On September 3, 1964 President Lyndon B. Johnson signed into law the Wilderness Act. This historic bill established the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS) and set aside an initial 9.1 million acres of wildlands for the use and benefit of the American people. Over the past 50 years, and as a result of America’s support for wilderness, Congress has added over 100 million acres to this unique land preservation system. The 1964 Wilderness Act defines “Wilderness” as areas where the earth and its communities of life are left unchanged by people, where the primary forces of nature are in control, and where people themselves are visitors who do not remain.

The NWPS was established for the use and enjoyment of the American people and provides many direct and in-direct benefits, such as those relating to ecological, geological, scientific, educational, scenic, spiritual, economic, recreational, historical, and cultural uses and activities. The 757 wilderness areas within the NWPS are managed by all four federal land managing agencies, the Bureau of Land Management, Fish and Wildlife Service, Forest Service, and National Park Service.

In 2014, our nation will celebrate “50 Years of Wilderness” and we hope that your organization will find a way to become a part of this historical commemoration honoring America’s “True American Legacy of Wilderness!”

Planning for 2014

The 50th Anniversary National Wilderness Planning Team (Wilderness50) goals are to:

- Engage the public to better understand and appreciate the many benefits and values of wilderness, ultimately resulting in more people supporting responsible wildlands stewardship;
- Bring the wilderness community (NGOs/Agencies/International Advocates) “together” to efficiently and consistently steward wilderness for the use, enjoyment, and benefit of the American people;
- Connect with today’s youth and with non-wilderness using groups to find the thread that ties their lives to wild places so they can more directly relate to, understand, and value, wilderness.

Wilderness50’s diversity commitment is to:

- Acknowledge that diverse communities celebrate and engage with wilderness in many different ways—even though their traditions have not always expressed these
connections in the same way as more "orthodox" environmentalists. 
• Realize that the assumptions of the Wilderness Act, valuable and pathbreaking in many ways for Americans, have led to a "non-inclusive" movement around the wilderness concept, and many people in non-traditional communities view wilderness as irrelevant. 
• Reach out to and work with diverse communities to incorporate them as full participants into planning efforts.