

KEEPING *the* WILDERNESS WILD



By Oren Arnold

AGAINST the time when the complexities of American living shall threaten emotional decay, a new non-profit organization has set out to preserve the nation's greatest natural resource.

This resource, as its protectors conceive it, is the living wilderness—not just the deposits of oil or coal or lumber, but everything. Specifically, the group hopes to have set aside certain vast primeval regions where everything can remain exactly as Nature dictates, unaided and unhampered by man.

This program is not to be confused with the development of national parks, many of which already exist. It transcends that, in fact lists the existing parks as items to be included only in the organization's third division of conservation.

The wilderness program is a new concept, bigger than anything of the sort heretofore. It has no political affiliations, is entirely non-commercial. Membership is granted to interested persons in a group known as the Wilderness Society, but there are no dues, no obligations save that of patriotism. It is a purely philanthropic endeavor which, rather surprisingly, has taken hold all over the country in a very short time.

First goal of the organization is to proclaim what it terms Extensive Wilderness Areas, and have these left untouched forever in all their primeval splendor.

In them will be no automobiles, no roads, no trains, no landing fields, no mechanical conveyance of any kind. They will be sufficiently spacious that a person may spend at least a week of travel in each one without crossing his own trail. They may include bare rocks, range lands, timber, snowfields, marshes, deserts.

Visitors in them must depend largely on their own efforts and their own competence for survival. Trails and shelters, which were scattered there long before white man came to America, will be permitted in places, but certain designated zones will be kept free from those primitive invasions.

THESSE Extensive Wilderness Areas necessarily will be located mostly in western United States. Largest roadless area in the nation today lies in Arizona and Utah, and totals 8,890,000 acres. Maine, however, has one totaling 4,100,000 acres.

The Owyhee area in Idaho, Oregon and Nevada is second in size with 4,130,000 acres, and Grand Canyon in Arizona is fourth with 4,000,000.

Except for that in Maine, however, those are largely desert areas, rich with small woodlands, exotic shrubs and flowers, rocks and mountains and gorges, but lacking in the majestic forests of watered regions. Roadless forest areas of 2,000,000 acres or more are to be found in Washington, Idaho, California, Montana and Wyoming, and slightly smaller areas in Maine, Washington, Minnesota, Wyoming, Oregon and Colorado.

Secondary divisions of the American wilderness are termed Primeval Areas.

These are smaller virgin tracts in which human activities have never modified the normal processes of nature. They, too, are to be found now mostly in the west, although New York state has three roadless areas of approximately 400,000 acres each, and Georgia has one.

Third classification set up by the society is called Superlatively Scenic

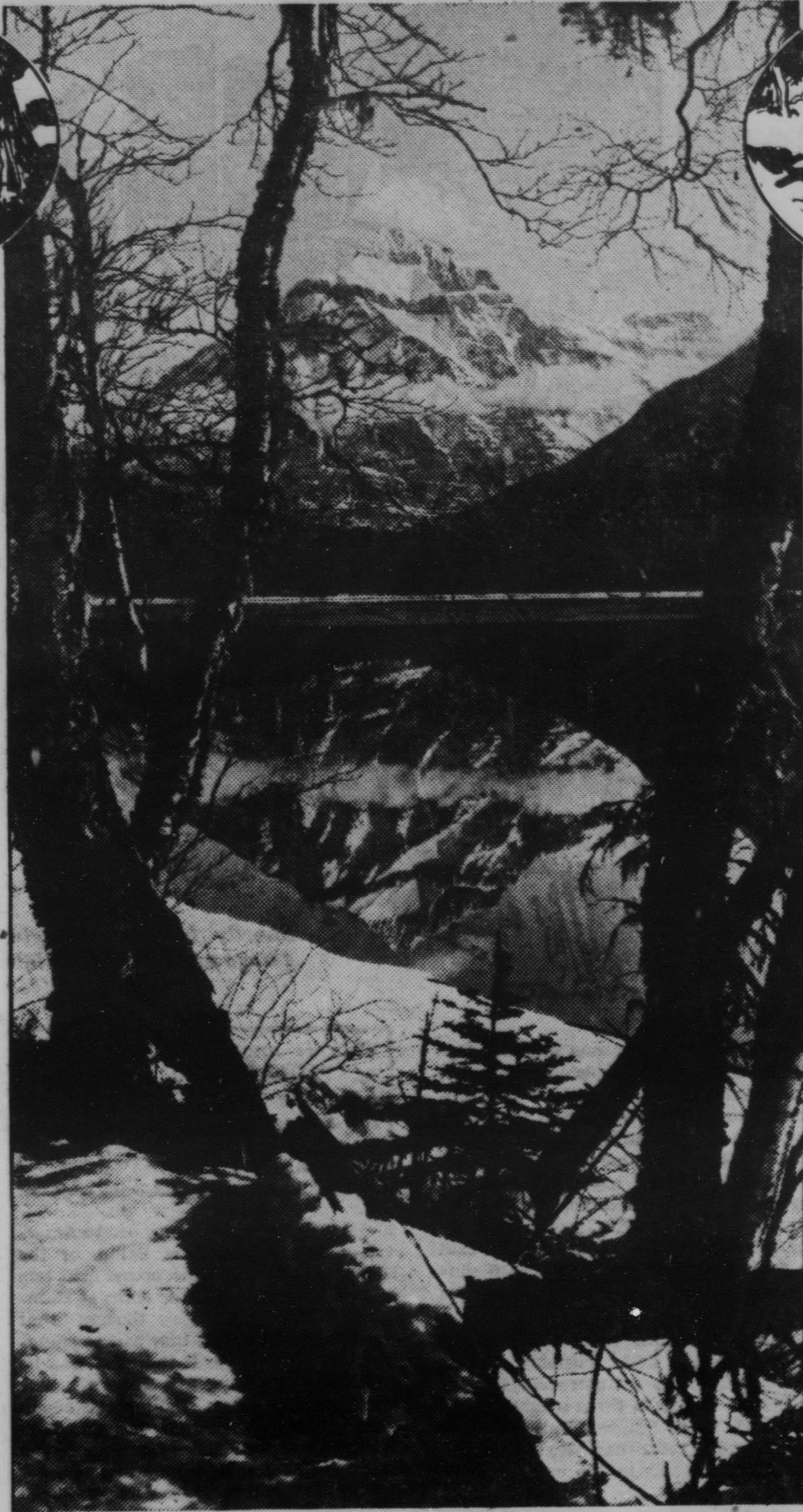


Photo Courtesy Glacier National Park.

A glimpse of the beauty which is not a luxury, but an essential, to civilized living—Lake McDonald, in Glacier National Park, with Mt. Cannon in the background.

Areas, and this would include most of the National Parks, plus certain other tracts distinguished by extraordinary phenomena such as Yellowstone's geysers.

Fourth and fifth classifications are called Restricted Wild Areas, and Wilderness Zones.

The former are tracts in regions of concentrated population which, even though lacking great size, virgin conditions and superlative scenery, are at least free from the sights and sounds of mechanization. Wilderness Zones are strips along the backbones of mountain ranges and along rivers, and which maintain primitive travel conditions along their axes even though crossed by railroads and highways.

Although the individual cannot find in either of these the adventure, dependence on his own competence, and the emotional thrill of the largest wildernesses, they will represent the closest

approach to wilderness conditions available to millions of citizens.

Radios and telephones will be taboo in all the protected areas of every classification, except where absolutely essential to forest fire prevention. Graded trails will be permitted only in limited sections.

No logging will be permitted, and no power lines except where crossing Wilderness Zones.

THE Wilderness Society does not propose to invade the field of any existing organization," says its secretary, Robert Sterling Yard, "but it does propose to battle uncompromisingly for the one purpose of saving the wilderness remnants in America.

"Members scattered throughout the nation will serve as nerve centers of the organizations. They will suggest desirable areas for preservation, and will learn of plans to invade these areas



locally. At once they will report to the headquarters in Washington, D. C.

"If, as in most cases, this invasion is to be publicly financed, the society's officials will go to the bureau concerned to get the invasion plans revoked.

"If this fails, all members of the society will be notified promptly, and every resource at their command will be mobilized to fight the invasion."

The time has come, says the society's platform, when the pressure of a spreading metropolitan civilization forces recognition of wilderness environment as a serious human need, rather than as a plaything and luxury.

The membership of the Wilderness Society so far has centered around university scholars, or thinking men and women in other walks of life, all real lovers of nature in all its primeval splendor.

Mere "joiners" are not welcomed, although nobody is refused membership. Politicians of the better class have found it advisable to be associated with the movement, as one of rapidly increasing strength and complete unselfishness.

ON the other hand political wire pullers who hope to get through certain proposed irrigation projects, pipe lines, or similar commercial enterprises at the public expense, are apprehensive lest the Wilderness Society arise and squelch them. And their apprehensions are well founded, for that is precisely what the society expects to do, when "development" enterprises threaten primitive areas that belong to all the people.

"Waterpower and irrigation projects are two of the first dangers to wilderness conservation," one official of the new society explained. "These involve perversion of natural conditions, and should never be allowed in the designated wilderness preserves, especially since there is abundant potential waterpower and more than ample irrigable land outside of the few possible wilderness areas which are still left."

But not all the land projects are launched by individuals or groups for private financial gain. Some have only sincere public service in view, as in case of the National Parks. But here the great American god Convenience tends to be worshiped more than the natural beauties and wilds, the society's officers feel. Roads and lodges and filling stations and horseback trails and curio shops clutter up the National Parks. Even Uncle Sam is discovering this mistake, however.

"I am not in favor of building any more roads in the National Parks than we have to build," said Harold P. Ickes, Secretary of the Interior.

"I am not in favor of doing anything along the line of so-called improvements that we do not have to do. This is an automobile age, but I do not have a great deal of patience with people whose idea of enjoying nature is dashing along a hard road at 50 or 60 miles an hour."

Americans today are close to the danger of seeing every asset of nature subsidized for private gain, every wild beauty fenced in some manner with a pay-for-a-peek sign on the gate. Within this generation a United States senator tried to make the Grand Canyon a private show place, and even now a dude ranch desecrates its magnificent bosom.

Undoubtedly the Wilderness Society will have imperfections. It can, though, be the klan of poetic souls, rising in indignation.