



Wilderness Character

What is Wilderness Character?

The Wilderness Act defines wilderness, in part, as, “...an area of undeveloped Federal land retaining its primeval character and influence...”. Although there is not a definition in the Act of exactly what primeval character is, land managers across different agencies have, through the intent of the Act, defined wilderness character through four tangible qualities that are practical to wilderness stewardship.

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The Four Qualities of Wilderness Character

“An area where the earth and its community of life are **untrammelled** by man,” and “generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature.” In short, wilderness is essentially free from modern human control or manipulation.

Natural areas are “protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions.” They are wilderness ecological systems substantially free from the effects of modern civilization.

“An area of **undeveloped** Federal land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation,” “where man himself is a visitor who does not remain,” and “with the imprint of man’s work substantially unnoticeable.”

“Outstanding opportunities for **solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation**.” This quality is about the opportunity for visitors to experience separation from people and civilization, connection with nature, a sense of timelessness, and the physical and mental challenge associated with adventure.

However, each of these qualities of wilderness character can be degraded by modern, human activities.

These four qualities together comprise an approximation of wilderness character for wilderness planning, stewardship, and monitoring.