

The Effects of Drought on Recreation and Wilderness

March 22, 2017 webinar

5 minute intro....WWSR

Thank you for hosting and organizing this webinar on this critical topic of effects of climate change on our recreation and Wilderness/Wild & Scenic River resources.

We are very fortunate as managers to have close access to research scientists to help us prepare for changes in public values and uses of their national forests.

I want to share a short introduction to Wilderness and Wild/Scenic River Acts and public values of our Congressionally designated areas with challenges in management with the effects of changing climate. I'm providing slides with information here for your future reference.

Wilderness is designated to preserve an area's natural condition, untrammelled by man....what is natural?

Forest Service is responsible for 445 of the 756 Wildernesses, 36.7 million acres, or 19 percent of the National Forest System lands.

Wild/Scenic Rivers are designated to preserve free-flowing condition, and protect water quality and outstandingly remarkable values. Protecting these key water resources is going to become increasingly more difficult with the changing climate.

Forest Service is responsible for 125 of the 208 Wild/Scenic Rivers, about 5,000 stream miles and 1.5 million acres of river corridor. That's about 1.25 percent of total stream miles on National Forest System lands.

These are some of the current benefits of these designated areas for our public. Are these benefits, and values, going to change depending on the resource conditions resulting from the changing climate?

And of course there are management considerations we need to respond to in order to stay relevant to the public we serve.

Our Wilderness Management policy directs us to preserve the wilderness resource as the overriding value. We preserve the Wilderness itself for future generations, we don't consider economy or human convenience or comfort or commercial value of Wilderness in our management decisions. The changing climate is effecting the natural resource condition or natural character value of Wilderness. How will that change our management?

Rebecca Rasch is going to talk about the effects of drought and urbanization on Wilderness management. We are also seeing an increase in ecological values of W and WSR as resource conditions change. Values such as refugia and wildlife connectivity.

We're already seeing conflicts increase between the Endangered Species Act and the Wilderness Act that courts have told us we resolve by considering each law equally, not one over the other. Listed species such as the Bull trout need help to increase. We are receiving proposals to consider stocking Bull

trout in portions of streams in Wilderness where they haven't been before – a conflict with Wilderness Act natural character. And a proposal to inventory wolverines across 4 states, including many Wilderness for this reclusive carnivore. We're considering short-term impacts to Wilderness character for inventory methods in Wilderness, for long-term benefit to natural character.

The speakers will be talking about effects of changing climate on recreation activities and opportunities, think about the effects to changing benefits and values, and the challenges to our future management for these public values.