



West
Virginia
Highlands
Conservancy



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THE WILDERNESS SOCIETY

Wilderness on the Mon: Myth vs. Reality

MYTH: Wilderness erodes private property rights.

REALITY: Wilderness does **NOT** erode private property rights because it is only designated on federal lands. Private land may be surrounded by wilderness, but wilderness area management restrictions, such as prohibitions on logging and road construction, do not apply to private land. [Property owners must be assured “adequate access” to their parcels that could include permission to drive through wilderness.]

MYTH: There is already a large amount of the Monongahela National Forest set aside as wilderness

REALITY: Less than 9%, 78,800 of 918,368 acres, are currently designated as wilderness on the Monongahela National Forest (the national average for designated wilderness on federal lands is 18%¹).

MYTH: The Monongahela does not have any areas that qualify for wilderness status.

REALITY: There are over 190,000 acres of land on the Mon that meets the criteria established by the 1964 Wilderness Act and refined by the Eastern Wilderness Areas Act of 1975. Only 143,000 acres of this is being proposed by the West Virginia Wilderness Coalition due to concessions made to non-Wilderness interests.

MYTH: Wilderness hurts local economies.

REALITY: Wilderness provides numerous economic benefits and helps maintain the natural capital that can help communities diversify economies by attracting and retaining new businesses, residents and a local workforce. Wilderness also protects scenic backdrops that improve property values, thereby increasing county revenues. A study by The Wilderness Society showed that in the Green Mountains of Vermont, wilderness actually increases nearby private property values.²

MYTH: Wilderness “locks up” commercial forest land.

REALITY: On average, only around **3%** of the state’s timber supply comes off the Mon National Forest.³ Timber in potential wilderness areas is generally less accessible than privately owned timber. Wilderness “frees up” wild land from being developed. The majority of acreage being proposed by the West Virginia Wilderness Coalition is currently off limits to cutting timber by way of its US Forest Service Management Prescription. The proposal being put forth by the West Virginia Wilderness Coalition would affect only **less than 1%** of the state’s timberland.

Myth: Hunting and fishing are not allowed in wilderness areas.

Reality: Hunting and fishing are traditional uses in National Forests wilderness areas and are permitted. Our current wilderness areas are home to some of the best hunting and fishing in the nation. They provide hunters and anglers a unique experience in wild, unspoiled country.

Myth: Wilderness designation involves acquisition of additional land by the federal government.

Reality: Wilderness designation occurs only on current federally-owned, public land.

Myth: Motorized transportation is totally prohibited in wilderness areas, even in emergencies.

Reality: While the Wilderness Act prohibits the general use of motorized equipment or vehicles in wilderness, the law clearly allows for their use by managing agencies for search and rescue, firefighting,

and other circumstances where they are found to be the minimum tool necessary for the administration of an area. For example, helicopters may be used to evacuate an injured person, and chainsaws might be allowed to clear massive blow downs of trees across trails.

Myth: Fires, insects, and diseases may not be controlled in wilderness areas.

Reality: Section 4(d)(1) of the 1964 Wilderness Act states that “such measures may be taken as necessary in the control of fires, insects, and diseases.”

Myth: Wilderness restricts recreation opportunities, making it available only to the young and healthy

Reality: Over $\frac{3}{4}$ of the Mon NF would remain non-wilderness if the proposed 143,000 acres are added to our current Wilderness. Wilderness itself provides people with a broad array of outdoor recreational opportunities. These include backpacking, hiking, hunting, fishing, camping, horseback riding, mountaineering, rock -climbing, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, wildlife viewing, photography, canoeing, and kayaking.

Myth: Wilderness conflicts with the “multiple use” of federal lands.

Reality: Wilderness *is* multiple use by fact and law.⁴ The 5 multiple uses of National Forests are wildlife, watershed, recreation, range and timber. Wilderness provides for all of these, however, the timber remains standing!

¹ The Wilderness Information Network; <http://www.wilderness.net>

² Phillips, S. 2000. Windfalls for wilderness: land protection and land value in the Green Mountains. In Cole, D.N. and McCool, S..F. *Proceedings: Wilderness Science in a Time of Change*. Proc. RMRS-P-000. Ogden, UT: U.S. Depart. of Agriculture Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Research Station.

³ The Wilderness Society. 2001. *The Monongahela National Forest and the West Virginia Economy*. November 16

⁴ Multiple Use and Sustained Yield Act of 1960, Federal land Policy and Management Act (1976), National Forest Management Act (1976)