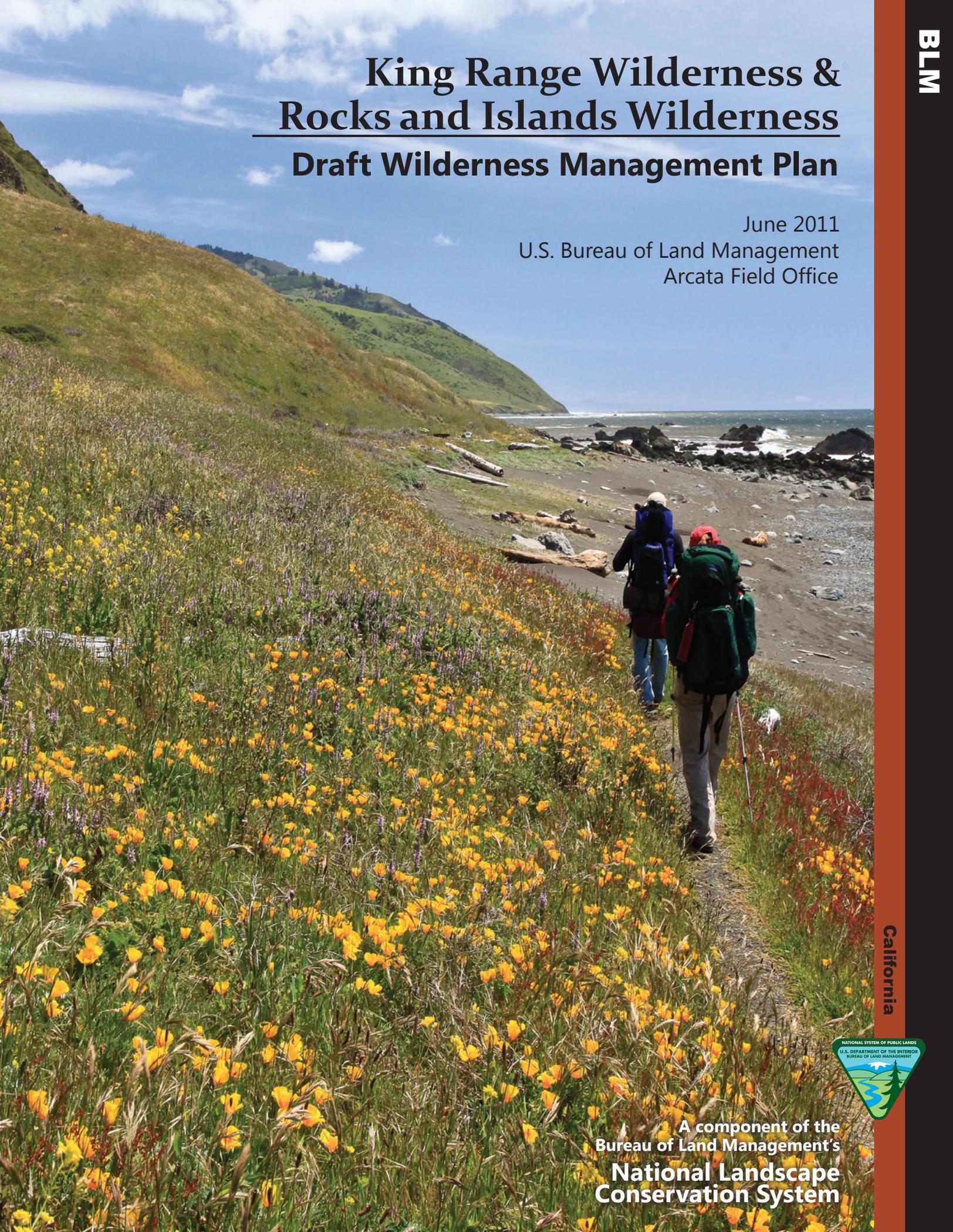


# King Range Wilderness & Rocks and Islands Wilderness

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## Draft Wilderness Management Plan

June 2011  
U.S. Bureau of Land Management  
Arcata Field Office



California



A component of the  
Bureau of Land Management's  
**National Landscape  
Conservation System**



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# List of Acronyms

ATV	All Terrain Vehicle
AUM	Animal Unit Month
BLM	Bureau of Land Management
BSB	Black Sands Beach
CALFIRE	California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection
CCNM	California Coastal National Monument
CCWHWA	California Coast Wild Heritage Wilderness Act
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
EA	Environmental Assessment
EMS	Emergency Medical System
FR	Federal Register
HCSO	Humboldt County Sherriff's Office
LCT	Lost Coast Trail
MIST	Minimum Impact Suppression Techniques
MRC	Mattole Restoration Council
NCA	National Conservation Area
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
NLCS	National Landscape Conservation System
NRHP	National Register of Historic Places
RMP	Resource Management Plan
ROW	Rights-of-Way
SAR	Search and Rescue
SRP	Special Recreation Permit
US	United States
USC	United States Code
USCG	United States Coast Guard
USDI	United States Department of the Interior



# Chapter 1: Introduction and Background

## 1.1 Introduction

The 42,585-acre King Range Wilderness, located in California's Humboldt County, encompasses a dramatic landscape of coastal mountains and pristine, rugged beaches. It is one of the few coastal wilderness areas in the contiguous United States (U.S.). Adjacent to the King Range Wilderness, lies the Rocks and Islands Wilderness, which encompasses approximately 2 acres of rocky marine outcroppings extending 3 miles off shore surrounded by California coastal waters. This proposed wilderness management plan provides the primary management guidance for the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) administration of these areas.

The King Range Wilderness, which was designated by the Congress in 2006, lies almost entirely within the King Range National Conservation Area (NCA). The Rocks and Islands Wilderness is part of the California Coastal National Monument (CCNM). Both the King Range NCA and the CCNM are part of the BLM's National Landscape Conservation System (NLCS). The NLCS includes over 886 federally recognized areas and approximately 27 million acres of National Monuments, National Conservation Areas, Wilderness Areas, Wilderness Study Areas, Wild and Scenic Rivers, National Scenic and Historic Trails, and Conservation Lands of the California Desert.

The proposed wilderness management plan will supplement the existing King Range NCA Resource Management Plan (RMP), completed in 2005, by providing wilderness-specific management direction. The plan will also supplement the RMP for the CCNM which the Rocks and Islands Wilderness is a part of (Figure 1-1). The plan will ensure that these two wilderness areas are administered in a manner that furthers the purposes of the Wilderness Act of 1964 (Wilderness Act) and the Northern California Coastal Wild Heritage Wilderness Act, through which the wilderness areas were designated. The plan functions as an environmental assessment (EA) in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other relevant federal and state laws and regulations.



**Figure 1-1** Rocks and Islands Wilderness and King Range Wilderness

## 1.2 Plan Layout

This document presents the BLM’s management approach for the King Range Wilderness and the Rocks and Islands Wilderness. It is intended to provide guidance and a greater understanding of the BLM’s approach to wilderness management. The outline below describes what readers can expect to find in each chapter.

- *Chapter 1—Introduction:* This section includes information on the history of these areas, the purpose of this plan, and the internal and public scoping process undertaken by the BLM in its development.
- *Chapter 2—Current Conditions and Trends in Wilderness Character and Management:* This section describes the condition of the five qualities contributing to the area’s wilderness character, as well as the current management actions affecting these qualities. This chapter also serves as the *Affected Environment* section of the EA for the plan.
- *Chapter 3—Wilderness Management Plan:* The plan provides a framework to protect the area’s wilderness character while providing for various uses. It addresses an array of resource and use issues raised by BLM employees and members of the public during the plan development process. This chapter also serves as the *Proposed Action* section of the EA.
- *Chapter 4—Environmental Assessment:* This section describes a “no action” alternative to the wilderness management plan (proposed action), as well as the effects of the plan and the alternative on the area’s wilderness character and other resources. It also includes a list of those who prepared the plan and the agencies and other key persons consulted or contacted during its development.

## 1.3 Location and Legislative History

The King Range Wilderness is located along the northern California coast, approximately 60 miles south of Eureka and 200 miles north of San Francisco (Figure 1-2). The area is characterized by an abrupt mountain range rising 4,000 feet above the Pacific Ocean, making it one of the most spectacular and remote stretches of coastline in the contiguous U.S. With its wild, undeveloped beaches, lack of roads, and rugged peaks the area has become known as the “Lost Coast” of California. The wilderness draws visitors from around the world who wish to experience its wilderness character. When gazing out to sea from the King Range Wilderness, wilderness visitors are often, unbeknownst to them, observing the Rocks and Islands Wilderness.



The passage of the King Range Act in 1970 designated 35 miles of the Lost Coast as the King Range NCA. Under this law, Congress directed the BLM to consolidate and acquire lands, restore habitat and watersheds, and provide for public recreation in the area. In 1976, the Federal Land Policy and Management Act directed the BLM to study all of its lands for possible inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. A large portion of the King Range NCA was found to possess wilderness characteristics. Thirty years later, the Northern California Coastal Wild Heritage Wilderness Act officially designated 42,585 acres of the 68,000-acre King Range NCA, as well as the 2-acre Rocks and Islands Wilderness, as part of the National Wilderness Preservation System (Figure 1-3). The Northern California Coastal Wild Heritage Act requires that, where a conflict exists between its language and the King Range Act, the more restrictive provision must be followed.

The Rocks and Islands Wilderness is part of the CCNM. The CCNM was designated by presidential proclamation in 2000 to protect the significant scenic, biological, and cultural resources of offshore rocks, reefs, and pinnacles along the 1,100 mile California coastline. The CCNM includes those portions of the rocks and islands that stand above mean high tide.

#### **1.4 Planning Area and Relationship of the Wilderness Management Plan to Existing Management Plans**

The King Range NCA RMP was completed in 2005, prior to the passage of the Northern California Coastal Wild Heritage Act and the designation of King Range Wilderness. However, protection of wilderness qualities was a major focus of the RMP, which was written to be compatible with wilderness legislation. Goal *WIL 1* of the RMP reads, “Recognize that coastal lands with wilderness characteristics are rare in the contiguous U.S. and provide management that protects and restores these values in the KRNCA.” Objective *WIL 1.3* states that, “Any lands designated by Congress as wilderness will be incorporated into the Backcountry Management Zone and managed under the prescriptions for this zone and the specific direction of area wilderness legislation.” The Backcountry Zone is described in the plan as “. . . essentially roadless, with a primary management goal focused on recognizing and managing this unique and primitive undeveloped coastal area and its wilderness characteristics.”

Since the King Range NCA RMP was written for compatibility with wilderness legislation, the passage of the Northern California Coastal Wild Heritage Act does not necessitate a revision of the existing RMP. A few of the RMP’s implementation level decisions will be updated through

this plan to ensure full compatibility with wilderness management. However, these changes are minor in scope and are considered to be plan maintenance as described in the BLM Land Use Planning Handbook H 1601-1 (USDI BLM 2005). Similarly, the CCNM RMP considered wilderness qualities of the Rocks and Islands Wilderness and includes management prescriptions compatible with wilderness. This plan will also serve to implement the CCNM RMP.

The planning area totals 45,093 acres that includes the King Range Wilderness and the Rocks and Islands Wilderness. In addition, for management of solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation purposes only, the planning area includes the 2.5 miles coastal strand extending north from the wilderness boundary to the Mattole Trailhead (the northern terminus of the Lost Coast Trail) as well as the acquired lands in the Indian and Mill Creek drainages located in the northeast portion of the planning area.

## 1.5 Wilderness Character

### 1.5.1 Background on Wilderness Character

The 1964 Wilderness Act, which provides the overarching legal structure for wilderness management in the U.S., directs administering agencies to preserve the wilderness character of each wilderness under their jurisdiction. Drawing on the language of the act, the administering agencies have identified five component qualities of wilderness character which are used to develop management actions and measure the

effectiveness of wilderness stewardship. These five qualities—natural, undeveloped, untrammeled, solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation, and unique or supplemental values—are described below.

*Natural*—Ecological and evolutionary systems within wilderness areas are substantially free from the effects of modern civilization. The Wilderness Act states that wilderness shall be “protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions.” The King Range Wilderness

is a mosaic of ecosystems including forest, grassland, coastal scrub, and beach (Figure 1-4). Invasive weeds and departure from natural fire regimes are examples of impacts to naturalness.

**Figure 1-4** The natural landscape of the King Range Wilderness





*Undeveloped*—The Wilderness Act states that wilderness is “an area of undeveloped federal land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation,” where “the imprint of man’s work [is] substantially unnoticeable.” This quality is affected by the presence of structures, installations, and habitations and through the use of motorized or mechanized vehicles or equipment that increase the ability of humans to occupy or modify the environment. While recreation facilities are addressed under the solitude and primitive and unconfined recreation sections of Chapters 2–4, these facilities do impact the undeveloped quality of the King Range Wilderness (Figure 1-5).



**Figure 1-5** Monitoring instruments affect the area’s undeveloped quality

*Solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation*—The Wilderness Act states that wilderness has “outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation.” Increasing visitor encounters, signs of modern civilization, recreation facilities, and management restrictions on visitor behavior impair this quality (Figure 1-6).



**Figure 1-6** Visitors seek solitude in the King Range Wilderness

*Untrammeled*—The Wilderness Act states that wilderness is “an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man.” A “trammel” is literally a net or hobble that impedes an animal’s movement. The term “untrammeled” is used metaphorically here to refer to a landscape that is essentially free from modern human control or manipulation. This quality is degraded by human activities that control or manipulate ecological systems within a wilderness. Management restraint is the key to preserving an area’s untrammeled quality. Even actions that may promote naturalness, such as removing invasive plants or setting prescribed burns, impair an area’s untrammeled quality (Figure 1-7).



**Figure 1-7** Wilderness areas are intended to be landscapes where humans exercise restraint in manipulating or “trammeling” the environment

*Unique/supplemental values*—In addition to the four required wilderness qualities listed above, the Wilderness Act states that wilderness “may also contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical use.” Some of these supplemental values, such as the presence of threatened and endangered species are also part of an area’s natural quality. Other values, such as the presence of important cultural



**Figure 1-8** Punta Gorda Lighthouse, which began operation in 1912, is a historic value in the King Range Wilderness

resources or paleontological specimens, do not fit easily into one of the four statutorily required qualities (Figure 1-8).

While all areas designated under the Wilderness Act demonstrate the five qualities described above to some degree, most are not “pristine” in the strictest definition of the word, having been affected by varying levels of past and current land uses. Congress determines the state of an area’s wilderness character at the time of designation and identifies what uses will be allowed to continue in the area. It is the responsibility of wilderness administering agencies to prevent the degradation of wilderness character while providing for these uses.

### 1.5.2 Managing for Wilderness Character

The five wilderness qualities described above comprise an approximation of wilderness character that can be used for planning, managing, and monitoring. The planning process would be very simple if protection of wilderness character simply involved implementing actions to maximize protection of each quality. In practice, however, managing for wilderness character is much more complex. Here are several examples related to the King Range Wilderness Plan:

1. Projects to restore or mimic ecological processes damaged by past land uses will improve naturalness, but also manipulate the landscape and negatively affect the untrammeled quality.
2. Congress requires the BLM to recognize valid existing rights and uses such as livestock grazing and access to private land inholdings, even where activities associated with these uses impact wilderness character.
3. Concerns outside the wilderness area, such as providing protection to private property during wildfire events will affect firefighting tactics within wilderness, causing impacts to natural and undeveloped qualities.
4. Increasing numbers of visitors can result in overcrowding and the diminishment of the wilderness experience they seek.

## 1.6 Planning Issues

In developing this plan, the BLM considered a wide range of issues that might affect the wilderness character. The BLM solicited input on such issues from both agency resource experts and the public. Fourteen public comments were received during a public scoping period held from December 5, 2008 through January 23, 2009. Issues raised during the scoping process and considered in this plan include managing for

solitude in the face of increased visitation, enforcing regulations and protecting public safety, educating visitors about backcountry ethics and appropriate wilderness uses, managing habitat for threatened and endangered species such as the northern spotted owl, controlling non-native species, carrying out efficient search and rescue operations, facilitating access for traditional Native American uses, and protecting private property from wildfire. A more detailed discussion of issues raised during the scoping process can be found in Appendix A.

