

# Wilderness – Frequently Asked Questions

## What is wilderness?

- The Wilderness Act of 1964 defines wilderness as an area of undeveloped Federal land that retains its primeval character and has been primarily influenced by the forces of nature. When an area is identified as fitting this definition, and is congressionally designated as wilderness, it is permanently protected by the gold-standard of land preservation. This is the best way to ensure that the wildlife habitat, biological diversity, watersheds, and ecosystems in an area remain healthy and pristine.

## Why do we need wilderness?

- Wilderness designation is the best way to protect our landscapes from resource extraction, roads and infrastructure development, and high impact recreation.
- Wilderness is the closest thing we have to a guarantee that future generations will be able to enjoy our mountains, streams, and wildlife as we enjoy them today.
- Backcountry recreation: As our state continues to grow, becoming increasingly filled with homes and roads, access to quiet, pristine places to backpack, hike, horseback ride, hunt, fish and paddle is more important than ever.
- Cultural resources: Colorado is rich in artifacts from our state's past residents. Designating wilderness protects many of the remaining treasure troves of past cultures for future generations to enjoy.
- Water quality: With increasing demand and dwindling supplies, ensuring Colorado's water quality is a top priority. Wilderness protection guarantees that the watersheds that feed our state's cities and towns will stay clean and clear.
- Wildlife habitat: Colorado's wildlife relies on wild places for food, water and shelter. Wilderness protection ensures that the deer and elk, falcons and eagles, marmots and mice, and bears and mountain lions will have the habitat they need to thrive.

## What can you do in wilderness?

- The many recreational uses include: ***hiking, hunting, fishing, horseback riding, backpacking, cross-country skiing, photography, rafting, canoeing, kayaking, camping, snowshoeing, bird watching, nature study, and rock climbing among other things.*** Wilderness designation enhances the many opportunities for quiet recreation in an area, and ensures that the land will be able to sustain these uses far into the future.

## What is not allowed in wilderness?

- Restricted activities include motorized vehicle use, logging, mining, road construction, building infrastructures, and mountain biking.

## Does wilderness designation allow Fire Departments or Emergency Services from keeping people, their property, and the forest safe and healthy?

- The Wilderness Act specifically says that fire fighters and search and rescue teams are allowed to use whatever means they deem necessary and reasonable to ensure the safety of people and their property.

- There are also provisions in the Wilderness Act to allow the Forest Service and the BLM to manage situations like insect infestation, disease, etc., to keep the forest healthy.

### **What is the economic value of wilderness?**

- Direct use benefits, such as recreation. Wilderness benefits all kinds of recreation including fishing dependent on healthy watersheds, hunting that relies on healthy, unfragmented habitat, and incomparable views from scenic travelways and communities.
- Community benefits, such as new residents or business attracted to the high quality of life
- Scientific benefits, such as research and education
- Off-site benefits, such as increased property values
- Biodiversity conservation
- Ecological services, such as watershed protection

### **How does wilderness affect watersheds?**

- Communities throughout Colorado draw water from wilderness watersheds, assuring them of pure water in perpetuity. In fact, some wilderness areas were designated in order to preserve healthy watersheds for current and future generations.

### **What would this mean for companies and individuals that currently have leases in these areas?**

- The legislation honors all existing water rights and mining claims and allows existing livestock grazing to continue.
- The Wilderness Act specifically approves the continued grazing of livestock in wilderness. With increasing population, recreation pressures, and energy development in our region, wilderness helps ensure effective, undisrupted grazing on these select public lands.

### **Are outfitters allowed to operate in wilderness?**

- Outfitters and guides can operate in wilderness. They must have a permit from the managing agency (as is the case for all public lands). Outfitters must operate within the confines of the Wilderness Act and follow Forest Service/BLM rules and regulations.

For more information on the Colorado Wilderness Act, or to request a presentation and discussion about the Act with your group, please contact:

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*Prepared with information from:*

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Colorado Environmental Coalition ♦ Central Colorado Wilderness Coalition  
Bureau of Land Management

