

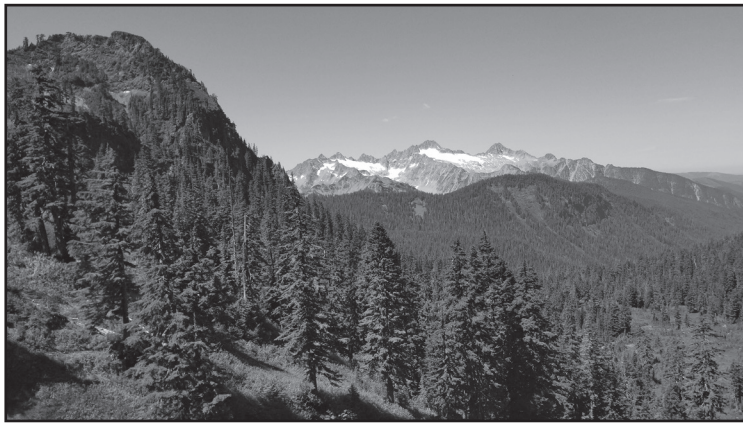


North Cascades Grizzly Recovery: Looking for an Alternative that is Good for Grizzlies and Good for Wilderness

By Kevin Proescholdt

Wilderness Watch recently asked the National Park Service (NPS) to develop a new alternative in the planning for grizzly bear recovery in the North Cascades of Washington State. Our suggested proposal would both benefit grizzlies and protect designated Wilderness, something that none of the existing alternatives in the NPS's current plan do. Wilderness Watch has requested that a natural recovery alternative be thoroughly developed and studied for grizzly restoration.

A natural recovery alternative doesn't mean *do nothing* as some of its critics contend, but instead would call for real action in British Columbia and the U.S. to facilitate natural recovery. That could mean many things, such as changes in black bear hunting regulations in both countries, facilitating passage across highways, reducing road densities, guidelines for human behavior in the areas most likely used as connecting corridors for grizzly expansion, building social tolerance, and the like. In other words, it would be a cooperative plan between the U.S. and Canada for grizzly recovery. If this



Mount Baker Wilderness, Washington by Dan Neville via Flickr

Columbia, the long-term genetic viability of a relatively small grizzly population on the U.S. side of the border would also be at risk.

We recognize at least some of the current challenges to facilitating grizzly movement across the border from Canada, but we also believe it is imperative for the NPS to rigorously study, analyze, and disclose such an alternative. Sometimes grizzlies can confound even the experts. Twenty years ago, for example, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service proposed a plan (which died after the election of George W. Bush) to reintroduce 25 grizzlies into the

Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness but as an "experimental, nonessential" population that would receive lesser protections under the Endangered Species Act. Most experts said there was absolutely no way that grizzlies could get into the Selway-Bitterroot on their own. But now, 20 years later, grizzlies are indeed moving in there on their own. The

North Cascades ecosystem has differences with the Selway-Bitterroot regarding potential grizzly movement, of course, but the NPS has not seriously looked at the possibilities and pitfalls of a natural recovery option for grizzlies in the North Cascades.

The current plan by the NPS and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to translocate grizzly bears into the North Cascades in Washington raises many concerns about the harms posed to individual bears, who will be snared or culvert-trapped or pursued by helicopters and shot with tranquilizers, removed from their familiar home territories, poked, prodded, and collared with electronic surveillance devices. The environmental analysis

North Cascades Grizzly Recovery continued on page 3

In This Issue...

N. Cascades Grizzly Recovery	1
Executive Director's Message	2
In the Courts	4
In Congress	5
Wilderness Ethics as an Andidote	6
On the Watch	10

... and More

Message from the Executive Director



How the ideals of the Wilderness Act can lead the way on climate change

A few weeks ago I wandered down to Caras Park, a local gathering spot on the banks of the Clark Fork River, to join about 500 fellow Missoulians for the local version of the worldwide Student Climate Strike. Inspired by the now-famous Swedish teen, Greta Thunberg, who began skipping school every Friday to sit outside the Swedish Parliament protesting her government's inaction on climate change, students around the globe have been striking from school to draw attention to the plight of our Earth under the increasingly dire calamity of global warming.

I was more than a little impressed by the passion with which the students spoke, but even more so by their message. Almost without exception they talked about how the threats to a livable future go beyond greenhouse gas emissions, serious as those are, to economic and political systems that treat the planet as expendable, and that “discount” the future—their future—in favor of living it up today. Unlike most climate friendly politicians, celebrities, and business leaders who promote green energy, these young people recognize that the threats to their future won't be so easily fixed as replacing coal-fired power plants with windmills and solar panels—“trading in your gas guzzler for a Prius”—as one young speaker put it. Instead, we have to be willing to change most everything about the way we live. Ultimately, they spoke of the need for the human species to practice restraint, to learn to do with less.

In a culture built upon an insatiable demand for more, the idea of doing with less will be a hard sell. Yet that's exactly what our current climate and ecological crises demand.

These young folks' appeal for restraint echoes the message embodied in the Wilderness Act. The idea that we should forego material goods or even some of the recreational opportunities or management prerogatives our wildlands might otherwise provide in order to let nature be, was a radical idea in its time; and of course it still is. But as Wilderness Watch intern Andrew Hersh writes elsewhere in this newsletter, no issue poses a greater challenge to our ability to practice restraint than does climate change. And as Andrew points out, a changing climate combined with managers' “action bias” makes the likelihood of more proposals to manipulate wilderness ecosystems almost inevitable.

There's a bit of irony in that Wilderness as envisioned by the Wilderness Act is one of the things most threatened by our reaction to climate change, but yet it also offers a key to the answer...restraint. Should we heed that lesson and approach the coming challenges with both humility and restraint, both our Wilderness system and a livable future might survive. 🌿

—George Nickas



WILDERNESS WATCH
Keeping Wilderness Wild

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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indicates bears would be taken “from source populations in northwestern Montana and/or south-central British Columbia” where, at least in Montana, grizzly bear populations are still struggling and suffering record high mortality rates. The heavy-handed capture and translocation methods proposed—as well as continued monitoring and handling methods—could result in death or injury of the bears, which are protected as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act. And if that weren’t enough, the DEIS ignores the literature describing the negative effects—including severe stress responses and avoidance of important habitat—of all this helicopter traffic on wildlife, including grizzlies

And, as we’ve unfortunately seen again and again in Idaho and Washington, politically controversial predators with electronic tracking devices around their necks are regularly targeted for “removal actions.”

Freedom of Information Act documents in Idaho showed that Idaho Fish and Game (and possibly the federal management agencies involved before delisting) regularly supplied Wildlife Services with GPS data from wildlife collars to locate and kill wolves, oftentimes through aerial gunning. Washington

also has a long, sordid history of killing wolves at the behest of cattle ranchers. The environmental analysis here indicates “all released grizzly bears would be GPS-collared and monitored. If a bear frequents an allotment area, the FWS and WDFW would work with the USFS and livestock owners to determine the best course of action to minimize bear-livestock interactions.” We are sympathetic to the desire to move quickly if there are only a few bears left in the North Cascades, but what of the bears that are dropped there against their will? What of the struggling source populations? And, are we simply creating another island population that cannot survive without ongoing, heavy-handed intervention? Is this really good for the bears? For Wilderness? We think these are questions that deserve serious analysis and public disclosure.

The current plan is misguided in the many ways that it would violate the 1964 Wilderness Act. None of the current action alternatives in the *Draft Grizzly Bear Restoration Plan/Environmental Impact Statement* (DEIS) are compatible with Wilderness. The proposed recovery area of 6.1 million acres includes North Cascades National Park and 2.6 million acres of Wilderness in the Pasayten, Mt. Baker, and Stephen Mather Wildernesses. All, or almost all, of the proposed helicopter landings would apparently be in Wilderness, either in North Cascades National Park or in surrounding national forests, despite the fact that 60 percent of the project area is outside of Wilderness. The plan proposes anywhere from 50 to 400 helicopter landings and twice that many flights (though the DEIS is some-

what inconsistent on the exact numbers) to move up to 160 bears, again all or mostly all within Wilderness despite more of the project area being outside of Wilderness. The extensive use of helicopters would continue indefinitely for monitoring bear movement and numbers.

The essential irony is that agencies recognize the best place to release bears is in the exceedingly rare wildness of the North Cascades. The best grizzly habitat is synonymous with Wilderness: space to roam, isolation, denning sites, safety from human-caused mortality, and distance from human conflicts and garbage. But the agency’s proposed methods of re-establishing grizzlies diminish all these advantages.

Wilderness Watch supports the recovery of grizzly bears and other native species where suitable habitat exists. The rugged North Cascades are historic grizzly bear habitat, and there are likely a few currently living on the U.S. side of border now, with a grizzly bear photographed there in 2010.

But recovery efforts must also meet the letter and spirit of the Wilderness Act. This means restoring the area’s grizzly population without the use of motor vehicles and equipment, without endless landings of

helicopters in Wilderness, without trammeling or manipulating the landscape or its wildlife. However suitable the habitat in the North Cascades is, we take issue with the methods proposed—the reintroduction plan is extremely intrusive, relies on activities prohibited by the Wilderness Act, and would come at a significant cost to Wilderness. What is good for Wilderness is good for bears, and those conditions are worth protecting.

It is precisely this type of heavy-handed manipulation of Wilderness that Wilderness Act author Howard Zahniser warned against, even when done for seemingly good reasons. In 1963, for example, the secretary of interior’s wildlife advisory board of ecologists led by Zahniser’s friend A. Starker Leopold recommended extensive manipulation of the National Parks and their wildlife (and the wilderness in the Parks). The Leopold Report called for manipulating parks and wildlife to re-create a representation of “the condition that prevailed when the area was first visited by the white man.” The report also stated, “Management may at times call for the use of the tractor, chainsaw, rifle, or flame-thrower but the signs and sounds of such activity should be hidden from visitors insofar as possible.”

Zahniser penned his classic rebuttal to this proposal. While some projects may have merit, he wrote, “it is certainly in contrast with the wilderness philosophy of protecting areas at their boundaries and trying to let natural forces operate within the wilderness untrammelled by man.” He continued, “Those who have advocated the preservation of wilderness

North Cascades Grizzly Recovery continued on page 4

by protecting at the boundaries the areas within which the natural community would be untrammled by man have often been confronted with practical difficulties—the smallness of even the most extensive areas, for example. The ‘realism’ of their advocacy has been questioned.” But nonetheless, Zahniser urged us, when it came to Wilderness, to be “Guardians, Not Gardeners.” In the case of the North Cascades grizzly project, Zahniser would urge us to guard the Wildernesses of the North Cascades from manipulation, and to not manipulate (or “garden”) them for our own purposes, even for something as worthwhile as grizzly recovery.

If the Park Service adopts a translocation plan, it must be in line with the letter and spirit of the Wilderness Act. Monitoring should take place in a way that’s respectful to Wilderness and bears, including using hair snags, camera traps, scat collection, and on-the-ground sightings to know whether the bears are thriving. It’s wrong to rely on intrusive helicopter use, radio-collaring and ongoing handling and tranquilizing of the bears.

The DEIS entirely lacks a natural recovery option. The best way to meet the goal of a viable grizzly population in the

North Cascades would be to allow for and *boldly promote* the natural recovery of grizzlies. This is a very different approach than the “no action” option in the DEIS, which is to “do nothing.” A natural recovery alternative would require working with British Columbia to protect grizzlies over a larger land base and would provide for connectivity between populations in the U.S. and Canada using protected habitat corridors. It would also include other measures to ensure that grizzlies are not killed by humans, regardless of what side of the border they are on and whether they are in national parks, Wilderness, or other public or private lands. It will take longer and require more patience than the instant gratification of capturing and releasing dozens of bears, but it would ultimately create a more durable population sharing the landscape with a human population that is more likely to respect the bears that make it back to the North Cascades on their own.

Let’s have the NPS look at this alternative that is both good for grizzlies and good for Wilderness. 🐾

Kevin Proescholdt is the conservation director for Wilderness Watch.

Wilderness in the Courts

River of No Return Wilderness Gets its Day Before the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals

Wilderness Watch was before the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals in Portland recently to defend our successful federal court injunction against Idaho Department of Fish and Game’s (IDFG) unlawful helicopter-supported elk collaring project in the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness in Idaho.

In 2017, a federal judge ruled that the Forest Service illegally authorized IDFG to conduct 120 helicopter landings in the Wilderness to radio collar elk—an action IDFG said was necessary to study an elk-population decline that has occurred since the return of wolves to the Wilderness. Wilderness Watch and allies filed suit hours after receiving a copy of the signed permit authorizing project implementation. But, within the next three days, while the suit was pending and before we could get before the judge, IDFG inundated the Wilderness with repeated helicopter flights and landings. And, even though it was clear IDFG was not authorized to harass and collar wolves, IDFG—an agency with an unapologetic history of wolf extermination efforts—nonetheless “mistakenly” captured and collared four wolves.

Acknowledging the egregious nature of the agencies’ behavior, the judge ordered IDFG to destroy data obtained from the illegal collars, forbade the agencies from using that data to support future project proposals, and ordered a

90-day implementation delay of future helicopter projects to allow time for legal challenges. The agencies appealed this ruling, conceding they violated the law but arguing the judge didn’t have jurisdiction to hear the case because the agencies completed the project before the judge could review it, or alternatively, that the terms of the injunction were too harsh. Our attorney from Earthjustice did an excellent job defending the lower court ruling to a three-judge Ninth Circuit panel, and we expect to have a ruling in the coming months. 🐾

Chainsaw Proposal Before the Court in Colorado

Earlier this year, we filed suit challenging the Forest Service’s authorization of extensive use of chainsaws to clear trail systems across the Weminuche and South San Juan Wildernesses in Colorado—a decision that was likely the first approval in a larger push to authorize chainsaw use across national forests in Region 2 to clear trails. The decision was made quietly, without any public notice or an opportunity to comment. After we filed the case, the Forest Service issued a vague withdrawal of its authorization, citing access issues relating to snowpack. We’ve asked the court to retain jurisdiction over the case as we suspect the authorization will be revived, once again without notice, and we believe the court can, and should, address ongoing National Environmental Policy Act violations as well as serious Wilderness Act violations stemming from the prolific use of motorized equipment in Wilderness. 🐾

Wilderness in Congress

Three Good Wilderness Bills Move in Congress

Three good wilderness bills have begun to move in Congress, specifically in the Democratic-controlled House of Representatives. These bills are:

- **Arctic Refuge Protection from Drilling.** HR 1146, introduced by Rep. Jared Huffman (D-CA), is a short bill with a big impact. As readers may recall, it was President Trump's 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (Public Law 115-97) that contained provisions opening the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil and gas drilling for the first time ever. No leases for that drilling have yet been sold.

Rep. Huffman's bill, officially known as the Arctic Cultural and Coastal Plain Protection Act, would repeal Section 20001 of the tax cuts law, which is the section containing the coastal plain drilling provisions. After passing out of the House Natural Resources Committee, the full House of Representatives passed HR 1146 on September 12, 2019, by a vote of 225-193. It was largely a party-line vote, with only 4 Republicans voting for the bill, while 5 Democrats voted against it; all other Democrats voted for the bill, and all other Republicans voted against it.

There is no Senate companion bill to HR 1146, but the House sent Rep. Huffman's bill over to the Senate, where it has been referred to the Energy and Natural Resources Committee, chaired by Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R-AK). There it faces an uncertain future. Sen. Murkowski played a key role in inserting the drilling provisions into the tax cuts bill in 2017.

- **Colorado Outdoor Recreation and Economy (CORE) Act.** HR 823 was introduced by Rep. Joe Neguse (D-CO). This bill incorporates four separate bills from the previous Congress: bills dealing with the Continental Divide, San Juan Mountains Wilderness, Thompson Divide, and Curecanti National Recreation Area. Only the first two portions of the CORE Act deal with Wilderness.

In the Continental Divide section, the CORE Act would designate 26,395 acres of Wilderness in four additions to existing Wildernesses on the White River National Forest. This section of the bill would also designate an 8,036-acre Proposed Williams Fork Mountains Wilderness as a potential Wilderness, to be reclassified as Wilderness after the completion or rehabilitation of certain range improvements.

The portion of the bill dealing with the potential Wilderness would allow motorized equipment and transport in the potential Wilderness for range

improvements. This portion also contains language requiring the Secretary to make a determination about two vacant livestock grazing allotments, which could potentially lead to permanent retirement of these allotments.

In the San Juan Mountains section of the bill, the CORE Act would designate 3 new wilderness additions totaling 22,841 acres on the Grand Mesa-Uncompahgre-Gunnison National Forest, plus a new 8,884-acre McKenna Peak Wilderness on BLM-administered land. This portion of the bill also releases from wilderness-study protection the remaining lands of the Dominguez Canyon and McKenna Peak Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) that are not designated as Wilderness by the bill.

The CORE Act passed the full House of Representatives on October 31, 2019, on a 227-182 vote. The Senate companion bill to HR 823 is S. 241, introduced by Sen. Michael Bennett (D-CO). No Senate hearings have yet been scheduled.

- **Hardrock Leasing and Reclamation Act.** House Natural Resources Committee Chair Rep. Raúl Grijalva (D-AZ) introduced HR 2579, the Hardrock Leasing and Reclamation Act of 2019.

This bill, while not designating any Wildernesses or addressing any particular area, nonetheless would bring enormously positive benefits for many Wildernesses throughout the National Wilderness Preservation System. It essentially reforms and replaces the antiquated 1872 Mining Act, which still allows countless acres of America's public lands, including Wilderness, to be polluted by toxic mining every year.

For Wilderness, the bill prohibits hardrock mining activity in units of the National Conservation System (including the National Wilderness Preservation System), Wilderness Study Areas, and elsewhere. For existing mining claims in Wilderness, the bill contains provisions whereby those claims will become invalid and void after 10 years if no plan of operation has been approved. The bill also establishes a royalty payment of 12.5 percent, and requires reclamation standards and bonding requirements.

HR 2579 would be a very positive bill for Wilderness. It has 27 co-sponsors in the House. It passed out of the full House Natural Resources Committee on October 23, 2019. There is as yet no Senate companion bill, though Sen. Tom Udall (D-NM) has introduced his own Hardrock Mining and Reclamation Act, S. 1386.



Wilderness Ethics as an Antidote to Climate Change Hubris

By Andrew Hursh



Would a modern Bob Marshall drive a Tesla to the trailhead? Motors of any propulsion certainly drove him and other early leaders of the Wilderness movement out of the woods and into public advocacy. In 1901, when Marshall was born, only some 14,000 automobiles were registered in the United States. By his untimely death in 1939, there were over 31 million. The Wilderness Society founder's life and core mission reflect a conservationist's reaction to a great environmental challenge of his era, the zeal with which we roaded up so much of our undeveloped, wild country in so short a time.

Today, the hallmark of environmentalists is less notably their backcountry boosting and more commonly which vehicle they buy. A cynic might bemoan that this twist in attitudes betrays a loss, with the shift into the twenty-first century, of the Wilderness values so remarkably celebrated in the clutch of the twentieth. Perhaps, however, it's a change that instead reflects a reaction to one great environmental challenge of our era, climate change. Consider these dates: Howard Zahniser, primary author of the Wilderness Act of 1964, died that same year, mere months before he could have witnessed President Johnson sign the bill into law. Next, in 1965, Johnson had his science advisory committee evaluate other ecological issues with a report on "Restoring the Quality of Our Environment." In the early pages of that report sits perhaps the earliest recognition in the US government of the greenhouse effect and the atmospheric impact of fossil fuels.

The coming sea change in the way we grapple with our effects on the natural world thus occurred lamentably late for us to gain the perspective of the architects of the Wilderness Act on the ramifications of climate change. As a result, today's wilderness advocates are divided. Faced with the reality of how far-reaching our impacts on the natural world are, renewed debate has livened questions about what Wilderness means and when and how wilderness character should be compromised in the name of climate change mitigation and adaptation. From assisted migration to thinning, burning and replanting to other biological controls, the impulse to manipulate ecosystems in our National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS) grows stronger along with our understanding of ways we may have inadvertently affected them. At the same time, generational shifts in thinking may exhibit erosion of the wilderness ethics that championed the original creation of the NWPS. Politically hyper-focused on climate change and broad-scale ecological concerns, some people may see wilderness areas more as venues for adventure sports than as temples to humility in the face of nature. Many otherwise conservation-conscious advocates simply misunderstand or have never learned what, and why, the NWPS is.

From intervention-minded managers to globally-minded millennials, what do these shifts in thinking mean for resolving the principled vision described by Howard Zahniser and

those that shaped our original wilderness movement? There's a reason that Zahniser favored a phrase like "Guardians not Gardeners"; although his writing predated certain complex dialogues about climate change, the foundations of wilderness ethics contain guidance for why we should exercise restraint and how to rescue wilderness—the ideal and the real, untrammelled landscape—in the modern era. Perhaps climate change presents the perfect test of our humility and an opportunity to reinvigorate the original reasoning for leaving the wild alone. Perhaps, as our developing knowledge leads us to lament the reach of human damage, we may reeducate ourselves about the cultural, scientific, ecological, and ethical reasons for leaving wilderness areas unmanipulated any further. "In wilderness," Zahniser noted, "we should observe change and try not to create it!"

The key definitional phrase in the Wilderness Act calls for areas in the NWPS to be those "where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man." That word choice is monumental and has caused much consternation among those who have tied some thread of their lives to this venerable resource. The problem arises when the Act "further defines" wilderness, using the phrase "primeval character" and calling for management "to preserve its natural conditions." In recent years, certain voices in Wilderness conservation have erected a perceived "paradox" or conflict in the Act's mandate to preserve wilderness character, contending that "natural conditions" and "untrammelled" are management goals that can be at odds with one another. Some have expressed a belief that natural conditions should be defined by certain desired ecological baselines (some "primeval" analogue, or often even recent data points). When these have changed as a result of human influence, pursuit of their reconstruction then threatens our call to safeguard "untrammelled" wilderness character.

Consider the following real-life example: as an unintended consequence of decades of fire suppression, there is some evidence that certain now-dense forests have lost their historical resilience to high-intensity wildfires. Should we step in and intensively restore these woods to a thinner density, through prescribed burning or silvicultural treatment? People with a perspective favoring action often see "trammeling" in such cases as an acceptable means of recreating a certain vision of "natural." Consequently, numerous such proposals have come forward, among the most recent including the 19,000-acre Trinity Alps Wilderness Prescribed Fire project that was submitted for public comment in late July 2019.

A recent study evaluated the fire mitigation situation described above, noting that "restoration of altered fire regimes is a frequently cited justification for intervention in protected areas, including wilderness." The authors assessed a number of assumptions that must be made by managers inclined toward intervention, ranging from how variable historic fire regimes truly were, to the factors at play in the present forest conditions, to the likely response of the ecosystem to treatment. For each of these, the researchers found that "the scientific evidence at hand is not consistent with the assumptions

that might be used to justify wilderness intervention.” Additionally, note that USFS directives create a framework for evaluating manipulations. Among the criteria are that “there is a reasonable assurance that the project will accomplish the desired objectives” and that a “pilot study should take place in a comparable area outside of wilderness if possible.”

Faced with these criteria and a lack of definitive science on a project’s effects, how could one possibly justify human intervention in such a case, compromising the untrammelled nature of the wilderness? As the authors of the above study concluded, “intervention proposals often lack the detail required to evaluate either the magnitude of the ecological threat or the likelihood that intervention will be successful.” Nonetheless, all four of the agencies that manage lands in the NWPS have shown an openness toward ecological manipulations. Researchers at the Aldo Leopold Institute recently conducted a survey of wilderness interventions among BLM, USFS, NPS, and FWS managers, coming to the following conclusion: “landscape-scale actions in wilderness are happening across all agencies, for diverse reasons, across all geographic regions within the United States, and in both large and small wildernesses. Given changing climate patterns and documented ecological changes, more proposals to intervene are likely inevitable.”

Indeed, a Forest Service briefing paper recently noted that “climate change will force a reassessment of wilderness stewardship goals and objectives.” While acknowledging the need to take special care to better define desired intervention outcomes and scientific reasons for limiting the practice, the document also stated that responding to climate change “will require compromise between such competing values as biodiversity conservation and the desire to leave nature alone” and that “the boundaries between wilderness and surrounding lands must be made more porous if ecosystems are to respond appropriately to climate change.” On the ground, the temptation towards active mitigation, a phenomenon researchers have coined “action bias,” often wins over. In a 2011 USDA report on adaptation to climate change in national forests, to “reconsider definitions of wilderness” is floated as a strategic option.

Such reconsideration would of course be troubling to those who cherish wilderness. Leaders at Wilderness Watch in particular have argued that protecting “wildness” has always meant unifying the concepts of “natural” and “untrammelled,” each meant to support the preservation of areas that develop and change as nature sees fit in the absence of direct human influence and human intent. This would best further our hard-fought wilderness vision and Zahniser’s deliberate

advocacy for wilderness that “should be managed to be left unmanaged.” Opposing thinkers have argued that climate change renders moot the avoidance of human influence and that human intent to mitigate that influence justifies interventionist action. Perhaps, however, climate change instead presents a rich opportunity to revitalize the early wilderness movement’s principled, harmonious approach to noninterventionist Wilderness ethics.

Why did Zahniser, Marshall, and other early proponents invoke high-minded principles of human humility and the force of wilderness on our character and spirit? Through today’s lens of transactional conservation policy, it might seem

Faced with the unpredictability of climate change, we need places that stand on their own, where we do our utmost to let nature proceed as unhindered, as untrammelled, and in which we visit as unassumingly as we can.

like these advocates simply didn’t have robust technical tools such as ecosystem services calculations or tourism market studies to wield in the fight to protect their favorite remote habitat like the Selway or Alaska’s North Slope. But that view would cast careful ethical arguments as a cynical device for achieving designation; perhaps, rather, the “philosophy of land” that grew out of the wilderness movement was indeed

as Aldo Leopold described it, “the end result of a life journey.”

Today’s environmentalists often cast their climate activism less as a land ethic derived from life experience and more as a hubristic appeal to “save humanity.” Such apocalyptic rhetoric about the fate of the earth may be tenuously borne out by certain datasets, but it is also famous for leaving concerned citizens and scientists in a state of despondence and fatigue. Even when the goals appear to be similar, as in wilderness preservation, consider the consequences of the different scales at which each era has viewed the concept. Advocates in the early Wilderness movement sought mainly to protect *certain special areas* from the encroachment of mechanized, commercial and industrial development. We’ve been making way for those things *everywhere else*, they argued, but *not here*, not in the last of our wilderness. By contrast, the framing of the climate change generation seeks to protect *the planet* from the ill consequences of that same development. In the name of protecting *everywhere*, they seem to argue, we’re open to technical interventions that maintain certain ecologies *anywhere*, even at the expense of untrammelled wilderness.

Of course, that framing is not monolithic among the populace concerned about climate change. Proposals about the efficacy of geoengineering the climate, for example, have sparked lively debate about the precautionary principle and the likelihood of unintended consequences of our actions. And if a precautionary default should govern decision-making anywhere, it ought to be in wilderness. Nonetheless, there remains an action-minded strain of climate change advocacy pursuing

Wilderness Ethics as an Andidote continued on page 8

Wilderness Ethics as an Antidote to Climate Change Hubris (continued from page 7)

species preservation, carbon sequestration and other goals that butt heads with the ideals of the NWPS. Unfortunately, these advocates may be under-exposed to wilderness principles, misunderstand the concept, or otherwise be concerned with different environmental challenges best suited for other lands.

For example, one recent survey probed the resonance of various wilderness values with survey respondents of different generations. The researchers analyzed the language favored by respondents—through statements regarding subjects like clean water, recreation, endangered species, science, or simply knowing wilderness is there—and they derived certain categories of values placed in wilderness. The researchers dubbed several traditional values “use amenities,” “non-use amenities,” and “ecological services.” They noted that these three values “may not resonate as much with the youngest cohorts.” Older generations, of course, are neither known to venerate the “services” and “amenities” of wilderness in so many words, but the academic distinction derives from their greater appreciation for the label as something more than another type of technical habitat management. Younger respondents, by contrast, have mostly retained a value for what the researchers termed “ecological protection”—characterized by a more granular interest in natural conditions for certain species—in a manner hypothesized to stem from their “technological embeddedness.”

What role, then, should the humble wilderness ethic play in contemporary times? Arguably, as it did during the mid-twentieth century, it could again provide a much-needed font from which to draw a “philosophy of land” that can inform and inspire environmentalists. A forward-looking, positive approach that esteems the inherent intelligence of nature would provide a potent antidote to the dual ills of modern climate change advocacy: technocracy and dejection. The power of an appeal to wilderness conservation as an act of humility for nature’s sake can avoid the pitfalls of nitpicking, technical critiques of our climate response measures—in wilderness, our desired conditions matter less than those that nature chooses on its own. And the same reverence for nature provides a richness of meaning and a recognition of our humble place on the earth that can outdo the gloomiest of human prognoses—we can rest easy knowing the wilderness we cherish will last if we let it.

When advocating for coherent and principled construction of the Wilderness Act, we can recall two particular frames through which its proponents and writers viewed the definition of wilderness, even before the climate change debate. First, early advocates recognized that an inability to totally remove human effect from the landscape should not preclude setting an area aside as wilderness. For example, prior to 1964,

we were aware of issues such as fire suppression, grazing, and logging that had re-shaped many proposed wilderness lands. Fire suppression tactics had changed the structure and density of forests in a number of our original Wilderness areas. Historical grazing practices received certain accommodations by advocates for the Wilderness Act—they hoped to phase out the practice, but the presence of the ecological effects of grazing was not considered a barrier to designation. And early wilderness advocates recognized that some areas in the East, even though logged extensively in the past, had re-gained a wildness that, through “untrammelled” non-management going forward, could be protected through inclusion in the NWPS. Importantly, boosters of the Wilderness Act did not



Trinity Alps Wilderness, CA by Tom Hilton via Flickr

argue that we first had to actively restore such areas before they could be considered wilderness. It was the act of leaving them untrammelled, prospectively, that would allow them to adapt and recover through natural, unguided processes. Representative Saylor, testifying on the bill before the house, noted that in wilderness, “the time required for restoration is considerable; the process cannot be forced.”

Second, a key characteristic of wilderness areas is their contrast with other lands. Representative Saylor again stressed that “most of the value of wilderness tracts depends on the existence of sharp contrast between wilderness tracts and the rest of the country. Within this framework, therefore, the aim of minimum interference is not only appropriate but essential.” In fact, “scientific, educational . . . or historical values” are ancillary characteristics of wilderness areas that the Act explicitly seeks to protect. Scientists who hope to better understand climate change and how various ecosystems adapt are particularly interested in retaining unmolested natural areas from which to draw comparisons and collect baseline data. “When we exploit paleoenvironmental archives derived from these study sites,” one researcher writes, “we define the background variability of the processes that shape ecosystems. Understanding the nature of this variability, both in terms of its causes and its consequences, is increasingly recognized as a key to sound ecosystem management.” Testifying prior to the passage of the Wilderness Act, Representative Mike Mansfield put it similarly: “a further value of wilderness . . . is the importance of having undisturbed plant and animal communities available for scientific studies. It is felt that only with such controls can the effects of man’s many modifications be properly judged, and unwise practices avoided.”

Modern critics might quibble with the naivete of early takes like Mansfield’s on what constitutes “undisturbed” nature or the reference to “primeval” landscapes. Today’s

science and anthropology have better informed us about how ubiquitously we've managed to affect our earth. What early twentieth-century writers viewed as "primeval," for example, was more a vestige of the hollowing out of once-thriving and populous indigenous civilizations across much of the continent. Recent science has also informed us that land use change likely affected our atmosphere over a much longer period than just since the industrial revolution—the early development of agriculture itself may have contributed to the climate stabilization we so enjoyed until contemporary times. Similarly, evolution in our knowledge about disturbances in dynamic ecosystems has deflated old myths about "climax communities" and "steady states."

But retrospectively ignorant-looking notions should not be used to undercut the forward-looking stances taken by early wilderness writers; this would be to woefully misunderstand their position. Zahniser, for one, well-recognized that setting aside wilderness was itself a novel human project. He wrote: "The idea of wilderness as an area without man's influence is man's own concept. Its values are human values. Its preservation is a purpose that arises out of man's own sense of his fundamental needs." Chief among those needs is the need to reserve and learn from vast resources we did not mold.

During an early wilderness conference, Zahniser admonished the perspective of one scientist who framed wilderness as a scientific resource that presented an opportunity for "the intelligent use of our technical skills." Much like many managers do today, that scientist argued that the existence of man-made impacts justified a position that "we should do more" to intelligently correct them. Zahniser countered that such practices would be antithetical to wilderness and would "make of these areas gardens rather than preserves. Technology to create (or re-create) the wilderness to suit our fancy," he wrote, would be one sure way to lose our wilderness.

Today, so much of our research into historical natural variability has led to broad observations that anthropogenic climate change has pushed many systems well out of the bounds of "normal." This provides what some have called a "no-analogue" situation, whereby there is no historical precedent for the natural state of an ecosystem absent any human effect. In fact, there's a growing movement to dub the era since the Industrial Revolution the "Anthropocene" in the annals of academic geologists. And again, in response to our evolving knowledge, some who would compromise wilderness offer a shrug of futility: if we've tainted everything beyond pure "naturalness," why not actively cultivate environmental conditions to mitigate future change? But a stronger response would be to point out that natural conditions, if defined by the wild processes of nature and the absence of our human intent, have not changed. In fact, our reverence for untrammeled nature and our need to escape the "mechanisms that make us immediate masters over our environment" have been consistent forces through many eras of change.

In 1957, Howard Zahniser gave a speech to the New York

State Conservation Council on "where wilderness preservation began." Representative O'Brien of New York entered his remarks into the congressional record the following year in support of an early draft of the Wilderness Act. In the speech, Zahniser discussed a lineage of wilderness values dating to writers in the nineteenth century. Zahniser was interested in why Mr. William H.H. "Adirondack" Murray, back in 1869, had complained about "how harshly the steel-shod hoofs smite against the flinty pavement" in the clamor of big-city Boston. Zahniser experienced wilderness as a reprieve from development in the age of airplanes and automobiles, so he imagined nineteenth-century Boston would seem a "quaint and serene" place to retreat. The value of wilderness as an escape from human noise, he noted, is certainly relative but has long been a cultural and spiritual need.

So today we've seen another relative shift in the trappings of civilization from which wilderness advocates seek to create enclaves of protection. Aldo Leopold once called for wilderness areas large enough for a "two-week pack trip" over which the mules wouldn't cross their own tracks. Such travel, of course, is decreasingly the norm among backcountry enthusiasts, who more commonly explore their treasured landscapes by packraft, mountain bike, and belay device. Climate change, our great environmental challenge, is battled with windmills and electric cars and international treaties. But nonetheless, the need for a refuge of wilderness persists, and the need for a strong wilderness ethic could not be greater. Faced with the unpredictability of climate change, we need places that stand on their own, where we do our utmost to let nature proceed as unhindered, as untrammelled, and in which we visit as unassumingly as we can.

Somewhere in the wilderness today wanders the modern Bob Marshall. When she's motivated out of the woods, ready to combat contemporary environmental threats, it may be by decrying federal inaction on the push for renewable energy. She might pen op-eds about the fate of the earth, or read about cutting-edge proposals from tech billionaires who want to geengineer us out of climate catastrophe. She'll roll her eyes. Marshall's objection notwithstanding, she might plug into an electric vehicle charger at the trailhead. In 1964, atmospheric carbon dioxide was around 320 parts per million. Today, it's well over 400. And through the great environmental challenge of her era, all the global development, the hubris, and the complexity, she'll turn to our wilderness heritage as an ethical guide. Through this, where nature in all its entropy inspires and educates, she'll lead our fellow citizens, our public servants, and our courts to use these guiding principles, in the same way we once mobilized to put them into law, as a means of achieving the environmental humility we so crave in the face of climate change. ♪

Andrew Hursh was a Wilderness Watch legal intern this past summer. He studies at Vermont Law School, focusing on environmental law, public lands, and international climate change agreements. For a longer version of this piece complete with citations to further reading, please visit wildernesswatch.org.

On the Watch

Ambler Road Threatens Gates of the Arctic Wilderness



National Park Service

Wilderness Watch is voicing concern over a destructive and unnecessary road proposed across a wide swath of the southern Brooks Range in Alaska. The 211-mile road to the so-called Ambler Mining District would facilitate huge mining operations that would benefit a private Canadian company at the expense of Wilderness and wildlife.

The Alaska Industrial Development and Export Authority's preferred route would pass through Gates of the Arctic National Preserve, adjacent to the Gates of the Arctic Wilderness and National Park. Gates of the Arctic is one of our wildest parks—with no roads, no trails, and no established campsites. The area is home to grizzly bears, wolves, Dall sheep, moose, wolverines, and three caribou herds. Road noise, dust, and

vehicle headlights at night would degrade the area's wild character, and this new road would lead to motorized intrusions in the Wilderness. 🐾

WW Objects to Wilderness Helicopter Invasion in Arizona



AZ Game and Fish Department via Desert LCC/Flickr. License: bit.ly/1ryPA8o

Wilderness Watch, Grand Canyon Chapter Sierra Club, Friends of the Sonoran Desert, and Cyndi Tuell Consulting submitted a formal Objection to an Arizona Game and Fish Department proposal for up to 150 helicopter landings in the Four Peaks, Hellsgate, Mazatzal, Salt River Canyon, and Superstition Wildernesses to capture and collar bighorn sheep.

Wildlife should be allowed to roam free and unfettered in Wilderness, not captured, collared, and electronically monitored 24-7. Wildlife research and monitoring should be conducted in a wilderness appropriate way, such as through on-the-ground observation and study. Bighorns are not endangered, nor is there anything about bighorn populations in these Wildernesses that suggests extraordinary measures are justified.

The Wilderness Act bans the use of motorized equipment, except in those rare instances where such use is essential to wilderness protection or search and rescue operations. This project clearly fails to meet either exception. 🐾

Massive Strip Mine Threatens one of our Largest Eastern Wildernesses



US Fish and Wildlife Service

Wilderness Watch is opposing a massive titanium and zirconium strip mine proposed by Twin Pines Minerals of Alabama for 12,000 acres on the eastern edge of the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge in southern Georgia.

The 354,000-acre Okefenokee Wilderness makes up almost 90 percent of the Refuge, is one of the largest Wilderness areas in the East, and is part of one of the world's largest intact blackwater swamp ecosystems.

The proposed mine could degrade thousands of acres of wetlands, which would forever change the unique ecosystem of the Swamp. Wilderness values like solitude, silence, and remoteness could be impacted by the close proximity of industrial mining activity and associated development. 🐾

On the Watch (continued)

Towboats Create Wilderness Sacrifice Zones in the Boundary Waters



David Grant via Flickr

Wilderness Watch continues to urge the Forest Service (FS) to change course and protect the wild character of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW) by reigning in ongoing excessive commercial towboat use. Wilderness Watch recently submitted comments on the FS's Draft Recreational Commercial Services Needs Assessment, which is being conducted as part of a lawsuit settlement with Wilderness Watch over significant violations of the area's towboat limit.

In 2015, Wilderness Watch filed a lawsuit in federal district court to force the FS to comply with its own plans and regulations for limiting commercial towboat use. Not only had the FS been allowing too much towboat use, but it basically ignored the problem by failing to monitor or control the number of towboat trips during each season, instead relying on reports from the outfitters after each season ended.

Towboat use makes many lakes (or chains of lakes) wilderness sacrifice zones with motorboats constantly buzzing back and forth. The commercial needs assessment fails to address whether commercial services, and towboat services in particular, are necessary in the BWCAW, and if they are, the extent to which they are necessary. We urged the FS to undertake a NEPA analysis, with an opportunity for public review and comment, and to analyze the direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts of commercial use in the Wilderness and fully consider a range of alternatives to that use. 🌿

Game Farming Plan Dropped for Wasatch Wildernesses



James Marvin Phelps via Flickr

In October 2019, after years of resistance from Wilderness Watch and our allies, the Forest Service announced that the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (UDWR) had dropped its proposal to use helicopters to net-gun capture and collar mountain goats and bighorn sheep in the Mt. Timpanogos, Lone Peak, and Twin Peak Wildernesses in the Wasatch Mountains.

In 2017, Utah requested permission from the Forest Service to capture mountain goats in

the three Wildernesses, but because the goats aren't a native species (UDWR introduced them for hunting some years ago), it was virtually impossible to show the project was necessary to benefit the Wildernesses. So, UDWR piggybacked bighorn sheep onto the project to make it appear it might help a native species. Wilderness Watch submitted a formal Objection to this ill-advised plan in January 2018.

The proposal was a slap in the face to Wilderness in its attempt to game farm a non-native species in Wilderness, to place electronic surveillance collars on wildlife to effectuate this purpose, and by its reliance on repeated helicopter landings (up to 60) in the Wildernesses. 🌿

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Wilderness Stands Out

By Jeff Smith



You don't need me to tell you that we live in a storm of media and messaging these days. We spend our time trying to shield ourselves from the incoming spam on our phones, on our computers, every 10 minutes on the TV and radio, along the highways, behind the batter at home plate (!), and literally swirling around the stadium in a dissonant, electronic crawl.

That's what makes it so much more extraordinary that Wilderness Watch has increased its membership by over 40 percent in the last two years. Somehow in the message scum that is our current reality, wilderness lovers have picked out our message and committed to our mission by making their first donations.

As I start my 14th year as membership/development director, I'm convinced there is nothing magic about how our message breaks through. Americans care about wilderness. Our ears perk up. Our skin tingles. We jump back into our memory banks of those times when we roamed in the wild. Vivid pictures jump into our minds of the lake at 8,000 feet, of the canoe pulling into the remote camping site, of the Rocky Mountain sheep above the meadow.

We want it protected! We want our children and grandchildren to experience this same freedom. Too many of our public lands have been spoiled by development, by the incessant noise of machines, and, yes, by all the commercial hype.

We are humbled by your trust, and we will work single-mindedly to halt the degradation of our wildest, most pristine lands.

Thank you. 