

Capacity Determination for Visitor Use in Wilderness

Basis in Agency Policy

Bureau of Land Management Policy -

BLM Manual 8560.08.B.3 *Limits to Use*. There is a limit to the extent to which such uses as recreation and education may take place within wilderness, because the Wilderness Act also says that they must occur in a manner so as to leave the wilderness unimpaired for future use and enjoyment as wilderness. Provision may be made for recreational, scenic, scientific, educational, conservation, and historical use of wilderness areas in ways that do not jeopardize the conditions of naturalness, the opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation, or the special features that existed at the time an area was designated wilderness by congress. All public use will be administered to ensure that the wilderness resource is kept unimpaired.

BLM Manual 8560.08.B.5. *Use capacity*. Use capacity (recreational, historic, educational, etc.) based on social and ecological elements, will be established for each wilderness area, and will be considered in determining how much use to allow.

BLM Manual 8560.14.C. *Use Capacity*. The use capacity of the wilderness area must be determined, and managers use this capacity to anticipate and avert degradation of the area's wilderness character and as a basis for mitigating the impacts caused by various uses.

BLM Manual 8560.31. *Recreation and Visitor Use*. The wilderness resource will be dominant in all management decisions where a choice must be made between preservation of wilderness character and visitor use. There are places and times within wilderness where unique values may require that recreation and visitor use activities be restricted or entirely prohibited in order to preserve an enduring resource of wilderness. The highest priority among various kinds of visitor use will be accorded those activities which are most dependent upon the wilderness environment and cannot be reasonably accommodated outside of wilderness, and lest effect the wilderness environment. Consider the ability of the wilderness resource to sustain visitor use without loss or degradation of the wilderness resource itself. Carrying capacity (social, biological, and physical) may vary widely within and between wilderness areas due to variations in types and amounts of use, resource characteristics, and the capabilities of the resources to sustain different types and amounts of uses. The leading management tool and document to consider these factors and set guidelines for managing visitor use will be the Wilderness Management Plan. These plans describe the level at which an area is able to absorb use and impacts and describe measures needed to protect wilderness values.