

THE RELATIONSHIP OF WILDERNESS TO
DESIGNATED BACK COUNTRY

I'm glad to be here for several reasons.

Personally, I have a long-standing commitment to wilderness just as all of you do. I can understand and relate to your thoughts and feelings as a result of experiencing for myself what wilderness has to offer. I've visited 30 Wildernesses and Primitive Areas.

Professionally, I'm responsible for giving leadership to the building and maintaining of a high quality Wilderness System within the Northern Region of the Forest Service, and for 4 years I had the privilege of working at the National level to carry out the Wilderness Act as it applies to the National Forest System.

So you and I are working toward the same general goal - quality Wilderness in Montana and the Nation. We need to work together if we're going to achieve our objectives. Building the system is only a part of the job. We and those who come after us will have a much tougher job maintaining its quality or even its very existence. The battles we face together in this regard may make the classification task look small by comparison. We have five units of the Wilderness System in Montana, and it's timely that we concern ourselves with their

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management while we are working to add new lands to the System. The way we manage our Wildernesses during these early years will establish the height of our breast works for the coming conflicts to maintain high quality Wilderness. We need your help!

The subject of this panel (Wilderness as it relates to designated Back Country) is vital to the wilderness cause. It is important that we talk about it.

The National Forests encompass about 187,000,000 acres and include some of the most scenic and inviting of America's open spaces. They are truly the Nation's playgrounds, but even more important, they will play an increasingly important part in maintaining environmental quality in our Nation. More and more people are finding and using the National Forests for recreation. The total recreation use for 1968 amounted to about 157,000,000 visitor days with 8,741,000 visitor days in the Northern Region's National Forests. About 415,100 visitor days of this use were in this Region's Wildernesses and Primitive Areas, and this use is growing rapidly.

The Forest Service has long recognized that an important role of the National Forests is to provide opportunities for the broad spectrum of resource-oriented outdoor recreation activities and experiences. This variety ranges from those associated with Wilderness to those at intensively developed places. I should emphasize here that this opportunity spectrum does not intend to denote a quality scale. Within this range of opportunities, National Forest visitors enjoy a wide variety of

high quality recreation activities such as hiking, backpacking, camping, mountain climbing, swimming, skiing, boating, canoeing, hunting and fishing. Opportunities for most of these activities are found on nearly all National Forest land. However, the visitor's tastes, skills, and habitat patterns determine which experience-level opportunity best fills his particular needs and where he looks for it.

Wilderness and Back Country, about which I will talk more later, both hold important places in this spectrum. Neither is a substitute for the other, but they complement each other. The decisions as to where in the National Forests each of the recreation opportunity will be accommodated must consider people's needs, other resource values, and other factors - not the least important of which are basic ecological needs of the land and its particular community of life. These are truly very basic multiple use decisions.

The late Howard Zahniser, one of our great Wilderness champions whom some of you know personally, put it this way, "Not only is wildlands preservation consistent with the multiple-use principle - the best apparent hope for success in the preservation of such areas, including wilderness, is indeed actually in application of the multiple-use principle."

He also said, "To preserve some areas free from timber cutting will require adequate timber production on other areas. Preserving

natural areas undeveloped with recreation facilities will require adequate provision of developed areas with the access and facilities needed by the large numbers seeking outdoor recreation with conveniences...."

As a basis for our discussion today, it is important that we briefly review just what is this thing called the National Wilderness Preservation System.

Most of you probably know the Forest Service pioneered the Wilderness concept in 1924 with the establishment of a large part of what is now the Gila Wilderness in New Mexico. By the time the Wilderness Act passed in 1964 about 8 percent of the National Forest System was being managed for Wilderness purposes. Of this, 3,104,000 acres is in the Northern Region. This is 12 percent of the total area in the Region.

What was the basic reason for establishing a Wilderness System? The legislative history of the Act makes it clear that the objective was much more than just setting aside places to ride, hike, hunt, fish, or camp. Congress recognized that the basic character of the American people grew out of the wilderness. Our forefathers fought and conquered it and in that process developed strong characteristics. Those of us who favored the Wilderness Act felt that some of this heritage should be maintained so this and future generations can continue to receive the benefits of continuing opportunity for a contact with wilderness.

The Wilderness Act provides that units of the System shall be devoted to recreational, scenic, scientific, education, conservation, and historical uses, but this really doesn't go very far toward explaining the basic reason for establishing Wildernesses. All of these activities can be achieved in other kinds of areas - so why Wilderness? Wildernesses unique values can be divided into three broad categories: physical, mental, and aesthetic.

Physical values are much more than the exercise and fresh air obtained from hiking, riding, or doing other recreational activities in wilderness. These same values can be had in almost any rural setting. Wilderness must, therefore, provide something more. In wilderness the visitor must have the opportunity to test himself against nature without the aid of mechanized equipment or facilities which have been placed there ahead of him by someone else. This will teach him personal independence and the ability to care for himself by carrying his own burdens, providing his own fuel, preparing his own food, furnishing his own shelter, and selecting his own camp.

Bob Marshall put it this way:

"More than mere heartiness is the character of physical independence which can be nurtured only away from the coddling of civilization. In a true wilderness if a person is not qualified to satisfy all the requirements of existence, then he is bound to perish. As long as we prize individuality and competence it is imperative to

provide the opportunity for complete self-sufficiency.

This is inconceivable under the effete superstructure of urbanity; it demands the harsh environment of untrammelled expanses."

The mental values are many and varied. A few of the more important are: opportunities for independent thinking unhampered by distracting influences of civilization; the scientific and educational value of having areas where natural ecological processes are allowed to operate unfettered by man; opportunities to escape from the pressures of modern civilization; and the perpetuation of pioneer skills.

Aldo Leopold who pioneered in Wilderness designation said:

"The day is almost upon us when a pack train must wind its way up a graveled highway and turn out its bell mare in the pasture of a summer hotel. When that day comes the pack train will be dead, the diamond hitch will be merely a rope, and Kit Carson and Jim Bridger will be names in a history lesson."

Wilderness will keep the diamond hitch alive, it will also keep alive the crosscut saw, double-bitted axe, and basic woodsman skills, because they will be necessary to use wilderness.

There are indirect mental values sometimes identified as "vicarious values." Some people value wilderness because their enjoyment of non-wilderness outdoor experiences are conditioned and enhanced by knowledge that wilderness exists.

In nearly all of mankind there is a powerful desire for adventure, but with the many and increasing amenities, the opportunities for adventure are few. Wilderness can provide this opportunity, but to do so, it must remain harsh. The visitor must be challenged, and he must actually face some peril - the peril of getting lost, the peril of a dangerous mountain trail, the peril of meeting a grizzly face to face, or the peril of fording a raging,, storm-swollen stream. Bertrand Russell once said "many men would cease to desire war if they had opportunities to risk their lives in alpine climbing."

The aesthetic values of wilderness also needs discussion. Many of our Wildernesses contain spectacular mountain peaks, beautiful streams, and green, flower-sprinkled meadows, but these are not the unique qualities of wilderness beauty. These qualities are found in many places accessible by roads where no wilderness exists. The uniqueness of wilderness beauty lies in the fact that it is in constant state of natural flux - ever changing, uncontrolled by man. This is amplified by the vastness of wilderness. Bob Marshall said:

"Any one who has stood upon a lofty summit and gazed over an inchoate tangle of deep canyons and cragged mountains, of sunlit lakelets and black expanses of forest, has become aware of a certain giddy sensation

that there are no distances, no measures simply unrelated matter rising and falling without any analogy to the banal geometry of breadth, thickness and height."

We've discussed the values of wilderness - the reasons for having a Wilderness System - now what kind of direction did Congress give for protecting these values?

The Wilderness Act is seven pages long; however, much of the language deals with the procedures for establishing Wilderness and the discussions of exceptions to the general provisions of the Wilderness Act. Here today, I want to concentrate on some key sections or words and phrases within sections, which I believe outline our mutual responsibilities - yours as users and ours as administrators.

The objective of the Act was set forth in the first sentence in section 2(a). It is:

"...to assure that an increasing population, accompanied by expanding settlement and growing mechanization, does not occupy and modify all areas within the United States..."

In that same section, Congress set forth the policy that it would follow in order to meet this objective -

"...it is hereby declared to be the policy of the Congress to secure for the American people of present and future generations the benefits of an enduring resource of wilderness...." (emphasis added)

You will note that in this policy statement, Congress has identified wilderness as a distinct and unique resource of the land.

In addition to setting forth the policy and the objectives, the Act establishes our management direction in section 2(a) -

Wildernesses:

"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, and so as to provide for the protection of these area, the preservation of their wilderness character, and for the gathering and dissemination of information regarding their use and enjoyment as wilderness..." (emphasis added)

Congress set forth additional management direction in section 4(b) where it said that administering agencies -

"...shall so administer such area for such other purposes for which it may have been established as also to preserve its wilderness character...." (emphasis added)

The policy and the management direction I have quoted refer to the wilderness resource, the wilderness character of the area, etc. What is this wilderness resource? Perhaps one of the best ways of approaching the answer to this question is to explore some of the things that it is not. Wilderness is not necessarily high mountains, highly scenic country, good hunting, good fishing, geologically or

ecologically unique, or historically significant. The Wilderness Act does not say that a Wilderness is a recreation area or a wildlife sanctuary. Congress recognized that the word wilderness means different things to different people; so in order to provide a firm foundation for the System, it defined the wilderness resource in section 2(c) of the Act. Following are key words from that section:

"...where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain...."

"...land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation,...generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable;... outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation..."

That section pointed out that these lands may also have -

"...ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical values...."

To maintain the enduring wilderness resource defined by the Wilderness Act, Congress established certain prohibitions. It stated that there shall be no commercial enterprise, permanent road, temporary road, structures, or installations and no use of motor vehicles, motorized equipment, motor boats, aircraft, or mechanical transport within any

Wilderness. It would have been very clear if Congress had left these prohibitions specific and absolute; however, it complicated our administration by providing exceptions. These exceptions include: existing private rights, administrative activities, emergencies involving people within the area, fire control activities, insect and disease control, mining, water facilities (when approved by the President), grazing of domestic livestock, access to surrounded private land, access to valid claims and occupancies, commercial operations by outfitters and guides, and the continued use of motor boats and aircraft where this use had already been established. There are no other exceptions in the Act.

The administrative exception has caused considerable discussion. Let us examine it more closely. It reads as follows:

"...except as necessary to meet minimum requirements for the administration of the area for the purpose of this Act..." (emphasis added)

Some administrators, miners, outfitters, livestock operators, water users, and others have wanted to read this exception as follows:

"except for the administration of the area."

It is very important, however, to recognize that Congress added some very significant and restrictive modifiers, and perhaps the most significant

of these were the words "for the purposes of this Act." These words alone rule out administrative use of nonconforming equipment or structures for water management, wildlife management, etc.

As we have proceeded with the job of implementing the Wilderness Act, it becomes obvious that administration of Wilderness in the years ahead will become increasingly more complicated. The basic problem lies in the unavoidable philosophical conflicts in the law itself which requires that these areas be made available to the public for use and with a minimum of restrictions. Yet, the more a wilderness is used, the less it is wilderness. The more a wilderness is used, the more the Forest Service will have to apply local controls such as the management, dispersal, and even limitation of people; otherwise, the area will slowly lose the very characteristics which made it suitable for wilderness.

Research and administrative investigations into the needs and desires of National Forest visitors show that many of them have skills commensurate with the solitude and challenge offered by the Wilderness System. You, in this room, are examples of this hardy group, and it is for you and people like you that Wildernesses have special significance.

The same studies also show, however, that many others have a lesser degree of skills and want or need some facility and comfort or convenience items not appropriate in Wildernesses, such as more

intensive trail signing, firegrills, tables, toilets, and shelters. Such persons normally turn to designated Wildernesses only when opportunities for the experience levels they need are not provided elsewhere. This results in excessive and frequently incompatible demands on the designated wilderness resource. Most of the people seeking these kinds of experiences are not primarily concerned with the ecological history of the area in a high degree of solitude or even in most other National Forest activities which might be underway so long as their interests are not unduly impinged upon. They are, however, looking for areas where there is no public road access - areas where scenery and natural beauty are protected and wildlife values are enhanced or maintained.

Through its very character, much National Forest land will continue to be unroaded and thus will provide back country type of recreation opportunities for the foreseeable future. This is so because rough topography makes road access extremely difficult or expensive; fragile soils or other resource values would be damaged by road construction; or potential commodity resource values do not warrant the costs which would be involved. Despite this, we in the Forest Service recognize that we can't leave this to chance. We must actively plan to provide opportunities for back country recreation experiences if we are to assure their continued availability to future generations.

Recognizing and designating areas for back country recreation opportunities will also have the significant long-range effect of helping

to protect units of the National Wilderness Preservation System. At the same time, back country areas will serve as training grounds where visitors may test and sharpen the skills necessary to use and enjoy Wildernesses without damage to the basic wilderness resource.

This need has been recognized in various ways throughout the Forest Service. One Region provides in its Regional Multiple-Use Guides for a "Backwoods Zone." Other Regions have designated Scenic Areas to fill this need. Still others have designated management units in their multiple-use plans which have variously been referred to as "Pioneer Areas," "Back Country Areas," or "Roughing Areas." Some of these have been given a lot of publicity. Others have been primarily for administrative guidance and have had little or no publicity.

Many have asked what is "Back Country?" and rightly so. First, let me say that it is not just one kind of area. The "Back Country" or "Pioneer" or "Frontier" area designations cover that part of the recreation opportunity spectrum between those activities served by roads and those available only in the Wilderness. Each area may be slightly or greatly different from other areas, but its management direction is firmly established in the management plan which when approved by the Regional Forester serves as the designation document. This plan represents a firm commitment to the people that management of the area will not be changed unless there is a clear public mandate for change.

Although these areas may each be somewhat different, they all have some common characteristics. Recreation is recognized as a key value. There is no public road access into the area. All administrative and resource management activities are conducted so as to promote the scenic attractiveness, wildlife, and outdoor recreation values of the area. Back Country Areas may be from several hundred to many thousands of acres in size. They generally provide outstanding opportunities for one or more types of recreation activities such as camping, hiking, horseback riding, canoeing, river floating, fishing, hunting, mountain climbing, nature study, rock collecting, berrypicking, photography, and scenic enjoyment. Reasonably good auto access to or near boundaries of most Back Country Areas will eventually be provided. The boundaries of such areas may follow near road edges, or the perimeter of recreation areas developed for auto access, or areas of intensive resource development.

Earlier I mentioned that ecological consideration plays an important part in deciding which kind of designation is appropriate for a particular piece of land. The Bob Marshall Wilderness is important to the grizzly, and the San Rafael Wilderness in California is important to the California condor, but Wilderness designation isn't always the best for some plants or animals whose very existence may depend on careful manipulation of their habitat. Let's consider the Kirtland Warbler for example. This is a rare and perhaps vanishing song bird. At present, it nests only in scattered locations in the northeastern part of Michigan's lower peninsula. This

bird nests only in homogenous areas of young jack pine between 5 and 15 feet high. When trees get higher than 15 feet, they begin to lose their lower limbs and are no longer suitable for nesting. Before the area was settled, this habitat was perpetuated through normal wildfire patterns. This can no longer occur. It would, therefore, seal the doom of the Kirtland Warbler if its prime remaining habitats were placed in a Wilderness where the ecological processes must be permitted to operate untrammelled.

Finally, let me again emphasize that neither Wilderness nor Back Country alone can be expected to accommodate all of the roadless recreation activities. Any effort to make them do so will result in a serious loss of Wilderness quality. Wilderness quality must remain high so that it can continue to meet the high purposes Congress had in mind. Back Country will meet the special needs of those who don't desire or need a wilderness experience. Neither is a substitute for the other - both are essential.