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Wilderness: Overview and Statistics

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Summary

Congress enacted the Wilderness Act in 1964. This act created the National Wilderness Preservation System, reserved to Congress the authority to designate wilderness areas, and directed the Secretaries of Agriculture and of the Interior to review certain lands for their wilderness potential. The act also designated 54 wilderness areas with 9 million acres of federal land. Congress began expanding the Wilderness System in 1968, and today, there are 759 wilderness areas, totaling nearly 110 million acres, in 44 states. Numerous bills to designate additional areas and to expand existing ones have been introduced and considered in every Congress.

The Wilderness Act defined wilderness as an area of undeveloped federal land, but, due to differing perceptions of wilderness and its purpose, did not establish criteria or standards to determine whether an area should be designated. In general, wilderness areas are undeveloped, and commercial activities, motorized access, and roads, structures, and facilities are generally prohibited in wilderness areas. However, in response to conflicting demands, Congress has granted both general exemptions and specific exceptions to the general standards and prohibitions.

The federal government owns about 29% of the land in the United States, although the proportion in each state varies widely. Four federal agencies—the Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, and Fish and Wildlife Service in the Department of the Interior; and the Forest Service in the Department of Agriculture—manage most of the 110 million acres of designated wilderness, as well as many other lands. They also protect lands as possible additions to the Wilderness System, and review the wilderness potential of lands.

In total, nearly 18% of federal land administered by the four major federal land management agencies, and nearly 5% of all land in the United States, has been designated as wilderness, largely in Alaska. Alaska, because of its size and relatively pristine condition, dominates wilderness statistics—more than 52% of designated wilderness is in Alaska. In total, nearly 16% of all land (federal, state, private, and other) in Alaska has been designated as wilderness. In contrast, 3% of all land in the United States outside Alaska has been designated as wilderness.

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In 1964, the Wilderness Act established a national system of congressionally designated areas to be preserved in a wilderness condition: “where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain.”¹ The National Wilderness Preservation System (the Wilderness System) was originally created with 9 million acres of Forest Service lands. Congress has since expanded the Wilderness System to more than 109 million acres (see **Table 1**) among some 615 million acres of land managed by the federal land management agencies—the Forest Service in the Department of Agriculture, and the National Park Service (NPS), Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in the Department of the Interior (see **Table 2**). Federal agencies, Members of Congress, and interest groups have recommended more lands for inclusion in the Wilderness System. Furthermore, at the direction of Congress, agencies have studied, or are studying, the wilderness potential of their lands. This report provides a brief history of wilderness, describes what wilderness is, identifies permitted and prohibited uses in wilderness areas, and provides data on wilderness designations as of December 31, 2013. For information on current wilderness legislation, see CRS Report R41610, *Wilderness: Legislation and Issues in the 113th Congress*.

History of Wilderness

As the United States was formed, the federal government acquired 1.8 billion acres of land through purchases, treaties, and other agreements. Initial federal policy was generally to transfer ownership to states and private ownership, but Congress also provided for reserving certain lands for federal purposes, and over time has reserved or withdrawn increasing acreage for national parks, national forests, wildlife refuges, etc.² The general policy of federal lands disposal was changed to a general policy of retaining the remaining lands in the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA).³

Beginning in 1897, management of the national forests emphasized conservation—protecting and developing the lands. It did not take long for some Forest Service leaders to recognize the need to preserve some areas in a natural state. Acting at its own discretion, and at the behest of an employee named Aldo Leopold, the Forest Service created the first wilderness area in the Gila National Forest in New Mexico in 1924. In the succeeding decades, the agency’s system of wilderness, wild, and primitive areas grew to 14.6 million acres. However, in the 1950s, increasing timber harvests and recreational use of the national forests led to public concerns about the permanence of this purely administrative system. The Forest Service had relied on its administrative authority in making wilderness designations; there was no law guaranteeing future protection.

In response, Congress enacted the Wilderness Act in 1964. The act defines wilderness and prohibits or restricts certain activities in wilderness areas, while permitting other activities to occur. The act reserves to Congress the authority to designate areas as part of the National Wilderness Preservation System.

The Wilderness System was initially endowed with the 9.1 million acres of national forest lands that had been identified administratively as wilderness areas or wild areas. The Wilderness Act

¹ P.L. 88-577. 16 U.S.C. §§1131-1136.

² See CRS Report RL34267, *Federal Land Ownership: Constitutional Authority and the History of Acquisition, Disposal, and Retention*.

³ P.L. 94-579. 43 U.S.C. §§1701, et seq.

directed the Secretary of Agriculture to review the agency's 5.5 million acres of primitive areas, and the Secretary of the Interior to evaluate the wilderness potential of National Park System and National Wildlife Refuge System lands. The Secretaries were to report their recommendations to the President and to Congress within 10 years (i.e., by 1974). Separate recommendations were made for each area; and many areas recommended for wilderness were designated, although some of the recommendations are still pending. In 1976, FLPMA directed the Secretary of the Interior to conduct a similar review of the public lands administered by BLM within 15 years (i.e., by 1991). BLM submitted its recommendations to the President, and presidential recommendations were submitted to Congress.

The 90th Congress began expanding the Wilderness System in 1968, as shown in **Table 1**. Five laws were enacted, creating five new wilderness areas with 792,750 acres in four states. Wilderness designations generally increased in each succeeding Congress, rising to a peak of 60.8 million acres designated during the 96th Congress (1979-1980), the largest amount designated by any Congress. Also during the 96th Congress, the largest single designation of 56.4 million acres of wilderness occurred through the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act.⁴

In 1977, the Forest Service began a review (RARE II)⁵ of 62 million acres of national forest roadless areas, to accelerate part of the land management planning process mandated by the Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974 and the National Forest Management Act of 1976 (NFMA).⁶ The RARE II Final Environmental Statement was issued in January 1979, recommending more than 15 million acres (24.3% of the study area) for addition to the Wilderness System. In addition, nearly 11 million acres (17.4%) were to be studied further in the ongoing Forest Service planning process under NFMA. The remaining 36 million acres (58.3% of the RARE II area) were to be available for other uses—such as logging, energy and mineral developments, and motorized recreation—that might be incompatible with preserving wilderness characteristics. In April 1979, President Jimmy Carter presented the recommendations to Congress with minor changes.

In 1980, the state of California successfully challenged the Forest Service RARE II recommendations for 44 areas allocated to nonwilderness uses, with the court decision substantially upheld on appeal in 1982.⁷ The Reagan Administration responded in 1983 by directing a re-evaluation of all RARE II recommendations, except in states with wilderness laws containing certain provisions known as *release language*.⁸ Tensions between the Administration and Congress, and among interest groups, led to a particularly intense debate during the 98th Congress (1983-1984). A compromise version of release language achieved in May 1984 led the 98th Congress to enact 21 wilderness laws designating 8.5 million acres of wilderness in 21 states—more laws and more acres outside of Alaska than by any Congress since the Wilderness System was created.

⁴ ANILCA; P.L. 96-487.

⁵ The first Roadless Area Review and Evaluation (RARE) was begun under the agency's administrative authority in 1970, but was abandoned in 1972 because of a lawsuit asserting the review had been restricted in ways that violated the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA, Act of January 1, 1970; P.L. 91-190; 42 U.S.C. §§4321-4347).

⁶ Respectively: RPA; P.L. 93-378; and NFMA; P.L. 94-588. 16 U.S.C. §§1600-1614, et al.

⁷ *California v. Bergland*, 483 F. Supp. 465 (E.D.Cal. 1980), aff'd in part, rev'd in part, 690 F.2d 753 (9th Cir. 1982).

⁸ *Release language* provides direction on the timing of future wilderness review and of the management of areas not designated as wilderness until the next review.

Table 1. Additions to the National Wilderness Preservation System

Congress	Number of Laws ^a	Number of States	Number of New Areas (Additions) ^b	Acres Designated ^c
88 th	1	13	54 (0)	9,125,721
89 th	0	0	0 (0)	0
90 th	5	4	5 (1)	792,750
91 st	3	13	25 (0)	303,612
92 nd	9	7	8 (1)	913,337
93 rd	4	22	35 (0)	1,271,535
94 th	8	23	35 (0)	2,428,327
95 th	7	18	28 (5)	4,680,519
96 th	7	10	71 (11)	60,753,605 ^d
97 th	6	6	7 (0)	83,309
98 th	21	21	177 (49)	8,530,657
99 th	5	5	11 (2)	99,153
100 th	7	8	22 (4)	1,422,730
101 st	5	5	68 (3)	3,501,160
102 nd	2	2	6 (4)	426,290
103 rd	2	2	79 (14)	8,272,871
104 th	2	2	1 (2)	29,970
105 th	1	1	0 (1)	160
106 th	8	7	18 (1)	1,081,465
107 th	5	5	18 (13)	529,590
108 th	2	2	15 (0)	801,784
109 th	6	7	25 (11)	1,030,748
110 th	1	1	1 (0)	106,000
111 th	1	9	50 (27)	2,096,150
112 th	0	0	0	0
113 th	0	0	0	0
Total	118	44	759 (149)	109,511,966

- Excludes laws with minor boundary and acreage adjustments (less than 10 acres of net change).
- The first number indicates the number of new wilderness areas; the parenthetical number indicates the number of additions to existing wilderness areas.
- This total differs from the total of the column because of acreage revisions.
- This includes 56.4 million acres that were designated wilderness through the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA: P.L. 96-487).

Including the Wilderness Act—which created the National Wilderness Preservation System in 1964—Congress has enacted 118 total laws designating new wilderness areas or adding to existing ones, as shown in **Table 1**. The 112th Congress was the first Congress since the 89th Congress (1965-1967) not to designate any new wilderness areas. The Wilderness System now contains 759 wilderness areas with more than 109 million acres in 44 states, managed by the four federal land management agencies, as shown in **Table 3**. The agencies have recommended additional lands be added to the Wilderness System; these lands are generally managed to protect

their wilderness character while Congress considers adding them to the Wilderness System. Additional lands are being studied by the agencies, to determine if they should be added to the System. However, comprehensive data on the lands recommended and being reviewed for wilderness potential are not available.

Questions and discussions persist over the protection and management of areas that some believe should be designated as wilderness and others believe should be available for development. The Clinton Administration moved to protect many of the remaining national forest areas that could be designated as wilderness administratively, initially in January 1998 with a temporary moratorium on road construction in roadless areas, and finally with a rule that prohibited most road construction and many other activities in *inventoried roadless areas* (i.e., the remaining undesignated RARE II areas). Over a decade of litigation followed, with the Clinton Administration rule being enjoined twice, and the Bush Administration promulgating a rule that also was enjoined. The courts deciding the cases upheld the Clinton Administration rule, and in October 2012, the Supreme Court refused to review the issue.⁹

Questions also persist over BLM *wilderness study areas* (WSAs). WSAs are the areas BLM studied as potential wilderness under Section 603 of FLPMA, which requires BLM to protect the wilderness characteristics of all WSAs (including areas not recommended for wilderness) “until Congress determines otherwise.” Congress has designated some BLM WSAs as wilderness (included in **Table 3**), and, generally in the same statutes, Congress has released BLM from the requirement to protect the wilderness characteristics of certain other areas. However, release language in BLM wilderness statutes has generally been more controversial than for national forest areas.¹⁰

What Is Wilderness?

The Wilderness Act defines wilderness as an area of generally undisturbed federal land. Specifically, Section 2(c) states:

A wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized as 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 wilderness is further defined to mean ... an area of undeveloped Federal land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural 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.

This definition provides some general guidelines for determining which areas should, or should not, be designated wilderness, but there are no specific criteria in the law. The phrases

⁹ Wyoming v. U.S. Department of Agriculture, 661 F.3d 1209 (10th Cir. October 21, 2011); California v. U.S. Department of Agriculture, 575 F.3d 999 (9th Cir. 2009). For more background information on and the current status of these rules, see CRS Report RL30647, *National Forest System (NFS) Roadless Area Initiatives*.

¹⁰ See CRS Report R41610, *Wilderness: Legislation and Issues in the 113th Congress*.

“untrammeled by man,” “retaining its primeval character,” and “man’s work substantially unnoticeable” are far from precise. Even the numerical standard—5,000 acres—is not absolute; smaller areas can be designated if they can be protected, and the smallest wilderness area—Wisconsin Islands Wilderness in the Green Bay National Wildlife Refuge—is only 2 acres.

These imprecise criteria stem in part from differing perceptions of what constitutes wilderness. To some, *wilderness* is an area where there is absolutely no sign of human presence: no traffic can be heard (including aircraft); no roads, structures, or litter can be seen. To others, sleeping in a camper in a 400-site campground in Yellowstone National Park is a wilderness experience. Complicating these differing perceptions is the wide range of ability to “get away from it all” in various settings: in a densely wooded area, isolation might be measured in yards, while in mountainous or desert terrain, human developments can sometimes be seen for miles.

In an attempt to accommodate contrasting views of wilderness, the Wilderness Act provided certain exemptions and delayed implementation of restrictions for wilderness areas, as will be discussed below. At times, Congress has also responded to the conflicting demands of various interest groups by allowing additional exemptions for certain uses (especially for existing activities) in particular wilderness designations. Ultimately, *wilderness areas* are whatever Congress designates as wilderness, regardless of developments or activities which some might argue conflict with the definition of wilderness.

Prohibited and Permitted Uses¹¹

In general, the Wilderness Act prohibits commercial activities, motorized access, and roads, structures, and facilities in wilderness areas. Specifically, Section 4(c) states:

Except as specifically provided for in this Act, and subject to existing private rights, there shall be no commercial enterprise and no permanent road within any wilderness area designated by this Act and, 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.

This section prohibits most commercial resource development (such as timber harvesting) and motorized entry (via cars, trucks, off-road vehicles, aircraft, or motorboats) except in emergencies. However, Section 4(d) provides numerous exceptions, including (a) possible continued use of motorboats and aircraft; (b) fire, insect, and disease control measures; (c) mineral prospecting conducted “in a manner compatible with the preservation of the wilderness environment;” (d) water projects; (e) continued livestock grazing; and (f) commercial recreation activities.

In addition to these exemptions, the Wilderness Act extended the mining and mineral leasing laws for wilderness areas in national forests for 20 years, through 1983. New mining claims and mineral leases were permitted for many wilderness areas, and exploration and development were authorized “subject, however, to such reasonable regulations governing ingress and egress as may

¹¹ See CRS Report R41649, *Wilderness Laws: Statutory Provisions and Prohibited and Permitted Uses*.

be prescribed by the Secretary of Agriculture.”¹² Despite this authority, no permits for on-site exploration were considered until James Watt became the Secretary of the Interior in 1981.¹³ Litigation halted a drilling application in Montana that year, and Congress enacted a moratorium on wilderness area leasing and exploration in the Department of the Interior appropriations laws for FY1983 and FY1984.¹⁴ However, mineral rights existing on or before December 31, 1983 (or before the area was designated), remain valid, and can be developed if the right-holder chooses, under “reasonable regulations” determined by the Secretary of Agriculture, and some mineral exploration has occurred in designated wilderness areas under such regulations.¹⁵

The Wilderness Act also directs that the act not alter existing federal-state relationships with respect to state water laws or state fish and wildlife responsibilities. Specifically, Section 4(d) states:

(7) Nothing in this Act shall constitute an express or implied claim or denial on the part of the Federal Government as to exemption from State water laws.

(8) Nothing in this Act shall be construed as affecting the jurisdiction or responsibilities of the several States with respect to wildlife and fish in the national forests.

However, the extent and nature of federal water rights that might arise from wilderness designations continue to be an important issue for Congress.¹⁶

Finally, as noted above, Congress has also enacted numerous exemptions to the Wilderness Act’s standard prohibitions on activities and developments.¹⁷ These exemptions typically apply to one or a few areas and typically authorize a particular activity (that might not be permitted under the Wilderness Act’s management guidance) to be allowed to continue in the area at the level or intensity that occurred prior to the area’s designation as wilderness.

Data on Wilderness Designations as of December 31, 2013

The following tables present data on the federal lands managed by the four principal federal land management agencies and on the acreage designated as wilderness by Congress. The data were gathered from several agency sources and reflect the most current data available as of December

¹² At the time of the Wilderness Act, most lands in the National Park System and the National Wildlife Refuge System were already withdrawn from mining and mineral leasing, and extensive BLM wilderness designations were apparently not contemplated until FLPMA was enacted in 1976. Thus, the Wilderness Act addressed mining and mineral leasing only in the national forests.

¹³ Although national forests are managed by the Forest Service in the Department of Agriculture, mining claims and mineral leases on most federal lands, including the national forests, are administered by BLM in the Department of the Interior.

¹⁴ P.L. 97-394, and P.L. 98-146, respectively.

¹⁵ Olen Paul Mathews, Amy Haak, and Kathryn Toffenetti, “Mining and Wilderness: Incompatible Uses or Justifiable Compromise?” *Environment*, v. 27 (April 1985): 12-17, 30-36.

¹⁶ See CRS Report R41649, *Wilderness Laws: Statutory Provisions and Prohibited and Permitted Uses*.

¹⁷ See CRS Report R41649, *Wilderness Laws: Statutory Provisions and Prohibited and Permitted Uses*.

31, 2013. This section describes the agency land data shown in **Table 2** and the wilderness data shown in **Table 3**.

Agency Land Data

Table 2 shows the area managed by the four major federal land management agencies.¹⁸ The data are not directly comparable across agencies, however, because of differences in accounting practices. Differences occur in part because official ownership status often differs from managerial responsibility; for example, the Forest Service administers 462,678 acres in Oregon that are officially BLM lands. Another complication is partial ownership, such as split estates, with the federal government owning only the surface (or the subsurface), and another owner for the subsurface (or surface) rights; similarly, some lands are managed by the federal government under easements and long-term leases, without fee simple federal ownership. Thus, the agency acreage statistics in **Table 2** may overstate actual federal land ownership.

Table 2. Total Area Managed by Federal Land Management Agencies
(in acres)

	USDA Forest Service	National Park Service	Fish & Wildlife Service ^a	Bureau of Land Management	Four-Agency Total
Alabama	671,063	17,581	33,177	2,753	724,574
Alaska	21,951,287	52,535,000	76,838,008	72,594,739	223,919,034
Arizona	11,264,611	2,695,806	1,703,820	12,202,750	27,866,987
Arkansas	2,598,645	101,735	374,780	1,075	3,076,235
California	20,828,020	7,614,256	417,326	15,330,274	44,189,876
Colorado	14,537,029	660,350	251,521	8,332,880	23,781,780
Connecticut	24	6,775	1,406	0	8,205
Delaware	0	0	26,486	0	26,486
Florida	1,177,740	2,515,005	286,628	374	3,979,747
Georgia	867,796	41,409	486,858	0	1,396,063
Hawaii	1	357,837	300,115	0	657,953
Idaho	20,465,172	512,820	52,430	11,611,720	32,642,142
Illinois	297,773	12	90,374	0	388,159
Indiana	202,870	11,248	16,957	0	231,075
Iowa	0	2,708	71,801	0	74,509
Kansas	108,176	731	29,520	0	138,427
Kentucky	814,087	94,815	11,696	0	920,598
Louisiana	604,340	17,707	576,559	738	1,199,344

¹⁸ Other federal agencies, such as the Department of Defense, administer some federal land, but land and resource management is not their primary mission.

	USDA Forest Service	National Park Service	Fish & Wildlife Service ^a	Bureau of Land Management	Four-Agency Total
Maine	53,709	78,169	69,658	0	201,536
Maryland	0	46,979	48,056	548	95,583
Massachusetts	0	34,034	22,633	0	56,667
Michigan	2,876,492	632,616	121,517	0	3,630,625
Minnesota	2,840,874	142,908	603,034	1,447	3,588,263
Mississippi	1,173,898	109,247	219,255	5,020	1,507,420
Missouri	1,493,565	63,645	65,296	0	1,622,506
Montana	17,116,002	1,222,149	932,662	7,983,412	27,254,225
Nebraska	352,463	7,126	179,076	6,354	545,019
Nevada	5,765,914	777,259	2,346,228	47,794,096	56,683,497
New Hampshire	736,028	20,538	34,372	0	790,938
New Jersey	0	38,710	75,429	0	114,139
New Mexico	9,411,718	379,634	332,144	13,484,412	23,607,908
New York	16,259	37,755	30,083	0	84,097
North Carolina	1,256,014	396,359	430,673	0	2,083,046
North Dakota	1,106,690	71,657	1,879,827	58,841	3,117,015
Ohio	241,375	21,482	8,643	0	271,500
Oklahoma	400,928	10,206	115,014	1,975	528,123
Oregon	15,692,301	198,507	577,824	16,135,531	32,604,163
Pennsylvania	513,418	53,952	10,218	0	577,588
Rhode Island	0	5	2,570	0	2,575
South Carolina	630,741	32,038	128,965	0	791,744
South Dakota	2,017,749	269,354	1,607,961	274,437	4,169,501
Tennessee	720,751	370,106	54,664	0	1,145,521
Texas	755,365	1,203,902	594,588	11,833	2,565,688
Utah	8,209,272	2,099,081	111,211	22,854,632	33,274,196
Vermont	401,235	22,519	34,187	0	457,941
Virginia	1,664,467	336,576	134,963	805	2,136,811
Washington	9,291,900	1,936,829	165,787	429,167	11,823,683
West Virginia	1,045,076	65,810	19,830	0	1,130,716
Wisconsin	1,533,902	74,030	207,538	2,364	1,817,834
Wyoming	9,241,422	2,393,335	77,467	18,373,316	30,085,540
Other ^b	28,581	51,904	24,778	0	105,263
U.S. Total	192,976,743	80,384,215	92,835,615	247,495,493	613,692,064

Sources: For Forest Service: U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, Forest Service, *Land Areas Report (LAR)*—as of Sept 30, 2012, at http://www.fs.fed.us/land/staff/lar/LAR2012/LAR_Table_04.pdf. Data reflect land within the National

Forest System, including national forests, national grasslands, purchase units, land utilization projects, experimental areas, and other areas.

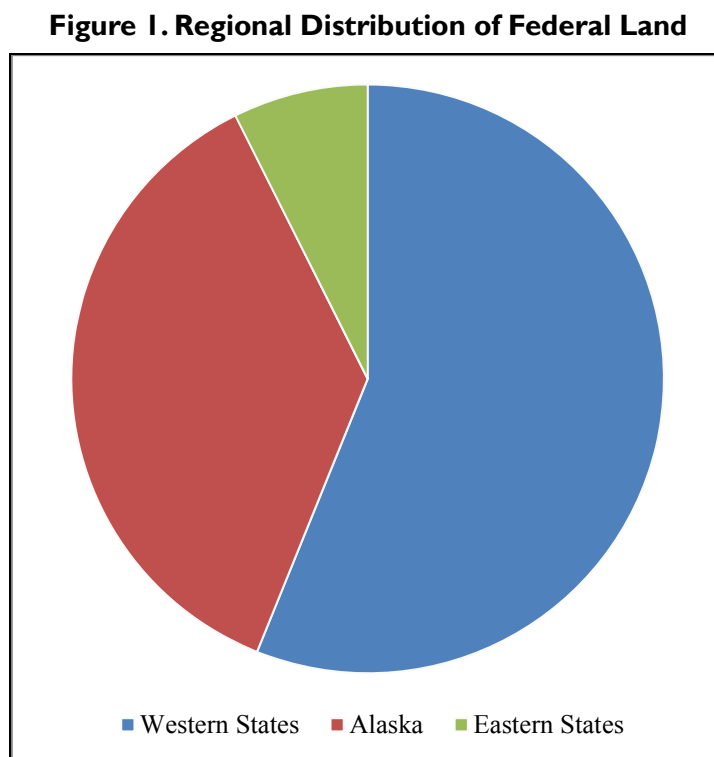
For NPS: U.S. Dept. of the Interior, National Park Service, *National Park Service, Listing of Acreage by State, as of 9/30/2012*; personal communication with Mike Walsh, NPS Land Resources Division, Washington, DC. Data reflects federally owned lands managed by the NPS.

For FWS: U.S. Dept. of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service, Division of Realty, *FY2012 FWS Land Statistical Data Tables for the Annual Report of Lands Under Control of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service as of September 30, 2012*, Table 2—Summary by States, Associated Governments and Possessions, at http://www.fws.gov/refuges/realty/archives/pdf/2012_Annual_Report_of_LandsDataTable1162012.pdf.

For BLM: U.S. Dept. of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, *Public Land Statistics 2011*, at http://www.blm.gov/public_land_statistics/pls11/pls1-4_11.pdf.

- a. Excludes marine areas.
- b. Includes the District of Columbia, American Samoa, Guam, Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands, and U.S. territories.

Figure 1 shows the distribution of federal land between eastern states, western states, and Alaska.¹⁹ As can be seen from the data, federal land ownership is concentrated in the 11 western states.



Source: CRS.

Note: The 11 western states are the states west of the 100th Meridian: Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming. The eastern states include the other continental states (excluding Alaska and Hawaii).

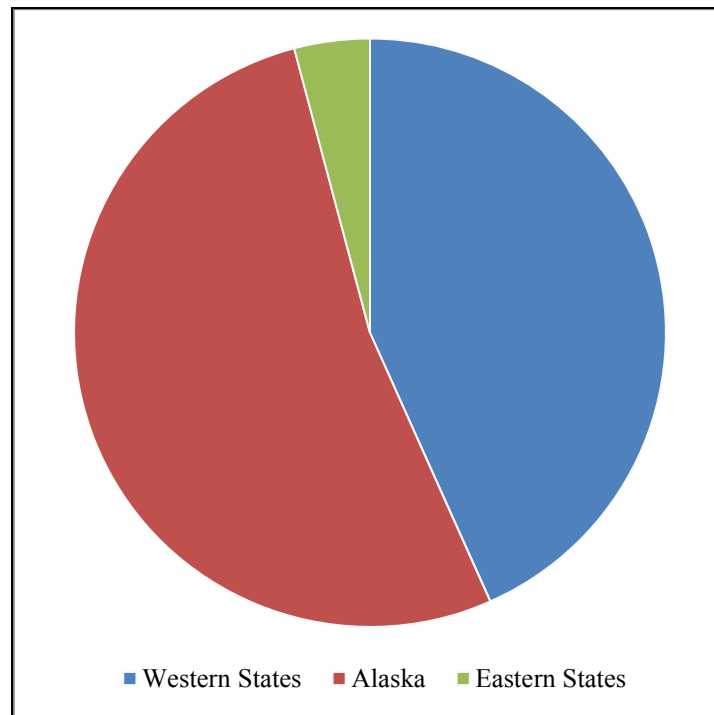
¹⁹ The 11 western states are the states west of the 100th Meridian: Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming. The eastern states include the other continental states (excluding Alaska and Hawaii).

Wilderness Statistics

The wilderness statistics presented in **Table 3** are the current acreage estimates by the agencies. Acreages are estimates, since few (if any) of the areas have been precisely surveyed. **Table 3** is the acreage for areas that have been designated by Congress. In addition, the agencies have recommended areas for addition to the National Wilderness Preservation System, and continue to review the wilderness potential of other lands under their jurisdiction, both of congressionally designated wilderness study areas and under congressionally directed land management planning efforts. However, statistics on acreage in pending recommendations and being studied, particularly in the planning efforts, are unavailable.

As of December 31, 2013, Congress had designated 109.5 million acres of federal land in units of the National Wilderness Preservation System, as shown in **Table 3**. **Figure 2** shows the regional distribution of lands designated as wilderness. Nearly 52.5% of this land—57.4 million acres—is in Alaska, and includes most of the wilderness areas managed by NPS (75%) and by FWS (90%). About a third of the Wilderness System is managed by the Forest System, but most of the FS wilderness area (84%) is outside of Alaska. Wilderness areas have been designated in 44 states plus Puerto Rico; only Connecticut, Delaware, Iowa, Kansas, Maryland, and Rhode Island have no federal lands designated as wilderness.

Figure 2. Regional Distribution of Wilderness Designations



Source: CRS.

Note: The 11 western states are the states west of the 100th Meridian: Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming. The eastern states include the other continental states (excluding Alaska and Hawaii).

Table 3. Federal Designated Wilderness Acreage, by State and by Agency
(in acres and percentage of agency/federal land)

	USDA Forest Service		National Park Service		Fish and Wildlife Service		Bureau of Land Management		Total Designated Area		Share of NWPS
Alabama	41,367	6.2%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	41,367	5.7%	0.04%
Alaska	5,753,971	26.2%	32,979,406	62.8%	18,692,775	24.3%	0	0.0%	57,426,152	25.6%	52.46%
Arizona	1,333,293	11.8%	444,055	16.5%	1,343,444	78.8%	1,397,106	11.4%	4,517,898	16.2%	4.13%
Arkansas	116,578	4.5%	34,933	34.3%	2,144	0.6%	0	0.0%	153,655	5.0%	0.14%
California	5,078,948	24.4%	6,010,513	78.9%	9,172	2.2%	3,834,292	25.0%	14,932,925	33.8%	13.64%
Colorado	3,140,187	21.6%	351,409	53.2%	2,560	1.0%	205,814	2.5%	3,699,970	15.6%	3.38%
Connecticut	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%*	0	0.0%	0.00%
Delaware	0	0.0%*	0	0.0%*	0	0.0%*	0	0.0%*	0	0.0%	0.00%
Florida	74,495	6.3%	1,296,500	51.6%	51,252	17.9%	0	0.0%	1,422,247	35.7%	1.30%
Georgia	114,537	13.2%	9,886	23.9%	362,107	74.4%	0	0.0%*	486,530	34.9%	0.44%
Hawaii	0	0.0%	155,509	43.5%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%*	155,509	23.6%	0.14%
Idaho	3,961,944	19.4%	43,243	8.4%	0	0.0%	517,362	4.5%	4,522,549	13.9%	4.13%
Illinois	28,063	9.4%	0	0.0%	4,050	4.5%	0	0.0%*	32,113	8.3%	0.03%
Indiana	12,463	6.1%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%*	12,463	5.4%	0.01%
Iowa	0	0.0%*	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%*	0	0.0%	0.00%
Kansas	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%*	0	0.0%	0.00%
Kentucky	18,132	2.2%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%*	18,132	2.0%	0.02%
Louisiana	8,679	1.4%	0	0.0%	8,346	1.4%	0	0.0%	17,025	1.4%	0.02%
Maine	11,233	20.9%	0	0.0%	7,392	10.6%	0	0.0%*	18,625	9.2%	0.02%
Maryland	0	0.0%*	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0.00%
Massachusetts	0	0.0%*	0	0.0%	3,244	14.3%	0	0.0%*	3,244	5.7%	0.003%
Michigan	89,529	3.1%	143,758	22.7%	25,309	20.8%	0	0.0%*	258,596	7.1%	0.24%
Minnesota	812,941	28.6%	0	0.0%	6,180	1.0%	0	0.0%	819,121	22.8%	0.75%
Mississippi	6,046	0.5%	4,080	3.7%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	10,126	0.7%	0.01%

	USDA Forest Service		National Park Service		Fish and Wildlife Service		Bureau of Land Management		Total Designated Area		Share of NWPS
Missouri	63,552	4.3%	0	0.0%	7,730	11.8%	0	0.0%*	71,282	4.4%	0.07%
Montana	3,372,525	19.7%	0	0.0%	64,535	6.9%	6,347	0.1%	3,443,407	12.6%	3.15%
Nebraska	7,794	2.2%	0	0.0%	4,635	2.6%	0	0.0%	12,429	2.3%	0.01%
Nevada	1,087,624	18.9%	235,796	30.3%	0	0.0%	2,055,005	4.3%	3,378,425	6.0%	3.09%
New Hampshire	138,618	18.8%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%*	138,618	17.5%	0.13%
New Jersey	0	0.0%*	0	0.0%	10,341	13.7%	0	0.0%*	10,341	9.1%	0.01%
New Mexico	1,387,498	14.7%	56,392	14.9%	39,908	12.0%	169,523	1.3%	1,653,321	7.0%	1.51%
New York	0	0.0%	1,380	3.7%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%*	1,380	1.6%	0.001%
North Carolina	102,634	8.2%	0	0.0%	8,785	2.0%	0	0.0%*	111,419	5.3%	0.10%
North Dakota	0	0.0%	29,920	41.8%	9,732	0.5%	0	0.0%	39,652	1.3%	0.04%
Ohio	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	77	0.9%	0	0.0%*	77	0.03%	0.0001%
Oklahoma	14,543	3.6%	0	0.0%	8,570	7.5%	0	0.0%	23,113	4.4%	0.02%
Oregon	2,228,103	14.2%	0	0.0%	940	0.2%	247,993	1.5%	2,477,036	7.6%	2.26%
Pennsylvania	9,002	1.8%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%*	9,002	1.6%	0.01%
Rhode Island	0	0.0%*	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%*	0	0.0%	0.00%
South Carolina	16,671	2.6%	15,010	46.9%	29,000	22.5%	0	0.0%*	60,681	7.7%	0.06%
South Dakota	13,426	0.7%	64,144	23.8%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	77,570	1.9%	0.07%
Tennessee	66,349	9.2%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%*	66,349	5.8%	0.06%
Texas	38,483	5.1%	46,850	3.9%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	85,333	3.3%	0.08%
Utah	772,925	9.4%	124,406	5.9%	0	0.0%	260,273	1.1%	1,157,604	3.5%	1.06%
Vermont	101,019	25.2%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%*	101,019	22.1%	0.09%
Virginia	135,325	8.1%	79,579	23.6%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	214,904	10.1%	0.20%
Washington	2,715,607	29.2%	1,739,763	89.8%	805	0.5%	7,140	1.7%	4,463,315	37.7%	4.08%
West Virginia	118,810	11.4%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%*	118,810	10.5%	0.11%
Wisconsin	46,414	3.0%	33,500	45.3%	29	0.01%	0	0.0%	79,943	4.4%	0.07%
Wyoming	3,111,232	33.7%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	3,111,232	10.3%	2.84%

	USDA Forest Service		National Park Service		Fish and Wildlife Service		Bureau of Land Management		Total Designated Area		Share of NWPS
Territories	10,000	35.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%*	10,000	9.5%	0.01%
U.S. Total	36,160,560	18.8%	43,900,032	54.6%	20,703,061	22.3%	8,700,855	3.6%	109,464,508	17.8%	100.00%
Share of NWPS		33.0%		40.1%		18.9%		7.9%			100.00%

Sources: For Forest Service: U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, Forest Service, *Land Areas Report (LAR)—as of Sept 30, 2012*, at http://www.fs.fed.us/land/staff/lar/LAR2012/LAR_Table_07.pdf.

For NPS: U.S. Dept. of the Interior, National Park Service, *National Park Service, Designated Wilderness Acreage by State, as of 12/20/2012*; personal communication with Jeremy Sweat, NPS Office of Legislative and Congressional Affairs, Washington, DC.

For FWS: U.S. Dept. of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service, Division of Realty, *FY2012 FWS Land Statistical Data Tables for the Annual Report of Lands Under Control of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service as of September 30, 2012*, Table 8, at http://www.fws.gov/refuges/realty/archives/pdf/2012_Annual_Report_of_LandsDataTable11162012.pdf.

For BLM: U.S. Dept. of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, *Public Land Statistics 2011*, at http://www.blm.gov/public_land_statistics/pls11/pls5-4_11.pdf.

Note: *indicates the agency owns no land within the state.

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