

40 Years of the Wilderness Preservation Act

Amy Teegarden, Community Outreach Coordinator

Authors, philosophers, and preservationists have long struggled to define wilderness.

For some, it is a concept, a state of mind, opportunities. For many, wilderness is best described as a place where nature and its forces work undisturbed by human activities.

Wilderness has shaped our heritage and enriched our lives. In 1964, Congress passed the National Wilderness Preservation Act as a means to protect what remained of our Nation's last wild places. With the signing of the Wilderness Act by President Lyndon B. Johnson on September 3, 1964, the National Wilderness Preservation System was established to "...secure for the American people of present and future generations the benefits of an enduring resource of wilderness."

Congress defines Wilderness as an area untrammelled by humans. However, Native peoples inhabited these wilderness areas for millennia and today a broad range of human activities are still permitted in wilderness areas. Hiking, horseback riding, camping, hunting, fishing and grazing are all allowed. However, the use of mechanized or motorized equipment, including mountain bikes, generators, chain saws, is prohibited in wilderness.

The Helena National Forest manages two very diverse designated wilderness areas, the Gates of the Mountains and Scapegoat Wilderness areas. In 1964, Congress designated the 28,562 acre Gates of the Mountains Wilderness. Explorers Meriwether Lewis and William Clark entered the Rocky Mountains along the limestone cliffs that tower above the Missouri River to form the official Gates of the Mountains. While the Gates of the Mountains Wilderness is bordered by popular recreation attractions, it receives fewer visitors than many other wilderness areas in Montana. The area offers plenty of steep canyons, craggy peaks, and wide-open meadows. The habitat is excellent for birds of prey, mountain goats, and bighorn sheep. Late June and often through July a wild array

of flowers carpets the meadows, including lupine, larkspur, fairy slippers, and dogtooth violets

The Lincoln Ranger District of the Helena National Forest manages 80,697 acres of the 239,936-acre Scapegoat Wilderness. The Scapegoat was designated wilderness in 1972. The long northwest border of Scapegoat Wilderness is shared with the Bob Marshall Wilderness. The Scapegoat's rugged ridgetops slope down onto alpine meadows, heavily forested hillsides, and timbered river bottoms. Fish are plentiful in 14 lakes and 89 miles of streams. Elevations range from about 5,000 feet on the Blackfoot River to about 9,400 feet on Red Mountain. Wildlife includes wolverines, moose, deer, elk, mountain goats, mountain sheep, mountain lions, black bears, and numerous grizzly bears. Hunting season, opening the second half of September, draws the most visitors to this area. The Scapegoat includes 50 miles of the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail.

If you have any questions about the Gates of the Mountains Wilderness Area, please contact the Helena Ranger District at 449-5490. For questions concerning the Scapegoat Wilderness Area contact the Lincoln Ranger District at 362-4265

WILDERNESS PIONEERS

The USDA Forest Service has a long history of wilderness management. Aldo Leopold, Arthur Carhart, and Bob Marshall, all one-time Forest Service employees led the way. In 1924 the Forest Service designated the first wilderness area. Not until 1964 did the US Congress, through the Wilderness Act, assume the role of designating wilderness areas.

Arthur Carhart (1892-1973) became the USDA Forest Service's first full-time landscape architect in 1919. Assigned to plan recreational development of Trappers Lake in Colorado, he instead strived for keeping the lake roadless and pristine. It remains so to this day, the first formal application of the wilderness concept in the United States. In 1926 Carhart's efforts lead to the protection of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness. Carhart later wrote that "there is no higher service that forests can supply... than the healing of mind and spirit which comes from... great solitude."

Aldo Leopold (1887-1948) began his career with the USDA Forest Service in New Mexico. Inspired by Carhart's kindred spirit, he championed creation of the Gila Wilderness in 1924, the first designated wilderness area in the United States. Leopold later pioneered the field of wildlife management, weaving together forestry, agriculture, ecology, biology, zoology and education. His philosophy evolved from use-oriented conservation to a holistic view that soil, water, biota, and other factors are interwoven on the land. His land ethic has deeply influenced land managers worldwide.

Bob Marshall (1901-1939) foresaw early in his career a need to reserve a percentage of U.S. forest lands as recreation areas. In the 1930's, as chief of recreation for the Forest Service, he reformed the use of wilderness and primitive areas by banning logging, road-building, and motorized vehicles. With Aldo Leopold and others, he co-founded the Wilderness Society in 1935. In 1938, he took a team across the West to map and propose millions of acres for designation as primitive or wilderness areas. Shortly after his death, the Forest Service designated a wilderness in his honor, the Bob Marshall Wilderness in Montana.

Tri-County Fire Working Group—Recognition of a Partnership

Duane Harp, Helena District Ranger

Forest Supervisor Tom Clifford often comments that "there's little that we do that doesn't involve a partnership of one kind or another." Those partnerships range from volunteer groups to local and state governments to other Federal agencies, and are key to the Helena National Forest accomplishing its mission of 'caring for the land and serving people'.

One such partnership, which has provided many benefits to the Forest and the communities we serve, is the Tri-County Fire Working Group. It consists of members from disaster and emergency services for Broadwater, Lewis & Clark, and Jefferson Counties, Helena City Fire Department, Lewis & Clark County Rural Fire Council, Lewis & Clark County Sheriff's Department, Montana Department of Natural Resources, Helena National Forest, Butte Field Office of the BLM, and private citizens and contractors. The work group was formed in 1984 to address issues of mutual concern relative to the threat of wildfires. Sonny Stiger of Wolf Creek, one of the organizers of the group said the idea was based on his work with a similar group in Colorado. "Prior to forming the Tri-County Working Group, a lot of folks were working hard to improve the public's understanding of problems created by the build-up of forest fuels, but weren't making much progress. By working together, we were able to speak with one voice and people started to listen", said Stiger.

While the group has worked primarily on wildfire prevention, preparedness, and suppression issues, they have also dealt with

being prepared for and responding to other events such as floods and earthquakes.

The group's work has paid off in many ways, especially in the area of educating the public about the hazards associated with living in a forested environment where wildfire is always a potential risk. The group has produced brochures and sponsored public service announcements to heighten public awareness of the hazards of living in the "wildland-urban interface". They also undertook a major mapping project which displays the fuel hazard ratings for the tri-county area, and conducted workshops on how property owners can create "defensible spaces" around their homes. They have assisted in developing interagency fire protection plans and provided support for acquiring State and Federal grants for assisting private landowners in reducing fuels on their properties. Of particular significance are the close working relationships developed among members that have paid big dividends in responding to stressful events such as the fire seasons of 2000 and 2003. Paul Spengler, Lewis and Clark County Director of Emergency Services and chair of the working group said "working together on these many issues has served to strengthen our ability to act together in a positive way during emergencies."

The Helena National Forest is proud to be associated with such a fine group of dedicated individuals who care deeply about the communities and people they serve.