

Recommending new wilderness areas in EIS alternatives

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Summary: This paper provides Regional guidance on developing, applying and documenting rationale for recommending new wilderness areas for any and all alternatives that contain such recommendations. The paper should be used in conjunction with the R3 Forest Plan Revision guidance papers on wilderness evaluations and special area recommendations.

A required part of the plan revision process is to evaluate forest land for recommended wilderness. While some forests will determine that there are not any areas appropriate for a new wilderness recommendation, other forests may consider multiple recommendations in their EIS.

If you are carrying forward wilderness area recommendations from your previous plan that were never designated, document that these areas were recommended in the last round of planning and are still being recommended today.

If you chose to recommend new wilderness areas in any alternative of your EIS alternatives, ensure that you have fully evaluated each area, and documented your evaluation and recommendation process as described below.

Before you recommend a wilderness area in an EIS alternative, each potential wilderness area must:

- Meet the statutory definition of wilderness as outlined in Section 2(c) of the Wilderness Act
- Pass the criteria established in FSH 1909.12 Chapter 70 Section 71.1, qualifying for the potential wilderness inventory (or have been recommended by a Responsible Official to be added to the inventory)
- Be taken through the potential wilderness inventory steps, including being named, numbered and mapped¹
- Be evaluated for capability²
- Be evaluated for availability
- Be evaluated for need³

All areas that have met the evaluation tests of capability, availability, and need are suitable areas to be recommended as wilderness within plan alternatives. Only areas with their exact boundaries analyzed in these tests are suitable for inclusion in alternatives; if someone internal or external proposes recommending a wilderness area with slightly different boundaries, these new boundaries cannot be adopted as a recommendation unless the area as bounded has met the above requirements and been taken through each evaluation..

¹ For R3 Guidance on the potential wilderness inventory steps see [Special Areas and Forest Plan Revision R3 Work Group Product](#), and the [R3 Potential Wilderness Inventory Process](#)

² See the [R3 Capability Rating Criteria](#)

³ See the [R3 Wilderness Need Assessment Instructions](#), and the [Regional Demand for Wilderness, Southwestern Region](#)

Any wilderness areas we propose in our developed alternatives must be consistent with these requirements. If members of the public recommend wilderness areas and we adopt them they become “our” alternative and we must abide by the Forest Service evaluation process.

If instead, the public proposes an entirely complete “Citizen’s Alternative” providing direction on all aspects of forest management, and if part of that alternative includes wilderness areas that were not considered in our evaluation, then this alternative can be included as it was written and submitted. However, in order to be a valid alternative to be considered in detail, the wilderness areas in that “Citizen’s Alternative” must have been evaluated for capability, availability and need prior to any formal recommendation for wilderness area designation.

When recommending wilderness areas within an alternative, you must have clear, reasoned, documented rationale for why the area is being considered within a draft alternative.

- Each Forest must develop, apply and document their rationale for determining which areas meet the tests of capability, availability and need. The Forest must also document why each area is being recommended as wilderness areas. The rationale for wilderness area recommendations will vary by Forest, so there is no Regionally standard rationale.
- Considerations for determining which areas should be included in a draft EIS alternative include such things as public recommendations, social and economic considerations, administrative recommendations or congressional proposals. Again it is up to each Forest to develop, apply, and document the appropriate rationale specific to the theme of the alternative.
- Rationale for recommending wilderness areas must be documented for all alternatives. Based on the theme of the alternative, that rationale can, and likely will, vary from alternative to alternative, but a clear rationale must be documented (within your planning record) for recommending wilderness areas for each alternative that contains such recommendations.

All areas being recommended as wilderness areas in an alternative (this applies to all alternatives, not just your preferred, proposed, or recommended alternative), must first have been evaluated for capability, availability and need. . Areas being recommended for wilderness do not necessarily have to be those areas that evaluated the highest (in terms of capability, availability, and need), but the reasoned rationale for recommending wilderness areas for each alternative must be clearly documented within the planning record.

Operational Draft: *This document is prepared to provide guidance to forest plan revision teams. As this guidance is implemented we expect to learn improved ways to do this work. As we learn, this document will be updated. This document was written in October 2010 in accordance with the requirements of the 1982 Planning Rule provisions, as accessed by the 2000 Planning Rule transition language at 36 CFR 219.35 (Federal Register, Volume 74, No. 242, Friday, December 18, 2009, pages 67073 and 67074.)*