



WILDERNESS WATCHER

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Of Wolves, Elk, and Wilderness: The Battle in the River of No Return

By Dana Johnson

It's January in the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness—the largest contiguous expanse of Wilderness in the Lower 48. From the south, the Middle Fork of the Salmon River makes its way north for over 100 miles until it joins the Main Salmon. From there, the river cuts west, unimpeded, carving one of the wildest canyons on the planet. Rising roughly 6,300 feet from the river bottom, old forests, rocky bluffs, and jagged crags connect with a massive network of ridges and drainages—refuge for the undomesticated. The elk have moved to lower elevations, browsing on south facing slopes, while mountain goats and bighorn sheep navigate the windswept scree and crags above. A mountain lion leaves its solitary trail in the snow.

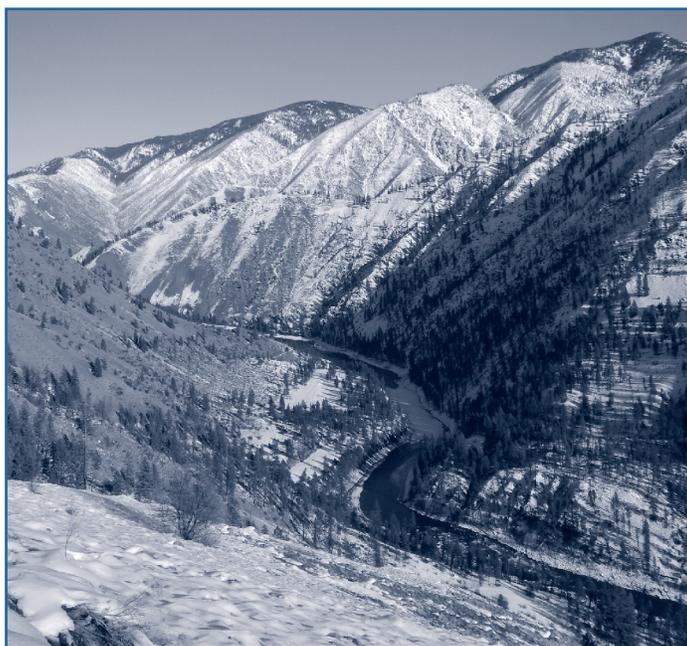


Photo: Brett Haverstick

manding full, visceral attention. Avalanches pierce silence like a shotgun. Wolves project their long, mournful howls across the ridges. Trees, bending under the growing weight of winter, abruptly snap.

Always, the crystalized silence settles once again awaiting the next carnal interruption. This January is different. Helicopters approach over the ridges and into the heart of the Wilderness, their mechanized thumping growing in intensity. Herds of panicked elk flee across their wintering grounds, legs scrambling to maintain the impossible trajectory. The helicopters hover and swoop until close enough for the passengers to take aim. The

net-gun fires—one is hit. The helicopter touches down long enough for the passengers to jump and then returns to a hover over the entangled, waiting animal. She is “processed.” This scene replays over and over. When the helicopters leave, 64 animals will return to their wild companions carrying something new and out of place.

This year, in January, the Forest Service authorized Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) to make 120 helicopter landings in the River of No

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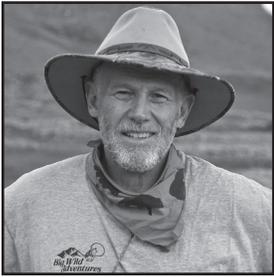
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...and More

Anyone who has spent time in wilderness in the depth of winter knows that the stillness is striking. The absence of noise makes any deviation from the status quo an acute jarring of the senses—the present moment de-

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message from the President



As I write this column, it's mid-February and the radical right's occupation of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in Oregon has ended. It's no longer headline news, which is fine with me, because I've noticed that in this drama the mainstream media rarely questioned often-repeated but erroneous dogma.

The dogma is that these radical anti-government bullies at the Malheur want to "take back" the public lands and "return them" to the states. That's been repeated in the media ad-nauseum with few reports bothering to mention the inconvenient fact that the states never owned these lands in the first place. With few exceptions, America's public domain has always been in public ownership, held in trust by the federal government for all American citizens, no matter where they live. About a third of the United States is national public land, administered by one of four federal land management agencies.

Furthermore, were the states to gain control of our national forests, national parks, national wildlife refuges and BLM lands, they wouldn't be able to afford the upkeep. Federal expenditures for enforcing environmental regulations plus basic administration would overwhelm them. Not to mention all of the unfortunate subsidies doled out by the feds to prop up the ranching, mining, oilfield, logging and off-road vehicle industries. So the states would either go bankrupt trying to replicate federal programs, or they'd allow an unregulated free-for-all of environmental destruction. Or, they'd sell the lands to private corporations. Imagine Exxon-Mobile in charge of the Bob Marshall Wilderness! In any event, this proposed land-grab is uneconomical, undesirable and unworkable, the far-fetched fantasy of a few far right-wing zealots.

What the mainstream media also misses is that the vast majority of Americans, including rural westerners, support the public land concept; the anti-public land radical fringe in fact is a tiny minority. There's good reason for this sentiment. Our public lands represent the best of the American way. Laws such as the National Environmental Policy Act and the National Forest Management Act ensure that all of our citizens have an opportunity to help decide what happens to these landscapes. History has shown that when a variety of American citizens, not just corporations or local governments, get involved in public land issues, good things usually happen. Our system of public land administration and stewardship is far from perfect, sure, but it's way better than the alternative.

Over the years I've often argued that Wilderness is the best idea in the history of humanity. Add "public lands" to that assertion. Public lands give us the opportunity to preserve wildness, both from the standpoint of adding areas to the National Wilderness Preservation System and in forcing the agencies to keep designated Wilderness wild, which Wilderness Watch does better than anyone. No doubt, public land managers could do a lot better, but most private landscapes aren't even close to being wild or natural. Want to see what a landscape that lacks public land looks like? Visit Europe. Or Texas. These places are tame. Controlled. Entirely tamed, pastoral and civilized. Opportunities for fair-chase hunting of native species, fishing, backpacking, bird-watching, horse-packing and other such activities are nearly non-existent, as are nearly all opportunities for challenge in wild nature. Native wildlife diversity is minimal. Natural ecosystems are radically altered. There's little wildness and almost no lands that we would consider to be of wilderness quality. The anti-public land radicals want us to emulate Europe. They would turn the American West into Europe West. Fortunately, most folks realize how out of touch with reality these faint-hearted lily-livered pseudo-tough guys are. 🌿

—Howie Wolke



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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Return Wilderness to place radio telemetry collars on 60 elk. To our knowledge, this is the most extensive helicopter intrusion ever authorized in Wilderness. IDFG said the project was necessary to study an elk-population decline that has occurred since the return of gray wolves to the Wilderness. The objective of the project is to gather data that will inform IDFG's decisions concerning hunting, trapping, and "predator control" actions in the Wilderness. Wilderness Watch, Friends of the Clearwater, and Western Watersheds Project filed suit in Federal District Court on January 7th—hours after receiving a copy of the signed special use permit authorizing project implementation. Within the next three days, while the suit was pending and before we could get before the judge, IDFG inundated the River of No Return Wilderness with repeated helicopter flights and landings. And, even though it was abundantly clear that IDFG was not authorized to harass and collar wolves, IDFG nonetheless "mistakenly" captured and collared four wolves. Those 60 elk and four wolves now have collars transmitting radio telemetry data, including precise location points, to IDFG—an agency with an unapologetic history of wolf extermination efforts and a current plan to "aggressively manage elk and predator populations," including exterminating 60 percent of the wolves within the Middle Fork Zone of the River of No Return Wilderness. As I write this article, IDFG, along with Wildlife Services, is carrying out aerial wolf gunning activities in the Lolo area north of the River of No Return Wilderness.

IDFG's activities, authorized by the Forest Service, constitute an affront—the latest in a long line of affronts—on Wilderness. Our complaint sets forth the legal framework for this position, and you can read it on our website. We'll post additional case filings as they become available. With the limited space here, I'd like to step beyond the case filings and address the legitimacy, relevancy, and urgent necessity of wild spaces—of nature's own wild order.

Our intelligence as a species has always been a double-edged sword. Scientific and technological advances have allowed the human population to increase rapidly and exponentially, which in turn has significantly taxed the basic elements needed for our survival. Indeed, an

alarming number of our non-human counterparts have recently made their untimely departure to the world of extinction. Computers, Wi-Fi, and cell-phones have made it easier to stay connected, organize for causes, and access information, yet we find it more and more difficult to disconnect from the pressures of modern life and to meaningfully connect with other people and the land around us—the real world. Ed Abbey duly noted that "[h]igh technology has done us one great service: It has retaught us the delight of performing simple

Wilderness is a place where we've decided to let time move slowly, let distances remain great, let wildness do its thing without interference, and let danger and uncertainty exist without temperance.

and primordial tasks—chopping wood, building a fire, drawing water from a spring." There is a profound reason for this delight. We are rapidly losing something immeasurable and very old. Something that runs much deeper than our new-world focus

on recreation. Something much deeper than our abstract economic and scientific labels. Something that is not compatible with helicopters, drones, satellite collars, industrial clear-cutting, motorized and mechanized transport, corporate sponsorships, Facebook, and text messages. We are destroying this very old thing—sometimes with the best of intentions.

The drafters of the Wilderness Act saw this threat. In 1964 and the years preceding, these wilderness visionaries knew that the rapid expansion of the human population coupled with the rapid progression of technology and mechanization was inevitable. They also knew that this trajectory posed significant irreparable harm to our last wild places and to our own human existence. They understood that even though they could not know all of the forms that our technological advancement might take, they could define its opposite, the wild baseline, and put forth a firm intention to protect the wild above all else. They envisioned and promoted various human uses of Wilderness, including scientific and recreational uses, but they expressly subjected each of those uses to compatibility with a primary purpose: the preservation of wilderness character. And what is Wilderness? What is wilderness character? The drafters provided this definition of Wilderness:

A wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his own works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man

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himself is a visitor who does not remain. An area of wilderness is further defined to mean in this Act an area of undeveloped Federal land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions and which (1) generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable; (2) has outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation; (3) has at least five thousand acres of land or is of sufficient size as to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition; and (4) may also contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value.

In a speech promoting the Wilderness Bill, Howard Zahniser, drafter of the Wilderness Act, did not mince words when describing the essence of Wilderness and the fundamental purpose of the Wilderness Act: “We describe an area as wilderness because of a character it has—not because of a particular use that it serves. A wilderness is an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man. (Untrammelled—not untrampled—untrammelled, meaning free, unbound, unhampered, unchecked, having the freedom of the wilderness).”

Luckily for us, and due in large part to wilderness designation, we still have pockets of untrammelled, primordial space—landscapes protected from our relentless industrial and technological growth and from our unending conquest to defy physical space. With 7.4 billion people now on this planet, and with our insatiable appetites for consumption and control, the pressures against these primordial spaces are mounting. The Wildernesses of central Idaho are comparatively and contiguously massive. We have a real opportunity, and a real obligation, to protect this wild space from the types of intrusions inflicted by IDFG, and authorized by the Forest Service, this past January.

Compounding the legal and moral precedent of allowing intensive helicopter intrusion into the heart of the River of No Return Wilderness, IDFG's current elk (and wolf) collaring project is part of its broader plan to manipulate wildlife populations in the Wilderness to enhance elk hunting opportunities—an agenda that is fundamentally antithetical to preserving “an area

where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man.” And this is only the beginning. IDFG stated in its project proposal that it will need five to 10 years of successive helicopter-assisted collaring in the Wilderness to obtain valid data. Its ultimate goals are clearly spelled out. IDFG's Elk Management Plan calls for restoration of elk population levels to those observed in the 1990s—before the return of wolves to the Wilderness and before the restoration of natural predator/prey dynamics—and for “aggressive” predator control activities to achieve this end.

IDFG's motives and actions in this case should not tarnish the value of scientific study of wilderness, generally, or human enjoyment of wilderness. Quite to the contrary, wilderness provides a unique opportunity to observe an untrammelled ecosystem with scientific curiosity, and wilderness is the best place to immerse oneself in the wild. These pursuits are expressly contemplated by the Wilderness Act, but not at the expense of wilderness itself. We need wilderness much more than we need more information about wilderness. And, if that information leads ultimately to

control of wilderness, it does not preserve wilderness. Through the Wilderness Act, we made the decision to limit our power, to exercise restraint and humility. Wilderness is a place where we've decided to let time move slowly, let distances remain great, let wildness do its thing without interference, and let danger and uncertainty exist without temperance. We would have much to learn if we could only resist our urge to meddle.

I fear that with each passing generation, our memory of truly wild landscapes will fade. I can't imagine a world where that long, mournful howl of the wolf doesn't stop me in my tracks. I can't imagine a world where a fresh griz track doesn't make every hair on my body stand on end and make the sound of a single falling pine needle strike the intensity of thunder. I can't imagine a world where a handheld device tells me—shows me—what to expect around every corner, or a world where once fiercely wild animals roam the wilderness with collars on their necks—their every movement transmitted to a computer, manned by a human who works for an agency that does not value things it cannot control. If anything must be controlled, for the sake of wilderness, it is us. 🌿



Photo: Brett Haverstick

Wilderness in the Courts

Defending Wilderness Against Hovercrafts



Yukon-Charley River National Preserve. Photo: NPS

In 2007, the National Park Service told Alaska resident John Sturgeon that he could not use his motorized hovercraft to hunt moose in the Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve, a unit of the National Park System in eastern Alaska. The Park Service, by regulation, bans hovercraft within national parks. Sturgeon sued in Federal court arguing that the State owns the submerged land beneath the river and that the National Park Service may not regulate the navigable waters covering that land under the Park Service's general authority to manage public lands within national parks. A U.S. district court in Alaska disagreed with Sturgeon and upheld the Park Service's hovercraft ban in 2013. The Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals affirmed that decision in 2014.

Sturgeon's case has now made its way to the U.S. Supreme Court with the State of Alaska supporting Sturgeon's position. Because this case carries important implications for federal regulation of navigable waters within federal public land boundaries, including Wilderness, Wilderness Watch and other groups, represented by Trustees for Alaska, jointly submitted an amicus brief to the Supreme Court supporting the National Park Service's long-standing authority to regulate navigable waters within park boundaries. (This authority is pursuant to the Property Clause and the Commerce Clause of the U.S. Constitution, the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act, the Park Service's Organic Act, long-standing legal precedent, and as an essential mechanism for achieving the purposes for which Congress established national parks.) The Supreme Court heard argument in this case on January 20, 2016. (The audio from that argument is available here: http://supremecourt.gov/oral_arguments/audio/2015/14-1209.) A decision is expected by the end of June. 🐾

Join us Online



New Wilderness Watch website

We recently redesigned and relaunched the Wilderness Watch website with a clean, new look and structure that makes it easier to find information and get involved in protecting Wilderness. Our Home page features a slide show of some of the most pressing issues affecting Wilderness, easy-to-use navigation, call-to-action buttons for donating and signing-up for our e-newsletter and action alerts, plus links to our blog and social media sites. You'll also find the latest wilderness information and alerts. Take a look: www.wildernesswatch.org

Get social and help Wilderness Watch defend Wilderness

Wilderness Watch has expanded our social media efforts on Facebook and Twitter and we could use your help to spread the word! One of our goals in 2016 is to better position ourselves to put more people into action when wilderness threats or opportunities arise, and the fast-paced world of social media will help us do that.

You can find us on Twitter @WildernessWatch and connect with us on Facebook at: www.facebook.com/wildernesswatch64. Please give us a "like" and a "follow," and make sure to let your friends know that Wilderness Watch's social media sites are a good source for the latest news, updates, and action alerts about America's Wilderness system. Thanks for helping us #KeepItWild! 🐾

On the Watch

Stronger rules proposed to protect predators in wildlife refuges in Alaska



Photo: Michael Stadelmeier

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) manages a massive amount of land in Alaska. There are nearly 77 million acres of national wildlife refuges in the state, of which nearly 18 million acres are Wilderness, and millions of more acres qualify for wilderness designation.

In March, Wilderness Watch submitted comments supporting proposed FWS regulations prohibiting many of the state of Alaska's most unethical hunting and trapping practices on national wildlife refuges. The state's rules allow using bait to lure and shoot bears, killing mother bears and their cubs in their winter dens, killing wolves and coyotes during denning season when adults are most vulnerable and the young can't survive on their own, and using traps and snares for killing wolves, bears, and other predators.

In response to the state's rules, the Fish and Wildlife Service is proposing regulations patterned after those recently adopted by the National Park Service for national preserves in Alaska (more information below). The FWS' proposed regulations would prohibit the use of bait for hunting brown bears, the use of traps and snares for killing any bears, and prohibit hunting and trapping wolves during part of their denning season.

While these proposals are a good start, they fall far short of what is needed and appropriate for these refuges. We urged the agency to strengthen its proposed regulations, including asking FWS to:

- also prohibit the unethical practice of using bait to lure and shoot black bears;
- extend the wolf and coyote hunting season closure to run from April 1 to November 1, rather than August 9, to prevent pups and denning mothers from being easily killed;
- prohibit the killing of black bears and cubs while in their winter dens; and
- uphold the purpose of our refuges—to “conserve fish and wildlife populations and habitats in their natural diversity” and to maintain natural ecological processes, such as predator-prey dynamics. ❧

Some predator hunting practices banned in national preserves in Alaska



Photo: Rex Parker

The National Park Service (NPS) has finalized regulations banning some inappropriate and unethical hunting practices on 19 million acres of national preserves in Alaska, codifying temporary restrictions in place. The regulations apply to sport hunters only; subsistence hunters are not affected.

Wilderness Watch is pleased to see the Park Service working towards upholding the purposes of the preserves—to maintain natural diversity and ecological processes. The Park Service regulations ban the baiting of black bears and grizzlies, ban the use of spotlights to shoot black bears and cubs hibernating in their dens, prohibit dogs for hunting black bears, and also prohibit shooting caribou while swimming or emerging from the water.

We are disappointed, however, that the regulations for hunting wolves and coyotes won't protect these animals during much of their denning and rendezvous periods. The final Park Service rules ban wolf and coyote killing only from May 1 to August 9, but should have extended from April 1 to November 1. The end of the NPS ban coincides with the start of Dall sheep hunting. This suggests the NPS was more concerned about sheep hunters having the chance to kill a wolf if they happen upon one, than the plight of wolf pups who could be left motherless, or of wolf packs that will have their social structure destroyed, by an early season hunt. ❧

PolyMet Mine threatens Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness



Photo: Kevin Proescholdt

In December 2015, Wilderness Watch joined with dozens of organizations and tens of thousands of citizens to oppose PolyMet's proposed sulfide mine in northeastern Minnesota not far from the storied 1.1 million-acre Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW). Over 1,600 Wilderness Watch members and supporters also submitted comments on the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS). In 2014, over 58,000 comments were submitted on PolyMet's Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement, with over 98% opposed to the proposal.

Despite these tens of thousands of citizen comments and detailed scientific objections filed by conservation groups, little has improved about PolyMet's proposal. The FEIS is littered with unrealistic assumptions

about capturing and treating polluted water and contains no new information about financial assurance (a damage deposit for cleanup costs). In addition, the possibility that PolyMet's polluted water would flow northward into the Boundary Waters watershed has not been sufficiently addressed. The U.S. EPA, in its comment on the PolyMet FEIS, noted this is a real risk the FEIS doesn't adequately study and that would need to be addressed in any permit application.

On March 3, the MN Department of Natural Resources (DNR) ruled the FEIS "adequate." PolyMet may begin applying for state permits, though litigation challenging the FEIS and the adequacy determination could at least temporarily block the issuance of any permits. Gov. Mark Dayton could also block DNR's decision.

PolyMet is just one of many copper-nickel sulfide mines proposed near the BWCAW. Twin Metals, the next likely mine plan to advance, proposes a massive underground mining operation much closer to the BWCAW within the watershed of the Wilderness. Gov. Dayton came out strongly against the Twin Metals mine on March 7 due to its close proximity to the BWCAW, which may indicate he will take a hard look at PolyMet as well. 🌀

Helicopters threaten Wildernesses and bighorn sheep in Nevada



Mt. Charleston Wilderness by Sendi Kalcic, BLM

Wilderness Watch is questioning a proposal by the Nevada Department of Wildlife (NDOW) to use helicopters and to capture, collar, and translocate bighorn sheep in 13 Wildernesses—Arrow Canyon, Eldorado, Ireteba Peaks, Jumbo Springs, La Madre Mountain, Lime Canyon, Mount Charleston, Muddy Mountains, North McCullough, Rainbow Mountain, South McCollough, Spirit Mountain, and Wee Thump Joshua Tree (and four Wilderness Study Areas)—in Nevada. The NDOW plan includes the following: using helicopters and net guns to capture sheep, affixing radio collars to the animals, moving the sheep to other areas, and temporary installation of game cameras, among other actions. The scoping letter fails to show how any such actions are necessary to preserve these Wildernesses.

sary to preserve these Wildernesses.

If the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) and NDOW's goal is to conserve bighorn sheep, they should instead consider changing hunting policies, regulating human use, and removing cattle and other livestock from public lands to avoid competition for forage and the spread of disease. This type of "game-farming" mentality as put forth in NDOW's proposal has no place in Wilderness administration and protection. 🌀

Forest Service proposes weaker protections for nation's largest wilderness study area



Photo: Frank Kovalchek

In February, Wilderness Watch urged the Forest Service (FS) to protect and improve the wilderness character of the largest wilderness study area in the country—the two million-acre Nellie Juan-College Fiord Wilderness Study Area (WSA) in Alaska.

The Congressionally-designated Nellie Juan-College Fiord WSA on the Chugach National Forest in Alaska's western Prince William Sound is an ecological and scenic treasure. It is two million acres of ancient rainforest, wild salmon, remote islands, and stunning mountains and glaciers.

The FS's proposed plan for the Chugach would degrade the area's wilderness character by loosening some protections and permanently removing others, protections that have been in place for almost 40 years. The proposed Chugach plan would also allow residential timber harvests, expanded motorized uses, manipulation of habitats, mining, and helicopter-assisted skiing and hiking.

In our comments, we urged the Forest Service to:

- keep its long-standing promise to protect the wild character of the entire Wilderness Study Area until Congress finalizes its protection;
- recommend the 1.9 million eligible acres of the Wilderness Study Area and surrounding roadless lands eligible for wilderness designation as Wilderness;
- not abandon protection for the nearly 600,000 acres it proposes to eliminate from the Wilderness Study Area;
- reverse its recommendation to split the Wilderness Study Area into two smaller units; and
- prohibit recreational snowmobile use in the Wilderness Study Area. 🐾

Wilderness Watch opposes helicopters in Alpine Lakes Wilderness



Photo: Steve Boutcher

Wilderness Watch is opposing a Forest Service (FS) plan to use helicopters and other motorized equipment and build structures in the Alpine Lakes Wilderness in Washington. The FS plans to issue a Categorical Exclusion to reconstruct trails and at least one bridge. The proposal includes an undetermined number of helicopter landings to haul in materials, including gravel and treated wood, to create hundreds of feet of turnpikes and one (or more) bridges. The agency has failed to demonstrate the project is necessary to protect the Wilderness, or to offer less intrusive alternatives. We suggested a number of other ways to accomplish the work, if deemed necessary, including the use of traditional skills, pack stock, and native materials (if available). We are asking the agency to complete an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). 🐾

Plans should focus on Keeping Yosemite and Mt. Rainier National Parks wild



Yosemite National Park by George Wuerthner



Mt. Rainier National Park by Dllu (commons.wikimedia.org)

Wilderness Watch recently submitting scoping comments on the Park Service's Wilderness Stewardship Plan/EIS for world-renowned Yosemite National Park (NP) in California and on the Wilderness Management Plan for Mt. Rainier National Park in Washington's rugged Cascade Mountains. The 704,624-acre Yosemite Wilderness makes up about 94 percent of Yosemite NP. The 228,480-acre Mt. Rainier Wilderness makes up about 96 percent of Mt. Rainier NP. Unfortunately, the Park Service's proposed alternatives fail to recognize the primary tenet of Wilderness—its wildness.

The Park Service has raised four issues in the scoping letters for Yosemite and Mt. Rainier National Parks—visitor use and capacity, stock use, trail management, and commercial services. These important issues are all related to overuse and over allocation.

In our scoping comments, we urged the Park Service to:

- respect the intent of the Wilderness Act to limit commercial services in Wilderness;
- stop routine use of helicopters and other motorized equipment in Wilderness;
- remove nonconforming structures and uses in potential wilderness within the Parks and designate those areas as Wilderness;
- ensure that all alternatives protect and preserve wilderness character;
- implement a strong wilderness monitoring program;
- better manage visitor use; and
- allow natural processes to determine conditions in Wilderness. 🌀

Clarification:

In the Fall 2015 *Wilderness Watcher* we referred to the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness as the second largest Wilderness in the lower 48 states (second to Death Valley Wilderness). However, although Death Valley is officially listed as the largest Wilderness in the lower 48 states, the Death Valley Wilderness is actually a cluster of wilderness units split by roads in Death Valley National Park. Although wilderness clusters or complexes such as those in Death Valley are extremely important, and some of the Death Valley units are over a half million acres in size, the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness and adjoining Gospel-Hump Wilderness in the mountains of central Idaho are the largest, unbroken block of Wilderness in the lower 48 states. 🌀

Wilderness in Congress

Izembek Road

As readers may recall from the Fall 2015 *Wilderness Watcher*, a U.S. District Court judge upheld Interior Secretary Sally Jewell's decision to reject a land exchange that would have built a road through the center of the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge and Wilderness. Wilderness Watch had intervened in that litigation to support Secretary Jewell's decision. On January 12th, however, Rep. Ken Buck (R-CO) introduced HR 4371, the Article I Consolidated Appropriations Amendments. Buried deep within this lengthy bill (Title V, section 501) is the "King Cove Road Land Exchange," which would force that same ill-advised land exchange and road construction through the heart of the Izembek Wilderness. Senator Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), who has pushed this project for many years, coincidentally chairs the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies. We've alerted our allies and will help oppose this sneaky legislative attack.

Sportsmen's Bills

Congress has introduced a number of bad sportsmen's bills that would harm Wilderness, and unfortunately the bills keep getting worse.

In the House, HR 528 (Benishek, R-MI), the Recreational Fishing and Hunting Heritage Act, would effectively repeal the 1964 Wilderness Act. This bill would allow unlimited habitat manipulation and development, including temporary road construction, for actions to purportedly facilitate hunting, fishing, recreational shooting, or wildlife conservation. The bill would amend the Wilderness Act to place such projects and activities on par with preserving wilderness character, as the purpose of the Wilderness Act. The bill would also exempt all such projects in Wilderness from environmental review.

HR 2406 (Wittman, R-VA), the Sportsmen's Heritage and Recreational Enhancement Act (SHARE), contains the bad wilderness language of HR 528, but would also for the first time open all Wildernesses across the nation to commercial filming by such commercial enterprises as TV, cable, and internet hunting and fishing shows. HR 2406 passed the House Natural Resources Committee last October. On Feb. 26, the bill passed the full House of Representatives, made even worse by the addition of numerous bad amendments including a legislative de-listing of the wolf in Wyoming and the Great Lakes from the Endangered Species Act.

In the Senate, S. 405, the Bipartisan Sportsmen's Act (Murkowski, R-AK) has been split into two bills, but both bills are expected to be combined later on the Sen-

ate floor. S. 556, the first part, passed the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee in November and contains the language that would open all Wildernesses to commercial filming. This bill has been placed on General Orders on the Senate floor. S. 659, the other part of Murkowski's Bipartisan Sportsmen's Act, contained provisions under the jurisdiction of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee. It passed out of this committee on Jan. 20, 2016, but a number of damaging amendments were added. These bad amendments included a legislative de-listing of the wolf in Wyoming and the Great Lakes States from the protections of the Endangered Species Act, and a legislative blocking of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's attempts to limit predator killing and unethical hunting practices on U.S. Fish and Wildlife Refuges in Alaska.

REVA

Grazing on public lands has made the national news lately with the Bundys' armed thugs illegally taking over the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in Oregon. One longer-term solution to grazing problems is to remove cows from our public lands. Wilderness Watch supports the Rural Economic Vitalization Act (REVA, H.R. 3410), a bill by Rep. Adam Smith (D-WA) that provides conservation interests with the opportunity to buy-out grazing permits on public lands that would then be permanently closed to livestock grazing. H.R. 3410 could benefit all public lands and Wildernesses that currently allow livestock grazing, one of the more destructive activities allowed on public lands. REVA has been referred to both the House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committees, but no hearings on the bill have yet been held.

ANILCA Oversight Hearing

On December 3, 2015, the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee held an oversight hearing on the 35th anniversary of the landmark 1980 Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA). Among other things, ANILCA designated 56 million acres of Wilderness in Alaska, more than doubling the size of the National Wilderness Preservation System. The hearing witnesses were unfortunately stacked against ANILCA (not surprising, given Committee Chair Lisa Murkowski's (R-AK) antagonism towards ANILCA), with only one pro-wilderness witness allowed to testify. But Wilderness Watch prepared and submitted a formal statement for the hearing record to provide additional support for the tremendous conservation accomplishments that ANILCA brought, while also pointing out some of the challenges and unfulfilled promises that have resulted from federal agencies' failure to properly implement this landmark law. 

Mr. Carlquist's Most Generous Surprise

By Jeff Smith



As the fundraiser for Wilderness Watch, I never know what to expect at the mailbox on any given day. The other day, for instance, there was a short letter from Richard Kauffman telling us that his brother-in-law, Brad Carlquist, a Wilderness Watch member, had died.

“He was 63 years old,” Richard wrote, “and throughout his entire life was passionate about nature, wildlife, and environmental causes. His happiest times were spent camping, hiking in the mountains, and as a park ranger in our National Parks including Katmai, Denali, Glacier Bay, and Mount Rainier National Parks.”

That was bad news, to lose a member who shares our deeply held convictions.

Brad had found us through a routine mailing back in 2008 and had stayed with us, giving an annual donation since then. The good news came when Richard wrote that Brad liked our mission, the preservation and proper stewardship of Wilderness and wild rivers. And, before he died, he decided to give Wilderness Watch a generous portion of his individual retirement account. It goes without saying that this is an incredible boost to our work and the kind of reinforcement that cheers the staff and our board.

We were very sorry to hear of Brad's death, and we will work hard to honor his generous gift and make sure his passion for wildlands continues.

Surprise bequests like Brad's and legacy gifts to our Forever Wild Endowment are very easy to set up and will sustain Wilderness Watch and wilderness protection for years to come. Please call (406.542.2048 x1) or email me (jsmith@wildernesswatch.org) if you would like more information. 

LOVE THE WILDERNESS? Help Us Keep It Wild!
Yes! I would like to make a contribution and help defend Wilderness!

Here is an extra donation to help protect Wilderness!

\$250 \$100 \$50 \$30 \$ _____

I would like to become a member!

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On our Blog

It's time to change how we administer Wilderness and strengthen the National Wilderness Preservation System *by Brett Haverstick*

Taking a long trip into the backcountry during winter doesn't appeal to some people. That's understandable. But I enjoy it, and it's something I try to do a few times a year. Winter backpacking is very different, and more challenging, compared to strapping on the pack during other seasons.



For one it's darn cold, with many trips never getting above freezing, day or night. Two, there's usually lots of snow on the ground, which means you're probably wearing snowshoes, and, perhaps, breaking trail too. Three, your pack is heavier because of all the extra warm gear you are carrying, including more food because you need to consume a lot of calories each day. Four, you have to work harder in just about everything you do, from setting up your shelter and trying to stay warm to melting water and attempting to stay hydrated. Five, there's not a lot of daylight, so you have to stay motivated and keep moving if you want to cover some miles. Lastly, not too many people want to spend five-six days in the cold, blowing snow of the northern Rockies in January! But find someone to share the workload if you can!

My recent trip into the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness was with a friend, and, perhaps more importantly, an individual with a skill set that I could trust and depend on. Once the weather report showed a high-pressure system moving across the region, Russell and I finalized our plans and set out for the trailhead. We felt confident we could cover 50 miles before the next weather front moved in.

Read the rest on our website. 