"The Need for Wilderness Areas," *The Living Wilderness*, Number 59, winter-spring, 1956-57, pp. 58-43, Howard Zahniser.

In addition to our needs for urban and suburban parks and open spaces, in addition to our need for a countryside of rural loveliness, a landscape of beauty for our living and *in addition* to the needs for parkways and parks and well developed areas for all kinds of outdoor recreation, there is in our planning a need also to secure the preservation of some areas that are so managed as to be left unmanaged—areas that are undeveloped by man's mechanical tools and in every way unmodified by his civilization.

These are the areas of wilderness that still live on in our national parks, national forests, state parks and forests, and indeed various other categories of land likewise.

These are areas with values that are in jeopardy not only from exploitation for commodity purposes and from appropriation for engineering uses. Their peculiar values are also in danger from development for recreation, even from efforts to protect and manage them as wilderness.

There is a great need that resides in the desires of so many people for wilderness experiences, a need that should certainly be met. There is likewise a practical need for realizing our ideal of preserving for everyone the privilege of choosing to enjoy the wilderness if he or she so wishes.

There is another practical or immediate need in our compulsion to save from destruction whatever is *best*. Some of our strongest determination to preserve wilderness arises from this motive.

Robert Marshall, whose memory I honor with admiration and deep gratitude, conveys such an appreciation of the wilderness *as a superlative* in a short essay found among his papers by his brother George Marshall and published posthumously as the editorial in the Summer 1954 issue of *The Living Wilderness*. Essaying a demonstration of "certain distinctive values" that come to a person with a return for a time to the primitive life of the wilderness, he places before us authoritatively the benefits of wilderness and suggests the need for preserving it as something superlative. Note the variety of superlatives in these paragraphs—"best," "ideal," "perfect," "unique," "most perfect." He says:

> The wilderness furnishes the best environment which remains in the country for physical adventure. It is difficult to overestimate the importance adventure assumes in the longings of innumerable vigorous people. Lack of opportunity to satisfy such longings undoubtedly is responsible for much unhappiness, for a considerable portion of the crime which is so often committed as a means of self expression, and, if we are to believe William James and Bertrand Russell, even for war.
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> A wilderness journey provides the ideal conditions for developing physical hardiness. In the wilderness a person cannot buy transportation or services. He must provide them for himself. He cannot find machinery to

> relieve him of the need for expending his own strength and energy. If he gets into trouble he must get himself out of it or face the consequences.
>
> The wilderness also furnishes the perfect environment for peacefulness and relaxation. This is of no consequence in an environment which has been developingthrough an unbroken chain of natural sequences for millions of years. In the true wilderness there are no jarring notes, no discordant clashes with one's instinctive sense of what is fitting and proper.
>
> From an esthetic standpoint the wilderness is unique because in it alone immensity is a major quality of the beauty which one enjoys. The values which one gets in a view from some lofty mountain top cannot be comprehended at all if one tries to reduce them to color or form or pattern.
>
> All these esthetic values are present, but they are blended with the dominant value of being a part of an immensity so great that the human being who looks upon it vanishes into utter insignificance.
>
> The wilderness is also unique esthetically in that it stimulates not just the sense of sight, as does art, or the sense of sound, as does music, but all of the senses which man has. The traveler wandering at evening to the shore of some wilderness lakelet senses through his sight the pink sunset sky and the delightful pattern which the deep bay makes among the spruce trees which rise from its shores; senses through his hearing the lapping of the water against the rocky shore and the evening song of the thrush; senses through his smell the scent of balsam and the marsh flowers at the water's edge; senses through his touch the gentle wind which blows on his forehead and the softness of the sphagnum beneath his feet. The wilderness is all of these senses harmonized with immensity into a form of beauty which to many human beings is the most perfect experience of the earth.

Who that can see clearly these superlative values of the wilderness through the perceptions and interpretations of Robert Marshall can fail to sense a need for preserving wilderness areas?

Who in a democratic government that seeks to serve the public interest even for the sake of minorities would wish to lose an opportunity to realize a policy for wilderness preservation?

Who that looks on into the future with a concern for such values would not wish to insure for posterity the freedom to choose the privilege of knowing the unspoiled wilderness?

But are these superlative values essential?
Is the exquisite also a requisite?

I think it is.

I believe that at least in the present phase of our civilization we have a profound, a fundamental need for areas of wilderness—a need that is not only recreational and spiritualbut also educational and scientific, and withal essential to a true understanding of ourselves, our culture, our own natures, and our place in all nature.

This need is for areas of the earth within which we stand without our mechanisms that make us immediate masters over our environment—areas of wild nature in which we sense ourselves to be, what in fact I believe we are, dependant members of an interdependent community of living creatures that together derive their existence from the sun.

By very definition this wilderness is a need. The idea of wilderness as an area without man's influence is man's own concept. Its values are human values. Its preservation is a purpose that arises out of man's own sense of his fundamental needs.

Wilderness to most of us is vacation country, thought about for the most part in connection with occasional good-time escapes from a civilized life which somehow or other seems to be "reality." It is usually only after reflection that one perceives the true reality in the wilderness.

It is, of course, not surprising that recreational values are generally understood as representing the dominant importance of wilderness in our modern civilization. Only in a society that produces the erosion of human beings, the wearing away of soul and body and spirit that is so familiar in our modern circumstances, does the concept of recreation appear.

The wilderness represents the antithesis of all that produces these conditions which recreation remedies. It not only provides the kind of recreation most needed by the increasingly large number who seek wilderness, but it also affords the background for the kind of outdoor recreation for which conveniences and accommodations are provided—the frontier where those who do not wish to experience the rigors of wilderness living and travel may still know in some degree the tonic benefits of its wildness.

Recreational values of the wilderness are thus not only intrinsic but also pervasive throughout the outdoor recreation program of a society with the tastes and resources of the United States. Wilderness preservation is a part therefore of a comprehensive recreational program—a very important part of such a program's provision for outdoor recreation—and it is the ultimate resource for that phase of outdoor recreation that ministers to the individual as such.

But wilderness vacations have overtones that make them more than narrowly recreational. They are more likely to be joyous than merry, more refreshing than exciting, more engrossing than diverting. Their rewards are satisfactions. There is likely to be seriousness about wilderness recreation and an earnestness among those who seek it. So

philosophers of education who describe their goals in such terms as “life adjustment” and “personality development” may find in the wilderness a most valuable resource, and recreational values in such a context become profoundly educational.

Deeper and broader than the recreational value of wilderness, although indeed encompassing it, is the importance that relates it to our essential being, indicating that the understandings which come in its surroundings are those of true reality. Our lives seem so derivative from the wilderness, we ourselves seem so dependant on a renewal of our inspiration from these wild sources, that I wonder sometimes if we could long survive a final destruction of all wilderness. Are we not truly and in reality *human*, essentially, as spiritual creatures nurtured and sustained —directly or indirectly—by a wildness that must always be renewed from a living wilderness?

Is it not with some such understanding as this that we realize the essential importance of our wilderness areas?

Is it not thus that we can explain the fact that a wilderness vacation is remembered as more than sport, more than fun, more than simple recreation?

Are not these the understandings which give such profound significance to the longer sojourns that a civilized man or woman occasionally spends in a return to the wilderness—gaining experiences that so often prove interesting to so many of us?

It is characteristic of wilderness to impress its visitors with their relationship to other forms of life, and to afford those who linger an intimation of the interdependence of all life. In the wilderness it is thus possible to sense most keenly our human membership in the whole community of life on the Earth. And in this possibility is perhaps one explanation for our modern deep-seated need for wilderness.

Because we are so well able to do things, we forget that we can do them only because something else is done. We forget that we can continue only as long as other men, other animals, and other forms of life also keep on doing things. We forget that the real source of all our life is not in ourselves, not even in the Earth itself, but more than 90 million miles away, in the Sun. And not one of us is able alone to live on this great source. We live only as members of a community.

If for a time some of us might seem to do well at the tragic expense of other life in this community, we can be sure that it would likewise be at the expense of our children, our grandchildren, and our great-grandchildren through the generations that might live. For we know that we can live on in our descendants only if our Earth community lives on with them. We not only exist but we are immortal on the Earth only as members of a great community.

These are facts and understandings that have been known to us only a comparatively short time—through the observations and studies made by our scientists—and not all of us have appreciated them rightly. It is not long since man thought of himself as the center

of the universe, thought even of the Sun—the very source of all our life—as a light by day revolving about the Earth. As our new understanding has come—through science—science also has brought us many other new and wonderful discoveries, and the new knowledge of what we *are* has been overlooked by many of us in our eagerness for the new knowledge of what we can *do*. We have become as proud over what we can *do* as ever our ancestors could have been over themselves as the center of the universe. We deeply need the humility to know ourselves as the dependant members of a great community of life, and this can indeed be one of the spiritual benefits of a wilderness experience. Without the gadgets, the inventions, the contrivances whereby men have seemed to establish among themselves an independence of nature, without these distractions, to know the wilderness is to know profound humility, to recognize one's littleness, to sense dependence and interdependence, indebtedness, and responsibility.

Perhaps, indeed, this is the *distinctive* ministration of wilderness to modern man, the characteristic effect of an area which we most deeply need to provide for in our preservation programs.

Thus, the most profound of all wilderness values in our modern world is an educational value.

As the so-called conquest of nature has progressed, men and women—separated by civilization from the life community of their origin—have become less and less aware of their dependence on other forms of life and more and more misled into a sense of self sufficiency and into a disregard of their interdependence with the other forms of life with which they—together—derive their existence from the solar center of the universe.

In the areas of wilderness that are still relatively unmodified by man it is, however, possible for a human being, adult or child, to sense and see his own humble, dependant relationship to all of life.

In these areas, thus, are the opportunities for so important, so neglected a part of our education—the gaining of the true understanding of our past, ourselves and our world which will enable us to enjoy the conveniences and liberties of our urbanized, industrialized, mechanized civilization and yet not sacrifice an awareness of our human existence as spiritual creatures nurtured and sustained by and from the great community of life that comprises the wildness of the universe, of which we ourselves are a part.

Paradoxically, the wilderness which thus teaches modern man his dependence on the whole community of life can also teach him a needed personal independence—an ability to care for himself, to carry his own burdens, to provide his own fuel, prepare his own food, furnish his own shelter, make his own bed, and—perhaps most remarkable of all—transport himself by walking.

In these lessons are further the lessons of history—a stimulus to patriotism of the noblest order—for in the wilderness the land still lives as it was before the pioneers fashioned in and from it the civilization we know and enjoy.

With these lessons come also the understanding that physical, psychic, and spiritual human needs are such that wilderness recreation should always be available and, in fact, should be enjoyed to a much greater extent than it now is.

Thus recreational and educational values of the wilderness merge.

In a culture like that which we call modern we can be sure that it will be increasingly important for students, of the present and of future generations, to know what wilderness has to teach—through their own experiences; through educators who are informed and corrected by wilderness experiences; through photographs, paintings, writings, and other educational and informational materials with a validity insured by a still living wilderness.

So long as wilderness exists in reality, providing actual resorts for human beings, giving a sense of actuality to pictorial and literary representations of the wilderness, and affording the scenes for further research, so long will the safeguards against an urban, industrial, mechanized ignorance of the facts of human life be effective.

There are monumental or historic values of the wilderness also; values which are closely related both to educational and recreational values. The wilderness I once described as "a piece of the long ago that we still have with us." It is highly prized by many people as such. It perpetuates on our continent not only the scene of the pioneering activities of the first white men in this hemisphere but also a still more ancient scene. The areas preserved are monuments to the pioneers' conquests, but they also are samples of the natural world without influences of modern man. They have deep values in the continuing opportunity they afford to relive the lives of ancestors and thus, with also the anticipation of posterity's similar interest, to participate in the immortality of the generations.

The wilderness has profoundly important scientific values. These are similar to those of historical importance in depending on the preservation of areas as they existed, and exist, without the influence of modern man. These values too have an educational aspect, but their more precisely scientific importance is in relation to research. Their research uses are dual: They afford the scenes for fundamental investigations of the natural world of living creatures unmodified by man; they afford also "check" areas where none of the factors being compared in a particular study (land-use research, for example) have been operative.

The scientific values pertain not only to research and original investigation but also to the study and observation that are essentially educational in their purpose. Wilderness areas, including the smaller natural areas and also the extensive wild regions, should accordingly be preserved for the sake of the field study that they make possible for students in each generation. They serve this purpose for the summer camps of youth organizations, for field stations of college summer-school classes, and also for the more advanced excursions of graduate students.

And Aldo Leopold exclaimed: “As a matter of fact, there is no higher or more exciting sport than that of ecological observation.”

So we have various needs for wilderness areas that are all derived from a need to maintain an awareness of our human relationships to all life, the need to guard ourselves against a false sense of our own self sufficiency. We need to draw ourselves constantly toward the center of things and not allow our eccentricities to carry us off on a tangent, toward increasing unhappiness.

We are a part of the wildness of the universe. That is our nature. Our noblest, happiest character develops with the influence of wildness. Away from it we degenerate into the squalor of slums or the frustration of clinical couches. With the wilderness we are at home.

Some of us think we see this so clearly that for ourselves, for our children, our continuing posterity, and our fellow men we covet with a consuming intensity the fulness of the human development that keeps its contact with wildness. Out of the wilderness, we realize, has come the substance of our culture, and with a living wilderness—it is our faith—we shall have also a vibrant vital culture—an enduring civilization of healthful, happy people who, like Antaeus, perpetually renew themselves in contact with the earth.

This is not a disparagement of our civilization—no disparagement at all—but rather an admiration of it to the point of perpetuating it. We like the beef from the cattle grazed on the public domain. We relish the vegetables from the lands irrigated by virtue of the Bureau of Reclamation. We carry in our packs aluminum manufactured with the help of hydroelectric power from great reservoirs. We motor happily on paved highways to the approaches of our wilderness. We journey in streamlined trains and in transcontinental airplanes to conferences on wilderness preservation. We nourish and refresh our minds from books manufactured out of the pulp of our forests. We enjoy the convenience and comfort of our way of living—urban, village, and rural. And we want this civilization to endure and to be enjoyed on and on by healthy, happy citizens.

It is this civilization, this culture, this way of living that will be sacrificed if our wilderness is lost. *What sacrifice!*

Our only hope to avert this loss is in our deliberate effort to preserve the wilderness we have. The ramifications of our developing mechanical enterprises are such that only those areas which are set aside for preservation will persist as wilderness.

It behooves us then to do two things: First we must see that an adequate system of wilderness areas is designed for preservation, and then we must allow nothing to alter the wilderness character of the preserves.

We have made an excellent start on such a program. Our obligation now—to those who have been our pioneers and to those of the future, as well as to our own generation— is to see that this program is not undone but perfected.

In our marvelous National Park System; in the wilderness, wild, primitive, and roadless areas of our national forests; on extensive tracts of Indian reservations; in certain units of the national wildlife refuge system, and in state parks, and some others too, we have areas that have either been set aside as wilderness or are protected in a way that safeguards wilderness.

The process of designation of areas of wilderness for preservation, however, is not complete as yet. There are still some to be added—especially grassland, seashore, and desert. There is no doubt, so far as I know, about the correctness of the designation of any of the areas now being preserved. There are, I understand, some boundary adjustments that need to be made for certain areas that were established without opportunity for adequate care as to exact boundaries. There are zoning questions in some of our parks. There are some additions that can be made to established areas. There are private holdings within these public areas that should be acquired.

These aspects of the perfection of the designations should be cared for in a persisting program. And the other potential units in this system of wilderness should be sought out as soon as possible.

For these areas of wilderness we should obtain the maximum possible degree of security. We need Congressional action, to provide for their preservation as wilderness, we should move forward as steadily as we can toward this action.

[Here followed the outline of a proposed bill, which with the modifications of many suggestions and criticisms and further consideration, has been realized in the Wilderness Bill.]

Conservation is both practical and idealistic, as is well demonstrated in our concern with wilderness preservation.

It is good and sound to realize that in preserving areas of wilderness we are recognizing our own true human interest. It seems good, ethical, to consider ourselves as members of a community of life that embraces the earth – and to see our own welfare as arising from the prosperity of the community.

Yet there may be a danger in too conscious, too deliberate, too intent an effort to see all in terms of our own welfare. Jesus suggested that self-seeking is not the way to self-realization; not deliberately but through indirection human beings realize their best welfare, by losing sight of themselves.

It is a great satisfaction to be able to demonstrate to another that an unspoiled wilderness is important because it serves a man’s need for “escape,” but going to the wilderness to escape from something is no certain way of actually being in wilderness at all. The only way to escape from one’s self in wilderness is to lose one’s self there. More realistically,

the true wilderness experience is one, not of escaping, but of finding one's self by seeking the wilderness.

The sum of this moralizing may be in forsaking human arrogance and courting humility in a respect for the community and with regard for the environment.

The central human importance of such experience, I believe, constitutes profound evidence of need for wilderness areas.

An understanding of these fundamental needs, as well as the so-called more practical needs to meet recreational demands of people for wilderness experience – this understanding should inspire us anew to work for the perfection of a national program for wilderness preservation – a program to serve not only our own human needs but also those of the generations to follow.