

“Wilderness” is the word the environmentalist’s hide behind when they are trying to close our public lands to recreation.

The environmentalist will try and convince the general population that recreation can and does take place in wilderness, but I disagree. I am positive that when more people understand the real definition of wilderness, and the ramifications of designating an area as “wilderness,” they will agree with me. Wilderness does not equal recreation; wilderness does equal closure to all recreationists except a very small group I call “hikers.”

What is Wilderness?

The word “Wilderness” is often heard in debates, on TV, or the nightly news. But, the real question is do you understand what it means? If you have an hour or two you could research the National Wilderness Preservation System, or better known as the Wilderness Act of 1964. If you only want to spend a few minutes to educate yourself on a highly controversial and political issue (that could possible effect every weekend of the rest of your life), then you only need to read this article...

The simple definition of Wilderness is an area where the earth and wildlife is untrammled by man.¹ More specifically it is federal land retaining its original character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation, and is being protected and managed to preserve its natural conditions.² Additional provisions of the statute state that to be wilderness (1) the imprint of man’s work is substantially unnoticed, (2) it provides solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation, (3) has at least five thousand acres of land or sufficient size to make preservation practical³, and (4) devoted to the public purposes of recreational, scenic, scientific, educational, conservation, and historical use.⁴

Who manages wilderness, or designates wilderness?

The three divisions of federal land management are the National Park Service, National Forest Service, and the Bureau of Land Management. Wilderness areas or wilderness study areas (WSA) are managed by the Department and agency that managed that particular land immediately before it became wilderness or WSA. Basically, if the National Forest Service managed the land before it was designated wilderness then the National Forest Service will continue to manage the wilderness area.⁵

The National Park Service, National Forest Service, and the Bureau of Land Management have the discretion to designate WSA. These areas are those that the agencies feel should be wilderness and meet the criteria to be wilderness.

The responsibility for wilderness classification is placed on Congress. The statute (Wilderness Act) removes the absolute discretion of the land management agencies to designate wilderness. The land management agencies are responsible for the protection of the land and the recommendation of wilderness areas to Congress.⁶

How does this apply to your recreation?

Now that the boring part is over I’ll move on to the part that you really care about... How does this apply to your recreation? Wilderness prohibits uses of the land including, permanent or temporary roads and structures, the use of motor vehicles, and the landing of aircraft.⁷ When

applied to types of recreation, wilderness areas prohibit full-size 4x4's, side-by-sides, quads, snowmobiles, dirt bikes, motor boats, airplanes, helicopters, motor coaches/homes, house trailers, toy haulers, mountain bikes, horses (sometimes allowed if a diaper is placed on the horse), generators, any type of motorized equipment (i.e. drills, pumps), and some camping equipment (if it is motorized or mechanical).

Even though case law and the statute do not specifically address canyoneering or rock climbing (sport or traditional climbing), both of these activities could easily fall under prohibited activities. The canyoneer must leave behind webbing or bolts used in conjunction with anchors, and rock climbers use permanent bolts or cams which are mechanical devices.

You probably recognized that almost all recreation is barred (except hiking and backpack camping) and seems to contradict the provision in the statute that says, to preserve the land for the purpose of "recreational, scenic, scientific, educational, conservation, and historical use."⁸ I will break down each component of that provision so that you can easily see why I believe that designating our public lands as wilderness offers recreation to only a very small minority of recreationists.

1. Cases that have tested the provisions of the Wilderness Act have shown that recreation refers to only hikers or backpacking into the wilderness area to camp.⁹
2. Enjoying the scenic value of the wilderness area only applies to hikers unless you count looking in from the outer edges of the area. We all know seeing the interior of a five-thousand acre parcel of land is not always possible and most often does not provide a true scenic experience.
3. Again, if there is any educational value it will have to be on foot or through binoculars.
4. There probably is conservation, but this conservation could take place without locking up large parcels of land. If the public does not get to enjoy the land (and I mean not just the hikers), then why are we conserving the land? Who are we protecting it for if it is locked up and not even future generations will get to enjoy it?
5. The only historical use would be if there is rock art (pictographs or petroglyphs). Remember there isn't suppose to be any permanent structures so if there is any early settler ruins the agency might remove them, and it is unclear how they handle Anasazi or Fremont dwellings.

Now you can see why designating our public lands as wilderness is preserving it not for future generations, but instead it is preserving it for a minority group of recreationists, the hikers. This small group of people, you know who I am talking about, have continuously manipulated the public and large contributors into thinking that creating wilderness preserves land. It is becoming more and more evident that their "wilderness campaign" is propaganda. It is now easier to see that their true agenda is claiming our public lands for themselves. It is time that it is known that they are not the superior group of recreationist they think they are, they are not the elite. We have as much and more right to use our public lands because we are the majority. Hikers are only one small group of people who use public lands. I previously mentioned all of the other groups that are being barred from wilderness areas and other federal managed lands. It's time to make our views known!

We Can Stop Designation of Wilderness!!

Utah has over 300,000 acres of wilderness area including the latest Washington County addition that encompasses Zion National Park. According to the Bureau of Land Management website Utah has 3.2 million acres of WSA. The amount of recreationists who are being blocked from access to federal lands is a much larger group than the small group of hikers that are allowed in wilderness.

Get involved; educate your friends and family on the issues. Donate time and money to organizations that keep the land open. Support elected officials who support our right to access these lands. Make it a goal to recruit at least one new individual to our cause each time you go out and enjoy public land. Get your recruits to join USA-ALL as members and to commit a little time and money each year that will help keep public land open.

We are competing with opposing Utah organizations like Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance that have annual budgets of over a million dollars. There are more than 200,000 registered OHV's and snowmobiles in the state of Utah. If each of those 200,000 individuals donated only \$50 a year to USA-ALL we would more than double our current annual budget.

We cannot stand by any longer and let the minority groups make decision for us on our future use of public lands. We are the majority and we can stop designation of wilderness we can stop closures of our roads and trails if we ascribe to the small level of involvement that this article suggests.

¹ See Wilderness Act of 1964, 16 U.S.C.A §1331 (West 2009).

² *Id.*

³ *Id.*

⁴ *Id.* §1333.

⁵ See *Id.* §1131.

⁶ See *Parker v. United States*, 309 F. Supp (D. Colo. 1970), *aff'd*, 448 F.2d 793 (10th Cir. 1971).

⁷ See *Getty Oil Co. V. Clark*, 614 F. Supp 904 (D. Wyo. 1985).

⁸ See *Id.* §1333.

⁹ *Id.* *Getty Oil Co.*, 614 F. Supp at 904.