

Wilderness on Federal Lands in Arizona

Wilderness Questions and Answers

1. What is Wilderness anyway?

A legislated Wilderness is an area “Where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain.” Wilderness is not an area that is absolutely pristine and undisturbed or which has never seen the imprint of man. When Congress passed the Wilderness Act of 1964, it recognized that such areas may not exist; therefore, the act defines (in part) a Wilderness as an area of undeveloped federal land which “generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature with the imprint of man’s work substantially unnoticeable.” Provisions were made for such activities as grazing of cattle, mining for minerals, and building of trails. Other activities and facilities such as commercial enterprise, roads, motorized vehicles and equipment, power lines, and permanent structures are normally prohibited. Other special projects such as water conservation works and power projects can be authorized by the President of the United States.

1. What is the difference between a WILDERNESS and an area being studied for WILDERNESS?

Both Forest Service and BLM have lands under study for possible future Wilderness designation by Congress. Management of study lands is carried out on a “non-impairment” basis to allow the lands to remain in a wilderness-like condition pending the final outcome of the study and Congress’ final determination of suitability. **Only** Congress can designate a Wilderness.

2. Is grazing allowed in a Wilderness?

Yes, grazing is allowed in all areas where it was authorized when the area was initially made Wilderness and at the same approximate levels. Ranching activities continue in most Wildernesses in the Southwest.

3. May I hunt and fish in Wilderness?

Yes. Wildlife remains the property of the State of Arizona and is governed by appropriate state fishing and hunting laws. However, motorized equipment may not be used to pursue hunting and fishing activities.

4. Could wildlife species be re-introduced into a Wilderness where not presently found?

Yes. If these species were native to the area, the Federal agency may cooperate with the appropriate game and fish department to re-introduce the species. This process would be the same for Wilderness and non-Wilderness lands.

5. May I ride horseback or take my dog with me into a Wilderness?

Yes. Pets and horses are generally allowed in Wilderness. However, consideration should be taken for wildlife in the area, as well as other visitors. As such, pets should be kept under control at all times. Recreational livestock may be subject to special permit, and you may be required to carry weed free feed if adequate forage is not available.

6. Is mining allowed in a Wilderness?

Yes and no. Congress authorized the continued application of the 1872 mining laws until December 31, 1983, with the original Wilderness Act, or until date of designation for areas under wilderness study. Work on valid claims may continue after that date as long as there is an approved operating plan. Existing surface management regulations manage mining activities and wilderness to prevent unnecessary and undue degradation of wilderness values. This may make mineral development in wilderness more difficult and expensive than on other federal lands; however, operators will be allowed to carry out operations that are necessary and reasonable incidental to a mining operation being developed under an approved plan.

7. How about access to private lands within a Wilderness?

Owners of land surrounded by Wilderness shall have rights of adequate access to their lands. This access will be designed to cause the least adverse impact to the Wilderness.

8. What happens if I'm lost or an emergency arises in a Wilderness?

When requested, helicopters may be approved by the federal agency for search and rescue operations within Wilderness. In Arizona, the county sheriff's office is responsible for these search and rescue operations.

9. Aren't Wildernesses only for the super-physically fit and/or elite rich who can afford the special equipment to visit these areas?

Wildernesses come in many shapes and sizes, and there are many opportunities for anyone in reasonable physical condition to visit a Wilderness. A beginner needs only a good pair of shoes, a canteen, and an adventuresome spirit. As an individual develops their own abilities, they may want to make a corresponding investment in appropriate equipment. Commercial outfitting and guiding is permitted and allows many, including the handicapped, to visit a Wilderness in relative comfort.

10. If an area is made Wilderness, will I be able to visit the area onl with a permit?

Not usually. Because of management information needs of some areas, permits or registration are sometimes required to visit a Wilderness. Permits are generally free, usually not rationed, and often self-issuing. Implementation of any permit system would only follow a carefully prepared management plan after considerable public input.

11. How am I supposed to maintain my stock tanks and other range facilities if an area is designated Wilderness?

Congress made special provisions for both maintenance of range facilities as well as installation of new needed improvements for resource protection when called for by an approved management plan. Motorized equipment and vehicles may occasionally be used to conduct this work when no practical alternative exists.

12. Can I collect rocks or cut firewood in a Wilderness?

Hobby collecting of mineral specimens is allowed in a Wilderness. Collection methods are limited to non-mechanical means. Wood for campfires, when permitted, will usually be limited to dead and down material. Cutting of live vegetation will not normally be allowed.

13. Where can I get more information about Wilderness in Arizona?

Forest Service and BLM maintain field offices in many areas of the state. You may contact any office for information on Wilderness areas, proposed Wildernesses, or wilderness study areas in their vicinity. Free brochures and maps are available for many areas at office locations and websites.

Prepared by the Arizona Wilderness Coalition.