



Wilderness Recommendation Process

Lolo National Forest Plan Revision

1.1 Introduction

As part of the land management plan revision effort for the Lolo National Forest, the Responsible Official must identify and evaluate lands that may be suitable for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System and determine whether to recommend any such lands for wilderness designation (36 CFR 219.7(c)(2)). This process document summarizes how we intend on meeting the requirements of the Wilderness Preservation Act of 1964, as amended, National Forest Management Act of 1976, and the 2012 Planning Rule. It is based largely on existing Forest Service Handbook (Forest Service Handbook 1909.12, Chapter 70) direction and examples from other recent revision efforts within the region and across the agency. As required by the 2012 Planning Rule, public involvement as well as coordination with tribal, state, and other federal agencies will ensure a transparent, thorough review of lands that may be suitable to include in the National Wilderness Preservation system.

The process occurs in four primary steps: inventory, evaluation, analysis, and recommendation (Figure 1; Forest Service Handbook 1909.12 Chapter 70 Section 70.6). Public involvement will occur with each step of this process and will coincide public engagement strategy associated with the Lolo National Forest Plan Revision efforts.

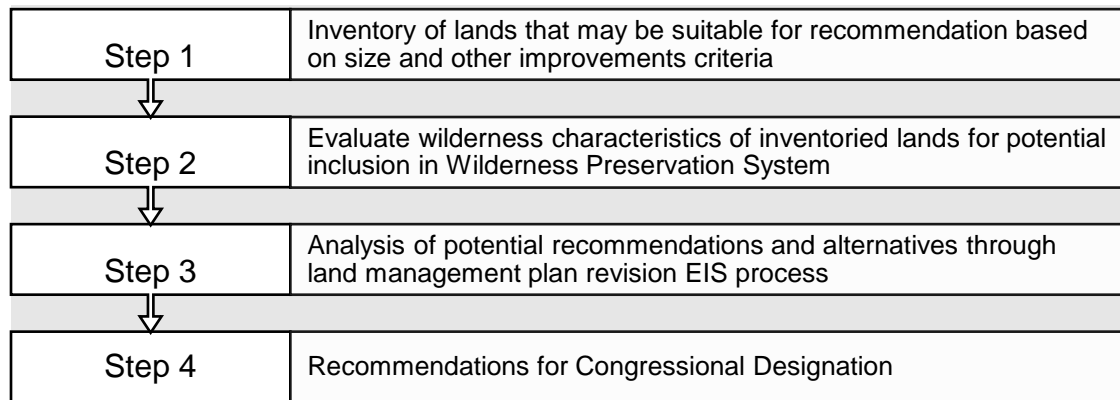


Figure 1. The four primary steps of the wilderness recommendation process

The initial inventory of lands that may be suitable for recommendation will be available for public review in April 2023. Unlike previous recommendation processes, this inventory will be very broad and inclusive. Areas will only be eliminated where they do not meet the area size, forest roads, and other improvements criteria outlined in the 2012 planning rule and Forest Service Handbook direction.

After completing the inventory and incorporating public input, the evaluation step focuses on several criteria to determine each inventoried area’s suitability for recommendation. The interdisciplinary team will document the evaluation of apparent naturalness, opportunities for solitude and primitive or

unconfined recreation, ability to preserve wilderness characteristics, and the presence of other resource values of interest.

Following the evaluation and public review, the interdisciplinary team will develop potential recommendations and alternatives to consider and analyze during the environmental analysis process associated with the Lolo National Forest land management plan revision effort. These recommendations and alternatives will be open for public comment during the traditional public involvement requirements associated with the Plan Revision Environmental Impact Statement processes. Finally, the responsible official will include any recommended additions to the National Wilderness Preservation System in the decision document supporting the plan revision.

1.2 Background

Four congressionally designated wilderness areas are within, or partially within the Lolo National Forest administrative boundary. Congress designated these areas all prior to the 1986 Lolo National Forest Plan. Based on current National Forest System spatial data reflecting these areas, the Lolo National Forest contains about 147,856 acres of designated wilderness. Welcome Creek¹ (28,214 acres) and Rattlesnake² (34,237 acres) Wilderness areas are wholly within the Lolo National Forest administrative boundary. The Scapegoat Wilderness³ 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 Wilderness⁴ (9,831 acres) falls within the Lolo National Forest.

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 Additions (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.

The Lolo National Forest prepared for a Land and Resource Management Plan Revision in 2003-2006. Under the direction of the planning rule and policy in effect at that time, the plan revision team evaluated potential additions to the National Wilderness Preservation System focusing on areas designated as roadless under the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule. Through this evaluation process, the plan carried forward proposed wilderness from the 1986 Plan with adjustments and additional areas to recommend for the national wilderness preservation system. These areas included an addition to the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex (70,119 acres), the Great Burn (77,124 acres), Quigg/Sliderock (64,887 acres), South Fork Lolo Creek (11,100 acres), Stoney Mountain (33,742 acres), and Reservation Divide (15,407 acres). Due to changes in the planning rule and policy regarding plan revision, the Lolo National Forest did not finalize the proposed plan from these efforts. The 2012 Planning Rule and current policy requires a much broader inventory of lands to evaluate and consider for potential recommendation. However, these previous recommendations will be reviewed and considered as we complete the process summarized below.

1.3 Laws, policy, and regulations

The National Forest Management Act of 1976, as amended, directs the Department of Agriculture to develop, maintain, and revise plans for units that provide for multiple uses and sustained yield of the products and services obtained from National Forest System lands in accordance with the Multiple-Use,

¹ Endangered American Wilderness Act - Public law 95-237 (2/24/1978)

² Rattlesnake National Recreation Area and Wilderness Act of 1980 - Public law 96-476 (10/19/1980)

³ Public law 92-395 (8/20/1972)

⁴ The Wilderness Act - Public law 88-577 (9/3/1964)

Sustained-Yield Act of 1960. This includes coordination of outdoor recreation, range, timber, watershed, wildlife and fish, and wilderness. The agency is directed to develop land and resource management plans that include guidelines ensure consideration of the economic and environmental aspects of various systems of renewable resource management, including the related systems of silviculture and protection of forest resources, to provide for outdoor recreation (including wilderness), range, timber, watershed, wildlife, and fish.

To understand the objectives of this study we rely on the 1964 Wilderness Act, as amended, definition of wilderness as:

“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:

- generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable;
- has outstanding opportunities for solitude OR a primitive and unconfined type of recreation;
- has at least 5000 acres of land or is of sufficient size as to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition; and
- may also contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value.”

The 2012 Planning Rule requires that all plan revisions or new plans must complete the wilderness recommendation process before the Responsible Official determines, in the plan decision document, whether to recommend lands within the plan area to Congress for wilderness designation (36 CFR 219.7 (c)(2)(v)).

1.4 Step 1: Inventory of lands that may be suitable for recommendation to include in National Wilderness Preservation System

Per Forest Service Handbook 1909.12, Chapter 70, Sect 70.6, the Responsible Official shall identify and create an inventory of all lands that may be suitable for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. Inclusion in the inventory is not a designation that conveys or requires a particular kind of management. Lands included in the inventory must be documented, identified on a map(s), and further evaluated as described in Step 2: Evaluation.

The inventory begins with considering existing, relevant information including information about designated areas (such as inventoried roadless areas), transportation infrastructure (such as national forest system road operational maintenance levels), and past or pending wilderness recommendation proposals. Building on this information and any additional public input, the interdisciplinary team should apply the criteria for including lands in the inventory from Forest Service Handbook 1909.12 Chapter 70 Section 71.2, as described below.

After applying these criteria, the Responsible Official shall also review the information provided through public participation during the assessment or as part of the wilderness recommendation process including areas that have been proposed for consideration as recommended wilderness through a previous planning process, collaborative effort, or in pending legislation. In reviewing the criteria for lands to include in the

inventory, please remember that the Responsible Official may include in the inventory additional areas identified as part of that review that do not meet the criteria for the purpose of carrying such areas forward to the evaluation step.

1.4.1 Criteria for including lands in the inventory

Size

According to the Wilderness Act, a wilderness area “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”. Areas included in the inventory must be federal lands and must meet the size criteria (16 U.S.C. 1131c; FSH 1909.12 Ch 70 Sec 71.21):

- The area contains 5,000 acres or more; or,
- The area contains less than 5,000 acres but is of sufficient size as to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition, including but not limited to areas contiguous to an existing wilderness, primitive areas, administratively recommended wilderness, or wilderness inventory of other Federal ownership.

Improvements

Pursuant to the Wilderness Act, the inventory includes areas “where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain. An area of wilderness is further defined to mean... 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; ...” (16 U.S.C. 1131c; FSH 1909.12 Ch 70 Sec 71.22).

Forest Road Improvements

Roads influence an area’s ability to provide outstanding opportunities for solitude and primitive, unconfined recreation. They can also impact the area’s ‘untrammelled’ character, thus precluding an area’s suitability for the Wilderness Preservation System. In review of existing forest road information, the inventory will include⁵:

- Areas with operational maintenance level 1 forest roads or areas with roads that will be reclassified as maintenance Level 1 through previous decision documents.
- Areas with operational maintenance level 2 forest roads (or higher developed roads that will be reclassified to level 2) where these roads have not been improved and maintained by mechanical means for regular continued use, have not cumulatively degraded wilderness character or preclude future preservation of the area as wilderness, and have not been identified for continued public access and use through previous decision documents or travel planning decisions supported by NEPA analysis.
- Areas with any routes that are decommissioned, unauthorized, or temporary, or forest roads planned for decommissioning or found as likely unneeded in a previous decision document.

⁵ See Definitions, References, and Other supporting documents on page 8 for descriptions of forest roads and various maintenance levels, as well as references to other supporting regulations and policy

- Areas with forest roads previously proposed by the Forest Service for consideration as recommended wilderness during previous forest planning process; or areas with forest roads that the Responsible Official merits for inclusion in the inventory that were proposed for consideration through public involvement during the assessment or other public or intergovernmental participation opportunity.
- Areas with historical wagon routes, historical mining routes, or other settlement era transportation features considered part of the historical and cultural landscape of the area.

Areas excluded from the inventory include:

- Areas with forest roads where management access and public use is not prohibited. This typically includes operational maintenance level 3, 4, and 5 forest roads and those open to public motorized use on the Motor Vehicle Use Map.
- Areas with operational maintenance level 2 roads, or roads that will be reclassified as Level 2 road per previous decisions, that have been improved and are maintained through mechanical means, cumulatively degrade wilderness character, or preclude future preservation of the area as wilderness; or are needed for continued access or public use through previous decision documents.
- Areas with permanently authorized roads validated by a federal court or the Department of the Interior for which a valid easement or interest has been properly recorded.

Other Improvements

In addition to forest road improvements, other improvements influence an area's suitability for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. If substantially noticeable, these activities affect the primitive, undeveloped character of the landscape. See 'Definitions, References, and Other supporting documents' for explanation of substantially noticeable considerations in the inventory.

In consideration of other improvements, the inventory will include:

- Airstrips and heliports.
- Areas where vegetation treatments, previous logging, and associated road construction activities are not substantially noticeable.
- Areas where mining activities are not substantially noticeable.
- Grazing areas and range allotments with only minor structural and nonstructural improvements that are not substantially noticeable.
- Watershed treatment areas that are not substantially noticeable and where minor treatments have been accomplished manually.
- Areas with minor, easily removable recreation improvements, such as temporary occupancy locations for hunting or outfitter camps.
- Areas with permanently installed vertical structures, such as electronic installations that support television, radio, telephone, or cellular communications, provided their impacts, maintenance and access needs are minimal.
- Ground-return telephone lines, electric lines, and powerlines where the associated right-of-way has not been cleared.
- Areas with historical and cultural structures, dwellings, and other relics of past occupation.

- Lands adjacent to development or activities that impact opportunities for solitude. The fact that non-wilderness activities or uses can be seen or heard from within any portion of the area, must not, of itself, preclude inclusion in the inventory. It is appropriate to extend boundaries to the edges of development for purposes of inclusion in the inventory.

Developed recreation sites and powerlines with cleared rights-of-way, pipelines, and other permanently installed linear right-of-way structures will not be included in the inventory.

In reviewing the criteria for lands to include in the inventory, the Responsible Official may include in the inventory additional areas identified as part of that review that do not meet the criteria for the purpose of carrying such areas forward to the evaluation step. Inclusion in the inventory is not a designation that conveys or requires a particular kind of management. Lands included in the inventory must be documented, identified on a map(s), and further evaluated as described in Step 2: Evaluation.

1.5 Step 2: Evaluation

Per the Wilderness Act and Forest Service Handbook 1909.12 Chapter 70 Section 72, the Responsible Official shall evaluate the wilderness characteristics of lands in the inventory. To conduct the evaluation, the Responsible Official shall ensure the Interdisciplinary Team applies these criteria:

1. Evaluate the degree to which the area generally appears to be affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprints of man's work substantially unnoticeable (apparent naturalness).
 - a. The composition of plant and animal communities. The purpose of this factor is to determine if plant and animal communities appear substantially unnatural (for example, past management activities have created a plantation style forest with trees of a uniform species, age, and planted in rows);
 - b. The extent to which the area appears to reflect ecological conditions that would normally be associated with the area without human intervention; and
 - c. The extent to which improvements (see 'Improvements' section above) included in the area represent a departure from apparent naturalness.
2. Evaluate the degree to which the area has outstanding opportunities for solitude or for a primitive and unconfined type of recreation. The area does not have to possess outstanding opportunities for both elements, nor does it need to have outstanding opportunities on every acre.
 - a. Consider impacts that are pervasive and influence a visitor's opportunity for solitude within the evaluated area. Factors to consider may include topography, presence of screening, distance from impacts, degree of permanent intrusions, and pervasive sights and sounds from outside the area.
 - b. Consider the opportunity to engage in primitive-type or unconfined recreation activities that lead to a visitor's ability to feel a part of nature. Examples of primitive-type recreation activities include observing wildlife, hiking, backpacking, horseback riding, fishing, hunting, floating, kayaking, cross-country skiing, camping, and enjoying nature.
3. Evaluate how an area less than 5,000 acres is of sufficient size to make its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition practicable.
4. Evaluate the degree to which the area may contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value. These values are not required to be present in

an area for the area to be recommended for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System, but their presence should be identified and evaluated where they exist.

- a. Rare plant or animal communities or rare ecosystems. Rare can be determined locally, regionally, nationally, or within the system of protected designations.
 - b. Outstanding landscape features such as waterfalls, mountains, viewpoints, waterbodies, or geologic features.
 - c. Historic and cultural resource sites (Confidentiality requirements with respect to cultural resource sites must be respected (25 U.S.C 3056)).
 - d. Research natural areas.
 - e. High quality water resources or important watershed features.
5. Evaluate the degree to which the area may be managed to preserve its wilderness characteristics.
- a. Shape and configuration of the area;
 - b. Legally established rights or uses within the area, such as reserved mineral rights;
 - c. Specific Federal or State laws that may be relevant to availability of the area for wilderness or the ability to manage the area to protect wilderness characteristics;
 - d. The presence and amount of non-Federal land in the area; and
 - e. Management of adjacent lands.

The Responsible Official may vary the scope of the evaluation of specific areas or portions of areas. The evaluation must be documented and included in the planning record. The interdisciplinary team will document how these criteria were applied to each area.

1.6 Step 3: Analysis

Per the Wilderness Act and Forest Service Handbook 1909.12 Chapter 70 Section 73, the Responsible Official shall consider the areas evaluated and determine which areas to further analyze for recommendation as part of one or more alternatives in the applicable National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) document. These alternatives will be developed and analyzed in conjunction with the plan revision environment analysis process and disclosed as part of environmental impact statement.

Not all lands included in the inventory and subsequent evaluations are required to be analyzed for recommendation. For each evaluated area, or portions thereof, that are not included in an alternative in the Plan Revision Environmental Impact Statement, the Responsible Official shall document the reason for excluding it from further analysis.

For each area evaluated and included in one or more alternative, the Responsible Official shall identify the:

1. Name of the area and number of acres in the area to be considered for recommendation.
2. Location and a summarized description of a recommended boundary for each area. To identify a clearly defined boundary for each area, evaluate how the location of the boundary will support management of the area for wilderness and other adjacent uses. Where possible, boundaries should be easy to identify and to locate on the ground.
3. A brief description of the general geography, topography, and vegetation of the recommended area.

4. A brief description of the current uses and management of the area.
5. A description of the area's wilderness characteristics and the ability to protect and manage the area to preserve its wilderness characteristics.
6. A brief summary of the factors considered, and the process used in evaluating the area and developing the alternative(s).
7. A brief summary of the ecological and social characteristics that would provide the basis for the area's suitability for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System.

1.7 Step 4: Recommendation

Per the Wilderness Act and Forest Service Handbook 1909.12 Chapter 70 Section 74, the Responsible Official shall decide, based upon the analysis and input from Tribal, State, and local governments and the public, which areas, if any, to recommend for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. The Responsible Official shall identify any such lands in the final decision document for the plan.

1.8 Definitions, References, and Other supporting documents

Forest road. A road wholly or partly within or adjacent to and serving the National Forest System (NFS) that the Forest Service determines is necessary for the protection, administration, and utilization of the NFS and the use and development of its resources (36 CFR 212.1).

Maintenance levels. The level of service provided by, and maintenance required for, a specific road (Forest Service Handbook 7709.59, Chapter 60, Section 62.31). For the purposes of this inventory, we are relying on the Operational Maintenance Level assigned to National Forest System Roads, as that is the current maintenance level to understand the existing use and impact to wilderness characteristics.

Level 1

These are roads that have been placed in storage between intermittent uses. The period of storage must exceed 1 year. Basic custodial maintenance is performed to prevent damage to adjacent resources and to perpetuate the road for future resource management needs. Emphasis is normally given to maintaining drainage facilities and runoff patterns. Planned road deterioration may occur at this level. Appropriate traffic management strategies are to "prohibit" and "eliminate" all traffic. These roads are not shown on motor vehicle use maps.

Roads receiving level 1 maintenance may be of any type, class, or construction standard, and may be managed at any other maintenance level during the time they are open for traffic. However, while being maintained at level 1, they are closed to vehicular traffic but may be available and suitable for nonmotorized uses.

Level 2

This level is assigned to roads open for use by high-clearance vehicles. Passenger car traffic, user comfort, and user convenience are not considerations. Warning signs and traffic control devices are not provided with the exception that some signing, such as W-18-1 "No Traffic Signs," may be posted at intersections. Motorists should have no expectations of being alerted to potential hazards while driving these roads. Traffic is normally minor, usually consisting of one or a combination of administrative, permitted, dispersed recreation, or other specialized uses. Log haul may occur at this level. Appropriate traffic management strategies are either to "discourage" or "prohibit" passenger cars. "Accept" or "discourage" strategies may be employed for high clearance vehicles.

Level 3

This level is assigned to roads open and maintained for travel by a prudent driver in a standard passenger car. User comfort and convenience are not considered priorities. The manual on uniform traffic control devices is applicable. Warning signs and traffic control devices are provided to alert motorists of situations that may violate expectations.

Roads in this maintenance level are typically low speed with single lanes and turnouts. Appropriate traffic management strategies are either to “encourage” or “accept” passenger cars. “Discourage” or “prohibit” strategies may be employed for certain classes of vehicles or users.

Level 4

This level is assigned to roads that provide a moderate degree of user comfort and convenience at moderate travel speeds. Most roads are double lane and aggregate surfaced. However, some roads may be single lane. Some roads may be paved and/or dust abated. The manual on uniform traffic control devices is applicable. The most appropriate traffic management strategy is to “encourage” passenger cars. However, the “prohibit” strategy may apply to specific classes of vehicles or users at certain times.

Level 5

This level is assigned to roads that provide a high degree of user comfort and convenience. These roads are normally double lane, paved facilities. Some may be aggregate surfaced and dust abated. The manual on uniform traffic control devices is applicable. The appropriate traffic management strategy is to "encourage" passenger cars.

2. Appendix A: Timeline for Wilderness Recommendation Process Tasks

Table 1. Timeline for Wilderness Recommendation Process Tasks

Process Step	Anticipated Dates Completed or Planned	Accomplishments/Tasks Planned
Pre-process: Process white paper and gathering information from past evaluations	January - March 2022	The Wilderness Inventory and Evaluation Process paper provided to forest for review and input. Continued coordination with the forest recreation staff and regional office program managers during the development of this process.
Step 1: Training/awareness workshop on process and data compilation to support inventory of lands that may be suitable for recommendation in the Wilderness Preservation System.	March 2022	A wilderness inventory and evaluation workshop held to support common understanding of the process outlined in FSH 1909.12 Chpt 70. Workshop held for FLT/POCs/recreation staff and Regional Revision Team. Part of this workshop involved reviewing other examples of 'substantially noticeable' and developing criteria appropriate for the Lolo National Forest and the types of 'Other Improvements' across the landscape. During the workshop the group discussed data sets available/needed to inform other improvements and evaluation and reviewed the evaluation template developed for Step 2.
Data Clean Up	June – December 2022	The Revision Team, Regional Travel Management Team, and Forest Staff worked together to address inaccuracies in dataset needed to inform the Wilderness Inventory development. Datasets reviewed included Recreation Sites, Special Use Permits, Trails, and Roads.
Step 1 (Part II): Workshops to validate inventoried polygons.	March 2023	One workshop in each zone may be held in April-May to facilitate a thorough review of the inventoried polygon to move through the evaluation in Step 2. We will also brief the Lolo FLT on 3/29/2023 before public engagement scheduled for April and the request for input on the initial inventory of polygons to study.
Step 1 (Part III): Information sharing on Wilderness Recommendation process and inventory development. Public release and review of inventory and opportunity for input and understand the public interest in areas to move through evaluation	March, April 2023	Public engagement opportunity to provide information about the Wilderness Recommendation process and begin gathering additional input about the initial inventory through workshops and collaborative mapping tool.

Process Step	Anticipated Dates Completed or Planned	Accomplishments/Tasks Planned
Step 2: Draft the evaluation template for each inventoried polygon. Coordinate with Lolo staff to provide additional information as necessary to capture wilderness characteristics for each inventoried polygon.	May, June, July 2023	Revision Team will begin populating the evaluation template for each polygon using past evaluations, validated datasets, and other information as available. District level evaluation workshops of Wilderness Characteristics for inventoried polygons – Superior RD, Plains/Thompson Falls RD, Ninemile RD, Missoula RD, and Seeley RD
Step 2 (Part II): Public release and review of evaluation summaries and opportunity for input and additional information about wilderness characteristics of inventoried areas.	August-September 2023	Public engagement opportunity to provide overview of evaluation summaries and seek additional information about wilderness characteristics.
Step 3: Analysis and associated public engagement	TBD, during proposed action (2023) and alternative development for the revised plan	Through alternative development, include documentation of why inventoried/evaluated polygons were not carried forward in analysis.
Step 4: Recommendation and associated public engagement	TBD, through the record of decision and establishment of the revised plan (2026)	