

WILDERNESS IN THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Resource Brief

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Wilderness Stewardship Division

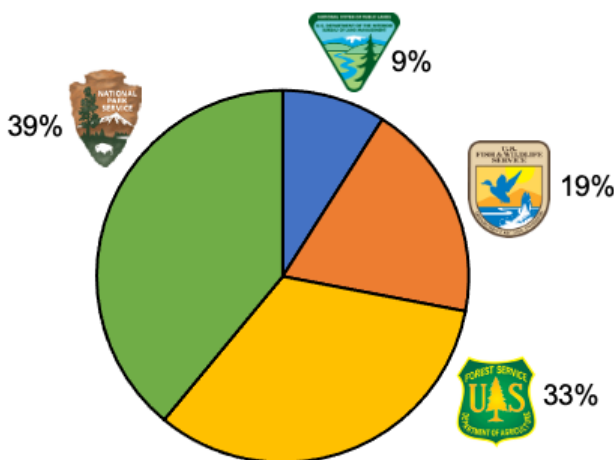


Background

The 1964 Wilderness Act established the National Wilderness Preservation System and defined wilderness as "... as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain." The National Wilderness Preservation System protects over 111 million acres of federal public land through wilderness designation, managed by the National Park Service (NPS), Bureau of Land Management, US Fish and Wildlife Service, and US Forest Service.

The NPS is responsible for the stewardship of 61 designated wilderness areas, totaling over 44 million acres*. Per agency policy, the NPS also manages more than 25 million additional acres as eligible, proposed, recommended, and potential wilderness (see reverse for category definitions). In total, over 80 percent of all NPS lands are managed as wilderness, from Alaska to Florida.

Percent of National Wilderness Preservation System Acres by Agency



Wilderness Stewardship

The NPS manages wilderness areas for the use and enjoyment of the American people in such a manner as will leave them unimpaired for future use and enjoyment. Central to NPS wilderness stewardship is the preservation of wilderness character, which includes the biophysical environment, personal experiences, and symbolic meanings encompassed within a wilderness area. NPS wilderness areas are devoted to the public purposes of recreational, scenic, scientific, educational, conservation, and historical use.

Recognizing the deep connections shared between past, present, and future peoples and wilderness, the NPS invites the public to be stewards of our shared wilderness resource.



Buffalo National River Wilderness (Jeff Rose), Rocky Mountain National Park Wilderness (Mike Halpert), Denali Wilderness (Alaska Geographic), and Shenandoah Wilderness (NPS photo)

Contacts

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To learn more about NPS wilderness visit:

[NPS.gov/wilderness](https://www.nps.gov/wilderness)

[NPS Wilderness Stewardship Program SharePoint](#)

**Acreages cited are based on 'current' acreages informed by GIS mapping technology, which may differ from the legislated acreages.*

DEFINITIONS FOR NPS CATEGORIES OF WILDERNESS

Per *NPS Management Policies 2006*, the NPS preserves wilderness character in five different categories of wilderness:

Eligible Wilderness

An area that possesses the qualities and character, as identified within the Wilderness Act, which would qualify it for designation within the National Wilderness Preservation System. An area where, based upon a wilderness eligibility assessment, the Director has approved the managerial determination of eligibility for wilderness designation and has published notice of eligibility in the Federal Register.

Proposed Wilderness

The findings and conclusions of a formal wilderness study that have been submitted as the NPS proposal by the Director to the Department of the Interior, but has not been approved by the Secretary.

Recommended Wilderness

An eligible wilderness area that has been studied and proposed by the NPS, recommended for wilderness designation by the Department of the Interior to the President, and then transmitted by the President as her/his recommendation for wilderness designation to Congress.

Designated Wilderness

Federal land designated by Congress as wilderness and a component of the National Wilderness Preservation System where the NPS is required to manage according to the Wilderness Act.

Potential Wilderness

Lands which possess wilderness characteristics which would normally qualify them for designation within the National Wilderness Preservation System but contain temporary nonconforming or incompatible conditions (such as structures or roads) or uses (such as in-holdings, valid mining claims or operations) which prevent their being immediately designated as wilderness. These lands may be identified as “potential wilderness” in NPS wilderness proposals, wilderness recommendations, and by Congress in legislation designating other portions of a park as wilderness. Designated potential wilderness should be converted to designated wilderness once the non-conforming uses have been extinguished by publishing a notice in the Federal Register.



Gates of the Arctic Wilderness (NPS/Adrienne Lindholm)