

This Land is Your Land

By Brad Powell, Arizona Wildlife Federation President



BOW fly fishing instructors Skip Tallon and Donna Walkuski fish the Grand Mesa National Forest. Photo courtesy of Donna Walkuski

If you are a hunter, angler, camper, hiker, wildlife watcher, or live anywhere in rural Arizona, you are well acquainted with the treasure of Federal public lands in our State. It's almost a certainty that one of your favorite places is located on these public lands. It is also very likely that you have been confused at some point by land designations (e.g., National Conservation Area, National Park, Areas of Critical Concern, National Monuments, National Forest, National Recreation Areas, Wilderness, National Historic Site, and many more).

As a conservation organization, the Arizona Wildlife Federation supports multi-use of our public lands. However, we do not support all uses in all places. Mining, grazing, and OHV use are examples of public land uses that in some cases are allowed, and in other cases limited or prohibited. The land designation AND the specific management plan for each area determine what is considered appropriate use for that specific area. This is particularly relevant when it comes to policy decisions and advocacy. We're often asked, "does AWF support more national monuments?" or "does AWF support 30x30?" Quite honestly, the answer is "it depends." We determine our position on each proposed designation and management plan independently based on the conservation value of that specific land and the best known science about the impacts and mitigation of multiple use.



Just where did these different designations come from and what are the rules that apply to them? To begin this discussion let's step back to the beginning and get a better understanding of Federal land management, where it began, and how it has evolved.

The concept of wild lands and wildlife as public resources began in America in the 19th Century. In 1864, President Lincoln protected Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Grove of giant sequoias. Yellowstone was designated as America's first National Park in 1872. The Yellowstone Park Timber Land Reserve was designated in 1891 and it became the Bridger-Teton, Custer, Shoshone, and Caribou Targhee National Forests under President Roosevelt. Today our system of public lands covers approximately 640 million acres, which is nearly 28% of our nation's lands. We are fortunate in Arizona to have over 30 million acres of Federal public lands. Four Federal land management agencies are responsible for administration of the bulk of our nation's Federal lands. These four Federal Agencies were established by Congress and have differing management responsibilities and goals. These include:

- Bureau of Land Management (BLM), in the Department of Interior, is responsible for the management of 244 million acres of public lands. In Arizona the BLM manages 12,203,495 acres.
- Forest Service (FS), in the Department of Agriculture, is responsible for the management of 193 million acres of public lands (National Forest System). In Arizona the FS manages 11,264,619 acres.
- U.S Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), in the Department of Interior, is responsible for the management of 89 million acres of public lands (National Wildlife Refuges). In Arizona the FWS manages 1,683,269 acres.
- National Park Service (NPS), in the Department of Interior, is responsible for the management of 80 million acres of public lands (National Park System). In Arizona the NPS manages 2,618,735 acres.

Also, often overlooked are lands administered by the Department of Defense (DoD). These military lands are a significant land and public access resource in our state. Approximately 2.9 million acres of the DoD's national total of 26 million acres are in Arizona. Technically, military lands are considered to be federal lands, and not public lands per se. However, much of the stewardship and public access guidelines apply. In DoD's case, the authority is delineated in the Sikes Act, which directs the military to manage natural resources for the public trust, collaborate its management with the US Fish and Wildlife Service and the state wildlife agency, as well as provide public access for hunting and similar public recreation as is consistent with its military mission. More information on DoD's natural resources management is summarized in a factsheet available at www.denix.osd.mil/nr/. Public access to the three largest DoD installations in Arizona - Goldwater Range, Yuma Proving Ground, and Fort Huachuca - is administered at <https://isportsman.net/>.

Some land designations are the same across these Federal Agencies while others are specific to one or more organizations. Special land designations can come from the President, Congress, or the land management Agency. This web of managers, land management objectives, and varying land designation authorities has led to complexities in the current system. The tables below clarify most land designations, who has the authority to authorize them, and the intent of the designations.

America's Federal public lands contain many unique areas in need of special management attention. The authorities vested in the President, Congress, and the Agency administrators have been used to identify and develop management plans for these areas with strong engagement of the public. It's important to remember that these are your lands!

During your visits to Arizona's public lands, it's always wise to check the maps or talk with local Agency personnel to ensure that you understand the location and management guidance associated with each of these management areas. So get out and enjoy your public lands!



Your Land, Cont'd.

Multiple Agencies with the Same Designations			
Designation	Authority	Agency	Purpose / Characteristics / Notes
Wilderness	Congress	NPS, FS, BLM, FWS	Wilderness areas are “untrammeled by man,” motorized use prohibited (few exceptions by statute), highest protections under law.
National Recreation Area	Congress	NPS, FS, BLM	Includes important recreation areas, often near Bureau of Reclamation reservoirs.
National Monuments	Congress, President	NPS, BLM, FS, FWS	Includes areas of natural, cultural, historical, archeological significance. Presidential proclaimed areas have historic landmarks, historic/prehistoric structures, or other objects of historic or scientific interest. Permitted uses depend on management plans.
National Scenic Trail, National Historic Trail, National Recreation Trail	Congress, Sec. of Interior or Agriculture	NPS, FS, BLM	National scenic trails access significant scenic, historic, cultural areas. National historic trails protect routes of historic importance. National recreation trails often cross state, local, or private lands and provide for outdoor recreation.
Wilderness Study Area	Congress, Sec. of Interior or Agriculture	BLM, FS, FWS	BLM wilderness study areas are managed as wilderness until Congress designates or releases them. Most FS and FWS wilderness study areas are designated and managed according to individual statutes.
Wild and Scenic Rivers	Congress, Sec. of Interior	FS, NPS, BLM, FWS	Wild rivers have no impoundments and are generally accessible by trail only. Scenic rivers have no impoundments and are accessible by road. Recreational rivers are accessible by road, often have development along the shore and may have had past impoundments.

United States Forest Service (FS) Designations		
Designation	Authority	Purpose/Characteristics
National Scenic Area, National Scenic Research Area, National Scenic Recreation Area, National Scenic and Wildlife Area	Congress	Congress has designated 11 scenic areas on the National Forests. The management Direction for each is contained in the legislation. Generally, the lands contain outstanding scenic, recreation and geologic resources.
National Volcanic Monument	Congress	Congress has designated two National Volcanic monuments.
Special Management Area	Congress	Congress has designated more than 50 special management areas. The Statutes detail the purposes.
Inventoried Roadless Area	FS	Inventoried Roadless areas were areas that exceeded 5000 acres in size, met minimum criteria for Wilderness consideration and were inventoried during the FS Roadless Area Review and Evaluation or Forest land management planning. Timber harvest and road building are prohibited in most cases.

Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Designations		
Designation	Authority	Purpose/Characteristics
National Conservation Area	Congress	Contain significant natural, scientific, cultural, ecological, scenic, historic, or recreation values. The management emphasis is provided in the establishment statutes.
Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC)	BLM	The public and the BLM nominate areas that require “special management attention, to protect and prevent damage to important cultural, scenic, fish and wildlife resources or other natural systems or processes. Areas are designated through the BLM resource management.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) Designations		
Designation	Authority	Purpose/Characteristics
National Wildlife Refuges, Marine National Monuments, Wetland Management Districts, Waterfowl Production Areas, Wildlife Coordination Areas, National Fish Hatcheries	Secretary of Interior, FWS, Congress	Wildlife conservation drives everything on national wildlife refuges. Each refuge is established to serve a statutory purpose that targets the conservation of native species dependent on those lands and waters.

National Park Service (NPS) Designations		
Designation	Authority	Purpose/Characteristics
National Historic Sites and Landmarks, National Memorials, National Battlefields, National Historic Parks, National Heritage Areas	Congress, Sec. of the Interior	The National Park Service preserves unimpaired the natural and cultural resources and values of the National Park System for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations. Management goals each designation differ and are provided in the legislation of each site.