

# Wilderness.net's Columbine-Hondo Wilderness Fact Sheet



Credit:  
Pew Charitable Trusts

## Introduction

The United States Congress designated the Columbine-Hondo Wilderness in 2014 and it now has a total of 44,372 acres. All of the wilderness is in New Mexico and is managed by the Forest Service.

## Description

The Columbine-Hondo Wilderness is a wild mountain basin, located in the majestic Sangre de Cristo Mountains. These mountains were pushed up around 20 million years ago, and are one of the youngest mountain ranges on earth. The northern boundary, along the Red River, sits at the base of a now extinct

super volcano known as the Questa Caldera, which is said to have erupted 26 million years ago. The Columbine-Hondo contains the headwaters of the Rio Hondo and Red River, both major tributaries of the upper Rio Grande in northern New Mexico, that provide surface water for the downstream agricultural communities of Valdez, Arroyo Hondo, Arroyo Seco, San Cristobal, and Questa. The lush forests and alpine meadows of the Columbine-Hondo are home to abundant Rocky Mountain wildlife, such as mule deer, elk, black bear, and mountain lion. Above treeline, New Mexico's prized herd of bighorn sheep, along with marmots and pica, can be seen in a fragile alpine tundra habitat. The Columbine-Hondo shares a long multi-cultural history with the people of New Mexico. Paleo-Indians walked these mountains 11,000 years ago, and evidence of the earliest stone tools come from nearby Folsom and Clovis, NM. The Ancient Pueblo cliff dwellers of the Four Corners region migrated to the Taos Area roughly 1,100 years ago, making Taos Pueblo the oldest continuously inhabited dwelling in North America. Nomadic Kiowa, Ute, and Apache explored and hunted the area for almost as long. Spanish settlers since the 16th century used the area for seasonal sheep grazing and depend on the area's surface water for traditional agriculture. The trails of the Columbine-Hondo are part of an historic trail system to commemorate the New Mexico Gold Rush from the late 1800s into the turn of last century. In the 1930s artists like Georgia O'Keefe and writers like DH Lawrence moved the area for its outstanding natural beauty and solitude.

## 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 Columbine-Hondo 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 Columbine-Hondo 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 Columbine-Hondo 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 national forest office or visit the websites listed on the 'Links' tab for more specific information about the regulations listed.

## ALL VISITORS

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.

## Links to Other Websites

[Carson National Forest 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 113-291</b> | <b>December 19, 2014</b> | <b>45,000</b>             |

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): 1334-1340.