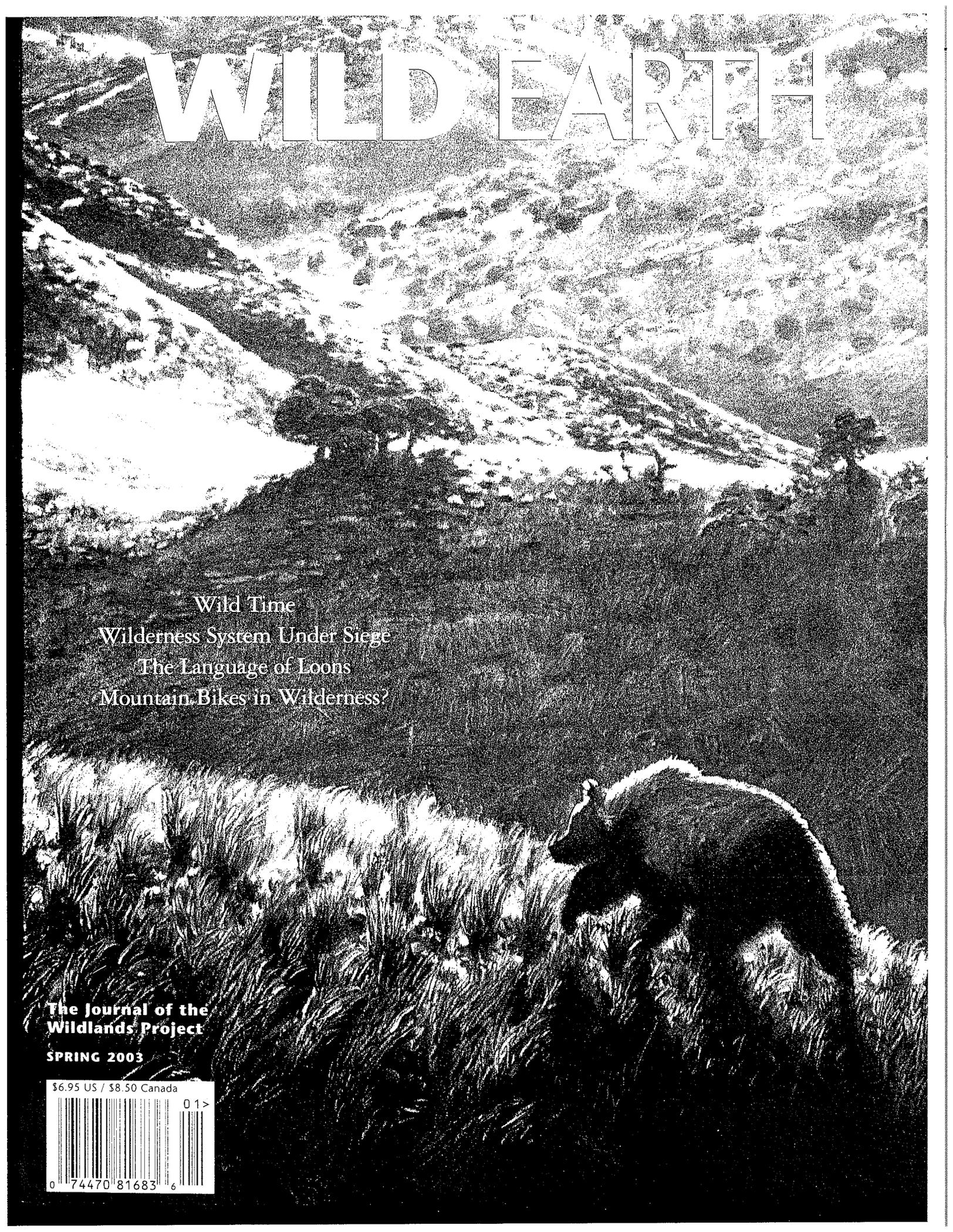


WILD EARTH



Wild Time

Wilderness System Under Siege

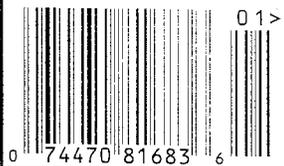
The Language of Loons

Mountain Bikes in Wilderness?

The Journal of the
Wildlands Project

SPRING 2003

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WILDLANDS PROJECT



reconnect restore rewild

WE ARE AMBITIOUS. We live for the day when grizzlies in Chihuahua have an unbroken connection to grizzlies in Alaska; when wolf populations are restored from Mexico to the Yukon to Maine; when vast forests and flowing prairies again thrive and support their full range of native plants and animals; when humans dwell on the land with respect, humility, and affection.

Toward this end, the Wildlands Project is working to restore and protect the natural heritage of North America. Through advocacy, education, scientific consultation, and cooperation with many partners, we are designing and helping create systems of interconnected wilderness areas that can sustain the diversity of life.

Wild Earth—the quarterly publication of the Wildlands Project—inspires effective action for wild Nature by communicating the latest thinking in conservation science, philosophy, policy, and activism, and serves as a forum for diverse views within the conservation movement.

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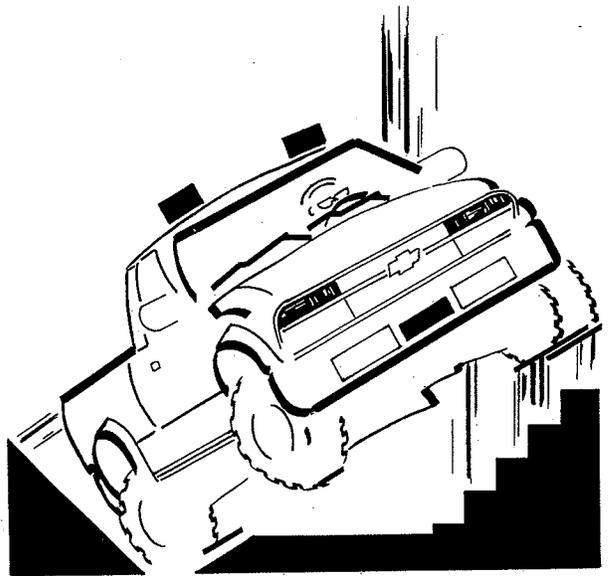
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ON THE COVER

"California Grizzly on Hills" (detail), oil on paper by Laura Cunningham, ©1997



A Brief History of the Federal Land Managing Agencies' Refusal to Control Wheels

IN THIS ISSUE OF *Wild Earth*, we offer contrasting views on mountain bikes in wilderness areas. It would be worth our while to backtrack the historical trail to look at the larger issue of wheels in wilderness—in particular at the federal land managing agencies' historic failure to control off-road vehicles.

Paul Sutter clearly shows in *Driven Wild* that the wilderness area movement after World War I came about because of the invasion of the national forests by automobiles.¹ Back in 1979, historian Susan Flader made the same point. From 1919 to 1923, Aldo Leopold was Chief of Operations for the Forest Service in the Southwest. Part of that job was overseeing roads. Based on his on-the-ground

knowledge of how roads and automobiles were invading the backcountry, he developed his proposal for a Gila Wilderness Area. He asked:

Who wants to stalk his buck to the music of a motor? Or track his turkey on the trail of the knobby tread? Who that is called to the high hills for a real *pasear* wants to wrangle his packs along a gravelled highway? Yet that is what we are headed for, at least in the Southwest. Car sign in every canyon, car dust on every bush, a parking ground at every waterhole, and Fords on a thousand hills!²

In the 1970s, the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management worked hard to limit wilderness designation to as few areas as possible. Closely tied to the agencies' opposi-

tion to wilderness areas was their refusal to restrict damaging motorized recreation, which was then beginning to boom with the wider availability of four-wheel-drive vehicles and the invention of dirt bikes. In 1971, President Richard Nixon ordered the federal land managing agencies to survey their lands and formally close or open them for off-road vehicle (ORV) use. Off-road vehicle areas and routes were to be "located to minimize damage to soil, watershed, vegetation, or other resources of the public lands...to minimize harassment of wildlife or significant disruption of wildlife habitats...[and] to minimize conflicts [with] other...recreational uses..."³ The agencies did their level best to ignore Nixon's ORV executive order.

