

Carhart Wilderness Character Video Transcript

Ever wonder what your biggest responsibility is to be a good wilderness Steward. I can tell you in three words, preserve wilderness character and today's wilderness training video we're going to explore the five qualities that make up that wilderness character.

In 1964, President Lyndon Johnson signed into law "An Act to establish a National Wilderness Preservation System for the permanent good of all people, and for other purposes." Otherwise known by its short title The Wilderness Act. As the legal title states, the Wilderness Act established the National Wilderness Preservation System and originally designated around 9 million acres. The system has grown to over 111,000,000 acres since its inception. Congress stated it was their policy "to secure for the American people of present and future generations the benefits of an enduring resource of wilderness."

You might be wondering what did they mean by a resource of wilderness? What benefits? The act goes on to state that. Each agency administering any area designated as wilderness shall be responsible for preserving the wilderness character. This is viewed as our mandate as wilderness stewards. The preservation of wilderness character. Seems simple enough, but what exactly is wilderness character? Let's read what the Wilderness Act says to get a better understanding of our mandate.

The definition of wilderness section 2C of the Wilderness Act provides a practical definition of wilderness character. The five tangible qualities of wilderness character are described in this section of the Wilderness Act: Untrammeled, Undeveloped, Natural, Outstanding Opportunities, and Other Features of Value. Let's look at each individually.

Untrammeled.

"A wilderness... is hereby recognized as an area where the Earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain." Untrammeled is a seldom used word with a powerful meaning. The word is not untrampled. It's not describing not trampling or disturbing the surface of the wilderness. Polly Dyer and environmental activist fighting for protection of lands in the Olympic Peninsula in the 1950s. Use the word untrammeled in her campaigns. She suggested to Howard Zahniser. Then he also used the word to describe wilderness when drafting the Wilderness Act. That word tripped people up then and it trips people up today.

A trammel is a net or shackle or hobbled. It's something that restricts movement and impedes free play. Some of the synonyms to untrammeled are unmanipulated, unrestrained, unhindered, wild, uncontrolled, and free. You can see the intent of the word untrammeled in the Wilderness Act. These are areas where humans do not direct what goes on in the environment. It is the forces of nature that affect the environment. Untrammeled is about how a wilderness has managed it's about what we as managers of these places choose to do, whether or not in area is untrammeled as a management decision. When we practice restraint in our management, we protect its untrammeled quality. Restraint is a key component to

untrammelled. When actions are taken to manipulate plants, animals or natural processes. We are traveling the wilderness. The wilderness becomes less wild.

What are some examples? Let's go through a few since this is such a misunderstood word and tricky concept and wilderness management. Trammeling would be conducting prescribed burns. Actions that manipulate predator prey relationship. When we remove mountain lions or reintroduced native predators like wolves. Spraying herbicide to control nonnative invasive species. Spreading seeds after a wildfire and stocking fish. There may be good reason to do these activities, but we need to be conscious that those actions degrade the untrammelled quality. The wildness. Untrammelled speaks to the actions, not the effects of management. Our actions are the trammeling. Just remember, a trammel is something that restricts free movement. Untrammelled is wild. We definitely want our wilderness to be wild.

Let's move on to the next quality of wilderness character.

Undeveloped.

The Wilderness Act tells us that wilderness is to be "...undeveloped, Federal land, retaining its primeval character and influence without permanent improvements or human habitation." This one is a bit easier for most people to understand. The absence of the signs of modern human occupation is one of the first things people tend to think of when they think of wilderness. The undeveloped quality is degraded by structures or installations where the use of motors or mechanical transport, undeveloped as essentially without the things that facilitate our ability to occupy or modify the environment.

Natural.

Wilderness is a resource "...which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions and which generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature with the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable:" In area is natural when the presence of native flora and fauna or within a normal range of distribution and density. Whether it is air quality, water quality and quantity and soil condition and also when ecological processes are within the normal range of variability.

Natural in a wilderness context is measured by how free the ecological conditions are from the effects of modern civilization. The fewer of those effects, the more natural the wilderness is. Remember that untrammelled refers to the actions, while natural links to the effects. Natural in a wilderness context is measured by how free the ecological conditions are from the effects of modern civilization. The fewer of those effects, the more natural the wilderness is. Natural is degraded when nonnative plants are present, for example. These usually come in without intentional action on the boots and equipment of recreators. But if they are not part of the natural process, is there a degradation to natural quality? Other examples include loss of native species, degraded physical conditions such as water or air pollution, and when ecological processes are absent, for example with fire suppression. In all of these examples, the natural quality is degraded.

Outstanding Opportunities.

The Wilderness Act tells us that wilderness provides "...outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive or unconfined type of recreation." Outstanding opportunities describes a sense of remoteness and includes opportunities for traditional and primitive skills of a variety of types. It's a place for connection and freedom to engage as you choose. This quality is degraded by the signs of modern society, including encounters that diminished solitude and by visitor use restriction. So just camping regulations.

Other features of value.

The Wilderness Act tells us the wilderness "...may also contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic or historical value." This quality isn't meant to be a catchall for features and all wilderness areas that don't fit into one of the other qualities of wilderness character. These other resources are defined either in legislation or nationally recognized, for example, on the National Historic Register or as a feature. Is widely recognized as a defining unique element of that wilderness. These are degraded when their scientific values have been lost by regional issues such as air quality, obscuring scenic values, or by theft of artifacts or species among other reasons.

Those are the five major tangible qualities of wilderness character. Our mandate in section 4(b) of the Wilderness Act is to preserve wilderness character. Understanding wilderness character is fundamental to stewardship. This concept is the benchmark to completing a Minimum Requirements Analysis and to monitoring wilderness. Do we ignore one quality in favor of another? No, wilderness is a single resource, so we're not managing one quality over another. We're considering them as the whole.

There are other intangible values of wilderness to. Wilderness protects spiritual and aesthetic values, such as a sense of connection with nature and values beyond oneself. Opportunities for personal renewal, inspiration, self-reliance, and solitude, and a haven from the pressures of modern society. If you're in doubt or struggling to understand any of the qualities of wilderness character, the Keeping it Wild 2 document is a great resource that can really help you untangle things. Keeping it Wild 2 document is available on Wilderness Connect.

As a closing note, remember that what we're trying to achieve over the long run is to preserve the full expression of wilderness character in our wilderness areas. Wilderness character is a complex topic, but we hope that you walk away with a better understanding of the five major qualities. And be on the lookout for other videos in this series and training opportunities at the Arthur Carhart National Wilderness Training Center.

Thank you for watching.