

## Wilderness/Wilderness Study Area basics

What is Wilderness? In 1964, Congress established the National Wilderness Preservation System and designated the first Wilderness Areas in passing the Wilderness Act. Wilderness areas retain a primitive character, without permanent improvements and generally appear to have been affected mainly by the forces of nature. The wilderness idea — protection of the Nation's most pristine undeveloped lands — was born in the United States. Early supporters of a wilderness system saw a fundamental need to sustain the unique American character shaped by our national encounter with the wild frontier. The nine wilderness areas in Oregon and Washington are places where natural processes take precedent; areas managed so that nature remains substantially unchanged by human use. Rugged trails provide the only access into wilderness, and travel is restricted to foot or horseback.

How does Congress know which lands to designate as Wilderness? Congress seeks information and data from land management agencies based on their recommendations or by proposals from the public. The public can also request through the legislative branch that lands with 'wilderness characteristics' receive protection in the form of a National Monument or other special designation. The Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) Burns District has one wilderness area – 170,150 acres – on Steens Mountain.

What is a Wilderness Study Area (WSA)? Good question. The Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) of 1976 directed the BLM to inventory and study all lands for wilderness characteristics (nationwide studies began around 1980). To be designated as a WSA, an area had to have: at least 5,000 acres of public lands, naturalness, and outstanding opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined types of recreation. In 1991, the Oregon/Washington BLM issued a wilderness inventory report to the public that detailed the qualities and characteristics that make up these special places. Over the last 30 years, Congress has only reviewed *some* WSAs and designated *some* as wilderness (or released them from WSA status for other uses). Until Congress makes a final determination on each WSA, the BLM continues to preserve these special areas. The BLM's Burns District manages 21 WSAs containing about 922,000 acres.

Wilderness and WSA designations limit uses on public land, like motorized and mechanized recreation. But, isn't the BLM supposed to manage public lands for multiple-use? Yes. With the passage of the FLPMA in 1976, Congress directed the BLM to manage public land for multiple use and sustained yield. The term multiple-use includes ...the use of some land for less than all of the resources; takes into account the long term needs of future generations for resources including, but not limited to, recreation, watershed, wildlife and fish, and natural, scenic, scientific, and historical values; and with consideration being given to the relative values of the resources and not necessarily to the combination of uses that will give the greatest economic return. In short: wilderness *is* part of the spectrum of multiple use.

To learn more about the nine spectacular wilderness areas that the BLM manages in Oregon and Washington, head on over to: <http://www.blm.gov/or/wilderness/>

