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To: Regional Foresters, Station Directors, Area Director, IITF Director, Deputy Chiefs and WO Directors

In 2014, America will celebrate “50 Years of Wilderness” as it honors the golden anniversary of the National Wilderness Preservation System and the Wilderness Act of 1964. The Forest Service has a rich history of wilderness stewardship. As an agency, we were protecting land for wilderness values well before the signing of the Wilderness Act, with the 1924 designation of what would become the Gila Wilderness in New Mexico. Our rich wilderness legacy is testimony to the foresight and vision of Aldo Leopold, Arthur Carhart, and Bob Marshall. Today, the Forest Service manages 439 designated wilderness areas covering over 36 million acres.

This anniversary year provides a wonderful opportunity for us to re-affirm our commitment to wilderness stewardship and to engage the public, particularly youth, in opportunities for a better understanding and appreciation of wilderness benefits—clean air and water, natural settings, critical plant and wildlife habitat, solitude, recreation, spiritual renewal, and economic benefits.

The Forest Service is playing a key role in the 50th Anniversary National Wilderness Planning Team (Wilderness50), a coalition of over twenty groups including the four Federal wilderness management agencies, universities, and wilderness-related non-profit groups. On August 23, 2012, the Forest Service joined the Bureau of Land Management, Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, and wilderness non-profit organizations in signing a memorandum of understanding formally committing to spotlighting and celebrating the Nation’s wilderness system in the months leading up to the Wilderness Act’s Anniversary - September 3, 2014.

In addition, Leanne Marten, Director of Wilderness and Wild & Scenic Rivers, has engaged a Forest Service 50th Wilderness Team to explore how we can tell the Agency’s wilderness story. This team will explore how we can work cooperatively with the National Wilderness Planning Team, Tribes, and engage partners - both internally and externally - to make sure that citizens across America have opportunities to participate in 50th wilderness events. The Team’s tasks include developing a communication plan, identifying key deliverables, and producing products and tools that will help employees across the Agency engage with communities in celebrating not only the past 50 years of the Wilderness Preservation System but the next 50 years.

As I travel to our National Forest and Grasslands, I continue to be struck by the diversity of landscapes and the wonder of wilderness. Our legacy is woven in the beautiful tapestry of untrammeled landscapes which we are honored to steward on behalf of the American public. You will hear more from the 50th Wilderness Team in the months to come.

/s/ Thomas L. Tidwell
THOMAS L. TIDWELL
Chief

