

WILDLANDS PROJECT

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Mission, vision, and purpose

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Mission, vision, and purpose

The Problem

As the new millennium begins, humanity approaches a watershed for wildlife and wilderness. Human activity is undoing creation; the remaining degraded and fragmented lands will not sustain their biological diversity and evolutionary processes. We need a bold plan to halt and reverse the destruction. Healing the land means reconnecting the parts so that vital flows can be renewed.

Our Mission

The mission of the Wildlands Project is to protect and restore the natural heritage of North America through the establishment of a connected system of wildlands. The idea is simple. To stem the disappearance of wildlife and wilderness we must allow the recovery of whole ecosystems and landscapes in every region of North America. Recovery on this scale will take time—100 years or more in some places. This vision for continental renewal rests on the spirit of social responsibility that has built so many great institutions in the past and acknowledges that the health of our society and its institutions depends on wildness. The land has given much to us; now it is time to give something back—to allow nature to thrive once more and to restore the links that will sustain both wilderness and the foundations of human communities.

Our Vision

We are ambitious: we live for the day when grizzlies in Chihuahua have an unbroken connection to grizzlies in Alaska; when wolf populations are restored from Mexico to the Yukon; when vast forests and flowing prairies again thrive and support their full assemblage of native plants and animals; when humans dwell with respect, harmony, and affection for the land; when we come to live no longer as conquerors but as respectful citizens in the land community.

Our Challenge

We are called to our task by the inability of existing parks, wilderness areas, and wildlife refuges to adequately protect life in North America in the face of increasing human numbers and technological change. While these areas preserve spectacular scenery and provide outstanding recreational opportunities, they are too small, too isolated, and represent too few types of ecosystems to perpetuate the continent's biological wealth. Despite the establishment of parks and reserves from Canada to Central America, true wilderness and native, wildland-dependent species are in precipitous decline.

- Grand predators—including the grizzly bear, gray wolf, wolverine, jaguar, and American crocodile—have been exterminated from large parts of their pre-Columbian range and are imperiled in much of their remaining habitat.

- The disappearance of these top predators and other keystone species hastens the unraveling of ecosystems and impoverishes the lives of human beings.
- Forests have been over-cut, cleared, and fragmented, leaving only scattered remnants of once vast ecosystems. Even extensive habitats, such as the boreal forest, face imminent destruction.
- Tall- and short-grass prairie, historically the most extensive community type in North America, and once home to an extraordinary concentration of large mammals, has been almost entirely destroyed or domesticated.
- Deserts, coastal areas, and mountains are imperiled by sprawling subdivisions and second-home development.
- Motorized vehicles penetrate the few remaining roadless areas on illegal roads and tracks.
- A rising tide of invasive exotic species—ecological opportunists of the global economy—threatens a new wave of extinction and the eventual homogenization of ecosystems everywhere.
- Climate change adds to the vulnerability of wildlands that remain.

These trends, acting globally, are among the notable causes of the current and sixth major extinction event to occur since the first large organisms appeared on Earth a half-billion years ago. The Wildlands Project, as a remedy, is working to create regional and continental networks of conservation areas that will protect wild habitat, biodiversity, ecological integrity, ecological services, and evolutionary processes.

The Meaning of Wilderness

We reject the notion that wilderness is merely a remote destination suitable only for backpacking. We see wilderness as a wild home for unfettered life. Wilderness means:

- Extensive roadless areas—vast, self-regulated landscapes—free of mechanized human use and the sounds and constructions of modern civilization;
- Viable, self-reproducing populations of all native species, including large predators;
- Natural patterns of diversity at the genetic, species, ecosystem, and landscape levels.

Such wilderness is absolutely essential. It is not the solution to every ecological problem, but without wilderness the planet will sink further into biological poverty, and humanity's communion with its roots will be lost forever.

Our Method

We seek partnerships with grassroots and national conservation organizations, government agencies, indigenous peoples, private landowners, and with naturalists, scientists, and conservationists across the continent to create networks of wildlands from Central America to Alaska and from Nova Scotia to California. We seek to heal nature's wounds by designing and creating

wildlands networks and by restoring critical species and ecological processes to the land.

The wildlands networks will:

- Support the repatriation of top predators where they have been extirpated from present and future wilderness areas and national parks;
- Establish large areas of wild habitat where plants and animals are unrestrained, where native species thrive, and where nature, not technology, determines their evolutionary fate;
- Establish extensive linkages between large natural areas to ensure the continuation of migrations and other movements vital for the survival of healthy populations;
- Enable the recovery of natural processes such as fire.

We will implement these networks by:

- Supporting the designation of new conservation areas and improving the management of existing public lands;
- Campaigning both for the removal of public subsidies that maintain abusive land-use practices and for positive incentives that encourage responsible land management;
- Assisting land owners and land trusts in the voluntary protection of critical parcels of private land;
- Cooperating with transportation agencies to help remove or mitigate barriers to wildlife movement;
- Working with planners at all levels to create a balance between the needs of nature and human society;
- Promoting the restoration of disturbed lands and waters until that time when nature has recovered and can manage itself.
- Inspiring the people of North America to care for their home—for its own sake and for the sake of those yet to come.