



1.6 Policy.

A. Congressional Direction and General Principles

2. Preserve Wilderness Character

- a. Section 2(a) of the Wilderness Act sets forth the Congressional declaration of policy regarding the National Wilderness Preservation System. (See Appendix A for the complete Wilderness Act text).
- b. Section 4(b) further sets forth the agencies' responsibilities in administering wilderness areas and states that the preservation of wilderness character is the primary management mandate. In the relevant part, the Act states: "Except as otherwise provided in this Act, each agency administering any area designated as wilderness shall be responsible for preserving the wilderness character of the area." Section 4(c) of the Act identifies certain uses that are generally prohibited in order to preserve wilderness character. Section 4(d) of the Act sets forth certain "special provisions" for managing certain uses in wilderness areas that may impair wilderness character; details on how to manage these uses within a wilderness context are found in Section 1.6.C of this manual.
- c. As set forth in Section 2(c) ("Definition of Wilderness") of the Wilderness Act, wilderness character is composed of four mandatory qualities and a fifth, optional, quality. These are:
 - i. *Untrammeled*. The Wilderness Act states that wilderness is "an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man." A "trammel" is literally a net, snare, hobble, or other device that impedes the free movement of an animal. Here, used metaphorically, "untrammeled" refers to wilderness as essentially unhindered and free from modern human control or manipulation. This quality is impaired by human activities or actions that control or manipulate the components or processes of ecological systems inside wilderness.
 - ii. *Natural*. The Wilderness Act states that wilderness is "protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions." In short, wilderness ecological systems should be as free as possible from the effects of modern civilization. Management must foster a natural distribution of native wildlife, fish, and plants by ensuring that ecosystems and ecological processes continue to function naturally. Watersheds, water bodies, water quality, and soils are maintained in a natural condition; associated ecological processes previously altered by human influences will be allowed to return to their natural condition. Fire, insects, and diseases are allowed to play their natural role in the wilderness ecosystem except where these activities threaten human life, property, or high value resources on adjacent non-wilderness lands. Additional guidance on this is provided in section 1.6.C of this manual, which addresses the management of specific activities in wilderness. This

quality may be affected by intended or unintended effects of human activities on the ecological systems inside the wilderness.

- iii. *Undeveloped.* The Wilderness Act states that wilderness is an area “of undeveloped Federal land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation,” “where man himself is a visitor who does not remain,” and “with the imprint of man’s work substantially unnoticeable.” Wilderness has minimal evidence of modern human occupation or modification. This quality is impaired by the presence of structures or installations, and by the use of motor vehicles, motorized equipment, or mechanical transport that increases people’s ability to occupy or modify the environment. More detail on the activities that impair this quality is found in Section 1.6.B of this policy.
 - iv. *Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation.* The Wilderness Act states that wilderness has “outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation.” Wilderness provides opportunities for people to experience: natural sights and sounds; remote, isolated, unfrequented, or secluded places; and freedom, risk, and the physical and emotional challenges of self-discovery and self-reliance. Any one wilderness does not have to provide all these opportunities, nor is it necessary that they be present on every acre of a given wilderness. Where present, however, the preservation of these opportunities is important to the preservation of wilderness character as a whole. This quality is impaired by settings that reduce these opportunities, such as visitor encounters, signs of modern civilization, recreation facilities, and management restrictions on visitor behavior.
 - v. *Unique, Supplemental, or Other Features.* The Wilderness Act states that wilderness areas “may also contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value.” Though these values are not required of any wilderness, where they are present they are part of that area’s wilderness character, and must be protected as rigorously as any of the four required qualities. They may include historical, cultural, paleontological, or other resources not necessarily considered a part of any of the other qualities. These values are identified in a number of ways: in the area’s designating legislation, through its legislative history, by the original wilderness inventory, in a wilderness management plan, or at some other time after designation.
- d. The relationship between the components of wilderness character is important: though the qualities listed above are generally thought of separately, it is these qualities working in concert that actually define the whole of wilderness character. There are other intangible components of wilderness character, such as its inspirational value, that have been considered components of wilderness

character in subsequent wilderness designations. Implications of managing for all qualities of wilderness character include:

- i. The qualities of wilderness character are all important.
- ii. Each wilderness may have unique aspects of these qualities.
- iii. Wilderness character is affected by stewardship decisions to take action or not to take action. A single decision or action may impair and/or improve more than one quality.