



National Landscape Conservation System

The mission of the National Landscape Conservation System is to conserve, protect, and restore these nationally significant landscapes that have outstanding cultural, ecological, and scientific values for the benefit of current and future generations. — Bureau of Land Management, 2000

The National Landscape Conservation System is a network of the last, great places to experience the history and wild beauty of the American West. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is the steward of these 26 million acres of special lands and waters—that include National Monuments, National Conservation Areas, National Historic Trails, National Scenic Trails, wilderness and wilderness study areas—all designated for conservation by Congress or the President.

The Conservation System's canyons, mesas, mountains and rivers are unique and irreplaceable refuges for our shared natural and cultural history. From the native grasslands of the Carrizo Plain in California, to the thousands of cultural sites at Arizona's Agua Fria or Colorado's Canyons of the Ancients, the Conservation System's diversity is dwarfed only by the potential it holds to help conserve incredible and iconic American landscapes.

The Wilderness Society, working with an alliance of more than 70 organizations and millions of Americans nationwide, seeks to make this system permanent and recognized as a world-class system of conservation lands managed by the BLM. We also support expansion of the Conservation System through additional BLM wilderness, new National Conservation Areas, and other conservation designations.

The Wilderness Society Goals for the National Landscape Conservation System

The BLM's National Landscape Conservation System brings together the best of BLM's lands and waters. The 26-million-acre Conservation System provides countless benefits, from hunting to fishing and other recreational opportunities, to important research and inquiry into ecosystem health and cultural resource protection. To sustain those benefits and keep the Conservation System healthy, wild, and open, the Wilderness Society seeks:

1. System Permanence for America's Newest Conservation System

On April 9, 2008, the House of Representatives passed the National Landscape Conservation System Act, which permanently establishes the National Landscape Conservation System. This tremendous accomplishment is the result of the commitment that both national and local conservation and citizens' groups have made to the Conservation System. The Wilderness Society is leading this effort.

As of December 2008, the Senate bundled the Act with over one hundred other public land and resources bills into an omnibus package that awaits a vote in the Senate. There is hope that Congress will address this important legislation in early 2009.

The Wilderness Society seeks congressional recognition of the System to promote consistent stewardship of the System's treasured places, to elevate the stature and recognition of the Conservation System's unique qualities, and to promote public understanding of the vital role these public lands play in the environment and local economies of the West.

2. Adequate Funding and a Transparent Budget

Since the Conservation System's inception in 2000, funding has steadily declined, though The Wilderness Society helped secure a modest increase last year over the prior year's level. The Wilderness Society is working to maintain and increase levels of funding each fiscal year. Eleven of the fifteen fastest growing states in the country are in the West, making the Conservation System the new backyard for millions. In parts of the System, visitor use has tripled in the past five years.

We asked for \$70 million in FY09 funding and \$75 million in FY10, which is about 5% of the whole of BLM's budget. (For some perspective, the Wildlife Refuge System budget is \$434 million in operations and management for approximately 100 million acres.)

Greater transparency and accountability in the System's budget is also a top priority of The Wilderness Society. This year, The Wilderness Society helped secure greater clarity in the System's budget but more work is needed.

3. Resource Protection and Public Awareness

Through the administrative planning process, the BLM makes decisions critical to the health of the Conservation System. The land use planning process for Conservation System areas like National Monuments and National Conservation Areas result in decisions on off-road vehicle use, determinations of wilderness protections, oil and gas leasing stipulations, and power corridors, among others—ultimately improving land condition or increasing possible harm. The planning process provides critical opportunities for advancing real protection and for public engagement in land conservation. The BLM Action Center in our Denver Regional office is a national leader in this process and supports our local partners across the West in ensuring the Conservation System is managed to the highest standards of resource protection.

4. System Growth

There are still many BLM areas worthy of protection and inclusion in the Conservation System. The Wilderness Society is leading the effort to identify and advocate for these lands. By combining the knowledge and skills of our Regional Offices and the Wilderness Support Center, we look forward to a National Landscape Conservation System that more fully represents the crown jewels of the lands managed by BLM.

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