

Castillo (202) 447-4211  
McDavid (202) 447-4026

# NEWS

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

## FOREST SERVICE TO STUDY ADDITIONAL WILDERNESS AREAS:

WASHINGTON, Oct. 15—Responding to more than 8,000 public comments, the U.S. Department of Agriculture today added 39 areas covering more than one million acres to its National Wilderness Preservation System study area.

The Department now will look at 274 National Forest areas covering 12,289,000 acres in 14 states and Puerto Rico for possible inclusion in the wilderness system, John R. McGuire, chief of USDA's Forest Service announced.

An initial list announced last January covered 235 areas and 11 million acres.

Public response and other factors led to the increase in both numbers of areas and acres, Chief McGuire said.

All but three of the 274 areas are in the West. The eastern areas to be studied are 22,000 acres in Bradwell Bay National Forest in Florida, 14,935 acres in Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock National Forest in North Carolina and 8,488 acres in El Cacicque National Forest in Puerto Rico. In addition, Congress is considering legislation for other additions to the eastern wilderness system, Mr. McGuire said.

Acreage in each of six of the western states--Alaska, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Washington and Wyoming--exceeds one million acres. The greatest study acreage in any one state is the 2.5 million acres in Alaska, which presently has no designated wilderness.

Studies have already started on some of the areas, but the bulk of the project will be delayed until after other studies have been completed on Forest Service primitive areas, Mr. McGuire said. Congress has required that studies of 34 National Forest primitive areas for possible inclusion in the wilderness system be completed by September 1974. Mr. McGuire said the study process on the new study areas will be



completed as rapidly as possible, but will be contingent upon availability of funds and manpower to complete the task.

He also reported that still other areas may be considered for possible study during the normal land-use planning process by each National Forest.

There are 56 million acres of roadless and undeveloped areas in the National Forests which could be considered for the wilderness system.

Mr. McGuire said areas selected will be managed to preserve their wilderness characteristics. The moratorium on development activities which would threaten wilderness values will continue until studies are completed and determination is made whether or not the areas will be classified as units of the national wilderness system.

At the present time, the wilderness system contains 11 million acres, 10.7 million of which are contained in 67 Congressionally established wilderness in National Forests. The remaining 300,000 acres of the system are in National Parks or National Wildlife Refuges.

The Forest Service's new list of study areas and environmental statement climax two years of inventory, review and evaluation. The process involved more than 300 public meetings attended by over 25,000 people to compile the initial list for the draft statement. The 8,000 written comments and suggestions since January were focused on the initial list and the draft statement.

A 690-page final environmental impact statement on the study areas went to the Council on Environmental Quality today.

The states with wilderness study areas, the number of study areas in each state, and the acres covered by the study areas follows:

Alaska, 6 study areas, 2,567,000 acres; Arizona, 20 areas, 398,537 acres; California, 22 areas, 990,910 acres; Colorado, 52 areas, 1,768,165 acres; Florida, 1 area, 22,000 acres; Idaho, 33 areas, 1,627,649 acres; Montana, 36 areas, 1,551,589 acres; Nevada, 7 areas, 184,511 acres; New Mexico, 24 areas, 426,994 acres; North Carolina, 1 area, 14,935 acres; Oregon, 12 areas, 262,020 acres; Puerto Rico, 1 area, 8,488 acres; Utah, 11 areas, 355,965 acres; Washington, 25 areas, 1,022,120 acres, and Wyoming, 29 areas, 1,092,961 acres.

The state listings of study areas totals more than the actual number of study areas, because some study areas embrace more than one state. However, the acreages listed are totals for all areas and parts of areas within individual states.