The goal of the 10-Year Wilderness Challenge is to bring every one of the more than 400 wildernesses under the USDA Forest Service’s care to a minimum stewardship level by 2014, the 50th Anniversary of the Wilderness Act. The 10-Year Wilderness Stewardship Challenge defines a new level of accountability for Forest Service Wilderness Stewardship.

Signed in 1964, the Wilderness Act was landmark legislation that set aside 9 million acres of wilderness for the enjoyment of present and future generations.

Now more than 106 million acres of designated wilderness are managed by Federal land management agencies. The U.S. Department of Agriculture is responsible for the management of about 35 million acres, or 33 percent of the National Wilderness Preservation System.

To ensure that these wildernesses stay wild forever, we have identified 10 key elements that help define successful wilderness stewardship. These 10 elements combine many essential qualities of wilderness character.

However, your help is needed with the task of wilderness stewardship. Today, only about 20 percent of all wildernesses managed by the USDA Forest Service meet even our minimum stewardship level — defined as achieving success in 6 out of these 10 elements. Yet, meeting all ten elements is our ultimate goal to assure the preservation of wilderness character.

Like any challenge, this won’t be easy, but the rewards will be great. By working together, we can keep wilderness wild.

What is the 10-Year Wilderness Stewardship Challenge?
The value of wilderness depends on the degree to which it remains undeveloped and free—a contrast to the highly developed world in which most of us live.

The Wilderness Act of 1964 gave wilderness managers a difficult and challenging task. Wilderness areas are to be kept in a wild and natural state—relatively free of human influence and control while at the same time, providing for human use and enjoyment.

In the last 40 years, this has become even harder. Thousands of feet are trampling lakeshores. Campfire scars dot remote valleys. Funding allocated for wilderness education programs and rangers has declined.

What's at stake?

After 40 years, it may seem as if we will always have wilderness as part of the American landscape. But what is a wilderness where native birds and animals no longer thrive because invasive species have crowded them out? What is a wilderness where you can’t escape the sights and sounds of other people? What is a wilderness without the heart and soul of wildness? What happens when we lose the “wild” from wilderness?

Keeping wilderness wild contributes to the ecological, economic, and social health and well-being of our citizens, our country, and our world.