

U.S. FOREST SERVICE • REGION 4

WILDERNESS EVALUATION PROCESS

SEPTEMBER 2016

Intermountain Region
Federal Building
324 25th Street
Ogden, Utah 84401



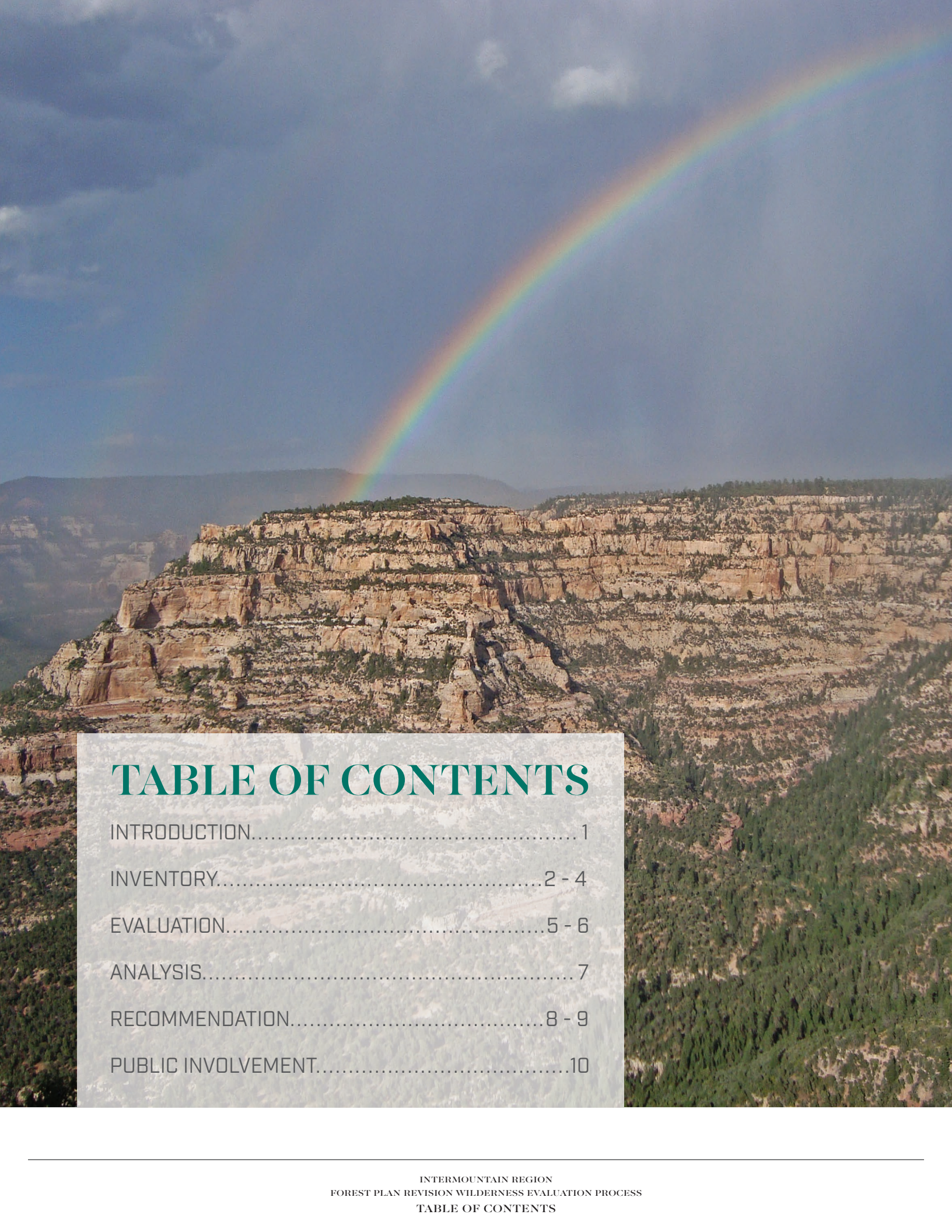


TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	1
INVENTORY.....	2 - 4
EVALUATION.....	5 - 6
ANALYSIS.....	7
RECOMMENDATION.....	8 - 9
PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT.....	10



he wilderness evaluation process was developed by the U.S. Forest Service Region 4 planning staff. Implementation of the

wilderness evaluation process will be completed on a site specific basis for each of the seven Forests revising their Forest Plans within Region 4, and will be led by the Regional Forest Plan Revision Wilderness Project Manager in conjunction with local Forest staff, partners, and the public. This will provide for a consistent approach to the methods and analysis used to determine any preliminary administrative recommendations regarding wilderness, while also utilizing local knowledge and expertise from Forest staff and participating publics. The process was peer reviewed by the Forest Service Washington Office Planning and Wilderness staff and by the The National Advisory Committee for Implementation of the National Forest System Land Management Planning Rule. This 21-member committee is comprised of a diverse range of stakeholders which represent the various publics served by the Forest Service and the National Forest System. This committee has a Forest Plan Revision Wilderness Evaluation Process work group. The Region 4 wilderness evaluation process is consistent with recommendations from this group and the direction in Chapter 70 of the 2012 planning rule handbook (effective January 30, 2015).

REGION 4 DRAFT WILDERNESS EVALUATION PROCESS



adaptive land management planning process that is inclusive, efficient, collaborative and science-based to promote healthy, resilient, diverse and productive national forests and grasslands. In order to do this, the Forest Service developed direction to implement the 2012 planning rule and provide more structure for revising forest plans, also called Forest Plan Revision. As part of completing Forest Plan Revision, the 2012 planning rule and directives instruct individual Forests to complete an assessment and other pre-work as part of the revision process. One piece of this pre-work is to inventory and evaluate lands that may be suitable for wilderness recommendation. The planning directives, specifically Chapter 70 of Forest Service Handbook 1909.12 (“Chapter 70”), provides the overall wilderness process for a Forest revising a plan, including the direction for identifying and evaluating lands that may be suitable for inclusion in the NWPS and the process for recommending any such lands for wilderness designation.

Seven National Forests located in Region 4 (Intermountain Region) of the Forest Service are scheduled to revise their forest plans between 2016 and 2025. Each individual Forest is responsible for completing the revision for lands within their administrative boundaries; however, some pre-work is being completed and processes developed at the regional level to provide consistency across the Forests. A wilderness evaluation process will be completed for each Forest, but the process used will be developed at the regional level. This document describes the process that Region 4 will use to complete the wilderness inventory, evaluation, analysis and preliminary administrative recommendation.

The U.S. Forest Service manages 193 million acres of public lands, including lands with special designations, such as 35 million acres of wilderness that are part of the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS) established by the Wilderness Act of 1964. The National Forest Management Act of 1976 (NFMA) requires the Forest Service to adopt and periodically revise management plans, or Forest Plans, for all national forests and to consider the wilderness resource during the forest planning process.

To implement the direction of NFMA, the Forest Service operates under a planning rule that provides a framework for developing forest plans. The current rule, referred to as the 2012 planning rule, provides guidance to the 155 individual National Forests that reflects a 21st century land management vision.

As Forests update their forest plans, the 2012 planning rule promotes an

The wilderness evaluation process has a sequence of 4 steps which includes a broad and inclusive inventory and evaluation of lands that may be suitable for further wilderness consideration based on a set of criteria. Based on the evaluation of lands identified in the inventory and through public participation, certain areas, or portions of areas, in the inventory are analyzed through a range of alternatives in the Forest Plan Environmental Impact Statement. Finally, a decision is issued, as part of the Forest Plan Revision decision, whether or not to make a preliminary administrative recommendation to add any units of land into the NWPS. During each step of this process, public participation is a key component and will result in a process and decision that is transparent and inclusive. After the Forest Plan Revision decision is made, the preliminary administrative recommendation will then receive further review and possible modification by the Chief of the Forest Service, the Secretary of Agriculture, and the President of the United States. Only Congress can designate wilderness.





INVENTORY

The first step in the wilderness planning process is to determine what lands to consider for wilderness recommendation based on the size, roads, and improvements (man-made features on the landscape) criteria. The inventory stage is intended to be comprehensive and broad. It is important to note that lands included in the inventory provide a starting point for further evaluation, and their inclusion is not a designation that conveys or requires a particular kind of present or future management. The directives used to develop this criteria are found in Chapter 70. During the Inventory phase, we will develop and share maps that depict lands that may be included in the inventory for further evaluation and analysis.

CRITERION 1: SIZE

Areas that meet the size criteria will be included for further consideration. Those that do not meet the size criteria will be eliminated from further review.

Include areas in the inventory that are:

- A.** 5000 acres or greater
- B.** Less than 5000 acres, greater than 50 acres and through Forest staff and public review is determined to be of sufficient size that it is practicable to include in the inventory. Examples are areas such as self-contained islands or canyons, or large enough to be effectively managed as a separate unit of the NWPS.
- C.** Less than 5000 acres, and adjacent to existing designated Wilderness, primitive areas, or recommended wilderness on both NFS lands and adjacent lands of other Federal ownership.

CRITERION 2: SIZE

Chapter 70 lists several improvements that may or may not eliminate an area from further consideration for the Inventory phase. Most are based on the degree to which they are **substantially noticeable** in the area as a whole. For the Inventory phase, in Region 4, substantially noticeable represents a significant degree of change lasting 20 years or more, to the existing character of the landscape as a result of the improvement. This is measured by applying visual resource management objectives through describing the line, color, texture, form, and pattern of both the improvement and the landscape within which it is located. Each improvement identified as part of the inventory will be included in the draft inventory data, with a worksheet describing the rationale on why the feature is/or is not substantially noticeable in the area as a whole.

EXCLUDE AREAS FROM THE INVENTORY WHEN:

Management actions or public use have left a substantially noticeable change to the landscape such that wilderness characteristics have been impaired. This includes excluding developed recreation sites, power lines, pipelines and other permanently installed linear structures that have rights-of-way.

INCLUDE AREAS FOR FURTHER ANALYSIS THAT MAY CONTAIN THE FOLLOWING IMPROVEMENTS:

Include improvements such as airstrips and helispots, historical structures, outfitter and guide camps, and permanently installed structures such as cell towers as long as the maintenance and access needs are minimal and these improvements are not substantially noticeable in the area as a whole.



INVENTORY (CONTINUED)

SUBSTANTIALLY NOTICEABLE
FOR THE INVENTORY PHASE,
'SUBSTANTIALLY NOTICEABLE' MEANS
THE IMPROVEMENT HAS RESULTED IN
A SIGNIFICANT DEGREE OF CHANGE TO
THE EXISTING CHARACTER OF THE
LANDSCAPE AS A WHOLE, AND THAT
THE CHANGE WILL LAST 20 OR MORE.

After applying the size and improvement criteria, the area will be further reviewed to meet the roads criteria.

CRITERION 3: ROADS

Chapter 70 provides direction on what type of roads will eliminate an area from being included in the Inventory. The Forest Service defines and manages roads based on a classification system that utilizes the level of maintenance required for each road segment. The Level 1 through 5 classification definitions can be found in section 70.5 of Chapter 70 and in the Forest Service directives for road maintenance (Forest Service Handbook 7709.59, Chapter 60).



LEVEL 1 ROADS are closed and have been placed in storage for potential future use, with only basic custodial maintenance performed to prevent resource damage. While closed to motorized traffic, level 1 roads may be suitable for non-motorized uses.

LEVEL 2 ROADS are open to high clearance vehicles. The level of maintenance on these routes are minor, and users

are acknowledging risk and unknown road conditions. Cars are generally discouraged or prohibited from travel on these routes.

LEVEL 3 ROADS are open to passenger cars and are generally roads that have a moderate amount of maintenance involved to provide for user comfort. While these roads are open to cars, speeds are generally lower, and surfaces are gravel

or other minimal surfaces.

LEVEL 4 ROADS are open to passenger cars and usually are double lane and paved, providing for moderate speed levels and user comfort.

LEVEL 5 ROADS are open to passenger cars and are a high maintenance level, paved, usually double lane and provide for high speeds and user comfort.

INVENTORY (CONTINUED)

Areas that meet the improvements and size criteria will be further analyzed based on the presence or absence of the 5 different maintenance level roads. Any area that contains roads with a maintenance level of 3 to 5 are automatically excluded from further analysis because these roads require a high level of maintenance, are generally frequently traveled, and do not contribute to an area's suitability for further consideration for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. Level 2 roads are generally excluded from further analysis with several exceptions that are clearly defined in Chapter 70, whereas areas with Level 1 roads are included for further analysis.

LEVEL 2 ROADS ARE GENERALLY EXCLUDED FROM FURTHER ANALYSIS EXCEPT WHEN:

Roads have been identified through a travel plan decision or other project-related NEPA decision to be reclassified as a Maintenance Level 1 road or have been identified for decommissioning. Also included is any other on-the-ground knowledge of a particular route that is brought forward by Forest staff or through public review and comment that would preclude the area from further consideration.



After applying the 3 criterion described in the Inventory phase, a draft map will be developed which identifies areas that meet the Inventory criteria. These data will be shared with the public, other agencies, stakeholders, collaborative groups, and internal staff through meetings, workshops, webinars and utilizing online resources. At the inventory phase, comments and participation should focus on applying any on-the-ground knowledge and correcting data, such as identifying use levels and trends, like popular hiking or mountain biking routes, or identifying features that may have been missed in the data such as roads, powerlines, or other improvements. The inventory data set should be general and all-encompassing, allowing further analysis and discussion of wilderness characteristics to occur during subsequent phases.

After collecting and considering public comments and feedback, a revised inventory map will be developed. According to the planning directives, if a new area surfaces after the inventory stage has otherwise been completed (such as through public comment on the EIS), the Responsible Official (Forest Supervisor) can update the inventory maps to reflect the additional areas being considered, and these areas will be carried forward into the evaluation and analysis phases of the wilderness planning process.



EVALUATION

The next step in the wilderness evaluation process is to take a more detailed look at the areas carried forward from the inventory phase based on the criteria in the Wilderness Act. Beyond meeting the basic size, road and improvement criteria, during the evaluation phase each area will be further examined to determine if it has wilderness characteristics. These characteristics are defined in Chapter 70, Section 72.1. This will be accomplished by completing an evaluation worksheet for each area identified in the inventory and through field verification. These worksheets will be compiled into a draft report and a map for each area will be available.

Public review and participation in the evaluation phase is critical to making an informed decision later in the process.

THE EVALUATION CRITERIA ARE BASED ON THE DEFINITIONS IN THE WILDERNESS ACT AND ARE SUMMARIZED AS FOLLOWS:

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. Include the extent to which ecological conditions and man-made improvements are 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 word "or" means that an area only has to possess one or the other.

The area does not have to possess outstanding opportunities for both elements, nor does it need to have outstanding opportunities on every acre.

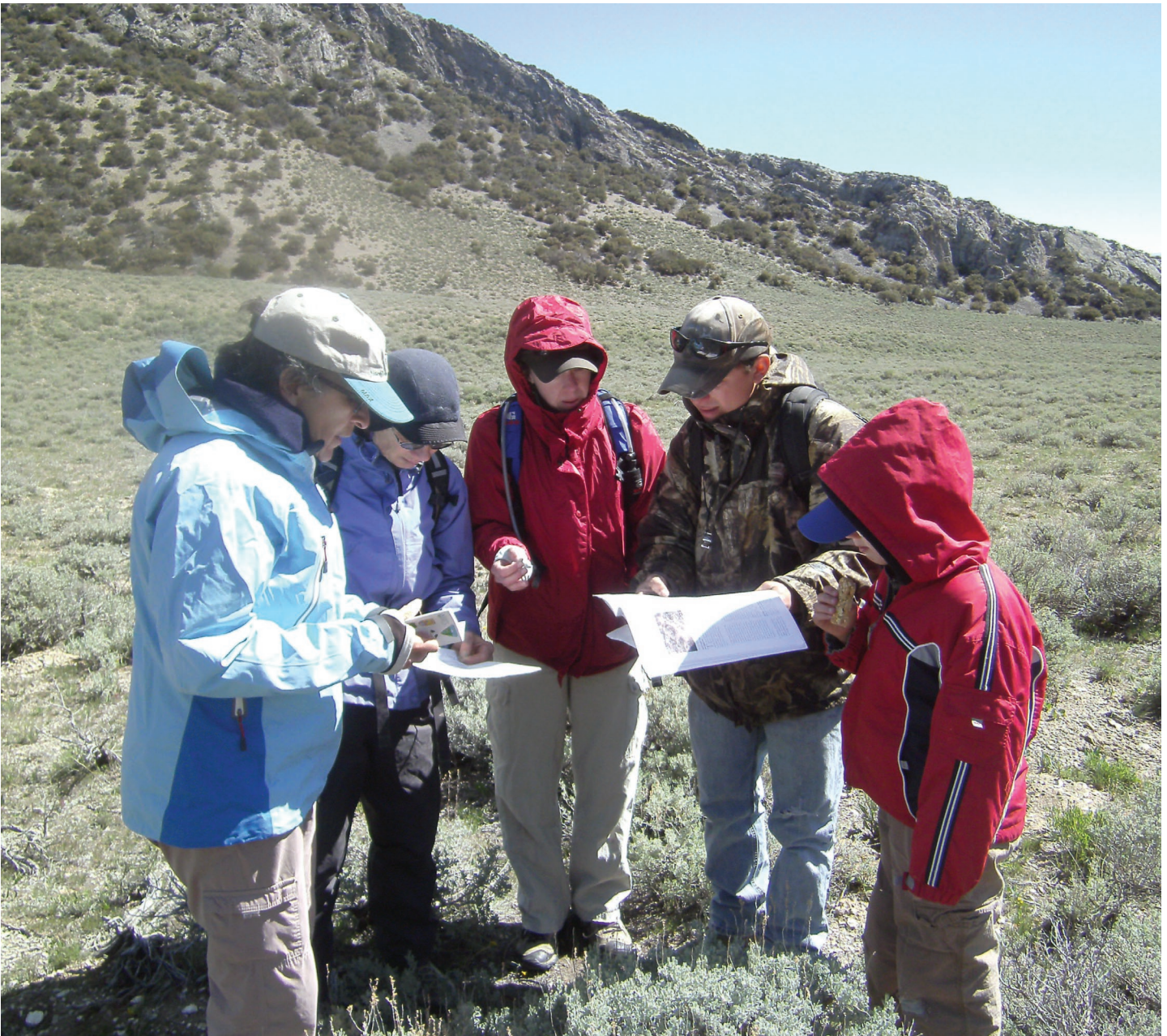
3. Evaluate how an area of less than 5,000 acres is of sufficient size to make its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition practicable.
4. Evaluate the degree to which an area may contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value. These values are not required to be present in an area, but their presence should be identified and evaluated where they exist.
5. Evaluate the degree to which the area may be managed to preserve its wilderness characteristics.

EVALUATION (CONTINUED)

The draft evaluation report will be made available for public review and comment, and shared with the cooperating agencies, stakeholders, collaborative groups, and internal staff through meetings, workshops, webinars and utilizing online resources. During the evaluation phase, comments and participation should focus on applying any on-the-ground knowledge about factors that could contribute to or impair the wilderness characteristics and if the area has been appropriately represented in the results.

The results of the evaluation process will inform the decision of which areas to carry forward into the next phase of the process. This is also a critical step where public and stakeholder partici-

ation is necessary to develop the best set of alternatives for further analysis. Not all areas evaluated are required to be carried forward to the analysis phase; however, the Forest Service must explain the reason for excluding any evaluated areas (or portions of those areas) from the analysis phase. Just as with the inventory step, the evaluation step may need to be revisited during subsequent phases of this process if new areas are considered, or boundary adjustments are made as a result of new information that the Forest Supervisor may receive during the duration of the Forest Plan Revision process. Furthermore, the information displayed in the inventory and evaluation phase is not final until the decision is signed and the final environmental impact statement is published.



Following the evaluation phase, the third phase in the process is analysis and integration with Forest Plan Revision. During this phase the Forest analyzes the effects of recommending any or all of the areas identified in the evaluation phase for inclusion in the NWPS.

Based on the evaluations and input from public participation opportunities, the Forest Supervisor will identify which specific areas, or portions thereof, from the evaluation to carry forward as preliminary administratively recommended wilderness. The proposed revised forest plan will include overall management direction for areas recommended for wilderness that will protect and maintain the ecological and social characteristics that provide the basis for each selected area's suitability for wilderness recommendation.

The Forest Supervisor could elect not to carry areas forward into the Forest Plan alternatives based on data from the evaluations and public input. If any areas identified in the evaluation are not included in the alternatives, rationale will be documented and available for public review.

This analysis will include a range of alternatives, which could include a wilderness recommendation for none, some, or all of the areas reviewed in the evaluation phase. Not all lands included in the inventory and subsequent evaluations are required to be carried forward in an alternative.

AREAS INCLUDED IN THE ANALYSIS

For each area included in one or more alternatives, we will provide: the area name, the number of acres, a recommended boundary, a description of the natural features and uses in each area, and other summarizing information. The complete list of requirements can be found in Section 73 of the Chapter 70 directives.

Additional alternatives could be developed as needed to address issues brought up during the development of the wilderness evaluation process and while revising the forest plan. Input from the public, partners, and collaborative groups will be sought when developing the broad range of alternatives. The analysis of effects of the alternative(s) for wilderness recommendations will be integrated with the environmental impact statement for the proposed revised Forest Plan. This will be consistent with the National Environmental Policy Act as well as the additional requirements for use of best available scientific information and public engagement from the 2012 planning rule and directives.



RECOMMENDATION

In the final phase of this process, the Forest Supervisor will issue a decision whether to recommend specific areas for inclusion in the NWPS based on the analysis disclosed in the final environmental impact statement for the proposed revised forest plan. The Forest Supervisor will weigh and consider public input received throughout forest plan revision, including the wilderness evaluation process.

Once a decision has been made and documented, the Responsible Official, through the Regional Forester, shall notify the Chief of the Forest Service of the preliminary administrative recommendations for wilderness designation for consideration to submit to Congress as a legislative proposal. Such recommendations may

then be forwarded by the Chief to the Secretary of Agriculture for his or her consideration and then on to the President of the United States to submit to Congress as a legislative proposal. Congress has reserved the authority to make final decisions on wilderness designation.

For lands in the inventory and evaluation that were not recommended for inclusion in the NWPS, the decision document must briefly identify and describe what management direction is provided in the plan for those lands.







OBJECTIONS

The decision on whether to recommend specific areas for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System and how to manage any recommended areas is subject to the Pre-Decisional Administrative Review Process (objection process) for the revised forest plan, as described in the 2012 Planning Rule. The objection process provides an opportunity for members of the public who have participated in the planning process to have any unresolved concerns reviewed by the Forest Service prior to a final plan approval by the Responsible Official. Only those who provided substantive formal comments during opportunities for public comment during the planning process, which includes the Wilderness Evaluation Process are eligible to file an objection, unless the objection concern identifies an issue that arose after the opportunities for formal comment. A plan revision is not subject to objection when the Responsible Official does not receive substantive formal comments during opportunities for public comment or if another administrative review process is used consistent with 36 CFR § 219.59

For a complete list of objection requirements see 36 CFR § 219.

Eligibility requirements for filing objections are described at 36 CFR 219.53. Guidelines for submission and content of an objection are included in 36 CFR § 219.54. The circumstances under which the decision is not subject to the objection process are described in 36 § CFR 219.51.



MANAGEMENT OF RECOMMENDED AREAS

Lands identified in the record of decision of the forest plan environmental impact statement as being recommended for preservation as wilderness must include direction on how the agency will protect and maintain the ecological and social characteristics that provide the basis for each area's suitability for wilderness recommendation. When developing plan components for recommended wilderness areas, the Responsible Official has discretion to implement a range of management options as long as it does not detract from the area's suitability for wilderness designation. Management actions identified in the forest plan for the recommended wilderness area could include continuing, altering, or eliminating existing uses, except those subject to valid or existing rights. This interim plan will remain in effect until Congress chooses to designate the area as wilderness in the National Wilderness Preservation System or releases it from further review.

INTERIM MANAGEMENT

Of recommended wilderness must either maintain or enhance the ecological and social characteristics that provide the basis for wilderness designations.

Plan components can be found in Section 74.1 of the Chapter 70 directives.





PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

A major component in completing the wilderness evaluation process is engagement and participation from Forest staff, stakeholder groups, and the public. The Chapter 70 directives are clear about how we complete this process, and that opportunities for engagement are present at each phase of the process. This recognizes that input from the people who are most familiar with the landscape is imperative to making the best informed decision. In order to achieve this and stay consistent with Chapter 70, there will be diverse opportunities to be involved, informed, and provide feedback during each phase of the process.

This process will be followed for each of the seven Forests completing Forest Plan Revision. The Regional Office serves as the point of contact for managing the wilderness evaluation process on each Forest, with close communication and participation from the Forest, stakeholder groups, cooperating agencies, and the public.

The level of detail that each Forest engages with their publics and stakeholders can vary. At a minimum the following will occur:

- A draft map and report will be made available to the public for each step of the process, in conjunction with a public meeting and a 15 day informal review and comment period.
- Workshops will be held during the inventory and evaluation phases, to work with interested parties and encourage meaningful and substantive comments.
- Multiple avenues will be utilized to engage people, disseminate information, and ask for feedback. This includes resources such as interactive mapping tools, web design, and local outreach on radios, newspapers, etc.
- A public participation plan specific to the wilderness evaluation process will be developed and will identify and track specific groups, members of the public, and stakeholders and provide key messages and talking points. This plan will complement the overall Forest Plan Revision communication strategy.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (CONTINUED)

The following National Forests will be completing the wilderness evaluation process as part of Forest Plan Revision:

2016	Ashley and Manti-LaSal
2017	Salmon-Challis
2018	Bridger-Teton
2019	Dixie
2020	Fishlake
2021	Humboldt-Toiyabe

The wilderness evaluation process will occur concurrently with Forest Plan Revision.
For more information and to get involved in a planning effort, contact the Forest Plan Revision team lead.

