

Wilderness.net's South San Juan Wilderness Fact Sheet



Introduction

The United States Congress designated the South San Juan Wilderness in 1980 and it now has a total of 160,998 acres. All of the wilderness is in Colorado and is managed by the Forest Service.

Description

Ages of volcanic activity followed by the infinitely patient carving of glaciers left the rough, imposing terrain of the remote South San Juan Wilderness, an area typified by steep slopes above broad U-shaped valleys cut sharply deeper by eroding streams. You'll find high peaks and cliffs, as well as jagged pinnacles and ragged ridges, making travel difficult. Elevations rise as high as 13,300 feet. Thirty-two lakes, most of them formed by glacial activity, hold much of the area's moisture and drain into turbulent creeks. The Conejos, San Juan, and Blanco Rivers have their headwaters here, and about 25 miles of the Conejos River has been recommended for Wild and Scenic designation. Erosion of rich volcanic rock in combination with heavy snowfall has produced ideal forestland, certainly among the best in the state. Forest ecosystems rise from the shadowy cover of magnificent lodgepole pine to aspen, then through Engelmann spruce and subalpine fir to alpine tundra. Much of the forestland has a peaceful, park-like quality under the trees where sun-starved undergrowth grows thin and low.. You'll find about 180 miles of trails, and some of the most exemplary backpacking in the state. The Continental Divide crosses the heart of the Wilderness for 42 miles. The South Fork of the Conejos River Trail will lead you to the Conejos Peak Trail, which climbs north to the summit of Conejos Peak and offers a fantastic view into the heart of the area. You can continue down to beautiful Blue Lake and return down the creek to where you started, a total distance of 22 miles. A great bear was killed here in 1979, the last known Colorado grizzly. But rumor, extrapolation, and scientific evidence all join hands to suggest strongly that more grizzlies, if they still live anywhere in Colorado, inhabit the recesses of this rugged Wilderness, which many claim as the wildest left in the state.

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 South San Juan 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 South San Juan Wilderness is part of the 111 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 South San Juan 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.

- Campfires (except those not using wood as a source of fuel) are prohibited within 200 feet of Bear Lake, Blue Lake, Green Lake, and Red Lake.
- Camping is prohibited within 100 feet of any water source.
- Camping is prohibited within 200 feet of Bear Lake, Blue Lake, Green Lake, and Red Lake.
- 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, tethering, or grazing pack or saddle stock is prohibited within 200 feet of Bear Lake, Blue Lake, Green Lake, and Red Lake.

Contacts

Conejos Peak Ranger District
15571 COUNTY ROAD T5
LA JARA, CO 81140

Phone: 719-274-8971

San Juan National Forest
15 BURNETT COURT
DURANGO, CO 81301

Phone: 970-247-4874

Links to Other Websites

[San Juan National Forest, South San Juan 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)

<u>Law</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Acreage Change (in acres)</u>
Public Law 96-560	December 22, 1980	130,000
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	31,100
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Colorado Wilderness Act of 1993 - Public Law 103-77 (8/13/1993) Colorado Wilderness Act of 1993

 [download 103-77](#)