

Wilderness.net's Flat Tops Wilderness Fact Sheet



Introduction

The United States Congress designated the Flat Tops Wilderness in 1975 and it now has a total of 230,830 acres. All of the wilderness is in Colorado and is managed by the Forest Service.

Description

Arthur Carhart's 1919 visit to Trappers Lake in the verdant embrace of the Flat Tops prompted him to be the first U.S. Forest Service official to initiate a plea for Wilderness preservation. No wonder he found the area so entrancing: behind Trappers Lake loom majestic volcanic cliffs, and beyond them a vast subalpine terrain reluctantly yields to alpine tundra (part of the White River Plateau with an average elevation of about 10,000 feet).

Approximately 110 lakes and ponds, often unnamed, dot the country above and below numerous flat-topped cliffs. Roughly 100 miles of fishable streams are in the Flat Tops Wilderness. The valleys and relatively gentle land above the cliffs offers over 160 miles of trails. This is ideal country for stock-users and traveling cross-country. The hiking is inviting and limitless. Elk, deer and moose find the area quite pleasant in the summer. A skeletal forest of dead spruce and fir stretches across the higher slopes below the tundra, the eerie legacy of a 1940s bark beetle epidemic. In 2002 more than 17,000 acres burned around Trappers Lake and over 5,500 in the vicinity of Lost Lakes in the East Fork of the Williams Fork drainage amounting to almost 10% of the area of the Flat Tops Wilderness. The Flat Tops is Colorado's second largest Wilderness, a precious expanse of breathtakingly beautiful open land.

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 Flat Tops 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 Flat Tops 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 Flat Tops 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 group.
- Campfires are prohibited within 1/4 miles of Trappers Lake, Hooper Lake, Keener Lake, and Smith Lake, and within 100 feet of any other lake, stream, or trail.
- Storing equipment, personal property, or supplies (caching) for longer than 10 days is prohibited.

-- Do not cut switchbacks.

-- Dogs or other animals must be under physical or voice control at all times and may not harass wildlife, people, or damage property.

-- Mechanical transportation (including wagons, game carts, wheelbarrows, bicycles, or other vehicles) is prohibited.

OVERNIGHT VISITORS

-- Camping is prohibited within 100 feet of any lake, stream, trail, or “No Camping/Wilderness Restoration Site” sign. Camping is also prohibited within 1/4 mile of Hooper Lake, Keener Lake, Smith Lake, and Trappers Lake.

-- Overnight visitors cannot occupy an individual campsite for more than 14 days or within 3 miles of a previously occupied campsite during a continuous 60-day period.

-- Camping more than 28 days within the continuous 60-day period is prohibited.

STOCK USERS

0--Group size is limited to no more than a combination of 25 people and pack or saddle stock, with the maximum number of people being 15.

-- It is prohibited to possess, store, or transport hay, straw or mulch. Certified weed free feed that has been processed through chemical or mechanical means such as hay/grain pellets or cubes or rolled grains is allowed.

-- Possessing pack or saddle stock within 1/4 mile of Trappers Lake (except for watering or through travel) is prohibited.

-- Hitching, tethering, or hobbling pack or saddle stock is prohibited within 100 feet of any lake, stream, or trail.

Contacts

East Zone/Eagle Ranger District
125 WEST 5TH STREET
EAGLE, CO 81631

Phone: 970-328-6388

Phone: 970-878-4039

West Zone/Blanco Ranger District
220 EAST MARKET STREET
MEEKER, CO 81641

Phone: 970-625-2371

West Zone/Rifle Ranger District
0094 COUNTY ROAD 244
RIFLE, CO 81650

Phone: 970-638-4516

Yampa Ranger District
300 ROSELAWN AVE
PO BOX 7
YAMPA, CO 80483

Links to Other Websites

[White River National Forest, Flat Tops Wilderness](#)

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 94-146	December 12, 1975	235,230

(No official title, designates Flat Tops Wilderness) - Public law 94-146 (12/12/1975) To designate the Flat Tops Wilderness, Rontt and White River National Forests, in the State of Colorado

 [download 94-146](#)