50 Years of the Wilderness Act

INSIDE: The Gila’s Heart, p.16-17

PLUS: Exclusive Interview with Sen. Martin Heinrich, p.12
Welcome to the latest edition of the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance newsletter. This year marks the 50th anniversary of the landmark Wilderness Act, the gold standard of federal public land protection, which codified an entirely new way of valuing special wild places for their intrinsic worth. This issue of New Mexico Wild looks back so that we can look forward. It is vitally important that we remember the shoulders we stand upon and recognize the responsibility we have for further realizing that original vision. It is now our turn to make our own contributions to protect the increasingly rare wild that still remains. We are proud to offer you in these pages contributions from some truly amazing authors, including the legendary Dave Foreman, Kenneth Brower and Phillip Connors, as well as an extended interview with New Mexico Senator Martin Heinrich. Some of these pieces are perhaps longer and denser than what we typically publish, but you’ll see why we did when you read them. As always, there are also beautiful pictures, fun facts, maps and campaign updates.

If you are already one of our thousands of members, thank you for your support and for standing up for wilderness. If you aren’t yet a member but are interested in joining a passionate, scrappy and effective group dedicated to protecting New Mexico’s wilderness, please give us a call or visit our website. I can’t think of anything that compares with the feeling of being part of a successful effort to permanently protect these special places so that future generations unknown to us will still have the opportunity to experience the humility, the wonder and awe that comes from wilderness.

As we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Wilderness Act and rededicate ourselves to the values it articulates, a small but persistent voice of opposition can be heard from time to time on the wind. Of course, there have always been those representing selfish commercial interests who don’t believe any land should be off limits to for-profit exploitation. And the philosophical objection of those opposed to public lands in general is not new. Nor is the demagoguery of those who stoke those sentiments for their own narrow political reasons.

More insidious, perhaps, is an increasingly fashionable strain of thinking in certain circles that the Wilderness Act was a well-intentioned but romantic distortion or, in the most recent manifestation of this argument, that it is antiquated, no longer necessary and even harmful to the very places meant to be protected. We hear that it is quaint and that since no place is actually pristine from human behavior, the value of self-willed places is a dangerous conceit. For example, in a recent opinion piece in the New York Times (“The Wilderness Act is Facing a Midlife Crisis,” July 5, 2014) the author offers us the following instruction: “We need to rethink the Wilderness Act. We need to toss out the ‘hands-off’ philosophy that has guided our stewardship for 50 years. We must replace it with a more nuanced, flexible approach—including a willingness to put our hands on America’s wildest places more, not less, if we’re going to help them to adapt and thrive in the diminished future we’ve thrust upon them.”

Maybe that sounds reasonable to some. I respectfully disagree. I think arguments like this fundamentally misunderstand what wilderness is or what makes it qualitatively different. They evidence a failure to internalize why wilderness matters, why it still matters—as much now as ever before. Practically, politically, these arguments sound naive and dangerous to me. They are a slippery slope that will inevitably aid and abet those who are hostile to the idea of wilderness and who would despoil our precious few remaining protected wild places. Would there be any place left free from the belching of bulldozers and the din of chainsaws?

There will be a great and spirited “treatment” of this at the national Wilderness 50 conference in Albuquerque in October, I’m sure. Instead of countering these arguments at length in this space we reprint the essay on the following page as an eloquent statement of our position.
A Letter to My Friends in Wilderness

By George Duffy

As my life comes to a close, I feel compelled to express my gratitude to those of you who have journeyed together with me in wilderness and contributed to my understanding of wilderness and subsequently of myself.

The Wilderness Act of 1964 marked a turning point in America’s attitude toward wild places. It was an acknowledgment that their loss was accelerating and would soon lead to a society impoverished by the absence of the fundamental relationship between humans and the lands that defined them. The language of the Act...reads more like poetry than law and evokes an emotional response that invites introspection and the vision of a future expressive of our concern for restraint and accommodation of other life forms.

The Wilderness Act will challenge and enrich scholars, legal experts, wilderness managers, and wilderness advocates for as long as there is wilderness. We can only hope that the spirit that created this awareness of our place in the natural order prevails in our thinking. Today our collective commitment to America’s wilderness is being challenged by all manner of argument.

Within the [Forest Service] agency, there are those who are impatient with the idea of the minimum tool and craft arguments to justify the use of chain saws, trail machines, jackhammers, helicopters, and other expedients for the sake of convenience or economy. There are those who feel that the existing framework, and accordingly suggest that accommodation for human use, rather than preserving an untrammeled wilderness resource, be the paramount consideration when shaping wilderness policy.

Outside the agencies, there are those who, in their eagerness to see more public lands gain the protection of wilderness, have agreed to... provisions that compromise the wilderness quality of the very lands they wish to preserve. There are those who think of wilderness as beautiful landscapes or wildlife sanctuaries or recreation areas rather than as places that integrate the enduring physical, biological, and spiritual dynamics of an untrammeled part of the earth.

The authors of the Wilderness Act held no such views. They were keenly aware that there were but few remnants of the landscapes that had shaped the American character, and they wanted to ensure that these were preserved in the condition of wilderness that confronted and influenced our early pioneers.

They knew that wilderness had to remain a point of reference in both our natural and cultural histories, an enduring benchmark for our journey through time and space, unchanged by human intervention and subject only to natural forces.

They knew that wilderness was an indispensable part of our humanness and was critical to our understanding of our place in the universe.

Today, the American public can be grateful that you have been vigilant...

I am extremely grateful to you for having chosen to be stewards of these lands. You have assumed a sacred trust, to be executed with reverence, humility, and a profound sense of responsibility. You are engaged in no less than preserving the nation’s precious remaining repositories of wilderness and guarding the permanent home of our human spirit.

As you enter another year of wilderness stewardship, please be as caring of yourselves as you are for wilderness. Take the time to open yourselves fully to the dynamics of wild landscapes and their effects on your mind, body, and spirit. Share your passions with your colleagues and the earth. Become fully alive.

These days you share with wilderness are gifts you will treasure forever.

My fondest memories are of those times when I felt nature’s influences most keenly:
A Letter to My Friends in Wilderness  
continued from page 3

Lying in a sunny meadow and sensing that all the spirits there were filling my being with strengths unknown and unknowable;
Feeling a timeless wisdom trying to order my thoughts to wholeness.
For most of us, our connection with wilderness is commonly understood to be primarily rooted in the cultural and aesthetic responses that evolved from the experiences of early explorers and settlers in the new landscapes of America.
We have recently discovered, however, that the underlying basis for our responses to wilderness goes deeper—much deeper.
The mapping of the human genome confirmed that, genetically, we are still wild, Pleistocene creatures.
Finally, an answer as to why we feel so at home in wilderness.
[Paul Shepard said that] “The time is coming to understand the wilderness in its significance, not as adjunct to the affluent traveler, to an educated, esthetic, appreciative class, or to thinking of nature as a Noah’s ark in all of its forms, but as the social and ecological mold of humanity itself, which is fundamental to our species.”
I have but one request of you.

Go. Find yourself in the wilderness. Be at home.
Let your genes once again find expression in the world that defined them.
When we first walk into wilderness, we feel like alien creatures, intruding into the unknown, but if we stay a while…and pay attention to ourselves, those gifts become apparent.
The awkwardness we first felt when moving over broken ground has been replaced by a fluid economical rhythm of movement that seems almost effortless.
These are not new skills learned; they are ancient abilities recalled—pulled from the shelves of that genetic library deep within our being.
As we peer into campfire flames, the comfort of thousands of fires, in thousands of caves, over thousands of years, warms us from the inside as well from the outside.
The diminuendo of the canyon wren and the raucous scolding of the Steller’s jay invite our hearts to sing.
The warmth of the sun and the snap of the cold affirm that we are alive, and vulnerable.
The mountains, the deserts, the storms, and the rivers challenge our cunning and demand our respect.
The vastness of the landscape humbles and fixes us in scale.
As we lie on the earth in the evening, the march of Orion across the heavens fixes us in time.
We are still those Pleistocene creatures—at home and full of the wonder of being.
This is the wilderness in our genes, found manifest in a simple, bipedal hominid, surrounded by a peace that transcends time, and in a place we shall always need—wilderness.
Thank you.
George Duffy, Wilderness Ranger

George Duffy passed away one month after this excerpted essay was originally published in our spring 2010 newsletter. George was a member, volunteer, mentor and a dear friend to NM Wild. He was a retired Forest Service wilderness ranger and an avid climber and backpacker. We will always remember George as a man of great personal strength, integrity and passion for the wild lands and wildlife we all care so much about.
The article can be read in its entirety at http://www.nmwild.org/nmwa/wp-content/uploads/newsletters/nmwa_2010_spring.pdf
In 2014, we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the passage of the Wilderness Act. Here are some important milestones in wilderness history nationally and in New Mexico.

1872: Congress creates Yellowstone National Park, stating that the land is to be “set apart as a public park or pleasing ground for the benefit of the people.”

1891: Forest Reserve Act passed, allowing the president of the United States to set aside forest reserves from the land in the public domain.

1903: President Theodore Roosevelt creates the first national wildlife refuge at Florida’s Pelican Island, in addition to setting aside vast tracts of federal forest.

NM 1906: The Antiquities Act, drafted by New Mexican Edgar Lee Hewett, is signed into law by President Theodore Roosevelt. This act gives the president of the United States the authority to, by executive order, set aside certain valuable public natural areas as park and conservation lands.

1908: President Roosevelt uses Antiquities Act to declare the Grand Canyon a national monument.

1913: Public and congressional support of wilderness fails to stop plans to build a dam at Yosemite’s Hetch Hetchy Valley.

NM 1913: Ecologist Aldo Leopold spearheads the designation of the Gila Wilderness in New Mexico.

1913: Bob Marshall leads the campaign for a national system of wilderness areas. More than 14 million acres of “primitive areas” are established within national forests.

1930: Bob Marshall leads the campaign for a national system of wilderness areas. More than 14 million acres of “primitive areas” are established within national forests.

1956: Conservationist Howard Zahniser drafts the Wilderness Act, and a bipartisan wilderness bill is introduced.

1964: Lyndon B. Johnson signs the Wilderness Act into law. (New Mexico’s longtime Senator Clinton P. Anderson, sponsor and floor manager of the Wilderness Act, stood behind President Johnson in the Rose Garden as he signed it.)

NM 1964: With the passage of the Wilderness Act, the Gila, Pecos, San Pedro Parks, Wheeler Peak and White Mountain wilderness areas in New Mexico are added to the National Wilderness Preservation System.

1968: The first U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service wilderness area is designated: Great Swamp Wilderness in New Jersey.

NM 1968: The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act is signed into law by President Johnson. The Rio Grande Wild and Scenic River, including 74 miles of river that passes through the 800-foot deep Rio Grande Gorge, is added to the National Wild and Scenic River System. It is among the first eight rivers Congress designates as wild and scenic. The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act is signed into law by President Johnson.


1970: The first wilderness areas within National Park Service sites are designated: Craters of the Moon National Monument in Idaho and Petrified Forest National Park in Arizona.


1983: The Bear Trap Canyon unit of the Lee Metcalf Wilderness in Montana becomes the first wilderness on Bureau of Land Management lands.


1997: New Mexico Wilderness Alliance is formed.

2005: The 10,000-acre El Toro Wilderness in Puerto Rico becomes the first wilderness area in a U.S. territory.

2009: The Omnibus Public Land Management Act designates 2 million acres of wilderness in nine states.

2014: As of the 50th anniversary of the Wilderness Act, there are 110 million acres of protected wilderness in the U.S.


2015: A new golden age of wilderness protection?

(Timeline adapted from a handout created by The Wilderness Society)
New Mexico’s Most Endangered

Staff Report

CHACO: The Chaco Culture National Historical Park area is under threat of oil and gas drilling in the Mancos Shale formation. The Farmington office of the U.S. Bureau of Land Management is considering where to allow drilling as part of an amendment to its Resource Management Plan. We are advocating a master leasing plan to safeguard areas immediately adjacent to and within the view of the park boundaries.

SANTA FE: Bad state legislature bills: For the past few years New Mexico and other Western states have seen bills repeatedly introduced in state legislatures calling for the immediate transfer of all federal public land to state control. Conservation and other public interest groups defeated these bills in New Mexico in 2013 and 2014, but other attempts are expected in 2015. NM Wild will actively fight these attempts.

SANGRE DE CRISTO MOUNTAINS: Roadless lands adjacent to the Pecos Wilderness are threatened by off-road vehicles (ORVs) and new roads, which fragment wildlife habitat and exacerbate erosion into streams and rivers, compromising clean water and the overall health of the watershed. Roads and ORVs by definition degrade the wilderness characteristics of these lands that deserve additional protections.

BLM/WSMR TRANSFER: Two wilderness study areas and a portion of the Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge would be transferred to the military at White Sands Missile Range under a spending bill provision sponsored by U.S. Rep Mike Simpson, R-Utah, and supported by Rep. Steve Pearce, R-N.M. The provision threatens public access to approximately 300,000 acres and has had zero public input.

WOLVES: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is proposing changes to the Mexican Wolf Recovery Rule that would expand the recovery area to include all of Arizona and New Mexico south of Interstate 40. However, the proposal would also greatly expand the circumstances in which wolves could be removed lethally from the wild. Meanwhile, the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance (NM Wild) is continuing its lawsuit against the Department of Justice for not prosecuting the illegal killings of wolves.

GILA: The Southwest’s last free flowing river is under threat. At the end of 2014, the state of New Mexico must notify the Secretary of the Interior if it will move forward with an unnecessary, ill conceived, cost prohibitive and technically infeasible diversion project. The diversion would severely damage the Gila’s fragile ecology replacing wilderness with an industrialized zone of diversions, canals, access roads, reservoirs and fences.

OTERO MESA: Recent flare tests on two wells appear to have met threshold requirements to demonstrate that they are capable of producing developable quantities of gas, which could lead to renewed industry interest and the threat of new oil and gas drilling in the largest and wildest remaining Chihuahuan grassland.
A wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain.—Section 2(c) of the 1964 Wilderness Act.

This year is the 50th anniversary of the passage of the 1964 Wilderness Act, the strongest and most comprehensive measure to keep lands and waters from being “developed”—where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain.—Section 2(c) of the 1964 Wilderness Act.

By Dave Foreman

WILDERNESS EVANGELIST

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How **New Mexico** Compares to Other Western States

Alaska, California, Arizona, Idaho and Washington have the most protected wilderness in the United States, while New Mexico trails behind—we are the last of the 11 Western states for wilderness acreage protected, coming in at just 2% of our state’s total acreage.

From WILDERNESS.NET

### Wilderness Stats

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<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Acres</th>
<th>Wilderness as a Percent of Total Acres</th>
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<tr>
<td>Alaska</td>
<td>57,425,992</td>
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<td>Oregon</td>
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<tr>
<td>New Mexico</td>
<td>1,653,461</td>
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### Wilderness Name

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<tr>
<th>Wilderness Name</th>
<th>AGENCY</th>
<th>Total Acreage</th>
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<td>Bosque del Apache Wilderness</td>
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**Summary**

Wilderness Areas: 25
Total Acreage Sum: 1,653,461 Acres
50th Anniversary National Wilderness Conference

THE WILDERNESS ACT OF 1964 WAS LANDMARK LEGISLATION to protect the last remaining tracts of undeveloped land in the United States and to establish the National Wilderness Preservation System. Wilderness areas are public lands endowed with the highest protection available by law. They embody the wildest, most remote parts of our country where visitors can enjoy true solitude and challenging primitive recreation. They also protect watersheds that supply drinking water for America’s largest cities, secure important wildlife habitat for both endangered and game species, and are emerging as critically important refuges in a changing climate. Although the current wilderness system is comprised of 757 individual wilderness areas in 44 states and Puerto Rico encompassing 110 million acres, these special areas collectively represent only 2.7 percent of the contiguous United States. In 2014, we will celebrate the 50th anniversary of this law and the 110 million acres of wilderness it protects.

A diverse, continually-expanding coalition known as the 50th Anniversary National Wilderness Planning Team (Wilderness50) has formed to plan and conduct educational projects, events and activities commemorating the 50th anniversary. The New Mexico Wilderness Alliance (NM Wild) spearheads this coalition in New Mexico, working with 25-plus environmental non-profit organizations, academic institutions and federal government agencies. The Society for Wilderness Stewardship serves in the unique role of fiscal sponsor for Wilderness50.

The 50th Anniversary National Wilderness Conference represents the culmination of a year-long series of events and activities that highlight America’s wilderness heritage and focus on future stewardship of and advocacy for the National Wilderness Preservation System. By continuing the momentum started during the advocacy-oriented Washington, D.C., Wilderness Week in mid-September 2014, the National Wilderness Conference in October honors a half-century of wilderness preservation and marks the shaping of the future of wilderness preservation and stewardship. NM Wild is honored to co-sponsor the conference as the local wilderness organization in the Land of Enchantment.

We hope you will join us in celebrating the diversity in traditional and modern wilderness preservation and stewardship.

The National Wilderness Conference will be held in Albuquerque on October 15-19, 2014, at the Hyatt Regency Albuquerque. (Conference attendees only. Register on-site October 14-18 between 8 a.m. and 6 p.m. at the Hyatt.)

Wilderness Conference Opening Ceremony and Reception:
October 16, 6 p.m. at the Hyatt Regency Albuquerque

Wilderness Past to Wilderness Future, an opening ceremony and reception, sponsored by the Society for Wilderness Stewardship, with special performances by the Buffalo Dancers, an Aldo Leopold impersonator and musician Bart Koehler, record collector and former President Jimmy Carter, and keynote speakers Mark Allison, NM Wild executive director, and Sen. Martin Heinrich of New Mexico.

Wrenched: The Movie ($20 fundraiser for NM Wild, open to the public), October 17 from 6:30-10 p.m. at the KiMo Theater in Albuquerque (www.kimotickets.com)

Join NM Wild for the New Mexico premier of “Wrenched,” a story of Ed Abbey. Reception and discussion follows with Dave Foreman, Terry Tempest Williams, ML Lincoln, Jack Loeffler and Kim Crumbo. Food and beverages will be served.

Get Wild Festival (Free and open to the public)
October 18 from 2-10 p.m. in Albuquerque’s Civic Plaza

This family-friendly, community event is designed to connect attendees to the history, science and recreation of wilderness. It will be an interactive day of hands-on, wilderness-related learning and activities, as well as an event filled with diverse expressions of wilderness through art, music, storytelling and performances that highlight various cultures in New Mexico. This festival will celebrate the community’s connections to our lands, while strengthening stewardship and recreation in the outdoors. We are excited to have performances by native flutist Andrew Thomas; singer/songwriters Susan Grace and Bart Koehler; Jicarilla Apache Butterfly Dancers and Toya Family Pueblo Dancers; Allison Wardon performing Arctic rap; and local bands Animal Opera, Le Chat Lunatique, Trio Los Amigos and Let it Grow. Marble Brewery is sponsoring the beer garden with a local wilderness brew! Bring the kids to explore the Wilderness Awareness Trail, climbing wall, animals, archery and free ‘smores!

The People’s Wilderness Film Gala, October 14 from 7:30-10:15 p.m. and October 19 from 1:30-6:15 p.m. at the KiMo Theater in Albuquerque (www.kimotickets.com)

This family-friendly film gala will showcase new and old films about the beauty of wilderness, its meaning, importance, history and issues related to its preservation. The films will include sweeping vistas and stories of our wild lands, peoples’ experiences of them, the problems facing wilderness protection and the cooperation needed to make it happen.

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Smithsonian Wilderness Forever Photo Competition: HONORABLE MENTION—WILDLIFE PRO

American Pika, Ochotona princeps, Rocky Mountain National Park Wilderness, CO. By Fritz Rust ©

www.nmwild.org
When Dave Foreman heard that I was going to speak at the biennial Geography of Hope conference last year in Marin County, California, he made a request: “Try to get wolves and wilderness in.” Foreman, the cofounder of Earth First! and a leader of the rewilding movement, is one of the two most riveting environmental evangelists I’ve ever heard preach; he ends his talks by howling like a wolf. The howling I can interpret, but his request puzzled me a bit. The conference was billed as three days dedicated to the ideas of Aldo Leopold. How could you celebrate Leopold without wolves and wilderness?

At the conference, I found out. In session after session, before an audience at Toby’s Feed Barn in Point Reyes Station, speaker after speaker had nothing to say about either the wolf or the place it lives. Leopold’s “land ethic” and his ideas on sustainability and restoration drew all the attention. The great forester’s campaign leading to the 1924 designation of New Mexico’s Gila Wilderness, the first anywhere, and his seminal writing on wildness in “A Sand County Almanac” went missing. When wilderness finally did come up, it was by way of dismissal. Wilderness is an antiquated notion, one panelist said. We have a new paradigm, said another. J. Baird Callicott, one of academia’s leading wilderness deniers—or “wilderness deconstructionists,” as Foreman calls this breed—told us that wilderness is a flawed idea and an imperialistic enterprise. If Leopold were alive and here today, Callicott said, he would have very different ideas on wilderness.

Yes, and Jefferson, if only we could fetch him, would disown his Declaration of Independence, and Lincoln his Emancipation Proclamation. For years I had laughed off this kind of revisionism, but now, at a Leopold symposium in Marin County, one of the greenest spots in the nation, I realized that we are losing the wilderness idea. “Geography of hope,” the title of the conference series, is the final phrase of the famous “Wilderness Letter” by Wallace Stegner. “We simply need that wild country available to us,” Stegner concluded, “even if we never do more than drive to its edge and look in. For it can be a means of reassuring ourselves of our sanity as creatures, a part of the geography of hope.”

Stegner sent that letter to David Brower, my father, the first executive director of the Sierra Club and the other most riveting environmental evangelist I’ve ever heard speak. At the time, 1960, my old man was near midpoint in his 10-year campaign to pass a wilderness bill. As editor of (Sierra Magazine), then called the Sierra Club Bulletin, he regularly bombarded readers with propaganda for the legislation. In summertime, as leader of the Sierra Club High Trips, he introduced his four kids to the wilderness of the West, and in spring he dragged us around to the biennial Sierra Club Wilderness Conferences, which he had retooled as combination think tanks and tent revivals for the wilderness bill. In the off-season, at the family table, he indoctrinated us in wilderness theory and recited from wilderness thinkers and poets. Recognizing Stegner’s letter as the finest expression yet of the wilderness idea, he published it in a Sierra Club book, “Wilderness: America’s Living Heritage,” and from there it spread around the world.

When it came time for me to speak at Toby’s Feed Barn, I’m afraid I did so with some heat. The “geography of hope,” I pointed out, is a description of wilderness. The green fire in that year’s theme, “Igniting the Green Fire: Finding Hope in Aldo Leopold’s Land Ethic,” had nothing to do with a land ethic, or sustainability, or restoration—as admirable as all of those causes are. The words are from Leopold’s most famous quote of all, about a wolf he had just shot: “We reached the old wolf in time to watch a fierce green fire dying in her eyes. I realized then, and have known ever since, that there was something new to me in those eyes—something known only to her and to the mountain.” That fierce green fire, that thing known only to the wolf and to the mountain, is wilderness.
Wilderness is not dispensable. It’s what reminds us of who we are... Without wilderness, Gerard Piel said, we are, in a deeply terrifying sense, on our own.

Gerard Piel described wilderness—whether Muir or anyone else—ever said wilderness means no people. Seasonal visitation by humans does not disqualify a place as wilderness, nor does subsistence use of it. How could it? By the end of the Paleolithic, Homo sapiens had wandered everywhere on the planet, save Antarctica. Wilderness, according to the definition that its deniers, by a kind of bad ventriloquism, seek to attribute to its advocates, has not existed on this planet since 1821, when an American sealer became the first person to set foot on the Antarctic Peninsula.

So what is wilderness? The Wilderness Act defines it, “in contrast with those areas where man and his own works dominate the landscape... as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain.” My father, who occasionally helped the bills author, Howard Zahniser of the Wilderness Society, tweak the language, had his own tongue-in-cheek definition: “Wilderness is where the hand of man has not set foot.”

Wilderness is where we come from. Homo sapiens evolved as hunter-gatherers in the wilderness. Homo sapiens had not set foot on the Antarctic Peninsula. This planet since 1821, when an American sealer became the first person to set foot on the Antarctic Peninsula.

Wilderness is not dispensable. It’s what reminds us of who we are. Once the entire world, it is that shrinking sliver where life operates as Creation—or the life force, or God or Nature—intended before humankind’s attempted improvements on that old plan, and we lose it at our peril. Without wilderness, Gerard Piel said, we are, in a deeply terrifying sense, on our own.

This essay was reprinted with permission from Sierra Magazine. Kenneth Brower is an environmental writer who published his first story 55 years ago, when he was 14, in Sierra Magazine. His recent books are “The Wilderness Within: Remembering David Brower” and “Hetch Hetchy: Undoing a Great American Mistake.”

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From Our Members

NM WILD MEMBERS REFLECT ON THEIR MOST MEMORABLE EXPERIENCES IN THE WILDERNESS

“Too many to write about right now but sitting in the wilderness at night looking up at the sky during a meteor shower. The sky was so dark and the meteors so close to earth that I thought they would crash into the ground around me any minute!”
—Breece Robertson, Santa Fe

“I grew up on the Gulf Coast and knew NOTHING of hiking in the mountains. In the spring of 1999, a friend and I planned my first backpacking trip to the Pecos Wilderness. We were foolish and had not anticipated snow, and ended up post-holing for a half a day. We made camp on the only flat-ish spot we could find, and I slept on snow for the first time... without a tent, under the stars at 10,000 feet. I was frozen and miserable. But somehow between the wind, the elk calls and the thin mountain air, the misery turned to awe and I realized that I had to live here one day. It took some time, but eventually I sold my belongings and moved to New Mexico to be closer to the mountains that had infected me. And now I’m here. And I don’t plan on leaving any time soon.”
—Michael Lee, Sandia Park

“The wilderness takes me out of myself, out of the conflicts in the world, and gifts to me a place of peace, a smell of sweetness, and a spiritual validation that renews the spirit.”
—Stacy Quinn

“This summer we arrived at our camp site late at night and set up via flashlights and then we were extremely thankful—and delighted—to wake up early the next morning opening our tent door to be greeted by a most majestic view!”
—Monica Grigsby-Suarez, Albuquerque

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MA: Thank you Senator Heinrich for your time this afternoon.
I wanted to start by recognizing that you have demonstrated a consistent commitment for land conservation throughout your life, both before and after elected office. What does wilderness mean to you and your family?

MH: It is one of the things that I have always loved about New Mexico. I have always been drawn to places like the Gila as well as some of our desert mountain ranges that are wilderness study areas. These places are landscapes where you can get away from the constant cell phones and computers and iPhones and everything else that tends to clutter the mind and really think more basically like a human being. So, I have always been very attracted to that and many of my formative life decisions have been made in these places.

MA: Did you have an agenda or vision related to land conservation when you ran for office?

MH: I think less than an agenda; I had an attitude about how to work with other people who care about a land ethic in order to find common ground and to be able to move forward in a challenging political environment. What I am excited about in New Mexico is that we have been able to build local consensus and very broad coalitions at a time when much of the country has struggled with divisiveness and very polarized situations around federal land conservation in particular. As a result, New Mexico has seen major accomplishments at a time when other states have really struggled to show the same sort of results.

MA: I was fortunate to recently spend eight days backpacking in the Gila Wilderness with our Gila organizer, Nathan Newcomer, and we timed our trip to come out on June 3 in recognition of the 90th anniversary of the Gila Wilderness, the country’s first protected wilderness. I recall that you took a similar trip to the Gila after 9/11. Can you talk a little bit about why you were drawn to that particular place at that time and what you took away from that experience?

MH: I have always felt, from the first time I went to the Gila Wilderness, that it is a captivating landscape. It is large and not like a lot of other wilderness areas in the way it looks and feels, and it has amazing wildlife. That trip right after 9/11 had been planned for some time with a friend of mine from college. It was at a time in my life when I was shifting gears from the work that I had done as an educator and an outfitter guide—including putting trips together, including educational trips into the Gila Wilderness—towards more public service. And it was on that trip—I think we did about 53 miles of backpacking all through McKenna Park and Turkey Feather Pass, the Jerky Mountains and the Gila River canyon—that I decided to run for elected office for the (Albuquerque) city council. That trip gave me the time and space to think about the future and how I wanted to give back to my community.

MA: You’ve spoken about your father who was a German immigrant who fled the Nazi regime. Is your dad an outdoorsman, and what lessons did you learn from him and his experience coming to the U.S.?

MH: My dad is an outdoorsman. He was quite young when his parents immigrated to the United States in...
Many people mistakenly refer to national forests, national parks, state parks, county and city open spaces, or even primitive privately-owned lands as wilderness. These lands, although valuable as complements to lands contained within the National Wilderness Preservation System, are not defined or permanently protected as wilderness according to the Wilderness Act.

In fact, most of these lands are not designated as wilderness. Wilderness lands are federal lands that have been designated as part of the National Wilderness Preservation System by Congress and are managed by the Bureau of Land Management, Fish and Wildlife Service, Forest Service or National Park Service under the Wilderness Act of 1964.

Federal wilderness can be designated only on existing federal public lands. No private lands are involved or transferred to federal ownership.

Wilderness areas are maintained under a detailed management plan, which is based on management objectives and public input, as with all other federal public lands. These land-use management plans also undergo periodic review that includes community input.

Although low-impact recreation is a common benefit of wilderness designation, the primary goal is the preservation of an area where “natural forces prevail.” As a general rule, recreational activities aren’t expanded in wilderness.

Although wildfires play an important role in many forest ecosystems, their treatment is determined by local needs and the applicable management plan. Fires can be extinguished if they pose any hazard to life or there is a risk of spreading outside wilderness.

In compliance with the 1990 Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA), wheelchairs are permitted in wilderness areas. “Nothing in the Wilderness Act is to be construed as prohibiting the use of a wheelchair in a wilderness area by an individual whose disability requires the use of a wheelchair.”

Wilderness designation does not mean the “multiple use” mandate does not mean multiple use on every acre and that agencies have discretion to close some portions of federal land to certain uses.

Wilderness designation does not mean the “multiple use” mandate does not mean multiple use on every acre and that agencies have discretion to close some portions of federal land to certain uses.

Wilderness areas don’t meet the multiple use requirement for public lands.” Wilderness areas continue to meet all multiple use objectives except timber production. These include wildlife habitat, recreation, watershed protection, scenic qualities and air purification.
I grew up right smack in the middle of the Great Plains. Wilderness was not a concept that I considered as a child—I was surrounded by wheat and soybean fields, not mountains and canyons. In fact, my home state of Kansas does not have one designated wilderness area. (Wilderness areas are found in all but six states: Connecticut, Delaware, Iowa, Kansas, Maryland and Rhode Island.)

I do remember as a young girl visiting the Konza Prairie, which is situated right outside of my hometown of Manhattan. (Yes, there is a Manhattan, Kan. Please hold your laughter.) Konza Prairie, managed by the Nature Conservancy and Kansas State University, is located within the largest remaining area of unplowed tallgrass prairie in North America, the Flint Hills. As a young adult, I would often visit this area to find quiet respite from my studies at the university. I admired the unique and tall prairie grasses, the wildflowers and the buzzing honeybees (the state’s official insect). Sometimes I caught a glimpse of larger wildlife such as those comical (the state’s official insect). Sometimes I caught a glimpse of larger wildlife such as those comical turkeys running through the paintbrush. I went backpacking for the first time. I went backpacking for the first time and I learned the true sound of silence. Though I had visited a handful of New Mexico’s designated wilderness areas, I felt that I had barely scratched the surface.

Then I got involved in planning for the wilderness 50th anniversary National Wilderness Conference, which will be happening in Albuquerque this October. All over the nation throughout this year, organizations, students and federal employees have been commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Wilderness Act. My very own colleagues Mark Allison and Nathan Newcomer spent more than a week trekking the Gila to commemorate the 90th anniversary of this wilderness area (see pages 16-17 for their story). What could I do? Then it hit me—I’d visit every wilderness area in the state of New Mexico! This would serve not only to commemorate the anniversary, but it would give an out-of-stater like me the knowledge needed to speak intelligently about the state’s wilderness areas.

More than anything, I’ve started noticing a challenge. I have:

• Decided NOT to put that insect repellent on in the Chama River Canyon Wilderness (skin resembled constellations across the New Mexico sky … lesson learned).
• Watched a hiking partner carry a 60-pound dog three miles out of a hike because the outer layer of her paw pads had scraped off somehow (poor thing).
• Driven on a primitive road definitely not suitable for my vehicle (dust cover under my car detached … lesson learned).
• Encountered a wilderness area so unknown that I’m not sure if I ever really went there (madly following up on this). Two out of three of the folks at the agency who manages this area didn’t even know it existed within their management area!
• Came to realize there are actually 28 distinct wilderness areas in New Mexico—not the 25 on my map.
• Found countless trail and wilderness signs on the ground. (This is where map and compass come in handy too!)
• Let overconfidence take me off the trail a half mile from my car and got lost for an hour (tail between legs, lesson learned, took a map and compass class shortly after …).
• Encountered some real experiences worthy of the word “challenge.” I have:

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    • Came to realize there are actually 28 distinct wilderness areas in New Mexico—not the 25 on my map.
    • Found countless trail and wilderness signs on the ground. (This is where map and compass come in handy too!)
    • Let overconfidence take me off the trail a half mile from my car and got lost for an hour (tail between legs, lesson learned, took a map and compass class shortly after …).

And adventure it has been. From the very beginning of my challenge, I have experienced some real experiences worthy of the word “challenge.” I have:

• Encountered a wilderness area so unknown that I’m not sure if I ever really went there (madly following up on this). Two out of three of the folks at the agency who manages this area didn’t even know it existed within their management area!
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But my travels haven’t all been about my (thankfully limited) lapses in judgment and less than perfect circumstances. I’ve also encountered incredible wildlife, seen some of the most beautiful places in the state (and the country, in my opinion), and experienced great solitude (and companionship on those trips where I was joined by a partner).

More than anything, I’ve started noticing a change in myself: the more time I spend in the wilderness this year, I’m more peaceful. I’m more appreciative of the small. I’m more thoughtful.

Plus, I have begun to love New Mexico more and more each day. I go on one of my quirky adventures. And, one day, I’ll have a lot of great (triumphant, embarrassing) stories to tell.
Clockwise from top left: A mushroom stands alone in the White Mountain Wilderness; Clouds in the Sandia Mountain Wilderness; A butterfly stops for a drink in the Bandelier Wilderness; A storm moves into Cañoncito Lake in the Latir Peak Wilderness, near Questa; A horned lizard in the Cebolla Wilderness.

FOLLOW TINA’S ADVENTURES
Blog and photos of Tina’s travels to each wilderness area: wilderness50challenge.wordpress.com
This June, on the 90th anniversary of the Gila Wilderness, our Executive Director Mark Allison and Gila Grassroots Organizer Nathan Newcomer hiked 45 miles across the Gila Wilderness. As part of their journey, they read aloud the names of loved ones given to us by our members:

“At dusk on the third night of our trek through the Gila Wilderness, on the bank of the babbling Gila River, deep in the heart of the wilderness, many miles from the nearest pavement and below towering rock spires where Wild Cow and Water Canyons intersect with the fast flowing waters, we read aloud the names of your loved ones you entrusted us to carry. We hope you felt the memories come home as you wrote your beautiful letter or penned each name to give to us in preparation for our 45-mile trek, completed this week.

Please know that the names we spoke aloud punctuated our time in the wilderness in a way that is not possible to adequately describe. We can only give back our gratitude to you for allowing us to be in your service in this important way.”

Staff members hike the Gila Wilderness in celebration of its 90th birthday.

The Gila’s Heart

5/27 Mile 0 Forks Trailhead (upstream from Grapevine on Hwy 15)
5/28 Mile 11 Near Sycamore Canyon
5/29 Mile 18.5 Just past confluence of Sapillo Creek
5/30 Mile 25 Reading names where Wild Cow and Water canyons meet the river
5/31 Mile 31.5 Between Utah Bill and Hidden Pasture canyons
6/1 Mile 39 Trucks in the river, just outside of the wilderness boundary
6/2 Mile 42 Area of proposed diversion
6/3 Mile 45 Trip end on the 90th anniversary of the Gila Wilderness (Mogollon Box) Campground

Photos: Mark Allison and Nathan Newcomer
The wilderness stretch of the Gila is one of the secrets of river running in the American West. There exists no guidebook, no comprehensive website devoted to itemizing its dangers. Local intelligence can be had if you know the right people, but mostly you’re on your own, and, anyway, the river’s mood can change in a moment.

Before we set out for the unknown, the entirety of my companion’s experience consisted of a tame 10-mile float on the Rio Grande—a Gila trip would more than quadruple that—and mine amounted to little more. We were as green as the country after the monsoon rains, and that felt right. The river would teach us what we needed to know. It was a true wilderness run after all: no hand-holding rangers, no knowing in advance where the hazards lurked.

I seemed to recall someone telling me that the 42 miles from Grapevine Campground to the takeout at Mogollon Creek could be run in one epic day, though the usual method was to camp multiple nights. I made a couple of calls, hoping to confirm this rumor lodged in some dark fissure of my cranium. Neither was answered. The fateful choice was made: We’d leave the camping gear behind.

Sunrise found us cruising N.M. 15 under cloudy skies and light rain. The campground was empty; the morning and the river were ours. We’d hoped to be on the water by 8 a.m. We had no way of knowing the precise time, as neither of us wore a watch, but it seemed a safe bet that the target hour had come and gone by the time the kayak was inflated, the sandwiches made, the float bag packed. Then we were off, under the bridge and beyond sight of man-made infrastructure until the gauging station some 40 miles downstream.

For months, the river had been a source of worry and something of an abstraction in studies I’d read of its diversion potential by bureaucrats in Santa Fe and their hirelings in the engineering-consulting racket. In these jargon-laden reports, the river is portrayed as little more than an underutilized ditch hauling water that, if diverted and dammed up and pumped and conveyed off site, could water the fields of irrigators and slake the thirst of the citizens of Deming. It was madness, every last word of it, and I hated having to sit through Orwellian public

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GETTING OUT THERE
HIKES, OUTINGS AND SERVICE PROJECTS

By Tina Deines

Each year, the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance (NM Wild) leads dozens of hikes, service projects and special events throughout New Mexico as part of its Let’s Get Wild program, the cornerstone of our wilderness education efforts. The program is designed to actively educate people about the importance of protected public lands and engage the community in wilderness stewardship and restoration. The “Wild Guide,” which provides information about upcoming hikes, projects and educational events offered by NM Wild, is published as part of the Let’s Get Wild program.

NM Wild works to inform people of all ages about New Mexico’s wild public lands and diverse wildlife, and how these treasures are directly connected to our clean air, drinking water and recreational opportunities. We want people to experience the natural beauty of New Mexico and want to give them the chance to give something back through hands-on projects, such as restoring a trail, identifying and removing invasive weeds, inventorying a backcountry campsite, or working on a riparian restoration or fence-removal project that improves habitat for native fish and wildlife.

In 2014, we offered nearly 30 hikes and service projects from the Pecos in Northern New Mexico to the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument in southern New Mexico. This year, we partnered with the U.S. Forest Service, Gila Backcountry Services, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, experts in archaeology and map and compass, Far Flung Adventures, Los Rios River Runners, the U.S. Bureau of Land Management and Wild Earth Llama Adventures to offer a wide variety of experiences to our hike and service project attendees. We also worked with local biologists in Albuquerque to lead area hikes focusing on wildlife and plant identification, and we continued our ongoing effort to fight invasive cheatgrass by leading hikes to identify and pull the plants in the Sandia Mountains.
NM Wild Staff Retreat 2014

THE NEW MEXICO WILDERNESS ALLIANCE STAFF had a wonderful retreat in May 2014 at the Trail End Ranch in the Gila National Forest. This was not only a great time for staff from across the state to converge and bond, but a time for us to look strategically toward the future of our campaigns. We spent some time hiking to a local Mimbres traditional site, dipping in the Gila River and catching up with our coworkers from Silver City, Albuquerque, Mora, Santa Fe and Las Cruces. Most importantly, we came back with renewed excitement and vigor for working to protect New Mexico’s wild lands! We’d like to give a special thanks to Albuquerque Academy, the Trail End Ranch and the Brindle Foundation for making the staff retreat possible.

Above: NM Wild staff members pose for a picture during the annual staff retreat in the Gila National Forest this May. Front (left to right): Tisha Broska, Judy Calman, Tira Deines, Alicia Johnson, Roxanne Pacheco, Nathan Small. Back (left to right): Emma Tomingas-Hatch, Jeff Steinborn, Mark Allison, Angel Peña, Nathan Newcomer, John Olivas.

Left: Tisha Broska (left) and Judy Calman (right) hike during NM Wild’s 2014 staff retreat in the Gila National Forest.

Right: Jeff Steinborn (left), Nathan Small (right) rest along the banks of the east fork of the Gila River during NM Wild’s annual staff retreat.

Staff Reflect On What Wilderness Means To Them

“Wilderness is characterized by an undeveloped landscape: Pure, Pristine and Preserved. It is defined by a sense of place that provides solitude and beauty for those that came before us and those that will follow.

Many of our traditional partners in New Mexico identify the land as a place that our ancestors called home. Wilderness is a way to maintain the integrity of the lands that have been part of our culture for so many generations.”

John Olivas, Traditional Community Organizer

“Wilderness to me is made up of something much more than the pristine and breathtaking resources which define wilderness. It is the interaction between these places and people that gives us a sense of wilderness. Wilderness for me is measured by the experience that people and families have in these undeveloped landscapes more than the geographical surroundings themselves. For me wilderness is made up of many cultural landscapes, past and present.”

—Angel Peña, Cultural Resources Specialist and Hispanic Organizer

“Freedom.’ I know that’s a really short answer, and somewhat cliché, but that is honestly what wilderness is for me. Wilderness honors the basic concepts of freedom and our country. As Aldo Leopold once said, ‘Of what avail are 40 freedoms without a blank space on the map?’ I wholeheartedly agree.”

—Nathan Newcomer, Gila Grassroots Coordinator

“Wilderness is meaningful to me because it’s a place where humans don’t get control. We control everything else in the world. There should be places where our egos are tamed by the inability to change what’s around us and where we have to allow non-human, natural processes to have their way.”

—Judy Calman, Staff Attorney
Honoring cultural heritage, always an important core value in conservation campaigns, proved critical to the designation of the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument. The All Pueblo Council of Governors, Ysleta del Sur Pueblo and Fort Sill Apache helped convince President Obama that the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks needed permanent protection. Non-federally recognized nations such as Pueblo of Tortugas and Piro-Manso-Tiwa in Las Cruces also helped win designation. Gaining native support meant inviting diverse communities into natural landscapes and relied upon key advice to guide connections with native communities.

Unnecessary knowledge was one topic. Too often, in the advisor’s opinion, people tried explaining every petroglyph, pictograph or cultural site in a landscape proposed for protection. Tribal partners were answering endless questions about “what does it mean,” shrinking cultures and landscapes into limited understanding. Instead of always asking, “what does it mean,” we were advised to celebrate the presence of cultural sites and the people’s relationships to these landscapes. Natural and cultural landscape connectivity took on greater importance, along with never publicly revealing site locations. Instead of asking, “what does it mean,” we were advised to invite native communities into the field to experience integrated landscapes—lands that are more than just a beautiful view, lands with both cultural and biological values.

During these outings, both natives and non-natives could experience and create emotional and personal connections with these landscapes. Participants also had a chance to ask (and maybe even answer) a more universal question of “why here?” On some trips native participants spent time alone in particular areas. Sometimes we were invited to share in the discussion of sites and their associated human symbols. Always, there was emphasis on the entire landscape, not just a cliff face resplendent with petroglyphs or a ground site filled with lithic shards.

Other advice conveyed the importance of maintaining native access to cultural landscapes. Currently, native communities use many protected areas for the harvest of traditional plants and other cultural practices. Access could mean the gathering of those materials or simply the opportunity to visit and experience cultural sites and landscapes after permanent protection is in place. In making the case to native leaders that protection was the right choice, conservationists were diligent in maintaining the focus on native access to cultural landscapes.

On May 21, 2014, President Obama designated the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument. The president highlighted supportive tribal governments. Conservationists, the community and the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance will continue working closely with tribal governments and native peoples on the many opportunities and challenges that lie ahead for the monument. The final piece of advice we received, again appropriate across many venues, was to keep working together to better steward natural treasures and honor all of our communities.

Working Together
Conservation that honors all of our communities

By Nathan Small
Heinrich on Wilderness

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the mid-’30s and by the time he was a teenager, he was working outside as a cowboy. When I was growing up we had a small ranch, and he was sort of a natural conservationist in how he managed the land, how he related to wildlife, as well as producing cattle. So I grew up outside every chance I could, and that usually meant disappearing after school for hours at a time, bringing all kinds of wildlife home at night that my mother did not really appreciate—snakes and turtles and what have you. My father always really supported that and was always interested and encouraging in that. I do not think he ever set out to be an outdoorsman, he just was.

MA: Speaking of fathers, New Mexico is the birthplace of wilderness in important ways and can claim two of the wilderness movement’s fathers—Aldo Leopold and Sen. Clinton P. Anderson. I’ve also heard you speak of the less-well-known New Mexican, Edgar Lee Hewett, who drafted legislation that would become known as the Antiquities Act. There have been many other New Mexicans, both private citizens and elected officials, who have made significant contributions to the wilderness and conservation movement. Why do you think New Mexico has had this unique strain of conservation throughout our history and had such a profound and outsized influence compared to our small population?

MH: I think there is a persistent misunderstanding that because our relationship with wilderness is such that we are not residents in wilderness, that we are not in it all the time, that (this) somehow means it is not part of our culture. The reality is in New Mexico that there has always been an enormous impact on culture from the natural landscape and the places where people may only be part of the year during hunting season or some places in the summer and some places in the winter. There has been this enormous influence on all of the cultures of New Mexico by the landscape and that has been exemplified by people like Aldo Leopold and Clinton Anderson, but it is also endemic in the land-based Hispanic culture in New Mexico. It is endemic in the relationships that the Pueblo tribes have in New Mexico and their reverence for specific mountains and the places that they hunt and fish. There is an enormous influence on all of us as people by the special landscapes of New Mexico, and I think everyone who has lived in New Mexico has been influenced by that landscape, and it consistently drives people to do things, to perpetuate that natural relationship between people and land and between culture and land.

MA: One of the things, of course, that makes New Mexico so special is our rich history and our diverse cultural heritage. We have found strength in that, but it is complicated. Are there lessons you’ve learned as you travel across the state about what we can do to broaden the conservation movement even further so that it better reflects New Mexico?

MH: You know, you put it well—it is complicated and it is hard and it is challenging to get people out of their place of comfort to sit down with others that come from different perspectives. The flipside of that is that it is so much more powerful when we have broad coalitions working together. The strength, I think, of the conservation movement in New Mexico is that in many ways it has been ahead of any place else in the Western United States in building those coalitions and having open and honest dialogue. When that occurs, it allows things to move forward that oftentimes simply could not without the depth and diversity of those coalitions. When you look back at the last 10 years of conservation in the state of New Mexico and what has been accomplished, it has really been quite incredible. It has been akin to what you might have seen in the early ’70s when the environmental movement was at its peak. Not only have we had these two landscape-level national monuments that were driven locally and that were supported by very culturally diverse coalitions, but we have also had campaigns like the protection of the Valle Vidal, a place where the hunting and fishing community really got out and led the charge but had an enormously broad coalition behind them. Places like the Ojito (and Sabinoso wildernesses, new national wildlife refuges in the state, all of that was possible because people were working together. Many of those places were places where these efforts had been tried in the past, but people were not committing the time and working together as well as they could have, and, when they did, it made all the difference.

MA: We’ve talked a little about fathers and I now want to turn to sons. I have two sons, as do you. What has been your approach to trying to instill values of public service and love of the outdoors and an ethic of stewardship in your boys? How can we better engage young people and cultivate the next generation of stewards?

MH: I think the most important thing beyond anything else is just giving kids an opportunity to spend time in the outdoors. Oftentimes in an era when screen time is more ubiquitous than time in the woods, that is the most important thing because kids will naturally gravitate to it. Some of my absolute best memories bar none are the camping trips that I have been able to take with my wife, Julie, and my two sons in New Mexico, and it is places like the Cruces Basin Wilderness that we go back to again and again. That is where my kids first went fly-fishing, and we have these memories of picking and cooling wild mushrooms and chasing grouse during fall hunting season and all these things that will stay with my kids for their entire lives. I do not think it matters so much what part of the state you are from but just to get your kids outside and be a good role model for them, make sure that you leave your campsite nicer than you found it and that you model an ethic of stewardship, and kids will embrace that. They understand how lucky it is to be outside, to be able to camp and enjoy time with their family in these great places, but the most important thing is that you carve out the time to make that happen because that does not happen for too many young people these days.
Victory!

By Tina Deines

THE NEW MEXICO WILDERNESS ALLIANCE (NM WILD) HAS MADE GREAT STRIDES in the protection of New Mexico’s best public lands since its founding in 1997. Since then, we have successfully fought for two new wilderness areas in the state—Ojito and Sabinoso—and ensured the protection of two new national monuments—Rio Grande del Norte and the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks. In addition to these victories, we’ve had countless successes large and small since our inception. One such success has been our campaign in Otero Mesa. In the last 10 years we have held off oil and gas development and hard rock mining there.

Ojito Wilderness, 2005

ABOUT OJITO: Ojito contains the ruins of prehistoric Puebloan, Navajo and Hispanic cultures. The area also features fossil remains of rare dinosaurs, plants and trees from the Jurassic-age Morrison Formation (about 150 million years ago). One of the largest dinosaur skeletons ever discovered—the seismasaurus—was found here. Animals that depend on Ojito for habitat include birds of prey, swifts, swallows, various reptiles, mule deer, elk, American antelope and the mountain lion.

OUR WORK: The designation of Ojito Wilderness in 2005 was one of the NM Wild’s first conservation victories. In the mid-’90s, NM Wild formed and established itself as the statewide grassroots voice for wildlands. In the mid-2000s, the organization started pushing for Ojito Wilderness. Efforts included collaboration with the Zia tribe, New Mexico Gov. Bruce King and other statewide elected officials. After the Ojito Wilderness Act was passed by both the U.S. House of Representatives (unanimously) and U.S. Senate, President George W. Bush signed the legislation into law on Oct. 26, 2005.

GOTHERE: A map and compass, plenty of water and good knowledge of wilderness navigation is essential here. The Ojito Wilderness is accessible by using I-25 and using the U.S. 550 exit (Bernalillo). (Ojito is located about 16 miles north of Albuquerque, 40 miles south of Santa Fe.) Traveling northwest toward Cuba on US 550 from Bernalillo, the distance is approximately 20 miles. Before San Ysidro (about 2 miles), turn left onto Cabezon Road (County Road 26). Follow the left fork.

Sabinoso Wilderness, 2009

ABOUT SABINOSO: Rising 1,110 feet from the surrounding plains, the Sabinoso unit sits upon the Canadian Escarpment, which is composed mostly of the Jurassic Morrison Formation and Triassic Chinle Shale. The area has fantastic ecological, scenic, recreational and cultural values. The area is one of New Mexico’s last intact Great Plains ecosystems. Sabinoso is located in San Miguel County of northeast New Mexico eight miles northeast of Trujillo.

OUR WORK: Sabinoso became a designated wilderness on March 24, 2009, when President Obama signed into law the Omnibus Public Lands Management Act of 2009. NM Wild worked with a broad alliance of ranchers and local and state lawmakers to gain support to protect Sabinoso.

GOTHERE: There is no public access to Sabinoso Wilderness at this time, as it is surrounded by private land. NM Wild continues to work to find opportunities for public access to Sabinoso.

Rio Grande del Norte National Monument, 2013

ABOUT RIO GRANDE DEL NORTE: The Rio Grande del Norte encompasses some of the most spectacular lands in all of New Mexico. The Rio Grande cuts into the Servilleta lava flows that make up the Taos Plateau just above the Colorado border. Eight miles downstream, at the New Mexico state line, the river is 200 feet below the canyon rim, the gorge 150 feet across. West of Questa, where Big Arsenic Spring bubbles from the rock, the river is a glinting green ribbon 800 feet down. The opposite rim is over half a mile away, and, on summer mornings, bald eagles soar southward in pairs. At John Dunn Bridge the river enters The Box, an 18-mile stretch of 900-foot cliffs, famous among rafters and boaters. This is also the Rio Grande Migratory Flyway—one of the great migratory routes of the world.

OUR WORK: Rio Grande del Norte was designated as a national monument on March 25, 2013, by President Obama. After nearly a decade of work, NM Wild was honored to be invited to the signing ceremony at the White House. NM Wild continues to work with a broad coalition to ensure the very best management plan is adopted and enforced.

GOTHERE: Rio Grande del Norte has a wealth of recreational opportunities including whitewater rafting, hunting, fishing, hiking and mountain biking.


By Tina Deines

NM WILD’S CONSERVATION SUCCESSES
On May 21, 2014, President Barack Obama designated the landscape-scale Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument. The Organ Mountains and surrounding desert peaks are steeped in culture, history and wildlife. After 10 years of organizing community support, 496,000 acres of southern New Mexico are protected. Several New Mexico Wilderness Alliance staff members were honored to be at the forefront of this monumental effort, and we would like to send a heart-filled thank you to all of you who contributed to protecting the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks.

In 2004, the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance (NM Wild) opened its satellite office in Las Cruces. Mike helped, with staff including Greta Van Sustern, Alberto Zavala and long time board member Bob Tafanelli, a distinguished former New Mexico State University professor. After interest for protection of public lands in southern New Mexico grew, we needed more help and recruited Jeff Steinborn who previously served as an advisor to both U.S. Sen. Jeff Bingaman and then Congressman Bill Richardson. As Sen. Bingaman’s former advisor to the Otero Mesa, Jeff was steeped in protecting New Mexico’s landscapes and played a vital role in helping to guide campaign strategy. Jeff was born and raised in Las Cruces and holds the mountains and canyons in the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks region close to his heart. Jeff also has politics pumping through his veins and is currently a state representative in the New Mexico legislature.

Nathan Small, hot off an Otero Mesa roadshow through 13 different states, joined Jeff. Nathan started building membership, and gathering support from sportsmen and businesses. He also began organizing hikes into the wild public lands of what is now protected as the new national monument. A third-generation New Mexican and an avid outdoorsman, Nathan has a way of talking to people and building support from a community that cares about the land. In 2007, Nathan decided to run for a council seat representing District 4. He is now serving his second term.

In 2010, David Soules was elected to the NM Wild board. David is a lifelong resident of southern New Mexico. David’s passion lies with protecting the outdoors, and he soon jumped into the local effort. An engineer by trade, David put his talents to work by developing a Google Earth map of the proposed Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks monument with details of the unique biological, cultural and historic history of the landscape. David made countless presentations and updates of this map and was a huge advocate for the land he knew well. Even better were the many trips with family, friends and soon-to-be-friends that David organized and led many weekends. In 2013, Angel Peña joined our team with a commitment to preserving the history, culture and spirit of the Southwest. Angel worked to connect local youth, as well as the Hispanic and native communities, to the environmental and cultural heritage of the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks. A graduate student studying archaeology, he led research with the Groundworks Green Team youth crew in summer 2013. This group discovered new cultural sites close to the boundary of the proposed monument, a critical element to achieving protection of some areas that were originally going to be excluded from the monument.

The team was in place, the momentum was high and national support began to bloom. As the local coalition of supporters grew, so did the diversity of support. We connected with elected officials, who passed numerous resolutions of support within nearby municipalities. We connected with sportsmen, who both David and Nathan spent time with during the hunting season. We connected with Hispanic business owners, the local bishop and rabbi, and other faith-based groups. We connected with students and teachers from NMSU and local schools. We built support from veterans. We built support from many native peoples and nations. Our team scoured every corner of the community to find support for the beautiful lands of Doña Ana County.

This effort began as a wilderness and national conservation area campaign, and legislation was introduced in Congress three times by Sens. Bingaman, Tom Udall and later Martin Heinrich to no avail. With the wilderness proposals stuck in the mud, our team strategically decided to shift to a national monument campaign in 2012. Nationally, OMDP was one of the few campaigns of landscape scale with diverse support. Support waivered from a few key places, but eventually rebounded to grow even stronger. In 2013, our team and our partners were eager to have a victory, especially after the 112th Congress did not protect one acre of wilderness. Interest in the OMDP National Monument continued to grow and spread nationally. We were getting questions about boundaries, and negotiations were tough. Compromise was only a last resort.

Jeff, Nathan, David and Angel fought for every last acre of the national monument. They represented the land, wildlife, water and people of southern New Mexico. They did not give up, they did not lose faith and they won. We all won nearly half a million acres of biologically diverse and culturally important public lands permanently protected.

NM Wild founding board members first initiated work on this campaign as early as 1972. It was a very long process, and we are grateful for all who contributed to the success of the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks.
NM Wild Makes Progress on Key Campaigns

Chaco Canyon
We continue to work on the Bureau of Land Management’s (BLM) Resource Management Plan amendment, through which the agency will complete an inventory and consider management of lands with wilderness characteristics and also consider oil and gas development in the Mancos Shale formation surrounding Chaco. We hosted a public meeting in Albuquerque in May for more than 100 people, including 20 BLM employees. We submitted extensive comments with a coalition of other environmental and clean energy organizations. Most recently, we have started doing our own inventory to ensure that the BLM has the most accurate data about special places in the Farmington area.

Columbine Hondo Proposed Wilderness
Federal legislation has been introduced both in the House of Representatives and Senate to designate approximately 45,000 acres within the Carson National Forest as permanently protected wilderness. A coalition comprised of community members, elected officials, chambers of commerce and businesses is working closely with our federal delegation. The next step for the bill is to go through the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee and receive a full markup. If the bill does not pass during this Congress, we expect it will be reintroduced next year.

Rio Grande del Norte National Monument
The Rio Grande del Norte National Monument was designated in March 2013 by presidential proclamation. Legislation is pending in Congress that would designate two wilderness areas within the monument. This legislation has gone through markup before the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee and is ready to be included in a public lands omnibus bill this Congress. We are coordinating a local friends group to help assist the Bureau of Land Management with management decisions and field projects.

Gila River and Gila Wilderness
NM Wild is actively engaged on a number of fronts including working to stop illegal grazing in sensitive riparian areas within the wilderness; closing illegal roads; preparing for the Gila National Forest Land Use Plan Revision process, which will guide management decisions for the next 20 years and provide us opportunities to recommend additional wilderness protections; conducting inventory of wilderness quality lands; appealing the recently published Travel Management Plan; continuing our lawsuit against the Department of Justice for failing to prosecute illegal killing of Mexican gray wolves and, most urgent, supporting local efforts to prevent the diversion of the Gila River. NM Wild recently announced
our intention to pursue Wild and Scenic designation for sections of the Gila and San Francisco rivers, including those under threat from the diversion proposal. We continue to offer numerous opportunities for outings and service projects in the area and are fortunate to have the help of dozens of volunteers.

**Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument**

The Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument was designated on May 21, 2014. Las Cruces and New Mexico are already benefiting from monument designation. Dozens of articles (including mentions in “National Geographic,” “Outside Magazine” and the “New York Times”) have appeared celebrating the nation’s newest national monument and its natural and cultural treasures along with the diverse community that protected them.

Two conferences have chosen Las Cruces because of the monument—including the Pecos Conference, an annual gathering of archaeologists—that will bring hundreds of visitors to the area, increasing positive attention and helping the local economy. In addition, the Las Cruces Green Chamber of Commerce, along with NM Wild and Friends of the Organ Mountains, has created a visitor brochure for area businesses and local economy. In addition, the Las Cruces Green Chamber of Commerce, along with NM Wild and Friends of the Organ Mountains, has created a visitor brochure for area businesses and local economy.

The Wilderness Act of 1964 had both Republican and Democratic sponsors, including New Mexico’s own Sen. Clinton P. Anderson. The Wilderness Act passed the House of Representatives by a vote of 373-1. While it is true that wilderness, like most other issues, has recently been caught up in the hyper-partisanship of Washington, D.C., wilderness has historically been supported by Democrats and Republicans and by liberals and conservatives. After all, what is more conservative in philosophy than conservation?

The largest public is very supportive of wilderness, and numerous public opinion surveys on attitudes have shown that people find the benefits of wilderness to be increasingly important. Protecting air quality, water quality, wildlife habitat and unique wild plant and animal species, as well as leaving a bequest to future generations are all consistently rated as the top five most important benefits of wilderness. Most Americans, whether urban or rural, also ascribe high importance to additional benefits, including the scenic beauty of wild landscapes, the knowledge that wilderness is being protected, the choice to visit wilderness at some future time, the opportunity for wilderness recreation experiences, preserving nature for scientific study, and spiritual inspiration.

A 2014 Conservation in the West poll of likely voters, including those in New Mexico, found that 69 percent of voters are more likely and 33 percent are much more likely to vote for a candidate who supports enhancing protections for public lands such as national forests.

A 2013 poll from Democratic and Republican pollsters shows post-9/11 veterans in Western states strongly support protection of America’s parks and public lands. The poll, commissioned by the Vet Voice Foundation, shows that a 75 percent majority favors the federal government protecting public lands by designating them as national parks, monuments or wilderness, including 56 percent who strongly favor such action.

An August 2014 article in “Field and Stream” by Ted Williams included this quote: “You put sportsmen and enviros together, and you get a minimum of 65 percent of the vote—an unstoppable juggernaut.”

**Busting the Myths**

Continued from page 13

**14) FALSE: “Rescues and firefighting are impaired because motorized equipment isn’t permitted.”**

Although non-motorized means are preferred, motorized equipment can be authorized when required. In emergencies, authorized mechanical equipment may go into wilderness areas to fight fires or assist injured persons, following the “minimum tool necessary” principle. In addition, studies have shown that there are more fires in roaded areas than in roadless areas.

**15) FALSE: “Wilderness proposals are the work of outside environmental groups.”**

Federal public lands belong to all Americans, and everyone has a right to fight for their protection. That said, the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance is a statewide, homegrown advocacy organization with thousands of dues-paying members throughout the state. Our board of directors, staff, members and volunteers are New Mexicans speaking with a collective voice to protect New Mexico’s special wild places.

**16) FALSE: “Wilderness only benefits elite environmentalists.”**

Wilderness supports many values that benefit everyone: clean air and water, genetic diversity, archaeological protection, open space, health, and inexpensive, family-oriented recreation. Preserving increasingly rare special wild places in perpetuity for the benefit of the public and future generations is not elitism. Sacrificing our children’s birthright for short-sighted commercial interests for the benefit of private for-profit endeavors is.

**17) FALSE: “Wilderness designation is really only supported by one political party.”**

The Wilderness Act of 1964 had both Republican and Democratic sponsors, including New Mexico’s own Sen. Clinton P. Anderson. The Wilderness Act passed the House of Representatives by a vote of 373-1. While it is true that wilderness, like most other issues, has recently been caught up in the hyper-partisanship of Washington, D.C., wilderness has historically been supported by Democrats and Republicans and by liberals and conservatives. After all, what is more conservative in philosophy than conservation?

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**18) FALSE: “Most public lands are already protected as wilderness” or “We have enough already!”**

Most public land is not protected wilderness! Only 4.8 percent of the entire United States is designated wilderness, with 52 percent of that in Alaska. In New Mexico only 2 percent of the state land area is protected as wilderness. (See table on page 8.)

Millions of acres of other types of public land are open to motorized recreation, and the fraction of land preserved as wilderness ensures that those seeking non-motorized recreational opportunities can enjoy them in an environment free from the effects of “expanding settlement and growing mechanization” mentioned in the Wilderness Act.

**19) FALSE: “There are other ways to protect areas without wilderness designation, so designation is unnecessary.”**

Congressional designation as wilderness is the only way to permanently protect an area from logging and oil drilling, as well as from parking lots, buildings and motorized vehicles.

**20) FALSE: “Wilderness is an antiquated concept and no longer necessary or relevant to today’s environmental issues.”**

See the essay on Pages 2-4 of this newsletter.

Adapted in part from materials provided by: Illinois Sierra Club, Wilderness.net, Bureau of Land Management, whywilderness.org, Montana Wilderness Association, www.wildernesstruths.com
The strength, I think, of the conservation movement in New Mexico is that in many ways it has been ahead of any place else in the Western United States in building those coalitions and having open and honest dialogue.

we have a lot of public land can learn so much from how all of you in New Mexico have worked on these issues together and if those lessons are learned well by people in other states, I think the sky is the limit.

MA: Do you have any thoughts on what NM Wild can do to better our chances for future protections?

MH: I think the role that the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance plays very well is making people aware that they have this great birthright in these amazing public lands that belong to them. You know there are many places in the world—most places in the world—that do not have anything like protected wilderness, and the more people know what they have, the more they value it and the more they want to be good stewards of it. I think it is a matter of laying the groundwork so that when the opportunity is right you can formalize that and make some of these efforts more permanent. A great example, I think, moving into the future will be Columbine Hondo—the incredible business support, the local community support (from) local elected mayors, county commissioners, outfitter guides, grazers, Acrevia parciates, local conservation groups to state-level groups like the Wilderness Alliance working together to make that happen. I cannot tell you it will happen in this Congress, but because that coalition is so strong and deep and broad, I have every confidence that it will happen just like Rio Grande del Norte happened.

MA: Outstanding! What do you think the future of conservation should be like in the U.S. in terms of the most prominent issues and possible policies or laws to address them?

MH: I think there are a couple of things that we need to focus on. Clearly climate change is beginning to impact every corner of the country and so even though my entire life I have really focused more on land conservation, I think it is important for all of us to see the local impact that climate change will have and to begin to take some ownership in wanting to address that issue. It will have huge economic ramifications for states like New Mexico. It will have cultural ramifications. It puts pressures on every sector of our population from ranchers and farmers to the business community to the conservation community… I think all of us can play some role in taking ownership and coming up with solutions that will be broadly supported to address issues like that and I think we need to continue to build on the great work that our leadership in this state has done over time. We have had these giants of forethought and you have mentioned many of them. More recently Sen. Jeff Bingaman laid much of the groundwork that Sen. Udall and I have mentioned. Ben Ray Lujan and Congresswoman (Michelle) Lujan Grisham were able to utilize to do many of the successful things that we have done in the last year and a half.

MA: We’re proud to be co-hosting the national Wilderness 50 conference in Albuquerque in October to mark the 50th anniversary of the Wilderness Act. I know you’ll be speaking at the conference. What message do you plan to bring?

MH: I think it is very much one of, “be strengthened by our history and be willing to take on the new challenges as we move into new and uncertain times.” I just want to thank all your members for the hard work that went into many of the efforts that we have seen in recent years. It is because of their grassroots support and their willingness to work with very diverse coalitions that we are able to make progress in a time when it is very hard to make progress.

MA: Thanks again for your time today and for your leadership on protecting the places New Mexicans care so much about.

MH: Thanks Mark. I look forward to seeing you soon.
Check Us Out Online—visit us at nmwild.org

- Become a member
- Sign up for hikes and service projects
- Shop at our online store
- Read about our campaigns
- Get all the latest news

Plus, check out our social media to stay up to date on the most current happenings and to connect with us.

Facebook: facebook.com/nmwilderness

YouTube: www.youtube.com/user/TheNMWA

Twitter: www.twitter.com/nmwild

Instagram: www.instagram.com/nmwilderness

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What is Querencia?


From Author Barry Lopez in The Rediscovery of North America, querencia is “a place in which we know exactly who we are. The place from which we speak our deepest beliefs.” “A sense of place,” he says, “must include, at the very least, a knowledge of what is inviolate about the relationship between a people and the place they occupy, and certainly, too, how the destruction of this relationship, or the failure to attend to it, wounds people.”

Wilderness—that place in nature that remains wild and untrammeled by man—is querencia. It’s place from which we came. It’s the land that gives us life: water, fresh air, food. It’s life, love and respect for where we come from. It’s home.
More than two decades ago, our founders articulated a conservation ethic in the state of New Mexico aligned with our nation’s landmark Wilderness Act of 1964. Dedicated to the rights and the value of citizen involvement, this organization began listening to and amplifying that citizen voice to protect our increasingly rare wild places within our public lands.

To this day we remain exclusively dedicated to protecting Wilderness. We ask citizens to join us in this effort to preserve what is ours as a nation, that which should never be diminished by the desires of commerce or thoughtless action. We accomplish this goal by pursuing our ends through the democratic process.

We each live but a short time and we cannot forget these lands that others kept open for us. It is for this experience of full life on Earth we rededicate ourselves every day, trusting Wilderness will remain widely consecrated by citizens as theirs to conserve.

Beyond our human intentions lies the evidence that Wilderness belongs. The landscapes, both majestic and subtle, give home and sustenance to this earth’s unfathomable diversity. Within a human life span, it lives. And beyond a human life span it lives, moving to its own timepiece, if we only allow it.

Just as freedom is every American’s birthright so too is Wilderness. We know they are inseparable. We hold this truth dearly as we preserve Wilderness from generation to generation for us, for all species and for its own sake.
1964 Wilderness Act

continued from page 7

Written by Howard Zahniser, who, as a professional editor and writer, well understood the importance of picking the right word, this definition lines up with self-willed land in both of its two key phrases: “untrammeled” and “visitor who does not remain.”

Wilderness is where the works of man do not “dominate the landscape.” Zahniser then chose the little-known word “untrammeled” carefully, and not just because it slips off the tongue sweetly. Trammel is a hobble for a horse. As a verb, trammeled means to hinder the freedom of something. Untrammeled, then, meaning free of some- thing is not hobbed; it is self-willed. Untrammeled land is the ground for evolution. In his writings about exploring unmapped and unknown Alaska from 1929 to 1939, Bob Marshall used untrammeled “repeatedly in reference to the Brooks Range,” writes Arctic National Wildlife Refuge wildlife specialist Roger Kaye. Moreover, as Jay Turner shows in his new book, The Promise of Wilderness, Zahniser liked untrammeled because it was a fuzzy, not sharp word. Thus, it lent itself more to feeling than to a checklist.

The last phrase gives some folks heartburn: “where man himself is a visitor who does not remain.” Men and women are only visitors or wayfarers in Wilderness Areas; we have no permanent settlements. Many kinds of Wilderness Area foes bristle at this banning of dwell- ing. However, I believe this lack of long-lasting settlement is the key to wil-der-ness (will of the land). Where humans dwell long, we trammel or trample the willfulness of the land around our living spots and outward by stamping down our will. How far? This hinges on the population size and technological might of the band.

Think of Wilderness Areas as wild neighbor- hoods and we Homo sapiens who go into them as friendly wayfarers wandering through. We should follow the path of “minimum impact” to be good folks understood this before-and-after cleavage, not just because it slips off the tongue sweetly. Aldo Leopold warned, “One of the penalties of an ecological education is that one lives alone in a world of wounds.” Indeed, an ecological educa- tion gives our feelings about naturalness bedrock on which to stand.

Some kinds of wilderness scatters wrongly believe that conservationists see wilderness as pristine (an absolute word). Many anticonserva- tionists and resourcists, so as to thwart setting aside Wilderness Areas, say that lands must be pristine to qualify as Wilderness Areas. Neither Zahniser nor Leopold, the gospels are true. Working conservationists have always understood that Wilderness Areas are not always, and do not have to be, pristine. Men and women are only visitors or wayfarers in Wilderness Areas; we have no permanent settlements.

The fourth definition of Wilderness comes from Section 2(c) agree: “Will of the land is at the heart of wilderness.

The third definition of Wilderness is the work- ing definition and sets out the entry criteria for candidate areas: “An area of wilderness is further defined to mean in this Act an area of undevel- oped Federal land retaining its primeval character and influence,” Zahniser said. “Any permanent improvements or human habitation, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions and which (1) generally appears to have been af- fected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable; (2) has outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation; (3) has at least five thousand acres of land or is of sufficient size as to make practicable its preserva- tion and use in an unimpaired condition; and (4) may also contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or his- torical value.”—Section 2(c).

Although in keeping with self-willed land (“un- developed,” “primeval character and influence,” “without permanent improvements or human habitation,” “natural conditions”), this is a practi- cal definition acknowledging that even mostly self-willed land may not be pristine (“generally appears,” “affected primarily,” “substantially un- noticeable.” Notice, there is no word pristine in the Wilderness Act. As with the word untram- meled, the entry criteria are thoughtfully fuzzy and thwart being put into a checklist, although the agencies have done their damnedest to do so. Aldo Leopold warned, “One of the penalties of an ecological education is that one lives alone in a world of wounds.” Indeed, an ecological educa- tion gives our feelings about naturalness bedrock on which to stand.

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Although in keeping with self-willed land (“un- developed,” “primeval character and influence,” “without permanent improvements or human habitation,” “natural conditions”), this is a practi- cal definition acknowledging that even mostly self-willed land may not be pristine (“generally appears,” “affected primarily,” “substantially un- noticeable,” “solitude,” “a primitive and unconfined type of recreation,” “educational, scenic, or historical value”). The other is an ecological defini- tion (“undeveloped,” “primeval character and influence,” “forces of nature,” “eco- logical,” “scientific”). These ecological meanings in the Wilderness Act belie the time and again rap that the act and the National Wilderness Preser- vation System made by it are only about scenery and recreation. Recreation is not the only end of the act, although federal agencies have often managed Wilderness Areas as if it were and have mostly picked lands for Wilderness designation because of their nonmotorized-recreational draw.

The two things we need to learn from Section 2(c) are that Wilderness Areas do not need to be pristine and that the ecological worth of Wilder- ness Areas is well acknowledged along with expe- dient values. Ecological protection and recovery are underlying goals of the Wilderness Act.

The fourth definition of Wilderness is come with a yardstick for caretaking land after it comes under the Wilderness Act. “Except as specifically provided for in this Act, and subject to existing private rights, there shall be no commercial enter- prise and no permanent road within any wilder- ness area designated by this Act and except as necessary to meet minimum requirements for the administration of the area for the purposes of this Act (including measures required in emergencies involving the health and safety of persons within the area), there shall be no temporary road, no use of motor vehicles, motorized equipment or motorboats, no landing of aircraft, no other form of mechanical transport, and no structure or in- stallation within any such area.”—Section 4(c).

Elsewhere, the Wilderness Act makes room for a handful of exceptions to the above prohibitions, such as firefighting, rescue and livestock grazing, all of which were political compromises that back- ers of the Wilderness Act had to swallow before Western members of Congress would go along with passage. Thus, the Wilderness Act is some- what flawed and sometimes at odds with itself.

The use prohibitions try to keep the land untrammeled (self-willed). They are stronger than the entry criteria in Section 2(c). For one, the Wilderness Act does not say that candidate Wilderness Areas must be roadless and unlogged, but Section 4(c) holds that they must be kept roadless after they are put in the National Wilder- ness Preservation System. In other words, earlier roads, if any, must be shut down and no further logging may be done. There are many once- roamed or earlier-logged wildlands now in the National Wilderness Preservation System—even some of the classic big Wilderness Areas in the West! This after-designation stewardship defini- tion lends itself to a checklist much more than do the other three definitions. Rightly so.

If what wilderness means and what the Wilder- ness Act says were carefully and truthfully word- ed in clashes, many misunderstandings about wilderness should melt away. However, muddying the meaning of wilderness is often not due to lack of knowledge, but is a witting dodge by anticonser- vationists and even agency resourcists.

The brawl over conservation is at heart about whether we can abide self-willed land. Excepted from “The Great Conservation Divide” by Dave Foreman.
The Aldo Leopold Writing Contest honors the life and legacy of Aldo Leopold, one of the most important advocates for the protection of wilderness in the 20th century. The Bosque School in Albuquerque received more than 150 entries from public, private and home school students from all over New Mexico in sixth through 12th grade. Students responded to the prompt: “Describe what ‘wilderness’ means to you and your community.” Three winners were chosen based on grade level and were honored at a ceremony at the New Mexico Museum of Natural History and Science in April.

**Kate Stratton - sixth grade, the International School at Mesa del Sol**

I watched as a crane finished off its corn lying on the cool green grass. I watched as that crane flew away into the sky, as its white feathered wings flapped gracefully through the air. I watched until the crane was gone, over the hills and mountains to find a place to sleep that night. I sat under a tree in the fall grass, feeling the cold air against my face, as I listened to the music of the wilderness.

That day changed me. I realized that “wilderness” is an amazing word. It’s a place that the trees can sway in the breeze and the animals can run free, untouched by human hands. It’s where blossoms can grow on peach trees almost ready to make the plump and juicy fruit. It’s where there are beautiful rock formations that are so tall that they can almost touch a fluffy white cloud overhead.

There is so much to learn from the word “wilderness” such as peace. That one day that I watched the crane fly away gave me peace and love for nature and wilderness. People should love the world and treat it well. We should have love for beautiful rock formations or peach blossoms. The Wilderness Act is a way to embrace and understand that we are not the only living things on this planet. It’s a way to show love and peace to our environment that is so important to us. There are places that we must keep safe so we don’t forever ruin what we have and stop loving it. Wilderness is a reminder of the world and how lucky we are that we have it, but we must keep it safe. We must remember the raw beauty of life and how much we can learn from it.

**Kyra Sprague - ninth grade, Española High School**

When I was the last time you went exploring in the wilderness? Before everyone had cell phones and tablets, the great outdoors was the best kind of entertainment. It was a home for some of the most beautiful creatures, a laboratory for scientists and a place for wild adventures. Now, we barely see it. Wilderness is important to me and my community because we would not be alive without it.

In the continental US, 2.7 percent of the land is made up of protected wilderness. To this nation the wilderness means a decreasing percentage. We cut down trees without even thinking about our diminished oxygen supply. We hunt and kill animals without remembering that our ancestors once watched these creatures and learned from them. We are oblivious to the fact that we have gone too far to go back and we can’t correct ourselves, but we can slow down the process.

The wilderness is a natural habitat for so many amazing animals. It provides shelter for them and breeding grounds. Without the wilderness there would be no place for wildlife to procreate naturally. Zoos and wildlife facilities help to breed species and put them back in the wild but no matter what humans do to prepare the animals, it doesn’t quite add up to being born and raised as a wild animal. Zoo raised animals don’t get the education they need to survive in the wild.

Scientists use protected wildlife areas for research. Information from the plants and animals living in a certain area can help them find possible problems with the area. The more scientists familiarize themselves with an issue, the faster they can work on treating it. But with so little protected areas left, how can we expect researchers to collect all the data they need to keep it alive?

For my whole life growing up, wilderness was a safe place to have fun and explore. My family and I would play games out there and bond. It made my family closer to each other, which is now a scarce thing. Without that time, we wouldn’t be so close now.

The wilderness is important to me because it made me fall in love. It gave me something to be passionate about and now I am set on conserving it so that one day, in many years, it will still be there for everyone to enjoy.

**Winner: 10th-12th grade category**

My house lies on the border of urban and rural. It sits on the boundary between the world of black asphalt and the world of piñon and quaking aspen. If I opened my front door and walked directly west, I would encounter miles of tangled roadways and cement-block shopping centers. But if I turned east instead, I would follow meandering arroyos into juniper-spotted foothills, and onward until I reached the craggy granite peaks that I call home.

I find a certain comfort in the grooves of tree bark. When I press my nose up close to the trunk of a ponderosa, the smell of vanilla encompasses me. On hikes, I like to make chains out of shed pine needles before they unfurl and fall apart. Wilderness is something that engages all my senses and forces me to exist in the moment. The thing about wilderness is that it doesn’t have to be remote and unattainable. It isn’t defined by where it is, but instead by what it means. For me, wilderness is home. It is a place where I can connect with myself, away from wires and cement. It is a meditative place, where I can escape from the pressures of everyday life. From a young age, the Sandia Mountains have always provided me with this sense of belonging. Because my house is located in their rolling foothills, I can easily walk down my driveway and into an arroyo that will take me far up a steep canyon, or wander around in a field of granite boulders bigger than me.

Unfortunately, my city sees the wilderness surrounding it as something to be encroached upon. Albuquerque’s expansion into its surrounding displays a general disregard for the pristine landscape around it. Though there are many people who love the wild as much as I do, the vast majority of my city’s inhabitants do not see the sickening sprawl of Albuquerque and how it is spilling into the wilderness. Empty lots are being leveled and drug stores are replacing cottonwood groves. Suburbs are being built where coyotes make their dens, and roads are carving through fields that had previously been covered in rabbit brush and cholla. The border between urban and rural is rapidly changing, and my home might cease to exist in a wild place. I might not be able to leave my house and go for a hike without having to dodge cars on my way to the open space in the east.

I wish beyond all else that my community would stop seeing the wilderness that surrounds us as something dispensable. I wish that other people felt the same way as I do about the mountains, because like Aldo Leopold, I cannot live without wild things. If more people felt a sense of love and respect for the wilderness that we make our homes in, we might be able to protect these wild places that play such a large role in our lives.
meetings in order to wrap my mind around the monomaniacal hubris that could propose such a dastardly crime with a straight face and call it ecologically beneficial.

These concerns dissolved upon our first encounter with whitewater and, not long after it, a glimpse of a fallen tree across the river. To get the animal juices flowing you can hardly do better than to pull hard across the current to an eddy on the inside bank when the flow has every intention of slamming you into a half-submerged sycamore on the outside of the bend. Sometimes we floated on a surface as smooth as polished stone, only to round a corner and find a sweeper, a strainer or a run of submerged rocks whipping the muddy water into a frothy meringue.

One time we failed to turn the boat parallel to a cliff on the outside of a dogleg bend; the bow T-boned the wall, the stern swung downstream, and all of a sudden we flipped. We came up spitting and gasping, literally in over our heads. My companion managed to grab the boat and a paddle. I lunged wildly for the other paddle and the float bag, then set off at a swim in chase of her hat. Nothing was lost, no one was hurt, but it was the sort of rude baptism that can bring a person face to face with the prospect of soggy death—an adrenaline jolt and an indelible memory if luck holds.

The beauty of the canyon was close to indescribable, even for someone in the business of wrangling words, but by nightfall we hadn’t made the takeout, as I suppose any sane person could have predicted. A mile beyond Turkey Creek we bivouacked. A campfire helped dry our clothes, and we tucked ourselves in the boat side by side for warmth.

“ar said this would be epic,” my companion reminded me, “but I’m not sure that word does it justice.” We had come roughly 38 miles. Her uncomplaining demeanor no longer surprised me, and my overconfidence went mercifully unmentioned. A down-canyon breeze rustled the leaves of the cottonwoods, and the rush of the water made music to sleep by, if only fitfully. Morning would bring several portages, thanks to more strainers and sweepers: a river doing its ancient thing, heedless of human designs.

Long may it remain, a siren song of adventure to the curious, and a lesson in humility for those who still care to be humbled.

Philip Connors was born in Ames, Iowa, and grew up on a farm in southern Minnesota. He worked for several years at the Wall Street Journal, mostly as an editor on the Leisure & Arts page. In 2002 he left New York for a job as a wilderness fire lookout in New Mexico’s Gila National Forest, where he has spent every summer since. That experience became the subject of his first book, “Fire Season: Field Notes From a Wilderness Lookout,” published by Ecco in 2011. It was named the best nature book of the year by Amazon.com and won a National Outdoor Book Award.
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