

Wilderness.net's Birkhead Mountains Wilderness Fact Sheet

Introduction

The United States Congress designated the Birkhead Mountains Wilderness in 1984 and it now has a total of 5,025 acres. All of the wilderness is in North Carolina and is managed by the Forest Service.

Description

Most people haven't even heard of the Uwharrie Mountains, much less seen these ancient volcanic landforms, considered the oldest range on the North American continent. Although eroded by eons of time and weather, the Uwharries are still the highest uplift in the eastern half of North Carolina. Birkhead Mountains Wilderness marks their northern end.

Covered primarily in old-growth hardwoods, the Wilderness consists of several long, wooded ridges and surrounding drainages of moderately steep terrain. Small, clear streams run past rocky outcroppings down to the Uwharrie River and outside the western boundary. An understory of wildflowers, shrubs, ferns, mosses, and other plant species flourish on their sodden banks. Elevations range from about 450 feet on drainage bottoms to around 950 feet on Cedar Rock Mountain in the northeastern section.

When explorers first landed here in the late 1600s, they found Native American tribes that had been inhabiting the area for more than 12,000 years. European settlement began in earnest in the 1760s, and the natives were pushed westward. The Birkhead family moved in around 1850, leaving their name and mark on the land. Among the trees of Birkhead you may see remnants of old homesteads, farms, gold mining operations, old roads, and evidence of timber harvesting.

The Birkhead Mountain Trail crosses the heart of the area for approximately 4.5 miles from north to south (but you won't find a parking lot on either end). From a parking lot on the western boundary of the Wilderness, the Robbins Branch Trail (about three miles) enters the area to fork at the Hannah's Creek Trail (about 1.5 miles). Both trails join the Birkhead Mountain Trail. Group size is limited to 10, a regulation enforced in all North Carolina Wildernesses.

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 Birkhead 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](#)

Area Management

The Birkhead Mountains Wilderness is part of the 110 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 Birkhead 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

Group size is limited to 10 people

Dogs must be on leash or under control

OVERNIGHT VISITORS

Campsites must be at least 100 feet from streams

Maximum length of stay is 14 continuous days

STOCK USERS

No stock animals allowed

Contacts

Uwharrie Ranger District
789 NC24/27E
TROY, NC 27371

Phone: 910-576-6391

Links to Other Websites

[National Forests in North Carolina](#)

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 98-324	June 19, 1984	4,790

North Carolina Wilderness Act of 1984 - Public law 98-324 (6/19/1984) To designate certain public lands in North Carolina as additions to the National Wilderness Preservation System

— [download 98-324](#)