WILDERNESS AND EVERYDAY LIFE

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I challenge the dualistic view of wilderness that has influenced wilderness philosophy, politics and experience in recent years. In its place, I offer an alternative vision that recognizes wilderness areas and working landscapes as complementary elements of a larger, inhabited landscape characterized by a heterogeneous mixture of human-land relational patterns representing various points along an urban-wilderness continuum.

In chapters 2 through 4, I explore the philosophical, political and experiential implications of this wilderness-in-context vision. Experienced and understood as part of the landscape we call home, wilderness may engender, renew, and sustain an engaged and integrated wilderness practice involving regular contact with wilderness places, committed activism on behalf of wild lands and their inhabitants, and grounded reflection on the meaning and value of wilderness in our everyday lives.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Conceptually, politically, and experientially, wilderness is often framed as a black and white issue. Wilderness visitors frequently describe their experience of wilderness as an “escape” from the busyness and distractions of everyday life. For them, wilderness offers contact with “real” nature in its “pristine” form, which stands in stark contrast to the defiled, domesticated version they encounter in their own backyards and neighborhoods. Wilderness boundaries, so experienced, stand as rigid barriers separating the sacred wilderness within from the profane work-a-day world without.

In the political arena, many wilderness advocates have tended to view wilderness areas as islands of protection in a sea of exploitation. For them, wilderness boundaries serve as walls that separate the protected land within from the up-for-grabs land without. Wilderness opponents view these boundaries as equally rigid and impermeable; they are the walls behind which valuable natural resources are frustratingly locked away or behind which they cannot ride their off road vehicles, motorcycles or mountain bikes.

At the conceptual level, both defenders and critics of the wilderness idea typically portray the relationship between wilderness and non-wilderness (the places where we live and work) in dualistic terms. Celebrated or scorned, the absolute, either-or nature of the distinction is tacitly assumed. Unfortunately, this dualistic framework has made wilderness both politically intractable and conceptually problematic, while detracting from the potential meaning it may hold for our everyday lives.

Rather than understanding and experiencing wilderness as one term of a rigid either-or dichotomy, I suggest that we think about wilderness as one end of a continuum of human-land
relational patterns. At the other end of this continuum are not, as is often assumed, degraded landscapes but, rather, landscapes exhibiting a high degree of human transformation. The scale of this continuum is not one of degrees of degradation from an idealized—and non-existent—standard (“pristine” wilderness), but simply the relative extent of human modification. Within this conceptual framework, large wilderness areas like Montana’s Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex stand near one end of the continuum, and large urban centers, like Dallas, Texas, stand near the other.

Such an understanding is generally consistent with a similar notion put forward by Roderick Nash in the third edition of his classic text, *Wilderness and the American Mind*. In the prologue, Nash suggests that wilderness is best understood using the conception of a spectrum of conditions or environments ranging from the purely wild on the one end to the purely civilized on the other—from the primeval to the paved. This idea of a scale between two poles is useful because it implies the notion of shading or blending. Wilderness and civilization become antipodal influences which combine in varying proportions to determine the character of an area. … As one moves toward the wilderness pole from [the] midpoint, the human influence appears less frequently.

Nash’s “spectrum” is helpful because it highlights the relativity of the wilderness idea and focuses on degrees of human influence, rather than degradation. By placing wilderness along a common continuum with lands exhibiting a greater degree of human transformation, what emerge are both essential differences and significant similarities. Along such a continuum, there are no privileged places of value. Both wilderness areas and urbanized landscapes hold open the possibility of sustainable and meaningful human-land relationships, while neither guarantees them. Together, they define the ends of a continuum of relational patterns that include a wide range of intermediate possibilities, differing in spatial and temporal scales, as well as degrees of human transformation.

At the same time, however, legally designated wilderness areas hold a distinctive place
along this spectrum. They are, as a matter of fact, circumscribed by conceptual, legal, and administrative boundaries that distinguish them from other places in important ways; there are inescapable and significant differences. While Nash rightfully highlights the “shading or blending” that occurs along his spectrum of relative human influence, we also need to understand the conceptual and experiential implications of the clearly demarcated boundaries that exist between wilderness areas and non-wilderness lands--the places where most of us live and work.

Acknowledging these boundaries does not necessarily mean resigning ourselves to the conceptual, political, and experiential dualisms mentioned above. Overcoming these perceived dualisms does not require that we dissolve the boundaries between wilderness areas and non-wilderness lands, nor must we minimize the essential differences between the two. Instead, it means recognizing the permeability of the boundaries between wilderness and non-wilderness lands, as well as the complementary nature of these different modes of human-nature relational patterns. By holding them within the same field of view, especially as they manifest themselves across a particular landscape, we discover that these relational patterns do not necessarily conflict with one another. By experiencing the permeability of the boundaries that separate and connect wilderness and non-wilderness lands, we find meaning and value in the dynamic interaction between the two. Rather than being mutually exclusive, wilderness areas and the places we live and work may be understood as mutually constitutive. One defines, enriches, and gives meaning to the other. Our historical and cultural imagination enlivens wilderness, even as we gain a growing awareness and affirmation of the presencing of the wild in our most urbanized landscapes.

During the “timber wars” (or, alternately, “wilderness wars”) that raged across the Northern Rockies and Pacific Northwest during the 1980s, there was a popular anti-wilderness
bumper sticker that proclaimed, “Wilderness: Land of No Use.” On many levels, the bumper 
sticker highlights a deep and important truth about wilderness, as well as the challenge it presents 
to our society. By definition, designated wilderness is a place where we must, to a great extent, 
check our claims of use, ownership, and control at the door. In establishing wilderness areas, the 
human challenging of nature is, to some degree, held in abeyance. This suspension of the 
predominant categories and modes of interaction through which our society relates to the natural 
world encourages and, in some ways, enforces both a conceptual and practical bracketing that 
shapes our wilderness experience.3 For one thing, it radically re-positions us with respect to the 
pervasive technological paradigm that, according to Martin Heidegger and Albert Borgmann, 
reduces nature to a stockpile of natural resources standing ready for our appropriation, 
consumption and use.4 In other words, wilderness invites us to take up with the beings and 
things we encounter in our travels as something other--and something more--than resources 
whose meaning and value are calculated exclusively in terms of what they are “good for.” As a 
tonic to our society’s rampant resourcism, wilderness resists reduction to terms of utility and 
instrumentality. It offers us an alternative relational model to business as usual, where we may 
take up with the world in a manner that allows nature to reveal/conceal itself as something more 
and other than a warehouse of resources waiting to be developed and consumed. In this sense, 
one of the great gifts that wilderness may offer us derives from its very uselessness--a 
uselessness that can inform our lives and relations with ultimate meaning and purpose.

The regular, embodied practice of wilderness walking and riding (horses and mules) 
cultivates--potentially, not necessarily--a disposition of openness that Henry Bugbee identifies as 
a central element of what he calls the wilderness ethos.5 For Bugbee, echoing Heidegger, such a 
disposition of openness involves “leaving things be.” As he explains, “By ‘leaving things be’ I
do not mean inaction; I mean respecting things, being still in the presence of things, letting them
speak.” Thus, wilderness becomes a place where our active passivity (“leaving things be”)
attunes us to what Irene Klaver calls the “passive activity” of things. As such, wilderness
becomes a home of dialogue, where the irreducible voice of the other is heard--and honored--
by the attentive listener.

This heightened attunement to the speech of our fellow creatures is one of the great gifts
wilderness offers us--a gift that is bestowed only in conjunction with our correlative gifting of
wilderness to the creatures who live there (grizzlies and ground squirrels, creeks and dry washes,
canyon walls and talus slopes, fairy-slipper orchids and Douglas firs). Furthermore, such
attunement may extend to, and inform, all aspects of our lives and relations. This is the
habituating and heuristic force of wilderness. In speaking of his experiences in the northern
Canadian Rockies during the fall of 1941, Bugbee claims that “it was there in attending to this
wilderness, with unremitting alertness and attentiveness, yes, even as I slept, that I knew myself
to have been instructed for life, though I was at a loss to say what instruction I had received.”

The instruction one may receive in wilderness is for life. Wilderness is not the exclusive
province of the wild, nor should it be. The wild dwells within and alongside that which is near at
hand in the most ordinary aspects of our lives. Wilderness practice, to the extent that it helps
attune us to the voice of the other, is not a denial or denigration of the potential meaning of
everyday experience. On the contrary, we return from our wilderness practice with greater
openness to the call of the myriad others whom we meet in the places we live and work, and this
heightened attunement infuses our response to others with care and concern. We perceive with
renewed clarity the potential wildness in all the beings and things around us. For Bugbee, this
insight led him to identify the central theme of his most fruitful philosophizing as the recognition
of “reality as a wilderness,” where “the wilderness is reality experienced as call and explained in responding to it absolutely.”

The ultimate meaning of wilderness and its relationship to the places we live and work is best understood and experienced within the context of the dynamic interplay between wilderness areas and working landscapes. Understood as one part of larger landscapes of inhabitation, wilderness instantiates a unique form of human-land relations, and wilderness boundaries reveal their permeable and fluid nature. Experienced in the context of a wilderness practice characterized by a dynamic back and forth movement of withdrawal and return, wilderness provides an orienting and animating presence in our lives, and our wilderness boundary crossings take on the character of an easy, all-embracing dance.

Experienced within this rhythm of withdrawal and return, wilderness areas serve as sabbath places. The wilderness ethos informs our lives and relations much in the same way that the sabbath ethos is meant to inform the entire work week and infuse it with the sabbath’s indwelling holiness. Or, to use an analogy from the Buddhist tradition, wilderness walking and riding, as habituating and heuristic practices that cultivate attunement to the vocative nature of reality writ large, are, in this sense, not unlike the practice of vipassana (insight) meditation. In the latter case, the regular practice of formal sitting meditation engenders greater mindfulness (and its attendant compassion, sympathetic joy, and loving-kindness), both during the meditation period and throughout one’s daily life.

Conversely, in so far as we fail to “remember the sabbath day,” maintain mindfulness, or embody the wilderness ethos in our daily lives, these respective practices become empty, vain, and idle. Cut off from the larger temporal and spatial context of our lives, they lose their meaning; they are either disregarded as useless and unnecessary, or they are taken to be the be-
all and end-all of our existence. In both cases, the compartmentalized separation of these
practices from the rest of our lives is a total corruption. For sabbath observance, vipassana
meditation, and wilderness walking/riding, the true meaning and significance of these practices is
to dwell in holiness, mindfulness, and openness to the wild in all things. Just as these practices
help us to sanctify, awaken, and uncover the meaning of the everyday, so, too, does the everyday
provide them with the context in which their ultimate purpose and meaning are made manifest
and gain clarity and relief.

This vision of wilderness as a sabbatical place within the context of larger landscapes of
human inhabitation challenges the dualistic tendencies that often find expression in wilderness
philosophy, politics, and experience. In place of these pervasive dualisms, I offer an account of
wilderness philosophy, politics, and experience that acknowledges and affirms the
complementary and co-constitutive relationship between wilderness and the places where we live
and work, as well as the dynamic and permeable nature of the boundaries separating and
connecting the two. In chapters 2 through 4, I attempt to tease out the implications of this vision
in relation to each of these three domains--wilderness philosophy, politics and experience. In the
fifth and final chapter, I conclude by bearing witness to the power of wilderness--encountered
through engaged wilderness practices--to orient and animate our lives, even as we seek to
articulate a meaningful response through philosophical reflection, political action, and artistic
expression.

Chapter 2 explores the implications of my contextual and co-constitutive account of
wilderness as a sabbath place in relation to contemporary debates concerning the idea of
wilderness. Any attempt to re-think the meaning and value of wilderness must address the issues
brought forth by its most formidable critics.
In recent years, the notion of wilderness has been roundly criticized by several prominent environmental philosophers and historians. They argue that the “received wilderness idea” is dualistic, ethnocentric, and static. According to these critics, this idea of wilderness finds clear expression in the Wilderness Act of 1964. I argue that the idea of wilderness so ably deconstructed by its critics bears very little resemblance to the understanding of wilderness presented in the Wilderness Act. The critics assume a backward-looking, purity-based definition of wilderness that runs counter to the forward-looking, relativistic interpretation of the Wilderness Act that has guided and informed subsequent wilderness legislation, management, and visitation.

Under the Wilderness Act, wilderness designation is less a matter of preserving remnants of “pristine” nature than establishing a covenant between humans and a particular place. Wilderness areas, so conceived, serve as sabbath places; their ultimate significance is best understood in terms of their mutually informing relationship to the places we live and work. Rather than detracting from our efforts to inhabit the earth in more creative and sustainable ways, as its critics contend, wilderness represents a vital part of larger landscapes of human inhabitation characterized by a diverse mixture of human-nature relational patterns.

Chapter 3 describes how an understanding of wilderness as an integral part of larger landscapes of human inhabitation has found expression in wilderness politics during the past decade. Beginning with the Steens Mountain Cooperative Management and Protection Act of 2000 (eastern Oregon), wilderness politics in the Inland West has shifted in a new direction. Since that time, there have been several pieces of legislation where wilderness designation has been linked to broader concerns regarding the social, cultural, economic, and ecological well
being of a region. For a number of historical and ideological reasons, the politics of “wilderness or …” is being challenged and, in some cases, replaced by the politics of “wilderness and ….”

Two examples of this trend in Montana are the Forest Jobs and Recreation Act (FJRA) and the Rocky Mountain Front Heritage Act (RMFHA). Introduced by Senator Jon Tester (D-MT) in 2009, FJRA would add 666,260 acres of newly designated wilderness in Montana, while also mandating sustainable timber harvesting and large-scale restoration projects; setting up local advisory boards; supporting biomass development at locally owned and operated timber mills; and establishing approximately 370,000 acres of mixed use recreation areas (motorized, mechanized, foot and stock travel). The RMFHA is a proposal developed by the Coalition to Protect the Rocky Mountain Front that has yet to find a legislative sponsor, although coalition members continue to meet regularly with Sen. Max Baucus (D-MT) and his staff. The Heritage Act proposal seeks to protect one of Montana’s most beloved landscapes through coordinated public-private noxious weed control strategies, establishment of a Conservation Management Area designed to maintain and perpetuate current traditional uses and non-motorized forms of travel, and designation of approximately 86,000 acres of wilderness additions to the Bob Marshall and Scapegoat wilderness areas.

Obviously, there is a lot more involved in these two proposals than wilderness designation. In name, they are not “wilderness bills” at all. They are package deals that have been developed over years of negotiation and compromise among local stakeholders, including conservationists, ranchers, timber representatives, bicycle clubs, off-road vehicle users, county commissioners, and many others. In both cases, the question of wilderness is embedded within the larger social, cultural, economic, and ecological context of a particular place. At the same time, both proposals affirm the crucial role of wilderness in fostering more meaningful and
sustainable (both ecologically and economically) modes of human inhabitation across western Montana. They embody a sabbatical understanding of wilderness in which wilderness areas, rather than being islands of protection in a sea of exploitation, represent sabbatical places that are integral parts of well-managed landscapes. In these cases, our relationship to the wilderness areas we refrain from using (as traditionally understood in terms of resource development and commodity extraction) now speaks to and shapes questions of how to best interact with and manage the land we do use, and vice versa. The perennial battles over the number of acres protected (or “locked up,” depending on your perspective) now give way to broader concerns for the ecological health of the larger landscape, for the habitat needs of wildlife, and for the viability of local human communities that depend on these landscapes for their economic sustenance.

Chapter 4 explores the experiential side of this sabbatical understanding of wilderness-in-context as expressed through creative nonfiction and music. Specifically, the chapter takes the form of a recorded performance piece titled “Crossing Boundaries: Musings on Bach in the Backcountry,” which features my words and solo viola music played by professional violist, Jennifer Smith. The piece is the result of a two-week artists’ residency in the Bob Marshall Wilderness as part of the Artist*Wilderness*Connection Program sponsored by the Hockaday Museum of Art (Kalispell, MT), Bob Marshall Wilderness Foundation, Flathead National Forest, and Swan Ecosystem Center. To date, it has been performed ten times for hundreds of people at locations throughout Montana.

Approximately one hour in length, the performance reflects the performers’ experiences as participants in an intensive three-way conversation between music, words, and their wilderness surroundings. Through the shared artistic lenses of creative writing and viola
performance, the piece explores the meaning of wilderness in contemporary society, while, at the same time, raising broader questions concerning the relationships between wilderness and civilization, nature and culture, work and play, emptiness and fullness, sound and silence, and other long-standing dualisms embedded in Western culture. By engaging in an intensive exploration of the boundary zones where these contrasting elements meet, the performance seeks to highlight the permeability of these boundaries and offer a glimpse of the ways in which wilderness and civilization give definition and meaning to each other through their mutual interaction.

Chapter 5 concludes with a brief account of how wilderness, understood and experienced as an integral part of the landscape we call home, may bring an animating and integrating focus to our lives. I suggest that our regular engagement in a threefold wilderness practice not only stands as a powerful challenge to the technological paradigm, but also may engender forms of wilderness reflection, activism, and art that acknowledge and affirm the meaning and value of wilderness in its complementary and co-constitutive relationship to the places where we live and work.

Notes
2 Ibid., p. 6.


7 Irene Klaver, “Philosophy as Translation,” Unpublished Manuscript, p. 8.

8 Bugbee, *The Inward Morning*, p. 150.

9 Ibid., p. 128.

10 Bugbee develops the idea of “sabbatical placement” in his essay “Wilderness in America.”
CHAPTER 2

THE TWOFOLD MYTH OF PRISTINE WILDERNESS: MISREADING THE WILDERNESS ACT IN TERMS OF PURITY

Introduction

Beginning with Ramachandra Guha’s essay, “Radical American Environmentalism and Wilderness Preservation: A Third World Critique,” which appeared in *Environmental Ethics* in 1989, the idea of wilderness has been the subject of ongoing academic and popular debate. Guha’s challenge to the wilderness idea from a Third World perspective was followed by a number of critiques from environmental philosophers and historians in North America, including J. Baird Callicott and William Cronon. According to these and other scholars, the “received wilderness idea” (Callicott’s term) is not only inappropriate for other parts of the world (such as India), but is problematic in its native North American context.

The received wilderness idea, as outlined by Callicott and Cronon, refers to the popular idea of wilderness that emerged in nineteenth-century North America and persists to the present day. In general, this idea conceives of wilderness as “pristine” or “virgin” nature unsullied by the damaging influence of humankind—remnants of sacred nature in an increasingly humanized and, therefore, profane world. According to Callicott and Cronon, the historical roots of this idea can be traced to a variety of sources, the most influential of which are European romanticism, American Transcendentalism, and the writings of John Muir. While there are no self-identified adherents of something called the received wilderness idea, both Callicott and Cronon find this understanding of wilderness expressed in the works of various historians, philosophers, wilderness advocates, and popular writers. According to Callicott, “More than anyone else, Roderick Nash (1967) has molded the popular idea of wilderness in the contemporary American mind,” while Cronon cites the works of Bill McKibben, Dave Foreman, and various deep
ecologists as examples of how this idea manifests itself in contemporary environmental thought.\(^5\) Based on their examination of both historical and contemporary literature, Callicott and Cronon argue that the received wilderness idea is, among other things, dualistic, ethnocentric, and static.

Overall, the debate sparked by critics such as Guha, Callicott, and Cronon has been a good thing. They have pointed out problems in the way preservationists often conceptualize the relationship between humans and nature, and they have forced wilderness supporters to re-think certain underlying assumptions of their cause. Some have responded by defending the received wilderness idea, while others have acknowledged the merits of the criticisms and attempted to clarify, recover, or construct alternative ways of accounting for the value of wilderness and the need for its continued protection. This ongoing conversation has helped advocates, philosophers, and historians alike to think more clearly about the historical and contemporary meanings of wilderness.\(^6\)

However, within the context of this debate, the term *wilderness* has been used in a variety of ways, and these ambiguities have created a great deal of confusion. Wilderness sometimes refers to an idea with a long and evolving history; elsewhere, it refers to a legal designation, and in still other contexts it refers to actual wild lands. Callicott and Cronon recognize these potential confusions. They claim that what they take issue with is the received wilderness idea, not wilderness areas so designated. For example, Callicott writes, “I am as ardent an advocate of those patches of the planet called ‘wilderness areas’ as any other environmentalist. My discomfort is with the idea, the received concept of wilderness, not with the ecosystems so called.”\(^7\)

The question arises, however, whether such a clear distinction is possible. For Callicott, the problems inherent in the received wilderness idea also infect the Wilderness Act of 1964,
which, for him, “beautifully reflects the conventional understanding of wilderness”\textsuperscript{8} and “crystallizes”\textsuperscript{9} the received wilderness idea. This linkage suggests that if the received wilderness idea finds expression in the original Wilderness Act, then the critique of the received wilderness idea also stands as an indictment against the act, as well as the entire National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS) it established. However, as the earlier quote from Callicott illustrates, most critics of the received wilderness idea refrain from drawing this logical conclusion. With few exceptions, critics of the wilderness idea are remarkably consistent in their affirmation of designated wilderness areas.

In order to resolve these seeming contradictions, we need to examine more closely the relationship between the received wilderness idea, as presented by Callicott and Cronon, and the phenomenon of wilderness as legally defined in the Wilderness Act of 1964 and experienced during the past half century of wilderness history in the United States. The key question is: What is the relationship between the received wilderness idea as presented by its critics and the thing that we have come to know as wilderness under the National Wilderness Preservation System? As I argue in this essay, the relationship is tenuous at best. The thoughts and beliefs attributed to the received idea of wilderness do not seem to be reflected in the intentions of Wilderness Act authors, subsequent congressional actions, federal management practices, or on-the-ground experiences of wilderness visitors. In short, the received wilderness idea, as presented by its critics, does not appear to play a significant role in shaping wilderness policy, management, and visitation since 1964.

In this essay, I examine each of the three primary arguments used by Callicott and Cronon to critique the received wilderness idea. First, I review their claims that the received idea of wilderness is based upon and perpetuates a dichotomy between humans and nature. After an
extended discussion of the purported dualism of wilderness, I address the critics’ claims that the notion of wilderness is inherently ethnocentric and static.

Wilderness as Dualistic

For both Callicott and Cronon, the fundamental problem at the heart of the received wilderness idea is the sharp dichotomy it sets up between humans and nature. According to Callicott, “[T]he concept perpetuates the pre-Darwinian Western metaphysical dichotomy between ‘man’ and nature.”10 Cronon writes, “This, then, is the central paradox: wilderness embodies a dualistic vision in which the human is entirely outside the natural. ... The dualism at the heart of wilderness encourages its advocates to conceive of its protection as a crude conflict between the ‘human’ and the ‘nonhuman’--or, more often, between those who value the nonhuman and those who do not.”11 These authors then point out, quite rightly, a number of problems with such a separation between nature and humanity. Among other things, it ignores the findings of ecology and evolutionary science and promotes human alienation from nature. “Pristine” wilderness is understood as “real” nature. Human actions necessarily degrade nature, thereby making it impossible for us to inhabit the natural world in a non-destructive manner. Wilderness is held up as sacred, while nature modified by humans has become profane. As a result, our celebration of wilderness inevitably leads to our devaluation of, and estrangement from, places where we live and work.

Both Callicott and Cronon cite numerous examples from our Western intellectual history and contemporary environmental writings that demonstrate the prevalence of the human-nature dichotomy present in the received wilderness idea. What’s more, they do an excellent job of exposing the dangers inherent in this kind of dualistic thinking. But how dualistic is the
understanding of wilderness articulated in the Wilderness Act of 1964? To what extent have these dualisms informed our wilderness politics, management, and experience over the past half century?

According to Callicott, the definition of wilderness offered in the Wilderness Act of 1964, “[A]ssumes, indeed it enshrines, a bifurcation of man and nature.”\textsuperscript{12} But does it? Here is the famous definition of wilderness included in Section 2(c) of the Act:

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 condition and which (1) generally appears to have been affected 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 preservation and use in an unimpaired condition; and (4) may also contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value.\textsuperscript{13}

While ambiguous enough to admit a range of interpretations, nothing in this definition necessarily implies a sharp dichotomy between humans and nature. In fact, the relative and qualified nature of the language argues strongly against such an interpretation. In order to see this definition as “enshrining a bifurcation of man and nature,” as Callicott does, one must interpret it in light of what has become known as the “purity definition of wilderness.”\textsuperscript{14}

By taking a closer look at some of the key terms and ideas found in the wilderness definition, we can see how such a dualistic and purist interpretation runs contrary to the more relativistic, common-sense understanding of wilderness that has prevailed among Congress, wilderness managers, and the general public over the past fifty years or so. First, consider the role of humans in wilderness. In wilderness, “man himself is a visitor who does not remain.” Wilderness areas are places without “permanent … human habitation.” According to the
Wilderness Act, wilderness is a place we visit, not a place where we establish permanent residence. Is this distinction a symptom of human-nature dualism? Not necessarily. Within human culture, a similar relationship obtains with respect to all kinds of public spaces that we periodically visit, including churches, temples, mosques, city parks, playgrounds, and performance centers. Even though we do not reside in these places, they serve as focal points of meaning within the larger cultural landscapes we inhabit. In other words, while such places may not be our den or nest sites, they nevertheless are important parts of our cultural home range. Similarly, while we do not reside in wilderness areas, they serve as focal points of meaning within the larger landscapes we call home. For many of us, wilderness is an integral part of the local or regional landscapes we inhabit. However, in order to maintain wilderness areas as places where human presence is “substantially unnoticeable” and does not “dominate the landscape,” we, as a society, have decided not to build our homes there. Instead, we protect wilderness, in part, for the homes it provides for other creatures, especially those like grizzly bears, lynx, wolverine, and bull trout, who do not fare so well living in close proximity to human neighbors. Humans are not absent from wilderness; we just don’t set up residence there.

In addition to accepting the role of visitor, as opposed to resident, humans also limit their transformative influence in wilderness areas. In wilderness areas, human influences are not absent; they are just minimized. Like everything else about wilderness, it is not a question of human or natural, but a matter of degree. Although critics frequently talk about the myth of “pristine” wilderness, it is important to note that this oft-repeated word never appears in the Wilderness Act. Instead a wilderness area is a place that “generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature.” It is a place where human activities do not “dominate the landscape,” where the imprint of our work is “substantially unnoticeable.” All of these relative
terms and qualifiers argue against a dualistic and purist interpretation of wilderness. They suggest that, among the various forces operating in wilderness areas, human influences should be de-emphasized and non-human forces should be allowed to exert a greater influence.

Wilderness areas should retain their “primeval character and influence,” and we protect and manage these areas to “preserve their natural condition.” While a purist might be tempted to interpret these passages in dualistic terms, a more widely accepted--and embodied--reading relies on the common-sense notion that wilderness areas should exhibit a higher degree of naturalness than other places where human influences play a greater role. Wilderness represents one end of a continuum of naturalness that extends from non-wilderness public lands to farms and ranches, exurbs and suburbs, and includes towns, cities, and major urban centers. Along this scale, most places exhibit a high degree of human influence and transformation, while less than three percent of the total land area in the United States is designated as wilderness and managed to exhibit this high degree of natural influence.

However, even within wilderness areas, human influence, although minimized, is apparent. Anyone who spends significant time in designated wilderness areas will be quickly disabused of any notions of pristine nature in these places. At the most obvious level, one is greeted by constructed trails and signage at every turn, and these areas all bear the marks of their pre-1964 history. Consider two of the biggest and wildest wilderness areas in the lower forty-eight states--the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness (Idaho and Montana) and the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex (Montana). At over 1.3 million and 1.5 million acres, respectively, these two areas are considered flagships of the wilderness system.

On its east side, the Selway-Bitterroot is characterized by a series of parallel mountain canyons that follow rushing creeks up to the Bitterroot Divide separating Montana and Idaho.
As one approaches the divide, one enters beautiful alpine cirques, many of which contain small trout-filled lakes set dramatically at the base of looming mountain headwalls. Not only are the trout there thanks to the stocking efforts of federal and state agencies, but many of these beautiful lakes are bounded by cement check dams at their outlets. The dams were built in the 1930s to control irrigation waters for the farmers and ranchers living in the Bitterroot Valley below. Crossing the Bitterroot Divide, one enters Idaho and a huge expanse of wilderness where one can walk for days without seeing another person. Along the way, one can also walk through backcountry airstrips used by outfitters and their clients or visit historic fire lookouts. One can even walk along--and plainly recognize--an odd, road-like stretch of trail built by Norman Maclean and immortalized in his short story, “USFS 1919: The Ranger, the Cook, and a Hole in the Sky.”

The Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex (which is actually composed of three adjoining wilderness areas--the Bob Marshall, Great Bear and Scapegoat) offers equally explicit examples of its rich human history. At the heart of the Bob Marshall lies the Danaher Valley, out of which flows the South Fork of the Flathead River. From any direction, it takes a couple days to walk into the Danaher. However, the expansive meadows, mountain scenery, and abundant wildlife make it well worth the effort. In many ways, it represents all those things wilderness advocates most value--natural beauty, wildlife habitat, watershed protection, remoteness, solitude.

The Danaher Valley also is a great place to learn about Montana history. In the 1840s, it was the site of a battle between the Blackfeet and Flathead Indians; a rustic interpretive sign now stands at the confluence of Danaher and Camp Creeks to commemorate the event. Half a century later, the valley was homesteaded by the Danaher family, who, by some accounts, made their living stealing horses on one side of the Continental Divide and selling them on the other.
Their rusting farm implements and other items still litter the homestead site. On my most recent visit to the Danaher, I walked along a trail originally built more than 100 years ago.

The more one gets to know the Bob Marshall country, the more rich and storied its past becomes. Local lore is filled with tales about this or that cave where an old miner worked a claim or stashed a load of dynamite. Backcountry ranger cabins, fire lookouts, and airstrips dot the wilderness, some of which are still connected by a primitive backcountry telephone system. These are not aberrations. They are examples taken from the country’s premier wilderness units-the wildest of the wild. As critics of the wilderness idea often point out, the notion of pristine wilderness is a myth. Fortunately, wilderness designation has never been based on the criteria of purity. Wilderness areas must be of a certain size, possess a significant degree of naturalness, and provide opportunities for solitude and “primitive” recreation; they need not be pristine. Human influence is not absent from any of these places; it just doesn’t dominate the landscape.

Much of the confusion over the question of naturalness hinges on the rather odd word “untrammeled,” which holds such a key place in the wilderness definition. According to Mark Woods, “[T]he existence of naturalness in wilderness, as legally interpreted, [is] the untrammeled condition of wilderness.” But what, exactly, does untrammeled mean? The Wilderness Act’s author, Howard Zahniser, explains his intent in using the word when he states, “The idea within the word ‘untrammeled’ [is] of [wilderness areas] not being subjected to human controls and manipulation that hamper the free play of natural forces.” This sense of wilderness as a place where nature is not constrained or bound by human control is consistent with the Latin and early French roots of the word trammel, which originally referred to “a kind of net used to catch fish or birds.” Untrammeled wilderness areas, then, are places where natural processes may proceed in an unimpeded or “free” manner. The untrammeled naturalness
of wilderness areas does not mean that humans are absent from wilderness; nor does it mean that such places are untouched by human agency.

Since 1964, however, there have been several attempts to re-interpret *untrammeled* in a dualistic sense, where wilderness refers only to “pristine” nature undefiled by human impacts. According to Woods,

[A] number of groups opposed to wilderness and the USFS [United States Forest Service] argued that the Act required an untrammeled condition of wilderness in the strictest sense possible: lands previously impacted by humans in any way could no longer be considered as candidates for wilderness designation. Defining wilderness in this way came to be known as the purity definition of wilderness.\(^{20}\)

It is important to note that it was parties opposed to expanding the wilderness system--not wilderness advocates--who embraced the dualism inherent in the purity definition. The timber industry and others invoked the notion of “pristine” wilderness to prevent commercially valuable lands from being included in the National Wilderness Preservation System. The U.S. Forest Service had a slightly different (although mutually agreeable) agenda. The original Wilderness Act, in addition to designating certain areas as wilderness, also identified a number of “primitive areas” for the U.S. Forest Service to study for possible inclusion in the NWPS at a later date. In this way, the USFS was given primary control over an essentially administrative process for evaluating and nominating areas for future designation as wilderness.

However, as early as 1965, citizens groups, working with their congressional delegations, began pursuing legislative efforts to include new areas in the wilderness preservation system independent of the U.S. Forest Service review process. In 1972, the first citizen-initiated wilderness law was enacted to designate the Scapegoat Wilderness in Montana. The U.S. Forest Service resented the public’s intrusion into the wilderness designation process. As one USFS administrator put it, “Why should a sporting goods and hardware dealer in Lincoln, Montana,
designate the boundaries for the 240,000-acre [Scapegoat Wilderness] …? If lines are to be drawn, we should be drawing them.”

The U.S. Forest Service used the purity definition of wilderness to try to maintain control of the wilderness designation process they saw slipping away from them. One way this occurred was through the RARE (Roadless Area Review and Evaluation) process carried out between 1971 and 1973. Under the RARE process, the U.S. Forest Service identified 12.3 million acres of USFS lands as suitable for future designation as wilderness, using the strictest standards based on the purity definition. However, the general public, Congress, and the Carter Administration rejected these findings and demanded that a new inventory be completed that was consistent with the standard, non-purity definition of wilderness. The result was the RARE-II process, which ended up recommending over 60 million acres of de facto wilderness for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System--more than five times the acreage originally recommended under RARE-I. The rejection of the RARE-I findings demonstrated the overall consensus that “untrammeled” should be interpreted in a manner consistent with the intent of the Wilderness Act’s author and supporters, as opposed to the dualistic, purity-based interpretation advocated by the U.S. Forest Service during the 1960s and 1970s.

The passage of what has come to be known as the Eastern Wilderness Act of 1975 offers another example of the degree to which Congress and the public rejected the purity definition of untrammeled wilderness. The original Wilderness Act of 1964 was conceived with large Western wilderness areas in mind. Few relatively natural areas east of the Mississippi River could qualify for wilderness designation under the original Wilderness Act. They either were too small (less than 5,000 acres) or showed signs of significant human impact. However, with the passage of the Eastern Wilderness Act, Congress re-wrote the standards for eastern wild lands
and lowered the eligibility requirements. In doing so, sixteen eastern wilderness areas were established. Once again, Congress demonstrated that untrammeled wilderness did not mean unused, untouched, or unaltered by human hands.

As noted earlier, the word *pristine* is never mentioned in the Wilderness Act of 1964. In contrast, the word appears frequently in the writings of both Callicott and Cronon. This difference is symptomatic of different temporal perspectives concerning the nature and meaning of wilderness. The received wilderness idea described by Callicott and Cronon is exclusively historical. In its dualistic form, it focuses on the historical presence or absence of human influence. Pristine wilderness, under the strict purity definition of wilderness, is understood as places untouched by humans in the past. This perspective guided the U.S. Forest Service during the RARE-I inventory. As Mark Woods explains, “The USFS interpreted the terms ‘untrammeled’ and ‘primeval’ in a backward-looking sense: lands that had been trammeled by humans in the past and had lost their ‘primeval character’ had lost a condition of naturalness required for wilderness designation.”24 Woods calls this a “synchronic” interpretation of wilderness.25

Congress and the general public have consistently rejected this backward-looking, synchronic interpretation of wilderness, as evidenced by their opposition to the RARE-I inventory and their support of the Eastern Wilderness Act. As opposed to a synchronic interpretation, they have embraced a “diachronic” or forward-looking interpretation of wilderness.26 As Woods writes, “Legal wilderness preservation enshrines a diachronic sense of the present and future naturalness. … [A] forward-looking form of naturalness suggests that naturalness is a matter of degree, rather than a sharp category distinction between pristine wilderness and previously trammeled tracts of nature.”27 While wilderness areas need to exhibit
a certain degree of naturalness (as Woods points out, it would be hard to justify designating a Wall Street Wilderness Area), our understanding of wilderness is only partially based upon past human influence on the land, as evidenced by the large number of previously roaded, logged, mined, and inhabited areas that have been designated as wilderness in the past forty-four years.

Wilderness designation is based not only on the extent to which humans have modified certain places in the past; it also is based upon an understanding of our future relationship to such places. The fact that there is no place in the United States (or the world) that has not been impacted by human activity (pre- or post-1492) is, according to a forward-looking interpretation of wilderness, beside the point. Wilderness areas are places that have been relatively untrammeled in the past, and, just as importantly, they are places where we have agreed to allow natural processes to proceed in a free and unhampered manner in the future. From this perspective, wilderness designation establishes a covenant between humans and a particular landscape. Rather than emphasizing our separation from nature, wilderness designation instantiates a unique form of human-nature relationship—one characterized by human forbearance, humility, respect and non-instrumentality. It is not dualistic, but potentially dialogical.

Wilderness as Ethnocentric

In the essay cited at the beginning of this paper, Ramachandra Guha reminds us that our culturally constructed notions of wilderness are deeply rooted in our European-American heritage. He not only challenges us to reflect upon certain assumptions we hold with respect to wilderness, but he also rejects the application of this model of wilderness to densely populated countries like India. He points out that, in India, the establishment of uninhabited wilderness
areas (and parks) results in the dislocation of local people and serves the interests of the urban elite at the expense of the poor. According to Guha, the exportation of this wilderness model carries unacceptable social costs and does not serve the needs of India’s vigorous conservation movement.28

Critics of the received wilderness idea similarly emphasize that our understanding of wilderness is a uniquely European-American cultural artifact. The idea of wilderness has a long and dynamic history in the art, literature, and philosophy of the West. Both Callicott and Cronon do an excellent job summarizing the evolution of the wilderness idea in Europe and North America.

One key element of the received wilderness idea as constructed in the West is the notion that North America was in a “wilderness condition” in 1492.29 As both Callicott and Cronon point out, this notion suggests that Europeans landed on the shores of a pristine continent unaltered by human hands. Such an idea, of course, ignores the many millions of American Indians that had been inhabiting and modifying the continent for thousands of years prior to European arrival. Such willful ignorance makes it all too easy to overlook the genocidal campaigns that resulted in dramatic decreases in Indian populations, created unfathomable hardship and suffering, and forever destroyed or radically altered their rich multiplicity of languages, traditions, and cultures. The myth of North America as pristine wilderness prior to European settlement renders the original inhabitants of the continent invisible and conveniently whitewashes the tragic history of their persecution at the hands of European-American settlers.30

Cronon, Callicott, and other authors do their readers a great service by foregrounding the dangerous ethnocentrism looming within this element of the received wilderness idea. Along with other scholars, such as William Denevan, they remind us just how extensively American
Indians had settled and transformed the North American landscape by the time Columbus arrived in 1492. But, again, how does this element of the received wilderness idea relate to our understanding and experience of legally designated wilderness? The notion of pristine wilderness is a myth in two senses. First, as the critics point out, North America was not a pristine wilderness when Europeans arrived in 1492. Second, as I argued in the preceding section of this essay, the understanding of wilderness articulated in the Wilderness Act of 1964 and reflected in subsequent wilderness legislation, management, and visitation neither requires nor assumes that wilderness areas be pristine. So, while the fact that North America was not a pristine continent in 1492 may present a serious challenge to a dualistic, backward-looking, purity-based idea of wilderness (such as the one Callicott and Cronon critique), it does not challenge the relativistic, forward-looking interpretation of wilderness consistently maintained by Congress and countless wilderness advocates over the past half century.

As mentioned earlier, the received wilderness idea presented by Callicott and Cronon took shape in the United States during the nineteenth century, at a time when the country was preoccupied with its manifest destiny to establish an empire that stretched across the continent. The fact that the continent was already inhabited by millions of Native Americans presented a serious problem for both the myth of manifest destiny and the myth of pristine wilderness. In both cases, the solution to the “Indian problem” was the same: remove the native inhabitants from the desired lands and relocate them on reservations. Journalist and traveler Samuel Bowles, writing in 1868, described the solution as follows: “Let us say to [the Indian], you are our ward, our child, the victim of our destiny, ours to displace, ours to protect. We want your hunting grounds to dig gold from, to raise grain on, and you must ‘move on.’ … [T]he march of …
empire demands this reservation of yours, we will assign you another; but so long as we choose, this is your home, your prison, your playground.”

As this quote suggests, the primary objective of Indian removal and relocation policies was to clear the land of native people so that White settlers could claim ownership, establish settlements, grow crops, tap the country’s rich natural resources, and build a nation. To achieve these objectives and preserve the sense of moral/religious legitimacy granted by the myth of manifest destiny, the current inhabitants of the land needed to be, if not eradicated, placed out of sight and out of mind--relocated from economically valuable lands and confined to reservations.

However, as Cronon and other scholars demonstrate, this strategy also was used to achieve various aesthetic and recreational objectives associated with the country’s first national parks, including Yellowstone and Glacier. In these instances, the presence of Native Americans could not be reconciled with the myth of pristine wilderness prevalent during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By removing the native inhabitants and severely restricting their usufruct rights, the U.S. government was able to create the appearance of a previously uninhabited, untouched landscape, thereby perpetuating the myth of pristine wilderness in the first national parks. As Cronon explains,

The movement to set aside national parks and wilderness areas followed hard on the heels of the final Indian wars, in which the prior human inhabitants of these areas were rounded up and moved onto reservations. The myth of the wilderness as “virgin,” uninhabited land had always been especially cruel when seen from the perspective of the Indians who had once called that land home. Now they were forced to move elsewhere, with the result that tourists could safely enjoy the illusion that they were seeing nature in its pristine, original state, in the new morning of God’s own creation.

As Cronon and others suggest, the idea that North America was a pristine wilderness prior to 1492 has been used to advance the aims of European-American settlers at the expense of the country’s original inhabitants. Primarily, this notion has been used to prop up the goal of
westward expansion—fulfilling the nation’s manifest destiny, settling the land, and appropriating its natural riches. However, as Cronon and others remind us, the idea of a pristine North American continent also has, at times, been used to justify the removal of native inhabitants to create our most beloved national parks. Whatever the reasons, however, the results have been the same for native people: dispossession, dislocation, and suffering.

In telling this important story, however, Cronon and others have inadvertently added to the confusion surrounding the wilderness debate by conflating the history of the national parks movement with the history of wilderness designation. Consider, for example, the first sentence of the previous quote from Cronon: “The movement to set aside national parks and wilderness areas followed hard on the heels of the final Indian wars” (emphasis added). While this statement is accurate for national parks such as Yellowstone (1872), Yosemite (1890), and Glacier (1910), it stretches the limits of credibility when it comes to designated wilderness areas. The nation’s first wilderness area, the Gila Wilderness in New Mexico, was not established until 1924, and even then it was something of an anomaly. It was not until 1929 that the U.S. Forest Service developed its L-20 Regulations to protect “primitive areas” from commercial development, and not until 1939, when the L-20 Regulations were replaced by U Regulations, that these “primitive areas” were reclassified as “wilderness.” However, these administratively identified wilderness areas only became eligible for permanent legal protection with the passage of the Wilderness Act in 1964. While the first national parks in the United States were established “hard on the heels of the final Indian wars,” the country’s legally designated wilderness areas were not.

This point is not simply a matter of nitpicking. The preceding quote from Cronon illustrates how the critique of the received wilderness idea often becomes, despite the authors’
claims to the contrary, a critique of wilderness designation and the wilderness preservation system. The supposedly clear distinction between the idea and its manifestations becomes difficult, if not impossible, to maintain. In addition, the tendency to lump together national parks and designated wilderness areas makes it all too easy to overlook important historical and philosophical differences between the two. Most importantly, it implies that the dualistic, backward-looking, purity-based understanding of wilderness that informed the establishment of the first national parks in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was the same understanding of wilderness that guided the creation of the wilderness preservation system during the middle of the twentieth century. As the preceding section of this essay suggests, this is not the case; wilderness legislation, administration, and visitation in the latter half of the twentieth century reflects a much more relativistic and forward-looking conception of wilderness, one for which the question of prior human inhabitation, use and/or modification (by Native Americans or non-natives) does not present an inherent challenge.

In his excellent book, *Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks*, Mark David Spence recounts the history of Indian inhabitation of, and removal from, Yellowstone, Glacier, and Yosemite national parks. Based on his exhaustive research, he argues that the pristine, uninhabited wilderness these parks were established to celebrate and protect had to be created (by removing the native inhabitants), before it could be preserved. The reference to wilderness in the book’s title clearly refers to an idea of wilderness similar to that presented by Callicott and Cronon, which Spence elegantly reconstructs from a variety of nineteenth and early twentieth-century sources. However, like Callicott and Cronon, Spence’s critique of the received wilderness idea and its expression in the history of Yellowstone, Yosemite and Glacier national parks, at times, extends to wilderness protection in general.
According to Spence, “[W]ilderness preservation is predicated on native dispossession.”35 While this statement is true in the most general sense (the existence of the United States is predicated on native dispossession), it misleadingly implies a direct historical relationship between Indian removal and the establishment of designated wilderness areas—a subject Spence never discusses in his book.

However, when the linkage between Indian removal and the creation of national parks is extended to actual wilderness areas, the historical connection becomes tenuous. In Montana, for example, the Confederated Salish, Kootenai, and Pend d’Oreille Tribes were removed from the Bitterroot Valley in the 1850s so that the land could be opened up for White farmers and ranchers—not so that, some 100 years later, Congress could create the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness in the mountains looming to the west. Linking nineteenth-century Indian relocation practices to wilderness designation is a bit like saying the Dutch bought Manhattan from the Lenape in order to someday create Central Park.

Ultimately, the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness, like Manhattan or Missoula, is predicated on the dispossession of native peoples, and that important fact should never be forgotten. However, once we acknowledge that wilderness designation—as described in the Wilderness Act of 1964—is not predicated on a backward-looking, purity-based understanding of wilderness, then the issue of prior inhabitation (by American Indians or European-American settlers) does not present a unique challenge to, or indictment of, the nation’s wilderness preservation system.

The received wilderness idea, as presented by Cronon, Callicott, Spence, and others, has undoubtedly been used to prop up notions of manifest destiny, justify the appropriation of native lands (whether for homesteads, mines or national parks), erase American Indians from history, and salve the conscience of the nation. However, once we break the assumed connection
between the myth of pristine nature and our understanding of wilderness, we can see the ethnocentric ideas within the received wilderness idea for what they are: a justification for claiming ownership to a previously inhabited landscape.

Wilderness as Static

A third major point in the critique of the received wilderness idea is that it is inherently static and unhistorical. The very idea of preserving wilderness in its current state runs counter to our understanding of nature as dynamic. Callicott summarizes this contradiction when he writes:

[I]t [the received wilderness idea] ignores the fourth dimension of nature, time. In a recent discussion H. Ken Cordell and Patrick C. Reed say flatly, “Preservation implies cessation of change.” But in ecosystems, change is as natural as it is inevitable (Botkin, 1990). Hence, trying to preserve in perpetuity—trying to “freeze-frame”—the ecological status quo ante is as unnatural as it is impossible.36

Wilderness preservation efforts, then, reflect an outdated understanding in which, according to Daniel Botkin, “We have tended to view nature as a Kodachrome still-life.”37 The received wilderness idea fails to acknowledge the ecological facts of temporal change and historicity in dynamic natural systems.

The writings of Callicott, Botkin, and others have helped shift our understanding of nature toward the more dynamic and process-oriented outlook suggested by evolutionary biology, ecology, and historical geology. The question here, however, is whether such a view somehow contradicts or undermines the understanding of wilderness articulated in the Wilderness Act of 1964 and expressed in contemporary wilderness management practices. According to the Wilderness Act, a wilderness area is “protected and managed so as to preserve its natural condition.” If nature, as we now understand it, is fundamentally dynamic, then wilderness areas will be protected and managed to facilitate and safeguard those natural processes. As Callicott
himself points out, such a process-oriented understanding of wilderness is not uncommon. He writes,

A more sophisticated and refined concept of wilderness preservation among contemporary conservationists aims rather to perpetuate the integrity of evolutionary and ecological processes, instead of existing “natural” structures. Cordell and Reed … in fact understand wilderness preservation not as an effort to halt change, but to slow “accelerating rates of change” and to preserve the “dynamic operation of natural processes … fire, drought, disease, predation, and geological change.”

In recent decades we have shifted from a static understanding of nature to one that acknowledges nature’s inherent dynamism. The understanding of wilderness presented in the Wilderness Act of 1964 is more than capable of accommodating this larger conceptual shift.

So, wherein lies the problem? As in the case of the ethnocentrism argument, the critique of wilderness preservation as a quixotic attempt to suspend natural processes and deny the temporal dynamism of nature is rooted in the dual myth of pristine wilderness. Once we rid ourselves of the dualistic and backward-looking notion that wilderness designation is ultimately a matter of preserving remnants of pristine or “virgin” nature, then the issue of temporal change in wilderness is no different than the question of ecological change in general.

In “The Wilderness Idea Revisited,” Callicott demonstrates how tightly these two ideas—pristine nature and static nature—are linked in the following conditional statement. “If we conceive of wilderness as a static benchmark of pristine nature in reference to which all human modifications may be judged to be more or less degradations then we can duck the hard intellectual job of specifying criteria for land health in four-dimensional, inherently dynamic landscapes long inhabited by Homo sapiens as well as by other species.” But what if we conceive of wilderness as neither static nor pristine? In order for the consequent of this statement to be true, the antecedent must be true. Conversely, if the antecedent is false, no claims can be made regarding the truth value of what follows. As I have argued above, the understanding of
wilderness presented in the Wilderness Act and manifested in congressional action and
wilderness management does not conceive of wilderness as pristine nature. Neither is it the case
that our working understanding of wilderness fails to account for natural change or prevents us
from playing an active role in managing change.

The idea that, once designated, wilderness areas will maintain themselves in a state of
self-perpetuating equilibrium is a myth. The idea that wilderness management is simply a matter
of managing people--and that nature will take care of itself--also is a myth. Neither of these
myths is expressed in the Wilderness Act of 1964. As Sections 4(c), “Prohibition of Certain
Uses,” and Section 4(d), “Special Provisions,” of the Wilderness Act explain, wilderness
managers have a wide range of management tools available to them within the wilderness
management toolbox. The key point is that the use of these tools must be consistent with the
overarching goal of maintaining the “wilderness character” of a given area. As such,
management efforts will seek to minimize evidence of human impacts and to facilitate the
untrammeled expression of natural processes. Again, it’s a matter of degree. Unlike the vast
majority of places in the United States where anthropogenic changes dominate the landscape,
wilderness areas represent a few places where we reverse our roles and give natural processes
freer reign.

The result is hardly a hands-off approach. Again, anyone who spends significant time in
designated wilderness areas will undoubtedly note the flurry of activity that constitutes
wilderness management. Several years ago, while hiking along a ridge of Crown Mountain in
the Scapegoat Wilderness, I witnessed the blow-up of a lightning-caused wildfire on nearby
Bunyan Point. In that case, the U.S. Forest Service monitored the fire closely, let it burn, and,
within a week or so, early season snows put out the fire. Several years later, I climbed the same
peak to watch another wilderness fire. This time, however, the fire was started by the U.S. Forest Service—the first phase of a prescribed burning project planned to encompass over 20,000 acres in an area where wildfire had been suppressed for nearly 100 years. On other occasions, I’ve passed pack trains carrying fluvial grayling fry destined for reintroduction in the North Fork of the Sun River and encountered trail crews battling exotic weeds like spotted knapweed. To get an idea of the extent of wilderness management going on in the backcountry, all one needs to do is spend some time in an active fire lookout. The vistas are spectacular, but don’t expect peace and quiet—not unless you get far enough away from the lookout to escape the constant chatter of the two-way radio. All day long, the radio reports the activities of wilderness managers hard at work—actively managing wilderness areas. No one would dare assume that such places are pristine—or that they can be managed to facilitate natural processes and maintain their “wilderness character” through a strategy of benign neglect.

Conclusion

The ongoing debate over the idea of wilderness has challenged us to think more clearly about the relationship between humans and the rest of the natural world. However, at times, it also has proved to be a source of added confusion. This confusion manifests itself in the words of the wilderness idea’s most articulate critics, as well as in the disjunction between their analyses and the realities of contemporary wilderness history, politics, management, and practices. As I pointed out in the introduction to this essay, critics of the received wilderness idea are almost unanimous in their affirmation of wilderness landscapes. They maintain that their critique targets an idea—specifically, the received wilderness idea that finds expression in academic and popular writings past and present. As should be clear from this chapter, I find
their critique of this received wilderness idea to be a powerful one, and I wholeheartedly agree
with the main points of their argument: humans are not separate from nature; North America was
not a pristine continent in 1492; nature is not static.

However, my confusion arises because the received wilderness idea they critique fails to
match the understanding of wilderness expressed in contemporary wilderness policies and
practices. Specifically, the idea they critique rests upon a dualistic, backward-looking, purity-
based interpretation of wilderness that bears little resemblance to the relativistic, forward-looking
understanding of wilderness that has guided and informed so much wilderness legislation,
management, and visitation during the past half century. I am not suggesting that the received
wilderness idea deconstructed by Callicott and Cronon does not exist. It can be found in a wide
range of writings by scholars, advocates, and popular essayists alike. My point is that this
understanding of wilderness is not the one reflected in the Wilderness Act of 1964 or subsequent
wilderness legislation. Nor is it an idea of wilderness that fits the on-the-ground experiences of
any but the most inattentive or unreflective wilderness visitors. Most importantly, it is not an
understanding of wilderness that recognizes the ultimate value of wilderness as part of a larger
landscape of meaningful human inhabitation.

In some ways, contemporary wilderness supporters who espouse the received wilderness
idea have been victims of their own hyperbole. Wilderness areas are valuable and meaningful in
many, many ways. Some wilderness supporters have tended to highlight these values and
meanings by focusing on the distinctiveness of wilderness vis-à-vis more humanized landscapes.
That is, they have tended to contrast wild and humanized landscapes as polar opposites and to
present their pro-wilderness arguments in dualistic and hierarchical terms. Oftentimes, these
value-laden dualisms are most evident in the rhetoric of wilderness advocates who take an all-or-nothing position with respect to wilderness designation.

However, for many wilderness advocates, wilderness has never been a black-or-white, either-or issue. Instead, they recognize that the ultimate value and meaning of wilderness are found, not in its distinctiveness from, but in its relation to, humanized landscapes. For them, the significance of wilderness can only be fully understood and appreciated within the context of its complementary relationship to the places where we live and work.⁴⁰

In his beautiful—and largely ignored—essay, “Wilderness in America,” Henry Bugbee describes our participation in wilderness as a form of “sabbatical placement.”⁴¹ For Bugbee, wilderness is a place in space analogous to the Sabbath’s place in time. Like the Sabbath, wilderness invites us to suspend our commercial pursuits, relinquish our claims to ownership and control, and turn our attention toward the other-than-human ground and source of our being. Like Sabbath observance, our wilderness practice embodies a dynamic of withdrawal and return. Just as the Sabbath is meant to infuse the entire work week with its indwelling holiness, so too, the meaning and instruction received through wilderness practice should inform and enrich our relations with the entire natural world, including the places where we live and work. The ultimate significance of Sabbath observance and wilderness practice is that they may teach us to dwell—at all times and in all places, to the extent humanly possible—in holiness and openness to the wild in all things. Just as these practices help sanctify and give meaning to the everyday, so too, does the everyday provide them with the context in which their ultimate meaning and purpose are made manifest and gain clarity and relief.⁴²

Such a complementary understanding of wild lands and working landscapes as mutually informing elements of a larger place of inhabitation is hardly unique to Bugbee. It also can be
found in the works of better known writers such as Aldo Leopold, Gary Snyder, and Wendell Berry. In each case, what ultimately matters is finding ways for humans to dwell upon the earth in a harmonious, meaningful and sustainable manner. Such forms of inhabitation will include a heterogeneous mixture of landscapes that represent different forms of human-nature relations and varying degrees of human influence. Wilderness, rather than detracting from our efforts to establish greater harmony between humans and the land, represents an essential part of the mix.

As Wendell Berry writes,

In that healed harmony the world is used
But not destroyed, the Giver and the taker
Joined, the taker blessed, in the unabused
Gift that nurtures and protects. Then workday
And sabbath live together in one place.
Though mortal, incomplete, that harmony
Is our one possibility of peace. 43

Notes


5 William Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness,” pp. 82-86.
The anthology by Callicott and Nelson, *The Great New Wilderness Debate*, provides a great overview of this debate and includes essays representing a wide variety of perspectives.


Ibid., p. 349.


In addition to this common-sense approach to describing the relative naturalness of a given landscape, a variety of more formal--even quantitative--definitions of naturalness have been put forward recently. Callicott, Crowder and Mumford give three examples of such definitions in their essay “Current Normative Concepts in Conservation,” *Conservation Biology* 13 (1999): 22-35.


Ibid., p. 127.


Quoted in Scott, *The Enduring Wilderness*, p. 79.

Occasionally, the purity definition of wilderness gets resurrected. Most recently, former Congressman Richard Pombo (R-CA) used purity arguments to temporarily derail the passage of the Wild Sky Wilderness Act (Washington). He claimed that the area in question, which is within an hour’s drive of Seattle, was not pristine enough to merit consideration as wilderness. In 2008, President George W. Bush signed the Act into law.


Ibid., p. 137.

Ibid., pp. 136-37.

Ibid., pp. 137-38.

Guha, “Radical American Environmentalism and Wilderness Preservation.”


See both Callicott, “The Wilderness Idea Revisited,” and Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness,” for their respective presentations of this argument.


Quoted in Mark David Spence, Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 27.


Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness,” p. 79.

Spence, Dispossessing the Wilderness,” p. 39.


Ibid., pp. 354-55.

See Chapter 3 of this thesis for several examples of how such an understanding of wilderness finds practical expression in the political arena.

42 The idea of wilderness as a sabbath place can only be mentioned here; however, it merits much greater attention as we think through the meaning and value of wilderness in contemporary American life.

CHAPTER 3

WILDERNESS-IN-CONTEXT: WILDERNESS POLITICS
IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Introduction

Congress finds that … this Act … encourages the economic, social, and ecological sustainability of the region and nearby communities; and promotes collaboration and recognizes the positive relationships between wilderness, forest restoration activities, and communities by addressing multiple activities across a landscape.¹

In my experience, work, play, soil, predators, wilderness, and agriculture can be balanced with one another – if we drop the dualisms and start shaking hands instead.²

Overcoming the perceived dichotomy between wilderness and the places where we live and work begins with acknowledging their complementarity. Put negatively, wilderness and working landscapes are not antithetical to one another. Rather, insofar as we understand and experience them as different elements of a larger, inhabited landscape characterized by a variety of human-land relational patterns representing various points along the urban-wilderness continuum, wilderness areas and non-wilderness lands stand in mutually informing and co-constitutive relationship to one another. Each gives meaning and definition to the other. Across a given landscape, they serve as integral components of a heterogeneous mixture of human-land relational patterns through which we can (potentially, not necessarily) discover and enact sustainable and meaningful forms of human habitation.

Recognizing this complementarity, however, does not mean ignoring the important differences between designated wilderness areas and working landscapes. At the practical and conceptual levels, designated wilderness instantiates a unique form of human-land relations; it stands in relation to working landscapes much in the same way that traditional Sabbath observance stands in relation to the work week. As a sabbath place, wilderness derives--and bestows--meaning only within the context of its relationship to the places where we live and
work. Removed from this lived context, wilderness becomes an empty abstraction, subject to potential distortion and misinterpretation.

In the same way, wilderness boundaries, abstractly considered, appear as rigid barriers erected to isolate the protected lands within from the abused or defiled lands without. Understood in this way, these boundaries carve up the landscape into discrete and unrelated units of unequal value, and our relational life within the local landscapes and communities where we live can become easily compartmentalized and impoverished.

On the other hand, to the extent that we recognize the complementarity of wilderness areas and working landscapes, wilderness boundaries serve as permeable membranes that both separate and connect wilderness and non-wilderness lands. Within the context of a larger landscape characterized by a mosaic of different human-land relational patterns, these fluid boundary zones facilitate a dynamic interaction—a mutual leavening—between wilderness areas and the places where we live and work. Through their mutually informing interaction, each enriches our understanding and experience of the other, much in the same way that the dynamic back and forth movement between traditional Sabbath observance and the work week (or vipassana meditation and our everyday lives) gives meaning and value to both.

While the understanding of wilderness and wilderness boundaries summarized in the previous four paragraphs has received little attention among wilderness theorists, it is becoming increasingly commonplace in the world of wilderness politics. Beginning with the Steens Mountain Cooperative Management and Protection Act of 2000 (eastern Oregon), wilderness politics in the Inland West has shifted in a new direction that reflects the wilderness-in-context perspective outlined above. In the decade since the act became law, citizens and legislators across the region have come together to develop a number of similar proposals that explicitly
link wilderness designation to broader concerns regarding the social, cultural, economic, and ecological well being of a particular landscape. As a result, the divisive politics of “wilderness or …” (and the administrative and legislative gridlock accompanying it) is being challenged and, in some cases, replaced by the more collaborative politics of “wilderness and …”

This political shift represents a direct challenge to the dualistic interpretation of wilderness articulated in the “received wilderness idea” discussed in the previous chapter. In affirming the complementary, co-constitutive, and mutually-enriching relationship between wilderness and the places where we live and work, it undercuts the notion of wilderness as a pristine remnant of “real” nature that stands apart from our everyday lives. Rather than isolating wilderness from its larger social, political, economic, and ecological context, “wilderness and …” politics places wilderness within a heterogeneous landscape that includes a variety of human-land relational patterns and forms of inhabitation. “Wilderness and …” politics provides a practical, concrete expression of a vision of wilderness-in-context that avoids the dualisms expressed in the received wilderness idea.

As discussed in chapter 2, J. Baird Callicott, William Cronon, and other critics of the received wilderness idea highlight its inherent dualisms and their associated dangers. In fact, both Callicott and Cronon assert that the fundamental problem with the wilderness idea is that it is inescapably dualistic. However, the non-dualistic, wilderness-in-context understanding of wilderness articulated throughout this thesis and embodied in “wilderness and …” politics calls into question the underlying premise of the arguments put forward by the wilderness idea’s most noteworthy critics. If the idea of wilderness that finds expression in contemporary wilderness politics is not inherently dualistic, then the critique of the admittedly dualistic “received wilderness idea,” for all its merits, loses much of its force and relevance. While offering a
compelling critique of an important historical idea (one that still finds expression in some circles),
these critics fail to account for the prevailing understanding of wilderness that finds expression in
contemporary wilderness politics and, as I argued in the previous chapter, the Wilderness Act of 1964.

In this chapter, I argue that the collaborative, place-based, landscape-level approach to
wilderness politics initiated over the past decade in the Intermountain West embodies a
wilderness philosophy that acknowledges the complementarity of wilderness and working
landscapes, while affirming the value of wilderness as an integral part of larger landscapes of
human inhabitation characterized by a heterogeneous mixture of human-land relational patterns.
This wilderness-in-context approach has resulted in the development of complex legislative
packages that call for new wilderness designation, while, at the same time, addressing
management issues for adjacent non-wilderness lands. Each of the package deals developed to
date has been the product of extensive collaboration and compromise among local citizens,
interest groups, and stakeholders, and, as such, each reflects the unique set of circumstances
facing the local landscapes and communities in question. While the details of each agreement
vary from place to place, one thing has remained constant: in each case, the question of
wilderness is thoroughly embedded within the larger social, cultural, economic and ecological
context of a particular place.

In the remainder of this chapter, I offer a general overview of this trend as it has arisen in
the Inland West. I then examine in greater detail two proposals recently developed in Montana:
Senator Jon Tester’s (D-MT) Forest Jobs and Recreation Act and the Rocky Mountain Front
Heritage Act. In describing these legislative proposals, my primary purpose is not to evaluate
their relative merits and shortcomings; rather, I wish to demonstrate that, in each case, what
remains clear is that its proponents understand wilderness to be a part of—not apart from—the places they call home. At the same time, I also show that the generalized critique of this approach to wilderness designation (as distinct from criticisms targeting specific elements of specific proposals) from within the environmental community tends to reflect a stubborn adherence to a decidedly dualistic understanding of the relationship between wilderness and working landscapes, as well as a conception of wilderness boundaries as rigid barriers separating two isolated and unrelated realms. I conclude by suggesting that the wilderness-in-context approach encourages both wilderness proponents and opponents to recognize and affirm the non-dualistic complementarity of wilderness and working landscapes, while providing tangible opportunities to practice meaningful and sustainable forms of inhabitation in the landscapes and communities in which we live.

Within the political realm, at least, the old vision of wilderness areas as islands of protection in a sea of exploitation (a vision that, according to biogeographers and conservation biologists, may doom many big, far-ranging creatures to extinction) is beginning to lose traction. In a growing number of places, this notion is being replaced by a more holistic vision of wilderness as part of a larger landscape of inhabitation—a place where people live, work, and play. Across the West, this vision is finding embodiment in some surprising places and under some surprising names.

The Rise of “Wilderness and …” Politics in the Intermountain West

Signed into law on October 30, 2000, the primary purpose of the Steens Mountain Cooperative Management and Protection Act is to “maintain the cultural, economic, ecological, and social health of the Steens Mountain area in Harney County, Oregon.” As part of the law, a
170,166 acre wilderness area was established in the heart of the Steens Mountains in eastern Oregon. In Nevada, the Clark County Conservation of Public Land and Natural Resources Act of 2002 and the Lincoln County Conservation, Recreation, and Development Act of 2004 resulted in over 1.2 million acres of newly designated wilderness. When President Barack Obama signed the Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009 on March 29, 2009, it contained a number of new laws guiding the management of federal lands across the country, including the Owyhee Public Lands Management Act. Among other things, the Owyhee Initiative, as it is commonly referred to, established the 517,000 acre Owyhee-Bruneau Wilderness in southwestern Idaho.

For the past five years, another Idaho initiative, the Central Idaho Economic Development and Recreation Act (CIEDRA), has been slowly working its way through Congress. First introduced by Congressman Mike Simpson (R-ID) on May 28, 2005, the bill, if passed, would establish three new wilderness units in the Boulder-White Cloud Mountains totaling 332,775 acres.

As their names suggest, these pieces of legislation involve a lot more than wilderness designation. Each is a complex, multi-faceted legislative package that has been developed through years of negotiation and compromise among local stakeholders. In addition to designating new wilderness, these bills include land exchanges and grazing buyouts; additions to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System; release of wilderness study areas to non-wilderness multiple use management; pipeline rights-of-way; grants for rural economic development; establishment of citizens’ advisory councils and science review boards; private-public cooperative management agreements; motorized recreation areas; watershed protection initiatives; and protection of American Indian cultural resources. Wilderness is a central component of all of these laws and bills; however, in each case, the question of wilderness is embedded within the larger context of the social, cultural, economic and ecological well-being of
the region. According to Representative Simpson, “Honestly, I think this is how we’re going to
do wilderness bills in the future. We’ve always had this fight over where you would draw the
lines. In this bill (CIEDRA), we’ve expanded the debate into trying to take care of more of the
regional problems other than the problems just in the (proposed wilderness).”

As opposed to the statewide wilderness bills that grew out of the RARE II (Roadless
Area Review and Evaluation) process during the late 1970s and 1980s or large regional
proposals like the Northern Rockies Ecosystem Protection Act (NREPA), these local initiatives
focus on very specific places, each of which possesses a particular set of unique circumstances
(ecological, political, economic, social). Instead of proposing a one-size-fits-all solution (which
often alienates locals and does not serve the best interest of diverse landscapes), these place-
based, context-dependent proposals attempt to forge homegrown solutions by engaging local
constituents and stakeholders. Undoubtedly, the success of this collaborative approach will vary
from place to place. Nothing guarantees that the proposals emerging from this process will result
in the best laws and policies for protecting landscapes and/or sustaining the communities that call
them home. Even its strongest supporters recognize the potential for this highly situational and
context-dependent approach to result in unbalanced and ineffective proposals. For all parties
involved, the devil is always in the details. In the following section of this chapter I provide an
in-depth account of two wilderness-in-context proposals from Montana in order to highlight a
few of these devilish details.

A Brief History of Wilderness Gridlock in Montana

Not a single acre of public land in Montana had been designated as wilderness since 1983.
This is despite the fact that the state contains more than six million acres of de facto wilderness--
currently undesignated roadless lands that, in theory, meet the eligibility requirements for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System established under the Wilderness Act of 1964. In the intervening twenty-five years since Montana added the Lee Metcalf Wilderness (1984-2009), Congress has added more than twenty-eight million acres of wilderness to the National Wilderness Preservation System in other states, and in only five of those twenty-five years has Congress failed to enact at least one piece of new wilderness legislation.9

Why the impasse in Montana? The answer to that question lies in the history of the state’s wilderness politics. During the RARE II inventory conducted in the late 1970s, the United States Forest Service (USFS) identified national forest lands it deemed suitable for wilderness designation. However, the task of legally designating wilderness (and “releasing” the lands not designated as wilderness for multiple use management) was a legislative, not administrative, job. So, in the aftermath of RARE II, each state’s congressional delegation wrote one or more wilderness bills to sort out these issues in their home state. As a result, the late 1970s and 1980s saw a flurry of wilderness legislation across the country, with Congress enacting thirty laws-designating 16.5 million acres of new wilderness in thirty-three states between 1977 and 1990.10

In the Intermountain West, most states tried to settle the unresolved wilderness issue by writing statewide wilderness bills addressing the status of their RARE II lands. Only Idaho and Montana failed to do so--although not for lack of effort. In Montana, for example, debates over wilderness legislation raged across the state. Throughout the 1980s, wilderness proponents and opponents testified at countless hearings, and legislators drafted and re-drafted dozens of proposals, with wilderness boundaries and acreages shifting with each new draft. After several attempts, Representative Pat Williams and Senator John Melcher (both Democrats) introduced
the Montana Wilderness Bill of 1988. This legislation passed both chambers of Congress only to fall victim to election-time, partisan politics.

In order to help fellow Republican Conrad Burns unseat incumbent John Melcher in the 1988 Montana Senate race, President Ronald Reagan refused to sign the Montana Wilderness Bill. The President announced his plans to pocket veto the bill just days before the election, and Burns used this political defeat to attack Melcher and his pro-wilderness position. Burns went on to win the election and represented Montana in the Senate until 2006, when he was defeated by current Senator Jon Tester. Burns’ campaign manager at the time, Denny Rehberg, a strident opponent of wilderness, was elected to the House of Representatives two years later and has served as Montana’s sole representative in the House ever since.

As wilderness politics have evolved over the past forty-five years, any wilderness proposal that lacks the support of the state’s congressional delegation is doomed to failure. Conversely, any proposal that has the backing of that state’s delegation will be approved by their peers from other states. According to former Montana Representative Pat Williams, who served nine terms in the U.S. House and authored no fewer than sixteen pieces of wilderness legislation, “[T]he history of wilderness designation has been that the Congress has followed the guidelines of those who represented the area, the states within which the lands under consideration were located. The Congress has, with only Alaska as the lone exception, waited until a state’s senators or representatives introduced a wilderness proposal and then followed the lead of that state’s delegation.”

The proposed Northern Rockies Ecosystem Protection Act provides a telling example of how this works. If enacted into law, NREPA would establish more than 24 million acres of newly designated wilderness across a five state region that includes Montana, Idaho, Wyoming,
eastern Washington and eastern Oregon. Each legislative session since the late 1980s, proponents of this multi-state wilderness proposal gain the support of hundreds of legislators from across the country. NREPA was most recently re-introduced in 2007, when it received a hearing in the House Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands. Sponsored by Carolyn Maloney (D-NY) and Christopher Shays (R-CT), 115 co-sponsors also signed on in support of the bill. However, none of these co-sponsors were from the Northern Rockies region, and, as in previous legislative sessions, the bill went nowhere. Pat Williams sums up NREPA’s chances as follows: “Will [NREPA] become law? Not a chance. Does it deserve to become law? No.”

To warrant serious consideration, any proposed wilderness legislation must have support from local congressional leaders.

This historical and political backdrop helps explain the gridlock that has characterized wilderness politics in Montana for the past two decades. Since Senator Melcher’s defeat in 1988, wilderness has become politically toxic; for many Montana politicians, wilderness is an issue that one loses elections over. Until Senator Tester’s introduction of the Forest Jobs and Recreation Act of 2009, no Montana legislator dared to address the unresolved legislative issues surrounding any of Montana’s six million acres of de facto wilderness. At the same time, as the fate of NREPA plainly shows, the only people who are in a position to resolve these issues are the members of Montana’s congressional delegation—the very people who have been unwilling to do so.

The ensuing gridlock has benefitted almost no one—not environmentalists, not the timber industry, and not the forests. While no new wilderness has been designated in Montana during the past twenty-seven years, off-road vehicle (ORV) use has skyrocketed on the state’s federal forest lands, including wilderness study areas and inventoried roadless lands, during that time.
As ORVs continue to establish “historical use” and motorized routes in many of these areas, their wilderness character is severely compromised, and their potential for wilderness designation is greatly diminished. As a result, “Of the 1.4 million acres [of proposed wilderness] in the 1988 [Montana Wilderness] bill … approximately 250,000 of those no longer qualify for wilderness preservation due to motorized recreation’s expanded footprint.”\textsuperscript{17} For wilderness advocates in Montana, the ongoing gridlock over the state’s wilderness question does not, as some have claimed, serve their interests. Instead, it has resulted in continuing losses on the ground.

For Montana’s sawmills and the communities they support, the situation is even worse. As in other western states, Montana’s timber industry has been in a freefall since the 1980s. The reasons for the industry’s decline are numerous and complex. On the demand side, some contributing factors include stiff competition from Canadian softwood producers and plantation forests in the southeastern United States (where trees grow five times faster than they do in the Intermountain West), increased automation, the collapse of the housing market, and current economic recession.\textsuperscript{18}

On the supply side, saw logs have become increasingly difficult to obtain. Currently, timber sales from national forest lands (which account for the vast majority of timberlands in Montana and throughout the West) are approximately twenty percent of what they were in the 1980s.\textsuperscript{19} At Sun Mountain Lumber, a sawmill located in Deerlodge, Montana, more than ninety percent of the logs they processed during the 1980s came from surrounding federal lands (primarily the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest). Today, federal lands account for less than five percent of the mill’s logs, with the rest coming from more distant state, tribal and private lands.\textsuperscript{20} Frequent appeals and litigation by environmentalists, understaffed and underfunded agencies, detailed environmental review processes, and all-too-common procedural
delays are the main causes of what former Chief of the U.S. Forest Service, Dale Bosworth, referred to as “analysis paralysis.” While no one is calling for a return to the clearcuts and cut-and-run practices of the 1970s and 1980s, the fact remains that the flow of timber coming off national forests in Montana and throughout the West has been reduced to a trickle. As for private timber lands, many of these have already been cut or converted to real estate property for residential development. Even the mills that have survived these difficult times continue to face chronic uncertainty over supply.

Ironically, the RARE II-era wilderness legislation that most members of the timber industry opposed sought to resolve this supply side uncertainty through “soft release” language. As part of these bills, lands not included as wilderness were released from wilderness consideration and returned to multiple-use management, including timber harvesting. In Montana, “[T]he vetoed 1988 bill, for instance, would have released four million acres from the 1970s-initiated holding pattern.” However, that never happened in Montana, and the state’s national forests, for the reasons cited in the previous paragraph, have failed to provide timber mills with the predictable supply of logs they needed to stay in business. As a result, many mills have shut down, and sales of wood and paper products have declined precipitously. Between 2005 and 2008, for example, the University of Montana’s Bureau of Business and Economic Research found that the state’s sales receipts for wood and paper products dropped from $1.2 billion to $710 million. In 2010 alone, Montana lost more than 1,700 jobs in the timber industry.

Meanwhile, Montana’s federal forest lands continue to face a growing number of threats—threats that the U.S. Forest Service appears unable to adequately address with its available resources and through its current management practices. Some of these threats, such as off-road vehicle use in the backcountry [and the increased erosion, proliferation of noxious
weeds, and wildlife dislocation (not to mention noise and smell) that accompany them], may be best addressed through wilderness designation. In other instances, more active management strategies may be necessary. One hundred years of active fire suppression, a massive pine bark beetle infestation (most likely exacerbated by global climate change), a growing wildland-urban interface, and widespread exurban development have created conditions on the ground that require active intervention to restore impaired streams, replace damaged culverts, close and obliterate roads, improve wildlife habitat, and manage wildfire. Currently, the U.S. Forest Service estimates that between 60 and 80 million acres of national forest lands across the country are in need of some form of active restoration work.25

While reports of a declining timber industry might sound like good news to some environmentalists, without a viable wood products industry, much of this restoration and fuels reduction work will have to be done by the U.S. Forest Service using tax dollars. In such places as Colorado and New Mexico, where the timber industry has all but collapsed, no other options are available. In Montana, however, the U.S. Forest Service, residents of forest communities, and a growing number of environmentalists all recognize the importance of having a functional timber industry available to perform the mechanical treatments and restoration work needed to properly manage the forests, especially in the roaded frontcountry where a combination of social, economic, historical and ecological factors requires a more hands-on approach. As current Chief of the U.S. Forest Service, Tom Tidwell, remarked in a 2007 interview, “We’re more in need of the industry. It’s essential that we have someone to do the work so that taxpayers don’t have to pay for it.”26
The Forest Jobs and Recreation Act

In an attempt to resolve the gridlock facing Montana’s forests and tackle the forest management issues outlined above, Senator Jon Tester introduced the Forest Jobs and Recreation Act (FJRA) on July 17, 2009. The bill, which is currently in legislative limbo after its inclusion in the short-lived Senate Omnibus Appropriations bill of 2010, is actually a compilation of three community forestry initiatives developed independently across western Montana: the Three Rivers Challenge (Kootenai National Forest), the Blackfoot-Clearwater Landscape Stewardship Project (Lolo National Forest), and the Beaverhead-Deerlodge Partnership (Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest).27

Each of these initiatives is the product of years of negotiation, collaboration, and compromise among a diverse group of local stakeholders. For example, the Lincoln County Coalition responsible for putting together the Three Rivers Challenge includes local businesses, an outfitter, a conservation group (Yaak Valley Forest Council), motorized vehicle groups (Kootenai Ridge Riders ATV Club, Troy Snowmobile Club, and Lincoln County Snow-Kats), and county commissioners. The Blackfoot-Clearwater Landscape Stewardship Project partnership is equally diverse, including conservationists, loggers, snowmobilers, ranchers, outfitters, and a retired forest supervisor. The Beaverhead-Deerlodge Partnership, which is by far the largest and farthest reaching of the three community forestry initiatives included in Forest Jobs and Recreation Act, was developed by three conservation groups (Montana Wilderness Association, Trout Unlimited of Montana, and the National Wildlife Federation) and five locally-owned and -operated timber mills (Sun Mountain Lumber [Deerlodge, MT]; R-Y Timber [Townsend and Livingston, MT]; Pyramid Lumber [Seeley Lake, MT]; Smurfit-Stone [Missoula, MT]; and Roseburg Forest Products [Missoula, MT]).
Combined as the Forest Jobs and Recreation Act, these proposals call for the
designation of 666,260 acres of new wilderness. In addition to wilderness designation, FJRA
would establish 369,500 acres of recreation areas that allow some form of motorized travel for
dirt bikes, four-wheel off-road vehicles and/or snowmobiles (but no roads or extractive resource
development). At the same time, the bill mandates 10,000 acres of mechanical treatment/logging
per year (3,000 acres on the Kootenai Forest and 7,000 acres on the Beaverhead-Deerlodge
Forest) for ten years.\textsuperscript{28} Logging would be done using stewardship contracts, in which receipts
from timber harvesting would stay at the local level to fund “forest and watershed restoration
projects” authorized by the legislation. Stewardship logging receipts also could be used to
support the construction of biomass systems at local timber mills. The legislation establishes
local advisory boards with representation from various stakeholder groups to work with U.S.
Forest Service administrators to identify suitable sites for mechanical treatments and restoration,
as well as to plan and monitor logging and restoration work.

In many ways, the Forest Jobs and Recreation Act is the result of tremendous
dissatisfaction with both wilderness politics in Washington, D.C., and forest management
practices on the ground. Most, if not all, of the partners responsible for developing the
collaborative proposals included in FJRA agree that the current system of federal forest planning
and management is broken, and, after years of frustration trying to work within this system, they
have come up with place-based alternatives that meet the specific needs of diverse stakeholders
at the local landscape level. In the case of the Beaverhead-Deerlodge Partnership, the initial idea
arose during conversations following a Senate hearing at which conservationists and loggers
expressed equal dissatisfaction over the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest’s Draft
did environmentalists. Both sides said the Forest Service had been ignoring them.” So, they decided to get together and, in a manner of speaking, write their own forest plan. In his article “Thinking Outside the Timber Box,” journalist Ray Ring quotes Sherm Anderson, owner of Sun Mountain Lumber and the original timber partner in the Beaverhead-Deerlodge Partnership, as saying, “I’m a Republican, and a principle of our party is, ‘Control our own destiny.’” “In other words,” writes Ring, “Let’s take charge of the forest.”

In trying to “take charge” of the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest, partners worked together to forge a common vision for managing the forest. According to Tim Baker (then-executive director of the Montana Wilderness Association) and Ed Regan (resource manager for R-Y Timber), two of the chief architects of the partnership plan,

Our vision was simple: look across the entire landscape, while focusing on specific activities for specific places. The agreement is possible because the Partners see a big picture—we recognize that ‘forest management’ means taking care of the whole—not just focusing on one part. Our notion of ‘stewardship’ not only includes places for sustainable timber harvest, but also restoring places where the land and water are damaged and recognizing that some places are best off left alone, as wilderness. … The resulting Beaverhead-Deerlodge Forest Partnership rests on three pillars: jobs in the woods, healthy forests, and protection of our Montana backcountry heritage.

The vision for the Beaverhead-Deerlodge Partnership articulated in the preceding quote could also serve as a vision statement for the entire Forest Jobs and Recreation Act. The proposal takes a landscape-level approach to forest management and wilderness protection. It is place-based legislation that addresses the needs of particular communities and their local landscapes. It has its origins in the collaborative efforts of numerous individuals and organizations who have set aside their differences to find common ground--on the ground--and practice what Dan Kemmis calls the “politics of inhabitation.” The Forest Jobs and Recreation Act recognizes and affirms the potential for a variety of human-nature relational patterns to contribute to meaningful and sustainable ways of human inhabitation. Logging, restoration, and wilderness are equally
important parts of the mix, and each has its rightful place within the larger landscapes that the people of western Montana call home. Wilderness, understood and experienced as such, is part of, not apart from, that home.

Not everyone, however, supports Senator Tester’s Forest Jobs and Recreation Act. One vocal group of opponents is represented by certain motorized recreation groups that strongly oppose any new wilderness designation. For them, wilderness designation represents yet another government restriction, one that prevents them from riding their motorbikes, all-terrain vehicles, and snowmobiles anywhere they choose.

At the other end of the spectrum are environmentalists who believe that the Forest Jobs and Recreation Act does not designate enough wilderness. They criticize the bill because it releases some portions of two USFS wilderness study areas (and several small BLM wilderness study areas) to multiple use management, includes some inventoried roadless acreage in the pool of lands potentially available for mechanical treatment, allows non-conforming uses in one proposed wilderness area (Snowcrest), and mandates specific acreages (an average of 6,667 acres) for mechanical treatment each year. They also fear that bill undercuts existing environmental laws including the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and National Forest Management Act (NFMA).

Within the environmental community, the two groups most actively opposing FJRA are the Wild West Institute and the Alliance for the Wild Rockies. Both organizations are strong advocates of the Northern Rockies Ecosystem Protection Act, which would designate all inventoried roadless areas in the five-state Northern Rockies region as wilderness. They also are frequent appellants of timber sales in the state. In fact, according to the Alliance for the Wild Rockies website, “The Alliance for the Wild Rockies files more appeals and fights more court
battles to preserve wild lands and native species than any single organization in the region. And we also win more.”

Montana’s lone Congressman in the House of Representatives, Denny Rehberg, also opposes FJRA. He refuses to support any new wilderness designation without stronger guarantees that the logging component of the project will happen first. Fearing appeals from environmental groups, he has recommended that FJRA be rewritten to include “trigger language”—an incremental tit-for-tat approach, whereby the completion of a certain amount of logging “triggers” the designation of a certain amount of wilderness. Senator Tester has rejected this suggestion, saying, “Trigger language is something out of the 1970s. It’s a non-starter. Even timber people recognize that. With trigger language in the bill, it’s dead in the water.” As Montana’s only Congressman, Rep. Rehberg’s opposition could become a major obstacle for passing the Forest Jobs and Recreation Act when Republicans take control of the U.S. House of Representatives in 2011.

To date, the most substantive concerns about the Forest Jobs and Recreation Act have come from the U.S. Forest Service. Agency representatives initially expressed reservations concerning funding issues related to proposed restoration work, overly ambitious timber harvest levels and timelines, the potential “balkanization” of the national forest system, and the precedent set by establishing timber harvest levels through legislative mandates. During a December 2009 hearing before the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, USDA Undersecretary Harris Sherman voiced each of these concerns, calling the logging targets and timelines “unworkable” and warning that the proposed legislation could set a dangerous precedent. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack summarized the administration’s concerns about “balkanization” as follows: “We have 155 different forests across the country. We don’t
want a situation where we’re legislating the management of every forest.”37 Or, as Martin Nie, Professor of Natural Resource Policy at the University of Montana’s College of Forestry and Conservation put it, “Perhaps the most important question related to Tester’s bill is the precedent that would be established in legislating timber treatment mandates on national forests. What might those treatments look like in other proposals if such legislation is now politically acceptable?”38

Following the original introduction of the Forest Jobs and Recreation Act in July 2009, Senator Tester and his staff have worked closely with Forest Service officials to address these concerns. In summer 2010, Senator Tester introduced a revised version of the bill that, among other things, extends the timeline for logging, clarifies funding issues, and frames the proposal as a “pilot project”—an experiment in alternative forest planning and management. After months of negotiation and two visits to Montana, Secretary Vilsack announced that changes made to the original bill adequately addressed the administration’s initial concerns and that they now support the legislation. In his formal letter of support, the Secretary summarizes USDA’s position as follows:

As the Administration expressed in testimony on S.1470, we have reservations about legislating specific treatment levels and other aspects of our forest plans. However, the holistic package of mechanical treatments, wilderness designations, and job creation, along with the collaborative approach and hard work of the stakeholders in Montana, and your work directly with the Forest Service, ensure that this legislation can serve as a model for similar efforts elsewhere.”39

As Secretary Vilsack’s comments indicate, the fate of FJRA has implications that reach far beyond Montana. As a collaborative, citizen-driven, place-based, and landscape-level approach to forest planning and management (including wilderness designation), the Forest Jobs and Recreation Act offers an alternative to business as usual on our national forest lands. Just as importantly, FJRA offers an alternative vision of the relationship between human communities
and the forest landscapes that surround them, a multifaceted relationship that includes wilderness as an important part of the mix.

The Rocky Mountain Front Heritage Act

Compared to the Forest Jobs and Recreation Act, the Rocky Mountain Front Heritage Act is relatively simple and non-controversial. The proposal, which has yet to find a congressional sponsor, was developed by the Coalition to Protect the Rocky Mountain Front, a loose-knit collection of diverse local stakeholders representing ranching, farming, hunting/fishing, business, recreation, and conservation. The coalition’s steering committee includes local ranchers, outfitters, a taxidermist, retired school teacher, lawyer, former U.S. Forest Service supervisor, and representatives from three conservation organizations: Montana Wilderness Association, Montana Wildlife Federation, and the Wilderness Society. Members of the coalition have been working on the RMFHA proposal since 2007, but their efforts to protect this iconic landscape go back more than thirty years. In fact, advocates for “the Front” (as the area is commonly referred to) claim a conservation legacy dating back almost a century, beginning with the establishment of the Sun River Game Preserve in 1913.

The Rocky Mountain Front Heritage Act is the culmination of these conservation efforts and represents what proponents hope will be the crowning achievement in a string of recent administrative and legislative victories. These victories include:

- (1997) An administrative decision by then-Lewis and Clark National Forest Supervisor, Gloria Flora, to place a fifteen-to-twenty year moratorium on all oil and gas leasing on U.S. Forest Service lands along the Rocky Mountain Front.

• (2006) Passage of legislation introduced by Senator Max Baucus (D-MT) prohibiting all future oil and gas leasing on the Front and establishing a mechanism for buying out and retiring existing leases;

• (2007) Implementation of a Travel Management Plan for the Lewis and Clark National Forest’s Rocky Mountain Ranger District (the Rocky Mountain Front south of the Badger-Two Medicine area) that places a strong emphasis on non-motorized travel; and

• (2009) Implementation of a Travel Management Plan for the Badger-Two Medicine area of the Rocky Mountain Ranger District that eliminates motorized travel throughout the interior of the Badger-Two Medicine.41

The 2006 law has gone a long way toward permanently protecting the Front from its greatest threat--oil and gas development.42 Besides prohibiting any future leasing, the program has already resulted in petroleum companies abandoning over 110,000 acres of pre-existing leases along the Front.43 Within the next few years, proponents anticipate that all pre-existing leases along the Front will be retired.

The recently issued travel plans provide temporary protection from the Front’s other major threat: increased motorization and expanded off-road vehicle use. However, because travel planning is an administrative process that has to be repeated every twenty years, these plans do not offer the permanent protections provided by law. The Rocky Mountain Front Heritage Act would provide permanent, legal protection.

The Rocky Mountain Front is a singular landscape--a boundary landscape where the eastern edge of the Rocky Mountains rises in precipitous limestone reefs and ridges from the Great Plains, and where huge tracts of undeveloped federal land (most notably the 1.5 million
acre Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex) abut large working ranches. The dynamic interactions between these forces have created a place of spectacular beauty, abundant wildlife, and multigenerational ranching traditions. According to outfitter (and former Wilderness Society lobbyist) Bill Cunningham, “From the Yukon to Mexico, this is the best of what remains of the Rocky Mountain Front. It’s the last part of the Front that is still wild enough to support plains grizzly bears. It has the second-largest migratory elk herd in the country, and the largest herd of Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep.”44 Mike Aderhold, a retired regional supervisor for the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, states, “[T]he Front remains in the top 1 percent of all wildlife habitats in the country, containing a higher diversity of animal and plant life than anywhere else in the Rockies, from Canada to Mexico.”45 It is the mutual interactions along the boundary between mountains and plains, as well as public and private lands, that create this incredible abundance and diversity. Karl Rappold, a rancher and Coalition Steering Committee member explains the key role that private ranchlands play: “We’ve been ranching here for 128 years. That’s what’s kept the Front in the pristine shape it’s in. It has limited access to the Front, and sustained the landscape. The working landscape has made it what it is today.”46

Conservation easements on tens of thousands of acres of private land along the Front ensure that these working landscapes will remain intact as working farms and ranches, free from subdivision and industrial development in perpetuity.

The motivation behind the Rocky Mountain Front Heritage Act boils down to this: people love the Rocky Mountain Front and want to keep it the way it is. This means protecting the landscape from future threats of expanded motorized use; providing continued access for traditional foot and stock travel, as well as hunting and fishing; and ensuring that people can continue to make their livelihood from the land.
In fall 2009, the coalition released the initial draft of the Rocky Mountain Front Heritage Act and held four public meetings in Great Falls, Helena, Choteau, and Augusta to present the proposal and solicit feedback. Of the more than 400 people who attended the meetings, a majority spoke in favor of the proposal. Among the critics, most concerns focused on the amount of wilderness included in the package--too much for some, too little for others. In the months that followed, coalition members painstakingly sorted through all public comments and mailed out written responses addressing the most frequently mentioned concerns. They also held dozens of meetings with key stakeholders, area ranchers, grazing permittees, conservation groups, and Forest Service personnel. After vetting a modified version of the proposal with U.S. Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee staff, the coalition released a revised draft of the proposed legislation in May 2010.

The succinct, seven-page draft legislation has three components. First, it would establish a 218,327 acre Conservation Management Area on all non-wilderness U.S. Forest Service lands on the Front (excluding the Badger-Two Medicine). This unique designation would permanently restrict motorized travel to roads and trails where it is currently allowed under the existing travel plan. Grazing, post and pole cutting, firewood gathering and other current uses would continue as before within the Conservation Management Area. However, the bill would not allow any new, permanent roads constructed within the CMA.

Second, the bill would establish 86,438 new acres of wilderness on the Lewis and Clark and Helena National Forests. The six new wilderness units would adjoin the existing Bob Marshall and Scapegoat wilderness areas. The legislation specifically references section 4(d)(4) of the Wilderness Act of 1964 in order to explicitly recognize that current grazing activities will be allowed to continue in designated wilderness areas.
The third and final section of the Rocky Mountain Front Heritage Act calls for the development of a comprehensive noxious weed management plan for all 434,237 acres of U.S. Forest Service lands on the Front, including the Badger-Two Medicine. The plan will seek to control, prevent, and eradicate noxious weeds on USFS lands, through coordinated efforts involving local county weed districts, state weed control programs, the Blackfeet Indian Nation, and nonprofit organizations. While no funding is requested in the legislation, it contains language authorizing money to be appropriated under subsequent legislation, as well as through potential grant funding provided under the Noxious Weed Control and Eradication Act of 2004. Results from a recent survey found that, in 2009, land managers along the Front spent an estimated $1.1 million dollars to fight noxious weeds that have already infested more than 32,000 acres, degrading water quality, agricultural productivity, and wildlife habitat.

Since its initial introduction, the Rocky Mountain Front Heritage Act has received widespread support, with minimal opposition. Among these opponents are motorized vehicle users who find current travel plans too restrictive, a small number of mountain bikers who oppose wilderness additions that would close several trails to mechanized travel, and some local ranchers and leaseholders who fear additional restrictions and regulatory controls due to protective designations like the Conservation Management Area and wilderness.

At the other end of the spectrum, some environmentalists oppose the proposal because they believe that the Conservation Management Area designation would end up weakening protections for these roadless lands currently in place under the Roadless Area Conservation Rule. According to Michael Garrity of the Alliance for the Wild Rockies, “[T]hey’re opening all this inventoried roadless land to logging. It opens up this huge area along the Front that’s currently being protected.” However, since the dry, east side slopes of the Rocky Mountain
Front contain very little marketable timber, most opposition within the environmental community focuses on the relatively small amount of wilderness included in the proposal. At a public meeting in Helena, Paul Edwards, a former member of the Coalition, stated, “I’ve felt from the beginning that this was a totally inadequate approach to protecting what is some of the last great wilderness in Montana. In reading this bill, it’s very obvious that it was laboriously crafted to enlist local landowners’ support, when many of those landowners are totally antiwilderness.”\textsuperscript{51} As a matter of fact, the Rocky Mountain Front Heritage Act proposal does contain less wilderness acreage than many wilderness advocates would like (and, for the portion of the Front administered by the Lewis and Clark National Forest, less wilderness acreage than the USFS recommended in its most recent Forest Plan). Coalition members, in turn, argue that their goal is to protect “every inch” of the landscape through a combination of protective designations. As coalition member and taxidermist, Roy Jacobs, explains, “The hardest part was convincing all those groups that wilderness isn’t the only way to protect land. We’ve had some real knock-down drag-outs. But there’s only a couple places on the globe like this.”\textsuperscript{52}

Recent polling data indicate that most Montanans support the RMFHA proposal. In a poll of more than 500 registered Montana voters conducted by Harstad Strategic Research in November 2009, sixty-nine percent of Montanans said they were in favor of the proposal, with only twenty-one percent opposed and ten percent undecided.\textsuperscript{53} The Rocky Mountain Front Heritage Act proposal also has received public endorsements from the editorial boards of several statewide newspapers (including the \textit{Missoulian} and \textit{Great Falls Tribune}),\textsuperscript{54} a group of 15 former wildlife officials,\textsuperscript{55} three former chiefs of the US Forest Service [Jack Ward Thomas (1993-1996), Mike Dombeck (1997-2001) and Dale Bosworth (2001-2007)],\textsuperscript{56} and Lewis and Clark County commissioners.\textsuperscript{57} Current administrators with the Lewis and Clark National Forest,
Helena National Forest, and Region 1 of the USFS have reviewed the proposal and found nothing objectionable. Coalition members also have presented the Rocky Mountain Front Heritage Act proposal to each member of Montana’s congressional delegation. Both Senator Tester and Senator Baucus have been encouraging, but, to date, no one has stepped forward to sponsor the legislation. Senator Tester has focused his efforts on securing passage of the Forest Jobs and Recreation Act, while Senator Baucus has taken a wait-and-see approach. At the present time, the future of the Rocky Mountain Front Heritage Act, like the Forest Jobs and Recreation Act, remains uncertain.

Perhaps more than any other piece of legislation described in this chapter, the Rocky Mountain Front Heritage Act embodies the wilderness-in-context approach. It is a truly grassroots proposal that has been developed through a collaborative process involving a diverse group of stakeholders united by more than three decades of common efforts to protect their beloved Rocky Mountain Front. The proposal focuses on a single, iconic landscape--one that is immediately recognizable to most Montanans and treasured as both a wild and working landscape. The intent of the proposal is to provide some level of permanent, legislative protection for “every inch” of the landscape, not just the relatively small areas of designated wilderness. The proposal offers place-based solutions designed to fit the needs of a one-of-a-kind landscape and the people who live, work and play there. While one component of the package was designed to support local efforts to fight noxious weeds that affect public and private lands, as well as wildlife and livestock, yet another component makes use of a brand new protective designation (Conservation Management Area) created specifically with the needs of this landscape and its inhabitants in mind. Proponents tout the bill as a “Made-in-Montana” solution that will keep this wild and working landscape intact, protect its extraordinary wildlife habitat,
maintain traditional uses, ensure access to quiet trails for foot and stock travelers, and support the area’s farming and ranching heritage.

As one of the three pillars of the Rocky Mountain Front Heritage Act, wilderness plays a critical role in achieving all of these goals. Conversely, without the other two pillars, wilderness, by itself, fails to provide the landscape-level protection needed to achieve any of the proposal’s ambitious, interrelated goals. As coalition member Roy Jacobs put it during a public meeting in Great Falls, “We’re trying to protect a giant landscape versus my little spot [wilderness], and the hell with the rest of it.”

Conclusion

As indicated in the preceding analysis, each piece of wilderness-in-context legislation described in this chapter has its share of critics on both ends of the political spectrum. Many Westerners are against any new wilderness and are, on principle, adamantly opposed to all new wilderness legislation. To them, wilderness represents the most restrictive land management designation possible, and they strongly resent another layer of governmental regulation and control (especially from the federal government) in their lives. Their motto is simple: “Not one acre more.” Organizations representing off-road vehicle users are typically the most vocal proponents of this position.

At the same time, each of these legislative proposals has come under equally strong attack from within the environmental community. For some environmentalists, wilderness protection achieved through such legislation is purchased at too high of a price. In many cases, opposition comes down to the fact that these compromise proposals contain too few acres of wilderness—or, put negatively, that they don’t include every acre of potential wilderness in
question. Many of these critics oppose any piece of legislation that would release any *de facto* wilderness to multiple use management, and each of the proposals described in this chapter (except for the Rocky Mountain Front Heritage Act) contains some kind of release language. In Idaho, for example, the Owyhee Initiative designated 517,000 acres of new wilderness and 316 miles of Wild and Scenic Rivers, but it also released 199,000 acres of wilderness study area lands from future consideration as wilderness. In the case of the Central Idaho Economic Development and Recreation Act, the bill would establish over 330,000 acres of wilderness in the Boulder-White Clouds, while releasing more than 130,000 acres of wilderness study area to non-wilderness, multiple use management.\(^5^9\)

In Montana, critics of the Forest Jobs and Recreation Act also contend that the bill contains too little wilderness and releases too much acreage from wilderness study area status. They also object to the non-conforming uses in designated wilderness areas, which they argue would undercut the intent and purpose of the original Wilderness Act of 1964. Others fear the dangerous precedent the bill sets in establishing legislative mandates for logging, as well as the “balkanization” of the entire national forest system. On the Rocky Mountain Front, opponents believe the proposed wilderness acreage is woefully inadequate, and they fear that the designation of certain roadless lands as part of a Conservation Management Area (a new and untested land management designation) would actually weaken the level of protection they currently, if tenuously, enjoy under the on-again, off-again Roadless Rule.

In turn, proponents of these proposals offer compelling replies to each of these criticisms. Some of their responses site actual conditions on the ground that make wilderness designation virtually impossible (even in wilderness study areas and inventoried roadless areas), while others focus on political expediency and the need for compromise. As a result, these proposals have
engendered a lively public debate within the environmental community concerning the relative strengths and weaknesses of the particular provisions included in each specific piece of legislation. Even some individuals and organizations who may support the collaborative, landscape-level, place-based approach used to develop these proposals have weighed in against them, based upon their opposition to one or more of the specific provisions included in the legislation. It is hardly surprising that each of these proposals has received a mixed response within the environmental community.

However, a few environmentalists have dismissed this approach on principle and have strongly criticized the trend toward linking wilderness protection with regional economic and social issues. They have dubbed such legislation “quid pro quo Wilderness.” In their report entitled *Quid Pro Quo Wilderness--A New Threat to Public Lands*, Blaeloch and Fite write:

> In recent years, a notable change has materialized in wilderness campaigns and legislation. Traditionally, wilderness legislation has simply designated the boundaries of newly-protected areas and might have included “release” language that dropped other nearby areas from protection. But while past wilderness bills entailed compromises, a new breed of compromise has emerged, with wilderness designations tied to complex land-use legislation addressing issues that go far beyond the wilderness boundaries. This trend has serious, negative implications for public land policy and could have devastating consequences for Wilderness. These deals create a *quid pro quo* situation wherein wilderness protection is essentially “paid for” with balancing provisions in the same piece of legislation that facilitate development, privatization, and intensified land use—even in the very “wilderness” set aside in the deals. If this trend continues, the days of the stand-alone wilderness bill, along with strict observance of the letter and spirit of the Wilderness Act, may become relics of the past.  

According to the authors, these new, multi-issue “wilderness bills” are changing the political landscape of wilderness for the worse. They argue that the continuation of this trend threatens the future of “Wilderness” as we know it and may undermine the meaning and intent of the Wilderness Act.
In articulating their critique of “quid pro quo wilderness,” Blaeloch and Fite offer a very different interpretation of wilderness and its relationship to non-wilderness lands than the one outlined in the opening section of this essay. Their critique reflects a dualistic understanding of wilderness, in which wilderness designation is reduced to drawing boundaries around islands of “stand alone” wilderness. Such boundaries, in turn, function to protect the wilderness within by isolating it from the surrounding non-wilderness lands. Not surprisingly, these critics denounce the new breed of wilderness proposals because these legislative packages deal with issues that “go far beyond the wilderness boundaries.”

Blaeloch and Fite champion the value of wilderness within its boundaries but fail to recognize its relationship to the working landscapes and human communities that surround it. They adhere to the dualistic vision of wilderness areas as islands of protection in a sea of exploitation, and, in setting up this sharp distinction, they isolate wilderness areas from the landscapes where we live and work. The physical and cognitive boundaries between wilderness and working landscapes have been sharply drawn and jealously defended. Wilderness designation, for them, seems to be all about drawing boundaries and controlling borders.

The value of wilderness initiatives such as the Forest Jobs and Recreation Act and the Rocky Mountain Front Heritage Act lies precisely in their attempts to open the boundaries between wilderness and working landscapes. This is not to say that such proposals are inherently good or that they always have the best interests of the land and local communities in mind. As stated earlier, the devil is in the details. Each proposal needs to be assessed on the basis of its individual merits and drafted (and re-drafted) through meaningful negotiations that take into account the voices of a wide range of stakeholders. Compromise is required, and it is unlikely that all sides will get exactly what they want.
In principle, however, these proposals frame the whole question of wilderness in a very
different context than the one that many people have come to see as politically intractable and
philosophically suspect. They challenge the dualistic understanding of wilderness expressed in
both the “received wilderness idea” and its subsequent critique. Specifically, these new
wilderness initiatives affirm the potential complementarity of wilderness areas and working
landscapes within a larger, landscape-level context. Rather than treating wilderness as something
isolated from, and in opposition to, the places where we work and live, these proposals address
the question of wilderness designation in conjunction with other questions concerning the
ecological health of surrounding non-wilderness lands, as well as the social and economic
welfare of local communities. By linking wilderness designation to land management issues on
non-wilderness lands, as well as to socio-economic issues affecting local communities, they hold
out the possibility that the respect, forbearance, and humility manifest in wilderness designation
and engendered in wilderness practice might also inform human action in areas that exhibit a
greater degree of anthropogenic change--the very places where we live and work.

Recent proposals from Montana represent especially compelling expressions of this
emerging understanding of wilderness in the West. Both the Forest Jobs and Recreation Act and
the Rocky Mountain Front Heritage Act affirm the crucial role of wilderness within the context
of a landscape-level approach to public land management that attempts to create and perpetuate
more meaningful and sustainable (both ecologically and economically) modes of human
inhabitation in western Montana. They present wilderness as the wild heart of a landscape that
includes a diverse mixture of land uses and human-nature relational patterns--an integral part of a
larger, mosaic landscape that may rightfully (that is, ethically) include restoration projects,
timber harvesting, cattle grazing, subsistence uses, and human inhabitation. Placed in this context,
wilderness is recognized and acknowledged as part of our home--a place we care about and care for.

Ultimately, the overarching question is one of inhabitation. Considered as co-constitutive parts of a landscape of inhabitation, wilderness and working landscapes complement each other and offer us very different ways of taking up with and relating to the places we call home. Each invites us to engage in meaningful practices appropriate to the place, practices that can help us come to know and care about the landscape we call home and better understand who and where we are. For human dwellers on the earth, such embodied understanding and sense of at-homeness may well be the ultimate good--the happiness--we seek.

Notes

1 Original draft of Forest Jobs and Recreation Act of 2009, S. 1470, 110th Cong. (2009), Section 2. Since its original introduction, the legislation has been revised and condensed (reduced from 87 pages to 50). The statement quoted here, along with all other Congressional “findings,” has been removed from subsequent drafts of the legislation. However, it accurately reflects the intentions and purposes of Senator Tester and the collaborative partnerships that forged the agreements that gave rise to this legislation.

2 Courtney White, “A New Environmentalism,” Forging a West that Works: An Invitation to the Radical Center (Sante Fe, NM: Quivira Coalition, 2003), p. 66.


12 Ironically, President Reagan holds the distinction of signing more wilderness bills than any other President. His veto of the Montana bill had nothing to do with his position on wilderness; it was motivated solely by partisan politics. See Mahoney, “Wilderness and Community Forestry,” p. 10.


15 Williams, “NREPA.”

16 The Clinton-era Roadless Area Conservation Rule does not address the issue of motorized vehicle use in roadless areas.


Ibid., p. 13.

Saldin, “Will the Tester Bill End the Wilderness War?” p. 2.

“Managing the West’s forests for fun and profit.”


Senate Majority Leader, Harry Reid, introduced the $1.3 trillion spending package on 14 December 2010, only to withdraw the bill two days later after he learned that it would not have enough votes to stop Republican plans to filibuster in order to block an actual vote on the legislation. The Forest Jobs and Recreation Act, which is referred to as the “Forest Jobs and Restoration Pilot Initiative” in the Omnibus Appropriations bill, occupied approximately forty-four of the bill’s 1,924 pages. For more details, see Eve Byron, “Sen. Tester’s forest act awaits vote inside draft spending bill,” *Independent Record*, 15 December 2010, [http://helenair.com/news/article_5feb1af0-081a-11e0-96ad-001cc4c03286.html](http://helenair.com/news/article_5feb1af0-081a-11e0-96ad-001cc4c03286.html).

The total amount of acres treated under the legislation will be 100,000; however, the revised version of the bill introduced in 2010 allows fifteen years for these mechanical treatments to take place. To put this in perspective, the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest covers 3.3 million acres and, according to the Revised Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest Plan (2008), has 1.9 million acres “suitable for timber production and timber harvest.” Mandated logging under the Forest Jobs and Recreation Act would affect .2 percent of the total forest land base each year and two percent over fifteen years. However, considering the fact that, over the past decade, an average of only 1,300 acres per year has been available for timber harvesting on the Beaverhead–Deerlodge National Forest, guaranteed access to 7,000 acres per year is very good news to the proposal’s timber partners, providing them with both the volume and certainty they need to operate. See Original Draft of Forest Jobs and Recreation Act of 2009, S. 1470, pp. 13-14 & Ring, “Thinking Outside the Timber Box,” p. 15, for details.


Ring, “Thinking Outside the Timber Box,” p. 15.

Ibid.


Ibid.


Thomas J. Vilsack, United States Department of Agriculture, Office of the Secretary, Letter to the Honorable Jon Tester, 11 October 2010.

For a detailed account of the events surrounding this decision, see my “Dialogue, Responsibility, and Oil and Gas Leasing on the Rocky Mountain Front,” *Ethics and the Environment* 8, no. 2 (2003): 8-30.

During the travel planning process for the Rocky Mountain Ranger District, the U.S. Forest Service decided to treat travel issues in Badger-Two Medicine area (roughly one-third of all USFS lands on the Rocky Mountain Front) separately. This was due to the special relationship that exists between these lands and the Blackfeet people, whose reservation lies adjacent to the Badger-Two Medicine area. Up until 1895, the Badger-Two Medicine was part of the Blackfeet Indian Reservation; however, after prospectors reported the potential for gold in the mountains, the U.S. government, led by chief negotiator, George Bird Grinnell, coerced the Blackfeet into ceding the land to the federal government. After the promise of gold turned out to be unfounded, the lands fell under the administration of the USFS, with the Blackfeet retaining traditional usufruct rights. Many Blackfeet tribal members feel that the Grinnell Agreement of 1895 is invalid and would like to see the lands returned to the Blackfeet. Recognizing the Blackfeet’s special relationship to the Badger-Two Medicine (if not their legal claims), the U.S. Forest Service developed the travel plan for the area in consultation with tribal leaders. This accounts for the two year delay in issuing the Badger-Two Medicine Travel Management Plan, which has subsequently been appealed by off-reservation motorized user groups as being overly restrictive and, in an odd twist, denying them religious freedoms guaranteed under the First Amendment. That appeal is still pending in court. For this reason, as well as the fact that the remaining unretired oil and gas leases on the Front are located in the Badger-Two Medicine, the area was not included as part of either the wilderness additions or Conservation Management Area in the Rocky Mountain Front Heritage Act. While the tribal government has been publicly supportive
of the 2006 oil and gas withdrawal and the 2009 travel plan, they have refrained from taken a position on the RMFHA.

42 At one time, approximately 153,000 acres of federal land on the Front had been leased for energy development. After a great deal of exploration work, several wells were drilled but very few produced profitable amounts of oil and gas. For details, see Rob Chaney, “Coalition of apparent contradictions works to protect Front,” Missoulian, 30 May 2010, http://missoulian.com/news/local/article_cb963a46-6c70-11df-b898-001cc4c03286.html.


45 Mike Aderhold, “Rocky Mountain Front is our last best habitat,” Helena Independent Record, 27 August 2010.

46 Chaney, “Coalition of apparent contradictions works to protect Front.”

47 However, while the law would prevent motorized use from ever increasing on the Rocky Mountain Front, nothing in the law prevents the U.S. Forest Service from prohibiting motorized access on currently motorized routes to protect the land from further degradation.


49 “Survey: more money needed to fight noxious weeds,” Great Falls Tribune, 7 July 2010.


52 Chaney, “Rocky Mountain Front Heritage Act would designate 6 new wilderness areas.”

53 Karl Puckett, “Poll finds support for Rocky Mountain Heritage Act’s Front protection plan, Great Falls Tribune, 4 December 2009.

54 “Crowning achievement for Front,” Missoulian, 28 April 2010 and “We all win with Rocky Mountain Front Heritage Act,” Great Falls Tribune, 4 October 2009.

55 Aderhold, “Rocky Mountain Front is our last best habitat.”


Karl Puckett, “Critics of Front plan call for more wilderness,” Great Falls Tribune, 1 October 2009.

“Releasing” these lands, it should be noted, does not mean releasing them for some specific form of development or use. Rather, it removes their more restrictive status as wilderness study areas and subjects them to the traditional multiple use planning processes employed by the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM), as outlined in the National Forest Management Act (NFMA), Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

CHAPTER 4
CROSSING BOUNDARIES: MUSINGS ON BACH IN THE BACKCOUNTRY

Introduction

In August 2008, professional violist, Jennifer Smith, and I spent two weeks at Pendant Cabin in the Bob Marshall Wilderness as Artists-in-Residence with the Artist*Wilderness*Connection Program. The goal of the program, which is co-sponsored by the Hockaday Museum of Art (Kalispell, MT), Bob Marshall Wilderness Foundation (Hungry Horse, MT), Flathead National Forest (Kalispell, MT) and Swan Ecosystem Center (Condon, MT), is to connect artists and the public with the local wild lands of northwestern Montana. Working artists in various disciplines and media are placed in remote U.S. Forest Service cabins for up to two weeks and expected to produce works of art based on their residency experiences. Artists then share their experiences and artwork with the public through various outreach and extension activities, including gallery showings, performances, and school programs.

The result of our 2008 residency is a performance piece titled, “Crossing Boundaries: Musings on Bach in the Backcountry,” which features readings of my nonfiction writing interwoven with Jennifer’s performance on viola. Grounded in our intensive immersion experience at Pendant Cabin and informed by almost forty years of combined wilderness practice in and around the Bob Marshall Wilderness, our piece explores the lived meaning of wilderness in contemporary society, while, at the same time, raising broader questions concerning the relationships between wilderness and civilization, nature and culture, work and play, emptiness and fullness, sound and silence, and other long-standing dualisms embedded in Western culture. By focusing on the boundary zones where these contrasting elements meet, our performance highlights the permeability of these boundaries and speaks to the ways in which wilderness and
civilization give definition and meaning to one another through their mutual interaction. It also seeks to reaffirm the value of wilderness as an integral part of the landscapes many of us call home, while testifying to the experiential force of these places in our everyday lives.

Between September 2009 and June 2010, Jennifer and I performed “Crossing Boundaries” ten times to audiences across the state of Montana--from Kalispell to Billings, Dupuyer to Missoula. The piece is intended to be experienced as a live performance, which includes a slideshow of selected images running in the background. We also have made an audio recording of the project. In lieu of either of these options, this chapter presents a detailed outline of the performance and a complete transcript of all readings.

Program for “Crossing Boundaries: Musings on Bach in the Backcountry”

“The world speaks itself between bookends of silence.”

Music: Chahagir for Viola Solo, Op. 56A, by Alan Hovhannes

Spoken Word: “Boundary Crossing”

Like the Hovhannes piece you just heard, like all things, ultimately, our wilderness residency begins in silence--in the cool, pre-dawn stillness of the Owl Creek Packer Camp.

As we proceed slowly through the dense, shaded forest, we carry remnants of the silence with us, ambling along in the quiet company of big trees.

Soon enough, though, the day’s buzz takes hold. The light flattens out and we’re stomping along the hot, dusty trail that takes us past Upper Holland Lake and on to Pendant Pass.

We reach the pass by mid-afternoon and encounter a sign marking the boundary of the Bob Marshall Wilderness--only that’s not exactly what the sign says.
Split down the middle and missing its entire right side, it welcomes us, somewhat cryptically, to the BOB …RSHALL …DERNESS.

Below the cloven wooden sign is posted a smaller, metal one that tells us, in no uncertain terms, what we can’t do in the wilderness: “No motor vehicles or motorized equipment allowed.”

Both signs are missing something; neither one tells the full story.

By their very nature, boundaries serve as crossroads of meaning. They stand between things. They mark the end of one thing and the beginning of another. They define limits.

On the one hand, boundaries act as barriers. They divide, separate, hold things apart--think of the Berlin Wall or the border fence between the US and Mexico. In these cases, boundaries are about separation and isolation. They’re meant to protect what we value from that which we fear.

But boundaries also are places of meeting and interaction, intimacy and connection. All communication occurs across boundaries. Our skin, for example, marks the limits of our physical body, the place where we end and the world begins. But it’s also where we communicate with the world, where self meets other--in the caress of a gentle breeze, the touch of a lover’s body, the heft of the tools with which we do our work.

Boundaries are about relationship and contact as much as they are about separation. That’s the creative tension inherent in boundaries. They’re about being-with and, at the same time, about being-apart. Forever between the two, we dwell on the threshold of meaning.²

And what about wilderness boundaries? Are they places of separation or connection? Rigid barriers or permeable membranes?

These are some of the questions Jenny and I carry with us as we enter our wilderness residency, questions we’ll wrestle with for the next two weeks and beyond.
Right now, though, the most significant thing about our wilderness boundary crossing is the simple fact that the ground is beginning to slope downward ahead of us. With grateful legs and lungs, we make our way downhill to Pendant Cabin--our temporary home in the wilderness.

Music: Suite No. 1 in G major: Courante, by J.S. Bach

Spoken Word: “Reading Maps, Reading Music”

After a day or two at Pendant Cabin, we’re pretty much settled in. The packers who brought in our supplies have gone, and our food and other belongings have found their places in the cozy, 14 by 16 cabin.

Our tools of the trade--viola, sheet music, and practice stand for Jenny; books and notepads for me--sit alongside the essential tools of wilderness work--axes, pulaskis, cross-cut saws, horse feed, tack, and so on. Together, they make for a strange, but somehow companionable, assortment of cabin-mates.

Standing in the center of the cabin, surrounded by this odd assemblage of items, I stare at the piece of music open on Jenny’s practice stand.

Although I can read music, the figures on the page mean little to me. I don’t hear anything among all the notes, rests, bowings, and dynamic markings. They speak to me only of potential--of the time when Jenny will put bow to strings and make the music come alive.

In many ways, the pile of maps now scattered across the cabin’s table strikes me much the same way.

I can read the signs and symbols, and get a vague sense of the lay of the land, but it’s really just a space on a map for me--exciting in the promise it holds, but also a bit unreal.
That’s not at all how I feel when looking at maps of the east side of the Bob. In that case, it’s more like looking at maps of my own backyard. Those east-side maps evoke a rich and storied past--routes taken on backpacking trips with family and friends, the mountaintop where Jenny and I met, the camp site on Grouse Creek where we sat listening to wolves howling on a gray, misty morning. Add to that the local tales one hears about other familiar places: the Cabin Creek Ranger Station, where a friend once doctored a Boy Scout after the boy was mauled by a bear; or, the flat spot below Welcome Pass, known to some as Camp Watch-Yer-Step, where a hunting party shared a miserable bout of dysentery.

Together, these experiences and stories make the maps come alive. They transform spaces into places.

Like turning notes on a page into music, turning spaces into places is a creative act – one that requires practice, enactment. It’s a form of poetry, in the original sense of the Greek word, poiesis--creating, bringing into being.

In our wilderness travels, we create places as we walk or ride through them, encountering what presents itself along the way and enriching those experiences with memory and story as we go.

Instead of the viola and bow that Jenny uses to make music come to life, I rely on my own two feet as the instruments of my wilderness poetics. Walking through these mountains, I practice the art of transforming spaces into places.³

Spoken Word: “Walking in the Presence of Things”

This next piece, Heinrich Biber’s Passacaglia in c-minor, captures something of the essence of walking. A passacaglia is a slow, deliberate dance. The name has Spanish origins and
literally means stepping or pacing down the street. It’s walking set to music.

In this passacaglia, Biber uses just four notes to lay down the basic rhythm of our steps. However, within that simple rhythm, repeated over and over again, Biber creates whole worlds of music--event-filled worlds rich with variation, embellishment and innovation.

It’s the same when we walk in wilderness. Ambling down the trail, our footsteps keep a steady rhythm, measuring our thoughts and quieting our minds with simple repetition--just one foot in front of the other, over and over and over again.

The rhythm of footfall serves as a kind of mantra, and, with mind attentive and senses turned outward, we fall into the flow of things as they arise, come into presence, and pass away.

Often, things arise gradually, in stillness. A mountain peak comes into view, changes appearance as perspectives shift, and then disappears behind a ridge rising in the foreground.

At other times, the action quickens--a jay screams overhead; a woodpecker hammers away at a snag; a deer bolts from its cover--breaking branches, pounding hooves.

All this occurs within the metered rhythm of footfall--of walking in the presence of things, acknowledging all, and clinging to none, as we move on down the trail.4

Music: *Passacaglia in C minor*, by Heinrich Ignaz Franz Biber

Return to Silence

Music/Spoken Word: “Wilderness Sabbath” and *Suite for Solo Viola: Allegro con brio*, by Alan Shulman

That was the first movement of Alan Shulman’s *Suite for Solo Viola*--not exactly the most meditative music. Shulman wrote this piece in 1953, and it seems to express much of the
jarring dissonance and noisiness of twentieth century life.

So, why does Jenny insist on playing it over and over again out here in the wilderness? Confined to our tiny cabin on rainy days, it’s the kind of music that can get on your nerves. I beg her to please play the Biber again.

It’s tempting to think of wilderness as a place to escape from the dissonance of our post-industrial, postmodern, post-whatever lives. There are days when we’d just like to leave it all behind and return to a wilderness that’s part of some simpler, mythic time. But it just doesn’t work that way. For better or worse, we bring our hi-tech, Information Age world with us into the backcountry—we carry it in on our backs, in our pack boxes, and in our minds. Like it or not, we’re immersed in twenty-first century life, and we experience wilderness as twenty-first century creatures. And it’s in that context that we need to figure out what wilderness means to us—today.

So, rather than thinking of wilderness as a place to escape to, maybe we’re better off thinking of it as a sabbath place. Like traditional Sabbath observance, wilderness invites us to suspend business as usual. It slows us down, renews our attention to detail, helps us put things in perspective. And when our periodic wilderness sabbaticals come to an end, we return to the craziness of our twenty-first century lives in a better place, reawakened to the wonder and wildness at the heart of all things.

Listening to Jenny work through this piece, I hear a similar dynamic of withdrawal and return. In the final two movements, you’ll hear ancient dances, birdsong, even a howling windstorm—all presented through the dissonant filters and twelve-tone gridwork of a thoroughly contemporary American sensibility. The piece gives voice to the creative tension at the heart of the relationship between nature and culture, wilderness and civilization. The results aren’t always pretty, especially in the driving final movement, where Shulman unleashes the full-throttle
energy of our neon wilderness. And yet … that frenetic energy is now tempered a bit by the soft
couplet of birdsong weaving in and out of the soundscape, giving voice to the wilderness rhythm
of withdrawal and return.⁵

Music: *Suite for Solo Viola: Alla Siciliano, Vivo and Allegro Energico*, by Alan Shulman

Spoken Word: “Ephemera: Bach and Mayflies”

Being creatures of habit, we fall into patterns quickly during our stay at Pendant Cabin.
Weather permitting, Jenny brings her instrument outside after dinner, and I settle in against a
fallen tree, while, overhead, the evening sun lights up the red ridges of Gyp Mountain.

Set free from the confines of the tiny cabin, Jenny’s music resounds through the open
space. The music doesn’t fill the space or squeeze out the silence, but rather seems to take up its
rightful place within it.

On this particular evening, Jenny’s working her way through a few of the Bach suites.
Sitting out here in the open, I can’t help but notice the organic quality of Bach’s music, and I’m
reminded once again of the exuberant, playful heart inside the grumpy-looking old guy in the
wig.

As Jenny plays the Prelude to the 1ˢᵗ Suite, I’m quickly swept up in the steady, undulating
flow of the music: high notes rolling over green and red river rocks in shallow riffles, low notes
dropping sharply over fallen logs into deep, limpid pools.

For the first few minutes, the Suite transports me downstream - twisting and turning in
the current, with a pulse and rhythm uniquely its own. And then, the music unexpectedly
abandons the creek and takes wing, and my mind, lost in the music’s flight, returns to another
summer evening, sitting alongside some other creek, watching mayflies dance in slanting sunlight.

Bach’s music and the mayflies share a common story--a common life history. Emerging from the water, they fill the air to dance in golden sunlight--celebrating their light and easy movement, celebrating the here and now.

Once airborne, Bach’s music continues to soar. And then, like the Ephemeroptera flying about, it vanishes, with the memory of the last notes hanging in the air, like the last felt vibrations of a ringing bell.

Music: *Suite No. 1 in G major: Prelude*, by J.S. Bach
Spoken Word: “Leave No Trace”

For me, this music gives new meaning to the idea of ‘leave no trace,’ that familiar wilderness ethic that exhorts us to take only pictures, leave only footprints.

Of course it’s a good idea to minimize your impact when traveling through the wilderness--tread lightly, pack out your trash, and all the rest. It’s the only way we can avoid loving to death the wild places we cherish.

But I think wilderness and music can teach us a deeper lesson about leaving no trace. As a society, we’re bent on leaving a trace. It almost seems stitched into the fabric of who we are.

Recently, I was running across the pedestrian bridge that spans the Missouri River in Great Falls and couldn’t help noticing all the black bicycle tire skid marks on the composite surface. “Why do we do that?” I wondered. Even as kids we want to leave our mark. As we
grow up, it only gets worse. We become preoccupied with our legacy. The question, “What will I leave behind?” seems to haunt us as the years advance.

Of course, a little bit of the monument-builder spirit isn’t bad. Thanks to this quality, we have wonderful, enduring works of art, great architecture, and a rich cultural heritage--think of the Mona Lisa, *Macbeth*, the pyramids of Egypt.

But there’s another kind of art--less prominent, perhaps--that resonates more deeply with the leave no trace ethic of wilderness and offers important lessons in the art of living.

I remember a day in India years ago, when I watched a throng of Hindu devotees move through the town of Puri in a riotous procession. At the center of the advancing crowd, men carried on their shoulders large, ornate carts housing beautiful images of Hindu gods and goddesses--before dumping them--deities and all--into the Bay of Bengal to be carried away by the tides.

More recently, I watched Buddhist monks for weeks as they prepared a beautiful sand mandala at a Great Falls museum. I also remember attending the ceremony during which they swept up the sand, poured it into bottles, and dumped it into the Missouri River.

Those final notes of the Bach Prelude remind me how much live music mirrors this kind of artistic expression.

Playing and listening to music out here in the wilderness, Jenny and I have the opportunity to engage in a wonderfully creative act, sharing music that no one but us will ever hear--no one, that is, except the deer wandering past our cabin or maybe the billy goat high on the ridge of Gyp Mountain.

It’s good to leave no trace--to enact beauty for its own sake, in all its glorious and fleeting uselessness.
Wilderness teaches us to celebrate these moments and then let them go, ready to engage the next moment in the flow of existence—with no desire to stake a claim, with no desire to leave a trace.

Music/Spoken Word: “At Play in the Land of No Use” and Suite No. 3 in C major: Gigue, by J.S. Bach

• Measures 1-8

My favorite wilderness bumper sticker is one I haven’t seen around for awhile, but it was popular among wilderness opponents back in the mid-80s. It reads: “Wilderness: Land of No Use.” As a long-time wilderness lover, I’ve always wanted one of those bumper stickers.

• Measures 9-20

Not so long ago, I read an essay by a very serious philosopher who combed the wilderness literature and came up with a list of 30 different wilderness values—all the things wilderness is good for. It’s a great list, but the author failed to mention one important wilderness value: its potentially redemptive, slightly subversive, uselessness.6

• Measures 21-31

Like it or not, most of us are the cultural heirs of Cotton Mather—that happy-go-lucky Puritan who once said, “That which is not useful is vicious.”7 If something is good, it’s got to be good for something. So, perhaps it’s best if we don’t talk too much about the uselessness of wilderness; folks might not take it seriously.

• Measures 32-48

So we end up talking about the “enduring resource of wilderness;” in other words, we define wilderness in terms of what it’s good for—after all, that’s what being a resource is all
about. But wilderness, by the conventional standards of our society, is an odd resource. For one thing, we don’t use it like we use other resources--trees for 2 by 4s, grass for grazing, coal for kilowatts. Wilderness isn’t a thing we use so much as a place we visit. At least, that’s what the Wilderness Act says.

But Mather’s ghost keeps nagging us: Why visit wilderness? Why strap on a 50-pound pack and spend a week of your life walking in a big circle? What’s the point? What do we hope to accomplish?

- Measures 49-55

Kids don’t play in order to accomplish anything. They don’t play to amuse themselves or strengthen their team-building skills or develop good hand-eye coordination. Ask most kids why they play, and they’ll look at you like you’re crazy. Play resists that kind of explanation.

- Measures 59-71

As adults, we tend to turn all of our play into work. We make sure that everything we do serves some purpose--serves the god of ‘good for,’ instead of praising the God of goodness. Heaven forbid that we do something just for the hell of it.

- Measures 72-79

Wilderness is a place where we can learn to play again--to graze on huckleberries, scramble along the ridge of an unnamed peak, skinny dip in an icy stream, walk in very big circles. Wilderness is a place where we do all sorts of silly things for no good reason.8

- Measures 80-91

Wilderness, the land of no use, is the perfect place to practice the art of uselessness. It’s precisely because our wilderness practice serves no purpose that it feels so free, so wild, so playful. With enough practice, we learn to carry some of that wild playfulness back into our
everyday lives, infusing our days with a sense of meaning that goes beyond our petty purposes – a sense of *ultimate* meaning that can’t be reduced to our ideas of what it’s good for. We learn - to borrow the Navajo expression - to walk in beauty.

- Measures 92-108, and then repeated in its entirety

Music/Spoken Word: “Wilderness Work: Past and Present”

Music – Medley of Traditional Fiddle Tunes: “Garry Owen,” “Irish Washerwoman,” “Old Joe Clark,” “Liberty” and “Devil’s Dream”

During our second week at Pendant Cabin, a visit from a trail crew out of Big Prairie interrupts our solitary retreat. Arriving one cold, rainy afternoon, they inform us that they’ll be sharing the cabin with us for the next few days, while they dynamite and clear a section of nearby trail.

Their arrival serves as a clear reminder that, while wilderness is a place of play and sabbath renewal for some of us, there’s a lot of work going on out here, too. Reading through the Pendant Cabin log book reinforces this fact, as it chronicles a steady stream of visits from trail crews, rangers, snow surveyors, packers, and others. One gets the sense that folks are out here working constantly--working so that we can play or, for those so inclined, worship or meditate.

Unlike most of us, these caretakers and custodians of the backcountry come to know wilderness through the intimacy of work. Immersed in the backcountry for extended periods, they’re the ones who know these places the best. With time and sustained contact, they acquire a kind of day-in-day-out knowledge that seeps in through the pores of their skin--slowly, almost imperceptibly. Over time, though, it’s the kind of knowledge that can shape the course of one’s life--steering someone towards a life in the woods, while causing them to forego other, perhaps more comfortable or lucrative, options.
At least that’s the sense I get talking with our cabin visitors. Confined to the cabin for a few soggy evenings, the six of us gather around the wood stove as the rain drums steadily on the roof overhead. Jenny plays fiddle tunes, the crew tells stories, and we pepper them with all sorts of questions about their jobs and lives in the backcountry.

The exchange is both instructive and entertaining, and their visit turns out to be one of the highlights of our stay. Not only do their stories give us a deeper appreciation of all the work that goes on in the backcountry, they also help us conjure up vivid images from days gone by, echoing tales of the past and evoking the rich historical legacy of the Bob. Because while a lot of things have changed in this country, other things stay pretty much the same--things like heavy work done with primitive tools, close working relationships with pack and saddle stock, the easy camaraderie, quiet reserve, and the take-it-as-it-comes hardiness. Sitting around the cabin’s smoky barrel stove, listening to Bill and Tad tell their tales, it’s easy to imagine the exploits of all those that have preceded them--folks like Tom Danaher, A.P. McCrea, Felix Baptiste Zeroyal, Nine Pipes (Music begins – “Westphalia Waltz,” with mute), Michelle and Mary Kiser, Charley ‘Kid’ Young, Allen and Mildred Chaffin, Howard Copenhaver, Clyde Fickes, Jack Clack, Clayton Roush, Ruby Kirchbalm, Pat Taylor, Ezra Shaw, Toad Paullin, Joe Murphy, Charlie Shaw, K.D. Swan, Henry Thol, J.R. Hutchinson, Mary and Ed Thompson …

Music –“Westphalia Waltz,” without mute


As our two weeks at Pendant Cabin come to a close, we prepare to leave. No one stays in wilderness forever--that’s the rule. We’re only visitors here. Even Tad and the trail crews at Big Prairie will pack up and head out sometime around Thanksgiving. Then, a deep silence reclaims
the place, punctuated only by the pianissimo shushing and muted voices of an occasional snowshoer, skier, or snow survey crew.

To visit wilderness--to come to know and love these places--and then take our leave reminds us of our own impermanence. Of all the lessons we may learn from wilderness, perhaps none is more important than what it means to be at home in our existential homelessness. Wilderness, like an old Zen master, can teach us something about what it means to abide in no abode.10

Wilderness is not our home--and yet, it is.

Through years of wilderness practice, we come to know these places as part of the larger landscapes we call home. Whether we live in Great Falls or Kalispell, Choteau or Seeley Lake, for many of us, the Bob is our backyard wilderness.

It’s part of our personal geography of meaning--a geography born of contact, stories, history, tradition, and memory. It’s a place we’ve come to know--through work and play, hiking and riding, hunting and fishing. And with this intimate knowledge comes something more than just having good stories to tell, or trophy racks hung on the wall, or pretty pictures to show friends and family. With this kind of knowledge comes respect and compassion--those two wellsprings of moral action. There’s a rhythm here: touching, knowing, caring, acting.

Wilderness is our home, and yet it isn’t.

As we travel through wilderness, we inhabit the apparent contradiction between being at home and being homeless--being a part of, and being apart from. We find ourselves brought face-to-face with our situation as threshold dwellers, living in the tension of the in-between.

To the degree that we can learn to be at home in this in-between world, we find our lives graced--able to move back and forth with greater ease across the boundaries that separate and
connect so many dimensions of our lives: nature and culture, wilderness and civilization, work and play, sound and silence, self and other. Released from the shackles of simple either/or choices, our boundary crossings become a dance, following a rhythm that affirms difference, finds meaning in shades of grey, and celebrates beauty in the interplay of light and shadow.

Music: *Suite No. 3 in C major: Sarabande*, by J.S. Bach

Notes

1 Bob Marshall (1901-1939) was a professional forester and leading wilderness advocate of the twentieth century. Along with Aldo Leopold, Robert Sterling Yard, Benton Mc Kaye and others, he co-founded the Wilderness Society in 1935. As Director of the U.S. Forest Service’s Division of Recreation and Lands, he established the “U Regulations” that provided millions of acres of wild country with administrative protection from road building, logging, and other forms of development. With the passage of the Wilderness Act in 1964, Congress established the Bob Marshall Wilderness in western Montana, where Marshall had worked and explored during his career with the U.S. Forest Service. A legendary hiker and climber, Marshall died unexpectedly of heart failure at the age of thirty-eight. For more details on Marshall’s life and legacy, see James Glover’s *A Wilderness Original: The Life of Bob Marshall* (Seattle: The Mountaineers, 1986) and Paul Sutter’s *Driven Wild: How the Fight Against Automobiles Launched the Modern Wilderness Movement* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002).


4 The phrase “walking in the presence of things,” as well as the whole flow of this section, reflects ideas and images found in Henry Bugbee’s *The Inward Morning: A Philosophical Exploration in Journal Form* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1999).

5 Again, the primary influence here is Henry Bugbee. See his “Wilderness in America,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 42, no. 4 (December 1978): 614-20, where he discusses sabbatical placement in wilderness and the moral and aesthetic dynamics of withdrawal and return. The latter idea also appears in several other essays that Bugbee wrote.

My source for this quote is a short story by William Kittredge, “We Are Not in This Together,” in _We Are Not in This Together: Stories_ (Saint Paul: Graywolf Press, 1984), p. 101. In the story, the quotation is stitched into a needlepoint plaque hanging on the wall of a character’s home near Glacier National Park.


The list of names includes local Indians, early settlers, trappers, explorers, outfitters, and U.S. Forest Service employees who lived and/or worked in the vicinity of Pendant Cabin and the South Fork of the Flathead River. For the most part, stories from their lives can be found in: Mildred Chaffin, _My Forty Years Scribblin’s_ (Bozeman, MT: Jerry and Yvonne Coopmans, 1978); Charlie Shaw, _The Flathead Story_ (Kalispell, MT: Flathead National Forest, 1967); and Kathryn L. McKay, _Trails of the Past: Historic Overview of the Flathead National Forest, Montana, 1800-1960_ (Kalispell, MT: Flathead National Forest, 1994).

For more discussion of the Zen Buddhist idea of “abiding in no abode,” see D.T. Suzuki, _Zen Buddhism_, ed. William Barrett (Garden City, NY; Doubleday & Company, 1956) & Henry Bugbee’s _The Inward Morning_.

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CHAPTER 5
THREE DIMENSIONS OF INTEGRATED WILDERNESS PRACTICE

I live where the Sun River joins the Missouri as it leaves its mountain headwaters behind and begins the long journey eastward through the country’s prairies and plains. Some 50 miles or so west of here stands the source of the Sun River—the Rocky Mountains. On clear days, the blue wall of the Rocky Mountain Front is plainly visible from town, and, as I go about my daily business, I often pause to identify several key landmarks standing out from among the distant tidal wave of rock: Steamboat Mountain, Crown Mountain, Fairview Peak, Sawtooth Ridge, Sun River Canyon, Castle Reef, Ear Mountain, Rocky Mountain Peak. Each of these places holds meaning and memories for my neighbors and me. They are defining features of the landscape we call home.

At the same time, many of these features serve as wilderness boundary markers. On the back side of Steamboat and Crown mountains lies the Scapegoat; further north, beyond Sun River Canyon and Rocky Mountain Peak, begins “the Bob.” Other non-boundary features—Fairview Peak or Ear Mountain, for example—stand as key reference points within that skinny transition zone along the Rocky Mountain Front where public wildlands and private ranchlands meet. For my neighbors and me, wilderness is not some faraway place, nor is it an abstraction. It is as near—and concrete—as Steamboat Mountain looming on the western horizon or the Sun River snaking its way through the west end of town. It’s all part of where we live—here, together, in this place.

Experienced as part of a larger landscape of inhabitation, wilderness, for many of us, shares certain affinities with what Montana philosopher Albert Borgmann calls a “focal thing.” For example, wilderness is concrete, tangible, and specific—the ground underfoot, these
snowflakes falling on my face, this golden eagle soaring overhead. It engages us as whole persons (physically, intellectually, emotionally, spiritually, and morally) and requires certain levels of competency, knowledge and discipline. Wilderness is both “eloquent” and “deep,” speaking to us of itself and in its own right, with each physical feature of the landscape significant at multiple levels of meaning. In wilderness, we open ourselves to events beyond our control (weather and predators, among others) and, in turn, are graced by gifts of insight and meaning that are beyond our power to procure at will. Our experience of wilderness is such that it helps bring our lives into sharper focus, discloses networks of relationship, provides context, offers clarity of vision, and helps orient us in a more-than-human world. Finally and somewhat paradoxically, wilderness thrives in a technological setting. Experienced within the broader technological framework (Borgmann’s “device paradigm”) that isolates means from ends and reduces things to resources to be harvested and commodities to be consumed, wilderness offers opportunities to bracket these categories of use and control, recognize the value of things beyond their mere instrumentality, and come to terms with the pervasive rule of technology in our lives.2

Like Borgmann’s focal things, wilderness, in order to thrive and prosper, must be coupled with an engaged and committed practice. Throughout the preceding chapters, I have used the phrase “wilderness practice” in a rather general sense. But what does wilderness practice actually entail? For me, the answer to this question has taken shape over nearly twenty-five years of personal wilderness practice, sometimes sustained, sometimes rather sporadic. What’s more, my answer to this question rests in the very form and content of this thesis. In general, wilderness practice most often manifests itself in three integrated realms: the experiential, the political and the philosophical. When combined as a sustained practice woven into the fabric of one’s daily life, these three dimensions of wilderness practice give rise to a vocational unity that centers and
orients us, sponsors our sustained commitment, and lends enduring meaning to our lives and actions.

At the heart of wilderness practice is immediate contact with wilderness places and the creatures that inhabit them. Simply put, wilderness practice begins with walking and/or riding (on a horse or mule) in wilderness. As the foundation of our practice, we return to this experiential dimension again and again, with frequency and regularity. Whether it is a solo day hike or a ten-day pack trip with family and friends--exploring a new creek drainage for the first time or returning to a favorite peak for the twentieth time--these direct encounters with wilderness engender, renew and sustain our wilderness practice.

“Crossing Boundaries: Musings on Bach in the Backcountry,” the narrative portion of which is presented in chapter 4 of this thesis, attempts to bear witness to the meaning and value of our wilderness experiences through words and music. However, perhaps no one has articulated the enduring force of our wilderness experiences better than Henry Bugbee. In The Inward Morning, he writes:

I do remember that this walking in the presence of things came to a definitive stage. It was in the fall of ’41, October and November, while late autumn prevailed throughout the northern Canadian Rockies, restoring everything in that vast region to a native wildness. Some part of each day or night, for forty days, flurries of snow were flying. The aspens and larches took on a yellow so vivid, so pure, so trembling in the air, as to fairly cry out that they were as they were, limitlessly. And it was there in attending to this wilderness, with unremitting alertness and attentiveness, yes, even as I slept, that I knew myself to have been instructed for life, though I was at a loss to say what instruction I had received.

Bugbee goes on to say that, while the specific details of that “instruction” remain beyond his ability to articulate, he was able to discern and distill a “basic theme:” “The basic theme was simple enough, indeed it was the theme of simplicity: Things say themselves, univocally, unisonously, formulating a tautology of infinite significance.”
In the end, the ultimate significance and meaning of our wilderness encounters is not something for which we argue, as much as something to which we bear witness. As such, our testimony is best expressed, not through argument, but rather through story, poetry, art and music—what Borgmann calls “deictic discourse.”¹⁵ In telling our stories, such as the one offered by Henry Bugbee in the previous paragraph or the ones Jennifer and I attempt to tell in “Crossing Boundaries,” we testify to the meaning and value of our wilderness experiences, while pointing to the continuing significance of wilderness as a focal presence in our everyday lives.

For many wilderness practitioners, direct contact with wilderness engenders a respect and love for wilderness landscapes that sponsors a deep and enduring moral concern, which, in turn, manifests itself in political engagement and wilderness activism. There is an ethical rhythm here, one characterized by a dynamic movement between touching, knowing, caring and acting.⁶ Given the political nature of wilderness designation in the United States, it is hardly surprising that our actions on behalf of the wilderness we know and love find expression in the political arena.

Chapter 3 of this thesis outlines current trends in wilderness politics, while also highlighting significant changes in the way people have been doing wilderness politics during the past decade. In Montana, proposals such as the Forest Jobs and Recreation Act and the Rocky Mountain Front Heritage Act reflect a growing understanding of wilderness as part of a larger landscape of inhabitation, where healthy ecosystems and healthy communities are recognized as being, to a great extent, mutually dependent on one another. In developing these proposals, wilderness advocates have reached out to engage in open dialogue with a wide variety of local stakeholders, including traditional adversaries, and worked with their newfound partners to develop collaborative, place-based solutions to seemingly unsolvable land management issues,
including wilderness. Instead of the polarization and the gridlock that has characterized wilderness politics for so long, these locally-driven, grassroots proposals are beginning to move wilderness politics toward what Dan Kemmis, former mayor of Missoula and one-time speaker of the Montana House of Representatives, calls the “politics of inhabitation.”

In practicing the politics of inhabitation, we begin by focusing on what brings us together, rather than focusing on what divides us. Without ignoring or trivializing differences, we begin with what we have in common, what we share. And, what Montanans share is the land, the particular places where we live with our neighbors (our near-dwellers). For Kemmis, it is the land that serves as the “public thing” (*res publica*) that binds us together, for better or worse. For those who practice wilderness politics as a politics of inhabitation, being part of a particular landscape also means being part of a particular community, recognizing that the health of the places we love and the health of the communities to which we belong go hand in hand. It means establishing right relations with the land and establishing right relations with our neighbors, putting a human face on the other, and cultivating civic virtues like trust and empathy. In a recent opinion piece, Tim Baker, former executive director of the Montana Wilderness Association, offers a beautiful account of how the politics of inhabitation have shaped the politics of the Forest Jobs and Recreation Act:

Just as important as the details of the legislation are the stories behind it. This is a real Montana success story.

It’s the story of the backcountry horseman, who wants to ride the traditional pack and saddle trails of the East Pioneers in solitude.

It’s the story of the millworker in Deer Lodge, who wants to earn a decent wage and live in a prosperous community with a good quality of life.

It’s the story of the angler in the Big Hole, who wants to know that native trout populations in southwest Montana are healthy.

This is the story of Montanans rolling up their sleeves and challenging each other to understand the other’s perspective.
It’s about building trust, and putting faith in the best part of ourselves. No one interest will ever get all that it wants, but by working together we can achieve our most noble common goals: A healthier economy, robust forests, improved fish and wildlife habitat, enhanced recreational opportunities, reduced fire risk to communities, and permanent protection of Montana’s most beloved wild places.

That this is happening in Montana shouldn’t be surprising to Montanans. After all, in the end most of us live here for the same reasons.

We all get shivers when we hear an elk bugle. We all smile in wonder when we watch a Charlie Russell sunset light up the sky. And we all have a favorite small town, even if we don’t live there.

As Montanans, we all love the land, even if some of us want to use it in different ways.\(^{10}\)

How we experience and understand wilderness shapes how we practice wilderness politics. In recognizing wilderness as part of the larger landscape we call home, we seek to engage in political practices that embody our deepest respect and concern for the land and foster meaningful and sustainable inhabitation--on the land we love, among the neighbors with whom we share it.

A third and co-equal element of our wilderness practice is reflection on the significance, meaning, and value of our wilderness experiences and our wilderness activism. In this thesis, chapter 2 represents the most explicit attempt to engage in philosophical reflection about wilderness and our relation to it, although such reflection can be found in the other chapters as well. Often overlooked by many wilderness visitors and activists, our wilderness philosophizing is an essential component of our wilderness practice. According to Irene Klaver, “Every practice involves a distancing from itself: a literal ‘reflection,’ in order to deal adequately with changing situations. A distancing, however, that gravitates within the horizon of the activity itself.”\(^ {11}\) Such reflective distancing is not separate from, but rather integral to, the dynamics of a multifaceted and engaging practice. In fact, as Klaver reminds us, “[E]nvironmental philosophy is environmental practice.”\(^ {12}\) In the same way, wilderness philosophy--like wilderness walking and wilderness activism--is wilderness practice. It’s all part of the same practice.
Within this integrated vision of wilderness practice, our philosophical reflections play a distinctive role. While firmly grounded in intimacy with wilderness landscapes and acquainted with the minute details of wilderness politics, they attempt to move us beyond the particularities of our specific context to open up new possibilities and shed light on broader—ultimate—questions of value and meaning. However, even as we affirm the distinctive value of our wilderness reflections, we simultaneously recognize our philosophizing as part of a larger, unified practice. This recognition helps us overcome what Klaver calls “compartmentalization,” that characteristic of modernity that tends to equate alterity with opposition and exclusivity, rather than acknowledging “the implicit co-presence of oppositional states in which oppositions are mutually constitutive instead of exclusive.”¹³ From a non-compartmentalized perspective, we can see how our wilderness walking/riding, activism and reflection are not exclusive opposites, but rather how each is implicitly present in the explicit manifestation of the others, together forming a unified practice.

Through regular and sustained engagement in such an integrated wilderness practice, this non-compartmentalized perspective, in turn, shapes our very experience and understanding of wilderness. Recognized as integral parts of a larger landscape of inhabitation, wilderness and working landscapes no longer stand in exclusive opposition to one another. The rigid barriers erected by either-or dualisms are replaced by permeable boundaries that both separate and connect complementary elements of a mosaic landscape characterized by a diversity of human-land relational patterns. As mutually constitutive, wilderness is implicitly present in the places where we live and work, even as those same places are implicitly present in wilderness. Each gives definition and meaning to the other; each is implicitly present in the other, despite—and, sometimes, because of--its explicit absence. The differences between wilderness and working
landscapes remain, but their alterity, across the landscape, is marked by complementarity, rather than exclusivity. Both are integral parts of the places we call home.

Montana 2008: Strains of unaccompanied Bach resound through the Bob Marshall Wilderness, while grizzlies filled with wanderlust leave their mountain fasts to re-explore the prairies--and stubble fields--of the Great Plains.

Notes


2 Ibid., pp. 219, 197, 191-92 & 182.


4 Ibid., p. 141.

5 Borgmann, *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life*, p. 178.

6 The knowledge referred to here is less a knowledge about a place or being, and more a knowledge of the other born of immediate and direct contact. This is consistent with the Hebraic meaning of the verb “to know”--to touch, contact or intercourse with the other. Many years ago, during a reading of his essay “Wilderness in America” at a University of Montana Philosophy Forum, Henry Bugbee made several side comments connecting this notion of Hebraic knowing with his ideas regarding the sponsorship and enactment of moral concern. For an expanded discussion of this idea, and its role in moral action, see Martin Buber’s *Good and Evil: Two Interpretations*, trans. R.G. Smith and M. Bullock (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1953).


8 Ovando, Montana, rancher, David Mannix, refers to this approach as the “80/20 Rule.” “We start with the things we have in common first, and that often covers 80 percent of what we have to talk about. Then we can talk about harder things.” Quoted in Rob Chaney, “Vilsack praises Montana conservation efforts at Blackfoot gathering,” *Missoulian*, 1 June 2010.

9 Kemmis, *Community and the Politics of Place*, p. 5.


12 Ibid., p. 399.

13 Ibid., pp. 398 & 400.
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