

# WALKER MOUNTAIN



## WILDERNESS PROPOSAL

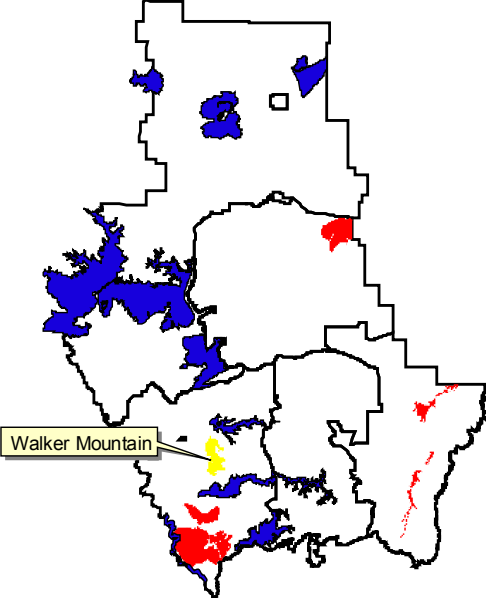


Arizona Wilderness Coalition  
March 2007

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# Coconino National Forest



## **Introduction**

The Arizona Wilderness Coalition (AWC) presents this 6,377-acre wilderness proposal of Walker Mountain Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA) to be reviewed during the Coconino National Forest's 2006 Land Management Plan revision process. A review of the RARE II findings shows that the Forest Service determined Walker Mountain to have an overall wilderness attribute rating of 17 on a scale of 4 to 28 (USDA, 1978 [RARE II DES, Appendix, Section II, page 3a]). The Forest Service adopted a very confined interpretation of Section 2 (c) of the Wilderness Act in its wilderness evaluation process, which could be the reason Walker Mountain received as low a score as it did. Testimonies during the formation of The Endangered American Wilderness Act have accused the Forest Service of applying overly restrictive wilderness evaluation standards (The Wilderness Society, 2000). A recent citizen's inventory has produced evidence that Walker Mountain IRA does in fact meet the wilderness suitability criteria defined by the 1964 Wilderness Act and if designated wilderness the area could be a valuable component of a wild land complex that helps to sustain wildlife, watersheds, ecosystems and overall forest health.

In this proposal, the AWC describes the wilderness characteristics, as defined by the Wilderness Act of 1964, of Walker Mountain IRA that qualifies the unit to be designated as Wilderness. The Wilderness Characteristics section also includes Supplemental Values such as the geological, ecological, and historical significance of Walker Mountain. The AWC has also reviewed and documented routes surrounding Walker Mountain and has included recommendations for road management.

## **Wilderness Review Mandates**

During the Region 3 Forest Planning of 1984, the Forest Service recommended a slew of wilderness areas to Congress for designation. The Arizona Wilderness Act of 1984 designated 32 new wilderness areas on Forest Service land totaling 762,400 acres (Arizona Wilderness Act, 1984). Under section 103(b)(2) of the 1984 Arizona Wilderness Act, specific language directs the Department of Agriculture to reconsider wilderness designation of lands that were reviewed under the Roadless Area Review and Evaluation II (RARE II) but not designated wilderness at that time. The specific soft release language, as it is known, under section 103(b)(2) is 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.” (Arizona Wilderness Act, 1984)

This specific section of the 1984 Arizona Wilderness Act requires that the Forest Service

reconsider inventoried roadless areas for recommendation as wilderness.

Further, within the Forest Service manual under land management planning section 1923 there is non-binding guidance regarding wilderness review. The first line of the description of section 1923 states “Consideration of wilderness suitability is inherent in land management planning” (USDA, 2006 [FSM 1900, Chapter 1920, Section 1923, page 42]). While this does not obligate the Forest Service to make wilderness recommendations it does compel them to evaluate potential wilderness areas every time a forest plan is reviewed or amended.

Again, within the Forest Service Manual (2006) under policy of wilderness areas section 1923.03, number 2 it states:

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

This excerpt from the Forest Service Manual clearly instructs the Forest Service to ‘evaluate and consider’ all appropriate IRA’s, which were formed through RARE II, for wilderness proposal.

### **Unit Description**

Walker Mountain IRA is located in the southern portion of the Coconino National Forest in Yavapai County. The unit is composed of mountainous terrain with Walker Creek transecting the northern portion. Elevation within Walker Mountain proposed wilderness ranges from 4,100 feet to a high point of 5,850 feet on the western peak of Walker Mountain, providing visitors with spectacular views and challenging topography.

The Walker Mountain proposed wilderness unit lies in the Central Mountains Province, beneath the Colorado Plateau and above the Basin and Range Area. Within the Central Mountains Province one can find characteristic rugged mountains composed of igneous, metamorphic, sedimentary, and volcanic rocks of Proterozoic age with the occasional erosional remains of the Paleozoic period (Nations, 1981). The exposed geology from canyons to peaks display the various rock types and the erosion processes of weathering over time.

Walker Mountain Inventoried Roadless Area, Forest Service # 03055, was established under the Roadless Area Review and Evaluation II (RARE II), which was completed in 1979 (Hendee and Dawson, 2002).

## **Wilderness Characteristics**

### **Size**

The proposed Walker Mountain wilderness is 6,377 acres, which exceeds the size requirements stated in the Wilderness Act of 1964. There are possible boundary expansions on the southern end of the IRA as well as the northern and northeastern portions, which include the higher eastern peak of Walker Mountain at an elevation of 5,925 feet.

### **Naturalness**

To qualify as Wilderness, an area must be substantially natural where the imprint of man cannot dominate (Wilderness Act, 1964). The inventories of Walker Mountain show the area appears to have been primarily affected by the forces of nature with the imprint of man substantially unnoticeable. Due to the steep, rugged terrain Walker Mountain has seen minimal encroachment from man leaving nature to take its course. Within the majority of the unit, the visitor is immersed in a natural landscape and serene silence. The natural quality of Walker Mountain would not only make it an ideal addition to the already existing wilderness areas on the Coconino National Forest but also to the National Wilderness Preservation System.

### **Opportunity for Solitude**

The proposed Walker Mountain wilderness provides ample opportunities for solitude. The juxtaposed tall peaks and deep incised ravines act not only as a barrier from external non-natural influences but also as dividers within the area itself. A person seeking solitude can easily find it throughout the majority of Walker Mountain.

### **Primitive and Unconfined Recreation**

Walker Mountain proposed wilderness is the ideal setting for multiple forms of primitive and unconfined recreation. A few examples of recreation types that Walker Mountain would lend itself to are hiking, backpacking, horseback riding, bird watching, wildlife viewing, hunting, orienteering, rock climbing, rock hounding and many others. The trails that cross the saddles, ravines, and peaks of Walker Mountain provide recreationists with various types of primitive and unconfined experiences.

## Supplemental Values

Supplemental values are referenced in section 2(c)(4) of the Wilderness Act and refer to values such as ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value.

### Geological

Walker Mountain Roadless Unit lies within the Transition Zone, which is an area between the Basin and Range geology to the south and the Colorado Plateau bordering the north (Nations, 1981). One can study the geologic influence of both areas within the Transition Zone such as faulting and erosion that has carved canyons, valleys, and mountains. Sedimentary Gabbro was formed from ancient oceans over 1.8 billion years ago and under lays portions of Walker Mountain roadless area. One can also find evidence of Tapeats Sandstone, Martin Limestone, and Redwall Limestone all from the Paleozoic era and also found in the Grand Canyon. The higher elevations of Walker Mountain are capped with the volcanic Hickey Formation having been formed as recently as 18 million years ago (Zion National Historic Association, 1975).

The geologic influences of nature found in Walker Mountain provides a classroom in the wild for geologists and others interested in Earth's history.

### Ecological

Ecosystem fragmentation caused by urbanization is considered the number one threat to the biodiversity of the region and is not expected to diminish during our lifetimes (Kaufman & Franz, 1996). The designation of Walker Mountain as wilderness would help reduce ecosystem fragmentation by protecting it from becoming roaded and further developed. Designating Walker Mountain IRA as wilderness will also create a larger wild land complex including Mazatzal, Cedar Bench, Fossil Creek, Pine Mountain, West Clear Creek and Beaver Creek Wilderness areas. In addition to existing wilderness areas, other inventoried roadless areas that AWC is proposing for wilderness consideration such as Hackberry IRA, Boulder Canyon IRA, and Cimarron Hills IRA would create a core area for the larger wild land complex. This large wild land complex will help sustain suitable habitat for large predators as well as facilitate healthy, functioning watersheds and ecosystems (Foreman, 2005).

Walker Mountain provides habitat for many mammals, insects, reptiles, and amphibians. Walker Mountain's remote landscape along with its riparian areas provides an abundance of habitat and vegetation types for a variety of wildlife helping to maintain an intact food web. The vegetation within Walker Mountain can easily withstand drought, and is highly adapted to fire (Lowe, 1964).

Pinyon juniper forest, which is found throughout much of Walker Mountain IRA, provides key habitat for pinyon jays (*Gymnorhinus cyanocephalus*) and many other species of birds. Also, the mountainous terrain provides ideal habitat for large mammals such as coyotes (*Canis latrans*), black bear (*Ursus Americanus*), bobcat (*Lynx rufus*), Elk (*Cervus canadensis*) and mountain lion (*Puma Concolor*). The riparian creeks and canyons within the Walker Mountain unit are ecologically significant. Riparian areas, which exist on less than 2% of the land in Arizona, are critical habitat in the desert Southwest that helps to sustain healthy populations of fish and wildlife (Baker et al,

2004). Designating Walker Mountain as wilderness would help to protect these sensitive areas.

### Scenic

Walker Mountain proposed wilderness abounds in scenic opportunities. From the higher elevations one can find views looking east and north into the Verde Valley, Wet Beaver Creek Wilderness and beyond to the San Francisco Peaks or to the south looking over the lush West Clear Creek Wilderness. The smaller hills and valleys of the unit provide an intimate feel while imparting exceptional wildlife viewing opportunities.

### Historical

Walker Mountain has many known pre-historic sites around and within its boundaries. Evidence of Native American cultures is found in the form of rock art sites, dwellings, knapped stone fragments and pottery shards. Beaver Creek Ruins, also known as Sacred Mountain, lies just outside the northwestern boundary of the IRA and contains beautiful remnants of dwellings, pottery and knapped stone (Harris, 2000). Potential boundary expansions could be made to include this site and Deadwood Point. Many other sites with evidence of pre-historic culture exist within the IRA boundaries.

### Manageability

The size, topography, and location of Walker Mountain proposed wilderness make it possible for the Forest Service to manage it as an enduring resource of wilderness.

Encompassing 6,377 acres, with possible boundary expansions, Walker Mountain is large enough that it “.has natural integrity or appears to be natural and free from disturbance so that the normal interplay between biotic species inhabiting the area continues” (USDA, 2005). The size and topography of the unit also prohibits external influences from penetrating the inner portions.

Walker Mountain IRA’s boundaries conform to existing terrain features such as steep cliffs and canyon walls. These distinct land features not only make managing the area feasible but also provide easily recognizable boundaries when on the ground.

While the inner portions of Walker Mountain proposed wilderness remain untrammelled by man, the surrounding Forest Service roads provide adequate access for visitors. Forest Service road 618 travels the proposed wilderness’ western boundary while Forest Service 214 provides access to the southern boundary with numerous short Forest Service roads approaching the proposed boundary.

### Resource Opportunity Cost

Walker Mountain IRA has essentially negligible potential resource uses that would be incompatible with wilderness designation, but the benefits of wilderness designation compensate for loss of use. The following is a brief analysis of the benefits and detriments to resource opportunities if Walker Mountain IRA is designated as wilderness. The data used for this analysis came from the Arizona Supplement to the



Draft Environmental Statement for the Roadless Area Review and Evaluation II (RARE II) (USDA, 1978).

Growing Stock (MMBF)

Walker Mountain was reviewed by the Forest Service and was determined to have 0.0 MMBF (All growing stock, hard and soft wood). Clearly, if Walker Mountain was designated wilderness and commercial, mechanized wood harvesting was limited or prohibited all together there would be no economic loss.

Animal Use Month (MAUM)

The Forest Service determined that Walker Mountain has 0.7 MAUM. Though wilderness designation would not prevent livestock grazing it would limit ranchers to non-motorized management. The 0.7 MAUM that Walker Mountain was determined to have is less than 1.3 MAUM that West Clear Creek IRA was gauged to have and West Clear Creek has since received wilderness designation.

Dispersed Non-Motorized and Motorized Use (MRVD)

The Forest Service’s review concluded that Walker Mountain IRA is better suited to non-motorized recreation versus motorized recreation. While Walker Mountain was determined to have 1.0 MRVD for non-motorized recreation it was also determined to have 0.0 MRVD for motorized recreation. By designating Walker Mountain wilderness there would be negligible effect on motorized recreation save for a few potential unauthorized motorized routes. Furthermore, the lure of prohibition on motorized recreation might increase the number of non-motorized recreationists enjoying Walker Mountain proposed wilderness.

Energy and Mineral Production

Figure 1 displays what producing, proven and possible mineral and energy potential Walker Mountain IRA has.

<b>Minerals and Energy</b>	<b>Yes or No</b>
Critical Minerals	No
Non-Critical Minerals	No
Oil/Gas	No
Geothermal	No
Uranium	No
Coal	No

Figure 1- Producing, Proven and Possible Mineral and Energy Resources in Walker Mountain IRA

Clearly, the Forest Service has established that Walker Mountain possesses no current or possible significant mineral and energy resources. Therefore, wilderness designation would not affect mineral and energy development in Walker Mountain.

## **Historical Review**

The US Forest Service evaluated Walker Mountain in the RARE II process and concluded that the unit possesses a wilderness attribute rating of 17 on a scale of 4-28, 28 being the highest. Walker Mountain Inventoried Roadless Unit was recommended as Wilderness for alternatives J and was recommended for Further Planning or Non-Wilderness for alternatives B, C, D, E, F G, H, and I (USDA, 1978).

**Alternative B:** *Allocates all inventoried areas to non-wilderness units*

**Alternative C:** *Wilderness would be clustered on the Prescott and Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests.*

**Alternative D:** *Allocates to wilderness Arizona's share of the areas that have composite wilderness attribute ratings in the top 40 percentile of all areas within the region.*

**Alternative E:** *Selects for wilderness, Arizona's share of the South-western Region's planning assignments or targets required to meet the minimum level, level I, of a National Wilderness Preservation System. All other areas are allocated to non-wilderness.*

**Alternative F:** *Allocates to wilderness Arizona's share of the South-western region's planning assignments or targets, sufficient to meet Level I for landform representation and wilderness associated wildlife and Level II for ecosystem representation developed for National Wilderness Preservation System.*

**Alternative G:** *Allocates to wilderness Arizona's share of the Southwestern Region's planning assignments or targets required to meet the moderate level or level II of the National Wilderness Preservation System. Areas were selected that would meet level II targets assigned to the Region for landform and wildlife habitat and level III for ecosystem representation.*

**Alternative H:** *Considers Regional trade-offs, social and economic effects, public interest in specific areas, industrial needs, state and local government positions, and the prospective resource management program on National Forest lands.*

**Alternative I:** *Addresses the issue of additional designated wilderness and provides a reasonable distribution of wilderness areas within the Region and in Arizona.*

**Alternative J:** *Does not satisfy Regional or State issues related to commodity production and the availability of resources for uses other than Wilderness.*

Alternative Descriptions as Stated in the RARE II Supplement to Draft Environmental Statement Roadless Area Review and Evaluation

New information derived from a recent citizen's inventory reveals that Walker Mountain meets the 1964 Wilderness Act's wilderness criteria and should be designated as such to receive full protection from exploitation of wilderness resource.

## **Conclusion**

Designating Walker Mountain IRA as Walker Mountain Wilderness would protect and preserve a vital and increasingly scarce large plot of undeveloped public land. This report demonstrates that the ecological and social benefits of proposing Walker Mountain as wilderness would far out weigh any economic losses. The addition of Walker Mountain to the National Wilderness Preservation System would facilitate a healthy, sustainable wild land complex benefiting ecosystems, watersheds, wildlife and the citizens of Arizona and the United States. The size and topography of Walker Mountain would make its manageability feasible as well as accessible to visitors. Wilderness designation of Walker Mountain would promote sources of clean air and clean water and provide remarkable recreational opportunities for residents of the Verde Valley. Walker Mountain IRA meets all the Wilderness requirements listed in section 4 (c) of the Wilderness Act, including optional Supplemental Values such as geological, ecological, historical and scenic significance. The documentation provided here is a valid claim for recommending Walker Mountain as Wilderness in the planning process. Encroaching development and off road vehicle use threaten the Wilderness Characteristics of Walker Mountain. The AWC believes that the best management decision for this unit is wilderness protection

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