

Forest Plan Revision for the Colville, and the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forests

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Briefing: Forest Plan Revision and Inventoried Roadless Area, Potential Wilderness Areas, and possible Wilderness Recommendations

History of Inventoried Roadless Areas

The term “inventoried roadless area” first came about in the 1970s during the Roadless Area Review and Evaluation (RARE I and RARE II) efforts by the Forest Service. The Forest Service was directed to evaluate areas for potential wilderness recommendation to carry out the 1964 Wilderness Act. Inventoried roadless areas identified by these efforts came to be known as “Appendix C Inventoried Roadless Areas” as they are listed in Appendix C of the final environmental impact statement for forest plans. Another key event was the 2001 Roadless Rule, which established national direction for all inventoried roadless areas identified in the 2001 Roadless Rule maps. For the Colville and the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forests this is identical to the Appendix C Inventoried Roadless Area maps. Subsequent litigation on the 2001 Roadless Rule has occurred and remains active to this date. Recently, the name used in the Forest Service Handbook (FSH 1909.12, Chapter 70) to refer to Inventoried Roadless Areas has changed to “Potential Wilderness Areas,” more closely reflecting their role. For sake of clarity, this paper continues to use the term inventoried roadless area.

It's the Law

When a forest plan is revised, the 2008 Planning Rule and the 1984 Washington State Wilderness Act require the Forest Service to review, evaluate and determine whether inventoried roadless areas should be recommended or not recommended to Congress for designation as additional wilderness.

Role of the Forest Plan

The existing forest plans that direct management of the Colville and Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forests are currently being revised. The first generation forest plans were implemented in 1988-1990 after extensive participation by the public. The forest plans assigned land management allocations to each acre of the national forests. These land management allocations direct national forest managers to manage each allocation with emphasis and priority for various natural resources and/or human uses. For example, when the existing forest plans were implemented, land management allocations were assigned to all the inventoried roadless areas. Some of the inventoried roadless areas were essentially allocated to remain unroaded and to be managed as key deer and elk habitat, while some of the other roadless areas were directed to be managed for motorized unroaded dispersed recreation, timber management, or other purposes. As a result, implementing management decisions authorized by the existing forest plans changed the physical character of some of the lands that were listed as “Appendix C Inventoried Roadless Areas”.

Forest Plan Revision & Evaluating Inventoried Roadless Areas

In the summer of 2005, the Forest plan revision team for the Colville and Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forests began the process of evaluating inventoried roadless areas with the help of interested members of the public. Although inventoried roadless areas are evaluated for potential wilderness it does not necessarily mean that the inventoried roadless area will automatically become (or not become) a new wilderness area. It is an evaluation process, not a final decision on designation. Only Congress can designate additional wilderness.

The Forest Service uses inventory criteria from the Forest Service Handbook to evaluate for potential wilderness. These criteria have been in place since the 1970s. In order to qualify for placement on the inventory of potential wilderness an inventoried roadless area has to meet one or more of the criteria. A few examples of the criteria follow.

- A potential wilderness area should contain 5,000 acres or more.
- A potential wilderness area can contain less than 5,000 acres due to physical terrain if it can be preserved; or the area is self-contained such as an island; or the area is contiguous to existing wilderness regardless of size.
- A potential wilderness area can not contain forest roads or other permanently authorized roads.

The first step of the evaluation process is to use the inventory criteria to validate the boundaries of the 2001 Roadless Rule inventory of roadless areas. Beginning in the summer of 2005, the Forest Service asked the public to participate in the review of inventoried roadless areas boundaries through a series of public meetings, web site postings, and electronic and hard copy mailings/newsletters. The public provided the Forest Service with input, which the Forest Service validated. Then the Forest Service made adjustments to the inventoried roadless area boundaries based on a given area's current condition.

The second step in the evaluation process is to carefully evaluate each validated inventoried roadless area as additions to the National Wilderness Preservation System. An area recommended as suitable for wilderness *must meet the tests of capability, availability, and need*. In addition to the inherent wilderness quality it possesses, an area must provide opportunities and experiences that are dependent upon or enhanced by a wilderness environment. Also considered is the ability of the Forest Service to manage the area as wilderness.

The two-step wilderness evaluation process will identify whether or not any of the validated inventoried roadless areas should be ultimately recommended to Congress for addition to the National Wilderness System. Any potential wilderness area recommended to Congress is managed to preserve those wilderness characteristics that made it a candidate for wilderness until Congress chooses to take action. The plan revision process identifies how to manage potential wilderness areas not recommended to Congress.