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Clif Merritt and wilderness wildlife: Learning how to live in paradise

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CLIF MERRITT AND WILDERNESS WILDLIFE:
LEARNING HOW TO LIVE IN PARADISE

By

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Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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December 2005

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Clif Merritt and Wilderness Wildlife: Learning how to live in paradise.

Chairperson: Dan Flores

Clifton Reeve Merritt's (1919 - ) works provide an exemplary model of effectively accessing grassroots power, worthy of study by organizers today. Merritt began as national field director for the Wilderness Society (TWS) in 1964, battling to protect Scapegoat Mountain on Montana’s Continental Divide from ill-advised development; Congress protected that area, America’s first citizen-initiated wilderness, in 1972. Primary documents and interviews highlight extensive yet subtle contributions Merritt and TWS field services made to assist local advocates, such as anonymously producing brochures and coordinating networks of popular and scientific support. Merritt contributed to Scapegoat’s legislation by establishing boundaries with sound ecologic, economic, and legal rationales, and by initiating contacts with congressmen.

Merritt developed a passion for wildlife growing up on homesteads outside Helena, Montana. He learned tenacity surviving, unscathed, polio at age four, and rheumatic fever at fifteen, while helping run his family’s farm and ranch, during the Dust Bowl. Merritt’s grandfather Lawrence Merritt taught him sustainable management practices decades before public recognition of their importance. World War Two interrupted Merritt’s formal education. He took work as field director for Montana’s employment service offices in the Mountain region, and learned to navigate mazes of agencies related to resource law. He formed and joined networks of active and observant outdoorsmen, who noticed as large-scale, mono-cultural resource extraction practices increasingly injured Northern Montana’s fragile ecology.

By 1953 Merritt and peers mounted an eventually-successful grassroots challenge to Forest Service development plans in the upper Flathead Valley of Montana; Congress designated that area “Great Bear Wilderness” in 1978. Scapegoat established Merritt’s model for habitat-protection strategies, successful over ensuing decades as he integrated passions for wilderness, wildlife, and grassroots action, with extensive knowledge of public land management law--and motivated others to do likewise. During fifteen years with TWS, Merritt and his field representatives established multiple legal precedents as they coordinated grassroots actions enabling Congress to protect nearly thirty million acres of wilderness. In 1979 Merritt cofounded American Wildlands (AWL), which continues the battle for wildlife habitat to this day. In 1992 Merritt and AWL launched the Corridors of Life project, which may prove Merritt’s greatest legacy.
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Introduction

A new social history has begun acknowledging the importance of common individuals to human history. Yet, many questions remain essentially un-addressed about the dynamic period of recent history, beginning in the 1950s and running through the mid 1980s, when wilderness preservation efforts rose and peaked in the United States. To what degree did abstract ideals or threats to local lifestyles motivate grassroots workers of the era? How much did individual personalities influence the direction and thrust of the modern wilderness movement? How well do the broadly-interpretive administrative histories, which dominate the literature, describe the methods and activities of grassroots wilderness preservation networks that arose in the 1960s across the nation, and particularly in the West?

My attempt to address these questions arose in response to an unsolicited opportunity to collaborate on an autobiography with Clifton Reeve Merritt (1919 - ). Volunteer conservation leader in Montana through the 1950s, Director of Field Services for the Wilderness Society through the 1960s and 1970s, and Executive Director of American Wildlands through the 1980s and 1990s (a group Merritt cofounded in 1978), Merritt provides, through examination of his “field” work, deep insight into the personality and soul of the wilderness preservation movement of the last half of the twentieth century.

When in late 2003 Rob Ament, then Executive Director of the conservation group American Wildlands, requested through Dan Flores, Hammond Chair in the History Department of the University of Montana, a graduate student to help write a biography
of grassroots leader Clif Merritt, he included the imperative “it is now or never.”

Further, Ament correctly noted that since Merritt played an integral leadership role in the national movement for more than 25 years and “had his finger in more wilderness bills than anyone else,” that “all of it may be a monumental task that is bigger than a thesis.” He may be correct; archived documents and live interviews reveal how extensively, yet subtly, Merritt and his field cohorts contributed to other peoples’ preservation efforts throughout the era.

I argue that Merritt wielded ubiquitous influence on both the people and legislation of the American wilderness preservation movement, beginning in the mid-1950s and continuing through the end of the century. “Ubiquitous” requires a coverage beyond the scope of a thesis; thus, here I have selected a small set of examples that combined suggest the depth and multiplicity of Merritt’s involvement. My argument follows three steps.

First, an in-depth analysis of the Scapegoat Wilderness battle, Merritt’s first Wilderness Society project and the topic of my first chapter, reveals how Merritt operated. From inspecting the area for wilderness qualities and establishing boundaries with sound ecologic, economic, and legal rationales, to anonymously producing brochures and coordinating networks of popular and scientific support, to initiating contacts with congressmen, Merritt ‘tightened the nuts and bolts and greased the belts’ needed to ensure that grassroots action achieved maximal effectiveness in establishing protection for the wildlands and wildlife. Historians of the wilderness movement generally acknowledge that the Scapegoat Wilderness, as the first Wilderness Congress established in response to citizen rather than Forest Service request, represents an important legal precedent. Yet, few have recognized Merritt’s extensive role in the process.
Second, an examination of his training and preparation suggests why Merritt achieved success so readily beginning with Scapegoat in 1964. His experiences as a youth and young adult provided him with the diverse skills and broad knowledge necessary for getting along in both wilderness and political settings. He also discovered early in life the deep wellsprings of inner strength and passion that propelled him into successful leadership with the Wilderness Society, and sustained his tireless efforts for nearly fifty years. Merritt succeeded right from the start, not because of luck but because he arrived well-prepared, willing to engage, and un-intimidated by the spectre of the difficult battles and unpredictable vicissitudes sure to follow.

Third, having established how and why Merritt rose to national leadership, a review of his career in conservation and preservation indicates how often he contributed, and in how many realms. Of his many preservation projects, too numerous to list here, those that established national precedents form the crux of my third chapter. The trail of primary documents and personal testimony combine to suggest strongly that Merritt’s methods and activities, discovered by close examination of the Scapegoat process, generalize to all of his ensuing protective engagements, as well as those of his field representatives. With a focus on continued wildlife diversity, Merritt embraced legal alternatives to Wilderness designations that offered proper habitat protections, distinguishing himself from idealistic “wilderness purists.”

These three levels of evidence taken together show clearly that Merritt involved himself intelligently, deeply and at multiple levels in his projects, and that he coordinated a great multitude of projects in the course of his nearly fifty-year career. Merritt touched the ground of nearly every wilderness in the West, whether designated, under study, or de facto, and touched the lives of many of the volunteers, cooperators, foresters, and
politicians working to protect those lands. The fact that he has remained relatively unknown beyond that circle of wilderness workers themselves, I will examine further in my discussion of the “Methodology” underlying my investigation, a few pages hence. Merritt’s works provide an exemplary model of effectively accessing grassroots power, worthy of study by organizers today.

Review of the Literature

Merritt’s career in national conservation covered nearly fifty years; he engaged a great diversity of activities, representing several sub fields within environmental and conservation history. My thesis focuses on Merritt’s training and careers prior to 1980, particularly his 15 years as director for the Wilderness Society’s national field network, further narrowed to emphasize his efforts related to preserving unprotected wilderness wildlife habitat. Thus, I generally focus my secondary reading to works related to: the Wilderness Society, the national forests and U.S. Forest Service, and the American conservation and environmental movements after World War Two.

In his foreword to Paul Sutter’s recent book *Driven Wild: How the fight against automobiles launched the modern wilderness movement* (2002), William Cronon wrote a compelling argument to focus the spotlight of recent environmental historical analysis in the West on the Wilderness Society. As Merritt directed the Wilderness Society’s Western Office in Denver for 15 years, Cronon’s call implicates people like Merritt. In his book, Sutter identified the automobile as the threat to wildlands that motivated formation of the Wilderness Society in the 1930s, through his examination of the lives of some of its founders. James Morton Turner, in his 2004 dissertation in history at Princeton, “A Promise of Wilderness,” picked up the Society’s history where Sutter
dropped it. Turner emailed me a copy in mid-2004 with the caveat that he would change it some for its upcoming publication by the University of Washington Press. Brock Evans, M. Rupert Cutler, and Doug Scott, all longtime professional wilderness advocates active since the 1960s, have extolled Turner’s work as the authoritative administrative history of the Wilderness Society from 1964 through the 1990s. Cutler and Evans note, however, a remaining need for illumination of the Society’s grassroots networks to complete the Wilderness Society story.

Of the many works on the national forests, U.S. Forest Service Chief Historian Dennis M. Roth’s histories of the wilderness movement and the national forests between 1960 and 1984 (1984 and 1988) provide the most significant mention of Merritt and his influence on Forest Service management practices. Robert Marshall (1933), Arthur Carhart (1959), and Harold K. Steen (1976) provided contemporary descriptions of the national forests over the decades. William G. Robbins (1985) and Paul W. Hirt (1994) examined influences on Forest Service policy through the century. Countless Forest Service reports and brochures, available in the university library, enhance the broader literature. Several MA theses, particularly from the University of Montana, illuminate forest dynamics in the Northern Rockies, Merritt’s stomping grounds. Of these, Montana’s William P. Cunningham’s “Magruder Corridor Controversy: A case history” (1968) and Todd L. Denison’s “Wilderness in the Northern Rockies: A Missoula-Lolo National Forest perspective” (1993) provide detailed examinations of both grassroots and legislative influences in Montana’s early preservation battles.

Histories of the conservation, preservation, and environmental movements vary from scholarly to popular. According to many commentators on the historiography, Samuel P. Hays provides the leading academic contributions, beginning with his Gospel of
Efficiency (1959), and followed by Beauty, Health and Permanence (1987) as well as countless articles. He summarizes his decades of study and observation in 2000 with A History of Environmental Politics Since 1945, a book that significantly influenced my approach to this thesis. Aldo Leopold (1949), Howard Zahniser (edited 1994, concerning the 1940s and 1950s), Doug Scott (2004), and Dave Foreman (1989, 2004) provide contemporary descriptions of the preservation effort over the decades. Michael Frome offers insightful observations on the movement and its personalities through the 1970s, and Mark Harvey has continued the tradition in the 2000s. Also, Char Miller and Hal Rothman compiled excellent, broad coverage in collections of essays by leading environmental and forest historians (1997).

Methodology

Merritt's work often took place behind closed doors and off the record; his peers, the only witnesses to much of his influence, are also getting up in age. Thus, I made a priority of confirming—through interviews, correspondence and archival research—the several of Merritt's stories that seemed to deviate from the versions in the literature. No thesis could address more than the tip of the iceberg of information I have discovered through Merritt and his associates of the era.

In my research, I encountered three issues that complicate and color the historical examination of Merritt's contributions to an already confounding movement. All three relate to sources; two I can best describe through Wilderness Society examples, and the third with ancient ruins.

First, Wilderness Society Executive Director Howard Zahniser, his assistant Stewart Brandborg, and their new field director Clif Merritt together formulated the
Society’s field mission in response to the strictures of the Wilderness Act of 1964. Their plan included a deliberate obfuscation of TWS involvement in local and regional affairs. TWS wanted to leave no evidence that outsiders from the big city influenced, much less directed, local affairs across the West. No receipts, no affiliations, no shared letterhead; TWS field services worked through an accepted local leader on each project. They intended to exclude any mention of TWS field representatives’ involvement from media coverage of local preservation engagements, especially those in which TWS agents were integrally entangled.¹

This strategy had the effect of manipulating the official document-trail upon which the discipline of history rests its ultimate investigations. Merritt’s job description included making sure he never made the official records. “Merritt” was a name that kept coming up in wilderness preservation history, but upon which nothing could be pinned. He worked “leading from behind” the scenes, constantly covering his tracks as he went. He seldom got caught on the stage. I will need to elbow him through some doors barely opened in the secondary literature.

My second research issue raises the question: Whom do you trust? After decades as one of America’s premier historians on the wilderness and environmental movements of the post-World War II years, in the year 2000, Samuel E. Hays wrote his capstone work, synthesizing trends both in the movements and in the related historiography. He made a startling claim, essentially condemning as incomplete all extant works on the organizations of the era, as “they collectively miss the mark and arrive at what are quite ill-informed conclusions” (italics mine). He pointed to the field workers, heretofore ignored, as the keys. Foreman agrees; now, I do too.

¹ Interviews with Clif Merritt and Stewart Brandborg, notes in my possession.
² From “Clif Merritt: he leads from behind,” in High Country News, 1 August 1975, p. 16.
Of the recent social historians who focus on workers’ roles in the human story, I have been particularly influenced by David E. Stuart and his demonstration in his classic *Anasazi America* (2000) of how thoroughly skewed the Great Man assumption can make a story. Stuart needed to ignore the easy evidence supplied by the elite’s centers, and ignore the academically popular conclusions based on that evidence; he needed to dig through the masses and messes left by the field workers, in order to enlighten our understanding of the Anasazi great house era. Hays suggests that we need to do the same with the wilderness movement if the academy has any hope of generating a working comprehension of what happened during those incredible decades of recent American history--by digging through the masses and messes of documents left by the scores of field workers and local volunteers. Thus my second issue has been to find and mine the primary documents and be willing to draw conclusions sometimes contradicting those of established historians.

My third issue remains a mystery. In December 1978, the new Executive Director of TWS terminated the field services as they existed, and instructed Merritt to close the Denver field office immediately. Merritt took the great majority of his records to the Arthur Carhart Conservation Library in Denver, which the Wilderness Society had established as its official repository some years earlier. Merritt took alarm in the mid 1980s when he could not access his records; he did not understand that financial troubles had closed the archive. In January 2005, with generous A. B. Hammond Fund support from the University of Montana, I visited the new home for the archives of the conservation movement, reestablished in 1995 at the Denver Public Library. During my week there conservation conservators for the Wilderness Society papers assured me that nothing had been lost.
Yet, in spite of several hopeful leads in the finding guides and many forays into the stacks, we could not locate any files from the Denver office between 1966 and 1979. We found scattered documents from the Denver office, but only in files from the central office. Two decades after Merritt’s “false alarm,” we find ourselves asking again: Where did Merritt’s papers go? And how can any historian recognize the importance of TWS field activities if even a determined seeker cannot find the related documents?

While that mystery has not been resolved, I did find other rich fonts of primary sources, scattered widely as Hays predicted. I found much correspondence with and about Merritt among the papers of several of his associates from his TWS years, archived at libraries in Denver, Missoula and Bozeman, Montana, as well as in private collections. Also, phenomenal numbers of newsletters by local and regional organizations have extolled his efforts, promoted his agenda, and published his articles and editorials. Many of these have become available on the internet over the past couple years--a google search on “Clif Merritt” returns many times more hits than does a search in all academic sources combined.

Meanwhile, beginning with my first visit to Merritt’s home in Hamilton, Montana, I knew that documents from American Wildlands and his manuscripts cluttered his office. By the time his daughter, Sherry Essig, had finished organizing the records in his garage, in mid-2005, she had filled and labeled nearly thirty apple-boxes with countless correspondences, memos, reports, government and scientific documents, and hundreds of slides and photos, dating from yesterday back to the mid-1940s (with some significant gaps).

Taken all together, my primary sources heavily outweigh my secondary sources, whether concerning the general methods of grassroots successes, or Merritt’s
contributions to them. This profundity of primary materials will grease the path as I slide Merritt out of the shadows and into the light of history.

I began this project and immediately encountered dozens of hours of oral history, then a plethora of primary materials—which inevitably supported the oral histories. Later, as I engaged related secondary sources, I encountered disparities between the official accounts and those I had constructed based on archival evidence and Merritt’s papers. Upon reading Hays, I understood better the underlying difficulties of my task and also the rich opportunity that collaborating with Merritt presented.

Acknowledgments

First and foremost I must express my most sincere gratitude to Clifton Reeve Merritt for his assistance with this project. His old friend Loren Kreck of Kalispell once wrote that you “must become personally acquainted with Clif so as to realize some of the goodness involved in the human potential.” I agree, and feel honored that Merritt welcomed me into his life these past two years, and shared with me his experiences in the wilderness preservation movement of the last half of the twentieth century. Thank you Clif, first for the preservation work that subsumed your life, and then for teaching me what it was really about.

Also, many people who worked with Merritt responded to my inquiries with candid enthusiasm; they contributed great insight and encouragement to guide my investigations and my writing. I offer my sincere appreciation and thanks to (in alphabetical order): Florence and Ken Baldwin (whom Doris Milner calls the “godparents of Montana wilderness”), Stewart Brandborg (and his daughter-in-law Becky), Dale Burk, Dick Carter, John and Lance Craighead, Rupert Cutler, Brock Evans, Dave Foreman, Cecil
Garland (and his daughter Teresa), Jerry Mallett, Doris Milner, Sally Ranney, Paul Richards, Teddy Roe, Doug Scott, Linda Wilson, and Ed Zahniser. I also need to thank in a general tribute the scores of conservation-minded individuals who contribute not only to the success of wilderness preservation in America, but also to the immense and diverse body of information illuminating not just their efforts, but the causes behind their actions.

Jay Turner gets my thanks for emailing me a copy of his dissertation, it provided a thorough outline of general TWS activity throughout Merritt’s years. I must give special thanks to Sherry Essig, who cleaned and organized Merritt’s files, making them easier for me to work with. At more formal archives, my searches in the huge TWS collection at the Denver Public Library often felt like looking for the proverbial needles in a haystack; Colleen Nunn and Claudia Jensen and the crew in the stacks provided invaluable patience and persistence. In Missoula, at the Mansfield Library of the University of Montana, Donna McCrea deserves recognition for her effort to expand the local conservation holdings, and my thanks for providing me access to recent acquisitions.

Faculty and staff in the History Department have provided regular and essential assistance, advice and encouragement. In the office, Diane Rapp helped me scan photos and documents into computer files, and gave her office over to me to scan more. Most especially, I must express my deep gratitude and thanks to Dan Flores, the finest writing coach I ever worked with (no one can blame him for my continued tendency to split the occasional infinitive), who is also my committee chair and advisor. His guidance enabled me to sort through the “snake pit” of materials I long wallowed in and to focus them into a workable thesis, of which I am proud.

Thanks and a tip of the hat to you all.
CHAPTER ONE

THE SCAPEGOAT WILDERNESS, PRIZE OF DILIGENCE AND VISION

Introduction

In one of Gary Larson’s comic views of scientists at work in “The Far Side,” we see on the chalkboard a trail of abstract equations. A madcap mathematician in white lab coat exclaims “then a miracle occurs!” to justify his conclusion. This humorous commentary struck me as a particularly vivid analogy as I examined the literature on America’s first “citizens’ wilderness” designation--Montana’s Scapegoat Wilderness.¹

This chapter will present a brief overview of the Scapegoat story, and point out where historians have essentially agreed that a miracle must have occurred. Then it will argue that responsibility belongs not with a miracle, but with effective human interaction and extraordinarily close cooperation among a myriad of diverse people--led by a relatively unsung Montana native turned national representative of the Wilderness Society named Clifton Reeve Merritt. Scapegoat is the initial example of how the Wilderness Society subtly yet significantly influenced grassroots organizations beginning the moment it instituted its field program under Clif Merritt in 1964, and further exemplifies how field workers, like Merritt, made fundamentally essential contributions to wilderness legislation, particularly by establishing boundaries and their rationale, even before the bills reached the halls and lobbyists of Congress.

¹ “Citizens’ wilderness” is my phrase; other authors have used “de facto” rather than “citizens.” Dennis Roth’s The Wilderness Movement... chapter 2 is entitled “The Lincoln-Scapegoat: The First De Facto Bill.” In The Enduring Wilderness, Scott defined a “de facto Wilderness” as any region that had never been administratively protected as a “primitive area.” (p. 67) Both assume a setting in the Wilderness Act era for use of this well known phrase. Use of “de facto” somehow obfuscates the role of democracy in this preservation process.
DEFINITION OF WILDERNESS Sec. 2.(c) A wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his own works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized...

With one proverbial stroke of President Lyndon Johnson’s pen, the Wilderness Act of 1964 established formal legal protection for nearly ten million acres of American roadless lands, in a new National Wilderness Preservation System. House Interior Committee Chairman Wayne Aspinall of Colorado had insisted that the first paragraph, Section 2.(a), inserted prior even to the definition of wilderness, include the requirement that each addition to the system after 1964 would require its own act of Congress. Many people at the time interpreted that first clause of the Act, deemed “affirmative action,” as closure for the wilderness system. They saw only that it abolished “traditional” dependence on bureaucrats and administrative procedures. A few, however, reacted to the mandate by reaching out to the opportunity to insert democracy into the governance of American public lands.

The indomitable Dr. Howard Zahniser, executive director of the Wilderness Society (TWS) and author of the Wilderness Act, led the few. He recognized Congress could be swayed by organized citizen groups. Zahniser envisioned the Wilderness Society finding such groups, opening communications between them, and focusing their energies into effective citizen lobbying efforts. Affirmative action, he realized, did not close the wilderness system, it simply required that grassroots efforts drive new wilderness additions. He also realized that the Wilderness Society, as structured and staffed in the early 1960s, would be incapable of addressing this new challenge to

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wilderness preservation.\(^3\)

In late 1962, proofreading the Wilderness Society budget report for his governing council, Zahniser inserted a handwritten proposal.\(^4\) With the Wilderness Act nearly a reality, and the "affirmative action" clause inevitable, Dr. Zahniser decided that the Wilderness Society needed a "Field Programs Director," with a part-time secretary.\(^5\) He knew that America needed the Wilderness Society to field a national representative. While government officials may respond to citizen concern, only a professional could dependably focus and organize diverse citizen energies. Only a professional could guide the citizens through the maze of congressional hearings and committees, always prepared with the details needed for drafting wilderness legislation.

By January 1964, Dr. Zahniser had identified the man to fill the new position; he held no application process. Zahniser traveled to Bozeman, Montana, for the annual meeting of the Montana Wilderness Association. That night, Clif Merritt gave a slide presentation demonstrating visually, the legal meaning of "wilderness qualities." After he finished, Zahniser invited him into a back room for a moment of private discussion. They gazed out the windows a moment and admired the picturesque snowstorm swirling through the sublime Gallatin range.

Dr. Zahniser turned casually and asked "Would you consider turning your avocation into your vocation?" Clif Merritt, aged 44 years, had fantasized about how

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\(^{1}\) The job description Howard Zahniser wrote in 1962 for the new position of Field Programs Director involved duties not included in prior organization charts, it dwelled on contacting, organizing, and educating groups and members, and specified a new "permanent Western field office." (See next note.) I can draw no other conclusions. Howard Zahniser's biographer Mark Harvey and son Ed Zahniser have not seen these two claims documented anywhere. Ed Zahniser went on to say, however, he believes they are both generally true (in an email to me, 16 November 2005).

\(^{4}\) The Wilderness Society papers, Denver Public Library, Western History and Genealogy Department. CONS 130, Box 3:500, Folder "TWS: Members: Howard Zahniser: Official Memos describing organization, 1962." Copy in my possession.

\(^{5}\) As wise an administrator as wilderness advocate, Zahniser recognized that an active field worker would require secretarial support, so included it even in his initial budget proposal.
much he could accomplish if he could work at preservation full-time, rather than squeezing it into weekends. The then impending Wilderness Act suggested a need for leadership through grassroots interaction. Merritt’s twenty year career with the State of Montana, and his conservation activism throughout the 1950s had both long found him working in diverse mountain settings, working with diverse people through their interaction with their environments. He liked that kind of work, and he said so. Dr. Zahniser asked how much time he needed to assume the position. Merritt replied with a grin, “Well, I should give two weeks notice at work. That would only be fair.”

Unbeknownst to the world, Howard Zahniser had passed the torch of wilderness advocacy to an equally indomitable force. Both men foresaw a dynamic struggle ahead, a battle centered not in the bureaucratic centers of the East, but in diverse local citizen-arenas across the country. With the Wilderness Act, the intermountain West, home of the largest tracts of federally-held roadless lands, would become the new conservation battleground.

By late 1963, however, Zahniser’s health had turned for the worse. Already stretched beyond human limits advocating and defending his Wilderness Act, Zahniser nonetheless detoured into rural Montana in a snowstorm. He wanted a unique man— one familiar both with wild lands and the laws governing them, a man able to adapt to the demands of a decentralized effort, a man already familiar with finessing a fickle Western

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6 Interview with Merritt, notes in author’s possession. While he didn’t “bat an eye” over the decision, his wife did, though she supported his efforts.

7 Interview with Clif Merritt, notes in author’s possession. Neither Dr. Mark Harvey, Zahniser’s biographer, nor Merritt’s eldest daughter Sherry Essig, nor I have been able to uncover any initial, official agreement or contract between Merritt and the Wilderness Society. Stewart Brandborg, Zahniser’s assistant at the time, suggests none exists. Essig does not find that unusual, as “dad always lived on a handshake.” Dr. Harvey attested via email to me of a printed source, currently in a private collection and unavailable, placing Zahniser at that meeting of the Montana Wilderness Association in Bozeman. The rise of Merritt’s name in LBCPA papers in January 1964, especially on the cc line— ubiquitous in folder 1-5, absent in prior years— suggest he had taken a sudden leap in responsibility and authority among conservationists.

population, while respectful of diverse, often-fragile egos in potential local leaders. He knew he needed, as environmental historian Samuel Hays later put it, a man experienced with "not only the complex of state agencies and the politics in which they were involved but also the intricate relationships between state and federal management agencies." With enthusiastic support from his assistant Stewart M. Brandborg, Zahniser selected Merritt to be the leader for new kind of age, and went personally to recruit his heir. Dr. Zahniser prepared the Wilderness Society for the new era with a handshake on a 'dark and stormy night' high in the Montana Rockies.

Their discussions that evening had included a plan. Merritt would open a Wilderness Society office somewhere in the West, the place of his own choosing. He would take two Montana battles for his first priorities. This would enable him to lay foundations for Society work prior to leaving for Washington D.C. in mid-1964. Dr. Zahniser’s death early in 1964 threw the Wilderness Society into momentary disarray. Merritt had to spend two full years in Washington helping the new Executive Director Stewart Brandborg (Montana forester Guy M. Brandborg’s son) settle the dust and reorient the Wilderness Society to accommodate the Wilderness Act. Meanwhile, Merritt did not ignore either of his Montana field assignments.

One battle had arisen along the border with Idaho in southwestern Montana. The Forest Service withdrew protected status from a huge swath of the Selway-Bitterroot Primitive Area in the process of reclassifying it as Wilderness. Merritt teamed-up with old friend Guy “Brandy” Brandborg to reestablish protection for the so-called Magruder

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10 Interview with Brandborg, 26 October 2005. Notes in author’s possession.
11 Turner argues that the transition from Zahniser to Brandborg represented a major transition point in TWS history, as it accompanied passage of the Wilderness Act of 1964. And, I cannot deny the influence of Charles M. Schultz allusions here.
12 Interviews with Merritt and Brandborg, notes in author’s possession. Verification of the date of opening for the Western office in Denver in 1966 provided by TWS papers, and Jay Morton Turner.
Corridor. They chose Doris Milner of Hamilton as local leader for that battle. She won there (afterward heaping huge praise on Clif Merritt's help) and has followed with four decades of strong and effective conservation leadership in Montana. But she is a different story.

The other issue on the top of Merritt’s new national to-do list lay in the Lincoln Back Country, deep in the Rocky Mountains astride the Continental Divide, in north-central Montana. (See LBCPA brochure, figure 1.) Cecil Garland, “without whom we would have no Scapegoat,” and the Lincoln Back Country Protective Association (LBCPA) had by 1963 already engaged the Forest Service in a fierce battle over development plans in their local roadless area. That battle makes up the rest of this story. However, first, I must give a background to the lands under consideration, Montana’s northern Continental Divide.

\[1^{1}\] Discussions with Clif Merritt, notes in author’s possession. Every time he even mentioned the Scapegoat, Merritt emphasized Garland as the unequivocal center of the effort.
Notice the cooperative effort: on a brochure for the LBCPA, published by the Montana Wilderness Association, the Montana Fish & Game Department provided photographs. The Wilderness Society "silently" paid for printing, courtesy of Clif Merritt and Stewart Brandborg.

Go west, young man!

Travel across the continental United States; once you cross the Mississippi River, all roads tend uphill toward what we now call the Continental Divide. Emulate the most famed explorers of early America, Lewis and Clark, and you’ll eventually be traveling west across the endless rolling hills, and through the ceaseless wind of central Montana when you begin to feel the presence of “it.” Whether on the Missouri River, or close on U. S. Highway 2 or 12 or even Interstate 90, that strange feeling only intensifies over the miles, when finally, dead ahead or off to the right you may catch a glimpse, or a whisper of a view, of the towering snow covered peaks of Montana’s Rocky Mountains.
in the far distance. Or were those just clouds on the horizon?

I have never been able to describe “it” satisfactorily. In his journal, Meriwether Lewis bemoaned his feelings of inadequacy brought on by his inability to describe properly the sublimity of the Great Falls of the Missouri River.\(^\text{14}\) I wonder if that feeling of inadequacy had been building up through the prior week—ever since his first glimpse of “it.” Huge beyond experience, intimidating beyond description, inviting beyond reason or sanity, Montana’s northern Rocky Mountain Front reigns as one of America’s preeminently sublime ecosystems. Yet, while Lewis and Clark REALLY wanted to travel west, they chose not to travel west through “it.”\(^\text{15}\)

The wave of Americans that poured west over the next 120 years, to civilize the “open lands” Lewis and Clark described, chose to follow their lead, and avoided “it.” Trappers and settlers alike pretty much avoided the northern mountains of Montana’s Continental Divide until very late in the nineteenth century, whether because of the ruggedness of the mountains, or the often ferocious resistance offered by the Blackfeet Indians, whom American forces had backed up against that mountain front.\(^\text{16}\) As Montana historian K. Ross Toole so eloquently noted, "High, wide, handsome, and remote, this area resisted penetration longer, perhaps, than any other."\(^\text{17}\) (See relief map of Montana, figure 2.)

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\(^{15}\) Of course their working orders required finding the Missouri River head waters, yet even on the return trip they sent scouts only up the Sun and Marias Rivers, and not all the way, and not over the divide. Thus, they never found the South and Middle Forks of the Flathead River drainage, nor set foot in what is now Montana’s Continental Divide Wilderness Complex.

\(^{16}\) Washington Irving, *The Adventures of Captain Bonneville.* Includes many such opinions by the trappers of the 1830s.

Only in 1889 did John F. Stevens discover the Marias Pass for official-America, and realize it provided the easiest route through Montana’s Rocky Mountains, just about 50 miles south of the Canadian border as the eagle flies. The Great Northern knocked a railroad through by 1895. After discovering that the area held few if any mineral reserves, the railroad and others lobbied hard to establish a vacation destination on that new railroad line. They had, after all, found more than a few immaculately sublime vistas while building and scouting.

In 1910 the U.S. Government established Glacier National Park, in part to protect all the mountains north of the Marias Pass road and south of the Canadian border from
unfettered commercial invasion, and in particular from human habitation. The park service, however, did allow some development. On July 15, 1933, they opened and dedicated “Going to the Sun Road,” a scenic highway through the park that crosses the Divide at Logan’s Pass, about 30 miles northeast of Marias Pass. While providing America with a sublime outdoors recreation destination, those roads did not open up Montana’s northern mountains to much human settlement.

From Marias Pass in 1935, an eagle needed to fly nearly a hundred and twenty miles south and east to find another functional road across the Rocky Mountain Divide—the “old” railroad pass on Mullan’s Road, west of Helena, Montana. Along the way, that eagle would view “one of the most completely preserved mountain ecosystems in the world, the kind of wilderness most people can only imagine: rugged peaks, alpine lakes, cascading waterfalls, grassy meadows embellished with shimmering streams, a towering coniferous forest, and big river valleys.” For nearly 22 miles of flight along the Divide, the eagle would follow a huge escarpment known as “The Chinese Wall” that extends south to terminate in Scapegoat Mountain, within a dozen miles of the old mining town Lincoln, Montana. That wall maintains an average height of nearly 1000 feet as it careens along, reaching up to 9,000 feet in elevation. Imagination might get you a virtual visual notion, but the feeling of standing beneath a 1000 foot tall vertical wall of sheer rock cannot be duplicated anywhere except under a 1000 foot tall wall of rock.

The area provides watersheds for both eastern and western Montana, and habitat for the last substantial populations of native American “wilderness wildlife.” In spite of the fact that Lewis and Clark never found the South and Middle Forks of the Flathead River (thus helped keep those drainages out of the public eye), they did provide what Merritt now considers the quintessential account of the wildlife “natural” to the area--for

baseline he prefers the documented 1805 to a theoretical 1492. Even today we can find there the critters that noticed Lewis and Clark on their Missouri river trek, though in sometimes decimated populations: the grizzly bear and gray wolf, elk, whitetail and mule deer, Canadian Lynx, bobcat, bighorn sheep, mountain goat, black bear, wolverine, and cougar. Along the pristine waters so clear that the trout appear to be “gliding about as if in the air,”19 beaver, river otters, snowshoe hares and marten ply their trades, as the indigenous black-spotted cutthroat trout and grayling continue to buck trends pushing their extinction. Meanwhile, bald and golden eagles, falcons, hawks, owls, grouse and woodpeckers soar the clearest of Montana’s big skies, among its northern and central Rocky Mountains.20

By the mid-1930s, Wilderness preservation pioneer and founder of the Wilderness society, Bob Marshall had wandered the area extensively, and publicly extolled its virtue as one of America’s greatest treasures. In 1941, three years after Marshall died of heart failure at age 39, the US Forest Service set aside the three contiguous “South Fork [Flathead], Pentagon, and Sun River Primitive Areas” west of the Continental Divide.21 Many Montana locals--especially from nearby Helena and Kalispell--immediately began calling it “the Bob Marshall Wilderness” or just “the Bob.”22 The Forest Service adopted the popular moniker in 1964, with the Wilderness Act. Yet, that new Forest Service Primitive Area only embraced the center of the sublime roadless lands overflown by our southbound eagle.

The Continental Divide between Marias Pass and Helena remained without a serviceable road crossing it until the late 1950s, when the state of Montana paved a road

19 Ibid., Irving, p. 53. About streams further south, yet equally pristine.
20 Ibid., FS website.
21 Ibid.
22 Interview with Clif Merritt, notes in author’s possession.
over Rogers Pass about forty miles north of the Helena pass, to provide a direct link between Great Falls and Missoula. Now called Mt. 200, that road connected Lincoln, a sleepy remnant of a mining town, not only to those Montana metropolitan centers, but also to the expanding American vacation economy. Still, most of the corridor had remained roadless; "its protection was built in by inaccessibility, lack of significant timber, and other commodity resources."\(^3\)

Beginning in the mid 1950s, a few years before completion of the Lincoln road, Clifton Reeve Merritt and his friends and associates began efforts to extend protection to the pristine lands surrounding "the Bob." Begun with the "Battle of Bunker Creek" in 1954, the effort to extend the Bob’s boundaries north to Glacier Park culminated in 1978 with designation of the Great Bear Wilderness. By 1962, Merritt and friends had prompted the Forest Service to protect about 15,000 acres on the western border of the Bob, in the Swan Mountain Range, as "Jewel Basin Hiking Area ... a pristine land of snow-painted peaks and jewel-like lakes,"\(^4\) And, as this chapter will go on to describe, the Scapegoat Wilderness extended the Bob’s boundary to the south in 1972.

Today, the contiguous roadless areas of the Bob Marshall (1,009,356 acres), Scapegoat (240,500 acres), and Great Bear (286,700 acres) Wildernesses comprise what is known as the "Bob Marshall Complex," the last bastion of many endangered species in the continental United States. But now, in acquainting you with the lay of the land near Lincoln, I have gotten far ahead of my story. Thus, I return directly to the drama in Lincoln, Montana, just after 1960.

\(^4\) Clifton Merritt, title of his article about Jewel Basin, in MWA newsletter.
Cecil Garland and the Lincoln Back Country: Summary of Traditional Version

The Secretary of Agriculture is authorized and directed to develop and administer the renewable surface resources of the national forests for multiple use and sustained yield of the several products and services obtained therefrom. ... The establishment and maintenance of areas of wilderness are consistent with the purposes and provisions of this Act.25 (1960)

By 1962, after years supervising campground construction and maintenance for the FS, Cecil Garland had established himself in remote Lincoln, Montana. Soon after the paved road reached Lincoln in the late 1950s, his family owned and operated a general store and small-engine repair shop. He took pride in his new home and lifestyle, and loved horses and mountains. Earlier in life, he had watched mismanagement and abuse destroy wildlife habitat throughout the Smoky Mountains of North Carolina and Tennessee, home of his youth. He determined not to let that happen in his adopted home in the rural Rocky Mountains of central Montana, where he and his family plied their skills to make a living.

Garland first learned that his favorite hunting and hiking area just north of his Lincoln home faced grave danger through a traditional Montana communication method—the “grapevine.” Friends who had been out in the woods noticed signs of a road survey, and talked about it. Garland then quickly learned, again through the mountain grapevine, that the US Forest Service had decided not only to build a road through the roadless and pristine north half of the Lincoln Ranger District of the Helena National Forest, but to develop and promote high-intensity recreational opportunities along that road.

In response to the "hidden" Forest Service secret, found only by a wandering winter outdoorsman, Garland and his friends organized to protect their local resource.

25 Multiple Use - Sustained Yield Act, Public Law 86-517, section 2. Emphasis mine, and possibly industry's.
They did not want to lose their "Poor Man's Wilderness" to the planned industrial intrusion, and fought the Regional Foresters' development decisions. They formed the Lincoln Back Country Protective Association and became political. To be more precise, Garland and friends re-formed the LBCPA. It had originally formed in 1957, with three members, as a prescient response to a policy shift toward “multiple use” by the Forest Service. They had letterhead printed, and actively recruited around Lincoln. That incarnation dwindled and fell into inactivity, as that predicted threat did not arise as quickly as anticipated. It came later, however, and faced with a very real plan to impose on their lifestyle in 1963, they quickly dug out the old letterhead, reorganized, and reactivated.²⁷

LBCPA documents dated 12 February 1963 stated clearly its number one purpose: To save the Lincoln Back Country because “It is a natural habitat of big game, ... and contains some of the world’s best trout streams.”²⁸ While many in the Wilderness Society, including Bob Marshall, had emphasized sublimity, solitude, and soul as the value of wilderness, the LBCPA emphasized wildlife as their primary motivator. Yet, they agreed on the ultimate goal; the LBCPA's policy statement resolved to be “firm advocates of wilderness legislation” related to drainages of the North Fork of the Blackfoot River.²⁹

Only a month later, on 27 March 1963, did the USFS publicly unveil its long-range development plan for North Half Lincoln Ranger District at a Lion’s Club luncheon

²⁶ Ibid. Roth, FS 391, p. 25. So called because of easy access to day hikers and campers, without outfitter support.
²⁷ LBCPA papers, folder 1-1.
²⁸ Ibid. Page 1 of LBCPA organization paper.
²⁹ Ibid., page 2.
in Lincoln. Garland and others felt deceived; in the past the local foresters had always communicated openly about plans before implementing them, suddenly they did not even offer an invitation.

Garland worried most about the intensity and scale of the proposed logging and recreational developments. The prized animals of the area, such as grizzly bears, elk, bighorn sheep, mountain goats and west-slope cutthroat trout, had well demonstrated their intolerance to automobiles and their too often disrespectful drivers. The lakes there are shallow, the stream banks fragile. Car-camping areas in terrain similar to the Lincoln backcountry but nearer to established roads, had shown how quickly intensive human-use degraded the fruitful but delicate landscape. Garland had constructed many campgrounds in that area when working for the FS, he knew firsthand the adverse ecologic impacts of intensive use at USFS recreational and camping sites. Meanwhile, ever since the early 1930s founders of the Wilderness Society had been espousing the dangers of roads and the automobile-culture to American wildlands in general. Preventing roads had already provided a theme nearly as unifying for postwar preservationists, as fire had provided for conservationists early in the century.

Nearly the “entire adult population of Lincoln” turned out for a hastily-prepared Forest Service presentation on 19 April 1963 in Lincoln’s log community center. The public, left uninvited to the Lion’s Club luncheon, had demanded the forester publicly present the details of the FS plan to develop the north half of the Lincoln forest district:

11 Ibid., interviews with Garland and Merritt. Also in former Montana Representative Pat Williams’ article “Scapegoat Turns 30!” in the Fall 2002 MWA publication Wild Montana, p. 6.
he assented. LBCPA membership swelled as an immediate aftermath of that lively meeting.\textsuperscript{33} Nearly everyone had come to like the new paved-highway through their town, but a majority opposed using it to create the new high-density, boom-destination proposed by the Forest Service. As environmental historian Samuel Hays and wilderness advocate Dave Foreman suggest, the back country fight arose and gained momentum as a reaction by the people to circumstances of the day. Yet, Hays suggests the citizen movement to protect un-designated wilderness-quality land began in Montana in the late 1960s;\textsuperscript{34} we see here that he missed late by a handful of years.

The Forest Service, as had been tradition, treated the gathering as a venue to present its plan, not discuss it. In those days, decisions on plots of Forest Service land consisting of 100,000 acres or fewer rested almost entirely with a Regional Forester. Because of the overwhelming local opposition to its plans, the Regional office acceded to schedule an inspection tour of the area for summer of 1963. Its report, issued only in October, reiterated support for development and logging, as set forth in the original long-range plan. With administrative remedy to his concerns denied, Garland took the advice of some of his supporters and turned to federal Congressional delegates for legislative aid. Senators Lee Metcalf and Mike Mansfield began work by November 1963 to encourage establishment of “the Lincoln Back Country” (LBC), a Primitive Lands category on Forest Service lands.

In spite of citizen and legislative pressure, the Forest Service insisted on development. Their planned roads would not only provide recreational opportunity, the stated goal of the development plan, but would bring motorized access to the southern boundaries of the Bob Marshall Primitive Area--a commercially-friendly primary effect.

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., Behan, p. 25, 28.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., Hays, p. 38.
No one could even imagine a more awesome Scenic Highway than one across from the Chinese Wall! (See figure 3.) However, District One Regional Forester Neal Rahm, as his predecessor Boyd Rasmussen, had “grossly underestimated the quality of his opposition.”

Figure 3: From LBCPA brochure.

Looking across the wild and beautiful headwater drainages of the North Fork of the Blackfoot River from Olsen Peak to Scapegoat Mountain — the very heart of the grizzly country. Fanning out from the high scalloped walls of Scapegoat flow the clear waters of three major rivers.

Scapegoat Mountain forms the southern terminus of the long escarpment called the Chinese Wall. Notice the emphases of the caption: sublime beauty, wilderness wildlife, AND water quality. It captures a diversity of reasons to support wilderness designation.

The LBCPA had gained widespread support locally, literally packing the house for its meetings. (See figure 4.) It had also attracted the support of many Montana conservation groups. Those groups were led by a cast a characters with impressive

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credentials, including several faculty at MSU-Missoula. These conservation workers included: Dr. George F. Weisel, Professor of Zoology; Dr. John J. Craighead, Research Professor of Wildlife Ecology; Dr. Arnold J. Silverman, Professor of Geology; Dr. James Lowe, Associate Professor of Forestry and Zoology, Dr. W. Leslie Pengelly and Dr. John T. Harris in Wildlife and Wildlife Management; Dr. R. A. Solberg; Dr. James Morrison at ECE Billings; and the godfather of modern conservation in Montana, Guy Brandborg. Dr. Clarence C. Gordon supported the LBCPA through his presidency at the Western Montana Scientists Committee for Public Information. By December 1963, after examining reports on studies by his ace field researcher Bob Cooney, the State of Montana Fish and Game Department’s director Frank Dunkle offered full support for LBC wilderness protection.

Figure 4: Photo by Clifton Reeve Merritt

Cecil Garland addresses an LBCPA meeting in March 1964.

Montana did not reorganize and name its Missoula campus the University of Montana until after 1963, when the Bozeman campus became MSU.

Ibid., LBCPA papers. Folder 1-8 and 1-5 contain statements of support for LBCPA by each of these. Statements by “Doctors” of unknown affiliation include Dr. D.D. Layne, Missoula and Dr. D.W. Downey, Kalispell. Dr. Lauren Kreck, a dentist from Columbia Falls, provided invaluable help in establishing the Great Bear Wilderness, but that is a different story. Bob Cooney had shared the honor of being the first Montanan to receive the prestigious American Motors Conservation Award in 1959, along with Guy Brandborg.
Samuel Hays has noted that most state agencies and organizations of the era did not have the resources to hire the experts needed to challenge Forest Service technical authority. The Service had become accustomed to its autonomy; it had faced little organized expertise, in an adversarial setting, since before the war. Yet, the Montana conservationists formed a team with greater scientific expertise than even the FS could afford to field. They not only carried professional eminence, but also possessed deep and loving firsthand knowledge of the lands under question. Their interactions with the regional FS administration presented them a psychological dilemma. In their roles as professionals, they were sought out as respected consultants and got paid to study and report on various aspects of wildlife and wild lands. In their roles as local conservationists, however, their reports were being dismissed as trivial and argumentative by Forest Service administrators. Two consecutive Regional Rangers had added professional insult to their proposed wildland “injury”.

During this era, as exemplified by newspaper clippings about this battle in Montana, the strange phenomena we now know as "spinning" news rose to new heights. As issues became complex, the need for technical expertise increased through all levels of society in the 1950s and 1960s, including the biological sciences applicable to the national forests. Yet, complex and technical issues do not lend themselves to simplistic and summary reporting. Thus, with reporters often not even understanding the underlying

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Ibid., Hays, p. 190.


George F. Weisel complained for the Western Montana Fish and Game Association in a letter to Congressman Battin that the foresters “acted arbitrarily in disregarding public opinion.” (LBCPA papers, folder 1-4, letter dated 16 November 1963). Also, in a letter dated 24 October 1963 to S. Brandborg in TWS Washington office, J. J. Craighead complained of FS obstinacy in western Montana. Craighead also, speaking for the United Sportsmen’s Association of Montana, wrote to Congressman Arnold Olson in a more pointed tone. (Behan quoting letter 22 April 63. 29.) In Garland’s Congressional testimony, he claimed that “for the Forest Service Officials it became a loyalty issue of ‘My Bureaucracy--Right or Wrong,’” which had led to their “disregard for the consensus” of people, scientists, and a plethora of constituent groups. (LBCPA papers, folder 1-8.)
science, the media presented results from the environmental sciences as questionable philosophical opinion rather than dependable material circumstance. Given its cooperative agreements with diverse corporations, which in Montana necessarily included inside access to most newspapers, the Forest Service could spread widely the opinion that any results generated outside of its own confines represented "bad science," while assuring the public through a trusted hometown paper that Forest Service policy always represented "good science."

By the early 1960s, resource extraction industries in the Northern Region had already spent nearly a decade spinning environmental news in their attempt to ameliorate psychologically adverse reactions to the dramatically escalated scale, and waste, of their operations. Local conservationists needed to learn the new twisted public relations on the spot, seldom having prepared for a sudden threat. In deciding to oppose a bureaucratic decision, locals generally found themselves at a media disadvantage right from the start. Yet, because the western Montana conservationist base included such a diversity of highly qualified scientists, scholars, journalists, and outdoorsmen, they were among the first to thwart Forest Service manipulation of opinion. Montana conservationists spread environmental education and awareness more effectively throughout their general populace than, Hays suggests, most other local, regional or state groups across the nation were capable of. The Montana experts surprised everyone and outplayed the Forest Service machine at every step.

In spite of this apparent animosity between conservationists and Forest Service administration, Garland and Merritt both insist that the Helena Forest Supervisor Robert

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41 Ibid., Hays, p. 219.
42 Ibid., Robbins.
43 Ibid., Malone and Roeder, and Toole.
44 Ibid., Hays.
Morgan, newly appointed in 1963, became an important ally of the LBCPA. While not abandoning the FS multiple-use philosophy, Morgan recognized its poor fit for the Lincoln back country. FS historian Roth is less equivocal: “A strongly professional organization, such as the Forest Service, is open to internal debate. Without the dissenting voices of Bob Morgan and the the Lincoln District Rangers who served under him, roads would have been built in the Lincoln-Scapegoat long before the Scapegoat Wilderness Act of 1972.” With the traditional control given supervisors in the Forest Service's highly decentralized bureaucracy, Morgan was able to enforce, against regional desires, moratoria that enabled study and postponed construction in the Helena National Forest. By December 1963, Bob Cooney’s report for the Montana Fish and Game Department verified the serious threat of degraded habitat under recreational and logging pressures, and advised supporting wilderness designation for the LBC.

Encouraged by the January 1962 Outdoor Recreation Resource Review Commission Report that emphasized that “once destroyed (primitive areas) can never be restored,” President John Kennedy increased White House support for a Wilderness Act, and made passage inevitable. That law would declare that all Primitive Areas in existence on the day enacted would be granted “Wilderness” designation and protections. Had the USFS given U-1 or U-2 protection to the Lincoln Back Country in 1963, or through most of 1964, they knew that the area would have automatically reverted to wilderness protections almost immediately. The Regional Forester deliberately chose to

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46 Ibid., Roth, 1964-1980, p. 34
47 Ibid., LBCPA papers, folder 1-4: 1963 II.
49 Both Doug Scott in his talk at the University of Montana Wilderness Institute and Steven Schulte in his Wayne Aspinall and the Shaping of the American West, (Boulder, Colorado: University Press of Colorado, 2002.) suggest President Kennedy pressured Representative Aspinall to find a compromise and pass the bill. Representatives Saylor, Anderson and Seiberling and Senators Church and Mansfield deserve especial notice.
force the LBCPA to "do it the hard way. Make them get their own act of Congress if they want it so bad."

The old tradition of foresters as caretakers had been replaced, even in remote Montana, by the postwar imperative for industrial control. The attitude behind that new unfettered imperative in remote Montana would cause the first serious challenge to the Forest Service's national regime.

Lincoln, Montana burst onto the national stage as a direct result of the Wilderness Act of 1964. The Act specified that new wilderness could be established only by Congress. Within three months of its becoming law, Montana Senator Lee Metcalf jumped at the new opportunity. On 6 January 1965, he introduced Senate bill 107 to protect 73,000 acres of Lincoln Back Country as wilderness. He acted quickly and first: the Lincoln Back Country would become the test case for the Wilderness Act's affirmative action opportunity. Within months, Montana's Republican Representative James Battin countered with a 240,500 acre proposal. The Democratic Senators immediately amended their bill, seemingly with no recriminations, to match the Republican Battin's. Thus, they created a unified, bipartisan Montana front, a condition Merritt and the Wilderness Society already recognized as essential even to hope for successful wilderness legislation.

The law to establish the Lincoln Back Country-Scapegoat Wilderness cleared Congress in 1972, seven years after originally introduced. A small area compared to the Wilderness Act's designations, the Scapegoat took nearly as long to become law. Leading the paradigm shift as mandated by the Wilderness Act, the Scapegoat law established a democratic precedent overturning powerfully traditional administrative control of public lands. With the Scapegoat law, Congress protected wildlands as requested by citizens.

50 Clif Merritt quoting in 2004 a discussion with Regional Forester Rahm that occurred in early 1964.
51 Ibid., Scott.
not only without Forest Service administrative approval, but against virulent Forest Service opposition. Having blazed the trail as America’s first citizens’ wilderness, Scapegoat proved itself as significant a legal precedent as its opponents had dreaded. Ensuing grassroots actions brought many further protections; under the affirmative action clause, the wilderness system has increased by nearly one hundred million acres since 1964.

Cecil Garland was quoted as admitting in 1972 that “when we started, I never in my wildest dreams thought we would save it.” Still he persisted all those years, in the face of “official” condemnation and chastisement, through the economic hardships of a local boycott of his store. He persisted with determination, talking to every politician and to anyone who would listen, touring the state with a sublime slide show—and won protection for three times as much pristine wildlife habitat as he had originally proposed with but little hope. His hard work and perseverance certainly paved the way for the bill’s success. Merritt claims to have been inspired by Garland’s tireless efforts.

Yet, Garland paid a high personal toll for dedicating such energy to wilderness preservation, in both business and family relations. Even some of the people who had supported the backcountry for hunting resented having the entire area closed to industrial development; the Garland business suffered a boycott, deadly in a small, rural town. Eventually, his wife, who did not share his evangelical dedication to preserving the Back Country, got tired of waiting for his attention, and divorced him. She stayed in Lincoln when Garland moved to Utah soon after the 1972 climax of his work. He lives there yet, while his youngest daughter was running the family business in Lincoln when I stopped in April 2004.

I have summarized in the above narrative the traditional version of the Scapegoat’s

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Interview with Clif Merritt, notes in author’s possession.
history and implications. The literature agrees that the efforts of Cecil Garland and the LBCPA culminated in a monumental step in conservation—designation of Wilderness no longer through the machinations of government administrators, but by the democratic efforts of concerned citizens. A poor working man had organized with a bunch of others like himself. They couldn’t buy influence within the ingrained Forest Service administrative bureaucracy like corporate timber and resource executives could. Instead they used the democratic system, and found that little people banding together could generate the impetus needed to overcome ingrained bureaucratic opposition to an undeniably righteous cause. Garland’s Scapegoat Wilderness became the first public lands in the Wilderness Act era salvaged by citizen insistence from floundering "in the limbo of roadlessness" to become bound and designated by Congress as a protected Wilderness.

The Miracle.

The literature on this important story, by omission, implies some kind of miracle must have occurred between mid-February and mid-March 1965. Inexplicably, suddenly, and unilaterally, every version of the history reports that Garland drastically changed his organization’s plans—he even changed proverbial horses midstream. He switched political parties, switched Congressional houses, and more than tripled the acreage involved—miraculously, without losing his support or momentum.

No past version of the Scapegoat story has considered why he decided to switch all, nor why it caused so little impact on his support base. In his exhaustive exposé of the

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51 Ibid., Robbins. A major theme throughout the text emphasized that industry pretty much dictated FS policy from the early 1900s through the 1970s.
53 Dennis Roth’s The Wilderness Movement... chapter 2 is entitled “The Lincoln-Scapegoat: The First De Facto Bill.” In The Enduring Wilderness, Scott defined “de facto Wilderness” as regions that had never been administratively protected as “primitive areas.” (p. 67) Both place the word in the Wilderness Act era.
political and rhetorical posturing by the LBCPA and Montana interest groups, Donald Kendall cited a Montana Wildlife Federation meeting in Missoula on 19 January 1965 followed by a “flurry of inter-group communication,” then jumped to Representative Battin suddenly deciding to appease some pressure groups. In his article “The Scapegoat turns 30!” past Montana congressman Pat Williams “suggested that Battin came out of the wind” and just introduced his competing bill. The literature ubiquitously asserts Ranger Rahm’s assumption about Garland, made in a frustrated rant to his peers:

“Why have lost control and leadership (sic) in the sphere of Wilderness philosophy. Why? The Forest Service originated the concept in 1920, and practically, has been standing still since about 1937 ... Why should a sporting goods and hardware dealer in Lincoln, Montana, designate the boundaries for the 240,000-acre Lincoln Back Country addition to the Bob Marshall? .... If lines are to be drawn, we should be drawing them.”

Who drew those boundaries?

That Clif Merritt, as new Director of Field Services for The Wilderness Society, had suddenly become actively involved with the LBC at the time of Garland’s miraculous change of heart, has barely received notice. Only Roth noted, of the histories, that this new Wilderness Society field rep had been raised on a homestead near Lincoln, and had

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56 Ibid. Kendall, p. 27-8.
58 Ibid., Roth, 1964-1980, pg. 32, quoting Rahm at an early 1969 meeting of agency leaders. Doug Scott’s The Enduring Wilderness contains an abbreviated version (pg. 79), as do several other authors.
59 Ibid., See overview of the Scapegoat literature in the Preface. One exception in the 40th anniversary articles can be found in the High Uintas Preservation Council Newsletter of 20 June 2004. Dick Carter’s article “The Wilderness Story” states frankly that one new fellow in particular, Clif Merritt, had teamed with Garland in the battle for the Lincoln-Scapegoat. See <http://www.hupc.org/Archive/newsletters/June%202004/wildstory.htm>.
recreated in the Scapegoat Mountain area since 1926—for 38 years. Having moved his family to Washington, D.C. in mid-1964, Merritt had become officially the big-city outsider, but he hadn’t lost his deep local roots. That Merritt happened to be an old friend of Senator Metcalf has also escaped the histories, even though their friendship helped shape history, however quietly.

**Vision. Essential Guide to Persistence**

The literature implies Cecil Garland just, wham!, changed his mind one night, as if due to revelation. I insist that Clif Merritt—with his intimate knowledge of the Scapegoat Mountain region, its wildlife and ecology—intervened with a rare combination of knowledge and wisdom, with finesse and a little force. Merritt, as an official representative of the Wilderness Society, yet still closely tied to all Montana Wildlife Federation flurries of correspondence, took a fateful trip to Lincoln in early 1965 “to talk with Cecil about the back country effort.”

Merritt recalls that he had to argue with Garland to convince him to change his proposal to the larger, more ecologically sound and economically sustainable boundaries. Garland knew the Lincoln Back Country area, but couldn’t vouch for the entire Scapegoat region. Merritt gave assurance, in terms of fellow hunter, lover and photographer of the land, that he personally knew, and could vouch for the wilderness quality of the entire region. Garland worried about losing support from ranchers who grazed their herds within the new boundaries. Merritt explained that the Wilderness Act guaranteed those ranchers their traditional grazing rights in Wilderness—making renewal no longer subject to

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Ibid., Roth, p. 31, suggests Lincoln had been among Merritt’s favorite camping areas as a child, yet places Merritt’s involvement nearer to 1966. Also, from interviews with Clif Merritt, notes in author’s possession.

Interview with Clif Merritt, notes in author’s possession.
the whim of a Forest Service administrator, so even better for those ranchers. Garland worried about upsetting Senator Metcalf. Merritt assured him that the Senator would understand.

These two men debated, in early 1965, like two well-prepared lawyers. Indeed, Merritt’s plan had been in action for nearly a year by the time they met. Merritt, by then, had already spent decades wandering wildernesses with Montana naturalists like Bob Cooney, Guy Brandborg, the Craighead twins, George Weisel, and Loren Kreck, and and other conservation leaders like Dale Burke, Don Aldrich, Dallas Eklund, and Ken and Florence Baldwin. Their shared love of the land and wildlife had brought them to leadership positions in many Montana conservation groups. Notably, even when not planning excursions, they kept in constant contact with each other. Ideas percolated among them; Merritt depended on them, both to gather and to spread news. Even before joining TWS, Merritt had embraced one of the Society’s primary methods; centralized coordination of otherwise separate local concerns enabled greater unity across a wider community, thus increased the effectiveness of each of the smaller actions.62

As early as 4 April 1964 the Montana Wildlife Federation had met in Missoula—with Clif Merritt still their secretary. They “resolved to request the Forest Service” to engage in joint studies with state and national conservation groups, on the desirability of wilderness designation for the Lincoln Back Country and Scapegoat Mountain region. The May edition of the Montana Wildlife Federation News broadcast their respectful request, and published their proposed boundary.63 It also called for other Montana conservation and outdoorsmen groups to show their support by sending letters and petitions to Forest Service and government officials.

62 Ibid., Hays, p. 246.
63 Ibid., Kendall, p. 27.
Soon after the April MWF meeting, Merritt offered a creative solution to support
his defensive opposition to LBC development.\footnote{Sutter, p. 246, suggested a prime goal of the TWS founders included “positive and creative as well as
defensive” actions.} He wrote to George Weisel suggesting
they actively support new roadside development along State Highway 20 (now Mt. 200,
the shortest and sometimes quickest route over the mountains between Missoula and
Great Falls). With easy-access recreational facilities available on the newly refurbished
highway along the Blackfoot River, Merritt wrote, maybe the FS would back off their
opposition to Lincoln Back Country protection.\footnote{Ibid., LBCPA papers, folder 1-5: Letter from Clifton R. Merritt, Secretary of the Montana Wildlife
Federation.} (Campgrounds on Rt. 20 would return to play, as trump, in the 1968 Congressional hearings.) Merritt, following TWS tradition,
did not oppose all development, just development in certain pristine places. Like most of
the successful leaders of the environmental movements, Merritt did “not reject the
modern world but rather (sought) to enhance the role of nature within it.”\footnote{Ibid., Hays, p. 37.} From
Marshall to Zahniser, Wilderness Society leaders had long acknowledged that preserving
some forests required designating others for harvest. Merritt adapted that pragmatic
approach to campgrounds with the same argument: Place the new developments in
locations that have already been penetrated.

May 23 and 24 of that year found Merritt hiking in the Great Smoky Mountains.
Harvey Broome, one of the Wilderness Society founders and charter members, and his
wife Ann provided local guidance through that Eastern roadless area, which they had been
working to protect.\footnote{Ibid., Hays, p. 37.} Merritt returned the favor in August 1964 by arranging for them to
take a horse-pack trip into the Lincoln Back Country and Scapegoat Mountain area.
They examined and discussed qualities supporting and contradicting legal definitions of
wilderness, and enjoyed the pristine environment as well as the sublime views and fishing. (See figure 5.) That trip also provided the Broomes with some truly unique excitement, and gave Merritt one of surprisingly few wilderness encounters with a grizzly bear. As the troop crested a ridge the griz stood and took notice, then immediately fled across and down a snow field before anyone could get a camera out. (See figures 6 a,b.)

Figure 5: Photo by Clifton Reeve Merritt

One of Merritt's favorite ways to convince people that a wilderness area is worth fighting to protect: take them there! Here, he had arranged for Harvey Broom and his wife Ann to enjoy the sublime scenery of the Scapegoat Mountain region from horseback, in August 1964.
As they crested a pass, the party with the Broomes and Merritt startled a grizzly bear. Merritt points to where the bear ran across the snow field, seemingly off the edge of the mountain.

The grizzly bear that the Broome party chased off the mountain left a fresh paw print in the snow the size of Merritt's broad rim hat.
Simply sharing their favorite wild areas furthered one of the Wilderness Society's primary goals, nationalizing local actions.\textsuperscript{68} Merritt's attachment to the Smokies and the Broomes' attachment to the Scapegoat rose beyond the abstract to become part of their lives; the passions of Eastern and Western conservationists intermingled and fueled each other. To the advantage of Merritt's cause, the Broomes had their own fresh photographs and memories of their excursion into Scapegoat country to share casually as they traveled the East advocating the Appalachians.

Support for protecting the entire Scapegoat area continued to broaden. In December 1964 a report from Bob Cooney to Montana Department of Fish and Game Director Frank Dunkle summarized his studies, which the department had pursued in its cooperative response to the April call for study by the MWF. It concluded that the "Lincoln Back Country-Extension" lands upheld the same high wilderness qualities as the LBC, and thus were just as worthy of protection. Further, Cooney argued, survival of west slope black-spotted cutthroat trout and the grizzly bear alone justified the extension. At the annual meeting in January of 1965, the Montana Wildlife Federation officially updated its advice. Based on the state study and passage of the Wilderness Act of 1964 the prior October, the MWF requested not further Forest Service study, but that the LBC "together with the contiguous Scapegoat Mountain area" be reviewed for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System.\textsuperscript{69}

Thus, Garland knew well, during his meeting with Merritt, that should he switch his support to larger boundaries, he would quickly garner backing from many Montana conservation groups. But Garland had worked long and hard for the LBC. His modest

\textsuperscript{68} Ibid., Sutter, p. 246.
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid., LBCPA papers. Folder 1-10: 28 December 1964, memo from Cooney to Dunkle re "Lincoln Backcountry-Extension;" copy of May 1964 "Montana Wildlife Federation News;" minutes of 23 January 1965 annual meeting by president J.J. Craighead.
request to the forest service had obtained official U.S. Senate recognition; he was as a proud father.

Meanwhile, Merritt had already written to Senator Metcalf that he was “greatly pleased to learn of S.107” because of the rare or endangered species involved. In the letter he specifically cited grizzly bear, bighorn sheep, cougar, American (bald) eagle, pileated woodpecker, black spotted cutthroat trout, and grayling. The letter equated concern for wildlife to concern for their habitat, and then gave an explication of outstanding landmarks surrounding the LBC, including several watersheds and Scapegoat Mountain itself, all of “pristine wilderness quality.” In a congratulatory letter full with allusions to home, Merritt had planted a Scapegoat seed with his old friend the Senator.

Garland did not know about Merritt’s ties to Metcalf, but he had already heard and rejected all of Merritt’s arguments, many times. After much sparring, Garland “poured out his heart” full with fear and loneliness in his devoted preservation efforts, ceaselessly lobbying his neighbors and the Montana public for their support, he often faced outright abusive responses. Merritt offered his understanding, and then brought out his big new stick for his clinching argument. Merritt recalls the climax that evening: “I said ‘Cecil, do you want the Wilderness Society’s support?’ He was quiet a few seconds, so I took it as if he accepted. I started showing him where the boundaries should go, and he took the pen.”

LBCPA papers, folder 1-7: Bills II. Letter on TWS letterhead from Merritt to Metcalf, dated 14 January 1965. Folder 1-7 contains legal documents and testimony from various related hearings and bills with one exception, the very last document in the folder is this letter from Merritt. The list of wildlife in this letter exemplifies Merritt’s primary dedication to wilderness as habitat. TWS employee Doug Scott noted that many, if not all of Merritt’s writings from the time included extensive listings of impacted wildlife. (Discussions with Doug Scott, Gallagher Business Building, UM-Missoula, 8 February 2005, notes in my possession.)

Ibid.

Interview with Clif Merritt, notes in author’s possession, in several discussions. Related in more detail in his autobiographical manuscript, in progress.
Garland concurred: Merritt had been the first to suggest that the back country proposal, originally limited to Lincoln Ranger District land, really needed to include parts of the Lolo and Lewis and Clark forests and extend up to the southern edge of the Bob Marshall Wilderness. Merritt, nearly a year after suggesting the idea, newly armed with the promise of the Wilderness Society’s support, finally convinced Garland to accept the change--face to face, one on one. In the back room of the little Lincoln shop in early March of 1965, they fed the wood stove and hammered out the boundary for a new proposal, stringing it from peak to peak, arguing the pros and cons of including various draws, meadows, and wetlands.

Is it coincidental that Garland's new boundaries matched nearly identically those advocated in the May 1964 edition of the *Montana Wildlife Federation News*? Merritt provides a very concrete connection between the two sources. Merritt continued to coordinate Montana's local campaigns, as he had when secretary of the MWF, in spite of his move to Washington, D.C. When it hired Merritt, the Wilderness Society obtained his integral connections to one of the strongest state wilderness networks in the country. The Society hopes of access to and coordination of local projects across the country, received an immediate boost.

Merritt took a copy of the new map and slipped back to Washington. The “outsider” disappeared, his new role unrecognized. He left Garland to manage the frontline of battle for a new ecologically superior alternative to the LBC. Not surprisingly, local support flocked to Garland from many corners--academics, ranchers, sportsmen, and

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74 Merritt’s autobiography chapter “Scapegoat” includes a delightful blow by blow discussion of setting the boundary with Garland. Vividly combining science with passion and experience, his stories read more like a biography of the lands he worked with, than an autobiography.
the State of Montana, all with political lubrication from beyond the sunrise.\textsuperscript{35}

Montana’s conservation groups collectively sighed in relief; their respected Lincoln leader had finally come around. (See figure 7.)

\begin{figure}[h]
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\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure7.jpg}
\caption{Photo by Bob Cooney, April 1965}
\end{figure}

Again notice the diverse groups represented. Preservation fighter Garland, Forest Supervisor Morgan, with photographer Bob Cooney of the Montana State Fish and Game Department riding along, published by the Montana Wildlife Federation soon after Garland changed his proposal to include Scapegoat Mountain and vicinity. From \textit{Montana Wildlife Federation News}, April 1965.

\textsuperscript{35}Ibid., Garland. Also as general summary of breadth of voices from diverse grassroots organizations represented in the LBCPA papers, folders 1 - 5.
Merritt immediately established what became the archetype of TWS "silent support," while demonstrating his skill at coordinating Montana's local groups. With Brandborg's support, Merritt arranged for the Society to fund printing of a brochure for the LBCPA, published and distributed by the Montana Wilderness Association (a group Merritt helped co-found in 1958 with Ken and Florence Baldwin of Bozeman, Montana), with photos credits by the Montana Fish & Game Department (probably taken by Merritt's childhood buddy Bob Cooney). Merritt also helped put the brochure together, and made sure it reached out to a broad support base, appealing directly to lovers of sublime beauty as well as workers for wilderness wildlife and water quality. (See figures 1, 3 and 8.)

Figure 8: Photo by Montana Fish & Game Department.

Brochure cover highlights the sublimity of riding in to the southern terminus of the 'Chinese Wall' at Scapegoat Mountain.


78 Hays, pp. 105-6. In particular Hays argued for the value of the technique of involving local and state groups in the collection and distribution of information. TWS enabled that engagement by quietly paying the copy machine costs, and making sure the locals' work got published.
Shortly thereafter, Ken Baldwin, then representing the Montana Wildlife Federation, visited Washington D.C. He asked Merritt to take him to meet with some Republican friends, in particular Representative Battin. Merritt didn’t think at the time that Battin knew Metcalf’s bill had failed to include Scapegoat Mountain; he was right. As soon as Baldwin informed Battin of the omission, Battin’s cowboy boots rose off his desktop and stomped the floor; he immediately offered to sponsor the greater area. Then he looked to Merritt, “Could you have the ‘metes and bounds’ by Monday?” Merritt replied, “Of course,” and thought “another weekend at work.” Like Garland, he hadn’t spent a weekend at home with the family in quite some time.78

Merritt knew that by then Congress had switched to using annotated maps, rather than complex ‘metes and bounds’ descriptions. Nevertheless, Merritt wrote them up for the good congressman, to accompany the map. True to his word, the following Tuesday (7 April 1965) Battin submitted his bill to the U.S. House of Representatives for 240,500 acres of Scapegoat Wilderness (H.R. 6398).

Scapegoat averted what could have turned into a damning legislative dogfight, only through a long friendship based on mutual respect— that of Clif Merritt and Lee Metcalf. Merritt reported that he “met with Senator Lee Metcalf shortly after that. Lee felt he had been dealt with improperly. I told him, yes, some of our people just didn’t know [the area] all the way to the Bob Marshall. Lee said ‘If I had known, I would have introduced the larger bill.’ I said ‘I know. We did not mean to mistreat you.’ ‘Well, I’ll fix my bill.’ ‘And we will contact the other senators and conservationists to support you.’ And we

78 Interview with Clif Merritt, notes in author’s possession. Similar story about Battin’s reception in Roth, p. 31, from interview with Clifton Merritt, Denver, CO. 23 June 83, Forest Service History Section.
Senator Metcalf promptly amended his bill to support the Battin boundary.

Senator Mike Mansfield and Representative Arnold Olson, both Democrats from Montana, signed-on to create unanimous, bipartisan support by the state delegation. Merritt played "only" the unseen catalyst; his plan, implemented quietly in the spring of 1964, continued to progress well.

Merritt also took his efforts public, in a backhanded way. Enthusiastically supportive of the work done by the Craigheads and Bob Cooney on grizzly bears in the Montana Rockies, he wrote an article about it, "Wilderness Protection Needed for Grizzly Bear," which Defenders of Wildlife News published in October 1965. The article stressed the importance of the entire Bob Marshall complex, and especially the Scapegoat area, as the last American grizzly habitat, without mentioning the wilderness battle with the Forest Service. Merritt wanted someone else to open a fight for the Scapegoat from the grizzly angle, thus enlarging his coalition and expanding its political strength through diverse support.

While still stationed in Washington, one of Merritt's tasks included traveling to lobby for support throughout the Great Smoky Mountain region with fellow TWS worker M. Rupert Cutler. Cutler recalls that no matter where they went, no matter who

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79 Quote from phone call with Merritt, 17 Jan 05, whence Merritt gave a short concise summary of the interaction. This closely matches notes from other renditions of this story. Senator Metcalf died in 1978, so I cannot verify this private conversation. Teddy Roe, Metcalf's administrative assistant in the 1970s and aid to Senator Mansfield in the 1960s, testifies (interview and email, October 2005) that Merritt and Metcalf were often found in private conference ever since he can remember. In general support of Merritt's claim, Lee Metcalf wrote in a letter of recommendation to the American Motors Conservation Award Committee that Merritt "conducts most of his work out of the public view. ... His work speaks volumes." (Ibid., Milner papers, AMCA binder, letter dated 7 November 1975.)

80 Doug Scott of Campaign for America's Wilderness argued in his book The Enduring Wilderness: Protecting Our Natural Heritage through the Wilderness Act (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Printing, 2004) that no wilderness legislation has a chance of success without a unanimous delegation from the impacted state, as well as bipartisan support.

81 LBCPA papers, folder 1-10.
they talked to or why, given any break in the conversation Merritt would launch into a long-winded presentation of his Scapegoat back home. Merritt had found another way for TWS to nationalize Garland's local action, in spite of the little bit of chiding he had to take from the staff in doing so. Meanwhile, Merritt continuously wrote appeals for letters of support by Montanans and Montana conservation groups, on the Wilderness Society's national stationary.

The legal process involved another seven years of legislative intrigue. Throughout those years, Garland continuously lobbied citizens for support in Montana, with a few visits to Washington. He reports that a couple times when he checked on the progress of the bill, it had disappeared onto the bottom of a stack in some minor subcommittee on vacation. He dug it out each time. In 1967, he had to get the bill reintroduced to Congress. The "patience on patience" advocated by Howard Zahniser does not preclude persistence. Merritt waited a year for Garland to come over, but worked incessantly toward that end all the while. So too did Garland and Merritt both continue to lobby and strengthen their case throughout the many years they waited for legislative resolution.

When the Subcommittee on Public Lands scheduled Congressional Hearings in Great Falls in September 1968, Merritt organized and hosted a hospitality room for those testifying. He solicited testimony from conservation, in both written form and live in Great Falls. He noted in particular that the "many excellent campgrounds" on Highway

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83 Roth, p. 33. It quotes Cecil Garland, reminiscences, Forest Service History Section: “[W]hen Congressman Aspinall became fully committed to the passing of the bill, I asked him why he had decided to help us. His reply was, ‘Son, you’ve got one powerful Senator,’ and I knew who he meant. I knew Mike had not forgotten.”
85 Howard Zahniser, Where Preservation Began, p. 41.
20 and nearby were not being fully utilized. In spite of the fact that the Subcommittee rescheduled the hearing three times—each time eliciting an onslaught of communications from Merritt to inform every one—conservationists turned out in force. Testimony overwhelmingly favored wilderness protection. Merritt provided passionate testimony himself, his devotion to wilderness fueling his scientifically-dense presentation. To intrude less on other witnesses’ time, he asked and was permitted to submit a written statement for the Wilderness Society, in addition to his spoken testimony as a native Montanan.

The Forest Service responded to the hearing’s testimony a month later with a development plan hardly different from that plan of 1963 which had started all the dispute. Merritt, from the Wilderness Society's Western Field office in Denver (established in 1966) countered with a call for more letters of support for the new legislation.

Not until Public Law 92-395 did Congress officially designate approximately 240,000 acres as Scapegoat Wilderness in August 1972. The U.S. Congress and President Nixon, over the emphatic objections of US Forest Service administration, proffered federal protection for the wild lands and, thus, its world-class wildlife.

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86 Ibid., LBCPA papers, folder 1-10, open letter from Merritt at TWS to conservationists dated 5 September 1968.
87 Ibid., Kendall, p. 33. He cites a ratio of 5:1 in favor of wilderness designation out of 900 statements.
Summary

In the spring of 1965, Clif Merritt spent an evening with Cecil Garland, the two alone with a Forest Service map. Soon thereafter an equally private talk with Senator Lee Metcalf in Washington D.C. cemented a bipartisan and unified Montana delegation to support America’s first citizens’ wilderness. Clif Merritt ensured habitat protection through a nearly invisible trail of personal respect and cooperation. He provided vision to guide the persistence and dedication of the LBCPA.

While telling me about his role in the inside story of America’s first grassroots wilderness area, Merritt reiterates his Scapegoat mantra: “We would not have Scapegoat today if not for Cecil Garland. He provided the energy and local leadership.” Yet, grassroots success needs leaders in several realms.

Garland’s wilderness area would have covered a 73,000 acre ecological island without Merritt’s direct personal influence and guiding vision. The Forest Service had room and intent to build roads around that island. We could today have drive-up resorts on the southern border of “the Bob.” With foresight and diligence Merritt ensured that these impositions on his precious wildlife could not happen there. He ensured that the work done in Lincoln would result not in a backcountry corral, but a wildlife corridor.

Conclusion

From the very beginning of his first assignment with the Wilderness Society, Clif Merritt demonstrated both his knowledge of, and dedication to, the Society’s traditions. Like Bob Marshall, he proved tireless as both an advocate and an outdoorsman.91 He

91 Interview with Clifton Merritt, 28 February 2004, notes in author’s possession. He has repeated it for me several times since then. Each retelling includes repetitions of “Without Cecil, there would be no Scapegoat.” On this point Merritt remains most emphatic.

91 Ibid., Sutter, p. ix.
followed Benton MacKaye's lead in promoting Scapegoat as an effort to keep wilderness local and easily accessible. He adopted Robert Sterling Yard's emphasis on surveying the lands for their wilderness quality to inform better management. And like them all, Merritt knew he needed to apply tenacity and knowledge to each new circumstance in order to adapt to the rapidly changing political and physical environment.

Yet, passage of the Wilderness Act in October 1964, with its "affirmative action" clause, mandated a new audience for conservation and preservation workers. Efforts by citizens to influence management decisions no longer needed to focus exclusively on a small group of well-educated technocrats and well-placed personalities at U.S. Department of Agriculture headquarters in Washington, D.C. Rather, pushing legislation through Congress required influencing as many voters, from as many diverse backgrounds, as possible. Zahniser and Brandborg led the way in planning for this deep and fundamental shift; Merritt implemented their plans on the ground.

As seen through the Scapegoat story, the most immediate adjustment in traditional approaches came in the realm of education. Through most of its early history, members of the Society worked to influence professionals and congressmen, often exchanging ideas at conferences and through journals. Bob Marshall used to say "Experience has shown us ...," and Clif Merritt frequently says "We have found ...." in arguing with evidence against tradition. In any case, after 1964 they recognized that community meetings, newspapers, newsletters, brochures, and nature presentations complete with color-slide shows, proved more effective in reaching and influencing the newly desired audience. Samuel Hays has pointed us to those sources rather than central office files as the keys to

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92 Ibid., p. 207.
94 Ibid., p. 43.
understanding the era. Clearly his is correct to do so if the Scapegoat story serves as an example.

Following in Leopold's footsteps, Merritt's writings "substantiated the wilderness cause with scientific observations and research, and continued to advocate congressional protection of wilderness throughout his life. Yet, the nature of corresponding changed with the audience in 1964. Merritt "peppered" all his associates with correspondence, as had Benton MacKay before him. However, rather than MacKaye's philosophy and strategy for an "inner sphere" of advocates, the Wilderness Act era called for Merritt to emphasize technique and strategy for the "public sphere." Merritt produced the same "voluminous correspondence" to members as did Robert Sterling Yard, yet the membership had grown and diversified. Thus, Merritt also contributed significantly to the brochures, newsletters and press releases, and slide shows that promoted the Lincoln Back Country - Scapegoat Wilderness designation, as well as maintaining the traditional personal correspondence with fellow outdoorsmen, conservation groups and their leaders, politicians, and land management officials.

Drawing from deep Society traditions, yet adapting them as needed for the new age, Clif Merritt's work with the Scapegoat battle proved highly successful--both in obtaining the desired boundary and in keeping TWS out of the media coverage, and out of controversy. His many ensuing successes followed the pattern he demonstrated with Scapegoat, with personal respect and intense preparation enabling the ability to adapt to circumstance, as needed, to protect wildland habitat.

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10 Ibid., p. 251.
12 Ibid., p. 250.
CHAPTER TWO

THE MERRITTS AND THEIR PRICKLY PEAR HOMESTEADS:

MONTANA 1878 - 1954.

Man brings all things to the test of himself.

A conservationist is one who is humbly aware that with each stroke he is writing his signature on the face of his land. Signatures of course differ, whether written with axe or pen, and this is as it should be.

Ability to see the cultural value of wilderness boils down, in the last analysis, to a question of intellectual humility.

Do economists know about lupines?

-- Aldo Leopold

_A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There_

The Reverend Charles Lutwidge Dodgson (better known as Lewis Carroll) must have met one truly memorable man, and brought the impression to his nefarious writing by the late 1800s. In the famous encounter he penned between the White Knight and Alice, one of her _Adventures Through the Looking Glass_, Dodgson provided an analogy that brings out the full flavor of my first meeting with Clif Merritt. Some people say that if you meet one truly memorable person in your lifetime, you have been lucky. The new social history has tried to acknowledge the importance of personality to the human drama of history, and to address what distinguishes commonly memorable from historically remarkable people. The wilderness preservation movement in America brought many
remarkable people out of the woodwork and into the public sphere, thus elevating some to historical status.

The wilderness preservation movement's roots can be traced back to late 1919: shortly after Aldo Leopold visited Arthur Carhart high in the Colorado Rockies, the latter created the first of what we now would call "wilderness alerts," a document suggesting that they needed to shift attention from merely taking care of America's forests to flat-out preserving them, while stressing the human rights, thus democratic, basis of the issue. Coincidentally, exactly one week prior to that document's date, the birth of Clifton Reeve Merritt in rural Montana provided those two men with a protégé in their own image, a worker who would choose to dedicate his life to their purposes, taking their observations and their implications and bringing them to the people of the nation. The movement to preserve American wildlands begun by Leopold and Carhart took several decades to mature; by the time the public was ready for their prescient ideas, Merritt had also grown and matured and learned how to take the reins of their movement.

Chapter one of this thesis illustrated the significance of Clifton Reeve Merritt's applications of established Wilderness Society methods, as he set the precedent for citizen designation of de facto wilderness, with "tireless work both in the field & office [that was] primarily responsible for the classification of the beautiful Scapegoat area in Montana as Wilderness."¹ In chapter three I will examine his methods and strategies further, illustrated through an examination of his precedent-setting activities early in the American wilderness preservation movement. In this chapter, however, I wish to lay out the background that trained and fortified Merritt to become a tenacious and successful warrior for wildlife and wild lands via grassroots democracy and the Wilderness Act. So

¹ Robert S. Cooney, Montana Fish & Game Department, Helena, MT. From letter of recommendation for Merritt, 1975, for American Motors Conservation Award, in binder compiled by Doris Milner. Merritt currently holds Milner's papers. Merritt received the AMCA for professionals in 1976.
many unique and rare events shaped Merritt’s life prior to the Wilderness Act era that the remainder of this chapter examines those influences that helped prepare him to lead the wilderness preservation movement successfully into the 21st century, adopting and adapting traditions set by the movement’s founders.

Out of Experience

With so many stylistic similarities between Merritt and Wilderness Society leaders, I asked him whom he had studied or emulated in learning his craft. He paused, looked me squarely in the eye and responded frankly “No one. I learned how to do it by doing it.” He elucidated the general attitude underlying his work in conservation in a 1996 letter to Jeff Larmer, then Executive Director of wilderness advocacy group American Wildlands (which Merritt had cofounded in 1979).

In the earlier years, I used whatever appropriate group was available as a base to work from--Montana Wildlife Federation, Montana Wilderness Association, The Wilderness Society--you name it. To me it was one continuous, joyful project, mostly stopping the Forest Service’s excessive clearcutting and overcutting juggernaut long enough to protect some important big-game habitat and irreplaceable wilderness. Or blocking big boondoggle dams to safeguard both habitat and wilderness by getting a wild river designated, instead. However, few substantial achievements are realized in the conservation movement without the support of the wonderful volunteers!

Once Merritt took the lead in the Montana’s conservation movement, which quickly became a preservation effort, he soon established his criteria for recruiting co-conspirators, criteria that later became American Wildlands tradition. He wanted people in the battle with three minimum qualifications: First and foremost they must possess a “gut feeling” and love for wildlands; second, they must possess a degree or significant

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7 Interview with Merritt, notes in my possession.

1 Letter Merritt to Jeff Larmer, Executive Director, American Wildlands, 17 April 1996. In Merritt papers.
experience in resource or wildlife management and associated laws; third, they must desire
to get along well with people. With such requirements, he had significantly limited the
availability of potential field leaders. Merritt claims he learned his trade, including these
stringent expectations for field representatives, independently. Yet, he speaks and has
written with pride in knowing the man whom he considers the unquestionable model for
preservation leaders, demonstrating every necessary quality, in superlatives—Arthur
Carhart (1892 - 1973).4

Unlike many of the well-known early stars in conservation history who studied
forestry, Arthur Carhart graduated from Iowa State College in 1916 with a degree in
landscape architecture. To help it in its turf wars with the National Park Service,5 the
U.S. Forest Service hired Carhart in 1919 as their first “recreation engineer.” Carhart
immediately began to tour the nation’s forests, and to shape the future of American
wilderness. After a survey trip to Trapper’s Lake in the White River National Forest in
northwestern Colorado, one of his first assignments, Carhart convinced his superiors that
their plans for roads and summer homes around the lake should be canceled. Within
Carhart’s first year in the service, the USFS had designated Trapper’s Lake as an area to
remain roadless and undeveloped; it “remains so to this day.”6 The National Park Service
suggests that no one can be called the “father of the wilderness concept,” but they argue
that we must recognize Carhart as “the chief cook in the kitchen during the critical first

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4 For an insightful examination of Carhart’s role in the American conservation, preservation and grassroots
efforts, see Don Baldwin’s The Quiet Revolution: Grass-Roots of Today’s Wilderness Preservation
Movement (1972). To compare Merritt’s attitude and use of language with Carhart’s, read Carhart The

5 See Hal K. Rothman, “‘A Regular Ding-Dong Fight’: The Dynamics of Park Service-Forest Service

6 Ibid.
On December 6, 1919, a forester from New Mexico named Aldo Leopold visited Carhart in Colorado. As a follow-up to that meeting, Carhart wrote what “became one of the most significant records in the history of the wilderness concept.” Addressed simply “Memorandum for Mr. Leopold, District 3,” Carhart identified in writing a “new” challenge to American conservation, a challenge which has done nothing but intensify in the ensuing decades.

There is a limit to the number of lands of shoreline on the lakes; there is a limit to the number of lakes in existence; there is a limit to the mountainous areas of the world, and ... there are portions of natural scenic beauty which are God-made, and ... which of a right should be the property of all people.**

Trapper’s Lake remains protected “to this day” only because a child born a week earlier grew up to challenge and overturn Forest Service plans to develop it in 1975—but that takes us too far ahead of our story. On November 29, 1919, at a promising homestead near Helena, Montana on the east slope of the Rocky Mountain Continental Divide about 600 miles north of Trapper’s Lake as the eagle flies, Emmelen Esther (Lambrecht) Merritt presented her husband Clifton Rosser Merritt with twins—a pair of bouncing baby boys they named Clifton Reeve and Donald Ross.

In 2003, the elder twin, Clif Merritt, finished writing an eighty page manuscript for his nephew, called “I Remember My Grandfather: Memoirs as Related to My Nephew, Owen ‘Gene’ Gabriel.” Within that collection of insightful vignettes about life in rural Montana in the early decades of the 1900s, Merritt nestled much of his own

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“Historical Perspectives” from <http://www2.nature.nps.gov/views/KCs/Wildemess/HTML/ET_04_Why.htm> labeled as “Views of the National Parks,” meaning the views they hold, not photos of. No author, no date/2004. Also, interviews with Merritt, notes in my possession.

* Ibid.

** Ibid.
philosophy on conservation. Clif Merritt attributed his own appreciation for diversity, sustainability, and wilderness as habitat to his grandfather Lawrence Merritt’s example, to lessons and experiences under “Granny’s” careful guidance and constant encouragement. “Grandfather Merritt was our idol. When children idolize a parent or grandparent, there is usually a good reason. In this case, there were many reasons.”

Reader warning: I will write about both Clifton Reeve Merritt and his father Clifton Rosser Merritt in this chapter. The former, subject of this thesis, always went by “Clif” and his father always went by “Cliff.” I will respect their preferences, taking care to point out now the mere one-letter difference between their names.

Homesteading in Montana

In the mid-1870s, Lawrence Merritt (1861 - 1935) watched his father throttle his younger brother for the last time. He stepped in, grabbed the “cat of nine tails” whip out of his father’s hands and stopped that “unmerciful beating.” In the power relationship of his father’s Iowa homestead, Lawrence knew he had overstepped his bounds, and knew the consequences. He opted to leave and seek a place where he could establish a better life. The American frontier had yet to be declared closed when Lawrence looked west, so he joined the “final thrust of the three-century advance of the American agricultural frontier.”

He recalled an uncle, Theodore Merritt, who had established a working horse ranch in the Prickly Pear Valley of Montana—just east of current day Helena. Families traditionally laid the web for western migration, first from Europe, then from the

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Ibid., Malone, p. 236
American East, and finally from the Mississippi basin. Lawrence decided to visit that uncle in Montana. Still a teenager, he packed his few belongings (mother secreted him some pemican) and left the family farm in western Iowa, on foot. He set off across the plains of Iowa, Nebraska, and the Dakotas, walking alone most of the time, swimming rivers and streams as needed. For a hundred or so miles, he hitched some company hiring on as a bullwhacker with a group driving cattle. He even got to ride a mile or two on a buckboard during the thousand mile trek. As Merritt’s manuscript tells the story:

At last, the wagon-train and Grandfather traveled their separate routes and, in general, he followed the Missouri River upstream beyond the Gates of the Mountains until he came to a large, bowl-shaped valley with a town originally named Last Chance Gulch nestled against the mountains on the valley’s southern border.

When he walked into Last Chance, he told Brother Don and me, there were no railroads and no buildings—just tents and tent frames. Placer gold had been discovered there on July 14, 1864, and a gold rush followed. ... He could have become a gold miner and maybe struck it rich, Grandfather observed, but he said he wasn't at all interested. ...

He got a few directions and hiked about 12 miles northeast across the Prickly Pear Valley (now known as the Helena Valley), until he came to large and lush meadowlands where a series of creeks—Ten Mile, Six Mile, Prickly Pear, Spring Creek and a few smaller streams—joined to form the Prickly Pear River. The river flowed a few miles toward the Eldorado Bar and emptied into the big Missouri. On their Expedition of Discovery for President Jefferson in 1805, Lewis and Clark named the Prickly Pear Valley. They also named the Gates of the Mountains, which they first believed to be an impassable, sheer limestone canyon through which the Missouri tumbled.

There, in the lush meadowlands, he found his Uncle Theodore Merritt on his large horse and cattle ranch. Much of the ranchlands and all of the Prickly Pear River are now flooded by Lake Helena and Montana Power Company's Hauser Dam on the Missouri.

Lawrence arrived to a very sparsely populated countryside. "The combined dangers of the Blackfeet and the uncertainties of travel on the Big Muddy" resulted in the early waves of the frontier movement bypassing Montana. Historians generally agree that Bannack, Alder Gulch (now Virginia City), and Last Chance Gulch (now, Helena) represent Montana's three gold rushes, in that order, and motivated the first real move to settle Montana. With creation of the Montana Territory in 1864, the most populous region, Virginia City, became the capital. After they had stripped Alder Gulch of its gold, however, the miners drifted away as quickly as they had gathered; in 1875 the government also left, and moved to Helena. After the gold rushes of the 1860s, Bannock quickly became the ghost town it remains today. Virginia City nearly followed, surviving as a community only because "Gold Medal Flour" heir Charlie Bovey turned the town's buildings into a "living museum" in the 1940s. Helena, however, grew around its tent city and remained the Montana capital after statehood in 1889, and through today.

Helena and the Prickly Pear Valleys held an advantage over the other mining towns of the era—location. Situated "on the line" between the Western Montana mountainous region and the Eastern Montana plains, the area offered the best of both worlds. It received bountiful water running off from the Rocky Mountain Continental Divide Range on the west and the Big Belt Mountains on the east. While it "got awfully cold" in the winters, the two mountain ranges provided significant shelter from the renowned howling winds of the plains of Eastern Montana. Hardy farmers eventually

13 Ibid., Malone, p. 50
14 Ibid., Malone, Toole, others.
found the well-watered and protected, broad and rolling valley’s land suitable to raising agricultural products for the city growing around Last Chance Gulch’s miner’s tents.\textsuperscript{16} Theodore Merritt, Lawrence’s Uncle Teddy, arrived among “the first twelve” homesteaders in the valley, and grabbed some choice horse-grazing land at the far north end near the sublime Gates of the Mountains.\textsuperscript{17}

Technologic advances of the late 1800s also boded well for Helena. Between 1858 and 1862 Captain John Mullan organized construction of a military road that crossed the Rocky Mountains just west of Helena. The 624 mile “Mullan Road” ran between the two major distribution centers of the expanding western frontier,\textsuperscript{18} Fort Benton at the westernmost point of navigability on the Missouri River and Fort Walla Walla, the easternmost American settlement on the Columbia River. Shortly thereafter, when rails connected the two coasts in 1864, the road up from the station at Corrine, Utah to the port at Fort Benton provided another important freight route into Montana--and also passed close to Helena. Meanwhile, after itinerant miners had collected all the placer gold nearby, strikes of silver ore and gold-laden quartz ore encouraged industrial capitalists to build local smelters; such long-term investments helped encourage permanent settlement.\textsuperscript{19}

By the late 1870s, Helena had already established itself as a transportation hub and “cosmopolitan haven” in the midst of a “terribly isolated” territory.\textsuperscript{20} Its support for cultural development led it to provide public schools throughout the valley, including the Harmony School out in the northern reaches for farmers of the Prickly Pear Valley.\textsuperscript{21}

Montanans began early to ensure its extraordinarily literate population, even in its early

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., Malone, p. 233.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., Richards.
\textsuperscript{18} See History of the Mullen Road at www.ultimatemontana.com.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., Malone, p. 188.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., Malone, p.84.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., Paladin, p. 26. That school was used until 1921, when they built a new one, and moved the old one to its current home, preserved and maintained on Merritt Lane off Lakeside Road.
years when its residents included a large foreign-born element.”

Lawrence Merritt liked his new home. He wrangled horses for his uncle for a couple of years, visited his family in Iowa, and returned to the Prickly Pear by 1880 to work as a freight driver on the 135 mile run from Helena to Fort Benton. That job disappeared in 1883 when the Northern Pacific finally brought its rails into Helena to service the then booming mining and timber industries in the area; the train provided safer and more efficient transportation than wagons and horses could offer.

Unsettled and single in a land of extremes, Lawrence Merritt wandered back home to Iowa. He found a wife, Mary Jane Rosser, who gave birth to their first daughter, Alta, in 1885, and in early 1889 headed back to Montana to stay. Montana became a state that year, and in December the young couple had their first son and named him Clifton Rosser Merritt. Lawrence had long had his eye on some land about seven miles south of his Uncle Teddy’s; with a growing family he moved on it. In 1891 Lawrence homesteaded the 640 acres he longed for, the Spring Creek Place. According to Clif Merritt’s typescript memoir,

In Spring Creek, which ran cold and clear through the ranch, he could catch a family dinner of large native cutthroat trout in a few minutes. In the fall, ducks were plentiful on the creek. On the eastern flanks of Prickly Pear Valley, the rugged Big Belt Mountains supported abundant populations of elk, deer, bighorn sheep, grouse and other wildlife. And the trout and wildlife greatly enhanced his love of life as an outdoorsman. He said he often asked himself, "How could I ask for more?"

Within a decade, Lawrence Merritt had expanded his holding by 1200 acres and established a reputation for raising quality horses. He had built a two-story log ranch house, a bunk house, corral and stables, blacksmith shop, and dug a storage cellar into the

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23 Ibid., Malone, p. 332.
24 Ibid., Malone, p. 358.
hillside by the house.24 (See figures 9, 10.) He also had started to notice some deleterious effects of his success; overgrazing by horses had begun to change and damage the make-up of the range. He announced his observations to neighboring ranchers at the spring roundup in 1900, and suggested reducing the herds. No one volunteered to contribute to such an effort, so Merritt led the way by rounding up all 2200 head of range horses bearing his wine-glass brand. Then, with his fourteen year-old daughter Alta driving the chuck wagon in the rear, his ten-year old son Cliff and one ranch hand acting as the “swing riders” on either side, Lawrence Merritt led his herd out of the valley and headed east. Selling and trading along the way, they arrived in Iowa with about 75 good farm horses for their relatives and their neighbors.

Figure 9

Clif Merritt (on right) chats with current owner, Terry Scott, of the Spring Creek place north of Helena, between two buildings that Merritt’s grandfather Lawrence had built in the 1890s. Photo by R. N. Baker.

24 Current owners of the Spring Creek Ranch still inhabit, in 2005, those buildings.
In that same decade Montana’s population had risen by a hundred thousand to nearly a quarter of a million people. Lewis and Clark county, however, added only 26 people (up to 19,171 residents), while the population in the Helena area dropped by three thousand--nearly all urban dwellers--to just under eleven thousand.\(^5\) The city adjusted down from its boom-time peaks, replacing tents with brick and stone buildings as it became established, and the population then remained stable for nearly thirty years. The few farmers in “favored locations east of the mountains” were also holding their own.\(^6\) Yet, the settlement’s stability had exacted costs from the land. As Merritt noted


\(^6\) Ibid., Malone, p. 241.
and other settlers noticed, the range had begun to deteriorate, and game had become scarce on the hills near town.\(^7\)

Back at home in the Helena Valley after the cross country horse drive, Lawrence scaled back his ranching operations. He sent his eldest son Cliff to the local Harmony School and then Montana Wesleyan University in 1910. Cliff continued to live at Spring Creek, but quit school and took a job in town driving produce for the Capital Commission Company in 1911. But good rains had come to the valley in 1909\(^8\) and stayed awhile. In 1912, without quitting his day job, Cliff took a risk on his own 160-acre homestead a few miles north of his father’s, next to the “old Kennett place” close to Lake Helena along the old “pole line.” In 1914 the state launched a national public relations campaign, promoting Montana farm land as an “assured future.”\(^9\) By 1916 Cliff’s courtship of a friend of relatives, Emmelen Lambrecht, recently arrived from Wisconsin, resulted in their marriage. Their situation reflected that of many others in the valley in 1916; along with a job in town the men raised a little alfalfa, wheat, and hay, and took care of a couple horses while the women and children (if any) kept a few dairy cows and chickens, and maintained a vegetable garden.\(^{10}\) The rains kept coming and their homestead seemed to be providing a dependable livelihood; Cliff quit his job in town with the arrival of his first child, Betty Geneva, in 1917. Optimism permeated the land as Montana farmers generally harvested record crops in 1917 and 1918, though hints of drought appeared on the horizon.\(^{11}\) (See figure 11.)

\(^7\) Ibid., Paladin.
\(^8\) Ibid., Malone, p 242.
\(^9\) Ibid., Malone, p. 248.
\(^10\) Ibid., Paladin, p. 156. 196 for examples.
1919: A beginning for parallel stories.

In northern Colorado the passions of two foresters touring and inventorying the U.S. National Forests coincided, and hatched the embryo of a idea in 1919--to protect American wilderness. A different kind of passion had Emmelen Merritt’s belly growing with a Montana homesteader’s twin sons. Those boys would grow to embrace and nurture those foresters’ infant notion as they matured along with the American wilderness preservation movement. Yet, all was not well in their Prickly Pear paradise. “In 1919, historian Michael Malone has written, “perhaps the most calamitous year Montana ever saw, the drought became generalized, even spreading into the normally well-watered
valleys of the western mountains.\textsuperscript{32} Emmelen Merritt persevered; her twin boys Clif and Don joined the family that year in late November, to an ominous forecast. Noted historian Joseph Kinsey Howard reflected that the ensuing years proved to be “Montana’s disastrous decade”\textsuperscript{33} as the Dust Bowl set settled across the Northern Plains. Another celebrated Montana historian, K. Ross Toole, wrote of the era: “It was in 1920 that the winds came. ... right on schedule. First the drought and then the wind. Only this time there was a difference. There was no grass to hold the soil. The plow had destroyed it.”\textsuperscript{34} To make matters worse, as Lawrence had predicted two decades earlier, livestock had grazed bare what ground the plow couldn’t reach. In spite of the pervasive drought and poor land practices, the Prickly Pear possessed a favorable well-watered location. The springs on both Merritt homesteads continued to pour potable water enough for household use.\textsuperscript{35} (See figure 12.) It took a lot of work to make ends meet on a small farm in the 1920s, but a family could do it.\textsuperscript{36} Still, after a couple of “bad crop years,” with his twins in their ‘terrible twos,’ (see figure 13) Clif made the calamitous decision to move his family north to Canada, where he would manage a large ranch and earn a more lucrative living.

On the way to his new post in spring 1922, Clif’s draft horse kicked him and shattered his jaw. The job remained for him after his recovery in a Great Falls hospital, but did not work out as he had hoped.\textsuperscript{37} In retreat by late fall, Emmelen insisted they pass through Portland, Oregon, to visit her family for Christmas, and for the birth of her

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., Malone, p. 281.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., Toole, p. 237.
\textsuperscript{35} Interview with Merritt at the homestead site, notes in my possession.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., Malone, p. 212
\textsuperscript{37} After reading extensive modern medical literature and reflecting on his youth, Clif now believes his father struggled at the time with depression caused by lithium deficiency.
Drinking water for the Clifton Rosser Merritt homestead, which had been a few yards behind where Clifton Reeve Merritt is shown standing, needed to be hauled from a spring in the copse of trees visible above his head here. Then, they used 5-gallon milk cans to carry the water. Because the household used less water than the animals and gardens, Clif’s father Cliff had placed the house closer to the stream (not visible, just to the left) than to the spring. Nothing remains of Cliff’s old house. The current owner has tapped the spring and piped it directly into his home, barely visible to the right of the trees. Photo by R. N. Baker.

third daughter, Bernice Lucille, in January. In June 1923 they boarded a train for Montana; before they reached Spokane, six-year old Betty seemed ill enough that Emmelen begged to get off and take her to the hospital. Cliff told her to wait for Helena; she obeyed. In those days, the trip took a few days by rail. By the time they reached Helena, Betty’s rheumatic fever had advanced beyond repair; the doctors could do little but try to offer comfort. Her demise and death that fall punctuated the Merritts’ return to the Prickly Pear. That loss left Emmelen with a tightly-strung tension over her
children’s health, and the roots of animosity toward her husband.\footnote{Interviews with Meg Merritt, Sherry (Merritt) Essig, Clif Merritt. Notes in my possession.}

Upon returning to the homestead, Cliff decided to increase his cattle herd; with no access to public lands, he realized the need to raise more alfalfa and grain to do so. He set his three-year old boys the task of “grubbing out the sagebrush, juniper and a few boulders” to prepare the “virgin but shallow topsoil” for the latest technology—a mouldboard gang plow. Clif Merritt’s memoir of his family puts it this way:

In the meantime, he urgently needed to produce a couple of crops to pay for additional farming equipment. So he double-disk harrowed the virgin land, broadcast the seed by hand with a sack of grain slung under his shoulder, and used a spike-toothed harrow to cover the seed.
Someone had taken photographs, which I had acquired, of Dad standing in the two outstanding crops of wheat and oats that his "stopgap" methods produced. He was six feet six and one-half inches tall and wore a peaked Stetson hat. Yet the large heads of grain topped off at approximately the same height as his hat! Those first two crops, he said, were the best that he had ever seen.

That summer at age three Clif Merritt decided that he had been blessed with “Nature’s Nod,” a special interest and fascination with nature. From then on, he constantly watched and listened to the birds and insects and butterflies and flowers and plants and rodents and game and all. From then on he asked about every living thing around him, “such as how garden seeds became vegetables.”

1924: Tenacity pays

The clouds of misery had passed neither Montana nor the Merritt homestead. In early 1924, as drouth and winds continued to batter the land, four-year old Clif strangely found that his arms and legs just wouldn’t work. Disease was no stranger to the Merritts, and polio had already gained a national reputation for effectively maiming and killing its victims. Yet, the medical community had found no effective response for diseases like rheumatic fever, polio, and influenza, which swept the nation--reaching even into remote Montana in the early twentieth century. Jonas Salk’s vaccine lay decades in the future.

The expert medical advice of this time was to keep victims fed and cleaned, and prayed over. Cliff and Emmelen were told that the best they could hope for would be that Clif might live, but would be restricted to a wheelchair for the rest of his life.

Emmelen would not settle for such a prospect. She had heard of a woman in 10 Merritt’s chapter title.
Canada who preached the value of oil massage and stretching and hot baths to enable full recovery from polio. So, Emmelen massaged her son Clif daily, and she moved his limbs for him, since he couldn’t manage the exercise himself. Even though she had to have water packed a couple hundred yards in five and eight gallon milk cans from the spring to the house, and heated on the stove, Clif’s mother Emmelen bathed him almost daily. She fed him mashed up food, not tasty but nutritious, and managed his wastes. The doctor repeatedly admonished her that she was wasting her time and building false hope. She got the doctor to admit that, even though her treatments couldn’t help, they probably did not hurt, either. She persevered double duty—caring for Clif while running the ranch and her other children. As weeks turned into months, the doctor’s admonitions continued to fall on deaf ears—she continued to exercise, massage and clean her paralyzed son, Clif.

In the ninth month of paralysis, one morning Clif called quietly for his mother. He told her he had moved his left foot. She saw, indeed, that he could. She knelt down beside his bed, and cried and prayed. Not immediately, but quickly, young Clif was out playing with siblings and critters. He studied right next to his twin brother, who had not contracted the disease, at the one room Harmony school in Helena Valley. He had suffered no muscle-tissue degeneration from the disease, and, with the help of his active brother and life on the range, regained full strength and movement in his limbs.

The medical profession called it a miraculous cure. Clif then considered it the result of love, acting through knowledgeable and caring perseverance; he still does. Mother had persisted for more than eight months, patiently active, trusting her hands-on approach, diligently working through the needs of each day without losing site of an unknowable future, knowing in her heart she was correct, in spite of regular condemnation from “the experts.” Clif attributes a very similar approach to saving wilderness areas
much later in life, when they came under attack from forces equally voracious as polio.

In fact, further south along the Rocky Mountains, Carhart and Leopold, through their own tireless and relentless and on-the-ground work, fueled by similarly deep passion, also bucked the system and nearly miraculously put their idea in place. In 1924 Aldo Leopold finally convinced the U.S. Forest Service to protect some of its primitive lands from the epidemic of development sweeping the nation; it formally established its first wilderness area in the Gila National Forest in that year. In the process, FS administrators explicitly acknowledged the compatibility of wilderness within their multiple-use philosophy.\(^{40}\) That year showed both young Clif and the nation that devoted advocates, with the help of their friends, can overcome great obstacles.

By spring of 1925, with a hint of rain in the air, Clif had finished clearing the acreage destined for plowing. Clif remembers riding on a wooden crosspiece and watching his father’s new deep furrow plow beneath him churning the dirt. It cut more deeply into the thin Prickly Pear ground of their homestead than the discs had, turning the dark topsoil under a thick layer of sandy clay. He noticed that the difference looked troubling.

"Dad, shouldn't this dark ground be on top?" I asked on several occasions. His answer was always, "Well, we have to make a loose seed bed for the crop to grow." Apparently, he never understood my question. It was not that the soil shouldn't be loosened but rather: shouldn't the dark topsoil remain on top? … Dad never got another good grain crop from this acreage.

During his recovery from nine months of paralysis, Clif played constant companion to his mother in the gardens, when not under his father’s feet. He pestered

her constantly also, to learn the hows and whys and peculiarities and needs and benefits of each of the various plants—nutritional, medicinal, and aesthetic. She encouraged his curiosity.

Clif often lingered by the corral and watched Grandfather and others break and brand and train the horses. With his father using mostly horse-power on their homestead, and his grandfather raising racehorses, he grew up with horses even more closely than most American children now grow up with automobiles as an expected and essential part of life. He watched wild and aggressive beasts thrash his grandfather, and then observed their transformation into friendly race horses that would eat out of his little hands.

If horses could learn manners, anyone could; horses gave Clif his first lessons for his lifelong faith in education. Yet, as with humans, horses practice those manners variously—as if by individual volition, and in response to given circumstances. Like humans, some horses he met would become friends, some only respected acquaintances. He learned early in life that if you seek and acknowledge their tastes, they accept your company more readily. Merritt would suggest that any unbiased observer must admit horses exhibit intelligence, personality and soul. Even today, Merritt’s interactions with, and attachments to, horses begin with these memories. His respect and empathy for animals in general, rooted with horses and Grandfather’s dog Shep, only grew during and after his youth.

That fall, many of the local ranchers gathered at Cliff Merritt’s place to help with threshing. After a long day driving bundle wagons from the fields to the threshing rig, Clif watched as Grandfather shifted a brag-session into a lecture about improper land practices.

"Fellows, I think you're making a mistake. It's not necessary to plow nine to eleven inches deep for grain. Besides, you're putting that rich
topsoil down where the grain roots never reach it. And who's running
the most cattle on the range is not the most important point. It's the
condition of the range that counts the most. I've been looking at the
open range for years, and you're all overgrazing. If you keep on doing
it, the range will grow less and less grass, and you'll all go belly-up!"

Unfortunately, the ranchers didn't understand or wouldn't believe what
Grandfather was telling them. But, within a few years, most of them
went "belly-up" and lost their spreads. Some of them would say, "The
land just gave out." Yet they never realized that their poor land
practices were the cause.

Grandfather's comments on proper land use made an unforgettable
impression on me. He confirmed my childhood thoughts on the
subject and inspired me to focus my lifelong work on promoting
proper use of our natural resources. *Man must do right by the land or
perish, I concluded. There was no other option.* (italics mine.)

Grandfather had confirmed Clif's intuition on the dark soil needing to stay on top;
Clif had been stewing over that seeming contradiction all year. The norm for Iowa and
Kansas simply did not apply to their corner of Montana, no matter how hard anyone
pretended it did. The new industrial-agriculture technology simply did not accommodate
the irregular soils and rugged lands of the eastern foothills of the Rocky Mountains. Clif
comprehended that just as farm land must be cared for to maintain its productivity over
the years, so too, as more people moved to Montana, grasslands should be managed for
sustained yield. He didn’t see deep furrow plowing as an advance indicator of "industrial
disease," but rather as a case of poor human judgment.

As a young boy, Clif Merritt simply loved the land and its inhabitants and their
interactions. He had been taught that people should, and showed that people could if
they cared, coexist sustainably with their natural surroundings. By age seven, he had
caught the Progressive dream: Plan well, succeed, educate. Yet, pragmatism from
experience always tempered his dreams and goals. He already knew that some people
just did not care about sustainability, and that some lands needed protection from such people. Unbeknownst to him, others had already begun a movement to do just that with the public forests.

Grandfather Lawrence recognized and encouraged his conservation prodigy. Young Clif loved wildlife enough to want animals to thrive, loved them enough to learn how to help in whatever little ways he could. Between his curiosity and Granny’s willingness, every walk and wander, every hike became a naturalist’s exploration of cycles of growth and interdependence among diverse species, feeding and watering preferences, and local history. On roads and maintained trails, they walked with one twin on each side of Grandfather; on animal trails he made them walk single file so as not to break up the terrain—even small feet could cause troublesome erosion.

Since the twins had reached an appropriate age (seven, 1927), and showed proper respect for, and decent skill with, their rifles, Grandfather took them hunting for real game that fall—a step up from the rabbits, prairie dogs, gophers, and target practice found in the Prickly Pear Valley.44 They had to travel over the Continental Divide to Copper Creek under Red Mountain—on the edge of the current day Scapegoat Wilderness—to find their desired deer and elk. By age seven, Clif could handle the wildland transportation—horses—both physically and psychologically. He rode himself to the hunting ground, as did his brother, over the pass and through the woods along with Granny and Father and their pack horses.

Just as they all valued the horses for their multiple uses—companionship and diverse applications of horsepower—so too Clif learned in his youth to value wildlife on several levels. Wilderness animals provide not only aesthetic beauty, and existential proof of the value of diversity, but also meat for dinner. In the ensuing decades the twins

44 Ibid., Paladin, p. 196. Also interviews with Merritt, notes in my possession.
convinced themselves, at least, that the more remote the beast's lair, the better the meat. Naturally, those healthier deep mountain bucks and bulls sported healthier racks.

Granny taught the boys to watch the lands and animals, to learn their ways and their needs, and to recognize how their needs drive their ways. He instilled in them the willingness to develop patience in learning from the wild (i.e. made them sit tight even when they didn't want to, until they had experienced the prizes of sitting tight). He always emphasized that "other living things possess some sensitivities far sharper than our own," especially regarding subtle natural forces and changes. (italics mine.)

To supplement their diets, the men of the family took annual treks east into the Big Belt or south to the Elkhorn mountains to collect huckleberries. Dad loved them, and Mom could preserve them several ways. On such excursions, Cliff made his twins pick berries "as long as you can see them," in spite of the boys' objections "but, cutthroat don't bite after dark!" Fruit otherwise rarely found its way to the Merritt kitchen on their Prickly Pear homestead; Clif recalls that they still succored an orange at Christmas as a very special treat. Even in remote Montana, the human sweet tooth had its say. Finding a honey tree brought accolades and cooperation from every body in the extended family, as they hurriedly gathered wagon and buckets and axes to go harvest its succulent, and storable, nectar. (Merritt recalled several honey-tree excitements in his memoirs of Grandfather.) Granny never, however, instilled in young Clif the willingness to work with the bee hives on Spring Creek place.

With knowledge and experience you learn how to care for the land and its inhabitants for mutual benefit, and learn the necessity of all species to ensure the well-being of each species in the web of life. With Clif Merritt, such lessons did not derive from appreciation of theory or symbols, but from pure love of, and passionate fascination

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Interview with Merritt, 15 Oct. 04, notes in my possession.
with, the experience of life in all its diverse manifestations. He had tapped the wellspring 
that fueled the incredible energies and devotion of the likes of Leopold, Carhart, and Bob 
Marshall; even today’s preservation advocates admonish that passion is good for 
wilderness.⁴³

1929

The twins took life on the homestead seriously; they played hard and learned the 
tricks of the ranching trade by working hard. So, in 1929 when Cliff needed to move the 
family dairy cattle about 35 miles along the road route to Townsend, and needed to ride 
ahead to prepare the way and the new farm, he confidently left his two boys--aged ten--in 
charge of the cattle. Clif says it was reasonable; he and brother Don rode smart horses, 
and the cattle generally followed their lead. Grandfather Merritt joined at the last 
moment, and the three herded their 25 milkers down the trail.

They made one potentially serious misjudgment: While range cattle could have 
easily made the trip in one day, not so with dairy cattle. When Grandfather said “We will 
spend the night here,” he caused twin consternation. While the cows were loving the 
choice, the boys had neither dressed for the cold Montana night, nor brought bedrolls. 
Grandfather just pointed at a haystack, “as though he had it all in mind before arriving at 
the site.”

Grandfather passed his comfort with nature to the twins early in their lives; he 
enabled them to gain confidence through repeated experience. By age ten, Clif claims, he 
and his brother already considered “the outdoors a part of home.” Diligent watchfulness, 
respectful caution, knowledge of the land’s resources, and faith in life, together pre-empt 
fear to enable wonder at nature, whether sublime or mundane. To the Prickly Pear

⁴³Ibid., Doug Scott talk at the Wilderness Institute, University of Montana, 2005.
homesteaders, it was all nature, and they were a part of it.

Clif wrote that learning to be comfortable in the outdoors helped his twin Don to a successful outfitting business, and provided Clif confidence to investigate wilderness personally by trekking for days in wild land that would daunt a less experienced outdoorsman. Meanwhile, that night he learned an important lesson for life in the wilds: you do what you can with what is at hand. While the cows loved the wild prairie grasses, it took the lesser food in the rancher’s haystack to provide the boys with their primary need at the moment, a safe and comfy bed.

Clif empathized with his animal companions, and could even personalize their troubles in life. For example, Merritt explained, “when a cow’s bag is full, it is like waking up and really needing to go to the bathroom. Almost painful.” When a full cow nudges its calf, it wants that calf to drink and relieve the pressure. When a cow nudged Clif, he would cringe at the feeling that we all know only too well, and hurry to go get a bucket and help her out.^

After proving their competence with the dairy cows, the boys moved up to responsibility with the horses. Clif remembers at age ten and eleven watching wild horses graze, learning how they move, around Mount Ascension above Helena. He and twin Don, at age twelve accepted their first assignment rounding up wild range horses, chasing them into remote corrals for branding. It turned out they were among the last who would do so, as fences encapsulated the last of the frontier. In Merritt’s words:

On the open range, the Thoroughbreds and Hambletonians frequently interbred with the tough, endurable mustangs and produced fast, excellent saddle horses. ... Our wild horses ran in bands, 20 to about 35 head to a band. Some bands were made up of fleet-footed sorrels. Other bands were blue and strawberry roans, while still other groups contained a mixture of bays, iron grays and blacks. ... It was an exciting

^ Merritt interview, 30 Mar. 04, notes in my possession.
and beautiful sight to top a rise on our saddle horses and see a bunch of
colorful roans become alert and gather together, or a band of sorrels
already starting to run with their flaxen manes and tails waving in the
breeze. Many of these horses had never felt rope and were as wild as a
deer. ... It was up to us and our top saddle horses to outwit and outrun
them, while heading them for the Spring Place and the corrals miles
away. ... By the mid-1930s, we had taken nearly all of Grandfather's
and Dad's horses off the range. For Don and me, it was a sad time.
"Mustangers" were seeking the unclaimed horses. And the era of wild-
horse roundups came to an end.

Cliff offered only cursory instructions as he sent his able sons after his range
horses for the first time: "Now, boys, when you ride to the top of a rise and see a band of
our wild horses below, you have to decide at once through which pass (in the mountains)
they'll go--and beat them there!" Dad the cryptic, sounded reminiscent of the Karate Kid
going to his first competition; when he asked for the rules, his teacher admonished: “Hit,
don’t get hit.” Yet, Cliff confidently knew the twins had watched often enough and could
rope well enough, and he trusted their saddle horses to keep them from getting lost.

The lesson in “outpointing your opponent” stuck with Clif. Later in life he
paraphrased the strategy and taught it to his field representatives with the Wilderness
Society and American Wilderness Alliance (later, American Wildlands) “in order to
safeguard some of our vanishing public wildlands so essential to perpetuating our world-
class wildlife.”

From managing horses’ power in the fields, to running them down and across the
range toward a tiny target, Clif learned much about the intelligence and social instincts of
horses. It took watching his brother Don break them--Clif proudly claims his twin Don
never got thrown--to comprehend the depth and breadth of individual personalities among
the species. They can all learn, but they go about it in many different, highly individual,
ways. Some, Clif claims, choose never to be ridden--just like some men choose not to be
tamed--but that reflects insistent preference, not low intelligence. Abstracting these respectful, even soulful, attitudes from horses to all animals came naturally to Clif, especially under Grandfather’s devoted tutelage. Merritt also generalized his appreciation and accommodation of diversity within species to humans, a trait that enabled him to successfully direct a grassroots network made up of highly independent Westerners.

Grandfather’s lessons on range management continued over the years. From his initial concern to sustain their livelihoods as ranchers through wise use of the land, existence forced him toward more radical stands as he recognized the inability for any animal to live in and populate the rapidly deteriorating landscape of 1930s Montana. If cows can’t find forage, neither can deer and elk--even limited permit hunting cannot help game animals repopulate if the land provides them no food. According to Lawrence Merritt, every wild thing needed habitat protection, thus management, by the 1930s. Not until Aldo Leopold’s classic *A Sand County Almanac* in 1948 did such an ecological attitude begin to take root in the mainstream of thought. Nor would *Sand County* have become a classic without the likes of Granny preparing a new generation the likes of Clif, already paying attention to the ecology of their homes.

Grandfather advocated not just better land use policy, but also watershed protection. He saw protecting watersheds to provide the key to fisheries management. That process would either begin soon, Grandfather declared by 1930, or else there would be no fish left to manage. In particular, grayling and native cutthroat trout need cold, clear water in order to propagate. With the grayling nearly gone and the magnificent trout disappearing, nature was insisting that the waters had fallen below standard--and thus needed protection.

At a personal level of contributing to fishery welfare, Grandfather explained his
catch and release behavior as releasing the “important spawners” to help ensure sustainability. He taught the boys similar guidelines for big-game hunting: a respectful hunt provided challenge and intrigue for the soul and ego, and meat for the belly, without endangering the species’ viability. When one ram avoided his best hunting effort for several hours, Grandfather explained to the boys why he gave up the hunt: It had kept him at bay long enough to prove it deserved to live, his species needed his strength and wisdom.

People, Lawrence Merritt suggested by the example he lived with his grandsons in the wild and semi-wild lands of central Montana, could drive policy. He passed to his grandsons an abiding passion for the respectful treatment of all things living—whether the opposition at a land-use hearing, an elk in the woods, or a watershed in the mountains. Clif Merritt took his grandfather’s lessons to heart, and applied them throughout his life to the American grassroots and scientific efforts to preserve wild lands in America, often, as I will demonstrate in chapter three, with amazing success.

Childhood with Grandfather Merritt provided young Clif extensive experience with ranching, wild lands and biologic sustainability, and instilled in him a deep love and appreciation for the diversity of nature and wilderness. By his teen years, Clif Merritt had also been imbued with an abiding passion to respect all things living. Together with life on the Montana homestead, Lawrence Merritt nurtured the budding “organic intellectual” among American conservationists, and provided the foundation for his action-oriented preservation ideals.

Among grandfather Merritt’s many talents, his success with one of humanity’s ancient practices remained forever an enigma to Clif Merritt’s scientific studies and rational bent: the strange phenomena called dousing, also known as “water witching.” Clif
noted that dousing rods need to be freshly cut, green wood. He also noted that tree roots possess incredible sensitivity to the whereabouts of accessible underground water. Could the roots’ “instincts” channel themselves through the green wood and the douser? With no solid science to explain the validity of water witching, Merritt still struggles with the undeniable success of Grandfather’s applications of the art. If you believe in things that you don’t understand, then you’ve watched nature in action, too.

In 1933, Grandfather Merritt, after an eventful 72 years of frontier life, experienced his first stay in a hospital. “He was a man who never asked a favor but was constantly doing favors for others.” But time had come for him to sit back and let the next generation take charge and do the favors.

By then, influential ex-forester Bob Marshall, twelve years younger than Cliff and eighteen older than Cliff, and heir to the Leopold/Carhart legacy, had become so disenchanted with American public land management that he wrote *The People’s Forests* to advocate a national shift to socialism as the only way to ensure a proper relationship between America and its wilderness. Sustainable forest employment and communities required sustained yield harvesting methods, which “experience has shown us” does not occur under capitalist incentives. He saw a federally enforced just-stay-out rule for wilderness in the forests as the only solution to rampant destruction, similar to the policy already accepted for fire in the forests. While Marshall adhered to strict anthropocentrism in his 1933 plea and never mentioned wildlife as a benefit and benefactor of wilderness, he warned that the land had become direly ill beneath its outward appearance of health and vitality, and would deteriorate quickly without immediate intervention. He elevated the sense of dire urgency begun with Carhart’s note

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46 “Bob Marshall. This is his 1933 book’s thesis.”
to Leopold only 14 years earlier, to new heights.

1935 a tough year

Clif recalled that because of the family’s lifestyle, the Great Depression caused but a wave, not tsunami, in daily life on the homestead. The drouths of the mid and late 1930s, however, brought very hard times; nature still played a greater role in their lives than Wall Street. A handful of conservationists could not say the same about the national forests. The National Recovery Act, in an effort to reverse the lingering effects of the 1929 crash that set off the Depression, made economic development a federal priority. That act authorized the Civilian Conservation Corps to employ thousands of workers in the nation’s forests and parks with picks, shovels, bulldozers, and the intent to construct thousands of miles of roads and trails. This federally-funded sponsorship of development in the forests, including pristine roadless wildlands, coupled with a long history of private sector intrusion and destruction, frightened a few nationally-known conservation workers.

In January, 1935, a handful of like-minded activists decided to band their energies together in an effort to gain strength for their struggling wilderness preservation movement, through numbers and diversity. Bob Marshall spearheaded the formal founding of the Wilderness Society at the Cosmos Club in Washington, D.C. with enthusiastic support from cofounders in attendance: Harold Anderson, Harvey Broome, Benton MacKaye, and Robert Sterling Yard. There they gave formal “definition to the modern wilderness idea: the notion that the federal government ought to preserve large expanses of roadless and otherwise undeveloped nature in a system of designated wilderness areas.”

47 Ibid., Sutter, p. 6.
By invitation “to give the organization a stronger national standing,” Ernest Oberholtzer and Aldo Leopold joined as founding members from their homes in Minnesota and Wisconsin, respectively. Leopold had just begun the restoration of some farmland decimated by poor past practices, a project in ecology eventually made famous posthumously with his *Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There.* (1949)

That May, Clif Merritt grieved mightily when his grandfather died. As the summer of 1935 progressed, Clif became listless and easily fatigued. While not paralysis, it felt nearly as disabling.

Polio “hit Helena particularly hard” in the 1930s, and typhoid made its presence known. Life circumstances had vaccinated the Merritts against the former; the cold, clean, running waters of Spring Creek probably helped them avoid the latter. But the rheumatic fever, having taken their eldest child in the early 1920s, had not finished with them. At age 7, Clif had suffered a couple weeks of the fever, “without permanent damage.” At age 15, the Helena doctor diagnosed Clif’s chronic fatigue and weakness as triple heart valve leakage, a consequence of rheumatic fever.

As he lay in bed one day after an examination, he heard the doctor tell his parents that they might as well start gathering flowers, because their son would be dead within a day or two. As that doctor left the ranch house, he passed Clif and told him, as all good doctors must, to get better quick. Clif retorted that he’d heard the conversation in the kitchen, and “I want you to know I’m going to get well in spite of you!” The doctor gave out a big guffaw, replied “That’s the spirit!” and with a wide grin clapped Clif cheerfully, yet gruffly, on the back. “That almost finished me off right there.”

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48 Ibid., Paladin, p. 245.
If that slap didn’t shake him up enough, the earthquake that nearly flattened the city of Helena at 10:30 pm on October 18, 1935, certainly got his attention. When asked late in his life what he was doing when it struck, Merritt replied wryly “I was laying in bed dying when plaster started falling from the ceiling onto me.” It could have been worse.

Many of the brick and stone buildings Helena’s founding fathers so diligently erected to announce permanence crumbled under the temblor’s force. Hundreds of Helena residents huddled under tents that night, including 30 in the pastures of future Helena National Forest Supervisor Bob Morgan’s family. Scores of people lived at the fairgrounds and other temporary quarters for months while they cleaned and reconstructed their city. At Spring Creek, besides knocking some plaster loose, the earthquake displaced just two logs, below the window on the west side of the house (visible behind Merritt in figure 9). Emmelen cleared the chunks and dust from Clif’s quilt; Don and Cliff quickly squared and sealed the wall. The house has remained stable since then, through today.

Clif’s second miraculous recovery from a killer disease took three years of bed rest, and caused him to fall years behind his twin brother Don at high school. The family moved to Tigard, Oregon, for two years (near Emmelen’s family in Portland), because Emmelen believed the lower altitude might allow Clif’s heart to work less, so heal itself more quickly. He spent the entire time literally on his back. He remembers always finding magazines, with good western stories, and writing materials handy by his bedside, though doesn’t recall just how they got there. Could it have been any other but his

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50 Merritt interview, notes in my possession.
51 Ibid., Paladin, p. 196. See chapter one for his role in preserving the Scapegoat Wilderness in the 1960s.
53 Interview with current owner Terry Scott, May 2005, notes in my possession.
54 Merritt interview, notes in my possession.
mother and nurse Emmelen?

Merritt’s two big bouts with disease paralyzed his body, not his mind. Emmelen ensured that during those months and years he exercised himself the only way he could, by thinking and honing his intellect. He developed an uncanny facility with words and intellectual persuasion. While his twin brother Don excelled in kinesthetic skills—a master mechanic, machinist, and bronc buster, he also won the Oregon State Typing Contest in 1937 while at school in Portland—Clif learned to excel in the intellectual realm, particularly in communications.

During his long recovery, he combined his own feelings and fantasies with the notion of public demand he derived from his reading, in poetry written for ballads. After writing his lyrics, he worked with the publishing houses’ professional composers to put the correct music to it. While nearly immobile, he practiced expressing himself in terms his audience understood, and did it well enough to get published in Portland.

When Clif began to show signs of recovery, the Merritts moved back to Montana. Before dying, Grandfather had placed the Spring Creek Place in Clif’s name, so they had a familiar home to return to. (See figure 14.) There, Clif pursued the physical exercise needed to regain his strength and mobility once again. He walked and hiked the local hills and fields, taking note of changes in the land and seeking causes. To prepare for his favorite fall pastime, he practiced his aim reducing the ranch’s gopher population.

An examination eight years later, by the same doctor who made the original diagnosis, revealed no trace of heart valve problems, none at all. What brought about the cure, in an age before pharmaceutical relief, matters little to this story; the long recovery

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took amazing patience, perseverance, and hope. Again, it took a devoted advocate and cooperative family network to enable success in the face of adversity.

Figure 14

The Merritt Family: Donald Ross, Clifton Reeve, Father (Clifton Rosser), Audrey Mae, Mother (Emmelen), Bernice Lucille, Shirley Ann

By the mid-1930s Cliff had moved his family to his father’s Spring Creek place. Photo from Clif Merritt’s memoirs.

Fellow Montana conservationist and author Paul Richards suggests this second bout with a deadly disease made Clif more sensitive to the feelings of others, which by then included all animals.⁶⁶ Merritt has always claimed that a compulsion to take regular excursions into the Montana wilderness enabled him to regain his health as a youth, and retain it as an adult. The rheumatic fever episode of his life brought to the teenage Merritt the assurances first that the proverbial heart and the physical heart cannot be separated, and second that wilderness presents an immaculate holistic bond to help keep the two hearts healthy and in sync. He carried with him into the wilderness preservation battle

⁶⁶ Paul Richards, long article on Clif for Montana Retiree News. Richards had been a leading advocate to obtain Wilderness protection for the north half of the Elkhorn Range, south of Helena, in the mid 1970s.
the assurance that the mind, body and soul go together inseparably. Wilderness advocates, he taught by example and word, need to possess a healthy ability in wild lands, as well as carry a deep love for them, in order to help inform their knowledge of them.

Clif Merritt returned to Helena High in 1938 for his final two years of high school. His mother moved into Helena for work, and to provide a home in the city so Clif's heart needn't endure the brutal punishment of the road out to the Spring Creek place in order to get a proper public education. On the ranch only for weekends, he kept busy with school during the week. His senior yearbook, the *Vigilante*, credits him for academic excellence, plus contributions to the school newspaper, *The Nugget*; the yearbook, *Vigilante*; the annual Vigilante Parade; the Senior Class Poem and Class Motto, as well as helping to arrange their Senior Banquet. (See figures 15, 16.) Meanwhile, his teachers elected him to the Honor Society, and he participated in the Latin Club, German Club, and Spanish Club—and became president of the latter. He not only excelled with language, but successfully managed many diverse activities as a student leader.

![Figure 15](image)

Clifton Merritt in the 1940 Helena High School *Vigilante* yearbook, page 21. Each student picture is accompanied by a quote; Merritt’s says “Much wisdom often goes with the fewest words.”

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The family held high hopes for their budding scholar as he graduated high school in 1940. While the Dust Bowl of the prior decades left their ranch land unproductive, mother worked for the city school district. The Merritts managed to send Clif to Carroll College in Helena. Living at his mother's home in town, he dove into a formal study of the Humanities. The reading proved richer than his Western magazines. He embraced the intellectual stimulation and guidance of the academy with as much delight as when he engaged the wonder and awe he found wandering beyond the roads.

Then, as soon as the United States formally entered World War II in December of 1941, brother Don entered the service. Clif’s health history bought him a 4F rating; he
Stayed in school, but the Merritt family had lost an income, so he sought work, too. Staff at Carroll College tried to help—they recruited students for him to tutor, especially in the languages. He did odd jobs for the professors, and even substitute taught a time or two. Yet, as the war expanded to two fronts, patriotic Americans needed to sacrifice personal wants for the nation’s production needs. Clif dropped out of college, never to return, to support his family and country, and entered the workforce in 1942.58

Luckily, the American workforce at the time had a great need for the likes of Clifton Merritt. Educated, organized, literate, and deeply devoted to the public good, democracy, and (always important in a state like Montana) the right to bear arms, hunt and fish—Merritt provided a model civil servant for Montana. His skills fit right into the federal bureaucratic expansion necessary to manage the logistics of the huge masses of people and stuff involved in the war effort. After but little time looking for a suitable position, he settled for working with outdoorsmen and their employers, in western Montana.

The Montana civil service, in particular, was primed for the likes of Merritt. During the 1930s, many officials sought a way to break the Anaconda Company’s strangle hold on every aspect of state operations. Well-intentioned state officials found they could avoid the deeply rooted cronyism by embracing a “new federalism.”59 They established agencies to address federal programs, with employee relations governed by federal civil service guidelines rather than the whims of a company hack. Through the 1930s, “[o]ne of the most refreshing aspects of Montana politics [was] its open, breezy grassroots democratic atmosphere.”60

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57 Polk’s Directory 1941-42, Helena listed Clif as a student living with mother and siblings, Audrey a seamstress and Don a clerk: p. 182. I found no directory for 1943; the 1944 directory listed none of them.

58 Ibid., Malone, p. 302.

59 Ibid., Malone, p. 381.
Unions in Butte struck for months in 1934 to obtain an 8-hour day and 40-hour week. A state constitutional amendment initiative in 1936, mandating the 8-hour day throughout the state, passed by about four thousand votes out of more than 200,000 cast, with nearly 90 percent of registered voters participating. A similar federal law, promoted by the National Recovery Administration, passed only two years later; Montanans had led the pack. In order to get federal moneys through the Social Security Act of 1935, the state established several new agencies in 1937, including the Unemployment Compensation Commission. Both Montana’s UCC and its “breezy grassroots democratic” methods would come to play large roles in Clif Merritt’s development as a wilderness preservation leader.

Also in 1937, preservation guru Bob Marshall became chief of the division of the U. S. Forest Service overseeing lands, recreation and wilderness policy. In September, 1939, the Secretary of Agriculture implemented “U” regulations proposed by Bob Marshall, providing stronger wilderness protection. The 14 million acres of “primitive areas” already established were scheduled to be reviewed, reevaluated and reclassified—as “Wilderness” if more than 100,000 acres, as “Wild” if between five and a hundred thousand acres. By 1940, the Forest Service gave protected status to three contiguous primitive areas in northern Montana that Marshall had espoused as constituting a particularly valuable national treasure, and named it after him. That area was quickly called simply “the Bob” by Montana’s outdoors enthusiasts.

Tragically, at a moment of great potential for the wilderness movement, Robert Marshall died of heart failure at age 38 in late 1939, without seeing his favorite hiking grounds protected. His estate provided an endowment for the Wilderness Society to

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1 Ibid., Waldron, p. 141.
2 http://www.wildernessforever.org/learn/wilderness_timeline.pdf
keep it operational for what he must have expected to be a challenging future.\textsuperscript{53} Merritt survived the 1930s against high odds to become one of the leaders of the “many individuals [who] carried on in the example of Marshall’s tireless energy and spirit.”\textsuperscript{64}

**Got a job, settled in**

As the twentieth century progressed, American foresters began to notice “the much evidence”\textsuperscript{65} that private timberlands had become seriously depleted--some have suggested due to decades of market-driven poor practices.\textsuperscript{66} The American timber industry had developed timber and wood products programs to work with the kinds of wood that it could find and harvest easily, and profitably. Two centuries of the pressure of Euro-American expansion, combined with wasteful ways, had removed traditionally-favored woods from profitable availability. The industry had barely begun its search for new kinds of trees with desirable properties, and new ways to work with them, by the 1930s. The U.S. Forest Service opened its modern Forest Products Laboratory in 1932 to support the effort.\textsuperscript{67} Those efforts accelerated exponentially as the war raged and the nation faced a mounting need for natural resources, especially timber. The nation turned to its public lands, and to forests theretofore unharvested to obtain it. That included the mountainous regions of Montana.

It took a war’s frenzy, which motivated both the willingness and the will to make

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., Sutter.
\textsuperscript{64} Ibid., nps “Historical Perspectives,” Robert Marshall, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{66} Robert Marshall’s *The Peoples’ Forests* in 1933, Aldo Leopold’s *Sand County Almanac* in 1948, Arthur Carhart’s *The National Forests* in 1959, all tell the same story of the great majority of profit-driven forestry in the West.
great public expenditures in both money and man-hours in exchange for resources, to turn the nation’s attention seriously to the forests of Montana’s rugged mountains. By 1943, the United States Employment Service (USES) had taken over the responsibilities of the Montana Unemployment Compensation Commission, and created “39 strategically located” local offices throughout Montana’s timbered regions. It intended to organize and finance the timber cut with the efficiency needed for the massive war effort, while trying to establish employment, thus economic, stability for the region.68

Clif Merritt joined the Helena office of the USES as an “Interviewer,” and immediately found himself working out of a small office in Polson, on the south end of Western Montana’s Flathead Lake, snuggled under the majestic Swan and Mission Mountain Ranges. There he played middle-man between forest workers, their employers, and federal and state bureaucracies. He learned, first hand, the diverse roles of many layers of workers within the extraction industry, and within public land management bureaucracies.

With the war demands, timber extraction pressure in Montana had risen beyond all prior experience. In the year following the war, that trend only amplified, fueled by countless returning soldiers needing work and exploding consumer demands requiring increased resource extraction. The war effort soon decimated Montana’s stocks of Western red cedar. So, immediately after the war, lodgepole pine began its meteoric rise in use by the wood products industry. Lodgepole provided high quality pulp for manufacturing rayon and the rise of plastics throughout America’s burgeoning commerce and industry. With a full one-third of the nation’s supply of lodgepole growing in Montana in 1945, the timber industry, with subsidies from federal, state and local

agencies, quickly began construction of ten new treatment and processing plants in Montana, close to the sources of this new crop. Large sawmills also began displacing mid- and small-sized operations across the state. Merritt oversaw the rise in Western Montana's timber industry, as he dealt directly with the rushes in employment it brought.

As always, he brought his ingrained respect to each of his duties--be it preparing a worker for a new position, arranging with a company to outfit a work team for a new project, or reporting to the bureaucracy on job stats or the relationship between policy and practice. He worked diligently to help his clients and employers; he read and visited work sites incessantly to stay informed on every aspect of his work, as well as that of his clients. Along the way, he made friends across every stratum of Montana society.

While he already knew that many managers and bureaucrats held to values different from his own, he fought to make personal respect, integrity and honesty an integral component of his work, and that of his office. Officials at the USES must have appreciated Merritt's approach. They published his two-page sermon "From the Receptionist to the Interviewer, Good Operations Win the Public" in the October 1946 edition of their national publication, Employment Service Review. In that article he set forth his position on effectively and efficiently running an office that interacts with the public. Because this position barely changed in ensuing decades, the article provides an early insight to a subtle yet fundamental aspect of Merritt's administrative successes.

Unless the personnel within the office so conduct themselves in their daily routine that the public is impressed with their friendly, helpful, and professional service, no amount of publicity, public relations, or employer visiting outside the office can bring success to our work. ... Argumentation not only fails to win the applicant over

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to the interviewer’s point of view, but also serves to prejudice the applicant against the office. Furthermore, it may alienate other applicants and employers who are in the office and overhear the unbusiness-like conversation.

Never does the reporter leave the office without a news article on local office activity or labor market information. ... It is the constant objective here to make good public relations even better, realization of which depends upon the thoughtful, courteous, alert, and informed attitude of each member of the staff.70

Here he clearly announced his devotion to teamwork, and his egalitarian respect for every contributor to the effort. He drew from human psychology to explain why he avoided personal argumentation and its long-term effects, preferring always to focus on issues and commonalities. Meanwhile, as a mere civil servant in a remote settlement, he had already come to value the press as a useful ally, and had already begun to nurture that relationship.

With a flourishing postwar free market, Congress disbanded the USES in 1946, requiring that the states absorb all employees without decrease in salary. Montana resumed its operations of Employment Services under the Unemployment Compensation Commission (UCC) on 15 November, 1946.

Both Clif and his twin Don accepted minor promotions during the turnover, and settled into secure careers with the state.71 While they would never get rich, they desired and trusted the security offered by the Montana civil service’s “merit system” of employee evaluation. The merit system gave them legal recourse in the event of arbitrary or capricious or personal actions against their job. Pragmatists from a lowly homestead in

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a state still known for the influence of its “old boy” political network, both the Merritt twins valued, above all other considerations, legal protection for their economic security. They both embraced the American Dream; with their disciplined work ethic they would rise above the poverty of their youth into a secure American middle-class.

By the end of 1953, Clif Merritt had married, begun a family, and risen in the UCC to “field director” for western services, headquartered at the Kalispell, Montana office. He bought a house in town with a yard for the kids, a garden plot for vegetables, and rafters in the garage for hanging game. Taking advantage of his location, Merritt continued to hunt and fish and wander in the wilderness, and to expand his network of outdoors enthusiasts. He even managed, working within the legislatively defined merit system, to get his best fishing buddy, Dallas Eklund, a job in the UCC office with him.

By then, the once remote settlement of Kalispell, below the southwest end of Glacier National Park and above the confluence of the Flathead and Stillwater Rivers in northern Montana, had begun a growth spurt that continues to this day. Snuggled in a valley below Montana’s most pristine forests, surrounded by some of America’s last free-flowing rivers, Kalispell grew hand-in-hand with the postwar booms in the timber and outdoor-recreation industries. From his home in town, Merritt could easily make weekend trips, in his Studebaker, into wild lands surrounding “the Bob” and throughout the immaculate Swan, Mission, and Whitefish mountain ranges. (See figure 17.) With job security, family, friends, and wilderness all on hand, Merritt possessed all the outward signs of success and satisfaction. He might have considered himself in the proverbial American hog heaven.
Yet, Merritt stewed and fretted; he knew deep in his heart and bones that, as the bard once phrased it, “Something is rotten in the state of Denmark.” While a staunch advocate of progress, he had become deeply troubled—both at work and play—over the ways government and industry had begun to implement it in the roadless lands of Western Montana.

When lumber men first sent their industrial-scale operations to Montana in the 1940s, they faced a new scenario: seemingly infinite expanses of amazingly even-aged stands of lodge pole pines. The forest service’s silviculture experts examined the growth patterns of those trees, the management experts examined the economic-logistics of harvesting those forests, and they all agreed that one method would most efficiently address both concerns. Thus, they implemented it—“clearcutting”—at industrial-scale.

52 William Shakespeare, in Hamlet, Marcellus to Horatio, following Hamlet after the ghost. I.i.90.
throughout Merritt’s UCC region.

For years, Merritt withheld judgment, pending evidence about this new silvicultural experiment. All the while, his position as field director enabled him to watch and gather diverse evidence from diverse sources—from the deep woods to the capital in Helena—to evaluate the impact of clearcutting on regional employment. He learned quickly to value mining diverse sources of information, so as to inoculate himself against bias and manipulation.

Merritt had always held tenaciously to the UCC mission: “Employment Stabilization Is The Ultimate Goal of an Employment Security Program.” The clearcut method did not require constant, long-term tending of any sale-area, thus did not require any long term employees. Instead, it required significant forces of transient men; companies frequently moved them from forest to forest across the West. Those who wouldn’t follow the sale-sites far and wide had to settle for ephemeral employment. As such, those men seldom established “stable” homes and families. Merritt worked so close to them that he could not deny that clearcutting caused economic insecurity of the type that the Montana legislature considered “a serious menace to the health, morals, and welfare of the people of this State.” Yet, when he presented evidence of the deleterious impact of clearcutting on the people and economy of the region, his superiors in the UCC advised him to get over it and accept modernity.

Meanwhile, Merritt’s view of the American Dream much reflected my own father’s: The job involved only 40 hours per week, the rest of the time belonged to him. Owning a home on his civil servant salary ($2640 per year in 1947) made augmenting the

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72 Ibid., quoting Section 2 of the Montana Unemployment Compensation Law.
73 Ibid. 8.
pantry nearly essential, thus he used the meat from hunting and fishing as a good excuse to get into the wilderness. During off-seasons, he used the need for “frequent exercise in a healthful environment to prevent a return” of his heart difficulties as another excuse to go wander the local wildlands. All the while, as an amateur naturalist, he constantly observed, and eventually became an avid photographer.

He noticed, and learned to document, things like changes in wildlife density and health and choices of corridors, changes in water flow and clarity and fish diversity, both near to and distant from logging sites. The borderlands created by the clearcut technique indeed proved beneficial to some browsing species like deer, but the open spaces scared off the world-class wildlife like elk, bear, and caribou. Clearcut slopes hold little water, so even light rain brought flooding and rapid erosion. Silt from the runoff also destroyed native fish spawning grounds. He juxtaposed this ecological evidence with his economic conclusions, to become adamantly opposed to clearcutting. He even began to question the motives of those, expert or not, who advocated that kind of so-called efficiency.

He spent a lot of his time-away-from-work in the woods and on remote rivers and streams. Yet, he never went alone; he always rounded up some outdoorsman friends, like Dallas Eklund, Loren Kreck, Guy Brandborg, Bob Cooney, or John Craighead, to accompany him on his excursions. Increasingly often, his outdoorsman associates from work and play—even those without conservationist leanings—noticed and mentioned irregularities and developments that never appeared in the relevant reports.

By 1954, such friends and associates, provided a concrete foundation for Merritt’s unshakable trust in on-the-ground citizen-monitoring to ensure legal public land management. Meanwhile, personal observations by local outdoorsmen, when compared

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76 Interview with Merritt’s eldest daughter, Sherry Essig. Notes in author’s possession.
78 Interview with Merritt. Notes in author’s possession.
to the state and Forest Service reports Merritt had access to, showed too much disconnect to sit well with him. Given the shortsighted definitions of efficiency popular at the time, Merritt foresaw difficulties ahead—the same instability and unsustainability that David Stuart would highlight decades later, in his classic exposé of the devastating results of analogous shortsighted survival strategies by the Anasazi great house society.76 Possessing a healthy skepticism and an acutely analytic mind, with the accumulation of so much unfavorable and undeniable evidence, Merritt began to lose faith in both the land and labor management systems he had long worked for, and had once revered highly.

From the perspectives of conservationists, academics, and state agencies in Montana, the Region One administrative support for industrial clearcutting seemed to preclude public debate prior to implementation. Forest administrators had chosen maximal cut over maximal care.80 Appeals had been dismissed offhand. The urgings of well-informed advisors had made no headway against the inertia of government bureaucracy. Even the “economic instability” argument failed in the official corridors of Montana’s UCC. Merritt faced a Hamlet moment of angst and internal struggle between his progressive upbringing and his love of the wilds. Hamlet died undecided; obedient to tradition he caused the miserable demise of his entire clan. Maybe learning from Hamlet’s mistake, Merritt leaned toward Aldo Leopold’s view: “We all strive for safety, prosperity, comfort, long life, and dullness. ... but too much safety seems to yield only danger in the long run. Perhaps this is behind Thoreau’s dictum: In wildness is the salvation of the world.”81 Merritt deliberately abandoned tradition, and in doing so made a decision that would help change the landscape of the American West.

80 Ibid., Robbins.
Because he believed he had exhausted all reasonable options to protect his beloved roadless areas of western Montana from what he considered the obvious idiocy of the clearcut, Merritt chose to risk the vicissitudes of a last ditch option: he turned to democracy. As a handhold for hope in a seemingly desperate situation, Merritt suggested to his friends that maybe the weight of public pressure might work. In July 1953, the Outdoor Writers’ Association of America (a national organization of outdoor journalists and editors) held its annual conference in Missoula, Montana, and further fanned and focused Merritt’s enthusiasm. He attended talks with titles like “Education, The Sharpest Tool for Conservation Resources” and “The Crusading Columns for Conservation.” He determined to join the crusaders, and to use columns of educational articles as his chief outreach.

By March of 1954, Merritt decided to answer Aldo Leopold’s 1949 call by working to create a “militant minority of wilderness-minded citizens [to] be on watch ... and available in a pinch” in western Montana. He cofounded the Flathead Lake Wildlife Association (with office mate Dallas Eklund) as the venue to fire his first salvo as a preservation barbarian at the gates. With petition to the Forest Service and hand-colored map attached, he sent a letter to every sportsman’s association and outdoor organization in the region, “& All Individuals Interested in the Preservation of Our Outdoor Heritage.” Hand-typed in formal business letter format, the header reached right out: “SUBJECT: Threatened Destruction of Wilderness Area! IMPORTANT!”

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82 by Ernest Swift, director of the Wisconsin Conservation Department, and Thomas D. Fry, Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Game commission, respectively. Transcripts of these speeches found in Merritt’s papers, box “early 1950s.” The OWAA met 20 July 1953.

83 Ibid., Leopold. P. 200.

84 Subject line of open letter from the Flathead Lake Wildlife Association, Dallas F. Eklund, President; Clifton R. Merritt, Secretary. 5 March 1954. Found in Merritt Papers, folder 1950s correspondence.
The letter began “Please read the attached petition NOW! This matter is of vital importance to every outdoorsman in the United States!” Then it explained why. The petition detailed what Merritt’s new association wanted the Forest Service not to do, practice clearcutting; the map showed exactly where it shouldn’t be done, in the Bunker Creek drainage just north of “the Bob’s” boundary. Merritt kept the urgency high; he knew he would have to set national precedent if he had any hope of influencing what he saw as irrational forest Service policy in his own backyard. He openly declared his local battle to be a national issue.

With this initial thrust, Merritt distinguished himself from the typical American outdoorsman, and entered into a small class of highly energetic leaders of mid-century conservation. The next chapter of this thesis will extend from this first salvo to outline his volunteer efforts in western Montana conservation through 1964, and examine his ensuing 15 years directing the Wilderness Society’s western field network as, ironically or not, a centrally-guided grassroots engagement.

Summary

By early 1954, Clif Merritt had prepared himself--with, he insists, a lot of help from god, nature, and family--for the battles ahead. He had cultivated each of his human natures--mind, body and soul--individually and holistically. Further, Merritt recognized that he could integrate the three, and feed them simultaneously, through his love for wild life. He read voluminously, participated ceaselessly, interacted constantly with all things wild and all people similarly inclined. With eyes wide open and focused on his version of paradise, he formed his own long-term mission, goal, and vision statements for conservation, and vigorously set out to achieve them.
Merritt embraced grassroots democracy not as a superior ideal, but as a pragmatic, last-ditch response to a perceived threat to his own backyard. He recognized, then, that he personally would have to labor ceaselessly to motivate masses of others to fight to stop the proliferation of demonstrably poor practices by the Forest Service, particularly in and around his beloved Bob Marshall Primitive Area.

Samuel Hays has reiterated, in his capstone reflection on the past half-century of the wilderness movement, that most volunteers entered the movement for concrete reasons of their own—usually in response to local incursions of development. Only later, if ever, did they engage the literature and its ideals. While Merritt had by then thoroughly engaged the wilderness and conservation literature and science of the age, he entered the political realm of the movement—just as Hays would generally predict—for concrete reasons of his own. Merritt joined groups to garner support for his own goals—in particular to “Save the Bob” corridor—not to align himself with ideologues. He held his own ideology too dearly to compromise it, especially to people less experienced with the wild.

In this chapter I hope to have indicated, however incompletely, the complex interrelationships among the many seemingly small human and chance influences that contributed to Merritt’s preparation for his future success in conservation. A university would be hard pressed to produce as effective a curriculum to generate the same important leadership properties for an upcoming generation. The holistic depth of Merritt’s preparations brought him to leadership in wilderness preservation, organically, without the fertilizer of family money or social status to launch or buoy him.

The sieve of mainstream history, of the academy, has suffered from its failure to grapple with the slippery, subtle waters of personal wellsprings of ambition. The
multidimensional link Merritt formed with wild life—both animal and vegetable—by 1954
proved an incredibly rich fount, one that nourished and nurtured more than five decades
of contentious American wilderness preservation efforts. To Merritt, after 1954 all he
did was the work that he needed to do, “the ‘nuts and bolts’ guiding light” who
constantly made sure the belts stayed greased. In the next chapter, I turn to that work, its
outcomes, and its place in the movement.

... I saw an aged, aged man,
   A-sitting on a gate.
‘Who are you, aged man?’ I said.
   ‘And how is it you live?’
And his answer tricked through my head
   Like water through a sieve.

He said ‘I look for butterflies
   That sleep among the wheat:
...’
His accents mild took up the tale:
   He said ‘I go my ways,
...
He said ‘I hunt for haddocks’ eyes
   among the heather bright,
...
‘I sometimes dig for butter rolls,
   Or set lined twigs for crabs:
I sometimes search the grassy knolls
   For wheels of Hansom-cabs.
And that’s the way’ (he gave a wink)
   ‘By which I get my wealth—
   And very gladly will I drink
Your Honor’s noble health.’
...

85 Ed Zahniser. 1975 letter recommending Merritt for the 1976 American Motors Conservation Award for
Professionals. Copy in AMCA folder compiled by Doris Milner, among Merritt’s papers.
I thanked him much for telling me
The way he got his wealth,
But chiefly for his wish that he
Might drink my noble health.

And now, if e'er by chance I put
My fingers into glue,
Or madly squeeze a right-hand foot
Into a left-hand shoe,
Or if I drop upon my toe
A very heavy weight,
I weep, for it reminds me so
Of that old man I used to know--
Whose look was mild, whose speech was slow,
Whose hair was whiter than the snow,
Whose face was very like a crow,
With eyes like cinders, all aglow,
Who seemed distracted with his woe,
Who rocked his body to and fro,
And muttered mumblingly and low,
As if his mouth were full of dough,
Who snorted like a buffalo--
That summer evening, long ago,
A-sitting on a gate. ***

CHAPTER 3
CLIF MERRITT, CATALYST

In his quiet, unobtrusive way, he is a genius at inspiring his co-workers and his staff with zeal and love of the battle.

Mardy Murie, long-time Wyoming conservationist

I think that most of us who work closely with Clif would march into Hell to do a wilderness study on it if he asked.

Dave Foreman, Wilderness Society field representative

In Chapter One of this thesis I examined the role of Clif Merritt, then new Director of Field Services for the Wilderness Society, in the shaping, progress, and success of legislation establishing the Scapegoat Wilderness in Montana. In Chapter Two I argued that he achieved success in Scapegoat not by a stroke of luck, but through intense preparation; his knowledge of the land, the law, and the people administering them came through many years of experience in all three realms. Early guidance by his mentor and grandfather Lawrence Merritt helped him form a conservationist’s worldview early in life. In this chapter, I will show that Scapegoat was not a “one-hit wonder” by highlighting Merritt’s activities in the conservation movement first as a volunteer in the 1950s and early 1960s, and then as a paid professional through the 1970s. I quote Merritt often and at length in the effort to provide a sense of the voice that has motivated many wilderness workers over the past 50 years.

With passage of the Wilderness Act of 1964, and the emergence of “ecology” as a social concern, America experienced an exponential rise in public interest in the management of public lands and waters. Studies by many government agencies and

1 Both quotes in “Clif Merritt: he leads from behind,” *High Country News*, August 1, 1975, p. 16.
legislation in state and federal legislatures multiplied in response to a perceived threat to the health of ourselves and our forests. Long-time wilderness advocate Doug Scott, now of Campaign for America’s Wilderness in Seattle, has noted that Clif Merritt, as Wilderness Society Director of Field Services, involved himself in nearly every single study of a wild area or scenic river during those years.³ To provide exacting coverage of those dynamic decades requires a project larger than a master’s thesis.

Thus, I will briefly review Merritt’s 15 years with the Wilderness Society, and provide sources that future researchers may find enlightening. I will elaborate primarily on those activities where my primary sources significantly inform the secondary literature. Brock Evans, long-time lobbyist for the Sierra Club and Audubon Society and currently president of the Endangered Species Coalition in Washington, D.C., recently noted that because “the big guys” in the central offices typically push wilderness legislation through its final stages, they tend to take more credit for it than they deserve. They often forget--especially those who never worked in the field--the years of energy, input, study, and negotiations other people struggle through to get the legislation as far as Washington in the first place.⁴ My highlights of Merritt’s work during the Wilderness Act Era will support the argument that grassroots workers had greater impact on wilderness legislation of the era than many people recognize, scholars included.

The first half of the chapter, however, will focus on Merritt’s 10 years of work as a volunteer conservation leader, from about 1953 to early 1964. During those years Merritt began cultivating his leadership talents on lands he had long loved, along the Flathead River in Western Montana. I demonstrate, again through selected activities, that as long-time Montana conservation activist, author, and publisher Dale Burk notes, the

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³ Doug Scott, email from <dscott@leaveitwild.org> “Re: Clif Merritt and history.” 20 May 2004.
⁴ Brock Evans interview, notes in my possession.
"Flathead was precursor and model for the national movement to follow a decade later."

Out of the Chute

The Native Forest Network’s (NFN) history of conservation on Montana’s Rocky Mountain Front lists two noteworthy events in the 1950s. Both reflected the grassroots mentality that Montana historian Michael P. Malone notes has permeated Montana politics. First, throughout the decade “Hunters and ranchers fended off” Bureau of Reclamation development plans to flood the Upper Sun River with its proposed Sun Butte Dam. I will note other dams they did not mention. Second, the NFN notes that in 1953 in particular, “Flathead sportsmen initiate campaign to add portions of the Swan Range, Spotted Bear, and upper Middle Fork Flathead River to the Bob Marshall Wilderness.” As noted in Chapter Two, by 1953 Clif Merritt and Dallas Eklund had finally lost hope in the administrative process and Forest Service versions of wise use, and had begun to prepare for their first preservation salvo from Kalispell, Montana, beneath the Swan Range in the upper Flathead Valley.

They had long been watching and listening carefully throughout their local stomping grounds. Merritt, currently writing his autobiography with working title “Beyond the Roads,” summarized his observations in his chapter “The Battle of Bunker Creek” as follows.

A major change from custodial to utilization with National Forest management in Montana and Idaho started to take place around 1948. In Northwestern Montana excessive clearcutting and overcutting began on the North Fork of the Flathead, including Big Creek, Coal Creek, Whale Creek and also on the Kootenai and Bitterroot National Forests.

Interview with Dale Burk, notes in my possession.


Ibid.
Entire mountain slopes were virtually denuded. Security and thermal cover essential for elk, moose, bighorn sheep, mountain goat, grizzly bear, woodland caribou, deer and other wildlife was largely eliminated. Wildlife herds disappeared.

In runoff periods, many new logging roads eroded vast amounts of sediment into the trout streams. The streams ran coffee-colored from early spring into the rivers. Key spawning beds vital to reproduction of large numbers of native bull trout (formerly referred to as Dolly Varden) and to native cutthroat trout were covered with sediment and destroyed. Bull trout and cutthroat populations rapidly diminished. The North Fork was a cut-out and get-out operation.

"The Battle of Bunker Creek" began in the effort to prevent the Forest Service from building roads into the northern reaches of the Bob Marshall Primitive Area, and throughout the 500,000 acres between the Bob and Glacier Park. With Merritt and Eklund at the helm, Flathead Lake Wildlife Association took the lead in educating the valley’s residents about this little-known threat by “sponsoring public meetings to acquaint the citizens with the Forest Service project and invit[ing] the Forest Supervisor to attend and explain his plan.” The local radio station and word-of-mouth provided the only advertisement for the Flathead Lake Wildlife Association meetings, still, valley residents gathered en mass at them to discuss the half million acres of clear cut along the headwaters of their beloved Flathead River, proposed by the U.S. Forest Service.

Merritt estimated about 400 people attended each meeting, which “showed the public’s great concern about logging the large tract.” As secretary of their group, Merritt encouraged members to write, call, or visit the Flathead Forest Supervisor with their concerns. He knew they would need to generate a lot of local pressure to match the federal pressure “to get out the cut,” which recent experience had shown the valley’s

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8 Ibid., p. 2.
9 Ibid.
outdoorsmen would occur without regard to wildlife or water welfare.

In August 1953, Kalispell’s newspaper, The Daily Inter Lake, in spite of having refused to publish Flathead Lake Wildlife Association’s meeting times, reported a dinner meeting scheduled in Missoula between the Regional Forester and the Wilderness Society’s Executive Director. Merritt, a local boy already thinking nationally, grabbed Eklund and drove down to meet the latter, Dr. Howard Zahniser, and to solicit his help. Merritt had not realized at the time that while his and Eklund’s groups were “striving hard to add a half-million acres of outstanding but undesignated wilderness to the national forests’ wilderness system,”10 Dr. Zahniser had called the Missoula meeting to encourage the Region One Forest Service team to resist growing national and industry pressure to carve away at the wilderness areas already established in Montana. Still a bit naive, Merritt then believed that “administratively protected” meant “protected.” Merritt says that after a delightful dinner discussing their case, “Dr. Zahniser replied there was not a thing that he could do to help us.”11 Merritt and Eklund drove back to Kalispell a bit dejected; they would have to save the Flathead River’s headwater country on their own. Yet, Merritt had introduced himself, personally and over dinner, to the Wilderness Society through its courteous and indefatigable leader, Howard Zahniser.

In accordance with a lifelong habit, Merritt went home and wrote Dr. Zahniser a letter as summary and response to their meeting.12 He then wrote to Michael Hudoba, Washington Editor of Sports Afield, with a progress-update on the road resistance, and with Zahniser’s sad news. It took Merritt and Eklund nearly a year to invigorate the Flathead Lake Wildlife Association. They moved its office from tiny Somers to Kalispell, Montana, and raised its membership from 60 to more than 1000. By March, 1954.

10 Ibid., p. 3.
11 Ibid.
Merritt had garnered sufficient force to seek defensive protection through an offensive move. As reported in a long and passionate speech by Forrest C. Rockwood, City Attorney of Kalispell, Montana, over radio station KGEZ:

The Flathead Lake Wildlife Association, Flathead Sportsmen’s Association, and Whitefish Rod & Gun Club, have filed with Ezra Benson, as the U. S. Secretary of Agriculture and head of the U. S. Forest Service, a petition requesting that this area be put within the Bob Marshall Wilderness Area, thereby preventing the construction of roads, logging and grazing. So the real issue to be considered is the inclusion of this area within the Bob Marshall Wilderness Area; the logging of the Bunker Creek spruce is but a part of this issue.13

The Association had taken its local argument and turned it national—only the Secretary of Agriculture could grant their request. Fred A Plummer, Executive Secretary of Flathead Conservationists in Kalispell, mailed a transcript of the entire speech to all members, with the request that they send him copies of all correspondence they had sent to administrators or government officials regarding Bunker Creek.14 If compiled in one folder, the overwhelming numbers of respondents could not be denied, even by an administration accustomed to autonomy, such as the Forest Service’s.

Meanwhile, Merritt began to pepper the Montana congressional delegation with arguments and requests to influence the Secretary of Agriculture. He touted recreation as “one of Flathead’s three largest industries.”15 He argued further “that the relatively small amount of timber involved in the upper stretches of the South and Middle Forks of the Flathead drainage is more valuable as watershed protection and fish and wildlife

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13 Transcript of radio speech over Station KGEZ, 7 April 1954, by Forrest C. Rockwood, City Attorney, Kalispell, Montana. In Eklund papers, in Merritt papers.
14 Cover letter to transcript, “Dear Conservationist,” from Fred A Plummer, Executive Secretary of Flathead Conservationists, Kalispell, Montana. nd. “All correspondence and petitions must be in our possession by 10 May 1954” in the letter, and 7 April 1954 on the transcript suggests mid-April.
sanctuary." He pointed specifically to the need to accommodate one of the great and sudden changes in Montana's economy after the postwar years—the rise of recreation as an industry. Also, Merritt knew that watershed protection shared with timber production the lead role for forests in the Organic Act of 1897, so provided a very reasonable legal argument to protect the Bunker Creek area. Montana's Senator James E. Murray and new Representative Lee Warren Metcalf proved willing and helpful advocates.17

By October, Mike Hudoba wrote from his Washington office to Merritt about a meeting he had attended with the Forest Service's top brass. "I gathered that the steam you all have built plus the activity we have carried on here in Washington has, for the time being, stopped the Forest Service from moving ahead with the original plans."18 U.S. Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas wrote a letter in support of the road's opponents. The Montana Fish and Game Department officially opposed the road and logging plan for "the roadless area above Spotted Bear"19 popularly known as Bunker Creek. The Forest Service's first attempt to get a road to the edge of the Bob Marshall Wilderness Area had generated significant and diverse opposition at the local, state, and national levels. Merritt, as secretary of Flathead Lake Wildlife Association, instigated and coordinated the battle at all levels.

In spite of support by the Kalispell newspaper and Chamber of Commerce, Regional Forester P. D. Hanson of Missoula announced his abandonment of Forest Service plans to build the Bunker Creek Road. He sent a letter with his decision to the

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16 Ibid.
17 "Representative Lee Metcalf favors Extension of Wilderness Area," Kalispell News-Farm Journal on 27 January 1955. Clipping found in scrapbook in Eklund papers, in Merritt papers.
18 Letter Mike Hudoba to Clif Merritt, 15 October 1954, on Sports Afield letterhead. In Merritt papers.
19 "Forest Drops Project on Bunker Creek Road" headline for Kalispell Daily Inter Lake on 5 January 1955. Clipping found in scrapbook in Eklund papers, in Merritt papers.
Association's ex-president, Dallas Eklund, on 3 January 1955. Merritt immediately wrote of the good news to Mike Hudoba. "This action of the Forest Service is the cause of much happiness around the Flathead Valley tonight. Stopping the Bunker Creek road was probably the most popular issue last year in the entire Flathead area." With such a significant victory, Merritt wondered where that placed his pet forest in the national movement. He continued quite frankly:

Thus it would appear that we have won [sic] the first round in our fight to protect our primitive areas. However, we feel the biggest battle is still ahead. That of course is to get the primitive area on the north boundary included in the Bob Marshall Wilderness. As we start action in this direction, we would like to know very frankly what support we can count on from the national conservation organizations.

Merritt, aware of the role of audience in his writing, took a different tack announcing the perceived victory to his local supporters. He lavished praise on them as he reminded them once again why they had bothered, and encouraged them to keep in contact.

Dear Fellow Sportsman: ...

With this much appreciated help, we made our voices heard, so that the Forest Service called for a re-examination of the proposal that would ultimately destroy the public’s last substantial primitive region in Montana--and with it, a big elk herd, grizzly bear, Rocky Mountain seep and goats, and other rare wild animals, as well as the main source of Montana’s famous Black Spotted and Dolly Varden trout.

Read the outcome of this re-examination in the attached January 5 news article ..., "Forest Drops Project on Bunker Creek Road." ... [The area’s] timber has been officially declared to be of "decidedly submarginal" value. ...

Thanks again for your splendid support--and watch for further word from us!

Remember, in protecting our wilderness areas, national parks, and other public lands, we are bearing the brunt of conservation for 160

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20 Letter Merritt to Hudoba, 5 January 1955. In Eklund papers, in Merritt papers.
21 Ibid.
million Americans!22

Notice he closed by reminding them of the responsibilities of living in their mountain paradise, implying that “our wilderness” might be our back yard, but belongs to the nation. He was already playing the nationalize-the-local-issue from several angles.

Merritt had chosen his desired path in preservation: working with and educating the masses of common people. As indicated by the rapid rise in membership due to its public meetings, the “breezy grassroots” tradition in Montana helped provide a willing audience for his Association’s efforts. Merritt and Guy Brandborg, long time Forest Service ranger in the Bitterroot National Forest and active conservationist, agreed that lack of public understanding made new scientific management efforts essentially ineffective, so formed education committees in their local groups.23 Also in the mid-1950s, Montana State University Botany Department Chair J. W. Severy implemented an extension service that sent Dr. Les Pengelly across Western Montana holding adult wildlife forums. Merritt attended the forums, encouraged others to, and wrote several letters of thanks and encouragement to Dr. Severy for originating them. Merritt observed that the forums “demonstrated that by teaching the adult, as well as the student, we can have wise management of our renewable resources now and in the future.”24 He further appreciated that the forums helped reduce a current local problem with deer overpopulation, and importantly helped reduce opposition to modern scientific management by “misinformed groups and individuals.”25 Sponsored by the university, the forums gave official, scientific

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22 January 17, 1955 open letter from Clifton R. Merritt, Acting Secretary for Flathead Conservationists, Kalispell, Montana. In Eklund papers, in Merritt papers
24 19 Feb 1956 Letter CRM to JW Severy, Chair, Dept. of Botany, MSU, Missoula, p. 2. In Eklund papers in Merritt papers.
25 22 Feb 1956 CRM to JW Severy, Chair, Dept. of Botany, MSU, Missoula. “Re: Les Pengelly’s adult wildlife forums in Western Montana.” p. 2. In Eklund papers in Merritt papers.
status to the land management ideals that Merritt had long touted.

In November 1955 Merritt attended the 17th North American Wildlife Conference; he, like many humans, sought out like-minded company. In the speech “Conservation and You,” speaker Walter P. Taylor emphasized to attendees that only “you in Action” would generate the democratic support needed to challenge entrenched bureaucracy, where ever it is found. Merritt brought a transcript home with him and got busier.

By early January, 1956, he had written and compiled his “first attempt at getting out a wildlife newsletter to the clubs of the Western District.” Actually, that newsletter went out only to selected readers, soliciting their personal comments and critiques. By mid-January, Merritt had sent a letter of gratitude to Guy Brandborg, then president of the Ravalli County Fish and Wildlife Association, for his comments on the newsletter. By the end of the month, Guy’s son Stewart, then working at the Washington, D.C. office of the National Wildlife Federation (NWF), responded with great enthusiasm and encouragement. Stewart Brandborg, “very much impressed,” advised Merritt to send his newsletter to all the NWF Montana affiliates, to officers in other mountain states, and also to the region’s congressmen. Brandborg and Merritt would become strong allies and mutual advocates for the next two decades.

In the Western Montana Wildlife News of February 1, 1956, Merritt compiled, edited, wrote and typed five legal pages of diverse conservation news from across the region. (It became the first of more than 300 monthly newsletters he produced and

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27 9 January 1956, letter CRM to Les Pengelly. In Eklund papers in Merritt papers. I found no response from Dr. Pengelly in the files.
distributed by the time he retired in 1999. As technology advanced over the years, he added maps, then pictures.) Merritt signed the newsletter as secretary of the Western Montana Conservation Association--First District, Montana Wildlife Federation, Kalispell, Montana, an umbrella organization to which Merritt's Flathead Lake Wildlife Association, under its new name Flathead Wildlife, Inc., belonged. They had learned from the timber industry's tactics of the early 1900s that coalitions of associations carry more weight than mere assemblages of voters in lobbying government officials. Several individuals held various offices in various Montana groups over the years, sometimes multiple positions at once. The ones willing to write a lot and to assert themselves, such as Merritt, took secretary positions.

Keeping up with who was where could confuse a diligent watcher even then, so Merritt published meeting times and places for as many of the constituent groups as possible. As a regular feature of his newsletters, he devoted a short article to soliciting others' news and concerns. The issue of February 1956 also included articles examining and supporting Congressman Lee Metcalf's H. R. 1823, which proposed setting aside ten percent of National Forest receipts for recreation and wildlife habitat improvements--a resolution, the article (Merritt) reminds us, that was "submitted from your First District." Another article examined gas and oil leases in the Bob, pointing out that the Bureau of Land Management grants such leases, the Forest Service only advises, thus contacts should be arranged accordingly. Another notes that the Chief Ranger of Glacier Park, Elmer Ladmark, had yet to be convinced it would be acceptable to let the proposed

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29 *Forty Years of Western Forestry: A history of the movement to conserve forest resources by cooperative effort, 1909-1949.* Foreword by Clyde S. Martin. Portland, OR.: Western Forestry & Conservation Association, 1949. p. 32
Glacier View Dam’s waters flood the park. Nearly a half page promotes and describes the beneficial and enjoyable wildlife forums held by Les Pengelly. The last page closes with the half-page challenge: “ONE MORE BATTLE?” While all looked clear that day, Merritt admonished that threats would return in new disguises; consider he suggested, Secretary of Interior MacKay’s recent attempt to gut the National Wildlife Refuge system, as well-covered in *Sports Afield*. The diversity of articles in the newsletter addressed the many colors of conservation concerns being raised by members across Montana.

In the February 1956 issue of the New York magazine *Argosy*, Ed Zem’s article “Save the Madison,” a headwater of the Missouri River, shook Montana’s conservationists. Nobody living in the Madison Valley had heard of the more than a dozen water impoundments planned for their home until it was reported out of New York City. Federal agencies, once saviors for a Company-owned state, had repeatedly squandered their good will among Montana outdoorsmen through such secrecy.

The tide of public support for preservation efforts in the Flathead Valleys rose as a direct response to what many residents considered the Forest Service’s increasing lack of “maturity of judgment, concern and objectivity for an integrated and coordinated program that recognizes all public values and resources.” But, as Merritt intimated in his victory letter to Mike Hudoba, he knew that his battle had just begun. In fact, the 1954 federal Small Watershed Program (PL-566) and devotion to larger dam projects
made sure Montana conservationists had little time to revel over preventing the roads into the upper headwaters of the Flathead River’s forks. Merritt concluded his chapter on Bunker Creek by introducing his next project.

It seemed that building roads and clearcutting the half-million acres of undisturbed wildlife habitat wasn't enough damage. The U. S. Bureau of Land Management proposed to build a dam at Spruce Park on the upper Middle Fork and divert the river through a three-mile tunnel to the South Fork.35

Merritt admitted that he had arrived too late to fight the Hungry Horse Dam on the lower South Fork of the Flathead River, just north of Kalispell, but that he could not in good conscience allow another dam in the region. Not only did such dam projects destroy pristine habitat for wildlife, they threatened to destroy the local fishery by preventing trout from reaching their spawning grounds in high, cold tributaries. Meanwhile, with Hungry Horse Reservoir backing the South Fork River nearly into the Bob, and roads lining both sides high up the North Fork on Glacier Park’s western border, the upper portions of the Middle Fork remained the last undisturbed, wild river in the northern Montana Continental Divide Ecosystem.36 Thus, plans for the Spruce Park dam on the upper Middle Fork drew particular attention from Western Montana conservationists. With sublime scenery and wildlife habitat demonstrably ranking low on federal agencies’ priority lists, wildlife biologist Dr. John J. Craighead teamed up with Merritt to spearhead calls for study on the economic impact of a headwaters dam to the Flathead Lake fishery.

Still, Bureau engineers insisted their proposals placed Spruce Park dam far above the reaches of Flathead Lake’s fish, so would cause no adverse economic impact on the

35 Ibid., Merritt manuscript chapter, p. 5.
Lake’s fishery. Dr. Craighead planned to test that “harmless” hypothesis by taking a raft from the headwaters of the Middle Fork and documenting the locations of fish tagged in Flathead Lake. He and Merritt scheduled and arranged the trip for July of 1956.

In April, the western Montana conservationists opposed plans for a kraft pulp mill on the main stem of the Flathead River, and received good notice in the local paper. By June the Kalispell Mayor and City Council sought the help of Merritt’s and Eklund’s Flathead Wildlife, Inc., to establish a community committee for “abatement and prevention of the pollution of Ashley Creek,” where the town dumps its raw sewage. Merritt boasted in a letter to his cohort Les Pengelly, “Quite a task for ‘twenty selfish sportsmen.’” His devotion to wildland preservation had gotten him invited into the still infant environmental movement.

By July they had four flathead drainage dams to worry about: Spruce Park, Glacier View, Swan River, and Smoky Range. Meanwhile, a compilation of excerpts of letters received by Representative John P. Saylor of Pennsylvania in support of his new Wilderness Act included one from “Clifton R. Merritt, Chairman, wilderness and refuge committee, Flathead Wildlife, Inc., Kalispell, Mont.” Grassroots success required keeping abreast of a multitude of issues at all times.

One of Merritt’s most significant projects of the 1950s came about through the source he learned to depend on throughout his career, like many in the environmental movement: well-planned, dedicated scientific research. Recall that in mid-1956 Dr. John J. Craighead planned a trip down the Middle Fork. In July of 1956, for his

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37 27 April 1956, Daily Inter Lake, “Sportsmen oppose mill on river. Cite sewage as too much already.” Clipping in Eklund papers, in Merritt papers.
38 7 June 1956, letter CRM to Les Pengelly, Director, Wildlife Extension, MSU, Missoula.
"reconnaissance of the wildlife and recreational assets of the river," he brought with him Dr. J. Frederick ("Fritz") Bell, Medical Research Director of the U.S. Public Health Laboratory at Hamilton, Montana, and Clif Merritt. They kept detailed logs and took numerous photographs of the fish and wildlife they spotted, and of their experiences on "one of the first float trips on record down this relatively unknown river." Both Craighead and Merritt wrote and published articles about their experience. Merritt began his by setting the scene:

In Northwestern Montana the Middle Fork of the Flathead River tumbles from the Pacific slopes of the Rocky Mountain Divide in countless cascades of rushing whitewater that levels off into deep pools of turquoise as it winds its way northward through magnificent mountain country fully as primitive and rugged as any on the North American continent.

The Middle Fork of the Flathead is truly a "wild" river—the only one left in Montana. From its source high in the Bob Marshall Wilderness Area to where it forms the southern border of Glacier National Park, fifty-odd miles downstream, the spectacular Middle Fork flows as a primeval river—unexploited, clear, and cool. Along this remote stretch of the river and for twenty miles on either side there is not one road, commercial structure, or private dwelling. Only the presence of a small landing field, cut out of a dark-green spruce grove and maintained by the U.S. Forest Service for fire control, discloses that civilized man has ever been there. This is located at Schafer Meadows, near the headwaters of the river and just outside the Bob Marshall border. The wild, undeveloped Middle Fork area is a part of the Flathead National Forest.

The records they kept clearly indicated that Flathead Lake fish migrated far up the headwaters of the river and into its smallest tributaries. They documented many of wilderness qualities of the river and its surrounding wildlands. Yet, the most important

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41 Ibid.
42 Ibid.
outcome of their trip was an idea that they refined during their five days in the wild. Craighead summarized their ruminations in his article for *Montana Wildlife*, the official publication of the Montana Fish and Game Department.

Possibly the first task of conservationists today is to develop a system for evaluating upstream drainages and to classify these according to their potential as recreational areas of the future. We might tentatively place Montana’s upstream drainages into four categories:

1. Wild river,
2. Semi-wilderness rivers,
3. Semi-exploited rivers,
4. Exploited rivers.  

The article went on to describe the particular qualities of the four categories.

Within weeks of the float-trip, MSU published studies suggesting Hungry Horse Dam had reduced the number of fish in Flathead Lake by a third. Based on this initial scientific evidence of lake fish in the upper headwaters of the Middle Fork Flathead River, Flathead Wildlife Inc., requested the State Fish and Game Department to declare the North, South, and Middle Forks of the Flathead River a native trout sanctuary for both west slope black spotted cutthroat, and Dolly Varden. That did not work. However, the state did engage a full study of the fishery. In early 1964 did Montana Governor Hugo Aronson forwarded the state’s “Report on Flathead Fishery” to the *Montana Wildlife Federation News*. It concluded that the lake’s fish migrate and spawn throughout the Flathead River’s watersheds, thus any dam on the Flathead River’s forks would destroy the native fishery in Flathead Lake and seriously hurt the local economy.  

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45 August 9, 1956 *Daily Inter Lake*, Dr. Royal Brunson of MSU reports on fishery. Clipping in Eklund papers, in Merritt papers.  
Two years later the U. S. bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife concluded likewise. It took another two years for the legislation to pass, but the idea and the definitions generated under the stars by Craighead, Merritt, and Bell provided the foundation for the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968.

Merritt stayed busy with conservation activities throughout 1956, while holding down his full-time job as regional supervisor with Montana’s Unemployment Compensation Commission. Dallas Eklund, Merritt’s coworker in the UCC Kalispell office, cofounder of Flathead Wildlife, Inc., and fishing buddy, saved most of the group’s papers and correspondence. Merritt wrote at least 105 letters on Flathead Wildlife, Inc. letterhead in 1956, on top of producing newsletters for that and other groups. In the face of rapidly changing times, he constantly encouraged and cajoled active participation by members. For example, he included this plea in the mailer to members, addressed not to all but to each of them, announcing a weekend gathering for July in Polson, Montana:

Dear Conservationist:
It is only through the unity of our clubs in District 1 that we have strength and influence in State and National affairs to help assure the continuation of the American way of life through the preservation of wildlife and allied resources. With threats of encroachment on Montana’s wildlife and recreational areas on every hand, if there was ever a time when there was a need for a strong and enlightened sportsmen’s organization in action, the time is now!

In the fashion and with the urgency described above, by the end of 1956 Clif Merritt had engaged the wilderness preservation movement body and soul. He had already established the modus operandi that led eventually to his recruitment by the Wilderness Society. Testimony from his peers over the years suggests that this became

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49 7 July 1956, CMR sec. District 1, MWF preparing for the 28-9 July meeting in Polson

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his life pattern: visiting wild lands to determine wilderness quality and to monitor Forest Service management, as well as keeping himself healthy and providing meat for his family’s table; plumbing the minds and experiences of local outdoors enthusiasts and scientific experts; pressuring administrators and lobbying politicians; and reading and writing voluminously. As Howard Zahniser’s son Ed later reflected: “Again, Cliff [sic] Merritt was not only creating but helping thousands of others to create perhaps the greatest extant body of a literature of environmental concern for U.S. public lands and public lands policy.”

Merritt created and documented environmental history in its immediate context. My look at another of his projects from the 1950s demonstrates clearly his contextual approach. As with Bunker Creek and the Middle Fork Flathead River, he embraced this project in his effort to prevent clearcut logging in the unprotected lands between the Bob Marshall Wilderness and Glacier Park to the north.

This project arose from what Merritt embraced as the primary source of information about Forest Service plans; an outdoorsman friend observed activities deep in the woods, and talked about them. In his tremendously insightful capstone work in 2000, *A History of Environmental Politics Since 1945*, Samuel Hays suggested that citizen monitoring of the environment arose in response to water pollution in the 1960s. Primary documents suggest Montana groups had already embraced the method a decade earlier, not over pollution but over poor and secretive management. Also, Hays did credit

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50 Ed Zahniser, email 18 November 2005 from <Ed_Zahniser@nps.gov> “Re: Letter in support ...”
51 Ibid.
52 Interview with Merritt, July, 2005, notes in my possession. Everybody called it a wilderness area by then, except formal FS documents; for ease, I will also.
Montanans as establishing the first state groups to fight for de facto wilderness, yet again he set the battle in the late 1960s. While neither citizen monitoring nor de facto extensions reached national prominence until then, they had proven successful in Montana by the mid-1950s under the leadership of Merritt, Guy Brandborg, Ken Aldrich, and Ken and Florence Baldwin (whom Clif had helped establish the Montana Wilderness Association in 1958, as a spin-off of the Montana Wildlife Federation).

One day in the summer of 1956, Bill Friedrich, an outfitter from Bigfork, Montana, paid a visit to Merritt’s home in Kalispell. From the front yard, they could see the not-too-distant towering peaks of the Swan Range, which is what Friedrich had come to talk about. He had discovered a Forest Service survey line for a road across the Swan Crest, and offered to saddle some horses and take Merritt out for a look. Merritt immediately accepted. He explained his particular attachment to the area in an article published later by *Friends of the Bitterroot News*. Merritt described it this way:

A few miles northeast of Kalispell, Montana, the picturesque Swan Range rises abruptly out of Bad Rock Canyon, gateway to Glacier National Park, and runs for approximately 80 miles in a southerly direction. The southern half of the Range forms the western border of the Bob Marshall Wilderness. The Range is from 10 to 20 miles wide and is bordered on the west by the upper Flathead Valley and on the east by the famous South Fork of the Flathead River country.

A pristine land of snow-painted peaks and jewel-like lakes, the Range is the home of the mountain goat, grizzly bear, bighorn sheep, moose, elk and other wilderness-associated wildlife. In several of nearly 50 natural lakes strung along the Swan Divide are found the native cutthroat trout. From the time in 1948 when I took a job in Kalispell with the state government, I spent many weekends in the area, hiking, camping, picking huckleberries, fishing the lakes, observing the wildlife and hunting elk and deer in season. I looked forward to the time when my wife and young family would enjoy the area with me.

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\(^{54}\) Ibid., Hays, p. 38.
We rode down the drainage along the line of flagged stakes to Handkerchief Lake near the Hungry Horse Reservoir and back up the steep eastern slope of the Range to a small grassy park. ... For a while, Bill and I sat enthralled by the spectacular wild view below us. Finally, I asked him what the area was called. He thought for a while, then shook his head and replied, "I don't know that it's got a name." "It has to have a name if we want people to fight for its protection," I said. I gazed down on those exquisite lakes sparkling like jewels and told him, "Let's call it Jewel Basin." The name seemed to satisfy everyone, and it was placed on the state maps.55

By February 1957 the Region One Forester had officially canceled the road’s construction. Several conservationist sponsored pack-trips into the area convinced many people of its unique value. While the Regional Forester opposed any reduction of timber lands, and adamantly opposed additional primitive or wilderness designations in Region One, the Forest Service’s flexible management structure allowed the Forest Supervisor to arrange other forms of protection.56 Merritt, like Zahniser not wed to purity,57 encouraged and assisted in planning an alternative management program. “With the firm support of Flathead Wildlife, Montana Wilderness Association and other conservation groups, as well as the widespread approval of Flathead Valley citizens, the Flathead Forest established the Jewel Basin Hiking Area”58 in summer 1962.

Merritt believes that by the late 1950s, he had made enough of an impression on

57 Doug Scott, of Campaign for America’s Wilderness, talk in Missoula, Mt, February 2005, notes in my possession.
58 Ibid. Also see “Highlights of the Management Plan for the Jewel Basin Hiking Area: Flathead National Forest R-1.” In Merritt papers, copy scanned into my computer.
the timber industry that they leaned on his boss, Jess Fletcher in Helena, to quiet him down. Fletcher barely veiled his threats to Merritt, irrespective of the fact that the civil service offered protection against such arbitrary and capricious action. Merritt continued writing his ceaseless stream of articles and editorials, but used aliases like “Bren North” and “Lee Jordan” to avoid further confrontation at the Unemployment Compensation Commission. By 1960, the UCC decided to restructure and moved all of its regional field supervisors to the Helena headquarters. Merritt believes the restructuring occurred simply to get him out of the heavily-forested and sublime Flathead Valley. Samuel Hays suggests that this sort of retaliation against vocal environmental advocates has been common, and urged a heretofore missing study of the active and well-organized “environmental opposition.”

In any case, Merritt found himself living once again in Helena, and the one of three state field supervisors responsible for the region furthest from the Flathead National Forest, Eastern Montana and its endless wind and broad barren expanses. He correspondingly shifted his conservationist’s attention to the prime wild feature of the eastern part of the state, the Missouri River and its so-called “Breaks,” and also lobbied for the Montana Stream Preservation Act. Yet, as soon as he moved out of the Flathead, the Forest Service “snuck a road into Bunker Creek, behind my back.” When he found out, he called some friends and chastised them for letting the road in. Shortly thereafter, “Dale Burk, Dallas Eklund and Dr. Loren Kreck got Senator Lee Metcalf to introduce a

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59 Interviews with Merritt, notes in my possession.
60 Ibid. Also, in Merritt papers, nine manuscript copies of articles survived the broken pipe in Merritt’s Denver home in 1975. Bren North titles include “Roads and Resources,” “Wily Whitetail,” “The Biologist and the Fish Basket,” “Shall We Keep Wilderness?,” and “Battle on the Wild Missouri.”
62 Ibid., Hays, pp. 109 -121.
63 Interview with Merritt, notes in my possession.
bill⁴ that finally (in 1978) established 286,700 acres on the undeveloped Middle Fork of
the Flathead River, as the Great Bear Wilderness. Yet, as noted in Chapter One, by the
early 1960s Merritt had become less than pleased with his good job in Montana’s civil
service.

Thus did Clif Merritt’s first years as an active conservation leader establish the
pattern for the rest of his lifetime. He seems to have embraced the “extremes and
inconsistencies” of life in Montana,⁵ an atmosphere that would permeate the preservation
movement of the coming decades. He seemed able to focus his attention on one or two
major projects while simultaneously contributing constantly to general outdoors-
education concerns and to other peoples’ projects. He found that to be successful as a
grassroots leader he needed to perform multiple and diverse tasks constantly, always
playing to the audience and environment of the moment. His success depended as much
on the quantity and diversity of his contributions and his ability to communicate
meaningfully with people across the social spectrum as it did on his thorough preparation
and planning, keen insights into natural systems, or his occasional mastery of a simple
idea, such as naming Jewel Basin.

In the above narrative, I have noted just a small fraction of Merritt’s activities as
found detailed in primary documents from the period. These few, however, begin to
illustrate the demands of working with the public, as well as some of the lessons Merritt
claims to have learned from his first twenty years working “in the field” in the mountains
of Western Montana. No one, or even a handful, of these actions would single him out as
special, but taken altogether they drew the attention and admiration of leaders of the

⁴ In Merritt papers, outline for “Beyond the Roads” manuscript.
Wilderness Society in Washington, D.C., especially of Stewart M. Brandborg, then assistant to Executive Director Howard Zahniser, and by mid-1964 his successor.

The Wilderness Act Era

By the time the Wilderness Act of 1964 'forced' grassroots action onto conservationists across the nation, Merritt had already spent a decade demonstrating that democratic pressure could influence agency policy, at least in Montana. He had already spent a decade finding and honing strategies to accommodate the two constraints Samuel Hays suggests faced every activist in the environmental protection movement: the need to motivate high volunteerism, and the willingness to face strong opposition. As Merritt undertook the ethical problem of preserving wildlife diversity, he found himself engaged in the accompanying challenge of rapidly expanding his knowledge base, as well as that of his neighbors. With a persistence and tenacity acquired in childhood and never relinquished, he rose to the demands of the age and the desires of his constituents in his continuing effort to preserve wilderness wildlife habitat.

By the time Howard Zahniser scribbled out the proposed new position of national field director for TWS in 1962 (see Chapter One), his assistant Stewart Brandborg had been corresponding regularly with Merritt for nearly a decade. The close and mutually supportive relationship formed between Merritt and Guy Brandborg in the 1940s influenced Stewart Brandborg's early recognition of, and enthusiastic support for, Merritt's volunteer work. Brandborg claims that he lobbied Zahniser incessantly to hire

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"Ibid., Hays, p. 199.
"Aldo Leopold, A Sand County Almanac, p. 225. He claimed that engaging ethical frontiers necessarily expands the intellect.
"Both the Eklund and Merritt papers include many letters between Merritt in Montana and S. Brandborg, who by 1954 represented the National Wildlife Federation from its Washington, D.C. office, and by 1960 had joined the Wilderness Society office there.
"Interviews with Stewart Brandborg, Doris Milner, and Merritt. Notes in my possession.
Merritt for the new position, "because he was a stalwart." Merritt certainly shared Brandborg’s “evangelical belief in citizen activism.” Once convinced, Zahniser took personal responsibility for recruiting Merritt.

After Zahniser died in early 1964, his successor Brandborg teamed up with TWS cofounder and Governing Council member Harvey Broome to complete Merritt’s hire, and to launch a new era in the Wilderness Society’s history. Merritt brought with him twenty years of experience “administering federal and state laws pertinent to stabilization of jobs and industry ...[requiring] a broad knowledge of natural resources and industry in the state--forestry, logging and lumbering, agriculture, construction, mining, manufacturing and retail and service trades.” He exuded a confidence and deep love of the land that enabled him to dictate the conditions of his hire: he would stay in Washington, D.C. for up to two years, but then would move back to open a Western Field office as he had agreed with Dr. Zahniser, or else quit. He would not keep his family away from the mountain wilds any longer than that, period. Brandborg accepted those terms and the Merritt family packed their station wagon and moved to the nation’s capital in June, 1964.

As indicated by the coverage required to flesh-out Merritt’s contribution to the long and convoluted battle for the Scapegoat Wilderness, any work comprehensively detailing Merritt’s input to the many battles he took on as National Field Director for the

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70 Interview with Stewart Brandborg, notes in my possession.
71 Ibid.
72 Ibid., Turner, p. 36.
73 Correspondence between Merritt and Broome, May - June 1964. Interviews with Merritt and Brandborg, notes in my possession.
76 Interviews with Brandborg and Merritt, notes in my possession.
Wilderness Society between 1964 and 1978 would require thousands of pages. Thus, in the remainder of this chapter I will look only briefly at Merritt’s contributions to a few selected battles.

As most preservation projects required several years of attention, I will introduce them chronologically by the year first engaged. I will also use short summaries Merritt wrote for Montana activist and author Paul Richards, to introduce Merritt’s battles. A block quote beginning with an asterisk refers to that document. I follow each with commentary, elucidating their significance or introducing new evidence to the record.

Beginning 1964

Merritt moved to the East Coast Beltway in June of 1964. He immediately began working with Brandborg on last-minute lobbying for the Wilderness Act, which introduced Merritt to national conservation-minded politicians like Republican Representative from Pennsylvania John Saylor, and to powerful enemies of conservation like Colorado Democrat Wayne Aspinall. Merritt helped as Brandborg not only held the Society together after Zahniser’s death, but expanded it to include field services.

Merritt also engaged his love of the grassroots by accompanying fellow TWS new-hire Rupert Cutler on field studies of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Opposing a proposed new road through the middle of one of the largest roadless areas east of the Mississippi river, they instead advocated developing extant roads into a “circumferential recreation and tourist route.” Brandborg and Cutler went on to win that battle, and to support Merritt’s big projects Out West.

One of those “Out West” projects involved the Bitterroot country of western

77 Fax, Merritt to Paul Richards, 10 January 1997, Re: Paul’s request. In Merritt papers.
78 Interviews with Brandborg, Cutler, Merritt. Notes in my possession.
79 Ibid., Merritt, Outline of manuscript “Beyond the Roads.”
Montana and eastern Idaho. Merritt told Richards that he:

* Initiated the strategy, organized citizen support and led the national effort that prevented road construction and clearcut logging in the unstable headwaters of Idaho's Upper Selway River (Magruder Corridor), 1964-67. Helped lead the support for congressional legislation establishing Idaho's 2.2 million-acre River of No Return Wilderness. Most of the Upper Selway was included as a part of the Wilderness.

In the early 1960s, the Forest Service finally processed its reclassification of the Selway-Bitterroot Primitive Area to a Wilderness Area under the U-regulations of 1939. In doing so, it withdrew a couple hundred thousand acres from the original Primitive Area designation. Residents in nearby Hamilton, Montana, immediately noticed and began to complain. Guy Brandborg conferred with Merritt, and they chose Doris Milner to lead an ad-hoc committee to "Save the Selway." Merritt wrote and compiled a brochure for the effort, and arranged for "silent" TWS support to fund printing it. He also recruited respected scientists to implement studies of the area. Ensuing hearings clearly showed the public that "not all of the experts are in the employ of the Forest Service."

The public's supportive response, from both sides of the Bitterroot Mountains, astounded Milner. She frequently called on Merritt, depending on him for both technical and moral support. He visited Hamilton to ride and walk and evaluate the Bitterroot lands and their qualities as compared to the Wilderness Act's requirements, and talked to people constantly. Milner claims that his most significant contribution lay in how he "imbued a lot of people in Montana with an understanding of the value of Wilderness."

I used all of Chapter One to describe the Scapegoat Wilderness designation.

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81 Ibid., p. 97.
82 Ibid., p. 145.
83 Interview with Milner, notes in my possession.
84 Ibid.
Merritt summarized his efforts there more concisely, in a curt, resume-like paragraph emphasizing the importance of the wilderness as habitat. Merritt wrote that he:

* Led the national effort to prevent ill-advised road building and clearcut logging in Montana's Lincoln Back Country-Scapegoat Mountain area. Provided the strategy and successfully supported establishment of the 239,000-acre Scapegoat Wilderness, 1964-72. This rugged wild area which straddles the Continental Divide is critical habitat of the threatened grizzly bear and other wilderness wildlife.

Bill Cunningham's thesis on the Selway battle claimed that together with the Scapegoat, those two Montana battles created a precedent-setting challenge to the Forest Service. Todd Denison's comprehensive thesis on conservation in the Northern Rocky Mountains barely recognized Merritt's efforts in Scapegoat, though noted his central role to the Magruder Corridor battle. Denison also claimed the two actions together created the primary impetus for the Forest Service to implement its Roadless Area Review and Evaluation (now known as RARE I) of 1968 to 1972. As a critical driving force behind both the Scapegoat and Magruder actions, Merritt recognized their implications.

Merritt corresponded copiously with government and agency officials and conservation leaders and cooperators, yet his staff at the Wilderness Society's Western Office staff listened to him on a daily basis. In a letter advocating Merritt for a national award, they pointed out that "For about a year, he [Merritt] was the lone voice asking for input in working with the agency in identifying roadless area." When others finally recognized that the Forest Service was attempting to use RARE as a national EIS and thus regain control of wilderness forests from Congress, conservationists and Congressmen

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85 Ibid., Cunningham, p. 6.
87 Letter from TWS Denver office staff to American Motors Conservation Awards Programs Committee, 28 October 1975, advocating Merritt for the AMCA in the Professional category. Signatories included Wilderness Coordinators Jean Widman, Roger Scholl and Sally Ranney; Trip Program staff Jill Rowland, Debra Rohde, and Danell Jones; and office secretaries Linda Wilson and Joan Huppert. AMCA binder. Milner papers in Merritt papers.
Opposition to RARE led directly to the Eastern Wilderness Areas Act of 1975, in which Congress denounced the “purity” policy the Forest Service had tried to impose through RARE in its effort to minimize lands available for wilderness designation. Purity standards of RARE being found contrary to the intent of Congress, the Forest Service implemented the more comprehensive RARE II studies of the late-1970s under Assistant Secretary of Agriculture in charge of the Forest Service, M. Rupert Cutler. Nonetheless, California courts found RARE II unacceptably biased toward commodity uses. Yet, being much better than RARE I, even if not particularly good, RARE II guided a multitude of state wilderness bills between 1980 and 1984. Reactions to Merritt’s early TWS works reverberated through the country and halls of Congress for decades.

Beginning 1966

The Merritts’ attentions in early 1966 focused on moving back to the Rocky Mountains. In March, they joyfully packed their station wagon again, and headed west. While the Merritts considered the move a return to normalcy, the move accelerated the Wilderness Society into a new era with its new permanent presence west of the Mississippi River. Merritt wanted to return to Montana to set up in a supportive and known environment. Brandborg, however, realized that Montanans had already created an enduring foothold for the movement, even without TWS. He sent Merritt instead to the more centrally-located Denver, where the Colorado Environmental Coalition was just

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88 Ibid., Hirt. He argued throughout that since World War Two, the FS has never wavered from this goal.
89 Interview with Doug Scott, notes in my possession.
90 Interview with Sherry [Merritt] Essig, notes in my possession.
91 Ibid., Turner, p. 36, 200-201.
beginning to take shape.  

In Denver, Merritt quickly located an ideal spot for the new TWS office. He moved the Society right next door to the Colorado Open Space Coordinating Council, Inc.’s office. That new location would not draw attention to TWS by creating a new center of conservation activism; if he became successful, it would look to casual observers as if the COSCC had grown. Meanwhile, the office staff enjoyed a supportive local environment in which to establish the new Society center.

Back in 1953, the Society had implemented its “A Way to the Wilderness” program as a “service to wilderness vacationers.” In 1964 all eight of the trips offered took place in the West. Thus, when the Society opened its new office in Denver, it made sense to have Merritt administer the program, and arrange for outfitters, from there. In accordance with the Brandborgs’ and his own “belief that people who enjoy first-hand wilderness experiences and learn proper use of the wilderness resource become spokesmen and active workers on behalf of its preservation,” Merritt shifted the emphasis from vacations to educational outdoor experiences. The program grew by an order of magnitude; from a potential net income of under $25,000 in 1964, Merritt’s management combined with the times to increase its annual budget to $250,000 by 1975.

As had long been his habit, Merritt also continued to arrange for horse-pack trips into roadless areas that TWS had decided to protect, inviting local politicians and agency officials to accompany him, for free. To Merritt, education required dialogue, so he

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97 Ibid., Turner, p. 34. Also interview with Brandborg.
98 Comparing letterheads, the two shared the same street address, 5850 East Jewell, through 1968 when Merritt moved the TWS office to accommodate its increased staff and activity.
100 Ibid., TWS staff letter to AMCA, 1975.
101 Ibid., TWS mailer and staff letter. If all eight trips offered in 1964 filled to capacity at the stated prices, the Society would have netted about $21,500 before paying outfitter expenses. I did not “do the math” for highly extended schedules in the 1970s, and take the staff’s word for the program’s budget total in 1975.
invited the “opposition” as well as supporters and the undecided on his wilderness trips and to his workshops. Many of Merritt’s peers support Merritt’s claims to have created many new believers, while refueling true believers, merely by bringing them to the wilds and letting nature do the convincing.97

While working in Colorado, and having formed a close relationship with Colorado’s leading local wilderness advocates, Merritt focused a significant amount of his energy on preserving habitat in the Colorado Rocky Mountain. Again with great understatement, and again emphasizing the impact to wildlife, Merritt summarized fifteen years of work by writing that he:

* Supervised and led national campaigns which added two million acres of national forest and park wildlands in Colorado to the National Wilderness System, 1966-90. Among the key areas we proposed which were designated by law as wilderness were the 460,000-acre Weminuche, 235,000-acre Flat Tops and 133,000-acre Eagles Nest. The Flat Tops provides undisturbed summer range for one of the largest elk herds in the United States. The Forest Service wilderness proposals for these areas averaged one-third smaller and left unprotected critical winter range in the lower life zones for elk, deer, bighorn sheep, moose and other wildlife.

Among these projects that spanned the 1960s and 1970s, his repeated battles for the Eagles Nest Primitive Area within the Gore Range just west of the Denver metropolitan area in Colorado, provides particular insight into Merritt’s tenacity. First he had to spearhead an action preventing the construction of an interstate highway, with steep switchbacks and a long tunnel, through the middle of a pristine roadless area and its crest. A horse-pack trip along the proposed road’s survey line, with Colorado’s Senator Peter Dominick along, proved pivotal in that preservation effort. As with Great Smoky Mountains Park, improvement of an existing road proved, upon little scrutiny, to cost

97 Merritt interviews, notes in my possession.
significantly less taxpayer money and to cause less disturbance to the ecosystem.

Interstate 70 now crosses the Rockies at Vail Pass, rather than along the once proposed “engineering challenge” of the “Red-Buffalo” route through deep wilderness and rugged peaks.

Shortly thereafter, and of tremendous importance to the national movement, Merritt provided both the legal strategy and the wilderness expertise to prevent a timber sale along East Meadow Creek on the flanks of the Gore Range-Eagles Nest Primitive Area. His short time lobbying for the Wilderness Act in 1964 had made him intimately aware of clauses Representative Saylor had inserted late in the legislative process to help take the edge off some of the compromises given to Wayne Aspinall. Merritt wrote the story as concisely as anyone can tell it.

An untouched forest, cascading streams, deep clear lakes, abundant trout and wildlife, and one of the most rugged mountain ranges in Colorado characterize the 133,915-acre Eagles Nest Wilderness. There were times, however, when this superb wild ecosystem, then largely unprotected, was threatened with ill-advised development.

The Gore Range, in which the area is located, is a series of pointed peaks, crests and ridges that dominate the landscape and provide a base for perpetual snowbanks that lie on precipitous slopes. Seventeen peaks are over 13,000 feet, and 33 over 12,000 feet. More than 53 beautiful blue lakes are found throughout the area. Only 13 are named. The Wilderness Area encompasses the headwaters of the Piney River, as well as numerous tributaries of the Eagle River and Blue River. All three flow into the Colorado River.

The area is a haven for bighorn sheep, mountain goats, elk, deer, black bear, small mammals and birds, as well as the stately golden eagle that can occasionally be observed circling above prominent Eagles Nest Peak.98

I was sitting at my desk in The Wilderness Society's Denver field headquarters ... when I received a frantic phone call from a

98 Merritt, “Saving Eagles Nest Wilderness” from unpublished manuscript “Beyond the Roads.”
conservation-minded employee of the Vail Ski Resort. In a few seconds he told me the Forest Service was selling 4.3 million board feet of timber in the East Meadow Creek area to Arizona's Kaibab Industries. Road building and logging would start soon, he said. He asked what could be done.

As I had been aware since the adoption of the 1964 Wilderness Act, the law contained a provision--Section 3(b)-- that says, in part, "Nothing herein contained shall limit the President in proposing, as part of his recommendations to Congress, the alteration of existing boundaries of primitive areas or recommending the addition of any contiguous area of national forest lands predominantly of wilderness value." Representative John Saylor (R) of Pennsylvania told me that he had added the provision when he became disturbed with Chairman Wayne Aspinall adding several weakening amendments to the Wilderness Bill.

Contiguous to the northwestern border of the Eagle Nest Primitive Area, the undeveloped East Meadow Creek tract was predominantly of wilderness value. In other words, it would be illegal for Forest Service officials to develop the East Meadow Creek tract. By road building and logging it they would prevent the President from recommending its addition to the Primitive Area. There was no doubt in my mind that the Forest Service would be violating the law. So I told the Vail caller the only recourse left was to sue the Forest Service. He asked how to go about that. I suggested that he contact Tony Ruckels, a young Denver lawyer who had aptly handled a small legal matter or two for The Wilderness Society.99

The ensuing lawsuit, Parker v. U. S.,100 set a precedent opening an entirely new realm for conservation protective efforts--the courts. In a preliminary injunction, presiding Federal Judge William E. Doyle ruled that conservation groups have legal standing to sue based on the Wilderness Act of 1964, and that federal courts indeed have jurisdiction to rule on such cases. Judge Doyle also ruled that both Clifton R. Merritt and William Mounsey constituted expert witnesses in regard to wilderness quality. With technical objections thus disposed, Judge Doyle ruled a month later in favor of the

99 Merritt, "The Eagles Nest Is Threatened Again," from unpublished manuscript.
plaintiffs (Parker, residents of Vail, the Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund): the Forest Service must allow the President and Congress the opportunity to act on lands contiguous to designated primitive areas (or wilderness areas, depending on whether they had received reclassification for the 1939 or 1964 upgrades) before the lands may be significantly altered, such as by road-building and industrial logging.

The U.S. 10th Circuit Court of Appeals upheld Judge Doyle’s ruling in October of 1971, and the Supreme Court declined to take the case. Judge Doyle’s injunction had halted logging activities on nearly five million acres of Forest Service timber sales in “contiguous” lands that had already been violated by the Forest Service’s continued devotion to maximizing the cut. Thus legally prevented from ignoring the provisions of the Wilderness Act, the timber industry leaned heavily on the RARE process. Industry eventually lost there, too. The federal courts made it clear that as an act of Congress signed by the President in a nation with respect for the law, the Wilderness Act legally binds federal agencies against allowing development in certain wildlands.

Todd Denison’s MA thesis in history at the University of Montana provides a detailed examination of the legal process, and places Merritt squarely at the root of this controversial lawsuit. Yet, only a $2000 check made the official TWS records. Brandborg had mailed it to Denver, where Merritt promptly deposited it in its own TWS savings account, so the court would count it as part of the lawsuit’s bond. It looks in the record like a token administrative support for the Sierra Club’s investment in the case. Jay Turner does not cite Denison in the bibliography of his administrative history of TWS; he conducted only one short interview with Merritt. Without support from the minor publications and primary documents that Hays considers essential to

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101 Ibid., Denison, p. 106.
102 My claim, based on a week of examining the TWS collection in Denver.
In 1967

As early as the 1830s, the Snake River canyons had been recognized as “most wild and romantic” in character. In 1967, Brock Evans, then Northwest Rep for the Sierra Club, planned a reconnaissance mission to evaluate the appropriateness of working to save the undeveloped portions of the Snake River, along the Idaho-Oregon border. As he had in Lincoln, Merritt intervened using TWS prestige, impassioned logic, and a bit of stubbornness, to influence another Sierra Club project. Again, Merritt summarized his effort succinctly, and specifically identified the land as vital to the wildlife of the region.

* Responsible for the strategy which resulted in the establishment by Congress of the 662,000-acre Hells Canyon National Recreation Area, including 215,000 acres of designated Wilderness on the Oregon-Idaho border, 1967-84. This is vital habitat of bighorn sheep, mountain goats and other sensitive wildlife. Also protected by this act of Congress was the Middle Snake as a National Wild and Scenic River.

What does Merritt mean in saying he was “responsible for the strategy”? One morning after breakfast, he encouraged Evans to linger by the river as the others in their group went hiking and exploring. Merritt and Evans debated passionately for half an hour or more; Evans thought a Wild and Scenic River designation provided their best hope, but Merritt determinedly “tied TWS support to the canyon sides” and argued that they would obtain broader support if the proposal included more diverse uses than just river recreation. The argument worked. Evans went home, wrote the appropriate legislation, and sent a copy to Merritt to review. Merritt added a couple paragraphs, edited a few

104 Interview with Brock Evans, notes in my possession.
sentences, and sent it back. Evans then had the eventually successful legislation introduced through the Washington Congressional delegation. Merritt and the Wilderness Society field crew provided support throughout the ensuing designation process.

In my telephone interview with Evans in 2005, with barely a prompt he repeated Merritt’s story detail for detail. Another potentially confrontational private meeting with Merritt ended in a mutually beneficial agreement, and, as with Scapegoat, helped to add a significant number of acres to the National Wilderness Preservation System. Evans concluded our interview by calling Merritt “a great mentor” in accessing “the power of the people.”

**Beginning 1968**

Merritt characterizes the projects he launched toward success in 1968, and naturally specifies the species and ecosystem properties that would benefit from his actions, thus:

* Was a national leader in getting the Wild Missouri in Montana established as a National Wild and Scenic River, 1968-76. This action prevented a series of boondoggle federal dams that threatened the 149-mile reach of the free-flowing Missouri.

* Was a national leader in the campaign that resulted in Congress designating Montana’s North, Middle Fork and South Fork of the Flathead as National Wild and Scenic Rivers, 1968-76, thus keeping them free-flowing for native cutthroat and bull trout vital spawning runs.

* Conducted field studies and wrote the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness legislation, then organized citizen support for its successful enactment which resulted in the classification of 943,000 acres of national forest wildlands as a combined Wilderness in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, instead of a three-area, segmented Wilderness.

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105 Ibid.
totaling 522,000 acres, as proposed by the U. S. Forest Service, 1970-84. The magnificent area, which is the home of the grizzly bear, elk, bighorn sheep, moose and other wilderness wildlife, is one of the most popular Wilderness Areas in the United States.

How did one person manage to maintain so many personal projects while coordinating a national office and network of field agents as well as their contacts? Mardy Murie, Dave Foreman, Brock Evans and host of others suggest that much of Merritt’s strength as a leader lay in his ability to motivate others. First he convinced and generally made them want to get involved, he somehow made them want the things he wanted. Then he willingly taught them how to be effective at wilderness enjoyment and advocacy. Then, he kept in constant contact with them, offering encouragement and advice as needed.

Beginning 1970

The Forest Service named the mountainous areas of Montana and Idaho its Region One, with headquarters in Missoula, Montana, because that region lies in the center of its most forested lands. While Merritt had focused significant effort on protecting several large roadless areas in Montana— for example the Bob Marshall complex, the Selway-Bitterroot range, and the Absaroka-Beartooth complex—he recognized that Montana held many smaller, less-popular wildlands in need of protection. He also realized that most of them would remain unprotected by the Forest Service’s RARE process. Thus, he teamed up with his old friend Senator Lee Metcalf to obtain legislative protection for them. Since the chances of getting Wilderness designation for the areas seemed slim to nonexistent, they got creative and wrote a plan to protect the lands from roading and logging specifically until Congress and the President decided to act on them. Thus Merritt can
proudly claim that he:

* Wrote the Montana Wilderness Study Act (later known as S. 393) and successfully organized citizen support for its enactment to require formal wilderness studies, with interim protection until Congress determined otherwise, of ten primitive wildlife-rich areas threatened with unwarranted development in Montana's national forests.

Senator Lee Metcalf's Legislative Director through the 1970s, Teddy Roe, testifies to Merritt’s authorship of S. 393. As he wrote:

Clif personally drafted the language for S. 393, including an innovative clause guaranteeing open-ended protection to nearly a million acres of Montana’s finest back country. He then worked closely with Senator Metcalf for the next five years, helping to overcome mainly industry objections, until the Act was finally signed into law in 1977. Although adjustments have been made over the intervening years to certain of the S. 393 lands, the bulk of them remain much as Clif Merritt and Senator Metcalf ordained nearly 30 years ago.

The battle over S. 393 was bitter and hard-fought. By the time victory was achieved, Clif had been required to display an incredible range of talent, tenacity, diplomacy, strategy and leadership skill -- all accompanied with consummate proficiency and genuine humility. Although S. 393 was a milestone in Montana’s environmental history, it was in many ways just another day’s work for Clif. One day, he was walking the halls of Congress, impressing decision-makers with the logic of his arguments, and the next, a forest path in the Bitterroots, reconnecting with the land. 106

In 1976

Upon returning from a long and stressful foray and stay in Washington, D.C., Merritt discovered that the conservation community had launched an extensive project without his discovering it. He learned that he had been honored and named recipient of one of that year’s ten American Motors Conservation Awards for Professionals. The staff of the Western Office compiled a summary of Merritt’s accomplishments through

106 Email from Teddy Roe, 14 November 2005, “Re: Final copy of nominating letter.”
1975 in their letter to the Awards Committee. On top of the projects I have already described here, they pointed with pride at the wilderness workshops Merritt had developed and spread to other groups in the West, particular in conjunction with the Wilderness Workshop of the Colorado Open Space Council. As office manager and field director, he spent significant time at meetings with the Forest Service, conservationists, business organizations, and giving testimony at public hearings. Eight signatories on the letter claimed that "he maintains an unprecedented awareness of each potential wilderness area in the western U.S. and the problems inherent in keeping these wild lands intact." At age 84 when I first met him, he still did.

The staff made specific mention of his actions and intentions in expanding protected acreage in Powderhorn Primitive Area, Bandelier National Monument and Mesa Verde National Park, and his impact in getting the Gila Primitive Area appended back to the Gila Wilderness (an analogy for the Southwest of the Magruder Corridor in the North). Then to give an idea of the multitude of tasks on his TWS plate, they gave a generalization that I duplicate here.

Almost 100 wilderness proposals under the mandate process have been reviewed and drafted in the Western Regional office under Clif's supervision, many by himself. Clif has worked directly with conservationists and citizens in all the western states on these proposals. They include such areas as:

- Organ Pipe National Monument
- Death Valley National Monument
- Salmon-Trinity Alps Primitive Area
- Zion National Park
- Rocky Mountain National Park
- Blue Range Primitive Area
- Agua Tibia Primitive Area
- Great Sand Dunes National Monument
- Colorado National Monument
- Wilson Mountains Primitive Area
- Dinosaur National Park
- Saguaro National Monument
- Big Bend National Park
- Guadalupe National Park
- Sawtooth National Recreation Area
- North Cascades National Park
- French Pete Roadless Area
- Glacier Primitive Area

\[\text{(107) Ibid., Letter TWS Denver staff to AMCA.}\]
Idaho Primitive Area
Bryce Canyon National Park
Cedar Breaks National Monument
Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Monument
Hart Mountain National Wildlife Refuge

Cloud Peak Primitive Area
High Uintas Primitive Area
Arches National Park

The staff letter did not mention the crack team of field representatives Merritt had assembled for the TWS Western network, with recruiting help from his right-hand man Jerry Mallett and old friend Rupe Cutler. The field representatives ran projects that Merritt “only” oversaw, such as many in the staff’s list. At the time, those reps consisted of a bunch of willingly-underpaid wilderness advocates, many we might now call hippie-types, so may not have seemed worthy of note to the office staff. As many became leaders of their own groups, some influential, upon the 1979 dismantling of the Society’s Western network, they merit mention here.

Besides Dave Foreman in New Mexico and Arizona, Merritt’s TWS Western teams, bringing together diverse talents under a unified TWS thrust, included: Bill Cunningham and Phil Tawney in Montana and North Dakota; Bart Koehler in Wyoming, Nebraska and South Dakota; Dick Carter in Utah and Nevada; Joe Walicki in Oregon and Washington; Jim Eaton in California and Hawaii; Dan Lechefsky in Idaho; Perry Moyle in Colorado and Kansas; and Stan Senner in Alaska. Tim Mahoney rose through the ranks in Denver to become a leading lobbyist in Washington. Merritt speaks in particularly glowing terms about working with Sally Ranney and Debbie Sease. Foreman, Cunningham, Carter and Ranney all write in glowing terms about their experiences.

\[108\] For example, Dick Carter reminisced about the many trips taken in his VW microbus. Photos of the crew from the period also support such a claim. Turner notes their low pay; perusal of administrative records in the Denver Library Archives verifies the claim.


\[110\] Dick Carter, email from <carterpettis@mtwest.net> “Re: Denver TWS Office,” 29 August 2005.
Doris Milner of Hamilton coordinated the award nomination effort. She compiled 48 letters of support from people across a broad spectrum of American society, and from throughout the country. The Awards Committee summarized those letters in its press release:

Mr. Merritt’s job and his life—on a seven day a week basis using whatever time and effort become necessary—are devoted to preserving irreplaceable wild areas for future generations. He is known as a tough and tenacious adversary, but he fights for the cause of conservation with facts accumulated through careful and skillful research, and deals with issues, not personalities. He has gained the respect and attention of those on all sides of wilderness issues, and his office and the people in it are renowned for their expert knowledge, as well as their enthusiasm.

Beginning 1978

As Merritt continued to coordinate the Wilderness Society’s field network in Denver, local advocates of wilderness protection continued the battle in Montana. In particular they brought Merritt’s boyhood huckleberry grounds in the Elkhorn range just southeast of Helena into the spotlight. Merritt claims that in that battle he:

* Was instrumental in getting the 161,000-acre Elkhorn National Wildlife Management Area in the Helena and Deer Lodge national forests established by the Secretary of Agriculture, 1978-81. Wrote most of the basic management plan for the unit. This area is unique, in that it is the only substantial national forest area managed primarily for its wildlife. Approximately 2,000 elk, as well as mountain goats, moose, deer, bear and other wildlife inhabit the wild region, making it one of Montana’s most popular hunting areas.


This designation engendered as much opposition from Montana wilderness advocates as from the resource extraction industry. Merritt recognized that less than half of the Elkhorn Range legally qualified as Wilderness, yet the entire range provided exquisite wildlife habitat. Many people wanted to salvage at least the Wilderness half. Rupert Cutler, who had risen to Assistant Secretary of Agriculture in charge of the Forest Service since leaving TWS, says he "faced a choice between wilderness and wildlife."

To help him choose well, as typical, Merritt arranged for them to take a horse pack trip into the Elkhorn area. Out in the wilds, Cutler decided, with tremendous influence from Merritt, to choose wildlife. Cutler also enlisted Merritt to write the management plan."

Like most of the founders of the Wilderness Society, Merritt recognized that the crux of protecting wildlands rest in preventing roads from penetrating them. Thus he considered a legally established management plan that prevented roading and related incursions to be as desirable as Wilderness protection under the Act of 1964. Meanwhile, as he emphasized repeatedly, Merritt sought to protect wildlands primarily because only they enabled wilderness wildlife to prosper. He fought the Forest Service when it tried to restrict wilderness designation to only the most inaccessible and sublime public forests--the rocks and glaciers of their lands--and excluded wildlife habitat. He argued with Cecil Garland and Brock Evans when they tried to restrict their proposals to only the most prime centers of wildlife habitat. Not wedded to any ideal of wilderness other than its pragmatic importance to biologic diversity, Merritt repeatedly encouraged designations and management plans that prevented industrial invasion, even if he had to pursue alternatives to pure Wilderness. He accepted Jewel Basin preservation as a Hiking Area.

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113 Interview with Cutler, notes in my possession.
114 Ibid., and interviews with Merritt. See also video made through the efforts of 2005 Elkhorn WMU manager Jodie Canfield, not published, which includes interviews with several of the interested parties, including Merritt, on the history of the area and its management.
promoted numerous designations of both Wild and Scenic rivers for their importance to fisheries and wildlife migrations, pushed for the greater Hells Canyon ecosystem as a National Recreation Area surrounding its mere 200,000-acre Wilderness, and found himself fighting many long-time friends like Paul Richards to establish the entire Elkhorn range as the first National Wildlife Management Unit. Merritt appreciated the utility of wildlands as habitat, as the last chance for diversity to survive, far more than the purity suggested by the various wilderness ideals that have drifted in and out of vogue over the decades. He fought for habitat protection, taking advantage of the ideals only as they served his goals.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the country...

Rupert Cutler had joined the Wilderness Society staff about the same time as Merritt. Cutler worked at the Washington, D.C. office. By 1972, he says he “smelled the roses” and resigned from the Society. As Merritt and the Western Field crew continued their successes in obtaining Wilderness protections through the mid-1970s, with reasonably harmonious cooperation among their diverse ranks, on the other side of the country morale and communications in the Washington office deteriorated rapidly.

Turner summarized the resultant administrative actions:

Without citing the financial problems or the pervasive atmosphere of distrust, the council announced that it was hiring a management consultant to review the Wilderness Society’s operations. That fall [1975], with Clif Merritt serving as temporary director, the Wilderness Society proceeded with its legislative programs on a much reduced

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115 Ibid., interview Cutler.
basis.17

By December, the consultant’s report came in, and the Wilderness Society’s Governing Council dismissed Brandborg, acknowledging that he had led a remarkable period of growth for the Society, in both membership and influence. The Council immediately offered Merritt the job of TWS Executive Director. Merritt turned them down flat; he had no intention of moving back to Washington, D.C., success of the Eastern Wilderness Areas Act in 1975 or not. In fact, with that Congressional rejection of Forest Service purity policy, Merritt saw increased opportunity and demands out in the field, in the Rocky Mountains.

Yet, devoted heart and soul to the cause and to the Wilderness Society of Marshall, Leopold, and Zahniser, he again agreed to work out of Washington temporarily. As with the death of Zahniser in 1964, the organization needed extraordinary help to manage the ensuing storm. Merritt brought his professionalism and fiscal responsibility with him to Washington, with the caveat that he would stay at most four months while they found a suitable, permanent director. Doug Scott remarked about that troubled time in TWS history, that “Merritt the survivor held the whole thing together.”18 Merritt’s family stayed in Denver.

Following the release of Brandborg, and after Merritt’s short stint at the helm, the Wilderness Society went through several quick reorganizations as George Davis and Celia Hunter, in their short terms as directors, tried to salvage the nearly economically destroyed Society. In 1978 a strong-willed William Turnage took charge. With great faith in an autocratic, centralized bureaucracy of highly educated professionals19 and no faith in

17 Ibid., Turner, p. 131.
18 Doug Scott email from <dscott@leaveitwild.org>, “Re: Clif Merritt and history.” 20 May 2004.
grassroots power,\textsuperscript{120} Turnage summarily closed the Denver office and disbanded its network in December 1978. As Turner noted in his dissertation’s history of TWS:

Clif Merritt, who had been coordinating the western field program since Brandborg hired him in 1965, was effectively released when Turnage demanded that he move to Washington, D.C. Instead, Merritt chose to resign, ending his long career with the Wilderness Society.\textsuperscript{121}

After 1979

By the mid 1980s, nearly all of Merritt’s “field representatives had either left or been fired.”\textsuperscript{122} As Dave Foreman quipped about the dismantling of the Wilderness Society network: “Not only is the landscape fragmented biologically, but conservation has been fragmented as well.”\textsuperscript{123} Foreman went on, famously, to found with Earth First! With TWS support suddenly gone, Dick Carter realized that his home state of Utah needed a statewide organization, so formed the Utah Wilderness Association.\textsuperscript{124} (The UWA has remained active to this day, though Carter has gone on to focus his energies with the High Uintas Preservation Council.) Cunningham, Eaton, and Walicki continued working to protect wild areas in their home states as well.

Merritt has frequently claimed that his move into a career in conservation was the best decision he ever made. Thus, when dropped by the Wilderness Society, he chose to stay in the discipline. He, Jerry Mallett, and Sally Ranney banded together in 1979 to form a group they called American Wilderness Alliance (AWA), headquartered in Denver. They, as many other workers from the Western network displaced by the Wilderness Society’s 1979 reinvention of itself, struggled financially for many years. While working

\textsuperscript{120} Ibid., Turner, p. 205.
\textsuperscript{121} Ibid., Turner, p. 206.
\textsuperscript{122} Ibid., Turner, p. 206.
\textsuperscript{124} Dick Carter email to me 27 October 2005. “Re: Clif and U.W.A.”
with “conservation groups throughout the Rocky Mountain region, acquainting them with the need to protect public wildlands for wildlife habitat, fisheries, and quality recreation,” as Executive Director of AWA, Merritt also took a day-job in Boulder, Colorado, as manager of the National Audubon Society’s publication *Audubon Wildcountry.*

In 1983, at age 64, Merritt decided it was time to move home to Montana; he gave a year’s notice to then AWA President Sally Ranney, and to his wife, Edith. That year, Merritt began to think seriously about complaints AWA’s Montana representative, Dan Heinz, had been raising. Many people in Montana saw the name of his group, American Wilderness Alliance, and immediately rejected him as merely another “lock up the land” nut. Merritt formally changed his organization’s name to American Wildlands (AWL), a simpler name without the politically charged, bifurcating word “wilderness.”

True to his word, Merritt moved to Hamilton, Montana in 1984. Home of the active conservation group Friends of the Bitterroot, and the “banana belt” of Montana’s renownedly cold climate, at the time it was also home to his three sisters and mother. He continued to work as American Wildlands’ Executive Director, and as editor of its publications—alerts, monthly newsletters, special reports, and the quarterly “Journal of American Wildlands” called *On the Wild Side*—from his office, with computer and fax machine, in Hamilton. Soon thereafter, AWL moved its headquarters to Bozeman, Montana, where it resides and prospers to this day.

In 1990 Merritt stepped back in the organization, to Associate Executive Director, and began a project that may become his greatest legacy. He originated a broad plan, as he

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describes,

for studying and protecting migration corridors between roadless areas and established wilderness areas containing important wildlife populations. This is known as the Corridors of Life project. [The purpose of this project is to establish and protect routes through which wide-ranging wildlife can move freely from one roadless area or wilderness to another, as required with the changes of seasons and environmental conditions, and in the promotion of genetic interchange and biodiversity.][127]

The American Wildlands board of directors supported the idea. Within a year, cofounder Sally Ranney raised more than a million dollars, "then an unheard of amount in such a short time,"[128] to establish a world-class computerized laboratory with satellite telemetry access. Federal agencies and conservation groups alike have since used AWL's sophisticated land-mapping and wildlife-tracking capabilities to obtain reliable ecological data on which to base management suggestions and decisions effecting us to this day.

Meanwhile, the corridor idea has found other advocates, most tied to once-detested carnivores. A grand project has built on the general concept to establish the "Yellowstone to Yukon," or Y2Y, project. In part, Y2Y advocates protecting the genetic integrity of the grizzly bear through establishment of a large corridor up the spine of the continent, located as suggested in its name. Meanwhile, down south, Dave Foreman established the Sky Islands Network in New Mexico, in another international effort to reestablish habitat suitable to the wild cats that once roamed the Southwest.

Clif Merritt continued actively directing AWL until 1998 when he stepped down at age 79 to let the younger, more energetic captains take charge. Yet, he never ceased reading about the continuing battles now waged by others, and writing voluminously to friends and officials and for newsletters, in support of habitat-protection efforts across

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[127] Ibid., Merritt resume.
[128] Interview with Merritt, notes in my possession.
the region and country.

His cohorts in conservation, as they had in 1975, once again perpetrated a plot that Merritt never caught wind of. On November 10, 1998, instead of holding their normal board meeting in Bozeman, American Wildlands sponsored “A Special Event, Connecting the Wildlands of the Northern Rockies.” Merritt looked at the “tentative program” they had sent him, and looked at the blowing snow outside in Hamilton, which experience had shown would only get worse on the mountain passes between Hamilton and Bozeman. While Corridors of Life had been his baby, he not only trusted but had kept in constant contact with the people then running the program, so determined he could offer nothing special to the meeting. When he called to tell Ranney not to expect him, she convinced him that they could not proceed without him. He made the four hour drive, and found the snow was not as bad as he had feared. Only upon arriving did he discover what everyone else knew; the program title should have read “A Tribute to Clif Merritt.” Fittingly, Merritt celebrated his official retirement that night at the Gallatin Gateway Inn, in the same building where 35 years earlier and in a different snowstorm overlooking the sublime Gallatin Range, the esteemed Dr. Howard Zahniser had suggested that Merritt change his avocation into his vocation.

Beginning in 1999, Merritt found a new and unusual abundance of free time on his hands, so embarked on a project he had long dreamed about—writing it all down. Thus, on top of the mass of documentation he generated in the process of doing his job as a grassroots leader, he has now also written a memoir of his early days, and several chapters of a biography of the wildlands he came to know in the course of his career. He graciously permitted me to draw freely from all his works in writing this thesis.

129 AWL program for the event. In Merritt papers.
130 Interview with Merritt, notes in my possession.
131 Ibid. Also, the title of the main item on the AWL program for the evening.
Conclusion

Many people in America devote their lives to accumulating capital. Clif Merritt would fit in that category. Yet, unlike most, he counted his capital in number of acres of wildlife habitat protected in America. He never had the money to finish college, and had to work hard just to provide a comfortable yet modest living for his family. Still, by the time the Wilderness Society abandoned his network, he could consider himself a millionaire. By my count Merritt played a central role in the designation of nearly 7.5 million acres of wildlands, and his TWS team spearheaded another 20 million acres or so. At age 85, he claims that he cannot imagine a better living than working in conservation. Yet, he still feels a little disenchanted at the Wilderness Society’s treatment of him after he gave them so much of his life.\textsuperscript{132}

In his 2004 dissertation in history at Princeton, Jay Turner argued that TWS had lived through three incarnations. From the “small, elite, and idealistically-minded interest group” of 1935, it reinvented itself to lead the popular movements of the 1960s and 1970s under Brandborg and Merritt. Turner claimed that the Society redefined itself a second time through William Turnage’s centrist ideals after 1979, and that “[t]hese new organizational strategies persist to the present day.”\textsuperscript{133}

While woefully true when he wrote, had Turner completed his dissertation a year later, he would not have been able to draw that final conclusion. In January 2005, president of the Wilderness Society William Meadows stopped in Missoula, Montana to give a talk to the Wilderness Institute there. He enthusiastically promoted the formation of grassroots networks across America, to protect wilderness in the face of a very

\textsuperscript{132} Interview with Merritt, notes in my possession.
\textsuperscript{133} Ibid., Turner, p. 200-201.
commodity-oriented contemporary political environment.

After the talk, I went and spoke to him. I asked frankly if he was hoping to reestablish the kind of network that Merritt had created for TWS by the late 1970s. A far-away look came to his eyes; he replied simply, “yes.”

Back in 1994 Dave Foreman gave advice on how to begin doing so:

Conservationists at all levels need to learn from the history of administrations past. From Earth First!ers in the trees to the Gang of Ten, we need to study history and learn how David Brower, Stewart Brandborg, Harry Crandall, Clif Merritt, Brock Evans, and the other conservation gladiators of that era fought and often won against the Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon and Ford administrations.\(^{135}\)

\(^{134}\) William Meadows, after talk at the University of Montana Wilderness Institute, 28 February 2005.

CHAPTER FOUR
CONCLUSION

Samuel Hays pointed us to grassroots publications to enlighten scholarly writings about the true roots of the American environmental movement. William Cronon pointed us to the Wilderness Society to find a key to the national popularity of the wilderness preservation movement. Dave Foreman pointed us to the likes Clif Merritt to learn how to continue past successes in motivating the public to challenge intrusions into our lives by deleterious and impersonal industrial forces acting through political leaders. My work with Merritt suggests they all three have pointed us in the right direction.

Yet, I wonder, is examination enough? To lead the academy to a better understanding of a dynamic period of recent American history, yes, I believe study of the personalities involved will prove invaluable. To lead the country to a sustainable life with healthy ecosystems, no, I do not think study or emulation of particular techniques that worked in the past will suffice. We will need also to adapt those techniques to our times, just as Merritt and his band of cohorts adapted the techniques of Carhart, Leopold, Marshall, Yard and the like, as they strove to meet the changing demands and opportunities of society during the early decades of the Wilderness Act Era.

Conservation as Art

I first encountered my favorite philosophical model of the human being in the early 1980s, in the works of Armenian-born wanderer and writer Georges Ivanovich Gurdjieff (1872-1949, usually published as G.I. Gurdjieff, usually referred to simply as

\[1\hspace{1em}\text{The idea of "conservation as art" arose from discussions with Twilly@wildrockies.org.}\]
Since then, my own observations and experience have led me to trust the model in general; it also closely matches the creative processes described by scientists and mathematicians of this century, including Albert Einstein and Paul Erdős.

The "three brain" model of humanity—Gurdjieff used the word ‘brain’ equivalently to ‘human energy centers’—provides a pragmatic philosophical handhold to study our diverse species. For lack of better words, and perhaps an oversimplification, I call those three brains the intellectual, spiritual, and physical. Occasionally, if rarely, the three brains of a person align and agree, and result in the "aha" in art or science, or else the outstanding moment "oh wow!!!” in human living, encountered, for example, walking into a sublime natural phenomena that boggles the mind and allows subdued physical and spiritual energies to arise.

Even more rarely, a human lives with the balance and fortitude needed to regularly align their three “brains.” Those people who constantly train and exercise the abilities of all three of their centers, whether by choice or circumstance, in proper social settings, have become the true artists of our civilization, in diverse realms of human enterprise—from politics to painting, from administration to music, from science to sympathy.

G.I. Gurdjieff constructed his “All and Everything Series” over the final decades of his life, after having spent the first decades visiting diverse monasteries throughout Asia, Africa, and Europe. Those works include three books under the title Beelzebub’s Tales to His Grandson: An Objectively Impartial Criticism of the Life of Man, followed by the second series Meetings with Remarkable Men, which became the first Gurdjieff work published in the U.S. in 1969 and was later made into a movie, and concluding with Life is Real Only Then, When “I Am.” His students have also compiled Views from the Real World: Early Talks of Gurdjieff in Moscow, Essentuki, Tiflis, Berlin, London, Paris, New York and Chicago As Recollected by his Pupils to extend the availability of his original works. Other books I have read and suggest, that provide insights to Gurdjieff in a manner more-accessible to normal humans than his original works, include: Our Life with Mr. Gurdjieff by Thomas de Hartmann, The Gurdjieff Work by Kathleen Riordan Speeth, Teachings of Gurdjieff, A Pupil’s Journal: An Account of Some Years with G.I. Gurdjieff and A.R. Orage in New York and at Fontainebleau-Avon by C.S. Nott, Orage with Gurdjieff in America by Louise Welch, Luba Gurdjieff, A Memoir with Recipes by Luba Gurdjieff Everitt with Marina C. Bear. P.D. Ouspensky and Madame Blavatsky have also popularized, in Europe and the Americas, their derivatives of Gurdjieff’s work. Gurdjieff referred to himself throughout his later life as “a dance instructor,” yet his outlook on life and his commune outside of Paris gained him an extremely loyal following, who spread out across the world in the early and mid twentieth century, and brought his approach—engage life fully in all ways—where ever they traveled.
Viewed through this philosophical lens, Clif Merritt qualified as a budding artist in the field of conservation by 1954. Not attached to nature just for its provisions (physical), not attached to nature just for its grandeur (spiritual), not attached to nature just for its existential influences (intellectual), he subsumed himself in all three equally. Like true artists in every realm, he did it because he had to, by internal compulsion, not just choice or opportunity.

Upon choosing his democratic option to preserve wilderness habitat, Merritt’s entire being focused tightly and ferociously on the task. Beginning in 1954, he became an archetypical artist, serving the world through his abiding obsession for wildland. He approached conservation as a true artist, as a never ending process of interaction and growth rather than for a physical result to nail on the wall and admire.

Colin Wilson, author and commentator on many personalities of the early 1900s, wrote a biography of Gurdjieff and aptly characterized his broader philosophy in the title: *The War Against Sleep*. Sleeping people, Gurdjieff asserted, whether literally or figuratively asleep, do not engage life, do not generate the actual (as opposed to virtual?) experience needed for human growth, thus cannot reach toward their true human potential; they do not even know about the self-realization at the top of psychologist Abraham Maslow’s now-famous hierarchy of human needs. Merritt may not have known about self-realization, but his being understood and strove for it. While he never heard of Gurdjieff, Merritt willingly and independently joined the war against sleep. He recognized that sleeping people seldom comprehend the value of diversity, thus do not have the souls suitable to battle for wildland protections--they have not developed the “gut feeling” for wildlife essential, according to Merritt, to leading in the wildlife preservation effort. Meanwhile, sleep cut into his working time.
The artist Merritt needed to preserve wildlife habitat more than he needed rest: he joined the war against sleep to enable further his battles against ill-advised incursions into pristine wildlife habitat. As a result of his constant activity, like many true artists Merritt ended up producing prodigiously; his results ranged from essays on professionalism and the values of biological diversity, to photographs of sublime lands across America, to million-acre Wilderness Area designations, to multitudes of dedicated wildland advocates.

Like those of many distinguished artists, Merritt’s accomplishments motivated others to seek him out and to join his craft willingly. He taught them how to produce effectively, with the help of nature and their friends, thus to follow in his footsteps. Merritt’s protégés in America have picked up the effort where Merritt left off; today we can find them working throughout the West to protect critical wildlife habitat. For example, in 2004 ex-TWS field representative Bill Cunningham spearheaded the effort that convinced the current Bush administration not to open Montana’s Rocky Mountain Front to gas and oil exploration. Those lands, incidentally, lay contiguous to the Eastern edges of the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex; Merritt’s battle for lands surrounding the Bob continues to this day.

Other Awards: The Afterwords

While Merritt ably avoided the notice of most popular and academic media for many decades, he could never hide his success and humble devotion from his friends and associates. Thus, in 1976 and again in 1998, as noted in chapter three of this thesis, preservation workers from around the country banded together to honor Merritt’s wildland achievements, as well as his contributions to their personal developments. Yet
he made impacts on many diverse people, not just devoted preservationists. In 1980, the U.S. Forest Service presented Merritt with its "75th Anniversary Award" for his "personal interest and involvement in National Forest System management, and in appreciation of [his] significant contributions to Forestry and Conservation." That was four years before FS historian Dennis Roth, in his histories of the Forest Service during the Wilderness Act era, extolled Merritt’s influences on FS policy. An unusual occurrence in America, both "sides" of the preservation battle respected his work enough to honor it.

Not only national figures, but local workers around the West have tipped their hats to Merritt, thus providing further indication of his widespread and deeply personal impacts. In 1989 the Idaho Conservation League honored Merritt, claiming: "25 YEARS OF IDAHO WILDERNESS: An idea born from your vision; A reality won by your work; A goal inspired by your example. In honor of your long defense of things natural, wild and free[,] thank you." In 1997 the Montana Wildlife Federation gave "grateful recognition of [Merritt’s] continued support to preserve for future generations the legacy of Montana’s wildlife." In 2003, Friends of the Bitterroot presented Merritt with a Lifetime Achievement Award. In that award, the Friends summarized the opinions of scores of people who have written to and about Merritt. Addressing Merritt, they wrote:

Your inspired vision, your tenacious determination and your unwavering perseverance in the service of protecting precious and endangered wild lands, both here in Montana and in many other places across our country, place you among the most exalted of American conservationists. Friends of the Bitterroot is honored and privileged to have you among us, to have your lifelong experience and wisdom to help guide us, and to have your indomitable spirit as an inspiration.

The Ravalli County Fish & Wildlife Association, one of the oldest conservation groups in

Copies of this and all awards cited made from the originals, which currently hang on Merritt’s walls.
Montana, followed in 2005 by presenting Merritt with its “Nick Kramis Conservation Award.” The text in that award summarizes his career and then concludes: “Known for his tireless dedication to wildlife and wilderness, Clif, at 85, inspires many with his enduring commitment to the wilderness and the heritage of hunting and fishing.”

Truly, meeting Merritt belongs in anybody’s tales of “meetings with remarkable men.” He provides a rare combination of vision, dedication, technical know-how, humility, and respect. His works provide a rich entryway into the heart and soul of the American wilderness preservation movement of the past fifty years, through the many people whose lives he touched, and the masses of correspondence and educational documents they generated.

As Merritt stressed in his first newsletter in 1956, the world keeps changing, and threats to our health and quality of life keep donning new disguises. Only by staying awake and aware can we hope to recognize and ameliorate the impacts of new dangers to the diversity that makes life on earth sustainable. Yes, we need to continue to study; scrutinizing the life and motivations of Merritt has proven an extremely rich educational and personal experience for me. Yet, Merritt has never ceased to admonish us, as conscientious preservationists we also need to apply our knowledge with constant vigilance, continuously observing and adapting to nature’s needs, as part and parcel of our own desires.

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