

**6300-2 - CONSIDERATION OF LANDS WITH WILDERNESS  
CHARACTERISTICS IN THE LAND USE PLANNING  
PROCESS**

**U.S. Department of the Interior Bureau of Land Management**

BLM  
MANUAL

**6300-2 - CONSIDERATION OF LANDS WITH WILDERNESS  
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## **6300-2-CONSIDERATION OF LANDS WITH WILDERNESS CHARACTERISTICS IN THE LAND USE PLANNING PROCESS**

**.01 Purpose.** This manual contains the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) policy, direction, general procedures, and guidance for considering Lands with Wilderness Characteristics (LWCs) in the land use planning process under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA) and other applicable law. This manual also provides policy direction for designation of Wild Lands. It does not address or affect policy related to Congressionally-designated Wilderness or existing Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) pending before Congress.

**.02 Objective.** This guidance establishes the BLM's policy on considering LWCs in Resource Management Plans (land use plans) or land use plan amendments or revisions and management of LWCs as administratively designated Wild Lands. The guidance also establishes the BLM's policy for considering project-level decisions in areas not yet inventoried and analyzed in accordance with Part .1 of this policy.

**.03 Authority.** Principal authorities affecting the consideration of LWCs in the planning process are:

- A. The Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, 43 U.S.C. 1701 *et seq.* (FLPMA), exclusive of 43 U.S.C. 1782.
- B. The Wilderness Act of 1964, 16 U.S.C. 1131 *et seq.*
- C. National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, 42 U.S.C. 4321 *et seq.* (NEPA)
- D. Naval Petroleum Reserves Production Act of 1976, 42 U.S.C. 6501 *et seq.* (NPRPA)
- E. Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA), Section 1320, 43 U.S.C. 1784
- F. Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) Regulations, 40 CFR 1500-1508
- G. BLM Regulations, 43 CFR 1601-1610, 43 CFR 2360.0-1 *et seq.*
- H. Secretary's Order 3310
- I. Department of the Interior (DOI) NEPA Regulations, 43 CFR Part 46

**.04 Responsibilities.**

A. During the land use planning process, the BLM Director shall:

1. Implement policy, goals, objectives, and procedures for the consideration and protection of LWCs in land use plans and the preservation of the BLM's discretion to protect wilderness characteristics through subsequent land use planning.
2. Coordinate with BLM State Directors, field offices, other agencies, or entities in considering and protecting LWCs in land use plans.
3. Ensure adherence to proper delegations of authority related to decisions, actions, and policies concerning the consideration and protection of LWCs in land use plans.
4. Ensure compliance with the NEPA, FLPMA, BLM planning regulations, and CEQ and DOI NEPA regulations, and serve as liaison with the DOI's Office of Environmental Policy and Compliance.

B. During the land use planning process, State Directors shall:

1. Implement policy and provide statewide program coordination and guidance for the consideration and protection of LWCs in land use plans and the preservation of the BLM's discretion to protect wilderness characteristics through subsequent land use planning.
2. Provide program development, technical management assistance, and funding support to field offices as appropriate to ensure LWCs are adequately considered and Wild Lands are appropriately designated in land use plans.
3. Ensure compliance with the NEPA, FLPMA, BLM planning regulations, and CEQ and DOI NEPA regulations.

C. During the planning process, District Managers and Field Managers shall:

1. Update and maintain the wilderness inventory for lands within the planning area. Review existing information regarding wilderness characteristics, and gather and evaluate such information submitted by the public or the BLM for consideration and protection of LWCs in land use plans. This evaluation shall include any citizen proposals for designation of LWCs as Wild Lands. Identify all LWCs within the planning area.
2. After consulting with the State Director, determine planning priorities as needed regarding LWCs and designation of Wild Lands.

3. In carrying out any public participation requirements in accordance with applicable law, including 43 CFR 1610.2(c), ensure that the issues identified for consideration in the plan include LWCs when they are present.
4. Ensure that any planning criteria developed in accordance with applicable law, including 43 CFR 1610.4-2, include management of LWCs when they are present.
5. Disclose impacts of each alternative to identified LWCs.
6. As with other management actions, recommend to the State Director management actions for LWCs, including designation as Wild Lands and appropriate measures to protect wilderness characteristics in the plan.

#### **.05 References.**

- A. FLPMA, 43 U.S.C. 1701 *et seq.*
- B. The Wilderness Act of 1964, 16 U.S.C. 1131 *et seq.*
- C. NEPA, 42 U.S.C. 4321 *et seq.*
- D. NPRPA, 42 U.S.C. 6501 *et seq.*
- E. ANILCA Section 1320, 43 U.S.C. 1784.
- F. CEQ Regulations, 40 CFR 1500-1508
- G. BLM Regulations, 43 CFR 1601-1610
- H. BLM Handbook H-1601-1, Land Use Planning Handbook
- I. BLM Wilderness Inventory Manual 6300-1
- J. Secretary's Order 3310
- K. DOI NEPA Regulations, 43 CFR Part 46

**.06 Policy.** Managing the wilderness resource is part of the BLM's multiple-use mission. Proper management of this resource is a high priority for the BLM, and the natural state of such lands should be protected to the extent possible, consistent with the BLM's planning and management authorities and its multiple-use mission. The BLM shall protect LWCs when undertaking land use planning and when making project-level decisions by avoiding impairment of their wilderness characteristics unless the BLM concludes, as part of its decision-making process, that impairment of wilderness characteristics is appropriate and

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consistent with applicable requirements of law and other resource management considerations. Where the BLM concludes that authorization of uses that may impair wilderness characteristics is appropriate, the BLM shall document the reasons for its determination and consider measures to minimize impacts on those wilderness characteristics. Where the BLM concludes that protection of wilderness characteristics is appropriate, the BLM shall designate these lands as “Wild Lands” through land use planning.

The process described in this manual shall be integrated into land use plans in order to—

1. document the rationale for wilderness resource decisions,
2. ensure that wilderness characteristics and protective measures are being adequately evaluated in an environmental analysis, and
3. consider measures to minimize potential impacts on wilderness characteristics and other resource values and uses.

## **.07 Background.**

A. FLPMA specifically states that preserving and protecting certain public lands in their natural condition is part of the BLM’s mission. *See* 43 U.S.C. 1701(a)(8).

B. FLPMA provides direction for inventories in Sections 102(a)(2), 201(a), and 202(c)(4) and (9), and land use planning in Section 202. These sections direct the BLM to prepare and maintain an inventory of all public lands and their resources and values. These sections also direct the Bureau to rely, to the extent available, on inventory information in the development of land use plans.

C. Secretary’s Order 3310 affirms that the protection of the wilderness characteristics of public lands is a high priority for the BLM, and is an integral component of its multiple use mission.

## **.1 Procedures for Considering LWCs in Land Use Planning**

.11 Introduction. The BLM will evaluate LWCs through the land use planning process, and examine the agency’s options for managing these lands. The BLM will determine whether these areas should be designated Wild Lands and managed to protect their wilderness characteristics (and for uses that are compatible with such protection), or managed for other uses that may be incompatible with protection of wilderness characteristics. The BLM will then determine the most appropriate land use allocations for these lands.

## **.12 Factors for Consideration of LWCs**

A. Wilderness Characteristics. Consider and document the wilderness characteristics for each area identified as an LWC area resulting from the inventory described in the Wilderness Inventory Manual 6300-1, including the extent to which each of the

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identified wilderness characteristics contributes to the overall value of an LWC for designation as Wild Lands.

B. Manageability. Consider and document whether the LWCs can be effectively managed to protect their wilderness characteristics. Manageability may vary depending on the planning alternative.

1. General. The BLM must determine whether the LWCs may be managed to maintain their wilderness values by protecting identified wilderness characteristics over the life of the plan, based on present knowledge of the resources, ongoing uses, and valid existing rights in the area. If the ongoing uses, including the likely exercise of valid existing rights, are expected to substantially impair the area's wilderness characteristics even after any reclamation is completed, then the BLM may reasonably conclude that the affected portion should not be managed to protect wilderness characteristics as Wild Lands.

2. Documenting Land Status. Document the land status of LWCs. Subsurface rights in an area owned by a party other than the Federal government may limit the BLM's ability to protect wilderness characteristics on the surface.

3. Access to State or Private Inholdings. In addressing manageability, assess the potential impact of providing access to non-Federal inholdings.

4. External Impacts. The fact that incompatible activities or uses can be seen or heard from areas within the LWCs should not be a determining factor when analyzing the manageability of LWCs as Wild Lands unless these impacts are pervasive and omnipresent.

5. Other Statutory Requirements. Some lands managed by the BLM are subject to specific additional statutory requirements. Consider those requirements where appropriate in determining whether wilderness characteristics can be effectively managed to protect those characteristics.

C. Resource Values and Uses. Consider and document both the extent to which other resource values and uses of the LWC would be forgone or adversely affected as well as the benefits that may accrue to other resource values and uses as a result of designating the LWC as Wild Lands. Consider the following:

1. Presence of Other Resources. The degree to which the other resource or use is present in the LWC;

2. Development Potential. The potential for further development of the other resource in the LWC;

3. Resource Availability. The degree to which the other resource or use is present on other public and private lands outside the LWC;

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4. Economic Importance. Local or regional economic dependence on the resource in the LWC; and

5. Compatibility with Protection. The degree to which use or development of the resource is compatible with or conflicts with management of the LWC as Wild Lands.

.13. Land Use Planning Process. Additional information is included in the Land Use Planning Handbook H-1601-1.

A. Preparation Plan. The preparation plan provides the foundation for the entire planning process. The preparation plan should also identify the skills, data/meta-data, budget, and interim tasks (such as completing or updating the wilderness inventory) necessary to address the issues through the planning process.

1. Issue Identification. Planning issues are disputes or controversies about existing and potential land and resource allocations, levels of resource use, development, and protection opportunities for consideration in the preparation of the land use plan. Identify whether LWCs are a planning issue to be addressed and any associated management concerns.

2. Planning Criteria. Planning criteria guide development of the plan by helping define the decision space. Identify preliminary planning criteria related to wilderness characteristics and their protection, including plan parameters, constraints, or existing planning decisions—including designated Wild Lands—that will be carried forward.

3. Data Needs. The preparation plan should identify the information or data needed to resolve issues or to perform the requisite analysis. Identify existing LWC-related data sources, such as prior wilderness inventories and citizen-proposed LWCs. Identify data gaps and other information necessary to address LWCs, such as completion of a new wilderness inventory.

4. Budget. Identify labor and operation support costs to obtain skills, inventory information, and other data to address LWCs through the planning process.

B. Scoping. The Notice of Intent for the planning effort should include LWCs as a planning issue and LWC-related preliminary planning criteria. In the Scoping Report, summarize comments related to LWCs received during the formal scoping period and describe any additional LWC-related issues from internal or external scoping meetings.

C. Analysis of the Management Situation (AMS). The AMS provides the basis for formulating reasonable alternatives and can begin as soon as the planning project is approved. Describe current management direction relating to LWCs from existing

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planning documents. Prepare an area profile for LWCs that describes their locations and current trends and levels of other resource uses and activities in LWCs. Incorporate the analysis and documentation performed under section .12 of this Manual regarding LWC quality, manageability, and other resource values and uses. Identify management opportunities to respond to identified issues.

D. Formulation of Alternatives. Where LWCs have been identified, the NEPA document for the land use plan (or plan amendment) shall contain a reasonable range of alternatives, including an alternative or a combination of alternatives that protects all LWCs as Wild Lands, as well as ones that provide for other resource management considerations. These alternatives provide a basis for comparing impacts to wilderness characteristics and to other resource values or uses. Additional alternatives may also be developed.

When the wilderness inventory has identified the presence of one or more wilderness characteristic such as naturalness, but the necessary complement of wilderness characteristics needed to identify the area as an LWC area is lacking, consideration should be given to protection of those lands in other non-Wild Lands administrative designations in the land use plan, such as Areas of Critical Environmental Concern or Special Recreation Management Areas, if such area also meets the standards otherwise required for such designations.

During the development of all land use plans and land use plan amendments involving LWCs, the Washington Office (WO) will participate in the State Office review of the preliminary draft alternatives. The WO will review draft planning decisions affecting LWCs and brief the Director. State and Field Office staff shall participate in the Director's briefing as appropriate.

Each alternative should include desired outcomes (goals and objectives) and the management actions and the allowable uses and actions to achieve those outcomes. An alternative that protects and manages LWCs as administratively designated Wild Lands must contain management actions to achieve protection and could consider land use plan decisions including, but not limited to, those that:

1. Recommend withdrawal from mineral entry.
2. Close to leasing or allow leasing only with No Surface Occupancy/No Exceptions.
3. Designate rights-of-way exclusion areas.
4. Close to construction of new temporary or permanent roads.
5. Close OHV use or limit OHV use to designated routes.
6. Close to mineral material sales.

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7. Exclude certain commercial permits (e.g., commercial or personal-use wood-cutting permits).
8. Designate as Visual Resource Management (VRM) Class I or II.
9. Close to new structures unrelated to preserving the wilderness characteristics.
10. Retain public lands in Federal ownership.

Management actions and restrictions pertaining to the protection of LWCs, including designation of Wild Lands, should be placed in a “Wild Lands and Lands with Wilderness Characteristics” subheading under the “Special Designations” category in planning documents.

E. Resource Considerations. As stated in Secretary’s Order No. 3310, all BLM offices shall place a high priority on the protection of LWCs and designation as Wild Lands when making planning decisions, or when making decisions regarding the potential utilization of resources. The BLM shall designate LWCs as Wild Lands unless the BLM determines that impairment of wilderness characteristics is appropriate and consistent with other applicable requirements of law and other resource management considerations. In making this decision, the following resources and uses should be considered in the context of (a) the quality of the resource or use, (b) the quality of the wilderness characteristics, and (c) the impact of the proposed use on wilderness characteristics.

1. *Commercial uses*: Consider the scarcity of and alternative sites for proposed new commercial uses.
2. *Fire*: Wild land fire management is consistent with protecting wilderness characteristics. However, in rare cases fire management requires significant actions that are incompatible with protecting the wilderness characteristics. In these cases, priority may be given to fire management actions that are needed to protect human life or property.
3. *Grazing*: Grazing management may be consistent with protection of wilderness characteristics. In some cases, however, grazing management practices—including proposals for major new range projects, large vegetation manipulation, or significant needs for motorized access—could conflict with protection of wilderness characteristics.
4. *Minerals - Leasable*: Consider opportunities to protect the wilderness characteristics through the use of stipulations such as closed to leasing, as well as No Surface Occupancy with No Exceptions.

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5. *Minerals - Renewable Energy including solar, wind, and geothermal:* Consider the quality and scarcity of the site for production of renewable energy and the value of the wilderness characteristics.

6. *Off-Highway Vehicles:* Consider the quality and scarcity of the site for off-highway vehicle use. Consider LWCs in the development of travel management plans.

7. *Rights-of-Way:* Consider the purpose, need, and significance for the proposed right-of-way, and any impacts to wilderness characteristics.

8. *Scientific Research:* Scientific research is often consistent with protecting wilderness characteristics. Where significant scientific research opportunities exist, consider stipulations on the research to resolve potential conflicts.

- F. Affected Environment. In the NEPA document supporting the planning decision, identify LWCs using the 6300-1 Wilderness Inventory Manual and incorporate this inventory by reference. The NEPA document should include a brief description of these lands, including a map and the acreage for each area. Also describe the existing land use allocations, uses, management actions, and/or mitigation measures that are currently in place.
- G. Environmental Consequences. In the NEPA document supporting the planning decision, describe the direct, indirect, and cumulative effects of alternatives on wilderness characteristics and the effect of managing to protect wilderness characteristics on other affected resources.

The extent to which managing to protect the wilderness characteristics affects a particular resource or use will vary from area to area, depending on a number of factors, including:

1. The degree to which use or development of the resource is compatible with or conflicts with management of LWCs.
  2. The degree to which management for LWCs enhances other multiple use benefits on or near the management area such as protecting watersheds, wildlife habitat, natural plant communities, cultural and archaeological resources, scenic quality, and similar natural values.
- H. Final Planning Decision. In making the final planning decision on whether to protect LWCs, consider both the resources that would be forgone or adversely affected, and the resources that would benefit. When the decision is to protect the wilderness characteristics, they are designated as Wild Lands and managed accordingly.

**.2. Procedures for Considering Proposed Projects in Areas Not Yet Analyzed Consistent with this Policy.** The following procedures apply when a project is proposed in an area not yet analyzed consistent with this policy.

**.21 When Wilderness Inventory Is Not Required.**

A. If the project is in conformance with the existing land use plan, the BLM manager shall make an initial determination as to whether or not wilderness characteristics, as defined by BLM Manual 6300-1, are clearly lacking in the area affected by the project. If wilderness characteristics are clearly lacking and documented as such, the project can be considered without conducting a wilderness inventory. Lands that clearly lack wilderness characteristics are those that do not meet the naturalness criterion because they have extensive surface disturbance and/or do not meet the size criterion of 5,000 acres or any of the size exceptions. Documentation of a clear lack of wilderness characteristics should not be based on the solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation criteria.

B. When the BLM manager determines that wilderness characteristics are not clearly lacking in the area that would be affected by the proposed project, the manager shall determine whether or not the project could be implemented in a manner that preserves the BLM's discretion to protect wilderness characteristics as Wild Lands through subsequent land use planning. If the project can be so implemented, the project may be considered without conducting a wilderness inventory. Examples of projects that may fit into this category are construction and use of temporary facilities for wild horse and burro gathering activities and maintenance activities for existing range facilities.

**.22 When Wilderness Inventory Is Required.** All other situations involving proposed projects require that a wilderness inventory be conducted following procedures described in BLM Manual 6300-1. If the wilderness inventory documents that wilderness characteristics are not present, the project may proceed without further consideration under this manual. When the wilderness inventory documents that wilderness characteristics are present, consider this wilderness resource information as described below.

**.23 Decision-making Process in Areas Where the BLM Has Identified that LWCs Are Present.** If the BLM finds through its NEPA analysis that impacts from a proposed action may impair the wilderness characteristics, the BLM may, subject to applicable program regulations and valid existing rights—(1) deny the action, (2) approve the action, if appropriate and consistent with applicable law and other resource management considerations or necessary for the exercise of valid existing rights, (3) approve the action with measures to minimize impacts on wilderness characteristics, or (4) postpone the decision until wilderness characteristics can be addressed through a land use planning process.

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As part of this analysis, the BLM shall consider whether the action would create a temporary impact to wilderness characteristics that could be restored so as not to limit the BLM's discretion to designate the area as Wild Lands in a future land use planning process. As part of the NEPA analysis for the proposed action, the BLM shall also consider alternatives to the proposed action that would mitigate the impacts to wilderness characteristics, such as specific design features.

.24 Authority to Approve Projects that May Impair LWCs. The decision to protect or not protect LWCs is discretionary when considering proposed projects. However, as stated in Secretary's Order No. 3310, all BLM offices shall place a high priority on the protection of LWCs when making decisions regarding the potential utilization of resources. The BLM shall avoid impairing such wilderness characteristics unless, as part of its decision-making process, the BLM concludes that impairment of wilderness characteristics is appropriate and consistent with applicable requirements of law and other resource management considerations.

For proposed projects that fall under Section .2, District and Field Managers may approve projects in LWCs that may impair wilderness characteristics if the decision is necessary for the exercise of valid existing rights, for emergency actions, or under the following limited circumstances:

1. The proposed action is anticipated to create no more than minor surface disturbance or minor impacts to wilderness characteristics, such as maintenance of existing range projects, e.g., water sources, construction of temporary facilities for wild horse and burro gathers, and construction of fences to restrict livestock grazing in sensitive riparian areas.
2. The proposed action is anticipated to involve no more than minor surface disturbance or placement of small structures and would result in a net enhancement of wilderness characteristics. Such activities would include reclamation and restoration of past disturbances and unauthorized disturbances.
3. The proposed action is intended to control expansion of invasive exotic species.
4. There is general support at the local level among project proponents, stakeholders, interested members of the public, and BLM officials for the project and any proposed mitigation. Such support should be documented as part of the decision making process.

The State Director must concur on any decision to approve a project in an LWC that may impair wilderness characteristics to a greater degree than projects described in 1-2 above, if the proposed action would not preclude the BLM from exercising its discretion to designate the LWC as Wild Lands in subsequent land use planning.

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All other decisions, not covered by the limited circumstances outlined above, i.e., that may impair wilderness characteristics on a project-level basis that would preclude the BLM from exercising its discretion to designate the LWC as Wild Lands in subsequent land use planning, must be forwarded to the WO National Landscape Conservation System staff for review before proceeding. The WO will review draft decisions affecting LWCs and brief the Director on them. In any event, in order to authorize a project that may impair wilderness characteristics, the authorized officer must determine that the impairment of wilderness characteristics is appropriate and consistent with applicable requirements of law and other resource management considerations.

.25 Management of LWCs Pending Land Use Planning. Where an inventory has identified LWCs, but the BLM has not completed a land use plan process that addresses those lands in a manner consistent with Secretary's Order 3310 and this policy, the BLM shall evaluate whether closures or restrictions of areas and/or routes under 43 CFR Subparts 8341 and 8364 are warranted to implement this policy and preserve the BLM's discretion to protect wilderness characteristics through subsequent land use planning.

**.3 Recommendations for Possible Future Congressional Designation.** The State Director will determine whether the BLM should develop a recommendation for Congress to designate Wild Lands as units within the National Wilderness Preservation System. This determination may be made for a single land use plan or several land use plans that have designated Wild Lands within a state. If the State Director determines that a recommendation should be developed, the State Director shall submit a proposal to develop recommendations to the Director for consideration. The process for developing recommendations must provide for public involvement.

**WILD LANDS MANUAL – DRAFT GLOSSARY**

Following are definitions for terms used in this Manual. Also see definitions for terms used in Section 103 of FLPMA, the planning regulations at 43 CFR 1601.0-5, the wilderness regulations at 43 CFR 6301.5, and The Wilderness Act. This glossary does not supersede those definitions or those in other laws or regulations.

Amendment: the process for considering or making changes in the terms, conditions, and decisions of approved land use plans or MFPs using the prescribed provisions for resource management planning appropriate to the proposed action or circumstances. Usually only one or two issues are considered that involve only a portion of the planning area.

Conformance: means that a proposed action shall be specifically provided for in the land use plan or, if not specifically mentioned, shall be clearly consistent with the goals, objectives, or standards of the approved land use plan.

Goal: a broad statement of a desired outcome. Goals are usually not quantifiable and may not have established time frames for achievement.

Land Use Allocation: the identification in a land use plan of the activities and foreseeable development that are allowed, restricted, or excluded for all or part of the planning area, based on desired future conditions.

Land Use Plan: a set of decisions that establish management direction for land within an administrative area, as prescribed under the planning provisions of FLPMA; an assimilation of land-use-plan-level decisions developed through the planning process outlined in 43 CFR 1600, regardless of the scale at which the decisions were developed.

Lands With Wilderness Characteristics (LWC): lands that have been inventoried and found to contain wilderness characteristics as defined in Section 2(c) of the Wilderness Act of 1964.

Objective: a description of a desired condition for a resource. Objectives can be quantified and measured and, where possible, have established time frames for achievement.

Planning Criteria: the standards, rules, and other factors developed by managers and interdisciplinary teams for their use in forming judgments about decision making, analysis, and data collection during planning. Planning criteria streamline and simplify the resource management planning actions.

Project: any action or authorization that requires NEPA review, including a Determination of NEPA Adequacy.

Revision: the process of completely rewriting the land use plan due to changes in the planning area affecting major portions of the plan or the entire plan.

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Surface Disturbance: any new disruption of the soil or vegetation, including vegetative trampling, which would necessitate reclamation.

Wild Lands: a designation resulting from a plan decision to protect Lands with Wilderness Characteristics.

Wilderness: An area defined in Section 2(c) of the Wilderness Act of 1964 (78 Stat. 891), and included in the National Wilderness Preservation System.

Wilderness Study Area: designated areas with wilderness characteristics made through the inventory and study processes authorized by Section 603 of FLPMA, and, prior to 2003, through the planning process authorized by Section 202 of FLPMA.