



Forest Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE



Federal Ministry
for the Environment, Nature Conservation,
Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection



Wilderness in the USA:

Decision-Making on Interventions and Value Creation through Successful Cooperation

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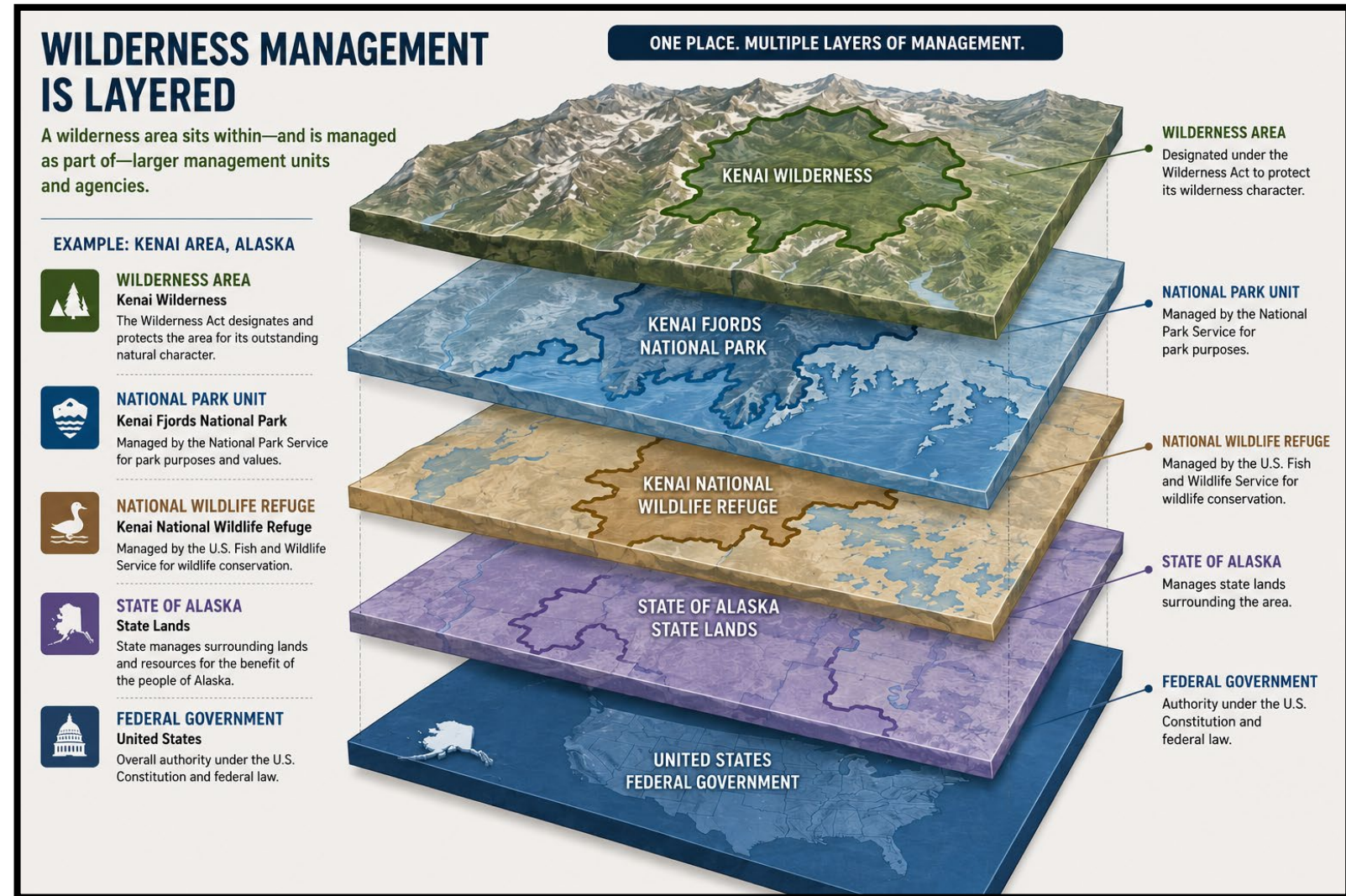
Wilderness in Dialogue Conference

June 22-26, 2026 Passau Germany

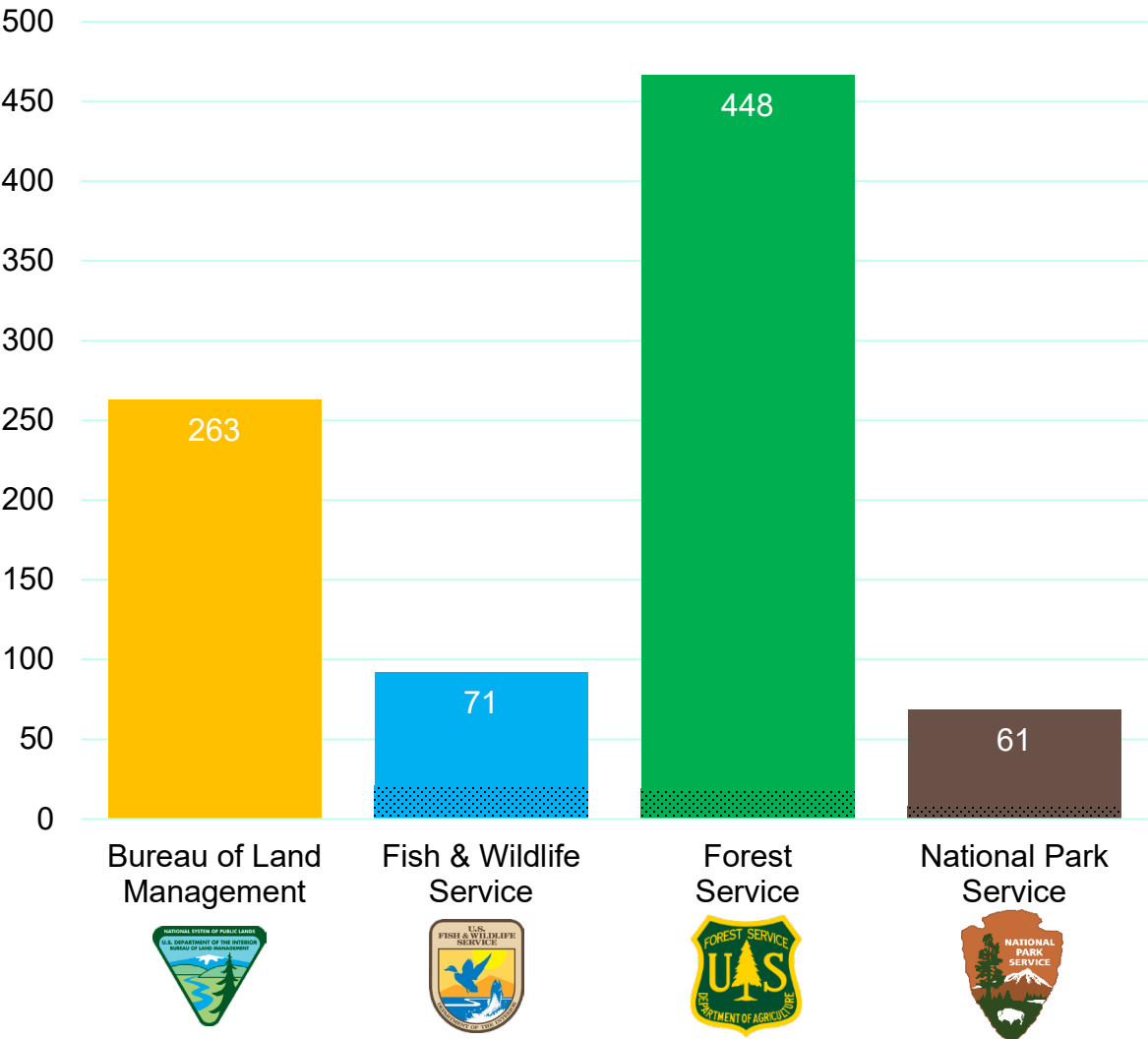
US Federal Land Management



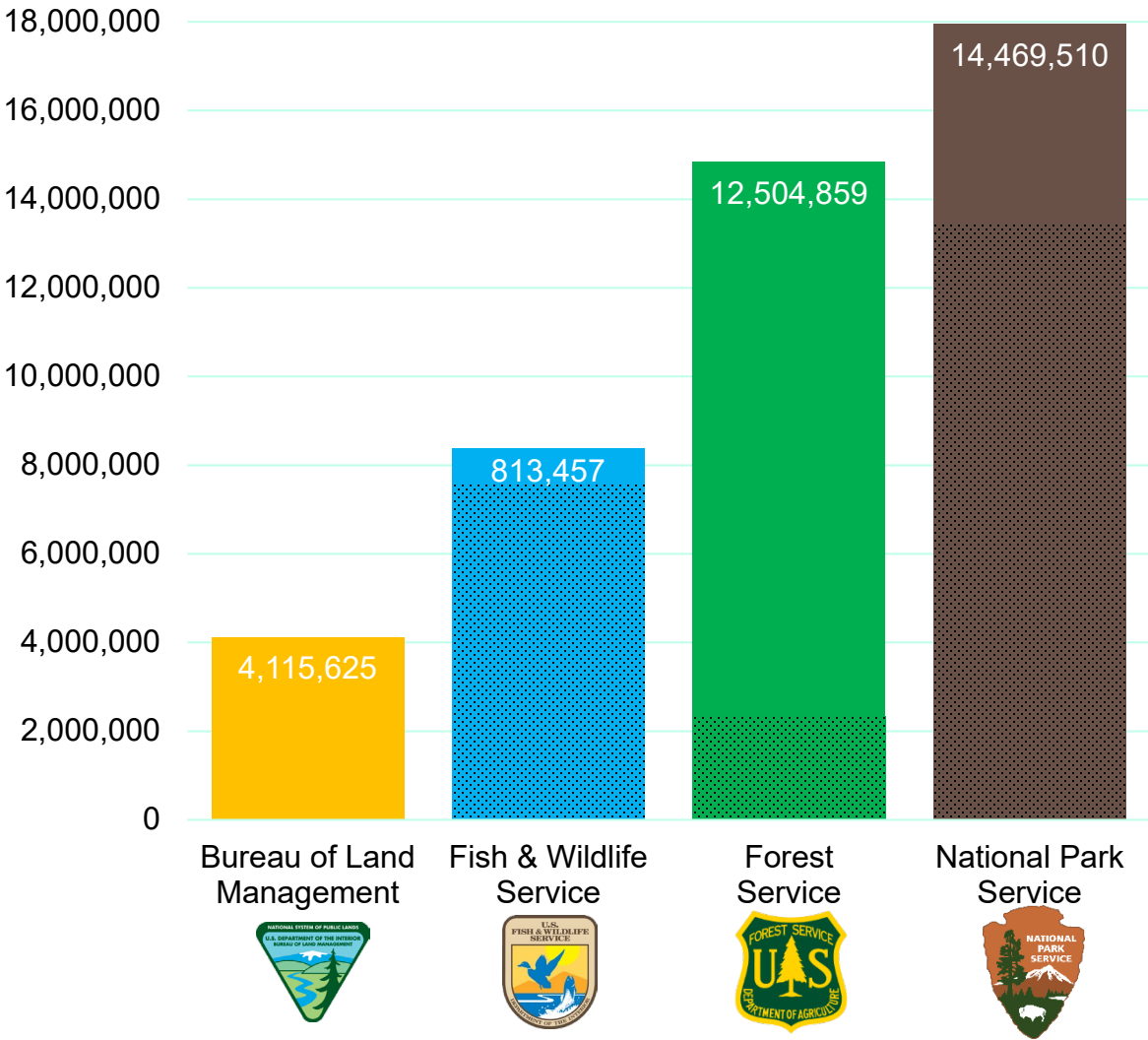
- Multiple Agencies:
 - Bureau of Land Management
 - U.S. Forest Service
 - National Park Service
 - U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
- Multiple Designations:
 - National Park, Wildlife Refuge, Wilderness, National Forest
 - Overlapping management means collaboration, coordination, and shared commitment to stewardship



Current Status of Wilderness



Wilderness Units by Agency



Wilderness Hectares by Agency

USA: Origins of the Wilderness Concept



- Wilderness as a Biblical concept
- Wilderness as an antidote to efficient and widespread nature domination
- A critique of what the Wilderness concept missed



Wrangell-Saint Elias Wilderness, Alaska

PUB #212

GEORGE H. STANKEY*

Beyond the Campfire's Light: Historical Roots of the Wilderness Concept

ABSTRACT

Because wilderness holds a variety of culturally imbued meanings, it is necessary to understand its cultural origins. The Judeo-Christian origins of western society generally are credited with portraying wilderness as a synonym for desolate, wild, and uninhabited lands manifesting God's displeasure. But wilderness also served an important function in Christianity as a place where one could prepare for contact with God. Such contrasting perspectives created an ambivalence that still prevails. Yet despite the ambivalence, early European and North American societies perceived wilderness as a threat. A gradual rise in scientific understanding was a major force in promoting a change in this perspective. But not until the intellectual shifts prompted by Romanticism and transcendentalism, along with an increasing scarcity of wilderness, did efforts to protect wilderness gain support.

INTRODUCTION

At one time, all the earth was wild. The natural forces of fire, wind, and rain operated freely, carving and shaping the face of the planet. The ebb and flow of environmental change took place unfettered by any human influence. Earth was a global wilderness.

Or was it? It was a place absent of any human impact, to be sure, but the very absence of human presence also meant there was no cultural system within which the values of naturalness or the distinctiveness of the environment as a contrast to civilization could be appreciated. Even as the early aboriginal tribes appeared and began the first tentative alteration of their environment to facilitate survival, the idea of wilderness as a distinctive environment, let alone an area deserving special attention, was beyond comprehension. Just as the iron ore of the Mesabi Range of northern Minnesota would hold no special value to the Chippewa Indians centuries later, untrammeled nature was of no special significance to the world's first human settlers.¹ At the dawn of human society, the world was simply a miscellaneous assemblage of biological conditions.

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1. Burch, In Praise of Humility: The Human Nature of Nature. XLV APPALACHIAN 66 (1984).



The Wilderness Act of 1964

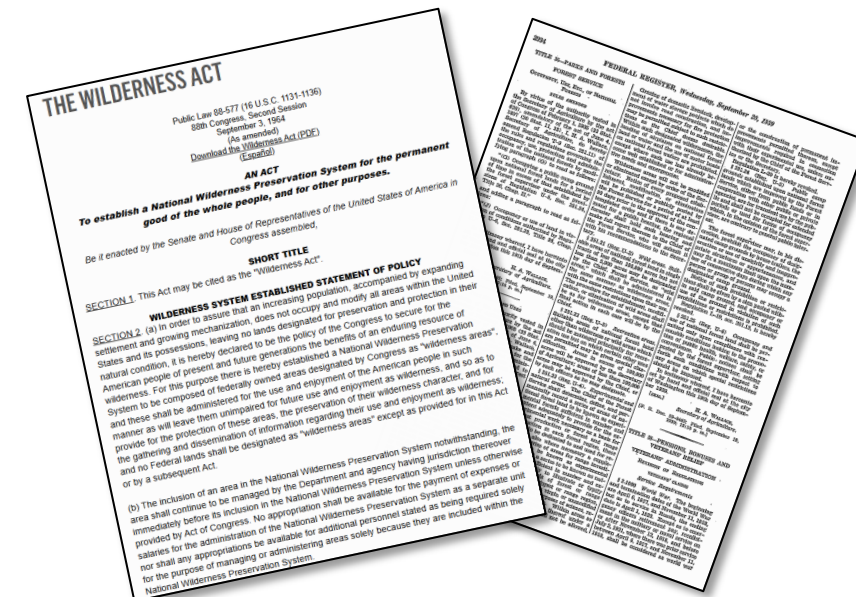


The Wilderness Act of 1964 defines wilderness as a place that:

- provides "...for the American people of present and future generations the benefits of an **enduring resource of wilderness.**" Section 2(a)
- "...shall be administered for the **use and enjoyment** of the American people **in such a manner as will leave them unimpaired for future use** and enjoyment as wilderness, and so as to provide for the protection of these areas, the preservation of their **wilderness character...**" Section 2(a)
- "...is protected and managed so as to **preserve its natural conditions...**" Section 2(c)
- "...has **outstanding opportunities for solitude** or a **primitive and unconfined type of recreation...**" Section 2(c)
- "...shall be **devoted to the public purposes of recreational, scenic, scientific, educational, conservation, and historical use.**" Section 4(b)



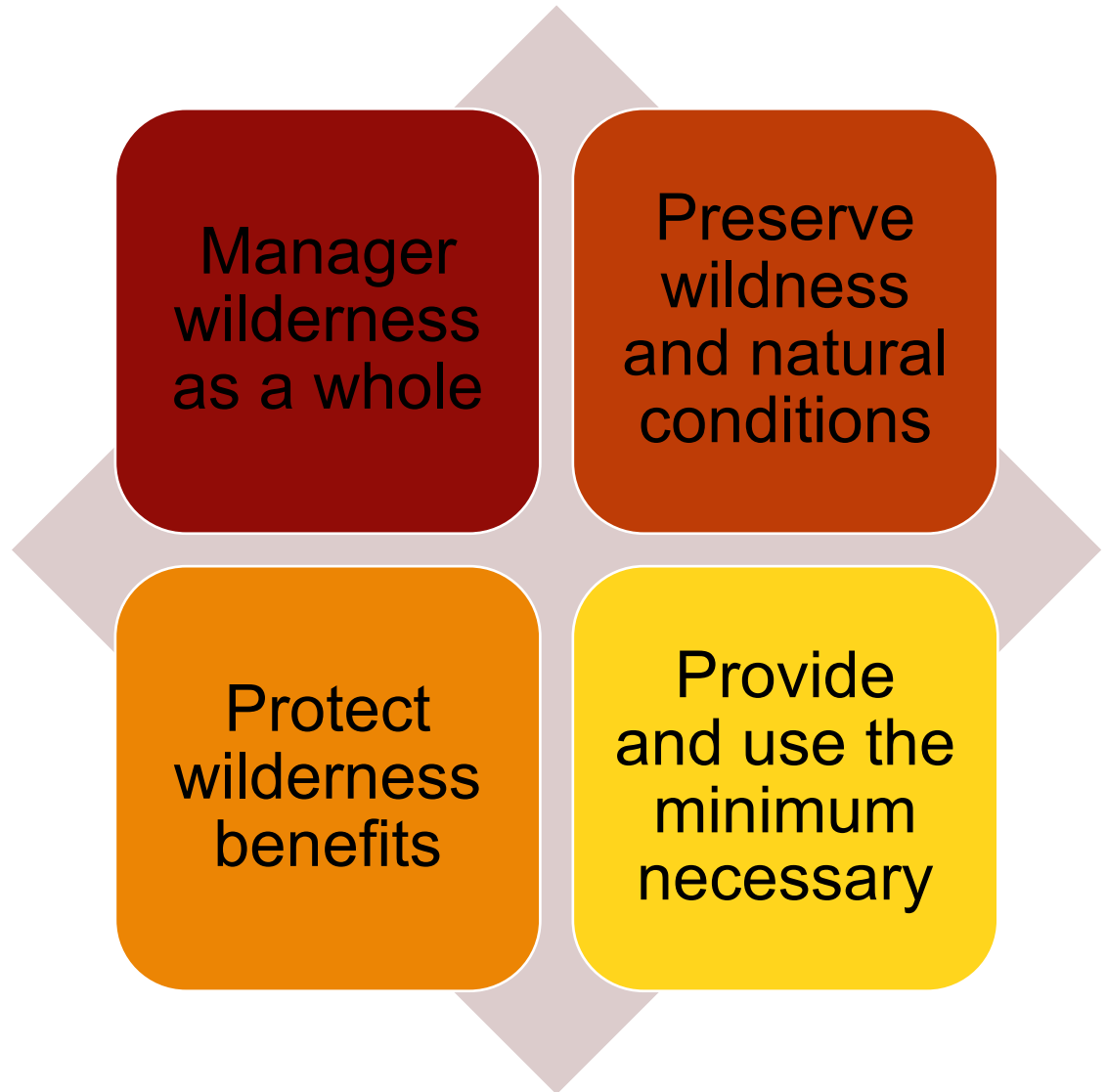
Anaconda Pintler Wilderness, Montana



Wilderness Management Principles



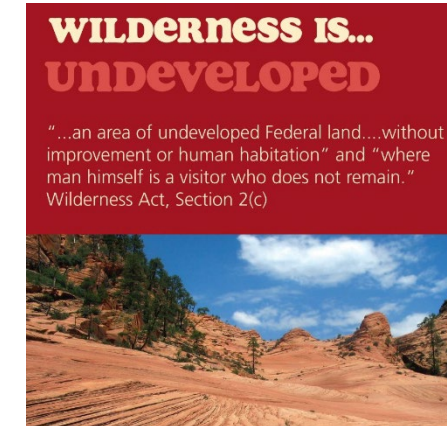
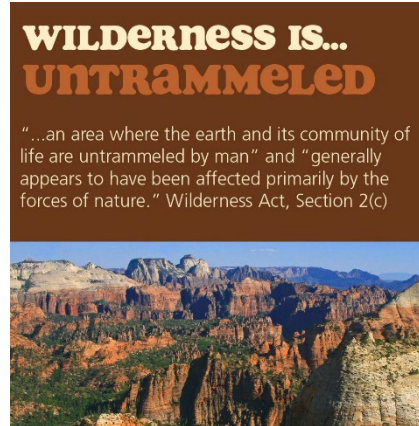
- Nondegradation Concept
- Wilderness Character
- Minimum Requirements
- Public Purpose of Wilderness



Preserving Wilderness Character

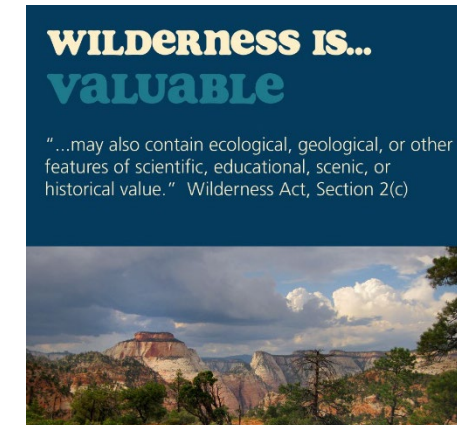
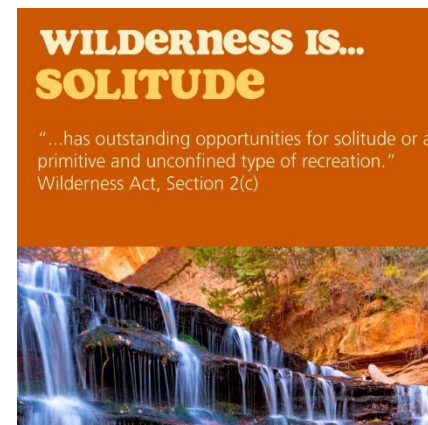


Wilderness character is a holistic concept based on the interaction of **biophysical environments, personal experiences, and symbolic meanings.**



Wilderness character also includes five **tangible** qualities associated with the biophysical environment:

- **Natural**
- **Untrammeled**
- **Undeveloped**
- **Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation**
- **Other Features of Value**



Minimum Requirements Analysis



Managing agencies adhere closely to the "minimum requirements" concept. Minimum means the least possible and a requirement is a necessity.

Examples include:

- to allow researchers to radio collar wolves
- repair an aging and unsafe historical cabin
- build a new trail

The concept is to:

- determine if any action is necessary in wilderness
- determine how to accomplish action using the least amount (if any) of an otherwise prohibited use and minimize impacts to wilderness character



Arthur Carhart National Wilderness Training Center

MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS ANALYSIS FRAMEWORK WORKBOOK

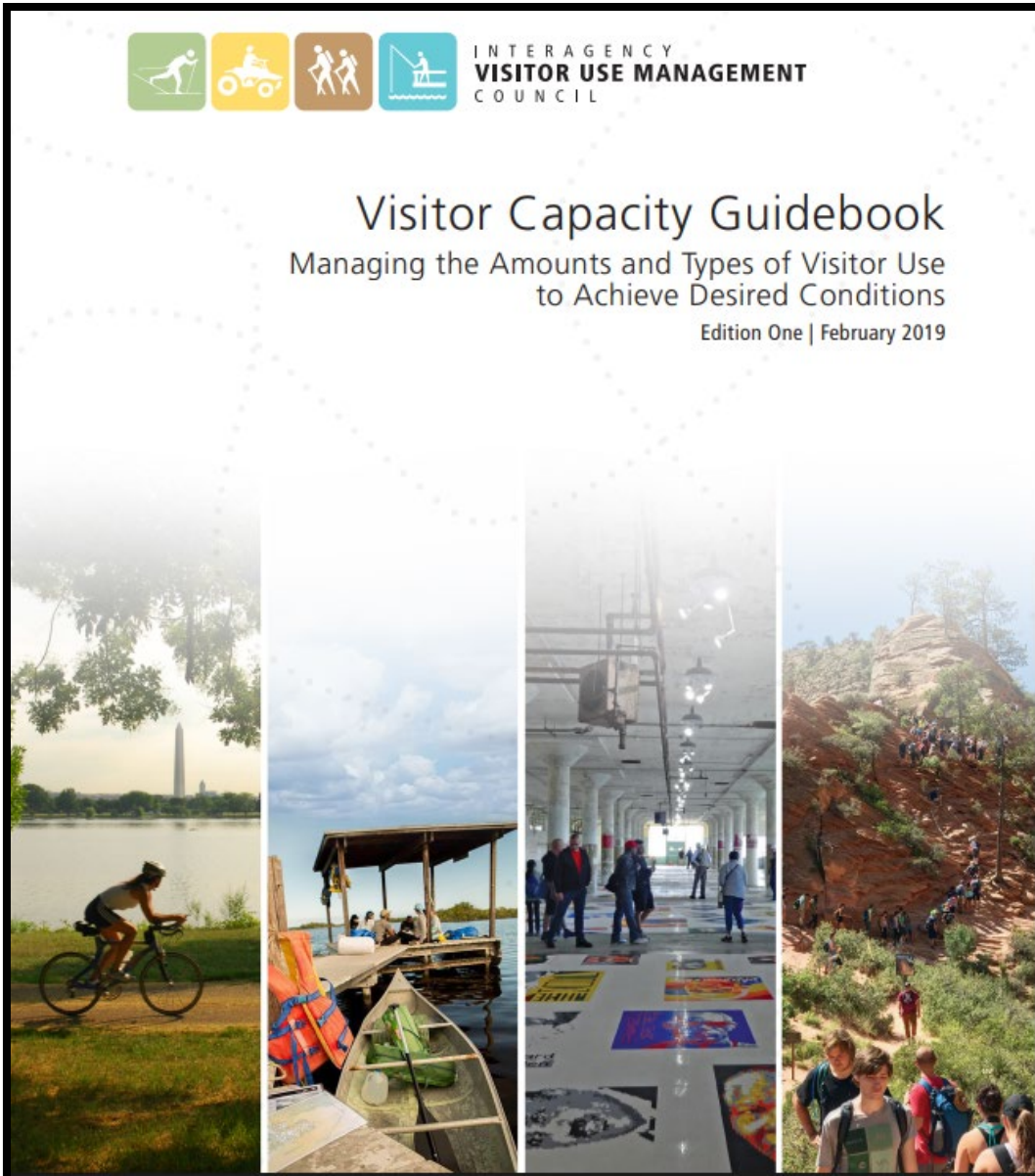
"...except as necessary to meet minimum requirements for the administration of the area for the purpose of this Act..."

— Section 4(c), Wilderness Act of 1964

Introduction

The Minimum Requirements Analysis (MRA) is designed to examine whether a project truly needs to occur in wilderness, and if so, how to accomplish it with the least impact to the wilderness resource. The framework below is intended to help managers: 1) evaluate actions proposed in wilderness involving a use otherwise prohibited by the Wilderness Act; and 2) consider appropriate choices about administrative actions they might take. Like the previous version of this document (the Minimum Requirements Decision Guide (MRDG)), the MRA Framework (MRAF) is based on the Wilderness Act and is consistent with agency policy. The MRAF incorporates lessons learned by agency employees as they used the MRDG over the years. The goal of the MRAF is to help provide consistency in the way wilderness-managing agencies consider actions to address threats to wilderness, and to ensure that agencies strive to preserve wilderness character through their on-the-ground decisions.

Interagency Visitor Use Management Framework



- Analyzing and describing the current conditions.
- Conceptualizing desired conditions for resources, visitor opportunities, facilities, and services.
- Determining strategies and actions that will help reach those desired conditions.
- Design a monitoring system to ensure the effectiveness of actions.

Wilderness Values



- Ecological benefits
- Ecosystem processes
- Clean air
- Clean water
- Wildlife protection and migration



Mount Hood Wilderness, Oregon

Wilderness Values



Ansel Adams Wilderness, California

- Economy
- Education
- Geology
- History and culture
- Outdoor recreation
- Scenery
- Science

Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness



- 437,060 hectares in northern Minnesota
- Annual visitation over 200,000 visits
- Permit quota system
- Nearly 70% of use by repeat visitors



Wilderness Challenges



- Untrammeled
 - Climate Change Destabilization
 - Temperature sensitive species
 - Wildland fire management
 - Water resources
 - Invasives species and restoration
- Evolving pressures from recreation
 - Exponential increases in demand
 - Ecological impacts to wildlife
 - Lack of resources and staffing





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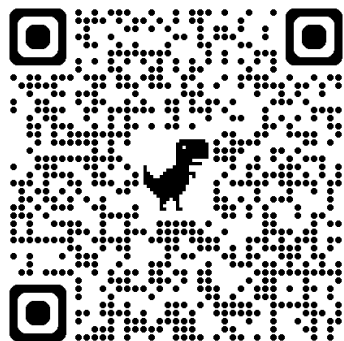
WILDNIS
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US-Germany Partnership on Wilderness

Thank you!



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