

Conservation Groups Applaud New Wilderness Designation

Secretary of the Interior administratively designates wilderness acreage authorized in 1988

Seattle, WA – Today, Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar administratively added 3,559 acres of Wilderness to the Stephen Mather Wilderness area, which includes parts of North Cascades National Park and Ross Lake and Lake Chelan National Recreation Areas. The Thunder Creek Potential Wilderness Area was originally identified for designation as Wilderness in the Washington Parks Wilderness Act of 1988. That law identified the area as Potential Wilderness because of its wilderness character accompanied by a potential non-conforming use due to a potential hydropower project on Thunder Creek

In this case, the City of Seattle was exploring the potential for hydropower development on Thunder Creek. The City has abandoned these plans, and with no other uses planned for the area, the Secretary was able to designate this area as Wilderness, as directed by the 1988 Washington Parks Wilderness Act.

“We welcome this latest wilderness designation for Thunder Creek, the first within lands managed by the National Park Service in 14 years in Washington State,” said Tom Uniack, Conservation Director of Washington Wild. “The Park Service deserves credit for their patience and due diligence in pursuing this potential wilderness designation.”

Washington Wild, along with 12 other conservation and recreation groups representing Washington State, sent a letter to Secretary Salazar, supporting an administrative decision to designate Thunder Creek as Wilderness.

The Park Service went well beyond the requirement of recommending a decision by the Secretary of the Interior: they worked with City Light to gain concrete support for the designation after the non-conforming use was eliminated and opened up the issue for public comment in their recently completed *Ross Lake National Recreation Area General Management Plan*.

The new Wilderness designation will continue to allow hunting and fishing, activities that are currently allowed within the National Recreation Area. Other existing uses, such as hiking, camping, rafting, horseback riding, and climbing, are also permissible in the Wilderness area.

Background

The Washington Parks Wilderness Act designated 634,614 acres of the North Cascade National Park, Ross Lake National Recreation Area, and Lake Chelan Recreation Area as the Stephen M. Mather Wilderness.

Also designated in this proposal was an additional 5,226 acres of potential wilderness that could be administratively designated at the direction of the Secretary of the Interior, if and when non-conforming uses are terminated. The two Potential Wilderness areas in the Ross Lake National Recreation Area are Thunder Creek, which was formally designated today, and Beaver Creek, which has not yet been implemented due to existing non-conforming uses.