



SPRING 2025

FINDING WILDNESS
CLOSE TO HOME

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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.

On the cover:
Mt. Rainier

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Spring.

Noun. 1) A time or season of growth or development. Verb. 2) to make a leap

This spring marks my ninth year as president of The Wilderness Land Trust, a personally meaningful journey of exciting new growth both for myself and this organization that accomplishes so much with so little to protect some of our nation's wildest places.

During my time as president, the Trust has grown the scope and impact of our work. We have expanded where we work across the country, from Alaska to Arizona to Virginia. And we have improved how we identify and prioritize the most critical conservation threats in those areas with the first-ever GIS based national inventory of private inholdings and edgeholdings.

The Trust's team has grown from three to seven smart, creative and talented individuals, who never fail to amaze me with how much one person can accomplish when they're driven by passion and a mission they truly believe in. The board of directors has evolved as well, building on a core of long-time members with more diversity, talent and experience than ever before.

My time at the Trust has also come with challenges: From particularly complex land deals to the Covid-19 pandemic, our team has overcome every head-scratching hurdle we've faced. Unwavering in our pursuit of the Trust's mission, we have persisted in adding acres to wilderness every single year. Looking ahead, I have no doubt the Trust will continue this track record of success.

I have decided that this coming year will be my last as president of The Wilderness Land Trust. Just as spring brings fresh ideas, fresh energy, and fresh perspectives, I look forward to seeing what new growth will come in this next season.

Which brings me to this spring – a time of growth, development, and making a leap. After so many years at the helm, I have decided that this coming year will be my last as president of The Wilderness Land Trust. These nine years with the Trust have been one of the most fulfilling chapters of my conservation career, and working with and getting to know all of you has made it a joyful one.

Just as spring brings fresh ideas, fresh energy, and fresh perspectives, I look forward to seeing what new growth will come in this next season, both for the Trust and myself. Over the next year I, and our staff, will continue carrying our mission forward as our board conducts a national search to find the best and brightest next president to lead the Trust into the future. I have every confidence this transition will strengthen the organization as we continue to evolve and grow.

With a heart full of gratitude, I hope you will join me in celebrating all that we have accomplished together during the past decade, and in looking forward to this exciting new chapter for The Wilderness Land Trust.

Onward!

Brad Borst, President



Meet Trust Supporters Jack and Sheri Overall

FINDING WILDNESS CLOSE TO HOME

When we talk about wilderness, we usually mean designated wilderness areas – large connected landscapes with a strict set of protections to ensure they remain untrammelled by man. But wildness exists on a spectrum of different scales and contrast to the built world around it. Jack and Sheri Overall are no strangers to designated wilderness, having spent a lifetime visiting the peaks and granite walls of Yosemite National Park and the rainforests and rugged coastlines of Kaua'i. But now in their 80s, the Overalls have come to appreciate small glimpses of wildness close to home just as much.

Both from California, they've made their home on nine acres in the foothills of Santa Barbara, tucked between the Santa Ynez Mountains and sandy beaches. There, they see the changing seasons reflected in the native plants that surround their home. Each year they watch as chicks are hatched and fledged in a resident hawk's nest, and as cougars and other

wildlife pass through. "At our age we've come to realize you don't have to be out in the wilderness to feel connected and enjoy the experience of the wild," they say.

This perspective has led Jack and Sheri to support both local conservation initiatives like the Land Trust for Santa Barbara County, as well as national efforts to protect wilderness. Aimee Rutledge, our Vice President and Senior Lands Specialist, remembers first meeting the Overalls in 2010 when they supported a Trust project in the nearby San Rafael Wilderness: "What has made working with Jack and Sheri over the years so great is that they see the big picture. They are dedicated to conservation of the local lands around them, but also care deeply about wilderness as a whole. Not only do they see the need for the Trust's work, but they see our bigger vision, and they've been very supportive of projects like our GIS inventory which will help propel our work into the future."



"The Trust is a well-run, focused, and thoughtful organization, and we've appreciated how effective they are able to be. We've supported certain projects throughout the years, but when Aimee told us about the Trust's

Each year Jack and Sheri watch as chicks are hatched and fledged in a resident hawk's nest.



"Jack and Sheri see the big picture. They are dedicated to conservation of the local lands around them, but also care deeply about wilderness as a whole."

strategic plan and GIS inventory project we were intrigued by the impact we could have at a broader level through it," says Sheri. "What the Trust does can't be trivialized – it's smart and strategic, they cover a lot of ground to do a lot of good, and avoid a lot of bad."

The Overalls have seen a lot of change in the wild places they love. "I'm old enough to remember a time when connecting to the outdoors was easier, when our kids could walk out the back door and be on a trail. We took it for granted" says Jack. When it comes to the future, they're committed to making sure their grandkids, who range in age from 15 to 25, have the same opportunities, whether close to home or in the remote solitude of wilderness. But for Jack and Sheri, legacy isn't something to passively leave for the future, it's something to actively engage in now: "Our concept is let's use our money now, while we're alive. Let's do what we can while we're here, and see the impact it can have for ourselves, rather than just leave it behind".

RECENT SUCCESSSES

Throughout the past year, the Trust has protected private properties in and around wilderness areas across the country with a value of over \$36.4M. But the true value of these landscapes is greater than their sale price or total acreage, it is how they inspire us and what makes them wild.



PUBLIC ACCESS

For many people the ability to access wilderness areas by trail or river forms the foundation for their conservation ethic. Oftentimes that public access is precarious, built on handshake agreements where trails cross private wilderness inholdings. Protecting access for the next generation of wilderness lovers is an important part of our mission. Thanks to your support, we made significant strides protecting public access on two popular trails in Colorado's **Weminuche Wilderness**: the Needle Creek Trail accessing Chicago Basin and the surrounding 14ers, and the Whitehead Trail which connects with the Continental Divide Trail.

Also in Colorado, public access was protected on the Green Mountain Trail in the **Collegiate Peaks Wilderness**. How we experience wilderness is influenced not just by the ground our feet travel, but also the views that we take in. That same project also protected viewsheds for the hundreds of thousands who come each summer to explore Independence Pass. In the **Raggeds Wilderness** we protected the viewshed of popular trails like Baxter Basin and Daisy Pass, ensuring a sense of solitude in the wilderness experience for those traversing the rugged landscape.

PROTECTED WATERSHEDS

We all rely on the clean water flowing from wilderness areas, whether for our drinking water, to fish, to swim and boat in, or to grow our food. Protecting watersheds, the area from which water flows into our streams and rivers, is essential to all life on earth. In Idaho's **Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness**, the largest wilderness area in the lower 48 states, we recently partnered with the Payette Land Trust to protect Annie Creek, a tributary of the Wild and Scenic Middle Fork of the Salmon River. In northern California's **Mount Lassic Wilderness** we also protected Bear Creek, a tributary of the



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Van Duzen and Eel Rivers, which host healthy salmon and steelhead runs. Protecting cold water tributaries like Bear Creek is increasingly important to maintaining healthy fisheries with a changing climate. In the arid landscape of southern New Mexico's **Gila Wilderness**, our Spring Canyon project protected a critical year-round water source, as well as an area which runs off into the Middle Fork of the Gila River during the monsoon rains.

CONNECTED LANDSCAPES

Private inholdings are like tears in the fabric of wilderness protection. Our work focuses on mending them to make wilderness whole. Connected landscapes allow wildlife the room they need to roam and are more resilient to climate change. Both are important factors in maintaining biodiversity. With your help, we are mending 15 of these tears in Washington's **Wild Sky Wilderness** as we transfer a package of projects totaling 650 acres to be added to the wilderness area, the culmination of years of work in the Silver Creek drainage. In the **Fossil Ridge Wilderness** of Colorado we removed the threat of development from 11 parcels on the

slopes of Cross Mountain which straddle the wilderness boundary and have nearby road access, making them particularly vulnerable. Also in Colorado, where the **Uncompahgre Wilderness** and **Handies Peak** and **Red Cloud Peak Wilderness Study Areas** meet, we further built on a recent project that protected 17 parcels with the acquisition of another 13 parcels. All of these projects helped unify protection and remove management conflicts across the landscape.

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THE ANATOMY OF A PROJECT

The projects that the Trust takes on are as diverse as the landscapes we work to protect. Some are relatively straightforward, but most are quite complex. And while each is a bit different, they often follow the same path and have common elements. This process commonly takes 2–5 years.



POTENTIAL PROJECT IDENTIFIED

To connect with landowners interested in selling or donating their property to us to be protected:

- We systematically send letters to landowners in our GIS inventory of inholdings
- Local community and agency partners bring projects to us
- Landowners hear about the Trust through word of mouth



DUE DILIGENCE COMPLETED

Because many of the properties we protect were once mining claims or have been in families for generations, transactions are rarely straightforward. We complete due diligence for all of our projects including:

- Appraisal to determine fair market value
- Legal actions to resolve title issues
- Environmental assessment



FUNDRAISING

For every project we must raise the funds needed to purchase a property, including its appraised value, due diligence, and closing costs, as well as costs associated with transferring the property. In order to be able to complete purchases when the opportunity arises, we depend on contributions to our Wilderness Opportunity Fund (WOF).



CONSERVATION VALUES ASSESSED

Once a potential project is identified, our staff will assess its conservation values, including its:

- threat of development
- biodiversity
- climate resilience
- wildlife migration corridors
- water resources
- public access
- management conflict

At this stage we will also begin working with our agency partners to ensure acquiring the property is a priority for them.



RESTORATION

Depending on the property, restoration work is sometimes needed to return it to its wilderness character prior to being transferred. This can include removing structures, hauling out trash or old mining equipment, closing mine adits, taking down fences, removing invasive weeds, or replanting riparian areas.



TRANSFER COMPLETED

Once we transfer the property to public ownership, the Trust no longer owns it, you, and all Americans do! If the property is an inholding, surrounded by designated wilderness on all sides, it will be added to the wilderness area automatically upon transfer. If it adjoins wilderness, it will be added to the surrounding National Forest, National Park, or BLM lands, typically to be managed as wilderness.



AGENCY DUE DILIGENCE COMPLETED

Before the federal agency can accept the transfer of the property, they must complete their own due diligence. This often means conducting a second appraisal and environmental assessment.

- Appraisal to determine fair market value
- Environmental assessment
- Transfer funding secured

PURCHASE COMPLETED

The Trust now owns the property, but it is only halfway to our ultimate mission of adding it to public lands.

OUR WORK IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER

THROUGHOUT THE WILDERNESS LAND TRUST'S 33-YEAR HISTORY

we've successfully worked with seven different presidential administrations with a wide range of approaches to conservation and public lands. Our focus has always been to have a real and tangible impact in our wild places by directly acquiring private lands in and around them that are at risk of development, rather than engaging in advocacy work. Just as wilderness is nonpartisan, so is the Trust.

As President Trump's new administration reaches their first 100 days in office, we are getting a better understanding of their priorities and plans for wilderness and public lands, and how they may impact our work.

As with any new administration, it is a mix of knowns and unknowns.

● **The strength of The Wilderness Act remains unchanged.** Any change to the protections the 1964 act has put in place for the 111 million acres of designated wilderness across the country would require an act of Congress. Members of Congress know that wilderness enjoys broad bipartisan support and any move to undermine its protections would almost certainly face public opposition.

● **The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) is mandatory, permanently authorized spending.** Funded by revenue from offshore oil and gas leases, LWCF supports everything from building local playgrounds to acquiring private wilderness inholdings. In 2019 the Dingle Act, which was signed into law by President Trump, mandated that \$900M of LWCF funds be authorized each year. The majority of the Trust's transfers are funded by LWCF.

● **Projects must be moved through the pipeline by agency staff at multiple levels.** The process of transferring projects to public ownership requires work from our agency partners at multiple levels: from site visits by local staff to transaction support by regional realty staff. This process could slow, or even stop, whether by directive from the administration, or as agency capacity is limited by federal workforce reductions.

● **The good news is the Trust's work is designed to be patient.** Under the best of circumstances it often take 2–5 years from when we acquire a private property till it transfers to public ownership. So if this timeline slows, or even pauses, our ability to continue patiently holding properties until they can be transferred is part of what makes the trust so uniquely effective. In the meantime, with your support, we can continue acquiring and protecting properties at high risk of development.

To learn more about supporting our continued work through the Wilderness Opportunity Fund, please contact Brad Borst, brad@wildernesslandtrust.org or 206-397-5240.



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SPRING 2025 NEWS

JOIN US IN KEEPING THE PROMISE OF WILDERNESS!



Together we can continue having a direct and tangible impact in our wild places, but we need your support now more than ever. **A gift made today will help build a conservation legacy that will last long into the future.**

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**Please join us
in welcoming
Jordan Jimmie
to our board
and Liz Seger
to our staff!**

