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Wilderness Weekend on the Lochsa Diverse Group Ponders Wilderness Management at 50 Years

Contributed by Carol Hennessey

Kamiah, Idaho (September 22, 2014) – Friends of the Clearwater, Wilderness Watch, and the US Forest Service were proud to co-sponsor 50 Years: A Celebration of Wilderness and our National Wilderness Preservation System on September 12-14 at the Wilderness Gateway Campground along the Lochsa River on the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests. Wilderness enthusiasts from around the northern Rockies met at the campground for this 3-day celebration and reflection of the historic passing of the Wilderness Act in 1964. This event was part of the nation-wide celebration of the anniversary. The weekend's festivities included engaging speakers, lively discussions, children's activities, a traditional-skills demonstration, live music and "late into the night" campfire discussions.

A key component to the weekend included group discussions about current and future challenges to the spirit of wilderness and the 1964 Act. These critical dialogue sessions included whether human manipulation that is contrary to wilderness should be done to maintain current natural conditions, how managing fire in wilderness could affect wilderness character, how fish and wildlife management could be conducted to be more compatible with wilderness, and the future of wilderness stewardship.

A traditional skills workshop was hosted by the Forest Service (FS) on Saturday and featured a "hands-on" approach to learning how to teach Leave No Trace Skills, how to pack and appreciate stock support in wilderness, and how ropes and winches can be used for a mechanical advantage when moving large materials in wilderness without motorized equipment. In addition, a hands-on demonstration for using cross-cuts to clear trails was hosted by trail specialists from the FS and Selway-Bitterroot Frank Church Foundation.

Highlights of the weekend included an inspiring address and call to action by the one remaining founder of the Wilderness Act Stewart Brandborg (Brandy), music by Dana Lyons, and an evening social that included a 50th birthday cake paying tribute to the Wilderness Act and the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness.

On Sunday, closing comments revealed that “bridges were built” among many in support of wilderness, and that groups should work together to encourage this stewardship. Friends of the Clearwater, Wilderness Watch and other participants said they would like to have more of these “coming together” sessions on wilderness, perhaps annually. They expressed eagerness to work with the Forest Service on the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests on wilderness administration including on-the-ground monitoring protocol and work.

Reflections from the participants:

- “Wilderness, history, science, music, people from all walks of life, young and old. We need more of these kinds of events to nurture our spirits and sustain us in our work.” Jim Miller and Carol Blum, Friends of the Bitterroot.
- "It's really important to get the public thinking about the big issues facing Wilderness as we celebrate its first 50 years, and to engage them in finding solutions. This event gave people the chance to learn more about and weigh in on the issues, to connect with each other, and to leave with renewed energy." Dawn Serra, Wilderness Watch
- "Regardless of differences over what areas should be designated wilderness, the critical dialogue we all shared at Wilderness Gateway made it clear that there is consensus over the future of the National Wilderness Preservation System. We all want a wild Wilderness system that endures into perpetuity. Gathering together at the gateway of the magnificent Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness was a most appropriate setting to discuss the future of Wilderness, explore how citizens can more easily engage agencies, and to learn practices the Forest Service employs to administer Wilderness locally. One thing stands out from our gathering: It will take all of our collective efforts to ensure that Wilderness retains its wild character into the future." Gary Macfarlane, Friends of the Clearwater
- “I enjoyed the depth of the discussions on pressing wilderness issues by the passionate people who attended. Hearing critical dialogue on wilderness stewardship was compelling and helpful. I carried many thoughts away, including the desire to work together to accomplish on-the-ground stewardship activities.” Steve Kimball, FS Region One Wilderness Program Manager



Under a beautiful sky, with the Selway Bitterroot Wilderness as a background, many engaged from places near and far to discuss the challenges and future stewardship of wilderness.



“At the celebration for the 50th anniversary of the Wilderness Act, we heard the wisdom of an 89 year-old Stewart Brandborg. Brandy worked with Howard Zahniser, the author of the Wilderness Act. He stood beside President Johnson when he signed the Wilderness Act in 1964. Brandy spoke about the power of our Democracy in a time when the U.S. Congress was a functional institution and about a time when the U.S. public was not so deeply polarized, and about a time when that public wanted to protect its wild land heritage. Brandy was born in Lewiston, Idaho.” Steve Paulson & Susan Nelson



The next generation of wilderness rangers and trail specialists; Caitlin and Mariana Miller, learn how to pull a cross-cut saw.