

USGS scientist is recipient of wilderness science award

Jan van Wagtendonk, an internationally known research forester stationed at Yosemite National Park, was the recipient of the USDA Forest Service's 2002 Excellence in Wilderness Stewardship Research Award. This award recognizes van Wagtendonk's career of more than 30 years in wilderness science. From 1972 through 1993, van Wagtendonk was employed as a research scientist with the National Park Service. Since 1994, he has been a research scientist with the U.S. Geological Survey.

His research at Yosemite National Park has assisted in the development of wilderness fire management and visitor use management programs that have contributed substantially to interagency wilderness stewardship programs in the Sierra Nevada. He has made major contributions to wilderness fire programs both in the Sierra Nevada and across the country with his work on fuel dynamics, fire prescriptions, remote sensing, and the application of geographic information systems to fire management.

Van Wagtendonk developed a concept and methodology for determining trailhead quotas and recreational carrying capacities—that is, how many people engaged in recreational activities a wilderness area can “support” without adverse environmental effects. Managers have found this information to be critical for making decisions relating to development, visitor use, and staffing plans. Although other researchers were developing similar work concurrently, van Wagtendonk's work was the first to take a numerical approach and to be applied to an actual management situation. Managers in several national parks and wildernesses in national forests in Oregon, North Carolina, and California have used the techniques developed by van Wagtendonk.



Jan Van Wagtendonk (left) is presented the Forest Service's 2002 Excellence in Wilderness Stewardship Research Award by Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth.