



Bill Worf

**3710 American Way, Apt. 201**

**Missoula, Mt. 59808**

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Chris Wood

Trout Unlimited

Box 96090

Washington, DC, 20090-6090

Dear Chris;

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This letter is a followup to our phone conversation a few days ago when i told you that the new Administration needs to be made aware of a significant, and to some, a very surprising, threat to, what I believe, is one of our Nations most priceless heritage assets- the NATIONAL WILDERNESS PRESERVATION SYSTEM (NWPS). I want to stress up front that this is not a plea for large additions to that System. Nor is the threat caused by a serious lack of funding. The threat is caused by a lack of commitment, on the part of managing Agencies to follow clear Direction given to them by Congress! However, before describing the threat , I will give you and those with whom you share this letter, an overview of the history and current status of that System.

The first documented idea for such a System I have found tells me that the idea was born in 1913 in the heart and mind of Aldo Leopold, then Supervisor of the Carson National Forest in New Mexico., He and a District Ranger, Elliot Barker had been riding for several days in the Pacos River drainage of the Carson N.F. One night around the camp fire, Leopold , propounded the idea of preserving large areas of land in condition found by European settlers when they came to America. Elliot Barker documented this in a letter (August 12, 1959) to Senator Clinton B. Anderson who helped pilot the Wilderness Bill through Congress. Leopold continued to develop his idea and in 1924 fostered the first National Forest Wilderness - The Gila. Others supported the idea and the first Bill was introduced in Congress in 1956. It was introduced in the Senate by Hubert Humphrey -A Democrat from Minnesota and in the House by a Republican, John Saylor from Pennsylvania. It was hotly debated for 8 years and was finally enacted into law on September 3, 1964. This was a truly bipartisan effort. There were only 12 dissenting votes in the Senate and only 1 dissenting vote in the House.



The nucleus of the new System was 54 National Forest Areas totaling some 9.1 million acres. Subsequent Congresses have invested nearly 100 million additional acres of land and resources into improving the System. These lands are within the National Forest, National Parks, National Fish & Wildlife Refuges, and lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management. Total investment in the NWPS has grown to about 107 million acres in about 650 units scattered throughout the Nation. No other Nation in the World has any permanently protected System that can even come close to the size and importance of our NWPS.

MOST Americans are not used to thinking or visualizing the sizes of land areas in millions of acres. So here is an effort to present it in a more readily recognizable way.

- A 107,000,000 acre System is 167,187 Square miles.
- The State of Montana encompasses 147,046 Square miles.
- The State of North Dakota encompasses 70,704 Square miles.
- If we constructed a blanket the size of the Wilderness System it would cover all of Montana plus nearly 30% of North Dakota.

### SO WHY HAS CONGRESS MADE THIS INVESTMENT?

This huge investment of public land and resources was made for one purpose and only one purpose as spelled out in Section 2.(a) of the 1964 Act *“n order to assure that an increasing population, accompanied by expanding settlement and growing **mechanization**, does not occupy and modify all areas within the United States and its possessions, leaving no lands designated for preservation and protection **in their natural condition**, it is hereby declared to be the policy of the Congress to secure for the American people of present and **future generations** the benefits of an **enduring resource of wilderness.**”* Emphasis Added)

### WHAT DIRECTION DID CONGRESS GIVE TO MANAGERS?

The Act contain several special provisions and some specific prohibitions but the overriding mandate to all administering Agencies is found in Section 4.(b) which says:

*“Except as otherwise provided in this chapter, each agency administering any area designated as wilderness shall be **responsible for preserving the wilderness character of the area and shall so administer such area for such other purposes for which it may have been established as also to preserve its wilderness character.*** (emphasis added)

In other words the overriding mandate given by Congress to every manager is “keep this Wilderness at least as wild as it was on the day we added it to the NWPS (The non-degradation mandate!)

Section 2.(a) also contains one bit of direction that is seldom noticed by administrators. It says that units of the Wilderness System shall be



administered “... *for the gathering and dissemination of information regarding their use and enjoyment as wilderness*”

### **SO EXACTLY WHAT IS THE THREAT AND WHAT CAUSED IT?**

In a nutshell, it is that administering Agencies have failed to keep their employees or the public aware of the fact that each Wilderness is an integral part of the National System ! What happens in one Wilderness will have a ripple effect that will effect every other Wilderness in the System! Most of today's visitors to the System were still in elementary school or not yet born when the wilderness idea was being debated by Congress. The same can be said about responsible administrators. There has been no concerted (plan wise) effort over the past 44 years to gather and disseminate information regarding use and enjoyment as wilderness as mandated by Congress in Section 2.(a) of the 1964 Act. As a result users and managers alike tent to view each Wilderness as an entity by itself. Generally they think of it as “a nice area to recreate where there is no resource extraction and no roads.

As I pointe out above the System is managed by four different Agencies in two Departments. No one Agency has responsibility for the System as a whole. Each of the four Agencies have primary missions that sometimes compete with Wilderness objectives` This provides a strong incentive for managers to think and act as though they are managing Wildernesses under only their Agency’s rules. This was the major problem identified by the panel of ten National experts put to gather In 1999 by the Pinchot Institute. The panel worked for nearly 2 years and filed its Report in September 2001. (I mailed you a copy of that Report a few days ago) There has been no response from the Agencies!

### **WHAT CAN BE DONE TO COUNTER THIS THREAT?**

The only way this threat can be brought under control is for all four Agencies to embark on a concerted effort to remind all of their employees, cooperators and the general public that we are working to maintain an enduring System of Wildernesses for the benefit of present and future generations. They must impress upon all employees the NON DEGRADATION MANDATE given to them by Congress. Wilderness Watch will assist them in any way we can.

Having said this, I must say that I am somewhat pessimistic that this will happen unless the Congress intervenes. After all, the Act was passed giving this direction in 1964 (nearly 44 years ago). This need was highlighted by the Pinchot Panel in 2001 with no obvious response from the



Agencies. Wilderness Watch has participated in legal challenges of a large number of management actions. The Courts have found the Agencies in violation of the law in a majority of those cases! The Agencies seem to respond by trying to find “bullet proof” ways of getting around the law. As I said earlier it is probably time for the Congress to step in. The first step would be an audit by their General Accountability Office (GAO).

It is my considered opinion that the only permanent solution will be the establishment of a separate Agency “THE NATIONAL WILDERNESS SERVICE” with responsibility to provide oversight to insure that all Wildernesses are administered in strict compliance with the clear Congressional Direction given in the 1964 Act.

I believe that this NWPS should be a small Agency made up of Wilderness Professionals. The Wildernesses themselves would continue to be administered by the Agency responsible for administration of the land which surrounds the Wilderness. The NWPS would be located in one Department (probably Interior). Its mission would be simply to provide oversight to insure that clear Direction given by Congress is followed.

Chris, Please call on me if you have any questions. My phone # is 406-251-6210. I will be glad to work with folks in the new Administration or in Congress if I can help in any way. Thank you for listening.

Sincerely,  
*/s/ Bil Worf*  
Bill Worf

dd: Wilderness Watcy