

FACT SHEET



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PRESERVING WILDERNESS AREAS

Wilderness is defined by the federal Wilderness Act as "an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain ... which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions." Consistent with this definition, the Izaak Walton League places great importance on protecting wilderness areas.

PROTECTION

The League has fought to protect wilderness areas across the nation since the 1920s. In 1964, we helped to pass the landmark Wilderness Act, which gave statutory protection to wilderness areas. Since then, the National Wilderness Preservation System has grown to 107 million acres.

Despite federal protection, wilderness areas still face several threats. One is from unmanaged or improperly managed recreation. Incompatible uses like motorboats or airplanes make it extremely difficult in some wilderness areas for managers to protect its wilderness character. Wilderness areas are also threatened by poor stewardship by understaffed agencies, as well as local political pressures to open up these areas for logging, drilling, and other uses.

Through reports, advocacy, education, and even occasional lawsuits, the League works to head off these threats. For example, when oil companies began pressuring the government to expand drilling during the energy crisis of the 1970s, the League led efforts to pass the 1980 Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act, which gave formal wilderness designation and protection to 56 million acres of federal land in Alaska. More recently, in Minnesota, we have been working to strengthen enforcement of regulations prohibiting snowmobile access to the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness.

DESIGNATION

In addition to protecting designated wilderness areas, the League also works to establish new wilderness areas established. Recently, we played a significant role in the designation of 80 percent of the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore in Wisconsin as wilderness. This area, home to pristine old-growth boreal forests and numerous wildlife species, is now Wisconsin's largest protected wilderness. We are currently working in Pennsylvania to set aside 54,000 acres of the Allegheny National Forest as wilderness, which would provide a retreat for the roughly 150 million Americans living within a day's drive of the area. And in South Dakota, we are working to designate 70,000 acres of the Buffalo Gap National Grassland as the nation's first ever grassland wilderness.

LEARN MORE ABOUT OUR WILDERNESS AND PUBLIC LANDS PROGRAM

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