



Date: August 14, 2026

U.S. Department of the Interior, Director (630)
Bureau of Land Management
1849 C St. NW, Room 5646
Washington, DC 20240
Attention: Management of Designated Wilderness Areas

Via submission on Regulations.gov: <https://www.regulations.gov/docket/BLM-2026-0067>

RE: **Policy Review: BLM Manual 6340, Management of Designated Wilderness Areas**
Document ID: BLM 2026-11949 (91 FR 35995)

Dear DOI & BLM Policy Review Teams,

Utah Public Lands Alliance (UPLA) is writing to provide public comment on the [Policy Review: BLM Manual 6340, Management of Designated Wilderness Areas](#). These comments are submitted on behalf of UPLA, its members, affiliated clubs, and volunteers who regularly recreate within the 244.4 million acres of BLM-administered public lands in the USA. This letter of comment shall not supersede the rights of other UPLA agents, representatives, or members from submitting their own comments; the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) should consider and appropriately respond to all comments received for this policy review.

UPLA is a non-profit organization representing over 5,800 members, in addition to speaking out for 69 OHV clubs and organizations. We advocate for responsible outdoor recreation, active stewardship of public lands, and encourage members to exercise a strong conservation ethic including “leave no trace” principles. We champion scrupulous use of public lands for the benefit of the general public and all recreationists by educating and empowering our members to secure, protect, and expand shared outdoor recreation access and use by working collaboratively with public land managers, all recreationists, and other public land stakeholders. Our members participate in outdoor recreation of all forms to enjoy federally and state managed lands throughout Utah, including BLM and US Forest Service managed public lands. UPLA members visit public lands to participate in motorized and human-powered activity such as off-roading, camping, hiking, canyoneering, horseback riding, sightseeing, photography, wildlife and nature study, observing cultural resources, and other similar pursuits on a frequent and regular basis throughout every season of the year. UPLA members and supporters have concrete, definite, and immediate plans to continue such activities in BLM managed public lands throughout the future.



I, Rose Winn, am an avid outdoor recreation enthusiast and anthropologist; hiking, backpacking, camping, rock climbing, off-roading, fishing, forage of wild herbs and plants for medicinal uses, and exploration of cultural and archeological sites and artifacts on public lands are among my core areas of activity and interest. I serve as the Natural Resources Consultant for Utah Public Lands Alliance (UPLA), a non-profit organization dedicated to keeping offroad trails open for all recreation users. While my profession allows me to advocate to protect public access to public lands for all stakeholders and multiple-uses, I also work as a volunteer on conservation, mitigation, and restoration projects on public lands.

As a joint writer of this comment letter, Loren Campbell is a Jeepster and UTV enthusiast from Virgin, Utah. Loren serves as the President of Utah Public Lands Alliance (UPLA). We share a strong interest in maximizing opportunities for offroad motorized recreation. Loren works full time as a volunteer advocate to protect access for all users, but also organizes and works as a volunteer on projects on public lands. UPLA, Loren, and I are also members of BlueRibbon Coalition. These comments are submitted on behalf of both me and Loren Campbell, as well as our members and followers from within and outside of Utah.

Please note our support and agreement with the comments submitted by BlueRibbon Coalition.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Topic	Page
General Comments	4
Prevent Administrative Expansion of Wilderness	5
Modernize Fire, Fuels, and Vegetation Management	11
Update Manual 6340 to Current Law and Executive Policy	20
Maximize Lawful Public Access and Unconfined Recreation	28
Public Safety and Emergency Response	37
Protect Motorized Access and Multiple Use on Adjoining Non-Wilderness Lands	44
Additional High-Priority Revisions to Manual 6340	52
Section-by-Section Recommended Revisions to Manual 6340	57
Summary of Recommendations	63
Closing	65
References	66



GENERAL COMMENTS

Utah Public Lands Alliance submits these comments in support of BLM's comprehensive review of Manual 6340, *Management of Designated Wilderness Areas*. This policy review provides an important opportunity to ensure that the Manual reflects current law, current Executive policy, contemporary wildfire science, modern public land management practices, and the statutory framework Congress established in the Wilderness Act. The letter advocates for modernization of the Manual without altering the fundamental purposes of designated Wilderness. Rather, it urges BLM to more faithfully implement the balance Congress created between preservation of wilderness character, protection of valid existing rights, public safety, and lawful public access.

UPLA supports preservation of congressionally designated Wilderness. However, that responsibility must remain bounded by the authority Congress actually delegated. Throughout the Manual, BLM should distinguish preservation from administrative expansion, ensuring that agency policy does not enlarge Wilderness boundaries, create de facto buffer zones, diminish valid existing rights, or extend Wilderness management standards onto adjoining multiple-use lands. Wilderness administration should remain firmly grounded in the Wilderness Act, FLPMA, individual Wilderness-designating statutes, and applicable judicial precedent.

The Manual should also recognize that the conditions facing America's Wilderness Areas have changed substantially since 2012. Increasing fuel accumulation, altered fire regimes, invasive species, climate variability, expanding recreation, technological advancements, and evolving public safety challenges require management policies that are flexible, science-based, and responsive to contemporary conditions. Active stewardship, when authorized by law and supported by sound science, frequently better preserves wilderness character than passive management alone.

UPLA further recommends that BLM modernize the Manual to reflect recent developments in administrative law, current Executive Orders governing federal land management and public access, modern wildfire policy, the EXPLORE Act, updated emergency response practices, and advances in ecological restoration and adaptive management. Wilderness administration should continue to emphasize public education, objective monitoring, transparent decision making, and meaningful stakeholder involvement while avoiding unnecessary regulatory burdens that exceed statutory authority.

Finally, we call your attention with emphasis on the fact that preservation of designated Wilderness and protection of public access are complementary, not competing, objectives. Congress established a National Wilderness Preservation System while simultaneously



maintaining a broader multiple-use framework across surrounding public lands. Revised Manual 6340 should preserve that balance by protecting wilderness character inside designated Wilderness while safeguarding lawful motorized access, recreation, emergency response capability, valid existing rights, and multiple-use management outside Wilderness boundaries.

PREVENT ADMINISTRATIVE EXPANSION OF WILDERNESS

Utah Public Lands Alliance supports faithful administration of lands that Congress has designated as Wilderness. That obligation, however, is inseparable from an equally important limitation: BLM must administer the Wilderness Congress actually designated, not a larger area or more restrictive land-management regime created through agency policy. UPLA therefore recommends that revised Manual 6340 establish an unequivocal distinction between preservation of congressionally designated Wilderness and administrative expansion of Wilderness protections beyond the boundaries, conditions, and restrictions established by Congress.

The Wilderness Act provides the starting point. Congress declared that “no Federal lands shall be designated as ‘wilderness areas’ except as provided for in this chapter or by a subsequent Act” and established a legislative process through which lands enter the National Wilderness Preservation System (Wilderness Act of 1964, 16 U.S.C. §§ 1131(a), 1132). Congress likewise directed administering agencies to preserve the wilderness character of an “area designated as wilderness,” not to expand that area through administrative action (16 U.S.C. § 1133(b)). FLPMA reinforces that limitation for BLM lands. Under FLPMA's original wilderness-review provisions, even a Presidential recommendation for Wilderness designation did not become effective unless Congress enacted the designation into law (Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 [FLPMA], 43 U.S.C. § 1782(b)). The statutory division of authority is therefore clear: BLM administers designated Wilderness; Congress creates it.

Manual 6340 should be revised throughout to reflect that distinction. The current Manual appropriately acknowledges that BLM Wilderness consists of lands “designated by Congress” and that congressional boundaries are fixed, but other provisions create opportunities for administrative expansion. Most significantly, section 1.6.D.1 states that congressional boundaries “are fixed and cannot be changed except by law,” but then establishes administrative setback presumptions where the boundary follows a vehicle route and no right-of-way is identified. Those presumptions place the Wilderness boundary 300 feet from the centerline of a paved road, 100 feet from a maintained unpaved road, and 30 feet from an unmaintained road or primitive vehicular trail.



Those presumptions must be removed. A BLM manual cannot substitute a nationally standardized administrative setback for the geographic boundary Congress enacted. Where Congress incorporated a map, legal description, survey, right-of-way boundary, road corridor, or other geographic feature into the designating legislation, those materials must control. Where genuine ambiguity exists, BLM should resolve it through cadastral surveying, examination of the designating statute and incorporated legislative map, contemporaneous legal descriptions, land-status records, title and right-of-way evidence, and other competent evidence of congressional intent. An agency policy presumption may assist administrative convenience, but administrative convenience cannot determine which land Congress placed within the National Wilderness Preservation System.

This principle follows directly from contemporary administrative law. In *Loper Bright Enterprises v. Raimondo*, the Supreme Court held that courts must exercise independent judgment in determining whether an agency has acted within the authority Congress granted and may not defer to an agency merely because a statute contains ambiguity (*Loper Bright Enterprises v. Raimondo*, 603 U.S. 369, 412–413, 2024). That principle is particularly relevant where agency interpretation could enlarge the geographic reach of a congressionally created land designation. Manual 6340 should accordingly direct managers to resolve uncertainty by determining Congress's best-established boundary, not by adopting a Wilderness-maximizing presumption.

Preservation Must Not Become Administrative “Enhancement”

The revised Manual should also distinguish the Wilderness Act's statutory mandate to **preserve** wilderness character from a discretionary objective to “enhance” wilderness character. The distinction matters. The Wilderness Act repeatedly directs agencies to preserve wilderness character and natural conditions (16 U.S.C. §§ 1131(a), 1131(c), 1133(b)). It does not grant BLM an independent power to enlarge Wilderness or eliminate lawful preexisting uses and excluded features merely because doing so might produce conditions that agency staff consider more characteristically “wild.” Yet Manual 6340 repeatedly employs enhancement as a management objective. Its vegetation-management provisions state that management should, when possible, emphasize “enhancement of wilderness character over time,” and other provisions contemplate reclamation or management intervention to enhance wilderness qualities.

We do not object to lawful ecological restoration within Wilderness where authorized by the Wilderness Act, the applicable designating legislation, or another statute. The concern is the transformation of “enhancement” into an independent regulatory objective that can be used to remove historically lawful features, reclaim disputed roads, impose new restrictions, or manage



an area toward a hypothetical condition different from that which Congress knowingly designated.

The condition of an area at designation is legally relevant. Congress frequently designates landscapes containing grazing infrastructure, water developments, historic structures, roads excluded by cherry stems, inholdings, established trails, utility rights, mining interests, or other uses protected by the particular designating statute or by valid existing rights. The Wilderness Act itself accommodates several such circumstances through specific provisions governing grazing, access, mineral rights, commercial services, water developments, aircraft and other uses (16 U.S.C. § 1133(d)). Congress's decision to designate land notwithstanding those existing conditions does not authorize BLM subsequently to erase them merely to create a more idealized version of Wilderness.

Legal scholarship similarly recognizes that Wilderness is a congressional land designation rather than a status agencies may confer independently. Pidot and Peterson (2021), examining conservation authorities on federal public lands, contrast administrative conservation mechanisms with Wilderness and note the Wilderness Act's express rule that federal lands are not designated as Wilderness except pursuant to the Act or subsequent congressional legislation. That distinction reflects an intentional allocation of decision-making authority between Congress and land-management agencies.

UPLA recommends replacing Manual language that treats “enhancement” as an autonomous management purpose with the following standard:

BLM shall manage each designated Wilderness Area to preserve its wilderness character in accordance with the Wilderness Act, the Act of Congress designating the particular Wilderness Area, valid existing rights, and other applicable law. Actions intended to restore or improve wilderness character must be supported by an independent statutory or land-management authority and shall not be used to enlarge the congressionally designated area, extinguish lawful uses or rights, alter congressionally excluded lands or corridors, or extend Wilderness Act restrictions beyond the designated boundary.

This approach would not diminish wilderness protection. It would align management more precisely with the legal authority Congress actually provided.

Congress Established Boundaries, and Administrative Policy Should Not Rewrite Them



Manual 6340 should establish a formal boundary-verification protocol applicable whenever the status of a road, corridor, trail, parcel, right-of-way, or other feature along a Wilderness boundary is disputed. At minimum, BLM should be required to examine the designating legislation, congressionally referenced maps, filed legal descriptions, cadastral and survey records, title records, recognized rights-of-way, historic road evidence, applicable county and State records, and valid existing rights before taking an action that effectively treats disputed land as Wilderness. The agency should provide affected State, county, Tribal, private-property, right-of-way, grazing, water, mining, utility, and other legitimate interests a meaningful opportunity to provide evidence before BLM installs barriers, issues citations, reclaims a route, or otherwise undertakes an action that may be difficult or impossible to reverse.

We recommend that BLM expressly prohibit administrative setbacks or presumptions that change the boundary established by Congress, while requiring cadastral and legal review before restriction or reclamation where a boundary adjacent to a road or access corridor is uncertain. This is also consistent with FLPMA's treatment of Wilderness designation. FLPMA required Presidential Wilderness recommendations to include a map and definition of boundaries and expressly provided that the recommendation became effective only through an Act of Congress (43 U.S.C. § 1782(b)). Once Congress designated an area, FLPMA provided that the Wilderness Act would govern administration of “such designated area” (43 U.S.C. § 1782(c)). The statute does not authorize BLM to enlarge that area subsequently through interpretive mapping.

Modern judicial review further counsels against policy-based expansion. Under *Loper Bright*, statutory ambiguity is not an invitation for agencies to adopt whichever interpretation maximizes agency regulatory authority. Courts must independently determine the scope of the authority Congress delegated (*Loper Bright*, 603 U.S. at 412–413). Likewise, the Supreme Court has emphasized in the public-land context that generalized planning or management aspirations cannot simply be converted into specific statutory commands absent congressional direction (*Norton v. Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance*, 542 U.S. 55, 66–72, 2004). Manual 6340 should therefore distinguish clearly between enforceable statutory requirements and discretionary administrative objectives.

Protect Cherry-Stemmed Roads and Other Congressionally Excluded Corridors

A related form of administrative Wilderness expansion occurs when BLM manages an excluded road or corridor as though it were inside Wilderness. Cherry-stemmed roads are a particularly important example. By definition, Congress may draw a Wilderness boundary around a road corridor so that the surrounding lands are Wilderness while the road itself remains outside. Manual 6340's glossary recognizes a cherry-stemmed route as a route around which the



Wilderness boundary extends. The legal consequence of that mapping convention must be explicit: the road corridor is not Wilderness.

The revised Manual should therefore state that roads, primitive roads, rights-of-way, trails and access corridors excluded through congressional cherry stems or other boundary configurations remain subject to the statutes, regulations, resource-management plans and travel-management provisions governing non-Wilderness lands. The Wilderness Act should not be used as independent authority to close, narrow, relocate, reclaim, or prohibit reasonable maintenance of such corridors solely because they are bordered by Wilderness.

UPLA specifically recommends retaining the principle that proximity to Wilderness, without an independent legal basis, is insufficient grounds for closing or reclaiming an excluded route.

The distinction is particularly significant where an R.S. 2477 right-of-way or other valid existing right may be implicated. FLPMA repealed the former R.S. 2477 grant prospectively but expressly protected valid existing rights. The Tenth Circuit has held that rights-of-way validly established under R.S. 2477 before repeal remain legally cognizable and that the scope and existence of those rights are determined through the applicable legal framework rather than extinguished merely by later federal land-management preferences (*Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance v. Bureau of Land Management*, 425 F.3d 735, 741–768, 10th Cir. 2005). Accordingly, designation of surrounding Wilderness or depiction of a route within a later agency GIS layer cannot itself eliminate an otherwise valid right.

Prohibit De Facto Buffer Zones and “Wilderness by Adjacency”

Manual 6340 should also expressly prohibit extension of Wilderness management standards onto adjacent multiple-use lands through protective perimeters, visual-resource restrictions, soundscape controls, “transition areas,” solitude protection, or similarly labeled administrative mechanisms where Wilderness proximity is the sole or controlling basis for the restriction. The existing Manual states that BLM generally does not prohibit uses outside Wilderness solely to protect wilderness character. That is appropriate. It then directs managers, however, to analyze effects of adjoining activities and allows mitigation including changes in location, timing, equipment appearance, lighting and other measures. Elsewhere, Manual 6340 recommends locating trailheads and access points “well outside” Wilderness boundaries to reduce impacts on Wilderness. Without a clearer limiting principle, such provisions can functionally create a buffer zone even though the affected acreage was never designated as Wilderness.



Congress has repeatedly rejected that result in Wilderness legislation. The John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act of 2019, including Wilderness designations directly relevant to BLM lands in the West, provides that nothing in specified designations creates a protective perimeter or buffer zone and expressly states that an activity outside Wilderness cannot be precluded merely because it can be seen or heard from within the Wilderness (John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act, Pub. L. No. 116-9, 133 Stat. 580, 2019). Congress's repeated use of this language demonstrates that Wilderness boundaries are intended to have substantive legal significance, not merely cartographic significance.

Legal scholarship recognizes the same distinction. Blumm and Erickson (2020), comparing federal protected-area statutes, note that express buffer-zone authority in statutes such as the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act contrasts with Wilderness legislation in which Congress has frequently prohibited protective buffers. Administrative agencies should not recreate through discretionary policy what Congress deliberately declined to impose through legislation. The revised Manual should therefore define a prohibited Wilderness buffer zone functionally rather than nominally. A buffer exists when an otherwise lawful use of non-Wilderness land is materially restricted solely or principally because the activity may be visible, audible, or otherwise perceptible from Wilderness, or because BLM seeks to insulate Wilderness visitors from the effects of lawful activities beyond the boundary.

This does not mean BLM lacks authority to manage lands adjacent to Wilderness. Those lands remain subject to FLPMA, NEPA, the Endangered Species Act, cultural-resource laws, travel-management regulations, public-safety authority and other applicable statutes. FLPMA requires BLM to manage public lands under principles of multiple use and sustained yield except where Congress has dedicated particular lands to a specific statutory use (43 U.S.C. § 1732(a)). Thus, a restriction on adjacent land may be fully lawful when independently justified by resource damage, wildlife protection, safety, engineering requirements, cultural-resource protection or another applicable legal standard. What BLM should not do is substitute the adjoining Wilderness designation itself for that independent legal basis.

This distinction is also consistent with current Executive policy. Executive Order 14408, *Removing Unnecessary and Counterproductive Restrictions on Access to Federal Lands*, directs federal agencies toward removal of unnecessary restrictions on public access and emphasizes administration consistent with applicable statutory mandates (Exec. Order No. 14,408, 2026). The Executive Order cannot alter congressionally established Wilderness restrictions, nor should it be interpreted to do so. It does, however, reinforce the importance of preventing discretionary



Wilderness management preferences from spilling onto lands that Congress left available for broader lawful access and use.

Recommended Manual Revision

We recommend that revised Manual 6340 establish the following controlling principles:

- Only Congress may designate or enlarge an area of the National Wilderness Preservation System. Administrative policy, land-use planning, wilderness-character monitoring, restoration objectives, mapping conventions or mitigation measures shall not change the geographic extent of congressionally designated Wilderness.
- Wilderness boundaries shall be determined from the designating legislation, congressionally referenced maps, legal descriptions, cadastral surveys and other competent evidence of congressional intent. Administrative setback presumptions shall not substitute for that evidence.
- Where the boundary or legal status of an adjoining road, corridor, right-of-way or parcel is genuinely disputed, BLM shall complete appropriate cadastral, title and legal review and consult affected governmental and right-holding interests before undertaking irreversible closure or reclamation.
- Cherry-stemmed roads, excluded corridors and other lands outside the congressional boundary shall be governed under the authorities otherwise applicable to those lands.
- Wilderness-character objectives shall not independently authorize protective perimeters or buffer zones on non-Wilderness lands. Where Congress expressly prohibited buffer zones, Manual 6340 must implement that direction without qualification.
- “Enhancement” of wilderness character shall not constitute an independent source of agency authority and shall not be used to extinguish lawful uses, valid existing rights, congressionally excluded features, or historically recognized access.

The fundamental policy should be straightforward. BLM has both the authority and the duty to protect the Wilderness Congress designated. That responsibility does not include authority to create additional Wilderness administratively. Revised Manual 6340 should protect the integrity of congressionally designated Wilderness by protecting the integrity of its congressionally established boundaries as well.

MODERNIZE FIRE, FUELS, AND VEGETATION MANAGEMENT

Utah Public Lands Alliance recommends substantial revision of Manual 6340's treatment of wildfire, fuels reduction, vegetation management, and use of motorized or mechanical equipment for resource-management purposes. The existing Manual reflects a management framework



developed in 2012 that strongly favors nonintervention, natural processes, and repeated prescribed fire while treating mechanical fuel treatment as an exceptional measure. That framework does not adequately reflect current wildfire science, contemporary forest conditions, advances in vegetation-management technology, or current federal direction emphasizing risk-informed wildfire prevention, forest health, public safety, and removal of unnecessary barriers to effective fuels management.

The Wilderness Act does not establish a categorical policy of passive management. Section 4(d)(1) expressly provides that "such measures may be taken as may be necessary in the control of fire, insects, and diseases," subject to conditions prescribed by the Secretary (Wilderness Act of 1964, 16 U.S.C. § 1133(d)(1)). Where otherwise prohibited equipment is proposed for administration of Wilderness, section 4(c) additionally permits such use when necessary to meet the minimum requirements for administration of the area for purposes of the Act (16 U.S.C. § 1133(c)). Courts have confirmed that this exception requires a reasoned determination of necessity, not a categorical prohibition against intervention (*Wilderness Watch, Inc. v. U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service*, 629 F.3d 1024, 1037-1040 [9th Cir. 2010]).

The Existing Manual Creates an Excessive Presumption Against Active Fuels Management

The current Manual states that the overall goal of fire management in Wilderness is to allow the natural fire regime to perform its ecological role and provides that wildfires should, where feasible, be managed without equipment otherwise prohibited under section 4(c). It further states that fuel treatment is "not allowed in wilderness, except in rare circumstances" and expresses a preference for repeated low-intensity prescribed fire, even where doing so increases the time or cost of treatment.

Similarly, the vegetation-management provisions state that natural processes should generally be favored, describe mechanical vegetation treatment as normally impermissible, and frame active intervention primarily as an exception where natural processes cannot restore ecological conditions.

That presumption should be replaced with a more neutral, site-specific standard. The relevant question should not be whether intervention is categorically less desirable than nonintervention. It should be whether available evidence demonstrates that active treatment or passive management better preserves wilderness character, ecological integrity, public safety, watershed function, wildlife habitat, cultural resources, and neighboring communities under existing conditions.



BLM's own current Manual recognizes that some Wilderness landscapes have undergone human-caused changes and that intervention may be necessary where natural successional processes have been disrupted or where waiting for natural recovery would allow continued degradation. Revised Manual 6340 should apply that principle consistently to fire and fuels management rather than limiting it through a presumption that mechanical treatment is permissible only in "rare circumstances."

Contemporary Fire Science Does Not Support a Universal Presumption of Nonintervention

A substantial body of scientific literature demonstrates that many frequent-fire forests in the western United States differ materially from historical structural and fire-regime conditions because of interacting effects that include past fire suppression, land-use history, timber harvest, grazing, invasive species, and climatic change. These changes are not uniform across ecosystems, and BLM should avoid treating every Wilderness landscape identically. In many dry, historically frequent-fire forests, however, exclusion of recurring low- and moderate-severity fire has contributed to increased stand density, ladder fuels, competition, tree mortality, and vulnerability to high-severity fire (Harrod et al., 2007; Allen et al., 2019).

Current research likewise indicates that fuels treatments can materially alter subsequent wildfire behavior. USDA Forest Service research has found that thinning combined with prescribed fire can substantially reduce stand density, crown-fire potential, and severe wildfire hazard, while prescribed fire and mechanical treatments may provide complementary benefits depending upon stand condition and treatment objective (Harrod et al., 2007; Reinhardt et al., 2008). Research examining actual wildfire outcomes has similarly found that fuel treatments and prior low- or moderate-severity fire can reduce severity of subsequent wildfire (Lydersen et al., 2017), and more recent empirical research found that low-intensity fire substantially reduced the subsequent risk of high-intensity fire (Wu et al., 2023).

These findings do not establish that thinning, prescribed fire, or mechanical treatment is appropriate everywhere. They establish something more important for Manual 6340: **BLM should not presume that nonintervention is ecologically superior.** Treatment selection must depend upon ecosystem type, historical fire regime, current fuel conditions, departure from reference conditions, anticipated wildfire behavior, treatment feasibility, and the risks associated with both action and inaction.

The revised Manual should expressly recognize that management inaction is itself a decision with consequences. Where accumulated surface and ladder fuels, excessive stand density, invasive annual grasses, insect mortality, disease, drought stress, or altered fire regimes create a



substantial probability of stand-replacing fire or other ecosystem degradation, passive management may impair rather than preserve the natural quality of Wilderness.

Catastrophic Fire Can Degrade the Wilderness Values the Manual Is Intended to Protect

The Wilderness Act requires preservation of wilderness character, not adherence to one management technique regardless of outcome. High-severity wildfire can produce profound changes to vegetation communities, soils, watersheds, riparian systems, wildlife habitat, cultural resources, and recreational infrastructure. Where those outcomes reflect substantially altered fuel conditions or other anthropogenic departures from historical processes, permitting severe degradation in the name of nonintervention can conflict with the Act's conservation purposes. Research has shown that fuels management can reduce fire severity and crown-fire occurrence and, in appropriate forest types, improve resilience to subsequent wildfire (Reinhardt et al., 2010; Symons et al., 2008). USDA Forest Service synthesis work has similarly concluded that fuel-treatment objectives generally should focus on reducing undesirable fire severity and that mechanical treatments, prescribed fire, or combinations of those methods may be appropriate depending upon site conditions (Reinhardt et al., 2008).

Manual 6340 should therefore require BLM to evaluate the comparative consequences of action and inaction. At minimum, that analysis should consider current and anticipated:

- surface, ladder, and canopy fuel loading;
- stand density and species composition;
- historical and contemporary fire-return intervals and severity;
- invasive vegetation and altered fire cycles;
- insect, disease, drought, and mortality conditions;
- risk of conversion to a substantially different vegetation community following high-severity fire;
- threats to watersheds, soils, riparian systems, wildlife habitat, and cultural resources;
- risk to adjacent communities, private property, public infrastructure, access routes, and responder safety; and
- the likelihood that delaying treatment will require more intensive intervention later.

This framework would preserve the Wilderness Act's preference for limited human manipulation while preventing that preference from becoming an inflexible substitute for ecological evidence.

The Wilderness Act Expressly Authorizes Necessary Fire, Insect, and Disease Management



Manual 6340 should quote and give greater operative effect to Wilderness Act section 4(d)(1). Congress could have prohibited active management categorically. It did not. Congress expressly preserved authority to take measures necessary to control fire, insects, and diseases (16 U.S.C. § 1133(d)(1)). Congress has repeated that understanding in later Wilderness legislation, including statutes stating that the Secretary may take measures determined necessary for fire, insect, and disease control and may coordinate those activities with State and local agencies. See, for example, 16 U.S.C. § 539r(d)(4).

The revised Manual should accordingly reject any implication that use of this authority is inherently inconsistent with wilderness stewardship. The proper legal question is whether the management action is necessary, appropriately tailored, and consistent with the controlling statutory standards.

Judicial precedent supports a disciplined but practical application of that test. In *Wilderness Watch v. U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service*, the Ninth Circuit held that an agency invoking the section 4(c) exception must make a reasoned finding that the otherwise prohibited action itself is necessary to meet minimum requirements for administration, rather than simply assuming the management objective justifies the selected method (629 F.3d at 1037-1040). That decision does not require agencies to reject motorized or mechanical methods categorically. It requires BLM to compare the actual need, alternatives, and consequences in a reasoned record.

Manual 6340 should adopt precisely that approach for fuels and vegetation management.

Reform the Minimum Requirements Analysis to Compare Total Impacts

One of the most important revisions should concern the Minimum Requirements Decision Guide or any successor minimum-requirements analysis. The existing Manual places substantial emphasis on primitive tools and nonmotorized methods. That preference can be appropriate, but it should not mature into an irrebuttable assumption that a hand tool necessarily causes less impact than a motorized tool. The Wilderness Act regulates categories of equipment, but where use of otherwise prohibited equipment may legally be considered, the minimum-requirements analysis should evaluate the total effects of accomplishing the management objective.

For example, a compact chainsaw or battery-powered saw used by a small crew for several hours may in some circumstances produce less total disturbance than a substantially larger crew making repeated multi-day entries with crosscut saws, pack stock, camps, food supplies, trail traffic, and associated ground disturbance. Similarly, a short-duration helicopter operation may under some circumstances impose fewer cumulative effects than repeated ground entries through



sensitive terrain. Whether either example satisfies section 4(c) must remain a site-specific determination, but the Manual should require the comparison rather than deciding the answer in advance.

We recommend that minimum-requirements analyses expressly compare:

- total duration of disturbance;
- number of workers and entries required;
- number of pack-stock or vehicle support trips outside and, where legally authorized, within Wilderness;
- vegetation, soil, wildlife, and hydrologic disturbance;
- noise magnitude and duration;
- emissions and ignition risk;
- worker and visitor safety;
- probability of completing the treatment effectively;
- ability to accomplish the work during an appropriate seasonal window;
- need for repeated maintenance; and
- cumulative disturbance from the entire operation.

No otherwise prohibited method should be authorized merely because it is efficient. Conversely, no lawful candidate method should be rejected solely because it is motorized. This approach follows the Ninth Circuit's requirement that relevant factors be weighed in relation to one another rather than addressed in isolation (*Wilderness Watch*, 629 F.3d at 1037-1040).

The Frank Church Decision Demonstrates the Need for Practical Tool Analysis

The Forest Service's 2026 decision concerning the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness provides a useful contemporary example of this principle. In May 2026, the Forest Service completed a Minimum Requirements Analysis addressing a proposal to use chainsaws for maintenance on approximately 542 miles of Wilderness trail. The agency's analysis specifically compared continued maintenance using traditional hand tools with limited chainsaw use under extraordinary trail-maintenance conditions (U.S. Forest Service, 2026).

The Frank Church authorization should not be treated as categorical authority for chainsaw use in all Wilderness areas, nor was it principally a broad fuels-reduction decision. Its significance is narrower and directly relevant to Manual 6340: a motorized tool prohibited under the ordinary rule of section 4(c) can still be evaluated under the Act's minimum-requirements framework when extraordinary conditions make traditional methods impracticable or materially less effective.



Reports surrounding the decision described extraordinary deadfall conditions and widespread trail obstruction, with the Forest Service authorizing limited chainsaw use to restore safe public access under specified conditions. The decision has also generated substantial disagreement among Wilderness organizations concerning whether the statutory necessity standard was satisfied. That dispute further underscores why revised Manual 6340 should not create categorical outcomes. It should instead require a transparent, documented comparison of necessity, methods, total impacts, safety, effectiveness, and statutory authority.

Federal Wildfire Policy Now Requires a Risk-Informed and More Proactive Approach

Manual 6340 should also be reconciled with current Executive direction. Executive Order 14308, *Empowering Commonsense Wildfire Prevention and Response*, directs the Secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture to strengthen wildfire-risk reduction partnerships on public lands, expand technology and data-sharing capability, use a risk-informed approach, remove barriers to wildfire prevention and response, improve forest health, facilitate appropriate prescribed fire, and consider innovative uses of woody biomass and forest products to reduce hazardous fuel loads (Exec. Order No. 14,308, 2025).

Executive Order 14239, *Achieving Efficiency Through State and Local Preparedness*, likewise establishes a federal policy favoring risk-informed preparedness and more active State and local participation in resilience planning, including wildfire preparedness (Exec. Order No. 14,239, 2025).

Executive Order 14225, *Immediate Expansion of American Timber Production*, separately directs Interior and Agriculture to issue or update guidance promoting sound forest management and directs consideration of streamlined procedures for forest-management and wildfire-risk-reduction treatments (Exec. Order No. 14,225, 2025). BLM's own 2026 NEPA rulemaking expressly describes expanded flexibility to respond quickly to high-risk forest conditions as serving public and infrastructure safety and reducing the potential for active crown fire (Bureau of Land Management, 2026).

None of these Executive Orders supersedes the Wilderness Act. Manual 6340 must remain fully consistent with sections 4(c) and 4(d). They do, however, establish current Executive Branch policy that BLM should use the wildfire-management authorities Congress has already provided rather than layering unnecessary administrative barriers onto them.

Establish Periodic Fuels and Vegetation Condition Assessments



Modernized Wilderness management should be proactive rather than crisis-driven. UPLA recommends requiring BLM to periodically evaluate wildfire and vegetation conditions within each BLM Wilderness where fire is a material ecological or public-safety concern. Such assessments should identify significant departure from historical fire regimes and vegetation structure, hazardous fuel accumulation, invasive vegetation, insect and disease mortality, changing climatic and drought conditions, values at risk, neighboring communities and infrastructure, and foreseeable treatment needs. The assessment should distinguish ecosystems in which high-severity fire is historically characteristic from ecosystems in which current stand-replacing fire risk represents a substantial departure from historical conditions. This distinction is essential because a uniform "fuels reduction" prescription would be no more scientifically defensible than a uniform nonintervention policy.

Where monitoring establishes that intervention is warranted, BLM should act before conditions become an emergency. A management regime that waits until fire behavior threatens human life or forces aggressive suppression can produce more disturbance to Wilderness than carefully planned pretreatment.

The scientific literature supports sustained maintenance rather than one-time treatment. Fuel accumulation and vegetation regeneration continue after prescribed fire and mechanical treatment, meaning treatment effectiveness changes over time and must be periodically reassessed (Battaglia et al., 2008). Manual 6340 should therefore provide for recurring monitoring and maintenance where treatment has been found necessary, rather than requiring managers to restart the conceptual justification from zero each time previously identified maintenance is due.

Protect Adjacent Communities, Infrastructure, and Non-Wilderness Resources

Wildfire does not stop at a congressional Wilderness boundary. Manual 6340 should recognize expressly that management decisions inside Wilderness can affect communities, private property, transportation corridors, utility infrastructure, watersheds, cultural resources, wildlife habitat, and multiple-use public lands outside Wilderness. The current Manual already recognizes that prescribed fire and fuel treatment may be appropriate where wildfire would create unacceptable risks to life, property, natural resources, or wilderness character. That principle should be strengthened and made operational.

BLM should evaluate cross-boundary wildfire risk using contemporary fire-behavior modeling, current fuel data, topography, prevailing winds, suppression opportunities, evacuation



constraints, community wildfire protection planning, and the location of critical infrastructure. Where the best available evidence demonstrates that untreated Wilderness fuels create a significant risk of high-consequence fire spreading to adjacent lands, the Manual should direct managers to evaluate lawful preventive action rather than requiring an imminent emergency before intervention becomes administratively acceptable.

Executive Order 14308 expressly directs stronger Federal, State, local, Tribal, and community partnerships for wildfire-risk reduction on public lands and encourages land-management measures that reduce wildfire risk and improve response. Manual 6340 should incorporate that direction by requiring early coordination with affected counties, fire districts, States, Tribes, utilities, water providers, emergency-management agencies, and neighboring landowners.

Recommended Revision

UPLA recommends replacing the Manual's general presumption against fuel treatment with a standard substantially along the following lines:

BLM shall manage fire, fuels, insects, disease, and vegetation within designated Wilderness consistent with the Wilderness Act, applicable designating legislation, and other governing law. Decisions between active management and nonintervention shall be based upon the best available site-specific scientific information and an evaluation of the consequences of both action and inaction. Natural processes shall not be presumed preferable where existing conditions materially increase the risk of unacceptable effects to wilderness character, ecological integrity, human life, responder safety, adjacent communities, infrastructure, watersheds, cultural resources, wildlife habitat, or other resources protected by law.

Where active treatment is legally authorized, BLM should select the method that accomplishes the lawful objective effectively while producing the least overall adverse effect, considering the entire operation rather than the identity or power source of an individual tool. Use of motorized equipment or mechanical transport within Wilderness must continue to satisfy the Wilderness Act's applicable statutory exceptions, but Manual policy should neither enlarge those exceptions nor administratively narrow them beyond what Congress enacted.

Modernizing Manual 6340 in this manner would not convert Wilderness into actively managed commercial forestland. It would instead recognize a critical distinction: preserving wilderness character does not always mean doing nothing. In landscapes materially altered by historic suppression, invasive species, changing fire regimes, insect and disease mortality, or other



forces, carefully limited intervention may be necessary to preserve the ecological processes, public safety, and natural conditions that Wilderness designation was intended to protect.

UPDATE MANUAL 6340 TO CURRENT LAW AND EXECUTIVE POLICY

UPLA recommends a comprehensive legal and policy reconciliation of Manual 6340. The Manual was issued in 2012 and remains anchored to a statutory, regulatory, judicial, and Executive-policy framework that has materially changed. BLM's current review specifically recognizes the need to identify provisions that are outdated or inconsistent with current law and policy, and Manual 6340 should be revised accordingly (Bureau of Land Management [BLM], 2026a).

The objective should not be to weaken the Wilderness Act or replace congressional direction with changing administrative priorities. The opposite is required. Revised Manual 6340 should distinguish clearly among: (1) requirements imposed by the Wilderness Act and individual Wilderness-designating statutes; (2) other binding statutes and regulations; (3) current Executive direction governing BLM's exercise of lawful discretion; and (4) discretionary agency preferences that have no independent force of law. That distinction is particularly important after *Loper Bright Enterprises v. Raimondo*, in which the Supreme Court reaffirmed that courts must independently determine the boundaries of agency authority rather than defer to an agency's preferred interpretation merely because statutory language is ambiguous (*Loper Bright Enterprises v. Raimondo*, 603 U.S. 369, 2024).

Recenter the Manual on the Wilderness Act and Individual Designating Statutes

Manual 6340 should begin from the principle that the Wilderness Act remains controlling. Congress directed agencies to preserve the wilderness character of designated areas, generally prohibited certain uses under section 4(c), and simultaneously enacted specific exceptions and special provisions governing emergencies, fire, insects and disease, grazing, commercial services, access, water projects, mineral interests, and other uses (Wilderness Act of 1964, 16 U.S.C. §§ 1131-1136).

The current Manual itself recognizes that BLM Wilderness consists of lands designated by Congress and identifies the Wilderness Act, FLPMA, specific Wilderness statutes, NEPA, and other applicable law among its governing authorities. That hierarchy should be made more explicit throughout the revised policy.



Individual Wilderness statutes are especially important because Congress frequently adopts provisions tailored to specific landscapes. Those provisions can address boundary maps, access corridors, grazing, water rights, wildlife management, commercial services, search and rescue, roads, fire management, and prohibitions on protective perimeters or buffer zones. Where a special provision differs from generalized Manual language, the statute must control.

The John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act of 2019 provides a particularly important example for Utah. Congress designated substantial Wilderness acreage while simultaneously including provisions addressing maps and legal descriptions, existing grazing, commercial services, State wildlife authority, recreational access, and specific management considerations (John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act, Pub. L. No. 116-9, 2019). Manual 6340 should require managers to identify and apply the specific designating legislation for each Wilderness Area before relying upon generalized national policy.

UPLA recommends adding a controlling rule that no Manual provision may be construed to diminish, enlarge, or otherwise modify rights, restrictions, exceptions, access provisions, boundary directions, or management requirements established by Congress.

Incorporate the EXPLORE Act and Current Federal Recreation Law

Manual 6340 predates the EXPLORE Act and therefore does not reflect important congressional direction concerning recreational climbing and fixed anchors. Congress has now codified specific requirements concerning fixed anchors for recreational climbing on federal recreational lands, including Wilderness. Under 16 U.S.C. § 8422, the Secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture must issue guidance addressing the placement and maintenance of fixed anchors and the circumstances under which existing anchors may be retained, replaced, or removed (EXPLORE Act, 16 U.S.C. § 8422).

The existing Manual contains generalized restrictions on permanent climbing anchors and other installations that were written more than a decade before Congress enacted this newer statutory framework. Those provisions should be reconciled expressly with 16 U.S.C. § 8422 and any final implementing guidance issued pursuant to it.

More broadly, revised Manual 6340 should avoid treating recreational use as merely secondary to Wilderness management. The Wilderness Act expressly identifies recreational use as one of the public purposes of Wilderness, alongside scenic, scientific, educational, conservation, and historical uses (16 U.S.C. § 1133(b)). Current federal recreation legislation reinforces the



importance Congress continues to place upon meaningful public access to federal lands. Manual policy should therefore preserve unconfined recreation and lawful access to the fullest extent compatible with the Wilderness Act rather than creating restrictions through generalized administrative preference.

Remove Obsolete NEPA References and Align Manual 6340 with Current DOI Procedures

Manual 6340's NEPA framework requires substantial revision.

The current Manual was written when CEQ's government-wide NEPA regulations at 40 C.F.R. Parts 1500 through 1508 formed the central regulatory framework for federal NEPA implementation. Manual 6340 expressly cites former 40 C.F.R. Part 1502 and BLM Handbook H-1790-1, and it states that categorical exclusions cannot be used in specified circumstances based upon BLM's interpretation of then-existing NEPA procedures.

That framework has changed materially.

Executive Order 14154, *Unleashing American Energy*, revoked Executive Order 11991 and directed CEQ to propose rescission of its NEPA regulations and provide guidance for agency-specific procedures (Exec. Order No. 14,154, 2025). CEQ subsequently removed its government-wide NEPA regulations, with the final removal completed in January 2026 (Council on Environmental Quality [CEQ], 2026).

DOI then finalized revised NEPA implementing regulations effective February 24, 2026. DOI explained that much of its NEPA procedure would henceforth be maintained in Departmental guidance rather than the CFR and that the revisions were necessary because the former DOI regulations had been structured as supplements to CEQ regulations that no longer existed (Department of the Interior [DOI], 2026). BLM separately proposed revised agency-specific implementing procedures in April 2026.

Manual 6340 should therefore remove obsolete citations to superseded CEQ regulations, outdated BLM NEPA handbooks, and procedural requirements that no longer accurately reflect current law. Instead, it should provide a durable cross-reference to NEPA, 42 U.S.C. §§ 4321-4370m-12, current DOI regulations, the current DOI NEPA Handbook, and current BLM implementing procedures.

Just as important, Manual 6340 should expressly state that NEPA is a procedural statute and does not independently create Wilderness restrictions. NEPA requires informed environmental decision-making but does not itself dictate a particular substantive result. The Supreme Court has



repeatedly emphasized this distinction, including in *Robertson v. Methow Valley Citizens Council*, 490 U.S. 332, 350 (1989), and *Department of Transportation v. Public Citizen*, 541 U.S. 752, 756-757 (2004). Accordingly, identification of an environmental effect upon Wilderness through NEPA analysis does not itself supply legal authority to close a route, prohibit a use, establish a buffer zone, or regulate land outside the Wilderness boundary. A substantive restriction must rest upon separate statutory or regulatory authority.

Implement Executive Order 14408 Without Extending or Contracting the Wilderness Act

Manual 6340 should expressly recognize Executive Order 14408, *Removing Unnecessary and Counterproductive Restrictions on Access to Federal Lands*, issued May 29, 2026. The Order rescinded Executive Orders 11644 and 11989 and directed the Secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture to revise regulations and policies that implemented the former Executive Orders' off-road vehicle minimization regime (Exec. Order No. 14,408, 2026).

This change is directly relevant to Manual 6340 because the Manual interfaces with motorized access, boundary roads, cherry-stemmed routes, rights-of-way, adjoining multiple-use lands, and travel-management decisions. The Manual should not perpetuate, indirectly incorporate, or independently apply standards derived solely from rescinded Executive Orders.

At the same time, UPLA recommends precise legal drafting. Executive Order 14408 did not amend the Wilderness Act and does not authorize general motorized recreation within congressionally designated Wilderness where section 4(c) prohibits it. Nor did rescission of the underlying Executive Orders automatically erase every existing implementing regulation on the date the Order was signed. The Order instead directs regulatory and policy revision. Manual 6340 should therefore track current governing regulations as those revisions are completed while making clear that the Wilderness Act's section 4(c) minimum-requirements test is legally distinct from off-highway vehicle route-designation standards applicable to lands where motorized use may otherwise be considered.

That distinction is critical. Section 4(c) asks whether an otherwise prohibited method may be necessary for administration of designated Wilderness. Travel-management regulations govern route and area designations on lands potentially available for motorized use. They arise from different legal authorities and should not be conflated.

The revised Manual should state:

Nothing in Manual 6340 independently applies off-highway vehicle route-designation criteria to lands or routes outside designated Wilderness. The Wilderness Act minimum-



requirements standard and BLM travel-management authorities are separate legal frameworks and shall be applied only within their respective statutory and regulatory scope.

This clarification would prevent Wilderness management from becoming a surrogate travel-management regime on adjacent multiple-use lands.

Reconcile Manual 6340 with Rescission of the Conservation and Landscape Health Rule

BLM's May 2026 rescission of the Conservation and Landscape Health Rule is also relevant to the Manual review. BLM fully rescinded the 2024 rule, effective June 11, 2026, explaining that the rescission was intended to restore public-land management under FLPMA's principles of multiple use and sustained yield, prioritize access, empower local decision-making, and better align BLM regulations with statutory requirements (BLM, 2026b).

Manual 6340 predates the Conservation and Landscape Health Rule, so the document does not expressly incorporate the now-rescinded Part 6100 framework. Nevertheless, the current review should ensure that no new Manual language imports concepts from a regulatory framework BLM has formally withdrawn, particularly where those concepts could be used to regulate adjoining non-Wilderness lands according to Wilderness-oriented conservation objectives.

FLPMA remains controlling for BLM lands outside congressionally designated Wilderness. Congress directed BLM to manage public lands under principles of multiple use and sustained yield except where land is subject to a more specific statutory designation (43 U.S.C. §§ 1701(a)(7), 1732(a)). Wilderness is one such congressional designation. Land adjoining Wilderness is not. Revised Manual 6340 should therefore reinforce the distinction between statutory Wilderness management and FLPMA multiple-use management outside Wilderness boundaries.

Incorporate Current Executive Direction Favoring Access and Lawful Multiple Use

Current Executive policy repeatedly directs federal land-management agencies to remove unnecessary barriers to lawful access and use while operating within statutory constraints. Executive Order 14408 establishes the clearest direct instruction by rescinding the prior OHV Executive Orders and directing review of regulations and policies that unnecessarily restrict access (Exec. Order No. 14,408, 2026).

Executive Order 14154 likewise directs agencies to review policies and regulatory actions that burden domestic energy and natural-resource development and to streamline environmental



review consistent with law (Exec. Order No. 14,154, 2025). Other current Executive actions concerning wildfire prevention, mineral production, timber management, permitting, and resource access similarly emphasize use of existing statutory authority rather than unnecessary administrative restraint.

These Executive Orders cannot override the Wilderness Act. Manual 6340 should state that explicitly. But where the Wilderness Act gives BLM discretion, or where the affected activity occurs outside Wilderness, current Executive policy is relevant to how that discretion is exercised. Accordingly, the Manual should direct managers to avoid imposing restrictions broader than required by statute and to select alternatives that preserve lawful access and existing rights when equally protective lawful options exist.

Update the Manual to Reflect *Loper Bright* and the Modern Limits of Agency Interpretation

Manual 6340 should be revised with particular attention to *Loper Bright Enterprises v. Raimondo*. The Supreme Court overruled *Chevron* deference and held that the Administrative Procedure Act requires courts to exercise independent judgment in deciding whether an agency has acted within its statutory authority. Agencies remain entitled to exercise discretion that Congress actually delegated, but statutory ambiguity by itself does not transfer interpretive authority to the agency (*Loper Bright*, 603 U.S. 369, 395-413, 2024).

That holding has practical consequences for Wilderness policy.

Manual 6340 should not treat ambiguity concerning:

- Wilderness boundaries;
- statutory exceptions;
- valid existing rights;
- access corridors;
- commercial services;
- grazing;
- fire and vegetation management;
- adjacent-land effects;
- recreational restrictions; or
- emerging technology

as authority to adopt the interpretation that maximizes Wilderness-related restrictions.



Where Congress delegated discretionary authority, BLM may exercise it within statutory boundaries. Where Congress did not delegate authority, a Manual cannot create it. This is consistent with the Supreme Court's earlier public-land decision in *Norton v. Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance*, which rejected efforts to transform broad land-management objectives into discrete legally enforceable duties that Congress had not imposed (*Norton v. Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance*, 542 U.S. 55, 66-72, 2004). It is likewise consistent with *Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance v. Bureau of Land Management*, where the Tenth Circuit recognized that historic R.S. 2477 rights-of-way implicate legal rights that cannot simply be displaced by contemporary agency land-management preferences (*Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance v. Bureau of Land Management*, 425 F.3d 735, 741-768, 10th Cir. 2005).

Revised Manual 6340 should therefore distinguish between statutory command and administrative aspiration. Terms such as "enhance," "minimize," "naturalness," "solitude," "restoration," or "protection" may appropriately inform implementation where authorized, but they should not operate as independent grants of regulatory jurisdiction.

Modernize Policy Governing Emerging Technology

The Manual also requires modernization because technology has advanced substantially since 2012. Current policy should not attempt to resolve every future device by analogy to equipment common in 1964 or 2012.

The revised Manual should first determine whether a technology falls within a statutory category such as motorized equipment, mechanical transport, aircraft, structure, or installation. If it does, the applicable statutory prohibition and exceptions control. If it does not, BLM should evaluate the actual activity and its effects rather than prohibiting it simply because it is technologically novel.

This is particularly important for battery-powered tools, adaptive mobility technology, remote sensing, emergency communications, robotic equipment, automated monitoring systems, and uncrewed aircraft. A technology that falls within section 4(c) remains subject to section 4(c), regardless of whether it is quieter or cleaner than historical equipment. But where a statutory exception permits the equipment to be considered, BLM should compare its actual total impacts with reasonable alternatives instead of assuming that every powered or automated technology is necessarily more disruptive.

Manual 6340 itself anticipates that new activities and technologies will arise but provides relatively little durable analytical guidance beyond determining whether the activity violates



section 4(c). A function-based framework would better accommodate future developments while remaining faithful to the Wilderness Act.

Establish a Formal Hierarchy of Authority

UPLA recommends that revised Manual 6340 expressly identify the order in which managers must apply governing authorities. A concise hierarchy would materially reduce inconsistent field-office interpretation:

1. The Wilderness Act and other Acts of Congress;
2. The statute designating the particular Wilderness Area, including incorporated maps, legal descriptions, special provisions, and valid-existing-rights language;
3. Other applicable federal statutes;
4. Valid regulations;
5. Current controlling Executive Orders, to the extent consistent with statute;
6. Departmental and BLM policy; and
7. Discretionary management guidance.

Where these authorities conflict, a lower-level policy cannot supersede a higher-level legal requirement. Likewise, an MRDG, wilderness management plan, NEPA document, resource management plan, monitoring protocol, or Manual provision cannot create authority Congress did not confer.

Recommended Manual Revision

UPLA recommends adding a general legal-conformance provision substantially as follows: Manual 6340 shall be administered consistent with the Wilderness Act, the Act of Congress designating each particular Wilderness Area, valid existing rights, other applicable federal statutes and regulations, and current lawful Executive direction. Where a conflict exists, controlling statute and regulation shall prevail over Manual policy. Nothing in this Manual independently enlarges the geographic scope of designated Wilderness, creates authority to regulate adjoining non-Wilderness lands, expands the prohibitions of section 4(c), narrows statutory exceptions enacted by Congress, or modifies valid existing rights.

The Manual should also require periodic national review, rather than waiting another decade or more for wholesale revision. Changes in legislation, regulations, judicial precedent, Executive Orders, and technology should trigger targeted policy review where those developments materially affect Wilderness administration.



Updating Manual 6340 in this manner would provide greater legal certainty both for Wilderness protection and public access. Wilderness policy is most durable when it rests upon Congress's actual commands rather than accumulated administrative assumptions. BLM should preserve designated Wilderness rigorously, but it should do so under the legal framework that exists today.

MAXIMIZE LAWFUL PUBLIC ACCESS AND UNCONFINED RECREATION

We recommend that revised Manual 6340 more faithfully implement the Wilderness Act's dual mandate to preserve wilderness character while providing meaningful opportunities for public recreation. Wilderness is not a statutory synonym for closure, exclusion, or progressively increasing regulation. Congress expressly defined Wilderness to include “outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation” and directed agencies to administer Wilderness for public purposes that include recreational, scenic, scientific, educational, conservation, and historical use (Wilderness Act of 1964, 16 U.S.C. §§ 1131(c), 1133(b)).

Manual 6340 recognizes these principles, but they should be strengthened and converted into clear decision standards. The current Manual describes solitude and primitive and unconfined recreation as integral components of wilderness character, acknowledges that solitude is not required on every acre, states that BLM has no mandate to create opportunities for solitude that did not exist at designation, and recognizes that visitor education and indirect management should generally precede direct regulatory restrictions. Those principles are fundamentally sound. Revised Manual 6340 should ensure they are consistently applied before permits, quotas, closures, campsite mandates, party-size limitations, seasonal restrictions, or similar constraints are imposed.

Treat Unconfined Recreation as a Statutory Value, Not Merely an Impact to Be Managed

The Wilderness Act does not define wilderness character solely through ecological naturalness or solitude. Congress expressly included the opportunity for a “primitive and unconfined type of recreation” within the definition of Wilderness (16 U.S.C. § 1131(c)). The word “unconfined” therefore deserves independent weight in BLM decision-making.

Contemporary Wilderness research reinforces this point. A 2026 Forest Service study examining regulatory confinement across federal Wilderness areas characterized wilderness recreation as involving distinct dimensions of solitude, primitiveness, and unconfined experience, with “unconfined” recreation associated with unrestricted access and minimal management regulation.



The study found that recreation experiences in Wilderness were, on average, more administratively confined than recreation on comparable non-Wilderness federal lands, a result the authors described as contrary to the concept of Wilderness as a setting with minimal management presence (Rice et al., 2026).

That finding should be taken seriously in the present policy review. A management regime can protect solitude while simultaneously degrading unconfined recreation through excessive permits, reservations, quotas, mandatory itineraries, assigned campsites, group limits, seasonal closures, and other administrative controls. Because both solitude and unconfined recreation are components of wilderness character, BLM should not automatically sacrifice one to maximize the other.

Manual 6340 should therefore require managers to evaluate expressly how proposed visitor-use restrictions would affect the unconfined quality of Wilderness. A restriction should not be justified merely by showing that it could increase solitude. BLM should demonstrate that the restriction addresses a documented problem and that its benefits to wilderness character outweigh the loss of recreational freedom it creates.

Establish a Mitigation-Before-Restriction Standard

UPLA recommends establishing an express hierarchy of visitor-use management in which education, voluntary compliance, maintenance, resource-specific mitigation, and enforcement of existing rules are evaluated before additional restrictions on lawful recreation.

The current Manual already provides a useful foundation. It states that visitor education should be used where feasible and that only the minimum regulation necessary should be employed. It further recognizes indirect management methods as generally preferable to direct regulation. Revised Manual 6340 should transform that preference into a decision standard.

Before establishing a permit, quota, closure, campsite restriction, group-size limitation, length-of-stay limit, temporal restriction, or similar constraint, BLM should document why reasonably available less-restrictive alternatives would not adequately address the identified condition. Appropriate alternatives may include improved maps and visitor information, voluntary dispersal, trail maintenance or minor rerouting, targeted restoration, sanitation improvements where legally permissible, signing, education, enforcement against conduct that is already unlawful, and restrictions focused narrowly upon the location or activity actually causing harm.

This approach is consistent with BLM's binding Wilderness regulations. Under 43 C.F.R. § 6302.19, BLM may close or restrict Wilderness use when necessary to implement the Wilderness



Act or other federal law, but any closure must affect the **smallest area necessary for the shortest time necessary** (43 C.F.R. § 6302.19, 2026). That standard should appear prominently in Manual 6340 and should govern not merely formal closure orders but the Manual's broader treatment of visitor restrictions.

UPLA recommends that every significant restriction identify:

- the specific resource or wilderness-character condition requiring action;
- current, site-specific evidence supporting the need for intervention;
- the less-restrictive alternatives considered and why they are inadequate;
- the smallest geographic area and shortest duration necessary;
- measurable objectives for determining whether the restriction is effective; and
- a review or expiration date with objective criteria for modification or removal.

Restrictions should not become permanent simply because BLM lacks staff, funding, or administrative incentive to revisit them. Where the condition supporting a restriction has ceased to exist, the restriction should terminate.

Require Current, Site-Specific Evidence Rather Than Generalized Carrying-Capacity Assumptions

Visitor restrictions should be based upon demonstrated conditions rather than generalized assumptions that increasing visitation necessarily impairs Wilderness. Recreational use can cause localized resource impacts, and UPLA does not contend otherwise. The appropriate response, however, depends upon the type, magnitude, location, timing, and persistence of the impact. Social effects associated with encounters among visitors should likewise be distinguished from measurable ecological degradation. Manual 6340 should avoid using abstract concepts such as “carrying capacity,” “visitor experience,” or “solitude” as self-executing authority for access restrictions without measurable thresholds and site-specific evidence.

This distinction is especially important because demand for Wilderness recreation has substantial social and economic value. Research conducted by Forest Service economists on Wilderness recreation found that the economic value individuals placed upon Wilderness recreation increased during the COVID-19 period and that trip duration and group composition materially affected recreation value, underscoring that Wilderness access provides measurable benefits to users rather than functioning solely as a source of environmental pressure (Sloggy et al., 2023). Broader research likewise recognizes physical, psychological, social, and economic benefits associated with access to natural environments and outdoor recreation (Wolf et al., 2020). These benefits do not override the Wilderness Act's conservation requirements, but they are consistent



with Congress's express decision to make public recreation one of the purposes for which Wilderness is administered.

BLM should therefore evaluate both sides of the management equation. A restriction that reduces environmental impacts may simultaneously reduce access, participation, visitor freedom, economic value, and opportunities for people to experience Wilderness. The agency should consider those consequences rather than treating reduced use as inherently beneficial.

Do Not Manufacture Solitude Beyond the Conditions Congress Designated

The current Manual appropriately states that solitude need not exist on every acre and that BLM has no mandate to create opportunities for solitude that were not present at the time of Wilderness designation. That language should be retained and strengthened.

UPLA recommends that revised Manual 6340 prohibit the use of “solitude enhancement” as an independent rationale for eliminating historically established recreation patterns or lawful access that Congress knowingly incorporated into a Wilderness designation. Congress often designates landscapes containing established trails, historically popular destinations, outfitter use, grazing activity, access to water, and other existing human uses. Wilderness designation does not necessarily imply that Congress intended those landscapes subsequently to be emptied of visitors so that every location achieves an administratively preferred encounter rate.

This is particularly important where restrictions are justified predominantly by social perceptions rather than measurable resource damage. The presence of other visitors may affect an individual's subjective perception of solitude, but the Wilderness Act protects an **opportunity** for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation. It does not guarantee that every visitor will encounter no other person during a trip.

Manual 6340 should consequently distinguish among actual degradation of natural resources, physical crowding that creates demonstrable management problems, and purely subjective preferences regarding visitor encounters. Restrictions based primarily upon the latter should receive particularly careful scrutiny because reducing visitation to maximize solitude can directly diminish the statutory value of unconfined recreation.

Maintain Trails and Access Infrastructure Necessary for Meaningful Wilderness Use



A statutory opportunity for recreation has little practical meaning if Wilderness becomes physically inaccessible through administrative neglect. Revised Manual 6340 should recognize reasonable trail maintenance as an important component of preserving public recreational use. The current Manual directs managers to evaluate existing trails and permits relocation or closure, while also restricting new trail construction and generally favoring primitive conditions. Those provisions should be balanced by an affirmative expectation that trails serving legitimate public-access, safety, administrative, or resource-protection purposes will be maintained to a functional standard unless BLM documents a reason for closure or abandonment.

Trail maintenance can protect rather than impair wilderness character. A reasonably maintained trail can concentrate foot and stock travel, prevent proliferation of unauthorized social trails, reduce erosion, direct visitors away from sensitive resources, provide predictable routes for emergency response, and facilitate public use without requiring developed facilities. The Manual should also reject closure by neglect. Fallen trees, erosion, wildfire damage, washouts, damaged trail structures, or deferred maintenance should not automatically become justification for eliminating an established recreational opportunity. Where a trail remains appropriate under the applicable Wilderness management plan, BLM should evaluate reasonable means of restoring safe and functional passage.

This principle is consistent with current federal policy emphasizing greater access to public lands. Executive Order 14353, establishing the President's Make America Beautiful Again Commission, directs federal land-management agencies, to the extent practicable, to expand access to public lands and waters for recreation and to eliminate bureaucratic delays that impede effective environmental management (Exec. Order No. 14,353, 2025). Executive Order 14408 likewise directs federal policy toward removal of unnecessary and counterproductive barriers to access while remaining subject to applicable statutory limitations (Exec. Order No. 14,408, 2026). Neither Executive Order overrides the Wilderness Act. Both reinforce the principle that BLM should not impose restrictions beyond those necessary to satisfy the Act.

Preserve Commercial Services That Facilitate Lawful Wilderness Access

Manual 6340 should also implement section 4(d)(5) of the Wilderness Act in a manner that recognizes the legitimate public-access function of commercial services. Congress expressly allowed commercial services within Wilderness “to the extent necessary for activities which are proper for realizing the recreational or other wilderness purposes of the areas” (16 U.S.C. § 1133(d)(5)).



Commercial outfitters, guides, pack-stock operators, and similar services can enable visitors to experience Wilderness who otherwise could not safely or practically do so. This may include older visitors, inexperienced users, people with mobility limitations, hunters requiring stock support, visitors traveling substantial distances, or individuals who lack specialized equipment, livestock, navigational skills, or backcountry experience.

Manual 6340 should not presume that an otherwise identical recreational activity becomes less appropriate merely because compensation is involved. The relevant statutory question is whether the commercial service is necessary to facilitate appropriate Wilderness purposes and whether its level of use is consistent with preserving wilderness character.

The Ninth Circuit's decision in *High Sierra Hikers Association v. Blackwell* illustrates both sides of that obligation. The court recognized agency authority to permit commercial pack-stock services under section 4(d)(5), while requiring the agency to assess the extent to which those services are necessary and to respond to documented environmental damage rather than simply perpetuating historical permit levels (*High Sierra Hikers Association v. Blackwell*, 390 F.3d 630, 642-649 [9th Cir. 2004]). Properly applied, *High Sierra Hikers* supports evidence-based management rather than categorical hostility toward commercial access.

The determination of whether a commercial service is “necessary” should evaluate the function the service performs in providing meaningful public access, not merely whether some visitors could undertake the same activity without commercial assistance. A service may be necessary within the meaning of section 4(d)(5) when it enables a segment of the public to realize recreational or other Wilderness purposes that those visitors could not reasonably, safely, or practically realize without that service.

That analysis should expressly consider the access needs of older visitors, people with disabilities or mobility limitations, inexperienced visitors, families and groups lacking specialized backcountry skills, hunters and other visitors requiring pack-stock support, and members of the public who do not own the livestock, equipment, transportation, or specialized gear necessary to undertake the activity independently. The availability of Wilderness recreation to highly experienced or well-equipped individuals should not, by itself, establish that a commercial service is unnecessary for other members of the public.

BLM should also distinguish between the impacts of the underlying recreational activity and impacts attributable specifically to its commercial character. Where substantially similar private and commercially supported activities produce substantially similar effects, compensation alone should not provide a basis for treating the commercial activity as inherently less compatible with



Wilderness. Restrictions should instead respond to documented impacts associated with the particular activity, level of use, location, timing, or operating practices.

The revised Manual should therefore require BLM to evaluate the actual impacts and access benefits of commercial services. Where impacts can be addressed through route selection, group limits, seasonal conditions, stock-management practices, sanitation requirements, permit conditions, or other targeted mitigation, those measures should be considered before eliminating the service.

The revised Manual should therefore require BLM to evaluate both the actual impacts and the public-access benefits of commercial services using current, site-specific information.

Restrictions should be tailored to documented impacts rather than imposed through categorical assumptions about commercial use. Where identified impacts can reasonably be addressed through route selection, group-size limits, seasonal conditions, stock-management practices, sanitation requirements, permit conditions, education, monitoring, or other targeted mitigation, BLM should consider and, where adequate, employ those measures before reducing or eliminating the service.

Any substantial reduction, nonrenewal, or elimination of an established commercial service should identify the specific Wilderness impact requiring action, explain why less restrictive measures are inadequate, evaluate the effect of the decision on public access, and establish a rational relationship between the documented impact and the restriction imposed. Commercial-use restrictions should also be periodically reviewed and modified or removed when the conditions supporting them materially change.

Expand Practical Access for People With Disabilities and Mobility Limitations

Maximizing lawful access also requires greater attention to people who cannot experience Wilderness in the same manner as highly mobile backcountry users. The Wilderness Act's restrictions remain controlling. Manual 6340 cannot authorize general motorized recreation inside Wilderness contrary to section 4(c). BLM regulations nevertheless recognize that qualifying wheelchairs may be used in Wilderness, and federal law does not require BLM to treat every mobility device identically where Congress has established specific Wilderness limitations. See 43 C.F.R. Part 6300.

More importantly, BLM retains substantial authority over access infrastructure **outside** Wilderness boundaries. Revised Manual 6340 should direct managers to preserve motorized access to trailheads, overlooks, accessible viewpoints, boundary access locations, interpretive



sites, parking areas, and other facilities on adjoining non-Wilderness lands wherever lawful and practicable. Wilderness protection should not become an indirect reason to eliminate accessible recreation opportunities outside Wilderness. That distinction is especially important for people with disabilities and mobility limitations, because restrictions imposed outside Wilderness may determine whether they can reach the Wilderness boundary at all.

When evaluating access decisions on non-Wilderness lands adjoining designated Wilderness, BLM should expressly consider whether a proposed road closure, relocation, or access restriction would disproportionately reduce meaningful opportunities for people with disabilities, seniors, veterans, and others with limited mobility. The existence of a hiking trail, foot access, or a more distant nonmotorized alternative should not automatically be treated as an equivalent substitute for existing motorized access where the practical effect would be to exclude visitors who cannot reasonably travel that distance or terrain without a motor vehicle.

BLM should also evaluate whether retaining an existing road, parking area, overlook, trailhead, boundary access point, or other non-Wilderness facility would provide a meaningful accessible opportunity without altering Wilderness conditions inside the congressionally designated boundary. Where lawful access can be preserved outside Wilderness without impairing the statutory management of Wilderness itself, Manual 6340 should favor preserving that opportunity rather than eliminating it solely to reduce visitation, sights, sounds, or other perceived influences upon Wilderness.

Current research concerning barriers to Wilderness recreation identifies physical ability, knowledge, transportation, cost, geographic access, social factors, and institutional constraints among the factors that can limit participation (Thomas et al., 2022). BLM cannot eliminate every barrier without changing Wilderness character, nor does federal disability law require it to do so. It can, however, avoid creating unnecessary administrative barriers and preserve meaningful access at the Wilderness boundary.

The revised Manual should further direct managers to identify accessible opportunities as part of Wilderness access planning. This should include, where appropriate, accessible parking, viewing areas, interpretive facilities, trailhead access, boundary access points, and reasonable connections to roads and facilities on adjoining non-Wilderness lands. Access planning should consider not only whether a destination is technically reachable, but whether it is practically reachable by visitors with differing levels of mobility.

Protect Access Outside Wilderness That Makes Wilderness Recreation Possible



Many Wilderness experiences begin on lands that are not Wilderness. Trailheads, parking areas, access roads, staging areas, overlooks, campgrounds, equestrian facilities, and cherry-stemmed roads commonly provide the practical means by which visitors reach a Wilderness boundary. Revised Manual 6340 should therefore distinguish clearly between management of recreation **inside** Wilderness and management of access **to** Wilderness.

The Manual presently recognizes that activities outside Wilderness cannot be prohibited merely to maintain solitude within Wilderness, yet it also suggests relocating trailheads or access facilities to reduce Wilderness impacts. Such actions should require independent justification. BLM should not relocate, close, or restrict a lawful non-Wilderness access facility solely because its presence can be perceived by Wilderness visitors or because reducing access would reduce visitation.

This concern is particularly acute in Utah, where Congress has expressly prohibited protective perimeters or buffer zones in multiple Wilderness designations and has specified that lawful activities outside Wilderness cannot be precluded merely because they may be seen or heard from within Wilderness (John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act, 2019). Wilderness access policy should honor those congressional boundaries rather than indirectly shrinking public access through restrictions on surrounding lands.

Recommended Manual Revision

UPLA recommends that Manual 6340 adopt a general public-access and unconfined-recreation standard substantially as follows:

BLM shall administer designated Wilderness to preserve wilderness character while providing for the recreational and other public purposes established by the Wilderness Act. Primitive and unconfined recreation is an affirmative component of wilderness character. Restrictions upon lawful public use shall be based upon current, site-specific evidence, shall use the least restrictive effective management approach, and shall affect the smallest area for the shortest period necessary. Education, voluntary compliance, enforcement of existing requirements, maintenance, and site-specific mitigation shall be considered before permits, quotas, closures, mandatory itineraries, campsite restrictions, or other direct controls are imposed.

The Manual should further require every substantial visitor restriction to include measurable objectives, periodic review, and reopening or modification criteria. BLM should preserve existing trails where they remain compatible with Wilderness purposes, protect necessary



commercial services that facilitate public use, maximize accessible opportunities on adjoining non-Wilderness lands, and avoid using solitude or wilderness character as independent authority to restrict lawful access outside the congressional boundary.

Wilderness preservation and public recreation are not competing concepts that Congress instructed BLM to choose between. Congress incorporated both into the Wilderness Act. Revised Manual 6340 should therefore protect Wilderness from unnecessary development while also protecting Wilderness visitors from unnecessary administration. A policy that preserves natural conditions while progressively regulating people out of Wilderness would fail to protect the primitive and unconfined recreational opportunity that Congress made part of wilderness character itself.

PUBLIC SAFETY AND EMERGENCY RESPONSE

UPLA recommends that revised Manual 6340 establish a clearer and more operationally effective framework for search and rescue, emergency medical evacuation, wildfire response, disaster response, law enforcement emergencies, and other threats to human life and public safety. Wilderness designation does not require responders to accept preventable loss of life, nor does the Wilderness Act require completion of ordinary administrative processes before taking actions reasonably necessary during a genuine emergency.

The statutory foundation is unusually clear. Section 4(c) of the Wilderness Act prohibits motor vehicles, motorized equipment, aircraft landings, mechanical transport, structures, and installations in Wilderness except as specifically provided by the Act and except where necessary to meet the minimum requirements for administration of the area, expressly including “measures required in emergencies involving the health and safety of persons within the area” (Wilderness Act of 1964, 16 U.S.C. § 1133(c)). BLM’s implementing regulations similarly authorize the agency to prescribe emergency measures involving human health and safety, including conditions for the use of motorized equipment, mechanical transport, aircraft, installations, structures, rock drills, and fixed anchors (43 C.F.R. § 6303.1(d), 2026).

Manual 6340 should implement that authority directly and without ambiguity. The current Manual already recognizes that emergency actions require different treatment than ordinary administrative projects and instructs managers that decisions concerning normally prohibited uses in an emergency should err on the side of protecting human life (BLM, 2012). Current interagency wildfire standards repeat that direction for BLM Wilderness operations and specifically identify protection of human life as controlling when emergency circumstances require rapid decisions concerning otherwise prohibited equipment (National Interagency Fire



Center [NIFC], 2026). Revised Manual 6340 should strengthen rather than dilute this existing principle.

Human Life and Responder Safety Must Take Priority During Genuine Emergencies

UPLA recommends a bright-line rule that no Minimum Requirements Decision Guide (MRDG), programmatic planning requirement, NEPA documentation, wilderness-character analysis, internal consultation requirement, or higher-level administrative approval should delay immediate action reasonably necessary to protect human life or responder safety during a time-sensitive emergency.

This does not create a general public-safety exception to the Wilderness Act. Routine maintenance, foreseeable administrative work, and projects that can be planned in advance remain subject to applicable statutory requirements. The distinction is between planned management actions and circumstances in which delay itself creates material risk to human life or safety.

In an emergency, the incident commander, SAR authority, law enforcement officer, fire official, emergency medical professional, or other appropriately authorized official should be permitted to select the transportation, equipment, communications capability, and response method reasonably determined necessary under the circumstances. Depending upon the incident, that could include helicopters, fixed-wing aircraft where lawful and operationally suitable, UTVs, snowmobiles, tracked vehicles, motorized watercraft, chainsaws, powered rescue equipment, temporary communications installations, drones or other aircraft where lawfully authorized, technical rescue systems, or other emergency tools.

The Wilderness Act itself makes human-health and safety emergencies part of the section 4(c) exception (16 U.S.C. § 1133(c)). BLM regulations go further by expressly identifying motorized equipment, mechanical transport, aircraft, structures, installations, rock drills, and fixed anchors among the measures that may be authorized for emergencies (43 C.F.R. § 6303.1(d), 2026). Manual policy should not impose an administrative hurdle that makes those statutory and regulatory authorities practically unavailable precisely when they are most needed.

Emergency Response Should Not Await Completion of an MRDG

The minimum-requirements framework remains important for planned management decisions. Courts have required agencies to make a reasoned determination before invoking the section 4(c) exception for otherwise prohibited uses in nonemergency management contexts (*Wilderness*



Watch, Inc. v. U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, 629 F.3d 1024, 1037-1040 [9th Cir. 2010]). That principle does not mean an injured visitor, lost child, firefighter, sheriff's deputy, or other person facing imminent harm must wait while BLM prepares a conventional MRDG.

BLM should distinguish explicitly between:

1. **Advance emergency planning**, for which minimum-requirements analysis can appropriately identify likely response methods, sensitive locations, aircraft landing considerations, communications needs, and preferred lower-impact options; and
2. **Incident response**, where operational decisions must be made according to actual conditions and may necessarily differ from assumptions made during advance planning.

This distinction is consistent with other federal Wilderness-management policy. National Park Service policy, for example, emphasizes advance planning so emergency response can incorporate minimum-requirements concepts where practicable, while recognizing that an on-site decision-maker may determine that actual emergency conditions require a different response (National Park Service [NPS], 2006).

UPLA recommends that Manual 6340 state expressly that an MRDG is not a prerequisite to immediate emergency response. If otherwise prohibited equipment is used, BLM may document the circumstances, decision rationale, impacts, and appropriate restoration after the emergency has stabilized. BLM regulations already contemplate restoration occurring concurrently where practicable or as soon as practicable after the emergency ends (43 C.F.R. § 6303.1(d), 2026).

Require Advance Search-and-Rescue Planning With Counties and Local Responders

Emergency preparedness should begin before an emergency occurs. In much of Utah and the rural West, county sheriffs, county SAR organizations, volunteer rescue teams, fire districts, emergency medical services, and State agencies provide the personnel and operational capacity that respond to incidents occurring on federal lands. DOI itself recognizes that local governments bear significant costs for search and rescue, law enforcement, road maintenance, and emergency services associated with visitation to federal lands (Department of the Interior [DOI], 2025). Manual 6340 should therefore require BLM field offices to establish advance emergency-response protocols with relevant local authorities for Wilderness Areas where SAR incidents are reasonably foreseeable. Those protocols should address, as appropriate, dispatch procedures, points of contact, communications frequencies, aircraft and landing protocols, vehicle access, technical rescue, medical evacuation, wildfire response, incident command, temporary closures, responder staging, and post-incident restoration.



Congress has already endorsed this model directly in Utah. The John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act requires the Secretary to offer to enter into a memorandum of understanding with Emery County to clarify approval processes for use of motorized equipment and mechanical transport for search-and-rescue activities within the Muddy Creek Wilderness (John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act, 2019). That provision is significant beyond Muddy Creek because it demonstrates that Congress considered advance coordination regarding motorized and mechanized Wilderness SAR compatible with Wilderness designation.

UPLA recommends extending that practical model through Manual policy nationwide, while recognizing any special provisions contained in individual designating statutes.

Response Time Is a Genuine Safety Consideration

The need for operational flexibility is supported not merely by administrative convenience, but by emergency medicine and SAR research. Wilderness incidents present unusual challenges because treatment commonly involves four separate operational phases: locating the patient, gaining access, stabilizing the patient, and evacuating the patient, often in terrain where conventional ambulance access is impossible (Townes, 2002).

Medical helicopters are used in Wilderness SAR specifically because they can rapidly reach patients in remote terrain, deliver medical personnel, and expedite evacuation when ground access would be substantially slower or impracticable (Grissom et al., 2006). More broadly, emergency medicine research has demonstrated an association between prolonged EMS response time and mortality, including in rural and Wilderness settings. Byrne et al. (2019), analyzing more than 2.2 million ambulance responses across 2,268 U.S. counties, found that longer EMS response times were significantly associated with increased motor-vehicle-crash mortality and that the relationship remained significant in rural and Wilderness areas.

These findings do not establish that a helicopter, motor vehicle, or mechanical device is necessary for every Wilderness emergency. They demonstrate why response time, terrain, patient condition, weather, distance, available personnel, daylight, evacuation route, and responder exposure must be treated as substantive safety factors rather than merely administrative considerations.

The Manual should therefore reject any presumption that the least mechanized response is automatically the safest or most appropriate response. A rescue requiring twenty responders to carry an injured person for ten hours through technical terrain may expose the patient and



rescuers to greater aggregate risk and may create greater cumulative Wilderness disturbance than a short helicopter extraction. Conversely, where a ground evacuation can safely and timely accomplish the mission, motorized access may be unnecessary. The decision should turn on the emergency actually presented.

Protect Responder Safety Along With Patient Safety

Manual 6340 should expressly recognize that the Wilderness Act's emergency provision encompasses not only the person initially requiring assistance, but the safety consequences imposed upon responders attempting to reach and evacuate that person. Remote SAR frequently occurs in steep terrain, darkness, severe weather, extreme heat or cold, wildfire conditions, snow, flood conditions, rockfall zones, or locations requiring technical rope rescue. Wilderness safety guidance acknowledges that emergency rescue in remote terrain can be difficult or, under some circumstances, impossible (U.S. Forest Service, 2025). Wilderness emergency literature similarly identifies weather, daylight, terrain, access, stabilization, and evacuation as practical constraints upon effective rescue (Spano et al., 2015; Townes, 2002).

BLM should not require rescuers to assume materially greater risk merely to avoid temporary use of equipment Congress expressly allowed the agency to authorize during health and safety emergencies.

The correct objective is to use no more impact than reasonably necessary to conduct a safe and effective response. Safety and minimum impact should be complementary goals, but where they genuinely conflict during an active life-safety emergency, protection of human life must control.

Modernize Emergency Policy to Account for New Technology

Manual 6340 also needs a technology-neutral emergency framework. Rescue tools have advanced substantially since the Manual was issued in 2012. Satellite communications, personal locator beacons, drones, compact battery-powered cutting and lifting equipment, improved medical devices, high-resolution mapping, automated location tools, and other technologies can accelerate search operations or reduce responder exposure.

Research on unmanned aircraft has documented significant potential for SAR applications, including rapid aerial search, image analysis, target localization, and operation in terrain difficult or dangerous for ground personnel (Lyu et al., 2023). This does not mean drones should be authorized for ordinary recreational use where otherwise prohibited, nor does it remove requirements imposed by the Wilderness Act or federal aviation law. It means that Manual 6340



should evaluate new technology according to its actual emergency function, statutory classification, effectiveness, safety benefits, and total impacts rather than rejecting new equipment simply because comparable technology did not exist when the Manual was drafted. Where emergency use of a technology falls within an otherwise prohibited section 4(c) category, the emergency exception remains the governing legal framework.

Integrate Wildfire and Disaster Response With Current Executive Policy

Emergency-response policy should also be reconciled with current Executive direction concerning wildfire preparedness and incident response. Executive Order 14308, *Empowering Commonsense Wildfire Prevention and Response*, directs Interior and Agriculture to remove barriers to wildfire prevention and response, promote year-round readiness, improve coordination, employ a risk-informed approach, strengthen State and local partnerships, and modernize wildfire response capabilities (Exec. Order No. 14,308, 2025).

Executive Order 14239, *Achieving Efficiency Through State and Local Preparedness*, similarly establishes federal policy emphasizing risk-informed preparedness, resilience, and greater State and local responsibility and coordination in emergency planning (Exec. Order No. 14,239, 2025). Neither order supersedes the Wilderness Act. Both, however, reinforce a central principle relevant to Manual 6340: agencies should plan before emergencies occur, coordinate with responders who will actually conduct the response, eliminate unnecessary procedural barriers, and make decisions according to operational risk.

Current interagency fire standards already reflect this approach. The 2026 *Interagency Standards for Fire and Fire Aviation Operations* incorporates Manual 6340's Wilderness direction while emphasizing Minimum Impact Strategies and Tactics where practicable and simultaneously directing that emergency decisions concerning otherwise prohibited uses should err on the side of protecting human life (NIFC, 2026). Revised Manual 6340 should align directly with that current operational standard.

Emergency Access Routes and Infrastructure Should Remain Functional

Public safety also depends upon maintaining access outside Wilderness. Roads, cherry-stemmed corridors, boundary routes, trailheads, helispots where lawfully established, communications sites, staging locations, and other facilities outside the Wilderness boundary can be essential to emergency response. Manual 6340 should not allow Wilderness-management objectives to cause these non-Wilderness access points to become functionally unusable. Where an authorized road provides access to a Wilderness boundary, SAR staging area, wildfire response location, water



source, communications facility, or emergency evacuation point, routine maintenance and removal of fallen trees, landslide material, flood debris, wildfire debris, vegetation, rocks, or other obstructions should be governed by the authorities applicable to that non-Wilderness route, not by section 4(c).

Likewise, temporary obstruction or lack of recent use should not automatically be treated as abandonment of emergency access. Preservation of reasonable access to the Wilderness perimeter can reduce the need for more intensive intrusion into Wilderness when an incident occurs.

Establish Post-Emergency Review Rather Than Pre-Emergency Delay

UPLA supports accountability for emergency actions. The appropriate mechanism, however, is generally post-incident review rather than pre-response delay. Following an emergency involving otherwise prohibited equipment or unusually intensive disturbance, BLM should document the nature of the emergency, response methods used, approximate disturbance, whether restoration is necessary, and lessons relevant to future emergency planning. This would allow the agency to improve preparedness and reduce future impacts without interfering with time-critical operational decisions.

Such review should not second-guess reasonable field decisions with the benefit of hindsight merely because a less intrusive method later appears theoretically possible. Emergency decisions should be evaluated based upon the information, personnel, equipment, weather, terrain, medical condition, fire behavior, communications, and operational risks reasonably known at the time.

Recommended Manual Revision

UPLA recommends adding a controlling emergency-response provision substantially as follows:

Nothing in Manual 6340 shall delay action reasonably necessary to protect human life, responder safety, communities, critical infrastructure, or public safety during a genuine emergency. Consistent with section 4(c) of the Wilderness Act and 43 C.F.R. § 6303.1, authorized emergency personnel may use motorized equipment, mechanical transport, aircraft, communications equipment, temporary structures, and other response methods reasonably determined necessary under the circumstances. A conventional Minimum Requirements Decision Guide or other advance administrative documentation shall not be required before immediate action where delay would materially increase risk to human life



or responder safety. BLM may document the action and require appropriate restoration after the emergency has stabilized.

The Manual should further direct field offices to undertake advance emergency planning with county sheriffs, SAR organizations, fire agencies, States, Tribes, emergency medical providers, and other relevant response authorities; identify likely emergency access and evacuation options; establish clear delegated approval authorities; and periodically update those arrangements as personnel, technology, access conditions, and hazards change.

The principle is straightforward. Wilderness designation requires restraint in ordinary administration, but Congress expressly anticipated emergencies and provided authority to address them. Manual 6340 should ensure that this authority is operational rather than theoretical. Protecting wilderness character is an important statutory obligation. During a genuine life-safety emergency, protecting human life must remain paramount.

PROTECT MOTORIZED ACCESS AND MULTIPLE USE ON ADJOINING NON-WILDERNESS LANDS

UPLA recommends that revised Manual 6340 establish an unequivocal boundary between administration of congressionally designated Wilderness and management of adjoining non-Wilderness public lands. The Wilderness Act governs lands Congress designated as Wilderness. It does not independently authorize BLM to extend Wilderness restrictions onto adjacent roads, cherry-stemmed corridors, trailheads, staging areas, campgrounds, multiple-use lands, or other acreage outside the congressionally established boundary.

This distinction is essential because a Wilderness designation can otherwise generate indirect restrictions well beyond the acreage Congress actually designated. Manual 6340 should not allow Wilderness management objectives to become a surrogate travel-management regime or a basis for creating de facto buffer zones around Wilderness. On non-Wilderness BLM lands, FLPMA's multiple-use and sustained-yield framework remains controlling unless Congress has separately dedicated those lands to another specific statutory purpose (Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 [FLPMA], 43 U.S.C. §§ 1702(c), 1732(a)). BLM therefore must continue to balance recreation, grazing, mineral development, rights-of-way, wildlife, watershed, conservation, and other authorized uses on adjoining lands according to the laws and land-use plans applicable to those lands, rather than treating proximity to Wilderness as a new land-use designation.

Wilderness Restrictions Must Stop at the Congressional Boundary



Manual 6340 already recognizes that activities outside Wilderness generally cannot be prohibited solely to protect wilderness character. That principle should be strengthened because other Manual provisions allow consideration of views, sounds, access-point locations, screening, and other effects of adjoining activities in ways that can functionally transfer Wilderness-management standards beyond the boundary.

UPLA recommends a clear controlling standard:

The Wilderness Act and Manual 6340 shall not independently regulate lawful activities occurring outside a congressionally designated Wilderness boundary. Any closure, relocation, limitation, or condition imposed upon a use of adjoining non-Wilderness land must identify an independent statutory, regulatory, land-use planning, public-safety, or resource-management basis applicable to the affected non-Wilderness land.

This does not prevent BLM from considering legitimate environmental effects upon nearby Wilderness through NEPA or other applicable law. Nor does it prevent restrictions independently justified by documented resource damage, public safety, species protection, cultural-resource requirements, engineering conditions, or another lawful management objective. It means that Wilderness adjacency itself cannot substitute for legal authority.

Congress has repeatedly drawn precisely this distinction. The John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act of 2019 contains numerous provisions stating that Wilderness designation does not create a protective perimeter or buffer zone and that an activity on land outside Wilderness may not be precluded merely because it can be seen or heard from within Wilderness (John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act, 2019). That language appears across multiple Wilderness designations, demonstrating that Congress understands the legal significance of a Wilderness boundary to include protection of lawful activities outside it.

For Utah, this principle is particularly important because the Dingell Act's Emery County provisions established new Wilderness areas as part of a broader legislative settlement governing recreation areas, roads, access, grazing, and other uses. The statutory bargain should be honored as enacted. BLM should not administratively expand the restrictive component of that legislation while diminishing the access and multiple-use components Congress preserved.

Prohibit De Facto Wilderness Buffer Zones



Revised Manual 6340 should define and prohibit administrative buffer zones where the applicable designating statute does not authorize them, and it should expressly implement statutory prohibitions where Congress has included no-buffer language. A prohibited buffer zone should be defined functionally, not according to the terminology BLM uses. A restriction should be treated as Wilderness-buffer management when an otherwise lawful activity, route, facility, or use outside Wilderness is closed, relocated, materially conditioned, or otherwise restricted principally because it may be visible, audible, or perceptible from Wilderness, or because the agency seeks to improve solitude or another Wilderness visitor experience by suppressing lawful activity beyond the boundary.

Examples can include closing a motorized route because vehicles are audible from Wilderness, relocating a trailhead or campground solely to reduce visible activity near the boundary, imposing time-of-day restrictions to improve Wilderness solitude, narrowing an excluded corridor to reduce perceived motorized influence, or managing adjoining multiple-use acreage to Wilderness-like standards because of proximity alone. Current Manual language should be revised so that such measures cannot be imposed without independent authority and site-specific justification.

The Dingell Act is explicit on this point. Congress provided that the fact a non-Wilderness activity can be seen or heard from Wilderness “shall not preclude” the activity outside the boundary (John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act, 2019). Manual 6340 should give that language full operative effect rather than reducing it to a general policy preference.

Protect Cherry-Stemmed Roads, Boundary Roads, and Excluded Corridors

Cherry-stemmed roads and similar access corridors require especially clear protection. When Congress draws a Wilderness boundary around a road or corridor, the exclusion has substantive meaning. The surrounding acreage may be Wilderness, but the excluded road is not.

Revised Manual 6340 should state expressly that a cherry-stemmed road, boundary road, primitive road, trail, right-of-way, or other congressionally excluded access corridor is governed by the laws, regulations, land-use plan, transportation plan, and valid rights applicable to non-Wilderness lands. Proximity to Wilderness alone should never establish grounds for closure, narrowing, reclamation, or refusal to maintain the route.

Where boundary confusion may encourage inadvertent Wilderness entry, the preferred response should be accurate mapping, visible boundary identification, signing, education, and enforcement against actual unauthorized use, rather than closure of a lawful excluded route. UPLA



specifically recommends that BLM maintain accurate geospatial representations of these corridors so that the public, counties, emergency responders, and agency personnel can reliably distinguish Wilderness from non-Wilderness access.

This distinction also has practical importance for access to trailheads, hunting areas, grazing allotments, private inholdings, water facilities, cultural sites, overlooks, and other public lands. An excluded road that is allowed to become unusable can create a much larger practical closure than the legal footprint of the road itself.

BLM's own Dingell Act access reporting recognizes that physical and legal connectivity to public lands determines whether public acreage can actually be used. BLM identifies road access, trailheads, easements, and transportation connections as central to improving public-land accessibility and notes that improved access can support recreation, community connections, and local economic activity (BLM, 2026). The same principle applies to maintaining established access adjacent to Wilderness.

Do Not Permit Closure by Administrative Neglect

Manual 6340 should explicitly prevent an authorized non-Wilderness road or access corridor from becoming functionally closed merely because BLM fails to permit routine maintenance or removal of natural obstructions. Fallen trees, rockfall, sediment, landslides, wildfire debris, floods, washouts, vegetation encroachment, damaged drainage structures, and similar conditions can make a legally open route impassable without any formal closure decision. A policy that prevents reasonable maintenance can therefore accomplish indirectly what would require a formal travel-management decision if done expressly.

Routine maintenance on non-Wilderness roads should remain governed by the authorities applicable to those roads. Subject to those authorities, maintenance may reasonably include removal of fallen trees and rocks, clearing drainage structures, removal of flood or landslide deposits, stabilization of traveled surfaces, repair of erosion and washouts, restoration of the established alignment and width, and correction of unsafe conditions. The mere fact that Wilderness exists immediately beside the road should not subject work occurring within the excluded corridor to the Wilderness Act's section 4(c) minimum-requirements test.

The same principle should apply when a tree, rock, soil mass, or other material originates inside Wilderness but falls or moves into a non-Wilderness road corridor. Management should turn on the legal location of the maintenance activity and the status of the road, not simply the original location of the obstruction.



Temporary impassability should likewise not be interpreted as abandonment or evidence that a route is no longer necessary. Such an interpretation could create a perverse cycle in which deferred maintenance causes declining use, declining use is then cited as evidence of diminished need, and diminished need becomes justification for permanent closure.

Provide for Reconstruction and Reasonable Realignment After Natural Damage

The Manual should also address reconstruction and realignment when natural events make a cherry-stemmed or boundary road unsafe or physically impracticable. A congressionally excluded road corridor must remain reasonably functional if the exclusion is to retain practical meaning. Landslides, flooding, wildfire, erosion, geologic instability, and repeated washouts may render the historical centerline impossible or unsafe to maintain. Where that occurs, BLM should evaluate reasonable reconstruction or realignment within the existing right-of-way, excluded corridor, or other adjoining non-Wilderness land before concluding that public access must terminate.

If a safe realignment cannot be completed entirely outside Wilderness, BLM should then determine whether a valid existing right, special provision in the designating statute, emergency authority, Wilderness Act minimum-requirements authority, or another legal mechanism permits the necessary action. BLM cannot simply move a congressional Wilderness boundary administratively, but neither should it treat an unavoidable change in road geometry as automatic extinguishment of access Congress intended to remain outside Wilderness.

Early coordination with affected counties, State agencies, right-holders, grazing permittees, landowners, utilities, and emergency responders should be required before BLM determines that an access route cannot reasonably be restored.

Protect County Roads, R.S. 2477 Rights, and Other Valid Existing Rights

Manual 6340 should require legal-status review before BLM closes, obstructs, reclaims, or converts any route associated with a Wilderness boundary.

This review should determine whether the route is a State or county road, an asserted R.S. 2477 right-of-way, an access route protected by the designating statute, a route serving an inholding or valid occupancy, or otherwise subject to a valid existing right. Wilderness mapping cannot extinguish an independently valid property interest.



The Tenth Circuit's R.S. 2477 jurisprudence is particularly important in Utah. In *Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance v. Bureau of Land Management*, the court explained that R.S. 2477 offered rights-of-way over unreserved federal lands without federal administrative formalities and that valid rights established before repeal remain legally cognizable (*Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance v. Bureau of Land Management*, 425 F.3d 735 [10th Cir. 2005]). Subsequent Tenth Circuit litigation has emphasized that the validity of disputed R.S. 2477 rights ultimately requires appropriate legal proof or recognition under federal law rather than unilateral administrative assumption.

Legal scholarship examining the decision likewise describes R.S. 2477 disputes as questions concerning vested roadway rights whose existence and scope cannot simply be replaced by contemporary federal land-management preferences (Azbell, 2007).

UPLA therefore recommends that BLM refrain from irreversible physical reclamation where a bona fide ownership, title, or right-of-way dispute remains unresolved. Reasonable interim measures may protect resources or public safety, but reclamation should not effectively decide a property-rights controversy before the proper legal process does.

Keep Wilderness MRDG Requirements Separate From Non-Wilderness Travel Management

Manual 6340 should expressly prohibit use of the Minimum Requirements Decision Guide as a decision framework for non-Wilderness roads and lands. The section 4(c) minimum-requirements inquiry addresses whether an otherwise prohibited use may be employed for administration of designated Wilderness. It does not independently govern route designation, maintenance, or motorized recreation outside Wilderness. BLM's current off-road vehicle regulations separately govern lands where motorized use is otherwise legally available, including designation of lands as open, limited, or closed under 43 C.F.R. Part 8340 (43 C.F.R. §§ 8340.0-1, 8341.1, 8342.1, 2026).

These frameworks must remain separate.

Manual 6340 should expressly state that nothing in the Manual incorporates or independently applies the off-road vehicle area and route designation criteria contained in 43 C.F.R. § 8342.1 to designated Wilderness administration or to roads, routes, corridors, or lands outside the Wilderness boundary. The minimum-requirements standard in section 4(c) of the Wilderness Act and the travel-management standards applicable under 43 C.F.R. Part 8340 arise from different



legal authorities and perform different functions. Neither standard should be used to expand the geographic or substantive reach of the other.

Accordingly, management of cherry-stemmed roads, boundary roads, excluded corridors, rights-of-way, trailheads, and adjoining multiple-use lands must be governed by the statutes, regulations, land-use plans, and travel-management authorities otherwise applicable to those lands. Wilderness character, Wilderness-management objectives, or the minimum-requirements process should not serve as independent grounds for applying § 8342.1, closing or restricting an otherwise lawful motorized route, or imposing Wilderness-management standards outside the congressionally designated boundary.

This distinction is especially important following Executive Order 14408, *Removing Unnecessary and Counterproductive Restrictions on Access to Federal Lands*. The Order rescinded Executive Orders 11644 and 11989 and directed Interior and Agriculture to review and revise regulations and policies adopted to implement those prior Executive Orders (Exec. Order No. 14,408, 2026). Existing regulations remain operative until lawfully revised, but Manual 6340 should not independently preserve or expand requirements derived from rescinded Executive policy, nor should Wilderness-management criteria be used as a substitute for whatever travel-management framework ultimately governs non-Wilderness lands.

Any future revision of Part 8340 should be reflected in Manual 6340 through a durable cross-reference to then-current travel-management law rather than by importing a fixed set of Wilderness-oriented criteria into adjoining lands.

Recognize the Practical and Economic Value of Motorized Connectivity

Protecting adjoining access is not merely a technical boundary issue. Motorized routes frequently provide the transportation backbone by which people reach large public-land landscapes, including Wilderness trailheads and other nonmotorized recreation opportunities. Utah State University research examining OHV access in Utah found that recreation destination choices were statistically responsive to the amount of public land classified as open, limited, or closed to OHV use. When access was restricted in one county, OHV users were more likely to shift recreation to another county, with modeled visitation changes in some areas reaching approximately 20 to 40 percent. The authors cautioned that even where aggregate regional economic effects appeared modest, concentrated losses could be significant for particular small towns or local areas (Jakus et al., 2008).



That research supports a basic planning principle: route access has network effects. Closing a short boundary road or cherry-stemmed connector may affect far more recreational opportunity than the physical mileage closed because it may eliminate access to a trailhead, destination, loop, dispersed-camping area, hunting unit, or broader transportation network.

BLM's current economic reporting likewise confirms that multiple uses of BLM lands are economically consequential. BLM reports that activities authorized on its lands generated approximately \$245.4 billion in total economic output and supported roughly 884,000 jobs in fiscal year 2024, including recreation and numerous other multiple-use sectors (BLM, 2025). Manual 6340 should therefore avoid treating adjoining lands merely as protective space surrounding Wilderness. They remain working multiple-use landscapes with distinct recreational, economic, transportation, and community functions.

Recommended Manual Revision

UPLA recommends adding a controlling adjoining-lands provision substantially as follows:

The Wilderness Act and Manual 6340 apply to lands within congressionally designated Wilderness boundaries and shall not independently impose Wilderness management standards upon adjoining non-Wilderness lands, roads, rights-of-way, routes, trailheads, facilities, or access corridors. Activities outside Wilderness shall be governed by the statutes, regulations, land-use plans, travel-management decisions, valid existing rights, and other authorities applicable to those lands. Proximity to Wilderness, or the fact that an otherwise lawful activity may be visible, audible, or perceptible from Wilderness, shall not by itself constitute authority to prohibit, close, relocate, narrow, reclaim, or materially restrict that activity.

The Manual should further provide that cherry-stemmed roads and other excluded corridors remain non-Wilderness; that routine maintenance and obstruction removal outside Wilderness do not require an MRDG merely because Wilderness lies adjacent to the work; that reasonable reconstruction and realignment should be evaluated when natural events impair excluded access; and that BLM must identify and protect State, county, R.S. 2477, inholding, grazing, water, utility, and other valid existing access rights before undertaking irreversible closure or reclamation.

Congress has drawn Wilderness boundaries for a reason. Inside those boundaries, BLM must faithfully administer the Wilderness Act. Outside them, BLM must faithfully administer the laws governing non-Wilderness public lands. Revised Manual 6340 should prevent those two regimes



from being administratively blurred. Protecting the integrity of Wilderness does not require diminishing motorized access, public access, or multiple use on lands Congress chose not to designate as Wilderness.

ADDITIONAL HIGH-PRIORITY REVISIONS TO MANUAL 6340

In addition to the preceding recommendations, UPLA encourages BLM to incorporate several additional policy revisions that would substantially improve legal clarity, administrative consistency, and long-term stewardship of designated Wilderness Areas. Collectively, these recommendations reinforce the central principle that Wilderness should be managed according to the authority Congress enacted, using transparent, evidence-based decision making that protects both wilderness character and the broader multiple-use framework governing surrounding public lands.

Improve Boundary Identification, Mapping Accuracy, and Public Notice

One of the most effective ways to reduce resource damage, visitor confusion, and unnecessary enforcement actions is to ensure that Wilderness boundaries are accurately identified, consistently mapped, and readily understandable to the public. Many designated Wilderness Areas contain irregular legislative boundaries, cherry-stemmed roads, excluded rights-of-way, split-estate lands, inholdings, and complex legal descriptions that are not readily apparent on the ground. Inconsistent GIS layers, outdated public maps, or inaccurate digital mapping can unintentionally direct visitors onto closed routes or discourage lawful access that Congress intended to remain available.

Manual 6340 should therefore require BLM to maintain authoritative digital boundary data derived directly from congressional maps, legal descriptions, cadastral surveys, and subsequent legislative amendments. Where discrepancies exist among mapping products, the Manual should require prompt correction and public notification.

Likewise, field offices should periodically evaluate whether boundary signing remains sufficient to allow a reasonable visitor exercising ordinary diligence to determine whether they are entering designated Wilderness. Improved mapping and boundary identification reduce inadvertent violations, improve voluntary compliance, reduce enforcement conflicts, and better protect wilderness resources without imposing additional restrictions on lawful recreation.

This recommendation is consistent with FLPMA's requirement that BLM manage public lands using principles of multiple use while maintaining accurate public land records (43 U.S.C. §§



1701(a)(5), 1732(a)) and with longstanding federal surveying authorities governing public land boundaries.

Strengthen Monitoring Through Objective, Science-Based Performance Standards

UPLA recommends that Manual 6340 modernize its monitoring framework by emphasizing measurable resource conditions rather than subjective management preferences. The existing Manual appropriately recognizes monitoring as an important component of wilderness stewardship. However, revised policy should establish greater consistency regarding what is measured, how monitoring results are interpreted, and how management decisions are triggered. Monitoring should emphasize objectively measurable indicators such as:

- vegetation condition;
- invasive species occurrence;
- fuel loading;
- trail condition;
- soil stability;
- hydrologic function;
- wildlife habitat condition;
- visitor-use patterns;
- campsite impacts;
- unauthorized route development; and
- restoration effectiveness.

Whenever monitoring results are used to justify new restrictions on public access or recreation, the Manual should require BLM to identify the measurable threshold exceeded, explain why existing management tools proved insufficient, and demonstrate how the proposed action is expected to improve the identified condition.

The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine have repeatedly emphasized that adaptive natural-resource management is most effective when management objectives, monitoring protocols, performance measures, and decision thresholds are explicitly defined before management actions occur (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine [NASEM], 2018). Adaptive management likewise depends upon periodic reassessment rather than assuming initial management decisions remain appropriate indefinitely.

Accordingly, revised Manual 6340 should distinguish between monitoring that informs management and monitoring that automatically drives progressively more restrictive management. Monitoring should function as an objective decision-support tool, not as a



mechanism that consistently ratchets management toward increasing regulation regardless of actual resource conditions.

Improve Transparency, Documentation, and Public Participation

UPLA recommends strengthening procedural transparency throughout Manual 6340. Although many Wilderness management actions receive public review through NEPA or land-use planning, numerous operational decisions affecting visitor access, route maintenance, vegetation management, restoration projects, or implementation of Wilderness management plans occur with relatively limited public visibility. Revised Manual 6340 should encourage early coordination with States, counties, Tribes, grazing permittees, recreation organizations, neighboring landowners, local governments, emergency responders, and other affected stakeholders whenever significant management actions are contemplated.

For decisions involving substantial restrictions upon public access, changes to established visitor use, major restoration activities, vegetation manipulation, relocation or closure of trails, or similar actions, BLM should maintain an administrative record documenting:

- the legal authority supporting the decision;
- the factual basis supporting the action;
- alternatives considered;
- public involvement undertaken;
- expected management outcomes;
- monitoring criteria; and
- conditions under which the action will be reevaluated.

Such transparency promotes public confidence, improves decision quality, reduces litigation risk, and strengthens long-term stewardship.

This recommendation is consistent with NEPA's continuing emphasis on informed decision making and public participation, notwithstanding recent revisions to implementing regulations (*Robertson v. Methow Valley Citizens Council*, 490 U.S. 332, 349-352 (1989)).

Provide Greater Policy Direction for Emerging Technology

Manual 6340 should also be revised to accommodate rapidly evolving technology without requiring continual policy amendments. Since Manual 6340 was issued in 2012, technological advances have dramatically changed navigation, communications, emergency response, resource monitoring, ecological restoration, and administrative operations. The Manual currently provides



relatively little guidance beyond evaluating whether a particular device falls within one of the Wilderness Act's prohibited categories.

UPLA recommends replacing equipment-specific language with a functional decision framework. Rather than attempting to anticipate every future technology, the Manual should require managers to evaluate:

- whether the technology falls within a category regulated by the Wilderness Act;
- whether another federal statute or regulation governs its use;
- whether an applicable statutory exception authorizes consideration of the technology;
- the technology's actual environmental effects;
- its contribution to public safety or resource protection;
- whether it reduces cumulative impacts compared with available alternatives; and
- whether its use remains consistent with the minimum requirements applicable to the proposed action.

Such an approach would allow the Manual to remain relevant as technology evolves while preserving the statutory framework established by Congress.

Clarify Restoration Standards and Avoid Artificial Historic Reconstruction

UPLA supports restoration of disturbed Wilderness where restoration is authorized and supported by sound science. At the same time, Manual 6340 should clarify that restoration does not require reconstructing an idealized historical landscape that may never have existed or attempting to erase every evidence of human influence regardless of legal context.

The Wilderness Act directs agencies to preserve wilderness character and natural conditions. It does not require restoration to a single historic ecological baseline, nor does it authorize removal of lawful facilities, valid existing rights, grazing infrastructure, water developments, access corridors, or other congressionally protected uses solely because they reflect human activity. Current ecological research increasingly recognizes that many western landscapes continue to change in response to climate variation, altered disturbance regimes, invasive species, and other long-term ecological processes. Consequently, restoration should emphasize ecological resilience, native ecosystem function, and long-term sustainability rather than attempting to recreate a static historical condition that may no longer be attainable.

The Ecological Society of America has similarly recognized resilience-based restoration as an increasingly appropriate framework for managing ecosystems experiencing changing environmental conditions (Gann et al., 2019). Revised Manual 6340 should therefore distinguish clearly among:



- restoration required to repair identifiable human-caused disturbance;
- ecological management necessary to preserve wilderness character under changing environmental conditions; and
- discretionary attempts to enhance wilderness character beyond the conditions Congress designated.

This distinction would better align restoration policy with both contemporary ecological science and the statutory limits of agency authority.

Require Periodic Policy Review

Finally, UPLA recommends establishing a formal process for periodic review of Manual 6340 itself. The present Manual remained substantially unchanged for more than a decade despite major developments in federal public-land law, administrative law, NEPA implementation, Executive policy, wildfire science, recreation management, technology, and judicial interpretation of agency authority. Future revisions should not depend upon infrequent wholesale policy reviews. Instead, the Manual should require periodic national evaluation whenever significant changes occur in:

- Acts of Congress affecting Wilderness administration;
- federal regulations;
- Supreme Court or controlling circuit precedent;
- Executive Orders materially affecting public-land management;
- Departmental policy;
- significant advances in ecological science; or
- technological developments affecting Wilderness management.

Periodic review would improve consistency, reduce policy obsolescence, minimize unnecessary litigation, and ensure that field offices continue administering Wilderness according to current law rather than outdated assumptions.

Recommended Manual Revision

UPLA recommends incorporating the following overarching implementation standards into Manual 6340:

- Maintain authoritative boundary mapping and provide clear public identification of Wilderness boundaries and excluded corridors.
- Base monitoring and adaptive management upon measurable, objective performance standards supported by the best available science.



- Expand transparency through improved documentation, stakeholder coordination, and periodic review of significant management decisions.
- Evaluate emerging technologies through functional analysis rather than equipment-specific assumptions.
- Focus restoration on ecological resilience, preservation of wilderness character, and repair of documented disturbance, while respecting valid existing rights and congressionally protected uses.
- Require periodic review and revision of Manual 6340 to ensure continuing consistency with current statutes, regulations, judicial precedent, Executive Orders, and scientific knowledge.

These recommendations complement the preceding sections of this letter by improving the long-term administration of designated Wilderness without altering the fundamental statutory framework established by Congress. Together, they would make Manual 6340 more legally durable, scientifically credible, operationally practical, and fully consistent with the Wilderness Act's dual objectives of preserving wilderness character while providing meaningful opportunities for public enjoyment of America's designated Wilderness Areas.

SECTION-BY-SECTION RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MANUAL 6340

The preceding sections of this letter address the principal policy revisions UPLA believes are necessary to modernize Manual 6340. During our review, however, we identified several additional provisions that warrant revision to improve legal clarity, administrative consistency, and implementation of the Wilderness Act. While individually narrower in scope, these revisions would substantially improve the Manual's long-term effectiveness and reduce unnecessary conflicts over Wilderness administration.

Clarify the Relationship Between Wilderness Character and Wilderness Purposes

Throughout Manual 6340, the concepts of "wilderness character," "wilderness purposes," and "natural conditions" are occasionally used interchangeably even though the Wilderness Act assigns them distinct legal functions.

The Act identifies preservation of wilderness character as the overarching management responsibility while also directing that Wilderness Areas be administered for recreational, scenic, scientific, educational, conservation, and historical purposes (Wilderness Act of 1964, 16 U.S.C. §§ 1131(a), 1133(b)). Those statutory purposes should not be interpreted as competing objectives



in which one purpose routinely overrides another. Rather, they should be balanced within the broader obligation to preserve wilderness character.

Manual 6340 should therefore distinguish more clearly between:

- statutory management purposes established by Congress;
- qualities commonly evaluated as components of wilderness character;
- resource conditions monitored for management purposes; and
- discretionary management objectives adopted by the agency.

Doing so would reduce confusion regarding which management considerations are legally required and which represent administrative implementation choices.

Clarify the Role of Wilderness Management Plans

The Manual should also more clearly define the legal status of Wilderness Management Plans. Management plans serve an important implementation function by translating statutory direction into site-specific management strategies. They do not, however, possess independent regulatory authority beyond the statutes, regulations, land use plans, and decisions from which they derive.

Revised Manual 6340 should therefore state expressly that Wilderness Management Plans:

- implement existing legal authorities;
- may not enlarge the geographic scope of designated Wilderness;
- may not eliminate valid existing rights;
- may not create restrictions unsupported by governing law; and
- must remain consistent with applicable Resource Management Plans adopted under FLPMA.

This clarification would improve consistency among field offices and reduce uncertainty regarding the relationship between national policy, local planning documents, and controlling statutes.

Require Greater Coordination With Resource Management Plans

Although Wilderness Areas are governed by the Wilderness Act, they remain components of broader BLM planning landscapes administered under FLPMA.

Manual 6340 should therefore direct managers to evaluate proposed Wilderness actions within the context of adjacent Resource Management Plans, travel management decisions, grazing



decisions, vegetation management programs, wildfire planning, wildlife management, and other multiple-use decisions affecting surrounding public lands.

This recommendation is particularly important where actions occurring inside Wilderness may influence access, fuels management, watershed conditions, wildlife movement, or emergency response outside Wilderness.

FLPMA directs BLM to coordinate land-use planning with State and local governments and to provide consistency, to the extent practical, with State and local plans (43 U.S.C. § 1712(c)(9)). Wilderness management should likewise recognize that adjacent public lands frequently function as part of integrated ecological, recreational, transportation, and emergency-response systems.

Clarify Treatment of Existing Facilities and Historic Improvements

The Manual should more clearly distinguish among prohibited new development, lawful maintenance of existing facilities, and preservation of historic resources.

Congress has repeatedly designated Wilderness Areas containing preexisting improvements, including historic cabins, dams, corrals, water developments, fences, range improvements, administrative facilities, trails, and cultural resources. In many cases, Congress specifically preserved authority to maintain these features or otherwise recognized their continued existence through valid existing rights or special statutory provisions.

Manual 6340 should therefore avoid language implying that every human-made feature necessarily conflicts with wilderness character or should ultimately be removed.

Instead, the Manual should require managers to distinguish between:

- unauthorized modern development;
- maintenance or replacement authorized by statute;
- historic preservation activities authorized under applicable law;
- public safety improvements authorized under existing authorities; and
- removal of facilities that no longer possess legal authorization.

This approach better harmonizes the Wilderness Act with the National Historic Preservation Act and other federal cultural-resource authorities while respecting congressional decisions regarding existing improvements.

Clarify Scientific Research Standards



Scientific research is expressly recognized as one of the public purposes for which Wilderness may be administered (16 U.S.C. § 1133(b)). Revised Manual 6340 should more clearly articulate how research proposals are evaluated.

Research should neither receive automatic approval nor be presumed inconsistent with Wilderness simply because equipment or temporary installations may be proposed.

Instead, the Manual should require evaluation of:

- scientific necessity;
- consistency with Wilderness purposes;
- availability of less intrusive methods;
- expected duration;
- cumulative impacts;
- opportunities for data sharing;
- restoration requirements; and
- long-term public benefit.

Where research requires otherwise prohibited equipment or installations, BLM should continue applying the applicable statutory exceptions and minimum-requirements analysis required by the Wilderness Act.

This balanced framework would encourage valuable scientific inquiry while preserving wilderness character.

Clarify Visitor Information and Interpretation Policy

The current Manual appropriately emphasizes education as the preferred means of achieving compliance. UPLA recommends strengthening that principle by expanding direction regarding visitor information.

Public understanding of Wilderness regulations is one of the most effective and least restrictive management tools available to BLM. Visitor education frequently reduces resource damage, improves voluntary compliance, decreases enforcement conflicts, and allows management objectives to be achieved without additional regulation.

Accordingly, revised Manual 6340 should encourage field offices to provide:

- accurate digital maps;
- downloadable GIS data;



- current trail information;
- boundary descriptions;
- information regarding valid access routes;
- Leave No Trace education where appropriate;
- wildfire and emergency information;
- seasonal resource advisories; and
- explanations of applicable regulations and visitor responsibilities.

Providing accurate information is often more effective than imposing additional restrictions after avoidable violations occur.

Clarify Adaptive Management Standards

Although adaptive management is referenced throughout modern federal land management, Manual 6340 should more carefully define how adaptive management operates within Wilderness.

Adaptive management should not become a mechanism through which temporary management actions gradually become permanent without additional analysis or public review.

Instead, adaptive management should require:

- clearly stated objectives;
- measurable performance indicators;
- periodic monitoring;
- documented evaluation of results;
- public transparency regarding significant adjustments; and
- willingness to modify or remove restrictions that no longer serve their intended purpose.

Adaptive management is most effective when it remains genuinely adaptive rather than functioning as one-directional escalation of regulatory controls.

Clarify Interagency Coordination

Many Wilderness Areas involve overlapping administrative responsibilities among BLM, the U.S. Forest Service, National Park Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, State wildlife agencies, county governments, Tribal governments, and emergency-response organizations. Manual 6340 should encourage greater coordination where adjacent jurisdictions manage contiguous Wilderness Areas or where management decisions affect shared transportation systems, wildfire response, wildlife populations, watersheds, or visitor access.



Greater interagency coordination promotes consistent visitor information, improved emergency preparedness, more efficient resource management, and reduced administrative conflict.

Improve Internal Consistency Throughout the Manual

Finally, UPLA recommends a comprehensive editorial review of Manual 6340 to improve consistency among chapters.

Several provisions currently express similar management concepts using different terminology, while other sections contain internal repetition or language that could be interpreted inconsistently by different field offices. Definitions, decision standards, and terminology should be standardized throughout the Manual.

In particular, terms such as:

- wilderness character;
- natural conditions;
- preservation;
- restoration;
- enhancement;
- minimum requirements;
- necessary;
- generally;
- ordinarily;
- where feasible; and
- where practicable

should either be defined or consistently applied throughout the Manual to reduce unnecessary variation in implementation.

Because Manual 6340 serves as national policy, even relatively minor wording differences can produce significant differences in field-level administration.

Recommended Manual Revisions

UPLA recommends incorporating the following additional revisions throughout Manual 6340:

- Clearly distinguish wilderness character, wilderness purposes, and administrative management objectives.



- Clarify that Wilderness Management Plans implement existing legal authorities rather than creating new authority.
- Require consistency between Wilderness administration and applicable FLPMA Resource Management Plans.
- Differentiate authorized maintenance of existing facilities and historic resources from unauthorized new development.
- Establish clearer standards governing scientific research proposals.
- Expand visitor education and public information as preferred management tools.
- Define adaptive management using measurable objectives and periodic reassessment.
- Encourage stronger coordination among federal, State, Tribal, county, and emergency-response agencies.
- Standardize terminology and decision standards throughout the Manual to improve national consistency.

Collectively, these revisions would improve the clarity and defensibility of Manual 6340 while reducing inconsistent interpretation among BLM field offices. They would also better align national Wilderness policy with the statutory framework established by Congress, reinforce public confidence in Wilderness administration, and promote more consistent implementation of the Wilderness Act across the National Wilderness Preservation System.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Prevent administrative expansion of Wilderness.** Clarify throughout Manual 6340 that only Congress may designate or enlarge Wilderness and eliminate administrative practices that effectively expand Wilderness boundaries or restrictions beyond those enacted by Congress.
2. **Modernize wildfire, fuels, and vegetation management.** Replace the Manual's presumption favoring passive management with a science-based framework that evaluates active and passive management equally and authorizes appropriate fuel reduction, vegetation treatment, and wildfire mitigation where consistent with the Wilderness Act.
3. **Update Manual 6340 to reflect current law and Executive policy.** Revise the Manual to incorporate recent Supreme Court precedent, current Executive Orders, the EXPLORE Act, updated NEPA implementation, and other significant legal and policy developments occurring since 2012.
4. **Protect primitive and unconfined recreation.** Reaffirm that recreation is an express statutory purpose of the Wilderness Act and ensure that visitor restrictions are supported by documented necessity rather than precautionary assumptions.



5. **Strengthen public safety and emergency response.** Clarify emergency authorities, improve coordination with State and local responders, modernize guidance for search and rescue operations, and ensure that administrative procedures never impede protection of human life.
6. **Protect multiple use and motorized access outside Wilderness.** Clearly distinguish Wilderness management from management of adjoining public lands, prohibit de facto buffer zones, protect cherry-stemmed roads and valid existing rights, and ensure Wilderness management does not become an indirect travel management program.
7. **Improve mapping, monitoring, and administrative transparency.** Require accurate boundary mapping, objective performance-based monitoring, improved documentation, greater public participation, and consistent national implementation.
8. **Modernize restoration, research, and technology policies.** Clarify restoration objectives, encourage appropriate scientific research, establish technology-neutral decision frameworks, and incorporate contemporary ecological science into Wilderness management.
9. **Strengthen coordination with broader public land planning.** Improve consistency between Wilderness Management Plans, Resource Management Plans, emergency planning, wildfire management, and other federal, State, Tribal, and local planning efforts.
10. **Improve internal consistency throughout Manual 6340.** Standardize terminology, clarify decision standards, distinguish statutory requirements from discretionary guidance, and eliminate provisions that create unnecessary ambiguity or inconsistent implementation among field offices.
11. **Establish periodic policy review.** Require regular review of Manual 6340 to maintain consistency with future statutory amendments, judicial decisions, Executive Orders, scientific advancements, and evolving public land management practices.



CLOSING

UPLA appreciates BLM's willingness to undertake a comprehensive review of Manual 6340 and respectfully requests that this revision result in a Manual that is firmly grounded in congressional intent, current law, contemporary science, and practical land management experience. As presently written, portions of the Manual reflect assumptions and management approaches developed more than a decade ago. Since that time, federal administrative law, wildfire science, recreation management, ecological restoration, emergency response practices, and Executive policy have evolved significantly. The Manual should evolve accordingly while remaining faithful to the statutory framework established by the Wilderness Act.

The recommendations presented throughout this letter are intended to strengthen, not weaken, stewardship of designated Wilderness. Preserving wilderness character requires active, informed, and legally sound management that recognizes changing ecological conditions while respecting the limits Congress placed upon agency authority. Equally important, faithful implementation of the Wilderness Act requires protecting the integrity of congressionally established boundaries, respecting valid existing rights, preserving lawful public access, maintaining emergency response capabilities, and ensuring that management of designated Wilderness does not inadvertently restrict multiple-use management on adjoining public lands.

Collectively, the revisions recommended by UPLA would produce a Manual that is more legally defensible, scientifically credible, operationally practical, and nationally consistent. They would improve transparency, strengthen public confidence, reduce unnecessary conflict, and provide clearer direction to BLM field offices responsible for administering some of America's most valued public landscapes.

UPLA urges the BLM to adopt these recommendations and revise Manual 6340 in a manner that faithfully implements both the protections and the limitations established by Congress. By doing so, BLM can preserve the wilderness character of designated Wilderness Areas while ensuring that public access, multiple use, valid existing rights, public safety, and the rule of law remain integral components of federal public land stewardship for generations to come.

Utah Public Lands Alliance would like to be considered an interested public for the Policy Review: BLM Manual 6340, Management of Designated Wilderness Areas. Information can be sent to the following address and email address:

Rose Winn
Utah Public Lands Alliance



PO Box 833, St. George, UT 84771

rose@utahpla.com

Sincerely,

Rose Winn
Natural Resources Consultant
Utah Public Lands Alliance
559.862.6382

Loren Campbell
President
Utah Public Lands Association
909.499.3295

cc: Senator Mike Lee, Senator John Curtis, Congresswoman Celeste Malloy, Congressman Mike Lee, Congressman Blake Moore, Congressman Burgess Owens, Governor Spencer Cox, Redge Johnson, Laura Ault, UPLA Trustees and Members

References

43 C.F.R. Part 6300, Subpart 6302 (2026).

43 C.F.R. § 6303.1 (2026).

Allen, I. E., Chhin, S., Zhang, J., & Zhang, X. (2019). Fire and forest management in montane forests of the northwestern United States. *Forests*, 10(4), 342.

Azbell, J. (2007). Public lands: The road less traveled: The Tenth Circuit adjudicates R.S. 2477 claims using a piecemeal state-law approach instead of a uniform federal policy; *Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance v. Bureau of Land Management*, 425 F.3d 735 (10th Cir. 2005). *Wyoming Law Review*, 7(2), 547.

Battaglia, M. A., Smith, F. W., & Shepperd, W. D. (2008). Can prescribed fire be used to maintain fuel treatment effectiveness over time in Black Hills ponderosa pine forests? *Forest Ecology and Management*, 256, 2029-2038.

Blumm, M. C., & Erickson, L. (2020). The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act at 50: Overlooked watershed protection. *Michigan Journal of Environmental & Administrative Law*, 9, 1–55.

Bureau of Land Management. (2025). *A sound investment for America 2025: Economic contributions from BLM-managed lands*. U.S. Department of the Interior.

Bureau of Land Management. (2026). *Dingell Act priority access biennial report*. U.S. Department of the Interior.



Bureau of Land Management. (2012). *Manual 6340: Management of designated wilderness areas*. U.S. Department of the Interior.

Bureau of Land Management. (2026). *National Environmental Policy Act implementing procedures for the Bureau of Land Management*. Federal Register.

Bureau of Land Management. (2026a). *Policy review: BLM Manual 6340, Management of Designated Wilderness Areas*. Federal Register.

Bureau of Land Management. (2026b). *Rescission of Conservation and Landscape Health Rule*. Federal Register.

Byrne, J. P., Mann, N. C., Dai, M., Mason, S. A., Karanicolas, P., Rizoli, S., & Nathens, A. B. (2019). Association between emergency medical service response time and motor vehicle crash mortality in the United States. *JAMA Surgery*, 154(4), 286-293.
<https://doi.org/10.1001/jamasurg.2018.5097>

Council on Environmental Quality. (2026). *Removal of National Environmental Policy Act implementing regulations*. Federal Register.

Department of the Interior. (2026). *National Environmental Policy Act implementing regulations*. Federal Register.

Department of the Interior. (2025). *Statement of Jon Raby, Nevada State Director, Bureau of Land Management, on pending legislation before the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources*. U.S. Department of the Interior.

Department of Transportation v. Public Citizen, 541 U.S. 752 (2004).

Executive Order No. 14,154. (2025). *Unleashing American energy*.

Executive Order No. 14,225. (2025). *Immediate expansion of American timber production*, 90 Fed. Reg. 11365.

Executive Order No. 14,239. (2025). *Achieving efficiency through State and local preparedness*.

Executive Order No. 14,308. (2025). *Empowering commonsense wildfire prevention and response*, 90 Fed. Reg. 26175.

Executive Order No. 14,353. (2025). *Establishing the President's Make America Beautiful Again Commission*.

Executive Order No. 14,408. (2026, May 29). *Removing unnecessary and counterproductive restrictions on access to Federal lands*. The White House.



EXPLORE Act, 16 U.S.C. § 8422.

Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, 43 U.S.C. §§ 1701–1787.

Gann, G. D., McDonald, T., Walder, B., Aronson, J., Nelson, C. R., Jonson, J., Hallett, J. G., Eisenberg, C., Guariguata, M. R., Liu, J., Hua, F., Echeverría, C., Gonzales, E., Shaw, N., Decleer, K., & Dixon, K. W. (2019). International principles and standards for the practice of ecological restoration (2nd ed.). *Restoration Ecology*, 27(S1), S1-S46.

Grissom, C. K., Thomas, F., & James, B. (2006). Medical helicopters in wilderness search and rescue operations. *Air Medical Journal*, 25(1), 18-25.

Harrod, R. J., Povak, N. A., & Peterson, D. W. (2007). Comparing the effectiveness of thinning and prescribed fire for modifying structure in dry coniferous forests. In *Proceedings: Fire and Fire Surrogate Study Conference* (USDA Forest Service Proceedings RMRS-P-46CD).

High Sierra Hikers Association v. Blackwell, 390 F.3d 630 (9th Cir. 2004).

Jakus, P. M., Keith, J. E., & Liu, L. (2008). *Economic impacts of land use restrictions on OHV recreation in Utah*. Department of Applied Economics, Utah State University.

John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act, Pub. L. No. 116-9, 133 Stat. 580 (2019).

Loper Bright Enterprises v. Raimondo, 603 U.S. 369 (2024).

Lydersen, J. M., Collins, B. M., Brooks, M. L., Matchett, J. R., Shive, K. L., Povak, N. A., Kane, V. R., & Smith, D. F. (2017). Evidence of fuels management and fire weather influencing fire severity in an extreme fire event. *Ecological Applications*, 27(7), 2013-2030.

Lyu, M., Zhao, Y., Huang, C., & Huang, H. (2023). Unmanned aerial vehicles for search and rescue: A survey. *Remote Sensing*, 15(13), 3266. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rs15133266>

National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2018). *Adaptive management for a changing world*. National Academies Press.

National Interagency Fire Center. (2026). *Interagency standards for fire and fire aviation operations*. National Interagency Fire Center.

National Park Service. (2006). *Management Policies 2006: Chapter 6, Wilderness preservation and management*. U.S. Department of the Interior.

Norton v. Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance, 542 U.S. 55 (2004).



Pidot, J. R., & Peterson, M. (2021). Conservation rights-of-way on public lands. *UC Davis Law Review*, 55, 89–139.

Reinhardt, E. D., Keane, R. E., Calkin, D. E., & Cohen, J. D. (2008). Objectives and considerations for wildland fuel treatment in forested ecosystems of the interior western United States. *Forest Ecology and Management*, 256(12), 1997-2006.

Reinhardt, E., & Holsinger, L. (2010). Effects of fuel treatments on carbon-disturbance relationships in forests of the northern Rocky Mountains. *Forest Ecology and Management*, 259, 1427-1435.

Rice, W. L., et al. (2026). Are wilderness recreation experiences more regulated than recreation experiences on other federal public lands? U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Research Station.

Robertson v. Methow Valley Citizens Council, 490 U.S. 332 (1989).

Sloggy, M. R., Long, D., & Sánchez, J. J. (2023). The effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the willingness-to-pay for outdoor recreation in Wilderness Areas. *Journal of Forest Economics*, 38(3), 293-316. <https://doi.org/10.1561/112.00000566>

Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance v. Bureau of Land Management, 425 F.3d 735 (10th Cir. 2005).

Spano, S. J., Macias, D., Snowden, B., & Vohra, S. (2015). A lightning multiple casualty incident in Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks. *Wilderness & Environmental Medicine*, 26(1), 43-53.

Symons, J. N., Fairbanks, D. H. K., & Skinner, C. N. (2008). Influences of stand structure and fuel treatments on wildfire severity at Blacks Mountain Experimental Forest, northeastern California. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Pacific Southwest Research Station.

Thomas, E. R., et al. (2022). Constraints to wilderness recreation: A scoping review. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Research Station.

Townes, D. A. (2002). Wilderness medicine. *Primary Care: Clinics in Office Practice*, 29(4), 1027-1048.

U.S. Bureau of Land Management. (2012). *Manual 6340: Management of designated wilderness areas*. U.S. Department of the Interior.

U.S. Forest Service. (2026). *Minimum Requirements Analysis Framework Workbook: Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness trail maintenance*. U.S. Department of Agriculture.



U.S. Forest Service. (2025). *Wilderness safety: Black Hills National Forest*. U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Wilderness Act of 1964, 16 U.S.C. §§ 1131–1136.

Wilderness Watch, Inc. v. U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, 629 F.3d 1024 (9th Cir. 2010).

Wolf, K. L., Derrien, M. M., Kruger, L. E., & Penbrooke, T. L. (2020). Nature, outdoor experiences, and human health. In S. Selin, L. Cervený, D. J. Blahna, & A. B. Miller (Eds.), *Igniting research for outdoor recreation: Linking science, policy, and action* (Gen. Tech. Rep. PNW-GTR-987). U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Pacific Northwest Research Station.

Wu, X., et al. (2023). Low-intensity fires mitigate the risk of high-intensity wildfires in California's forests. *Science Advances*, 9, eadi4123.