



Riccardo Savi

FIELDER, WALK FOR WILDERNESS HEADLINE SEPTEMBER EVENTS

September is the coolest month in our “Wild for Good” event series, celebrating the 40th anniversary of the Wilderness Act.

Dave Foreman started us off with a superb slide show at Aspen’s Paepcke Auditorium on Wednesday, Sept. 1. The former Earth First!er, who now runs the Rewilding Institute in Albuquerque, presented an inspiring, practical vision for restoring ecological balance by reconnecting the continent’s wild places and making room for major carnivores such as wolves and grizzlies. By the end of the show, he had 300 people howling in unison! If you missed it, you can catch reruns on Aspen Grassroots TV.

And if you missed the opening of our “**Images of Wilderness**” photo exhibit, never fear – it will continue to hang at the Woody Creek Gallery through Oct. 4. The works of two dozen local professional and amateur photographers will draw you into their varied wild worlds.

And please join us for these upcoming events:

• **Friday, Sept. 10 – John Fielder: “Mountain Ranges of Colorado.”** Acclaimed pho-



Capitol Peak and sky pilots, by John Fielder

tographer John Fielder has published more than 20 books celebrating Colorado’s wild and remote places. This slide show – featuring images from his just-published coffee-table book – is a benefit for WW. John will sign books afterward. Wheeler Opera House, 6:30 p.m. \$10. Tickets available from the Wheeler Box Office, 920-5770.

• **Saturday, Sept. 25 – Walk for Wilderness.** Come show your support for wilderness by hiking 1.5 miles along the River Run Trail from Ashcroft to the Pine Creek Cookhouse. Complimentary t-shirt and water bottle, plus music and food at the cookhouse. *Note that the early registration deadline is Sept. 10 – after that the adult reg-*

istration fee goes up to \$20.

Please see the attached flyer for details.

• **Friday, Oct. 1 – Wilderness poetry evening.** As the nights draw in, we’re thinking it’ll be time for a cozy indoor event. Featured poets will be Bruce Berger and Karen Chamberlain; there will also be an open-mic segment for anyone wanting to share their own wilderness-inspired verse. Woody Creek Gallery, 7 p.m. Donation.

• **Tuesday, Oct. 12 – Wendy Keefover-Ring of Sinapu will give a slide show on mountain lions – their natural history, their role in the ecosystem, and the possibility of coexis-**

tence. Location TBD.

• **Saturday, Oct. 23 – Oil & gas activist workshop.** We’re looking for a few good activists willing to get trained in the fine art of defending their beloved local landscapes from gas development. Come learn how to monitor permit applications, review proposals, and challenge ecological threats. Since the front line in this war has now reached Thompson Creek, this all-day workshop will be held at Carbondale Town Hall (time TBD).

Please contact the office (544-0733; info@wilderness-workshop.org) for more information on any of these events.

COME HIKE WITH US

We have two naturalist-guided hikes scheduled for the remainder of this year:

• **Sept. 18 – Red Table Mountain**, with Dr. John Emerick. Red Table is the largest of the areas in our White River Wilderness Campaign.

• **Oct. 16 – Aquatic habitats**, with Dee Malone. Location to be announced.

Hikes are free, but are limited to 15 people, so please sign up early. WW members and their friends have first priority. Meet at 9 a.m. at the WW office to carpool to the trailhead, or join the group elsewhere en route by arrangement.

These are all-day hikes. Be sure to bring rain gear/warm clothing, sunscreen, good hiking boots, water, and lunch.

GAS LEASING: NEXT STEPS

We were informed on Aug. 30 that the Bureau of Land Management had dismissed our protest of three gas leases in the Thompson Creek area.

The Wilderness Workshop had led a group of six conservation groups in filing the protest prior to the auction date of May 13, on the grounds that the decision to offer the leases had failed to take into account numerous ecological impacts that the federal agencies themselves are required to take into account. The auction went ahead anyway, and the leases sold for a mere \$44,000, but they were held in abeyance for 75 days while the BLM reviewed the decision.

In the meantime, we partnered with EcoFlight to take county officials, ranchers and other stakeholders on overflights of Thompson Creek; we organized a town meeting in Carbonade that drew 100 very concerned people; and we helped Carbonade activist Nancy Zi draft a citizen petition that garnered 700 signatures. All of this attracted major coverage by the local media, generated many citizen comment letters, and turned up the heat on the BLM

and Forest Service decision-makers.

But during the summer we also learned that the situation is much worse than we thought. Our research revealed that these were by no means the first gas leases to be granted in our area. It turns out that roughly 95 percent of White River National Forest lands with natural-gas potential have already been leased; most of the leases were granted decades ago, when we environmentalists were busy securing wilderness designation for areas close to recreational centers like Aspen, and were paying little attention to lower-elevation areas such as Thompson Creek, which we now realize are ecologically richer and arguably more important for biodiversity.

The dismissal of our protest of the three new leases was unfortunate, but not unexpected. With the help of our pro-bono attorney, Mike Chiropolos of Western Resource Advocates in Denver, we and our partner groups have roughed out a multi-pronged strategy for

defending local roadless areas against gas development.

Our likely next step in contesting the recently awarded Thompson Creek leases is to appeal the decision to the Interior Board of Land Appeals; this must be done in the next 30 days. Reversals by the IBLA are rare, but this is a motion we will probably have to undertake to help build the administrative record. If we strike out with the IBLA, we'll have to take it to court – a battle that could take years.

The other pre-existing leases will require a separate finger-in-the-dike strategy. Having already been granted, leases generally aren't revoked (although they *can* be bought out – the federal government bought back leases off the coast of Florida, at Jeb Bush's request), so we can only influence the how and when of the drilling. Still, there are a number of ways to minimize the environmental damage done.

To this end, we're organizing an activist training workshop on Oct. 23 (see page 1). We hope this will lead to the creation of an "adopt-a-lease" program and

an active corps of citizen monitors who can scrutinize proposals, challenge any environmentally damaging aspects, and push for limitations on well-pad density, surface occupancy and the like based on scientific rationales.

Our primary aim is to protect these wild places until Washington develops a more enlightened national energy policy that makes efficiency, renewables, and alternative fuels more cost-effective than despoiling ecologically important wildlands for the last few days' worth of gas and oil.

Yet a third parallel strategy – which we're still researching – is to challenge the 1993 Forest-wide environmental impact statement (EIS) that all subsequent gas leases rest on. Since that EIS was written, it has been made obsolete by changed circumstances: gas prices have quadrupled, giving companies greater incentive to drill in marginal areas, while technical advances now enable them to extract gas from tight sand formations that were previously too expensive to develop.



Abbie McFlynn

Kate McBride Puckett and daughter Riley rode in the Wilderness Workshop's float in the Aspen July 4 parade. That's Casey at the wheel.



WEAR IT WILD

Proclaim your wildness! We're selling t-shirts with the Wild for Good logo crisscrossed by lynx tracks. They come in men's and women's V-neck styles – \$15 each. Inquire at the WW office (544-0733).

PUBLIC COMMENTS NEEDED!

ROADLESS AREA CONSERVATION RULE

In July the Bush administration proposed revisions to the Roadless Area Conservation Rule that would basically kill it. The July announcement kicked off a 60-day public comment period. Therefore, **comments must be received by the Forest Service no later than Sept. 14.**

By now you should have received a postal mailing sent by a consortium of Colorado conservation groups, including the Wilderness Workshop. It gives background information on the issue, and provides a detachable comment card that you can fill in and mail by Sept. 10.

At a minimum, please fill in the card. But if you'd like your comments to carry more weight with the feds, write a letter in your own words. (For extra credit, write it in longhand – the folks who review public comments tend to assume that handwritten letters come from good, honest rural folk whereas word-processed letters must have been written by effete urban elites...)

The Roadless Rule, created by the Clinton administration, prohibits road construction in roadless areas except for fire/forest health considerations and to access pre-existing mineral leases. Without this rule,

it'll be open season on road-building. We're already feeling the hot breath of this trend in local roadless areas such as Thompson Creek, where the BLM and Forest Service are contending that the Roadless Rule doesn't apply because it's being contested in court.

Here are some points from the card that you might want to include in your letter:

- Building roads is a taxpayer liability. The Forest Service – the largest roadbuilder on earth – is only maintaining 20 percent of the roads it has.
- Protecting roadless areas maintains our watersheds, thus

providing clean drinking water, and protects important wildlife habitat.

- Protected roadless areas equals more jobs. Outdoor recreation is a major business sector in Colorado.

Send your letter to:

Content Analysis Team
Roadless State Petitions
USDA Forest Service

P.O. Box 22190

Salt Lake City, UT 84122

Fax: (801) 517-1014

For the Wilderness Society's analysis of the proposed Roadless Rule revision (read evisceration), see www.wilderness.org/Library/Documents/upload/Roadless_StatePetition_Analysis.pdf.

OFF-ROAD VEHICLE RULE

In the May newsletter we alerted you to an anticipated new Forest Service rule on off-road vehicles (ORVs). The draft rule that has been proposed is a small step forward, but falls seriously short of the mark.

Letters from the public urging the Forest Service to strengthen it are urgently needed. **Comments must be received by Sept. 13.**

The future of our National Forests and the values they represent are threatened by the growing and uncontrolled use of ATVs, dirt bikes, and other off-road vehicles.

In many National Forests today, ORVs can drive almost anywhere. The Forest Service reports that more than 273,000 miles of roads and other routes are open to ORVs. On some forests, ATVs and dirt bikes can travel virtually without limit

across millions of acres. In Colorado, 86 percent of National Forest land outside of congressionally designated wilderness is open to motorized recreation.

This one use dominates the landscape at the expense of almost any other activity. According to the Forest Service, millions more people visit our National Forests to hike, view nature, hunt, or fish than visit to ride ORVs. With vehicles almost everywhere, there are fewer places where families can go for a quiet walk in the woods or a picnic, where hunters and fishermen can find quality experiences, or where hikers and horseback riders can avoid dangerous conflicts.

In 2001, the Forest Service estimated that forests nationwide were scarred with at least 60,000 miles of unauthorized

roads, many blazed by ORVs. This figure has only grown since then.

As off-road vehicle use has exploded and vehicles become capable of traversing almost any terrain, the Forest Service has failed to effectively manage this use or consistently enforce even its most basic rules on off-road use.

When commenting on the draft rule, ask the Forest Service to ensure that the final rule will require each National Forest to:

- Complete off-road vehicle route designations within two years of the effective date of that rule;
- Designate roads and routes, including any unauthorized renegade route, for off-road use only after public participation and site-specific analysis of environmental impacts and user-conflicts;
- Immediately end use of all unauthorized renegade ATV and

dirt bike routes pending site-specific study and official designation;

- Ensure that it can afford, maintain and manage any system of roads and routes designated for off-roads vehicle use; and
- Disallow ORVs in inventoried roadless areas and other ecologically sensitive areas.

In addition, please urge the Forest Service to retain the following in the final rule:

- The general prohibition on motorized cross-country recreation, provided that any area designated as available for off-road vehicle use be limited and discrete;
- The requirement that off-road vehicle use be authorized only on those roads and routes specifically designated as open on use maps;
- The conclusion that forests are not required to inventory

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Wilderness Workshop

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info@wildernessworkshop.org

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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and/or map unauthorized renegade routes prior to commencing the official route designation process; and

- Disallow motorized recreation vehicles in roadless areas.
- Send comments to:
Proposed Rule for Designated Routes and Areas for Motor Vehicle Use
c/o Content Analysis Team
P.O. Box 221150
Salt Lake City, UT 84122
Email: trvman@fs.fed.us
Fax: (801) 517-1014

VALLEY GOVERNMENTS SET WILDERNESS WEEK

"Wilderness is like mom and apple pie," Wilderness Workshop Development Director Dave Reed told the Basalt Town Council in August. The council apparently concurred. Basalt joined Aspen, Snowmass Village, Carbondale, Glenwood Springs, and Pitkin and Garfield Counties in proclaiming Aug. 30-Sept. 5 as Wilderness Week.

The proclamations, based on wording proposed by the Wilderness Workshop, were timed to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the Wilderness Act, which was signed into law on Sept. 3, 1964.

The proclamations all affirmed the value of wilderness in the valley's quality of life and economy, and cited the role played by WW founders Connie Harvey, Joy Caudill, and Dottie Fox in helping to secure the designation of our local wilderness areas.

Thanks to Cindy Houben for drafting the proclamation wording, and to Hal Sundin, Michael Hassig, Sloan Shoemaker, and Dave Reed for presenting it to the various local governments.

MR. SHOEMAKER GOES TO WASHINGTON

Wilderness Week comes a bit later in Washington. On Sept. 19-22, Wilderness Workshop Executive Director Sloan Shoemaker will be one of 300 conservation advocates from around the country gathering in the capital to participate in four days of events, hearings, and rallies in recognition of the Wilderness Act anniversary.

According to Sloan, the convocation will enable participants to bring their regional concerns and perspectives from the grassroots to the center, and to bring national strategic thinking from Washington back to their memberships. They'll divide their time between meeting with members of Congress, presenting testimony, listening to speakers, and networking with each other.

CARBONDALE, HERE WE COME!

Starting in early October, the Wilderness Workshop will have a wonderful new office in Carbondale. We will also continue to maintain an office in the Yellow Brick Building in Aspen, and all our existing contact coordinates (at left) will continue to work.

The WW board and staff had been contemplating establishing a physical presence downvalley, where we're doing a growing proportion of our work, for the past couple of years. Recognizing our growing role as a valley-wide (and beyond) organization, we decided last year to drop "Aspen" from our name.

The decision was expedited this summer when we received notification from the City of Aspen that we would have to leave our current Yellow Brick

space.

The address of our new Carbondale office is 75 N. 2nd St., Apt. B; it's just a half block off Main Street. Thanks to former board member John Seidel, who owns the building, we'll have twice the space for the same rent we currently pay in Aspen. Our Aspen office – OK, a desk and a computer – will be in the basement of the Yellow Brick Building.

Please feel free to drop by our new office – but please give us until mid-October to get settled! We'll announce a date for an open house in the next newsletter.

WW BOARD NEWS

Michael McVoy joined the Wilderness Workshop board in July. An adviser with Raymond James Financial Services in Aspen, Michael is an experienced nonprofit hand who has served on the boards of the Aspen Valley Land Trust and several other organizations.

Cindy Houben announced in August that she's stepping down from the WW board. As Pitkin County's Community Development Director, Cindy has become the point person for the county's response to gas leasing, and she wants to devote her time to developing the county's code to deal with the issue.

THANKS...

We're out of space and we haven't even thanked all the folks who submitted photos to "Images of Wilderness," judged and helped set up the exhibit, volunteered at the Dave Foreman event, made donations...

We promise to thank you properly in the next newsletter.