



Wilderness & Backcountry Stewardship Plan 2012 Newsletter

From the Superintendent:

Dear Friends,

The National Park Service is preparing a plan to manage the wilderness areas of El Malpais National Monument. The purpose of the plan is to provide the vision, stewardship goals, objectives, monitoring standards, and implementation strategies to preserve and protect the characteristics that comprise wilderness lands at El Malpais, while providing for the enjoyment of those lands by the public. The plan will address lands that are recommended for wilderness designation, lands determined as potential wilderness, and undeveloped backcountry lands that are not within the wilderness boundaries. A map of the monument's wilderness area and a set of the draft plan objectives are included in this newsletter.

The Wilderness and Backcountry Stewardship Plan will be prepared with an Environmental Assessment, in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act. A range of alternative management

scenarios and the potential impacts associated with those scenarios will be included in the plan and environmental assessment. Your participation in the planning process is essential to the preparation of a successful Wilderness and Backcountry Stewardship Plan. This newsletter serves to provide you information about the planning process, as well as to invite you to share your thoughts about wilderness and wilderness stewardship at El Malpais National Monument. I invite you to submit your written comments by April 1, 2012, and I look forward to working with you in this endeavor to preserve and protect our wilderness and the many unique resources within it.

Sincerely,

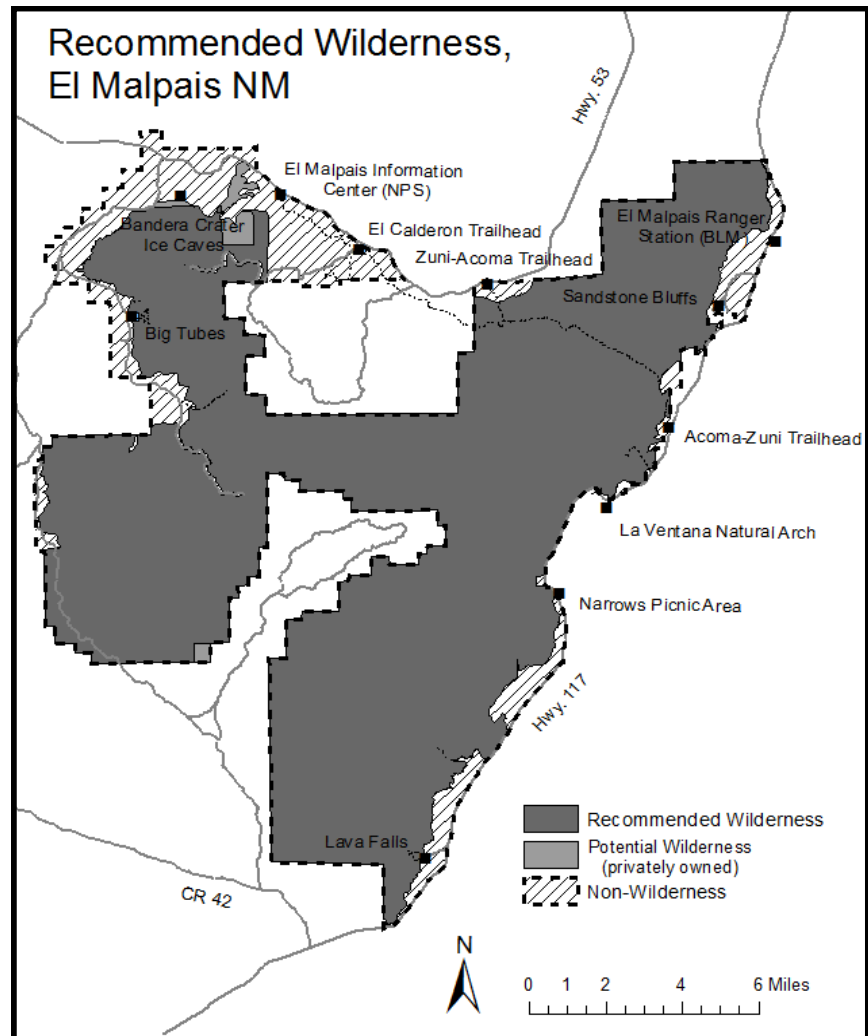
Kayci Cook Collins
Superintendent,
El Malpais National Monument



The purpose of the El Malpais Wilderness and Backcountry Stewardship Plan is to guide the monument in managing the wilderness resource and backcountry areas in the monument; to preserve the wilderness's natural and cultural resources, scenic beauty, and wilderness character; and to provide for the enjoyment of wilderness by the public. The plan will serve as a public document as well as a working guide for staff that explains a wilderness stewardship vision, goals and objectives, standards, and actions taken to preserve and protect wilderness at El Malpais National Monument.

About the Monument

El Malpais National Monument, located in northwestern New Mexico within Cibola County, was established in 1987 (P.L. 100-225) "...to preserve, for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations, that area in western New Mexico containing the nationally significant Grants Lava Flow, the Las Ventanas Chacoan Archeological Site, and other significant natural and cultural resources." The monument includes a diverse volcanic-derived landscape and extensive lava tube system. The monument is almost entirely surrounded by the 261,800 acre El Malpais National Conservation area, administered by the Bureau of Land Management, which contains the Cebolla Wilderness Area (60,000 acres), the West Malpais Wilderness Area (38,210 acres), and the Chain of Craters Wilderness Study Area (17,468 acres). The Continental Divide National Scenic Trail runs through both the monument and conservation area.



What is "Wilderness?"

Wilderness is a federal designation for land that qualifies, under the Wilderness Act of 1964, as:

"...an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain. An area of wilderness is further defined to mean in this Act an area of undeveloped Federal land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions and which (1) generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man's

work substantially unnoticeable; (2) has outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation; (3) has at least five thousand acres of land or is of sufficient size as to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition; and (4) may also contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value."

Today there are 757 wilderness areas in the United States totaling approximately 109,512,959 acres. Alaska contains 57,425,910 of the total acres, which is about 16% of the state. About 5% of the U.S. is protected as Wilderness.

Wilderness at El Malpais

As directed by the monument's enabling legislation, the 1990 El Malpais General Management Plan recommended the suitability or non-suitability for wilderness of all roadless areas of the monument, except those lands within the areas identified as "potential development areas." Today, approximately 85% (97,428 acres) of the monument is managed as wilderness. Other areas within the monument boundaries that did not meet the criteria for wilderness suitability but are undeveloped are classified as backcountry. Backcountry areas also include inholdings of privately-owned land and roads.

Significant Qualities of Wilderness Lands at El Malpais

Wilderness lands at El Malpais National Monument contain significant qualities that distinguish them from other lands. The NPS staff have summarized these qualities in four statements:

- The vast extent of the rugged, volcanic terrain offers unmatched challenges of navigation.
- Naturally shielded from contemporary development, the diverse cultural heritage of the region has uniquely shaped the human experience in El Malpais.
- The diversity of lava flows presents a wide range of landscape and terrain, resulting in opportunities for many levels of physical challenges, risks, and personal rewards.
- The different lava flows define unique natural systems and processes, producing extraordinary assemblages of kipukas, lava tubes and caves that provide a variety of wilderness experiences and inspire scientific exploration and visitor discovery.

Issues and Opportunities

Wilderness and Backcountry Stewardship

- What resource protection, visitor use, and experience opportunities are appropriate in wilderness and backcountry areas?

Neighboring Agencies

- How can wilderness management be best coordinated with adjacent BLM wilderness lands, given each agency's mission?

Cultural Resources

- What concerns do American Indian nations have regarding traditional use and access to traditional cultural properties?
- How could the protection of cultural resources contribute to wilderness values?

Caves

- How should the monument's caves, along with their associated natural resources, be protected while allowing for a wilderness experience?

Route Delineation

- How should popular routes be marked without compromising visitor safety, solitude, or the undeveloped quality of the wilderness?

Education

- How can we foster public understanding and support of wilderness values?

Draft Plan Objectives

- Provide for consistent stewardship of the monument's wilderness resource on a short and long-term basis and ensure decisions are based on sound science.
- Provide guidance for staff in the application of wilderness stewardship and integration of wilderness stewardship goals into other park management activities.
- Establish a wilderness monitoring program by which individual indicators of wilderness values can be evaluated.
- Establish a process for determining the least disruptive actions and tools necessary to accomplish stewardship goals.
- Ensure the consistency of the monument's wilderness program through coordination with agency policies and best practices.
- Coordinate with adjacent land stewardship agencies to provide continuity in managing the natural and cultural resources of the wilderness and surrounding area.
- Develop and implement a public education program to promote wilderness appreciation, wilderness ethics, and Leave No Trace skills.
- Facilitate appropriate public use of the wilderness.
- Provide public opportunities to participate in the development of stewardship decisions affecting wilderness preservation.
- Continue to identify unknown wilderness, cultural, historical, ecological, geological, or other outstanding and remarkable features.





National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

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El Malpais

National Monument

We want to hear from you!

Now that you have an idea of what the El Malpais wilderness is all about, we want to hear your thoughts on how we should manage this unique resource. Please submit comments, ideas, concerns, or questions to the NPS planning documents forum at **parkplanning.nps.gov** (click on the El Malpais Wilderness Stewardship Plan in the list of documents). Alternatively, you can send mail to El Malpais National Monument, 123 East Roosevelt Avenue, Grants, New Mexico 87020. Please submit your comments by April 1, 2012. If you have specific questions that you would like to discuss in detail, please feel free to call our office at (505) 285-4641.

