



1.13 What is wilderness character?

A. Preserving “wilderness character,” referenced throughout the Wilderness Act and this policy, is a primary criterion for judging the appropriateness of proposed refuge management activities and refuge uses, including public use and enjoyment, in wilderness. Preserving wilderness character requires that we maintain both the tangible and intangible aspects of wilderness. Wilderness character increases as it approaches the highest measure of natural conditions and being untrammeled.

B. The tangible and intangible aspects of wilderness include:

- (1)** Maintaining the natural, scenic condition of the land;
- (2)** Providing environments for native plants and animals, including those threatened or endangered;
- (3)** Maintaining watersheds and airsheds in a healthy condition;
- (4)** Maintaining natural night skies and soundscapes;
- (5)** Retaining the primeval character of and influence on the land;
- (6)** Serving as a benchmark for ecological studies; and
- (7)** Providing opportunities for solitude, primitive and unconfined outdoor recreation, risk, adventure, education, personal growth experiences, a sense of connection with nature and values beyond one’s self, a link to our American cultural heritage, and mental and spiritual restoration in the absence of urban pressures.

C. The character of wilderness refocuses our perception of, relationship to, and use and enjoyment of nature. It requires changing our view of a landscape from the utilitarian, commodity orientation that often dominates our relationship with nature to respect for and deference to other life forms and natural processes. It requires us to recognize that we are embedded in these natural processes. Wilderness character imposes upon us an obligation to leave to future generations what remains of the world we did not make and do not control. Wilderness represents a symbol of respect for the natural conditions and wildness that civilization has displaced.

D. We influence wilderness character with every decision about refuge management activities and refuge uses, including public use and enjoyment of wilderness. Maintaining wilderness character requires an attitude of humility and restraint. In wilderness, we do not adjust nature to suit people, but adjust human use and influences so as not to alter natural processes. We strengthen wilderness character with every decision to forego actions that have physical impact or would detract from the idea of wilderness as a place set apart, a place where human uses, convenience, and expediency do not dominate. We preserve wilderness character by our compliance with wilderness legislation and regulation, but also by imposing limits on ourselves.

1.14 What are the principles for administering wilderness? We observe five key principles in administering wilderness:

A. Accomplish Administration Act purposes, refuge purposes, including Wilderness Act purposes, and the Refuge System mission. The Administration Act, refuge purposes, and Wilderness Act purposes tell us what to accomplish on a refuge. The Wilderness Act, however, may affect how we accomplish these purposes, and the Refuge System mission.

B. Secure “an enduring resource of wilderness” by maintaining and, where appropriate, restoring, a wilderness area’s biological integrity, diversity, environmental health, and wilderness character.

C. Administer wilderness areas to provide a wide variety of public benefits “for the use and enjoyment of the American people” (Wilderness Act, section 2(a)) in a manner that is appropriate and compatible with the Administration Act, refuge purposes, including Wilderness Act purposes, and the Refuge System mission; retains wilderness character; is consistent with the nondegradation principle; and leaves the areas “unimpaired for future use and enjoyment as wilderness”

D. Use restraint in our administration of wilderness. As a place “where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man,” we minimize actions for administration of wilderness areas. We may allow exceptions to the generally prohibited uses if the uses are the minimum requirement for administering the area as wilderness and are necessary to accomplish the purposes of the refuge, including Wilderness Act purposes. We may limit even nonmotorized refuge management activities to protect wildness.

E. Provide opportunities for primitive recreation, giving priority to compatible wildlife-dependent activities that are enhanced by a wilderness setting. Provide physical, social, and administrative settings that are conducive to experiencing opportunities for solitude, adventure, challenge, inspiration, and other aspects of wilderness character that the American people can use and enjoy.

1.17 How do refuge managers accomplish both the establishing purpose(s) of a refuge and the purposes of the Wilderness Act?

A. The wilderness portion of a refuge is encompassed both within the Refuge System and the NWPS. Refuge System laws, regulations, and policies apply to refuge wilderness, but we carry them out in ways that preserve wilderness character and comply with the Wilderness Act's prohibitions. Refuge purposes and Wilderness Act purposes tell us what to accomplish on a refuge. The Wilderness Act, however, may affect how we accomplish these purposes and the Refuge System mission.

(1) For instance, on a refuge established for migratory birds, the refuge manager may conduct a census on foot within designated wilderness, while using motor vehicles on other portions of the refuge.

(2) We continue to fulfill the establishing purposes of the refuge and the mission of the Refuge System while complying with the Wilderness Act, and we adjust our management strategies and techniques to prevent degradation of the wilderness character.

B. We adhere to a much stricter standard than usual for approving actions in wilderness so that we maintain the natural and untrammeled condition of the wilderness. We do not authorize generally prohibited uses in refuge wilderness **except** when the use is:

(1) Allowed under the terms of the area-specific wilderness legislation and the Wilderness Act;

(2) The minimum requirement for administering the area as wilderness and necessary to accomplish the purposes of the refuge, including Wilderness Act purposes; or

(3) An emergency involving the health and safety of a person or people within the area.