Why is Wilderness Important?

Does the American Public Really Care?

Should it be managed?

Why?

Who should Manage it?

How should it be Managed?
Shifting Attitudes Toward Wilderness

“Ours has been the first, and will doubtless be the last, party of whites to visit this profitless locality. It seems intended by nature that the Colorado River, along the greater portion of its lonely and majestic way, shall be forever unvisited and undisturbed.”

Joseph Christmas Ives, Explorer, 1857.

- The early conception of wilderness in North America was dominated by fear and abhorrence. Authors have portrayed wilderness as desolate, a howling wasteland, a godless tract;

- As settlers expanded west, the image of wilderness began to shift;
Wilderness was seen not only in its traditional role as a barrier to progress, but a potential contaminant of the human spirit as a place that harbored anti-Christian forces, wild animals, Indians, thieves and other threats;

What began to emerge was that wilderness held value in and of itself, that it was not just to be exploited for the material from which civilization was to be fabricated.
Causes of this Shift in Attitudes

- Increased Scientific understanding of Wilderness (physical laws and processes of nature);

- American culture slowly began to realize that wilderness and nature were a distinctive aspect of their culture absent from the influence of Europe;

- What was once considered an endless tract to wilderness was discovered to have bounds, livable and that fact that it could be scarce found its way into the American psyche as something valuable, to be treasured.
From roughly the last decade of the 19th century through the first two decades of the 20th century, a great transition occurred in America’s attitude toward wilderness;

Over this time, the negative evaluation of wilderness, fear and support for its elimination were replaced by significant intrigue and concern that at least some wilderness should be preserved.
Summary

• Generally there has been an evolving conception that recognized the importance of wilderness;

• This evolution has been driven three main forces;
  – shifts in thinking among both scientists and philosophers,
  – increasing scarcity of wild land,
  – recognition of the value of retaining a diversity of environmental settings as a complement to an increasingly developed landscape.
The Wilderness Act of 1964 established a National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS) "to secure for the American people of present and future generations the benefits of an enduring resource of wilderness."

The Wilderness Act was a result an expanding national consciousness in relation to natural resources.

The policy makers of the time recognized numerous values in establishing a system of protection for wilderness areas.
The Wilderness Act of 1964

- The 1964 Act established 9.1 million acres of Forest Service land in 54 wildernesses.

- NWPS is composed of over 104 million acres in 628 wildernesses, in all but six States and administered by:
  - USDA Forest Service (FS)
  - USDI Bureau of Land Management (BLM),
  - Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS)
  - National Park Service (NPS)
National Wilderness Preservation System is composed of federally owned areas designated by Congress as "wilderness areas", and these shall be administered for the use and enjoyment of the American people in such manner as will leave them unimpaired for future use and enjoyment as Wilderness.
Definition of Wilderness

• A wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his own 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;
An area of wilderness is further defined to mean in this Act an area of undeveloped Federal land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions and which;

- To have been affected primarily by forces of nature, with the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable;

- Has outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation;
– Has at least five thousand acres of land or is of sufficient size as to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition; and

– May also contain ecological, geological, cultural or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value.
What is Wilderness?

Roderick Nash, in *Wilderness and the American Mind*, tells us that wilderness is a difficult word to define.

- There is no universal definition of wilderness.

- He believes that wilderness is so heavily weighed with meaning of a *personal*, *symbolic*, and *changing kind* that it is difficult to define.

- Defining the character of wilderness would in turn have to include some *perceptions and values*. 
What is Wilderness?

Aldo Leopold (1949), in Sand County Almanac, provides a number of values for wilderness that are inclusive of most wilderness as:

- **Reservoirs of biological diversity** and therefore an intrinsic scientific value;

- **Life support systems** providing essential components to the human ecosystem like oxygen;

- **Historic and cultural values** helping to define the nature of being American;
What is Wilderness?

- **Aesthetic values** with an impact on recreation and spiritual applications;

- **Educational values** drawn from experiencing nature in a natural form.

- Other contemporary values for wilderness expand from this base classification as our awareness of the significance of intact watersheds, spiritual connections, and recreational opportunity, to name a few, continue to expand and become apparent.
What Meanings are Associated with the Arctic Refuge

The Arctic National Refuge:

• Provides a connection to American Cultural Heritage.

• Is a place of mystery and unknown, a place for exploration and discovery.

• Provides psychological benefits associated with solitude.

• Is a place of wildness, a state where nature is uncontrolled and free to continue along its evolutionary pathway.
• Provides a connection to the natural world and our species’ evolutionary past.
• Is a place to approach and experience humility.
• Is a place of intrinsic value.
• Is a bequest to the future.
• Is a place of restraint.
• Is a sacred place.
History

• Under the leadership of Gifford Pinchot in 1897, management of the national forests emphasized conservation, the protection and development of the lands.

• However, it did not take long to recognize the need to preserve some areas in a natural state.

• U.S. Forest Service created the first wilderness area in the Gila National Forest (New Mexico) in 1924.
History

• The Forest Service issues the L-20 regulation to protect some of its "primitive" areas from commercial development until management plans are developed.

• The federal government also passes regulations in 1930, when Congress enacts the **Shipstead-Newton-Nolan Act** (protection of water levels and lakeshores by prohibiting dams, and logging within 400 feet of recreational waterways) to protect over 1 million acres in the Superior Primitive Area in Minnesota.

• This is the first federal law in American history to protect a wilderness area.
History

• Former "primitive" areas are reclassified as "Wilderness," "wild" or "roadless," depending on size.

• After nine hearings, sixty six major revisions, and over six thousand pages of testimony in 1963 the U.S. Senate passes the Wilderness Bill.

• In 1964 House of Representatives passes the Wilderness Bill and President Johnson signs the Wilderness Act.
Grassroots public movement for Support of Wilderness

- It is unreasonable to expect to pin down the origins of public support for wilderness to a single figure, time or event.

- Works by John Muir, Jack London, Aldo Leopold, James Fennimore Cooper dramatically publicized wilderness over a broad time span, still inspiring people today.

- The impact of concepts that American culture, described as rugged individualism, is the result of exposure and awareness of wilderness, has directly influenced national policy.
Public Support for Wilderness

- The debate over the creation of a Hetch Hetchy Dam (a glacial valley in Yosemite National Park in California) in a *federally protected natural area* created a focal point from which a wilderness preservation groundswell developed.

- The *failure* to protect dam construction despite massive public opposition lent support to all future preservation efforts.

- Significant figures in preservation lent leadership to the development of a NWPS, *John Muir’s* support for preservation directly and through the Sierra Club continued as *David Brower* assumed leadership.
• In 1935 The Wilderness Society is formed, led by Bob Marshall, Aldo Leopold and others.

• The combined efforts of conservationists in 1950 worked to prevent construction of a dam at Echo Park in Dinosaur National Monument.

• In 1955, Howard Zahniser, Executive Director of the Wilderness Society, writes first draft of a Wilderness Bill that would designate lands to be protected from any form of resource extraction became the framework for the NWPS.
The 1964 Wilderness Act

• May also contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value;

• Deliberately imprecise criteria are used for the definition in order to be both inclusive of diverse perceptions and to facilitate agency level decision making.
**The 1964 Wilderness Act**

- Section 4 contains the use of Wilderness Areas and how they fit in the management directives of public lands agencies.

- Sec. 4 (a) spells out how wilderness areas “… are hereby declared to be within and supplemental to the purposes for which national forests and units of the national park and national wildlife refuge systems are established and administered.”

- This section essentially establishes how wilderness is one use that agencies have to manage.
The 1964 Wilderness Act

• Sec.4 (c) establishes a prohibition of certain uses; no commercial enterprises, no permanent roads, no motorized equipment, no permanent structures.

• However, Sec.4 (d) establishes that there are special provisions permitting of the prohibited uses; (For example, until 1984 all existing mineral leases were valid along with actions required for operation of the lease, like road building, in wilderness areas or commercial enterprises (Rafting, Stock etc.).
Summary

• The NWPS is a piece of legislation with a dramatic impact on the character of the Wilderness in the United States.

• The development of the NWPS was a stepwise progression of popular support and government legislative action.

• In 1964 the Wilderness Act succeeded in creating a wholly new designation on our public lands, preserving a diminishing resource.

• Current debates about wilderness designations abound, whether it is the best use of public lands, are certain prohibited uses really incompatible with wilderness, can one really manage for wilderness.
Summary

• The Act itself is considered important by some wilderness advocates as it requires Congressional designation but also makes it too susceptible to industry lobbyists.

• Pro-industry advocates site how wilderness areas are mostly visited by a cultural, educational or the economic elite and as a national resource these areas need to be opened up to other uses for the public at large.

• The controversy illustrates the difficulty that such an Act would face trying to get passed today.

• However, the preservation afforded by the Wilderness Act continues to provide citizens access to a natural resource in short supply.