

The Wilderness Stewardship Reference System

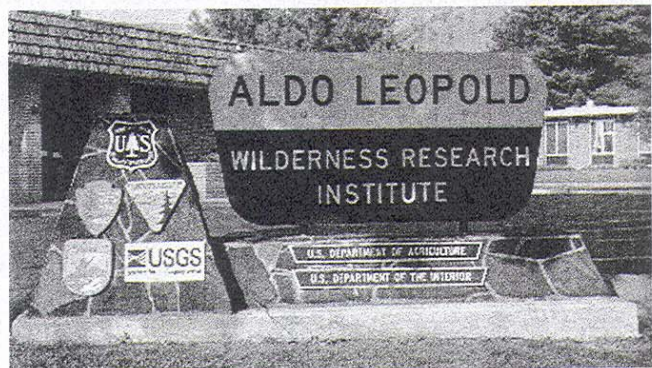
BY PETER LANDRES

Wilderness stewardship faces increasingly complex challenges from myriad internal and external threats to wilderness, along with increasing demands for the use of wilderness for all manner of different purposes. Wilderness managers are looking for information to help them answer difficult questions, for example, about whether competitive recreational events should be allowed, if herbicides should be used to control weeds, if non-native fish should be removed, or if fuels accumulated from fire suppression should be removed.

The new Wilderness Stewardship Reference System (WSRS) was designed to provide quick and easy access over the Internet (www.wilderness.net/WSRS) to U.S. legislative, administrative, judicial, and scientific information on more than 60 difficult wilderness stewardship issues. The primary purpose of the WSRS is to provide information that will help managers make decisions consistent with the letter and spirit of the 1964 Wilderness Act, subsequent wilderness legislation, and agency policies. The WSRS applies to all four U.S. federal agencies responsible for managing wilderness and may be useful to a variety of other people interested in wilderness and its stewardship. Collaboratively developed between the Leopold Institute and the Arthur Carhart National Wilderness Training Center, the WSRS is hosted on Wilderness.net, a website that provides a variety of resources for wilderness stewardship.

The WSRS is organized around specific issues such as mining, access, inholdings, commercial services, and fire and provides excerpts, as appropriate, from the following types of information:

- Special provisions language in wilderness legislation
- Legislative history of congressional discussion before a wilderness law was passed




- Code of Federal Regulations pursuant to wilderness legislation
- Agency policies on wilderness
- Judicial decisions of major cases affecting wilderness stewardship
- Annotated scientific publications relevant to wilderness stewardship.

The WSRS provides easy access to this information, and should be especially useful for people who are not familiar with how to search for legislative, policy, and judicial information. The WSRS offers three different methods of searching for this information:

1. One issue—the information is organized into six general categories which are then further divided into specific issues
2. All issues—all the types of information that are available for all issues are displayed in a single, large table
3. Keyword—any word or combination of words is used to search for all of the information that is available based on the keyword(s).

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Users of the WSRS need to be aware of what it does not provide. First, the WSRS does not provide full text documents. For example, it contains excerpts from House Reports that are relevant to the issues, but it does not contain the full text of these House Reports. Second, it does not cover nonwilderness legislation such as the Endangered Species Act or the Multiple Use Sustained Yield Act, although these laws may affect wilderness stewardship. Third, much of the information on the WSRS, and legislative history information in particular, is subject to interpretation. Most importantly, the 1964 Wilderness Act frames all uses of the WSRS, and this website should not be used as a substitute for seeking legal counsel.

The WSRS also has links to the Wilderness.net Law Library that contains all U.S. wilderness laws in a downloadable format, and to the Policies and Regulations page that contains links to the full text documents of all U.S. federal agency wilderness regulations and policies. Pending funding and support, and feedback on its functionality, the WSRS will be updated annually. 

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