



WAG *Tales*

NEWSLETTER OF THE CHIEF'S WILDERNESS ADVISORY GROUP (WAG)

SPRING 2022



Katie Armstrong in the Muir Woods

WO NAMES NEW WILDERNESS and WILD & SCENIC RIVER DIRECTOR

The Washington Office is pleased to introduce Katherine "Katie" Armstrong as the new Director for Wilderness and Wild & Scenic Rivers for the US Forest Service.

Katie brings 19 years of Forest Service career experience to this position. Prior to her current role, she served as the acting Chief of Staff for the Chief's Office for nearly a year. Previous assignments in the Forest Service include Deputy Director and acting Director of Legislative Affairs, Chief of Staff for Fire &

Aviation Management, Legislative Affairs Specialist and Public Affairs Specialist all in the Washington Office headquarters. She started her Forest Service career in Brighton, Michigan, as the agency's Emerald Ash Borer Liaison. Katie also served as the Urban Connections Coordinator for Region 9 while stationed in Detroit, Michigan.

A native of Michigan, Katie earned her Bachelor and Master of Science degrees in Forestry from Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan. She is passionate about bringing her experience and energy into this new role. She spent her youth camping and canoeing on her favorite national forest- the Huron Manistee. Katie is very much looking forward to spending more time in the field and interacting with partners.

Her priorities in the role include increasing support for critical planning, monitoring/research, and stewardship efforts that focus on understanding climate-related impacts and threats. Another key focus area will be expanding the program's emphasis on Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion, including exploring needed shifts in early career professional development opportunities that lead to permanent positions, and the enhanced role partnerships can play to facilitate equitable recreational access.

Katie can be reached by email at: Katherine.e.Armstrong@usda.gov

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Wilderness Stewardship Performance (WSP) Funding

The [WSP program](#) enables Wilderness managers to make measurable achievements on the ground and provides a consistent management framework for communicating the challenges and successes in Wilderness management. In contrast with previous years, there was not a national application and selection process for identifying and funding Wilderness Stewardship Performance (WSP) projects in 2022. Instead, this funding normally held for later allocations was included to increase overall regional base allocations. Forest and Regional leadership should work with their units to identify and fund WSP projects from these allocations. Units are expected to continue to implement an interdisciplinary strategy for each designated wilderness to make progress toward achieving or maintaining a WSP total score of 60 (managed to standard), and, if possible, strive to make progress toward improving scores beyond the 60-point level.

Forest Service Wilderness Areas Managed to Standard (based on FY 2021 WSP reporting)		
Region	Number of Designated Wilderness Areas	Number of Wilderness Areas Managed to Standard (% of units)
1 – Northern	13	3 (23%)
2 – Rocky Mountain	47	14 (30%)
3 – Southwestern	53	18 (34%)
4 – Intermountain	48	8 (17%)
5 – Pacific Southwest	61	3 (5%)
6 – Pacific Northwest	65	16 (25%)
8 – Southern	87	10 (11%)
9 – Eastern	55	24 (44%)
10 – Alaska	19	3 (16%)
TOTAL	448	99 (22%)

Visit the WSP SharePoint site (<https://usdagcc.sharepoint.com/sites/fs-nfs-wsp>) for the current guidebook, support resources, including; tools and templates, communication materials, and accomplishment reports, and the new interactive dashboard which can be filtered to display data for a specific region, forest, and wilderness.



OTHER FUNDING SOURCES THAT COULD SUPPORT WILDERNESS PROGRAMS

If you are feeling the pinch without a direct project boost from WSP funding, you might be wondering if there are other funding opportunities to tap into. While money may not be directly marketed for wilderness work, there are a number of new pieces of legislation that could result in indirect or lateral support for Wilderness work. To this end, we've included links and information to a few programs that might offer a funding alternative for managers to draw from.

- 6/3/21 - [President Biden's Budget Invests \\$2.8 Billion to Support Economies, Outdoor Recreation and Access to Public Lands](#)
- [PL 116-152 Great America Outdoors Act](#)
 - 3/8/21 - [USDA Invests \\$285 Million to Improve National Forest and Grassland Infrastructure](#)
- [H.R.3684 - Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act](#)
- [H.R.5376 - Build Back Better Act](#) This act is still in legislative process, but should it pass, there will be more money provided for the Civilian Climate Corp and match requirements for partnerships would be removed.
- [Confronting the Wildfire Crisis: A Strategy for Protecting Communities and Improving Resilience in America's Forests.](#) A strategy that will dramatically increase the scale of forest health treatments over the next decade.

Federal Lands Transportation Program (FLTP) and Legacy Roads and Trails

This following summary of the FLTP and LRT funding programs is meant to raise awareness of these funding sources for trails and trail bridges projects. These programs are funded through the 2021 [Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act](#) (IIJA). Engineering is the lead for both programs at the national and regional levels. Regional Recreation Directors, Regional Trail Program Managers, and Forest Recreation and Trails Staff are encouraged to communicate early and often with counterparts in Engineering to ensure good collaboration when soliciting and evaluating eligible project proposals.

The Washington Office allocates FLTP and LRT funding directly to the Regions to select their priority projects under each funding program. The regional project lists are then consolidated into a national FLTP and national LRT project list.

Federal Lands Transportation Program Overview ([Title 23 USC 203](#))

Improve safety

Repair transportation and bridge infrastructure

Support high-use Federal recreation sites or Federal economic generators

Support resource and asset management goals of Federal land management agencies

FY22-26 FLTP Funding

A total of \$130M over five years (\$24M in FY22, \$25M in FY23, \$26 in FY24, \$27M in FY25, \$28M in FY26).



Forest Road 373-A on the Nez Perce-Clearwater NF in R1. Photo by Kearstin Edwards

Legacy Roads and Trails Remediation Program (LRT)

The purpose of the [Legacy Roads and Trails](#) program is to improve water quality by making roads and trails more resilient to climate change, decommissioning closed and unauthorized routes, and improving aquatic organism passage.

Project Qualifications

The following list outlines the eight activities identified in Section 40801 of the IJA that would qualify projects for funding under LRT. Projects should entail one or more of the following activities:

- Restore passages for fish and other aquatic species by improving, repairing, or replacing culverts and other infrastructure, and removing barriers from passages.
- Decommission unauthorized user-created roads and trails that are not a National Forest System Road (NFSR) or Trail, if unit has published an Motor Vehicle Use Map (MVUM) and road is not identified as an NFSR on the MVUM, or unit has published a map depicting authorized trails and trail isn't identified as a NFST on the map.
- Prepare previously closed NFSRs for long-term storage in a manner that prevents motor vehicle use in conformance with route designations, prevents roads from damaging adjacent resources, reduces or eliminates need for road maintenance, and preserves roads for future use.
- Decommission previously closed NFSRs and trails.
- Relocate NFSRs and trails to increase resilience to extreme weather, flooding, and other natural disasters; and to respond to changing resource conditions and public input
- Convert NFSRs to NFSTs while allowing for continued use for motorized and nonmotorized recreation, to the extent the use is compatible with management status of the road or trail.
- Decommission temporary roads constructed before the date of enactment of the IJA for emergency operations or to facilitate a resource extraction project; that were designated as a temporary road by the Secretary; and in violation of Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974 on which vegetation cover has not been reestablished, or that have not been fully decommissioned.
- Carry out projects on NFSRs, NFSTs and bridges to improve resilience to weather events, flooding, or other natural disasters.

FY22-26 LRT Funding

Approximately \$50M (CILG) in IJA and \$5M (CMLG) in appropriations annually. For Fiscal Years 2022-2024, \$1.5M of CMLG will be distributed via grant program managed by National Wilderness Stewardship Alliance (NWSA).

For more information about the Federal Lands Transportation Program (FLTP) and Legacy Roads and Trails, please read the entire article written by the WO Trail Team and WO Engineering at [FLTP and LRT.pdf](#).

Wilderness Advisory Group Task Team Updates



Supporting Boots on the Ground - Hiring Task Team

Our team looked into the seasonal (1039s) vs Permanent seasonal (PSE) appointments and drafted a [Talking Points Seasonal vs Permanent Seasonal](#) document to aid in discussions with leadership related to workforce planning. The information was gathered from a 2019 document [Forest Service Seasonal Hiring Improvement Project: Data Analysis and Focus Group Findings Summary](#) and work done by a small team of WAG, TAG, and HR to resolve 1039 hiring barriers.

The temporary hiring process is, and will continue to be, a barrier to hiring and retaining a skilled workforce unless the top and/or bottom of the organization takes a different approach. The team recommends converting long-standing 1039 positions into permanent seasonal positions. With budget modernization and a more consistent funding in NFSE, we feel now is the time to consider adding permanent seasonal positions. Direct costs to do so are slightly higher, but the indirect cost savings to the agency, by reducing time spent hiring and retraining skilled employees, would more than offset the cost of transitioning these positions.

VISITOR USE MANAGEMENT AND PERMIT TASK TEAM

With visitor use on National Forest Service lands dramatically increasing, many managers are seeing a substantial increase of use within wilderness areas. These changing use patterns are triggering an increased consideration of the benefits and costs associated with implementing different types of permit systems, as a way to control crowds and minimize resource damage, both within and outside of wilderness areas.

To offer managers a way to review permits systems currently in use, the Visitor Use Management and Permit task team concentrated on identifying and compiling a spreadsheet of locations across USFS lands that have any type of permit system. The resulting reference is divided into voluntary and controlled systems that often limit visitor entry numbers, so managers can see what other units are doing, and identify units that may be able to share information about the outcome of actions taken in similar situations.

The team is waiting to hear back from Regional Wilderness Program Managers to make sure the collected information is valid. Once validated, the task team plans to post the spreadsheet on Wilderness.net.



Dry Creek Trailhead in the Mt. Washington Wilderness, Oregon, Photo by: Jasmine Berg

BRIEF THE CHIEF AND REGIONAL WILDERNESS COMMUNICATION SUMMARY

During the fall meeting, the WAG agreed upon documenting and discussing what communication methods were being utilized to convey all things wilderness-related across the country. We not only wanted to know how information was being conveyed both at the regional and national level, but also between the Forest/District and their regional wilderness program managers. It turns out there were a lot of good things going on and, as always, there is some room for improvement as well. Ultimately, we wanted to work on consistent and good communication to develop relationships within regions and their wilderness practitioners so that knowledge is travelling both up and down the trail. By nature, we work on big landscapes and have always operated distantly from each other across the country, and then of course there was the pandemic which made getting together even locally more virtual. Our goal is that not only will the Chief of the Forest Service receive a good rundown of what the field is working on, accomplishing, and facing, but also that field employees feel like they have a finger on the pulse of current direction, focus and trajectory for managing our wild areas. Additionally, WAG representatives would like to report accurately back to regional wilderness program managers on recommendations and thoughts after the "Brief the Chief" springtime meeting when the WAG Chair and Co-Chair talk Wilderness in Washington DC.

Communication Recommendations/Plans (Some that currently exist and some that are developing)

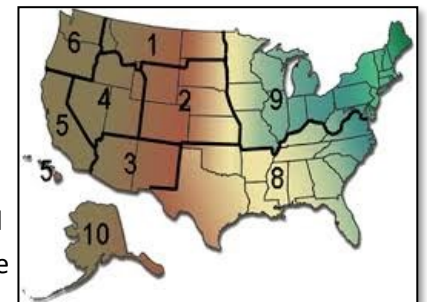
- RPM (Regional Program Manager) distributes weekly or bi-weekly regional email newsletter with everything wilderness & Wild & Scenic Rivers related. (Trainings, job-postings, employee profiles etc.)
- RPM hosts monthly or quarterly wilderness program manager/ wilderness community calls/check-ins/lunch hour (will aid in communicating struggles, sharing successes, collaboration on resource sharing, and training)
 - * Develop schedule of topics to discuss – WSP projects, WCM, MRAs, training
- Work with RPMs and WAG/WIMST Reps to establish regional MS Teams/SharePoint sites
 - * Maintain/post a document with current contact information for wilderness staff across the region
- Work with RPM to schedule Brief the Regional Forester Meeting after the Brief the Chief has occurred.

Lastly, the wilderness program manager (detailed) Togan Copazza from Region 5 volunteered to pilot a Teams channel where all things Wilderness can be discussed. It will be interesting to see how it works out! This is from the latest R5 Wilderness and Wild & Scenic Rivers Weekly Update announcing the new Teams channel...

Connect with Your R5 Wilderness and Wild and Scenic Rivers Peers on Teams

Wilderness areas are great places to find solitude but we don't want our wilderness and wild and scenic river managers to feel alone! Many of you across the region are confronting similar challenges but lack a forum to share resources, commiserate, and celebrate successes. Region 5 WWSR has a Teams channel just for you. We encourage you to utilize the [general chat](#) to post questions, solicit examples, share resources and training opportunities, and maybe even brag about your accomplishments. To increase your reach, tag posts @R5 Wilderness, Wild & Scenic Rivers. Look for invitations to respond to "idea campaigns" to generate input on a variety of WWSR topics. Our first campaign asks ["What support or resources do you need on your unit to better manage wilderness and/or wild and scenic rivers? How can the regional office help?"](#)

Please share your ideas and/or vote on ideas that you think will make an impact.



FS Regions: R5 is the Pacific Southwest, encompassing California and Hawaii

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSIVITY IN WILDERNESS- TASK TEAM

With a new Chief in the agency and more focus being placed on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in the workplace, discussion during the WAG's fall planning meeting made it clear there are ample opportunities to lean into discussions around DEI and wilderness management. The group started by hosting a discussion within the WAG to get a better sense of what sort of programs or concerns each region was seeing in regard to acknowledging opportunities to explore DEI in wilderness programs and partnerships. The task team's intent was to identify ideas, resources and conversation starters that could be shared to encourage more open and in-depth conversations at the field level and make Wilderness a less exclusive resource.

Feedback from the WAG discussion highlighted a few interesting factors. Region 9, with its financial investment in the Urban Connections program offered the greatest array of creative programs meant to connect a diversity of American citizens with educational and experiential wilderness related programs. Financial investment is key to supporting these educational opportunities, a fact made all the more evident in contrast to Regions where educational programming isn't specifically funded, or isn't funded on a consistent, recurring basis. Employees noted some district level efforts to provide native land acknowledgements or include native blessings into public events but felt some of these were tokenizing efforts. Conversely, some locations were noted to avoid these types of land acknowledgements for fear of offending any single sovereign, when more than one group claimed ancestral ties to certain lands.

In an effort to help kick start further conversations, the task team is including a few questions for you to think about in regard to creating DEI opportunities for your wilderness area, as well as information and a few examples of more inclusive program outreach efforts. Haven't had a chance to give this topic much thought yet? That's ok! Take a look at one of these examples; they might provide ideas on how to incorporate DEI in your programs or start conversations about DEI on your unit.

- [Creating Brave Conversations About DEI in the Workplace](https://crescendowork.com/guide-start-diversity-inclusion-strategy/create-brave-conversations-diversity-inclusion) (Website Reference)
<https://crescendowork.com/guide-start-diversity-inclusion-strategy/create-brave-conversations-diversity-inclusion>
- [National Recreation and Park Association's Equity Language Guide](https://www.nrpa.org/our-work/Three-Pillars/equity/equity-language-guide/) (Website Reference)
<https://www.nrpa.org/our-work/Three-Pillars/equity/equity-language-guide/>
- [Beyond The Scope - YouTube](#) (Video-11 min) Meet Anna Le, an aquatic ecologist and environmental educator. "Beyond the Scope" is a film amplifying Anna's story and conveying her contagious love for conservation and her deep desire to cultivate a more inclusive outdoors for all. -- [#EveryoneOutside](#) is an Outbound Collective initiative focused on creating a more inclusive and culturally diverse outdoor community by elevating the profiles, work, and stories of historically marginalized and systemically excluded leaders and athletes.
- [Spirit of the Peaks | Hunkpapa Lakota skier balances athletic passion and cultural obligation - YouTube](#) (Video- 41 min)

URBAN CONNECTIONS

[Urban Connections](#) ([Region 9 - Home \(usda.gov\)](#)) is an outreach program of the U.S. Forest Service's Eastern Region (R9) that seeks to bridge the gap between urban residents and the national forests nearby. Working with the Forest Service's State & Private Forestry and Research and Development branches, Urban Connections provides unique opportunities for urban audiences to get involved in natural resource activities.

This program has been successful in providing outdoor opportunities to those whose previous access to Wilderness may have been limited. The agency in turn reaps the benefits of having a new cadre of Wilderness stewards, knowledgeable in things such as Leave No Trace principles and Wilderness ethics, and able to help spread the word. As we seek nationwide to bring Wilderness Areas up to managed-to-standard status, partnerships and more boots on the ground are critical.

This past year, members of the Urban Connection program were essential manpower behind a Wilderness campsite rehab and removal on the Shawnee National Forest. The program participants were introduced to the Wilderness Act, the tenets of Wilderness Character, the metrics of Wilderness Stewardship Performance, and how to work safely around traditional tools and pack stock. They immediately put their newfound knowledge into practice the following week in the Garden of the Gods Wilderness, removing campsite impacts and recording the data in Survey123.



Members of the St. Louis AmeriCorps Emergency Response Team (ERT). The next generation of Wilderness Stewards!

WOMEN'S WILDERNESS



[Women's Wilderness](#) is a nonprofit in Boulder, CO, connecting women, girls, and the LGBTQ+ community to nature. In an industry that is often male-dominated and pervaded by a "conqueror" relationship with nature, our organization is actively working to reimagine the relationship between people and outdoor recreation. While we hike to the top of peaks and scale rocks, our programs are less rooted in summiting and more in restoring mind and body. Our vision is a socially just and environmentally sustainable society. Our mission is to support girls, women and LGBTQ+ people in accessing their power and improving their health through connections to the outdoors and community.

Women's Wilderness was founded in 1998 with the goal of creating a gender-inclusive space in the outdoor industry. Since then, the organization has grown to include a slate of programs that specifically serve folks of color. Our Outdoor GIRLS (Girl Immigrant Refugee Leadership Series) program is designed to serve immigrant, refugee, and asylee girls in East Denver and Aurora. Over the course of a year, participants in this program connect with each other and experience outdoor activities, ranging from nature walks to bird watching to rock climbing. We are thrilled to help our participants access protected wilderness areas and build relationships with the land in our beautiful backyard wilderness, the Indian Peaks Wilderness!

For more information please visit [Home - Women's Wilderness \(womenswilderness.org\)](https://www.womenswilderness.org)

Ranger to Ranger



Learning Lessons: Creek Fire, Sierra National Forest 2020

Q&A with Sierra NF Wilderness Rangers- Tim Crosby & Evan Tirey

Interview by: C. Engelhardt (R5 WAG representative, Inyo NF)

Clearing Wilderness Trails after Catastrophic Wildfires

As the summer field season quickly approaches, Forest Service employees are bracing for what may be another challenging fire year after much of the Western United States saw minimal winter snowpacks. As we strategize for what looks to be the “new normal” in managing massive fires and maintaining access for the public, we thought it would be interesting to get insights from the field on clearing wilderness trails after a big burn. We talked with two seasoned Wilderness Rangers (Tim Crosby & Evan Tirey) from the Sierra National Forest in California. Tim, who has 17 seasons under his boots as a Ranger on the Forest, and Evan who will be starting his fourth, were gracious in answering some questions regarding their experiences relative to trails work following the Creek Fire.

The Creek Fire started on Sept 4th 2020 and burned until Dec 17th 2020. All told, it scorched over 379,895 acres and cost \$193 million to fight. NASA documented the initial blow up and its pyro-cumulonimbus cloud on Sept 5th to be one of the largest ever seen in the United States. The Sierra National Forest Wilderness & Trails crew along with many volunteers completed an incredible amount of BAER (Burned Area Emergency Recovery) work during the 2021 Summer season. Most of the BAER work consisted of logging out system trails, cleaning water bars, and constructing drain dips to prevent further soil erosion. Additionally, scraping ash and debris off existing system trails, addressing slough and berm issues, widening tread width, armoring drainage outlets, and out sloping the trail tread to improve drainage were important tasks. Staff and volunteers hiked 1,990 miles, cut 1,746 trees off trails, and put in close to 4,000 hours of work during the effort.

What were the most significant challenges in clearing or re-constructing wilderness trails within the Creek Fire burn? Did you use primitive tools, or did you get an exemption to use motorized equipment?

The most significant challenge was the constant amount of work to be done. The sheer number of rocks, sticks, needle cast, and ash slough on the trail tread was impressive. Some places in the burn scar averaged 50 significant trees a mile to cut. Due to fire severity, there wasn't any available material to construct water bars, so the most important aspect of trail maintenance was out sloping the trail tread as well as constructing large drainage dips. We decided to have rangers put eyes on the trails before deciding about motorized exemption based on safety concerns and tree complexity. We did not get an exemption and decided to use traditional tools in our wilderness areas. The wilderness rangers did BAER work in 4 wilderness areas on the Sierra National Forest, including the John Muir, Ansel Adams, Kaiser, and Dinkey Lakes Wilderness. --Tim



Agency crew cutting with cross cuts saws through a jackpot of fire affected trees

First and foremost, the unknown conditions in most of the areas challenged our ability to prepare adequately for some hitches, especially with the tools we would need. It was hard to know which areas were affected differently before we put eyes on them ourselves. We found the most challenging areas for clearing were in the moderate or low intensity areas, where fire damaged the base of trees but did not fully consume them. These areas often had a high number of large diameter green trees. This was exacerbated by two high wind events that impacted the burn area in the winter of 2020/21. We used only primitive tools in the Wilderness areas and were able to continue the legacy of our great internship program by introducing, training, and building the passion for primitive tool use with many young folks on our crews. (continued on next page)

Ranger to Ranger

Was there a favorite trail or area that you re-visited after the fire that has been completely altered or changed, that made a lasting impression on you?

I worked primarily in the Ansel Adams Wilderness during most of the field season, where I have spent the last three seasons.

The last 40 or more miles of the drive to our work center was in the burn area. Our first week of work for the season was in this area, clearing from trailheads to the Wilderness boundary. Every day felt surreal, visiting trailheads that were unrecognizable and some of my favorite sections of trail that were wholly burned. Experiences like that brought tears to my eyes on a couple occasions. On the flip side of that, however, was watching new plant life growing every week. Seeing small things coming back helped us to remember that the forest will be bursting with life again soon. We tried to convey to visitors on the trail that there are benefits to the fire and that the forest will recover, although it will never be the same as it was before. -Evan



How does this fire change the scope and mindset of a wilderness ranger or trails employee in your area?

The workload increased tremendously and will be a 10–15-year battle to maintain these trails. Trails were having to be cleared 3 to 4 times a season, water bars and drainage dips had to be cleaned frequently, and when you thought you had a trail in good shape, Mother Nature would prove you wrong with the summer monsoonal storms. PPE, knowledge, and backcountry and primitive tool skills were all important to mitigate hazards, but I felt working with coworkers that you have rapport, respect, and trust was more beneficial and motivating. My mental health and safety were just taking it one day at a time and careful campsite selection. I don't mind working and cutting underneath snags all day but sleeping under it is a different story. -Tim



Evan Tirey-Wilderness Ranger Sierra NF

I felt it was important to have knowledge of the fire to be able to educate visitors about the events and the effects of the fire on our trails and Wilderness areas. In this way we can help people to understand that fire is an important and necessary part of the ecosystem we recreate in! I think that having a vigilant and positive mindset will be one of the most important pieces of working in the burn in the years to come. We noticed new hazards throughout the field season last year, and I have no doubt that trend will continue into this summer. At times we had dedicated spotters for especially hazardous scenarios, and we bypassed at least one tree that was too dangerous to cut and in an unsafe area. Throughout these experiences, though, we tried to stay positive, have some laughs, and remember why we all work in Wilderness – because we love it! -Evan

What skills were vital to accomplish trail work within the burn safely and efficiently?

Having experienced sawyers on every crew was crucial for having solid cut plans and keeping our saws in the best shape possible while cutting through burned trees, often in unfavorable locations (i.e., partially buried trunks, many rocks, jackstraw piles) Also being able to field sharpen tools was important in that chainsaws dulled quickly in the fire hardened trees, Pulaski's and Mcleods took a beating as well where missing vegetation and soil revealed all the rocks. Communication was obviously crucial - from warning each other about hazards, to reminding our crew members about good ergonomics, and keeping our spirits up with a good laugh. -Evan

(Continued on next page)

Ranger to Ranger

What skills were vital to accomplish trail work within the burn safely and efficiently?

Probably efficiency, situational awareness, and observation of local weather patterns. Getting most of the workload done before the late afternoon winds picked up. Having everyone on board, focused, paying attention, and watching out for each other. Also, by wearing all PPE, staying hydrated and applying copious amounts of sunscreen. The snowpack was dismal, and creeks weren't reliable, so having more water capacity at all times was also important. –Tim

What was the biggest day of work you accomplished?

This was probably the biggest SEASON of trail work during my tenure on the Sierra NF. Doing all facets of trail work from May 11 to Nov 5 proved the kind of rangers and people I am privileged to work with. The fire hardened trees with no moisture left made cutting the trees a grind and a slog. Sometimes it was faster to use an axe. –Tim

My crew's biggest tree to clear was a 50-inch Western White Pine. It fell with a favorable lay in the trail and we were able to do two easy straight cuts and roll it right off the trail. We also had many days of either maintaining or constructing drainage features where we had a shovel or Pulaski in our hands from the first step in the morning until we set our packs down at the end of the day. Some of those days I worked on 40+ drainage features. –Evan

What approach did your team take in organizing to start clearing trails following the fire?

Our crew decided to start the first week in the Ansel Adams where we had little recon knowledge with high fire intensity and a lot of chainsaw territory before the wilderness boundaries. It helped the seasonal rangers get the rust off and work together while observing the fire intensity and working on the trail damage. When the rest of the wilderness rangers and volunteer groups showed up, we split off into our separate crews and began logging out the higher use trails from level 3 systems trails down to the level 1 system trails. Half the season was within the burn scar, so it came down to campsite selection and day hiking to the project sites to mitigate the massive safety hazards. –Tim

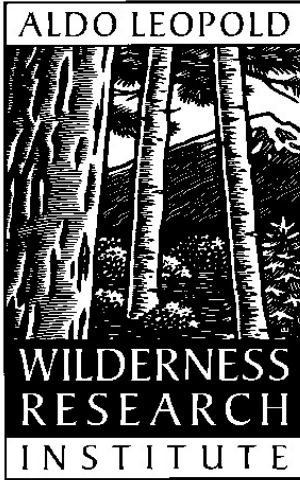


Tim Crosby –Wilderness Ranger, Sierra NF

In your eyes, what's your take on the overall aftermath?

The aftermath of the Creek Fire varied widely throughout the three Wilderness areas that were affected, from total destruction to where the fire stopped. I think it is also enlightening for visitors to be able to hike through the burn, starting in an area of devastation, passing through the transition to moderate and low intensity fire, then ending at their destination that is most likely untouched. This gives people a view into how the Creek Fire burned, but also what different kinds of fire look like on the ground. --Evan

The Creek Fire aftermath and its destruction were pretty amazing to study and observe. From 3500 feet to 8000 feet the burn intensity was catastrophic in most places. But into the further reaches of the burn scar in wilderness at high elevations, there were areas that burned beneficially, that cleaned up the forest floor sparing the dominant and codominant trees. Hopefully this will make the forest more resilient to drought, beetle kill, and fires in the future. --Tim



Aldo Leopold Wilderness Research Institute

leopold.wilderness.net

Aldo Leopold Wilderness Research Institute (ALWRI), part of U.S. Forest Service Rocky Mountain Research Station, is an interagency, national research facility located on campus at the University of Montana. Our mission is to advance wilderness stewardship through transformational science. The Leopold Institute is the only Federal research group in the United States dedicated to development and dissemination of knowledge needed to steward the 111-million-acre National Wilderness Preservation System, all 800+ units managed by two Departments and four agencies, from Puerto Rico to Alaska. We have a long history of conducting and sharing science in support of the National Wilderness Preservation System, as well as collaborating with management, tribal, academic, non-governmental organizations, community, and other partners.

The team at ALWRI recently completed a draft of the Institute's next science charter. We engaged the wilderness community to gather diverse input on priorities for wilderness stewardship research. Prioritized needs, across 175 respondents (from USFS, BLM, FWS, NPS, Tribes, University, and other respondents), were analyzed to understand the myriad of priorities. Five public workshops were then conducted to understand the nuances and context within partner input. The highest priorities from this broad public engagement provided the foundation for developing the ALWRI draft science charter.

We've had several staff changes over the last year. Research Ecologist Dr. Carol Miller retired in April 2021 after nearly 20 years with ALWRI. Carol's contributions to wilderness fire management cannot be understated. In fact, Carol was recently awarded the Biswell Lifetime Achievement Award from the Association for Fire Ecology!

[Dr. Kellie Carim](#) joined ALWRI in September of 2021. She is an aquatic ecologist who may be best known for her work using environmental DNA methods to understand the presence and distribution of aquatic species on both local and landscape scales. However, her research experiences are broad and include aspects of landscape ecology, invasive species management, population dynamics, stream restoration, and conservation genetics. She takes a collaborative approach to research, working with tribal, state, federal, academic, and non-profit partners to address applied research questions. Kellie is excited to build the Institute's first research program focused on aquatic ecology and wilderness stewardship.



*Dr. Kellie Carim,
Research Ecologist*



*Dr. Lauren Redmore,
Research Social Scientist*

In December 2021, we welcomed [Dr. Lauren Redmore](#) to the team as the first research social scientist focused on advancing an understanding of diversity, equity, and inclusion in relation to wilderness. Lauren is an environmental anthropologist interested in exploring how people connect to wilderness and wildlands through culture, and understanding how evolving wilderness governance decisions impact and are impacted by underserved communities. She comes to the Institute with 15 years of applied research experience in the conservation and development sector, including experience in Oregon, California, across the US, and in sub-Saharan Africa, where she lived for seven years.

Aldo Leopold Wilderness Research Institute leopold.wilderness.net

ALWRI has advanced or completed a robust list of projects relevant to wilderness stewardship and broader conservation needs. A full accounting of these projects can be found in our [FY21 Progress and Accomplishments Report](#). The following highlights an example project that may be of interest to wilderness managers.

RECENT ALWRI PROJECT IN THE ALPINE LAKES AND ENCHANTMENTS WILDERNESS AREAS:

After a few years spent working closely with the Forest Service to identify the best paths forward to reduce human pressure on the Alpine Lakes and Enchantments Wildernesses, two of the most popular wilderness areas outside of Seattle, WA. ALWRI scientists Chris Armatas and Lauren Redmore are teaming up with various collaborators to trial the development and implementation of a novel shared stewardship strategy. A governance strategy is being articulated to describe engagement approaches and will soon be shared with interested groups, including tribes, recreation organizations and outfitters, among others to ensure that wilderness management strategies are inclusive of underserved communities. Chris and Lauren will study both the process and outcomes of this shared stewardship approach, as well as the trial of a novel working group approach that will seek to share lessons learned along the way with wilderness managers across the NWPS, documenting what is possible in different contexts. This is the first effort of this kind to move parallel policies targeting diversity, equity, and inclusion, shared stewardship initiatives, and improved nation-to-nation engagement to practice.

*Figure 1. Alpine Lakes Wilderness, Washington
Photo by Chris Armatas*



*Figure 2. Vault Toilet boxes from Alpine Lakes Wilderness,
full of human waste, awaiting air transport for removal
Photo by Chris Armatas*



Arthur Carhart National Wilderness Training Center

carhart.wilderness.net

The mission of the Carhart National Wilderness Training Center is to equip and inspire agency leaders and partners to ensure that America's National Wilderness Preservation System endures for future generations. We do this through training, information, and education.

Staffing: Kimm Fox-Middleton joined the Carhart staff in August 2021 as the Wilderness Interpretation and Outreach Specialist. Kimm has worked in concessions, volunteerism, interpretation, environmental education, agroforestry, and community engagement for the National Park Service, US Peace Corps in Kenya, Portland Public Schools, and the Oregon Zoo. She holds BA in Biology and MPA in Natural Resources. We are excited to have her on the Team.

On May 9, Timothy J. Fisher started as the Interim Director.

Trainings: Carhart is planning to return to in-person trainings in 2022. Courses include:

Regional Wilderness Stewardship Trainings

- Fort Collins, CO - May, 16-19
- Shenandoah Valley, VA - August/September
- St. Mary's, GA - Fall, TBD

In addition, there are online courses, webinars, and a comprehensive amount of information on [Wilderness Connect](#).

Register Today!

Register now for 2022 National Wilderness Skills Institute before registration closes. The registration portal will ask you to select sessions for each day. Registration is not binding but will be used to estimate the number of participants for each session. Make sure to review the session descriptions and agenda before registering.

[Click Here to Register Now](#)

For more information about the National Wilderness Skills Institute, session descriptions, draft agenda, and to register, visit:

<https://wildernessskillsinstitute.org/nwsi/>



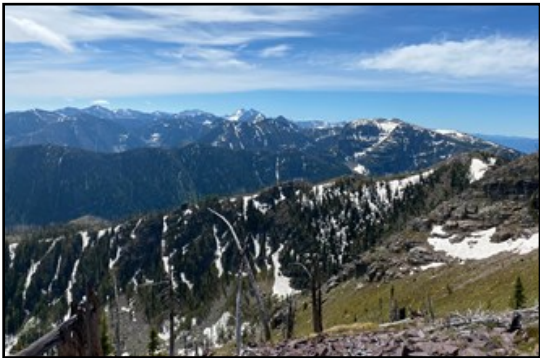
PHOTO FEATURE: Cabinet Mountain Wilderness -Kootenai NF in NW Montana (R1)



Photos Courtesy of William Gilbert

The Cabinet Mountains Wilderness is a 35-mile-long range of glaciated peaks and valleys trending north and south. Initially designated a Primitive Area in 1935, the 94,272-acre area was formally classified as a “Wilderness” with passage of the National Wilderness Preservation Act of 1964. The Cabinets obtained their name from early French explorers who noted that the rock formations along the Clark Fork River looked like boxes or cabinets. Although most of these rock formations are now under the Cabinet Gorge Reservoir (built in 1952), some are still visible today.

The Cabinet Mountains Wilderness includes high, rocky peaks, often snowcapped year-round, which extend down to groves of huge cedars in the canopied valleys. Hidden in the peaks and ridges are scores of deep blue lakes, feeding clear, cold streams that tumble into moose country below. Elevations in the Cabinets range from 2,880ft to 8,738ft, atop Snowshoe Peak. Blackwell Glacier, the remnant of an alpine glacier, still exists on the north slope of Snowshoe Peak. Other permanent snow fields can be found near Little Ibex Lake and Elephant Peak. Patches of snow sheltered by mountainous ramparts are often found in the high country throughout the summer.



Rugged Peaks in the Cabinet Mountain Wilderness

This Cabinet Mountains have been valued by humans for a variety of reasons. The Kootenai people utilized the area as an important hunting grounds for big game species. The mountain goat was prized for its pelt and meat, along with many plants adapted only to high altitudes, that provided food and medicines. In the 1880’s the area was used by Euro Americans, primarily for mining. Mineralization was discovered in the southeast part of the wilderness, which has since become known as the Snowshoe Fault. Mining at some scale has occurred along this fault sporadically since the early 1900’s. Recently, Hecla Mining Company purchased Montanore Mine Project with plans to extract silver and copper beneath the Cabinet Mountain Wilderness.

Current recreation opportunities in the Cabinets primarily include hiking, camping, hunting, snowshoeing, back country skiing, ice climbing and stock use. Like many other areas across the country, the Cabinets experienced a noticeable increase in visitor use during the Covid 19 pandemic. The rugged character of the Cabinet Mountains, which limits access points, further amplified visitor concentrations and resulting resource impacts. The Kootenai National Forest has applied for Great American Outdoor Act funds to help address some of these issues.



Trail Crew working on Leigh Lake Trail

In 2020, personnel from the Libby Ranger District, in conjunction with Blaster, Steven Petesch, hiked 300lbs of explosives up the Leigh Lake Trail to conduct a blasting project targeted at improving tread and mitigating some trail segments that posed long-standing health and safety concerns.



*Dust cloud from explosive detonation to improve tread
Photo by Kyle Hannah*

Wilderness Character Monitoring Central Team Updates

The Forest Service began working to complete Wilderness Character Monitoring (WCM) Baselines in 2018 with the first pilot wildernesses. Since then, each region started work on a few additional areas, efforts that are now evident in our WCM baseline completion stats. Currently, there are 121 fully completed WCM baselines. There are 186 WCM efforts currently in-progress, 73 units that have created their Wilderness Character Narrative and 70 that have not yet been started. Our agency emphasis will continue to be on completing WCM baselines over the next 2-3 years and will be preparing for the first round of WCM trend assessments starting in 2024.

How much does it cost to complete a WCM baseline? Many factors can affect the answer to this question. Are you planning to complete the WCM utilizing only Forest Service staff or will you utilize partner support? Do you plan to work on one or several wilderness areas? Are the wilderness areas on the same forest or proximate geographically (there can be efficiencies in costs when doing it this way)? Do you plan to complete WSP WCM Element 2- through 8-point steps in one year, or do you plan to stagger the work over 2-3 years? Will you need to provide housing, a housing stipend, or travel funds to staff completing the WCM baselines? Will you need to send them to training on how to complete WCM work?

How long does it take to complete a wilderness character baseline? Again, numerous factors will affect the time needed to complete WCM for your wilderness. Will staff working on the baseline be dedicated to WCM work, or will some of their time be dedicated to other unrelated tasks? Is needed information and documentation already gathered and organized, or will someone need to spend time locating relevant data? Will local specialists be able to respond quickly to requests for assistance in locating, interpreting data, and reviewing draft narratives, measure forms and baseline reports, or will there likely be pauses while waiting for their assistance as they balance multiple priorities? How complex is the wilderness area? If the area is shared across district, forest, regional, and/or agency boundaries this can increase the time needed. Taking these factors into consideration, most WCM baselines are completed within 1-2 years, however two years may stretch across three fiscal years.

WCM RESOURCES:

The WCM Central Team is here to help with the WCM process! If you haven't yet reached out to us, we recommend that you connect with your regional wilderness program manager and any partners you are planning to have help, and contact us. We can help you better understand specific support that may be needed for your situation and provide information about available resources. The [WCM Toolbox on Wilderness Connect](#) and the [WCM External Pinyon Site](#) both offer great training as well as access to templates and completed examples.

If you are looking for an avenue to connect with others working on WCM baselines, the WCM Central Team offers bi-weekly Office Hours, a virtual meeting place where you can ask questions, and learn from questions others are asking. If you do not already receive an Outlook calendar invitation for these calls, you may contact the WCM Central Team at pd_l_wo_nfs_WCM_team@usda.gov and request a meeting invitation. You can also use this address to email the team questions at any time.

If you share management responsibilities for your wilderness, there will be a session offered at the Northern Wilderness Skills Institute in May, which speaks to best practices for working across administrative boundaries to complete and implement WCM.

(Continued on next page)

Wilderness Character Monitoring Central Team Updates continued...

What else does the WCM team do? The WCM team is available to review drafts of wilderness character narratives, WCM measure selection forms, and WCM baseline reports, to help move WCM goals forward. We also work ahead of upcoming planned WCM baseline work to gather, reformat, and prepare WCM Central Team-supplied data you will need. For example, WCM Program Specialist Jim Edmonds is currently processing data on impaired waters, ozone, and visibility that are sourced from outside the USFS databases. He synthesizes the data so it can easily feed into WCM measures. WCM Data Services Specialist Drew Lindsey is working to improve our communications and instructions for annual NRM-WCM data rollover for 2022. His work includes creating a new NRM-WCM-specific data steward list. We are also developing transition materials to prepare forests for interim tasks and data maintenance once WCM baselines are complete. And, we are revamping the outdated WCM Sharepoint Site. Another big effort in 2022 is to develop improved materials for use in advocating to your leadership that development of WCM baselines and implementing WCM should be a funded priority for your unit, and that establishing Wilderness Character Monitoring is foundational work that will inform wilderness management for decades to come!



National Wilderness Preservation System

The WCM Central Team is here to help. Please reach out to us at any time!

Trails Advisory Group (TAG) Update

The Trail Advisory Group (TAG) is a collection of field-going trail professionals representing each region of the Forest Service. The goal is to be a communication channel from the field to Forest Service leadership while providing a field perspective on national level trail initiatives. TAG representatives elevate concerns from the field and provide a contact point for employees to voice those concerns. TAG participates in National Trail Board calls and works with the National Trail Board and Washington Office trail program on small teams and planning efforts. Team members in 2022 include:

Region 1 Jess May	Region 4 Bryan Carter	Region 8 Matt Able (TAG Chairman)
Region 2 Christopher Bouton	Region 5 Tracy Knapp	Region 9 Cristin Bailey
Region 3 Kerry Wood	Region 6 Joe Welke	Region 10 Laurent Deviche

2022 TAG Projects

- **TAG continues to work to address barriers to getting trail work accomplished.** Examples of barriers currently identified as restricting productivity include: a lack of capacity to develop, manage and coordinate volunteers and partners; administrative processes that are unclear; NEPA process inconsistencies/CE categories; and Recreation Technician Series Qualifications.
- If you haven't found your way to the [Trail Community Map](#) yet, take a look! TAG created this resource through ArcGIS Online (AGOL) to spatially display Forest Service Personnel and partners, listing their skills and certifications. The map can be used as a communication tool to connect people needing specific skills for trail projects or training.

The Wilderness Information Management Steering Team (WIMST)

The Wilderness Information Management Steering Team (WIMST) consists of representatives from each Region, along with members from the Washington Office and academia. The group was established in 1999 for the purpose of promoting quality wilderness stewardship at all levels of the organization through the effective and efficient use of information.

WIMST would like to thank team members who rotated off the group this fiscal year, for their years (or in one instance, decade+) of passionate, dedicated, and valuable work to benefit wilderness rangers, wilderness managers, partners, and the wilderness resource. Tim Eling (R8), Justin Ewer (R6), Zach Maughan (R4), and Charis Parker (R5), thank you for your leadership.

During the Fiscal Year 2022 planning meeting in November 2021, eighteen possible tasks were identified for WIMST to address. Even though making the final selections are always difficult, six task teams were selected for more in-depth discussion.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

For the second year in a row, a task team was formed to develop methods to improve communication, information sharing, and resources to address diversity, equity, and inclusion. One of the products is a self-assessment form to assist wilderness managers review the current wilderness descriptions posted on Wilderness Connect. You can access the new self-assessment in the [Wilderness Data Stewards SharePoint site](#). When you make changes to your description, please notify the Wilderness Connect webmaster and eric.sandeno@usda.gov to post your new description.

The National Wilderness Skills Institute (NWSI) this year will include an open dialogue session with agency staff and partners to identify resources that are needed for managers to better understand, respect, and appreciate the increasingly diverse public we serve. Look for opportunities to participate on the NWSI agenda.

Wilderness Stewardship Performance (WSP) Webinars

The WSP Webinars task team will continue to provide informational/educational webinars on the WSP elements. In addition to finishing up webinars for all 20 elements, some previously completed training webinars that are now a few years old, will be replaced. Completed webinars have been recorded and posted to the [WSP SharePoint Site](#), [Wilderness Connect](#), and the [NRM Support Site for Wilderness](#).

Signs and Posters Toolbox update

This task team has been working with Wilderness Connect webmaster Lisa Ronald and the US Fish and Wildlife Service Representative at the Arthur Carhart National Wilderness Training Center to review and revise content on the Signs and Posters Toolbox. Updates to this toolbox should be in place in the coming months.



Digital Resources

Are you using Collector, Field Maps, Survey123, or a locally developed method to collect and download wilderness monitoring field data? If you are, would it have been helpful to know what other managers have developed or to get some tips from them on lessons learned? This task team is doing that for you. If you would like to use digital resources for monitoring, this team will also develop a library examples.

The Wilderness Information Management Steering Team (WIMST) continued...

Partnership & Volunteer Coordinators

The growing need for field-going partnership & volunteer coordinators is echoed across many Forests to support the wilderness and broader recreation programs. With the anticipated increase of these positions, this task team is capturing the successes of current positions serving units and determining essentially 'what works and doesn't work' for successful field-based Partnership & Volunteer Coordinators. Successes will be shared via white paper. The team plans to provide a webinar in the fall to highlight successes, tips & tricks, do's and don'ts for this type of position.

Wilderness Website

A few years ago, WIMST redesigned the Forest Service [Wilderness Webpage](#). This year, we are going to freshen up the [Wilderness Stories](#) information. Most of the videos and articles date back to 2014 and while still interesting, there will be new information posted soon.

Get to Know Your Local WAG Representative

The Chief's Wilderness Advisory Group (WAG) was established in 1989 for the purpose of providing advice and counsel to the Chief of the Forest Service, from the perspective of field level managers, on matters related to wilderness stewardship. The WAG consists of one field-based manager from each Region, as well as representatives from the Washington Office, the Arthur Carhart National Wilderness Training Center, and the Aldo Leopold Wilderness Research Institute.



Region 1: [Kearstin Edwards](#)

Moose Cr. R.D., Nez Perce-Clearwater N.F.

Region 2: [Jonathan Brooks](#)

Laramie R.D., Medicine Bow-Routt N.F.

Region 3: [Allison Ayers](#)

North Kaibab R.D., Kaibab N.F.

Region 4: [Del Orme](#) (Chair)

Cedar City R.D., Dixie N.F.

Region 5: [Chris Engelhardt](#)

White Mountain R.D., Inyo N.F.

Region 6: [Jason Fisher](#)

Bend/Fort Rock R.D., Deschutes N.F.

Region 8: [Lisa Jennings](#)

Grandfather R.D., Pisgah N.F.

Region 9: [Ed Sherman](#)

Eleven Point & Poplar Bluff R.D., Mark Twain N.F.

Region 10: [Edie Leghorn](#)

Sitka R.D., Tongass N.F.

Washington Office: [Peter Mali](#), [Dusty Vaughn](#), [Tangy Ekasi-Otu](#), Wilderness and Wild & Scenic Rivers Staff

Arthur Carhart National Wilderness Training Center:
[J Dan Abbe](#), Forest Service Representative

Aldo Leopold Wilderness Research Institute:
[Kellie Carim](#), Research Ecologist