

Wilderness Signs

Forest Service Wilderness Policy

Wilderness is designated as an area that is “for the use and enjoyment of the American people” and it “opportunities for ... primitive recreation”. But it is also an area that is undeveloped and in ‘contrast to those areas where man and his works dominate the landscape’. To meet these mandates, expressed in The Wilderness Act of 1964, agencies have developed policies and guidelines for signs in wilderness that provide necessary information but refrain from allowing wilderness to become developed. The direction for management of wilderness in the national forests is found in FSM 2320 and other directives as noted below.

Wilderness signs can be used at trailheads and entry points to inform visitors about the wilderness resource, provide information on maps, post regulations, and help educate visitors on the use of Leave No Trace techniques.

2320.3 - Policy

10. Inform wilderness visitors that they face inherent risks of adverse weather conditions, isolation, physical hazards, and lack of rapid communications, and that search and rescue may not be as rapid as expected in an urban setting in all publications and personal contacts.

2323.12 - Policy

2. Use information, interpretation, and education as the primary tools for management of wilderness visitors.

In most wilderness areas, access is provided by a trail system through trailheads, portals or entry points.

2323.13f - Transportation System. Design, construct, and maintain the transportation system in wilderness to provide access to and within a wilderness, that meets the wilderness objectives described in the forest plan.

1. Trails. Trails are an acceptable improvement. Construct and maintain trails to standards described in FSH 2309.18, Trails Management Handbook. National Recreation Trails are generally not designated within wilderness (FSM 2350).

Signs can be used at trail junctions to provide direction to of travel information.

2324.33f - Signs

1. Use a minimum of signing in wilderness.
2. Do not provide wilderness signs for the convenience of the visitor. Along with accurate maps, and wilderness education materials, provide a minimum number of signs for either the routing or location of the traveler or the protection of the wilderness resource.
3. Conform to the standards and guidelines for wilderness signing in FSM 7160, FSH 7109.11, 7109.11a, and 7109.11b. *(Note This direction has been replaced by the **Sign and Poster Guidelines for the Forest Service (EM 7100-15) Chapter 5 – Trail Signing** which is found in Section I of this Toolbox.)*
4. Do not use interpretive and informational signs.