

WILDERNESS STEWARDSHIP PLANNING

Resource Brief

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Wilderness Stewardship Division
Denver Service Center



Background

Wilderness is a unique, vital, and irreplaceable source for a wide range of ecological, cultural, social, economic, ethical, and other values. Wilderness character preservation lies at the core of wilderness stewardship. Understanding the concept of wilderness character and how it can be effectively and efficiently integrated into park planning is crucial to preserving the enduring benefits and values of wilderness for future generations.

NPS Management Policies 2006, Section 6.3.4.2 states that “the superintendent of each park containing wilderness resources is to develop and maintain a wilderness stewardship plan or equivalent planning document to guide the preservation, management, and use of these resources.”

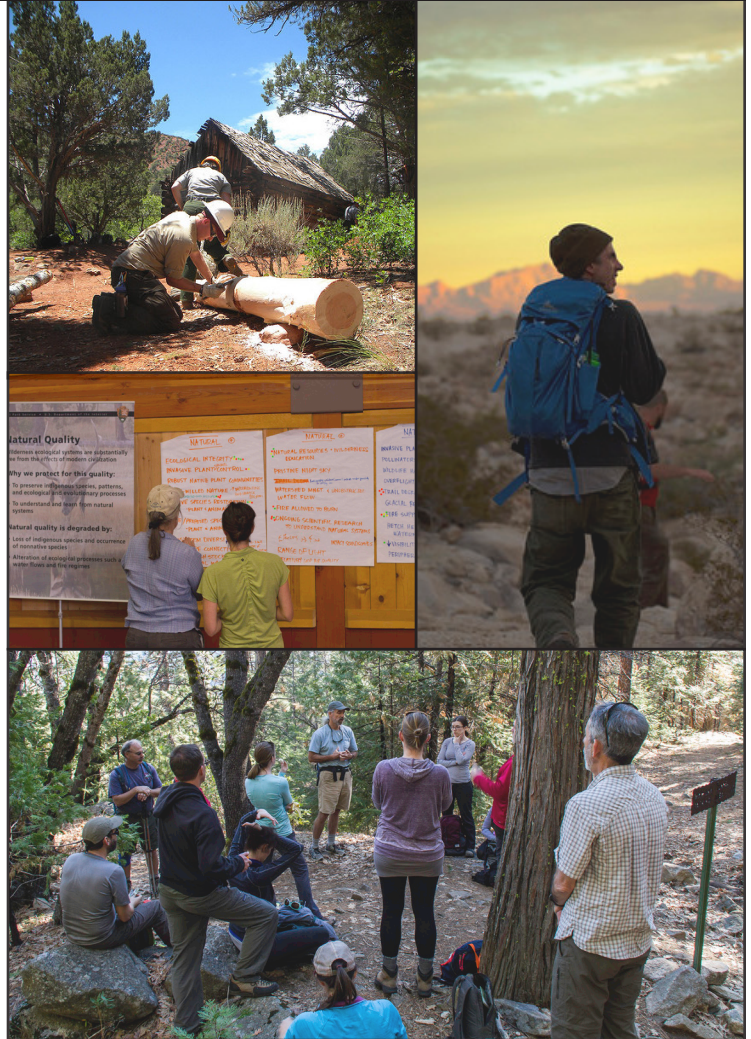
Wilderness stewardship planning is focused on the preservation of wilderness character, a central mandate of the **1964 Wilderness Act**.

What is a Wilderness Stewardship Plan?

The overarching goal of a Wilderness Stewardship Plan (WSP) is to restore, protect, and enhance the area’s wilderness character. A WSP sets longterm goals and objectives, identifies issues and opportunities, and provides a decision-making framework and appropriate actions to preserve and, if necessary, improve wilderness character now and into the future. The plan identifies desired conditions and establishes indicators, measures, and standards beyond which management actions would be taken to maintain or restore desired conditions for wilderness character.

Ready to Start Planning?

Before embarking on a formal planning effort, park staff are encouraged to complete the Wilderness Character Building Blocks. The Building Blocks correspond to achievable and meaningful steps that inform wilderness stewardship planning efforts. This approach provides maximum flexibility for staff to continue to effectively and efficiently strengthen wilderness stewardship in the park. Completion of the Building Blocks can provide interim guidance



for managing wilderness and tracking change in wilderness character.

Building Blocks 1 and 2 should be *developed first*:

1. Wilderness Basics (includes the Wilderness Character Narrative)
2. Wilderness Character Baseline Assessment
3. Integrate Wilderness Character into Management + Operations (*ongoing*)

Parks may initiate Building Block 3 *before and during* the WSP planning process. Additionally, it is important to identify wilderness management issues and their associated environmental impacts, data needs to evaluate those impacts, and potential management actions. *Once these are complete, the park is ready to begin the WSP planning process.*

Resources

NPS Wilderness Stewardship Plan Handbook (2014)

The Handbook provides a basic format or outline for a Wilderness Stewardship Plan EA/EIS. It also contains guidance, instructions, and hints for each section of the plan, explaining what to include and how the sections relate to one another. The Handbook focuses primarily on how to incorporate wilderness management policies and wilderness character into a WSP but also provides a general overview of planning and compliance.

NPS Wilderness Stewardship Plan Toolkit (2018)

The Toolkit helps planning teams write WSPs and complements the 2014 Handbook. It includes key points and best practices for writing each of the major components in a WSP and points planners to sources for additional information.

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