

WILD EARTH

The Journal of the
Wildlands Project

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Rod Nash on Wild Rivers

North of the 51st Parallel

The Joyful Terror of Oneness

What are Central America's Parks *For?*

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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.

WILD EARTH

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NOTE TO READERS

For 13 years, Wild Earth has provided a quarterly forum for conservation—and we look forward to continuing this role for years to come. However, in 2004 we will produce only two issues: spring/summer and fall/winter. As the back cover of this edition makes clear, our budget is tight. Like many in the conservation community, we have not been immune from downturns in the economy and shifts of focus among environmental grantmakers. With growth in our newly launched Wild Earth Fund—and your ongoing belief in our mission—we look forward to bringing you four issues in 2005.



We are not simply trying to delay the inevitable taking over of all our wilderness lands by a fast moving civilization. We are trying...to fashion a policy and develop a program that, if successful, will persist in perpetuity so that we shall always have these areas of wilderness.

—HOWARD ZAHNISER, FROM A 1957 SPEECH TO
THE NEW YORK CONSERVATION COUNCIL



Looking Back, Looking Ahead

ON JULY 29, 1946, the Zahniser family's first full day of vacation in the Adirondack mountains, Howard Zahniser awoke before dawn to watch the sunrise. He built the morning campfire, did camp chores, went for a 12-mile hike (much of it bushwacking), got back to the cabin for a late dinner, put the kids to bed, and enjoyed graham crackers and peaches with his wife Alice next to the fire until well after midnight; they eventually retired to bed at 1:30 AM. He concluded in his journal, "I think I got as much out of this day as there was in it."¹

Every American who has ever visited a federal wilderness area, or hopes to someday, or who endorses the notion that some parts of the American landscape should remain untrammelled—forever wild, self-willed lands—should be grateful that Howard Zahniser showed the same tireless zeal for life during the work week as he did on vacation.

Zahnie (as his friends called him) was, of course, the principal architect and author of the Wilderness Act and served as executive secretary of The Wilderness Society from 1945–1964. During this year's celebration of the Wilderness Act's 49th anniversary, conservationists will certainly be looking back and celebrating Howard Zahniser's central role in enacting a national legislative framework for wilderness protection. Newly emboldened by an improbable victory over the dam builders at Echo Park in Dinosaur National Monument, the conservation community worked cooperatively for wilderness legislation from the bill's introduction in 1956 until its passage eight long years later.

Zahnie, as David Brower recalled to me in 1998, was "the principal glue" that held the coalition together. "He was my coach," said Brower. "Terribly good man."² But neither Zahnie nor his long-time Wilderness Society colleague Olaus

Murie would see President Johnson sign the Wilderness Act in September of 1964; both were dead, Zahniser that July, just days after a final hearing on the legislation. Their widows, Alice Zahniser and Mardy Murie,³ stood next to the president as he formally signed the bill into law, creating our National Wilderness Preservation System.

Howard Zahniser remains a useful role model—a strategist whose knowledge of conservation history informed his vision for the future. Due largely to the energy and intellectual firepower of Robert Marshall and Aldo Leopold, the nascent wilderness movement of the 1920s had pushed successfully for designated wilderness areas on national forests, but by the 1940s it had become clear to some conservationists that such administrative protections were inadequate. Inspired by the constitutional protections afforded to state public lands within the Adirondack and Catskill State Parks by Article 14

of the New York State Constitution (the “forever wild” clause), Zahniser and others began laying the groundwork for federal legislation. He clearly believed that a national wilderness system was vital to Americans’ collective and individual identities, that we have “a fundamental need for...wilderness—a need that is not only recreational and spiritual but also educational and scientific, and withal essential to a true understanding of ourselves, our culture, our own natures, and our place in all nature.”

Howard Zahniser was correct that an expansive wilderness system would be the best way to secure the nation’s natural heritage for future generations, but his thinking was overly optimistic on one point. In a 1951 speech, he exhorted his fellow conservationists to “be done with a wilderness preservation program made up of a sequence of overlapping emergencies, threats, and defense campaigns! Let’s make a concerted effort for a positive program that will establish an enduring system of areas where we can be at peace and not forever feel that the wilderness is a battleground.”

Forty years later, an enduring system of federal wilderness areas comprising roughly 106 million acres does stretch from sea to shining sea, where visitors may find some peace from an ever-expanding technological civilization. But as every modern conservationist knows: the wilderness is still a battleground.⁴ Even while a proactive campaign to designate new wilderness areas is ongoing—from Vermont’s Green Mountain National Forest, to the redrock canyonlands of Utah, to the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge—the conservation movement is also engaged in defensive

campaigns, helping to fend off the overlapping emergencies of our day, an unprecedented series of attacks on public lands and environmental law.⁵ Defensive campaigns have absorbed the bulk of the conservation movement’s energy since the Bush Administration took office, but they are not new; threats to wildlands and wildlife have been ongoing regardless of which party or president holds office, and likely will ever remain so.

Just as the challenges are increasing, an economic downturn and related reduction in foundation giving is causing many conservation groups to face tough times. The Wildlands Project and *Wild Earth* are not immune from this belt-tightening climate. Due to budget constraints, we have decreased staff and will produce only two issues of the journal this year. Reducing frequency was a painful decision to make, and we hope to resume a quarterly publishing schedule in 2005. Meanwhile, we have commenced a dialogue about *Wild Earth*’s future, using this difficult time to think about the journal’s past and future role in the wilderness movement.

I firmly believe that through its first 13 years, *Wild Earth* has been an invaluable forum for discussion and debate, for strategizing—and for dreaming. We’ve looked back at some of the most compelling stories in conservation history, and looked ahead to a North American landscape where systems of conservation lands, anchored

by wilderness areas, form continental-scale wildlands networks. We’ve been willing to think boldly about the future, and in this way honor early wilderness visionaries like Howard Zahniser who wanted more than to “delay the inevitable,” but hoped to change the world. Indeed, *Wild Earth* serves much the same role today as The Wilderness Society’s periodical *The Living Wilderness* did in the middle twentieth century, under the editorship of Howard Zahniser: It’s an idea seed-bank—the research and development wing of the wilderness movement—and vital to developing tomorrow’s conservation strategies.

We invite you to help us keep those ideas flowing. In the coming months, many options are on the table for reinventing *Wild Earth*. We want your input—on format, content, funding sources, organizational structure—anything that might help the journal be better “glue” for the American wilderness movement, to borrow Brower’s metaphor. Write, call, or e-mail⁶ with your good ideas. And we hope to see you at one of the events around the country that will mark the Wilderness Act’s 40th anniversary.⁷ This could be a landmark year for the wilderness movement; as we look backward and forward, we can rededicate ourselves to work as hard “for eternity” as Howard Zahniser did, to get as much out of each day as there is in it.

~ Tom Butler

1. Ed Zahniser, ed., 1992, *Where Wilderness Preservation Began: Adirondack Writings of Howard Zahniser* (Utica: North Country Books), 17.
2. Interview: David Brower, 1998, *Wild Earth* 8(1): 33–38.
3. After Olaus Murie’s death, Mardy blossomed into a national wilderness leader in her own right. See tribute by Flo Shepard, 2003–2004, *Wild Earth* 13(4): 6–7.
4. Howie Wolke, 2003, National Wilderness System: Under Siege, *Wild Earth* 13(1): 15–19.
5. Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., 2001, Crimes Against Nature, *Rolling Stone* 937(Dec. 11).
6. E-mail editors Jennifer Esser (jennifer@wildlandsproject.org) or Josh Brown (josh@wildlandsproject.org).
7. See Announcements, page 80.

