

# Wilderness.net's Great Gulf Wilderness Fact Sheet



## Introduction

The United States Congress designated the Great Gulf Wilderness in 1964 and it now has a total of 5,658 acres. All of the wilderness is in New Hampshire and is managed by the Forest Service.

## Description

Cradled within the rugged crescent of New Hampshire's Presidential Range lies the Great Gulf Wilderness. This peaked carpet begins at Mount Washington, unfurling north and east to cover the flanks of Mounts Jefferson, Adams, and Madison. Then, finally, it enfolds the Great Gulf, the largest cirque in the White Mountains of New Hampshire. The small and beautiful Spaulding Lake lies on the floor of this steep-walled bowl and is drained eastward by the West Branch of the Peabody River. Many rivulets tumble into the Peabody from both sides of the glacially carved valley. From the headwall rising 1,100 feet to 1,600 feet above the bowl's bottom, the gulf drops ruggedly east for about 3.5 miles, then flattens into more open country for another 1.5 miles. Mount Washington, just south of the Wilderness boundary, stands at 6,288 feet, the highest point in New England. Let the records show that it was here, on April 12, 1934, that winds howled past at 231 miles per hour, the highest wind velocity ever documented on Earth. The southern Wilderness boundary lies just north of the Mount Washington Auto Road, which provides motorized access to the summit. Mount Adams anchors the northwestern Wilderness boundary, and at 5,799 feet garners second place in the New England height tourney. Mount Madison, at the northernmost point of the Wilderness, tops out at 5,366 feet then plummets 4,000 feet to river valleys below. The views from the ridge and summits of the Presidentials, and from the floor of the bowl, rank among New England's best. The name of the Wilderness likely comes from the early misadventures of legendary explorer Ethan Allen Crawford. Upon taking a wrong turn on an 1823 hiking trip, Crawford found himself at the "edge of a great gulf." The area is rich in history that dates back to its first recorded observation by Darby Field in 1642. Botanists, geologists and lovers of the wild began their visits in the early 19th century and the first trail was blazed in 1881. A number of other historic trails were constructed in the 30 years that followed, most of which are still used today. A number of spur trails hook up to the Great Gulf Trail, which serves as the main artery for the area's trail network and cuts roughly east-west through the center of New Hampshire's oldest and smallest Wilderness. Beginning about 1.5 miles east of the Wilderness boundary, the trail traverses approximately five and a half miles of Wilderness and then continues toward the summit of Mount Washington. The Appalachian National Scenic Trail runs essentially perpendicular to the Great Gulf Trail as it takes in 2.7 miles of the Wilderness on its way from Georgia to Maine. In all, there are about 22 miles of maintained hiking trails within the Wilderness.

## 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 Great Gulf 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 Great Gulf 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 Great Gulf 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 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 for more specific information about the regulations listed.

#### ALL VISITORS

- Group size is limited to no more than 10 people per party.
- Campfires (except liquid-fueled camp-stoves or candles) are prohibited.
- Do not store equipment, personal property, or supplies (caching) in the Wilderness (including geocaching and letterboxing).
- As with all designated Wilderness areas, mechanical transportation (including wagons, game carts, and other vehicles) is prohibited.

#### OVERNIGHT VISITORS

- Overnight visitors cannot occupy any single location longer than 14 days in a 30-day period.

Camping is prohibited at the following locations (except at designated sites):

1. within 200 feet of any trail
2. within 1/4 mile of the Great Gulf trail, from the intersection of the Sphinx Trail to the intersection with the Gulfside Trail
3. within 1/4 mile of any hut shelter, cabin, picnic area, or day use site

### **Contacts**

**Androscoggin Ranger District**  
300 GLEN ROAD  
GORHAM, NH 03581

Phone: 603-466-2713

Remarks: Office hours 8-4:30 Mon-Friday Oct15 -May 15 May 15-Oct 15  
Mon-Sun 8-4:30

### **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)
<b>Public Law 88-577</b>	<b>September 3, 1964</b>	<b>5,400</b>

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The Wilderness Act - Public law 88-577 (9/3/1964) To establish a National Wilderness Preservation System for the permanent good of the whole people, and for other purposes

— [download 88-577](#)