



Interagency Wilderness Messages

National Wilderness Preservation System



Contents

Background	3
What Makes Wilderness, Wilderness!	4
Messages	5
Additional Resources	8

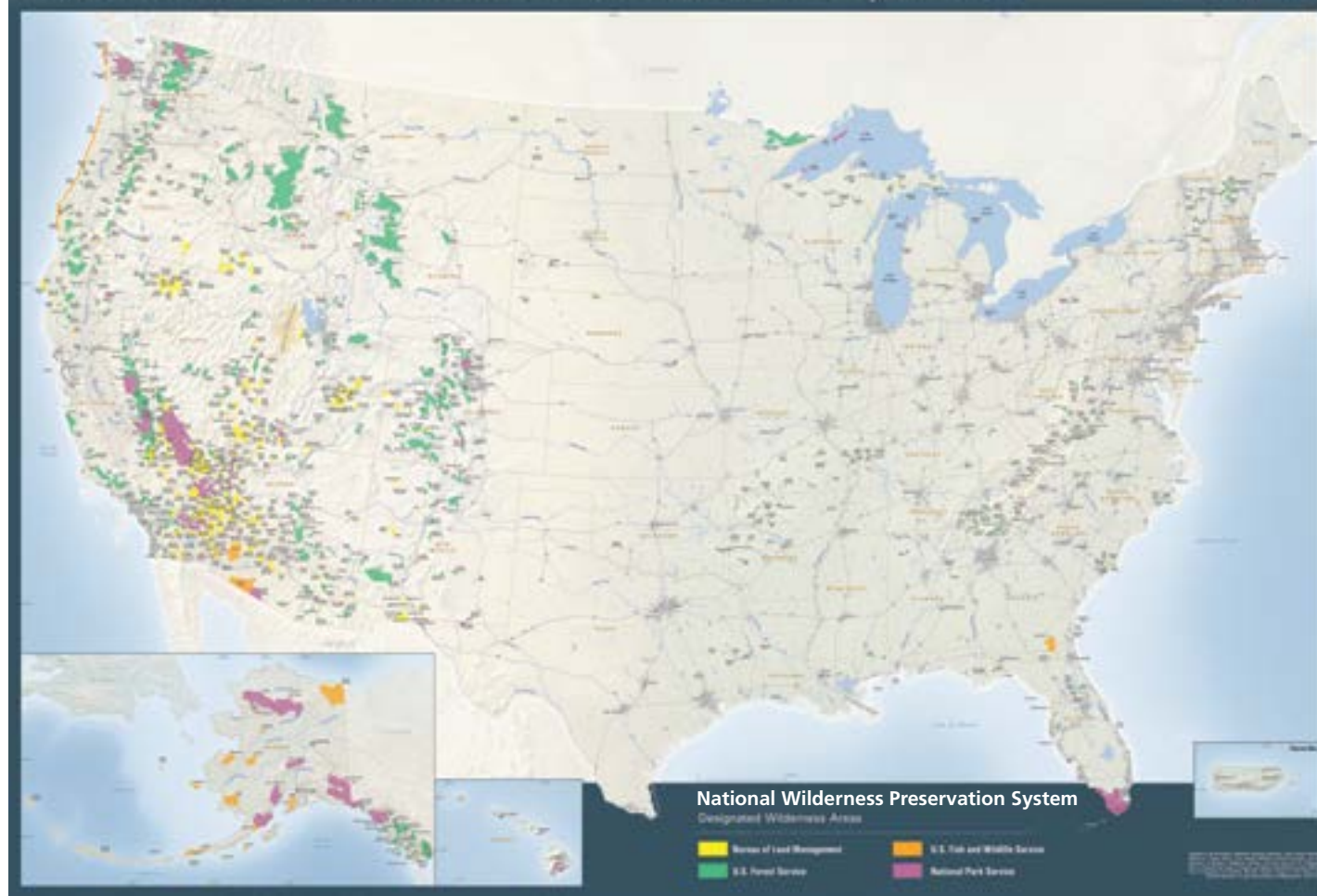
Cover Photo: Mecca Hills Wilderness. Photo Credit: BLM

Background

On September 3, 1964, President Johnson signed the [Wilderness Act](#). It established the National Wilderness Preservation System and immediately designated 9.1 million acres of federal public lands as wilderness in 54 individual wilderness areas. This landmark conservation achievement, with sweeping bipartisan support, provides the highest level of public lands protection in America.

Today the National Wilderness Preservation System contains more than 110 million acres with over 800 wilderness areas, from large and remote tracts in the Alaskan tundra to a small natural oasis just a bus ride away from Times Square in New York City.

Wilderness lands exist within our national conservation lands, national wildlife refuges, national forests, and national parks, and are managed by their respective agencies: Bureau of Land Management (BLM), US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), US Forest Service (USFS), and National Park Service (NPS).



"I believe we have a profound fundamental need for areas of the earth where we stand without our mechanisms that make us immediate masters over our environment."

Howard Zahniser, Author of the Wilderness Act

These wilderness messages were designed as a collaborative interagency communications effort to foster lasting connections to place and specifically to wilderness. The creation of these messages is a priority articulated in the [2020 Vision: Interagency Stewardship Priorities for America's National Wilderness Preservation System](#) — "Expand public awareness, understanding, and support of Wilderness...Utilize consistent and culturally relevant messages about Wilderness values and benefits."

Intended for use with "in-reach" — outreach to agency employees — and outreach by agency staff and partners, tailored use of these messages can help to grow awareness and understanding of wilderness. Messages can be integrated into many communication applications including websites, social media, news releases, bulletin boards, and staff-led activities. The goal is to provide consistent, sustainable and lasting messages for wilderness throughout the National Wilderness Preservation System.

Messages were crafted or re-purposed from existing interagency wilderness publications and Wilderness Act 50th anniversary products and messages. They align with the Department of Interior's and Agriculture's Secretarial Priorities and guidance from the 2018 [Language of Conservation: Updated Recommendations on How to Communicate Effectively to Build Support for Conservation](#).

What Makes Wilderness, Wilderness!

As stewards of our public lands, you may hear colleagues refer to wilderness as either the “little w” or “big W.” The “little w” refers to wilderness as a broad and very malleable concept, like something you might find when you Google the word (i.e., defined as uncultivated, uninhabited or inhospitable) or hear in a popular song. For some, it might mean a city park, while for others it means vast expanse of land. The word “wilderness” has many meanings to many people, and those meanings have changed over time. When we refer to the “big W,” we are referring to federal lands designated as wilderness by Congress and part of the National Wilderness Preservation System. But what does that really mean?

The Wilderness Act gives us an eloquent legal definition that applies to lands within the National Wilderness Preservation System: “A wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his own works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man...” Furthermore, the Wilderness Act states that wilderness areas must be protected for their wilderness character. Wilderness character is a holistic concept based on the interaction of biophysical environments, personal experiences, and symbolic meanings. The idea of wilderness character is unique to federal wilderness areas. Preserving wilderness character, in turn, requires a distinct approach to land management.



Interested in learning more about the 1964 Wilderness Act? Check out [this video](#) to better understand the importance of this law. Considering using this video in your own wilderness communication efforts.

The BLM, USFWS, USFS, and NPS manage wilderness with a sense of restraint and attentiveness to the relationship shared among the different components of wilderness character. By law, agencies must manage a wilderness area differently from other public lands in order to retain the wilderness area’s primeval character and natural conditions, and to preserve it as a special place for humans to examine their relationship to the rest of the natural world. It takes thoughtful human effort to keep wilderness in a “wild” and “free” state, because wilderness implies a deliberate restraint from prevailing trends toward development and control.



Messages

These messages are for you! Use as is, or as a template to write more effective, place-based wilderness messages relevant for your audience.

Theme 1: Wilderness is connected to our way of life.

For the People: Wilderness is yours to share, enjoy, and protect. Many recreational activities are appropriate and compatible with wilderness, especially those that rely on human power and offer challenge and self-development skills.

Past and Present Cultures: Wilderness stewardship builds upon the legacy of shared connections between people and the land. The centuries-old and rich tradition of residence, culture, and identity of indigenous people to lands now managed as wilderness is important to recognize and respect.

Legacy: By preserving wilderness, we leave behind a rich legacy for future generations.

Health: Wilderness protects fresh air, clean water and other attributes important to our physical and mental health. Wilderness gives us a place to unplug and take a break from the busy world around us. Doctors are finding that nature is as important to human emotional and spiritual wellbeing as well as physical health.

Inspiration: Wilderness is a place to rejuvenate and awaken your senses. Visiting wilderness inspires the feeling of being part of something larger than one's self. Even from a distance, wilderness has the power to renew us just by knowing such wild places exist.

Diversity of Recreation: Opportunities for exploring wilderness are as diverse as the landscapes and the people of our country. From walking, hiking, climbing, and paddling to horseback riding, fishing, hunting, skiing, and snowshoeing, wilderness is a place to make unforgettable memories with family and friends or by yourself.



Economic Vitality: Wilderness is the backbone of many gateway communities that rely on visitors to fill hotels, visit shops and outfitters, and to hire guides. Communities near wilderness provide a high quality of life that often attracts new residents and businesses. Jobs in communities near wilderness provide residents with a quality of life many seek and are therefore willing to relocate for new jobs near wild places.

Recreation and Tourism: Outdoor recreation is a growing industry that supports millions of jobs. Wilderness plays an important role in the suite of recreation opportunities upon which this industry depends.

Close to Home: From Miami to Los Angeles, New York City to Seattle, many wilderness areas are within a few hours drive of America's largest cities.

Scientific Knowledge: Wilderness provides ideal locations for scientists, researchers and students to learn from our natural world and apply findings to improve how we live, play, work, and understand natural systems. Wilderness is also a reference point for understanding how natural areas respond to a changing climate.

Climate Resiliency: Wilderness helps provide resilience for our land, air, and water as we see more extreme and varied weather. Benefits from wilderness like clean water and flood protection are even more important as we learn to adjust to these changes.

Stewardship: Managing wilderness requires commitment and thoughtful action—or a decision not to act—by land managers. Together, we can ensure that everyone has a positive and inspiring experience in wilderness by practicing Leave No Trace ethics and being a voice for wilderness values. Stewardship activities attract people dedicated to wilderness work through volunteer and partner programs with the land managing agencies.



Theme 2: Wilderness protects clean water for people, plants, and animals.

Drinking Water: Many waterways throughout the country begin in wilderness. Rivers that start in wilderness provide clean drinking water for our communities downstream: more than 60 million people get their drinking water from wilderness.

Pollution Prevention: Wilderness protects land along and around rivers, lakes, and streams and prevents pollution from entering waterways.

Water is Life: Whether in deserts or rainforests, protected waters in wilderness are essential for plants and animals living in and near these areas.

Theme 3: Wilderness is a natural home for animals and plants.

Home and Habitat: Animals and plants are at home and can roam freely in wilderness, amid vital waters and fresh air with space to adapt to a changing climate.

Endangered Species: Wilderness protects diverse natural areas that give endangered plants and animals refuge.

Pollinators and Our Food: Wilderness can provide a buffet of wildflowers for bees and butterflies that pollinate the fruits and vegetables we eat.

Wildlife Viewing: Wilderness is a spectacular place to experience the awe and wonder of America's wildlife.



Additional Resources

Below are additional resources for those who are new to wilderness and want to learn more:

[2020 Vision: Interagency stewardship priorities for America's National Wilderness Preservation System](#)

[Wilderness Connect](#) (Interagency designated wilderness website)

- [Wilderness reading and bibliography](#)

Agency wilderness websites

- [BLM Wilderness](#)
- [USFWS National Wildlife Refuge System Wilderness](#)
- [USFS Wilderness](#)
- [NPS Wilderness](#)

[Interagency Arthur Carhart National Wilderness Training Center](#)

[Interagency Aldo Leopold Wilderness Research Institute](#)

Acknowledgments

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