After the most expensive—$14 billion on the presidential and congressional elections alone—and one of the most contentious elections in memory, the nation wound up almost where it was before in Congress, with the Senate likely controlled by Republicans and the House under Democratic control. Of course there was one big change, Joe Biden defeated Donald Trump and will be the next President. Here are some of the implications for Wilderness from the election going forward:

**President.** To be honest, we don't really yet know how a Biden Administration will deal with Wilderness; it will largely depend on the people he puts in charge of the federal land agencies and our ability to influence them. The new administration will certainly be better than Trump's slash-and-burn, scorched-earth policies on Wilderness and public lands. Trump's current Secretary of Interior David Bernhardt, for example, is a former oil, mining, and energy industry lobbyist who has defended and enabled Trump's rollback of environmental regulations.

There are some specific issues where Biden's win will almost certainly be a win for Wilderness. It was Donald Trump's team, after all, that continually sought to build a road through the heart of the Izembek Wilderness in Alaska, an effort that Wilderness Watch and others successfully blocked in court again and again. We don't expect the Biden Administration to continue the road-building scheme. It was Donald Trump's Administration that illegally renewed two expired federal mining leases for the proposed Twin Metals copper-nickel sulfide mine next to the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness in Minnesota. Biden is likely to revoke the unlawfully issued leases and reinstitute the study process from the Obama Administration that may lead to a ban on federal mineral leasing in the entire watershed. It was Donald Trump who was fixated on building his expensive border wall along the border of Mexico, waiving environmental laws and damaging Wildernesses all along the border. We don't expect Biden will continue building the wall or keep waiving environmental laws. It was Donald Trump who pushed to open the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska to oil and gas development in the 2017 tax bill. Biden has committed to protecting the Arctic Refuge from leasing and development. And it was Donald Trump who dramatically eviscerated the Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monuments in Utah in an unprecedented move that is still being challenged in the courts. Biden is almost certain to reinstate the original monuments and their protections.

One person often mentioned as a potential Secretary of Interior in the new Biden Administration is Sen. Tom Udall (D-NM), who did not run for reelection. Udall's father, the legendary Stewart Udall, served as a conservation-oriented Secretary of Interior for Presidents...
Wilderness in the Time of COVID
by Mark Petersen

In these times, the COVID virus has changed our lives profoundly. We see evidence everywhere, in the cities and across the countryside. Perhaps in unexpected and harmful ways, we even see indirect impacts of the virus reaching deep into our Wildernesses.

I experienced these impacts recently in two Wilderness areas, separated by over 1500 miles. Ecosystems apart, they are different in just about every way—including how federal agencies manage each. In early September my family and I canoed into the lakes and forests of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW) in Minnesota. Five weeks later I backpacked the slickrock and juniper-studded canyons in the Box-Death Hollow Wilderness of southern Utah.

One of the most beneficial and understudied values of Wilderness to people is the many health benefits it provides. A trip into Wilderness delivers unparalleled mental and physical benefits that are difficult to achieve in civilized areas.

Thus it was no surprise to discover people flocking to both areas. With COVID on the loose, recreational opportunities stymied in the cities, and elections creating great anxiety, humanity was coming to Wilderness seeking a safe and calming sanctuary. Not only were there more visitors, but many of them were Wilderness “newbies,” having little prior Wilderness experience. Just as COVID pushed people to Zoom for the first time, the virus has caused many to try their skills in Wilderness for the first time.

What I found was a tale of two Wildernesses. In the BWCAW, the Forest Service has a sophisticated on-line permit system, regulating the number of people entering the Wilderness overnight at trailheads from May to September. When we picked up our permit, personnel reviewed with us the rules and leave no trace practices. It was like a crash course in Wilderness 101, and backcountry rangers were there to follow-up.

In contrast, when we planned our Death Hollow Wilderness travels, the Bureau of Land Management told us to register at the trailhead. We were given little advice on leave no trace principles. As for the trailhead permit, there was no space on the entry forms to provide our information. We resorted to a scrap of paper to offer logistical details in case we didn’t return home as expected.

With this lack of information, the consequences became apparent. In the Death Hollow Wilderness, the newbies had little knowledge of rules or practices. We found ourselves having to gently reprimand fellow travelers who built fires when they were strictly prohibited, washed utensils in streams, and left calling cards behind them. Group size limits were ignored.

While many of the canoe travelers we encountered in the BWCAW were also here for the first time, we found ourselves simply providing them with map directions rather than rebukes. They had been schooled in the principles and practices of Wilderness travel through the permit process.

Passing legislation to establish Wilderness is only the beginning to achieve Wilderness protection. How we care for and steward these amazing jewels will determine the extent to which they remain untrammeled and whole.

While we fight against the forces that would intentionally compromise our National Wilderness Preservation System and the many values Wilderness upholds, we must remember the much less sensational, but no less degrading, forces of ignorance that quietly erode the Wilderness experience. We don’t need more rules, just more education, enforcement, and enlightenment. In some areas, a better permit system to govern numbers. More backcountry ambassadors to provide informational education and enforcement when necessary can be of great help. For once COVID abates, what we’re experiencing in Wilderness today may become the new normal.

Mark Peterson is a Board member of Wilderness Watch.
Kennedy and Johnson in the 1960s (before later serving on Wilderness Watch’s board of directors). Other names being bandied about include Rep. Deb Haaland (D-NM), Sen. Martin Heinrich (D-NM), and outgoing Montana Governor Steve Bullock.

Of these, Sen. Udall has the longest history with and knowledge about Wilderness and the National Wilderness Preservation System; Rep. Haaland is a first-term House member who has shown great appreciation for and support of public lands protection as sub-committee chair; Sen. Heinrich has tried to become a champion for sportsmen and Wilderness on the key committee; and Gov. Bullock, outside of being a western state governor, doesn’t have a strong record on public lands and has taken some controversial and harmful positions as governor.

There will be many avenues that a Biden Administration may take to help Wilderness, but that depends significantly on other appointments such as the heads of agencies like the National Park Service or Forest Service. The Biden team may well support Wilderness Watch’s campaign to reform livestock grazing practices in Wilderness, for example. Just as President Trump extensively used executive orders on a host of topics, President Biden may use executive orders and national monument proclamations to protect wild areas. The Biden team will likely help protect some of the iconic areas in Alaska that President Trump has attacked, such as the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and the Izembek Wilderness. We will certainly be urging the Biden Administration to focus on examining the unraveling of the wilderness programs in the federal agencies.

**U.S. Senate.** Many political prognosticators predicted that the Democrats would rather easily gain control of the U.S. Senate, given the large number of Republican seats that were up for reelection. Prior to the election, Republicans controlled the Senate 53-47, and currently hold a 50-48 advantage following the election. Two Senate seats in Georgia are still up in the air and will be decided by special run-off elections in January.

One thing will be for certain: Senator Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) will no longer chair the key Energy and Natural Resources Committee, the panel that deals with wilderness legislation. She is term-limited as committee chair under the Senate Republican caucus rules. If Republicans retain control of the Senate in 2021, we’re not likely to see any meaningful change in how that body deals with public lands legislation. To the extent it deals with Wilderness at all, it will be in the form of wilderness designation bills packaged with damaging public lands bills or bad special provisions in a large omnibus package, which has been the pattern in recent years.

If the Democrats pick up both of the remaining undecided Georgia races, and control the Senate on a 50-50 basis (with Vice President Kamala Harris serving as the tie-breaker), Sen. Joe Manchin (D-WV) would most likely chair the Energy and Natural Resources Committee in 2021. Though Manchin is not known as a wilderness champion, we would likely see more support for Wilderness in the committee under Democratic control.

**U.S. House.** Democrats retained control of the House of Representatives, but with a narrower margin. This means that Rep. Raúl Grijalva will continue to chair the Natural Resources Committee, through which wilderness legislation must pass in the House. Rep. Grijalva is a wilderness supporter and has good committee staff, so progress may be made on various wilderness initiatives. But with a narrower majority, Chair Grijalva and Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) will have a more challenging time to pass any new wilderness legislation in the 117th Congress, particularly to pass wilderness legislation that could also pass a likely-Republican Senate. Still, the House can help control the conversation, raise the issues that need to be raised, and engage in oversight of the agencies and their programs.

**Lame-Duck Session.** Congress will likely re-convene in November and December for a “lame duck” session of current members before the new Congress begins in January. COVID-19 relief measures will likely be a top priority in the lame-duck session. It’s unclear whether any wilderness bills will be addressed.

Even though the Biden Administration will be much more favorable to Wilderness than the Trump Administration, wilderness advocates still will have our work cut out for us in 2021. We need to push the Biden Administration hard on most wilderness issues in order to get attention in a packed agenda. Repairing damage from the Trump Administration will also be a top priority, which President-elect Biden has indicated he will try to do right away using executive orders. But not all of the Trump damage can be un-done through executive orders in the first 100 days. As always, Congress and the new Administration will need to be lobbied and pushed to protect Wilderness.

The new administration will certainly be better than Trump’s slash-and-burn, scorched-earth policies on Wilderness and public lands.

Kevin Proescholdt is the conservation director for Wilderness Watch.
Livestock Damaging Fragile Desert Wildernesses

Wilderness Watch is pushing back on a Bureau of Land Management (BLM) proposal to continue to allow livestock grazing in the North and South Maricopa Mountains Wildernesses in the Sonoran Desert National Monument in southern Arizona. The Sonoran Desert is generally unsuitable for grazing due to arid conditions and fragile desert soils and vegetation, but the BLM wants to maintain wilderness grazing despite the damage to the Wildernesses.

The BLM has withdrawn a decision on part of the Big Springs livestock grazing allotment renewal in southern ID in response to an appeal by WW and Western Watersheds Project. The 100-square-mile allotment is critical wildlife habitat for sage-grouse, pygmy rabbits, mule deer, bighorn sheep, and other native species, and includes part of the Owyhee River Wilderness. BLM proposed a nearly five-fold increase in livestock grazing, although it's unclear whether the increase would occur in Wilderness. BLM would also allow ranchers to drive in the Wilderness to haul supplies. We also commented on an EA for a second part of the Big Springs allotment, which BLM has divided into a total of three separate pieces for analysis. Current grazing continues on the allotments. We'll keep you posted.

Scapegoat: Wilderness or Fish Hatchery?

Wilderness Watch is urging the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (FWP) to scrap a plan to poison 60 miles of the North Fork Blackfoot River and its headwater tributaries and three small lakes in the Scapegoat Wilderness. The plan calls for at least 60 helicopter flights to haul in poisons and other equipment, a motor boat, and generators and other motorized equipment in the Wilderness. The Scapegoat is part of the famed Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex in northwest Montana.

The streams, lakes, and upper reaches of the North Fork Blackfoot River scheduled for poisoning are naturally fishless. This is FWP’s attempt to kill the non-native fish it has stocked in these streams for decades. But, the agency’s ultimate goal isn’t to restore this natural condition—after the poisoning is deemed complete, the agency plans to restock the streams with westslope cutthroat trout.

Poisoning streams and stocking fish in naturally fishless waters wreaks havoc on the natural aquatic ecosystem. In our comments, we noted that the poison rotenone has been shown to kill many of the organisms that derive oxygen from the water, including aquatic vertebrates and invertebrates, amphibians, and other species that naturally occur in these streams. Introducing westslope cutthroat—a voracious predator—into naturally fishless ecosystems has been shown to have devastating effects on natural systems throughout the West. Creating more angling opportunities is not a legitimate justification for trammeling and manipulating Wilderness, and FWP needs to drop this plan.

E-Bike Threat Grows

Wilderness Watch is urging the Forest Service (FS) to drop its plan for expanding electric bike, or e-bike, use in our National Forests. E-bikes are already allowed on about 60,000 miles—nearly 40 percent—of trails in National Forests and Grasslands. The proposed rule has the potential to affect millions of acres of public land, and poses significant problems for wildlife, other trail users, and protected areas like Wilderness.

Unlike the National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, and Fish and Wildlife Service, the FS proposes to continue classifying e-bikes as motor vehicles, which is good. However, we’re concerned that it appears that the reason for the rule is to allow e-bikes on non-motorized trails in the future because the agency is treating e-bikes differently than other motor vehicles. That could conflict with the agency’s own Travel Management Rule and has the potential to impact the environment, so the agency should analyze such a proposal under the National Environmental Policy Act.
Don’t "Manscape" the Missions

Wilderness Watch has submitted a formal Objection to a Forest Service (FS) proposal to ignite fire on 13,500 acres and plant white bark pine on 2,000 acres in the Mission Mountains Wilderness in northwest Montana. This is part of a larger 15-year proposal for logging up to 40,000 acres of the Flathead National Forest.

The Forest Service claims burning and logging are needed to reduce wildfire risk to homes, but the plan ignores climate change as the underlying cause of hotter fires and fails to protect property or lives since research shows conditions in a structure’s immediate area, not in forests far from communities, determine home ignition.

This proposal would allow an undetermined number of fire ignitions over a number of years via helicopter in the Wilderness. The FS should instead allow natural fires to burn in the Wilderness.

The Forest Service wants to ignore a fundamental tenet of Wilderness—its “untrammeled” quality—and plant blister rust-resistant white bark pines. This not only manipulates Wilderness, but likely won’t work. This experiment could further endanger white bark pine across the landscape—blister rust is a highly adaptive fungus and planting blister rust-resistant trees will likely select for rust that can overcome trees thought to be rust-resistant. The Forest Service needs to drop this plant-and-burn plan for the Missions.

We’re opposing prescribed fire, vegetation manipulation, and associated motorized use elsewhere in Wilderness, such as in the Powderhorn in Colorado and the Mt. Graham Wilderness Study Area in Arizona.

Fish and Wildlife Service Blindly Expands Hunting

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) has approved a plan to greatly expand hunting in many National Wildlife Refuges (NWR). FWS failed to complete adequate analysis of the impacts to Wilderness due to expected increased use. Our concerns over the plan’s impact on the Cabeza Prieta Wilderness in Arizona, Crab Orchard Wilderness in Illinois, Fort Niobrara Wilderness in Nebraska, and the Bosque Del Apache Wilderness in New Mexico were not addressed.

The FWS is now allowing previously prohibited predator hunting and year-round hunting for certain species; a near doubling in visitor use at Cabeza Prieta NWR which will impact wildlife, solitude, and the desert’s fragile soil and vegetation; and possible motorized or mechanized access into the Cabeza Prieta Wilderness by bighorn sheep hunters, despite the Wilderness Act’s prohibition on such use.

We’ll keep tracking the impacts of this significant new hunting in the Refuge Wildernesses.

Bridger-Teton Wilderness be Dammed?

This past summer the Forest Service (FS) approved a plan to allow the Silver Lake Irrigation District to drive heavy equipment, including a drill rig and excavator, several miles into the Bridger-Teton Wilderness in Wyoming to do survey work on its private irrigation dam in the Wilderness. The FS failed to notify the public and approved the project despite its own analysis that determined negative impacts to the wilderness qualities of untrammeled, undeveloped, natural, and solitude/primitive. Upon hearing the decision, WW and other groups filed a formal Objection, which the FS promptly denied. A full-scale dam reconstruction proposal could follow this initial work.
2020 is just about over...

By Brett Haverstick

It’s safe to say that 2020 will be a year to remember, or a year to forget. Both sentiments are equally justifiable. We witnessed historical impeachment hearings, suffered through a global pandemic, watched protests and riots unfold across the country, and recorded record-breaking temperatures and ice melt.

The National Wilderness Preservation System hasn’t gone unscathed, either. Government agencies responsible for the stewardship of Wilderness have proposed and/or approved non-conforming activities such as prescribed burns, tree plantings, stream poisonings, predator control, increased grazing, motorized access, oil and gas leasing, and more. And with your support, we haven’t backed down one bit. We’ve managed to keep the pressure on.

As the year comes to a close, we want to say THANK YOU for responding to our action alerts, making phone calls, testifying at virtual public hearings, renewing your membership, and making important donations in the defense of wildness. Your support has guided us through a very dark year. We realize that it has been a very, very challenging year for you, as well.

Please consider including us in your end-of-year giving, if you are in a position to do so. Annual membership is $30.00, and we also offer a secure monthly donor program. Contributing to our Forever Wild Endowment is another option and a great way to ensure the legacy of Wilderness. Call me in the office at 406-542-2048, ext1 or email me at brethh@wildernesswatch.org, and we can work together to fulfill your goals.

Here’s to a new year and wilder wilderness system!

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On the Watch (continued from page 5)

Ambler Road Heads to Court

On October 7, six Alaska Native tribal councils and a tribal consortium with 42 members filed suit against a destructive and unnecessary industrial road that would cross a wide swath of the southern Brooks Range in Alaska. The road will facilitate huge mining operations for the benefit a private Canadian company at the expense of Wilderness and wildlife.

The Bureau of Land Management approved the Ambler Road on July 23, despite public opposition from WW members and others. The 211-mile road to the so-called Ambler Mining District would cross part of Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve—one of our wildest parks, with no roads, no trails, and no established campsites. We’ll keep you posted.
Wilderness in the Courts

Predator Killing in Wildernesses, AK

We’ve been updating you about our ongoing litigation supporting 2015 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and National Park Service regulations aimed at protecting predators in National Wildlife Refuges, National Preserves, and Wildernesses in Alaska. These regulations banned the most barbaric hunting practices authorized by the Alaska Board of Game’s “intensive management” law, including shooting wolves and pups during denning season, bear baiting, killing mother bears with cubs—even while in their winter dens, trapping and snaring bears, using aircraft and motor vehicles to pursue and shoot wildlife, using machine guns to kill wildlife, killing animals while they are swimming, and using electronic devices (such as artificial light and remote location devices) to track and kill animals. With the exception of subsistence hunting, the Fish and Wildlife Service and Park Service regulations prohibited these activities within Wildlife Refuges and National Preserves in Alaska, but Safari Club International, Alaska Professional Hunters Association, and the State of Alaska challenged them in court relying on the familiar “federal overreach” argument. We intervened in the lawsuits to help defend the regulations.

Over the last few months, while litigation over the more protective regulations was still pending, the Trump administration issued roll-back rules, essentially nullifying the protections afforded by the 2015 regulations and giving the green light to Alaska’s abhorrent “intensive management” activities. With the exception of subsistence hunting, the Fish and Wildlife Service and Park Service regulations prohibited these activities within Wildlife Refuges and National Preserves in Alaska, but Safari Club International, Alaska Professional Hunters Association, and the State of Alaska challenged them in court relying on the familiar “federal overreach” argument. We intervened in the lawsuits to help defend the regulations.

Oil and Gas Drilling in the Arctic, AK

In August, we joined a coalition of groups in a lawsuit against Interior for opening the entire coastal plain in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, which includes the Mollie Beattie Wilderness, to oil and gas leasing. The Arctic Refuge—known as the “Serengeti of the Arctic”—has long stood alone as our wildest, most ecologically intact and critical landscape in the United States, and it is the largest system of public lands and waters set aside for wildlife conservation in the world. It is the calving grounds for the Porcupine Caribou Herd, a herd famous for its 2,700-mile annual migration—the longest overland migration of any terrestrial mammal on the planet. It is also essential for the critically imperiled Southern Beaufort Sea polar bears, providing the highest density of onshore polar bear denning habitat in the Arctic. This iconic area has been federally protected from oil and gas development until 2017, when the Trump administration pushed through a rider to tax reform legislation, opening up this iconic area to exploitation. Adding insult to injury, Interior selected the most brazenly broad and harmful alternative from its Environmental Impact Statement, opening “the entire program area” to oil and gas leasing, “and consequently for future potential exploration, development, and transportation.” The lawsuit is in its early stages, and we’re gearing up for a big fight.

E-bikes in National Parks

Back in December 2019, we filed suit challenging a National Park Service directive instructing all Park Superintendents to immediately treat electric bicycles the same as bicycles and allowing them “where traditional bicycles are allowed.” The directive exacerbates the already growing issue of overcrowding in National Parks and threats to wildlife from increased human access, and it is part of a larger push to get bicycles and e-bikes into wilder and more remote places, including Wilderness. The directive was given without formal rulemaking or environmental review, was the product of closed-door meetings with an industry advisory committee called the “E-bike Partner & Agency Group,” and it was yet another authorization carried out by unconfirmed Interior employees unlawfully seated by the Trump administration. The case has been slow-moving, and Interior recently issued a formal rule for e-bikes in National Parks and sought to dismiss our case as moot. We are currently opposing Interior’s motion to dismiss and are looking at challenging the many deficiencies with the newly released rule.
Hi everyone! My name is Marlee and I’m a third year law student at the University of Michigan. I’m interested in public lands conservation, particularly Wilderness and wildlife issues, and I was fortunate enough to intern with Dana Johnson (WW’s staff attorney) this past summer. I learned how special Wilderness is while doing trail work in the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness before law school. Due to that experience I was excited to learn about the legal framework of the Wilderness Act and federal agency management of Wilderness areas.

During my internship I researched legal cases and agency administrative documents involving activities prohibited under the Wilderness Act. The ultimate goal of my project was to better inform WW in its ongoing efforts to protect Wilderness from agency projects involving prohibited activities like motorized equipment, helicopters, and the construction of permanent structures. I also conducted legal research in support of WW’s comment on the proposed Enchanted Valley Chalet project in the Olympic National Park Wilderness. Even in a remote format (due to the pandemic) my internship was a fantastic experience. It was inspiring to see how hardworking and generous everyone at WW is and how wholeheartedly they care about protecting Wilderness. I could not have learned from and gotten to know a better group.

I plan to continue fighting for the protection of wild ecosystems after graduation. My other experiences include externing with the Western Environmental Law Center, acting as a student attorney with Michigan Law’s Environmental Law Clinic, and interning with the Alaska Attorney General’s Office. I was named a Wyss Scholar for the Conservation of the American West, which provided funding for my work at WW. In my free time I love to read, hike and backpack with my two dogs, and go searching for wild berries.