

National Park Service Backcountry Management

The 1998 Shenandoah National Park Backcountry and Wilderness Management Plan gives background on the Park history and Shenandoah Wilderness enactment and outlines Park backcountry management philosophy. Section 1.5 defines backcountry in Shenandoah National Park as “the primitive, undeveloped portions of the Park, managed primarily for natural conditions and processes. Facilities and/or cultural resources surrounded by backcountry are part of the backcountry. The Skyline Drive historic zone and associated developed zones are specifically excluded. Designated wilderness areas are located within and are part of the Park’s backcountry.”

In chapter 2 DESCRIPTION OF THE BACKCOUNTRY RESOURCE, the Plan notes that “backcountry” includes 79,579 acres of legislatively designated wilderness area comprising 40.6% of the park’s total acreage. “These areas do not include facilities or roads and include primitive trails as the only development. Wilderness boundaries are not physically identified in the backcountry except by large rock barriers placed on former fire roads to prevent motorized vehicle entry. Approximately 116,000 acres of the backcountry is non-wilderness.

“Facilities in the backcountry include cabins and huts operated and maintained by the PATC as overnight lodging and a few day-use shelters maintained by the NPS. Most backcountry facilities are located in the Central District. Camp Hoover, a former presidential retreat, is now rarely used as a conference and special activities facility and is actively interpreted to visitors during the summer months. White Oak cabin is sometimes in use as a ranger residence. Structural remains of past mountain culture are located throughout the Park. These remnants are generally not maintained and are subject to natural weathering forces. Other development includes powerlines, gas lines, radio/microwave antennas, and gravel administrative roads.

“Backcountry facilities are described in chapter 6. The primary backcountry development is in the over 500 miles of hiking and horse trails. This vast network of trails allows for many circuit hike possibilities and provides backcountry users with a variety of challenges and opportunities.”

The 400 page document contains exacting detail on Park and wilderness history, recent management history and many specific management details. Download at <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.693.6010&rep=rep1&type=pdf>