

Domestic sheep grazing and Wilderness are always at odds

By Mason Parker

Stumbling over the rugged alpine landscape of the High Uintas Wilderness, a bighorn lamb is coughing and struggling, afflicted with pneumonia as the cold skies of winter set in. Here in northeastern Utah, a battle between domestication and wilderness has been raging for three decades, while the West's wild bighorns have fought for survival for over two centuries.

In September, Wilderness Watch filed an objection to a decision signed by the Uinta-Wasatch-Cache National Forest to continue domestic sheep grazing on 144,000 acres, nearly one-third of the High Uintas Wilderness. Releasing another 10,000 domestic sheep into the wild would put countless bighorn sheep at risk of sickness and death, leaving them vulnerable to the harsh conditions of the High Uintas in winter. Sick lambs don't live long out there.

Brought to America from the old country, the pathogen *Mycoplasma ovipneumoniae*, or Movi, causes the runaway spread of pneumonia after being introduced to bighorns through domestic sheep. The pneumonia, which is unde-

tectable in domestic sheep, is spread through nose-to-nose contact, a friendly greeting between two long-separated descendants of a common ancestor. For these bighorn herds, the result is nothing short of catastrophic. First the

disease annihilates the herd, then it becomes endemic. Ewes become chronic carriers, infecting their lambs for decades after the initial outbreak. Any bighorn lamb that becomes infected has likely been issued a death sentence. If the infection doesn't take their life, the sickness leaves them vulnerable to predation and the elements. In North America, the bighorn population has plummeted by an estimated 96 percent since Euro-American colonization. There are many reasons for

this, but the primary cause of untimely mortality among wild sheep is pneumonia. Tragically, the agencies managing these areas refuse to implement simple solutions, even as they witness the wildlife they're responsible for dying excruciating deaths year after year.

The impact of domestic sheep grazing on Wilderness doesn't end with dying lambs—endless ecological



Domestic sheep grazing in the High Uintas Wilderness by Ken Lund

In This Issue:



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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Don't despair—take action!



It's easy to despair and feel hopeless these days. America's National Wilderness Preservation System is facing unprecedented threats. Our public lands are under threat of being sold or transferred to the states. Key environmental laws and regulations are being gutted. Even climate change is claimed to be a hoax. These are indeed "the times that try men's souls."

We all need to resist the urge to feel helpless. Most Americans love their public lands, treasure our Wilderness, and want wildlife to thrive. If you're reading this, you're one of them. We must stand up, stand together, and fight back.

Wilderness Watch is a fighter. When we see the Wilderness Act under attack or being ignored by government agencies, we object and—when necessary—take legal action. We constantly monitor proposed federal regulations and legislation and inform you through our action alerts and this newsletter so you can contact your own senators and representative and urge them to defend Wilderness. And we speak to them directly through our lobbying efforts.

Most of the legacy wilderness organizations no longer focus on Wilderness—even those with "Wilderness" in their names. They have moved on to other things and grown into big, inefficient businesses. Wilderness Watch is lean and mean and works full time on Wilderness and only Wilderness.

But we can't do it without you. We all have to do more. We recently added two additional staff to increase our impact during this critical time. We were able to do that because of your generous past support and we'll need your ongoing support to keep at full force. So please be as generous as you can with your year-end donations. And consider making them monthly and automatically through your bank rather than by credit card. Credit card fees cost us almost \$10,000 a year—money that could be spent protecting Wilderness.

Most importantly, take action yourself. Read our action alerts and use the links to let your senators, representative, and the federal land management agencies know what you think. And take a few moments to customize your email messages. Unique emails are much more effective. Better yet, call your elected leaders. If you are shy about talking to a live person, call in the evening and leave a voice mail. Write a letter to the editor for your local paper. Let your concerns be known on social media. Urge your friends to join Wilderness Watch. Find and join a local group that supports your local Wilderness area.

A democracy only works if its citizens are actively involved. The first word in "public lands" is "public." That's you. Act like an owner—because you are—and speak out. Bad things happen only when good people stand by and do nothing.

Our Wilderness and wildlife need us more than ever. It's easy to let despair—and the demands of everyday life—paralyze us. But each of us taking individual action is more important than ever.

Wilderness Watch thanks you for your support. Our Wilderness areas—and the vast web of life they protect—thank you. Future generations will also thank you for helping preserve and protect our incredible wild lands. Let's stand up—and act up—for Wilderness! 🐾

—Mike Browning

Mike Browning is the Vice President of Wilderness Watch's Board of Directors. He also serves on the Board of Directors for the Eagle Summit Wilderness Alliance, which works to protect four Wilderness areas in Colorado. He is passionate about the intrinsic values of Wilderness.

problems arise when you turn a Wilderness into a feedlot. Unsupervised sheep defecate wherever they like, which has led to filthy conditions in areas of the High Uintas like Bald Mountain, where domestic sheep run roughshod. Backpackers have reported so much feces covering the ground they couldn't even find a place to set their packs.

Domestic sheep grazing leads to the depletion of vegetation that would otherwise feed native wildlife, like elk, mule deer, and, of course, bighorn sheep. This leads to accelerated soil erosion and sedimentation that flows downstream and gets dumped into vulnerable ecosystems, impacting aquatic life as well. Excessive sedimentation clogs fish gills, reduces oxygen levels, disrupts the food chain, and leads to the loss of sensitive species such as cutthroat trout.

And yet, having access to these Wilderness lands, overgrazing and trampling them to mud and dust still isn't enough. Permittees demand the trapping and killing of native wildlife like black bears, mountain lions, and coyotes. This, of course, is after the ranchers and government worked together to trap, hunt, and poison gray wolves in a coordinated campaign of extermination in the Uintas that ended when the last wolf was killed in 1929. Utah's Bighorn Plan, which is supported by the Forest Service, calls for the killing of cougars and the helicopter gunning of potentially infected bighorn sheep, rather than the more logical and humane closing of livestock grazing allotments. You and I pay for this! Taxpayers foot the bill to prop up the failing business model of public lands ranchers across the West, including 13 million acres of Wilderness. In fact, the ranching corporation grazing their domestic sheep in the High Uintas Wilderness pays less than one cent a day per sheep for the privilege. Where's DOGE when you need them?

If wild animals are not safe in Wilderness, then there is nowhere safe for them left in the world.

Domestication is sweeping the planet at an unprecedented rate—wild animals make up only four percent of the mammals on earth. The other 96 percent is nothing but humans, our pets, and our livestock. Chickens and poultry make up 70 percent of the avian life left, more than double the population of remaining wild birds. If we haven't drawn a line already, when will we? The ecological turmoil resulting from modern agricultural practices should be enough, but what about the misery and loneliness at the end of the extinction crisis? E.O. Wilson called this era of mass extinction and biological catastrophe the Eremozoic period, or the Age of Loneliness, when we have given up all the world's wildlife and biodiversity for a cheeseburger and another pair of socks.

While the thought of dying bighorn lambs and mass extinction is unbearably depressing, some of our ecological problems have straight-forward solutions. Protecting the bighorn sheep of the High Uintas is

one such problem, and the solution is clear: end domestic sheep grazing in this alpine Wilderness. Yet land managers seem fanatical in their desire to appease those who exploit the Wilderness to line their pockets.

Wildernesses like the High Uintas are the last remaining sanctuaries for wildlife, as the planet succumbs to the sprawl of civilization. It is vital that these lands remain safe for wild bighorns, because they have nowhere left to go. If we allow ranchers to feed from the public trough, it should come with an understanding that it is done with respect for the land and its wild inhabitants, not at the cost of ecosystem collapse and mass extinction. If this means we must end the practice altogether, especially in Wilderness, so be it. The agencies that approve plans leading to the death of bighorns and the destruction of ecosystems are not just complacent in the ranchers' conquest, they are equally responsible.

The reality is that domestication and wildness are at odds with one another. They cannot coexist in any sustainable way, because the primary goal of domestication is the taming of wildness. While wildness now only exists in small pockets around America, there are some who wish to see it eradicated entirely. Nearly everything is not enough. A world of domestication is defined by barrenness, sickness, and boredom, but a world of wildness is fertile and vigorous and intense. We must do everything we can to protect what's wild and prevent the transformation of Wilderness into feedlots. For the bighorns of the High Uintas, there is no more room for compromise. 🐾

Mason Parker is Wilderness Watch's Wilderness Defense Director.

Help end livestock damage to Wilderness

Wilderness Watch applauds Rep. Adam Smith (D-WA) for introducing the Voluntary Grazing Permit Retirement Act (H.R. 5785) this past October. This legislation will expand the successful model of voluntary federal livestock grazing permit retirement across the western U.S., including in Wilderness.

Wilderness Watch strongly supports H.R. 5785 as a solution toward ending livestock damage to Wilderness by bolstering wilderness protection, allotment-by-allotment, fairly and permanently.

Specifically, H.R. 5785:

- Authorizes ranchers in 16 Western states to voluntarily waive federal grazing permits or leases to permanently end livestock grazing on an allotment, including in Wilderness.
- Ensures retired allotments can't be re-leased for new grazing permits.
- Helps restore wildlife corridors, protect water quality, and reduce the costs of administering grazing programs.

Please call your Rep at (202) 224-3121 and urge them to co-sponsor and pass the Voluntary Grazing Permit Retirement Act (H.R. 5785).

Wilderness in the courts

Wilderness Watch files lawsuit to prevent private road through Lusk Creek Wilderness

Wilderness Watch, with our partners at Heartwood, recently filed a lawsuit challenging the Forest Service's authorization of a 2.5-mile motorized road through the heart of the Lusk Creek Wilderness in the Shawnee National Forest of southern Illinois. We're represented by counsel from Great Rivers Environmental Law Center.

At 6,352 acres, the Lusk Creek Wilderness is known for its rugged canyons, diverse topography, and high-quality streams, including Lusk Creek itself. The Wilderness protects broad, relatively flat ridge tops and terraces that overlook narrow ravines and deep sandstone gulches.

This litigation isn't just about a road—it's about protecting the very idea of Wilderness that Howard Zahniser, author of the 1964 Wilderness Act, called an "enduring resource," to be safeguarded by restraint. As Zahniser put it, Wildernesses like Lusk Creek are areas "so managed as to be left unmanaged—areas that are undeveloped by man's mechanical tools."

The Forest Service's decision would carve and maintain a 12-foot-wide, 2.5-mile-long road and permit private vehicle use across the heart of the Lusk Creek Wilderness so a set of landowners—nearly all with properties completely outside the wilderness boundary—can drive to their tracts. The agency has authorized heavy equipment to remove brush and trees; build ditches, culverts, and other drainage features; and install gravel surfacing to create a year-round, all-weather roadway. Such engineered additions are precisely the "structures or installations" Congress excluded from Wilderness, and the intended private motor traffic underscores that this is not incidental administration but a through-wilderness driveway.

The litigation relies on three distinct legal claims.

First, the Wilderness Act claim relies on Section 4(c)'s prohibition on roads, motor vehicles, motorized equipment, and installations in designated Wilderness, subject only to narrow exceptions. The Act does not authorize a permanent road for private access and does not create private access rights for properties outside the Wilderness. Authorizing a year-round vehicle corridor with ongoing maintenance for private ingress is therefore a prohibited road and motorized use in violation of Section 4(c).

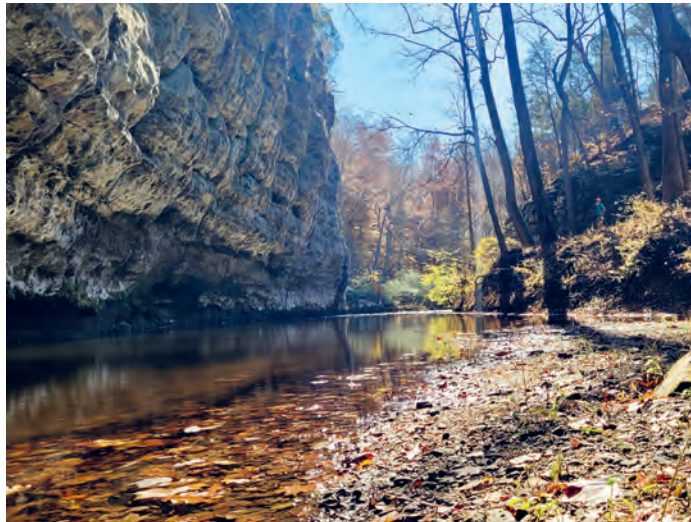
Second, the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) claim challenges the Forest Service's reliance on a categorical exclusion to approve a drivable, engineered corridor while skipping the more rigorous environmental analysis and public participation required in an Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement. A categorical exclusion applies only if no extraordinary circumstances exist, and congressionally designated Wilderness is itself an extraordinary circumstance. The agency's own materials acknowledge that motor access, heavy equipment, and associated infrastructure would degrade undeveloped character and solitude—the very wilderness qualities the law protects—and approving the project by categorical exclusion short-circuited NEPA's requirement that agencies take a "hard look" at environmental consequences.

Third, the access-law claim asserts that when private tracts are involved, the agency must make parcel-specific findings about what "adequate access" means and must evaluate reasonable, less intrusive alternatives, especially options outside Wilderness or non-motorized access. In this case, the Forest Service bundled multiple owners, relied on decades-old cost figures to dismiss outside-wilderness routes, and failed to analyze seasonal or non-motor alternatives.

Because the primary parcel served lies entirely outside the Wilderness, treating the entire corridor as if both parcels required a through-wilderness vehicle road is unlawful, and the law allows only adequate access—not a permanent road through a congressionally designated Wilderness.

Wilderness Watch is asking the court to set aside the approval, require a lawful, transparent, parcel-specific, up-to-date access analysis that genuinely evaluates non-wilderness and non-motorized options, and ensure management consistent with the Wilderness Act's bright-line protections. We are asking the court to prohibit work on the road while the case proceeds to prevent irreparable harm to the landscape.

The Lusk Creek Wilderness needs to remain wild and undeveloped as Congress intended. In the words of Zahniser—and the Wilderness Act itself—the value of Lusk Creek, and every Wilderness, is to stand "in contrast with those areas where man and his own works dominate the landscape," one "where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man." Building a road across the heart of Lusk Creek is antithetical to that purpose. 🌿



Lusk Creek, a Wild and Scenic River candidate, by Karen Frailley

Wilderness in the courts

Wilderness Watch stops poisoning plan in Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness

In a landmark victory for wilderness protection, U.S. District Judge Donald Molloy ruled in favor of Wilderness Watch on October 24 and struck down the Forest Service's approval of a Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks (FWP) plan to poison more than 45 miles of Buffalo Creek in the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness north of Yellowstone National Park.

In his order, Judge Molloy stated:

Wilderness Watch argues that the Project “unlawfully elevates managers’ desired outcomes above the Wilderness Act’s ‘untrammeled’ mandate” by authorizing “a stunning amount of intensive motorized and mechanical intrusions and other prohibited activities into the Wilderness . . . to poison miles of streams and wetlands in a remote watershed.” Wilderness Watch is correct.

Judge Molloy found the project violated the Wilderness Act on several grounds and, “[u]nlike other resource management statutes, the Wilderness Act is not merely a procedural checklist or a delegation of discretion to a managing agency to weigh competing uses; the Wilderness Act mandates the preservation of wilderness character.”

Styled as an effort to expand Yellowstone cutthroat trout populations, the project would have involved more than 80 helicopter landings, plus the use of aircraft, motorboats, and other motorized equipment to poison and kill fish, amphibians, and insects in numerous lakes, ponds, wetlands, and high-mountain wilderness streams. After poisoning the watershed with the toxic chemical rotenone, FWP planned to stock the naturally fishless streams and lakes with cutthroat trout.

The judge rejected the Forest Service's claims that the project would restore natural conditions in the Wilderness, pointing out that because the watershed was naturally fishless, “the wilderness neither depended on Yellowstone cutthroat trout for ecological balance nor contributed them to the watershed as a whole. As a result, conserving them serves no wilderness purpose.”

Judge Molloy's ruling also clarifies how the Act must be applied: “the Wilderness Act mandates the managing agency ‘preserve wilderness character’ even if it acts to further other enumerated purposes.” Echoing other decisions in the Ninth Circuit, the court noted, “when there is a conflict between maintaining the primitive character of the area and between any other use, the general policy of maintaining the primitive character must be supreme.”

This ruling not only reaffirms that Wilderness wasn't designated by Congress to serve as a staging area for agency manipulation, but it's also one of the most important rulings for protecting the integrity of the Wilderness Act in the law's 61-year history. The idea that managers can substitute their desired conditions for what Nature provides in these wild places threatens to destroy the

profound values that set Wilderness areas apart. Judge Molloy's thoroughly reasoned order spells out precisely why the agency's misguided aims are fundamentally at odds with the law. Every manager who oversees Wilderness needs to read and understand it.

A special thank you to nearly 15,000 of our members and supporters who submitted public comments back in 2021 against the Forest Service and Montana FWP's

plan to invade the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness with poisons, helicopters, and other motorized equipment. Your actions and support helped lay the groundwork for our successful lawsuit. 🙌



Buffalo Creek in the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness by U.S. Forest Service

Wilderness in Congress

Senator Lee's Border Bill guts the Wilderness Act, potentially impacting all Wilderness in the U.S.

In October, anti-public lands and anti-wilderness crusader, Senator Mike Lee (R-UT), introduced legislation that guts the Wilderness Act, potentially allowing the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to build roads, land aircraft, and install surveillance technology across America's entire 112 million-acre National Wilderness Preservation System.

Specifically, Senator Lee's so-called "Border Lands Conservation Act," S. 2967, would allow DHS to do the following prohibited activities in Wilderness across the country:

- Construct and maintain roads and physical barriers.
- Deploy tactical infrastructure and technology, including observation points, remote video surveillance systems, motion sensors, vehicle barriers, fences, roads, bridges, drainages, and detection devices.
- Use motor vehicles, motorboats, and motorized equipment.
- Use aircraft, including landings and takeoffs.

The bill also appears to open Wilderness to logging, chaining, brushing, and similar efforts to prioritize "fuels management" and create fuel breaks along the border and the new "navigable roads" that could be constructed in these areas.

Early reporting on Senator Lee's bill focused on the bill applying to federal public lands, including Wilderness areas, within 100 miles of the northern and southern borders, but Wilderness Watch's analysis of the bill shows that while some of the bill's provisions appear to limit its reach to border areas, the bill's provisions that amend the 1964 Wilderness Act apply to every Wilderness in the nation. With DHS spread across the entire U.S., a Homeland Security Secretary could concoct a border security reason to send bulldozers or aircraft or install remote video surveillance systems in any Wilderness in the National Wilderness Preservation System if Lee's bill becomes law.

Even if Senator Lee's bill only applied to public lands and Wilderness closer to the northern and southern border, the impact to Wilderness and its wildlife would be significant—

it could damage 73 Wilderness areas across 12 states, affecting more than 32 million acres of the National Wilderness Preservation System.

Senator Lee's border bill is as unoriginal as it is destructive, with parts of the bill sharing several near-identical provisions with H.R. 1820, the "Federal Lands Amplified Security for the Homeland Act," or "FLASH Act," which was reintroduced early this Congress and quickly underwent a House Natural Resources subcommittee hearing in the spring. The FLASH Act purports to achieve vague aims to "deter illegal crossings" or "gain operational control of the southern border" through expansive permissions on Wilderness and other federal public land, including unlimited road construction; structure installation

from barriers to surveillance equipment; and the directive to "reduce hazardous fuels" (i.e. logging). Both Lee's bill and the FLASH Act almost identically amend the Wilderness Act to authorize these activities in Wilderness areas everywhere, regardless of distance from a border.

Senator Mike Lee's anti-public lands and anti-wilderness views and policy initiatives are well known. Earlier this year, Senator Lee attempted to sell off over three million acres of America's public lands heritage as part of legislation that passed this summer. Senator Lee has previously introduced legislation to weaken the Wilderness Act and allow mountain bikes, strollers, and game carts on every piece of land protected by the National Wilderness Preservation System. Senator Lee also fought to get permanent, fixed anchor climbing gear and installations allowed in Wilderness.

Wilderness is nonpartisan. If you don't want to be surveilled in all Wilderness, if you don't want DHS buzzing all around the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, if you don't want DHS obliterating the desert of the Cabeza-Prieta Wilderness with motor vehicles and barriers, if you don't want the DHS constructing roads in the Pasayten Wilderness, tell your senators, early and repeatedly, to oppose both S. 2967 and H.R. 1820. You can call your senators at (202) 224-3121. 🐾



Bridger Wilderness, WY by Leon Werdinger Photography

Wilderness in Congress

Congressional Review Act: A new tool for lawmakers to meddle in public land management

Congress has alarmingly expanded how it applies the Congressional Review Act (CRA). The CRA was enacted via a rider in the 1990s as part of Newt Gingrich's "Contract On America," and enables lawmakers to nullify federal regulations they don't like with a simple majority vote on a joint resolution within 60 days after the rule was published and received by Congress.

During the initial days of the first Trump administration, Congress negated 16 Obama-era regulations with the CRA, including U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service regulations that banned bear baiting, killing of bear cubs or mothers with cubs, and killing wolves during their denning season in wildlife refuges in Alaska, including nearly 20 million acres of Wilderness on the refuges. Once a CRA is passed on a regulation, an agency cannot adopt a substantially similar regulation—ever. The only way to override this prohibition is with future legislation.

In the current Congress, for the first time ever, lawmakers wielded the CRA, previously only used to nullify regulations, to kill three land management plans across the U.S. One of these joint resolutions (H.J. Res. 106), which the Senate and House have both passed, nullifies the Central Yukon Resource Management Plan in Alaska. This land management plan had designated three million acres as an area of critical environmental concern, administratively ending

the proposal to build the Ambler Mining Road crossing the Gates of the Arctic National Preserve and the Kobuk Wild and Scenic River. When the president signs this joint resolution into law, the administrative hurdle prohibiting the Ambler Road will be removed because the entire land management plan will be gone, and the road proposal can be revived.

Beyond the Ambler Road, this new application of the CRA injects an extraordinary level of congressional meddling into agency land management decisions. Land management plans—which until now commonly

undergo years of environmental analysis by career agency employees, are supposed to consider the best science, and are challenged in court to comply with environmental laws—will now be at the whim of lawmakers who don't like even just one little provision.

One lingering question is how an agency moves forward after

Congress strikes with their own prerogative. The CRA prohibits any future substantively similar rule. What constitutes "substantially similar" for land management plans is open for flagrant political meddling in the management of America's public lands, including Wilderness. 🐾



Grizzly sow and cubs by Sam Parks

This is our most important time of the year to raise the funds necessary to keep fighting for Wilderness.

Give to the wild:



On the watch

Trump administration attacks iconic wildlands in Alaska

On October 23, the Trump administration launched fresh attacks on three iconic wildlands in Alaska, places that Wilderness Watch, our members and supporters, and our conservation allies have fought to safeguard for decades. These places, which teem with native wildlife, are the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, the Izembek Wilderness, and the areas near and through Gates of the Arctic threatened by the Ambler Road construction.

Arctic Refuge Coastal Plain

The 1.56 million-acre coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge has been a target for oil and gas development ever since the 1980 Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) failed to provide much needed and deserved wilderness protection. The wild coastal plain is the birthing grounds of the fabled 200,000-member Porcupine caribou herd, relied upon for subsistence living by the Gwich'in native people, and provides critical habitat for polar bears, migratory birds, and other native wildlife.



Caribou by Frostnip

In 2017, Trump signed a tax bill that required two lease sales in the coastal plain. The second sale attracted no bidders, and the Biden administration later suspended and canceled leases from the first sale. On October 23, the Trump administration announced it will hold an oil and gas lease sale in the coastal plain this winter, and would reinstate seven canceled oil leases from the previous sale that had been acquired by the State of Alaska.

Izembek Wilderness

Located near the tip of the Alaska Peninsula, the remote Izembek National Wildlife Refuge is more than 95 percent Wilderness. A quarter-million migratory birds—including virtually the entire population of Pacific black brant—congregate here each fall, and nearly 7,000 caribou overwinter here. Hundreds of sea otters swim in the Izembek Lagoon, occasionally near migrating orcas, whales, and sea lions. Massive brown bears lumber through wilderness streams during peak summer salmon runs.

For years, the native village of King Cove has demanded to build a road through the heart of the Izembek Wilderness to access a year-round airstrip at Cold Bay. Initially the access was

to transport seafood from the now-shuttered Peter Pan seafood plant in King Cove. In recent years that demand has morphed into access for emergency medical evacuations, despite a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers analysis that showed that non-road alternatives for transportation would be more reliable, less expensive, and would not harm Izembek and its wildlife.

In October, the Trump administration announced that it had finalized a land exchange with King Cove to delete lands from the Izembek Wilderness so that the road could be constructed, and the land patents have already been exchanged. The Izembek Wilderness will lose 490 acres of land through which the road corridor would be built in

exchange for 1,739 acres of King Cove Corporation lands outside of the Refuge. On November 12, Wilderness Watch and our allies sued the Interior Department and King Cove Corporation in U.S. District Court in response.

Ambler Road

The 211-mile Ambler Road has been proposed to reach the mining claims of a private Canadian mining company south of the Brooks Range. If built, the

Ambler Road would stretch west from the Dalton Highway—the Haul Road leading to the Prudhoe Bay oil field on the North Slope—to the mining claims. Along the way, this “road to ruin” would cross Gates of the Arctic National Preserve and the Kobuk Wild and Scenic River, both ecologically significant public lands that make up part of the largest remaining wild, roadless area in the entire nation.

The Ambler Road also would cross nearly 3,000 streams, 11 major rivers, major caribou migration routes, and would bisect a wide swath of the southern Brooks Range, home to numerous Athabaskan and Iñupiat villages, as well as grizzly bears, wolves, and Dall sheep. If built, the Ambler Road would undoubtedly lead to more use and motorized intrusions into the National Preserve and nearby Wildernesses. Road noise, dust, and vehicle headlights would further degrade the area’s wild character.

The Biden administration ruled against building the Ambler Road after the first Trump administration approved it. On October 23, Trump’s Interior Secretary, Doug Burgum, reissued right-of-way permits for the 211-mile road.

On the watch

What happens next in Alaska?

While these Trump actions are certainly potentially catastrophic for these iconic wildlands and their wildlife, the story is not yet over. Litigation may well slow or stall these decisions, including several active, related cases we're currently involved with that address oil and gas leases in the Arctic Refuge.

Wilderness Watch and our allies will continue to fight to protect the priceless areas, and we thank our terrific members and supporters who have sent in literally tens of thousands of comments over the past years in order to protect these incredible wild places and their critters. Stay tuned! 🐾

Strengthen the 2001 Roadless Rule to protect Wilderness and wildlife

Wilderness Watch is urging the Department of Agriculture to drop its plan to rescind the Roadless Rule, which has helped protect roadless areas and adjacent wilderness lands on national forests for nearly a quarter-century.

The Roadless Rule dates back to 2001, when the Clinton administration finalized a lengthy rulemaking process to protect roadless areas in national forests from road-building and associated development. About 58 million acres of wildlands were covered under the Roadless Area Conservation Rule, which have mostly been kept free of road construction, logging, and other types of development.

National forest roadless areas in Idaho and Colorado received overall lesser protections via separate state-based rules and are not part of the repeal attempt; however, 44.7 million acres of roadless areas on national forests could be opened to logging, mining, road-building, and development if the administration succeeds in repealing the Roadless Rule.



Pemigewasset Inventoried Roadless Area, NH by Zack Porter, Standing Trees

The national forests already have over 380,000 miles of roads, which the Forest Service can't afford to maintain. These roads choke rivers and streams with sediment, fragment important wildlife habitat, and lead to more

human-caused fire in the backcountry. In contrast, roadless areas on national forests offer recreation, with large sections of the Continental Divide Trail, Pacific Crest Trail, and Appalachian Trail crossing protected roadless areas. Roadless areas also provide secure wildlife habitat and migration corridors. Because many roadless areas abut Wilderness, these roadless areas better protect Wilderness by keeping road-building and

development away. And in the future, Congress may look to roadless areas for possible wilderness designations.

Unfortunately, the 2001 Roadless Rule is not nearly protective enough. It contains numerous loopholes that allow some road-building, logging, and development under certain circumstances. Wilderness Watch is advocating that rather than repeal the 2001 Roadless Rule, it should be strengthened and these loopholes eliminated. 🐾

Wilderness Watch helps defeat proposal to increase wolf killing in the Bob Marshall Wilderness

In August, Montana's Fish and Wildlife Commission presented a number of possible changes to its statewide wolf management plan, including a proposal that would directly and negatively impact the Bob Marshall Wilderness by greatly expanding wolf killing to a year-round hunting season. Wilderness Watch fought this proposal to manipulate predator-prey populations in the Wilderness (the stated goal was to increase elk numbers by killing more wolves) by submitting written comments and testifying in person at the commission's meeting. In our comments, we noted

that not only is it wrong to interfere with natural wildlife population dynamics in Wilderness, but collecting bounties for dead wolves violates the Wilderness Act's prohibition on commercial enterprise in Wilderness. Ultimately, the Fish and Wildlife Commission voted down the proposal to create a year-round wolf hunting season in the Bob Marshall Wilderness. While we're glad this bad proposal was defeated, Wilderness Watch supports ending wolf hunting and trapping in Wilderness, period. 🐾

Welcome Suzanne, Jennifer, and René

We're pleased to welcome our new and returning board members: Suzanne Cable, Jennifer Mamola, and René Voss



Suzanne Cable found her calling in life after volunteering as a wilderness ranger in the Bob Marshall Wilderness in Montana. That experience led to a 30-year career with the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and National Park Service, advocating for Wilderness and the protection of wildlands. Her agency work and nomadic spirit allowed her to contribute to the stewardship of Wilderness, wild and scenic rivers, and other protected areas in nine national forests and four national parks, as well as internationally through USFS International Programs. Suzanne's career and love of travel has provided her with abundant opportunities to actively explore and study wildlands around the world. Now in retirement, she continues to hike, climb, ski, paddle, and seek solitude in wild places from her base camp in Wenatchee, Washington.



Jennifer Mamola has served as the John Muir Project's Forest Protection Advocate in Washington D.C. since 2019. Prior to her tenure there, Jenn dedicated five years to championing the health, safety, and security of Peace Corps Volunteers on Capitol Hill. A native of Southern California, Jenn ventured to the Bay Area to pursue her education at St. Mary's College, where she resided for nearly a decade before embarking on her journey with the Peace Corps. Following a life-altering auto accident that curtailed her Peace Corps service, Jenn found solace and renewal in nature, sparking a deep passion for environmental preservation. Her explorations have taken her through all 48 contiguous states and over half of America's national parks, fostering a love for wilderness experiences devoid of cellular connectivity.



René Voss lives in San Anselmo, California, where he is Executive Director of the Western Alliance for Nature, a conservation land trust. He also practices Natural Resources Law for non-profits and serves on the Town of San Anselmo's Open Space Committee. He is a past member of the Sierra Club Board of Directors (1999-2001) and a current member of Coho Salmon Land Trust Board of Directors. He is an avid hiker, backpacker, and photographer (renevoss.com), whose photographs regularly appear in Wilderness Watch's newsletter and various online communications. René previously served on our Board of Directors, and we're thrilled to welcome him back. 🌿

Wilderness Watch presents at Southeastern Public Interest Environmental Law Conference

In October, Wilderness Watch attended and presented at the Southeastern Public Interest Environmental Law Conference in Tennessee. Katie Bilodeau, our Legislative Director/Policy Analyst, presented, "The Earth and its community of life: Elevating non-human animals in justice, ethics, and law through wilderness protection." Katie challenged the audience to consider an individual animal's experience with

aggressively invasive population management activities within Wilderness, such as shackling terrestrial animals with research collars and moving them to unfamiliar new homes, or poisoning entire aquatic habitats to introduce other species. Katie discussed how the Wilderness Act might protect these animals. 🌿

Happy Trails, Mark Peterson!

It is with gratitude and well-wishes that our board and staff bid “Happy Trails” to Mark Peterson, who is stepping down from the Wilderness Watch Board of Directors as his second term concludes. Mark has been an invaluable part of our organization for many years, leaving an indelible mark on our mission and work.

Mark’s journey with Wilderness Watch is a testament to his commitment. A long-time member and supporter, he approached us about joining the board in 2018, demonstrating his initiative and passion for protecting America’s Wilderness. His dedication reached new heights in 2022 when he stepped up to lead as President. During his tenure as President, Mark guided Wilderness Watch with a love for Wilderness and an unwavering focus on our mission, helping

to steer the organization through an important period of organizational growth.



Beyond his leadership, Mark’s talents as an excellent writer and communicator elevated our outreach efforts. He was a primary force behind the inspiration and execution of improvements to this very newsletter—advocating for a full-color format and expanding its length to better connect with our members and supporters. He contributed several insightful articles and recently lent his keen eye to editing, ensuring the quality and clarity of our communications.

We are grateful for Mark’s dedicated service, leadership, and numerous contributions. His impact will be felt for years to come. We wish him all the best in his future endeavors and look forward to seeing him on the trails! 🐾

Jerome Walker, In memoriam

Wilderness Watch lost a good friend on October 16, 2025 with the passing of Jerome Walker.

We became acquainted with Jerome in 1997, when his first wife, Melissa, joined the Wilderness Watch Board of Directors. Jerome, a neurologist and always a doer, quickly went to work establishing our Georgia Chapter and working on issues affecting the Rich Mountain Wilderness in the southern Appalachians and Cumberland Island Wilderness off the coast of Georgia. After Melissa passed in 2009, Jerome moved to Missoula and joined our Board, where he served for six years, several as secretary-treasurer, and volunteered for everything from mailing parties to fieldwork.

Jerome was an avid backpacker and accomplished photographer. Howie Wolke, a Wilderness Watch board member who guided wilderness trips for more than 40 years, said about Jerome: “He did two different Escalante trips with

us...and the second one he did at the age of 80, breaking the (then) all-time Big Wild age record for successfully completing a backpack trip. And he did quite well, too. He didn’t slow the group down at all, except for his frequent photography—which was kind of a frequent thing. And he was a good photographer!”



We shared many adventures with Jerome, hiking in Yellowstone and on backpacking trips in the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness and Cumberland Island Wilderness. Cumberland Island was a particularly special place for Jerome, and he worked tirelessly for decades to protect it from mismanagement by the National Park Service.

Jerome was a great friend to Wilderness and to many of us at Wilderness Watch. We’ll miss him.

We extend our condolences to Jerome’s wife, Marcia Williams, and to his children and grandchildren. 🐾



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Your end-of-year giving propels us forward!

By Brett Haverstick

With our country in crisis, it's difficult to know what to prioritize, where to invest your time and energy, and how to make a difference.

While it's not easy to chart the path forward, Wilderness Watch remains laser-focused on defending Wilderness and ensuring that America's National Wilderness Preservation System endures.

I'm proud to share that we have gained over 400 new members this year, and our monthly donors have increased by 30 percent compared to this time last year! Both of

these numbers speak to your unwavering dedication to Wilderness and the wildlife that call our wildest places their home. Let's keep building on this momentum and making a difference for all that's wild.

If you're not already a monthly contributor, now is a great time to start. You can become a monthly donor through our website at wildernesswatch.org (or by using the QR code on page 7). We also offer a secure direct deposit option that eliminates those expensive credit card fees. Please email me at bretth@wildernesswatch.org or call (406) 542-2048 to set up direct deposit.



Wilderness Watch board and staff

You should have received our winter fundraising letter in the mail by now. Please be as generous as you can. This is our most important time of the year to raise the funds necessary to keep fighting for Wilderness.

Your strong support allows us to continue pushing back on harmful agency proposals affecting Wilderness, file lawsuits holding agencies accountable to the Wilderness Act, educate members of Congress, and be active in the community.

Thank you for being with us every step of the way! 🐾