

Wilderness.net's Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness Fact Sheet



Introduction

The United States Congress designated the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness in 1978 and it now has a total of 937,032 acres. Montana contains approximately 913,338 acres. Wyoming contains approximately 23,694 acres. It is managed by the Forest Service.

Description

The Absaroka Beartooth Wilderness is located in south central Montana, with a small portion in northern Wyoming, just north of Yellowstone National Park. The Wilderness is home to Montana's tallest peak, the steep rocky mass known as Granite Peak. At 12,799 feet, Granite Peak towers above the Beartooth Plateau. It anchors the Beartooth Range, which stands higher and more rugged than the Absarokas, with many peaks exceeding 12,000 feet (one of them resembles a bear's tooth). The Beartooth portion of the AB is dominated by vast, treeless plateaus, which fall off sharply into surrounding canyons, much like the Alaska Range. Lakes are much more numerous in Beartooth than in the nearby Absarokas. The lakes are small and tucked high into glacial cirques. The Crow Indians called themselves Absarokas, hence the name of the mountain range that, along with Beartooth, characterizes this Wilderness. Active glaciers, sweeping tundra plateaus, deep canyons, sparkling streams, and hundreds of alpine lakes combine to make this one of the most outstanding Wilderness areas in America. The Absarokas, unlike Beartooth, have ample vegetative cover, including dense forests and broad mountain meadows crossed by meandering streams. Mt. Cowan is the tallest peak in the Absaroka Range, topping out at 11,206 feet. Bighorn sheep and mountain goats roam about the mostly rugged country, along with elk, deer, moose, marmots, coyotes, black bears, wolves and members of a substantial grizzly population. The harsher Beartooths accommodate far fewer animals. Trout reside in many of the lakes and streams in both ranges. Adjoining Yellowstone National Park on the park's northern edge, this Wilderness extends down into Wyoming. More than 700 miles of hiking trails provide access to this area, a backpacker's dream. Both ranges offer opportunities to wander off-trail for an unsurpassed Wilderness experience. Wilderness pack trips have a long history in the area, often supported by outfitters. Only a relatively small portion of the extensive Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness lies in Wyoming. The area is dominated by the high granitic alpine plateaus of the Beartooth Mountains, a starkly beautiful country of expansive views, hidden lakes among bald rocks, and wildly unpredictable weather. Cold and wind may strike any day of the year. Boulder-strewn Beartooth Plateau lies between 9,000 and 10,000 feet below bare crags and peaks streaked with red and yellow. The plateau is cut by deep canyons and carpeted in wildflowers when the snow melts in early July. This is an extremely fragile environment, with large expanses of tundra habitats, rare to the lower 48 states. The lakes are rich in trout, and the air teems with mosquitoes in summer. Wildlife is abundant in the forested valleys: moose, elk, and mule deer live here with grizzly bears. On barren ridges you'll see little except pikas and the occasional mountain goat and bighorn sheep. An extensive network of trails is often under snow until early July.

Leave No Trace

How to follow the seven standard Leave No Trace principles differs in different parts of the country (desert vs. Rocky Mountains). Click on any of the principles listed below to learn more about how they apply in the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness.

1. [Plan Ahead and Prepare](#)
2. [Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces](#)
3. [Dispose of Waste Properly](#)
4. [Leave What You Find](#)
5. [Minimize Campfire Impacts](#)
6. [Respect Wildlife](#)
7. [Be Considerate of Other Visitors](#)

For more information on Leave No Trace, [Visit the Leave No Trace, Inc. website.](#)

Area Management

The Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness is part of the 109 million acre National Wilderness Preservation System. This System of lands provides clean air, water, and habitat critical for rare and endangered plants and animals. In wilderness, you can enjoy challenging recreational activities like hiking, backpacking, climbing, kayaking, canoeing, rafting, horse packing, bird watching, stargazing, and extraordinary opportunities for solitude. You play an important role in helping to *"secure for the American people of present and future generations the benefits of an enduring resource of wilderness"* as called for by the Congress of the United States through the Wilderness Act of 1964. Please follow the requirements outlined below and use Leave No Trace techniques when visiting the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness to ensure protection of this unique area.

General Wilderness Prohibitions

Motorized equipment and equipment used for mechanical transport is generally prohibited on all federal lands designated as wilderness. This includes the use of motor vehicles, motorboats, motorized equipment, bicycles, hang gliders, wagons, carts, portage wheels, and the landing of aircraft including helicopters, unless provided for in specific legislation.

In a few areas some exceptions allowing the use of motorized equipment or mechanical transport are described in the special regulations in effect for a specific area. Contact the Forest Service office or visit the websites listed below for more specific information.

These general prohibitions have been implemented for all national forest wildernesses in order to implement the provisions of the Wilderness Act of 1964. The Wilderness Act requires management of human-caused impacts and protection of the area's wilderness character to insure that it is "unimpaired for the future use and enjoyment as wilderness." Use of the equipment listed as prohibited in wilderness is inconsistent with the provision in the Wilderness Act which mandates opportunities for solitude or primitive recreation and that wilderness is a place that is in contrast with areas where people and their works are dominant.

Wilderness-Specific Regulations

Wilderness managers often need to take action to limit the impacts caused by visitor activities in

order to protect the natural conditions of wilderness as required by the Wilderness Act of 1964. Managers typically implement 'indirect' types of actions such as information and education measures before selecting more restrictive measures. When regulations are necessary, they are implemented with the specific intent of balancing the need to preserve the character of the wilderness while providing for the use and enjoyment of wilderness.

The following wilderness regulations are in effect for this area. Not all regulations are in effect for every wilderness. Contact the Forest Service office or visit the websites listed on the 'Links' tab for more specific information about the regulations listed.

ALL VISITORS

-- Party size is limited to no more than 15 people. Groups larger than 15 people must split into two or more smaller groups and camp a minimum of 1/2 mile apart.

-- Storing equipment, personal property, or supplies (caching) is prohibited.

-- Do not shortcut switchbacks.

-- Do not dispose of debris, garbage or other waste in the Wilderness.

-- Mechanical transportation (including wagons, game carts, or other vehicles) is prohibited.

-- All campfires (other than propane or gas camp-stoves) are prohibited within 200 feet of any lakeshore, 100 feet of any live stream, 200 feet of the west shore of the Stillwater River (from the Woodbine Trailhead to mile marker 4), at Black Canyon Lake, in Black Canyon drainage, in the upper East Rosebud drainage above the outlet of Twin Outlets Lake, as well as Fossil, Cairn, Dewey, Medicine, Oly, Sioux Charlie and other small unnamed lakes at the head of the East Rosebud Drainage.

-- Placing or possessing salt for the purposes of attracting wildlife is prohibited. Persons providing salt to pack and saddle stock in approved corrals or other approved livestock feeding locations in the immediate vicinity of camp are exempt.

-- From March 1 to Decemeber 1, visitors are required to store all food, refuse, animal carcasses or other wildlife attractants acceptably (so as to make them unavailable to wildlife). See the Custer Gallatin National Forest Website at:

<http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/custergallatin/home/?cid=stelprdb5127768> for specific information on proper storage of attractants and food. In summary proper storage means:

1. All food, refuse or other attractants must be acceptably stored or acceptably possessed during daytime hours (either in certified bear resistant containers and/or utilizing a method listed on the most recent Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee Certified Bear Resistant Products List, or hung 10 feet off the ground, 4 feet away from the trunk of the tree or pole).
2. All food, refuse or other attractants must be acceptably stored during nighttime hours, unless it is being prepared for eating, being eaten, being transported, or being prepared for acceptable storage.
3. Any harvested animal carcass must be acceptably stored, unless the carcass is being field dressed, transported, being prepared for eating, or being prepared for acceptable storage.

4. Camping or sleeping areas must be established at least 1/2 mile from a known animal carcass (on the ground) or at least 100 yards from an acceptably stored animal carcass.
5. Forest users shall report the death and location of livestock to a Forest Service official within 24 hours of discovery.
6. Burnable attractants that cannot be completely consumed by fire (i.e., no post burning residue) must be packed out.

OVERNIGHT VISITORS

- Overnight visitors cannot occupy a single location for a period longer than 16 consecutive days. The term "location" means the occupied undeveloped campsite and lands within a five mile radius of the campsite. After leaving, a minimum of seven days is required before any group or person(s) from that group may reoccupy their original location.
- Camping is prohibited within 200 feet of any lakeshore, 100 feet of any live stream, 200 feet of the west shore of the Stillwater River (from the Woodbine Trailhead to mile marker 4), and around the shoreline of Sioux Charlie Lake.

STOCK USERS

- Using more than 15 head of pack or saddle stock in any group is prohibited in the East half of the Wilderness.
- Using more than 25 head of pack or saddle stock in any group is prohibited in the West half of the Wilderness.
- Hitching, tethering, or picketing pack or saddle stock in violation of posted trailhead instructions, within 200 feet of a lake, or 100 feet of a stream or free-flowing water is prohibited.
- All pack or saddle stock feed must be certified weed seed free. Weed seed free products must be certified as being noxious weed seed free by an authorized State of Department of Agriculture official or designated county official; each individual bale or container must be tagged or marked as weed free and reference the written certification.
- Free trailing of pack or saddle stock is prohibited.

Pack and saddle stock are prohibited from the following areas:

- On the trail-less portion of the Beartooth Plateau from December 2 to July 31. (Overnight use of or camping with pack or saddle stock is always prohibited here.)
- Within 1,000 feet of Summerville and Castle Lakes on the Beartooth Plateau.
- On the Mystic Lake Trail #19 on the Beartooth Ranger District from the trailhead to the junction of trail #17, except during the fall deer/elk/bighorn sheep hunting seasons.
- In the Zimmer and Aero Lake areas. This includes the Zimmer Lake Trail #574 and Lady of the Lake Trail #31 north of the junction of these two trail in Section 32, T.8S., R.15E.
- On the Pine Creek Lake Trail #47 on the Yellowstone Ranger District from December 2 to

September 15.

-- On the Thompson Lake Trail #282 on the Yellowstone Ranger District from April 1 to June 15.

Contacts

Beartooth Ranger District

6811 HWY 212
RED LODGE, MT 59068

Phone: 406-446-2103

Phone: 406-848-7375

Gardiner Ranger District

PO BOX 5
GARDINER, MT 59030

Phone: 406-222-1892

Yellowstone Ranger District

5242 HIGHWAY 89 SOUTH
LIVINGSTON, MT 59047

Phone: 307-527-6241

Shoshone National Forest

808 MEADOW LANE
CODY, WY 82414

Links to Other Websites

[Custer Gallatin National Forest Wilderness](#)

[Shoshone National Forest, Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness](#)

Links on Wilderness.net

[National, Regional and Local Wilderness Organizations \(NGOs\)](#)

A listing of societies, organizations, coalitions and other wilderness-related advocacy and stewardship groups.

[Career and Volunteer Opportunities](#)

A listing of sites providing information about wilderness- and environmentally-related career and volunteer opportunities.

Applicable Wilderness Law(s)

Law	Date	Acreage Change (in acres)
Public Law 95-249	March 27, 1978	904,500

(No official title, designates Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness) - Public law 95-249 (3/27/1978) To designate the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness, Custer and Gallatin National Forests, in the State of Montana

— [download 95-249](#)

Public Law 98-140 **October 31, 1983** **-67**

Lee Metcalf Wilderness and Management Act of 1983 - Public law 98-140 (10/31/1983) To establish the Lee Metcalf Wilderness and Management Area in the State of Montana, and for other purposes

— [download 98-140](#)

Public Law 98-550 **October 30, 1984** **23,750**

Wyoming Wilderness Act of 1984 - Public law 98-550 (10/30/1984) To designate certain lands in the state of Wyoming for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System, to release other forest lands for multiple use management, to withdraw designated wilderness areas in Wyoming from minerals activity, and for other purposes

— [download 98-550](#)