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Wilderness and RARE II

Background on National Wilderness Preservation System

The wilderness concept was born within the U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service in 1924, with the administrative designation of the Gila Wilderness on the Gila National Forest in New Mexico. The system grew through administratively designated wilderness, wild and primitive areas to a total of 88 units containing 14.6 million acres by 1964.

The Wilderness Act of 1964 designated 54 National Forest System areas comprising 9.1 million acres as wilderness. It also required a study of each of the 34 National Forest primitive areas (5.5 million acres) with a report to Congress as to their suitability or nonsuitability as wilderness by 1974. Included in the provisions of the Wilderness Act was a requirement for the Secretary of the Interior to study suitable areas under his jurisdiction in the National Park and National Wildlife Refuge System. Numerous areas have been designated wilderness as a result of these study provisions with a number still under consideration by the Congress. At present the National Wilderness Preservation System contains the following units:

	Units		
Forest Service, USDA	110	15,257,135	(80.2%)
National Park Service, USDI	25	2,975,197	(15.6%)
Fish & Wildlife Service, USDI	52	771,307	(4.1%)
Bureau of Land Management, USDI	3	12,459	(0.1%)
Total	190	19,016,098	

In addition to the areas designated or pending before Congress, the Congress has designated certain additional areas for study. Also the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 directed the Secretary of the Interior within 15 years to review roadless areas administered by the Bureau of Land Management. This review is currently underway. Congress also has before them the Alaska lands legislation in which the designation of wilderness is one of the major considerations.

Review of National Forest System Lands

In order to assure that suitable National Forest System areas were not overlooked as potential candidates for consideration as wilderness, the USDA Forest Service undertook an inventory and evaluation process of the National Forest System in 1971. This Roadless Area Review and Evaluation (RARE) identified 56 million acres of roadless areas on the National Forests in 1,449 areas. The evaluation process identified 274 areas involving 12.3 million acres that should be studied further to determine if they should be recommended for wilderness or allocated to other purposes.

Concern began to be expressed that the land management planning process involving all 274 areas might be too slow. In addition there was concern that some areas might have been overlooked and that the RARE did not adequately inventory the eastern National Forests and the National Grasslands.

As a result of these concerns, the Secretary of Agriculture initiated RARE II, an acceleration of a part of the land management planning process to determine how much of the National Forest System should be recommended as wilderness, those lands that needed further planning, and lands to be managed for uses other than wilderness.

Roadless Area Review and Evaluation (RARE II)

Rare II is a comprehensive process, instituted in June 1977, to identify roadless and undeveloped land areas in the National Forest System and to determine their general uses for both wilderness and other resource management and development. The RARE II process identified 2,919 roadless areas encompassing 62 million acres in National Forests and National Grasslands in 38 States and Puerto Rico. The process led to recommendations or allocation of each of these areas to wilderness, for multiple uses other than wilderness (hereinafter referred to as nonwilderness), or as needing further planning for all uses, including wilderness. The nonwilderness category includes different mixes of multiple uses other than wilderness, including but not limited to those permitting campground and other recreation site development, timber harvest, intensive range management, and road construction on the one hand, and relatively primitive wildlife habitat, watershed, and vegetation manipulation on the other. The specific multiple use direction is established and periodically updated in land and resource management plans.

Extensive as this project of public land allocation has been, it is still part of the broad planning direction for all Forest Service activities laid out by Congress in the Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974 and the National Forest Management Act of 1976.

The roadless area inventory phase of the RARE II process was completed in the fall of 1977, after massive involvement of the public. The public was asked to suggest additions to or deletions from an inventory of roadless

areas, and to suggest criteria which should be used to evaluate those areas for wilderness and nonwilderness use. More than 50,000 persons responded with comments and suggestions.

Based on this response and other resource information, a draft environmental statement was filed with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and issued to the public on June 15, 1978. It included a series of alternatives for allocation of the inventoried areas, and the public was asked to comment on three things: (1) what individual areas should be allocated to wilderness, nonwilderness, or further planning, and why; (2) what approaches should be used by the Department in reaching a decision on allocating the total roadless areas inventory; and (3) what decision criteria should be used in developing a proposed course of action. The public response exceeded expectations. More than 264,000 replies from almost 360,000 people were received. Included in this response was comments from members of Congress, State Government, and Federal agencies. That response, as well as exising laws and regulations, was used to help develop the proposed action described in the RARE II Final Environmental Statement.

The Final Environmental Statement was released on January 4, 1979. It recommended 15.1 million acres for wilderness classification. It allocated 36.1 million acres for nonwilderness and 10.8 million acres for further planning.

Following the release of the Final Environmental Statement in January, affected members of Congress, Governors, and other Federal agencies were asked to provide comments on the recommendations by March 15. During the period between March 15 and April 15 a final review occurred within the Administration which led to the President's decision.