

## **Interview with Paul Torrence 11/19/2016**

***WLT: Tell us about your connection to wilderness.***

PT: Well that's at least half my life. From the time I got out of graduate school to now, as soon as I heard the idea about wilderness I was involved in it. When the Wilderness Act passed (1964), we needed to deal with the fact that much of the eastern lands had been impacted by man and would not be wilderness. So we scoped out places that could become wilderness. For instance Shenandoah National Park had incredible areas but had been logged. There were so many wonderful people like Ernie Dickerman who were involved and helped pass the Eastern Wilderness Act in 1975 (resulting in the designation of 16 wilderness areas in the East). I am still working on the George Washington-Thomas Jefferson National Forest (where one million acres have been designated wilderness). There are so many places there where I obtained a refuge.

It is to some extent unappreciated there is so much diversity in the Appalachians.

***WLT: What are some of your favorite Wilderness Areas?***

PT: I have a list as long as your arm. It is almost like trying to choose a favorite child. And they are so different. There are places like Otter Creek, Dolly Sods and the Cranberry Wilderness Areas (West Virginia). I have to say in the West, it is the Wind River Mountains (Bridger Wilderness, Wyoming). I have never been in such a wonderful place. Then there is the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, where I spent a month one time. It is 19 M acres with all kinds of ecosystems including high peaks, glaciers, riparian habitat, and coastal plain. It is the home of the caribou and the grizzly, one of the few places on earth where when you are lucky you can see the tracks of a grizzly cross the tracks of the polar bear cross the tracks of the wolverine. When I lived in Flagstaff, there it was the San Francisco Peaks (Kachina Peaks Wilderness).

***WLT: What wilderness values are most important to you?***

PT: I look at things from a view of a person who values solace, refuge, beauty, birds and plants, as well as challenge and adventure. The older I get the more attracted I get to adventure. All that brought me over time is an appreciation of biodiversity on this planet. From a scientific point of view and an interest in the future of human beings, all life has the right to exist. I came to that view from being in wilderness. It kind of determines your fate. Wilderness is important from all perspectives, from recreation to living life itself. When my son graduated from college we visited the Arctic Wildlife Refuge. It was one of the high points of our relationship. My family grew up learning to love wilderness and visiting it. We bonded by time spent together in the outdoors. When my daughter went to college, she called to say, "Dad, I told my friends some of the stuff we used to do together. They were so amazed that we did those things."

***WLT: What is it about Wilderness that inspires you?***

PT: Wilderness is a place of life, life is going on the way it has for millions of years. It is a place where you get to be in contact with water and forest, where there is nothing artificial. To let wild places enter you, let nature enter you, you get a sense of what life is really about. There is a sacredness of all life on earth that gives us an appreciation of each other. We get reminded of how simple and graceful everything really is.

***WLT: Why do you support the Wilderness Land Trust?***

PT: Well, I want my grandchildren and their children and the next seven generations to experience wilderness. Because there will be about one billion more people on the planet by the end of this century, we have to protect a few places for wilderness. That is why it is so important and we can all benefit. I see the dangers of inholdings in wilderness areas. Once when I came upon an inholding on a wilderness backpacking trip, three miles in this beautiful open grasslands with aspens and evergreens, all of a sudden there was this large modern log cabin palace set right in the middle of the wilderness. It was a feeling of being wrong. I came to find out that it is extremely damaging biologically, far beyond the actual footprint of the development. I want to see wilderness preserved. The Trust provides certain safeguards we have to take to make sure Wilderness Areas will be intact.

***WLT: When you think of The Wilderness Land Trust, what key words or phrases come to your mind?***

PT: Efficiency. Dollar-for-dollar, bang-for-your-buck The Trust is highly efficient. I have met the people and I know they are so darn good at what they do in this tough business. It says a lot about them. It feels satisfying. I support advocacy, but that work never ends. The Trust's work results in a piece of land, this place that I have helped set aside and preserve. For anyone who feels a connection to the land, there is a great deal of satisfaction.

You see results: a place that is sacred and you helped make sure it stays that way.

***WLT: What aspect of WLT's work gives you the most satisfaction?***

PT: The done deal is great. It is also nice to know that The Trust has many deals going on all the time. It takes a long time and patience to complete these deals. The Trust never rests on its laurels. There are always many more projects on the back burners so they are always moving on. The best shot at preserving these places is being taken by the Trust.

***WLT: What is the single most important consideration in your decision to support WLT?***

PT: I like to know as much possible about causes I support. I like to know how it works. And I like to know the people, to know they are dedicated. I know this organization is efficient. The work is work that needs to be done, and it is magnified by the surrounding wilderness it protects. I know what is being done with my dollar. It is not going into the cloud somewhere.

***WLT: What result/impact/outcome are you most proud you were able to help achieve during your time on the Wilderness Land Trust Board of Directors?***

PT: I am most proud of a Mendocino National Forest one square mile project. Small projects can make the biggest difference. It was a former ranch with a six-mile road that went through wilderness and left a scar on the wilderness. And there were lots of detrimental impacts on the water and the wilderness. This project eliminated the road and the damage it caused the surrounding wilderness.

Of course, the Sabinoso (New Mexico) is a premier acquisition and a crown jewel accomplishment.

And in the Sierra's, The Trust's 2000-acre project in the Domeland Wilderness (California) connected two wilderness areas together.

This is very vital work, getting these inholdings placed into Wilderness. So much has been done and there is so much left to do.

*Paul F. Torrence is a retired Emeritus Professor of Chemistry and Biochemistry, Northern Arizona University. His career spanned 30 years at the US National Institutes of Health where he was a Section Chief and then 8 years at Northern Arizona University where he was department chair for 3 years. He has published more than 200 scientific papers and edited 4 books in medicinal chemistry, biochemistry, and drug discovery.*