

**SUNDAY A.M.**

**May 14, 1978**

Lewiston Morning Tribune

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## Something is lost when everything is in its place

"Wilderness is a blank spot on the map."

Aldo Leopold

By Bryan Abas

MOSCOW — Wilderness. The term invokes a political meaning as much as it describes a state of nature.

The federal attempt to create more "wilderness" has helped draw political battle lines. The conflicts are as much a fight over the word as the use of the land.

The Idaho Forest Council, for example, bases its campaign against expansion of the federal wilderness system on the restrictiveness of the federal definition of wilderness, hoping that that definition is too restrictive for most.

But conservationists find the ultimate conservation in a strict wilderness classification and definition.

Like human rights, wilderness has become a slogan. A slogan to be staunchly defended, and sharply attacked.

As with human rights at the Borah Symposium in early April, an attempt was made on the University of Idaho campus last month to de-sloganize wilderness and reestablish a basic meaning.

Roderick Nash is a professor of history and environmental studies at the Santa Barbara campus of the University of California. His appearance at Moscow was sponsored by the College of Forestry and held in conjunction with UI natural resources week, April 16-22.

Nash traces the root meaning of wilderness to the use of the word "will" in early Teutonic languages, meaning chaotic, unruly, and disorderly.

"Wilderness should be a place where it is possible to get lost, to become,



Roderick Nash

literally, bewildered," he said at Moscow. "Reducing this possibility may make a place more pleasant to some people, but also less wild.

"The existence of trails, guidebooks, ranger patrols and well organized search and rescue squads poised to bail out the unlucky or the incompetent strike at the

very essence of wilderness. And since wilderness is a state of mind, even the knowledge that these things exist diminishes the wilderness feeling. It is even arguable that as soon as we label a region wilderness, we destroy it as wilderness."

Taking a cue from Leopold's definition of wilderness, Nash discussed the impact of the soon-to-be-completed task undertaken by the U.S. Geological survey of publishing topographic maps for every spot in the lower 48 states.

"The completion of this monumental task — the reduction of the U.S. to the scale of one inch to the mile — will be just a cause for celebration for that part of ourselves and our culture that seeks to order, organize, measure and control. But for the other part, there is something terribly sad and terribly final about the end of uncertainty. Those who understand what wilderness means cannot rejoice in the prospect of a totally mapped world."

Against that admittedly idealistic background, Nash traces the gradual evolution of wilderness management, something he has just noted is a contradiction in terms.

Early conservationists recognized that by managing wilderness, they might be destroying it.

Such a concern was counterbalanced, he said, by the crushing and phenomenal increase in the use of wild areas of wild areas that came in the late 1960s.

At least in this country, wilderness acquired an entirely new meaning, he said. "For the great majority of Americans, wilderness was no longer an adversary to be feared and conquered, but a novelty to be sought as a refreshing antidote to an urban-industrial lifestyle. If the counterculture of the 1960s had any definable meaning it was that the establishment had gone too far with growth, progress, and control. Nature acquired new appeal."

And with that new appeal hordes upon hordes of people went into the wilderness. Nash cited geometric increases in visitations to wilderness areas. The 280-mile float down the

Colorado River was a journey completed by 44 people between 1869 and 1940. During 1963-64 still only 44 people made the trip. Last year, more than 11,000 did.

Those figures necessitate management, Nash argued.

"As management increases in intensity, satisfaction declines because wilderness is supposed to be a place that civilized man does not control, a place to escape from control, an island of freedom for the individual."

And in that lies what Nash calls "the terrible dilemma of wilderness management today.

"The managers have to manage. If they don't, crowds quickly eliminate any vestige of solitude and the resource itself is damaged. But the very fact of management destroys the essence of wilderness."

Nash does not have any magic solution. He does advocate what he calls unobtrusive management.

"What this means is that the element of risk, the presence of danger and mystery, should be cherished and protected.

"Better to have an occasional backpacker killed by a bear than to computerize every moving thing in the backcountry.

"Better to require wilderness licenses as evidence of minimum camping skill than to send waves of patrolling, ticket writing rangers through the mountains and down the canyons.

"Better to have some visitors get lost than signs at every trail crossing.

"Better to give self-guided but well-trained and properly equipped parties precedence over commercially outfitted safaris in allocating limited time in wilderness.

"If that means some people cannot make a trip, tough.

"The point is to manage so that less management is necessary. Upon this seemingly simple yet enormously difficult principle hangs the fate of everything that the wilderness preservation movement has tried to achieve.

"The sad alternative is to have wilderness that is not wild."