

National Wilderness Preservation System

The National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS) of the United States protects federally managed land areas designated for preservation in their natural condition. The Wilderness Act (Public Law 88-577) established the NWPS when it was signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson on September 3, 1964. The NWPS includes lands managed by four federal agencies: Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Forest Service, National Park Service, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Wilderness areas are parts of national parks, wildlife refuges, national forests, and the public domain and may include land in several different units managed by different agencies.

When the Wilderness Act was passed in 1964, 54 areas (9.1 million acres) in 13 states were designated as wilderness. Since 1964, the NWPS has grown almost every year and now includes 757 areas (109,512,959 acres) in 44 states and Puerto Rico¹. In 1980, the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) added over 56 million acres of wilderness to the system – the largest addition in a single year. Information about all of the 757 wildernesses that make up the NWPS is available in a searchable format at www.wilderness.net.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service manages 20,702,900 acres of designated wilderness, of which 18,692,615 acres (90.3%) are in Alaska ([USFWS 2009 Lands Report](#) (2.3 meg pdf file)). The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge has 8,000,000 acres of designated wilderness in the NWPS.

¹ Acreages are from www.wilderness.net. According to this website, they are the sum of acreage measurements reported by each administrative unit for each wilderness, and the data were last updated on April 20, 2011.