



Appendix K. Wilderness Characteristics

This appendix provides background on the Evaluation and Planning Process for lands with wilderness characteristics.

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Wilderness Characteristics Analysis

Introduction

BLM has developed an evaluation and planning process to consider wilderness characteristics during the western Oregon plan revisions. This process has been designed to: (1) review original wilderness inventories conducted by BLM between 1978 and 1980 to ensure current and accurate information exists to analyze the environmental impacts of alternatives on BLM lands with wilderness characteristics; and (2) address proposals from the public to inventory and protect BLM lands with wilderness characteristics.

BLM's authority to conduct wilderness reviews, including the establishment of new wilderness study areas, expired on October 21, 1993, pursuant to Section 603 of FLPMA. However, BLM has retained authority under Section 201 of FLPMA to inventory wilderness characteristics and to consider such information during land use planning. Through this planning process, BLM has discretion to determine which portions of BLM lands with wilderness characteristics would be protected under special management. However, BLM can not manage these areas under the non-impairment standard described in BLM's Interim Management Policy for Lands Under Wilderness Review (Handbook H-8550-1) which applies only to wilderness study areas.

BLM received scoping comments from the public to inventory and protect wilderness characteristics on specific BLM lands in western Oregon (hereinafter referred to as "public wilderness proposals"). These requests have been considered along with all other resource information during this land use planning process.

Protection of wilderness characteristics on O&C lands determined to be suitable for permanent timber production is considered to be inconsistent with the O&C Act. Information about the presence or absence of wilderness characteristics on these lands, therefore, is not necessary to make land use plan decisions. However, BLM has determined where O&C lands suitable for permanent timber production overlap public wilderness proposals in order to analyze how wilderness characteristics, if present, would be affected by each alternative.

Wilderness characteristics include: naturalness, outstanding opportunities for solitude, and outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation. These characteristics must be present in a roadless area of at least 5,000 acres or a smaller roadless area that is of sufficient size to make practical its preservation in an unimpaired condition. A consideration used in this evaluation process is when a smaller BLM roadless area adjoins an identified roadless area of the U.S. Forest Service, and their combined acreage is a minimum 5,000 acres. In this situation, a determination has been made whether or not the BLM portion contains wilderness characteristics when considered in context with the U.S. Forest Service portion.



The size of the roadless area is a critical factor in the determination of the presence or absence of individual wilderness characteristics. If the size requirement is not met, then the area cannot be considered to possess wilderness characteristics, since such characteristics are dependent on the sufficient size of the roadless area. Wilderness characteristics within areas of sufficient size are defined as follows:

Naturalness. Naturalness is present within an area that has been affected primarily by the forces of nature with the imprint of human activity substantially unnoticeable. Some imprints of human activity may exist if they are substantially unnoticeable. More consideration is given to “apparent naturalness” rather than “natural integrity.” “Apparent naturalness” refers to whether or not an area appears to be in a natural condition to the average visitor who is not familiar with the biological composition of natural ecosystems versus human-affected ecosystems in a given area. Major influences on apparent naturalness are structures, evidence of past significant vegetative disturbance such as logging, and other obvious surface-disturbing activities. “Natural integrity” refers to the presence or absence of ecosystems that are relatively unaffected by human activity, such as the presence of native vegetative communities and absence of invasive species.

Outstanding Opportunities for Solitude. “Solitude” is defined as the state of being alone or remote from others; isolation; a lonely or secluded place. “Outstanding” is defined as standing out among others of its kind; conspicuous; prominent; superior to others of its kind; distinguished; excellent. Presence of this wilderness characteristic considers an individual’s opportunity to avoid the sights, sounds, and evidence of other people in the area. Factors that affect opportunities for solitude are the size and configuration of the unit; vegetative and topographic screening; ability of visitors to find a secluded spot, even when others are present in the area. Does not consider the sights and sounds of human activity outside of the unit’s boundaries unless they are so extremely imposing that they cannot be ignored.

Outstanding Opportunities for Primitive and Unconfined Recreation. Primitive and unconfined recreation includes activities that provide dispersed, undeveloped recreation which do not require facilities or motorized equipment. Some examples include but are not limited to: hiking, backpacking, fishing, hunting, caving, horseback riding, rock climbing, river running, cross-country skiing and bird watching. An area may possess outstanding opportunities for a primitive and unconfined type of recreation either through the diversity in the number of primitive and unconfined recreational activities possible or the outstanding quality of one opportunity.

The following includes a step-by-step evaluation and planning process that was used to: (1) review past wilderness inventories; (2) screen public wilderness proposals; (3) evaluate public wilderness proposals; (4) determine if proposed management would be applied to protect select units of BLM lands with wilderness characteristics; and (5) analyze each alternative’s effect on all BLM lands with wilderness characteristics.

**Step 1. Review past wilderness inventories.**

BLM reviewed existing published wilderness inventory reports and maps that were prepared as a result of the original inventories conducted between 1978 and 1980, under Section 603 of FLPMA. This review enabled BLM to determine if public wilderness proposals contained any new information that was not considered as part of the original inventories.

Step 2. Screen public wilderness proposals.

All public wilderness proposals were organized by BLM district. These proposals were mapped in GIS and then overlaid with O&C lands suitable for permanent timber production. All proposals were considered in the evaluation process; however, portions of those that occur on O&C lands suitable for permanent timber production were not considered further for protection.

Step 3. Evaluate public wilderness proposals.

BLM then determined if lands specified in each public wilderness proposal overlap the boundary of an original wilderness inventory unit, and if so, if any wilderness characteristics were identified in the original inventory of those lands. If necessary, original inventories were updated. If an inventory was not previously completed for a portion of BLM lands contained within a public wilderness proposal, then an assessment was completed to determine if wilderness characteristics currently exist. In most cases, this assessment was completed using existing field knowledge of an area and remote-sensing techniques such as: digital ortho photography, forest operations inventory data, and ground transportation road network data. On-the-ground evaluations were conducted if a reasonable determination could not be made using these techniques. Evaluation reports that summarize these results were developed for all public wilderness proposals. These reports were the basis for making a final determination of which BLM lands contain wilderness characteristics.

Step 4. Determine if proposed management would be applied to protect selected lands with wilderness characteristics.

BLM districts selected one of the following outcomes for each unit of BLM lands that was determined to contain wilderness characteristics: (1) emphasize the protection of wilderness characteristics as a priority over other uses, excluding portions that occur on O&C lands suitable for permanent timber production; or (2) emphasize other uses as a priority over protecting wilderness characteristics.

Step 5. Analyze each alternative's affect on BLM lands with wilderness characteristics.

See the Planning Criteria for the process used to analyze each alternative's affect on BLM lands with wilderness characteristics.