

MRDG Evaluation Guide

This guide should be used to guide the author when drafting an MRDG or to evaluate the quality of an existing MRDG. Each row corresponds to an individual section within the MRDG and each cell within the row details criteria for what constitutes an unacceptable, acceptable or outstanding section. Additional information useful for preparing or reviewing an MRDG is contained in the MRDG Instructions at: www.wilderness.net/MRA.

General Rating Definitions		
Unacceptable	Acceptable	Outstanding <i>Acceptable plus:</i>
<p>The response is inadequate because it does not include necessary information, includes incorrect information, or is not responsive to the criteria</p>	<p>The response represents an adequate and necessary analysis and is responsive to the criteria.</p>	<p>An “Outstanding” rating includes all the elements of an “Acceptable” rating <i>plus</i> the elements of the “Outstanding” rating.</p> <p>An “Outstanding” rating may not be applicable or possible for all situations or projects.</p>

Step 1. Determine if any administrative action is necessary.

	Unacceptable	Acceptable	Outstanding <i>Acceptable plus:</i>
Briefly describe the problem or situation that may prompt action.	<p>Unnecessarily describes the use of a possible method or tool</p> <p>- OR -</p> <p>Outlines the authority for taking action</p> <p>- OR -</p> <p>Justifies why action is necessary</p> <p>- OR -</p> <p>Justifies use of motorized equipment or mechanical transport, landing of aircraft, use of motor boats, motor vehicles, or placement of a structure, facility, or temporary road.</p>	<p>Describes a problem or situation that prompts a possible need for action and may include supporting information (i.e. cause, threat, existing use, etc.).</p> <p>- AND -</p> <p>The description does not describe a specific action, method, or tool unless it is necessary to understand the situation.</p> <p>-AND -</p> <p>The description does not justify a specific action or method or use of a specific tool.</p>	<p>The description of the problem or situation is focused and does not contain extraneous elements or explanations not related to the problem or the wilderness.</p>
<p>Options outside of wilderness. <i>Can action be taken outside of wilderness that adequately addresses the situation?</i></p>	<p>No identification of possible options outside wilderness or inadequate explanation (i.e. obvious options not described and explored).</p>	<p>Options outside wilderness are described and are either obviously possible or obviously impossible.</p>	<p>Explanation shows extraordinary diligence or creativity in searching for options outside wilderness.</p>

	Unacceptable	Acceptable	Outstanding <i>Acceptable plus:</i>
<p>A. Valid Existing Rights or Special Provisions of Wilderness Legislation</p> <p><i>Is action necessary to satisfy valid existing rights or a special provision in wilderness legislation (the Wilderness Act of 1964 or subsequent wilderness laws) that requires action?</i></p>	<p>Applicable references to special provisions are not described or cited or the provisions are misinterpreted.</p>	<p>The response provides:</p> <p>1) Any applicable special provision language whether in the Wilderness Act of 1964 or subsequent designation legislation.</p> <p>2) An adequate explanation of whether a valid existing right or special provision requires a prohibited use or allows consideration of a prohibited use (e.g. does the law use the term 'shall' or 'may').</p>	<p>An identification of supporting information (i.e. congressional committee reports, etc.) relevant to an applicable special provision or valid existing right.</p>
<p>B. Requirements of Other Legislation</p> <p><i>Is action necessary to meet the requirements of <u>other federal laws</u>?</i></p>	<p>Applicable references to other laws are not identified, described, or cited.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">- OR -</p> <p>The explanation incorrectly states that one law trumps another.</p>	<p>The response provides:</p> <p>1) Reference(s) to applicable provisions of laws not directly concerned with wilderness (such as the Endangered Species Act, National Historic Preservation Act, etc.).</p> <p>2) Description of any genuine conflicts with provisions of other laws that must be addressed in wilderness.</p>	<p>There is evidence that other similar projects were examined and these examples were used to help determine the necessity, or lack thereof, for taking action to meet the requirements of other laws was addressed.</p>

	Unacceptable	Acceptable	Outstanding <i>Acceptable plus:</i>
<p>C. Wilderness Character</p> <p><i>Is action necessary to preserve one or more of the qualities of wilderness character?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Untrammeled</i> • <i>Undeveloped</i> • <i>Natural</i> • <i>Outstanding Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation</i> • <i>Other Features of Value</i> 	<p>For any of the qualities the response does not provide:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) An explanation of how action is or is not necessary to preserve each quality or that the quality is not applicable to the situation or problem. 2) An identification of which qualities may be impaired by taking action and how. 3) Correct understanding of the definitions of the qualities of wilderness character. 	<p>For each quality the response provides:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) An identification and explanation of how action <i>is</i> or <i>is not</i> necessary to preserve wilderness character or that the quality is not applicable to the situation or problem. 2) An explanation of how taking action may impair one or more qualities of wilderness character (where there is no need to take action to preserve wilderness character). 3) Correct use of each of the definitions of the qualities of wilderness character. 	<p>References from national wilderness character monitoring publications or agency wilderness character monitoring resources are cited.</p> <p>- OR -</p> <p>There is evidence that other similar or applicable projects were examined and an explanation of how these examples were used to help determine the necessity, or lack thereof, for taking action in support of the qualities of wilderness character.</p>

Step 1 Decision – Is any administrative action necessary?

	Unacceptable	Acceptable	Outstanding <i>Acceptable plus:</i>
<p>DECISION FOR STEP 1:</p> <p>Is <u>any</u> administrative action necessary in wilderness?</p> <p><i>Is there a need for action and a need to proceed to Step 2?</i></p> <p><i>Explain the rationale for proceeding.</i></p>	<p>The response provides:</p> <p>1) No evaluation of responses to the questions in Step 1.</p> <p>2) No documentation of the following when applicable:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the responses indicate that taking action will cause adverse impacts to wilderness character, there is no determination of a sufficient reason to proceed to Step 2. • No recognition of a need for more information or interdisciplinary consultation. 	<p>The response provides:</p> <p>1) An evaluation of the responses made to the questions in Step 1 and a determination of whether there is a need to proceed to Step 2 and why.</p> <p>2) The responses and rationale prioritize compliance with the Wilderness Act and the provisions of other laws.</p> <p>3) Documentation of the following when applicable:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the responses indicate that taking action will cause adverse impacts to wilderness character, a determination that there is sufficient reason to proceed to Step 2. • Recognition of a need for more information or interdisciplinary consultation. 	<p>There is evidence that other similar or applicable projects were examined and an explanation of how these examples were used to help determine the necessity or lack thereof, for taking action.</p>

Step 2: Determine the minimum activity.

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	Unacceptable	Acceptable	Outstanding <i>Acceptable plus:</i>
<p>Other Direction</p> <p><i>Is there “special provision” language in legislation (or other Congressional direction) that explicitly allows consideration of a use otherwise prohibited by Section 4(c)?</i></p> <p><i>Has the issue has been addressed in agency policy, unit and wilderness management plans, species recovery plans, or agreements with tribal, state, and local governments or other federal agencies?</i></p>	<p>The response provides:</p> <p>1) No or inadequate documentation or explanation of relevant legislative direction.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">- OR -</p> <p>2) No reference or explanation of relevant direction from agency policy, unit and wilderness management plans, species recovery plans, or agreements with tribal, state, and local governments or other federal agencies.</p>	<p>The response provides:</p> <p>1) Citations and explanations for any pertinent legislative document(s) and its explicit direction.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">- OR -</p> <p>2) References and explanations of how the issue has been addressed in any pertinent document such as agency policy, unit and wilderness management plans, species recovery plans, or agreements with tribal, state, and local governments or other federal agencies.</p>	<p>Evidence of consultation with agency specialists or legal staff on how a legislative record or other relevant direction should be considered.</p>
<p>Time Constraints</p> <p><i>Explain any environmental constraints that would dictate timing of the action.</i></p> <p><i>These constraints are universal, and do not vary by alternative.</i></p>	<p>The response:</p> <p>Fails to adequately describe known timing constraints.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">- OR -</p> <p>Describes environmental time constraints as the availability of workers, training, materials, agency approvals, or available funding.</p>	<p>The response:</p> <p>Identifies any significant timing requirements based on protection of wilderness character and worker safety due to seasonal restrictions or states that none exist. Examples include: a nesting season, seasonal high water levels, etc.</p>	<p>Evidence of investigation into known time constraints and potential mitigation measures or alternatives to limit conflicts.</p>

	Unacceptable	Acceptable	Outstanding <i>Acceptable plus:</i>
<p>Components of the Action</p> <p><i>List each discrete components of the action to form the basis of comparison between the alternatives which follow.</i></p>	<p>The response provides:</p> <p>No or inadequate identification or breakdown of the components of the action.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">- OR -</p> <p>If relevant, no component action identifying the condition of the site after the action is complete.</p>	<p>The response indicates:</p> <p>The action has been broken down into the smallest components which might be different between alternatives.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">- AND -</p> <p>If relevant, the condition of the site after the action is complete is identified as a component.</p>	<p>Evidence of consultation with others or investigation into similar projects to help insure identification of the components of the action.</p>

The following sections of the MRA Evaluation Guide should be applied to each alternative:

	Unacceptable	Acceptable	Outstanding <i>Acceptable plus:</i>
Description of the Alternatives	<p>The response indicates:</p> <p>A full range of alternatives is not identified.</p> <p>Obvious, feasible alternatives are not identified and considered.</p> <p>Key parts of the alternative description (i.e. what, when, where, mitigations) are not described or are inadequately described.</p> <p>Alternatives are eliminated from full evaluation solely because of increased costs or time to implement or because skills and equipment are not readily available on the local unit.</p>	<p>The response:</p> <p>Describes the action and the components of the action including:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Methods and techniques that will be used 2) Timeframe for when the activity will take place 3) Location where the activity will take place 4) Mitigation measures <p>Identifies a full range of alternatives is represented which could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No Action • No proposed Section 4c prohibited uses • A combination of actions including minimal proposed Section 4c prohibited uses • Proposed Section 4c prohibited uses <p>Alternatives are excluded from full evaluation because:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actions are impossible to accomplish by any means. • Actions would have a significantly greater impact on wilderness character • Actions create safety risks that cannot be mitigated. 	<p>Creative and innovative alternatives, actions, or mitigation measures are identified and described, possibly based on consultation with others or examination of other similar or applicable projects.</p>

	Unacceptable	Acceptable	Outstanding <i>Acceptable plus:</i>
<p>Component Activities</p> <p><i>For each alternative, enter the activity (i.e. method, tool, practice) that will be used to accomplish each component.</i></p>	<p>The response:</p> <p>Fails to identify or adequately describe a specific activity for each component of the action.</p>	<p>The response:</p> <p>Describes a specific activity for each component of the action.</p>	<p>Evidence of consultation with others or examination of similar projects to identify best practices.</p>

ALTERNATIVE COMPARISON CRITERIA

Impacts on the Qualities of Wilderness Character			
	Unacceptable	Acceptable	Outstanding <i>Acceptable plus:</i>
Untrammeled	<p>The response:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Fails to identify or describe the impacts to the untrammeled quality 2) Fails to discuss the degree to which the components or processes of ecological systems are intentionally controlled or manipulated in both the short and long term. 3) Mistakenly identifies or describes impacts to the untrammeled quality or incorrectly identifies an impact to another quality as an impact to the untrammeled quality. 	<p>The response:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Lists and describes the impacts to the untrammeled quality based on the component actions. 2) Discusses the degree to which the components or processes of ecological systems are intentionally controlled or manipulated in both the short and long term. 	<p>Description of impacts indicates consultation with other resource specialists (e.g. biologists) if applicable.</p>

	Unacceptable	Acceptable	Outstanding <i>Acceptable plus:</i>
Undeveloped	<p>The response:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Fails to identify or adequately describe any impacts to the undeveloped quality. 2) Fails to identify how “the imprint of man’s work will remain substantially unnoticeable” and wilderness will continue to be in contrast to other areas of “growing mechanization” in both the short and long term. 3) Failed to recognize the prohibited uses as impacts to the undeveloped quality. 4) Mistakenly identifies or describes impacts to the undeveloped quality or incorrectly identifies an impact to another quality as an impact to the undeveloped quality. 	<p>The response:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Describes any adverse impacts related to the use of any of the prohibited uses (motorized equipment, mechanical transport, motor vehicles, motor boats, landing of aircraft, temporary roads, structures or installations) on maintaining the undeveloped quality of wilderness character. 2) Identifies how “the imprint of man’s work will remain substantially unnoticeable” and wilderness will continue to be in contrast to other areas of “growing mechanization” in both the short and long term. 	<p>Description of impacts indicates consultation with other wilderness managers if applicable.</p>

	Unacceptable	Acceptable	Outstanding Acceptable plus:
Natural	<p>The response:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Fails to identify or describe potential impacts or benefits to natural conditions. 2) Fails to discuss impacts related to protecting natural conditions within the regional landscape (i.e. insects, disease, or non-native species). 3) Mistakenly identifies or describes impacts to the natural quality or incorrectly identifies an effect to another quality as an effect to the natural quality. 	<p>The response:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Describes the potential for protection, impairment, or restoration of natural conditions (air, water, soil, wildlife, fish, plants, etc.) including endangered, threatened, or rare species, natural biological diversity, and self-regulating ecosystems. 2) Identifies impacts to natural conditions resulting from the actions required to implement the alternative. 3) Discuss impacts related to protecting natural conditions within the regional landscape (i.e. insects, disease, or non-native species) where applicable. 	<p>Description of impacts indicates consultation with other resource specialists (e.g. biologists) if applicable.</p>
Opportunities for Solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation	<p>The response:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Fails to recognize impacts to the visitor experience. 2) Does not differentiate between the solitude and primitive/unconfined components of this quality. 3) Mistakenly identifies or describes impacts to this quality or incorrectly identifies an impact to another quality as an impact to this quality. 	<p>The response:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Identifies how opportunities for visitors to experience solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation will be protected or impaired by describing the impacts that will be noticeable to the visitor and that could affect their experience in wilderness. 2) Includes impacts on visitors from visitor use management actions such as regulations, campsite designation, area or trail closures, recreation facilities, and crowding in high use areas. 	<p>The description of impacts indicates consultation with other wilderness managers if applicable.</p>

	Unacceptable	Acceptable	Outstanding <i>Acceptable plus:</i>
Other features of value	The response either missed an obvious unique component or considered components that are not really unique.	The response identifies any applicable unique features of value of this wilderness not included in the above qualities, and describes the positive or negative impacts to this quality.	The response includes a list and description of unique components in a regional and national context.

Note - If there are any impacts to the Public Purposes that aren't automatically included in the impacts to Wilderness Character, each should be addressed in its corresponding quality of Wilderness Character, as shown in the following table:

Public Purpose	Corresponding Quality of Wilderness Character
Recreational	Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation
Scenic	Natural or Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation
Scientific	Any except Untrammeled, as appropriate
Educational	Unique Attributes or Other Features
Conservation	Natural
Historical	Unique Attributes or Other Features

Step 2 Decision – What is the Minimum Activity?

	Unacceptable	Acceptable	Outstanding <i>Acceptable plus:</i>
Final Decision and Rationale	<p>The response fails to explain why the use of motorized equipment, mechanical transportation, structures, or installations is the minimum necessary requirement for the administration of the area as wilderness by briefly describing the benefits or adverse effects to the qualities of wilderness character and other legal requirements by not identifying any and all of the relevant of the items listed in the Acceptable column.</p>	<p>The response explains why the use of motorized equipment, mechanical transportation, structures, or installations is the minimum necessary requirement for the administration of the area as wilderness by briefly describing the benefits or adverse effects to the qualities of wilderness character and other legal requirements by identifying:</p> <p>The decision is in conformance with law and applicable agency policy.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">- AND -</p> <p>The decision is clearly a result of objective evaluation of the alternatives to determine the minimum necessary requirement for administration of the area as wilderness.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">- AND -</p> <p>The significance and magnitude of impacts identified in the Alternative Comparison tables are provided.</p> <p>CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE</p>	<p>The rationale describes why other alternatives fail to meet the “minimum necessary” test.</p>

Unacceptable	Acceptable	Outstanding <i>Acceptable plus:</i>
		<p style="text-align: center;">- AND-</p> <p>If any of the qualities of wilderness character are degraded in the selected alternative, and explaining how that degradation is justified by preserving wilderness character as a whole.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">- AND –</p> <p>If an alternative is selected that does not have the least negative impact to wilderness character, as shown on the Alternative Comparison worksheet, explain why.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">- AND – -</p> <p>If the decision is based entirely or partly on safety criteria, and providing a rationale and supporting documentation is included.</p>
Final Decision Monitoring and Reporting Requirements	The monitoring and reporting requirements are omitted.	The response includes basic follow-up for implementing the decision including monitoring and agency reporting requirements. <p style="text-align: right;">- OR –</p> Outlines decision space for future similar proposals.

Review Criteria Applicable to all Step 1 and Step 2 Responses

	Unacceptable	Acceptable	Outstanding <i>Acceptable plus:</i>
Applicability	The response does not indicate that there is no applicability when it should have or is left blank.	The response indicates that there is no applicability, when appropriate, and why.	
Accuracy	The identifications and explanations are incorrect or inaccurate or indicate bias.	The identifications and explanations are correct and accurate and without bias.	The identifications and explanations are correct and accurate and fully supported by trackable citations.
Quality of overall writing	Writing is occasionally difficult to follow, evidence of sloppy “cut-and-paste” mechanics, or many obvious spelling or grammatical errors.	Writing is clear; there are no obvious “cut-and-paste” errors; a few spelling or grammatical errors are acceptable.	All writing is succinct; the issue, solution, and the process of arriving at the latter from the former are all clear
Support and Evidence	Supporting evidence is clearly lacking where needed.	Where some supporting evidence is necessary, a satisfactory amount was provided to justify the determination.	Where some supporting evidence is necessary, an exceptional range was provided along with indications of consultations with others.
Creativity/Innovation	None evident where some creativity would provide a simple solution the author has missed.	Evident where needed in alternatives or decision and rationale. - OR - None evident, but no obvious omissions as a result.	Evidence of consistent application of “outside the box” thinking, either in formulation of alternatives or in looking for an option outside wilderness that will address the issue