

National Wilderness Preservation System

The National Wilderness Preservation System was created on September 3, 1964, when President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Wilderness Act — eight years after the first wilderness bill was introduced by Senator Hubert H. Humphrey. The final bill passed the Senate, 73-12, on April 9, 1963, and the House of Representatives, 373-1, on July 30, 1964.

The bill established 9.1 million acres of federally protected Wilderness in national forests. The law did not increase the amount of land under federal control, nor did it mandate acquisition of additional lands.

Did You Know?

- ✓ There are 662 Wilderness Areas on America's public lands, with a total of more than 105 million acres of protected Wilderness in national forests, national parks, national wildlife refuges, and Bureau of Land Management lands
- ✓ The U.S. Forest Service manages the largest number of Wilderness Areas; the U.S. Park Service manages the largest total Wilderness acreage
- ✓ The Gila National Forest in New Mexico was the first land dedicated as "wilderness" under the public lands system
- ✓ Four percent of the nation's Wilderness lies east of the Mississippi River, and nearly half of that can be found in a single Area: Everglades National Park in Florida
- ✓ States that do not contain federally designated Wilderness Areas are Delaware, Connecticut, Iowa, Kansas, Maryland, and Rhode Island
- ✓ Largest Wilderness Area in the lower 48 states: Death Valley National Park in California, with 3.1 million acres
- ✓ Largest Wilderness Area in the entire United States and its territories: 9.1 million acres in Alaska's Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve
- ✓ Smallest Wilderness Area: Pelican Island in Florida, with five acres

Benefits of Wilderness

Wilderness areas are important because they: help produce clean water by protecting watersheds; improve air quality by acting as a filter for pollutants; provide critical habitat for threatened or endangered species; maintain biological diversity; offer outdoor recreation opportunities; provide scenic beauty; and serve as a spiritual or psychological haven from modern day pressures. Wilderness areas also act as "living laboratories" for medical and scientific research. Many of the prescription drugs in the U.S. were derived from natural substances, and there are thousands of plants on our public lands that have not yet been studied for their potential medicinal qualities.

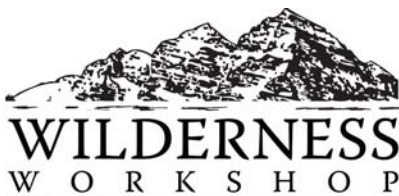
Protection Provided by the Wilderness System

- ✓ Wilderness areas are protected from development such as logging roads, dams, or other permanent structures; from timber cutting and the operation of motorized vehicles and equipment; and, since 1984, from new mining claims and mineral leasing
- ✓ Mining operations and livestock grazing are permitted to continue in Wilderness Areas if these practices existed *prior* to an Area's designation. Existing operations must be conducted to minimize the impact on wilderness and other resource values. In most cases, Congress has drawn Wilderness boundaries to exclude public lands potentially rich in mineral resources. Wilderness Areas have generally been found to contain little or no potential for mineral production
- ✓ Hunting and fishing are permitted in Wilderness Areas, though hunting and commercial fishing are not allowed in most national park units, or other places specifically closed to these activities

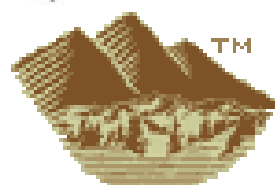
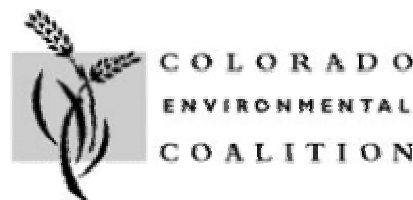
How Wilderness Areas Are Designated

The Wilderness Act directed the Forest Service, National Park Service, and the Fish and Wildlife Service to survey their roadless lands for possible Wilderness designation. The Bureau of Land Management was directed to inventory its roadless lands for Wilderness preservation under the Federal Land Management and Policy Act of 1976. The Alaska Lands Act of 1980 also called for certain Wilderness reviews. Each agency is required to recommend to Congress lands it believes qualify for Wilderness designation on a state-by-state basis. Congress then decides which areas to designate. In many cases, Congress has designated more lands for Wilderness than federal land management agencies recommended.

www.WhiteRiverWild.org



THE WILDERNESS SOCIETY



TM
SOUTHERN ROCKIES
ECOSYSTEM PROJECT