

# Wilderness.net's Mount Zirkel Wilderness Fact Sheet



## Introduction

The United States Congress designated the Mount Zirkel Wilderness in 1964 and it now has a total of 160,306 acres. All of the wilderness is in Colorado and is managed by the Forest Service.

## Description

The Mount Zirkel Wilderness lies within the Routt National Forest in northwestern Colorado. It was one of the original areas protected under the 1964 Wilderness Act and has since been expanded twice to

its present size of 160,648 acres. The wilderness straddles the Continental Divide in the Park Range and the Sierra Madre and offers a diversity of ecosystems from sagebrush meadows in the lower areas, through pine and spruce/fir forests and on up to alpine tundra. It contains the rugged peaks of the Sawtooth Range and the headwaters of the Elk, Encampment and North Platte rivers. There are over 70 lakes within the wilderness as well as 15 peaks over 12,000 feet, the highest being 12,180 foot Mount Zirkel, named in 1874 to honor Ferdinand Zirkel's contributions to the science of geology. Glaciation has left its distinctive mark of high valleys ending in precipitous cirques. Over 150 miles of trails provide access and the wilderness offers a variety of recreational opportunities. Some areas, notably several of the lakes and areas along the Continental Divide, are very popular and receive a high level of use but visitors looking for solitude can find it if they come during the week and/or visit less-popular areas. Ample opportunity exists to view nature's dynamic cycle of disturbance and rebirth. The Routt Divide Blowdown in 1997 toppled millions of trees over a 150 square mile area, most of it within the wilderness, with beetle epidemics and wildfires following in its wake. These natural forces have temporarily altered the landscape without permanently eroding its wilderness character.

## 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 Mount Zirkel 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 Mount Zirkel 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 Mount Zirkel 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 mile of Gilpin Lake, Gold Creek Lake, and Three Island Lake,

and within 100 feet of any other lake, stream, or trail.

-- Storing equipment, personal property, or supplies (caching) for longer than 14 days within a 30-day period is prohibited.

-- Do not cut switchbacks.

-- Dogs must be leashed at all times.

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

## OVERNIGHT VISITORS

-- Overnight visitors cannot occupy a single location longer than 14 days in a 30-day period.

-- Camping is prohibited at the following locations:

1. within 100 feet of any other lake, stream, or trail
2. within 1/4 mile of Gilpin Lake, Gold Creek Lake, and Three Island Lake
3. within 200 feet of a post sign reserving a site for a commercial outfitter

## STOCK USERS

-- 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.

-- Possessing or transporting unprocessed plant material such as hay, straw, or other unprocessed pack or saddle stock feed for bedding, feeding, or other uses is prohibited.

-- Possessing, hobbling, picketing, loose herding, or grazing pack or saddle stock within 100 feet of any lake, stream, or trail is prohibited.

## Contacts

### **Hahns Peak/Bears Ears Ranger District**

925 WEISS DRIVE

STEAMBOAT SPRINGS, CO 80487

Remarks: West side of Continental Divide

Phone: 970-870-2299

### **Parks Ranger District**

PO BOX 158

100 MAIN STREET

WALDEN, CO 80480

Remarks: East side of Continental Divide

Phone: 970-723-8204

**Medicine Bow-Routt National Forest**  
2468 JACKSON STREET  
LARAMIE, WY 82070

## Links to Other Websites

[Medicine Bow-Routt National Forest, Mount Zirkel 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)
<b>Public Law 88-577</b>	<b>September 3, 1964</b>	<b>72,180</b>
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		
 <a href="#">download 88-577</a>		
<b>Public Law 96-560</b>	<b>December 22, 1980</b>	<b>68,500</b>
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		
 <a href="#">download 96-560</a>		
<b>Public Law 103-77</b>	<b>August 13, 1993</b>	<b>20,750</b>
Colorado Wilderness Act of 1993 - Public Law 103-77 (8/13/1993) Colorado Wilderness Act of 1993		
 <a href="#">download 103-77</a>		