

Wilderness.net's Weminuche Wilderness Fact Sheet



Introduction

The United States Congress designated the Weminuche Wilderness in 1975 and it now has a total of 496,972 acres. All of the wilderness is in Colorado and is managed by the Forest Service.

Description

The Weminuche Wilderness was designated in 1975, and was expanded to its current size by the Colorado Wilderness Acts of 1980 and 1993. It is the largest designated Wilderness in Colorado. The Weminuche lies in the San Juan and Rio Grande National Forests of southwestern Colorado. Its average elevation is 10,000 feet. Eolus, Sunlight, and Windom Peaks rise above 14,000 feet in elevation, while many others reach above 13,000. Fifty miles of the Continental Divide, the geological backbone of North America, dissect the Weminuche, diverting its headwaters to either the Pacific or Atlantic oceans.

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 Weminuche 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 Weminuche 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 Weminuche 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 no more than 15 people per party.
- Camping is prohibited within 100 feet of any water source.
- Camping and all campfires are prohibited at the following locations:
 1. within 200 feet of Archuleta Lake, Fourmile Lake, and West Ute Lake
 2. within 1/2 mile of the north shore and 1/4 mile of other shores of Emerald Lake
 3. within 1/4 mile of Little Emerald Lake
 4. between the shore and Flint and La Osa Trails at Flint Lake; and within 200 feet of the west and

north shores

5. in Needle Creek drainage at Twin Lakes

6. in the hot springs area at West Fork (Rainbow)

-- Campfires are also prohibited in all of Needle Creek Drainage (including Chicago Basin) and Vestal Basin.

-- Do not shortcut switchbacks.

-- Pets must be under verbal control or leashed at all times.

-- Disposal of human waste and wash water is prohibited within 100 feet of any water source.

-- As with all designated Wilderness areas, mechanical transportation (including wagons, game carts, wheelbarrows, bicycles, or other vehicles) is prohibited.

STOCK USERS

-- Group size is limited to no more than a combination of 25 people and pack or saddle stock, with no more than 15 people per party.

-- All feed must be weed-free certified in Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nebraska, Wyoming, or Utah and be marked with certified twine, packing, or transit certificate. Only the following are allowed: weed-free baled hay, cubed or pelletized hay, steamed grain in a processor's stamped bag, and weed-free baled mulch made from tree fibers or steamed material.

-- Pack or saddle stock are prohibited from being restrained within 100 feet lakeshore, stream, or riparian area.

-- Hitching or tethering pack or saddle stock is prohibited at the following locations:

1. within 200 feet of Archuleta Lake and Fourmile Lake

2. within 1/2 mile of the north shore and 1/4 mile of other shores of Emerald Lake

3. within 1/4 mile of Little Emerald Lake

4. between the shore and Flint and La Osa Trails at Flint Lake; and within 200 feet of the west and north shores

-- Hitching or tethering pack or saddle stock is also prohibited within 200 feet of West Ute Lake.

Contacts

Rio Grande National Forest
1803 W HWY 160
MONTE VISTA, CO 81144

Phone: 719-852-5941

San Juan National Forest
15 BURNETT COURT
DURANGO, CO 81301

Links to Other Websites

[Air Resource Management Data for the Weminuche Wilderness](#)

[Weminuche Wilderness Trip Planning](#)

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	405,031
(No official title, designates Fish and Wildlife Service wildernesses) - Public law 93-632 (1/3/1975) Designation of wilderness areas within the National Wildlife Refuge System		
— download 93-632		
Public Law 96-560	December 22, 1980	66,000
Colorado Wilderness Act - Public Law 96-560 (12/22/1980) To designate certain National Forest System lands in the States of Colorado, South Dakota, Missouri, South Carolina, and Louisiana for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System		
— download 96-560		
Public Law 103-77	August 13, 1993	28,740
Colorado Wilderness Act of 1993 - Public Law 103-77 (8/13/1993) Colorado Wilderness Act of 1993		
— download 103-77		