

# Access to Public Lands... Guess how much of our federal lands are already under designations that restrict access and use

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February 28, 2013

You've heard these terms: WSA (Wilderness Study Area), NRA (National Recreation Area), NPS (National Park Service), IRA (Inventoried Roadless Area), NLCS (National Landscape Conservation System). That's just some of the alphabet soup of federal designations. Together they spell 'Motorized use is not welcome here'. But have you ever wondered how they all add up? Just how much of our federal public lands are under these restrictive designations?

I wondered, and I decided to add them up. I was prepared to be surprised. But I was shocked.

Let's start with the total of federal lands. From a 2012 CRS Report to Congress:

*"The federal government owns roughly 635-640 million acres, 28% of the 2.27 billion acres of land in the United States. Four agencies administer 609 million acres of this land: the Forest Service (USFS) in the Department of Agriculture, and the National Park Service (NPS), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS)*

**370.58 million acres out of the 640 million acres are under Congressional designations**

**That means 58% of our lands already have a restrictive designation**

58% of our federal lands are NOT being managed for multiple use. They are managed for other goals and purposes, primarily for 'environmental' reasons and for only some kinds of recreation. They are being managed for protectionist goals that are used against motorized access.

I am only including federal designations created by Congress in this total:

**109.5 million acres of Wilderness**

**73.6 million acres of National Park Service (non-wilderness lands)**

**89 million acres of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service**

**23.7 million acres of BLM lands with national designations (not including NRA's)**

**3.15 million acres of National Recreation Areas (2.95 million is USFS)**

**58.5 million acres of USFS Inventoried Roadless Areas (one-third of all USFS lands)**

**6.53 million acres Congressionally Designated Areas in USFS (other than the NRA's)**

**6.6 million acres of USFS Wilderness Study Areas**

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**370.58 million acres of federal lands with special designations**

**That's 57.9%, not including NASA, NOAA and a handful of smaller agencies.**

## **Congressional designations do not account for all the restrictions and closures on public lands**

1. These designations do not include the thousands of separate restrictive designations imposed at the local level, by individual USFS and BLM offices. ('non-motorized areas', ACEC's, roads and areas closed, etc.)
2. The Inventoried Roadless Areas are 1/3 of our national forests. IRA's are supposed to be managed for 'wilderness characteristics', to maintain their 'suitability' for future wilderness designation. Existing roads and trails are legal to use under the rules passed by Congress. But the USFS is not obeying those rules. It is using its Travel Management Rule to close roads and trails to motorized use, even though motorized use is legal in IRA's.
3. The BLM's national directive about identifying lands to manage for 'wilderness characteristics' has a similar effect as the IRA's. It also gives enormous latitude to local offices, to identify lands it wants to manage restrictively ('wannabe wilderness'). These areas are not congressionally determined or identified by any national process or being selected with any standardized criteria. Every local BLM manager is being allowed to act as a 'pseudo-Congress' . He or she can designate 'pseudo-Wilderness' and use that to lock out motorized use.
4. This does not account for the effects of habitat designations by the USFWS. Local BLM and USFS units restrict multiple use because of habitat designations. Recovery Plans for threatened or endangered species are generally added to USFS Forest Plans and to BLM Resource Management Plans (RMPs). The Recovery Plans include details about restricting use, often motorized use (in addition to restricting commercial uses like grazing, timber harvest, mineral extraction and energy development).
5. This does not account for the effects of the National Trails System. Roads and trails we've used for generations suddenly are included in a 'national trail' and designated 'non-motorized'. Motorized use in adjacent (supposedly multiple use) lands can be restricted to 'support the values' of the non-motorized trail.
6. This does not account for the decisions to close motorized use being made under the USFS Travel Management Rule, or the closures done when BLM units revise their Resource Management Plans (RMPs)

**The following references are my 'fact checking' sources. All the numbers come from federal government websites**

I've included extra Wilderness data since that is always a big issue. The numbers are tricky to pin down. Websites on NRA's or National Monuments include all the different management agencies. Some categories include others (NPS lands include wilderness areas and other designations like monuments.)

I've been very careful to not double-count any acreage, but errors might have slipped in. There could well be some designations I've missed.

### **1. Land Mass of U.S. and percentage of federal lands:**

<http://www.fas.org/sqp/crs/misc/R42346.pdf> CRS Report prepared for Congress: "Federal Land Ownership: Overview and Data", dated Feb 8, 2012:

**"The federal government owns roughly 635-640 million acres, 28% of the 2.27 billion acres of land in the United States. Four agencies administer 609 million acres of this land: the Forest**

**Service (USFS) in the Department of Agriculture, and the National Park Service (NPS), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS),** all in the Department of the Interior (DOI). Most of these lands are in the West and Alaska. In addition, the Department of Defense administers 19 million acres in military bases, training ranges, and more. Numerous other agencies administer the remaining federal acreage.”

The BLM: 248 million acres and 700 million acres of subsurface mineral resources.

The USFS: 193 million acres

The FWS: 89 million acres of federal land (plus several large marine areas)

The NPS: 80 million acres

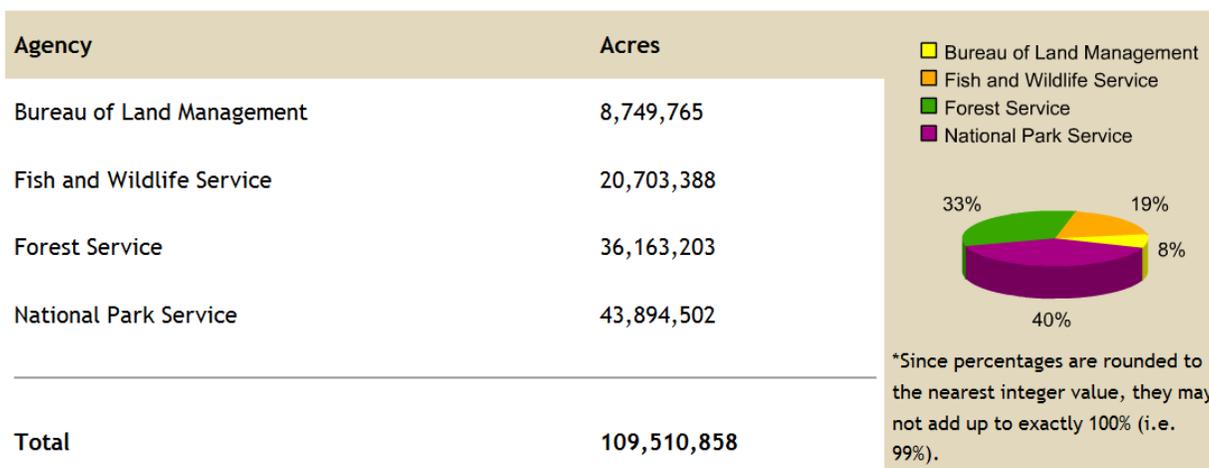
“Federal land ownership is concentrated in the West. Specifically, **62% of Alaska is federally owned, as is 47% of the 11 coterminous western states. By contrast, the federal government owns only 4% of lands in the other states.** This western concentration has contributed to a higher degree of controversy over land ownership and use in that part of the country.”

Exact acreages from the report are 628,801,639 acres of federal land, out of the 2,271,343,360 acres in the U.S. Alaska is 365,481,600 acres, and 225,848,164 acres is federal owned (61.8%). That is not unusual, federal ownership in Nevada is 81.1%, Utah 66%, Idaho 61.7%, Oregon 53%, Wyoming 48.2%. (see maps at last page.)

Footnote states the total federal ownership is understated because the table doesn't show other federal agencies, such as Agricultural Research Service, Bureau of Reclamation, Department of Energy, NASA.

**2. 109,510,858 acres of Wilderness** as of 1/28/13 from [www.wilderness.net](http://www.wilderness.net), the website is co-run by the University of Montana and the 4 agencies that manage wilderness areas. Here's wilderness by agency:

Wilderness Acreage By Agency



Alaska holds 52% of the Wilderness, but it also holds a large percent of the land mass of the country. Wilderness is 57,425,992 acres out of a land mass of 365,481,600 acres in Alaska. Here is the summary for continental U.S. from wilderness.net.

Wilderness Acreage By Agency: Continental United States

Agency	Acres
Bureau of Land Management	8,749,765
Fish and Wildlife Service	2,009,873
Forest Service	30,399,232
National Park Service	10,759,587
<b>Total</b>	<b>51,918,457</b>

\*Since percentages are rounded to the nearest integer value, they may not add up to exactly 100% (i.e. 99%).

**How Does Wilderness Look If You Take Out Alaska?**

Someone might argue, ‘Yes, but so much of the wilderness is in Alaska.’

Answer: true, but Alaska is big, and is 62% federal land. Alaska holds 37% of all federal lands,. Alaska has 225,848,164 acres of federal lands. Without Alaska, the total acreage of federal lands is reduced from 609 million acres to 383 million acres.

Here are the numbers:

All U.S. 109 million acres of wilderness / 609 million acres of fed land: 17.9% wilderness

Minus Alaska: 52 million acres of wilderness / 383 million acres of fed land: 13.8% wilderness

**3. 73.6 million acres of National Park Service (non-wilderness lands)**

[www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2012/tables/12s1255.xls](http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2012/tables/12s1255.xls)

The NPS is 84,383,361 acres which includes 10,759,587 acres of wilderness. So for our total, I count the NPS as 73.6 million, so I do not double-count the wilderness

**4. 89 million acres of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service**

<http://www.fas.org/sqp/crs/misc/R42346.pdf>

**5. 23.7 million acres of BLM lands with national designations**

[http://www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/prog/blm\\_special\\_areas/NLCS/National\\_Conservation\\_Areas.html](http://www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/prog/blm_special_areas/NLCS/National_Conservation_Areas.html)

The BLM National Landscape Conservation System includes national monuments, NCAs and other designations. I’m breaking them out by type to avoid double-counting wilderness.

**4.12 million acres of National Conservation Area (NCA)**

**12.7 million acres of BLM Wilderness Study Areas**

[http://www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/prog/blm\\_special\\_areas/NLCS/wilderness\\_study\\_areas.html](http://www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/prog/blm_special_areas/NLCS/wilderness_study_areas.html)

**5.59 million acres of national monuments** (includes 762,308 acres of non-BLM federal acres)

[http://www.blm.gov/pgdata/etc/medialib/blm/wo/Law\\_Enforcement/nlcs/online\\_electronic.Par.98873.File.dat/NM%20Detail%20table%20April%202012%20final.pdf](http://www.blm.gov/pgdata/etc/medialib/blm/wo/Law_Enforcement/nlcs/online_electronic.Par.98873.File.dat/NM%20Detail%20table%20April%202012%20final.pdf)

**1.16 million acres protected under Wild and Scenic Rivers**

[http://www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/prog/blm\\_special\\_areas/NLCS/Rivers.html](http://www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/prog/blm_special_areas/NLCS/Rivers.html)

**6. 3.15 million acres of National Recreation Areas (2.95 million is USFS)**

[http://www.fs.fed.us/land/staff/lar/LAR2012/Table\\_15.pdf](http://www.fs.fed.us/land/staff/lar/LAR2012/Table_15.pdf)

**7. 58.5 million acres of USFS Inventoried Roadless Areas (one-third of all USFS lands)**

[http://www.fs.usda.gov/wps/portal/fsinternet!/ut/p/c/4/04\\_SB8K8xLLM9MSSzPy8xBz9CP0os3qDfxMDT8MwRydLA1cj72BTFzMTAwjQL8h2VAQAJp-nEq!!/?ss=119930&navtype=BROWSEBYSUBJECT&navid=09100000000000&pnavid=null&ttype=roadmain&cid=FSE\\_003853&position=RELATEDLINKS&pname=Roadless-Home](http://www.fs.usda.gov/wps/portal/fsinternet!/ut/p/c/4/04_SB8K8xLLM9MSSzPy8xBz9CP0os3qDfxMDT8MwRydLA1cj72BTFzMTAwjQL8h2VAQAJp-nEq!!/?ss=119930&navtype=BROWSEBYSUBJECT&navid=09100000000000&pnavid=null&ttype=roadmain&cid=FSE_003853&position=RELATEDLINKS&pname=Roadless-Home)

“Inventoried roadless areas constitute roughly one-third of all National Forest System lands, or approximately 58.5 million acres. Although the inventoried roadless areas comprise only 2% of the land base in the continental United States, they are found within 661 of the over 2,000 major watersheds in the nation and provide many social and ecological benefits.”

**8. 6.53 million acres Congressionally Designated Areas in USFS** (other than the NRA's)

There are 9.48 million Congressionally Designated Areas in USFS, including the two categories below. I took out the 2.95 million acres of NRA's in the USFS, so they don't get double-counted.

<http://www.fs.fed.us/recreation/programs/cda/special-areas.shtml>

**7.385 million acres are under these designations**

“Congress has designated several areas unique for their special characteristics and the opportunities they offer. In addition to congressionally designated wilderness and wild and scenic rivers, they include these National Historic Landmarks (NHL), National Volcanic Monuments (NVM), National Historic Scenic Areas (NHS), National Recreation Areas (NRA), Scenic Recreation Areas (SRA), National Scenic Areas (NSA), National Preserves (NP), and National Monuments (NM).”

**2.1 million acres in ‘Other Congressionally Designated Areas** (National Management Emphasis Areas)’

**9. 6.6 million acres of USFS Wilderness Study Areas**

<http://www.gao.gov/products/RCED-93-151>

1993 GAO report, page 8 claims a lot of areas allow motorized use. Often that means a few roads begrudgingly allowed and always under attack. This report dated 1993 shows 26.3 million acres of BLM WSA.

603 out of 752 WSA's were designated under FLPMA. The BLM recommended at that time that 336 areas, 9.5 million acres, are suitable for wilderness. (The USFS has 117 WSA's totaling 6.6 million acres. As of 1993 the USFS has recommended 4.6 million acres (about 70%) for wilderness.)

**10. National Trails System: over 60,000 miles in all 50 states** National Historic and National Scenic trails are managed by the BLM, USFS and NPS. I can't provide acreage because they are measured in miles not acres. The best database I could find was on <http://www.americantrails.org/resources/feds/40yearfact.html> It says there are 11 National Scenic Trails and 19 Historic Trails designated by Congress. The trails are managed by the federal agencies, but not necessarily all on federal lands.

Maps from Congressional Report Feb 2012

Federal lands in the West compared to the East

