

YES

Rick Bass

ON WILDERNESS AND WALLACE STEGNER

I keep waiting each day to make friends with the Forest Service—not with the individuals, but with the agency itself. The agency harbors, as a rotting log harbors nutrients and hope-for-the-future, some of the country's best and most passionate hydrologists, entomologists, range managers, recreation specialists, ornithologists, wilderness specialists, big-game biologists. But the gears and levers of the agency are still pulled and fitted in Washington, in an agency run by a Congress that in turn is run not by the people but by the corporations that funded their election campaigns.

We all know this. The simplicity of it makes us want to shriek. Its inevitability—the brute force, the economic biomass behind this process—also makes us want to shriek. Artists in the West continue to struggle daily with the question of how best to combat the madness of this loss: whether to lay down works of beauty—classical art, in the form of song, sculpture, stories, paintings, poems—or to lay down works of essay and activism; whether or not to speak directly to the politics of this loss, as the health of our communities and of our wild heritage continues to be taken from us. It is a taking, a theft, that is funded by our own dollars, as if we were some hideous, wounded wolverine caught in a trap, eating its own entrails.

I am speaking about wilderness, of course, or about the lack of wilderness—not just in Montana's Yaak Valley, where I live, but all across the Rocky Mountain West: the failure to protect as wilderness anything beyond rock and ice.

There is much talk now by some in the Forest Service about "ecosystem management" as a new and somehow a better way to draw profit from the

land, but there are those of us who will tell you, and who believe, that this is only a new pretext for building more roads into the last roadless areas. A Forest Service Chief once issued a memo directing his regional foresters that if they were denied entrance to a roadless area for a timber sale that would violate the law, they should not try to "make up" that "lost" volume by moving the sale to a roaded area, but should instead try to substitute entrance into a different roadless area.

I have not yet heard ecosystem management talk about conservation biology or wilderness cores. It has thus far skirted this issue so completely that I believe its true heart has been revealed: that it is a ploy to further fragment wild places, rather than begin healing and weaving them back together.

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Central to the science of conservation biology is the need for cornerstone or foundation reserves, undisturbed cores of diversity—forests, or any other ecosystems, of such radiant health and strength that they not only exist strong and free in the world by themselves, but pass on their genetic and spiritual vigor to things and places beyond their perimeters.

You don't want to try to figure out how to go into those places and dissect them. You want to move in the opposite direction—as the Forest Service has yet to do, in the Yaak and many other areas. You want to devise ways to protect these places—to turn away from them and walk in the opposite direction.

You want to preserve them, not extinguish them.

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For me, the question of harm and injustice and what's wrong with these initial

visions of ecosystem management, and the question of what's right and diverse and healthy about a whole, untouched wilderness, resonates most clearly and painfully in the specific example of the Yaak Valley. The Yaak rests up against the Idaho and British Columbia borders. It is a pipeline, a thin straw, drawing genetic diversity down out of Canada and into the rest of the West. It is also utterly unprotected for the future. The valley is almost 500,000 acres in size, and within it exist over 150,000 acres of roadless cores, still connected or nearly connected in an archipelago of vibrant health—and yet not a single acre of wilderness is protected for future generations.

The Yaak lies in a seam, a crevice, between the rainforest ecosystems of the Pacific Northwest and the jagged mountainscapes of the northern Rockies. The richness of these two systems combines to create a richness that is even greater, and that is palpable. When you sleep in the Yaak for the first time, you have dreams you never had before; as a writer, you think of stories you never previously imagined; as a painter, you see shadows and colors not earlier noticed; as a hunter, you see and feel more acutely the different movements, different relationships to each other, of the animals in the forest. As a scientist, you think of connections you never made before. The double-richness of the landscape of the Yaak is like the mysterious, tempting, rich and troubling territories of the heart in the areas between art and activism.

Woodland caribou use this country occasionally, as do, with great frequency, moose, elk, mule deer and whitetails, mountain goats and bighorn sheep along the Kootenai River. It is, to the best of my knowledge, a zone of unprecedented

speciation and uniqueness in the West, a secret gift of life. On any given mountain you can find three species of grouse. There are groupings of vegetation as yet undescribed, and some even still unknown—the stuff of literature, dreams, and mystery.

The Yaak is a predators' showcase, home to a snarling and scrapping, reclusive combination of tooth and claw: wolves, wolverines, lynx, black bears, grizzlies, bobcats, martens, fishers, coyotes, mountain lions, hawks, owls, golden eagles, bald eagles. It is a valley of giants—five-hundred-year-old cedar trees and tamaracks; great blue herons, sturgeon, bull trout weighing twenty and twenty-five pounds. I have lived and camped all over the country, and the Yaak is the most savage and delicate place I've ever seen. It is a vital organ of the West. Yet it continues to be ignored for wilderness protection.

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For a Western artist, to speak about the wilderness system of the West is to speak indirectly about the work of Wallace Stegner; it is to speak about the vision of wilderness that he put forth in works such as the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *Angle of Repose* and the essay collection *The Sound of Mountain Water*, among so many others. As a team of oxen pulls in a double-yoke, he used his talents as an artist and as an activist, all his life, to help give us what we have now: what we have as a community of artists and what we have as a community of those who love the landscape of the West.

Is it too easy a metaphor to discuss Stegner's work as a core of community health, similar to a core of wilderness health? In a healthy forest, vertical and horizontal matrices of diversity—by

species, age, structure, and every other factor—are interwoven. If you can gauge the life of an artist by such a measure, Stegner's was the healthiest I know. In every dimension—as a writer of novels, short stories, essays; as an activist for wilderness; as a teacher, a father, and a husband—he was exemplary in the truest sense of that word. He was example, bedrock, and touchstone for the rest of the country around him.

I keep finding myself trying to figure out how he was able to maintain this vertical and horizontal strength so forcefully throughout his working career—while publishing in seven decades, roughly one third of the United States' history. But I believe that, in the end, the answer to this question is really no mystery at all. It's like wondering how a forest that has such big trees can also have such rich soil, or how a forest that has such a diversity of bird life can also have so many different mammals.

In the essay, "The Law of Nature and the Dream of Man," Stegner wrote: "How to write a story, though ignorant or baffled? You take something that is important to you, something you have brooded about. You try to see it as clearly as you can, and to fix it in a transferable equivalent. All you want in the finished print is the clean statement of the lens, which is yourself, on the subject that has been absorbing your attention. Sure, it's autobiography. Sure, it's fiction. Either way if you have done it right, it's true."

* * *

Ecosystem management is not yet true. It will not succeed without vital cores—anchor points—of wilderness in each ecosystem. Only a few islands of health currently exist in the West, and even the health of those is suspect. And the

fact that agency discussions of ecosystem management continue to avoid acknowledging that there are relationships we can never understand convinces me that timber managers are speaking only of managing those few factors they think they can understand and perhaps get a handle on: more fiber production from one or two species of tree, over the short run; maybe, over the short run, more summer-time forage for big game.

We can never manage or control the balance of, say, seed-eating versus insect-eating birds within a region. It is due to factors perhaps within that region, but perhaps beyond—tropical deforestation, global warming, worldwide ecosystem fragmentation. The faces of different forest types, especially in a land as diverse as the Yaak, are still in wild flux—especially compared to our knowledge, or lack of it. Even a 500-year-old larch forest is in relative flux, part of an earth-desired, rock-and-soil-desired cycle of progression and regression—a pulse—that is specific to that particular spot on the earth, and yet connected to all others. Core samples in the bogs in the interior of an old tamarack forest will reveal the ashes of sagebrush and juniper from only a few thousand years ago. In the wilderness, the forest continues to tilt, to change, under its own rules, with all the wonderful accompanying (and invisible) genetic alterations in species and speciation, of the trees themselves and of everything above and beneath and around them—birds-plants-mammals-insects-fungus; the forest changes through the centuries and millennia like the shadows of clouds drifting across a mountain.

Of course there are places where we need to attempt, with respect, to do our awkward best. Ecosystem management acknowledges this. But again: ecosystem

management does *not* yet acknowledge the necessity of protecting significant wilderness cores in each and every watershed—not shifting these wildernesses around, like moving old folks from one rest home to another on a Forest Service shuttle bus, but committing the cores, the anchor points, to nature for the duration of humankind's time on earth.

The number that is expected with regard to tithes, both spiritual and biological, is 10 percent. I propose that in fragile or ravaged landscapes such as the Yaak, 15 or 20 percent is entirely more appropriate—and that in some landscapes, 100 percent is appropriate—in an attempt to initiate the healing process, to re-establish health and balance and cycles. A solution in the Yaak, a place wildly out of balance (the bug-killed lodgepole was ignored as timber in the 1980s, and two thirds of the harvest comprised instead green larch and fir) is still within [r]each. Wilderness designation of at least the last roadless areas in the Yaak would still leave almost 350,000 acres for the hard-core, high-volume timber yearnings of Congress and the Forest Service, and for our own consuming hungers. Let the ecosystem managers then tie in their activities to the wild cores or anchor points, rather than riding over and erasing these last fixed points of reason and last fixed points of data.

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The idea behind ecosystem management is that we humans can enter a forest, or a desert or a meadow, and with our scientific tools and studies divine where to cut and where to burn or even build so as to imitate the actions of nature.

But is chaos theory applicable to insect and fire patterns in lodgepole stands,

and soil changes, and forest succession through the centuries' cycles? Should we walk along every streambank following every fire, whether natural or prescribed, and attempt to manage or evaluate, as nature does, whether each and every burned snag should be left standing for one of the forty-seven species of cavity nesters that use the Yaak, or pushed over at a 45- to 90-degree angle into the stream to help trap ash and other sediment runoff? Or pushed over so as to land parallel to the slope, to help hold ash and soil in place on-site? Or pushed over so as to land upslope, to rot in the soil and produce a seedbed for ceanothus or kinnikinnick? But wouldn't that then help the seed-eating birds instead of the insect-eaters? And wouldn't the insects get out of hand, then? And then after the insects took over the world, wouldn't that mean more dead trees, hence still more fires? Maybe the fires would fry some of the insects, but then wouldn't it just start all over again? Maybe we need to re-think this. Maybe we need to do another study.

Even today—as recently as 1996—you will find Forest Service officials making such statements as, "It's comparatively easy for foresters to emulate nature's large severe fires . . . by clearcutting large areas and burning the slash." The truth is, we haven't figured it all out, and I don't think we ever will—not to the extent that we can outmanage the wilderness cores that inspire and nurture an ecosystem's health. We can't even make up our minds about whether to burn slash or leave it on the ground, whether to try to aerate the compacted soil of clearcuts or leave it alone to recover in the next millennium on its own.

We're only just beginning to figure out site-specific light management for over-story openings: the balance of photosyn-

thesis versus UV shielding required by different seedlings. What about the understory, and what about the mechanics of soil? Does anyone really think we can manage dirt—two million, or four million, or twelve million acres of dirt? Wilderness cores are not only sources of vital health. They are buffers against our trials and errors. Wilderness cores forgive us our trespasses into other areas.

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The light touches that Stegner could wield with his pen, in his art, cannot of course be wielded by humans upon the land. We are too small and the land is far larger than an 8¹/₂-by-11-inch sheet of paper, and infinitely deeper than the little three-pound electrical impulse-generator we know as the human brain, marvelous as that organ is. The earth is an enormous, unimaginably complex brain, and we ought to let pieces of it, places of it, function under the grace and power of its own miracle. The Yaak is only one instance of our present failure to do this.

I like to believe that Stegner was aware of the healthy influence exerted by the artistic cores, the anchors, he created through his work: not just the interconnectedness of his work to that of his many students—like migration corridors for diversity—but the sanctuaries of his individual books. It was in Stegner's era that we evolved, in the manner of a forest approaching its fullest health and complexity as it matures, our fullest tradition of nature writing. In this country's first century and a half, a few individuals carried most of the load of ecological literacy and the obligation to disperse it. The shifts of duty among these writers followed a somewhat linear model, similar to that of the beginnings of a forest: new seedlings of a few species concentrating on verti-

cal growth. Only a handful of names led the way through this period—Thoreau, Emerson, Muir, Austin, Leopold, Carson, Stegner among them, and relatively few others.

Stegner's work acted as a core, an incubator and radiant source, of health and diversity in the literature of nature. Due in large part to his teaching and writing and his example, a critical threshold of literary health was reached. There are now hundreds, even thousands, of nature writers, blossoming from Stegner's era as if from a nurse log. In literature, if not out on the land, there is now a community of health.

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If the last roadless, wild cores of the West are lost—entered, whether by ecosystem management or clearcutting; further fragmented, rather than re-connected—will this, over time, cause the artistic works that sprang up out of love of earth, love of country, to lose part or all of their power—to become like ghosts, tales of things-gone-by, like empty insect-husks in the autumn?

As much as I love the works of Stegner and other writers whose work is based in the roadless wilderness and in the healthy country that lies on its perimeter, I cannot argue that the power of those works is not at risk. They are too intimately and fully connected, not just to the spirit of these places, but also to the physical elements, the presence, of these places. Those who have visited these sanctuaries, and even those who only hope to visit them, can feel their existence. There is a blood of vitality that still flows from the land to its literature (and perhaps from the literature back to the land—perhaps the dirt desires stories, as it desires life). The land and

the literature are still connected. Harm the land further and a case can be made that it will diminish our literature, both that which has already been gifted to us and that which is still to come.

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If ecosystem management continues to avoid committing to the protection of these last undesignated wilderness cores, it is nothing more than another blueprint for extinction, and extinguishment. We might just as well enter these last roadless areas now, and we might just as well gather up all of Stegner's books and get it over with: rip the pages out of them, or hire lesser writers to manage them—to re-write, re-shape, re-imagine, and re-create them.

New York literary folks were not always able to understand Stegner's work, nor were the extractive industry corporations and chamber of commerce flash-in-the-pan boosters always overly fond of it. If they could have outlawed or fragmented him, I think they would have. If they could have ignored him, they would have. If they could have clearcut his work, or even if they could have ecosystem-managed it, they would have.

But they couldn't. Art, like nature, desires life. His books and his life have everything to teach us about wilderness and ecosystem management, and we all need to go back and re-read them, and then re-read them again, and keep re-reading them. And we need to protect the Yaak and our other last wild and roadless places: to guard them as fiercely as we would our libraries or any other heritage, against intruders either foreign or domestic.

We need to keep using and saying the word *wilderness*—not replacing it,

through time, with lesser phrases—
with diluted, vanishing, and finally
invisible non-words such as “ecosystem
management.” We owe it to Stegner and
we owe it to ourselves and we owe it to
those who will be following after us.

I want to believe in ecosystem man-
agement and I keep waiting to be friends
with the Forest Service again, but in
the meantime, there is still no protected
wilderness in the Yaak Valley, nor is the
lack of it being discussed enough.

NO

William Tucker

IS NATURE TOO GOOD FOR US?

Probably nothing has been more central to the environmental movement than the concept of wilderness. “In wildness is the preservation of the world,” wrote Thoreau, and environmental writers and speakers have intoned his message repeatedly. Wilderness, in the environmental pantheon, represents a particular kind of sanctuary in which all true values—that is, all nonhuman values—are repositied. Wildernesses are often described as “temples,” “churches,” and “sacred ground”—refuges for the proposed “new religion” based on environmental consciousness. Carrying the religious metaphor to the extreme, one of the most famous essays of the environmental era holds the Judeo-Christian religion responsible for “ecological crisis.”

The wilderness issue also has a political edge. Since 1964, long-standing preservation groups like the Wilderness Society and the Sierra Club have been pressuring conservation agencies like the National Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management to put large tracts of their holdings into permanent “wilderness designations,” countering the “multiple use” concept that was one of the cornerstones of the Conservation Era of the early 1900s.

Preservation and conservation groups have been at odds since the end of the last century, and the rift between them has been a major controversy of environmentalism. The leaders of the Conservation Movement—most notably Theodore Roosevelt, Gifford Pinchot, and John Wesley Powell—called for rational, efficient development of land and other natural resources: multiple use, or reconciling competing uses of land, and also “highest use,” or forfeiting more immediate profits from land development for more lasting gains. Preservationists, on the other hand, the followers of California woodsman John Muir, have advocated protecting land in its natural state, setting aside tracts and keeping them inviolate. “Wilderness area” battles have become one of the hottest political issues of the day, especially in western states—the current “Sagebrush Revolt” comes to mind—where large quantities of potentially commercially usable land are at stake.

The term “wilderness” generally connotes mountains, trees, clear streams, rushing waterfalls, grasslands, or parched deserts, but the concept has been institutionalized and has a careful legal definition as well. The one given

From William Tucker, “Is Nature Too Good for Us?” *Harper’s Magazine* (March 1982). Adapted from William Tucker, *Progress and Privilege: America in the Age of Environmentalism* (Doubleday, 1982). Copyright © 1982 by William Tucker. Reprinted by permission.

by the 1964 Wilderness Act, and that most environmentalists favor, is that wilderness is an area "where man is a visitor but does not remain." People do not "leave footprints there," wilderness exponents often say. Wildernesses are, most importantly, areas in which *evidence of human activity is excluded*; they need not have any particular scenic, aesthetic, or recreational value. The values, as environmentalists usually say, are "ecological"—which means, roughly translated, that natural systems are allowed to operate as free from human interference as possible.

The concept of excluding human activity is not to be taken lightly. One of the major issues in wilderness areas has been whether or not federal agencies should fight forest fires. The general decision has been that they should not, except in cases where other lands are threatened. The federal agencies also do not fight the fires with motorized vehicles, which are prohibited in wilderness areas except in extreme emergencies. Thus in recent years both the National Forest Service and the National Park Service have taken to letting forest fires burn unchecked, to the frequent alarm of tourists. The defense is that many forests require periodic leveling by fire in order to make room for new growth. There are some pine trees, for instance, whose cones will break open and scatter their seeds only when burned. This theoretical justification has won some converts, but very few in the timber companies, which bridle at watching millions of board-feet go up in smoke when their own "harvesting" of mature forests has the same effect in clearing the way for new growth and does less damage to forest soils.

The effort to set aside permanent wilderness areas on federal lands began

with the National Forest Service in the 1920s. The first permanent reservation was in the Gila National Forest in New Mexico. It was set aside by a young Forest Service officer named Aldo Leopold, who was later to write *A Sand County Almanac*, which has become one of the bibles of the wilderness movement. Robert Marshall, another Forest Service officer, continued the program, and by the 1950s nearly 14 million of the National Forest System's 186 million acres had been administratively designated wilderness preserves.

Leopold and Marshall had been disillusioned by one of the first great efforts at "game management" under the National Forest Service, carried out in the Kaibab Plateau, just north of the Grand Canyon. As early as 1906 federal officials began a program of "predator control" to increase the deer population in the area. Mountain lions, wolves, coyotes, and bobcats were systematically hunted and trapped by game officials. By 1920, the program appeared to be spectacularly successful. The deer population, formerly numbering 4,000, had grown to almost 100,000. But it was realized too late that it was the range's limited food resources that would threaten the deer's existence. During two severe winters, in 1924-26, 60 percent of the herd died, and by 1939 the population had shrunk to only 10,000. Deer populations (unlike human populations) were found to have no way of putting limits on their own reproduction. The case is still cited as the classic example of the "boom and bust" disequilibrium that comes from thoughtless intervention in an ecological system.

The idea of setting aside as wilderness areas larger and larger segments of federally controlled lands began to gain more support from the old preservationists'

growing realizations, during the 1950s, that they had not won the battle during the Conservation Era, and that the national forests were not parks that would be protected forever from commercial activity.

Pinchot's plan for practicing "conservation" in the western forests was to encourage a partnership between the government and large industry. In order to discourage overcutting and destructive competition, he formulated a plan that would promote conservation activities among the larger timber companies while placing large segments of the western forests under federal control. It was a classic case of "market restriction," carried out by the joint efforts of larger businesses and government. Only the larger companies, Pinchot reasoned, could generate the profits that would allow them to cut their forest holdings *slowly* so that the trees would have time to grow back. In order to ensure these profit margins, the National Forest Service would hold most of its timber lands out of the market for some time. This would hold up the price of timber and prevent a rampage through the forests by smaller companies trying to beat small profit margins by cutting everything in sight. Then, in later years, the federal lands would gradually be worked into the "sustained yield" cycles, and timber rights put up for sale. It was when the national forests finally came up for cutting in the 1950s that the old preservation groups began to react.

The battle was fought in Congress. The 1960 Multiple Use and Sustained Yield Act tried to reaffirm the principles of the Conservation Movement. But the wilderness groups had their day in 1964 with the passing of the Wilderness Act. The law required all the federal land-management agencies—the National Forest Service,

the National Park Service, and the Fish and Wildlife Service—to review all their holdings, keeping in mind that "wilderness" now constituted a valid alternative in the "multiple use" concept—even though the concept of wilderness is essentially a rejection of the idea of multiple use. The Forest Service, with 190 million acres, and the Park Service and Fish and Wildlife Service, each with about 35 million acres, were all given twenty years to start designating wilderness areas. At the time, only 14.5 million acres of National Forest System land were in wilderness designations.

The results have been mixed. The wilderness concept appears valid if it is recognized for what it is—an attempt to create what are essentially "ecological museums" in scenic and biologically significant areas of these lands. But "wilderness," in the hands of environmentalists, has become an all-purpose tool for stopping economic activity as well. This is particularly crucial now because of the many mineral and energy resources available on western lands that environmentalists are trying to push through as wilderness designations. The original legislation specified that lands were to be surveyed for valuable mineral resources before they were put into wilderness preservation. Yet with so much land being reviewed at once, these inventories have been sketchy at best. And once land is locked up as wilderness, it becomes illegal even to explore it for mineral or energy resources.

Thus the situation in western states—where the federal government still owns 68 percent of the land, counting Alaska—has in recent years become a race between mining companies trying to prospect under severely restricted conditions, and environmental groups trying to lock the

doors to resource development for good. This kind of permanent preservation—the antithesis of conservation—will probably have enormous effects on our future international trade in energy and mineral resources.

At stake in both the national forests and the Bureau of Land Management holdings are what are called the “roadless areas.” Environmentalists call these lands “de facto wilderness,” and say that because they have not yet been explored or developed for resources they should not be explored and developed in the future. The Forest Service began its Roadless Area Resources Evaluation (RARE) in 1972, while the Bureau of Land Management began four years later in 1976, after Congress brought its 174 million acres under jurisdiction of the 1964 act. The Forest Service is studying 62 million roadless acres, while the BLM is reviewing 24 million.

In 1974 the Forest Service recommended that 15 million of the 50 million acres then under study be designated as permanent wilderness. Environmental groups, which wanted much more set aside, immediately challenged the decision in court. Naturally, they had no trouble finding flaws in a study intended to cover such a huge amount of land, and in 1977 the Carter administration decided to start over with a “RARE II” study, completed in 1979. This has also been challenged by a consortium of environmental groups that includes the Sierra Club, the Wilderness Society, the National Wildlife Federation, and the Natural Resources Defense Council. The RARE II report also recommended putting about 15 million acres in permanent wilderness, with 36 million released for development and 11 million held for further study. The Bureau of Land Management is not scheduled to

complete the study of its 24 million acres until 1991.

The effects of this campaign against resource development have been powerful. From 1972 to 1980, the price of a Douglas fir in Oregon increased 500 percent, largely due to the delays in timber sales from the national forests because of the battles over wilderness areas. Over the decade, timber production from the national forests declined slightly, putting far more pressure on the timber industry's own lands. The nation has now become an importer of logs, despite the vast resources on federal lands. In 1979, environmentalists succeeded in pressuring Congress into setting aside 750,000 acres in Idaho as the Sawtooth Wilderness and National Recreational Area. A resource survey, which was not completed until after the congressional action, showed that the area contained an estimated billion dollars' worth of molybdenum, zinc, silver, and gold. The same tract also contained a potential source of cobalt, an important mineral for which we are now dependent on foreign sources for 97 percent of what we use.

Perhaps most fiercely contested are the energy supplies believed to be lying under the geological strata running through Colorado, Wyoming, and Montana just east of the Rockies, called the Overthrust Belt. Much of this land is still administered by the Bureau of Land Management for multiple usage. But with the prospect of energy development, environmental groups have been rushing to try to have these high-plains areas designated as wilderness areas as well (cattle grazing is still allowed in wilderness tracts). On those lands permanently withdrawn from commercial use, mineral exploration will be allowed to continue until 1983. Any mines begun by

then can continue on a very restricted basis. But the exploration in “roadless areas” is severely limited, in that in most cases there can be no roads constructed (and no use of off-road vehicles) while exploration is going on. Environmentalists have argued that wells can still be drilled and test mines explored using helicopters. But any such exploration is likely to be extraordinarily expensive and ineffective. Wilderness restrictions are now being drawn so tightly that people on the site are not allowed to leave their excrement in the area.

IMPOSSIBLE PARADISES

What is the purpose of all this? The standard environmental argument is that we have to “preserve these last few wild places before they all disappear.” Yet it is obvious that something more is at stake. What is being purveyed is a view of the world in which human activity is defined as “bad” and natural conditions are defined as “good.” What is being preserved is evidently much more than “ecosystems.” What is being preserved is an *image* of wilderness as a semisacred place beyond humanity's intrusion.

It is instructive to consider how environmentalists themselves define the wilderness. David Brower, former director of the Sierra Club, wrote in his introduction to Paul Ehrlich's *The Population Bomb* (1968):

Whatever resources the wilderness still held would not sustain (man) in his old habits of growing and reaching without limits. Wilderness could, however, provide answers for questions he had not yet learned how to ask. He could predict that the day of creation was not over, that there would be wiser men, and they would thank him for leaving the source

of those answers. Wilderness would remain part of his geography of hope, as Wallace Stegner put it, and could, merely because wilderness endured on the planet, prevent man's world from becoming a cage.

The wilderness, he suggested, is a source of peace and freedom. Yet setting wilderness aside for the purposes of solitude doesn't always work very well. Environmentalists have discovered this over and over again, much to their chagrin. Every time a new “untouched paradise” is discovered, the first thing everyone wants to do is visit it. By their united enthusiasm to find these “sanctuaries,” people bring the “cage” of society with them. Very quickly it becomes necessary to erect bars to keep people *out*—which is exactly what most of the “wilderness” legislation has been all about.

In 1964, for example, the Sierra Club published a book on the relatively “undiscovered” paradise of Kauai, the second most westerly island in the Hawaiian chain. It wasn't long before the island had been overrun with tourists. When *Time* magazine ran a feature on Kauai in 1979, one unhappy island resident wrote in to convey this telling sentiment: “We're hoping the shortages of jet fuel will stay around and keep people away from here.” The age of environmentalism has also been marked by the near overrunning of popular national parks like Yosemite (which now has a full-time jail), intense pressure on woodland recreational areas, full bookings two and three years in advance for raft trips through the Grand Canyon, and dozens of other spectacles of people crowding into isolated areas to get away from it all. Environmentalists are often