



EARTH

FALL 1998

Agriculture and Biodiversity Rewilding

\$4.95 US

Gary Nabhan, Scott Russell Sanders, Wes Jackson,
Paul Shepard, Catherine Badgley, Michael Soulé, Reed Noss



Around the Campfire

by Dave Foreman

The Ever-robust Wilderness Idea and Ernie Dickerman

When it comes to postmodern deconstructionist critics of the wilderness idea and of Wilderness Areas, J. Baird Callicott stands head and shoulders above his academic colleagues. In scholarship, sincerity, and openness he rises well above William Cronon, for example. Cronon's anthology, *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, came out of a trendy academic conference in the artificiality of Irvine, California (whether intended or not, holding that symposium near Disneyland was appropriate). *The Great New Wilderness Debate*, edited by Callicott and Michael Nelson, is a more useful work which pulls together all sides of the discussion and includes papers by Reed Noss, David Johns, and me.

But my friend Baird still doesn't get it.

I got a BA in history from the University of New Mexico in 1968, but I've never been to grad school. This makes me—if I may be so bold—a lay scholar, never having gone through the formal, priestly rituals of becoming an academic. Looking in from the outside, it seems to me that one of the illnesses rife in academia is the casting out of old theories to thoroughly replace them with new theories. (I'm reminded of the story in the New Testament of Jesus casting devils out of a crazy person and sending them into a nearby herd of pigs.) Today's "New West" historians toss Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis of American history to the pigs and chuckle smugly whenever a lay boob like me refers to him (maybe I'm seen as one of the possessed pigs).

There is a wide chasm between constant revolution by throwing out the old to replace it with the new, and an evolutionary process of adding new ideas to old ideas. Instead of saying, "Yes, Turner explains part of the picture; here's another way of looking at history that also explains part of the picture," social scientists say, "Turner is wrong and out-of-date. The new, correct view is this." Callicott and Nelson's introduction to their anthology is a sterling case of this search for constant revolution—in this case that the wilderness idea is wrong, has failed, and must be utterly replaced with something new.

Two essays of mine are included: 1) "Wilderness Areas for Real," a combination of my chapter "Where Man Is a Visitor" in David Burks's anthology *Place of the Wild* and "Wilderness Areas Are Vital," my defense of Wilderness Areas against Callicott's



About Wild Earth and The Wildlands Project

Wild Earth is a quarterly journal melding conservation biology and wildlands activism. Our efforts to strengthen the conservation movement involve the following:

- We serve as the publishing wing of *The Wildlands Project*.
- We provide a forum for the many effective but little-known regional wilderness groups and coalitions in North America, and serve as a networking tool for wilderness activists.
- We make the teachings of conservation biology accessible to non-scientists, that activists may employ them in defense of biodiversity.
- We expose threats to habitat and wildlife.
- We facilitate discussion on ways to end and reverse the human population explosion.
- We defend wilderness both as concept and as place.

The Wildlands Project is the organization guiding the design of a continental wilderness recovery strategy. Through advocacy, education, scientific consultation, and cooperation with many regional groups, *The Wildlands Project* is drafting a blueprint for an interconnected, continental-scale system of protected wildlands linked by habitat corridors.

Wild Earth and The Wildlands Project are closely allied but independent non-profit organizations dedicated to the restoration and protection of wilderness and biodiversity. We share a vision of an ecologically healthy North America—with adequate habitat for all native species, containing vibrant human and natural communities.

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cover art (detail) *by Gertrude Ten Broeck, Middlebury, Vermont*

WILD EARTH (ISSN 1055-1166) is published quarterly by the Cenozoic Society, Inc., POB 455, Richmond, VT 05477. The Cenozoic Society is a non-profit educational, scientific, and charitable corporation. ■ Cenozoic Society Board: John Davis (CA), Barbara Dean (CA), Dave Foreman (NM), David Johns (OR), Reed Noss (OR). ■ Membership in the Cenozoic Society is open to the public and includes a subscription to *Wild Earth*. Non-membership and institutional subscriptions are also available. The basic rate for individual membership subscriptions is \$25; low income membership is \$15. Subscriptions to Canada and Mexico are \$30 per year, overseas subscriptions are \$45 (air mail). ■ Periodicals postage paid at Richmond, VT. ■ POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *Wild Earth*, POB 455, Richmond, VT 05477. ■ All editorial and membership correspondence should be sent to *Wild Earth*, POB 455, Richmond, VT 05477. We strongly discourage submissions of unsolicited manuscripts. We welcome submissions of artwork. Artists who want their work returned should include a stamped, self-addressed envelope. *Wild Earth* assumes no responsibility for unsolicited materials. ■ *Wild Earth* accepts a limited amount of advertising that is compatible with its policies and goals. For rates/information contact Lina Miller at (802) 434-4077. ■ Copyright ©1998 by Cenozoic Society, Inc. All rights reserved. No part of this periodical may be reproduced without permission. All artwork is the property of the individual artist and is used by permission. Unauthorized reproduction of artwork is unethical and illegal. ■ Permission to photocopy items for personal use, or the internal or personal use of specific clients, is granted by the Cenozoic Society, Inc., provided that the base fee of \$1 per copy of the article is paid directly to the Copyright Clearance Center, 27 Congress St., Salem, MA 01970; this fee may be waived in some circumstances by the publisher. For those organizations that have been granted a photocopy license by CCC, a separate system of payment has been arranged. The fee code for users of the Transactional Reporting Service is: 1055-1166/92 \$1.00. ■ *Wild Earth* is available on microfilm from University Microfilms, Inc., 300 North Zeeb Rd., Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106-1346. Statistical abstracting by Pierien Press, POB 1808, Ann Arbor, MI 48106. ■ Articles appearing in *Wild Earth* are indexed in ENVIRONMENT ABSTRACTS, ENVIRONMENTAL PERIODICALS BIBLIOGRAPHY and THE ALTERNATIVE PRESS INDEX. *Wild Earth* is printed on 100% PCW paper (cover and insert) and unbleached 50-100% PCW paper (inside).

