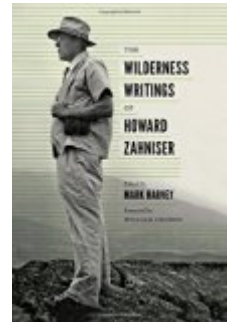


**Mark Harvey, ed..** *The Wilderness Writings of Howard Zahniser*. Weyerhaeuser Environmental Classics Series. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2014. 224 pp. \$30.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-295-99391-1.



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Nearly two decades have passed since the great wilderness debates and environmental historians have gone on to explore a wide range of human-nature relationships. Yet Mark Harvey's selections of Howard Zahniser's work remind us of the importance of wilderness as a primary way in which we understand and relate to the nonhuman world—the ultimate Other. Moreover, these carefully selected writings demonstrate the power of the written word to turn ideals into policy, and ultimately, to turn policy into protected landscapes. Zahniser's prophetic devotion to wilderness and his strong, skillful prose helped to codify a lofty vision and to successfully navigate a complicated political arena. These linguistic and political acrobatics ultimately yielded the 1964 Wilderness Act, the country's strongest legal mechanism for protecting wild places.

Woven throughout these excellent selections are concise biographical sketches that not only tell the story of the man who was the voice of wilderness, but also provide a concise organizational history of the Wilderness Society and the

development of wilderness advocacy in the United States. Like many who fought to protect America's wilderness areas, much of Zahniser's adult life was spent not in a tent in some remote mountain valley, but behind a desk in Washington DC. Like others, he appreciated the nuances of nature in neighborhoods, but he built his career on penning passionately the virtues of "untrammelled" nature.

Convincing the nation that federal protection was necessary to protect wilderness areas was no easy task and Harvey helps to illuminate some of the tension surrounding the passage of the 1964 Wilderness Act by including correspondence between Zahniser and wilderness opponents such as F. S. Baker, a forestry professor at the University of California-Berkeley. Like others who opposed federal protection for wilderness, Baker was concerned that such a designation might lock up resources and prevent the sustained use of timber. Yet the debate between Baker and Zahniser reveals something much more profound than the simple old preservation versus conservation di-

chotomy. First, the exchange between the two men foreshadowed the great wilderness debates that would captivate environmental historians in the 1990s. Second, and perhaps more important, it illustrates the ability of two people with different ideologies to engage in productive and civil discourse despite their differences—something that we do not see much of in today's political culture.

Several environmental historians have recently explored the impact that public designation has had on people who worked or lived in protected areas like national parks and federal wilderness areas, and although Harvey includes passages in which Zahniser spoke about the need for federal control, one wonders if he had more to say about the local politics of wilderness designation. From the selections, it is clear that Zahniser believed that local and state officials were more vulnerable to the forces that threatened wilderness, and he frequently invoked the utilitarian language of wilderness being for all to enjoy—including both present and future generations. But what about those who lived in or near protected areas? Although the style and spirit of Zahniser's writing often echoed that of civil rights advocates in the 1950s and '60s (perhaps a reflection of his upbringing as the son and nephew of Free Methodist ministers), his attitudes and thoughts about social justice issues, specifically in regard to federally designated wilderness areas, are left unexplored. Perhaps that is terrain for some future historian.

Despite these lingering questions, Harvey's selections of Zahniser's writings repeatedly illustrate one of Zahniser's core messages: that by exposing people to nonhuman existence, wilderness helps us to see our dependence on a wider sense of community. In this way, this collection of essays and letters allows environmental historians to see the evolution of an idea that was formative to our field, and demonstrates that wilderness remains a compelling concept to explore relationships between humans and nonhuman beings.

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