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Comments: These important trailless areas help protect plants and wildlife, keep Wilderness from being overrun by humans, and offer a truly primitive experience for those who venture into these areas. The WMNF and its Wilderness areas are popular with hikers and skiers and have seen a lot of use in recent years.

The Presidential Range-Dry River Wilderness, where the trail reroute is proposed, is 29,000 acres of spruce-fir and northern hardwood forests, steep slopes, high ridgelines, and fragile alpine and subalpine habitat. Native wildlife living here include moose, black bears, Canada lynx, fishers, beavers, white-tailed deer, coyotes, peregrine falcons, and bobcats.

In 2023, the Forest Service considered amending the Forest Plan to allow trail relocations outside of established trail corridors in Wilderness via a Categorical Exclusion (CE), which would have limited environmental review. Wilderness Watch and local group Standing Trees, along with our members and supporters, successfully advocated for maintaining wilderness protection in trailless areas by convincing the Forest Service to address wilderness trail issues on a site-specific and individual basis via a more rigorous environmental assessment (EA) instead.

Now the agency is specifically looking at relocating part of the Webster Cliff Trail-a section of the Appalachian Trail-to an area the Forest Plan and Wilderness Plan designate as trailless to better protect the Wilderness. Both plans must be amended if this location is chosen.

Wilderness Watch and Standing Trees commend the Forest Service for taking steps to protect the Presidential Range-Dry River Wilderness by completing an EA instead of using a CE, by doing a site-specific Forest Plan amendment, by responding to constructive feedback from the public, and by proposing to complete the trailwork the "wilderness way"-without using motorized tools or equipment. We also urge the agency to consider alternatives to its current proposal.