

**File Code:** 2320**Date:** OCT 18 2016**Route To:****Subject:** 2016 National Forest Service Wilderness Awards Recipients**To:** Regional Foresters, Station Directors, Area Director, IITF Director, Deputy Chiefs

I am pleased to announce the recipients of the 2016 National Wilderness Awards. These awards honor individuals and groups for excellence in wilderness education, traditional skills leadership, decision making, and overall wilderness stewardship. This year we are naming the Wilderness Education Leadership award to honor Connie G. Myers, for her unprecedented contributions to wilderness education as she retires after 23 years as the founding Director of the interagency Arthur Carhart National Wilderness Training Center. Delivery of the awards will be coordinated with the respective regional offices for presentation at an appropriate opportunity.

#### **Aldo Leopold Award for Overall Wilderness Stewardship Program**

**Linda Merigliano**, North Zone Wilderness and Recreation Program Manager, Bridger-Teton National Forest

Over the course of Linda Merigliano's career, she has led development of management plans for the Jedidiah Smith, Teton, Gros Ventre, and Wind River Wilderness areas, but this is only a glimpse of her many accomplishments. More recently, Linda is one of the principal authors of the 2015 *Keeping It Wild 2: An Updated Strategy to Monitor Trends in Wilderness Character Across the National Wilderness Preservation System*. In addition, she serves on the national interagency committee that is developing direction for Visitor Use Management. She is also a founding member as well as active board member for the Society for Wilderness Stewardship whose mission is "to promote excellence in the professional practice of wilderness stewardship, science, and education to ensure the life-sustaining benefits of wilderness." Linda donates countless hours to promote ethics and responsible use of public lands. Additionally, because of her vast knowledge of and passion for Wilderness, and for her ability to solve wicked problems and foster relationships she has become a community icon.

#### **Bob Marshall Award Individual Champion of Wilderness Stewardship**

**Pete Irvine**, Trails and Wilderness Program Manager, George Washington and Jefferson National Forests

No other Forest level wilderness manager is responsible for more Wildernesses than Pete Irvine, who manages 23 that are each highly visited. Although he has only been in this position for about five years, those who meet Pete get the sense that he has been doing this job forever. In 2011, Pete served on a three person team that hosted Interagency Wilderness Resource Advisor training in the Southern region, the first training of its kind within the Region and nation in many years. In 2012, he worked with partners to host a series of public "Evenings of Wilderness." He also visited each District on the Forest and did a wilderness awareness session for all staffs. Pete



has gone above and beyond, serving national and Regional auxiliary roles. He is a leading member of the Southern Wilderness Advisory Group, the Regional Leave No Trace representative, and was the only Forest level representative on the Forest Service Wilderness 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary planning team. No matter what the role, Pete's knowledge, professionalism, and passion for Wilderness shine bright!

### **Bob Marshall Award for Group Champion of Wilderness Stewardship**

#### **New Mexico Volunteers for the Outdoors, Albuquerque, New Mexico**

Established in May 1982, the New Mexico Volunteers for the Outdoors (NMVFO) is an all-volunteer, 501(c) 3 non-profit organization created primarily to work alongside Federal land managing agencies on a wide variety of outdoor recreation service projects. Highly-dedicated, they are involved in over 20 service projects annually across New Mexico. Not all of their projects take place in congressionally designated Wilderness, but in 2015, seven of their projects took place in six different wilderness areas across four National Forests. Just one example, the inaugural volunteer trail maintenance project took place in the newly designated Columbine-Hondo Wilderness, Carson National Forest where NMVFO volunteers and horse packers contributed to the "maintenance to standard" of 3.1 miles of the Columbine trail #71: removal of deadfall, brushing, and treadwork. They contributed 264 volunteer hours with an estimated dollar value of \$6,090.48 to the Carson National Forest and community. Year after year, they demonstrate their deep commitment to wilderness stewardship by pursuing projects that result in enormous benefits to the management and safe enjoyment of these areas. No other New Mexico volunteer service organization participates in more projects annually in wilderness than the NMVFO.

### **Wilderness Partnership Champion Award**

#### **Trapper Creek Job Corps: Wilderness Discovery Certification**

Chris Futrier, Director, Trapper Creek Job Corps Center Director

Steve Archibald, Wilderness Educator (retired), Forest Service

Adam Washebeck, Wilderness Ranger, Stevensville District, Bitterroot National Forest

In order to involve a more diverse and underrepresented group in wilderness activities, Trapper Creek Job Corps Civilian Conservation Center located in Hamilton, Montana developed a Wilderness stewardship and traditional tool education program with the assistance of the Bitterroot National Forest and the Arthur Carhart National Wilderness Training Center. The Wilderness Discovery Certification program provides eight hour classroom training accompanied by traditional skills training such as ax use and cross cut saw training. Students are familiarized with the Wilderness Act, one of its proponents, Aldo Leopold, and the special requirements for visiting or working in these areas. This training program is now being implemented on eight other Job Corps Civilian Conservation Centers located across the United States. Through this partnership, the Wilderness Discovery Certification helps to train the wilderness stewardship leaders of tomorrow.

**Excellence in Wilderness Stewardship Research Award (2 co-winners)****Aldo Leopold Wilderness Research Institute and University of Montana: “Fire as a self-regulating Mechanism”**

Sean Parks, Research Ecologist, Aldo Leopold Wilderness Research Institute  
Carol Miller, Research Ecologist, Aldo Leopold Wilderness Research Institute  
Lisa Holsinger, Ecologist, Aldo Leopold Wilderness Research Institute  
Cara Nelson, Associate Professor, College of Forestry and Conservation, University of Montana

Collaboration between the Aldo Leopold Wilderness Research Institute and the University of Montana resulted in the publication of “Wildland fire as a self-regulating mechanism: the role of previous burns and weather in limiting fire progression.” This highly relevant article provides scientifically sound quantitative information that is essential for making decisions about resource benefit fires, including information about how to take advantage of previous burns when managing fire. This first-class team of scientists, led by Sean Parks, capitalized on increased fire activity in recent decades to evaluate the degree to which wildland fire limits the progression, or size, of subsequent fire in four very large wilderness landscapes. Over 1,000 fires in four large Wilderness areas were analyzed to quantify the effect of wildland fire on subsequent fire spread, thus improving upon previous case studies and anecdotes and allowing results to be applied broadly and confidently. Using novel and creative methods, Sean and his research team were also able to quantify how extreme weather influences the ability of previous burns to serve as fuelbreaks to subsequent fires. These findings are important because they provide wilderness managers with a quantitative rationale for allowing fires to burn as managed wildland fires. Simply put, the information reported in the article will improve wilderness stewardship.

**“This is Your Brain on Nature” Study**

Dr. David Strayer, Professor, University of Utah  
Dr. Ruth Ann Atchley, Professor, University of Kansas  
Dr. Paul Atchley, Professor, University of Kansas

Dr. David Strayer, along with collaborators Dr. Ruth Ann Atchley and Dr. Paul Atchley, conducted studies revealing an increase in creativity after spending four days backpacking in the Wilderness disconnected from electronic devices. These results were first published in PLOS ONE, an online journal published by the Public Library of Science, but this work was also highlighted in a January 2016 National Geographic article. Their work, showing that interacting with nature has real measurable benefits to creative problem-solving, hadn’t been formally demonstrated before. It provides a rationale for trying to understand a healthy way to interact in the world, and that some costs of abundant time in front of a computer screen can be remediated by taking a hike in nature. Earlier work has shown that going on a hike can improve proofreading, the ability to see a certain optical illusion, and the ability to repeat digits backwards after hearing a list of digits. Dr. Strayer, however, says none of those abilities provide a standard measure of executive attention or creativity. Unlike other studies, where subjects were tested in labs after brief periods outdoors, this study is unique in that participants were exposed to nature over a sustained period and they were still in that natural setting during testing. This study is an excellent example of the continuing and ever increasing relevance of Wilderness in our world.

**Excellence in Wilderness Research Applications Award**

**Dr. Peter Landres**, Aldo Leopold Wilderness Research Institute

Since joining the Aldo Leopold Wilderness Research Institute in 1992, Dr. Peter Landres has contributed to Wilderness science in innumerable lasting and substantive ways to address top issues confronting wilderness stewardship. Most recently were his contributions to the *Technical Guide for Monitoring Wilderness Character*. Quite simply, Peter is the “beginning, middle and end” on the topic of wilderness character monitoring, which is arguably the most significant research application of the past 20-years. He has dedicated the bulk of his career to developing and instituting wilderness character monitoring as a core component of the Forest Service’s wilderness stewardship program. His talents and efforts have provided tools to help wilderness managers gauge the effectiveness of their actions, while also increasing the accountability, transparency, and defensibility of Forest Service wilderness stewardship nationwide. It is hard to imagine a more deserving Wilderness champion than Dr. Peter Landres.

**Traditional Skills and Minimum Tool Leadership Award**

**Washington Trails Association (Winner)**

Karen Daubert, Executive Director

Washington Trails Association (WTA) is a state based trail organization that conducts volunteer maintenance and advocates for hiking trails across the state. Beginning with a Cost Share partnership on the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest in 1994, the organization has grown from a few thousand hours of volunteer trail maintenance led by a small cadre of volunteer crew leaders to a statewide maintenance juggernaut that in 2015, contributed over 130,000 volunteer hours. A total of 60,000 of these hours were on National Forest System lands, the majority of which are within designated Wilderness. Regardless of designation, WTA’s 65 certified sawyers and army of swampers use cross cut saws on all of its trail projects. With the WTA exemplary safety record, they have been a leader in saw training for its volunteers as well as for other volunteer organizations, such as the Pacific Crest Trail Association. WTA may have introduced more people to the satisfaction and challenges of wilderness trail work than any other organization. The incredible number of volunteers trained to “Be Safe, Have Fun, and Get Some Work Done”, will help ensure that the use of traditional tools will be maintained in our Wilderness areas for decades to come.

**Shawnee National Forest Burden Falls Wilderness Aircraft Wreckage Extraction Team  
(Honorable mention)**

Kelly Pearson, Team Leader

In the early morning hours of a stormy Monday, August 11, 2015, the Pope County Sherriff learned a small single engine aircraft had not reached its planned destination in southern Illinois. The following day, a hiker found the wreckage approximately 1/4 mile inside the Burden Falls Wilderness on the Shawnee National Forest and immediately notified the authorities. Tragically, there were no survivors. After investigation and removal of the bodies, the Forest Supervisor made the decision to break the wreckage into small loads using traditional tools and remove it by foot. In addition to using game sleds to remove the largest pieces of the debris, crew members searched for and removed the very smallest, most minute pieces of metal and fabric. The oil-

contaminated soil was even scraped and gathered with a Pulaski and shoveled into five-gallon buckets and transported out of the wilderness. Through the capability, experience, endurance, and familiarity with minimal tool concepts of the highly skilled Shawnee National Forest Trails Crews, the entire process of collecting the wreckage, disassembling the fuselage and packing all of the materials out of the wilderness was completed in only 14 hours! This feat is an excellent example of the minimum tool concept and preservation of Wilderness values.

### **Connie G. Myers Award for Leadership in Wilderness Education**

**Dr. Martha Lee**, Professor, School of Forestry, Northern Arizona University

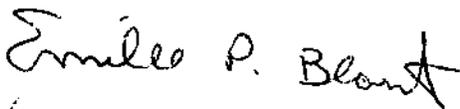
In the spring semester of 2000, an educational partnership between Dr. Martha Lee's Wilderness Management Class at Northern Arizona University and the Coconino National Forest, Flagstaff Ranger District was established. The partnership was established to assist the Forest Service with managing Wilderness areas, and to provide the students with practical land management experience. Since then, over 300 students have participated and the partnership has blossomed into a valued collaboration that now includes other agencies such as Arizona Game and Fish Department, National Park Service, and Coconino County Search and Rescue. Each year prior to the fall semester, land managers meet and discuss potential projects with Dr. Lee. Forest Service Wilderness managers then meet with the students on a weekly basis to provide direction, assistance and counsel to complete the projects by the end of the semester. The focus for the last several years has been for the students to assist with meeting the Chief's 10-year Wilderness Stewardship Challenge and now the Wilderness Stewardship Performance elements. The success of these and other projects completed through this partnership truly benefit the Wilderness around Flagstaff and deserve recognition.

### **Line Officer Wilderness Leadership Award**

**Joseph Aragon**, Deputy District Ranger, Covelo Ranger District, Mendocino National Forest

Demonstrating personal and professional commitment to wilderness, Joe Aragon serves on the Region 5 Pack Stock Center for Excellence Steering Committee, is a representative on the tri-forest wilderness council, has built strong relationships with numerous community groups, and coordinated a forest grants and agreements committee in order to find avenues to improve wilderness stewardship and Wilderness Stewardship Performance scores. He continually educates the public as well as his colleagues about wilderness values and encourages them to become involved in wilderness stewardship. His dedication to wilderness is very deserving of this award.

Please join me in congratulating this year's Wilderness Award recipients!



LESLIE A. C. WELDON  
Deputy Chief, National Forest System