

## **Action Alert!**

### **NPS National Wilderness Policy Revisions**

The National Park Service has revised all of its national policies, including its wilderness review and stewardship policies, and is soliciting public comments on new Draft policies.

Many of the subtle changes in wording and priorities may *appear* benign but, if adopted, will mean big changes that will weaken wilderness protections out on the ground.

Instead of wild, undeveloped places associated with solitude and self-reliance, under the new policies wilderness would be managed for intensive recreational and scientific uses and special events. NPS would actively promote and facilitate visitor use and commercial services in wilderness. Facilities and new developments would be justified on the basis of improving visitor safety and enhancing visitor use.

The NPS oversees more wilderness acreage than any other agency, so PLEASE let the Park Service hear your thoughts and concerns!!

The draft policies are online at:

<http://parkplanning.nps.gov/document.cfm?projectId=13746&documentID=12825>

COMMENTS DUE: February 18<sup>th</sup>, 2006 (e-mailed by midnight MST, or postmarked that day)

SEND TO: [waso\\_policy@nps.gov](mailto:waso_policy@nps.gov)

Or:

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Or -- You can comment online through links at the above website address. However, experience indicates that commenting via an NPS website may mean that you won't be able to retain a copy of your comments.

SUMMARY OF MAJOR PROBLEMS WITH THE NEW DRAFT POLICY:

1. Modifies the current wilderness review process, making it easier for political appointees in the Executive Branch to shield areas from further consideration as wilderness by not forwarding complete information to the President for ALL areas that have undergone a wilderness suitability study.
2. Defines public use as the primary purpose of wilderness. Downplays preservation of wilderness character as the singular statutory purpose of the Wilderness Act.
3. The draft policies place major emphasis on encouraging and *facilitating* visitor uses in wilderness.
4. Emphasizes visitor safety as a major goal of wilderness management, and allows all sorts of developments in wilderness to enhance safety and convenience -- administrative cabins, signs, trail developments, outfitter caches, toilets , developed camp sites -- even picnic tables!

#### COMMENT POINTS TO CONSIDER:

##### **Preserving Wilderness Character**

1. **CRITICAL!** The revised policies misconstrue the six "public purposes" (uses) listed in § 4(b) of the Wilderness Act as the primary "purposes" of the Act (i.e. recreational, scenic, scientific, educational, conservation, and historical uses). **Tell NPS that the statutory purpose of the Wilderness Act is singular, not plural -- the Wilderness Act is clear that the purpose of the Act is to preserve the wilderness character of each area in the National Wilderness Preservation System, not to promote any particular use!**
2. **CRITICAL!** A primary emphasis in the policies is on "accomplishing" the six "public purposes" (uses) by accommodating, encouraging, and facilitating public use of wilderness. **NPS policies should emphasize that appropriate types and amounts of public use are allowable in wilderness to the extent that they are compatible with protection of an area's wilderness character, including the area's undeveloped, non-motorized qualities and wilderness solitude.**

##### **Wilderness Suitability Review:**

*Helpful Background:* NPS does an initial screening of all NPS lands to identify those areas that have wilderness characteristics and are therefore suitable and eligible for further consideration as wilderness. NPS then conducts a more formal "wilderness study" of all lands identified by the initial screening as suitable and eligible for wilderness designation.

1. **CRITICAL!** The revised policies would allow a political appointee -- the Secretary of Interior -- to administratively shield suitable areas from further consideration as wilderness by not forwarding complete information to the President for ALL areas that have undergone a wilderness study. This means that if the Secretary does not recommend an area for wilderness designation then (s)he could simply decide not to forward any information about that area to the President for his review. However, the Wilderness Act *explicitly* requires the Secretary of Interior to forward recommendations to the President regarding both the suitability AND non-suitability for *all* areas that have undergone the formal wilderness study process. By not forwarding his recommendations for those areas deemed by the Secretary to be unsuitable for wilderness, the Secretary inappropriately hinders the President's opportunity and statutory right to fully review and modify all wilderness recommendations made by the Secretary. **Please tell NPS this policy change is illegal under the Wilderness Act and that the Secretary MUST forward both suitable AND non-suitable recommendations on to the President for all areas that have undergone a formal wilderness review!**
2. Current NPS policy requires that lands originally deemed eligible for wilderness, but which were not included in the wilderness recommendation forwarded to the President and Congress, must still be managed as wilderness until the legislative process runs its course and Congress makes its final decision. The new draft policies delete this provision and would no longer require NPS to manage eligible but non-recommended areas the same as wilderness. **Similar to point # 1, tell NPS that information and recommendations must be submitted to the President and Congress for ALL areas that have undergone a wilderness review, and that NPS is obligated to preserve the wilderness qualities of these lands until CONGRESS -- not the NPS -- makes a final decision regarding wilderness designation!**
3. Under the revised policies, wilderness suitability reviews would only be done for parks when specifically required by legislation or at the request of the Secretary of Interior or Director of the Park Service. In contrast, current NPS policy requires that all lands administered by the NPS must be evaluated for wilderness suitability. **Ask NPS to retain the requirement that ALL NPS lands be evaluated for wilderness suitability!**
4. The revised policy drops the requirement that lands originally assessed as unsuitable for wilderness due to the presence of incompatible uses must be re-evaluated for wilderness suitability once the non-conforming uses have been terminated. **Ask that NPS retain the requirement to re-evaluate wilderness suitability once incompatible uses cease!**
5. Current policy states that the presence of existing private rights will not prevent an area from being identified as suitable for wilderness designation. The new policy would eliminate this provision. **Ask that this provision be retained!**

6. The revised policy would eliminate a provision that encourages NPS to forward wilderness recommendations for "potential wilderness" to the Secretary, President, and Congress -- i.e. lands with temporary incompatible uses that will be suitable for future wilderness designation once the incompatible uses cease. **Ask that the new policies retain provisions encouraging NPS to make recommendations for "potential wilderness!"**
  
7. For areas identified by Congress as "potential wilderness" (i.e. temporary, incompatible uses are occurring), current policies direct NPS to actively seek removal of the incompatible conditions so the area can become designated wilderness. The revised policies drop this directive. **Tell NPS to keep its current policy in place that requires active efforts to end incompatible uses and enable wilderness designation for areas classified by Congress as "potential wilderness."**

### **Visitor Safety, Use, and Convenience**

1. **CRITICAL!** The new policies focus intensively and inappropriately on assuring visitor safety as a central goal of wilderness management. The policies specify that improving safety and visitor use is an appropriate reason to allow the development of recreational and administrative facilities in wilderness, including new trail developments, administrative cabins, trail shelters, signs, developed campsites, and toilets -- even picnic tables! **Tell NPS that the Wilderness Act intended wilderness to remain *in contrast* to our developed and highly regulated modern world. Tell NPS that wilderness should remain a place of challenge, discovery, risk, and self-reliance, not managed and developed to promote visitor safety! Developing facilities to enhance safety is an inappropriate action in wilderness.**
  
2. **CRITICAL!** The new policies place major emphasis on NPS encouraging, and *facilitating* visitor use of wilderness, including promoting the use of commercial outfitting services. **Tell NPS that it's not their job to promote increased use in wilderness or market wilderness as a recreational playground. By law, their job is to preserve wilderness character and enhance public awareness and appreciation for the qualities and values that make wilderness unique and different from non-wilderness national park backcountry that may be managed primarily as a recreational resource.**
  
3. Zoning -- The new policies would allow spatial and temporal zoning of wilderness in order to "accommodate all the legislated purposes" (uses) of wilderness. **Tell NPS that the singular legislated purpose of wilderness is preservation of wilderness character, not facilitation of various public uses. Zoning is both inappropriate and unnecessary if NPS is adequately protecting all components of an area's wilderness character and is not allowing incompatible activities such as helicopters for scientific research.**

4. Scientific research -- new policy would remove the current prohibition on permanent placement of research equipment and caches in wilderness, and would allow a variety of activities and forms of access that are incompatible with wilderness if those activities would facilitate research goals. **Tell NPS that science is a compatible use as long as it is conducted in a manner that does not violate the Wilderness Act's prohibitions on roads, motor vehicles, aircraft, and permanent structures and installations. It is NOT the intent of the Wilderness Act to facilitate research at the expense of wilderness values and wilderness character.**
5. Special Events -- The new policies would allow special events in wilderness if they have a park or wilderness theme and are consistent with the "public purposes" (uses) listed in the Wilderness Act (recreational, scenic, scientific, educational, conservation, and historical uses). **Tell NPS that organized special events are inappropriate and unnecessary in wilderness, incompatible with wilderness values of solitude and small groups or individuals travelling in a self-reliant, independent, primitive and unconfined mode, free to experience and interact spontaneously with wilderness in a personal manner.**
6. Commercial outfitters and guides -- New policies would grant outfitters and guides special privileges not allowed to other wilderness visitors, such as placement of temporary caches in wilderness. **Tell NPS that commercial outfitters should be held to the same rules and standards as other wilderness visitors, including the same group size limits and no authorization to install camp facilities or equipment caches in wilderness. Outfitted groups should not need more equipment than any other group, and therefore no need to store extra food or equipment in caches in wilderness. NPS and its permittees should lead the way in setting an exemplary example for other visitors in regard to appropriate wilderness travel techniques.**
7. Commercial outfitters and guides -- **Tell NPS that all concession contracts or commercial use authorizations for commercial activities in wilderness must first undergo a written "needs assessment" with public review and comment opportunities!**
8. The draft policies say that outdoor recreation ethics developed by Leave No Trace and "Tread Lightly!" will be applied to recreation management in wilderness. **Tell NPS that "Tread Lightly!" is a program focused on the ethical use of motorized and mechanized vehicles on land and water, and therefore has no place in wilderness management, with the possible exception of Alaska, where motorboat and airplane access may be allowed in wilderness.**

## **Administration and Stewardship**

1. Minimum Requirement / Minimum Tool Analysis -- NPS policies currently allow each park superintendent to devise their own format for conducting a "Minimum Requirement" Analysis to assess the need and appropriateness for various administrative activities in wilderness. **Tell NPS that most superintendents have no training in designing a Minimum Requirement Analysis. A standardized Minimum Requirement worksheet should therefore be required throughout the NPS and be subject to public comment and review in order to improve consistency, accountability, and public understanding across all park wildernesses.**
2. Administrative Facilities -- the new policy would allow permanent administrative supply caches in wilderness and construction and maintenance of Ranger cabins in wilderness if these are "necessary to protect an area's wilderness character." NPS frequently uses helicopters to access such facilities that exist now in certain wildernesses. **Tell NPS that permanent caches and cabins are NEVER necessary to protect wilderness and in fact degrade and compromise wilderness character by intruding on the undeveloped, remote, qualities that make wilderness unique. Tell NPS that Rangers can access and camp in wilderness via the same non-motorized, traditional, self-reliant means that other wilderness visitors do. NPS should be leading the way in setting a good example for other visitors in regard to appropriate wilderness ethics and travel techniques.**
3. Monitoring -- The new policies define the purpose of wilderness monitoring, in part, as "ensuring that the public purposes (uses) of wilderness are being met." **Tell NPS that wilderness monitoring is about preserving wilderness *values* and wilderness *character*, not about assuring that sufficient public use is occurring. Wilderness monitoring must focus on more than biophysical carrying capacity -- its central focus must be on assuring that the unique qualities and values of wilderness character are respected and preserved.**
4. Historic Structures -- Many wildernesses contain historic structures -- cabins, trail shelters, etc. -- that were built since European settlement and prior to wilderness designation. **Tell NPS that it is not necessary or appropriate to maintain or rebuild historic structures in wilderness because the purpose of wilderness is to preserve the primitive, undeveloped qualities of the landscape, not to preserve signs of past activities by modern humans. Such structures should be allowed to gradually decay back into the land. The National Historic Preservation Act requires NPS to document and record historic information for such structures, but does not require that the physical presence of such structures be preserved.**