

## Wilderness – the highest form of land protection

The Wilderness Act provides the means to preserve some of the country’s last remaining wild places for the benefit of future generations. Lands that are designated as wilderness areas are preserved in a natural state in perpetuity. They provide outstanding opportunities for hiking, camping, hunting, fishing, and other outdoor recreation. Nearly every Congress since 1964 has added lands to the National Wilderness Preservation System by designating new wilderness areas. The 111<sup>th</sup> Congress provides outstanding opportunities to add new wilderness areas with dozens of wilderness bills currently pending before Congress. We hope that Congress will take immediate action to approve pending wilderness legislation.



The Owyhee Canyon Wilderness Study Area in Nevada is home to mule deer, bobcat and mountain lion.

### What is Wilderness?

Wilderness is defined in the Wilderness Act of 1964 (P.L. 88-577; 16 USC § 1131 et seq.) as those public lands already owned by the American people “where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain.” Wilderness areas are generally free from developments and human disturbance, and are managed for the use and enjoyment of the American people and to preserve their wilderness character. Within designated wilderness areas, roads, permanent structures, motorized or mechanized vehicles, commercial logging, new mining claims, and mineral leases are prohibited. Livestock grazing is permitted to continue in wilderness areas where such operations existed prior to an area's designation. Hunting and fishing are also allowed in wilderness areas (except in most national parks), as are a wide range of other non-mechanized recreational, scientific, and outdoor activities.

### Benefits of Wilderness

Wilderness provides so much more than a place to camp, fish or hunt. Wilderness cleans our air; filters our water; provides essential habitat for wildlife, including imperiled species; and affords a natural retreat from the stress of our everyday lives. Wilderness offers people opportunities for solitude, inspiration, and a place to get away. Wilderness protects values vital to all of us by:

- Protecting watersheds that provide drinking water to many cities and rural communities.
- Providing important habitat for wildlife threatened by extinction.
- Helping to filter and improve the quality of our air.
- Maintaining the "web of life" and providing natural laboratories for research.
- Providing outstanding opportunities for outdoor recreation: hiking, hunting, fishing, bird watching, canoeing, camping, and many other activities.
- Offering a haven from the pressures of our fast-paced, industrialized society, and providing places where we can seek relief from the noise, haste, and crowds that too often confine us.

### Economic Benefits of Wilderness

Wilderness provides important economic benefits to local economies. By providing new opportunities for outdoor recreation, protecting healthy landscapes where people can live and work, and increasing tourism,

wilderness designation provides a strong economic base in rural regions. Nationwide, outdoor recreation contributes \$730 billion to the American economy, while supporting 6.5 million jobs.<sup>1</sup>

### **How Wilderness Proposals are Crafted**

Wilderness designation is a locally-driven, community process that usually begins with a group of citizens who are interested in securing protection for a nearby area on federal lands. These citizens work with community leaders, stakeholders, interest groups, and the general public to develop a wilderness proposal that is responsive to community needs, addresses concerns about designation, and provides adequate protection to imperiled landscapes.

### **Wilderness Stewardship**

Without adequate funding for stewardship and management, many wilderness areas (or wilderness quality areas) are at risk of losing the very values that they were established to preserve. We look forward to working closely with the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress to ensure that our land management agencies have the resources needed to properly manage and protect all designated wilderness and wilderness quality lands.

### **Priorities in the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress**

Dozens of wilderness bills were introduced in the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress by both Democratic and Republican sponsors, demonstrating the broad, bipartisan support for, and interest in, wilderness designation. While many bills were reported out of committee in the House and Senate, only one, designating 110,000 acres in the State of Washington, was signed into law. Many of the rest were reported unanimously out of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee but were not taken to the Senate floor.



The stunning King Range Wilderness Area along California's northern coast was added to the National Wilderness Preservation System by the 109th Congress.

Fifteen wilderness provisions affecting eight states were included in an omnibus public lands bill that included nearly 150 pieces of mostly non-controversial legislation affecting American public lands. These provisions would protect such American icons as the breathtaking Sierra Nevada Mountains of California, scenic Mt. Hood of Oregon, and popular Rocky Mountain National Park in Colorado. The provisions would also designate new wilderness in Virginia and West Virginia, thus providing much-needed outdoor recreation opportunities in the eastern United States. Passing this omnibus lands act remains a top priority in the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress.

Additionally, new wilderness proposals are being developed in nearly every western state, and several eastern states. Together, these proposals afford the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress a prime opportunity to leave a legacy of wilderness by preserving America's natural heritage for future generations. The Wilderness Society stands ready to help.

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<sup>1</sup> Outdoor Industry Foundation. 2006. *The Active Outdoor Recreation Economy: A \$730 Billion Contribution to the U.S. Economy*. Available at <http://www.outdoorindustry.org/>.

