

Research and Scientific Activities Toolbox

Federal Agency Policy

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Fish and Wildlife Service wilderness policy is from its Natural and Cultural Resources Management, Part 610 Wilderness Stewardship, Chapter 2 Wilderness Administration and Resource Stewardship (610 FW2).

2.27 How does the Service conduct research in wilderness?

A. The scientific value of wilderness derives from the relatively undisturbed condition of the biophysical environment and its ecological and evolutionary processes. Because such undisturbed natural areas are increasingly rare, wilderness areas provide unique opportunities for scientific investigation. Everyone associated with research in wilderness must know and understand the purposes, values, and protective provisions of wilderness.

B. We will not allow or engage in research that has significant or long-term adverse impacts on wilderness character or refuge purposes.

C. We permit research in wilderness only if it furthers the administrative or educational objectives or scientific knowledge of the area. There must be a reasonable assurance that the benefits to be derived from the research outweigh any impacts on wilderness character. We require researchers to restore disturbed areas to their previous condition to the greatest extent practical. Existing and potential research activities should be described and evaluated in the refuge's WSP or CCP.

(1) Research as a Refuge Management Activity. We administer Refuge System and Refuge System sponsored research as refuge management activities. We will evaluate research proposals through an MRA (see 610 FW 1.18).

(2) Research as a Refuge Use. We may authorize private research in a wilderness area, with a special use permit (SUP) if it is appropriate and compatible with refuge purposes, including Wilderness Act purposes, and does not involve generally prohibited uses (see section 2.7 and 610 FW 1.16 for additional information).

2.28 How does the Service conduct inventory and monitoring activities

in wilderness? Long-term wilderness stewardship requires that we inventory and monitor wilderness character. Conditions prevailing within a wilderness area at the time of designation serve as a benchmark for the area's wilderness character.

A. We will not allow degradation of these conditions.

B. We should conduct baseline inventories for key wilderness resources and identify the nature, magnitude, and source of any threats that originate both within and outside the wilderness area. Baseline data also provide a frame of reference for the limits, thresholds, and indicators identified in the WSP that may trigger refuge management activities, including limiting public use.

C. Inventories also give us the information necessary to evaluate the effects of refuge management activities, refuge uses, and external threats on wilderness character. We will evaluate proposed inventory and monitoring protocols and activities in an MRA and document inventory and monitoring activities in the refuge's WSP.

2.29 How does the Service protect cultural resources in wilderness?

B. Archeological Research. We administer archaeological research within wilderness areas according to the conditions outlined for research in section 2.27. We encourage archeological research employing noninvasive and nondestructive survey and inventory methods. The refuge manager and the RHPO will review proposals for archeological research. The Regional Director approves or denies archaeological research permits based on the recommendation of the refuge manager and Regional archeologist. We will approve archeological research requiring digging, trenching, or other forms of excavation in wilderness when required to protect a threatened resource. We may also approve other research involving excavation when it can be demonstrated that significant archaeological information may be obtained that cannot reasonably be expected to be obtained from nonwilderness lands.