

# Washington Wilderness: Preserving the Land for Future Generations

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## **Q: What is a Wilderness area?**

**A:** The Wilderness Act (1964) defines Wilderness as “land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation, which generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man’s work substantially unnoticeable...” Wilderness is unique in that only Congress can designate specific areas for Wilderness use and protection.

The tradition of protecting wilderness dates back almost 100 years to the country’s foremost conservationists—Theodore Roosevelt, John Muir, Aldo Leopold to name a few—who recognized the need to set aside America’s wild places in order to preserve our watersheds, wildlife habitat and the great outdoors from the ever-growing spread of development and commercialization. However, the formal designation of Wilderness began with the passage of The Wilderness Act in 1964.

## **Q: What can I do in Wilderness areas?**

**A:** Hunt, fish, hike, camp, canoe, kayak, swim, picnic, backpack, bird watch, take wildflower walks, ride horses, cross-country ski, snowshoe, go spelunking or rock-climbing, conduct ecological research, lead educational trips. Enjoy the solitude and escape from the hustle of the city.

Many hunters and anglers prize Wilderness for its hunting and fishing opportunities and for the ability to hunt without having game harassed or habitat degraded by motorized vehicles.

## **Q: How much designated Wilderness does Washington state have?**

**A:** Less than 10 percent of the entire land base of Washington state is protected as Wilderness. There are 30 Wilderness areas in Washington, covering approximately 4.3 million acres. These Wilderness areas are managed by US Forest Service, US Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, and Bureau of Land Management.

## **Q: Doesn’t Wilderness restrict use by disabled people?**

**A:** No. Those with disabilities may use wheelchairs within Wilderness. The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 reaffirmed that nothing in the Wilderness Act should be construed as prohibiting the use of a wheelchair in a Wilderness area by individuals whose disability requires it. A 1992 report by the National Council on Disability found that “[a] significant majority of persons with disabilities surveyed very much enjoy the [National Wilderness Preservation System] and 76

percent do not believe that the restrictions on mechanized use stated in the Wilderness Act diminish their ability to enjoy wilderness.”

One of the most important purposes of Wilderness is to provide people with a broad array of outdoor recreation. Senior citizens and disabled individuals regularly enjoy visits to our Wilderness areas

**Q: Doesn't Wilderness conflict with other recreational uses of the national forest?**

**A:** No. In fact, not only is Wilderness identified as one of the “multiple-uses” for national forests under the law, it is one of the best tools to achieve many of the other designated uses, including recreation, water and soil conservation, and wildlife habitat.

**Q: Are roads permitted in Wilderness areas?**

**A:** Generally, no. No permanent roads are allowed. However, the law makes a few limited exceptions for temporary roads if absolutely necessary to properly administer the Wilderness area, including protecting public health and safety. Also, access is allowed to private property surrounded by Wilderness.

**Q: Are all motors banned from Wilderness areas?**

**A:** In order to adequately preserve the wild, natural character of the nation's Wilderness areas, The Wilderness Act prohibits the general use of motorized and mechanized equipment and transportation. But the Act clearly allows for their use by the U.S. Forest Service (and other managing agencies) for search and rescue operations, firefighting to protect adjacent private land, insect and disease control, and other circumstances where they are the minimum tool necessary for the proper administration of the area. For example, chainsaws can be authorized for clearing trails.

**Q: Does Wilderness affect private property?**

**A:** No. Only federal land may be designated as Wilderness. The Act allows access to private in-holdings.

**Q: Does Wilderness hurt the economy of small, rural towns?**

**A:** No. In fact, Wilderness can help communities diversify their economy by attracting new businesses, residents and visitors. It also protects scenic backdrops that help improve individual property values, and protects the headwaters of the drinking water supply for many communities that might otherwise face costly water treatment.

Income and employment from resource extraction have been on the decline nationally for years and are no longer the economic bases for small or rural communities. Therefore, by protecting of natural assets and quality of life values of the surrounding human communities, Wilderness benefits local economies.