

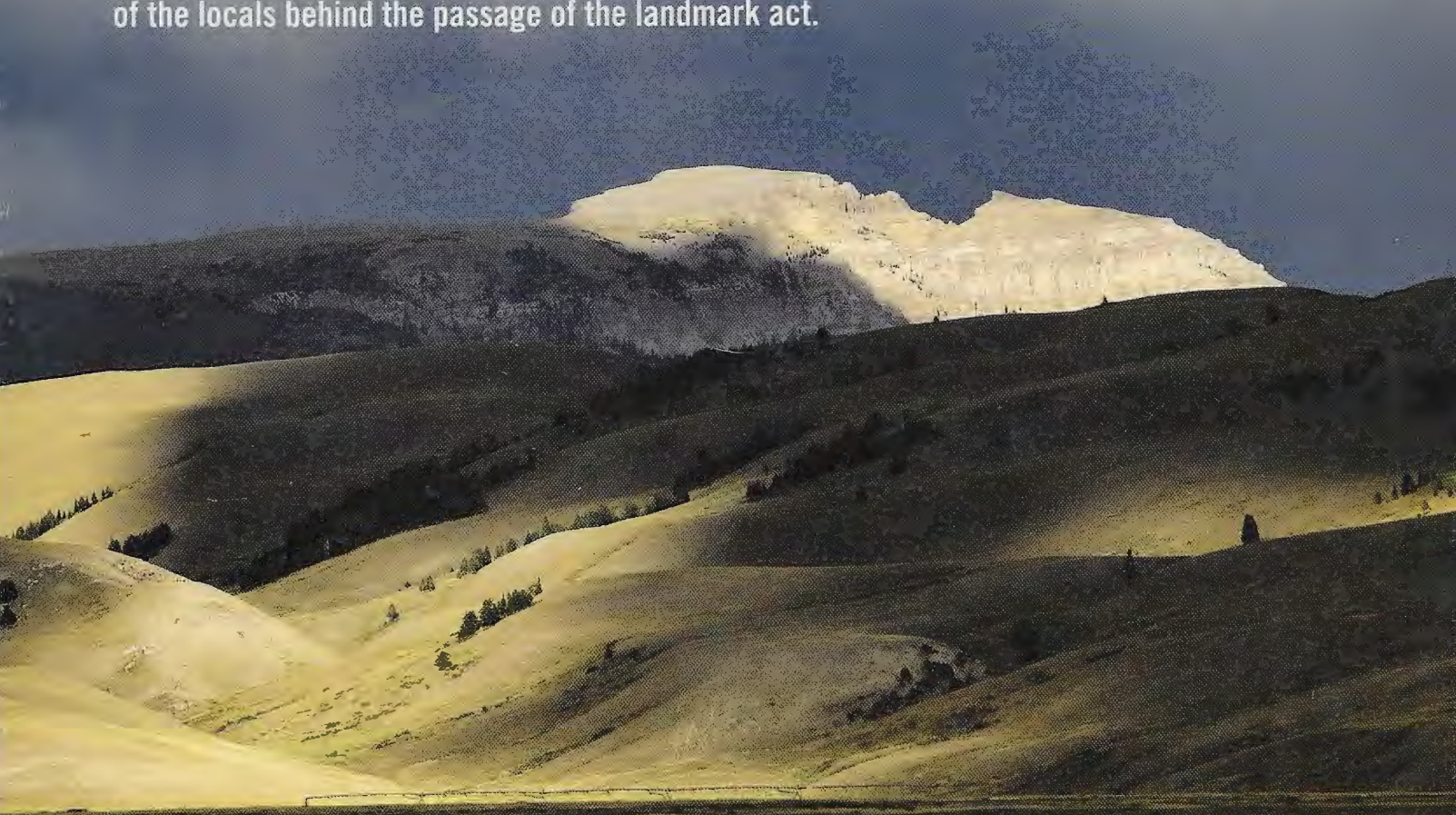
Jackson Hole

magazine

SUMMER 2014

Wilderness Act Turns **50**

Explore Jackson Hole's wilderness areas and meet some of the locals behind the passage of the landmark act.



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GETTING OUT
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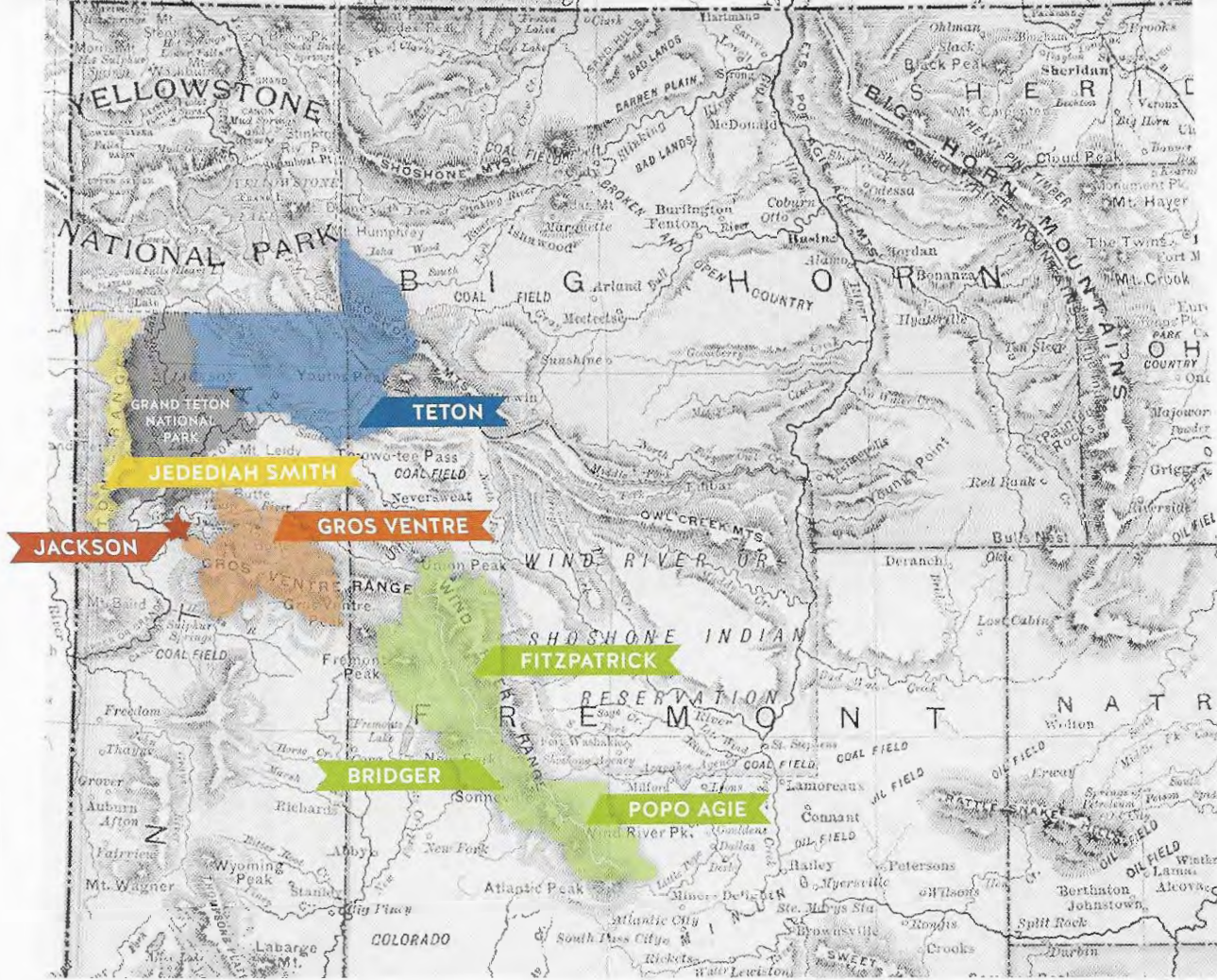
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WHAT'S IN A LETTER?

THE WILDERNESS ACT
TURNS 50



This map shows six wilderness areas in Wyoming's Greater Yellowstone region. Across the state, there are a total of fifteen designated wilderness areas.

“A wilderness ... is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain.” —Wilderness Act of 1964

By Molly Loomis

IT'S A GRAY and overcast Wednesday when I make my way to the Jackson Town Square. Standing beneath the archway of antlers, I poll passersby. “What does the difference in these two words mean to you?” I ask, holding a sheet of paper with the handwritten words, *Wilderness* and *wilderness*.

“They look exactly the same, except one is capitalized.”

“The ‘W’ is the Tetons, the mountains upside down! It’s a capital W because Jackson Hole is all about Wilderness!”

“One’s a title, right?”

This isn’t intended to be a trick question, but it’s starting to feel that way. Planeloads and buses of people flock to Jackson Hole to soak in the valley’s natural beauty and enjoy its open spaces, but evidently that doesn’t mean they know the difference between an elk and a deer ... or Wilderness and wilderness.

Thinking it might be fairer to quiz locals, I head for Pearl Street Bagels. No luck. Even people I know who have lived here for decades or work in our local wildlands are confused by my question.

OPPOSITE: In the Jedediah Smith Wilderness west of Grand Teton National Park, Buck Mountain is reflected in a pond in Alaska Basin.



BRADLY J. BÖNER

2014 MARKS THE fiftieth anniversary of the Wilderness Act, a piece of legislation whose roots run deep in the Tetons. The word *wilderness* describes wild places. But capital “W”*ilderness* is an official designation given to parcels of public land. Out of the many types of protected federal lands we have—national forests, national parks, national reserves, and national monuments—“wilderness” is the strictest type of land designation. In the words of the Wilderness Act’s main

author, Howard Zahniser, areas marked as such are to be left as “untrammeled” by man as possible, and forever protected from development, logging, mining, and roads. Within these wild oases there’s no mechanized equipment and transport (that means no chain saws or mountain bikes), and no landing of aircrafts, no commercial enterprises, no structures, and no installations. Yes, it’s a lot of rules, but ironically, these rules enable a kind of freedom—the kind that can only be experienced in the wildest of places. Capitalization means the difference between a place like the west slope of the Tetons, now protected as the Jedediah

Smith Wilderness Area, being stripped of its lodgepole and crisscrossed by roads, and being a place where it’s just you and Mother Nature.

WHEN PRESIDENT JOHNSON signed the Wilderness Act on September 3, 1964, fifty-four sites totaling 9.1 million acres in

JACKSON HOLE 50TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

IN MID-OCTOBER, prior to a national event celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the Wilderness Act in Albuquerque, New Mexico, activists, educators, and enthusiasts will gather in Jackson Hole for the Wilderness Rendezvous. This event is a combination of outdoor activities, exhibits, and an impressive panel of speakers. Included in the list of speakers is conservationist Edward Zahniser, the son of the Wilderness Act’s author. Muriecenter.org

In the Bridger Wilderness, Temple Peak dominates the skyline as a fisherman casts in North Lake in the Wind River Mountain Range with the hope of catching dinner.

Jackson Hole residents and noted conservationists Olaus and Mardy Murie were instrumental in the drafting of the Wilderness Act. Here, they're hiking along Alaska's Sheenjek River in 1956.



THE MURIE CENTER / COURTESY PHOTO

thirteen different states, including 2 million acres in Wyoming, became official wilderness areas. Two of these—the Bridger Wilderness and the Teton Wilderness—were in or around Jackson Hole. Both were in the Bridger-Teton National Forest.

Over the last fifty years, the National Wilderness Preservation System has continued to expand. Now nearly 110 million acres—a mass slightly larger than California—are designated wilderness areas. Massing the wilderness areas in the Lower 48, you get something about the size of Minnesota. They're still growing, too. In 2011, the Elkhorn Ridge Wilderness was designated in California. This past February, Michigan's Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore was added. Twenty-six additional areas have been proposed to Congress. Forty-four states

have at least one wilderness area. Wyoming has a comparatively high proportion of wilderness areas: 3,111,233 acres. One and a half million of these acres are near Jackson Hole.

OUR VALLEY ISN'T remarkable only for its preponderance of wilderness areas. Jackson Hole residents played a key role in getting the 1964 act passed and continue as influencers both on a local and national level.

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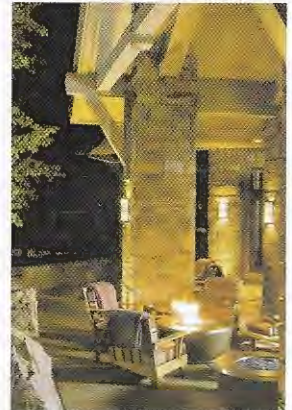
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Biologist Olaus Murie and wife Mardy, fondly referred to by many as the “Grandmother of Conservation,” were tireless advocates for the Wilderness Act. It was during a 1947 Wilderness Society Governing Council meeting at the Muries’ ranch in Moose that the council voted to pursue permanent protection for wilderness on federal land.

Eight years, sixty-six drafts and nineteen public hearings later, the Wilderness Act was presented to Congress. Olaus Murie died in 1963 and Howard Zahniser in 1964. Mardy took up the reins, lobbying for the act’s passage. As President Johnson signed the act, Mardy stood alongside Alice Zahniser, Howard’s widow, in the White House Rose Garden.

While the Muries’ and other Wyomingites’ advocacy resulted in 1.3 million acres within Wyoming being designated as wilderness in 1964, it didn’t end there. In the late ’70s and early 80s, a motley crew of residents on both sides of Teton Pass banded together to stop oil and gas, roads, mining, and logging proposals on national forest land. Bart Koehler founded the Wyoming Wilderness Association (WWA) in 1979 and many locals—Loring Woodman, Phil Hocker, Howie Wolke, Louisa Wilcox, Hank Phibbs, and Leslie Petersen—signed on. While these days it’s often liberal environmentalists associated with the Wilderness Movement, local outfitters—Harold Turner, Lynn Madsen, Woodman, and BJ Hill—were, and are, influential in wilderness

Just twelve miles from downtown Jackson, Turquoise Lake, in the Gros Ventre Wilderness, is a popular camping spot for backpackers hiking from Cache Creek to Granite Creek.

MIKE CAMRUC



designations, too.

In 1984, President Reagan signed the Wyoming Wilderness Act, which the group had lobbied for, designating 1.1 million additional acres of wilderness in the state. This act created the Gros Ventre Wilderness, Jedediah Smith Wilderness, Popo Agie Wilderness, and Winegar Hole Wilderness.

Since then, no new wilderness acreage has been added in the state. Forty-four areas totaling 735,840 acres have been proposed. Although the WWA and other conservation groups are hard at work lobbying for these additional areas, Liz Howell, WWA executive director, says, "Now congressional designation of public lands is a negotiating process."

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“PEOPLE ASSUME NATIONAL parks are the gold standard for protecting wildlands,” says Dan Burgette, former district supervisor at Grand Teton and recipient of the Park Service’s Wilderness Champion Award. “But having wilderness designation is another layer over and above being a national park.” Neither Grand Teton nor Yellowstone national park has any designated wilderness within it, although both parks have areas recommended for the designation currently pending. So where do you find official wilderness areas around the valley?

The state’s second-largest wilderness area, the Teton Wilderness, straddles the Continental Divide and sits between Yellowstone National Park, the Washakie Wilderness, and Grand Teton National Park. This view is from Austin Peak, in the wilderness’ Absaroka Mountains.

TETON WILDERNESS

Often bypassed for the in-your-face drama of the Tetons proper, the 585,238-acre Teton Wilderness, capping the northeastern end of the Teton Range and butting against Yellowstone’s southern boundary, is a paradise for horse packing trips and hunters. Extended outings with lots of solitude are still possible, and horses can be left to graze freely in meadows. The Teton Wilderness boasts the

Lower 48’s furthest point from any road. This point is near Hawk’s Rest Ranger Station and the headwaters of two Wild and Scenic-designated rivers, the Snake River and the Yellowstone River.

THE BRIDGER, FITZPATRICK, AND POPO AGIE WILDERNESSES

All three of these wilderness areas include various parts of the Wind River Range, south and east of Jackson Hole. The Bridger Wilderness, outside Pinedale, covers this range’s western flank. The northern and southern areas of the range are the Popo Agie (pronounced “puh-PO-shuh”) and Fitzpatrick wildernesses. In addition to incredible fishing and climbing, these wilderness areas include Wyoming’s tallest mountain, Gannett Peak (13,809 feet), some of the contiguous U.S.’ largest glaciers, and the headwaters of the Green River.

Despite all this, Bridger Wilderness natural resource specialist Andrea Davidson says that few Pinedale residents—Pinedale is the town closest to them—recognize the remarkable-ness of their backyard. “Unlike in Jackson, where there’s a tradition of wilderness, in Pinedale it’s hard to get support for wilderness,” says Davidson, speculating the lack of advocacy groups supporting the Bridger may be due to Pinedale’s smaller size, relative isolation, and smaller tourism market. Davidson recalls a recent visit to the local high school. She asked if students were familiar with the Bridger Wilderness. “I then asked about the Wind Rivers,” she says. “Out of a class of thirty, only two had been into the mountains.”

While Pinedale residents may not be taking advantage of their local surroundings, outsiders certainly are: Roughly 80 percent of visitation to the Bridger Wilderness is by people from outside of Wyoming.

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AS TOLD TO:

Three wilderness users from different generations share their experiences.

PAST: DON MURIE

Around the Tetons, the name Murie is synonymous with conservation for the extraordinary efforts of Olaus, Mardy, Adolph, and Louise in the advocacy, science, and creation of protected wild areas. The Murie Ranch, now located inside Grand Teton National Park, was an epicenter for developing wilderness philosophy and campaigns. Don Murie, Olaus and Mardy's youngest son who grew up in the Tetons, recalls the words of his parents and life in those times.



I didn't realize until quite recently that my parents were famous. When I was growing up, we just had all these people coming to visit all the time, and we kids sometimes resented it. We learned early that the work was number one ... sometimes we'd get kicked out of the house, and my mother would lock the door to keep us out because they had important things to do.

When they were fighting a dam on the Green River, my father said, "You must always stick to your principles. Don't try to do things that aren't consistent with what you're really wanting." He said if you try to argue the dam on an economic basis, your opponents will come up with another plan that will scotch that. You have to stay with what you really want and that is to preserve the country.

They understood and accepted that this was going to be hard all the way; that they were fighting what my father called "the almighty dollar." There were times when you lose the fight, but there's another fight, and we have to get to it. There's no time spent weeping over losses.

My mother always said we must talk to the young people because they are the ones who are going to deal with things. The old

people are set in their ways. My roommate in college came out with me one summer to the ranch and got a job at the park doing trail work. He said later, "I was going to be the driver of the bulldozer, but you took me out there and you changed my life." That's how it's done—get people exposed to wilderness, and it changes their lives.

PRESENT: MAURA LONGDEN

Over the course of Maura Longden's thirty-three-year career with the National Park Service (NPS) she's worked as a climbing ranger, wilderness ranger, wilderness manager, and supervisor in more than a dozen Western parks like City of Rocks, Yosemite, Sequoia, and Yellowstone. Today, Longden serves as the Board Chair for the Society for Wilderness Stewardship and as the NPS' climbing management specialist. She splits her time between Victor, Idaho, and Moose, Wyoming.



I started my NPS career as a wilderness ranger when I was eighteen. I was on extended patrols in the Sierra and that opened my eyes to a lot of the challenges in the Sierra that I hadn't seen growing up in New England. From there on I expected all wilderness areas to be quite different, and they have been.

In recent years, we're seeing more of a demand for convenience and mechanization. I think back to conversations I had at one point with other wilderness rangers about whether wearing a wristwatch was appropriate in wilderness. Now we're carrying GPS and SPOT devices.

I think that we are all aware of the pressure to tap oil and gas in protected areas. There is also more demand to accommodate scientific studies in wilderness. In some cases, conducting research in wilderness comes with the heavy cost of installing instrumentation and utilizing aircraft and motorized vehicles to most efficiently access study sites, gather data, maintain equipment, and minimize field time. As time goes on, there is likely to be even more pressure for administrative "exceptions" to become the norm.

I think we're continuing to interpret what's appropriate in wilderness, and there's going to continue to be a push for

access and for more use from certain groups. What does wilderness mean in terms of wildlife management? Wildland fire management? We're going to keep being challenged to interpret what's appropriate in wilderness because again, it's an evolution of thought.

FUTURE: WHITNEY BALL

Whitney Ball, a Jackson native and sixth-grader at Journeys School, is one of nine participants in Young Ambassadors for Wilderness, a yearlong program organized by the Wyoming Wilderness Association and dedicated to cultivating young wilderness stewards. When she's not in school, Whitney can be found riding her horse, Mokimac Snickelfritz—Sam for short.



I think kids here appreciate the beauty of wilderness but don't necessarily know much about capital "W" wilderness. Most people care, but I think a lot of people, not just kids, take it for granted.

My best friend and I were riding up at Windy Gap in the Gros Ventre Wilderness. It was just beautiful up there, but we had to turn around because there was a big gale of wind. We were just laughing even though it was cold and storming. Just looking out with the wind in our faces, I think the word would be "freedom." I think of how little wilderness there is; it is very sad. Wilderness embodies freedom, peace, and beauty.

I think there are some wildlands that aren't protected when they should be, like areas in national parks that have been recommended to be capital "W" but it's never been acted on. Capital "W" wilderness can never be built on, developed, or destroyed. There's not necessarily a difference in the way it looks, but the main thing is that somebody in the future might really appreciate those places as they are.

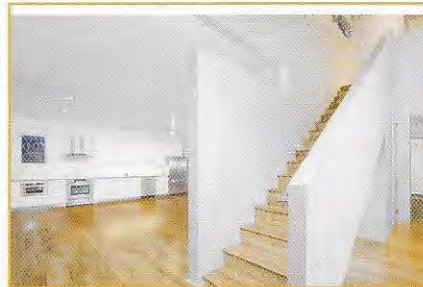
Getting more kids outside is our job as Young Ambassadors for Wilderness. A lot of kids do like the wilderness, but instead of just driving through the park it would be better if they got into it—hiking or camping, riding horses, canoeing, kayaking, or packrafting. Once you go to those places and you see how stunning and necessary they are, you start to love them. ■■



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