What is a Wilderness Study Area Area?

Florida Mountains WSA, New Mexico
At the end of this module, students will understand:

❖ What defines a WSA
❖ How WSAs are a part of BLM’s mission
❖ Which laws authorize WSAs
❖ The process by which BLM established WSAs
❖ General management principles
❖ The difference between wilderness, WSAs, and lands with wilderness characteristics
Wilderness Study Area:

A special designation that applies to lands managed to protect wilderness characteristics until Congress designates the WSA as wilderness or directs BLM to manage the area for other multiple uses.
Wilderness Study Areas are not designated wilderness... but Congress could designate them as wilderness in the future.
Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA)

**INVENTORY AND IDENTIFICATION**

Sec. 201. (43 U.S.C. 1711) (a) The Secretary shall prepare and maintain on a continuing basis an inventory of all public lands and their resource and other values (including, but not limited to, outdoor recreation and scenic values), giving priority to areas of critical environmental concern. This inventory shall be kept current so as to reflect changes in conditions and to identify new and emerging and other resources and values. The preparation and maintenance of such inventory or the identification of such areas shall not, of itself, change or prevent change of the management or use of public lands.

(b) As funds and manpower are made available, the Secretary shall ascertain the boundaries of the public lands, provide means of public identification thereof including, where appropriate, signs and maps, and provide State and local governments with data from the inventory for the purpose of planning and regulating the uses of non-federal lands in proximity of such public lands.

**LAND USE PLANNING**

Sec. 202. (43 U.S.C. 1712) (a) The Secretary shall, with public involvement and consistent with the terms and conditions of this Act, develop, maintain, and, when appropriate, revise land use plans which provide for tracts or areas for the use of the public lands. Land use plans shall be developed for the public lands regardless of whether such lands previously have been classified, withdrawn, set aside, or otherwise designated for one or more uses.

(b) In the development and revision of land use plans, the Secretary of Agriculture shall coordinate land use plans for lands in the National Forest System with the land use planning and management programs and of Indian tribes, by, among other things, considering the policies of approval of local land resource management plans.

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Wilderness Study Process
The BLM’s Wilderness Program manages:

❖ Wilderness
❖ **Wilderness Study Areas (WSA)**
❖ Lands with wilderness characteristics

“In the Public Lands will be found wilderness regions of charm and beauty.”

- Robert Yard, 1926 (a founding member of the Wilderness Society)
The Wilderness Act, Section 2(a):

- “...to assure that an increasing population, accompanied by expanding settlement and growing mechanization does not occupy and modify all areas...”
- “...there is hereby established a National Wilderness Preservation System to be composed of federally owned areas designated by the Congress as ‘wilderness areas’...”
- “...for the use and enjoyment of the American People...”
Key Laws and Dates in BLM’s Wilderness Program

- Wilderness Act: 1964
- Federal Land Policy and Management Act: 1964
- Oregon Wilderness Act: 1978
- Completion of FLPMA mandated study: 1984
- Wilderness Study Reports Sent to Congress: 1991
- Congress and the President authorize the BLM’s system of National Conservation Lands: 2000
- Secretarial Order Establishes BLM’s system of National Conservation Lands: 2009
BLM Wilderness Program

BLM Director Neil Kornze

BLM Wilderness Study Areas
Wilderness Act, Section 2(a):

❖ “It is hereby declared to be the policy of the Congress to secure for the American people of present and future generations the benefits of an enduring resource of wilderness.”
Wilderness is part of BLM’s multiple use mandate

Definition of multiple use (FLPMA, Sec 103):
- “…making the most judicious use of the land for some or all of these resources or related services”
- “the use of some land for less than all of the resources.”
The Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA) requires an inventory of all resources.

- Sec. 201(a): “The Secretary shall prepare and maintain on a continuing basis an inventory of all public lands and their resource and other values....”
FLPMA required special consideration of wilderness resources.

- Sec. 603 (a) “the Secretary shall review those roadless areas... identified during the inventory required by section 201(a)... as having wilderness characteristics described in the Wilderness Act... [and] report his recommendation... as wilderness.”
Wilderness Characteristics

❖ Size
❖ Naturalness
❖ Outstanding opportunities
❖ Other features

Select the button below to access the definition of wilderness as written in the Wilderness Act of 1964

Definition of Wilderness
Wilderness Characteristics

Size

- Roadless Areas over 5,000 acres

Gardner Mountain WSA, WY
A road is:

- constructed
- maintained
- receives regular use

Select the button below to access House Report 94-1163 defining what a road is in order to identify roadless areas.
Is this a “road”?

Is it:

- constructed? □ YES □ NO
- maintained? □ YES □ NO
- receives regular use? □ YES □ NO

Check Expert Answer
Wilderness Characteristics

Size
- Roadless Areas over 5,000 acres
- Roadless Islands
- Sufficient size to be practicable for wilderness management

The 1,145-acre Prospect Mountain WSA (red) adjacent to the 23,300-acre Platte River Wilderness (green) in Wyoming
Naturalness

- “...appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man’s work substantially unnoticeable....”

Wilderness Act, Section 2(c)(1)
Wilderness Characteristics

Outstanding Opportunities

❖ “...has outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation...”

Wilderness Act, Section 2(c)(2)

Centennial Mountains WSA, MT
Other Features

- “...may also contain ecological, geological,... scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value.”

Wilderness Act, Section 2(c)(4)
Not all WSAs have the same origin.

❖ Two sections of FLPMA resulted in the establishment of WSAs:
  ○ Section 603 – Wilderness Study
  ○ Section 202 – Land Use Planning
Approval of this plan constitutes formal designation of 21 Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs), 4 Section 202 Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs), 4 Research Natural Areas (RNAs), and 2 Wild and Scenic River Study Areas. The plan also makes decisions concerning land ownership adjustments, vehicle designations, access, rights-of-way, minerals, recreation, cultural resources, wildlife, watershed, and vegetation management.
WSAs are managed to ensure they are unimpaired for preservation as wilderness until Congress has determined to designate them as wilderness or release them from WSA status.
Non-impairment standard

New uses and facilities must be:

❖ temporary
❖ create no new surface disturbance
No matter how a WSA was designated, the non-impairment standard applies.
The Non-impairment standard applies until Congress:

- designates the WSA as Wilderness or
- releases the WSA to other uses

This could be a long time from now, or just around the corner.
There is no time limit on WSA management.
FLPMA, Section 603(a):
“the Secretary shall... report... his recommendation as to the suitability or nonsuitability of each such area or island for preservation as wilderness.”
Regardless of the recommendation, all WSAs have wilderness characteristics.

WSAs with non-suitable recommendations continue to be managed to prevent impairment.

Over the decades, the basis of some of these recommendations may have changed.
What is the difference between a WSA and other wilderness land resources?

wilderness focused lands

- Wilderness
- Lands with wilderness characteristics
- Wilderness Study Area

fundamental management principle

- Manage as described in RMP
- No impairment of wilderness characteristics
- Preserve wilderness character
Basic Differences

- **Wilderness Study Area**
  managed to not impair wilderness characteristics

- **Wilderness**
  designated in perpetuity to preserve wilderness character

- **Lands with wilderness characteristics**
  may or may not be protected in a RMP
Know your key legislative authorities!

Legislative authorities

- Federal Land Policy and Management Act, Sections 201 (a) & 202 (c)
- Federal Land Policy and Management Act, Section 603 (a)
- Wilderness Act, Section 2 (a)

wilderness focused lands

- Wilderness
- Wilderness Study Area
- Lands with wilderness characteristics
Know key regulations and policies directing management!

- Regulations and policies
  - 43 CFR 6300
  - BLM Manual 6320
  - BLM Manual 6330
  - BLM Manual 6340

- Wilderness focused lands
  - Wilderness
  - Wilderness Study Area
  - Lands with wilderness characteristics
A WSA is a special designation that applies to lands managed by BLM to protect wilderness characteristics until Congress decides to designate the WSA as Wilderness or no longer consider the area for wilderness designation.

The wilderness resource is part of BLM’s multiple use mandate.

Authority for WSAs comes from Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) 1976.
❖ WSAs were established through FLPMA or by Congress

❖ WSAs are managed to ensure they are unimpaired for preservation as wilderness

❖ Use information in this module to respond to questions that may come up in your daily work