



Minimum Requirements References in National Park Service Policy

2006 NPS Management Policies

Chapter 6: Wilderness Preservation and Management

6.3 Wilderness Resource Management

6.3.1 General Policy (in part)

All management decisions affecting wilderness will further apply the concept of “minimum requirement” for the administration of the area regardless of wilderness category. The only exception is for areas that have been found eligible, but for which, after completion of a wilderness study, the Service has not proposed wilderness designation. However, those lands will still be managed to preserve their eligibility for designation.

6.3.5 Minimum Requirement

All management decisions affecting wilderness must be consistent with the minimum requirement concept. This concept is a documented process used to determine if administrative actions, projects, or programs undertaken by the Service or its agents and affecting wilderness character, resources, or the visitor experience are necessary, and if so how to minimize impacts. The minimum requirement concept will be applied as a two-step process that determines

- whether the proposed management action is appropriate or necessary for administration of the area as wilderness and does not cause a significant impact to wilderness resources and character, in accordance with the Wilderness Act; and
- the techniques and types of equipment needed to ensure that impacts on wilderness resources and character are minimized.

In accordance with this policy, superintendents will apply the minimum requirement concept in the context of wilderness stewardship planning, as well as to all other administrative practices, proposed special uses, scientific activities, and equipment use in wilderness. The only exception to the minimum requirement policy is for eligible areas that the Service has not proposed for wilderness designation. However, those lands will still be managed to preserve their eligibility.

When determining minimum requirements, the potential disruption of wilderness character and resources will be considered before, and given significantly more weight than, economic efficiency and convenience. If a compromise of wilderness resources or character is unavoidable, only those actions that preserve wilderness character and/or have localized, short-term adverse impacts will be acceptable.

Although park managers have flexibility in identifying the method used to determine minimum requirement, the method used must clearly weigh the benefits and impacts of the proposal, document the decision-making process, and be supported by an appropriate environmental compliance document. Parks must develop a process to determine minimum requirement until the plan is finally approved. Parks will complete a minimum requirement analysis on those administrative practices and equipment uses that have the potential to impact wilderness resources or values. The minimum requirement concept cannot be used to rationalize permanent roads or inappropriate or unlawful uses in wilderness.

Administrative use of motorized equipment or mechanical transport will be authorized only

- if determined by the superintendent to be the minimum requirement needed by management to achieve the purposes of the area, including the preservation of wilderness character and values, in accordance with the Wilderness Act; or
- in emergency situations (for example, search and rescue, homeland security, law enforcement) involving the health or safety of persons actually within the area.

Such management activities will also be conducted in accordance with all applicable regulations, policies, and guidelines and, where practicable, will be scheduled to avoid creating adverse resource impacts or conflicts with visitor use.

While actions taken to address search and rescue, homeland security and law enforcement issues are subject to the minimum requirement concept, preplanning or programmatic planning should be undertaken whenever possible to facilitate a fast and effective response and reduce paperwork.

For more detailed guidance, see Director's Order #41 and the National Wilderness Steering Committee Guidance Paper #3: "What Constitutes the Minimum Requirements in Wilderness?"

(See Director's Order #12: Conservation Planning, Environmental Impact Analysis, and Decision-making)

Additional references to minimum requirements can be found in the following sections of Management Policies:

- 6.3.6 Scientific Activities in Wilderness
- 6.3.9 Fire Management
- 6.3.10 Management Facilities
- 6.4.4 Commercial Services
- 6.4.7 Grazing and Livestock Driveways

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1999 Director's Order #41 Wilderness Preservation and Management

B. INSTRUCTIONS AND REQUIREMENTS

3. Management Responsibility and Accountability. Park managers will ensure that wilderness resources are afforded maximum protection through implementation of the following actions addressing the NPS wilderness accountability and responsibilities defined in Chapter 6

Wilderness Preservation and Management policies. (Reference Manual #41: Appendix C provides a checklist for these items)

d. Administer and Protect the Wilderness Resource. Stewardship responsibilities for wilderness will be completed through the following:

(ii) Minimum Requirement Process. A process to determine the "minimum requirement" for administrative actions, proposed special uses, scientific activities, and equipment use in wilderness will be identified and established. It must specify how the process is to be implemented in the park and that a record of the decisions generated through this process must be kept for public inspection.

C. WILDERNESS MANAGEMENT ISSUES

The following guidance is provided for dealing with major wilderness management issues confronting the National Park Service:

1. Wilderness Management Plan Requirements

The wilderness management plan will: 1) clearly identify the boundaries of wilderness units of the park; 2) identify individuals and/or organizations within the park administration responsible for wilderness preservation; 3) establish an administrative process to determine "minimum requirement" for actions in wilderness; and 4) establish specific management actions to be applied to guide public use and preservation of wilderness resources, including the establishment of desired future conditions.

2. Application of the Minimum Requirement Concept

...except as necessary to meet the minimum requirements for the administration of the area for the purpose of this Act (including measures required in emergencies involving the health and safety of persons within the area) there shall be no temporary road, no use of motor vehicles, motorized equipment or motorboats, no landing of aircraft, no other form of mechanical transport, and no structure or installation within any such area.

The Wilderness Act: Section 4 (c)

All management decisions affecting wilderness must be consistent with a minimum requirement concept.... When determining minimum requirement, the potential disruption of wilderness character and resources will be considered before, and given significantly more weight than, economic efficiency and convenience. If a compromise of wilderness resource or character is unavoidable, only those actions that preserve wilderness character and/or have localized, short-term adverse impacts will be acceptable.

NPS Management Policies: 6.3.5 Minimum Requirement

The National Park Service will apply the minimum requirement concept to all administrative activities that affect the wilderness resource and character. The application of the minimum requirement concept is intended to minimize impacts on wilderness character and resources and must guide all management actions in wilderness.

Wilderness managers may authorize (using a documented process) the generally prohibited activities or uses listed in Section 4(c) of the Wilderness Act if they are deemed necessary to meet the minimum requirements for the administration of the area as wilderness and where those methods are determined to be the 'minimum tool' for the project. The use of motorized equipment and the establishment of management facilities are specifically prohibited when other reasonable alternatives are available. The minimum requirement process cannot be used to permit roads or

inappropriate commercial enterprises within wilderness unless these are authorized by specific legislation.

The minimum requirement concept is to be applied as a two-step process that documents:

- (1) A determination as to whether or not a proposed management action is appropriate or necessary for the administration of the areas as wilderness, and does not pose a significant impact to the wilderness resources and character; and,
- (2) If the project is appropriate or necessary in wilderness, the selection of the management method (tool) that causes the least amount of impact to the physical resources and experiential qualities (character) of wilderness.

It is important to understand the distinctions between the terms "Minimum Requirement," and "Minimum Tool."

Minimum Requirement is a documented process the NPS will use for the determination of the appropriateness of all actions affecting wilderness.

Minimum Tool means a use or activity, determined to be necessary to accomplish an essential task, which makes use of the least intrusive tool, equipment, device, force, regulation, or practice that will achieve the wilderness management objective. This is not necessarily the same as the term "primitive tool," which refers to the actual equipment or methods that make use of the simplest available technology (i.e., hand tools).

Park managers will apply the minimum requirement concept when making all decisions concerning management of the wilderness area. This includes decisions concerning administrative practices, historic properties, proposed special uses, research, and equipment use in wilderness.

Planned administrative actions that may result in an exception to a prohibited use (i.e., chainsaws, aircraft use, radio repeater sites, rock drills, patrol structures, weather stations) or have the potential to impact wilderness resources and values must be consistent with an approved wilderness management plan and be documented in accordance with the park's minimum requirements process. The minimum requirements process will be conducted through appropriate environmental analysis (e.g., categorical exclusions, environmental assessment/FONSI, or an environmental impact statement/Record of Decision).

When determining the minimum requirement for a proposed action, the manager will strive to minimize the extent of adverse impact associated with accomplishing the necessary wilderness objective. The determination as to whether or not an action has an adverse impact on wilderness must consider both the physical resources within wilderness, and wilderness characteristics and values. These characteristics and values include: the wilderness's primeval character and influence; the preservation of natural conditions (including the lack of man-made noises); cultural resource values, the assurance of outstanding opportunities for solitude; the assurance that the public will be provided with a primitive and unconfined type of recreational experience; and the assurance that wilderness will be preserved and used in an unimpaired condition.

Managers must give appropriate consideration to the aesthetic values of wilderness as well as the physical resource. These factors take precedence over cost or convenience in determining minimum requirement.

National parks with wilderness must have a documented process for applying the minimum requirement concept. Reference Manual #41: Appendix F includes examples of "decision trees," which may be adopted or referred to as a procedure by which alternatives can be assessed and final management decisions developed. These decision tree examples do not alleviate a park's

responsibility for providing adequate environmental compliance documentation for individual projects.

Additional references to minimum requirement can be found in the following sections of Director's Order #41:

- C.4. Cultural Resource Management
- C.5. Fire Management
- C.7. Mineral Development
- C.8. Scientific Activities
- C.10. Special Events
- C.12. Commercial Services