

# WONALANCET OUT DOOR CLUB

Newsletter

November, 2014



CARING FOR THE SANDWICH RANGE SINCE 1892

## THE 50<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF THE WILDERNESS ACT:

(THE WODC THINKS ABOUT WHAT IT ALL MEANS)

### **Wilderness is a People Thing: A Little Cabinet of Wilderness Paradoxes by Doug McVicar**

*2014 and 2015 mark major anniversaries: the 50<sup>th</sup> of the Wilderness Act, the 40<sup>th</sup> of the Eastern Wilderness Act and – nearest to our hearts – the 30<sup>th</sup> of the Sandwich Range Wilderness. Let's celebrate with a philosophical and historical look at the what, why and how of wilderness (the concept) and Wilderness (the creation of Congress). . . .*

#### **I. United States Forest Service: the Creator is the Destroyer.**

It is hard to imagine how much less wondrous a place the White Mountains would be today if there was no National Forest to protect them. When the White Mountain National Forest was in its infancy, the Forest Service worked hard to acquire ravaged lands and restore them. Attentive to the nature-loving constituencies that made National Forests in the East possible, the Forest Service initially worked closely with the public.

But by the mid-1900s the WMNF was focused on timber production goals. Clearcutting was standard practice. The increasing public clamor for scenic beauty, recreation, non-game wildlife and ecosystem management, seemed to have little impact on foresters who felt their main constituency was timber buyers. WODC members were pleased in 1975 when the Forest Service invited them to comment on an early forest plan draft, only to find when the final plan was released that 91% of the Wonalancet Unit had been designated for logging. In 1977 a large clear-cut operation on the flank of the Wonalancet Ridge left a huge and ugly scar that took decades to heal. WODC members had visited the site before the work began with a WMNF forester who told them that the cut would have feathered edges, would therefore hardly be visible, and would quickly disappear under a curtain of new growth. In 1978 the Forest Service sent notice that it was selling timber on 667 acres of Flat Mountain and Whiteface country – 56% to be clearcut.

Clearcutting was possible anywhere. Permanent roads running through the forest in our area were announced. Destructive summer ATV use, prohibited on paper, continued because the

trails were never actually posted. And the final straw was a 1980 Department of Energy report that White Mountain granites could be an excellent site for disposal of high-level nuclear waste. There was little comfort in the thought that the Forest Service stood guard over the resource.

#### **II. It Takes a Village to Make a Wilderness**

Clearly it was time for citizen action. In 1974 WODC President George Zink, sounded the alarm and recommended an “overhaul” to make the club more effective in responding to emerging threats. All his recommendations had a common goal – to engage more people. The *Newsletter*, for example, went

from a single page letter of housekeeping announcements to the hard-hitting journal of environmental critique and action we know today. The new activism required a year-round executive committee. Hikers benefited from a new parking lot in 1977, and read the WODC message at the new Kiosk built

there. More money was needed, of course, so the club presented concerts, reluctantly raised the dues, and in 1981 began selling the famous WODC tee-shirts.

Most importantly, WODC activists pursued dialogue. They offered training at local libraries designed to teach citizens how to understand – and critique – Forest Service policies. They jumped at every opening the Forest Service offered for public comment. Sometimes it was by mail, sometimes at hearings, and often by that dreaded instrument of New England town governance, the committee. One WODC leader I spoke with for this article told me: “I went to committee meetings, so many committee meetings. I can't tell you now where they all were, who was there, or what was said, but I clearly remember an awful lot of them!”

In raising its profile and rousing its membership, WODC clearly benefited from the ingenuity, statesmanship and endurance of its leaders. [Learn more about these leaders in The Elders Issue of this *Newsletter*, April 2014. ] But another factor was also at work here. The wild outdoors was coming back into American life. The mid 1900s had seen a long period of decline when hiking trails fell into disuse and hiking clubs atrophied. But by 1970 interest in backcountry recreation was surging again. As more people ventured out into nature, appreciation of wilderness values became widespread. (See the accompanying chart for a sense of how often hiking and wilderness were

“What would the world be, once bereft  
Of wet and of wildness? Let them be left,  
O let them be left, wildness and wet;  
Long live the weeds and the wilderness yet.”  
from *Inversnaid* by Gerard Manley Hopkins

featured in the American dialogue during the 20<sup>th</sup> century.)

### III. The Absence of Wilderness is a Presence on the land.

By 1977, with the clearcut on the Wonalancet ridge hanging over the village like the HOLLYWOOD sign in the Santa Monica mountains, making the threat of clearcutting difficult to ignore, there seemed to be only one solution: Wilderness. No logging, no roads, no ATVs, no noisy campgrounds, no nuclear waste. Ah, Wilderness!

But in the decade after the Wilderness Act, the Forest Service had not recommended, and Congress had not designated, Wilderness east of the 100<sup>th</sup> meridian. The Forest Service had adopted a “purity” standard which barred Wilderness designation for any land that had ever been logged, farmed or lived on. This policy was regarded with suspicion in the East because it blocked virtually all wilderness designation, leaving more land potentially available for timber harvesting. In 1975 Congress broke the log jam with the “Eastern Wilderness Act” which proclaimed its awareness of the “urgent need” in the East, and demolished the purity standard.

In 1979 the Forest Service released its study of Wilderness candidates, and recommended 168,176 acres in the WMNF for designation. The door was open. Around the White Mountains, the meetings were unremitting. And the Forest Service was beginning to see the light of ecosystem thinking. One meeting veteran said it seemed to be the Public Relations officer who got it first, well before the still entrenched foresters. But it wasn't just the persuasive power of the public that was moving the Forest Service, there was also a change within the organization itself: old-time timbermen were retiring and young men and women trained in biology, environmental science and recreation management were taking their places. By 1982, the President of WODC wrote optimistically in the *Newsletter* “The Service is not impervious to suggestions.”

The most important of all the committees was the Ad Hoc WMNF Advisory Committee, which was convened and chaired by the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests. The members were carefully selected for political clout and balance across the broadest range of interests, from the Brown Paper Company and the NH Snowmobile Association to the Waterville Valley ski area to the New England Sierra Club and the Appalachian Mountain Club. The WODC representative was, of course, the redoubtable George Zink. The Forest Service worked closely with the group. In three intense meetings filled with gut-wrenching sacrifice for nearly every member, a unanimous consensus was forged. Maps of the three recommended Wilderness Areas were drawn with the approval of the Forest Service in the summer of 1983. The unanimous decision of the Ad Hoc committee gave the New Hampshire Congressional delegation and the Governor the political cover they needed. In September a WMNF Wilderness Bill following the Ad Hoc Committee's recommendations was introduced in the House and Senate. It passed with minor amendments, and was signed into law by President Reagan on 19 June, 1984.

### IV. Wilderness makes strange bedfellows.

Environmental historian and self-declared wilderness lover William Cronon enraged fellow environmentalists when he asserted that “there is nothing natural about the concept of wilderness. It is entirely a creation of the culture that holds it dear.” Note that he *didn't* say the trees and fungi and frogs aren't natural, only that whether or not they live in “wilderness”

is our idea, not theirs. But suddenly there was a raging battle, one that has lasted for years, within the conservation community.

Which in a way proves Cronon's point: there isn't much debate about “river”, “mountain”, “sky” or “forest”. But everyone has developed their own ideas about what “wilderness” could, should, must or mustn't be.

Ronald Reagan, of all people, signed into law more wilderness acres in the lower 49 states than any other President. Counting by number of Wilderness Areas, no other President is even close – Reagan has more than twice as many as any other President. Skeptics will point out that legally Wilderness creation belongs to the legislative rather than executive power, and that many Reagan appointees were vigorous opponents of Wilderness designation. But Reagan's remarks at the signing ceremony where our Sandwich Range Wilderness became a reality were probably sincere, a product of his own complicated personality and the mysterious paradoxes of wilderness:

*“No task facing us is more important than preserving the American land. . . . The legislation that I am about to sign will designate thousands of acres of wilderness area in North Carolina, New Hampshire, Vermont, and Wisconsin. Each of these areas is intended to be completely natural – no housing developments, no powerlines, just forest, rock, wind, and sky. . . . And as Americans wander through these forests, climb these mountains, they will sense the love and majesty of the Creator of all of that.”*

The Wilderness Society, widely acknowledged to have been the major force in producing the Wilderness Act of 1964, testified in opposition to the White Mountain National Forest Wilderness Act, on the idealist grounds that it didn't go far enough. Defenders of Wildlife and The National Audubon Society joined in the opposition. Yet New Hampshire Audubon supported the bill. So did the Sierra Club, which had staff on the ground in the White Mountains.

### V. Most of us love wilderness, except for a few little things . . .

Every person has a different idea of what Wilderness should be. The Appalachian Mountain Club was fearful that its historic system of huts would be threatened by Wilderness. But after careful boundary sculpting assured that while the huts would enjoy proximity to wilderness, there would be no actual intrusion of Wilderness into hutland, the AMC became an enthusiast supporter of Wilderness. Similarly, snowmobilers were willing to support any Wilderness that didn't close off important snowmobile routes, so adjustments were made. Ray Conley, a former NH Legislator and Sandwich Planning Board Member, who was left paraplegic by a Korean War injury, wanted to be sure that wilderness-like experiences would be available to disabled citizens, so he argued for (and got) a thin finger of non-Wilderness that extends up through the Sandwich Range Wilderness to the shore of Flat Mountain Pond.

Not everyone is lucky enough to get their personal vision of wilderness enacted by Congress. One WODC wilderness advocate told me how disappointed he was that formerly breathtaking views are now lost because they can't be maintained in Wilderness. Even George Zink, reached his limit when the National Forest identified the dilapidated WODC

shelters – Heermance, Rich and Shehadi – as not acceptable in Wilderness. George had happy memories of time spent in those shelters as a boy. He tried various schemes to save them. He tried to get other WODC members interested, but those old eyesores were part of his idea of wilderness, not ours. He tried to get them registered as historic buildings, but they had rotted out and been replaced so many times that there was not a stick of historic wood in them. So the shelters came down.

Full disclosure requires that I state my own idea about Wilderness. I think prohibiting blazing and distances on trail signs in Wilderness is at best silly, and at worst could be quite dangerous.

## **Wilderness in the Media: a Tale of Two Magazines by Susan Goldhor**

*Backpacker* magazine celebrated the 50th anniversary of the Wilderness Act by sending writer Mark Jenkins to hike the Gila River Wilderness with Steve Brumbach, headlined in September's issue for his quest to hike all 439 U.S. Forest Service Wildernesses. That's a big chunk of hikes. I suppose that -- as quests go -- this was no more quixotic than, say, a birder's quest to log the most species in a given year, or the desire to climb the highest mountains on each continent, or . . . whatever. They all keep the airlines in business, and satisfy urges which, luckily, are not universal. Brumbach had hiked 430 Wildernesses, and rated them, which makes him a sort of one man Wilderness Zagats. I guess it should surprise no one that our northeastern Wildernesses don't rate very high. They really don't rate at all since, on a single road trip east (he lives in Wyoming), he knocked off 25 wilderness areas in 33 days. Given this schedule, it's probably not surprising that he said, "Most of them were dayhikes because the wildernesses are just so small in the East. And they all look so damn similar. I started to ask myself, 'Didn't I do this exact same trail yesterday?'"

Well! You can imagine how my heart swelled with hurt and anger. To vent these potentially explosive feelings (it was pouring rain, and thundering and lightning at the time so I couldn't go out and work off steam on the trail), I emailed this quote to a select group of folks who foolishly spend time in local wilderness areas, instead of heading out west to the good stuff. David White waited almost half an hour (what was he doing, away from his computer for so long on a stormy night?) before emailing, "My first response is: at this speed, no wonder Steve Brumbach thought they all looked the same. He is on a record-setting mission that has nothing to do with appreciating the qualities of the Wilderness areas themselves. Regardless of size, one could easily be immersed in any number of tiny New England Wildernesses for great lengths of time and still fail to discern all that presents itself. I think of those who have devoted lifetimes to the study of a back yard or a square yard of earth, teeming with minute life."

Sheldon Perry chimed in ten minutes later, "On a macro scale, the trails, the vegetation and the topography have an Eastern feel, but it is the little differences between them that make a grand difference to me!" And C.C. White spoke to these differences when she wrote, "Within 'our' own Sandwich Range Wilderness there are marked and obvious variations: think of the dark mosses, damp, slippery stones, and evergreens of Kelly

Much as we all grumble about Wilderness management, we'd never give up the Wilderness. In the decades since these events took place, our relations with the Forest Service have improved considerably. The dynamic of give and take with citizens of every persuasion has been reborn. Caring for the Sandwich Range will bring plenty of challenges in the future, and their best solutions will bubble up from the yeasty brew of working democracy.

Now, if we could only get rid of those committee meetings. . .  
*(Photo of logging Mt. Wonalancet is on p. 6; other illustrations for this article can be seen on [www.wodc.org](http://www.wodc.org))*

Trail, and the bright beech/hardwood forest of Big Rock Trail, and the sunny wide-open ledges of Blueberry Ledge and Whiteface. And these are the obvious. What he truly missed was the unique quality of each square inch of each mountainside, each river, each stream, each overhead cloud, each rotting stump teeming with life, each patch of hobblebush flowering white in the spring, each surprise view of a trail curving ahead. . . . " And, from our geologically focused president, "The statement that all Eastern Wilderness looks the same is more a comment on the observer than the Wilderness. Hiking 25 Wilderness areas in 33 days means that you are watching the calendar more closely than the woods. How can anyone think that the Great Gulf Wilderness with its glacial cirque and metamorphic geology is the same as the Pemigewasset Wilderness with much younger volcanic formations, possibly even a volcanic ring dike? I start to appreciate the forest after I have hiked in that forest many times. The first few times the forest is just a blur of trees, slopes, and streams. I'm seeing but not feeling, everything is new, nothing familiar. After 8 -10 visits I start to feel comfortable, I recognize trees, stream crossings, viewpoints. It's less kaleidoscope, more nature I can connect with. I'd rather connect with one Wilderness for 33 years than hike 25 Wilderness areas in 33 days."

A little more than two hours later, Jed Talbot sent the following message from the field, via his iPad (how he did this is beyond me): "As I sit right now in my tent in the Pemigewasset region of the White Mountains in the middle of a crazy storm, I wonder how anybody who has open eyes can call these eastern wilderness areas similar... I was just struck by the light beautifully refracted through storm clouds into the spruce/fir landscape and was mesmerized, if but for a moment, at the unique and inescapable beauty that separates this area from all others, including those that are just a few miles away. I think that anyone who has the time constraints that Mr. Brumbach had would likely miss at least part of what lies directly in front of their eyes. I'm just a bit sad that it was published."

While Chris Conrod laconically added, after reading what was rapidly becoming a group gripe email, "Kinda ambivalent. Being a stay-at-home kind of guy, I'm pleased to hear that I can experience the full range of eastern wilderness in my own back yard. And it makes me happy for the rest of the eastern U.S. to know that they have places like the bog in Lost Pass, the glacial melt-water legacy in and south of Paugus Pass, and the exquisite view of Chocorua from a seldom visited ledge on the north ridge of Mt. Paugus. On the other hand, I think that turning the wilderness areas into another hiker's bucket list is anathema to Leopold's vision. Sure, let's make it our goal to trammel all the remaining 'untrammled' 'tag ends of wilderness.' In this context, Mr. Brumbach has done the eastern

wilderness areas a favor. The more bad press wilderness gets, the better.”

It was heartening to hear my feelings about our own small wilderness areas from so many friends. But, there was one thing that didn't get addressed directly: access. Even Brumbach admits partiality for the wilderness areas in his home state, where he doesn't have to get onto a plane in order to start hiking. (Brumbach spent \$9,000 on bush flights last year, and had booked his flights for five Alaskan wilderness areas to be visited this summer when the *Backpacker* article went to press.) It costs thousands to visit some of his top choices, even if you pack your own jerky and sleep in your own tent. But Eastern wilderness is democratic; you don't have to be rich to hike our trails. You don't have to be a spectacular athlete to walk into our wilderness. Sure, there are amazing Western wilderness areas with snow covered peaks; major rivers and lakes, and hundreds of square miles of prairie or tundra or desert or forest. But how many people can afford to visit and how much of that can they actually see? Can you really get to know that turf? Remember the definition of wilderness: *an area . . . untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor and does not remain.* That means us. It means you fly in, walk around (in the big wilderness areas, there are often no trails, so you either bushwack through the devil's club, squish your way from tussock to tussock across the tundra, or canoe down a river) and fly out. Because visiting the big wilderness areas in the West is a once in a lifetime experience for most folks, you see that place at one season in whatever conditions obtained then. Most of those areas can't be visited for much of the year; they're either inaccessible or so muddy, buggy, boggy, hot or icy that only the most masochistic adventurer would venture forth. I'm not bad-mouthing the Western wilderness areas -- I've been in a few and treasure the memories. I loved hiking in the high Sierras when I lived in California, but we spent most of the year planning the trips and getting in shape because the total season was August and the first bit of September. Period. So how lucky we are to have our own intimate wildernesses that we can hike over and over again; to see in all their seasons and weathers and lights! As Marcel Proust said, "The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes".

Of course, *Backpacker* wasn't the only magazine talking about the 50th anniversary of the Wilderness Act. I didn't see all of them. But I did see *National Geographic* on the subject. NG hired Elizabeth Kolbert, one of the top environmental writers in the country (and one of my idols) to write an introduction to their photo essay on wilderness. She went to see the two guys who comprise the entire New England office of The Wilderness Society (the Western offices are bigger, natch), and they offered to introduce her to a third guy who could take her on a hike into a recently expanded wilderness area and who had the

added advantage of having been a key player in getting that area's expansion onto the federal books. So, when she wrote her article, she started by describing her showshoe hike with Fred Lavigne this past February on WODC trails in the Sandwich Range Wilderness, and ended by noting the 10,000 acres Fred (and others) got added onto that Wilderness fifteen years ago. (Take that, *Backpacker*!) The article gives the impression that Liz and Fred were alone in the woods but in fact, the Wilderness Society's two guys plus Jack, Jennifer Wiley and David White were all along, since Fred --who is terminally modest -- didn't want to be a lone star. Fred's goal was to show Liz a red pine marked by bear or -- as Fred put it -- "she was looking for wilderness; I was looking for a tree". (A tree that, Jack notes, had moved since the last time Fred saw it.) Since I'm a charter member of the EK fan club, I wanted to know about her. Fred says she's a regular person; a good hiker, keeps chickens, has three kids and a husband, and lives in Williamsburg, MA. Not exactly tabloid material but then, she's not exactly the tabloid type, being known for her *New Yorker* articles, and her two books: *Field Notes from a Catastrophe: Man, Nature and Climate Change*, and *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History*, which came out this year and is key reading on the Anthropocene era.

As for what Fred thought about the *NG* article, he said, "It was great. They had a terrific photograph of some big rugged peak out west and I thought, that's what Passaconaway must have looked like before it got worn down." Friends, if I were written up in a major magazine, I'd focus on what the article said about *me*. Fred focused on our wilderness. And that's why we have it.



**Elizabeth Kolbert visits our Wilderness**  
(photo by Jeremy Scheaffer, The Wilderness Society)

# Wilderness: Bah, Humbug!

by Chris Conrod

Sometime recently I learned that the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Wilderness Act is being celebrated this year. It was probably when the Newsletter editor informed me that I would not be writing about one of my very favorite, vile, smelly mammals but instead should write a wildlife-related piece about wilderness. That got me to thinking: What would be the response of a wild animal to learning that it was a resident of a federally designated Wilderness? In no time I had the answer: "What a pile of crap!" Now hold on a minute. Before you go all tree-hugger rabid and accuse me of being a traitor to the legacy of Aldo Leopold, let me explain.

Using the dictionary and Roderick Nash's *Wilderness and the American Mind* as sources, I distilled the definition and the classic American perception of wilderness into the following terms: (1) uninhabited, (2) unproductive, and (3) uncontrolled (undomesticated, uncultivated, unregulated, uncivilized). So basically, wilderness is defined by what it is not. And what it is not, is us. Us and everything of us. Not to get sidetracked but, by definition, we've already destroyed the notion that there is any wilderness left to protect. We, and everything of us, have already permeated every acre of the Earth. Our actions and the byproducts of our actions have left an indelible mark on the biodiversity, structure and climate of all points on the globe. The world is as it is because we made it that way. But that's another rant; let's get back on track.

Even (especially) when you get past the anthropocentric bias, the notion of an uninhabited, unproductive, uncontrolled wilderness remains absurd. We can knock off the first two terms in quick order so we can get to the really neat stuff. I'll let my friend, the deer mouse, tackle the first one. Mr. Mouse:

"What do you mean by uninhabited? I'm here, aren't I? And right about this time of year, just after the nut trees have done their thing, I'm sure not alone; 30 or more of us per acre! So that means our predators are here: weasels, foxes, hawks, coyotes, owls, snakes, bobcats, raccoons, and those weird opossums. Where'd they come from? And then there's all those confounded pests: ticks, lice, mites, bot flies... Uninhabited, my hairy tail! It's a zoo around here. You humans are nuts! Inedible nuts, I might add."

And then we have the question of productivity. I doubt that our wildlife neighbors have much interest in the GDP, the standard human metric for productivity. They would be more interested in biomass, the ecological measurement of productivity. Ms. Moose has something to say about that:

"You wanna talk about unproductive? I'll show you unproductive. Try raising a calf in a parking lot. Even your so-called productive farmland is a joke; twenty metric tons per hectare, tops. And that's only after applying fertilizer, soil conditioners and pesticides. The forests and wetlands where I live produce two hundred metric tons per hectare and most of that stays where it is, contributing to a sustainable production rate without the need for artificial additives. Everything I need is here, year round. I couldn't survive on what you call productive land."

I like to think that our so called wild neighbors could forgive us for these first two trespasses. Self-centricity is, after all, important toward the survival of a species. When it comes to maintaining fitness, which in evolutionary biology boils down to the ability to reproduce, pragmatism rules whether we're talking

about the individual, the group, or the species at large. The practical challenge of staying alive (as comfortably as possible) takes precedence over the luxury of contemplating the effects of our actions on the rest of the biota. I doubt that the typical wild animal is any less myopic than we are when it comes to viewing ourselves in the context of the whole, interdependent biosphere.

Where we really impose an insult upon our fellow animals is found in the third term: uncontrolled, and all the negatives that it implies. Basically, we are accusing nature of lacking any set of social norms and the ability to achieve a group order that facilitates quality of life and sustainability of the species. Pure arrogance! We really need to look back to our roots and realize that we did not invent the concept of society, nor are we the sole possessors of cognition. Let's start this debunking locally. Angela is one of the neighborhood river otters I've gotten to know and I asked her what she thought of being labeled a wild beast:

"Yeah, I've heard that rubbish, and I think we members of the Carnivora family get the brunt of it. Even the ecologists tend to label us as being 'asocial'. Can you believe it? I share a home range with my mother. Granted, I have a small core area where Mom knows she darn well better knock before entering. But can you blame me? Who wants her mother barging in anytime she feels like it? But most of our home range is shared equally. We get together now and then so the pups can play with Grammy and then we celebrate with a big fish dinner. Two or more otters fishing cooperatively can feed a family much quicker than fishing independently. Herd 'em up and haul 'em in.

"Speaking of working cooperatively, did I tell you that one of last year's litter – Caboose; you remember her, don't you? -- she's staying with me this year. I'm of two minds about this. I like to see my pups go out and make it on their own but Caboose couldn't find a good home range. She'll just have to wait for one to open up. Meanwhile, I've got some helping paws. She's good with the pups and it takes some of the work load off of me.

"And our social ethic doesn't stop with family. As river otters, our habitat is mainly rivers (no surprise), beaver ponds, marshes, and the brooks that connect them all together. We live in a linear domain. It's hard for vagabond males and first-year dispersers to move around without passing through other otters' home ranges. We're all cool with that. We let them pass on through and grab a fish or two. It's only being neighborly. Sometimes they'll stop to say hello but even if they don't, I'll know they've been here. Every otter home range has at least a dozen check-in stations. Everyone deposits a calling card when they pass a check-in station. And with our complex anal gland secretions we can identify individuals and discern their age, sex, reproductive status, diet, and sometimes even where they've been. We have no problem with sharing. The only time I have to be on guard is just before mating time when the males are high on testosterone. I don't know why you humans let your males walk around fully charged all year long. It's a miracle you haven't totally annihilated yourselves."

Angela would have continued with more salient points but I stopped her there. I knew she was going to hit some more sore spots. Plus, as social as otters are, they have nothing on some other species when it comes to technology, particularly innovative means of domesticating and cultivating food species. To name just a few: The Ambrosia beetle carries fungi to inoculate new galleries excavated in a tree trunk. The beetle doesn't eat the wood of the tree; it uses the gallery as a shelter and a substrate for growing the fungi. The snail, *Littoraria irrorata*, chews marsh grass in marine estuaries but, much like the Ambrosia beetle, not as a direct food source but to grow

edible fungi on the wounded grass.

And then there's everyone's favorite organism: the slime mold. Biologists are still trying to figure out exactly what slime molds are and where they fit in the phylogenetic tree, so don't ask me to explain them. All I know is that they're kinda like amoebas that can function on their own or form one huge mass that goes marauding through the soil, engulfing everything, digesting what it can and letting the rest pass through. The preferred food appears to include various species of bacteria. Biologists have recently learned that some species of slime mold will store some of the bacteria, rather than digesting it all, and then stock their fruiting bodies with the bacteria. The fruiting bodies will then grow new slime mold amoebas and bacteria to feed them.

The champion agriculturists are the ants. Some are dairy aphid farmers and others are fungi farmers. The fungi farmers have been at it for so long now (about 50 million years) that various methods have been developed. Some are traditionalists, using methods handed down through thousands of generations; some are specialists, such as the coral fungi farmers and the yeast farmers; and some are high-tech farmers, growing GMO crops and using antibiotics supplied by subcontractors. I really wanted to visit one of the high-tech farms but, wouldn't you know it, trade secrets are at stake; they don't give public tours. I had to settle for an informal visit to one of the traditional ant fungi farms, run by *Mycetosoritis hartmanni*. Let's just call them the Hartmanns. Antie Hartmann, shift foreman and impromptu tour guide, led me into a small, underground gallery full of a white, fibrous mat growing out of what looked and smelled like an over-ripe compost pile.

“What we're growing here is a heritage strain of *Leucocoprineae* fungi. It has mutated some over the past ten million years or so but it could probably still grow in the wild. The high-techies have engineered a cultivar that can only grow under cultivation and produces a higher yield, but they pay for that through added pest control and substrate preparation. Our substrate is whatever detritus we can drag in here: forest litter, dead bugs, whatever. The high-techies use specific leaves; sometimes they defoliate an entire tree for one crop of fungi. Those workers you see here, crawling over the mound, are the weeders. We hand weed for the most part but we also treat the fungi with our sweat, which has some antibiotic effect against *Escovopsis* fungi, the major pest we have to deal with. The high-techies have to hire a bacteria, *Pseudonocardia*, to supply an antibiotic that controls *Escovopsis*. I think it's probably because they bred all the competitive advantage out of their cultivar. It can't even survive on its own, for Pete's sake. We're trying to maintain all natural, low-impact farming methods. Our yield isn't as high but our ecological footprint is smaller. And I think our product tastes better.”

Pretty neat. And we didn't even get to discuss the green sea slug, which incorporates algal chloroplasts into its own skin tissue and somehow managed to insert the controlling gene into its own genetic code. A true, photosynthetic animal. Or Dr. Jim Shapiro's take on bacteria as cognizant, purposeful, genetic engineers using non-random recombination. But that's another story. And it will have to wait until we humans are ready to acknowledge that nature is beating us at what we consider to be our own, exclusive games.

Uninhabited, unproductive, uncontrolled wilderness, my hairy tail!

**Meriwether Lewis (of the Lewis and Clark expedition) was so distraught by the thought that the area west of the Mississippi, that he loved so much, was going to be completely colonized and developed, that he committed suicide three years after the expedition ended.**



Winter Logging from Paugus Mt. Wonalancet, N.H.

Never again! And, if you think this (ca. 1915) looks bad, you should have seen the Pemi, which had massive clearcuts, logging camps and a railroad. You can still see occasional remnants of the construction as you walk in that beautiful “wilderness”. The mills and laborers’ housing at Ferncroft have disappeared, and it’s hard to find the site of Dicey’s Mill. Let us all give thanks for the fecundity and forgiveness of nature.

**“We simply need that wild country available to us, even if we never do more than drive to its edge and look in. For it can be a means of reassuring ourselves of our sanity as creatures, a part of the geography of hope.”**  
Wallace Stegner

## Fall Trails Report

The 2014 Trails season was very productive. We didn't have to deal with the impact of a major weather event like Hurricane Sandy, nor did we sponsor a major trail reconstruction project this year. We did hire Jed Talbot's "Off the Beaten Path" group to do Annual Maintenance. In 200 hours OTBP cleared most of the blowdowns and the drainages on our trails. This got us off to a very strong start.

The weather wasn't perfect; the May Volunteer Trails Day was rained out, but the other three days were well attended and productive. In June we focused on Annual Maintenance on both Blueberry Ledge Trail and the McCrillis Path. July was spent brushing out a portion of the Square Ledge Trail (sound familiar?). In September, we cleaned up the bootleg blazes on the relocated portion of the McCrillis Path within the Sandwich Range Wilderness.

We also had an innovative project. Jocelyn Gutches, through her NH Charitable Foundation Fund sponsored an AMC Teen Crew. The crew consisted of eight teenagers and two leaders. They spent a week camped at Camp Rich while doing Annual Maintenance on trails in that vicinity. They logged 363 hours on these trails. When added to the 200 hours from "Off the Beaten Path" and 292 hours from adopters and volunteer trail days we spent 855 hours on Annual Maintenance in 2014. The trails are in very good shape because of this effort.

Sadly, I want to pass on the news that Jocelyn Gutches passed away this summer. WODC and countless other local organizations are grateful for the generosity she showed in supporting programs such as the AMC Teen Crew. Jocelyn sponsored this particular project to connect teenagers to the Wilderness environment. To say she will be missed is an understatement.

Outside my window it's windy and wet. Soon the snow will be accumulating. It's time to enjoy the pleasures of winter and look forward to dealing with next year's challenges. Thanks to everyone who pitched in to maintain the trails this season.

**Jack Waldron**, Trails Chair (and, although he's too modest to say it himself, President)

**Isabella Pezzulo** was one of the teens that Jocelyn supported for that innovative project, and she kept a blog. Here's an excerpt from what Izzy wrote: "We had the pleasure of being hosted for the night at Mead Base by members of WODC. **Jocelyn Gutches**, who had hiked the peaks of the The Bowl Research Natural Area countless times, was among the WODC members who sat down for dinner with our crew. Jocelyn's stories would inspire us for the work we were about to embark on. After a fantastic meal, we felt motivated to experience the trails that the members of WODC had expressed a love for. We realized from the first day that the Sandwich Wilderness was an extraordinary place to experience; in the same way Jocelyn Gutches must have experienced it years ago. It was truly motivating for our crew to encounter an individual who cared about the land wholeheartedly, and was a patron of the work that we aimed to accomplish. As we rode back to Camp Dodge, we left the Sandwich range behind knowing that the work accomplished would hopefully protect the Sandwich Wilderness, along with the past and future adventures of anyone like Jocelyn Gutches- who took pleasure from the pristine peaks of the research bowl as well as giving back to it."

# WODC ORDER FORM

(SHAMELESS COMMERCE DIVISION)

PLEASE MAIL COMPLETED ORDER FORM TO:

**WODC MEMBER SERVICES  
HCR 64. BOX 248  
WONALANCET, NH 03897**

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QTY	DESCRIPTION	PRICE	TOTAL
1	WODC Patch	3.00	
1	WODC Map & Guide (3rd edition) Members	6.00	
1	Non-Members	8.00	
1	Unfolded WODC Map & Guide	9.00	
1	3 or more unfolded Maps - each	7.00	
1	WODC Historical Collection (CD)	25.00	
1	"Serene Green" Cotton T-shirt (Old Logo) Specify M, L or X-L _____	18.00	
1	Synthetic (silky) Navy Blue T-shirt (New Logo - see design on website). Specify M, L or X-L _____	18.00	
1	New Memberships <input type="checkbox"/> Pathfinder (not for renewals!) <input type="checkbox"/> Steward <input type="checkbox"/> Trail Blazer <input type="checkbox"/> Five Year	15.00 25.00 50.00 250.00	
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**Editor's Ramble:** I've been thinking a lot recently about the disappearance of animals. Anyone on the mailing list of even a single conservation group will understand this. The number of species that either have gone extinct recently or are threatened with extinction is not exactly unprecedented (there have been massive extinctions in the past, fueled by mega-events like the implausible landing of a tremendous asteroid, or the explosive eruption of a huge volcano), but this time the event is us -- the apparently inexorable spread of pavement, fossil fuel combustion and hunger for protein that accompanies our species' increase. And, in keeping with the earlier loss of very large animals, such as mammoths, giant sloths, and cave bears, brought about by the spread (with spears) of early humans, the world is now losing what sadly diminished charismatic mega-fauna we still have: polar bears and rhinos; elephants and gorillas; right whales and sea turtles. (To say nothing of the non-charismatic fauna and flora disappearing without fanfare.) Still, those of us here in the Northeast are in an odd position, since even though mountain lions and wolves have become rare and elusive, bear and deer, coyotes, turkeys and -- most recently -- fisher cats, have gone suburban and even urban, and are experiencing a surge of population growth. (Thoreau, who lived from 1817 to 1862, never saw a deer, although he once did meet a man who'd seen one.) Also a surge of unpopularity. It's one thing to admire a fleeting glimpse of a noble wild beast in the woods, and another to be kept out of your own backyard by a surly individual rooting in the garbage can or eating the cat. But nature is never straightforward and our world view is currently being altered by DNA analysis, which is teaching us that some species, at least, are not gone, but live on in other species. We've known for a while that the Neanderthals have not totally disappeared since all of us of non-African origin are carrying bits and pieces of their genomes. (I'm not sure whether this explains our savagery, or our kinder, gentler selves.) Every coyote in the northeast is a mix of coyote and wolf and -- in some cases -- dog. And, we've just learned that although polar bears (who evolved from brown bears less than 500,000 years ago) may be endangered, they've been crossing with brown bears occasionally all along, and that trend is increasing. Which brings us to a question looming ever larger on biologists' minds these days: What exactly is a species? Not only do we not have an answer to that, we've lost confidence in what we used to think was the answer. Writing about fungi, Nick Money said (in an article that brought the wrath of many down on his head), "For 250 years, mycologists have tried to reconcile diversity with the Linnean fantasy of a divine order throughout nature that included unambiguous species. This effort has failed and today's taxonomy rests on an unstable philosophical foundation. Rather than persisting with the present endeavour, it may be more fruitful to abandon the notion of species pending further basic research." Well, it may not be just fungi. And isn't that something to think about on those long winter nights?

**Susan Goldhor**



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