



WILDERNESS WATCHER

The Quarterly Newsletter of Wilderness Watch

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Bringing Back the Great Bear

By Jeff Smith

This is the story about a plan to return grizzly bears to some of the wildest, best habitat in the lower 48, the North Cascades in Washington State. At 6.1 million acres, the proposed recovery area is the size of Vermont, larger even than Yellowstone National Park. More than 83 percent is federal land. Three-quarters is roadless, with 2.6 million acres of prime wilderness in nine Wilderness areas.

Yet the North Cascades are nearly empty of grizzlies.

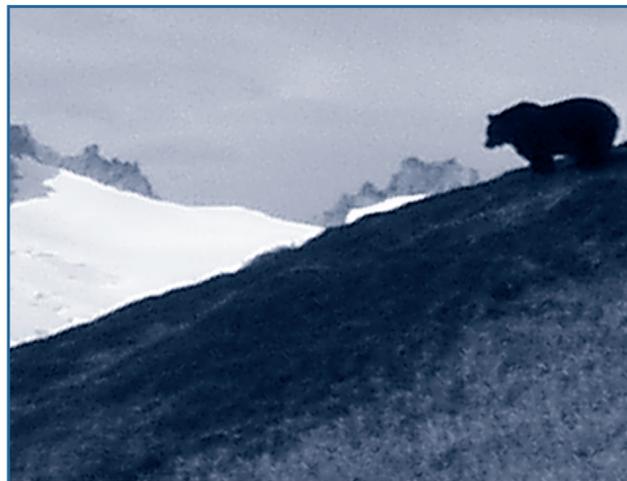
Right now, after a decades-long analysis driven by the bear's threatened status under the Endangered Species Act, federal agencies have published an environmental impact statement (EIS) to re-establish a population in the North Cascades. Biologists estimate the "most plausible carrying capacity" in this prime habitat of 9,800 square miles to be around 280 bears.

It's an ambitious project for our times. But, like many contemporary wilderness projects, agency officials are proposing a very intrusive, heavy-handed operation relying on unlimited helicopter use, obsessive collaring and satellite telemetry, and repeated, unneeded human interventions. Wilderness

character and conditions of multiple designated wildernesses... through extensive trammeling, motorized use, and electronic installations...[The plan is] more indicative of a safari park type atmosphere than a wild ecosystem."

Don't get us wrong. We love the historic idea of a healthy grizzly population in the North Cascades, but we think this plan has gone awry. Agencies are right to go boldly forward but, at the same time, they're wrong to disrespect the Wilderness Act's constraints on trammeling, motorized equipment, and technology.

We believe the EIS needs a natural recovery option. The agencies must start by better protecting habitat, protecting



This grizzly bear was photographed in the North Cascades in 2010, allegedly the first to be photographed in 50 years. Photo: Joe Seville

corridors to neighboring populations in British Columbia, where the B.C. government has banned hunting in order to bolster grizzly numbers, and aggressively managing human-caused sources of bear mortality, including black bear baiting which draws grizzlies, conflicts with ranchers, and heavy recreation use which can lead to habituated (i.e. dead) bears. The Fish and Wildlife Service says humans are the "primary agent of death" for grizzlies. Connected, secure habitat on both sides of the border will be necessary to ensure grizzly

survival in the North Cascades over the long term, whether a natural recovery or a translocation alternative is adopted.

If the agencies decide on translocation instead of natural recovery, they need to use wilderness-compatible methods. We are concerned about the nearly unrestricted helicopter intrusions in Wilderness, the misuse of radio collars, about ongoing, frequent harassment and trauma to individual bears.

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Watch is concerned. Our board president, Gary Macfarlane, put it this way in WW's public comments:

This proposal will allow "...multiple activities prohibited under the Wilderness Act...will impact the wilderness

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Message from the Executive Director



President Trump's executive order demanding a review of all national monuments larger than 100,000 acres and established since 1996 portends potentially serious consequences for the National Wilderness Preservation System.

For starters, within those 27 monuments are 29 Wildernesses in six western states. While the president can't undo the Wilderness designations—that would require an act of Congress—the protections that national monument status affords to the lands surrounding these Wildernesses undoubtedly help preserve the conditions within them. Healthy wildlife habitat and populations, biodiversity, water quality, scenic vistas, silence, solitude, remoteness, and dark skies are all values within these Wildernesses that benefit from the surrounding national monuments.

Consider the Dark Canyon Wilderness, as just one example. This relatively small 45,000-acre Wilderness on the Manti-LaSal National Forest in southeastern Utah lies near the geographic center of the new 1.35 million-acre Bears Ears National Monument. Prior to establishment of the national monument, much of the land around Dark Canyon was open to logging, mining, oil and gas development, and off-road motorized and mechanized vehicle use. But because of the monument proclamation the lands surrounding Dark Canyon Wilderness are largely protected from industrial uses, and vehicles are limited to roads and trails designated for their use. If Bears Ears National Monument is rescinded, the Dark Canyon Wilderness could eventually be ringed with development and ORV use.

But there is an even greater threat to Wilderness from President Trump's monument repeal effort: it is the first shot across the bow of the Administration and Congress to undo many of our nation's greatest conservation laws. There are already more than a dozen bills introduced in Congress to weaken the Endangered Species Act. And as I write this the House of Representatives has an oversight hearing scheduled to discuss the "overreach" of the Wilderness Act and Federal Land Policy Management Act, which they claim have "gone astray." Any day we expect to see the latest incarnation of the "Sportsmen's Heritage Act," an effort that would effectively repeal the Wilderness Act. Previous versions have passed the House, but stalled in the Senate, partly due to the Administration's opposition. That opposition has likely vanished.

While the national media and public attention is focused on issues like the health care debate, tax reform, and Russian meddling in our elections, it's easy to fall into the trap of thinking the Trump Administration is failing and its agenda is stalled. To those involved in protecting our endangered wildlands, threatened wildlife, and our nation's natural legacy, the Trump agenda is anything but stalled. It's full speed ahead.

This is why every wildlands and wildlife conservationist should be alarmed and ready to do battle over the Administration's efforts to repeal any of our nation's national monuments. Should Trump, Secretary Zinke, and their allies in Congress succeed, the monuments will be only the first to fall. ♪

—George Nickas



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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Wilderness Watch

P.O. Box 9175
Missoula, MT 59807
Phone: (406) 542-2048
www.wildernesswatch.org
wild@wildernesswatch.org

Bringing Back the Great Bear (continued from page 1)

“Wilderness is good for bears and other wildlife because it is habitat secure from human meddling,” says Dana Johnson, Wilderness Watch’s legal counsel. “We want to ensure that both bears and Wilderness are protected at a time when pressures on both are increasing, when the world’s facing an increasing pace of ecological change, when anti-predator and anti-federal rhetoric is reaching fevered pitch, and when state game agencies are pushing the ‘control button’ for predators harder and harder.”

Some Background

When Europeans entered the Pacific Northwest after the Lewis and Clark expedition, there were lots of grizzlies, some 50,000 roaming the Great Plains all the way to the West Coast.

We don’t know how many inhabited the North Cascades. The first explorers didn’t mention grizzlies, but, beginning in the 1820s, Hudson Bay Company trappers did. They killed them on sight to cash-in their hides, and company records show that trappers exported 3,788 grizzly hides between 1820 and 1860.

The onset of mining and logging in the late 1850s brought roads, flumes, cabins, sawmills, tramways, farms and ranches, sheep and cows, settlements, railroads, and more killing. The fate of *Ursus arctos horribilis* in the Northwest was sealed.

Some suggest there is a remnant population in the North Cascades, probably less than 10, but these bears are unable to replenish their numbers. We have only 21 observations of the great bear between 1964 and 1991. Most recently, biologists selected 36 “capture sites” and set up baited culverts. Over the course of four seasons (323 “trap nights”), they caught only two black bears, although a hiker photographed a grizzly in 2010.

That’s where the story would have ended in the days before the landmark Endangered Species Act.

Bringing Bears Back

Grizzlies are an apex predator, the top of the 75 mammalian species in the North Cascades. But these bears (and those to the immediate north and west) are the fragile fringe of grizzly populations in southwestern B.C., and they need numbers, some 200 to 250 bears, to create a population with genetic integrity. Building numbers is a slow process. Females only breed every three years and don’t breed until six-to-ten years old. Mortality can run as high as 50 percent the first few years of life.

The National Park Service and Fish and Wildlife Service began the EIS on the North Cascades in 2014 and released it earlier this year. (<https://tinyurl.com/k6t2tfa>)

The plan sketches four choices:

1. **No Action.** This would leave the few grizzlies that remain alone to achieve the goal population of 200 bears on their own. Biologists believe it’s more likely the North Cascades grizzlies will become extirpated.

2. **Ecosystem Evaluation.** Biologists would release up to 10 grizzlies from British Columbia or Glacier National Park at a single site over two years, monitor them for four years, and then decide the next steps.
3. **Incremental Restoration.** Biologists would release five-to-seven bears a year until they reach a stable population of 25. The population would stabilize at 200 bears in 60-to-100 years.
4. **Expedited Restoration.** The population would reach 200 bears in 25 years after the rapid translocation of a total of 155-to-160 bears, released in small numbers—five to seven bears at different release points—each year.

The EIS compares the benefits and impacts of these three translocations. On the positive side, all would increase the ecosystem’s biodiversity and likely avoid the permanent loss of grizzlies. A growing population in the North Cascades would contribute to the overall recovery of the species and build stamina and genetic diversity. But it would come at a significant cost to Wilderness, in particular showing complete disregard for fundamental ideals of humility and restraint in our relationship to it.

This End Doesn’t Justify these Means

The goal of supporting a viable population of grizzlies in the North Cascades is a laudable one. It’s the methods Wilderness Watch takes issue with. Our concerns filled 14 single-spaced pages of comments: <https://tinyurl.com/ya9z55wg>

The essential irony is that agencies recognize that the best place to release bears is in the exceedingly rare wild-ness of the North Cascades. The qualities of the best grizzly habitat are synonymous with wilderness: space to roam, isolation, denning sites, safety from human-caused mortality, and distance from human conflicts and garbage. But the agencies’ methods of re-establishing grizzlies diminish all these advantages.

Look at the numbers. The first restoration alternative (ecosystem evaluation) envisions 40 helicopter flights in two years. The second alternative—an incremental restoration—requires between 100 and 136 helicopter flights potentially over five-to-ten years. The final, expedited restoration requires 25 years of helicopters, an estimated 672 flights. These numbers don’t include additional flights for collaring and monitoring activities. The EIS adds “a couple of days” of fixed-wing airplane missions monitoring collared animals every spring and fall. And it is vague about any locate/capture flights necessary to manage the grizzlies or to pick up dropped radio collars.

The EIS ignores the literature describing the affects of helicopters on wildlife, including grizzlies, and it admits that these new flights come to an ecosystem where “helicopter operations are not uncommon.” Within the Stephen Mather Wilderness, for instance, the National Park Service averages 142 “overflights” a year for fire management, trail crews, search and rescue, and administrative activities. This flaunt-

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Bringing Back the Great Bear (continued from page 3)

ing of wilderness safeguards against motorized intrusions is perpetuated in the grizzly relocation plan. There are also uncounted military, commercial, and private aircraft that use wilderness airspace.

Wilderness Watch's Proposal

The best way to meet the goal of a viable grizzly population in the North Cascades would be to allow for and boldly promote natural recovery of grizzlies. This would be a very different approach than the “no action” option in the EIS, which is a “do nothing” approach to the status quo. A natural recovery alternative would require working with British Columbia to protect grizzlies over a larger land base and would provide for connectivity between populations in the U.S. and Canada via protected habitat corridors. It would also include other measures to ensure that grizzlies are not killed by humans, regardless of what side of the border they are on and regardless of whether they are in national parks, Wilderness, or other public or private lands. It might take longer and require more patience than the relatively instant gratification of capturing and releasing dozens of bears, but it would ultimately be a more durable population, sharing a larger landscape with a more tolerant human population that is more likely to respect the bears that make it back on their own.

If the Park Service decides on translocation, it needs to look at less invasive or non-invasive means of grizzly reintroduction, something more in line with the letter and spirit of the Wilderness Act. Since 60 percent of the recovery area is outside of Wilderness, why not release the bears there and keep the helicopters out of the Wilderness?

Then, after releasing the bears, why not monitor them in a way that's respectful to Wilderness and bears? Researchers have developed a number of ways to monitor wildlife populations and movement using hair snags, camera traps, scat collection, and good old shoe-leather and visual sightings to know whether the bears are thriving. It might be more work than tracking a radio-collared bear from the comfort of an office chair and may not be as exciting as racing over the mountains in a helicopter, or as ego-boosting as snapping a selfie with a collar-adorned and drugged bear, but it's the wilderness way and a better way. We think the bears would agree.

Public comments of the first draft of the EIS closed on April 28. The Park Service will now analyze the comments it's received, including many sent by Wilderness Watch members and supporters. We'll keep you informed when the final EIS is released, expected to be later this year. 🐾

Wilderness in the Courts

Settlement Reached in Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness Commercial Towboat Lawsuit

The Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness is no stranger to controversy over motorboat use. Conservation groups have filed successful challenges over the years to reign-in excessive motorboat use, but the issue of commercial towboat use has largely been left unresolved. Commercial towboat operators charge a fee to transport clients to various drop-off points in the Wilderness. The operators strap canoes to the top of a motorized towboat, paddlers hop aboard, and the towboat buzzes off through the Wilderness to the drop-off location. The Moose Chain is particularly affected by the regular back-and-forth buzzing of towboats—records show this area is inundated with, at a conservative estimate, well over 2,000 towboat trips per season. The farthest drop-off location on the Moose Lake Chain (Prairie Portage) is approximately eight miles away—about a three-to-four hour paddle without the aid of a motor.

Commercial towboat use is unique in that it involves two Wilderness-degrading uses—motorized use and commercial enterprise, both of which are prohibited under the Wilderness Act absent specific statutory exceptions. A capped amount of motorboat use is allowed in the Boundary Waters, and commercial services may be authorized “to the extent necessary” for recreation access. The commercial services provision generally applies to

services offered by outfitters and guides, but before permitting the service, the Forest Service must undertake a needs assessment to determine if the service is in fact necessary, and if so, to what extent.

In 2015, Wilderness Watch challenged the Forest Service's authorization of commercial towboat operations for exceeding the cap on motorboat use, and also for permitting a commercial service without having first determined that the service is necessary. As a result of our lawsuit, the Forest Service agreed to complete a needs assessment and provide opportunities for public comment. The needs assessment will determine whether commercial towboat services are necessary, and if so to what extent, given other opportunities for Wilderness access and given the impact of towboat use on wilderness character. Wilderness Watch withdrew its other claims pending completion of the needs assessment.

The settlement agreement is an important first step in curbing excessive commercial towboat use in the Boundary Waters. We urge all Wilderness Watchers to help protect this unique canoe-country Wilderness by getting involved during the needs assessment process, so keep an eye on our website and social media for updates. 🐾

On the Watch

No Permanent Firebreaks in the Ventana Wilderness



Photo: S. Rae via flickr

Wilderness Watch is urging the U.S. Forest Service (FS) to end permanent, artificial firelines in the Ventana Wilderness in southern California. The Forest Service's Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the *Strategic Community Fuelbreak Improvement Project* in the Ventana Wilderness proposes to re-establish and permanently maintain 10.4 miles of "fuelbreaks" or firelines within the Wilderness. While the agency proposes to not use bulldozers to reconstruct the fuelbreaks, it would allow chainsaws and other motorized tools, and there are no guarantees bulldozers won't be called in when the next fire occurs.

Designated as Wilderness in 1969, Congress added more land to the Ventana Wilderness in 1978, 1984, 1992, and 2002. Fire has had a frequent presence there (as in many Wildernesses). Congress included special language in several of the addition bills allowing some "pre-suppression" activities in those wilderness additions.

Wilderness Watch is supporting Alternative 1, the No Action Alternative. The Forest Service first and foremost should protect the wilderness character of the Ventana Wilderness by allowing the old firelines to heal over time, particularly when research shows fuelbreaks are often ineffective, and reducing flammable material in the immediate vicinity of structures is far more effective for protecting homes. For these reasons, Wilderness Watch is urging the Forest Service to focus fire prevention measures on the structure protection zone (usually within 100 feet of homes and other structures) rather than build firelines in the distant Wilderness. 🌿

More Helicopter Projects Threaten Wilderness and Wildlife



Photo: James Marvin Phelps via flickr

Wilderness Watch is urging the Forest Service (FS) to reject several proposals to use helicopters to capture and collar wildlife in Wilderness. Helicopter use is incompatible with Wilderness, harasses wildlife, and destroys the experience for wilderness visitors.

In one proposal, the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (UDWR) would capture and collar mountain goats and bighorn sheep in the Mt. Timpanogos, Lone Peak, and Twin Peak Wildernesses in Utah. Mountain goats are a non-native exotic species in Utah that UDWR placed in the Wasatch Mountains some years ago for hunting. Attempting to perpetuate a non-native species in Wilderness violates a fundamental tenet of Wilderness—that it remain untrammeled. The proposal would allow up to 60 helicopter landings—40 for mountain goats and 20 for bighorn sheep—nearly all in Wilderness.

The project originally involved capturing only mountain goats, whose population is declining, but because they aren't native it was virtually impossible to show the project was necessary to benefit the Wildernesses. UDWR later added bighorn sheep, a native species, to the project. If the agency could justify capturing bighorns, it could do so on the roughly two-thirds of their range outside the Wildernesses. If UDWR is concerned about a decline in the mountain goat population, hunting should be limited or ended.

Wilderness Watch is also urging the Forest Service to reject a plan for multiple helicopter landings in the Boulder River, Henry M. Jackson, and Glacier Peak Wildernesses in Washington to capture and collar mountain goats, which are native to the area. The FS cites declining goat populations as the project's justification, but the agency already knows overhunting is the biggest factor in the decline. Again, the Forest Service needs to reject this proposal, which would harm wilderness character, and address mountain goat population decline by limiting or ending hunting.

Wildlife managers must learn to practice the same restraint that others do in Wilderness, and wildlife research should be conducted using noninvasive, wilderness-compatible means so that Wilderness is protected and animals suffer as little stress as possible. 🌿

Wilderness in Congress

Mountain Bikers Seek to Gut Wilderness Act

Rep. Tom McClintock (R-CA) recently introduced a bill in Congress at the behest of a group of mountain biking proponents that would eviscerate the 1964 Wilderness Act and allow bicycles in every Wilderness in the nation. The bill, HR 1349, was introduced on March 15th on behalf of the Sustainable Trails Coalition (STC).

This bill would weaken the Wilderness Act to allow bikes, strollers, wheelbarrows, game carts, survey wheels, and measuring wheels in all Wildernesses. In an especially cynical and disingenuous move, the mountain bikers also seem to hide behind people with disabilities: the bill lists “motorized wheelchairs” and “non-motorized wheelchairs” as the first uses authorized in Wilderness (even prior to listing “bicycles”), though the 1990 amendments to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) have clearly allowed wheelchairs in designated Wilderness for more than a quarter-century.

The 1964 Wilderness Act prohibits bicycles in the National Wilderness Preservation System. The law bans all types of bicycles as well as all other forms of mechanical transportation in Wilderness. Section 4(c) of that act states, “[T]here shall be...no use of motor vehicles, motorized equipment or motorboats, no landing of aircraft, no other form of mechanical transport, and no structure or installation.”

Furthermore, Congress stated the purpose of the Wilderness Act was, in part, to protect these areas from “expanding settlement and growing mechanization....” (Wilderness Act, Section 2[a]).

In a deft use of falsehoods and “fake news,” the mountain bikers have claimed the Wilderness Act actually allows bikes in Wilderness. They falsely state that the U.S. Forest Service put the ban in place in 1984 when the agency explicitly named bicycles as one of the prohibited forms of mechanical transport in Wilderness (the agency’s 1965 wilderness regulations did not specifically prohibit bikes since mountain bikes had not yet been invented).

The STC arguments also evince an incredibly narrow and selfish view of Wilderness as just a recreation “pie” to be divided up among competing recreation user groups, with seemingly no regard for wildness, wildlife habitat, solitude, or future generations’ desires for truly wild Wilderness. For over a half century, the Wilderness Act has protected Wildernesses from mechanization

and mechanical transport, even if no motors were involved with such activities. This has meant, as Congress intended, that Wildernesses have been kept free from bicycles and other types of machines. Wilderness advocates believe that this protection has served our Nation well, and that the “benefits of an enduring resource of wilderness” would be forever lost by allowing mechanized transport in these areas.

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

Use our action alert to urge your Senators and Representative in Congress to oppose HR 1349 and similar bills that would gut the Wilderness Act: <https://tinyurl.com/k78glnw>

FOR MORE INFO:

See “5 Lies Being Used to Get Mountain Bikes into Wilderness” at <https://tinyurl.com/m2eg6bo> 

Alaska Predator Regulations

Many readers sent in comments in 2016 in favor of new regulations proposed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) governing the hunting of predators on National Wildlife Refuges in Alaska, including nearly 20 million acres of Wilderness. In August 2016, the FWS finalized the regulations to prohibit same-day airborne hunting of bears, wolves, and wolverines; use of traps, snares, and nets for killing bears; killing of wolves and coyotes from May 1 to August 9; killing of bear cubs or mothers with cubs (except for subsistence hunts where this is traditional); and use of bait to kill brown bears.

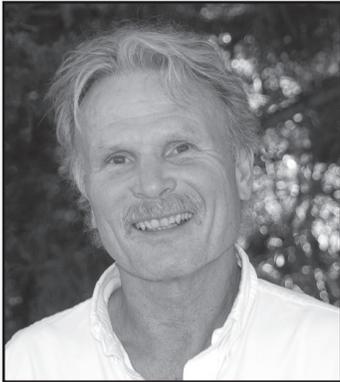
Unfortunately, under the Congressional Review Act, Congress can seek to nullify regulations finalized within 60 legislative days before a new Administration takes power. This spring, Congress passed H. J. Res. 69 (S. J. Res. 18) to nullify these new regulations. Despite strong opposition, President Trump signed the measure into law on April 3rd as Public Law 115-20, rescinding these important protections for native wildlife in National Wildlife Refuges in Alaska.

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

Use our action alert to urge the FWS to protect wildlife and resist Alaska’s aggressive hunting policies: <https://tinyurl.com/m7yxjsz> 

George Wuerthner Joins WW Staff

Wilderness Watch is pleased to welcome noted author, ecologist, and conservation activist George Wuerthner to our staff. As our new Advocate-Organizer, George will play a key role in advocating for wilderness protection and advocacy around the country.



George is a well-known writer on conservation issues, having published 38 books and innumerable articles, essays, and opinion pieces for newspapers, journals, Internet blogs and a variety of other online sources. A polished speaker, he's given hundreds of presentations around the country on Wilderness, wildfire, livestock grazing, wildlife protection, and other public land issues.

George is also a wildlands explorer extraordinaire, having hiked and paddled in more than 400 designated Wildernesses and more than 180 national park units. He's worked in Alaska as a backcountry ranger for the National Park Service in Gates of the Arctic National Park and as a river ranger for the Bureau of Land Management on several Wild and Scenic Rivers, and as a recreation staff for the Forest Service in Idaho. He also worked as a wilderness guide in Southeast Alaska and the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness in Montana.

As part of the Foundation for Deep Ecology he worked the past dozen years for wildlands philanthropist Doug Tompkins. With his ecological training and experience in wildlands throughout the country, George brings passion, knowledge, and ecological humility to wilderness advocacy.

His travels and his work for wildlands around the country have helped George build an incredible network of activists, upon whom he can draw to help spread the word about Wilderness. Expect to see and hear a lot more from George in the coming year.

Welcome aboard, George! 

George Wuerthner will be hitting the trail this fall and winter to raise awareness about Wilderness and the threats and challenges facing it. If you would like to help organize or schedule a presentation in your community—to an organization or civic group to which you belong, a classroom, an open house or any other venue—please email info@wildernesswatch.org. We can help! George's road show schedule will be posted on our website so you can see when and where he's going to be in your area.

LOVE THE WILDERNESS? Help Us Keep It Wild!

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An easy way to do a most important thing for Wilderness

Letters to the editor are a great way to reach a wide audience—not only are they generally one of the most read sections of the newspaper, but members of Congress and other public officials read and pay attention to them. Wilderness Watch encourages you to write a letter to the editor on Wilderness. Your letter could address a specific wilderness stewardship issue (such as the many posted on our website and in this and recent newsletters), especially if you live near or have visited the Wilderness you're writing about, or you can write a more general letter, perhaps talking about the value of Wilderness and why it matters to you.

Here are some tips for getting a letter to the editor published:

- Stay within your newspaper's word limit.
- Know to whom to submit your letter (You can usually find this information on a paper's editorial page or website.).
- Be concise. Choose one topic.
- Make it personal—relate an experience you've had or why this matters to you.
- Use a local hook if you can.
- Write about something happening or important right now.
- If you're responding to an article or editorial, mention it and the date it ran.
- Follow up. If your letter isn't printed, try to find out why and whether you can revise it to get it printed.

Happy letter writing! Let us know if we can help. 