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Flat Tops Wilderness Education Plan

White River and Routt National Forests



The Flat Tops Wilderness is located on the Eagle and Blanco Districts of the White River National Forest and The Yampa District of the Routt National Forest. The wilderness encompasses 235,214 acres, and is the second largest in the State of Colorado. The Flat Tops Wilderness plays host to tens of thousands of recreationists in search of hiking, camping, horseback, hunting and fishing. Nationally, management of this wilderness has been rated as the highest complexity.

Wilderness managers recognize wilderness education as a proactive management tool. Managers also know that educating wilderness visitors today can reduce or, in some cases, prevent resource damage in the future and save money in the long run. This education plan is a tool for identifying issues, assigning action items and tracking accomplishments related to the education of wilderness visitors and land managers on the importance and protection of the wilderness resource.

Goals:

- Increase awareness of wilderness history, philosophy, values of wilderness, and role of wilderness in ecosystem management.
- Instill and strengthen an appreciation for the value of resources in development of a wilderness ethic that results in informed decision making.
- Influence behavioral changes that promote the preservation of wilderness quality.
- Demonstrate and promote attitudes and behaviors appropriate to wilderness resource protection. Promote the sustainability of the wilderness ecosystem by ensuring its health, diversity, and productivity.
- Recognize the unique characteristics of wilderness that distinguish it from more traditional and environmental education efforts (historical perspective and cultural legacy, spiritual and emotional renewal, challenge and risk and preservation of natural systems).
- Provide accurate, accessible, and meaningful wilderness information via web pages, trailhead signage, booklets and brochures, and training of internal personnel with wilderness responsibilities, including VIS and frontliners.
- Collaborate with stakeholders, other agencies, and publics in fostering wilderness awareness through the development of partnerships.

Issues: The major issues identified for the Flat Tops Wilderness in order of priority are:

- ❖ Improper Backcountry Practices
- ❖ Non-native Plants
- ❖ Increasing Use
- ❖ Motorized Intrusions
- ❖ Lack of Wilderness Awareness

Impact of Issues on Wilderness:

Improper Backcountry Practices: Wilderness managers have noticed a slow decline in backcountry campsites and day use areas. Improper sanitation, stock use, trail etiquette and campsite use is causing degradation in many areas.

Invasive Plants: Noxious weeds have been known to crowd out native and endemic plants, which may lead to erosion and alter food sources for livestock and wildlife. Non-native infestations disturb the naturalness of wilderness.

Increasing Use: As more and more people a venturing out on the trail, social and environmental conditions are threatened.

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Motorized Intrusions: Illegal motorized use has been on the rise in recent years as OHVs have become more popular and snow-machines have increased in power and efficiency. Motorized use harasses wildlife, and detracts from the serenity, solitude, and beauty of the wilderness.

Lack of Wilderness Awareness: Wilderness is often viewed internally as a place for recreation. This idea leads to a lack of interdisciplinary support. Externally, many potential advocates are unaware of the wilderness movement and wilderness management issues.

Key Messages:

Improper Backcountry Practices: Wilderness areas are special and sometimes fragile areas. Entering a wilderness requires a large amount of responsibility toward protection of the resource. If a person chooses to go to a wilderness they must adhere to the regulations and the Leave No Trace (LNT) principles.

Invasive Plants: Impacts of non-natives on ecosystem. Ways to reduce impacts. Identification and documentation protocols for use by agency personnel. Refer to the Medicine Bow-Routt NFs Noxious and Invasive Plant Management Plan.

Increasing Use: Many wilderness visitors aren't necessarily seeking a wilderness dependant experience. Their needs may be met outside wilderness.

Motorized Intrusions: Mechanized transportation is illegal in wilderness. Refer to R2 I&E Plan for the Prevention of Snowmobile Trespass.

Lack of Wilderness Awareness: Wilderness is special place. Wilderness values transcend recreation. Wilderness is a full partner in the Forest Services' multiple use mission.

Target Audiences:

Externally, all wilderness users as well as potential advocates that do not visit wilderness. Internally, resources specialists and frontliners will be targeted.

IMPLEMENTATION

Issue	Action Item	Responsibility	Target Date	Completion Date	Monitoring Results
Backcountry Practices	LNT and Authority of the Resource				
	Post Trailheads	Wild Rangers	6/15		XX% of THs
	Front Desk	VIS	Ongoing		XX Contacts
	Backcountry contacts	Wild Rangers	Ongoing		XX Contacts
	News releases	Wild Managers	Ongoing		XX News Releases
	Ed Groups (expound)	Wild Rangers	9/15		XX Presentations
	Local Cable	Wild Managers	5/1		XX Stations
	User Groups (expound)	Wild Managers			XX User Groups
	Train FS Crews	Wild Managers	6/15		XX Trained
	Regulation Compliance	Wild Rangers	Ongoing		XX Violations
Internet	Cox	1/1		XX Hits	
Invasive Plants	Non-native management				
	Front Desk	VIS	Ongoing		XX Contacts
	Post Trailheads	Wild Rangers	6/15		XX% of THs
	Backcountry contacts	Wild Rangers	Ongoing		XX Contacts
	FS -Identification and Documentation	Range	6/15		XX Trained
Increasing Use	Promote Wilderness Independent Activities				
	Front Desk	VIS	Ongoing		XX Contacts
	Backcountry contacts	Wild Rangers	Ongoing		XX Contacts
	Internet	Cox	1/1		XX Hits
Mechanized/ Motorized Intrusions	Non-motorized message				
	Front Desk	VIS	Ongoing		XX Contacts
	Backcountry contacts	Wild Managers	Ongoing		XX Contacts
	News releases	Wild Managers	1/1		XX News Releases
	Regulation Compliance	Wild Rangers	Ongoing		XX Violations
	User Groups (expound)	Wild Managers			XX User Groups
	Post Trailheads	Wild Rangers	12/1		XX% of THs
Wilderness Awareness	NWPS/FTW Awareness				
	Front Desk	VIS	Ongoing		XX Contacts
	Backcountry contacts	Wild Rangers	Ongoing		XX Contacts
	News releases	Wild Managers	Ongoing		XX News Releases
	Ed Groups (expound)	Wild Rangers	5/15,9/15		XX Presentations
	Local Cable	Wild Managers	5/1		XX Stations
	User Groups (expound)	Wild Managers	Ongoing		XX User Groups
	Internal Presentations	Wild Managers	6/1		XX Presentations
Internet	Cox	1/1		XX Hits	

References:

Wilderness Act of 1964

The foundation of wilderness education can be found in the 1964 Wilderness Act.

The Act states:

“there is hereby established a National Wilderness Preservation System to be composed of federally owned areas designated by Congress as ‘wilderness areas,’ and these shall be administered for the use and enjoyment of the American people in such a manner as will leave them unimpaired for future use and enjoyment as wilderness and so to provide for the protection of these areas, the preservation of their wilderness character; and for the gathering and dissemination of information regarding their use and enjoyment as wilderness.”

National Strategy

In 1991, a National Strategic Plan for Wilderness Education was developed. This plan states that the Forest Service is at the forefront of Wilderness management and uses education as a primary management tool. The Wilderness education program exemplifies the Agency’s role as a wise steward of wild lands and will fulfill the Forest Service’s mandate to preserve Wilderness quality. A high quality, fully supported wilderness education program, targeted both within the agency and at our publics, will:

- Foster knowledge and understanding of wilderness values.
- Influence behavioral changes that promote the preservation of wilderness quality.
- Instill and strengthen a wilderness ethic that results in informed decision making.
- Carry wilderness values to those who do not experience wilderness through visitation.
- Create a constituency, which supports Forest Service wilderness management.

Forest Service Manual Direction 2323.12(2) - Policy

Use information, interpretation, and education as the primary tools for management of wilderness visitors.

The Chief’s 10-Year Wilderness Challenge Action Plan

The 10-year challenge has set a goal of having all wilderness areas accomplishing 6 out of 10 BFES elements by 2014 and to have this make a difference on the ground. One of the 10 elements is the completion and implementation of a wilderness education plan for each wilderness.

Rocky Mountain Region Action Plan

The Regional Wilderness Education Action Plan is tiered from the National Wilderness Education Strategy. The Regional Strategy states that the future of wilderness protection lies in our ability to educate the American public to the values and benefits of wilderness. Wilderness managers recognize wilderness education as a preventive management tool. Managers also know that educating wilderness visitors today can reduce or, in some cases, prevent resource damage in the future and save money in the long run. The Regional Action Plan has three areas of emphasis in FY2004. These areas are:

- Education Plans, from the 10-year Wilderness Advisory Group (WAG) Challenge,
- 40th Anniversary Events, from the 10-year Wilderness Advisory Group (WAG) Challenge,
- Attending R2 Wilderness trainings