



WILDERNESS WATCHER

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Who's Minding the Store? What 20 years of monitoring tells us about stewardship of the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex

— By Randy Tanner & George Nickas

The Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex (BMWC, or “the Bob,” as it is known to many) has always held a special allure. Encompassing more than 1.5 million acres along the continental divide in northwestern Montana, the BMWC (consisting of the Bob Marshall, Scapegoat and Great Bear Wildernesses) has often been deemed the “flagship” of American Wilderness. The BMWC offers outstanding primitive recreational opportunities within the most ecologically intact region in the contiguous United States.

The Bob also holds a special place in the annals of wilderness planning. In 1982, the Forest Service launched a new and unique planning effort in the BMWC. This new approach to planning – “The Limits of Acceptable Change” (LAC) process – was developed by Forest Service researchers and has been applied to most national forest Wildernesses since that time.



Managing the BMWC has always been a challenge. Recreational use patterns have created significantly degraded conditions in a number of areas, due largely to the traditionally heavy reliance on pack and riding stock. Early management plans received little public support, while concerns about wilderness conditions continued to grow. The LAC process was designed to address these problems by more effectively involving the public in developing management objectives that would provide recreational opportunities while still preserving the area’s wilderness character.

So how is it working? Are the stewards of the BMWC rising to the challenge of protecting this incomparable place and its status within the National Wilderness Preservation System? A recent analysis of Forest Service data by Wilderness Watch suggests the answer is clearly “no”, and the findings from our work highlight a problem that exists far beyond the Bob Marshall.

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insights

From the President

— By *Howie Wolke*

Our house sits on 32 acres of foothills prairie with scattered juniper, limber pine and Douglas-fir. There are a few patches of aspen, and some old growth conifer woodland down in the draw. Above our home, alpine summits of the wild Gallatin Range scrape Montana's big blue sky.

As the CO₂ content of that sky increases, the native grasses and forbs on our 32 acres face an increasing challenge to thrive. That's because a number of non-native Eurasian weeds – which tend to be adapted to xerothermal (warm and dry) habitats – are rapidly spreading as our climate becomes warmer and drier. Here, cheatgrass (downy brome) is our primary nemesis, so Marilyn and I spend much of our spare time pulling, burning, weed-whacking and otherwise resisting this hostile takeover of our beautiful native plant community.

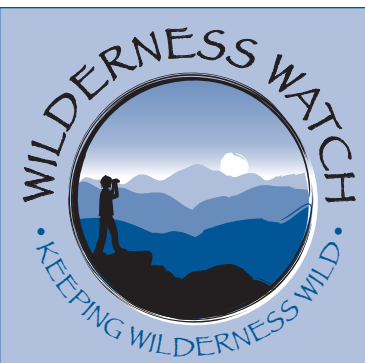
One argument for big wild interconnected wilderness in our western mountains is the need to protect a broad range of altitudinal and latitudinal habitats so that plants and animals can effectively migrate in response to climate change. Yet the supposition that species will successfully migrate upslope or northward to cooler environs implies few unforeseen human-induced obstacles. Other than obvious impediments such as freeways, fences, reservoirs and cities, we also must recognize that the exotic Eurasian weed may be at least an equal obstacle.

Studies show that in many places climate change now occurs much faster than plants can migrate. This suggests that as existing plant communities die out, there will be empty niches that will be invaded by aggressive weeds before native species can move in from down slope or down south.

Already, poor land use practices and the nature of aggressive exotics have allowed various noxious weeds such as knapweed, leafy spurge and cheatgrass to overtake literally millions of acres of once-rich steppes and prairies. In severe infestations, native ecosystems are completely transformed. For example, around here the native bunchgrass prairies normally stay green and thus provide good wildlife forage well into summer. By contrast, cheatgrass greens up early choking out the natives, and it never cures; it rapidly goes to seed and then dies off, leaving a parched wasteland from early June on. In a severe global warming scenario, will my 32 acres of Montana prairie and woodland look like the Utah desert? Or will it be a wasteland of exotic weeds? Or something entirely unforeseen?

Unfortunately, many Wilderness areas are already overrun with weeds and other exotics. For example, thousands of low-elevation acres of the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness are a spotted knapweed monoculture, with nary a blade of native grass. There are many other sad examples.

The climate crisis is real, and it exacerbates the weed problem. It is fueled primarily by too many humans emitting too much air pollution. There, I said it: Overpopulation is our most fundamental problem. Over six billion humans – one species out of over 10 million – now usurp about half of the Earth's net primary production (photosynthate), the basis of all ecosystems. According to virtually every climate scientist not employed by Exxon-Mobile, things are going to get much warmer and much less predictable. This means that no matter how well we steward our wilderness, tomorrow's wilderness will look and function much different than today's. We will not like most of these changes, though the degree of change is open both to debate and to the decisions humans make now, regarding greenhouse gas emissions in the immediate future. — *Continued bottom of page 3* —



The Wilderness Watcher is the quarterly newsletter of Wilderness Watch, a non-profit organization advocating the protection and responsible stewardship of the nation's designated Wildernesses and Wild & Scenic Rivers.

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A word about the management plan. Key to the LAC management planning process is identifying *indicators* of wilderness conditions, establishing binding *standards* that must be met for each indicator, establishing a *monitoring* program that will determine whether management is meeting the standards, and specifying *management actions* that will be taken to ensure the standards aren't exceeded.

Because recreational use was the key concern affecting the BMWC's wilderness conditions, and because overnight use was the norm in this area, campsite conditions and campsite density (i.e. number of campsites per 640 acres) were selected as key indicators for determining if resource conditions within the BMWC were improving, degrading or stable. The plan called for a comprehensive monitoring program that would measure conditions at each campsite, beginning in 1987 and repeated at five-year intervals. This was a huge commitment by the Forest Service given the size of the area, but it was a commitment that was instrumental in garnering wide support for the plan.

Over the past several years, however, both anecdotal and limited empirical evidence have raised concerns that all is not well, that in fact resource conditions in the Bob are out of standard and degrading. To find out whether this was the case, Wilderness Watch queried the Forest Service, but learned that the agency had never compiled and analyzed the data and couldn't answer the question. We then set out to analyze the management plan and all of the monitoring data collected since 1987.

After receiving the data from the Forest Service, we found that making these determinations would be largely impossible. Despite having nearly twenty years worth of campsite-impact data in hand, the data lacked the comprehensiveness and representativeness that were necessary for any statistical analysis. Because of these inadequacies, neither we (nor the Forest Service for that matter) were able to determine with any confidence how campsite conditions in the Bob have changed since the LAC process was instituted. Nevertheless, through our research, we were able to uncover some important findings related to the stewardship of the BMWC.



Trail damage, Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex.

One of the most disconcerting findings from our analysis was the fact that there has been a steady decline over the past decade-and-a-half in the amount of campsite monitoring conducted in the Bob. According to the management plan, every campsite is to be monitored at least once during a five-year "monitoring period." During the first and second monitoring periods (1987-1992 and 1993-1997, respectively), there were roughly 1,300 and 1,800 monitoring observations. However, during the third monitoring period, which began in 1998, there were only 701 observations, and if the current trend continues, there is likely to only be around 950 observations in the current monitoring period.

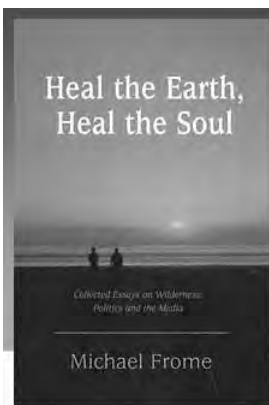
Perhaps more troubling, though, is that very few campsites in the Bob have been monitored more than one time. For example, of the campsites monitored during the first monitoring period (1987-1992), only 10% were ever monitored again. In order to determine how conditions in the BMWC are changing, those conditions must be observed on a continual basis. But, in the case of the BMWC, it's not possible to make a determination because so few campsites have been monitored more than once.

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From the President, continued from page 2

We at Wilderness Watch pride ourselves in our focus to keep Wilderness wild. Somewhere in my life's journey I learned that in order to effect real change, one must focus, rather than trying at once to solve every social or environmental ill. Yet we live in a world of interconnections, where an African virus might quickly spread to Minnesota, like the Chinese dust storms that obscure the blue skies of Nevada. As global trade and travel expand, foreign weeds hitch rides and quietly overtake native ecosystems; this may be North America's least well-known environmental fiasco.

So yes, I'll continue to focus my conservation efforts on my primary passion, Wilderness. But when I bang out a column, when I lecture my wilderness students or chat with our backpacking clients, when I speak with public officials or work to elect a candidate, I always try to remember the twin terrors of global warming and human overpopulation. That's because unless we slay these dragons, then sure as future wars, their fallout – which includes the exotic weed -- will slay much of our remaining real wilderness. 🐉



Heal the Earth, Heal the Soul

By Michael Frome. Bartram Books/Big MPG, 2007.
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Inquire@BigMPG.com. \$19.95 plus \$3 shipping.



Frome's Essays Shine a Light on the Journalist's Role

— Reviewed by Jeff Smith

Most who work on behalf of wilderness recognize that the reputation of journalism has gone into decline over the past 20 years. Too often, journalists hold up only one hand for examination, the one filled with the dazzling, distracting jewels of sensationalism, ribald consumerism, and celebrity worship. The other hand is out of sight, the one that spills over with corruption, unsustainable economics, and the rank desecration of nature.

Keep it light, the editors tell them. Focus on the mundane and distracting. When it comes to the major issues of the day, be objective, that is, keep silent or equivocate. Give the foxes at the door an equal voice with the hens they are guarding.

But there are exceptions. On television, Bill Moyers' recent special on journalists in the run-up to the Iraq War comes to mind. Eugene Robinson in the Washington Post, and a few others, do not suffer lightly the illegalities, misjudgments, and incompetence of the current occupant of the White House. But most do.

And then there is Michael Frome, who has just completed a retrospective collection of essays on wilderness, politics, and the media called "Heal the Earth, Heal the Soul."

Frome dispenses with myth of objectivity in his essay, "Reaffirming the Writer's Role":

... freedom of expression is clearly restricted by the power and influence of corporate rule. A handful of mammoth private organizations (Disney, Time Warner, Bertelsmann, Rupert Murdoch, Hachette and Viacom) dominate the mass media, controlling the world's news gathering, current affairs, entertainment and publishing. They define social and cultural attitudes. They shape public images of political leaders and political debate.

Frome maintains a rare position because he earns the respect of both journalists and environmental activists. It's worth analyzing how he does this.

First, he tells the truth. In the book's first essay, from 1974, "In an Age of Enlightenment Wildlife Comes First and Not Last," Frome calls the Forest Service simply and plainly "an agency committed to commodity production rather than resource protection." Then he describes how the Forest Service used an Environmental Protection Agency analysis to justify the spraying of DDT over 650,000 acres of Northwest forests to fight the tussock moth. The analysis had data describing the loss of timber. "But," Frome writes, "[T]here was nothing substantive in [the data] for the loss of birds, insects and fish, or for the impact on large mammals, or for long-term ecological disruption."

For many writers, objectivity starts on terms hospitable to those in power. Not Frome. It's refreshing to read essays where, in the first paragraph, we know exactly where we stand. He's continuing the legacy begun by Thoreau and Muir and continued into the previous generation by Ed Abbey and Wallace Stegner, among others.

Second, there is Frome's voice, which is reasonable, informal, and somehow reassuring, as if he were a favorite uncle talking around the campfire. But also firm, insistent, and authoritative. This favorite uncle is a person of great intellect who makes known his perspective on history and the current struggle. Listen to his voice in the essay, "In Wilderness Is the Preservation of the World":

My personal experience and readings convince me that preservation of wild places is the best of American traditions. Wilderness is at the heart of the nation. It tells one generation what is right and lasting about all generations and about the land itself.

And, later:

Too often Americans have allowed powerful self-serving interests to control decision-making, but when presented with strong valid ideas in the common good they respond with approval and support. A review of wilderness history thus teaches that each of us must be inspired to realize the power of his or her own life and to never sell it short. The timid, the hesitant, the compromisers have failed. The bigger and bolder the program, the greater the chance of success. Individually and collectively, true believers can and do work miracles, if we have faith and hang together, daring to take risks based on principles above political expediency.

Third, there is his broad record of success addressing matters of serious concern. Though there is some repetition of ideas in the course of these 24 essays, Frome displays his wide variety of interests over his 30-year career.

Some of the essays in this collection graced the pages of mainstream magazines such as *Reader's Digest*, *Smithsonian*, and *American Forests*. Others found their home in small magazines, newsletters, or as chapters in other writers' books. A few of the most forceful are transcripts of Frome's speeches to organizations such as the National Association for Interpretation, where he pulls no punches talking to federal employees. One essay, a portrait of Wilderness Watch's honored board member Stewart Brandborg, was taken from this very newsletter. The earliest goes back to 1974, the most recent was published in the *International Journal of Wilderness* in 2004.

Lastly, Frome has taken on a role as historian of the wilderness movement, profiling those who may not have made headlines but, behind the scenes, made our National Wilderness Preservation System possible. We read about Harvey Broom, William O. Douglas, Conrad Wirth, Newton Drury, Horace Albright, Roderick Haig-Brown, and others. These are not normally the people conservationists hold up in their pantheon of letters. These are not the dreamers, but the implementers, the people who set the tone for government agencies or created the patterns of citizen activism we now take for granted. Frome says simply, "The nation will everlastingly be richer for [their] coming our way."

The same can be said for the writer himself. ♪



Out & About - Wilderness Watch on the Road

Washington Wilderness Forum

In early June Wilderness Watch hosted its fourth Wilderness Forum, this time on the eastern side of the North Cascades in north-central Washington State. The beautiful Mazama Country Inn graciously provided us with a quiet, retreat setting near the banks of the Methow River and a bounty of fine meals.

The event was co-sponsored by Conservation Northwest, Olympic Forest Coalition, Olympic Park Associates, The Lands Council and the Washington Wilderness Coalition. Twenty-one participants gathered to spend the first warm days of summer discussing everything from the philosophical and psychological underpinnings of the wilderness idea to the heart of wilderness defense -- the concepts and principles in the Wilderness Act that define wilderness protection.

Attendees included citizen wilderness advocates as well as professional conservationists from across the State. Wilderness Act scholar Roger Kaye traveled from Fairbanks, Alaska to give a keynote presentation on the values of wilderness to the human spirit. Wilderness Act attorney and Wilderness Watch Board member Jon Dettmann traveled from Minneapolis to explain how the courts have interpreted the Wilderness Act in a variety of legal rulings, and how to apply those rulings to protect wilderness values everywhere. Board member Bill Worf shared stories and insights from his experiences in implementing the Act within the U.S. Forest Service after the Act's passage in 1964.

We hope the participants gained a greater understanding of the challenges facing Wilderness and what they can do to preserve this rich natural heritage.



Washington Wilderness Forum participants, 2007.

Native American Radio

Wilderness Watch was invited to be a guest speaker on a radio program called Native America Calling. The program broadcasts nationally to major cities and Indian reservations, and aired live on July 2nd. The program addressed a proposed road through the Izembek Wilderness in Alaska. Guests include Della Trumble, an Aleut and President of the King Cove Corp. and Tina Marie Ekker, Policy Director for Wilderness Watch.

Listeners called in with questions and comments from a wide variety of locations including Hotevilla, AZ, Barrow, AK, Albuquerque, NM, Vancouver, British Columbia, and King Cove, AK.

River Management Society

In May, Wilderness Watch executive director George Nickas addressed the River Management Society's annual convention in Missoula, Montana. Nickas spoke on a panel where he described Wilderness Watch's activities related to wild river protection including our landmark court victory regarding cabins and lodges on the Wild Salmon River, and some of the challenges facing wild and scenic rivers around the country. Also on the panel were representatives for American Rivers, Trout Unlimited and the River Management Society.

Wilderness Watch Report Documents Violations in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness

— By Kevin Proescholdt

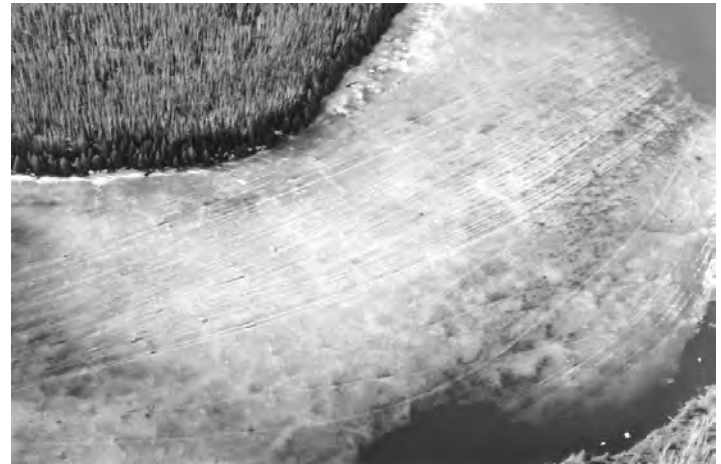
In April, Wilderness Watch and several coalition partners released a report that documented extensive wilderness violations in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW) of Minnesota. “Wilderness Between the Cracks: Where Motor Use and other Wilderness Violations have Degraded the Eastern Part of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness” is a 20-page report with more than 20 color photographs that documented a variety of violations in the million-acre BWCAW, the nation’s most heavily visited Wilderness.

Joining with Wilderness Watch in producing this report were the Izaak Walton League of America, Sierra Club North Star Chapter, and Northeastern Minnesotans for Wilderness. These same organizations had earlier joined together in litigation challenging a U.S. Forest Service proposal to build a snowmobile trail along a cliff face just barely outside the BWCAW border, but above a lake that lies within the Wilderness. That litigation is still pending.

“Wilderness Between the Cracks” detailed a number of violations of the 1978 BWCA Wilderness Act, or other wilderness regulations. These violations included illegal snowmobile trespass in areas where snowmobiling is prohibited, excessively-wide snowmobiles on the one route where snowmobiles may legally operate (the 1978 law restricts snowmobiles to no more than 40 inches in width on this route), motorboat violations, commercial towboat problems, illegal chainsaw use, and ATV incursions.

“Wilderness Between the Cracks” received extensive press coverage in Minnesota, including lengthy articles in the *Duluth News-Tribune*, *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, *Cook County-News Herald*, *Ely Timberjay*, Minnesota Public Radio, WCCO-TV, and other media outlets.

Wilderness Watch and the other organizations recognize the complexities involved with law enforcement in a remote Wilderness. These complexities include continuing cuts in the Superior National Forest’s wilderness and law enforcement budgets, declines in the number of professional Forest Service staff available for law enforcement and stewardship, the remoteness of the area, and the presence of U.S. Border Patrol agents. In some instances Border Patrol agents have been exempted from complying with the Wilderness Act and other environmental laws and can legally drive snowmobiles along the international boundary in the BWCAW. Despite these complicating factors, however, the conservation organizations believe that much more must be done to protect the wilderness character of the BWCAW.



Snowmobile tracks cross Rose Lake in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness.

The Forest Service is required by law and regulation to protect the BWCAW’s wilderness character. That directive is the central mandate in the 1964 Wilderness Act. Yet, as “Wilderness Between the Cracks” documents, the wilderness character of the BWCAW has been degraded by the motorized incursions and other problems in the wilderness. Even if some of the snowmobile use documented in “Wilderness Between the Cracks” came from the legal use of snow machines by U.S. Border Patrol agents, that motorized use still degrades the area’s wilderness character.

Representatives of the conservation organizations have initiated a series of meetings with Forest Service officials at the Superior National Forest to discuss the report, the problems documented in it, and ways to improve stewardship and enforcement. The first meeting occurred in April, and a second scheduled for June was postponed due to a large fire along the Gunflint Trail (the Ham Lake Fire) that burned the road corridor just outside the BWCAW, as well as some lands within the wilderness.

For those who wish to read or download the entire “Wilderness Between the Cracks” report, see www.iwla.org/publications/wilderness/wildernessbtwcracks.pdf.

Kevin Proescholdt is the Director for Wilderness and Public Lands for the Izaak Walton League of America, and vice-president of Wilderness Watch.

Bob Marshall Monitoring, continued from page 3

Even though we could not make any general determinations of how campsite conditions have changed throughout the area during the past 20 years, some troubling facts did become apparent. In Opportunity Class 1 areas – the most pristine areas representing 60% of the BMWC – no moderately or highly impacted sites are permitted by the plan; but, across all four monitoring periods, the percentage of the campsites monitored that were either moderately or highly impacted has ranged from 60% to nearly 70%. Thus, at a minimum, 60-70% of the campsites monitored in Opportunity Class 1 exceed the impact standards.

In addition to the campsite impact standards, the management plan also includes limits on the number of campsites per 640 acres (i.e., one square mile). In the monitoring guidelines for the Bob, managers are directed to make this assessment using a circle-shaped template representing a 640-acre area. Irrespective of where the template is placed on the map, the density standard is not to be exceeded. Managers, though, have chosen to ignore this guideline by crafting their own 640-acre areas based on geographic features or visitor-use patterns. In principle this might be a logical approach, but unfortunately, the boundaries of those areas exist only in the minds of individual managers and have not been recorded on any maps. As staff come and go, so do those 640-acre area boundaries. Consequently, different or new managers who draw those mental boundaries in different ways have inconsistent assessments of whether or not standards have been exceeded. It leaves the monitoring results open to significant bias and doubt.

Time and resources didn't allow Wilderness Watch to analyze the maps in detail to determine to what degree the number of campsites within any given area exceeds the standards in the plan. However, even without a detailed assessment it is clear that many areas within the Bob are out of compliance.

The findings of our research lead to several conclusions. First and foremost is that, without judging at which level of the agency the problems exist, the commitment to monitoring conditions and taking action to prevent damage is seriously lacking in the BMWC.

Second, managers must adopt a systematic approach to monitoring. If the funding isn't available to monitor every campsite, then a statistically reliable sampling method should be developed. This will prevent a somewhat haphazard program that creates mountains of data that are of little utility.

Third, monitoring teams should be chartered at a higher organizational level than at the individual Wilderness level – for example, in the case of the Forest Service, at the Regional Office or the Research Station level. Monitoring serves as a performance evaluation for managers whose responsibility is to preserve the area's wilderness character. As long as those collecting and ana-



Outfitter campsite in the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex.

lyzing the data answer to the person whose performance might be judged, the perception, if not the reality, exists that the results may not be objective. Moreover, monitoring efforts organized at a higher level are more likely to receive consistent funding.

Finally, as directed by the BMWC's "Recreation Management Direction," managers must take a number of actions to ensure that standards are not violated. Standards are not caution lights; they are absolute limits that should not be exceeded. As discussed above, between 60- 70% of the campsites observed in the Bob's most pristine areas have been out of standard, yet there exists no documentation identifying what steps have been taken to bring those areas into standard and ensure they stay in standard. If management actions have been undertaken, though, the monitoring results suggest that they have not been very successful and that more aggressive measures may be in order.

Wilderness Watch will continue to review monitoring data from the BMWC and use that information to advocate for better stewardship. Unfortunately, under the current agency leadership there appears to be little emphasis on or accountability for ensuring that the wilderness character of areas like the BMWC is being preserved. Ultimately it is likely to require congressional oversight spurred by the active engagement of citizens to force the agency to take its responsibilities seriously.

A final note: one thing that must be said about the monitoring effort in the Bob. There have been many dedicated professionals and volunteers involved in monitoring campsites over the years. The failures of the monitoring program are not their fault. What is lacking is an agency-wide commitment to good wilderness stewardship. Without that commitment, both in funding and managerial support, the agency is doing a disservice to the committed workers on the ground that strive to preserve this magnificent Wilderness. 🌿

You can find a more detailed account of this study in the *International Journal of Wilderness* vol. 13, no. 1: "Evaluation of Campsite Impact Monitoring: From 1987 to 2004 in the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex," by Randy Tanner & George Nickas, or by contacting Wilderness Watch.



On the Watch

Frank Church - River of No Return Wilderness, ID

Getting it Right the Second Time - Last summer when heavy rains washed logs into the Middle Fork of the Salmon River, forming a massive logjam at Pistol Creek Rapid, the Forest Service went in with a motorized drill, placed sticks of dynamite and blew up the jam. Wilderness Watch appealed to the Chief of the Forest Service to conduct an internal review of the decision to remove the logjam, noting the incongruity of intervening in a natural event in a designated Wilderness, and the likelihood that similar events will occur in the future. The Chief rejected our request. At the same time a post-incident report prepared by the local forest supervisor affirmed that the supervisor's "emergency" decision was the right one.

The agency justified its decision because there were approximately 300 rafters on the river upstream from the jam. While some hiked out to a nearby airstrip and others portaged their boats and gear around the jam on an existing trail, the agency declared the situation a safety emergency. Of course it wasn't. In reality it was an economic emergency for commercial outfitters and a convenience emergency for self-guided rafters, who felt the need to hurry back home to the rat race.

But Mother Nature wasn't deterred. This year spring storms washed logs into the river again, rechannelling a short stretch of the Middle Fork and forming a new logjam at Pistol Creek. This time the Forest Service is taking a different approach, which they announced in a news release:

"It is important to remember that the Middle Fork is within the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness and is designated a Wild river under the National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. What that means is that the Forest Service is obligated to manage the Middle Fork for its wild character."

"It is the responsibility of every boater to be aware of conditions on the rivers and take appropriate precautions including being heads-up and scouting the rivers. It may mean portaging or lining your boats around hazards. The Salmon-Challis National Forest will not be clearing obstacles from the rivers to assure passage for boaters."

Boaters continue launching upstream, and are lining and portaging their watercraft around the logjam and other obstructions. Best of all, local Forest Service officials seem to have learned from last year's example and have made the right choice.



High Uintas Wilderness, UT.

High Uintas Wilderness, UT

No Can-Do When Congress designated the High Uintas Wilderness in 1984, it was recognized that there were more than a dozen old earthen dams within the area. The dams were constructed by non-motorized means early in the 1900's for purposes of storing water for late-season irrigation in the valleys below. The tools used during construction included horses, shovels and picks. The Forest Service eventually acquired the dams, assuming responsibility for meeting dam safety standards required by State law. The dams currently do not meet modern safety standards so the Forest Service plans to breach and decommission each of them over the next several years in order to restore natural water flows.

The Forest Service has a golden opportunity to highlight traditional wilderness skills by breaching the dams using non-motorized means - an approach the High Uintas Preservation Council and Wilderness Watch have urged the agency to adopt. One of the larger dams, Clements Lake, is scheduled for breaching in 2007. The breach will consist of opening a 60' long by 15' high V-notch in the center of the dam to enable stream flow to resume. History shows and traditional skills experts concur that with a little foresight and planning it would have been possible to complete the project this year using traditional skills like hand tools and horse-drawn equipment. Instead, the Forest Service has opted to drive heavy equipment several miles into the wilderness this summer to complete the project with backhoes and bulldozers, wilderness values be damned.

Steens Mountain Wilderness, OR

“Riding” the Range - In April the BLM issued a draft travel management plan for the Steens Mountain Wilderness and surrounding lands. The preferred alternative would allow livestock grazing permittees to drive motor vehicles on a total of 42 miles of routes within the Wilderness, including approximately six miles of cross-country driving on what BLM euphemistically calls “historical” routes.

Wilderness Watch counted 36 separate routes on the map constituting the 42 miles that would be open to motor vehicle use. This is an average of slightly more than 1 mile in length each in terms of distance from a road. In fact, it appears that 15 of the 36 routes in Wilderness are *less than one mile* long, and 7 of those appear to be no more than a *few hundred yards to 1/2 mile* in length from the nearest road! Only two of the 36 routes appear to possibly be more than two miles in distance from a road.

Ranchers claim to have historically driven the routes to check water levels in stock ponds, mend fences, haul salt blocks and check cattle. In addition, the plan reveals that one rancher uses a helicopter to check and mend fences and open and close gates, landing in the Wilderness 15–20 times each year.

According to information provided by BLM, it appears there are 9 stock ponds that need to be checked regularly. Only one appears further than a mile from a road, with several located just a couple hundred yards to 1/4 mile from a road. BLM claims that time constraints would make it an economic hardship for the ranchers if they had to access the stock ponds by non-motorized means, and that it is easier to unload an ATV than to haul a horse trailer to the sites. This is not credible when a trek to the most remote stock pond is only 2 miles round-trip—an easy hike. Wilderness Watch sincerely doubts that any of the ranchers would be unable to check *all* of their stock ponds in a single day or at most during an overnight camping trip.



Grazing in the Steens Mountain Wilderness, OR.



Salmo-Priest Wilderness, WA.

We submitted lengthy written comments and had several conversations with BLM about our concerns. On May 31st BLM issued a final plan adopting its preferred alternative with the notable exception of banning future helicopter landings for ranching operations in Wilderness. However, a week later BLM withdrew the plan to make some changes relating to hiking and non-wilderness mountain biking routes. We anticipate the new final plan will be released later this summer.

Salmo - Priest Wilderness, WA

Operation Noble Mustang - As noted above, Oregon ranchers have hung up their saddles in favor of riding ATV's to check fencelines and stock ponds in the Steens Mountain Wilderness. In contrast, U.S. Border Patrol agents are enthusiastically saddling up to patrol remote country along the U.S. - Canadian border.

The latest recruits in the effort to tighten border security are four-legged and sure-footed, part of Operation Noble Mustang, a pilot project of the U.S. Border Patrol to patrol rugged stretches of the border in Washington, Idaho and Montana with mustangs. The horses were captured from the estimated 31,000 mustangs roaming wild in the West. Much of the border terrain in the Northern Rockies region is rugged and mountainous, with steep shale slopes and thick forests. But, unlike the cowboys at Steens Mountain, Border Patrol agents are demonstrating a can-do attitude when it comes to utilizing traditional skills while conducting their duties in remote wilderness terrain.



Wilderness & the Courts

Kofa Wilderness, AZ

On June 14, Wilderness Watch was alerted by one of our members to a press release issued two days earlier by the Kofa National Wildlife Refuge. At 516,000 acres, the Kofa Wilderness is the second largest wildlife refuge Wilderness outside Alaska. The release announced a new joint desert bighorn sheep management strategy signed by the Arizona Game & Fish Dept. and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The release also announced that a new bighorn sheep “guzzler” (an artificial water development) had recently been constructed in the Kofa Wilderness and that another one was planned in a few days. There was no public involvement conducted or environmental analysis done for the projects.

Constructing the guzzlers involves driving heavy construction equipment into the Wilderness, burying a 10,000 gallon or larger water tank, building a series of check dams and pipelines to divert intermittent water flows, and providing a trough from which the bighorns can drink. During the driest times, a water truck is often used to fill the guzzler tank.

Wilderness Watch joined by the Arizona Wilderness Coalition immediately filed for a temporary restraining order in federal court to prevent construction of the second guzzler. We alleged that the USFWS violated the Wilderness Act and the National Environmental Policy Act in approving the guzzlers without any environmental review or without showing that the guzzlers are consistent with the Wilderness Act. The order asked that the second guzzler be delayed until the court case could be heard.

Unfortunately, the guzzler was constructed on June 16. We have since asked the USFWS to make both new guzzlers inoperable pending a ruling from the court. At press time we do not know whether the agency will agree to the request.

Silver Peak Wilderness, CA

In a blow to Wilderness protection, a federal court in California has ruled that the Forest Service acted legally when it permitted a rancher to graze livestock in an area that had been closed to grazing for 17 years, including the time the land was held by the two previous landowners. The ruling could affect many Wildernesses where grazing may have historically occurred, but where livestock have been absent for a long time.



Kofa Wilderness, AZ.

The case involved a parcel of land that had been in private ownership since the late 1800s. New owners acquired the land in 1990 and did not permit any livestock to use the land. Five years later they sold the land to the Trust for Public Lands, which in 1997 transferred it to the Forest Service. At the time the Forest Service acquired the land the area was not part of the Silver Peak Wilderness. The agency began assessing whether to allow grazing on the newly acquired parcel. Before a final decision was made, Congress, in 2002, added the area to the Silver Peak Wilderness.

The case (*Ventana Wilderness Alliance et al. v. John Bradford, et al.*) largely hinged on a provision in the Wilderness Act that states, “the grazing of livestock, where established prior to the effective date of this Act, shall be permitted to continue...” The Ventana Wilderness Alliance argued that because the area had been ungrazed for 12 years prior to Wilderness designation, and that it had never been grazed since becoming public land, that livestock grazing was not “established” prior to designation and there was nothing to “continue”. The Forest Service claimed that grazing did continue on the land—even if without the landowners permission—up until the time the agency acquired the parcel. Grazing was suspended at that point, according to the agency, while it prepared an environmental review.

The court generally accepted the Forest Service’s “history” of grazing up until 1997, and thus found that grazing had never actually ceased, only been suspended. More troubling to wilderness advocates is that the judge opened the door to a potentially broader interpretation of the Wilderness Act’s grazing provision. Writing in her June 27, 2007 decision, Judge Hamilton stated, “The statute requires only that grazing be established prior to designation as wilderness, not at the exact time of designation.” Given that grazing at some time in the past was established on most public lands now designated as Wilderness, how far back might one go in determining whether grazing could again be allowed on currently ungrazed lands?

The plaintiffs are still considering whether to challenge the district court’s ruling.

Bequests, Endowment, & Charitable Annuities: Wilderness Watch unveils a Legacy for Wilderness Campaign

There's no doubt that Wilderness Watch members are quite extraordinary. A significant percentage of this organization's income comes from members' renewals and donations, and your calls, letters and activities in the field make all the difference "on the ground" where it really counts. We couldn't do what we do without you.

It's also true that Wilderness Watch is blessed with members who think long-term. Our members are well-informed about wilderness. They know what the Wilderness Act says, and they know how critical the role of citizens is to make the dream of the National Wilderness Preservation System come true. Our members do what they do and Wilderness Watch does what it does knowing that our efforts will outlast each of us and our short time here on Earth.

So Wilderness Watch has created a new way for our existing members to support the long-term interests of wilderness protection—our Legacy for Wilderness campaign.

Let me tell you about our legacy campaign.

- Bequests are gifts of personal property passed on to Wilderness Watch through a will at the end of life. The donor

can tailor these contributions to a specific program or leave them open for general operating expenses. Adding Wilderness Watch to a will is as simple as adding a statement such as: "I give the sum of \$_____ to Wilderness Watch, a charitable organization located in Missoula, Montana, to use as the board of directors determines." (Your attorney should review all statements.)

- Gifts to our Endowment are donations to a special permanent fund. Wilderness Watch invests its endowment, and, when authorized by the board, uses the interest to pay for programs to preserve and protect wilderness.

- Charitable Annuities are strategic gifts that both provide income to Wilderness Watch and guarantee payments to the donor and/or a spouse. Often annuities come with advantageous tax benefits. (This is particularly true in Montana, where legislators recently re-authorized the Montana Endowment Tax Credit.)

To learn more, call Jeff Smith, (406) 542-2048, ext. 1, or check the appropriate box on the form below, fill in your name and address, and send it back to us. Thanks for thinking ahead!

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!

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

I would like to become a member!

\$15 \$30 \$50 \$500 \$ _____

Living Lightly Regular Contributor Lifetime Other

My check or money order is enclosed.

Please charge my: Visa MasterCard

Card # _____

Exp. Date __ __ / __ __

Please send information about the **Legacy For Wilderness Campaign.**

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____

State/Zip: _____

Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

(to receive our monthly e-mail update)

Please make checks payable to: "Wilderness Watch"

Mail to:
P.O. Box 9175,
Missoula, MT 59807

Honoring a Wilderness Stalwart

The University of Montana School of Forestry and Conservation recently bestowed an honorary doctorate degree on Clifton Merritt, a native Montanan, long-time member of Wilderness Watch's advisory council and national leader in the wilderness movement. Clif helped to pass the Wilderness Act and founded or co-founded many organizations, including the Montana Wilderness Association, American Wilderness Alliance (now American Wildlands), and his homegrown Friends of the Bitterroot.

A more selfless activist there has never been. As Dick Carter, long-time Utah wilderness leader and one of Clif's "hires" from the 1970's recently wrote, "Rather than leading any particular charge, Clif simply trained advocate after wilderness advocate while with The Wilderness Society in the '60s and '70s. He turned them loose to train others and they did; thus, the modern day wilderness movement was stitched together."

Brock Evans, a national environmental leader in his own right who employed Clif's help in the epic fight to save Hells Canyon from being dammed shared this "Clif is and has always been one of my heroes...a truer model of unwavering courage under fire and total dedication to the cause there never was."

Congratulations Clif, for an honor so richly deserved.



Clif Merritt visits with Montana Governor Brian Schweitzer at a Univ. of Montana reception honoring Clif.
Photo by Larry Campbell.



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