

## Wilderness Values and Benefits

The values of wilderness have been elaborated upon by many:

- *Wilderness Management*, Hendee and Dawson, Chapter 1
- *A Wilderness Bill of Rights*, William O. Douglas, Chapter II
- *The Enduring Wilderness*, Doug Scott
- *Worship and Wilderness*, Lloyd Burton
- *Wilderness and the American Mind*, Roderick Nash
- *A Sand County Almanac* and other sources, Aldo Leopold
- Bob Marshall
- Sigurd Olson
- Howard Zahnizer
- Wallace Stegner

A clear articulation of these values facilitates an evaluation of the changes occurring in wilderness and helps with consideration of changes in the way our evolving culture sees these values over time.

Many of the wilderness values espoused in 1964, and still generally valid today, are captured in words and verbiage of the 1964 Wilderness Act. These values or benefits have been publicly elaborated on by many writers of that time. Comparing these values with writers of today can provide interesting perspective.

For additional information and descriptions of wilderness values visit the **What is Wilderness ? – What benefits do wilderness areas provide and why are they of value to Americans today?** at:

<http://www.wilderness.net/index.cfm?fuse=NWPS&sec=values>

In 2002, a national survey done for the congressionally mandated National Survey on Recreation and the Environment (NSRE) asked a random sample of Americans about their views on wilderness and what they valued the most and least about wilderness. A partial summary of the survey results is displayed below.

1. Should we designate more federal lands as wilderness?

	<u>Important or Very Important</u>
North	66%
South	55%
Great Plains	50%
Rockies	59%
Pacific Coast	59%

2. What are the top five benefits of wilderness?

- Protecting air quality
- Protecting water quality
- Protecting wildlife habitat
- Protecting T&E species
- Legacy for future generations

3 What values of wilderness rank lowest?

- Providing recreation opportunities
- Providing spiritual inspiration
- Using areas for scientific study
- Stimulate income for the tourism industry

For more recent information on how Americans value wilderness see the Wilderness Research ; Visitor Trends and Wilderness Values study results at: <http://www.srs.fs.fed.us/trends>

Also, a recent study done by the Sonoran Institute looked at the value of wilderness to communities in the west including effects on local economies. This study can be found at: <http://www.sonoran.org/programs/prosperity.html>

The following text is excerpted from the Wilderness Awareness Training Module, 1993, published by the Arthur Carhart National Wilderness Training Center.

## **Introduction**

"A wilderness is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain."

*-The Wilderness Act (PL 88-577), September 3, 1964*

Over the past century the United States has built a federal land conservation system that is the envy of the world. We were the first nation on earth to create a national park system, the first to establish national wildlife refuges, and, on September 3, 1964, the first to set aside pristine wilderness areas for permanent protection in their natural state.

On that day the President signed the Wilderness Act, enacted by Congress 'to secure for the American people of present and future generations the benefits of an enduring resource of wilderness.' With the stroke of a pen, the preservation of federal wildlands became national policy.

The Wilderness Act established the National Wilderness Preservation System to be composed of federally owned areas designated by Congress. The Act did not expand the federally owned land base or require the acquisition of additional land. It simply directed that some existing federal wildlands be set aside and protected as part of the new preservation system, and that other federal lands with wilderness characteristics be reviewed for possible wilderness designation by Congress. Today, congressional designations are made on wildlands within our National Forests, National Parks, National Wildlife Refuges, and on western lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management.

The Wilderness Act mandates that wilderness areas be administered for the use and enjoyment of the American people in such a manner as will leave them unimpaired for future use and enjoyment as wilderness. Accordingly, wilderness areas are protected from development--from the construction of roads, dams or other permanent structures; from timber cutting and the operation of motorized vehicles and equipment; and, since 1984, from new mining claims and mineral leasing.

Today, the nearly 106 million acres that make up the National Wilderness Preservation System are the crown jewels of America's public lands heritage. They stand as living testimony to the wisdom and foresight of Congress and the American people--to the concern of past generations for future generations.

## **Why Wilderness?**

To Thoreau, wilderness was a 'tonic', enough of which humans could never have. To John Muir, wilderness represented 'the hope of the world.' And for former Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas, wilderness helped preserve man's 'capacity for wonder--the power to feel, if not see, the miracles of life, of beauty, and of harmony around us.'

However an individual may view wilderness, there are a number of recognized reasons for its preservation. Wildlands have natural and ecological values that are vital to the nation's--indeed, the planet's--well-being, many of which are yet to be discovered or fully understood:

Wilderness protects watersheds upon which many cities and rural communities depend for pure water.

Wilderness serves as critical habitat for wildlife threatened by extinction.

Wilderness improves the quality of our air because of the filtering action of their green plants and forest.

Wilderness maintains gene pools to provide diversity of plants and animal life. Today, as we learn more about the greenhouse effect and the depletion of the ozone layer, more and more people are coming to realize that humanity is only part of an interconnected 'web of life,' and that the survival of our own species may ultimately depend on the survival of others. That is why the preservation of biological diversity is of importance.

Wilderness serves as a unique and irreplaceable 'living laboratory' for medical and scientific research. Already plant and animal species existing in their natural states have played major roles in the development of heart drugs, antibiotics, anti-cancer agents and anti-coagulants. More than one-quarter of all the prescriptions sold in America each year contain active ingredients from plants.

Wilderness also provides for the protection of geological resource values. Undisturbed, naturally occurring geologic phenomena are protected for present and future generations to pursue the origin of this planet and the universe.

Wilderness serves as a haven from the pressure of our fast paced industrialized society. It is a place where we can seek relief from the noise and speed of machines, and confines of steel and concrete, the crowding of people.

Wilderness is a unique repository for cultural resource values. Artifacts and structures protected by the Archeological Resources Protection Act or other laws take on a new perspective when experienced within the context of the wilderness. These features tell a valuable story about the human relationship with wilderness.

For all its uses, values, and scenic wonders, wilderness is a land heritage that is uniquely American. In the words of Pulitzer-Prizewinning novelist Wallace Steger, 'Something will have gone out of us as a people if we ever let the remaining wilderness be destroyed.'

## **Values and Benefits**

### **1. Recreation** (Re-creation of the mind, body and spirit)

- a. Improved performance - place of challenge where can discover inner resources and develop them. Solitude can enhance creativity.
- b. Physical and mental health.
- c. Self-esteem, confidence.
- d. Self-sufficiency, independence.
- e. Spiritual values, Inspiration.
- f. Develop outdoor skills including hunting and fishing.
- g. Intro-group intimacy, Build teamwork.

### **2. Scenic .**

- a. Teton Range is internationally renown for its scenic value.
- b. Aesthetics inspire art, music, literature.
- c. People can re-connect with natural beauty.

### **3. Scientific**

- a. Ecological benchmark to assess impacts in more developed settings; a baseline for global monitoring.
- b. Study how natural systems function - interactions, evolution.
- c. Study people's relation to land - how can we better harmonize activities.

### **4. Educational**

- a. Outdoor classroom where can learn about nature first-hand.
- b. Learn skill to live more simply and more self-sufficiently in everyday life.

### **5. Conservation / Preservation / Non-utilitarian**

- a. Ecosystem preservation. Species biodiversity. Maintain planet health.
- b. Preservation of gene pools, carbon banks.
- c. Right of other species to live freely.
- d. Preserves future options - don't know how whole planet works, so shouldn't disturb now.
- e. Bequest to future - pass on some wild places to future generations.
- f. Refuge for many species that depend on large, remote, undisturbed areas.

## **6. Historical**

- a. Part of our natural character.
- b. Tie with our history - reminder of what the frontier meant in shaping a national culture.
- c. Maintains traditional, primitive skills.
- d. Archeological resources tell valuable story about human survival in harsh environments.

## **7. Quality of Life**

- a. Improved air quality due to lack of development and filtering action of green plants.
- b. Steady flow of water to downstream areas, reduces floods and provides places to recharge aquifers (water supply).
- c. Clean, relatively pure water (quality).
- d. Helps maintain open space. Limits urban sprawl.

## **8. Economic/Commercial**

- a. Outfitter/Guide Businesses.
- b. Domestic livestock grazing.
- c. Commercial art and photography.
- d. Potential place to collect gene stocks - seeds and tissue of wild plants for propagation. Already plant and animal species existing in their natural states have played major roles in the development of heart drugs, antibiotics, anticancer agents, and anti-coagulants. More than 23% of all prescriptions sold in America each year contain active ingredients from plants.
- e. Tourism and rural growth. A national survey on migration into western wilderness counties found that, while populations in most rural communities were declining in the 1980's, counties with wilderness were continuing to grow. Scenery, outdoor recreation opportunities, environmental quality, peace of life and limited development potential were reasons people were moving to the counties. 55% of the residents felt wilderness was an important reason for living in the area, while 72% of the migrants considered it a major factor in their decision to move to the area.

### **Reference**

Rudzitis, G. and H.E. Johansen. 1989. *Migration into Western Wilderness counties: causes and consequences*. *Western Wildlands*. 15(1):19-23.

### **Threats to Wilderness**

In our modern, increasingly developed and fast paced society there are many threats to the management of wilderness and preservation of wilderness character. The threats can come in the form of social issues such as increasing development near wilderness, demands to allow motor vehicles or forms of mechanical transport in wilderness, and high use of popular areas. Other threats can effect the biological and physical resources such as air pollution, non-native invasive species, fire suppression, or the potential to explore for and develop mineral, energy, or water resources in wilderness, etc.

For a discussion of the current threats to wilderness and how wilderness is effected, visit **What is Wilderness? – What are the threats to wilderness?** at: <http://www.wilderness.net/index.cfm?fuse=NWPS&sec=threats>