



Gordon Bronson

WILDERNESS MATTERS

FOUR MORE YEARS...

The 2004 election and the environment

After some serious soul-searching over the recent election outcome, we've come to the conclusion that the environment just isn't a winning political issue, and we're going to have to moderate our position to get in line with American public opinion.

Just kidding!

Let the pundits and pollsters fret about red and blue states and "moral values." We know that, however much voters were distracted by other issues in this election, an overwhelming number of Americans support strong environmental protection.

The environment should *not* be a partisan issue. Protecting wilderness and the ecological health of public lands is in everyone's interest: it preserves our priceless natural heritage and our quality of life, deepens our

appreciation of the natural world on which our species depends, and helps maintain a healthy environment for our children and grandchildren.

Alas, a second Bush administration is likely to be even harder on the environment than the first, and is going to greatly increase the workload for organizations like the Wilderness Workshop. Here's a rundown of what we can look forward to:

- Federal energy policy will continue to emphasize increasing supplies, while largely ignoring the greater bang-for-the-buck potential of efficiency and renewables. Oil and gas drilling will trounce all other uses on Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service lands. (See pages 2 and 3.)
- The administration will use the 2003 Healthy Forests Restoration Act to push for increased logging on federal lands. While the supposed purpose of the law is to promote thinning of small trees to reduce wildfire danger, such treatments are expensive. Given the ballooning federal deficit and the Forest Service's already underfunded budget, the result is likely to be an emphasis on "profitable" sales of mature, ecologically important stands far in the backcountry that pose very little fire risk to communities.
- The stealth campaign against roadless areas will intensify. The Bush administration hates wilderness designation because it permanently precludes roads and resource extraction, and has been working hard to encourage road-building so as to remove areas from wilderness eligibili-

ty. Expect Washington to proceed with its plan to gut the Roadless Area Conservation Rule, disregarding unprecedented public opposition, and to pass on the chance to tighten rules on off-road vehicles (ORVs), which despite their name often end up creating new roads. We'll also be hearing a lot more about R.S. 2477, an obscure 1866 law that's being used to legitimize "roads" throughout the West with the administration's blessing.

- Personnel in agencies such as the Forest Service and BLM will be under increasing pressure to implement these policies. Many good people will quit or be marginalized, making way for more industry-friendly replacements. Funding for enforcement and scientific analysis will be reduced, science will be bent to political ends, and inconvenient findings will be ignored or buried.
- In the past four years we've seen the opportunities for public input on proposals shrink, and several of the tools available to watchdog organizations like ours have been blunted or eliminated. If this trend continues for another four years, those critical of environmental policies will be left with few options besides protesting in the streets.
- Seeing that the clearance sale on our public lands has been extended for another four years, shoppers – the timber, mining, energy and motorized-recreation industries – will have every incentive to get it while they can. This bodes poorly

WW DOES DOWNVALLEY

Reflecting the huge increase in our workload downvalley, the Wilderness Workshop has opened an office in downtown Carbondale.

It's looking like we won't have time to organize an open house until early in the new year, but in the meantime we invite you to drop by for a visit. You'll find us at 75B N. 2nd Street – just a half block off Main Street, the last building on the left before the railroad tracks.

We're currently without an Aspen office, but we hope to get one set up in the basement of the Yellow Brick Building next year.

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for biodiversity, wildlife habitat, climate, air and water quality, and human safety.

In short, we're bracing ourselves for more bad proposals, fewer tools with which to oppose them, and a diminishing chance that our views will be listened to.

We'll be filing more technical and legal challenges, organizing more meetings and protests, circulating more petitions. Sadly, we may be forced to spend a lot of time literally bearing witness to the harm that's being done – reminding people of the consequences of their vote, alerting them of what's being done in their name, and educating them about what's being lost.

If all this concerns you and you'd like to do something about it, we welcome your help. There are many opportunities to get involved, from adopting a gas lease (see next article) to filing public comments to helping with mailings and events. (Those of you who've been offering to lie in front of bulldozers – it may well come to that.)

If you'd like more information on ways to get involved, please send us your email address and we'll put you on our alert list.

Fortunately, while the national picture looks bleak, there's good news here in Colorado. The elections of Ken and John Salazar and Kathleen Curry, and the passage of the statewide renewable-energy measure, all indicate that Colorado is neither red nor blue – it's green.

At its annual retreat in Carbondale on Nov. 16-17, the Southern Rockies Conservation Alliance – a statewide coalition of groups that includes the Wilderness Workshop – concluded that Colorado has the best chance of any state of putting forward a wilderness bill in the next few years.

In light of that, the Alliance chose as one of its top priorities in 2005 the White River Wilderness Campaign, which is being spearheaded by WW. We're very excited about the campaign, since it will provide an inspiring, achievable goal, not to mention a chance to make positive gains in the face of an otherwise defensive few years.

It's time to stand up for what we believe. We're sticking to our "moral values" – the defense of wild nature – and we believe the vast majority of citizens will side with us, regardless of (or perhaps because of) national politics.

Have you got your tickets to the Dec. 5 Evening Tribute to Three Special Women? Tickets to the world premiere of *Wild by Nature* and the award ceremony honoring Connie Harvey, Joy Caudill and Dottie Fox are available through the Wheeler Box Office, 920-5770. \$15. (The reception is sold out.)

ADOPT A LEASE

Our battle against natural-gas development on sensitive local lands is starting to get creative.

At an Oct. 23 training for citizen activists organized by the Wilderness Workshop and the Colorado Mountain Club, folks were very enthusiastic about our new "adopt-a-lease" program.

Because our legal challenges to the Thompson Creek gas leases ultimately may not prevail, and because much of the highlands southwest of Carbondale have already been leased, we need to be prepared to challenge drilling proposals as they arise. The adopt-a-lease program enables us to monitor all phases of the drilling process, from the initial drilling application all the

way through to remediation.

The purpose of "adopting" leases is to ensure that industry and federal land managers are held to the highest standards and are obeying all the regulations governing gas development on public lands. The energy industry is naturally loathe to spend money to protect air/water quality and wildlife. Lease adopters will ensure that companies don't cut corners, and that the value of the land is given due consideration throughout the process.

We need lots of participation to adequately cover each lease parcel in our area, and for this we need your help. If you're interested in adopting a lease or would like more information about the process, please contact WW Executive Director Sloan Shoemaker.

Some have expressed concern about the physical challenges of hiking the lease parcels. Please don't let that discourage you. Stomping the ground is only one aspect of adopting a lease. Research and deskwork are just as important, and we may be able to partner those more inclined to paperwork with those who prefer the fieldwork.

We plan to hold an additional training in late January or early February for those who missed the first round.

IN MEMORY OF HEATHER HOPTON

Heather Hopton, beloved wife of longtime WW board member Charles Hopton, died Oct. 24 at her home.

A memorial service will be held at Paepcke Auditorium on Nov. 27 at 10 a.m., followed by a reception at the Mountain Chalet at 1 p.m.

Heather loved the high country and hiked and camped with Charlie, dogs and friends. She served on the boards of the Aspen Center for Environmental Studies, the Independence Pass



Foundation, the Roaring Fork Chapter of the Audubon Society and the Pitkin County Weed Management Board.

Heather was a founding member of the Friends of Hunter Creek, and her love of Hunter Creek led her to fight for many years for public access to the valley.

In lieu of flowers, memorials may be made in Heather's name to the Wilderness Workshop or the Independence Pass Foundation.

BLM: OK TO DRILL ROAN PLATEAU

Waiting until safely after the election, the BLM finally released its Draft Environmental Impact Statement on gas drilling on the Roan Plateau on Nov. 19.

The plan's preferred alternative is to open up most of the top of the plateau to drilling, but not until 80 percent of the wells at the base have been drilled – an unusual proposal that would delay drilling on the top by an estimated 16 years.

The Roan Plateau, northwest of Rifle, is an island of biologically rich wildlands surrounded by a sea of oil and gas development. The broad, rolling plateau

contains quiet forests, wildflower meadows, dramatic canyons, one of Colorado's highest waterfalls, and rare plants that exist nowhere else on earth. Conservationists view the Roan as an irreplaceable ecological treasure that, like Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, should be left alone in the push to develop domestic energy sources.

The BLM's plan came just as we were finalizing this newsletter, so we haven't had time to analyze it fully. But it would appear that what the BLM sees as a balanced plan gives the energy industry essentially everything it wanted, and the

environment gets the scraps. Very little of the sensitive plateau would remain off-limits to drilling, and in fact the 80-percent trigger would only serve as an incentive to the gas industry to accelerate drilling at the base to gain access to the top.

WW continues to back the position taken by the Save the Roan Plateau Campaign, which is pushing for a compromise that would enable the energy companies to extract nearly all the gas believed to lie under the area through directional drilling – a technology the Bush administra-

tion's own Energy Plan has touted as the new, environmentally sensitive way to develop energy resources.

Citizens now have 90 days in which to file public comments on the BLM's proposal. For more info, go to www.SaveRoanPlateau.org.

In addition, the BLM will hold a series of public meetings on the plan, including two on the same day, Dec. 15, at the Rifle Fairgrounds and the Greenwood Springs community center. Garfield County will also hold its own public meetings on the plan.

FOREST PLAN APPEAL NOW A WAITING GAME

Unfortunately, but not surprisingly, our administrative appeal of the revised White River National Forest Plan was denied in September.

Our appeal points were several, but perhaps the most ecologically significant was the WRNF's failure to designate a management indicator species (MIS) for the aspen and spruce-fir forests – forest types that comprise the vast majority of the WRNF.

What's an MIS? It's a shorthand way of gauging the ecological health of the a forest ecosystem. The idea is that there are one or two particular species whose population trends can serve as a proxy to determine the health of the particular ecosystem they occupy. If the population of that species is declining, it's an indication that the management of that ecosystem needs some adjustment to

reverse the trend.

Obviously, if an MIS isn't identified for a particular ecosystem, then the one shorthand method of gauging its health doesn't exist. Not only does this defy sound ecological science, we argue that it violates federal law.

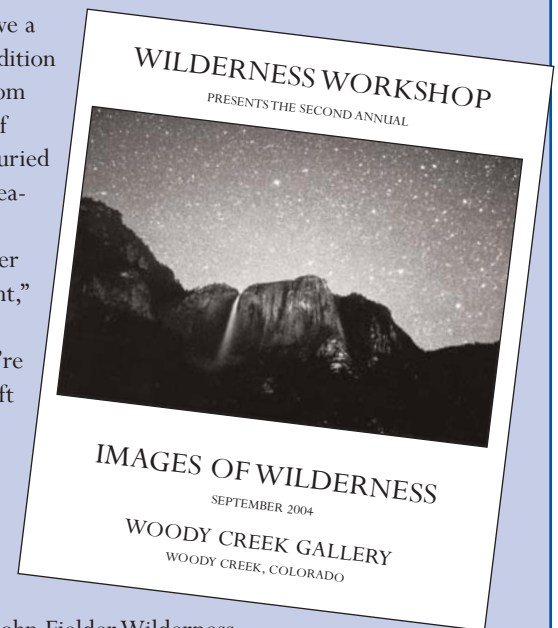
Litigating the appeal denial isn't an option, however, due to a recent precedent-setting court ruling that found that forest plans are merely programmatic plans that can't in themselves cause harm to a plaintiff; the harm can only come from a specific project arising from the plan, such as a timber sale, ski area expansion, road construction, etc.

So we'll remain vigilant, waiting for the WRNF to propose projects that implement what we see as the glaring shortcomings in the forest plan, and then sue.

HOLIDAY GIFT IDEAS

We still have a few limited-edition art posters from our "Images of Wilderness" juried photo show, featuring Peter Sahula's "Upper Fall in Starlight," for just \$30.

And if you're looking for gift ideas, how about a set of four greeting cards featuring watercolors by Dottie Fox (\$12), a John Fielder Wilderness Anniversary poster (\$15), or a "Wild for Good" t-shirt (\$15)? We've got 'em all in the office.



COURT DISMISSES TWO MORE MINING CLAIMS

Another victory in the fight against bogus mining claims on Forest Service lands surrounding Aspen: the last two of six test cases were dismissed in federal district court in early November.

The claims, if upheld, would have resulted in private inholdings (read monster homes) in the Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness. The dismissal of these six test cases means the remaining 44 claims are unlikely to stand. WW filed briefs in the test cases.



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The Wilderness Workshop's mission is to protect and conserve the wilderness and natural resources of the Roaring Fork Watershed, the White River National Forest, and adjacent lands.

The Workshop is a non-profit organization that engages in research, education, legal advocacy, and grassroots organizing to protect the ecological integrity of local landscapes and public lands with a focus on the monitoring and conservation of air and water quality, wildlife species and habitat, natural communities, and lands of wilderness quality.

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"Some things may be profitably broken up and sold for the materials in them; others are better left intact. Would the cherry trees in Washington, D.C. be more useful in the form of kindling? Ought Congress to sell the Lincoln Memorial to a rock crushing concern, or the paintings in the National Gallery to a rag collector?..."

"The remaining bits of American wilderness also constitute a great national treasure, but if Congress permits them to be destroyed, they, like Humpty-Dumpty, can never be put back together again."

— Connie Harvey, 1964 (in support of the Wilderness Act)