

FOREST SERVICE

P.O. Box 2417

Washington, D.C. 20013

August 26, 1977

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To: All those interested in National Forest Wilderness

Forest Service Chief, John McGuire, has asked that we provide you a copy of Assistant Secretary Cutler's most recent direction to us on wilderness management.

The enclosed memorandum, although not exhaustive, does serve to clarify some of the more important issues connected with National Forest wilderness management. As many of you know, there has been a good deal of misunderstanding about some of the management limitations as provided in the Act and Forest Service policy. We believe this should help clear up much of the misinformation and questions regarding the Department's and Forest Service's policy.

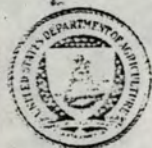
For those of you familiar with the Statement of Understanding between the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies and the Forest Service, we would emphasize that this policy direction does not constitute a change in the spirit of that understanding. Although the Assistant Secretary has reserved for himself the approval of certain actions, the cooperative arrangements between State Fish and Wildlife Directors and the Forest Service remains unchanged.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jane G. Smith, Jr.".

JANE G. SMITH, JR.

Director, Recreation Management



DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20250

Aug. 11, 1977

SUBJECT: Policy for Management of Wildernesses within the
National Forests

TO: Chief, Forest Service

The Department's wilderness management policy is not well understood. Some clarification is offered here, to gain broader awareness and acceptance of that policy. This is not an exhaustive list of practices or uses, but provides a statement of policy for the issues of most concern in managing National Forest wilderness.

The American people will be assured the benefits of an enduring resource of wilderness only if that wilderness resource is managed to protect its unique qualities. Wilderness management, to be effective, must have a basic set of objectives--applied uniformly, with latitude to adapt to the individual requirements of each area--which are understood and accepted both by Forest Service employees and the public.

The Department wilderness management objectives are:

- To maintain an enduring system of high-quality wilderness representative of all National Forest ecotypes;
- To perpetuate the wilderness resource for future generations;
- To the extent that it is consistent with the first two, to provide opportunities for public use, enjoyment, and understanding of wilderness and the unique experiences dependent upon a wilderness setting;
- To maintain plants and animals indigenous to the area by protecting the natural dynamic equilibrium associated with natural, complete ecosystems;
- To accommodate and administer those "nonconforming but accepted" uses provided in the Wilderness Act and subsequent Acts in a way to minimize their impacts;
- To maintain stable watersheds;
- To consider the special protection needs of endangered plant and animal species and their habitats.

Forest Service wilderness management policy must be applied uniformly. Each wilderness, however, requires its own specific direction. This individual need shall be set forth in a management plan for each area. Such plans are to be developed locally with substantial local and regional public participation. The policies and plans shall be applied so that each area retains its wilderness quality; i.e., is managed on a "nondegradation" concept.

Efforts may be made, in modest ways, to improve wilderness quality by restoring natural conditions; practices which would result in the degradation of that quality will not be allowed. There is no place for vista clearing or any other form of "enhancing natural beauty" in wilderness.

Professional skill; knowledge of the Wilderness Act, subsequent-related Acts of Congress, and USDA wilderness policies; good judgment; and public participation are essential components of wilderness management. The local manager should be given some latitude to apply common sense and practical interpretation to national management direction and policy.

GENERAL

Within wildernesses there shall be no timber harvesting, no manipulation of vegetation for watershed, wildlife, or forage purposes, and no use of motor vehicles, mechanical transport, motorized equipment, installations, or structures other than as specifically provided for by the Wilderness Act or as stated hereinafter.

VISITOR USE FACILITIES

Visitor use facilities are permissible only as needed to protect and manage the wilderness resources, and shall not be provided for the convenience of the visitor. Trails, built and maintained to the standard needed to protect the soil, water, and biological resources, may exist to properly distribute visitors throughout the wilderness. Bridges, made of native materials where possible, may be provided if their absence would subject the visitor to significant hazard or the riparian environment to unacceptable impact. Shelters will not be built, but those in place at the time of designation of the wilderness will be maintained until they need major rehabilitation or their use contributes to unacceptable impacts on soil, water, or biological resources, at which time they will be removed or destroyed. If necessary, to protect soil, water, biological, and wilderness resources, camping use may be restricted to designated sites; such sites may contain an identification marker and any facility specifically needed to protect the wilderness, such as a fire box in areas of extreme fire hazard. Existing, unsophisticated water sources such as hand pumps may be

retained and maintained. Pit or vault toilets serviced by nonmotorized or nonmechanical transport may be emplaced where human waste disposal problems cannot be corrected by dispersal or reasonable limitation of visitor numbers. "Brow logs" may be used to reduce erosion at boat landings. Other facilities such as, but not limited to, boat docks will not be built in wilderness. Such existing facilities will be phased out and removed within ten years of designation of the area as wilderness.

COMMERCIAL SERVICES

Commercial services needed for proper use and enjoyment of the wilderness are allowable under special use permits. Certain installations may be allowed for these services. Outfitter camp permits may provide for hitching racks and corrals made of native material. Such facilities should be designed to facilitate seasonal dismantling. The dismantling, however, can be waived provided use is intended during the next snowfree season and continued use of the location will not cause unacceptable impacts on soil, water, and biological resources. If a permittee was authorized to emplace or use tent frames with board flooring, wood siding, or built-in bunks--not generally of a temporary nature nor ordinarily permitted--in the season prior to wilderness designation, he may continue use until the facility needs replacement or major rehabilitation or their continued use would cause unacceptable impacts on soil, water, or biological resources. New installations of this nature will not be authorized in wilderness.

EMERGENCIES AND ADMINISTRATION

Emergency use of motorized vehicles and equipment and mechanical transport may be made by the Forest Service for search and rescue, fighting forest fires, or insect and disease epidemics. Nonemergency use should occur only in unquestionable instances of wilderness management need by the Forest Service or cooperating agency. Proposed uses of chemicals for control of outbreaks of insects and diseases must be approved by the Assistant Secretary.

Hydrometeorological devices existing when the area is designated may remain so long as the operating agency agrees to convert to miniaturized equipment, adequately camouflaged, each time a device needs replacement. State game and fish agencies may conduct fish-stocking programs approved by the Forest Service, using aerial drops on those waters where such aerial stocking was in practice prior to wilderness designation. State agencies, reintroducing animals in a project approved by the Forest Service, may use mechanical transport, including helicopter, only upon a determination by the Assistant Secretary that the reintroduction is desirable and that no practical alternative mode of transportation exists.

NONCONFORMING, BUT ACCEPTED, USES

The Wilderness Act provides that certain uses, generally considered as "nonconforming" to wilderness environments, may continue in wildernesses. Where grazing had been established before designation and is continuing, installations and improvements for grazing are permissible only as needed to protect wilderness resources--including soil, water, and biological resources. Where the use of aircraft and motorboats had become established prior to designation as wilderness, their continued use may be permitted at locations, times, and in such manner as is provided in the management plan for that wilderness, so long as that plan concludes that such continued use is necessary and proper for use of the wilderness. Hunting and fishing shall be in accordance with applicable State and Federal laws and regulations. There may be wilderness locations so popular with nonhunters during the hunting season that hunting closures by the State agency should be negotiated for limited areas less popular with hunters in order to provide autumn wilderness experiences for both hunters and nonhunters.

The establishment of new water projects or parts of projects may be permitted only upon specific authorization of the President. Existing water developments will either be made as esthetically compatible as possible with the wilderness environment or removed. Maintenance of such existing developments will be by primitive tools unless case-by-case authorization is granted by the Regional Office for motorized maintenance methods.

PHILOSOPHICAL BASIS OF WILDERNESS POLICY

As writer Michael Frome notes in Whose Woods These Are: The Story of the National Forest, "the modern concept of wilderness was born and reached fruition in the Forest Service." Aldo Leopold, who won creation of the Gila Wilderness in 1924, the Nation's first, stated that "the administration of the National Forests of America has for its real purpose the perpetuation of life--human, plant, and animal life."

Leopold is credited with considering the predicted timber famine "a matter of quality rather than quantity," and suggested that "the emphasis on logging under intensive forestry be limited to richer, accessible forest regions, capable of producing high-quality timber, while dedicating remaining regions to various forms of recreation, game management, and wilderness."

While Leopold introduced the wilderness idea and was responsible for establishing the first area in New Mexico, Robert Marshall brought the concept to maturity during his career as Director of Recreation in the Forest Service. Marshall developed the administrative regulations under which the Forest Service proceeded, on its own, to protect over 14 million acres of National Forest land as "wilderness," "wild," or "primitive" areas, prior to congressional passage of the Wilderness Act of 1964.

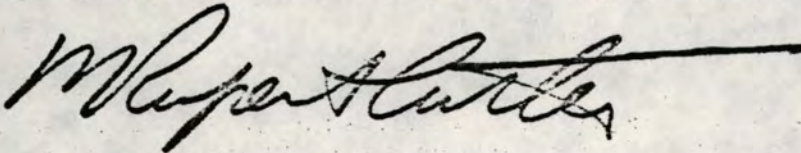
The Forest Service should be proud of its leading role in wilderness administration. Forest officers engaged in wilderness administration today should be guided by their predecessors' wise counsel:

Leopold: "Recreation is valuable in proportion to the intensity of its experiences, and to the degree to which it differs from and contrasts with workaday life. By these criteria, mechanized outings are at best a milk-and-water affair. Recreation is not their only, or even their principal, utility. Ability to see the cultural value of wilderness boils down, in the last analysis, to a question of intellectual humility. Raw wilderness gives definition and meaning to the human enterprise."

Marshall: "The National Forest System is uniquely fit to provide two distinct vacation environments: One, the comfortable and modern; two, the peaceful timelessness where vast forests germinate and flourish and die and rot and grow again without relationship to the ambitions and interferences of man."

These observations are as valid today as when they were made, and the value of wilderness will increase as our society becomes more dependent upon complex technology.

Let's continue our record of excellence in wilderness administration through uniform application of these policy guidelines.



M. RUPERT CUTLER
Assistant Secretary for Conservation,
Research, and Education