
DESIGNATED WILDERNESS & WILDERNESS STUDY AREAS IN WYOMING

Congress recognized certain lands should be preserved for their historical, educational, and aesthetic values beyond protections already provided by other statutes. To ensure the preservation of these lands, Congress passed various acts designating special areas of land for management in accordance with preservation principals. Those acts generally identified lands to be preserved, the agency charged with managing them, and set out mandates and baseline requirements for how those lands are to be managed.

Wilderness Areas

The Wilderness Act of 1964 created the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS).¹ The system combined federally-owned lands that were designated by Congress as “wilderness areas” into a single system of administered lands for the use and enjoyment of the American people in such manner as will leave them unimpaired for future use and enjoyment as wilderness, and to provide for the protection and preservation of the wilderness character of these areas.² The Wilderness Act also provides that no other federal lands shall be designated as Wilderness Areas except as provided for in the 1964 Wilderness Act or by a subsequent act of Congress.³

Management of Designated Wilderness Areas

By definition, Wilderness Areas are protected and managed to preserve natural conditions.⁴ The Forest Service (FS), Bureau of Land

Management (BLM), Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), and National Park Service (NPS) are the primary federal agencies charged with managing Wilderness Areas. Once an area is included in the NWPS, the lands continue to be managed by the agency having jurisdiction immediately prior to the area’s designation as wilderness.⁵

In general, the administering agency of the designated Wilderness Area must preserve the wilderness character of the area and administer the area for such purposes consistent for which it may have been established.⁶ Except as otherwise provided in the Wilderness Act, Wilderness Areas shall be devoted to the public purposes for recreational, scenic, scientific, educational, conservation, and historical use.⁷ Generally, no commercial enterprises or permanent roads are allowed within any Wilderness Area. And, motorized vehicles, motorized equipment, mechanical transport (including bikes or pull carts) are only allowed in emergency situations involving the health and safety of persons within the Wilderness Area.⁸

Expansion of the Wilderness System

Upon its enactment, the Wilderness Act designated 9.1 million acres as wilderness within national forests.⁹ The Act required the Secretary of Agriculture to evaluate “primitive” areas within national forests for suitability for preservation as Wilderness Areas and to make recommendations to Congress for the ultimate designation (or not) as wilderness within 10 years of the passage of the Wilderness Act. In addition, the Act also directed the Secretary of the Interior to conduct a 10-year

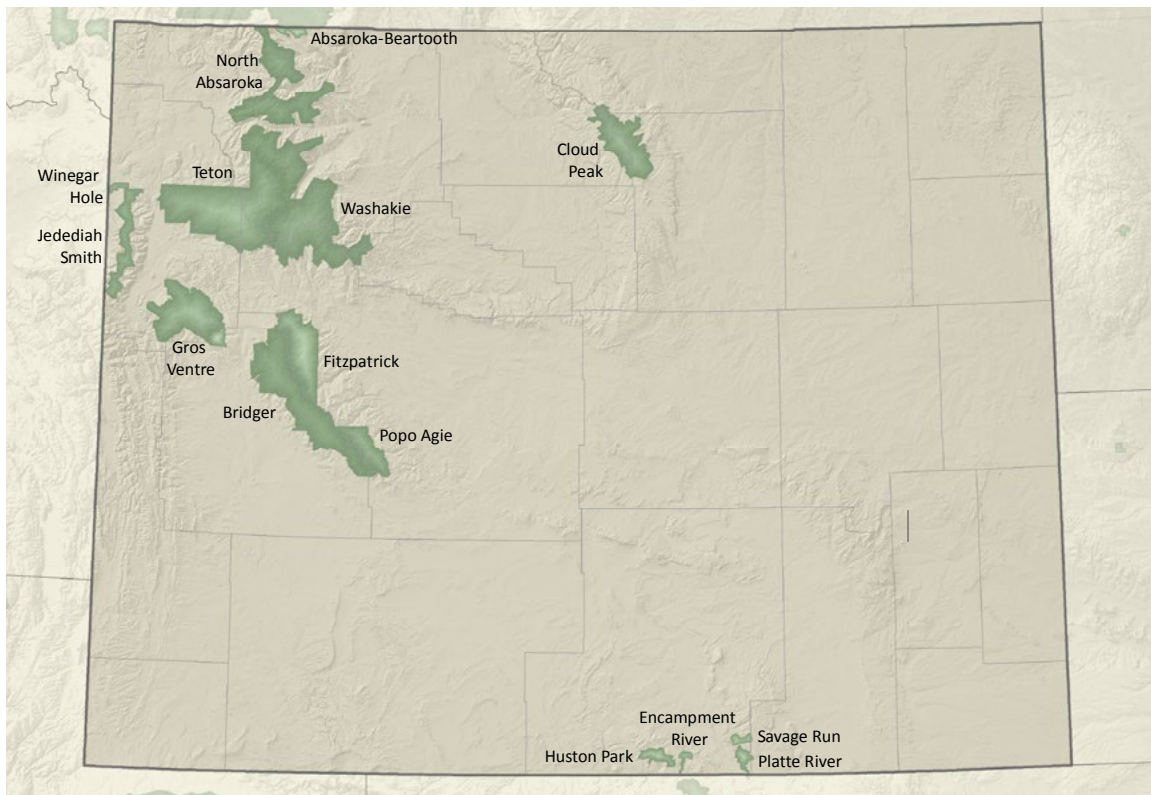
review and make recommendations with respect to roadless areas within the National Park System, National Monuments, NWRs, and game ranges.¹⁰

Although the Act did not expressly deal with lands administered by the BLM, the Federal Land Policy & Management Act (FLPMA) required the Secretary of the Interior to complete similar studies and recommendations for roadless areas of BLM lands within 15 years of its enactment. Section 603 of the FLPMA requires that these Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) be managed so as not to impair the suitability of such areas for

preservation as wilderness until Congress acts upon the proposals.¹¹ WSAs are managed with the goal of prohibiting actions or impacts that will interfere with Congress’s prerogatives in either designating the areas as wilderness or releasing them for other non-wilderness uses.

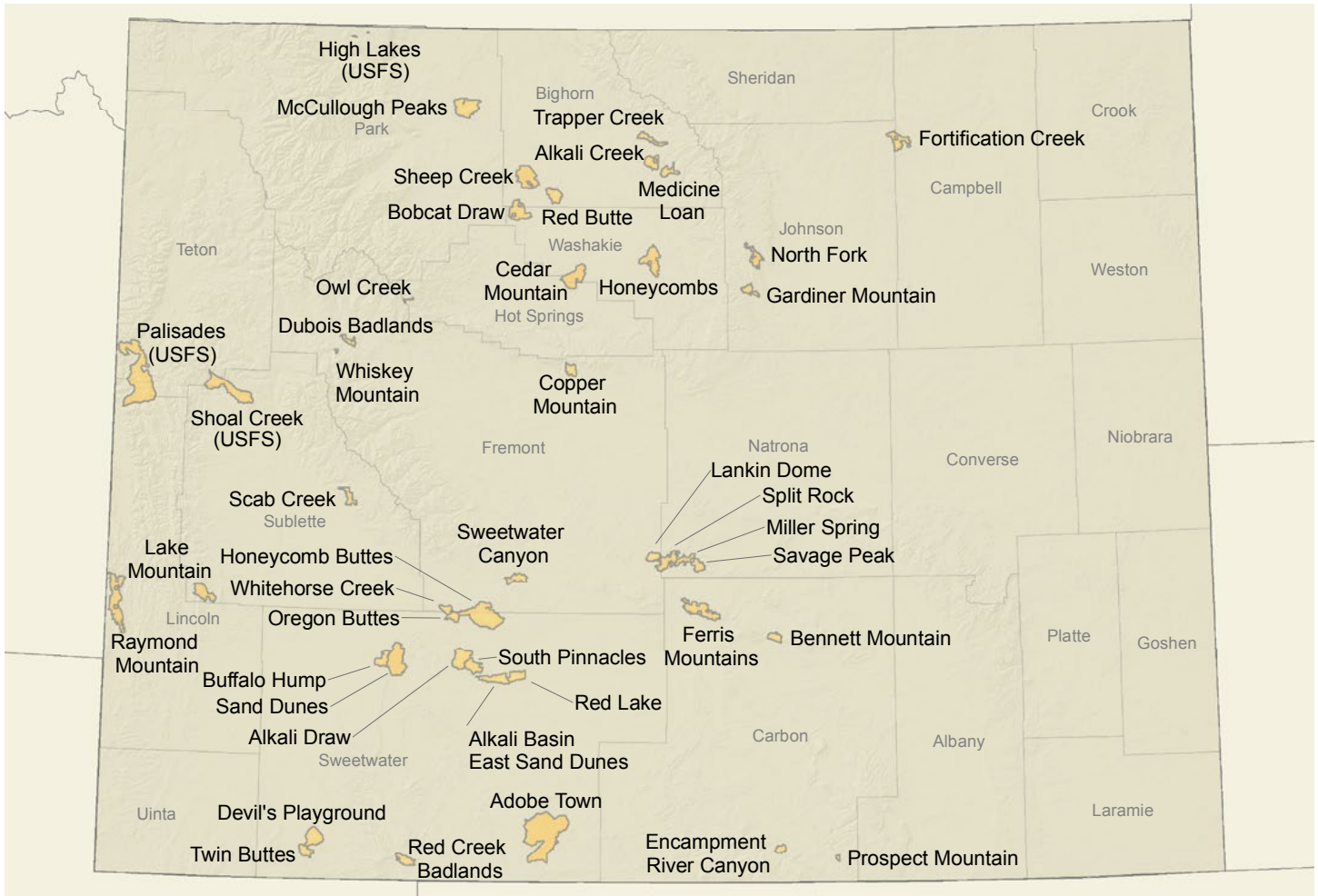
Wyoming is home to 15 designated wilderness areas covering over 4 million acres.¹² The BLM also manages 42 WSAs encompassing 577,000 acres of public land, while the FS manages 3 WSAs encompassing 130,000 acres.¹³

WYOMING WILDERNESS AREAS



Wilderness Name	Total Acreage	Wilderness Name	Total Acreage
Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness	943,648	North Absaroka Wilderness	350,488
Bridger Wilderness	428,087	Platte River Wilderness	23,492
Cloud Peak Wilderness	189,039	Popo Agie Wilderness	101,870
Encampment River Wilderness	10,124	Savage Run Wilderness	14,927
Fitzpatrick Wilderness	198,525	Teton Wilderness	585,238
Gros Ventre Wilderness	317,874	Washakie Wilderness	704,274
Huston Park Wilderness	30,588	Winegar Hole Wilderness	10,715
Jedediah Smith Wilderness	123,451	TOTAL	4,032,340

WILDERNESS STUDY AREAS IN WYOMING



WSA Name	Total Acreage	WSA Name	Total Acreage	WSA Name	Total Acreage
BLM High Desert District		Sand Dunes	27,109	McCullough Peaks	24,570
Adobe Town	85,710	Scab Creek	7,636	Medicine Lodge	7,740
Alkali Basin/ East Sand Dunes	12,800	South Pinnacles	10,800	Miller Spring	6,429
Alkali Draw	16,990	Whitehorse Creek	4,002	Owl Creek	710
Bennett Mountain	6,003	BLM High Plains District		Pryor Mountain (WY)	4,352
Buffalo Hump	10,300	Fortification Creek	12,419	Red Butte	11,350
Devil's Playground/ Twin Buttes	23,841	Gardner Mountain	6,423	Savage Peak	7,041
Encampment River Canyon	4,547	North Fork	10,089	Sheep Mountain	23,250
Ferris Mountain	22,245	BLM Wind River/ Bighorn Basin District		Split Rock	12,789
Honeycomb Buttes	41,188	Alkali Creek	10,100	Sweetwater Canyon	9,056
Lake Mountain	13,865	Bobcat Draw	17,150	Trapper Creek	7,200
Oregon Buttes	5,700	Bighorn Tack-On (WY)	353	Whiskey Mountain	487
Prospect Mountain	1,145	Cedar Mountain	21,560	BLM TOTAL	577,504
Raymond Mountain	32,936	Copper Mountain	6,858	USFS	
Red Creek Badlands	8,020	Dubois Badlands	4,520	Palisades	82,584
Red Lake	9,515	Honeycombs	21,000	Shoal Creek	32,374
		Lankin Dome	6,316	High Lakes	15,224
				FS TOTAL	130,182

ENDNOTES

- ¹ 16 U.S.C. §§ 1331-1336 (2014).
- ² *Id.* § 1131(a).
- ³ *Id.*
- ⁴ *Id.* § 1131(c).
- ⁵ *Id.* § 1131(b).
- ⁶ *Id.*
- ⁷ *Id.*
- ⁸ *Id.* § 1133(d).
- ⁹ Wilderness Soc’y, *Wilderness Act*, <http://wilderness.org/article/wilderness-act>.
- ¹⁰ 16 U.S.C. §§ 1132(a)-(c).
- ¹¹ 43 U.S.C. § 1782(c) (2014).
- ¹² Univ. of Montana, *Wilderness Statistic Reports*, <http://www.wilderness.net/NWPS/advSearch> (choose Maps, Data, and Images, Data).
- ¹³ Bureau of Land Mgmt., *Nat’l Conservation Lands*, http://www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/prog/blm_special_areas/NLCS.html; see U.S. Forest Serv., *Palisades Wilderness Study Area*, https://fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/fsbdev3_062637.pdf; U.S. Forest Serv., *Shoal Creek Wilderness Study Area*, https://fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/fsbdev3_063011.pdf; U.S. Forest Serv., *High Lakes Wilderness Study Area*, Shoshone Nat’l Forest Land Management Plan 137-138, available at http://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/stelprd3842886.pdf.

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The Wyoming County Commissioners Association (WCCA) is an organization consisting of the Boards of County Commissioners of all twenty-three Wyoming counties. The WCCA exists to strengthen the counties and the people who lead them through a program of networking, education, and unified action.