



# WILDERNESS WATCHER

The Quarterly Newsletter of Wilderness Watch

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## Gates of the Arctic: An Agency Loses its Way

by Jeff Smith

Let's start with the premise that this particular Wilderness is off-the-charts extraordinary: four times the size of Yellowstone with no established trails but with six Wild and Scenic rivers, home to grizzlies, muskox, three migrating herds of caribou, Dall sheep, and 145 varieties of birds, situated north of Mount McKinley and above the Arctic Circle and bisected by the Central Brooks Range. Here is the wild heart of a 40-million-acre tract of protected land broken only by the Dalton Highway-Alaska Pipeline Corridor. The legendary Bob Marshall first visited in 1929 when looking for "blank spaces on the map," and gave the wilderness its name.

The Gates of the Arctic.

For the past 31 years the National Park Service (NPS) has managed Gates as an 8.4-million-acre National Park and Preserve. Congress has mandated that the agency



Photo: A. Halford

manage about 85 percent of the Park (7.1 million acres) as Wilderness. This is the second-largest designated Wilderness in the National Park System.

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## Dynamiting the Joyce Kilmer Wilderness

by Dawn Serra



It was past the 11th hour when Wilderness Watch heard about the Forest Service's (FS) plan to use explosives to blast about 150 old-growth hemlock trees in the Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Wilderness in North Carolina. The

majestic trees were dead or dying, killed by a hemlock woolly adelgid infestation—an accidentally introduced exotic bug that is wreaking havoc in hemlock forests along the East Coast. The plan's goal, to make visitors safe from falling trees, was identical to what we'd seen a couple of years ago in the Sandia Mountains Wilderness outside of Albuquerque, New Mexico.

The trees the FS planned to blow apart were located along trails within the Joyce Kilmer Memorial Forest—part of the 17,394-acre Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Wilderness in North Carolina and Tennessee. The Memorial Forest's 3,800 acres have been described as "perhaps the single most impressive growth of eastern virgin forest in the United States, with many trees hundreds of years old." It's named

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...and More!

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## message from the Board of Directors



As most Wilderness Watch members know, the 110-million-acre National Wilderness Preservation System contains many of the finest remnants of Wild America. From the small 6-acre Pelican Island Wilderness in Florida to the sprawling 9.1 million-acre Wrangell-Saint Elias Wilderness in Alaska, the Wilderness System contains places of great natural beauty, rich biological diversity, and an essential wild character that by federal statute are to remain “untrammeled” and un-

manipulated by humankind. The Wilderness System is a legacy well worth preserving as (according to the Wilderness Act) “an enduring resource of wilderness” to current and future generations.

That’s where Wilderness Watch comes in. While many larger, better-funded organizations focus on the important work of designating more areas for the National Wilderness Preservation System, Wilderness Watch is the only national conservation organization focused on protecting those areas already designated as Wilderness. And the need for Wilderness Watch has never been greater.

Though there are many good friends of Wilderness who work for the four federal agencies that steward Wilderness, the agencies, unfortunately still make decisions that degrade the wilderness character of the areas in their care, decisions contrary to the letter and spirit of the Wilderness Act. And no single agency has a lock on poor stewardship, as this newsletter sadly shows.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service wants to allow the State of Alaska to conduct aerial gunning of wolves in Alaska’s Unimak Wilderness and gassing wolf pups in their dens. The U.S. Forest Service illegally built a new visitor building atop Green Mountain in the Glacier Peak Wilderness in Washington without public notice. The National Park Service wants to erode wilderness character in Gates of the Arctic, one of our most iconic wild areas. The list goes on and on. And often it is only Wilderness Watch that challenges these bad decisions.

Fortunately we have passionate members and supporters inside and outside of the agencies who understand the critical importance of Wilderness Watch’s work. Our members alert us to new Wilderness abuses, write letters, send emails, and support us financially by renewing their membership. You are our bedrock. Thank you.

That support is more important than ever. As the economy still struggles to pull out of the Recession, Wilderness Watch continues to rely on your donations to fund our important work. Our extraordinarily talented and dedicated staff does tremendously effective work day in and day out on behalf of Wilderness, and our board of directors and our members help amplify the staff’s effectiveness, but we still need funding to make it happen.

So this year, please be even more generous than you have in the past. Please join with me in making an extra contribution to Wilderness Watch. You won’t regret it, and the beneficiary of your generosity will live on in an “enduring resource of wilderness”—our great National Wilderness Preservation System.



Kevin Proescholdt



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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for preserving the most pristine wilderness conditions even among the superlative Wildernesses of Alaska.

But this year, with little publicity and no fanfare, the Park Service has begun writing a new management plan, and, if its scoping documents are any indication, the agency intends to weaken wilderness protections by allowing a more invasive administration, outlawed structures, degraded “gateways,” and a cavalier attitude toward the three laws that guide the process, the Wilderness Act, the National Environmental Policy Act, and the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act.

One Wilderness Watch member and former Gates park ranger, Steve Ulvi, told the agency, “I see no indication of agency restraint or humility in the roots of this plan so far . . . and a sad decline in understanding the intent of the Wilderness Act and a fire in the belly for preserving the rarest of all landscape values . . . risky, hair-raising, primordial Wilderness.”

Curiously, the draft amendment to the management plan would divide Gates of the Arctic into five zones, with the first two zones on the outskirts of the wilderness, the third – though

wilderness – allowed to be “largely modified by contemporary humans,” and only the last two zones managed ostensibly to preserve wilderness character. But, even here in the remotest of remote Alaska, the NPS is reserving the right to install permanent human-built structures and allow “administrative transportation and access,” word play that means they would routinely fly in agency personnel in helicopters.

The Wilderness Act contains no provisions for any agency to permit any degradation of any designated Wilderness. The agencies are charged with maintaining and enhancing the wilderness character of these lands. Wilderness Watch considers any kind of partitioning of wilderness to allow damage to its wilderness character an unacceptable equivocation.

The NPS also proposes to step up the level of “educational and science-based opportunities” and supporting them with new infrastructure and new mechanized access – again a euphemism for more aircraft. Wilderness Watch’s position is that education and scientific

research are important values of Wilderness though they must be conducted in a manner that doesn’t harm the area’s wilderness character.

We are also concerned that, at the same time the Park Service has begun planning a change in Gates of the Arctic’s management, it is separately proposing to install four automated weather monitoring stations, air-lifted into the Wilderness and regularly maintained by crews in helicopters.

These monitoring stations have the laudable goal of monitoring climate change in the arctic. Powered by 50-Watt solar panels, the stations will transmit air temperature, humidity, wind, soil temperature, snow depth, and solar radiation every hour to a satellite. This is impressive,

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**“Across the Koyukuk is a cut bank, projecting about fifty feet upwards. It is pleasant to climb to its top late in the afternoon and watch the evening and night come down on the valley. At first, backed by the bright setting sun, Wiseman is an imposing-looking village with its well-spaced group of houses arranged in orderly rows, up and down the river. But as the sun dips behind the mountains, and the chill evening winds arise, the town seems to shrivel and the all-abounding wilderness grows larger and more impressive. Dusk keeps on deepening, a single light shines from a cabin window, and before long all of Wiseman is aglow. Its brightness, however, seems very trivial in the infinite extension of the uninhabited mountains. As darkness descends, the wilderness keeps on expanding, until when night has fallen the sparkle of town seems only the tiniest oasis of warmth and comfort, almost lost in the all-pervading desolation and freezing and mystery of the Arctic.”**

Bob Marshall, from *Arctic Village*, 1933

# In the Courts

## Appeals Court Rules Guzzlers in Kofa Wilderness Illegal

The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit has ruled that the construction of two water developments (called “guzzlers”) in the Kofa Wilderness was illegal. Wilderness Watch and other conservation groups filed a lawsuit in June 2007 after learning the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS) had constructed one 13,000-gallon water development within the Kofa Wilderness and was planning to install another similar structure.

The Appeals Court found that the Fish and Wildlife Service failed to show constructing the tanks met the requirements of the Wilderness Act, and specifically that the guzzlers were necessary to preserve the Kofa’s wilderness character. The court remanded the decision to the District Court to either fashion a remedy for the illegal construction or give the agency a second chance to prove the structures are necessary to meet the minimum requirement to preserve Wilderness.



Guzzler construction/A bighorn sheep/Eight mule deer  
Photos: U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

That will be a tall order for the FWS to meet. The guzzlers were ostensibly built to increase the numbers of bighorn sheep on the Kofa National Wildlife Refuge, which is more than 80 percent designated Wilderness. At both guzzlers, the FWS installed a remote, motion-activated camera to document wildlife use. In the intervening three and one-half years, no bighorns have visited the one site and only two bighorns have visited the other. Neither of the bighorn sheep was shown getting a drink. A former refuge biologist warned when the guzzlers were being built that they would not benefit bighorns, but might attract mule deer. The camera data bears out that concern. Not only has the Court determined the tanks are illegal, the bighorns have apparently found them equally repugnant.

Despite the Appeals Court ruling, the case is far from over. Several hunting-related groups, including the National Rifle Association and Safari Club International, intervened in support of the FWS and submitted a petition to the Ninth Circuit Court asking for a rehearing en banc. On March 1st their petition was denied, so we will be back in District Court arguing that the guzzlers be removed and the Kofa Wilderness restored.

Peter Frost of Western Environmental Law Center and Erik Ryberg, a Western Watersheds Project attorney, represent Wilderness Watch and our co-plaintiffs. ❧

## Wilderness Watch Files Suit to Undo Illegal “Lookout” Construction

Wilderness Watch has filed a complaint in Federal Court seeking to force the Forest Service to remove a newly constructed visitor contact station atop Green Mountain in the Glacier Peak Wilderness. The FS used helicopters to transport materials and workers to the site and power tools to

erect this replica of a fire lookout that had fallen into disrepair and was removed from the peak in 2002.

The Wilderness Act defines wilderness as “an area of undeveloped federal land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements

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## Gates: An Agency Loses its Way (continued from page 3)

perhaps critical machinery that could be installed in the millions of acres of public land at the same latitude outside designated Wilderness.

Wilderness Watch member and long-time Alaska conservation leader Allen Smith spoke for us, too, when he commented that the Park Service missed the mark. “Wilderness is about humility before wild nature and restraint in what we do there. Wilderness is not about convenience or about subordinating it to other uses or goals.”

Here’s an idea. Instead of getting mesmerized by building an empire of new facilities and the desire for employees to fly all over the Wilderness in helicopters, or getting absorbed in the archaeology of the Park and

its own interpretations for visitors, Park Service leaders simply choose to do what’s right for Wilderness.

Maybe they should keep managing Gates of the Arctic the next 25 years with the goal of leaving it as wild or even wilder than it is today.



Wilderness Watch members can comment on the Park Service’s general management plan (GMP) late this winter or spring after the agency assesses the first round of

comments on its scoping documents and publishes a draft GMP. It is our hope to bring hundreds – if not thousands – of comments from members and friends to protect and preserve America’s preeminent Wilderness national park. ❧

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## Dynamiting the Joyce Kilmer Wilderness (continued from page 1)



for the poet who penned the famous poem, “Trees.” (*I think that I shall never see a poem lovely as a tree.*)

When WW learned of the plan in late October, the FS had already approved it without any public scoping. We joined local activists in strongly opposing the blasting and asked the agency to instead respect the Wilderness Act, which prohibits heavy-handed management in favor of allowing natural conditions to prevail. We urged the agency to use this as an opportunity to educate and engage the public on the value of real Wilderness. We encouraged the FS to preserve the Joyce Kilmer’s wild, untrammled conditions for visitors to experience nature on her own terms, including the risks, self-reliance, and adventure inherent in a wilderness experience. After all, Wilderness is not meant to be a managed forest or a garden or a city park. Wilderness has been set apart from these other places for good reason—so future generations can experience America as it was before rapid settlement and its accompanying pressures dominated the landscape.



Photos: David Govus

WW pointed Nantahala National Forest officials to the Sandia Mountains Wilderness, where the Forest Service faced a similar situation in 2009 with dead and dying trees in a popular and heavily used area. WW urged the FS to drop its plan to chainsaw log thousands of dead trees along 80 miles of trails, and instead use news releases, trailhead signs, and a revised trails brochure and Forest website to educate visitors about the potential risk and why allowing nature to run its course is the appropriate response in Wilderness. The agency ultimately took

this suggested course of action. We encouraged the FS to adopt a similar approach for the Joyce Kilmer.

Unfortunately, the FS went ahead and blasted the old hemlocks rather than allow the stately monarchs to gradually fall on their own. It chose to modify the Wilderness rather than ask visitors to modify their expectations and behavior while visiting Wilderness. WW will continue to work for a better outcome for Wilderness next time. ❧

# On the Watch

## Unimak Wilderness, Alaska



Photo: US Fish & Wildlife Service

Wilderness Watch is urging the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) to deny the State of Alaska's request to shoot and kill wolves from helicopters within the Unimak Wilderness. The proposal also includes gassing pups in their dens. According to the FWS's environ-

mental assessment (EA), the purpose for killing wolves is to increase the number of caribou for subsistence hunting.

Unimak Island, part of the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge, is 98 percent (910,000 acres) Wilderness. False Pass (pop. 54) is its only human community.

Fish and Wildlife Service's proposed action calls for exterminating all wolves found in caribou calving areas in May. An intensive study of calf mortality will be initiated, including capture and radio collaring using helicopters, fixed wing aircraft and temporary field camps.

The proposed wolf-killing is being undertaken even though FWS admits there is no evidence wolves have caused the decline in caribou numbers. Further, several times in the past 80 years the herd has been much smaller, including years when no caribou were found, so this cycle does not seem atypical.

And while the State claims the project is designed to help subsistence hunters, local hunters primarily hunt caribou from the nearby Southern Alaska Peninsula herd. All

reported harvest of the Unimak herd since 1999 has been by non-local Alaska residents and non-residents. The vast majority of hunting is done through two commercial guide services and is focused on killing trophy bulls.

Wilderness Watch is urging FWS to choose the "no action" alternative, which would maintain the untrammled, wild character of the Unimak Wilderness and allow natural ecological processes to continue. We let FWS know that:

- Killing wolves to attempt to artificially boost caribou numbers is completely unacceptable in a National Wildlife Refuge Wilderness;
- The goal of increasing caribou numbers for subsistence hunting is at odds with reality—all caribou killed in the past decade were killed by non-local and non-resident hunters, most of whom were commercially guided trophy hunters;
- The EA lacks scientific evidence to support FWS's proposed action. Essentially nothing is known about the habitat condition or numerous other possible causes for the herd's decline, and the population has fluctuated widely in the past;
- Helicopter use is extremely intrusive, has no place in Wilderness stewardship, and is prohibited by law except in very rare circumstances;
- The agency must prepare a full environmental impact statement to assess the numerous factors impacting the herd.

Read WW's comments: [www.wildernesswatch.org/issues/index.html#CaribouFarm](http://www.wildernesswatch.org/issues/index.html#CaribouFarm) ☮

## Pasayten Wilderness, Washington



Photo: Steve Boutcher

Wilderness Watch let the FS know its long-awaited "Pack and Saddle Stock Outfitter-Guide Special Use Permit Issuance Draft Environmental Impact Statement" (DEIS) for the Pasayten and Lake Chelan-Sawtooth Wildernesses fails to comply with the Wilderness Act

and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). In the DEIS, the FS proposes to more than double commercial pack stock use in the Pasayten and to substantially increase it

in the Lake Chelan-Sawtooth. This, despite years of documented damage from overuse in these Wildernesses, particularly the Pasayten. In addition, the DEIS proposes to amend the forest plan standards for barren-core areas at outfitter camps from the current standard of 400 sq. ft. to up to 5,000 sq. ft. So much for "minimum impact" or "no trace" ethics!

The Pasayten Wilderness borders Canada and is adjacent to the Stephen Mather Wilderness (SMW) in North Cascades National Park. Its 529,000 acres are home to the largest population of lynx in the Lower 48 and are essential to grizzly recovery in the North Cascades. The Pasayten Wilderness provides habitat for numerous other imperiled species and has 150 peaks over 7,500 feet elevation, hundreds of lakes

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## Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, MN



Photo: Kevin Proescholdt

Wilderness Watch, along with several other conservation groups, is again voicing concerns over a proposed snowmobile trail—the South Fowl Lake Snowmobile Access Project—adjacent to the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW) in Minnesota.

Two years ago a federal court blocked construction of the trail and ordered the Forest Service to prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) to analyze the impact of the trail on the wilderness character of the adjacent Boundary Waters.

In our comments on the draft EIS WW and our allies raised a number of concerns including among other things:

- The DEIS fails to adequately analyze noise impacts from snowmobile use. The agency used faulty testing methods, and it failed to consider effects on wilderness character;
- The precedent set by appeasing illegal motorized use as stated by “the intent of this new trail is to replace the old illegal trail”;
- The failure to address the noise and habitat impacts on rare and endangered animals such as the Canada Lynx;
- And, the DEIS’s failure to analyze the ineffectiveness of trail closures in preventing ORV use.

Read our comments: [www.wildernesswatch.org/issues/index.html#FoulPlan](http://www.wildernesswatch.org/issues/index.html#FoulPlan) 🐾

## West Chichagof-Yakobi Wilderness, AK

Wilderness Watch is encouraging the Forest Service (FS) to restore a piece of the West Chichagof-Yakobi Wilderness as it considers the long-term management of the White Sulphur Springs cabin, bathhouse, and trail in the West Chichagof-Yakobi Wilderness in southeast Alaska. Built a long time ago at a natural hot springs, the two buildings are in disrepair. The FS is considering the following alternatives—reconstructing or replacing the 12 x 14’ cabin and moving it 100 feet from the springs, replacing or removing the bathhouse, and reconstructing the one-mile trail with a gravel surface. A helicopter would be used to deliver the bulk of materials for the project, including gravel for the trail.

The Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act of 1980 (ANILCA) allows for repair and replacement of public use cabins such as this one, but includes no allowance for bathhouses and other similar structures. The bathhouse is incompatible with the area’s wilderness character, and is likely unlawful.

Wilderness Watch asked the FS to restore this piece of the West Chichagof-Yakobi Wilderness by:

- Removing the bathhouse and restoring the hot springs

and the surrounding area to their natural condition;

- Removing the cabin to restore the physical attributes of the wilderness setting and improve opportunities for solitude and a sense of remoteness important to a wilderness experience;
- Should the FS replace the cabin, the new cabin should be of equal or smaller size and constructed of materials that can be packed by non-motorized means to the site;
- If the trail is reconstructed, native materials obtained on site should be used;
- All work should be completed using traditional skills and without motorized vehicles or equipment.

WW encouraged the FS to choose the “no action” alternative, the only one that meets the letter and spirit of the Wilderness Act and to use this opportunity as a “teachable moment” to educate visitors about the value of Wilderness and the incompatibility of this kind of development.

Read WW’s comments: [www.wildernesswatch.org/issues/index.html#WestChichagof](http://www.wildernesswatch.org/issues/index.html#WestChichagof) 🐾

## Pasayten Wilderness (cont. from pg. 6)

and streams, and 600 miles of trails. The Lake Chelan-Sawtooth Wilderness also borders the SMW, and is 151,000 acres of forests, alpine lakes, and deep ravines.

Read WW’s comments and get additional information: [www.wildernesswatch.org/issues/index.html#Pasayten](http://www.wildernesswatch.org/issues/index.html#Pasayten) 🐾

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## Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness, Idaho



Photo and article: Gary Macfarlane

float takeout on the Selway River and the Moose Creek Ranger Station in the heart of the Wilderness. A ford was

The U.S. Forest Service (FS) has approved a plan to use helicopters for replacing a bridge across Three Links Creek in the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness in Idaho. Three Links Creek enters the Selway River about halfway between the Race Creek trailhead/

used before the current bridge was built (using traditional, non-motorized tools and native material “stringers” for support). The environmental assessment (EA) failed to seriously consider non-motorized options, claiming the span was too great for a packable bridge design and that native materials were not readily available. The FS also rejected use of the ford, which it claims in the EA is too dangerous.

This is yet another example of creeping motorization and diminished wildness in designated Wilderness. Wilderness Watch, Friends of the Clearwater, and Alliance for the Wild Rockies commented on the proposal and are considering an administrative appeal. 🐾

## Wild Voices: Unlawful, widespread, intentional, and habitual snowmobile use in the Alpine Lakes Wilderness

By Robert Mullins, Leavenworth, WA

**W**e parked at the Beverly Creek trailhead on the Wenatchee National Forest, and walked on skis up Earl Peak on the edge of the Alpine Lakes Wilderness, a 362,789-acre preserve in Washington’s Cascade Mountains. At the 7,036-foot summit, we saw spectacular views of Mt. Stuart and the aptly-named Enchantments. We were surprised by snowmobiles lapping the valleys and crossing several drainages inside the Alpine Lakes Wilderness below us.



Photo: Robert Mullins

We were further dismayed by both the Forest Service’s and local sheriff’s refusal to do anything to catch the trespassers even after we reported the license plate numbers of their vehicles from the parking lot!

Sadly, I’ve seen illegal snowmobile use in Wilderness on many other backcountry ski trips. New, advanced technology enables snowmobiles to climb mountains they never could before! The Teanaway/Ingalls divide, open country with spectacular views, is tracked by snowmobiles regularly, and law-breakers cross the divide to enter the Wilderness. Last winter I climbed Navaho Peak with a friend and we planned to ski the northeast bowl into the Wilderness. The ridge was a packed snowmobile-highway through scores of broken high-altitude trees. From the summit we saw that snowmobiles had tracked the bowl and adjacent ridge far into the Wilderness and also descended at least 1500 vertical feet below (also into the Wilderness).

It’s frustrating to see so much snowmobile trespass in the Alpine Lakes Wilderness. Forest Service officials claim to take the problem seriously but say they are unable to stop it. A local group, the Wenatchee Mountains Coalition has had enough. We have submitted a proposal to Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest Supervisor, Rebecca Heath, to designate new winter non-motorized areas along the Wilderness boundary. Closing the slope south of the Wilderness boundary on the Teanaway crest, down to the North Fork Teanaway Road, would create an easily enforceable snowmobile closure boundary that would keep snowmobiles away from the Wilderness. The Forest Service could easily enforce the law within its current budget by creating this boundary, which would be a groomed road they could patrol.

The problem is well known and discussed extensively on internet forums. Reliable reports, many from USFS personnel, document trespass across the breadth of the Wilderness—from Stevens Pass to Cle Elum! Citizens must speak out, insist that the agency enforce federal law and protect the Alpine Lakes Wilderness from unlawful, widespread, intentional, and habitual snowmobile Wilderness trespass. A recent article—[www.justgetout.net/Wenatchee/21163](http://www.justgetout.net/Wenatchee/21163)—describes the efforts of the Wenatchee Mountains Coalition. For more information or to join, email: [wenatcheemountainscoalition@hotmail.com](mailto:wenatcheemountainscoalition@hotmail.com). 🐾



## Lone Peak Wilderness, UT

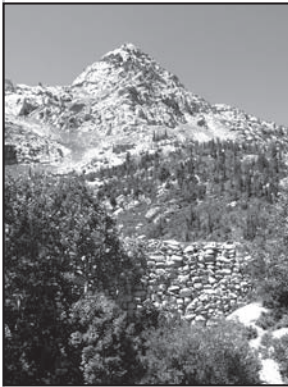


Photo: George Nickas

Wilderness Watch has been urging the Forest Service (FS) to forego the use of helicopters and other motorized equipment to lower or partially breach the Silver Lake Dam in the Lone Peak Wilderness in Utah. We are also encouraging the agency to breach the dam so the natural lake will find its natural level. The dam was built 100 years ago for irrigation purposes, enlarging the original 5.6-acre Silver Lake to its current 13 acres, and abandoned in 1960

following construction of the Silver Lake Flat Reservoir. A Utah state water engineer determined the dam is a “moderate hazard” that will eventually fail without stabili-

zation, so the FS proposed lowering the lake’s spillway six feet from the crest of the dam and to plug the outlet with concrete. The proposal includes the use of an excavator, a cement mixer, and a helicopter.

Wilderness Watch and the Utah Environmental Congress appealed the FS decision to airlift heavy equipment into the Lone Peak Wilderness and won. In overturning the forest supervisor, the regional forester wrote the decision rationale “does not articulate why the authorization for motorized equipment and mechanical transport is necessary to meet the minimum requirements for the administration of the area as wilderness.” The agency is currently revising its analysis.

Read WW’s comments: [www.wildernesswatch.org/issues/index.html#SilverLake](http://www.wildernesswatch.org/issues/index.html#SilverLake) 🐾

## LOOKING NORTH

### A Second Chance to Get it Right

In the September 2010 *Watcher*, we reported that U.S. Customs and Border Protection was set to prepare environmental impact statements (EISs) for the entire U.S.-Canada border including lands extending approximately 100 miles south of the border. The Border Patrol recently announced a change in plans, and now intends to prepare a single programmatic EIS for the entire northern border. This approach makes sense in many ways, but the Border Patrol fails to identify what its proposed action is. Without knowing what the Border Patrol is planning, or the alternatives to a proposed action, concerned citizens or affected agencies (like the Forest Service or National Park Service) can’t provide meaningful comments for Border Patrol’s consideration in the draft EIS.

Regardless of how one feels toward the activities of the Border Patrol on our southern border, or the trade-offs involved, there is no dispute that its actions have wreaked untold havoc on fragile Wildernesses like Cabeza-Prieta and the Otay Mountains. To think that the same approach might be coming to the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, Glacier or North Cascades National Parks, the Pasayten Wilderness and others, ought to give all of us pause. You can read Northern Border Programmatic EIS Scoping Comments here: [www.wildernesswatch.org/pdf/Northern\\_Border\\_scoping\\_comments.pdf](http://www.wildernesswatch.org/pdf/Northern_Border_scoping_comments.pdf) 🐾

## LOOKING SOUTH

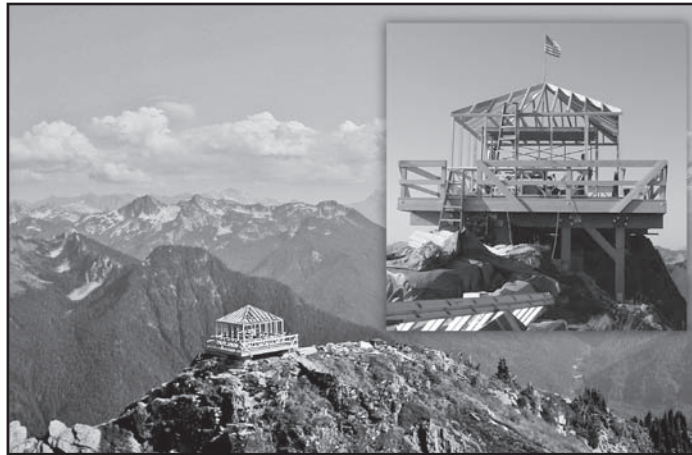
### Blame the Terrain

The investigative arm of Congress, the Government Accountability Office (GAO), released a report last October concluding that federal rules governing Wilderness, national parks, and other public lands are not preventing Border Patrol from doing its job. Ninety-seven percent of all Border Patrol apprehensions on the U.S.-Mexico border occur on these federal lands, which make up only 40 percent of our southern border. The GAO took nearly a year and interviewed lead agents at 26 border stations. Although agents acknowledged restrictions and delays in patrolling the border, 85 percent said the “overall security status of their jurisdiction is not affected by land-management laws. Instead, factors such as the remoteness and ruggedness of the terrain have the greatest effect on their ability to achieve operational control.” Read more: [www.wildernesswatch.org/newsroom/guardian/Border\\_Patrol.html](http://www.wildernesswatch.org/newsroom/guardian/Border_Patrol.html) 🐾

or human habitation, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions.” The Act also states, “there shall be...no use of motor vehicles, motorized equipment or motorboats, no landing of aircraft... and no structure or installation” within Wilderness.

The Forest Service violated these fundamental tenets of Wilderness law by building this new structure on Green Mountain and using helicopters to transport materials and workers to the site. The agency also violated the bedrock requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act by failing to notify the public of its plans and not conducting an environmental review. This is a textbook example of agency officials ignoring their legal mandate to protect and preserve Wilderness and instead promoting other interests.

The proper thing for the Forest Service to do is take down the structure unlawfully built in the Wilderness and use it to replace one of the dozens of other lookouts outside Wilderness and in need of repair. The structure can be enjoyed and the Wilderness preserved. Instead, the agency has decided to dig in its heels and waste hundreds of thousands of taxpayer dollars defending its



WW file photos

illegal actions with little chance of prevailing.

The Forest Service would do well to contemplate the words of federal judge Franklin Burgess when he overturned a National Park Service decision to replace two collapsed trailside shelters in the Olympic Wilderness: “Once the Olympic Wilderness was designated, a different perspective on the land is required... The [shelters] have collapsed under the natural effects of weather and time, and to reconstruct the shelters and place the replicas on the sites of the original shelters by means of a

helicopter is in direct contradiction of the mandate to preserve the wilderness character of the Olympic Wilderness.” He added, rather than providing shelters, “a different ‘feeling’ of wilderness is sought to be preserved for future generations to enjoy, a place ‘where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man’ and which retains ‘its primitive character and influence, without permanent improvements.’”

It is this perspective—a commitment to both the spirit and the letter of the Wilderness Act—that Wilderness Watch’s lawsuit seeks to uphold. 🌀

## Challenge Seeks to Protect Native Species in Wilderness Lakes

**W**ilderness Watch has joined with several other groups in challenging the State of California’s Fish Hatchery and Stocking Program Environmental Impact Statement. Among other things, the suit seeks to stop the State’s practice of stocking fish in naturally fishless Wilderness lakes.

Ecologists have documented that introducing fish to these lakes causes significant impacts to native fish, amphibians, aquatic invertebrates, and other wildlife.

Introduced fish introduce disease. They also generally disrupt and impair natural conditions needed for native wildlife and ecosystems to thrive and function properly.

Should fish stocking cease in these lakes, many historically fishless waters will continue to maintain a fishery for years, perhaps decades. Yet, over time, most if not all of these lakes will gradually return to their natural condition, with a rich abundance of native aquatic life forms free to prosper and evolve in their own way. 🌀

# Message from the Membership and Development Director

By Jeff Smith



One of the issues we've been talking about in the office is the sheer number of proposals to use helicopters in Wilderness. There's been a shift. All four wilderness management agencies now assume the big birds are necessary to repair an irrigation dam, transport researchers, study wildlife, deliver crews and supplies for trail work, or check the work of subordinates.

The agencies still like horses and mules and human crews walking trails with pulaskis, as part of the mythology of wilderness service, illustrated in sepia photographs in brochures and online. But I would suggest agencies have turned a corner, deciding traditional skills using non-motorized methods are no longer viable. There aren't enough old timers around who know how to use them, and the idea of training a new generation is anathema. The future is overhead, it's loud, and please get out of the way.

One definition of Wilderness in the Wilderness Act is an area providing "outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined types of recreation." Wilderness can't be wilderness without quiet, away from giant machines hovering overhead. This is not a luxury or an afterthought. This is the law.

As far as I know, no one has moved to amend the Wilderness Act to permit ubiquitous, authorized aircraft. There is usually some attempt to justify helicopter use as a "minimum tool" to maintain "an enduring resource of wilderness," but, really, that is a contradiction. It's likely the American people wouldn't abide the legislated use of helicopters in Wilderness, and you are supporting the only national organization that will fight to keep them out. ♪

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## Wilderness Watch Events



State Employees' Charitable Giving  
Campaign Fair in Helena, MT



Film still from "Flathead Wild," Wild & Scenic Film Festival

**W**ilderness Watch participated in two friend/fundraising events in Helena, MT—the State Employees' Charitable Giving Campaign (SECGC) "Non-Profit Fair" and Community Night at Blackfoot River Brewing. More than 430 state employees stopped by the rotunda in the State Capitol to meet us and dozens of other nonprofits. Afterwards Wilderness Watch staff met wilderness supporters at the Blackfoot River Brewing, which organized the gathering in our honor. We raised funds by serving donated pizza and beer. It's tough but somebody has to do it. We thank Brian Smith and the gracious Blackfoot staff and Beki Brandborg and SECGC. (MT state employees who'd like to give to Wilderness Watch through this program should use code 5142.)

Wilderness Watch also co-hosted the Wild & Scenic Film Festival last December, screening eight award-winning environmental films. We chose films about the endangered upper Flathead Basin (the "missing piece" of Canada's Waterton Lakes National Park), young conservationists making a difference, mountaineers trying to reach the center of the universe, and a family who lived a year (in New York City!) without environmental impact. Despite a winter storm the event attracted 450 people, included live introductions by local filmmakers and activists, recruited new Wilderness Watch members, and gave us a chance to host a pre-Festival reception for our local members. To read about the festival (which raises money for environmental groups in more than 100 U.S. cities), go to [www.wildernesswatch.org/newsroom/Wild\\_Scenic\\_Film\\_Fest.html](http://www.wildernesswatch.org/newsroom/Wild_Scenic_Film_Fest.html). Scroll to the bottom to watch the films.