



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Washington, D.C. 20240



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Memorandum

To: Regional Chiefs, Regions 1-8

From: Assistant Director – National Wildlife Refuge System *Gregory E. Siskantus*

Subject: Establishment of a Wilderness Character Monitoring Committee

As we discussed during the Regional Chiefs' conference call on November 4, I am establishing a Wilderness Character Monitoring Committee to provide focus and support to our efforts to inventory and monitor wilderness character in National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS) wilderness. (See attached charter.)

The primary stewardship mandate of the 1964 Wilderness Act is to preserve wilderness character, yet for 46 years, we have not had a process for measuring its loss or preservation, or for assessing how our stewardship affects it.

Based on the interagency framework (published by the USFS as a General Technical Report) "Keeping It Wild: An Interagency Strategy to Monitor Trends in Wilderness Character Across the National Wilderness Preservation System," this team will establish standards for a wilderness character inventory and monitoring program consistent with the NWRS Inventory and Monitoring Strategy; strategically identify, evaluate, and prioritize inventory and monitoring activities that would benefit NWRS wildernesses; provide coordination with the NWRS Natural Resource Program Center and the interagency wilderness character inventory and monitoring effort; and begin implementation of a nationally consistent approach to describe and assess trends in wilderness character in the NWRS.

Dr. Peter Landres, research ecologist at the Aldo Leopold Wilderness Research Institute will chair the team. The NWRS will benefit from Dr. Landres' experience conducting a similar effort on behalf of the National Park Service. Other members of the team include refuge wilderness managers, a refuge biologist, a regional wilderness coordinator, a representative from the NWRS Natural Resource Program Center, the Service Carhart Wilderness Training Center representative, and the national wilderness coordinator.

Wilderness character monitoring will be an important tool to help managers assess whether or not stewardship actions for an individual wilderness are fulfilling the mandate of the Wilderness Act to "preserve wilderness character." Information from this monitoring will also inform program managers and decision makers about the effectiveness of agency policies to preserve wilderness character.

I would appreciate your full support for all phases of this effort.

For further information, please contact Nancy Roeper, National Wilderness Coordinator, at 703-358-2389 or nancy_roeper@fws.gov.

Attachments

Wilderness Character Monitoring Committee

CHARTER

Background

Pilot testing validated that:

- the interagency protocols are needed to improve wilderness stewardship,
- the approach is practical, and
- the workload impacts to the field are reasonable.

Proposal

We propose to inventory wilderness character in every National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS) wilderness (63) by the 50th anniversary of the Wilderness Act. Trends will be identified in later years by reapplying the protocol five years after the initial baseline inventory to determine if wilderness character has been preserved, has improved or is degrading. To even out workload, the protocol may be implemented in 20% of the wildernesses annually, with all wildernesses being included after 5-years. We also propose to clarify how information about wilderness character can be used to make better decisions for Wilderness stewardship in the NWRS.

Purpose:

The Wilderness Character Monitoring Committee is established for the primary purpose of providing focus and support to inventory and monitoring in NWRS wildernesses by ensuring that such inventory and monitoring is:

- Purposeful and responds to priority information needs
- Integrated across all appropriate disciplines and geographic scales

This primary purpose is achieved by developing a national strategy for wilderness inventory and monitoring that integrates data collected from individual wildernesses. Further, the Wilderness Character Monitoring Committee will encourage and support the development of local monitoring programs and protocols that are fully integrated with this national strategy, the NWRS Inventory and Monitoring strategy, and NWRS planning processes.

Membership:

The Committee will be comprised of 5-7 members, providing wilderness field representation from across the country, as well as representatives from key groups. Ad-hoc members will be involved on an as needed basis. The Washington Office will fund travel and per diem for the team members. It is anticipated that the Committee will complete its work within one year.

The initial membership will consist of:

- Aldo Leopold Wilderness Research Institute representative as Chair
- Managers of NWRS wilderness (2-4)

- Regional Wilderness Coordinators representative
- National Wilderness Coordinator
- Arthur Carhart National Wilderness Training Center representative
- NWRS Natural Resource Program Center representative

Group Responsibilities:

To establish standards for a wilderness inventory and monitoring program, possibly including sampling and statistical design requirements, quality assurance/quality control procedures, and information/data management requirements consistent with the NWRS Inventory and Monitoring Strategy.

To strategically identify, evaluate, and prioritize inventory and monitoring activities that would benefit NWRS wildernesses and their stewardship, including planning and management.

To provide coordination with the NWRS inventory and monitoring program, and the interagency wilderness character inventory and monitoring effort, to enable wilderness managers to utilize these programs as a foundation or basis for wilderness monitoring activities.

Member Responsibilities:

Participate in meetings, conference calls, and electronic mail to communicate discussion points, decision-making needs, and periodic process reviews.

Communicate between program managers, regions, field units, and resource groups to disseminate information and to market products.

Contribute to the decision-making process and support agreements made by the committee.

Key Relationships:

The Wilderness Character Monitoring Committee:

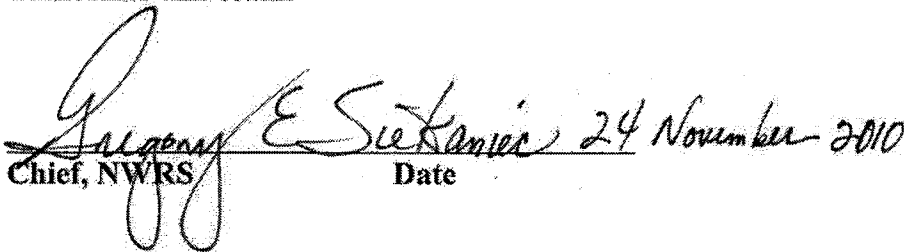
- Reports to the Deputy Chief, NWRS, the Division Chief, Natural Resources and Conservation Planning and Policy, and the Regional Chiefs, who will actively encourage and support wilderness monitoring throughout the NWRS.
- Works closely with the Regional Wilderness Coordinators. The Regional Wilderness Coordinator representative on the Committee has responsibility for identifying those decisions that would warrant the further involvement of the Regional Wilderness Coordinators.
- Develops ad hoc relationships with other functional staff areas and National Wilderness Preservation System agencies on an as-needed, task specific basis.

NWRS Leadership Team Liaison:

A member of the NWRS Leadership Team will be assigned as a liaison to the Wilderness Character Monitoring Committee. This assignment may rotate. The Liaison will communicate NWRS Leadership priorities and decisions to the Committee and be available to provide advice and guidance on Committee work.

Authorization:

On behalf of the NWRS Leadership Team, the Chief of the National Wildlife Refuge System authorizes this team.


Chief, NWRS Date 24 November 2010