Stewart Brandborg is gone, leaving in his wake a legacy of wild nature, including our National Wilderness Preservation System. The last surviving purveyor of the Wilderness Act also left behind his infectious enthusiasm for conservation activism, a gift to the natural world that will keep giving for generations to come.

“Brandy” had Wilderness in his blood. His Dad, Guy Brandborg, was a Bitterroot National Forest Supervisor who tried to reform Forest Service timber policies. Brandy graduated the University of Montana in 1947 and then earned his Master’s degree in Wildlife Biology at the University of Idaho in 1951. In the early 1950s he conducted landmark studies on mountain goats in Idaho and Montana. In 1954 he migrated to Washington, D.C. to work for the National Wildlife Federation, which eventually led him to The Wilderness Society.

Brandy’s conservation accomplishments include a key role in the passage of the 1964 Wilderness Act. When the bill’s primary author, Howard Zahniser, tragically died four months prior to passage, Brandy took over as TWS Executive director and led the final charge through Congress. The bill was signed into law by Lyndon Johnson on September 3, 1964. The Wilderness Act created the uniquely American National Wilderness Preservation System, a system of Wilderness Areas, to be uniformly managed as “untrammeled” wild nature, and to “preserve wilderness character”.

Stewart Brandborg first taught me about conservation long before I met him. In 1975 I was a greenhorn wilderness activist in Wyoming, working as a volunteer for a field representative of The Wilderness Society. Brandy was the TWS Executive Director. He ran an organization that emphasized grassroots organizing. The TWS Denver field office, headed by the late Clif Merritt, oversaw a staff of professional field organizers. I learned from these folks that to protect Wilderness, you do your field work, draw up a Wilderness proposal to maximize acreage, and then educate/organize to create enough political pressure to make it happen.

In This Issue...
- Brandy 1
- Executive Director’s Message 2
- On the Watch 4
- The Happiness Effect 7
- ... and More

Brandy continued on page 3
Message from the Executive Director

The Great Warrior…

Wilderness Watch has dedicated this issue of the Watcher to a wonderful friend, mentor, long-time board member and advisor, and unparalleled wilderness champion—Stewart Brandborg, who died on April 14 gazing out across his beloved Bitterroot Valley to the towering mountains of the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness beyond.

Brandy was the last surviving member of that small cadre of wilderness leaders who worked against tremendous odds throughout the 1950s and early 1960s to pass the Wilderness bill and create the National Wilderness Preservation System. As Wilderness Act author Howard Zahniser’s assistant, Brandy was in the thick of the fight day in and day out for much of the decade-long battle to pass the bill. Just knowing Brandy made the epic story to create our nation’s wilderness system and those who made it happen real and tangible, yet a constant reminder that our conservation successes are human efforts not to be taken for granted.

I first encountered Brandy at a Wild Rockies Rendezvous in the early 1990s, where he was leading a workshop on grassroots organizing. This was shortly after he left Washington D.C. to return home to Montana’s Bitterroot. I was pretty skeptical, wondering what a “DC insider” could possibly know about grassroots organizing? Was I in for a surprise! The guy had a passion and skill for organizing people that I hadn’t seen before or since.

Brandy believed in the power of regular citizens to make great things happen, and he was living proof of it. He liked to say that change happens when the people in power “start to feel the hot of oil of public opinion pouring down their back,” and he proved it time and again whether in halls of Congress or at county commission meetings at his home in the Bitterroot Valley.

Brandy never seemed much for discussing the minutia of policy and he lamented how the conservation movement had drifted toward being run by consultants and technocrats. He didn’t care to dwell on “those damnable issues.” He was much more interested in organizing people who cared, and getting those who didn’t to start. Whenever Brandy asked what you’d been doing, the answer better include a healthy dose of organizing—“building the working circles” as he would implore.

When one of our board members asked Brandy what books he should read to learn more about Wilderness, Brandy’s retort was, “Hell, you already know enough, just get out there and get to work!”

That to me is one of Brandy’s greatest legacies: the message that you don’t have to know all the facts, all you have to do is care, and to act on it. The way to save our wild places and wild critters is to express your support and get others to do the same.

We’ll miss Brandy. We’ll miss the camaraderie, his counsel, his unwavering passion for wild country, and the direct connection he gave us to our movement’s founders. But we’ll also remember Brandy’s eternal optimism, a living example of the great things an individual can achieve.

—George Nickas
It worked. In Brandy’s 12 years as TWS Executive Director, 70 Wilderness Areas in 31 states were designated, most with few or no weakening special provisions.

Despite his accomplishments, in 1976, the TWS Governing Council fired Brandy for reasons that vary, depending upon who you ask, though differences with the Council over TWS policy and training programs seem to have played a role.

After TWS, Brandy worked for the National Park Service in Washington, D.C., but was fired by Reagan’s Interior Secretary James Watt for being pro-environment. While there, though, he helped to usher the 1980 Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act through Congress. This was complimentary to his earlier efforts as TWS Executive Director when he led the effort to thwart the Alaska (oil) Pipeline. Obviously, the pipeline was built. But Brandy’s efforts slowed down the project and forced improvements that ultimately made it safer for land and critters than it otherwise would have been.

Brandy’s late beloved wife and partner Anna Vee acted as his editor for both his written and verbal pontifications. In fact, Anna Vee was a true partner in all of Brandy’s conservation efforts, and an effective activist in her own right. Brandy and Anna Vee had five children, all of whom are now grown.

The Brandborg family moved back to the Bitterroot Valley in 1986, and soon thereafter Brandy co-founded Friends of the Bitterroot (FOB), a grassroots group dedicated primarily to keeping roadless areas roadless. FOB is still doing exactly that. Later, Brandy spent years as a board director for Wilderness Watch, and also as a tireless promoter of grassroots efforts toward sane land use planning in the Bitterroot Valley.

You’re probably getting the impression that Brandy believed in grassroots organizing. I remember in the year 2000 Marilyn and I watched a presidential debate between Bush and Gore at the Brandy/Anna Vee home. After the debacle, I dejectedly suggested that Gore had just lost the election and that the environmental ramifications would be dire. Brandy’s response: “Well, we’ll just have to out-organize the bastards!” His mantra: Organize! Organize! Organize! The man knew that political wheeling and dealing works only when backed up by grassroots activism. He also knew and preached that you never go to the negotiating table with an already compromised proposal.

Brandy’s enthusiasm for grassroots activism was off the scale. He would speak of conservation activism as an opportunity for “fun and fulfillment”, something that I have always had ambivalent feelings about. But Brandy knew that you can’t win folks over with negativity. And his enthusiasm was contagious.

To be fair and balanced, Brandy could sometimes exasperate with his insistence on forming working circles and organizing retreats for conservation volunteers who had other jobs and limited time. Brandy would also delegate tasks, sometimes to folks who had no interest in said task. Like when he tried to enlist me into Friends of the Bitterroot’s finance committee. Believe me, I am the last person you want on a finance committee! Of course, even Brandy’s shortcomings were in the spirit of getting citizens mobilized for Wilderness or good land use planning, or to stop some egregious threat to the natural environment.

While dismayed by the corrosive influence of money on our government and the influence of big oil, mining, and timber, Brandy was most troubled by the changes he witnessed in the conservation movement. By the early ‘80s, then Wilderness Society Executive Director William Turnage had dismantled Brandy’s field rep program. Grassroots organizing was out. The “Beltway Greens” morphed into a home for urban political careerists and MBAs. Dedication and determination were replaced by expediency (bad Wilderness bills were “better” than no bills). The centralized Wilderness movement was being led by folks with little Wilderness experience, either on the ground or as organizers.
Wilderness Watch recently weighed in against human meddling inside the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW)—one of the most popular and well-visited areas in the entire National Wilderness Preservation System. In the Hi Lo Project, located along the Echo Trail road north of the town of Ely, Minnesota, the Forest Service proposes to intentionally ignite 1,314 acres of forest inside the BWCAW. The agency also proposes to conduct road construction and logging in most of the five roadless areas along the wilderness boundary in the project area.

In our comments, we pointed out that the proposed prescribed burning would not be done for any wilderness purposes, nor are they the minimum necessary for the administration of the area as Wilderness, but rather to “harden” the wilderness boundaries to try to prevent future fires inside the BWCAW from burning outside of the Wilderness. While we support allowing lightning-caused fires to play their ecological and evolutionary roles inside the BWCAW, the proposed prescribed fires do not have the same ecological effects and are striking examples of the human meddling and manipulation that the 1964 Wilderness Act was passed to prevent.

In May, Wilderness Watch commented on the proposed Central Cascades Wilderness Strategies Project for the Three Sisters, Mount Jefferson, Mount Washington, Waldo Lake, and Diamond Peak Wildernesses in Oregon. The Forest Service proposes to institute a new visitor permit system to address overcrowding and resource damage in these popular Wildernesses.

In our comments, we opposed any exemptions for particular user groups (like hunters or Pacific Crest Trail through-hikers) and argued that the permit system must apply to everyone who enters these areas, since all user groups contribute to crowding and impacts on wilderness character. We also opposed instituting any new “user fees” for these areas, and advocated that any fees for the reservation service be kept to a minimum and only be high enough to cover just the cost of the reservation service. We also argued that the permit system be on a “first come-first served” basis, with no portion of permits reserved for commercial outfitters, and that visitors not be restricted on their travel once inside the Wildernesses.
Wilderness Watch and other groups have sent the Chief of the Forest Service a letter urging him to permanently close four backcountry airstrips located in the Big Creek drainage within the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness in Idaho. The Simonds, Vines Ranch, Dewey Moore, and Mile Hi airstrips were not in regular use at the time of wilderness designation through the Central Idaho Wilderness Act in 1980, and they should have been closed permanently decades ago. Instead, the agency has kept them open under “emergency use only,” bowing to pressure from aviators and the Idaho Congressional delegation who are now pushing the Forest Service to open the strips to unlimited use by recreational pilots.

The area’s wilderness quality continues to suffer from the ongoing and increasing noise and intrusion, with the airstrips being used for multi-airplane rendezvous, practice “touch and go” landings, and airstrip “bagging.” In 1982, the Forest Service put forth a plan to let the four airstrips revert back to their natural state. It’s long past time for this to happen.

Legal Fellow Bolsters Wilderness Watch Programs

Alex Sosa

Alex Sosa recently finished his final year at the University of Idaho College of Law. He moved out West for the law program but ended up finding so much more in friendships, rivers, trails, and wildernesses. After paddling and hiking through the River of No Return and the Gospel Hump Wildernesses in Idaho, he wanted to help protect the areas that he holds dear so that others may enjoy the unimpaired beauty of these wild places. To accomplish this, Alex joined Wilderness Watch as a legal intern, focusing his efforts on protecting the Big Creek Drainage in the River of No Return Wilderness from increasing aerial intrusions. When not spending time indoors advocating, you will find him kayaking, backcountry skiing, or riding his mountain bike (but not in Wilderness!).

On the Watch continued on page 6
Little has changed, and as he aged, Brandy was increasingly critical of TWS (even when they bestowed their Bob Marshall award on him) and many other overly compromising groups such as the Montana Wilderness Association and the Greater Yellowstone Coalition.

Brandy’s recent take: “We must resist the fuzzy fuzzy Neverland of collaboration.” Brandy also opposed Montana Senator Jon Tester’s so-called “Forest Jobs and Restoration Act” which would open roadless areas to roadbuilding and mandated timber cutting levels. Even though Brandy was a Democrat, he never let party loyalty get in the way of opposing bad Democratic party proposals. That’s an important lesson that many conservationists need to learn.

We all miss the old goat. The least we wilderness lovers can do is to carry on his legacy. I mean a real wilderness legacy, the one that so proudly draws from John Muir, Aldo Leopold, Bob Marshall, Mardy and Olaus Murie, Marjory Stoneman Douglas, Howard Zahniser, Brandy and others who’ve given their all for the wilds. Not today’s latter day apologists for environmental apocalypse, who think of Wilderness as little more than another social issue that is amenable to unending compromise.

That may be Brandy’s greatest gift: his contribution to the ultimate truth that wilderness is finite, nearly always shrinking, usually becoming less wild, and because there’s so little left, always less amenable to further compromise than almost anything else.

Former Wilderness Watch President Howie Wolke has been a wilderness guide for over 40 years and lives near Yellowstone in southern Montana. He and his wife and editor, Marilyn Olsen, own Big Wild Adventures.

On the Watch (continued)

The Forest Service (FS) recently announced a draft decision to remove an unsafe log bridge over the East Branch of the Pemigewasset River in the Pemigewasset Wilderness in New Hampshire. In keeping with the spirit of the Wilderness Act, the FS stated in the decision that visitors must “meet nature on its terms.” The 46,000-acre Pemigewasset, known for its beautiful peaks, forests, and vistas, is the largest Wilderness in the state.

The Forest Service has faced pressure to replace this bridge rather than remove it, but comments from wilderness supporters like you led the FS to propose the right decision for Wilderness.

The agency proposes to dismantle the Thoreau Falls Trail Bridge using primitive hand tools, and to leave the concrete abutments to decompose over time. However, the FS wants to retain the option for up to two helicopter trips to remove large material. Wilderness Watch has urged the agency to instead use stock animals, dog sleds, or other nonmotorized means. This would follow in the tradition of rewilding the area while protecting the area’s wilderness character—several years ago, the Forest Service removed another unsafe suspension bridge in this same Wilderness without motorized equipment.

On the Watch continued on page 8
Ah, summer. We’ve waited for you. We’ve been good. Now’s the time to cash in all the winter planning and anticipation. Go ahead. Lace up the boots and get a few days down the trail. Recent research suggests what many of us have already known, trips deep in wilderness re-set your mind.

University of Utah cognitive psychologist David Strayer actually tested backpackers before and after trips and found a huge – 50 percent – improvement in cognitive testing. His and other research suggests that the first two days in wilderness wipes your prefrontal cortex of the beehive of everyday life. With a clean windshield, you replace tension with sensory perception, empathy, and productive day-dreaming.

Bring it on.

“If you can have the experience of being in the moment for two or three days, it seems to produce a difference in qualitative thinking,” Strayer told National Geographic. By the third day, you’re involved with the clouds, the undulations of the stream, and the sounds of the birds. And other researchers have found that this wild restoration lingers when you return to civilization.

All this is good news indeed at a time when we’re seeing the agencies shrink support for Wilderness. Help us keep the pressure on to preserve and enhance our great wilderness heritage.

Here is an extra donation to help protect Wilderness!

☐ $250 ☐ $100 ☐ $50 ☐ $30 ☐ $ _______

I would like to become a member!

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On the Watch (continued)

Commercial Rocket Launches Threaten Cumberland Island Wilderness

Wilderness Watch is concerned over a proposal to launch commercial rockets over the Cumberland Island Wilderness off the coast of southern Georgia. Camden County’s commercial space launch site would be less than five miles from Cumberland Island National Seashore, and poses a grave threat to the seashore and Cumberland Island Wilderness, which Wilderness Watch has long fought to protect.

In March, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) released a draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) whose preferred alternative allows for 36 tests and 12 commercial rocket launches every year over the island’s north end—the location of Cumberland Island Wilderness.

Camden County’s spaceport would have huge negative impacts on the Wilderness as well as the seashore, wildlife, and the area’s many visitors. The launches would shatter the area’s natural sounds, stress native wildlife including threatened and endangered species, create major safety concerns from rocket fuel and ignited debris falling from exploding rockets, and could force the Park Service to close and evacuate the Wilderness and National Seashore multiple times per year. (The preferred alternative allows closures of up to 12 hours per each of the 12 launch days per year, plus up to three hours for each of the 36 tests allowed per year.)

Clearly, the intrusion, noise, trash, and other impacts pose a major threat to the wild character of the Cumberland Island Wilderness. The FAA needs to reject Camden County’s ill-advised rocket launch site near Cumberland.