In the March 1981 issue of this journal, our article on the right to risk in wilderness appeared along with critical comments from J. Alan Wagar and Stewart Allen. Our purpose in this communication is to respond to those comments and in so doing to reaffirm the intent of that article.

Paraphrasing Wagar, we are concerned about the clash between increasing governmental regulations and personal freedom and self-reliance as that conflict is manifested in current wilderness management. Our proposed resolution calls for the establishment of a "no-rescue" policy in selected wilderness areas. The purpose being to give recreationists an opportunity to experience wilderness completely on their own. In that sense we are indeed asking managing agencies to sanction the right to risk one's life in the wilderness.

While Wagar grasps the principle of our argument, Allen does not. He speaks both for risk and rescue. He reasons that "the land, not a managing agency, provides the opportunities for risk" and that "agency rescues are a posteriori decisions" which have no impact on the risk taken by wilderness users. "The risk is there," Allen says. What he does not realize is that the amount of risk depends on the possible consequences of one's actions. Thus, there is a fundamental difference between being held accountable for one's behavior in the wilderness by one's pocketbook (having to pay for one's own search and rescue), as he proposes, and being held accountable by one's life, as we propose.

In the first instance, the risk is not really there. The prospect of rescue by others diminishes the level of perceived risk. Those who advocate a "no-rescue" policy recognize this and find Allen's alternative a poor substitute. So, too, would have Robert Marshall.

As one of the visionaries of the American wilderness system, Marshall (1930) held that wilderness areas should provide the "opportunity for complete self-sufficiency." We are not suggesting that wilderness is only a playground for people. On the contrary, we are proposing that wilderness be restored in its full meaning and travel routes secret so that agencies would never be in the position of refusing to rescue people known to be in distress." In other words, Wagar stopped short of endorsing the idea that agencies sanction the right to risk in the ultimate sense. Consequently, while we view his suggestion as a positive intermediate step, we believe it should be extended to incorporate the full meaning of our proposal.

Allen, on the other hand, objected to "no-rescue" zones as a "peculiar" notion that would "adversely affect all wilderness." In fact, wilderness zoning is not a peculiar notion.

Lucas (1973), Stankey (1973), and Hendee et al. (1978) all proposed zoning as an acceptable wilderness management practice. Moreover, Merriam and Knopp (1976) suggested a wilderness classification system based on different experiential opportunities such as challenge and self-reliance. More recently, Nash (1981) has recognized the need for zoning to safeguard increasingly rare wilderness opportunities. He has proposed the establishment of five categories of wilderness ranging from small, highly used areas, to sanctuaries that would receive no recreational use. It is interesting to note that his fourth category is described as "remote, rugged, and dangerous; expedition level skills; no trails, signs, patrols, or search and rescue."

We do concur with Allen's assertion that "individuals should take responsibility for their actions in all wilderness areas." Underlying our original article, however, was the premise that increasing agency controls and search and rescue procedures prevented wilderness recreationists from fully accepting that responsibility. We are pleased that some managing agencies are currently decreasing regulations, as Allen submits, and thereby are restoring control to the individual. We ask only that such control be restored in full in a few areas so that those who so choose may also fully accept the consequences of their actions.

In the final analysis, the adoption of a "no-rescue" policy in selected wilderness areas across the United States would expand the range of choices open to outdoor recreationists by returning to them an opportunity for complete self-sufficiency. While that opportunity may make some people uncomfortable, it is better to have it than not to have it. Working out the implementation may indeed be difficult, yet its necessity has been well stated by Nash (1981), "If wilderness is to be part of the future wilderness, we must plan and manage for that value."