

Isle Royale Wilderness Plan: Let the Wilderness Be Wild

By Kevin Proescholdt

The Isle Royale Wilderness at Isle Royale National Park is one of the most iconic Wildernesses in the National Wilderness Preservation System. Located in the northern part of Lake Superior in the waters of Michigan, Isle Royale National Park encompasses 133,788 acres of land and 438,008 acres of surface water. The park is the largest island in Lake Superior, which is itself the largest freshwater lake by surface area in the world. There are over 400 smaller islands surrounding the main island, which together constitute the full archipelago of Isle Royale.

Last fall, the National Park Service (NPS) began the initial “scoping” phase of the effort to develop a new Wilderness Stewardship Plan for the Isle Royale Wilderness. While a new plan is needed, wilderness advocates may ask this basic question: Will this new plan allow the Wilderness to be wild, or will the managers tightly control and manipulate the Isle Royale Wilderness (and its wildlife) to serve human desires?

Congress designated approximately 98 percent of the land portion of the park as Wilderness in 1976. Later con-

versions of Potential Wilderness to official Wilderness brought the total wilderness acreage to 99 percent, encompassing 132,018 acres. Only 1,677 acres of the island are classified as non-wilderness.

The new Wilderness Stewardship Plan should include direction for the following issues:



Wolf controversy

—In recent years, the NPS undertook a highly controversial effort to import wolves to Isle Royale. Wolves are not known to have lived on Isle Royale until the late 1940s when some wolves crossed the winter ice from Minnesota or Ontario. Since then, wolves have come and gone from the island. But as the wolf population declined in the

early 2000s (as expected under the principles of island biogeography), the NPS came under pressure to catch wolves from their packs on the mainland and exile them to the island, rather than letting the wolves themselves decide if they wanted to cross the ice and live there, as they did in the past and still do now, even with the lower frequency

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President's Message

The Arc of Wilderness Preservation and Appreciation



A century ago, the preservation of our wild places was achieved with a simple stroke of the pen. A Presidential executive order or Congressional legislation would delineate an area to be protected, and it would be so.

Today, with pressures from population growth and mobility, technology, politics, and many other forces, permanent protection requires constant citizen vigilance, readiness, and resources to act. Consider just a sample of the articles you've read about in this newsletter in the past year covering some of the protection issues in which Wilderness Watch is engaged:

Ninth Circuit Deals Blow to Izembek, Alaska
Grizzlies and Lynx Trapped in Idaho's Wolf Killing Craze
Capturing Bighorns with Helicopters
Double the Harm to Sids Mountain
Absaroka-Beartooth Poisoning Challenged
Wildernesses Spared from Burn Plan
Mine Remains a Threat to Okefenokee
Wild Alaska Threatened by 211-Mile Industrial Road
Cattle vs. Fragile Desert Wildernesses
Air Force Targets Wildernesses in Vermont

As this sample illustrates, Wilderness protection cuts across a broad swath of threats and must be fought in a wide variety of arenas—legislative, judicial, administrative, educational, and in the courts of public opinion. And unfortunately, too often it requires challenging the very officials who have responsibility to preserve these special places in accordance with the Wilderness Act and other protective laws. That is the reality of preserving Wilderness in our time.

It is a paradox that while the threats to harm Wilderness have grown over the decades, so too has our understanding and appreciation of the many critical benefits uncompromised Wilderness areas provide. Wild places were once appreciated primarily for the outstanding scenery they encompassed. Today, we have a much deeper understanding for the many values of Wilderness that make all life possible and nourish the human spirit, suggested by Henry David Thoreau when he famously wrote, "In Wildness is the preservation of the world."

Indeed, with your support of Wilderness Watch you help to protect a multitude of vital benefits for our mental and physical well-being. Our Wilderness areas give to us clean air and water, ecological integrity, pristine wildlife habitat, opportunities for solitude, scenic beauty, spiritual inspiration, scientific discovery, education, recreation, cultural and historic preservation, personal renewal, and much, much more. We gain value in simply knowing these places remain wild. Given the state of the world today, the benefits of Wilderness are needed like never before.

Clearly, a membership in Wilderness Watch provides a broad spectrum of essential benefits that not many other memberships can match—and not only for today, but throughout time as our legacy to future generations.

Once Wilderness is compromised, it is diminished forever. Thus, we greatly appreciate your support of our efforts to secure the many enduring values of Wilderness. Thank you. 🍷

—Mark Peterson

Mark Peterson is a former director for the National Parks Conservation Association, the Sigurd Olson Environmental Institute, and the National Audubon Society.



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

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Wilderness Watch

P.O. Box 9175
Missoula, MT 59807
406.542.2048
wild@wildernesswatch.org
www.wildernesswatch.org

of winter ice bridges to the mainland. Now the Isle Royale Wilderness has new radio-collared wolves that can barely take a step without being tracked, photographed, or recaptured. Rather than a sanctuary of wildness, management has been geared toward turning the Isle Royale Wilderness into a gigantic zoo, manipulated for human desires (visitors wanting to hear wolves howl, researchers wanting to study a confined population, managers wanting wolves to kill the abundant moose on the island, etc.). The former “natural” predator-prey study that ran for decades ended when the NPS started importing new wolves. From a wilderness standpoint, the NPS should now stop its intrusive wolf studies and importation, and allow the wolves and the Island to sort out their future without human manipulation.

Other Wildlife—The Draft EIS and Wilderness Stewardship Plan must also address the entire range of wildlife issues in the Isle Royale Wilderness. In particular, the documents must address the impacts of human visitors on wildlife. For example, what role do human activities play in the poor success rates of loon nests? What are the impacts of researchers and their volunteers on secure habitats needed by wildlife?

Cabins/Structures and Potential Wilderness—The 1964 Wilderness Act prohibits buildings, structures, and installations in designated Wilderness, even those that may have historical significance. Structures and buildings in the designated Wilderness portions of Isle Royale should not be maintained or stabilized. They should be dismantled, allowed to deteriorate in place, or relocated (without the use of motors and other prohibited means) to areas outside of designated Wilderness where they may be better curated and preserved. Only these options would follow the directives of the Wilderness Act. This will be a major issue for the new Plan.

In 1976, Congress designated 236 acres of Isle Royale as Potential Wilderness. Potential Wilderness may be administratively converted to designated Wilderness by the NPS once the non-conforming structure is gone or use has ended. More than half of that original Potential Wilderness has since been converted to designated Wilderness. Now 93 acres of Potential Wilderness remain. For some years, the NPS has been contemplating how many structures in Potential Wilderness (and even in designated Wilderness) to retain and maintain in perpetuity to help share and interpret the history of the lodges, commercial fishing operations, and families. The issue is further complicated by an Isle Royale family group that has been trying to maintain perpetual access to their former cabins, some of which lie in Potential Wilderness and some of which still have life estates or other

access rights. Though the NPS now owns all the cabins, some of these cabins are still lived in and maintained during the summer by the original families or their descendants.

Questions to be answered in the Wilderness Stewardship Plan include: will the NPS maintain buildings and structures in designated Wilderness, will the NPS convert any more Potential Wilderness to designated Wilderness, and will the NPS convert Potential Wilderness acres to designated Wilderness even if it plans to maintain structures there in violation of the Wilderness Act?

Fire—Wilderness Watch wishes to see more information in the Draft EIS and Wilderness Stewardship Plan regarding fire. What is the NPS policy on naturally-caused fires in the Isle Royale Wilderness? Will naturally-caused fire be allowed to play its ecological role in the Isle Royale Wilderness, rather than be suppressed by managers? Does the NPS envision the use of manager-ignited fire? Is the existing Mount Ojibway fire tower in Wilderness “necessary to meet minimum requirements” for administering the Wilderness? Can other fire detection methods eliminate the need for that structure?

Visitor Management—Beyond the impacts on wildlife, the Draft EIS and Wilderness Plan must examine other visitor management issues. Where does crowding occur, and how can it be alleviated? How do large groups impact solitude? Can visitor use be dispersed, and what methods can be used to do so? If use is dispersed, what steps can be taken to prevent degradation in those dispersed areas? Should group size limits be established?

Commercial Use—Wilderness Watch supports ending commercial uses in the Isle Royale Wilderness, in accordance with the Wilderness Act. The Draft EIS and Plan should analyze all commercial uses conducted within the Isle Royale Wilderness and justify any proposed exceptions to the prohibition on commercial uses and services.

Despite its wilderness challenges, the Isle Royale Wilderness is a magical place well worth fighting for. Wilderness Watch will continue our involvement with the development of the Isle Royale Wilderness Stewardship Plan, and will encourage our members and supporters to advocate for the protection of this iconic Wilderness’s wildness. 🐾

Kevin Proescholdt is Wilderness Watch’s conservation director.

Isle Royale Wilderness is a magical place well worth fighting for.

On the Watch

Promote natural recovery of grizzlies in the North Cascades

The National Park Service (NPS) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) should allow and facilitate natural recovery of grizzly bears in the North Cascades Ecosystem (NCE) in Washington instead of translocating them. The agencies propose to capture three to seven grizzlies a year from British Columbia or the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem (NCDE) around Glacier National Park to release into the NCE for 5 to 10 years. The proposed recovery area includes 2.6 million acres of Wilderness—the Pasayten, Mount Baker, and Stephen Mather.

Wilderness Watch supports the recovery of native species such as grizzly bears where suitable habitat exists, and the rugged North Cascades are historic grizzly bear habitat, but the NPS/FWS plan would most likely degrade Wilderness, weaken the grizzly population in the NCDE, and strip individual grizzlies of their current Endangered Species Act protections.

Most of the 6.1 million-acre project area is outside of Wilderness, but helicopter landings would likely occur in Wilderness and continue indefinitely for monitoring bear movement and numbers. Bears would be subjected to the stress of initial capture, handling, and helicopter flight and are likely to be collared, drugged, subjected to sample collection, and handled for many years. The plan also has a problematic proposal to designate the reintroduced grizzlies as an “experimental population” under section 10(j) of the Endangered Species Act (ESA), which would strip U.S.-captured bears of their current ESA protections, and they could be shot, re-captured, or killed in the NCE.

If the agencies adopt a translocation plan, it must align with the Wilderness Act, including monitoring that’s respectful to Wilderness and bears (e.g. using hair snags, camera traps, scat collection, and on-the-ground sightings to know whether the bears are thriving).

Wilderness Watch is advocating for a better plan that promotes natural recovery. That includes working with British

Columbia to protect grizzlies and provide for connectivity between U.S. and Canadian populations, plus other measures to ensure that grizzlies are not killed by humans, regardless of whether they are in National Parks, Wilderness, or other public or private lands on either side of the border. It might take longer and require more patience than the instant gratification of capturing and releasing dozens of bears, but it would ultimately create a more durable grizzly population. 🌿

Keep the promise of a wild Cumberland Island

Wilderness Watch is urging the National Park Service (NPS) to improve its misguided Visitor Use Management Plan (VUMP) for the Cumberland Island National Seashore and Wilderness in southern Georgia. Cumberland

is the largest undeveloped barrier island on the eastern seaboard and one of the gems of America’s National Park system, with its massive live oak maritime forests, saltwater marshes, and spectacular white sand beach.

The NPS has failed over the decades to keep the Cumberland Island Wilderness wild—allowing unlawful motor/

mechanized vehicle use, prioritizing saving structures rather than letting nature reclaim the Wilderness, and the list goes on. The VUMP seeks to maximize visitor numbers and recreation at the expense of the Island’s Wilderness and wildlife. The plan is so off-base that it proposes to allow bikes (including ebikes), in Wilderness.

All NPS decisions should promote restoring a wild Cumberland Island, including allowing natural fire to shape the Wilderness. The NPS needs to prohibit motorized and mechanized vehicle use except for those who have private existing rights, and limit bicycle use to the island’s developed southern end; maintain the current 300/day visitor limit; and not establish commercial services nor new developed campgrounds in Wilderness. The VUMP deserves an Environmental Impact Statement at the very least since the current plan offers no alternatives that would protect the Wilderness. 🌿



On the Watch

Mining ban protects the Boundary Waters

In January, the Department of the Interior issued a 20-year mineral withdrawal on 225,378 acres in the Superior National Forest in Minnesota. The mineral withdrawal bans copper-nickel sulfide-ore mining—some of the most toxic mining on the planet—of federally-owned minerals in the watershed of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW).

The 1.1 million-acre BWCAW is the largest Wilderness east of the Rockies and north of the Everglades. Its 1,000-plus pristine lakes and 1,200 miles of rivers and streams are especially sensitive to pollution from copper-nickel mining, which includes sulfuric acid, mercury, lead, and arsenic.

The new mineral withdrawal impacts the proposed Twin Metals mine at the doorstep of the BWCAW, but does not affect the proposed PolyMet Mine or other mining proposals for primarily state and private minerals in the watershed of the BWCAW. While the threats of copper-nickel mining are not entirely eliminated, the withdrawal is a huge step in protecting the BWCAW. And Wilderness Watch supports Rep. Betty McCollum's (D-MN) bill, reintroduced in late January as HR 668, to make this mining moratorium permanent. 🌿

Wilderness and wildlife, Yes! Cows, No.

Thanks to pressure from Wilderness Watch, including our members and supporters, the Hoover Wilderness in the Sierra Nevada range in California scored a win when the Forest Service (FS) issued a final decision last November to close part of the area to cattle grazing. Domestic sheep had been removed more than a decade ago to protect state and federally endangered Sierra bighorn sheep, but in 2018, the FS proposed re-opening part of the Wilderness to cattle grazing.

Re-opening this area to cows would have substantially impacted the Hoover Wilderness, its watersheds, and native

wildlife. As the decision properly stated, "The improved conditions...over the last 10-20 years and the potential for continued improvement outweighs the benefit that would arise from authorizing cattle...." 🌿

More precious than gold

Perpetua Resources (formerly Midas Gold) is proposing a massive strip mine on the Payette National Forest at the doorstep of the famed Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness (RONRW) and in the headwaters of the East Fork of the South Fork of the Salmon River. The 2.4 million-acre River of No Return Wilderness in Idaho is one of the wildest areas in the lower 48.

The Nez Perce Tribe and the federal government have spent millions cleaning up past mining impacts. Perpetua

Resources wants to re-open and expand former mine pits for a cyanide vat leach gold mine called Stibnite Gold Project.

Stibnite Gold Project doubles the old mine's existing footprint, would use up to a fifth of the water in part of the East Fork of the South Fork, and includes about 1,800 acres of mine pits, 15 miles of new roads,

a 400 foot-high tailings dam for 100 million tons of materials, more than 3,000 annual hazardous vehicle trips, and year-round traffic for the mine's 25-year time period.

Under the proposal, road construction and mining operation noise could travel nearly two miles, wildlife could be disturbed and displaced, streams could be polluted, and this now quiet and lightly-visited place could be subjected to more human use. A new road along the boundary of the Wilderness would further harm the RONRW and its wildlife.

WW is urging the Forest Service to deny the mine permit and to require that Perpetua finish cleaning up the mine site. 🌿



On the Watch continued on page 6

Thank You for Everything

It's never fun to send off our dear friends and board members, but term-limits and time to step away had us doing just that for three long-time stalwarts, Louise Lasley, Gary Macfarlane, and Talasi Brooks.



From left: Talasi, Gary, and Louise at a WW board meeting.

Louise joined the Board in 2007, and, with the exception of a couple of years between terms, she has served ever since, including seven years as president, the second longest tenure in Wilderness Watch's history! Louise always ran a tight ship and kept us on task, often with a laugh and a smile. No small feat! Louise's decades-long conservation career included work with the Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance and wildlife-related work around the west.

Gary, like Louise, joined the board in 2007 and has served ever since, with a bit of time off between terms. He filled almost every role on the board, including secretary, vice president, and president. Gary's encyclopedic knowledge of Wilderness and public lands issues and history has benefited Wilderness Watch in more ways than anyone can count. Gary retired from Friends of the Clearwater in 2022 after working full-time for more than four decades protecting Wilderness, wildlife, and wildlands in Idaho and Utah. Lucky for us—and for Wilderness—Gary will continue doing contract work for Wilderness Watch.

Talasi, a staff attorney with Western Watersheds Project, has been on the board since 2015, but her involvement with Wilderness Watch began in 2009 as an intern while earning her Environmental Studies degree at the University of MT, and she later completed a legal internship with WW as well. We have great expectations that Talasi continues her work for Wilderness as an attorney, and as she raises her young family into becoming the next generation of wilderness advocates!

Thank you, Louise, Gary, and Talasi, for your dedication, friendship, and years of service to Wilderness Watch and Wilderness! Don't be strangers. 🐾

On the Watch *(continued from page 5)*

Gunning in the Gila

Wilderness Watch is voicing concern over the Forest Service's (FS) recent authorization of intensive helicopter intrusions and aerial gunning of feral cows in the Gila Wilderness in New Mexico. The project entails 14 days of helicopter pursuit and gunning operations followed by undisclosed future helicopter operations.

The authorization has massive implications for the National Wilderness Preservation System, yet the FS approved the project via an inappropriate Categorical Exclusion from formal NEPA review. While the FS did solicit public comment on its scoping notice, the notice contained only two pages of text describing the project. Additionally, the FS approved the gunning immediately following

public comment, making the public comment period meaningless. This flippant disregard of public review and the Wilderness Act is a concerning trend within the Forest Service, and one we've successfully challenged in court on multiple occasions.

Feral cows in the Gila are not a new problem—they have degraded the Wilderness for nearly half a century. The FS should have delayed its proposal to allow time for meaningful public participation and agency review. And, it should have undertaken a thorough analysis to ensure the broader problem of cattle grazing in the Gila was addressed, that actions were taken to effectively prevent feral cows in the future, and that wilderness-compatible cattle removal methods were explored. 🐾

Wilderness in the Courts

Bear Baiting, Boundary Waters, and BLM Records

Wilderness Watch has been active in court recently, with progress under our open dockets and new lawsuits underway.

For several years, we've been battling the Forest Service (FS) in a lawsuit over the agency's failure to protect grizzly bears in National Forests in Idaho and Wyoming. These states allow hunters to bait black bears, which has led to grizzly bear deaths and threatens grizzlies' continued recovery. To comply with the Endangered Species Act, the FS needs to reconsider its policy allowing the states to permit bear baiting in grizzly territory and reconsult with the Fish & Wildlife Service. On January 31, we argued our case in federal court, explaining how the agency misrepresents its regulatory history and the legal duties it has failed to meet. We'll provide updates as the court reaches its decision.

In February, we filed a new lawsuit against the Superior National Forest over its handling of commercial motorized towboats in the Boundary Waters. We sued over this issue about eight years ago, and the Forest Service settled, prom-

ising analyses of the towboat situation that would force it to reckon with commercial motorboats' wilderness degradation and incompatibility with the law. Well, the FS didn't make good on its promises, so we're taking the agency back to court to clean up a mess of towboat traffic that has only gotten worse in the intervening years. Stay tuned for updates as the case proceeds.

We also sued the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in January to remedy the agency's persistent failure to respond to our document requests. For years, we've been asking for records on motor vehicle use authorizations related to grazing permits in Wilderness areas. Under the Freedom of Information Act, we're entitled to these documents, but the BLM has ignored our requests and won't even respond when contacted. We're disappointed that it will take a lawsuit to get the agency to share what it is required to by law, but we'll keep fighting for the information Wilderness Watch needs to do our work. 🌿

Wilderness in Congress

Wilderness did not fare very well in the 117th Congress that ended in December. Wilderness designation bills for Colorado, California, Washington, and New Mexico that passed the House of Representatives as part of the Protecting America's Wilderness and Public Lands Act unfortunately did not pass the Senate. Rep. Betty McCollum's (D-MN) much-needed bill to permanently prohibit mining of federally-owned minerals in the watershed of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW) in Minnesota, to protect the Wilderness from proposed copper-nickel mining, also narrowly missed passing the full Congress in December. Other bills to designate the Coastal Plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska, the Redrock wilderness of southern Utah, and the Northern Rockies were introduced but did not advance.

Ultimately, Congress passed only two bills that designated any Wilderness, and both came with mixed results. These bills are:

Bonneville Shoreline Trail Advancement Act (HR 2551/S. 1222)

This bill deleted 10 acres from the Mount Naomi Wilderness, 197 acres from the Mount Olympus Wilderness,

10 acres from the Twin Peaks Wilderness, and 108 acres from the Lone Peak Wilderness, all in Utah, to facilitate the development of the multi-use Bonneville Shoreline Trail. To compensate for the loss of Wilderness acres, the bill also added 334 new acres (a former Scout camp) to the Mount Olympus Wilderness. Wilderness Watch had opposed this bill as a troubling precedent for reducing Wilderness boundaries as urban development crept closer. This bill was in the final Consolidated Appropriations Act that passed in December, Public Law 117-328.

Nevada Wilderness (Originally HR 5243)

This legislation designated three new BLM-administered Wildernesses in Churchill County totaling 168,563 acres and two BLM-administered Wildernesses in Lander County totaling 14,152 acres. All of these new Wildernesses are weakened by extensive special provisions (unfortunately typical of recent Nevada wilderness bills) that allow non-conforming uses otherwise not permitted by the Wilderness Act. This was part of a bill that expanded Fallon Air Force Base in Nevada, and was included by the Nevada Congressional delegation in the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), Public Law 117-263. 🌿



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Keeping Wilderness Wild

Wilderness Watch
P.O. Box 9175
Missoula, MT 59807
p: (406) 542-2048

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Leave a Legacy Gift for Wilderness

By Brett Haverstick

During the dead of winter, I take out my maps and begin dreaming of backpacking trips that I want to take when the snow melts. Besides visiting the Selway-Bitterroot, I'm getting the itch to explore more of the rugged mountains and canyons in the River of No Return. Indeed, the first threat that Wilderness Watch took on was the use of permanent structures and equipment caches by commercial outfitters in this Wilderness.



Since 1989, our work has been made possible because of the outstanding dedication and vigilance of our members and supporters. The past year has been no different—you responded to our various fundraising appeals with tremendous support. A very generous member in Alaska, who wishes to remain anonymous, also matched over \$27,000 in new member donations last year. The same individual has pledged to match up to \$30,000 for first-time donors in 2023. Thank you to everyone!

This is also a good time to consider leaving a legacy gift for Wilderness. A bequest to Wilderness Watch is a simple and effective way to make a lasting difference. Leaving money, stocks, or real estate in your will can ensure that our mission continues well into the future. You also have the option of leaving a gift to our Forever Wild Endowment. Our endowment provides the stable funding we need, today and beyond, to defend Wilderness. Making a Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD) through your IRA is another option. Please

speak with your financial planner about the various options and potential tax benefits.

As this newsletter attests, we're gearing up for another busy year in the trenches. Let's keep speaking out, making phone calls, and writing letters to decision makers and elected officials. There's a lot at stake for Wilderness and its wildlife. 🐾