



Wag Tales

SPRING 2025

EDITOR'S NOTE

Putting the final touches on this year's wilderness newsletter, it strikes me how much has occurred since the Chief's Wilderness Advisory Group (WAG) started this newsletter in November. As we live and work through these changing times, I find myself leaning into what I like to think of as "Advice from the Wilderness", or a few lessons that I've learned from working as a wilderness steward. Perhaps a few of these lessons will resonate with our readers and be applicable even in more developed settings:

- Check weather conditions before starting any new project work.
- Travel light, with focus on necessities
- A good (crosscut saw) partner communicates early and often!
- Get to know the pack string and learn which mule can be trusted to carry the fragile stuff.
- Get off the summit /water before the lightening starts.
- It's the flexible trees that withstand the windstorms.
- Working independently doesn't require that you work alone.
- Sharp tools save time and work.
- You too can be a force of nature.

Knowing the kinds of folks who gravitate toward public land stewardship, I'm confident there will be dedicated, hard-working individuals to continue looking after the public lands and wild places. We hope you enjoy reading about some of these folks in the WAG newsletter! Thank you for the work you do!

Outgoing R2 Rep, Kearstin Edwards

INSIDE THIS EDITION:

Ranger To Ranger
International Ranger Federation
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National Technology & Development Program
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Wilderness Information Steering Team
Arthur Carhart Wilderness Training Center
Aldo Leopold Wilderness Research Institute
Endicott River Wilderness Spotlight



RANGER TO RANGER

A DAY IN THE LIFE: UNIQUE EXPERIENCES OF RANGERS NEAR AND FAR



Every day, rangers around the world serve as frontline defenders of nature: safeguarding ecosystems, protecting wildlife, and preserving the landscapes that inspire and sustain us. Their work is as diverse as the conservation areas they protect, including designated wilderness areas, national parks, wildlife reserves, and world heritage areas. The annual Ranger to Ranger article traditionally highlights the experiences of Forest Service Wilderness Rangers. This year, in collaboration with the International Ranger Federation, the Chief's WAG is sharing the stories of Forest Service wilderness rangers from seven regions, agency partners, and international rangers of various disciplines from Oceania, Asia, Europe, and South America. The wide scope of conservation professionals interviewed has shown something significant in common – these professionals have dedicated their lives to stewarding the planet's most remote, biodiverse, and ecologically intact places. By inviting rangers to share their version of 'A Day In The Life,' we hope to highlight the important and often unseen work of rangers worldwide and to emphasize their essential role in protecting the enduring resource of designated wilderness and wild places.

HOW DO YOU ACCESS THE WILDERNESS/CONSERVATION AREAS IN WHICH YOU WORK?

For some rangers, just accessing their worksite is an adventure. **Toby Robinson**, a Wilderness Ranger for the Tongass National Forest that works on Admiralty Island National Monument, shared that "We take amphibious float planes that can land on the runway here in Juneau and then on the water over on the island on whatever lake is closest to where we're spiking camp. Once I'm on the islands, I get to the different work sites by jon boats, we have them staged on different lakes around the island to help access an area during the trip."

Marcos Uzquiano, Ranger at Beni Biosphere Reserve in Bolivia, also travels by water to access work sites, but in a very different context. Marcos travels by boat on the Amazon River to reach patrol sites, sometimes using a small motor or by paddling, depending on the river conditions. It can take hours by boat to get to the sites he patrols. Some rangers, like **Bonnie**



Ferguson, Ranger at Lake Sinclair National Park in Tasmania, and **Alice Undery**, Ranger at Boodjamulla National Park in Australia, reach work sites by helicopter. Alice shares that "The majority of our park, no one has walked on at all. It's all helicopter access; our fire management will be with helicopter and flying out to some of our [invasive plant] sites that we go to as well." Bonnie has a similar experience, stating that rangers "fly into a remote area and do some [invasive plant] management and camp out for about two to three nights, and then walk out of the area. We have places where we have established helipads; if we don't have an established helipad, we have to do what's called a hover exit or entry, where the helicopter won't land. You have to climb yourself out, which is quite stressful."



RANGER TO RANGER

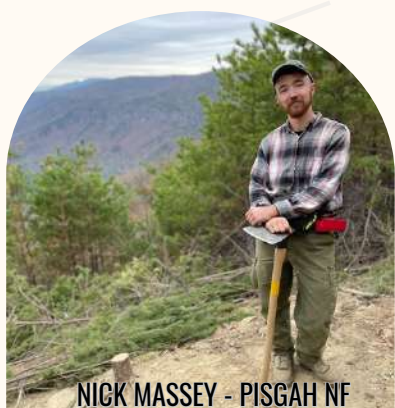
Many rangers use a combination of long drives and long hikes to reach work sites.

Vicente Ordonez, Wilderness Ranger for FS partner group New Mexico Wild, said that "The Gila Wilderness is very limited in its access. There's one highway that runs down the middle and the road ends at the National Park Service inholding at the Gila Cliff dwellings. My commute is about four hours to get to the center of the Gila on the paved road, and then from there the trail heads kind of radiate out into the wilderness. Once, I get to the trailheads, it's all on foot. That's one of the neat aspects about the Gila Wilderness, its remoteness and difficult access to get to." **Kristina Schenk**, Wilderness Manager on the San Juan National Forest, utilizes a rather unique form of access to reach work sites in the Weminuche Wilderness, sharing "We have a historic train that will drop you off at two different access points in the middle of the wilderness. When we're working on the west side in the Needle Mountains, we'll take the tourist train in, it's called the Durango Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad, which is always kind of a production. We're in uniform, we're loading all our tools onto the boxcar, which is always a really good conversation starter, people ask about our crosscuts and axes and other hand tools."



KRISTINA SCHENK - SAN JUAN NF

WHAT DOES YOUR DAY LOOK LIKE FROM SUN UP TO SUN DOWN?



NICK MASSEY - PISGAH NF

A typical day for a ranger is far from predictable, a ranger's work is driven by the heartbeat of their environment. Weather, seasonal visitation, and wildlife are a few of the many factors that determine what the day will look like for a ranger. During peak visitation season, many rangers spend a large portion of their time interacting with visitors. **Brendan Green**, Wilderness Ranger on the Deschutes National Forest, expressed "We work 8 day hitches. One of our top priorities is visitor contacts on a busy day. Rangers in our district will see upwards of 200 people which is not ideal usage for some of these wilderness trails. We have permit systems in place; we check permits, people that don't have permits, we educate them about the permit system. We do a lot of leave no trace and wilderness regulation education for visitors." A common theme expressed by the wilderness rangers was the many different things they do outside of wilderness monitoring.

Evan Tirey, Lead Wilderness Ranger on the Sierra National Forest, shared that "Our work schedule is 9 days on, 5 days off. We backpack for the whole summer; we move most days. We don't have a dedicated trails program on this forest right now, we are doing all the trail maintenance as well. We're cross cutting basically the entire summer here. We do a lot of visitor contacts depending on where we work. We have Pacific Crest Trail and John Muir Trail that come across our forest, in those areas you see a lot of people. We have other places where you'll go for 8 days and you won't see anybody at all; it really depends on where we're at and what our aim is." **Nick Massey**, Wilderness Ranger on the Pisgah National Forest, stated "It's almost exclusively day work here. We have a small recreation staff here; we get pulled into a lot of other projects. Outside of our specific job descriptions for us in the wilderness during the summer, our busy season here, we spend more time on public interactions and we move away from trail work. Fall and spring are our perfect seasons for trail work here, especially for trying to do any kind of earthwork on the ground if frozen. As it gets colder, we switch more to cross cutting and tree work." Four of the rangers interviewed work predominantly as wildlife rangers.

Catalin Josan, a ranger with Rewilding Romania, shared an example of a day of work with the bison reintroduction program. "We have a herd of around 220 bison already. A few of them have GPS collars. We monitor their health, look for newborns,



BRENDAN GREEN - DESCHUTES NF

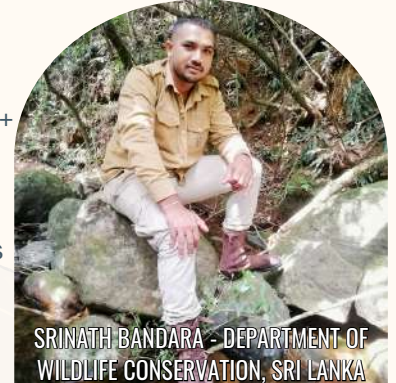


ALEXANDRU OLTEANU - FOUNDATION
CONSERVATION CARPATHIA

RANGER TO RANGER

and monitor feeding sites. We hike a lot in search of the bison; we take samples and record observations, gathering data to help the scientific community learn how the reintroduced animals adapt to life in the wild. Since their home range is not that big yet and we have rangers that are local, there's no need for us to stay overnight." **Alexandru Olteanu**, ranger at Foundation Conservation Carpathia, also works with wildlife in Romania, stating that "I leave home at 8am and pick up

a volunteer that will work with me that day. It's hard to have a specific plan each week, there are a lot of variables. It's up to each Ranger to consider the weather, quantity of snow, recent wildlife presence, and manage their routes. You never know how much time you will spend in the field; you need to adapt and interpret the cues that the animals leave behind in the forest. We are currently working on a wolf monitoring project; we follow their tracks and collect genetic samples. Without driving time, we spend around 6 hours in the field during winter, and up to 8 hours in the summer. There are also situations when we spend the night at a remote location for two or three nights per week." For **Ashish Kumar**, Wildlife Ranger at Raja Ji Tiger Reserve in India, days and nights are spent monitoring tigers. "We get information about illegal activities, illegal trespass, or man and animal conflict, then we start between 5-6am and return at 4pm; rest for 30 minutes; then start our night patrolling. We often spend 16+ hours in the forest. In the Tiger Reserve area, there are no buffer areas, the boundaries of the tiger reserve are surrounded by a huge population with lots of settlements and agricultural lands; wild animals go outside the Tiger Reserve, so it is very difficult to manage the man/animal conflict issues as well as protect our wildlife. We often patrol on foot. The tiger is very sensitive, if we track the tiger on our own feet, we can observe each and every thing. In the monsoon season, when the rainfall becomes heavy, we use our captive elephants for patrolling." Similarly, **Srinath Bandara**, who is in charge of the Wildlife Rangers at the Department of Wildlife Conservation Sri Lanka, spends much of his time mitigating human/leopard conflict. "We start the day in our office to see if there are any reports of leopards or injuries to other wild animals. If there are no cases that require animal rescue, we visit the strict nature reserve and monitor for illegal activities. If we have human/wildlife conflict cases, we go to the location and observe, gathering information and recording data and injuries to the animal, then transporting the animal to the Veterinary Office. In the evenings, we do night patrols. Otherwise, we join other government meetings and do normal wildlife conservation duties." **Romaine Lacoste**, Ranger at Mercantour National Park in France, does a little bit of everything. His duties consist of "visitor sensitization, scholar and student sensitization, scientific data collection, wolf feces collection, bird and ungulate monitoring, law enforcement, ecosystem restoration, trails maintenance, and building relationships with different stakeholders." To sum it up, "We're Rangers, we have a RANGE of things to do!" says **Bonnie**, who was told the same thing when she started her first role as a ranger for Tasmania Parks and Wildlife Service.



SRINATH BANDARA - DEPARTMENT OF
WILDLIFE CONSERVATION, SRI LANKA



ROMAINE LACOSTE - MERCANTOUR
NATIONAL PARK, FRANCE

WHAT KIND OF SPECIALIZED TOOLS DO YOU USE?

The tools rangers use to complete their work are as diverse as the variety of tasks they tackle. Wilderness rangers rely on traditional hand tools for things like trail and cabin maintenance, but some regions handle specialized tasks that require specialized gear. **Kristina** on the San Juan NF shares the district's pack stock with the range program. "We've got quite a bit of tack for that, like special saddles for packing. We have a facility called Coal Ranch for our stock and we have a hay field with irrigation. There is quite a bit of equipment and maintenance that goes into stock use."

RANGER TO RANGER

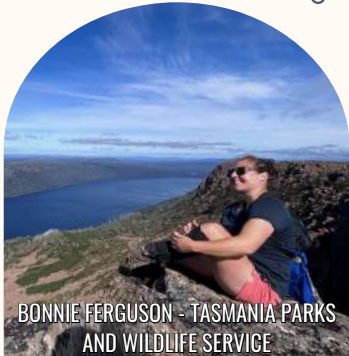
Catalin shared a highly specialized tool his team at Rewilding Romania is using to manage wildlife conflicts, "We use a team of Border Collies to chase the bison away from the conflict areas. These dogs are very smart, very active, and they can get a lot closer to the bison. They can even nip them on their heels and noses, they will not back down. The bison are very stubborn and during the night they usually return, but it's an experiment we just started. We are developing a fear based landscape for them to start to avoid. We are chasing them away from agricultural fields where they bother people; we are trying to teach them that this is our area and the dogs' area and they should stay in the forest."



CATALIN JOSAN - REWILDING ROMANIA

WHAT MAKES THE AREAS THAT YOU STEWARD UNIQUE?

Wilderness and conservation areas possess distinct ecological features and cultural resources that reflect the intricate relationships between biodiversity and human history across the global landscape. **Bonnie** shares that "Lake Sinclair is the deepest lake in Australia and contains multiple endemic species. The conditions of the lake allow universities to come in and test underwater submarines that they'll later take to Antarctica. The park is part of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area which represents more than 20% of Tasmania's land mass and is one of the world's most outstanding wilderness areas. **Alice** shared "Boodjamulla National Park contains Riversleigh World Heritage Area, which is a major mammal fossil site, we have fossils from the Oligocene and Miocene periods, which is between 10-30 million years old. They have found fossils of birds, crocodiles, predecessors to koalas...the fossil site is massive. The other unique thing about our park is that we are one of the first parks in Queensland to have joint ownership and management with the local traditional owners (Waanyi Aboriginal People); they have a record of living in that area up to 30,000 years ago." Marcos expressed that his work at the Beni Biological Reserve includes working closely with the indigenous Tsimané community, 1 of 36

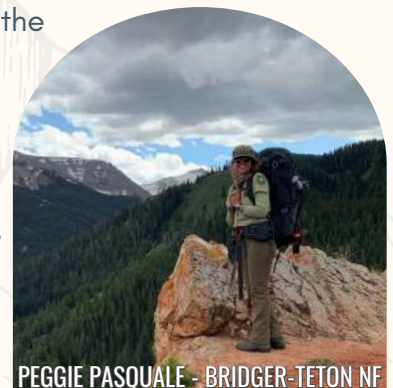


BONNIE FERGUSON - TASMANIA PARKS AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

indigenous cultures in Bolivia. The Tsimané people show generous hospitality to the rangers; they have built a strong and positive working relationship. **Peggie Pasquale**, Wilderness Ranger on the Bridger-Teton NF, emphasizes the truly wild journey of the waters moving through the Gros Ventre Wilderness: "The Gros Ventre River has its headwaters in the heart of the wilderness and starts its journey heading east out of a remote high alpine basin. The river changes direction and curves around to the north, and then following this curve around, begins to head west. As its arc continues, it flows through the site of the renowned Gros Ventre Slide, before the river begins

heading south where it eventually confluent with the Snake River after completing a wild and untrammelled journey in all cardinal directions!" Alexandru expressed about the Făgăraș Mountains, "Being home to a large amount of biodiversity, consisting of different and rare habitats, including pristine forests with healthy presence of large carnivores. It is one of the few areas like that still found in Europe. The cultural values that can be found in the communities around this land are special and deeply connected to nature. It's a unique place considering this relationship that coexistences between people and the forest, with all the species in the food chain - where they should be." **Toby** shared "What makes Admiralty Island unique is the interactions with wildlife. The 'ABC Islands' (Admiralty, Baranof, Chichagof) supposedly have the highest density of brown bears in the world.

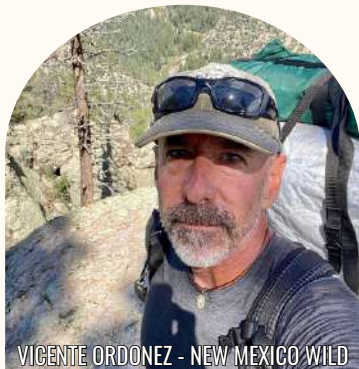
Romaine notes of Mercantour National Park that "The elevation ranges from 400-3193 meters. We have Mediterranean weather and mountainous weather, so we have high plant and animal species endemism. We have endangered species, especially the relict species living at high altitude. With climate change, their habitat is disappearing.



PEGGIE PASQUALE - BRIDGER-TETON NF

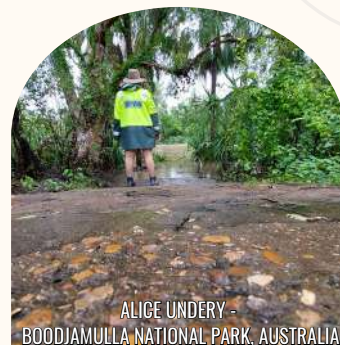
...TO SECURE FOR THE AMERICAN PEOPLE OF PRESENT AND FUTURE GENERATIONS THE BENEFITS OF

AN ENDURING RESOURCE OF WILDERNESS



VICENTE ORDONEZ - NEW MEXICO WILD

The Wilderness Act of 1964, the legal framework for designating and managing wilderness in the United States, established the National Wilderness Preservation to "secure for the American people of present and future generations the benefits of an enduring resource of wilderness." We asked rangers what the phrase 'enduring resource' means to them, and how they incorporate this concept into their work. **Evan** mused "I always think an 'enduring resource' is a challenging thing for our brains to wrap itself around; we are here for such a short time compared to the lifetime of these natural areas that we work to preserve. They have changed since they were first formed and will continue to change outside of the way that we can preserve them. We're all in this together, as humans, to maintain these places and take care of them. I try my best to make sure we're educating people making a minimal impact, but remind them humans have always been part of what we consider our wilderness areas. **Peggie** shares "The enduring resource that the Wilderness Act secures is an opportunity for people to step into a world as it was before the evolution of modern technology and the degradation that resulted took hold. Our role as rangers is to ensure that these places are allowed to exist and persist, immune to the ever-pressing desire of the humankind to alter and control... to trammel these wild places. There is a magic and a value beyond what words or dollar signs can explain that exists within a wilderness boundary." **Nick** emphasizes community involvement in the Linville Gorge Wilderness, "For us, an enduring resource looks like the communities here and fostering that. A community that feels connected to that wilderness area, that advocates for it, even if the agency doesn't have the resources to do so. For the longevity of high use wilderness areas, having that stewardship-minded community will aid in keeping that resource around longer than any of us will be working for the agency." Vicente shares his perspective, "We just celebrated 100 years of wilderness on the Gila this year. That's a beautiful example of endurance over time. The important message is bringing partners in to help with that task of all that goes into wilderness management, bringing the public out, and helping them understand the importance of wilderness. If they get the opportunity to see the importance of wilderness, it'll make the future of wilderness that much more enduring."



ALICE UNDERY -
BOODJAMULLA NATIONAL PARK, AUSTRALIA

RANGER SUCCESS STORIES IN 2024



ASHISH KUMAN -
RAJAJI TIGER RESERVE, INDIA

Nick: Reopening multiple wilderness trails after significant damage from Hurricane Helene.

Romaine: Worked with multiple stakeholders to close a climbing route when an owl was found nesting in the rockface along the route.

Srinath: Since leopard death tracking began in 2015, there were 2-3 deaths per year, but in 2024 there were 0 leopard deaths due to effective conflict management.

Evan: Accomplished the first long-term trail work that the program had seen in a decade with SCA and ACE crews.

Asish: Lead the removal of an illegal settlement blockade in the Chilla-Motichur Wildlife Corridor, which provides crucial habitat connectivity.

Catalin: Re-introduced bison are thriving, 20 calves born last year, program is observing healthy predation patterns.

Alice: Worked closely with the local traditional owners (Waanyi) to facilitate recovery after a major flood during the first years of a new joint ownership and joint management agreement.

Toby: Worked with youth crew from the village of Angoon to log out a trail that hadn't been maintained in years.

Brendan: Central Cascade permit system compliance has increased from 60% in 2021 to 90% in 2024.

Peggie: Encountered many well-educated wilderness users on the trail after years of dedication by wilderness managers and allies creating resources and performing effective outreach.

RANGER TO RANGER...

Rangers worldwide share a deep commitment to stewarding wild places. Their workdays are unpredictable, demanding, and dangerous, yet they remain steadfast in their mission to protect natural resources. From tracking wildlife and educating visitors to battling forest fires and restoring trails, every ranger plays a vital role in safeguarding wilderness as an enduring resource. Their stories highlight the challenges, triumphs, and dedication required to keep the wild truly wild for generations to come.



THANK YOU TO THE RANGERS WHO PARTICIPATED!

INTERNATIONAL RANGERS

USFS RANGERS AND PARTNERS

Oceania:

Alice Undery –Boodjamulla National Park, Australia

Bonnie Ferguson –Tasmania Parks &Wildlife Service, Tasmania

Asia:

Ashish Kumar –Raja Ji Tiger Reserve, India

Srinath Bandara –Dept. of Wildlife Conservation, Sri Lanka

Europe:

Romain Lacoste – Mercantour National Park, France

Alexandru Olteanu –Foundation Conservation Carpathia,
Romania

Catalin Josan – Rewilding Romania, Romania

South America:

Marcos Uzquiano – Madidi National Park

R2: **Kristina Schenk** – San Juan NF, Colorado

R3: **Vicente Ordonez** – New Mexico Wild, Gila
NF, New Mexico

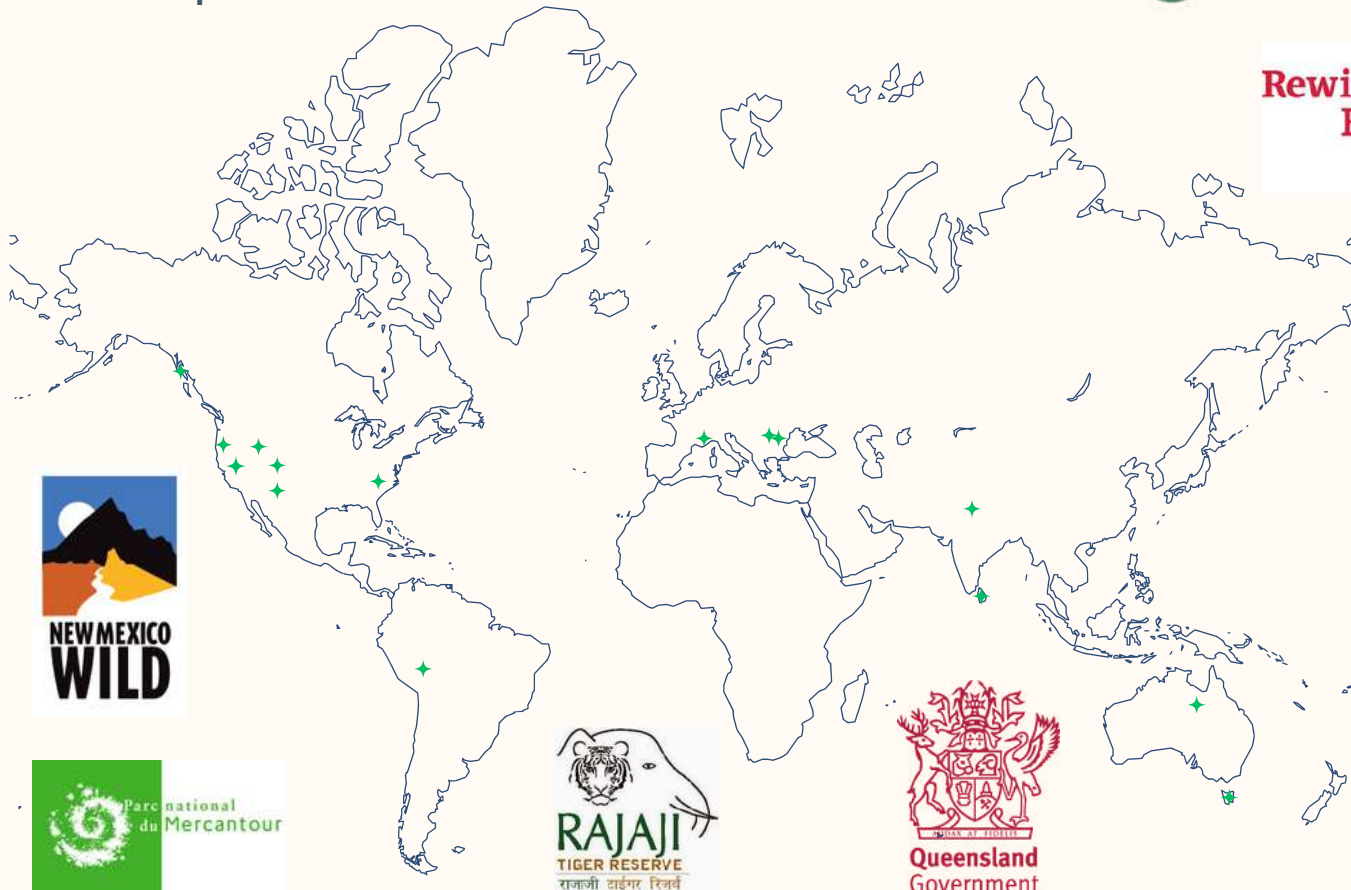
R4: **Peggie DePasquale** – Bridger-Teton NF,
Wyoming

R5: **Evan Tirey** – Sierra NF, California

R6: **Brendan Green** – Deschutes NF, Oregon

R8: **Nick Massey** – Pisgah NF, North Carolina

R10: **Toby Robinson** – Tongass NF, Alaska





International Ranger Federation (IRF)

Ranger Associations Strengthening the Ranger Workforce

The work of rangers globally has never been more important. Rangers play an indispensable role in protecting natural resources and cultural heritage while safeguarding the ecosystems that provide essential services for all species. Their work is crucial in combating biodiversity loss, supporting climate change adaptation and mitigation, whilst advancing global sustainable development goals.

As planetary health workers, rangers operate in some of the world's most remote and challenging environments, yet they are continually overlooked, under-resourced and undervalued. It is estimated that to protect 30% of land and water by 2030, we need 5 times the number of rangers we currently have in the field.

The International Ranger Federation (IRF) was established in 1992 to advance the work of rangers and promote their critical role in conservation. Founded by rangers, the IRF facilitates a global network that nurtures a common bond among protected area workers and provides a space for rangers to share knowledge and best practices. Over the past three decades, we have established a network of more than 150 ranger associations across 50 countries, representing an estimated 80,000 rangers.

Last year the IRF focused on strengthening connections between regional associations. The 10th IRF World Ranger Congress and the Hyeres Ranger Declaration were shaped by the voices of over 450 rangers from 88 countries, calling for better recognition, resources, and support to effectively carry out their critical work. We also launched our first ever

State of the Ranger Report to better understand the ranger profession on a global scale.

Today, evidence shows that ranger associations help legitimize and strengthen the credibility of the ranger profession while fostering a shared global vision for its future. This is why the IRF is prioritizing regional needs. Supporting the creation of regional ranger associations has been key to strengthening the ranger community within geographical regions and enhancing connections between national and local associations to better achieve their objectives. Well-organized ranger associations, both nationally and regionally, are proving to be powerful catalysts for change.

Successful examples of regional associations include the Game Rangers Association of Africa (GRAA), the European Ranger Federation (ERF), the Ranger Federation of Asia (RFA) and Latin American Ranger Federation (FLG). With the support of the IRF, the FLG convened in Peru last year to develop their first 5-year action plan.

In 2025, the IRF wants to strengthen collaboration between these regional ranger associations, while sharing best practices and lessons learned. Just last year, the IRF and the USFS WAG signed a cost-share agreement to support this goal. Hopefully, a new North America ranger association will emerge soon!

For more information about the IRF, visit <https://www.internationalrangers.org/> or contact federationofficer@internationalrangers.org.





NATIONAL WILDERNESS STEWARDSHIP ALLIANCE



CELEBRATING 15 YEARS OF PARTNERSHIP IN SERVICE TO WILDERNESS

Joelle Marier, Executive Director, National Wilderness Stewardship Alliance

This year marks NWSA's 15-year anniversary and one of the things we will be celebrating is our strong partnership with the U.S. Forest Service wilderness and trails programs. NWSA has been a collaborative effort between federal agencies and nonprofit partner organizations since its inception. For our part, NWSA serves as a vital connector between nonprofit partners and federal land managers, helping these different entities work together efficiently and effectively. Our partnership works because we each bring unique tools and resources and share a common goal: to care for wilderness and public lands. Limit one partner and wilderness stewardship suffers. With federal workforce reductions and budget cuts underway, upholding our stewardship obligation to public lands will be challenging in the coming year(s). We could all use some positive energy right now, so I want to share some of the work we've accomplished together over the past 15 years and some exciting things ahead.

NWSA administers two grant programs through challenge cost share agreements with the Forest Service: the Wilderness Stewardship Performance (WSP) Program and the Trail Stewardship Partners Program. Since 2016, these programs have distributed \$4.5 million to nonprofit partners working in their local areas to care for National Forest wilderness and trails. With these funds, partners have maintained almost 11,000 miles of trail, supported 1,000 points of Wilderness Stewardship Performance scores, engaged 34,000 volunteers, and contributed \$25 million in cash and in-kind contributions to shared stewardship. In the process they have connected thousands of people to the wilderness areas and trails in their backyards, assisted with public safety, helped to preserve natural landscapes, and collected valuable data to support future land management decisions.

These awesome accomplishments are a direct product of strong partnership and would not be possible without federal financial investments and the invaluable expertise of local, regional, and national agency staff.

NWSA's next round of WSP grant recipients will be announced soon with \$125,000 in grant funding to award for the 2025 field season. This essential funding will support partners in solitude and invasive species monitoring, recreation site and user trails inventories, wilderness character baseline assessments, and a range of wilderness education activities. We are also excited to begin planning the next National Wilderness Workshop, slated for fall 2026, and are looking for one or two Forest Service partners to join the planning team. If you are interested, contact Bill Hodge, bill@wildernessalliance.org.

Thank You!

All of us at NWSA and across our community appreciate you immensely. We know how much you do to care for America's public lands. We know many of you do the job of two or more staff. We know the strong teams and communities you've built within your agencies and departments. We know you are proud to serve the American people. We know the true passion and expertise you bring to your work. We know you are amazing, and we can't do what we do without you. We are here for you!

About NWSA

The National Wilderness Stewardship Alliance (NWSA) supports a national network of public lands stewardship organizations and builds effective partnerships between community-based non-profit organizations, volunteers, and government agencies to add much needed capacity to caring for America's wilderness and public lands. Visit our [website](#) to learn more about our work.



SOCIETY FOR WILDERNESS STEWARDSHIP

-An Enduring Partnership-

2025 is a monumental year for the Society for Wilderness Stewardship (SWS)- this year we celebrate our 20th anniversary! Since 2015, SWS has partnered with the Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service and Fish and Wildlife Service to complete wilderness projects across the National Wilderness Preservation System. Last year we completed more projects than any other year in our history with over two dozen employees partnering with federal agencies to support the management of our public lands. We accomplished work in every single geographic region of the Forest Service! SWS continues to support Wilderness Character Monitoring (WCM) work and has now accomplished WCM projects in 363 different wilderness areas, 334 of which are Forest Service areas.

Most WAG readers are familiar with SWS and our work helping with WCM, but we tackle so much more than WCM. Building on an understanding of complex federal databases, in 2024 we piloted a position helping forests in the Southwest Region analyze and improve annual reporting in the Natural Resource Manager database (NRM). This SWS position has helped standardize and provide guidance in NRM linking and annual reporting. It has also provided guidance, education, and clarification documents for the forests to follow going forward. Anyone who has worked in NRM knows that the database is not intuitive. Having a position that is focused on and an expert in understanding NRM is an invaluable asset to any region.

Last year we also helped put on events for R1, R5 and R6. By helping the Forest Service identify presenters, write curricula, manage event sign-ups, and provide digital

outreach for events, SWS helps fill the spaces of what would otherwise be a heavy lift for agency staff to do without partner support. These events help Regional Program Managers provide training opportunities to wilderness employees and serve as a place where people can come together in person and connect with folks from different forests and discuss wilderness management issues. SWS's support of these events has become so valued that regions now write event support into their agreements with SWS to ensure we allocate employee time to help.

Another project SWS took on last year was supporting work on forest plan revisions. With most forests' plans now a couple of decades old, many are due for plan revisions. Given the extent of work federal employees already must



tackle, it's unlikely this work can be accomplished without the support of partners. SWS helped the Tongass National Forest with the Wilderness Inventory and Evaluation portion of their ongoing

forest plan revision. This is a required step of the revision process where non-wilderness lands are assessed for wilderness characteristics and potential eligibility for future wilderness designation.

Looking forward, SWS is excited to support the next 20 years of stewardship on public lands. Our team is working hard to continue to find opportunities to provide our highly trained specialists to where managers need support most. Through education, training, and stewardship, SWS brings our community together to build a unified approach to conserve wild landscapes so everyone can enjoy.

chief's



wilderness advisory group



WAG members
overlooking the Gila Wilderness in NM- Nov 2024



YOUR 2024-2025 REGIONAL USFS REPRESENTATIVES

The Chief's Wilderness Advisory Group (WAG) consists of representatives from each Forest Service Region, along with members from the Washington Office, Aldo Leopold Wilderness Research Institute and Arthur Carhart National Wilderness Training Center. The group was established in 1989 for the purpose of providing advice and counsel to the Chief of the Forest Service on matters related to wilderness stewardship from the perspective of field level managers.

Region 1

Kearstin Edwards

kearstin.edwards@usda.gov

Region 2

Jennifer Stagner

jennifer.stagner@usda.gov

Region 3

Phil Walrod

phillip.walrod@usda.gov

Region 4

Jeremy Kunzman

jeremiah.kunzman@usda.gov

Region 5

Chip Morrill

don.morrill@usda.gov

Region 6

Sarah Rodriguez

sarah.rodriguez@usda.gov

Region 8

Lisa Jennings

lisa.n.jennings@usda.gov

Region 9

Ed Sherman

edward.sherman@usda.gov

Region 10

Morgan Valone

morgan.valone@usda.gov

2025

WAG TASK TEAMS

Wilderness Ranger Field Guide

The Wilderness Ranger Field guide is an ongoing project. This year the team is in the writing phase and have completed 15 out of 33 first drafts for an array of topics. WAG is working on this project in conjunction with help from the National Technology Development Program. Anticipated project completion date is 1-2 years out. Also coming from NTDP is a Wilderness 101 online training, this training is on trajectory to be published in advance of the field guide.



Disaster Response & Emergency Authorizations Management

The DREAM (disaster response & emergency authorization management) team worked on finding ways to support wilderness managers working through emergency situations and natural disasters. We compiled examples of past emergencies to identify the best way to approach disaster response, best practices, & methods of action. Tracking and reporting emergencies and associated motorized and mechanized use is a critical part of wilderness year end reporting, so we developed a guide to help managers understand how to complete reporting.



Education Communication & Outreach

The ECO team is working to create a 12-month communication plan for the agency's Office of Communication that highlights positive wilderness messaging. The plan will include themes for each month, as well as examples of social media posts tied to monthly themes. The goal is to create adaptable and scalable templates, that can be shared widely across-boundaries, and in a timely manner. Examples will include outdoor ethics information tied to both the Leave No Trace and Recreate Responsibly programs.

Stock Program Support

Pack and saddle stock, such as horses and mules, play a crucial role in the US Forest Service's mission by supporting various field-based programs, including Range, Trails, Recreation, Wilderness, and more. The Chief's Wilderness Advisory Group (WAG) Stock Program Action Team has gathered concerns from stock managers, which include training and retention, animal procurement, regional coordination, safety, and the need for internal and external communication about the importance of stock programs. There is strong support for developing a community of practice among Forest Service stock practitioners. To facilitate this, the WAG action team will establish a Microsoft Teams platform for sharing challenges, solutions, and potentially forming an advisory group.



WILDERNESS INFORMATION MANAGEMENT STEERING TEAM



***WIMST members at the Mendenhall Glacier Visitor Center,
on the Tongas NF in AK- Nov 2024***

Region 1: Colter Pence (Co-Chair), Flathead NF-Hungry Horse RD

Region 2: Andrea Maichak (+1), Bighorn NF

Region 3: Ron Turner, Tonto NF

Region 4: Tim Farris, Bridger-Teton NF-Jackson RD

Region 5: Kelly Muller, Inyo NF

Region 6: Molly Johnson, Deschutes NF

Region 8: Mason Boring, Cherokee NF-Ocoee/Hiwassee RD

Region 9: Stacy Duke, Hoosier NF

Region 10: Karisa Garner, Tongass NF

Academia: Troy Hall, Oregon State University, College of Forest
Ecosystems and Society

WO: Katie Armstrong, Director Wilderness and Wild & Scenic Rivers

WO: Portia Jelinek, Wilderness and Wild & Scenic Rivers

WO: Eric Sandeno, Wilderness and Wild & Scenic Rivers

WILDERNESS INFORMATION MANAGEMENT STEERING TEAM

The Wilderness Information Management Steering Team (WIMST) consists of representatives from each Region, along with members from the Washington Office and academia. The group was established in 1999 for the purpose of promoting quality wilderness stewardship at all levels of the organization through the effective and efficient use of information and data.

During the Fiscal Year 2025 planning meeting in November 2024 on the Tongass National Forest, the group decided to continue to focus on the wilderness program fundamentals, Wilderness Stewardship Performance (WSP) and Wilderness Character Monitoring (WCM). Two additional task teams focusing on ways to better integrate Tribal Action Plan components into the WSP elements as well as a task team addressing ways to support our workforce were also created. A brief description of the WSP and WCM task teams are below and a full list of task team work as well as additional information about WIMST can be found on the [National Wilderness Program SharePoint Site](#).

Wilderness Stewardship Performance

2024 marked the 10th year of Wilderness Stewardship Performance as the wilderness performance measure. Look for the article in this issue of WAG Tales and take a survey to help us improve the performance measure. WIMST will review results of the survey and adjust elements where consistent concerns are raised by the field. Changes most likely will not take effect until 2026.

During the National Wilderness Skills Institute, WIMST will be sharing some tips and tricks from wilderness managers who are performing well with the Invasive Species, Recreation Sites, Solitude, and Trails elements. Presenters will walk through the steps they used to go from 0 to 10 in these popular Wilderness Stewardship Performance elements.

Are you struggling with the user developed trails components of the Trails element? Keep an eye out for a user developed trails template that will be coming out soon.

Wilderness Character Monitoring

The Wilderness Character Monitoring task team is working on support resources to assist units in completing baseline assessments and to help those who have moved on to trend assessments. These tasks include:

- *A best practices document for units working on Wilderness Character Monitoring with partners*
- *Wilderness Character Monitoring crosswalk with Wilderness Stewardship Performance Guidebook*
- *Review and finalize the first ever Wilderness Character Monitoring draft trend report!*
- *Find and post Wilderness Character Monitoring success stories*



Wilderness Stewardship Performance Survey

The Wilderness Stewardship Performance (WSP) program has been in place for 10 years. This agency performance measure tracks which wilderness tasks get accomplished and which tasks still need to be accomplished. The performance measure addresses these tasks in a systematic, defensible, and transparent approach. The action items in the performance measure were developed directly from surveys with wilderness managers and wilderness rangers to identify the tasks they do as part of their job.

After 10 years of implementing WSP, this is an appropriate time to consider whether to make any changes to aspects of the performance measure that are not working as intended. To do so, we need input from wilderness staff who have direct experience with what has worked, challenges faced, and opportunities for refining the approach. We invite your thoughts and suggestions.

Please note that WSP is the agency's mechanism for tracking changes in key indicators of wilderness stewardship over time. The performance measure was never intended to be about how the wilderness program gets funded. However, the ability for a wilderness manager or partner organization to show specific tasks that will be accomplished if funding is available, is a benefit of the WSP program.

We know that within the existing framework, there are likely areas for improvement or clarification. While we want to address barriers within elements that impact the ability to complete tasks, we also would like to avoid creating impacts to progress being made.

While this survey includes questions about each of the WSP elements, we ask that you respond to those that are of most importance or concern to your wilderness(es). In other words, you can skip elements that you did not select for your wilderness(es), or elements that are working just fine for you. To the extent possible, please focus on changes we can make that are actionable and feasible.

You may need to reference the most current WSP Guidebook to refresh yourself on each of the elements and the components of the element. The 2024 version of the WSP Guidebook is located here ([WSP Guidebook](#)). Thank you for providing input on the WSP program.

Wilderness Stewardship Performance Survey

https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=5zZb7e4BvE6GfuA8-g1Gl47tqaZG4XxDrq_VWM1wv5tUNIBQNVVLM0ZNTes1MzI3VTJISFRSSlpZTy4u



WILDERNESS SPOTLIGHT : ENDICOTT RIVER WILDERNESS

Endicott River, AK



Team stream crossing effort to get to the Wilderness



Endicott Wilderness Monitoring Crew- 2024

Back: Matthew Brodsky, Lucas Beck (NPS Glacier Bay), Dylan Miller Front: Fiona Papile, Bo Schwanke, Keagan Walker

The Endicott River Wilderness, considered one of the most remote and least visited wilderness areas in the nation, lies in the heart of the coastal Chilkat Mountains on the Tongass NF in Alaska. Designated in 1980, the Endicott Wilderness encompasses 98,396 acres and is bordered by the Glacier Bay Wilderness to the west (2.6 million acres).

Accessing the Endicott River Wilderness requires a boat ride with the support of neighboring Glacier Bay National Park, an 8 mile paddle on a kayak, and a day and a half of hiking that includes glacial stream crossings, just to reach the wilderness boundary.

In 2024, Juneau RD wilderness rangers, an archaeology technician, and a wildlife technician from Glacier Bay NP conducted a wilderness monitoring trip for the first time in 10 years, which included the area's first ever archaeological survey. The Endicott River Wilderness is truly an enduring resource, remaining wild and unimpeded for perpetuity.



ARTHUR CARHART

NATIONAL WILDERNESS TRAINING CENTER

"Fostering interagency excellence in wilderness stewardship"



Updates from the Arthur Carhart National Wilderness Training Center

The mission of the Arthur Carhart National Wilderness Training Center (ACNWTC) is to equip and inspire agency leaders and partners to ensure that America's National Wilderness Preservation System endures for future generations. We do this through training, information, and education. To learn more about the ACNWTC follow this link: [ACNWTC Home](#)

Project Highlights

- Michelle Reilly has presented "Through the Historical Looking Glass: The Wilderness Movement" during several webinars and will have a related article published in the upcoming International Journal of Wilderness. To see one of the webinars you can follow this link: [Through the Historical Looking Glass: The Wilderness Movement](#)
- Rob Burrows recently led a webinar in January titled "Incorporating Indigenous Perspectives into Wilderness Stewardship." A recording of that session will be posted here: [Incorporating Indigenous Perspectives Into Wilderness Stewardship](#)
- Carhart Staff is partnering with the Forest Service National Technology and Design Program as well as Washington Office and field staff to develop a Wilderness Stewardship Basics Training Program. This project will equip early-career Wilderness stewards, including those new to wilderness issues, as well as individuals transitioning into Wilderness roles later in their careers for the first time. The objective is to provide these professionals with the essential knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) necessary for effective job performance in wilderness areas.

Staffing:

- Dan Abbe, the Forest Service Representative at the training center, retired in February. For those of you than knew Dan please be on the lookout for a virtual celebration of his career in the months ahead.
- Jimmy Gaudry started as the permanent Director at the training center in January. Some of you may know Jimmy from his previous roles on the WAG and as a Regional Wilderness Program Manager in Region 1 and 8. He is excited to be in this new role and looks forward to continued work with the Forest Service Wilderness Stewardship community in this capacity.

Training

- Please visit the training section of [Wilderness Connect](#) for the latest listing of available training opportunities.

Aldo Leopold Wilderness Research Institute

Last year at ALWRI, while we celebrated the 60th anniversary of the 1964 Wilderness Act, we stood by our commitment to advance wilderness stewardship through transformational science and provide innovative, science-driven solutions that integrally support the management of congressionally designated wilderness areas. Our research contributed new methods and information to broader management efforts such as wilderness fire, biodiversity conservation, and stewardship effectiveness. This year's highlights from our program illustrate how creative collaborations between research and management can serve to ensure that wilderness areas continue to thrive as critical resources for wildlife, ecosystems, and future generations.

ALWRI's research continues to be guided by many of the dynamic challenges faced by wilderness areas and their managers. With five research priority areas, over the past year our projects ranged broadly, focusing on topics from fire management, recreation, to biodiversity, to co-stewardship and access. We continued to collaborate with partners across agencies and administrative units, in state and local governments, from industry, and from Tribal Nations. Our results were shared in readily accessible products, such as managers' reports, online videos, academic journal articles, and write-ups in popular outlets. ALWRI's Science Delivery outputs over the past year include the ongoing development of a web-enabled tool designed to help manage wildlife movement in wilderness areas and improve wildlife habitat connectivity across the western U.S. Our eDNA work on Pacific lamprey distributions in Wilderness and



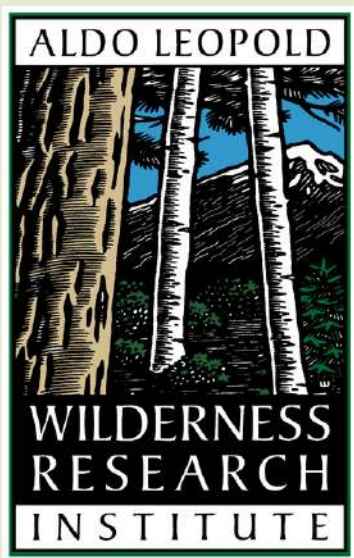
Pacific Lamprey eel photo by Sean Connolly

Wild and Scenic Rivers gathered and analyzed over 200 samples from across Oregon, Washington, and Idaho. We wrapped up analysis on fire history in the Axolotl Wilderness Study Area, Montana, where we are collaborating with Montana State University and the Crow Tribe to integrate Indigenous knowledge and fire management practices into wilderness stewardship. Findings from our whitebark pine conservation project, spanning several U.S. states, suggested future conditions may drastically reduce climatically suitable areas for whitebark pine by mid-century. We are currently writing up the details of this work for a forthcoming publication. In



Whitebark Pine seedling in Glacier National Park
NPS Photo

January 2025, we held a workshop with national wilderness leads to discuss whitebark pine conservation and restoration strategies, to inform coordinated action across agencies. Also in January 2025, findings from a study about the role of science in wilderness decision-making were published in Park Stewardship Forum. Through facilitated discussions with 68 managers from across the National Wilderness Preservation system, we found that managers make operational, relational, informational decisions within national policy contexts. We then identified how managers use science in these decisions and opportunities to strengthen actionable science for wilderness.



As ALWRI look towards the next 60 years of the Wilderness Act, we reaffirm our commitment to providing you with research products and decision-making tools that help support your work towards ensuring the resilience of our invaluable and irreplaceable wilderness ecosystems.

Some recent tools and science delivery products from the ALWRI team:

• **A systematic review of visitor preferences concerning recreation allocation:**

Chris Armatas, Socio-Ecological Socio-Ecological Practice Research

• **International Wilderness in the Twenty-First Century: A Global Review:**

Chris Armatas, Wilderness Management (book). Stewardship and Protection of and Values. Eds: Chad P. Dawson, John C. Hendee. 2025

• **Fire in wilderness ecosystems (book chapter in 'Wilderness Management'):** Sean Parks, Wilderness Management (book). Stewardship and Protection of Resources and Values. Eds: Chad P. Dawson, John C. Hendee. 2025

• **Examining and strengthening the role of science in wilderness decision-making:** Lauren Redmore, Jaclyn Rushing, Chris Armatas, Vita Wright, Olga Helmy, Park Stewardship Forum

• **Reflecting on the co-production ideal through practice:** Chris Armatas and Teresa Hollingsworth: Socio-Ecological Practice Research

• **Experimental recreationist noise alters behavior and space use of wildlife:** Kathy Zeller, Current Biology
And Stay tuned for:

• **Whitebark pine in the U.S. projected to experience an 80% reduction in climatically suitable area by mid-21st century**
(currently in review): Sean Parks, Kira Hefty, Jaclyn Rushing.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONTINUED WORK AS STEWARDS OF AMERICA'S ENDURING WILDERNESS RESOURCE!

For more information about Wilderness Stewardship, please visit:

National Wilderness Program SharePoint Site (FS Internal): <https://bit.ly/FSWilderness>



Chief's WAG (FS Internal): <https://bit.ly/ChiefsWAG>

WIMST (FS Internal): <https://bit.ly/WIMST>

ALWRI: <https://leopold.wilderness.net/>

ACNWTC: <https://carhart.wilderness.net/>

National Trails Program (FS Internal): <https://bit.ly/FSTrails>