These days it is easy to be apathetic and even easier to be cynical. Safer too. If we risk nothing, we lose nothing—at least not personally, not emotionally. The television and newspapers are dispiriting and it is hard to fault anyone for concluding that things are just too far gone, that our system is broken, that individual citizens have no real voice, no power, no ability to affect real change.

Except that isn’t true, at least not always. And I can prove it. My proof: Two recent and enormous victories, which together protect nearly three quarters of a million acres of some of our most cherished and unique landscapes in New Mexico (Rio Grande del Norte and Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks national monuments—the second largest and largest national monuments, respectively, designated by President Obama). Is it an accident that these are both in New Mexico? Was it luck that both of these campaigns were described as “national models”? Is it coincidence that NM Wild was a driving force in both of these efforts?

Analyzing these wins and identifying the commonalities between these two successful campaigns, not only to document this important story for posterity, but more practically to better understand what made them successful and what lessons might be learned for future campaigns so that they might be replicated in other places, has led me to a few initial observations:

• Both required a long, sustained effort, each taking the better part of a decade. There were some very dark and lonely days, emotional roller coasters and some heart-crushing setbacks. Persistence (not giving up) is one of the most important attributes of good advocacy. Our opponents knew that we weren’t going to quit, and we didn’t. After all, what is 10 years in geological time?

• Both were based on sometimes difficult but absolutely necessary collaboration—finding common ground with diverse stakeholders and unconventional allies with different perspectives and motivations but compatible goals. This too takes time…educating, organizing, listening, building trust and relationships and, ultimately, speaking with the strength of a collective voice. The breadth of these coalitions was what in large part made them “national models.” Identifying and cultivating partners and stakeholders is at the root of grassroots organizing.

• Both campaigns featured local voices. The credibility that comes from this authentic recognition and passion for cherished places bubbling up from neighbors and communities with direct and deep personal memories and connections to the land is effective. These campaigns were driven not from the top down, but from the bottom up and out. Yes, we are also the locals, but sometimes it meant that we intentionally kept a low profile to afford others the opportunity to tell their important stories.

The thread running throughout all of these elements is that both campaigns depended on the critical role of citizen activism.


The test these days, whether it is a legislative path or an administrative one by the president using his executive authority under the Antiquities Act, is community support. Now more than ever, the bar is high. To be noticed, to be considered, to have any chance of success, we need to demonstrate that we care and that we aren’t going away. Our elected officials—even when we are blessed with conservation-minded ones like New Mexico’s federal delegation—need to know that we have done the hard work. Whether we’re prodding them to do more or supporting their leadership, they need to know that the citizens—we—are involved, engaged and paying attention.

As we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Wilderness Act, it is important to remember how hugely important it was as a new idea. First and foremost of course, it recognized the importance and value of wilderness for its own sake as...
Around 50 miles of the Gila River were recently ground zero for Executive Director Mark Allison and I, as we walked the talk—literally—to conduct new field research, a strategic part of this organization’s ongoing wilderness preservation work.

In honor of all three hallmarks—the 50th anniversary of the federal Wilderness Act, the 90th national anniversary of the Gila Wilderness, and the 40th anniversary of legendary environmentalist David Foreman’s Gila River walk—Mark and I entered the rugged, river wilderness in late May, collecting data over a 50-mile stretch of the river, matching the territory Foreman studied in 1974. We completed the combined 100 miles of research value on June 3, 2014, exactly 90 years from the date the Gila Wilderness was named America’s first wilderness. Inventory work will continue with our valued volunteers through the summer.

A highlight of our trip was carrying and speaking aloud into the heart of the Gila Wilderness more than 100 names of departed family and friends who particularly loved this wild river territory. NM Wild members wrote beautiful letters of remembrance and we spent an entire evening giving them to the woods, the river, and the wildlife who were surely watching.

Do I love my job? Most surely, yes. I’ll see you in the wild!

Nathan Newcomer
Field Specialist and Gila Grassroots Organizer – Silver City

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What We Do

Each day, your scrappy and resourceful NM Wild staff members fight for your wild public lands.

We...

• Monitor and “watchdog” New Mexico’s federal public lands and wilderness areas to hold management agencies accountable for following the law and minimizing abuses;

• Conduct field research to identify and document lands with wilderness characteristics that are currently unprotected and under threat from off-road vehicles, oil and gas, timber harvesting and development;

• Train and coordinate volunteers for restoration projects on public lands;

• Build broad community support for wilderness protection and cultivate new stewards through education, outreach and service projects;

• Advocate for the permanent protection of our dwindling special wild places in New Mexico by building grassroots campaigns and working with our federal congressional delegation and the executive branch.

• Fight, fight, fight for the places we all hold dear!

Get Involved

• Join or renew your membership;

• Ask your friends and family to join NM Wild;

• Give the Wild Guide as gifts to your loved ones;

• Join us for one of our many outings;

• Act on our advocacy alerts;

• Volunteer in the field or the office;

• Host a membership gathering;

• Write a piece for our newsletter;

• Contribute financially what you can;

• Let us know what is on your mind;

• Connect with us: www.nmwild.org;

• Follow us! facebook.com/nmwilderness twitter.com/nmwild instagram.com/nmwilderness
National Forest Wilderness Areas

Dave Foreman, Executive Director of The Rewilding Institute

In the 1930s, forest supervisors and district rangers of the custodial bent put up and backed most of the Primitive Areas named by the Forest Service. Theirs was the Forest Service of creaking saddle leather, mule trains coughing in trail-dust, canvas wall tents, and Dutch ovens. This was not acknowledgement of wilderness for its own sake but a love of pioneer travel and skills. Such foresters could have a strong bond to their chosen Primitive Areas and yet be against locking up “too much” of the backcountry.

In 1939 the Forest Service put out the “U Regulations,” which bade forest supervisors to do thorough studies of whatever Primitive Areas were on their National Forest. Well thought-out boundaries were to be at last drawn. The Primitive Areas and neighboring roadless lands recommended for permanent protection were to be called Wilderness Areas if over 100,000 acres and Wild Areas if less than 100,000 acres. These U Regulations were mostly the work of Bob Marshall, Director of Recreation for the Forest Service (and the main founder of The Wilderness Society). Alas, Marshall died as the new regulations were being done. Then, the Primitive Area studies were put on hold by the war.

After the war, conservationists thought the studies would go on. Primitive Areas, whatever their acreage, were most often rugged, scenic mountain ranges within a much bigger acreage of wild, roadless backcountry. The part of the bigger roadless area not designated as a Primitive Area was likely flatter, smoother, and cloaked in bigger trees. Conservationists thought the Forest Service, after study, would ask the Secretary of Agriculture to make new Wilderness Areas of all of each Primitive Area along with much of the roadless acreage around each. Instead, the Forest Service more often than not called for shrinking Primitive Areas and bringing in to the new Wildernesses little if any of the other roadless acreage—so that they could then road and log the unprotected roadless lands and what was cut out of the old Primitive Areas.

The Gila Wilderness in New Mexico tells the tale. Recall that this was the first Wilderness/Primitive Area and that it was Aldo Leopold’s baby. In 1924 at birth, it weighed in at 750,000 acres. But after Leopold left the Southwest, new leaders at the Gila National Forest hacked what was named the North Star Road through the Wilderness, leaving a Gila Primitive Area to the west and a Black Range Primitive Area to the east (following the terminology of the L-20 regulations). Another road was driven like a stake into the heart of the Gila Primitive Area from the south to the Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument and private inholdings where the forks of the Gila River came together. Ranchers, with the backing of the Forest Service, dammed mostly dry streams with mule-drawn fresnos and even bulldozers to build “stock tanks” deep within the Primitive Area and on its edges. The Gila Primitive Area was 563,000 acres when the URegs were made before World War II and was one of the first of the Primitive Areas to be looked at for permanent Wilderness classification after the War.

In 1952, Southwest Regional Forester C. Otto Lindh called for reclassifying 375,000 acres of the Gila Primitive Area as the Gila Wilderness and dropping 188,000 acres of the Primitive Area from any kind of protection—75,000 acres of old-growth ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir on Iron Creek Mesa to the north and over 100,000 acres to the east between the North Star Road and the road to the Gila Cliff Dwellings. One-third of the Gila Primitive Area would lose all protection. The Forest Service wanted to log Iron Creek Mesa and believed that the other land was too flat to be kept from Jeeps and trucks—in truth it did not meet their belief of what a “Wilderness Area” should look like. The Wilderness Society and Sierra Club were aginst chopping up the Gila; amazingly (to conservationists today, leastways), so were the folks in nearby Silver City.

The Forest Service shuffled their proposal a little. On January 15, 1953, the Secretary of Agriculture announced a new Gila Wilderness—410,000 acres keeping Iron Creek Mesa. One hundred and forty-eight thousand acres, mostly the East Side but also in scattered acreages around the Wilderness, were left of the old Primitive Area and kept as the Gila Primitive Area for study at a later time. When it was restudied in 1972, the Forest Service worked again to cut out most of the Primitive Area, but conservationists got Congress to put nearly all of it in the Gila Wilderness in 1980.

In 1953, the Forest Service got away with taking an ax to the Three Sisters Primitive Area in the Oregon Cascades. Fifty-three thousand acres of lordly old-growth forest at lower elevations along French Pete Creek and elsewhere were dropped from protection and opened up for clear-cut logging. Even after the Wilderness Act was being worked on in Congress, the Forest Service still hacked away at Primitive Areas. Michael Frome tells the tale of Primitive Areas taken to the slaughterhouse in Battle for the Wilderness. Conservationists quickly learned that instead of a growing network of National Forest Wilderness Areas, they were being given half the loaf they thought they already had.

This onslaught against the old Primitive Areas for the sake of clear-cutting ancient forest is what truly drove The Wilderness Society, Sierra Club, other wildlovers, and many members of Congress to work hard for a congressional Wilderness Act—one that would take away the Forest Service’s lordship over Wilderness Areas.
Much to my surprise, I was recently referred to as being a middle-aged mom. What? I’m not middle-aged. I can still hike 12,000-foot peaks, kayak, hackey sack and dance like I did 20 years ago. But the mom part, yep that’s me! I love my family and the time we spend together…especially when it is outside.

This year the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance is working to plan the National Wilderness Conference and a Get Wild Festival on Albuquerque’s Civic Plaza to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Wilderness Act. It’s an important anniversary—one that gives us the opportunity to take a look at how far we have come to protect wilderness and how to build the future stewards of our natural legacy. I’ve enjoyed working with a dedicated group of volunteers and wilderness professionals to plan the events, and let me tell you it is a huge effort! But during my time out of the office I decided to make this year a celebration of wilderness for my family too. I pledged to get us out into the wilds as much as possible.

My husband and I got to backpack the Gila Wilderness to celebrate his 50th birthday earlier this year. We’ve rafted through the Rio Grande del Norte National Monument, kayaked through the Rio Chama Wilderness and hiked in the new Organ Mountains Desert Peaks National Monument. It has been fantastic and we are just getting started. Our family celebration is also about fostering our children’s connection with nature and their understanding of the importance of wild, undeveloped lands; and creating memories that will last forever.

This last weekend on Friday the 13th there was a full moon on our camping trip. Apparently, a full moon will not occur again on Friday the 13th until 2049. I asked my kids to take a moment to soak in the beauty of the wild landscape that surrounded us…the sandstone cliffs of pastel hues fading to redrock, the green cottonwoods and willows draping the river. I also asked them to call me in 35 years when I’m in “old-age” and remind me of what we did on the last full moon on Friday the 13th.

Tisha is looking for volunteers who would like to help monitor non-native invasive plants in the Sandia Mountain Wilderness. If you are interested in getting involved, please contact her at tisha@nmwild.org.

**Resource Recommendation**

**Book:** *Outdoors in the Southwest: An Adventure Anthology*
Edited by Andrew Gulliford

A new book of essays by 27 of the most articulate writers and speakers on wilderness, including Ed Abbey, Barbara Kingsolver, and Terry Tempest Williams. This very fresh, readable book honors low desert to high alpine terrain outdoor experiences in the Southwest. At once a great armchair book, it also serves as a very informative guidebook to the Southwest for the reader or the reader’s favorite outdoor advocate, volunteer and wanderer. It is also designed for book clubs and classrooms with thoughtful study questions.

Rich with historical, anthropological, geological and downright great storytelling, this collection edited by Gulliford, a professor of history and environmental studies at Fort Lewis College in Durango, Colo., is worth your bookshelf space. At 400 pages, published by University of Oklahoma Press in 2014, the work is uncompromised and offers an index, bibliography and end footnotes, contributor bios, and useful illustrations. Equally satisfying as the best of the many articles inside of its covers (not a bad one in the bunch), is the underlying advocacy overall by Gulliford for an outdoor ethic based on “curiosity, cooperation, humility, and ecological literacy.” A staff pick!

Join us for a reading from *Outdoors in the Southwest* with Gulliford July 5 at 3 p.m at Booksworks in Albuquerque.
Reverse Alchemy and the Love of Dirt

Alicia Johnson

When you dig into something for the love of it and how it multiplies in the world, you may find yourself with little to crow about if the measurement is a new pile of gold at the end of the day. And you may even end up with nothing but dirt.

Sally Strong of Santa Fe literally made old gold into dirt—“reverse alchemy” as she likes to claim. A loyal supporter of New Mexico Wilderness Alliance (NM Wild), her first contact came by way of her late husband, Bob Langsenkamp, an original member of the Wilderness Study Group and a giant in the conservation movement in New Mexico. NM Wild exists in large part due to his skill in articulating the research of scientists like Dave Foreman into the political lexicon of citizens, creating a shared value across New Mexico and beyond.

A teacher and proponent of conservation values in her own right, Sally’s interests are child development and education—a beautiful partner to her husband’s deep and abiding accomplishments for wilderness. And she likes dirt.

A few years back, Sally chose to increase an already large, family garden into a gigantic plot with potential to produce nutritious food for many mouths. A water catchment system, the clutch of “friends-who-weed,” and her own time commitment were valuable resources ready to go. But the plot needed more life-sustaining dirt.

Originally from West Virginia, Sally understands “top soil”—the inches of living dirt that elicit envy when one has it. Resourceful to the core, she gathered every broken earring, knotted necklace, and every ring whose stone was gone and performed what she now describes as “reverse alchemy”—turning gold into dirt. The $400 of useless cashed-in gold pieces went to dirt, enough compost delivered on site to give her top soil to grow vegetables by the bushels. Which she shares.

Sally accomplished another alchemical feat for NM Wild—again in reverse. In the name of her husband, Sally gifted a life-sustaining donation to the organization in 2007 when times were more than tough and closure due to financial stress seemed imminent. Her financial gift sustained life and our work turned to gold. Across the country, and in particular here in New Mexico, all of us owe Sally a huge debt of gratitude. If she had not foreseen the need to continue her husband’s vision with the much-needed financial gift, it is entirely possible the recent addition of three-quarters of a million acres in New Mexico designated as protected land would not have happened. Gold turned into love of the wild.

What’s her current project? As every grandparent knows, when your kids produce the miracle of a grandchild, it is alchemy gone futuristic. Sally’s Louella, a lovely 14-month-old granddaughter is her point of light. Regarding grandparenthood, “you can’t believe how joyful it is,” she beams. Although Louella is being raised in New Hampshire, New Mexico will never be far away. Sally’s wish is that her children’s children know their grandfather’s importance as a leader in the 20th century conservation movement, especially in New Mexico. Sally punctuates that legacy by stating fervently that, “preserving what we have left is critical—once it is gone, it is GONE.”

In reminiscing about her times in the wilderness with Bob and their children Matt and Margaret when they were growing up, Sally’s love of teaching effectively continues to offer sound advice: “Make it fun. Let young people test themselves too—wilderness skills create confidence. Matt has traveled the world alone since he was a teenager and I attribute that courage to what his dad taught him in the outdoors. It makes you tough and smart and adaptable.”

Hoping today’s parents can experience the outdoors, camping, and hiking with their children, Sally remembers that Bob was more than a fan of wilderness. “His life’s work was environmentalism. It wasn’t a job. It wasn’t a hobby. There was nothing else for him—it was his life.”

She beckons parents and grandparents to help young people experience the wilderness and attests to the common outcome—becoming partners around the globe in the continuing value of land conservation.

“It’s all about personal experience, to know what it feels like to sleep under the stars, fingers sticky with s’mores!”

We thank you, Sally, for turning gold into everlasting love of this beautiful earth.

We sincerely thank Ms. Strong for naming this organization in her will. Her gift will be for the benefit of the "Bob Langsenkamp Fund" at New Mexico Wilderness Alliance. If you would like to contribute to this legacy fund, or create a fund in honor of the conservationists in your family or circle of friends, contact Alicia Johnson: alicia@nmwild.org.
Continued from front

opposed to federal public land for “multiple uses,” including extractive industries like oil, gas and mining. For the first time it would permanently protect places and recognize the intrinsic value of land apart from commercial and utilitarian purposes. It was and is the gold standard of protection.

But it was also new in that it presupposes—it requires—ordinary, everyday people from all walks of life fighting fiercely for the special wild places they care so much about and working with our elected representatives to permanently protect deserving places under threat.

Howard Zahniser, the “father of the Wilderness Act,” and others saw that power needed to come from citizen activists, not administrators and bureaucrats. Protection through legislation would mean that the power would come from citizen activists driving, pushing and working with their elected representatives. The Wilderness Act was itself conceived by citizen activists. By decentralizing the power from administrators to the legislative process, it essentially acknowledged grassroots organizing and citizen’s proposals through and with our elected officials.

And one more thought on perseverance—While it is true that the final vote for the Wilderness Act in July 1964 was bipartisan and nearly unanimous (373-1), we shouldn’t forget that passage of the bill preserving wilderness was not easy. It was an idea decades in the making. Zahniser wrote the first draft of the Wilderness Act in 1956. It wasn’t passed until eight years later. Zahniser wrote 66 drafts, and there were 18 public hearings. I think the lesson for advocates and people who care about wilderness is that persistence has always mattered in ultimately achieving protection.

Lots to celebrate, sure. Even better, being a citizen activist isn’t always a heavy lift and there are lots of ways to contribute. It may seem inconsequential, unbelievable even, but I can tell you that things like Facebook likes, retweets, phone calls to our congressional delegation and the White House, public comments, and letters to the editor of your local newspaper really do make a difference. Showing up for a workshop or a town hall makes a difference. When the secretary of the interior asks to see a show of hands of people in the audience who are supportive of a national monument and 100 percent of the hands go up (as was the case for Rio Grande del Norte) or 80 percent of the hands go up (as was the case in January for Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks), it has a huge impact. When administration officials fly back to Washington, D.C., with smiles on their faces, gushing about our special places and marveling at the level of community support, that is the difference between a successful campaign and one that is not.

Don’t scoff. I know personally that these things make the difference. I’ve had the privilege of seeing it firsthand. There are wild places still left in New Mexico that aren’t protected and under threat of being lost forever. Lots of work left to do. Let’s get to it together.

Mark Allison, Executive Director

Wilderness Act 50th Anniversary Gear

Hats: $20  Magnets: $4  Mugs: $10  T-shirts: $16

Order online at www.nmwild.org. Go to Shop.

Support the work of achieving and protecting wilderness in New Mexico. New Mexico Wilderness Alliance is a non-profit organization. Please support by donating securely online at www.nmwild.org or by sending a check payable to NM Wild, P.O. Box 25464, Albuquerque NM, 87125. Please also consider remembering NM Wild in your will. To learn more about making a charitable contribution, including stock transfers and bequests, contact Alicia Johnson by e-mail: alicia@nmwild.org

Wild Outings

SAVE THE DATE: Yellowstone Wildlife Watch
February 22-26, 2015

Join the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance’s Executive Director Mark Allison and special guest David Parsons for three days and four nights in the stunning setting of Yellowstone National Park for our most unique wilderness and wildlife watching experience. More information and sign up soon.