

Wilderness Preservation and Management guidelines from the National Park Service Management Policies:

<http://www.nps.gov/policy/mp/policies.html>

6 Wilderness Preservation and Management

All NPS lands will be evaluated for their eligibility for inclusion within the national wilderness preservation system. For those lands that possess wilderness characteristics, no action that would diminish their wilderness eligibility will be taken until after Congress and the President have taken final action. The superintendent of each park containing wilderness will develop and maintain a wilderness management plan or equivalent document. Wilderness considerations will be integrated into all planning documents to guide the preservation, management, and use of the park's wilderness area and ensure that wilderness is unimpaired for future use and enjoyment as wilderness.

6.1 General Statement

The National Park Service will manage 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 as wilderness. Management will include the protection of these areas, the preservation of their wilderness character, and the gathering and dissemination of information regarding their use and enjoyment as wilderness. The purpose of wilderness in the national parks includes the preservation of wilderness character and wilderness resources in an unimpaired condition and, in accordance with the [Wilderness Act](#), wilderness areas shall be devoted to the public purposes of recreational, scenic, scientific, educational, conservation, and historical use.

The policies contained in this chapter are supplemented by Director's Order #41: Wilderness Preservation and Management and Reference Manual 41, which accompanies the director's order. Those documents should be referred to for more detailed information on the topics covered in this chapter.

6.2 Identification and Designation of the Wilderness Resource

The National Park Service will use the following wilderness study process to consider NPS areas for inclusion within the congressionally designated national wilderness preservation system.

6.2.1 Assessment of Wilderness Eligibility or Ineligibility

All lands administered by the National Park Service, including new units or additions to existing units since 1964, will be evaluated for their eligibility for inclusion in the national wilderness preservation system. Additionally, lands that were originally assessed as ineligible for wilderness because of nonconforming or incompatible uses must be reevaluated if the nonconforming uses have been terminated or removed. A wilderness eligibility assessment will consist of a brief memorandum from the regional director to the Director that makes a managerial determination as to the eligibility of the park lands for wilderness designation.

The assessment may include information important for other park planning purposes, and other park planning efforts may likewise produce information important to wilderness. The assessment should therefore be completed in a timely manner and thoughtfully coordinated with other planning activities. The assessment may be combined with the wilderness study described below if the combined document can be completed in a timely manner.

6.2.1.1 Primary Eligibility Criteria

NPS lands will be considered eligible for wilderness if they are at least 5,000 acres or of sufficient size to make practicable their preservation and use in an unimpaired condition, and if they possess the following characteristics (as identified in the Wilderness Act):

- The earth and its community of life are untrammeled by humans, where humans are visitors and do not remain.
- The area is undeveloped and retains its primeval character and influence without permanent improvements or human habitation.
- The area generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of humans' work substantially unnoticeable.
- The area is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions.
- The area offers outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation.

6.2.1.2 Additional Considerations in Determining Eligibility

In addition to the primary eligibility criteria, the following considerations should be taken into account in determining eligibility:

- A wilderness area may contain significant ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value, although it does not need these things to be considered eligible for wilderness designation.
- Lands that have been logged, farmed, grazed, mined, or otherwise used in ways not involving extensive development or alteration of the landscape may also be considered eligible for wilderness designation if, at the time of assessment, the effects of these activities are

substantially unnoticeable or their wilderness character could be maintained or restored through appropriate management actions.

- An area will not be excluded from a determination of wilderness eligibility solely because established or proposed management practices require the use of tools, equipment, or structures if those practices are necessary to meet minimum requirements for the administration of the area as wilderness.
- In the process of determining wilderness eligibility, lands will not be excluded solely because of existing rights or privileges (e.g., mineral exploration and development, commercial operations, agricultural development, grazing, or stock driveways). If the National Park Service determines that these lands possess wilderness character, they may be included in the eligibility determination so that they can be considered for designation as wilderness or potential wilderness.
- Lands containing aboveground or buried utility lines will normally not be considered as eligible for wilderness designation, but they can be considered as eligible for “potential” wilderness designation if there is a long-term intent to remove the lines. No new utility lines may be installed in wilderness, and existing utility lines may not be extended or enlarged except as may be allowed pursuant to section 1106 of the [Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act \(16 USC 1133\(c\)\)](#).
- Historic features that are primary attractions for park visitors will generally not be recommended as eligible for wilderness designation. However, an area that attracts visitors primarily for the enjoyment of solitude and unconfined recreation in a primitive setting may also contain cultural resource features and still be included in wilderness. Historic trails may serve and be maintained as part of the wilderness trail system, as identified and coordinated within an approved wilderness management plan and the park’s cultural resource plan. The presence of historic structures does not make an area ineligible for wilderness. A recommendation may be made to include a historic structure in wilderness if (1) the structure would be only a minor feature of the total wilderness proposal; and (2) the structure will remain in its historic state, without development.
- Dams within or affecting the area being studied do not make a waterway ineligible for wilderness designation. The nature and extent of impacts and the extent to which the impacts can be mitigated would need to be addressed in subsequent wilderness studies.
- The established use of motorboats, snowmobiles, or aircraft does not make an area ineligible for wilderness. The nature and extent of any impacts on the environment and on eligibility, and the extent to which the impacts can be mitigated would need to be addressed in subsequent wilderness studies, along with the possible need to discontinue the use.
- Overflights do not make an area ineligible for wilderness designation. The nature and extent of any overflight impacts and the extent to which the impacts can be mitigated would need to be addressed in subsequent wilderness studies.

6.2.1.3 The Assessment Process

The Service will involve the public in the wilderness eligibility assessment process through notification of its intentions to conduct the assessment and publication of the Director's determination, either as "eligible" or as "ineligible" for further wilderness study. Notification will include the issuance of news releases to local and regional news media and the publication of a final eligibility determination in the *Federal Register*. The final determination of an area's eligibility, or ineligibility, for further study must be approved by the Director before publication of the final eligibility determination in the *Federal Register*. For areas determined to be ineligible for wilderness designation, the wilderness preservation provisions in the NPS *Management Policies* are not applicable. However, ineligible lands will be managed in accordance with the [NPS Organic Act](#) and all other laws, executive orders, regulations, and policies applicable to units of the national park system.

6.2.2 Wilderness Studies

Lands and waters found to possess the characteristics and values of wilderness, as defined in the [Wilderness Act](#) and determined eligible pursuant to the wilderness eligibility assessment, will be formally studied to develop the recommendation to Congress for wilderness designation. The National Park Service will continue to undertake wilderness studies of all lands that have been determined to be eligible as a result of the wilderness eligibility assessment. Also, studies will be made of lands for which subsequent legislation directs that wilderness studies be completed.

Wilderness studies will be supported by appropriate documentation of compliance with the [National Environmental Policy Act](#) and the [National Historic Preservation Act](#). The Council on Environmental Quality requires environmental impact statements for wilderness studies that will result in recommendations for designations (i.e., proposals for legislation to designate as wilderness).

6.2.2.1 Potential Wilderness

A wilderness study may identify lands that are surrounded by or adjacent to lands proposed for wilderness designation but that do not themselves qualify for immediate designation due to temporary nonconforming or incompatible conditions. The wilderness recommendation forwarded to the Congress by the President may identify these lands as "potential" wilderness for future designation as wilderness when the nonconforming use has been removed or eliminated. If so authorized by Congress, these potential wilderness areas will become designated wilderness upon the Secretary's determination, published in the *Federal Register*, that they have finally met the qualifications for designation by the cessation or termination of the nonconforming use.

6.2.2.2 Proposed Wilderness

The findings and conclusions of a formal wilderness study will be reviewed by the Director, who will then determine which lands will be forwarded to the Department of the Interior (Assistant Secretary's Office) as "proposed" wilderness. The Director's proposed wilderness will identify

park lands that the Director believes the Secretary should recommend for immediate wilderness designation, as well as any other lands identified as “not proposed” or as “potential” wilderness.

6.2.3 Recommended Wilderness

The Secretary of the Interior is responsible for recommending to the President those lands under his/her jurisdiction that are suitable or unsuitable for inclusion within the national wilderness preservation system. The Secretary performs this function through the Assistant Secretary’s Office by reviewing NPS proposed wilderness and either approving or revising the proposal. The final result is forwarded by the Secretary for the President’s consideration. The President is then responsible for transmitting his recommendations with respect to wilderness designation to both houses of Congress. These recommendations must be accompanied by maps and boundary descriptions. The National Park Service will track the status of the wilderness designation process in Congress.

6.2.4 Designated Wilderness

After the President’s wilderness recommendation is formally sent to and considered by Congress, Congress may subsequently enact the legislation needed to include the area within the national wilderness preservation system as “designated” and/or “potential” wilderness. The National Park Service will assist the department and Congress in this process as requested. Lands released by Congress from further wilderness consideration will be managed in accordance with the NPS Organic Act and all other laws, executive orders, regulations, and policies applicable to nonwilderness areas of the national park system.

6.3 Wilderness Resource Management

6.3.1 General Policy

For the purposes of applying these policies, the term “wilderness” will include the categories of eligible, study, proposed, recommended, and designated wilderness. Potential wilderness may be a subset of any of these five categories. The policies apply regardless of category except as otherwise provided herein.

In addition to managing these areas for the preservation of the physical wilderness resources, planning for these areas must ensure that the wilderness character is likewise preserved. This policy will be applied to all planning documents affecting wilderness.

The National Park Service will take no action that would diminish the wilderness eligibility of an area possessing wilderness characteristics until the legislative process of wilderness designation has been completed. Until that time, management decisions will be made in expectation of eventual wilderness designation. This policy also applies to potential wilderness, requiring it to be managed as wilderness to the extent that existing nonconforming conditions allow. The National Park Service will apply the principles of civic engagement and cooperative conservation as it determines the most appropriate means of removing the temporary,

nonconforming conditions that preclude wilderness designation from potential wilderness. All management decisions affecting wilderness will further apply the concept of “minimum requirement” for the administration of the area regardless of wilderness category. The only exception is for areas that have been found eligible, but for which, after completion of a wilderness study, the Service has not proposed wilderness designation. However, those lands will still be managed to preserve their eligibility for designation.

(See [Minimum Requirement 6.3.5](#))

6.3.2 Responsibility

NPS responsibility for carrying out wilderness preservation mandates will be shared by the Director, regional directors, and superintendents of parks with eligible, study area, proposed, recommended, and designated wilderness. Interagency cooperation and coordination and training responsibilities will also be carried out at the Washington, D.C., region, and park levels. Specific wilderness management responsibilities will be assigned at each of these administrative levels to carry out these responsibilities effectively and to facilitate efforts for establishing agency and interagency consistency in wilderness management techniques.

Superintendents will provide the information needed to prepare an annual wilderness report to Congress and to report to the Director on the status of wilderness management in the national park system. Based on this information, the Associate Director for Visitor and Resource Protection will provide the Directorate with recommendations and advice to permanently establish a system of accountability, consistency, and continuity for NPS wilderness management.

6.3.3 Consistency

The National Park Service will seek to achieve consistency in wilderness management objectives, techniques, and practices on both an agency and an interagency basis. Accordingly, the National Park Service will seek to maintain effective intra-agency and interagency communications, and will encourage, sponsor, and participate in intra-agency and interagency training and workshops designed to promote the sharing of ideas, concerns, and techniques related to wilderness management. However, the need for interagency consistency will in no way diminish any established NPS wilderness standards and values.

6.3.4 Wilderness-related Planning and Environmental Compliance

Policies on wilderness planning and compliance include the following.

6.3.4.1 Zoning for Wilderness

When necessary, all categories of wilderness may be zoned for visitor experiences and resource conditions consistent with their wilderness values within the established management zoning system for each park. However, management zoning or other land use classifications cannot and will not diminish or reduce the maximum protection to be afforded lands with wilderness values.

Transition zones adjacent to wilderness may be identified to help protect wilderness values, but no transitional or “buffer” zones are appropriate within wilderness boundaries.

6.3.4.2 Wilderness Management Planning

The superintendent of each park containing wilderness resources will develop and maintain a wilderness management plan or equivalent planning document to guide the preservation, management, and use of these resources. The wilderness management plan will identify desired future conditions, as well as establish indicators, standards, conditions, and thresholds beyond which management actions will be taken to reduce human impacts on wilderness resources.

The park’s wilderness management plan may be developed as a separate document or as an action component of another planning document. Whether prepared as a stand-alone plan or as part of another planning document, all wilderness management plans must meet the same standards for process and content as specified in this section 6.3.4. Wilderness management plans will be supported by appropriate documentation of compliance with the [National Environmental Policy Act](#) and the [National Historic Preservation Act](#). The plan will be developed with public involvement and will contain specific, measurable management objectives that address the preservation and management of natural and cultural resources within wilderness as appropriate to achieve the purposes of the [Wilderness Act](#) and other legislative requirements.

(See [Visitor Carrying Capacity 8.2.1](#))

6.3.4.3 Environmental Compliance

Proposals having the potential to impact wilderness resources will be evaluated in accordance with NPS procedures for implementing the [National Environmental Policy Act](#). Those procedures include the use of categorical exclusions, environmental assessments (EAs), or environmental impact statements (EISs). Administrative actions impacting wilderness must be addressed in either the environmental assessment or environmental impact statement accompanying the approved wilderness management plan or as a separate environmental compliance document.

Managers contemplating the use of aircraft or other motorized equipment or mechanical transportation within wilderness must consider impacts to the character, esthetics, and traditions of wilderness before considering the costs and efficiency of the equipment.

In evaluating environmental impacts, the National Park Service will take into account (1) wilderness characteristics and values, including the primeval character and influence of the wilderness; (2) the preservation of natural conditions (including the lack of man-made noise); and (3) assurances that there will be outstanding opportunities for solitude, that the public will be provided with a primitive and unconfined type of recreational experience, and that wilderness will be preserved and used in an unimpaired condition. Managers will be expected to appropriately address cultural resources management considerations in the development and review of environmental compliance documents impacting wilderness resources.

(Also see [Director's Order #12: Conservation Planning, Environmental Impact Analysis, and Decision-making](#))

6.3.5 Minimum Requirement

All management decisions affecting wilderness must be consistent with the minimum requirement concept. This concept is a documented process used to determine if administrative actions, projects, or programs undertaken by the Service or its agents and affecting wilderness character, resources, or the visitor experience are necessary, and if so how to minimize impacts. The minimum requirement concept will be applied as a two-step process that determines

- whether the proposed management action is appropriate or necessary for administration of the area as wilderness and does not cause a significant impact to wilderness resources and character, in accordance with the Wilderness Act; and
- the techniques and types of equipment needed to ensure that impacts on wilderness resources and character are minimized.

In accordance with this policy, superintendents will apply the minimum requirement concept in the context of wilderness stewardship planning, as well as to all other administrative practices, proposed special uses, scientific activities, and equipment use in wilderness. The only exception to the minimum requirement policy is for eligible areas that the Service has not proposed for wilderness designation. However, those lands will still be managed to preserve their eligibility.

When determining minimum requirements, the potential disruption of wilderness character and resources will be considered before, and given significantly more weight than, economic efficiency and convenience. If a compromise of wilderness resources or character is unavoidable, only those actions that preserve wilderness character and/or have localized, short-term adverse impacts will be acceptable.

Although park managers have flexibility in identifying the method used to determine minimum requirement, the method used must clearly weigh the benefits and impacts of the proposal, document the decision-making process, and be supported by an appropriate environmental compliance document. Parks must develop a process to determine minimum requirement until the plan is finally approved. Parks will complete a minimum requirement analysis on those administrative practices and equipment uses that have the potential to impact wilderness resources or values. The minimum requirement concept cannot be used to rationalize permanent roads or inappropriate or unlawful uses in wilderness.

Administrative use of motorized equipment or mechanical transport will be authorized only

- if determined by the superintendent to be the minimum requirement needed by management to achieve the purposes of the area, including the preservation of wilderness character and values, in accordance with the [Wilderness Act](#); or

- in emergency situations (for example, search and rescue, homeland security, law enforcement) involving the health or safety of persons actually within the area.

Such management activities will also be conducted in accordance with all applicable regulations, policies, and guidelines and, where practicable, will be scheduled to avoid creating adverse resource impacts or conflicts with visitor use.

While actions taken to address search and rescue, homeland security and law enforcement issues are subject to the minimum requirement concept, preplanning or programmatic planning should be undertaken whenever possible to facilitate a fast and effective response and reduce paperwork.

For more detailed guidance, see [Director's Order #41](#) and the National Wilderness Steering Committee Guidance Paper #3: "What Constitutes the Minimum Requirements in Wilderness?"

(See [Director's Order #12: Conservation Planning, Environmental Impact Analysis, and Decision-making](#))

6.3.6 Scientific Activities in Wilderness

The statutory purposes of wilderness include scientific activities, and these activities are encouraged and permitted when consistent with the Service's responsibilities to preserve and manage wilderness.

6.3.6.1 General Policy

The National Park Service has a responsibility to support appropriate scientific activities in wilderness and to use science to improve wilderness management. The Service recognizes that wilderness can and should serve as an important resource for long-term research into and study and observation of ecological processes and the impact of humans on these ecosystems. The National Park Service further recognizes that appropriate scientific activities may be critical to the long-term preservation of wilderness.

Scientific activities are to be encouraged in wilderness. Even those scientific activities (including inventory, monitoring, and research) that involve a potential impact to wilderness resources or values (including access, ground disturbance, use of equipment, and animal welfare) should be allowed when the benefits of what can be learned outweigh the impacts on wilderness resources or values. However, all such activities must also be evaluated using the minimum requirement concept and include documented compliance that assesses impacts against benefits to wilderness. This process should ensure that the activity is appropriate and uses the minimum tool required to accomplish project objectives. Scientific activities involving prohibitions identified in section 4(c) of the [Wilderness Act \(16 USC 1133\(c\)\)](#) may be conducted within wilderness when the following occur:

- The desired information is essential for the understanding health, management, or administration of wilderness, and the project cannot be reasonably modified to eliminate or

reduce the nonconforming wilderness use(s); or if it increases scientific knowledge, even when this serves no immediate wilderness management purposes, provided it does not compromise wilderness resources or character. The preservation of wilderness resources and character will be given significantly more weight than economic efficiency and/or convenience.

- Compliance with the [National Environmental Policy Act](#) (including completion of documented categorical exclusions, environmental assessments/findings of no significant impact, or environmental impact statements/records of decision) and other regulatory compliance (including compliance with section 106 of the [National Historic Preservation Act \(16 USC 470\(f\)\)](#)) are accomplished and documented.
- All scientific activities will be accomplished in accordance with terms and conditions adopted at the time the research permit is approved. Later requests for exceptions to the Wilderness Act will require additional review and approval.
- The project will not significantly interfere with other wilderness purposes (recreational, scenic, educational, conservation, or historical) over a broad area or for a long period of time.
- The minimum requirement concept is applied to implementation of the project.

Research and monitoring devices (e.g., video cameras, data loggers, meteorological stations) may be installed and operated in wilderness if (1) the desired information is essential for the administration and preservation of wilderness and cannot be obtained from a location outside wilderness without significant loss of precision and applicability; and (2) the proposed device is the minimum requirement necessary to accomplish the research objective safely.

Park managers will work with researchers to make NPS wilderness area research a model for the use of low-impact, less intrusive techniques. New technology and techniques will be encouraged if they are less intrusive and cause less impact. The goal will be for studies in NPS wilderness to lead the way in “light on the resource” techniques.

Devices located in wilderness will be removed when determined to be no longer essential. Permanent equipment caches are prohibited within wilderness. Temporary caches must be evaluated using the minimum requirement concept.

All scientific activities, including the installation, servicing, removal, and monitoring of research devices, will apply minimum requirement concepts and be accomplished in compliance with *Management Policies*, director’s orders, and procedures specified in the park’s wilderness management plan.

(See [Studies and Collections 4.2](#); [Social Science Studies 8.11](#))

6.3.6.2 Monitoring Wilderness Resources

In every park containing wilderness, the conditions and long-term trends of wilderness resources will be monitored to identify the need for or effects of management actions. The purpose of this

monitoring will be to ensure that management actions and visitor impacts on wilderness resources and character do not exceed standards and conditions established in an approved park plan.

As appropriate, wilderness monitoring programs may assess physical, biological, and cultural resources and social impacts. Monitoring programs may also need to assess potential problems that may originate outside the wilderness to determine the nature, magnitude, and probable source of those impacts.

6.3.7 Natural Resources Management

The National Park Service recognizes that wilderness is a composite resource with interrelated parts. Without natural resources, especially indigenous and endemic species, a wilderness experience would not be possible. Natural resources are critical, defining elements of the wilderness resource, but they need to be managed within the context of the whole ecosystem. Natural resource management plans will be integrated with and cross-reference wilderness management plans. Pursuing a series of independent component projects in wilderness, such as single-species management, will not necessarily accomplish the over-arching goal of wilderness management. Natural resources management in wilderness will include and be guided by a coordinated program of scientific inventory, monitoring, and research.

The principle of nondegradation will be applied to wilderness management, and each wilderness area's condition will be measured and assessed against its own unimpaired standard. Natural processes will be allowed, insofar as possible, to shape and control wilderness ecosystems. Management should seek to sustain the natural distribution, numbers, population composition, and interaction of indigenous species. Management intervention should only be undertaken to the extent necessary to correct past mistakes, the impacts of human use, and influences originating outside of wilderness boundaries.

Management actions, including the restoration of extirpated native species, the alteration of natural fire regimes, the control of invasive alien species, the management of endangered species, and the protection of air and water quality, should be attempted only when the knowledge and tools exist to accomplish clearly articulated goals.

(See [Chapter 4: Natural Resource Management](#). Also see Director's Order #77 series on natural resources management)

6.3.8 Cultural Resources

The [Wilderness Act](#) specifies that the designation of any area of the park system as wilderness "shall in no manner lower the standards evolved for the use and preservation of" such unit of the park system under the various laws applicable to that unit ([16 USC Section 1133\(a\)\(3\)](#)). Thus, the laws pertaining to historic preservation also remain applicable within wilderness but must generally be administered to preserve the area's wilderness character. The responsible decision-maker will include appropriate consideration of the application of these provisions of the Wilderness Act in analyses and decision-making concerning cultural resources.

Cultural resources that have been included within wilderness will be protected and maintained according to the pertinent laws and policies governing cultural resources using management methods that are consistent with the preservation of wilderness character and values. These laws include the [Antiquities Act](#) and the [Historic Sites, Buildings and Antiquities Act](#), as well as subsequent historic preservation legislation, including the [National Historic Preservation Act](#), the [Archaeological Resources Protection Act](#), and the [Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act](#). The *Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Archeology and Historic Preservation* projects provide direction for protection and maintenance. Cemeteries or commemorative features, such as plaques or memorials, that have been included in wilderness may be retained (including approved access to these sites), but no new cemeteries or additions to existing cemeteries may be made unless specifically authorized by federal statute, existing reservations, or retained rights.

(See [Chapter 5: Cultural Resource Management](#))

6.3.9 Fire Management

All fire management activities conducted in wilderness areas will conform to the basic purposes of wilderness. Actions taken to suppress wildfires must use the minimum requirements concept unless the on-site decision-maker determines in his professional judgment that conditions dictate otherwise. Preplanning is critical to ensure that emergency response incorporates minimum requirements to the greatest extent possible. Fire suppression activities should be managed in ways that protect natural and cultural resources and minimize the lasting impacts of the suppression actions. Information on developing a fire management program in wilderness is contained in [Director's Order #18: Wildland Fire Management](#).

Guidance on the need to suppress wildland fire or to use some wildland fires to achieve desired future conditions should appear in the park's planning documents (for example, in the wilderness management plan and fire management plan). Information in these documents will guide managers in the selection of fire management tactics that protect natural and cultural resources from fire and from fire suppression actions.

The park's fire management plan will provide guidance for responses to natural and human-caused wildland fires based on fuel conditions, climatic conditions, resources at risk, potential for damage to property or loss of life, both within and adjacent to the wilderness, as well as the availability of fire suppression resources.

If a wildland fire use program is implemented, planning documents will also include the prescriptions and procedures under which the program will be conducted within wilderness.

(See [Fire Management 4.5](#))

6.3.10 Management Facilities

Part of the definition of wilderness as provided by the Wilderness Act is "undeveloped federal land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements."

Accordingly, authorizations of NPS administrative facilities in wilderness will be limited to the types and minimum number essential to meet the minimum requirements for the administration of the wilderness area. A decision to construct, maintain, or remove an administrative facility will be based primarily on whether or not the facility is required to preserve wilderness character or values, not on considerations of administrative convenience, economic effect, or convenience to the public or park staff. Maintenance or the removal of historic structures will also comply with cultural resource protection and preservation policies and directives, and with the concept of minimum requirement management techniques for wilderness.

6.3.10.1 Administrative Facilities

Administrative facilities (for example, ranger stations and/or patrol cabins, fire lookouts, radio and/or cellular telephone antennas, radio repeater sites, associated storage or support structures, drift fences, and facilities supporting trail stock operations) may be allowed in wilderness only if they are determined to be the minimum requirement necessary to carry out wilderness management objectives and are specifically addressed within the park's wilderness management plan or other appropriate planning documents. New roads will not be built in wilderness. Temporary vehicular access may be permitted only to meet the minimum requirements of emergency situations. As rapidly as possible, disturbed resources will be restored according to an approved restoration plan. Where abandoned roads have been included within wilderness, they may be used as trails, restored to natural conditions, or managed as a cultural resource.

No permanent heliports, helipads, or airstrips will be allowed in wilderness unless specifically authorized by statute or legislation. Temporary landing facilities may be used to meet the minimum requirements of emergency situations. Site improvements determined to be essential for safety reasons during individual emergency situations may be authorized, but no site markings or improvements of any kind may be installed to support nonemergency use. In Alaska, any prohibitions or restrictions on the use of fixed-wing aircraft should follow the procedures in [43 CFR 36.11\(f\)](#).

Permanent storage caches are prohibited in wilderness unless necessary for health and safety purposes or when such caches are determined necessary, justified, documented, and approved through a minimum requirements analysis.

(See [Overflights and Aviation Uses 8.4](#))

6.3.10.2 Trails in Wilderness

Trails will be permitted within wilderness when they are determined to be necessary for resource protection and/or for providing for visitor use for the purposes of wilderness. The identification and inventory of the wilderness trail system will be included as an integral part of the wilderness management plan or other appropriate planning document. Trails will be maintained at levels and conditions identified within the approved wilderness management plan or other planning document. Trail maintenance structures (such as water bars, gabions) may be provided, under minimum requirement protocols, where they are essential for resource preservation or where significant safety hazards exist during normal use periods. Historic and/or prehistoric trails will

be administered in keeping with approved cultural resource and wilderness management plan requirements.

Borrow pits are not permitted in wilderness areas, with the exception of small-quantity use of borrow material for trails, which must be in accordance with an approved minimum requirements analysis.

6.3.10.3 Shelters and Campsites

The construction of new shelters for public use will generally not be allowed, in keeping with the values and character of wilderness. An existing shelter may be maintained or reconstructed only if the facility is necessary to achieve specific wilderness management objectives as identified in the park's wilderness and cultural resources management plans. The construction, use, and occupancy of cabins and other structures in wilderness areas in Alaska are governed by applicable provisions of the [Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act](#) and by NPS regulations in [36 CFR Part 13](#); such structures may be permitted only under conditions prescribed in the park's wilderness management plan.

Although the development of facilities to serve visitors will generally be avoided, campsites may be designated when essential for resource protection and preservation or to meet other specific wilderness management objectives. In keeping with the terms of the park's wilderness management plan, campsite facilities may include a site marker, fire rings, tent sites, food storage devices, and toilets if these are determined by the superintendent to be the minimum facilities necessary for the health and safety of wilderness users or for the preservation of wilderness resources and values. Toilets will be placed only in locations where their presence and use will resolve health and sanitation problems or prevent serious resource impacts, especially where reducing or dispersing visitor use is impractical or has failed to alleviate the problems. Picnic tables will not be allowed in wilderness except in those limited circumstances when they are necessary for resource protection and when documented and approved through a minimum requirements analysis.

6.3.10.4 Signs

Signs detract from the wilderness character of an area and make the imprint of man and management more noticeable. Only those signs necessary for visitor safety or to protect wilderness resources, such as those identifying routes and distances, will be permitted. Where signs are used, they should be compatible with their surroundings and the minimum size possible.

6.3.11 Wilderness Boundaries

Policies related to wilderness boundaries include the following.

6.3.11.1 Legal Descriptions and Boundary Maps

Every park with designated wilderness will possess a written legal description of the wilderness area and a map (or maps) that illustrates the legal description of the wilderness. Each park will ensure that the legal description and map(s) are filed in the appropriate locations. Wilderness boundaries have the force of federal law and may only be modified through the legislative process—unless minor adjustments and corrections are specifically authorized within the wilderness designation enabling legislation.

6.3.11.2 Caves

All cave passages located totally within the surface wilderness boundary will be managed as wilderness. Caves that have entrances within wilderness but contain passages that may extend outside the surface wilderness boundary will be managed as wilderness. Caves that may have multiple entrances located both within and exterior to the surface wilderness boundary will be managed consistent with the surface boundary; those portions of the cave within the wilderness boundary will be managed as wilderness.

(See [Caves 4.8.2.2](#))

6.3.11.3 Waters in Wilderness

In keeping with established jurisdictions and authorities, the Service will manage as wilderness all waters included within wilderness boundaries, and the lands beneath these waters (if owned by the United States).

(See [Water Resource Management 4.6](#))

6.3.12 American Indian Access and Associated Sites

American Indian access rights and protection of sites associated with Indian tribes will be protected and maintained according to applicable laws and policies. [The American Indian Religious Freedom Act](#) reaffirms the First Amendment rights of Native Americans to access national park system lands for the exercise of their traditional religious practices. Native American human remains that were removed from wilderness areas and are subject to the [NAGPRA](#) repatriation may be reinterred at or near the site from which they were removed. American Indian religious areas and other ethnographic and cultural resources will be inventoried and protected. American Indians will be permitted access within wilderness for sacred or religious purposes consistent with the intent of the American Indian Religious Freedom Act, the [Wilderness Act](#), and other applicable authorities provided by federal statutes and executive orders.

(See also [Executive Order 13007](#) (Indian Sacred Sites))

6.4 Wilderness Use Management

The National Park Service will encourage and facilitate those uses of wilderness that are in keeping with the definitions and purposes of wilderness and do not degrade wilderness resources

and character. Appropriate restrictions may be imposed on any authorized activity in the interest of preserving wilderness character and resources or to ensure public safety.

When resource impacts or demands for use exceed established thresholds or capacities, superintendents may limit or redirect use. If these actions are determined to be the minimally required level of management, physical alterations, public education, general regulations, special regulations, permit systems, and the local restrictions, public use limits, closures, and designations implemented under the discretionary authority of the superintendent ([36 CFR 1.5](#) and [Part 13](#); [43 CFR Part 36](#) for Alaska units) may all be used in managing use and protecting wilderness.

6.4.1 General Policy

Park visitors need to accept wilderness on its own unique terms. Accordingly, the National Park Service will promote education programs that encourage wilderness users to understand and be aware of certain risks, including possible dangers arising from wildlife, weather conditions, physical features, and other natural phenomena that are inherent in the various conditions that comprise a wilderness experience and primitive methods of travel. The National Park Service will not modify the wilderness area to eliminate risks that are normally associated with wilderness, but it will strive to provide users with general information concerning possible risks, any recommended precautions, related user responsibilities, and applicable restrictions and regulations, including those associated with ethnographic and cultural resources.

6.4.2 Wilderness Interpretation and Education

In the context of interpretive and educational planning, national park system units with wilderness resources will (1) operate public education programs designed to promote and perpetuate public awareness of and appreciation for wilderness character, resources, and ethics while providing for acceptable use limits; (2) focus on fostering an understanding of the concept of wilderness that includes respect for the resource, willingness to exercise self-restraint in demanding access to it, and an ability to adhere to appropriate, minimum-impact techniques; and (3) encourage the public to use and accept wilderness on its own terms—that is, the acceptance of an undeveloped, primitive environment and the assumption of the potential risks and responsibilities involved in using and enjoying wilderness areas. NPS interpretive plans and programs for wilderness parks will address the primary interpretive themes for wilderness. Education is among the most effective tools for dealing with wilderness use and management problems and should generally be applied before more restrictive management tools.

(See [Visitor Safety 8.2.5.1](#))

6.4.3 Recreational Use Management in Wilderness

Recreational uses of NPS wilderness are generally those traditionally associated with wilderness and identified by Congress in the legislative record for the development of the [Wilderness Act](#) and in keeping with the language provided by sections 2(a) and 2(c) of the act itself ([16 USC 1131\(a\) and \(c\)](#)). These recreational uses of wilderness will be of a type and nature that ensures

that its use and enjoyment (1) will leave it unimpaired for future use and enjoyment as wilderness, (2) provides for the protection of the area as wilderness, and (3) provides for the preservation of wilderness character. Recreational uses in NPS wilderness areas will be of a nature that

- enables the areas to retain their primeval character and influence;
- protects and preserves natural conditions;
- leaves the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable;
- provides outstanding opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined types of recreation; and
- preserves wilderness in an unimpaired condition.

(See [Management of Recreational Use 8.2.2.1](#))

6.4.3.1 Recreation Use Evaluation

Recreational uses—particularly new and emerging activities that compromise the stated purposes and definitions of wilderness or unduly impact the wilderness resource or the visitor experience within wilderness—will be evaluated to determine if these uses are appropriate or should be limited or disallowed through use of the superintendent's compendium in [36 CFR 1.5](#). Evaluation or reevaluation should be accomplished within wilderness management plans or similar implementation plans. Recreational uses that do not meet the purposes and definitions of wilderness should be prohibited in NPS wilderness.

Significant changes in patterns or increased levels of use will not be authorized by special permit, administrative discretion, or authorities under the superintendents' compendia, except in cases where sufficient information exists to adequately determine there is no significant impact on wilderness resources and values, including visitor experiences. These increased levels of use and changes in patterns of existing use will normally not qualify for a categorical exclusion under the [National Environmental Policy Act](#). Decisions regarding significant changes in patterns and new levels of use will require environmental analysis and review, including opportunity for public comment, in accordance with the NEPA requirements.

(See [Appropriate Use of the Parks 1.5](#); [Visitor Carrying Capacity 8.2.1](#))

6.4.3.2 Outdoor Skills and Ethics

Leave-no-trace principles and practices will be applied to all forms of recreation management within wilderness, including commercial operations. Wilderness users will generally be required to carry out all refuse. Refuse is defined in [36 CFR 1.4](#).

6.4.3.3 Use of Motorized Equipment

Public use of motorized equipment or any form of mechanical transport will be prohibited in wilderness except as provided for in specific legislation. Operating a motor vehicle or possessing a bicycle in designated wilderness outside Alaska is prohibited (see NPS regulations in [36 CFR 4.30\(d\)\(1\)](#)).

However, section 4(d)(1) of the [Wilderness Act \(16 USC 1133\(d\)\(1\)\)](#) authorizes the Secretary—where legislation designating the wilderness specifically makes this provision applicable—to allow the continuation of motorboat and aircraft use under certain circumstances in which those activities were established prior to wilderness designation. Section 4(d)(1) gives the Secretary the discretion to manage and regulate the activity in accordance with the Wilderness Act, the [NPS Organic Act](#), and individual park enabling legislation. As authorized, the National Park Service will administer this use to be compatible with the purpose, character, and resource values of the particular wilderness area involved. The use of motorized equipment by the public in wilderness areas in Alaska is governed by applicable provisions of the [Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act](#), NPS regulations in [36 CFR Part 13](#), and Department of the Interior regulations in [43 CFR Part 36](#). The specific conditions under which motorized equipment may be used by the public will be outlined in each park’s wilderness management plan.

(See [Soundscape Management 4.9](#); [Use of Motorized Equipment 8.2.3](#))

6.4.4 Commercial Services

Wilderness-oriented commercial services that contribute to public education and visitor enjoyment of wilderness values or provide opportunities for primitive and unconfined types of recreation may be authorized if they meet the “necessary and appropriate” tests of the [National Park Service Concessions Management Improvement Act of 1998](#) and section 4(d)(6) of the [Wilderness Act \(16 USC 1133\(d\)\(5\)\)](#), and if they are consistent with the wilderness management objectives contained in the park’s wilderness management plan, including the application of the minimum requirement concept. Activities such as guide services for outfitted horseback, hiking, mountain climbing, or river trips and similar activities may be appropriate and may be authorized if conducted under the terms and conditions outlined in the park’s wilderness management plan and/or in legislation authorizing these types of commercial uses.

The only structures or facilities used by commercial services that will be allowed in wilderness will be temporary shelters, such as tents, or other specifically approved facilities that may be required within the wilderness management plan for resource protection and the preservation of wilderness values. Temporary facilities will generally be removed from the wilderness after each trip, unless such removal will cause degradation of the wilderness resources. In Alaska, additional guidance for the management of temporary facilities for hunting and fishing guides is found in the [Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act](#) section 1316 ([16 USC 3204](#)). The use of permanent equipment and supply caches by commercial operators is prohibited within wilderness.

Managers will ensure that commercial operators are in compliance with established leave-no-trace protocols.

(See [Visitor Use 8.2](#); [Commercial Use Authorizations 10.3](#))

6.4.5 Special Events

The National Park Service will not sponsor or issue permits for special events to be conducted in wilderness if those events are inconsistent with wilderness resources and character or if they do not require a wilderness setting to occur. Permits will not be issued in NPS wilderness areas for commercial enterprises or competitive events, including activities involving animal, foot, or watercraft races; the physical endurance of a person or animal; organized survival exercises; war games; or similar exercises.

(See [Special Events 8.6.2](#). Also see [36 CFR 2.50](#))

6.4.6 Existing Private Rights

Wilderness designation does not extinguish valid existing private rights (for example, fee-simple interest, less-than-fee-simple interest, valid mineral operations, rights-of-way, grazing permits). The validity of private rights within wilderness must be determined on a case-by-case basis. Valid private rights in wilderness must be administered in keeping with the specific conditions and requirements of the valid right.

6.4.7 Grazing and Livestock Driveways

Commercial grazing or driving of livestock in park wilderness will be allowed only as specifically authorized by Congress. Where these activities are authorized, they will be managed under conditions and requirements identified within the approved wilderness management plan and corresponding allotment management plans. The use of motorized vehicles, motorized equipment, or mechanical transport by grazing permittees will not be allowed except as provided for by a specific authority—that is, a valid existing right, the enabling legislation, or an NPS determination of minimum requirement. The construction of livestock management facilities other than those specifically authorized by legislation is prohibited.

Noncommercial grazing of trail stock used as part of an approved livestock management program within wilderness may be authorized in accordance with NPS regulations and conditions outlined in the wilderness management plan or stock use management plan. All approved livestock use must ensure the preservation of wilderness resources and character. Superintendents will be responsible for monitoring livestock use in wilderness to the same degree as human use, and may use the same management tools and techniques, including the application of the minimum requirement concept to manage livestock use that are available for managing other wilderness uses.

(See [8.6.8 Domestic and Feral Livestock](#))

6.4.8 Rights-of-Way

Existing rights-of-way that have been included in wilderness should be terminated or phased out where practicable. Rights-of-way subject to NPS administrative control should be administered under conditions outlined in the park's wilderness management plan that protect wilderness character and resources and limit the use of motorized or mechanical equipment. The Service will not issue any new rights-of-way or widen or extend any existing rights-of-way in wilderness. Rights-of-way and access procedures affecting wilderness areas in Alaska are governed by applicable provisions of the [Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act](#) and regulations in [43 CFR Part 36](#), and [36 CFR Part 13](#).

(See [Existing Private Rights 6.4.6](#))

6.4.9 Mineral Development

The National Park Service will seek to remove or extinguish valid mining claims and nonfederal mineral interests in wilderness through authorized processes, including purchasing valid rights. In parks where Congress has authorized the leasing of federal minerals, the Park Service will take appropriate actions to preclude the leasing of lands or minerals within wilderness whenever and wherever it is authorized to do so. Lands included within wilderness will be listed as "excepted areas" under applicable regulations in [43 CFR Parts 3100](#) and [3500](#) (see section 3500.8).

Unless and until mineral interests and mining claims within NPS wilderness are eliminated, they must be managed pursuant to existing NPS regulations, policies, and procedures. (See [36 CFR Part 9, Subpart A](#), for mineral development on mining claims; [36 CFR Part 9, subpart B](#), for nonfederal oil and gas development; and [43 CFR Parts 3100](#) and [3500](#) for federal mineral leasing.). A validity examination of unpatented claims in wilderness affected by a proposed plan of operations must be conducted by a certified mineral examiner before plan approval. Motorized use in wilderness is allowed only with an approved plan of operations on valid mineral claims and where there is no reasonable alternative. Motorized use for access can occur only on existing or approved roads. There will be no new roads or improvement of existing roads unless documented as being necessary for resource protection. Any plan of operations that is approved will include stipulations on operations and reclamation that will ensure that long-term effects on the wilderness area are substantially unnoticeable. For access to mining claims in NPS wilderness in Alaska, see [43 CFR 36.10](#).

6.4.10 Accessibility for Persons with Disabilities

The National Park Service has legal obligations to make available equal opportunities for people with disabilities in all programs and activities. This requirement includes the opportunity to participate in wilderness experiences. Management decisions responding to requests for special consideration to provide wilderness use by persons with disabilities must be in accord with the [Architectural Barriers Act of 1968](#), the [Rehabilitation Act of 1973](#) (as amended in 1978), and section 507(c) of the [Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 \(42 USC 12207\(c\)\)](#). Such decisions should balance the intent of access and wilderness laws and find a way of providing the highest level of protection to the wilderness resource.

Section 17.550 of the Secretary of the Interior's regulations regarding the enforcement of nondiscrimination on the basis of disability in Department of Interior programs ([43 CFR Part 17, subpart E](#)) states that agencies are not required to take any actions or provide access that would result in a fundamental alteration in the nature of a program or activity. However, the agency has the burden of proving that compliance would result in a fundamental alteration. This concept is also found in section 507 of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

(See [Accessibility for Persons with Disabilities 1.9.3, 8.2.4, and 9.1.2](#). Also see [Director's Order #42: Accessibility for Visitors with Disabilities in National Park Service Programs and Services](#))