

Wilderness Recommendation Process

As part of the land management plan revision effort for the Lolo National Forest, the forest supervisor must identify and evaluate lands that may be suitable to include in the National Wilderness Preservation System and determine whether to recommend any such lands for wilderness designation (36 CFR 219.7(c)(2)).

The process occurs in four primary steps: inventory, evaluation, analysis, and recommendation (Figure 2). Coordination with tribal partners, other agencies, and the public occurs with each step of this process and is integrated into the public engagement and participation strategy.



Figure 1. Picture from Trail 27 in the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex.

Step 1: Inventory of lands that may be suitable for recommendation

The first step of the wilderness recommendation process is to develop an inventory of all lands across the Lolo National Forest that may be suitable for wilderness recommendation due to size, roads, and other improvements. Including lands in the inventory doesn't mean it is recommended for designation or that certain types of management are required.

The inventory will include previously recommended wilderness areas from the 1986 Lolo National Forest Plan and established inventoried roadless areas per the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule. Areas of 5,000 acres or more that are generally unroaded, undeveloped, or unmodified will be included in the inventory of lands

to evaluate for potential recommendation. The forest supervisor may choose to include areas that do not meet the inventory criteria to evaluate because of input received through public engagement and coordination with other agencies and tribes.

Step 2: Evaluating the lands that may be suitable for recommendation

After creating the inventory in Step 1, we will use existing information to describe the wilderness characteristics for these areas. This will help us understand how an area meets the intent of the Wilderness Act. How natural or natural appearing is the area? Does the area provide for solitude or opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation? What factors may hinder our ability to preserve the area's unmodified condition? Are there unique ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical values present in the area?

The public will have an opportunity to help us understand these potential wilderness characteristics and the suitability of these lands to recommend for the Wilderness Preservation System through this evaluation step. These evaluations will help the Forest Supervisor determine which areas to move into Step 3: Analysis.

Step 3: Analyzing areas, or portions of areas, to recommend

As part of developing the plan and completing the environmental analysis, we will develop and analyze alternatives that include additional lands to recommend for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System.

Analysis for recommendation is not all lands included in the inventory and subsequent evaluation. The forest supervisor will disclose their reasoning for excluding any evaluated area, or portions thereof, in alternatives and environmental analysis. The public will have an opportunity to provide input on the recommendations

and analysis as part of the comment period for the environmental impact statement.

Step 4: Recommending lands to include in the National Wilderness Preservation System

The forest supervisor will determine whether to recommend any additional areas for the National Wilderness Preservation System as part of the record of decision. Lands not carried forward under the record of decision will be managed under the guidance of the revised land management plan. Congress reserves the authority to designate federal lands for the Wilderness Preservation System.



Figure 2. Four steps of the wilderness recommendation process.

What is Wilderness?

Wilderness can mean different things to people. For this process, we rely on the definition provided in the Wilderness Act of 1964:

“An area of undeveloped Federal land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements, or human habitation, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions and which:

1. Generally, appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable;
2. Has outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation;

3. Has at least 5,000 acres of land or is of sufficient size as to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition; and,
4. May also contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value.”

How much of the Lolo National Forest is currently designated Wilderness?

Four congressionally designated wilderness areas are within, or partially within, the Lolo National Forest administrative boundary. Congress designated these areas prior to establishing the 1986 Lolo National Forest Plan. Based on current National Forest System spatial data reflecting these areas, the Lolo National Forest contains about 147,893 acres of designated wilderness. Welcome Creek (28,214 acres) and Rattlesnake (34,273 acres) Wilderness areas are wholly within the Lolo National Forest administrative boundary. The Scapegoat Wilderness is managed as part of the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex and covers about 75,574 acres of the Lolo National Forest. A portion of the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness (9,831 acres) falls within the Lolo National Forest.

How will the revision process consider previously proposed wilderness or existing wilderness study areas?

The 1986 Lolo Forest Plan proposed an additional 223,915 acres for wilderness designation across the forest. Proposed wilderness areas included the Great Burn (90,392 acres), the Bob Marshall Addition (70,995 acres), the Selway-Bitterroot Addition (3,702 acres), and Sliderock (58,826 acres). None of these areas have received congressional designation to date. These areas will be included in the inventory and the evaluation will ensure a consistent summary of the wilderness characteristics as required under the 2012 Planning Rule, along with other lands that may be suitable for recommendation. There are no wilderness study areas located within the Lolo National Forest administrative boundary.