at headwaters, for example, enjoy a natural means of water protection in that no water development is physically possible upstream of the wilderness. Thus, no existing water uses or water rights need be affected.

In other instances, water can be protected through acquisition of water, subject to principles and requirements of fairness, as assured under Colorado water law, or as arranged through cooperative agreements with existing water users, or both.

Even when wilderness water protection is accomplished through a new water right, that right is junior to all existing water rights. Such wilderness water rights are subject to availability of unappropriated water. This ensures that when water is available, wilderness gets its fair share.

Wilderness water protections are for in-stream flows. Any water rights that might be associated with those protections are non-consumptive water rights.



The protected water flows through and nourishes wilderness and the wildlife and habitat associated with it, then flows out, high in quality and available for other uses.

In sum, wilderness water protections will be designed and implemented in ways that fully respect other water rights on the related streams, without disrupting existing rights, facilities, or project operations.

Myth: Wilderness “locks up” commercial forest land.

Fact: The National Forests produce less than 5% of the U.S. timber supply. Timber in potential Wilderness is generally less accessible and therefore generally prohibitively expensive, especially in comparison to privately owned timber. The impact Wilderness has on the availability of commercial timber is insignificant.



Myth: Wilderness harms local economies.

Fact: Wilderness provides numerous economic benefits and helps maintain the natural capital that can help communities diversify economies by attracting and retaining new businesses, residents, and a local workforce. Wilderness can also protect scenic backdrops that improve property values, thereby increasing county revenues. Studies show that counties containing Wilderness have economies 2-3 times more robust than similar counties without Wilderness.

Myth: Wilderness restricts recreational opportunities, making it available only to the young, healthy and wealthy.

Fact: One of the most important purposes of National Forest Wilderness is to provide people with a broad array of outdoor recreational opportunities. These include hunting, fishing, backpacking, camping, horseback riding, mountaineering, rock climbing, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, wildlife viewing, photography, canoeing, and kayaking.

Myth: Wilderness is a private enclave for hikers who are a vocal minority of public land users.

Fact: Non-motorized recreationists comprise the vast majority of public land users.

Myth: Wilderness conflicts with other uses of the national forest.

Fact: Not only is Wilderness identified as one of the “multiple-uses” for national forests under the law, it is one of the best tools to achieve many of the other designated uses, including recreation, water and soil conservation, and wildlife habitat.

Myth: Recreation is restricted in wilderness.

Fact: Recreation is enhanced in wilderness. Hunting, fishing, horse riding, hiking, camping, canoeing, and many more activities are all allowed in wilderness and wilderness assures a high quality experience for these uses.

Myth: All motors are banned from wilderness areas.

Fact: Although the Wilderness Act prohibits the general use of motorized/mechanized equipment and transportation, the Act clearly allows for their use for search and rescue operations, fire fighting to protect adjacent private land, insect and disease control and other exceptional circumstances where they are the minimum tools necessary for proper administration of the area.

Myth: Fires, insects and disease can't be controlled in wilderness.

Fact: The Wilderness Act specifically states the certain measures may be taken to control fires, insects and disease in Wilderness Areas. In short, anything necessary for the protection of public health or safety, including the use of mechanized equipment, is clearly permissible.

Myth: Injured people cannot get help in a wilderness area.

Fact: Emergency vehicles (helicopters, all-terrain vehicles) are routinely used to transport rescuers into and injured persons out of Wilderness Areas.

Myth: Trails cannot be maintained in wilderness.

Fact: Trails are routinely maintained in Wilderness Areas. In general, trail crews use the minimum tools necessary, i.e., hand tools. However, power tools can be authorized in exceptional circumstances brought on by ice storms, extensive blow-downs, or other events.

Myth: Wilderness areas are not handicapped accessible.

Fact: In a 1992 report to Congress, 76% of persons with disabilities surveyed said that they enjoy wilderness areas and do not believe that wilderness designation diminishes their ability to enjoy an area.

Myth: Hunting and fishing are not allowed in wilderness.

Fact: Hunting and fishing are two of the primary intended uses of wilderness in the National Forests. Some of the best hunting and fishing in the U.S. is in Wilderness areas.



Myth: Wilderness designation involves acquisition of additional land by the federal government.

Fact: Wilderness designation occurs on land already owned by the public through the federal government. No additional land purchases are required.

Myth: Wilderness conflicts with “multiple use” of public lands.

Fact: Wilderness is “multiple use,” by fact and law. The five multiple uses of National Forests are wildlife, watershed, recreation, range and timber. All five occur in Wilderness however, the timber remains standing!



Myth: Only pure, pristine, and virgin lands qualify for Wilderness designation.

Fact: The [1964 Wilderness Act](#) carefully defines a Wilderness Area as “undeveloped federal land retaining its primeval character and influence and which generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable.” These key words allow for the designation of lands that are less than pristine.

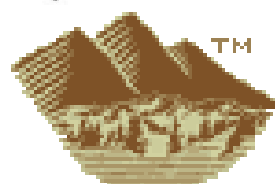
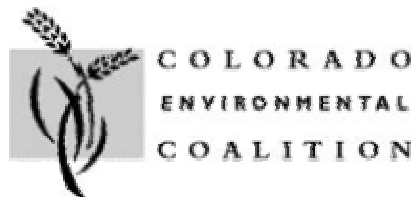
Query: Why not protect these areas without designating them as Wilderness?

Answer: Congressional Wilderness designation is the only way to permanently protect an area from logging and oil drilling, and from parking lots, buildings and motorized vehicles. Other levels of protection are less strict, and can be overturned with the stroke of an administrative pen. Only Congress can protect wildlands with Wilderness designation and it takes a similar act of Congress to undo those protections.

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