

Wilderness.net's Bob Marshall Wilderness Fact Sheet



Introduction

The United States Congress designated the Bob Marshall Wilderness in 1964 and it now has a total of 1,063,538 acres. All of the wilderness is in Montana and is managed by the Forest Service.

Description

The Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex Located in Northwestern Montana on both sides of the Continental Divide, this large complex includes three Wilderness areas: the Great Bear, the Scapegoat, and the Bob Marshall Wilderness. Together the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex makes up an area of more than 1.5 million acres, the third largest in the lower 48 states. Grizzly bear, lynx, wolverine, deer, elk, gray wolf, moose, black bear, mountain lion, mountain goat, and mountain sheep roam about these rugged ridge tops, gently sloping alpine meadows, thickly forested river bottoms and open grass parks.

Across this continuous landscape over 1700 miles of trail provide challenges and experiences to satisfy visitors with a wide range of skills. The Bob Marshall Wilderness was named for Bob Marshall, the early wilderness advocate, explorer and conservationist who promoted the development of effective and meaningful wilderness management. Designated in 1964 with the passage of the Wilderness Act, the Bob Marshall Wilderness is the oldest of the three wilderness areas composing the BMWC. It is also the largest, covering 1,063,503 acres on the Flathead (Spotted Bear Ranger District) and Lewis and Clark (Rocky Mountain Ranger District) National Forests. There are approximately 1,100 miles of system trail in this wilderness. Much of the area now comprising the Bob Marshall Wilderness was originally protected as the South Fork, Pentagon and Sun River Primitive Areas, which were established in 1931, 1933, and 1934 respectively. In 1978, additional lands were designated in the Birch Creek area. Then in 2014, additional lands were designated along the Rocky Mountain Front bringing the Bob Marshall Wilderness to its current size. The Continental Divide separates the Bob Marshall Wilderness into the Flathead and Sun River drainages, with elevations ranging from 4,000 feet to more than 9,000 feet. A huge escarpment called the Chinese Wall, is one of the most spectacular features of the landscape, averaging 1,000 feet in height and extending 22 miles. East of the Divide, the mountains of the Rocky Mountain Front rise from the plains, with elevations of 2,000 to 8,000 feet, and extend over 60 miles from north to south along the eastern edge of the Wilderness area. This wilderness area is host to the popular Wild and Scenic South Fork of the Flathead River as well as the many lakes, concentrated in the South Fork drainage, including the largest in the BMWC, Big Salmon Lake (972 acres).

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 Bob Marshall 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 Bob Marshall 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 Bob Marshall 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.
- Storing equipment, personal property, or supplies (caching) is prohibited.
- Do not shortcut switchbacks.
- Do not dispose of debris or garbage (including excess livestock salt) in the Wilderness. This does not prohibit the destruction of combustible material by burning or the disposal of human or livestock waste.
- Mechanical transportation (including wagons, game carts, or other vehicles) is prohibited.

FOOD STORAGE INFORMATION

The entire Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex is subject to the Food Storage Special Order, designed to minimize grizzly bear-human conflicts and thereby provide for visitor safety and recovery of the grizzly bear. The following information is applicable between April 1 and December 1 for portions of the Bob Marshall Wilderness on the Flathead National Forest and between March 1 and December 15 for portions of the Bob Marshall Wilderness on the Lewis and Clark National Forest. This is a general summary only; for specific information and definitions please see the special order.

- All attractants, including food, beverages, garbage, grease, livestock feed, and pet food, must be stored in an approved bear-resistant container or suspended at least 10 feet up and 4 feet out from any upright support (trees, poles, etc.).
- Attractants cannot be burned in an open campfire, buried, or discarded.
- All wildlife carcasses, birds, fish or other animal parts that are within 0.5 mile of any camp must be stored in an approved bear resistant manner during the nighttime hours or when otherwise unattended.
- Death of livestock and its location must be reported to the Forest Service within 24 hours of discovery.

An equipment loan program offers a limited number of bear resistant panniers, backpacker food tubes, and rope/pulley hoisting systems. Contact one the Ranger District office for more information.

For trails leading into Wilderness, approved bear-resistant storage methods also include the following for non-Wilderness areas:

- Secured in a hard-sided camper, vehicle trunk, cab, or trailer cab

- Secured in a hard-sided dwelling or storage building
- Stored within an approved and operating electric fence

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 in a portion of the North Fork of the Sun River between October 15 and December 15 and yearlong in the area east of the Continental Divide between Salt Mtn and Cliff Mtn and approximately 1 mile down Trail #131 in the Moose Creek drainage. Specific maps and location of the above noted 2 areas are attached to the special order available at Rocky Mountain Ranger District and Lewis Clark National Forest offices.

STOCK USERS

- Using more than 35 head of pack or saddle stock in any group 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.
- Possessing livestock salt in forms other than block or in excess quantities is prohibited.
- Containment of pack or saddle stock, defined as grazing, herding, tying, picketing, tethering, hobbling, or hitching, within 200' of the following lakeshores is prohibited: Big Knife Lakes, Big Salmon Lake, Doctor Lake, George Lake, Koessler Lake, Lena Lake, Lick Lake, Necklace Lakes, Pendant Lakes, Woodward Lake, Dean Lake, Trilobite Lakes, Palisade Lakes, and Sunburst Lake.
- Camping with stock and grazing are prohibited in the following areas of the Bob Marshall Wilderness on the Lewis & Clark NF: Moose Creek – east of the Continental Divide between Salt Mtn and Cliff Mtn in the Moose Creek drainage – and 500' from the lakeshore at Bear Lake, My Lake, and Lake Levale.

Contacts

Hungry Horse Ranger District
10 HUNGRY HORSE DRIVE
PO BOX 190340
HUNGRY HORSE, MT 59919

Phone: 406-387-3800

Remarks: Office hours: M-F 8:00 am - 4:30 pm; Spotted Bear RD & Hungry Horse RD share office in winter months

Phone: 406-466-5341

Rocky Mountain Ranger District

1102 MAIN AVE NW
PO BOX 340
CHOTEAU, MT 59422

Phone: 406-758-5376

Spotted Bear Ranger District

PO BOX 190310
HUNGRY HORSE, MT 59919

Remarks: Summer and Winter physical address and phone numbers are different. Office hours: M-F 8:00 am - 4:30 pm; Winter Phone only (October - May) 406-387-3800; Summer Phone (June - September): 406-758-5376

Links to Other Websites

[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 88-577 | September 3, 1964 | 950,000 |
| 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 | | |
| Public Law 95-546 | October 28, 1978 | 60,000 |
| (No official title, designates Great Bear Wilderness) - Public law 95-546 (10/28/1978) To designate the Great Bear Wilderness, Flathead National Forest, and enlarge the Bob Marshall Wilderness, Flathead and Lewis and Clark National Forests, State of Montana | | |
| — download 95-546 | | |
| Public Law 113-291 | December 19, 2014 | 50,401 |

National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2015 - Public law 113-291 (12/19/2014) To authorize appropriations for fiscal year 2015 for military activities of the Department of Defense, for military construction, and for defense activities of the Department of Energy, to prescribe military personnel strengths for such fiscal year, and for other purposes.

— [download 113-291](#) - Relevant legislation found on page(s): 1388.