Why Wilderness?

"In order... that an increasing population, accompanied by expanding settlement and growing mechanization, does not occupy and modify all areas within the United States…

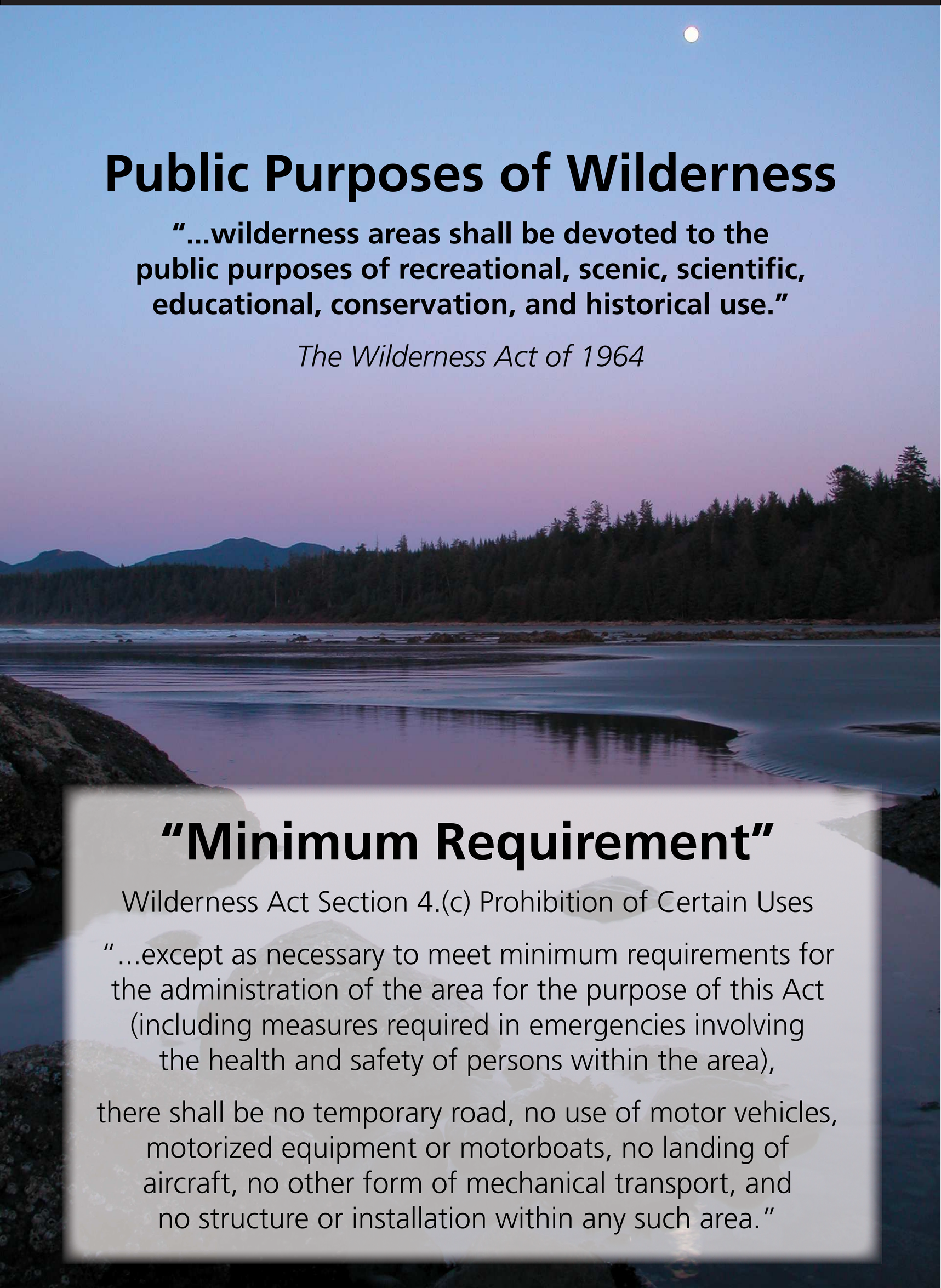
it is hereby declared to be the policy of the Congress to secure for the American people of present and future generations the benefits of an enduring resource of wilderness."

The Wilderness Act of 1964

What is Wilderness?

- 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 undeveloped Federal land retaining its primeval character and influence
- Without permanent improvements or human habitation
- Protected and managed to preserve its natural conditions

The Wilderness Act of 1964



Public Purposes of Wilderness

"...wilderness areas shall be devoted to the public purposes of recreational, scenic, scientific, educational, conservation, and historical use."

The Wilderness Act of 1964

"Minimum Requirement"

Wilderness Act Section 4.(c) Prohibition of Certain Uses

"...except as necessary to meet minimum requirements for the administration of the area for the purpose of this Act (including measures required in emergencies involving the health and safety of persons within the area),

there shall be no temporary road, no use of motor vehicles, motorized equipment or motorboats, no landing of aircraft, no other form of mechanical transport, and no structure or installation within any such area."

Olympic Wilderness Designation

"By today's wilderness quality scale, the Olympic wilderness is superb – possessing the classic attributes of high mountain rugged character, alpine lakes, rivers and streams, forests and meadows, abundant and diverse wildlife, and a sense of remoteness. This wilderness quality was one of the main reasons Olympic was established as a national park."

Wilderness Recommendation, April 1974

President Ronald Reagan signed the Washington Park Wilderness Act into law on November 16, 1988 designating 95% of Olympic National Park as the "Olympic Wilderness".

"Olympic's wilderness values are superlative... These wilderness lands are of inestimable value and their unique qualities emerge as among the most precious of the park's resources. Their designation has secured for the American people the inheritance of a near-pristine, naturally functioning ecosystem for each succeeding generation to protect and enjoy."

Olympic National Park General Management Plan, August 2008

Park's Wilderness Responsibility

Each agency administering wilderness shall be responsible for preserving the wilderness character of the area and shall so administer such area for such other purposes for which it may have been established as also to preserve its wilderness character.

The Wilderness Act of 1964

Wilderness Character is:

"...the combination of biophysical, experiential, and symbolic ideals that distinguishes wilderness from other lands."

Keeping It Wild, 2008

Key Elements of Wilderness Character

- It is composed of four universal qualities that uniquely apply to every wilderness
- It also includes a fifth quality for other, unique values specific to that wilderness
- All qualities of wilderness character are equally important and inter-related
- Stewardship decisions to take or not take action affect these qualities

Natural Quality

Wilderness ecological systems are substantially free from the effects of modern civilization.

This quality is preserved or improved when natural conditions including endangered, threatened, or rare species, biological diversity, and self-regulating ecosystems are sustained or restored.

Native vegetation

Natural disturbance

Flowing water

Decomposition

Native wildlife

The natural quality is degraded by:

Air pollutants

Extirpated native animals and plants

Presence of non-indigenous species

Altered disturbance regimes

Untrammeled Quality

Wilderness is essentially unhindered and free from the intentional actions of modern human control or manipulation. The untrammeled quality is important...for its symbolic meanings and values to individuals and society.

This quality is supported or preserved when activities or actions that intentionally control or manipulate the components or processes of ecological systems inside wilderness are not taken.

The untrammeled quality is degraded by:

Authorized actions that manipulate, control, or hinder the "community of life"

Lighting or Suppressing Fire

Collaring Wildlife

Stocking Fish and Wildlife

Unauthorized actions that manipulate, control, or hinder the "community of life"

Wildlife Poaching

Killing Predators

Beach Debris

Undeveloped Quality

Wilderness retains its primeval character and influence, and is essentially without permanent improvement or modern human occupation. The undeveloped quality preserves places from "expanding settlement and growing mechanization".

This quality is preserved by the absence of structures and installations, and refraining from the prohibited uses.

The undeveloped quality is degraded by:

Non-recreational structures or installations

Use of motor vehicles, motorized equipment, or mechanical transport

Landing of aircraft

Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation Quality

The solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation quality offers important personal benefits and meanings.

Primitive recreation and the use of traditional skills

Personal challenge and self-discovery

Freedom from the constraints of culture

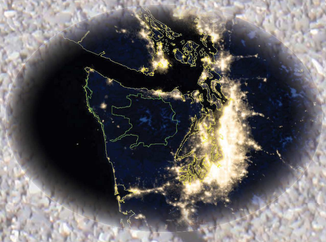
This quality is preserved or improved by management actions that reduce visitor encounters, signs of modern civilization inside wilderness, agency-provided recreation facilities, and management restrictions on visitor behavior.

This quality is degraded by:

Management restrictions on visitor behavior

Sights and sounds of people inside wilderness

External sights and sounds that affect wilderness

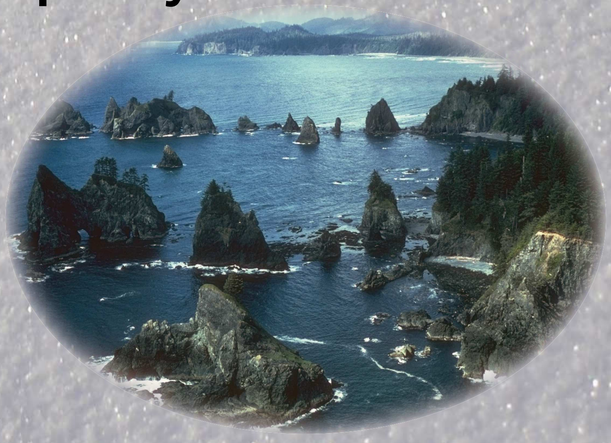


Facilities that decrease self-reliant recreation

Other Features of Value

Wilderness preserves other tangible features that are of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value.

This quality is based on the last clause of Section 2(c) of the Wilderness Act which states that a wilderness "may also contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value."

This quality captures important elements of the wilderness that aren't covered in the other four qualities, such as cultural or paleontological resources.

This quality is preserved or improved when these resources are preserved. Loss of or impacts to such features degrade this quality.