

Wilderness Facts

- Currently 687 Wilderness Areas in 44 States
- Smallest is Pelican Islands Florida: 6 acres
- Largest is Wrangell-St. Elias, AK: 9 million acres
- Total 106,771,194 acres; Alaska contains 54%.
- 4.67% of the United States is protected as Wilderness
- NPS: 41%; USFS: 33%; USFWS: 20%; BLM: 6%





Why Wilderness?

Scientific Value

- “Experimental control” group to compare disturbed landscapes and management experiments
- Should be large enough to encompass landscape processes

Biological

- Habitat for species that do not interact well with humans (e.g., large carnivores)
- Refugia are “sources” for maintaining biodiversity

Source of Human Values

- Humility in the face of nature; lack of control
- Freedom; frontier mentality that contributed to American individuality

Intrinsic Value

- The mere existence of wilderness is valuable
- Rooted in ecocentric environmental ethics

Aldo Leopold (1887-1948)

Published, 1949: *A Sand County Almanac*

Political entrepreneur for first administrative wilderness in Gila National Forest, NM (1924, Gila Wilderness)



“All ethics...rest upon a single premise: that the individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts...The land ethic simply enlarges the boundary of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land.”

We were eating lunch on a high rimrock, at the foot of which a turbulent river elbowed its way. We saw what we thought was a doe fording the torrent, her breast awash in white water. When she climbed the bank toward us and shook out her tail, we realized our error: it was a wolf. A half-dozen others, evidently grown pups, sprang from the willows and all joined in a welcoming melee of wagging tails and playful maulings. What was literally a pile of wolves writhed and tumbled in the center of an open flat at the foot of our rimrock.

In those days we had never heard of passing up a chance to kill a wolf. In a second we were pumping lead into the pack, but with more excitement than accuracy...

We reached the old wolf in time to watch a fierce green fire dying in her eyes. I realized then, and have known ever since, that there was something new to me in those eyes-something known only to her and to the mountain. I was young then, and full of trigger-itch; I thought that because fewer wolves meant more deer, that no wolves would mean hunters' paradise. But after seeing the green fire die, I sensed that neither the wolf nor the mountain agreed with such a view.

Since then I have lived to see state after state extirpate its wolves. I have watched the face of many a newly wolfless mountain, and seen the south-facing slopes wrinkle with a maze of new deer trails. I have seen every edible bush and seedling browsed, first to anemic destitute, and then to death. I have seen every edible tree defoliated to the height of a saddlehorn. Such a mountain looks as if someone had given God new pruning shears, and forbidden Him all other exercise. In the end the starved bones of the hoped-for deer herd, dead of its own too-much, bleach with the bones of the dead sage, or molder under the high-lined junipers.

----- Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac, and Sketches Here and There*

Bob Marshall (1901-1938)

Founded Wilderness Society

Pushed for U-Regulations in Forest Service (Bob Marshall Wilderness in MT is one of the best in the US)



“There is just one hope of repulsing the tyrannical ambition of civilization to conquer every niche on the whole earth. That hope is the organization of spirited people who will fight for wilderness.”

National Wilderness Preservation System: A Synopsis

1964 Wilderness Act

- Definition: “An area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain.”
- Generally a minimum of 5000 acres of roadless land (although Congress has passed legislation, esp. in the East, for smaller)

Administrative Wilderness

- Beginning in 1924 with Aldo Leopold in the Gila Nat. Forest in AZ; Forest Service has designated certain areas as wilderness (“L” and “U” regulations, Bob Marshall)
- 1964 Wild. Act designated bulk of these areas (54 areas, 9.1 million acres)
- 1964 Act directs Forest Service to review roadless areas; 1967 RARE I; RARE II
- FLMPA requires BLM to review roadless areas ‘
- Reviews create “wilderness study areas” for future inclusion; “de facto” wilderness that is subject to special requirements in planning

Wilderness Area Rules

- Wilderness areas must be designated by Congress
- Wilderness managed by agency with jurisdiction over lands in which it is designated
- No roads, no buildings, no motors, except as required for minimum services
- Existing rights grandfathered; many wilderness areas have some historical motorized or grazing use
- 20-year window on establishing mineral rights; prospecting allowed, and claims recognized until 1984
- Operating plans for mines restricted to minimize wilderness impact; e.g., motorized transport not generally allowed
- Fire, disease, and insect control is allowed, but ecological processes are favored

Modern Wilderness “Deals”

Protecting Roadless Areas

- FLPMA orders BLM to inventory Wilderness areas by 1991, with possibility of ongoing study
- Clinton administration orders additional inventory of wilderness areas in Utah and Colorado
- Utah sues DOI under Babbitt; loses in Court of Appeals
- Bush administration: Utah sues again, DOI settles (thereby avoiding court), and 2.6 million acres of potential wilderness now open to oil/gas exploration
- Gale Norton prohibits any further wilderness studies

New Wilderness Designations

- Local coalitions are pressuring their Congress people; e.g. Nevada Wilderness Coalition
- New wilderness details involve trade-offs between wilderness acres and releasing some areas from wilderness designation
- Clark County (NV) Conservation of Public Land and Natural Resources Act of 2002: Designates 17 wilderness areas, releases 233,000 acres of WSA; allows airport expansion
- California Wild Heritage Act; introduced by Senator Barbara Boxer (D)—what tradeoffs are there?

