



THE STATE
of **ALASKA**
GOVERNOR MIKE DUNLEAVY

Department of Natural Resources
OFFICE OF PROJECT MANAGEMENT AND PERMITTING

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August 14, 2026

Bureau of Land Management
Attention: Management of Designated Wilderness Areas
Division of National Conservation Lands
1849 C St. NW, Room 5646
Washington, DC 20240

Submitted online at [regulations.gov](https://www.regulations.gov)

Re: Policy Review: BLM Manual 6340, Management of Designated Wilderness Areas

The State of Alaska (State) reviewed the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Manual 6340-*Management of Designated Wilderness Areas* for any necessary updates, clarifications, or suggested revisions. The manual provides policy and guidance for managing BLM lands that have been designated by Congress as Wilderness, as part of the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS). The comments below incorporate input from the Departments of Natural Resources (DNR) and Fish and Game (ADF&G).

There are currently no designated Wilderness areas on BLM-managed lands in Alaska, and while the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) section 1320 granted BLM authority to periodically conduct formal wilderness reviews in Alaska, the State does not support the creation of any new BLM wilderness in Alaska, given that 57.5 million acres in Alaska are already permanently designated as wilderness. This makes up over half of all designated wilderness in the United States.

Despite the lack of designated Wilderness on BLM-managed lands in Alaska and the clear statutory limits of ANILCA Sections 1320 and 1326, the State submits the following comments to inform management of the Central Arctic Management Area (CAMA) Wilderness Study Area (WSA) and in the event Congress designates any BLM lands in Alaska as wilderness in the future, to provide practical administrative guidance to protect the public's use and enjoyment of wilderness.

ANILCA Context

ANILCA, signed into law in 1980, is a compromise that enacted the largest expansion of the national preservation system in history while also recognizing that no further additions were necessary to the system of Conservation System Units (CSUs). Title VII of ANILCA designated areas of wilderness within the National Park system, the National Wildlife Refuge system, and the National Forest system, amounting to the largest expansion of the national preservation system in history. Additionally, ANILCA established study areas for Wild and Scenic River designations, a WSA in Chugach National Forest, and CAMA on BLM-managed lands. Beyond that, Section 1326 of ANILCA established that "no further studies of Federal lands in the State

of Alaska for the single purpose of considering the establishment of a [CSU] ... shall be conducted unless authorized by this Act or further Act of Congress. Taken in their entirety, Titles VII and XIII of ANILCA establish a clear Congressional intent that the wilderness areas added to the NWPS through ANILCA were sufficient, and that no further additions were necessary in the State of Alaska.

Agency policies and manuals which direct agency staff to identify lands with wilderness characteristics and lands suitable for wilderness designation that may be recommended to Congress as additions to the NWPS are inappropriate in Alaska. Despite claims from DOI agencies that these practices are required by guiding statutes such as Section 603 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA), they are in fact contrary to the Congressional intent of ANILCA that no further additions were necessary to the system of CSUs in Alaska.

Summary of Recommendations

The State requests the addition of language clarifying that in Alaska, ANILCA Section 1320 supersedes FLPMA Section 603, and that Section 1326(b) of ANILCA limits further wilderness suitability studies of any kind unless authorized by further acts of Congress.

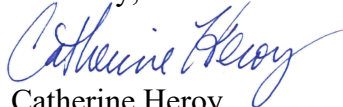
The State appreciates the inclusion of ANILCA Section 1110(a) as an example in 1.6- **Policy, B- Prohibited Uses, 3- Special Provisions and Exceptions to the Prohibitions. (d)- other legislation (ii)- general exception in a designating act.** Further context in Manual 6340 could be added to describe the special exceptions to the Wilderness Act of 1964 that are provided by ANILCA, including but not limited to additional allowances in Title XI (transportation, utility systems, and access provisions), Title VIII (subsistence), Title XIII (aquaculture, cabins and temporary structures, and more).

In Attachment A, we provide page-specific revisions and additions if an over-arching exemption of Alaska from the Designated Areas policies is not accepted. These revisions include adding references to ANILCA in the Manual authorities, referencing a range of allowed uses in Wilderness and WSAs under ANILCA, and clarifying guidance regarding commercial services to better align with the broad principles established under the Wilderness Act.

Closing

Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on BLM Manual 6340, Management of *Designated Wilderness Areas*. Through the recommended changes provided, the State hopes that BLM can include the context necessary to manage lands in accordance with the provisions of ANILCA. Doing so will benefit the people, lands, and managing agencies of Alaska. Please contact me at (907)269-0880 or by email at catherine.heroy@alaska.gov to coordinate any follow up discussions.

Sincerely,



Catherine Heroy
Federal Program Manager

Attachment A: Section-Specific Comments

We submit the following section-specific edits and comments to ensure BLM Manual 6340 reflects the impacts of ANILCA on the CAMA WSA and any potential BLM wilderness designations and to provide practical administrative guidance to protect the public's use and enjoyment of wilderness.

Section 1.3 Authority

- **Comment:** Add ANILCA (16 U.S.C. 3101 et seq.) to the list of explicit authorities.
- **Justification:** While there is currently no designated BLM wilderness in Alaska, the CAMA WSA is managed in accordance with the management direction ANILCA provides for designated wilderness in Alaska. ANILCA contains specific statutory exceptions to general wilderness prohibitions, including Title XI (transportation, utility systems, and access provisions), Title VIII (subsistence), and Title XIII/Section 1315 & 1316 provisions (cabins, temporary structures, motorized equipment, and more). These unique provisions modify general wilderness administration guidelines applied in the lower 48 states.

Section 1.6 Policy. Congressional Direction and General Principles

- **Comment:** Please revise as shown below:
 - ... Section 603(c) of FLPMA directed that for BLM lands "designated [by Congress] for preservation as wilderness, the provisions of the Wilderness Act that apply to national forest wilderness areas shall apply with respect to the administration and use of such designated area." In Alaska, ANILCA Section 1320 grants BLM authority to conduct wilderness reviews "from time to time," however, it also specifically exempts BLM lands in Alaska from FLPMA Section 603. As a result, BLM is not allowed to manage lands recommended for wilderness designation to the non-impairment standard and is instead directed to manage in accordance with applicable land use plans.
- **Justification:** ANILCA Section 1320 modifies implementation of FLPMA Section 603 for lands in Alaska.

Section 1.6, Policy. A. Congressional Direction and General Principles. 2. Preserve Wilderness Character. d. Inspirational value.

- **Comment:** BLM should not manage for "inspirational value" or other non-statutory, intangible components of wilderness character unless Congress has expressly included them in a given wilderness designation.
- **Justification:** The guidance language suggesting that inspirational value and similar qualities are integral to wilderness character exceeds the Wilderness Act's defined framework. Adding new, non-statutory qualities risks creating unwarranted management restrictions and expanding wilderness obligations beyond what Congress authorized.

Wilderness character management must remain grounded in the values explicitly established by Congress, not broadened through agency interpretation.

Section 1.6 Policy. C. Managing Resources and Resource Uses in Wilderness 2. Preserve Wilderness Character

- **Comment:** Please include reference to ANILCA's special provisions for lands in Alaska.

...uses within a wilderness context are found in Section 1.6.C of this manual. In Alaska, ANILCA includes unique provisions allowing certain uses in wilderness areas.
- **Justification:** Ensures proper allowances are included for Alaska lands.

Section 1.6 Policy. C. Managing Resources and Resource Uses in Wilderness Section 3. Collection for Personal Use.

- **Comment:** Amend this section to explicitly recognize that subsistence collection of renewable resources in Alaska is governed by ANILCA Title VIII. Subsistence use includes the making and selling of handicraft articles out of nonedible byproducts of fish and wildlife.
- **Justification:** Any restrictions or closures regarding the collection of renewable plant and animal resources for subsistence purposes in Alaska must go through the Federal Subsistence Board and comply with 43 CFR 51.

Section 1.6 Policy. C. Managing Resources and Resource Uses in Wilderness. Section 4: Commercial Enterprises and Services

- **Comment:** Ensure consistent terminology using the full Wilderness Act term "public purpose" and align commercial service guidance with the statutory principle that wilderness is preserved for the public's "use and enjoyment."
- **Recommended Language Edits for Commercial Services:**
 - i. The BLM should determine through analysis if one or more of the public purposes of wilderness would go unrealized, by a segment of the public, if there was no commercial use. ~~If a given purpose can be adequately realized in a given place and time without commercial services then the commercial service is not necessary.~~
 - ii. Commercial services may serve all visitors, not just those who lack the necessary physical or cognitive ability or specialized knowledge, skills, or equipment to engage in wilderness recreation. To be allowable a commercial service must be necessary to realize wilderness public purposes ~~rather than only to provide a desired activity in a wilderness setting~~. BLM recognizes that outfitters and guides fulfill a vital public purpose by providing technical skills, safety expertise, and educational guidance.
 - iv. In all instances, commercial services may be performed within the wilderness to the extent necessary for activities which are proper for realizing the recreational or other wilderness public purposes of the area. For example, an overnight pack trip to a distant valley to experience wilderness solitude may be dependent on a wilderness setting and

therefore would likely satisfy the statutory requirement that the service is proper for realizing the wilderness purposes of the area.

~~v. Commercial services can be allowed only where their authorization will not impair wilderness character as a whole. Where commercial services are likely to impair wilderness character as a whole, reduction in commercial service use or non-commercial use (or both) may be necessary. Reductions will be based on levels of demand, need, equity, and availability of similar experiences in the vicinity of the wilderness.~~

- **Justification:** This guidance is arbitrary and unsupported by statute. The Wilderness Act explicitly identifies "use and enjoyment" as a primary tenet of wilderness designation and management. Historically, recreational commercial services, including guided hunting and transporting, were actively utilized and valued by the original proponents of the Wilderness Act, such as Robert "Bob" Marshall and Howard Zahniser, who possessed extensive wilderness skills. Commercial services serve the entire public and fulfill valid wilderness public purposes (e.g., recreation, conservation, education, historical use, and facilitating research).

Section 1.6 Policy. C. Managing Resources and Resource Uses in Wilderness. d Structures and Installations

- **Comment:** Add specific reference to ANILCA Title XI and ANILCA Sections 1315 and 1316.
- **Justification:** In Alaska, managers must evaluate structures such as utility system installations, cabins, temporary campsites, and equipment shelters under the unique statutory framework provided by ANILCA Sections 1315 and 1316, as well as Title XI transportation and utility system and access provisions.

Section 1.6 Policy. C. Managing Resources and Resource Uses in Wilderness. 7. c. Prescribed fires.

- **Comment:** We recommend revising this section to better support the public purposes of wilderness, specifically recreation and conservation.
- **Justification:** Management directions should not impose blanket prohibitions on prescribed fires. Instead, administrative activities within wilderness or WSAs should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis using a Minimum Requirements Analysis (MRA). For example, to support recreational public purposes such as moose hunting, targeted prescribed burns may be necessary to regenerate forage and wildlife habitat when natural fires are disrupted or absent.
- **Recommended Language Edits for Prescribed Fires:**
 - i. Prescribed fires can be used in wildernesses only to clearly enhance the land's wilderness public values, including restoring natural vegetative communities. Generally, enhancing wilderness public values means reestablishing the natural role of wildfire where both the following conditions are met:

ii. ~~Except as necessary to~~ A MRA will be used to control exotic species or contribute to the survival of threatened or endangered species, or species for which Federal protection has been found to be warranted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, ~~prescribed fire cannot be used to~~ enhance specific wildlife species, specific vegetative types, or forage production, ~~although secondary effects to these resources may occur~~. As noted above, however, prescribed fire may be used to restore natural vegetative communities.

Section 1.6 Policy. C. Managing Resources and Resource Uses in Wilderness. 9. Inholdings and Edgeholdings.

- **Comment:** Add references to ANILCA Section 1110(b) governing access to inholdings within CSUs including designated wilderness.
- **Justification:** Under ANILCA Section 1110(b), state, private, and Alaska Native inholders, as well as valid occupiers of land within or surrounded by CSUs, are statutorily guaranteed adequate and feasible access for economic and other purposes that is not limited to that enjoyed by date Congress designated the area surrounding the inholding.

Section 1.6, C. Managing Resources and Resource Uses in Wilderness. 14. Research, Subsection d. Research Proposed Without A Use Prohibited by Section 4(c) of the Wilderness Act.

- **Comment:** This section should include a section that specifically addresses State fish and wildlife management research.
- **Justification:** The 2006 Policies and Guidelines for Fish and Wildlife Management by the Forest Service, BLM, and the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies affirm state authority under Section 4(d)(7) of the Wilderness Act. State fish and wildlife management activities (including research), may be administratively exempt from MRA, provided they do not involve any prohibited tools or methods (e.g., no motorized vehicles, permanent structures).