

Why Wilderness?

Wilderness offers the highest degree of Forest protection - maintaining soil and water quality, ecological stability and plant and animal gene pools, and provides habitat for wildlife and unsurpassed recreational opportunities.

Why More Wilderness?

Demand for Wilderness is increasing. The USFS Cherokee National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (2004) references a study that estimates that “wilderness use will increase 171% over the next 50 years”.¹

Citizens want more Wilderness! The National Survey on Recreation and the Environment (2001) found that 69.8% of those surveyed agreed or strongly agreed with designating more federal lands in their state as wilderness, and over 96% agreed or strongly agreed with knowing that future generations will be able to visit and experience wilderness areas.

Existing Wilderness will not meet future needs Currently about 10.4% of the Cherokee National Forest is officially designated as wilderness. Nationally, wilderness comprises about 18.5% of total US Forest Service lands. Here in the southeast, only 5.4% of US Forest Service lands in region 8 are designated as wilderness. With more than 120 million Americans living within a half day’s drive to our ten southeastern National Forests, now more than ever, it is important to protect our roadless areas, old growth forests, and areas containing critical wildlife habitat. Without protections, these forests will not be available for future generations to enjoy.

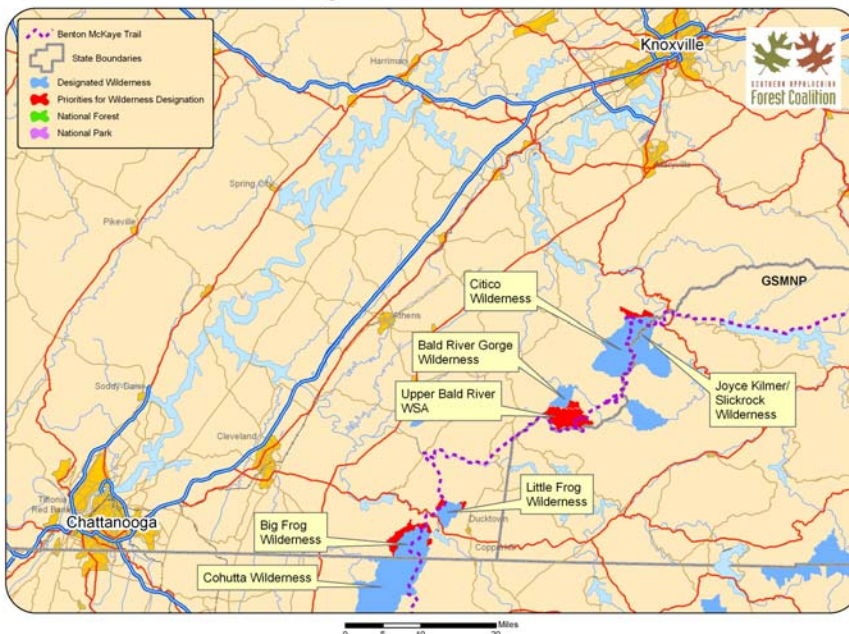
1. *Participation rates based on *Cherokee, Pisgah, Nantahala National Forests Recreation Realignment Report*, Overdevest and Cordell, 2001. Projections based on *Outdoor Recreation in American Life, A National Assessment of Demand and Supply Trends*, H. Ken Cordell, Principal Investigator, 1999 with the projections converted to a base year of 2000 instead of original base year of 1995.

Wilderness in Tennessee

The Big Frog Wilderness, which is adjacent to the Cohutta Wilderness is the gem here in Tennessee. At a total of 45,000 acres, the Cohutta-Big Frog Wilderness with adjacent Primitive areas creates the largest tract of Wilderness on USFS land in the eastern United States.

Perhaps the best way to experience National Forest wilderness in Tennessee is to hike the Benton MacKaye Trail. This 300-mile long hiking trail passes through all of the wilderness areas in the southern Cherokee, with the exception of the Gee Creek Wilderness (2,493 ac).

Priorities for Wilderness Designation in Cherokee National Forest - Southern Districts



<i>Southern Cherokee Areas that Qualify for Wilderness</i>		
Big Frog Wilderness	365 ac	USFS recommended
Big Frog perimeter	4,400 ac	USFS did NOT recommend
Little Frog	977 ac	USFS recommended
Upper Bald River WSA	9,197 ac	USFS recommended 9,112 ac
Bald River Gorge Wilderness	873 ac	USFS did NOT recommend
Joyce Kilmer Slickrock Wilderness	1,973 ac	USFS recommended

Q: *What is a wilderness area* **A:** Wilderness designations on parts of our National Forests that give the highest degree of protection. The Wilderness Act (1964) defines wilderness as “land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation,... which generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man’s work substantially unnoticeable...”. Wilderness is unique in that only Congress can designate specific areas for wilderness use and protection.

Q: *What can I do in wilderness areas* **A:** Hunt, fish, hike, camp, canoe, kayak, swim, picnic, backpack, bird watch, take wildflower walks, ride horses, cross-country ski, snowshoe, go spelunking or rock-climbing, conduct ecological research, lead educational trips. Enjoy the solitude.

Q: *Are roads permitted in wilderness areas* **A:** Generally, no. No permanent roads are allowed. However, the law makes a few limited exceptions for temporary roads if absolutely necessary to administer the wilderness area, including protecting public health and safety. Also, access is allowed to private property surrounded by wilderness.

Q: *Are all motors banned from wilderness areas* **A:** In order to preserve the wild, natural character of the nation’s wilderness areas, the Wilderness Act prohibits the general use of motorized equipment and transportation. But the Act clearly allows for their use by the U.S. Forest Service (and other managing agencies) for search and rescue operations, firefighting to protect adjacent private land, insect and disease control, and other circumstances where they are the minimum tools necessary for the proper administration of the area.

Q: *How are trails maintained in wilderness areas* **A:** In general, only the minimum tools necessary for maintenance are used, normally hand tools. However, power tools can be authorized in emergencies brought on by ice storms, extensive blow-downs, or other events.

Q: *Can fires be fought in wilderness areas* **A:** The Wilderness Act specifically states in Section 4(d)(l) that certain measures may be taken to control fire in wilderness areas. These include the use of mechanized equipment, the building of fire roads, fire towers, firebreaks, or pre suppression facilities and other techniques for fire control. In short, anything necessary for public health or safety (for example, protecting adjacent private lands and buildings) is clearly permissible. U.S. Forest Service policy provides for suppression of wild fires in wilderness areas.

Q: *Doesn’t wilderness conflict with other uses of the national forest* **A:** No. In fact, not only is wilderness identified as one of the “multiple-uses” for national forests under the law, it is one of the best tools to achieve many of the other designated uses, including recreation, water and soil conservation, and wildlife habitat.

Q: *Does wilderness hurt the timber industry and other parts of the economy* **A:** Wilderness preservation is a negligible factor in the availability and production of timber. Let’s look at Virginia as an example. For example, in 1997, less than one percent of the state’s total timber harvest came off the George Washington and Jefferson National Forests, according to the U.S. Forest Service figures. And existing wilderness is less than six percent of Virginia’s national forests. Further, timber in designated and potential wilderness areas is generally less accessible and less cost-effective to harvest than on other government and private forestlands. In fact, wilderness can help communities diversify their economy by attracting new businesses, residents and visitors. It also protects scenic backdrops that help improve individual property values, and protects the headwaters of the drinking water supply for many communities.

Q: *Does wilderness affect private property* **A:** Not adversely. Only federal land may be designated as wilderness. The Act allows access to private in-holdings. Private property values near wilderness often rise.

Q: *Is wilderness designation a new idea* **A:** The tradition of protecting wilderness dates back almost 100 years to the country’s foremost conservationists—Theodore Roosevelt, John Muir, and Aldo Leopold, to name a few—who recognized the need to set aside America’s wild places to preserve our watersheds, wildlife habitat and the great outdoors from the ever-growing spread of development and commercialization. The National Wilderness Preservation System however, began with the passage of The Wilderness Act in 1964.

