

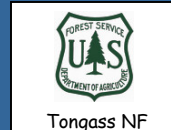
# WILDLIFE VIEWING IN WILDERNESS

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**The Aldo Leopold Wilderness Research Institute's mission:**  
*"To provide scientific leadership in developing and using the knowledge needed to sustain wilderness ecosystems and values."*

*This project supported by:*



Tongass NF



Photo by Dave Spildie

*There are over 600 designated Wilderness areas in the U.S.*

## INTRODUCTION

Managers of designated Wilderness areas have different goals than do managers of other public or private lands. The 1964 Wilderness Act (P.L. 88-577) requires Wilderness to be kept in "natural conditions," without evidence of human development, and to provide "outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation." Many people are drawn to wilderness because of the opportunity it provides for rare wildlife sightings and interactions. Increases in recreation, tourism, and appreciation of wild places may lead to localized pressure to develop additional wildlife viewing sites in wilderness. An example from Alaska helped us to identify unique opportunities and concerns for managers of wildlife viewing activities in wilderness.

## WATCHABLE WILDLIFE & WILDERNESS

### Why Watchable Wildlife?

*Watchable Wildlife* represents the nation's only coordinated network of wildlife viewing areas that has national involvement by all the federal agencies that manage Wilderness. The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and National Park Service each have representatives on the National Partners in Watchable Wildlife steering committee.

### What is a Watchable Wildlife site?

*"A [Watchable Wildlife] site is an area... that has been designated a good place to view wildlife and is open to the public... A site may be as small as a fraction of an acre, or as large as thousands of square miles, offering dispersed or concentrated viewing opportunities..."*

--Nature Watch: A Resource for Enhancing Wildlife Viewing Areas. Falcon Press. 1992.



*There are over 3,000 designated Watchable Wildlife sites in the U.S.*

## TRADITIONAL WATCHABLE WILDLIFE PROGRAMS



Photo by Deborah Richie Oberbillig

To date, most Watchable Wildlife programs have focused on developing wildlife viewing, interpretation, and education projects *outside of wilderness*.

These programs are often based on roadside experiences or on the development of structures such as trail-side interpretive signs and viewing platforms.

Many of these programs offer a relatively prescribed viewing experience, telling people exactly where to stop and look for the species or habitat characteristics of interest.

In many cases, information about these programs is distributed to the public, resulting in the potential for concentrated use of some areas by wildlife viewers.

Some traditional Watchable Wildlife programs may be incompatible with wilderness.

### A WILDERNESS EXAMPLE:

## BROWN BEAR VIEWING IN ALASKA

Pack Creek is a well-known designated Watchable Wildlife site in Admiralty Island's Kootznoowoo Wilderness. Bear viewers who visit Pack Creek have different experiences than those who use nearby undesignated sites. The undesignated viewing sites, which are being visited by increasing numbers of people, provide an opportunity for managers to determine what creates a "wilderness" wildlife viewing experience that is different from the types of experiences that are available elsewhere.



Visitors to the Pack Creek viewing site during July & August share the viewing platform with up to 23 other people at a single time. They are almost guaranteed to see a bear - up-close - as soon as they enter the platform, and they can have all their questions answered by the ranger on site.



Visitors to the undesignated sites during July & August have the freedom to watch bears in solitude. They can experience the excitement of wondering where and when a bear will become visible; they can watch bear behavior from a distance; and they can independently explore the answers to questions.

Taking advantage of the following opportunities may help ensure compatibility between wildlife viewing and wilderness:

~ PROMOTE "WILD" EDUCATION ~



Photo by Milo Burcham

Wilderness offers an opportunity to expand the range of wildlife viewing and educational experiences to include those based on independent exploration of wild places. Wildlife viewing based on exploratory learning and a self-initiated discovery process may be more compatible with wilderness values and character.

~ TEACH THE INTERCONNECTEDNESS OF WILDLIFE & WILDERNESS ~

*"Great wilderness has two characteristics, remoteness, and the presence of wild animals... Remoteness cannot be imitated with cheap materials; and the wilderness without wild animals is merely scenery."*

*--Crisler, L. 1958. Arctic Wild. Harper & Row.*

- Highlight the importance of wilderness and the U.S. National Wilderness Preservation System for sustaining wildlife and providing wildlife viewing opportunities.
- Highlight the importance of wildlife to the existence and maintenance of wilderness character.

**Implementing the following ideas can minimize the impacts of wildlife viewing activities to wildlife and to wilderness character:**

**~ INCORPORATE THE  
"LEAVE NO TRACE" PROGRAM ~**

*Strengthen the relationship between Watchable Wildlife programs and the Leave No Trace Program (LNT). LNT is a national program designed to assist visitors with their decisions when they travel and camp on public lands. The program is well suited to wilderness visitors because it specifically focuses on teaching non-motorized (i.e., wilderness) recreationists how to identify, prevent, and minimize recreational impacts, including impacts to wildlife.*

**~ USE THE INTERNET  
AS AN INTERPRETIVE TOOL ~**

*Provide interpretive information on the Internet about Watchable Wildlife programs to reduce the need for brochures, signs, and other traditional interpretive materials in wilderness. Many federal land management agencies rely increasingly on the Internet to disseminate information to visitors prior to their trips. This interpretive tool can be used to influence visitor expectations, experiences, and behaviors.*

**CONCLUSION**

Wildlife viewing is an important component of wilderness recreation. Wilderness wildlife viewing has the potential to enhance public understanding of wildlife species and their habitat needs in wilderness, and to compel wildlife viewers to become involved in, and supportive of, both wildlife and wilderness conservation efforts. In order to maintain wilderness character while supporting wildlife viewing activities, managers can encourage programs that minimize evidence of human impacts and development. Wilderness is a place where wildlife viewers experience solitude and learning based on self-discovery. Future research is needed to clearly identify the types of wildlife viewing programs that are compatible with wilderness, and whether these programs can be effectively incorporated as Watchable Wildlife programs while maintaining wilderness character.