



WILDERNESS DEFINITION

Wilderness

Wilderness exists where large areas are characterized by the dominance of natural processes, the presence of the full complement of plant and animal communities characteristic of the region, and the absence of human constraints on nature.

Values of Wilderness

Intrinsic Value – Wilderness, including all life and natural processes, has its own inherent value that is independent of its usefulness to humans.

Social Value - Wilderness areas provide recreation opportunities, solitude, and a refuge from the stress and noise of everyday life. The scenic beauty enhances the enjoyment of outdoor recreation. Wilderness areas are valued for science, education, and are sometimes associated with meditation, spiritual renewal and personal growth.

Biophysical Value - Wilderness provides essential biological services such as air and water purification and waste disposal, habitat for plant and animal species, and allows the maintenance of biodiversity and key ecological and evolutionary processes.

Characteristics of Wilderness

Ecological Integrity is the capability of an ecosystem to maintain natural processes and the diversity of native species over time.

Biodiversity is the variety of life, and includes genetic diversity, species diversity, and community and ecosystem diversity. Biodiversity is both spatially and temporally variable and depends on biogeography and evolutionary context. In true wilderness, species distribution and abundance should be consistent with natural patterns characteristic of the region.

Naturalness refers to the absence of human disturbance. Many human activities are incompatible with wilderness and can diminish its essential qualities.

Large, undisturbed areas are required to provide for the long-term maintenance of wilderness. Small, isolated areas cannot support viable ecosystems, species and genetic diversity, or landscape-scale natural disturbances.

Restoration of Wilderness

For practical purposes, the definition of wilderness must be broadened as a consequence of the degree of human modification of most landscapes in Alberta. As a last resort, when land-use planning has failed and pristine wilderness does not exist, consideration must be given to areas with the potential for restoration to wilderness state, and those that maintain some, but not all, characteristics of wilderness. For example, small patches of unmodified landscape may not be large enough to qualify as wilderness; however, within a highly modified landscape, these areas may be the last natural areas available, and may provide many of the values associated with wilderness.

