

BLM Manual 6340—Management of BLM Wilderness

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14. Research

a. Background. Wilderness offers important and unique opportunities for biophysical and social science research in areas that are relatively unmodified by modern people; these studies may improve wilderness stewardship and benefit both science and society. Educational benefits derived from such research can be significant. All research in wilderness will be managed to minimize impairment of wilderness character through the use of the MRDG and applicable NEPA analysis. Though its use is not required for BLM managers, A Framework to Evaluate Proposals for Scientific Activities in Wilderness (U.S. Forest Service General Technical Report RMRS-GTR-234WWW) may be of assistance to both managers and researchers in developing and analyzing research proposals. See also Appendix B of this manual.

b. General principles. All research proposals may be subject to additional program-specific requirements beyond the guidance provided in this section.

c. Research proposed with a use prohibited by Section 4(c) of the Wilderness Act. Section 4(c) of the Act prohibits an array of uses and activities, including erecting structures and installations; using motor vehicles, motorized equipment, non-motorized mechanical transport; and landing aircraft, including dropping or picking things up from aircraft that do not land (see also section 1.6.B). Exceptions to these prohibitions can be made "as necessary to meet minimum requirements for the administration of the area" as wilderness. Administrative purposes include research that will enhance knowledge and effective protection of wilderness resources. Science activities related to health and safety concerns also may be exempt from the Section 4(c) prohibitions.

i. Generally, any research that must employ a prohibited use and can be done outside the wilderness must be done outside the wilderness. In some circumstances, the BLM may determine through the use of the MRDG and associated NEPA analysis that a 4(c) prohibited use may be allowed for research that would provide substantial benefits to the preservation of wilderness character even if such research could take place outside of wilderness.

ii. Any research that can be done without a prohibited use must be done without a prohibited use if it is conducted in wilderness. When a research project is broken down into component actions, each action that can be done without a prohibited use must be done without a prohibited use.

iii. Research, or any component action of research, that must employ a prohibited use and must be done in wilderness may be permitted if the use meets the minimum necessary test and the benefits to wilderness character BLM Manual 6340—Management of BLM Wilderness outweigh the impacts. In considering whether to allow this research, managers must take into account all

the positive and negative effects to the various qualities or components of wilderness character. Be sure to include both the Undeveloped quality and the Unique or Supplemental quality that encompasses the scientific values of the wilderness.

iv. In determining if a prohibited use is in fact necessary, factors such as cost, efficiency, and time constraints based on non-wilderness concerns should not be used as criteria for excluding non-prohibited methods or alternate locations.

d. Research proposed without a use prohibited by Section 4(c) of the Wilderness Act. These activities must still be analyzed to weigh both benefits and negative impacts to wilderness character. The fact that no prohibited use would be employed does not automatically mean the research would be allowed since some research could impair wilderness character even if it does not involve prohibited uses.

Federal Regulation:

§6302.16 When and how may I gather scientific information about resources in BLM wilderness?

(a) You may conduct research, including gathering information and collecting natural or cultural resources in wilderness areas, using methods that may cause greater impacts on the wilderness environment than allowed under §6302.15(a), if—

- (1) Similar research opportunities are not reasonably available outside wilderness;
- (2) You carry out your proposed activity in a manner compatible with the preservation of the wilderness environment and conforming to the applicable management plan;
- (3) Any ground disturbance or removal of material is the minimum necessary for the scientific purposes of the research; and
- (4) You have an authorization from BLM.

(b) You must reclaim disturbed areas, and BLM may require you to post a bond.