

WILDERNESS RESEARCH PLANS
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MOSCOW - "Our aim is not to become political activists," Dr. Albert W. Erickson, director of the University of Idaho Wilderness Research Center, told members of Sigma Xi scientific honorary last night.

Erickson, who became the first director of the new center last fall, was outlining plans, goals and philosophy for the facility which is located 25 miles east of Big Creek within the Idaho Primitive Area.

He explained that many of the present wilderness preservation efforts create conflict between wilderness purists and those interested in resource extraction.

"We will take a stand on facts and objectivity," Erickson stressed, adding that individuals on both sides of the wilderness question would thus be more likely to turn to the research center for neutral, rational information.

Erickson outlined three areas of major concern for the center -- development of a wilderness philosophy, a methodology for wilderness classification and tools for wilderness management.

His own definition of wilderness is a significant, pristine ecological area large enough to contain the home range of ^{the most mobile} ~~the major~~, non-migratory animal in the area.

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Four types of projects with which the center might deal were also outlined.

Erickson explained that all federal agencies that oversee federal land, for example the U.S. Forest Service, are presently evaluating land use in their area. He noted that evaluation of wilderness is apparently among the most difficult because data on human impact on wilderness is lacking. Research on such impact could be carried out at the center.

Study of endangered species of plants and animals and the establishment of base line data for air and water quality could also be undertaken.

The management of wilderness also needs to be studied in terms of carrying capacity of human beings and pack animals, for example. Fire control also needs to be studied to see if fire fighting has more impact on an environment than the fire itself does.

In conclusion, Erickson stressed that the center hopefully will involve people from many disciplines at the university, social sciences as well as natural sciences.