



# WILDERNESS WATCHER

The Quarterly Newsletter of Wilderness Watch

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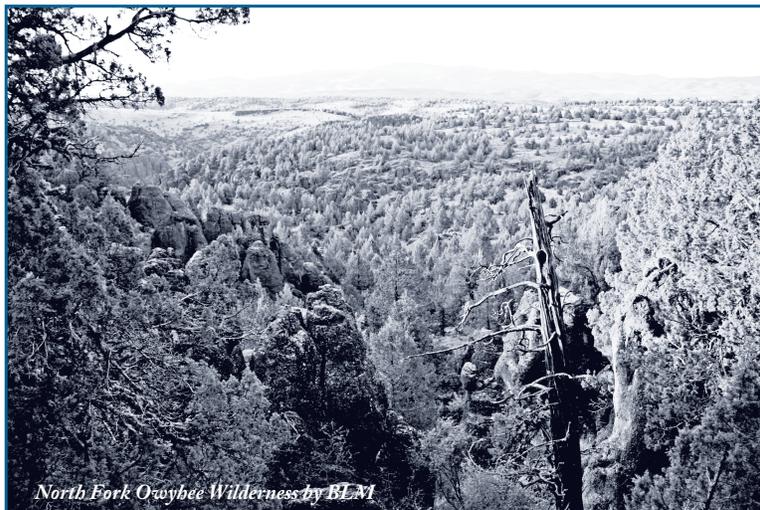
## Massive Juniper Clearing Proposed Across Owyhee Wildernesses

By Dana Johnson

In the Owyhee region of southwestern Idaho, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is planning a massive habitat manipulation project—one of the largest juniper removal projects ever proposed. Native juniper trees will be cleared from approximately 600,000 acres (940 square miles), including 47,000 acres in the Little Jacks Creek, Big Jacks Creek, Pole Creek, North Fork Owyhee, and the Owyhee River Wildernesses. Quoted in the *Salt Lake Tribune*, the director for University of Idaho’s Rangeland Center stated, “[f]or juniper, these numbers are unprecedented. This is bold.” Noting that juniper reduction will increase forage for cattle, the Rangeland Center director was excited about the project’s prospect for “get[ting] juniper back in its place.” For its part, the BLM states that the project is necessary to protect sagebrush-steppe habitat, and thus sage-grouse, from encroaching juniper forests. But, what does it mean to put juniper back in its place, and how

land management agencies. Land management agencies are there to manage and thus they have a long, ingrained history of tinkering with and modifying public lands—sometimes to appease various interests, sometimes as a means to achieve or restore “desired conditions.” But in Wilderness, the Wilderness Act sets forth the desired condition. In Wilderness, the desired condition is a wild, primitive landscape, untrammled by man, where natural processes prevail. This isn’t to say that management actions are never appropriate. If a patch of spotted knapweed pops up along a stock trail in the middle of the

Wilderness, it might not be a bad idea to pull it. Though, more intensive actions involving chemical-spraying over large areas might not be a good idea, particularly if repeated actions are required. This project is far from pulling a rogue patch of spotted knapweed, and all-too-often the fundamental idea of Wilderness, and its value, is forgotten in



North Fork Owyhee Wilderness by BLM

the larger urge to manage and control—particularly at the landscape scale.

In the case of the Owyhee juniper-removal project (called the *Bruneau-Owyhee Sage-grouse Habitat* or BOSH Project), the BLM paradoxically states that broad-scale, long-term habitat manipulation is “needed to preserve the wilderness free from the effects of modern civilization.” The BOSH project is the latest example of a land management agency proposing heavy-handed habitat and wildlife population manipulations in Wilderness based on the argument that

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would the proposed 10 to 15-year project, followed by subsequent, ongoing juniper removal, comport with the mandates of the Wilderness Act?

The idea of Wilderness as a self-willed landscape has often been a difficult one for

## Message from the President



**A**lmost three years after the passage of the Wilderness Act, my father deemed me old enough to go on a backpacking trip with him and his friends to catch fish in the old High Uintas Primitive Area, which along with some contiguous wildlands became the High Uintas Wilderness in 1984. In my opinion, I had been old enough five years earlier to go on this annual trek my father took with his friends. At last I was joining in this great yearly adventure, the putative goal of which was to fish in high

mountain lakes. For me, it was much more than simply a fishing trip—glimpses of marten, time to myself to wander (without getting lost!), and the smells, sounds, and feel of big wild country.

As I step into the role of president of Wilderness Watch, some thoughts have crossed my mind over the past few months besides the adventure I had fifty years ago. Following in the footsteps of Howie Wolke is impossible—he is eloquent in both the written and spoken word. And his wilderness passion and experience are second to none. On a more somber topic, the US election, if it can be called that, will most likely result in the gravest threats to Wilderness and the Wilderness Act since its passage. Admittedly, had the election turned out differently, Wilderness and other wild places would still be in trouble—from politicians, from commodification by the ever-growing outdoor recreation industry catering to thrill-seekers, and from the two-pronged threat of global warming and human population growth, among others.

In the coming weeks and months, Wilderness Watch will continue to work with other conservationists to help protect Wilderness and the Wilderness Act. For whatever reasons, far too many conservationists don't understand Wilderness or wildness. A new, perhaps modern, form of recreation centrism, driven by corporate institutions, is becoming entrenched in popular culture and in discussions about public land, wildness and Wilderness, much to the detriment of all three. Networks of like-minded people, who love America's public lands, will be necessary to counter expected efforts to diminish our wildland heritage. And by our, I mean to include all wild things—the grizzly bears, snails, salmon, mycorrhizal fungi, and the humans who love wildness.

Another daunting task is to counter the obfuscation by agencies charged with the administration of Wilderness. Rather than hold to the spirit or letter of the law, the agencies seem to be entertaining new ways to administratively gut the Wilderness Act. For example, policy initiatives that may have originally been well-intended—like the minimum requirements-minimum tool analysis process, developed to systematically determine whether agency proposals were indeed necessary for preservation of Wilderness—are being twisted to rationalize everything from (re)constructing unneeded buildings, under the ruse of historic preservation, to using helicopters to collar wildlife as part of predator control plans. We at Wilderness Watch plan to be both staunch and strategic in challenging wrong-headed agency decisions.

Many of us will draw on our connections to wildness in the months and years ahead as we struggle to protect Wilderness. Howard Zahniser, the Wilderness Act's author, had a great vision, "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." No one can say for certain what the future of Wilderness or the Wilderness Act will be. I certainly can't, and therein lies hope. We have the opportunity to shape that bold future. Besides, nature bats last, and that is a comforting thought. ♪

—Gary Macfarlane



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  
Phone: (406) 542-2048  
www.wildernesswatch.org  
wild@wildernesswatch.org

# Juniper Forest Removal (continued from page 1)

conditions in the Wilderness have deviated from desired conditions. The agencies generally refer to the “desired condition” as the “natural condition” and argue that manipulation is necessary to restore the Wilderness’s natural character. There are two major problems with this argument. First, natural conditions will generally flow from natural processes. In other words, an area that is untrammelled—an area where natural processes prevail with little human intervention—will create its own natural conditions that evolve naturally over time. Second, in scenarios where human activity has caused a discernible disruption in natural processes, land management agencies are often unwilling or unable to stop the underlying activity causing the disruption. Instead, they attempt to mitigate the effects of the activity through some form of counterbalancing manipulation. Because the underlying activity causing the problem continues, the need for the manipulation continues.

There might be scenarios where man has interjected a discrete disruption into the natural order that could be corrected through a discrete management action. Pulling the small, rogue patch of spotted knapweed could be an example. A more complicated example might be reintroducing an apex predator to the landscape after an intentional, focused eradication. So long as landscape conditions would still support the predator, no further or ongoing intervention actions would be required. Of course, this scenario presents its own controversy—might it be more in-line with Wilderness values to allow natural repopulation to occur? At the least, in such a scenario, the argument could be made that ongoing manipulation of the Wilderness would not be required beyond the act of releasing the predator back into the landscape.

With the BOSH project, there is no discrete, human-caused disruption of the natural order that can be corrected with a discrete, short-lived intervention. The BLM acknowledges that “there are several causes of habitat loss and fragmentation across the range of sage-grouse,” including wildfire suppression, invasive annual grasses (such as cheatgrass), and conversion of sagebrush steppe to juniper woodlands. Allowing fire to play its natural role in the ecosystem would have positive impacts on all three of the listed causes and would not offend Wilderness values. Grazing activities, road construction and use, off-road vehicle use, and other ground disturbance activities are known dispersal mechanisms for invasive annual grasses. Addressing these

activities in the broader project area would benefit sagebrush-steppe habitat without offending Wilderness values. But the BLM is narrowly tailoring its project to juniper removal and declining to address these other issues.

The BLM never explains why the presence of native juniper forests are unnatural in the project area. In fact, the BLM acknowledges that “[h]abitat in the project area and adjacent landscape reflect[s] habitat trends across much of the western distribution of sage-grouse.” The DEIS indicates that vegetative succession in the project area has occurred from pre-settlement times to current as a result

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**Rather than addressing fire suppression, livestock grazing on the 143 grazing allotment units in the project area, and other human activity, the BLM is proposing to clear juniper over a 10 to 15-year period with ongoing cutting thereafter as juniper reestablishes. Such a proposal is either an attempt to resist natural vegetative evolution, or it is an attempt to put a band-aid on bullet wound.**

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of natural forces (flooding, fire, drought, and climate) and man-made forces (fire suppression, livestock grazing management, off-road vehicle use, and dispersed recreation). Rather than addressing fire suppression, livestock grazing on the 143 grazing allotment units in the project area, and other human activity, the BLM is proposing to clear juniper over a 10 to 15-year period with ongoing cutting thereafter as juniper reestablishes.

Such a proposal is either an attempt to resist natural vegetative evolution, or it is an attempt to put a band-aid on bullet wound—a band-aid that will likely need to be repeatedly reapplied. This is trammeling at its finest.

Wilderness Watch certainly appreciates concern for at-risk species such as sage-grouse. But, what of Wilderness? If a species requires ongoing habitat manipulation to persist in a particular area—either because we are unwilling to address underlying man-made causes of habitat change or because natural processes favor a vegetative evolution unfavorable to that species—do we opt for a fabricated landscape? The BLM’s wilderness management guidance states that “Wilderness areas are living ecosystems in a constant state of evolution[,]” and “[i]t is not the intent of wilderness stewardship to arrest this evolution in an attempt to preserve character existing” at some prior point in time. Accordingly, “[w]henver possible, the BLM will rely on natural processes to maintain native vegetation and to influence natural fluctuations in populations within wilderness.” We think that is smart advice.

To read WW’s detailed comment on the Owyhee juniper removal plan, visit our website or contact the office for a copy. 🌿

*Dana Johnson is Wilderness Watch’s staff attorney.*

# Wilderness in Congress

**W**ild public lands in the United States, especially those lands designated by Congress as Wilderness under the 1964 Wilderness Act, face the most serious threats and assaults in the half-century since the landmark law passed Congress. The new 115th Congress that began in 2017 is probably the most virulently anti-wilderness Congress ever, with wilderness-hating members chairing the key committees in both the House and Senate. That, coupled with the new bull-in-the-china-shop, pro-development Trump Administration, spells HUGE trouble for Wilderness. The 1964 Wilderness Act itself might easily be gutted. The very idea and definition of Wilderness could be lost.

Up until this year, even though the Republican party held majorities in both the House and Senate, anti-wilderness Republicans in Congress knew that their most egregious bills wouldn't likely pass muster with the Obama Administration. And the Obama Administration did oppose many of the worst bills, testifying against some of the bills and threatening vetoes against others.

But now the backstop of the Obama Administration is gone. The new Trump Administration's positions on Wilderness are not entirely clear at this point, but the early indications of advancing oil and gas drilling on public lands, of approving the construction of oil and tar sands pipelines, of promoting coal development, and of denying climate change all indicate that the new administration is more interested in developing public lands rather than protecting them. And without the backstop of the Obama Administration, the anti-wilderness Members of Congress are gearing up their attack on Wilderness, figuratively salivating at the opportunity to pass their worst anti-wilderness bills and have them signed into law by Donald Trump.

Already the bill introductions have begun. Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) and Rep. Don Young (R-AK) have introduced bills (S. 101/HR 218) to force construction of a new road through the heart of the **Izembek Wilderness** in Alaska, which Wilderness Watch has fought since 2009. Sen. Murkowski, who chairs the Energy and Natural Resources Committee, has pushed this issue hard for many years and may finally succeed this time around.

Other expected bills to damage Wilderness will likely soon come, too. These include bills we fought in the last

Congress, such as the bill to open up all Wildernesses nationwide to **mountain biking**, and the bill to open the entire National Wilderness Preservation System to **commercial filming**. The **Utah Public Lands Initiative** (PLI), which would radically weaken the very definition of Wilderness, may well be reintroduced again by Rep. Rob Bishop (R-UT), who chairs the Natural Resources Committee. And legislation has just passed the House (H.J. Res. 69) to **overturn protections for bears, wolves, wolverines, and other native carnivores** in national wildlife refuges in Alaska.

But perhaps the most sinister bill that will surely be reintroduced is the **Sportsmen's Heritage Act**. Last year's House version of this bill would allow nearly unlimited damage and manipulation of Wildernesses by state or federal agencies if even remotely connected to hunting, fishing, shooting sports, or fish and wildlife management. Many state agencies in many western states despise federal Wildernesses, and this bill would allow them to drive motor vehicles into Wilderness, build water developments, conduct logging or chaining, or engage in all sorts of other ecological manipulations if even remotely done for some habitat purpose. These provisions would even allow a state game agency, for example, to bulldoze a road for 10 miles into a Wilderness, build a dam, stock fish, build a cabin for employees, and then drive their pickups into the Wilderness to check on their fish. Of all the anti-wilderness bills introduced in recent Congresses, the Sportsmen's Heritage Act is the most destructive to Wilderness and the least understood.

So what can we do to fight against this terribly grim outlook for Wilderness? At Wilderness Watch, we're organizing to resist the onslaught. We will work with our colleague organizations, we will notify and activate the public, and we will fight the anti-wilderness congressional agenda. We will also work to educate and activate our supporters in the U.S. Senate who, even though they are in the minority, still retain influence to stall or block some of the bad anti-wilderness bills through the threat of filibusters. We are also creating a new organizer staff position to help activate citizens to counter the threats. And we will continue to call on you, our committed members, to help save our priceless wilderness heritage for future generations. Please join with us to save the wild! 🌿

# Wilderness in the Courts

## Judge Rules Elk and Wolf Collaring Project Violates Wilderness Act

On January 18, a federal court in Idaho ruled that the Forest Service (FS) decision authorizing Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) to land helicopters to capture and collar elk in the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness (FC-RONRW) violates the Wilderness Act and the National Environmental Policy Act. The issue came to a head on January 6, 2016 when the FS authorized IDFG to make approximately 120 helicopter landings in the remote Wilderness to capture and place radio telemetry collars on wild elk. (See Spring 2016 *Wilderness Watcher*.)

The illegally authorized helicopter operations are part of IDFG's efforts to artificially inflate elk numbers in the Wilderness by exterminating wolves. During the collaring operation IDFG also illegally captured and collared four wolves in three packs.

The court found the FS failed to show the project was necessary to protect the Wilderness and thus could not approve it. The judge rebuffed the State's contention that it doesn't need federal approval for wildlife management actions in Wilderness: "IDFG must obtain approval from the Forest Service before undertaking a project in a Wilderness Area. And that means that any action taken by the IDFG without Forest Service approval would be contrary to the Wilderness Act. It also means



Photo: Ryan Hagerty/USFWS

that before any approval can be granted, the Forest Service must first make the 'necessity' finding discussed above."

The court also ordered destruction of the unlawfully obtained radio-collar data.

In his ruling, U.S. District Judge Lynn Winmill expressed his displeasure with the FS and IDFG for ignoring his earlier directive to delay implementation of such projects until the public could challenge them and the court could rule. In the extant case IDFG launched the collaring project the day after the FS decision was signed. As a result, the court also enjoined the FS from implanting any future helicopter projects in the Wilderness for 90 days to allow time for legal challenges.

Both the State of Idaho and the FS have asked the court to amend its ruling to allow them to keep and use the data. WW

and our co-plaintiffs stand ready to defend our victory for wildlife and Wilderness against their efforts, including defending the decision should the agencies appeal.

We are grateful to Earthjustice attorneys Tim Preso and Katherine O'Brien who represented WW and our co-plaintiffs in the case. ♪

## Wilderness Watch Appeals Court Ruling on Olympic Wilderness Structures

In October 2015, Wilderness Watch filed suit to stop another building boom in the Olympic Wilderness in Washington. A decade earlier, a federal judge declared that the Park Service violated the Wilderness Act when it decided to replace two collapsed shelters in the Olympic Wilderness. The judge stated that "[w]hile former structures may have been found to have met the requirements for historic preservation, that conclusion is one that is applied to a man-made structure in the context of the history of their original construction and use in the Olympic National Park. Once the Olympic Wilderness was designated, a different perspective on the land is required." Several years later, a Wilderness Watch Board member backpacking in the Olympic Wilderness was surprised to stumble upon a Park Service crew reconstructing yet another building. That discovery prompted Wilderness Watch to investigate, and what we discovered was an ongoing effort by the National Park Service to reconstruct multiple severely degraded and collapsed structures in the Wilderness, without any public notice and in direct violation of the Wilderness Act, under the guise of "routine maintenance."

Unfortunately, in a marked departure from prior caselaw, the judge deciding Wilderness Watch's 2015 suit deferred to the Park Service's decision to rebuild these structures. Although the Park Service itself admitted that it had not determined the structures were necessary (a required finding to overcome the Wilderness Act's prohibition on structures), the judge found that rebuilding the structures was "inherently necessary," stating in oral argument that the inspirational value of encountering a trail-side shelter was on par with encountering the famed Chinese Wall, a 1,000-ft high, 22-mile long escarpment in the Bob Marshall Wilderness. Wilderness Watch has appealed to the Ninth Circuit where we will argue to a three-judge panel that the values Congress sought to protect under the Wilderness Act are different than the values protected outside of Wilderness—that, in Wilderness, allowing the land to reclaim its wild, undeveloped character is more valuable than perpetuating the work of man. ♪

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# On the Watch

## Let Nature Determine Outcome on Isle Royale



Photo: Kevin Proescholdt

In December, the National Park Service released its Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for public comment to address the presence of wolves in the Isle Royale Wilderness in Michigan. The wolf population there has dropped to only two. The Park Service's Preferred Alternative in the DEIS calls for transplanting 20-30 wolves to Isle Royale over three years. Because of the Wilderness Act's directive that Wilderness should be untrammeled and unmanipulated by humans, Wilderness Watch opposes this active manipulation of the wolf population and supports letting the wolves decide whether to inhabit or leave the island. In 2015, for example, wolves crossed Lake Superior ice from the mainland and spent five days on Isle Royale, but then returned to

the mainland despite the island's abundance of moose. Though most human visitors enjoy the presence of wolves on Isle Royale, we should respect the wild character of Isle Royale regardless of whether our preferred outcome plays out. 🌿

## BLM Proposes Manipulating Remote Wildernesses in Arizona



Wilderness Watch has told the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) it needs to drop its plan to significantly manipulate or trammel the Mount Trumbull and Mount Logan Wildernesses in the Grand Canyon-Parashant National Monument in Arizona as part of its *Uinkaret Mountains Landscape Restoration Project*. The Bureau of Land Management is planning prescribed burns within the two Wildernesses. Wilderness Watch supports allowing lightning-caused fire to play its natural role in Wilderness, but there is nothing natural about this BLM proposal which would significantly alter these Wildernesses and destroy the areas' wilderness character.



Photos: Mount Trumbull Wilderness (top) and Mount Logan Wilderness (bottom) by Tainter via Wikipedia.

The 14,650-acre Mount Logan Wilderness, named for its 7,966-foot peak, is a remote Wilderness located north of the Grand Canyon in northwestern Arizona. The 7,880-acre Mount Trumbull Wilderness lies seven miles north of the Mount Logan Wilderness, and is known for its prehistoric and historic sites.

The Environmental Assessment (EA) is largely inadequate as it fails to look at alternatives that would protect the areas' wilderness character, such as allowing natural fires to burn. Although it appears the agency doesn't plan to log or use chainsaws in the two Wildernesses, the plan calls for using helicopters "*if terrain is difficult or conditions warrant.*"

The project area encompasses some 127,000 acres in this mountain range, but the EA fails to reveal how many acres would be impacted within the two Wildernesses and for how long of a time period. Additionally, the EA fails to prove any of its proposed actions are necessary to administer the Wildernesses to preserve their wilderness character, and makes a number of false assumptions related to what drives wildfires. 🌿

### Leave the Fire Island Breach Be



Photo: National Park Service

Wilderness Watch is asking the National Park Service to allow natural processes to determine the outcome of the breach in the Otis Pike Fire Island High Dune Wilderness in New York. In December 2016, WW submitted comments supporting the No-Action Alternative (Alternative 2) in the Park Service's *Draft Fire Island Wilderness Breach Management Plan and Draft EIS (DEIS)*.

The 1,380-acre Otis Pike Fire Island High Dune Wilderness lies just outside of New York City on a barrier island south of Long Island. The Wilderness stretches for seven miles along the eastern half of 32-mile-long Fire Island, and is the only federal Wilderness in New York. The legislation that designated the Fire Island Wilderness

contained language allowing the Park Service to fill in Wilderness breaches under certain circumstances.

On October 29, 2012, Hurricane Sandy created a breach in the Fire Island Wilderness. To its credit, the Park Service resisted early calls to fill in the breach, and has instead monitored the breach and its effects, which have included a significant improvement in water quality in the Great South Bay between Long Island and Fire Island. Now the agency is developing a long-term breach management plan.

Wilderness Watch is supporting Alternative 2 (*Status Determined Entirely by Natural Processes*), the No-Action Alternative that would allow natural processes to determine what happens with the breach. Alternative 2 is the only alternative that will protect the wilderness character of the Otis Pike Fire Island High Dune Wilderness in the long run and in accordance with the Wilderness Act. We appreciate the Park Service's restraint in not filling the breach to date. 🌿

### The Latest on Mining Threats to the Boundary Waters



Photo: Kevin Proescholdt

**Twin Metals:** In mid-December, the U.S. Forest Service (FS) notified the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) that the FS did not support the renewal of two expired federal mining leases near the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW) in northeastern Minnesota. The following day, the BLM notified Twin Metals that the two leases would not be renewed. Twin Metals needs these two leases if it is to move ahead with its proposal for a massive underground copper-nickel mine located just outside the BWCAW. In mid-January, these two federal agencies also published notices in the Federal Register announcing a proposed 20-year withdrawal of federal minerals from exploration or mining in about 234,000 acres in the watershed of the BWCAW and Voyageurs National Park. We'll keep you updated on the proposed withdrawal.

**PolyMet:** Meanwhile, the other proposed copper-nickel mine in the area, proposed by PolyMet Mining, continues to move ahead. In January the Forest Service approved a land exchange of 6,650 acres needed by PolyMet to proceed with its proposed open-pit mine. Two lawsuits have been announced to challenge this land exchange, one by the Center for Biological Diversity and Earthworks due to impacts on habitat of wolves and Canada lynx (this is a notice of intent to sue), and the other by WaterLegacy Project, challenging the FS's failure to properly appraise at their full value the federal lands proposed for exchange (suit filed Jan. 30). 🌿

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## Commercial Abuse Threatens Pasayten and Lake Chelan-Sawtooth Wildernesses



Photo: Aaron via Flickr

Wilderness Watch is opposing the latest effort by the Forest Service (FS) to drastically increase the amount of commercial pack stock outfitting and guiding from current levels in the Pasayten and Lake Chelan-Sawtooth Wildernesses east of the Cascade crest in Washington State. This is some of the wildest country in the lower 48 states, providing habitat for rare lynx, spotted owls, grizzlies, and wolves. Despite evidence of damage from existing use, the agency's reissued *Pack and Saddle Stock Outfitter-Guide Special Use Permit Issuance Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement* (SDEIS) seeks to allow even more use by commercial outfitters and guides. Wilderness Watch successfully challenged an earlier plan in 2013 that would have nearly doubled such use.

Alternative 3 in the SDEIS comes closest to meeting the letter and spirit of the Wilderness Act. It reduces party size to 12 “heartbeats” (a combination of people and stock not to exceed 12), and allows the least amount of commercial use, 25 percent over the past five years’ average. However, even Alternative 3 proposes to allocate more use than the average of the past several years.

We let the FS know it needs to consider other alternatives that would protect the Pasayten and Lake Chelan-Sawtooth Wildernesses from the abuses of commercial interests. In our SDEIS comments, we urged the agency to:

- Reduce party sizes from 18 head of stock to a maximum of nine (a number based on wilderness research) or adopt the 12 “heartbeat” limit for all groups;
- Retain existing rules that keep campsites away from streams and other sensitive areas;
- Maintain current forest plan standards for barren core areas at campsites and require outfitters to modify their operations to allow existing soil and vegetation damage to heal;
- Reduced allocated commercial use to only that which is necessary, somewhere below the 10-year maximum of 1,500 service days; and
- Focus on protecting the wild character of these two Wildernesses rather than catering to the economic interests of a few. 🐾

## WW Objects to Military Range in Wildernesses in Washington



Photo: Colonel Bob Wilderness by USFS

In January, Wilderness Watch formally objected to the Forest Service's (FS) draft decision on the *Pacific Northwest Electronic Warfare Range*. This project, which includes flying supersonic military aircraft at low altitudes, would negatively impact five Wildernesses in Washington state: the Colonel Bob Wilderness, the Olympic Wilderness, the Washington Islands Wilderness, the Lake Chelan-Sawtooth Wilderness, and the Pasayten Wilderness. Additional Wildernesses likely to be affected include: the Stephen Mather, Glacier Peak, Mount Baker, Noisy Diobsud, Boulder River, Henry M Jackson, Wild Sky, Alpine Lakes, and San Juan Islands Wildernesses.

Military training exercises have no place in Wilderness. The Environmental Assessment (EA) the Navy prepared for its proposed warfare range fails to name any Wildernesses within the project area, let alone analyze impacts to these Wildernesses—from military jets, their noise (including sonic booms), or the emitters, some of which would be sited near Wilderness. As such, the EA violates the Wilderness Act and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). We are asking the Forest Service to issue an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), and if the project is approved, to make sure impacts to Wilderness are reduced, if not eliminated. 🐾

# Western Lands Project: A Tribute

By Gary Macfarlane

Quite some time ago, at a conference in Oregon, I finally had the opportunity to meet Janine Blaeloch, executive director of Western Lands Project (WLP). I had heard much about her, how she had founded the organization as a way to speak up for keeping public lands public by opposing various schemes—land exchanges, sales and giveaways. Big green groups, even in the 90s, had abdicated their roles to safeguard public land, including national forests, the targets of most of these “deals”.

Over the years, Janine became a good friend and colleague. I learned she has a rare gift, a brilliant mind. Due to her and her excellent staff, WLP met with phenomenal success in bringing reform and attention to federal public land deals. Administrative land exchange programs were altered because of the work of Western Lands Project. WLP uncovered corruption within the Department of Interior’s appraisal process, and blocked most of the backroom legislative deals that would give away public land, though former Democratic Senator Harry Reid of Nevada was able to push some of these bad deals through Congress. (Political corruption, it seems, is not the province of any one political party.) WLP exposed quid pro quo Wilderness legislation—deals that would designate some Wilderness, usually with harmful and weakening provisions, and give away other public lands or mandate land exchanges not in the public interest.



Janine at the 2014 Wilderness Act Anniversary Conference in Albuquerque, NM.

In speaking at the Wilderness Act 50th Anniversary Conference in Albuquerque in 2014, Janine said this about quid pro quo wilderness deals:

*The bills included increasingly more detailed, micromanagement language for Wilderness that moved the land further from true Wilderness protection. The ideal of Wilderness was being systematically contaminated with compromises and special provisions. Other public lands, many deserving of protection, were being used as currency to buy Wilderness, dramatically undermining the idea that these lands have intrinsic value, and treating them as a simple commodity.*

On September 1, 2016, the Western Lands Project ended its nearly 20-year existence as a non-profit organization fighting to keep public land public. It was a sad day for many of us, yet in reality WLP had achieved much of what it set out to do: to bring transparency and accountability to the public lands exchange process. There will always be more to do, and fortunately former WLP staff attorney Chris Krupp will carry on the work under the stewardship of Wild Earth Guardians. Nonetheless, the loss of Janine’s day-to-day involvement is a blow to the grassroots conservation movement and the organization will be missed.

Perhaps presaging the current political climate, Janine concluded her statement at the Wilderness conference with this sage advice:

*We must re-unify as a principled, public-interest movement, and fight for true wilderness and public land protection. ♪*

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## Courts (continued from page 5)

### Wilderness Watch Joins Lawsuits to Defend Bears, Wolves in Alaska

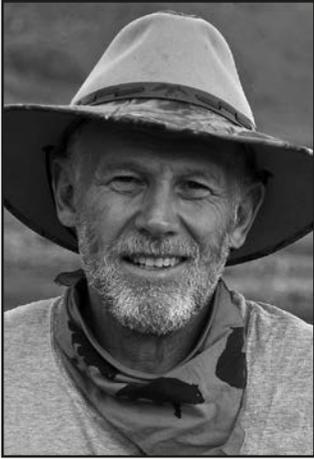
In our Spring 2016 newsletter, we told you about new U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and National Park Service regulations aimed at protecting predators in National Wildlife Refuges and National Preserve lands in Alaska. The new regulations ban the most unethical hunting practices authorized by the Alaska Board of Game’s “intensive management” law, which is aimed at reducing predator populations to increase populations of moose, caribou, and other commonly hunted species. Alaska’s intensive management law authorizes direct predator killing measures such as shooting wolves and pups during their vulnerable denning season, bear baiting—including brown-bear baiting, killing mama bears with cubs—including while in their winter dens, trapping and snaring bears, and airborne hunting of predators. With the exception of subsistence hunting, the new Fish and Wildlife

Service and Park Service regulations generally prohibit these types of unethical killing practices within Wildlife Refuges and National Preserves in Alaska.

Relying on the familiar “federal overreach” argument, the State of Alaska and Safari Club International filed two separate lawsuits in January challenging the new federal regulations. Wilderness Watch, along with several other groups, has intervened in the lawsuits to defend federal efforts to protect predators within Refuges and Preserves in Alaska. We are represented by attorneys from Trustees for Alaska. With over 96 million acres of Refuge and Preserve land affected, including many millions of acres of Wilderness, the new regulations are an important step toward protecting wildlife against the State of Alaska’s aggressive predator killing programs. ♪

# Bigger is Better

by Howie Wolke



When it comes to wilderness, bigger *is* better. This is as true from an ecological perspective as it is from that of the human wilderness experience.

The Wilderness Act defines wilderness (in part) as “...at least 5,000 acres of land or is of sufficient size as to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition...” Although as a Montanan, 5,000 acres seems pretty small, the Act’s authors rec-

ognized that wilderness is fundamentally distinct from tiny areas of protected open space, such as many county parks or small state recreation areas, with size being one of its distinguishing characteristics.

From a human perspective, it is difficult to experience wilderness values such as awe, oneness with nature, solitude and challenge in a small woodlot or county park hemmed in by noisy roads or machines. The authors of the Wilderness Act rightly understood that in the face of our growing and expanding civilization, if folks accepted postage-stamp sized natural areas as “Wilderness”, then our perception of wilderness would lose its unique distinction. And as the wilderness idea is cheapened, so too, is wilderness on the ground.

From a biocentric perspective, conservation biologists assert that size of a protected area is crucial to maintaining native biodiversity. So is connectivity. And often ignored is the interior to edge ratio of protected lands.

Large wild areas with connectivity to other wildlands protect native species populations from inbreeding depression, random loss of adaptive genetic traits (common in small isolated populations), disease, and environmental events such as wildfire, flood or prolonged drought. Species that have specific habitat needs such as old growth forest or undisturbed sagebrush steppe are particularly vulnerable to the problems associated with small isolated habitats. So are large carnivores, which naturally occur in much lower densities than prey species, and thus are spread thinly across large areas. Many of these vulnerable creatures are called “wilderness dependent species” and small isolated wildland tracts do not promote their survival.

I also mentioned interior to edge ratio. As human population growth continues to spiral out of control, most protected wildlands are increasingly impacted by human activities on surrounding lands. Logging, mining, roadbuilding, road “hunting”, poaching, urban sprawl, off road vehicles, livestock grazing, fences, power corridors, dams and diversions and more all serve to isolate wilderness areas. When wilderness

boundaries are amoeba-shaped with “cherry-stemmed” exclusions, we create lots of edge compared with more secure interior habitat. Along the edges are where many of these destructive human activities occur. So not only is bigger better, but so are areas with holistic boundaries that minimize edge.

The problem is that what works best on the ground is often forsaken by the increasingly sketchy politics of wilderness conservation. Many conservation organizations now get funding from foundations that demand “collaboration” with traditional wildland opponents. And all too often these collaborations produce “wilderness” boundaries that exclude all or most of the potential conflicts in order to mollify the opposition. These processes create compromised wilderness units that are small, isolated and laden with boundary intrusions and non-wilderness corridors that create much edge and minimal secure interior habitat. Moreover, so-called wilderness proponents often accept or even promote special provisions in wilderness bills that clash with the intent and letter of the Wilderness Act. Or, they sometimes actually support agency actions that overtly violate the Wilderness Act.

Of course, our political system is based upon compromise, and compromise works when both sides have legitimate concerns and common goals. When it comes to wilderness, though, we do well to remember that each wilderness debate begins with an already greatly compromised remnant wildland. And also, wilderness areas laden with legislated exceptions to the letter of the Wilderness Act are not really wilderness in any meaningful sense of the word.

So, bigger *is* better. In North America, we find healthy populations of grizzly bear, wolf, lynx and many other species only where big wilderness is a dominant landscape feature. Healthy watersheds thrive only where the entire watershed is protected. Also, dynamic disturbance-driven natural vegetation patterns can be maintained only in large protected landscapes. For example, natural wildfire patterns are not allowed to prevail in small nature preserves near suburbs or commercial timber stands.

In other words, temptations to compromise wilderness in terms of size, “collaborated” boundary exclusions and diminished internal untrammelled qualities are immense in 21st century industrial America. Protecting and maintaining real wilderness won’t get easier. But unless wilderness organizations develop a better understanding of what real wilderness is and the importance of size, connectivity and wholeness, it is unlikely that the very concept of wilderness will survive for many more generations. And I mean generations of the four-leggeds and all members of the biotic community, in addition to the upright two-legged great apes that we call “human”. 🐾

*Howie Wolke is an ornery old wilderness guide from southern Montana and is a recent past president of Wilderness Watch.*

# You Can Help Make Wilderness Forever Wild!

By Jeff Smith

**W**ilderness is the alternative to the notion that Americans manifest their destiny to settle, develop, and use every square inch of America. The idea has played out well: wild places to wander, wild places to unplug, wild places of unparalleled biological integrity, wild places to wake up and rejoice, as John Muir did when he exclaimed, "How glorious a greeting the sun gives the mountains!"

As reported in our last newsletter, we lost one of the celebrators of the idea of Wilderness, Michael Frome, last September. Michael stood strong for wild country to the very end. We were overwhelmed and

heartened to receive a very large donation from his estate on one of the very last days of 2016.



Michael was a nationally-acclaimed journalist and author, and a fierce defender of Wilderness, National Parks, and the natural world. His many books included *Strangers in High Places: The Story of the Great Smoky Mountains* (1966), *Battle for the Wilderness* (1974), and *Rediscovering National Parks in the Spirit of John Muir* (2015).

As he did in life, Michael blazed a path for the rest of us. Let me know if you want to walk with him by leaving a legacy gift or contributing to our *Forever Wild! Endowment*. ☞

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## On our Blog

### Sigurd Olson and the Establishment of Voyageurs National Park

by Kevin Proescholdt



Last year, 2016, marked the centennial of the formation of the National Park Service. The heightened awareness of the National Park Service surrounding this anniversary has triggered a fresh interest in the national parks that this agency manages. Of particular interest to those with an interest in Sigurd F. Olson is the story of national parks in Sig's home state of Minnesota and Sig's role with them. As this article will show, Sig did play a critical role in the establishment of Minnesota's only full-fledged national park, Voyageurs National Park, for at least a decade in the 1960s and early 1970s.

There had long been an interest in establishing a national park along the international border in northern Minnesota. As early as 1891, the Minnesota Legislature passed a resolution asking the President to establish a national park in Minnesota by "setting apart a tract of land along the northern boundary of the state, between the mouth of the Vermilion River on the east and Lake of the Woods on the west...."

By 1959, the National Park Service (NPS) expressed interest in updating its 1939 parks and recreation plan for the Minnesota Division of State Parks, and NPS field staff visited the area to do that and to begin investigating possible national areas in the Kabetogama Lake area. The State Parks Director, U.W. "Judge" Hella (not a judge in real life), briefed Minnesota Governor Elmer L. Andersen in September 1961 about the NPS interest, and Andersen became like Hella an enthusiastic national park supporter. Sigurd Olson would also play a vital role.

Read the rest on our website. 