



United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240



March, 2004

Memorandum

To: Superintendents
Chiefs of Interpretation

From: Director

Subject: Celebrating the Wilderness Heritage in the National Park System

Congress has given the American people a wonderful gift in the form of National Park Service wilderness. We can take pride in the fact that we are responsible for the stewardship of more wilderness than any other Federal land management agency—wilderness has been designated in 46 national parks and on nearly 53 percent of the National Park System. With good reason, a former regional director called National Park Service wilderness “the best of the very best,” a wonderful resource that is increasingly important to share with and make available to park visitors and friends.

Congress designates *wilderness* for the public purposes of recreation, enjoyment, science, education, and conservation and preservation of cultural resources. Congress clearly wanted the American people to experience and enjoy these areas. In addition, the extent of wilderness designations across the National Park System is a definite indication that the American people have valued this resource and want to keep the national parks as wild and natural as possible, for themselves and for future generations. Although support for wilderness in the American public appears to be strong, changing demographics, urbanization, and many other trends make it important that we now make even greater efforts to educate park visitors and neighbors about their wilderness heritage and its value and benefit to the nation.

We are all aware that the mission of the National Park Service is to preserve our natural and cultural heritage and associated values and resources unimpaired in trust for use and enjoyment by all the people, both now and in the future. Stewardship of national park wilderness and all the resources and values it contains is an important part of this mission. It is too easy for the benefits and values of wilderness to be lost in competition with the modern world.

Educating the American public is one of the National Park Service’s fundamental responsibilities and is central to our preservation and use efforts. Accordingly, an NPS wilderness education work group, sponsored by the National Wilderness Steering Committee, has developed a Servicewide *Wilderness Education and Partnership Plan* to aid park interpreters and educators to participate in this mission. One of the highest priorities in the plan was the development of the *Wilderness Education and Interpretation Resource Notebook* titled *Celebrate Wilderness!* I am pleased to introduce you to this notebook and to encourage you to use it to help the American public enjoy this great resource.

Celebrate Wilderness! contains wilderness education materials that are designed to facilitate your roles as guides and teachers to help people to experience, value, and respect the meanings of their wilderness heritage. The basic message is simple and familiar: National Park Service wilderness areas are special places. They are special places today because they are so rare and because so many Americans have been committed to keeping them and enjoying them as wild and natural as possible.

This notebook is specifically designed to help wilderness managers, interpreters, educators, public information officers, and resource specialists tell the wilderness story. Use *Celebrate Wilderness!* as a resource to help educate park visitors, wilderness users, park neighbors, and partners about the values and benefits of wilderness. Share the notebook with your staff and others with a vested interest in NPS wilderness. As a wilderness manager, educator, ranger, or as a concerned volunteer, take every opportunity to share your

knowledge of wilderness with those who visit or would like to visit these areas. Leave them with a better understanding of why Congress and the American people expect us to use, protect, and preserve these unmodified landscapes as inspirational areas of beauty and wildness.

Over the next several years, additional educational materials identified in the *Wilderness Education and Partnership Plan* will be developed to assist you in this important education effort and to help you incorporate wilderness interpretive themes into your park's education plan as requested by *Director's Order 41*. To the extent practicable, all these materials will also be available on the NPS Wilderness Program website at *InsideNPS* and at www.wilderness.nps.gov. Feedback on these materials is appreciated, together with ideas on additional materials that would be useful in your efforts to welcome the American public to their wilderness areas.

Dedication to Wes Henry, NPS Wilderness Program Manager



Wesley R. Henry ~ Dec. 16, 1948–Dec. 16, 2003

National Park Service Wilderness Program Manager Wes Henry enlightened the spirits of many through his deeply passionate leadership. Wes not only dedicated his life to the preservation of wild lands, he was committed to finding innovative ways to educate others about the value of these special places. His skillful ability to contend with complex resource management issues was furthered by an exceptional talent to help people experience, appreciate, and respect the meanings of the natural world around them.

This Wilderness Education and Interpretation Resource Notebook is a direct result of Wes Henry's unwavering devotion to provide inspiration, ideas, and educational tools to help connect people to their wilderness heritage. Personally involved in the development of each aspect of the *NPS Wilderness Education and Partnership Plan* of which this notebook is a part, Wes easily expressed the desired outcome of these materials: for everyone to *Celebrate Wilderness!*—every day.

When I stare at the flowing river long enough, I can almost see and witness life pass me by. Most of the time the water does not have smooth sailing. Rocks and trees—both living and resting—block its way, but somehow it overcomes those obstacles in hope of finding a more peaceful passage.

But as it overcomes the obstacle that is upon it, another one presents itself, and another one, until it may find calm water. But this does not last very long; just ahead is another obstacle. The river continues to do this despite the undeniable fact that it does not know its destination. This for me is what wilderness is: an undeniable part of one's life. It nourishes our bodies, the air we breathe, and the water we drink. And it definitely nourishes our soul. It enlightens my spirit in ways I never thought possible.

—journal entry by Joseph,
Wildlink student,
Yosemite National Park

