

Wilderness Stewardship Guidelines

Ventana and Silver Peak Wilderness Areas

Monterey Ranger District
Los Padres National Forest



Citizens Alternative
Ventana Wilderness Alliance

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Description of the Environment

Ventana Wilderness

Within the northern Santa Lucia Mountains between the Big Sur coast and the Salinas Valley lies the Ventana Wilderness, originally set aside as a 55,884 acre Primitive Area in 1929 and subsequently given Wilderness status in 1969 when it was then enlarged to encompass 160,000 acres. Following the epic Marble-Cone Fire of 1977, the Ventana was further enlarged to 164,503 acres. In 1984, 2750 acres were added and in 1992, the Los Padres Condor Range and River Protection Act increased the total acreage under protection in the Ventana to 202,503 acres.

Bounded on the west by the Pacific Ocean, the mountainous geography of this coastal range creates a stronghold of wilderness in an increasingly metropolitan area of the state. The sharp-crested ridges fall into steep V-shaped canyons where streams wind their way to the ocean, spilling over waterfalls and quietly flowing through deep pools in a verdant riparian corridor.

A great diversity of vegetation and wildlife is present in these mountains, with numerous threatened and endangered species represented. Along with chaparral, pines, oaks and grassy meadows, stands of virgin redwoods are found. Black-tail deer, mountain lion, and black bear freely roam these lands as golden eagle, red-tailed hawk and the re-introduced California condor soar above. The many miles of streams host both rainbow and threatened steelhead trout.

Silver Peak Wilderness

The Silver Peak Wilderness was created in 1992 by the Los Padres Condor Range and River Protection Act, protecting 14,500 acres of pristine wildlands near the southern border of the Monterey District in the northern Santa Lucia Mountains. It extends from near Cape San Martin in the north southerly to near the San Luis Obispo County line. The Silver Peak displays a great variety of habitat and vegetation and is the home to the threatened southern steelhead and the California condor.

The Silver Peak differs from its northern neighbor, the Ventana, by displaying a drier habitat and thus is the southernmost naturally occurring location of the coast redwood and other species. It is also the northern limit of some southern species. This overlapping creates a very wide variety of habitat and species. The terrain varies from open grassy hilltops to deep virgin redwood canyons and expanses of chaparral and coastal scrub. The crest of the Santa Lucia provides sweeping panoramas of ocean, coast and inland vistas.

Desired Future Conditions
and
Wilderness Opportunity Classes

Wilderness Opportunity Class (WOC) describes the conditions within the Ventana and Silver Peak Wilderness Areas that are to be maintained or restored. These two classes describe both current conditions and those considered achievable in the future. They specify the management objectives and desired conditions for management zones in both wilderness areas. Primarily, the conditions described convey descriptions of recreational experience and associated impacts. Acreages given for WOC's are approximate. Standards and Guidelines that are common to both WOC's are described separately.

Ventana Wilderness	
WOC Class I Management Zone	
Horse Canyon	26,000 Acres
Ventana Mountains	21,000 Acres
Zigzag	10,500 Acres
WOC Class II Management Zone	
Ventana	144,678 Acres
Silver Peak Wilderness	
WOC Class II Management Zone	
Silver Peak	14,500 Acres

Wilderness Opportunity Class I - Pristine

An unmodified natural environment only minimally affected by the activities of users. Human-caused disturbances usually recover on an annual basis.

Management Direction

Emphasis is placed on sustaining and restoring natural ecosystems and wilderness qualities. Human-caused impacts affecting wilderness resources are promptly restored to natural conditions. Management actions are directed towards the protection of wilderness character and resources utilizing only the minimum tools, regulations and practices that bring the desired results with the least intrusive measures. Forest Service presence is usually limited to monitoring conditions to achieve management objectives. Signs, administrative structures, or facilities are not present.

Social Conditions

Exceptional opportunities for solitude and isolation are present in an environment free of the evidence of human activities. Travel is off-trail or on un-maintained travel routes or ways. While either traveling or camping, the likelihood of contact with other users is remote. The visitor is presented with a highly challenging environment that often provides an element of risk requiring both self-reliance and superior outdoor skills.

Campsites

Very few established campsites are found. Fire rings are not present and impacts associated with camping recover annually. There is little or no loss of vegetation and mineral soil exposure, erosion, or compaction is minor.

Trails

There are no maintained system trails. Visitors travel cross-country or along un-maintained paths or routes. Very few user or social trails exist and none are allowed to form.

That portion of the Ventana Trail, 2E042, extending from the north end of the Puerto Suello Trail, 3E081 to its termination at the Ventana Double Cone, shall be managed as prescribed in WOC II.

Wilderness Opportunity Class II – Primitive

A predominantly unmodified environment only minimally affected by the activities of users. Human-caused resource disturbances are limited to designated primitive campsites and along popular trails. Impacts may persist from year to year in high use areas. In lesser-used areas, they usually recover on an annual basis.

Management Direction

Emphasis is placed on sustaining and restoring natural ecosystems and wilderness qualities. Management actions are directed towards the protection of wilderness character and resources utilizing only the minimum tools, regulations and practices that bring the desired results with the least intrusive measures. Patrols are conducted to monitor conditions to achieve management objectives. Signing is limited to resource protection information, identification of designated primitive campsites, and directions at major system trail intersections.

Social Conditions

Excellent opportunities for isolation from human activities are available. Outstanding opportunities for solitude, discovery, challenge, and utilizing outdoor skills are present. These experiences may be moderated in areas that experience higher visitor use levels. Off-trail, conditions similar to those described in WOC Class I are found.

Campsites

The existing system of designated primitive campsites provides camping areas for the majority of wilderness visitors. Fire rings and grates may be present at these campsites. Loss of vegetation may be evident and areas of bare mineral soil may be exposed with some soil compaction and erosion apparent. These impacts often persist from year to year. Higher use campsites may exhibit a higher level of impacts than those receiving less use. Non-designated primitive campsites will resemble those described in Class I.

Trails

System trails are maintained to minimum standards in a manner that protects wilderness character and resources. Social or user trails exist, but new ones are not allowed to form. Off of system trails, conditions resemble those described in Class I.

Management Direction - Standards and Guidelines

Administrative Sites

Management Direction

Administrative sites, structures, and improvements including those under special use permit, are limited to those essential for the management and protection of the wilderness and are the minimum tool suitable to accomplish the task.

Standards and Guidelines

Evaluate all existing administrative sites, structures and improvements within wilderness for retention.

The establishment of any administrative site, structure, or improvement within wilderness is preceded by the appropriate level of NEPA analysis and includes public involvement.

Air Resources

Management Direction

Protect the current conditions of air quality related values (AQRV), including visibility, while allowing for natural forces such as fire to assume their natural role. Meet Federal and State air quality standards for Class I Airsheds. Evaluate proposed significant sources of emissions that would adversely affect Class I Airsheds including sources not on Federal land.

Standards and Guidelines

Identify and develop key AQRVs for monitoring.

Collect baseline information to monitor for changes in AQRV.

Campfires

Management Direction

Campfire sites will be managed in a manner that minimizes impacts to wilderness character and resources.

Standards and Guidelines

Campfires are permitted only in designated primitive campsites and prohibited in all other areas. At undesignated primitive campsites, only the use of pressurized gas stoves is permitted.

No new fire rings are allowed to form in designated primitive campsites. Where campfires are prohibited, all fire rings are removed and none are allowed to form.

As designated primitive campsites are rehabilitated, excess fire rings are removed and any remaining fire ring(s) are outfitted with fire pans.

Campsites

Management Direction

Visitors are encouraged to utilize the existing system of designated primitive campsites. Both designated and undesignated primitive campsites are rehabilitated or naturalized as necessary to protect wilderness character and resources.

Standards and Guidelines

Existing designated primitive campsites are inventoried and assigned the appropriate condition status. As encountered, undesignated primitive campsites will be mapped, inventoried, and assigned an appropriate condition status. Depending upon the intensity of use, identified campsites are re-evaluated every 1-5 years.

The following classification system will be utilized.

Campsite Condition Classification System (Modified Frissell System)

Undesignated Primitive Campsites

Class 1U Evidence of campsite is slightly visible. No fire rings are present. There is little if any loss of vegetative cover and/or minimal disturbance of organic litter. Site improvements such as seats or windbreaks are not present. No mutilation of natural features is evident.

Class 2U Campsite is evident. No fire rings are present. A slight amount of vegetative cover is lost, along with some organic litter. A minor amount of soil is exposed or eroded. Improvements, such as seats or windbreaks materials may be present. Little, if any, mutilation of natural features is present.

Class 3U Campsite is obvious. Fire ring(s) present. Vegetation cover is lost along with organic litter. A moderate amount of soil is exposed. Improvements, such as seats or windbreaks may be present. Some mutilation of natural features may be in evidence.

Designated Primitive Campsites

Class 1D Campsite is noticeable with one or more fire rings or iron grates in evidence. Some vegetative cover and organic litter are lost. Bare soil is present in the primary use area. Very limited or no mutilation or defacement of natural features is present.

Class 2D Campsite is obvious with one or more fire rings or iron grates in evidence. Moderate amounts of vegetation and organic litter have been lost. Bare soil is exposed beyond the primary use area. Seating, constructed of native materials, may be present. Moderate defacement of natural features is present.

Class 3D Campsite is very conspicuous, often consisting of a complex of individual campsites. Fire rings or iron grates are found throughout the campsite complex. Improvements, constructed of native or imported materials, are present. Vegetation loss is extensive, as is the presence of bare soil. Tree roots are frequently exposed. Mutilation or defacement of natural features, including by saw-cut or axe, is evident.

This campsite classification system may be modified or other methods and protocols of classification developed and implemented as appropriate for site conditions and situations.

- Undesignated primitive campsites classified Class 3U are rehabilitated to Class 1U or 2U conditions.
- At designated primitive campsites, excess fire rings are removed and those remaining are fitted with fire pans.
- As resources permit, efforts are directed towards the rehabilitation and naturalization of human impacts at all designated and undesignated primitive campsites.

Fire

Management Direction

Prepare a Wilderness Fire Management Plan.

Standards and Guidelines

Allow naturally ignited fire to resume its role of shaping the natural ecology of the wilderness while reducing the risk of wildfire spreading beyond wilderness boundaries.

Fish and Wildlife

Management Direction

Natural processes, rather than human actions and influences determine the presence, abundance, and distribution of fish and wildlife.

Standards and Guidelines

Utilizing the minimum tool, the habitat of sensitive species is protected or restored from human-caused impacts, including livestock grazing. No fish stocking will occur within wilderness.

Livestock and Range

Management Direction

Grazing is managed in a manner that provides for the protection of wilderness resources.

Standards and Guidelines

Where a conflict with recreational use persists or resource damage is occurring, consider changes in allotment boundaries.

Allotment holders will rehabilitate and maintain damaged campsites and trails commensurate with the impacts caused by livestock.

All vacant livestock grazing allotments within existing or proposed wilderness are permanently retired.

Signs

Management Direction

Wilderness boundaries are signed at entry points. Signing at trailheads will provide educational resources, such as Leave No Trace camping information and wilderness regulations and restrictions.

Within wilderness, signs are limited to directional signing at major system trail intersections, identification of designated primitive campsites and as necessary to protect wilderness resources.

Where mechanized or motorized vehicle trespass is likely or occurring, signs shall be posted advising that this activity is illegal within wilderness.

Standards and Guidelines

Signs within wilderness are constructed of unfinished, natural wood. Letters and numbers will be routed and left unpainted.

Soils

Management Direction

Soil conditions are determined by natural processes, taking place at naturally occurring rates, with only localized soil compaction, erosion or displacement occurring at some campsites.

Standards and Guidelines

Campsites and trails are monitored for soil erosion, disturbance and compaction resulting from human activities and, utilizing the appropriate minimum tool; actions are taken to rehabilitate human impacts to soils where practicable.

Special Use Permits

Management Direction

Wilderness utilization by outfitters and guides must be compatible with wilderness character, resources, and other visitors.

Standards and Guidelines

All wilderness use regulations and restrictions shall apply to outfitters and guides.

Special use permits will be evaluated to determine that the service provided meets a demonstrated public need, is wilderness dependant, is compatible with wilderness character and will not degrade wilderness conditions.

Recreational livestock used overnight by outfitters and guides will be fed certified weed free or processed feed such as alfalfa pellets or crimped oats.

Outfitters and guides will provide trail maintenance commensurate with their impact on trails.

Trails

Management Direction

System trails are maintained to a condition that does not exceed minimum standards. Trail maintenance, utilizing the minimum tool, is performed in a manner that protects wilderness character and resources.

Standards and Guidelines

No new system trails will be developed except as a measure to protect resources where other management options are not available.

To protect resource values, where practicable, existing trails should be relocated away from meadows, riparian areas, known Threatened, Endangered, Proposed and Sensitive species (TEPS) populations or habitat, and heritage sites.

Construction, reconstruction or abandonment of system trails is preceded by the appropriate level of NEPA analysis and includes public involvement. When practicable, abandoned trails are naturalized to approximate the surrounding landscape.

User-created or social trails, non-constructed paths created by the passage of visitors and not likely to recover within one year, are permitted near designated primitive campsites or popular features where no resource damage is occurring. User created trails are closed, obliterated and naturalized if found to cause direct, identifiable impacts to wilderness resources such as Threatened, Endangered, Proposed and Sensitive species (TEPS) and riparian zones.

The materials and methods used for trail construction, reconstruction, and maintenance shall blend with the wilderness landscape in a harmonious and unobtrusive manner.

Vegetation and Sensitive Plants

Management Direction

Natural processes determine the composition and distribution of plant communities. Threatened, Endangered, Proposed and Sensitive species (TEPS) are monitored to ensure their protection, and where necessary, action taken that ensures their protection. Use prevention, education, detection and eradication to prevent the introduction and establishment of exotic plant species.

Standards and Guidelines

Campsites and trails are monitored and, utilizing the minimum tool, actions are taken to rehabilitate human impacts to vegetation.

Survey and monitor human impacts on sensitive plant species and relocate trails or initiate other appropriate management action where trampling or other harm is occurring.

Educate wilderness users, including recreational stock users, on the threat of invasive exotic weeds and how they can stop their spread into the wilderness.

All feed transported into wilderness must be certified weed free or shall be processed feed such as alfalfa pellets or crimped oats.

Equipment used for resource management and administration within wilderness shall be cleaned prior to entry to prevent the inadvertent introduction of exotic species. Whenever possible, equipment cleaning shall not take place at wilderness entry points.

Inventory and map noxious weed and exotic species infestations, focusing on trail corridors, grazing allotments, fire control lines and trailheads. Utilizing the minimum tool, remove infestations and monitor for reoccurrence.

Water Quality

Management Direction

Streams, springs and other water sources are not allowed to degrade as a result of human use and influence, including livestock grazing.

Standards and Guidelines

Water quality is to meet or exceed State and Federal Water Quality Standards.

The use or disposal of soaps, detergents, or other substances that may degrade water quality, is prohibited in streams, springs and other water sources.

To protect water quality, water for allotment livestock shall be piped to troughs located a minimum of 100' away from the water sources, and float valves shall be utilized and maintained on troughs to preserve the natural hydrological regime of the water source.

To protect water quality, recreational livestock shall be tethered as far from water sources as is practicable.

Water quality monitoring, including fecal coliform bacteria levels, will be performed for the following rivers on at least a quarterly basis. Other rivers or streams may also be monitored as necessary to determine wilderness water purity.

1. Arroyo Seco River
2. Big Sur River
3. Carmel River

Wilderness Recreation

Management Direction

The management of the Ventana and Silver Peak Wilderness Areas is directed toward maintaining both wilderness character and resources while providing opportunities for primitive recreational experiences by visitors. Recreational use will be managed to meet the appropriate WOC Class objectives. To realize these objectives, the minimum tool appropriate to the situation will be utilized.

Standards and Guidelines

Visitor Permits

Visitor permits will be required for overnight use of the wilderness. Self-issuing permits will be available at wilderness trailheads and selected National Forest entry points.

Group Size

Group size will be limited to 12 people per group for both day and overnight use.

Recreational Stock

For both day and overnight use, the number of animals per group is limited to 10 animals. Stock must travel on system trails, cross-country travel is not permitted. Only certified weed free feed or processed feed such as alfalfa pellets or crimped oats may be brought into the wilderness and must be carried and used. Where practicable, stock is to be tethered away from camping areas and water sources. Tying stock to trees is prohibited, except for loading, unloading and for short rest breaks while traveling.

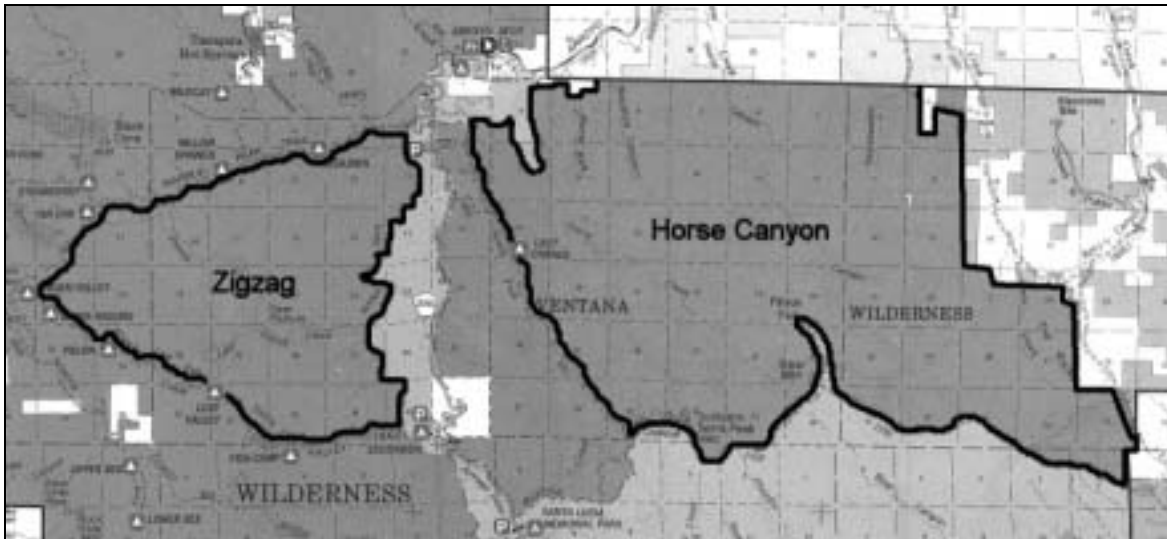
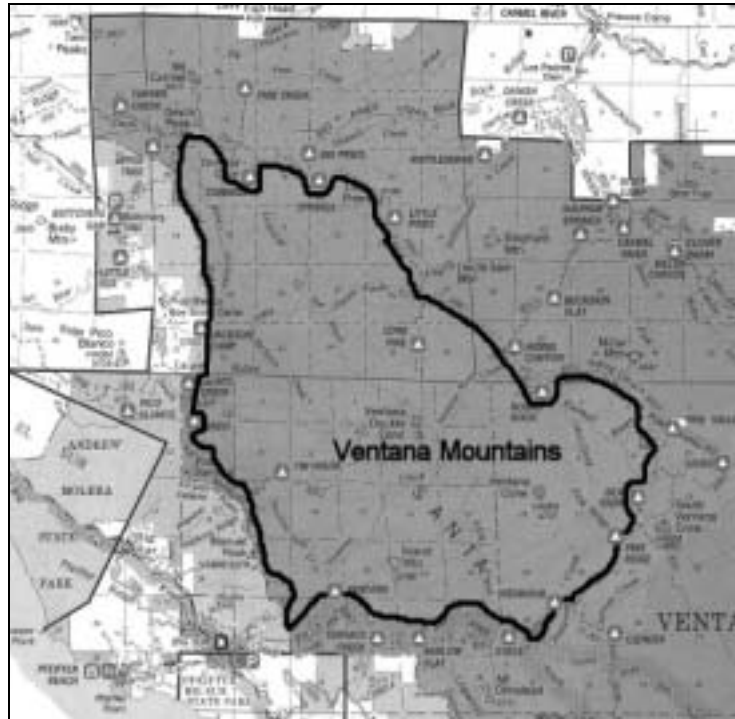
Control of Dogs

Dogs shall be leashed and not be permitted to run at large, chase wildlife, or inconvenience other visitors. Any dog used for the purposes of search and rescue, livestock management, or legal hunting, is exempt from this requirement.

Recreational Shooting

No recreational shooting (e.g. target shooting or "plinking") is permitted within wilderness. Recreational shooters are directed to non-wilderness areas open to this activity.

Wilderness Opportunity Class I – Pristine



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