WILDERNESS WATCH
KEEPING WILDERNESS WILD

WILDERNESS WATCHER

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2006 Reflecting Back, Looking Ahead

Whew! 2006 was a wild ride for wilderness, as a number of local and national challenges worked their way to showdowns. With major threats pending simultaneously on several fronts, the year found Wilderness Watch working intensively with other conservation groups and citizen advocates around the country. It is with relief and pride that we can report that 2006 is ending on a positive and very hopeful note for wilderness, with many serious harms dodged or defeated, with strides made in wilderness protections, and with promising new opportunities on the horizon.

A very heartening trend picked up steam in 2006 as real wilderness gained increasing support from members of Congress, the federal courts, and some policy-makers. Wilderness Watch's efforts played a significant role in generating greater concern among key leaders about the condition of our National Wilderness Preservation System.

For example, during last year's winter holidays Wilderness Watch worked feverishly to convince the Forest Service to deny helicopter landings in the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness in Idaho for darting and collaring wolves. Through our leadership, a coalition of wilderness advocates came together quickly and turned what was anticipated to be routine approval by the Regional Forester into a public debate that ultimately led to canceling the proposal.

Central Idaho wildlands.

Later in the year we raised the alarm over proposed new policies that would permit aerial gunning and poisoning of predators in national forest wilderness. The Forest Service received more than 80,000 letters in opposition to the plan. Similarly, we joined with a broad coalition to challenge National Park Service draft policies that would have given priority to visitor use and services instead of protecting park resources. The policy was withdrawn.

In 2006 Wilderness Watch continued to build a body of good case law on the Wilderness Act. In our successful Emigrant Wilderness dams case the court rejected the Forest Service's argument that Congress allowed each of the land management agencies to interpret the intent of the Wilderness Act, with the judge noting, "Congress created one national wilderness system with uniform overarching statutory mandates…if courts must defer to each of the four agencies' singular interpretation

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In This Issue...

And Much More!

insights
From the President

Keeping Wilderness Wild & Free

— By Howie Wolke

In recent months, Wilderness Watcher has carried news of what we believe are the misguided efforts of some of our colleagues to get unprotected wildlands designated as Wilderness. The problem is that many new Wilderness proposals and bills include various provisions that will degrade Wilderness and other wildlands, too. Naturally, it pains us to oppose new Wilderness designations. After all, our organization's board and advisors include some of the staunchest advocates in the country for new Wilderness designations. We believe that supporters of this new and highly compromised approach mean well, but act in the mistaken belief that we can win support and protect wildlands by compromising our very core beliefs.

In addition to some of our colleagues promoting Wilderness bills with what we believe are bad provisions that severely compromise the letter and intent of the Wilderness Act, our movement's recent infatuation with "collaboration" concerns me. Organizations are even sponsoring entire conferences on the subject. Often, it seems, collaborators have pre-determined that they'll make a deal, no matter what, instead of moving forward only when it's strategically advantageous. In other words, in a sense, collaboration has become more of a goal than a tactic.

I see collaboration and Wilderness compromise as intimately related. Folks are frustrated on many conservation fronts. Although I share and understand these frustrations, especially over the lack of new Wilderness designations in recent years, I do not believe that the solution is to collaborate with entrenched wilderness opponents in order to agree to new "Wildernesses" that are Wilderness more in name than reality.

Nonetheless, I hope that improved dialogue can iron out differences within our movement. Dialogue is good; we must always be willing to listen, even to traditional Wilderness opponents. But sometimes, we must simply and respectfully agree to disagree.

It is important to note that perhaps our most brilliant piece of legislation ever – the Wilderness Act – was already notably compromised by the time it became law. One of our rock solid core beliefs at Wilderness Watch is that further compromise to the Wilderness Act and thus to the Wilderness Idea, leads us down a steep and slippery slope into decidedly less wild realms. Indeed, history has proven that when non-conforming provisions are written into Wilderness bills, they are often repeated in ensuing legislation.

Highly controversial bills with varying levels of bad provisions have been advanced in Idaho, Utah and Nevada.

Some of the "bad provisions" include slicing the largest remaining national forest roadless area in the lower 48 states (Idaho's Boulder-White Clouds) into 4 units divided by motor vehicle and mountain bike trails; deeding public wildlands to counties (to be sold to developers), in exchange for support for massively compromised Wilderness; allowing ranchers and state game managers to drive vehicles through the Wilderness; allowing predator control in Wilderness; and granting livestock operators grazing rights beyond those granted by the Wilderness Act. In addition, in order to appease ranchers, private inholders, loggers, miners, mountain bikers, ATV'ers and others, some of these newfangled bills have more "cherry stems" than a cherry orchard. So the resulting Wilderness areas are shaped like narrow amoeba, with little interior habitat and huge amounts of edge, thus encouraging invasive weeds and discouraging wilderness dependent species. Not to mention the loss of solitude, challenge and other intangible wilderness values.

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The Wilderness Watcher
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of the Act, it would undermine Congress' intent to create one uniform wilderness system." The judge went on to note that the Act "emphasizes outcome (wilderness preservation) over procedure" and is "as close to a 'purist manifesto' as may be found in federal law."

Based on an appeal filed by Wilderness Watch to prevent a road from being built across the Mt. Tipton Wilderness in Arizona, a panel of administrative law judges from the Interior Board of Land Appeals ruled that BLM must determine whether a landowner had an established right to motorized access at the time of wilderness designation, and, if no such right existed, then BLM can only authorize non-motorized access. It was an extremely important ruling that will serve as a guide whenever private land owners request approval for motorized transportation through wilderness to access private property.

Some the most heartening events of 2006 involved Congress. Wilderness Watch helped lead a broad coalition that stopped several bills that were loaded with wilderness-damaging provisions. Most importantly, several congressional leaders rose in opposition to the bills and spoke eloquently against them. Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney (NY), speaking from the floor of the House, quoted extensively from Wilderness Watch position papers in raising objections to the Central Idaho Economic Development and Recreation Act (CIEDRA).

Incoming House and Senate committee leaders who will have oversight of wilderness legislation also echoed Wilderness Watch's concerns about these bills. Congressman Nick Rahall (WV) spoke to the poisonous effects the bills' special provisions will have on wilderness values by noting that "Wilderness is not defined by the absence of certain activities, but rather by the presence of certain unique and invaluable characteristics." Senator Jeff Bingaman (NM) objected to including in the bills "matters which are not consistent with wilderness protection and which include non-wilderness provisions which cannot stand on their own merits." In the end, all but one of the bad bills were stopped.

Looking ahead, we feel optimistic about the opportunities in 2007. While the threats we've engaged have been challenging, they've served to raise awareness among many of our conservation colleagues and key members of Congress for the need to pay greater attention to wilderness stewardship. Our growing string of court victories provide an excellent body of case law that should produce better decisions and policies from the agencies, as well as guide future courts whenever Wilderness is threatened. The national elections in November increase the likelihood of gaining congressional oversight of the agencies' wilderness programs and rekindling support for protecting the Wilderness System. And last but certainly not least, the generous financial support we've received from you, our members, and a growing list of supporting foundations makes us confident that we'll be able to raise the resources Wilderness Watch needs to aggressively pursue our bold agenda in the year ahead.

Stay tuned. Keep active. There is much to do!

Wild & Free, continued from page 2

In a nutshell, as Wilderness becomes rife with exceptions to the basic mandate of the Wilderness Act, Wilderness will become less wild and natural, and opportunities for good stewardship will become a pipedream. Plus, managers elsewhere will no doubt be encouraged to reduce standards for even for those Wilderness areas not encumbered with damaging legislative provisions. That's human nature: reduce one's efforts to comply with the lowest common denominator.

Fortunately, many other conservation groups also recoil at the ramifications of watered-down Wilderness. Too often though, they blame the controversy entirely on the big bucks funneled into the "Campaign for America's Wilderness" (CAW) by the Pew Charitable Trusts. And yes, I also recoil at how CAW seems to be setting an agenda of Wilderness designations at any cost. Again, though, many proponents of weak Wilderness mean well and simply act, I presume, out of frustration of the slow growth of the Wilderness System in recent years.

As an alternative, I believe that we can increase our success through a combination of patience (Whoa! many anti-wilderness congressional leaders will soon be gone), vision (i.e. promote real wild untrammeled Wilderness, big and interconnected, and managed as Wilderness, period), and a re-dedication to rallying potential supporters around that uncompromised and exciting vision. I'm talking about the kind of old-fashioned grassroots organizing that was most successful before a largely volunteer movement morphed into one dominated by professional technocrats and fundraisers. In 1980 we did it with the Alaska Lands bill, and more recently, with the Clinton Roadless Rule.

Successful grassroots campaigns require the excitement generated by that uncompromised vision, that uplifting story of heroes working toward a goal where the planet and future generations of humans win. That's my version of "win/win". Successful grassroots campaigns are mature enough to realize that yes, sometimes we must negotiate, but that the idea of a "win/win" solution is illusory if a deal means that even more wild landscapes will be degraded.

Let's turn off the computers and get out into our communities to encourage folks to wrap their heads around the vision of real wild Wilderness, designated under the Wilderness Act of 1964, with no weakening provisions that would legalize abusive practices on the ground and damage the Wilderness Idea. That will be a big step forward, away from the slippery slope of degraded watered-down Wilderness, and away from the nightmare of a future that's tame and controlled, not wild and free.

Out & About ~ Wilderness Watch on the Road

Wild Rockies Rendezvous 2006

Once again Wilderness Watch was a sponsor and organizer of the Wild Rockies Rendezvous, an annual event bringing together conservationists from throughout the Northern Rockies region. The event took place September 23-24th at the Birch Creek Center in southwestern Montana. This year the Rendezvous was held jointly with the National Forest Protection Alliance's annual national convention, drawing folks from as far away as Wisconsin, North Carolina, and Virginia. Topics included climate change and implications for ecosystem restoration, the importance of establishing ground rules for collaborative processes, fire ecology, and much more! A cold, clear night brought us the Northern Lights and many good stories shared around the campfire.

The Future of Wild

Wilderness Watch policy director TinaMarie Ekker participated on a panel discussion with George Wuerthner from the Foundation for Deep Ecology and scientist Dave Cole with the Aldo Leopold National Wilderness Research Institute on December 5th at the University of Montana. Wuerthner encouraged attendees to take the long view of preservation and politics and reminded us that nearly all bold conservation efforts—from the creation of Yellowstone National Park to the Alaska lands bill—have faced fierce opposition from local interests, but that eventually the vast majority support the outcomes of those efforts. David Cole discussed two of the major stewardship challenges confronting wilderness—recreation demand, particularly near urban areas, and the growing perceived need to manipulate ecological processes in order to restore natural conditions. Cole noted that the early leaders of the wilderness movement considered creating a multi-tiered protection system, with "wilderness" such as that defined by the Wilderness Act as the most protective, but not the only designation system. Ekker discussed the growing threats from motorization, crowding and manipulation, and urged the audience to remember that the myriad of threats facing wilderness not only threaten the land, but also the very idea of wilderness articulated by luminaries such as Howard Zahniser and Wallace Stegner.

National Meeting on Collaboration — Cooperative Quagmire or Conservation Coup?

Wilderness Watch executive director George Nickas and policy director TinaMarie Ekker were invited by American Lands to participate with seventy other conservationists from around the country in an examination and discussion of collaborative processes, when they work and when they don't, and how to decide whether to enter into a collaborative process. The meeting took place November 16-18th in Portland, Oregon. There has been increasing interest as well as increasing controversy over the use of collaboration in making public land decisions, including many affecting wilderness, so this discussion was very timely and hopefully will lead to additional national dialog.

Wilderness 101:

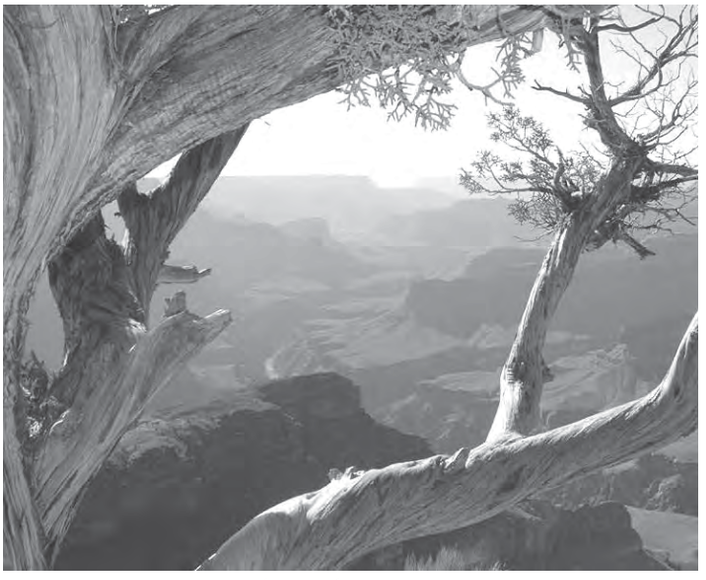
Knowing the future of Wilderness lies with future leaders, Wilderness Watch takes every opportunity to speak to university classes. In November, executive director George Nickas spoke to a wilderness studies class at Montana State University–Billings. The MSU-B class studied the history of the wilderness movement, citizen activism and contemporary issues in wilderness protection.

Atendees of the 2006 Wild Rockies Rendezvous. Courtesy of the Swan View Coalition.

Wilderness & the Courts

Grand Canyon, AZ

The last issue of Wilderness Watcher reported that the Grand Canyon River Outfitters Trade Association (an industry group) and Grand Canyon Private Boaters Association (an access-oriented group) had petitioned the Court for permission to intervene on the side of the National Park Service (NPS) in litigation filed by Wilderness Watch and three other organizations regarding the new Colorado River Management Plan for Grand Canyon. In October, the judge exercised his discretion and granted full intervenor status to both parties, noting that they had an interest in the river use policies, and that the Court believes the intervenors will aid in resolving the case.



The Grand Canyon, AZ.

Emigrant Wilderness, CA

The last issue of Wilderness Watcher reported that the Forest Service and several intervenors have filed a notice of appeal in the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals challenging the ruling won by Wilderness Watch at the district court level that forbids the Forest Service from repairing, maintaining, and operating 11 old dams within the Emigrant Wilderness. The Forest Service has taken a number of procedural actions that have postponed the deadline for filing briefs in the case. We'll continue to keep you posted as this important case advances.

The Emigrant Wilderness, CA.

Forest Service Litigation 1989-2002

The June 2006 Journal of Forestry presents findings from a study of litigation in which the U.S. Forest Service was named as a defendant in lawsuits filed between January 1st, 1989 and December 31st, 2002. The study examined 729 lawsuits and found that the USFS won 57.6% of cases, lost 21.3%, and settled 17.6% of the cases. Plaintiffs seeking less resource use lost more than half of the cases they initiated, while plaintiffs seeking greater resource use lost more than two-thirds of the cases they initiated. The USFS was most successful in litigation involving the 1995 Salvage Rider (84.2%) and the National Historic Preservation Act (77.8%). The USFS was least successful in defending its decisions against challenges based on the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) and the Wilderness Act. In contrast to the agency's weak record, Wilderness Watch has an unblemished record when challenging agency actions based on the Wilderness Act.

Trouble in the Tongass - the USFS stuggled to defend its decisions based on the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act.

Book Review

Wilderness Forever: Howard Zahniser and the Path to the Wilderness Act

By Mark Harvey, forward by William Cronon.
Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005. 328 pp.
Available from http://www.washington.edu/uwpress/
(800) 441-4115. Hardcover, $35.

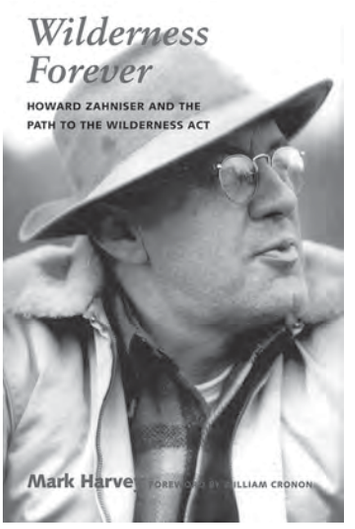
Howard Zahniser today is largely an unsung hero to the environmental community or the wilderness movement. For those who do know of him, we know Howard Zahniser as the author of the 1964 Wilderness Act.

Zahniser literally wrote the wilderness bill, lobbied Congress tirelessly and persistently for its passage over eight long years, fought even some of his own board members about its need, selflessly worked with allies in the conservation movement, and patiently responded to critics and supporters alike in his gentle and unfailingly polite manner. Sadly enough, he died from a failed heart shortly before President Lyndon Johnson signed his wilderness bill into law.

Beyond his significant role with the Wilderness Act, "Zahnie" (as his friends called him) was a lover of literature, a literary craftsperson, and an articulate and eloquent spokesperson for wilderness values. He joined the staff of the Wilderness Society in 1945, and helped transform the organization from a small, somewhat sleepy club into a nationally recognized conservation organization. He also edited the organization's quarterly magazine, The Living Wilderness. His deep, thoughtful, and often spiritual articulation of Wilderness and its values are found throughout the 20 years of issues of The Living Wilderness that he edited.

His love of language and his eloquent writing can still be read in the 1964 Wilderness Act. In the most beautiful prose anywhere in the entire federal statutes, he crafted this elegant definition: "A wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his own works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain." Zahnie's use of the word "untrammeled" demonstrated the precision of his writing. Many people asked him to use a different word in the bill, one that was more commonly used or understood. But though a little-used word, untrammeled means unconfined or unmanipulated -- exactly the essence Zahnie wished to convey about Wilderness.

Zahnie still offers Wilderness Watch and other wilderness advocates great guidance for our common work today. In 1951, for example, he told the Sierra Club's Wilderness Conference, "It behooves us then to do two things. First, we must see that an adequate system of wilderness areas is designated for preservation, and then we must allow nothing to alter the wilderness character of the preserves." In an editorial in The Living Wilderness in 1963, he responded to a report that suggested some manipulation of Wilderness and parks by urging us instead to be "Guardians, Not Gardeners" of Wilderness. Again, he crafted a perfect epigram for the work of Wilderness Watch.



Mark Harvey's new biography on Howard Zahniser will help an entire new generation of wilderness enthusiasts to know and appreciate who Zahnie was and how much we owe him. In Wilderness Forever, Mark describes Zahnie's life, from boyhood in a family of Methodist ministers to working for the federal Bureau of Biological Survey, from his marriage to Alice Hayden and his family life to his enormous workload at the Wilderness Society and, ultimately, his failing heart. Mark has produced a warm and needed portrait of this great, unsung hero of Wilderness.

Despite my enthusiasm for Mark's book, a few very minor errors crept into the manuscript. Sigurd Olson's "moving piece," for example, was not an elegy to the Quetico-Superior canoe country, but an elegy to Bob Marshall, with whom Sig had canoed in the area in 1937 (p. 59). "The Mallard" was the name of Ernest Oberholtzer's island, not his house on the island (which is called "Big House") (p. 81).

I greatly enjoyed reading Wilderness Forever, however. I only wish it was longer, with a deeper analysis of Zahnie's character and wilderness philosophy. Wilderness Forever mentions one of Zahnie's most important speeches, for example, "The Need for Wilderness Areas" (pp. 167-170), which he delivered in 1955. Though the book quoted from that speech, I would have preferred a fuller quote instead of the condensed one used, and also with a deeper analysis of the values that Zahnie espoused.

Zahnie wrote in that speech, "We deeply need the humility to know ourselves as the dependent members of a great community of life, and this can be one of the spiritual benefits of a wilderness experience. Without the gadgets, the inventions, the contrivances whereby men have seemed to establish among themselves an independence of nature, without these distractions, to know wilderness is to know a profound humility, to recognize one's littleness, to sense dependence and interdependence, indebtedness, and responsibility. Perhaps, indeed, this is the distinctive ministration of wilderness to modern man, the characteristic effect of an area which we most deeply need to provide for in our preservation programs."

This is a wonderful piece of writing, rich in meaning, yet the book quotes only part of the second sentence from the above passage and combines it with other sentences from earlier in the speech without the full context of the entire passage. As a consequence, the book's quote from this speech reads flat and somewhat disjointed. At a minimum, ellipses should have been used to indicate that passages in the original were skipped; I would have preferred to see the full quote without portions eliminated from it.

I would have also liked a deeper exploration of the human interactions between Zahnie and some of the Wilderness Society Governing Council members. The eight-year struggle for passage of the Wilderness Act took a heavy toll on Zahnie's health, which was not always helped in Council meetings by the tough interrogations from Jim Marshall and Dick Leonard. They challenged Zahniser's strategies and his role as principle lobbyist for the bill, despite Zahnie's careful adherence to practices that protected the organization's tax-exempt status. Most challenging were repeated deliberations at the Council's annual meetings about whether passage of the bill should continue to be the Society's principle mission. These challenges from within the Society's "inner circle" took a heavy toll on Zahnie. A fuller examination of these dynamics would have revealed a more richly textured portrait of Zahniser and his character.

A deeper exploration of Zahnie's perseverant and patient leadership in enlisting and sustaining the cooperative support of other national organizations would have likewise revealed much more about Zahnie's character and inimitable contribution. A more complete analysis of Zahnie's spirit and loving treatment of his colleagues would have revealed much about his gentle touch and his deep and respectful friendships.

Despite its shortcomings and my desires for deeper analysis, however, Wilderness Forever is a great book on the wilderness movement's biggest unsung hero. Mark Harvey's fine book will help us and future generations better sing the praises that Zahnie so richly deserves.

— Reviewed by Kevin Proescholdt

Bioprospecting in our National Parks -

Corporations seek to mine the substance of life

In September the National Park Service (NPS) issued a draft EIS (DEIS) examining whether to allow corporations to "bioprospect" for biological materials in national parks. Bioprospecting involves collecting samples of microorganisms, plants, or other biological materials in order to obtain the DNA unique to a particular species.

Corporations inject specialized strands of genetic code obtained through bioprospecting into other organisms such as bacteria, plants, or animals to direct that organisms' enzymes to carry out or speed up specific biochemical reactions that are used in producing a wide array of consumer products including pharmaceuticals and many other household items.

Once a corporation finds a unique strand of DNA that may be useful to them they patent it to prevent other companies from using that same gene sequence in producing a similar product. Essentially, corporations are claiming sole proprietorship to the substance of life itself.

Why National Parks?

Bioprospecting has occurred for decades all over the world. Highly unusual habitats such as volcanoes or geothermal pools often contain extremely specialized lifeforms. Many national parks were established precisely because they contain highly unusual geologic or biological features.

Geothermal pool, Yellowstone Nat'l Park.

Yellowstone, with its colorful, nutrient-rich geothermal features, has been the focus of the bioprospecting debate, though the recent EIS proposed to authorize bioprospecting throughout the entire national park system. Several years ago, Yellowstone's hot pools attracted the Diversa Corporation, which signed a deal with the NPS to prospect in the park. In exchange, Diversa promised a portion of any future profits to the park. That sparked a legal challenge, the outcome of which is the current EIS.

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Glacier National Park, MT

Glacier Bombing. In January 2004 a series of avalanches derailed an empty 118-car train on the Burlington Northern Santa Fe railway (BNSF) that parallels Highway 2 through a canyon on the southern boundary of Glacier National Park. The avalanches originated in an area of the park that has been formally recommended to Congress for wilderness designation.

Following the derailment, BNSF commissioned a study of avalanche risk in this mountain canyon. Twelve potential avalanche paths were identified. The railroad tracks across seven of the avalanche paths are partially protected by heavy-beamed snowsheds constructed over the tracks. To further lessen avalanche risk BNSF has requested permission from the NPS to use explosives, including military artillery, to stabilize snowpack, above the avalanche paths, a technique commonly used at ski resorts.

In October 2006 a draft EIS was issued jointly by the USFS, NPS, and Montana Department of Transportation to examine the proposal and other alternatives. To the agencies' great credit the preferred alternative is to construct up to one mile of additional snowsheds over the tracks instead of using explosives in the park's recommended wilderness. Wilderness Watch submitted comments strongly supporting and commending this recommendation, and hope it will be adopted.

Glacier National Park, MT

National Forest Wilderness, AK

Machine-friendly Wilderness? The Forest Service has released a 14-page paper explaining allowable public uses of motor vehicles, aircraft, motorboats, and snowmobiles, and motorized equipment within national forest wilderness in Alaska. The paper is titled "What Can I do in Wilderness? Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act and Wilderness on National Forests in Alaska."

Most wilderness in Alaska is governed by the Wilderness Act and ANILCA. Passed in 1980, ANILCA contains many exceptions for motorized use and other public uses not found in the Wilderness Act. The paper presents the USFS' interpretation of ANILCA's motorized use provisions. Wilderness Watch interprets ANILCA quite differently on several points, and feels the Forest Service paper has widely missed the mark.

ANILCA allows the public to use snowmobiles, airplanes, and motorboats as transportation methods for traditional activities. Based on ANILCA's legislative history, it's quite clear that Congress intended traditional activities to mean hunting, fishing, berry picking, subsistence activities and travel between villages.

In contrast, the USFS interprets "traditional activities" to includes recreation activities and the paper states that "no proof of pre-existing use is required in order to use a snowmachine, motorboat, or airplane" in wilderness. In other words, while Congress intended that a snowmobile might be used as a means of access for a legitimate traditional activity, the Forest Service has determined that recreational snowmobiling itself is an allowable activity.

ANILCA also allows appropriate use of "snowmobiles, motorboats, and other forms of surface transportation traditionally employed" for subsistence activities by rural residents. The USFS interprets this to mean that today's ultra-powerful ATV's are allowed in wilderness for subsistence purposes, even though the first rudimentary ATV appeared on the market in 1976, just four years prior to ANILCA's passage. Surely very few Alaska residents owned ATV's in 1980, raising the question as to how "traditional" ATV's were used for subsistence purposes in 1980, although today their use is epidemic in Alaska.

The Forest Service's approach to managing motor vehicle use in Alaska is certain to lead to increased public controversy and degradation of Wilderness.

Contact Wilderness Watch for a copy of the USFS paper, or download it online at:
http://www.fs.fed.us/r10/ro/policy-reports/

National Forest & BLM Wilderness

Stealth Move on Wildlife? In July, with no public notice, the Chief of the Forest Service and Director of the BLM signed and adopted a document titled "Policies and Guidelines for Fish and Wildlife Management in National Forest and Bureau of Land Management Wilderness." The document was co-signed by the executive vice president of the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA), a private lobbying group primarily representing the interests of State fish and game managers.

The title of the document suggests that it constitutes official new policy for the USFS and BLM, but the document does not explicitly state that it replaces current policy. It would certainly be inappropriate for the federal agencies to allow a non-governmental interest group to co-write national policies, and behind closed doors no less!

The new policies weaken the role of federal wilderness managers and strengthen the decision-making authority of State game managers in wilderness. Under the new directives, use of motor vehicles and aircraft for wildlife management will be more readily considered, fish stocking of naturally fishless lakes and streams will continue, pesticides can be used in wilderness for predator control, and prescribed fires will be allowed to "reduce the consequences of fire" -- code for maintaining habitat conditions for desired game species such as elk.

The document notes that the USFS and BLM are required to preserve wilderness character "while supporting the States' fish and wildlife objectives." Nowhere in the Wilderness Act are the federal agencies directed to support the fish and wildlife objectives identified by the States. As we've learned time and time again, many of those objectives, not to mention the activities allowed by the new policy, fly in the face of efforts to preserve wilderness character.

The Crab Orchard Wilderness provides refuge for Canada Geese.

Crab Orchard Wilderness, IL

Gotta have it all. On October 27th the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's (FWS) Great Lakes regional director signed a new management plan for the Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge in Southern Illinois. The new plan -- called a comprehensive conservation plan (CCP) -- will govern management of the entire refuge, including the Crab Orchard Wilderness, for the next 15 years. Located in the southwest corner of the refuge, the 4,050-acre wilderness covers less than 10% of the refuge.

Devil's Kitchen Lake is one of four reservoirs on the refuge. The majority of Devil's Kitchen extends to the north outside the wilderness but at the wilderness boundary the lake splits into three long, narrow fingers that slice through the eastern portion of the wilderness. The wilderness boundary extends to the water line so the inlets themselves are not technically within the wilderness, but for all practical purposes they are integral components extending through the core of the wilderness.

Recognizing this, the FWS proposed closing the three inlets to motorboats, while continuing to allow motorboats on the majority of Devil's Kitchen Lake and on all other lakes on the refuge. This seemed both beneficial and fair, but recreational fishermen and State fish and game managers vigorously protested excluding motorboats from the finger channels. Not satisfied with motorboat access on 95% of all lake surfaces on the refuge, they demanded that the three inlets remain open to motorized access as well. They claimed that older fishermen would have difficulty rowing up the channels and back in a day, and that the inlets are popular fishing spots for some precisely because they are more secluded and quiet than the main body of the lake.

Wilderness Watch and the Illinois Chapter of Sierra Club urged FWS to manage these narrow channels for a non-motorized wilderness experience, but the political pressure generated by fishermen and State fish managers resulted in the Final CCP leaving two of the inlets open and only closing the easternmost inlet to motorboats. Unfortunately, the FWS sidestepped this opportunity to protect the area's wilderness qualities.

Who's afraid of the big bad wolf?

On September 23rd two U.S. Forest Service employees from Utah were evacuated by helicopter from the Sawtooth Wilderness in central Idaho after encountering a pack of howling wolves along a drainage in the southwestern portion of the Sawtooths.

The two employees were part of the Forest Service's national Forest Inventory & Analysis (FIA) program, which surveys vegetation composition across all forested areas in the United States. The duo had hiked into the Wilderness and set up a base camp. The morning of the incident they were day-hiking from their camp to an inventory plot several miles away when an elk pursued by wolves crossed their path just a hundred yards away. After the animals disappeared from sight the tone of the wolves' howling changed in tone and the FS personnel reportedly interpreted that to mean the wolves had made a kill.

Wary of encountering wolves at the kill site, the pair started back toward camp but soon began hearing howling all around them and saw several other wolves travelling up the draw, presumably going to join the pack.

Seeing and hearing the wolves at such close range frightened the field team and in panic they left the trail and clambered down to a large stream which they forded through waist-deep, icy water. They climbed onto a high rock where they huddled, wet and cold and watching for wolves as the howling continued. They reportedly panicked over their situation and contacted their supervisor in Ogden, Utah by satellite phone, asking to be evacuated from the area.

They hadn't brought any emergency supplies on the day-hike, such as matches or warm jackets so, according to USFS officials, the supervisor felt the employees were at risk of hypothermia. He dispatched a helicopter to swoop into the Sawtooth Wilderness to evacuate the terrified employees.

Once discovered, the event got extensive media coverage in Idaho and stirred controversy. Idaho Fish & Game managers wanted to know why the USFS denied their request last winter to land helicopters to radio-collar wolves in wilderness, but allowed a helicopter landing to evacuate a frightened field crew. A State game manager was quoted in the press reminding the Forest Service that wolves howl all the time in the woods, it's how they communicate.

A central Idaho paper editorialized:

> "If the agency is going to tread on the Wilderness Act with such a flight, it had better have a good reason. This was anything but that… All this is a source of amusement to real outdoors people, who know they are in greater danger driving to the woods than they are from wolves once they get there."
> (Lewiston Morning Tribune, 10/13/2006).

Bioprospecting, continued from page 7

The idea of selling national park resources in order to fund park management raises obvious long-term policy questions. It also raises legal questions including the impact on the park system's 44 million acres of Wilderness. The Wilderness Act prohibits commercial enterprise in Wilderness, and bioprospecting is a commercial activity. NPS policies also direct parks to manage recommended wilderness the same as designated wilderness. As Wilderness Watch pointed out to the NPS in our comments, existing law and policy prohibit bioprospecting in more than 80 percent of the national park system.

Comment Today!

The comment deadline is January 29, 2007. To learn more about bioprospecting and to see a sample letter visit www.parksnotforsale.org. Letters can be mailed to:

Benefits Sharing DEIS Team
Yellowstone Center for Resources
P.O. Box 168
Yellowstone National Park, Wyoming 82190

Thanks for Making Us Strong

— By Jeff Smith, Membership and Development Director

Ah, the end of the year, time of thanks and time of looking ahead.

Thank you, everyone, for making Wilderness Watch stronger this past year. Your generosity has humbled us. It's allowed us to pursue our mission with great energy and to think big for the coming year. Call us what you will, but we are not timid, thanks to you.

I hope we weren't too big a pain in the neck with our membership renewal reminders, annual appeals, action alerts, newsletters, listservs, web headlines, and emails. It's a rare day when a storm of in-coming and out-going notices and contributions and bequests and pledges and grant proposals drafts and foundation responses don't mix with one another in the middle of my desk. This is the soup that fortifies us. If Wilderness Watch's familiar logo is not crossing your threshold or clamoring for attention in your computer's in-box regularly, we're not doing our job. We want you to be involved and informed, a fundamental part of the process.

We all know that government works best when citizens are right in the middle of it, observing, questioning, commenting, making sure that the people acting on behalf of the rest of us live up to the promise of the Wilderness Act.

The stakes are high. Americans set up the wilderness preservation system for their progeny 42 year ago. It is the largest, most significant system of preservation in the world. The system's creation was the first act in a long, complex drama. Our job is:

- To ensure that agency wilderness stewards are keeping to the high standards established by law.
- To make sure Congress provides the proper statutory guidance and oversees the competence of the executive agencies in their wilderness programs.
- To establish legal precedent so that the Wilderness Act gains strength as we enter the future.
- To build knowledge and support for better wilderness stewardship within the conservation community.

Thank you for supporting us.

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!

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I would like to become a member!

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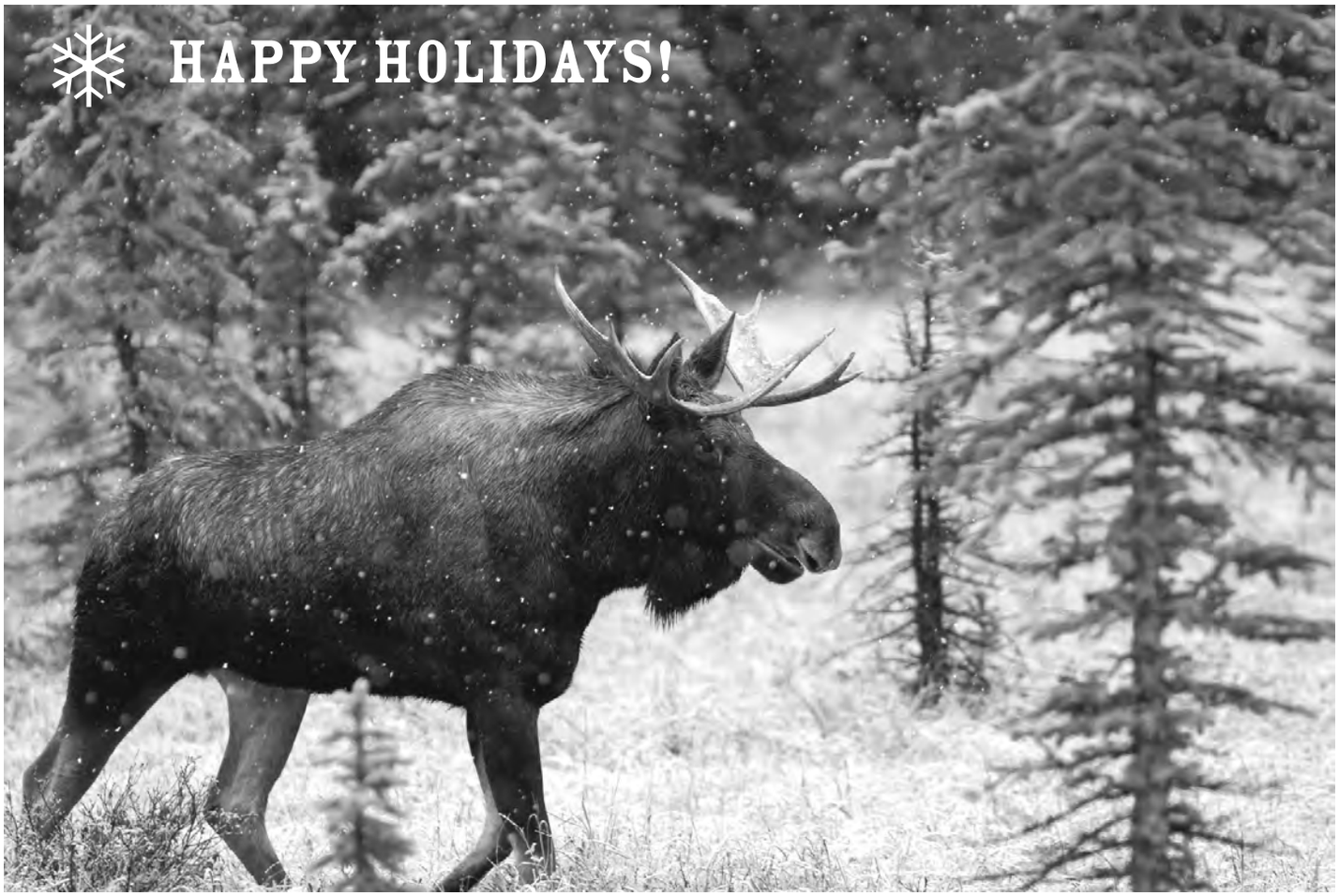

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