

WILDLIFE EARTH

FALL 2000

TOM WATKINS TRIBUTE by Terry Tempest Williams
FICTION FOLIO Dave Foreman's Lobo Outback



Little Things

Microcosmos

Forgotten Pollinators

American Burying Beetle

Resurrection Ecology



\$6.95 US / \$8.50 Canada



Wilderness Warrior

T.H. WATKINS (1936–2000)



by Terry Tempest Williams

THE WILDLANDS OF SOUTHERN UTAH lost one of its most eloquent and fierce defenders this past year. On February 23, 2000, Tom Watkins passed away in his home in Bozeman, Montana, from cancer. He is survived by his wife, Joan Parker Watkins, and two children, Lisa Pless of Pinole, California, and Kevin Watkins of Beaverton, Oregon. His father, Thomas F. Watkins, resides in Yacaipa, California.

Shortly after his death, Barry Lopez said, "What we have lost in Tom Watkins' passing is a front-line voice that understood the social history that informed political choice."

Nowhere was this more clearly evident than at The Orion Society's Fire & Grit Conference held in 1999 at the National Conservation Training Center in West Virginia. It is an image of Tom I will never forget. Watkins gave a tour-de-force speech on the confluence of conservation and social justice.

I do not think you can have a truly valid land ethic if you do not accept a social ethic that addresses the needs of human beings.

He went on to say how the same political impulse that brought relief to victims of the Depression also created the Soil Conservation Service, which created the atmosphere that enabled millions of acres to be included in the National Wildlife Refuge and National Park Systems; that the same political era that created the Wilderness Act, the Endangered Species Act, the Clean Air and Water Acts, and the Environmental Protection Agency also brought us the Civil Rights Act, the Voting Rights Act, Medicare and Medicaid, the Food Stamp Program, and Head Start.

It was a rousing call to arms in the name of environmental justice.

Too often, those of us within the conservation movement forget the powerful teacher history can be to understanding the psychology and patterns behind social change. As a historian, Watkins was always mindful of context as evident in his books, *Righteous Pilgrim*, the biography of Harold L. Ickes, secretary of Interior for Franklin D. Roosevelt, and *The Hungry Years: A Narrative History of the Great Depression*, published in 1999. It's what gave his voice authority and depth. Michael Kazin praised Watkins' prose in the *New York Times*, saying it "has the intensity and warmth of a photo by Dorothea Lange or a novel by John Steinbeck."

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illustration by Patrick Dengate

About Wild Earth and The Wildlands Project

Wild Earth and The Wildlands Project are closely allied but independent nonprofit 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 natural and human communities.



Through the quarterly journal *Wild Earth*, other publications, and advocacy, **Wild Earth** works to foster a culture of conservation, helping to communicate and shape the latest thinking in conservation science, philosophy, politics, and activism.

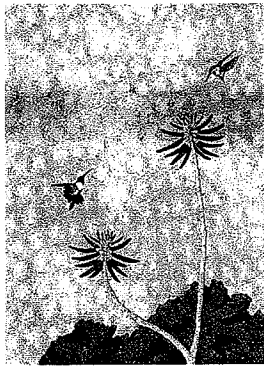
- We make the teachings of conservation biology accessible to non-scientists, that citizen advocates may employ them in defense of biodiversity.
- We provide a forum for dialogue within the conservation movement on the scientific, strategic, and spiritual foundations of effective conservation action.
- We highlight the campaigns of biodiversity preservation groups and coalitions across North America, and serve as a networking tool for wilderness activists.
- We serve as the publishing wing of The Wildlands Project.
- We expose threats to habitat and wildlife, and regularly explore the links between human population growth and biodiversity loss.
- We defend wilderness both as *idea* 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 working to design and implement systems of protected natural areas—wildlands networks—across the continent.

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Wilderness Warrior

continued

He also had a clarity and wit about him.

On more than one occasion, I can tell you it was Tom's deadpan humor or perspective that saved the day in meetings of the Governing Council of The Wilderness Society, where he served as editor of *Wilderness*, the quarterly magazine of the Society, from 1982 to 1997. Again, he carried the history of the organization inside him, serving as a continuum between the generations of employees, activists, and council members.

As he lay dying, Tom found not only the fortitude but the physical and mental energy to pen a hard-edged op-ed piece for the *New York Times* entitled, "Nature, Up for Sale," in support of the Clinton administration's current moratorium on road-building on some 40 million acres of undeveloped national forest land, and with a pointed reminder that John McCain's environmental record was no better than that of George W. Bush. It was published a few days before his death.

Forever vigilant.

But what I loved most about Tom as a friend and fellow writer was his unguarded passion for Utah wilderness. The heat of the redrocks of southern Utah never cooled for him. Each year, he could hardly wait for his return to what he called "the home of my heart."

I am helplessly addicted to this place, this wondrous geographic puzzle of canyons turning in on themselves, of upthrust plateaus and big blisterlike mountains, of multi-colored rocks all layered and bent and broken, of curling rivers dammed by beavers and shaded by grandfather cottonwoods, of horizon-wide sweeps of sunlit emptiness and fragile unknown places where darkness hides and will not tell its name.

He first came to these wildlands in 1988 with his friend John G. Mitchell, who he had assigned to cover an article on the unprotected BLM wildlands in Utah for *Wilderness*. He recognized almost immediately,

The wildlands of southern Utah were not going to be like so many—too many other landscapes in my recent life, places that I had taken a look at then moved away from, satisfied that the memory alone would suffice. I wanted to know these lands, pry into their hidden places, walk where I could persuade myself no one else had ever walked before, at least not within the age of recorded time, take the measure of myself as well as the land.

I loved Tom. He was a friend and ally. As I write this piece, it is hard for me to comprehend his absence. But we have his words and that in itself is its own form of immortality. And we have the incomparable wildlands of southern Utah that he loved so much, where his joyous spirit will forever be found.

Last spring, somewhere along the Dirty Devil, a small group of close friends and family scattered his ashes.

In Tom's own words: *The sky above me has turned to ink. There are no answers and there is no moon. Only the stars; the stars; the stars.*

Conservationist and writer Terry Tempest Williams is herself a wilderness warrior who has worked tirelessly on behalf of her beloved Utah wildlands. Her latest book is Leap (Pantheon, 2000).

