

## *Wildness: What is it? Why should our conservation agencies perpetuate it?* by Roger Kaye

**W**hat is this evocative and elusive landscape quality, wildness? Given its prominence, we ought to know. We need to know if we're going to perpetuate it, especially since it is among the most threatened landscape qualities in the Anthropocene future we face.

In terms of etymology, wildness shares the same root word as wilderness, that is, *will*, referring to an entity being self-willed. But while wilderness is a place, wildness is a condition wherein the processes of an area's genesis are allowed to shape its future, free from human willfulness, utility, or design. Thus wildness is defined as "the state of a landscape characterized by its freedom from the human intent to alter, control, or manipulate its components and ecological and evolutionary processes."

Its being "free from human intent" is important, for two reasons. For one, it reminds us that wildness also has an inter-relational dimension. It's a way of relating to the land, a relationship of respect for and deference to these processes. Second, it differentiates wild from natural, which can be defined as "not shaped by or substantially changed by human activities." So while wildness is freedom from *human intent*, naturalness is freedom from *human effect*.



Arctic National Wildlife. By Ned Vasquez

meaning of natural in the next century of the Anthropocene.

In response to changes in our resources of concern, we'll see more proposals for management interventions, manipulations, and restoration efforts to maintain "natural" conditions, including wildlife assemblages. And according to a recent study, 37 percent of wilderness units have already engaged in such interventions in response to just climate change. But we must remember that every inter-

vention, however important the resources or uses it seeks to perpetuate, diminishes an area's wildness, its freedom to adapt and evolve as it will.

So in Wilderness, should we strive to maintain natural conditions, that is, the products of evolutionary creativity at our point in time, or should we perpetuate that creative process itself, wildness? Within Wilderness, our humble role would be to watch and learn as the ecosystems transition as they will, however they will, and not according to our will.

But first, we need to better understand and articulate the functions and values of wildness and wild areas so that they can be more fairly considered when competing with the more tangible reasons for intervening and managing.

Best recognized by the agencies is the scientific function of wild areas that Aldo Leopold first espoused. They can serve as laboratories for understanding how ecological systems function, transition, and respond to change when left alone. Thus one of the reasons that the preeminent FWS biologist Olaus Murie argued for the Arctic Refuge to be preserved as "a little portion of our planet left alone" was that it would enable us to "see how Nature proceeds with evolutionary processes."

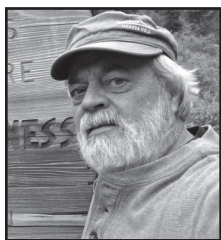
But the greater value, the aesthetic, mystique and allure of

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But if you believe in best science, in the trends and projections for global-scale change, you have to recognize that no place, not even the Arctic Refuge, will meet the common

## Beyond Wilderness



Many of our nation's Wilderness areas anchor much larger swaths of public land often just as ecologically significant, but lacking the stringent safeguards afforded Wilderness designation. These larger landscapes function as ecosystems with the potential to harbor native species at population levels.

Unfortunately, the non-Wilderness lands have long been under attack by known culprits: timbering, mining, habitat manipulation and other actions that fragment and thrash the landscape into submission. Add to this the tsunami currently washing across our public lands—society's insatiable desire to “be outside,” to recreate all over and by every means conceivable, and we must ask—how much more can our wild, public lands endure before losing their ecological integrity? This trend has been apparent for some time, but with the pandemic, today's recreational demands engulfing our public lands are unprecedented and alarming. To make matters worse, there is no indication that this will be waning anytime soon.

The 1964 Wilderness Act is the strongest land protection law we have. It's meant to safeguard our Wilderness areas from most impactful human activities—to keep them “untrammeled by man.” And yet the Wilderness Act can do little to protect Wilderness areas from perturbations occurring outside their boundaries. It cannot keep Wilderness areas from becoming island sanctuaries surrounded by altered landscapes suffering from ecological degradation.

Most Wilderness boundaries are arbitrary compromises drawn with little regard for larger ecosystem values. And a Wilderness boundary is not a wall, nor should it be if the ecosystem is to function unimpaired. But because management decisions imposed on lands outside Wilderness areas are often driven by “multiple use” mandates, many actions may be incompatible with and very detrimental to the values within.

For example, some activities can appear innocuous, such as sound pollution from nearby energy development, or air and water pollution from “up-stream” industrial development. And then we have the not so innocuous, but devastating, impacts of global climate change.

If all this weren't enough, now we face efforts by some mountain bike groups to amend the Wilderness Act to allow mountain and e-bike use to expand into Wilderness areas. This well-organized effort has already gained significant rewards. For example, the Department of Interior recently finalized regulations to permit the use of e-bikes in National Parks, and on Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Bureau of Reclamation lands.

Meanwhile, the Forest Service is undergoing rule-making to provide guidance for management of e-bikes on over 67,000 miles of Forest trails—that's 2.7 trips around planet earth. (Over 60,000 miles of trails and roads are already open to e-bikes.) This has the potential to put thousands of e-bikers right up against Wilderness boundaries. Then what?

It used to be that extractive industries posed the greatest threat to our public lands, but now we can add the general public to this list—yes us: our friends and neighbors.

If a Wilderness is to remain the living heart of a larger ecosystem, it has to remain untrammeled, AND the surrounding landscape must also be free of significant activities and disturbances that might wash over Wilderness boundaries. This is why Wilderness Watch is fighting to halt the development of an open pit sulfide-ore copper mine in northern Minnesota's Rainy River watershed that includes much of the Boundary Waters Wilderness and nearby Voyageurs National Park. This is why Wilderness Watch vehemently opposes a bill in Congress that would “weaken the Wilderness Act and blast open every Wilderness in the nation to mountain bikes and other human-powered machines.”

Wilderness Watch doesn't just “Watch Wilderness,” it fights for Wilderness—and the lands beyond. ♪

—Franz Camenzind

Franz is a wildlife biologist turned filmmaker and environmental activist who has served on the WW board since 2015.



**WILDERNESS WATCH**

*Keeping Wilderness Wild*

The *Wilderness Watcher* is the quarterly newsletter of Wilderness Watch, America's leading conservation organization dedicated solely to protecting the lands and waters in the National Wilderness Preservation System.

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## Wildness: What is it? (cont. from pg. 1)

those special places set apart for wildness lie in the meaning they come to have, what they represent. As places wherein we recognize a non-anthropocentric reason for being, their intrinsic value, they come to represent that part of us that still holds reverence for something outside human utility. The perpetuation of wildness releases Nature from being ours to being its own. Thus it's the most genuine expression of environmental humility. It serves as an encouraging demonstration and reminder of our capacity for restraint. Ultimately, wild areas serve as a gesture of respect for and deference to the autonomous creativity of unwilling processes that shaped—and connect—our species, all species, all the Earth.

As places set apart from human willfulness and hubris, wild areas can enhance understanding of how these traits have distanced humankind from its sense of dependence and interdependence with the larger community of life. As we move farther into the terra-incognita of the Anthropocene, changing the world and ourselves, wild areas can serve as an anchor-point.

Those who visit can experience the sheer otherness of a place that is there for itself. So too, they can catch an atavistic, experiential glimpse of ancestral ways of knowing and relating to the world. And millions who will never visit find satisfaction and inspiration in just knowing that really wild places still exist. Remember, what is also kept alive in wildness is something of ourselves.

Yes, the agencies give lip service to wildness, but as yet do little to operationalize and perpetuate it. Perhaps that's because wildness threatens their *managerial* precepts. Perhaps too, it's because they lack the objectivity and humility to accept that there is a resource on the landscape that they can't count, weigh, or measure. Yes, the unmanaged and unquantifiable nature of wildness is a problem for many, but is central to its essence, its intrigue, its otherness. (See sidebar.)

And so too is the paradox that the intent to leave some areas self-willed must come from human will, that to maintain them free of human purpose must be a human purpose. 🍄



*Roger Kaye has worked for the USFWS in Alaska for 41 years, as a planner, pilot, Native liaison and in recent years, as the agency's Alaska wilderness coordinator.*

## What future for Arctic Refuge in the Anthropocene

*From the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge's website on wildness*

Because of its northern latitude, the Arctic Refuge is changing more rapidly and dramatically than most areas of the nation. Most noticeable now are the Refuge's melting glaciers, eroding coastline, and impacts to polar bears from diminishing sea ice. But more alarming is what the science predicts: the permafrost will continue thawing, potentially releasing methane and microbes; there will be shifts in the range and composition of plant and animal communities, such as increased shrub cover and advancing tree lines, and a decline in wetlands and soil moisture; changes in water abundance, temperature, chemistry and alkalinity; larger, more frequent and intense wildfires; more likelihood of increased invasives and pathogens; earlier breakup and later freeze up. The list continues to grow.

Refuge staff, and others, find themselves confronting a dilemma: This Last Great Wilderness won't be natural in the foreseeable future, at least not by the common meaning of natural. That common meaning being "not shaped by or substantially altered by human activities".

We now recognize that the Refuge can only remain natural if we reinterpret natural to mean free from developments, roads, facilities, and other such artifacts, regardless of the degree to which the area's composition and ecology have changed because of human-caused climate and other global-scale effects.

But the Refuge can always be wild if we refrain from intervening. It will remain wild as long as it remains a place of free-functioning ecological and evolutionary processes, where all lifeforms adapt and evolve in response to changing conditions as they will, not according to our will. We should remember that the root word of wilderness is will, referring to an area being self-willed, and not subject to our will.

So what can we do? Well, we could try to resist some changes through what are called ecological interventions, manipulations, or restoration efforts. For example, we could try to put out wildfires, find a way to manipulate the hydrological system, or use assisted migration or genetic engineering to help plants and animals adapt. But given the limits of our ecological understanding, interventions have the potential for risky unintended consequences. For example, putting out wildfires would have the effect of causing larger and more intense fires in the future. As well, in the long term, interventions could impede the ecological system's ability to adapt to new conditions on its own.

Pondering this dilemma, the staff began by considering the historic purposes of Arctic Refuge. The founders believed that it should always remain wild, and its special function should be seen in the larger context of human-earth relations. That's why Olaus Murie said the campaign to establish the Refuge was also about "what the human species is to do with this Earth." We also considered Indigenous perspectives on the interrelatedness of humans and the larger community of life, and the need for humility, respect and restraint in relating to nature.

Therefore, as the staff contemplates the Anthropocene changes and challenges that lie ahead, we believe it may be short-sighted, even futile, to try to maintain the conditions of our current point in time. Rather, perhaps we should respect and perpetuate the creative evolutionary process itself—wildness. Thus we would avoid interventions and manipulations aimed at resisting the inevitable effects of global-scale change. We would stand back, watch and learn, but not intervene, as the ecological systems within Arctic Refuge adapt and evolve. We understand that over time some species will decline and disappear from the area, and be replaced by others. That's how the creative process of evolution works, by opening niches for new plants and animals better adapted to the changing conditions.

In response to the growing Anthropocene dilemma, the Arctic Refuge staff decided to no longer speak of management of the Refuge's landscapes and species. Instead, we will speak of Refuge stewardship. The connotations and nuances of these two words are different. Although they both denote an underlying element of oversight, management strongly suggests manipulation, control, domination, and making or keeping things the way we want them to be. Stewardship better conveys the idea of caring for a place, and embraces a sense of humility, restraint, and a deference to the processes of the area's origin and unfolding.

# On the Watch

## *Victory for the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness*



Following pressure from Wilderness Watch members and supporters who sent more than 15,000 letters, the Forest Service (FS) decided to leave two livestock grazing allotments vacant in the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness in Montana. The allotments are steep and unsuitable for cattle grazing, and have not been grazed for 20 years. WW had earlier urged the FS to better protect the Absaroka-Beartooth by permanently closing the allotments, but the agency declined.

Bordering Yellowstone National Park, the 937,000-acre Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness is home to grizzly bears, moose, elk, bighorn sheep, pikas, wolves, and other native wildlife. Cattle grazing would cause substantial negative impacts to the Wilderness, its watersheds, and wildlife. 🐾

## *BLM poison and burn plan needs to be scrapped*



Current Bureau of Land Management (BLM) wilderness and ecosystem management plans prohibit the level of manipulation BLM is proposing for thousands of acres in the rugged and remote Aravaipa Canyon, Dos Cabezas Mountains, Fishhooks, North Santa Teresa, Peloncillo Mountains, and Redfield Canyon Wildernesses in Arizona. So, the agency is proposing to amend its management plans so that it can implement this massive landscaping project called the *Safford Field Office Vegetation Management Plan EA*. BLM plans to use helicopters to ignite fire and chainsaws and herbicides to remove “unwanted” vegetation, and proposes radical increasing in the amount of burning allowed in Wilderness.

BLM needs to abandon its proposed *Wilderness and Ecosystem Plan Amendments* and instead allow natural processes to determine on-the-ground conditions. The amendments, which should have been included in the original EA, violate the Wilderness Act and fail to offer alternatives that don't degrade Wilderness. 🐾

## *Don't mar the Mt. Rainier Wilderness*



The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) is seeking approval from the National Park Service (NPS) to develop eight new permanent monitoring stations within the Mt. Rainier Wilderness for seismic and GPS monitoring and for continuous volcanic gas monitoring. Helicopters would be used to service the stations for decades, and probably in perpetuity.

The *Lahar Detection System Environmental Assessment (EA)* acknowledges that the lahar monitoring stations and aircraft landings are inconsistent with preserving wilderness character. The EA should have fully considered alternatives—such as the use of packable, temporary equipment, as well as using sites outside of the Wilderness for permanent stations. The NPS needs to reject this proposal with its years of

unwarranted helicopter incursions and unnecessary permanent structures that would mar this spectacular Wilderness. 🐾

## On the Watch (continued)

### *70 groups petition to re-list wolves as "endangered" throughout the West*



USFWS

been presented to support reinstating federal protections. This would be the first step on the road to restoring federal protections for gray wolves. 🐾

Citing "inadequate regulatory mechanisms" in Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming, and a lack of minimum viable populations of wolves in all other western states, Wilderness Watch joined 70 groups in filing a formal petition on July 29 with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to re-list the gray wolf as an endangered species throughout the American West under the Endangered Species Act. The re-listing petition comes in the wake of draconian new laws passed in Idaho and Montana to kill wolves and radically reduce wolf populations below biologically appropriate levels.

The formal ESA petition requires the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to render a formal determination, called a "90-day finding," determining whether substantial scientific and commercial information has

### *Protect Joshua Tree Wilderness in climbing plan*



Pedro Szekely via Flickr

anchors in the designated Wilderness portions of Joshua Tree as well as in all Wildernesses nationwide. 🐾

Wilderness Watch is urging the National Park Service (NPS) to protect Wilderness at Joshua Tree National Park in California as it considers adopting a new Climbing Management Plan to regulate climbing and to protect natural resources. The area's unique geological formations make it an attraction for climbers.

Rock climbing is an allowable recreational activity in Wilderness, but many climbers rely on installing bolts or other permanent fixed climbing anchors to assist in climbing challenging rock faces. These permanent fixed climbing anchors deface the rock walls, degrade the area's wildness, and are prohibited by the Wilderness Act.

The NPS should prohibit all bolts and permanent fixed climbing

### *Grizzlies and cattle don't mix*



Howie Wolke

Wilderness Watch is opposing a Forest Service (FS) proposal to issue permits for cattle grazing in three vacant allotments totaling more than 13,000 acres in the Gros Ventre Wilderness in Wyoming. Located south-east of Grand Teton National Park, the Gros Ventre is critical habitat for wolves, lynx, wolverines, and grizzly bears. The Fish and Wildlife Service has already authorized the killing of up to 72 grizzlies in adjacent grazing allotments on national forest lands, and the last thing grizzlies need is more potential conflicts with cattle. In addition to endangering grizzlies, cattle grazing could do extensive damage to riparian areas, harm aquatic life, and spread invasive weeds. The FS should protect the Gros Ventre by permanently closing all vacant grazing allotments. 🐾

On the Watch continued on page 8

# Wilderness in the Courts

## Notice of Intent to Sue over Wolf Killing Laws, ID/MT

Idaho and Montana have officially stripped their thin veneers of decency and plunged, unabashedly, into senseless bloodlust. Both states passed new laws this year encouraging an all-out slaughter of wolves, including allowing the killing of 90 percent of the current wolf population in Idaho and 80 percent of the population in Montana. Many of these wolves will be targeted in Wilderness. The laws permit a range of killing methods once deemed illegal, not to mention abhorrent. For example, the Idaho bill removes any limit on the number of wolves a hunter may kill and removes restrictions on the methods of killing, including allowing night vision equipment, shooting from vehicles and aircraft, spotlighting, killing pups in dens, and baiting. Montana implemented similar measures. Both laws also greatly expand trapping and snaring seasons and methods, a move that threatens a range of “non-target” species, including threatened grizzly bears and Canada lynx. So, we recently joined forces with Earthjustice and several other groups in filing notices of intent to sue under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) to protect ESA-listed predators in Idaho and Montana from the states’ extreme wolf killing laws. If the states don’t take immediate action to prevent harm to ESA-listed species, we’ll head to federal court. In addition to this effort, we’ve also joined other coalitions in petitioning for the relisting of gray wolves as a protected species under the ESA. 🐾

## Scapegoat Wilderness Poisoning Project, MT

On July 22, 2021, we filed a federal lawsuit and a motion for a temporary restraining order to protect the Scapegoat Wilderness from a massive aquatic poisoning and fish stocking project. The Forest Service issued its decision authorizing the project on July 16, 2021 and indicated project activities would begin as soon as the first week of August. In its decision, the Forest Service authorized Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) to make approximately 67 helicopter landings in the Wilderness, apply rotenone to kill previously stocked fish in 67 miles of streams and 3 lakes, restock naturally fishless waters with hatchery-reared westslope cutthroat trout, and use motorized and gas-powered boats and equipment to facilitate the efforts. Incredibly, the Forest Service categorically excluded the project from environmental analysis under the National Environmental Policy Act. The court set our case for an emergency hearing, and in response, the Forest Service pulled the plug on the project for this year. It, however, did not pull the plug entirely—FWP still plans to implement the project next year—so we’ll continue with our lawsuit. We’ll keep you posted as this case progresses. 🐾

## *It takes a team to defend Wilderness*

By Brett Haverstick



When Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks proposed to poison 67 miles of streams and three lakes in the Scapegoat Wilderness, our members and supporters (YOU) sent hard-hitting comments to the agency telling them that their project was incompatible with Wilderness. When the Forest Service (FS) sought public comment on the plan, we sent another action alert asking you to join us in telling the agency to reject the state’s ill-conceived proposal. Collectively, our alerts generated over 50,000 comments! The line in the sand had been drawn.

In mid-July, the FS approved the massive poisoning project with work to begin in August. Our staff sprang into action and filed for a Temporary Restraining Order in court. Before the ink could dry, the FS pulled the project. We had them pegged dead-center, and the

agency knew they had to go back to the drawing board. But the FS will be back, and all of us—our staff, our members and our supporters—will be prepared to defend the Scapegoat Wilderness again.

I hope this example of how WE work together to protect Wilderness and the Wilderness system resonates with you. We’re making a difference, and we all play an important role. We have different skill sets and backgrounds, but we share the most important thing in common—a love and dedication to preserving Wilderness, now and into the future.

I’d like to also send a sincere thank you to a very generous anonymous donor who issued a \$15,000 first-time donor match at the beginning of this year. We met the goal and are very grateful.

Another passionate member is Bob Weggell. Bob is offering a \$10,000 first-time donor match for the second half of this year. Please spread the word to your family and friends.

Go team! 🐾

# Wilderness in Congress

## Biden Administration Testifies Against Bikes-in-Wilderness Bill

On June 16, two officials with the Biden administration testified at a Senate subcommittee hearing against Sen. Mike Lee's (R-UT) Mountain Bikes in Wilderness bill, S. 1686, also known as the Human-Powered Travel in Wilderness Areas Act. This was a most-welcome change from the Trump administration's support for the bill.

Nada Culver, Deputy Director of Policy and Programs for the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), testified on behalf of the Department of Interior. "The Department strongly opposes S. 1686," she testified. "Allowing mechanical travel in designated wilderness areas would undermine the principles of the Wilderness Act, which was intended to preserve certain lands in their natural condition, protect watersheds and wildlife, and provide opportunities for outdoor recreation and scientific research. Only a small portion of the public land in the United States is designated as wilderness, with the purpose of preserving land from uses that could damage the natural condition, yet there are many opportunities across Department of the Interior managed lands to use mechanically assisted travel."

Chris French, Deputy Chief of the Forest Service for the National Forest System, also testified against the bill on behalf of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, of which the Forest Service is a part. Mr. French unequivocally stated that "we strongly oppose S. 1686, 'Human-Powered Travel in Wilderness Areas Act.'" The Deputy Chief further added, "Specifically, S. 1686 would increase management challenges associated with preserving Wilderness character by altering the consistent interpretation and implementation of the Wilderness Act's prohibition on mechanical transport across the National Wilderness Preservation System."

The Mountain Bikes in Wilderness bill is being pushed by the Sustainable Trails Coalition (STC), a mountain biking splinter group that wants to open up the entire National Wilderness Preservation System to mountain bike use, despite the Wilderness Act's prohibition on mechanized travel. STC initially tried to pass the bill through the House of Representatives when the Republicans controlled the House, where it passed the Natural Resources Committee in

December 2017 but never came to the floor. Now that the Democrats control the House, STC wants to try to force its bill through the evenly-divided Senate. The recent Administration testimony will make that much more difficult.

Wilderness Watch has led the charge against this legislation since it was first introduced in Congress in 2016. We built a coalition of over 150 conservation groups from across the country to oppose the legislation, submitting testimony at hearings, developing organizational sign-on letters of opposition, and raising public awareness of the threat to our Wilderness System. Though the strong opposition of the Biden Administration is very helpful, Wilderness Watch will remain vigilant in opposing this damaging legislation. 🐾

### YES! I want to help keep Wilderness wild!

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## On the Watch (continued)

*Izembek temporarily spared but battle rages on*



Kristine Sowl/USFWS

In late June, Wilderness Watch members and supporters urged the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) to reject the State of Alaska's latest efforts to build a road through the spectacular Izembek National Wildlife Refuge and Wilderness. For decades, the state and others have attempted to build a road through the Wilderness to connect the Peter Pan Seafoods cannery in King Cove to the airport in Cold Bay.

This remote stretch of land at the tip of the Alaska Peninsula attracts hundreds of thousands of migratory birds each fall, and is home to brown bears, thousands of caribou, and hundreds of sea otters and Stellar sea lions. A new road bisecting Izembek would be catastrophic.

The FWS was on the verge of issuing the state special use permits to use helicopters to complete survey work for the road. Thanks to

you, FWS has decided to prohibit helicopter access and use, essentially stopping the surveys.

This is good news, but it isn't the end of the story. The Biden administration continues to defend the Trump administration's agreement for a land exchange of federal public lands in Izembek, which the state wants in order to punch the road through, despite two court opinions ruling against land exchanges and in favor of protecting Izembek. On August 4, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals heard oral arguments in the appeal of our latest legal victory that rejected then-Interior Secretary David Bernhardt's agreement for the land exchange.

We'll keep you posted on the legal battle. 🐾