



WILDERNESS WATCHER

The Quarterly Newsletter of Wilderness Watch

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William “Bill” Worf — the Father of Wilderness Stewardship

By George Nickas

It is with great sadness Wilderness Watch announces the death of Bill Worf, our founder, long-time board member, president emeritus, and inspirational leader. Bill died on the evening of the Winter Solstice. He was 85.

Bill dedicated his life to making certain the ideals expressed in the Wilderness Act would live on in the National Wilderness Preservation System. No one worked as hard or long or with such great principle toward that goal.

Bill was raised on a homestead ranch in eastern Montana, during the Great Depression where he learned the lessons of hard work and perseverance that were hallmarks of his life. He joined the Marines at 17 and soon found himself in the thick of combat in the invasion of Iwo Jima. After the war, he returned home, married Eva Jean Batey on December 22, 1946, and earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Forestry and Range from the University of Montana.

In 1961 Bill was appointed forest supervisor overseeing the Bridger Wilderness in the Wind River Range in Wyoming, and he began his 50-year career of protecting wilderness. As with everything he did, Bill jumped into wilderness stewardship with a fervor



that attracted the attention of all around him. He initiated the first wilderness management program and hired the first wilderness rangers. He became an outspoken proponent for the wilderness bill at a time when the Forest Service was lukewarm to the legislation. His advocacy for wilderness led the Chief of the Forest Service to select Bill as one of a small group to write the regulations and policies for implementing the Wilderness Act in 1964-65. He was then asked to lead the agency's wilderness program in the Washington Office, which he did for many years before getting his feet back on the ground in the regional office in Missoula, Montana.

Like many of his peers, Bill initially saw wilderness as a recreational resource and his duties as a manager primarily to promote it as a backcountry playground. He often told the story of standing on the edge of Island Lake, and counting more than 130 campers around the shore of that wilderness gem. “We were making use of the country, and it made my Forest Service-heart swell with pride,” Bill would recall with a laugh.

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Bill Worf Memorial Fund Created

To honor Bill Worf and his legacy of protecting wilderness, Wilderness Watch has created the Bill Worf Memorial Fund (BWMF). This will be a named fund within Wilderness Watch's permanent endowment. Bill had specifically requested that any donations received in his name go into the endowment.

The Wilderness Watch board of directors has determined that earnings from the BWMF will initially be used to help fund an internship at Wilderness Watch for university students who want to become involved in wilderness stewardship and advocacy. In this way, we hope to help build the next generations of wilderness advocates to continue Bill's work on behalf of wilderness. We hope to establish the internship program as a permanent part of Wilderness Watch's endowment program.

Bill and his wife, Eva Jean, believed strongly in the value of higher education and encouraging college students interested in wilderness. They established an annual scholarship in 1996 for deserving students in the Wilderness and Civilization program at the University of Montana's College of Forestry and Conservation. The purpose of the scholarship was to "aid in securing the integrity of the National Wilderness Preservation System by encouraging the education of professional wilderness stewards."

Friends and supporters of Bill are invited to contribute to the Bill Worf Memorial Fund at Wilderness Watch, P.O. Box 9175, Missoula, MT 59807. You can also contribute on-line by going to www.wildernesswatch.org and clicking on "Donate today." Make sure you tell us in the comment section that your donation is for Bill's memorial fund.



Bill with his daughter-in-law and grandkids in 1994 in the High Uintas Wilderness. The memorial fund will help to ensure an enduring legacy of wilderness for future generations.



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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Bill's Wilderness Legacy...

From his ranch background and earliest career in the Forest Service, Bill Worf demonstrated his love of wilderness, the wild country. He realized early on the vulnerability of this precious land.

Bill's commitment to save this untrammled land was recognized by the Forest Service, leading him to assignments in the Washington office. With the passage of the 1964 Wilderness Act, he was given the primary responsibility for designing the agency's management, the policies to meet the mandate of the new law.

The challenge of implementing the Wilderness Act required mobilizing public participation and gaining the support of Congress. Bill, in his pivotal position, set high standards for preserving Forest Service wildlands. He built the framework, which guided the agency's designation of wilderness areas. He became the primary source of direction in administering the Act. It was Bill's leadership that made possible the expansion of the system into today's more than 110-million acres.

In his retirement years Bill returned to his Montana home. There, following his lifetime commitment, he founded Wilderness Watch, a national organization for people who shared his love for wilderness. Wilderness Watch continues today as the principle advocate and defender of our nation's wildlands.

Bill leaves us with the charge and mandate for preserving wilderness. This is his legacy.

— *Stewart Brandborg, executive director of the Wilderness Society from 1964 to 1976, and a biologist who conducted groundbreaking wildlife and wildlands research.*



At work writing wilderness policies and regulations in the attic of the Forest Service building, Washington, D.C., 1964. "The pigeons flew in and out at will. We had to cover our desks at night to keep the pigeon droppings off."

A Wilderness Champion...

I was privileged to know and work with Bill Worf for many years. From the outset I learned to respect and admire him for his integrity, competency, and commitment to the cause of wilderness and its protection under law. I feel he belongs in the pantheon of wilderness champions, along with Aldo Leopold, Robert Marshall, Olaus Murie, Howard Zahniser and Stewart Brandborg.

In reviewing Bill's writings, he comes across to me now as a teacher, drawing from his vast professional experience, in the field and in Washington, leading us gently through issues of policy and management, defining options and opportunities, all designed to show us how to uphold fundamental principles of preservation.

I recall (and was there) when he spoke, in September 1989 in Minneapolis at the national conference on "Managing America's Enduring Resource of Wilderness." Bill's topic was "Forest Service Implementation of the 1964 Act," which he summed up as follows:

"There are those in the wilderness agencies who believe the American people are not really interested in true wilderness. In support of their position they point to the many acts designating wilderness, some of which also include special (nonwilderness) exceptions for specific units. They also point out that very few citizens speak out when the agency takes a stand to protect wilderness from some special interest. They advocate a reasonable, practical and flexible (people-oriented) approach to wilderness management. I believe these folks are misreading the public, which has had its attention focused primarily on getting new wildernesses. I see signs they are becoming much more concerned with taking care of what is already in the [wilderness] system. I am honored to have been elected president of Wilderness Watch, a fledgling national organization which will focus solely on management issues. You can look to Wilderness Watch when you need support for sound biocentric programs or actions."

Good for you, Bill. You were right as rain then, when Wilderness Watch came into being. And now, in memorial tribute to you, I hope that Wilderness Watch will stay on course and grow and become even more effective and influential in support of sound programs and actions.

— *Michael Frome, Ph.D. Author of Battle for the Wilderness, and Regreening the National Parks.*

Bill Worf — the Father of Wilderness Stewardship

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But a pack trip with Wilderness Act author, Howard Zahniser, started an evolution in his thinking. He began to see that wilderness stewardship was about much more than recreation. As he worked over the next several years with congressional leaders, agency officials and other key leaders in facing the unique challenges of implementing that visionary law, his understanding grew. As he often noted, “I had to forget almost everything I knew about wilderness management in order to understand the higher goals the Wilderness Act was trying to achieve.”

In addition to co-authoring the regulations and policies to implement the new wilderness law, Bill was at the center of many early battles that shaped the Forest Service’s wilderness stewardship posture for decades. He worked closely with the Chief and the Secretary of Agriculture fending off a pro-



Bill spent decades riding and packing in wilderness country.

While this is sad news, it is also a time to celebrate a life well-lived and full of accomplishment. He leaves a wonderful legacy and is admired by many. I certainly feel blessed to have known him and am forever grateful for his guidance and inspiration.

— *Steve Brouger, retired wilderness program leader, Stanislaus NF.*

Bill hired me in 1962. I was chosen to implement his trained seasonal wilderness ranger management program for the Bridger Wilderness. His experiment created a national model for seasonal and professional and technical wilderness stewardship and leadership. I bid you a safe journey Bill, and thanks for what you did for keeping the Wilderness Act in focus. The land will miss you.

— *Tom Kovalicky, US Forest Service, retired*

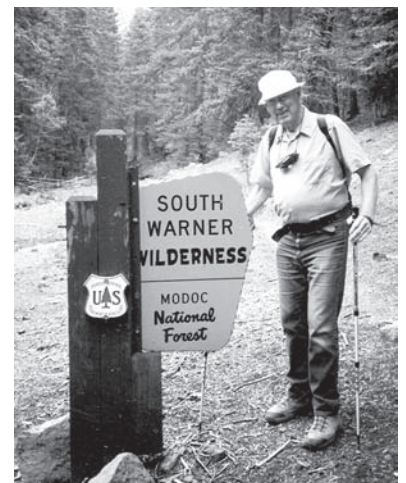
posal to route Interstate 70 through the Gore Range-Eagles Nest Primitive Area in the Colorado Rockies, and a plan by Kennecott Copper to construct a massive open-pit mine deep in the Glacier Peak Wilderness in the Washington Cascades. They turned away plans to build communication sites on wilderness summits, use chainsaws for clearing trails, and to use heavy equipment to rebuild dams. He worked with pioneering wilderness researchers like Bob Lucas, John Hendee, Bob Mutch, and Bud Heinselman on ways to minimize visitor impacts on wilderness, and to restore natural processes like fire to the wilderness landscape.

Upon his retirement from the Forest Service in 1981 — due to macular degeneration, which rendered him legally blind — and with the active support of Eva Jean, Bill vowed to dedicate his remaining years to working for sound management of wilderness. In 1989, he and two colleagues founded Wilderness Watch, the only national citizens’ organization dedicated solely to promoting sound stewardship of des-

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He was a tower of leadership for wilderness and served the Forest Service so well. His legacy will live on in our hearts and in the wilderness concept he established. We owe so much to such pioneers.

— *Zane G. Smith, Jr., U.S. Forest Service, Retired*



Bill took the Forest Service to task over its management of grazing allotments in the South Warner Wilderness, 2003.

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ignated wildernesses and wild rivers. As a measure of the tremendous credibility that Bill had built up during his career, former Secretary of Interior Stewart Udall and former Secretary of Agriculture Orville Freeman accepted Bill's invitation to join the Wilderness Watch Board of Directors. Bill remained active with Wilderness Watch and wilderness issues until his death. "I shall not perish from this earth without doing everything within my realm to save its most precious non-human resource," he wrote.

I think about Bill often -- he made such a lasting impression on so many of us. I will carry the lessons he taught me forever.

— *Linda Merigliano, Wilderness Program Manager,
Bridger-Teton National Forest.*

A few days before he died, I paid Bill a visit. His body and mind were shutting down, and he could no longer find the words to speak. He could hear, but, initially, it was hard to tell how much he could understand. Since Bill always wanted to know the latest wilderness news, I told him about a meeting I had earlier that day. Two local FS retirees and I met with Leslie Weldon, the new Forest Service deputy chief. We were relaying our concerns about the long-term erosion of the FS' commitment to wilderness. We pinpointed examples from the nearby Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness. Weldon, who had been a district ranger overseeing part of the Selway-Bitterroot 15 years earlier, asked when we felt management of the SBW began to erode, to which one of my colleagues laughed and said, "It was after you left, Leslie. It wasn't you." She quickly retorted, "I know it wasn't me. I was trained by Bill Worf!" When I told that to Bill, he let out a laugh and a smile spread across his face. And I knew that he knew his wilderness legacy would live on.

Bill was the right person in the right place at the right time, and he made the most of it. He inspired an entire generation of wilderness rangers and wilderness advocates. All of us, but especially future generations of American citizens, are the fortunate recipients of Bill's dedication to the wilderness cause.

Bill Worf will be sorely missed, but his spirit lives on in all those who believe in the principled stewardship and defense of wilderness in America. Thank you, Bill. 🌿

We are deeply saddened to learn of Bill's passing. He was truly America's foremost hero in defense of the true meaning and value of wilderness.

— *Bill Cunningham & Polly Burke, longtime wilderness advocates*

Bill Worf Remembered...

Word of Bill Worf's passing fills me with sadness, and also gratitude for his mentoring and all I learned from him. I first met Bill in summer 1965 when representatives from all the regions of the Forest Service went on a pack trip in the San Juan Primitive Area to discuss how the new Wilderness Act would be administered—with what standards and how. Bob Lucas and I participated as representatives from Forest Service Research. From then on Bill was a giant in my life. Several times in my career I consulted Bill and he advised me. And occasionally, when we disagreed over an issue he would say, "Well John, I believe there are at least two of us in this world who really understand wilderness, but occasionally and lately I begin to wonder about you."

Wilderness Watch was Bill's baby, birthed upon his retirement from the Forest Service, and a creation for which he was rightfully proud for its defense of wilderness that would be worth the name and idea, and the opportunity costs of its protection.

— *John Hendee, Emeritus Professor/Dean retired,
University of Idaho, College of Natural Resources*

If it weren't for Bill Worf, the National Wilderness Preservation System would be an empty shell.

— *Gary Macfarlane,
Friends of the Clearwater*



Bill on a backpacking trip in the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness in the early 1970s.

Bill Worf: A Tribute

By Jeff Smith

Two years ago, I got a chance to travel with Bill Worf by train to Minneapolis on a fund-raising expedition. It was a grueling trip: up at 4 A.M. in late November to drive marginal roads to Whitefish, Montana, to board a 7:30 train arriving in Minneapolis 26 hours later for two days of nonstop meetings and presentations. We then boarded the train for another 24 hours. We got back in my truck (it started!) in Whitefish at midnight, and I dropped Bill at “The Springs,” his beloved retirement home, at 3 A.M.

I have to admit I heard a couple of Bill’s stories more than once, but never once did I hear a word of impatience.

When I asked him on that trip what it was about wilderness that caused him to dedicate his life to it, he didn’t talk about camping in Wyoming’s Bridger Wilderness with Howard Zahniser, the author of the Wilderness Act. He didn’t talk about his decade in Washington, D.C., hobnobbing with presidential advisors and elected representatives. And he didn’t mention Wilderness Watch, the organization he helped found after a 32-year career with the Forest Service.

He talked about his mother sewing him a sleeping bag when he was a kid and taking a horse by himself into the high, wide, and handsome country around Forsyth, Montana.

Bill knew the complexities of wilderness, its place in American history, law, and culture. But what appealed to him most about wilderness was what it offered the American people: the opportunity for solitude, personal freedom, and a chance for adventure, challenge, and risk-taking.

In a sense, that was what Bill’s life was about. Certainly that would describe his leaving high school at 17 to join the Marines and spend 35 days in the battle of Iwo Jima, an eight-square-mile island of death and destruction during World War II that took the lives of almost 30,000 of his generation.

I only heard him tell one story about that pivotal time in his life, and it was a self-deprecating one at that. Halfway through the battle, he jumped into a bomb crater and found a Japanese soldier who had just died. Bill noticed something in the soldier’s hand. It was a photograph of a woman, the soldier’s sweetheart, Bill assumed, like the photograph Bill carried in the pocket over his heart. All he’d learned about the Japanese, the racist tripe that they were ruthless animals, vanished in that moment. It would never return.



Bill joined the Marines at 17, and soon found himself in the Battle of Iwo Jima.

It was an adventure of a different kind to be part of the occupying forces in Japan after the war. He saw the destruction wrought by the atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and it was a satisfying thing to work with a crew of former Japanese soldiers in one of the best jobs ever, locating and blowing up the leftover munitions of war.

Bill married the woman whose picture he carried in the War, Eva Jean, and they moved to Missoula while Bill earned a Bachelor of Science degree in forestry and range on the GI bill. He joined the Forest Service as a range surveyor in 1950, and for the next 11 years worked his way up the chain of command in three national forests in Utah. In 1961, he became supervisor of the Bridger National Forest in Wyoming.

Early on in his tenure Bill had the opportunity to spend a week in the backcountry with the executive secretary of the Wilderness Society, Howard Zahniser, who was promoting the Wilderness Act. Who among us wouldn’t have liked to be part of those campfire conversations? Soon thereafter Bill wrote the Forest Service’s first wilderness management plan and hired the

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agency's first wilderness rangers, five of them, for the Bridger Wilderness. This was before Congress passed the Wilderness Act.

Once a bipartisan Congress did so in 1964 – with 12 senators and only one representative voting nay – the Forest Service brought Bill to Washington to write the policies and regulations to implement the law. Bill participated in hearings, worked to clarify the law for those in the field, met often with the Secretary of Agriculture and Members of Congress and their staffs, and went around the country on behalf of the Chief of the Forest Service to study problems. Could a wilderness manager in Washington State install a repeater for a telephone system? Could a wilderness manager in Wyoming install a weather station? Should a highway bisect an area of Colorado being studied for wilderness designation? By all accounts of those who worked with him, Bill performed admirably, but, in private notes and letters, he wrote that the stress caused him to lose 40 pounds and see his doctor.

The proof of his good work lies in the regulations themselves, which still guide wilderness management today. “For all of us young wilderness rangers,” Chris Ryan, Forest Service Northern Region Wilderness Specialist, told a *Missoulian* reporter, “he was a complete hero of ours. He wrote our very first wilderness policy, and it has not changed much since then. Even today we are managing wilderness under the policy written by Bill Worf.”

From 1969 to 1981, Bill was back in Missoula as regional director for wilderness, recreation, and lands. Bill made sure wilderness rangers and managers of the region's national forests knew how to follow the law. And Bill told a Forest Service historian after he retired that the most important rule was to maintain the wilderness character “[E]ven though ... we have some areas of wilderness, some wildernesses and some parts of some



Stewart Brandborg, Roderick Nash, and Bill Worf, legendary pioneers of wilderness philosophy and protection in America, on a 2009 field trip in the Bitterroot mountains.

wildernesses that are less wild than others,” he said, “you manage them all so that they are not degraded.”

Roderick Nash, who wrote the history of the American wilderness movement, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, summed up Bill's contribution this way: “Bill Worf came from a professional background in which the legal preservation of wilderness was an unprecedented and somewhat scary idea. Many were reluctant to accept the full implications of letting wild land be truly self-willed. The temptation to garden, rather than to guard, was, and remains, strong. Bill was one of the vanguard who understood that the Wilderness Act of 1964 required a degree of restraint unprecedented in American land management. He never backed down from the full implications of this revolutionary policy. Thanks to Bill, and Wilderness Watch, for protecting the integrity of one of the best ideas American civilization ever had.”

When it came time to end his Forest Service career after 32 years, Bill stepped down. But he didn't stop working. When he saw the Frank Church—River of No Return Wilderness in Idaho being degraded by outfitters building permanent camps along with caches and other equipment, Bill worked hard to convince other organizations to stand up against clearly illegal activities and collusion between federal officials and commercial interests. When none would, he didn't despair. He started Wilderness Watch, found the lawyers and the money to go to court, and prevailed after months and then years of effort. This was the first of many Wilderness Watch victories.

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Colin Deihl was the attorney on the cache case. Here's the way he summed up Bill's role, "His ability to convey the importance of the wilderness system and its integrity was truly a thing to behold. He had a cynical federal judge mesmerized as he explained what was happening on the ground 2000 miles away."

An activist organization, Wilderness Watch has had its share of growing pains, but we will celebrate our twenty-third birthday later this month. Bill has helped craft this tenacious organization that, according to one of our board members, "is on the mind of every agency supervisor throughout the nation when he or she makes a decision about managing wilderness."

Bill's wasn't a perfect life by any stretch. Being a young kid carrying a rifle in one of the deadliest war zones mankind has ever created wasn't the only tragedy he experienced. He lost two of his five sons in auto and plane crashes, held his wife of 50-some years as she expired from the ravages

of diabetes. And, as he admitted to a Forest Service historian, he knew he wasn't going to win any awards as the most tactful person in the world.

But Bill was loving, straight-forward, generous, at times cajoling, and always – always! – ready for the next challenge.

We'll miss his stories about leaders who made the tough choices for wilderness. We'll miss the kind of passion that could convince a Texas oilman – who bought the place he and Eva Jean loved overlooking the Bitterroot Valley – to write the check that launched Wilderness Watch into a full-time organization. We'll miss watching him open up a conversation with anyone, anywhere, anytime, to find out what he or she knew about wilderness, and ask whether he or she might want to contribute to the cause.

I'm kind of expecting a donation any day from St. Peter himself.

Rest in peace, Bill. We'll take the baton now. We'll do our best, with your shining example in mind, to make sure this "enduring resource of wilderness" for the American people remains as wild as wild can be. 