Wilderness.net's Mission Mountains Wilderness Fact Sheet

Introduction

The United States Congress designated the Mission Mountains Wilderness in 1975 and it now has a total of 73,877 acres. All of the wilderness is in Montana and is managed by the Forest Service.

Description

The Mission Mountains are a land of ragged peaks with snow on them most of the year, small active glaciers, alpine lakes, meadows, clear streams that run icy cold, slab-like boulders, vertical cliff faces, and talus slopes. The average elevation is 7,000 feet. In the northern portion you'll find the terrain less severe and more heavily timbered. The southern portion, however, receives more visitors, primarily around the alpine lakes (most of which do not thaw until mid-June). The dense forest includes pine, fir, larch, and western red cedar. In summer high basins are painted with a sea of wildflowers.

The Flathead and Pend Oreille Indians once hunted, fished, gathered berries, and sought visions (they would go into the Wilderness alone, often depriving themselves of food and water, in hopes of seeing a vision) in the rough and broken Mission Mountains. The first organized exploration of this area did not occur until 1922, after which part of the region was set aside as the Mission Mountains Primitive Area in 1931 and then expanded in 1939. The Wilderness you see today stretches for about 30 miles and varies from two to six miles in width.

Wildlife lives in abundant numbers in the Missions: elk and deer, black bears and grizzly bears, mountain goats and mountain lions, a few gray wolves, and a wealth of smaller furbearing animals. Approximately 50 species of birds have been identified, including bald eagles. A small population of fish is generally confined to the lakes. About 45 miles of maintained trails are used almost exclusively by backpackers, the terrain being generally unsuitable for horses. Few of the trails are easy, and many are tremendously steep. There is no overnight camping at Glacier, Upper or Lower Cold Lakes. The area shares its entire western and southern boundaries with the Flathead Indian Reservation. A permit must be obtained from the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes to enter the Mission Mountains Tribal 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 Mission Mountains 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 Mission Mountains 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 Mission Mountains 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

Proper Food Storage is required. The Mission Mountains are grizzly bear country and propose storage of food and bear attractants is required for your personal safety, the safety of others and to protect bears. All human, pet and livestock food (except bailed or cubed hay without additives) and garbage must be stored in a bear-resistant manner or attended. Food and attractants must be stored in approved bear resistant containers or hung at least 10 feet off the ground and four feet out from any upright support (trees, poles, etc.). Please do not leave coolers - even if they are empty, or garbage - outside your vehicle (in a pickup bed for example) at the trailhead. Do not attempt to burn garbage or attractants in a campfire.

Caching of equipment is prohibited. Storing any personal property, camping equipment or supplies is prohibited. Wilderness visitors may set up a base camp and travel from that camp to other spike camps during the course of one visit, but cannot leave any camps or equipment behind when leaving the Wilderness. This includes leaving such equipment as game cameras unattended within the Wilderness.

The use of wagons, wheelbarrows, strollers, bicycles, game carts or other vehicles is prohibited.

OVERNIGHT VISITORS

Maximum lenght of stay is 14 days. Wilderness visitors may not camp in any one location for more than 14 accumlated days during any 30-day period. Any camp relocations within the 30-day period must be at a distance of at least 5 air miles from the previous campsite. Camping for more than 30 days within the same calendar year is prohibited.

Overnight camping is prohibited at Glacier and Upper and Lower Cold Lakes. Camping is prohibited to protect fragile shorelines and to allow heavily impacted sites to recover. Specifically there is no overnight camping within 1/4 mile of the shores of Upper and Lower Cold Lakes found in Sections 21, 22, 27, and 28 of Township 21 North, Range 18 West, or Glacier Lake found in Sections 30 and 31 of Township 19 North, Range 17 West, and Sections 25 and 36 of Township 19 North, Range 18 West.

Overnight camping is prohibited at all restoration sites. These sites are found at many lakes in the Mission Mountains and are marked with signs that read "Wilderness Restoration Site, No Camping." These sites have been damaged by over use and are closed to restore native ground cover and vegetation. Please find other suitable campsites.

STOCK USERS

Stock users please take note of the following important regulations. Due to stock impacts to fragile lakeshore sites containment of livestock is prohibited within 200 feet of all lakes in the Mission Mountains Wilderness. Containment is defined as grazing, herding, tying, picketing, tethering, hobbling and hitching animals by any means within 200 feet of all lakes. Campsites in these areas may be used, but please remove stock from the site as soon as they are loaded or unloaded.

Certified weed-free feed is required. All hay, straw or other feed brought onto the National Forest and into the Mission Mountains Wilderness must be certified as noxious weed seed free. This certification must be attached to every bale. Pelletized feed or grain must meet current certification standards in Montana for weed seed free feed.

Contacts

Swan Lake Ranger District
200 RANGER STATION RD
BIGFORK, MT 59911

Phone: 406-837-7500

Links to Other Websites

Air Resource Management Data for the Mission Mountains Wilderness

Flathead National Forest Special Places

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 93-632	**January 3, 1975**	**75,588**

(No official title, designates Fish and Wildlife Service wildernesses) - Public law 93-632 (1/3/1975) Designation of wilderness areas within the National Widlife Refuge System

download 93-632