

## ***EAGLE POST 29***

The eNewsletter of **Friends of Eagles Nest Wilderness**, apprising you of important activities in and around Eagles Nest, Holy Cross, and Ptarmigan Peak Wilderness Areas.

## **FRIENDS OF EAGLES NEST WILDERNESS**



### **Before we begin...**

We are delighted to introduce the **FENW ENDOWMENT FUND**. Now, in addition to the usual routes for giving, you can make a **bequest** - a donation that will be invested through [The Summit Foundation](#), and will provide support in perpetuity for FENW Wilderness projects. Learn more at [www.fenw.org/join donate/..](http://www.fenw.org/join donate/)



Dear **\*|FNAME|\***

Greetings!

August 2018:

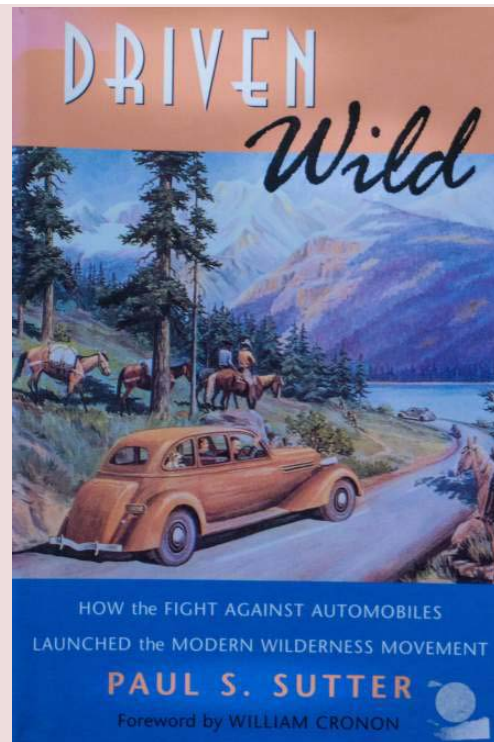
**DRIVEN WILD**

**Professor Paul Sutter**

Chair, Department of History

University of Colorado

Right: *Driven Wild* cover. The image is "Headin' for the Hills", 1937, by Irvin Shope, from a Montana State Highway brochure



## INTRODUCTION

In his book *Driven Wild*, Paul Sutter gave a fascinating and authoritative account of how the Wilderness Movement got its start nearly a century ago, grew into the founding of the Wilderness Society in 1935, and scored its greatest achievement, passage of the federal Wilderness Act in 1964.

In his essay below, Professor Sutter revisits those battles - the first one against a complex brew of the public's desire to see Nature, the explosive growth of the automobile industry, and the tourist boosterism of growing towns - all of which identified a singular initial target for preservationists: **roads**. Later battles of course arose with miners, dam builders, and loggers; Dr. Sutter brings us full circle to today's challenges.

Of the history, Sutter writes, "Wilderness was not simply about saving large swaths of wild land for the recreational enjoyment of Americans; it was about making sure large swaths of wild land were not sacrificed to the recreational enjoyment of Americans." Perhaps even truer today than nearly a century ago.

[Images below are from *Driven Wild*]



## DRIVEN WILD

**"The Automobile and the Making of Modern Wilderness" – by Paul S. Sutter**

Wilderness can seem timeless, a nature that exists outside of history. That is the power of its

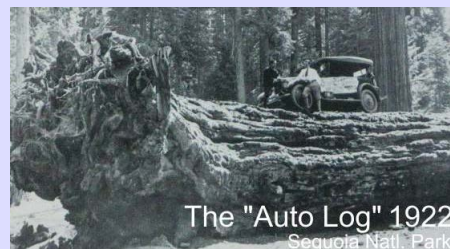
appeal. But as wilderness advocates face new questions about wilderness policy and management in the twenty-first century, it is worth remembering that the modern system of wilderness preservation arose as a response to a specific set of historical circumstances. The cultural appeal of wilderness has a history, as do the forces that imperil it, and effective wilderness advocacy requires that we understand that history.

How did a nation born of a devotion to transform wilderness come to embrace its preservation? That is the fundamental question in American wilderness history. When I first began to study the origins of modern American wilderness advocacy, I assumed that the story would hinge on some combination of ecological and ethical changes in how Americans thought about and sought to preserve wild nature. My research focused on the 1935 founding of the Wilderness Society, the first national organization devoted to the preservation of wilderness. Aldo Leopold, the great American conservationist, was one of the founders of



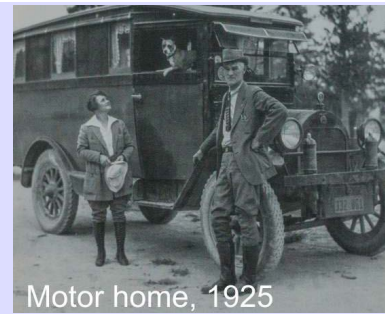
the Wilderness Society and had, in fact, first suggested wilderness preservation in a landmark 1921 article. Leopold was a pioneering ecological thinker who, in the most famous section of his masterwork, *A Sand County Almanac*, had formulated a “land ethic” premised on the idea that the natural world had values of its own that we were bound to respect. Given Leopold’s presence at the founding, the modern wilderness idea must have been a product of such ecological and biocentric thinking. These intellectual gestures, it initially seemed to me, were what separated wilderness from the scenic national park idea that had only found real purchase with the creation of the National Park Service in 1916.

But when I found myself one evening reading through the [first edition of \*The Living Wilderness\*](#), the magazine of the Wilderness Society, I was surprised to find a different set of motivations animating the society’s founders. Every article in that first edition bemoaned the threats that roads, automobiles, and the recreational modernization of America’s public domain posed to the nation’s remaining wildlands. The modern wilderness idea, I realized, emerged not as a more ecologically and ethically sophisticated antidote to the economic transformation of the natural world. To the contrary, wilderness was about checking Americans’ growing affection for outdoor recreation and the ways in which that affection, hitched to the powerful technological force of the automobile, was mechanizing and motorizing even the remotest parts of the continent. Wilderness was not simply about saving large swaths of wild land for the recreational enjoyment of Americans; it was about making sure large swaths of wild land were not sacrificed to the recreational enjoyment of Americans. [More from early issues of *The Living Wilderness* [HERE](#)]



Our experience of the landscape today is so profoundly shaped by the automobile and modern roadways that it is difficult to imagine the world without them, or how their steady creep across the landscape seemed alarming to conservationists. That the automobile democratized outdoor recreation and gave many Americans easy access to remote

parts of the continent should not be discounted. For just that reason, the early leaders of the National Park Service were keen to develop the national parks for motor tourists. But for the founders of the Wilderness Society, mechanized and motorized access was a kind of ruination. Once the machine



Motor home, 1925

was unloosed in the garden, escaping its mechanized presence seemed essential to a minority of wilderness lovers. Wilderness was a bulwark against these invading forces, and, to a certain degree, a critique of the ways in which the National Park Service was doing business.

The interwar years brought these threats to a boiling point. Not only did the number of automobiles increase dramatically, but this era saw the federal government move into road-building on a large scale. More than that, the Great Depression loosed onto the nation's public lands a vast army of conservation workers, and often they built roads, campgrounds, and other facilities for motorized access. Another founder of The Wilderness Society, Benton MacKaye, was driven to advocate for wilderness when he saw his big idea of the era – an



CCC roadbuilding crew, 1934

“Appalachian Trail,” which he envisioned in an article that also appeared in 1921 – increasingly compromised by plans for a series of skyline drives along the Appalachian ridgeline, roads that New Deal labor would play a major role in building. The interwar era was thus the moment in our history when getting back to nature increasingly meant driving to and through it. Wilderness preservation was a way of keeping at least some of the nation's wildlands free from those forces and thus open to a different kind of recreational experience. As Leopold observed as the 1930s came to an end, “Recreational development is a job not of building roads into lovely country, but of building receptivity into the still unlovely human mind.”

We live today in another distinct era in America's wilderness history, one that ought to remind us of the interwar years. The immediate postwar decades seemed different, as large-scale dam building and the aggressive move of the nation's timber industry onto the national forests brought the threat of wholesale transformation to huge stretches of remaining public wildlands. Those extractive threats certainly remain today, particularly in the form of energy development. But over the last several decades, new recreational threats and challenges have become central to wilderness preservation and management. In a curious reprise of the forces that drove the creation of modern wilderness advocacy, off road vehicles have proliferated on many of the nation's public wildlands that are not protected as wilderness. In a more vexing challenge to the nation's wilderness system, mountain bikers and their advocacy organizations have fought for access to wilderness areas, raising fundamental questions about whether these newer forms of mechanized transport belong in wilderness. Many wilderness areas, particularly those near urban areas, have become so heavily used that their essential wilderness qualities are threatened. Even the smartphone revolution has

fundamentally changed how Americans interact with wilderness.

The strength of the founding generation of American wilderness advocates is not that they provide clear and definitive solutions to these new wilderness conundrums. It is, rather, that their advocacy had at its core a deep and critical engagement with our modern outdoor recreational habits and the technologies that have shaped them. The modern wilderness idea, and the system of public land preservation that flowed from it, emerged from a reckoning with a similar set of questions – questions that go to the core of why we have the environmental commitments that we do. This history is a vital resource as we face the future of wilderness preservation in a changing world.

#### ABOUT PAUL SUTTER

Paul S. Sutter is a Professor of History and Chair of the Department of History at the University of Colorado Boulder. As an environmental historian, he is interested in the many ways in which humans have interacted with, impacted, and thought about the natural world over time. He is the author of a number of books, including *Driven Wild: How the Fight against the Automobile Launched the Modern Wilderness Movement*. Whenever he can, he escapes to his mountain cabin, from which he can walk (or ski or snowshoe) into the Indian Peaks Wilderness Area.



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#### Here's the 2018 Trail Projects schedule:

June 2 -National Trails Day

June 16 & again June 17 -Gateways Trail Day

July 27-29 -Slate Lake - llamas / 2 nights out

**Aug 2** -FENW/Colorado Outward Bound School at Piney Lake - llamas

**Aug 11 & again Aug 12** -Salt Lick Connector Trail with VOC. Register in advance after June 1 [HERE](#)

**Aug 17-19** -Gore Creek Overnight -

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Our **hard copy newsletter** is available.

It contains two dozen fun and informative articles, all of them about FENW - past, present, and future. If you haven't

llamas / overnight

Sep 15 & again Sep 16 -Deluge Lake Trail  
with VOC

TBD -Lily Pad Lakes Plank Bridge Project -  
llamas

\*Adopt-A-Trail on Deluge Creek– TBD

Learn about trail work [here](#).

**Join us!** for our **Planning Meeting**

THURSDAY, August 9, 5:30 PM,  
USFS Offices (video link) Silverthorne  
([MAP](#)) and Minturn

Details at [www.fenw.org/](http://www.fenw.org/)

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