

**U.S. FOREST SERVICE**  
**WILDERNESS AND WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS STRATEGY – 2010-2014**

## **THE PROMISE**

Twice in the 1960's Congress issued stirring declarations recognizing and protecting portions of the American landscape. The Wilderness Act of 1964 promises “...to secure for the American people...the benefits of an enduring resource of Wilderness...” places “...where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man.” The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968 charges us “...to preserve in free-flowing condition...certain selected rivers, to protect water quality and to fulfill other vital national conservation purposes.” In each case, Congress boldly broke from a past of utilization and consumption, striving to create more balance in the Nation's approach to natural resources. The Forest Service shares with three other federal agencies the trust to fulfill these ennobling visions.

For over 40 years, our agency has cared for these resources with zeal and integrity, and has a very credible record of planning, management, and protection. In 2004, in recognition that wild and scenic rivers and wilderness areas are important natural as well as recreational resources, the agency established a separate staff area, with the intention to provide additional focus and prominence for these resources. The 2010-2014 Strategy for the Forest Service Wilderness and Wild and Scenic Rivers Program (WWSR) is a response to that charge.

## **WILDERNESS AND WILD AND SCENIC RIVER MISSION**

*The Forest Service Wilderness and Wild and Scenic Rivers Program provides leadership in the protection of current and future wilderness areas and wild and scenic rivers entrusted to our care for present and future generations. We preserve and enhance the broad range of regionally, nationally and globally significant biological, ecological, cultural and recreational values for which they were established.*

## **THE PRESENT**

Wilderness and Wild and Scenic rivers are widely recognized for the benefits they do or can provide. Our wilderness areas are major blocks of biodiversity and ecological health, refugia for species under stress, key pieces and connectors in large landscape mosaics, and revered species places where people can reconnect to the earth. Wild and scenic rivers are critical corridors crossing elevational and political gradients, migratory routes for land and aquatic species, models of interjurisdictional and public-private collaboration, and recreational magnets to draw and educate our increasingly diverse population.

The issues of climate change and water are the paramount challenges of our time, daunting in scientific and political complexity. Temperatures are departing from historic ranges, seasons and natural cycles are disrupted, and precipitation and storm patterns are sharply altered. Our wilderness areas and rivers face rapidly changing species assemblages and water regimes. Managers and researchers grapple with the magnitude and implications of the changes and the need to consider historical conditions and current day

variability for reliable reference points and baselines. In this unprecedented period of uncertainty, managers are being challenged to maximize benefits and values of wild and scenic rivers and wilderness areas while adhering to the laws that created them.

We also face many social, political and cultural challenges. Wilderness and wild and scenic rivers provide invaluable recreational opportunities and continue to enjoy enormous use, but full engagement of both the Nation's culturally diverse population and a generation afflicted with "nature deficit disorder" remains elusive. In addition, some high use areas within wilderness and on rivers are experiencing unacceptable impacts. Designation of new wilderness area and wild and scenic rivers continues to be championed by the large and diverse array of conservation organizations and individuals, but these advocates are often less interested in ensuring stewardship of areas that have been designated. New Congressional designations of rivers and wilderness are often encumbered with limitations, restrictions, or special provisions that make the management more complex.

Technology has brought vast changes and advantages to the world since the Wilderness and Wild and Scenic Rivers Acts were signed, but has also introduced new challenges. As technology moves civilization forward, it also challenges us as managers to evaluate the appropriateness and impact of new inventions, high tech equipment and an array of ever-changing recreational pursuits. We strive to continue to be leaders in preserving the skills and ethics of traditional tool use that has been a hallmark of our management of wilderness.

The Forest Service is transforming to better embrace a partnership culture, one that includes full appreciation of what partners can accomplish in support of the agency mission, including in wilderness and on wild and scenic rivers. However, numerous administrative and policy hurdles exist which limit partnership success, and models and mechanisms for partnership work are limited. Capacity, skills and commitment to make staff available to build and nurture partnerships at the forest and district level is lacking, resulting in many lost partnership opportunities. Despite pioneering successes with the Interagency Arthur Carhart National Wilderness Training Center and the Interagency Wild and Scenic Rivers Coordinating Council, cross-agency sharing and collaboration still struggle for legitimacy.

We also face organizational challenges. Paradoxical attitudes exist within the Forest Service toward wilderness and wild and scenic rivers. On one hand they are viewed as iconic and are revered, with a long history of being championed within the Forest Service, as demonstrated by recent events and ceremonies that received warm sponsorship at the highest levels of the agency. On the other hand, they are sometimes seen as obstructing management actions or imposing onerous requirements, and they compete with numerous priorities and programs for attention and funding in a large agency with a broad mission. Wilderness and wild and scenic river management requires an interdisciplinary approach; organizational incentive and shared ownership need to grow across the agency for the Wilderness and Wild and Scenic Rivers Program to succeed. Several years of declining funding for most Forest Service programs, along with many retirements, has left many Forests and Districts without the critical staff to meet basic management and partnership responsibilities for wilderness and wild and scenic rivers.

Meeting all of these challenges requires amplitude, and exciting opportunities for the Wilderness and Wild and Scenic Rivers Program are at hand. Wildlands and free-flowing, natural streams have a central role to play in realizing the Forest Service mission to "*sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the Nation's*

*forests and grasslands to meet the needs of current and future generations.”* The Forest Service Wilderness and Wild and Scenic Rivers Program provides stewardship for 439 wilderness areas (36+ million acres) comprising almost 20% of National Forest lands, and 119 rivers (≈5000 miles). These areas are vital components in the achievement of the agency’s Strategic Plan goals, and are important contributors toward a shared, all-lands vision encompassing restoration, climate change, kids in the woods, water, and rural prosperity.

## **OUR DESIRED FUTURE**

We visualize the National Wilderness Preservation System as an expanding central component in a land mosaic, representative of all ecosystems, managed collectively to play a critical role in the Nation’s mitigation and adaptation responses to climate change. Our wildernesses will be healthy, high-functioning natural systems that contribute vital ecosystem services. They will be essential baselines for researchers and provide outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation for an ever more diverse population.

The National Wild and Scenic Rivers System will provide ever-cleaner waters for the Nation, protect critical riparian and upland ecosystems, and re-establish the all-important connection of streams to their floodplains. They will be enjoyed by present and future generations for their outstandingly remarkable scenic, recreational, geologic, fish and wildlife, historic, and cultural values. Wild and Scenic Rivers will be key landscape components, providing critical connectivity in developed and remote areas, and will increasingly serve as models for enlightened partnerships and cross-boundary management of watersheds and water resources.

The Wilderness and Wild and Scenic Rivers Program will be recognized by all as central to the achievement of the Forest Service mission and well integrated with the activities of other programs. We will have competent and committed wilderness and wild and scenic rivers managers, and the staffing levels and skills to match resource needs and management responsibilities. Our program will have a broad, vigilant, vocal constituency of citizen stewards. Partners and partnerships will be a routine part of how we do business, and the National Wilderness Preservation System and the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System will be managed in seamless collaboration with the Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

## **OUR VISION**

*Designated wilderness areas and wild and scenic rivers entrusted to our care are healthy, high-functioning natural systems, contributing vital, life-sustaining services and providing societal benefits to present and future generations. The National Wilderness Preservation System and the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System are growing and supported by an engaged and educated constituency, expanded scientific knowledge, and interdisciplinary agency commitment, and are protected, nurtured, and sustained by competent and committed managers.*

## OUR STRATEGY

Traditionally, the Wilderness and Wild and Scenic Rivers Program has provided stewardship and management for wilderness and rivers through a suite of activities including field work, planning, policy updates, training, information, education, legislative support, volunteer management, alliance building, monitoring both the resource and our performance, and working to acquire funding to accomplish all of the above.

These remain our basic, and generally successful, approaches. But without full and meaningful engagement in the central national issues of our day – mitigation and adaptation to climate change, husbandry of water resources, engagement of all Americans in the out-of-doors, opportunities for people to sustain a nation healthy in body and mind – wilderness areas and wild and scenic rivers may come to be seen as “museums” rather than as relevant, contemporary conservation tools central to the agency’s mission. Without developing more internal and partner capacity, including “ownership” by the entire Forest Service, we cannot begin to meet the challenges ahead. And without a strong and vocal constituency, the current equation for setting priorities, and the status of the Wilderness and Wild and Scenic Rivers Program, will remain unchanged.

To fulfill the Forest Service mission and support its strategy, to fulfill the mission of the Wilderness and Wild and Scenic Rivers Program, and to achieve our vision we have developed a three-pronged strategy:

- *Promote effective stewardship in the face of rapid change*
- *Build capacity for stewardship of Wilderness and Wild and Scenic Rivers*
- *Develop strong external and internal constituencies for Wilderness and Wild and Scenic Rivers*

### **Strategic Element 1: Promote Effective Stewardship in the Face of Rapid Change**

#### GOALS & OBJECTIVES

1. Manage wilderness and wild and scenic rivers to prescribed standards.
  - a. Complete the 10-Year Wilderness Stewardship Challenge (10YWSC), with 100% of wildernesses managed to the “minimum stewardship level”
  - b. Manage 50 % of wild and scenic rivers to “meet statutory requirements” through implementation of the Wild and Scenic River Program Agenda
  - c. Improve the currency, usefulness and consistency of direction for wilderness and wild and scenic rivers by updating manuals
2. Establish significant roles for Wilderness and Wild and Scenic Rivers Program in agency frameworks for climate change, water resources, recreation, and youth engagement
  - a. Maintain the relevance of the Wilderness and Wild and Scenic Rivers Program to broader agency priorities by actively participating in the development, implementation and maintenance of agency initiatives and frameworks

- b. Engage the next generation of wilderness stewards through: integration of wilderness information into existing agency youth initiatives; conservation education classroom and field-based outreach programs; and, creation of a virtual community and campus for youth in wilderness
- 3. Conduct periodic monitoring of key indicators of wilderness and wild and scenic river resource health to establish baseline conditions and monitor trends over time
  - a. Implement a national program to monitor wilderness character, with the goal of establishing a baseline in all areas
  - b. Improve attention placed on monitoring wild and scenic rivers by completing a “monitoring matrix” for all WSRs
  - c. Actively engage other program areas to identify mutual areas of overlapping interest relative to inventory and monitoring
- 4. Use monitoring information and adaptive management to modify wilderness and wild and scenic river stewardship direction in forest plans.
  - a. Prioritize actions to ensure preservation of wilderness character
  - b. Engage wilderness research (i.e. ALWRI) to help determine necessary direction
  - c. Participate in the development of the Forest Service planning rule and ensure that wilderness and wild and scenic rivers study is accommodated, as is developing direction for designated components of the systems
- 5. Consider recommendations to expand Wilderness and Wild and Scenic Rivers systems in context of landscape-scale goals of the Department and Forest Service
  - a. Take direct and timely actions that lead to the establishment of strategic additions that meet landscape level planning goals and enhance habitat connectivity issues for the National Wild and Scenic River and National Wilderness Preservation Systems
  - b. With other FS staffs, explore alternate protection strategies to wilderness designation to expand protection to other landscapes
- 6. Provide support to newly designated wildernesses and wild and scenic rivers
  - a. Provide the support necessary to bring newly designated wilderness up to prescribed performance standards within 10 years of designation
  - b. Provide the support necessary to bring newly designated wild and scenic rivers up to prescribed performance standards for planning components within 4 years of designation and for active management components within 5 years
- 7. Provide international leadership on protected areas and river resources.

**Strategic Element 2: Build Capacity for Stewardship of Wilderness and Wild and Scenic Rivers**

GOALS & OBJECTIVES

- 1. Expand collaboration with other program areas in support of wilderness and wild and scenic rivers
  - a. Develop inter-staff networks for budget, planning, policy, and implementation
  - b. Facilitate the development of an enterprise team to support wilderness and WSRs needs

- c. Develop and implement new DOA/DOI saw safety policy
2. Revitalize and expand interagency efforts
    - a. Formalize, renew agency leadership commitments to the Interagency Wild and Scenic Rivers Coordinating Council
    - b. Create budget mechanisms to insure long-term budget stability for Carhart Wilderness Training Center
    - c. Implement new 5-year interagency vision to cultivate or retain a more skilled workforce, connect the wilderness community, and communicate the relevancy of wilderness through the Interagency Arthur Carhart National Wilderness Training Center
    - d. Engage the Wilderness Policy Council and Wilderness Steering Committee to collaborate on development of a unified action plan or initiative for advancement of the National Wilderness Preservation System
  3. Develop a committed, enduring stewardship group for every Forest Service wild and scenic river and wilderness
    - a. Help launch national organizations whose missions are to support local groups providing stewardship for wild and scenic rivers and wilderness
    - b. Provide resources and assistance to local managers and partners to help establish new stewardship groups for wild and scenic rivers and wilderness areas
  4. Clarify needed staffing levels for wilderness and wild and scenic rivers (including management of newly designated areas)
  5. Develop a workforce skilled in the management of wilderness and wild and scenic rivers.
    - a. Ensure that adequate training and education opportunities and resources are available for wilderness and wild and scenic rivers management, and are being utilized.
    - b. Require wilderness and wild and scenic river training for line officers and managers with wilderness responsibilities and with wild and scenic river responsibilities
    - c. Ensure that all Forest Service line officers and managers have a basic awareness of wilderness and wild and scenic rivers, their values, and management requirements
    - d. Professionalize the discipline of wilderness stewardship by following OPM guidance to catalogue wilderness stewardship responsibilities within the professional 401 series
    - e. Commission a National Traditional Skills Strike Team of agency and non-agency experts to accomplish work and provide training for employees and volunteers in the safe and effective use of crosscut saws and other non-motorized tools and equipment.
  6. Expand wilderness and wild and scenic river research
    - a. Increase collaboration with FS Research (Aldo Leopold Wilderness Research Institute) and NPS wilderness research
    - b. Develop an electronic repository that synthesizes all research conducted in/on wilderness and wild and scenic rivers.

## **Strategic Element 3: Develop Strong External and Internal Constituencies for Wilderness and Wild and Scenic Rivers**

### GOALS & OBJECTIVES

1. Several vital internal Forest Service groups function to support WWSR
  - a. Establish a line officer group to provide support and advice to wilderness program leadership and to strengthen program priority by influencing awareness and priorities
  - b. Utilize the Chief's Wilderness Advisory Group to provide advice to agency leadership from the field perspective
  - c. Utilize the Wilderness Information Management Steering Team to provide leadership on topics related to information management.
  - d. Utilize the wilderness and wild and scenic rivers regional program leaders to provide internal support
  - e. Utilize the Interagency Arthur Carhart National Wilderness Training Center to identify wilderness training, information, and education needs and to develop and implement recommendations for meeting those needs
2. Several external groups function to support wilderness and wild and scenic rivers
  - a. A stewardship group exists for every NFS wilderness
  - b. A National non-governmental organization strengthens a network of stewardship groups supporting wilderness by 2013
  - c. A stewardship group exists for every NFS wild and scenic river
  - d. A National non-governmental organization strengthens a network of stewardship groups supporting wild and scenic rivers
  - e. Support the continuation and growth of River Management Society
  - f. A national Society for Wilderness Stewardship is established to advance the profession of wilderness stewardship to ensure the life-sustaining benefits of wilderness
  - g. Engagement of youth and diverse populations become standard for all external partners
3. The Chief of the FS includes WWSR in agency priorities and key messages. Agency leadership supports funding solutions for WWSR programs
  - a. The Chief prioritizes the completion of the 10-Year Wilderness Stewardship Challenge and helps secure the resources to accomplish it
  - b. The Chief hosts Interior agency heads to discuss strengthening the NWPS in 2010 and the NWSRS
  - c. Agency and Departmental leaders make appearances in support of and highlighting FS wilderness and wild and scenic rivers.
  - d. WWSR accomplishments and successes regularly reported and shared to demonstrate the value of the programs to the agency.
  - e. Budget allocations reflect importance of WWSR to the agency
4. Connect the cross-disciplinary wilderness workforce, scientists, educators, students, and the public to their wilderness heritage
  - a. Expand application of the Connect.wilderness.net social networking tool to build community and capacity

- b. Recapture America's wilderness spirit by commemorating our wilderness heritage in the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary year (2014) in meaningful and visible ways through collaboration with other agencies and NGOs
- c. Increase the number of diverse populations and youths visiting National Forest wilderness (as measured by NVUM) and wild and scenic rivers
- d. Initiate expanded outreach to the general public with quality information services and educational tools on wilderness and wild and scenic rivers to the general public

## **IMPLEMENTATION**

Specific actions to support the goals and objectives for each strategic element will differ depending on organizational level and will be guided by following principles. Actions will:

- Position the Wilderness and Wild and Scenic Rivers programs to be responsive and play key roles in some of the agency's (and the Nation's) most critical issues
- Be based on hard choices, ensuring that we concentrate our limited resources on our highest priorities
- Leverage our resources to build new capacity by working with other Forest Service programs, other agencies, NGOs, and the private sector
- Enhance agency expertise and scientific knowledge for professional management of wilderness and wild and scenic river resources
- Evolve our roles from being primarily doers and technical experts to conveners and facilitators who utilize their technical expertise in new and innovative ways
- Demonstrate and imaginatively report accomplishments and the value of our program
- Seek out and strengthen an informed, forceful, and diverse constituency for the stewardship of wilderness and wild and scenic rivers
- Engage leaders inside and outside the agency who can help carry our messages