

Forest Plan Revision for the Colville, and the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forests August 2008

Briefing: Special Areas and Management Areas¹

This paper presents further information on options for management of lands not included in a preliminary administrative recommendation for wilderness. The options fall under the following broad types:

Special areas - areas designated by law or statute or through administrative process.

Management areas - separate areas of a Forest designated in the forest plan where different uses and activities are generally suitable.

Special Areas vs. Management Areas

Key Difference = who makes the designation decision

The time, effort, and complexity vary for designating special areas and management areas. While not absolute, management areas generally take the least effort and time to designate, while administratively designated special areas take more time and effort, and special areas designated by Congress typically take the most time and effort. The following table shows the authority that makes the designations.

Designation	Designation Authority
SPECIAL AREAS:	
Areas designated by law	Congress
Areas administratively designated	Secretary of Agriculture or a Forest Service official
MANAGEMENT AREAS	Forest Supervisor

Categories of special areas and who has the authority to designate them are shown in the table on page 5. Note that statutorily designated areas can also be proposed to Congress by the public outside the plan revision process.

¹ Additional information on special areas and management areas may be found in Forest Service Handbook 1909.12, Chapter 10

Special Areas

Certain limited areas of National Forest System lands may have outstanding or unique examples of plant and animal communities, geological features, scenic grandeur, or other special attributes that merit special management. These areas are designated by law or may be designated administratively as special areas. Designated areas are managed to emphasize recreational and other specific related values. Other uses are permitted in the areas to the extent that these uses are in harmony with the purpose for which the area was designated. The law or decision designating each area provides specific objectives and guidelines for management of each area.

No provision in law requires the Forest Service to inventory, evaluate, and recommend special areas for designation, with the exception of wilderness and wild and scenic rivers. Forest plans may identify areas as special for various reasons without a formal designation.

Special areas, such as botanical areas or significant caves may be designated by the Responsible Official in approving a plan revision. Such designations are not final decisions approving projects and activities. Forest plans include special areas already designated by law (like Salmopriest Wilderness Area) or administrative process, such as Sherman Pass National Scenic Byway on Colville National Forest.

Special Areas Designated by Law or Statute

Of all the possible special areas, there has been public interest in National Recreation Areas. National Recreation Areas (NRAs) are designated through law passed by Congress. In order to qualify as an NRA these areas have outstanding combinations of outdoor recreation opportunities, aesthetic attractions, and proximity to potential users. They may also have cultural, historical, archaeological, pastoral, wilderness, scientific, wildlife, and other values contributing to public enjoyment. The uses and activities allowed (the desired condition) within an NRA depends on the law designating the area and can vary widely. Some notable local examples include the following:

Examples of National Recreation Areas (areas designated by law or statute)

Mt. Baker National Recreation Area

The Mount Baker National Recreation Area was created in conjunction with the 1984 Washington Wilderness Act to accommodate and preserve the winter snowmobile use of the Mount Baker area in and around Schriebers Meadow. To preserve this use, management of the area focuses on providing snowmobile and cross-country skiing opportunities during the winter and non-motorized recreational uses during the summer season. The Mount Baker National Recreation Area differs from the adjacent Mount Baker Wilderness by allowing the use of snowmobiles when snow levels are sufficient (greater than two feet at Schriebers Meadow Trailhead).

Hells Canyon National Recreation Area

The Hells Canyon National Recreation Area was established by Congress on December 31, 1975 under Public Law 94-199. The act that created the HCNRA states that “to assure that the natural beauty, and historical and archaeological values of the Hells Canyon area and the seventy-one-mile segment of the Snake River between Hells Canyon Dam and the Oregon-Washington border, together with portions of certain of its tributaries and adjacent lands, are preserved for this and future generations, and that the recreational and ecologic values and public enjoyment of the area are thereby enhanced, there is hereby established the Hells Canyon Recreation Area.”

Sawtooth National Recreation Area

The Sawtooth National Recreation Area's (SNRA) 756,000 acres are part of the Sawtooth National Forest in Idaho. The SNRA was established by Congress in 1972 "... in order to assure the preservation and protection of the natural, scenic, historic, pastoral, and fish and wildlife values and to provide for the enhancement of the recreational values associated therewith..." At the same time, the 217,000-acre Sawtooth Primitive Area was designated as the Sawtooth Wilderness.

Special Areas Designated Administratively

Of all the special areas that are administratively designated, current interest to the public are the *special interest areas*. These types of special areas are designated to protect and manage for public use and enjoyment. They are areas with scenic, recreational, geological, botanical, zoological, paleontological, archaeological, or other special characteristics or unique values.

Selecting one of the above examples of special interest areas, a *recreational area* is a unit of land that has been administratively designated for particular recreation opportunities or activities such as hiking, rock hounding, recreational mining, photography, or other special activity.

Recreational areas are designated administratively, meaning this special area can be designated by the Regional Forester if less than 100,000 acres, and by the Secretary of Agriculture if greater than that. Local examples of administratively designated special areas range from the one-acre proposed Columbia Mountain Lookout archaeological special interest area on Colville National Forest to the 48,000-acre Teanaway recreational special interest area on the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest.

As can be seen from the description of a recreational area, the uses and activities allowed within the area are dependent on the desired condition for the area. The management emphasis of a recreational area would be for the kind of recreational opportunity provided by the area. Other uses, such as livestock grazing, are permitted in the areas to the extent that these uses are in harmony with the desired condition for which the area was designated. In the forest plan such special areas are assigned a unique set of management guidance that provides for the recreational opportunity and can constrain other uses through a set of guidelines.

Management Areas

Besides special areas, a forest plan identifies separate areas similar to county or city zoning where a distinct set of management guidance is applied. These are called *management areas*. No set list of management areas exists as for special areas. Rather, management areas are defined and developed in a forest plan. Like special areas, management areas have desired conditions and guidelines specific to those areas. Unlike special areas, those desired conditions and guidelines are not specified by law, statute, or administrative direction. Management area guidance is developed by the particular national forest in response to social, ecological, and economic concerns and conditions.

National Forest System lands are generally suitable for a variety of uses such as outdoor recreation, viewing scenery, livestock grazing, timber production, fisheries and wildlife, cultural and heritage resource interpretation, and watershed purposes. Management areas arrange these various uses across the forest in varying levels of intensity. Management areas tend to encompass large areas (50,000 acres plus) of a Forest and often cross Ranger District boundaries.

Conclusion

Areas not designated for wilderness may be managed to achieve a wide variety of desired conditions. The desired conditions may be framed using a special area or a management area designation. The time and effort to designate areas varies by who has authority to designate an area and the process. Past experience shows that the process to designate special areas through Congress (wilderness or national recreation areas) or by the Secretary of Agriculture (large recreation special interest areas) generally takes longer than those areas designated by the responsible official (Regional Forester or the Forest Supervisor). All special areas, whether a one-acre special interest area or a very large wilderness area, come with a set of rules on how they are managed. The rules and their flexibility vary with the type of special area.

Special Areas - designating official and guidance cross-reference

Special Areas	Designation Authority	Additional Guidance Location
Statutorily Designated Areas		
National Monument	Responsible Official recommends Presidential Executive order or Congressional act designates	FSM 2371
National Recreation Area	Responsible Official recommends Congressional act designates	FSM 2371
National Scenic Area	Responsible Official recommends Congressional act designates	FSM 2371
National Trails National Scenic Trails National Historic Trails	Responsible Official recommends Congressional act designates	FSM 2353.4
Wild and Scenic River	Responsible Official recommends Congressional act designates	FSM 1924 & 2354 FSH 1909.12
Wilderness, or Wilderness Study Areas	Responsible Official recommends Congressional act designates	FSM 1923 & 2320 FSH 2409.19
Highway Systems, Interstate and National	Congressional act established process Secretary of the Department of Transportation approves	23 CFR part 470
Responsible Official Designated Areas		
Botanical Area	Responsible Official Designates	FSM 2372
Geological Area	Responsible Official Designates	FSM 2372
Administratively Designated Areas		
Experimental Forest or Range	Responsible Official recommends with concurrence of Station Director Chief designates	FSM 4062
National Natural Landmark National Historic Landmark	Responsible Official recommends Secretary of Interior designates	FSM 2373 FSM 2363.1
Recreation Areas	Responsible Official recommends Secretary of Agriculture designates	36 CFR 294.1 FSM 2360
Research Natural Area	Responsible Official recommends Regional Forester designates, with concurrence of Station Directors	FSM 4063
Scenic Byway - Forest Service	Responsible Official recommends Chief designates	None
Scenic Byway - National	Responsible Official recommends Federal Highway Administration designates	None
Significant Caves National Recreation Trails	Responsible Official recommends Regional Forester designates	36 CFR part 290 FSM 2353.4