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## ESSAY

# ON THE NATURE OF WILDNESS: EXPLORING WHAT WILDERNESS REALLY PROTECTS

GREGORY H. APLET\*

### INTRODUCTION

*Hunting in the wilderness is of all pastimes the most attractive, and it is doubly so when not carried on merely as a pastime. Shooting over a private game-preserve is of course in no way to be compared to it.*<sup>1</sup>

Theodore Roosevelt, 1897

In the more than a century since Teddy Roosevelt reflected on its value, wilderness has become a prized possession of the American public and is now valued for a host of contributions, including utilitarian, cultural, and conservation purposes.<sup>2</sup> With wilderness now well established as an American value thirty-five years after the passage of the Wilderness Act of 1964,<sup>3</sup> we enter the next century with the National Wilderness Preservation System standing at over 104 million acres,<sup>4</sup> beyond the wildest dreams of the early wilderness advocates.<sup>5</sup> The popularity of wil-

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1. Theodore Roosevelt, *The American Wilderness: Wilderness Hunters and Wilderness Game*, in *THE GREAT NEW WILDERNESS DEBATE* 63, 74 (J. Baird Callicott & Michael P. Nelson eds., 1998).

2. For detailed discussions of wilderness values, see JOHN C. HENDEE ET AL., *WILDERNESS MANAGEMENT* 7-11 (2d. ed. rev. 1990); Michael McCloskey, *The Meaning of Wilderness*, in *MANAGING AMERICA'S ENDURING WILDERNESS RESOURCE* 22, 22-25 (David W. Lime ed., 1990); Michael P. Nelson, *An Amalgamation of Wilderness Preservation Arguments*, in *THE GREAT NEW WILDERNESS DEBATE*, *supra* note 1, at 154, 156-93.

3. Wilderness Act of 1964, Pub. L. No. 88-577, 78 Stat. 890 (codified as amended at 16 U.S.C. §§ 1131-1136 (1994)).

4. Peter Landres and Shannon Meyer of the Aldo Leopold Wilderness Research Institute in Missoula, Montana, recently completed a comprehensive inventory of the National Wilderness Preservation System and found it to contain 104,571,344 acres in 624 units in 44 states. See P. LANDRES & S. MEYER, *NATIONAL WILDERNESS PRESERVATION SYSTEM DATABASE: KEY ATTRIBUTES AND TRENDS, 1964 THROUGH 1998*, at 1, 9 (Forest Service General Technical Report, RMRS-GTR-18, 1998).

5. Early in his career, Aldo Leopold wrote: "Several assumptions can be made at once without argument. First, such wilderness areas should occupy only a small fraction of the total National Forest area—probably not to exceed one in each State. Second, only areas naturally difficult of ordinary industrial development should be chosen." Aldo Leopold, *The Wilderness and Its Place in Forest Recreational Policy*, 19 J. FORESTRY 718, 719 (1921). In 1935, Robert Marshall and Benton MacKaye wrote in the founding platform of The Wilderness Society: "All we desire to save from

derness continues to escalate, as poll after poll show that people want more land protected as wilderness.<sup>6</sup>

Despite its popularity, wilderness has come under attack of late. Some question whether wilderness is something real or simply a creation of the human mind.<sup>7</sup> Others believe the idea of wilderness to perpetuate an ultimately self-destructive separation of humans from nature, to ignore or subjugate aboriginal people, and to assume stasis in natural ecosystems.<sup>8</sup> While most of the debate's antagonists do not criticize (indeed, they actually celebrate) wild places, they suggest that the time has come to move beyond "the received wilderness idea"<sup>9</sup> to focus less on wilderness protection and more on sustaining the wildness that is all around us.

invasion is *that extremely minor fraction of outdoor America which yet remains free from mechanical sights and sounds and smells.*" *About TWS, The Wilderness Society's Roots* (visited Oct. 25, 1998) <<http://www.wilderness.org/abouttws/history.htm>> (emphasis added).

6. A July 1998 poll conducted for The Wilderness Society by the firm of Lake, Snell, Perry & Associates demonstrated overwhelming support for wilderness protection. Two-thirds (67%) of the 862 registered voters surveyed responded that they opposed the building of roads in national parks or protected areas, especially if such development threatens the "wilderness character" of those places. See *The Wilderness Society—Eye on Washington* (visited Nov. 6, 1998) <<http://www.wilderness.org/poll.htm>>. Where people are more familiar with wilderness, support may be even higher. In Colorado, a June 1997 poll conducted for the League of Conservation Voters showed that 80% of Colorado voters favor a proposal to protect about one-sixth of Colorado BLM land as wilderness. See *The Wilderness Society—Four Corners—Coloradans Support Wilderness* (visited Nov. 6, 1998) <<http://www.wilderness.org/ccc/fourcorners/poll.htm>>. The popularity of wilderness preservation is also manifest worldwide. The Sixth World Wilderness Congress, held in Bangalore, India, in 1998, examined and celebrated wilderness in its many forms around the globe. See *6th World Wilderness Congress* (visited Oct. 25, 1998) <<http://www.worldwilderness.org/6/6a.html>>.

7. Roderick Nash concluded: "There is no specific material object that is wilderness." RODERICK NASH, *WILDERNESS AND THE AMERICAN MIND* 1 (3d ed. 1982). Environmental historian William Cronon wrote: "Far from being the one place on earth that stands apart from humanity, [wilderness] is quite profoundly a human creation—indeed, the creation of very particular human cultures at very particular moments in human history." William Cronon, *The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature*, in *UNCOMMON GROUND: TOWARD REINVENTING NATURE* 69, 69 (William Cronon ed., 1995).

8. Wilderness philosophers J. Baird Callicott and Michael P. Nelson recently compiled a broad array of previously published and original works into a book entitled *The Great New Wilderness Debate*, which explores early conceptions of wilderness as well as more recent critiques and rebuttals. It includes 39 different essays and provides virtual "one stop shopping" for diverse conceptions of wilderness. See *THE GREAT NEW WILDERNESS DEBATE*, *supra* note 1.

9. J. Baird Callicott & Michael P. Nelson, *Introduction to THE GREAT NEW WILDERNESS DEBATE*, *supra* note 1, at 1, 2. The "received wilderness idea" was coined by environmental philosopher J. Baird Callicott to describe what he believes to be the essential notion of wilderness as Americans understand it. See *id.* at 1–20. Callicott asserts that early wilderness thinkers handed down a conception of wilderness in which pre-Columbian America is held to have been in a "totally wilderness condition," and any alteration of that condition degrades "pristine nature." The only way to protect nature, therefore, is to prevent its occupancy and use. Callicott believes this conception separates people from nature, ignores aboriginal people, and holds nature static. This caricature forms the basis of Callicott's and others' critiques of the wilderness idea; however, a more careful reading of the early writers shows that they were well aware of many of the points raised by the "new" critics. William Cronon stops short of such caricature but fears that

Thus far, this reexamination of the wilderness idea has largely been limited to academics and a few wilderness defenders, but the policy implications are huge. The current attack on wilderness has the grave potential to undermine support for the popular practice of wilderness protection. Alternatively, policies that embrace wilderness as "the place for nature" risk devaluing nature outside of wilderness, ultimately diminishing our obligation to care for the earth as a whole.

Pundits impugn or defend wilderness from widely divergent understandings of the term. Critics attack wilderness as the figment of an imperialistic, misogynistic imagination; defenders point to the one hundred plus million acres in the National Wilderness Preservation System as undeniable proof of the validity of the construct. But both sides miss a critical point: wilderness is neither simply an idea nor a place. It is a place where an idea is clearly expressed—the idea of wildness. The Wilderness Act seeks to identify and protect those lands on the federal estate where wildness is best expressed.<sup>10</sup> Critics seek to ensure that nonwilderness wildness is appreciated wherever it is expressed. In an effort to bridge the chasm that has developed between the critics and defenders of wilderness, this Essay examines the qualities of a place that confer wildness and explores some of the implications of treating wildness as a quality best expressed in the places we call wilderness, but also infused in special places closer to home.

### I. WILDERNESS VERSUS WILDNESS

*I believe that mistaking wilderness for wildness is one cause of our increasing failure to preserve the wild earth . . . we are confused about what Thoreau meant by wildness, we aren't sure what we mean by wildness, and we aren't clear how or what wildness preserves.*<sup>11</sup>

Jack Turner, 1986

There is an interesting contrast between the words wilderness and wildness brought to light by Thoreau's most famous observation, "in Wildness is the preservation of the World."<sup>12</sup> Often misquoting or appropriating it as "in Wilderness,"<sup>13</sup> the conservation community has not been bothered by the difference, for it has been easy enough to reconcile the two: wilderness is wild; therefore, preserving wilderness preserves the

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wilderness embodies a dualistic vision in which the human is entirely outside the natural. If we allow ourselves to believe that nature, to be true, must also be wild, then our very presence in nature represents its fall. . . . We thereby leave ourselves little hope of discovering what an ethical, sustainable, *honorable* human place in nature might actually look like.

Cronon, *supra* note 7, at 80–81.

10. See Wilderness Act § 2(a), 16 U.S.C. § 1131(a) (1994).

11. JACK TURNER, *THE ABSTRACT WILD* 81 (1996).

12. HENRY DAVID THOREAU, *Walking*, in *THE PORTABLE THOREAU* 592, 609 (Carl Bode ed., 1977).

13. For a discussion of the cliché usage of "wilderness," instead of "wildness," see TURNER, *supra* note 11, at 92.

world. But Turner, a philosopher, makes a good point: wilderness is a place; wildness is a quality. They are not equivalent, yet we have allowed them to be confused.

This confusion would pose no problem if what Thoreau had meant was that wilderness was the place of wildness, but this was not exactly his intent. Instead, Thoreau intended to point out the wildness in all things. As Jack Turner observes in *The Abstract Wild*:

Thoreau understood wildness as a quality: wild nature, wild men, wild friends, wild dreams, wild house cats, and wild literature. He associated it with other qualities: the good, the holy, the free. Indeed, he equated it with life itself. By freedom he meant not rights and liberties, but the autonomous and self-willed; and by life, not mere existence, but vitality and life force.<sup>14</sup>

An alternative expression of this notion is offered by the poet Gary Snyder in his book, *The Practice of the Wild*, a book Jack Turner considers the only serious treatment of the relationship between nature, wildness, and wilderness:

[W]ildness is not limited to the 2 percent formal wilderness areas. Shifting scales, it is everywhere: ineradicable populations of fungi, moss, mold, yeasts, and such that surround and inhabit us. Deer mice on the back porch, deer bounding across the freeway, pigeons in the park, spiders in the corners. . . . Wilderness may temporarily dwindle, but wildness won't go away.<sup>15</sup>

If wildness is a quality infused in all things, not just wilderness, how do we distinguish between wilderness and nonwilderness? Here, for the moment, we are on familiar ground: wilderness consists of those places that are most wild. As Gary Snyder says, wilderness is "a place where the wild potential is fully expressed."<sup>16</sup> Historically, we have sought rules to help us make this determination—section 1131(c) of the Wilderness Act provides the most familiar set:

[A]n area of undeveloped Federal land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions and which (1) generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable; (2) has outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation; (3) has at least five

14. *See id.* at 107.

15. GARY SNYDER, *The Etiquette of Freedom*, in *THE PRACTICE OF THE WILD* 3, 14–15 (1990).

16. *Id.* at 12. Snyder's use of the term "fully expressed" suggests that he might view wilderness as an absolute condition. Elsewhere, however, he reveals that his true sentiments are just the opposite: wilderness exists in relative opposition to development. *See infra* text accompanying note 45.

thousand acres of land or is of sufficient size as to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition; and (4) may also contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value.<sup>17</sup>

The Wilderness Act was the result of debate and compromise that took place over more than eight years.<sup>18</sup> It defines wilderness as an area of federal land larger than 5,000 acres with no people or artificial structures and providing outstanding recreation or other values.<sup>19</sup> This provides a political/legal definition that can be used to identify places that qualify for wilderness designation under the Act, but it still does not directly address the question: "What are the qualities of a place that make it wild?"

To begin to answer this question, one may start with a dictionary. The *American Heritage Dictionary* defines wild as "occurring, growing, or living in a natural state; not domesticated, cultivated or tamed."<sup>20</sup> This is consistent with Gary Snyder's observation that "[w]ild is largely defined in our dictionaries by what—from a human standpoint—it is not [e.g., wild land is uninhabited and uncultivated]."<sup>21</sup> Others have described wilderness as "unkempt,"<sup>22</sup> "unconfined,"<sup>23</sup> "self-willed,"<sup>24</sup> and "outside of human control"<sup>25</sup>—in other words, free.

Freedom, an essential ingredient of wildness and an essential quality of wilderness, was beautifully captured by the drafters of the Wilderness Act in the word "untrammled."<sup>26</sup> This obscure word, which has come to be almost synonymous with wilderness, does not mean "untrampled upon," as is commonly misunderstood; instead, it means unshackled, allowed to run free.<sup>27</sup>

But what does it mean for land to be "untrammled?" The image of land in shackles does not easily come to mind. Environmental historian Michael Cohen writes, "I am troubled by the term 'untrammled.' At what point have we caught and trapped the wilderness? I would presume that a process of capturing or trapping begins when men try to 'open out

17. Wilderness Act § 2(c), 16 U.S.C. § 1131(c) (1994).

18. See Mark Woods, *Federal Wilderness Preservation in the United States*, in THE GREAT NEW WILDERNESS DEBATE, *supra* note 1, at 131, 149 n.2.

19. See Wilderness Act § 2(c), 16 U.S.C. § 1131(c).

20. THE AMERICAN HERITAGE DICTIONARY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE 2041 (3d ed. 1992) [hereinafter AMERICAN HERITAGE].

21. SNYDER, *supra* note 15, at 9.

22. NASH, *supra* note 7, at 47.

23. ALDO LEOPOLD, A SAND COUNTY ALMANAC at xi (1966).

24. TURNER, *supra* note 11, at 111.

25. REED NOSS, WORLD WILDLIFE FUND CANADA, MAINTAINING ECOLOGICAL INTEGRITY IN REPRESENTATIVE RESERVE NETWORKS 27 (1995).

26. Wilderness Act § 2(c), 16 U.S.C. § 1132(c) (1994).

27. See THE AMERICAN HERITAGE DICTIONARY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE 1960 (3d ed. 1992).

routes' among the mountains."<sup>28</sup> Thus, the construction of roads diminishes the freedom of the land, but there are other ways. By extinguishing lightning-caused fires, eliminating keystone predators, damming rivers, tilling soil, and other more subtle actions, we have brought vast parts of the landscape under human control or influence. Indeed, our very presence in large numbers diminishes the freedom of the land, as we inevitably put it to use for our purposes (e.g., transportation, recreation, hygiene). With air pollution and climate change altering basic ecological processes and modern transportation extending human reach to the most distant corners of the earth, it is clear that absolute freedom of the land no longer exists; all we have left is relatively free land.

For some, freedom is the key quality of wilderness. The postmodern philosopher Jack Turner believes that anything we do as humans to intervene in wilderness diminishes its wildness:

Why not work to set aside vast areas where we limit all forms of human influence: no conservation strategies, no designer wilderness, no roads, no trails, no satellite surveillance, no over-flights with helicopters, no radio collars, no measuring devices, no photographs, no GPS data, no databases stuffed with the location of every draba of the summit of Mt. Moran, no guidebooks, no topographical maps. Let whatever habitat we can preserve go back to its own self-order as much as possible. Let wilderness again become a blank on our maps.<sup>29</sup>

To authors like Turner, it is the expression of the will of the land ("its own self order"), not the will of people, that confers wildness; the essential requirement of wilderness is that it be set free.<sup>30</sup>

28. MICHAEL P. COHEN, *THE PATHLESS WAY: JOHN MUIR AND AMERICAN WILDERNESS* 86 (1984).

29. TURNER, *supra* note 11, at 120.

30. *Id.* In 1930, Robert Marshall wrote: "There is just one hope of repulsing the tyrannical ambition of civilization to conquer every niche on the whole earth. That hope is the organization of spirited people who will fight for the freedom of the wilderness." Robert Marshall, *The Problem of the Wilderness*, in *THE GREAT NEW WILDERNESS DEBATE*, *supra* note 1, at 85, 95-96. Though Marshall may have been referring to the will of the land in this case, much of his concern with wilderness protection was to ensure that there would always be places in which people could be free. In a famous passage from *Walking*, Thoreau says, "I wish to speak a word for Nature, for absolute freedom and wildness, as contrasted with a freedom and culture merely civil . . ." THOREAU, *supra* note 12, at 592. The Romantics of the nineteenth century championed wilderness as a place to escape the stranglehold of civilization. Roderick Nash notes: "[Wilderness] not only offered an escape from society but also was an ideal stage for the Romantic individual to exercise the cult that he frequently made of his own soul. The solitude and total freedom of the wilderness created a perfect setting for either melancholy or exultation." NASH, *supra* note 7, at 47. Throughout the history of the idea, wilderness as a place in which to be free has been a recurrent value. In contrast, the Wilderness Act speaks of wilderness as "an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man," suggesting that it is the land itself that is the object of the verb. Wilderness Act § 2(c), 16 U.S.C. § 1131(c). While wilderness will remain highly valued as a place where people can be free, it is this second sense, the freedom of the land itself, that is the focus here.

In a spirited rejoinder to the postmodernist attack on wilderness, Marvin Henberg writes: "Whatever final form a pancultural view of wilderness takes as it is negotiated among nonauthori-

Taking this to the extreme, it would seem that any land, set free, would be wilderness. The most burned-out inner city tenement could be wilderness if set free. This, of course, does not match any but the most eccentric definitions of wilderness. The essential quality of wilderness missing from this definition is something best described as "naturalness." This notion recurs in all discussions of wilderness throughout time, even those, like Turner's, that stress freedom as the essential quality.<sup>31</sup>

Natural, primitive, pristine, presettlement. These words have been associated with wilderness since the dawn of the idea. Even the dictionary cited above identifies "a natural state" as integral to the definition of "wild."<sup>32</sup> Generally, natural has two connotations. First, it can mean an intact biota, as in "the community of life untrammled by man" that appears in the Wilderness Act.<sup>33</sup> Ecologist Reed Noss defines natural as "the condition of a landscape before substantial alteration by modern human activity."<sup>34</sup> This meaning is comparable to that of Gary Snyder when he says: "To speak of wilderness is to speak of wholeness."<sup>35</sup>

The other connotation of "natural" is the lack of human modification, as in Bob Marshall's reference to conditions that "preserve as nearly as possible the essential features of the primitive environment."<sup>36</sup> The Wilderness Act referred to wilderness as being "in contrast with those areas where man and his works dominate the landscape."<sup>37</sup> Whether it is the presence of intact ecosystems or the absence of human imprint, the quality of naturalness is critical to ideas of wildness and wilderness.

The first definition of natural offered by the *American Heritage Dictionary* is "[p]resent in or produced by nature,"<sup>38</sup> meaning not artificial or man-made. As many philosophers have noted over the years, however, people themselves are natural, and therefore, so are their products. Even wilderness philosopher and poet Gary Snyder prefers to think of nature as "[t]he physical universe and all its properties."<sup>39</sup> Conceiving of nature as simply the absence of man is problematic, especially given the important role that aboriginal people have played in shaping the composition and structure of some ecosystems.<sup>40</sup>

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tarian cultures, I believe freedom will be its ultimate value. For nonhuman life, freedom can only be based on the spontaneity of wildness." Marvin Henberg, *Pancultural Wilderness*, in *WILD IDEAS* 59, 68-69 (David Rothenberg ed., 1995).

31. See TURNER, *supra* note 11, at 111.

32. AMERICAN HERITAGE, *supra* note 20, at 2041.

33. Wilderness Act § 2, 16 U.S.C. § 1131(c).

34. NOSS, *supra* note 25, at 27.

35. SNYDER, *supra* note 15, at 12.

36. ROBERT MARSHALL, *THE PEOPLE'S FORESTS* 177-78 (1933).

37. Wilderness Act § 2, 16 U.S.C. § 1131(c).

38. AMERICAN HERITAGE, *supra* note 20, at 1204.

39. SNYDER, *supra* note 15, at 9.

40. William Denevan attacks the idea of wilderness for failing to acknowledge the extensive influence of indigenous people in North America through hunting, burning, agriculture, and con-



Defining natural as the condition of North America at the time of European settlement has also been criticized, since ecosystems are dynamic and are constantly changing.<sup>41</sup> Though the Yellowstone fires of 1988 were not unnatural, there can be no disputing that Yellowstone in 1989 was a much different place than it was over a century earlier when it was established as a national park. The dynamic character of ecosystems makes it difficult to identify a particular state called "natural."

Despite these criticisms, the need to describe naturalness persists. The National Park Service Organic Act requires the National Park Service "to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and wild life therein,"<sup>42</sup> and the Wilderness Act requires that wilderness be "protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions."<sup>43</sup> These two mandates require that the definition of naturalness not merely be the subject of academic debate; managers on the ground have been charged with its protection and need a meaningful definition.

Wilderness ecologist David Cole of the U.S. Forest Service has explored the naturalness mandate of the Wilderness Act and concluded that it provides conflicting direction. On the one hand, natural conditions may

struction. See William Denevan, *The Pristine Myth: The Landscape of the Americas in 1492*, in THE GREAT NEW WILDERNESS DEBATE, *supra* note 1, at 414, 414–16. Callicott takes this information to what he believes to be its logical conclusion:

Since Darwin's *Origin of Species* and *Descent of Man* . . . we have known that man is a part of nature. . . . If man is a natural, a wild, an evolving species, not essentially different in this respect from all the others, . . . the works of man, however precocious, are as natural as those of beavers, or termites, or any of the other species that dramatically modify their habitats.

J. Baird Callicott, *The Wilderness Idea Revisited: The Sustainable Development Alternative*, in THE GREAT NEW WILDERNESS DEBATE, *supra* note 1, at 337, 350. In rebuttal, philosopher Holmes Rolston argues:

Not so . . . because the human presence is so radically different, humans ought to draw back and let nature be. Humans can and should see outside their own sector, their species self-interest, and affirm nonanthropogenic, noncultural values. Only humans have conscience enough to do this. . . . To think that human culture is nothing but natural system is not discriminating enough.

Holmes Rolston III, *The Wilderness Idea Reaffirmed*, in THE GREAT NEW WILDERNESS DEBATE, *supra* note 1, at 367, 369. Based on his research on the historical ecology of Yosemite National Park, geographer Thomas Vale simply rejects the myth of the humanized landscape:

Village sites were substantially humanized by the everyday life of Indians; groves of oaks or stands of bracken fern may have been modified in form or extent, for variable lengths of time, by native peoples; some areas of low-elevation meadows and forests could have been altered by Miwok burning, although lightning fires seem adequate to account for the pre-European fire regime; the middle and higher elevations, by contrast, were changed only superficially by native peoples. Even given the most generous interpretation of what was "humanized," much of the park was "natural"—in the sense that its landscape characteristics were determined by natural processes.

Thomas Vale, *The Myth of the Humanized Landscape: An Example from Yosemite National Park*, 18 NAT. AREAS J. 231, 234 (1998).

41. See Vale, *supra* note 40, at 231.

42. National Park Service Organic Act of 1916, ch. 408, § 1, 39 Stat. 535, 535 (codified as amended at 16 U.S.C. § 1 (1994)).

43. Wilderness Act § 2(c), 16 U.S.C. § 1131(c) (1994).

be thought of as untrammled or unmanipulated; on the other, natural conditions may be thought of as a "pristineness" or "what would have existed in the absence of post-aboriginal humans."<sup>44</sup> The Wilderness Act is clear in providing both natural and untrammled conditions as goals for wilderness. Cole argues that when naturalness is defined as both untrammled and pristine, conflicts arise, as manipulation is needed to repair damage caused by overuse, exotic species invasions, and fire exclusion. If, however, untrammled is equated with freedom from human control, then natural can be defined independently as pristine or "presettlement."

Unfortunately, defining natural as pristine does not address the problem of dynamism in ecosystems. If ecosystems are dynamic, then any presettlement date, such as 1492, is an arbitrary reference point. Instead, natural conditions have to be described as the range of conditions, or bounded behavior, of ecosystems over a period of time during which the major factors controlling those ecosystems (i.e., climate, organisms, soils, and disturbance) remained relatively constant. In North America, this amounts to the two thousand or so years prior to the arrival of modern technological man. In other parts of the world, where aboriginal technologies continue to exert their traditional influences, ecosystems may remain natural even in the presence of significant human population. It is the bounded condition of ecosystems, dynamic and in the presence of aboriginal man, that we may consider "natural" or "pristine." Again, as is the case with freedom, the effects of pollution, recent extinction, and widespread species introductions assure that no place remains truly pristine, only relatively so.

Thus, it is possible to conceive of wildness as increasing in two dimensions: from the controlled to the "self-willed" along a gradient of freedom, and from the artificial to the pristine along a gradient of naturalness (Fig. 1). At the most controlled and artificial ends of the spectra are the least wild lands—the built environment of the city. Where freedom and naturalness are highest is the wilderness. In between, lands can possess any combination of freedom and naturalness and intermediate wildness. For example, Washington D.C.'s C&O Canal would have to

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44. David N. Cole, *Ecological Manipulation in Wilderness: An Emerging Management Dilemma*, INT'L J. WILDERNESS, May 1996, at 15, 15 (1996). Cole is not alone in equating "natural" and "untrammled." In a recent review of the implementation of the Wilderness Act, Mark Woods writes:

For the sake of brevity, I shall call the existence of naturalness in wilderness, as legally interpreted, the untrammled condition of wilderness. The term "untrammled" is a less precise way to say that wilderness areas are undeveloped "without permanent improvements or human habitation" that retain a "primeval character and influence."

Mark Woods, *Federal Wilderness Preservation in the United States: The Preservation of Wilderness?*, in THE GREAT NEW AMERICAN WILDERNESS, *supra* note 1, at 131, 135. Thomas Vale agrees: "A landscape can be labeled pristine, or natural, or 'in a wilderness condition' if the fundamental characteristics of vegetation, wildlife, landform, soil, hydrology, and climate are those that result from natural, nonhuman processes, and if these conditions would exist whether or not humans are present." Vale, *supra* note 40, at 232.

rate low on the scale of naturalness; it is an artificial waterway choked with exotic species. Nevertheless, it receives little direct manipulation and functions according to its own—now artificial—processes. It, therefore, may be said to be free from control and, therefore, more wild than the city.

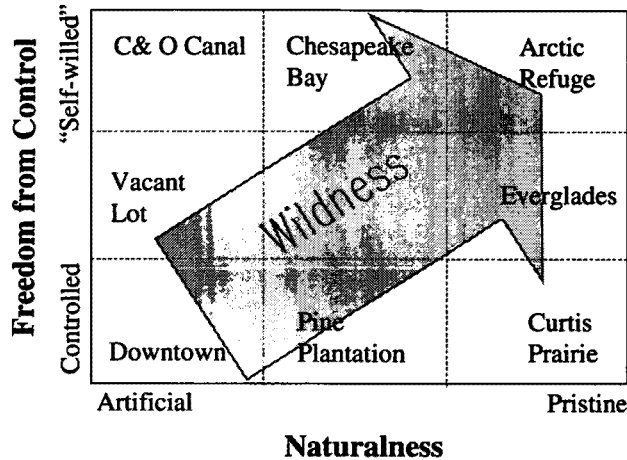


FIGURE 1. WILDNESS IS A FUNCTION OF BOTH FREEDOM AND NATURALNESS

In contrast, Curtis Prairie is a restored prairie patch at the University of Wisconsin arboretum. Because it consists almost entirely of native species on native prairie soils, it can be thought of as highly natural. On the other hand, it is under the direct control of arboretum staff. Seed dispersal is a human function, and the fires that maintain species composition are set and controlled by people. Curtis Prairie is not "self-willed" and is, therefore, not as wild as wilderness. For different reasons, both the C&O Canal and Curtis Prairie are more wild than the city but less wild than wilderness. All lands fall somewhere along this two-dimensional continuum of wildness.

Examples abound of places that we think of as wild that are under some degree of control. The flow of water through the Everglades is controlled by a massive artificial plumbing system. The Colorado River through the Grand Canyon is controlled by Glen Canyon Dam. Many of our national wildlife refuges maintain rare wetlands in agricultural landscapes through the artificial impoundment of water. Indeed, the increasingly popular practice of ecological restoration is a matter of bringing a landscape under tighter control in order to increase its naturalness (Fig. 2). Ideally, once naturalness is restored, a landscape can be released to function on its own, but in many cases, restoring naturalness will require continuous control.

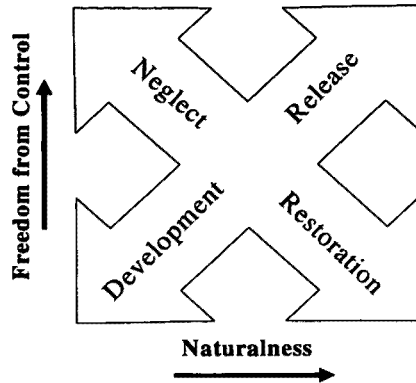


FIGURE 2. WILDNESS WILL CHANGE AS FREEDOM AND NATURALNESS INCREASE OR DECREASE

## II. WILDERNESS VERSUS WILD LANDS

So, we have identified freedom from control and naturalness to be the primary determinants of wildness. But we have also recognized that wildness permeates all places and beings. How, then, do we recognize wilderness, and how do we identify other wild lands if they are not the same as wilderness? The answer is that these classes are marked by points on a continuum of wildness; from exclusively crafted and tame, to raw wilderness. This idea of wilderness as one end of a continuum of wildness is a recurrent theme among wilderness thinkers. As Gary Snyder explains:

Every region has its wilderness. There is the fire in the kitchen, and there is the place less traveled. In most settled regions there used to be some combination of prime agricultural land, orchard and vine land, rough pasturage, woodlot, forest, and desert or mountain "waste." The de facto wilderness was the extreme backcountry part of all that. The parts less visited are "where the bears are." The wilderness is within walking distance—it may be three days or it may be ten. It is at the far high rough end, or the deep forest and swamp end, of the territory where most of you all live and work. People will go there for mountain herbs, for the trapline, or for solitude. They live between the poles of home and their own wild places.<sup>45</sup>

Thus, it is clear that wilderness represents one end of a continuum of wildness. Wilderness encompasses those places on the landscape that are most wild. In this context, rules for identifying wilderness become more problematic, and a debate ensues over the minimum criteria for wilderness. The history of this question suggests that the answers are

45. GARY SNYDER, *The Place, the Region, and the Commons*, in *THE PRACTICE OF THE WILD*, *supra* note 15, at 25, 28.

complex. Arguments over purity standards, sufficient size, etc. continue. Also, history shows that minimum criteria for wilderness are context dependent. The battle over eastern wilderness on the national forests showed that wilderness is valued wherever it occurs, even if the criteria change depending on land use history and societal expectations.<sup>46</sup> It would be unwise to try to resolve the debate here; all that can be said is that wilderness occurs at the most wild end of the land spectrum.

But, what about nonwilderness wild lands? Given the continuum, how can we draw a line between wild land and nonwild land? Arthur Carhart, one of the icons of the wilderness movement, answered the question this way:

[P]hysically "wildlands" begin wherever we face away from the man-dominated landscape of farm, town, city, or any landscape grossly modified by human occupancy maintained for any purpose. From this spot the wildlands extend in graduated degrees of lessening human influence in the natural landscape, outward, to reach their type climax in the wilderness. Thus the term "wildlands" is more than a synonym for the term "wilderness"; wildlands are the wilderness plus all the surrounding lands that lie between genuine wilderness, as exemplified by the totally natural landscape, and those landscapes where man's control and manipulations are immediately evident.<sup>47</sup>

....

For the moment let it suffice that, in general terms, we all know what "wilderness" means. It is land lacking permanent facilities and conveniences of any kind needed for human occupancy. Its natural attributes remain practically undisturbed by transient and impermanent human visitations. Wilderness should be readily classified by most of us as the wildest sort of country in the entire gamut of areas that might be called wildlands. There is no "wilder" wildland to be classified as beyond the ultimate wilderness.

Now, where can you draw a line across a map or landscape, so on one side are wildlands and on the other are lands that should be called rural or urban? How much must someone have dug, plowed, axed, graded or otherwise imposed his works on land that was wild before the "wild" environment has been tamed?

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46. Congress specifically included lands in the eastern United States in the National Wilderness Preservation System that did not meet the standards for wilderness described in the Wilderness Act of 1964. Congress through this action, known most commonly as the Eastern Wilderness Act, stated its intent that the most wild federal lands of the East be included in the wilderness system, even though they were small and had experienced significant human impact. See Act of Jan. 3, 1975, Pub. L. No. 93-622, 88 Stat. 2096 (codified at 16 U.S.C. § 1132 (1994)). For a detailed history of the fight for eastern wilderness, see DENNIS M. ROTH, *THE WILDERNESS MOVEMENT AND THE NATIONAL FORESTS: 1964-1980*, at 38-48 (Forest Service History Series No. 391, 1984).

47. ARTHUR H. CARHART, *PLANNING FOR AMERICA'S WILDLANDS I* (1961).

Until we need a more exact definition, we may use something like this as our rule-of-thumb in deciding which may be wildland and which is not:

Wildland would be a portion of the earth's surface on which it is readily evident that the topography and ecological associations living thereon exist in relationships determined predominantly by natural laws and forces.<sup>48</sup>

Carhart was a very practical man. The poet Gary Snyder explained it this way:

Between the extremes of deep wilderness and the private plots of the farmstead lies a territory which is not suitable for crops. In earlier times it was used jointly by the members of a given tribe or village. This area, embracing both the wild and the semi-wild, is of critical importance. It is necessary for the health of the wilderness because it adds big habitat, overflow territory, and room for wildlife to fly and run. It is essential even to an agricultural village economy because its natural diversity provides the many necessities and amenities that the privately held plots cannot.<sup>49</sup>

This continuum of wildness can be represented as bands across the two-dimensional space created by freedom and naturalness (Fig. 3). Where freedom and naturalness are low, we find the "man-dominated landscapes of farm, town, [and] city."<sup>50</sup> Beyond these areas are the lands, from semi-wild to wilderness, that are highly natural, free, or both. As with the line between wilderness and nonwilderness, the line between wild land and nonwild land is inexact and context-dependent but is nevertheless meaningful.

Thus, it is safe to say that parking lots and laser-leveled fields are not wild lands; however, mountains are. But, what about city parks, rural woodlots, and ski areas? This question raises the issue of scale. Wild places are recognizable only in the context of a larger whole, and which lands we recognize as wild depends on the scale of analysis, or the size of the landscape being considered. As Gary Snyder observes, in every region, no matter what the size, "[t]here is the fire in the kitchen, and there is the place less traveled."<sup>51</sup> Every landscape, whether urban, rural, or remote, will have its places where, as Carhart says, "[we] face away from the man-dominated landscape."<sup>52</sup> These are the wild lands and they are valued for their wild character wherever they occur.

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48. *Id.* at 15-16.

49. SNYDER, *supra* note 15, at 30.

50. CARHART, *supra* note 47, at 19.

51. SNYDER, *supra* note 15, at 28.

52. CARHART, *supra* note 47, at 19.

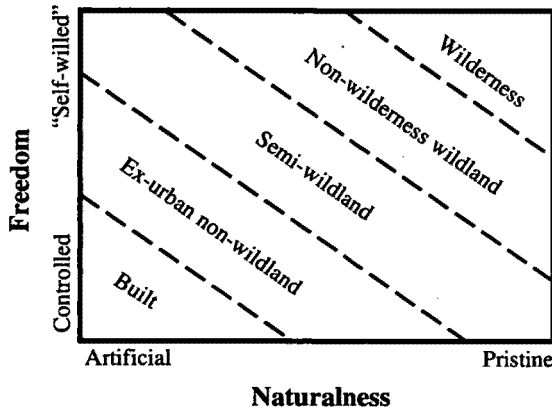


FIGURE 3. WILD LANDS ARE FOUND ALONG THE CONTINUUM OF WILDNESS WHEREVER WE FACE AWAY FROM THE MAN-DOMINATED LANDSCAPE

In his 1997 speech accepting The Wilderness Society's (TWS) highest honor, the Robert Marshall Award, author and TWS Governing Council member Tom Barron described the importance of these places:

My guess is that every one of us is here today, doing whatever we can to protect wilderness, because at some point in our lives we discovered a strikingly wild place—both on the land and in ourselves. It could have been a canyon, a marsh, an alpine meadow, or a simple tuft of moss clinging to a stone. For me, I think, it was an old ponderosa pine tree that grew beside a steep-walled creek on my parents' ranch in Colorado.<sup>53</sup>

He then proceeded to recount the story of Kate, the heroine of his book *The Ancient One*,<sup>54</sup> who found shelter and communion in the hollowed-out heart of an ancient tree, inspired by that old ponderosa pine.<sup>55</sup> After the story, he continued:

I share with you this little story of a youngster and a tree, and the passage it inspired, because I know that each of you have been touched by a place like that in your own past. I have often wondered what a gash would have been torn in my life if that old ponderosa had been cut down for another telephone pole, or if that land had been paved over for another shopping mall.

That spot would never have qualified as a national park, let alone as designated wilderness. Already, it has been surrounded by shop-

53. T.A. Barron, A Passion for Wild Places, Address at the Robert Marshall Award Dinner, Springdale, Utah (Sept. 18, 1997), transcription available at (visited Oct. 29, 1998) <<http://www/wilderness.org/profiles/barronspeech.htm>>.

54. T.A. BARRON, THE ANCIENT ONE (1992).

55. See *id.*

ping malls. Yet, not so very long ago, it still possessed enough wildness to qualify, for one youngster at least, as a sacred place.<sup>56</sup>

Wilderness scholar Michael Frome puts it this way: “[L]arge areas are desirable, but wilderness embraces a sample of the primitive in any degree. It may be as small as one’s backyard or a clump of wild plants and grass that provide a feel for the original landscape.”<sup>57</sup> Frome uses the term wilderness as we would use wild land, but the point is the same—the wild can be experienced anywhere. The recognition of the role of scale allows for variability in the way people perceive wildness in the landscape without diminishing the importance of large wilderness areas. The ever-practical Carhart explains:

[T]here are several gradations from the absolute wilderness, toward the semi-suburban picnic zone of our wildlands, *that can deliver to many people approximately the full impact of the absolute wilderness.* These zones in wildland classifications may have in them old wagon roads, dilapidated sawmill structures, abandoned mines, even fresh jeep tracks and still supply many people a *true wilderness experience.*<sup>58</sup>

Aldo Leopold recognized the importance of scale when he wrote, “[W]ilderness exists in all degrees, from the little accidental wild spot at the head of a ravine in a Corn Belt woodlot to vast expanses of virgin country. . . . Wilderness is a relative condition.”<sup>59</sup>

Figure 4 illustrates this sentiment by showing that the wild land continuum does not exist only at the scale of large landscapes from city to wilderness. Within the portion of the land that we call rural are land uses ranging from agribusiness to ranch. We may determine that tilled or developed land is not wild, but that a large ranch is. Even on the nonwild farm landscape, land can range from developed home-sites to uncultivated pasture and forest. Within this landscape, these uncultivated areas provide a glimpse of the natural and free and are highly prized for their wildness.

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56. *Id.*

57. MICHAEL FROME, *BATTLE FOR THE WILDERNESS* 12 (rev. ed. 1997).

58. CARHART, *supra* note 47, at 39–40.

59. Aldo Leopold, *Wilderness As a Form of Land Use*, in *THE GREAT NEW WILDERNESS DEBATE*, *supra* note 1, at 75, 77.



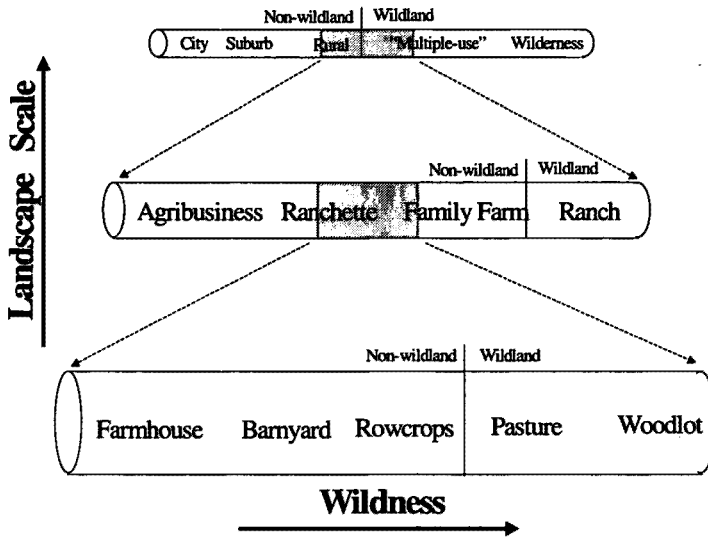


FIGURE 4. AT EVERY SCALE, THERE EXIST WILD LANDS AND NONWILD LANDS

### III. WILDERNESS: IDEAL OR REAL?

So far, this Essay has argued that two qualities, freedom and naturalness, contribute to the wildness of any piece of land and that wilderness exists at the most wild end of the continuum of wildness in any landscape, at any scale. This may help clarify the meaning of wilderness, but it does not address one of the main criticisms of wilderness: that it is an idea, rather than a place. The question remains as to whether any actual place can be considered wilderness.

The notion that wilderness is an idea more than a place is often credited to historian Roderick Nash, who opens his seminal and classic work, *Wilderness and the American Mind*: "Wilderness has a deceptive concreteness at first glance. The difficulty is that while the word is a noun it acts like an adjective. There is no specific material object that is wilderness."<sup>60</sup> Almost thirty years after Nash, Max Oelschlaeger devoted 477

60. NASH, *supra* note 7, at 1. Interestingly, Nash notes in the preface to the third edition that his idea to write on wilderness was not originally well-received by the academic establishment: Assuming, quite logically, that wilderness had nothing to do with man, Professor Curti gently suggested I consider reorienting my graduate program to geology or biology. But we continued to talk, concluding that if wilderness was a state of mind—a perceived rather than an actual condition of the environment—why not write a history of the wilderness idea?

*Id.* at ix. It thus appears that Nash's most famous contribution to wilderness scholarship (that wilderness is an idea) was a prerequisite condition of his approval to write on the subject, not a finding derived from his substantial research.

pages of philosophical discourse to the idea of wilderness.<sup>61</sup> Indeed, that wilderness is as much a matter of experience as it is a physical place has been a recurrent theme in wilderness literature. To Thoreau, walking and the "certain roughness of character" it produced were as important as the character of the wilderness itself.<sup>62</sup> Bob Marshall sought "physical independence" in a "harsh environment,"<sup>63</sup> while Sigurd Olson pursued "sweat and toil, hunger and thirst, and the fierce satisfaction that only comes with hardship."<sup>64</sup> Nature writer David Quammen was extolling the experiential, rather than the physical, aspects of wildness when he wrote: "Wildness . . . inheres in any geographical or emotional context that remains unpolluted by absolute safety and certainty."<sup>65</sup> Even Theodore Roosevelt, in the quotation that opened this Essay, was celebrating the experience of hunting in wilderness, rather than the land itself.<sup>66</sup>

Thus, there is clearly an experiential component to wildness. Different people will experience the landscape in different ways. Some may experience wilderness in a landscape marked by human presence. For others, freedom and naturalness can only be experienced on much larger scales. Jack Turner dismisses the wildness of all of North America outside of Alaska and Canada.<sup>67</sup> Michael Frome sees wilderness in a clump of grass.<sup>68</sup> This kind of subjectivity creates problems for anyone trying to identify wilderness or wild lands on the ground. There is no question that experiences of adventure, danger, surprise, spiritual renewal, and other values are cherished aspects of wilderness, but as we have seen, there is also a tangible aspect to wildness, inherent in the land itself, that can be observed and objectively described. As Michael Frome notes, "While the state of wilderness exists in the mind, it does so only to the degree it exists somewhere on the ground. It becomes worthy of description as wilderness because of its character, not because of any particular purpose it serves."<sup>69</sup> This realization is critical to our understanding of wilderness. Wilderness is clearly not simply an idea. It is a place—a place where an idea is clearly expressed: the idea of wildness.

61. See MAX OELSCHLAEGER, *THE IDEA OF WILDERNESS: FROM PREHISTORY TO THE AGE OF ECOLOGY* (1991) (tracing the story and idea of wilderness through the ages with reference to the current "age of ecology").

62. THOREAU, *supra* note 12, at 596–97.

63. Marshall, *supra* note 30, at 88.

64. Sigurd Olson, *Why Wilderness?*, in *THE GREAT NEW WILDERNESS DEBATE*, *supra* note 1, at 97, 100.

65. DAVID QUAMMEN, *WILD THOUGHTS FROM WILD PLACES* 12 (1998).

66. See Roosevelt, *supra* note 1, at 74.

67. See TURNER, *supra* note 11, at 84 ("Why isn't our wilderness wild, and why is there so little experience of wildness there? Well, first of all, the wilderness that most people visit (with the exception of Alaska and Canada) is too small—in space and time.")

68. FROME, *supra* note 57, at 12.

69. *Id.* at 11.

## IV. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The recognition of wilderness as one end of a continuum of wildness at many scales, has profound implications for how we view wilderness. It has been said that when the first Europeans reached North America, they encountered a vast unsettled continent: "wilderness coast to coast." In fact it was not. It was already inhabited by people who, in some places, greatly modified their surroundings in order to control the land. But it was a continent with far fewer people than it now has, using technologies far less capable of dramatic and widespread ecosystem modification. In the past 500 years, we have inverted the relationship between wild and nonwild land along the continuum. What was once a sea of wilderness dotted with islands of development has become a developed sea supporting a beleaguered archipelagoes of wild lands of various sizes. The rate of the assault is reflected in the growing lexicon describing the invasion of development into the remaining wilderness: "suburbia," "exurbia," "wild land-urban intermix." The popularity of wilderness protection reflects a growing concern over the loss of the wild places all around us.

The upshot of this inversion is that the wild end of the continuum is now increasingly less common in many landscapes and increasingly valued for what it provides. The so-called Eastern Wilderness Act of 1975 was pathbreaking in its explicit recognition that wilderness exists relative to its surroundings.<sup>70</sup> It identified the *most wild* federal lands of the highly developed eastern United States as *wilderness*. The implications are far reaching. While the Wilderness Act and its regulations will still guide what may be designated a wilderness area on large federal land holdings, the Eastern Wilderness Act established the philosophical underpinnings for the recognition of other federal and non-federal wild lands as wilderness. Wilderness no longer needs to be thought of only as vast tracts in a distant land; it may be found much closer to home in the wildest parts of any landscape.

The Eastern Wilderness Act also recognized a temporal dimension to wildness. Many of the lands designated in that law had been highly modified agricultural landscapes a century earlier. Through their release from agriculture, they recovered aspects of both naturalness and freedom from control that led to their recognition as wilderness. Thus, it has been established that some degree of wildness can be restored, which opens the philosophical door to the long-term recovery of wilderness ecosystems on degraded lands. The ability to restore wildness has the potential to inspire a change in wild land conservation from hopeless defense against development's onslaught to the vigorous assembly of a sustainable nationwide network of wild lands.

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70. See *supra* note 46 and accompanying text.

Recognizing wildness as a two-dimensional continuum also improves understanding of a long-standing controversy in wilderness management. Some have argued that wilderness management is an oxymoron; that is, land cannot be both managed and free and therefore, cannot be both managed and wilderness. However, the twin qualities of wilderness, rather than providing conflicting goals, provide twin goals for wilderness management that must be approached simultaneously. This will involve tradeoffs and compromise, but these tradeoffs need not be viewed as unmanageable conflicts.

Primarily, wilderness management aims to minimize human impacts by managing people, not the land, to keep the land free and functioning according to its own rules. This can be done by managing the number and distribution of people and their behavior in wilderness. Secondly, managers may need to intervene to repair damaged ecosystems and restore naturalness. Very often, this involves compromising freedom to restore or maintain naturalness. Decisions to intervene on behalf of naturalness must take into account the relative reversibility of the results of action and inaction, the sustainability of resulting conditions, and the long-term impact of intervention on the freedom and naturalness of the system. Solitude is a lot easier to restore than soil or an extinct species. Nevertheless, intervention in wilderness must always be approached with humility and, as Wilderness Watch President Bill Worf cautions, intervention should be "limited to those minimum actions that will establish conditions that will allow natural processes to hold sway once again."<sup>71</sup> Without wilderness management, overuse, extrinsic influences, and exotic species will cause the land—and the experience of the land—to degrade to the point that it can no longer be considered natural or free.

One current example of how the two-dimensional continuum may help provide a framework for policy making is the issue of fixed anchors in wilderness. The U.S. Forest Service has proposed prohibiting the permanent installation in wilderness of equipment, such as bolts and pitons, that aids in rockclimbing and mountaineering.<sup>72</sup> The Forest Service has argued that these installations result in a modification of the environment that is not allowed under the Wilderness Act. Rockclimbers have responded angrily that these modifications are substantially unnoticeable, especially relative to signs, bridges, and trails that are common features of wilderness settings. Consideration of both freedom and naturalness may offer a new perspective on this debate. Instead of considering whether bolts are more or less natural than bridges, managers may ask:

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71. Bill Worf, *Response to "Ecological Manipulation in Wilderness"* by Dr. David Cole, INT'L J. WILDERNESS, June 1997, at 30, 31.

72. See *Use of Fixed Anchors for Rock Climbing in Wilderness*, 61 Fed. Reg. 22,784, 22,786–87 (1996) (proposed May 13, 1996). Implementation of the regulations was to begin on June 1, 1998. However, the Forest Service delayed implementation of the regulations until the "public has the opportunity to be involved in the decision making process." *USDA News and Information* (visited Nov. 20, 1998) <<http://www.usda.gov/news/releases/1998/08/0337>>.

“What is the effect of fixed anchors on the freedom of the land?” “What will the effect be on the rock if we disallow fixed anchors?” “What will the effect be on the vegetation if we do?” Ideally, the decision will enhance both the freedom and naturalness of the wilderness, but it may ultimately result in compromise.

In his consideration of the dilemma of wilderness management, David Cole suggests that it may not be possible to achieve the goals of freedom and naturalness on the same piece of ground.<sup>73</sup> Achieving one goal makes impossible the achievement of the other. He suggests that the time may have come to consider a new land system in which some wilderness is managed for freedom, and we accept things like weed invasions and unnatural fire, and other wilderness is actively managed to maintain natural composition and structure.<sup>74</sup> Considering what we now know about the impacts of recreational use on both freedom and naturalness, perhaps it is time to consider a third type of wilderness, wilderness managed strictly for recreation. This would certainly resolve difficult issues like the fixed anchor debate. Such a system, however, would be a major departure from traditional conceptions of wilderness. The wildness of wilderness depends on both freedom and naturalness. It cannot be broken into constituent parts and remain wild. Similarly, the wilderness recreation experience can only be sensed in wilderness, not in a recreational “sacrifice zone.” If we are to retain the wildness of wilderness, we must find ways to simultaneously protect both the naturalness of the land and its freedom from human control.

#### CONCLUSION

The recent critique of the wilderness idea leveled by Callicott,<sup>75</sup> Cronon,<sup>76</sup> and others can be traced ultimately to the tension in traditional definitions of wilderness created by the opposition of people and nature. Wilderness is criticized for separating people from nature, for ignoring aboriginal people, and for holding nature static, even as it is revered as a place. The representation of wilderness described here as the end of a two-dimensional continuum of wildness defined by naturalness and freedom from human control offers a way out of this dilemma. By describing wildness as a continuum, we acknowledge the wildness that is all around us even as we celebrate the places at the end of the continuum. By defining “natural” as presettlement or historical conditions, we have accounted for aboriginal influence in creating natural systems; but by acknowledging that intensive aboriginal influence can diminish the land’s

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73. See Cole, *supra* note 44, at 17.

74. See *id.*

75. See Callicott, *supra* note 40 (arguing for the integration of economic development with biological conservation).

76. See Cronon, *supra* note 7 (arguing that wilderness is a human creation and a cultural invention).

freedom from human control, we have placed aboriginal and post-settlement humans on the same level. Finally, by defining a natural setting as the bounded conditions of ecosystems over a history of relatively constant environmental factors (including anthropogenic disturbance), we have allowed for dynamism in ecosystems while acknowledging that some conditions are more natural than others. Perhaps this conception will help us understand better both the meaning of wilderness and its place in our culture.

In closing, we may conclude that the Wilderness Act captured the essential qualities of wildness. Its recognition of “primeval character and influence” maps well onto the qualities of naturalness and freedom from human control, as described here. To be sure, there are gray areas around the central concept, just as there are around any concept, but it is clear that the idea of wilderness works. For thirty-five years, the definition provided by the Wilderness Act has allowed us to agree on what wilderness is—to the tune of over 104 million acres. It is also clear that wildness is a quality inherent in other places that do not meet the Wilderness Act’s definition. Other wild lands reach beyond congressionally designated wilderness across semi-natural landscapes into the parks and undeveloped lands that permeate rural and urban environments. As we enter the next century, let us now turn our attention not away from wilderness, but toward its protection wherever it occurs, and dedicate ourselves to expanding our current system into a sustainable national network of wild lands.

