

## **WILDERNESS ACT AND HOWARD ZAHNISER**

*In: The Fully Managed, Multiple-Use Forest Era, 1960-1970*

Passage of the Wilderness Act of 1964 involved decades of work on the part of many people both inside the Forest Service and from a variety of interest groups. As early as the 1910's and 1920's, there were several important proponents of wilderness designation in the national forests. Three men are considered pivotal in these early years and all were Forest Service employees: Aldo Leopold, Arthur H. Carhart, and Robert Marshall. Their efforts were successful at the local level in creating administratively designated wilderness protection for several areas across the country. At the national policy level, there was a series of policy decisions (L-20 and U Regulations) in the 1920's and 1930's that made wilderness and primitive area designation relatively easy, but what was lacking was a common standard of management across the country for these areas. Also, since these wilderness and primitive areas were administratively designated, the next Chief or Regional Forester could "undesignate" any of the areas with the stroke of a pen.

Howard C. Zahniser, executive secretary of the Wilderness Society (founded by Bob Marshall), became the leader in a movement for congressionally designated wilderness areas. In 1949, Zahniser detailed his proposal for Federal wilderness legislation in which Congress would establish a national wilderness system, identify appropriate areas, prohibit incompatible uses, list potential new areas, and authorize a commission to recommend changes to the program. Nothing much happened to the proposal, but it did raise the awareness for the need to protect wilderness and primitive areas from all forms of development.

In 1955, Zahniser began an effort to convince skeptics and Congress to support a bill to establish a National Wilderness Preservation System. Drafts of a bill were circulated the next year. By the late 1950's, it seemed that the wilderness bill would eventually become law, but there were still many battles to be fought. At the same time, the Multiple-Use Sustained-Yield Act (MUSY) was also being pushed through Congress. Some have suggested that the Forest Service strongly supported MUSY to counteract the wilderness legislation, and after the passage of MUSY in 1960 there were many who felt that there was no need for a separate wilderness bill because wilderness was one of the many multiple uses allowed in the act. Senator Hubert H. Humphrey (D-MN) became a major supporter of the wilderness bill, but mining interests were very much opposed. The wilderness bill, which was stalled for several years in Congress, finally came out of committee with a compromise that allowed mining in national forest wildernesses until 1984. Eight years after the bill was introduced, President Lyndon Johnson signed the bill into law in September 1964. Ironically, Howard Zahniser, who pushed so hard for the act, died a few months before the bill became law.

Overnight, Forest Service wildernesses became part of the National Wilderness Preservation System. A team of Forest Service wilderness managers met soon afterward in Washington, DC, to come up with implementing regulations for these new congressionally established wildernesses. What they thought would be an easy task took many months as they found that there were no consistent or agreed-upon ways to manage the existing wildernesses.

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