



Forest Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE



Rocky Mountain Research Station Science You Can Use *(in 5 minutes)*

OCTOBER 2024

Wilderness for a Diverse America: Lands stewarded to respect and reflect diverse cultures, generations, abilities, and perspectives

Federal land managers are asked to meet diverse goals ranging from sustainable resource management to social equity. But across the vast expanse of the National Wilderness Preservation System, some of these goals may be perceived and experienced differently. To encourage conversations around how to meet these goals, Aldo Leopold Wilderness Research Institute (ALWRI) Research Social Scientist, Dr. Lauren Redmore, recently teamed up with Dr. Aby

Sène-Harper, an assistant professor of Parks and Conservation Area Management at Clemson University, as guest editors for a special issue of the International Journal of Wilderness, [now available open access](#). The issue, themed “Wilderness for a Diverse America”, features contributed articles from emerging and established professionals, ranging from US federal agency and non-profit representatives to academic researchers, who contemplate

what wilderness means for a country in progress. This special issue examines how connections to, interpretations of, and ways of relating with wilderness are changing, and offered insights for how wilderness might be stewarded to respect and reflect diverse cultures, generations, abilities, and perspectives.

In their opening essay, the researchers note, “. . . neither wilderness nor diversity are singular: neither can be defined succinctly, measured with certainty, or valued unanimously. The 88th Congress that passed the Wilderness Act in 1964 was far from representative of the American public . . .”. And yet, they highlight, that same Congress also passed the Civil Rights Act. Over the past 60 years, both Acts have shaped national values, and continue to influence how we know and value the environment.

This special issue compiles a range of perspectives, research, and efforts spanning land management agencies, geographies, generations, abilities, and perspectives. Contributions range from grassroots



The High-Efficiency Trail Assessment Process (HETAP) machine measures trail attributes that can affect a user's ability to navigate the trail. National Park Service photo.



Rocky Mountain Research Station

efforts to foster Menominee youth connections to the Wild and Scenic Wolf River, to perceptions of wilderness in the Everglades by communities of color in Florida, to opportunities to span Yorùbá traditional ecological knowledge with scientific management in Nigeria for conservation, among others. Conservation and civil rights are entangled and this special issue offers opportunities to recognize and share paths forward together.

As managers navigate multiple mandates on the ground, there are many opportunities to learn and share across agencies, geographies, and contexts. This special issue offers just some perspectives, but highlights that diversity, equity, and inclusion are critical concepts for wilderness stewardship in the 21st century.

An intergenerational experience with QR codes at the boundary of the Ojito Wilderness in New Mexico. Photo by Kimm Fox-Middleton.



Key Findings/Management Implications

Some key contributions from this special issue include:

- Quinn Brett and Erin Drake recounted a trip along the Grand Canyon National Park's Rim-to-River trail, told from Brett's perspective as a person who uses a wheelchair for mobility. The article described some access barriers that may be insurmountable to a wheelchair user and highlight opportunities to increase trail accessibility in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.
- Adrienne Lindholm described how Glacier Bay National Park is leading National Park Service efforts in Alaska to both reimagine an inclusive wilderness concept and expand the park's wilderness stewardship model, including through co-produced park management plans with local Tlingit Tribal leaders, reframing interpretation materials, and building from shared values of wilderness as "a place where people can find a diversity of meaningful connections with the land".
- Kelsey E. Phillips and Dr. William Rice conducted a scoping review on concepts of fairness and equity in US river recreation allocation. Their review found that managers have been thinking about equity within river recreation for almost 50 years, but the concept is widely understudied and lacks nuance that is needed to meet growing demand for river use by recreators.

Lead Scientist

Lauren Redmore is a Research Social Scientist with the USDA Forest Service **Aldo Leopold Wilderness Research Institute** of the Rocky Mountain Research Station where she uses her training in environmental anthropology to better understand how to improve diversity, equity, and inclusion in wilderness and wildlands.

Olga Helmy is the author of this Science You Can Use in 5 Minutes.

Further Reading

The **December 2023 special issue** of the **International Journal of Wilderness** is now open access.



The Rocky Mountain Research Station is one of seven units within USDA Forest Service Research & Development. RMRS maintains 14 field laboratories throughout a 12-state geography encompassing parts of the Great Basin, Southwest, Rocky Mountains, and the Great Plains. While anchored in the geography of the West, our research is global in scale. RMRS also administers and conducts research on 14 experimental forests, ranges and watersheds and maintains long-term research databases for these areas. Our science improves lives and landscapes. More information about Forest Service research in the Rocky Mountain Region can be found here: <https://research.fs.usda.gov/rmrs>.

Click Here To
SUBSCRIBE
To Future SYCU