

How to propose an Alternative to Wilderness



Introduction

Many people across America are searching for recreation-friendly alternatives to the many large Wilderness bills pending before Congress. Recreation friendly alternatives to Wilderness bills have been proposed across western public lands, including California, Montana, Idaho, New Mexico and Nevada.

This hand-out was prepared for BRC members wishing to consider proposing such an alternative to Wilderness where they live and recreate. Please keep in mind that the information here is provided only as a general guide or idea generator.

Although individual recreationists are the heart and soul of any alternative proposal, it is important to consult with and utilize knowledgeable and experienced resources. There are many professional consultants such as lobbyists and lawyers who can provide advice assessing and responding to the specific circumstances of any particular situation.

We encourage any BRC member to contact us regarding how we can help you use this information to formulate a proposal that best fits your specific circumstances. If you have any questions about the information herein please call Ric Foster at 208-237-1008 ext. 2.

Why does BRC use the term "third-way alternative"?

The term "third-way alternative" was coined by the public lands staff at BRC because there are so many alternatives to Wilderness and no two are the same. So, to avoid confusion, we use the term 'third-way alternative.'

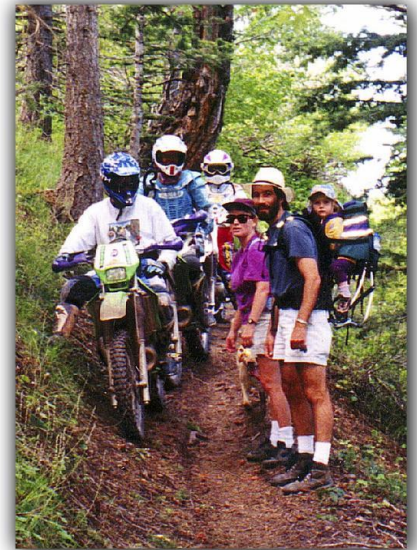
Among the third-way alternatives, the National Recreation Area and the National Conservation Area are the most well-known. There is also the National Protection Area and some have even advocated the establishment of a National Monument as a viable alternative to Wilderness. Of course, BRC is a strong supporter of our own Backcountry Initiative.

It is important to understand that all of the alternatives discussed provide the exact same level of protection from development as Wilderness does.

A few general concepts for BRC members considering proposing a third-way option:

It's worth it!

Taking the time and effort to formulate a third-way proposal is likely to provide benefits even if you never get a legislator to introduce it. At the very minimum, your proposal can be used to contrast what the Wilderness lobby is pushing. Any credible third-way alternative will show legislators that Wilderness is NOT the only way to protect our public lands.



There is no right way or wrong way to go about proposing a third-way option

Proposals can be conceptual, very specific or anything in between. Don't feel limited to our templates we've provided here. As mentioned above, this information is offered only as suggestion - an idea generator - to help you decide if this option is appropriate for your favorite recreation area.

Be sure to include all stakeholders



IMPORTANT!! - It is impossible to overstate the importance of including other key stakeholder groups early and frequently in the process. This is especially true for other recreational users, but also livestock grazers, local biomass harvesters and valid mining claim holders. Local government buy-in is also critical. Failure to discuss your proposal with other key stakeholders early on can cause suspicion and may drive influential groups into the arms of the Wilderness activists. The more people, businesses, cities and counties, and of course, politicians, who support your proposal the more influence it will have.

Think marketing

These days, every successful piece of legislation, no matter what kind of bill it is, has a four color glossy hand out! Legislative proposals often come packaged with savvy media marketing materials. BRC has examples of DVD's, handouts and even bumper stickers you can look at to get ideas for your proposal. And, you don't have to throw a pile of money at these efforts. A simple four color tri-fold handout is surprisingly inexpensive to produce and there are few more effective ways to tout the benefits of your proposal. Time spent creating some marketing materials is definitely worthwhile.

Whether Wilderness?

A lot of third-way alternatives include some Wilderness. If your area include lands that are suitable for the more restrictive Wilderness designation, you may want to consider incorporating Wilderness into your proposal.



Actually, many third-way bills that have been passed into law have included a mix of designations. For example, a bill in Utah included Wilderness designation, a National Conservation Area with special management for the desert tortoise and an OHV trail system - all in one bill.

How to begin:

Based on our experience, there are three key things we recommend you formulate first: Boundaries, Pillars and Values.

Boundaries

Drawing boundaries on a land status map is an excellent way to begin. A land status map will indicate property boundaries and will help identify other stakeholders your proposal will impact. Carefully crafting the boundary of your proposal is time well spent.



As noted above, take into consideration other designations that may be appropriate within your boundary. Give consideration for manageable boundaries, especially if your proposal includes any Wilderness. For example, consider whether it makes more sense to locate a Wilderness boundary on natural feature like a ridge-top or a manmade feature like a road.

Pillars:

Legislative pillars are simply a list of what your legislation will do. These will be broad bullet-point type statements that quickly and concisely describe what your legislation is trying to accomplish.

What are "resource values" and why are they important?

Please keep in mind that terms like "third-way" and "legislative pillars" are just terms that BRC uses. However, this is not true about the term "values."

When discussing public land legislation, the term "values" can take on a very important specific meaning. This is not at all like having good moral values. A value, in this context, is a specific resource existing within your boundary. For example, "scenic values" is often listed as legislative value in land bills. So is recreation. Other uses such as livestock grazing are sometimes listed as a value.

Identifying all of the recreation values in your proposal is important because the land management agency is required to base any and all decisions on the specific values defined in the legislation. Indeed, federal land managers are often required by law to manage an area "in a manner that protects the values for which the components of the system were designated."

Sadly, the litigious nature of today's Wilderness activists means any uses that aren't allowed in Wilderness should be specifically referenced. If there is any ambiguity, these radical groups will try to use the courts to eliminate any and all non-Wilderness activities. For example, instead of the term "recreation" as a value, your proposal might add "including motorized and non-motorized recreation."

Extra Credit: Draft Legislation

With these three key components (map, pillars and values) you can do an awful lot, including getting endorsements from other stakeholder groups and even from legislators.

Still, many find that actually drafting a bill is helpful in moving the issue forward. We've included several examples of both proposed legislation as well as legislation that has been passed. Also, we put together a "anatomy of a public lands bill" to help.

IMPORTANT NOTE: If you are at this stage in your proposal it is highly recommended that you get some professional help. BRC can assist and we can also suggest other places you can get professional assistance with your proposal.

If you determine crafting legislative language is important, careful attention must be paid to the following: Boundary map, Findings and Purpose, Defined values, Administration and Management.

As always, please contact us if you have any questions.

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[Anatomy of a Land Bill](#)

