



Celebrating 60 years of the Wilderness Act

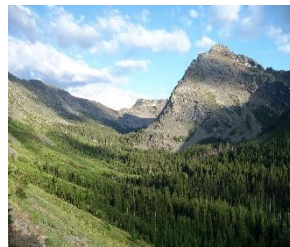


Six decades ago, on Sept. 3, 1964, President Lyndon Johnson **signed into law an act** that established a **National Wilderness Preservation System** - "... for the permanent good of the whole people." This law directed federal land management agencies, including the Forest Service, to manage congressionally designated wilderness areas to preserve their wilderness character. To commemorate this **important and visionary legislation**, the White House proclaimed September 2024 as **National Wilderness Month**. Our wildernesses encompass some of **America's most special places and landscapes**—forested mountains, alpine meadows, rock peaks above timberline, tundra, lava beds, deserts, swamps, coastal lands and islands.

Wilderness Areas in the Northern Region

The Northern Region manages **15 Wilderness Areas** totaling around **5 million acres**. This means that **about 20 % of the Region is Designated Wilderness**. Visit [Wilderness Connect](https://wilderness.net) (<https://wilderness.net>) or the [links](#) below to learn more.

Wilderness Areas in the Northern Region	Designation Year
Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness	1978
Anaconda Pintler Wilderness	1964
Bob Marshall Wilderness	1964
Cabinet Mountains Wilderness	1964
Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness	1980
Gates of the Mountains Wilderness	1964
Great Bear Wilderness	1978
Gospel-Hump Wilderness	1978
Lee Metcalf Wilderness	1983
Mission Mountains Wilderness	1975
Rattlesnake Wilderness	1980
Salmo-Priest Wilderness	1984
Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness	1964
Welcome Creek Wilderness	1978



Wilderness Character Monitoring

Wilderness Character Monitoring (WCM) is an interagency effort to monitor wilderness character and track how it changes over time across the entire **National Wilderness Preservation System**. WCM directly relates to **Wilderness Stewardship Performance (WSP)** by evaluating the outcomes of wilderness stewardship actions and how those **actions affect wilderness character**. As of 2024, the Northern Region has **completed WCM baselines for six wilderness areas** and expects all baseline work to be completed by 2026. **Trends in wilderness character** will start to be assessed as early as 2024 for the **Anaconda-Pintler** and **Mission Mountains Wilderness areas**.

Partnership Spotlight



The **Rattlesnake Wilderness** is located on the Missoula Ranger District, Lolo National Forest. Prior to its wilderness designation, the **Montana Power Company** built ten earthen dams on eight mountain lakes to supplement the water supply for the **City of Missoula**. The dams are operated and maintained under a combination of easement and special use permits. The dams are no longer used for municipal purposes. As a result, the **City of Missoula, Trout Unlimited**, and the **Lolo NF** partnered together to analyze the breaching and decommissioning of the **McKinley Lake Dam** as a pilot project. The dam breaching was successfully implemented this summer. **Forest Service blasters** from around the Region used explosives and traditional skills to breach the dam. The **Northern Region Pack Train** was used to transport the explosives and project supplies to the dam site. Wilderness personnel from the Missoula Ranger District also assisted. **Montana Conservation Corps** crews were used pre/post blasting to implement the necessary hand work. **Trout Unlimited** planned and led the outlet stream channel restoration work post blasting. The dam decommissioning will improve the wilderness character by removing a development and previous trammeling action in the wilderness and restoring the natural ecological processes and function of the lake and outlet stream.

Gates of the Mountain Wilderness

The **Gates of the Mountains Wilderness**, often referred to simply as “the Gates,” is 28,562 acres and lies roughly 20 miles north of Helena, Montana in the Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest. The unimpaired character of this place has endured centuries: multiple prehistoric cultural groups – whose present-day descendants are the **Blackfeet, Confederated Salish and Kootenai, River Crow, and Shoshone** – hunted, migrated, and lived in this area because of its unique wildlife, habitats, and location between the river corridors.



Northern Rockies GACC (NRCC)* Fire Update

Statistic**	Forest Service	All Ownership
Current Active Fires (#)	49	52
Current Active Fire Acres	49,703	50,790
YTD Fires (#)	593	2,584
NRCC Resources Committed in the GACC (aircraft, crews, engines, overhead)	303	425
NRCC Resources Committed outside the GACC (aircraft, crews, engines, overhead)	341	504

*GACC: [Geographic Area Coordination Center](#); NRCC: [Northern Rockies Coordination Center](#) ** Current as of Sept 21, 2024, final morning report and final active summary spreadsheet 9/23/2024.

Northern Rockies Wilderness Skills Institute

In 2018, Forest Service staff and partners developed a **weeklong training program** with the **vision** of “*providing the highest quality Wilderness training program in the Northern Rockies that will educate, support, and cultivate a community of present and future wilderness and wildland stewards through the cooperation of the Forest Service, partners, and volunteers.*”



The Northern Rockies Wilderness Skills Institute

(NRWSI) is a training partnership between multiple partners that include the [Selway-Bitterroot Frank Church Foundation](#), [Society for Wilderness Stewardship](#), [Bob Marshall Wilderness Foundation](#), [United States Forest Service](#), and the [Ninemile Wildlands Training Center](#). In May of 2024, over **200 new and seasoned wilderness professionals**

from the Northern Rockies and beyond gathered at Powell Ranger Station on the edge of the **Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness** for the fourth annual NRWSI. **Training includes** on-the-ground experiential classes in basic and advanced **trail maintenance, crosscut saw skills, horsemanship, field leadership skills**, and the practices and theory of **wilderness management**.



Mission Mountain Youth Crew

The [Mission Mountains Youth Crew](#) is a summer job program that exposes **high school-age youth living on the Flathead Reservation** in Western Montana to career pathways in natural resources. Partners involved in this program include the **Confederated Salish Kootenai Tribe, Flathead National Forest, National Forest Foundation, Salish Kootenai College, Swan Valley Connections, Bob Marshall Wilderness Foundation, and Daughter of the Sun Backcountry Services**. This year the crew

performed wilderness stewardship work in the **Great Bear Wilderness**, doing trail maintenance along the Long Creek #166 trail while learning about traditional travel routes and ways of life within the ancestral lands of the **Salish, Kootenai, and Pend d'Oreille**.

Outcome Spotlight – Fire and Wilderness

Fire plays an important role as a natural change agent that shapes forested ecosystems within designated Wilderness. However, with climate change and insect infestation, wildfires are more extreme than they were historically, causing more severe fire effects and potentially damaging forest health. **Natural ignitions within Wilderness** can result in wildfires that may cross into the **Wildland-Urban Interface** and threaten communities or infrastructure.

To continue to allow fire to play its natural role in designated Wilderness, while also preventing negative impacts outside the Wilderness boundary, **prescribed fire**

can be an important tool. On the **Swan Lake District** of the **Flathead National Forest**, work just inside the Mission Mountains Wilderness boundary has accomplished this objective. The Lindy Project utilized prescribed fire to address forest health issues just inside the boundary of the Wilderness. By introducing fire in a controlled manner, the ecological benefits to the Wilderness could be achieved while also creating a buffer to moderate fire behavior in the event of a wildfire crossing the boundary.

In the **Scapegoat Wilderness** in Montana, a multiyear (2003-2011) prescribed burning effort restored fire to 16,000 acres. Scientific studies of the area are pending. Local fire managers drawing on decades of experience in the Scapegoat Wilderness landscape observed that several subsequent wildfires were moderated by the previous prescribed burning. Subsequent wildfires required less intervention, including the 2007 Ahorn Fire, 2012 Elbow Complex, and 2021 Dry Cabin Fire. This effort has been highlighted as an example of the importance of prescribed burning to maintain Wilderness character in a recent paper published in *Fire Ecology*. (Untrammeling the Wilderness Story Map

