

SJ20: WILDERNESS STUDY AREAS

RESOURCES IN FOREST SERVICE AREAS

In March, the EQC study of Wilderness Study Areas administered by the Forest Service focuses on resources in those seven areas. Presenters at the meeting will explain current uses in these area as well as other resources including timber and minerals.

WILDERNESS CHARACTER MONITORING REPORTS

The Montana Wilderness Study Act of 1977 requires the Forest Service to maintain the wilderness character of the study areas. Toward that end, the Forest Service enlisted the Wilderness Institute to conduct field monitoring. As part of the W.A. Franke College of Forestry and Conservation at the University of Montana, the Institute used Montana Conservation Crews and volunteers for the field work. Included in the EQC materials are executive summaries for each of the reports with findings for:

- Weed infestations;
- Wildlife observations;
- Streambank conditions;
- Infrastructure; and
- Trails.

"... wilderness study areas designated by this Act shall, until Congress determines otherwise, be administered by the Secretary of Agriculture so as to maintain their presently existing wilderness character and potential for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System."
Montana Wilderness Study Act of 1977

CURRENT USES IN USFS WILDERNESS STUDY AREAS

The Forest Service provided a background summary for each wilderness study areas that includes current uses allowed under forest plans, a table that compares elements of each area, and maps that show what portions of wilderness study areas are also covered under the 2001

roadless rule. In general, the rule prohibits road construction and reconstruction in selected areas in addition to restrictions imposed under the Wilderness Study Act.

MINERAL DEPOSITS IN USFS WILDERNESS STUDY AREAS

The Bureau of Mines and Geology at Montana Tech will present geologic data and mineral potential for the wilderness study areas.

Overview and uses – WSAs managed by USFS in Montana

Provided by USDA Forest Service Northern Region at request of Montana EQC - March 9, 2020

WSA name & unit	Acres ^x	Forest plan recommended wilderness acres & date	Non-winter motorized access ^y	Non-winter mechanized access (mtn bikes)	Winter motorized access ^{y, yy}	Grazing	Suitable timber on nfs lands per forest plan ^z	Mining activity	Utility corridors	Forest plan revision status
Big Snowies (HLC)	91,000	0 (1982)	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	Underway
Blue Joint (Bitt)	61,000	28,500 (1987)	N	N	N	Y	N	Y	Y (1)	Not yet scheduled (TBD)
Hyalite/Porc/Buf (C-G)	151,000	0 (1987)	Y(motorcycles)	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	Underway
Middle Fork Judith (HLC)	81,000	0 (1982)	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y ^{xx} (1)	Underway
Sapphire (Bitt/B-D)	94,000	0 (1987)	N (Bitt) Y (B-D)	N (Bitt) Y (B-D)	N (Bitt) Y (B-D)	Y (Bitt) Y (B-D)	N (Bitt) N (B-D)	Y (Bitt) Y (B-D)	1 (Bitt) N (B-D)	B-D complete (09) Bitt Revision TBD
Ten Lakes (Koot)	34,00	26,000 (2015)	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y ^{zz}	N	Completed 2015
West Pioneer (B-D)	151,000	0 (1981 & 2009)	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	N	Completed 2009

Superscripts: ^x acreage per Montana Wilderness Study Act of 1977 (Public Law 95-150)

^y doesn't include any routes authorized to access private inholdings within WSA (if applicable)

^z per FSH 1909.12 ch. 20 sec. 24.41, WSAs are not suitable for timber production to maintain option for future designation

^{xx} utility corridor crosses southwest corner of the Middle Fork Judith WSA

^{yy} extent of area / routes open to over-snow motorized travel varies by WSA

^{zz} 5 claims existed in the WSA in 1977 (dating to 1890's/early 1900's). Govt purchased 4 claims between 1980-1989. Offer to purchase 5th claim not accepted.