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DOES THE WILDERNESS DESIGNATION ACHIEVE SOCIETY'S OBJECTIVES?

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Nobody is fooled by this question. It does not take half an hour to answer yes, and leave it at that. The fact that Congress established a National Wilderness Preservation System in 1964, after 8 years of contentious debate on over 65 separate wilderness bills, hardly leaves any doubt as to "society's" objectives, goals or values with respect to wilderness. The fact that every President since Lyndon Johnson has signed specific wildernesses into being is a rather clear statement. The fact that the 1964 Wilderness Act designated 54 wildernesses encompassing 9.1 million acres with the intent to study another 34 Forest Service primitive areas and contiguous acreage, National Park and Fish and Wildlife Service units for possible inclusion into the wilderness system is not inconclusive. The fact that this wilderness system has grown from 9.1 to over 90 million acres on over 470 areas restates society's obvious objectives of wilderness. The fact that Congress added an entire agency, BLM, to the wilderness fray in 1976 isn't shaded in gray. And on a local level the fact that men such as Senator Jake Garn and Congressman James Hansen enthusiastically introduced and supported the 1984 Utah Wilderness Act is again clear indication that society's objectives are, in fact, met with the designation of wilderness.

It appears about the only direction we haven't gone or will choose to go is "no wilderness." Even that appears to be in metamorphosis as Utah's state legislature, for the first time in recent years, failed to pass a "no more wilderness" resolution, opting for a

wilderness task force to consider information to assist in a formal state position. And the fact that we just enthusiastically celebrated the 25th anniversary of the Wilderness Act (in September 1989, the Utah Wilderness Association hosted a celebration on the edge of the High Uintas Wilderness cosponsored by the Wasatch-Cache National Forest and the Utah State BLM office) sends a clear signal that the Wilderness System is not yet finished.

So what is the question or how many questions, in fact, are being asked? There are the obvious questions: how much and where wilderness is to be designated; what should entail wilderness; how it should be decided upon; what resources actually benefit from wilderness designation; how to mesh local cultural values and wilderness designation; how to end the polarization surrounding the issue; how it should be managed; and how to separate it from nonwilderness issues, and still others.

There are a few things that can't be taken out of the debate. All agree it is one, only one, indication of a commitment to environmental quality. To people who place a high value on "environmental quality," something we aren't likely to universally define, wilderness is going to be of incredible importance, whether that person is a "user" or not. The opposite is obviously true.

Wilderness harbors an immense amount of symbolism and imagery. It is an icon. It seems very few enter the debate without powerful

images and perceptions. I have heard so often the charge from a county commissioner or opponent of wilderness at a public meeting of one type or another that these environmentalists are simply too "emotional" and won't listen to reason. Without even a blink we've all seen that same person simply say "no" to any wilderness and point out that wilderness is a threat to economic development, national security and somebody's rights somewhere.

But that is because wilderness is ponderable. And that alone is another value. The literature is replete with examples. It doesn't fit the scientific method, it is immensely personal and value laden, and it obviously represents the cultural heritage of this nation. Nash (1989) writes about wilderness as an "ethical constraint." Sax (1980) talks of an aesthetic or "reflective recreation." Beston (1928) speaks of the wild land and its wild inhabitants as "other nations." Stegner (1987) writes of the "the pervasive fact of western space, which acts as a preservative." Santa Fe author Dave Douglas (1987) writes of his wilderness experiences creating a "shuddering sense of dependence on God." Our own Tom Lyon (1989), Professor of English at Utah State University, at the 25th anniversary celebration of the Wilderness Act, under a crisp north wind and snow, said ". . . the world has nothing more precious, more worth saving, more worth fighting for than the song of one hermit thrush or the quick appearance and flowing disappearance of one marten . . . one of the great gifts of wild country is to restore this birthright attentiveness."

This powerful theme that wilderness is pure and rehabilitative — a very real therapy — goes far beyond simple "unconfined and primitive recreation." It seems to be trying to tie us to something. Wilderness is at the base of our dialogue with the planet on which we live. I suspect that dialogue is inescapable, crosses all cultures, and that wilderness, whether institutionalized or not, is the foundation of that discussion.

Wilderness has done more to define our land ethic and our personal, human and spiritual values toward land and its life than any other resource. Clearcuts may have permanence (unfortunately), but are of no real importance. Trees, once inhabitants of wild country, provide fiber. The West, for example, is not defined by herds of cattle or sheep, but by the wild country and its life forms prior to sheep and cattle. Wilderness gives us the opportunity to again become Leopold's (1949) "plain member." Whether we accept that role or not, it is wildland — wilderness — that has given us the opportunity to explore our relationship with the soil at our source. When we brutalize a landscape with roads and clearcuts and oil fields, when we destroy a stream and its surrounding environments, whether we need those resources or not, it is wilderness where we seem to retreat, often apologetically and just as often to see something of more importance. Our monumental effort at literally bringing Prince William Sound back to "pre-oil" can be no stronger statement of just this point. We will likely continue to be unsuccessful, but as Barry Lopez wrote in the story "Drought" in his book *River Notes* (1979) "Before we could ask for rain there had to be someone to do something completely selfless, with no hope of success. You went after that fish, and then at the end you were trying to dance. A person cannot be afraid of being foolish. For everything, every gesture, is sacred." Those words were, of course, from a blue heron.

Literally by discounting such values as frivolous or esoteric and meaningless one discounts an individual's and society's worth.

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I was hiking in the North Absaroka Wilderness a few years ago. My wife and I followed a set of astonishingly clear grizzly tracks all the way up Grinnell Creek. Fresh tracks, the night before. Why did we keep hiking through dense conifers, in and out of the stream, through low brushy country and open parklands with a grizz a day in front of us? We played the harmonica, sang, forced conversation, had the

jingling of our grizzly bells, talked to our weenie dog companion as though she could translate each crack in the timber. We spent a few days in the upper meadows, never calm but simply overwhelmed by Whirlwind Peak, the young moose that shared our stretch of the stream, the full moon and the fact that no other car had been parked at the trailhead.

Our last morning, over coffee and a sense of relief that we were leaving intact, I heard bells on the timbered slope above us. I looked at Margaret and said, "Well, at least they give us a chance here. They put bells on the grizzlies!" With that, out of the trees padded a huge, black . . . labrador and his companion, a bighorn sheep researcher from the University of Wyoming. We shared a hearty laugh, the last of the coffee, and wandered out together.

Following a grizzly in his home made me understand both selflessness and the essence of "plain member."

In a very real sense, those who say there should be no wilderness or no more wilderness are telling us that our spiritual, moral, and recreational values are without merit.

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Environmental values are at the pinnacle of this nation's domestic objectives. For the last two decades, environmental issues have dominated much of the discussion at both national and local levels. It is a complicated debate heightened by dilemmas of public versus private rights and conflicts over value systems. But poll after poll shows the protection of the environment is of critical importance to Americans.

Here in Utah, since 1986, at least three major studies have been conducted by the University of Utah, Utah State University and BYU delineating Utahns' attitudes toward wilderness and wildlife. A University of Utah study (1986) for Governor Bangerter's State Wilderness Committee clearly showed, no matter how the question was

phrased, that a sizeable portion of respondents supported preservation of more wilderness in Utah than was presently designated. Pope and Jones (1987) dealt with "willingness to pay" and again showed a powerful and knowledgeable support for more wilderness than was presently designated. Krannich and Cundy (1987) studied Utahns' attitudes toward wildlife management which repeatedly revealed that wildland/natural setting was one of the key components to wildlife enjoyment, whether consumptive or nonconsumptive wildlife user. Consistently that report noted that the setting, the sense of an uncrowded natural experience, as almost or as important as the harvest or take.

Obviously some will argue with these specific studies or the dozens and dozens of polls confirming the importance of environmental preservation. But the overriding sense is a single direction toward a greater appreciation and a more vigorous defense of the environment at every level. Again, the fact that Utah's Governor Bangerter has proposed a Utah Environmental Department sends a rather indicative signal!

Clearly the preservation of wilderness adds to the breadth and depth of that environmental commitment. It enhances and preserves our diverse array of environments. Wilderness becomes the place for the fisher, wolverine, wolf, grizzly, pine marten, bighorn sheep, mountain goat and a host of other species dependent upon an environment lacking human permanence. Our commitment to the environment we profess to care about diminishes dramatically without this complete effort.

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Fege and Corrigan (1990) summarized the challenge of the enduring wilderness resource for the next twenty-five years by stating:

As development and global environmental changes have increasingly dramatic effects, wilderness areas can stand as a yardstick for the imprint of human impact on the land and can be

reservoirs of gene pools. Over the next 100 or 1,000 years, the baseline physical and biological information for each wilderness may be invaluable as a benchmark for assessing global climate change, loss of biodiversity, and as yet unidentified environmental impacts. To achieve these wilderness values, managers and scientists must describe and monitor critical ecosystems within the wilderness system.

Again, this is hardly a new concept and has been the focus of much discussion in this symposium. Although widely believed, it is not well understood by many because of the incredible complexity of the very nature of ecosystems.

It hardly seems arguable that wilderness provides or should provide reasonably undisturbed wildlife habitat, particularly for species which have shown disdain for human meddling. It hardly seems arguable that wilderness allows or should allow reasonably natural vegetative succession to take place. It hardly seems arguable that wilderness allows or should allow predators to predate and prey to be prey. Even for the critters that are particularly adaptable to man's permanent influences, such as mule deer, wilderness provides some seclusion. It hardly seems arguable that wilderness provides or should provide clean and free-flowing water. And reasonably clean air to remind ourselves of the glorious colors (and not from space) upon this planet.

These values of wilderness have long been recognized and have come of age again as a result of a growing environmental ethic and a realization that all of the rhetoric of diversity, which many of us were taught as students in natural resource classes, isn't just textbook stuff.

While land managers once focused on the concept of producing edge environments at the expense of large, naturally diverse tracts of land, the concepts today are biological diversity, genetic diversity, habitat linking and land

bridges. Old growth, riparian habitats, undisturbed land tracts have become the resources of concern and rightly so since they are the disappearing or vanished components. Harmon et al. (1990) noted old growth forests account for .017% of the earth's land surface. Thus the importance placed on wilderness as a critical component of this planet's land surface, largely immune from our direct ailments, is rather obvious.

Unfortunately wilderness alone will not solve these problems. Newmark (1987) showed many western National Parks, for example, are simply too small to maintain the native wildlife found there at the time of park establishment! The whole issue of how big a wild preserve must be to preserve native flora and fauna is only now being engaged and is one of the most valuable discussions encouraged by wilderness designation issues.

To focus on wilderness, with a capital "W" or not, will not be enough. We must also focus on ecosystem management across the board as well as extensive restoration and rehabilitation efforts. Both efforts represent some of the most exciting inquiries in resource management today. It is important to realize that neither addresses itself to palliative management — in other words, making a bad thing a little bit better — but, rather, to improvement and restoration of ecological integrity. Obviously timber will be harvested and sheep grazed, for example. But both should be done ecologically correctly, regardless of whether an area is devoted to wilderness (obviously one can't harvest timber in a wilderness area) or extractive use.

As a fundamental objective of our society, wilderness not only preserves important resources but provides important value-oriented opportunities. It provides an environmental benchmark and has engaged serious ecological investigations into the planet's health. It is a barometer. It allows and almost demands reflection from all of us, whether we are resource managers, resource users, or wilderness users.

Wilderness allows an experience, whether recreational, spiritual or scientific (which can certainly encompass the other two) to be focused on the "natural" environment. Unfortunately, most other forms of public wildland recreation have been oriented toward increasing visitations or making access easier for more users. Thus the facilities and services rather than the resource itself draw the user. While some may argue wilderness is of no value because one **may** be able to hear a coyote howl or elk bugle off the side of a road, it is the uniqueness of the environmental attributes harbored in wilderness that stimulates that specific wilderness experience. That wilderness experience is obviously evermore irreplaceable when the wildlife, for example, is dependent upon a wilderness setting (it has been argued that a "wilderness elk" is different than a "non-wilderness elk"). Encountering a fisher or wolverine, a wolf or grizzly bear, a boreal owl or bighorn sheep, among many others, is likely to occur with any regularity in habitats protected by wilderness.

Sachs (1990) noted that we are trained "to look at forests and see lumber, to look at rocks and see ore, to look at landscapes and see real estate." Turning everything into an efficiently run resource dictates exploitation. Wilderness forces a core change in our perceptions. A wilderness forest isn't for something else. It isn't a management obstacle. It isn't something to be penetrated with a road to produce a converted resource.

It isn't divided into two parts, development or non-development. It is moment from moment. Thunder to lightning. Powerfully warm sun to cool breeze. It is alive and useful. We don't administer it, or to it. We are part of it. It is always fresh. Contrasted with the perception that a landscape represents real estate, wilderness produces an alternate, long term view of life and living. One has to wonder whether "living" can occur only within real estate.

Remarkably enough, some have argued that wilderness use is declining in Utah and across

the nation, and that is cause to oppose and restrict additional wilderness designation. This merely perpetuates the myth that wilderness serves one purpose — recreation. Yet we know wilderness is a critical component in providing stable wildlife communities, biological diversity, almost the exclusive reservoir of clean air and water, primary habitat for predators — a barometer of our humaneness and ability to survive with diverse life forms. Furthermore, the components of recreation are incredibly diverse and often verge on spiritual or re-creational values.

Wilderness offers us a chance to succeed with mother nature, not resist. To measure the value of wilderness by how many recreational visitor days occur on an acre of wilderness is obviously counterproductive to the entire concept. In wilderness space permeates.

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There are still other substantive questions that need exploration — some easier to address than those discussed so far. For example, although I'm not going to focus on it today, wilderness management is an issue warranting considerable discussion. We object to the claim that management is of lesser concern than allocation — "we can deal with management after we get it all designated." The two go hand in hand.

Unfortunately, wilderness management doesn't get much attention from land managers. Nearly six years after the Utah Wilderness Act was passed, the Forest Service still doesn't have formal maps for areas, boundaries are still being posted, and management plans, even though required by forest plans and desperately needed, haven't been initiated in some instances. Trailheads and other off-site programs, education, user registration, and informational brochures are usually neglected. On-site management is laze as well with issues such as permanent caches, predator control, and range management being approached timidly. (Yes, grazing is allowed in wilderness, but wilderness

range abuse is well documented.) Even the General Accounting Office (1989) has challenged wilderness management on National Forest lands. As a wilderness ranger I can attest, as do my peers, to many serious management problems.

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If wilderness meets all of these critical social objectives, why is it so difficult to resolve? The baggage is heavy. There is no capital T, Truth, or R, Right. Values play a significant role in the discussion. All of the elements that make the issue so ponderable, so valuable, also make it hard to resolve.

Let's look at the BLM wilderness review here in Utah. Congressman Wayne Owens, Utah's second district representative, said, "Let the debate begin." His counterpart from the first district, Representative James Hansen, responded, "Let the rumpus start." Both were talking of wilderness. Owens is the author of H.R. 1500, a 5.1 million acre wilderness recommendation proposed by the Utah Wilderness Coalition, a group consisting of the Sierra Club, Wilderness Society and many other organizations. Owens' district largely represents the metropolitan Salt Lake City area. Hansen has written H.R. 1501, a 1.4 million acre bill. Hansen's district harbors a substantive portion of the BLM proposed wildernesses. BLM has proposed 2 million acres and the Utah Wilderness Association and the state's wildlife-related organizations have long proposed about 4 million acres. For good reason, BLM wilderness triggers an inordinate amount of emotional review. The Colorado Plateau and Great Basin of Utah are physical landforms unmatched and epitomize wilderness.

But is there an alternative to yet another protracted and bloody battle over the management of public land here in Utah? What is so difficult about seeking consensus or so attractive about a no-holds barred fight? The present fight, after all, will do little or nothing to educate and alter the fundamental problems

surrounding resources — that of always looking at natural resources as something to be consumed.

Both "sides" seek to coerce rather than understand. Neither side appears to have an interest in setting in motion the personal and cultural changes that must occur if wilderness is to have any value.

So long as wilderness, in this case the BLM wilderness review, is pursued as the final statement on environmental quality we guarantee islands of wilderness surrounded by masses of development. It is not hard to imagine seeing wilderness in the future as monuments to our insensitivity to larger issues rather than monuments to our vision. Wilderness is one very important issue, but not the only one. Instead of a "tool," it has become the end. For example, too often we conveniently forget that after wilderness is designated wildlife is still threatened and watersheds are still hammered by too many cattle, sheep or off-road vehicles. That is because some of the most important habitats/ecosystems don't even qualify as wilderness. Yet they deserve our attention as much as any red rock canyon or high mountain. Wilderness is a piece of the biodiversity puzzle. We must move away from the idea of wilderness versus ecosystem-damaging development as the two alternatives.

If we are to achieve fundamental change in our collective view of the land, we must recognize that it is not a matter of "us versus them." It should be obvious by now that coercing others to alter their value system doesn't work. And in the case of BLM wilderness here in Utah, for example, there is nothing magical about Congressman Owens' bill of 5.1 million acres or Congressman Hansen's bill of 1.4 million acres. The need is for pursuit of the real issues and reasonable discussion. UWA has suggested Owens and Hansen drop their respective bills and pursue the interests and values inherent to the issue. This, of course, doesn't diminish the vision or purpose of each perspective.

Lofty talk about common ground seems meaningless when opponents of wilderness, like Utah's Multiple Use Coalition, continue to denigrate wilderness. Their absurd denial must end. It lacks substance from every direction, whether biological or political.

Believing that we can or should "roll" our opponents to grab a bigger chunk of wilderness today simply creates losers and seems to denigrate all of the rhetoric about diversity and tolerance from which the environmental movement came. If we can't pursue this effort, which is far from a passive "let Congress decide for us," and solve wilderness issues with some degree of consensus, success, respect and dignity, how will we ever address global environmental crises? Wilderness offers us a chance to succeed.

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Bob Marshall, wilderness explorer, Forest Service employee and co-founder of The Wilderness Society (Glover, 1986), wrote these words in 1929, as he was exploring Alaska's Brooks Range:

I cannot convey in words my feeling in finding this broad valley lying there, just as fresh and untrammelled as at the dawn of geological eras. . . I could liken the valley to a Yosemite without waterfalls, but with rock domes beside which world renowned Half Dome would be trivial . . . Best of all it was fresh — gloriously fresh . . . This, beyond a doubt, was an unbeaten path.

This very feeling has erupted within many a wilderness user time and time again, despite the fact that the area has been explored and re-explored. Bob Marshall may have been the first American to have a truly wilderness experience in North America. But the beauty of wilderness is that its freshness can't be terminated. And in this world what better thing to preserve?

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When I was a wilderness ranger on the Sawtooth Wilderness, and later the High Uintas, I found a "prayer" that I used each evening . . . and still do.

"Then Bear called, Good night, Mountains, you must protect us tonight. We are strangers but we are good people. We don't mean harm to anybody. Good night, Mister Pine Tree. We are camping under you. You must protect us tonight. Good night, Mister Owl. I guess this is your home where we are camped. We are good people, we are not looking for trouble, we are just traveling. Good night, Chief Rattlesnake. Good night, everyone. Good night, Grass People, we have spread our bed right on top of you. Good night, Ground, we are lying right on your face. You must take care of us, we want to live a long time." (DeAngulo, 1953)

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