

Wet Beaver Creek Wilderness Addition

The Grand Canyon Wildlands Council supports the Arizona Wilderness Coalition's proposed Walker Mountain Wilderness. In addition and based upon preliminary field surveys, **we propose an enlarged Wet Beaver Creek Wilderness consisting of approximately 16,000 acres** of suitable, contiguous lands including Walker Mountain IRA.

The eastern Upper Verde River watershed, especially the canyons of West Clear Creek and Wet Beaver Creek, provides relatively intact, biologically significant core and wildlife movement corridors through a landscape generally fragmented by roads and other impacts. The canyons are critical anchors for biodiversity on the Coconino Forest. Their long, linear shapes and arterial patterns make them unique. By physically and ecologically connecting habitats, riparian areas can significantly influence ecological processes and functions on a landscape level and contribute immensely to the connectivity of landscapes (Barnes 2005). The proposed addition to Wet Beaver Creek Wilderness provides significant wildlife core and connectivity between these two canyons. The long-term protection as wilderness will facilitate movement of many native species (Harris et al. 1996). For example, various species from black bears to forest-dependant birds successfully use well-buffered stream zones (Harris et al. 1996, Hannon et al. 2002).

With its emphasis on protecting and restoring all natural processes, wilderness designation provides the highest level of protection for the full range of native species (Hendee and Mattson 2002). Although administratively designated roadless areas (e.g., wildlife habitat areas and inventoried roadless areas) provide essential ecological protection of wildlife habitat, the agency historically has sacrificed roadless areas and wildlife protection in favor of resource extraction and motorized recreation (Forest Service 2000; Crist and Wilmer 2002; Crist et al. in review; Concerned Scientists 2004; DellaSala and Forst 2001; DeVelice and Martin; Heilman et al 2002; Loucks et al. 2003; Noss and Cooperidder 1994; Noon et al. 2003; Strittholt and DellaSalla 2001). The passage of the 1964 Wilderness Act was Congress's response to federal land management agencies' failure to protect these values (Frome 1997). While lands qualifying for wilderness designation (approximately 71,258 acres)¹ constitute less than four percent of the 1.8 million-acre Coconino National Forest, the proposed wilderness addition would permanently protect critical wildlife linkages and important core refugia.

¹ This figure includes ten areas currently proposed for the Coconino National Forest: East Clear Creek (north and south units): 4,165 acres; Barbershop Canyon: 10,430 acres; Jack's Canyon: 3,632 acres; Yeager Canyon: 3,800 acres; Padre Canyon: 9,425 acres; Boulder Canyon: 4,550; Cimarron Hills: 5,299 acres; Hackberry Mountain: 17,872 acres; Walker Mountain: 6,377 acres; and Mogollon Wilderness: approximately 25,000 acres (5,708 acres on the Coconino).

Boundary Description:

Beginning at the intersection of the Wet Beaver Wilderness boundary and the 4000-foot contour on the south bank of Wet Beaver Creek (section 23; T15N; R6E); continue in a westerly direction along the 4000-foot contour to its intersection with the private section in section 22 (Beaver Creek Ranch); then due south along the eastern boundary of the private section; then due west along the southern boundary of the private section to its intersection with the 4200-foot contour; then in a southerly direction along the 4200-foot contour to its intersection with the Walker Mountain IRA boundary in section 34 (T15N; R6E) in Walker Creek drainage; then along the IRA boundary in a southerly then easterly direction to its intersection with the south fork of the Mulcarie Tank-Bald Hill Tank No. 2 drainage (section 25; T14N; R6E); then in an easterly direction along the south fork drainage to its intersection with FS 214 1/10 mile east of Bald Hill Tank No. 2; then in a northeasterly direction along FS 214 to its intersection with FS 9246J section 14; T14N; R8E); then in a northerly direction along FS 9246J to its intersection with the 5900-foot contour on the north side of North Fork Long Canyon (section 2; T14N; R8E; West of Big Hill); then along the 5900-foot contour in northerly direction to its intersection with FS 214C/Roundup Basin Tank road; then in a westerly direction along Roundup Basin Tank road to its intersection with the 5700-foot contour at Roundup Basin Tank; then in a northerly direction along the 5700-foot contour to its intersection with the Wet Beaver Creek Wilderness.

Wilderness Evaluation

The Forest Service is required to evaluate wilderness quality lands during the Forest Plan revision process due to the clear direction specified in the Arizona Wilderness Act of 1984 [Public Law 98-406 Section 103(b)(2)] and as follows:

*...with respect to the national forest system lands in the State of Arizona which were reviewed...in the second roadless areas review and evaluation...the Department of Agriculture shall not be required to review the wilderness option prior to the revision of the plans, **but shall review the wilderness option when the plans are revised**, which revisions will ordinarily occur on a ten-year cycle, or at least every fifteen years, unless, prior to such time the Secretary of Agriculture finds that conditions in a unit have significantly changed (emphasis added).*

The National Forest Management Act requires that, “roadless areas within the National Forest System shall be evaluated and considered for recommendation as potential wilderness areas during the forest planning process

(36 CFR 219.17, 1982). This requirement includes the existing nine Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRAs) located on the forest.

Coconino National Forest Inventoried Roadless Areas

Area	Inventoried Roadless Area Acreage
Leonard Canyon	Approximately 7,000
East Clear Creek	1,730
Barbershop	1,290
Jacks Canyon	776 and 2,856
Padre Canyon	9,910
Boulder Canyon	4,550
Cimarron Hills	5,299
Hackberry Mountain	17,872
Walker Mountain	6,377

In addition, the Forest Service Manual provides direction that wilderness shall be taken into account during Forest Plan Revisions. Contained within chapter 1920- Land Management Planning, section 1923- Wilderness Evaluation, the first sentence states "Consideration of wilderness suitability is inherent in land management planning." The Wilderness Evaluation section under section 1923.03, the manual continues:

Unless otherwise provided by law, all roadless, undeveloped areas that satisfy the definition of wilderness found in section 2(c) of the Wilderness Act of 1964 should be evaluated and considered for recommendation as potential wilderness areas during plan development or revision.

General Process for Identifying Potential Wilderness Areas

The Land Management Planning Handbook (FSH 1909.12, Chapter 70 – Wilderness Evaluation) provides detailed direction for integrating wilderness evaluations during developing or revising a land management plan. FSH 1909.12, in particular, provides citizens guidance for preparing succinct proposals that will include the information that the Forest Service is required to evaluate. The agency process to identify and evaluate undeveloped areas for wilderness potential includes three general steps:

1. Identify current undeveloped lands with wilderness potential
2. Evaluate these lands for their wilderness values (FSH 1909.12, Chapter 7.2)
3. Recommend in the Forest Plan certain areas with suitability or potential for wilderness designation to Congress (FSH 1909.12, Chapter 7.3)

Step 1: Review Inventory of Potential Wilderness (USDA 2006).

Chapter 7 of the Forest Planning Handbook (FSH 1909.12, 8/92) contains three types of inventory criteria: size, presence of roads, and presence of other facilities or influences of man (USDA 2004). This step is done at the Forest level and involves reviewing the current inventory of potential wildernesses. Forests should start with their existing Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRAs) and add to that any additional areas that meet the inventory criteria in FSH 1909.12 Chapter 70. According to agency policy, the identification of potential wilderness should reflect all undeveloped lands on the National Forest that meet the criteria for wilderness. As such it should be comprehensive and include all lands that meet the criteria regardless of their classification during earlier rounds of planning (USDA 2004).

The Wilderness Act's (Section 2(c)(1)) definition of legislated wilderness includes an area which "*generally appears* to have been affected *primarily* by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man's work *substantially unnoticeable*" (emphasis added). Some areas proposed for wilderness may not be entirely free of the imprint of man but may be fully capable of providing wilderness benefits to the public. Past timber harvest activities, evidence of old mining, some range improvements, minor recreation sites, water-related facilities, etc. may be included in proposed wilderness provided that they are substantially unnoticeable. The term "substantially unnoticeable, derived from the Wilderness Act, means that the average lay person would not recognize the impact or that the impact is minor in comparison to the larger landscape such that its impact is relatively slight or subordinate and not easily recognized (USDA 2004). In summary, an area should not be excluded from wilderness consideration because of some evidences of past human activity, provided they are substantially unnoticeable, or could be rendered as such through restoration to a natural condition. **The proposed Wet Beaver Wilderness Addition "generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable."**

Step 2: Evaluate Potential Wilderness (USDA 2006)

This involves three steps: determining availability, need, and capability.

- a) Availability² – This evaluates at the forest level the value of and need for wilderness compared to the value and need for other resources. We

² All National Forest System (NFS) lands determined to meet wilderness capability requirements are considered potentially available for wilderness designation. However, the determination of availability is conditioned by the value of and need for the wilderness resource compared to the value of and need for other resources. In evaluating availability, describe the other resource demands and uses that the area under evaluation could satisfy. Include all other resource potentials—pertinent quantitative and qualitative information including current use, outputs, trends, and potential future use, and outputs of the various resources involved. Constraints and encumbrances on lands may also govern the availability of lands for wilderness. Determine the degree of Forest Service control over the surface and subsurface of the area. The Forest Service should have sufficient control to prevent development of unresolvable, incompatible uses that would negatively affect wilderness character and potential.

- strongly believe that preservation as wilderness of the proposed additions to the Wet Beaver Creek Wilderness values far outweigh any commercial values derived through commodity exploitation.
- b) Need³ – This evaluates the contribution of potential wilderness to the overall National Wilderness Preservation System. Need, according to the agency, should be considered at the national, regional, and forest levels. Based on the attributes presented below, we believe that designation of the proposed wilderness addition is essential to provide long-term protection of the watershed’s unique ecological and experiential values.
 - c) Capability – This evaluates how well the area meets the definition of wilderness and is done at the forest level. We describe below how the proposed wilderness addition fulfills of this criterion.

Capability (USDA 2007, Section 72.1)

This step is intended to evaluate how well the area meets the definition of wilderness (USDA 2007, Section 72.1). This evaluation is done at the forest level (USDA 2006). The capability of a potential wilderness is the degree to which that area contains the basic characteristics that make it suitable for wilderness recommendation without regard to its “availability” for or “need” as wilderness.

The proposed addition to the Wet Beaver Creek Wilderness meets the Wilderness Act’s definition as an area “retaining its primeval character and influence...” which “generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man’s work substantially unnoticeable” (section 2(c)). The unit meets the agency’s criteria for “undeveloped,” that is, it lacks permanent improvements or human habitation.⁴

Naturalness

The proposed addition to Wet Beaver Creek Wilderness “generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man’s work substantially unnoticeable.” In earlier guidance documents (Forest Service 2007) the agency lists attributes including “Natural” with qualifiers that we believe are problematic for wilderness eligibility under section 2(c) of the Wilderness Act (Forest Service 2007, section 72.1). For example, the presence of non-native species that alter the composition of natural plant and animal

³ Determine the need for an area to be designated as wilderness through an analysis of the degree to which it contributes to the overall National Wilderness Preservation System. Demonstrate this need through the public involvement process, including public input to the evaluation report. Deal with “need” on a regional basis and evaluate such factors as the geographic distribution of areas and representations of landforms and ecosystems.

⁴ Undeveloped. Determine the degree to which the area is without permanent improvements or human habitation. A measure of undeveloped is the level of human occupation and modification of the area including evidence of structures, construction, habitations, or other forms of human presence, use, and occupation (USDA 2007, Section 72.1).

communities (such as non-native plants, animals, fish, livestock, invertebrates, and pathogens) are of ecological concern, but do not necessarily preclude wilderness designation.

Experiential Criteria

The proposed addition to Wet Beaver Creek Wilderness meets the Wilderness Act's provision for providing "outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation (section 2(c)). The proposed unit also meets the agency's criteria for "Outstanding Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation"⁵ presented in FSH 1909.12. The proposed addition's size, and mountain and canyon environments enhance Wet Beaver Wilderness' outstanding opportunities for solitude and an unconfined type of recreation, providing a wilderness experience in a magnificent area that appears primarily affected by the forces of nature with the imprint of man substantially unnoticeable. The Forest manages only a limited opportunity for primitive and unconfined recreation including five existing and portions of three wilderness areas, for a total of 102,011 acres, or approximately six percent of the forest. The proposed wilderness would afford quiet, non-motorized recreational opportunities (nature study, hunting, birding, horseback riding and hiking) for a variety of users contrasting with over 6,000 miles of routes and trails currently available for motorized use on the Coconino National Forest.

FSH 1909.12 (Section 72.31) lists other "Factors" for wilderness recommendation, including several recreation-oriented considerations that may be problematic. For example, the consideration that "the location, size, and type of other wildernesses in the general vicinity and their distance from the proposed area...[including] accessibility of areas to population centers and user groups" is not a consideration required by the Wilderness Act. In any event, Coconino NF surrounds, or at least lies in close proximity to urban areas including Flagstaff, Sedona, and Camp Verde. The Forest manages only a limited opportunity for primitive and unconfined recreation including five (Kachina Peaks, Fossil Spring, Strawberry Crater, Wet Beaver, and West Clear Creek) and portions of three (Sycamore Canyon, Mazatzal, and Kendrick) wilderness areas, for a total of 102,011 acres, or approximately six percent of the forest. In any event, this consideration discounts the biological significance of potential wilderness areas.

Size Criteria

The proposed addition to the existing Wet Beaver Creek Wilderness exceeds the minimum general criteria for size. The unit includes the Walker

⁵ Outstanding Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation. Determine an area's capability of providing solitude or primitive and unconfined types of recreation. This includes providing a wide range of experiential opportunities such as: physical and mental challenge, adventure and self-reliance, feelings of solitude, isolation, self-awareness, and inspiration.

Mountain Inventoried Roadless Area (6,377 acres). In addition, the identification of potential wilderness reflects undeveloped lands on the National Forest that meet the criteria for wilderness regardless of their classification during earlier rounds of planning (USDA 2004).

Roads Criteria

While some agency policy interpretations suggest the presence of a "classified road"⁶ disqualifies that portion of the area from consideration as future wilderness (USDA 2004), we maintain that the presence of a "road" does not necessarily disqualify an area for wilderness designation. The Wilderness legislative history supports closure and restoration of roads, even paved roads, to qualify areas for wilderness designation.⁷ Scholars point out that the Wilderness Act embodies two distinct standards. One definition, in section 2(c)⁸, provides a more permissive standard for designating a wilderness; a second definition, in section 4(c), provides strict standards for managing wilderness once designated (Turner 2001:25-26). Section 4(c)'s prohibition against permanent roads in wilderness applies to designated wilderness. There is nothing in the Act prohibiting the designation of areas containing roads, only that once designated those roads must be restored to a non-mechanized trail or a natural condition (Scott 2001:31; and Turner 2001:25).

Proposed Route Closures

The proposed wilderness addition includes the non-motorized Walker Basin, Long Canyon, and Bell trails. In addition, we recommend designating FS 921J (Deadwood Pack Trail) east of the 4400-foot contour (436806/3834133) to its intersection with FS 214 as a hiking and equestrian trail to provide quiet recreational opportunities and protect soils, vegetation and wildlife.

⁶ Classified roads are roads wholly or partially within or adjacent to National Forest System lands that are determined to be needed for long-term motor vehicle access, including state roads, county roads, privately owned roads, National Forest System Roads, and other roads authorized by the Forest Service (36 CFR 212.1).

⁷ The third wilderness area designated by Congress after the 1964 Wilderness Act was the Great Swamp Wilderness in New Jersey, just 30 miles from Times Square. The local township agreed to close and restore to a natural condition a paved, two-lane road with ditches, shoulders, several bridges, and several suburban homes on private inholdings in order to qualify the area for wilderness. See Scott 2001, page 31.

⁸ "Definition of Wilderness," Section 2(c) A wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his own works dominated the landscape, is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man 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 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.

Supplemental Values

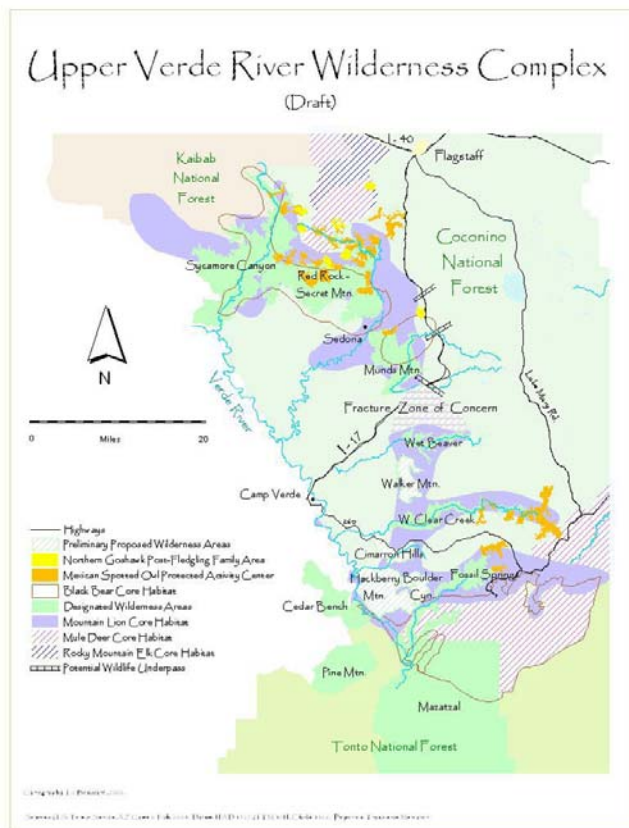
The proposed wilderness addition meets the Wilderness Act's provision for providing supplemental values⁹ as well as the criteria for "Special Features and Values."¹⁰

Preservation of Landforms and Ecosystems

FSH 1909.12 (Section 72.31) provides consideration for "an area's ability to provide for preservation of identifiable landform types and ecosystems.

Connectivity

The entire eastern Upper Verde River Wilderness Complex (West Clear Creek, Wet Beaver Creek, Fossil Creek and Verde River) watershed provides relatively intact, biologically significant core and wildlife movement corridors through a landscape generally fragmented by roads and logging impacts. The proposed addition to Wet Beaver Creek Wilderness (and the proposed Cimarron Hills, Hackberry Mountain, and Boulder Canyon wildernesses) directly and significantly contributes to the core/corridor ecological functions of the Wilderness Complex, by linking the Mazatzal/Fossil Springs and West Clear Creek wildernesses with the Mogollon Plateau.



Refugia

FSH 1909.12 (Section 72.31) provides consideration for "the need to provide a refuge for those species that have demonstrated an inability to survive in less than primitive surroundings or the need for a protected area for other unique scientific values or phenomena, The proposed wilderness addition provides habitat for black bear, elk, mountain lion, and deer. These species greatly benefit from wilderness

also contain ecological, geological, or ical value."

capability to provide other values such as enic, historical, or cultural significance. ue plants or plant communities,

connectivity, potential or existing research natural areas, outstanding landscape features, and significant cultural resource sites. Identify and describe any such values and their contribution to wilderness character (USDA 2007, Section 72.1).

designation by allowing them to persist in ecologically effective densities.

Manageability

The proposed addition to Wet Beaver Creek Wilderness meets the agency's "Manageability" criteria:

- Boundary locations avoid conflict with important existing or potential public uses outside the boundary that might result in demands to allow nonconforming structures and activities in the wilderness.
- It is possible to readily and accurately describe, establish, and recognize boundaries on the ground.
- Boundaries, where possible, conform with terrain or other features that constitute a barrier to prohibited use.
- Boundaries provide adequate opportunity for access and traveler transfer facilities.

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