50th Anniversary of the Wilderness Act Successes Report

Background
2014 marked the 50th anniversary of the Wilderness Act of 1964, one of the most groundbreaking pieces of environmental legislation ever enacted. A team of more than 30 non-profit organizations, businesses, universities, and federal agencies, called Wilderness50 convened in 2011/2012 to begin charting the course of the 2014 year, which grew to include a nationwide suite of local community events, high profile national events, and branding and media campaigning.

Goals
1. Engage the public to better understand and appreciate the many benefits and values of wilderness, ultimately resulting in more people supporting responsible wildlands stewardship;
2. 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;
3. 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.

Outcomes
Throughout 2014, nearly 850 community-level events took place in 45 states, Washington D.C. and Puerto Rico, and included everything from wilderness outings for 6-10 people to Seeley Lake Montana’s Wild 50th Fest weekend which drew around 2400 people for live music, hikes, speakers, a BBQ and other activities. A total of 20 wilderness proclamations were passed by state, county, and city governments in both conservative and liberal communities alike.

Popularity of Different Types of Local 50th Events

Outings like this New Year’s Day interpretive hike in New Mexico’s Manzano Mountain Wilderness (above) got people out into the wilderness, while festivals like Montana’s Wild50th Fest (below) brought people together for educational and family activities in their home communities.
On the actual Wilderness Act anniversary on September 3rd, the “Wilderness Forever” photography exhibit, containing more than 40 breathtaking images of wilderness areas from Florida to Alaska, debuted in the Smithsonian’s National Museum of Natural History, which receives over 8 million visitors each year. The exhibit will remain up through the summer of 2015.

Later in the month, more than 150 wilderness advocates descended on our nation’s capital during the D.C. Wilderness Week to lobby Congress for passage of current wilderness bills. Shortly afterward, the Senate passed a resolution of support for the 50th anniversary.

In October at the National Wilderness Conference:

- 84 sessions, 7 plenary presentations, and 2 lunch panels addressed contemporary topics including civic engagement, education, stewardship, science, experience, and history
- 1,156 people from 43 states, Washington D.C. and Puerto Rico attended representing more than 160 different non-profit organizations and businesses, 12 international/federal/state/city government agencies, more than 60 universities, and more than 20 media outlets
- 1,500 New Mexico residents came to the public ‘Get Wild’ Festival
- Agency leaders signed 2020 Vision, the agency strategy for future management of wilderness
- 157 people participated in 20 field trips to New Mexico wilderness areas and cultural sites
- 100 people attended a certified pre-conference training for government employees and non-profit advocates
- 800 people attended 3 events at the historic KiMo Theater: a 2-night wilderness film gala, a live docudrama on author and conservationist Aldo Leopold, and a screening of the documentary film Wrenched
- 55 exhibitors showcased their organizations in the exhibit hall
- 100 volunteers helped with everything from packet stuffing and registration to ‘Get Wild’ Festival setup
- The conference silent auction—more than 120 items including vacation packages, artwork, and outdoor gear—raised over $11,000
- Several thousand pictures from Raymond Watt Photography are now available to anyone on the following FTP site, ftp://ftp.cfc.umt.edu/Special/Ronald/50th/Conference/.

Images comprising the “Wilderness Forever” exhibit were selected from a summer 2013 national contest that received over 5,000 entries.
With our special focus on the next generation of wilderness stewards, here are some **youth engagement and education successes**:

- More than 100 youth under the age of 25 attended the conference and Youth Summit
- A total of 24 diverse youth (2/3 were female and 45% were Asian, Hispanic, African-American or American Indian) received scholarships to attend
- 14 Youth Leader Wilderness Scholarship winners were selected and will implement the knowledge they gained at the conference in their home communities through Wilderness Ambassador Projects such as grassroots wilderness designation awareness walks, videos and podcasts
- 9 youth presenters who spoke about future stewards and listening to youth drew crowds of more than 80 people
- 350 grade- and middle-school students along with 10 teachers were led through the Wilderness Awareness Trail by youth scholarship winners as part of local New Mexico school field trips
- 300 kids completed the Wilderness Passport Program at the ‘Get Wild’ Festival
- Throughout 2014, 15 Wilderness Investigations teacher workshops served more than 280 teachers who will ultimately teach more than 10,000 students about wilderness this year alone
- During 2015/2016, a post-anniversary one-time grant program dispersed approximately $30,000 of non-federal, discretionary proceeds remaining from the October 2014 National Wilderness Conference. The four grantees—Friends of the Boundary Waters Wilderness, Friends of Saguaro National Park, Native American Lands Conservancy, and North Cascades Institute—sent nearly 300 youth, many with ethnically and culturally diverse backgrounds, on experiential wilderness learning and service trips.

With our special focus on informing more people about wilderness during 2014, here are some **public awareness and marketing successes**:

- The [50th anniversary Facebook page](#) exceeded 5,000 likes by September 3rd, and our wilderness photo blitz that day had a post reach of 91,973 people
- More than 40 YouTube short videos and 3 podcasts have been broadcast
- Wilderness-themed pub trivia rounds were hosted on September 3rd in more than 120 venues across the country
Wilderness50th.org served as the clearinghouse for information about all local and national events and includes a toolbox with more than 120 resources.

The semi-monthly Wilderness50 e-news reached more than 3,000 members of the wilderness community with each issue.

41,500 wilderness maps, 5,000 brochures, more than 30,000 Wilderness Explorer Jr. Ranger activity books, and 3,250 commemorative 50th anniversary magazines were printed and distributed.

More than 100,000 50th logo stickers, 3,350 commemorative Monte Dolack wilderness posters, nearly 1,000 Wilderness Ranger Cookbooks, around 200 50th logo shirts, and nearly 1000 50th logo mugs, water bottles, tote bags and other merchandise were sold.

30 displays in a free public pool were rented for use at local community events by nearly 80 agency and non-profit offices.

8 live webinars were broadcast, with one hosted by Orion Magazine reaching 9,000 people via podcast.

Mainstream magazines including Backpacker, High Country News, Orion, National Geographic, Sunset, and Backcountry covered wilderness; other publications including Alpinist, Kayak Fish, High Country News, National Forest Magazine, Outside Magazine, Society of American Foresters magazine, and American Park Network guides donate advertising space; and nearly 1,500 news articles on the anniversary were written.

The Smithsonian Channel’s Aerial America: Wilderness episode aired on national television on Sunday, September 7, 2014; the initial screening on Friday, September 5, 2014 at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of Natural History drew nearly 500 viewers; and nearly 100 DVDs of the episode were mailed out for house party viewings scheduled in September and October.

Companies selling 50th anniversary merchandise included Flow397 (apparel), CafePress (various), Custom Sticker Makers (stickers), Eagle River Designs (various), Western Heritage (various), L & H Branding Irons (branding iron), Wilderness Watch (poster), and the Society for Wilderness Stewardship (cookbook).