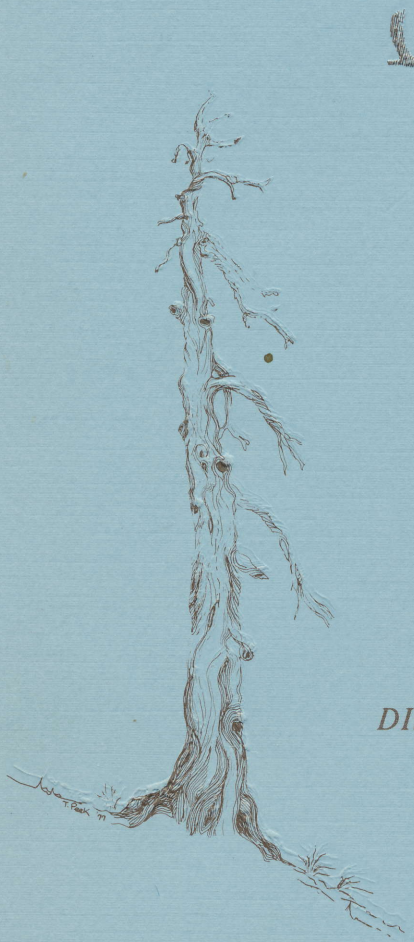
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

DIRECTOR

RUSSELL E. DICKENSON



WILDERNESS RESOURCE

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WILDERNESS VALUES IN THE NATIONAL PARKS

Russell E. Dickenson

UNIVERSITY OF IDAHO WILDERNESS RESEARCH CENTER

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Introduction

JOHN H. EHRENREICH

It gives me a great deal of pleasure to welcome you this evening to the fifth in the annual series of Wilderness Resource Distinguished Lectureships. Before I introduce our distinguished speaker, I would like to give you some background on this series and why tonight's topic was chosen.

The Lectureships are an activity of the University of Idaho's Wilderness Research Center, which is working to create a better understanding of wilderness, its natural and human-constructed elements, and the management systems designed or being developed to protect these areas. The concept of preserving and managing wilderness is relatively new to society, and we have much to learn about designing and developing these systems. The Wilderness Research Center attempts to stimulate scientific studies in these areas and to foster academic discussions on all subjects related to wilderness.

Previous Distinguished Lectureships have included:

Former Senator Frank Church, who discussed, "Wilderness in a Balanced Land Use Framework";

Dr. Roderick Nash, historian and author of "Wilderness and the American Mind," who challenged us to think whether there are contradictions inherent in the wilderness concept, and how these might be dealt with;

Former Secretary of the Interior Cecil D. Andrus, who gave us an insider's viewpoint on President Carter's attempts to reorganize the federal resource management agencies into a single Department of Natural Resources;

And last year, Mr. Patrick Noonan of The Nature Conservancy, who focused on efforts in the private sector to protect wilderness and smaller, unique natural areas for study and future enjoyment.

A topic that fits well into any consideration of wilderness is the national park system. The National Park Service was one of three major federal land management agencies charged in The Wilderness Act of 1964 with reviewing its land and identifying portions of it for wilderness designation. More than 10,000,000 acres have been so designated in the lower 48 states, and considerably more in Alaska. The National Park Service has also been a leader in interpreting wilderness to its visitors, and in developing management approaches to its wilderness resources.

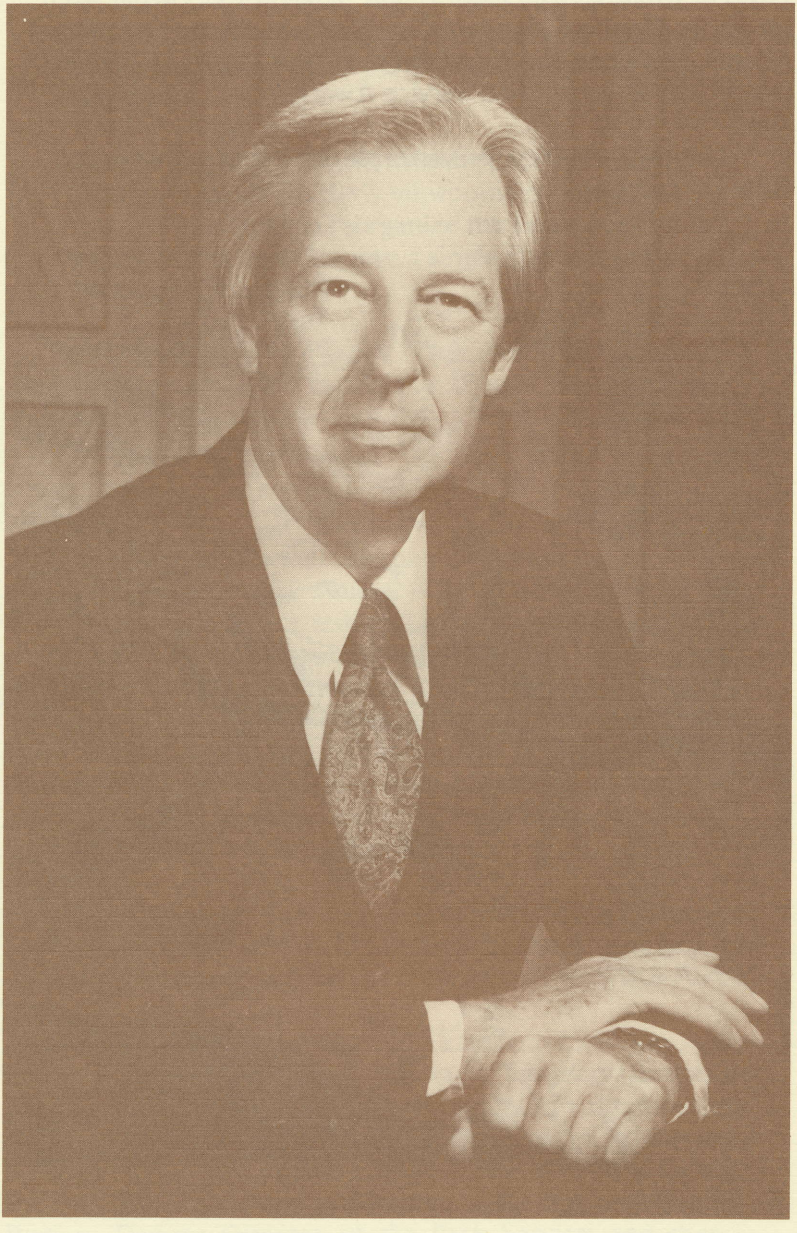
Tonight we are honored to have with us the Director of the National Park Service, Mr. Russell E. Dickenson, who will discuss the status of wilderness in America's National Parks.

Director Dickenson began his career in 1946 as a park ranger in Grand Canyon National Park. He progressed to the position of chief ranger and superintendent in a number of major national parks, most having large areas of wilderness. He then moved into critical administrative positions within the Park Service, serving as Director of the National Capital Region, Deputy Director of the Park Service, and then Director of the Pacific Northwest Region, covering Alaska, Washington, Oregon and Idaho.

Since 1980 he has served with distinction under Secretaries of Interior Cecil Andrus and James Watt. He has been recognized for his high level of achievement through numerous awards, including the Department of the Interior's highest honor—the Distinguished Service Award.

It is with deepest personal pleasure that I welcome Russ Dickenson.

Dr. John H. Ehrenreich is Dean of the College of Forestry, Wildlife and Range Sciences, University of Idaho.



WILDERNESS VALUES IN THE NATIONAL PARKS

Russell E. Dickenson

Here, in an academic setting, I am tempted to use an old classroom device. If I asked each of you to draft a comprehensive definition of the word "wilderness," I am confident that I would get a range of answers reflecting the range of experience, philosophy, and perceptions you represent.

To most Americans, wilderness is a term nearly synonymous with "jungle"—there is a strong emphasis on "wild," combined with a sense of dark, tangled forests. There is a feeling that wilderness is even a bit frightening, a place where one might easily lose all sense of direction, confront unknown hazards, face the ultimate test of man against nature.

Many people, perhaps even some here today, would be surprised to learn how broadly the dictionary defines this term. My desk edition offers four choices: the first is "an uncultivated, uninhabited region; waste; wild"; second choice is "any barren, empty, or open area, as of ocean"; third is "a large, confused mass or tangle of persons or things"; and fourth, described as obsolete, is "a wild condition or quality."[1]

To many of us, the obsolete definition is, in fact, the most accurate. It admits the possibility of urban wilderness; it recognizes the depths of swamps and jungles; it encompasses the sweep of Arctic tundra or desert sands; it includes mountains and barrier islands. "A wild condition or quality" demonstrates a tie to time, permits us to consider both the degradation and the regeneration of wilderness, the ever-changing nature of wilderness and what it holds.

Without Use ... an Unread Book

I believe the importance of wilderness lies in the dynamics of change. We can turn to the wild lands of America to understand much of what is happening in this world of ours. I also believe that we should actively use our wilderness. Without use, a wilderness has no more value than an unread book or a locked library. Used properly, it has more to tell us than all the volumes in the Library of Congress.

Our approach to wilderness should be not unlike that of the librarian or the book-lover. We should inventory it, catalogue it, and care for it. We should observe the trends, note the subtleties of tones and terms.

If we are the scholars of this wild library, searching learned tomes, we must share these places with those who seek out light reading as well. And we should remember that close scholarship can be limiting as well as enlightening.

If our most magnificent wilderness is like the library which serves equally the musicologist and the philosopher, the mathematician and the physician, then our smaller libraries may serve more specialized audiences, this one for the lover of mysteries, that one for the reader of histories.

As my career has been in parks, I will speak of wilderness in terms of parks. Nevertheless, I think what I have to say applies equally well to any wilderness, including the ocean wilderness noted in my dictionary.

I am a land manager and a public servant. These crucial elements of my job affect my perceptions. They also recall

the twin elements for which the National Park Service was established: "To conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life. . . . and to provide for the enjoyment of same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations."[2]

National parks are not to be subjected to normal consumptive uses, otherwise they would not long remain national parks. Rather, what we seek is measured, controlled, and respectful public use. Again, I am like a librarian. I send books back to the bindery when the pages start to come out; I have a staff to explain—interpret—the resources in our care; I have a maintenance staff whose job is to accomplish the necessary cleaning and repair, a security staff to protect against wanton destruction and vandalism, and a research staff, dedicated to finding every answer or idea proclaimed by catchy titles or hidden in obscure footnotes.

Wilderness has an infinite variety of values for people. Many of us receive satisfaction simply from knowing wild lands exist. As I noted at the beginning, we each have a personal definition, encompassing our own experiences, philosophy, and perceptions. What is more important is that each of those definitions *is* valid.

When I was a young ranger at Grand Canyon National Park, running the Colorado River was a rare and risky challenge. It embodied many of the traits associated with the Old West—rugged individualism at its extreme, tough men, severe danger, awesome sights. Gradually, more people sought that challenge, and the rewards it brought.

Within the last 20 years, we have seen dramatic changes. Regulated water flows from Glen Canyon Dam reduce some of the risks; the advent of rubber rafts and professional guides reduce others; the introduction of motors added speed to the journey. Those who run the river today differ from those of years past in that each passenger has less sense of the drama, perhaps less appreciation of the canyon's awesomeness, but also less reckless abandon. If the thrill of conquest is less, then seeking thrills for their own sake is also less.

Though some among you may disagree, I think we have achieved something very important. We have utilized the changes in the world about us to open this particular use to more users. But these visitors are more respectful—for example, they carry out their own waste and litter—and they have been exposed to a wilderness world once virtually beyond human attainment. The modern river runner is an appreciater, not a conqueror. Indeed, we have paid a price for these changes, but we have been repaid in human terms. Another great work has been taken from the rare book room and put into general circulation. Not everyone will check it out, nor fully understand it, but it is now within his or her reach.

This pattern is repeated throughout the national park system. We have seen the Appalachian Trail in the East and the John Muir Trail in the West graduate from elitest obscurity to mainstream objectives. For those trails, and others, we have progressed to the point where we must act to protect fragile resources. Today, we limit use of some trail sections because of our concern for carrying capacities. We have begun to study remote areas to find the outside limits on reasonable human use.

Recognizing Demands

Some would turn the clock back, attempting to make the wilderness as impenetrable as it was 50 or 100 years ago. Aside from the practical knowledge that time will go forward whether we like it or not, I think that is the wrong approach. Our job is to recognize the increasing demand and find ways to accommodate it so that we *do* simultaneously serve the public's needs and protect resources in our care.

We need places where man—or woman—can be alone. We need room for modern Thoreaus and Muirs to study, contemplate, and gain inspiration. But in 1850, Thoreau's America had only 23 million people and Muir's of 1900 had but 76 million. Our America has 230 million, plus a mobility those men never dreamed of. For every Muir, we now have three, for every Thoreau, ten. Is it any wonder that there is more pressure for use of our wild lands?

We must see parks and wildernesses in terms of people and their needs. If a modern Thoreau seeks quiet, he also cultivates his garden. The modern Muir wants his cabin in the woods. This is not to say Thoreau and Muir abused the land—they did not. But they used it in ways appropriate to their time and the competition for the resources they enjoyed. We must do likewise. We cannot allow private gardens and cabins in our wilderness if we are to protect it for posterity. But we can allow nonconsumptive uses suited to our times. Wilderness, as defined in federal statute,[3] is protected land. So it should remain.

In May 1980, the National Park Service sent to Congress an assessment of the State of the Parks.[4] That report represented the first time that the Service had evaluated the conditions of its natural and cultural resources on a servicewide basis. It revealed unexpected problems throughout. It suggested that some of the basic resources, for which the parks had originally been established, were being seriously threatened by a wide assortment of both internal and external activities. Most of the country's grand scenic parks reported more than double the servicewide mean number of threats. That documentation suggests that the National Park Service has *not* been the good steward that we and so many of our supporters believed us to be. But I challenge that.

Wilderness parks formerly were protected by a degree of isolation. Parks which once had relatively few developments or resource uses adjacent to their borders now face many developmental and environmental changes. Some of these changes not only sharply reduce the isolation factor, but threaten the integrity of wilderness values and other ingredients important to long-term perpetuation of natural, undisturbed conditions. While the National Park Service may warn, advise and cajole about those effects on parks, decision-making authority to mitigate threats in many instances lies outside the National Park Service.

The State of the Parks report received considerable attention from the Congress, from the press, from within the Service, and from the American public as a whole. It focused attention on the resources and reminded the Service of its

primary mandate to protect the significant natural and cultural resources. In a sense, it awakened the Service to the reality that, if the reported threats are to be dealt with, action must begin immediately, and the people of the United States and decision-makers at all levels—city, county, state and federal— must be informed and involved.

In a January 1981 followup report—"State of the Parks: A Report to the Congress on a Servicewide Strategy for Prevention and Mitigation of Natural and Cultural Resource Management Problems,"[5] we outlined both short- and mid-term strategies for addressing the numerous threats.

I want to talk, now, about the strategy we outlined in the prevention/mitigation report. Increased emphasis has been placed on the need for completing area resources management plans by December 1 of this year. Area plans are the principal planning statement for developing a systematic approach to resource problem documentation, ranking, and mitigation, forming the basis for annual budgets. No new research or resources management programs will be funded unless first documented in an approved resources management plan.

To Be Good Stewards

The National Park Service has just completed a period of considerable growth. It is now time to consolidate our gains and to make sure that we become the good stewards necessary to properly care for that trust that the American public has given us.

Emphasis now must be placed on the fundamentals of park management—systematic decision-making, fiscal responsibility, efficiency, accountability. It is back to the basics.

Time, in this instance, is not an ally. From here in Idaho, it is easy to point to some of the very real threats facing park resources which any of us could reach tomorrow. Glacier National Park, northeast of us, faces an incredible

range of problems. Mining, logging, air and water pollution, all occurring or planned beyond the park's borders, may jeopardize one of the last strongholds of the mighty grizzly bear.

It is essential to remember that we are talking about once-remote sites, places our own grandfathers would have had difficulty reaching, even if they had been as close as we are today.

While such parks may never have been truly remote to us—only to our ancestors—think for a moment of Mount McKinley, the nation's highest peak. Ten years ago, access to McKinley was difficult and time-consuming. In a heavy year, 25,000 people found their way to the park. Today, new roads and good air service would allow an apartment dweller from New York City to leave home tonight and reach the slopes of McKinley tomorrow. In 1980, the park recorded 297,800 visits. And, we can only expect those figures to rise in the future.

The McKinley experience is a sharp reminder of our dual mission and its basis. Without the resources, there would be little purpose for people to seek out parks. But without the people interested in those resources, there would be little public support for their preservation and protection. The people and the resources are closely linked, and must remain so. When they become separated, we will all lose.

The management of human activities to achieve and maintain a predetermined resource condition is absolutely necessary if we are to give the resources adequate protection. It requires a systematic approach that involves all of the expertise available today!

The most difficult facet of all management schemes is the management of human beings, the regulation of human use. In the long run, the success of any park management program depends on informed public support. Such support is developed through courteous, helpful visitor services; through informational and educational programs; and by

providing immediate tangible benefits—service—to the public. Above all, we must demonstrate, through successful management and operation of parks, the principle of stewardship. And, we must foster the understanding and acceptance of a stewardship ethic by the American people.

I have found, on recent visits to parks, that there is a renewed resource awareness all across the Service. The welfare of the National Park Service's natural and cultural resources has become a principal concern of the hundreds of park rangers and other dedicated employees working at all levels within the system. The intensity of that commitment also has increased, and the demand for professional resources management is greater now than at any other time in our history. I strongly support this new wave of attention.

Freeman Tilden, in his book, "Interpreting Our Heritage," stated:

> "Protection and preservation of the physical memorials of our natural and historic origins is primary, of course. And I suppose a good case could be made for the mere locking-up of our most important treasures—the fragile and the irreplaceable and the "bank deposits" of study in future years—because they are arks of our covenant and even when not seen are an inspiration through the feeling that they exist and are safe.
>
> "But fortunately, save in rare instances, this is not at all required. We can use these precious resources, so long as we do not use them up. Put it this way: we should not dissipate our capital, but we should zealously dispense the interest."[6]

We must dispense that interest to our shareholders, the citizens of this country. We seek profit only for the shareholders, not personal profit.

Part of the shareholder profit has to do with the nature of the resources found in our parks. Gone today is the lush

forest primeval that covered much of the east when the first European settlers arrived. Gone are the vast sweeps of prairie that once covered mid-continent America. Gone are the passenger pigeon, the Carolina parakeet, and the ivory-billed woodpecker. The timber wolf, bison, and grizzly have been reduced to remnant populations. The varieties of fish-life and plants that have become history are uncounted.

Charged to Protect

The parks, in many cases, encompass scattered communities of rare and unique species. They can be vital to our future. It is our charge to protect what we have. In the perpetuation of the strange, the unusual, the little understood, we may hold the key to the perpetuation of our own kind. For all that we have managed to control, our destiny is still tied to the land and sea of this planet.

We should not casually throw away any life form. We should study it, protect it, find its usefulness or, failing that, leave it for our descendants to assess anew.

It is estimated that our planet has 80,000 edible varieties of plants of which man has used, at one time or another, about 3,000. Yet only 150 varieties have ever been cultivated on a large scale, with fewer than 20 producing 90 percent of the world's food.

Obscure plants may indeed save us all. Within the relatively brief span of the history of America, we have seen the development of such modern staples as corn, peanuts, and soybeans. The recent discovery of a native, evergreen corn plant in the foothills of central Mexico holds great promise for improved food supplies the world over. This plant, hybridized with the perennial corn plants developed over the past century, could vastly increase the potential yield of every cornfield.

Such discoveries would not be possible without the preservation of the species. In this case, the corn plant could

easily have been lost had not a Texas botanist found it in a forest destined for clearcutting to make way for cattle grazing.

The parks, then, offer a special hope, one seldom given much public attention. The wilderness is a gene pool of unimagined proportions. Medical science has been quick to accept the potential that our botanical life holds. For food purposes, our species still has a great reluctance to experiment.

The natural storehouses of parks may someday prove invaluable. We must remember that the purple foxglove of Europe is the source for digitalis, a common heart compound to which millions can credit their lives. And who would care to go back to a time when the infamous bread mold, *Penicillium,* was just a common nuisance.

The parks also may hold the future for the fuel needs of the world. Some species found in them may be the key to methane production or some other, yet unknown, power source.

Greater emphasis must be placed on the acquisition of baseline information. Few parks presently have an adequate inventory of their natural resources. Few parks possess adequate information to implement enlightened management strategies. Good knowledge of the identity and location of park resources is prerequisite to wise stewardship. Improving the park's database will require that priority be given to conducting field studies on all types of physical and biological resources.

The scientist's role must be one of information gathering and analysis. The scientist's responsibility must be to provide decision-makers with sound alternative solutions to problems previously identified and ranked by the park manager. The scientist must inform the manager what options are available to meet a certain standard. Long-term monitoring programs designed for early-warning systems are essential. Wilderness reserves should be this nation's biological control units.

Wilderness Potential

If wilderness preservation and study are not to be bewildering, we must take the initiative. We must make the nation—and the world—aware of the potential that lies in the wilderness. And we must make them aware of its fragility. Wilderness *should* be used, but *never* debased.

We face a monumental task. Not only do we need to unlock the vast storehouse of knowledge and information that is hidden in the wilderness, we need to overcome the prejudices conjured up by that term.

Think back, if you will, to the definitions I read early in my remarks. Many of the terms are laden with pejorative messages: "waste," "barren," "empty," and "confused" were all used to define wilderness.

We must show the doubters that our interest is vital to theirs. There was a time, eloquently expressed by Alfred Runte in his book, "National Parks: The American Experience,"[7] that worthlessness was the most effective argument for preserving wilderness areas. The congressional debates leading to the creation of Yosemite, Yellowstone, Mount Rainier, Crater Lake and most other early park areas emphasized the economic and agricultural barrenness of these lands.

Such arguments may have been necessary in less sophisticated times. Today, they would be contrary to the public interest we seek to serve.

We must demonstrate that wilderness—its preservation, and research into its resources—is a vital national concern. How else can we demonstrate, when government fiscal constraint is obviously sought by the people, that protecting wilderness should hold a sufficient public priority to warrant continuing expenditure of public funds?

We have only begun to understand what the wilderness has to offer. Our research has just touched the surface. But we are already overdue in putting out the word.

We must guard our wilderness resources, jealously and zealously. But, in guarding them, we must also share them. We must overcome the arrogance built of our own knowledge of, and love for, the wilderness.

I would be the last person to argue that placing our prized possessions in untutored hands can be done without risk. But I firmly believe that the real message in this is that we must be the tutors. We must presume that people of all kinds can benefit from the wilderness. We must presume that people of all kinds are caring and careful when they know how to be so. Therefore, our role as stewards of the wilderness is to teach the untutored both how and why they should share in that stewardship.

Public support for national parks and the principles which guide operation and protection of the national parks have never been higher. Appreciation of the unique rewards arising from park visits and public use of wilderness is partially responsible. But the support also stems from the sure knowledge that wilderness lost—for whatever reason—ceases to be wilderness and may never recover. All the more reason for setting high standards of wilderness protection and use and for emphasizing every American's stewardship responsibility.

Notes

[1] Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language. 1968. Second College Edition. D.B. Guralnik, ed. The World Publishing Company. New York and Cleveland. 1692 pp.

[2] National Park Service Act of 1916. 16 U.S. Codes, Section 1 (1976).

[3] Wilderness Act of 1964. 16 U.S. Codes, Sections 1131-1136 (1976). See also (Public Law 88-577).

[4] National Park Service. 1980. State of the parks - 1980: A report to Congress. U.S. Dept. Interior. National Park Service. Office of Science and Technology. 57 pp.

[5] National Park Service. 1981. State of the parks: A report to the Congress on a servicewide strategy for prevention and mitigation of natural and cultural resource management problems. U.S. Dept. Interior. National Park Service internal report. 95 pp.

[6] Tilden, Freeman, 1977. Interpreting Our Heritage. The University of North Carolina Press. Chapel Hill. p. 100.

[7] Runte, Alfred. 1979. National Parks: The American Experience. University of Nebraska Press. Lincoln.

The University of Idaho Wilderness Research Center has initiated the Wilderness Resource Distinguished Lectureship as an annual event to encourage constructive dialogue and to broaden understanding of the wilderness resource. Speakers are invited on the basis of contributions to the philosophical or scientific rationale of wilderness management.

Other activities of the Wilderness Research Center include promotion of sound methods of protective management; stimulation of interdisciplinary research; support of a graduate student assistantship and of summer research projects for undergraduate students; sponsorship of annual field trips for Wildland Recreation Management students; and other similar wilderness-related activities appropriate to the mission of a land grant university.

Support for the Center or for its specific projects is welcomed in the form of gifts and bequests. For further information, contact

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