

Wilderness Facts

Wilderness is identified as one of the “multiple-uses” for National Forests under the law. It is one of the best tools to achieve many of the other designated uses, including recreation, water and soil conservation, and wildlife habitat.

Hunting, fishing, horse riding, hiking, camping, canoeing, and many more activities are all allowed in Wilderness.

The Wilderness Act clearly allows of the use of motorized equipment and transportation by the U.S. Forest Service (and other managing agencies) for search and rescue operations, fire fighting to protect adjacent private land, insect and disease control, and other circumstances where the equipment is assessed as the minimum tool necessary for proper administration of the area.



The Wilderness Act specifically states that certain measures may be taken to control fires, insects, and disease in Wilderness Areas. In short, anything necessary for the protection of public health or safety, including the use of mechanized equipment, is clearly permissible.

Emergency vehicles, including all-terrain vehicles and helicopters, are allowed to rescue injured people in Wilderness Areas.

Non-motorized hand tools are used for normal day-to-day maintenance activities in Wilderness. However, power tools can be authorized in emergencies brought on by ice storms, extensive blow-downs, or other event.

Only 4.4 percent of the entire land area of the United States is protected by Wilderness designation. Ninety-five percent of the U.S. Wilderness lands lie in Alaska and the Western states, with less than 5% of the designated Wilderness east of the Mississippi.

Unlike many other forms of recreation, the enjoyment of Wilderness does not require expensive, specialized equipment. All that is required to enjoy Wilderness Areas in the Shawnee National Forest are a pair of walking shoes, a bottle of water, and a few snacks.

The Wilderness Act allows access to private in-holdings, and private land that borders Wilderness has no restrictions. In fact, the value of private property near Wilderness often increases.

Congressional designation as a Wilderness Area permanently protects an area from development, logging, oil drilling, parking lots, buildings, and motorized vehicles. Other levels of protection are less strict, and the protection can be eroded by the Forest Service, the President, etc.

Only Wilderness designation conserves our wild heritage for future generations.