This year, 2019, marks the 30th anniversary of the founding of Wilderness Watch. The organization formed in 1989, and for three decades has proudly upheld the values and protections found in the visionary 1964 Wilderness Act, working to protect the National Wilderness Preservation System and to ensure that designated Wildernesses all over the country are properly stewarded to preserve their wilderness values far into the future. But many serious challenges remain that threaten the very survival of the Wilderness System.

**Founding**

By the late 1980s, the wilderness movement had changed since the heady days a quarter-century earlier when passing the 1964 Wilderness Act. By then, not much attention was being paid to whether Wilderness was being protected as the law intended. In 1989, wilderness activists in the northern Rockies were involved as the Forest Service developed new management plans for both the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness in Idaho and the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness along the Idaho-Montana border. Unfortunately, commercial outfitters maintained permanent campsites and equipment caches inside the Wildernesses, some even with piped water systems, buildings, and fixtures. The Forest Service proposed to eliminate these unlawful permanent caches and structures. The Idaho Outfitters and Guides Association filed an administrative appeal against the new plan.

Forest Service Chief R. Max Peterson initially ruled against the Association. But the next Chief, F. Dale Robertson, suggested to the outfitters that they take the Forest Service to federal court, and then he would settle the lawsuit in favor of the outfitters and guides, Wilderness Act be damned.

The wilderness activists felt that federal district court presented a daunting challenge, and they approached the larger national groups like the Wilderness Society and Sierra Club for help. But none was willing to get involved, claiming that they needed the outfitters on their side to pass new wilderness bills, or that they had too many other pressing priorities.

Three of these wilderness activists, Bill Worf, Bobbie Cross Guns, and Jim Dayton, met in a Missoula café to discuss the matter over lunch. They agreed that a new organization to focus on protecting existing Wildernesses and Wild Rivers was needed. Bill slapped down a $20 bill on the table, and Wilderness Watch was born. They found pro bono counsel, went to court, and won. Wilderness Watch was off and running.

**Threats to Wilderness Today**

While Wilderness Watch has achieved many victories...
Necessary Human Attributes for Wilderness to Survive

The wilderness writings from past editions of *The Living Wilderness* magazine are a wealth of information. This journal was edited for many years by the Wilderness Act’s author, Howard Zahniser, and was the official publication of the Wilderness Society, which Zahniser led for almost 20 years. These magazines contain several important discussions about wilderness issues that are even more relevant today. The common myth among some scientists and academics who study wilderness policy—that wilderness advocates 50 and 60 years ago couldn’t foresee problems of the future—is put to bed by a myriad of thoughtful essays.

Perhaps the best-known essay Zahniser wrote was “The Need for Wilderness Areas,” which appeared in the Winter Spring 1956/1957 edition of *The Living Wilderness*. That article was first delivered as a speech in 1955, and humility and restraint are at the heart of this powerful essay. He wrote in this essay regarding interdependence and humility in the context of Wilderness, “This need is for areas of the earth within which we stand without our mechanisms that make us immediate masters over our environment—areas of wild nature in which we sense ourselves to be, what in fact I believe we are, dependent members of an interdependent community of living creatures that together derive their existence from the sun.” He re-emphasizes the topic again, stating, “…to know the wilderness is to know profound humility, to recognize one’s littleness, to sense dependence and interdependence, indebtedness, and responsibility.”

It seems the agencies in charge of Wilderness, many recreationists, and even some wilderness advocates are ignorant of that advice and of the foundational principles of Wilderness itself. Zahniser recognized such a danger in this very same essay where he wrote, “Their peculiar values (of Wilderness) are also in danger from development for recreation, even from efforts to protect and manage them as wilderness.”

Zahniser’s son, Ed, a noted National Park Service historian, has also written about a key aspect of Wilderness his father recognized. Ed has written, “Preserving wilderness shows restraint and humility.” And along this same line of thought, Ed also wrote about Aldo Leopold’s vision of Wilderness as “an antidote to the biotic arrogance” of Homo sapiens.

As these authors wrote so many years ago, preserving wilderness requires restraint and humility. This is even truer today, when all one needs to do is look around to see the stark contrast between Wilderness and the rest of our world, which we’ve tamed and “improved” endlessly.

Zahniser believed Wilderness came “from the eternity of the past,” and he intended the Wilderness Act to be the mechanism to protect Wilderness now and in the future. Indeed, the Act he authored reflects this continuity of Wilderness from the past to the future by establishing “an enduring resource of wilderness.” Wilderness Watch remains forever committed to protecting Zahniser’s vision, without which there will be no Wilderness.

—Gary Macfarlane
for Wilderness over the past 30 years, unfortunately a great many threats remain. They include:

**Agency Opposition to Wilderness.** Despite the lofty promises to support Wilderness made five years ago at the Wilderness Act 50th anniversary conference in Albuquerque, the four federal agencies that administer Wilderness (U.S. Forest Service, National Park Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and BLM) remain largely indifferent or opposed to protecting authentic wild Wilderness. The agencies don’t like the loss of flexibility and discretion that the Wilderness Act brings, and often seek ways to ignore or by-pass the protections of the law. Many wilderness supporters remain in the agencies, but they are surrounded by staffers who are indifferent or opposed to Wilderness. This problem, of course, has existed since before the Wilderness Act passed Congress.

**Congressional Indifference and Opposition.** Congress itself is largely indifferent or opposed to Wilderness these days. The bipartisan Congressional wilderness champions from the 1960s and 1970s have long since retired, and the recent and current Congresses show little interest in their oversight responsibilities over the National Wilderness Preservation System. Congress still passes bills designating new Wildernesses, but nearly all of them contain bad special provisions that weaken the protections for these new areas.

**Degradation of Wilderness System via Special Provisions.** Starting in the 1980s, Congress began adding more and more special provisions to wilderness designation bills that weaken the protections for these new areas. These special provisions have then often been replicated or significantly expanded in subsequent wilderness bills. While we have grown the National Wilderness Preservation System in size (now 111 million acres), that growth has come at the cost of an overall degraded quality of the System, where exceptions have been made for everything from motor vehicles and bulldozers, buildings and structures and instrument stations, heavy-handed and manipulative wildlife management, and even seemingly small degradations such as permanent fixed climbing anchors.

**Tidal Wave of Industrial-Strength Recreation.** While recreation is certainly one legitimate benefit of Wilderness, recreation also threatens to overwhelm many Wildernesses with a tidal wave of industrial-strength use that harms wildlife, solitude, and other wilderness values. Even traditional recreation has its impacts—a recent study from Colorado, for example, showed a collapsing elk population in the Vail area due primarily to the number of hikers and skiers who swarm the area. Other recent studies show how relatively quiet and slow-moving hikers can disrupt wildlife movements within a quarter-mile or even a half-mile of hiking trails. Recreation is not the only nor the most important use of Wilderness. We would do well to remember Aldo Leopold’s charge to re-think recreation, “Recreational development is a job not of building roads into the lovely country, but of building receptivity into the still unloved human mind.”

**Loss of Humility and Restraint.** This has always been both the reason why we need Wilderness, why Wilderness is valuable, and the only way we can have Wilderness—Wilderness is the one place where we allow nature to just be, a refuge for both human visitors and for wildlife that may survive nowhere else. The writings of Wilderness Act author Howard Zahniser are replete with the need for humility and restraint as we humans deal with Wilderness. We seem to have lost a lot of that humility and restraint these days, as some recreation groups (mountain bikers, climbers, etc.) demand their piece of the wilderness pie. It may be that, going forward, the ideas of humility and restraint might be the most important values that Wilderness can teach us, ideas that we desperately need to re-learn as a warming planet continues to threaten so much of our world. We can’t always have a win-win, as the young Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg reminds us: we need not only humility and restraint but significant changes to save the planet from global warming, and we need humility, restraint and significant changes if we are to similarly pass along “an enduring resource of wilderness” to future generations, as the Wilderness Act so eloquently promises.

**The Future**

To save Wilderness, we must meet the above-mentioned challenges over the long term. This could include efforts to continue educating and activating the public to fight for Wilderness; to create a separate federal land management agency charged solely with administering the Wilderness System; to identify, educate, and recruit Wilderness champions in Congress; to continue working to eliminate special provisions in wilderness bills; to fight off the recreationalists who want Wilderness only as their playground; and finally, to promote the idea that we will protect authentic, wild Wilderness only by checking our desires for control and manipulation at the door.

So how will we do all of this? We’ve been successful for 30 years because of the loyal and consistent support from our members and supporters. You are the educated and active citizens who remain ever-vigilant and speak out for wilderness protection again and again. Without that support—as activists, as donors, as members—we could do very little. With that continued support though, Wilderness Watch can work to meet these challenges and continue to fight the good fight for Wilderness. Thank you for that support, and here’s to another 30 years of wilderness protection!

Kevin Proescholdt is the conservation director for Wilderness Watch.
The Problem of Grazing in Wilderness: High Uintas

The High Uintas Wilderness in northeastern Utah is renowned for high-elevation ridgelines—rarely dropping below 11,000 feet and rising as high as 13,500 feet—as well as the largest expanse of contiguous alpine tundra in the central Rockies. The peaks give way to glacial basins holding sensitive meadow and wetland habitat, the headwaters of many of Utah's major rivers, and spawning habitat for Colorado River Cutthroat Trout—a species reliant upon clean, sediment-free river substrate for spawning. The area forms the heart of an important continent-spanning wildlife corridor connecting the southern Rockies in Colorado with the central and northern Rockies in Wyoming, Montana, and Idaho.

This 453,000-acre Wilderness is also the stage for an increasingly familiar battle. The high ridges, and scree-rimmed alpine meadows provide classic bighorn sheep habitat, and the Wilderness is home to a reintroduced, struggling population of Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep. It is also the most heavily grazed Wilderness in the National Wilderness Preservation System with 261,075 acres—over half of the Wilderness—allotted to cows and domestic sheep. Right now, the Forest Service is considering the future of 10 domestic sheep allotments in the Wilderness, including one that has not been grazed in over 40 years, through a proposal that, if approved, would permit over 10,000 sheep and their lambs to graze for over two months every summer in the fragile, high elevation alpine basins—prime bighorn territory. It is a tired fact that bighorn die when they come into contact with domestic sheep, carriers of the pathogens Mannheimia haemolytica, Bibersteinia trehalosi, Pasteurella multocida, and Mycoplasma ovipneumoniae. In fact, herd die-offs from these deadly pneumonia transmissions are a major reason for dwindling bighorn populations. Once two million strong, bighorn populations in the nation have fallen to roughly 30,000 individuals. In the High Uintas, there are roughly 162 bighorn sheep—and the Forest Service recognizes that “the primary threat to these [bighorns] is disease (bacterial pneumonia),” that domestic sheep transmit pneumonia to bighorns, and that important bighorn habitat would be affected by these 10 allotments.

So why dump 10,000 domestic snot-swappers and their lambs in the remote territory of a struggling bighorn population? Well, the Forest Service says it considered that this might be a bad idea, but it ultimately decided that, because it couldn’t guarantee bighorns wouldn’t wander elsewhere and run into domestic sheep anyway (say on private land), why bother reducing the risk of contact in the Wilderness? It’s been a while since we took a logic course, but this smells like one of those binary cop-outs. Why bother keeping the sharp knives out of reach of Little Johnny when he might wander to a neighbor’s kitchen and poke his eye out anyway?

Bighorns aren’t the only victims of the Forest Service’s strained rationalizations. While the Forest Service is gun-shy on taking steps to protect bighorns from domestic sheep, it suffers less hand-wringing over authorizing (often ineffective) measures to protect domestic livestock from the Wilderness’s wild residents. Predator "control" measures are commonplace—affecting bears, mountain lions, coyotes, and various other species. The spectacular alpine landscape is sacrificed for forage. Sensitive watersheds in the High Uintas subjected to domestic grazing average about 50 percent bare soil while watersheds that aren’t grazed are nearly 100 percent covered in vegetation. Grazed watersheds suffer denuded and destabilized stream banks, loss of vegetative cover, loss of undercut banks and in-stream habitat, and an influx of sediment—bad news for spawning fish, not to mention manure-laden eye-sores for visiting humans. Of course, words are easy to explain away—pictures are more difficult.
Wilderness Watch is concerned about a Forest Service (FS) plan to spray herbicides and possibly introduce exotic insects in the Gros Ventre, Bridger and Teton Wildernesses, and Palisades and Shoal Creek Wilderness Study Areas in Wyoming. In our comments on the FS’s Invasive Plant Management Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the Bridger-Teton National Forest we questioned whether a massive weed control program could possibly be appropriate within Wilderness and the efficacy of more herbicide spraying since 15 years of past spraying hasn’t eradicated weeds. The inadequate DEIS fails to give any details such as Wilderness acreage to be aerially sprayed (a precedent, if allowed), whether exotic insects have or will be introduced (another form of trammeling Wilderness), and the amount of spraying in the past, among other issues.

We encouraged the agency to focus on weed prevention methods related to stock and visitor use rather than trammel the Wilderness. Such measures include: require pelletized food for stock to avoid weed-infested hay, close weed-infested areas until weeds can be eliminated, implement campsite standards to eliminate bare ground where weeds can take hold, inspect boats, and quarantine stock animals for 48 hours. In the High Uintas Wilderness, the conflicts with bighorns and the documented riparian damage should be enough for the Forest Service to seriously consider shutting down these 10 allotments. At the barest of bare minimums, it should not throw sheep on an allotment that has not been grazed in over 40 years. These are after all national forests meant to serve the broader conservation goals of our country, not domestic sheep pastures that serve the interests of only a few.

Facts cited and photos used in this article were drawn from the report, “Watershed Conditions Uinta Wilderness, Utah,” by Dr. John Carter. Read the report: bit.ly/2P4noiu

On the Watch

When the Cure is Worse than the Disease

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East Fork Black’s Fork grazed and eroding, with stream downcutting.

Uintas’ Beaver Creek after decades of livestock exclusion.

Where would you rather pitch a tent? Where would a bighorn or an elk want to live?

The High Uintas is just one illustrative example of the incompatibility of grazing and Wilderness protection. Congress made special provision for grazing in the Wilderness Act, but, contrary to the way agencies often act, it certainly didn’t intend to make the reduction or cessation of grazing in Wilderness more difficult than on other public lands. You can read more about our recommendations for ending grazing in Wilderness on our website. And, you can learn more about grazing conflicts in the High Uintas at: bit.ly/2ZY9e3L

Facts cited and photos used in this article were drawn from the report, “Watershed Conditions Uinta Wilderness, Utah,” by Dr. John Carter. Read the report: bit.ly/2P4noiu
Wilderness in Congress

The Curious Case of the California Congressman

Rep. Jared Huffman (D-CA) has reintroduced his Northwest California Wilderness, Recreation and Working Forests Act, HR 2250. The Senate companion bill is S. 1110, introduced by Sen. Kamela Harris.

Rep. Huffman and Sen. Harris are both generally considered friends and supporters of Wilderness. Rep. Huffman, earlier in his career, was an attorney with the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC). He has had a good voting record in support of Wilderness, and has been a leader on wilderness issues on the House Natural Resources Committee.

Rep. Huffman's Northwest California bill would designate 17 new Wildernesses or wilderness additions totaling 251,023 acres on lands administered by both the U.S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in northwest California.

Unfortunately, however, Rep. Huffman's bill in the last Congress was full of bad special provisions that would weaken the protections for the areas that this bill would designate as Wilderness. Wilderness Watch prepared a five-page memo highlighting and explaining the problems posed by these special provisions. We hand-delivered a copy of that memo to Rep. Huffman's staff in Washington, D.C. earlier this year. We never heard a word back from his staff, nor had other environmental organizations that had offered suggestions to improve his bill.

To make matters even worse, when Rep. Huffman reintroduced his bill as HR 2250 in April, not only had he ignored every one of our suggestions, but he had included even more special provisions to further weaken wilderness protection. Why has Rep. Huffman, an avowed wilderness supporter, ignored friendly input from wilderness organizations, and instead made his bill even worse? As they say, the case gets curiouser and curiouser, with no resolution yet in sight.

Here are some of the problems we've pointed out to Rep. Huffman in his bill:

Section 302(m). Permanent Fixed Climbing Anchors

Section 302(m) on recreational climbing is a completely new special provision this year. It would allow permanent fixed climbing anchors in the Wildernesses designated by HR 2250. The use and maintenance of fixed anchors in Wilderness directly contradicts the Wilderness Act’s prohibition of “installations” in Wilderness. The USDA Office of General Counsel confirmed this interpretation of the Wilderness Act in a 1990 ruling. Climbers should accept a higher level of responsibility in Wildernesses and utilize “clean” climbing practices on the rock faces they scale. Climbing using fixed bolts, permanent anchors, or pitons degrades wilderness character, and it is antithetical to the spirit of the Wilderness Act.

We recommend removing Section 302(m) from HR 2250.

Section 302(b). Fire Management and Related Activities

Section 302(b) states, “The Secretary may take such measures in a wilderness area or wilderness addition designated by section 301 as are necessary for the control of fire, insects, and diseases in accordance with section 4(d)(1) of the Wilderness Act (16 U.S.C. 1133(d)(1)) and House Report 98–40 of the 98th Congress.” Our concern with this provision is that the activities allowed in House Report 98-40, in particular introducing livestock to an area, using bulldozers to build permanent fire roads and fuel breaks—and even controlled burning—were not contemplated by the 1964 Wilderness Act. By stating these types of presuppression actions are “in accordance with the Wilderness Act also suggests all Wildernesses are subject to these activities, which could have a tremendous impact on the whole of a system that is to be administered so as to be “untrammeled by man.” Moreover, the language in House Report 98-40 references the unique situation to which the report applies (“Due to the arid climate, high seasonal temperatures and buildup of fuel that exists in so many California roadless areas, especially in Southern California” (emphasis added)), and suggests the report’s provisions were not to be widely applied.

We recommend removing the reference to House Report 98-40 and instead including a statement that acknowledges the important role natural fire and ecological processes play in preserving an area “untrammeled by man.”

Section 302(d). Fish and Wildlife

Subsection (2) Management Activities, is a sweeping provision that allows “any management activities that are necessary to maintain or restore fish, wildlife, and plant populations and habitats” in the Wildernesses designated by the bill, so long as those actions are conducted in accordance with the Wilderness Act and House Report 101-405. This is problematic for Wilderness for a couple of reasons. First, though it says the activities must be consistent with the Wilderness Act, the Wilderness Act calls for a “hands-off” policy—“untrammeled by man”—when it comes to manipulating populations and habitats (in the words of the Act’s author, Howard Zahniser, wilderness stewards are to be “guardians, not gardeners”). Including this language in the legislation suggests otherwise. Second, the referenced House Report 101-405 was adopted directly from agency policy, was prepared without any public input or scrutiny, and allows for expanded motorized access and other activities at odds with the Wilderness Act.

We recommend removing Section 302(d)(2) from the bill, which would still allow management actions consistent with the Wilderness Act to occur in these areas without creating the confusion and problems associated with the language in this provision and House Report 101-405.

Wilderness Watch recently sent the House Natural Resources Committee an organizational sign-on letter outlining our wilderness concerns, and we will continue to encourage Rep. Huffman to improve his bill and remove these and other harmful provisions.
Wilderness in the Courts

Forest Service Changes Tune on Golden Hand Mine:
Wilderness Watch scored an important legal victory for the famed Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness in Idaho when in 2016 a federal judge found the Forest Service’s approval of the Golden Hand Mine project—which included extensive drilling, bulldozing, road construction, and motorized vehicle use to validate a mining claim—in violation of the Wilderness Act and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The Forest Service authorized up to 571 motorized vehicle trips per year into the mine site—the majority of those trips were to transport workers in pickup trucks for shift changes, even though workers could hike or use stock like every other person in Wilderness. The mining company would also have used jackhammers, drillers, dump trucks, bulldozers, and other heavy machinery in the Wilderness to construct over four miles of road, to construct 11 drill pads and drill 13 to 18 core holes 500 to 800 feet underground, to excavate several trenches to bedrock, and to pump water from Coin Creek. Fortunately, the judge found that the Forest Service failed to justify the necessity of such extensive Wilderness intrusions to validate a mining claim, and it remanded the issue to the Forest Service for further review and explanation. In response to this ruling, the Forest Service released a recommendation to limit mining-related activities (including disallowing or limiting much of the drilling and trenching and reducing motorized use) at the Golden Hand Mine. As long as mining remains a threat, Wilderness Watch will keep working to end mining in Wilderness.

We’re Still Defending our River of No Return Elk Collaring Victory:
In 2017, a federal judge in Idaho issued a stern rebuke of the Forest Service’s approval of over 100 helicopter landings in the River of No Return Wilderness to collar elk in an effort to justify Idaho Department of Fish and Game’s (IDFG) plan to exterminate 60 percent of wolves in the Wilderness. To our knowledge, this was the most extensive helicopter intrusion in Wilderness ever authorized, and to make matters worse, IDFG also captured and placed electronic tracking collars on four wolves from three packs even though it was expressly not permitted to do so. The judge found the agency’s actions in violation of the Wilderness Act and the National Environmental Policy Act and ordered IDFG to destroy the illegally obtained data, noting this was the “rare or extreme case” where a mandatory injunction is required. Rather than appealing to the Ninth Circuit on the merits, the agencies appealed the decision on largely jurisdictional grounds arguing that the lower court did not have jurisdiction over IDFG, that the case was moot because the agencies rushed to finish the project before the court could rule, and that even if the court had jurisdiction to hear the case, it overstepped its authority in ordering the destruction of the illegally ob-

tained electronic tracking data. We are currently defending this important win for one of the largest areas of wild country in the Lower 48 and expect to have oral argument before the Ninth Circuit later this year.

Suit Filed to Stop Road through Izembek Wilderness:
On July 24, Interior Secretary David Bernhardt signed another land exchange agreement that would allow a road to be built through the Izembek Wilderness and National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska. This followed the Administration dropping its appeal of our legal victory this past March where a federal judge found a prior land exchange agreement illegal. (See our Summer 2019 Watcher.)

On August 4, Wilderness Watch and co-plaintiffs responded with another lawsuit to stop this latest attempt to build this road. Thank you to our attorneys at Trustees for Alaska. We’ll keep you posted.

YES! I want to help keep Wilderness wild!

Name _____________________________________
Address ___________________________________
City ___________________ State _______ Zip _________
Email ______________________________________

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☐ $30—Contributor ☐ $50—Supporter
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☐ Other $________

☐ I’ve enclosed my check, payable to Wilderness Watch.
☐ I prefer to pay by credit card (Visa/Mastercard/American Express):

Card # ________________________
Expires ____ /____ Security code (AmEx: 4 digits on front; all other cards: 3 digits on back): _________
Signature ______________________________________

Mail to: Wilderness Watch, P.O. Box 9175, Missoula, MT 59807

Thank you!
On the Watch (continued)

BLM Seeking to Commercialize Wildernesses in New Mexico

Wilderness Watch is concerned about a Bureau of Land Management (BLM) proposal to significantly increase commercial use and allow commercial filming in the new Organ Mountains and Broad Canyon Wildernesses (and several Wilderness Study Areas) in New Mexico. Commercial filming is prohibited in Wilderness, along with all other commercial enterprise, with the exception of commercial services such outfitters and guides (livestock grazing and valid existing rights such as mining claims are other exceptions). The BLM’s proposal violates the Wilderness Act by suggesting it could allow excessive levels of commercial outfitting/guiding and by proposing to allow commercial filming.

BLM’s proposal also fails to detail the commercial filming it would allow in the Wildernesses and suggests motorized transportation, another activity the Wilderness Act prohibits, could be utilized to support filming. Wilderness Watch will continue to monitor this proposal and voice our concerns.