

Wilderness and National Scenic Area FAQs

Some of our most spectacular federal lands are designated as National Scenic Areas and Wilderness areas. While there are some key differences between them, there are many similarities:

- Only Congress has the power to designate portions of national forests or other federal lands as National Scenic Areas or Wilderness Areas, and only federal land can be designated. Private lands near or within the proposed National Scenic Area are not included, and there are no private inholdings within the proposed Wilderness areas. Since this land is already federally owned and part of the George Washington National Forest, no land acquisition is required.
- Hiking, camping, backpacking, horseback riding, paddling, birdwatching, and many other forms recreation are allowed in both the National Scenic Area and Wilderness areas. Hunting and fishing are also allowed in both the National Scenic Area and Wilderness areas. This designation does not affect hunting or fishing rules, which are determined by the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources.
- The Forest Service can continue to fight fires and damaging outbreaks of insects and disease in both the National Scenic Area and Wilderness areas.
- Most timber harvest and industrial development, such as gas drilling, would be off-limits in both the National Scenic Area and Wilderness areas.
- The proposed Shenandoah Mountain National Scenic Area and Wilderness areas were both developed by and brought to Congress by local citizens, as most successful proposals are.

Wilderness is the highest level of protection available for public land. Wilderness areas are some of the nation's most remote and least developed places. They have a natural character, and the imprint of any prior land uses is substantially unnoticeable.

- To preserve the wild character of Wilderness areas, timber harvest, permanent roads, drilling, and other development are not allowed. The use of motorized equipment, motor vehicles, or other mechanical transport is normally not allowed, except when necessary for control of fire, insects, diseases, and for search and rescue operations. There are no existing roads in the proposed Wilderness areas.
- Designated Wilderness offers outstanding opportunities for people to enjoy solitude and backcountry recreation, and also protect forested refuges for wildlife and fish, clean water and air, and other natural values.

National Scenic Areas are more flexible, protecting the exceptional scenic and natural value of an area while allowing compatible uses to continue. Certain activities that are not allowed in Wilderness areas may be allowed in National Scenic Areas.

- Mountain biking is allowed on trails within the National Scenic Area.
- No existing roads within the National Scenic area will be closed, and visitors can continue to use them, including for scenic drives and to access campsites and trailheads.
- Virginia is home to three popular National Scenic Areas. The Mount Pleasant, Seng Mountain, and Bear Creek National Scenic Areas contain some of Virginia's most popular trails, and are popular destinations for camping, fishing, and other recreation.