



# *From the Editors*

## Why wilderness?

What is it about wilderness that intrigues us and engages our hearts and minds? Is it that wilderness represents some of the least manipulated ecosystems on Earth, landscapes that provide safe harbor for vast ecological systems and processes? Is it that wilderness provides a scientific baseline, particularly for research that seeks to advance our understanding of the effects of human activities on natural systems? Perhaps it is because wilderness is a portal to earlier, primitive cultures or that it provides a respite from the stressors of modern life for contemporary humans. Indeed wilderness represents a special place in the American psyche, simultaneously place and idea, fact and emotion. We explore several of these values and purposes in this issue of *Park Science*.

The National Wilderness Preservation System was created with passage of the Wilderness Act in 1964. As of 2011 it consists of 757 wilderness areas, covering nearly 110 million acres (45 million ha), in 45 states, administered by four bureaus: the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Forest Service and the Department of the Interior's Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and National Park Service. The National Park Service plays an especially important role in wilderness stewardship because it stewards more than 40% of this area, or 44 million acres (18 million ha), comprising 60 designated wilderness areas in 49 national parks. From the swamps of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas Wilderness in Florida's Everglades National Park to the ice-encrusted peaks of Alaska's Gates of the Arctic Wilderness in Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve, the portfolio of NPS-administered wilderness is vast, irreplaceable, and imminently important.

Just as significant as the wilderness landscape is the need for effective stewardship of wilderness. Like National Park System management, wilderness stewardship encompasses a wide array of issues, opportunities, and challenges; however, wilderness character and legislative protection afford it an additional layer of complexity. This issue of *Park Science* highlights this concept, with contributions from representatives from government, academia, and nongovernmental organizations.

In developing this edition we sought to put forth articles, case studies, invited features, and commentaries that demonstrate the breadth and depth of wilderness science and stewardship and the role wilderness plays in the portfolio of NPS-administered lands. The many contributors investigated effective stewardship of these areas and offer perspectives on policy, program evolution, and optimal wilderness management. The authors synthesize 50 years of wilderness visitor research; highlight climate change, transboundary cooperation, consequences of fire suppression, and wilderness as a cultural landscape; and discuss better alignment of science and research in a manner consistent with the Wilderness Act. Altogether, this edition seeks to celebrate the wilderness we know and inspire its future successful stewardship. For as Aldo Leopold said, "The richest values of wilderness lie not in the days of Daniel Boone, nor even in the present, but rather in the future."

We extend a heartfelt thank-you to all who contributed to this issue and to all those who help steward wilderness.

—Wade M. Vagias and Ingrid E. Schneider, Guest Editors  
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