

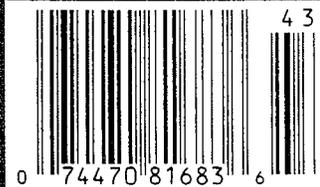
WILDCHEAT EARTH

WINTER 2000/2001

1991 WILD IDEAS FOR A WORLD OUT OF BALANCE *2001*



\$6.95 US / \$8.50 Canada



A Decade of Wild Thinking



IN HIS BOOK *Preserving Nature in the National Parks: A History*, Richard West Sellars describes the mythic origins of the national park idea, when members of the Washburne-Doane expedition, camping by the Madison River in autumn of 1870, decided to forgo the profits to be made by exploiting the Yellowstone country. Rather, they agreed to propose the area for a public park, and communicated this to the highest levels of government. Within a year and a half, Yellowstone became the first national park, and the national park idea spread:

Surely the national park concept deserved a "virgin birth"—under a night sky in the pristine American West, on a riverbank, and around a flaming campfire, as if an evergreen cone had fallen near the fire, then heated and expanded and dropped its seeds to spread around the planet.¹

Sellars goes on to dissect this creation myth and show how the motives of the Yellowstone boosters were not entirely altruistic; the intersection between the early park movement and commercial interests was considerable.

Another creation myth, also set around a wilderness campfire, has Dave Foreman and John Davis conceiving *Wild Earth* journal while camping in New Mexico in late 1990.² In spring 1991, the new periodical melding conservation biology and wilderness activism was launched.

Like the apocryphal virgin birth of the National Park System, *Wild Earth's* genesis account lacks nuance. It doesn't reflect the central role that John's mother, Mary Byrd Davis, had in making a good idea come to life. (She was a charter board and staff member, and did the bulk of the work setting up *Wild Earth's* business infrastructure.) Other original board members, most notably David Johns and Reed Noss, attended the birth and have remained central to the organization's success through the years.

Another element missing from the *Wild Earth* creation story is context. A thorough analysis of the American conservation movement in the late 1980s and early 1990s is beyond the scope of this brief reminiscing, but it is useful to recall that era's rancor between grassroots groups with a biocentric orientation and Washington DC-based nationals that tended toward anthropocentrism and political expedience. Tension between radicals (i.e., those focused on root causes) and reformers (political incrementalists) is unavoidable in any social change movement, but the expanded member rolls and concomitant corporatization in management of the national environmental groups in the post-James Watt era had brought tensions to the boiling point. Moreover, within the radical wing of the conservation movement, a rift and eventual split occurred between activists with an urban, social justice orientation and those primarily focused on biodiversity and public lands. *continues on page 2*

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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