



The Wilderness Act of 1964 and the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act of 1980

Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act of 1980

The Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act of 1980 (ANILCA) set aside huge amounts of land for conservation purposes in Alaska. Wrangell-St. Elias National Park & Preserve, including 9.5 million acres of wilderness, were established under ANILCA. In addition to creating conservation areas across Alaska, ANILCA provided a way to address the ongoing land ownership issues across Alaska. Today within Wrangell-St. Elias we see a mosaic of land ownership, including private inholdings, native corporation lands, and State of Alaska lands.



How the Wilderness Act and ANILCA fit together

The Wilderness Act and ANILCA have many intertwined provisions and purposes. ANILCA affirms that “...wilderness designated by this Act shall be administered under the applicable provisions of the Wilderness Act governing areas designated by this Act as wilderness...” (Section 707). While adding many provisions on how wilderness in Alaska is managed, ANILCA asserts that the values and purpose of wilderness remain unchanged. The Wilderness Act and ANILCA are thus complementary, wherein both laws shape the on-the-ground management of some of the most remote and wild places in Alaska.



Alaskan Wilderness

ANILCA recognized the differences between wilderness in Alaska and that of the continental United States. Given Alaska’s remote, rugged and extreme terrain, with a long tradition of Native Alaskans living on the land, ANILCA provided for uses and purposes that are generally not allowed in designated wilderness outside of Alaska. Some of the exceptions provided in ANILCA that pertain to wilderness management and this plan are summarized below.

- **Subsistence uses** — continued opportunities to engage in a subsistence way of life are allowed, and subsistence is established as a priority consumptive use of fish and wildlife and other renewable resources on public lands (Section 802(1)). The continued opportunity for subsistence is affirmed as essential to physical, economic, traditional, social and cultural existence of Native and non-native Alaskan residents (Section 801(1)).
- **Access** — rural residents shall be given reasonable access to subsistence resources. The appropriate use of snowmobiles, motorboats, and other means of surface transportation traditionally employed for such purposes by local residents for subsistence purposes is allowed in Alaskan wilderness, subject to reasonable regulation (Section 811(a)(b)).
- **Motorized transport**—The use of snowmachines, motorboats, airplanes, and non-motorized surface transportation methods for traditional activities, and for travel to and from villages and homesites are permitted (Section 1110(a)). Access to inholdings that is adequate and feasible shall be provided, subject to reasonable regulation (Section 1110(b)).
- **Cabins** — cabins and other structures may be used to support subsistence uses (Section 1303(a)), traditional and customary uses (Section 1303(b)), commercial fishing in Wrangell-St. Elias (Section 205), and taking of fish and wildlife (Section 1316(a)). Some cabins in National Park units have been made available for public use under Section 1315(c), but new public use cabins may only be constructed in designated wilderness if necessary for the protection of public health and safety (Section 1315(d)).



The list of provisions and rules in ANILCA is extensive. This list only addresses some of the more prominent points that relate to this Backcountry and Wilderness Stewardship Plan. Even then, this list provides only a small window into the regulatory framework with which this plan must comply.

The Wilderness Act of 1964

The Wilderness Act was passed in a time of expansive development in the continental United States—the national highway system was expanding and previously wild lands were being developed at unprecedented rates. The Wilderness Act responded to popular fears that no wild places would remain and was enacted to preserve the wildest lands in the U.S. “...for the use and enjoyment of the American people...by present and future generations” (Section 2(a)).

Under the Wilderness Act, land managers are required to preserve the wilderness character of the area. An area’s unique wilderness character includes its:

- Undeveloped quality with few permanent developments on the landscape;
- Opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation;
- Natural ecosystems;
- Untrammeled quality where the area is free from intentional manipulations of the environment.

The Wilderness Act also created some restrictions on use in wilderness with the aim to preserve the qualities described above for future generations. These include:

- Motorized use, motor vehicles, and mechanical transport;
- Permanent or temporary roads;
- Structures or installations;
- Commercial services, which may be conducted to the extent necessary for the administration of the area as wilderness.

