



**FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE  
NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT**

**Natural and Cultural Resources Management**

**Part 610 Wilderness Stewardship**

**Chapter 3 Wilderness Stewardship Planning**

**610 FW 3**

**3.1 What is the purpose of this chapter?** This chapter describes how to develop wilderness stewardship plans (WSPs).

**3.2 What is the scope of this chapter?**

**A.** This chapter covers:

**(1)** Congressionally designated wilderness (see 610 FW 1, Exhibit 1, National Wildlife Refuge System Designated Wilderness Areas),

**(2)** Proposed wilderness, and

**(3)** Where specifically addressed in this chapter, recommended wilderness.

**B.** Where this guidance conflicts with provisions of legislation establishing wilderness on refuges (see 610 FW 1.3F), the provisions of the establishing legislation take precedence.

**C.** We administer wilderness areas in Alaska following the guidance in this chapter. The policy addresses the special provisions on Alaska wilderness in the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA), and there should be no conflicts. However, if anything in the policy guidance conflicts with the provisions of ANILCA, the provisions of ANILCA prevail. Refer to 610 FW 5 for some of the special provisions for wilderness in Alaska.

**3.3 What are the authorities that directly affect wilderness stewardship on Service lands?** Our authorities to be stewards of wilderness are contained in 610 FW 1.3.

**3.4 What is a wilderness stewardship plan (WSP)?** A WSP guides the preservation, stewardship, and use of a particular wilderness area.

**A.** The WSP is a step-down management plan (602 FW 1.6 and 602 FW 4). The WSP provides detailed strategies and implementation schedules for meeting the broader wilderness goals and objectives identified in the refuge comprehensive conservation plan (CCP). We develop WSPs using the planning process guidance in 602 FW 1, 3, and 4.

**B.** We base the goals and objectives for a particular wilderness on refuge purpose(s), including Wilderness Act purposes, the provisions of the establishing legislation for the wilderness area, the Refuge System mission, and wilderness stewardship principles.

**C.** The WSP contains specific and measurable stewardship strategies and implementation schedules that address the preservation or, as appropriate, restoration of cultural and natural resource values and conditions.

**(1)** A WSP must clearly show the strategies and actions we will use and implement to preserve the wilderness resource and the linkage between those strategies and actions and the wilderness goals and objectives identified in the CCP.

**(2)** It also contains indicators, standards, conditions, or thresholds that define adverse impacts on wilderness character and values and that will trigger stewardship actions to reduce or prevent those impacts.

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**(3)** The WSP also describes ongoing and needed monitoring and research, appropriate and compatible uses and associated determinations, and Minimum Requirement Analyses (MRAs) for refuge management activities and commercial services.

**3.5 Does every wilderness area need a WSP?** We describe the stewardship direction for each wilderness area either in a WSP or as part of a CCP (602 FW 3). Where the majority of a refuge is designated wilderness, we may prepare a detailed CCP that incorporates the required elements of a WSP rather than preparing a separate WSP. In a WSP, we address each wilderness as a separate management area.

**3.6 May refuge managers prepare a WSP for wilderness study areas (WSA) recommended for wilderness designation in a final CCP, recommended wilderness areas, or proposed wilderness areas?** Yes. It may be appropriate to prepare WSPs for these areas in the absence of an approved CCP or when a CCP does not adequately address the goals, objectives, strategies, implementation schedules, and other details necessary to maintain wilderness character. Other considerations include degree of public interest, the amount of available information, and the complexity of the issues.

**3.7 May refuge managers combine other step-down management plans with the WSP?** Yes. The manager may combine step-down planning for other refuge resources and programs with the WSP when it is logical to take an integrated approach. The decision to do so rests with the refuge manager. Refer to 602 FW 4 for more guidance.

**3.8 What should a WSP contain?** The WSP should include, at a minimum (see Exhibit 1 for more guidance):

**A.** Stewardship direction in accordance with refuge purposes, including Wilderness Act purposes, the Wilderness Act, specific wilderness-establishing legislation, and the Refuge System mission.

**B.** Goals and objectives for the wilderness area. We derive wilderness goals and objectives from refuge purposes, including Wilderness Act purposes; the Refuge System mission and goals; the Wilderness Act; wilderness-specific establishing legislation; and continental, international, national, and Regional plans. If the refuge has a completed CCP, we use the wilderness goals and objectives, without change, from the CCP and use them in the WSP.

**C.** A description of baseline wilderness resource conditions and public uses existing at the time of designation as well as current wilderness resource conditions, including:

**(1)** A description of:

**(a)** The wilderness area,

**(b)** Natural resources,

**(c)** Cultural resources and values,

**(d)** Stewardship activities,

**(e)** Existing facilities,

**(f)** Search and rescue programs and associated partnerships, and

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**(g)** Public use levels and activities, and

**(2)** Indicators of change in resource conditions, standards for measuring that change, and desired conditions or thresholds that will trigger stewardship actions to reduce or prevent impacts on the wilderness.

**D.** A description of stewardship strategies (administrative, natural and cultural resources, public recreation, and interpretation and education) and an implementation schedule, including:

**(1)** Funding and staff required to adequately administer the area,

**(2)** A list of specific actions needed to accomplish WSP objectives,

**(3)** Prioritized action items, and

**(4)** Target dates for completing action items.

**E.** As appropriate, references to approved step-down management plans for other refuge programs and resources that are applicable to those programs and resources in the wilderness area.

**F.** A description of research needs and monitoring programs and protocols (for wilderness character and, as appropriate, other natural resources, cultural resources, and public use programs) necessary to determine if we are meeting our wilderness stewardship objectives.

**G.** MRAs and documentation of National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) compliance for all refuge management activities and commercial services necessary to administer the wilderness area.

**H.** Copies of appropriateness and compatibility determinations for refuge uses in the wilderness area. We prepare new compatibility determinations for uses if the WSP addresses new uses, determines an ongoing use to be incompatible, or requires significant changes in the way people are currently using wilderness areas.

**I.** Descriptions of how we will administer valid existing rights and congressionally authorized uses to protect wilderness character.

**J.** An explanation of how we will coordinate, as much as possible, with adjoining wilderness units so that visitors traveling between them can do so with minimal impediments.

**K.** A legal description and map of the wilderness area.

**L.** The Regional Chief, National Wildlife Refuge System's signature approving the WSP.

**3.9 How does the Service coordinate with States, other Federal agencies, and tribes in wilderness stewardship planning?** Effective conservation of fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitat depends on partnership and cooperation among many individuals and organizations. This is especially true in designated wilderness areas where refuge management activities must not only meet the purpose(s) for which the refuge was established, but also meet the purposes of the Wilderness Act.

**A.** Representatives of State fish and wildlife agencies, other Federal agencies, and tribes most commonly will be involved in wilderness stewardship planning by serving on or coordinating with the CCP team.

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These teams conduct wilderness reviews and establish wilderness goals and objectives as part of CCP development. We directly incorporate these wilderness goals and objectives into the WSP.

**B.** If we significantly modify the CCP wilderness-related goals or objectives when developing the WSP, we must provide the State fish and wildlife agencies, other Federal agencies, and tribes another opportunity for comment (see 602 FW 4.2). We prepare WSPs in compliance with NEPA, including appropriate interagency and tribal notification, coordination, and opportunity for comment.

**3.10 How does the Service involve the public in wilderness stewardship planning?** We provide opportunities for meaningful public involvement as we develop stewardship guidance for our wilderness areas. We require public involvement in the preparation of CCPs (see 602 FW 3), and we directly incorporate the wilderness goals and objectives from the CCP into the WSP. If we significantly modify the CCP wilderness-related goals or objectives when developing the WSP, we must provide the public another opportunity for comment (see 602 FW 4.2). We prepare WSPs in compliance with NEPA, including appropriate public notification, coordination, and opportunity for comment.

**3.11 How does the Service administer wilderness areas that do not have an approved WSP?**

During WSP development, we follow the wilderness stewardship policy (610 FW 1-5) and the refuge CCP as we conduct day-to-day activities.

**3.12 May the Service decide to implement a WSP that was completed before development of the refuge CCP?** We may implement a WSP that was completed before the development of the refuge's CCP if the WSP:

**A.** Is current and approved, and

**B.** Was prepared in accordance with the NEPA process, including appropriate interagency and tribal coordination and public involvement.

**3.13 How frequently should the Service revise WSPs?** We will review the WSP annually to determine if it requires any revisions. At least every 15 years, we will formally review and revise a WSP concurrently with the CCP. We also revise a WSP when significant changes to assumptions and conditions warrant, including major natural events, legal requirements, uses, management strategies and actions, or environmental conditions. When we revise wilderness stewardship direction, we include appropriate interagency and tribal coordination, public involvement, and documentation of compliance with NEPA.

**3.14 How does wilderness stewardship planning work when Service wilderness adjoins wilderness of another Federal agency?**

When a Refuge System wilderness area adjoins lands administered by another Federal agency, we coordinate wilderness stewardship planning, including appropriate interagency and tribal coordination and public involvement, with the neighboring agency. We develop joint stewardship plans with all involved agencies, if practicable.

/sgd/ Rowan W. Gould  
ACTING DIRECTOR

Date: November 7, 2008

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Date: 11/2/2008