

Arthur Carhart National Wilderness Training Center's  
***Wilderness Investigations***  
High School

**Wilderness Hero #7**  
***Howard Zahniser***



Howard Zahniser  
(from Wilderness.net; Image #559)

**Common Core Standard Connections**

Standards addressed will vary depending on how the teacher chooses to approach the lesson and/or activities.

**Instructions for the teacher:**

The reality of federally designated and protected wilderness came about because of the efforts of many fine people. A smaller, yet still significant group, worked to develop and then write legislation that would protect wilderness and satisfy politicians. Yet only one person actually authored what was to become the Wilderness Act. Between 1956 and 1964 Mr. Zahniser wrote 66 drafts of the bill. He testified on behalf of the bill 18 times in Congressional hearings. He died just 4 months before it was signed into law by President Lyndon Johnson.

Howard Zahniser joined forces with the likes of Bob Marshall, Olaus Murie, Aldo Leopold, Mardy Murie and others to nurture the Wilderness Society. He was their Executive Director for almost two decades until his death. Mr. Zahniser was a true wilderness hero. His wordsmithing,

encouragement, and inspiration were key to the passage of the Wilderness Act whose benefits we enjoy today.

To help students get to know this wilderness hero, choose one or more of the following:

- Photocopy and hand out *Howard Zahniser Wilderness Hero Sheet* to each student.
  - Based on the information found there, have students write an obituary that in a small space attempts to communicate his life and work to an audience unfamiliar with him.
- Mr. Zahniser purposefully used the word *untrammled* in the Wilderness Act. Have students research the word's meaning and come up with a visual lesson that clearly illustrates what the word means and why he chose it to communicate his ideas about wilderness.
- A word used to describe Mr. Zahniser is PERSISTENT. Have students come up with as many synonyms as they can for this adjective.
- Write a thank you letter to Mr. Zahniser expressing gratitude for his work to support wilderness.
- Use the handout as the basis of a short mini-lesson.
- Have students do some research on some of Mr. Zahniser's co-workers on the wilderness protection cause: Olaus Murie, Bob Marshall, and Aldo Leopold. Make lists that address--
  - What did they have in common?
  - How were they involved with The Wilderness Society?
  - Why were they all so passionate about wilderness?
- Howard Zahniser loved books and reading.
  - Make a list of books where the story takes place in natural settings (fiction or non-fiction) or is focused on nature topics (non-fiction). Write a sentence or two next to each title that tells why Mr. Zahniser might have enjoyed reading the particular selection.
- Create a *Wilderness Hero* classroom display or post on class website.
  - Have students create illustrations, maps, descriptive words, etc. that tell the story of Howard Zahniser.
- Have students study and then place their copy of this *Wilderness Hero* sheet in their Wilderness Investigations Folder.

**Wilderness Hero**  
***Howard Zahniser***  
**1906 - 1964**



Howard Zahniser (left) with Mardy and Olaus Murie  
(from Wilderness.net; Image #57)

**Introduction to a Hero**

If you've ever tackled a big project (like remodeling your bedroom OR cataloging and organizing all of the music on your iPod according to mood/occasion/event OR making travel plans and arrangements for you and some friends for a special weekend out-of-town) or set lofty goals (learning to play a new instrument OR speaking a new language OR riding your bicycle across the country) then you're really going to appreciate the story of Howard Zahniser. He was the author of what was to become the Wilderness Act. Have you ever complained about having to rewrite a paper you've produced? Well, listen to this—Howard Zahniser wrote 66 drafts of the bill between 1956 and 1964! That's persistence.

Howard was born on February 25, 1906 in Pennsylvania. Growing up near what is now the Allegheny National Forest. In this special place he came to love nature and reading. After graduating from college he taught school and worked as a newspaper reporter. Next, he worked for the federal government and during this period honed his nature skills as he spent time with Aldo Leopold, Bob Marshall, and Olaus Murie. Firm friendships and a growing wilderness appreciation brought Howard to a place where he became involved in the leadership of The Wilderness

Society. It was during this time that he worked tirelessly for development and passage of the Wilderness Bill.

As you may remember, that bill was signed into law in September 1964. Unfortunately, Howard Zahniser died in May of that year. At the signing ceremony his widow Alice stood alongside President Johnson as he officially brought Howard's goal of designated wilderness into reality. Howard Zahniser knew how to be persistent, set goals, and work hard. We all—humans and the land itself—benefit today because of these *wilderness hero* qualities.

### **Learn more about *Wilderness Hero* Howard Zahniser**

- Mr. Zahniser wrote many articles on topics of conservation and the environmental movement for scholarly and scientific publications.
- Howard was the Executive Secretary for The Wilderness Society at the same time Olaus Murie (remember Mardy Murie? Olaus was her husband.) was the Executive Director. The two made a powerful team!
- Howard had a tailor in the Washington D.C. area make a special coat. It had four extra-large inside pockets sewn in. He would walk around with those pockets full of books (remember—he loved to read), Wilderness Bill information, Wilderness Society membership applications and other useful items. He was a walking office!
- He successfully fought against a move to build a dam within Dinosaur National Monument. Many saw this 1949 battle as the beginning of a committed public support for preservation and conservation.
- Howard and Alice had four children. One of them, Ed, became an important conservationist and author in support of wilderness protection.
- He played important roles for many conservation and environmental groups during his life.
- Howard was called “Zahnie” by his friends and is known as the “Father of the Wilderness Act”.