



THE WILDERNESS LAND TRUST

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60TH ANNIVERSARY OF
THE WILDERNESS ACT



MISSION

We Keep the Promise of Wilderness – by acquiring and transferring private lands to public ownership to complete designated and proposed wilderness areas, or directly protect wilderness values.

VALUES

We revere our remaining wild places, a legacy to pass on to future generations, the tenacity to work until the job is done and treating everyone with fairness.

VISION

A future where all wilderness areas are complete and protected from development, where their biodiverse landscapes thrive, sustain life, and provide refuge for wildlife and people alike.

The Trust adopted this new vision statement in February 2024 reflecting our hope for wilderness to be as vital and vibrant in another 60 years as it is today.

On the cover: Waterfall near Macey Lakes, Colorado. John Fielder photo

FROM THE PRESIDENT

As I have had the pleasure of meeting many of you over the years, you have shared your personal stories about the exact moment when you fell in love with a wild place, leading to your lifelong devotion to see such landscapes protected, and commitment to generously support our work. This past summer I was able to witness such a moment firsthand.

For nearly three decades I have been blessed with the opportunity to spend time on the trail during the summer with a group of guys my wife affectionally calls “The Five Nice Guys Hiking Club.” Our latest adventure, a 10-day, 9-night trek, included William, the polite 15-year-old son of one of our group.

This was to be his first true wilderness adventure, and the first three days were challenging with heavy afternoon thunderstorms, blisters on both feet, long distances between campsites, and hungry mosquitos. Not to mention the fish refusing to bite as he repeatedly tried out his new backpacking fly rod!

Midway through the trip I was worried that the challenge might be too much. But as the sun came out and we broke camp on the fourth day, I asked William how he was doing. He looked up at me as he was shouldering his pack with a huge smile on his face and said “I can’t wait to see what happens today,” and truth be told that smile never left his face the entire rest of the trip.

This year marks the 60th anniversary of the passage of the Wilderness Act, a landmark conservation law passed in 1964 to permanently protect our nation’s biodiverse ecosystems and wildest places, giving generations of people, just like William, the opportunity to escape the hustle and bustle of urban life and have life-changing experiences. But even with the highest level of protection, these lands still remain at risk.



Protecting federally designated wilderness from the threat of residential, commercial, and industrial development is the heart and soul of what we do here at The Wilderness Land Trust. For the past 32 years we have worked tirelessly to protect nearly 58,000 acres, while transferring 579 parcels over to public ownership in 120 unique wilderness areas. Thanks to loyal supporters like you, we have added to wilderness every single year since our organization began.

With your generous support of the Trust and our work to protect our wildest places, you are ensuring the legacy of the Wilderness Act: that future generations will enjoy the discovery of a remote high mountain lake, the scent of fields of wildflowers in full bloom or watching wild animals undisturbed in their natural environment. As you enjoy this newsletter, I hope you are filled with pride, as I am, for what we have been able to accomplish together to protect this legacy for members of William’s generation and beyond.

Brad Borst, President



INNOVATING THE NEXT CHAPTER OF WILDERNESS CONSERVATION

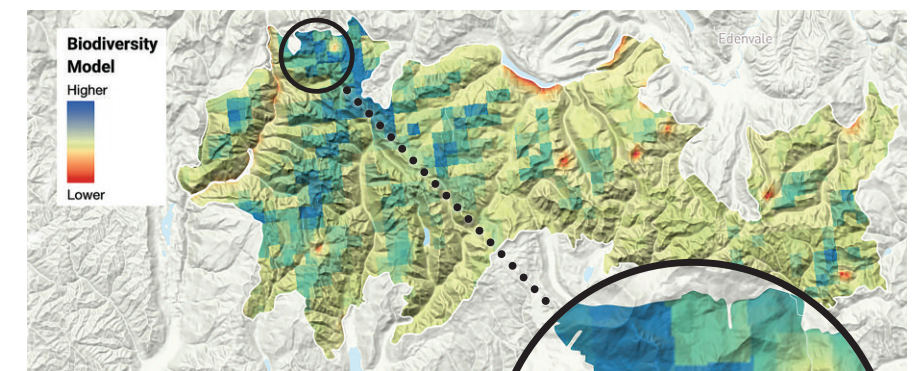
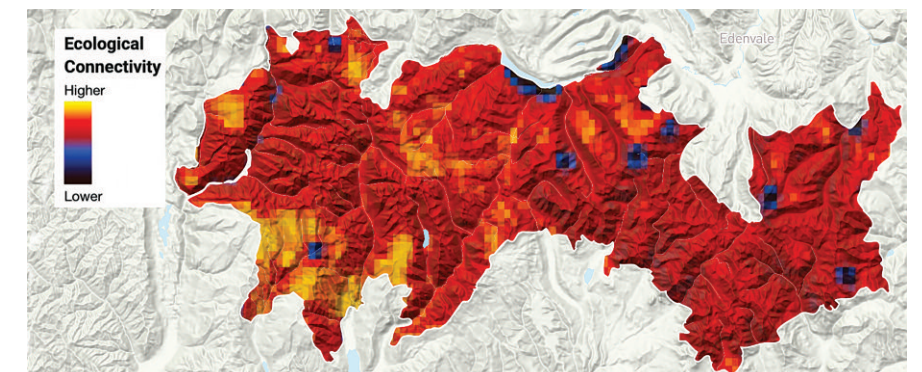
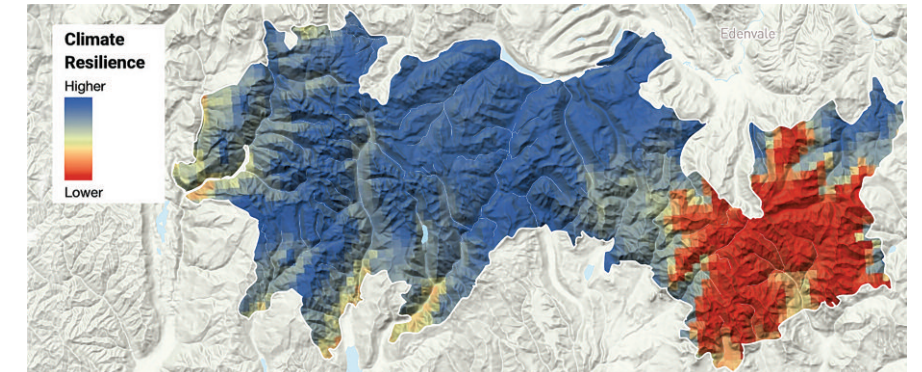
The Wilderness Land Trust is building a first-of-its-kind GIS database to map private lands in and around wilderness areas and analyze their conservation values. For those unfamiliar with GIS, Stu Smith, a retired GIS professional donating his services on the project, likes to explain it like a big map overlaid with transparent sheets showing things like land ownership, soil types, watersheds or wildlife migration corridors, all georeferenced, or lined with up with the map and each other. These sheets can be viewed in any combination to see how they intersect.

This project represents a huge leap forward in our work. For most of the Trust’s 32-year history, we have relied on a largely manual system for inventorying private wilderness inholdings. For a small organization with a staff of five, this new GIS tool will profoundly impact our work. Across the country are over 180 million land ownership parcels in 3,200 counties and thousands of different parcels of conservation lands including wilderness. “GIS analysis can not only find where private parcels intersect with Wilderness Areas, but it can also define relationships between them. The computational power required to conduct this analysis at a nationwide scale far exceeds what could ever be done manually, making GIS exponentially faster and more efficient,” explains Stu. The product is a complete inventory of private properties across the country that are within, adjoining, or near designated wilderness, along with other kinds of conservation lands like proposed wilderness, inventoried roadless areas, or wild and scenic river corridors.

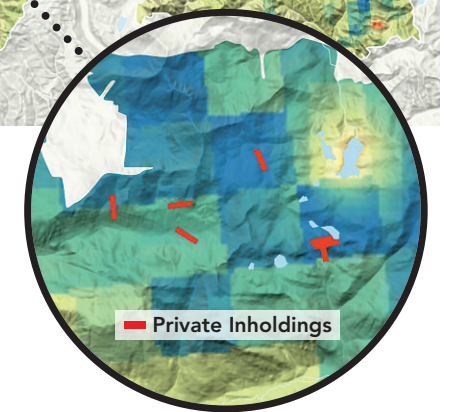
With the inventory built, we can analyze each parcel for different conservation values using landscape-scale datasets capturing ecological factors like vegetation as well as complex conservation values like

biodiversity, habitat connectivity, and climate. By mapping these layers over our inventory of private parcels in and around wilderness, we can better prioritize potential projects and understand the impacts of our work across larger landscapes.

This tool will help carry our work forward for the decades to come as we continue to deepen our impact in western states, and expand our reach east of the Rockies. We are asking you to join us in investing in this work and the future of our wild places.



GIS maps show climate resilience, ecological connectivity, and biodiversity across the Weminuche Wilderness, located northeast of Durango, CO. Zooming in, we can see how these factors vary across several wilderness inholdings.



CELEBRATING AN AMERICAN LEGACY

Passage of the Wilderness Act designated 54 wilderness areas in 13 states, covering 9.1 million acres. Today there are over 750 designated areas covering almost 112 million acres, with wilderness areas in all but six states. Pictured: Wee Thump Joshua Tree Wilderness in Nevada.

60 YEARS AGO, WITH 446 YEAS AND 13 NAYS, CONGRESS PASSED THE WILDERNESS ACT.

Shortly after, on September 3, President Lyndon Johnson signed it into law, creating the National Wilderness Preservation System as a protective overlay for public lands, defining how wilderness would be managed, and establishing the first round of designated wilderness areas.

The road leading to the passage of the Act was long, beginning decades earlier with the work of Aldo Leopold, Arthur Carhartt, Bob Marshall, and their contemporaries who sought a more stringent form of protection for the nascent public lands they were tasked with stewarding. In 1956 Howard Zahniser penned the first draft of the Wilderness Act, and by 1964 he had rewritten it 66 times. When we talk about the history of the Wilderness Act, these are the names we've come to know. To use a very un-wilderness-like metaphor, they laid the foundation for America's wilderness system brick by brick, with this landmark legislation as its cornerstone.

If the foundation was laid by these fathers of American conservation, the house that sits on it has been built by many more who go largely unnamed. Passage of the Wilderness Act designated 54 wilderness areas in 13 states, covering 9.1 million acres. Today there are over 750 designated areas covering almost 112 million acres, with wilderness areas in all but six states. That we enjoy over 12x more wilderness today than when it was first established is in large part thanks to grassroots efforts across the country, local communities coming together to protect the wild places they love. How we tell the story of wilderness matters in who will feel welcome in it and how it will endure. So as we celebrate the foundation, we must also make the story expansive enough to fit the whole house – to reflect what we've accomplished and what we've learned in the 60 years since it was laid.

Upon signing the Wilderness Act President Johnson said, "So it seems to me that this reflects a new and strong national consensus to look ahead, and, more than that, to plan ahead; better still, to move ahead. We know that America cannot be made strong by leadership which reacts only to the needs or the irritations or the frustrations of the moment. True leadership must provide for the next decade and not merely the next day." The language of the Wilderness Act reaches beyond simply regulating the next day to inspire the next decade, or six. In many ways it reads more like poetry than legislation, imagining vast landscapes where "in contrast with those areas where

man and his works dominate the landscape... the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain."

The Wilderness Act and The Civil Rights Act were passed within months of each other, each codifying new protections and visions for a brighter future. The Civil Rights Act didn't singlehandedly remove all inequity and discrimination, and we continue to understand and address their reach and impact today. We also continue to better understand and address how those forces have impacted our idea of wilderness. Wilderness functions within the system of land ownership and use stemming from the disenfranchisement of native and enslaved communities. The way wilderness is defined by the Act as a resource, as untrammelled, where man is a visitor, reflects a relationship to land that discounts indigenous connections, often excluding traditional practices. So as we celebrate the 60th anniversary of both Acts we also recognize that the work to carry out their visions are ongoing.



"True leadership must provide for the next decade and not merely the next day."

– President Johnson, upon signing the Wilderness Act

At The Wilderness Land Trust we work every day to carry this vision forward, to keep the promise of wilderness. With each property restored to its natural character and each acre protected, a tear in the fabric of wilderness is mended. With each we come one step closer to the Act's vision for a future where all wilderness areas are complete and protected from development, where their biodiverse landscapes thrive, sustain life, and provide refuge for wildlife and people alike. We are also working to open more windows and doors into the house of America's wilderness legacy – to let in the light and lay down the welcome mats, to ensure that we can all find our home in it.

Tell us what you're celebrating most for the 60th anniversary of the Wilderness Act! Take our annual community survey.
www.wildernesslandtrust.org/survey



scan me



RECENT SUCCESSES

Throughout the past year, the Trust has protected private properties in and around wilderness areas across the country with a value of over \$4.5 M. But the true value of these landscapes is greater than their sale price or total acreage, it is what makes them wild.

CONNECTED ECOSYSTEMS

With each private property we protect, we come one step closer to a connected, resilient ecosystem where wildlife has room to roam. The Silver Creek Drainage in Washington’s **Wild Sky** and **Henry M. Jackson Wilderness Areas** is a prime example of how our work has unified the patchwork of ownership and protection over time. This year the Trust added nine properties in the drainage to public ownership, bring the total protected to 21. Adjoining California’s **Sanhedrin Wilderness**, 917 acres have been protected, connecting a critical wildlife corridor through lower-elevation habitats and the mature fir forests that blanket the high country. In southwest Colorado, the Trust protected 17 private properties in

and around the **proposed Handies Peak** and **Red Cloud wilderness areas**, removing barriers to their possible future designation. As the Trust’s first project in Utah, we are working to connect the **Cougar Canyon** and **Slaughter Creek Wilderness Areas** with the protection of 713 high-development-risk acres.

PROTECTED WATERSHEDS

Clean water is one of the many ecosystem services we rely on from undeveloped lands. In New Mexico, 57 acres have been added to **Santa Fe National Forest** protecting Frijoles Springs, transferring its associated water rights to public ownership. A section of the Little Chetco River in Oregon’s **Kalmiopsis Wilderness** that was once an active dredge mining

operation has been restored to its wild character and added to the wilderness area, protecting important salmon and steelhead spawning grounds. Similarly, in Northern California we protected sections of Hat Creek in the



Lost Creek Proposed Wilderness, upstream of larger fisheries restoration efforts by local tribes and conservation groups. Along Idaho’s Salmon River, cutting a steep canyon through the **Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness**, the Trust recently added 37 acres to the wilderness. And finally, in our first project east of the Rockies, we have secured the connection between Virginia’s **Priest Wilderness** and Tye River, a drinking water source for 4 million people and a tributary of the imperiled Chesapeake Bay Watershed.

PUBLIC ACCESS

It’s not uncommon for public access through private wilderness inholdings to rely on handshake agreements or the good-will of landowners, leaving it vulnerable. In Colorado, recent projects have protected popular trails serving as wilderness gateways, as well as off-trail routes for summiting two of the state’s 14,000 ft peaks. Just outside the **Mt. Massive Wilderness**, 270 acres stretching from a stream-side trail almost to the summit of Mount Champion have been protected. Not far from there, 650 acres adjoining the **Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness** have been protected in partnership with Pitkin County, CO, including two very popular trails. Farther south, the slopes of Blanca Peak, just outside the **Sangre de Cristo Wilderness** have also been secured. Finally, in coastal California, 160 acres providing public access with a trailhead connecting two popular **Ventana Wilderness** trails has been protected.

Top: Access to the slopes of Blanca Peak, just outside the Sangre de Cristo Wilderness in Colorado, have been secured.

Left: Clean water is one of the many ecosystem services we rely on from undeveloped lands.

THESE SUCCESSES ARE MADE POSSIBLE BY OUR WONDERFUL SUPPORTERS

Donors like **Lou Bubala** are investing in the Trust’s work to protect not just the wild places they love most, but wild places across the country benefiting communities beyond their own.

Growing up in Indiana, Lou’s first memories of wilderness were from annual family trips to places like Yellowstone and Pikes Peak, a tradition carried on from his mother’s childhood. After starting a family, moving west for law school, and settling just outside Reno, NV, Lou found himself surrounded by the kinds of wild places he’d visited as a kid. Inspired to get to know his new wilderness backyard, he and his 5-year-old son showed up for a National Public Lands Day volunteer project with Friends of Nevada Wilderness and were hooked. Since then, Lou and his family have participated in their wilderness stewardship projects across the state, and Lou eventually joined the organization’s board of directors.

As an attorney, he found his loves for wilderness and the law intersecting when he began working with a rural ranch going through bankruptcy that included an inholding used for grazing in the Goshute Canyon Wilderness. Wondering what could

be done to protect the inholding property, he brought it to Friends of Nevada Wilderness, who introduced him to The Wilderness Land Trust. While that particular inholding property remained under private ownership, Lou kept in touch with the Trust: “I started donating, getting the newsletters, and learning more about what the Trust does, not just in Nevada but across the country. I’ve really enjoyed getting to know the staff, especially Brad and Aimee.”

A few years ago, Lou and his wife Jill switched from an annual gift to monthly giving, a decision he says has made their life easier. “Like most people, we’d wait till the end of the year and make a bunch of donations that would all stack up at once. These days it’s so easy to set up automatic monthly giving, so we started it with a few of the organizations we care most about, including the Trust. Now when we get to the end of the year, we don’t have to worry about whether we remembered to give, it’s already taken care of, and what we’d normally give as an annual gift has been spread out throughout the year.”

Are you interested in switching your giving to monthly donations? Contact us for more information!



The Bubala family in Death Valley National Park



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SPRING 2024 NEWS

JOIN US IN KEEPING THE PROMISE OF WILDERNESS!



Whether you give once a year, monthly, through a donor-advised fund, or as part of your planned giving, you are building a legacy of conservation in the wild places you love.

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