North Cascades National Park Service Complex
Stephen Mather Wilderness

An Enduring Legacy of Wilderness

"[It is hereby declared to be the policy of the Congress to secure for the American people of present and future generations the benefits of an enduring resource of wilderness..." - Wilderness Act, 1964

The North Cascades National Park Complex includes 686,000 acres in three units: North Cascades National Park, Lake Chelan National Recreation Area, and Ross Lake National Recreation Area. Congress has designated 94% of the Complex as the Stephen Mather Wilderness.

Today, as in the past, wilderness is an important part of every American’s story. People seek out wilderness for a variety of reasons: physical or mental challenge, solitude, renewal, or a reprieve from modern life; or as a place to find inspiration and to explore their heritage. What draws you to visit wilderness?

The Stephen Mather Wilderness is at the heart of over two million acres of some of the wildest lands remaining, a place “where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man..." Untrammeled (meaning “free of restraint,” “unconfined”) captures the essence of wilderness: a place where the natural processes of the land prevail, and the developments of modern technological society are substantially nonexistent. Here, we are visitors, but we also come home—to our natural heritage. It is a place to experience our past, and a place to find future repose. This is the enduring legacy of wilderness.