WILDERNESS WATCH
Keeping Wilderness Wild

Wilderness WATCHER

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Is the National Park Service serious about Wilderness?

By Mark Peterson

"The Park Service has done relatively little to demonstrate that it has taken its wilderness management responsibilities seriously nor has it implemented a management program which reasonably provides for the day-to-day and long-term preservation of this resource. The lack of evidence that the Service has met even its most basic responsibilities as required by the Wilderness Act, and its own policies…has generated a growing distrust of the agency by the public…This distrust is exacerbated by the growing number of incidents throughout the Service wherein NPS staff violate the letter and spirit of the Wilderness Act…with little or no consequences." —Jim Walters, former NPS Intermountain Region Wilderness Coordinator

When one thinks of wild landscapes in the U.S., national park areas come quickly to mind. Yet, as we celebrate 60 years of the Wilderness Act this year, wild places in too many of even our most iconic parks have been left behind and left vulnerable. Deserving areas suitable for wilderness designation in parks from Acadia to Yellowstone and 13 areas in Alaska have not been protected under the Wilderness Act.

Yosemite Wilderness by René Voss

While only Congress can designate Wilderness, the law requires the National Park Service (NPS) to identify lands that qualify for wilderness designation and make recommendations to the President, and ultimately to Congress, as to which lands should be designated Wilderness. NPS policies require recommended wilderness to be administered as Wilderness, though the NPS often doesn't abide by the policy. As one former NPS wilderness specialist wrote, "…NPS' wilderness program remains erratic, poorly defined, and vaguely implemented in most parks within the system."

Recent examples reveal there is no guarantee that Wilderness and potential wilderness areas in our national parks will be managed according to the letter and spirit of the law. National Park Service administration has strayed far from the Wilderness Act, a particularly discouraging fact given it oversees so many of our nation's wildest crown jewels. Consider these NPS actions in national park Wildernesses:

- Olympic—replacing old trail-side shelters with new structures helicoptered in;
- Point Reyes—fencing native Tule elk out of much of the area to appease ranchers that graze cattle there, then hauling water troughs and water to keep the elk herd alive;

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In This Issue:

Message from the Board

Among Howard Zahniser's many memorable quotes is this one: "The wilderness that has come to us out of the eternity of the past, we have the boldness to project into the eternity of the future." Nothing so eloquently expresses the chain of advocacy that resulted in the wilderness system we revel in today, and the responsibility we all now hold.

On the 60th anniversary of the Wilderness Act, it's worth recalling and celebrating those contemporary advocates on the ground who had the fortitude and passion to establish many of the pillars of the National Wilderness Preservation System that today we perhaps take for granted.

But that's just the first step of securing an enduring resource of Wilderness. Equally important is the never-ending need to monitor the federal agencies charged with managing Wilderness to ensure faithful adherence to the Wilderness Act and preserving wild areas in an untrammeled condition. That's where Wilderness Watch uniquely fits the bill. And Wilderness Watch relies ever more upon local advocates as eyes and ears on the ground.

In 1965, in the Roaring Fork Valley of western Colorado, a young woman named Connie Harvey struck up a conversation in an Aspen ski lift line with one of the Sierra Club's legendary wilderness champions, Dr. Edgar Wayburn. Ed suggested Connie get involved in advocating protection of her backyard wilderness, and soon Connie Harvey, with her neighbors Joy Caudill and Dottie Fox, were guiding the Aspen Wilderness Workshop. They rallied friends and neighbors around their kitchen tables to pore over topographic maps and undertake field reconnaissance to buttress proposals for new and expanded Wilderness.

Their efforts through the 1970s Roadless Area Review and Evaluation (RARE) processes resulted in several hundred thousand acres of protected Wilderness, including more than doubling the size of the Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness, and establishing the Collegiate Peaks, Hunter-Fryingpan, and other surrounding Wildernesses. Eventually, the success of Connie, Joy, and Dottie gained them the moniker of the "Maroon Belles."

But just as importantly, their advocacy for wilderness protection didn't end with legislative designation. By 1984, they had launched a wilderness monitoring program to oversee the burgeoning recreation growth even then starting to overwhelm the Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness. Because these champions were rooted in place, they were just as much involved in watch-dogging the implementation of the wilderness designations in their backyards and holding our federal managers accountable for achieving the lofty intentions of the Wilderness Act.

All too often, wilderness proponents are narrowly focused on the increasingly heavy lift of gaining legislative wilderness designation through Congress. Perhaps understandably, once the label of "wilderness" is applied to a cherished wild landscape, advocates breathe a sigh of relief and feel a job well done. In reality, the job has just begun to ensure the lands underneath that wilderness label are not diminished by both overt and insidious harms that include active manipulation of wilderness ecosystems, intrusive wildlife management, and exploding recreation, among others.

As we look back 60 years, one can follow the lineage of wilderness champions from those early proponents. It's like a relay, where advocates pass the baton from one to another across generations. Those of us today benefit from the wisdom and work of our predecessors, and we'll rely upon the next generation to similarly carry the baton into Howard Zahniser's eternity of the future. It's up to Wilderness Watch, its members, supporters, and wilderness advocates everywhere to uphold that vision and safeguard Wilderness for future generations.

—Mark Pearson

Mark Pearson is Executive Director of San Juan Citizens Alliance, based in Durango, Colorado, and serves on the Wilderness Watch Board of Directors. He's championed wilderness protection in Colorado for 40 years, and lives in the foothills of the San Juan Mountains.

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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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- Cumberland Island—transporting visitors via passenger vans on primitive routes through Wilderness;
- Everglades—over 3,000 helicopter landings in Wilderness in one year for fire management and research projects with inadequate analysis of non-mechanized, wilderness-compatible alternatives;
- Sequoia-Kings Canyon—more than 20,000 acres of Wilderness landscaping (logging, burning, and planting) to create managers' desired conditions in giant sequoia groves, rather than allowing nature to determine the conditions there;
- Glacier Bay—a draft plan that would designate a less protective shoreline zone permitting a radio tower and up to 10 repeater towers and research installations; and
- Gulf Islands—allowing misuse of personal watercraft and motorboats within Wilderness.

NPS recommended and potential Wilderness on which Congress hasn't taken action

National Park Unit	Recommended (acres)	Potential (acres)
Arches, UT	61,547	8,461
Assateague Island, MD	440	4,760
Big Bend, TX	538,250	44,750
Bryce Canyon, UT	20,810	--
Canyonlands, UT	260,150	18,270
Capitol Reef, UT	179,815	4,050
Cedar Breaks, UT	4,830	--
Colorado, CO	13,842	937
Crater Lake, OR	127,058	--
Craters of the Moon, ID	346,800	--
Cumberland Gap, KY/TN	12,191	1,900
Dinosaur, CO	205,672	5,055
El Malpais, NM	82,267	11,161
Glacier, MT	927,550	3,360
Grand Teton, WY	122,604	20,850
Great Smoky Mts., TN	390,500	400
Yellowstone, WY/MT/ID	2,032,721	--
TOTAL	**5,327,047**	**123,954**

Source: Frank Buono, NPS retired

The NPS administers more Wilderness than any other federal land management agency, including 53 park areas designed as Wilderness and at least 31 additional areas identified as "recommended," "proposed," "potential," and "eligible" as Wilderness. And this number likely underestimates qualifying lands since the NPS has not conducted assessments to identify potential wilderness designations in every park with wild lands, despite the law requiring it do so.

Since the passage of the Wilderness Act in 1964, three NPS task forces have documented the problems of NPS wilderness management. And in 2002, a committee of knowledgeable individuals from the academic and environmental community provided additional perspective and recommendations on the NPS wilderness program. Yet, while there has been some progress, the agency has ignored or only superficially adopted most of the recommendations, to the great detriment of its wilderness lands.

One key factor contributing to the poor state of wilderness management is the program's continued and intentional invisibility throughout the NPS. Although roughly 86% of all NPS lands are designated, recommended, or potential wilderness, wilderness management in the national office consists of only one policy position. Throughout the agency, the wilderness program is generally buried and largely ignored.

"The lack of accountability and oversight regarding Wilderness is a huge problem for the agency," says Bob Krumenaker, former Superintendent of the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore, who orchestrated the designation of 80% of the park as the Gaylord Nelson Wilderness. "Superintendents are allowed wide discretion on how their park is managed. Decentralization provides for useful nimbleness and flexibility, but it…allows wilderness protection to be compromised. Evaluating superintendents' wilderness performance should be part of their annual evaluation."

Examples of the NPS wilderness accountability problem are not hard to find. In 1999, park staff discovered that Devils Postpile National Monument had been designated Wilderness in 1984. Apparently, for 15 years park staff were unaware of that status and the park was managed without a wilderness plan or consideration. Likewise, in 2003, Sequoia-Kings Canyon issued rules that would allow the routine use of helicopters and other motorized equipment prohibited within Wilderness, with no public involvement and no wilderness management plan to guide decisions.

In 2004, NPS' Intermountain Region Wilderness Coordinator, Jim Walters, wrote to his boss, NPS Director Fran Mainella, "…the NPS has a poor record for completing wilderness management plans even though this has been a policy requirement for nearly two decades…less than 20% [of parks with designated Wilderness] currently have a wilderness management plan. Of these, approximately half are badly outdated and do not meet the basic requirements for a wilderness plan…."

"The Park Service needs to do a much better job of wildland planning," Krumenaker says. "We need to develop a simple

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On the Watch

The National Park Service needs to protect the wild in the Everglades

Wilderness Watch is urging the National Park Service (NPS) to develop a strong new wilderness stewardship plan for the Marjory Stoneman Douglas Wilderness in Everglades National Park in South Florida. Unfortunately, the agency seems headed down the wrong path with its initial ideas.

The 1,296,500-acre Marjory Stoneman Douglas Wilderness is the largest Wilderness east of the Rocky Mountains. The park's nine distinct habitat types—hardwood hammock, pineland, freshwater marl prairie, freshwater slough, cypress, coastal lowland, mangrove, and marine and estuarine—are home to rare and endangered species like the manatee, American crocodile, and elusive Florida panther. The area is also a World Heritage Site, International Biosphere Reserve, and a Wetland of International Importance.

Marjory Stoneman Douglas Wilderness by Zack Porter

Unfortunately, the NPS has allowed development and has otherwise greatly disturbed nature in the Everglades for decades, including within the Wilderness. The agency allows motorized boats (airboats and other motorboats) to disrupt what are supposed to be quiet wilderness waters, including its well-publicized 99-mile-long Wilderness Waterway. In another travesty, the NPS has allowed the area's natural water flow to be altered by maintaining canal plugs on artificial canals and pumping stations inside Wilderness. This is typical of the agency's penchant for manipulating Wilderness so as to create what it sees as "desired conditions," rather than letting Wilderness determine its own conditions.

We're urging the NPS to do the following to protect Wilderness in the Everglades:

- Remove motorized boats from wilderness waters, including the 99-mile Wilderness Waterway;
- Remove structures and installations from the Wilderness, including canal plugs, pumping stations, and more;
- Remove emphases on "desired conditions," which represents the human manipulation of Wilderness, and let a wild, untrammeled Wilderness create its own natural conditions; and
- Increase wilderness-compatible efforts to minimize non-native species and to restore natural water flows to and through the Everglades.

Don't blame beavers for human folly

Wilderness Watch is opposing the latest U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) plan to artificially inflate Arctic grayling numbers in the Red Rock Lakes Wilderness in Montana by breaching beaver dams in Red Rock Creek. This proposal comes on the heels of the agency's plan to construct a pipeline through the Wilderness to add oxygenated water to Upper Red Rock Lake during winter months, a plan Wilderness Watch stopped in court. (See Fall/Winter 2023 *Watcher.*) Rather than address ongoing human-caused impacts to grayling, such as livestock grazing, angling pressure, regular electro-shocking for population surveys, and human-built dams blocking migration, the FWS wants to reengineer winter and blame beavers for the grayling's decline.

This unique Wilderness and natural wetland complex in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem is not the appropriate place for managers to cycle through habitat manipulation experiments in pursuit of arbitrarily chosen conditions for one species. Even if grayling are imperiled and breaching the beaver dams might help, the FWS needs to pursue actions that don't compromise the Red Rock Lakes Wilderness or the Wilderness Act. These could include closing occupied grayling streams to angling, finding alternatives to electroshocking to census fish, reducing livestock grazing impacts, and restoring habitat connectivity in tributary streams both above and below Upper Red Rock Lake.

Wilderness Watch will continue to engage on this.

On the Watch

Protect the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex from outfitter impacts

Wilderness Watch has raised concerns with a Forest Service (FS) proposal to renew 62 existing outfitter permits in the Bob Marshall, Scapegoat, and Great Bear Wildernesses in Northwestern Montana—which collectively comprise the 1.5 million-acre Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex. The FS is proposing to reissue the 10-year permits without any environmental analysis or disclosure of the impacts from these commercial operations.

The Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex helps protect one of the last great expanses of biodiversity in North America, with outstanding habitat for grizzly bears, Canada lynx, wolverine, elk, gray wolves, moose, mountain lions, mountain goats, bighorn sheep, and many more species.

Bob Marshall Wilderness by Troy Smith

The Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex has a long history of outfitting and guiding, and some outfitters have been instrumental in protecting the area. But impacts from outfitting and camps are often glossed over or overlooked, including wilderness trails so heavily used by pack animals that they more resemble roads than foot or horse trails, and many of the outfitter campsites are more suited to front country "glamping" than wilderness travel. These impacts are compounded by the extraordinarily large party sizes (up to 35 pack animals) allowed in the Wildernesses. And with the State of Montana's current war on predators, the impacts of these commercial hunting operations on the Wilderness' wolves, bears, and cougars need to be considered.

Given the growing impacts from all recreation use in the Bob, the Forest Service needs to take a hard look and do a thorough environmental analysis—with public input—before issuing new outfitter-guide permits in the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex.

End carnivore killing on national wildlife refuges

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) has released a new rule on "biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health" for the national wildlife refuge system. The rule could have a far-reaching impact on the refuge system, which includes nearly 21 million acres of Wilderness.

The rule is an important step toward ending carnivore killing on wildlife refuges with its proposal to heavily restrict "predator control" activities. However, the provision prohibits carnivore killing that would "alter predator-prey population dynamics," leaving it unclear whether individual animals could still be targeted, including at the behest of livestock interests. Wilderness Watch is urging the agency to strengthen the rule by explicitly prohibiting the killing of all native carnivores under the "predator control" provision.

The rule also includes extensive wildlife and ecosystem manipulation provisions that could impact wilderness protection across the refuge system. The rule contemplates a range of trammeling activities (e.g. interventions, active adaptation and manipulation measures, and species "translocations") that fundamentally undermine wilderness protection, threaten the future of the National Wilderness Preservation System, and come with a host of potential unintended consequences. Wilderness Watch is urging the NPS to expressly exclude Wilderness from these trammeling actions and associated activities, including helicopter intrusions, structures, installations, and motorized travel and equipment.

On the Watch continued on page 6

Wilderness in Congress

The damaging EXPLORE Act (HR 6492), which combined two bad bills—the Connect Our Parks Act and the Protect America's Rock Climbing Act (PARC Act)—passed the House on April 9, 2024. The Connect Our Parks Act threatens national park Wildernesses and areas eligible for wilderness designation with infrastructure intended to greatly expand internet and cell phone service across vast natural areas. (See Fall/Winter 2023 *Watcher*.) The PARC Act would weaken the Wilderness Act by allowing climbers to drill permanent metal anchors into Wilderness mountainsides and cliffs, leaving visual evidence of human development and drawing more climbers to remote locations. (See Summer 2023 *Watcher*.) Currently, there is no identical companion legislation, so the Senate must decide whether to adopt the House version or pass its own version.

Death Valley National Park by Tom Stromer

Wilderness Watch is also tracking alarming non-conforming-use language in proposed wilderness bills for Oregon (S 1890), Nevada (HR 3173, S 3134, and S 3593), and California (HR 3681, HR 3700, and S 1776). These bills would codify House Report 101-405 Appendix B, a 1990 Interior Committee report. Appendix B did not originate from committee study or hearings. Instead, the report adopts—verbatim—a 1986 document created by the U.S. Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, and the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies that outlined wildlife management activities in Wilderness. These directives allow non-conforming activities, such as aerial fish stocking. They also allow activities that courts have found to violate the Wilderness Act, including building water pipelines, poisoning streams to introduce agency-preferred fish species, and radio-collaring animals. Adopting this report with legislation creating Wilderness would weaken that Wilderness unit by creating a special exception for state wildlife agencies to pursue activities otherwise prohibited by the Wilderness Act.

View a complete listing of wilderness bills in Congress: wildernesswatch.org.

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Forest Service needs to let ANILCA cabins be phased out

When Congress passed the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) in 1980, there were numerous existing, privately built cabins on federal lands, including lands ANILCA designated as Wilderness. Some of the cabins had been authorized under special-use permits, while others had never been authorized. The new law directed the Forest Service (FS) to issue special-use permits for these cabins, but with different rules depending on whether the cabins were previously authorized or not. For the unauthorized cabins, the permits could be renewed only until the death of the last immediate family member of the original claimant. The clear intent was to phase out those cabins. Conversely, the previously permitted cabins could remain indefinitely, and the permit could be transferred to unrelated persons. While ANILCA permitted cabins for "traditional and customary" uses, the cabins aren't allowed for private recreational use.

However, the FS is now proposing to change this permitting system to allow unlimited permit renewals and permit transfers, and is broadening the definition of "traditional and customary" in a manner that could encompass private recreational use. For Wilderness, these changes could mean generations upon generations of persisting structures.

Private recreational cabins don't belong in designated Wilderness. Wilderness Watch is urging the agency to leave its policy unchanged and to phase out the pre-ANILCA unauthorized cabins, as per the law's intent. These cabins were never meant to persist in Wilderness, and to change this policy would undermine both ANILCA and the Wilderness Act.

Wilderness in the Courts

Defending Wilderness in the courts often means defending its wildest and most threatened animal inhabitants, and no creature represents the battle to save the wild quite like wolves. Wilderness Watch's litigation docket has seen two recent developments in our efforts to protect wolves from persecution and keep Wilderness wild.

First, on March 19, we won an important victory in federal district court in Idaho in our lawsuit challenging Idaho's egregious expansion of wolf trapping regulations to facilitate wolf killing. Our arguments in the case hinged on another wilderness-dependent species—the grizzly bear. Grizzlies, as they expand into vital habitat in Idaho, are threatened and harmed by the state's expansive trapping practices. In March, a federal court issued summary judgment in our favor and found that Idaho's latest wolf trapping regulations violated the Endangered Species Act. The court curtailed the application of Idaho's rules to prevent trapping and snaring in regions with potential grizzly presence during non-denning periods. We'll continue to defend our win and its valuable impact on the ground if the state appeals.

Gray wolf by Sam Parks

Second, we joined a new lawsuit filed on April 8 seeking to restore Endangered Species Act (ESA) protections for gray wolves throughout the West. Along with a large coalition of conservation groups, Wilderness Watch petitioned the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 2021 to restore ESA protections to wolves. But this February, the agency finally formally declined, finding listing "not warranted." Our new lawsuit challenges the faulty basis for the agency's unlawful decision and raises the importance of protecting wolves against growing contemporary threats and the horrible hunting and trapping schemes pursued by states like Idaho, Wyoming, and Montana.

In addition to protecting wildlife directly, we're also suing to keep Wilderness untrammeled because safeguarding the autonomy of wild ecosystems ultimately ensures better protection for plants, animals, and other wild residents. In November 2023, we filed our second lawsuit challenging watershed poisoning and fish "stocking" in Montana. This project in the Buffalo Creek watershed of the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness would poison 46 miles of streams and over 30 acres of lakes and wetlands with rotenone, including aerial broadcasting over 25 acres of open water, for up to five years. The project would also authorize up to 60 days of motorized use, including up to 81 aircraft landings, in the Wilderness. And the project's goal is to eradicate fish the agencies stocked nearly a century ago and replace them with a different fish species, even though the area was historically fishless prior to stocking efforts. We expect to have the case fully submitted for a decision before project activities begin this August.

At our website, you can learn more about these cases and find links to the filed documents to explore them in depth.

Join us at our Wilderness Act 60th Anniversary Celebration!

September 13-15 at Wilderness Gateway Campground
on the Lochsa River near the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness in Idaho.

For more information:
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visit https://bit.ly/3yjAG1P,
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template to make basic wilderness planning easier—clear legal boundaries, managing visitors, protocols for scientific research and monitoring, identifying unacceptable activities, and strategies for preservation. Basic park-specific guidelines are essential to ensure that parks with wilderness resources aren't compromised, and that its wilderness stewardship program is not subject to the whims of individual superintendents who come and go."

Tule elk herd behind a fence at Point Reyes in the Philip Burton Wilderness by Allen Pecorino

On the eve of the 60th anniversary of the Wilderness Act, the words of Richard Sellers, NPS Historian and Wilderness Steering Committee member in the early 2000s, capture today's challenge and opportunity before his agency:

"…the Park Service's wilderness management puts to the test NPS's belief in itself as a preservation agency. This belief is in everyone's heart, but is still not reflected in everyone's action. As we know, Wilderness is statutorily different from typical backcountry, and the law requires very special treatment of Wilderness. National Park Service compliance with the law should recognize the tremendous significance of Wilderness as outstanding examples of America's most pristine landscapes—areas of great ecological, spiritual, and recreational value."

"Let the Park Service now live up to its belief in its preservation mission, and match the nobility of national park Wilderness—and of the Wilderness Act itself—with a strong and decisive wilderness management program that is institutionalized throughout the National Park System."

Mark Peterson is the president of Wilderness Watch's Board of Directors.