

## *What is Wilderness Without its Wolves?*

By Franz Camenzind

For millennia, wolves have occupied nearly all the lands now designated as Wilderness in the western U.S., with the exception of coastal California. Yet today, fewer than two score of the approximately 540 Wildernesses west of the 100th meridian (not including Alaska's 48) can claim some number of wolves as residents and only a dozen or so harbor wolves in numbers sufficient to be considered sustainable—in either the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, Central Idaho Wildlands or Montana's Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem. Arguably, the long-term sustainability of wolves in other Wilderness areas is at risk due to the limited security provided by those smaller, often isolated landscapes.

The Wilderness Act defines Wilderness as a place where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by humankind, retains its primeval character and where natural conditions are preserved. Simply stated, Wilderness is meant to exist with minimal human interference. Yet within the vast majority of Wilderness areas, the wolf, the

apex species with profound ecosystem influence, is now absent—an absence due entirely to the relentless killing by humankind.

We need look no farther than

Yellowstone National Park to witness the influence wolves have on an ecosystem. The park's wolves were exterminated by the early 1900s, ostensibly to protect the park's favored elk herds. What followed was not surprising—an overabundance of elk which led to deleterious impacts to vegetation, particularly lower elevation riparian and willow communities.

Since the reintroduction of wolves to the park in the mid-1990s, elk numbers have dropped to levels most

ecologists agree resemble something near carrying capacity. Similarly, park wolf numbers stabilized around 100, after initial highs of 150–170. With the wolf's return, the park ecosystem is showing signs of reaching a dynamic equilibrium beneficial to all components. It's not an exaggeration to say that wolves were instrumental in returning the park's wildlands nearer to their primeval conditions.



Franz Camenzind

Wolves hold apex status, in part, because of their far-ranging hunting behavior. Yellowstone-area wolf packs hunt in territories ranging from 185–310 square miles. Besides being smaller, the Yellowstone elk herd is more dispersed and spends less time in the lower elevation meadows and riparian-willow communities.

Most ecologists agree that the wolf's collective impact on elk is contributing to the resurgence of the willow communities, which in turn is witnessing an increase in avian biodiversity and density. The revitalization of Yellowstone's northern range willow communities has also enabled an increase in the beaver population,

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Like so many people, this summer I got out and about much more than I had been. It was such a treat to visit both new and treasured places. And I wasn't alone. National Forests and National Parks across the country reported large increases in the number of visitors, many setting attendance records. While recreation impacts on our public lands have for years been a valid concern, this past year should highlight how necessary it is to find a solution to the impacts caused by these growing numbers of visitors. It is possible people new to enjoying our public lands might just bring a needed contribution to advocacy; they are now finding and using public lands and can be a voice to make sure our forests and parks are protected. But it isn't just too many visitors that are negatively impacting our Wilderness areas. The agencies that are supposed to be supervising these lands often make decisions that cause harm.

This edition of the *Wilderness Watcher* covers issues critical to designated Wilderness that are being considered in Congress, working their way through the court system, or on the drawing boards of the federal land management agencies. These issues impact the Wildernesses we visit, and that we can appreciate for their beauty and solitude. There is an article on why wolves are an important part of Wilderness and what WW is doing to stop Idaho's and Montana's war on wolves. Updates from Congress, in the Courts, and in the field describe how a proposed wilderness bill, aside from designating multiple new Wilderness areas, has damaging provisions; the latest on the effort to ensure that the Arctic Refuge is never drilled for oil or gas, plus multiple examples of agency projects and decisions that would harm Wilderness. Each of these topics encompasses a community that cares, that wants to make sure protections continue, and in some cases, involved people contacting Wilderness Watch for help or to help.

We've also included a wonderful piece—*Wilderness and Traditional Indigenous Beliefs: Conflicting or Intersecting Perspectives on the Human-Nature Relationship?*—for our readers to hear the unique voices of Cu'pik and Gwich'in people on Wilderness and their relationship to the land, and consider Wilderness from an historical lens as well. We've included this piece as we see the need for the wilderness community to address the contention that Wilderness and Indigenous cultures are inherently at odds with each other, or worse, that the wilderness idea "erases Indigenous people from the landscape."

For 32 years Wilderness Watch has been actively protecting Wilderness areas across the country, making sure the letter and spirit of the Wilderness Act are followed. For any specific area it might be the wilderness visitors, advocates, the federal land managers and employees, or the courts that drive, support and determine a positive outcome on a problematic issue. Despite bad decisions proposed for or made on our public lands, or the poorly crafted wilderness bills that erode the intent and the word of law in the Wilderness Act, there is hope in that Wilderness Watch and our members and supporters bring these violations and poor policies into view and correct them.

Wilderness Watch will continue at the forefront of actions that will assure all of us are able to experience Wilderness without development, or heavy-handed management, that provide the break from our expanding and intense societal dominance. We need the supporters, the people who turn to Wilderness for the benefits it provides each of us, those who have seen or had or remember being uplifted by their time in Wilderness. Wilderness Watch works for and with communities to achieve these benefits and protections. Thank you to all who support and advocate for Wilderness with us. 🌿

—Louise Lasley



**WILDERNESS WATCH**

*Keeping Wilderness Wild*

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

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## *What is Wilderness without its Wolves? (Continued from page 1)*

leading to positive changes to stream ecology, thus benefitting aquatic invertebrates and the fisheries.

Many of the ecological changes brought about by the wolf's return may take years if not decades to recognize and fully understand. But one thing is clear, today's Yellowstone and the Wildernesses harboring robust wolf populations more closely resemble their primeval character than those lacking wolves. Wolves may just be nature's best wilderness stewards.

Three states now account for the majority of the west's wolves: Idaho (1,556), Montana (1,220) and Wyoming (347). Another 351 are tallied for Washington (178) and Oregon (173). Mexican Gray Wolves occur in two states: New Mexico (114) and Arizona (72). Combined, approximately 3,660 wolves currently reside west of the 100th meridian—a number that pales to the 250,000 to 2 million estimated to have resided in the entire United States before the European invasion. However, the current numbers are better than the few dozen residing in north-west Montana three decades ago, which were a result of wolves immigrating from Canada.

Today's bad news is that wolves in Idaho and Montana are once again facing the vigilante actions of the 1800s. Both state legislatures recently passed draconian legislation with the stated objective of reducing wolf numbers to near 150—the number at which the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will take over wolf management as per the states' wolf management agreements in effect since Endangered Species Act protections were taken away from wolves.

The new legislation authorizes the state commissions to allow wolf-killing by pretty much any means imaginable: the use of traps and snares, unlimited quotas, extended hunting and trapping seasons, and in Idaho, night time hunting, aerial gunning and killing pups in dens. Idaho also designated \$200,000 to "cover expenses incurred" by private individuals while killing wolves—essentially imposing a bounty on wolves.

Idaho's and Montana's aggressive wolf-killing legislation has been temporarily dampened a bit by the states' wildlife commissions which have some leeway when setting annual wolf hunting and trapping regulations. For instance, this season, Montana is limiting the

open-ended quotas written into their legislation. But the intent and goals remain unchanged—it may just take a few more years to achieve those goals. Ironically, that means more wolves will be killed because each year the survivors will produce young, thus replenishing their numbers, resulting in "a need" to kill more wolves to reach the 150 goal.

State wildlife agencies manage wolves by the numbers, ignoring the fact that wolves are one of the most social species on the planet, and function and survive not as individuals, but as members of highly structured packs. Consequently, intense, random killing can cause packs to break up, resulting in diminished hunting efficiency and pushing wolves toward easier prey, such as livestock.

Today, wolves and the wilderness ecosystems they inhabit are imminently threatened by these irresponsible state efforts to kill upwards of 90 percent of their wolf populations, including within Wilderness. A weakened or removed apex species inevitably results in a weakened

ecological system. If this barbaric killing is allowed to proceed, ecosystem function and wilderness protection will be pushed back decades.

Wilderness Watch continues to fight for Wilderness and its wolves, and, along with Earthjustice, filed a 60-day Notice of Intent to sue Idaho and Montana for their new barbaric anti-wolf statutes. We've petitioned the U.S. Department of Agriculture to promulgate rules or issue closure orders preventing certain killing methods, hired killers, and paying bounties in Wilderness. Wilderness Watch also joined a petition authored by Western Watersheds Project to relist wolves under the Endangered Species Act in light of the new, aggressive wolf-killing statutes. In response, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced that it will undertake a status review of the gray wolf over the next 12 months.

A Wilderness denied of its wolves is a wounded Wilderness. If wolves can't be allowed live in Wilderness, where can they live? Wilderness Watch will continue to do all it can to protect this critical, symbiotic relationship and the ecological integrity of Wilderness itself. ♪

*Franz Camenzind is a wildlife biologist turned filmmaker and environmental activist who recently retired from the WW Board after serving 6 years.*

# On the Watch

## *WW objects to Mission Mountains Wilderness trammeling*



On October 25, Wilderness Watch filed a formal objection to the Forest Service's (FS) *Mid-Swan Landscape Restoration and Wildland Urban Interface Project*. This 15-year project entails widespread habitat manipulation in the Mission Mountains Wilderness in northwest Montana—with the FS igniting fire from helicopters across 5,887 acres of Wilderness (plus 7,800 acres of recommended Wilderness) and selectively planting white bark pine across 1,860 acres. The Missions are important habitat for native wildlife such as elk, grizzly bears, mountain goats, mountain lions, and wolves.

The FS should allow the area's natural processes to determine where and when fires burn, and what the distribution of white bark pine is. The agency claims burning and logging is needed to reduce wildfire risk to homes, but its argument fails to address climate change as the

underlying cause of hotter fires, or protect property or lives since home ignition is determined by conditions in a home's immediate area, and not in forests far from communities. Trying to short-circuit an evolutionary process of tree adaption is not only likely to fail, but may further endanger white bark pine across the landscape since white pine blister rust is highly adaptive and would likely overcome trees previously thought to be rust-resistant.

This massive landscaping project threatens not only the Mission Mountains, but would set a dangerous precedent for other Wildernesses. It violates the fundamental tenets of the Wilderness Act, strikes at the heart of Wilderness as a place free from intentional human intervention, and raises the very question of whether we allow Wilderness to persist into the future. ♪

## *Good changes proposed for Wichita Mountains Wilderness*



Wilderness Watch is supporting a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) proposal that would restore more natural conditions in the Wichita Mountains Wilderness in southwest Oklahoma. The Wilderness is located in the Wichita Mountains National Wildlife Refuge, which is home to a herd of bison, with habitats such as mixed-grass prairie and oak forests. The Wilderness consists of two units: the 2,847-acre North Mountain unit in the north-central part of the Refuge's "special use area" closed to public access; and the 5,723-acre Charons Garden unit in the southwestern part of the Refuge that sits in the Refuge's "public use area."

FWS's good proposals would specifically improve and protect the Charons Garden Wilderness unit at the Wichita Mountains Wilderness. The FWS proposes to demolish the current Headquarters building

near the Charons Garden Wilderness unit and construct a new Headquarters complex near the Visitor Center about five miles away from the Wilderness, convert the Treasure Lake "cherry-stemmed" road to a hiking trail on southern edge of the Wilderness, remove the abandoned Treasure Lake Job Corps Civilian Conservation Center at the southern edge of the Wilderness and create a new wilderness access point there, and remove bridges, a sewage lagoon, and the sight of buildings from the Wilderness. The FWS's good proposal will improve and protect the Wichita Mountains Wilderness. ♪

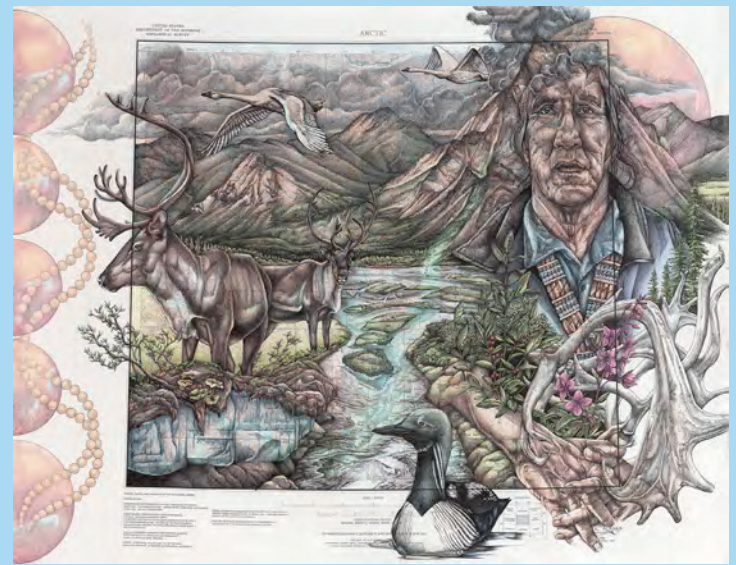
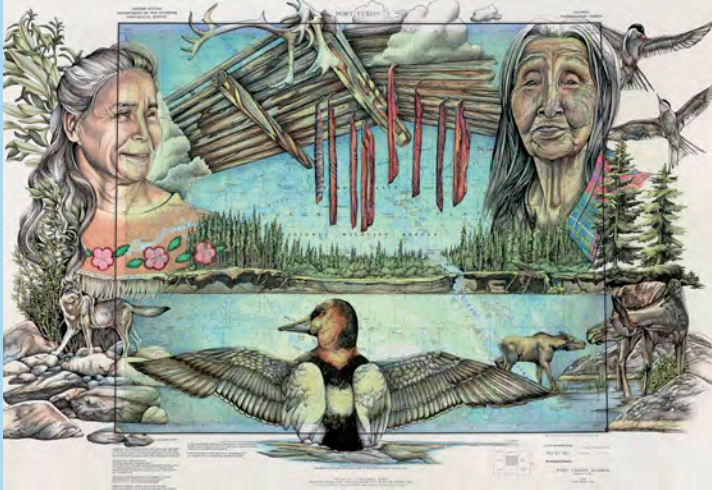
## *Protect natural sounds in National Parks*

Wilderness Watch is encouraging the National Park Service (NPS) to protect natural sounds as it develops its first air tour management plans. Many National Parks and even Wildernesses are plagued by the intrusion of commercial, low-level "flightseeing" air tours which can be incredibly noisy and shatter the quiet and solitude for visitors and wildlife.

The first NPS plans—for Mount Rainier, Olympic, Everglades, and Death Valley—all permit some number of air tours over Wilderness though such tours are always at odds with experiencing the quiet and solitude of wild places and should be prohibited over National Parks and Wilderness. The Park Service needs to instead provide the public with a "no flight" alternative to comment on in each National Park, rather than only soliciting public comments on allowing some level of air tours. ♪



# Wilderness and Traditional Indigenous Beliefs:



## Conflicting or Intersecting Perspectives on the Human-Nature Relationship?

*By Roger Kaye, Polly Napiryuk Andrews, and Bernadette Dimientieff, with artwork by Lindsay Carron.*

Indigenous people had no word for Wilderness. What are the implications of this increasingly noted fact? Is Wilderness just an Euro-American cultural construct? Is it somehow neglectful or disrespectful of Indigenous cultures? Let's consider these questions from a historic wilderness perspective and from Indigenous Cu'pik and Gwich'in perspectives.

### An Historical Wilderness Perspective, by Roger Kaye

First, we share concern about the disproportionate focus on differences between traditional Indigenous beliefs and the wilderness concept these days, and inadequate recognition of what they have in common. For example, uniting many traditional Indigenous beliefs and the Wilderness concept are fundamental, underlying ideas, values, and guides for behavior relating to:

- Human's role in the larger world
- The interrelatedness of humans and the larger community of life
- The need for humility, respect, and restraint in relating to nature



These themes comprise what Henry Thoreau, an early wilderness proponent, summarized as "Indian wisdom." They echo through Indigenous campfire stories, songs, and ceremony and they resonate through the early wilderness literature. But here is another, growing commonality: We all now face unprecedented global-scale environmental threats that neither founders of the wilderness movement nor Indigenous Elders

could have foreseen. Threatening are climate change, pollution, resource sustainability, and loss of biodiversity. Threatened are wildlands, subsistence resources, even the biosphere that all inhabitants of this Earth share. So more and more, wilderness interests and Indigenous people are working together to further our common values and hopes for the future.

So why is the concept of Wilderness often considered alien to Indigenous cultures? For several reasons. In part, it's because some wilderness ideas developed from ethnocentric notions about America as a frontier. And it is also partly because early wilderness writers and advocates had little knowledge of the complementary Indigenous beliefs about human's place in nature. But while the inappropriateness of the frontier ideology is increasingly recognized and being abandoned, Indigenous visions are finding greater voice among wilderness organizations, agencies, and literature.

It is true that early Indigenous people had no conception of wilderness—but neither did western people before they were exposed to the environmental degradations that led to development of the wilderness ethic. We should remember that

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*Images on this page. Upper right: Lindsay Carron artwork representing Arctic Village, featuring Trimble Gilbert. Upper left: Lindsay Carron artwork representing FYukon flats featuring Julie Mahler and Clara Joseph. Center: Author Roger Kaye.*



**Lindsay Carron's Fish & Wildlife Service artist-in-residence project** seeks to give visual expression to the ancestral and continuing connection of Indigenous people to Alaska's wildlife refuges. Her works feature Native people and wild animals embedded in the wilderness. "Mystical symbolism" is how one writer described the art because it represents more than the Indigenous people's ongoing subsistence and cultural relationship to these wild landscapes.



The project was stimulated by a Gwich'in spiritual leader, the Dr. Reverend Trimble Gilbert of Arctic Village. He told the Fish and Wildlife Service that when he looks over his homeland, now the Arctic Refuge, he sees "the land that holds the bones of thousands of generations of my ancestors." He explained how every caribou eaten contains some elements of those ancestors' being, thus making the hunt something of a communion with them, a living link, as he described it, between the past and present.

And beyond this organic connection, Trimble reminds us that before his homeland was overlain with the Western refuge-wilderness-conservation ideology, the Gwich'in had a holistic, harmonious worldview of this land and its creatures that prescribed human's appropriate relationship to them. This traditional worldview, he says, underpins the Gwich'in peoples' strident efforts to protect the Refuge's coastal plain as Wilderness, and their expanding advocacy for just and sustainable environmental policies.

Lindsay's art was intended to serve as a background for discussion about how the Refuge System can better

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the wilderness idea evolved and continues to evolve, as do all concepts of environmental ethics, in response to new understandings and changes in society and its relationship to the environment.

The idea of Wilderness we have today is not an inherent component of Western culture. In fact, it is relatively recent. The Wilderness concept arose largely in response to changes wrought by the Industrial Revolution. The wilderness movement began in the late 1920s and accelerated after World War II in response to a new, unprecedented order of environmental threat. It was in reaction to the industrialization, urbanization, the rapid loss of natural areas, destructive logging, mining, and agricultural practices, and the spread of pollution and pesticides. These weren't part of the world pre-contact people lived in, but they are now part of the world we all share. Before widespread environmental alteration and degradation, there was no need for a concept of areas left free from them. But there is now.

An unfortunate misunderstanding has been that the wilderness idea somehow erases Indigenous people from the landscape. It is true that pre-contact Indigenous populations and their activities were, until recent years, little understood. But the Wilderness Act's description of Wilderness as a place "... where man is [currently] a visitor and does not remain" does not imply that wilderness lands were "pristine" or devoid of any Indigenous history or effect. That is why the Act defines an area qualified to become Wilderness as "*generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable*" (Section 2(c), emphasis added). In fact, when wilderness movement leader Bob Marshall defined Wilderness, he specifically recognized that "trails and temporary shelters, which were common long before the advent of the white race, are entirely permissible." Remember, the idea of Wilderness was a reaction against the modern, new order of environmental threat. It was certainly not at variance with the Indigenous people or their sustainable lifeways, which in fact, wilderness literature often romanticized.

#### **A Cup'ik Perspective, by Polly Napiryuk Andrews**

It is true that my Cup'ik ancestors had no word for Wilderness. Nor did we have words for airplanes, computers, or the internet, or for climate change, endangered species or biodiversity either. But we've adopted these words and concepts for the modern, altered, and changing world we now live in.

Yes, there are differences between our traditional worldview and the

Wilderness concept. But too often we focus too much on differences. So we don't see the more important underlying values and hopes for our descendants that we have in common. And that commonality is what's most important, and not just for these areas of our homelands that Congress made Wilderness. It's important too because the central message of the Wilderness concept as it developed over the last 5 or 6 generations, and the beliefs that have guided my Cup'ik ancestors for some 500 or 600 generations, can contribute much toward addressing the new huge-scale environmental threats we now all face.

We've seen on our land the many and worsening effects of climate change. We know our oceans are becoming acidic, our air polluted. These threaten all the Earth's peoples



in corporate Indigenous history into its philosophy and informational programs. It helps us recognize that the Indigenous belief system is an inherent part of wilderness character, enhancing its meaning and the experience of visitors.

But perhaps most importantly, as we stumble into the Anthropocene era, altering our world and ourselves, precepts of the Indigenous worldview that the art helps illustrate can help lead us, as Trimble says, to a more just and sustainable world. As opposed to the Dominant Western Worldview, premised on human separateness from and right to dominant Nature, Indigenous beliefs remind us that humans are an interdependent part of and belong within Nature. They lead us to question the belief that the accumulation of stuff and wealth are what brings well-being, as opposed to sharing, reciprocity and sense of community. As opposed to the assumption that science and technology can solve any problems incidental to “progress,” they remind us of the need for humility and skepticism.

Such Indigenous beliefs, like the wilderness ethic, are often at variance with modern Western assumptions, paradigms, and worldviews. But they both remind us that there can be other, more healthy and sustainable ways of relating to the world.

*Lindsay's portraits of Polly and Bernadette are part of her independent **Indigenous Women Who Speak for the Earth** project.*

and all creatures and all generations ahead of us. Ultimately, these threats come from human's increasingly unsustainable behavior and that's rooted in how we see ourselves in relation to the natural world. I believe that we all need to remember the importance of the ancient idea of living in harmony with—not dominating—this world. That idea is most apprehensible to those who live closest to the land, but if you go back far enough, it's part of everyone's' human heritage.

This is what the author of the Wilderness Act, Howard Zahniser, described as “a piece of the long ago we still have with us.” In explaining “The Need for Wilderness Areas,” Zahniser wrote:

In the wilderness it is possible to sense most keenly our membership in the whole community of life on the Earth. . . . We deeply need the humility to know ourselves as the dependent members of a great community of life . . . to know the wilderness is to know a profound humility, to recognize one's littleness, to sense dependence and interdependence, indebtedness, and responsibility.

Zahniser wrote this in the 1950s and it became part of the history of the Wilderness Act. But hardly known is the fact that for thousands of years this sentiment underlying the wilderness concept was part of my Cup'ik people's oral tradition. Let me provide one example: The story of the boy who went to live with the seals.

Long ago, there was a couple who wanted their only son to learn how to become a great hunter, and part of that was knowing the proper and reciprocal relationship between humans and the animals. So they arranged for a shaman to send the boy to live with the seals for a year. Down through a hole in the ice he went, and the story goes on to tell how over the year the seals taught him to see the world and human's role in it from the seal's point of view. And what he learned was really much like those things Zahniser later wrote about—that animals aren't there just for human exploitation, but they, like us, are members of a larger community of life. We must treat them with respect, and with a sense of humility and kinship because our futures are intertwined. What is good or bad for the seals is the same for us; we are interdependent.

Imagine . . . as stories enable us to do, seeing the human-nature relationship from the point of view of the creatures with whom we share this Earth. There's a message in this and other stories that complements and gives multicultural meaning to that message of the Wilderness concept. Perhaps we all, like the boy, will wish to learn from other's ways of seeing humans in relation to the natural world, and from other, older ways of expressing the relationship upon which our mutual well-being depends.

### **A Gwich'in Perspective, by Bernadette Dimientieff**

At the first Gwich'in gathering in over 150 years the Alaskan and Canadian Gwich'in tribes came together for an historic meeting. Oil development was threatening “Lizhik Gwats'an Gwandaii Goodlit” known to our people as the “Sacred Place Where Life Begins”, known nationally as the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

At that gathering the Elders directed the Gwich'in Nation to go out and tell the world we are here, to work in a good way and not compromise our position. To fight for the



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permanent protection of our sacred lands.

We advocate for Wilderness because it will provide the strongest protection for the birthing grounds of the Porcupine caribou herd. We are the caribou people; a piece of the caribou heart lies within us and a piece of the Gwich'in heart lies within the caribou and it has been so since time immemorial. They are a part of who we are as a people, our way of life, our food security and our identity.

But our concern goes beyond maintaining the numbers of caribou for hunting, nutrition, and continuing traditions. We have a spiritual and cultural connection with the caribou. We treat them with respect and humility because we are related to them. And as science now shows, caribou are central to the healthy ecological function of the environment in which we live and in which our culture developed.

More than any other modern land category or management system, Wilderness recognizes our way of relating to the land and the Earth. The wilderness idea that humans are part of a larger "community of life" (and should act like it) has been known to my people for millennia.

We don't only feel attacked by climate change but by our own government too. We fight against both oil development in the Arctic Refuge and climate change, each rooted in today's secular, consumptive and unsustainable lifestyles. The Gwich'in Steering Committee works with organizations like the Alaska Wilderness League and the Wilderness Society to address these two related threats.

Gwich'in People provide an example of how we can live as respectful, interdependent, and low-impact members of this Earth's community of life. The wilderness concept helps provide English words for what my ancestors have always intuitively known of this community. We are simple people, we understand if we take care of the land, the land will take care of us. We are interconnected to the land, water and animals.





# On the Watch (Continued)

## *Supersonic jets and wilderness don't mix*



U.S. Air Force Tech Sgt. Brian Ferguson

Wilderness Watch is working to prevent the expansion of low-level flights by supersonic F-15E Strike Eagle fighter jets over Wilderness in the Owyhee Canyonlands in Idaho and the Jarbidge Wilderness in Nevada. Such flights would shatter the area's natural sounds, ruin the wilderness experience for visitors, and stress wildlife.

The Pole Creek, North Fork Owyhee, Little Jacks Creek, Big Jacks Creek, Bruneau-Jarbidge Rivers, and Owyhee River Wildernesses total 516,000 acres, and are important wildlife habitat for native species, including the greater sage-grouse, whose population is in steep decline. The remote Jarbidge Wilderness is one of the least visited Wildernesses in the lower 48.

An out-of-court settlement currently restricts low-level supersonic military overflights in most of the Wildernesses in the Owyhee Canyonlands. The proposed action keeps that agreement, but allows low-level supersonic flights outside of the agreement area—in the Jarbidge and North Fork of the Owyhee Wildernesses. Since military training exercises are always at odds with Wilderness and should be prohibited, the area's current restrictions on overflights should be expanded to include the Jarbidge and all of the Owyhee Canyonland Wildernesses. 🐾

## *Wilderness should always be free*



Dan Nevill-via Flickr

Wilderness Watch is pushing back against a plan to charge people to camp at Crater Lake, Snowmass Lake, Geneva Lake, Capitol Lake, Conundrum Hot Springs, and along the Four Pass Loop in the Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness in Colorado. The Forest Service is justified in proposing quotas to reduce impacts and protect wildlife and solitude for visitors, but charging people \$12 per day just to visit Wilderness is both inappropriate and illegal. Wilderness areas are our shared natural heritage, open to all, not just those who can pay fees.

The proposed fees are illegal under the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act, which prohibits charging fees for parking at, hiking through, horseback riding in, or camping in undeveloped federal sites such as Wildernesses. Just another part of the effort to commercialize Wilderness,

the fees would exclude the public from accessing and enjoying public lands. Congress appropriates more than enough tax money to federal agencies to administer these national treasures, and the agencies shouldn't treat them as a way to raise more funds. 🐾

## *World-class wildlands in Utah deserve protection*

Wilderness Watch is concerned over a Bureau of Land Management (BLM) proposal to authorize commercial and other special recreation permits (SRPs) in 17 recently designated Wildernesses in Utah's San Rafael Swell and Desolation Canyon, which could drive overuse by visitors and too many commercial operations. To make matters worse, the BLM hasn't completed the required analysis of current Wilderness conditions or written management plans for the Wildernesses. This could lead to BLM approving inappropriate commercial operations in these Wildernesses that would later need to be removed (which could be politically difficult to do).

BLM needs to protect the area by first developing good Wilderness Management Plans, by sparingly issuing commercial recreation permits, by reducing excessively large proposed group sizes (up to 25 people in some areas), and by reworking its inadequate commercial "needs assessment" to analyze what (and whether) commercial services are needed.

The BLM's SRP plan also fails to consider the effects on wildlife. Many sensitive species rely on these areas, including bighorn sheep, Mexican Spotted Owls, and other raptors. Given the prolonged mega-drought in this part of the world, the last thing the areas' Wilderness and wildlife need is increased stress brought on by inappropriate or excessive human use. 🐾

# Wilderness in the Courts

## 2015 Predator Protection Regulations in Wilderness, AK

We've been updating you about our ongoing litigation supporting two 2015 rules aimed at protecting predators in National Wildlife Refuges, National Preserves, and Wildernesses in Alaska—a Fish and Wildlife Service rule (“Kenai rule”) and a broader National Park Service rule. These rules banned the most barbaric hunting practices authorized by the Alaska Board of Game’s “intensive management” law with the Kenai rule specifically banning brown bear baiting in the Kenai Refuge and Wilderness. Safari Club International, Alaska Professional Hunters Association, and the State of Alaska challenged both rules in court claiming federal overreach. We intervened in the lawsuits to help defend the rules, and in November of 2020, a federal judge ruled in our favor in the Kenai lawsuit upholding the ban on brown bear baiting. Safari Club and others have appealed that ruling, so we are defending it in the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals. Briefing is wrapping up and we’ll likely have a hearing sometime next year.

The Park Service lawsuit did not proceed because the Trump administration issued a new 2020 Park Service rule, essentially nullifying the protections afforded by the 2015 Park Service rule. See below for more information. 🐾

## 2020 Predator Persecution Regulations in Wilderness, AK

On August 26, 2020, we challenged the Trump administration’s new (bad) Park Service predator regulations that reversed Interior’s longstanding position, codified in the Park Service’s 2015 rule, that sport hunting regulations that are aimed at reducing populations of predators on National Preserves are fundamentally at odds with the Park Service’s statutory mandates. The 2020 rule defers to state regulation, which allows many of the more egregious hunting practices—such as bear baiting, the killing of female bears with cubs, use of aircraft and motor vehicles to pursue and kill wildlife, killing an animal while it is swimming, use of electronic devices (such as artificial light and remote location devices) to aid in the tracking and killing of animals, and killing of wolves during denning season—that the 2015 rule prohibited.

The Biden administration has indicated it may begin a new rulemaking process to undo the bad 2020 rule implemented by the Trump administration, but, so far, it has not given a timeframe for new rulemaking, and it continues to defend the bad 2020 rule in court. Briefing should begin later this year. Whether engaging in a new rulemaking process or litigating the 2020 rule, we’ll continue pushing for strong protections for predators living in National Preserves and Wildernesses in Alaska. We’ll keep you posted on opportunities for public involvement. 🐾

## A Road Through Izembek, AK

The battle rages on to stop road construction through the heart of the Izembek Wilderness—even with the Biden administration running the show. We’ve been in a decades-long battle to protect this spectacular and ecologically critical Wilderness. King Cove—an Aleut town on the far side of the Wilderness that is home to Peter Pan Seafoods—and the State of Alaska have long pushed for a road to “link together two communities having one of the State’s premier fishing ports/harbors (including North America’s largest salmon cannery) in King Cove with one of the State’s premier airports at Cold Bay.” Previously, a court upheld then-Interior Secretary Sally Jewell’s decision to forgo this road construction due to “significant degradation of irreplaceable ecological resources” and because there are viable transportation alternatives for reaching King Cove. However, after the Trump administration took office, Interior did an about-face and ushered through a closed-door land exchange to facilitate the construction. We challenged that exchange in federal court and won. Interior then sealed another closed-door land exchange to push construction through. So, we sued again. And, last June, we won again. In both cases, the court found that Interior illegally disregarded its prior findings. Interior filed another appeal on August 14, 2020. While there was some hope that the new Biden administration would pull the appeal, that didn’t happen. Briefing and oral argument are complete, and we are waiting on a decision. 🐾

## Drilling in the Arctic Refuge and Wilderness, AK

In August 2020, we joined a coalition of groups in a lawsuit against the Department of Interior for opening the entire Coastal Plain in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil and gas leasing. The Arctic Refuge—known as the “Serengeti of the Arctic”—is our wildest, most ecologically intact landscape in the United States, and it is the largest system of public lands and waters set aside for wildlife conservation in the world. This iconic area, which sits on the northern border of the Mollie Beattie Wilderness, had been federally protected from oil and gas development until 2017, when the Trump administration pushed through a rider to tax reform legislation, opening up the Refuge to exploitation. So we sued. The good news is, the Biden administration is now hitting a pause button and reviewing the whole program. As part of that review, the administration is preparing a supplemental environmental impact statement (SEIS). Early public scoping on the SEIS just wrapped-up, and the administration is starting work on a draft SEIS. Meanwhile, the litigation is stayed to allow the SEIS process to play-out. Stay tuned for action alerts on how you can help us fight to keep oil and gas development out of the Arctic. 🐾



# Please support Wilderness Watch with a generous gift!

By Brett Haverstick



In 2021, we collectively beat back numerous proposals that would have harmed Wilderness.

We denied the expansion of F-16 fighter jet overflights. We stopped vacant grazing allotments from being filled with domestic cows and sheep. We averted road survey work. We fended off massive ecosystem manipulation proposals—made with little environmental analysis or public involvement—like poisoning streams and igniting fires.

We also submitted extensive comments opposing motorized access for ranchers, helicopters to rebuild bridges, monitoring stations, expanded airstrips, herbicide spraying and tree planting in Wilderness, and much more.

In 2022, we'll continue our efforts to stop a road from being built through the Izembek Wilderness in Alaska, and we'll keep defending the Arctic Refuge from oil and gas drilling. We will continue to advocate for the removal of dams with traditional tools in the Rattlesnake Wilderness in Montana. We'll protect the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness in Minnesota from excessive commercial, motorized towboat use. We will remain opposed to efforts to build a mine on the border of the Okefenokee Wilderness in Georgia. We'll continue the fight to keep mountain bikes out of Wilderness, and we'll also keep advancing our national campaign to reform livestock grazing in Wilderness.

Next year will be an important year in the courts, too. We hope to shut down black bear baiting stations in Idaho and Wyoming that have led to the death of imperiled grizzly bears. We've put Idaho and Montana on notice of our intent to sue for their new barbaric laws aimed at slaughtering wolves through hunting, trapping and snaring, while also jeopardizing rare grizzly bears and Canada lynx.

Look for our holiday fundraising letter in the mail. This is a critical time for generating the funding we'll need for next year, so please be as generous as you can. Your financial support will equip us with the means in 2022 to keep defending Wilderness across the country. 🐾

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## Wilderness in Congress

Much of the action on wilderness bills in the 117th Congress has so far centered on the so-called “Protecting America’s Wilderness and Public Lands Act,” HR 803. This package passed the full House on Feb. 26, 2021, and had previously passed the House in the last Congress, but saw no action in the Republican-controlled Senate. The House added the package to Rep. Diane DeGette’s Colorado Wilderness Bill, keeping her bill number for the entire package. On Sept. 23, 2021, the House added this wilderness package to and passed the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) (HR 4350), a must-pass bill, which increases the likelihood of final passage of the wilderness package. It’s unclear yet, however, if the Senate will agree to including the wilderness package in the NDAA.

The Protecting America’s Wilderness package includes the following new wilderness designations:

- 741,000 acres—Colorado Wilderness Act.
- 251,000 acres—Northwest California Wilderness, Recreation, and Working Forests Act.
- 126,000 acres—Wild Olympics Wilderness and Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (WA).
- 73,000 acres—Colorado Outdoor Recreation and Economy (CORE) Act.
- 31,000 acres—San Gabriel Mountains, Foothills and Rivers Protection Act (CA).
- 250,000 acres—Central Coast Heritage Protection (CA).
- 5,600 acres—Virginia Wilderness Addition (2 additions in the Rich Hole and Rough Mountain Wildernesses).

While these potential new additions to the National Wilderness Preservation System look good on first blush, most of these bills are also larded up with harmful special provisions for the Wildernesses they would create, providing less protection than that provided for in the 1964 Wilderness Act. These special provisions include:

- Legalizing permanent fixed climbing anchors (these anchors are installations prohibited by the Wilderness Act).
- Authorizing motor vehicles and aircraft for wildlife management in Wilderness.
- Allowing installation and maintenance of weather stations.
- Legalizing construction and maintenance of wildlife water structures (“guzzlers”). (These are often serviced by water trucks that drive into the Wilderness.)
- Allowing competitive equestrian and running events.
- Prohibiting buffer zones around Wilderness, so development can occur right up to the wilderness boundary, without the wilderness-administering agencies able to ask for changes to better protect the Wilderness from that adjacent development.
- Preventing any regulation of military overflights above Wilderness, including incredibly noisy, low-level, and frequent training flights.

While Wilderness Watch certainly supports the designation of new Wildernesses, we also believe that the wilderness community must do much better in resisting the harmful special provisions like those found in the Protecting America’s Wilderness and Public Lands package. ♻️