



USDA Forest Service
Malheur, Umatilla, and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests

About Areas with Wilderness Potential

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What is the difference between wilderness and roadless?

Wilderness is a congressional designation. The 1964 Wilderness Act defines congressionally designated wilderness as, "A wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his own works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized 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".

An area of wilderness is further defined to mean in this act an area of undeveloped federal land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions and which "(1) generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable; (2) has outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation; (3) has at least five thousand acres of land or is of sufficient size as to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition; and (4) may also contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value."

Roadless Areas or Inventoried Roadless Areas: These terms mean many things to many different people. In the initial forest planning process, roadless areas were identified as the first step to determining what areas might be suited for wilderness recommendation – areas with wilderness potential - and are identified in Appendix C of each of the four *Final Environmental Impact Statements (FEIS)* for the *current* Forest Plans. Appendix C of each Forest Plan identified inventoried roadless areas and their potential wilderness values. Roadless lands on national forests have been addressed in several studies: in the 1970's a studies called RARE and RAREII "Roadless Area Review and Evaluation" (RARE). The current Appendix C inventoried areas were also included in the "2000 Roadless Area Conservation Rule". The "2000 Roadless Area Conservation Rule," and subsequent roadless area rulemaking, provides management direction for the lands specified in the rules, but this rulemaking is not intended for making wilderness recommendations or designations.

What is the current status of the most recent "Roadless Rule"??

On May 5, 2005, the Forest Service announced its final rule on the conservation of roadless areas in the national forest system. The rule invites governors to petition the secretary of agriculture for state-specific roadless rules. If a governor chooses to petition, petitions are due November 13, 2006. Unless governors choose to initiate a change through the petition process, existing inventoried roadless area management requirements contained in individual land management plans will remain unchanged.

During the petitioning process, the Forest Service's interim direction for protecting roadless areas remains in place. It reserves to the chief and regional foresters most decisions on projects in these areas.

The secretary, who is the final decision maker on the petitions, as well as any subsequent state-specific rule, has six months to decide on a petition. If the secretary approves a petition, subsequent state-specific rulemaking for inventoried roadless area management will be undertaken in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The Forest Service will be the lead in doing the NEPA analysis with the states as cooperating agencies.

We are reviewing the rule to see what impact it will have on the forest plan revision process.

How will the decision be made to recommend areas out of the wilderness “inventory” as new wilderness?

Wilderness is being addressed in a three-step process during forest plan revision. These three steps include a review of areas with wilderness potential, an evaluation of the capability, availability, and need for these areas to be wilderness, and the determination of management direction.

We do not know at this time if the Revised Forest Plans will recommend new wilderness.

Review - Interdisciplinary teams made up of natural resource specialists who know the areas well, updated information about the resources of the lands described in Appendix C of the current Forest Plans. The draft results of this review and update of the inventory were available for public review last April. Further refinements to the inventory were made based on public comments and additional Forest Service review.

Evaluation - After the review and update of the inventory is completed, areas in the inventory will be evaluated to decide whether to recommend them for additions to the National Wilderness Preservation System. Under the Forest Service Handbook criteria, areas with wilderness potential will be evaluated for capability, availability, and need. Any decision to recommend designation of an area for wilderness will be identified at this time.

Determination - The evaluations will be reviewed and management direction will be decided with full knowledge of the environmental consequences.

Who will make the decision to recommend new wilderness?

The decision whether to recommend additional wilderness areas will be made by the Forest Supervisors at the time a decision on the Revised Forest Plan is made. Proposed recommendations will be identified in the Proposed Revised Forest Plans in early 2007.

How much wilderness was recommended in the current Forest Plan?

The current Forest Plans for the national forests of the Blue Mountains do not recommend any new wilderness. The 1984 Oregon Wilderness Act and others created many wilderness acres prior to the finalized forest plans and included direction that Oregon national forests did not have to make additional wilderness recommendations during the initial round of forest planning.

What protocol was used for the update and review of the inventory?

The *Forest Service Handbook* outlines detailed criteria for the review of lands with potential for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. While the inventory process itself is NOT a forest plan decision, the evaluation of lands with wilderness potential and recommendation for new wilderness is.

How did you select areas to consider?

The existing Forest Plan Appendix C - Inventoried Roadless Areas establish the starting point for the current review and update of the inventory of areas with wilderness potential. Using inventory criteria outlined in the Forest Service Handbook (FSH 1909.12, 7.1), the review and update is anchored in the existing Appendix C areas. The review and update will be used to correct misapplication of criteria and incorporate changed conditions since the initial forest plan. The review and update process will not resolve issues based on public disagreement with the criteria. Examples of errors include inclusion of private property to determine area size, mapping errors that misrepresent the intended area, or instances where an area meeting the criteria was simply overlooked in the initial inventory. The inventory review and update process will involve both increases and decreases to the Appendix C areas.

Situations that may result in acreage changes:

- Corrections, including mapping refinements and errors in the 1990 application of inventory criteria
- Management activities that have occurred since the last inventory such as road construction, timber harvest, or other developments that are inconsistent with the inventory criteria in the Forest Service Handbook
- Disposal or acquisition of national forest lands through land exchange

We are not changing the criteria outlined in the Forest Service Handbook or starting a new, zero-based inventory. It is important to keep the focus on review and update of the existing information from Appendix

C of the current Forest Plans, and to remain consistent with the criteria in the Forest Service Handbook. Any suggested changes to the 1990 inventory must include the reason for the change.

Can areas identified in the current Forest Plans as having wilderness potential ever be developed?

Yes. Areas inventoried as having wilderness potential should not be considered “de-facto wilderness”.

Inventoried Roadless Areas encompass 18% of the national forest land within the Blue Mountains. There are 79 Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRAs) totaling almost 981,457 acres.

The existing Forest Plans provided direction that allowed road building and timber harvest in some IRAs.

- In the Malheur National Forest Plan 101,094 acres of the IRAs were categorized as available for development and 79,854 acres were categorized as unavailable for development. The portion of the Ochoco National Forest now managed by the Emigrant Creek Ranger District has an additional 3,504 acres not scheduled for development, and 3,955 acres scheduled for timber and range management.
- In the Umatilla National Forest Plan 86,100 acres of the IRAs were categorized as available for development and 195,000 acres were categorized as unavailable.
- The Wallowa-Whitman National Forest Plan (outside of the Hells Canyon National Recreation Area) has 130,510 acres of the IRAs were categorized as available for development and 121,470 acres were categorized as unavailable.

Not all of the timber harvest and road construction that was projected in the Forest Plans has occurred. Future management of areas not recommended for wilderness, are considered for other management direction which is determined through the forest planning process, depending upon the characteristics of each area. This decision is based on the desired values and uses for a particular area as identified through a public involvement process.

What kinds of activities would be allowed in these areas with wilderness potential?

Under revised forest plans, areas identified as having wilderness potential could be managed to protect specific values or uses identified by the public or the agency. Some changes may be in motorized access opportunities. It is important that the public share their thoughts about particular areas so that the Blue Mountains Forest Plan Revision Team has a broad understanding about how these areas are currently being or could be used. This will help create a Revised Forest Plan that includes future management that is responsive to people’s needs and to the desired conditions for the area.

Why should I care about areas with wilderness potential, where they exist, and how they are managed in the future?

The collaborative process is an opportunity to interact meaningfully with interested parties in the inventory review and update. As we move through this review and update of the inventory, we want to keep all involved parties focused on identifying changes based on the inventory criteria outlined in the Forest Service Handbook. Although some parties may choose to create their own inventory using different criteria, it is important to note that the Forest Service will keep a consistent approach to the review and update of areas with wilderness potential, based on the criteria in the Forest Service Handbook.

What happens to acres that are in the inventory but not recommended for wilderness?

Areas not recommended for wilderness will be considered for other management direction which is determined through the forest planning process, depending upon the characteristics of each area. This decision is based on the desired values and uses for a particular area as identified through a public involvement process.

Could the simple fact that an acre of land is in the inventory provide the basis for a lawsuit?

No, the inventory itself is NOT a forest plan decision, although the recommendation for new wilderness is subject to legal action.

Nearly 1 million acres inventoried that “could” become wilderness seems like a lot. Is this comparable to the number of acres inventoried in the last planning process? Are they the same areas shown in the last plan? How much or how little overlap is there?

The existing Forest Plan Appendix C - Inventoried Roadless Areas establish the starting point for the current review and update of the inventory of areas with wilderness potential. The 2006 inventory is 23,333 acres less than the current Forest Plan inventory. The review and update corrected misapplication of criteria and reflects changed conditions since the initial forest plan. Examples of errors include inclusion of private property to determine area size, mapping errors that misrepresent the intended area, or instances where an area meeting the criteria was simply overlooked in the initial inventory.

Why can't the wilderness areas be identified once and for all?

The National Forest Management Act (1976) requires that each national forest go through the process of inventorying and evaluating areas with wilderness potential each time a forest plan is revised. Additionally, the Oregon Wilderness Act of 1984 requires this review and evaluation for national forest system lands in Oregon when forest plans are revised. Additionally, the 2005 Planning Regulations re-emphasize these requirements.

If an individual is really opposed or supportive of an acre being in the inventory, what can or should he/she do?

The collaborative process is an opportunity to interact meaningfully with interested parties in the inventory review and update. The Blue Mountains Forest Plan Revision Team is committed to a collaborative process for review and update of the inventory and evaluation of areas with wilderness potential. In Round Three of the Blue Mountains Forest Plan Revision Collaborative Community Workshops (April, 2005) we introduced our inventory and evaluation process, discussed important contributions and constraints of areas with wilderness potential, and began taking comments from the public on the updated inventory. If someone had additional comments, he/she should contact the Revision Team by phone, email/letter, or personal visit. Contact information and workshop materials may be obtained on our website at:

www.fs.fed.us/r6/uma/blue_mtn_planrevision/