

National Forest Suitability Determinations

Introduction

Management Areas are used in the revised Forest Plans to define the general suitability of various places for different uses and management activities. Each area is defined by a description of uses and management activities that are generally suitable. While these descriptions are used to define and map areas that are generally suitable for different types of management and use, they do not describe what uses and management activities will actually take place at any given time or location. Those decisions will be made later, and will be subject to site-specific analysis and documented through the NEPA process.

The following Management Area themes are described in these pages:

- 1.1 Designated Wilderness
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- 2.1 Designated and Eligible Wild, Scenic and Recreational Rivers
- 2.2 Backcountry Areas
- 3.1 Special Interest Areas, Special Areas, and Experimental Forests
- 3.2 Research Natural Areas
- 3.3 General Forest: Mixed Use Emphasis, Low Intensity Management
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- 5.1 General Forest: Mixed Use Emphasis, High Intensity Management
- 5.2 Residential Forest Intermix
- 6.1 High Use Recreation Complexes or Use Areas

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Management Area Themes

1.1 Designated Wilderness

Theme – Wilderness Areas are designated by Congress and managed to protect and perpetuate their natural state, while offering opportunities for solitude and self-reliance by the individual. Natural processes and conditions are minimally affected by human use, and impacts from visitation do not detract from the natural setting. Ecological processes such as natural succession, fire, insects and disease are allowed to function with a minimum of human influence.

General Suitability of Wilderness Areas:

- Wilderness areas are not suitable for timber production, timber harvest (including salvage), or commercial use of miscellaneous forest products.
- These areas are not suitable for commercial communication sites or utility corridors, although the Forest Service may have small radio repeater sites to assist in Wilderness administration.
- Although Wilderness areas may be generally suitable for livestock grazing, the Bitterroot, Flathead and Lolo Forests do not have any commercial grazing allotments in Wilderness areas. Outfitter guides and recreational stock users may graze pack stock in some areas where feed is available although they are encouraged to pack weed free feed for their animals.
- Wilderness areas are generally suitable for managed fire use to promote ecosystem function.
- These areas are not suitable for motorized or mechanized use except in emergency or other special situations.
- Wilderness areas are generally not suitable for other activities or uses that do not conform to wilderness policy such as facilities that provide user comfort.
- These areas are generally suitable to provide the following Opportunity Classes: Pristine (Opportunity Class 1), Primitive (Opportunity Class 2), Semi-Primitive (Opportunity Class 3), Semi-Primitive Concentrated Use (Opportunity Class 4). The primary Opportunity Class is Primitive.

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1.2 Recommended Wilderness

Theme – Recommended wilderness areas are those areas that the Forest Service has recommended to Congress for inclusion in the Wilderness System. Until Congressional action is taken they will be managed to protect their wilderness characteristics, while allowing opportunities for solitude and self-reliance by the individual. Ecological processes such as natural succession, fire, and insects and disease, are generally allowed to function with little human influence, and with the imprint of man substantially unnoticeable.

General Suitability of Recommended Wilderness Areas:

- Recommended Wilderness areas are not suitable for timber production, timber harvest (including salvage), or commercial use of miscellaneous forest products.
- These areas are not suitable for commercial communication sites or utility corridors, although the Forest Service may have small radio repeater sites to assist in administration.
- Although Recommended Wilderness areas may be generally suitable for livestock grazing, the Bitterroot, Flathead and Lolo Forests do not have any commercial grazing allotments in Recommended Wilderness areas. Outfitter guides and recreational stock users may graze pack stock in some areas where feed is available although they are encouraged to pack weed free feed for their animals.
- Recommended Wilderness areas are generally suitable for managed fire use to promote ecosystem function.
- These areas are not suitable for motorized or mechanized travel except in emergency or other special situations.
- Recommended Wilderness areas are generally not suitable for other activities or uses that do not conform to wilderness policy such as facilities that provide user comfort.
- Recommended Wilderness areas are generally not suitable for other activities or uses that have the potential to change or alter the qualities that qualify an area for wilderness recommendation. (Suggested Change).
- These areas are suitable to provide the following Opportunity Classes Pristine (Opportunity Class 1), Primitive (Opportunity Class2), Semi-Primitive (Opportunity Class 3), and Semi-Primitive Concentrated Use (Opportunity Class 4). The primary Opportunity Class is Primitive.

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2.1 Designated and Eligible Wild, Scenic and Recreational Rivers

Theme – This designation applies to river segments that Congress has designated under the National Wild and Scenic River System, and also to streams found eligible by the Forest Service for a river study to assess the potential for inclusion in the national system. Designated and eligible rivers have been identified due to the presence of one or more of the following outstandingly remarkable values: scenery, recreation opportunities, geologic features, wildlife, or fisheries.

Wild rivers are sections of rivers that are free of impoundments and generally inaccessible except by trail, with watersheds or shorelines essentially primitive, and waters unpolluted.

Scenic rivers are sections of rivers, that are free of impoundments, with shorelines or watersheds still largely primitive and undeveloped, but accessible in places by roads.

Recreational rivers are sections of rivers accessible by road or railroad that may have some shoreline development, and may have had an impoundment or diversion in the past.

These rivers, and adjacent areas, are managed to protect and perpetuate their river values. The actual width of an area may vary in order to protect the outstanding remarkable values, but it is usually at least one-quarter mile on either side of the stream.

General Suitability of Wild River Segments:

- Wild River segments are not suitable for timber production, timber harvest (including salvage), or commercial use of miscellaneous forest products.
- These areas are not suitable for commercial communication sites or utility corridors.
- Although Wild River segments may be generally suitable for livestock grazing, the Bitterroot, Flathead and Lolo Forests do not have any commercial grazing allotments in Wild river segments. Outfitter guides and recreational stock users may graze pack stock in some areas where feed is available although they are encouraged to pack weed free feed for their animals.
- Wild River segments are generally suitable for managed fire use to promote ecosystem function.
- These areas are not suitable for motorized use.
- Wild River Segments are generally not suitable for other activities or uses that do not protect the outstandingly remarkable values for which they were designated.

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General Suitability of Scenic and Recreation River Segments:

- Scenic and Recreation River segments are not suitable for timber production, although timber harvest (including salvage), for multiple use reasons could occur. These areas are generally suitable for commercial use of miscellaneous forest products.
- These areas are generally suitable for commercial communication sites or utility corridors.
- Scenic and Recreation River segments are generally suitable for livestock grazing allotments.
- These areas are generally suitable for managed fire use to promote ecosystem function.
- These areas are generally suitable for motorized use on designated roads and trails.

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2.2 Backcountry Areas

Theme – Backcountry areas are generally roadless landscapes that are natural appearing with little or no evidence of recent human-caused disturbance. These areas are generally suitable for non-motorized recreation opportunities in a natural-appearing landscape. Ecological processes such as natural succession, fire, and insects and disease, are allowed to function with little human influence, while allowing opportunities for solitude and self-reliance.

General Suitability of Backcountry Areas:

- Backcountry areas are not suitable for timber production, although timber harvest (including salvage), for multiple use reasons could occur. These areas are generally suitable for commercial use of miscellaneous forest products.
- These areas are generally not suitable for commercial communication sites or utility corridors, although the Forest Service may have small radio repeater sites to assist in administration.
- Although Backcountry areas may be generally suitable for livestock grazing, the Flathead, Lolo, and Bitterroot Forests do not have any commercial grazing allotments in Backcountry areas. Outfitter guides and recreational stock users may graze pack stock in some areas where feed is available although they are encouraged to pack weed free feed for their animals.
- Backcountry areas are generally suitable for managed fire use to promote ecosystem function.
- These areas are generally not suitable for motorized use except in emergency situations. Existing motorized routes may be allowed to exist as corridors through Backcountry areas and the use of chainsaws for trail maintenance is specifically allowed.
- These areas are generally not suitable for facilities that provide user comfort, however minimal improvements may exist from past use.
- Backcountry areas are generally suitable for recreation opportunities that are near the primitive end of the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum. Semi-primitive motorized opportunities may occur in some areas where existing motorized use is allowed to continue. Generally Summer Recreation Opportunity Spectrum classes range from primitive to semi-primitive non-motorized. Generally the Winter Recreation Opportunity Spectrum is semi-primitive non-motorized, but may include semi-primitive-motorized. The primary Recreation Opportunity class is Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized.

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3.1 Special Interest Areas, Special Areas, Experimental Forests, and National Recreation Areas

The primary distinctions between these four designations are:

- Special Interest Areas protect unique scientific values, and only foster use where appropriate.
- Special Areas have recreation as an underlying value.
- Experimental Forests provide for management-based research.
- National Recreation Areas are Congressionally designated areas with high recreation values and are managed to protect and enhance public recreation use.

Special Interest Areas are meant to protect, and where appropriate, foster public use and enjoyment of areas with scenic, historical, geological, botanical, zoological, paleontological, or other special characteristics. Each area possesses specific and unusual scientific values that are made available for public study and use. Such areas may contain examples of unique vegetation or animals, possess emotional significance, scenic values, or have great public popularity. Size may vary from small to fairly large.

General Suitability of Special Interest Areas:

- Special Interest areas are generally not suitable for timber production, timber harvest, salvage, or commercial use of miscellaneous forest products.
- These areas are generally not suitable for commercial communication sites or utility corridors.
- Special Interest areas are generally not suitable for livestock grazing.
- Special Interest areas are generally suitable for managed fire use to promote ecosystem function.
- These areas are generally not suitable for motorized use except in emergency situations. Existing motorized routes may be allowed to exist as corridors through Special Interest areas and the use of chainsaws for trail maintenance is specifically allowed.
- Special Interest Areas are generally suitable for other uses to the extent that these uses are in harmony with the purpose for which the area was designated. They are generally suitable for non-manipulative research, observation, and study of undisturbed unique habitats.
- Special interest area may be suitable for a few facilities to provide comfort or interpretation depending on the purpose of the area.

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- These areas are generally suitable to provide the following Recreation Opportunity Spectrum Classes in both summer and winter; primitive, semi-primitive non-motorized, to semi-primitive motorized. The primary Recreation Opportunity class is Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized.

Special Areas are meant to protect and manage for public use and enjoyment, special and unique recreation areas with scenic, geologic, botanical, zoological, paleontological, archaeological, or other special characteristics or unique values. Size may vary from small to fairly large. State designated historic sites and potential developed sites could be considered for designation.

General Suitability of Special Interest Areas:

- Special areas are generally not suitable for timber production, timber harvest, salvage, or commercial use of miscellaneous forest products.
- These areas are generally not suitable for commercial communication sites or utility corridors.
- Special areas are generally not suitable for livestock grazing.
- Special areas are generally suitable for managed fire use to promote ecosystem function.
- These areas are generally not suitable for motorized or mechanized use except in emergency situations. Existing motorized routes may be allowed to exist as corridors through Special areas and the use of chainsaws for trail maintenance is specifically allowed.
- Special Areas are generally suitable for other uses to the extent that these uses are in harmony with the purpose for which the area was designated.
- Special Areas may be generally suitable for a few facilities to provide comfort or interpretation depending on the purpose of the area.
- These areas are generally suitable to provide the following Recreation Opportunity Spectrum Classes in both summer and winter; primitive, semi-primitive non-motorized, to semi-primitive motorized. The primary Recreation Opportunity class is Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized.

Experimental Forests provide lands for research that serves as the basis for management of forest and rangelands. Established Experimental Forests are managed according to developed resource management plans specific to each forest.

General Suitability of Experimental Forests:

- Experimental Forests are not suitable for timber production, although timber harvest (including salvage), for multiple use (research) reasons could occur. These areas are generally not suitable for commercial use of miscellaneous forest products.

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- These areas are generally not suitable for commercial communication sites or utility corridors.
- Experimental Forests are generally not suitable for livestock grazing except for research purposes.
- Experimental Forests are generally suitable for managed fire use to promote ecosystem function.
- These areas are generally suitable for motorized use on designated roads and trails.
- Experimental Forests are generally suitable for other uses to the extent that these uses are in harmony with the purpose for which the area was designated and the use is agreed to by the Forest and Range Experiment Station Director and the Forest Supervisor.
- Experimental Forests may be generally suitable for a few facilities to provide comfort or interpretation depending on the purpose of the area.
- These areas are generally suitable to provide the following Recreation Opportunity Spectrum Classes in both summer and winter; primitive, semi-primitive non-motorized, to semi-primitive motorized. The primary Recreation Opportunity class is Semi-Primitive Motorized.

National Recreation Areas are meant to protect and manage for public use and enjoyment, high value recreation areas. Size may vary from small to fairly large.

General Suitability of Special Interest Areas:

- National Recreation Areas are not suitable for timber production, although timber harvest (including salvage), for multiple use reasons could occur. These areas are generally not suitable for commercial use of miscellaneous forest products.
- These areas are generally not suitable for commercial communication sites or utility corridors.
- National Recreation areas are generally not suitable for livestock grazing.
- National Recreation areas are generally suitable for managed fire use to promote ecosystem function.
- These areas are generally not suitable for motorized use except in emergency situations. Existing motorized routes may be allowed to exist as corridors through National Recreation areas and the use of chainsaws for trail maintenance is specifically allowed.
- National Recreation Areas are generally suitable for other uses to the extent that these uses are in harmony with the purpose for which the area was designated

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- These areas are generally suitable to provide the following Recreation Opportunity Spectrums Classes; primitive, semi-primitive non-motorized, to semi-primitive motorized. The primary Recreation Opportunity class is Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized.

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3.2 Research Natural Areas

Theme – Research Natural Areas (RNA) form a network of representative forest habitats, shrub lands, grasslands, alpine, wetlands, riparian systems, geologic formations, wildlife habitats, aquatic communities, and other such areas that have special or unique characteristics of scientific importance. Research Natural Areas are selected for one or more of the following reasons:

- To serve as reference areas for evaluating the range of natural variability and the impacts of management in similar environments.
- To protect and maintain representative or key elements of biological diversity at the genetic, species, population, community, or ecosystem levels.
- To serve as areas for the study of ecosystems and ecological processes including succession.
- To support educational activities.
- To serve as baseline areas for measuring ecological change.

General Suitability of Research Natural Areas:

- Research Natural Areas are generally not suitable for timber production, timber harvest, salvage, or commercial use of miscellaneous forest products.
- These areas are generally not suitable for commercial communication sites or utility corridors.
- Research Natural Areas are generally not suitable for livestock grazing.
- Research Natural Areas are generally suitable for managed fire use to promote ecosystem function.
- These areas are generally not suitable for motorized use except in emergency situations. Existing motorized routes may be allowed to exist as corridors through Research Natural areas and the use of chainsaws for trail maintenance is specifically allowed.
- Research Natural Areas are generally suitable for other uses to the extent that these uses are in harmony with the purpose for which the area was designated. They are generally suitable for non-manipulative research, observation, and study of undisturbed unique habitats
- These areas are generally suitable to provide the following Recreation Opportunity Spectrum Classes; primitive and semi-primitive non-motorized. The primary Recreation Opportunity class is Semi-Primitive non-Motorized.
- RNA's area generally suitable to provide limited interpretation facilities but not suitable for permanent facilities that provide for user comfort.

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3.3 General Forest: Mixed-Use Emphasis, Low Intensity Management (Not-Suitable for Timber Production)

Theme – Low Intensity General Forest (and non-forested) areas are generally suitable for providing a mix of fish and wildlife habitat, a relatively natural visual quality setting, a assortment of recreational opportunities, and a variety of other goods and services. They are generally suitable for managing vegetation at low intensities, although initial entries in areas with moderate to high fuels may be managed more intensively to reduce the hazard. Management in these areas emphasizes ecosystem management goals using a wide variety of methods.

General Suitability of Low Intensity General Forest Management Areas:

- Low Intensity General Forest Management areas are not suitable for timber production, although timber harvest (including salvage), for multiple use reasons could occur. These areas are generally suitable for commercial use of miscellaneous forest products.
- These areas are generally suitable for commercial communication sites or utility corridors.
- Low Intensity General Forest Management areas are generally suitable for livestock grazing allotments.
- These areas are generally suitable for managed fire use to promote ecosystem function.
- These areas are generally suitable for motorized use on designated roads and trails, but at low road density levels.
- These areas are generally suitable for limited improvements for public comfort and interpretation.
- These areas are generally suitable to provide the following Recreation Opportunity Classes in both summer and winter; semi-primitive non-motorized, semi-primitive motorized to roaded natural. The primary Recreation Opportunity class is typically Semi-Primitive Motorized.

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4.1 General Forest: Mixed-use Emphasis, Moderate Intensity Management (Suitable for Timber Production)

Theme – Moderate Intensity General Forest (and non-forested) areas emphasize a balance of sustainable ecosystems and resource uses with lands that are suited for timber production. These areas are generally suitable for providing a mix of fish and wildlife habitat; a relatively natural visual quality setting with moderate evidence of human management activity; a wide range of recreational opportunities, and a variety of other goods and services. Landscapes appear modified with roads and vegetation management activities evident at moderate levels.

General Suitability of Moderate Intensity General Forest Management Areas:

- Moderate Intensity General Forest Management areas are generally suitable for timber production. These areas are generally suitable for commercial use of miscellaneous forest products.
- These areas are generally suitable for commercial communication sites or utility corridors.
- Moderate Intensity General Forest Management areas are generally suitable for livestock grazing allotments.
- These areas are generally suitable for managed fire use to promote ecosystem function. On the Flathead National Forest, these areas are suitable for prescribed burning but generally not suitable for wildland fire use.
- These areas are generally suitable for motorized use on designated roads and trails.
- General forest areas are suitable for dispersed recreation users and developed rustic facilities that provide for some level of user comfort, interpretation and protection.
- These areas are suitable to provide the following Recreation Opportunity Spectrum Classes in both summer and winter; semi-primitive motorized to roaded natural, with limited semi primitive non-motorized. The primary Recreation Opportunity class is typically Roaded Natural.

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5.1 General Forest: Mixed-use Emphasis, High Intensity Management (Suitable for Timber Production)

Theme – High Intensity General Forest (and non-forested) areas are generally suitable for providing a broad mix of forest products. This could include commercial and non-commercial forest products and uses; forage production; a diversity of fish and wildlife habitats; minerals development; and a natural visual quality setting with high evidence of human management activities. Timber harvest and other active vegetation treatments are generally suitable means for achieving management goals. These areas are characterized by coniferous forests, which can be intensively managed for wood fiber. This suitability designation is applied in areas where the potential to grow timber is high, and where regularly scheduled harvest of commercial timber harvest is a feasible tool for meeting management objectives. Areas have open roads, which provide commercial access and roaded recreational and motorized OHV opportunities on designated roads and trails, including high use dispersed recreation sites. They are also generally suitable for providing non-motorized and mechanized recreation opportunities on closed roads. Visual quality settings generally reflect an intensively managed landscape where human influence is evident.

General Suitability of High Intensity General Forest Management Areas:

- High Intensity General Forest Management areas are generally suitable for timber production. These areas are generally suitable for commercial use of miscellaneous forest products.
- These areas are generally suitable for commercial communication sites or utility corridors.
- High Intensity General Forest Management areas are generally suitable for livestock grazing allotments.
- These areas are generally suitable for managed fire use to promote ecosystem function. On the Flathead National Forest, these areas are suitable for prescribed burning but generally not suitable for wildland fire use.
- These areas are generally suitable for motorized use on designated roads and trails.
- These areas are generally suitable for high dispersed recreation use and developed facilities that are designed to provide user comfort, convenience and interpretation.
- These areas are suitable to provide the following Recreation Opportunity Spectrum Classes in both summer and winter; semi-primitive motorized, roaded natural, to rural. The primary Recreation Opportunity class is Roaded Natural.

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5.2 Residential and Forest Intermix

Theme – These areas are characterized by public lands intermingled with private lands. This is an area where private use and developed residential use adjoins National Forest System Lands. National Forest System lands are typically managed to protect natural resources and provide compatible multiple uses. Lands are generally not suitable for resource extraction on a sustainable basis; however, treatment may occur to improve public safety, enhance scenery or reduce fuels. Opportunities to consolidate land ownership patterns may be pursued. Numerous open roads provide access to private land, roaded recreational and motorized OHV opportunities on designated roads and trails. Motorized transportation is common. Some closed roads may provide non-motorized and mechanized recreation opportunities if access through private land is available. Dispersed recreation activities requiring overnight stays are not encouraged. Access to existing high use areas is usually provided. Sights and sounds of people predominate. Visual quality settings reflect low to moderate intensity management where human influence is evident.

General Suitability of Intermix Areas:

- Intermix areas are generally not suitable for timber production, although timber harvest (including salvage), for multiple use reasons could occur. These areas are generally suitable for commercial use of miscellaneous forest products.
- These areas are generally suitable for commercial communication sites or utility corridors.
- Intermix areas are generally suitable for livestock grazing allotments.
- These areas are generally suitable for managed fire use to promote ecosystem function to the extent that fuel and weather conditions permit the accepted risk to private land values.
- These areas are generally suitable for motorized use on designated roads and trails.
- These areas are generally suitable to provide developed facilities for user comfort, convenience and specialized recreation activities but are not suitable for overnight dispersed camping.
- These areas are suitable to provide the following Recreation Opportunity Spectrum Classes in both summer and winter; semi-primitive non-motorized, semi-primitive motorized, roaded natural, to rural. The primary Recreation Opportunity class is typically Roded Natural.

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6.1 High Use Recreation Complexes or Use Areas

Theme – Recreation use is the priority of these management areas. They have an attractive element such as a reservoir, skiing terrain, campground, or trail system that encourages public use. They provide, or are capable of providing, an array of recreational opportunities and experiences in a forested environment. Examples could include a four season winter sports area, a hiking trail system with a developed trailhead facility, developed campground, a lake or reservoir with combinations of developed and dispersed recreation opportunities or a groomed snowmobile trail system with associated trailhead facilities. The key factor in these management areas is that the recreation experiences are the attraction and other natural resources are complimentary to the recreation experience.

Surrounding terrain may also be included in the management area in order to assure an attractive setting for the development, and to provide for future expansion. The visual quality of the setting typically reflects planned high intensity management on the immediate site with moderate to high intensity management of surrounding areas. Human influence is usually evident.

General Suitability of Intermix Areas:

- High Use Recreation Complexes or Use areas are not suitable for timber production, although timber harvest (including salvage), for multiple use reasons could occur. These areas are generally not suitable for commercial use of miscellaneous forest products.
- These areas are generally not suitable for commercial communication sites and utility corridors.
- These areas are generally not suitable for managed fire.
- These areas are generally suitable for motorized or mechanized use if desirable and restricted to designated roads and trails.
- These areas are generally suitable for multiple facilities designed for use by large numbers of people. Facilities may be strictly designed for user comfort and convenience and could be highly refined.
- These areas are suitable to provide the following Recreation Opportunity Spectrum Classes; rural to urban, with infrequent occurrences of roaded natural settings. Some semi-primitive non-motorized opportunities may exist in the winter. The primary Recreation Opportunity class is rural.